



# THE WALRUS

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Northern Virginia Community College  
Woodbridge Campus

## DEDICATION and ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The time has come, the Walrus said,  
To talk of many things:  
Of shoes — and ships — and sealing-wax —  
Of cabbages — and kings —  
And why the sea is boiling hot —  
And whether pigs have wings.  
--Lewis Carroll

With this issue, *The Walrus* returns from its long hiatus that began in the spring of 2020 with the onset of COVID. We dedicate this issue to our NOVA students, who have shown great determination and resilience in persisting through isolation, personal loss, and all the physical, mental, emotional, social, and economic challenges posed by the pandemic. This issue also honors the memories of those students, staff, faculty, family and community members who did not survive this tragic period in our national and global life.

Thank you to all the the students who submitted their literary and visual art for this issue, to Provost Richmond Hill and Dean David Epstein for their support, to Associate Dean Stephanie Harm for her encouragement, and to all the members of the Woodbridge Campus Language, Arts, and Social Sciences Division who inspired their students to participate. Special thanks to Managing Editor Dac Nelson, Art Editor Zac Jackson, and Publicity Guru Charlene Wilkins.

Assembling this issue was a richly rewarding experience as time and time again I was struck by the sheer talent, passion, imagination, and depth of feeling and insight in our NOVA students. Please enjoy and share this issue widely.

Jay Udall  
Issue Editor

Cover Art: *Head of Medusa* (Detail) by Abby Warren, acrylic paint on wood

## CONTENTS

### CREATIVE NONFICTION: PERSONAL ESSAY

4-5 Maria Bonilla *Sanctuary*

19-20 Logan Kotlus *When My World Stopped*

53-54 Jessica Sackitey *Rules Are Meant to Be Broken*

### DIGITAL ART

46 Abby Warren *Fantasy Meadow (Detail)*

### DRAWING

21 Lexy Altieri *Bateman*

52 Lexy Altieri *Broken (Detail)*

57 Lexy Altieri *Geisha Dolls*

### FICTION

14 Gunnar Foster *The Freeze*

27-28 Kaitlin O'Brien *Suburban Sprawl*

37-38 Sarah Hughes *Rose Moon*

40-41 Louis Hansen *A Picnic on the Moon*

### LITERARY ANALYSIS

11 Travis Theiler *Blasphemy in Eden*

22-24 Stephen Rhoades *“How We Suffer”*: *Suffering and Addiction in “Sonny’s Blues”*

31-34 Andrea Ortiz-Valdez *An Angel within a Devil...*

44-45 Martin Green *“Queer Theory According to my Grandmother”*: *Toxic Masculinity...*

55-56 Humaira Hatif *Family Meals*

### PAINTING

Cover Abby Warren *Head of Medusa (Detail)*

35 Lexy Altieri *Lucifer (Detail)*

### PHOTOGRAPHY

3 Savon Sharp *Harry’s*

6 Kyle Hallman *Untitled*

10 Savon Sharp *Ghost*

16 Lucas Dean *Mirrored Messengers*

26 Novera Chowdhury *Walking Alone*

30 Savon Sharp *Barefoot*

39 Savon Sharp *5:49 AM*

60 Savon Sharp *Midsummer*

## CONTENTS (continued)

### POETRY

- 1 Sarah Hughes *Midnight Assassin*  
2 Kyle Hallman *Two Dollar PBR*  
13 Indy Rushing *Ouroboros*  
15 Josue Ayala-Franco *Gate B44*  
17-18 Annie Terault *Watch Me Burn*  
25 Kayla Moss *Am I worth self-worth?*  
29 Stefan Kovecevic *What's Up*  
36 Angel Savoy *Cigarette Smoke*  
42-43 Indy Rushing *An Ode to Radio Stations*  
47 Gunnar Foster *The Fields Then and the Fields Now*  
58-59 Huayra Forster *Freed Unrestfully: The Referential Point of '08*

### SCRIPTS

- 7-9 Rebecca Beauchemin *The Lamb*  
48-51 Kim Aalaie *Women, Life, Freedom*

**Midnight Assassin**  
**Poetry by Sarah Hughes**

Obsession, the symbiote of love,  
Creeps upon the spider-silk of my heartstrings;  
A midnight assassin  
Bites into my heart, paralyzes—  
Everything twists and crimsons and blurs  
And then I am alone.

Alone, falling into the belly of a black hole,  
Ambition spaghettified,  
Love deconstructed,  
Purpose unraveling,  
Atom by atom,  
Until I reach a singularity:  
Obsession, the consort of love,  
The omnipresent shadow  
To my heart's wildfire,  
The ever-waiting leopard  
In the romantic wisteria,  
The oil spill  
In my oasis tide pool.  
Obsession, my midnight assassin,  
Was love an illusion I cast to mask the madness?  
Do these veins not distinguish between love and a piercing needle?  
Is that why at the bottom of this dark chasm I crave the fluttering ecstasies  
of uncontaminated love?  
Retch me out of your abyss, obsession,  
Into unblemished sun and unclouded skies,  
Into oozing pink blisses and sugar-stardust highs,  
Retch me out  
So that I may fall in again.

**Two Dollar PBR**  
**Poetry by Kyle Hallman**

The sound of steps on a sidewalk.  
The constant beat of soles on concrete.  
A mute drum banging as I stroll to no single tune,  
Only the conflicting melodies of cars on streets,  
Wind through conifer needles and dead branches.  
Music in the distance from an uninvited party, and  
The ringing of the bells on top of Burruss Hall.  
Searching for my favorite bar,  
And its two dollars special on PBR.  
The sound of a crash on Prices Fork Road,  
Wheels squealing, the sound of a shout, a  
Sickening thud, and silence.  
In the trees hundreds of jet-black wings.  
Oily streaks against a grey blue sky, squawking  
Their own ugly tune, harmonizing with the  
Approaching sirens in the distance.  
The ambulance zooms past and  
I watch the crows take flight,  
First a chaotic cloud, and then a murder of intent.  
Streaming by, following the fading blue and red lights  
I continue away, on my own muted beat,  
Soles pressing on concrete drums,  
Banging to the tune of flapping wings,  
Searching for my favorite bar,  
And its two dollars special on PBR.

Harry's  
Photo by Savon Sharp



## Sanctuary

### Personal Essay by Maria Bonilla

I never understood the beauty of trees. They were always just large plants attached to the earth that gave us oxygen, shed their leaves every fall, and grew them back in the spring. I never understood trees until one of them became my favorite place in the world. There stood an old tree that sat in the backyard of my childhood home with small flowers around the trunk of it, and I always found it mesmerizing whenever I looked at it. On sunny days when the breeze was calm and the backyard was empty, I would sit underneath it whenever things at home became too overwhelming. It was my little bubble from the world, and whenever I would sit underneath it, I felt like nothing could hurt me. I could climb its branches for hours and admire the world as I climbed higher up. I could lay on the grass underneath and stare up at it while my head filled with stories of the tree and how it could have had a name that only the plants and wind could pronounce. It was my favorite place in the world.

My father was an abusive man growing up, and my mother could only do so much to protect us. It's weird to think that someone you're supposed to feel safe with is the monster in your nightmares or the thing that goes bump in the night. My mother never really had a safe place to go to; since she came from a traditional Hispanic household, she would often get asked by her aunts, "What did you do to make him so mad?" or say, "If you were truly a good wife, this wouldn't be happening to you," whenever she tried to confide in someone about what was happening to her. I never understood why no one would help her. I had never felt so helpless before as I did at that moment.

The leaves on my tree were mint green, and the bark had a rough texture underneath my fingertips. The air around me had an earthy smell that I grew to love. I would lay my head against the tree and watch the leaves fall from above me. This was my sanctuary, and with no escape from the horrors at home, the tree in my backyard brought me a sense of safety. I could sit there for what felt like an eternity and just pick the small flowers that grew on the trunk of the tree, but the feeling of safety could only last for so long. Just inside, I could hear the rage in my father's voice echoing throughout the house and leaking out into the backyard. There was a lump in my throat that I couldn't swallow, and my heart was beating so quickly that it felt like it was going to jump out of my chest at any given moment. I couldn't stay outside forever, no matter how badly I wanted to. When the sun began to go down and the day turned to night, I left my sanctuary and went inside, and with each step I took, it felt heavier than the last.

As a child, it was drilled into my head that what happened behind closed doors stayed behind closed doors. My mother's family made it clear that they wouldn't meddle in her marriage, but maybe if they had known how bad things were, they would have helped, but help never came. My mother was a strong woman and made sure to shield my older sister and I from what was happening as best as she could, but with no one to protect her from the monster that lived in the same house as her and nowhere to go, she had to endure the abuse at the hands of my father.

There was a time when my mother joined me in my little sanctuary. It was the beginning of fall, and the problems at home started to leak out into the outside world as people began to notice the bruises on my mom, which she couldn't quite hide. The leaves were crimson red and sun-flame gold. The pile of leaves around me reeked of a musky, sweet scent, and if I were to smell it again, I know it would give me a pleasant feeling in my chest. During this time, my mother was planning on leaving my father. She had managed to obtain a job at a video store when they were still popular and worked late shifts since my father never liked to watch over my older sister and me for long periods of time.

I think my mom didn't understand why I found safety in the tree in our backyard. She only saw it as a large hunk of wood that didn't have any purpose to her, but to me, it was everything. It was a place for me



to go when my father's shouting became too overwhelming and I could no longer listen to the soft cries coming from my mom as she looked into the face of the beast and endured his physical abuse. That day was the only time my mom ever joined me underneath the tree. She didn't do anything as she sat there and listened to me ramble about the color of the leaves, holding a large collection of them as I handed her leaves I thought were pretty.

I didn't know the last time I would see my favorite place in the world, my sanctuary, would be the day my mother finally left my dad. I remember the way the breeze calmed me as I tried to tune out my parents fighting inside the house, the sting in my eyes as I tried not to cry, and the lump in my throat that took me multiple times to swallow. The feeling of fear and dread mixed in the pit of my stomach as the noises from inside the house grew louder and more violent. Who knew a large old tree could hold all the secrets it witnessed while also providing me with comfort? A tree that has lived longer than I have, who has seen the people who have lived in the house come and go, who has seen people come into and leave this world, leaving nothing but memories and ghosts behind.

The last day I looked at my sanctuary was the day my mother finally had the courage to finally leave my father. I was outside saying goodbye to my tree as if it could hear me; a part of me liked to think it could, and I wondered if it would miss me. My mother was inside the house packing our belongings before my father came home from work. She knew that she no longer wanted to be a victim of his abuse and knew she needed to do what was best for her children and leave. My mother knew in her heart that if she stayed any longer, my father would eventually kill her like all the other abusive husbands that were spoken about in the news, so she became the hero that you would read about in stories, who came along and saved the innocent. She saved herself and her children from enduring any more horrors than we'd already faced. My mother had put together all the money she had earned from working at the video store and convinced my grandmother to let us move in with her until she could find a place for us to live away from my father.

I often think back at that old tree and wonder if it's brought any comfort to the residents that now occupy the house I once grew up in. Who would have thought that my favorite place in the world was an old tree that's been alive longer than I have? I'll always be grateful for the comfort it gave me during a time in my life when nowhere was safe and for the memories I will cherish for years to come. I had never seen the beauty in trees, but my perspective on them changed, and I had never seen a more beautiful thing in my life. I still find comfort in trees; even now, at the age of twenty, I admire the beauty of them whenever I sit underneath one and let my gaze dwell on the lace of leaves above me. My favorite place in the world was a hunk of wood, and to this day I still miss it. I hope one day I will be able to go back and see it one more time, but for now I'll have to settle for the memories it's given me.

Photo by Kyle Hallman



**The Lamb**  
**Script by Rebecca Beauchemin**

Characters:

1. Charlie Baker: 18, female
2. Meredith Taylor: 18, female
3. Dr. Hill: 46, female, overseer of the tests

Setting:

1. Starts in a test-taking facility ran by the government

Time:

1. Year 2087

(Charlie sits in the waiting room with her childhood friend Meredith while they both wait for their results from the examination taken two days prior.)

Meredith: You nervous?

Charlie: Of course, aren't you?

Meredith: (Shrugs.) Not really.

Charlie: I shouldn't be surprised, Miss Nerves-of-Steel.

Meredith: Why're you nervous?

Charlie: Because these tests decide where we belong in society based on our personalities!

Meredith: So?

Charlie: (Huffs.) So, what if there's no place for me? What if my results say that I don't belong?

Meredith: That's ridiculous. Of course, you belong; everyone belongs. Everyone has an important role to play, no matter their personality.

Charlie: You're basically just quoting their motto.

Meredith: Based on that little smile, I'd say my attempts to make you feel better are working.

Charlie: (Covers her face with her hands.) Shut up.

Meredith: I promise you belong, okay? We may not have the same results, but you'll have a purpose.

Charlie: Promise?

Meredith: (Smiles.) Promise.

(The two friends wait a moment or two before a guard walks in.)

Guard: Charlotte Baker?

Charlie: (Stands up on trembling legs and follows the guard.)

Meredith: Love you!

Charlie: (Turns around.) Love you too!

Guard: (Leads Charlie out of the building to a parked van.) Wait in the back. Dr. Hill will arrive shortly.

Charlie: Did something happen? Is there something wrong with my results?

(Guard closes and locks the doors, sits in driver's seat. A middle-aged woman in a business suit enters the passenger seat.)

Dr. Hill: Hello, Miss Baker, I'm Dr. Hill. How're you doing this morning?

Charlie: Nervous. Was there something wrong with my results? I'm worried I don't have a place in our society.

Dr. Hill: Don't worry, Miss Baker, everyone belongs, including you.

Charlie: I do?

Dr. Hill: Absolutely! In fact, we're taking you there right now. We're very lucky to have your personality come up the way it was.

Charlie: Wait, really?

Dr. Hill: Of course!

Charlie: Why?

Dr. Hill: Because you have a key role in helping us maintain our perfect society.

Charlie: (Smiles to herself.)

Dr. Hill: If you look to your left, Miss Baker, you'll see where you'll be staying.

Charlie: (Looks out the window to see a brick building surrounded by chain-linked fences and watchtowers.) Looks like a prison.

Dr. Hill: What was that?

Charlie: Oh, I was just talking to myself.

(A large office building comes into view and Dr. Hill leads Charlie inside.)

Dr. Hill: Miss Baker, I'm sure you know how important it is to keep our society pure, don't you?

Charlie: Of course.

Dr. Hill: And do you know how we do that?

Charlie: (Shakes her head.)

Dr. Hill: Sorting.

Charlie: Sorting?

Dr. Hill: Separating the good from the bad through tests.

Charlie: What kind of tests?

Dr. Hill: Personality tests.

Charlie: What—

Dr. Hill: (Takes out Charlie's results and begins to read.) Reserved, quiet, shy, overemotional traits that are seen as bad. Traits that don't belong in our society.

Charlie: Wait, but I thought you said I had a purpose!

Dr. Hill: You do. Here—along with the others who are like you. Your "purpose" is to be our test subjects so we can give the people with good personalities a better life. Experiment drugs on you, medicines, sleeping and eating habits, and other things related.

Charlie: No...

Dr. Hill: Yes. How else do you think we maintain a perfect lifestyle? You're our test tubes. That is your purpose.

Charlie: You can't do this!

Dr. Hill: But we have been for almost a decade now.

Charlie: (Shakes her head.) This is wrong.

Dr. Hill: Funny. I don't recall you saying that when you were living like someone who has good traits. In fact, no one ever seems to care until they're the ones who have to suffer. Until they're the ones who have to be sacrificed.

Charlie: It isn't fair!

Dr. Hill: (Scowls.) Fair? How old are you? You really think we have such a successful society without any sacrifices made? You think our world is so perfect, that nothing bad ever happens? Such naivety is, well, befitting for you, I suppose.

Charlie: You believe all your perfect citizens have no bad traits? Or people like me have no redeeming qualities?

Dr. Hill: Weren't we in agreement on how perfect and pure our society was a moment ago?

Charlie: (Lowers her head and stays quiet.)

Dr. Hill: Anyway, I learned about your living arrangement; about how you live with your childhood friend, correct?

Charlie: Is she coming here?

Dr. Hill: No, she received her results the day she took the test.

Charlie: What! But she came with me—

Dr. Hill: To say goodbye.

Charlie: (Pauses a bit before speaking.) What do you mean?

Dr. Hill: What do you think it means? We told her your results and explained that you'd be taken here. We asked if she wanted to say goodbye and she said yes.

Charlie: (Mostly to herself.) Why didn't she say anything?

Dr. Hill: She knew you'd react this way, so she told us this would be our best approach at getting you here.

Charlie: This was her idea?

Dr. Hill: Everyone is brought here in different ways. Miss Taylor knew what was best for you as an individual.

Charlie: (Vehemently shakes her head in denial.) No. No, you lied to her. You told her I'd be living in a happier place, or something. She doesn't know about this place, about me. She can't!

Dr. Hill: You think like a child. Unlike you, once we explained the situation, she understood it was for the betterment of our society.

Charlie: You'll be dehumanizing us.

Dr. Hill: How was it?

Charlie: (Gets caught off guard by the question.) What? How was what?

Dr. Hill: Living in society. Did you enjoy eating succulent meals? Sleeping in the coziest of sheets? Taking medicine that worked basically instantaneously on any cut, bruise, or illness?

Charlie: (Remains quiet.)

Dr. Hill: You and people like you taint the purity of society. Hence, why you belong here.

Charlie: We don't—

Dr. Hill: (Presses a button on her desk and another guard arrives, holding chains.) This will be our last time seeing each other. We all thank you for living out your purpose here and—

Charlie: No—!

Dr. Hill: —for the sacrifices you'll be making each day to maintain and improve our perfect society. They will not be forgotten. (Stands up and leaves, ignoring Charlie's cries.)

END

**Ghost**  
**Photo by Savon Sharp**



## Blasphemy in Eden

### Literary Analysis by Travis Theiler

Changes in society throughout history can often be seen through the works of great writers and poets of their time. Writers will often challenge people to think differently and perhaps question things that they never thought to question before. Forough Farrokhzad was one of these writers. In her poems, “The Sin” and “Rebellious God,” she challenged her Iranian readers with taboo topics such as sex and revenge in the face of repression. Her poems sought to break down the close-minded society she grew up in by putting her most deviant thoughts on display for all to see. Farrokhzad was a rebellious writer whom we can all learn from as long as we are willing to leave our comfort zones for just a short while.

Farrokhzad’s poem “The Sin” was her breakout poem that kickstarted her career. Controversy swarmed around a young married woman’s poem about sex with her lover. Just imagine the headlines. The poem begins with, “I sinned a sin full of pleasure.” This very first line tells me that she does not feel guilty for such a sin. Why is it bad to do something that feels good? This was not a sin out of anger or hatred; it was instead one of passion and love. She repeats this line again in the final stanza after unabashedly describing her time with her lover. This further solidifies her unapologetic feelings toward her actions.

You’d be forgiven for thinking sex is the conflict of this poem, but it is adultery that is the sin. In the third stanza, Farrokhzad writes, “In that dark and silent seclusion, / His lips poured passion on my lips, / I escaped from the sorrow of my crazed heart.” This implies she is in an unhappy relationship and this man she is with is who she truly loves. In the next stanza, she calls him “crazed lover of mine,” which puts away any doubt about who he might be.

To be guilty of adultery is horrible no matter who you are and where you live, but as a woman in 1950s Iran, it is far more serious. Farrokhzad admits to this act in her writing to highlight the discrepancy between how everyone says we ought to live, and how we actually live. Personally, I find adultery to be one of the worst things you can do to another person, but I recognize that everyone’s situation is unique to them. Maybe she was in a loveless marriage, or perhaps it was a way of revenge. Whatever the case may be, the world is not black and white, right or wrong, and I think her poem, “The Sin,” is a good representation of how messy the real world actually is.

In Farrokhzad’s poem, “Rebellious God,” she uses more metaphors and imagery than in “The Sin,” but keeps the theme of rebellion, as the title would suggest. She opens her poem with, “If I were God.” Similarly to “The Sin,” she starts challenging the reader right from the start. In Islam, it is quite a serious offense to even suggest that God be a woman. I once jokingly said to a young Muslim girl whom I was dating that Allah could be a woman and she gave me a look that I thought surely was a prelude to a slap on my face.

After taking on the role of God, Farrokhzad writes, “I’d upturn the world with the frenzy of my furious fingers, /and with my hands, tired of their thousand-year stillness, /I’d stuff the mountains in the seas’ open mouths.” This stanza expresses the anger she has toward the world. The “thousand-year stillness” is all the years that have gone by without God doing anything, and so she feels like her cleansing would be justified, like giving your dog a bath after playing in the mud. Her reasoning for her anger isn’t ever explained, but I think she feels repressed in her society and this is her way of rebelling against it.

Farrokhzad goes on at some length to describe the apocalypse of the world at her hand in destructive, horrifying ways but with beautiful metaphors and imagery. However, in the sixth stanza, we get to what I believe is the real horror and true meaning of the poem. She starts with the same line from the beginning, “If I were God.” This use of repetition draws attention to and acts as an indicator for the climax of the poem. She continues with, “I’d call on the angels one night, /to boil the water of eternal life in Hell’s cauldron.” For the past five stanzas of this poem, she has described the slaying of everyone on the planet, and now she wants to

continue that into the afterlife as well. Not even in Hell are you safe from her “furious fingers.” Yet, she goes one step further.

In that very same stanza she writes, “and with a burning torch chase out the virtuous herd, /that grazes in the green pastures of an unchaste heaven.” She feels that not even those considered to be righteous are safe from her wrath. She refers to them as a “herd” that “graze.” I believe what she is insinuating is that they are like sheep. They don’t walk where they want to walk, they are herded. In other words, they don’t think for themselves. I believe this is what she doesn’t like about them; this is their sin.

She concludes this masterpiece of a poem with something I think would make The Prophet Muhammad turn over in his grave if he read it. She begins the final stanza with, “Tired of being a prude, I’d seek Satan’s bed at midnight, /and find refuge in the declivity of breaking laws.” What she is saying here is that going against the rules is where she feels most safe. Being able to think for herself, even if it may be morally wrong in the eyes of some, is what she feels she deserves. This poem is absurd. It is horrifying. It is possibly my favorite poem I will ever read.

Farrokhzad did not sit idly by while she felt that she was being repressed by the world around her. Through her poetry she expressed her feelings, however “wrong” they might be. She went against the mold of how a Muslim woman is meant to act and think. She got a lot of pushback in her time, and for a while her poetry was banned in Iran. But her legacy of thinking for herself and challenging the norms of society lives on not just in her country, but around the world.



**Ouroboros**  
**Poetry by Indy Rushing**

The glass panes of my window turn plush / under the push and pull of my hands / My front door opens into the bathroom / and the door to the bathroom opens into the living room / At the grocery store I make a break for it / but fluorescents blind me / long enough to steer me to my bedroom / The hallways of my home loop into a running track / leaving me to run circles until I wear myself down / I can't get out / The drywall echoes my frustrated screams / even when I rip it off the wall / the starving rats mimic me / Their hollow eyes dissolving in the light / their paws shrivel like my grandmother's / The only option I have is to lay on the rug / watch the pattern transform into a labyrinth / just in case I fall through / Eventually I will fall through / be consumed by the wooden panels in the floor / Then the house waits for its next victim / lure in the next family / looking for a good deal on a house / At the sight of the comforting bricks / they'll fall in love with it / perhaps making a light comment / about how the neighbourhood is a little difficult to navigate / how all the roads look the same / The realtor will stand there on the porch / laughing and reassuring them they'll learn the layout soon enough / Did they see the nervous smile on the realtor's face / It was only a few seconds / The way he froze / glancing over his shoulder / Who's back there / Who's watching him / The family decides to buy the house / Can't they hear me trying to warn them / They need to get out of here / I need to get out of here / They point out muddy tracks from my shoes / the last evidence of my existence / With the twist of a knob / the realtor washes them away with my hose / It was never my home / Eventually the family will join me beneath the floor / listening to the rats like they're our own personal mockingbirds.

## **The Freeze**

### **Fiction by Gunnar Foster**

Captain Gutbrand stared at the massive aircraft carrier as it was towed into port. Already welders and mechanics were tearing open a hole to take the reactor out. The bunker was almost done and the final piece was the still beating heart of the USS Theodore Roosevelt. This reactor would provide the heat and power to keep 10,000 people alive in the Roanoke bunker system along with DNA samples of most animals on earth along with the seeds or saplings of most plants. Already massive sheets of ice were this far south and causing havoc for ships trying to make their way to ports rumored to have a bunker. Captain Gutbrand continued to watch as the last fighters the carrier would ever hold dropped bombs on a few cargo ships trying to run the blockade around the port. This scene had been repeated all over the world; as the world grew colder and darker, people had swarmed to the places that supposedly had bunkers or other ways to fight the freeze.

Gutbrand grunted in satisfaction as he saw the massive reactor finally being pulled out by one of the cranes used to load and unload cargo.

“Sir, the reactor is almost ready to be loaded onto the train,” Lieutenant Mukim said.

“Good, let’s hope that the National Guard secured the rail. We can’t have another Los Angeles. They’re still looking for another reactor!” Gutbrand said.

Mukim nodded his agreement “Yes sir. What about the civilians? We’re not going to do what supposedly happened in China and Detroit are we?”

“No, we have our orders. We’re going to give them the last of the winter survival gear and tell them to move out and look for shelter. They know that the lottery has already been drawn. Yes sir. I’ll prepare the fence guards.” With that Lieutenant Mukim walked outside into the blistering cold.

As the reactor was loaded onto the train car, the rest of the soldiers and technicians also loaded onto the train. They were all lucky. They had either won the lottery or the Government claimed them to be too important for the vital infrastructure of the bunker to be left to freeze. As the train moved out, Gutbrand watched the crowd of humanity cry in horror as they realized that their last hope was rolling away. Babies were held up above the crowd along with small children and even some pets. Gutbrand watched this all in silence as they slowly disappeared from view. He slowly went to sleep so he could get some rest before the offloading process began in five hours.

Gutbrand suddenly awoke to the sound of screeching metal. He looked out the window to see a wall of people rushing towards the train. Just then he felt a thud as the train hit a barricade on the rail line and started to tip over. With that, Gutbrand realized with a sinking gut that the National Guard had failed and now 10,000 people including his wife and child were going to freeze to death with the multitudes of humanity left outside the bunkers.

## **Gate B44**

**Poetry by Josue Ayala-Franco**

The crowd lines up  
Just like a pack

Bags in one hand  
With all their stuff

They scan and swipe  
The pass to leave

Left all alone  
With memories

Hopefully soon  
They can come back

With gifts and laughs  
To share with us

They walk into  
The plane with fear

Soon to be gone,  
Never back here

**Mirrored Messengers**  
**Photo by Lucas Dean**



**Watch Me Burn**  
**Poetry by Annie Terault**

The days are going by too slow  
Still wearing yesterday's clothes  
The sun is tattooed on my back, Apollo  
Is this really my life?

Been circling the drain  
Clumsily flying by your Venus flytrap  
Caught in a hurricane  
Driving down 95 with the lights off  
Tenderly holding my grief  
These arrows of mine aren't unique  
They stick out awkwardly  
But I can't help if people like me  
For my self-destructive habits  
Keep my distance from my past sins  
I look toward the sun as if I belonged there  
For my impulsive nature  
My careless smile in the face of danger  
A wounded cornered dog kind of grin  
So unaware of the burning  
Scent of charring wood and flesh  
Little star at my fingertips  
The manifestation of what I left unsaid  
Loosely holding back strands of hair  
Staring down the black hole  
Breathing isn't effortless anymore  
It's gasping for air  
Feed my fire  
Born just to burn to death  
Do you see me shining, bright one?  
Am I your monster or champion?  
A supernova in waiting  
Like Icarus, falling, failing

(continued)

The days are going by too slow  
The songs have stopped entering my ears  
The sun is tattooed on my back, Apollo  
This relief in my chest is just a twisted knife I fear

## **When My World Stopped**

### **Personal Essay by Logan Kotlus**

The Earth is currently spinning at approximately one thousand miles per hour. If it were to instantly stop, you would be flung due east at that same speed. This is exactly how it felt when my mother was diagnosed with cancer... the second time. When you receive this kind of news, everything else vanishes. All you think about- no, all you can think about, is that it is incredibly likely you might lose whoever received the diagnosis. It becomes a near obsession; there is almost a necessity to think about it. School, sports, friends, anything going on in your life ceases to matter in comparison to the news. So right then, when my world stopped and I was flying at a thousand miles per hour, all I thought about was how much time I had left with my mom.

I remember it like it was yesterday; I was ten years old, and for some reason my parents went on a trip for the day. As I did my schoolwork under my grandmother's supervision, it bugged me that I didn't know where they were. But that feeling was nothing compared to how I felt when I saw the look on my grandmother's face throughout the day. She was normally cheerful with a face full of emotion, but today she looked drained. Her face was set in a worried expression: she was pale, her eyes half-filled with half tears that pooled at the bottom of her eyelids but refused to ever fall, and her leg never stopped shaking up and down. When my parents returned, my dad took my two siblings and me into the master bedroom and sat us down on the side of the bed. He sat in his usual spot, a recliner chair where he would toil away on his laptop. A grave expression was on his face, and all I could do is wonder whether something was wrong or if the three of us were in trouble. Unfortunately, it was the former. My dad told us that mom hadn't been feeling well lately, so they went for a checkup with some of her oncologists. He told us that her cancer had returned.

I can't remember what my initial reaction to this was, but the look on my father's face after he broke the news haunts my nightmares. All he could manage to do before crying was say "I know. It really sucks." After that, we left the room and went into the garage where my mom was still sitting in the car with a look of determination. My two siblings and I opened the door to the car and hugged her as if it was our last chance to do so; gripping on to the woman who meant the world to us like we could anchor her there. For the rest of that night, I was devastated. I couldn't muster the energy to express everything I wanted to, so I just existed, detached from the reality I was in. After my dad took all of us to get some dinner, my mom, who would never let me or my siblings skip out on any of our responsibilities, reminded us that we were all going to school the next day. As I tried to sleep, I attempted to mentally prepare for the next day. I failed.

I grew up homeschooled for the majority of my life. As a result of this, any classes I took that weren't taught by my mom were taught by other homeschool moms, or very rarely, dads at a "co-op," which met once a week to have lectures and then assign homework. My first class was French. As soon as I walked into class, my teacher told me that my mom told her about the situation, and I immediately excused myself. I think I missed over half of French class hiding in a hallway crying, doing my best to pull myself together. My siblings seemed fine. My dad seemed fine. Even my mom was functioning, conversing with her friends as usual. I know now that they were keeping appearances up, but that day I felt like the weakest person on the planet. I was powerless to stop what was happening, and I couldn't even control my emotions and be strong for the rest of my family.

At this point I knew that changes were coming, but I didn't exactly know what the changes would be. The first my mom was diagnosed, we stayed with our grandmother while mom and dad were away at Duke University Hospital in North Carolina. But this time it was different, my siblings and I were older. The three of us made the decision to all go with our parents to Duke, which initially seemed great. But then I had to say goodbye to my friends. I had a whole day planned with my best friend at the time. We went to watch a movie,

get dinner, and then we went to the store to buy a notebook and some colored pencils. The plan was to write in it like a journal for a week, send it to the other person, and repeat. After that night, I was prepared to pack up and head to Duke. It wasn't until my mom's surgery that I realized I was in over my head.

After picking her up from the hospital, she looked frail. She could barely walk, moving slowly to try and get to the hotel room we were staying at. Her pale face shook with pain as she laid down, and I'll never forget the wincing of pain when I hugged her harder than I should have. The guilt from that hug took weeks for me to shake off. We found an Airbnb rental house that worked well for us, and we moved in. Things started to look normal, but she never felt normal. I tried my best to force a smile: I hated the feeling of selfishness I got when I expressed displeasure with our situation. After all, I wasn't the one with cancer; but every consecutive day felt like a punch in the gut. The hardwood floor had several notches where if you slid your foot over it your sock would snag and rip. There wasn't a garbage disposal in the sink, so I kept needing to fish out food that I accidentally put in. Whenever I tried to sleep, I would either cry or not be able to get past the fact that I wasn't in my usual bedroom. One day after waiting for longer than I thought we should have, my dad told me that the shared journal I had with my friend was lost in the mail. Everything just kept getting worse, including my mom's condition.

Every night before bed we would all get together in a room and give two blessings from the day to remind us that there were still good things, and my mom would write them down in her prayer journal. I usually made something up, I never felt like things were good. One day I couldn't think of anything real or fake, so I looked up at the ceiling fan. I looked out the window. "Ceiling fans and windows," I declared on my turn. Everyone laughed with me, but it wasn't a joke. I liked ceiling fans, I liked windows, those were my blessings for the day. It became a sort of tradition for me to answer with that, but eventually my mom realized what I was doing. She told me that joy was a choice and things would be better for me if I chose to see it in my life. I heard her, but I didn't listen. I was stuck away from home, I was separated from my friends, and she was getting sicker every day. The funny thing about chemotherapy and radiation is that yes, both of those things do kill the cancer, but they have no problem taking the patient down with it. Every day she went into treatment she killed herself just a little bit more, and I was right there witnessing it firsthand. Every day I watched my mother slowly dying, but I had to have faith in the doctors and act like I thought it was making her better.

She eventually recovered and is still with us today, but for years I never stopped thinking about how unfair all of it was for all of us, especially my mom. She already went through cancer once, wasn't it enough? What sort of cruel world did we live in that would allow for crap like that? I was angry, I was scared, and I never stopped worrying. After the first round of cancer, I was under the assumption that that was it, she was better; but now things were different, she could get sick again at any time. The worrying spread to the rest of my life as well to the point where I was completely irrational. For over a year I slept on the floor, hidden between my bed and the wall next to it so Somali pirates wouldn't see me through my window and kidnap me to make me mine for blood diamonds. I lived my whole life paralyzed in fear, but I had my incredible mother to help me work through it with me. She had been diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder from her cancer, and she recognized what I was going through. I was eventually given Zoloft to help with anxiety and depression, and I am doing much better now, but I wouldn't have been able to work through any of it without my mom. That woman was strong enough to work through cancer and put up with my emotional response at the same time. I will always be thankful for my family and their patience with me through that difficult time in our lives. Despite everything we had gone through I failed to realize that even though I was flying off the planet, they were with me, and together, we had a shot at survival. Speeding into the abyss.



**Bateman**  
**Drawing (Ink) by Lexi Altieri**



## **“How We Suffer”: Addiction and Suffering in James Baldwin’s “Sonny’s Blues”**

### **Literary Analysis by Stephen Rhoades**

James Baldwin was a black American writer born in 1924 who grew up in Depression-era Harlem. Baldwin was a leading spokesperson for Civil Rights and wrote many works which pulled from his life experience of growing up in America as a homosexual black man (Baldwin 91). One of Baldwin’s best-known works is “Sonny’s Blues”(1957), which revolves around two brothers that grew up in Harlem. Sonny, the younger brother who is passionate about being a pianist, ends up being jailed for heroin use and, after recovering and being released, reunites with his older unnamed brother, a high school teacher with a wife and kids. The story, from the older brother’s perspective as the narrator, then focuses on these two brothers’ frayed relationship slowly healing. Throughout, “Sonny’s Blues” speaks to many struggles of life, but Baldwin portrays the brothers’ relationship with addiction, suffering, and each other in ways that especially highlight the human struggle to survive and find ways to live a life worth living despite the pain.

After learning that Sonny was arrested during a heroin raid, the narrator runs across a friend of Sonny’s on the way home from the school where the narrator teaches. The friend is also a drug user and shares what he thinks will happen to Sonny now, saying, “they’ll try to cure him. [...] Maybe he’ll even think he’s kicked the habit. Then they’ll let him loose. [...] That’s all” (Baldwin 94). The narrator questions what he means by “that’s all” and eventually we learn that the drug user friend thinks that Sonny will just return to heroin after getting out. Sadly, the friend isn’t just being pessimistic since “after detoxification, a high percentage of heroin-dependent patients suffer a relapse into daily drug use” (Blum 598). All of this is clearly unknown to the narrator, so it is made very clear that he has had no real education on the topic of drugs and addiction despite being a schoolteacher. This sets up just one part of the divide in understanding between the two brothers that is later expanded upon and eventually slowly bridged.

Shortly after, during the same conversation with Sonny’s friend, the narrator asks why Sonny wants to die, because it seems to the narrator that Sonny must want to die when he is killing himself with drugs. The friend replies that of course Sonny doesn’t want to die, “don’t nobody want to die, ever” (Baldwin 94-95). While this might not be entirely accurate since people have taken their own lives before, there is still meaning in this friend’s assertion that nobody wants to die as even those who are suicidal rarely have a desire for death but simply a cessation of pain. The friend’s words also interestingly parallel those of Victor Frankl, a psychiatrist who lived through the holocaust and saw massive amounts of death, who wrote of a man for whom, “suffering and death were meaningful; his was a sacrifice of the deepest significance. He did not want to die for nothing. None of us wanted that” (Frankl 105). Comparing the words of both, it becomes clear that nobody wants a meaningless death, everyone wants to mean something, but that some will find meaning in death, whether as a sacrifice for others or as an escape from pain. So, the friend’s assertion is flawed, but only in the specifics that come from a desire for meaning which most only find through living. This exchange again serves to highlight the narrator’s inability to properly empathize or connect with Sonny due to his own limited point of view and preconceptions.

After Sonny goes through rehab and reunites with the narrator, the interactions are awkward and strained between the two for a while. There is a lot of internal reminiscing of how things got to where they are now from the narrator before the two brothers finally take time to sit down with each other and really talk things through. Sonny begins to share his experience with drug addiction and heroin saying, “It makes you feel – in control. Sometimes you’ve got to have that feeling” (Baldwin 108). While the narrator still isn’t really understanding Sonny’s perspective, what Sonny says here does make a lot of sense as “drugs do provide the addict with enjoyment (euphoria), serenity and pleasure, but primarily they offer a sense of relief and freedom from discomfort” (Chen 368). In Sonny’s case the freedom he gained was from the stress of feeling

like he had no control over his own life. Just from this bit we see that Sonny's heroin use, while perhaps destructive, wasn't something that was just done for fun or so that he would die, like the narrator once thought, but something that he felt he needed at the time.

The narrator, while seemingly trying to be open to the discussion, is still clearly struggling with empathizing or understanding Sonny. After Sonny shares the reason he started heroin, the narrator asks with an "ugly [voice], full of contempt and anger" (Baldwin 108) if he needs heroin to play his music. Sonny's reaction to the quasi-insult to his passion is very subdued as he gazes at the narrator "with great, troubled eyes, as though, in fact, he hoped his eyes would tell [the narrator] things he could never otherwise say" (Baldwin 108). Despite the intense emotions that Sonny is clearly experiencing and the desire to reconcile with his brother, the narrator's harsh reactions continue to make it difficult. It is known that "the stigma associated with drug use causes an individual to feel shame and fear discrimination. Consequently, they don't feel safe to discuss their issues with co-workers, or strangers. It has been shown that addicts and recovering addicts feel comfortable in sharing their addictions and recovery journey with friends and family" (Jha 22). However, at this point Sonny and his brother have been estranged for years and struggle to connect or understand each other. The last time that they talked before Sonny's incarceration Sonny told his brother, "that he was dead as far as [the narrator] was concerned" (Baldwin 105). So, simply the effort to try and talk with his brother about his struggles with heroin addiction highlights how much Sonny is trying to reconcile with and no longer be a stranger to his brother.

Shortly thereafter, on the topic of needing heroin to play or not Sonny shifts the conversation slightly and remarks upon the singing being done in the street that sparked the conversation, mentioning, "It struck me all of a sudden how much suffering she must have had to go through – to sing like that" (Baldwin 108). Here, Sonny shares some of his perspective on how suffering and music relate to each other. It seems to Sonny that for someone to really produce moving music they need to have experienced extreme personal suffering that they then feed into their passion for music. This is supported by the philosopher, Henry Nelson "Wieman (1946) [who] believed that although suffering may rob an individual of his/her sense of being, it may also prove to be creative and useful, depending on the sufferer's response" (Chen 363-364). So, while no one really wants to suffer, Sonny is clearly trying to find something that will give his own suffering meaning through his music and sees that suffering in his fellow musicians' work.

Continuing the topic of giving meaning to suffering, Sonny replies to his brother's statement of suffering being unavoidable by remarking, "No, there's no way not to suffer. But you try all kinds of ways to keep from drowning in it, to keep on top of it, and to make it seem – well, like you. Like you did something, all right, and now you're suffering for it" (Baldwin 109). Though not directly mentioned, Sonny is still talking about his heroin addiction here, and that part of the reason he started heroin was to try and give his suffering some reason to exist that he could understand. It seems better to suffer at his own hands instead of simply suffering for no discernible reason. This is reflected in a summary of Frankl's own experience with suffering: "To live is to suffer, to survive is to find meaning in the suffering" (Frankl 11). Though Sonny's starting of heroin is ultimately destructive, the effort to find meaning in his constant suffering remains, and as Frankl says this is crucial to his own survival. It is with this knowledge that Sonny's prior comments on the singer's suffering become more important and really communicate the importance that Sonny's music plays in his struggle to cope with his suffering and survive.

Discussing the topic of not being able to stop suffering, the narrator becomes increasingly emotional and tearfully says that he doesn't care how other people suffer; he just doesn't want to see Sonny die trying not to suffer. Sonny promises that he won't, "die trying not to suffer" (Baldwin 109) and talks about how he tries to get the storm that is inside of him out through his music. He says how sometimes you get so desperate to play, to get that storm out, that you'd cut your mother's, brother's, or even your own throat.

Sonny follows this dark train of thought by assuring his brother that he is alright now, continuing to say, “[...] and I think I’ll be alright. But I can’t forget – where I’ve been. I don’t mean just the physical place I’ve been, I mean where I’ve been. And what I’ve been” (Baldwin 109). This last line from Sonny especially illuminates the experience of a recovered or recovering addict. Looking back upon the actions and thoughts that one had while at rock bottom can be terrifying. Knowing that when a “drug addiction becomes the driving force in an addicts’ life, they lose control of their addictive behavior” (Chen 368), it is then easier to understand why the person, who Sonny used to be, would be so unsavory as to even be dehumanized by Sonny himself. Even now, when he is in a much better place physically and mentally, his time at rock bottom continues to bear upon his thoughts.

A key moment occurs near the end of the two brothers’ heart to heart. After Sonny has vented many of his frustration and struggles to his brother, he warns the narrator, “It can come again,” in reference to his heroin use and repeats “It can come again, [...] I just want you to know that” (Baldwin 110). As previously mentioned, a lot of recovered heroin addicts eventually relapse, so being upfront and honest with his brother about that is a crucial step in their continued relational healing. The narrator’s reaction is to simply accept Sonny’s warning which starkly contrasts his prior judgmental approach showing that the narrator is slowly starting to properly empathize and accept Sonny. The acceptance here from the narrator that Sonny’s journey of recovery is not simply over and in the past is especially important for their continued relationship. In cases of severe drug addiction, the addict’s “suffering extends to affect not only the addict, but also his/her friends and family, and continues even after the addict is ‘clean and sober’” (Chen 369). So, Sonny having the acceptance and empathy of his brother through the continuing struggle of recovery is only ensured after Sonny makes it clear that, despite his growth, he isn’t at the end of that journey to recovery if he ever will be.

Baldwin’s entire work of “Sonny’s Blues” is full of many more emotionally resonant and impactful moments and dialogue, but, throughout, the expression of personal suffering, how it can drive one to addiction in search of meaning or escape, and how that can then expand the suffering back upon oneself and onto one’s family is constantly being expanded and fleshed out. Sonny’s struggle reflects a very realistic experience of a man trying to find meaning in his life and all his suffering and eventually finding himself becoming an addict simply to have some feeling of control. However, ironically, after eventually hitting rock bottom, like many others in similar situations, “he recognizes the loss of control—control not only over the addictive behavior, but also over [his] life” (Chen 369). His path of recovery and reconciliation with his brother is an exemplary example of a man trying and gradually succeeding at healing some of the hurt he caused to his loved ones and himself. On the flip side his brother grows alongside him in better understanding which leads to a greater mutual empathy. In the end, “Sonny’s Blues” delivers a true to life exploration of recovering from addiction and finding meaning in suffering that ultimately highlights the importance of simply having someone be there to listen and try to understand how we suffer.

**Am I worth self-worth?**  
**Poetry by Kayla Moss**

Glittering,  
Shimmering,  
Dazzling eyes.

What do you think,  
When you're looking in mine?

Ecstasy,  
Rhapsody,  
Gaiety - you're divine.

What should I do  
To satisfy?

Insufferable,  
Unbearable,  
Lamentable – the shame.

A woman living in pain  
Under the male gaze.

Potence,  
Competence,  
Puissance – I strive.

I'll finally love myself more  
Than I love some guy.

**Walking Alone**  
**Photo by Novera Chowdhury**



## Suburban Sprawl

### Fiction by Kaitlin O'Brien

The name on the gravestone read Filomena Melwood, 1890-1901. It sat beneath a yew tree in a desolate, yellow field. It was all alone, save for the tree itself and a broken fence.

Mitch scratched his beard uncomfortably. There wasn't supposed to be a grave here. This will complicate everything.

"This will complicate everything," Mr. Tavers grumbled at his side. "Now we'll have to call in the proper authorities, archeologists and such."

Mr. Tavers and Mitch's colleague, Ronan, exchanged a grim look.

"If there is a grave here, we'll need to get the police involved as protocol too," Ronan grimaced. "It will be years before construction can begin."

Mr. Tavers muttered something about technicalities and wasting money. He whisked his glasses off his face and polished them on the hem of his shirt.

"I wonder how she passed." Mitch tilted his head and studied the grave. It was a very sad and lonely plot. The stone stood only as high as his knee, and it was speckled with lichen.

Mr. Tavers gave him an outraged look and a warm flush blossomed on the back of Mitch's neck.

"You know, she was very young when she died." He scuffed the yellow grass with his shoe. Only eleven. The same age as, well, it wouldn't do to think about that.

"Everyone died young back then." Mr. Tavers scowled and jammed the glasses back onto his face. "Everyone who was lucky, at least."

"Do you think we can lie?" Ronan offered hopefully. "There were only rumors about a cemetery up here, and I don't see a cemetery. I see one gravestone."

"Don't be ridiculous, Mr. Brunswick is already embroiled in legal trouble as is." Mr. Tavers narrowed his eyes. "But there is something to be said about bribery."

Mitch left them to it. He knelt and tried to see if there was anything else on the little gravestone. Had Geoffrey's headstone been that small? He couldn't remember. It was twenty years ago at least, and Mitch didn't like to think about it.

Did it happen to you like it happened to him? High up in that yew tree maybe? Struggling to keep up with an older brother? One weak branch, one bad step?

Mitch reached out to rub some of the lichen off the grave.

"Melwood Manors has already been delayed three times," Ronan countered. "One more delay, and the project is shelved for good, and we lose millions. I say it's worth the risk."

Mr. Tavers fastidiously polished his glasses on the hem of his shirt again.

"We'll bring our findings to Mr. Brunswick," Mr. Tavers finally said. "Then we'll give him the options. All of them."

"Did you know that families used to bury their loved ones at home?" Mitch rose and dusted his hands on his jeans. "They used to keep family plots, like this one."

Mr. Tavers gave him another impatient look.

"I reckon this used to be a farm once." Mitch gave the gravestone a final, pitying look.

"And now it's the property of Brunkswick and Sons, to develop as they please," Mr. Tavers said firmly. It was a conversation they'd had many times before.

"It used to be her home," Mitch continued, gesturing to the grave.

"Mitch, it was over a hundred years ago," Ronan said slowly.

"I think it would be immoral, to set up the development here," Mitch said. A fresh, red flush burned the back of his ears.

“And where do you propose to set up the new development?” Mr. Tavers scowled.

Mitch shrugged and dropped his gaze to his toes. He heard Mr. Tavers sigh.

“Look, whether you like it or not this new project will happen,” he said, not without pity. “Mr. Brunswick is determined. So when all of us meet him this afternoon, we will tell him what we’ve found, and we will give him solutions on how to move forward.”

His gaze lingered on Mitch.

“All of us.”

Mitch forced himself to nod and slowly, he trudged after the pair of them with his hands in his pockets as they hurried away from the lonely grave of little Filomena Melwood. Mitch looked back one last time. A sharp, cold breeze picked up, keening like a mourner. It seemed to him that even the tree and the broken fence were clustered around the grave like mourners too, grieving for Melwood’s lost daughter and for Melwood’s lost past.



## **What's Up**

**Poetry by Stefan Kovecevic**

**Day crawls across the earth and  
Seems everyone'll grin at the Sun.**

**Trees sure do,  
Spread their arms at that wave of yellow  
Fill up green dishes.**

**That's what I been told  
It's a little hard to see,  
Through a face all squinted up  
Past a hand working overtime as a roof  
And tears aren't great eyeglasses.  
(I don't think the sun grins at me)**

**I'm hoping for a stretch of grey cotton  
Loafing across the sky,  
Always a little clumsy  
Dropping lightning, dropping rain**

**That's what I tell others anyway,  
Seems that  
It's a little hard to see,  
Through a hood all drawn up  
Past an umbrella working overtime as a roof  
And rain tends to smudge up eyeglasses  
(I think the storm grins at me)**

**Barefoot**  
**Photo by Savon Sharp**



## **An Angel Within a Devil in “The Marquise of O–” and “The Sleeping Queen”**

### **Literary Analysis by Andrea Ortiz-Valdez**

In “The Marquise of O–” by Heinrich Von Kleist and “The Sleeping Queen” by Italo Calvino, rape, an immoral act in our society, is not reprimanded as it would be in ours; instead, it is rewarded with a bride and a fortune. Von Kleist does an incredible job hiding the identity of the perpetrator, and it takes the reader to read between the lines or even read the story twice to solve this mystery. Calvino, like Von Kleist, does not directly admit the perpetrator to the crime until the victim gives birth. The endings to these stories conclude with a marriage and “happily ever after,” accepting rape as something moral in their society. Heinrich Von Kleist’s novella “The Marquise of O–” and Italo Calvino’s short story “The Sleeping Queen” both disguise and justify the act of rape by highlighting the heroic acts that the perpetrators perform.

Giulietta, the main character and victim of rape in “The Marquise of O–,” is a widow and as she is looking for refuge during an attack towards her family by the Russian army she is captured by Russian soldiers and sexually abused. It is her own perpetrator, Count F–, that feigns he is “an angel sent from heaven” (Von Kleist 69). He acts as if he has come to save her and returns her to a safe place in her castle. Months pass and she learns she is pregnant, yet she doesn’t date back the pregnancy to her assault and turns to the local newspaper to publish a meeting with whomever impregnated her; he must come forward “at 11 o’clock on the morning of the 3rd of– in the house of her father Colonel G–” (Von Kleist 99). Between these events, “close reading reveals that the narrator is very careful not to make any direct disclosures or comments that would incontrovertibly determine the Count’s guilt until the end of the novella” (Bentzel 301).

Following the assault on the Marquise, Count F– departs for the next battlefield. The Marquise is then informed that Count F– died as a result of a gunshot wound, with his last words being “Giulietta! This bullet avenges you!” (Von Kleist 73). The narrator makes it appear to be a coincidence that the woman, Giulietta, to whom the bullet is dedicated, has the same name as the Marquise. The Marquise has only sorrow for this woman in her innocence and naivete, and “she grieved for the unfortunate lady, bearing the same name as herself” (Von Kleist 73). “A broad hint is addressed to the reader when Count F– cries out “Giulietta! This bullet avenges you!” as he falls wounded in battle, but only the juxtaposition of the incidentally mentioned name with this enigmatic cry informs us of the marquise’s given name” (Mortimer 295). The reader can easily dismiss and misinterpret this, just as Giulietta did, but Von Kleist is revealing that Count F– is the perpetrator; it can’t be a coincidence that he chose to reveal the Marquise’s name in that incident.

Count F– returns from the dead after months of being in recuperation from his gunshot wound and being sent on a mission; he finally has time to see the Marquise and confess his love to her. Just out of nowhere Count F– appears, confesses his love, and asks Giulietta to marry him. Von Kleist makes Count F– seem like any lover a woman wishes to have, coming from the dead, recuperating from all the suffering he’s been through, and then making the long journey to declare his love. “The reader is made to wish, romantically, that the marquise would take this godlike knight as her ideal husband” (Mortimer 296). Giulietta confesses she believes she might be pregnant and “at this he appeared overjoyed... and then asked her if she would be willing to marry him” (Von Kleist 75). Again, this can be misinterpreted by the reader as such a sweet act of love, how despite her condition he is still willing to marry her. In reality, it is his guilt. Count F– wants to make it up to her by marrying her so she won’t bear a child out of wedlock. The Count wanted an answer that same day and since they wouldn’t give it to him, he decided he would stay and wouldn’t leave until he had an answer from Giulietta: “the Count would prefer to risk the consequences rather than expose his honour to any aspersion” (Von Kleist 79). He sent his men, alone, to the next mission, and he stayed behind. Reading this superficially, it can be interpreted as he is willing to face the consequences from this negligence in his duty rather than to expose his honor to being rejected by Giulietta but in reality,

he would rather face the consequences of not reporting to his duty rather than not marrying Giulietta and the attack he committed against her coming to light and tainting his reputation. After this the family justifies his act and they “all agreed that his behaviour was extraordinary, and that he seemed to be accustomed to taking ladies’ hearts, like fortresses, by storm” (Von Kleist 79). Von Kleist justifies his behavior by saying this is typical of Count F–, he’s a ladies’ man. Ironically, von Kleist uses the words “like fortresses, by storm” (Von Kleist 79). Going back to page 69 of “The Marquise of O–” the description of the attack towards Giulietta can be described “like fortresses, by storm”: it is exactly what happened, a fort of men stormed at her and sexually attacked her.

The Count stayed, and that evening they had dinner together, and he confessed to the family that all he thought about during his illness was Giulietta, and “he had kept confusing his visions of her with the sight of a swan” (Von Kleist 82). “He had been particularly moved by one memory, of an occasion on which he had once thrown some mud at this swan, whereupon it had silently dived under the surface and re-emerged, washed clean by the water” (Von Kleist 82). This passage in “The Marquise of O–” can be interpreted as Giulietta being the swan because she is pure, innocent, and naive, and the mud, the crime committed by the Count, tainting her and robbing her of her innocence. The story of the swan “is a parable of desire, rape, and purity, and a window into the psychology of the Russian Officer” (Mortimer 295). This dream is “Count’s unconscious confession of his guilt” (Bentzel 296). The washing of the swan can be interpreted as Giulietta purifying herself from the act committed by the count, as he wishes it would be in real life (Bentzel 298). The narrator does include that this happened when he was a boy, and while reading it, one can think of it as if he was just a boy playing with mud and doing antics. It does stand out in the story because it is the only flashback that is shared, but it is up to the reader to interpret it, which may be difficult because Count ends this vision by declaring his love again to Giulietta, and then it was time to clean the table, and the characters get up and pay no attention to it (Von Kleist 82).

Giullietta doesn’t accept the count’s proposal, so he leaves and comes back again when she is no longer living with her parents after being kicked out of the castle in M– for confirming her pregnancy and not knowing who the father is. Giullietta’s brother informs Count F– that she has relocated to V– with her two children, and the Count is devastated to learn of Giullietta’s ordeal during his absence. The count declared the love he had for Giullietta again to her brother and told him Giullietta was worth the whole world and he believed she was innocent (Von Kleist 95). “Taking a horse Count F– galloped to V–” (Von Kleist 95). Again, Von Kleist makes Count F– look like a hero, a charming knight, ready to save the princess from harm and care for her, swaying the reader from what he just admitted of believing her declaration of innocence (Von Kleist 95). Of course, he knew she was innocent; he’s the perpetrator and the father of the child she is pregnant with, or else why would he believe her when her own family didn’t? He had to know something they didn’t. The count meets with Giullietta, and she is full of joy to see him, but when she learns he accepts her in her condition and believes she is innocent, she doesn’t like it and tries to run away. Count F– harasses her again, this time in bright daylight; “he ardently kissed her breast” (Von Kleist 96). Despite the Marquise’s orders to stop, Count F– held her tightly and refused to let go. Von Kleist slips this in and then goes on to describe the argument Count F– was having with the Marquise, and Count F– proposes again, distracting the reader from Count F–’s violatory acts or causing one to wonder what Count F– is doing and why he won’t let go and stop insisting.

The Marquise’s brother sees Count F– after he’s been rejected at V– and asks him “if he did not think that she would find the person she was looking for” in the newspaper, and Count F– responded, “‘Undoubtedly’... greedily devouring the meaning of the announcement” (Von Kleist 98). He now knew it was time to admit what he was responsible for. Count F– showed up at M–, at Colonel G–’s home at 11 o’clock on the morning of the 3rd. Giulietta cried and said to Count F–, “I was prepared to meet a vicious man, but not

a devil!” (Von Kleist 110). Giullietta marries Count F– twice; “they celebrated a wedding happier than the first,” and at this wedding, Count F– asked Giullietta why she fled from him when he went to M- on the 3rd day of the month; “she answered she would not have seen the devil in him then if she had not seen an angel in him at their first meeting” (Von Kleist 113):

Thus, she reveals her blindness or misreading, but, like all the information given about the second story, she does so only indirectly. The reader readily perceives the irony in her sentence, for it is when the count appears to her as a devil that he is really saving her from dishonor (a child born out of wedlock), whereas he was in reality a devil when he only appeared to be an angel saving her from a dreadful fate (rape) (Mortimer 298).

Giullietta admits to Count F– that she knows he is her perpetrator and that if she wouldn’t have seen the angel, she saw him as when he “saved” her on page 69 in “The Marquise of O–” first she wouldn’t have seen him as the devil when he came forward to respond to the meeting she published on the newspaper. In reality, he has always been the devil, but now she has learned to live with that and accept it, as she has married him twice after learning to love her rapist, giving up her innocence.

In “The Sleeping Queen” by Italo Calvino, prince Andrew is in search of water from a well at the Isle of Tears that will cure his father’s blindness. Prince Andrew faces many difficult and dangerous obstacles to get to the Isle of Tears. When he finally gets there and finds the water, it is time to get some rest before his voyage the next morning:

He found a bedchamber royally decorated and containing a large bed, in which a maiden of angelic beauty lay sleeping. The Maiden’s eyes were closed and her face was peaceful, so Andrew knew she had been put under a spell while she slept. After a little reflection, he undressed and slipped into bed beside her, passing a delightful night without her giving any sign she knew he was there (64).

When reading this, one may think, “Oh, he made himself quite comfortable and only slept on the bed.” In reality, Calvino is hiding that the prince raped the maiden; notice how it says, “passing a delightful night.” Calvino then does a smooth transition from the town where prince Andrew is from to what’s happening at the Isle of Tears, after “nine months went by, and the sleeping maiden gave birth to a fine baby boy, as she brought him forth, she awakened... the spell was broken... the whole city awakened” (Calvino 65). The identity of the father has yet to be revealed. Like Giullietta, the Sleeping Maiden was also raped, but in “The Sleeping Queen,” the sleeping maiden learns the identity of the father as soon as she awakes and sees the letter he left, saying, “To his great joy, Andrew, son of King Maximilian of Spain, slept in this bed on the 21st of March in the year 203” (Calvino 64). Calvino bypasses the immoral act just like Kleist and portrays the sleeping maiden as accepting of what Prince Andrew had done. In fact, she was amused by his bravery and declared her fortune to him. When the sleeping maiden met Andrew, she said to him, “Andrew, who freed my people, you will be my husband and king forever!” She was full of gratitude and joy at being awoken from the spell that was cast on her years ago and failed to see the horrendous act Andrew had committed. The sleeping maiden is another character who accepts her rapist and marries him.

It turns out that rape is not surprising in fairytales. It turns out that the “original German folktales were not children’s literature, because of the sex and violence they contained” (Bengtsson 15). In many of the Grimm Brothers’ fairy tales, which is where most of today’s fairy tales come from, rape, toxic masculinity, and violence are perpetuated as something normal and have been a part of the original fairy tales, such as Sleeping Beauty, who was raped by the king while she slept and woke up when she gave birth, just like “The Sleeping Queen”, Beauty from Beauty and the Beast who is verbally harassed by the beast, and Snow White who’s kissed without consent while being a minor.

Many of the tales initially contained themes of ancestral rape or attempted rape of a daughter by her

father. This dynamic of a father attempting to exploit a vulnerable child was largely replaced by the stepmother character that resents the beauty of her stepchild and thus exploits her in one way or another (Neikirk 38).

Just like in the folktales that the Grimm brothers wrote that included incest, so did “The Marquise of O-” (Bengtsson 15). Although, Giullietta’s father didn’t try to rape her, he took advantage of her vulnerability. “The Commandant undergoes an extreme change from that of child to that of lover of his daughter” (Weiss 541). During their reconciliation after kicking the Marquise out of M- the Commandant “pressed long, ardent, avid kisses onto her mouth just like a lover” while holding the Marquise on his laps (Von Kleist 107). He transformed from being a respected, serious man in the story to an abuser. Meanwhile, seeing her husband and daughter kiss made the mother’s “heart leap with joy” (Von Kleist 107). The father knew he was in the wrong. When he saw his wife’s face, he lowered his eyes and made a face, to which the wife replied, “Oh what a face to make!” and then she in her turn smoothed it out with kisses” (Von Kleist 107), making the incest acceptable in the story.

Despite the fact that “The Marquis of O-” was written by a German author and “The Sleeping Queen” was written by an Italian author, they share many similarities and technically have the same origin. Both involve a perpetrator who harasses the beautiful and innocent main character of the story and impregnates her. In both stories, the author manages to make this act acceptable in society by, in turn, giving the bride a happy ending, marriage, and a family, all whilst having the reader blinded by the villain’s heroic acts.

**Lucifer (Detail)**  
**Painting (Acrylic) by Lexy Altieri**



**Cigarette Smoke**  
**Poetry by Angel Savoy**

Our relationship reminds me of cigarette smoke and old paintings.

I am the painting; he is the cigarette smoke.

He taints me brown, leaving me depthless and colorless, suffocating within his grime.

I am smothered by him; I could make it out. I could be restored,  
but I could never return to my original glory.

I am over-compensated, over-painted,  
Because he tried to cover up what he did to me.

Now, all of his sins are a part of me, becoming a distraction, defying my original intent.  
Forever his smoke and their carelessness will cause the slow destruction of me.

People will see the monstrosity that is now the surface of me,  
from the cuts and tears in my face to the tiny cracks in my paint.

Everything must be covered.

For it will lead your eyes to every little discrepancy  
leaving you to discover the ugly in my seams.

All because his few seconds of pleasure, destroying me forever.



**Rose Moon**  
**Fiction by Sarah Hughes**

*Rose Moon tonight.*

The whispers blaze through town like the plague that ripped through us last December. I still have the red scars that bead 'round my neck like a choker. They tingle as I walk home, the cobblestone road wearing to dirt as I near the meadowland.

Most of the townsfolk have retreated underground, though some linger on their porches, murmuring in blustery tones.

Grandmothers grumble, "How big do you reckon it'll be this time?"

Sunkissed farmers reply, "Swollen as the sows, I bet."

I don't linger to hear the rest.

I've never seen a Rose Moon. Most that do aren't with us come dawn. The few that are say it's beautiful, petrifyingly beautiful. The moon's craters and seas bathed crimson. Looming low as if heaven's reins have loosened and it's about to fall into the sunflower field. We call it the Rose Moon because of its red hue—like a lunar eclipse, but much darker. And, also like a rose, it's a thorned beauty.

Dusk descends, coloring the puffy clouds butterscotch and violet. There was a time when I'd lay among the sunflowers with Gemma, watching the embers of day fizzle into star-speckled indigo as cicadas purred and fireflies danced around us. Hardly anyone stays out past dusk anymore, even on safe nights. We shutter our windows and bolt our doors. Moonlight churns my stomach into a maelstrom, no matter how silver and pure it is.

I reach my cottage. Greenery has claimed the weather-worn bricks, crawling over the windows and roof. Blooms burst along the vines, pinks, reds, whites. Grass whips in the fragrant breeze. Cicadas commence their chirring orchestra, vivace tonight.

I tear open the door and shut the gloaming out behind me.

Darkness embraces me. I keep the windows perpetually shuttered so no scintilla of moon sneaks in.

My stomach nips and growls. Dinner is not at the dust-coated table; it's waiting in the cellar, along with some other rations. After bolting the front door I head down, locking the hatch above me.

Blankets and pillows lay strewn on the mattress. Candles flicker in the corners, spilling scents of pine and vanilla. As I eat and drink from my ration chest, my thoughts drift to Gemma. What would she think of this? Hiding underground like worms, shrinking from the moon as if its light were acid?

"Tonight?" she'd whine, cradling a firefly-less jar. "But there's clouds of them out there!"

Life is hardly living anymore. I wonder if it's a mercy the plague took her and our parents before the first Rose Moon. My chest clenches. No. It wasn't.

I crash in bed and cocoon myself in the covers. Washed in fragrance and darkness, I float toward the waterfall's edge of sleep.

\* \* \*

Gemma joins me.

Her blackened hands grip my face, charred and peeling. Red welts ring her neck. Inky fluid leaks from her lips. She hacks and heaves, that black pus flooding her lungs. She's begging me to save her, tears streaking her blighted cheeks. But there's nothing I can do. Her earthy irises have turned ashy, cracked. They stare emptily heavenward.

Don't leave me. She sobs. I wipe her tears.

Never, I promise her, over and over.

That promise shatters with her last rasp.

\* \* \*

Screams jolt me awake.

Someone's pounding on the cellar door.

I dart for the lock—then freeze—the hell am I doing? Outside, the Rose Moon rages. If I open that hatch, I risk a droplet of moon on my skin and never knowing the sun's warmth again.

Their screams ice my veins. They beg, sob, beat on the door, fists bruised and bloody.

"Don't let me die, please, please...!"

My tongue frosts. Throat tightens. I can't.

Their cries crescendo, and then silence.

I exhale. It's over. Yet my fingers linger on the lock, ghosts swirling in my head.

Don't let me die.

Don't leave me.

The scars on my neck burn.

Never.

The lock unclicks.

My terror thaws, uncovering a dirt bed of numbness. I peek out. The intruder's gone, but the window is shattered and moonlight—silver moonlight—pours in. No tinge of red. No phantasmic tendrils tangle with my muscles and march me out the door to my funeral.

My fists clench, nails tearing into my palms. Tremors overtake my body. Where is that red fiend?

Blood roars in my ears. My heart sledgehammers against my ribcage.

I hear her.

Her laughter peeling silver but smothered, as though underwater, getting wrenched away in the rip current.

No. She's gone. Remember?

Her charred hands and boiled neck flash in my mind, her milky, cracked eyes, her pus-festered lungs—and fizzle to cinders.

No. She's out there. Listen!

My body rises like a geyser from the cellar and rushes for her.

She's out in the sunflower field catching fireflies, agleam in the moonlight and unscathed by the plague. I bound toward her, lungs burning.

"Gemma!" I scream, but when I soar through the air to tackle her, she shimmers out of existence, like mist. I faceplant into the dirt. Tears prick my eyes. Warm wind rustles the sunflower stalks, wind that's heavy with storm. My entrails pretzel.

Above me, the moon looms as though it has broken free from heaven's leash, its craters and seas bathed crimson. Hot, iron-stenching wind stings my nostrils, as if it's breathing. Salivating.

I tremble, my muscles liquified. So this is how my sister felt, when the pus drowned her lungs. Helpless as a twig in a riptide, but knowing that release rushed closer and closer.

I smile at the Rose Moon. They weren't lying about its petrifying beauty. A column of air tears me moonward, and serenity slices the shackles of fear.

I keep my promise.

**5:49 AM**  
**Photo/Digital by Savon Sharp**



## **A Picnic on the Moon**

### **Fiction by Louis Hansen**

A flash of orange. The hasty whisper of soft lips against my cheek, of breath hot on my neck. Her gentle hand resting on my thigh as she takes her seat.

She's across the table from me, wearing the lipstick that complements her hair, and her black velvet dress. Behind her is the sky, opaque, and stretched for miles, interrupted only by the eclipsing shadow of where we once were. With its messy shapes of greens and blues, like you'd find in a children's drawing.

"It's beautiful," she says. "You're beautiful."

Now the familiar response: green eyes wide and flustered, smile beaming and blissful, and hidden just below the surface is that modest streak of airy confidence that drives me insane. I can't help but smile back. She's the most beautiful woman I've ever seen. I can't look away.

She reaches for a biscuit from the table, lathering its surface in butter and strawberry jam with careful hands. When she realizes I'm still staring, a subtle rosiness compounds her freckles, and she shoots me another smile. This one is tentative and uncertain.

"What?"

"Nothing."

A tender hum of disbelief. "What?" she asks again.

"I don't know."

She lets it go. Though my words are meaningless, my tone is enough to reassure her that there's no reason to worry. Instead, she finds my hand with her own, absently twisting the ring on my finger as her focus shifts to our surroundings.

For a while we remain in comfortable silence. I nurse my virgin sunrise, and poke at a glob of peanut butter with a browning apple slice while Eden eats her biscuit and hums along to the distant tune emitting from our Walkman.

I feel surprisingly warm given the frigid extraterrestrial air and my lack of proper layering. Being around Eden has that effect.

As we sit here, I can't help but think about the moment I first promised her we'd picnic on the moon. A joke about Wallace and Gromit as I gazed up above me on a midnight stroll, back when our very existence was abbreviated text messages and laggy phone calls.

So much time has passed, and I still feel excited at the sound of her voice. Still feel giddy over her touch. I still want to wake up next to her every morning and hear all about her day every night. To me she's still the pretty girl I'm crushing on with the tangerine curls, who I promised to take to the moon.

"Eden?"

Her eyes find mine again. "Yes, my love?"

"Did you always know we'd make it?"

"Make it where?"

"To the moon."

"Of course I did."

Even I hadn't been that certain. There were no civilians allowed in space back then. Only top-ranking astronauts who'd been training their whole lives. The atmosphere was unbreathable, and they were forced to wear these special suits with heavy oxygen tanks and helmets that resembled tiny fish-tanks.

At first the picnic on the moon had been a metaphor—for when the long distance was over, and we'd be so powerful we could do anything we put our minds to. But eventually it had become more. Eventually it was no longer a fruitful dream, but a genuine possibility. One I was determined to make reality.

“Eden?”

“Yes, my love?” she repeats. This time the words are paired with a velvety chuckle.

I reach for her hand again.

“How’d you know?”

“I’m not sure.” A pause, then, “Why were you so determined to get us here?”

“Because you deserve the world... even if that means leaving it behind.”

Eden laughs, and once more the requited smile appears. She squeezes my hand. Then for a moment, all that can be heard is the soothing ambiance of space and the opening lines of “American Pie.” It doesn’t matter. I am happy to bask in the giddy as I wait for excitement.

“That’s how I knew,” she says at last. “Oh.”

My heart skips a beat.

The trip down memory lane has seemingly made us hungrier than our actual journey to get here, and it doesn’t take long for the food to disappear. After the appetizers, it’s tomato grilled cheeses sliced into halves, with white cheddar pretzel balls dipped into hummus, and homemade oat-milkshakes with Oreo centers. The perfect meal for a planet regarded by copious lore of its Yorkshire complexion.

With the checkered blanket now on the ground, we’ve shifted positions. She’s wrapped in my arms, and I pull her effortlessly closer as her admiration for the world echoes around us.

We’ve been granted one of the great privileges of modern life—the chance to breathe air untouched by factories and automobiles—to not only see the stars but be amid them. Yet to me, each day that goes by is a greater privilege—the one I am granted to love a woman with tangerine curls.

## **An Ode to Radio Stations**

### **Poetry by Indy Rushing**

90s Rock Station, my beloved,  
Come home from dead air to me.  
Every night, I sit by my window,  
and listen for your guitar solos,  
but am left listening to static  
and echoing screams of other stations.

R&B Station, my love,  
I lie in bed awaiting the sweet tones of your voice,  
only to awake in the middle of the night  
and you are no longer the station I once knew.  
You have become a station without music and only sermons.  
You no longer sing to me at night,  
you yell and condemn.

80s, 90s, and Today Station, my dearest,  
We once danced in the streets to your melody.  
Now, I must dance to the songs of engines and sirens.  
The absence of your pop beats leaves life dull  
and barren as I search for a single drop of excitement.  
Without you to teach me of your past,  
how can I appreciate the blossoming future?

Hot 99 Hits, my sweet,  
Sprawled in the sunshine, you recall your favourites,  
listing the songs who proved themselves worthy of acknowledgement.  
You puff your chest out in pride as you declare forgotten names,  
those of the past who your fathers and grandfathers deemed luminaries.  
For whom are you without the familiar features of your ancestors?  
Nevertheless, you sing me tunes that cause my mother to reel back  
in nostalgia for the local roller-skating rink, she once visited.

(continued)

Alternative Station, my star in the night,  
Our meeting was swift and sweet.  
You are forever lost to the shifting  
tides of air waves and tuning dials.  
I may never come across you again,  
but my head always turns when I trick myself  
into believing I hear your voice.  
Birds freeze midflight and cars slow  
at the sound of your power chords.  
In the stillness of the world,  
I pick through the crowd for a sight,  
a clue, a hint, a sign that you're out there.  
My one-day, whirlwind romance,  
may you find the love of your life  
as you wish for mine.

## **“Queer Theory According to My Grandmother”: Toxic Masculinity, Queerness, and Love; A Dangerous Combination**

### **Literary Analysis by Martin Green**

Any queer person you meet will understand the shame and alienation they go through when relatives cannot accept them for who they are. Oftentimes these relatives, close or distant, want to change their queer family members to fit their worldview. They do not realize that acceptance is what is best for their family member. Richard Blanco, an American poet, went through this with his family. In his poem “Queer Theory: According to My Grandmother”, Blanco recounts his experience with his grandmother’s viewpoints on Blanco’s activities. In doing so, Blanco combines the ideas of toxic masculinity, queerness, and femininity to show the toxic form of love his grandma shows towards him.

The poem’s form seems to represent the poem’s title well. The title suggests that the poem follows the thoughts of the poet’s grandmother on queer theory. While the content of the poem doesn’t quite seem that way at first glance, it does show the various thoughts the grandmother has on the topic, in a list-like format. Lines are usually short and pungent, with one sentence having an average of 5-6 words each: “Never drink soda with a straw-- / milk shakes? Maybe” (1). The sentence structure is basic; there is no simile, metaphor, or symbolic language. These further push that these are a grandmother’s thoughts, nothing else. These are her true feelings, with no fancy language or structure to embellish them. There isn’t much repetition, except for the line “I’ve seen you...”, which is repeated 5 times throughout the poem. This line serves to direct these thoughts specifically at the grandson and provides a source of tension between the grandmother and poet. It also adds an air of disappointment to the whole poem, which is important for understanding where the grandmother is coming from.

Blanco’s family is from Cuba, though Blanco was raised in Miami. Blanco’s grandmother had lived in Cuba most of her life and therefore would have a strong part of Cuba’s culture embedded within her. In Latino culture, there is a “social behavior pattern” (Mendoza 2) called machismo. Machismo is essentially the embodiment of masculinity and the full-on rejection of femininity. In the poem, the grandmother’s thoughts completely embody this ideology. Throughout the poem, she describes “masculine” things as desirable and “feminine” things as something to be avoided at all costs. For example, when she says, “Stay out of the kitchen. Men don’t cook - / they eat. Eat anything you want, except: / deviled eggs...” (45-47), she is implying that cooking – the feminine activity – is to be avoided, and that eating – the masculine activity – is to be sought after.

Blanco’s stance on machismo is made clear by the examples the grandma provides. Multiple times, the grandmother gives strange examples of the feminine behavior she wants Blanco to avoid. In the above example, eating deviled eggs is condemned by the grandmother, even though deviled eggs have little to no connection to the typical gender stereotypes. Another example the grandmother provides, “Those fancy books on architecture and art - / I threw them away” (61-62), condemns art and architecture as feminine even though typically artists and architects throughout time have been male. Blanco shows the absurdity of the grandma’s ideas of masculinity and femininity through these examples.

As well as highlighting the effect of machismo on the ideas of masculinity and femininity, Blanco shows the association the grandma has between queerness and femininity. Throughout the poem, Blanco shows that the grandma wants Blanco to drop all his feminine traits. At the end of the poem, her reason is revealed: “I don’t care - / you will not look like a goddamn queer / I’ve seen you... / even if you are one.” (68-71). She associates all these feminine traits with queerness (a stereotypical association). This queerness is clearly undesirable for the grandma, as she reacts incredibly negatively to the thought that Blanco was queer. This reaction serves as the basis for the type of relationship Blanco shares with his grandma.



This poem masterfully shows off the concept of toxic love through the relationship between Blanco and his grandmother. His grandma has clearly been raised in a culture that embodies machismo, and her ideas of what is right and what is wrong have been affected. She shows that her ideas of masculinity and femininity have been warped into something completely off base from the reality. This, combined with the idea that femininity in a male equals homosexuality means that the grandma wants her son to embody masculinity completely to avoid the perception of being queer. Her attempted prevention of feminine traits in Blanco is a sign she cares about Blanco in her mind. But to Blanco, it is completely negative. The line “I’ve seen you...” (5), repeated multiple times, is menacing. It is meant as an urge to do better by the grandmother but is seen as something by Blanco that is meant to shame and repress him. This disparity in meaning versus outcome shows the dangers of toxic love, as this tension is not sustainable in a loving relationship.

Blanco’s grandmother does care about him, and her expression of disdain for queerness and femininity isn’t exactly her fault. The culture one is raised in has a large effect on their worldview and Blanco’s grandmother was raised in a culture that nurtures toxic masculinity and is not favorable toward queerness. But where Blanco’s grandmother’s faults lie is her inability to look past her ideals to provide a loving and caring environment for Blanco. Her attempts at showing care are backfiring on her and destroying her relationship with him. In this poem, Blanco successfully shows the toxic mixture created by a combination of love, warped ideas of masculinity, and homophobia, as well as the harmful effect this combination can and will have on loved ones.

**Fantasy Meadow (Detail)**  
**Digital Art by Abby Warren**



**The Fields Then and the Fields Now**  
**Poetry by Gunnar Foster**

I walk along the grounds  
Where bodies once laid  
Where the creek ran with blood  
On that sunny July day  
Wondering where they have gone  
And in the distance I see  
The gleaming point of a Obelisk  
Marking the hole in the ground they made

I walk again upon the hallowed grounds  
To see where the men are remembered  
Young and Old, Black and White  
They lie on that same hilltop  
Next to the crater they made  
On that sunny July day  
Into the crater I look and I see  
The skulls and bones bleached clean  
From the sun and bugs of decades gone by  
With the Cannons still there turned green  
Watching over the fields  
That haven't been the same since the sunny July day

**Women, Life, Freedom**  
**Script by Kim Aalaie**

Setting: Home of Ammo, late one evening, a small two room condo with low light, a small dining room table with a backgammon game displayed and two teacups. A small radio sitting on a curio cabinet in the corner. Two men are sitting at the table discussing their country, past and current events, and playing backgammon.

Characters: Ammo – an old (67-68) Iranian, Muslim codger who lives alone above his own mechanic shop after losing his young wife and child during childbirth.

Hamid – 71-year-old Iranian businessman and Muslim friend of Ammo's since childhood.

Time: present day Iran

Iran is in the midst of a women-led uprising demanding the end of clerical rule with the slogan “Women, Life, Freedom.” The nationwide protests were set off by the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini after she was detained by the morality police and beaten to death.

Ammo: (Chuckling) Have you heard what's happening in the cities with the flying turbans?

Hamid: Yes, I heard. The young girls are going crazy. Running up and knocking off the turbans of the mullahs. Shameful. They are religiously learned men and are due our respect.

Ammo: Those reprobates. They don't deserve respect from anyone. Not even God. Why, if I was younger and could run faster, I'd be out there doing it too. I think it's funny! (Ammo laughs) They are arresting women right now who are protesting that young girl's death recently for having her hajib on wrong. It's wrong what the authorities are doing right now. She was sitting in her brother's car, minding her business.

Hamid: The law right now is that women must cover their hair and it must be obeyed. It's all out of respect for women to have them covered. We respect our women, more so than Americans do, for heaven's sake.

Ammo: Says who? The religious laws about women were never enforced until that stupid revolution in 1979. You remember how nice things were for women when the Shah was here. Why the women dressed nice...no chadors, fashions from Paris. Always had their hair done. Wore a little makeup and nail polish. I remember you used to like to take Osra (Hamid's wife) for walks in the park on Saturday night, stopping for ice cream. Her all dressed up. You didn't complain. Why, boys and girls can't even date anymore. Makeup & nail polish has been banned. Women have to be covered up by a chador or long tunic. You like this better?

Hamid: Yes, back then was nice, but now she wears no makeup, doesn't do her hair ... except a little henna now and then ... and she wears a scarf because that's the law. The law is the law for now. I love her either way. Take your turn.

Ammo: Law, schmall, nonsense! Half of Iranians wants to drop headscarf laws, believing that wearing a hijab should be a private choice – the other half are men. (Hamid chuckles) The women have no rights right now and they did when the Shah governed. Now they can barely find a good job or get an education. They can't

vote. Treated and classified as second-class citizens.

Hamid: Speaking of rights. Did you hear about the woman that was being arrested and when the officer was handcuffing her and telling her she had a right to remain silent, she started laughing.

Ammo: No, what happened?

Hamid: She told him she was just happy to finally have a right. (Hamid laughs)

Ammo: Eh baba. Sho'ma de'vana. (Ammo chuckles) Take your turn. Do you want more tea? (Ammo gets up and serves fresh tea for both)

Hamid: I'm not crazy! That was funny. But I remember our women back then. We have some of the most beautiful women in the world. Remember when they used to compete in those worldwide beauty contests? (Hamid picks up his teacup to drink)

Ammo: I remember. That was a long time ago, my friend. My Firoozeh (his deceased wife) was beautiful enough to have competed in one of those contests. Now, our young girls are embarrassed to wear the tunics and head scarfs in the FEW sports they can participate in when the Olympics are taking place. It's humiliating for them!

Hamid: Our women are protected, Ammo. They have husbands to care for them and fathers and brothers until then. They don't face rape like in some countries. The mullahs are trying to teach us God's way toward women. Women are special in Islam. That's why it tells us we should lower our gaze and guard their modesty and they should not display their beauty and ornaments ... except to their husbands. You see – no rapes. Allah's Apostle said: "An unveiled woman is a cause of corruption. Once she goes out Satan beautifies her in the eyes of men to seduce her as well as them." The Quran says, "respect to all women and treat them well."

Ammo: Oh, come on, Hamid. We have rapes. It's just, if the woman is young, she is sometimes forced to marry the guy. Men have more rights regarding divorce than women do. Muslim men may marry up to four women, but no such provision is made for Muslim women. A man's inheritance is to be a portion of two females. It's okay to beat wives. Should I go on?

Hamid: Allah's Apostle said: "Do not prevent women (wives, mothers, daughters, sisters, etc.) from praying at the mosques."

Ammo: Go on and finish the quote ... "Yet, their prayer at home is better for them."

Hamid: Ammo, calm down. You are getting excited. I brought pastry. Let me bring it. (Hamid goes across the room and returns with a pastry box) Let me say this to lighten the game. It's your turn, by the way. I met a Muslim man who said he had the Quran on DVD. The trouble started when I asked him to burn a copy for me. (Hamid slaps his leg and laughs loudly)

Ammo: Oh, you and your jokes. Thank you for the pastry. They look delicious! But you just proved my point. These fanatics are crazy ... and, and they are running our country. And ruining it! We are the laughingstock

of the world.

Hamid: Now wait a minute. The American sanctions are crushing our economy. And that's a fact.

Ammo: You wait a minute. That's because we keep doing stupid things, threatening people, like America. When the Shah was in power, we had great relations with the American people.

Hamid: We were their puppets!

Ammo: Tell me the truth, were you better off then or now? Could you be more successful if these god-forsaken mullahs weren't in power? Be honest.

Hamid: I admit it, I was better off. And, yes, I probably would be more successful if things were different in some ways. It's hard to get ahead these days if you aren't a devout Muslim who attends the mosque religiously. I'll say that.

Ammo: That damn revolution in 1979 started by Ayatollah Khomeini destroyed this country, including the women. First thing he did was get into a war with Iraq that lasted eight years that was based on nothing but revenge. Khomeini was pissed off that Iraq kicked him out of their county after all those years. That's what that was about. Set our country back years and maimed or killed most of our young men and boys.

Hamid: Yeah, I heard a joke that Muslim scientists have invented a time-travel device that can transport an entire country back to the dark ages. They're calling it "Islam." Not real funny when it's your country they are talking about.

Ammo: Point taken. All Khomeini did for this country was build cemeteries. He wanted an Islamic nation regardless what the people wanted. Your turn. These pastries are wonderful. Fresh tea?

Hamid: You're a good host, my friend. Fine dinner, backgammon, good conversation, and wonderful music on the radio.

Ammo: You know that makes us criminals!

Hamid: Huh?

Ammo: Two things, running down the government and listening to the radio. Music is still illegal, you know.

Hamid: You can't take everything from a man, besides good friends can be comfortable with each other.

Ammo: Do you think the women can be successful in something the men have tried a couple times over the years? They are not letting up. Taking to the streets still. Burning their hijabs and scarfs. Cutting their hair. Getting arrested. They are serious and dying for it.

Hamid: Many men are taking to the streets with them now and they aren't letting up. Be just like the women to show the men up and accomplish something the men couldn't do! That might start another type of

revolution. Could our country make some changes, sure, but another revolution? I don't know. Could make the country worse! And we definitely can't afford another war. We lost a lot of boys and men during those eight years. Was a shame! I know Osra is silently behind them, and I don't mind that. She misses the good times. Comes home complaining about the prices in the market for fruit and meat every time she goes to the bazaar. These damn sanctions are killing our economy, but she still provides within budget, bless her heart. (Hamid stands and reaches for his coat and hat)

Ammo: It's awful the human suffering going on, though. Well, my friend, come again.

Hamid: I will my friend, I will. Thank you for your hospitality.

Ammo: Hey, Hamid, what do Iranians and Americans have in common?

Hamid: I have no idea, my friend.

Ammo: They both hate the United States government. (Laughing, they both walk toward the door)

**Broken (Detail)**  
**Drawing by Lexy Altieri**  
**Graphite**





## **Rules Are Meant to Be Broken**

### **Personal Essay by Jessica Sackitey**

When I was four years old, I lived in a small house with my grandmother, my mom, my eldest sister Jemimah, and my other older sister Jennifer. Our toilet and shower were in a separate building outside the house. My grandmother was a tyrannical ruler with unyielding and unreasonable rules, rules such as never go outside without shoes, or an adult must always accompany you when you go outside. My least favorite rule was do not go outside at night because it was “dangerous”. That one really bugged me because we knew all our neighbors and none of them seemed dangerous.

One day, I learned to roll my eyes on command. That day I gave multiple back-to-back performances of my eye rolls. I did eye rolls while spinning, bouncing eye rolls, and dramatic pause eye rolls. Unfortunately, because the theater is a fickle mistress, my family soon grew bored with my performance and gently urged me to amuse myself with my toys. Unsatisfied with my family’s under appreciation for the arts, I decided to debut my show to my most devoted follower, the moon.

To reach the moon, I had to go through a few obstacles. First, find a way around my grandmother’s outrageous rules. Second, leave the living room without drawing any attention from my family members sitting on the sofas. Lastly, open my front door, whose monstrous height prevented me from even grazing the doorknob. Despite all these setbacks, I was filled with determination and audacity.

Step one, I knew I had to get a trusted grown-up on my side. Surveying the people in the room my mother and definitely my grandmother were immediately eliminated, leaving just my two sisters. First sister: Jemimah, age 10, pros: reliable, nurturing, and sees me as the center of her world; cons: fancies herself too much of an adult to go along with my scheme, making her disqualified. My last option was Jennifer who, being two years older than me, made her just the right amount of grown-up to be trusted to embark on my quest to showcase my talents to the world. Persuading Jennifer to join the cause was easy due to my mastery of the art of persuasion. Leaving my position on my mother’s lap I moved to go sit next to Jennifer, who was currently playing with some toys on the couch. Pretending to also be playing with the toys, I inconspicuously whispered to Jennifer, “Let’s go outside and roll our eyes at the moon.” Jennifer hesitantly asked “Why”? Leaning closer to her ear, I whispered the magic words, “Because we are bored.” Jennifer, not finding any flaws in my logic, agreed.

The next step to pulling off this Houdini level of escape was leaving the living room undetected. To leave the living room, Jennifer and I had to make it past the adults who were engaged in boring conversation. To carry out this goal, I knew I had to combine the stealth of a spy with the speed of a cheetah. Fortunately, I was multifaceted enough to do just that. Wrapped in the cloak of invisibility that is delusion, I filled my head with images of all things that are fast and stealthy, and I told Jennifer to follow my lead. Dropping to our knees from the couch, we crawled with speed across the cold hard floor, passing the grownups on the sofa to the door undetected except for the minor looks of confusion from the adults.

Soon I reached the final boss, my most formidable opponent, the door. I felt the door taunting me as it kept moving the doorknob up and down, always outside my reach. However, the door was no match for my very grown-up sister, whose additional two years allowed her to easily reach the knob, twist it and open the door. Jennifer’s ability to easily open the door reaffirmed my decision in recruiting her for the mission. With my grandmother’s rules in mind, I managed to grab my shoes from the shoe rack by the door just as I heard the clicking sound of the door unlocking and felt the warm embrace of the Ghana air.

The night was clear, calm, and unlike what my grandmother said, safe. Before walking out the door onto our veranda, we made sure to check for any bogeyman that might be hiding under the cover of the

night. The Moon, as I knew it would be, was fully captivated by my newfound ability to roll my eyes. It showered us with its warm glow of appreciation as the crickets and other nighttime critters cheered us on with their various chirps and croaks. Jennifer and I laughed with delight as we continued rolling our eyes without care.

Then suddenly, we heard a menacing growl coming from the side of the house. As we abruptly turned our heads, we were surprised to see a ferocious dog in our presence. All of us froze in place as we stared at each other, not blinking. Then without warning, Jennifer started running, leaving me alone with the dog. Frightened, I willed my legs to start moving as the dog began to slowly come towards me.

Just before the dog reached me, I started running and yelling. As my feet pounded the rough, jagged pavement, I regretted leaving my shoes on the veranda. Every time a rock stabbed my feet, I chastised myself for thinking I was clever for thinking, "She said never go out without my shoes, but she never said I had to be wearing the shoes." No matter how much I yelled or how fast I ran, the dog never stopped chasing me. In fact, all my efforts to get away only invigorated him.

Somehow, I managed to reach the bathroom and close the door; I was safe. Unfortunately, the dog stood guard outside, preventing me from leaving. Realizing I was stuck, I began to cry. As I was lamenting about how I would have to spend the rest of my days in the bathroom because nobody appreciated my talents, I heard a soft knock. Unsure whether it was a trap from the dog trying to lure me out, I froze. Soon more soft knocks came, followed by my mother urging me to open the door and come out.

Slowly, I opened the door, steeling myself for whatever was on the other side. When I saw my mother's familiar face, I launched myself at her and buried my face in the crook of her neck. I let out a great sob of anguish and relief. My mother, in her attempt to calm me down, made me face my greatest adversary. The big ferocious dog that was terrorizing me somehow transformed into a small fluffy yappy dog, a dog who was currently resting in its owner's arms, happy as a clam.

The night wrapped up with lots of hugs and kisses from everyone in the house. I never got in trouble for leaving the house. My grandmother, relieved that I was safe, decided that I had gone through enough. As I laid in my bed, two thoughts filled my mind: one, be wary of small fluffy dogs, and two, never under any circumstances roll your eyes at the moon.

## Family Meals

### Literary Analysis by Humaira Hatif

The poems “Eat” by Cathy Song and “Eating Together” by Li-Young Lee have much in common besides their similar titles. “Eat” is about motherly love and an eating disorder while “Eating Together” is about reminiscing the loss of the narrator’s father at a family meal. Both authors of these poems have an Asian-American background: Song has a Chinese-Korean background, and Lee was born to Chinese parents. Aspects of Asian-American culture are depicted through the meals or dishes described in each poem. In Song’s poem, she conveys her culture through her mother, who uses a “bamboo rice stick paddle” to serve her food (Song). In “Eating Together,” Lee demonstrates his culture through the imagery of a standard East-Asian meal. Both these examples allow readers to presume where the narrators are from, which conveys a common theme of culture in both poems. Although the poems “Eat” by Cathy Song and “Eating Together” by Li-Young Lee have many similarities, each poem has a unique structure, themes, and portrayal of food.

Some of the differences between Song’s “Eat” and Lee’s “Eating Together” are the titles and structure. The word “Eat” in Song’s poem is a command, which is displayed through the narrator’s mother forcing her to eat. The words “Eating Together” suggests that the poem will be story-like or somewhat chronological. “Eating Together” is one stanza, a twelve-line poem much in contrast to “Eat” which is three stanzas long with twenty-two lines. Song’s poem is structured so that the first stanza has fourteen lines, the second is one line, and the last has five lines. This structural form serves to emphasize the one-line stanza, “I grow thinner” (Song). The author does this to indicate a possible eating disorder. The first stanza introduces how her mother made her eat foods she disliked as a child, and how she has a child she must breastfeed now. The last stanza indicates speech, as her mother says, “He is sucking the living / Daylights out of you,” as she serves more food to the narrator. However, there are no quotation marks around the indicated speech. These lines might be at the beginning of the last stanza because the author needed to separate thoughts to indicate speech. In the poem “Eating Together,” however, the ideas are all pushed into one stanza. Although the beginning of the poem starts with imagery of food and ends with a mention of his father’s death, readers see how a meal reminds the narrator of his father’s death in one stanza. The narrator’s ideas flow from the seasoned fish and rice to how his father is missing at family lunch.

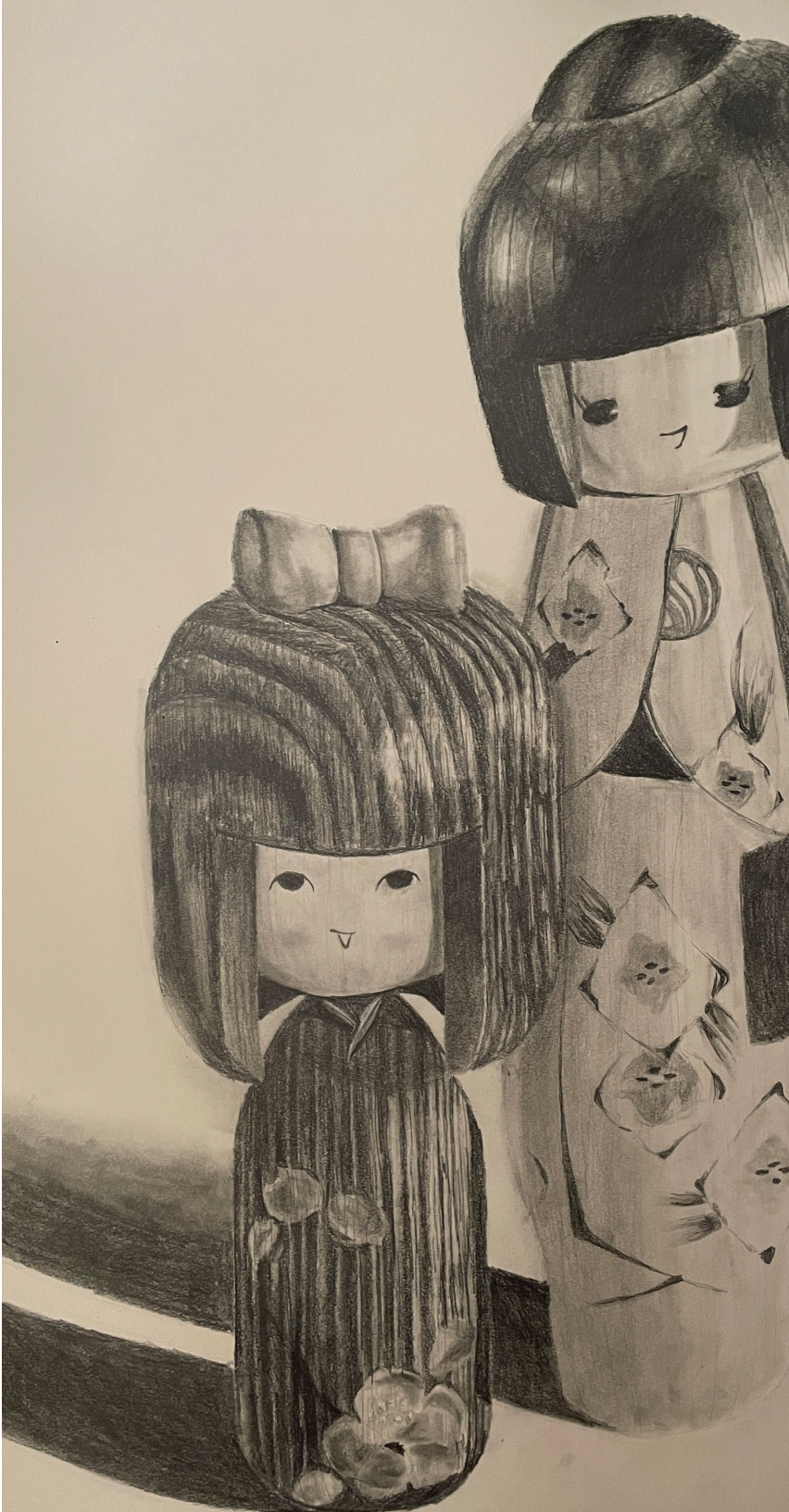
The two poems demonstrate the theme of familial love in different ways. In “Eat,” readers can identify three generations of a family: the narrator’s mother, the narrator, and her newborn child. Song portrays an act of maternal love through her mother holding her infant son so her daughter can eat (Song). The narrator is also a mother herself and portrays her love for her infant baby by acknowledging that she must feed her “own flesh and blood” (Song). However, there is sadness and distress in the poem, because the narrator is struggling with an eating disorder that can directly affect her child. The narrator’s mother also does not realize that her daughter is struggling with this eating disorder as she continuously forces her to eat. The theme of maternal love is presented perfectly in this poem because it shows that no matter how much a mother loves her child, her love can be flawed. Alternatively, “Eating Together” portrays familial love and tradition from a son’s point of view. The narrator, or Lee, is at his family lunch table remembering eating lunch as a family when his father was alive. Readers first notice that he does not mention his dad when talking about his family gathering for lunch: “We shall eat it with rice for lunch / brothers, sister, my mother” (Lee). When his mother eats the trout, Lee recalls, “the way my father did / weeks ago” (Lee). This allows readers to grasp that the family is dealing with a loss. The sad yet calm tone of the poem suggests that the narrator is coming to terms with his father’s death.

When analyzing these poems, a crucial question arises. How are aspects of Asian culture portrayed

through the food itself besides the mentioned dishes? Throughout many cultures, parents look for ways to get their children to eat their food. In “Eat,” the narrator’s mother unintentionally manipulates her into eating as she convinces her to eat “[f]or the starving children in China” (Song). Gratefulness is a commonly emphasized value in immigrant families, such as Asian American families. Her mother tries to teach her daughter to eat what she is given, even food she dislikes (Song). However, this unintentionally results in an eating disorder in which her daughter is unable to properly nourish herself. What she does manage to eat, goes to her son. Another aspect of Asian culture is the patriarch being the head of the household. In “Eating Together,” Lee’s mother “tastes the sweetest meat of the head” which is what his deceased father used to eat (Lee). “The sweetest meat of the head,” or the best part of the fish, must have typically gone to the head of the household who was previously his father (Lee).

However, we see a shift as his mom is now eating the best part of the fish. This portrays that the head of the household is now his mother, which also reimburses the sad theme of a loss of a patriarch of his family. The purpose of using food in these poems was to create emotion. In “Eat” by Song, readers see the narrator has a negative relationship with certain foods. She even expresses her dislike of mustard cabbage (Song). This creates the emotion of suffering and distress. In “Eating Together” the vivid imagery of the seasoned fish and rice meal allows readers to picture the food. This allows for a calm emotion, as lunch is being served. It also punctuates how important meals are when it comes to bringing people together. Food is an essential aspect of our cultures and lives and its significance is portrayed differently yet beautifully in each poem.

**Geisha Dolls**  
**Drawing by Lexy Altieri**



**Freed Unrestfully: The Referential Point of '08  
Poetry by Huayra Forster**

What do we want  
    What what do we need?

Sometimes Ohio calls back my name  
What were artists after  
    but unrelenting fame  
A voice emerged  
To call you brother  
You couldn't be more  
Check with the others

A limit set  
For the safety  
And were regrets and doubts  
Manifesting?  
Yes!

However when boundaries were  
Put to the test  
Discrimination was not a factor  
Skin  
A protective barrier.  
A humble rest.  
Does it matter if your shades  
Match mine?  
The journey of recovery  
Involves no police crimes. Reciprocity.  
Nor clowning mimes.

A shaky foundation  
Proved the nomad of land  
Rock to rock  
We're IN their hands  
A united march of  
A Saturday sloth

(continued)

The combination of limit  
And self is what will  
Determine your heart  
Controlled desire.  
Press the start-over  
And be inspired  
For art

Talk about  
Love  
As though it's February  
Black history tells an  
Integration story.  
Afro-Indigenous lives  
Belong  
And freedom is ours  
Working hours are long.  
Bring a new notice  
Very loud sweat  
Dripped  
Are we here for the  
Long run?

**Midsummer**  
**Photo by Savon Sharp**

