

The first issue of the *The Minor Bird* was published in the spring of 1929. The title was inspired by Robert Frost's poem of the same name after the poet visited Chatham's campus. The plain green paper cover sported the classic bird stamp logo that would be used for every edition of *The Minor Bird* until the 1940's. From 1939-49, *The Minor Bird* merged with the student newspaper, the *Arrow*, to create a publication known as the *Dart*— half creative, half journalistic. In the 1950s, *The Minor Bird* separated from the *Dart* and has remained in almost continuous publication for the last 67 years.

Today, The Minor Bird is a student organization with digital and print spaces for publishing poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction, critical essays, and art. The Executive Board of Editors are elected by students. In addition, students at large may apply for the Editorial Board as readers who help make publication decisions. The publication is also supported by the students of ENG234 Minor Bird Lab. The students in the class serve as "Assistant Editors" while they learn about the process of making a literary magazine and meet with local figures in literary publishing, while also serving as copy editors, marketers, event planners, and record keepers for the journal.

A Minor Bird

By Robert Frost

I have wished a bird would fly away,
And not sing by my house all day;

Have clapped my hands at him from the door
When it seemed as if I could bear no more.

The fault must partly have been in me.
The bird was not to blame for his key.

And of course there must be something wrong
In wanting to silence any song.



Spring 2018

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Editor's Note

This year, *The Minor Bird* had the pleasure of showcasing the art of some tremendous writers and artists. In a year of transition, our team worked together on unification, preservation, and most importantly, representation. Our executive and editorial boards have grown in size, and students have been showing more zeal than ever to curate the legacy of *The Minor Bird*. With next year's 90th anniversary issue fast approaching, it is pivotal that we have a devoted team. I am so grateful for the hard work and dedication that we have from the undergraduate literary community. This sort of student initiative is exactly what we need for a heightened campus presence, and in the process, we have made a far more inclusive journal.

This particular issue of *The Minor Bird* demonstrates a wide variety of individuals, and we are so glad to feature so many diverse voices in this year's pool of accepted work. By publishing contributors of color, queer contributors, and transgender contributors, as well as featuring a critical section of the journal to highlight interdisciplinary outreach, *The Minor Bird* is branching out to be a more expansive journal that is reaching beyond the Chatham bubble. We have so much talent featured this year, and I am so proud of what we have put together for this issue.

I hope you, dear reader, can find as much power and joy in these pieces as I do.

Carina Stopenski

Editor-in-Chief

Table of Contents

Page

- | | |
|--|--------|
| 3. <i>Honeysuckle</i> by Kylie Fletcher | Poetry |
| 4. <i>fig</i> by Carina Stopenski | Poetry |
| 5. <i>Treasure Hunting</i> by Claire Wozniak | Poetry |
| 7. <i>Palace Dive</i> by Ahmir Allen | Prose |
| 10. <i>Spores of Repressed Depression Agitate Anxiety to the Point of Asphyxiation</i> by Aurelia Sheehan | Art |
| 11. <i>turned pluviophile</i> by Josie Albrecht | Poetry |
| 12. <i>[s l i m e b o y]</i> by Blake Wessner | Poetry |
| 14. <i>Secrecy</i> by Jade Marzolf | Prose |
| 15. <i>On Discovering the Erotic Creature After Sheila Kelley's TED Talk</i> by Rachel Geffrey | Poetry |
| 16. <i>Suspension</i> by Ciarra McAllen | Art |
| 17. <i>Blood Moon</i> by Carsyn Smith | Poetry |
| 18. <i>If Music Be the Food of Love</i> by Rachel Geffrey | Prose |

- | | |
|---|--------|
| 21. <i>A.R.</i> by Zoe Weaver | Poetry |
| 22. <i>On My Shoulders</i> by Rebecca Emerick | Poetry |
| 24. <i>Soar</i> by Simon Matela | Prose |
| 26. <i>The Imponderable Structural Safety of Elevators</i> by Kaitlyn Shirey | Prose |
| 30. <i>Visitation Hours Are From 9-5</i> by Madison Krob | Poetry |
| 31. <i>Inside Outside</i> by Walker Orner | Art |
| 32. <i>Homecoming</i> by Carina Stopenski | Prose |
| 36. <i>Dream Tide</i> by Gryphon Ludwig | Poetry |
| 37. <i>Grit and Water</i> by Hope Sims-Medley | Poetry |
| 38. <i>Release</i> by Olivia Biggs | Art |
| 39. <i>Attention</i> by Iris Marzolf | Prose |
| 41. <i>Hymn of the Moon</i> by Carsyn Smith | Poetry |
| 43. <i>Totality on Blue Ridge Parkway, NC</i> by Alie Davis | Poetry |
| 44. <i>Blue Moon</i> by Yeongbin Byeon | Art |
| 45. <i>Child's Play</i> by Rebecca Emerick | Poetry |

47. *Burned Out Eyes* by Jimmy Zawada Poetry
49. *Dysphoria* by Blake Wessner Prose
50. *Blackout* by Simon Matela Prose
53. *I Prefer the Darkness* by Abby Young Poetry
55. *Slipstream* by Jay Margolis Art
56. *Afterword* by Amy Wain Poetry
57. *Am Not* by Anniston Bieri Prose
60. *Elegy for Dirt* by Ahmir Allen Poetry
62. *Untitled* by Robin Heller Art
63. *Violent Bodies in Raw* by Alie Davis Critical
68. *Existential Literature as an Influence on Societal and Personal Values* by Elana Ragan Critical
74. *Ocean* by Yeongbin Byeon Art
75. *Mother (Nature): Conflicts in Charlotte's Web* by Rachel Geffrey Critical
78. *Margaret Atwood's Surfacing and Our Role in the Ecological World* by Sidony Ridge Critical

Honeysuckle

by Kylie Fletcher

The air smells of honeysuckle
Sweet and young and gold
The scent by the vines
So heavy my eyes water.
The delicacy under my forefinger
Bursts under a heavy hand.
The juices turn to slime,
the flower a broken baby bird
a child stops to poke at,
a stick prodding limp wings.
Fingers caress the bruised petals,
The shriveled stem bleeds thin in skin
Until the scent goes sour
From new wildflower honey
Golden and dripping amber
To melons rotted furry and blue
The disintegrated meat tinged with
Aged sweetness too much to bear,
Crinkle your nose to snuff the burden.
Wipe the water from your eyes.

fig

by Carina Stopenski

the fig tree in our garden holds
the memory of dead relatives and
hot summers, nights framed
with lightning bugs and mason-jar
moonshine, tending basil plants

and tomato flesh at the edges of
jefferson avenue, our peaches never
grew much bigger than plums but
our figs grew to the size of clementines.

when i slurped the pulp from the
fuzzy skin, spat the stem between
the gap in my teeth,

i found home in the soil and forgot the cuts
on my fingers, healed my wounds with
the earthworms and gathered solace in
the comfort of the tendrils on my tongue.

Treasure Hunting

by Claire Wozniak

I miss the trout lilies &
 the chickweed
 the brambles

the hawthorns &
 the black walnuts
 the crawling wild
 rose soft-spoken

tufts of grass tall &
 never cut or bothered
 among the sand dunes
 unexpected in
 pennsylvania

they're up by the
 muddy part of the river
 we would walk there
 along the bank

to where the water
 runs clean over the
 stones & bits
 of broken glass

just past the bridge
 where we'd hide our
 we walk slow through
 the water necks bent
 crane-like & cautious

eyes trained on the riverbed
 looking for that glint
 of light against
 glass a promise

we're treasure hunting
 a white cold cream pot
 old milk bottle
 warped by time

find the one not broken
 a minnow's home
 filled with pebbles
 & dirt, half submerged

keep walking like this
 'til we reach the bend
 deeper than any water
 I've ever known

we turn around
 crawl up the bank
 past the nettle
 & take our treasures home

Palace Dive

by Ahmir Allen

There's a small lake half an hour outside of town, surrounded by a deep forest. The water there is more translucent than normal and the pebbles along the shore glitter brightly in the sunlight. My parents would always take me there in the summer, though I haven't gone back since moving out. Canoeing out on the lake with my dad was always the most boring part of the trip, mostly because I could never get over the quiet. The cicadas and the wind and the water would all blend together until I couldn't discern any of it, the final product a fake silence that felt like nails on a chalkboard.

"Pass the bait, buddy." My dad had finished setting up his fishing line and was ready to cast it out. We didn't look anything like each other—he had on a fishing cap and vest, and underneath he was wearing a red flannel. He would've looked like a stereotypical fisherman if he could grow a full beard, but a goatee was all he could muster. Meanwhile I was letting my hair grow wild around my head, curling and falling wherever it wanted, yet simultaneously hiding it under my dark blue hoodie. My eyes were always sleepier than his and his eagerness to fish brought on a few headaches every time we went.

The worms were kept in a small pail a little bit closer to me than to him, so I gave it a small shove his way. The force was a little stronger than I intended and the pail tipped over. Dad sighed and shut his eyes. "Nice going. Just..just stay over there and don't mess anything up, okay?"

I didn't try to argue; there never seemed to be a point in arguing with him or my mom. After a few boring minutes I was lucky enough to find myself passing out, slouched in the back of the canoe as it drifted back and forth on the waves.

"Damn it! What the hell?" Dad's voice woke me into jumping up and looking around, trying to figure out why he let out such a yell. His eyes were focused on the fishing rod, now sunken below the water's surface. The sun had jumped a little farther across the sky and it was glowing intensely, so the silver metal shined on its way down before the light lost it. "Why didn't you warn me the fishing pole was tipping over?"

I didn't hear the end of it for the rest of the night. Every chance he got, Dad would mutter somethings about not paying attention or ruining his trip.

"We really can't go anywhere with this kid," he tried to joke with Mom when we brought the canoe in, even though she didn't pay any attention to it. She'd spent the whole evening listening to music and reading in the den. Her book collection was decent, especially for a cabin that we only got to visit a few times a year. I had her hair and her tendency to stay inside, and imagining an evening chilling out and reading instead of fishing and disappointing my dad made me jealous.

The next day I went back out again, by myself this time, just after dawn. I pushed the canoe into the water slowly, careful not to wake up my parents back in the cabin. The mist was heavy down on the lakefront and it hung around as I got further out across the water. Eventually I caught a bright glimmer of what I thought was the fishing rod in the water and jumped. From the canoe it had felt like an easy task. It couldn't be more than twenty feet deep and I was confident that I could get down and back up for air in time. The benefit of getting Dad to stop groaning about losing his favorite rod seemed to outweigh the risks.

I noticed pretty quickly however that it wasn't just fifteen or twenty feet deep. It went much further, to the point that before I knew it at least a minute had gone by. Yet somehow I felt fine—no rushing back up to breathe, no trouble breaking down further through the water. And it kept going on and on until I noticed a few odd shadows appearing, distant silhouettes but undoubtedly there. Most seemed large, bigger than I thought could have fit at the floor of the lake. Ancient structures jutted out of the sediment, some of them almost fifty feet high, some of them shaped like domes or huts while others seemed like open amphitheatres, all carved from marble like art from a lost empire.

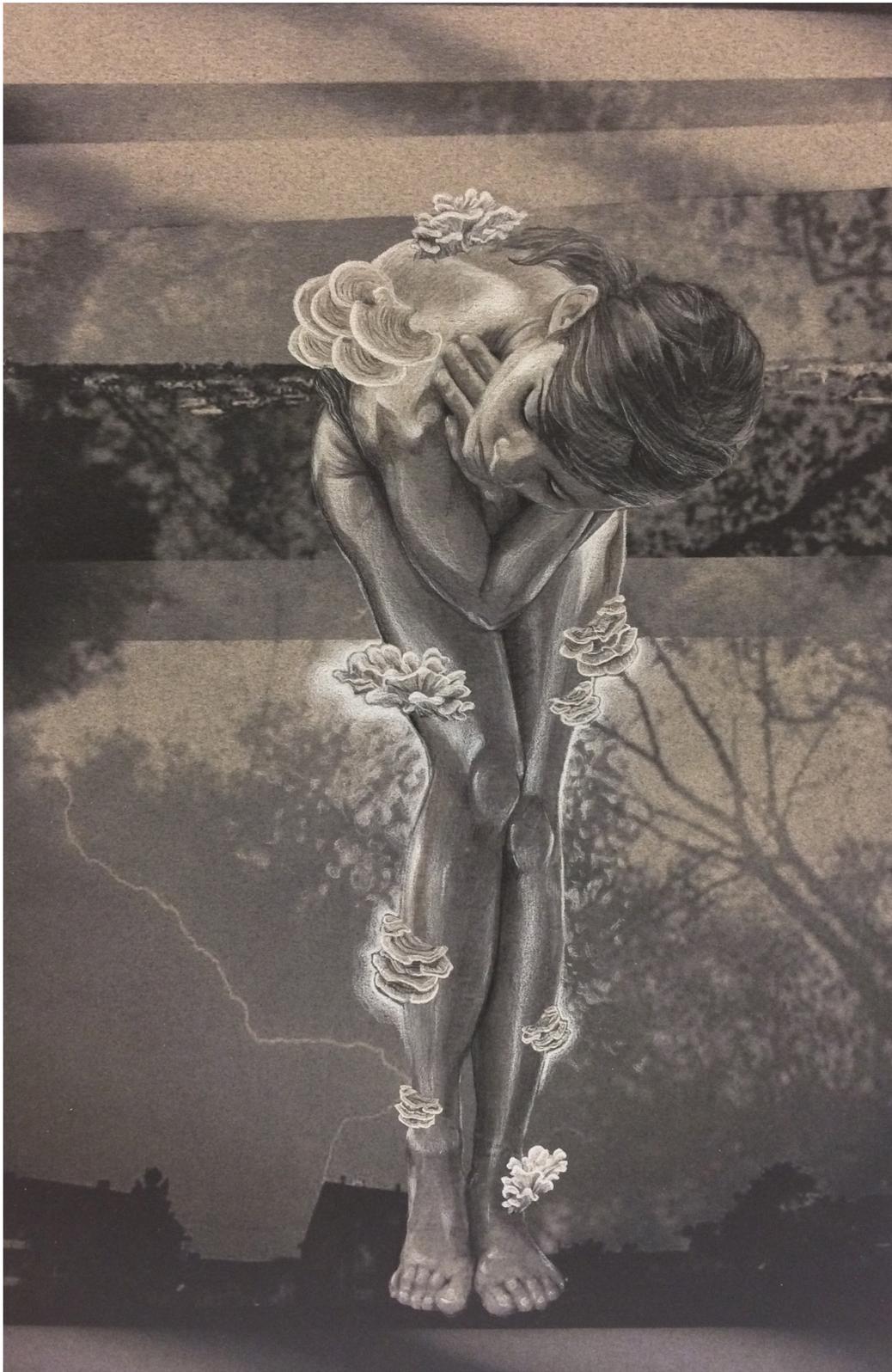
I reached the bottom of the lake and still felt fine. I even found myself walking along the silt and mud. Technically the term might be hopping or skipping, since every step would take me a few feet off the ground and have me float for a few moments before touching back down. All around it seemed like signs of some lost village or society, forgotten and totally out of place. And in the center of one giant amphitheater with tens of rows of seats, where the stage must have been, I saw the fishing rod still catching the light. I made my way over and picked it up, but instead of taking off back to the surface something made me pause. It occurred to me that maybe I could stay at the bottom of this lake and go exploring, at the very least keep it as

a secret hideaway when I felt the need for some solitude. Nothing had approached me, not even some of the fish Dad sought from higher up in the water. But standing there felt odd, not unnatural but not right at the same time, like I wasn't meant to be down among that lost city. More than anything it felt like I should leave it be—like going to a museum and knowing you aren't supposed to touch the art. Looking up, the surface felt as far away as the sky, but I tied the fishing rod around my shoulder and began my ascent anyway.

I'm not sure if there was any way to explain what happened without sounding like it was made up. That urge to go down underneath the water, the feeling like I could make it to the bottom if I tried, and the clarity to leave when it hit me that the city couldn't have been mine... it didn't seem real to me either. My dad was shocked when he found his fishing rod on the cabin porch later that morning.

“You'll never guess what I found outside!” He presented the fishing rod like a prize. “Wanna go out on the water again before we leave?”

I shook my head, hair shaking in front of my sleepy eyes. As he walked outside I started playing music and crashed into the couch, ready to start my real get-away.



Spores of Repressed Depression Agitate Anxiety to the Point of Asphyxiation by Aurelia Sheehan

turned pluviophile

by Josie Albrecht

the endless pour, flowing avenues, perished trees,
mass, external destruction.

fearfully, as the storm passed in front of me,

you can't stop the rain, child,

but you can run for shelter.

mama didn't tell me shelter was far,

mama didn't tell me running was hard,

mama didn't tell me

drought brings no more comfort

than the rain.

the small shack provided nothing

more than narrowness in thought,

anxiousness in lacking pain,

emptiness in cupped hands begging for water.

chapped, lifeless lips quivered for a drizzle.

scorched mind ached for the absorption of what was once an apprehensive zone.

spent my life chasing the protection

[a safe haven from what frightened me most]

until the refuge drank the being from me.

i hanged from clotheslines until each drop of life left my body.

shelter as permanent home is only good to those who have lost and lack passion

and now that i'm buried deep in sand, bare and dry,

i crave a hurricane.

[s l i m e b o y]

by Blake Wessner

he stares at his face in the mirror
and thinks he looks human

for once

and he wants to scream
with the sheer joy of it

but then his eyes travel d o w n

and snag

on his gills pulsing

with each inhalation

as if they have a life of their own

he presses a hand to his neck

like he can smooth them out

like wrinkles in a bed sheet

his gaze wanders

further along

his slick, cartilaginous body

his hands dig into his hips

so hard

that his claws leave

o o o o o z i n g

streaks behind

and somehow

that's even worse

his breath r a t t l e s

like a coiled snake

just as his stomach
begins to roll
like a sinking ship
and g o d he doesn't
want to cry
but he doesn't understand
how nine out of ten people
can be born human
and he's the one
s t u c k
in some alien body
and he's *terrified*
of being alone

[but that's all he knows]

Secrecy

by Jade Marzolf

When she looks in the mirror, all she can see is the Secret. It's been hiding behind the dull glass of her eyes, buried underneath her flesh for years.

She gazes at its reflection in the mirror and runs her fingernails over the scarlet bumps blooming on the pale surface of her arms. The Secret is attempting to escape again. She can feel it jabbing through the tissue paper of her skin. It boils her blood with its fury and sucks the marrow out of her bones, leaving them brittle. She's tired of it digesting her food and stealing her oxygen.

She considers allowing it to slip out, to ooze through her pores and release thickly into the air. What relief will she feel? Will she become hollow with its absence, as giddy as a crystalline bubble, and float away in the breeze?

Perhaps.

One night, she whispers it to her sunken-eyed reflection. Another, she murmurs it into her pillow. Once, she admits it to the cracks on the wall.

The Secret refuses to unclench its grip on her internal organs. It will never let go unless it has another human being waiting outside to hold and comfort it. Liberation is a terrifying thing, and the Secret needs to know someone exists to help take care of it.

Over the years, she chooses a number of potential hosts who might be willing to protect it – a mother, or the guidance counselor who tells everyone he wants to help – but forgets them, ashamed. Who wants to see something so hideous? No one deserves to be burdened by the Secret.

But still, shouldn't another person know? Anyone? Secrets are made to share with somebody else. That's why they beat a body, fill it with bruises from the inside out, until they are finally unleashed.

Despite the pain, she can't let the Secret go.

It screams. It begs and festers and abuses her, but without it, she will be nothing. The two of them have survived together for so long, she will have trouble drawing breath without it.

On Discovering the Erotic Creature After Sheila Kelley's Ted Talk

by Rachel Geffrey

Watch her barefoot in cotton—
not high heels and silk—
enough skin to grip the surface, but
not enough to make you think this is for anyone
but her. Watch her pace like a lynx around the pole,
swoop like a snowy owl, suspend herself
upside-down, mane brushing the floor while her body
roars. Beautiful, an adrenaline breath
at the top of a precipice, a heartbeat stutter.
Watch her kiss her own soul in the air.



Suspension by Ciarra McAllen

Blood Moon

by Carsyn Smith

They call a deep orange-red moon bloody,
That she can hurt, this rock we deify.
A burly boulder can't show tears or glee
Yet she is as joyous as stars are nigh.

Goddess Moon kissed Mother Earth in passion,
Fire consuming their love so time would not.
Time is a hunter they could not outrun,
As he ripped them apart, doomed them to rot.

One grew lush and strong, the other ice cold;
One circled the other in longing stares,
The other raising man in open wolds;
Memories in scars – what a tragic pair.

Bleed, Moon, bleed as I do cry for lost love,
Alone and cold with the stars high above.

If Music Be the Food of Love

by Rachel Geffrey

“You’re better than this,” she told me.

“Yeah, yeah,” The phone slipped from where it was wedged between my cheek and shoulder. I closed the fridge door, wishing I hadn’t opened it and seen those empty shelves.

“No, you are!”

I snorted, puffing a cloud of powdered sugar into the air of my empty, dusty, shithole of an apartment. “You may be right—*may*, Caroline, don’t let it go to your head—but it doesn’t earn me better tips.” Performing should have been the least of my worries; it was something I wanted to revel in. Instead, it had quickly become almost my sole livelihood. I was a trumpeter without credentials, a music ed major with a dropout instead of a degree. Sure, I had a few students for private lessons, but a few hundred dollars a week was not enough to live on, and the tools of my trade were expensive. When I was a kid someone told me that buskers could make six figures in a year. As far as fallbacks went, it wasn’t a cushy job with health care and a 401K, but it beat unemployment. Or it should have.

I was terrible at picking corners, but I couldn’t get better ones if I tried. I wasn’t *allowed* to get better ones because everywhere people actually go for the purpose of listening to music, where I wouldn’t be playing for just a few dollars an hour if I was lucky, there were bands booked, preventing me from getting close to those spaces without being kicked out. When the symphony went on strike, I thought, hey, that sucks, but maybe I can sneak in there and capitalize where they walked. I didn’t think that when the musicians left, the music lovers would go with them in solidarity. Made me feel like a vulture, and a bad one at that.

“Caroline, I have six dollars and twenty-seven cents in my bank account and I’m eating a donut for dinner because some schmuck—sorry, some *saint*—took pity on me on his way from Dunkin Donuts to his office. I’m taking starving-artist to a whole new level here.”

Caroline was silent. Something rattled in the background from her end of the phone. I imagined her in the apartment she shared with Rosie and Bekah. The girls had been friendly enough when we were all in school and Caroline and I were first dating, but that was pre-dropout. Now, they were leagues ahead of me and they knew it, and I couldn't figure out how Caroline hadn't wised up yet. Sure, they still had to share a place, but it was in one of the better neighborhoods, and with Rosie in banking, Bekah at a tech startup, and Caroline working her way up at a marketing firm, none of them were doing too bad.

And me?

I sighed and dropped onto the mattress on my floor.

A mattress. Some dingy sheets, fraying at the edges. A small stack of clothes, updated when I had money for Goodwill. A record player, some albums in an orange plastic milk crate beside it—all the greats. A stack of sheet music that I had either saved or salvaged over the years. And, of course, the trumpet, which I kept as pristine as possible—to let it fall into disrepair was to fall even further. This was all I had to my name. Well, that and a slightly stale donut, half of which was lodged in my throat, dusty with sugar and refusing to go down around the lump.

“I'm sorry, Care. This wasn't what I thought my life would be. I grew up with Dizzy Gillespie and Miles Davis. And my dad. God, he was good. I guess I just thought that if I surrounded myself with great musicians then maybe I'd turn into one of them. Obviously, that didn't work, and now look at me.”

“Bennett,” she said, sounding winded and slightly echoing, “it's not your fault that he got sick. You did the right thing. Your family needed you and you helped them so much.”

“And look where it's gotten me.” I laughed bitterly at the water-stained ceiling.

“It may have pointed you in this direction, but you're too stubborn to ask for help. Bennett, let me help you.”

Right, because nothing said dependable, responsible adult like needing your girlfriend to be the breadwinner. “You know I can't let you do that.” There was a knock at the door and I rose, bracing myself for a fight with the landlord. He was cutting me a break, but that could only last so long. “I can't offer you anything. I'm just—”

“Great,” she said. And there she was, in my doorway. Her fine brown hair was falling in

pieces out of her braid from the wind, but her red wool coat was neat enough to make up for the disarray, buttons marching in two straight lines down her ribs beneath a heavy plaid scarf. Her face was pink from the chill and the stairs. There was a vinyl copy of Davis' *Kind of Blue* in her gloved hands. She hung up and slipped her phone into her pocket. "You're great, Bennett." She held out the album, smirking. "And you've been surrounding yourself with the wrong kind of company on those corners if they've let you forget that."

A.R.

by Zoe Weaver

Constellations mapped across her face
Space matter and nebulas rest under two blue moons
Stars mark a trail over a happy nose
A spray outdone only by the up twist of her lips
Swimming only to drown in the ocean of her eyes
The calm currents swallow my beating heart
And leave me absolutely breathless
I find refuge on a freckle—
I skip over them like rocks in a shallow creek
But the emotions have already robbed all air from my lungs
How could something so beautiful hurt me so?
How could a goddess carved from marble cause me to feel so warm?
I stare at the stars that smother her
And let myself get lost in two blue moons.

On My Shoulder

by Rebecca Emerick

Most people have an angel
And a devil sitting on their
Shoulders

Not me

On one shoulder
Rests the heavy head of depression
His head in the crook of my neck
is comforting
But I know he is just trying
to comfort himself
He wraps a scared arm around me
And I feel my shoulder
getting damp with his tears
At times I can shrug him off
But for the most part
He is there

And on my other shoulder
Taps the scissor-hands of anxiety
Nervously ticking, picking
They bite my skin
While he whispers
What ifs and better nots
Into my always lifted ear

His menacing hands
Threaten my life
They are always
Grasping and ungrasping

Soar

by Simon Matela

The problem with learning to fly is that, on the first few attempts, you actually think you might be able to do it. I was luckier than most on my first try. I only shattered my tibia, a minor price to pay for the sake of progress. The whole ride to the hospital my mom was crying, both for me and the medical bills she would have to cover.

“What were you thinking, jumping out the window like that?” she yelled between short, phlegm-filled sobs. A jet-black Hyundai blares on its horn as our shitty Ford starts to drift into the next lane. Mom swerves to correct the car’s path and rolls down the window to flip off the offending driver. When turns her attention back to me she says, “Never do that again. Look at me, Charlie. Never. Do that. Again.” The thick musk of whiskey hung on every slurred word.

I spent what seemed like forever in the hospital, trapped in an oppressively white room, surrounded by a small army of nurses that watched over me like my mom used to. Then came the doctors, measuring my reflexes and asking all sorts of questions about my injury and family.

“Have you ever done this before?” / “Tell me if you can feel it when I do this?”

“Can you rotate your ankle for me?” / “How’s your relationship with your father?”

For the first few weeks after I was got home there was nearly always someone with an eye on me. Family dinners, a new concept in our house, were suddenly the norm. Most ended with little being said. Dad occasionally skipped them altogether to work in his den, or because he had to work late. It didn’t matter to me. Eventually, they would stop watching. Things would go back to normal. I’d learn to fly, whether they wanted me to or not.

That chance came on a wonderfully sunny Sunday afternoon. Mom was sleeping on the couch, beer cans strewn about the floor. Dad had been in his office all day, only coming out to use the bathroom. Every once in a while, I could hear his Keurig splutter out another coffee, the only indication I had that he was still there.

I crept up the steps to the second-floor window, slid the screen out and took a deep breath. The breeze rustled my hair a bit, I could see the trees swaying from side to side in the sunshine. I took a few steps back, got a running start, and propelled myself out the window. For one beautiful moment, I hung in the air. It might've last forever, if only the ground hadn't so rudely interrupted me.

The Imponderable Structural Safety of Elevators

by Kaitlyn Shirey

Elevators offer a mundane opportunity to contemplate common fears: Claustrophobia, heights, free-fall, and sudden death. The small space, too full or too lonely. The unseen knowledge of travelling far above the ground. An acceleration that feels not quite right. A heart dropped into a stomach. A delay before the door opens. A groaning noise from outside the car. A hitch in the ride. Given the necessary conditions, even stoic passengers reach for the walls to steady themselves. They may have to swallow images of snapping ropes, or they may just exit the elevator at the next floor and take the stairs the rest of the way to their destination.

For those who design, install, and maintain elevators, the fears catalyzed by elevators are not so commonplace. While of course they work to prevent all manner of disaster as they design elevators, the fact of the matter is that elevators are safe—often eight times safer than they need to be. The conditions that would cause an elevator to crash, it turns out, are much scarier than a single cable snapping.

In most everyday instances, elevators are more than just safe, even though much of the work to design and create an elevator is imprecise. Though equations and formulas help to make predictions, they describe only the most perfect and uniform situations. Most often, one estimates rather than measures the stresses on each individual piece of machinery. In this context, stress refers to the forces within structures that resist the forces acting outside the structures. One might think of stress in terms of rubber bands, where internal forces have to hold together the rubber band as you stretch it. If the threshold of the rubber band's strength is surpassed, the internal stresses become too great for the material and the band snaps. One assumes a fairly even distribution of stresses and bases designs on perfect physical construction. Thus, even the most mathematically sound mechanism is still only as good as the material it's made with and the conditions under which it is operated.

For this reason, engineers must design structures with a factor of safety, which “takes into account the imponderables” that the structure may encounter in its lifetime (Riley et al. 147). The factor of safety ensures that each piece of the structure is able to withstand not just the predicted load, but even greater stress. How much stress a structure must be able to withstand is a requirement in all building and machine codes that is based on the individual structure and its uses. It is meant to ensure that even if imponderable forces act upon the structure, even if some misfortune befalls the elevator or the building, no catastrophic failure will occur.

A factor of safety of 1.1, common for elevators and airplanes, means that an elevator that needs to be able to carry 600 pounds safely is actually able to carry 660 pounds without issue. In fact, most elevators have six to eight steel cables, each capable of holding more than the weight of a fully loaded car. Thus, even if one cable were to fail, the elevator would continue operating as intended due to the support of the remaining cables. It’s rare, but individual cables do occasionally break.

Elevators are also equipped with three braking mechanisms. Unlike the brake systems in cars, where one has to apply power to the brake to get the automobile to slow down, elevator brakes above the moving car require power to unclamp the cables. In this design, any loss of power to the building applies the brake to the cable and stops the elevator from moving until power is restored. A second type of brake sits below the car, a bar ready to engage with the guide rails on the sides of the shaft. This brake stops the car by wedging itself in the rails, in the event that the first brake does not function correctly. A third precaution takes the form of counter weights at the ends of the cables. These counterweights prevent free-fall even if the first two brakes fail by balancing out the load of the car and bringing it to a gentler stop at either the top or bottom of the shaft. If only a person or two are in the elevator, they would travel slowly up until they reached the top of the building. If full, the elevator would travel slowly down to the bottom. The counterweights, valued somewhere between the weight of an empty car and that of a full car, guarantee a swift but peaceful ride to the nearest stopping point.

The technology involved in these brakes has not changed much in the last century except to account for the greater speeds and greater weights of modern elevators. Passengers are protected from many of the imponderables that they either do not think about every time they pass through the sliding doors or choose to ignore. One cable snapping? It’s likelier than

one might think, but there are seven waiting to pick up the load. Elevator over the posted allowable weight? Even with only one cable left there is still a safety guarantee at ten percent more weight. Cable brake doesn't work? There are two other brakes ready to stop the car.

Because of these safety features, no recorded cases of spontaneous elevator failure exist in the United States. Only the truly imponderable has caused any kind of elevator accident in the last century. What does the engineer fear? The kinds of imponderables that one never wants to imagine, and that no mathematical formula can assist in protecting against: Elevator failure caused by plane crash.

It is more statistically probable for a plane to crash into a building than it is for an elevator to fall unexpectedly. The former has happened twice in New York, and the latter has not happened yet. The first time, in 1945, a B-25 Bomber accidentally crashed into the Empire State Building on a foggy morning. All eleven deaths occurred due to the initial impact and explosions of jet fuel. Part of the plane hit an elevator shaft, seriously injuring elevator operator Betty Lou Oliver. Rescuers helped her out of her elevator and into another so that she could be transported from the 79th floor to the ground level for medical assistance. They did not realize that the plane had severed all of the steel cables supporting this second elevator, leaving massive coils of steel at the bottom of the elevator shaft. Betty Lou Oliver, alone in the elevator car, plummeted over one thousand feet to the bottom of the elevator shaft. She had to be cut from the wreckage. The fall broke her neck and both legs. She survived. Miraculously, the compressed air in the long elevator shaft slowed the descent of the car and the coils of cables cushioned the impact, bringing her to a jolting halt.

Yet another imponderable comes into play in this story. Had there been fewer cables for the car to crash into, the crash would not have any softness to it. Experts would have predicted her death, not that these broken safety precautions would save Oliver's life. Similarly, no one could have predicted that a woman could, within a few minutes time, survive both a plane crash and an elevator calamity at such a height. Not only did Betty Lou Oliver survive, but she recovered to full health in eight months, and lived another 54 years following this accident.

The second incidence elevator failure by plane crash unfortunately caused a smaller survival rate and much larger destruction. The World Trade Center's elevators failed on September 11, 2001 for the same reasons as Betty Lou Oliver's did in 1945, sending many to their deaths inside free-falling elevators.

It is true that engineers refer to structural impurities with the term imponderables, describing all causes of sudden structural failure. But tragedies like this—unexpected, horrific—are always imponderable. It is as inconceivable to the engineers making the elevator as it is to the victims that lives could so quickly be taken away. Imponderable, too, that one could ever safeguard against such a disaster, whether accidental or purposeful. Our buildings cannot be airplane-proof in a world where airplanes grow larger and cities more populated every day. Elevators can be snap-proof and fall-proof and weight-proof but to make them airplane-proof or helicopter-proof or rocket-proof would be to build an elevator out of a bomb shelter. Or to destroy all flying vehicles.

It must be noted too that airplanes themselves have factors of safety similar to elevators, both in terms of the structural integrity of the millions of pieces that make up the plane and in terms of the protocol of everyone involved. As we can see and experience increasingly in the United States, there are as many rules for pilots and air traffic controllers and passengers to follow as there are mechanical parts in a plane. It seems we've never been closer to protecting from all imponderables, leading us to believe that more imponderables are just waiting in line. As soon as one imponderable is protected against, another steps up to the challenge.

So, are elevators safe enough? There is a good chance elevators will get too crowded and make some uncomfortable. There is also a chance that elevators will not be crowded enough, causing stress when alone on an elevator with a stranger. Less likely, elevators can get stuck and require rescue, thanks to well-functioning brakes. Overall, the answer is that of course, elevators are incredibly structurally safe. And in the event of imponderable catastrophe, the stairs are just as likely to be destroyed.

Visitation Hours are from 9-5

A Golden Shovel, After Ellen Bass

by Madison Krob

She says “*nobody comes to visit anymore*” slamming the yellowed curled edge crossword book on the table her eyes scan every morning a harrowing escape from the noxious knee that will keep her a prisoner of her own home arthritic fingertips trace over the sweater labeled grandmother furrows white brows pushes up pink frames pauses asks if we’ve heard of the neighbor’s death says “*he forgot the gas stove went off to light a smoke and lit up like a Christmas tree*” she shivers turns back to the television muttering something about the coyotes that woke her up last night and I wonder if she sees this world from the outside behind a fierce disposition where she isn’t a part of anything except for this old home some fifteen miles away from the nearest grocery store both dormant as debilitation comes at the age of eighty-five though always forceful in searching and retelling what her mind can remember revived from someplace within her frail body where living is insistent.



Inside Outside by Walker Orner

Homecoming

by Carina Stopenski

Autumn in Cherry Falls was met with the icy opposition of an early winter. Most of the trees were bare by now, silently swaying in the wind. Under the knotted branches of our favorite tree, the cold covered me like a blanket. My gloved hands trembled as they clung to the thick roots. There was no snow, no sleet, just the unnerving chill of lonely air. Jason would have loved it.

Only four years my senior, Jason acted more like a dad than our absent father ever did. Our dad was a deadbeat. I never knew what his vice was—drugs, booze, a woman other than our mother. Mom always kept that stuff from us. But Jason, he almost redeemed the Pernicki family name. He was a part of Cherry Falls' JROTC all throughout high school and volunteered for the food bank on the weekends. He worked as a stock boy at the grocery store in the evenings and still graduated with a 3.8 GPA. I always thought that Jason would become a doctor or something, open up a private practice here in Cherry Falls. As smart as he was, we never thought he would leave home.

Even with all his accolades, Jason never seemed to have that many friends. It was always just Toby. The two of them were never seen without each other. People assumed they were just close friends, but a sister's intuition is always right.

Once, I came into Jason's room to borrow his calculator when I saw the two of them cuddled next to each other, resting against the slope of the other's body. They had been studying all weekend, and I had heard them both crying about something earlier in the day. Now it was the early evening. Toby was asleep, snoring like the engine of old Mr. Monroe's truck down the street, and Jason was staring at the ceiling, his enlistment paper stacked on his bedside table.

He raised his eyebrows at me. I couldn't tell if he was happy to see me or startled. "Oh, Caroline. What're you doing in here? Did Mom send you up?"

“Is this a bad time?” I whispered. “I just needed a calculator for my math homework. I can come back later if you want.”

“It’s no problem, it’s in my top desk drawer.” Jason didn’t get up to get it for me like he usually would have. He just kind of pointed in the direction of his desk and set his book down, his now-free hand running through Toby’s hair.

“You told him you’re leaving, didn’t you?”

“Yeah, he’s not taking it too well.” Jason sighed, then bit his lip. I’ve only heard my brother cry four times: when Grandma passed away, the two times we watched Old Yeller, and today. “He’s afraid once I’m gone I’ll forget about him.”

“Well, if you care about each other then you’ll never forget, right?” I smiled.

Jason cleared his throat. “Hey, li’l bug?”

“Yeah, what’s up?” I asked as I fished for the calculator among folded up notes and chewed-up pencils.

“Let’s maybe not tell Mom about this.” There was a genuine fear in Jason’s voice that I didn’t recognize. It wasn’t like Jason to be afraid.

We both knew what he meant. It didn’t really need any further explanation. “I’ve got you, don’t worry.” When I left, I shut off the light and let the door click shut behind me.

The day before Jason was deployed, the sun was a deep orange egg yolk leaking onto the landscape. It was warm for October, and I thought the clouds looked like cotton candy when the red hues seeped into the sky. “You promise you’re going to write to me?” I asked as we sat on the driveway, watching the cars speed past on Beecher Street.

“Every chance I get, li’l bug.” Jason smiled, ruffling my hair. I was never too old for that. “You and Mom both. And Toby, too. All three of you better send me some care packages.” His smile grew as he said his friend’s name.

I cocked my head. “You’re the most difficult person to buy things for. You never ask for anything! What would you want in them, then, Mr. Send-Me-Some-Care-Packages?”

“Oh, you know, all my favorite things! Bags of pistachios, deer jerky from Mr. Monroe, some of those little doodles you do in your sketchbook, pictures of everyone here. I’m gonna miss you all so much.”

I dug my heels into the dirt.

“You know, I’m going to be okay.” Jason sighed after a long pause of silence. “I promise.” He stuck out his right pinkie and locked it with my left. For a moment, the sound of the cicadas and shoddy truck engines dissipated, the only noise the quaint breath between us.

We only had two months left with Jason. Before he left, Jason was always busy, helping Toby with college applications since he took a gap year, taking care of Mom when she was too tired or catatonic to get to work, the little things. Rehab hadn’t been good to Mom. Nonetheless, Jason’s booming tenor bounced through the house with vigor, singing classic rock songs while he did the dishes and practicing church hymns before services. Now that he was gone, the house had an eerie quiet about it, the bugs outside the only noise that ever permeated the walls.

His body came home draped in an American flag. I didn’t recognize half the people who came to the funeral. Neighbors overwhelmed Mom and I with hugs, strangers blubbering like they actually knew Jason. They only knew of him. It felt so unfair that extended aunts and uncles, even Dad, got to sit in the front row to receive condolences while Toby was shoved to the back row with his parents, scrambling for space in this crowd of posers. Mr. and Mrs. Jahovick knew about Jason and Toby but they never told Mom. They had always been kind to us.

Never one to be too sad during a time of mourning, I walked to the back of the room, my yellow blouse a flash of sun among the crowd of black-clad mourners, and squeezed in next to Toby. His face was currently buried in his palms, only showing his countenance when he rose up for air between sobs. I smiled. “Jason would’ve been really happy to know you all came.”

“I’m so sorry for your loss, Caroline.” Mrs. Jahovick rested her hand on my shoulder. “We all know how close you and your brother were.”

“Yeah, he was a good kid,” Mr. Jahovick reiterated. “That boy was going places.”

Toby took a break from crying and sniffled. “There’s just so much I wish I could’ve told him. There’s so much he didn’t know.”

“Look,” I said, taking Toby’s hands in mine. “He did know. And he loved you, okay? A lot. So, just remember that.” I paused. “Why don’t I take you to the spot he and I used to go all the time? If you’re up for it, after the service.”

Both Mr. and Mrs. Jahovick stared at their son, hoping for a positive response. Toby groaned. “Only if I can go there whenever I want after this, okay?”

“Got it.” I patted him on the back. “I’m going to go back up to the front and go see how Mom is doing. But I’ll send you the location. Just meet me there, okay?” The rest of the afternoon trudged on, insincere voices bouncing through the corridor when all I wanted was a little peace and quiet.

The woods were a forty-minute walk out of suburban Cherry Falls by car, but Jason and I didn’t mind making the trip out. Once he saved up enough cash to buy a used Toyota his junior year, we would take his car. Regardless of how we got there, though, we typically spent the evening in silence, with a picnic or a book, sometimes with nothing at all. And tonight was the first night I was doing it without him.

Almost as I was about to give up hope, I saw Toby’s dinged up Ford pull into the grass. I took two mediocre beers out of my backpack and sat them on the ground, patting a spot next to me. Toby sat down next to me gingerly.

“So this is the place?” he asked, his voice cracking “It’s gorgeous here.”

“Yeah, Jason really liked being in the trees,” I answered, handing him a bottle. “I can’t believe he never brought you here. Seemed like something he’d want to share with you.”

“Where’d you get these? No way that your mother gave these to you.”

I chuckled. “Stole them from Miss Josie’s fridge when I was helping her clean up her kitchen last week. Something inside me told me I’d need them eventually.” I cracked the cap of my bottle. “Here are the rules here: no talking, no asking questions. That’s it. This place, here? It’s sacred. You can ask me all the questions you want when you drive my lazy ass home.” That triggered a quick laugh from both of us. “But right now, we do what Jason would’ve wanted and just take all of this in, okay?” Toby, with tears welling in his eyes, clinked his bottle against mine and cleared his throat. Nodding, he looked up at the sky, and a look of contentment spread across his face. “He loved you, you know.”

“I know.” I pulled at some grass at the base of the tree. “He loved you, too.” Toby hugged me close and his tears soaked into my scarf. Wherever Jason was, he had to be happy, because amid the thick grey fog, a white ray of sun illuminated the frosted grass at the fall of day, letting us know that we would be okay.

Dream Tide

by Gryphon Ludwig

I wish to float and dream
in luminescent, placid pools

To be bathed in soft moon beams
touched only lightly by the light of day

To drift in stasis outside of time

Waft amongst teal waters
And in the center of magenta-sunset skies

Speaking only in blooms and wisdoms,
only moving to dance and fly

I want to rest, I want to dream, so let me be

Pushed along dream-currents, let me flow beneath the surface

Safe from consequence

Grit and Water

by Hope Sims-Medley

This back built you
This blood nourished the soil at your feet
These arms raised you sun high
Whilst these feet, kept you anchored.
Yet, all were stolen, never offered
Yet you're indignant when told otherwise
Yet you're frivolous with your words of disdain
Yet you suckle from my breast still.
I requested the sacred water you stole
You gave me poison
I requested the culture you vultured
You gave me excuses
I requested the autonomy you "dictate"
You gave me lies
I offered you my pain
You abstained, then reached for my dignity.
I am reclaiming the floodgates
You are not ordained to guard what I deem holy
I am reclaiming my graveyard
You've not been anointed to prophesy my death
I am reclaiming my body
You were never invested in its wellbeing
I am reclaiming my time
You are not destined to determine my future.



Release by Olivia Biggs

Attention

by Iris Marzolf

Mine is a hand-me-down school that shares everything. The gym, health room, and cafeteria are all the same. The floor is cheap blue rubber, ripping where lunch-table legs gouged it. One of the lights is busted from when a kid punted a kickball straight up. His name is Jamie. He sits at the table in front of me, with the rest of the boys in my class. The rest of the boys, and Lizzie. She's the only one who doesn't realize that boys and girls don't sit together in fourth grade. She's on the end, the white surface of table stretching between her and them. Her stringy blonde hair is knotted and clumped. Someone once started a rumor that she had head lice. Everyone in the school had to be checked by the nurse.

The teacher paces. On Mondays and Fridays, he is the gym teacher. On Wednesdays, he is the health teacher. His clothes stay the same no matter what he's teaching: swishy pants and a gray shirt. Sammy says he was a drill sergeant. I don't know what a drill sergeant is, but the way she whispers it means that he's a terrible person.

Today is Wednesday. Mr. Johnston is talking about drugs, and how we shouldn't use them. "Chewing tobacco ruins your teeth," he says. All the boys know about chewing, because of watching their favorite baseball players. At their table, half of them have their heads down. The other half lean on their hands or draw on the table.

All the girls know cigarettes give you yellow nails and bad breath because of watching pretty actresses smoke in movies. Sometimes during lunch, we practice holding pretzel rods and sticks of chewing gum the fancy way. Between two fingers, lips parted. We can almost see the smoke curling.

At our table, Rebecca scribbles on her nails with a pencil. She smirks, wiggling her fingers. It's a new polish, she says. Jaded Lead. She just invented it herself.

"If anyone tells you to sniff something in a paper bag, don't do it," says Mr. Johnston. His pants whisper as he walks. His mustache is gray and bristly, like a janitor's broom.

Jordan has real polish, and chips hers into a neat pile of black flecks. She sighs, and it whisks off the table.

A few girls away, Nicole and Marisa are whispering, even though they might get in trouble. Nicole shaved her legs for the first time yesterday. She cut herself with the razor. It bled and bled. There's a scab now, and she rolls up her pant leg, showing it to Marisa.

Mr. Johnston swishes past. "There are a hundred ways to say 'no,'" he says. He wants us to see who can say "no" the loudest. He tells Jamie to start, who pretends not to hear him. The other kids also pretend. Some of them don't pretend, because they are asleep.

Hymn of the Moon

by Carsyn Smith

I have come to realize that sunsets are
archways into a mourning and deft Earth.
Urban streets become hunting grounds –
growling crass echoes to her ears;
eerie red eyes.

Swimming in this sea, the fish come to feed –
fields upon fields of endless black concrete
caulked with hands reaching from shadows
shan't see us. Artificial lights,
like showers, swing.

She is unyielding: a light in nothing,
null to the very gravity she bends.
Belle, eyes that swallow fireflies,
fight a darkness that dawned in her:
hurt by dulled sheen.

Walking close enough, providing armor,
our coats barely touch: nylon on her wool
would give a warmth that street lights can't.
Gifted by moon's light, only then –
then I see her.

A flower, healing yellow, on her cheek
chiefly blazon the frailty of her skin.
Skiffs could take her from bottom,
but, she's sun grayed; a soft hidden
hymn of the moon.

Totality On Blue Ridge Parkway, N.C.

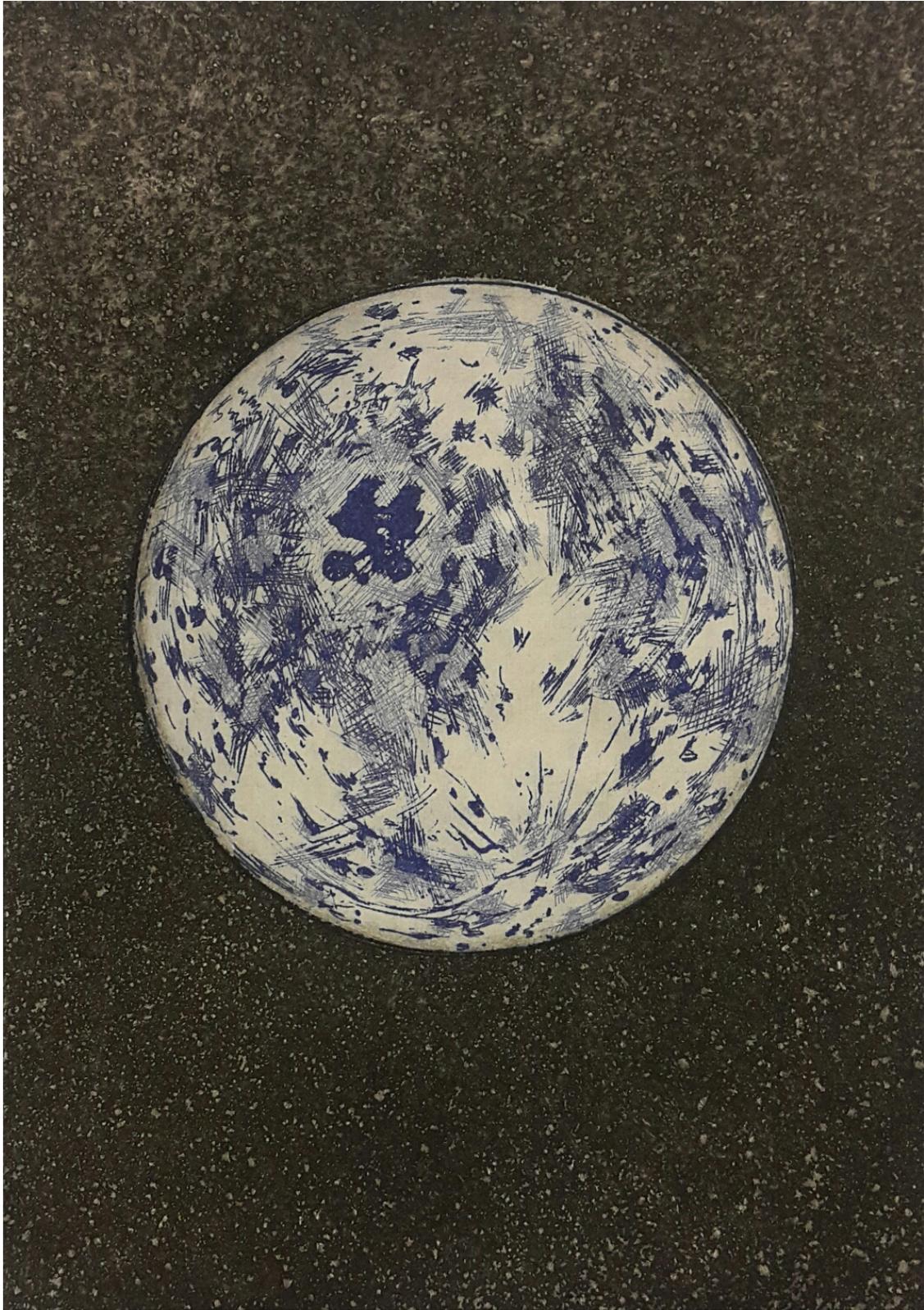
by Alie Davis

The sun extinguished,
reborn humbled
and dressed in moon-shadow.

We lay on grass
dry as cicada husks, yellowed
by time,
and the lateness of summer.

If we look close enough, each of your cuticles
are mirrored among us
on a ground tortured by crescents.

With one pair of Eclipse glasses
we pass between us, I spend more time inspecting
each of your fingers, the size of the moon
and inching closer.



Blue Moon by Yeongbin Byeon

Child's Play

by Rebecca Emerick

Nothing says

I like you

like a shovel full of sand
in my face.

Nothing says

A lot

like a second shovel full
tossed into my already
blinking eyes

Your falsetto teasing

saying

“Cry baby! Cry baby!”

Excuse me if I cry

this love of yours
hurts

The granules that glide
across my iris like crystals.

Through my water works

I can see you laugh

You double over
fall over
While I scream
and run

Not even my mother
can remove
the grit
of your love

Burned Out Eyes

by Jimmy Zawada

Glassy orbs open to a cascade of color.
Cold flames kiss the skin
Of the mesmerized, unmoving form
Watching the falling stars.

Cold flames kiss her skin
Devoured by Autumn.
She watches the falling stars
Wondering where Summer had gone.

Devoured by Autumn,
The maples continued to bleed,
Wondering where Summer had gone,
Having dreams of forgotten green.

Maples continue to bleed
Every wondrous, fiery color in their palette,
Having dreams of forgotten green,
Never again to see.

Every wondrous, fiery color in their palette,
The maples put on their show.
Never again to see,
The orbs let themselves be consumed.

The maples put on their show.
Greens turned to molten stars.
The eyes let themselves be consumed
By the final burning they would ever see.

Greens turned to molten stars,
Her burned out eyes watch in wonder
At the final burning they would ever see.
Autumn once again says, "It's time to eat."

Dysphoria

by Blake Wessner

I want to dig my nails into my skin and slough rotting flesh off bone. I want to hook my fingers under my cheekbones and rip until my skull snaps and pops apart along fissures. There I can dig and dig and dig until I excavate that broken circuit board, smash the misfiring synapses, and grind electrodes into dust. I want to claw at my wrist to find a vein and pull and pull and pull, slowly dragging this hollow husk until I reach those ivory gates and pry and pry until ribs liberate themselves from vertebrae with a devastating crack. Here I can grasp that fluttering beast in my claws and squeeze until its pitiful trembling finally comes to an end. And maybe when I stand back to gaze upon the visceral ruin I have wrought, I can shift through the scrap pile and repurpose and rework. I will be reborn an architect with blueprints for bones and build a house, a temple, a castle, somewhere where home is not just scrawled on the welcome mat but carved into the foundation.

Blackout

by Simon Matela

Richie stalks through the darkened streets just after the lights go out. Even without the streetlights to guide him he has no problem getting around. He knows the handful of alleys and fences he has to navigate like the back of his hand. He pauses at an intersection and looks down the crisscross of streets, trying to make out signs of life in the shadows. Where is everyone else? he thinks, worry starting to grow in the back of his head.

He hops the fence and falls into Eddie's backyard, breathing heavily. He feels a cut on his leg slowly leaking blood, courtesy of a rusty chain-link fence a few houses back. "Fuck, I hope I don't get tetanus," Richie thinks aloud. "That would be a shitty way to go."

Richie looks up as the attic window slides open. Eddie's head pokes out of the darkness, his shaggy black mop of hair barely visible in the moonlight. "Richie?" he says. "Yeah bud, it's me. Come let me in."

Eddie's head slides back into the murky blackness of the house. Richie turns to check over the nearby houses. Mr. Green's house, the Abneys' house and a few others, barely visible from the porch. The blackout claimed them all.

The creak of the door swinging open makes Richie jump. Eddie pokes his head out of the darkness. "Are you coming or not?" he asks.

They make their way through the house by memory alone. "What do you think is going on?" Richie asks.

"I have no idea. I just woke up, and they were gone." replies Eddie.

"Your parents just left without waking you up?" asks Richie, trying hard not to let panic show through his voice.

"They were just gone," Eddie says, "They didn't even leave me a note. Was your Dad with you? Did he send you to get me?"

Richie thinks about his Dad and considers the various places he might be. Drunk

maybe, in one the booths in Daisy's bar or in the alley beside it. He might be off with whichever girl took a liking to him this afternoon. Of course, that would require a new girl to have arrived in town. Most women living here already knew him and hated him.

"Who knows," Richie says, arriving at the attic steps. Eddie climbs up first, Richie following close behind. "Doesn't matter. He can handle himself," Richie explains, more to himself than Eddie. Saying it out loud made him feel a little better, but not much. If this is an extended blackout, who knows where his Dad could be?

"Do you think they're back?" Eddie asks, his voice shrill and nasally. Richie hesitates to answer, not wanting to exacerbate the younger boy's fears but still trying to prepare for the worst.

He and Richie sit down underneath the window, their view of the community obscured by an enormous oak tree. In the pale moonlight, Richie can see Eddie's eyes grow to the size of dinner plates.

"I don't know, buddy." Richie says, trying to sound reassuring.

"What are we gonna do if they're back?" Eddie asks.

Richie sits in silence and shivers as memories of the first time they came flood his mind.

He remembers waking up early that morning, just before dawn. Richie could feel static in the August air wafting through his bedroom window, but he assumed it was the panic of a rapidly approaching school term that woke him up in a cold sweat. He threw on a set of ratty clothes and crept through the house, being especially careful when passing his parent's room. The door was open just a crack, allowing him to peer in. His mom and dad were on the bed, dozing away under their sheets. They looked so peaceful when the sunlight shimmered through the window.

Richie descends into the main hallway of his house, giddy with excitement. He hadn't been up this early in a long time and he planned to use the extended day to his advantage. Alright, first I'll go get Eddie and then we'll get Wyatt and then we'll go down to the creek and we'll catch frogs and maybe go get ice cream, he thought in a wild rush of ideas and hopes that only an especially excitable 12-year-old could have. He opened the front door, being oh so careful not to let it shut any louder than his footsteps had been. When the handle clicked back into place he whipped around, immensely proud of himself for seizing the opportunity. Grinning wildly, he bounded down the

steps and across the street towards Wyatt's house.

In his adrenaline-filled state, he didn't notice how quiet it was. Or the smoke rising from the next block over. Later, Richie would recognize the signs that something was wrong. But all he could think about was ice cream and frogs and how much fun the day was going to be.

It took him a while to get to Wyatt's house, just on the border between the town and the forest, with the biggest backyard in town. He scrambled up the steps two at a time, almost smashing his hand onto the doorbell like he usually does until he realized the sun was just barely up and recoils. He vaulted over the railing and into the sideyard, rapping at Wyatt's window. When Wyatt failed to materialize, Richie dragged the huge green garbage can to the window and turned it over, climbing on top of it. He peered into Wyatt's darkened bedroom, hands cupped over his eyes so they adjusted faster. Although he saw nobody, Richie knew Wyatt had to be in there somewhere. Unless Wyatt had forgotten to mention a family trip, there was no reason he wouldn't have been dozing away a perfectly good morning. Ignoring common sense, Richie opened the window and slid into the house. The smell hit him before his eyes had fully adjusted. An awful, sickly sweet scent. Richie couldn't fully place it, something between a pile of dead leaves and rotten apples. Creeping farther into the room, he began to slip. He stuck his arms out to catch himself, instead planting his hands in a thick liquid leaking from under the door. His heart skips a beat when he recognizes the substance. Blood? Oh fuck, this is blood. "Wyatt?" Richie whispers, his heart almost beating out of his chest. He heard movement from out in the hall, mere feet from where he was doubled over. "Wyatt? Is... is that you?" he asked, praying someone, anyone would respond. Richie froze when he heard the slithering on the other side of the door, slowly coming closer to Wyatt's room. Richie wasted no time in diving out the window. He crashed onto the lawn, scrambled to his feet, and bolted off towards home. This time around he saw the smoke and heard the sirens. Not that it mattered.

Richie turns to Eddie and says, "We need to find your parents."

Eddie's brow furrows in confusion. "They always told me to stay put when I didn't know where they were." Richie grabs his arm.

"Look around. This isn't the department store. We aren't in grade school. This isn't the schoolyard and there are things far worse than Billy Hatcher lurking around

out there,” Eddie looks around desperately as Richie walks towards the stairs. Richie looks back at him.

“Come on then. The faster we get going the faster we’ll find them.” He grabs Eddie’s hand, feeling it quake with fear.

“Don’t worry. I won’t leave you until we find them,” he says, leading Eddie into the darkness.

I Prefer the Darkness

by Abby Young

I prefer the Darkness.
She's gentle and soft,
tickles my skin like a wide, flossy feather,
whispers in my ear,
swirls through the air in currents,
washing over me with cool and friendly caress,
blooming every pinprick of light into a sun
drawing every living thing to a standstill.

She's the oldest lullaby,
Darkness,
since the dusk of time
and the light of day went fading,
she was there
to sing the sunflowers to sleep,
to draw the owls out to join her harmony.

The Sun
is avarice, cloying,
drinking away the darkness so that he bleeds brighter,
blinding the sky with his proud and angry glare,
bruising it blue and red,
but Darkness, so generous,
she dances amongst the moon and stars,
not to swallow their light but to coax their glow outward,

Outward.

Even as the world is sleeping
the night will go on singing,
and singing
and when you find yourself waking
you listen



Slipstream by Jay Margolis

Afterword

after Mary Oliver

by Amy Wain

Meanwhile the world goes on.
You need to eat – sugary cereal and apples,
Peeling the stickers off like scabs.
You need to sleep – borrowed quilts and afghans
Soften the carpet but don't quite keep out the chill.
You need to bathe – fumble over unfamiliar knobs,
Choose between lava and ice.
You need to do – something. Scribble questions
In dry erase marker and wonder what happens next.
Because the world goes on, but
It is a new world, and not one you know.
They will hand the old world back to you
In pieces. Run down
The stone path of your new (but not unfamiliar) house
And hold out your arms to receive
Toys, books, blankets, clothes –
But not all of them. Never all of them.
Sort through the boxes and take note
Of what is missing.
Carve their outlines into your mind.
This will have to be enough.

Am Not

by Anniston Bieri

I slumped in the cheap vinyl chair with my cheek clasped into my palm, an elbow planted in the armrest, as flier after flier filled my empty hand.

I have a blurry memory of the counselor, whose name I made a point to forget. I saw him through half-closed eyes — a smear of pink skin and dark hair. He spoke in a deep nasal hum, briefly interrupted by questions that I didn't answer and a new self-care pamphlet finding its place in my hand.

The class bell chimed overhead and I ducked to grab my backpack off of the floor. I raised my head and found a new pamphlet presented in my face, which I took reluctantly. Printed at the top of the pink paper was the title, "Handling Grief like a Man."

The counselor rounds his desk and pulls his office door open for me. With two hefty pats on my back as I passed, he said, "I'll see you tomorrow, Vince." I shifted my backpack onto my shoulder and left with the papers clasped in my hand.

Past the doors of Millvale Middle school, where daffodils grew in newly mulched patches, kids buzzed along the sidewalk to find their buses lined along the curb. I stopped at the garbage can by the door and deposited today's papers, watching them flutter to the bottom like broken wings.

Two girls that I didn't talk to passed a soft "Sorry about your Mom," as they walked by. Stop reminding me. Please. I missed when kids nudged me in class and said that I was funny, told me I needed a haircut, wished me luck before band practice. Then Mom died, and that seemed to be the only thing that mattered about me.

An arm wrapped around mine and Nadia's nose pressed into my shoulder.

"Hey, Vinnie."

A grin took hold of my cheeks. "Hey," I said with a playful push. "Ready to go?"

"Yep," she said as we began along the curb and past the line of buses. "So—"

“What did Mrs. Ferris say about your drawing?” I interjected. “Are you getting that award?”

Nadia blinked, tucking a wisp of black hair behind a dark ear. “No, first place went to a fifth grader in Illinois who drew his baby sister. It was bad, he went way too dark with the shadows.”

“What did you place?”

“Fourth.”

“Fourth?!”

“Mrs. Ferris said that the contest doesn’t usually place older kids in the top ten. I got a gift card though! I’m taking you to Red Robin sometime.”

I chuckled as we strolled alongside the grassy lawns and wooden rail fences. “Still, your drawing is great. I wish I could do something like that.”

“It’s nothing fancy, just a cartoon. I should practice realism.”

“Like where you draw naked people?”

“Ew, no!” she snickered. “I think they do that in the high school though.”

I wrinkled my nose, “Ugh.”

The conversation came to a lull and I searched for something to say, until Nadia asked exactly what I didn’t want to hear, “So how was therapy?”

I sucked in a breath, trying to stifle the annoyance in my voice. “Fine.”

“Do you think it’s helping?”

“No. It doesn’t do anything. I wish they’d leave me be.”

“They can’t help you if you don’t try.”

“I don’t need it. I didn’t ask for it.” A school bus caught up and passed us, throwing a sharp breeze into our faces that whipped our hair and clothes. I wiped my eye.

She knew that I was nearing the end of my fuse, which, recently, has been cut so short that it surprised us both. “Vince,” she said with a tight, cautious voice, “Do you want to talk about it?”

I stitched my lips together, willing the bitter words back down my throat, letting them boil my stomach. I hurried my pace. I didn’t want the anger to leak out. I didn’t want to yell.

Nadia followed silently, her feet falling faster to catch up to my longer strides. I heard her sniff, then again, and when I turned, she was trying to wipe her eyes without me noticing.

I stopped. “Why are you crying?”

“I shouldn’t be,” she said, running her arm along her cheek. Her voice stumbled into a strained whimper, “I shouldn’t cry.”

Nadia missed her too.

I wouldn’t have met her if it weren’t for Mom when she asked me to walk the neighbor girl to school because she was two years younger. Nadia stayed at our house when her parents worked. We’d run in the yard until dinner, eat plate after plate of Mom’s Kabsa until our stomachs were warm, and sleep on the living room floor in a nest of blankets. I remember Mom guiding my hand as we kneaded butter cookies; kissing me on the cheek before school, pinning a barrette into Nadia’s hair before sending her home; sitting between the two of us with a picture book in her left hand, her right drawing shapes into my scalp.

“Now, you’re crying,” Nadia said, rubbing her cheeks.

I wiped my eye and sat on the low wood fence that bordered the curb. “Am not,” I said. Nadia sat beside me, took my hand, and everything hurt all over again.

Elegy for Dirt

by Ahmir Allen

I don't know how to drag love out of the ground,
how to speak to it, how to care for it,
how to document this tenderness
for future generations to study.

I do know how to grieve for it,
how to build shrines to it,
how to lay bouquets at their bases,
how to tend a tree burnt at the roots,
how to leave myself alone in a graveyard.

I know how to water a corpse,
how to arrange dead flowers so they look alive,
how to synthesize life out of some memories,
it's easier than I thought, like shaping clay
and loose ashes into bones,
living, breathing, tending gardens far away.

I know how to get lost in the forest,
how to confuse backwards
for forwards, how to keep running,
and how to trip and tumble
in mid-air like a cartoon.

I know how to mix up the past and the sky
above me, far away, filled
with pretty shiny things like heaven.

I know it all gets old. I know I always fall
back down to the Earth.
When I dig around for that feeling
I'm left clutching dirt.



Robin Heller

Violent Bodies in *Raw*

by Alie Davis

In the French horror film, *Raw*, a girl coming of age struggles with her sexuality and her desires. For her, a sudden hunger for human flesh and her sexual becoming are overlapped and enmeshed into a single entity. Justine is a freshman in veterinary school where she goes through a period of ritualized hazing in order to be accepted in the initiation process. Her sister, Alex, shows her that to refuse initiation comes at great costs. She shows her a collection of old class photos where some students are decapitated (13:47). Justine has many experiences that any teenage girl can relate to: she has crushes, struggles with her body, and feels shame for her desires. In the film, as Justine discovers more about her desires and her body, she transforms into a literal monster as her hunger for human flesh grows stronger. After being coerced by upper-classmen, including her sister, Justine is forced to eat a mysterious meat after living her life as a vegetarian (19:40). Something inside her is brought to the surface after ingesting the meat and her cannibalistic urges are triggered. She undergoes a radical character change, that can be read from “girlhood to womanhood” while subverting a cultural understanding of how girls become sexual beings. Justine experiences struggles with how others perceive her body, and a change in how she perceives other people’s bodies. There is a moment in most people’s lives when they begin to see bodies as sexual; Justine experiences this, but is unable to separate it from her desire to consume flesh.

In Robert King’s article, “A Regiment of Monstrous Women: Female Horror Archetypes and Life History Theory” explores different types of female characters in horror films. The archetype present in the film is titled “Scary Young Girl.” King claims this archetype includes themes of “puberty, blood/red/menstruation, predatory males, demonic (spiritual) possession/character change. Scary young girls are on the cusp of becoming sexual beings” (King 174). Justine plays the role of the “Scary Young Girl” as well as the predatory figure in the film. Justine begins to see her male roommate, Adrien, as a sexual being only after beginning to embrace her new cannibalistic

reality. In one scene, Justine watches Adrien play soccer without a shirt on. The way she is looking at his flesh is supposed to make the audience feel uncomfortable and frightened for him. This is how women feel all the time; that someone is looking at them, not only with the eye of sexual advance, but also with a violent and objectifying eye. It isn't often we see women, especially young women, have power with an objectifying gaze. Justine watches him with great attention, while it is unclear whether she wants him sexually or as a meal. The camera moves close to his skin and we see Justine watching his body. Most women know the feeling of being seen as a "piece of meat" under the male gaze, but as Justine watches him and objectifies him, she is the one put in a position of power and control. Her character is reversing the "male gaze" as she becomes predatory in the most animalistic way.

Dorothy Dinnerstein's *Mermaid and the Minotaur* serve as a theory of gender arrangements in Western culture. She describes the (male) Minotaur as "gigantic... greedy power... insatiably devours live human flesh" (Tong 131). Justine mirrors the male gender arrangement more than the female 'Mermaid' which is seen as "seductive and impenetrable." This theory accurately exaggerates the ways in which males and females are seen to come into their sexualities and their bodies. Justine's cannibal condition may frighten and confuse her, it also grants her a social power most women never have access to.

Girls are taught at a young age to have difficult, and often times violent relationships with their bodies. One aspect of this film that is particularly poignant is that Justine's main tension is between her and her violent relationship with other people's bodies. Topics like eating disorders and body image come up in the film, but in ways that are unexpected and don't leave the girl as the victim to herself and her own undoing. After her high-stakes veterinary program starts to take a real toll on her health, Justine begins to eat her own hair. In a particularly disturbing scene, Justine vomits up long strings of hair in the girl's bathroom. After getting herself together by the sink, a fellow student comes up to her and gently tells her, thinking she is providing her with a helpful tip says, "Two fingers will make it come up faster." This young woman believes she is helping Justine by giving her advice on how to make bulimic tendencies less painful and arduous (38:42). Possibly the most frightening scene in the whole film was right after as the nameless student, alone in the bathroom, smiles at herself in the mirror and

fixes her hair. What makes this scene so disturbing is how the student believes giving someone advice on how to more successfully embrace an eating disorder is actually helpful to another human being. This is reality for many girls and women; that is what makes it so chilling.

Justine's first taste of flesh occurs when her sister, Alex, is concerned about how Justine is presenting herself as a sexual being. She attempts to give Justine a Brazilian wax, believing that still having armpit hair and pubic hair will make her sister seem sexually inexperienced. Alex gets the wax caught on Justine's pubic hair and Justine kicks scissors out of her sister's hands as Alex tries to cut the wax off her sister's skin. Alex then accidentally cuts off one of her own fingers and faints. A crucial moment in the film occurs when Justine tries to stop the blood on Alex's detached finger by licking at the exposed meat, and immediately realizing that human flesh is what she has been needing. She begins by curiously nibbling at the exposed meat, then moves to devouring her sister's finger, her own 'flesh and blood' (44:02 - 46:20).

After discovering her sister, Alex, also has cannibalistic urges, the two are able to discuss it more freely. Justine, unsure how to feed her urges without hurting someone, tries to stop eating human meat. Alex comments on Justine's body, saying it seems as though she has lost weight and says "You better not be anorexic. It's gross." but what Alex really is trying to communicate is that if Justine tries to stop eating human meat, she is more likely to lose control (1:01:24). Between these two sisters, "anorexic" does not directly mean the eating disorder, but refers more to the attempt to withdraw from consuming human flesh. Only a scene later, Justine is in bed trying to sleep, suffering from cold sweats and the shakes, which is common among those who have ingested human flesh. Her infliction in this scene resembles an addict experiencing withdrawal, with violent hallucinations, sweating, and shaking (1:02:03). Human meat is something her body now needs to survive.

Because it is presented in the film as inseparable to her sexuality, she is put in a position where her desire for flesh, both sexually and cannibalistically, must be repressed and controlled. In the chapter of Feminist Thought on "Feminist Critiques and Appropriations of Freud" it is also stated that "a muted female eroticism is one oriented exclusively toward male pleasure" (Tong 132). Most women feel as though if they do not gain some control over their sexuality and their desires, they are inherently putting

themselves in danger. If a woman presents herself as sexually experienced or liberated in any way, and she is attacked or assaulted, she is the one who is blamed. Girls are taught from a young age to mute their eroticism as a tool to keep themselves safe, or at least believed if something were to happen. This erasure of sexuality serves the patriarchy. Justine is put in a position where not only is she forced to control her sexuality as a socially understood consequence of being a woman, she also has to keep herself in control because her sexuality is dangerous to herself and those around her.

Justine's infliction may cause grief and frustration, but it also offers a kind of protection most women do not have access to. One night, as Justine walks down to a loud dorm room on her floor, she discovers some students having a party. As soon as she steps into the doorway, blue paint is thrown on her. An upperclassman grabs a boy covered in yellow paint and pushes them into a closet together, and says "Don't come out until you're green." They are then shut in a room together. The yellow-painted boy tells her they can go slow, but Justine is clearly hesitant and uncomfortable. Since this is part of their hazing and they both have so much at risk, it is unclear if the boy would stop if Justine told him to. She begins to get more comfortable. She embraces the sexually charged situation and begins to lose control, after kissing passionately, she ends up biting a chunk of his lip off. Embarrassed by the scene she caused, she runs back to her dorm (1:04:32 - 1:05:55). It seems once again, Justine is either being punished by her cannibalistic urges for her sexuality, or her hunger is offering her a kind of protection from unwarranted sexual interactions.

Afterwards, she returns to her dorm and engages in intercourse with her male roommate. For her, this sex act is presented as being less about pleasure and sex itself and is more driven by her unfulfilled hunger. As the encounter becomes more passionate, Justine begins to look more animal than human. Her roommate looks uncomfortable as he tries to hold her further from him. He repeatedly tells her to stop trying to bite into his arm and throat. When she reaches a climax during this scene, she holds herself back from hurting him by sinking her teeth into her own arm until blood starts to pool in her mouth (1:08:57 - 1:10:14). By taking the force of her own destructive urges, she is sparing him the other half of her desire for him.

The film explores the question of why girls don't have access to bodily experiences or autonomy without being seen as dangerous, out of control, or not human.

Justine is in constant conflict with her sexuality, her hunger, and the cost of her desires. Her blooming sexuality is inseparable from her cannibalistic urges, creating a kind of cosmic punishment for being a girl becoming sexual. Through societal expectations of women and the female body, it is understood that one must either sacrifice her sexuality and her eroticism, or sacrifice her safety. It leaves one wondering if these learned qualities are necessary to make the transition from “girlhood to womanhood” in Western society; a fear of one’s own body and desires, a kind of self-repression and a self-control where men are not held to the same standard.

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Existential Literature as an Influence on Societal and Personal Values

by Elana Ragan

The love of wisdom, referred to as philosophy, is the process of actively seeking truths regarding concepts such as being, knowledge, and understanding. Dating back to before the works of Plato, philosophy has guided both the individual and collective development of values and systems of belief. From religion to government, philosophy allows humans to question the world around them and the systems into which they are born. Over time, beliefs prove to be fluid and malleable, as they are subjected and threatened by external and internal influences. Ultimately, historical and modern philosophical thought is present throughout society and it both passively and actively works to form our values as an individual and community.

Philosophical thought presents itself in a variety of forms within society and appears either blatant or subtle. Allusions to philosophical thinkers such as Plato, Sartre, and Nietzsche regularly occur in the media, movies, and television shows. Perhaps more abundant are the philosophical implications found in literature – from classic works to more modern pieces. Literary works throughout the ages tackle issues concerning identity and its various intersectional aspects; systems of belief or religion; societal issues, corruption (dystopia), and the ideal society (utopia); the fundamentals of being; debates on consciousness and reality; and more. Literature provides a foreground in which philosophical dialogue can be expressed. Dialogue is the root practice of philosophy – differing from debate or discussion – in that, dialogue encourages a “plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousness, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices,” as Mikhail Bakhtin, a Russian philosopher and literary critic, states about the use of the polyphonic structure in Fyodor Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers*

Karamazov (Dostoevsky and Guigon xi). Inherently, dialogue encourages a more inquisitive environment full of natural wonder – which encapsulates the goal of philosophy – rather than supporting a “right or wrong,” “black or white,” dichotomy; philosophy is fundamentally grey.

Literature as a method of communicating philosophy is an aesthetic approach of understanding the most pressing matters concerning the human existence. While some philosophers utilize a jargoned speech to express topics – often materializing as a muddled, difficult-to-understand, dense examination – other philosophers and literary authors choose to play with form and structure to create more easily consumable works. While translation and republication of older texts contributes to the clarity and literary artistry, Plato’s *Phaedo*, for example, relies on the technique of communicating its philosophical principles through the narrative of Socrates and his followers visiting him before his execution. Additionally, works by Nietzsche, Kafka, and Dostoevsky often rely on experimental forms ranging from more poetic and phrasal collections such as *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*; to fictional prose; to journal-like and abrasive personal assessments of society, such as *Notes from Underground*. Although there are controversial debates on the success of various literary and philosophical blends with their levels of true reader comprehension, the literary text provides two main functions: a breeding ground for philosophical exploration for the author, and the potential for interpretation and influence on the reader’s values and system of beliefs.

One ideology in philosophical thought generated a prolific amount of literary works –existentialism. Existentialism dismissed the long-standing belief that “essence” is at the root of human existence. The concept of essence states that an entity has set attributes or characteristics that constitute its identity; for example, a knife is considered a knife because of its blade – this is the essence of the entity that is known as “knife” – therefore, without the blade, the object would not be considered a knife. Essentialism, thus, coincides with the concept of determinism – the belief that occurrences are pre-determined or set beforehand. Ultimately, essentialism complicates the ideas relating to free will or freedom of choice.

Existentialism, however, opposes the essentialist and deterministic view. Jean-Paul Sartre, a philosopher fundamental to the existentialist movement and author of *Existentialism and Human Emotions*, coined the phrase “existence precedes essence”

(Sartre 13). This phrase envelops the notion of existentialist thought. The fundamental qualities of existentialism stress the individual responsibility placed on one to carve their own path. Despite sounding like an individualistic belief system, existentialism as defined by Sartre, rather, impacts all of society. Sartre stresses that, “our responsibility is much greater than we might have supposed, because it involves all mankind,” which reinforces the notion that all actions have consequences (positive or negative) –that consequences impact not only the self, but also those around the self (Sartre 17). As a result of existentialism’s belief in responsibility of choice, there is an oppositional push away from essentialism’s deterministic quality – aligning existentialism with an inherently freer property. Sartre recognized the immense potential for freedom that existentialism uncovered for humanity; this can either be motivating and awe-inspiring or utterly fearsome.

Collectively, existentialism is considered to be a “philosophy of the self,” because it is centered around the creation of one’s own identity and existence. As a result, existentialism has faced criticism from theists – raising the controversy of whether existentialism is a necessarily atheistic philosophy. Some existentialists, such as Nietzsche, proclaimed that, “God is dead!” thus completely renouncing the validity or necessity of God. Unlike Nietzsche, Kierkegaard – also a formative existentialist – was profusely religious. While the existence of God is a complicated concept for most people, existentialists are mostly concerned with the ability to choose whether or not to believe in a God. Also, that God would not have control over their actions or decisions, but rather simply and only possess the role of creator – truly providing an environment in which free will can flourish.

In literature, the discussion of God’s existence is a central topic for many authors. For Dostoevsky, his works are a playground for religious exploration and a tool for communication to his readers. His novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*, contains much religious contemplation and exploration for the time period – late 17th century Russia. Despite over 100 years passing since its original publication, the novel remains a classic piece of literature. The nested narration technique of Ivan Karamazov’s writing, “The Grand Inquisitor,” is a vital component of the religious discourse as in relation to the climate of Russia. Historically, during the 17th century there was a shift from feudalism toward enlightenment which resulted in a culture shock to some Russian citizens.

As an influx of Western ideologies invaded traditionalist Russia, a divide emerged between the older and younger generations. The older generation placed their energy into “bring[ing] about universal harmony and happiness on earth by applying...Christian philanthropic ideals of achieving heaven on earth” (Dostoevsky and Guigon xiii). This goal opposed that of the younger generation, who were dubbed “nihilists” (in close relation to the soon-to-be existentialists) who “rejected all traditional Christian values and set out to design an ideal society based solely on the principles of mechanistic materialism” (Dostoevsky and Guigon xiii). Ultimately, the younger generation had values more consistent with the existentialist movement – concerning themselves with carving their own paths, rather than placing faith in a predetermined or structured system. While the novel was written before the peak of the existentialist movement, as a reader of today, one can apply such a philosophical lens to interpret the text.

As related to philosophy, Dostoevsky’s character, Ivan Karamazov, constructs a drastic image of the relationship between God and the younger generation of 17th century Russia. Ivan introduces his piece of writing – which he refers to as a “poem” – to his naïve brother Aloysha who throughout the novel has been portrayed as pure, virginal, and holy. In “The Grand Inquisitor,” a dialogue is presented between an elderly cardinal and a reborn-on-earth Christ. In the poem, the cardinal condemns Christ for returning to earth; ultimately, the cardinal tells Christ that he must leave and never return, for Christ would cause harm to the workings of the church. Here, Sartre’s explanation of overwhelming freedom can be seen, as the cardinal shames Christ for giving mankind the “gift” of freedom; he claims that such extensive freedom is not such a gift at all, but rather a crippling burden on the human race. This is expressed as he says, “Thou [Christ] wouldst go into the world...with some promise of freedom, which men in their simplicity and their natural unruliness cannot even understand, which they fear and dread – for nothing has ever been more unsupportable for a man and a human society than freedom” (Dostoevsky and Guigon 25). Such a statement reveals the struggle that humankind endures as a result of their freedom, yet a feeling of freedom is necessary for mankind to feel a sense of control – they must have the power of choice to relinquish their freedom.

Following the idea of mankind and a willingness to abandon freedom brings the argument to the idea of community. The cardinal explains the work of the church as

creating stability for the people; he explains that mankind has an inherent desire “to find someone to worship” (Dostoevsky and Guigon 27). Additionally, mankind must agree to worship one central figure, rather than everyone choosing their own image to worship – therefore, there is a strong connection between mankind and its need for unity and togetherness. The argument follows the temptations of Satan – who ultimately becomes linked with the practices of the church – yet the nature of the cardinal’s work seems to have the best interests of the earthly people in mind. He expresses a deep wish to make mankind’s time on Earth pleasant and tolerable, since he believes that no one can truly worship Christ fully or correctly and is therefore condemned regardless.

Through Ivan’s discourse in “The Grand Inquisitor,” many questions arise surrounding what God’s true role is in society. Particularly, is “God” a necessary entity for the sake of maintaining the functionality of society, or could humans learn to put their immense freedom to a positive and unburdened use without God? Ivan’s theories lie mostly with the progressive Western ideologies and these can be compared with shifts away from the “common” theology of Christianity in America as of the 21st century. As noted in *The Existential Imagination*, a collection of sections from classical works that contain existential connections, Ivan is willing to “admit the actual existence of God, and even grant that all creation moves toward an ultimate harmony, but he cannot accept the ways of a Deity who includes in his scheme the suffering of the innocent” (Dostoevsky and Guigon 55). This shift away from religious identity is also noticeable in present day America. Older generations are more tied to their religious and fundamentalist values, while the younger generations are lending themselves toward a more atheistic (or at least agnostic) belief system. While this observation is not true in all cases, it does justify the cyclical nature of philosophy. Much like in the existentialist wave, society continues to ponder the meanings of community, moral and just values, and God in society – with literature acting as a catalyst and binding agent for the process.

Without doubt, Ivan’s discourse is controversial; it sparks dialogue in the novel between characters and makes readers think deeply about their own personal relationship with God and community. Such an introspective analysis allows for the generation of original thought and open philosophical dialogue with others. Ultimately, philosophy is a connection between historical beliefs and thoughts with society of today.

Arguments like Dostoevsky's (Ivan's) surface ideas and thoughts related to community and the purpose of government. Issues such as state and church are also brought into question. Democracy is an especially fascinating subject in comparison with *The Grand Inquisitor*, because as America's slogan goes: "by the people, for the people." Democracy preaches freedom and control, but in light of recent elections, some Americans may argue that their freedom feels limited (not by a higher force, but rather by the constructs that America has created). As a result, existentialism in relation to culture and society is a fascinating lens to examine human behavior. Literature allows philosophers to gain a retrospective and contemporary understanding of thoughts and feelings in relation to cultural and societal occurrences – just as Dostoevsky had influences from the political and religious climate of late 17th century Russia.

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Ocean by Yeongbin Byeon

Mother (Nature): Conflicts in Charlotte's Web

by Rachel Geffrey

E. B. White's 1952 classic *Charlotte's Web* explores the relationship between children, gender, and nature. The novel follows Wilbur and Charlotte on a journey of survival that starts with eight year old Fern Arable. Fern's mother presents commentary on gender roles and children's interactions with nature. Mrs. Arable stands in for societal expectations and gender roles in her interactions with and reactions to her children's behavior with nature.

Fern has some freedom to interact with nature, but only within certain contexts. After first saving Wilbur from slaughter, her mother supports her: "Mrs. Arable found a baby's nursing bottle and a rubber nipple. She poured warm milk into the bottle, [...] and passed it to Fern" (White 5-6). Fern cannot care for Wilbur while in school, so Mrs. Arable steps up to "[give Wilbur] a feeding around noontime each day" (White 8). This interaction between Fern and nature (Wilbur) is condoned by Mrs. Arable largely because the behavior fits traditional gender roles. Fern is filling a mothering, nurturing role in caring for "her baby" (White 9), feeding him, walking him, even nestling him in a blanket in her doll's carriage (White 10). In doing so, she is training for motherhood, something Mrs. Arable finds palatable and even preferable. She is also essentially removing Wilbur from nature. He is still an animal, but by treating him like a human baby or doll he is no longer a threat to ladylike behavior. The behavior is then doubly approved because she is using nonhuman, living elements of nature as a tool without soiling herself in the process.

Once Wilbur is moved to the barn, however, the blurred lines become distinct: Wilbur is a pig, Fern is spending time with nonhuman living creatures, and such behavior is not okay. Fern is no longer Wilbur's primary caregiver, and has left the motherly role of Mrs. Arable so appreciated. Wilbur is also in a different environment so he

cannot be as easily separated from nature as a pig or his unrefined, unladylike environment. Mrs. Arable grows concerned and visits Dr. Dorian: “It didn’t seem natural for a little girl to be so interested in animals,” she thinks (White 107). Such a characterization essentializes gender roles and limits girls’ accessibility to the natural world, yet she uses “natural” to argue against Fern’s interaction with nature. This emphasizes the line between human, animals, and nature – people are not animals and are not part of nature. Ironically, Mrs. Arable was the one to suggest that Fern “visit [Wilbur] as often as [she likes]” at her uncle’s farm in the first place, before her distaste for her daughter’s affinity for the natural world manifests (White 12). As Richard Louv notes, “Whatever shape nature takes, it offers each child an older, larger world separate from parents” (7). The interaction with animals and nature not only removes Fern from traditional gender roles, but also distances her from Mrs. Arable’s ability to reinforce those roles. Dr. Dorian assuages Mrs. Arable’s concerns, but does so problematically. Instead of arguing that nature is good for children, he notes that nature is fine, even wonderful, but not interesting enough to keep her attention: “I doubt that she spends her entire life in Homer Zuckerman’s barn cellar. How about boys — does she know any boys?” (White 111). Dr. Dorian brings the almost positive exchange back to heteronormative gender roles. It is perfectly acceptable for a girl to engage with nonhuman living beings as long as she returns to the domestic sphere. Nature is reduced to a temporary distraction rather than an important influence. This is reinforced when, after spending the day with Henry Fussy, Fern says, “I had the best time I have ever had anywhere or any time in all of my whole life” (White 143).

Fern’s brother Avery garners no such worry. It is perfectly acceptable to Mrs. Arable and Dr. Dorian that Avery “gets into poison ivy and gets stung by wasps and bees and brings frogs and snakes home [...] He’s fine” (White 111-112). Where Fern is pushed into feminine roles, Avery has the freedom to explore nature, even if it results in physical injury. Boys are essentialized as rough and tumble and are given license to engage with the natural world. When Fern tries to do likewise, such behavior is cause for concern.

Charlotte’s Web pushes the boundaries of youth gender roles but fails to push enough when the conclusion features a return to those structures. Nature is safe when taken out of context, but threatens traditional femininity when on its own terms. Males

are privileged in their uninhibited access to nature and are upheld in their role in removing women from nature. Still, *Charlotte's Web* challenges the norms of its time and helps advance the acceptance of children's interactions with nature. Most characters are comfortable with and even assured by Fern's activity with the natural world. Nature does not do lasting harm to children; rather, it helps them. By developing a positive relationship with nature in their youth, children gain awareness and regard that benefits both them and the natural world later in life.

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Margret Atwood's *Surfacing* and Our Role in the Ecological World

by Sidony Ridge

Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* explores the relationship between human and non-human life while challenging the capability of coexisting with the natural environment. The unnamed narrator's reflections on the environment around her arouse the ethical issue of abandoning one's responsibility to their natural environment in order to become part of it outside of human society. She ventures into an introspective experience that causes her to reevaluate the connections of society and nature. Through this self-reflection, she undergoes an interbody transformation from human to non-human, which creates a connection to the natural environment spiritually and emotionally, and later creates a disconnection from her own body and from human social conduct. She reaches a level of realization and healing, emerging back into society to acknowledge her role as a human being in the ecological world.

The story begins with the narrator setting out from the city, introducing notions of the "wilderness quest," which implies the use of the natural environment as a tool for self-discovery (Tolan 39). In her case, this self-discovery involves the gradual identification with the non-human world. Upon returning to her childhood home in a wooded lakeside cabin to search for her father, the narrator pieces together memories of what the forest and lake used to be like. "The trees will never be allowed to grow that tall again...the trees they're cut on have grown swollen edges around the wounds, scar tissue." (Atwood 43). Her return triggers many emotional attachments to the wilderness that blurs the boundaries between the ecological world and the human one. Her description of the trees having wounds and scar tissue implies their ability to feel pain, relating it to human pain. Her narrative asserts the connection between "woman and land," which "reinforces the need to overcome the division between human and nonhuman worlds" (Serpa 140). The narrator deconstructs exclusive boundaries between

human and wildlife, because she sees that the significance of their unity corresponds to her shifting identity.

Her attachment to the wildlife is not exclusive to the forest and lake but spreads to animal life as well. In the first fishing trip with Joe, David, and Anna she passively hooks a frog to the line to use for bait, acknowledging that it squeaks as she does so but giving no further thought to it (Atwood 61). Her apathy towards the use of that animal changes further in the novel with the second fishing trip. She releases the frog trapped in the jar, all the while contemplating human's use of them for experiments, "pinned flat as a doily and slit open" describing "the detached heart still gulping slowly like an Adam's apple, no martyr's letters on it," (Atwood 121). She has become disgusted with the indifference towards animal life, which she was culpably a part of. Her shift from indifference to empathy begins in chapter nine, when the narrator compares her own body with those of frogs. The connection between human and non-human life is once again reaffirmed. "I'm not sure when I began to suspect the truth, about myself and about them, what I was and what they were turning into...I hold inside it the clues and solutions and the power for what I must do now." (Atwood 75). The ambiguity of this passage illustrates the confusion over her identity and her purpose in the ecological world. As a human she feels guilt over her role in the destruction of natural life, thus desiring to separate herself from human society. She feels a transformation beginning to unfurl, recognizing "the evidence" of her identity "only needing to be deciphered" in order to reveal her true purpose (75). This further deconstructs the division between human and nature, compelling her to feel empathy for other life forms. From here she progresses her quest to transform into a non-human entity, simultaneously separating herself from human society.

As the search for her father continues, the narrator's internal metamorphosis begins to alter her perceptions of the search's purpose. She considers the spiritual and mystical realm of the natural environment, which compels her to connect to their realm.

That was what the pictures had meant then but their first meaning was lost now...I had to read their new meaning with the help of the power. The gods, their likenesses: to see them in their true shape is fatal. While you are human; but after the transformation they could be reached. "First I had to immerse myself in the other language" (Atwood 159).

The pictures as well as the rock paintings become more than just childhood drawings and academic sketches but messages and clues to her father's own spiritual visions and the realm of the gods. Tania Aguila-Way similarly argues that "the narrator's fantasies of animal incorporation are bolstered by" this sudden discovery of these hidden messages and their meanings (9). The only way to truly decipher them, however, is to harness the power of the gods, which can only be done by embodying a non-human form. From her emotional journey, which connected her to the natural world, she starts to undergo the spiritual journey that will complete the transformation and initiate her into the realm of the gods.

This embodiment for her involves the total immersion into the natural landscape and deconstructing any notions of human within herself. The first evidence of her undergoing this deconstruction is when she has sex with Joe under the moonlit night sky. She is "impatient, pleasure is redundant, the animals don't have pleasure" (Atwood 165). For her, this moment is purely for procreation, feeling it necessary to complete the natural cycle of life that had been prevented before, but under the natural setting of the forest and the moon. These are her first steps in her initiation and transformation, after which she begins "shedding her human skin and absorbing the spirit of the brutalized heron" (Aguila-Way, 9). She feels her body changing the same way the heron does as it decays, "the creature in me, plant-animal, sends out filaments in me; I ferry it secure between death and life, I multiply" (Atwood 172). By this time, she has completely hidden herself and run to avoid human contact and existence. As Fiona Tolan states, the narrator makes "an attempt to escape into isolation and innocence," innocence of the ecological world and away from her human form, which to her symbolizes apathy and trauma towards the natural environment (41). Her humanity had created an indifference to the wildlife and the destruction of the trees around her, which she feels emotionally and spiritually connected to. Her escape both isolates her and breaks that link to the toxicity of human conduct so that she can fully embody her non-human form.

She grounds herself in survival instincts while also gradually restricting her ability to utilize the tools necessary to live on her own in the forest. Her ability to fully incorporate her spiritual non-human form is guided and regulated by the rules of the gods. "I have become hungry. The food in the cabin is forbidden, I'm not allowed to go back into that cage, wooden rectangle" (Atwood 183). The rules accumulate gradually

to strip away any ties to the man-made. She burns papers from books, tears the sheets of the bed and her own clothes, then restricts any access to the whole cabin. The only source of warmth she affords herself thus far is a blanket, and the only sustenance still allowed is the garden, which is eventually forbidden as well.

These limitations cause her physical form to deteriorate from lack of food and warmth, as well as affect her psychological stability. She completes her transformation, finally immersed in her non-human form, “ice-clear, transparent...a tree leaning”. She is able to see within the spirit realm, to “them” (Atwood 187). However, once she has reached the realm, she understands that she will never be able to fully be a part of it. From here she slowly returns back to her human body, accepting her existence in society. The “narrator’s breakdown” psychologically and physically is “a breakthrough,” because she gains “strength from the wilderness in order to make a new start,” healing her of her past and her fears of a human existence (Atwood 144). Atwood is quoted from an interview saying “[the narrator] is released from that obsession” of finding these spirits, and when “she can’t enter the world of the dead” she accepts her position in the human world and the ecological one (quoted in Rosenberg). “I have to recant, give up the old belief that I am powerless and because of it nothing I can do will ever hurt anyone...I reenter my own time” (Atwood 197). She realizes the impossibility of abandoning her human connection, but instead of feeling more helpless with this circumstance she finds solace and new power in reemerging.

The deterioration she undergoes before this realization represents the limitations of coexisting and surviving in the natural environment without human application. Balance is necessary between both worlds, which the narrator discovers by the end of the novel. Her last observation illustrates this poetically, stating “the lake is quiet, the trees surround me, asking and giving nothing” (Atwood 199). She understands she cannot connect to the ecological world the way she previously thought because as a human, her role is to live in harmony with it rather than within it. They are only a presence to acknowledge and learn from but they are not responsible for her life.

The novel’s ending creates a finality to the narrator’s regeneration. She accepts her circumstances and acknowledges her role as a human being without reestablishing barriers between that world and her own. From the beginning her observations noted the deeper inter-connection of human and non-human life. To her, the boundaries

between them are not so stark as humans believe because they are dependent upon one another. Her slow transformation from this knowledge identifies her emotional and spiritual connection to the ecological world, and her deeper fear of human indifference to it. She therefore undergoes a journey to connect to the spiritual realm of the natural environment, shifting her own form into that of a plant-animal being in order to fully realize who she is. This is a particularly harsh experience for her because of how much she limits her ability to survive. However, the shift causes a realization that it will never be possible to avoid her human self. In surfacing, she gives up the fear and rejection of her human form, which allows her to embrace her identity and acknowledge the significance of the connection and disconnection of human and non-human life. In her new circumstances she decides to make a new start, establishing nature as an ally rather than as her authority.

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