The Nassau Literary Review



The NASSAU LITERARY REVIEW

Spring 2020

"The Virtual Issue"

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Cover art "LET YOUR HAIR FLOW LIKE WATERFALLS OVER THE MOUNTAIN THAT IS YOUR BODY" by Victoria Pan.

Dear Readers,

Spring 2020 is a semester without precedent in the history of Princeton. Because of the COVID-19 crisis, many of us have had to pack up and leave campus with little time to say goodbye. Others, with homes across borders, have been forced to stay with little indication as to when a return home might be possible. Some, with summer positions cancelled and no safe home to return to, have been thrust into housing insecurity, having to negotiate on short notice how to afford to remain on campus over the summer.

The Spring 2020 issue is also unprecedented in the history of the *Nassau Literary Review*. It will be the first issue published in full online (though eventually, we still intend to go to print). For this reason, we are titling this issue "The Virtual Issue," highlighting not only its launch on a virtual platform, but also the many ways in which *Nass Lit* staff collaborated virtually to bring the issue to life. This second half-semester was one experienced almost entirely online, and though we are apart, we've done our best to stimulate learning and togetherness. Still, a semester that was only virtually a semester pales alongside a physically present one.

Although our submission period ended before most students were required to leave campus, the work you will see here resonates eerily with our present experiences as well as with the concept of "virtuality." Many of these pieces struggle with a deep sense of "almost" as they navigate daily life and relationships, searching for a completeness that cannot be found. Many depict characters wandering and returning, as if on difficult journeys, as in Kadence Mitchell's "glimpses, toward knowing and unknowing," and Thomas Dayzie's "borne back." In others, characters struggle with identity, wandering within themselves. As we travel across this issue, we find characters who transform into foxes (Natalia Orlovsky's "Fox Studies"); who gaze out of train windows for answers (Ayame Whitfield's "stop me if you've heard this one before"); who grapple with family (Meera Sastry's "blizzard baby"); who struggle with grief (Tristan Collins's "Porch Light"). Where are we going? Away from love? Toward it? Back home, to the self? Or into a new landscape entirely?

Beyond this issue, our staff has been hard at work documenting the experiences of this pandemic. From our bedrooms and dorm rooms, we reviewed the art, books, movies, TV shows, and music that have kept us sane for our column "What We're Loving: Quarantine Edition." We also began a new series, "Shelter in Place," for student writing and art in response to the COVID-19 crisis. We hope you will find those at nasslit.com.

Perhaps this new virtual world may never be enough. But art has a way of transcending the bounds of an often fraught reality. During this period of instability, it has helped us return to some semblance of ourselves.

Shira Moolten and Julia Walton
Editors-in-Chief
THE NASSAU LITERARY REVIEW

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*Ekphrastic competition winner.

stop me if you've heard this one before

AYAME WHITFIELD

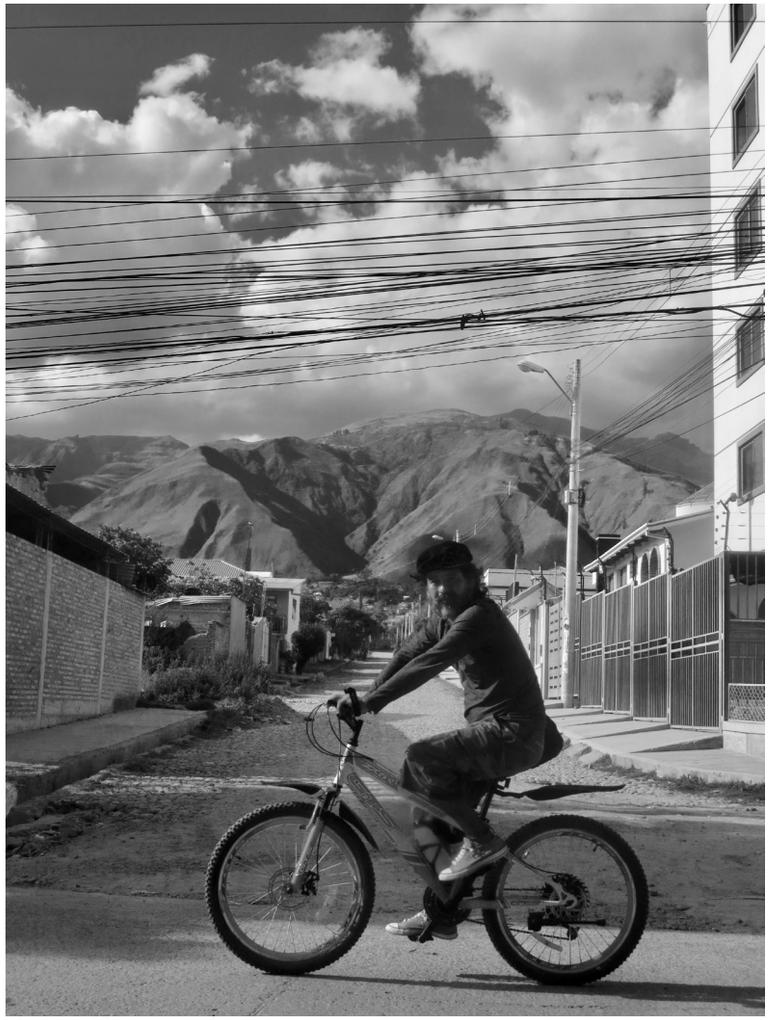
the robin perched on the train tracks points to
my placeless heartache and says, how much
of this love is summer and how much is truth?
i'm pressing a lifetime of shed wishes to sidewalks
that flood like lungs, turning corners expecting
to see a ghost of the girl i thought i wanted
to be. to love. the robin in the uncut grass says,
but isn't the memory-pain satisfying? and don't you
like to think of the ache that meant you were real?
maybe every intimacy made you cry, but maybe
that was truth, after all.

i'm up to my knees in the shallows and the sky
is one long scar reopening with thunder, raining
on my bare shoulders like pity. i'm homesick like
a broken compass, pointing to any north i can find.
my heart and this rust-feathered city hemming
its old seams, both of us too small for our own
skins, searching for a place in our bodies to call
our own. but even if i remember the feeling of falling,
does that mean it ever happened? memories and
subway maps can mean anything we want them to.

i thought you knew that, the robin says. the train
window is a wound letting in light. the city drowns
behind me and august heat rises off the lake, makes
the air a rotting curtain slipping from its window.
i'll come back, i tell the robin. wait for me.

Haku

ANNA HILTNER



Haku means "let's go" in Quechua.

Collaborative Playlists and "Gwan"

REBECCA NGU

My queer friends and I have joked that quarantine has appropriated lesbian culture and made it mainstream; everyone is yearning, texting exes, flexing their baking skills, navigating long distance relationships and virtual intimacies. I think about different forms of "touch" (touch as care, attention, presence) that are being rediscovered or relied upon in deeper ways. I think about the collaborative playlist that I share with my friend. We made it within the first few days of quarantine; both of us are suckers for sapphic memes about yearning, so it felt like a natural extension of our friendship. It's a quarantine playlist, but we didn't have expectations beyond that.

At this point, we've accumulated 2 hours and 46 minutes worth of shared music and counting. The sounds and names are eclectic but common by the moods they evoke—presence, warmth, heartache, desire. I listen to the playlist every day, often before falling asleep, and my favorites change with the day, but my favorite right now is "Gwan" by Rostam. It is a light and airy song whose gaze is decidedly retrospective, glancing backwards at experience returning in dream form, shimmering in new light, uncanny in its displacement from the original. I like the formulation of life returning as a dream because it evokes both memories of the past and speculations



Courtesy of genius.com

for the future. It is a nostalgic song, but it renders the nostalgia of the past and FOMO of the conditional (how might our semester have ended?) into an effervescent lightness, a dream that we can live together. The bright and lively strings surging the song forward no doubt help to create this hopeful mood, but there is a distinctive sense of human connection that powers through the song. In "Gwan" and his album *Half-Light* at large, Rostam consistently feels like he is speaking in direct address, to you—you you: "And sometimes I laugh / when I think about how well you know me." After the dreams comes laughter, not from a nostalgic yearning for the past or hope in an envisioned future, but the mutuality of presence, of sharing this experience alone, together, that makes our memories feel lighter, like we might float away.

Honey

JEREMY PULMANO

after Alexander Kim

drive slow & full like honey in tea. drive mezzo forté like
rain patter that blends with the click of turn signals. drive
cool like how the asphalt air tastes with one hand on the wheel,
& the other out the open window, the wind your fuel. drive
loops like commercial-free! radio pop, like songs long become
white noise, that you listen to anyway. drive steady, drive 15
in a 30, however the song goes. then drive it down to 0, don't
drive. like you & I wanted the pause, to feel presence like
negative space in dust. & have you ever watched the
raindrops fill a windshield, from start to finish? drive slow
& full like honey in tea.

Fox Studies

NATALIA ORLOVSKY

On the day that Miles turns into a fox, I wake up sneezing. I lay curled on my side, facing the nightstand. According to my alarm clock, it is 6:18 a.m. I switch on the lamp on my nightstand. I think, *God, who gets allergies in November*, and then I notice that the topography of our mattress feels all wrong, and I think, *Where is Miles*, and then I roll over. For several seconds, I stare at the arctic fox on my boyfriend's pillow. The arctic fox on my boyfriend's pillow stares back. I try to build a reasonable sentence in my head. It falls apart. I blink it back together. I need to say something, but for some reason all I can think is, *Well, at least it's not seasonal allergies*.

"How'd you sleep?" I ask, finally. The fox doesn't say anything.

I get up. I make coffee. I take antihistamines. I pour milk into two cereal bowls on autopilot before I catch myself. The fox watches me from our bed, his ears tracking my movements like lazy, triangular satellite dishes. I Google, *what do I feed a fox*. The Internet suggests chicken, tinned dog food, and maybe some cheese or fruit on special occasions. I catalogue the relevant contents of our refrigerator—leftover peach cobbler, a chicken sandwich Miles snagged from a work lunch, and three wedges of spreadable cheese. I stick a post-it to the freezer door: *Grocery shopping ASAP. Also PetSmart?*

"Should I call in sick," I ask the fox, "or will you be fine for a couple of hours?" He flicks the tip of his tail, indifferent. I feed him another cheese wedge and leave the cobbler sitting out on the edge of the coffee table. On my way out the door, I hesitate. The fox has moved to the armchair. There's something in his stillness that's so Miles it almost hurts. "I'll be home soon," I say, "I love you." And then I step outside as fast as possible, before his silence catches up to me.

***

On the day that Miles turns into a fox, the bus I take to work comes seven minutes late. I stand at the stop and stare at my reflection in a shop window. I tell myself: it's okay. These things happen. They must happen all the time.

Ji-hoon is already at his desk by the time I get there. He is labeling DNA gel scans in fine-tip red marker and drinking what looks like a half-gallon of black coffee. Ji-hoon is a postdoc, a self-proclaimed insomniac, and (according to Jenny) an all-around "friendly lab gremlin." Sometimes, he disappears for days on end. Occasionally, he pulls sixteen-hour shifts and we find him napping in the department mailroom. I wave hello. His gaze flickers over me, contemplative. He nods once and turns back to his papers.

I check my email. I skim three abstracts. I forward one of them to Miles, for when he turns back into a person. I do not Google *arctic fox behavior*, or *woke up with a fox this morning???*, or *boyfriend transformation help*. I plate mutant yeast colonies on nutrient deficient media and do not imagine the fox licking three-day-old peach cobbler straight out of the Tupperware. I pour several protein gels to run in parallel. I label seventy-two Eppendorf tubes and color-code all of them.

Jenny takes one look at my army of culture tubes and asks me if something is wrong. She is perched on the edge of the heating unit. Gusts of warm air lift her hair in golden clouds. "No," I say, "of course not." She can probably tell I am lying. She is hard to navigate around these days.

My cells have begun to run out of nutrients. I split all eight of my lines into fresh culture plates. I do not think about how last night Miles did the dishes while I showered, or how afterwards, when we went to watch half a John Oliver episode, he shrank into the frame of our couch and missed most of the punchlines. I count out centrifugation times in my head. I do not think about warning signs.

***

In the week following the transformation, I take out subscriptions to twelve zoological journals and set up text notifications for every fox-related keyword I can think of. I read about kit-rearing behavior, wintertime metabolic shifts, and the ways in which foxes apparently interact with Earth's magnetic field. There is no precedent in the literature for my situation.

I also register for a vulpine enthusiast internet forum, which promises to deliver daily fox facts to my email inbox. I read them out loud to the fox every morning, and he snuffles politely in response. Arctic foxes' bones are 30% lighter than dogs'; their paws are meant to spread their weight out like snowshoes; the weird chuckling sound they make is called a gekker. This last one makes me smile, if only because it feels kind of like a bad Geico product placement attempt. Apparently, foxes gekker all the time, in a broad range of social contexts, but the fox who naps in my boyfriend's favorite armchair has never gekkered in my presence. I am not sure what to make of this anomaly.

"Did you know," I ask the fox, "that you guys are the only tree-climbing members of the dog family? That's pretty cool, right?" From his perch on the sun-warmed windowsill, the fox yawns. I am in our bedroom, building a fox-sized nest out of blankets. The fox is not big on late-night comedy, but can be persuaded to tolerate our pre-transformation tradition of Monday night Daily Show re-runs if kept suitably comfortable. I am not sure if his reluctance is a function of taste—even in human form, Miles had mixed feelings about Jon Stewart—or merely of frames per second. There are lots of studies on canine visual acuity and flicker fusion, but as far as I'm aware, there is no fox-specific literature on the issue.

***

The weekend before Christmas, it starts snowing and doesn't stop for two days. The Chemical Biology Department cancels its annual Non-Denominational Holiday Extravaganza, which spares me from having to fabricate an excuse and from Jenny's inevitable disappointment. The fox stands painfully still on the back of the armchair and watches the wind lift snow in sheets of white. His claws dig into the upholstery. I want very badly to make him—laugh? gekker?—or at least to smooth the uneasy stiffness of his shoulder-blades. "I think maybe we should go walk around," I offer. "If you'd like to." He turns to look at me, as though surprised. In the five weeks since he became the fox, we have not ventured outside of our apartment. By weekend standards, it's early. There are only three other passengers in our subway car. One of them, an older woman with horn-rimmed glasses, gives me a look, like kids these days and their exotic pets. "He's a husky," I tell her, "just kind of smallish." The fox makes a sharp huffing noise. If I didn't know better, I might call it indignation.

The Boston Common is basically one large snowbank. I brush off a bench and sit down. "So, um," I say. In the face of this much white, I feel suddenly very small. "This is nice, right?" The fox glances up from nosing at the snow. He opens his mouth wide and pink, and the sound seems to come out of nowhere. It's this weird, high-pitched chitter, like laughter left to rattle at the bottom of a well. The gekker goes on for maybe ten seconds, and then the fox takes off running in a blur of white on white.

I freeze. I forget to exhale.

The fox is gone.

I can hear my pulse frothing up inside my ears. The fox is gone. The fox is gone. I line up words for the things I am feeling like molars in my mouth. I spell them forwards, and backwards, and forwards again, but I can't get them out fast enough, the letters of panic climbing down to obstruct my esophagus. The air rises around me in a ragged howl, and then the fox is skidding up in front of me, and it's only when the wail stops that I realize the sound was me, and that I am crying. My fox is looking up at me. His eyes are sad, and guilty, and endlessly dark. "It's okay," I am saying. "It's okay." I am not sure which one of us I'm trying to reassure. The fox rests his head on the toe of my shoe. The weight of it feels strangely comforting. In the sprawling, we watch the outlines of early morning joggers drift past us like ghosts.

***

After Christmas, we fall back into a kind of evening routine. I reheat hasty meal preps for myself and low-sodium chicken patties for the fox. I switch on all the lights in the kitchen. We eat sitting on the rug. As altitudinal compromises go, it's our best available option. I ask the fox, *how was your day*, and he doesn't answer. Instead, he meticulously transfers half a dozen bite-sized pieces of his dinner to my plate, stares pointedly at me until I've eaten them, and refuses my attempts to feed him bits of meal prep in exchange. It's a very Miles thing to do.

I tell the fox: Ji-hoon came down with a cold last week but keeps showing up to work regardless. Most of us have pretended not to notice his discreet sniffles, though a biohazard sticker did materialize on the corner of his desk sometime today. Jenny has denied involvement, but I think she's lying. (I do not say that I am worried about Ji-hoon, or that the tiredness he carries in the set of his shoulders makes me think of Miles in the weeks before he became the fox. Last night, I do not tell him, I dreamt that Ji-hoon had turned into a single yeast cell, and that I had to pour caffeine-infused agar plates for him to proliferate on.)

I tell him: I told Jenny about the transformation. She sends her love and offered to knit you little fox shoes for the winter. I told her about fox fur's insulating properties, and she said I needed to stop treating my personal life as a literature review. (I don't say that part of why I hadn't told her earlier was because at last year's non-denominational holiday thing, after Miles and I had met but before we'd settled on exclusivity, Jenny had kissed the corner of my mouth, and I had not not kissed her back. I do not tell the fox that I hate the way we've never talked about it, or that sometimes, I am struck by the urge to make Jenny smile. I do not say: I am sorry, or: I wish I could tell you this.)

"I line up words for the things I am feeling like molars in my mouth."

I tell him: Will from the separations lab has started dating my boss's daughter. My boss has been privately freaking out about this for days. I think you've met Will, I tell him, at the Alvarez lab's Fourth of July party last year. He was the one with the experimental cupcake recipe, remember?

"In the dream, I say to the fox, Where are we supposed to go now?"

(What I do not tell him is this: last week, the Washington Post ran an article about a female arctic fox. According to scientists in Norway who had outfitted the fox with a tracking collar in February, she had spent the winter walking along stretches of sea ice from the Svalbard Archipelago to Ellesmere Island in Canada. Her trek, which clocked in at 2,700 miles, was the longest fox journey on record. On the ice floes of Greenland, the fox had managed to travel more than 90 miles a day.

I do not say that, when I read the Washington Post article, I remembered the way the snow had soaked through my shoes while I'd sat on the edge of the Common and tried to talk my heart back into my ribcage.

I do not say: I have seen you with your front paws on the windowsill.

I do not say: this scares me.

I do not tell the fox that I have this recurring dream in which I wake up and I am also a fox. In the dream, the fox and I leave the apartment via the fire escape. We walk to South Station and look at the departures board. We cannot read, because we are foxes. In the dream, I say to the fox, *Where are we supposed to go now*. The fox opens his mouth, and I wait for Miles's voice to come out in a weird, gekker-type register, but I always wake up too soon.)

Instead, I say that today, one of the postdocs gave a lecture in which he argued that TFIIH was not a canonical helicase. "It's a translocase," he told us, his laser pointer dancing wildly. "Look, see? It's tethered to the rest of the complex *here*, and when it tries to walk away along the helix, the DNA bunches up and gets forced open." It was about tension, he argued, not torsional force. I couldn't picture it—all those tiny hydrogen bonds, peeling open under threat of distance. The fox, who has long since finished his chicken, shifts to rest his head on the side of my knee. I ghost my hand along the sleek curve of his back. His eyes drift shut. I ask him: how would you even imagine that?

***

In mid-March, the fox starts shedding. This is surprising, according to Wikipedia, which claims that early May would be more typical, but climate and physiology apparently move in mysterious ways. His fur turns patchy and brown in places. He shifts in and out of irritability and avoids his own reflection in the dishwasher door. I want to attribute this to self-consciousness, but it could just be a general fox thing. I email myself a reminder: *Google scholar search for fox reflection studies*. Tufts of white fur drift in clouds across our kitchen floor. I take to vacuuming the air vents every night to keep them from clogging. The fox, who hates the vacuum, scrambles under our bed with the angry clatter of claws on hardwood.

"I'm sorry, dude," I tell him. "Claritin can only handle so much." He stares back at me from under the curtain of our duvet, dark-eyed and strange.

The shower drain clogs up with fur. I find strands in my hair, the dryer lint trap, and my cereal bowl. Static electricity gathers it onto my clothing. My boss asks me if I've gone and adopted a cat, and I laugh politely. I say, "Not that I know of." He means well, I remind myself. He doesn't know about my fox, just that Miles is away on business, and that I've been home with headaches a lot this winter.

Jenny brings me one of those spiky glove things people use to brush Golden Retrievers and Maine Coons. I offer to do all her cloning for the week, and she looks at me strangely. "It's a glove," she points out. "You could just say thank you." She's cleaning glassware in the sink. Her bangs have gotten just long enough to fall uncomfortably into her eyes.

"Yeah, sure," I say, "but cloning sounds easier." Jenny very deliberately peels off her nitrile gloves to hit me upside the head, but she's laughing.

(Ji-hoon doesn't say anything, but he does buy me my favorite non-dairy creamer—french vanilla, made with real sugar—and leaves it by the coffeemaker. It feels like a sympathy gesture, which is weird, because I haven't told him enough to really warrant one.)

***

The fox spends most of late March sleeping, his chin pillowed on the fur of his tail. I'm pretty sure it's not just a nocturnal thing. Maybe it's the atypically cold spring weather, or some quirk of fox neurotransmitter regulation. I have heard of dogs and cats taking antidepressants, like Miles did before he was a fox. I can only assume that some foxes also spend the occasional greyscale winter caught behind a kind of mental screen, but I am a yeast biologist with no real zoological training. I want to ask the fox what it is I should be doing that I'm not. For all the articles I've read and highlighted, I know very little about vulpine psychology.

Most mornings, the fox sleeps through my alarm. I take to copying the daily fox facts that continue to arrive in my email inbox onto post-it notes in my neatest handwriting and sticking them to the refrigerator door at what I assume might be eye-level for a fox. I do not address or sign them. The fox hoards the notes in a little cache under our bed. I try not to read too much into this. Maybe all foxes are prone to this kind of stockpiling.

Jenny starts dating a marine biologist. She tells me this over lunch in the break room with a kind of casual precision. I say that I am happy for her, which is mostly true. The marine biologist comes to our department happy hour. She tells us about these two whales she's been tracking—one Atlantic, one Pacific—whose calls are approximately seventeen hertz higher than those of other whales. She stirs her iced tea with a straw and says, imagine. Only one other whale in the whole world who can hear you, and they're in the wrong ocean. Christ, says the marine biologist, it's got to be lonely.

`I take a careful bite of my sandwich and do not say anything. On my left, Ji-hoon coughs quietly. He tells the marine biologist that it was nice to meet her, and then goes back upstairs to check on a western blot. I start to type out a text—*hey, you ok?*—but decide not to send it. If I push too hard, it will only put him on the defensive.

That night, I sit at our kitchen counter with the fox asleep on the stool next to mine and catalogue the collection of magnets on the lower half of the refrigerator door, which the fox apparently rearranged while I was out. I time my breathing to the low hum of the dishwasher and curl my fingers into the fox's mottled brown fur. I think, *I wish I knew what you were trying to tell me*, and then I think about whales, and how some things float across incredible distances. I imagine building a tin can telephone and slipping one end into each ocean, so that when the lonely whale in the Pacific says, *Hello, can you hear me*, the second lonely whale off the coast of New England can say: *Yes, I've heard you. I hear you! Hello!*

***

Ji-hoon's son tells me that he intends to be a penguin when he grows up.

"Why a penguin?" I ask. It's an in-service day at the elementary school, and Ji-hoon's wife is away on another business trip, so the second grader has been deposited in the tech room. I have been charged with stalling the kid at his dad's desk and keeping him out of the lab. Thus far, it has proven surprisingly easy, because Ji-hoon has a swivel chair and keeps a side drawer full of candy. "Because they're cute," he answers, through a mouthful of caramel. "My mama is like a penguin," he adds, "but not really." I've never met Ji-hoon's wife, but I've seen photos of her. I can't say I've noticed anything particularly avian about her.

"Really?" I ask. "How does that work?"

"I dunno," says Ji-hoon's son. "Did you know that penguins can stay under water *for twenty whole minutes?* How cool is that?"

"Pretty cool," I say, "but did you know that foxes can make forty different sounds?"

By the time Ji-hoon comes back to retrieve his offspring, we've gone through three months' worth of fox forum emails. The kid's attention span is pretty exceptional. "She knows so much about foxes!" he informs Ji-hoon, delighted. I manage not to wince.

Later, I tell Ji-hoon that he's raised a future zoologist. I start to ask him what his son meant when he said that Ji-hoon's wife was like a penguin, but he cuts me off. He tells me to start four new kinase assays. He'll be leaving for three weeks, starting next Monday. We have deadlines to make.

***

On a Friday in mid-April, I come home to the smell of paint thinner and a stripe of forest green on the inside of our front door. When I go to take off my shoes, I happen to look down. There is a line of pink paw prints tracked over the doormat.

The fox is in the kitchen when I find him, asleep in the epicenter of a giant paint splatter. Reds and yellows rise in arcs over the dishwasher, the oven door. "What the *fuck*," I say, more bewildered than angry. The fox wakes with a start, sending empty jars of sparkly acrylics that I purchased for Ji-hoon's son's ninth birthday rattling across the floor like dice. He blinks up at me, wide-eyed and careful. His paws are caked in paint, fur dried in clumps of red and blue. There is a streak of green on the side of his nose, giving his whiskers the appearance of a terrible dye job. It's the green that really gets me. He's dragged it into lines that curlicue across the floor, the refrigerator, even the windowsill. It's like some weird alien script. It's like a toddler's first attempt at scrawling their own name in dull crayon, pressing nearly hard enough to split the wax.

"Writing," I whisper. "You're trying to write to me." The fox inclines his head a little. I think of whales and tin can telephones. I think of how, in the dream where I am also a fox, we cannot read the departure board, and of that space after waking up in which I try to remember if this time, the fox had spoken to me. I kneel down beside him. I almost reach out to touch him. "Miles," I start to say, but my throat closes on the word, and I think, no, don't say Miles—say fox, who was and will be Miles, but isn't Miles presently, because if I say the fox is Miles, then I am saying that the Miles from before the fox will not come back, and if I say that, then—

I think: hydrogen bonds, splitting open. I think: threat of distance. I think: 2,700 miles from Svalbard to Ellesmere. The letters of grief rearranging themselves like refrigerator magnets to obstruct my airways. The red acrylic paint I will wash from the fox's fur in the shower until the drain clogs up again and the water overflows.

***

On the afternoon before he leaves for his three-week holiday, I finally get Ji-hoon to tell me his destination. We are imaging one last batch of western blots, but the exposure times keep coming out all wrong.

"Cuba?" I ask him. "Seriously? You're taking a solo vacation to Havana?" I leave all my other questions—*why aren't you sleeping at home, why does your son spend every weekend with your sister, why won't you talk to us*—as subtext.

He smiles wryly. "How are you holding up," he asks me, "what with the fox?"

I freeze, replay the question in my head. I break it into its component parts. The meaning does not shift. Ji-hoon is almost certainly watching my non-reaction out of the corner of his eye. "Who told you?" I ask. "If it was Jenny, I might have to kill her."

"No one told me." He flips the membrane over with enviable precision and deposits it on the imaging platform. "My wife taught me to do western blots," he says, abruptly. "We did twenty-five of them in the first week of my rotation. She said I had steady hands. I said, no, it's that your hands are shaky, and she said that was because she was nervous, and would I like to get coffee with her sometime." He feeds the tray back into the machine and starts the cycle.

"My son told you that my wife is like a penguin," says Ji-hoon, "because my wife has been an osprey for three and a half years." His voice is perfectly level, but he's staring intently at the gel reader display screen. His left thumb rests against the wedding band on his ring finger. It's maybe the most heartbreakingly unconscious gesture I've ever seen.

"Oh," I say. "I didn't know." In my head, I page through sixteen months of little inconsistencies and try to separate the clues from mere coincidence. His strange work hours; his bird-themed laptop screensaver; his wife's weird winter business trips down south. "Cuba," I realize. "That's why—it's not a solo holiday, is it? It's migration."

"His left thumb rests against the wedding band on his ring finger. It's the most heartbreakingly unconscious gesture I've ever seen."

Ji-hoon tells me that most ospreys fly to Brazil in late fall, guided by the Earth's magnetic field. Each bird returns to the same location every year within a small margin of error. Ji-hoon's wife is apparently a scientific anomaly. Most ospreys closely follow the Atlantic coastline, but on her first trip south, something—maybe thirty-five years of human existence, or even sheer meteorological chance—jammed up her internal compass and sent her east, out over the Atlantic, into gale-force winds that blew her down to Cuba by some miracle. Ji-hoon had not accompanied his wife on the journey. Instead, he had outfitted her with a homemade GPS tracker. For most of that October, in lieu of sleeping, he had watched a little green tracker dot drifting out to sea.

"It's a stupid trajectory," Ji-hoon tells me, "and now she's stuck with it. I can't make her do that alone." He is spraying down the imaging tray with ethanol. I am standing very still and trying not to imagine the Svalbard fox and her lonely walk along sea ice. Instead, I picture the fox skidding up to the edge of the Boston Common, and then choosing to turn back. I picture Ji-hoon mapping out an itinerary through Havana, the Outer Banks, and the Delmarva Peninsula, keeping time with his osprey wife. My mouth is so full of questions that I cannot separate them far enough to ask. Ji-hoon zips up his laptop case and switches off his desk lamp.

"Hey," I say. "Hey, Ji-hoon. How could you tell? About my fox?"
"That's easy," he tells me. I think of possibilities—the fur on my clothing, my increased reliance on antihistamines, the fox fact emails I used to distract his child—but Ji-hoon just says, "It's mostly that your western blots are so neat that it hurts to look at them. That, and the dark circles. Believe me, I know the signs."

***

That night, I open all the windows in our apartment. I switch off all the lights. I lay very still with my eyes pressed shut. Six floors down, the street is a river of sound, but up here everything feels somehow far away. The air is thunderstorm-heavy. I imagine it pouring through the windows and winding in dark purple ribbons around all our furniture.

The fox is curled up in the armchair, and so I cannot feel his weight displacing the mattress. Today, as Ji-hoon locked the lab door behind us, I almost asked him a dozen almost-questions, all of which would have ultimately boiled down to: *Do you think they're coming back?* The thing is, when Ji-hoon talked about the osprey who lives in his apartment during the warm season, he did not refer to her by species, but by name. He did not say, *The osprey migrates.* He said, *My wife flies to Cuba in October every year.* In the context of the question that I couldn't bring myself to ask him, I am not sure what to make of that.

I think: since I cannot feel the fox's fox-weight on the mattress, I cannot prove that, in the minutes since I last opened my eyes, the fox has not turned back into a person. In my head, I am building parallel universes around this hypothetical. I call him by name in all of them. Miles is sitting cross-legged on the mint-green chair cushion; Miles is lazily flicking his tail. Miles is reaching out to switch on the lamp; Miles is about to bump his cool, wet nose against my elbow.

The air has gone cold. It might have started raining. I tell myself: in just a second, I'll get up to close the windows. In just a second, I'll open my eyes.

How Long Will You Love Me?

ERIC TRAN



My grandparents celebrating their 70th anniversary.



Complements

ERIC TRAN

glimpses,
toward knowing
and unknowing

KADENCE MITCHELL

well before i leave, my grandmother tells me,
in japan, the only sound you can hear on the train
is the wind against the window.
she is one to value comfort,
and quiet. i promise to make the trip to her hometown,
if only for an hour, if only to have seen it.
at kyoto station, my lover says,
let me ride with you, i just
want to talk this out.
i think i am medusa-stone but really
i am moveable. mutable.
molded.

i escape my body and submerge myself instead
in those passing by. i wonder, in this country
of summertime long-sleeves and umbrellas,
what they think of the Black American
with her ass out, how Black my Black
hair is in all this stress and humidity, and
can they feel that this is my home,
part-home,
too?
do they know how long this journey has been?
my lover says,
don't try to shut me up,
i will let this whole train know how i feel about you.
i take stock of ghost-white knuckles,
hitched breath,
scowl on chapped lips.
in the bodies of the passers-by, i politely
avert my eyes. a couples' spat has no place
in public. life is too short for peace and
too long for war. i watch the girl with
dead eyes and her lover, too-loud for the
train, far above the wind's whispers. i wonder,
how long has their journey been?

A New World Order: Exit West and the Evanescence of Migratory Life

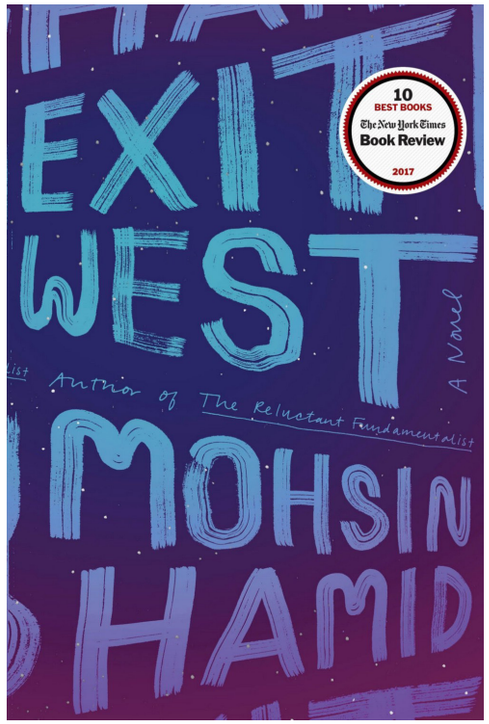
SIMONE WALLK

In moments of personal and political desperation, all we can hope for is escape, change, or movement—for anything to disappear. And yet leaving a past life behind is unendingly complicated. The interpersonal mess that results from migration is the subject of Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*, where characters cross miles in moments, crawling out of door-like portals into foreign lands as if "dying and being born" at once. Hamid probes these metaphorical deaths and births, painting a precise emotional portrait of the limbo that is migration.

Through his system of portals, Hamid limits discussion of the journey of migration and turns our attention to the personal effects of leaving home. At the center of his tale of transitions are Nadia and Saeed, lovers meeting secretly in an unnamed city. Nadia's conservative dress conceals her liberalism, ardent feminism, and drug use. She and Saeed, a more devout Muslim who works in advertising, develop a romance that burgeons as their city languishes under military occupation. Hamid contrasts Nadia's outward piety and inward rebelliousness with Saeed's growing faith, noting how their unlikely bond is made all the more romantic by the perilous conditions in which it takes place. As day-to-day life in their city becomes near impossible, Nadia and Saeed decide to risk leaving all they know behind by crossing a portal westward.

From here on, *Exit West* becomes another novel, not a war-time romance featuring a charmingly relatable couple, but a futuristic portrait of the tragedies and serendipities of migratory life. With fairy-tale like prose, Hamid employs fantastical and lyrical modes to capture the aftershocks of migration. He writes with linguistic ambiguity, a halting syntax that mirrors Nadia and Saeed's liminality: "Every time a couple moves, they begin, if their attention is still drawn to one another, to see each other differently, for personalities are not a single immutable color, like white or blue, but rather illuminated screens, and the shades we reflect depend much on what is around us." Both migration and love, we learn, are capricious; the love you expect to be your sustenance might unravel with the uncertainties of life in transit.

The growing gulf between Nadia and Saeed embodies Hungarian literary theorist George Lukacs' concept of transcendental homelessness, a sense of disordered ruin in the modern world that leaves spiritual and emotional gaps. How might relationships and communities resist disintegration in this world of flux, Hamid ponders, proposing religion as a possible solution. Saeed finds a pan-Islamic community abroad that helps him mourn the evanescence of migratory life: "He prayed fundamentally as a gesture for what had gone and would go and could be loved in no other way," for his parents and lost love and everything ephemeral. Hamid quells fears of migrant fundamentalism through Saeed's gentle spirituality, yet both Nadia and Saeed remain transcendentally homeless, estranged from one another and their new world.



Courtesy of amazon.com

Reading their grief is a precarious experience made pleasant by Hamid's lyrical prose.

Hamid's lyricism is reminiscent of Jhumpa Lahiri's writing, but his occasionally dystopian prose recalls Cormac McCarthy's The Road, another story of constant movement testing interpersonal ties. Like McCarthy, Hamid operates by allegory. Nadia and Saeed are the only named characters in *Exit West*, traversing a path characteristic of modern migrants: from the Middle East to Greece to London and

beyond, westward bound. In their anonymous origin, Nadia and Saeed symbolize contemporary refugees. They are cosmopolitan and liberal, sympathetic to Hamid's western audience, whose very world they might disrupt. Hamid's mission—a successful one—is to make the migrant's life legible and provoke empathy for their plight.

But *Exit West* is not only focused on Nadia and Saeed. It becomes a global narrative through vignettes featuring migrants seeking security, money, pleasure, and adventure. Here, too, Hamid uses allegory to explore the motivations of modern migrants. We meet a migrating Tamil family, captured by surveillance feeds upon crossing a portal and subsequently apprehended; a suicidal British accountant fleeing mundanity through a door to Namibia; and a pair of aging gay lovers traveling the world. In Hamid's portal world, a current of trading places underlies everyday life.

Hamid suggests that today's 65 million displaced people (a United Nations estimate) represent a new world order. This is not a far-fetched suggestion, as economic, political, and environmental instability constantly drive migration from all corners of the globe. Yet Hamid envisions normalcy, a far cry from today's ad-hoc refugee camps and our politicians' ad hominem attacks on migrants. In London, Nadia and Saeed assimilate through a labor for land system that promotes economic stability for Brits as well. He redefines the meaning of "native" in California, subversively imagining that white Americans are now as homeless as the Native American tribes their ancestors evicted. Still, Hamid cautions that this new world order will uphold the contemporary power structure. Metaphors of dark and light London—the latter defined by freedom of movement and electricity, the former by checkpoints and violent darkness—expose the "haves" and "have nots" of a migrating world. Despite their freedom of movement, Nadia and Saeed are subject to life on the margins of the West in literal darkness.

"They are cosmopolitan and liberal, sympathetic to Hamid's western audience, whose very world they might disrupt."

Though Hamid turns political at times, his vision lacks declarative statements beyond his call for migrant humanity. Instead, he evokes the psychological conflicts of all those displaced by migration, from migrant to citizen. Take Nadia, who wears a black robe as a defensive mechanism against sexual assault. Outwardly embodying Islam, she sees a real-time photograph of herself online and wonders "how could she both read this news and be this news." Nadia realizes this is not her image—nor does she represent what her robe reflects—yet she is news for the British; Hamid enters the psychological domains of both migrant and nativist through his speculations on a world of portals.

While Hamid's spiraling plot might not hold every reader, his prose is worth the wait. His sentences flow with universalisms, generalized statements crafted with linguistic precision that gives life to his painful themes. "When we migrate, we murder from our lives those we leave behind," he writes, evoking the ineffable permanence of moving away from family and friends. Generalizations like this one allow Hamid to analyze the fleeting bareness of migratory life.

Abounding with detail, Hamid's prose is most poignant when he describes violence as mundane through metaphor: a car bombing that is "felt in one's chest cavity as a subsonic vibration like those emitted by large loudspeakers at music concerts" implies the normalized shock of everyday war. Battle is "an intimate experience, combatants pressed close together," and the blood of a dead neighbors appears "as a stain in the high corner of Saeed's sitting room." Oscillating between universalisms and figurative language, Hamid's prose resembles the precarious liminality of his characters.

Exit West is a world of dualisms: pain and love, grief and opportunity, universalism and particularism, emotional stasis and unceasing movement. Hamid reinvents the clichéd immigration narrative through fusing genres, an impersonal tone, and allegory into a cry for the necessity of recognizing migrants' humanity and doing something—anything—to adapt to the new reality of their constant presence. *Exit West* is a grave, delicate recognition of the fleetingness of life in the face of movement; "for one moment we are pottering about our errands as usual and the next we are dying, and our eternally impending ending does not put a stop to our transient beginnings and middles until the instant when it does."

Old Man With Pipe

SYDNEY PENG



blizzard baby

MEERA SASTRY

Dumb kids my father says *Dumb girls*
splintering. February & undergraduates skid
their car into ours.
From the passenger seat
& through both windshields
I recognize silently
the tenderness in one's hand as she touches
the other's shoulder. My father
swears, hits his wrist
on the wheel. We step swiftly out
into a world
with more terror.
So so sorrys tumble from the
dumb girls' mouths as they shake flakes
off their cherry Docs.
My father says
don't apologize, you're admitting
you've done something wrong
in a voice that means they've done something
wrong, that means
he never apologizes.
Snow melts into his worn loafers
& is replaced unstoppably.
Cars keep swiveling
past the stopped ignition Mazda,
its brake lights shuddering
red into the slick ice.

Windshield wipers keep time
& my father counts beats, counts
years since the girls were born, counts
years since I was,
maybe counts further.
Somewhere thirty years ago. His first
college snowstorm, watching the world
scatter & become new
just to know it happened.
& we can't see our parents
young, & I don't want to. I just want
to see
my father
in awe.
Tonight, somewhere lost
is a consideration for winter. &
blizzards, a heartbreak
unimaginable in California.
Pink, yellow, so
warm. Sunlight's sister gliding.
A twilight, soft,
a little peace.
My father's eyes
on the ground,
while up near the trees
snow falls
real slow
like magic.

Oh Jerome, No and It's Bruno!

BES ARNAOUT

In an attempt to gracefully finish my thesis and senior spring classes, and with my pandemic-enhanced propensity to binge watch in mind, I decided to limit pop show intake to what is manageable, light, entertaining, not too many seasons, has short episodes… so it had to be short-form comedy. I was in for a treat with FXX's *Cake*, a self-described "handcrafted assortment of bite-sized content served up to viewers as a tasty treat for the mind." While I would argue that the last part, "for the mind," might perhaps be more narrowly for our humor receptors, with a half-hour run time and only eight episodes in the first season, each with seven to eight "bits," *Cake* is lighthearted, entertaining, and exciting, since every bit brings something new and unexpected.

I made this fortunate discovery by first watching an episode of *Oh Jerome, No* on Hulu, which led me to the smorgasbord of live-action and animation that is *Cake*, in which Jerome is a recurring, eight-episode "bit." While several critics favored the Cake's parody music video series *Quarter Life Poetry* by Instagram creator Samanhta Jayne, and others took pleasure in the various animated segments, I found *Oh Jerome, No* to be my favorite, because of a bias, perhaps, since I'm quite keen on Mamoudou



Courtesy of imdb.com

Athie, who plays Jerome. His characte is an "extremely sensitive young man in Brooklyn" who is just… well, trying to figure it out. Creators Alex Karpovsky and Teddy Blanks talk in interviews about wanting to show, through an absurdist lens, the tension of expectations and reality and its consequences on one man's emotions. The verisimilitude of Jerome's universe is on thin ice at times (in episode one, Natasha Lyonne's character mauls and eats a pigeon for lunch), but it all blends well overall, oftentimes salvaged by the humor itself. A dog named Party Time appears in the initial episodes; creators joked that they simply wanted Athie to yell "Party Time!" in a despondent way.

Jerome reminded me of the Netflix show *It's Bruno!*, which I saw many months ago and which induced this same satisfying feeling of having just binged a short and entertaining piece of parody that does not pretend to be anything other than what it is. It's Bruno! revolves around Malcolm, a born and bred Brooklynite, and his bug-eyed dog Bruno. Malcolm parodies the obsessive behaviors of dog owners in the sweetest and most earnest way. He is competitive and fears no confrontation when it comes to protecting the world that revolves around his dog, which he created and actively perpetuates, at times really pushing societal boundaries—like when he pets a neighbor's



Courtesy of netflix.com

granddaughter to show her why she should not have pet Bruno without asking him. And Bruno, he is just a dog, no magic powers, no sci-fi humanization. His pure and ordinary dogness is exactly what makes the show an absolute treat—pun totally intended. Bonus: it has a great soundtrack, and the amazing New Jersey native Shakira Barrera plays a dog-thieving seductress (a parallel with Party Time and Jerome's unfortunate expeditions in online dating).

So, if you are looking for something entertaining, light and binge-manageable, both *Oh Jerome, No* and *It's Bruno!* run at less than two hours for the whole season—and do not require more mental energy than what you might have working on your thesis while trying to reconfigure a new way of being in the completely changing world.

Hydra

JULIETTE CARBONNIER



Dolores

CASSANDRA JAMES

"we had no voice
we had no name
we had no choice
we had one face
one face the same."

The Penelopiad, Margaret Atwood

Dolores was not the first Arias woman to work at the Washington, but she was certain she would be the last. First, she was determined to never have children, especially girls; and second, the moment she had the money she was moving to Los Angeles to become a singer, beautiful before God and man. The Washington was merely a moment, a brief and romantic flash, in the grand vision of her life. This secret she kept to herself, but without her knowing, it crept onto her face in the form of an unfocused smile, simpering and listless. There had to be a man, the maids swore—only a man could be the cause of a smile like that. But which one, when pretty Dolores flirted with the delivery boy, the bellhop, the bartender, and the hotel's manager (and those last three married, too) all within a week, and gave none any real attention beyond a turn of her dark head and a wrinkle of her crooked nose? When they asked, Dolores laughed—she was in love with herself more and more every day, and was too vain to think of anything else.

The Washington stood in the center of West 44th Street, and was known, by and large, for its mahogany-paneled lounge and clever mixed drinks at the hotel bar. On Friday and Saturday nights, when the jazz band played in the corner of the lobby, guests and locals vied for the Washington's coveted seats, lingering until, like lovers, they turned to look for the black arms of night and found only cold, white dawn. Dolores's mother had been a waitress in the lounge, had married a line cook from the restaurant; her grandmother, eighteen and fresh off a ship from Colombia, had worked in the laundry rooms. The Arias name was as much a part of the Washington as its chandeliers and porcelain tubs—their women were, her abuela declared, a kind of royalty.

When she turned sixteen and her father died in the same year (he'd stumbled, high, into the street on his way home from work and gotten himself hit by a car; her mother had said only, good riddance), Dolores began working as a maid at the Washington. At twenty-four, she was still cleaning the same rooms she had for eight years, watching the guests flutter in and out with names indistinguishable from one another, remembering them only by the belongings they traveled with: a certain Russian, for example, brought a box of the same brand of Cuban cigars when he arrived on business; a family from Illinois kept a cat in the cabinet next to their mini-fridge; and in the summer before Dolores left the Washington, a Hollywood actress brought a fur coat dyed red and hung it, almost enshrined, in her closet.

Dolores first saw the coat when she was cleaning 1013 with Gloria from the Bronx, a small-eyed woman in her forties who smelled like car freshener. Gloria had come to America on a raft from Cuba, which she blamed for her lower back problems; she warned the wayward Dolores against men of all kinds, and insisted she would rather spend a night with the Washington than any one of her three ex-husbands. While Gloria chattered about her boyfriend who was Puerto Rican and useless, Dolores's vacuum sucked the coat's hem from under the door and choked on it, and so Dolores was forced to open the closet, take the coat off the hanger, and tug it out of the vacuum's tubing. But when she had it in her hands, she forgot about the vacuum, cleaning, and everything else. She stroked the fur with her thumbs, that pointless smile twisting her lips. How did they get it to be so red?

Lord, Gloria, she said. Isn't it gorgeous? You didn't wreck it, did you? Gloria said, bending down over her stomach to pick up towels from the floor. They'll make you pay for it if you did. It's fine, said Dolores. Gloria heaved: Well, put it back, mija, I can smell the trouble on it—I'm taking the linens, come to the next room.

Dolores nodded, sliding the coat back on the hanger, slipping it into the closet again. Winding the vacuum's chord around one arm like a noose, she watched Gloria waddle out of the room, and waited until the door clicked shut before she dropped the chord and moved to the closet, taking the coat from its hanger and into her hands again.

Her heart drummed a lopsided beat. What did she think she was doing? Who did she think she was? But then again, what did it matter who she was or what she was doing, if no one saw? And no one would ever see a maid; no one ever saw Dolores. So she unfastened her apron with trembling fingers, turned the coat, and slipped her arms into the cool silk lining of the sleeves, shivering when the fur touched her neck. She found the mirror on the wall and gasped. Lord, she said. That's beautiful.

The coat wouldn't have looked as lovely, Dolores knew, draped over the actress's bird-bone shoulders. When the woman had first arrived, Gloria had sniffed at the way she'd hooked

"Her heart drummed a lopsided beat. What did she think she was doing? Who did she think she was?"

herself like a fish to a man in a blue suit and laughed when he dropped a fifty dollar bill onto their luggage cart for the bellboy to find. That, Gloria had told Dolores, is a woman who has sold her soul to the devil. And we're better off, said Dolores. We've sold ours to a hotel. Gloria had sniffed again. Maybe. But find me a man who pays you every other Friday.

Dolores swayed on the backs of her heels. She could have drunk the picture in the mirror, or gotten drunk on it, dizzy from just looking at the brown girl with her curls falling like water over the fur and the light caressing the roundness of her lips, her eyes black and bright with sudden and spectacular visions. Gnawing on the inside of her cheek, Dolores thought that Los Angeles must taste just the way this girl looked—red. Then she started to sing, softly and then louder, as she stepped around the room with arms outstretched, dancing against the air. The coat brushed against her legs, and she closed her eyes. The walls of a church rose up around her with a starving sense of empire: she was standing in the chapel of her childhood, where her mother had positioned her, hair curled and dress bleached, like a living icon, where Dolores had opened her mouth each Sunday morning and let music fly from her young, raw throat, away, away. Her mother had told her that when she sang (and only then), she was beautiful before God and man. It was a pitiful consolation prize. But Dolores's small lips would bend into her heathen's grin around the hymns, hopeful and absurd. God and man. God and man.

Gloria's voice called from the next room, and her eyes flew open again. Hands trembling, she tore from the room, only to stop dead in the center of the hallway, one arm frozen halfway out of a sleeve. A man stood there, propped against the wall, arms crossed over a blue silk suit. Just a moment after seeing him, she couldn't remember what he looked like—there was a round chin, a bowed lip, and that blue suit, but that was all. Without ceremony, he introduced himself as Michael Jupiter, and told her she had the most beautiful voice he had ever heard. She replied that he needed to listen to better music, and how long had he been spying on her, anyway? He laughed and agreed with her.

"Well I can't tell you I have taste," he said. "But I do know how people with good taste think. I know what they like, what they don't, what they can't live without. And that matters more than anything in my business, or in any business."

He was a producer, he explained, among other things. Her mouth opened, and an apology tumbled off of her lips with instinctual humility. Laughing again, he waved her off.

"Don't worry, it doesn't mean a thing. My name gets slapped on what other people create, it's mercenary," he said with a smile that flashed and vanished like a firework. "I disgust myself most of the time. But even if I can't live with myself, I can live on the paycheck. That's what keeps me religious."

Dolores laughed and agreed—she told herself the same, she said, and still went to church. He made a note about great minds, his smile impressed. Dolores consciously blew her hair from her eyes.

"Would you like to meet me downstairs for a drink?"

Before she could reply, he'd informed her that six o'clock would be perfect, tipped his head, and strode past her. She looked at her watch—half past five. She pulled the coat tight around her body, calling to Gloria that she needed to find a new vacuum downstairs. Then she rode the elevator down to the hotel bar, smoothing her hair and puckering her lips in the glass.

Jupiter ordered drinks and talked through the evening. It was fate he'd stumbled into her; it was the beginning of a great origin story, almost Biblical. He needed talent like hers more than she needed him, of course, but he could be what she was looking for. They could get to know each other, and if things worked out—

"We have all the time in the world," he added, as if it were an old joke between them.

Dolores's thoughts, like drunks, stumbled vaguely over the fact that she couldn't remember his face. She laughed and tossed her head, charming, aloof, but her eyes lingered on the tip of his nose, on the shadows hollowing his cheeks. Should she keep one leg tossed over the other? Should she smile as she flirted, as if to say, I know, you know, what else is new? If the bartender had recognized her, he hadn't said so. She could guess what he thought of her, but found that she didn't care. Under the bar, Jupiter's hand found her knee. His thumb covered a tear in her stockings from kneeling on bathroom tile. Her throat swelled shut at the brush of his skin. She couldn't remember the color of his eyes. Brown? No, lighter—like leaves about to fall—like leaves—leaves crushed underfoot in a park—crushed by laughing children, with a sound like bones snapping—then leaves swept up into a heaping pile—it reeks of death—and carted away, all those leaves carted away. She watched his hands as he spoke, his long fingers and the way they furled and unfurled themselves. His voice settled, warm and smooth, in her stomach, and the bourbon he'd bought her chased it down to her toes.

"I've got more upstairs," he said, nodding to her glass.

She squinted at it—at some point it had become empty without her noticing. Mm, she said. His fingers on her back hummed like honeybees—she choked on a gasp as they crossed the lobby and stepped into the elevator. As it climbed to the tenth floor, she wondered what it would be like if the elevator never stopped, but kept climbing, up through the roof and out into the night—if you traveled upward for too long, would it begin to feel like falling?

***

Enjoy the champagne.
—J

Sheets wrapped around her stomach, Dolores held the paper—he'd ripped it from a notepad on the night table and scribbled on it, the handwriting neat, precise—like a dying bird, cupping her hands around its edges. She hadn't moved since she'd woken an hour ago; she'd read his note seven times. She looked at the clock—it was almost ten, now. They would be in soon to clean the room. White light fell at her feet; he had opened the blinds before he left. Dolores imagined how he must have stood there, bare-skinned and golden, staring out as the sun dragged itself up over the skyscrapers, another day, another day. Had he looked back at her?

A cigarette lay crumpled in the ashtray on the table. She didn't remember him smoking one, and wondered if she had, instead. The only other remains were hers. Her clothes were splayed on the floor in casual ecstasy; the coat was tangled on the back of a chair. Everything that had been his was gone. The bottle of champagne, along with a crystal glass and an orange slice on a white plate, stood on a tray at the end of the bed. Her ears burned. She could almost hear Gloria's sniff when the maid who had brought the tray told her about little Dolores, found tangled up in Jupiter's sheets.

Dolores slipped out of the bed onto the balls of her feet and shivered when the air hit her skin. She held herself with her own arms and callused hands. No matter how she arranged herself, she couldn't cover her body—in the most complete of betrayals, her own skin was suddenly translucent, and she felt the full weight of her despicable bareness. She reached for her clothes. She had no bruises she could see, but she winced as she slid her dress over her naked limbs, the fabric like fire on her back. At the sight of the gold embroidered W on the breast, she laughed to herself—of course he

"No matter how she arranged herself, she couldn't cover her body—in the most complete of betrayals, her own skin was suddenly translucent, and she felt the full weight of her despicable bareness."

must have known. She didn't know whether that made her feel better or worse, in the end.

Why was the news on the television? And why hadn't she noticed the television was on? She dipped her legs into her stockings and shoes, then began to fold the coat, first in half, then in half again, as she would fold a sheet—his cologne clung to the fur. While headlines raced across the bottom of the screen, she draped the coat over one arm, twisted her hair up, and tied it. Had he touched her hair with his fingers? It must have been better than when the bellhop had buried his nose against her scalp, or the manager. She looked at the room; she would have to clean it tomorrow, and every day after that. The reporter on the television lamented over an assault behind a bodega in Hell's Kitchen. Dolores reached down and took the orange off the white plate on the tray; the peel fell away in bits, one at a time, baring warm flesh. She pushed the slice onto her tongue. Her eyes watered at the sting of the juice. The victim was a nineteen year old female, brown. They didn't know her name.

A quarter after ten, she turned the TV off and left the room. The door clicked softly shut behind her. She stood in the hallway for some immeasurable stretch of time, the coat draped over one arm, a dead thing. A vacuum buzzed somewhere down the hall—over the roar, Gloria shouted for more towels and hand soaps. His note burned where she had slid it in her shoe. Enjoy the champagne.

Enjoy. Enjoy. Enjoy.

Dolores didn't know how long it was until she saw the woman standing in the hallway. She was tall, bird-boned. Her eyes moved from the coat to Dolores and back again—her eyebrows furrowed. Without makeup, her eyes were smaller, her skin a shade darker, and something about the pinch in her mouth made her look as if she feared everything. But she was the same woman who had come into the Washington on Michael Jupiter's arm. Dolores' fingers dug into the coat, turning her knuckles white.

How many times had this woman stood there? How many times had she stood in the hallway and watched another woman walk out of the room she had slept in the night before? How many times had she been that "other woman," walking out to meet the girl she had replaced, smiling her victory? How many women, how many hallways…

It occurred to Dolores then that she would lose the Washington for this. The woman would report her; Dolores would be fired without discussion. She would be remembered only by an apology: I'm very sorry for the trouble, ma'am, but I can promise that the girl is no longer with us—can I offer you dinner on the house? The removal of her body would make things right. One word from this woman, and she would be the last Arias to serve the Washington. And when had that been what she'd wanted? Dolores felt suddenly old—crippled with age, she bowed beneath the weight of her inherited crown, the weight of the Washington Hotel on West 44th.

But the woman continued to stare. Her eyes hovered over the gold W on Dolores's chest. So the women stood and they stared, each looking at the other and finding themselves. Dolores bent her head, remembering herself—she was so very tired of remembering herself.

I think this is yours, ma'am, was all she said.

The woman blinked. I thought I'd left it…

She didn't finish. Dolores waited. Beyond their silence, the vacuum howled.

Well, the other woman said, I think it's ours now.

Dolores nodded. She held out the coat. The woman took it—she was the first to look away, disappearing into an elevator. Dolores waited a moment longer, then she followed the sound of Gloria's voice down the hallway.

identity theft

AYAME WHITFIELD

my body, victimless. i walk through
another's life, sleeping under her
blankets, looking into her mirror,
brushing my teeth with her toothpaste.

am i this person, unwound in possessions?
am i anyone at all?

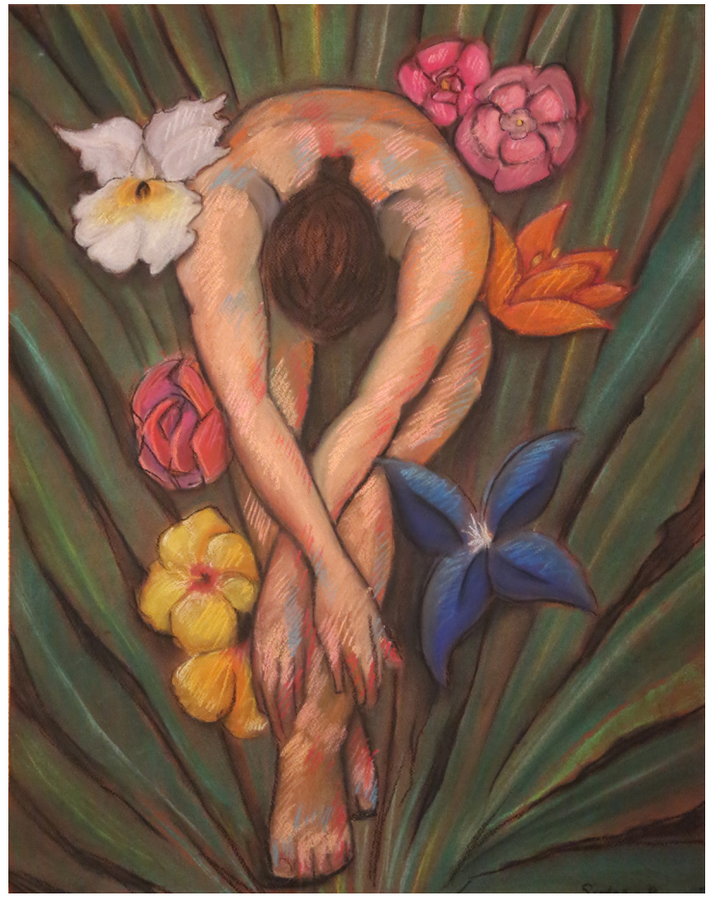
between her sheets, i slip on her dreams
like hand-me-down dresses. i'm
at the bottom of a well and all i see
is a circle of sky. it's low tide
and i'm chasing the waves as they
retreat.

i shower with her shampoo. i
blister in her shoes. i rearrange
the furniture in her room
and put it all back the next day.

the sky-circle hasn't gotten closer.
the sea hasn't, either. her skin
fits perfectly in all the wrong places.

Bloom

SYDNEY PENG



Sculptecture: Quelling the Sculpture-Architecture Dialectic

CAMMIE LEE

The Teshima Art Museum in Kagawa prefecture "consists of a concrete shell, devoid of pillars . . . [and] resembles a water droplet at the moment of landing."[1] Viewed from afar, its extraterrestrial form curves imperceptibly over the earth as if a part of the landscape itself. Before arriving at the structure, visitors walk along a promenade that weaves through the surrounding foliage while they listen to the waves crashing against the port and the wind rustling through bamboo leaves. They must then remove their shoes or slip on plastic coverings before entering the space to protect the white concrete flooring from outside scuff. Sounds within the structure become amplified and distorted, such that on a rainy day the soft pattering of raindrops creates ambient music. Two oval openings



Figure 1: Lateral view of the Teshima Art Museum. Teshima, Kagawa Prefecture, Japan. https://www.studio-block.com/blog/2018/7/17/creative-travel-the-art-islands-japan.

allow the viewer to peer out into the surrounding landscape from within the shell and invite the forces of nature to enter the space at their leisure. Vegetation native to Teshima surrounds the outside perimeter, while within the structure, groundwater seeps out of the porous concrete, collecting in small puddles on the smooth surface. Designed by artist Rei Naito and architect Ryue Nishizawa, the museum strives to impart an intimate experience of nature that engages all the senses.

The structure effortlessly merges with the surrounding landscape, yet its smooth, white, marble-like materiality distinguishes it from its natural surroundings. Although it evokes the elegance of classical sculpture, it permits visitors to tread along its surface as if walking through a building. It shelters visitors from the elements of nature while also allowing nature to enter the space without impediment, defying traditional notions of architecture. The structure in Teshima is both art and museum, pushing us to reconsider traditional distinctions between sculpture and architecture by presenting a novel form of art in between.

DIALECTIC

To understand the dialectic of sculpture and architecture, I find it necessary to first return to Vitruvius, as the Roman engineer and architect provides a foundational theory for understanding architecture in his treatise *De Architectura* [On Architecture]. From the Vitruvian principles of soundness, utility, and attractiveness, we recognize that architecture traditionally provided a protective shelter for mankind against the elements. Vitruvius offered the perspective that architecture resulted from necessity, and thus primarily served a utilitarian purpose. In the 18th century, architects such as Boullée and Piranesi began to promote the idea of visionary architecture. They sought to redefine architecture as the "art of designing," emphasizing a distinction between architects and builders, and asserted that like painters, sculptors, and poets, architects produced work from the imagination. Because they used immense scale to express the empirical sublimity of their imaginative projects, their works were often too visionary for the material world and were thus confined to paper. Through their sketches, they introduced a new understanding of architecture, one that would free architecture beyond the limits of utilitarianism and prompt people to conceptualize space in a new way. Visionary architecture signaled a shift from Vitruvius' utilitarian definition to architecture as an art form.

"The structure in Teshima is both art and museum, pushing us to reconsider traditional distinctions between sculpture and architecture."

Unlike architecture—a larger structure which housed the human—sculpture had the potential to imitate the size and physicality of the bodily apparatus. In *Art and Culture*, Clement Greenberg notes that traditionally "sculpture was handicapped by its identification with monolithic carving and modeling in the service of the representation of animate forms," referring to classical sculpture, which depicts the human figure.[2] Even as sculpture became increasingly abstract and suggestive, reducing complex, natural bodies to mere geometric shapes (exemplified by the work of Brancusi) and eventually arriving at the three-dimensional prismatic forms which characterize minimalist sculpture, sculpture has maintained a quality of anthropomorphism.[3] Michael Fried connects the thinking of Greenberg and Donald Judd to suggest that the anthropomorphism of minimalist sculpture gives it the presence of "a surrogate person—that is," Fried says, "a kind of *statue*."[4] Greenberg, Fried, and Judd speak to the same point, emphasizing sculpture's almost uncanny ability to mimic the effect of another body in space, separate from the viewer, as one of its key attributes. Rosalind Krauss adds another element to their discussion, asserting sculpture's attachment to place and its locational specificity as another of its defining features. She suggests that like the monument, sculpture traditionally "sits in a particular place and speaks in a symbolic tongue about the meaning or use of that place."[5] Thus sculpture not only acts as a "surrogate person," but also physically represents the place to which it is bound. To Krauss, sculpture's indebtedness to place becomes realized even at the level of its form—in its verticality, imitation of the figure, and reliance on the pedestal.[6]

Given their highly specific definitions, it comes as no surprise that critics have demarcated specific distinctions between sculpture and architecture, denying them the possibility of any overlap. Greenberg even touts



Figure 2: View from within the Teshima Art Museum. Teshima, Kagawa Prefecture, Japan. https://www.studio-block.com/blog/2018/7/17/creative-travel-the-art-islands-japan.

an illusive competition between sculpture and architecture, stating: "A work of sculpture, unlike a building, does not have to carry more than its own weight, nor does it have to be *on* something else, like a picture; it exists for and by itself literally as well as conceptually . . . . It is for a self-sufficiency like sculpture's, and sculpture's alone, that both painting and architecture now strive."[7] He suggests that in spite of architects' attempts to posit themselves as artists, a practice that began with the visionary architects, the functional utility of architecture continues to plague its existence and prevents it from gaining the same notoriety as sculpture. Krauss offers a different perspective regarding the distinction between two, suggesting that "sculpture had entered a categorical no-man's land: it was what was on or in front of a building that was not the building, or what was in the landscape that was not the landscape."[8] Taking a stance opposite of Greenberg's, her claims position sculpture as an art form seen in relation, and therefore always secondary, to architecture.

TESHIMA

With the traditional distinctions between sculpture and architecture in mind, the Teshima Art Museum poses an interesting paradox, embodying and defying qualities of both artistic categories. From the outset, its large shell-like form means that people interact with the structure as architecture. Visitors enter into the space through a small, arched opening and can freely roam inside the structure as if inside a building. Its sturdy, dome-shaped ceiling protects visitors from most of the natural elements. However, as wind, rain, and snow can easily enter the two large oval openings, the structure only partially upholds its duty as a Vitruvian structure. Additionally, the structure's design purposefully allows for groundwater to enter the space, which also seems antithetical to the Vitruvian idea that good architecture keeps nature outside. Such intentional modifications suggest that the structure entertains more of an artistic function in line with the thinking of the visionary architects.



Figure 3: Birds-eye view of the Teshima Art Museum. Teshima, Kagawa Prefecture, Japan. Photo by Thomas Seear Budd. Photographed for *Home Magazine*. http://www.thomasseearbudd.com/.

Yet in its harmonious coexistence with the surrounding environment, the Teshima structure seems to assert itself as sculpture over architecture. Built atop the natural curves of the landscape and carved out of the earth of the foundation, the form of the structure remains aggressively site-specific. Its design allows for groundwater, wind, sunshine, and other natural elements to permeate the inner shell, effectively tethering the structure to the place upon which it is built. From Krauss' viewpoint, the structure's attachment to place makes it a sculpture. Additionally, in comparison to the grandiose, expansive, geometric compositions of the visionary architects, the diminutive scale and asymmetrical form of the structure marks it as distinct from visionary architecture. Built without walls and resting low against the horizon, the erratic curves of the structure embody a sculptural animism which seems to imitate the organic forms of nature, harkening back to the Greenbergian conception of sculpture as a monolithic mimesis. However, it is much too immense and incorporated into the environment to take on the anthropomorphic quality of sculpture that Fried discusses. Positioned uncomfortably between disciplines, we are inclined to view the structure as an art form in between.

How then, can we begin to reconcile the vast expanse which separates sculpture and architecture to understand the duality of the Teshima Art Museum? I believe Heidegger provides a theoretical framework which allows us to process the differences between the two mediums. Through his discussion of the temple as a sculptural form, he dissolves the distinction between architecture and sculpture by suggesting that they serve the same function. Heidegger states that sculpture, the "object present-at-hand," opens up space by disrupting it and allowing us to see it in new ways.[9] He suggests that sculpture clears away space and "releases" places, which come to exist in the interactions between enclosed volumes of sculptural space and the empty space which exists between them. Sculpture thus causes us to notice spaces which we would have previously ignored.

"Positioned uncomfortably between disciplines, we are inclined to view the structure as an art form in between."

As for architecture, Heidegger asserts that the "steadfastness of the work" provides a point of contrast which illuminates the elements of nature. He states: "The lustre and gleam of the stone, though itself apparently glowing only by the grace of the sun, yet first brings to light the light of the day, the breadth of the sky, the darkness of the night. The temple's firm towering makes visible the invisible space of air."[10] The interaction between architecture and the environment thus makes visible the effects of nature, which we would otherwise take for granted. Simply by existing, Heidegger argues, "the temple-work, standing there, opens up a world and at the same time sets this world back again on earth . . . ."[11] As enclosed volumes of space, sculpture and architecture both function as disruptors of unmediated space. Their overbearing presences make us aware of the spaces we have grown numbingly accustomed to, and in doing so establish new places and environments.



Figure 4: Inside view of Teshima Art Museum. Teshima, Kagawa Prefecture, Japan. Photo by Andrea Anoni. https://www.andreaanoni.com/teshima-art-museum.

Through Heidegger's understanding of sculpture and architecture, the paradoxical duality of the Teshima Art Museum can be resolved in its disruption of space. In spite of the structure's coexistence with nature, its concrete surface invariably interrupts the multihued green disorganization of its surroundings. The white form demarcates a contained volume of empty space, effectively creating a white "blind spot" in the beholder's view of the landscape by obstructing a part of the natural environment. However, it is precisely through its disruption of space that the structure causes us to notice the nature of the surrounding place. When inside the space, the empty oval cutouts on the surface of the dome create a "frame" around nature when viewed in contrast to the structure's walls. Additionally, the cutouts allow the elements of nature—"light, wind, and the voices of birds . . . [and] on occasions also rain, snow and bugs"—to enter the space and interrupt the visitor's Vitruvian expectation to escape nature within the sheltered space.[12] As such, within the shell, the visitor experiences a full sensory disruption of the structure's neutral white tranquility. Although nature seems to disrupt the whiteness inside, it is ultimately the structure that acts as the disruptor on-site. The structure makes us aware of the environment by transforming nature—the state of normalcy to which we have become anesthetized—into the disruptor, evidence of its opening space to establish a new place. If sculpture and architecture are understood as interruptions to the uniformity of space in the Heideggerian sense, then as a disruptor and therefore *creator* of place, the Teshima Art Museum can

simultaneously act as both architecture and sculpture, resolving the tension within the dialectic.

ETYMOLOGY

In my concluding remarks, I want to address the terminology used to describe the Teshima structure. We call it an "art museum" for lack of a better word, but the term does not completely capture the structure's dual-identity as sculpture and architecture. "Art museum" favors the architectural half of the structure's dichotomy and fails to acknowledge its affinity to sculpture. Yet the term is necessary to effectively advertise the structure and attract a viewing public. The label "art museum" denotes a specific kind of destination where one can escape the modern world and engage in meditation with art. Traditionally operating at a smaller scale, sculpture is generally perceived as one piece of the museum, and thus does not bear the same monumental weight communicated by the term "art museum." As artists and architects continue to blur the lines separating sculpture and architecture, it will become increasingly onerous to continue using outdated terminology to label new hybrid works. Such a practice is a disservice to the artwork and an insult to the artist. Therefore, I implore the development of a new term which can better describe this new class of emerging work as simultaneously occupying the spaces of sculpture and architecture.



Figure 5: Outside view of the Café and Shop, Teshima Art Museum, and Ticket Office. Photo by Andrea Anoni. https://www.andreaanoni.com/teshima-art-museum.

NOTES

[1]"Teshima Art Museum," Benesse Art Site Naoshima, accessed March 6, 2020, http://benesse-artsite.jp/en/art/teshima-artmuseum.html.
[2]Clement Greenberg, Art and Culture (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965), 140.
[3]Michael Friend, "Art and Objecthood," in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battock (Berkely and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), 119.
[4]Friend, "Art and Objecthood," 129.
[5]Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," *October*, Vol. 8 (Spring 1979): 33, https://www.jstor.org/stable/778224.
[6]Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," 33. She explains that the pedestal acts as the point of contact between site and sculpture.
[7]Greenberg, *Art and Culture*, 145.
[8]Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," 36.
[9]Martin Heidegger, "Art and Space," in *Rethinking Architecture*, ed. Neil Leach (New York: Routledge, 1997), 122.
[10]Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art (Extracts)," in Rethinking Architecture, ed. Neil Leach (New York: Routledge, 1997), 120.
[11]Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art (Extracts)," 120.
[12]"Teshima Art Museum," Benesse Art Site Naoshima, accessed March 6, 2020, http://benesse-artsite.jp/en/art/teshima-artmuseum.html.

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42nd Street

JULIETTE CARBONNIER

running man

KADENCE MITCHELL

papa never was a running man. // in my dreams, he appears to me with his gun-slinging gifts in black and white, and the cap that proudly proclaimed his namesake, *POPS*, is both that and something else entirely; a massive cowboy's hat, a chieftain's headdress, cold milk cradling stale cereal, tom and jerry reruns and old western films—papa is horseback and leading his crew of men through Big Sky's Open Country // you see, my papa ain't never been no running man. instead, he is steel resolve and sheer force. agent of change, my papa could split mountains with a story and make grown men tremble // my papa could rob peter to pay paul, and still keep everybody fed // my papa could curse the devil in his own home and be back to his wife by suppertime // you see, my papa ain't never run a day in his goddamn life!

Flower Girl

SYDNEY PENG



A Letter

LOWELL HUTCHINSON

Dear Mahoney's Garden Center,

I am writing in regard to some forget-me-not seeds that I purchased a year ago. I followed the directions on the back of the periwinkle-colored packet exactly: 6 inches deep, in moist earth (near a body of water), and in the shade. I planted the seeds with my mother in 6-inch divots around the edge of the small pond next to my house. I thought they'd be done by July; my mother figured they'd survive until October, when the frost begins to settle in.

The forget-me-nots started to sprout in April. I know this because it was around the same time that my sister started getting worse, and my mother started crying regularly. I didn't want to watch her cry. So, I'd go out by the pond and watch the forget-me-nots. They grew slowly—like disease. Tiny green ovals balanced on white hair-like stems: they looked luminescent against the mud. They were so tiny, so delicate and fragile. I should've gotten a sturdier plant.

My sister had a talent for picking out just the right plant for every occasion. She'd often return from your store with the perfect texture and color. Pastel tulips for Easter, hydrangeas for my mother's birthday, and tiny yellow flowers for everything else. She really loved those little flowers. I'd considered getting those, but I didn't know their name, but then I wondered if I just couldn't remember the name, and the fact I couldn't remember the name set me on edge because I should be able to remember. I thought I had written it down at one point, but the paper had gotten lost in the hurricane mess that is our kitchen. I wished I could just ask her what their name was—perhaps that small remembrance would push her back to before the accident.

Before her memory dissolved.

My sister was particularly obsessed with the delicacy of flowers: the fragility of their petals, the shortness of their life. She was fascinated by floral rebirth—that they were able to die and grow back forever—a constant circle of death and birth and death and birth. Years ago, we used to play in the woods—I would try to climb the trees, and she would pick the petals off of wildflowers. I figured she had a crush on some boy in her class and was attempting to use floral magic to figure out if her love was reciprocated. But, one time, after she dropped the naked stem, she raised her young green eyes to me and said: "Mary, I'm so excited to die."

Last year, I went to your store to purchase those baby yellow flowers for my sister. And while I was looking at the seed packets, I read "forget-me-not." Forget-me-not. I felt the tiniest shred of hope pierce my heart: these seeds just might fix her. Maybe, through the magic of botany, my sister would heal and begin to remember again. So, I got them. I planted them. Their green leaves poked up in April; their baby blue heads surrounded the pond in July; and my sister died in October.

So, I'm writing to ask: what is the name of those little yellow flowers that my sister loved so much? Because they sure as fuck weren't forget-me-nots.

Sincerely,
Mary Krozak

The story "A Letter," written in response to "Flower," was the winner of Nass Lit's first Ekphrastics challenge.

third dirge

ANNA MCGEE

next week, my parents will meet me
outside the airport,
wind brushing neat my mother's hair.
on the drive home,
laura will ask again to see the pictures
of last month's dance.
raymond will open my door, then go nap
in his chair through the big game.
we will look out the window during sunset.
before i go to bed they will come
to my side in silence,
and we will say
james.



Frozen in Time

ANNA DE RIEL

Tomorrow (2015)

JULIA WALTON

I've watched a lot of movies over the course of this quarantine, but the French documentary *Tomorrow* (2015), by filmmakers Mélanie Laurent and Cyril Dion, has been the one I can't get off my mind.

As university students, we are well aware of the challenges that face our world: climate change, poverty, hunger, economic collapse. Very often we feel powerless in the face of these challenges, which are too big, too structural, for us to face by ourselves. *Tomorrow* was the first documentary that made me feel the exact opposite.

It is not only an optimistic film, with happy images of local farms, small businesses, the chic and adventurous filmmakers themselves, smiling children, and so on. It also attacks the problems at hand at the roots in order to explore solutions. Through interviews with innovative farmers, economists, lawyers, small business owners, mayors, and local concerned-citizens-made-activists, the filmmakers lay out clear, manageable steps that anyone can take. For example, did you know that farms that grow different crops together have a higher yield per acre—and are therefore more efficient—than destructive monoculture-based corporate farms? Or that the Finnish school system is the best in the world precisely because it is so relaxed, focused on social skills and personalized learning, without standardized tests?

The filmmakers' idea of "changing the world" is far from simple. Building a more sustainable and functional society will require changes in not just agriculture and renewable energy, but also changes to the economy, democracy, and education, all which depend on each other. It's a tall order. But, as the filmmakers show, many potential solutions already exist, and they start from the ground up.



Courtesy of tomorrow-documentary.com

The most surprising lesson I took from the movie is also its most crucial. Just like ecosystems are more stable when they're diverse, so are human societies. We've all watched with anxiety as supply chains fall apart, unthinkable amounts of fresh food are dumped or left at farms to rot, the government rushes to bail out the economy, and many people across the globe face food shortages and hunger in the midst of the coronavirus crisis. We have a globalized economy that has been revealed to be extremely precarious. Perhaps the aftermath is our chance to diversify, focusing on the local, in order to create a system that's more resilient. Starting at the grassroots is not only the easiest way to begin — it's also essential to the health of the world.

After watching *Tomorrow*, I feel hopeful that, if we chase a different dream for ourselves, we can create a better world—and energized to pursue it. That's been a gift to me while stuck at home.

borne back

THOMAS DAYZIE

As im borne back home
riding bitch in the back seat
the dull expanse unrambles

across the back-broken windshield
like the drabness of memory
that yawns, uncurling

in my skull of skulls.
Horse-hoarded home, where
the beasts paw at the ground

in solitude, nosing for traces
of scent in shit-laced dirt.
The image of this land sits

in memory's waiting room
alongside my first flu shot
alongside huddling in an alley;

they wait to be called:
to be assigned
a practically-sized compartment

to fold themselves into.
They wait to be shipped,
placed somewhere along

the pacific coast, and left.
In that place from which i dragged
myself so thoughtlessly,

brain lashed with realized whips,
brain tossing back & forth
like a steer raging against

a splintered corral. I say a prayer
to not remember & it echoes
in all the darkness of the road.



96th Street

JULIETTE CARBONNIER

Porch Light

TRISTAN COLLINS

Art had a rough three days. On Monday, he broke a plate. On Tuesday, he broke his ankle, and on Wednesday his mother died.

The plate was fairly insignificant. It was a piece in a collection—one of many. Art had no idea where the collection came from, but it existed in his apartment. It was his property and, however insignificant, it was an extension of himself. Losing it was not so painful, but at night he did have trouble sleeping. How strange it is that the slightest aberration can disrupt peace—a pinched nerve, the imprint of a whistle on silence. And the damage inflicted was incomputable; perhaps a year of his life had been lost, or a week, or just a day. Breaking a plate is something like losing time.

In the morning, the memory of the plate had disappeared entirely. It no longer mattered and to labor on such a tiny tragedy, even subconsciously, would only cause unnecessary harm.

It was Tuesday. Art dressed, ate a bowl of plain cereal, and prepared for work. As he had not been diverted from his regular schedule, he was able to remain calm. He tied his shoes, attempted to smooth the wrinkles that burdened his coat with neglect as dents burden a vehicle, and let his eyes wander to the window. It was an overcast October day. Violent trees were superimposed on an oppressive gray sky, the sort of sky that seems intent on disillusioning the world to all objects able to inspire a thrill of emotion. Against such a sky, the objections of the foliage earned only unnecessary stress.

Art worked for an insurance agency. He had dedicated himself to the peacemaking trade, the trade of peace. On his first day of work, Art had endured and eventually enjoyed a lecture on the importance of the job.

"See, we sell people peace of mind," his boss had said, putting his arm around Art's shoulder. "Human

beings worry. They should. Maybe it's an ironic statement, but we live in a death trap. From the moment we're born, the world turns its attention toward us and uses every resource at its disposal to kill us off. Lightning, tsunamis, mosquitoes, gravity. Each separate individual is the sole focus of every existing or imagined misfortune. See, human beings are self-centered creatures. And that will never change. So, we'll always exist," he swung his arms up, as if worshiping an omnipotent being.

There was something admirable about the boss. He was aware that he survived on exploitation, yet he was untroubled by remorse. The boss knew what he was doing; he accepted it, admitted it, and was therefore made guilty. However, he was only guilty before others. Although he knew that he deserved condemnation, he cheerfully refused to condemn himself. He existed in a paradox and was able to weather the storm. It was something he reveled in.

***

On that Tuesday, Art never made it to the Insurance Agency. He made it out his apartment door, and, after evading his habitually unpleasant landlady, he exited the building and hurried down the sidewalk toward his regular bus stop, but he did not make it onto the bus. When the bus stopped and opened to allow him passage, he, in his haste to board, tripped on the curb. Later, he would recall that he had been distracted by some undefinable half-thought. As he would describe it, "A prisoner of my subconscious brain had escaped into my conscious brain. I was busy attempting to restrain him."

In the confusion of the fall, the "prisoner" easily escaped detention, and Art, contorting his body to avoid the bus, fell awkwardly to the asphalt. He landed in an unnatural position and was promptly berated by a wave of pain. A number of horrible images spontaneously manifested themselves in his imagination—the least unpleasant being that of a broken ankle.

Ignoring the bus driver's offers of assistance, Art dragged himself to a nearby bench. Too nervous to examine his body, he trusted that his pain was proportional to the severity of his injury and dialed 9-1-1. After relating his location and (hypothetical) condition to the operator, Art hung up and waited, ignoring the eyes of the infrequent pedestrian, always curious but cautious, too interested to avoid glancing at the deformation but too frightened to approach or speak.

"From the moment we're born, the world turns its attention toward us and uses every resource at its disposal to kill us off."

At the hospital, a seedy looking, half-bald doctor took an x-ray of Art's lower leg and foot. The ankle was broken but that was not a remarkable surprise; Art, with his limited understanding of injuries and anatomy, had managed to provide a similar diagnosis. What he needed was a cast and crutches and advice. The doctor proceeded to burden him with all three.

"What should I do about work?" Art asked.

"Are you a professional athlete?"

"For transportation," Art clarified. "Can I continue taking the bus?"

"I'd avoid it. As long as you're unaccustomed to the crutches, it'll be difficult. And bus steps are steeper than the average step. If possible, I'd drive. Just try to walk as little as possible. It'll be hard to remember at first, but you'll get used to it."

Art took a taxi back to his apartment. That night, he again had difficulty sleeping. The first night with a cast is always the most troublesome, but there was a second source of discomfort. It lingered in the back of his mind, evading him. He didn't fall asleep until well past midnight.

When Art awoke, the previous day's events were entirely forgotten, and, for the shortest moment, his mind was at peace. But it was impossible not to notice the cast that suppressed the joint between his lower left leg and foot. And it would be very difficult to sense the cast and not remember the accident that had occurred. And so, after five minutes of impromptu meditation, Art stumbled out of bed and limped to the kitchen table. In a genius moment of forethought the night before, he had moved a box of cereal and a bowl from the cupboard onto the table. Sadly, the milk couldn't leave the confines of the refrigerator for an entire night, forcing one undesirable trip from the table to the refrigerator and then back again. Art poured himself a bowl of cereal.

It was seven o'clock. A few thin rays of sunlight were beginning to sneak over the windowsill and along the kitchen table; a single adventurous ray crept into the cereal bowl where it was disturbed by the milk. Closing his eyes, Art went over his schedule. Work began, as always, at nine. Usually the bus would greet him at quarter past eight, but today was an abnormal day. A coworker would be picking him up at eight thirty.

When, at eight thirty-two, the coworker arrived, Art was sitting on a wooden bench five minutes from his apartment building. Beside the bench was a trashcan and a lonely woodchip island from which a small maple tree protruded. Its leaves were just beginning to die, to flake, like tired monarch butterfly wings.

Art jumped, with limited agility, into the passenger seat of the car.

"How's the ankle?" the coworker asked. Art rarely spoke to the

coworker about anything unrelated to work; however, the man had never been anything but friendly. Art made an effort to return his friendliness.

"It's somewhere in there," Art said, nodding at the cast, "That's all I know."

It was nearing nine when they pulled into the crowded Insurance Agency Parking lot. It was five after nine when Art arrived at his desk. Having missed the previous day, he expected an unusually large pile of work, but he found that he had very little to do, which he decided was lucky. The confusion of the past two days had upset his practiced diligence. He couldn't trust himself to exude confidence or close a sale in his current state.

Art wasn't forced to make or return any calls in the morning. Out of boredom, he decided to eat lunch slightly early, at eleven thirty. Hoping to use his crutches as little as possible, he remained at his desk. Leaning back in his swivel chair, he removed a sandwich from a foggy plastic container and let his eyes wander out the window—a new and unfamiliar habit. He couldn't help but think that it was too nice of a day to be inside, or working, or unable to walk. Were all his bones in order, he wouldn't be having such thoughts. He knew it. On normal days, he didn't give undue consideration to things as variable as the weather or the sky.

After deliberately swallowing a meal of dry turkey and even drier bread, Art's phone rang. Oddly, it wasn't his work phone but his cellphone. Art rarely received calls on his cellphone; few people knew his cellphone number.

Art removed the phone from his pocket. He checked the phone number and recognized it as his father's. He cautiously answered the phone.

"Art... I'm sorry."

From the other end of the line came an unnatural voice—a voice dismantled and reconstructed faultily, an essential piece discarded. The voice, thus, appeared familiar, but failed to function as it once had. And Art, forced to consider its perfect but hollow form, was struck by sudden sad confusion. Was this frustrated sadness, Art wondered, a recognition of his own disillusionment (was he, only now, noticing his father's fragility), or had he, after years of treating his father dismissively, finally recognized the consequences of his own misguided immaturity. But Art wasn't responsible for the strangeness of his father's voice; rather, a sudden change had occurred, one capable of making Art's father's life a horrid dream—a dream that could only capably be averted by sleep.

Art found himself unable to console his father and unable to ask what deserved consolation. He waited for a strangled explanation, an explanation that his father would, finally, provide.

***

It was common knowledge that Art's mother had always hated cars. "What bothers me are the car companies and their lack of effort," she would say. "At least, in the past, the models were somewhat artistic. What's the word? Artisanal?" (Artisanal wasn't the word.) "But evolution takes its course. Why create something beautiful if something horrible makes a better profit? If only the car had evolved and not the philosophy of the industry."

If only she had lived in the past, the distant past, where there were no cars, no asphalt, no sharp turns or faulty brakes. Hers was an ironic death and, some dared to say, fitting, a death made for stories, a faultless parable.

***

The funeral was on Saturday. It was a humid day, but not especially miserable. Aspiring clouds billowed tentatively over the mountains and raindrops cracked against the ground, creating a Jackson Pollock of dark gray circles on the sidewalk. The rain would occasionally falter, but the change in the weather would go unnoticed. Umbrellas remained held to the sky.

It wasn't an objectively horrible day. If a survey were conducted, one would likely find that the adjective most used to describe the weather was "melancholy" or, if the subjects were especially pretentious, "contemplative."

Still, in the minds of those present, the day was miserable. They didn't notice the weather, as they had no reason to care about the weather. They felt no rain and saw no fog. The mountains were unrecognizable as mountains.

***

After a sufficient amount of soil had been placed on the box containing Art's mother, the crowd began to disperse. Somehow, many were able to exhibit symptoms of happiness, as if their tears had been designated for a single moment, a moment that had passed. They cried because they were empathetic. They felt no real sadness. Art couldn't blame them. They were trying their best. Was he so different?

Soon, only Art and his father remained.

"It's not beyond repair?" Art's father asked, gesturing to Art's cast.

Art shook his head.

"That's good," his father said, drifting off again. He wandered away from Art, guided by the arbitrary whims of his aimless eyes, turning his head indiscriminately and processing nothing.

Art's father was dazed. His eyes were empty and he both moved and spoke as if he were in a dream or, perhaps, as if he were watching a character in a dream. He was disconnected from everything physical and everything that had ever been allowed physicality. He had forgotten about his wife, not because of an absence of love; he

had and did love her more than any person on or below the earth. Yet now, he had forgotten her. Good for him, Art thought. He was partial, but for a short moment he was able to be concerned about Art's ankle. He would remember his wife in time. Now, she was too close, even if soil and the mahogany casket stood between them. Once he left the cemetery, he would struggle to recover this relief.

He would return home. She would not.

Art left the cemetery before his father. He decided to walk home; he felt that taking a bus or a cab would be selfish. How could he care for himself when so much else was more deserving of concern? But, of course, stumbling fifteen miles home does not relieve anyone's suffering. He was only rebelling against diffidence, revenging himself in silence. He was a child holding his breath in protest against the night. He was making himself a character in a film, lonely and pitiable and the subject of the sympathy and the tears of the man seeking entertainment and emotion in an imagined world. Wasn't his own suffering, easily avoidable, distracting from his mother's current condition? And, entertaining such logic, Art found that he couldn't avoid selfishness. After a mile of intense pain, he hailed a cab.

***

The driver of the cab was grizzled but seemingly young. His face didn't support heavy wrinkles or dark bags and his eyes were remarkably clear. When he first interacted with Art, the cab driver quickly demonstrated that he was unapologetically reticent, for which Art was grateful. The driver asked only for Art's desired destination. Art obliged, providing the address of his apartment building. The driver nodded, allowing Art to better return to the privacy of his thoughts.

Art searched for a harmless subject; few presented themselves and none were entirely removed from reality. All concerned real people, and though he had trained himself not to be emotionally affected by others, the thought of any relationship motivated a feeling suspiciously like guilt. Limited by his failing imagination, he prepared to make a difficult decision and chose to think about a more trivial relationship. Perhaps motivated by the sound of the taxi's tires on the asphalt, Art thought of the coworker who had so kindly offered to act as his chauffeur. That same coworker had, for two days now, been calling to check on Art, offering the assistance of his car. Though he had declined the offers, Art had refrained from relating the story of his mother's death; he didn't wish to acknowledge condolences. Instead, he had blamed his absence on the state of his ankle, claiming that the pain was almost unbearable and so obtrusive that it wouldn't allow him to complete any task with any efficiency. Each day the coworker had conscientiously relented before wishing Art well and offering to provide him with anything necessary, particularly groceries, as he was aware that Art was unable to travel to the store on foot. Each day Art had thanked him for his kindness before assuring him that help was unnecessary. He hadn't informed the coworker that he was surviving on dry cereal and water. On Thursday morning he had found that he had run out of milk.

Art found it strange that the coworker was not more suspicious of his absence. Art had never missed work before. In the past, he had been so diligent; his diligence had provided a foundation for his life, but what had that diligence been for? Diligence is commendable, but his diligence had been that of the sailboat, the unconscious acquiescence to the wind, the acquiescence of the man overwhelmed by a violent desire for simplicity. Dreaming of simplicity, he had advertised the necessity of insurance, claiming that worry was the enemy of a satisfactory life and proposing that nothing should be valued absolutely, but that everything should be made replaceable, that a broken plate could be forgotten and a broken ankle could be accommodated for. And his intentions were not dishonest. He had reasoned that if others were satisfied with simplicity, he could be as well, and, if everyone were satisfied, wouldn't that be a remarkable thing? But now everything had fallen apart. Such a contrived philosophy cannot overpower affection for a loved one; Art couldn't rationalize his mother's death. Any impressive insurance salesman would envy his current position. He was facing an enormous sale, but the words would not escape his throat. There was nothing he could offer, nothing he could accept, that would mend the present.

"He had reasoned that if others were satisfied with simplicity, he could be as well, and, if everyone were satisfied, wouldn't that be a remarkable thing?"

One might preserve a Jenga tower, removing and replacing bricks for some time before it falls. But so long as the game remains played, it must fall. Art could only acknowledge that he'd committed himself to the worship of a false deity, that he'd been too impressed by his boss's confidence. When the coworker called next, Art would be prepared with a better excuse. He was not on hiatus; he simply could not return to the insurance agency.

***

The cab had made the fourteen-mile drive to Art's apartment. In twenty-five minutes, the driver had not so much as whistled. Art told the driver that he could stop the cab two blocks from his apartment. The driver quietly pulled the cab to the side of the road. He didn't ask for any money, clearly assuming that Art was aware of how much he was expected to pay and clearly confident that Art would pay readily. His assumptions were

correct, and Art paid the correct amount of money, adding a larger tip than he would've normally considered reasonable. The driver nodded, his face directed at the road, and Art stepped onto the sidewalk, hobbled to the restaurant that was resting parallel to the cab, and sat down at a circular wire table. He didn't plan on ordering any food; had he, he would've been disappointed. The restaurant was closed for the season. It would open again in the late Spring or, perhaps, the early Summer.

Art sat in thought, occasionally shaking his head to prevent undesirable phrases from settling, like snow in snow globe. He couldn't allow himself rest. Were he careless, he would become stuck, trapped in the same thought, in the same position, in front of the same third-rate restaurant for years maybe. People would come to stare. His eyes would be glazed. They were now. His beard would trail along the asphalt. At the moment, he was clean-shaven.

The sun had begun to set, displaying the full range of colors found inside a Navel Orange across the grafted suburban horizon.

***

Art arrived at his apartment building at nine, but he didn't feel like sleeping, eating, or doing much of anything else. Of course, he had no reason to return to the sidewalk. He was stuck in the middle, so, leaning against the porch railing, he lit a cigarette and tried his best to escape his thoughts. He focused his energy on his senses. The air smelled like autumn. Of course, it was autumn, so his observation wasn't incredible, but it's true that there are some autumn days that smell nothing like autumn. At that moment, every sense dictated that it was autumn. Fog lined the streets and a cool wind touched Art's shoulders. Two dogs argued, one more distant than the other.

And there was the porch light. Art focused his attention on the light. It was hemispheric and stained brown where sediment had gathered over time. It seemed absolute from a short distance, but it only illuminated a small portion of the porch. The cigarette in Art's lowered hand had already escaped its gaze, becoming a negligible part of the expansive darkness.

From some unknown nocturnal corner, moths began to emerge. Maybe they had been there all along, shrouded in cigarette smoke. They were gray and white and pink and impressively weak. Like cherry petals, they floated as though subordinate to the breeze, but they were not; after every erratic tour, they would always return to the light, hovering near its surface, refusing to land. Art wondered why they did this. For food? No. For energy? They weren't plants. They didn't perform photosynthesis. Then why? A rational answer didn't present itself and a rare smirk cracked the practiced heaviness of Art's expression. That moths should frustrate logic... It was possible that he needed some sleep.

In the end, Art decided that it didn't matter why the moths were so attracted to the light. They existed to be near that light. In choosing to be near the light, they gave it meaning. When they returned to the light, the meaning was returned to them. That was all. The light did not provide any biological benefit, but they still existed for it. And they would be fine as long as light bulbs and lighting fixtures and fires existed.

Lucky, Art thought. If serenity were justified by light, life would be so secure. To a moth, the only existing threats to peace are predators and, perhaps, blackouts. Of course, the lifespan of a moth is, at most, a year. Of course, a meaningful year is an enviable thing.

"What do you think you're doing? Get rid of that cigarette this instant!" a voice called from the driveway. It was Art's landlady. She'd crept unnoticed to the bottom of the stairs where she now stood, dressed sordidly in darkness. It seemed that she too had been out for a late-night walk, a fact that Art recognized and begrudged. He believed walks to be symbols of sentimentality, and he didn't like to imagine that anyone else could be capable of sentimentality.

"I'm mourning," Art responded.

"I don't give a damn," the landlady said, "I've told you before. Not on my property."

Art reached for the doorknob. There was no relief, but he could only blame his own passivity.

"Don't ignore me."

"I'll toss it inside. I'll even toss it in the recycling."

"Find a trash can down the street," the landlady said. She climbed the stairs with quiet, threatening steps, and stopped in front of Art. Folding her arms like a disappointed elementary school teacher, she tilted her head upward. Her expression was oppressively cold; it did not suggest a capacity for sentimentality.

"I have a broken ankle," Art retorted.

"I don't give a damn."

The landlady watched Art hobble down the driveway. He didn't stop at the first trash can but continued along the sidewalk. Clutching the cigarette between his teeth, he gripped his crutches, focusing on every unique step. His ankle was beginning to go numb. After five minutes, maybe a little more, he arrived at the bench on which he'd sat while he'd waited for his coworker and the next day of work. Beside him, the branches of the little maple tree were covered in orange butterfly wings. They rustled in the breeze and, occasionally, they fell to the concrete, but, through squinted eyes, one could imagine that they were alive. The road was silent. Art swallowed a mouthful of damp air and leaned backwards.

Holding his cigarette between his index finger and thumb, Art traced the moon. It was full and alluring and as bright as the light on his apartment porch.

american love song

AYAME WHITFIELD

america loves me quiet, loves me
broken-mouthed & unwanting.
i have no more thirst, no more hunger

& no body at all to call my own. i'm
a blown-out tire on the highway shoulder
as america asks the wreck of me &

the ragged of me to look beautiful.
america loves me red with lipstick
unless i kiss it off another girl,

loves me on my knees for a man if i
hold silence in the clench of my teeth
& never let it go. you're made for

begging, america says. so beg.
i'm singing the only love song
america will ever teach me;

it's a hymn of razor wire &
giving bullets a home before
families. this love is conditional,

transactional, mine if i can afford it.
america promises it's mine,
bloodstains and all. where else

can you be so free? america asks.
where else can you be so alive?
where else?



Swipe Card to Play

ERIC TRAN

Contributors

Poetry

Tom Dayzie '22 is from San Diego. He studies English literature, Hebrew language, and American popular music. For recreation, he takes the necessary roads to either the movies or the beach.

Anna McGee '22 hails from Grand Rivers, Kentucky, and studies philosophy, creative writing, and cognitive science. She considers love her reason for living.

Kadence Mitchell '20 is an African American Studies major from Tacoma, Washington. Her creative and academic work explore the complex dynamics of ancestral legacy, and she feels closest to her roots when she's near an ocean.

Jeremy Pulmano '21 is a junior from New Jersey studying computer science with a certificate in creative writing. When he's not writing code or poetry, he's usually dancing. When he's not dancing, he's probably sleeping.

Meera Sastry '23 is a freshman from Los Angeles studying comparative literature. She has long been trying to get over a peanut allergy.

Ayame Whitfield '21 hails from Massachusetts and studies history of science and visual arts as well as writing intermittently. Some of the following are true about Ayame: might actually be a moth, collects exorbitant amounts of polyhedral dice, drinks far too much tea, and can be found writing poetry during precept more often than not.

Prose

Tristan Collins '23 is a freshman from Lenox, Massachusetts. While he has yet to declare his major, he has narrowed his choices to English and Philosophy. He is, however, most interested in improving as a creative writer.

Lowell Hutchinson '21 is a junior in the English department from the suburbs of Boston, Massachusetts. You will likely find her at the beach—flapping her arms and trying to communicate with the seagulls. She often wishes that she were a bird.

Cassandra James '23 grew up in a family of Greeks, Italians, and Colombians, which basically means she had to tell stories to survive. She loves the ocean at twilight, playbills, and avocados served with lime and salt.

Natalia Orlovsky '22 is a smallish, partially nocturnal mammal native to the northeastern United States. Although technically omnivorous, N. orlovskus subsists primarily on a diet of coffee, dark chocolate, and oranges. It is generally considered a lab-dwelling creature, but has occasionally been spotted in libraries, usually right before closing time.

Art

Juliette Carbonnier '23 is a freshman from New York City who hopes to study English with dashes of music, theater, art, and writing. She enjoys long walks in the rain, struggles to play chess, and is, sadly, allergic to onions.

Anna Hiltner '23 is a freshman from New Jersey. After taking a gap year in Bolivia, she is studying sociology, Latin American studies, and journalism. She loves a good adventure, whether it be hiking a new mountain or getting lost in a book.

Sydney Peng '22 is a sophomore from New Jersey. She likes to doodle in her free time, mostly in pencil sketches or digital drawings.

Abby de Riel '22 is a sophomore who loves spending time with books, dance, the outdoors, and having a cup of tea in hand. She's always thinking about movement, necessary pauses, and how to capture the essence of the world.

Eric Tran '22 is a sophomore from southeast San Diego concentrating in the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs. He enjoys writing and film photography, and his work covers anything from Vietnamese culture to processing grief, or capturing the simple joys in life. Avid consumer of cheese.

What We're Loving

Bes Arnaout '20 dreams with subtitles. When she grows up, she wants to be Lina Wertmüller or Jasmila Žbanić.

Rebecca Ngu '20 is a senior in the English department interested in urbanism and migration. They live in New York City but have been thinking a lot about Montana recently. They would like to pet your cat.

Julia Walton '21 is a junior from the Philadelphia suburbs. She is concentrating in English with certificates in Humanistic Studies, East Asian Studies, and Creative Writing. She currently serves as co-Editor-in-Chief for the *Nassau Literary Review*. She became nocturnal while writing her JP and is now trying to figure out how to wake up at a reasonable time again.

Essays

Cammie Lee '22 is a sophomore studying English, with additional interests in art history, Asian American Studies, and East Asian Studies. She wishes she could retreat to the Japanese countryside and live a provincial life making pots, reading books, and sipping tea.

Simone Wallk '21 is a junior from Chicago studying English. She loves long walks, art museums, and baked goods.

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