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Don MacGregor



Hannah Coiner, *Randi*. Photograph, 2019.

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Letter from the Editor



How do I begin to describe how this experience has been?

Do I explain the frustrations, excitements...anxieties?

The one thing I can point to as an excellent learning experience is putting dependable people by your side to help when you feel so damn inadequate. Take Toni, for instance—I asked her in a time of desperation for some help with InDesign. She was there and was dependable. Toni put in the hours, and we built this together. Or, take Zach, my main reader. He was ready to receive 15 emails at a time when I needed things read over quickly. The staff at Columbus State was always ready to help if I needed a key or an answer to a question. I suppose the most valuable thing about this journey has been growing in humility and out of the humility learning it's okay to ask for help. If I hadn't, I would have dropped this project a long time ago, and it would have never seen the light of day. So, many thanks to all of you who have stood by my side during this endeavor. Thank you to all who have submitted, because we definitely wouldn't be anywhere without your dedication to your craft. Thank you to the CSU staff. And, thank you to all of our readers. May our words embody our hearts, attitudes, and love for the world around us. And may they live in the hands and in the minds of our readers for many years.

~Hannah Coiner, Editor-in-Chief

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The Power of Owen Through Christ

World War I was the worst war that the world had seen at the time. The death toll around 20 million and the wounded about equal to it, those affected by the war needed to express their feelings. A lot of people used poetry; even soldiers took up poetry to express their emotions towards the war and those involved. Wilfred Owen, one of many poets from the World War I era, has become one of the most famous poets of his age. Despite him dying young in battle, he writes many moving and powerful poems about the war. His poetry often focuses on the soldiers' suffering and death, not only on the battlefield but upon returning home as well. The suffering, sacrifice, and death of the soldiers mirrors that of Jesus Christ, and Owen frequently draws analogies between the two within his poems.

Many, many artists and poets equated "the fallen soldier with the sacrificed Christ" because it "was a conveniently emotive analogy" (Rivers 123). Several of Owen's poems discuss the sacrifice of both, drawing parallels not just to their deaths but to their murderers also. Jesus, sent down to earth to reconcile mankind to God out of love, was killed on the cross as propitiation for the sins of those who would believe. He was sent by his father to die for others. Similarly, Owen shows the young soldiers being sent by their fathers to die for others. The Gospel story is familiar to most, and Owen uses it specifically to criticize the war and those in charge of its continuation. He uses Christ's death in his poems to dramatize the death of the soldiers, show the unjust slaughter of those fighting, and criticize the societal definition of love.

The war was brutal, deadly, and devastating, and Owen's poem "Greater Love" paints a clear picture of the brutalities that came with it. Owen uses lots of imagery in this poem, beginning with the first line: "Red lips are not so red | As the stained stones kissed by the English dead" (ll. 1). He uses red lips to involve romantic love and compares them to the blood stained stones that dead soldiers left behind. Red is a symbolic color, not only of love, passion, and romance but of violence, death, and blood. Owen also describes that soldiers are often physically blinded while fighting for the safety of those at home. He compares these blind eyes to the "lure" of a lover's eyes, making the description even more stark (ll. 5). This line gives images of enticing eyes that go unrequited while the receiver is beholding eyes that have been destroyed for the sake of their safety.

In "Greater Love," Owen continues describing the bodies of the soldiers as "knife-skewed" (ll. 8) and "pale" to draw the contrast to the lover's (ll. 21). He calls the shredded limbs "exquisite" (ll. 9) and the voices of the soldiers "dear,"

“gentle,” and “evening clear” (ll. 15-16). As readers can imagine an exquisite lover, it is shocking to imagine exquisite dead limbs and gentle voices of soldiers. The Oxford English Dictionary defines “exquisite” as “extremely beautiful and delicate” or “intensely felt” (*Exquisite*). The “knife-skewed” limbs of the soldiers, their life giving sacrifice, are beautiful and intensely felt by those for whom they died (ll. 8). The descriptions of the lover and the dead soldiers resemble blazons from the Renaissance Era. Owen uses this technique to exalt both the human body and the dead bodies of the soldiers for the sake of dramatic comparison.

While Owen blazons the bodies of these dead soldiers within the poem, the poem’s title “Greater Love” references John 15:13 from the Bible. In this verse Jesus says that “greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends,” foreshadowing his own death on the cross (John 14.13, *English Standard Version*). Owen uses this verse to draw on the brutality of war for the soldiers. He shows what they had to bear for their “friends” with vivid imagery. The intended readers of the poem know of Christ’s suffering, the beating, scorning, lashing, and, ultimately, crucifixion and can see the parallels Owen draws to the bodies of the soldiers.

Owen also uses the story of Abraham and Isaac to point to Christ’s death in “The Parable of the Old Man and the Young.” The story from the Old Testament is considered a foreshadowing of the death of Christ by many theologians (Rivers 122). In the biblical story, Abraham is commanded to kill Isaac but uses the ram that the Lord provides as a substitution when it is provided. Abraham was obedient to God. To draw the parallels, Abraham did not have to kill his son because God provided the sacrifice. Similarly, with Jesus, God provided a sacrifice for humankind to be the end of all sacrifices. Owen uses this story to show the unnecessary of the war, the unnecessary of the mass slaughter of young men. He shows that the patriarchs have a way to save their sons like Abraham; it has been provided for them, but they are refusing, refusing to slay their own pride in the war. They continue to kill their son and the sons of others despite the opportunity to spare them. Owen makes the soldiers Isaac, who represents Christ, to increase the “shock effect” of the poem (Rivers 123). He uses this example to show the absurdity in the continuation of war by the patriarchs.

Despite the seemingly senseless slaughter, Owen portrays the death of the soldiers, their sacrifice, as profound and beautiful through “Greater Love.” He compares this sacrificial love to romantic love, making romantic, female love look miniscule. It is nothing compared to the love these male soldiers demonstrated through their death (Musil 57). He emphasizes this point using imagery that shocks and satirizes the cultural, patriarchal version of love, first

using the opening line, "Red lips are not so red | As the stained stones kissed by the English dead" (ll. 1). The masculine, patriarchal version of love comes from women, not fellow men. Owen is criticizing the male-centered society on its definition of love, implying that the patriarchs have lost sight of true love, wasting it unnecessarily on the war. The soldiers died to save those at home, like Christ died to save humankind. Owen compares this to romantic love because it is very relatable. Most people have either experienced romantic love or read about it enough to understand its power. Not as many people have died for those they love, so to explain it in light of romantic love helps the readers understand the magnitude of love the soldiers demonstrated for their countrymen and women. It is Christ-like love. Owen makes the soldiers into a Christ-figure by discussing their love for their country in this way, as the greatest love.

Owen continues to redefine love as he compares the love of a lover to the love of the dead soldiers in "Greater Love." The first line compares lover's "red lips" to the red "stained stones" that soldiers left behind in their death (ll. 1-2). This vivid comparison shows that the color red can be associated with several types of love, not just romantic love but sacrificial as well. Owen is playing with the "kiss of death" as he describes the "stained stones kissed by the English dead;" the red kiss of death. Owen uses another simile when describing how a lover's heart was not made as "hot nor large" as the soldiers' hearts were when they died (ll. 19). He says that their hearts were "made great with shot," meaning that their love was categorized with John 15:13 when they died in the war (ll. 20). Owen is redefining the definition of love. Love is better defined with Christ in mind not romantic feelings of gush.

To emphasize the love hues, "Greater Love" has a calm tone as the speaker describes the love of the soldiers, and Owen uses words like "wind," "murmuring," "gentle, and "evening clear." This makes the reader comfortable though the meaning of the poem is profound and serious. The tone of the speaker is also thoughtful and serious as he speaks to his lover, comparing her love to the love of the soldiers. He is meditating on their sacrifice and making sense of it in a romantic context. The admiration of the sacrifice is clear throughout the poem. The speaker admires his lover, calling her singing soft and her eyes lure, and as he compares the soldiers and deems them as greater, it is apparent that he admires the soldiers and their sacrifice more than he admires his lover, exalting their love above hers.

Despite the admiration, there is a cynical tone throughout the poem that makes clear the intended criticism of societal love. The speaker is irritated that the soldiers' love is going unappreciated by the masses. Society, and the lover, is

consumed in idolizing the romantic love created by the patriarchal society while men and women are dying for their freedom to execute such sacrificial love. The later half of the final stanza shows this well:

And though your hand be pale, Paler are all which trail
Your cross through flame and hail:
Weep, you may weep, for you may touch them not.

A pale skin color was seen as beautiful by society, but for the speaker, it is not as beautiful as the ones who bore the cross of the lover "through flame and hail" (ll. 23). The comparison of the two extremes shows the gravity of their sacrifice. They bore the cross of those more concerned with societal matters. This resembles how Christ died for many who may care too late or may never care. Christ was "despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" much like the soldiers of World War I (Isaiah 53.3). Owen draws on this to emphasize his point of pairing soldiers to Christ in their suffering and death. He also uses such a tone to bring light to the shallow society that is more concerned with the romantic than the life-giving.

Culturally, Christ is the epitome of suffering and sacrifice. Owen's intended readers are familiar with the life and death of Jesus:

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. (Isaiah 53:7)

He suffered silently much like the soldiers. They were dying and unfortunately could not speak for themselves. Owen is seeking to speak for them and himself, being a soldier as well. Sacrifice is defined as "an act of slaughtering an animal or person or surrendering a possession as an offering to a deity" (*Sacrifice*). Both Christ and the soldiers sacrificed themselves for those they loved. They offered themselves in place of those they sought to protect. Paul writes that "Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Eph. 5.2).

Owen writes of the sacrifice of soldiers in two different ways. He describes their self-sacrifice in "Greater Love," yet describes the patriarchal sacrifice of them through "The Parable of the Old Man and the Young." "Greater Love" adorns the self-sacrifice. The poem exalts the soldiers for giving their lives, aligning with the feelings towards Christ's sacrifice for mankind. Their self-

sacrifice is the highest form of love, to be admired and appreciated.

However, the sacrifice of the soldiers by the patriarchs is not adored or admired. It is hated and unethical. Owen views it as unnecessary, especially because an alternative was readily provided (ll. 13). Self-sacrifice is in conjunction with love, but sacrifice of others is caused by "the Ram of Pride" (ll. 14).

Through these two poems, "Greater Love" and "The Parable of the Old Man and the Young," Owen constantly shows parallels between Christ and the soldiers of World War I. This has profound purpose in his themes and subjects throughout the poems. Not only is it to dramatize their suffering, but it is to make a stance against the higher powers that are in control of the senseless killing in the war and against the love that most people regard as best. Owen did not write poetry just to vent, but he wrote it to make a stand against the injustices in the war. He wrote to make people think differently when 20 million sons, dads, and brothers don't come home. He used Christ because typologizing the soldiers to him is powerful, emotional, and challenging for those familiar with the suffering and death of Jesus.

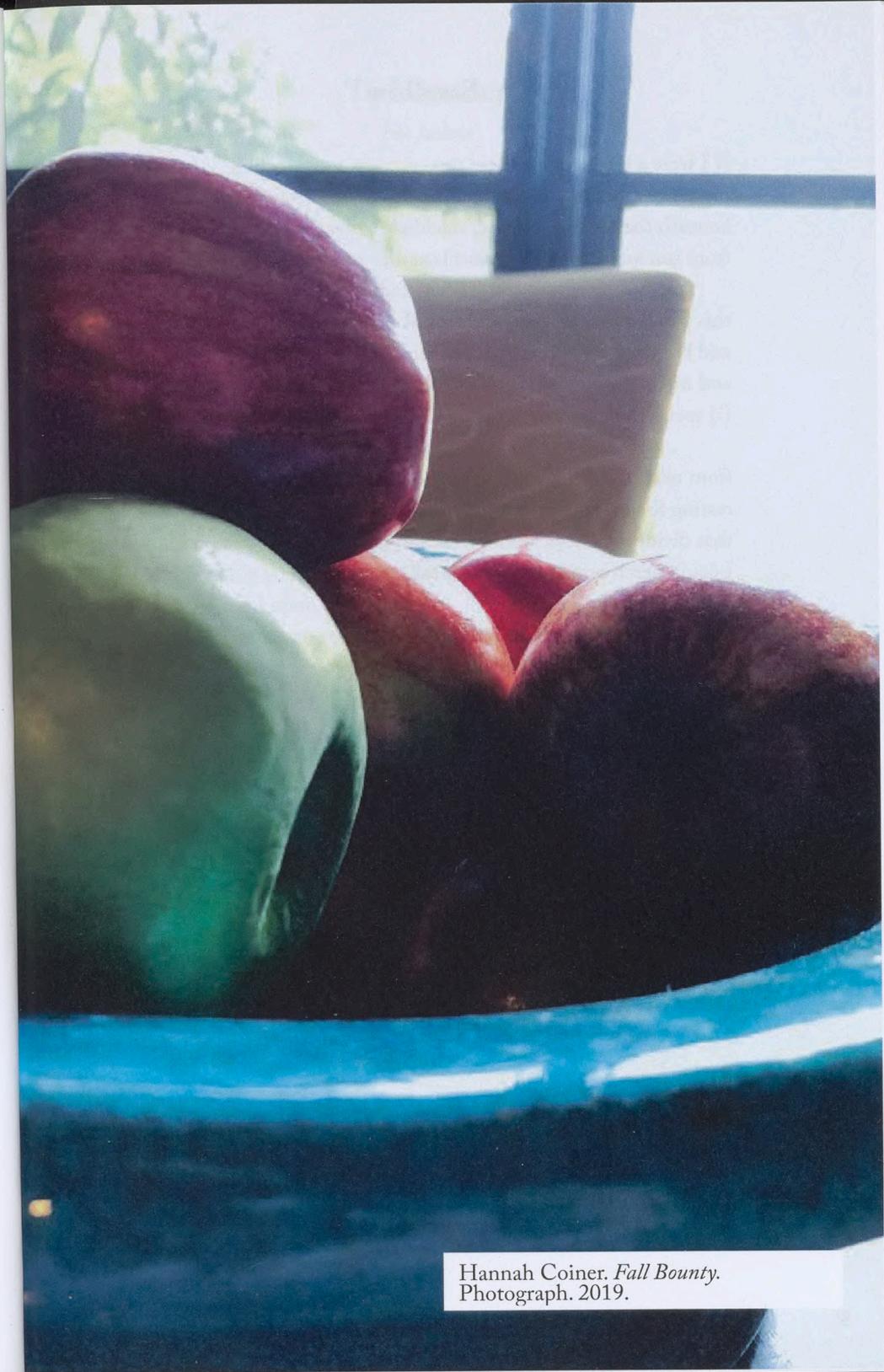
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-*Jacquelyn Hutchinson*



Hannah Coiner. *Fall Bounty*.
Photograph. 2019.

Swallow

If I were a bird I'd nest there too,
plaster my home of mud and moss
beneath the tool shed's eave, shielded
from sun and storm. I'd pick this yard,

this patch of oak-shaded fescue, unkempt
and buzzing with provisions for me
and my mate and four babies-to-be.
I'd spend the post-hatch spring zipping

from nest to earth and back, bug in beak,
resting for nothing save the darkness
that divides the days. I doubt, however,
I could perch now on the porch rail,

my mate fluttering about a kitchen window,
both of us keeping clear of the long, black
serpent stretched atop the tool-shed door,
still, sated, knotted times four.

-Steven Reynolds

To Lisander

For Joshua

Moaned in your sleep, are names whispered like omens
The narrative of a nomadic lover
Tallies taken in dusky dens or motel suites
Scores of sordid affairs sketched into cotton sheets
The baleful lament of my dear Lisander

Sorted, are the tokens of your travels
this one's eyes; that one's dewy lips
The bristling hairs of my skin—anxious
arranged as souvenirs upon a shelf

Should there be any rest after rapture,
or is there only your murmured hymn?
The rising total upon a roster
of spotless lambs you've led to slaughter,
The untold casualties of your sin

-Maya Price

Changé

Mother and Father made me
Take lessons, hoping to bring style
And beauty to my faltering gait,
Balancing on cords from pulleys
And able to hold my arabesque,
It seemed, forever,
Which left fractured toes
And bleary eyes from restless nights.
3am, night before the recital,
Mother and Father watch
From their cushioned couch
While I assemble, my skin taking on
the glossy shine of desperation.
I feel their torturous eyes
Whirling around me.
My childhood stands before me
Reminding me of pink slippers and
The bubblegum-scented shampoo
Mom and I used to adore.

-Eric Graves



Hannah Coiner. *Bud*. Photograph. 2019.

The Psychologist

"So start from the beginning and try to tell me everything. Leave nothing out," I ask him grabbing my clipboard and pen off the polished table next to me.

The man lying on the black-leather couch, is thin with a scruffy beard that he brushes with his fingers, and bed hair that looks as if he hasn't shampooed in a week. As he begins to talk, he clasps his hands together and faces them downward onto his stomach. As he does this, I realize I've seen this man before but I can't grasp just where I've seen him. Anyway, I better give him my full attention.

"I told myself it was just one drink," he says taking a deep breath. "Well at least that's how it started. It was after another fight we had and I wanted to forget about the entire night. Total nightmare let me tell you. The voices that bounce off the walls from us screaming how much we love each other, which lead into tears running down our faces is hard to get out of your head. Knowing I should never drink again, I got into to my car and next thing I know there's a bottle of whiskey and rum sitting next to me at the bar. Last place I should be, I know."

Huh. A nice whiskey with some rum to chase after it? Really? He's a depressed drunkard, plain and simple. There was a harsh scent of the drink that he carried when walking through the door, which I don't remember him knocking on. The scent was definitely on his clothes. "What's the bar called?" I ask him. He looks over at me and gives me sort of a side-eye. "You know..." he replies as if I do know the place he speaks of. "Do I?" I ask as I feel myself giving him the same look with my eyes.

"Louie's," he replies snapping back a little. I know Louie's. That's where I met Jacob. I wonder if he's seen Jacob? No. He couldn't possibly know him. Could he? It's been a while since I've seen or talked to Jacob, or been to Louie's, so how could he possibly know? "Doesn't ring a bell I'm afraid," I say trying to sound calm as if I haven't heard of it. The guy sits up and keeps his head turned towards me. "Sure I haven't seen you around? I know all the guys that go there," he says sounding a bit more comfortable.

"Never been." Who is this guy? He couldn't know me from Louie's, could he? I always try to keep a low profile going there. Then again, he just seems so familiar. His scent continues to linger and it stays on the mind leaving me confused. I have to have seen this guy from Louie's, or somewhere else. Is he a friend of Jacob's? Jacob never talked about anyone except his parents though. That's the last thing we spoke to think of it.

"So who did you have a fight with, and what was it about?" I ask him as I feel

my hands begin to tremble a bit. The guy looks down at his silver Fossil brands watch around his wrist. I remember Jacob giving me a Fossil watch for my birthday. Anyway, he seems as if he doesn't want to talk about the situation. "It's okay. No pressure," I say. "No. It's not okay. He left me. I let him leave. I let him walk right out the door and I didn't stop him. Why didn't I stop him?" he says as he begins to shed tears. I felt these words deep within me somehow.

He rises off the couch and walks closer and closer to me. "We let him leave. We let him walk away. We didn't stop him." I don't understand. He's saying we and the scent of whiskey and rum runs off his breath as he gets closer and the smell becomes even more familiar. "What are you talking about?" I scream and so does my head as he continuously repeats we. I shut my eyes close and bring my hands to my head. Trying to breathe in and out I can smell the whiskey and rum coming off my breath when I bring my hands over my mouth. Voices everywhere. "All he wanted was to tell the world about us and you were too scared to admit you love him like always. Jacob left and I took a drink for us because that's the only thing you'll ever love. But you can't see the truth. You never will. Not even if it's right in front of you.

Breathe. Breathe.

I open my eyes. I see my watch on the counter, broken. I look over to the couch. Where did he go?

-Eric Graves

Women in Frankenstein

Mary Shelley, daughter of Mary Wollstonecraft, undoubtedly knew her mother's work *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*. Wollstonecraft's small book critiques the English society of the time, standing up for the injustices towards women in regard to education, value, and purpose. Her writings were radical for the time, and she was heavily criticized by "a culture that allow[ed] [women] to exist only as objects and commodities" (Purinton 166). Wollstonecraft died shortly after birthing her daughter, but her legacy continued through Shelley. When Shelley wrote *Frankenstein*, she had many purposes in mind. She wrote *Frankenstein* with a feminine lens, with echos of Wollstonecraft throughout. She shows the way her society devalues women and the cost of doing so. In agreement with the arguments presented in Wollstonecraft's *Rights of Women*, Shelley's use of women in *Frankenstein* shows the cost of cutting out their voice in society, the risk in bypassing them as devalued beings, and the danger of excluding them from life with purpose.

Wollstonecraft's work argues for women's education. If women were educated, they could control their emotions better and contribute more to society as a whole. Education "sharpen[s] the senses, form[s] the temper, regulate[s] the passions as they being to ferment, and set[s] the understanding to work before the body arrives at maturity." This applies to both men and women. As Wollstonecraft sees it, "from their infancy women should either be shut up like eastern princes, or educated in such a manner as to be able to think and act for themselves." Wollstonecraft would argue that education is the key to integrating women into society. Without it, they are voiceless due to ignorance and lack of value. Uneducated women are "cruelly left" to "slavish dependance" on their parents and later their husbands (Wollstonecraft).

When men give women purpose, the system becomes "absurd and tyrannic" because women are regarded as "slaves" (Wollstonecraft). If women are beings who can think and act independent from man, they should not be treated as slaves and property. The patriarchal society has minimize the value of women, and that has been detrimental to society. Wollstonecraft makes a plea to men to stand up for women, who cannot always stand up for themselves: "Would men but generously snap our chains, and be content with rational fellowship instead of slavish obedience they would find us more observant daughters, more affectionate sisters, more faithful wives, more reasonable mothers—in a word, better citizens." Education and a level of independence would broaden the world for women. Without those two "rights," women are stripped of their voice in society, value as people, and purpose in life.

Shelley demonstrates dangers of the world Wollstonecraft fights against through Frankenstein. Beginning with the letters from Walton to his sister, Mrs. Saville, Frankenstein is male-centered. Walton is stranded on a ship in pursuit of "glory" for potentially finding the north pole (14). Readers never hear Mrs. Saville's voice; never is there a response. There are only Walton's voice, thoughts, and ideas. Those are, however, affected by Mrs. Saville. Walton says that his best years were spend in her "gentle and feminine fosterage" and that "refined the groundwork of [his character]," not allowing him to "overcome an intense distaste to the usual brutality exercised on board ship" (17). His response to the masculine is shaped by his influence of the feminine. This is showing his regard for the feminine. Though readers do not hear from Mrs. Saville, Walton clearly regards her highly and respectfully. Victor does not share Walton's regard for his sister's thoughts and feelings. In contrast, Victor regards his adopted cousin as an object for his pleasure and enjoyment, holding ideologies similar to the society to which Wollstonecraft directs her discourse.

Victor's cousin, Elizabeth, is a refined, attractive women. She is loved by many and highly regarded in her home of Geneva, but she does not speak into Victor's life as Mrs. Saville does for Walton. She was adopted by Victor's family and quickly became "the beautiful and adored companion of all [Victor's] occupations and [his] pleasures" (30). He saw her as a gift to him, as his mother put it (31). He took possession of her in his mind saying, "till death she was to be mine only" (31). Victor often flatters Elizabeth for her manner and beauty thus establishing her value as such. Wollstonecraft states that men use "those pretty feminine phrases" to "condescendingly . . . soften [women's] slavish dependence" on them. In Victor's mind, Elizabeth was bound to him even before she was adopted; she is regarded as an object. Because of this, her voice does not carry weight for Victor. Though she seems the perfect woman, "calm," "concentrated" (31), "soft," and beautiful, she is still regarded as Victor's property (33). Victor wanted "to have a meretricious slave to fondle, entirely dependent on his reason and bounty; he did not want a companion, whom he should be compelled to esteem" (Wollstonecraft).

Elizabeth's lack of voice leads Victor to disregard her feelings, words, or desires as he makes decisions that affect both of them. When he left for study, Elizabeth was especially distraught, and Victor wanted her to be in "some degree consoled," not that he would console her, but he assumed she would move beyond her grief (41). This reaction shows his desire for a "slave," to wait on him unconditionally, rather than a "companion," whose opinion and feelings he would "esteem" and regard (Wollstonecraft). Elizabeth writes him a long heart-filled letter when he becomes sick and fails to communicate for an extended

amount of time. She writes of her care for him and their family's concern for him. Following his reading the letter he exclaims, "I will write instantly, and relieve them from the anxiety they must feel" (60). This was the extent of his reaction, and it is not directly related to Elizabeth, who wrote him the letter. He also ignores her plea to stay with her leading up to their marriage. He leaves to create a female companion for his creature. He does so out of fear and seeming necessity, but his disregard for her feelings in the months following lead her to think he does not desire the marriage (231).

Victor is the average man that Wollstonecraft discusses in her *Rights of Women*. He is "under the influence" of his appetite, which is "more depraved by unbridled indulgence and the fastidious contrivances of satiety" (Wollstonecraft). He pursues his personal glory with no regard for anyone but himself, desiring to create life for his glory alone. He has no care for its effects on society or even his supposed love, Elizabeth, but he is solely concerned with the creature blessing him "as its creator and source" (48). He seemingly has no care for anyone or anything but the exultation of himself, and Walton is on the same track. Walton is also seeking to establish himself as a great explorer for his own exaltation, but thankfully he learns from Victor's story and chooses to give up his selfish, life-risking pursuit for the sake of surviving.

Victor's pursuit of creating life by bypassing the female sex creates a monster, and while he has Elizabeth, with whom he could marry and procreate, he chooses science and self-glory.

His only use for women is for his personal enjoyment and care. He wants to create on his own, without them; he does not want female help. Banerjee, from *Women's Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, aligns this idea with the "Enlightenment and Romantic world-view--a conception that is an intensified expression of the deep-rooted universal cultural ideology that defines man in terms of his transcendence of nature and the natural" (3). Victor is trying to transcend nature by creating life without the use of a female, and while he succeeds in creating life, his reaction to his success leads to his failure.

Similar to the men Wollstonecraft writes to, the purpose of women in Victor's life is to care for him and bring him enjoyment. Their purpose is also to care and serve others. Victor does not want to marry Elizabeth because he longs for a partner in life but because it brings him pride to have her, his prized possession. He devalues her to her looks and service. Shelley wrote the characters this way to show "non-alignment with the critical consensus that sees woman's reproductive function purely as her cultural power" (Banerjee 2). Victor does not marry Elizabeth to have children; that is not at the forefront of his mind. He wants to have his property solely to himself. Though women of Shelley's

time were given value for their "reproductive function," the lack of that desire shows that men can still devalue women without that purpose in mind. Victor disregards their value being procreation entirely as he seeks to create life without them. Without that value, women are left to complete service to their men, as Victor expects and receives from Elizabeth as she waits on him time and time again.

Shelley represents women in this light to show the danger is minimizing their voice, value, and purpose. When the man-centered society takes away their voice, they are left with no influence or say in even their own lives. Men refuse to listen to their reason, which can lead to disaster as seen with Victor and his creation. A woman's value is not how they look, serve, and care, but on who they are. In *Frankenstein*, Elizabeth's value was solely based on her looks and service to the Frankenstein family. She was good at it because her value depended on it. Victor always regards her highly in these areas, but who Elizabeth is, what she feels and thinks, is only seen through her letters. Even her letters are centered on serving Victor because she has been taught her place in the masculine society. The person of Elizabeth is lost because she has been trained that her value comes from her being a submissive servant and caretaker of the family.

Victor succeeds in bypassing the society definition of women's purpose. He at last takes away their last societally defined purposes in life. Victor suffers great horrors as he succeeds in taking away a woman's voice, value, and purpose. Because he has stripped women of themselves, he suffers greatly; his monster seeks revenge. His creation destroys his life because he desires a female companion, something Victor does not support or allow. Shelley "cloaks the monster in a male body to emphasize the monstrous consequences of a science that perpetuates the wrongs about women" (Purinton 157).

If acted upon, Wollstonecraft's arguments in *The Vindication of the Rights of Women* could have prevented the tragedies in *Frankenstein*. The women were not educated, were not seen as equal, were not valued as members of society. This led to Victor's self-glorifying pursuit. Unlike philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the rest of society, Wollstonecraft does not believe or support the idea that women should only be educated to please men. Society as a whole places women's value on pleasing men and Wollstonecraft firmly objects. Shelley shows the danger of this male-centered society through the tragedies of *Frankenstein*. She shows the danger of suppressing women into being submissive, pleasing servants and devaluing them as equal human beings.

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-*Jacquelyn Hutchinson*



Hannah Coiner. *White Azaleas*.
Photograph. 2019.

Netflixing after Church

“It’s like God is playing with the dimmer switch”
she says as our bare-windowed room
fades dark and bright and dark again,
and I propose He’s urging us outside
to watch His masterpiece in action—
fair-weather clouds sailing on the sea-blue sky,
an armadillo, a snail, an upside-down buffalo,
one by one eclipsing the sun
on this waning Sunday afternoon
and floating east on autumn’s current
into some other sky,
someone else’s poem.

-Steven Reynolds

Sleepover

The trailer creaks with my aunt's weight, panic
pulses in my veins, and I imagine
her body swallowed by the floor, half eaten,
legs kicking at the underbelly.
She hands us a jumbo bag of cheese curls.
Slumber party size. Orange stained fingers
feed rabbits housed in a side table cage.
Rabbits like cheese curls.
Walker Texas Ranger reruns light up
our faces, pinched in concentration
as we play cards. Rabbits nibble nightgowns
in a dance of cheese curls and freedom.
Late night radio fills the small bedroom,
and the bed bounces as we giggle, jumping
on the worn mattress, a single rabbit
hopping between our feet.
We collapse at dawn, high on nail polish
fumes and mischief. Morning light warms the rabbit's
stiff body.

-Renee Simmons

Seared

The cold seeped in to lay as his bedfellow beneath his grandmother's tattered heirloom quilt. Beams of morning sun permeated the yellowed lace curtains, hammering the ringside bell in his head. His father had let him have some the moonshine last night as they'd sat in front of the pot belly stove, watching the logs crackle and glow in waves of red and orange beneath the consuming flames. The lightning in the clear fluid had ricocheted around his skull as he'd slept that night. Aching, he sat up and dressed himself, putting icicled toes into yesterday's stiff socks and knot-laced boots. Today was his eleventh birthday.

He could hear the footsteps of his father in the kitchen, heavy and solid on the old hardwood floors. Those steps were dangerous, each one signaling unspoken intentions long before the man appeared. His father was a worn and wrinkled man, close lipped and stern with everything in life. Eleven years ago today, his wife had died giving birth to their only child, Emerson, leaving the man scarred and empty.

The stove's door was open breathing warmth into the room as Emerson emerged. The dented steel coffee pot softly bubbled on the flat top. His father sat at the table holding a plain white mug, steam rising from it into the chilled air. On his way out of his room, Emerson had grabbed his new pocket knife his cousin had stolen from the gas station in town, running his thumb over the smooth red plastic. It warmed to his touch as he fiddled with it in the lint sprinkled pocket of his worn blue jeans.

"Sit down and get some coffee. We've got work to do and I don't have time to wait all morning."

Emerson opened a cabinet with flaking blue paint and grabbed a chipped mug with "Visit Yellowstone" and a pack of wolves running across the beige ceramic background. The hot black liquid released steam into his face as he poured, and he inhaled the familiar comfort, feeling the wetness build and evaporate over his cheeks and his eyes. Both sat in silence as they drank their breakfast, and hunger set its talons deep in the flesh of Emerson's stomach as it twisted and turned in need.

"Finish that up and grab your coat."

"Yessir."

Emerson gulped the coffee, scorching his tongue and throat. He heard the screen door slam as his father left the house to tend the animals, leaving a trail of expectation for Emerson to quickly fall in behind him. He grabbed his brown oversized canvas coat from the hook by the door along with a length of fabric he used for a scarf.

An identical clap of the screen door announced Emerson's trudge down the gravel driveway and into the yard. The trees making up the divide between their property and Nature's, stood as sentries to the house's quiet existence. They stared back in silence as Emerson scanned the woods on the way to the chicken coop.

His father had just swung open the henhouse door and the chickens poured out like black and brown marbles from a torn bag. Emerson grabbed the small sack of feed from the wooden barrel they kept by the gate and spread a few handfuls over the bare ground.

"Hey, don't give 'em too much. We gotta make that last 'til Spring."

With that, his father set to lighting a freshly rolled cigarette. The pale blue smoke rose and drifted in the still air. Emerson watched the swirls dance and float until they disappeared against the bright morning sky. He threw out another handful of feed, put the small burlap sack back into the barrel and covered it, placing a large rock on top to keep the raccoons out. Emerson walked over to his father as he leaned on the coop and they both watched the chickens peck and scratch the ground for feed. Their red combs jiggled as they strutted and jerked one way and then another, launching their beaks at the ground when they spotted a speck of could-be feed. His father threw down the end of his cigarette and ground it under his foot. He walked into the group of chickens and grabbed one by the neck.

The auburn brown hen flapped her wings, stirring dust and feathers as the others scattered. His father held the hen at arm's length and in two large strides had walked her to a small cage near the gate. The hen clucked softly as she settled her displaced feathers, fear apparent in her golden eyes. Emerson stood quietly by the henhouse watching his father.

"C'mon, boy."

Emerson followed his father out of the small enclosure with his hands in his pockets, clasping the pocket knife in a sweaty palm. His father carried the cage with the chicken and Emerson could still hear soft clucks mixed in with the crunch of gravel as they made their way back toward the house.

"Grab my hatchet from the porch and bring it to me."

His father's gruff voice cut like ice through Emerson's heart. He did as he was told, bringing the old hatchet with the worn wooden handle to his father at the old stump they used for chopping wood. He'd seen his father sharpening the blade yesterday while he brought in firewood from the stack outside. The sound of the sharpening had almost driven Emerson crazy; the grate of the metal on the gritted slab sent chills down his spine with every stroke. Emerson went to hand the hatchet to his father but instead his father turned away, grabbing the hen from the cage, and placing her under his arm, holding her wings by her sides.

"You're gonna do this one today. Step up there, by that root. You can pluck her and drain the blood in that bucket over there."

Emerson tripped over his own feet, stumbling as he walked to his father's mark.

The hatchet grew heavy, the cold metal banging against his leg with every step. His fingers felt numb and he squeezed them around the handle, feeling nothing. He grabbed the hen by the neck and he turned his head when her freed wings flapped soft downy feathers into his face. His father crossed his arms and lit another cigarette as Emerson laid down the hatchet to secure his grip on the

hen's head, covering her bright golden eye that screamed at him. The cool wood of the stump cradled the hen as he smoothed her wings with his free hand, calming the bird as his own heart pounded in his ears. He looked to his father who nodded, and he slowly picked up the hatchet, raising it in the air, finding his mark, and driving the blade down through the stretched neck and into the waiting stump.

For a moment, there was nothing but blackness. An intense pain broke through, shooting up his arm, laying siege to his nerve endings as they slammed the red panic button. He opened his eyes to see a flock of birds pass through the clear morning sky and the pain bit down on his hand. He looked around to see his father holding the hen over a bucket as blood drained from the severed neck. The lit cigarette hung from his thin lips, glowing brightly with every drag. Emerson looked at his hands; the left thumb tip was missing, cut nearly to the joint. Blood sparkled on his coat, splattered from hen and hand. He squeezed his thumb to stop the flow and the tip gushed a deep red. His hands were trembling. Tears began to build, growing behind his eyes and threatening to overwhelm him. He stared at his thumb as droplets fell to the dry grass.

"C'mere, boy. You cut yourself?"

His father ashed his cigarette and replaced it between his thin lips, briefly glancing at Emerson's thumb as he held it up.

"Go and sit on the porch then."

His father went in the house and placed the headless hen on the kitchen table. The cold hugged Emerson as he sat there listening to his father bang around. He heard him throw logs into the stove and shut the grate. The hen flapped in a burst of energy fueled by the dregs of life within. He squeezed his thumb tighter, attempting to stop the flow, feeling the wave of pain travel through his body like slow electrocution. The steady drip was a leaky faucet of vitality staining the wood of the porch. He looked to the tree line and took deep, stabilizing breaths. The woods watched the blood fall, witnessing his pain. His father stepped out with a plate of black paste, a mixture of ashes, water, and herbs, the jar of moonshine, and some clean white bandages.

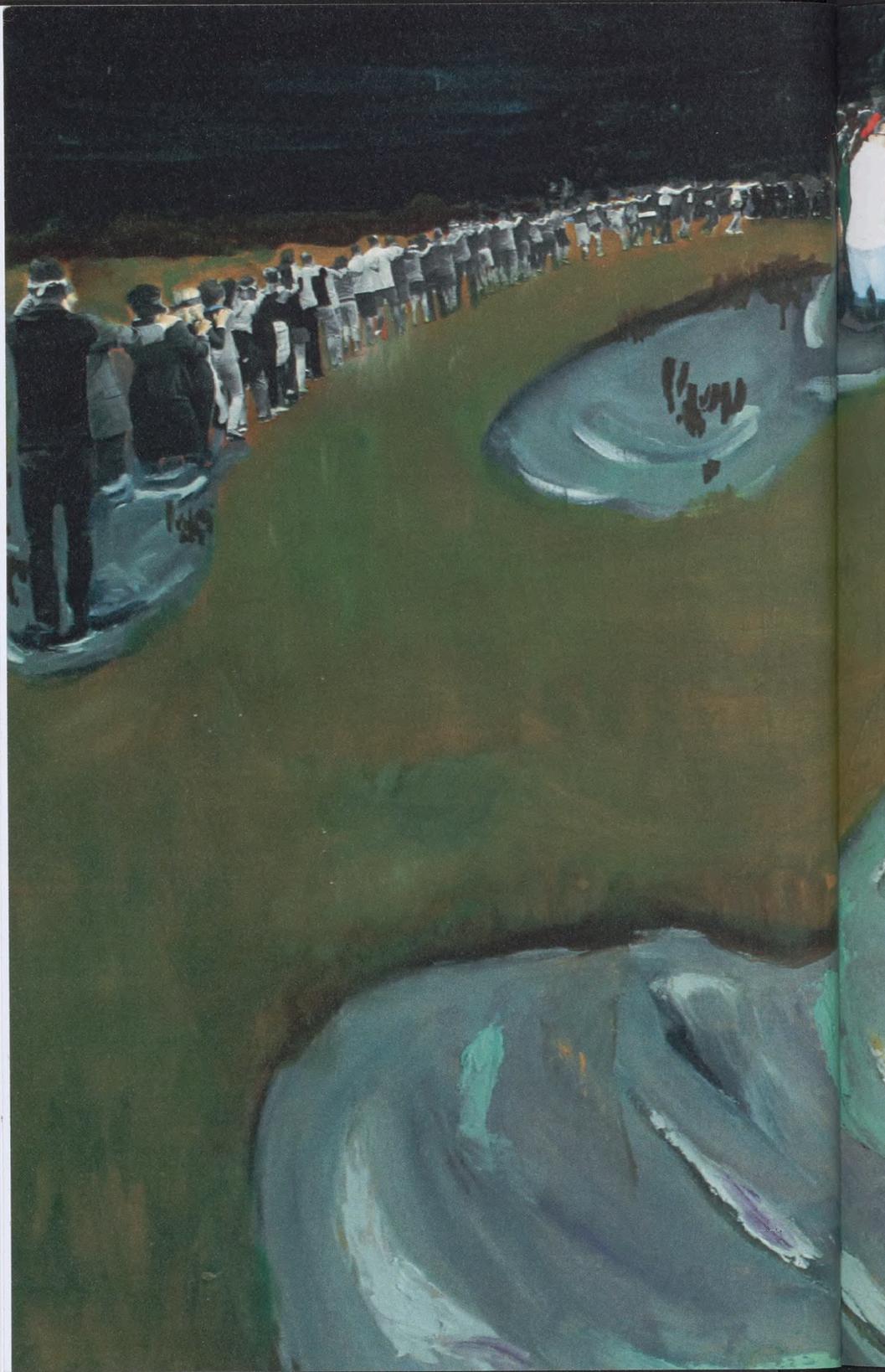
"Alright, boy."

He handed Emerson the jar of moonshine and told him to drink. He did. It was a gut punch, shattering his nerves as it swept through his bloodstream. His father went inside and came back holding a red-hot iron used for pressing shirts. The iron's glow menaced the boy, radiating an inanimate anger. His father stepped to Emerson, and quick as a fox, he snatched Emerson's hand and held the thumb to the searing metal as Emerson screamed.

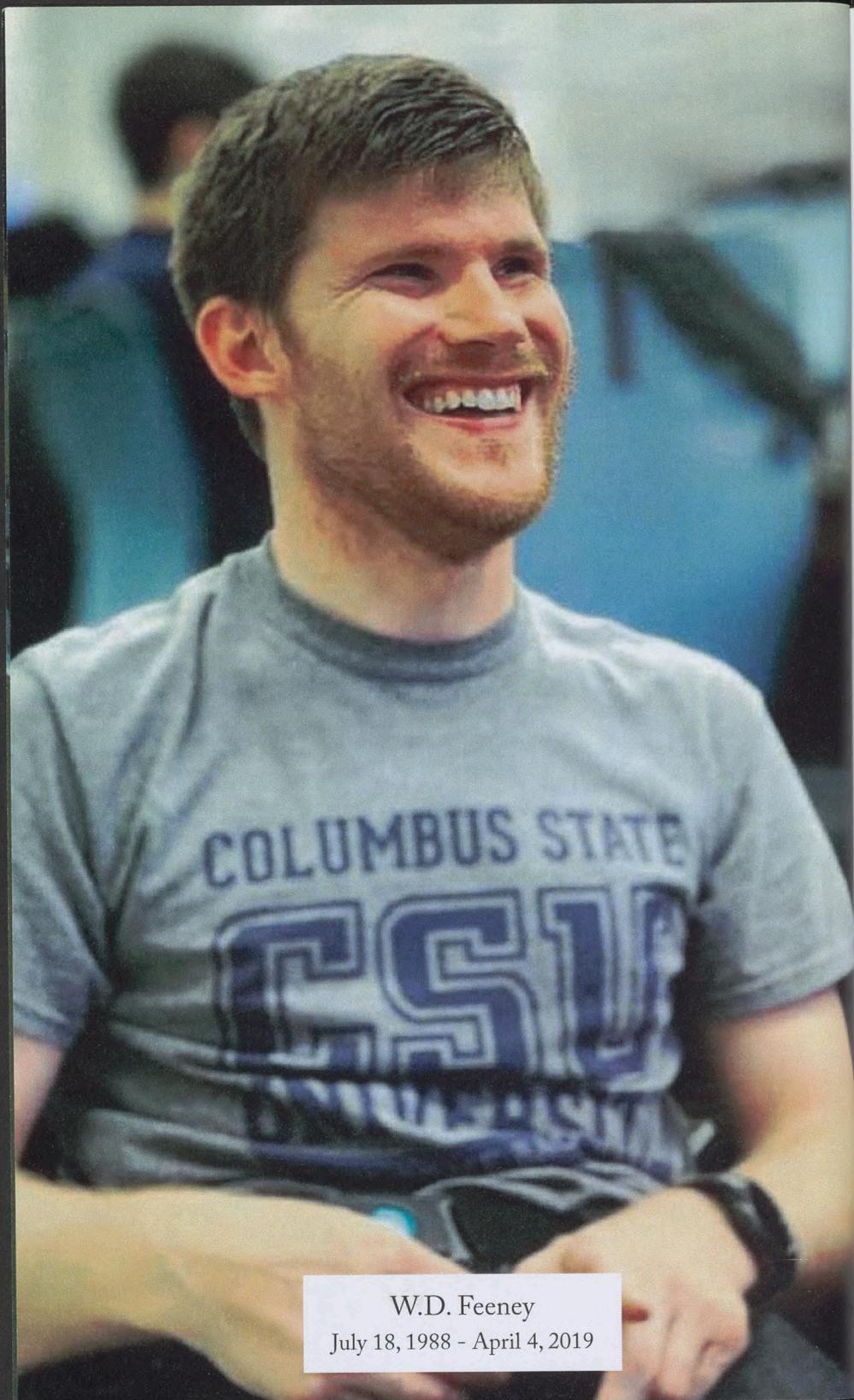
-Renee Simmons



Kate Scrivner. "Flourish." Watercolor. 2018.







W.D. Feeney
July 18, 1988 - April 4, 2019

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Papaya Drive

for W.D.

Spring does have a certain smell. And spring in the South doesn't just contain the smell of wild jasmine and magnolia, iconic as they may be. Somehow, spring in the South goes beyond that. It goes through the smell of Tide and Dawn dish detergent. It goes further, beyond the smells of grandma's casserole, grandpa's tobacco pipe, and your front porch at dusk. Spring in the South means swatting away flies in my car while the windows are down—and you. By this time, the mosquitos are creeping in, and I know I'll end up with red marks all over my calves by morning. You grasp your Starbucks cup, the ice gently swirling, tinkling the sides—as much as plastic will tinkle. The plastic cup contains iced tea, no sweetener. One of the funniest things, because you didn't make it a habit to eat well-rounded meals. The condensation slides down the side of your cup. You sip and lay it back down.

We've been talking about boys—or, one in particular. He's caused a bit of trouble in my life lately, and I'm trying to figure him out. A slight flush of your cheeks begins to match the red of your hair as you feel the heat of the early spring evening. You gently offer your advice. The slight red deepens as you make a crack, and we both begin to laugh. That deep laughter is one of the best parts about being with you. There's a bond between us that supersedes the bond of friendship. It's the familial bond of a brother and sister. Sweet and full of simple moments just like this. I swat away another fly and take a pull from the mocha. You always pay because I'm driving. You say it's only fair. I always enjoy these moments—quiet, filled with purpose. A moment of silence fills the air, then it's you, grasping your iced tea once more, your crook of a finger around the straw.

We move on. You speak of the most recent girl and wondering where you stand with her.

I smile.

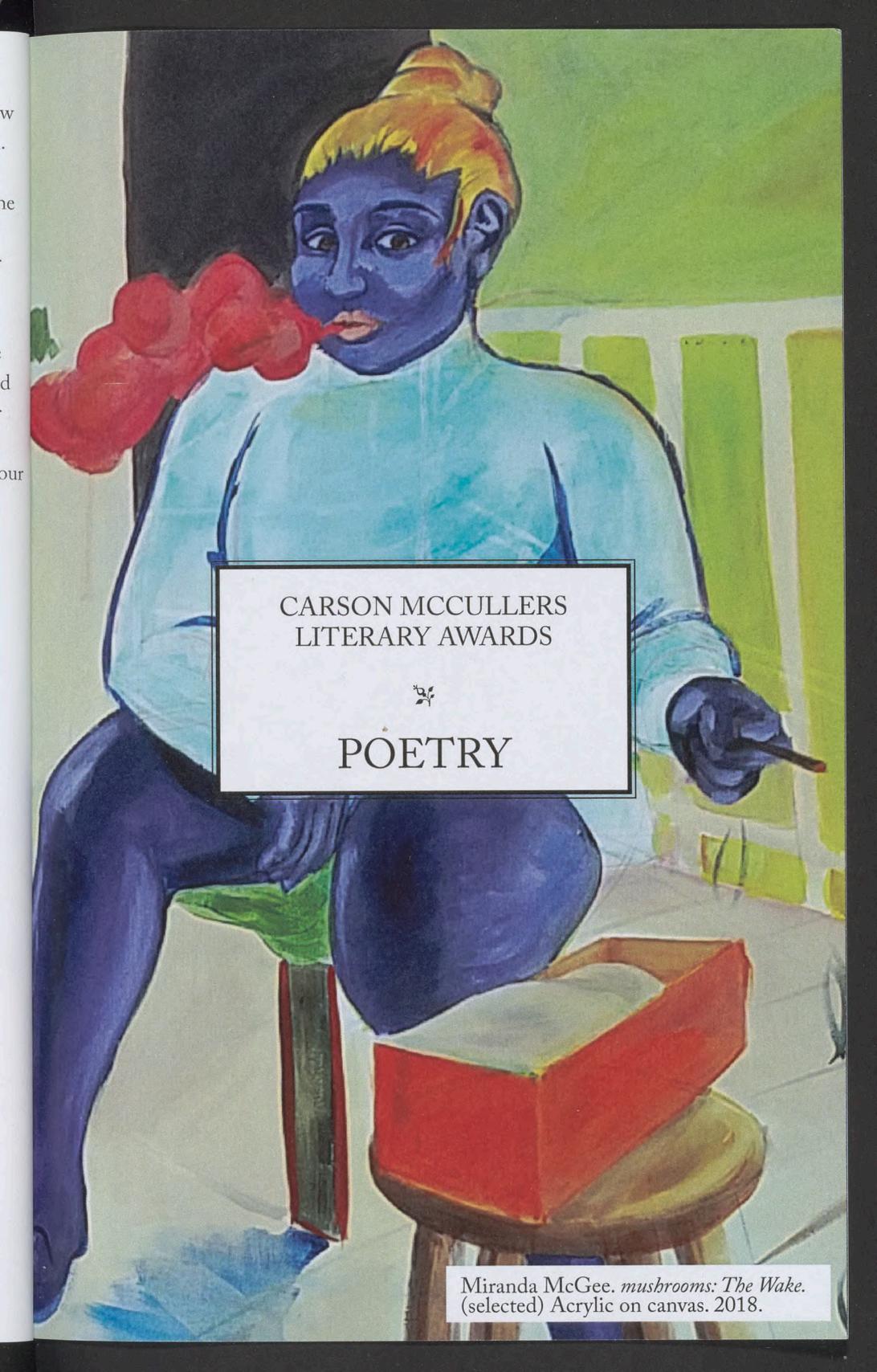
A few weeks ago, it was a similar scenario. Different girl. Different hair color. Same set-up. You wonder what grabbing that cup of coffee meant to her. I laugh. I feel sure no girl could feel as much pleasure in your company as I do now. Sitting here, sweating our asses off in the Georgia heat, it means so much. It mainly means so much because you've been there with me through deep, difficult things. You've been understanding even when I didn't have a good grasp of my emotions. And I for you. I've seen you through girl trouble, family questions, job searches, thoughts of venturing beyond the four walls of Columbus. We've been there for each other.

Till now. It's a Thursday, and I've just received a call that you're gone. I know what this means. This means that the hope we rest in, you're literally resting in. You now have seen Jesus face to face. Though I'm here—questioning for the moment—I know you're with Him. You're at peace. I try to make it through the rest of my cleaning job without excessive tears. I remember your exuberance, your life-giving words, that red-headed sass. And I remember you're no longer bound by limitations of a wheelchair.

You're free!

You're filled with more joy now than you could've ever had on earth. You're skipping, dancing, singing, playing—definitely documenting everything around you. All the things you loved here and more. For now, I'll sit down with a beer and a pen and smile. I'll remember those moments, laughing with you. I'll remember it all, down to the smell of a hot Georgia spring, sitting with you, your clean scent filling the car. Inhale, exhale, keep walking.

-Hannah Coiner



CARSON MCCULLERS
LITERARY AWARDS



POETRY

Miranda McGee. *mushrooms: The Wake.*
(selected) Acrylic on canvas. 2018.





My Hyacinthus

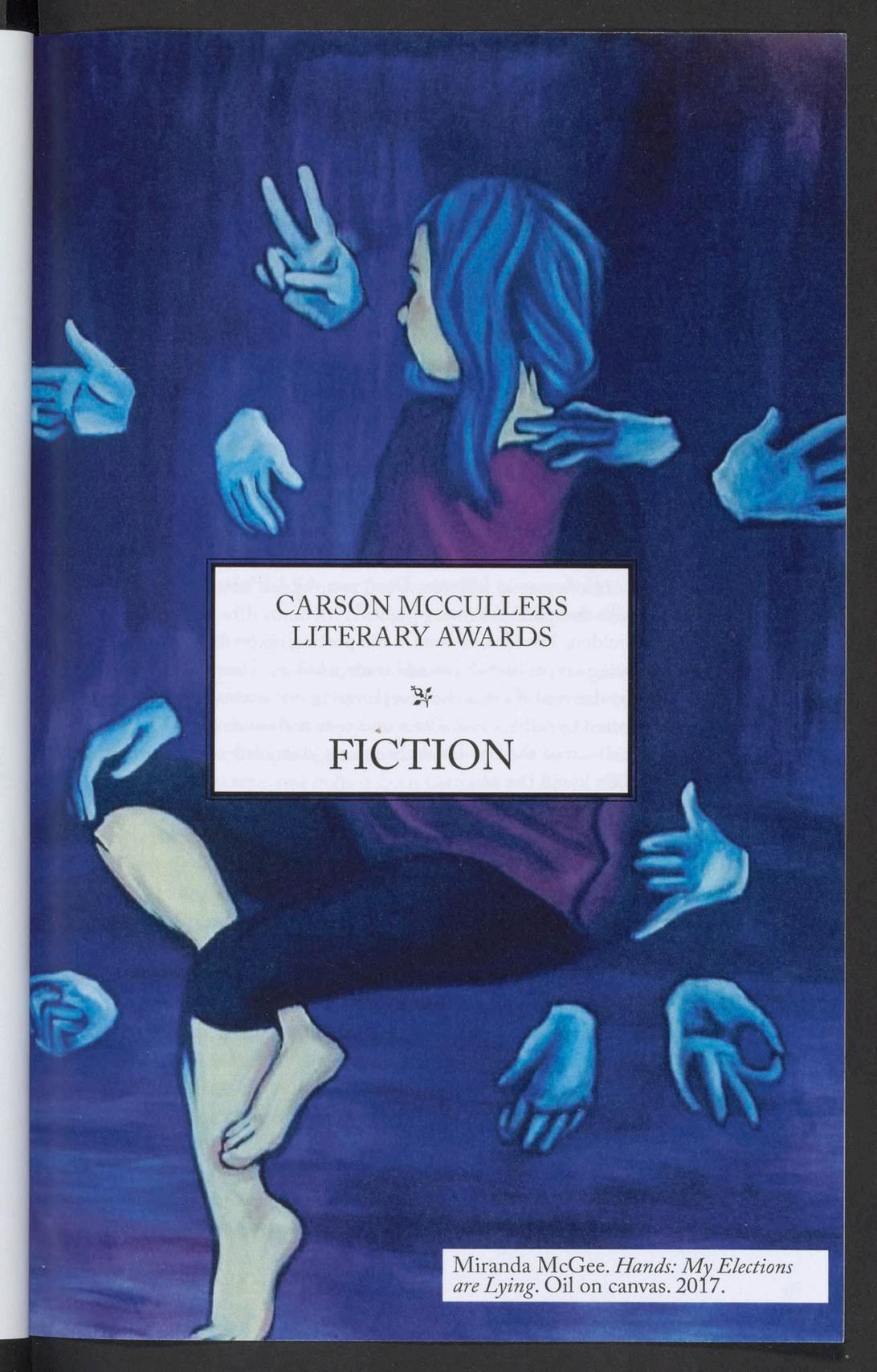
None recall the youth, my Hyacinthus
To whom I tutored the lyre and bow.
I wished to teach more, but a death by discus
Nipped juvenescence in the bud. O, woe!
Never could I love another so.

We climbed such heights, of those hills of ecstasy,
In my chariot drawn by whitest swans.
Your sweetness was my greatest symphony.
Tragedy: to let that past be bygone.

Were not for Zephyr, who hung 'bout the clouds,
And wished for the same joys I beheld,
And struck you, for he ne'er you endowed,
You'd still be, simply unparalleled.

Though I, god of remedy and cures,
Not my own ambrosia could suture such wounds.
Your soul, deserved more than Hade's own vapour.
Forever, my heart to be marooned...
From your ichor spilled, a flower created.
On its petals, your blood, ink, I wrote, "Alas!"
To remember such a life, truncated,
A devotion, ne'er one could surpass.

-Jessica DeMarco Jacobson, Third Place Poetry, CSU



CARSON MCCULLERS
LITERARY AWARDS



FICTION

Miranda McGee. *Hands: My Elections
are Lying*. Oil on canvas. 2017.

“Upgrade”

The sound of the crushed soda can rattling against my bike spokes melds in with the usual Friday evening clamor of my block. The rumbling bass of Niko's old school Camaro greets me before he does. Slow and creeping, he cruises by me, in his red bandana that seems glued to his damn forehead, corded arm perched on the window, head bobbing lightly to the latest “Lil” rapper. This nigga. The car slows to a stop at the curb as he raises a hand to beckon me.

Jaw clenched, I toe the kick stop and plant my feet on either side of the bike.

“Wassup, youngblood.” He extends a veiny hand to adjust the volume dial and I catch sight of the Bible verse inked across his upper arm, the lettering curving over a scar. My chin juts out quick and stiff.

“Nothin.” I keep my response short to avoid a long conversation.

He hums to himself and props his elbow on the center console, dragging a hand down the shrub of black hair jutting from his chin. Craning his neck to get a better view of me, the corners of his mouth curve downwards as his eyes move across my bike. “You ain't tired of rollin round on that raggedy ass bike yet? I told you I got some work fa you on Lincoln. Don't you think it's bout time you start helpin out yo folks and pullin ya own weight?”

I roll my shoulders. His idea of work is me posting up on a corner to keep the cycle going, preying on people who would trade a kidney for a crack-rock if they could. And I'd be damned if I was the one pumping our streets with poison to be smoked and snorted by fathers and sisters and sons and cousins. I would find a way to get the hell out of the hood and change my shitty fate without screwing up somebody else's life in the process.

“Nah, I'm good on that.” I stare straight ahead and pop my knuckles.

He chuckles dryly. “Yeah, aight youngblood. You got the number and you know where to find me when you ready to man the fuck up and upgrade ya lifestyle.”

The bass of the music returns and the car engine groans as he pulls away. I watch as the car eases down the street and comes to a stop at the corner, the music shallowing out and the words becoming even more indistinguishable than usual.

“Damn.” I groan and drag my hands down my face. I just pedaled my back to the top of his list of prospects.

Hopping the curb to cross the street onto MLK boulevard, I hear a siren blare somewhere, and I'm not sure if it's legit or a sound effect in whatever song Niko is bumping. I squint against the sun as I pass the liquor stores and Baptist churches shaking hands on every corner. Staring straight ahead, I ease past the two dudes leaning against the building to my left, hands in their pockets and eyes scanning the streets strategically for familiar faces and anyone with a little

too much sway in their step. Probably working for Niko. Malcolm X, Rosa Parks, Huey P. Newton, and Obama are painted above them like the faces of the black Mt Rushmore. In their backdrop are clouds, a random skyline, and the words, "If we can do it, so can you."

I chuckle at the irony. Four people who signified change and greatness and community, diminished to a location marker and a post-up spot for dealers. I don't know what they think "it" is, but it damn sure isn't what they're doing.

I cut through dirt-packed lawns where grass is as sparse as a winning lottery ticket and where boys in sweat stained t-shirts blacken the soles of their feet in intense rounds of touch football; between rusted George Foreman grills ignited every second Saturday, Veterans Day, and fourth of July, and only allowed to be touched by so-and-so's uncle wussaname; dodging toddlers with saggy Huggies swinging between their fat, ashy knees. Females sit on the steps of small concrete porches, heads cocooned in clouds of silk, feet clad in dingy flip-flops, cackling loudly into their phones, occasionally stopping to scold a child: "Aht, aht, Man-man. Get that outcho mouth! And you better not start that whinin."

Naked tree branches tangle with the ravaged laces bonding powerlines to the red Converse that dangle over our streets like streamers. Above our cracked sidewalks, spotted with sundried chewing gum and slickened with the water of far-reaching sprinkler heads.

Before I can speed past them, some old-heads holler at me from their seats beneath the tree by the corner store. Decade old chains rest on top of their bellies that have been rounded by years of Coors Light, red Kool-Aid and fried pork chops. Big Joe, leaning against a trunk the same brown as his skin, takes a drag from his cigarette and pulls it from his darkened lips, a pillow of smoke spilling between them. I think of Oreos.

"What yo Pops been up to, KO? Why we ain't seen him round here?" Two trails of white trickle from his nostrils as he sucks another mouthful from the slim stick. As he gently taps the end with his index finger, the ashes fall in a fiery flurry, and he drops his hand to his side. His left hand — bare and calloused — rests on his hip, and a rag drapes across his shoulder. I scowl at the nickname from my childhood, earned after accidentally giving my cousin a black eye in an intense round of slap boxing. The small crowd huddled around to see the scuffle had hunched over laughing, shouting at him to shake it off and clapping me on the back; I felt like shit but they were proud, so I did a victory dance.

"Nothin' for real. He just been working and picking up some extra hours at the warehouse. He straight." I give Big Joe a condensed rundown — stripped free of personal details — careful not to run my mouth and have my Pops business out in the streets. Planting my feet into the pavement and crossing my arms over my chest, I make sure to maintain direct eye contact. Never look down when a man is talking to you.

"Mhmm. Well, you tell Mrs. Williams to loose them reins up a lil bit. This ain't high school no mo. She oughta let that man be a man." He gives me a pointed look and takes another drag, the rest of the men grunting in agreeance. Gritting my teeth, I watch as the dunes of skin around his mouth stretch into a grin. Still grinning, he dips his head and gives me the OK to pedal away. They don't wait for me to be out of earshot before they start moaning about how back in the day, men were men and women were women. Them niggas.

Finally easing up to the REC, I jump off my bike and walk it the rest of the way, avoiding the flying feet and flailing limbs of the kids flipping through the patchy field. Landing flips that I'm sure I've seen on TV before. They go back and forth competing, jeering at each other about who can jump higher and hold their handstand the longest. Their school shirts cling to their bodies, knees of their khakis grass-stained, slim arms and round faces glistening like my Pops' gold chains. I think they're good enough for the Olympics but ain't no damn gymnastics in the hood.

Approaching the pale green door leading to the gym, I hear a thud followed by a chorus of "Deeee," and I know one of them little boys most likely bust they ass trying to land a flip. I glance back to see the culprit dusting off the back of his highwater pants, a frown on his face as he shrugs off the grimy hands of his cackling friends, repeating over and over: "It ain't even hurt. I'm good." Eventually he cracks a smile and starts laughing harder than the rest of them and reenacts his tumble. I know that feeling well.

I turn back to the door and pry it open, the sounds of squeaking sneakers and dribbling balls immediately pooling out of the small opening. Spotting my group huddled on the opposite end of the court, I lug my bike behind me and prop it up against the wall before heading over to them. The court is lined with dudes who have their faces planted in phone screens, probably fourth round picks waiting to get in on a game.

A smirk on my face as I close in on the trio, I cup my mouth with my hands. "Yooo! Wassup, lil bitty bitches?" Not missing a beat, they stick to the routine and all respond with the same four words, "Nothin much, ugly motherfuckaaaa."

A few feet out, Lucky launches the ball at me, and I catch it before it collides with my chest. "Last one to pull up so grab another ball and hop in for a two-on-two. That one flat as hell." He points to the ball in my hand and gestures for me to toss it.

As if it were a bowling ball, I nestle it into my palm and roll it down the court where it thumps against the wall and comes to a stop. Not far behind the ball, I jog across the court to the storage room. Stepping into the dimly lit room filled with everything from first-aid kits to jump ropes, I head towards the back-left corner where a burlap sack is sagging against the wall. I pull it open enough to make out the shapes and faded colors of its contents and reach my hand

inside in search of the familiar grainy texture of a basketball. I am reminded of a woman stuffing a Thanksgiving turkey as my hand sifts through the sack. Kneading a firm ball in my hands, I roll it out and give it a few test bounces to make sure it's good, and my eye is drawn to a case tucked behind the worn bag. The shape is long and rectangular like a gun case, but I know better than to believe somebody would leave their piece lying around like this. Especially one this big.

Tucking the ball under my arm, I move closer to inspect it. I silently pray that I'm not tampering with an old murder weapon, stashed here since the Leon River became a known ditch spot, scoped out by the police at least once a month now. Last thing I need is to be tied to a murder case right before graduation. The body is rugged, Stussy S's and names that I don't recognize carved into it, with more dents in the frame than the roads have potholes. The hinges look barbecued with the amount of rust on them. Curiosity peaked, I drop the ball between my knees and crouch down to pull the case toward me; the noise as it drags across the tile sounds like fingernails dragging across a pillowcase. Squinting down at the case and running my fingers along the side for some sort of clasp, they hook on something and I tug. The screws creak as the lid pulls back to reveal a violin. Aged, rustic, and filmed with dust.

I frown at it, slightly disappointed that it isn't a gun. At least then I could have taken it to the pawn shop and profited a couple hundred dollars off the shit. My eyes move along the body, following the curves up to the neck of the instrument, and I wonder what I should do with it. Trailing my fingers over the strings, I pluck, and a deep, vibrating noise trembles through the hollowed wood. I smile.

"KO! What you in there playin witcha self or somethin? Let's go, bruh." Lucky yells into the room and I slam the case shut, folding my fingers around the ball. My knuckles ache with the force. Them niggas would clown the hell out of me if they knew I was in here messing around with a violin.

"Nah, I'm playin with ya Moms." I shout back with my eyes fixed on the closed case. The sound still rings between my ears, gong-like and alluring and seductive.

Now after about three or four games, my group is the last remaining in the gym. As they gather their things, wiping their foreheads on their sleeves and checking their phones, they ask if I'm down to meet again on Saturday night. Mind on the abandoned case, I nod noncommittally and wave them off, pretending to be too preoccupied readjusting the can on my back tire to walk out with them. But once their footsteps and voices are swallowed with the slam of the door, I trek back to the closet. My footfalls bounce ominously against the walls and echo back to me, filling the silence with my stealthy movements. Slowly pushing the door open, I head back to the shadowy corner and hover

over the case, unsure if what I am about to do can be classified as stealing even though it's obvious that nobody is checking for an old ass violin. I weigh it against what I could be doing at this hour – peeping in car windows and tiptoeing around random backyards – and lift the case from the floor. I stare at it laying across my forearms, confused about my drive to take it considering I have never seen anyone who looked like me playing a violin. I balance it on the handlebars of my bike, sneaking down side streets and alleyways, avoiding street lights and neighborhood crackheads, and men on corners and under trees. The last thing I need is to be spotted with a goddamn violin with no explanation as to why I have it; I don't even know how to play the thing.

Wobbly pedaling up to our small concrete porch, I hoist the bike and the case up the three short steps and steady the bike against the rusted bars sectioning our home from the next. My mother's back is to the door — still in her nurse scrubs — as she cooks dinner, and my Pops is knocked out in front of the TV. Beer clenched in his hand, work shirt unbuttoned, shoe laces dangling, and the roar of a lawnmower pushing its way up his throat. He'll wake up long enough to polish off a plate of food, down another beer, hop in the shower, and knock back out.

“Baby is that you?” she calls out to me over her shoulder without turning around. Her forearms are buried in the sink, her hair gathered in a tight fist at the top of her head.

“Yeah, Ma.” I call back, not stopping until there is a locked door keeping me from the world. I slide the case underneath my bed, hidden from wandering eyes and suspicious parents, and pull my phone out of the pocket of my gym shorts to do a Google search of black male violinists. The results load and I'm met with tattoos, dreadlocks, snapbacks, t-shirts, and dark skin. All playing the instrument that I thought was a gun.

And now I have a barely functioning violin stashed under my bed and an untouched String Basics textbook tucked in my bookbag, crushing the scrap of paper Niko had scribbled his number on. Just in case the family ever hit hard times or the lint in my pocket needed some company or I was ready to “man the fuck up” and upgrade my lifestyle. It sat plucked from the library shelves, pages crisp, unbent, unfettered, and never flipped through by an unappreciative thumb. Somehow, I knew these strings would give me a way out of the hood that its cracked streets couldn't.

-Casi Turner, First Place Fiction, CSU



Miranda McGee. mushrooms: The Wake.
(selected). Acrylic on canvas. 2018.

Club Hopping in Osaka

"Mel, we are planning to go out to Osaka tomorrow night. Just get some drinks and chill. Are you up for it?"

I looked up to Diana from the sand I was swirling around with my foot beneath the table. "Uh, yeah, I guess. Who all's going?" I asked still not fully committed to the idea.

"Me, Shale, Tomoe, and Kaoru. Well, I say that, but Shale hasn't actually said if she can go or not yet."

I mulled this over. I wasn't that close to Shale so I wasn't bothered as long as Kaoru and Tomoe were going. Diana made things fun, though she was a wild card. Under normal conditions we probably never would have crossed paths. She wasn't exactly my kind of people, but I'd never tell her that. Still, without a clear reason to deny it, I replied, "All right, that sounds fine then. Are we just going to a *tabe nomi hodai*?"

Diana nodded her head while eating the curry she'd bought in the cafeteria. I started eating my Donburi, savoring the rice and saving the slices of tonkatsu meat for the end. "By the way, when did you all decide this?"

"Tomoe and Shale and I were talking about it last night. I just invited Kaoru after class," she replied around a mouthful of rice before chugging some water.

That's how most of our excursions went. Sporadic and spawned by Diana. It didn't bother me as long as I was in a good mood though. In fact, I sometimes felt those trips lifted my spirit more than anything. I knew I couldn't sit around my dorm room all day on the computer with familiar sights, trying to hide from the world. Sun, friends, food, and a little bit of exercise was undoubtedly better for both my mental and physical health. I knew that. I knew it better than anyone else maybe and had it committed to memory. I thought about it every single day.

Yet, I sat in my dorm, staring at my phone and dreading the text that would summon me to leave. I was fully clothed in what I thought would make me look attractive. At the very least, I felt attractive and more manly wearing my jacket, form fitting T-shirt, black jeans and necklace and rings. I looked myself in the mirror, smiled once, then looked at my sunken cheeks. They were sure to notice them. Tomoe was sure to notice. I didn't want to leave. I wanted to curl under the blanket with my laptop and watch YouTube videos for mindless entertainment until my eyes seared from exhaustion and I could pass out.

I didn't.

The train to Osaka whooshed into the station with the conductor calling out in familiar Japanese that let me know it was our train, Kaoru confirming that notion by moving onto the cars once they'd partly emptied. Inside was quiet and crowded. Unlike back home, there was no personal space and the stereotypical

blonde woman who needed so desperately to gossip about so-and-so as loudly as possible on the train was no where in sight. I hated being so crowded. It felt hard to breath and the silence felt crushing like all eyes were on me. When we got off at the station everyone was quiet, and there was a lack of busking I was so acquainted with. As we approached the station exit the noise roared and finally we all emerged into the shimmering Osaka night where cars honked, people walked, and the bustle was lively. I blinked into the night with relief. "All right, our reservation is soon. Let hurry," Kaoru said in Japanese and leading us.

We nodded and made our way through the streets and around the people, many of whom were business men going home late from work or, regrettably, men who had no reason to go home and were making their way to the bar. Power lines were strung all about the tightly knit buildings, like something out of a 70's film in New York, and I thought how claustrophobic it was to live with so little breathing room. As we hustled down the only unfamiliar street Diana spoke up. "Why'd we pick a Torikizoku so far from the station," she complained as she pulled her gloves on and zipped her coat, covering the blue shirt and necklaces she was wearing

"The closer ones were probably all booked out for groups," I speculated looking at the Saturday night crowd that was lined up outside a different bar, and then to Tomoe.

"That," Tomoe replied, pointing back at me with her painted nails and a flick of her ponytail.

I smiled slightly, taking pride in my deduction. I looked around at the other women, many of whom were stick legged and flat everywhere and compared it to what I was used to. Body images were so vastly different and I was put off by how unhealthy my own culture had to be. However, I admired Tomoe from behind and how thought how good her gym regiment must have been to look good. Kaoru led us, weaving carefully, to the bar we'd booked, and after climbing a narrow staircase, the staff worked us to a table. I sat on the wooden bench, opened the menu, and scanned the contents for anything different than the usual. It was always a rather flowery selection instead of the hard whiskey I'd had in American bars. "The seasonal special is pretty good," Kaoru said pointing to the front as he wedged himself in beside me.

I read that it was a some kind of plum sake and rolled the idea around in my head. Without any reference I wasn't sure if it was a drink I'd like, but for 300 yen I didn't mind trying that first. I always followed the try anything once ruled when it was applicable. I passed the other menu out and the girls looked at theirs while Kaoru shared mine, flipping back and forth as we decided on our first orders. I looked up from the menu and remembered the last time I'd gone out to drink with everyone. "By the way, are we splitting this evenly or is someone covering it this time?"

Kaoru puffed out his chest and declared he was going to cover the alcohol this time. I put my hand on his shoulder and hung my head, saying in English "You've taken the bullet this time comrade."

He chuckled and shrugged off his pea coat. "Could you hang this up for me?" "I don't know, can I?"

Kaoru gave me a dead pan face. I grinned.

I grabbed a hanger and hung his coat, pulling mine off and pushing it behind me while the others bombarded me with their coats. Tomoe winked at me slightly as she passed me her coat and I feigned ignorance, making her giggle. Once that was settled, we called the waitress and ordered drinks. "I'll take a pint of this and the plum sake," I said pointing to the menu so she didn't have to rely on my Japanese.

I also ordered some bar food to go along. This was vastly different from wings and fries. It was grilled meat, dumplings, fried vegetables. I order grilled beef skewers and a croquet, excited for the simple potato flavor. The others ordered theirs, all an assortment of alcohol and food that slowly began arriving at the table in batches. "It's a shame Shale couldn't make it," Tomoe said before she chased a piece of chicken with liquor.

We all nodded, though I wasn't that hurt over it. I was more relieved since she always hogged Tomoe's attention, whether she meant to or not. Still, I smiled, stealing a piece of Tomoe's karaage. "I offer this piece of chicken to you Shale, wherever you are out there!" I chanted as Tomoe complained at me in jest.

In turn she fast armed one of my skewers as the waitress set the tray on the table. "Oi oi! I took a small piece of chicken, not a whole skewer. Isn't that cheating?"

She gave me a haughty glare and folded her arms into her red sweater. "Ara? I thought you were a generous man, Mel. Would you go so far as to complain about a beautiful woman eating off the same tray as you? And here I thought I'd grace you."

Kaoru and I both grimaced. He leaned over and threw his arm around my shoulder. "Mel, you've awakened the Oujo-sama. My condolences."

"What do you mean Kaoru, we're in this together," I said, grabbing his hand that was trying to slide away with another of my skewers and giving him a faux scowl.

He gave a nervous chuckle and gently set it back as the girls laughed and we continued down the evening with merriment and jokes. I slowly felt my movements lag and the tension that seized my mind constantly faded as we all downed more drinks. The more intoxicated we became, the crazier things got, and the more fun it was. At some point, we stopped ordering and Kaoru looked relieved. "Hey, I paid last time we went out. It's a man's duty to uphold his word," I declared with a gallant gesture.

"He only says that when he isn't the one paying up, ne Diana? Remember last time how much he griped about how we'd turn into alcoholics if we kept it up?" she recounted with a sly smirk over her half drained pint.

"I recall him imitating you, actually. Remember how he said a good lady wouldn't drink so much?" Diana prodded.

We laughed as Tomoe's false, drunken pride took a blow. We started talking about politics after that and I had very little to offer. However, I couldn't help but mention my dismay for the inclination of Japanese women to be shoved into a submissive or objectified role. Even in the bar I could see the leers the drunk business men gave the women and it was a disappointing difference from the States. The table agreed with me, condemning the Japanese. I was suddenly aggravated and steered the conversation else where. We continued drinking and eating the night away, our discussions varying from one topic to the next. I felt myself loosening up from the anxieties of home sickness and culture shock the further the alcohol seeped into my system.

I finally reclined and declared I was done. My stomach was plenty full, and when I went to the bathroom it was enough struggle to focus only on the bowl so I knew I was sufficiently drunk. Upon my return, I saw the others had agreed and were handing off their empty glasses to the waitress. I sighed back into my seat after she squeezed by me and rolled my head over to Kaoru. "What's wrong? You got that look of constipation going on. Did you eat too much?"

I rubbed his back casually and he held his phone up to me. The time read 12:04 A.M. I felt a lead ball drop and grimaced. "I demand you tell me this instant what has you two so flustered," Tomoe said with a cute smile on her lightly orange lips.

When she and Diana saw the time they, too, felt the same lead ball, the gravity of the situation falling heavy. We missed the last train.

"Are there any buses that run this late?" Tomoe asked, her Japanese slurred more than just a bit.

Kaoru shook his head. "The buses aren't running anymore either," he explained while I watched him scrolling through information on his phone.

"So, what do we do now?" I said, posing the question that no one had an answer to.

I couldn't think up a better question, nor a solution as we began to pack our things. I passed the jackets out and we shuffled passed the late night office workers who's great solace on the weekends were office parties and the waitresses who just barely tolerated their behavior. We paid, teetered down the narrow stairs and emerged back on the main streets before broaching the subject again. The winter winds were biting at my cheeks and I turned my back to it while I listened to the others deliberate, the words missing me. Instead, I was thinking about the States. I remembered the nights with my friends when we could throw

house parties. I remembered cleaning the next morning. I could drive to Waffle House for breakfast to tame my hangover and then drive to Wal-Mart for random groceries while I was out. My part of the fridge at the dorms in Hirakata was nearly empty. I'd have to ride my bike out the next day to a couple different places to get the things I wanted, and there was no Waffle House, so I'd probably just have instant coffee and cereal. Maybe early morning McDonalds. "Why don't we just go club hopping since we're stuck here?"

My attention snapped back to Diana's suggestion. "You joking or what?"

Tomoe chimed in. "Me? Club hopping? I cannot believe you'd suggest such nonsense. Staying out all night is simply preposterous for a lady such as—"

"Sure, let's go. We are already drunk. We can't really get back and there isn't a hotel cheap enough that we could afford sporadically. Besides, it sounds like it could be fun. I've been to a few clubs back in Nara," Kaoru explained, and I found myself roped into the nonsense, holding my balance against a tree that lined the street.

"I don't have a better idea."

Diana looked over to Tomoe with a raised eyebrow, making finger guns at her. Tomoe was indignant until the pretend trigger was pulled and she made as if a deer being shot. She smiled and shoved Diana saying, "Fine you win. Hey Kaoru, look up some good clubs around here. If I'm going clubbing I want to dance," she said, more Tomoe in that statement than the superior lady persona.

"Already on it."

Diana whooped loudly as Kaoru mapped us in the right direction. "Now this is more like it! Osaka, here we come!"

The streets were as quiet as a busy night street could have been in the midst of downtown Osaka. Where we stood I wasn't entirely sure after the maze of streets. I only knew we were outside a club whose name I couldn't read and I always wanted to just turn back and walk home, but knew it was impossible. In our drunken mass we walked up to the bouncer, a rather unimpressive Japanese man who was likely more put together in life than the four of us combined, and he looked us over. I felt rather nervous, having yet to go to a club in Osaka. However, the bouncer smiled at us and motioned to the notice board that was propped up against the outside wall. "It's foreigner's night on Saturdays," he spoke in crude English, and the sign read the same.

I looked at Tomoe and Kaoru, feeling guilty that I'd get in free when they'd have to pay, but the bouncer made an excited motion for us all to go in, unconcerned with the two Japanese with us. I threw him a thumbs up and he returned the motion with all the enthusiasm of a hype man or a DJ. As we walked up the stairs to the thump of music filled air. I was immediately enticed. "Do you think he's always that enthused?" I called over the music to Kaoru.

He seemed to think about this for a moment, as if I'd posed a rather pressing question about the fabric of reality. He tugged off his pea coat to reveal the sleek,

black button down he had and he rolled the sleeves up, bracelets chinking away. "Probably. With a job like that, who wouldn't be?"

He passed his coat to Diana and I did the same, rolling the sleeves of my red flannel as our things were tucked into a locker. We wandered around a bit, finding a VIP room, the bathroom, and the main dance hall, which was dark and splashed with dancing lights as music blasted. A few people danced, but I was surprised to find it not jumping. I looked at Kaoru who shrugged in return, showing me the time on his phone. It wasn't quite late enough for things to be going, I assumed, so we took a seat at the bar where I made the executive decision to order more drinks and chat up the bartender, a light skinned man with the slight glisten of sweat on his forehead, and who spoke fluent English to my surprise. Kaoru listened in while meditating over a rum and coke.

"So how long have you worked here?"

"About six months."

I was impressed. He used a rag to clean out a glass while we talked. "Where are you from then?"

"South Africa. I'm going to be moving to Tokyo soon though."

"I'm from America. What are you going to Tokyo for?"

"Work. I landed a job with a translation company."

I nodded, strangely proud that he'd landed the job. I made a toast to his achievement and future success, which Kaoru drank to, and then he asked me, "What about you?"

"Study abroad student. I'm here for a little while longer," I explained.

I looked around the room as we talked and saw that the dance floor had become packed and Tomoe was trying to coax me, and subsequently Kaoru, into dancing, even though I had no idea what the song was. I was suddenly nervous to dance in front of her. Sober I could easily control my attraction, but this drunk I was like an uninhibited version of myself and I was nervous she'd see it. "I'm going to go dance for a bit, but I'll be back," I finally said.

He smiled and waved at us, calling out over the music, "What's your name?"

"Mel! Your's?"

"Chido!"

I gave him a thumbs up before Tomoe dragged me by the arm into the crowd and started dancing drunkenly about, pulling her lustrous hair from its pony tail. Diana and Kaoru joined and we had our own dance square fired up, unabashedly doing the most absurd, promiscuous, and outrageous dance moves we could manage. We laughed and toppled, clinging to each other at times to stop the rocking or, more often, when we were winded. At times Tomoe clung close to me, her soft, warm skin pressed to mine. In those moments I felt my heart race, certain it wasn't the alcohol but the pheromones. If she couldn't see it on my face I was certain anyone else could. Maybe she already knew though and was doing

it on purpose. I wasn't sure, but it made me forget about the suffocating darkness in my mind and I made no move to stop her.

When the music stopped while they switched DJ's, I went back to Chido for a while, taking a break for the sake of my stamina. He gave me a couple free drinks and we shared some of our stories while drinking together, laughing and talking about how different our three worlds were: South Africa, America, and Japan. We exchanged Facebook contacts and I felt bad for a moment, knowing I would likely never speak to him again after this night had passed. I let that depression slide from my shoulders though and reveled in free drinks and getting the eyes of the girls who came up to the bar, though I was much more interested in the eyes Tomoe cast from the dance floor. A song that I knew suddenly came on and my body moved to the dance floor, bombastic movements making everyone form a circle around me as I danced, moving aside to let others join and each person taking a turn until the song changed and I lost interest.

The exhaustion began to creep up so I sat, wiping the sweat from my brow and swaying. "Where are the girls?" I asked Kaoru who was sitting against the wall as well.

"Diana said they were going to the bathroom. I think they want to change locations," he slurred before downing the rest of his drink.

I nodded and closed my lids while waiting. My thoughts were muddled. I tried focusing, but they jumped from back in the states to the test we'd just taken. I remembered my fridge and then grimaced at how much money I'd probably spent that night alone. I felt alone. In a room surrounded by people, pounding music, good drinks, and better friends, I felt crushing loneliness seize me. I couldn't leave the country early, and my only choice was to suffer through until my last few months were up. Kaoru startled me from my stupor by rubbing my leg slightly. I surprised myself, being already strangely comfortable with the Japanese social norms and finding solace in his efforts. He smiled up at me and nodded once. "It's all right. We're here with you. Don't let it get you down," he yelled in English over the song.

I took a deep breath and remembered Tomoe's warm smile. I heard Diana's chipper voice in my head and read the support from friends in my mind. I felt my anxieties fade away for now and was glad to be among friends rather than crippling myself in the prison of my dorm room. "Thanks," I returned as the girls arrived back.

"You ready to head out?" I proposed.

The wind cut into us out in the streets and my ears rang. "Well, for my first club in Osaka, that was quite a riot."

"I agree."

I looked at my phone. It was 3 A.M. Everything that wasn't a part of the night life was most certainly closed. "What are we going to do now?" I asked,

turning to Diana for the answer as did the others.

"Don't look at me. Tomoe was the one who wanted to leave," she said, wobbling slightly as we walked aimlessly.

While we walked the cold pressed around us and our only salvation was a 7Eleven on the corner of a back street. We dipped inside and bought some snacks to quell the night hunger and escape the cold for a bit. With the stark contrast in the fun, I felt a twinge of depression creep up in that small store. We ate inside, the clerk eyeing us at first but soon ignoring us completely. "Tomoe, you're falling asleep," I said as she leaned against my shoulder slowly, the pastry clutched in her small hands forgotten.

I shook her lightly and she sat up, only to return to sleep on me. "Just leave her till we leave," Kaoru said in Japanese.

I shrugged, unbothered, though I felt anything but, and ate my red bean bun carefully, trying to fend off the exhaustion in myself. I felt her warmth pass over to me and dared not move for fear she would wake up and move away. We'd been playing back and forth with each other for weeks now, and this was the most intimate we'd ever been. Whether it was the liquor or the oddity of a night time escapade in Osaka I couldn't care less, I only soaked in the fact that we were so close together. It was enough to keep any depression at bay in the moment. Diana was the one who eventually ruined it and pulled us from our sloth lull and we dragged our feet back into the chill, Tomoe clinging to me. Sober, she was never so friendly, too stereotypically shy like a Japanese girl. Despite this, I was too nervous, too afraid of myself to make a move. I had little faith that I could impress her, feeling I needed to somehow. I was drunk and tired, my brain swaying despite my concentration. In that moment though, Tomoe on one arm, Diana and Kaoru snickering and supporting me, I felt the trip, Japan, wasn't all bad.

Diana wanted to go to the next club, which we only stayed at for half an hour before it closed, which she complained about. "I've never heard of a club closing so early."

"At least we didn't have to pay to get in," Kaoru suggested, which calmed Diana's frustration.

We shuffled while looking for the next club in hopes they hadn't closed yet and found a group of men standing in a small overhang of building lit by street light. They called out, asking if we had any drinks and I responded, feeling immediately on edge and prepared to run for my life or fight for my friends'. However, the men were immediately impressed by my Japanese and forgot about the booze. "Your Japanese is so good," one of them demanded.

I laughed nervously and shook my head, suddenly aware that I'd been using more Japanese while drunk than I dared while sober. "No no. I'm not really that good."

"No really. Your Japanese is fine. Much better than my English."

"How good is your English?" I asked and he held his arms in an X with a wide grin.

"Nashi!"

I laughed, he laughed, and I heard my friends laughing with the others beside the wall. He asked what we were doing and I, now excitedly, explained we were Club hopping, but the one we were just at closed. He pointed in some direction and said, "There's another club over that way. It's called...uhh...Yara Naika. I go there all the time with my buddies. That is, those guys over there," he said, jabbing a stubby finger over where some of the guys were talking to Diana and Kaoru at the wall to my right.

To the left was another guy chatting up Tomoe. She was smiling and laughing, more awake than before as her second wind hit, and kept casting coy glances my way, the same way I was watching her. "So what are you all doing in Japan?"

I went through the spiel that I'd grown so accustomed to over the months of explaining why I was in Japan and how I knew Japanese. He seemed to be genuinely impressed and the beer in his hand didn't say anything to the contrary, but still his insistence was droll and samey. I'd heard the same lines about my Japanese and my study abroad plenty of times. After a while I began shivering violently and Tomoe shuffled her way over to me and stuffed her hands in my pockets to steal my warmth, looking up at me with a drunken smile framed by her glasses. "When did you change out your contacts?" I asked, only just realizing she had.

She told me it was when she'd gone to the bathroom at some point. I was hesitant, even while drunk, to finally make any definitive move on her. Here I was, drunk in downtown Osaka, a beautiful girl making moves on me, and my anxieties seized my actions despite it all. Instead, my mind conjured up all the times I'd gone to the bathroom that night. My bladder decided I hadn't been enough and reminded me of that fact suddenly. The man whose name I'd already forgotten, or maybe had never gotten to begin with kept talking, while the other continued trying to hold a conversation with Tomoe, who replied with witty one liners that were both polite, but clearly dropping the hint that she wasn't interested in his number.

Though Tomoe and I were by no means an item, I felt protective, or maybe jealous, as if I wasn't standing there with her holding onto me. I glared at the man from time to time, but he didn't seem to notice, his gaze never leaving her. I wasn't certain, but Tomoe's hand gently rubbed my back as if consoling me, and I relaxed then, wondering if she'd noticed my glares. After a we talked and laughed for a long while my feet began to hurt. "Hey Mel, you ready to hit the next one?" Diana asked from where she sat, a big grin on her face.

I shot a sloppy fist into the air and then we explained we were going to try and find the club he was talking about. He looked dejected and extended a hand. I took it and shook it. "I had a great time talking with you. Made tonight way more interesting!" I exclaimed to lift his spirits, not wanting him to think I was insincere.

He nodded along, as did his friends as we all thanked them for the time and for telling us about the club, which apparently stayed open until 5:30 A.M., perfect for us. After we set off wandering through the frigid streets, Kaoru spoke up. "I was genuinely terrified for my life at first. I didn't know what was going to happen when they called out to us."

I chuckled. "I felt the same. They were pretty, I guess strange guys. Seemed harmless though. Maybe we were just that cool."

Kaoru laughed and Diana joined in. "It's really different here than back in the States. I'd never stop for people like that back in Florida."

We all nodded solemnly. It was almost alien to image something like that was the social norm, and I imagined explaining that to my friends back home would illicit concerned looks. It was strange to feel so safe even when confronted by men in the middle of the night, crouched together and drinking. I didn't mind it though. Suddenly remembering my problem, I made a great announcement. "I gotta piss again."

Kaoru shoved me. "Dammit Mel, you go like every half hour when you drink. Control your bladder!"

"Hey, I didn't tell you that when you ate that bad fish before."

"Touche" he said in English.

We began looking carefully at the various buildings we passed in the back streets of downtown Osaka. There were old ramen shops, obscure stores that sold obscure objects I couldn't make out in the dark, and a plethora of narrow staircases and back doors to shops. Completely unlike the spacious corridors of American grid cities, Osaka was close and compact and each time we found a place that looked open I would peek my head around to see if I could enter, more stressed with each dud. "I just need a bathroom man! Should I run all the way back to the clubs?" I asked, now panicking slightly. Tomoe had dislodged herself from my pockets and was now lined up with the other two, watching me do a drunken version of the potty dance. I was embarrassed. After the night had been going so well, I certainly didn't want to show this side to my friends, let alone Tomoe. "Mel, can't you just hold it in till we get to the next club?"

I stopped to think, felt my bladder, and swiftly decided that was a negative. "My god. Well, let's just keep going a little further. We can't be too far away."

"Oh yes we can be," I declared, but agreed with Diana reluctantly.

We hustled down the street in a tense silence until finally I found my salvation. It was a small hotel with an obscure entrance and a little lighting out

front. It reminded me of the sketchy motels in my home town, but I couldn't afford to be picky. "I'll be right back," I said and went inside.

Beyond the obscure entrance was a brightly lit lobby and posters lining the walls with Japanese adult video actresses. The ones that were explicit were censored, but plenty of large breasted women were on the walls and the prices for the hotel rooms were listed with clearly provocative room names at the front desk. It was my first time in a Japanese love hotel, and I felt strangely self-conscious being drunken and alone in such a place. I approached the attendant, wondering what she'd think of a man waltzing in alone, and after taking in the breadth of my first love hotel and asked, "Is there a bathroom here I can use?"

Typical. She was impressed with my Japanese and directed my attention to the bathroom, which was also plastered with attractive Japanese women. I concentrated my aim on the bowl instead of the walls. I didn't mind the scenery, though it was not exactly normal, even for Japanese standards. It was certainly an "Adult" experience and I wasn't sure if I should feel bad for enjoying it slightly. I hurriedly washed my hands, still baffled by the experience. When I left, I thanked the attendant with a slight bow and then relayed the experience to my friends waiting outside. "I almost want to go inside and look for myself," Kaoru said and Diana agreed.

"Why don't you then?" I asked with a wide grin, nudging him towards the building, wanting someone to share the moment with.

He was silent and Diana awkwardly evaded the question saying, "I just want to get to the next club. I'm tired of standing around outside."

Tomoe voted in agreement and charged forward, giving no room to complain. "Is she good?" Kaoru whispered as we walked.

"Just tired I think. It's like 4 A.M." I said with a yawn.

The Streets of Osaka blended together until we found the place, a small entrance with no bouncer. The music thumped and bodies gyrated inside despite the unholy time. It was humid and strangely cool inside, or maybe it was just me. My whiteness drew attention from the dancers, but only temporarily. Diana joined the crowd with Kaoru and Tomoe while I sat on the sidelines and felt my own weight hold me to the chair and push my lids down over and over. The others were getting their second wind. I felt like my third wind had just breezed over.

I watched the dancers go at it like it was the only time they'd ever dance and blinked, the song seeming to change between each blink. My anxiety began to creep in against the banging music. I sunk further into the hard metal chair, wondering if I should get another drink when Tomoe quietly slipped into the seat beside me. Maybe it was the look on my face, or maybe it was the fact that I was sitting alone. I couldn't be sure, but Tomoe tilted her head in question.

"I'm fine. Just exhausted," I called over the music, my voice giving out.

She started poking me persistently trying to coax me into talking, and I wondered where she got all the energy from. I assured her I was fine this time, not willing to burden her, or anyone else, with my own depression. I knew what she was doing. All my friends were aware how stressed I'd been leaving the States. The unfamiliar sights that became my everyday, the smells and tastes that I knew I'd someday miss. They were all my problems. But they stuck around offered me so much and asked for nothing in return. Tomoe started twiddling her thumbs, slowly and concertedly through her drunken state.

My mind jumped. My blood boiled and I was suddenly brimming with confidence as I watched her. She'd been taking unexpected steps all night and all I could do was nervously let her. I was afraid of myself, of my depression, afraid to be a burden. At the same time, just as I knew I couldn't sit in the dorm in crippling solitude, I knew I couldn't think like that and stagnate here. Every synapse,, every dendrite, every neuron told me that, and I finally moved forward in recognition.

I reached over and took her hand in mine, squeezing it tight as our fingers interlaced. I knew my friends were looking out for me, but Tomoe was special. Until that moment, I hadn't had the courage to act. Whether it was the booze, or the way the lights danced in her eyes, or the fact that she'd been supporting me so much,, I didn't know, but I took the leap. I swear I saw her cheeks flush and the surprise filled her. Only the Japanese would take holding hands like this so seriously, but I was just as nervous as she must've been. She looked at me finally and gave me a lopsided, drunken smile and the cat and mouse game was over between us. In that moment I realized that Japan wasn't so bad after all.

That last hour in the club was nebulous. Drunken and sleepy I was hardly aware of what happened, only that I was happy with Tomoe. At some point, though, Kaoru ended up on my other side while Diana had to be fetched from the crowd. "We should head to the station now," I said when we finally found her.

She seemed disappointed and relieved at the same time as she put her coat back on and tossed the purse over her shoulder again.

The streets were calm and cold. The sky had begun to lighten. We walked slowly in silence back to the train station and I admired the Christmas lights that had been hung early. In the morning dawn we could see our evanescent breaths that faded into the lessening gray of the sky. The alcohol had begun to wear off and a ringing pressure was forming in my head. I grimaced at the feeling. Still, I enjoyed the cold on my nose as I sniffled, and the warmth of Tomoe's hand that was in my pocket again. "That was a wild night," Kaoru said breaking the silence.

"You can say that again."

"That was a wild night."

I gave him the flattest look I could. "Kill yourself."

He showed his teeth and chuckled. "Really though, I've never done anything quite like that."

"Yeah, me either. I'm sure that wasn't Diana's first rodeo though," I ventured.

Diana was a zombie, shuffling along just behind us. "I feel like death," she exclaimed with a groan.

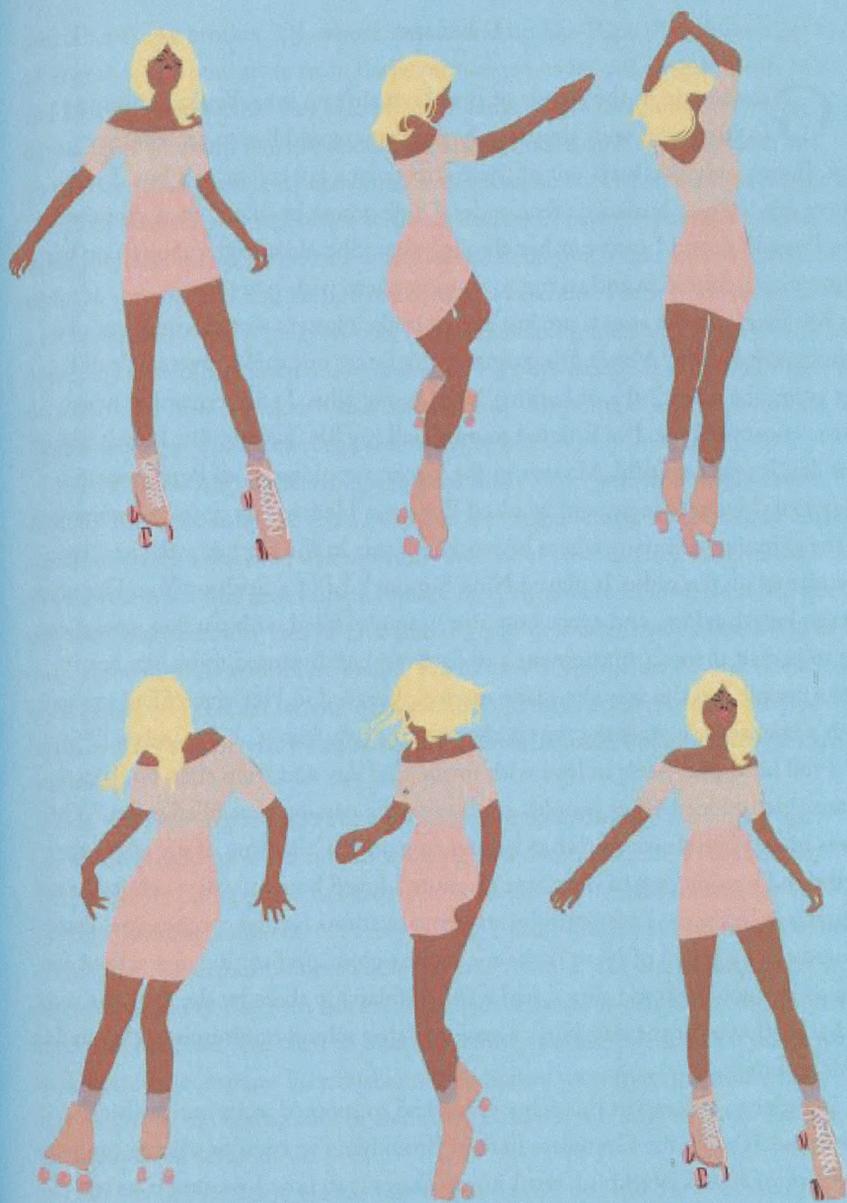
"Well, you were pretty much dancing all night long. I'm pretty sure you were the one who wanted to hurry to the last club too," Kaoru said.

It was my turn to chuckle as she complained further. "Yeah, and now I can't wait to dance my ass back in bed. I'm not getting up until tomorrow morning. Just let me die in peace."

"I'll agree with that sentiment. Sign me up for a funeral and all," I announced.

We reached the station just after the trains started up at six. Early morning business men and oba-san's were going to and from the station. The shops were starting up and preparing for waves of customers throughout the day. The night changed to day and the crowd moved with it, leaving only us four waiting at our train line. I remembered the lack of Waffle House and pondered what I'd do for breakfast. I smiled down at Tomoe, hands laced in harmony as we waited on the bench. I'd have to settle for Sunday morning McDonalds.

-Brandon McCullough, Second Place Fiction, CSU



Erin Aler. *Roller Skate Girl*. Digital.

Escape

Growing up in the streets of Brooklyn ain't no joke. You're constantly looking over your shoulder, hoping you would live to see another day. There's only two ways out of these streets: in a jail cell or in a box. Look where it got Pops: buried six feet under. I ain't gonna be like Pops. I promised Ma I wouldn't and I can't put her through that. She already got enough on her plate raising four kids and trying to support them with two jobs.

Me being on the streets are just gonna make matters worse. I only got one thing going for me: Music. It's gonna be my ticket out these streets. It's all I got going for me. It's the only thing keeping me alive. I still remember when music consumed me. I've listened to music all my life, but not like how it was on this day. It was beautiful. Ma was in the kitchen cooking all of Pops' favorites: Meatloaf, Mac n Cheese, and Mashed Potatoes. He had just gotten a promotion at the shipping company where he worked. I was in the kitchen with her when she turned on the radio. It played Nina Simone's I Put a Spell on You. Her voice was so breath taking and every note she sung was filled with passion, possessing me to just sit there in amazement and listen to her. I wanted to be like her, to make people feel the way she made me feel; I craved it. Her voice filled my soul with something so amazing that it changed me, you know. I was only a lil' jit.

I fell head over heels in love with music that day and from then on, I was determined to feed other people's souls with the passion that filled mine. When I was nine, I had discovered that I could sing and by the time of my eleventh birthday, I was singing in our church's choir. I loved how my voice echoed in the church while I sang. I admired the standing ovations for the congregation. Pastor invited the principal of New York's most prestigious performing arts school one day, so he could hear me sing. I had a full scholarship there by the time the sun had gone down for the day. Now, a senior at that school reminiscing, I wanted to achieve more.

In order to succeed at this school, you had to succeed in its annual Big Showcase. It's like the Grammys here in Brooklyn. I've been practicing my selection of Nina's Blackbird, but I just can't get it to how I wanted it to be. Maybe I was stressing too much, I don't know. But what I did know was that it had to be breath-taking. The top performing arts schools were going to be there, label executives from all over the US, pretty much everybody and they mamas were going to be there. And everybody was going to see who exactly Yaslin Williams was.

Practicing ain't a walk in the park like how I thought it would be. It's hard to manage the time to practice when you have three younger siblings to watch

over. There's my brother, DJ, whose gonna end up like Pops if he doesn't get his act together and stay away from those monkey asses he call friends. Both Ma and I have talked to that boy, tried to beat some senses into, and everything but he's just so damn hard-headed! He skips school majority of the time and on the days where we practically drag him there, he cuts up in class, acts like a complete ass, and gets in trouble with his teachers. Now my younger brother and sister, Johnathon and Serenity, I don't have to keep much tabs on like how I do with DJ. Johnny's six and all he's interested in is school. He says he wants to be a rocket scientist when he grows up. He loves helping me and Ma around in the house. DJ calls him a "mama boy" 'cause he's always doing what Ma tells him to do. I don't see how it makes him a "mama's boy" for being obedient, but what do I know what goes on I that pea- size brain of his.

Serenity's two. She is learning the basic stuff a two-year-old would learn: ABC's, Numbers, stuff like that. I call her my "angel" 'cause that's exactly what she is: an angel. Pops died when Johnny was 'bout two or three. Overdosed. Ma moved on to this new dude named Craig. They were in love, then Ma got pregnant with Serenity and he changed. I guess he wasn't ready to be a dad of his own. Three months within, he bailed. He left for a "smoke break" and never came back. No phone call, no letter, no explanation. I saw him with some 20-year-old hussy by the time Serenity was born. Never looked back. Pathetic, what a man he really was.

Ma was working as a secretary for some big company. By the time Pops OD'd, she picked up a second job working as a diner waitress, so that meant she'd rarely be home to see her kids. That's where I come in. I make sure everyone is home, have eaten, bathe, and have their homework done and in bed by the time Ma comes home. When Ma was at work and DJ, Johnny, and I were at school, Serenity was next door at Mrs. Kennedy's, our neighbor. She doesn't mind watching her. We tried to offer her money at first, but she ain't take it; she just enjoys the company. Her husband died before we moved in and her kids were all grown up, taking care of their own families, too busy to come for a visit. She has nobody left, but us.

Like I said, Practicing ain't a walk in the park. I was too busy "babysitting" DJ to make sure he didn't go off with that "gang". I left the boy alone to take a shower and to my surprise, when I came back, he was gone. He was sneaking and geeking off with that baric "gang". My nerves were through the roof when it came to dealing with DJ. He was testing my patience and when you know DJ, your patience become real thin. I had to go find him; Ma would be home soon and as his sister, it's my job to protect him.

I dropped Johnny and Serenity off next door and I took off looking for

my brother. I past the usual spots that I would find him: the liquor store, the park, and the grocery store parking lot. No sign of him anywhere. Called him numerous times, no answer. I didn't know what to do. After what seemed like hours, I had finally found him, torturing a kid with two other boys from their "gang" in an alley. The boy was about twelve. Tall, lanky. His glasses laid on the ground next to him, bout to be crushed by DJ's foot. I recognized the other two boys with DJ, Chris and Stewart. Chris went by his "gang" name "Zero" and Stewart "Rock". I don't know where they got those nicknames from. They sound stupid. They were stupid for coming up with them. Anyways, I got out of the car and all eyes were on me long enough for the boy to sneak off. The three of them looked pissed when their eyes snapped back at me.

DJ: "What the fuck are you doing here?"

Me: "You're coming with me. NOW! Ma would be home any min-"

DJ: "I not coming with you! I ain't no baby."

He had cut me off, knowing that I can't absolutely stand when he does that. I snapped.

Me: "Get your ass in the car or I'll make you. Try me if you want to Damon-Javier."

He caved in and hopped in the car. His little "buddies" gave me awful, angry stares as I walked away, but I ain't care. I wasn't stuntuin' them.

DJ: "I can't believe you did that in front of my friends Yas"

Me: "Friends?! "Them little boys ain't your friends. They the one whose gonna get you killed out here. Them the ones whose gonna make you end up like Pops. I am not gonna lose another loved one to the streets."

DJ: "Calm your tits. I'm not gonna end up like Pops. Remember, that nigga OD'd and as you can see I'm CLEARLY not on drugs."

There was a brief pause for a moment.

DJ: "Ion wanna be like Pops either. Not everyone can be as great and amazing as you are Yas."

I froze. I never knew he felt like that.

Me: "What you talmbout?"

DJ: "Everywhere I go, people always try to compare me with you: the girl with the beautiful big singing voice. I get tired of hearing "Why can't you be more like your sister?" on a daily basis. It starts to get fucking annoying to where if I hear it one more time, I will spaz out."

Me: "I never knew you felt like that"

My head was down, ashamed of myself as we pulled up in front of our ancient brownstone.

Me: "I'm sorry you feel like that, but lemme ask you a question? Do you enjoy

some of the stuff them boys do to other people? To the place you call home? To you?"

He stopped shrugging up his face

DJ: "No. Honestly, I don't."

He had finally realized what Ma and I been drilling into his head. I knew that it would eventually click for him.

DJ: "I'm sorry for what I've been putting you and Ma through. I never meant to hurt nobody."

Me: "You cool. Now do me a favor and go get your brother and sister from next door and get them ready for bed, ight?"

DJ: "Ight"

He opened the car door and walked in the building. I stayed behind and thought about what just happened. I had finally saved my brother from off the streets. Some of the pressure that's been on my back for the past few years were lifted in those five minutes. Now the only thing I really had to worry 'bout was wowing this showcase.

The day was finally here. Everyone was excited for the Showcase. I had planned on going home after school to get ready there. The whole family was coming, include Mrs. K. She was gonna bring Johnny and Serenity up there for Ma, so, that meant I had to bring DJ with me. DJ gets to the apartment before me since he goes to the high school down the street. After driving home and opening the door of our apartment, it came to my attention that he was gone. He never came home after school. Called him, no answer. I thought he understood our discussion we had the other night, but apparently, I was wrong. How could he do this? He knew how special this day was to me. He knew that this was my big break out of here. And because I let some kid go, he ruins any chance for me to leave this shit hole! This was my big day and he ruined it for me. Now I had to go find him... again.

I gotten ready and raced out the house. I knew he couldn't be at his usual spots, but I knew one spot that I hadn't checked ... LeVar's house. LeVar was part of the local gang. The real gang. Guns and everything. Not that little play crap DJ and his friends claim to be apart. They been wanting to get in, but I know how the gang life ends. My brother was not going to be in any part of that! LeVar only lived 10 minutes away from the school. I drove up there and snuck to the front window of his shabby little crack house . I could see DJ there with LeVar and Chris and Stewart ... with their guns all pointing towards DJ. I had to really go save my brother now. It could be life or death. Before I could even move, I felt hands on my shoulders, picking me up from off the ground and into the house. It was Chris and Stewart. LeVar must have heard my reaction and

sent them outside to check the situation. I noticed their necks when they were carrying me. They were branded, which meant they were a part of the gang now. And DJ was next.

There I was, standing next to my brother with guns to my face. I couldn't move, I couldn't react, and I couldn't even breathe. All I could do was just stand there and watch these guns being pointed to my face. LeVar gave me smile. He knew that I would come here and try to get DJ. He walked up to me and started checking me out. He walked around to get the "full body look". LeVar always had a thing for me. After checking me out, he walked up towards my ear.

LeVar: "You look so beautiful, you know that?"

I said nothing.

LeVar: "You know, I always had a thang for you. You was gon' be mine."

He started to play in my thick, course hair with his gun

LeVar: "But you never gave me the time or day. You was always up there with those uppidy white folks. I bet you got one of them as your man, right? You ain't pay me no attention. Ion like that. I get folks attention easily. I shouldn't have to beg for it."

He pushed my head with his gun and cocked it. Walking back towards the front of me, he talked again

LeVar: And because you did that, I felt like you disrespected me. Ion like disrespected. I gotta teach folks what it's like to be disrespected."

He pointed the gun back towards me. My life began to flash before my eyes. I quickly closed them. I knew that there was no escape from this one; I just knew that I was gonna die, right here on these old, dingy rugs with my brother's dead body next to mine. I began to cry. I saw my mama's face, Johnny and Serenity's, and DJ's. I saw me standing center stage, singing my heart out. I saw the standing ovation. I heard the claps of the people from the audience, then all of a sudden, I could see nothing but darkness.

POW! One gunshot filled the air. POW! POW! POW! Three more had gone off.

I opened my eyes to awaken in heaven, but instead see LeVar's body lying in a pool of his own blood. Chris and Stewart laid too. Chris was shot in his arm and Stewart in his foot. DJ had shot them with one of LeVar's gun he had given them. He took that gun from him to show that he was loyal towards him as the first part of initiation. He was bringing it back. I knew he understood what I meant that night.

As I approached him, he fell to ground. A gun shot hit him in the stomach. I curled up next to him, holding him in my arms as I began to weep. He reached his hand towards me and smiled, but it slowly disappeared. I began to scream at

the top of my lungs.

Me: "NO NO NO! DJ! DON'T LEAVE ME! OPEN YA EYES! C'MON MAN! DON'T LEAVE ME! DON'T LEAVE ME! WAKE UP! WAKE UP!"

I stayed with DJ until the cops arrived. I knew it was gonna be hard telling Ma that her child just die. She was going to be devastated. Our family was never gonna be the same.

I felt like I failed everyone. My one job was to protect him and make sure he found his own way out these streets, and I failed. I sat there, still hugging his body, crying my eyes out, blaming myself for what just happened. All of our memories together rushed through my head. That was all that he was now, a memory. A memory of my brother who I loved dearly. The only words that I could manage to get out of my mouth was "I'm sorry". I had it all: the talent, a family, and a promising future planned out ahead of me, but after that day, I lost it all. I didn't feel the urge to sing anymore. I didn't feel that fire that Nina filled my soul and spirit with because it was just drained out by my brother's death. I didn't know what to do with my life anymore. These streets were like prison and no matter how hard I tried, I couldn't leave. Like I was forever stuck in a cold, dark cell, waiting to die. I wanted to die. I lived to sing and now that it was gone, there was nothing for me to live me. It's been three years now. Ma barely gets out her bed. Johnny and Serenity miss their big brother. I miss my brother. I go see him, buried right next to Pops.

Me: "I told you you were gonna end up like Pops. Why ain't you'd listen sooner? I could have saved you. You should've let me save you".

Growing up in these streets are tough. You gotta have the right mentality to survive and let alone leave. I can't leave now. I'm trapped with no way ever escaping.

-Kierra Wells, Third Place Fiction, CSU



Toni Stauffer. *Wildberry*. Photograph.
2019

CARSON MCCULLERS
LITERARY AWARDS



CREATIVE
NONFICTION

A night in Gwangju

I'm thousands of miles from home on a street with a name I can't read – this is South Korea. The air smells of food. The scent of fried chicken carries with it memories of home, but the sights and sounds are a stark contrast. We have just left a restaurant and you're drunk off your ass. A testament to why I don't have younger friends. It seems that one bottle of soju was one too many.

Still, I feel a pull towards you. Born of an uninvited maternal urge, it insists that I protect you. A running joke amongst my friends, this role of 'mama bear' follows me everywhere, though I have little if no desire to have children.

We begin our walk back to the dorms in silence. With each step, the absence of familiarity becomes known. It permeates the streets in the form of signs written in Hangeul and faces that are unlike my own. Yet, I'm grateful for it. With time it's become harder to deny that back home there's no longer a place for me amidst the routine.

In front of us, a trio of guys has appeared. The two on the sides uphold the one in middle. Unlike my friend, his rendezvous with alcohol has left him unable to stand up. I don't need to understand Korean to recognize that heartbreak is the cause of his current state.

His friend on the left takes his hand, intertwines their fingers. If only for a moment, brotherhood trumps the ridiculous notion that interactions such as this one shouldn't occur between men. They're grinning now, this band of brothers. And it has the makings of one of those moments that these days you can only read about in books or see on television as more people seek comfortable within a screen instead of each other. Unbeknownst to them, I smile and take a picture to capture it.

A connection, albeit small, has formed between us and these strangers. It's simple, really. On this warm, humid night, we're all trying to make our way home. Traffic stops and the crosswalk light switches. My eyes return to you as we resume walking.

The trio goes their way and we ours. Despite feeling safe, I keep a close watch on our surroundings. Gwangju's sidewalks are peppered with pairs. Here, in this country with more couple holidays than I care to remember, I am constantly reminded of my singleness. My eyes flit from one pair to the next, until you call my name. What follows is a series of outbursts I dare not repeat for fear that I might embarrass you. Although something tells me that you wouldn't care.

Tonight, the walk feels even longer than usual. Maybe we should've stopped at one round of Korean barbeque. I will my short, fat legs to continue and curse myself for being physically inept.

You veer off course in the direction of a pair of cute boys and I follow, determined to keep you under some semblance of control. You motion for me to come closer and whisper of their hotness, your words a drunken slur. I want to scold you, but laugh

instead. Your observation is correct. They are attractive. But for me, the cigarettes they're clutching diminish their allure. Minutes pass and I finally convince you that we should move on before your ogling becomes too obvious. Caught up in their conversation, they remain unaware and we crest the hill.

Next, we pass the deserted recreational field. Up ahead is the last set of buildings before the dorms. A set of mosaic tiles adorns one of them. Each tile operates as a separate work of art. But together they create unforgettable kaleidoscope of images.

Every time I walk by, I notice something new. Tonight, it's a flower. The petals are yellow, my favorite color. At twenty-five, I should be just as this flower appears, in bloom. But the mental race I'm running keeps me tired and I feel just shy of the trash bin where they all go to die.

I turn away and there you are again. Like me, you have also taken a pause. We catch our breaths for a minute more then proceed. We are upon the stairs now, our final obstacle before the dorms. Below, the bright lights of the nearby convenience store beckon us.

You propose snacks, though our stomachs are more than full. We reach the bottom of the stairs and I concede. I follow you inside the convenience store but don't purchase anything. You buy your favorite chips and we leave.

Outside, more people have begun to gather. They're greeting the night just as we bid it farewell. But I'm not sorry. Our adventure though short-lived was an adventure. I press my thumb to fingerprint scanner on the dorm entrance and we walk inside. We take the same elevator although we're staying on different floors. Normally, that wouldn't matter but here there's one for odd and another for even. It's been decided that your dorm will be our first stop. As 'mama bear,' I must see you through until the end.

"Get some sleep. You have class tomorrow," I say as we arrive at your door.

You nod, keying in the code. I watch you enter and with that, my work is done. I forgo the elevator and climb the single flight of stairs that separates our rooms. When I arrive at my dorm, my roommate is perched on her desk chair, absorbed in a television show. She turns to acknowledge me and we exchange greetings. Afterwards, I shower and prepare for bed.

The next day you thank me. Insist that without my help, you wouldn't have made it back to the dorms. I shrug it off, looking after my friends has never been something I consider a chore. Uncharacteristic as it might be, you're my friend. In no time and with little effort, you've infiltrated my close-knit circle. Perhaps it's true what they say. The things we need often have a way of finding us, even when we're thousands of miles from home.

-Danielle Davis 1st Place Creative Nonfiction, CSU

Happy Birthday, Charlotte

Two brown sugars, must not make that mistake again twice, lots of milk, semi-skimmed, make sure I stir and strain the teabag this time, just the way you like it. I hate tea, but I want to make you smile, I want you to like me, I don't want you to get bored of me like I know you will. It's just a matter of time before you do. Everyone does.

I'm dancing to Morrissey in the Peer Hat with you. You sleep on the opposite end of the bed to show me that you're angry. I smoke a cigarette¹. You're asking me to get stoned. We're watching The Young Ones fully-dressed, sitting on top of the cover of my bed with a large gap separating us. We're having sex in the bathroom of a cheap hotel. We're holding hands. I'm waiting at the train station to meet you for the first time. We're dancing in the park at midnight. I call you after the Rolling Stones concert high on cocaine. You tell me you want an open-relationship². I make fried eggs for breakfast. We're at the O2 Ritz watching FIDLAR. I'm introducing you to my work colleagues and friends.

You are texting your mate who told you he fancies you. You're shouting at me for liking an Instagram photo before we met of a girl I know. I tell you you're beautiful. You write me a poem. I'm listening to 'Blood on The Tracks'. We're at your cousin's housewarming. You tell me you want to die. We're talking until 6am on the phone. You're angrily cutting your hair with scissors. We're drinking in Wetherspoons. I move to America. You don't answer my calls. I buy you a signed copy of 'Made of Bricks.' I quit my job. You cry at the train station. I ask to hold your hand. We sit in the rain and kiss. You shout at me for not wanting to stay at The Venue nightclub. I bring you food home from work. We're listening to 'In the Aeroplane Over the Sea.' I buy you flowers.

Stalking through the cold forests of eastern Russia and northern

1 Human decomposition is a natural process involving the breakdown of tissues after death. While the rate of human decomposition varies due to several factors, including weather, temperature, moisture, pH and oxygen levels, cause of death, and body position, all human bodies follow the same four stages of human decomposition.

2 Stage One: Autolysis

The first stage of human decomposition is called autolysis, or self-digestion, and begins immediately after death. As soon as blood circulation and respiration stop, the body has no way of getting oxygen or removing wastes. Excess carbon dioxide causes an acidic environment, causing membranes in cells to rupture. The membranes release enzymes that begin eating the cells from the inside out. Rigor mortis causes muscle stiffening. Small blisters filled with nutrient-rich fluid begin appearing on internal organs and the skin's surface. The body will appear to have a sheen due to ruptured blisters, and the skin's top layer will begin to loosen.

China lives a supreme predator. Even though it spans seven feet from head to tail, this large cat easily climbs tall trees, where it's on the lookout for prey. A thick coat of orange, yellow, and black spots keep the Amur leopard warm, and long legs allow it to easily stride through deep snow in the Siberian forest. Few animals can survive the harsh winters of Russia, but the Amur leopard's thick fur, large paws, and long legs allow it to carve out a home, even in the thickest of snowfalls.

On a lonesome night I scroll through Tinder, looking at all the people who think I am too ugly or too fat to talk to. I stumble across your profile; your pictures make me smile and your bio referring yourself to Dee from *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia* and Neil from *The Young Ones* makes me laugh. Another pretty girl, too cool for me, I swipe right anyway and await the inevitable rejection, but it never comes; instead three words appear changing my life, 'It's a match.'

I start the short weekends by longing, longing to see the ridges in your face when you smile and how your cheeks inflate instantly like the cheap pop-up tent I slept in at Leeds Festival, but instead of failing to keep me dry, warm and sheltered, your cheeks wrap around my face like a bendy ruler from primary school. I reach to the other side of the bed to see if you are awkwardly twitching or mumbling incoherently in your sleep again. I hope you're awake, so I can look into your brown eyes, the same dark brown, almost black eyes I have. The same eyes that I think of when I hear Van Morrison – 'Brown Eyed Girl' or Metric – 'Lost Kitten.' Eyes that see past my body shape, bad haircut and scars, instead seeing a totally different person that is only visible through specially prescribed, limited edition, one-of-one glasses, which you just so happen to own.

Sometimes your eyes are blurred by your fogged-up glasses and I can't look into those eyes making me feel lost, like a helpless sea captain trying to navigate his boat through treacherous waters when the lighthouse bulb runs out of power, leaving the boat bobbing at sea. I blindly feel for your hair, the hair you hate. The hair you cut whenever you are stressed with scissors made out of our arguments, each cut is another 'fuck you' to me or anyone else who dares to cross you when you have access to sharp objects and a sink. You wear the uneven, mismatched hair as war-paint, that you easily can disguise with bobby-pins during happier times. I attempt to find the spaces in-between your fingers in which only mine fit so perfectly. My hands that welcome the blunt fingernails digging into my flesh, secretly poisoning me with a love venom that only the taste of your lips rivals; lips so red they encumber my entire face making me look like a stop sign when I try to read them.

On the 25th May 2018, Joe, Zack and I, headed to London to see Florence + the Machine and the Rolling Stones at London Stadium. A day full of cigarettes, beer, bad singing, pissing in alleyways, marijuana and cocaine. That was the day I finally got the nerve to talk you on the phone for the first time. I left my friends at the cheap hostel and stumbled out onto an unfamiliar London pier with the three essentials you would need in this situation alone at 1am: a half-dead phone, a dodgy lighter and a badly rolled joint. I remember hearing you speak for the first time and, not only feeling relief you were not a catfish, but feeling enamoured by your soft, gentle voice, each syllable acting as a splash of water in my face sobering me up. It's the first time in my life in which I am able to keep up a conversation, granted this was helped by the alcohol and drugs. I had finally got my tongue free of its seal as if it was the bottom of a shirt that had been trapped in the fly of a pair of pants. We talked about absolutely nothing for hours as I aimlessly walked along the waterfront imagining what you looked like behind the digital mask of photographs.

I hold you close, rubbing my warm hands on your back. We are in Piccadilly Gardens watching the water spurt up from the floor vents and flash blue, green and red, still a little tipsy from the Woo-Woo cocktail pitchers we each had. You look concerned at the amount of sixteen-year-old looking kids out past curfew, smoking weed in public. We buy chips from the first open takeaway we see, with salt and no vinegar, heading back to my shitty, cramped room in a weird hotel-turned-apartment complex. We tuck ourselves in tight as if the weight of the world is merely the weight of the sheets that cover us. The world pauses as we sleep.

On the 30th May 2018, I made the short yet daunting walk to Oxford Road train station to meet you for the first time. It's technically my first date ever, a fact I didn't tell you prior. I wasn't sure it was a date in the first place, and I would never be narcissistic in thinking you wanted anything more than a friendly chat and drink at my local; that idea alone was a fantasy I was all but eager to live out like a greedy, lazy teen opting for half-cooked, soggy chips instead of waiting another five to ten minutes for them to properly cook. I remember when I first saw your head peer around the corner of the train station exit, awkwardly passing around the unfamiliar station in an unfamiliar city for me. The moment I saw the dark red raincoat, grey knitted-jumper and choker was like the day the family TV was upgraded from standard-definition to high-definition; it was such beauty and clarity I hadn't experienced before; the fuzzy TV static was now glossy and bright. The noise of the passing trains hymned Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds – 'Into My Arms,' for my ears only.

At this point I was already comfortable around you, and thankfully the lively mixture of cocaine, marijuana and alcohol had been replaced by the lust to learn everything about you in the pint-glass short relationship I expected this to be. Despite us speaking on the phone, soberly, I was still shocked that you would make the one-and-a-half-hour trip from Staveley to Manchester to see me.

I was prepared for you to down a pint so fast and leave, you would have time to make it back to the train station and get back on the exact same train that brought you here, regaining the exact same seat you sat on moments prior. But for some reason you didn't, you stayed. We bought Malibu and cranberry juice and headed back to mine to watch *The Young Ones*, an old British comedy that we initially bonded over on Tinder. My room was so small I didn't have a couch, so we had to sit on my bed. I was worried you would think I was just trying to have sex with you, but I wasn't. It was simply the only thing I had to sit on besides a small desk chair. We sat on opposite ends of my double-bed, over the sheets, fully-dressed including shoes. This was the only time in my entire life I wished I had a smaller bed; I would have happily give up my starfish pose-like sleeping positions just for the opportunity to innocently brush my arm, covered with a Mac DeMarco shirt and bomber jacket, against yours, which was covered by a sweater and coat.

The Amur leopard can be identified from other leopards by its long and thick pale cream-coloured fur, along with its large oblong black spots on the back and limbs. The cats are usually live in solitary, unless the female have offspring. Studies have shown the species to be more active during the day in both summer and winter; this is because they are usually hunting preys, deer and boars.

I'm cooking eggs butties for breakfast for us both, your favourite. I love cooking for you because you don't care about my catering qualification and fancy restaurant experience, you just want something quick and easy and messy. Something you can spill all over my bedding, give me an awkward smile, knowing I will clean up for you. I will happily change my bedding every morning after you eagerly bite into your butty with such enthusiasm the yolk bursts everywhere; I will always be there to wipe the gooey egg yolk from your chin just to see that half smile and touch your soft skin. You never want to be wined and dined, instead you'd rather eat Linda McCartney burgers and listen to records on Spotify in your underwear or in one of my band t-shirts. I love that about you, how you find beauty in the little things, like when I unexpectedly bought you a tea from McDonald's on the way home from work and remembered the two

brown sugars and milk, and you cried; or the time I bought you cinnamon swirls and pecan swirls because you mentioned it in passing once about how much you liked them, and you cried again; now every time I walk past a Cinnabon I think about you and how silly it is to cry over something so simple.

On the 20th July 2018, we go out dancing for the first time; we go to "Maladjusted' An Evening of Music from Morrissey/The Smiths and Other Related Artists' club night at the Peer Hat. You wear the iconic yellow Clueless skirt, better than Cher ever did, a black turtleneck and Dr. Martens. We have been drinking vodka and cranberry juice all afternoon. We dance and continue to drink in the particularly empty pub basement with a DJ who looks a bit too much like Morrissey and who strangely takes his shirt off to take a shot with people and spends more time dancing and asking people what songs they want to hear than actually being behind the decks. Our night is unfortunately cut short when I see you start to stumble and begin to have a blinding gaze, you still seem somewhat functioning, but with each step upstairs to the exit you become more and more dependent on me as a crutch, and seconds after we exit the club the beautiful, innocent Charlotte I know disappears and is replaced by a projectile vomiting, stumbling, rude, nasty mess. I carry you back to my room as you make fun of me for not being cool and popular and mock me for liking you³, a fact that is true, but I'm not mentally ready to admit this to you or myself. You threw up on my bed after promising not to and spend a good thirty-minutes with your head down the toilet. I undress you out of your vomit-ridden clothes, tuck you in bed, kiss you on the forehead and cry secretly next to you, hiding behind the clean new covers we share, that I hope you won't vomit on again; it is the most Morrissey-esque ending to a Smiths night imaginable.

You're about to leave me and go back to Staveley; I am worried it is the last time I will see you before I leave for America for almost a year, I have been trying to figure out a way to see you as much as possible before I leave. I see FIDLAR are playing a show in Manchester soon, a band I somewhat know and enjoy but a band I know you really like. I bring it up casually, 'I think I might go see FIDLAR,'

'I wanna see FIDLAR too.'

The answer I was hoping for. I go to a lot of concerts all the time, but always alone, constantly living the cliché, 'You are most alone in a crowd of people.' But

3 Stage Two: Bloat

Leaked enzymes from the first stage begin producing many gases. The sulfur-containing compounds that the bacteria release also cause skin discoloration. Due to the gases, the human body can double in size. In addition, insect activity can be present. The microorganisms and bacteria produce extremely unpleasant odors called putrefaction. These odors often alert others that a person has died, and can linger long after a body has been removed.

this concert was going to be different; for this concert I was going to be with you. For once I didn't have to worry about what to do in the awkward gap in-between the opener finishing, and the main-starting, I had you. Someone to talk to finally in those uncomfortable times and someone I could share my favourite pastime with.

The concert took place at the O2 Ritz, Manchester on the 19th July 2018. We got there early so you could be at the front to help your anxiety, we tried to stay away from the big crowd in the centre that inevitably would get rowdy. We danced, sang and jumped around to songs about alcohol, cocaine and skating. Things we couldn't really relate to anymore; you had never done drugs, despite wanting to try sex stoned, and I had only used harder-drugs like cocaine a handful of times, and you decided to stop drinking completely, a short time before the concert, and I only drank socially, and neither of us skated, but that didn't stop us from living vicariously through Zac, Brandon, Elvis and Max. After the concert, you spent the next thirteen days living with me before I left Manchester and moved back to my mother's house in Accrington for thirteen days before moving to Columbus, Georgia. It was the best time of my life. I even quit my job on the 22nd July 2018, so I could spend my last nine days as a Manc, totally and uninterruptedly yours. We went to museums, slept in all day, listened to records, ate shitty food and just enjoyed each-other's company. Before I quit my job and had to go to work, you would wait for me at home. I wouldn't eat on my break and would take left-overs when on the closing shift just so I could surprise you with some treats. Although you didn't always like the weird vegan fake chicken-tenders and cheeseburgers, you always appreciated the gesture and you loved the fake hot-dogs on the rare occasions I was able to bring one back.

You're telling me that you would be happy if we didn't have sex anymore; you just want to hold my hand and walk in the rain and make-out with me, stay up until the morning and do all the 'soppy' things with me. You wish you could have the emotional part of a relationship with me and find sexual gratification elsewhere. This isn't the first time you've brought up the idea of an open-relationship, but as always I laugh it off; if I tell you my real opinion and how disrespected I feel and how if I asked the same of you you'd probably slap me, but this is my first ever relationship and I don't want it to end, I've been lonely for so long. I say no to the open-relationship again, but I don't show you how hurt I am by the mere suggestion. I often stare at texts asking similar questions, my eyes glued to the screen re-reading my apparent shortcomings as a lover⁴.

4 Stage Three: Active Decay

Fluids released through orifices indicate the beginning of active decay. Organs, muscles, and skin become liquefied. When all of the body's soft tissue decomposes, hair, bones, cartilage, and other byproducts of decay remain. The cadaver loses the most mass during this stage.

I read my cowardly responses; responses I don't mean but responses I know won't offend you. I don't want this to end, I'm scared of returning to the rain of singledom, I've been in the sunshine of your love for far too long.

In 2007, the IUCN listed the Amur leopard as endangered, estimating less than thirty remained. The Amur leopard has been poached for years, and although illegal, hunters still poach the animal due to the high price for leopard skins.

We decide that the thirteen days wasn't enough and book two cheap hotels in Manchester; one on the 5th August and one on the 12th August, the day before I leave for America. The reality started to set in on the first hotel night, how we only had two days left which were staggered apart, then I would be gone for two-hundred and seventy-three days. These two days were some of the hardest times together, it was hard to fully enjoy ourselves given our limited time. We talked about our future and how much we love each other, and, on the 11th August 2018, we started officially dating. I guess we had technically been dating for a while, but the 11th was the day I finally asked you out. You had been hinting to me to ask you out for a while, but I was too scared, I had never been in a relationship of any kind, and I knew a long-distance, cross-continent relationship would be impossible for a novice like me, but you reassured me we could do it, said how you would be worried about if it would ever happen if we didn't do it now, and how you couldn't bear the possibility of me being with someone else. I love you, so I took the plunge and asked the hardest question of my life, in the grossest, dirtiest hostel in Manchester. A hostel we paid £50 for and didn't even sleep in, opting to pay another £50 for a near-by alternative. I knew it might have seemed dumb to start a relationship, my first ever relationship, two days before I leave the country for almost a year, but you are perfect, and I couldn't lose you, no matter how hard the next year would be. It was crazy to think how we would be apart longer than we had even known each other in person, but you would be worth the pain, every millisecond of it.

You're making me feel guilty for having two women I met on Tinder as Facebook friends, two women I have never met, two women who were simply just friends. You stalk their profiles and compare yourself to them, you tell me how ugly they make you feel in comparison and how given the chance I'd trade you in for either. It's simply not true, though; I have never felt anything like I feel when I think of you; I cling to my phone awaiting your message or your call, you make me feel so special and for the first time wanted. I delete the

two women from my friends list to make you happy despite how you met the majority of your friends on the same app or a similar one, friends who you have sent nudes to or had sex with, friends who tell you they still have feelings for you. You don't delete the guy who was introduced to you in hopes you would date him and has asked you out multiple times. But somehow its different, the same rules don't apply to you as they do me, these guys are all just people you see all the time and text constantly, actively interested in you, but it is these two digital women who I occasionally speak to about music and art that are the real threat to our relationship.

I am now 4202 miles away from you Charlotte, and I feel each millimetre of that distance; we try to communicate as much as possible through Messenger, WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram and Skype, but it just isn't the same. It is impossible to express your feelings for somebody through a screen, relying on an internet connection to transmit your love via satellite. You write me a poem on a postcard:

My Honeybee, My Moon, My Ocean

As of right now I am alone in my room and you are on my mind.

I think about you, about us, and about your smile.

I count down the days until your fingers intertwine with mine again.

Take my hand and hold it in your own like a child holding a balloon.

You are the soil, the rain, the light, and I am your flower.

I sleep in the forest of you and dream under your stars.

Let me be your favourite blanket, wrap up in me when the winter chill creeps to your fingertips and threatens to bite.

I bathe in the pools in your eyes, lose myself in your current, and everything is one.

I crave your laugh, your smell, the taste of your lips on mine.

Sometimes I think that all the air I'll ever need is in your lungs.

The sun shines out of you.

I'm caught up in the invisible thread that connects your soul to mine.

You are my north, you melt my heart, and crash the waves deep inside of me.

The ebb and flow of the tides in my chest are under the spell of your gravitational pull.

I'll give you my nectar and you give me your honey.

Abundantly, singularly, and decidedly yours,

Charlotte

I cry. I feel like a failure because I can't write you anything, I've tried so many times, but for some reason I am unable to write anything happy or positive ever.

On the 14th October 2018, you turned twenty-two. I bought you Kate Nash merchandise, which arrived early, and flowers, which arrived on your actual birthday. I waited all day to speak to you, but you were acting weird and said you felt ill, but you were well enough to spend your birthday with your friend who has told you how much he likes you on multiple occasions, the one you secretly have feelings for. I wanted to see you and speak to you; it had been a while since we spoke on the phone. The last time we spoke, you told me how hard you were finding the distance and how you didn't realise how much you would miss intimacy. You brought up the idea of an open-relationship again, a one-sided proposal that I had already denied multiple times. You decided not to answer my calls on your birthday and started sending me vague apology text messages. When I asked if something had happened you said, 'I don't know⁵'. At that moment exact moment, I died, went through all four stages of decay simultaneously. If the distance was too much I understand, but I deserved a call.

Looking back now I realise how much you used me; I was just filler until the perfect moment for you and your friend could finally get together. You took advantage of my innocence and romantic inexperience whilst pretending to be innocent and inexperienced also; you wanted the 'nice guy' for a short while until 'Mr. Right' was fully developed. You still say you want me in your life, you say you still love me and always will, but It simply isn't true; you change your profile picture to a photograph of you and him with a caption referencing The Wombats - 'I Don't Know Why I Like You but I Do' (a love song), just days after you broke-up with me and you tweet that you have a crush on him, whilst simultaneously texting me your innocence saying; 'he's just a friend,' this is what hurts me the most, I'm sad our relationship is over but I'm more devastated about the lack of respect you have for me. You didn't even have the decency to call me when you ended it, the fact you send a text that I constantly look at as permanent reminder of my 'unwantedness,' you refuse to take ownership of your wrongdoings. Cheating doesn't start and end with sex, when we were together, and he said he liked you, you told me you didn't feel the same, but you did, you said it was just the distance that made you end it, but this is a lie. You cheated on me emotionally with him and probably physically too, but you will never admit it to me. I delete you from all social media, and thankfully we have no mutual friends.

⁵ Stage Four: Skeletonization

Because the skeleton has a decomposition rate based on the loss of organic (collagen) and inorganic components, there is no set timeframe when skeletonization occurs.

Recently, the Amur leopard received some well-deserved good news. In 2012, former Vice-Minister of the Russian Federation, Sergey Ivanov helped create the 'Land of the Leopard National Park' in Primorsky Kai. The park was created for wild cats to live and breed safely and in 2018 the park reported having over 100 Amur leopards. This gives me a little bit of hope for us; though our relationship was doomed from the start, with an alarmingly short amount of days together, maybe one day we won't be endangered anymore.

I must thank you, Charlotte; though you treated me badly you taught me a lot about myself; how I never put myself first, and I care too much about being accepted, and I will do anything to please another. So going forward I will never bite my tongue for fear of abandonment or put anyone's worth and happiness over my own. Charlotte, I'm still madly in love with you and think about you all the time, I wish we were still together, but you have damaged me and betrayed my innocence, my love, my trust and my happiness, so for at least now I cannot be a part of your life in any capacity anymore; hopefully one day that can change, thoughⁱ.

ⁱ Work Cited

What Are the Four Stages of Human Decomposition?" aftermath.com, <https://www.aftermath.com/content/human-decomposition>. Accessed 19 Oct 2018.

-Elijah MacBean

Self- Worth

I am not comfortable in my own skin.

My hair won't grow longer than to my shoulders.

I've been bigger than most girls my age all my life.

I've always wished I was one of the pretty girls that gets all the attention from others.

I've always felt like I wasn't even attractive enough to be loved by someone other than in my family.

For the past eighteen years of my extinction, I have struggled with what I thought was beautiful about myself. An artist by the name of Londrelle once said, "Comparison distorts beauty, and the moment we begin to compare, all beauty dwindles away". This is what I took from it: when little girls begin to play with dolls and they see how skinny they are with their beautiful blonde hair and flawless complexions, they begin to wish that they were them. Every little girl has done it, including myself. I have felt like I was lost in some sort of magical forest, wishing for a way to get out. I am still wishing for a way out to this day. Beauty in general makes me feel insecure. Incessantly wanting my hair to look as beautiful as Beyoncé's and my body to be that perfect "hourglass" figure like J-Lo. Constantly seeking approval from others about how I look and what they thought. All of it sucks! Tremendously. It's sad to say that I am a woman who is still searching for a sense of beauty within myself.

Beyoncé once wrote a song entitled *Pretty Hurts*. She explains how society wants women to look like. She sings, "Blonder hair, flat chest. TV says, 'Bigger is better'. South beach, sugar free. Vogue says, 'Thinner is better'". This endless battle of what exact is beautiful for women is ruining our mentalities of how we see ourselves. It's songs like Ed Sheeran's *Perfect* or Alessia Cara's *Scars to your Beautiful* and TLC's *Unpretty* that we have to reassure that we are beautiful in our own damn skin. It's songs like Jessie J's *Who You Are* or Bruno Mars' *Just the Way You Are* and Christina Aguilera's *Beautiful* that I listen to almost every day just for validation. I understand the fact that we are our own person. I recognize that statement "Beauty is only skin deep". What I can't grasp is that I am beautiful.

"We are all created in God's image. He made us how he wants us to be". Repeating this in my head helps me to mask the real reason why I question my beauty. If we are all created in God's image, then why did he make me like this? A 5'6 woman with big thighs, short legs and dry skin? The only question I could ever have about my beauty can never be answered. People define beauty as "a

combination of different qualities that pleases the senses of others"; so, in other words, having that "triple threat" feature that draws folks around you. But why does having an hour glass figure or long stunning hair have to define what is beautiful on a person? Why can't a person be beautiful just by their smile or the way they carry their selves or even how they approach different things in their lives? Why are we so derogative towards beauty at all to where it makes women starve their selves into their perception of what beauty is? Anorexia nervosa. Bulimia nervosa. Purging disorder. Rumination syndrome. You have women everywhere in the world practically killing their selves just to be recognized as beautiful. My definition of beauty is this: being yourselves. Being kind makes you beautiful. Being smart makes you beautiful. Being strong. Being tough. Being witty. Being who you are for what you are makes a person beyond beautiful in my book.

In eighteen years on this Earth, I have struggled with how I look and my weight. One minute it'll go up 2 pounds and down 24 more, then up 30 more and so on. I felt sickened with how I look in crop tops and dresses. I would wear big shirts, but not because they were roomier; because I didn't want people to see what I had to see in a mirror every day. It took me so long to actually gain the confidence to not wear a shirt over my swimsuit. In the eighteen years on this Earth, I can actually say that I am starting to appreciate how I look. I am starting to acknowledge that my thighs are big, and my legs are short but that's okay. I'm not saying that I totally love my body for what it is, but it's a start. I'm not saying that I'm fully #BodyPositive, but it's a start from something that has been running through my brain since I can remember. I have always been called beautiful; whether it was from my mom, or my dad, or a boy who actually thought I was, but I could never feel it until now. Now I am at a point in my life where I can say that I feel how I look: beautiful. I once heard that "an ugly soul creates an ugly person while one that is beautiful creates something spectacular." In the past, all I did was hope that something about myself would change, whether it was my body or my mind. Now, little by little, my hope is coming true. Do I want to change things about myself? Yes. Do I appreciate the assets that I was born with? Yes. Am I still growing into something that I believe is spectacular? Yes. I am managing the fact that I am who I am.

If you watered the seeds of pain with love, flowers would grow. I am learning to love myself for my worth and not how I am being presented to the world. I am slowly processing that I am a woman who is abundance of things: smart, artistic, goofy, and sympathetic. Growing up, I felt the pain that no child should ever have to feel: the feeling that they are not good enough and will never be good enough. Now, as a prospering young woman, I feel as if I am who I am

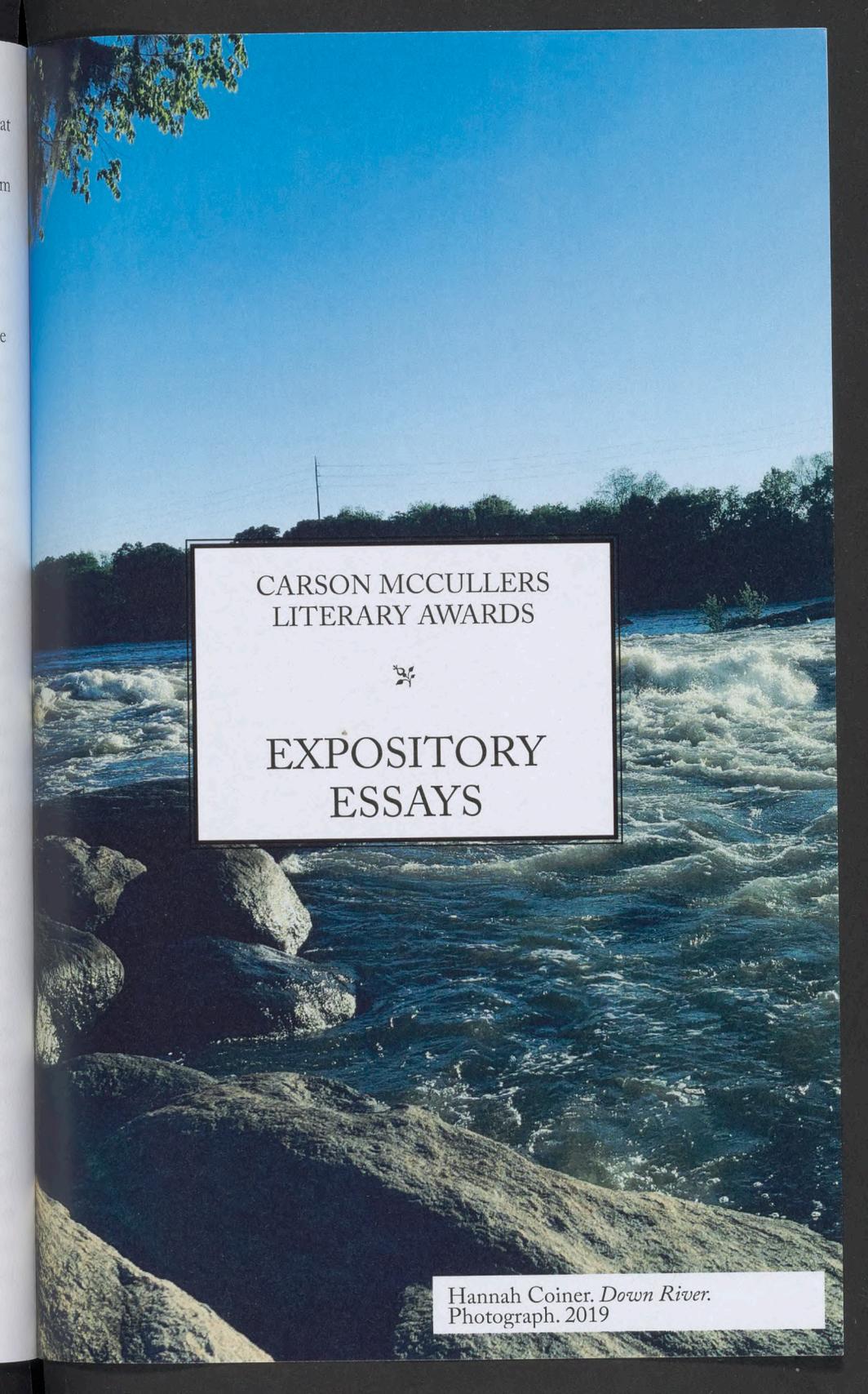
because of those feelings I felt as a child. I learned that things get better, and that the world won't end because of the agony that I feel in that moment. I learned that it's okay to be a big girl in this day in age. As life continues to move on, I am learning to love myself to the fullest extent. I feel more comfortable in my own skin.

It's okay that the longest that my hair will grow is to my shoulders.

I've been bigger than most girls my age all my life; okay, so what?

I am understanding that I am beautiful to others; now is the time to fully see it for myself.

-Kierra Wells, Third Place Creative Nonfiction, CSU



CARSON MCCULLERS
LITERARY AWARDS



EXPOSITORY
ESSAYS

Hannah Coiner. *Down River.*
Photograph. 2019

Victorian Culture and the Lady of Shalott

The prevalence of Arthurian legends in British society is a result of the content of these stories as a mythical origin for the British people. Many readers look to these legends as a means of both entertainment and history due to the masterful way many writers and bards intertwined the proven history of their homeland with fantastical lore and mythology from neighboring cultures (Whitaker 207). Although Arthurian legends solidified their place in British culture, there was a drastic renaissance of these medieval themes during England's Victorian era, which took place during the reign of Queen Victoria in the years

(Victorian The Art The mass Arthurian Victorian traced to the Alfred, Lord Idylls of the (Fries 44). published of poetic his famous Lady of was based off Malory's Le published in

As a popularity themes in art world the trend different characters

One of the most popular artistic organizations during this time was the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, which began in the early 1800's as an organization that "promoted an anti-academic brand of art that combined moral messages with hard-edged realism" (Mariotti). The Pre-Raphaelites would commonly depict literary scenes in a plein-air technique, or illustrating natural settings in the most realistic way possible (Tyreman 359). One of the most prominent female figures in Victorian Pre-Raphaelite art was Elaine of Astolat, or as Tennyson coins her,



Figure 1.
John Williams Waterhouse, *The Lady of Shalott* "I am Half Sick of Shadows" (1886).

1837-1901 Paintings: and Culture). rejuvenation of themes in literature can be publication of Tennyson's *The King* in 1859 Tennyson also multiple works prose, including ballad "The Shalott," which of Sir Thomas Morte D'Arthur, 1485 (Fries 44). result of the of Arthurian literature, the also picked up by illustrating scenes and from the stories.

The Lady of Shalott. It is through the literary works of Malory and Tennyson that the painters of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood are able to illustrate the ideal Victorian woman through the overarching theme of *The Lady of Shalott*.

The Victorian era of art can be summarized as having the sole purpose of glorifying the British Empire during an age of drastic expansion both industrially and territorially (*Victorian Paintings: The Art and Culture*). The conscious effort to illustrate and retell the story of King Arthur is absolutely a result of this desire to bring glory to the British Empire, and by drawing attention to the mythic founding of their country through literature and the visual arts, these creators are therefore glorifying the history of Britain. Members of the Brotherhood were inspired by art created in the late Medieval and Gothic periods, however their primary purpose was to “rebel against the values of the Royal Academy,” who “advocated an imitation of the Old Masters,” such as Michelangelo and Raphael (Orlando 618). The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood were especially critical of the artist Raphael due to his tendency to paint with a “grandiose disregard of the simplicity of truth” (qtd. In Orlando 618). The perspective of the Brotherhood eventually shifted into an emphasis on surroundings and nature (Orlando 618). The initial desire to depict truth and realism was abandoned due to its technical regression and not progression, leading the Brotherhood to conform to a *fin-de-siècle*, or end of the century, preference of the female form characterized by Elaine of Astolat (Orlando 616).

The story of Elaine of Astolat is first introduced in Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*. Told throughout book XVII, Malory describes Elaine of Astolat as a beautiful and virginal young woman who lives in a tower with both her father and brother (Malory 456). On his way to a tournament, a disguised Sir Lancelot meets Elaine and agrees to wear her token on his helmet during his joust (Malory 457). After winning the tournament, Lancelot returns to the home of Sir Bernard where Elaine begs for the knight to marry her; however, his unyielding love for the Queen Guinevere permits him from doing so (Malory 467-468). Heartbroken, Elaine commits suicide and leaves specific instructions for her family to place her body in a barge and allow it to flow down the Thames River into Camelot for Arthur and his court to see (Malory 469). It is the tragic demise of Elaine that captivates the ear of Victorians, and inspires so many to immortalize her heartbreaking fate through both literature and art.

One of the most prolific writers of the Victorian era, Alfred, Lord Tennyson published his first poem regarding Elaine of Astolat in 1832 (Dooley). Aptly titled “*The Lady of Shalott*,” Tennyson reimagines the story of Elaine through the cultural lens of a Victorian writer. By combining an elegiac tone in the form of a ballad, Tennyson juxtaposes the morbid themes of death and heartbreak with beautiful images of pastoral scenery in order to relay the complex emotional states of both Elaine and Lancelot (Dooley). While it is

obvious that Tennyson took his inspiration from Malory, he took great creative leniency when reimagining the story of Elaine. The most obvious divergence from his source material is the taboo Tennyson places on Elaine. In this poem, the Lady of Shalott has been placed under a curse by the Lady Morgana which prevents her from leaving her tower and forces her to weave the world around her from the reflection of a mirror. Tennyson's decision to portray Elaine as a cursed woman willing to sacrifice herself for love provides the Brotherhood with the notion that this poem could be allegorical for ideal Victorian womanhood, and what they believe to be the woman's role in society (Mariotti).

Created
Williams
painting The
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1). Lines 33-
the moon was
two young
'I'm half-
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(Tennyson
this point in
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interpretation
desire that
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is the exact
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is peaceful as



Figure 2.
J.W. Waterhouse, *The Lady of Shalott*,
(1894).

reflection of the newlyweds in her mirror, and the disarray of the room suggests a more comfortable feeling than a chaotic one. While the mirror is central in the painting, Elaine is the focus of the viewer, specifically her youthful face and glancing eyes which suggest she desires the love and freedom that the couple has.

Additionally, the colors Waterhouse uses in this piece are opaque and vibrant with an emphasis on passionate red tones (Jeffers 251). The symbolic

in 1886, John
Waterhouse's
Lady of Shalott
Sick of Shadows"
directly from
Tennyson (figure
36 read "Or when
overheard, Came
lovers lately wed;
sick of shadows,'
Lady of Shalott"
33-36). It is at
the poem where
realizes Elaine's
and freedom,
also opens the
that it is this
ultimately leads to
scene illustrated
where
a break from her
dreams of another
is free from her
she is "half-sick
(Tennyson part II
facial expression
she watches the

meaning of the color red is complex in the art world, and could represent both the seductive traits of her character, as well as her impending sacrifice for love (Whitaker 218). The viewer can see the “rouging of [her] lips and cheeks,” along with the intimate curves of her silhouette, both of which harken back to Renaissance traditions and contrast with impressionistic techniques of Victorian artists (Jeffers 251). Most likely, a Victorian woman would be depicted as “sleeping, sickly, or sentenced to silence,” because those traits were highly desired in Victorian England (Orlando 613). Because this illustration depicts one of the only scenes in which Tennyson allows Elaine to speak, Waterhouse is giving a silent voice to the Lady of Shalott through the title and her earnest expression (Jeffers 251). This depiction of Elaine of Astolat desires freedom from her curse to find her own love and adventure.

It is after the epiphany of the two newlyweds, “bold Sir Lancelot” enters Tennyson’s poem (Tennyson part III line 5). Tennyson writes:

“From the bank, and from the river
He flashed into the crystal mirror,
‘Tirra lira,’ by the river
Sang Sir Lancelot.

She left the web, she left the loom,
She made thee paces thro’ the room,
she saw the water-lily bloom,
she saw the helmet and the plume:
She looked down to Camelot”

(Tennyson part III lines 33-41).

This scene is illustrated in Waterhouse’s painting, also titled *The Lady of Shalott*, from 1894 (figure 2). In this depiction, Elaine is drastically different from the predeceasing painting. At first glance the viewer notices the contorting posture of Elaine’s body as she leaps from her chair in response to seeing the reflection of Lancelot in the mirror. Perhaps the most striking difference between the 1988 painting and this one would be the virginal white of Elaine’s dress as opposed to the vibrant crimson one, and that the Lady is making direct eye contact with the viewer. In this painting, Waterhouse emphasizes Elaine’s repressed sexuality not through color, but through posture and facial expressions (Jeffers 248). Although Elaine is wearing a pristine white gown, the almost animalistic posture and direct eye contact suggests that her sensuality “must be inferred through [her face]” (Jeffers 248).

As the viewer’s eyes travel down the painting, the folds in Elaine’s dress become more pronounced due to the tangled gold silk preventing her from taking “three paces thro’ the room,” toward the window (Tennyson part III line



Figure 3.
William Holman Hunt, *The Lady of Shalott*,
(1886)

concerns the inadvertent “tension between their [a woman’s] private desire and the reality of their social responsibilities” (Mariotti). Because of these preordained expectations of women in civilized western European society, the perspective of artists depicting these scenes would most likely possess some underlying context of societal views (Mariotti). In this instance, the Lady of Shalott would be the ideal Victorian maiden; however, once Lancelot enters the narration his character acts as a tempter for Elaine’s repressed sexual desires (Mariotti). It is the desire the Lady feels for Lancelot that forces her to steal a look “down to Camelot,” thus bringing the curse upon herself (Tennyson part III line 41). While the literal context of the painting concerns the medieval story of Elaine of Astolatt as Tennyson’s Lady of Shalott, the underlying moral theme of female promiscuity versus proper societal norms is evident through Waterhouse’s use of symbolism and figural features (Mariotti).

Similar to Waterhouse’s 1894 *The Lady of Shalott*, William Holman Hunt’s *The Lady of Shalott* (1886) depicts the moment Morgana’s curse befalls Elaine (figure 3). Hunt also depicts Elaine tangled in her woven web, however one major difference would be that Lancelot is obviously riding away from the tower as opposed to Waterhouse’s Lancelot who rides parallel (Jeffers 235). The setting of Hunt’s painting emphasizes round shapes with Elaine inside of her

38). This could be symbolic of Morgana’s curse literally holding her back from her desires, or perhaps from a more Pre-Raphaelite perspective, the restrictions of a woman’s sexual desires (Mariotti). During the Victorian era, women were expected to stay in the homes and perform domestic tasks, such as weaving (Mariotti). This perspective of a Victorian viewer could perhaps interpret the golden threads as Elaine’s purity, and that she is “abandon[ing] her social responsibility[ies] in her pursuit of love” (Mariotti).

The underlying moral message of Waterhouse’s *Lady of Shalott* (1894)

tangled loom and in front of the freshly-cracked mirror, which is flanked by two round religious portraits. Hunt is able to visually capture the moment Tennyson described in part three lines 42-45:

“Out flew the web and floated wide;
The mirror crack'd from side to side;
‘The cure is come upon me,’ cried
The Lady of Shalott”

(Tennyson part III lines 42-45).

In the painting, the threads fly throughout the room, tangling around Elaine's legs, and her hair is 'wildly tossed about, as if in a tornado' (Tennyson qtd. in Jeffers 235). Hunt defended this unconventional portrayal by claiming that he wished to “convey the idea of the threatened fatality by reversing the ordinary peace of the room and of the Lady herself” in order for the viewer to feel as though ‘the catastrophe had come’ (Hunt qtd. in Jeffers 235).

The objects strewn about the tower also parallel Hunt's perspective of Tennyson's narrative. Gradually the viewer's eye travels to the religious panels, the left depicting the Virgin Mary praying for her infant Jesus Christ, and the right showing Adam picking the Forbidden Fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, while Eve lounges underneath the shade. Hunt's decision to illustrate these motifs suggest the conflicting scenarios for Elaine's decision: the first would be leading a virtuous and chaste life as the Virgin Mary did, and the second would be giving in to temptation which would result in damnation (Whitaker 213). Other nods to Elaine's tarnished virtue include the white dove fleeing the scene and the lilies, which are a common symbol of the Virgin Mary's chastity, withered in the right corner (Whitaker 213).

Elaine herself closely resembles both Waterhouse's 1886 and 1894 figures with long dark hair and a pale flushed complexion. Elaine's posture is quite similar to Waterhouse's 1894 Elaine, with a contorted torso and reaching arms, yet the facial expressions are vastly different. Waterhouse's 1894 Elaine is obviously distraught with her newfound predicament, but Hunt's Elaine appears much softer as a result of her profile view. Although both paintings depict the same scene of Tennyson's poem, Hunt's depiction possesses much more movement with a larger emphasis on the moral and religious stakes because he is depicting Elaine “in the moment of her fall” before she even realizes the implications of her actions (Jeffers 235).

Perhaps the most recognizable image of the Lady of Shalott, John William Waterhouse's 1888 painting *The Lady of Shalott* captivates viewers with beautiful natural imagery painted in a beautifully realistic rendering (figure 4). This scene of the “death voyage” of Elaine is by far the most popular scene to depict from Tennyson's “*The Lady of Shalott*” (Whitaker 218). Waterhouse,

as well as multiple other artists, adorn the barge with vibrant flowers and textiles, perhaps to draw a comparison to a bridal coach in order to emphasize Elaine's unrequited love for Lancelot (Whitaker 218). The Lady's white gown also supports her image as a virginal "bride of death," yet her crimson lips and flushed cheeks also suggest the universal female role as a temptress for the male characters (Whitaker 218). In the context of Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*, Elaine's character provides Lancelot with a possible new romantic narrative; Elaine is a noble and eligible woman who is offering him her love, however Lancelot's devotion to Guinevere prevents him from courting Elaine. Waterhouse's decision to illustrate both sides of Elaine's character are present within the contrast of Elaine's wardrobe and setting and her seductive features (Whitaker 218).

The primary focus of the painting is a solemn and almost fail Elaine as she releases the chains restraining a boat she found "Beneath a willow left afloat" (Tennyson part IV line 7). Compared to Waterhouse's 1894 painting, this Elaine is much melancholier as a result of her solemn expression and posture against the cool natural tones. The boat is adorned with Elaine's own weavings depicting life in Camelot (Jeffers 247). Directly in front of Elaine rests a crucifix with Jesus Christ, suggesting the Lady's piety and perhaps martyrdom for her unrequited love (Jeffers 247). Religious undertones are also present in the three candlesticks mounted near the prow of the barge. The most obvious connection is to the Holy Trinity; however, the flames are extinguished save for one which suggests the foreshadowing of Elaine's demise (Jeffers 247).

It is this painting by Waterhouse that also displays another trend in Victorian art, the pale and sickly, almost lifeless, depictions of women (Orlando 616). During this period, the idealized female form emphasized the physical disadvantages of the woman's physique (Whitaker 218). This was most likely to affirm the masculine advantages of the male's ability to "engage actively in the real world outside the castle" (Whitaker 218). The curious infatuation male Victorian artists possessed for anemic women completely opposes the traditional preference for lively figures, however Victorian artists appreciated the tragic drama associated with the juxtaposition of a beautiful young woman so close to the end of her life (Orlando 615).

These few depictions of the Lady of Shalott encapsulate the evolving perspective and trends of the Pre-Raphaelite artists during the Victorian period. The fascination with Arthurian themes during this era sprouted from a national desire to glorify the British nation. While the Lady of Shalott was a rather insignificant character in Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*, Alfred Lord Tennyson's adaptation of her myth boosted her into the limelight of artists and writers in the late nineteenth century due to her blind dedication to Sir Lancelot, however it is possible that her numerous adaptations were a result of the popularity of the

“bride of death” motif to which Elaine conformed to so well (Whitaker 218).

While Waterhouse and Hunt both conformed to the primary image of the Lady of Shalott, a beautiful and cursed woman who craves the love of Sir Lancelot, they both respectively adapted their paintings to embody their perspectives of the idealized female role in western culture (Whitaker 218). Waterhouse depicts the same model, a fair-skinned brunette, throughout his series *The Lady of Shalott*, and emphasized Tennyson’s narration as opposed to Hunt’s focus on religious symbolism (Whitaker 217). Additionally, Waterhouse’s 1886 *The Lady of Shalott* would be considered a truer “illustration” of Tennyson’s text compared to Hunt’s due to the layout of the room (Jeffers 248). In the Waterhouse painting Elaine is comfortably seated at her loom with the mirror accurately portraying Tennyson’s version of events (Jeffers 248). Hunt’s *Lady* stands inside of her broad embroidery loom which takes up a majority of the tower’s space, and the viewer’s attention is dedicated to Hunt’s mythic portrayal of Elaine (Jeffers 248). Tennyson himself voiced his displeasure of Hunt’s depiction of Elaine, believing “the illustrator should always adhere to the words of the poet” (Tennyson qtd. In Jeffers 235).

Elaine of Astolat captivated her Victorian audience for years due to her tragic taboo and devotion to the ineligible Sir Lancelot. Her role as the quintessential medieval maiden opposes Queen Guinevere, and even transcends the Queen in popularity because of her chastity and innocence of the world (Orlando 615). These traits, both incorporeal and physical, earned Elaine abiding status as one of Arthurian literature and Victorian culture’s most beloved figures.



Figure 4.

John Williams Waterhouse, *The Lady of Shalott* (1888).

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-Amy Crawford, First Place Expository Essay, CSU



Kate Scrivner. *Untitled*. Oil on canvas.
2018.

McKay's Double-Consciousness

In 1919, as black troops returned to America after fighting in World War I, there were numerous "bloody race riots" against the Jim Crow Laws that were still plaguing America, labeling the summer, "Red Summer" (Denizé and Newlin 102). Claude McKay, a black Jamaican poet who immigrated to the United States, often wrote his poetry fueled by this historical context. McKay wrote "If We Must Die" in the midst of these riots, expressing the injustice towards the black population. Similarly, McKay wrote "The Lynching" in 1920, one year after 76 blacks were lynched, "the highest number in 15 years" (103).

This racial turmoil continued to spur the double-consciousness mentality among black Americans that began to grow after emancipation. Double-consciousness is described by W.E.B. Du Bois as "this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (2). McKay is not immune to the historical phenomena of double-consciousness, and his poetry exudes his difficulty with it. The "great anguish upon becoming aware" of double-consciousness is clearly seen in McKay's poetry (Bruce, 306). He often writes passionately about the assumptions made of black people and about their identity and quest for identity. McKay's double-consciousness is seen explicitly through the content within his poems and implicitly in his choice of form.

McKay, struggling to grip the harsh reality of racism in America, often wrote his poetry in a double-conscious point of view, "seeing himself as a human being while cognizant that prejudiced whites see him as subhuman" (Denizé and Newlin 102). It is "a problem in life of one seeking to take a Transcendental perspective on self and world" (Bruce 300). It is seen through "white stereotypes in black life and thought" and is "created by the practical racism that excluded every black American from the mainstream of the society . . . being both an American and not an American" (301).

McKay sees himself as black and American in a society that seeks to keep the two separate, and he is very aware of that. Unlike other black revolutionists, he does not necessarily want to end segregation, but he wants blacks and white to be equally American (Griffin 49). He does not want the blacks to be more white as he holds a certain pride in his race, but he wants blacks to be seen as equally human regardless of political or economic stature (49). When he came to America, he had to deal with experiences that he'd never imagined while in Jamaica, and this fueled his poetry, seeking a "unifying vision for humankind" (Denizé and Newlin 102).

In McKay's poem "The White House," he describes the difficulty that blacks face with the resistance and harshness shown by the whites beginning with the first line: "Your door is shut against my tightened face" (ll.1). The whites have unjustly shut their door, and the blacks are fighting within themselves to keep calm. The abuse has made them "sharp as steel" and led them to "possess the courage and the grace | To bear [their] anger proudly and unbent" (ll.2-4). Even though they are equally American, equally human, they are regarded as subhuman by the larger part of their nation and not given equal, deserved rights

as their white neighbors receive. McKay uses fierce language to portray the frustration caused by this injustice. He uses words like "anger," "burn," "savage," "passion," "wrathful," "poison," and "hate" to show the severity of the situation.

The tension in the poem is fueled by the double-conscious mindset of being black but also being American and trying to make sense of the two when the 'American' rebels against the 'black'. His sharp words show how the whites view the blacks as 'subhuman' and undeserving of equal treatment. The speaker is clearly conscious of the feelings towards the black race. McKay's choice in title, "The White House," also sends a powerful message about the identity of both the black Americans and America as a whole. The White House represents democracy, freedom, equality, and justice; those are the American ideals often associated and wished for within the leadership of the country. However, the poem emphasizes the fact that blacks are not included in those ideals. Though they are American, they are excluded from everything The White House stands for. They are shut out, forced to swallow their "sore and raw" (ll.10) emotions and keep the American "law" (ll.12) with "courage and grace" while whites look on without sympathy (ll.3). The leadership of the country is filled with "potent poison of . . . hate" that flows through the white society to oppress the American blacks who must stomach the pain (ll.14).

McKay shows that he knows and recognizes the mentality that the prejudiced whites have towards the blacks, demonstrating his acknowledgement of the double-consciousness within himself. Though double-consciousness is not a strictly American phenomena, McKay experiences it most clearly in America. He shows this through his poem "America." He describes the negatives of living in the United States, but concludes that he loves it still. America "feeds" him "bread of bitterness | and sinks into [his] throat her tiger's tooth" as she tortures him as a black man (ll. 1-2). America "steals [his] breath of life," but he confesses that he loves "this cultured hell that tests [his] youth" (ll. 3-4). The "vigor" (ll. 5) gives him strength "against her hate," (ll. 6) but instead of reacting, he waits for time to run its course, "as a rebel fronts a king in state" (ll. 8). This paradox of loving a land that makes life "hell" shows the struggle McKay has with double-consciousness. He feels that America hates him, that she drains him of life because of his race, yet he still desires to belong to her. He hates the racial landscape but loves the land. He knows he deserves better, that he is not who white America says he is, but he longs for his place with her.

In "To The White Fiends," McKay again demonstrates his understanding of blacks' place in white America. The speaker addresses whites with rhetorical questions pertaining to whether they think that he is "not a fiend or savage too" or that he would not "shoot down ten of [them] for every one | of [his] black brothers murdered, burnt by [them]" (ll. 1-4). The speaker tells the whites to "be not deceived, for every deed [they] do | [he] could match - out-match" because is he not "Africa's son, | Black of that black land where black deeds are done?" (ll. 5-7). He is accusing the whites of their perception of blacks. He is shoving their words back at them. Through his questioning, McKay shows the cognitive double-consciousness within.

After asking provoking questions, the speaker describes how the "Almighty" (ll. 8) placed blacks "among the white" (ll. 9) to prove themselves

"of higher worth" before it is too late (ll. 10). After showing his knowledge of the white prejudice, McKay proves that blacks have a purpose on earth given to them from God, which is far more important and valuable than how the whites define them. Through McKay's constant struggle to accept or reject the white's definition of blackness, he seeks to celebrate rather than integrate his people. He is constantly fighting against societal norms that say blackness is negative and should be conformed to whiteness. McKay defies that mentality.

In "Harlem Dancer," McKay compares the dancer's voice to "blended flutes | blown by black players upon a picnic day" (ll. 3-4). Her voice is not like any flute players'; her voice is like "black players," a very specific group of people. The dancer herself is black, and her voice compliments her race. If McKay would have compared her to white flute players, he would have diminished a part of her. However, he exults her voice by giving full credit to her race, demonstrating that black people can not only sing beautifully but play flute beautifully as well. He does not take away her value as a black woman by comparing her to whites, but exults her as she is by comparing her to others like her. The society of the time would say that comparing her to a white woman would improve the reader's perception of her, but McKay, knowing that attitude, compares her to other blacks, seeking to establish a worth in her identity to the world. Despite

McKay's strong opinions on the value of blacks, he still seems to hold some racist ideals about Africa showing his double-consciousness as he takes on the beliefs of the prejudiced whites. He often states that he longs for "the dim regions whence [his] father's came" ("Outcast" ll.1), one reason being so that he could "sing forgotten jungle songs" (ll.4). He understands Africa as a place where "man, and bird, and beast, lives leisurely . . . where life is fairer, lighter, less demanding" ("In Bondage" ll. 2-5). Africa to him seems to be a place of peaceful, uneducated people who sing songs and play in fields. Africa was created by the "Ancestral Spirit . . . out of the dark and dust" before God said, "Let there be light!" ("Invocation" ll. 1-8). McKay does not regard his "homeland" as somewhere made with light, but with darkness: "that black land where black deeds are done?" ("To White Fiends" ll. 5-7). This is a paradox because he values and exults the blackness in America, but views the blackness in Africa as simple and less civilized. Not only is his double-consciousness demonstrated in his poems' content, but his choice of form, the sonnet, shows his struggle between what whites say about blacks and who blacks truly are. He chooses to use sonnet form is to prove that he is an educated, capable black man. It is impressive and he was conscious of that. He chose a difficult form to go against the stigma of blacks being uneducated. He is educated and knows how to use the sonnet form well, similar to the original use of the form, specifically showing unrequited love.

McKay uses sonnet form in "The Harlem Dancer" to show the unrequited love between the dancer and her admirers. A major characteristic in the Renaissance Era was not only sonnets but sonnets that expressed unrequited love for a woman. The dancer in "The Harlem Dancer" is not mentally present in the moment. As those watching "devoured her shape with eager, passionate gaze," (ll. 12) she smiled "falsely" (ll. 13) and "was not in that strange place" (ll.14). She was impressive yet did not gain anything from the adoration. She does not desire the love the observers offer, and the speaker watches at a distance, admiring her body

but noting her absent-mindedness. The speaker discusses the unrequited love of not only the young men watching her but of himself also as he clearly admires her. McKay writes of a double instance of unrequited love, further showing his knowledge of the sonnet. McKay also frequently uses the sonnet to claim some English culture as his own. Coming from a colonized nation, Jamaica, English culture permeated through his homeland, often overtaking the native with the colonial. England had claimed Jamaica, its people, culture, and language as its own, and McKay, by using the sonnet form, claimed a piece of England as his own. While Shakespeare is considered the master of the sonnet, most of his content does not relate to personal experience in the same way McKay's sonnets do.

McKay reacts to historical events with "strong and passionate emotion" (Denizé and Newlin 100). The 18 sonnets that McKay wrote are often tied to the theme of "race relations, racial pride, culture, history, [and] lineage and roots" and expound on the "conflict between his cultural origins and the harsh realities of prejudice against African Americans" (101). He uses a white form to discuss black issues which goes back to his difficulty with double-consciousness. McKay's poem, "Enslaved," is a good example of him discussing the struggle between his cultural origins and the racism in America using the sonnet form. The speaker thinks of his "long-suffering race | For weary centuries, despised, oppressed | Enslaved and lynched" not having a "human place" in the "Christian West" (ll. 1-4). His "heart grows sick with hate" because of the racism that is against the blacks (ll. 7). He even wishes for the "avenging angel to consume | The white man's world" because of the deep anger he feels because of the racism that dehumanizes his race (ll. 10-11). He applies this not just to the black Americans, but he goes all the way back to Africa as he mentions "the Black Land disinherited" (ll. 5).

These parallels McKay draws between Africa and racism in America shows the African roots he clings to as he deals with prejudiced, white America. McKay's use of the sonnet shows his struggle between the expectations of whites and the personhood of blacks. His sonnets are classic, professional, and refined by white standards, but they also contain distinct and passionate situations about the hardships of blacks in America. McKay demonstrates his knowledge of the white expectations on him as an intellectual, but he does not want to forfeit his identity as a black man. This is clearly shown through his sonnet "Enslaved." This poem is in iambic-pentameter with 14 lines and a volta after line 8. The rhyme scheme is representative of a sonnet, being ABABCDCDEFEGG. The form is precise, but instead of discussing love and women like a typical English sonnet, McKay discusses the terrors of racism towards blacks and his desire for the "avenging angel to consume | The white man's world of wonders utterly" (ll. 10-11).

The thick topic of race combined with the tradition of the sonnet demonstrates the tension of double-consciousness within McKay's poetry. The racial scene in America fueled the majority of McKay's poetry, leading him to discuss the racism, inequality, injustice, and prejudices towards black people. He was passionate about equality for blacks and wrote his poetry to suit his agenda. Like the majority of blacks in his time, he suffered with the identity

placed on him by the white majority. He knowingly struggled to reconcile the identity placed on him and the identity he desired, otherwise known as double-consciousness described by Du Bois, and he expounds on that paradox with the content and form of his poetry by discussing his African roots and racism in America.

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Miranda McGee. *Untitled*. Acrylic on door, triptych. 2018.

Poetry as Identity in Emily Dickinson

Though she never wanted to publish, Emily Dickinson always considered herself a poet. She frequently sent her poems to her friends and family in letters. In another letter, she once wrote that she felt her brother was encroaching on her territory when he dabbled with poetry. Yet it seems odd that she would consider herself a poet and never consider publication. Looking at her writing, Dickinson demonstrates a relationship between her poetry and her individual identity wherein poetry manifests something intrinsically sacred about the Self.

First, it's important to note how Dickinson defines individual identity. In "The Soul selects her own Society –" the speaker describes the Soul in opposition to outside forces. The soul shuts herself off to the vast majority of people, devoting all her attention to her selected society. Some have even interpreted the "her own" in the first line as reflexive—the soul selects herself as her society. Also, the "Emperor be kneeling / Opon her mat" offers the image of a powerful figure in supplication, begging for entry (7-8). The "Chariots" in line five could imply an attempt at a siege, as chariots were often used in military conflicts. Both show vain attempts at intruding on the soul's inner sanctum, one through polite beseeching and the other through forceful sieging. Similarly, the last stanza of "She dealt her pretty words like Blades –" reads "To Ache is human – not polite – / The Film opon the eye / Mortality's old Custom – / Just locking up – to Die –" (9-12). This poem shows not only the potential emotional damage that comes from outside interactions, but also the way society intrudes on the individual's ability to feel. Dickinson argues that because aching is a natural human reaction, society sees it as uncouth and unacceptable, which leads to the "locking up," the ultimately suffocating repression of feelings. These readings reveal a definition of a self in conflict with the intrusion of others.

In fact, in several other poems, Dickinson reveals a need for isolation and privacy. In "I never felt at Home – below –" she describes God as "Himself – a Telescope / Perennial beholds us –" then expresses the desire to run away from Him and His gaze (12-13). God's all-seeing eye seems to trouble Dickinson's speaker. In a poem largely about the problems with common ideas about God and Heaven, it's interesting how Dickinson draws attention to this matter. The speaker argues that an omnipotent, omnipresent God excludes the possibility of privacy, and this disturbs them enough to wish they could run away from it. Inversely, in "The Way I read a Letter's – this –" the speaker describes—in seemingly humorous terms—the way they seek extreme privacy before reading a letter. They take care to make sure not even a mouse enters their space. The poem takes a serious turn at the end, however, when Dickinson writes "Peruse how infinite I am" (13). Dickinson's poems seem to place power in isolation, and find issue in the idea that privacy is an illusion.

Additionally, we know that Dickinson read at least some Transcendentalist works, and they were well known for their ideas of self-reliance. Transcendentalists like Ralph Waldo Emerson (who had connections to Dickinson's family), believed "that the individual's likeness to God lies in internal powers rather than knowledge of church doctrine or adherence to clerical rituals" (Martin 32). Transcendentalists also famously believed isolation could lead to expanding one's circumference and achieving one-ness with God. Though Dickinson doesn't appear to strictly adhere to these ideas, "her belief in the power of human consciousness to discover eternal truths in the natural world, Dickinson injects the basic tenets of Transcendentalism into her poetry" (Martin 33). Combining these concepts with the way the soul in "The Soul selects her own Society—" shuts most—if not all—others out, it's clear how Dickinson draws a connection between personal identity and isolation. While some might define identity as something that comes from other peoples' perceptions, Dickinson implies it is something that comes entirely from within.

It's natural this idea of identity coming from an internal source would lead Dickinson to conclude there's something sacred about the self, and nowhere is this idea more apparent than "Publication – is the Auction." The first two lines immediately draw a connection between writing and the self, "Publication – is the Auction / Of the Mind of Man –" (1-2). The speaker spends the rest of the poem arguing that publication is a corrupting, cheapening force. To emphasize this idea, she fills the poem with religious language, using words like "Creator" and "Him" (capital H), in addition to phrases like "Heavenly Grace" (7, 9, 14). She also utilizes more subtle allusions to Biblical passages. The repeated reference to the color white may allude to Psalms 51:7, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." In this context, it's clear Dickinson means "White" in the context of the clean and pure.

Additionally, when Dickinson writes "Thought belong to Him who gave it –" it's likely she's referring to Genesis 40:8, in which Joseph asks "Do not interpretations belong to God?" to two people who want to make sense of their dreams (9). This leads to the conclusion that any true interpretation of poetry belongs to God, or at least some divine force, and therefore mankind has no right to impose their readings onto a poet's work. These Biblical allusions and examples of religious imagery underscore the idea that what is publishable is sacred, in addition to being directly connected to the "Mind of Man" and the "Human Spirit" (1, 15). Moreover, the way Dickinson talks about the Mind of Man in this poem implies she sees Thought and Poetry as one in the same. In fact, as Ellen Louise Hart mentions, Dickinson often used "Thought" with a capital T as a synonym for poetry (qtd. in Ackmann 18). With this in mind, Dickinson is confident in asserting that publication is inherently exploitative because it attempts to profit from something within the human psyche. This

"Disgrace of Price," as Dickinson calls it, is therefore sacrilegious and should be avoided at all costs (16).

It's also clear how Dickinson places great power in the individual, a power she often puts on par with much greater powers. In "If I can stop one Heart from breaking" she shows a theme of individual importance. Though the poem's grander meaning is rather straightforward, it's important to consider why preventing even "one Heart" from breaking is the minimum requirement for not living in vain. Dickinson considers helping even one person as important as the grand narratives others aspire towards. Easing even "one Life the Aching" is as important to Dickinson—if not more important than—leaving a legacy or saving the world. She seems to up the ante in "It's easy to invent a Life –" when she declares "It's easy to efface it" in reference to Life (5). Later, she concludes the poem with the lines "Proceed – inserting Here – a Sun – / There – leaving out a Man –" (11-12). Not only does Dickinson argue mankind is powerful because it can destroy as easily as God creates, the last two lines imply she considers a single human equivalent to an entire sun. It's important that she uses the singular "Man" here, showing an individual's worth. "The Brain – is wider than the Sky –" shows several similar comparisons. In it, Dickinson says the human mind is "wider than the Sky," "deeper than the sea," and "the weight of God" (1, 5, 9). She compares the human capacity for thought and imagination to both natural and holy forces, and finds the Brain superior. She argues that—because people can picture all these things in both memory and daydream—their minds are just as powerful as these entities. In "I reckon – When I count at all –" the idea of humans outmatching the sun comes up again. The second line declares "First – Poets – Then the Sun –" (2). In no uncertain terms, Dickinson places poets—human entities—above the celestial body that makes life on Earth possible. However, it's no coincidence that she specifically selected poets as the most powerful beings.

Throughout the poem, she extolls the power of poets. She writes that they "Comprehend the Whole" and that "Their Summer – lasts a solid Year –" (6, 9). She compares poetry to Heaven and divine Grace, as well, showing how much power she places in written word. This theme also presents itself in "I would not paint – a picture" when the speaker describes the ecstasy they feel when consuming poetry. Though she takes on the persona of a reader in this poem, other poems show Dickinson had no shortage of appreciation for the power of poetry and poets.

"The poets light but Lamps –" may illuminate another way Dickinson sees poetry as powerful. The first line describes writing poetry as lighting lamps, then the rest of the first stanza goes on to describe these "vital" lights as immortal. The second stanza follows suit, describing these lights being powerful as suns, shining through each age as if it were a lens. This shows that not only

does poetry illuminate each new era, but each era interprets poetry. As a power Dickinson clearly didn't take lightly, "Shall I take thee, the Poet said" shows how much care she poured into her poetry. She describes possible words as "Candidates," which personifies words as people seeking confirmation of or conversion into their faith (3). When the poet finally makes their choice, she describes it in prophetic terms. She writes that a "Vision" grants the poet the proper insight, and describes the action as "The Cherubim reveal—" (9, 12). Once again, Dickinson describes poetry as divine, but she also underscores the care put into each individual word in a poem. Conversely, however, Dickinson describes poetry as being superior to religious ideology in "The Bible is an antique Volume—" In it, she states that the Bible is lesser, implying it came from "Holy Spectres" instead of the human mind (3). By contrast, Orpheus's "Sermon captivated— / It did not condemn" (16-17). In other words, Orpheus—the mythological bard who could entrance all listeners, human, animal, and divine—holds more power than those who wrote the Bible at the behest of God, because he was able to draw people in without pushing anyone out. She also implies that the Bible would be a much more potent work if it had come from the mind of a poet like Orpheus and not the Holy Spectres she references earlier. Once again using lofty language to describe the nuances of poetry, in "I dwell in Possibility—" Dickinson describes poetry as "A fairer House than Prose—" (2). She describes poems as using "The Gambrels of the Sky" for a roof, and states that "Visitors" of poetry "gather Paradise" (8, 9, 12). These images make poetry something limitless, and its readers enjoy heavenly bliss. Interestingly, however, Dickinson begins the poem with the word "I" (1). She draws an immediate connection between her speaker and poetry. Just like in "Publication— is the Auction," she connects the individual to poetry, which she connects to the divine.

Looking back at the previously mentioned poems, it becomes clear that Dickinson believes some sort of connection exists between poetry, poet, and divinity. She repeatedly uses holy imagery to convey both poetry and the human spirit, such as in "Publication— is the Auction." Dickinson clearly thinks of the "Mind of Man" as something more powerful than many would give it credit for. Imagination can contain the sea and sky, every human has a divine force on par with a supreme deity, and a single individual can outmatch the sun. But while Dickinson clearly thinks of individuals as holding great power, it's important to state how she puts poets above all the rest. Poets are the ones who harness words that contain Heaven, are able to stretch their scope to gather Paradise. There is power in an individual identity, power that manifests itself in poetry. Poems originate in internal identity, come from the Mind of Man—where Cherubim can reveal visions, where forces of nature can dwell, and where no one can rightfully intrude.



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