



JABBERWOCKY

2024

University of Massachusetts Amherst
Cover Art By Mary Zeng

Cover Artist Statement

Mid-Autumn Moon, 2023, linocut print

Mary Zeng

This linocut print draws inspiration from Chinese Mid-Autumn Festival folklore, recounting the story of a rabbit condemned to grind herbs on the moon each year as punishment. Reflecting on childhood memories of my parents pointing out the rabbit pattern on the Mid-Autumn full moon, I envisioned a reimagined narrative where the rabbit enjoys a day of freedom in nature with her friends. Set against a backdrop of a running river, billowing trees, rocks, and the full moon, the print incorporates a double moon symbolism. The positive moon represents the real full moon, while the negative one alludes to the transient nature of her happiness and freedom. The boats depicted in the foreground are inspired by the lyrics from a popular Chinese children's song, portraying the rabbit and the Jade tree navigating the Milky Way. Through the use of familiar visual elements and representations, this piece seeks to present a fresh perspective on the beloved Chinese folklore.

About Jabberwocky

Jabberwocky is the official undergraduate literary journal of the UMass Amherst English Department, published by students and featuring student works. Named after the whimsically terrifying creature from Lewis Carroll's poem, "Jabberwocky," and famous fantasy novel, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, our journal features a number of undergraduate writings and art pieces from this year.

Jabberwocky is a strictly non-profit journal, and as such, is not protected by copyright. Any work included in the journal is the property of the artist. All contributors reserve the right to publish their work elsewhere in accordance with the guidelines set by other publishers. Moreover, submissions are sent in, reviewed, and evaluated for publication caliber anonymously to guarantee a fair and unbiased review process.

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

Acknowledgements

We would like to extend a special thank you to the UMass English Department, specifically Celeste Stoddard, the Undergraduate Program Coordinator, for helping us through each step of the process, as well as Prof. Adam Zucker, the Director of Undergraduate Studies, for supporting us this year. Additionally, we would like to thank Tom Racine and Emma MacDonald for their help with the Class of 1940 grant and our launch party space respectively. Finally, we would like to thank Alicia Chhung and Mary Zeng for sharing their InDesign skills with us and putting our journal together. Thank you to everyone mentioned, and to everyone else who made this year's edition possible!

A Note From The Editor-In-Chief

Dear Reader,

When I first joined *Jabberwocky* as the Associate Editor my sophomore year, I was only given one task: set up the launch party at the end of the year. As easy as it sounds, especially since I had months to put the pieces together, I seriously floundered, and was convinced I'd be leaving the journal soon afterward. However, I was contacted again by the English Department asking if I was coming back, since the rest of the Admin Team had left the team, and I decided to give it another shot. At that point, I stepped up to being the Managing Editor, which locked me into the journal for the rest of my undergraduate career. I got invested, and before I knew it—this year—I was the Editor-in-Chief. In the blink of an eye, I'd gone from thinking I would quit to making thorough plans for my last year with the journal.

It has been a great pleasure to see the journal I joined on a whim three years ago grow, fueled by a number of talented editors, writers, and artists. The passion it takes to maintain a collaborative work such as *Jabberwocky* is nothing to shake a stick at, and I'm continually impressed with the dedication put into the project each year by everyone involved. Especially seeing that we took on the largest staff we've had since the pandemic, this passion shines forth in this edition of the journal, and I couldn't be more proud to have been a part of its creation. Being a part of *Jabberwocky* for so long has been a great privilege, and I hope you will enjoy the pieces included here.

I want to extend my deepest gratitude to my Managing Editor, Mary Elizabeth Vaughan, and my Associate Editor, Grace Holland, for keeping the journal running and keeping us on schedule; the journal would not exist were it not for their continuous involvement. Additionally, I want to thank each and every person that submitted to this year's journal for making the selection process a good challenge for our editors. Thanks also to the English Department, for their willingness to help us coordinate each step of the process, and to the professors that advertise us to their students (I know you're out there, and we all appreciate you!). Lastly, I want to thank you for reading our journal and sharing in each writer's pride in their work. I hope to be reading your own works someday soon!

Sincerely,

Christopher Govang

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Gloria

Esther Muhlmann

When I meet Gloria, she knows instantly that I am my mother's fourth child, the sum of the three who came before me. Finally, at my birth, my mother decides that four is the end, that she has fulfilled the prophecy she was told at twenty-two, about the children she would bear and the unbearable space each one would hold in her stomach, threatening to burst her open each time. Gloria says the first time she remembers feeling special was when she was four and her mother told her that she had a twin who died in the womb. Even then, she understood the feat of survival; the miracle of her existence.

My mother doesn't consider tying the umbilical cord around my neck like she did with the others. Instead, she holds me close to her low and heavy breasts, and whispers, "Can you hear what's inside of me?"

Years later, I slip into her car and she says nothing as I set down my backpack and close the door, yawning from a tired school day. We pull into the driveway, she shuts off the ignition, stares forward, says, "You know, we are the most evil ones in the whole family." I call Gloria when I get inside, and tell her about what seemed like a fondness in my mother's eyes as she said this; about the pride for the dark, unsettling parts of her, for these parts that we apparently share.

I run gold liner along Gloria's eyes the first time we drink together. It is New Year's and her family is having me over for a party. Only me and them. I am salivating the entire time we get ready, thinking of the Kosher chicken her mom has gone out of her way to prepare for me, alongside all the other dishes. The steamed eggplant with soy sauce, the whole red snapper with lemon and ginger, the homemade ice cream she has just perfected.

Gloria's mother can't say many words to me, and I can't say many to her, but she accepts my erratic hug that erupts before I go upstairs with Gloria to make ourselves beautiful. I can't help it, it bursts out of me and I attack her in an embrace. She laughs, light and like a child, slightly turns down the heat on the stove like it's a part of her body she is attending to, not needing to look at the numbers on the dial, and hugs back. "You're funny," she tells me.

I'm sure the nurses took me away to run tests and dress me just as my mother spoke her first words to me, conditioning me to consider her insides. I'm sure my father held my siblings back from pestering my mother, that he took them to the cafeteria to eat eggs and rye bread. I'm sure he was tired, aching for a rest from the children, the wife, the sterile stench of the hospital, the same hospital his mother died in years earlier, before even the birth of my oldest sister.

I am nearly drooling as the smells from downstairs waft into Gloria's room, as they mingle with her lavender hair, surrounding us. It has been so long since I've had meat. The only other time I had meat outside of my house was at the rabbi's Sukkot meal when I was ten. I ate nearly the whole platter of chicken legs, not understanding my rudeness, that it would be better to take one or two. Gloria knows this story. At dinner, she pushes the chicken towards me after I've finished my leg. Take more, please, she begs. Never in my life have I

tasted anything more delicious.

I am attached to my mother's nipple from the very beginning, and I beg her to let me nurse even when I am four and five, do not give up my pacifier until I am seven, and sleep in her bed until I am eleven. I guzzle the milk inside her, never drinking any other kind. To this day, I resist consuming milk from cows or goats or oats, or nuts. And if I do drink milk, it is only the fattiest, the richest.

Gloria tells me she nursed for even longer.

"I would put my mouth on her, look her in the eye, drink and drink the milk from her breasts. Things were different between us, then, back when the seasons stayed the way they were meant to. In the winter she allowed me every night into her bed. I curled myself into her, my head on her stomach, and dreamt of the nebulous warm months, of grasping onto the bloody tendons, of bobbing inside our shared fluids, wanting for nothing at all because I had everything I could ever want," she shares this with me on a walk around our town.

After getting ready, Gloria makes her way downstairs, toward family, smells of just-finished cooking, and the laughter I hear coming from her older sister, Allison. I wait a moment in her room, finishing my own eyeliner, overwhelmed in my gratefulness for this day, for the fact that she has allowed me into her home, that her mother has made me Kosher chicken, traveled 25 miles out of town to find it, that Allison lets me call her Allie now and talks to me about my boyfriend, that her father asks me questions about my Argentinian father's cooking, that he smiles when I remark that my father cooks with too much garlic, that he says other white families use almost no seasoning and he approves of the elaborate spice rack we have at home. I bask in the thought that I am less white, maybe. I tell myself that our families are parallel, that I can understand Gloria like no other, even more so than Connie and Sarah, friends she has had since she was five, friends who are Chinese and Taiwanese, like Gloria, who can speak to her mother and give her more than semi-manic hugs as she cooks them food.

When I hide in the basement with Zia I am six.

Gloria is the only person I share this with. We are in her room, lying on her purple carpet, and she is playing with my hair, running her fingers through it so gently that I almost cry.

I tell Zia we should take off our clothes, all of them, and lie on top of each other. She is weary, afraid, but not without desire. Whoever is on top can decide what clothes we take off, I say. You can be on top first, I gift. We keep our underwear and our sabbath skirts against our bodies. My father opens the basement door into the darkness below and calls for us, searching. We are hidden from view, but we jump, put on our clothes, never speak of this, not when we are 10 or 20 or 50. I wonder if she has forgotten, if I have made it up, if I will ever understand what happened that day, if I am evil, if I will wrap the umbilical cord around my own babies, or imagine it, even if I never tell a soul about the ideas, the images, what it's like to be six and to trick your friend into taking off almost all of her clothes.

Gloria's fingers stay in my hair, never pausing or hesitating. I open my eyes, not realizing they have been closed the entire time I've recounted Zia, our near nakedness; our adjacent bodies. Gloria meets my eyes and smiles. And then we laugh. Loud, ugly laughs. My toes

lie against the furnace in her room, warming my feet until I fall asleep right there on the purple carpet with Gloria's hands still in my hair.

I remember when we rode our bikes down the biggest hill I believed existed in our town. Gloria, free and with no hands at all. Me, fearing she'd lose her grip. It is not always this way; sometimes Gloria is the one who is afraid. She was afraid we would die after that party, and rightfully so I suppose. She is afraid of her mother. Or maybe she is just afraid of the way she feels about her mother. She is afraid she is insane or evil, and she is afraid that she is not. That she is plain, with nothing more existing beneath the surface.

Here, in our town, there are only a couple of roads that I fear Gloria biking down with no hands. Only two or three steep roads. Maybe that is why we cry over nothing and everything all at once. If Gloria fell and broke her flesh and bloodied her shirt and walked her bike home and bandaged her palm maybe she would not cry for a while.

Gloria did fall, I remember now. And she also cut her bangs with the hand whose skin had been torn months earlier. This is how I know we will be okay. Maybe tomorrow or in seven years or maybe not until the day after we die. But Gloria looks very nice with bangs, and she still rides her bike, and the skin has healed.

The window in my mother's room allows for such intense morning light that it turns my skin translucent when I wake up, disguising the body I have known all my life, the green veins growing visible like a fish under clear water, pulsing and alive.

Gloria tells me about her wish to be see-through, to be so fragile that she might die just from receiving a rotten-toothed smile or a sharp word from her sister. She tells me that the previous night she had one of those moments where everything feels very heavy and you feel very unhealthy, like when you're sticking a toothbrush down your throat and you hear your parents arguing outside the bathroom and your eyes are tearing up and you know everything is fucked and you are maybe irrevocably fucked and you just keep shoving the toothbrush, hoping for some release, some peace, but nothing comes up and you leave the bathroom and go to your bed and lay there for a while feeling sorry for yourself.

She's talking fast now, dissolving into something beautiful, mad, and more human.

I would never pray for a sunny day, she tells me. I'm an ingrate who loses earrings gifted to me, anything given to me I throw on my floor and step on with my running shoes, and my wet towels metastasize mold on the wood, are they wood? I can't even see them anymore, my mother may die soon. She tells me, she tells me, she tells me.

Later that summer we're outside on her deck, staring at the pool she loves to swim naked in as the sun rises. It begins to rain, but we don't mind.

It is cold and startling, blowing in on the spleen of the wind, slashing our foreheads, soothing Gloria's esophagus, hushing her as the water rolls over her lips, under her chin, and seeps into our skin. In this moment, we are not translucent or penetrable, and I am grateful to be there with Gloria, to sit by the pool, to know she is sturdy and real beside me, and so I look over at her.

Somehow I know that she is crying. That it is not just the rain. I don't know what to do; I tell her a story about my mother, about how at the top of the mountain in Argentina, she took off almost all of her clothes, about how I remember the weight of her breasts, how low they hung, how she swayed against the wind, about how my siblings and I held onto her legs and wrote poems about this moment years later, searching for something we could not articulate and still, to this day, could not.

Gloria is only crying harder by the story's end, shaking her head like a wet dog trying impossible to dry off. She lets out a severe moan as if she's in great pain, and tells me to shut up shut up shut up.

Gloria stands up, groans, goes through the glass sliding door, and leaves me. Even though there is no sun I can see my veins again, can feel the cold of the rain now.

Earlier that day, Gloria told me she would die to have some whiteness in her, even a drop. She says she has imagined realities in which she is just a woman, just white and see-through.

"Why?" I ask her, honestly incredulous, wishing only to have an ounce of Gloria in me, to have her insides and her outsides, to truly be her if I had the option. She doesn't look at me when I ask this, and I know that I have answered incorrectly, that with one word, I have shattered something between us, that she can stroke my hair and soothe me to sleep, but that I cannot do the same for her, that while she is a sturdy body next to me, I am ghostlike, porous and leaky. Or maybe I am life-sucking. A thing in a womb, depleting its mother of nutrients, space, and energy, of whatever it is that gives cheeks warmth and red.

I go inside quietly and wrap myself in the fluffy towel her mother has had the foresight to place by the door. As I pass through the living room, looking for my car keys so that I can return home, I see Gloria asleep on the couch, feet splayed on her sister's lap. Allison is on her phone, humming to herself absentmindedly, maybe a lingering trace from a song she had been singing to her sister.

Gloria's mouth is slightly opened, and a bit of drool has gathered on her hand that rests beneath her head. I wonder what she is dreaming about, and I accept brokenheartedly that I will never know.

DEAR NEW YORK,

Lance Cheng

I will never send a letter with a stamp that isn't yours,
and I will never run out of stamps. When I miss you,
you emerge from the negative space around me, your headlights
tearing apart the dark of the tunnel. With a *Please stand clear*,
we all push to board. Sometimes I see the other passengers
and I see me beside myself beside myself beside myself.
Then I think, I've never believed in a collective soul,
but *if you take the A train...*

Walk

Keely Wilson

walk along

walk forward

walk up

Walk down

walk backward

don't stop

to stop is to give up

and You don't want to give up

don't take a break

breaks are for the weak

study walking in university

always walk in Your dorm

Get a single so You don't have distractions

take classes on physics

literature

anthropology

make sure they have a focus in walking

if they don't aid Your walk they are a waste of Your time

graduate Summa cum laude

walk first across the stage

and keep walking out the stadium

You've been walking for 4 years straight

You can't stop now

walk till Your skin peels off

Your heart drops

walk for a large walking conglomerate

walk away

walk as a walking professor

walk away

walk till You hold a world record

a pulitzer prize

till You're a nobel laureate

an oscar nominee

a grammy winner

if You just stand You'll never get there

if You don't walk enough You're the same

as those standing that You patts

walk till You're the oldest person walking
Your feet have swelled
callused over
bones have warped to optimize Your walk

stop

stand

don't rest

walk in Your mind

now You're in hospice

lying down

surrounded by surgeons

neurologists

colleagues

urologists

journalists

students

children

priests

nurses

chefs

fans

People

think to Yourself:

maybe it would have been nice to sit

...

Things I Think About

Milan Portilla

People forget,
the mailman
waits for letters
too, and the bus

driver doesn't drive
around all night,
his route ends
at some early hour
and he catches a train
home.

The butcher, arms
heavy from a day
of killing,
makes himself
a sandwich,
and doctors take sick
days when they need
them. Teachers
get tired of reading
sometimes,
actors watch movies,
comedians cry,
lovers cheat.

After her lessons,
the pianist turns on
the radio and listens
to someone else,
or the baker who buys
his bread on days
when he is too tired
to knead.

Waiters go out to eat
poets run out of words,
mothers want to be held
in the arms of another.
The carpenter is homeless,
the seamstress has holes
in her blouse,

and on God's bedside table
there is no bible.



Cycles of Existential Rhyme
Paper Collage
Jillian Rosenbaum

Mass-Extinction Events

Katie McDonagh

Last spring, I was consumed by a flu-like illness. I stayed home for a week, cocooned in a dark cave of blankets, completely severed from life. Total silence pinched the air. No noise broke through the blinds of my windows. I felt like the last living person. I remember gently pulling up the shade and feeling the summer sun burn into my eyes like a descending ball of fire. I was meant to be studying for my final exams, but instead I took to watching films. With Jurassic Park on mute, I slipped into a feverish, half-subconscious state and began to generate absurd parables. Strange, uncontrollable scenes played out before me. God creates dinosaurs. God destroys dinosaurs. God creates man. Man destroys God. Man creates dinosaurs. It's a cycle, right? It's out of our control. It's fate.

When I returned to school, the air in the building was thick with dread. I took one of my exams in the art room, and the sun pooled around my feet like water. After so long in a house with no noise, it felt strange to hear the layered scratching of pencils. When we finished, my friend Ella and I walked down to the school's threadbare front lawn and lay down to sunbathe.

"It's so warm," she remarked, and I murmured agreement.

My head was pounding viciously. I still felt tender from the flu-like thing. I was also two weeks removed from a breakup—long enough for complaining about it to be unwarranted, but near enough to still have a sting. It was a good breakup, I told myself. I still saw him. We were still, in theory, friends.

As I lay in the grass, I shut my eyes against the sun. A prickling sensation crept up my back and neck and I became aware of tiny ants crawling over me. Little feet traversed the plane of my skin. Anthills dug into my back. Most people would've just moved. I lay there and suffered. Surely, I thought, this is apt. This is fitting for my current life story. Discomfort and suffering. It was inevitable.

Ants, despite their size, are tough. They've been around since the time of the dinosaurs. I felt like a fossilized, dried out relic—one day I was alive, texting him daily, letting him copy my notes, and the next I was crushed into ash, left with only silence and sickness and ants. I lay there, frying in the heat of the sun, as they crawled up and over my arms and head, around my ears, under my collar. I was shaking ants loose from my shirt and hair for the rest of the day.

Two weeks earlier, Ella had driven to my house in the late-spring twilight. My breakup was only several hours old. She appeared on the scene of a mass-extinction event: the sun all blotted out, panicked scrambling. Life had been wiped out, flattened into nothing. It was a fiery mess. I was furious. She carefully proposed reasons why it was a good thing he left me, reasons why I was actually better off without him. She reminded me of Christmas, when I gave him a painting I had spent hours on and he gave me a ten dollar Mario Kart figurine. She reminded me that I didn't even like Mario Kart, that Mario Kart was his interest and not mine. She reminded me of February, when he didn't speak to me at all on the 14th because he forgot it was Valentine's Day, and our friends ended up making me a card covered in hearts. She reminded me how he was always twenty minutes late to every date.

Ella had brought me a sugar-maple man in a box, neatly carved, standing at attention. It looked just like him.

"So you can bite his head off," she explained.

So I did. I ate him in pieces over the next few weeks, with my bitter coffee, while I recovered. It was like medicine. The head disappeared last of all, and I thought that would

be the end of it.

That summer, I went away. I flew around on crowded planes. I listened to a chorus of soda cans snapping open, of rustling napkins. Sounds of life returned to me. On the way to Spain, I sat behind a toddler, no older than three, who smiled along to a song his mother was playing. He sang Spanish lyrics and giggled.

Back when the air was filled with snow and cold wind, my ex-boyfriend would drive me home from parties. I used to go to them—those hellish boring basement gatherings—only to spend more time with him afterwards. I remembered how he sang along to the radio in his car, like the baby on my flight, to a Spanish song. I liked the way he knew all the lyrics, how he smiled while checking right and left to turn. He didn't look both ways when he merged his life away from mine, in another direction entirely.

I was burning up on that airplane, where everything seemed familiar but with details all wrong. The sun beamed in through the oval window, closer to me than it had ever been before. Time had twisted strangely. When I returned home, I got too curious and discovered that he had—probably months ago—deleted every playlist he ever made for me. I wondered what it would be like to clear-headedly and surgically wipe away memories like that. I had never done anything like it. I didn't understand anyone who would refuse to preserve memory. All things need to be kept alive, I thought. All ought to be frozen solid into amber.

Ella's maple man had been gone for a long time. He vanished in the spring, and stayed gone all summer. But, like real maple—the kind that oozes from trees—the original maple man returned. He accumulated, drip drip drip, until his body re-formed piece by piece, limb by limb, and became whole again. He promised that it would be different this time, that he wouldn't forget the important things. Fall and new beginnings. I went back to my old ways. We became a pair again. My friends chattered amongst themselves.

Before we broke up for the first time, I used to sit perched in the cafeteria's sunlight, waiting and waiting for him. Saving chairs and spaces for someone who was hardly there at all, in the grand scheme of things, letting my day be swallowed by looking and waiting. He would sit with me, poking edamame beans with chopsticks, and I would watch and wait for him to end and he did. The meteor landed. I evaporated. It's all fine now, though. In theory. We are back together and all is well. I forgive him once, twice, three times for forgetting things. I wonder if it ever ends, or if it will feel like summer and ants forever.

Ella tried again, later, with nudges and glances, to re-engage me with reality. The maple man re-engaged with his old affair of forgetting all about me. Valentine's day. My birthday. He still missed it all. Ella shook her head, and I kept on saying no, no, next time he will be here.

When he failed to appear for the third time—conspicuously absent at my first ever art show—she looked at me and told me, silently, to melt him down. For good. I stood among my paintings, surrounded by all my friends, and for the first time his absence no longer mattered. People I'd met only a few weeks prior cycled up and down the stairs of the gallery; under no obligation at all, they had remembered to come. I had finally encountered my final straw. The lilies he bought me as an apology for forgetting my birthday were dying in a vase on my living room table. Lilies have six petals, which means if you count them off—he loves me, he loves me not—you will always end on he loves me not.

After the art show, I stood outside the gallery in the rain. The weather washed away the last of my patience. I no longer felt ants crawling on me. In fact, the whole world became cool and blue and pleasant. When I confronted him about missing my show, on the phone in the middle of the empty gallery, he failed to see the big picture. I told him he had a habit of drawing the map of his mistakes over his own life, not mine. That he always stood on a podium and watched as I sank into grimy, swampy muck, doing a disservice to myself,

saying of course, *I forgive you, it was not your fault you forgot my birthday*. He said he was sorry, and I hung up.

I was familiar with world-ending events, being someone who perpetually bent backwards under the weight of destruction. I always crawled from the rubble of a disaster and thought *this is catastrophic!* and laughed, but this time I would be the one wiping something out. It was a strange feeling. Usually I clung to everything, trying to preserve it all perfectly. I used to play the role of the dinosaur. I cursed the giant, impending meteor and how it had flattened my life until it was thinner than a sheet of paper, which I then had to pick up and draw on without tearing through. I cursed the ants that covered me. But I had become the meteor, and I was beginning to understand that the meteor knows not what it does. Racing towards its dreadful conclusion, it never stopped and thought *today I will ruin everything*. It simply arrived. Sorry about the destruction, everyone, but it just had to happen. Sometimes things end. Sometimes people need to be wiped from my life. However, in the time between formation and destruction, wasn't it fun? Didn't the dinosaurs, just briefly, know and love each other? We are either destroyed or the destroyer.

This time, when I end things with him, it'll be permanent. Here is where it all stops, just as quickly as it began. I allow my mind to fill with a different gaze, a different smile, a different curve and flow of time. For a brief moment, I think—if only the dinosaurs were not extinct... maybe something can survive... and then it all ceases. That's wishful thinking. Nothing changes what is ultimately meant to happen. I drove home from the gallery in the storm, smiling at the new color of the world. It was raining and raining and raining and I checked the forecast, thinking *what's up with that big rock in the sky?* and then *wham*, it was over.

Is My Child Stupid?

Stella Rubalcaba

Is my child stupid? She spends all her money on drugs and cheap jewelry. The kind that tarnishes. Hates going outside, prefers to play *Sims* in her bedroom. Inhabits an unblemished version of herself in FullHD. Drowns the people she's mad at in digital swimming pools.

Is my child stupid? She gorges herself on processed sugar and acetaminophen. Can't sleep unless she's numb. Here she is at the gym sipping a Red Bull and penitently jogging in place. Treadmill tracks like a leather flog.

Is my child stupid? She refuses to look me in the eye. She reeks of pot morning, afternoon, and sleepless night. Cuts class to protest on behalf of whichever side will lose. Sticks a thumbtack through each palm and shivers on the cross. No wonder she can't read at grade level.

Over the whine of her speakers I can still hear her sob.

I prop the door open and we regard each other like foreign objects.

I just can't believe she's made of me.

Notes From My iPhone: Lists, Thoughts, Passwords, Quotes, and Shitty, Shitty Poems (Not All Written While Sober)

Eliza Keenan

9/12 at 12:34pm

things i need to buy:

1. gas
2. nyquil
3. barrington roasted coffee
4. gin (but not beefeater)
5. spoons (where did my spoons go?)
6. BBQ ribs
7. uno
8. deodorant

9/24 at 8:01pm

seismic shifts

the ground beneath my feet, or
my seismic plates
are shifting, seismically.
what a terrible poem this is.
judgment! judgment!
changes are happening,
big ones.
some might even call them
~seismic

9/30 at 6:55am

feeling so fly like a G6 right now

7:21pm

i thought i saw my face in a crowd

10/15 at 12:11am

people i love most:

ann gales
nico whyte
dev powell

10/27 at 7:25pm

today i gave a boy a fortune cookie. i didn't know him, but we were at a table in the dining hall, sitting across from each other without speaking. i got myself a cookie, too, and we opened them at the same time. neither had a fortune inside. we went on eating, without speaking. i feel i will not see him again

10/28 at 1:17pm

"you can't start dating until you break up with the people you've been dating in your head" —some girl sitting near me at the Works Café, quoting somebody else

10:44pm

i used to be good with words

i would say the right words
in the right tone, at the right time.
now i have words i say to myself, like
"step away from the plane" and
"what are you doing, silly? stop it!" and
"this is happening inside my head."
in my head i say words to other people,
they make me a hero, a wonder!
they even make me the perfect lover...
but if i were actually called on to speak
within an arena of eyes? well—
i'd rather swallow thirteen spoons.

11/13 at 2:26am

i love drugs

11/20 at 5:58pm

hulu password: Cunky523

11/24 at 1:50am

i've been falling in love like they do in the movies (really, not at all)
head over unthinking heels, for boys as lovely as paper

2:02pm

the moment you finally have him is when you realize you do not want him

9:53pm

you owe dev powell \$42.50

12/10 at 6:00pm

mom and i got high last night. i came out to her again, because i don't think
she got it the first time. i think i needed her to accept me before i could accept
myself

10:32pm

shawty like a melody in my head

10:45pm

is fear protecting me from something bad, or preventing me from something good?

11:22pm

“when was the last time YOU had goosebumps?” —some guy to R.L. Stine

11:46pm

there is something delicious about my own starvation

11:59pm

ROALD DAHL!!!

12/28 at 8:51pm

we want to be in relation to those who have what strike us as the best qualities, because to conjoin with those individuals would be to reproduce their qualities and then some. this involves biological reproduction or else an act of metaphysical consumption that integrates the other into our own selves, making us stronger. it all ties back to evolution, unless i subconsciously want it all to tie back to evolution and so i keep finding a way. is logic a reflection of truth, or a fabrication designed to arrive at a desired idea? is truth a revelation, or a construction?

8:59pm

piss in the penny machine

9:23pm

have we tried smoking EVERYTHING? what is there is more left to smoke?

9:25pm

i am exhausted by my mind

1/27 at 5:13pm

things i would name my kids:

GIRL: Ever, Hazel, Harvey, Piper, Ivy, August, Jamie

BOY: Simon, Tristan, Harvey, Nico, Devin, August, Jamie

8:36pm

“sometimes i put a teabag in my mouth and let it soak” —nico

9:02pm

friends are pieces of your soul wrapped up in other bodies

2/26 at 9:44am

“SHD” (a tune to remember local election day)

“S” is for Stealing edibles from my mom

“H” is for Her dog is afraid of me

“D” is for the Democratic candidate is older than spoons and he kept grabbing my elbow on the sidewalk... so i voted green rainbow

9:58am

there's power in not giving someone what they want

3/12 at 4:04am

i think i've been tricked into feeling like attention is only valuable when it comes from a man

2:36pm

“psych-bomb” —dev, trying to remember the word for “gaslight”

3/20 at 8:38pm

Maroon 5 was the puppet master of my childhood

4/6 at 7:34pm

“satire is moral outrage disguised as comic art” —my roommate quoting her professor, misquoting somebody famous

4/28 at 12:06pm

the thing that tells you you're not allowed is the thing that's going to make you do it but better

10:14pm

new hulu password: Killallhackers786

5/17 at 3:02pm

fairy rave at midnight! bring your own wings

10:42pm

“you can do anything in this life” —my uber driver from senegal, who came here to make music

5/18 at 12:00am

finally embracing your queerness feels like freeing a child from punishment

12:01am

what have you learned to call love?

Evolution of the Breakup Text

Renee Rollins

My dearest, you beheld my heart
For quite some time now.
My heart clenches and aches while apart
From you, my love, which is why

It is with deep sorrow and contrition
That our communication must come
To an end. An older woman such as I
Cannot wait longer to marry.

It has been a great year with you
as my boyfriend. Our Saturday date nights
bowling and singing karaoke have been fun.
However, I'm going to college soon and

We are just going on different paths.
I hope you know this is hard for me
to do. I will always remember you as
my first love. Good luck with everything.

hey, ur about to make us lose our
snap streak. also i've kinda been
realizing you aren't that cute anyway
but you do have a chill personality that

i vibe with. idk, it feels like you don't care
about me bc you barely snap me anymore
while your snap score goes up, so idk if i
can trust you. so we're done now

k?

IN THE SOFT BLACK MORNING,

Lance Cheng

it is never enough to want until
someone's ready to gorge himself on it,
drink it out and out of you and wonder
why the glass ends up half-empty.

Think of all the men you've ever slept with.
Think of those days in the garden,
the country music and curlicue clouds,
candle wax the color of apples or gasoline,

think of the halcyon melting into
inoperable time. Think of the park bench
or his fingers, both curled Corinthian-precise.
Think, finally, of asking him

how long he'll stick around,
if he's leaving, if so can you too,
if so can you find the same crossroads
even in different places—

Don't think of the body behind the mouth;
just close your eyes and lean in. Out here,
you have to make up your mind quick.
You know city boys don't like to kiss

anything but their teeth.





Mosquito Lunch
Digital Photography
Luke Patton

Ode to a Squirrel, Seen in Passing

Felix O'Hearne

Delightful little friend!
Champion of the terra!
Thee draws so near to me,
And blesses with thy presence!
Oh! Love be, to thee!

Chickadee Flyby
Digital Photography
Noah Stebbins

Ode to UMass Wind

London Cannon-Eckerle

When you brushed through my hair for the first time—
touch like a serpent ringing my torso—
I fell for the beauty of your springtime,
air flushed from the clementine sunny glow.

But gleaming stars lay amid the black nights—
leaves surrender, summer accepts its death—
You constrict, divulge your indevotion.

Yet, I remain bound; because through teared sight,
you relieve me from waters of lethe—
showing beauty in fervent emotion.





Concrete Romance
Digital Photography
Mary Zeng

The Fox has Teeth, but the Hens Have Claws: *The Beguiled*, the Power of Narrative, and the Legacy of Old Hollywood

Blaire Shields

The legacy of Hollywood and cinema is one that is always in flux surrounding its relation to the mythos of American gendered identity. Throughout its over one hundred year existence, the film industry has at once been the site of the most regressive and vile sexual politics this nation has seen, advocating for the repression of women and queer people, to one that at least attempts to keep up a facade of progressivism. Of the countless faces of the Los Angeles film industry to have existed throughout the decades, perhaps the most representative is that of Clint Eastwood, particularly his work in the classic movie *The Beguiled*. Eastwood was known as a classical cowboy protagonist of mid century American media, someone who claimed the wild west of the post-war order in the name of the U.S. empire, remaking the world in the patriarchal image of the militarized, dominant man. In this context, the emergence of Clint Eastwood in *The Beguiled*, a film that has come to be known as something of a feminist tale, might seem odd and out of character at first glance, but this misunderstands the point of the movie.

The Beguiled is a movie that finds itself at a crossroads, of at once painting a tale that is legible to many feminists as women reclaiming their power, but yet deeply entrenching itself in the misogynistic dream of the ‘fox in the henhouse,’ where a man finds himself in the realm of the feminine, where he has all the women he could ever want as sexual objects. However the film takes a decisive and subversive twist, turning it from a fantasy into a nightmare for our central character, John McBurney. McBurney, a union soldier in the middle of Mississippi, is fighting to end the Civil War and destroy the Confederacy from its furthest reaches. He is seriously wounded and found by 12 year old student Martha Farnsworth, who rescues him by taking him into the school she and many other girls of the area live in. Like many of the Union soldiers, he is not particularly interested in the end of slavery, as shown through his interactions with an enslaved woman in the house, Hallie. He is not a particularly moral man, and is more than willing to lie and sexually manipulate each woman in the house to his own gain, including the child who rescued him, as he kisses her immediately after learning her age. What follows in the film is a series of his manipulative machinations eventually backfiring, resulting in the women of the house taking violent and fatal revenge on him, ending with the child he forcefully kissed poisoning him after doing the very thing she was doing when she found him, picking mushrooms for dinner.

The debate over this film has to do with the intersection of the nature of this narrative and the figures involved with the film, two components at odds with each other. We can look at the film from a more modern perspective, where we can see this plot as the women taking their power back against the man that had wronged them all, but yet the spoken words and actions by those involved in its creation cast a shadow on this telling of the story. Clint Eastwood, the man who played John McBurney, has been an individual noted for his rather unsavory comments along the lines of race and gender, firmly representing the legacy of Old Hollywood. So too has the director of the film, Don Siegel, as he was the director most known for his role in the creation of the rugged individualist that came to dominate movies throughout the 1970s. Throughout his career as a director, his most notable accom-

plice was Eastwood, as the two would work together on far more than one occasion, including some of Eastwood's most famous roles outside of *The Beguiled*, including his biggest of all, *Dirty Harry*. Beyond the commercial and critical success of their partnership, there come some consistent themes that align with some of those inside this film, namely that women are both a target and a threat, and that women and girls are plotting to destroy masculinity and men with it.

The nature of these traits in Eastwood and Siegel are particularly easy to see when we look at interviews, particularly surrounding *The Beguiled*. Siegel can be quoted as saying "Women are capable of deceit, larceny, murder, anything. Behind that mask of innocence lurks just about as much evil as you'll find in members of the Mafia. Any young girl who looks perfectly harmless is capable of murder." Beyond the latent misogyny dripping from this statement, we can see that the creation of this film was not to display how women can take back power in a society that hates us for our existence, denigrating us to merely reproduce the workforce and nothing else, but rather to pose a warning to the patriarchy by a few central members of it: That women are a threat to be feared and put in their place to protect the position of men at the top of society. The horror in this film is not meant to come from the actions of McBurney, but rather how such an 'illustrious' man could be killed by this group of seemingly helpless, hapless, and harmless women. Siegel and Eastwood are known for their legacy of films with women as victims who are at best not to be trusted, and at worst, active villains to blame for their own pain, the main crime of which is how it affects men.

With the intentions of the main cast and director on display, how are we to interpret this movie for what it is? Does intention fully define what a film is, or can other interpretations apply? Throughout the film, Siegel and Eastwood make no effort to hide the fact that McBurney is a morally complicated character, as it is not downplayed that he is so manipulative and self centered, however throughout the film the women are still played as the villains. In most cases, the one to make the first move is one of the women or children in the house, which, ignoring the gross moral implications of Siegel including this detail, paints the picture of women as instigators in the story of McBurney. In addition, the actions of McBurney are painted as him trying to survive in a borderline POW situation, excusing what manipulations he is guilty of as done for survival. His actions, though they result in his death, are not played off as inherently evil throughout the movie. Even his advances on a child are not played for the creepy and messed up actions that they are, as it happens and is more or less ignored throughout the rest of the film. In fact, the catalyst for his demise is instead far more to do with sexual frustration, jealousy, and fear of being labeled a turn-coat to the Confederate army for holding a Union soldier in their home, rather than for the sexual crimes he is guilty of doing to all the women of the home.

The Beguiled is a film that will likely always be the subject of debate, as the story could so easily be interpreted as a feminist fable, but the people responsible for its creation had other intentions. Siegel and Eastwood will remain in history as two of Hollywood's biggest serial misogynists, and this creation remains as an example of that. The bones of this plot are one with tremendous potential of a revolutionary feminist story about reclaiming power from misogynists like McBurney, but what we are left with is a tale about the dangers of women, with the feminine being labeled as 'monster,' rather than the man responsible for the harms endured by the girls of the school. The villain is painted not as the man making advances on a child, but the child for fighting back against him. For the makers of this film, the scariest thing that they could imagine is someone fighting back against their predation, and it is from this that the horror is derived: The idea of the predator becoming prey.

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Prized Possession
Digital Art
Evelina Ruskulis



Allyson's Passing

Madison Medeiros

gentleness swindled by violence
thoughts about birthday cake
have now drifted
 to flowers, plants and fruit baskets
her final breath blew out my candles

when does the hour of Mourning
arrive and depart?

dawn-to-dark, Climate responded

storm clouds sobbed on saturday,
a serenade delivered by chickadees on sunday,
and on monday, snow capped cyclones spiraled
in as a gift from the ocean

Nature observed her absence.

we wound forward the hands of Time
although not far enough to make me forget

the first of endless cycles without her

Mortality: laborious and unyielding
Mourning: a temporal spiral we are eternally bound to

Grief:
a bad acid trip

where im left fixating
 continually
on the hands that harvested her organs



LIFE PANEL I II
Oil on Carved Wood Panel
Robin Lee

Prayer For This Life

Claudia Maurino

thank you for constancy and commitment
thank you for hard work and the tight elastic red of sore thighs
thank you for dedication, for tiny pellets of good work
skipped like stones over the glassy hours of a day
thank you for the gurgle of laughter rising
from the wettest parts of my mossy forest heart
thank you for obliqueness, chess moves initiated
by the huge hand of time I do not trust
but cannot help but pray to
thank you for scissors, a needle and thread
with which I sew constellation sentences
into the bedroom universe I call my home
thank you for hearth and comfort—blankets, my mother
these indelible heavy weights that place me in the world
thank you for attention, my eyes, thank you for turning my head
at the moment a flock alights and speckles the sky
in glorious, instinctual patterns
thank you for strangers who I love like myself:
because they exist, because they are loud and odd and buoyant
thank you for the lesbian professor in a gaudy suit
who yells and laughs with both arms open, pulling the past
and future of my people, dazzling and bright, into a single moment
thank you for the walk to the cafe I relish in more than the coffee
and for the coffee too, hot and indispensable
thank you for curiosity: that crooked finger, that spiraling fractal
beckoning me ever closer and ever further from
the drumbeatheartbeat point of it all
and thank you for my body, who does not have the words
to name the dance but nonetheless, invisibly and deftly
finds the rhythm

Cannibalism and the Feminine Identity

Lillian Bak

Cannibalism is one of the most taboo subjects worldwide, and yet around the globe people still hold a bizarre fascination with the topic. True crime and the horror genre have reached their zenith, with the recent biopic *DAHMER-Monster: The Jeffrey Dahmer Story* surpassing over one billion hours of watch time on Netflix (Cohen). Cannibalism stories are nothing new, with famous authors Charles Dickens, Mark Twain, and even Daniel Defoe throwing their hats in the ring. However, these stories all rely heavily on pre-existing stereotypes: the terrifying criminal with a lust for blood, the savage tribesmen, plane crash survivors slowly starving. However, very little research has been done on a newer form of fictional cannibal: the cannibal woman. The last ten years have seen a major boom in works of fiction centered around women engaging in acts of cannibalism. These works explore themes of femininity, society, and power dynamics. Through this lens they put an entirely new spin on the genre and revitalize the conversation surrounding what it means to be a woman.

What does it mean to eat at all? Eating is inherently a display of power, the predator consuming the prey. To eat is to sacrifice one life for another and to imbibe something's energy for oneself. Often, eating is viewed as a sexual innuendo. To fully "devour" another, particularly when talking about devouring another human being, is sexual. Neurologically, hunger and sexual appetite are very similar. Two parts of the "four F's" system (fighting, fleeing, feeding, and... fornicating), hunger and sex represent key "primal urges" that our brains are evolutionarily wired to seek out (Squire). Both result in a flood of dopamine, the reward chemical, into our synapses and make us *feel good*. Even in the realm of metaphor; eating, destroying, and having sex are often conflated. Sports teams "devour" the opponent, while in modern slang someone who does well "ate." Hunger is even used as a metaphor for want in general, "hungering" for food, sex, security, or human connection. In her foodbook, Margaret Atwood writes that "Eating is our earliest metaphor, preceding our consciousness of gender difference, race, nationality, and language. We eat before we talk" (Atwood). Food is our primal necessity, and all food is on some level metaphorical in addition to the physical.

Cannibalism, then, exists as the ultimate metaphor for the fusion of love, power, hunger, and control. In her book *Food, Consumption, and the Body in Contemporary Women's Fiction*, academic Sarah Sceats claims that cannibalism "is a fundamental exploitation in which one person is seen by the other in absolutely primitive terms and the abyss between what she calls 'master' and victim is at its greatest" (Sceats 48). Within cannibalism, people cease to be human beings and are instead items to control. All measures of control are fundamentally dehumanizing, and the act of cannibalism brings this from the metaphorical to the physical. Sceats is correct in asserting that "This measure of exploitation cannot take account of the victim as an equal person in any real sense at all."

This dehumanization is illustrated in Augustina Bazterrica's 2017 novel *Tender is the Flesh*. In this novel, a terrible disease has befallen society where common farm animals are no longer safe to consume. In this dystopian society, humanity turns to an alternative form of meat: human beings. Humans are divided between people and livestock, with a large population raised as animals devoid of language and referred to as "head."

The main plot of this book centers around a slaughterhouse employee named Marcos, who is given a female "head" as a gift. Slowly, he becomes enamored with her and appears to see her as more human than animal, even giving her a name, Jasmine. He tries teaching

her basic human skills and eventually goes as far as to commit the greatest social taboo: he has sex with her and uses her as a surrogate for his barren wife. Things appear to be going very well, and eventually, she gives birth to a healthy baby girl. However, immediately after, Marcos knocks her out and takes her to the slaughterhouse to have her beheaded. When his wife, who was hoping to have her produce more children, asks why he did it, he replies, "She had the human look of a domesticated animal" (Bazterrica). While the majority of the book is set up to have the reader believe Marcos has a moral code above those who are routinely killing and eating their "heads," ultimately he was still treating her as an animal, just a domesticated one. Instead of using her for meat, he uses her for children in the same way that one would use a cow for milk. She had a "human" look in the same way that our pets do: we may empathize with them, but ultimately, they are still animals.

This book uses cannibalism not just as a motif for power, but also to examine how women are viewed in society. Marcos appears to show love towards Jasmine, but ultimately still sees her as an animal and uses her for his benefit. The book does an excellent job of tricking the reader into believing that Marcos's feelings were genuine, then turning it on its head and displaying all his previous actions as purely transactional and for his benefit.

It's worth noting that in this tale, Jasmine has had her tongue removed. Not only does she not know language, she has no way of learning it or expressing herself throughout the story due to an act of violence. She cannot consent or object to anything in the story, which is particularly upsetting due to the sexual dynamic of Marcos and Jasmine's relationship. Jasmine is forced to exist as an object for Marco's convenience. The relationship between Marcos and Jasmine extends beyond the realm of literature and forces the audience to contend with the dynamic between men's and women's relationships in the real world.

The relationship between women and prey is further exemplified in Margaret Atwood's novel *The Edible Woman*. In this novel, a woman named Marian becomes preoccupied with the way women are objectified after entering an engagement and cheating on her fiance. She becomes unable to eat meat, identifying too strongly with it as prey. In the end, she bakes a woman-shaped cake and feeds it to her affair partner Duncan, who eats it voraciously and claims "it was delicious" (Atwood).

While this book contains no actual cannibalism, the entire story is based on an extended metaphor wherein women are reduced to prey animals and slowly eaten away by the men in their lives. Upon watching her future husband Peter, Atwood writes that Marian, "was one of them, her body the same, identical, merged with that other flesh that choked the air in the flowered room with its sweet organic scent; she felt suffocated by this thick sargasso-sea of femininity" (Atwood). This illustrates how Marian feels suffocated by the weight of her feminine identity and how men treat women. During this dinner scene, Marian feels she is losing touch with herself and her body. This is further emphasized by the switch to third-person narration. This detachment of point-of-view shows that Marian is no longer the main character in control of her own narrative. Instead, she is owned and controlled by the men around her and their vision of what she should be: a wife, a lover, a sex symbol, but not a human being. At the end of the novel, as Marian watches Duncan eat the cake, she eats part of it herself. This represents her acceptance that she will never truly own her own body. It is a startling and sad end to her struggle to reconcile her need for body autonomy and her need to conform to the social pressures of womanhood, but an end nonetheless.

While both previous books center around women being eaten and consumed, the flip-side of feminist cannibal literature involves women doing the eating. Even outside the realm of cannibalism, women are rarely seen eating in literature. In Emma Parker's work *You Are What You Eat: The Politics of Eating in the Novels of Margaret Atwood*, Parker writes that "Women are rarely depicted eating in literature because ... consumption em-

bodies coded expressions of power” (Parker). As previously discussed, eating is inherently a metaphor for conquering and control. It is this dynamic that makes modern depictions of women eating even more powerful. Modern feminist writers, particularly those depicting cannibalism, often flip this dynamic and have women physically consume men as a rebuttal to women being spiritually and metaphorically devoured by their male counterparts.

A prime example of this phenomenon is seen in Sayaka Murata’s novel “Earthlings.” In this text, a young girl Natsuki loses her hearing and sense of taste after being groomed and assaulted by her teacher. She then murders him but still retains her sensory loss. She only regains it as an adult when she and her husband decide they’ve had enough of society and want to become “aliens” by breaking the ultimate social taboo - cannibalism. They move to the mountains and kill and eat a man. In contrast to her usually flat prose, Murata describes this meal in vivid detail: “Miso Soup with Man, Daikon Leaf, and Man Stir-Fry, and Man Simmered in Sweetened Soy Sauce.” Natsuki regains her sense of taste in an explosion of flavor, and finally breaks free from society through this meal. In the end, she, her husband, and her cousin all consensually eat each other. Through eating each other, each character regains the autonomy that society has denied them, particularly Natsuki. Previously, she remarks, “My body was not my own. I had always been secretly shrinking the role I had been assigned as a tool of society.” Natsuki feels trapped, and only by breaking her relationship with society completely does she find freedom and autonomy. On the surface, this book is a bizarre tale about a woman turning to depravity, but underneath it lies the tale of a woman taking back her body from her abuser and from the oppressive roles of women in Japanese society.

In sharp contrast, however, cannibalism is sometimes used as commentary on love. In cannibalism, someone “absorbs” someone else into their own being, both of them becoming one. This idea of total and complete union is an attractive premise for many authors. As academic Sarah Sceats writes: “Because sexual intercourse is a fleeting and less than an absolute form of union, it is ultimately unsatisfying in comparison with the fantasy of cannibalism. The idea of total fusion is potent, yet unrealizable” (Sceats 35). As mentioned previously, the act of eating is inherently sexual. However, unlike sex, cannibalism and eating is permanently altering something else and forming one complete identity.

Additionally, the metaphor of cannibalism incites an interesting contrast between love and ownership. The yearning for complete fusion in a relationship indicates on some level wanting to possess the other. When we enter a relationship, particularly a sexual or romantic relationship, do we truly want someone as they are, or do we enjoy the power we have over them? Relationships are one of the rare circumstances where power and control can truly be reciprocal. To be with someone is to allow them power over you in return for power over them.

This contrast and the idea of “total union” is best illustrated through Tamsyn Muir’s novel *Gideon the Ninth*. This novel differs from those discussed previously because it is a fantasy novel, and cannibalism is achieved through the fantastic means of necromancy. *Gideon the Ninth* is rife with bone and blood imagery, but most striking is the finale where, to become immortal, Gideon’s partner Harrow absorbs her body and mind to create a “human battery” powering her necromantic abilities. This climactic ending fulfills the saying characters mention multiple times throughout the novel: “One Flesh, One End” (Muir).

Cannibalism in literature is often used to comment upon feminine gender roles and the dynamic between men and women in society, as well as the conflicting nature of love and possession. Ultimately, cannibalism is a display of power, one person taking ownership of another through physically imbibing the other. This exists as a gradient from the more metaphorical cannibalism present in *The Edible Woman* to the visceral horror displayed in

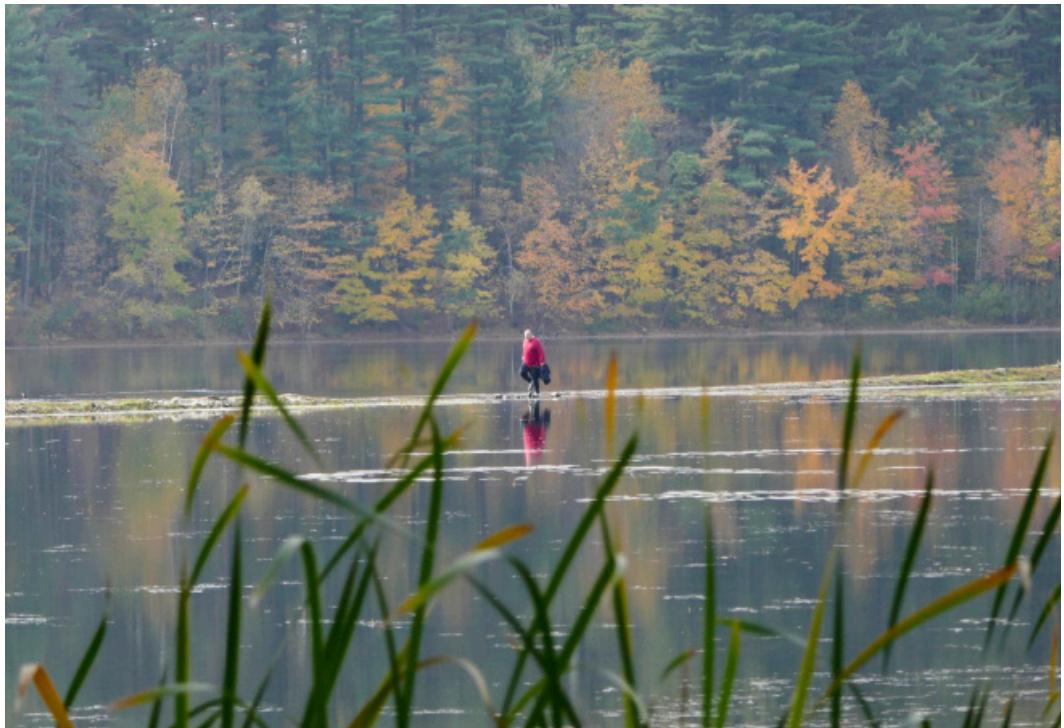
Earthlings. Cannibalism functions extremely well in literature as it takes the metaphorical and turns it physical. By taking the dynamics discussed in this work to the extreme, readers better understand the nuances present within them.

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Core
Digital Painting
TJ LaLonde





THE WAY IT GOES

Lance Cheng

I.

Tuesday morning, the world hadn't ended for anyone but me.

It was deathly cold and she didn't bother with a scarf, just drank the ice off the windshield through cracked lips and convinced herself it tasted like something, blood or earth or rot. Last resorts were the reality she'd learned to embrace, and they had carved her into the shape of a bottomless hunger. So she savored without savoring. Consumed without consuming.

II.

A long time ago, there was a first stop, then a second. Then one more, one more, just one more. She had wanted me to fill the passenger seat, and who was I to refuse? That was when I still thought that we could chase destiny and catch it, that she had chosen me for a reason.

Tuesday morning, I got in the car again, and she said, *Just one more*. So we drove, as we always had. It could have been beautiful if it were not so uneconomical, a responsibility with an empty weight and a vague guilt for it.

I asked, *Do you ever think you've forgotten to do something? Or rather, do you ever think you've forgotten something and been left helpless to it?*

She shrugged.

What she meant was, *We've killed our time. Let's waste some more.*

III.

The road forked into three. One was dust, one was dirt, and one was a little of both. We got out, soles flashing browner and browner with every step. She started talking about one road or another, which one was which and which one wasn't, but my eyes were watering, and the roads all blurred into one, diagonals on diagonals. The horizon teetered like a spinning top.

Go on, it said. Take your best guess.

IV.

It was a terrible vertigo. The way I kept waiting for the world to end.

We were going nowhere, and we were less us and more hyphenate, and only one of us liked to drive. I loved her, I did, but I wanted to set myself upright, and I wanted us to have found utopia already, and somewhere in my crooked head, destiny had become fate and the finish line was the end of everything.

V.

It was not Tuesday morning anymore.

The yolk of the sun had burst and run down, and the world still hadn't ended yet. So I burned it at the stake, the wicked, wicked thing.

So when she tasted the icy dirt, maybe the earth was not so delectable after all. So I was the same rubble, burning or not. So no one wants to ride with a dead man, but a passenger is a passenger.

So we were going nowhere, so we were always going nowhere, so I said, *Be the undertaker, dear. But don't open my eyes.*

Lunar

London Cannon-Eckerle

Full

While trying to sleep one night,
the moon's hue soaked through my eyes.
with that you slipped into my mind the same way
you skipped into my car before the sunrise.

Smiling, grinning that wondrous smile
that felt like sparkles and butterflies,
your giggle radiated through the darkness
each note illuminating the skies.

And when your fingers interlocked with mine—
my heart, blossoming like a meadow—
we skipped around in the dark parking lot
lightened by your optimistic glow.

And as our euphoric memories continued to play in my head,
the lulling moon inched forward, until its light no longer spread.

Waning Gibbous

On those late, lonely walks to my dorm,
where I look behind me every minute,
I shiver from the harsh wind warning me to walk back
so I end up calling you, and you always answer it.
You always answer because you always know
how scared I am of walking alone.
your voice seeps into my pores, wraps around me
and you become my favorite blanket, hand-sewn.
In that cold night, you become a cup of hot cocoa,
the moonlight shining through my window.
With a simple hello, the wick in my bones start to burn,
and nothing can cool my blushing face, not even the snow.
But during this I start to wonder: how do you always seem to notice my plights? How are
you able to always comfort me, all while continuing to shine your moonlight?

Third Quarter

At the last party of our semester,
the darkening lights continued to dim
until you walked in; a shining beauty—
looking so radiant flowers turned dull, the rest of the room grim
all the stars were captured in your smile
and shined as you handed the host a gift covered in lace:
a basket of treats with the calories scratched out—
which you told me you've always done “just in case.”
I wish I talked to you that late night, watched as you shined, but like how the
night transitions to day, you left as quickly as you arrived.

New Moon

The stars were brighter than ever, that night
and I'm not sure if it was the stars, the alcohol, or you
but the sweetness, the feeling
of you by my side— I felt completely anew.
I could barely feel the snow against me,
for I could only focus on this one moment, just us two
As our divine prints sculpted into the snow,
we observed the few stars in the overwhelming blue.
And at that moment you exhaled and told me:
“I hate the cold, but I love how it burns.”
The moon shines as equally as it wanes.
And finally, I looked at your cracks, craters, turns.
And although you now illuminate a different shade in my eyes, I will still
forever see you as the one skipping to my car before the sunrise.

14

Alex Thuene

Stand Strong!

Memory of Mother's Glass—

 Heave, and gasp

Cool, remains the seat

Leather blue and soft

lends itself to laying—

 so I do

Sleep Little

Think much of her hair

 silky, soot-color

And how she slept

 in my lap

A Moment—

Aged like wine

subsumed beneath the din of glass, slipped

 a shatter,

Most important—

the hush of fingers,

 When they sift through hair—

A hallway slanted, hissing, Tall

Dark

the spill, sordid

a fine year, a shame to Waste

Her silhouette,

 So Familiar—

 slight frame, small hands, calcium-deficient fingernails—

 Glassless, palms so scotch-coated

 narrow shoulders

 shudder, heave, aches:

 soot-bearing hips

 glass-throwing hands

Poor October,

And my tentative Love Listen to the

last of it—

pulse

Pour Dark liquor!

 fill the silence

 thin my smile

There's sinew enough—

For a year of pain.

Days Before

Hailey Furilla

You're the ache in my elbow
and I'm the seat of your bike
and how we fly with nothing but
our own cackles to cradle us.

We're finding balance on
the beach as the shoreline
crumbles under our feet
now too cold for we stole
jingles to wear in our hair
lady slippers to don on our toes.

We aren't two ends of
a phone line but white trim
bunk beds stretching base
to head curved on quiet
secrets all our own and
they sound of broken glass
of silken scarves and tucked
in our pillows they even smell
of the words we passed
through humid summer.

Where are the oceans and forests and rivers
where we'd skin our knees
down to the small bird bones
slipping into frog skin as
we ran into autumnal days
before
when dog teeth and thorns
caught thin skin and thick hair
when I was what you poked and prodded
when you didn't care too much to whine.

When you weren't scared
to hug me all the way back.

ache in my elbow

find balance

under our feet

our toes.

We aren't two ends of
a phone line but

secrets all our own

tucked

into autumnal days
before

when I was what you poked and prodded

When you weren't scared

hug me all the way back

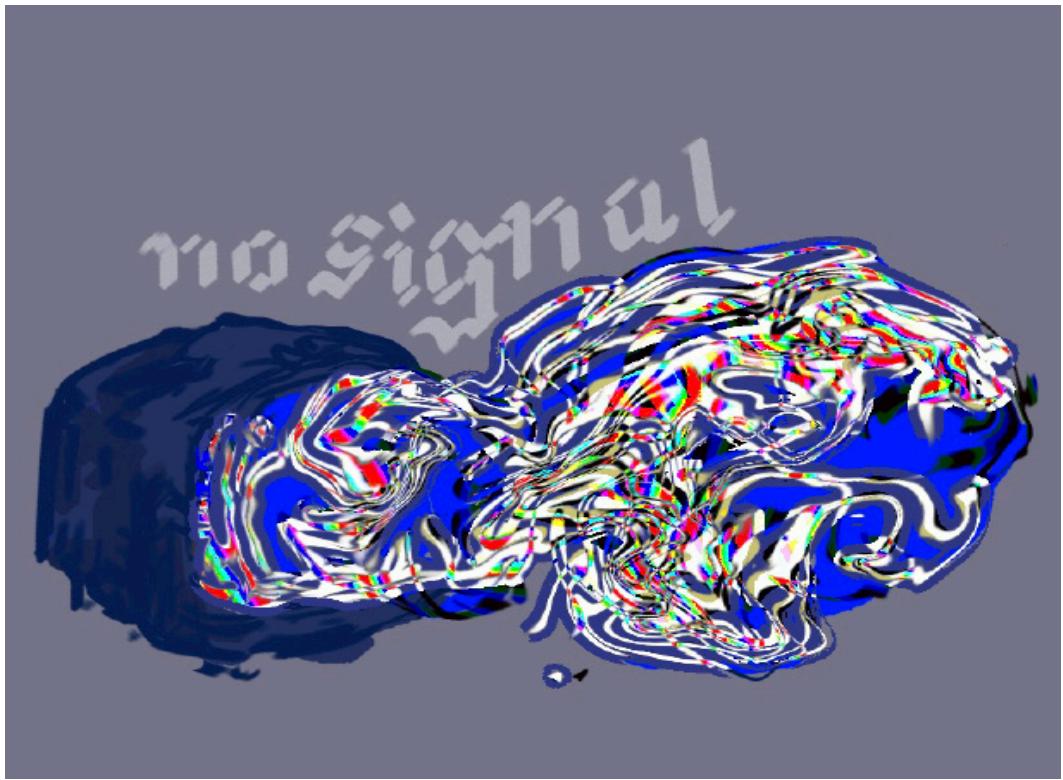


The Dimensionalist
Digital Art
Olivia Liera

Words On Set

Claudia Maurino

I sit behind the wall and wait to be wanted
I roll clean marbles down long hallways and brace
for impact, there's nothing quite like a firework
for results, nothing quite like the paper airplane, though
for desire they've not yet found a cure and it's easier to
keep your head down makes your neck hurt but at least
you stay dry, simple, unnoticed the girl slinks around
the corner into some other concrete
reason that everything terrible will someday be okay to eat
with enough mustard, a little relish, you know, street style
is when you wear the \$300 cowboy boots
in your soul and leaves of a yellowing tree in your hair and
pretend they grew there, natural, normal is a myth for weepers
and we are not in the economy of crying: other pearls shall pay
our passage down the waterways, which are mysterious and not
to be looked at directly when you wake up, you must begin
doing, there are few rules and that is one, two, three, four aching
in big rooms take an aspirin, for wants beyond your station, take
two on the third take hit your mark, for god's sake, we are all
going to be late to class!



NO SIGNAL
Digital Art
Kieran Dowd

Reaching out to the d/Deaf and Hard of Hearing Community in Cinema

Robin Lee

The controlled slam of drumsticks sends vibrations up to your elbows. Each stroke threatens to pierce the pockmarked drum skin. Beads of sweat drip from your hair and refract light from the bright flashes above into the whites of your eyes. You look out into the crowd—nodders, dancers, moshers, kickers, somersaulters—and look to your girlfriend, Lou: dressed in black, frenzied hair illuminated by the harsh lights, she screams into the mic in front of her. Music is your life. You are a recovering drug addict—heroin—of four years. An anxious meeting with a doctor informs you that you've lost over seventy percent of your hearing. You will soon go completely deaf. You are angry, lost. You are Ruben Stone.

Sound of Metal is a movie that debuted in 2019, under the director Darius Marder, starring Riz Ahmed as Ruben Stone. It follows Ruben's struggle with his deafness and addiction and how he navigates through this in a deaf community (rehabilitation) center.

When first released—although the film played an integral role in raising awareness of the deaf experience—many questioned its integrity, especially of its representation of deaf culture. In the 21st century where a constantly changing socio-political culture affects how diverse social groups are represented in film, recent efforts towards inclusion and respect-

ful representation rarely extend outside of race, gender, weight, and queer identity. They especially fall short in the context of disability. American cinema is and has been unwelcome to accurately and authentically representing diverse groups, and when they do, it's a presentation. Not to be confused with representation, presentation is the insertion of a character for diversity points—there is no thoughtfulness or depth behind the character; their race, gender, weight, queerness, disability, etc. is all they are. In most cases, disabled characters are written and played by able-bodied people who write and act out conceptualized versions of disabled life. The essay “Disabling discourses: Contemporary cinematic representations of acquired physical disability” by Shawni Botha and Claire Harvey describes the harmful effects of this as such: “...discrimination is institutionalized in the social, cultural, political, and economic fabric of society...disabling representations in the media ‘are fundamental to the discrimination and exploitation which disabled people encounter daily, and contribute significantly to their systematic exclusion’” (Botha & Harvey, 2022). Representations of disability in media are the main, if not only, mode of insight able-bodied people have on the disabled experience if they do not experience it first or second hand. Often, directors and actors dramatize the portrayal of a disabled character, grotesquely emphasizing negative aspects of living with disability to garner pity points and add some sort of cinematic “flair.” Thus, these stereotypical, discriminatory, and largely inaccurate representations are consequently reflected in how those with disabilities are treated and marginalized in society.

So I pose this question: how well does *Sound of Metal* portray deafness in the context of historic and modern deaf culture in film, and how can cinematic deaf/hearing disability representation be more accommodating? Given America’s current film culture and its (lack of) accommodation for d/Deaf audiences, *Sound of Metal* does surprisingly well at isolating and reaching a d/Deaf audience, and works to mindfully capture the deaf experience through critical representation, sound mixing, and open captions; these are choices that should continue to be made for movies in order to accommodate d/Deaf and/or hard of hearing (HOH) viewers.

Although I discussed American cinema’s exclusion and, to an extent, exploitation, of deaf culture, it has not always been like this. From 1824 to 1929, the “silent era”—a time period in which films were produced without audio—flourished, before taking a nosedive at the end of the 1920s with the rise of talking films, or “talkies,” thus shaping the film industry as we know it today. What drove this change? Phonocentrism, the idea that sounds and speech are superior to manual forms of communication, was central to America’s shift from silent movies to talkies. This was reflected by the transition from manualism (sign language) to oralism (speech and lip reading). In the essay “Better Gestures: A Disability History Perspective on the Transition from (Silent) Movies to Talkies in the United States,” Russell L. Johnson writes, “Oralism...was part of ‘enforcing normalcy’ on the deaf” as well as overall marginalization (Johnson, 2016). Silent movies were commonly viewed as unintelligent, and referred to as “dummies”—a term also used as an epithet towards d/Deaf people, implying that to be non-hearing was to be unintelligent, non-human. These efforts to ‘enforce [mainstream] normalcy’ resulted in shifts towards oralism in educational, societal, and cinematic spheres. In the latter, a disproportional dependency on oralism and a deliberate exclusion of manualist forms such as subtitles made films inaccessible for those with hearing disabilities, erasing this community’s ability to participate in cinema culture.

The interesting thing about *Sound of Metal* is that manualism is a central part of the viewing experience, as it uses sign language as a way to trace Ruben’s progress in coming to terms with his hearing disability and addiction. When Ruben first arrives at the deaf community rehabilitation center, he struggles to communicate with the others, and is resistant

to learning sign language, partly because his sign language classmates are children. The film portrays his growth by decreasing his use of speech as a primary mode of communication, and a gradual shift towards sign language.

A scene that captures this well is Ruben tapping a drumbeat into a metal slide as Michael, a kid in Ruben's sign language class, presses his ear into the slide to feel the vibrations; the next scene cuts to Ruben teaching the kids drum beats using empty buckets. The scene is simple but incredibly impactful: it's a thoughtful, authentic way of capturing the humanity of deaf people—something that, while it shouldn't be, is rare. Using manualism as one way of tracing Ruben's progression—socially, intellectually, mentally, emotionally—defies omnipresent phonocentrism and is a staunch reminder that manualism and deaf culture still exists and is thriving. *Sound of Metal* is full of scenes like this: Ruben and the kids in his sign language class placing their hands on a piano someone is playing to feel the vibrations, having competitions to see who can sign the alphabet the fastest, passionate and charged conversations using ASL around the dinner table.

Amidst existing films about deafness and disability that withhold humanity and instead over-dramatize and fetishize how miserable (newly) disabled life is, the simplicity and humanness of the aforementioned scenes are rare. But it shouldn't be. Disability representation in film should not have to have reality pimped out for cinematic flair or to prove humanity.

Let's trace back to silent films and talkies. A profound impact of silent films was that it leveled the playing field for hearing and non-hearing audiences. If anything, they predominantly benefited d/Deaf audiences, as they could pick up on certain nuances in the films' manual communication that hearing viewers could not. *Sound of Metal* takes into consideration the d/Deaf audience through its sound design, as well as its deliberate open captions. It accurately captures the sonic experience of someone who is hard of hearing. The movie's audio is from Ruben's perspective and travels in and out between the sounds he hears—warped warbles, muffled, muted sounds and voices, silence—and what's actually happening, trapping the viewer within Ruben's experience. For hearing audiences, this gives them insight into the experiences of the d/Deaf or HOH community, while d/Deaf and HOH audiences can recognize and relate to the familiarity of what Ruben is going through. This places the non-hearing and hard of hearing as the primary viewing audience.

The film achieves this through other modes: it has open captions—captions burned into the film itself so you can't turn them off—so the viewer does not have to be hearing-dependent to experience the film. Open captions are rare, even when films have deaf representation. Ironic? Yes, very. Interestingly, in *Sound of Metal*, open captions are not available for scenes where characters are communicating solely through ASL, placing hearing people who do not understand ASL on the outside looking in. Films about deaf culture and experience should take into consideration not only portrayal, but accommodation of d/Deaf and HOH communities.

Movies and movie theater experiences are hugely inaccessible to the d/Deaf and hard-of-hearing community. One step towards inclusion would be to require open captions for all movie showings at theaters. This would not only include d/Deaf or HOH viewers but also benefit hearing viewers. An article from the National Institute of Health “Video Captions Benefit Everyone” by Morton Ann Gernsbacher states, “...captions, also known as same-language subtitles, benefit everyone who watches videos...captioning a video improves comprehension of, memory for, and attention to videos, for children, adolescents, college students, and adults” (Gernsbacher, 2015). Open captions are beneficial for a range of audiences, from those who are not fluent in the film's primary language, to those with

auditory processing disorders, to able-bodied people of all ages, etc. The advantages of open captions are not restricted to d/Deaf and HOH viewers.

Representation in cinema rarely encompasses diverse race, gender, weight, queer identities, etc. and falls particularly short when it comes to disability, both regarding the film itself and the film's viewing experience. *Sound of Metal* is an exception that breaks out of this conventional marginalization and misrepresentation of the d/Deaf experience, culture, and community through its thoughtful representation, storytelling, sound design, and open captions. So how can cinematic representation be more accommodating for under-represented and misrepresented communities? All movies should contain open captions, and all movies about disability and marginalized identities should come from a place of consideration, authenticity, and humaneness, not from a place of ignorance and ill intention.

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Mystical Stump Landscape
Digital Photography
Noah Stebbins

It was Summer / It Was Morning

Kimberly Coke

Contrapuntal Poem: a poem where each column is read separately, then across both columns to create another poem

It Was Summer

When I opened my eyes
In the pool of
Shallow water, you swam into
Darkness, body disappearing
To a place I couldn't follow
Come back—
For a moment
I was alone in the water
I saw you
Moving gracefully
At last,
Returning
For a moment
Resurfaced, breathing
We were girls, once
It was summer, once

It Was Morning

The morning after you'd gone
Light, filtered as if through
Smoke
Silently, they took you away
I kept waiting
Turn around, you left me
I thought I was dreaming
But you didn't wake up
Under a star, dancing
Like this was your home
You smiled
To me
Memories,

Impermanent
Do you remember it?

Salt Flat

Maanasa Dhavala

My father and my mother were buried in the salt flats. Tossed in the same grave even, seeing as how they shared the same sickness and all. My brother too, when they found him crumpled off a horse. His brain had damn near leaked out of his skull already, and the salt had soaked it up. Not even a stain left.

It's coming for me now. I can't leave the church without salt crystals sticking to my eyelids, running underneath my fingernails. It worms itself into the tread of my boots, the fold of the Roman collar, between the buttons and the fabric of the cassock. When I lie awake at night, I repeat the rosary to myself, but I am a man of god, and I know that all of God's children will meet the fate our Lord has set for them. Mine is in the salt.

Lately, I've been hearing it calling. An empty voice as I walk, as I turn my head. The Butcher and the Bartender know it too - he's been looking at me funny and she's been overfilling my glasses. There's no mirror in the church, but I can see clear enough that I carry the pallor of a dead man around.

God is up there, in the cosmos. He is, he is, he is, I have been preaching and believing for decades and he must be. On the worst nights I scream straight up, begging him to please not condemn me to this, that I will take any other. Give me Samson, please, or Noah dying of old age, but not Lot's Wife. I have never been disobedient.

It's on a night like this I make my game against the salt. It's up to my knees now, as I clasp hands and recite prayers. I have not been sleeping lately, and I eat very little, always bland. Much of the time I should be doing either is spent here.

Please God, please. I have served you for my life and I will serve you for seven more if I must. The salt is reaching out its hands and I can't stay there. I will die any other way, please, God, help me.

She is sent to me then. A child, fifteen or sixteen, an answer to my Lord's prayer. She is in a shift with a candle in hand, asking if I am alright, if I need anything, and I know this is God. I have served him, and he has sent me a lamb to sacrifice on the altar, an offering to ease these gaping teeth.

She follows me inside, sits while I bring her milk and stale bread. She is like a daughter to me, although I cannot remember her very well. I must have done her Christening and her Communion, helped her pick out the name of a Saint. I don't remember what it was.

Joan, she says, and God is indeed gracious. She is like a child to me, and so I've poured laudanum in the milk. It would have been cruel to have not. She is birdlike as I carry her out, bones hollow and light as I lay her down. It is like a bed of snow, though I know she's never seen such a thing.

Was Abraham not commanded to kill Isaac? Was God not telling me to leave this child in my place, to win a victory against evil? She was asleep when it happened, which is far kinder than Abraham was, and God did not send down any horns to stop me.

There is a fuss in the morning, and then a cry. She is a good and godly child, and her mother believes this until she sees the way the girl is lying, injuries self-inflicted. There is a mourning and there is an anger, but there is also such a blanket of shame over Sunset that after days, it is like she did not live at all. An offering should not have a prior purpose.

But the salt eats through her quickly, calcifies and takes its hold and then realizes this is not what it had asked for. This is not what it had wanted, what it had been promised, and so it pulls back. It allows rot in.

The first sign was the meat. The Butcher sliced open one pig belly, then another, cut the head off a cow, skinned a cat just to see, and it was all the same. A black, damp mold taking over the animal, climbing up from the stomach like bile repurposed. The barn cats stopped catching mice, and the mice stopped being a nuisance.

I started being unable to stomach anything except imported wheat and liquor. Anything else caused black heaves, from deeper than my stomach.

The town was next. Buildings built out of clay and wood, buildings that had stood for decades, buildings that replaced the mess here before swayed and cried like they had heat-stroke. The high wood rafters of the brothel developed an odd white speckling, like they had been lost at sea for years.

I couldn't sleep for days, with the fever-hot sweat of the church walls closing in. I'd close my

eyes and they would push in close until morning.

Then, the people. Are we not animals? Are we not all creatures, the same under God's eyes? The animals were choking on mold, and the pianist was unable to bend his fingers anymore. A showgirl, the lamb's cousin or sister or something unimportant, started coughing one day, and she was gone by the next.

I'd started getting dizzy when I prayed out at night. I walked with a limp, one leg slightly dark and discolored under the cassock as I led Sunday service and preached about plagues.

I did her funeral, her family wearing the same grieving clothes they'd worn the last time. She was oddly tinged and pale, even for the dead, and they'd decided to bury her in the clothes she died in. The beading on her costume had gone white and crystal.

I still go out at night to pray, but it's less desperate now. I'm able to plead less to God, because I know that he has answered me - I will die one day, but this wretched salt will not drown me. It will not suffocate me, drying me out until I am a husk. It will not complete its collection and I will leave it wanting.

My family is not an evil people. My father built this town, took a horse and two pearl-handled revolvers and cleared the brush of the area until it was a flat, empty expanse of wasteland, built the brothel and the distillery and the butcher's with his own two hands until it was a town finally worth something. We are not evil people.

The Butcher keeps killing and the Bartender keeps losing girls and the walls of the church press in, press in, press in further every night. Those of my flock I have not lost to the rot or fleeing stare with wide, believing eyes as I rage at the sinners who have given this divine wrath. The adulterers and the gamblers, the brothel girls and those who do not fast during Lent. God is punishing them because he loves them, I say. Repent.

A matter of hours I wake up to a ceiling that is contracting with a heartbeat, that leaks foul black liquid onto my eyes. It stings and it blinds me. I stumble out to the salt and I know I have won. I own the land, yet I do not belong to it, and there is nothing it can do to make it so. My mouthless scream of joy carries, and I hear it echo back to me from the mountain. All of me over all of this, and still I am not owned.

The parishioners remark on my frozen mouth the next day, the snow that holds my lips from ever closing. I smile at them, and they flinch because they do not know better. That day I tell them about Moses leading his people out of plague and into safety. I am Moses and I am safety, and they shrink back away from me in fear and still I lead them through the ocean. My hand seizes as I raise it, fingers stuck together with thick phrases of crystals.

The leg goes next. I limp and I am joyous, because God is testing me with an angelic adversary and I am winning.

The distillery closes, and the Bartender closes up the brothel. She's lost all her girls, she says, and I barely remember their caskets. The families move and the Butcher wanders off, dried blood on his apron and a bloom of fungus at his eye. I lay in my church and I pray and I feel righteous, because God has listened. The salt did not kill me and I am not dead.

I wake up in solace now, my body a mass of white crystal, my face permanently in a wide-toothed, wide-eyed smile. The few people left in town had fled once they saw me, hulking and shuffling in a half-done up cassock, calcified like bedrock. Still I smile, because I can't do anything else. I lived and I conquered, and now I spend my days speaking to the lamb, watching as her rot spreads through our town and the next.

Maybe We Should Both Go To Michigan

Shawn Galligan

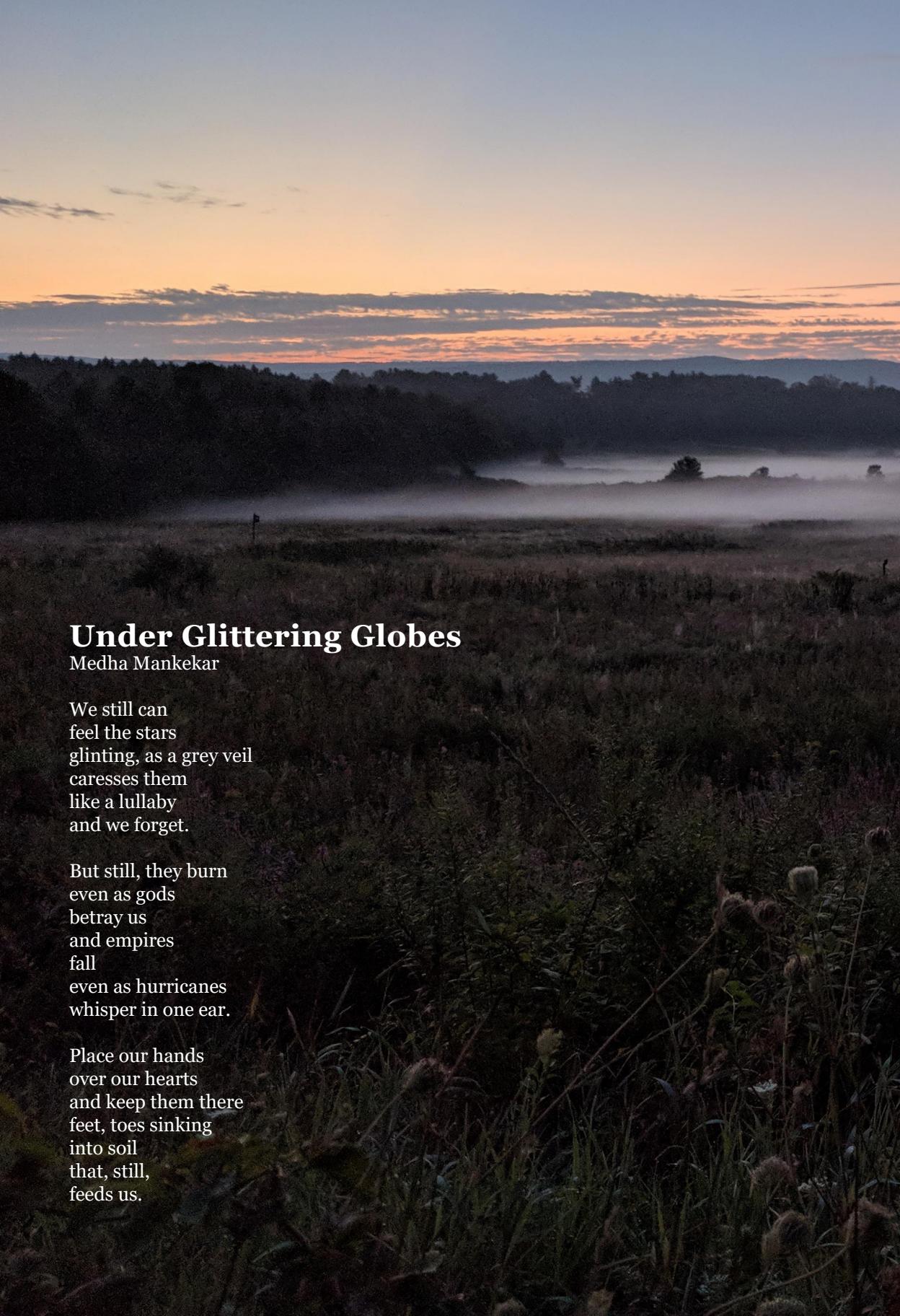
It's been so long since I've been kissed that my mouth has begun to wither.
It feels like a form of madness, that metastasized wanting that grips me
and shepherds me through nighttime walks and basement parties
that intangible embrace which lightly points my chin and casts my gaze

It's been so long since you've heard from him that you almost don't want to.
It comes in waves for you, that illusory domesticity, whispered impossibilities
the need of it, the indifference to it, a cyclical tide dragged over the sand
the terrifying reality that love is perhaps not enough or simply not convenient

We have spent a thousand nights in cars
theorizing about the value of casual sex
turning the idea of it in our minds
debating how and with whom it would be best
but you are not willing and I am too frightened
so the topic will be tabled until next we meet

Oh, maybe we should both go to Michigan,
and there will be a perfect little place there
Neither of us would bemoan our unwelcomeness
And we would like the people there I think
or dislike them just enough that we could debrief
and laugh at a thousand little irritations

The music would be the right music because we would both know it
And a girl would not say to you *you're so pretty* but would instead
ask you to dance and then ask you to coffee and she would decide
the place and time, just so that you wouldn't have to.



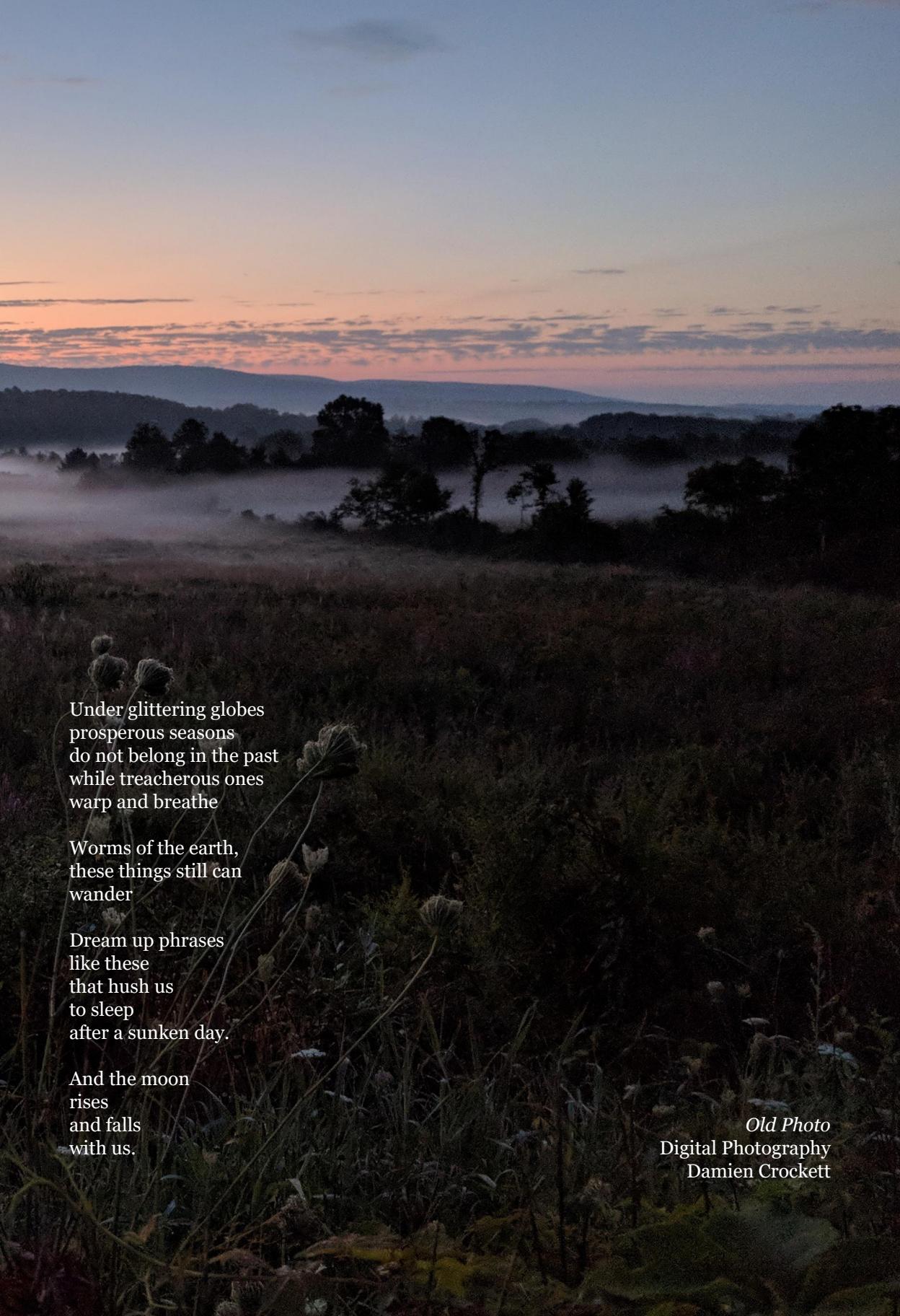
Under Glittering Globes

Medha Manekar

We still can
feel the stars
glinting, as a grey veil
caresses them
like a lullaby
and we forgot.

But still, they burn
even as gods
betray us
and empires
fall
even as hurricanes
whisper in one ear.

Place our hands
over our hearts
and keep them there
feet, toes sinking
into soil
that, still,
feeds us.



Under glittering globes
prosperous seasons
do not belong in the past
while treacherous ones
warp and breathe

Worms of the earth,
these things still can
wander

Dream up phrases
like these
that hush us
to sleep
after a sunken day.

And the moon
rises
and falls
with us.

Old Photo
Digital Photography
Damien Crockett



Huddled-Up Heron
Digital Photography
Noah Stebbins

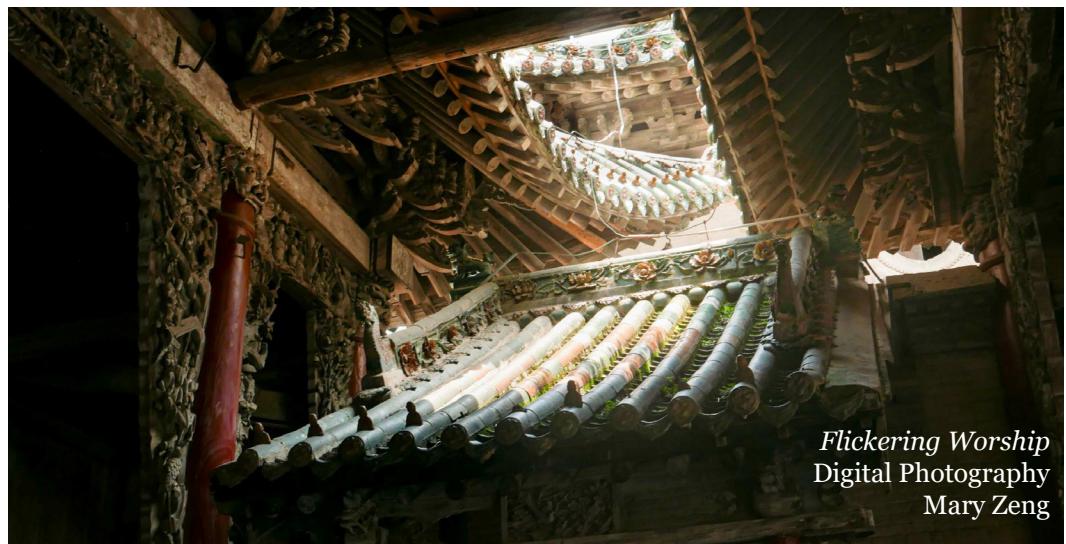


Shrouded Frog
Digital Photography
Noah Stebbins

How To Make A Universe

Claudia Maurino

have two friends
and a lot of wine
sit on mis-matched stools at a townie pub
and shout above the dusty, rural din
about shaving your legs and make up and first kisses
how to be a good feminist, how to fail a little
then get in the car, take a wrong turn, take two
and wind up where you thought you weren't going
then follow that asphalt till it bleeds
into the sky —and then drive there
keep going till the stars become a fine mist
like snowfall, like sparklers, like the glint
in your headstrong friend's eyes
and come down to earth, not with a kiss, not lightly
but with a smack, with a laugh
(hot, heavy, from your sternum), laugh
a laugh that takes something from you
and gives it back like a magic trick
return home and do not be tired
plan a life you couldn't possibly live
and gossip (you must— you are women)
and knit your words into a day you can wear tomorrow
and chalk it up to learning, to experience
("experience" she said
"that's the only reason I ever wanted to do anything anyway")



Flickering Worship
Digital Photography
Mary Zeng



Cloudy Skies
Digital Photography
Zoe George

Emily Dickinson & I Eat at the Hadley, Massachusetts Taco Bell & Talk About Everything & Nothing All At Once

Erica Larsen

It goes like this: we meet in Amherst Books. I guess she chooses me to tap on the shoulder on account of the long brown dress I had picked out this morning, but I am not of all that much assistance to her beyond maybe looking more familiar than the women in the store dressed in ripped denim. And really, most days I am a ripped-jeans wearer too. It's just autumn, finally, and my long brown dress is perfect in autumn, layered over a black turtleneck. Pure coincidence. So when she, in her floor-length skirt and thick cream blouse, extends her arm and asks me where she might be able to find poetry, I lead her to the back wall. I peer at her out of the corner of my eye as she picks a book adorned with her perfect likeness off the shelf, and she flips through it and frowns, and then it is my turn to tap her on the shoulder: *I know you and I aren't acquainted, but, well, have you ever heard of a Doritos Locos Taco?*

So Emily Dickinson hitches her skirt up to climb into my dirty Honda and I take her to the Taco Bell in the next town over, where we sit in the drive-through line until we are

handed two Doritos Locos Tacos and a medium Baja Blast. I give her the bag and drive us to the back of the Target parking lot. She unfolds the top and asks me why Taco Bell, of all the places. Seems she's kept up on the basics: she isn't confused about the car, or the traffic lights, or the roads, or my phone, or the existence of the Taco Bell. She pulls the tacos out, crunches into one. I shrug. *I saw a thing once about, if we gave a small Victorian child a Dorito, would that one singular Dorito have more flavor in it than all the other food they would ever eat?*

Dorito. She rolls the word around in her mouth. Takes another bite. *You know, it's not bad.*

I nod my way through the silence as Emily Dickinson chews her bright orange taco. The grease drips a little out the back and slides down her hand onto the fabric of her blouse, so I say: *Girl, we've got to get you a T-shirt or something.* She lets me take her inside the Target and buy her a green shirt and a pair of sweatpants, but she won't change into them even when I promise not to look. Maybe her bra's dirty or something. I don't judge.

When I pass the shirt and pants over, she takes them and ducks her head a little. Folds her taco wrapper up into a neat square. Picks the shredded cheese off her lap. *Can you take me home?*

Your house is a museum now, I tell her, but she shrugs. I know what she means. Home's home. I get it just as well as anyone. And, anyway, who would I be to say no to Emily Dickinson?

I take her home. On the way, she asks me if I am a poet. For a long moment, I fall silent. I don't have words to explain how I am a poet: there's the way I write only in class, late at night, or early in the morning; the way my poetry falls out of me all at once for three hours and then not again for weeks; the way I've never truly called myself a poet, but, well, I guess I am one, if only by the most liberal of definitions. I don't tell her this. I don't want to bore her. I settle for *I try.*

She nods. *Don't stop trying.* A silence falls over us while I pull the car off to the side of the road to let her out. *Thanks for the taco.* Emily Dickinson gets out of my car, and the hem of her skirt gets a little wet in the October dew as she walks through the grass. She places a hand on the outside wall; breathes deep in; raps her knuckles on the wood of her door. I can see where her fingers have stained the wall orange with Dorito dust.



Booths
3-D Environment Render
TJ LaLonde



Pancakes
3-D Environment Render
TJ LaLonde

Thought while Filling our Glasses

Milan Portilla

The drowning lily's white voice
lights another vessel, another silent
vessel below.
Bargains rooted in the red mud, wicked petals
drifting on the promenade of surface,
bubbles gathered
in the corner like grapes valleyed or vined,
life's greed, gulps of air or the gasps
of a drowning thing.

Lifting my eyes from the bottle
of Merlot,
I pour her a glass, and me,
wondering if Jesus ever tired
of the fraying taste, and decided
to part with the wine, turning it back
into water again,
maybe to wash down his last supper
or maybe to feed that parched lily
that's buried deep
inside each of us.



Pop of Color
Digital Photography
Luke Patton

Narcissus

Oliver Berg

there is a place within these walls
where goldfish float like dandelion seeds
carried by the wind
where time, our strangled lover
bends in a wet kiss.

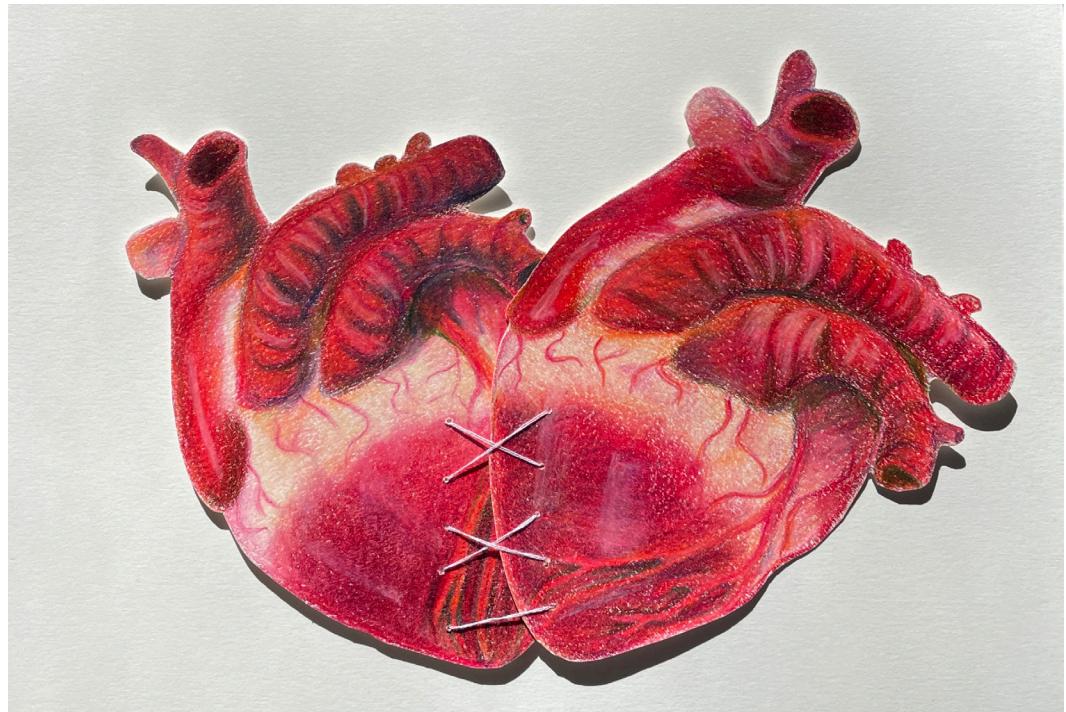
there is a place within these walls
where the memory of our skin
is pressed to the checkered floor,
bone against tile,
the flesh of the room tearing holes with its teeth.

within the walls of the room is glass

reflecting our bodies
between
two worlds that can never touch.
the satin stitching of our skeleton,
a firefly alight on one rib,
dust, filling up the spaces between.

a cool memory of our own tired hands
undressing our body slowly

first the skin, and then muscle
until nothing is left of this blistered mind
but bone;
a blanket of ecstasy,
the carcass of a star,
a pot overfilled,
and then,
empty.



Valentine
Colored Pencil on Paper and Embroidery Thread
Kimberly Coke

liminal valentine

Elizabeth Tatro

you're always at Love's doorway and Love's gate and
at the edge of Love's swimming pool and you're always
a thing staring at thresholds and doorbells and chasms
at a depth not romantic but Romantic, wherein
it is not appealing to drown but greatly appealing to be
the body in the swimming pool.

you're a Schrödinger-type
would love to be *inside-outside-both-neither*
unfit for any kind of place.
you're not Pandora, you're the thing in the box:
the cat, and the devils, and the body, and the packing peanuts.

heavy is the head that wears the crown. heavy is
the body in the swimming pool.

Ophelia sends her regards and yesterday's horoscope.

some things are built well to be underwater or inside or in lawns
behind gates but you aren't that
but you aren't *un*-that.
frying pan and acid bath.
whatever the opposite of amphibious is
neither at home on water or land
a *something-somewhat-somehow*.

they should let you write that on the census.
they should write that on the museum plaque for all your letters,
unsent, unwritten.
bring in the guests, let them stare at the space of
the un-thing and see something.

let them imagine another letter,
unsent, unwritten,
and add it to the pile that isn't there.

Rituals, Roles and Reflexivity: How Sexuality Defines *Jeanne Dielman*

Jeanne Dielman

Dex Veitch

On impulse or instinct, the housewife enacts a role of chronic ritual. The woman becomes a wife, mother, homemaker; her life becomes her husband, her children, her home. A housewife is a living example of a performance of femininity; her actions follow the example, lineage, and connotations of traditional gender roles. However, even if she adheres to these roles, the housewife is always under the scrutiny of eyes that will always view her under a sexual lens. There is a delicate distinction between the Madonna and the Whore that is subject to change, coinciding with the ever-evolving perception of sex.¹ Given this, analyzing the depiction of traditional femininity, and its relation to sex, can be used to understand misogyny's pertinence and the ways to combat it. So, how can this dichotomy be handled with sensitivity and objectivity at once? Depiction comes in many forms, but of the mediums and examples that can be used to capture, only cinema can elicit a sensorial and temporal experience equal in magnitude. For our purposes, there is one film in the canon of the medium that makes itself evident as the clear example to analyze. As much a character study as an interactive film, we discover the life of the domestic woman through the depiction of her complete, uninterrupted, and brain-numbing routine of rituals. In effect, she forces us to think about how we view this type of life and femininity that usually goes unseen. The domestic woman is representative of no one, yet she is representative of every woman. She is only herself. She is *Jeanne Dielman*.

A landmark in feminist, experimental and generalized cinema, Chantal Akerman's 1975 film *Jeanne Dielman 23, Quai Du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* reveals to its audience not just a nuanced portrait of womanhood, but an opportunity to uncover the role that sexuality has in defining said woman. The film's recognition and acclaim have grown since its initial release,¹ and with it has come forth a new interest in understanding the film within the context of Akerman's filmmaking. Her narrative themes (often relating to identity, through harsh self-reflection and/or chaos) and minimalist style (especially her use of silence and repetition) culminate to make this film her widely-understood masterpiece. *Jeanne Dielman* is a film that follows a housewife over the course of three days. A widow, titular Jeanne takes care of her house and her son, which we see in its entirety (and its tedium). It is also revealed that Jeanne is a sex worker, and this revelation alters how the film functions. Jeanne's routine begins to fall apart and it ends with her killing a client. Because of this event, Jeanne's sexuality becomes a factor we can more critically consider, and relate to the overall feminist reading of the film. Jeanne is presented to us as a polarized (if not contradictory) portrayal of womanhood solely because of her sexuality. But the film is one that invites a feminist reading in how it handles such a character, and so we may read Jeanne's sexual experiences as something more complex than a detriment to her purity. If we understand how the film realizes Jeanne's experience through its cinematic choices, we can gain a better understanding of why sex is equally employed as a thematic tool.

This film has a very tactile approach to mise-en-scène and visual world-building, which results in a character study defined by its sensorial approach. Every sense is imagined and realized in a way that elicits a feeling of familiarity with the environment. This results in the audience coming to know the home like Jeanne. The way the camera remains still and composed, to soak in every figment of each room, mirrors the intended lens through which to view *Jeanne Dielman*. We study Jeanne and her home so that we may see where they blur together to reflect the inner state. There is immense emphasis placed on staging and

blocking to present a choreographed portrait of a woman and of the subjugation of all women. As Carlo Chatrian muses, “..every shot functions like a cage...the reduction of mise-en-scène variables offers the protagonist a stage not unlike a theater.”² Like a theater or a cage, the stage is set so we may peer at Jeanne’s life. Yet where Akerman proves her ingenuity of presentation is in how in order to peer into Jeanne’s life, we must vicariously undergo its extremity. And while the space of the film is limited to the setting of the apartment, the *time* is not limited by such constraints. Akerman manipulates time as a narrative element so we experience Jeanne’s life not as a passive viewer but as a forced participant, intentionally placed at a distance. The audience watches her in real time, not allotted the cuts, edits and pace of a conventional narrative. The audience’s viewing experience, in turn, becomes an exercise of endurance as Jeanne’s monotonous and rigidly structured routine is presented to us. This dynamic between viewer and character mimics the dynamic of Jeanne as a woman in relation to men; with the viewer assuming the historically masculinized role of voyeur, and Jeanne, as a result, assuming the role as object of our view. This masculine voyeurship is subverted when confronted with the agonizing reality of how womanhood has confined Jeanne. This agony becomes visible through the condition of her home. The apartment is lived-in and homely enough, yet it follows a strict order that is unnervingly controlled. We witness this order happen, emphasizing the process of creating said order, emphasizing the labor required of Jeanne for maintenance. Order is the architecture of the home, as it is the architecture of Jeanne’s life and the architecture of the film.

Thus, when order falls apart, so does all else. The unraveling is tense, slow and meditative, testing the audience to notice. Unsettling yet inoffensive in its subtlety, Jeanne’s demise is as quiet and slow as the rest of her life. While the pivotal moment of conflict climaxes in the second-to-last scene (as Jeanne kills her client), its overtly sexual context reframes the way the entire film depicts sex. It makes us consider sex as a much more powerful element, as a force at work used to make Jeanne who she is to the audience. Sexuality is a defining aspect of Jeanne,² both in terms of characterization and of societal perception. Her role as a woman is made more complex because of her role as a sex worker.

The function of sex in the film doesn’t require explicit or graphic representation. Instead, sex is depicted through filmatic allusion and euphemism, placing distance in between the viewer’s proximity to Jeanne’s sexuality. The viewer sees pieces of Jeanne in every action, every chore she completes, all so it may construct a tableau of her character. But sex, even and especially including her own action of sex, is strictly transactional in its approach. It is like her other daily duties, a part of her routine she enacts to sustain her household. As Jeanne’s domestic property is used as a prop for her daily performance of femininity, so too is her body used to perform and to provide. She does not have sex for pleasure, but rather has intercourse as one of her chores, something that we see visually represented through the editing. For instance, unlike most of her other tasks, sex with clients is not shown in excruciating detail and length, but rather skipped over. We see Jeanne greet these men, take their coats and hats, and lead them to her bedroom to close the door on the viewer’s eye. A cut to the next sequence reveals Jeanne leading these men on their way out, presumably some time later (indicated from a change in lighting). While their entrances and exits are shown in the pace and tedium we expect, Jeanne actually engaging in intercourse is not revealed to us. The effect this has is dynamic—it can be seen to represent how Jeanne thinks sex has become so insignificant that her perception glosses over it, or how in some way she doesn’t want the viewer to be privy to her intimately. In some small sense, it shows a control Jeanne has over even our own view, censoring her sexuality and keeping it hidden. It echoes the perceived control she possesses when working as a seductress,

which is a farce because financially she is at the mercy of her clients. The omission of

these sex scenes creates a juxtaposition to the rest of the film's lingering cinematography. It taints the sex scenes with a feeling of apprehension and uncertainty as they are not made visible to us, and therefore go against the film's (and Jeanne's) established order.

The concealing of explicit sex is clearly intentional, and with the intent to change our preconceptions of the action. More than that, it is made abundantly clear to the viewer that sex, while likened to her other tasks, is distinct because of the weight attached to it. The distinction is drawn for us when Jeanne is shown taking a bath (0:08:30). We don't see her full body, but her bare breasts are visible, and enough to warrant an erotic expectation (from the lens of typical, voyeuristic cinema). This image of her in the bath can be viewed as sexual simply for the sake of showing a woman without clothing, yet is not that. By refusing the notion that nudity warrants a sexual outcome, Akerman forces reflection on what sex is and is not. Therefore, in conjugation with the feminist reading of the film, Jeanne's nudity serves as a way to emancipate her from sexualized voyeurism. At the same time, by being equally steadfast in the decision to not show sex, it may reveal her shame of being watched rather than her control over it happening. As Michaël Van Remoortere describes, "...not showing the acts of prostitution may also be a way of protecting her. It protects her from the voyeurism of the audience but it also protects her from having to deal with this transgressive existence she has carved out for herself."³ The bath scene shows a woman caring for her body the way she cares for the rest of her habitual ritual. It gives Jeanne autonomy and agency over her physical presentation, but that doesn't mean she feels physically (erotic or not) liberated. She timidly touches her own body, with the only semblance of closeness coming from its repetition and the process of upkeep. Jeanne treats her body the same as the rest of her chores, as something to maintain so that it may be used accordingly. However, it cannot go unmentioned that Jeanne using her physicality as a means of production is in conflict with her role as a woman. She is meant to be the head of the home, but as a woman she is not given the same access to the world outside of her domestic realm. Labor and life are intertwined (as well as limited to the context of domesticity) for Jeanne. She relies on sex work as a means of financial survival, which places her in a binary of gendered expectations. On one hand, she is emasculated by being the breadwinner and adopting a role that is assumed to be held by a man. This aspect of Jeanne's life may not be considered overtly masculine if not for its juxtaposition to the rest of her characterization. She, on the other hand, is so otherwise conventionally-feminine that any deviation from the standard becomes glaringly obvious. Her prostitution, her *work*, is also something that places Jeanne under a black-and-white observation. It also puts her femininity, or rather its adherence to tradition, into question. Like Akerman herself claims, "the prostitution sort of a metaphor anyway."⁴

Like her tedious plethora of chores, anything out of place from the predetermined routine becomes unbearably visible to the viewer. More than that, anything out of place signals impending worry from us, the audience, about what Jeanne might do. Herein lies the film's thesis: chaos comes from Jeanne deviating from the normalcy we've come to expect from her. Our idea of normalcy is entirely predetermined by seeing Jeanne perform a hyper-feminine role. So it makes sense that what causes Jeanne's most erratic and violent behavior was sex, seen as something that demonizes and defines the feminine role. The scene is emblematic of Jeanne's view of her own sexuality, repressed and confined to the point of disorder. The pivotal moment begins with Jeanne preoccupied while she should be expecting her guest. There is a knock and Jeanne leaves the room, placing scissors on the desk and leaving in a rush (3:07:37). This is the first time she has gone to greet a client unprepared. She takes off her shirt in the same fashion as she washed herself, careful and methodical, only for the scene to cut to her underneath the client, disinterested

and faraway. As the man moves, Jeanne grows tense and fidgety, pushing and growing more passionate. There is an ambiguity to her expression, difficult to discern whether she is experiencing pleasure or pain, showing her layered emotions surrounding sex. In order to be truly vulnerable, truly *visible*, during sex, Jeanne would need to relinquish the control she establishes by having her sexual activity follow order as everything else. As Akerman states “..not having pleasure was [Jeanne’s] last freedom. If Jeanne had found pleasure in having sex with her client she would have been surrendering to the men with whom she was working.”⁵This is why this is the first and only sex scene made explicit—because Jeanne loses her sense of power in this dynamic. In the ultimate relinquishing of control, it appears as if Jeanne has an orgasm, quite literally giving into her physical sensations she tries to have influence over. This loss of control is met with a projection of ashamed violence, as she dresses neatly and stabs the client to death with the scissors (3:14:01).

Sex, as a vehicle, is used in *Jeanne Dielman* to characterize and gender Jeanne at the same time. She performs her gender as she does her personality and demeanor and inner emotions—all to sum up her characterization. It’s contrast to the conventions established by the film’s structure, as well as its ambiguity until fully shown at the end, aid in proving Jeanne’s sexuality is a lens through which to understand her. Beyond this, it allows us to understand a woman’s sexuality in larger societal terms, and in turn gaining a deeper understanding of how sexual liberation contributes to deconstructing gender expectations. In effect, Akerman’s film is an experience that makes Jeanne more than a character, but a true depiction of a woman.

Notes:

1. Bareket, Orly, et al. “The Madonna-whore dichotomy: Men who perceive women’s nurturance and sexuality as mutually exclusive endorse patriarchy and show Lower relationship satisfaction.” *Sex Roles*, vol. 79, no. 9–10, 2 Feb. 2018, pp. 519–532, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-018-0895-7>.

2. The Foundation Chantal Akerman in collaboration with CINEMATEK, “Recounting the Years, Meeting Jeanne Dielman.” [Back, chantalakerman.foundation/recounting-the-years-meeting-jeanne-dielman](http://back.chantalakerman.foundation/recounting-the-years-meeting-jeanne-dielman). Accessed 8 Mar. 2024.

³ Michael. “Regarding the Pain of Mothers: On the Silence in *Jeanne Dielman*.” *Photogénie* , 30 Dec. 2022, photogenie.be/regarding-the-pain-of-mothers-on-the-silence-in-jeanne-dielman/.

⁴ “Chantal Akerman on *Jeanne Dielman*.” YouTube , YouTube, 6 Oct. 2015, www.youtube.com/watch?v=8pSNOEYSIlg.

⁵ Michael. “Regarding the Pain of Mothers: On the Silence in *Jeanne Dielman*.” *Photogénie* , 30 Dec. 2022, photogenie.be/regarding-the-pain-of-mothers-on-the-silence-in-jeanne-dielman/.



West of the Border, South of the Sun
Digital Photography
Mary Zeng



Cherry Sestina

Kimberly Coke

I take a week of drowning
Seven times the recommended dose
Until I am too dizzy to stand
Everyone I've ever loved has witnessed
Me take communion, sweet like cherries
Enough bread and drink to save

That which can be saved
A fisherman rescues fish from drowning
The tree removes itself from cherries
All the best medicine comes in small doses
All the worst testimony comes from the first witness,
But I'm the only one called to take the stand

You can tell a lot about a man by what he stands
For, more by what he wants to save
The least by what he's witnessed
You meet a man when he's drowning
As the doctor prescribes another dose
Of cough syrup, flavored cherry

Merciful imitation of cherry,
Treatment too cloying, too saccharine to stand
But an ideal patient would never miss a dose
Any good doctor can tell who does not want to be saved
I want to achieve stillness in drowning
Out all I can't bear witness

Ask the tree to call forth the witness,
It will send you the scent of cherries
Tell me there is no dignity in drowning
On land, sucking down water where you stand
If there's no ocean, how can I be saved?
If there's no syringe, how do I know the right dose?

Forgive me, I'll take the last dose
They can't investigate the murder if there are no witnesses
Who will we lose if everyone can be saved?
No one will know pain if everything tastes of cherries
I'd stay down if you asked me not to stand
You'd drink the ocean if it kept me from drowning

What to do, there are too many to save and not enough doses
You know, the trick to drowning is to make sure there are no witnesses,
The way a tree blossoms cherries until it suddenly stands — empty

Honey Wine

Keely Wilson

my guts spilled onto sidewalk gates
made of red wine the surrounded drank from me
sipped my juices like honey bees to grapes
stares of the mismatched masochistic
 architects of low middle class suburbia
strung my skin over broth and burrow
i was gifted with the feeling of love
similar to sweet brandy or maple bacon rum
an old man's fever for jazz or a monkey with
 headphones on
when finished they stuffed me back up with fake
 lies of forbiddance
they left me lying in my bones
picking myself up i scrubbed the grass clean
i scrubbed so hard i made the grass gray
from red to green to gray
and painstakingly i painted each blade a
 different shade
green
and when i was done i limped away
holding together my stomach with stitches made
 from sweatshirt strings
and a heart full of dollar store wine

blueprints of a single-family home

Victoria Wan

I raced
two steps at a time
and masqueraded
in the maiden's pantry
jumping up and
over feather pillows
with chicken's spikes poking
into the spongy bottom
of my soles.
like a crane:
I fly.

afternoons were spent
playing dress up with
my cat and dolls and
me, me again.
taking turns in *narnia*

pretending echos
were new voices—
my bureau held green
seas and mustard yellow
fields of festivals
where we paraded
top hats and
debutante dreams.

in the kitchen mom
watched over
a hot-pot.
i slammed my palm
down to the spiral
stovetop kissed
my skin and i cried
into my fist
focusing
on the pulse
my wails poured
out, and mom,
she stirred that empty pot
waiting for nothing
to boil over.

wiggling my toes, they
prod 'tween cracked tiles.
my cat pawed at
my chest— it collapsed
and tumbled far
into the wishing well.
the sound of escape's
air were rainbows
descending
behind me, make rings
like skipping stones
on unfrozen calamity,
follow me, wet tracks
never dry in this greying
house of junk drawers.

all i wanted
was to run.
instead i'm back
with my cat and
those stupid dolls
with ringlet curls and
button noses and
carved smiles and

we ignored the fire alarm
blaring a scorching song
i had lost when mom
plastered and sealed
the wallpaper again.



Abandoned Beauty
Digital Photography
Luke Patton

Here Is What I Have For You

Esther Muhlmann

here is what i have for you.

a red feather from the chicken coop and salt. the feather is just fallen, new, fresh. and the salt is from my dining room table, the table my father built, the one that sits under the harsh light, the one that feels as though it may break if you lean against it too hard when you slide your seat back to stand. you can have that, too. my standing, my two feet on the ground.

to stand while sitting at a table:

press your toes firmly to the floor, bend your entire upper body forward, rest your hands on the surface of the table and apply pressure as you scoot your chair backwards. now, with your arms outstretched in front of you and your legs outstretched below you, push into the ground, push into the table, and rise.

have you ever thought about that? about the motions of rising? there are, of course, different ways to go about getting up from your seat, but that sound of chairs skidding across the floor and feet shuffling to go about their day is familiar to you, right?

on the highway on friday i saw only the back of someone's head, and i saw the way they ran their fingers through their hair, and i knew instantly who it was. I never realized that the way he stroked his hair was familiar to me—i don't know him intimately or well—and later that day when i confirmed it was him, i felt a sense of pride, of wonder, of excitement. my brain knew, somehow. i give that to you, my knowing. all that i know well and all that i know subconsciously: the way people comfort themselves with a hand across the scalp, the distinct sounds my parents' chairs make as they leave the table.

my father has a hard time leaving the table ever since his knee surgery. his once effortless lean-and-push standing is behind him, at least for now. now, to stand, he must think.

where to best place his body weight? how to best shift the leg? where to bend and where to keep straight? to stand, he must be in pain. this leaves him on the couch most days, watching the television, reading his books, speaking to my mother. a few days ago, i saw his car gone from the driveway for the first time since his surgery, and when he returned he said he had not left his seat. he just sat and drove for hours. so i give you my standing, my ability to rise. my toes on the cold, wooden panels on those mornings when i'd rather lay in bed, my shoes striking the road behind my house as i try to move my body and run, my bare feet on max's green carpeted basement floor, a place i would never be if not for you.

you see, i rise for you. i know for you. i want you to know about my rising and my knowing, i want you to know that for me, like for my father, it can be hard to stand. it can be hard to push up from the table, time after time. and one thing i hold on to each day is the thought that maybe i'll learn something new, that i'll be in awe of the world around me once more. if i just keep standing, keep listening, keep learning so that i may know.

but my knowing would be nothing if i couldn't share it with you. and my standing would never happen as frequently if not for you. i'm in motion for you, i learn for you, and i give this all to you. you encompass my thoughts nearly every moment, with nearly every motion, with every important thing that i learn and come to know.

as for the red feather and the salt? i give them to you as an apology. to say sorry for when it feels like i'm plucking apart every part of you, and tearing at you with my words. and the salt is to heal the wound that my words and my motions have caused. to stop the bacteria from spreading and blistering and making this thing we've created so difficult to hold.

this is what i have for you:

a red feather, salt, my standing, and my knowing. it is all of me. it is everything.