Academy of American Poets

Undergraduate winner Annelies DeVos she having gone
UG Honorable mention Sue Hyon Bae Teatime
Graduate winner Lawrence Ypil “Aria”
GR Honorable mention Luke Cumberland Gainsborough Creek

Leanna Boysko Essay Contest

Junior winner Emma Hine “Govern well thy appetite”: Entrails, Sin, and the Conflict between Mind and Body in Milton’s Later Poetry
Senior winner Jason Schwartzman The River

Cornelison English Essay Contest

1st place winner Anna Deters Richardson and the Problem of Stoic Pride
2nd place tie Meg Dobbins “What did you cut it off for, then?”: Feminist Interpretations of Self-Violent Women
2nd place tie Lauren Robertson “For Ne’er Was a Dream So Like a Waking”: Time and Uncertainty in The Winter’s Tale

F. Ward Denys Essay Contest

Winner Genevieve Hay The Intersectional Politics of “The Beach of Falesa”

Dramatics Club of St. Louis Contest

Creative winner Aaron Senser The Impossible Adventures of Supernova Jones
Critical winner Natalie Grybauskas Paradox, Time, and a bit of Pure Mathematics in Samuel Beckett’s Endgame

Carrie S. Galt Fiction Contest

Winner Maria Xia Education
Andrea Goff memorial Poetry Contest
 Winner  Emily Berger  Paired is Lost

Roger Conant Hatch Poetry Contest
 Winner  Olivia Cook  Baader-Meinhof: A Meditation on Terror and Violence

Harriet Schwenk Kluver Contest
 Creative winner  Lara Sichi  Slack Water
 Critical winner  Beatrice Gantzer  Rings of Spectators in *Troilus and Cressida*”

Norma Lowry Memorial Fund Poetry Contest
 Undergraduate winner  Olivia Cook  Human Mountain Crossing
 Graduate winner  Aditi Machado  (A girl is running….)

Julia Viola McNeely Poetry Contest
 Winner  Alex Liu  Boat

James Merrill Poetry Contest
 Winner  Olivia Cook  What are you waiting for, and is the bus

Washington University Fiction Contest
 Winner  Glen Lindquist  Deep in Bigfoot Country

Alena Wilson Memorial Prize
 Winner  Caroline Wilkinson  Paper Boats
she having gone

2012 Undergraduate Winner
Academy of American Poets Contest

Annalies DeVos
she having gone

she having gone to find
independence from me
she left to find herself
centered she called me
and negative I made her

go out to dinner even though
she wanted to be quiet about us,
me, my lips kissing secrets

not anymore, now
I slur my words or run
even when it’s too warm

she said to sleep together
in the same bed that
I can’t sleep in now
where it’s always
cold even when
it’s not.
Teatime

2012 Undergraduate Honorable Mention Winner
Academy of American Poets Contest

Sue Hyon Bae
Teatime

Of course you do exactly what scares me the most.
Infants
small enough to fit in the oven should stay out
of the kitchen.
You might slip on the cooking-greasy floor.
You might catch your fingers in the cabinets.
I might drop
something.
I might swivel around holding the hot
kettle.
You should wear bells. I should clean more.
Of course there are knives point up in the open dishwasher.
Of course you try to touch them. It’s like you’ve planned
the best way to frighten me into eternal supervision.
Don’t go exploring
corners. I’m sure there’s a mixingbowlful of dirt here.
I love you. My back hurts. The trash is full. Go away.
"Aria"

2012 Graduate Winner
Academy of American Poets Contest

Lawrence Ypil
Aria

Now the painting makes an argument with the garden it faces:

Flower Leaf Leg Ground Beneath Our Feet What We Wake To Every Morning
When a leaf falls, my father picks it up. My mother in the morning tells a story.
At the dinner table, Grace. At porch, a dog. Sometimes. Then,

Consequently. My father leans onto a chair and thinks.

My mother understands. Face Porcelain By Force Of Love Of Horrible Habit. Now the polished floor anticipates forevermore

and everyday. At night, a lizard. Dawn. My mother

finishes my father’s sentences. And so on.
Gainsborough Creek

2012 Graduate Honorable Mention Winner
Academy of American Poets

Luke Cumberland
Gainsborough Creek

I grew up quickly and thinking I'd never need a drop in my life.
John was back—he had slept through his first year at college—
And we were sitting by the creekside as we'd done before, with the big oak
Hanging over the water, its leaves brushing the bright face of it;

Thread-legged bugs bending the surface with the neat tips of their legs,
Bending the light on the water in toward the hysterical little dance of their feet.
I'm reminded of a poem by Tu Fu, it is a poem about friendship:
How after years Tu Fu returns to the home of a friend

To find he has raised a family, and been successful in business;
They drink wine from the rhinoceros horn together. This was nothing like that.
"There are ten thousand cares in the world." John said, as the procession of water
Slowly spun the back wheel of an overturned Peugeot. "None of them are mine,

And I am not one of them either," and I agreed. By this time we had finished
The bottle he had brought, and were lumbering back home through the woods
Behind our street. All around us the fog hung in the trees like a wish. And we walked
Through it that night as if we could meet ourselves on the other side.
“Govern well thy appetite”:
Entrails, Sin, and the Conflict between Mind and Body in
Milton’s Later Poetry

2012  Junior Winner
Leanna Boysko Essay Contest

Emma Hine
"Govern well thy appetite": Entrails, Sin, and the Conflict between Mind and Body in Milton's Later Poetry

In *Paradise Lost*, Milton's world is a visceral one. Internal organs, specifically entrails and wombs, do not just coil in the bellies of God's newly created animals and humans. Rather, everything in his universe seems to possess a gut, something vulnerable to be spilled and exploited but also, conversely, somewhere for new life to grow. Earth, Heaven, Chaos, and Hell all have viscera in Milton's vision of the universe; devils "Rifled the bowels of their mother Earth/ For treasures" just as humans will do after the Fall (I.687-8). The internal parts of Heaven are similarly gutted, as Satan's army creates a gunpowder-like substance from "Part hidden veins digged up (nor hath this Earth/ Entrails unlike) of mineral and stone" (VI.516-7). The cannons that later fire this same substance also rip open Heaven's organs, "Embowell[ing] with outrageous noise the air" and tearing "all her entrails... disgorging foul/ Their devilish glut" (VI.587-9). Chaos too, personified as an aging and failing anarchist-king, tells Satan how God's light and creation have "Encroached on still through our intestine broils" (II.1001); here, "intestine" refers to the internal nature of the conflict. The inner parts of Earth, Heaven, and Chaos are all invaded and exploited for violence and destruction. Entrails, then, are something dangerous in their vulnerability, necessary to the nature of a thing but easily exposed, corrupted, and violated.

Hell, Milton's fiery wasteland, burns in the same dramatic colors as when "the shattered side/ Of thund'ring Etna, whose combustible/ And fueled entrails thence conceiving fire,/ Sublimed with mineral fury" (I.232-5). Milton's choice of language here suggests a way in which entrails function more broadly in *Paradise Lost*. Etna's "shattered side" recalls both Sin's torn bowels and Christ's pierced side; entrails, then, are related to
both the birth and conquest of Death. The “fire” here is also important, as it presents a
different kind of light from the “Bright effluence of bright essence” that is godly light and,
more specifically, Christ (III.6). Moreover, the volcano’s guts are “conceiving fire,” thus
blurring the distinction between intestine and womb in the text. Milton further expounds
this conflation of waste-disposing and life-nurturing organs in *Paradise Lost* with his only
other visceral description of a volcano in hell; this second volcano, instead of having
entrails like Etna, has hidden “in his womb...metallic ore” (1.673).

Wombs and entrails become even more confused in Milton’s descriptions of Earth.
When Mammon exploits the underground for treasure, the world has “bowels,” yes, but
Milton spends much more space associating the belly of the world with childbirth. He
describes how “the mounted sun/ Shot down direct his fervid rays to warm/ Earth’s inmost
womb, more warmth than Adam needs” (V.300-2). Again, this moment casts Earth as
nurturing and childbearing but also as hellishly hot and potentially destructive. In his
retelling of the creation, he writes, “The Earth was formed, but in the womb as yet/ Of
waters, embryon immature involved” (VII.276-7); the Earth not only is a womb but is also
cradled within one, part of a series of reproduction much like Adam and Eve’s fruitful line.
For later in the same book, at God’s command, from the world’s “fertile womb teemed at
birth/ Innumerous living creatures, perfect forms,” showing the contrast between its
entrails, associated with destruction and exploitation, and its womb here, associated with
potential and uncorrupted life (VII.454-5). Milton sums up this juxtaposition when he
describes “the womb of Nature and perhaps her grave” (II.911); in the innermost part of
the world are coiled both the capacity for life and the potential for violation and death.
The connection between entrails and death or exploitation is perhaps clearest in Milton’s treatment of the figure of Sin. While she guards the mouth of Hell, she tells Satan, her incestuous father, of her birth of their child Death:

    my womb
    Pregnant by thee, and now excessive grown
    Prodigious motion felt and rueful throes.
    At last this odious offspring whom thou seest
    Thine own begotten, breaking violent way
    Tore through my entrails, that with fear and pain
    Distorted, all my nether shape thus grew
    Transformed. (II.778-85)

Womb and intestines are completely interrelated here, as the one’s childbirth leads to the other’s destruction. With Sin, unlike with the Earth, the potential of the womb and the exploitation of the entrails are not separate and conflicting phenomena, but rather it is the new life that destroys. Also, Death does not merely slash his mother’s viscera and leave it at that; the “fear and pain” caused by his gory birth lead to the transformation of her lower half into a serpent. On introducing Sin in the text, Milton describes her as “woman to the waist, and fair,/ But end[ing] foul in many a scaly fold/ Voluminous and vast, a serpent armed/ With mortal sting” (II.650-3). When she gives birth, Sin’s entrails are destroyed and, as a result, she becomes part serpent.

This bisexion of Sin’s body into human and beast reflects the conflict in *Paradise Lost* between the upper and lower faculties. If her human head and torso represent her mind, reason, and soul, then the deadly serpent below her waist represents the counter-influence of her bowels, genitals, and appetites. The visceral violence in Milton’s treatment of Sin indicates that these two faculties are not balanced, but rather that she is ruled and determined by her writhing lower half; it follows that the act of succumbing to sin is, in a way, the yielding of the mind and soul to the body and the victory of the corporeal faculties
over the spiritual. Sin's grotesque physicality does not, though, mean that Milton is calling for celibacy, fasting, or other complete denials of the body. Instead, he uses Paradise Lost, as well as some of his other poetry, to call for the healthy balance of humanity's upper and lower halves. He portrays angelic digestion as the perfect example of this ideal balance;

Raphael tells Adam:

food alike those pure
 Intelligent substances require
 As doth your rational; and both contain
 Within them every lower faculty
 Of sense, whereby they hear, see, smell, touch, taste,
 Tasting concord, digest, assimilate,
 And corporeal to incorporeal turn.
 For know, whatever was created, needs
 To be sustained and fed. (V.407-415)

Angels are "pure," but they are not devoid of "lower faculty," giving them the ability to "digest." Similarly, even the humans' "rational" half requires food, and neither the human soul nor the angelic "Intelligent substances" can function without the help of bodily senses to interpret the world. Human nourishment follows this heavenly pattern before the Fall, with Adam and Eve enjoying "pure digestion" and never having to worry about food (V.4). After Eve is overcome by her bodily appetite and eats the apple, though, part of their punishment is the need to struggle for food. With the figure of Sin, Milton does not demand the erasure of the body or its deadly influence, but he does issue a warning with her tortured transformation: when the healthy balance between upper and lower faculties tilts towards the latter, things can go terribly wrong.

This battle between pure spirit and sinful body is not unique to Paradise Lost in Milton's body of work; he also explores the concept at length in his tragic drama Samson Agonistes, which he published four years later along with Paradise Regain'd. In the poem,
Samson laments, “O impotence of mind, in body strong!” demonstrating how his mind and his body are engaged in an inner battle, which the body is winning (52). Samson also alludes to the mutual reliance of spirit and flesh on each other, asking, “But what is strength without a double share/ Of wisdom” (53-4). He goes on to say, though, that the lower faculties are “By weakest suttleties, not made to rule,/ But to subserve where wisdom bears command” (56-7). Like the angels, then, Samson sees the necessity for a healthy balance but also for the ultimate influence of reason over appetite. From his perspective, any allowance of the body to rule the mind is a sin, for that is a manifestation of weakness, and “All wickedness is weakness,” after all (834). Furthermore, Samson, like Sin, personifies the struggle between body and soul in his very nature, for God has given him “this strength, diffus’d/ No less through all my sinews, joints and bones” (1140-1); to worship God with his soul, Samson must use the strength of his body without letting it overwhelm him like it has Sin.

Sin does not only bear a strong connection to Samson in Milton’s body of work, however: the connections between her and Eve, and therefore the concept of human sin, are many and complicated throughout Paradise Lost. Just as Sin gives birth to Death, Eve gives birth to Cain, the world’s first murderer. Eve’s is also, according to Milton, not the first tortuous labor; Sin’s birthing of Death seems an exaggeration, almost a parody, of the punishing of women to come. His use of the serpent here also recalls Eve, who falls from grace through the serpent’s temptation and who must live with, and pass on, mortality and strife. Milton’s description of Sin in a way suggests Eve herself after the Fall: though in appearance like the perfect and uncorrupted woman God created, she is transformed by the snake’s influence and now possesses a “mortal sting.” The importance of entrails in
Sin's characterization also has much to bear on Eve's own situation. She, like Sin and like the Earth, can also be understood, on one level, in terms of the conflict between her bowels and her womb. Milton calls her "our general mother," making hers the original womb for mankind, but she is also the first person to sin, and she does so through an act of digestion, giving her entrails equal importance in the world (IV.492). Both Eve's womb, which requires extra nourishment and is related to sexual desire, and her appetite represent the influence of her lower faculties over her reason and spirituality. When Raphael warns Eve to "govern well thy appetite, lest Sin/Surprise thee, and her black attendant Death," he alludes to this connection between sin and the physicality of eating (VII.546-7). The fruit must after all travel through Eve's intestines, which curl inside her in serpentine folds. In fact, Milton's description of the serpent through which Satan tempts Eve to eat could just as easily describe her internal organs, being "Wondrous in length and corpulence involved" and with "snaky folds" (VII.483-4); although Milton never makes this connection explicit, the constant presence of both entrails and serpents in the text allows the reader to see their similarities. While Eve's womb represents the potential for human life in the world, her viscera is the potential for sin inside everyone, shaped like Satan's chosen proxy and there to be exploited, succumbed to, or fought against. Eve's consumption and digestion of the fruit is then an exploitation of her entrails from an external force, just like the mining of Earth and Heaven. It is also the victory of lower over upper faculties. And she, like Satan's daughter, is a figure torn apart by her womb, the seat of human life and death in its proliferation of the species and its birth of the first murderer, and her intestines, the seat of human sin in their digestion of the forbidden fruit.
Before the Fall, human digestion is different, though, sinless and seemingly less messy, and it represents the rational balance of upper and lower faculties in Paradise. Milton describes how Adam’s "sleep/ Was airy light, from pure digestion bred,/ And temperate vapours bland" (V.3-5); this prelapsarian means of processing food leads to untroubled sleep and in no way resembles Sin’s tormented abdomen or the spewing volcanoes of Hell. Eve before the Fall is already defined on very physical terms, however; she recalls Adam saying to her, "to give thee being I lent/ Out of my side to thee, nearest my heart/ Substantial life" (IV.483-5). She is "substantial" and created out of a rib, whose function is to contain and protect a body's internal organs. Despite this early emphasis on her physicality, Eve like Adam is pure and even "goddesslike" until she listens to Satan and eats the fruit; this moment marks the conquering of her pure mind by her base body (VIII.59). When she does take a bite, Milton’s treatment of her Fall is heavy with entrails and acknowledgments of the physical nature of food; he even begins the first book of the poem by summarizing it as a tale “Of man’s first disobedience, and the fruit/ Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste/ Brought death into the world” (I.1-3). Here, it is not the fruit’s accompanying knowledge that ruins paradise but the taste of the fruit itself, which will go on to descend through Eve and wind through her organs. Eve is also struck by her physical desire to taste the fruit in her troubling dream, saying that “the pleasant savory smell/ So quickened appetite, that I, methought,/ Could not but taste,” which emphasizes the influence of her body over her spirit (V.84-6). The physicality of “savory” and “appetite,” combined with the emphasis on “taste,” again suggest the importance of the actual act of eating, and therefore digesting, the fruit. When Eve finally does partake, Milton writes that "Forth reaching to the fruit, she plucked, she ate" (IX.781). The simplicity of this
sentence, with its mostly monosyllabic words, directs the reader’s attention to the end of the line, where “ate” stands prominent; this is another reminder that Eve’s Fall is very much associated with her entrails, which rest beside her womb and represent the constant presence of and potential for sin, or the fall from reason and spirituality, in post-Edenic life. And when Adam follows suit and eats, Milton writes, “Earth trembled from her entrails, as again/ In pangs, and Nature gave a second groan” (IX.1000-1). This two connects gut and womb, for Earth’s “pangs” are reminiscent of labor, but she feels the effect of the Fall in her intestines, not her uterus. Adam also sees the postlapsarian Eve as a serpent, transformed just like Sin; he cries, “Out of my sight, thou serpent” and wishes “that thy shape,/ Like his, and color serpentine may show/ Thy inward fraud” (X.866-71). Although Eve remains in appearance a woman, it can be said that her entrails become physical proof of her “inward fraud.”

Eve is not the only woman in Milton’s opus to bear resemblance to the satanic serpent and to lead a man to abandon his faith and reason for his appetite. In Samson Agonistes, Dalila plays a similar role, and Milton repeatedly describes her as a snake; seen in conjunction with Eve and Sin in Paradise Lost, Dalila’s serpentine portrayal associates her with Sin’s tormented lower half and with the fall of Eve’s upper faculties to the influence of her entrails. Samson calls her “Dalila,/ That specious Monster” early on in the drama, but as Milton nears his conclusion, he characterizes his infamous heroine more and more as a serpent (229-30). Samson tells her, “That wisest and best men full oft beguil’d.../ Are drawn to wear out miserable days,/ Entangl’d with a poisonous bosom snake,/ If not by quick destruction soon cut off” (759, 762-64). Even the most faithful and rational men, then, must endure Sin’s struggle between the upper mind and the lower serpent, and in this
scenario, Dalila herself is the snake-like temptation of the body over the mind. Samson speaks of her “circling wiles,” which connotes the winding movement of a snake and implies that, unlike Eve, her appeal to his physical weakness is wicked and deliberate (871). When she leaves the drama, the Chorus says, “She’s gone, a manifest Serpent by her sting,” and Samson continues, “So let her go, God sent her to debase me,/ And aggravate my folly who committed/ To such a viper his most sacred trust” (997, 999-1001). Milton emphasizes Dalila’s physicality by describing her as “manifest.” Also, his use of “debase” is a reminder of her and Eve’s temptation of the lower faculties to outweigh the upper, for to debase is, by definition, to lower. Dalila, like Eve, is snakelike and connected to the lower faculties, and they both use these qualities, Dalila purposefully and Eve out of folly, to debase Samson and Adam through physical temptation. The Chorus says of Dalila:

What e’re it be, to wisest men and best
Seeming at first all heav’nly under virgin veil,
Soft, modest, meek, demure,
Once joint, the contrary she proves, a thorn
Intestin...in his way to vertue. (1034-9)

Although even the most rational and perceptive of men may see her as pure and harmless, Dalila is really a terrible threat to wisdom and to virtue. Specifically, she is a “thorn/Intestin,” a foreign object tearing at the vulnerable folds of Samson’s virtue just as Satan and his armies mine the bowels of Heaven. Even in Samson Agonistes, entrails are vital to the idea of sin and the conflict between spirituality and physicality. Dalila’s influence is seated in the very core of Samson’s body, the same place where, thanks to the serpent’s influence on Eve, human sin and vulnerability reside after the Fall.

After all, Eve is not the only human associated with entrails in Paradise Lost.
Instead of stopping with her “inward fraud,” Milton continues to portray the connection between internal organs and sin in the world after her fatal bite. For instance, when Cain kills Abel, he strikes him “into the midriff with a stone/ That beat out life,” and Abel falls “and deadly pale/ Groan[s] out his soul with gushing blood effused” (XI.445-7). This moment is the culmination of the equivalence of Eve’s role as “general mother” and Sin’s role as mother of Death, and it is fitting therefore that Abel dies from a blow to the gut. Michael, who shows this scene to Adam, goes on to list the other means of dying brought about by their tasting of the fruit; he describes how humans now suffer from “all maladies/ Of ghastly spasm...convulsions, epilepsies...Intestine stone and ulcer, colic pangs” (XI.480-1, 483-4); Eve’s intestinal moment of sin has made vulnerable the inner workings of all of humanity, and it has allowed the body to overpower even the strongest mind. And later on, God voices his displeasure at the Tower of Babel in terms of internal organs, saying, “Wretched man! What food/ Will he convey up thither to sustain/ Himself and his rash army, where thin air/ Above the clouds will pine his entrails gross...?” (XII.74-8). Here, sinful ambition will actually lead to intestinal failure. Also, the juxtaposition of “entrails gross” against the “thin air” is very different from Adam’s “pure digestion” and “airy light” sleep of before (V.4); it suggests an assumption of a more grotesque physicality, again echoing Sin’s lower transformation into a snake. Humanity after the Fall is far removed from the angelic balance of higher and lower faculties exemplified by heavenly digestion. All of these instances relate the presence of sin in the world to the presence of entrails in the human body, and they allow for chronologically later characters in Milton’s work, like Samson and Christ, to be associated with entrails as well.
This connection between sin and human organs becomes problematic when Milton associates Mary and Eve; Raphael hails Adam's wife just as he later would "Mary, second Eve" (V.387). If Christ is Mary's child, then, he is also directly descended from Eve, not just as a human but through the symbolic relation of the two women. In Book III, in what is known as the 'invocation to light,' Milton addresses Christ:

    Hail holy light, offspring of Heav'n first-born,  
    Or of th' Eternal coeternal beam  
    May I express thee unblamed? Since God is light,  
    And never but in unapproachéd light  
    Dwelt from eternity, dwelt then in thee,  
    Bright effluence of bright essence increate. (III.1-6)

Christ, born of Mary and yet the Son of God, is somehow both fully human and fully divine. Here, though, he is "unblamed" and made of God's "bright essence," very different from the sinful stock of his human mother. While this paradox is an intrinsic part of Christian theology, Milton complicates it a step further by centering human sin in the entrails and by relating bowels and wombs. The entrails through which Eve digests the forbidden fruit are representative of her constant vulnerability to sin and the influence of the body, a trait she passes on to the rest of mankind, and future human death and folly keep relating back to the gut. When Jesus, then, is "Substantially expressed," he must also have entrails and therefore, though "unblamed" and "Beyond compare," be susceptible to Satan. Though his conception and nativity too seem pure, holy, and very clean, the associations within Milton's text are a reminder that Christ, like all humans, spends nine months nestled inside a life-giving womb but directly beside a serpent-like mess of entrails; this physicality, this proximity to and possession of a symbol of sin are difficult to reconcile with the figure described as "the radiant image of [God's] glory" (III.63).
Seen in conjunction with Samson, though, Christ’s conflicting divinity and incarnation are just a more extreme version of humanity’s conflicting upper and lower halves. Just as Samson embodies the struggle between strength and faith and as the goal of mankind is to reclaim the healthy balance of mind and body that angels enjoy and Adam experiences before the Fall, Christ’s challenge is to be both fully human and fully divine but to still let his divinity rule. This is why entrails in Milton can be so intrinsically linked with hell and reprobation without being blasphemous; Christ would not be able to save humanity if he did not also struggle with the temptations of his lower half. In *Paradise Lost*, the body defeats the mind with the fall of Adam and Eve, but the promise of Christ is a chance for the soul to rule again over the influence of physical temptations. Milton addresses this chance in the first book of *Paradise Regain’d* when Satan tempts a hungry Christ in the wilderness. Jesus replies, “Think’st thou such force in Bread? is it not writ’tn...Man lives not by Bread onely, but each Word/ Proceeding from the mouth of God” (1.347, 349-50). Jesus, just like the angels who also must eat, is not devoid of human needs and desires, nor does he denounce them as evil. Rather, he acknowledges that humans have two halves, the body and the spirit, and that both require sustenance. In denying Satan’s offer of bread, Jesus simply chooses to ignore the plaints of his physical intestines and instead feed his soul with God’s Word. This choice, the exact opposite of Eve’s in the Garden, represents the recreation of a balance between the upper and lower faculties and the denial of the entrails in favor of the soul. It is for this reason that Christ can “quell/ The adversary serpent” and that “the sins/ Of all mankind [are] with him there crucified” (XII.416-7, 311-2). Milton’s Samson, then, is a sort of human reflection of Christ, who uses the conviction of his mind to convince his body to harm itself out of faith. When he pulls the
columned theater down on top of him with his God-given might, his father exclaims, “O last
ly over-strong against thy self!” (1590). It is this defeat of the lower temptations of the self that characterizes both Samson’s and Christ’s final victories and that redeems both Paradise Lost and Samson Agonistes from the serpents and the visceral sins that populate them.
Works Cited


The River

2012 Senior Winner
Leanna Boysko Essay Contest

Jason Schwartzman
The River

Part 1: "(Everybody Wanna Get Rich) Rite Away" – Dr. John

From across the Mississippi, the billboard for Casino Queen looks like a massive flag, the sign connected to its post at the corner. In some ways, the casino is the de facto capital of what the U.S. Department of Housing and Development called “The most distressed city in America” in 1989. East St. Louis occupies fourteen square miles of the southern Illinois flood plain known as the American Bottom. Back in 1958, it received the honor of being named an All-American city, but there are no stars or stripes on the casino’s flag – just a slogan: Home of the Loosest Slots. It is also home to regulars like Butch Mills, who visits what he affectionately calls “The Queen” almost every day.

He is living the life of his dreams. Before Butch Mills was Butch Mills – when he was a nine-year-old boy named Kyle - his uncle offered him a deal: for every minute he stood in freezing cold sea water he could earn one dollar. Little Kyle shivered his way to sixty bucks. Now, as blues musician Dr. John’s sound engineer, he says makes 500,000 dollars a year. That’s 8,333 hours worth of cold-water time. Yet his preferred cigarette is Smoker’s Choice: 80 cents a pack. It is this brand of cigarette he is smoking outside the Laclede’s Landing metro stop in downtown St. Louis on September 12, 2011, a few weeks before his breakdown.

The cigarette’s cheap brown paper burns quickly as he beckons his head, a shaggy mess of hair, up the steep staircase whose peak he cannot see past. He lingers, clasping the rail, panicking at the sound of his wife, Haley. She is so close he can feel it. She will kill him, he says, if she catches him smoking. He’s been a smoker for ten years but convinced her he quit. After a minute of paralysis, he climbs the stairs and finds the platform barren except for
an excitable gaggle of black teenage girls. Panic forgotten, he readies himself for the journey across the Mississippi to his beloved Queen. His pockets bulge with quarters, an allowance from his wife to limit his gambling. Money is no object, though, according to Butch. He doesn’t even need to work if he doesn’t want to – he could easily live off the trust fund his dad set up for him. But he is happy to be working in the industry he always fantasized about, and Dr. John is not only one of his heroes but also his friend. Since his job follows a tour schedule, when Butch is home in St. Louis he has nothing to do. He passes the time in casinos. It’s a break for him, he says. A place he can clear his head.

Butch has plenty of options. The industry that began in Missouri and Illinois as a few boats cruising up and down the river has metamorphosed into a billion dollar behemoth. Though it is only the 16th biggest metropolitan area, St. Louis boasts the 8th biggest gambling market. The Midwestern market was born in 1989 when Iowa legalized riverboat gambling to save its weak agricultural economy. Boosters prophesized an economic boon for a region not drawing many tourists; critics worried about the ugly social costs of an industry whose God is so nakedly money. Other Midwestern states quickly followed Iowa’s lead. The Casino Queen was sailing on the Illinois side of the Mississippi by 1993. It was actually the river’s second time around. In the midst of the region’s thriving 19th century trading industry, gamblers flocked to the river where poker got its start in America. The Mississippi is why in Texas Hold ‘Em, the last and most crucial card is called the river card. On one hand, it is the card of reality, a wake-up call, the arbiter of who wins and who loses. But on the other, it is the card of fantasy, often unknown, married to death, a dream chased by less skilled players hoping to get lucky.

The new casino riverboats were replicas of the paddle-wheel steamboats that filled the Mississippi in its last life as a gambling den. What was initially touted as a family-friendly
homage to history has turned into a Las Vegas imitation. Money is the steroid of evolution. First, the boats were no longer required to sail along the river and then, ten years ago, new legislation introduced the "boat on a moat" loophole, a legal fiction allowing the casino boats to move onto land and sit in "artificial inland reservoirs." The boats have become buildings, normal except for their strange underground trenches of water. Casino Queen — which resembles a McMansion — floats on 340,000 gallons of water. Harrah's, Ameristar, Lumiere, and River City are the other islanded heavyweights in what has become a fierce battle for market share.

"We will have the best casino in the Midwest, bar none," predicted Casino Queen spokesman Ron O'Connor to the Post-Dispatch in 2006, a year before the new building opened.

East St. Louis, too, was full of hope not only for increased tax revenues but also for the stimulation of development along the industry-scarred East Riverfront, a strip neglected for the last twenty years. It was an optimistic time for the beleaguered city. Just a year before, the plans were finally in motion for Gateway Geyser, a super-fountain capable of blasting 8,000 gallons of water per minute into the sky. Its 630-foot range would be the exact height of the Gateway Arch: architect Eero Saarinen had planned in 1958 for twin memorials to celebrate the union of the two sides of the river, the same year East St. Louis was recognized as an All-American city. But the eastern compliment was scrapped because funding ran out. The Gateway Geyser was going to be the long-awaited fruition of Saarinen's dream.

"By summer of 2006, if all goes as planned, this landmark will be as popular as the arch," said a project manager in a 2005 interview with KETC.

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In the elevator down from the metro, a turbaned black woman (Butch says Casino Queen is nicknamed African Queen) points at Butch and stares in disbelief.

“It’s you. It’s you.”

Butch is twenty-three years old. He is an American to the bone: born on July 4th, uncomfortable outside of the country. I’m an American – I speak American, he says. His appearance is ordinary: short, around five foot six, with brown eyes, eyebrows that curl inward, and elfish ears buried in sunny brown hair that reaches his neck. Straight teeth. He wears a t-shirt, wide jeans, and boots. There is a small gage in his left ear, black with a skeleton on it, a contrast to his white skin. Butch says he gets a kick when someone recognizes him. Recognizing others, though, is a different matter. He stares blankly at the woman for several seconds before she jogs his memory with an anecdote about a creepy old man. The anecdote involves the young age of a girl, how hot she is, how the old man has no chance and horseracing. This is enough for Butch, who remembers stories but not people, and the two of them launch into a series of debates. She calls Charlie Sheen retarded.

“Retarded and rich,” he corrects.

The word winning is tattooed across Butch’s right wrist, the overgrown tail of the g flatlining under the rest of the word. The tattoo, which he learned he acquired the morning after a drunken night, is an homage to Sheen, the former Two and a Half Men star notorious for his romps with porn stars, his claim to have tiger blood, and putting enough cocaine up his nose to powder a ski slope. Sheen has the word tattooed on his left wrist. Winning, to Sheen, means doing what he wants without caring, living without limits, without stopping, whatever the consequences.

The discussion moves to the sins of Jack Nicholson and then to a homely girl, whom the turbaned woman euphemizes as spunky. This is not a quality Butch respects. The
turbaned woman rolls her eyes after everything he says, at once aghast and half-chuckling, disapproving and yet needing to hear more.

“Someday even your dick gonna get limp.”

“I’m gonna be young forever,” Butch parries.

The turbaned woman rolls her eyes again as the group drifts across the ocean of parking lot. The license plates are almost all registered in Illinois or Missouri. On the group’s right is Casino Queen’s 157-room hotel, blocking views of the river and on its left is a withered, sun-cooked Asian woman who could find work as an extra in a zombie apocalypse movie. At last, they arrive at the façade of the casino. Big golden mirrors next to the lobby are partitioned into two sections, the large top halves reflecting sky, the puffy white permeating through shades of blue. The bottom halves are smaller, reflecting distorted scrawls of the highway that slices through East St. Louis. Butch banters his way past the security guards, avoiding the ID check that is mandatory for every guest. Security is tight: vans patrol, dozens of lights guarantee that the area never darkens, and the parking lot serves as a buffer from the city. Perception of safety is crucial for business because of the tremendous stigma attached to East St. Louis.

The city is a shell of its former self, the thriving corporate suburb that doubled in the 50’s as a prominent cultural center. Nicknamed “East Boogie,” it was one of the places where Chuck Berry helped start rock and roll. The city produced jazz legend Miles Davis and Olympian Jackie Joyner-Kersee; voted the best female athlete of the 20th century by Sports Illustrated. East St. Louis dubbed itself The City of Champions, a name visible on its welcome sign, bounded by two faded red stars. It was founded in 1820, seeking to capitalize on the wealth across the river as St. Louis begun its ascendancy toward becoming the fourth largest city in the country. In the beginning of the 20th century, East St. Louis had the second largest
railroad center and was considered the hog capital of the country. Andrew Theising, author of *Made in USA: East St. Louis, Rise and Fall of an Industrial River Town*, explains the city's development as a symbiotic relationship with its bigger brother across the river.

"Every major city needs a workbench, a trash heap, a washbasin; some kind of repository for the unattractive yet essential elements of urban life – slaughterhouses, smokestacks, rail yards."

The city was initially called Illinoistown but took on its current name to benefit from St. Louis' once valuable brand. At its peak, East St. Louis had a population of over 80,000 with seemingly endless sources of employment. But since it was created as a corporate suburb of St. Louis, its government was singularly geared towards profit. The town's existence centered on its corporations. When they left amid the post World War II economic realignment, people left with them, and government became impotent, left without a tax base and stripped of its purpose of existence: profit. With the money gone, East St. Louis hemorrhaged two-thirds of its population. The transition toward a more social governance has been a terrible failure, hamstrung by the corruption of machine politics. Because the city was designed with only corporations in mind, it is cut up by an industrial mess of rail lines, highways, and factory superblocks, full of dead-ends, isolated neighborhoods, swamplands and brownfields. It has suffered the same fate as the rest of the rust belt: boarded up storefronts, vacant lots, dilapidated housing stock that has been burned and looted. East St. Louis has sunk lower than most. At its worst, in the late eighties, abandoned tires covered stolen manholes, the sewage overflowing. Sinkholes destroyed the streets. Garbage went uncollected from 1987 to 1992. Abnormally large, engorged rats ran through decaying property. Its borders straddled a Monsanto superfund site. The city had some of the highest rates of poverty and crime in the country. According to Jonathan Kozol's *Savage Inequalities*,

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the chairman of the Illinois Board of Education called East St. Louis "the worst possible
place I can imagine having a child brought up." But throughout all the hard years, there have
been a core of residents who stayed loyal to their community: mostly older folks with a
connection to the city when it was alive, when it really was a city of champions.

"There's a fierce pride in this city," Theising told The Riverfront Times. "People wait
for a better day, and it never comes. Some people have been waiting a long time."

In 1993, East St. Louis looked to Casino Queen to save it. The city was as loose as
the casino: it would take anything that meant tax dollars.

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Butch claims he has no idea who the turbaned woman is. His lack of recognition is
pervasive, a legacy he chalks up to years of snorting cocaine. When he was a kid, crushed pez
served as his ersatz coke. By age 23, he has already "done all that shit": shrooms, LSD (the
trips are either great or terrible), Salvia (his favorite) and marijuana (once in a while). The
cocaine, at least, has ceased since the birth of his son Aidan, who is now two. Butch jokes
that he wanted to name him Kyle Jr., but he yielded to avoid a skirmish with his wife.

Inside the casino, Butch walks around and around, past the noisy slot machines, past
Crazy Cash Mystery Jackpots and Stinkin' Rich and Life of Luxury, under the little roulettes
of light, gaudy illumined blood in gaudy plastic veins, around the platoons of pot-bellied
men with bud lights and Cardinals hats and the elderly women kept upright by their walkers.
He is in the main room, an area a little smaller than a football field, with a cluster of roulette
and black jack tables in the center and slot machines on the periphery. The ceiling constantly
draws Butch's stares: the Eye-in-the-sky cameras, one every few feet. Flatscreen televisions
all tuned to ESPN stick out like signposts on a highway. Butch loves sports – the televisions
are a bonus. His favorite player is former Rams lineman Richie Incognito, a talented guard
who had severe anger management problems. Butch understands. He just wanted to win so badly, he says. He is not far away from it himself: occasional shouts of victory pierce the room, for winning is forgetting: it is whittling the world down to a tiny square of reality, filled with euphoria.

There are two bars called C-bar and Q-bar, each in an opposite corner. The casino has a mirror layout to disorient its clientele, keeping them from the exits. Butch sits at C-bar and orders his first of many cherry cokes with actual maraschino cherries. He believes it to be a delicacy. He mentions that soda is free, a chorus he repeats every once in a while, still impressed after months of visits. It is in the interest of the casino to get caffeine into the bloodstream of their clientele — to keep them awake long into the night gambling as much as possible. The Queen, after all, is open twenty-two hours a day. Waitresses buzz by soliciting orders. A mixed drink only costs two dollars. Casino Queen has filled a niche in the Metro East market as the cheapest casino. The minimum bet for black jack is five dollars and for roulette it is only a dollar. With such a low entrance barrier, it seems like anyone has a chance. On the wall behind Butch is a sign that reads: Out Of Luck? Since the legalization, in Illinois, Gamblers Anonymous groups have spiked from 14 to 80. Anti-casino activists claim between 25 and 50% of all casino revenue comes from problem gamblers.

Toward the middle of the room, near the card tables, a waitress spills a drink. At the Queen, waitress uniforms are scanty and give off a whiff of cheapness. They consist of high-heeled shoes, a short black dress and the apparently mandatory swells of cleavage. Everything shines in Casino Queen — even the breasts of the staff, lathered in sparkles. The bartender, Richard, points out the spill and Butch says he wishes he could get her wet. Then, he asks if Richard has received a bonus recently. Richard says no and Butch acts surprised. In the past, when he’s filled out a feedback form, he’s gotten big results. These forms are a
major source of his power at the Queen. Exhibit A is Susan, an old redhead who Butch yells
"I love you" to from twenty yards away. In private he calls her the worst dealer in the place.
One time, at her table, he was "cussin" and she yelled at him. He yelled back and threw a
nickel at her face, without repercussion. Butch is a regular, a status he mentions all the time.

"She has to be nice to me," he explains.

But Susan is only a footnote in the list of Butch's nemeses. There is the Varsity
soccer ref who confronted Butch during a high school game about what he was chewing.
Butch spit his tobacco in the ref's face and got suspended six games. And then there is
Cavanaugh, a local cop. Butch says Cavanaugh follows him everywhere and has it in for him.
He composed a song in his honor, the chorus consisting mainly of accusations of pedophilia
and stalking. According to Butch, Cavanaugh arrested him once for no reason and tased
him.

"Dzzzzzzzzzz," he says, as his whole body convulses, a motion that obscures his
habitually trembling hands.

Cavanaugh resents that Butch has an "in" with the police. Generally, Butch does
seem well insulated from the law. Through his connection to Dr. John, he shares access to a
high-powered lawyer. He says he's totaled six cars and had no problems, except one time he
was driving drunk and got a DWI. He lost his license. The cop made an example out of him,
he complains. Butch is quick to add that he could've thrown fifty grand at the problem but it
wasn't worth it. Dr. John is tattooed across his left wrist, another inked acquisition Butch
can't remember. Local bartenders know about his legal protection, he says, so they don't
mess with him, ejecting anyone he scuffles with. He gets in fights all the time. Once, sports
small talk escalated into some guy calling him a nigger. This struck some kind of nerve in
Butch - a self-proclaimed redneck from Alabama. He went outside to his adversary's brand
new Corvette, slashed the tires, slid across the hood and punched in the windows. He has the scars on his knuckles to prove it. The Corvette owner lay in a crumpled drunken heap watching the destruction through fogged eyes. When he was finished, Butch offered the man his business card.

He lacks restraint in the Queen too, acting like he owns the place. He tears off little squares of the plastic that envelopes his cigarette pack, letting them flutter to the ground. He walks round and round. Each slot machine earns only a few seconds of Butch’s attention, Hot Hot Penny and Gold Storm sucking up all his credits. He walks with high speed, sits down in an arbitrary seat before getting up an instant later, and repeats. The machine lights scream for his attention, drawing him in one direction and then another. In the smoking lounge he sees the yellow blink of a tow truck through the window and incessantly asks what is that?, wanting to go out and see, as if it is another slot, as if the rest of the world is an extension of the casino. Butch has an extraordinarily limited attention span. He can’t make it through a movie, so the only videos he watches are porn.

He is jerky and hurried. He itches his nose a lot. He can’t keep still. Butch is a contrast to the bunkered others, knees shackled against the machines, hands propped against their jowls, oozing up loose flesh, as if they are listening to a very boring story. The two most common expressions are the ‘get em next time’ grimaces and the ‘it’s just not my day’ headshakes, but Butch is on a different channel, a boy at a playground swinging along the monkey bars. In the thick of the Las Vegas-like labyrinth, with only the quick spreads of color across the ceiling like a hundred temporary north stars as guides, Butch always seems to know exactly where he is going, an engineer who can navigate his maze without the meticulously dense blueprint. He is slowed by only one thing: the city. If you stray outside
the lights of Casino Queen, “the game is already over,” he warns. Then you’re really in East St. Louis. He points to his right wrist: “losing.”

After reloading on cherry coke at C-bar, Butch heads to the center amidst the roulette tables. He takes a seat and turns to a corpulent girl wearing a Pink Floyd top who looks like she is no older than sixteen.

“Nice shirt,” he says.

“I’d like to have Comfortably Numb play at my funeral, she says, smiling at him, noticing that he has a Pink Floyd shirt on too.

“That’s how I feel every night when I’m drinking Everclear,” Butch replies, chuckling. This kind of friendly open interaction is what he likes about St. Louis: that you can talk to anyone, unlike the anonymous swarms of New York, where he always keeps his head down, eyes glued to pavement. His confidence seems to vary as a function of geography. After some time in Chicago, he transitioned from cigarettes to chewing tobacco so no one could possibly approach him on the street. In New York, thank God he can drive right by the streets, insulated by a rolled up window. Transportation is provided since he’s considered “high-profile.” Winning.

Part II: “I Ate Up the Apple Tree” – Dr. John

Butch goes on one of his smoking breaks and comes back, an approximately four minute routine that occurs a couple times an hour. Every time he’s convinced he’s lost his lighter, sure someone’s stolen it, until he finds it and forgets. Invariably he insists that he could afford a more expensive brand than Smoker’s Choice. The Queen does have a vending machine stocked mostly with cigarettes. Also behind the glass are various ibuprofens. When Butch smokes, his fingers never really move, as if he is in a subzero temperature. His hands
have the pallor of an old baseball mitt, like they won’t come clean. As a gambler who
smokes, Butch is in the middle of a market war, the fault line of which is the Mississippi
River, the state border.

In order for casino taxes to actually constitute new money for governments, that
spending has to come from out-of-staters who aren’t already paying taxes themselves. But
the dreams of attracting tourists are just dreams. St. Louis is not Las Vegas. The market is
local, so Missouri and Illinois steal tax money from each other in an interminable tug-of-war.
Gamblers seesaw over the river partially based on the latest legislation. On the Missouri side
of the river, gamblers can smoke as much as they want in the casinos. On the Illinois side,
they can’t, segregating the smoking from the gambling. In the past, Casino Queen has
blamed the smoking ban for shackling its profits, under the logic that every minute a
gambler smokes he could be gambling. A spokesman says that over 60% of its gamblers
smoke and having a casino exempt from the ban nearby causes a leak of over 20% of their
business. But a 2011 study by Washington University’s Brown School of Social Work found
that the ban has had no effect whatsoever on declining revenues from gambling in Illinois –
it is simply that the recession has hit harder in that state. Nevertheless, currently the Illinois
senate has passed legislation to repeal the ban in casinos, so that the Queen and its Illinois
brethren have a fair chance against their rivals in Missouri. Opponents slam the repeal as not
only an unbridled pursuit of profit, consequences be damned, but a fictitious one at that.
They say that the hidden cost of seeking those extra dollars is the health of the thousands of
casino employees who will have to breathe in the thick clouds of smoke nonstop.

In the parlance of the casino war, this phenomenon is called domino theory, when
cutthroat competition across state lines pressures removal of safety or health legislation so
profit can be maximized. The stakes are high: Illinois faces a 9 billion state deficit while
Missouri's totals 600 million. The casino market is a zero sum game. Since the pool of
gamblers is relatively fixed, for every dollar one state gains, the other state loses. The other
domino is loss limits, which was in effect in Missouri but not Illinois until 2008. Loss limits
prevent gamblers from losing more than $500 in two hours. Among their biggest supporters
were the St. Louis casinos that wanted an equal playing field with Illinois and education
groups who wanted to see the extra money filter into the cash-strapped, sinking school
system. Others, like anti-gambling group Casino Watch, warned that the money was just an
illusion: it would never reach the schools. Additionally, they argued that extra casino profits
come at a terrible social cost – that the limit was helping keep in check problem gamblers
and the externalities that come with them: crime, debt, divorce, abuse and mental health
problems.

The casino lobby won the political battle and Missouri repealed loss limits at the end
of 2008. According to a 2010 Associated Press article, the profit boost the next year was
minimal, though casinos credited the repeal with helping them survive the recession.
Another consequence, however, was that gambling self-exclusion programs were rendered
meaningless. The repeal did away with the special casino IDs that tracked losses. Now there
is nothing to stop self-banned gamblers from returning to the casino – a common
occurrence – unless they hit a jackpot. Only then do the casinos investigate. Furthermore,
the repeal has not been as beneficial to the schools as the casinos promised.

"The impact has been virtually nothing on school districts," Brent Gahn, spokesman
for the Missouri School Boards Association, told the Post-Dispatch.

The loss-limit in Missouri was the last vestige of the safeguards installed when the
state legalized gambling in 1993. The market has been unshackled. Because all the casinos
are clustered in the same region and the only main barrier is the river, the average consumer
has wide latitude to discriminate. The proximity encourages easy wins in the short-term, but
gains are short-lived. Consumers flock to a new amenity and then onto the next one. Casino
Queen pursued its move onto land only after Pinnacle announced plans for a new casino. In
response to the Queen’s novelty, Ameristar added a 400-room hotel as part of a $265 million
dollar expansion. To compete with the opening of the Lumiere a few months later, it opened
a 17,500 square foot nightclub. On the same night Lumiere opened, Harrahs premiered a
gargantuan buffet area, which cost over 17 million dollars. The cycle is unending. Each
casino believes it is pushing the market, but that perception is only a short-term truth. In the
long-term it is the market that pushes them. Meanwhile, the casinos spend more and enlarge
themselves for a consumer pool that isn’t growing.

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When Butch comes back inside he heads for a new table, calling “Twanya. Twanya.
Twanya” well before the dealer can hear him. A poster on the wall he walks along reads:
Spinning Out of Control? Twanya is already shaking her head when he sits down, trying not to
laugh.

“She does have a nice smile,” a black guy at the table says in acknowledgement of
Butch’s infatuation.

“Everything about Twanya is nice,” Butch lectures. He looks at her. “Once you go
black you never go back,” he says, his grin stretching.

He points to her shiny black hair and says he wishes his were like that. He leaves and
she can’t hold it anymore and her smile finally breaks through. Butch invited her to his
wedding at Navy Pier in Chicago, on which he spent thirty thousand dollars. He claims that
at no other time was there ever more rednecks on that pier than at his wedding. Butch is not
in touch with many old friends. He knew the guys in his adolescent band wouldn’t make it
like he did, a big success story. Twanya, one of many casino employees he is friendly with,
couldn’t come to the wedding because of work. Later he says he’d “die to get with Twanya.” Other times he says it’s all a game, all a joke, and he is nothing if not loyal to his wife. He unabashedly tells a story about having sex with a New Zealander who was on her honeymoon, while he too was married. Later, on the defensive, he amends his earlier assertion that the sex with the New Zealander was great, averring that it wasn’t good at all. Butch doesn’t see anything wrong with what he did. He explains that since his wife doesn’t know about it, then in her eyes it didn’t really happen.

He orders another cherry coke, new cup, and then goes out for a cigarette break.

Outside, in the smoking lounge, Butch notices a cleaning woman in her thirties.

“You’re the hot black chick.”

It’s good you’re here, he tells her.

“You can pick up after my cigarettes,” he says as he throws an expired one to the ground, forsaking the dozens of ashtrays atop garbage cans, their spaces sometimes occupied by small pyramids of plastic cups and white cigarettes planted in the beachy ash like graves.

“Keeps me busy,” she says after a pause.

Casino Queen seems to have a split personality regarding its employees. It is the biggest business in East St. Louis, having employed over 1,100 workers at its peak. While other local casinos have grandfathered out long-term employees, many Queen dealers have been around since the launch of the boat in 1993. But in 2007, twenty-five employees sued the Queen for “systemic” racial discrimination within the workplace. The city has a history of racial divide, a witness to the bloodiest race riot in American history when in 1917 whites beat and murdered hundreds of blacks. The whites left when the corporations left. The modern East St. Louis is 99% black.
The casino does make an effort to give back to the community. It helps the annual
citywide cleanup, contributes to high school programs, and plays Santa to kids on Christmas.
Every year since it first docked on the Mississippi, the Queen has donated large amounts of
money to all competing mayoral candidates. The casino has said the donations are part of its
community building efforts. Others, like Tom Gray, an anti-gambling activist, disagree,
indicting the donations as an attempt to buy everyone. He told the Post-Dispatch in 2003:

"The Casino Queen looms over the East St. Louis government. It’s a company
town...It inoculates (the boats) from local criticism. Every time the mayor is interviewed in
the media, the casino is the greatest thing since sliced bread."

Though the state ultimately controls the casino, it exists within constraints set by the
city. It needs city approval for expansion or policies relating to traffic and parking. Local
politicians have unfailingly supported the casino since its arrival. For over a decade, taxes on
the Queen’s revenue have accounted for 10 million of the city’s 21 million dollar annual
budget. No other city comes close to being so dependent on a casino. Nevertheless, the
Queen has given East St. Louis room to breathe, keeping it afloat.

"Their presence has been mighty," Mayor Alvin L. Parks told the Post-Dispatch.
"They've been a tremendous partner with East St. Louis."

The casinos are used to winning local battles. An incident in 2009 exposed the
industry’s perception of power over the distressed areas in which they are often anchored.
Casino Queen rival Pinnacle (Lumiere’s parent company), across the river, tried to block
legislation greenlighting yet another casino. CEO Dan Lee resigned after a failed attempt to
browbeat a councilman into voting the way he wanted. He alluded to his company’s massive
financial investment in St. Louis and how the city owed him. When denied, he screamed
about how he’d never forget.
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Back inside, Butch cashes in more money for chips — so far he has lost about twelve dollars. He goes to a different counter and requests a new Queen's Club member card. He thinks the black clerk, Tracy, is looking at him like she is smitten with him. Butch nods at Tracy’s cornrows.

"I wish I could get my hair like that. Me and Tracy could be twins."

His old card is fine but he wants to experience getting a new one again. His face betrays the mischief of a boy taking the last cookie from the cookie jar. The card is embossed in what seems like an infinity of sparkles, highlighting type that reads Exclusive Rewards. A number, 523616, is coupled with Butch’s name in all caps. The card is a symbol of privilege, but anyone can get one, signaling hierarchy that is in fact a mirage. The Queen knows that with its unimpressive infrastructure and East St. Louis location it has no chance of attracting high rollers. Its target market is different from the bigger fishes'. Paul Williams Surber sums up the change in a letter to the Belleville News-Democrat. He’s serving a 16-year sentence in federal prison for robbing banks to fund his gambling addiction.

"The gaming industry now caters to the average 'Joe,' you and me....They treat you like you are very special."

Butch inserts his new card into one of the machines and sees his name come up on the screen: Kyle J. Pedersen. He says only his wife calls him Kyle, but it turns out Twanya does too. Conversely, he never calls his wife by her name, Haley, and in addition to wife, he refers to her alternatively as girlfriend and fiancé. "I slip," he says. He fires off her description as if it is a blurb in a sleazy magazine.

"Five foot four, 120 pounds, blonde, blue eyes. She could be a porn star."
He is unwilling to show the pictures of her stored on his phone because they are naughty. He brags that before long he’ll have a stripper pole in his house. He calls Haley his baby, but he says they have the most dysfunctional relationship in the world. They met at age five and have dated since the 8th grade. Eventually their relationship became “eminent” so they just did “it,” it being marriage. Besides a failed stint as his secretary, she hasn’t had a job. She stays home with their son and manages their finances.

“She always wants to fuck,” Butch says.

It helps him fall asleep, he adds with a smile. His laugh is reminiscent of a defective car engine, alive one moment, wheezing into silence the next. In general, Butch has little to do with his family. His parents split up when he was three. He is out of touch with his brother and sister, who become, after a while, just some other people, he says. He is at a loss for why he is the way he is: early in the night he said he’s been like this (his “winning” behavior) for as long as he can remember. Later he said it all started when he joined the music industry three years ago. He accidentally dials his mom, whom he hasn’t spoken to in six weeks. She answers and he mumbles that he didn’t mean to call and hangs up.

“Shouldn’t mess with my wife, bitch.”

Butch explains that Haley and her family are real racists, while he never really means the racist things he says. His parents didn’t approve and he stood by his wife. Butch is a loner. He has trouble connecting with people outside the Queen. He squandered two semesters at Webster University, high the whole time. Just a bunch of queers there, he says. It’s not that he didn’t like them – he just didn’t have anything in common with them. He would’ve majored in music but never went to class so he dropped out. But hey, the past is the past and now he’s pals with Dr. John.

Part III: “Somebody Tryin’ Hoodoo me” – Dr. John
At C-bar, Butch dutifully watches his St. Louis Cardinals make their playoff push against the Pittsburgh Pirates. He is simultaneously listening to music out of his phone’s puny speakers (he downloads songs illegally) and playing the slot machine that is built into the bar. He says he needs to have his phone on him 24/7.

“If I lose it, I’m fired.”

Butch has a large sense of his own importance. He explains that he’s based in St. Louis so that he is in the center of the country - easy access to anywhere Dr. John needs him. He says he’s the glue that holds the band together. After all, when Arista fired Butch four weeks ago, Dr. John switched labels just to keep him. (He was fired for screaming anti-gay slurs at Joan Jett during a concert, backstage.) Butch even has his own taxi driver on retainer, Randy, whom he pays 600 dollars a month. He name drops DeGraw, Kravitz and Hanson. He professes to have St. Louis legend Bob Cassilly’s phone number. Butch reminisces that three years ago, when he was starting out in the music industry, the Riverfront Times did a profile on him. He shrugs as if it’s no big deal. RFT writer Pat Narsik portrayed him as an asshole. Butch wrote Narsik a letter and vowed to beat the hell out of him if their paths ever crossed. Still, he signed his own article and framed it. It isn’t easy for Butch to give his signature. He is incapable of steadying his hands, like someone with Alzheimer’s. It takes him a long time for him to put pen to paper. The strokes are uncontrolled wavering scratches, akin to the flickering needle of a polygraph. His signature consists of Butch and Mills piled on top of each other, the letters twisted together.

“My wife is gonna call me in an hour,” he mumbles as a non sequitur. His attention switches minute by minute, shifting between his phone and the slot machine. He loses, complaining to the bartender that he didn’t mean to press the button. The bartender tells him sorry, there’s nothing he can do, but Butch keeps pressing the button, staring vacantly at
Game Over. Once he won 2500 dollars with a single push. On all the slot machines, on the right end is a big circular button that says “Repeat Bet” and on the left end is a smaller square with miss-matched type that says “Collect Winnings.” Butch collects nothing because he keeps on losing. His loss has amounted to eighteen dollars.

Gambling analysts have dubbed slot machines the crack cocaine of gambling. Especially the penny and nickel slots, which seem affordable but surreptitiously allow higher bets. They eat away the most money, the player spending more than he thinks, entranced by the screen, money abstracted into credits. Slots are often confusing, offering multiple lines of play with a bevy of different betting options. If the player plays the slots without a Queen’s Club card, the tiny remnants of previous bets will excrete as paper slips with 5 or 10 cents on them. A whole sheaf of them can feel a lot like a pocket full of bills. The machines are programmed for small payouts at irregular intervals, keeping hope alive. Near misses are the real killers – thinking you’re close, thinking you’re one cherry away from the jackpot. The machines are programmed for them to occur very frequently. The whole thing is over within three seconds. For another chance, all one has to do is pull again. Bells, whistles and rattles cheer the player on. Slots are video games for adults. Noises farther off give the impression someone is winning. While Butch is playing, an alarm goes off in violent peals; a woman has just won seven dollars.

"No other form of gambling manipulates the human mind as beautifully as these machines," argues psychiatry professor at University of Connecticut School of Medicine, Nancy Petry, who was featured in a New York Times article on the rise of slot machines.

Slots are the casinos’ biggest cash cows, nicknamed one-armed bandits. They are booming all over the country, now legal in 37 states. In 2008, there were 767,418 active machines in the United States. 1 for every 395 residents, reported USA Today. 100,000 more
were on their way for 2009. They are intended for individuals, not groups. Such isolation prevents social checks on compulsive behavior. The industry has shifted away from skilled games toward games of absolute luck, so that anyone can play. In Missouri, slots represent 80% of gaming options. Blackjack, craps, poker and the like all require learning rules but slots only require pulling a lever or pushing a button. It has become less and less necessary to think. The slots, unlike the classic games, are brandable, targeting certain groups. For example, there is Sex and the City for women and Courgarlicious End2End for guys. The one that draws Butch has a cat brand. When he was a boy, his dad built a trap to catch a feral cat that was defecating all over their yard. The cat escaped but it lingered, friendly to Butch. At Laclede’s Landing, before he boarded the metro, Butch saw a beautiful orange kitten that reminded him of his childhood playmate. He charged to try to capture it but it escaped into a hole and didn’t come back.

Casino Queen’s identity hinges on its advertising boast: Home of the Loosest Slots. The phrase is omnipresent in its connection to the casino: on their signs, their newspaper advertisements, even their napkins. Its website advises: “If you want to win, we are the only place to play slots!” But according to a 1998 investigation by Post-Dispatch reporter Fred Faust, the Queen doesn’t actually have the loosest slots. Harrah’s does. Faust points out that the Queen’s claim is simply an exercise in how statistics can be manipulated. The claim is derived from the average payout per slot. The Queen’s average is indeed highest. The issue is that that number is determined by dividing the monthly payout by the total number of slot machines. Because of Illinois limits, the Queen has only 1,100 machines, significantly lower than its rivals on the other side of the river, which have nearly 3,000 each, resulting in lower averages for the Missouri casinos.

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The Cards are up 4-3 in the 8th and another cherry coke is on its way. The Pittsburgh catcher doubles and the Pirates pull even. The television flashes a replay and Butch thinks it’s happening again and he jumps out of the chair. After a minute he realizes it’s not real.

“I was about to have a heart attack. I need a smoke. Fuckin’ shittsburgh. Shittiest city in America.”

The smoking lounge looks like an indoor bus stop. The most communal area within the casino is technically outside of it. The lounge is an entirely separate space, especially with respect to sound. Inside the casino, conversation is rare and muttered, muted by the legion Nintendo whines of the slot machines, but in the lounge there is nothing to do but smoke and talk. The slots are out of sight. It is impossible to see into the actual organism of the casino from the outside: all that is visible is the gilded sheen of reflection.

Butch talks constantly and rarely asks questions. But he is attentive when a college kid tells a story about finding a diamond ring on a mountaintop, the glint of the metal sparkling in the sun, everyone eyeing it, ignoring them, filled with happiness, half-naked, running down the steep slope, slight cut of the diamond erased by the fierce clenching of fist.

“Winning. That’s winning,” Butch says with excitement, as if he has been speaking a foreign language and has at last been understood.

Another black woman whom Butch doesn’t remember recognizes him. She recalls his quest to acquire the flag that flew on the iconic St. Louis casino riverboat, The Admiral, when it was still in operation. The Admiral housed the President casino. Butch tells her he wound up getting it after he placed a call to the CEO. Some day, he says, it’s gonna be worth big money. Though he boasted earlier that the flag was in pristine condition, he now admits that it is a little ripped, but that’s okay, he says. The rip gives it character, shows that it’s real.
"I'm so glad you got that flag," the woman says.

Butch doesn't always get what he wants. Before he visited the Queen that day, on Laclede's Landing, Butch was walking a few hundred feet from the skeleton of the President Casino's loading dock. He noticed a Subway employee taking inside the sandwich chain's advertising flag and started yelling about how he wanted it. She ignored him. In the nearby parking lot, he made a random detour to a lamppost, unscrewed the metallic door at its base and pulled out long rolls of tickets that bore the name of the President's casino. Butch talks about the demise of the President as if it happened decades ago, but it closed in 2010, a casualty of the industry's expansion. By 2007 the industry was changing with Las Vegas giant Pinnacle set to move in. The time of the riverboat was ending.

"It's really outgrown itself. It's outdated," said East St. Louis Councilwoman Karen Cason about the Queen in 2006, talking to the Post-Dispatch.

At the time, the President and Casino Queen were in similar situations – aging riverboats almost directly across from each other along the Mississippi. With bigger competitors moving in nearby, they faced a choice: grow or die. Casino Queen was the fish that dragged itself onto land, ready for the unlimited potential of the future. It evolved; the President didn't. By the end of 2007, when the current 92 million dollar version of Casino Queen opened, the East St. Louis casino seemed unstoppable. In September, Casino Queen saw 286,754 more visitors than the year before, a 56% increase. Other casinos absorbed the hit, but none as hard as the President, losing 111,529 visitors, a 17.4% decline. Casino boosters' promise of bringing in outsiders proved to be moonshine. The market was feeding on itself. Still, Casino Queen was winning. In October, the Queen's revenue had shot up 24.2% while the President's had declined 9%. It stole gamblers like Butch from the dying riverboat. Lumiere would take even more when it opened a few months later, barely a block
away. It was the state of Missouri that delivered the final blow, highlighting government’s huge stake in the casino industry. The Missouri Gaming Commission called the President “obsolete and underachieving.” In an unprecedented move, the state stripped the President’s license because it wasn’t generating enough money. It would give the license to a casino that would produce more in taxes for the state. The river finished the job, flooding the dock, sealing the once proud ship’s fate.

It was a very different story on the other side of the river. In November 2007, the Post-Dispatch ran the headline *Can Anyone Dethrone the Queen?* But every winner hides a loser. The money catalyzes a peculiar reaction: individual loss brings prosperity to a casino and much-needed money to a desperate city. While gamblers were losing more money than ever at the Queen, East St. Louis was reaping in badly-needed extra tax money. In the year after Casino Queen’s move, the city had some reason to hope. The boat had helped but the building had even more potential. Homicides dropped from 31 in 2007 to 19 in 2008. Police flexed their muscles, ridding the community of over 1,000 guns.

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In the lounge, Butch tells the woman and her friend that he stole some steel scraps from the Admiral and they hush him and whisper, “You didn’t steal it. You found it,” because you never know who you’re talking to. Butch stands up and moves as if to an imaginary pulpit. His Smokers Choice pack has crumbled like a derelict house, and he plays with the severed patches of its white skin, rolling them between his fingers. He sings songs in accompaniment to a spasmodic dance, discussing history with them, and making them laugh, predicting that if he were at the new World Trade Center Memorial in New York he’d probably fall into the pools he’d be so drunk. It is obvious they like him. His smile forms and reforms, changing constantly like a flipbook. Butch goes out of his way to connect with
the all-black group, citing Martin Luther King Jr. as a man he wishes he could’ve met. It is an odd contrast to his more belligerent treatment of strangers when he is outside the casino: whenever he throws down one of his cigarette butts he stomps on it mercilessly, bloodying out any last flicker of life. He does this specifically so that the homeless can’t pick it up and smoke the remnants. The butts are his property, he explains.

The women leave and the one who remembers him says,

“I have a feeling I’ll see you again.”

Everyone remembers Butch but it is his face, not his name that they remember. On the metro, a white girl holding hands with a black guy walks by Butch. She does a double take. Her mouth and eyes open wide and hold that way. She gapes at him, as if she literally cannot believe what she sees. Butch can’t remember who she is.

“I won’t hit her but I’ll beat up her midget boyfriend.”

The black guy is noticeably taller than he is. After fifteen minutes, he remembers. Her name is Keira and they used to get high together in North St. Louis.

“She was tweaking real bad.” He pauses and seconds pass that delimit the huge hole in the story. He mumbles that Keira’s mom blamed him for something.

“My girlfriend was really angry,” he says, completing the anecdote, grinning.

Sometimes his life moves like dream logic, unable to explain how one event flows from the next. One time in Illinois he asked someone where was the nearest casino in Chicago and somehow wound up in Michigan. With actual Indians, he says. His favorite Dr. John song, “Right Place, Wrong Time,” is about a guy for whom everything is slightly off-kilter, whose world never seems to fit into place.

Butch believes in the name he invented for himself. The phonetic similarity to the beer Busch Mills is just a coincidence, he insists. He doesn’t mention well-known drummer
Butch Miles. But by adopting a second name for himself, he is further aligning himself with his heroes who occupy the space on his wrists. Charlie Sheen was born Carlos Estevez. Dr. John, the Night Tripper is a stage name and persona for Mac Rebennack. Butch speaks fondly of Butch Mills Inc., which he created to protect the song lyrics he wrote. And he tells that story about the New Zealander he had sex with while she was on her honeymoon. They did coke together. Her brand new husband was waiting in the lobby and figured out what was going on. The man was angry and told his cuckold what he was going to do to him.

“I was bein’ friendly and I warned him I’m Butch Mills and I’m from Alabama.”

The name meant nothing to the husband. He dismissed the warning and landed a right hook but after that Butch had him on the ground and kicked him good.

Part IV: “I Don’t Wanna Know” – Dr. John

It is late and the Cardinals lose. Butch moves out into the parking lot and says he sees diamonds in the hubcap of a car. There are no diamonds. And then it is the flashing gleam of light by the metro that he is after, a bursting star in the closed skull of the station. Up, up the creaking staircase until the shower of sparks is close, revealed as construction on the tracks. And then the train is coming in thirty seconds, announces the speaker, and Butch closes his eyes tight and counts as fast as he can to thirty and acts stunned when it has not yet arrived.

Two weeks later he is a wreck.

“There’s not much I enjoy anymore about life in itself. I’m in bad shape.”

His marriage has collapsed. A divorce looms. It came out of nowhere: his agent discovered Haley stealing from what Butch says are his offshore accounts. He could lose hundreds of thousands of dollars. At his low point, he thought Casino Queen would make
him feel better. He really needed to go before his latest road trip with former Eagles band
member Randy Meisner. He texted:

“'ll b lucky if I get through 5 days on the road my. My company is sending a back
back up sound Guy w me in case I crack.”

Self-medicating with gambling is a strong indication that someone has a problem. So
is seeing the world solely in terms of money. Butch is good with lock picks. He jokes about
breaking into vending machines to get more coins to gamble with. The Post-Dispatch ran a
series of articles in 2000 exposing the cost of tax money filtering into state and city coffers.

“There is an ugly undercurrent that’s sweeping away thousands of Missourians --
people whose addiction to gambling has led to debt, divorce and crime.”

Gambling detractors insist that the casino’s balance sheet is only one side of the
story. Area casinos may be profiting 1 billion dollars a year but that means that local
residents lost a billion dollars. By the same logic, a growing market translates as people losing
even more money. Casinos do tack up signs for the obligatory help hotlines, but they have
no incentive to rid themselves of their biggest losers. For the casinos, the consequences of
crippling losses represent a blissful ignorance. Management argues that they have no way of
knowing.

“I don’t have access to their family information, to their financial information,”
explains Casino Queen’s general manager, Craig Travers.

Furthermore, Travers says, since gambling is legal, it is not the casino’s job to police
its customers. Some gamblers have taken matters into their own hands. In Missouri, 15,950
people have signed up for a program banning themselves from casinos (though the end of
loss-limits has hamstrung the program). In Illinois, the number is 8,300. It turns out most
problem gamblers aren’t high rollers. They’re normal people who get in over their heads,
who lose control, sinking deeper and deeper into a pit of loss. For many, pathological gambling involves illusory perception. Vicky was a regular at Casino Queen who lost everything. Former addicts spoke with the Post-Dispatch for its feature on the costs of gambling in the St. Louis metro area.

"People see the winning. When I see the billboards, I see broken homes, I see bankruptcy."

Dennis, a pathological gambler from St. Louis County, blames the industry for being too close.

"I voted against riverboat gambling. I knew that if it's this close . . . I didn't want it this close. I tried to stay away, and it enveloped me. I lost my job, maxed out my credit cards... [Casinos] show all these winners, that's all people see on the billboards."

It is no wonder Butch, who is obsessed with winning, found a “home” in the casino. He fits right in. But his problems go deeper than that. He has several symptoms of schizophrenia: extreme paranoia, delusions of grandeur, hallucinations, inhibited ability to habituate, flattened affect, difficulty paying attention, and “loose associations.” He is invariably disconnected from his immediate environment. He is disconnected too in his own head. It is like his personality is on some kind of dial: one minute he says he is an arrogant asshole and the next he claims to be just an average guy. The disorder, in its Greek roots, translates as “splitting of the mind.” The typical onset is in the early twenties, Butch’s age. Schizophrenia causes a disruption of how someone perceives reality. He is not necessarily lying. He may be sincerely convinced of his own truths.

"I'm as real as you get. I won't sugarbrush nuttin'.”

The casino is his biggest enabler — letting him saturate in his own illusions. At the Queen everyone knows his name, he has perks and privileges, he can do whatever he wants.
It is a place where all his stories are true. At the Queen, all the evidence suggests that he is king.

But reality holds different cards for him. He was arrested in September for an incident on the Metro. Further, he is not who he says is. Staff at the Riverfront Times have never heard of him. They have no record of the profile he claimed they published. Moreover, RFT has never employed anyone by the name of Pat Narsik, the profile’s alleged author. A Google search for that name returns zero results. Butch does not work for Dr. John. The musician has never associated with Arista, the record label Butch said he did. It is hard to know if anything Butch says is not just a part of his fantasy world. The divorce presented itself just as his court date was approaching, a misdemeanor charge. Butch hasn’t been to the Queen in weeks. For a while, his phone stopped accepting incoming calls. Then his number went out of service.

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Casino Queen has been served its own dose of reality. It’s lost a third of its business since the 500 million dollar Lumiere entered the market in December 2007. Queen spokesman Ron O’Connor’s 2006 prediction that the casino would be the best in the Midwest rang hollow just a few months after it opened. By 2008, riding the strength of Lumiere, the market was growing at its fastest pace in two years. Compared to February of the year before, the market grew 6%, but Lumiere was the only casino to show any gains. As the newest casino, it was Lumiere’s time to shine, just as it had been the Queen’s a few months earlier.

In 2009, the Queen continued to struggle. A Post-Dispatch article titled New Queen is Rolling Snake Eyes detailed the decline of the east side casino, which laid off 250 of its employees. It was a compound fracture, resulting from the recession, the rise of Lumiere,
the 2008 Illinois smoking ban, and the removal of loss limits in Missouri in 2009. There was no light at the end of the tunnel: just eight miles away, Pinnacle opened another casino: $380 million River City. According to its website: “Nestled in the heart of South County lies an entirely new city. One with practically no limits. And it’s ready and waiting for you to explore.” By October 2010 it was River City’s time to shine, with the familiar pattern of the newest casino powering the market into a gain (5%) despite every other casino trending downward. Since River City opened in May, it has been the same story all five months.

By Jan 2011, the market gains were slowing, down to just 2.8%. The “market growth,” as was the case for Lumiere and Casino Queen before it, was really just a novelty effect for each new casino. Tourists were few. But Pinnacle’s senior vice president, Neil Walkoff, is encouraged by his company’s profit.

"Without River City (the St. Louis market would) be declining."

Casino Queen has suffered in the wake of the arms race it helped create. The Argosy Alton, Illinois’ first riverboat, and Casino Queen used to own a whole third of the 1 billion St. Louis market, but their collective stake has shriveled to less than one fifth. The blows keep coming for the East St. Louis casino. In Illinois, legislation to permit 900 slots at Fairmount Park, a racetrack in Collinsville is being kicked around in the state government. Boosters cite the same things casinos do, predicting a boon for the state in terms of revenue. A spokesman for Penn National Gaming, the group that owns the Argosy Alton, told the Post-Dispatch he disagrees.

"To add more gaming when the industry is already down is like trying to solve the housing crisis by flooding the market with more homes."

Meanwhile, Pinnacle is set to build an 82 million dollar expansion to River City. But the Queen already knocked over its domino to compete with River City’s opening; a 2.1
million dollar overhaul to transition to more of a sports and entertainment niche. A very small domino indeed.

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The little bubble East St. Louis' permitted itself has burst. Because of the Queen’s decline, money from the casino was $900,000 dollars less than expected in 2009. With no signs of improvement and perennial difficulties with its budget (at one time the mayor almost had to mortgage city hall), the city had little choice but to let go of 37 employees, including 19 of its 62 policeman in July 2010. “The criminals are going to run wild,” predicted a local pastor, according to the Post-Dispatch. The cuts were devastating for a city that had been becoming safer.

By February of 2011, the new reality had already set in. There are only a few patrolmen covering a population of 28,000 in an area that is more dangerous than 97% of other US cities. A Post-Dispatch article detailed the tradeoffs of the new policing landscape. An officer got a call that a man was attacking a woman in the street, so he went to investigate. After struggling through traffic, he didn’t wind up taking anyone to the station. The necessary paperwork would have sapped too many resources. At a higher level, Police Chief Lenzie Stewart refused to disclose to the Post-Dispatch certain information about how the decline of funds has impacted department operations.

"Some things you just don't want everybody to know."

At least one person found out. Illinois senator Dick Durbin of Illinois introduced plans to bring in federal officers. Still, the problems are systemic. As of 2009, 38.6% of the city’s residents live in poverty. 23% are unemployed. Most of the jobs people do have are in the service sector, with little or no possibility for promotion. 40% of East St. Louis’ families are fatherless. Only 9% of the local children meet state educational standards. The city
leaders themselves have been deemed incompetent by the state, which regulates East St. Louis' finances from an outside board. The city's icons have fallen apart. Miles Davis' home lies vacant, windows broken, stripped of its aluminum siding, on the verge of collapse. The Jackie Joyner Kersee center, a non-for-profit youth facility, is mired in debt and financial scandal.

- The East Riverfront has seen no new development. The only activity has been the continued erosion of the shore, nibbled away by the Mississippi. Casino Queen essentially has its own metro stop, for there is little else. Only a Cargill grain elevator and the slow-rolling freight trains. The Gateway Geyser finally opened in 2009 but remains alienated from its eastern twin, the Arch; not many people venture past the 61-acre site of Casino Queen. The fountain is mostly unknown, hidden within the riverfront, erupting only during certain parts of the day during certain parts of the year. In the high-stakes game of strapping all their hopes to a casino, East St. Louis got its money but saw local development stunted. Most of the city's TIF (Tax Increment Financing) money went to Casino Queen at the expense of smaller-scale development, like restaurants or stores.

"The thing that baffles me is that businesses near a casino always think they're going to get some spillover," said Ernie Goss, an economist at Creighton University, talking to the Post-Dispatch. "Well, there isn't any spillover. People come to town, and they make a beeline for the casino."

In Atlantic City, for instance, the number of restaurants dropped by 40% since the casinos moved in. Casinos already have all the amenities local development could offer, except it has them all in one place. Food, housing, nightclubs, bars, parking, entertainment. Butch says the Queen's Prime Steakhouse and Market Street Buffet are great. He says that at the end of the day, though, it's about entertainment. The Queen has delivered in that
capacity, bringing in famous entertainers. Among the most memorable to East St. Louis residents was Jerry Springer. In his opening address, he echoed the values of Casino Queen: the power of luck and the possibility of getting rich without doing any work.

"It's been a great ride, and I live this perfect life. I do six hours a week...It's not even work. It's stealing. I don't have any particular talent. I just lucked into this, and I'm very grateful. I'm living the American Dream."

Butch doesn't see himself as so different. In his mind, he completely lucked into his job. He met a guy in a bar, Dr. John's old sound engineer had just quit and it was that simple. He hit the jackpot. Springer is a fitting symbol for the casino; the Queen creates its own reality too. The casino has no clocks. There are no windows and no natural light. It is always the same time of day within the walls. The time is now, time to win. The Queen is its own island, not channeling people around the community but to its own four corners.

Conversely, the Queen's ubiquitous advertising brings in the locals. Signs for the Casino Queen are everywhere. They punctuate the road every couple of hundred meters, huge billboards with big arrows pointing to the word jackpots. It is like a racetrack where Casino Queen is the finish line. You're Almost There! read the signs closest to the Queen. In a blighted, unforgiving city, the casino is a place where good things can happen. At Casino Queen, the billboards scream, at least you have a chance.

But the casino's gigantic presence hasn't helped the area's reputation as a center of sleazy industry. It is the biggest fish in a sea of liquor stores, seedy nightclubs, strip clubs (Butch is a frequent patron), and prostitution and drug houses. The Queen makes no bones about it: it is the Home of the Loosest Slots, after all. When the bars in St. Louis close at 1:30AM, there is a mass exodus across the river, everyone “going East side.” Clubs on the east side of the river stay open until 6AM.
“If you want to get dirty in St. Louis, if you want to lose control for a while, if you want to take a chance, head to the area’s debauched zone, St. Vegas [the East side],” advises The Riverfront Times.

The legacy of East St. Louis functioning as St. Louis’ dark double has continued in a new form. Once the center of the larger city’s unwanted industry, today it is a repository for St. Louis’ hidden desires. This is the depth to which the east side had to sink to compensate for the loss of its industrial soul. There is no doubt though that the Queen was a godsend, a green pipeline into city hall for nearly two decades, consistently providing 40% of a whole city’s budget. But the money is unwashed and the river flows on, its muddy waters dividing Jekyll from Hyde, reality from fantasy.

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Sometimes, when it is so late the metro no longer runs, Butch crosses back into Missouri over the Eads Bridge. It is a short walk across a river that in its entirety covers 2,530 miles and filters through 31 states. From the bridge, East St. Louis is defined by its absence, the black beyond the lights of the Queen. On the other side of the river, the arch is starved of sunlight: dimmed and greyed. But Lumiere beckons, its building illuminated in flat fireworks, the bright colors regenerating in an endless cycle. The walk over the river is a nice break from it all, refuge from a no-limits world obsessed with winning. It’s a walk Butch appreciates, except for the bugs, straining against the lights that line the bridge, the swarms seeking the shine but never getting in, the glass membrane of the bulb transparent but impenetrable. They are his only company.
Richardson and the Problem of Stoic Pride

2012 1st Place Winner
Cornelison English essay Contest

Anna Deters
Cornelison Submission

Richardson and the Problem of Stoic Pride

How to promote a self-conscious practice of individual virtue and at the same time warn against the wickedness of pride and self-love is the central moral problem of Samuel Richardson’s novels. His attempt to develop a heroic ethos for the domestic novel is fraught with Mandeville’s charge that literary exemplarity relies on and exploits the pride of the reader. “Thus Sagacious Moralists draw Men like Angels,” Mandeville writes, “in hopes that the Pride at least of some will put ‘em upon copying after the beautiful Originals which they are represented to be.” In *Pamela*, Mr. B.’s snide observation that the eponymous heroine “makes herself an Angel of light” reveals Richardson’s concern that Mandeville’s claim is justified, that by making themselves into exemplars, Pamela and his subsequent heroines personify an ethically problematic didactic method. In this essay, I investigate Richardson’s treatment of this problem in order to reveal the inner workings of eighteenth-century domestic heroism.

Recent work on eighteenth-century domestic fiction has tended to focus on the gendered distinction between the public and private and the power relations that pervade the domestic arena. This latter concern belongs in part to a sustained reaction to Nancy Armstrong’s *Desire

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and Domestic Fiction, in which Armstrong argues that the fantasies propagated by domestic fiction liberated eighteenth-century subjects from their politicized status and endowed women with new moral authority. By calling for a recognition of women’s “essential qualities of mind,” the rise of the novel, Armstrong claims, cannot be divorced from the “history of female subjectivity.”

My treatment of the domestic novel elaborates on Armstrong’s premise that novels form female subjects who alter the course of eighteenth-century culture through their imitation of literary heroines. I argue that Richardson deeply investigates the ethical complexities of this didactic project by investing his protagonists with the problem of stoic pride.

Communicating his concern with stoicism in a letter written in 1751 to a potential French translator of Clarissa, Richardson remarks on the satisfaction he derives from the corrective nature of his literary endeavors. “[I]t is a glorious privilege that a middling man enjoys who has preserved his independency,” he writes, “and can occasionally (though not Stoically) tell the world, what he thinks of that world, in hopes to contribute, though but by his mite, to mend it.”

Emphasizing his freedom to exert moral influence despite (or perhaps, thanks to) his status as an individual of the “middling” class, Richardson’s words support Armstrong’s conviction in the authority of middling, domestic exemplars. But Richardson’s felt need to avert preemptively the impression that his corrective approach is “stoical” draws our attention to his unease with stoicism as it inflected his literary intentions. At once allured by the stoic’s uncompromising virtue and heroic exemplarity and repelled by the pride for which the stoic was known, Richardson pursues an exploration of stoic pride that reveals the Mandevillian heart of the domestic novel.

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Richardson begins in *Pamela* by addressing the more apparent facets of stoic pride—the autogenous exemplarity for which Pamela is notorious and the spiritual shortcomings of her stoic fortitude. In *Clarissa*, he moves past the shallow resolutions of his first novel and grapples with Clarissa’s stoic overconfidence in her own strength and her attempt to achieve heroic glory through the trial of her virtue. It is in *Sir Charles Grandison*, however, that Richardson demonstrates the most remarkable stage of his engagement with stoicism. Having worked on the moral intricacies of stoic pride over the course of thousands of pages, he converts to the belief that this pagan flaw exists organically and irrevocably within a Christian framework. On a trajectory of increasing moral sophistication, Richardson comes to accept pride as inherent—and even necessary—to the workings of domestic virtue.⁶

Richardson’s treatment of stoic pride should be considered in light of two relevant contexts. The first is the resonance of John Milton in eighteenth-century culture and its influence on Richardson’s own literary imagination; the second is the interest in classical stoicism on the part of Richardson’s coterie of friends and writers as a force that helps to define heroic virtue in the eighteenth century.⁷ Both Milton and Richardson’s coterie come to stoicism through attempts on the part of seventeenth-century English Neo-Stoics’ to merge its moral ideas with Protestantism. Stoic pride enjoys a long history of representation in English literature, but for Richardson it is Milton who most effectually dramatizes it as an ethical problem.

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⁶ The idea that Richardson develops his ideas through the progression of his three novels is not new. Jocelyn Harris demonstrates how “in a strange sense each novel ‘corrects’ its predecessor.” Harris, *Samuel Richardson* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 7.

⁷ In his study of the reception of Milton in the eighteenth century, Dustin Griffin suggests writers of the new century imbued new genres, namely, the novel, with the themes of *Paradise Lost*. Griffin writes, “By juxtaposing *Paradise Lost* and the novels of the eighteenth-century we can observe not only a pattern of significant allusion but a fundamental imaginative community.” Griffin, *Regaining Paradise: Milton and the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 92.
Milton describes Stoic pride most explicitly in *Paradise Regained* when Christ refutes Satan’s claim that lending his ear to “sage philosophy” will “render [Christ] a king complete.” Christ replies by asserting his sole dependence on God—“he who receives / Light from above . . . / No other doctrine needs”—and continues with a scathing critique of the various schools of ancient philosophy, all of which offer “little else but dreams, / Conjectures, fancies, built on nothing firm” (IV. 288-292). He saves his lengthiest, most vehement condemnation for Stoic philosophy:

the Stoic last in philosophic pride

By him called virtue; and his-virtuous man,

Wise, perfect in himself, and all possessing,

Equal to God, oft shames not to prefer,

As fearing God nor man, contemning all

Wealth, pleasure, pain or torment, death and life,

Which when he lists, he leaves, or boasts he can,

For all his tedious talk is but vain boast,

Or subtle shifts conviction to evade. (IV. 300-308)

In contrast to the petty errors of Plato’s “smooth conceits” or Epicurus’ mistaken commitment to “corporal pleasure,” Christ perceives the Stoic’s “philosophic pride” as a grave spiritual fault (IV. 295, 299-300). “[P]erfect in himself, and all possessing,” Christ’s Stoic is overly assured of his self-sufficient virtue and falsely believes that moral strength is derived from within, rather than from God. But stoic pride is not only the spiritual error of seeing oneself as “Equal to God,” as Satan does—it is also the root cause of presumption, an overconfidence in one’s virtue

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that entices one to pursue glory through seeking adversity as a personal trial. The “vain boast” of which Christ speaks stems from the self-imagined sage’s conviction that he can endure all tribulation and renounce all joy with heroic fortitude. Translating these themes for the mid-eighteenth century, Richardson’s novels are infused with the spirit of Milton’s Eve, the Lady in Comus, and Satan, each in their own way infected with the stoic’s error.

Stoic pride is the most significant moral issue that Milton and Richardson share, especially as both writers project the pagan flaw onto a domestic, Christian canvas. In fact, Eve’s stoic pride and Adam’s devotion to her after the fall fundamentally construct the conjugal domesticity of their life outside of Eden. Yet critical attention to the relationship between these two authors has focused instead on the allegorical symmetry between Milton’s epic poems and Richardson’s Clarissa. Critics tend to read Clarissa as Eve, or even as Christ in Paradise Regained, depending on whether they choose to see her primarily as a human figure subject to hidden desires or more as a Christian hero who transcends earthly concerns and provocations in a display of incorruptible virtue. ¹ I resist the emphasis on temptation and disobedience and counter the claim, voiced mostly explicitly by R. Paul Yoder, that “in order to establish the ability of women to stand unsupported against temptation, Richardson offered his Clarissa as an

alternative to Milton's 'pert Minx.'

In Yoder's view, Clarissa redeems women from Eve's sin by withstanding, on her own, all of Lovelace's affronts. But, in fact, Clarissa's conviction that she can "stand unsupported" is the very root of her Eve-like stoic pride and presumption. The "Satanic" takes many forms and appears where we might least expect it—hidden, I argue, within the virtue of Richardson's heroines.

The ethical complexity of standing unsupported was a concern of Richardson's coterie of female friends and correspondents—most notably, Elizabeth Carter, Hester Mulso Chapone, and Catherine Talbot. Young writers of essays, odes, and moral instruction in the 1740s and 1750s, these future bluestockings sought to promote the ethical independence of women, an aim that prompted their concerns about self-sufficiency. A tightly-knit network, Carter, Mulso, Talbot, and Richardson tacitly and explicitly enjoy a presence in each other's work, creating intellectual contacts that reinforce the theme of stoic pride. In Clarissa, Richardson includes the text of Carter's "Ode to Wisdom," a poem interested in the problem of self-sufficiency, which had been circulating in manuscript form. A decade later, he would serve as the printer of Carter's celebrated translation All the Works of Epictetus (1758), the prefatory ode of which was composed by their mutual friend and advisor, Hester Mulso. Catherine Talbot, who Richardson professed to be "the Queen of all the ladies I venerate," had a hand not only in editing Sir Charles Grandison, but was also the first to encourage Carter to embark on the translation of

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10 Yoder, "Clarissa Regained," 90.
11 Ian Watt briefly observes this dynamic when he notes that Clarissa's "error of judgment" in running off with Lovelace "was itself the result of Clarissa's very excellencies... with a supreme objectivity, Richardson connects his heroine's downfall with her attempt to realize the aims of the campaign of sexual reformation... she fell into Lovelace's power because of her spiritual pride." Watt, The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), 213-214. Watt, however, does not address Richardson's attraction to and reliance on this pride in developing Clarissa's heroism. Margaret Anne Doody briefly discusses Sir Charles Grandison's pride, but her analysis does not engage with it as a stoic problem. Doody, A Natural Passion: A Study of the Novels of Samuel Richardson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 266-272.
Epictetus and was pivotal in shaping the work’s editorial footnotes and introduction. One of the goals of their editorial efforts was to parse the merits and faults of stoicism. Generally, Talbot and Carter sought to promote the moral agency of women and at the same time hedge against inordinate individualism. The overlap of contributors in the production of Richardson’s novels and Carter’s Epictetus indicates the close relationship between the projects and their shared interest in understanding the heroic potential of women.

That Carter was drawn to Epictetus is no accident. The exercise of Epictetan stoicism was viewed as a particularly appropriate route for women to attain heroic stature. A slave whose motto was “to bear and forbear,” Epictetus was the patron stoic figure for women in the eighteenth century. Indeed, unlike other popular stoic figures such as Seneca and Marcus Aurelius, Epictetus is cited as a standard item of ladies’ reading. In A Letter of Genteel and Moral Advice to a Young Lady, the Reverend Mr. Wetenhall Wilkes recommends Epictetus as suitable reading "to qualify the FAIR SEX to be useful, and happy in every Scene of Life." Epictetus, Wilkes continues, was one of a few exemplary figures "who lived and died in the full Possession of Virtue; who behaved with an equal, a cheerful, a generous, and heroic temper." That Epictetus was considered to be an appropriate model for women and girls shows how women were encouraged to submit, to bear their burdens and constraints "cheerfully" and without complaint. Such texts suggest that trials of endurance allow women to prove their

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12 See ODNB entries on Elizabeth Carter and Catherine Talbot.
14 Wetenhall Wilkes, A Letter of Genteel and Moral Advice to a Young Lady (London, 1746), 144.
15 Epictetus is employed to control the female temper and form it to its feminine duties, as seen in Samuel Bowden’s poem “To an Ingenious Young Lady, Ruffled with Passion, Who grew Calm on Reading some Lines in Epictetus” (26 March 1750) in Poems on Various Subjects (Bath, 1754), 32-33. Describing “monster passion” as a “tempest” or “short earthquake in the human frame,” Bowden celebrates “that immortal Sage, / Who gave you peace, and calm’d the rising rage.” Imagining a young woman in the intimate setting of her closet or even her bed, he continues:
virtue, but this belief, as we shall see, also sets them at risk of cultivating powerful, stoic selves that exist independently from the claims of community or religion. Maintaining ethical freedom while being politically or physically enslaved was the pillar of Epictetus’s stoicism, and while this transcendence allowed people to imagine him as a kind of pagan Christ, he is at once the most Christian and the least Christian of the stoics. In him is figured both the impenetrability and standing posture of Christ in Milton’s Paradise Regained and the self-sufficiency of Satan.

Carter’s “Ode to Wisdom” (included in Clarissa) and Mulso’s ode (included in Carter’s Epictetus) neatly convey anxiety about how to promote moral autonomy and a heroic of private individual virtue while at the same time acknowledging all virtue as a gift from God rather than something that springs from within. The family resemblance between the two odes sheds light on the stoic character of Richardson’s Christian protagonists. Early in the novel in the midst of her familial strife, Clarissa sets Carter’s “Ode to Wisdom” to music in an Epictetan attempt, as

In vain those momentary storms shall rise,
When Epictetus at your elbow lies;
While on your desk the stoic lamp burns bright,
Or near your pillow sheds its peaceful light.
Protected thus—no storms your mind shall move,
And S—d’s bosom swell with nought but love.
While in this instance the young lady is "protected" by the subduing influence of the stoic sage and lulled into a notably passive state of slumberous love, Epictetus is also invoked to expose the uncontrollability of the female temperament. In the 1800 novel Fitzmaurice, William Frederick Williams describes a visit between women during which one of them, "who was busied in reading Mrs. Carter's Epictetus" is provoked into a rage by the other: "Mrs. Beddome, laying down Epictetus, flew in a violent passion." This comic portrayal of the ineffectacy of reading stoic literature relies on the eighteenth-century perception that women were the intended audience of Carter’s translation. Fitzmaurice: A Novel (London, 1800), 25.

16 Broadly describing the eighteenth century’s ideal of consciousness as one “that would permit obesiance to external order as well as to the self’s radical freedom,” Frederick Garber sees Clarissa as mastering a dutiful balance between profound ethical independence and reverence for God while Lovelace impiously believes in his own autogenetic agency. Clarissa, chaste, paradisally sequestered, is, Garber writes, “single in company with her God while Lovelace (like God and Satan) wants no other support than what he can draw from within.” Garber’s too tightly drawn distinction between Christ-like and Satanic selfhood undermines what I think is vital to the novel, the perniciousness of Self and likeness of Clarissa and Lovelace’s imperfection. Garber, The Autonomy of the Self from Richardson to Huysmans (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 6, 33.
Clarissa writes, "to try to compose my angry passions." The poem meditates on the "philosophic theme / Of PERFECT, FAIR, and GOOD" and conveys some of the ambiguity of wisdom's derivation (233). Renouncing any desire for the objects of "avarice, vanity, and pride," the speaker expresses gratitude to Pallas for a better gift—the gift of wisdom too divine to have originated in the breast of man: "To me thy better gifts impart, / Each moral beauty of the heart, By studious thought refined" (VI-VII). The italicization of "me" and "better" in these lines establishes a qualitative disparity between the humble speaker and her superior god. "Each moral beauty" is then "refined," but the absence of a subject obscures the agent who engages in the "studious thought" that elevates the heart to greater perfection. In other words, the self does not merely passively receive Wisdom's gift, but she participates in her own moral cultivation. Carter's unwillingness to acknowledge straightforwardly the self's involvement hints at her sensitivity to the problem of stoic pride. Throughout the ode, the speaker overstates her gratitude for the gifts "From thee deriv'd" to forestall too much self-congratulation (234).

Mulso's ode similarly addresses the issue of self-sufficiency, but while Carter seeks to evade accusations of self-aggrandizement, Mulso projects spiritual error onto the figure of Epictetus. Her prefatory "Irregular Ode" delineates the conflict between Christian humility and Stoic pride and serves as a kind of disclaimer of the impiety implicit in Epictetus' pagan views. Invoking Epictetus, the speaker yearns for the stoic's fortitude, the ability to "scorn Affliction's dart," "mock the Tyrant Pain" and resist the Passions' "flaming Brands." Celebrating the selfstanding, hermetic nature of the Epictetan stoic, the speaker renounces dependence on external help: "But teach me in myself to find / Whate'er can please or fill my Mind. / Let inward

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Beauty charm the mental Sight” (3). Mulso makes clear that Epictetus offers training in the art of total self-sufficiency. Learning to find within the self all that might “fill” the mind, the individual onanistically—and, like Eve, narcissistically—“pleases” and “charms” herself with the image of her own “inward Beauty.”19 Called “Godlike Reason,” this beauty is notably not godly, but merely godlike. The speaker’s praise of Epictetus’ wisdom is ironic, and the tone quickly shifts to one of bitter sarcasm and condemnation.

But, ah! What means this impious Pride,
Which heav’nly Hosts deride!
Within myself does Virtue dwell?
Is all serene, and beauteous there?
What mean these chilling Damps of Fear?
Tell me, Philosophy! Thou Boaster! Tell:
This god-like all-sufficient Mind,
Which, in its own Perfection blest,
Defies the Woes, or Malice of Mankind
To shake its self-possessing Rest,
Is it not foul, weak, ignorant, and blind? (3)

The contempt for stoic “Philosophy” expressed in these lines contradicts the praise for Epictetus we might have expected. The remainder of the ode champions the “real Wisdom” of the “Lamb of God” and distinguishes between the “Humility and Patience sweet” of Christianity and “Stoic

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19 Milton conveys Eve’s narcissism in the following passage: “A shape within the water gleam appeared / Bending to look on me, I started back, / It started back, but pleased I soon returned, / Pleased it returned as soon with answering looks / Of sympathy and love; there I had fixed / Mine eyes till now, and pined with vain desire.” Paradise Lost in The Major Works, ed. Stephen Orgel and Jonathan Goldberg, 355-618, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), IV. 461-466.
Pride” (3-4). Carter’s lengthy introduction likewise critiques the “Stoical Excess” of “flattering Man with false and presumptuous Ideas of his own Power and Excellence.”

In Pamela, Richardson forays into the problem of stoic pride by establishing a tension between his heroine’s “Stoical Excess” and her eventual recognition of the moral danger inherent to her “presumptuous Ideas” of herself. “[I]t may be presumptuous to trust too much to your own Strength,” Pamela’s parents admonish her, reminding her that every quality she possesses is a gift from God: “you did not make yourself, and so can have no Praise due to you for it” (27, 20). These reprimands, I argue, are key to understanding the moral objectives of Richardson’s first novel. Like the stoic who in life seeks self-perfection and in death hopes to be memorialized as a timeless exemplar, Pamela sets out to “make” herself by carefully crafting her image. Mr. B.’s observation that Pamela “makes herself an Angel of Light” touches upon the satanic undercurrent of Pamela’s self-fashioning and implicitly criticizes the didactic project of the domestic novel. Allowing an everyday servant to make herself into a heroine, Richardson invokes the stoic paradigm, figured in Epictetus, of the slave’s ethical freedom and self-sufficiency.

By casting herself as an angel and emplotting her trial as a struggle of Miltonic proportions ("Angels" and "Devils"), Pamela paves the way for the moral fall precipitated by her presumption. The event of Pamela’s near-suicide, the urge she feels to fling herself into the pond and thereby end all her troubles, brings to the fore the spiritual error of her self-sufficiency. Keeping with the imaginative self-creation she performs in her letters, Pamela fantasizes about the display of her body after death, when

these wicked Wretches, who now have no Remorse, no Pity on me, will then be mov’d to lament their Misdoings; and when they see the dead Corpse of the

29 Elizabeth Carter, All the Works of Epictetus (London, 1758), ii. References are to this edition.
unhappy *Pamela* dragg’d out to these slopy Banks, and lying breathless at their Feet, they will find that Remorse to wring their obdurate Hearts. (172)

The display of the self as an object that prompts conversion in the hearts of Pamela’s malefactors is the finishing touch of a life imaginatively crafted. Pamela elaborates further in picturing for herself her posthumous effect on Mr. B., the logistics of her burial, and the pity bestowed on her by the men and maidens of her father’s village, even imagining that she might, against her preference, be “the Subject of their Ballads and Elegies” (173). Despite her imprecation that her “Memory . . . may quickly slide into Oblivion,” it seems evident that she expects the self-determined act of suicide to earn her some kind of heroic, literary immortality (173). Richardson incorporates the extreme case of Pamela’s near-suicide as a warning or counterweight against the domestic novel’s celebration of self-made exemplars.

Indeed, Pamela soon recognizes the wicked self-indulgence of this destructive line of thought. Suicide oscillates in her mind between the “laudable Escape” advised by stoic thinkers and endless perdition prompted by “the Devil’s Instigation” (172).

Then, thought I, who gave thee, presumptuous as thou art, a Power over thy Life?

. . . How knowest thou what Purposes God may have to serve, by Trials with which thou art now tempted? Art thou to put a Bound to God’s Will, and to say, Thus much I will bear, and no more? . . . And how do I know, but that God . . . may not have permitted these Sufferings on that very Score, and to make me rely solely on his Grace and Assistance, who perhaps have too much prided myself in a vain Dependence on my own foolish Contrivances? (173-174)

In this passage, Pamela realizes her true moral quandary. She sees, for the first time, that the “Power” and authority she assumes in directing her life is rife with imaginative indulgence. She
sees the vanity at the root of her self-reliance and recognizes that her strength is not her own. She sees that the moral stakes of her plight have less to do with her corporal integrity than her spiritual life, that there is such a thing as “mental virtue” opposed to mere “virtue” in the sense of sexual chastity. In short, she learns what Richardson would later write in a letter to Hester Mulso, that “there is many a contaminated soul, that has an uncontaminated body to carry it about . . . .”²¹ Ultimately, she sees that her trial is a mysterious one conceived by God rather than the story of seduction and captivity she narrates in her letters. These revelations prevent her from committing suicide, giving her yet a “more abundant Reason to praise God,” that, she says, “I have been deliver’d from a worse Enemy, myself!” (175).

Criticisms of stoicism in the early modern period often emphasized the erroneous logic of stoic suicide, and Richardson, I argue, rewards Pamela more for her Christian acknowledgement of its evils than her virtuous withstanding of the “irresistible Offers of a fine Gentleman” (8). Her greatest success lies not in landing Mr. B. but in her rejection of suicide and her reliance on spiritual convictions that “aw’d [her] rebellious Mind into Duty and Resignation to the Divine Will!” (174). Calling suicide an “Act of Rebellion against the Decrees of Providence,” Carter explains in the introduction to All the Works of Epictetus how the stoics “professed indeed in Suicide to follow the divine Will.” “[B]ut this,” she writes, “was a lamentably weak Pretence. Even supposing Sufferings to be Evils, they are no Proof of a Signal from God to abandon Life; but to show an exemplary Patience, which he will reward” (xix). Staging Pamela’s greatest show of virtue as a struggle between suicidal self-sufficiency and Christian patience, Richardson has recourse to eighteenth-century platitudes on the differences between stoicism and Christianity. Doing so, he masks the novel’s palpable interest in the heroic potential of self-making. Richardson concludes his first novel with an unsatisfactory indictment of Pamela’s

²¹ Samuel Richardson, “To Hester Mulso,” 11 July 1751, in Selected Letters, 186.
belief that she can make herself into a heroic exemplar even while her self-asserted virtue is what propels her to heroic stature. The stoic pride and self-sufficiency that reside at the heart of her chastity comprise the governing moral difficulty Pamela must face, and the infrangible tension between pride and virtue abide at the core of Richardson’s didactic efforts.

When Pamela first gains permission to return to her parents, her father rejoices over her ordeal, celebrating not only its happy outcome but also the immaterial value he and his daughter have gained through their experience of distress. “Oh my dear Child, your Virtue has made me, I think, stronger and better than I was before,” he writes, “What blessed Things are Trials and Temptations to us, when they be overcome!” (37). In Clarissa, Richardson raises the stakes of what it means to “overcome” adversity and become “better and stronger than [one] was before” by compounding the number and the complexity of his second heroine’s trials. Doing so, he heightens the Miltonic and Epictetan tenor of the novel’s moral concerns. Like Epictetus the slave, Clarissa is subjected to an unrelenting tyranny and captivity that makes Pamela’s ordeal seem comic. Clarissa’s preservation of chastity occurs on a plane far above mere corporeal penetrability, as evidenced by the durability and brilliance of her resistance to Lovelace even after her rape. Yet, Clarissa faces a subtler trial in the temptations that coil out from her pride. Her desire to become “better and stronger” through triumph over trial and temptation matches both the stoic’s project of self-perfection and the Satanic wish for preeminence. In his second novel, Richardson reveals his secret admiration of the stoic’s lofty pride even while as a Christian he punishes it.

In shaping the moral drama of Clarissa, as in Pamela, Richardson relies on the Epictetan notion that life is a “formative test” that continually challenges us to exercise—and thereby prove—our virtue. The rigor of this formative test is provided by adversity. “[I]s not calamity
the test of virtue?" Lovelace asks, declaring his plan to marry Clarissa only if she proves herself to be truly virtuous in withstanding his unrelenting pursuit (519). While Lovelace expects the outcome of the trial to either confirm or deny Clarissa's moral strength, for Clarissa it means much more than merely establishing her chastity as unassailable. As Milton does in Comus, Richardson draws on Epictetus's notion of the "happy trial" as an opportunity to showcase one's virtue. "ADVERSITY is your SHINING-TIME" (579) Anna Howe famously tells Clarissa, echoing the Lady's eldest brother when he says, "Yea even that which mischief meant most harm / Shall in the happy trial prove most glory." Milton and Richardson express two ideas here: the first, that adversity presents advantage, and the second, that this advantage leads to one's aggrandizement.

The stoic sage recognizes misfortune as an opportune rather than an evil occurrence. In Book III of the Discourses, Carter's Epictetus explains how "some Advantage may be gained, from every external Circumstance":

"Is my Neighbour a bad one?" He is so, to himself; but a good one, to me. He exercises my good Temper, my Moderation. . . . Bring Sickness, Death, Want, Reproach, capital Trial. All these, by the Rod of Hermes, shall turn to Advantage.-----"What will you make of Death?"-----Why: what but an Ornament to you; what but a Means of your showing, by Action, what the Man is, who knows, and follows the Will of Nature. . . . Whatever you give me, I will make it happy, fortunate, respectable, and eligible. (III.xx.279)

This passage from Carter's translation expresses much of what Clarissa accomplishes after being raped by Lovelace. Lovelace is the bad neighbor who forces Clarissa to confront his cruelty,

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unleashing her heroic potential. Her death, that strange quasi-suicide, is the “Ornament” of her life. Her carefully designed coffin with its emblems and inscriptions is the final trapping and display of her life, the symbol of honor and grace that overwhelms her family members with self-reproach and converts them to a better understanding of themselves and their actions. The extended, sentimental theatre of Clarissa’s death ties her exemplarity to her self-determined stoic demise. While Richardson links Pamela’s morbid fantasy of Mr. B.’s discovery of her sodden corpse to the sinfulness of suicide, Clarissa’s lauded death exposes the irresistible appeal of stoic heroism and self-slaughter held for Richardson. Pushing at the fine line between stoic and Christian heroism, Richardson translates for the domestic novel the final action of the heroes and heroines of seventeenth-century Roman tragedy.  

Like Epictetus, Clarissa will turn to advantage “whatever you give me.” But this notion of the “happy trial” as a fortunate, fortuitous test works only when one is confronted by evil, not when pride and the aspiration for glory lead one to go in quest of it. “Seek not temptation then, which to avoid / Were better,” Adam warns Eve in Paradise Lost, “trial will come unsought” (IX. 364-366). Proudly believing she can rely entirely on the power of her virtue and seeking an opportunity to prove her greatness, Eve misjudges her strength in the face of danger—she asserts that her “firmness” should not be “doubted” (IX. 279). “But,” Adam reminds her after the Fall, despite all warnings, “confidence then bore thee on, secure / Either to meet no danger, or to find / Matter of glorious trial” (IX. 1174-1176). The idea that adversity provides good occasion for the attainment of personal glory is a dangerous one, and while Richardson is committed to Clarissa’s

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23 In plays such as Katherine Philips’s Pompey (1663), Nathaniel Lee’s Sophonisba (1676) and Lucius Junius Brutus (1681), Dryden’s All for Love (1677), and later, Joseph Addison’s Cato (1713) and James Thomson’s Sophonisba (1730), protagonists commit suicide to maintain their integrity in the face of tyranny, rape, and irresolvable conflicts between love and duty. The self-determined nature of Clarissa’s death echoes these stoic suicides. Throughout the novel, Richardson offers tantalizingly Roman instances in which Clarissa threatens to stab herself with scissors and knives, moments that anticipate and heighten the stoic tenor of her eventual demise.
status as sage exemplar and virtuous martyr, the showiness of her decline and her almost goading defiance of Lovelace’s menace call to mind her Eve-like pride, the original source of her troubles.

Clarissa implicitly envisions herself attaining great glory upon her reformation of Lovelace. She errs in taking credit for her earthly renown as a preeminent woman of virtue, but it is her desire for an even higher exaltation that endangers her. “I was too secure in the knowledge I thought I had of my own heart,” Clarissa confesses after her rape, “My supposed advantages became a snare to me” (891). In her letters delivered posthumously to her family, she credits stoic pride as the source of her demise:

\[\ldots\] the merit of the good I delighted to do, and of the inclinations which were given me, and which I could not help having, I was perhaps too ready to attribute to myself; and now, being led to account for the cause of my temporary calamities, find I had a secret pride to be punished for \ldots\] Temptations were accordingly sent. I shrank in the day of trial. (1375)

She confesses her error in perceiving herself, rather than God, as the source of her fine qualities. It is important to remember, however, that Clarissa’s self-blame for her assault does not diminish Lovelace’s culpability, and Richardson’s portrayal of her self-composure and spiritual transcendence establishes her not as a fallen woman but rather an ascending one. Grappling with the overlap between Christian and stoic ways of imagining virtue and heroism, Richardson has it both ways, lionizing her for her stoic grandeur even while asserting her Christian virtue. In his next and final novel, Richardson pushes this recipe even further, making stoic pride and Christian virtue two sides of the same coin.
In *Sir Charles Grandison*, Harriet Byron expresses disdain when she says, as if referring to Pamela’s reward and Clarissa’s misfortune, “What a dreadful, what a *presumptuous* risque runs she, who marries a wicked man, even hoping to reclaim him . . .”\(^{24}\) To correct the notion that a reformed rake makes the best husband was one of Richardson’s moral missions as well as one of the guiding motives behind *Clarissa* as a revision of *Pamela*. But more than this, Harriet’s early censure of Eve-like presumption signals Richardson’s turn to investigate even deeper features of the problem of Stoic pride. In his final novel, Richardson diminishes the relevance of presumption in order to highlight a heroic of fortitude best staged in the emotional challenges of domestic life and the complex human relationships that comprise it. Richardson aims to displace Epictetan chastity, which focuses on interiority, inviolable virtue, and self-containment, with a concern for social virtues, charity, and benevolence. We can see Richardson’s turn to the social dimension in the very form of his novels, in the way the near monologic nature of *Pamela* gives way to the intensely individualized and private letters that comprise *Clarissa*, which in turn are followed by the baggy, purposeless epistolarity of *Grandison*. Of interest to me, though, is how Richardson manages the problem of stoic pride in a novel so much committed to inculcating proper social behavior. In contrast to his assertion in *Pamela* that Christian patience and stoic fortitude are two distinct postures, in his final novel Richardson shows how even the sweetest, most passive Christian endurance is infected with the worst of stoic presumption and desire for glory. He addresses this inevitability by putting the pride of individuals to work for the good of humanity, a surprisingly Mandevillian turn in his thinking.

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One of the differences between *Clarissa* and *Grandison* is that in *Grandison*, Richardson’s characters seem to have already learned the lesson of Clarissa’s presumption. While Clarissa before her rape celebrates what she calls her “interior virtue” and the pride she takes in it, Sir Charles and Harriet Byron endeavor to avoid her blind self-assurance. Harriet doubts her humility and continually voices anxiety about her pride. Richardson seems to invest the protagonists of his final novel with a formidable self-knowledge, or at least a probing awareness of the depths of the human heart. But as in touch with themselves as he would have them be, Sir Charles and Harriet Byron’s fixation on absolute moral righteousness leads them to overcompensate for their perceived imperfections. Harriet, for instance, mistakenly accuses herself of presumption for having gone to the masquerade ball. “Let me forget, that ever I presumptuously ventured into such a scene of folly,” she writes, accepting her kidnapping by Sir Hargrave as her punishment when really she was reluctant to go in the first place and did not step forth, as she says, with any kind of “venturous” pride (II. 199).

Sir Charles preemptively exonerates himself from Stoic pride by addressing its primary spiritual error: denying God of his rightful glory. Countering the accusation made by Milton’s Christ that the Stoics “in themselves seek virtue, and to themselves / All glory arrogate, to God give none” (*PR* IV. 313-315), Sir Charles’s private religious “Reflexions” urge the following:

> Let me not build virtue on any notions of honour, but of honour to thy Name. . . .

> Can good be of human growth? No! It is thy gift, Almighty, and All-good! let not thy bounties remove the Donor from my thought. (VI. 51)

In this passage, Sir Charles directly confronts the problem of stoic pride in order to denounce false confidence in the self’s autogenetic virtue. Having his protagonists so openly acknowledge the briars that line their paths to righteousness, Richardson ostensibly aims to circumvent the
problems entailed by stoic pride and advances a self-knowledge more perfect than Clarissa’s. But the earnestness with which Harriet and Sir Charles evade imputations of stoic pride should prompt our skepticism. By protesting too much, they reveal Richardson’s own underlying suspicion that the self cannot be overcome. While Sir Charles and particularly Harriet go to great lengths to expose and restrain their selfish, prideful impulses, Richardson actually accepts pride as an inexpugnable component of human nature.

One of the first steps Richardson takes in recovering pride as a positive force—or at least a morally neutral one—is that he diminishes the role of presumption in stoic pride. Sir Charles fends against the initial fault of the Eve archetype with the following claim: “As I never sought danger, or went out of my way to meet it, I looked upon it when it came, as an unavoidable evil, and as a call upon me for fortitude” (I. 363). Here, Richardson distinguishes between active presumption and passive fortitude in order to lessen the moral danger of pride. If characters do not actively set out to tempt evil, then they are less likely to fall. Richardson—like Milton before him—recasts what he perceives to be the admirable aspects of stoicism into Christian terms in an attempt to distance his religious ethics from the impiety of pagan philosophy. However, altering the means by which one encounters his or her trial merely reinvests Stoic pride in a Christian framework. While the protagonists in Grandison may successfully avoid the presumption of overconfidently seeking danger, they still desire opportunities to attain personal glory. Particularly for the women in the novel, the call for fortitude provides a venue for triumph.

As many readers, including Jane Austen, have noted, Grandison is about the romantic hardships women face due to the “great dearth of good men” (III. 344). Polygamy, as Charlotte wryly regrets, is not an option, and so Sir Charles’s admirers must overcome their passions and
summon fortitude in the misfortune of not being his wife. This, of course, is what Harriet must endure as long as it seems likely that Sir Charles will marry Clementina. Harriet writes, “It is a trial. I am not ashamed to own myself affected: But I have fortitude, I hope!” (IV. 237).

Owing her feelings, Harriet qualifies any imputation of emotional apathy; yet the key to fortitude, and, by extension, to heroism, is self-denial and the stoic control of one's passions. Indeed, Clementina attains heroic stature in Harriet's eyes because, as Harriet puts it, she “has given an example to all her Sex, of a passion properly subdued” (V. 138). Harriet demonstrates this link between fortitude and heroism when Emily Jervois realizes she is in love with Sir Charles and decides to leave the house to overcome her attachment. In superbly overwrought language, Harriet exclaims, “Charming fortitude! Heroic Emily! How I admire you! . . . — Heroic Emily! whispered I, to confirm her in her real heroism” (VI. 92, 95). Affirming Emily's fortitude as what constitutes “real heroism,” Harriet promotes Richardson’s Miltonic agenda of lionizing domestic Christian virtue over pagan glory.25

Surrounded by “heroines” who bravely endure the trial of foregoing Sir Charles’s love, Harriet soon has reason to doubt her own self-worth. Richardson rewards her patience by marrying her to Sir Charles, but throughout the rest of the novel she is haunted by the anxiety that she will never attain the exalted status and sense of self-esteem enjoyed by the less fortunate women around her. In other words, Harriet begins to wonder whether she would find a life of heroic fortitude more self-gratifying than a life as Lady Charles Grandison. Adhering to the

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25 Ian Watt, Margaret Anne Doody, and Jocelyn Harris have addressed Richardson's role in the eighteenth-century reformation of manners and his promotion of what Watt calls a “new type of heroism” that found its “fullest demonstration” in Sir Charles Grandison. See Watt, The Rise of the Novel, 244; Doody, A Natural Passion, 242-250; and Harris, Samuel Richardson, 138. Building on this well-established account of the reformation of heroism, I show how Richardson invests his domestic protagonists with the epic drive for glory he ostensibly sought to restrain. For more on the conflict between epic and domestic heroism in a Miltonic context, see Griffin, Milton in the Eighteenth Century, 26, and Fish, Surprised by Sin, 162-184.
notion that virtue must be proven via adversity, Harriet decides that “One wants trials sometimes” (V. 244). Reflecting on Sir Charles's mother, she writes,

[Did not Lady Grandison shine the more for the hardships she passed through?—
And is it not necessary for virtue to be called forth by trials, in order to be justified by its fortitude under them? What trials can I be called to with Sir Charles Grandison? (VI. 31)

Without being tried, Harriet feels she cannot be the preeminent woman of virtue. Towards the end of the novel she laments, “I never, but by such a trial, can be as great as Clementina!” (V. 235). Although she claims her desire to be tried derives from a yearning for spiritual cultivation, Harriet's underlying motives are self-love and the wish to compete. And this desire leads her to seek opportunities to display her fortitude in the most unlikely places. She believes, for instance, that “it would be [her] glory” to have summoned the fortitude required to congratulate Clementina as the new Lady Grandison, if Sir Charles were to marry her, “for then [she] should not scruple to put [her]self in a rank with Clementina” (IV. 171). That she figures their difference in terms of rank (“her worthiness, my inferiority” [V. 300]) exposes the craving for superiority at the root of her thinking.

But while the desire for personal glory inherent to Stoic pride remains alive and well, Richardson does achieve something new: by moving away from the active pursuit of trials of virtue, Richardson diminishes the explicit selfishness of this pride. Blatant self-regard and self-centeredness are supplanted by a passive endurance that in order to be proven demands not just supreme exercise of individual will power, but social feeling. In other words, heroic fortitude requires a display of sympathy for others, a social turn that mitigates absolute self-absorption.
Harriet repeatedly insists on Clementina's superiority in part to demonstrate her own compassionate acknowledgment of Clementina's hardship. Harriet proves her own fortitude, selflessness, and virtuous sympathy most by supporting Clementina's cause. "But he ought to love Clementina," she writes. "She is a glorious, tho' unhappy, young creature. I must not have one spark of generosity left in my heart, I must be lost wholly in Self, if I did not equally admire and love her" (III. 104). Despite her protestation against self-absorption, Harriet competes for moral preeminence by cultivating ever loftier feelings of sympathy, an "enlargement" of the components of her virtue that comes close to self-aggrandizement. "I will welcome adversity, if it enlarge my charity!" she writes (III. 385). Harriet does not "seek" adversity in order to triumph over it, but rather passively "welcomes" challenges put to her moral and emotional strength. Her pride is what motivates her charity even as her charity is a source of her pride. This mutual reinforcement of pride and virtue reoccurs throughout the novel, suggesting Richardson's preoccupation with not just pride's persistence, but its necessity. Early in the novel Uncle Selby diagnoses Harriet's virtue as a symptom of pride and pride as the by-product of virtue, saying, "there is vanity in the very humility" (I. 30). At another point, Harriet perceives the circularity of love for others and self-love. "Indeed I love [Emily], at my heart—And, what is more—I love myself for so sincerely loving her." (V. 197).

Harriet is not the only character whose social virtue depends on personal pride. Clementina welcomes the most extreme occasions to display her magnanimity. At one point she learns that her cruel cousin Laurana is not dead as she was led to believe, and this is her reaction: "Thank God! then have I a triumph to come! . . . Excuse my pride! I will show her that I can forgive her!" (IV. 214). Odd as it seems, Clementina's elation stems not from the fact that her cousin lives, but rather from the opportunity it provides her to grant clemency for Laurana's past
behavior and thereby gain extra points in the proof of her virtue. Here, the problem of pride comes full circle, for Clementina’s motive is not selfless charity and the desire to forgive for the sake of Christian compassion, but an obsession with climbing ever higher in the ranks of both the heavenly elect and the worldly paragons who populate Richardson’s universe. Like Satan seeking preeminence, Harriet and Clementina compete to be the female paragon of their world, and their “heroism” is largely motivated by that “wicked thing” Self.

Now, I might stop here and say that Richardson’s goal is merely for us to see that despite his protagonists’ frank acknowledgment of pride the heart can always be further probed. This reading would leave intact the dominant moral tone of the novel. But Richardson invites us to question our surface interpretation of his novels. In my reading of Grandison, Charlotte Grandison, the “saucy” and outspoken Anna Howe figure of the novel, is the key to Richardson’s agenda of moral complexity and active reading. Her words, I argue, function as editorial insertions designed to trigger the reader’s active moral engagement with the novel. While Richardson’s efforts to circumvent the problem of presumption point toward a genuine desire to legitimate a heroic of fortitude, the text rubs against its own grain through Charlotte, whose commentary serves as counterpoint to the ideas of human perfectibility, self-knowledge, and exemplarity advanced by the novel. Charlotte exposes the underlying vanity of Clementina and Harriet’s preoccupation with heroism by doubting the authenticity of their fortitude. She

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26 John Mullan and Thomas Keymer offer opposing views on the nature of Richardson’s didactic method. Reacting to the poststructuralist celebration of the multiplicity of interpretations of Clarissa, Mullan notes the ways in which Clarissa is “massively supplemented” by Richardson’s worried editorial insertions to argue that Richardson hoped to forestall his readers’ probing of moral ambiguities. Keymer, on the other hand, suggests that Richardson intended his texts to provoke critical exertions on the part of the reader. Mullan, Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 107; Keymer, Richardson’s Clarissa, xviii, 65.

refers to Harriet and Clementina's "excellencies" as "a glorious perverseness, which they miscall constancy and perseverance" (VI. 215). Referring to their stoicism as "perverse," Charlotte recognizes the stubborn pride at the center of Harriet and Clementina's "glorious" moral stance. She calls out the incongruity between their motives and the Christian compassion they profess, as well as the underlying reason for their mutual admiration. Gently scoffing at Harriet for being "always a little tinctured with Heroism" (VI. 265) and complaining about how Harriet "is so taken up with her heroic friendship, that Clementina is now almost the only subject of her pen" (VI. 262), Charlotte most significantly remarks:

_Heroines_ both, I suppose; and they are mirrors to each other; each admiring herself in the other. No wonder they are engaged insensibly by a vanity, which carries with it, to each, so generous an appearance; for, all the while, Harriet thinks she is only admiring Clementina; Clementina, that she is applauding Harriet. (VI. 234)

It is hard not to agree with Charlotte's assessment of these heroines' narcissism. But to agree with Charlotte is to call into question the dominant view of virtue advanced by the novel. If their heroism is motivated by the pursuit of personal glory and their mutual admiration a subconscious projection of their own self-love, then Richardson's investment in selfless virtue and fellow-feeling is dangerously fraught.

Charlotte’s cynicism regarding Harriet's ideal of female heroism, however, actually accords with Richardson’s development as a moral novelist. Richardson recognizes the power of pride and comes to infuse the Shaftesburian ethos he promotes with a healthy dose of Mandevillian pragmatism. Mandeville’s definition of pride matches what Milton and Richardson condemn as stoic pride. "PRIDE," Mandeville writes, "is that Natural Faculty by
which every Mortal that has any Understanding over values, and imagines better things of himself than any impartial Judge, thoroughly acquainted with all his Qualities and Circumstances could allow him” (148). He associates this pride with the “Stoicks,” whose “Virtues they boasted of could be nothing but haughty Pretences full of Arrogance and Hypocrisy” (173).

Taking a pragmatic approach to the problem of stoic pride, Richardson decides that if pride can stem from virtue, then virtue can grow out of pride. Indeed, this is the very basis of Sir Charles’s method for reforming his servants, sisters, and female admirers, his rakish peers and a number of unruly middle-aged women. Sounding uncannily Mandevillian, he rejoices that “a regard for outward appearances” and “love of praise” will “overcome persons, who may not . . . be naturally beneficent” (IV. 147). And Charlotte acknowledges that like Mandeville’s awkward girl praised into making pretty curtsies, “one may be flattered, by undeserved compliments, into good behavior” (V. 2). In order to make space for the possibility of lived virtue, Richardson tasks his protagonists with harnessing their pride and riding it to ever more magnanimous social behavior.

At one point, Sir Charles makes a noble effort to distinguish between pride that is “(the fault of fallen angels)” and a quasi-Mandevillian pride that “may be called a prop . . . to an imperfect goodness” (IV. 386). But like the pretended difference between Christian patience and stoic fortitude, Richardson suggests that this distinction is a faulty one. Warning against the wickedness of stoic pride and self-love, while at the same time promoting a self-conscious practice of individual virtue, is the moral problem of Richardson’s fictional endeavors. In Grandison, he solves the problem by deciding that the problem cannot be solved, that pride and virtue must exist co-dependently.
As I suggested at the beginning of this essay, Richardson as a moral writer felt personally concerned with the problem of stoic pride. He wanted his voice to “mend” the world, but not “Stoically.” But just as stoic pride prompts so much of our virtue, it also sits at the heart of the sentimental, didactic project. The prefatory sonnet to Sir Charles Grandison celebrates Richardson as a kind of Miltonic attendant spirit; he is a

Sweet Moralist, whose generous Labors tend,
With ceaseless diligence, to guide the Mind,
In the wild maze of error wandering blind,
To Virtue, Truth, and Honor; glorious end
Of glorious toils!

These lines suggest that the reader, too, attains glory in navigating and enduring the moral complexity put forth by the novel. The ethical strain of reading, a strain afforded by Richardson’s “generous Labors” as a writer, produces the glories of tried, cultivated, and proven virtue.

By the end of his career, Richardson had come to look deeper into the nature of his moral writing. In the introduction to “An Equiry into the Origin of Moral Virtue,” Mandeville accuses didactic writers of stymying rather than contributing to the advancement of their readers’ self-knowledge. “One of the greatest Reasons why so few People understand themselves,” he writes, “is, that most Writers are always teaching Men what they should be, and hardly ever trouble their Heads with telling them what they really are” (77). We might read this as an indictment of literary projects, such as Richardson’s, that set out to provide moral exemplars. Interestingly, Richardson himself addresses the incongruity between fictional ideals and everyday human imperfection. Commenting on the self-interest at root of Harriet’s generosity toward
Clementina, Charlotte proffers a piece of wisdom: "Our best passions," she says, "have their mixtures of self-love." Harriet's response is petulant. "You have drawn a picture of human nature, Charlotte, that I don't like." But Charlotte is unfazed. "It is a likeness for all that," she responds (III. 286). Through Charlotte, Richardson announces a viewpoint that not only opposes Harriet's conviction of the irreproachability of her virtue and feeling, but also complicates his own ostensible commitment to wholly pretty pictures of human nature. In a way, he uses Charlotte to speak to and against his own work. As if arguing with himself, he leaves us with her words: "Self-love, self-love, at the bottom of all we say and do: I am convinced it is, notwithstanding all you have urged on the contrary" (IV. 252).
“What did you cut it off for, then?”: Feminist Interpretations of Self-Violent Women

2012 2nd Place tie Winner
Cornelison English essay Contest

Meg Dobbins
“What did you cut it off for, then?”: Feminist Interpretations of Self-Violent Women

In a memorable scene at the beginning of George Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss* Maggie Tulliver marches into her mother’s bedroom, seizes a pair of scissors, and cuts off her hair. Maggie’s brother Tom looks on, curiously, and eventually lends a hand. The Tulliver children delight in altering Maggie’s appearance: “One delicious grinding snip, and then another and another. The hinder locks fell heavily on the floor, and soon Maggie stood cropped in a jagged, uneven manner.” Yet Maggie and Tom derive pleasure for different reasons. Whereas Maggie delights in crafting a new image for herself, Tom enjoys witnessing his sister’s self-ruination: “What a queer thing you look!” he tells her, commanding Maggie to “look…in the glass.” Facing herself on Tom’s terms, Maggie feels the sudden, “unexpected pang” of shame:

Now, when Tom began to laugh at her, the affair had quite a new aspect. She looked in the glass, and still Tom laughed and clapped his hands, while Maggie’s flushed cheeks began to pale and her lips to tremble a little.

"Don’t laugh at me, Tom,” said Maggie, with an outburst of angry tears, stamping, and giving him a push.

"Now, then, spitfire!” said Tom. "What did you cut it off for, then?” (69-70)

The crisis of this early childhood moment is minute—even comedic; yet this scene also lays the groundwork for what will become many of the novel’s central concerns: Maggie’s aberrant femininity; her desire for love and acceptance; and the frustration of her thwarted attempts at self-alteration. Additionally, for feminist readers, Maggie’s haircut marks an especially uneasy moment in the novel because as much as we may sympathize with Eliot’s rash young heroine, we cannot help but also share in Tom’s confusion: why *does* Maggie cut her hair, and what does Eliot intend for her readers to make of a heroine at once so rebellious yet self-destructive?
In what follows, I examine instances like this one when the boundary between a woman’s resistance and her self-violence blurs, and propose new ways for feminist readers to interpret women’s self-harm beyond the limited designations of self-help and self-abuse. First, by examining scenes of female self-destruction across a wide array of nineteenth-century novels, I explore the complex and seemingly contradictory logic of women’s self-destructive self-making. Of what does women’s self-injury consist, what motivates it, and how does it tend to operate within the Victorian novel? Second, I use Chandra Mohanty’s theory of discursive colonialism in “Under Western Eyes” to reinterpret the repressed autobiography of Lucy Snowe in Charlotte Brontë’s Villette, and demonstrate the importance of historically contextualizing women’s repressions and rebellions. Finally, I consider the function of self-abuse in Villette, Jane Eyre, and Tess of the d’Urbervilles, relating self-harm in these novels to critical debates that take place in feminism about the roles self-help and self-abuse play in shaping feminist communities.

I focus on nineteenth-century literature in this analysis because women from this era so often disappoint contemporary feminist readers in search of empowering proto-feminist heroines. Scholars have noted that Victorians tend to be upheld as the epitome of conservative sexual repression. John Kucich, for example, observes that “our reading of nineteenth-century fiction and of Victorian culture as a whole has long suffered from the standard, caricatural view of repression. In general, twentieth century culture—both popular and intellectual—has been eager to view the Victorians as fearful, dishonest, silly, or coercive” (4). Since Foucault’s History of Sexuality, the caricatural view Kucich describes has been increasingly discredited. However, novels from this period still tend to remain a difficult facet of women’s literature. There are, feminist readers have complained, simply too many self-sacrificing wives and mothers; too many “dutiful daughters”; too many “angels in the house.”
George Eliot, in particular, is often criticized by feminist readers because, while she created characters like Maggie Tulliver and Dorothea Brooke (women who seem to lead tragically circumscribed lives), she herself pursued an unusually liberal Victorian lifestyle, residing with George Lewes. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, for instance, perceive the difference between Eliot and her heroines as hypocritical. “Eliot’s punishment of her heroines,” they write, “suggests the depth of her need to avoid identification with her own sex...Eliot resorts frequently... to pledges of deference and doctrines of feminine renunciation that are directly at odds with her own aggressively pursued career” (466). However, in “Why Feminist Critics are Angry with George Eliot,” Zelda Austen criticizes feminist scholarship “which asks the woman writer to write about women from a woman’s point of view, and, more narrowly, about liberated women from a liberated woman’s point of view” (556). While it is laudable that women desire courageous role models, Austen points out that striking any heroines from the canon who are not “aspiring and achieving” would have left Eliot with the limited option of “writ[ing] exclusively about herself,” a focus Austen considers counter-productive to Eliot’s goal of raising sympathy for others (552). Austen contends that Eliot approaches the novel as a form suited to the everyday, for “showing the attractions of a conventional life for the extraordinary girl, and thus her sisterhood with all other women” (558).

Without digressing too much on the (already much-discussed) autobiographical similarities and differences between Maggie and her author, I would add to Austen’s criticism that the tendency to separate “aspiring and achieving” Victorian authors from their self-destructive heroines exposes a problematic failure of feminist scholarship to accommodate experiences of women’s self-doubt. That is, if Maggie is to be read in relation to her author’s autobiography at all, it is important to emphasize the complexity of that relation. I suspect Eliot
created a figure like Maggie not only to foster “sisterhood” with other women, but also to contemplate her own difficult decision to cohabitate, unwed, with a married man. Maggie may represent the part of Eliot that could have chosen differently, that might have pursued the “conventional life.”

In addition to the perspective a re-evaluation of self-abuse promises to offer nineteenth-century feminist scholarship, the value of this project extends beyond Victorian literature to any place where the tenets of contemporary feminist thought might be disappointed or confounded. Today, after all, many current debates revolve around the difficulty of defining what is universally good or bad for the minds and bodies of women. Female genital mutilation/cutting, the traffic of women as “mail order brides” or prostitutes, and the Muslim observance of hijab (to name just a few issues) remain controversial topics for similar reasons. Increasingly, whether we are talking about physical violence, emotional repression, or the mundane, everyday self-abnegations of women around the world and at home, the same difficult questions arise about women’s volition, the limitations of applying universal feminist values to different cultural and historical contexts, and the ramifications an individual woman’s behavior has on others. This essay suggests that preliminary answers to these difficult questions may be found by “think[ing] back through our mothers,” as Virginia Woolf advises, and revisiting the recent history of self-abuse in Western literature (76).

I. Self-Destructive Self-Making

A cursory glance at nineteenth-century novels reveals the frequency of female self-abuse in literature from this era. After losing her husband, for example, Thomas Hardy’s Tess Durbeyfield has a “felicitous thought” and “mercilessly nip[s] her eyebrows off” (280). Tess disfigures herself in order to conceal her beauty from potential male-aggressors while she is
travelling alone. However such explicit reasons for a woman's self-injury are not generally provided in novels of the period. The French maid servant in Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* (1852-1853), for example, takes off her shoes and walks home through "the wettest of the wet grass" after being humiliated by her mistress, Lady Dedlock. Esther Summerson, who narrates this part of the novel, struggles to make sense of Mademoiselle Hortense's "retaliation:" it was "the most singular I could have imagined," Esther describes (299).

It is for their emotional and sexual repressions, however, that Victorian women are most infamous. Throughout *Bleak House*, Esther herself repeatedly denies her desires and emotions, a repressive habit that can be traced back to her early childhood. Before embarking for Bleak House, Esther reports feeling compelled to bury her beloved doll. This decision is painful for Esther, and she even notes that she is "half ashamed to tell it"; however, Esther never explains why this burial is shameful or necessary (36). In a parallel act of impulsive emotional repression in *Villette*, Lucy Snowe decides to bury John Bretton's love letters underneath a pear tree which the ghost of a nun is rumored to haunt (283). Lucy notes feeling struck by "one of those queer fantastic thoughts that will sometimes strike solitary people" but insists, nonetheless, that the "grief over which I had lately been weeping ... must be interred" (284; my emphasis). As Lucy and Esther's behavior suggests, then, even when woman do not harm themselves physically, they can be seen to render objects—dolls, letters—into extensions of their emotional and sexual selves which can be symbolically "cut off" from their everyday lived experience.

Such examples are taken from an array of different novels and attest to various degrees and types of women's suffering. Nonetheless, instances of women's self-violence in nineteenth-century novels share several common features which may be briefly summarized: first, women's self-injury is repressive and expressive at the same time. Women often operate as the objects of
their own rebellions because the problem they contend with lies in their own identities as women—how they are seen from the outside and feel on the inside. Thus, Maggie’s dark, unruly hair is the flaw of her femininity but also the means to fashion a new identity, to perform her femininity differently. Additionally, violence against the self often blurs with violence against others. Maggie, for example, cuts her own hair but earlier in the novel pushes her blonde-haired cousin Lucy in the mud. Hortense, similarly, walks home in the rain yet later frames her mistress for murder. Interestingly, whether aggression is turned outward toward other women or inward toward oneself, the target remains the same: the oppressive figure of an ideal, feminine “Woman.” Finally, self-violence is almost always abrupt and irrational. Esther inter alia beloved childhood doll for reasons she does not explain, just as Lucy impulsively buries her correspondence with John Bretton. Yet it is precisely because of such seeming madness that women’s self-violence operates as so poignant a mode of narration. Self-harm, that is, temporarily immerses its readers in a poetics of women’s self-fashioning that ruptures the very language and form of the traditional masculine bildung itself.\footnote{In Unbecoming Women, Susan Fraiman argues, for instance, that although Maggie is excluded from the conventional bildungsroman available to boys like Tom, her longing for her brother’s plot fragments, de-centers, and ultimately destroys the novel (131).}

Applying these features of self-destruction to the scene of Maggie’s haircut reveals the significance of that early childhood moment for the rest of the novel. In seizing her mother’s scissors, Maggie initially attempts to take her identity into her own hands—to destroy the image of her aberrant female identity by replacing it with a new one of her own making. Thus, when Tom asks Maggie why she is cutting her hair, Eliot writes that Maggie “answer[s] by seizing her front locks and cutting them straight across the middle of her forehead.” Quite literally, the scissors allow Maggie to cut Tom off. They grant her a way to begin intuicing a way of speaking...
back—of understanding her femininity as constructed and envisioning ways to perform her identity differently—even violently differently.

However, a final feature to note about women's self-destructive self-making is that such resistance is provisional, temporary, and ultimately cyclical. In the end, no haircut can offer Maggie permanent authority over her identity or liberation from her role as a Victorian woman. Almost immediately, after all, Tom's gaze, disparaging words, and derisive laughter at the sight of Maggie "queer" new appearance reinscribe Maggie in the very mutilated image she seeks to escape. Indeed, this early failure in Maggie's self-construction comes to establish a cyclical pattern of resistance and remorse that persists throughout the novel. Repeatedly, Maggie alters herself, faces external condemnation for her actions, experiences shame, and engages in further self-alteration in order to rectify her initial self-abuse. The plot of The Mill, I suggest, can be divided into three such cycles: in the first, Maggie attempts to renounce worldly pleasures after reading Thomas à Kempis. In the second, Maggie abandons this plan to commence a risky love affair with Philip Wakem (the son of her father's enemy). Finally, at the end of the novel, Maggie forgoes her feelings for Philip as well, remaining overnight on a boat with Stephen Guest, the fiancé of her cousin, to the detriment of her reputation.

Nor is Tom the only voice of disapproval in the novel. While Tom criticizes Maggie for her passionate wildness, Philip and Stephen later criticize Maggie for repressing these same desires. As Philip tells Maggie, "You want to find out a mode of renunciation that will be an escape from pain. I tell you again, there is no such escape possible except by perverting or mutilating one's nature" (430). Throughout the novel, he accuses Maggie of practicing "narrow asceticism" (318), "self-delusive fanaticism" (340), "self-torture" (342), and "monomania" (348). Stephen similarly implores Maggie to break her engagement with Philip: "It is
unnatural—it is horrible. Maggie, if you loved me as I love you, we should throw everything else to the winds for the sake of belonging to each other” (467). Tellingly, although Tom, Philip, and Stephen all criticize Maggie for different reasons, all three share the belief that for Maggie to deviate from her “nature” (however this nature may be defined) is for Maggie to become a self-mutilator. The central tragedy of The Mill, then, is ultimately not that Maggie must alter herself, but that every “natural,” submissive role she adopts—every haircut she tries out, so to speak—is denounced as self-abusive. The very first description Eliot provides of her heroine remains true throughout the novel: Maggie is simply a “small mistake of nature”—a smart, ambitious woman whose identity is itself an error and a mutilation (16).

II: Historicizing Repressions and Rebellions

As readers of Victorian literature, then, we may, like Tom, still find ourselves asking why Maggie cuts off her hair. Yet, unlike Tom, Philip, and Stephen, we must avoid interpretive methods that too quickly place Maggie in front of a mirror and condemn her for her self-mutilation. Eliot cautions that “moral judgments must remain false and hollow, unless they are checked and enlightened by a perpetual reference to the special circumstances that mark the individual lot” (517). In essence, Eliot’s words here express what has long been acknowledged as an important feminist practice: careful historicizing. In her now canonical feminist essay “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses” Chandra Mohanty argues that reductive comparisons between Western and so-called “Third-World” women results in a type of discursive colonization that constructs Third World women as a monolithic, ahistorical category of passive, agentless objects. Instead, Mohanty proposes a model of feminist discourse that conceives of women’s group status in terms of specific shared historical struggles and political resistance rather than shared experiences of apriori, top-down oppression. Mohanty’s theory
helps elucidate the limitations of traditional ways of interpreting women’s self-violence—not only in non-Western contexts, but in the literature of our own, Western past. When contemporary feminists look back to the nineteenth century, Victorian women appear as foreign, if pitiable, iterations of our own contemporary feminist values and agendas rather than as historical and cultural subjects embedded in their own circumstances and motivated by their own needs and desires.

Lucy Snowe, the emotionally and sexually repressed protagonist of Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette* provides a particularly helpful figure to think through the historical specificity of women’s self-destructive behavior in nineteenth-century literature. As Sally Shuttleworth points out in *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology*, Lucy’s repression is less the internalization of self-loathing than a response to the misogynistic Victorian belief that women were the physiological inferiors of men, unable to contain their passions. In the nineteenth century, Shuttleworth explains, “the distinction between sanity and insanity rest[ed] entirely on the individual’s ability to maintain surface control and to direct psychic energy into defined social channels” (36). “The internal contradictions within Victorian formulations of femininity,” Shuttleworth points out, then, posited that women were incapable of ruling their passions, yet condemned women as institutionally insane when they failed to maintain their decorum (70). In such a culture, Shuttleworth concludes, “women are rendered doubly abject, their own persecutors and destroyers” (Shuttleworth 179).

Lucy’s autobiography in *Villette* reflects the double bind that Shuttleworth observes. Throughout the novel, Lucy articulates her narrative “I” only within the disclaimer that she is neither an imaginative nor excessive autobiographer. The first instance when Lucy names herself, for example, she asserts, “I, Lucy Snowe, plead guiltless of that curse, an overheated and
discursive imagination,” immediately distancing her subjectivity from a womanly imagination

(9). Claims like these persist throughout the novel:

I, Lucy Snowe, was calm. (19)

Of an artistic temperament, I deny that I am. (55)

My mind, calmer and stronger now than last night, made for itself some imperious rules, prohibiting under deadly penalties all weak retrospect of happiness past. (221)

I expressed myself composed. (237)

In these passages, Lucy authorizes her subjectivity by insisting that she is not “nervous,” “mad,” “artistic,” decomposed, weak, or agitated. Yet Lucy’s repeated, hyperbolic assertions of sanity do not disguise the fact that she is an agitated, passionate, artistic, and, at times, even mad female heroine. Her calm self-characterization throughout her text is ultimately less the expression of natural, feminine self-abuse than it is the means by which she constructs a narrative that is simultaneously credible yet expressive of women’s suffering.

In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler observes that, “signification is not a choice, for the ‘I’ that might enter is always already inside: there is no possibility of agency or reality outside of the discursive practices that give those terms the intelligibility that they have.” As Butler famously posits, then, “The task is not whether to repeat, but how to repeat or, indeed, to repeat and, through a radical proliferation of gender, to displace the very gender norms that enable the repetition itself” (148; original emphasis). (37). Lucy’s “I,” according to Butler’s theory, cannot exist outside the discursive realm that gives her “I” legibility and authority as a Victorian woman. Yet how this self-restrained autobiography is told reveals the illicit pleasures Lucy takes in her own repression.
In *Repression in Victorian Fiction*, John Kucich has similarly argued that repression can be properly interpreted in Victorian literature only when the “simplistic” opposition between “society and repression on the one side, and creative, passionate individuals on the other” is undone and texts are read for their underlying libidinal features (7; 17). Yet, as Rita Felski has recently pointed out in “Redescrptions of Female Masochism,” male masochism has a long history of being interpreted as “artful choice,” commenting on any number of institutional, political, social, and cultural circumstances whereas women’s self-abuse is less likely to be understood as such (128, 136). To take but one example of this double standard: Franz Kafka’s short story “The Judgment,” is a text made famous because, not in spite, of its representation of a young man’s submission to his father and eventual decision to commit suicide simply because he is commanded to do so. Perhaps because it is a modernist text written by a man, few would suggest that Kafka’s short story merely reflects the innate if regrettable self-loathing of the male sex. Yet this is often how Victorian novels like *Villette* are interpreted—as conservative, uncomplicated autobiographical musings of repressed proto-feminist authors.

**III: Communities of Self-Help and Self-Abuse**

In large part, I suggest that what often prevents women’s self-violence from being understood as “artful choice” or indicative of performative, libidinal energies is the way feminists traditionally theorize the effects an individual woman’s actions have on other women. After all, if feminism can be understood as the project of helping women and fostering solidarity amongst women, it is not surprising that the place of the individual self-abuser becomes troubling. When women hurt themselves, we might be inclined to ask, are they not also hurting other women? At first glance, characters like Maggie Tulliver and Lucy Snowe appear to
represent women who have given in, internalized their violence, and opted for strategies of individual survival over more radical methods of collective feminist mobilization.

The self-violence of Brontëan heroines, in particular, is subject to this type of reading. In *Villette*, Lucy Snowe describes one night when she awakens to a thunderstorm. "I could not go in," she writes, "too resistless was the delight of staying with the wild hour, black and full of thunder, pealing out such an ode as language never delivered to man—too terribly glorious, the spectacle of clouds, split and pierced by white and blinding bolts" (102). Yearning to be near the storm, Lucy describes crawling out of her bed and sitting on a ledge outside her window. "It was wet, it was wild, it was pitch dark," she writes, with clear, erotic excitement. Yet Lucy does not dwell on the "wild" thrills of this scene. Instead, she describes with equal relish, how she quells her desire to witness the storm, likening her repression to the biblical story of Jael and Sisera: "This longing, and all of a similar kind, it was necessary to knock on the head, which I did, figuratively, in the manner of Jael to Sisera, driving a nail through their temples" (103).

Strangely, Lucy's excitement does not fade when she describes this act of figurative self-abuse. If anything, she is just as excited by imagining Jael's murder of Sisera as she is by the storm itself.

In his Marxist analysis of the Brontës, Eagleton claims that the sisters' novels create "myths of power" whereby a heroine's internalized conflict, which Eagleton identifies as "sadomasochistic," provides an "illusory resolution of real contradictions" (a.k.a. class conflicts) (75, 97; my emphasis). Writing about *Villette*, Eagleton claims that the novel's "avoidance of confrontation ... is in keeping with its general swaddling of social conflict" (95). Beverly Forsyth's psychoanalytic reading of the novel likewise defines Lucy as "a sadomasochistic personality with strong tendencies toward voyeurism and exhibitionism" (18). In contrast to
Eagleton's Marxist view of sadomasochism (which leads him to sidestep gender altogether), Forsyth claims that "these deviant tendencies give the modern reader a peek into the darker nature of female Gothic... Lucy identifies with both Jael, the slayer, and Sisera, the slain... by repressing herself, she receives pleasure from inflicting as well as receiving mental anguish" (17-18). As Forsyth suggests, Lucy's fantasies of repression allow her to inhabit subject positions on both sides of her pain.

Many feminists, however, have still objected to the presence of sadomasochism in Brontë's novels on the grounds that such "self-watching" is itself complicit in female victimization. In *Jane Eyre*, for instance, Bette London claims that "the female look which seems to structure so much of Jane's narrative... becomes the ultimate mark of her 'to-be-looked-at-ness'" (205), a "spectatorship," in London's view, that "merely reinforces the classic positions of femininity" (204). London's critique highlights, once again, the insufficiency of the categories of self-help and self-abuse to analyze the specificities of women's self-violence in the nineteenth-century novel. More importantly, however, interpretations like London's also reveal that one of the major reasons self-abuse causes discomfort for feminist readers is that self-destructive behavior is assumed to be individualist, ego-centric, and perhaps even necessarily selfish. Yet it is worth wondering why individual self-abuse is assumed to merely "reinforce" traditional, disempowered positions of femininity in the way London claims. After all, as I have tried to suggest here, if there is reason to assume that when a woman hurts herself she may also be helping herself, it stands to reason that when a woman hurts herself she is not necessarily hurting (or only hurting) other women either.

Of all of Charlotte Brontë's novels, *Jane Eyre* is a particularly useful novel to examine the relationship between a woman's individual self-help and self-abuse and other women
because this canonical feminist novel is just as often lauded for its vision of female upward mobility as it is condemned. Gayatri Spivak has argued, for instance, that any reading of nineteenth-century British literature must take the British Imperial project into account (243). Spivak sees *Jane Eyre* as a “cult text of feminism,” arguing that “what is at stake, for feminist individualism in the age of imperialism, is precisely the making of human beings, the constitution and ‘interpellation’ of the subject not only as individual, but as ‘individualist’” (244). Spivak argues that Jane is originally an outsider to the nuclear family, and, by the terms of conservative patriarchy, should be barred from marriage with Rochester. Jane is able to supplant Bertha, the legal wife, only because “nineteenth-century feminist individualism could conceive of a ‘greater’ project than access to the closed circle of sexual reproduction,” an imperialist project Spivak calls “soul-making” (248) “Through Bertha Mason,” Spivak writes, “the white Jamaican Creole, Brontë renders the human/animal frontier as acceptably indeterminate, so that a good greater than the letter of the Law can be broached” (247).

The difficult question raised by post-colonial critiques of *Jane Eyre* like Spivak’s is whether Jane’s success must come at the expense of Bertha Mason, a question Spivak and many others have persuasively answered in the affirmative. In *Upward Mobility and the Common Good*, however, Bruce Robbins has recently examined the relationship between individual upward mobility and the formation of the welfare state. “Much has been written about why dominant ideologies of our time might arrange to have people diverted and deluded by [upward mobility stories],” he writes, but “One cannot help asking: do these unrepresentative narratives have any other use than delusion and diversion?” (58). Robbins acknowledges that it is generally a fantasy that an individual rises from poverty to success and then adopts the role of benefactor to those left behind. Yet he does suggest “the possibility that upward mobility stories may not
after all be built on the absolute necessity of betraying and sacrificing some Bertha Mason or some representative of Third World indigeneity” (239). In his analysis of the relationship between the novel and the common good, Robbins understands the welfare state “as a set of imperfect institutions, produced in part by management from above and in part by pressure from below,” at the same time acknowledging that “the welfare state is not the sort of ideal that deserves to dictate all of one’s political commitments and aspirations” (9). Robbins suggests that, although, for Spivak “upward mobility is a betrayal,” the model of power she proposes (child-bearing vs. soul-making) ultimately renders “upward mobility possible as something other than a simple and unambiguous betrayal” (64; original emphasis). Robbins’ examination of the upward mobility novel ultimately suggests that “it is theoretically possible...to reconcile the desire for individual success and achievement with sympathy for and from others, with an achievement that somehow touches their welfare as well as one’s own” (34).

It may also be possible, as I have been arguing here, that for feminist readers, the poetics of female self-destructive self-making provides a better model for thinking through the possibilities and struggles of feminist solidarity than does the simple concept of individual self-help (and by extension individual self-destruction). For, in this sense, it is clear that if Jane Eyre is a novel about upward mobility and individualist self-help, it is also a novel about the complexities of self-repression and the community that is formed not when individuals triumph but when masses suffer. Indeed, one of Jane Eyre’s famous moments of introspection (of “self-watching”) results not just in her own self-awareness, but in her awareness of other consciousnesses as well. Looking out into the horizon on top of Thornfield Hall, Jane realizes “millions are condemned to a stiller doom than mine, and millions are silent in revolt against their lot. Nobody knows how many rebellions besides political rebellions ferment in the masses
of life which people earth" (129). Here, Brontë suggests Jane's awareness of her own pain leads to her recognition of other selves—an epiphany Brontë both likens to and distinguishes from other, more conventional types of political mobilization.

A similar moment arises in _Tess of the d'Urbervilles_ when Tess suddenly comes across a field of dead and dying pheasants that a group of hunters has left behind:

The birds had been driven down into this corner the day before by some shooting-party; and while those that had dropped dead under the shot, or had died before nightfall, had been searched for and carried off, many badly wounded birds had escaped and hidden themselves away, or risen among the thick boughs, where they had maintained their position till they grew weaker with loss of blood in the night-time, when they had fallen one by one as she had heard them.

She had occasionally caught glimpses of these men in girlhood, looking over hedges, or peeping through bushes, and pointing their guns, strangely accoutered a bloodthirsty light in their eyes...

... With the impulse of a soul who could feel for kindred sufferers as much as for herself, Tess's first thought was to put the still living birds out of their torture, and to this end with her own hands she broke the necks of as many as she could find...

"Poor darlings—to suppose myself the most miserable being on earth in the sight o' such misery as yours!" she exclaimed, her tears running down as she killed the birds tenderly. (279)

Tess's encounter with these wounded birds marks a turning point in the novel. Faced with the suffering of other creatures, Tess suddenly understands the relation between her own pain and the "bloodthirsty" men who are responsible for such acts of violence. Significantly, the "tender" murders she performs in the forest leads directly to her decision in the next chapter to mar her own face in order to disguise her beauty and avoid further unfavorable male attention. But lest we assume this passage encourages Tess _only_ to accept and internalize her abuse, it is also the first instance in the novel when we become aware of Tess's capacity for resistance. Her
willingness to kill foreshadows not just her later self-violence but also her decision by the end of the novel to murder her rapist Alec d’Ubervilles.

If it seems overly hopeful to hang the subversive potential of Victorian novels on moments like these, it is worth comparing Jane and Tess’s epiphanies in these passages to the discrete nature of women’s community that persists today. Women, after all, as Simone de Beauvoir writes in The Second Sex, “have no past, no history, no religion of their own; and they have no such solidarity of work and interest as that of the proletariat ... they live dispersed among the males, attached through residence, housework, economic condition, and social standing to certain men—fathers or husbands—more firmly than they are to other women” (19). De Beauvoir points out that the unique nature of women’s community defies traditional Marxist conceptions of political organization and revolution. In this era of postmodern, contemporary feminisms, de Beauvoir’s description of a global community of women still rings true. Given the limitations women face as a coherent political entity, it seems more important than ever not to discount the muted resistance of Victorian heroines because to do so would be to condemn one of the only ways women come to know, think, and feel about one another through time and across the world. In the moments when women stand both within and outside of their pain, they understand themselves not as solitary victims but as members of a resisting community of other women: the “millions” like themselves who are “silent in revolt against their lot.”

In closing, I want briefly to turn to a personal essay written by Jennifer Lutzenberger in the feminist anthology Jane Sexes it Up. In her essay, “Cutting, Craving, and the Self I was Saving,” Lutzenberger tells two intertwined stories: one of domestic abuse at the hand of her boyfriend and one of her own self-abusive cutting. Provocatively, Lutzenberger’s account of her
self-violence during this dark period in her life does not compound her role as a victim of domestic abuse. As Lutzenberger explains:

I’ve always carried shame about sharing the story of my abusive boyfriend with other people…I hear my stupid, average, boring story, and it makes me want to stop speaking, maybe never to speak again. The only part of my story that ever stood out to me as positive, of worth considering, was the perverse part, the cutting. (122-3)

Lutzenberger interrogates her self-mutilation as a means of surviving, contemplating, and eventually ending her abusive relationship with her boyfriend. Cutting allows her to stay “afloat in contradictory demands, roles, and regulations” (115). The story she tells of self-help and self-abuse ultimately affirms these liminal spaces, “where women hang suspended—between knowing and wanting, staying and leaving, complicity, and resistance” (124). The perversity of self-injury becomes “the measure of freedom for women inside various states of coercion; it’s whatever way a woman is able to move back and forth within the limits of one’s current self” (124).

Whether in Western, nineteenth-century literature or in practices of contemporary global feminism, an overlooked poetics of female self-destructive self-making can often be found in the space between the restrictive labels of self-abuse and self-help. When women stand within and outside their pain, I have argued, they are able to understand themselves not as solitary victims but as members of suffering yet still resisting communities of others. Self-violence in such cases come to express not simply women’s oppression and eventual submission to male dominance, but much more profoundly the poetical and provisional means through which women are able to begin imagining and constructing new modes of being, new modes of resisting.
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"For Ne'er Was a Dream So Like a Waking": Time and Uncertainty in *The Winter's Tale*

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Lauren Robertson
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“For Ne’er Was a Dream So Like a Waking”: Time and Uncertainty in The Winter’s Tale

The last scene of The Winter’s Tale is, in its strangeness, familiar: after supposedly having been dead for the past sixteen years, a statue of Hermione, the queen of Sicilia, is presented onstage; moments later, that statue comes to life, revealing that Hermione herself is actually alive. But has she come back to life from the dead, or simply remained alive, and in hiding for her entire sixteen-year absence from the world of the play? As Leonard Barkan puts it in his essay, “Living Sculptures,” “Shakespeare can hardly be said to invoke the latter [possibility] in order to rationalize the former; rather he piles one extreme improbability on top of another” (641). This piling up of extreme improbability is felt by the characters who witness Hermione’s (re)awakening. Regarding Hermione’s status for the past sixteen years, Polixenes demands that Paulina resolve the uncertainty, and “make manifest where she has lived/ Or how stolen from the dead” (V.iii.114-115). Also addressing Paulina, Leontes asserts that “Thou hast found mine [Hermione],/ But how is to be questioned” (V.iii.138-139). Their questions, however, are not answered in this last scene, and the two possible explanations for Hermione’s absence, which both seem to defy reason, cast a shadow of doubt around the joyful reconciliation at the end of the play. Again, as Barkan argues, Shakespeare could have resolved the question, had he wished:

Why could Hermione not have emerged from a conveniently placed convent, like the abbess in The Comedy of Errors; or why could not Paulina have restored Hermione directly, as Prospero restores Alonso and Ferdinand to each other in The Tempest; or why could not Hermione have restored herself, as Rosalind does
in *As You Like It?* Why, in short, run such risks with dramatic verisimilitude?

(641)

For Barkan, the answer to these questions lies in, as he says, "the significance of a statue that comes to life" (641). For my purposes, however, the importance of Shakespeare's risk lies in exactly how it is able to create uncertainty; why is it that a shadow of doubt can be cast over the seemingly simple question of the status of Hermione's existence?

The answer to this question, I want to argue, can lie only in the amount of time that Hermione has been absent from the world of the play; it is the improbable length of her absence that casts doubt not only over her whereabouts, but the status of her entire existence. The idea that Hermione could have been in hiding for the entirety of sixteen years, visited only by Paulina "twice or thrice a day" (V.ii.103), seems so extreme and improbable, that another, seemingly impossible, scenario is presented as a plausible explanation for Hermione's absence—the possibility that she has actually died and come back to life. The question of her absence is not resolved within the context of the play; instead, Hermione's sixteen-year disappearance becomes a gap in her existence, a break in the continuity of her life and being for which there is not a satisfying explanation. How is it possible that the simple passage of time can create such radical doubt?

The most obvious place to seek an answer to this question, is, of course, Act IV, scene i, in which the personified figure of Time appears onstage, to mark the sixteen-year gap in the dramatic narrative of the play. As John Pitcher notes, Time personified was an iconographic, and therefore recognizable, presence in the early modern period, from emblem books, proverbs, and masques (81). And Shakespeare's Time does bear attributes that make him identifiable as the Time of those words and images, most notably a large hourglass, which he turns over to signify
the “wide gap” of time halfway through his speech (IV.i.7). As a result, most criticism on The Winter’s Tale focuses on Shakespeare’s Time as representative of the Time presented in proverbs, emblem books, and, most importantly, Shakespeare’s own sonnets. As Stanton B. Garner argues, “Literally as well as figuratively, Time stands at the center of The Winter’s Tale, giving a strikingly emblematic stage life to a theme that had resonated in Shakespeare’s imagination since the sonnets and earliest plays” (347). In Inga-Stina Ewbanks’ famous essay, Time is figured as the combined figure of Revealer and Destroyer present in Shakespeare’s sonnets. Regarding the final scene of the play, she argues:

As [Leontes] stands there with Hermione and Perdita, many of the sonnets’ resolutions are fused into one dramatic situation. Leontes has defeated time in that his lines of life are stretching into the future [...] Hermione’s return represents another victory over time; she is a living proof that ‘Love’s not Time’s fool, though rosy lips and cheeks Within his bending sickle’s compass come’ (Sonnet cxvi). (153)

But even though Time in The Winter’s Tale does have attributes in common with time in the sonnets, how much are they actually alike? It is important to note, as Jonathan Hart points out, that Time is often figured in the sonnets as “Death...harvesting humanity” or as the proverbial “Devouring Time” (185, 188), a representation of impending mortality. In all of these images in the sonnets, Time appears with his scythe, ready to cut down and destroy youth and, eventually, life. Sonnet 60 perhaps makes this image of Time devouring and harvesting youth and life most clear:

Time doth transfix the flourish set on youth,
And delves the parallels in beauty’s brow;
Feeds on the rarities of nature’s truth,

And nothing stands but for his scythe to mow. (9-12)

Here, Time devours youth, and when nothing is left but old age, Time steps in to mow down what remains with his scythe.

This image of Time as a destroyer or devourer is clearly present in the sonnets, and does have some resonance in *The Winter’s Tale*; Hermione’s wrinkles in Act V, as it is often noted, are a fine example of the “parallels in beauty’s brow” created by time. But I am interested, as well, in how Time in *The Winter’s Tale* does not resemble the Time of Shakespeare’s sonnets. Most notably, Time in *The Winter’s Tale* does not appear onstage (at least from what we can tell from his language) with a scythe, that emblematic accessory of the sonnets. And more evidence comes from Time’s description of his actions that he is not simply a destroyer, or mower:

> Impute it not a crime
>
> To me or my swift passage that I slide
>
> O’er sixteen years, and *leave the growth untried*
>
> Of that wide gap, since it is in my power
>
> To o’erthrow law, and in one self-born hour
>
> To plant and o’erwhelm custom. (IV.i.4-9, emphasis mine)

Nothing about Time’s description of what he does here indicates that he is destructive, and what’s more, he specifically indicates that the growth of sixteen years he will leave untried; unlike the mower of the sonnets, he will not cut down life or years in this play, but will simply leave them untested, unresolved. Time’s work in this play is not the destruction of life, but the performance of a task much more nebulous: the production, or simply the recognition, of a gap in time, the creation of an absence.
How does this enigmatic task compare with Time’s function in the sonnets and emblem literature? The proverbial *tempus edax rerum* ("time eats up all things") does not appear in Time’s self-described duty, nor is the emblematic *veritas temporis filia* ("truth is the daughter of time") present in Time’s explanation of his work. Instead, Time professes that his duty within the world of the play is to both "make[] and unfold error" (IV.i.2). What exactly do these lines mean? The idea that Time performs these two tasks in relation to error is often taken as straightforward in the play: the first half of the play is read as the dramatization of Leontes’ errors as they are created in time, and the second half is the revelation of that error, and the realization of the mistake on the part of the one who made it. To my mind, however, this is only one interpretation of what it means to make and unfold error, and the language of Time’s speech allows for a much more nuanced reading of how the function of both time and error may be understood in *The Winter’s Tale*.

Both of Time’s self-professed duties demand, I think, close inspection; to begin with the first, what exactly does it mean for time to “make error,” within the context of this play? Act I, scene ii, the scene in which Leontes misreads Hermione’s actions and assumes his wife to be having an affair with Polixenes, is where most of the error in the play seems to be made; is it possible, then, to think of these errors as somehow made by time? The answer to this question is not straightforward, because, paradoxically, the creation of Leontes’ error in Act I, scene ii seems to take no time at all. About one third of the way through the scene, a stage direction indicates that Hermione “gives her hand to Polixenes” (I.ii.109), after having Wittily (or flirtatiously) convinced him not to leave for Bohemia, his home, but to stay longer in Sicilia. And it is this action, apparently, that makes Leontes suspect they are having an affair:

Too hot, too hot!
To mingle friendship far is mingling bloods.

I have tremor cordis on me. (I.ii.108-110)

Leontes witnesses Polixenes and his wife take hands, and instantly, he feels the trembling of jealousy, and doubt, in his heart. How is Leontes' doubt, his error in judgment about his wife's fidelity, created so quickly? It is by now a familiar argument about The Winter's Tale that Shakespeare does not provide a satisfying motive for Leontes' jealousy; unlike the play's tragic counterpart, Othello, The Winter's Tale is not about the slow build-up of jealousy founded on errors in perception and judgment. Rather, the error is created almost in an instant, and the rest of the play is concerned with the consequences, and resolution, of that error. Indeed, as Theresa Krier argues, this play is one half tragedy and one half comedy put together: "The Winter's Tale does give us a complete and highly compressed tragedy, with deaths and a sea of blood; and a compressed comedy, the action of grace" (343). But is it enough to say that time, as it contributes to the making of Leontes' error in Act I, scene ii, is simply compressed? I want to argue that something even more extreme has happened to the continuity of time here: that Leontes' error represents a gap, or a break in time, because when, as an audience, we witness his change from trust to doubt at this moment in the play, the alteration seems to take no time whatsoever. And this break in time as the demonstration of the birth of Leontes' error must be taken into account in terms of what it means for time, and Time, to "make error" at all.

The consequences of one's existence in time are sharply highlighted from the very beginning of this play, through the idyllic, pastoral relationship Polixenes and Leontes understood themselves to have as children. Explaining the nature of their relationship to Hermione, Polixenes says:

We were, fair queen,
Two lads that thought there was no more behind
But such a day tomorrow as today,
And to be a boy eternal. (I.ii.62-65)

The idea that the boyhood relationship between Leontes and Polixenes lay outside time is clear here; it is the entry into heterosexual sex, however, that necessitates an entry into a world of time, and as consequences, especially for Leontes, uncertainty in marriage and children, and mortality. This understanding of time, it should be acknowledged, is perhaps not too different than the way time is figured in the sonnets, as the destroyer of otherwise eternal youth. But Hermione’s response to Polixenes at this point in the play casts this entry into time in a new light. Responding to Polixenes’ claim that, had he and Leontes pursued a relationship with only each other, they could have entered heaven innocently, Hermione says, “By this we gather/ You have tripped since” (I.ii.75-76). From the context Polixenes’ speech, it is clear that the obvious meaning of “tripped” here is “fall”: the men, after all, have fallen from the world of pure and innocent pastoral into the corrupt world of time, heterosexuality, and mortality. But why the word “trip,” specifically, instead of “fall”? Why not use the word with the most explicit biblical connotation? The word “trip,” to my mind, has more to say about the complex relationship between the continuity of one’s existence, and the necessary unfolding of that existence in time: in the context of walking, a trip implies a break in the walk, or more specifically, a discontinuity in the continuous action of walking, but not an end or halt to the action. Hermione seems to be alluding to the idealistic, and unreal, idea of innocent, eternal childhood in her use of the word “trip”; Polixines and Leontes have, of course, always existed in a world of time, and in this sense, she understands their error of heterosexual sex as a break in the continuity of time, rather than a first entry into it.
This redefinition of Leontes' and Polixenes' fall into time, as a result, complicates the distinction between the world of the presexual pastoral and the world of mortal heterosexuality. There may be no error in the imagined world of timelessness, but errors, or falls, in the world of time are figured as trips: breaks in action that seem to disrupt that continuity of time. And that, I want to argue, is exactly how Shakespeare figures Leontes' fall, or trip, into error regarding Hermione's fidelity in Act I, scene ii of the play. The moment when he acknowledges his doubt about Hermione feels abrupt, out of context, and without motive because it is a break in what has, up to that point, been continuous action in the play; Leontes' doubt is a break in the continuity of his existence, a gap in time. And this gap, Shakespeare seems to be arguing, is a necessary consequence of living in a world of time. Leontes, and Polixenes' ideal pastoral world is only imagined; their entry into time is not figured as the fall from one eternal world into a distinctly mortal one. Instead, Shakespeare demonstrates that what Leontes and Polixenes fear is the entry into time is actually the acknowledgement of error, and in the case of Leontes in Act I, scene ii, jealousy and doubt. Arguing about time as it is experienced by Leontes from a humoral perspective, David Houston Wood claims:

The frantic passion of jealousy is perhaps best illustrated as a specific form of temporally lived experience, as a psychosomatic humoral state characterized by a subjective form of temporality [...] The frantic formulation of the temporal in which concern with knowing or establishing truth causes time itself to move at a frenetic subjective pace from the speaker's point of view, is the temporal hallmark of the jealous in Shakespeare." (128, emphasis his)

When Leontes acknowledges his doubt about Hermione, the speed of time increases dangerously (and not, I would argue, just from Leontes' subjective perspective, but the audience's as well;
certainly we feel time picking up speed not only here, but in plays like *Othello* and especially *Romeo and Juliet*. It is important, however, that this increase in the speed of time is not experienced as happening gradually, or even continuously. Leontes’ error is dramatized as happening instantly, as break in continuity, and what’s more, as a necessary consequence of living in a world of time.

One might easily argue, however, that the engendering of Leontes’ doubt about his wife is not sudden or discontinuous at all, but rather, that it has been brewing long before the play even began—nine months before, to be exact. Act I, scene ii begins with Polixenes’ announcement regarding the length of his stay in Sicilia:

Nine changes of the watery star hath been

The shepherd’s note since we have left our throne

Without a burden. (1-3)

Standing near him onstage is Hermione, who is, conspicuously, nine months pregnant. (I will return to this idea later, but for now, it is important to note here that her presence onstage indicates that she is literally, as it were, full of life.) As audience members, are we supposed to make the (incorrect) connection that Hermione’s appearance and the length of Polixenes’ stay are causally linked? The language and staging at the beginning of this scene seems designed to mimic Leontes’ own perception about the connection between Polixenes’ visit and Hermione’s pregnancy, and as a result, to make us, and not only Leontes, doubt Hermione’s fidelity, wrong as the suspicion turns out to be. The deliberate connection made between Hermione’s visual appearance and Polixenes’ words, then, makes plausible the idea that Leontes could have begun to doubt his wife before the play itself even began. But even if this is the case, it highlights only more strongly the break in time Leontes causes when he acknowledges his doubt about
Hermione. Polinexes’ marking out of time in language, and Hermione’s pregnant belly, a visual
reminder that she is nine months pregnant, create the impression at the opening of Act I, scene ii
that time in this play is continuous and can be accounted for, even if we, as an audience, have not
been privy to the events of the previous nine months. Like the idealized world of Polixenes’ and
Leontes’ childhood, the opening of this scene creates the impression that the continuity of time,
and one’s existence, cannot be broken, or punctured with gaps. Of course, all of the characters in
*The Winter’s Tale* are subject to these gaps in time, especially the sixteen-year gap which is left
untried within the world of the play. But the effect of these discontinuities, these breaks in time,
are dramatized most clearly in Hermione as the action of the play goes on; when Leontes
registers his jealousy and doubt regarding her, a break in her existence is opened up: the effects
of which prove to be just as unknowable as the sixteen-year gap that marks the two halves of the
play.

Even before she apparently dies in the play, Hermione herself seems to recognize the
break in her existence caused by Leontes. During her trial in Act III, scene ii, she and Leontes
exchange words regarding his control over her:

**HERMIONE.** You speak a language that I understand not.

My life stands in the level of your dreams,

Which I’ll lay down.

**LEONTES.** Your actions are my dreams.

You had a bastard by Polixenes,

And I but dreamed it. (78-82)

Hermione acknowledges in this exchange that Leontes holds her fate in his hands, but does so
not by highlighting his social, political, or gendered power over her, for example, but by rather
making a claim about the reality of her entire existence as contingent on his thoughts. If the reality of Leontes’ existence is, at this moment of the play, an epistemologically verifiable reality, Hermione’s is a dream. Leontes acknowledges her claim, speaking of the birth of her child as an event he has narrated; at this moment in the play, he is writing her existence, rather than allowing the events of time to unfold onstage. It is notable, too, that Hermione focuses on her body as the carrier of her innocence in her response:

My third comfort,

Starred most unluckily, is from my breast,

The innocent milk in it most innocent mouth,

Haled out to murder. (III.ii.96-99)

Hermione figures her innocence as inextricably linked to her child-bearing body, but by this point in the play, her presence as fully alive and embodied has been erased, transformed into the product of Leontes’ dream.

It is because of Leontes’ doubt about Hermione, then, that the state of her existence is reduced to the level of a dream. And his language in Act III states as fact his doubts, and speculation, about Hermione and Polixenes voiced earlier to Camillo, in Act I:

Is whispering nothing?

Is leaning cheek to cheek? Is meeting noses?

Kissing with inside lip? Stopping the career

Of laughter with a sigh? – A note infallible

Of breaking honesty. Horsing foot on foot?

Skulking in corners? Wishing clocks more swift?

Hours, midnights? (I.ii.282-288)
The beginning of this speech mirrors Leontes’ narration of the staged action between Hermione and Polixenes earlier in Act I, scene ii; his language is a description of his perception, jealously subjective though it certainly is. As the speech goes on, however, Leontes’ assessment of Hermione and Polixenes extends beyond a narration of what he has seen occur between them with his own eyes, when speculates that they must be “Wishing clocks more swift?/ Hours, midnights?” These last two lines are speculation about the thoughts of Hermione and Polixenes in the present moment, but by Act III, Leontes narrates Hermione’s actions in the past tense, as completed facts; her life has become the product of his dreams.

James A. Knapp discusses the connection between Leontes’ dreams and reality in relation to Hermione as part of his reading of Leontes’ opaque assertion in Act I, scene ii, that “[Affection] dost make possible things not so held,/ Communicat’st with dreams…With what’s unreal” (139-141). His argument is worth quoting at length:

[Leontes] is aware of the contradiction between his image of Hermione as adulteress and the accepted truth: the image makes possible “things not so held.” This awareness leads him to the conclusion that, in the image, reality and imagination merge as if the real “Communicat’st with Dreams…With what’s unreall.” Ward notes that the sense of “Communicat’st” here is likely that associated with the Eucharist, as in the act of “communicating” with the body of Christ. Taken in this way, Leontes’ affection goes beyond the power of persuasion to something like transformation: his imagination engenders his reality.” (268)

Even outside a religious context, it is clear that by Act III, Leontes’ imagination, or dreams, have the power to engender not only his own reality, as Knapp argues, but Hermione’s. At this point
in the play, Hermione’s dramatic unfolding in time is entirely dependent on the mind of Leontes, condemned, as she says, by “proofs sleeping,” that Leontes’ “jealousies awake” (III.iii.110, 111).

This is not, however, the only moment in the play when Hermione’s existence seems to have the status of a dream. In Act III, scene iii, while Antigonus carries the infant Perdita to be abandoned on the shores of Bohemia, he relates a story about a strange sight that appeared to him the night before. He begins by highlighting that he is uncertain about what he saw:

I have heard, but not believed, the spirits o’th’dead
May walk again. If such a thing be, thy mother
Appeared to me last night, for ne’er was a dream
So like a waking. (15-18)

After describing that the ghost, or dream, of Hermione ordered him to “leave [Perdita] crying” (31) in Bohemia, Antigonus gives his interpretation of the occurrence:

I did in time collect myself, and thought
This was so and no slumber. Dreams are toys,
Yet for this once, yea superstitiously,
I will be squared by this. (38-40)

Antigonus indicates that he will follow the orders he has been given; but what, exactly, has he seen? Was he dreaming, or did the ghost of Hermione present itself to him the night before? Even after telling his story, Antigonus seems uncertain about Hermione’s status as the product of the supernatural, or a dream, even though is certain he must follow the orders given to him. And it is perhaps important to note that Hermione’s order to leave the infant is essentially a restatement of Leontes’ order to take the infant “To some remote and desert place, quite out/ Of our dominions; and that there thou leave it” (II.iii.174-175). Hermione’s appearance, whether
real or false, does not affect the dramatic action of the play; why is it important, then, that the command be reiterated, that it be uttered again, this time from the other world of dreaming?

It is significant that this moment of disconcerting uncertainty on the part of Antigonus comes at one of the most emotionally, and morally, fraught moments of the play. Hermione, after having been proclaimed innocent by the oracle, has died, along with her son Mamillius; at this point in the play, the abandonment of Perdita by Leontes seems excessively cruel and tragic. But the moment is not figured as one of moral uncertainty—Antigonus seems sure about what he should do—but rather, epistemological uncertainty: Antigonus is not certain about what the Hermione he has seen actually is. In this sense, the dramatic action of the play has been translated from a moral realm to an epistemological one; and the translation has consequences not only for Hermione, but for Antigonus, as well. Antigonus’ uncertainty about the nature of what he saw is reflected as uncertainty about himself; was he awake or asleep when he saw Hermione, and why can’t he be sure of either possibility? He acknowledges that “ne’er was a dream/ So like a waking,” but he cannot give a final pronouncement on what he saw because he cannot be sure he was awake or asleep when he saw it. As Kathleen McLuskie notes, references to dreams occur often in early modern drama; in her argument, it is significant that “one of the clearest features of all these references is that dreams are thought of as alternative realities which parallel the reality of waking existence, particularly when that waking existence seems hard to understand” (149). What is hard to understand at the outset of this scene, Antigonus’ moral dilemma, is transformed into an epistemological dilemma about the state, and continuity, of his waking reality.

Antigonus’ experience at this point in the play, though it recalls other Shakespearean references to dreaming (Christopher Sly in Taming of the Shrew, Bottom in A Midsummer
Night's Dream, and Antipholus of Syracuse in The Comedy of Errors, to name a few examples) lacks the comic quality of those instances. Instead, it heightens the moral uncertainty of the moment by translating into radical epistemological doubt. In this sense, Antigonus' questioning of his existence as real or the product of a dream resembles more clearly the skeptical questions posed by Descartes in his First Meditation:

Am I not a man who is used to sleeping at night and having all the same experiences while asleep or, sometimes, even more improbable experiences than insane people have while awake? How often does the nocturnal quietness convince me of familiar things, for example, that I am here, dressed in my gown, sitting by the fire, when I am really undressed and in my bed? [...] When I think about this more carefully, I see so clearly that I can never distinguish, by reliable signs, being awake from being asleep, that I am confused and this feeling of confusion almost confirms me in believing that I am asleep. (19)

Descartes' Meditations were written thirty years after The Winter's Tale, but I bring up his writing here because it is a powerful example of what the lived experience of doubt feels like in time, with each passing moment. It is a written description of exactly the kind of doubt dramatized in time, in Antigonus, at this moment of the play. The discontinuity of Hermione's existence, her status as a dream in the mind of Leontes and possibly Antigonus, causes Antigonus to question his own ontological status, just as Descartes does in the Meditations. For Descartes, the inability to discern whether he is awake or asleep sets him down a road of powerful doubt, which causes him eventually to question even his own existence. Set in relation to Antigonus' doubt at this moment in the play, it becomes clear how the uncertain status of
Hermione’s existence in time engenders radical doubt in the other characters in *The Winter’s Tale*.

Up to this point, I have suggested that the making of error is not so much a function of Time, but rather, a necessary condition of time, and that, within the context of *The Winter’s Tale*, those errors in time appear as discontinuities, breaks, or gaps in one’s existence. To explore the consequences of these breaks and gaps, it is fitting to return to Time’s speech in Act IV. What does it mean for Time to “unfold error,” after he has made it? Again, it is possible to read this part of Time’s self-professed duty traditionally, to mean that Time straightens out errors, makes them clear, or in a moral sense, rights the wrongs or errors of the first half of the play; and the tragicomic ending of *The Winter’s Tale* makes such a reading entirely plausible. But I want to entertain a different reading, perhaps even a deliberate misreading of the word “unfold” in this speech. If the word is taken to mean reveal, or open up, even extend or increase, with regard to the error of the first half of the play, what Time has done at the end of *The Winter’s Tale* is to display that error, increase it in magnitude, even present it visually onstage, but no where does Time profess his duty to be to give us a solution to that error. In this sense, the sixteen-year gap of time at the play’s center may be thought of as the very unfolding of the play’s earlier errors: an increase in magnitude of the discontinuities in time evidenced in Leontes’ doubt about Hermione, and Hermione’s own breaks and gaps in existence, which result in her uncertain status as a living being or a dream.

What happens, then, to these gaps in time, even after Hermione returns to the world of the play, alive? In other words, can they be filled up? In some sense, it is Paulina who takes it upon herself to do just that, by filling up that gap of time with memory, and as a result, erasing doubt, most notably in the mind of Leontes. Of her, Anita Gilman Sherman argues, “Paulina is a
confident knower—passionate, headstrong, and full of conviction, never shown internally debating or pondering a choice. Her grasp on the truth of past events defeats the doubts of Leontes” (72). But what, exactly, is it that Paulina remembers? The doubts of Leontes she defeats, when she says in Act 5, Scene 1, “To make a perfect woman, she you killed/ Would be unparalleled” (14-15), are doubts about his role in the death of his wife, and her moral perfection and purity. In other words, the doubts resolved in this play are ethical, or moral, but not epistemological. And after the translation of moral doubt into epistemological, as evidenced by Antigonus’ dream in Act III, Paulina’s resolution of doubt does not feel altogether complete, even after Hermione is shown to be alive. The question that seems as though it should be easiest to answer—whether Hermione has been alive or dead for the past sixteen years—or rather, the question that seems as though it should not be a question at all, is made the center of doubt at the end of the play, because the gaps in Hermione’s existence in time must remain unknown.

In light of all of this, I offer the following reading of the last scene of the play, specifically of Hermione’s presentation as a statue. What does it mean for her to come back after sixteen years of absence, especially since that span of time remains untried? In some sense, the presentation of Hermione as a statue is reminiscent of her fully alive presence onstage at the beginning of the play, but now, her presence includes the gaps and discontinuities that are the necessary consequence of living in time. She is, of course, able to be seen by everyone onstage, as well as everyone in the audience, when Paulina draws the curtain to reveal the statue, yet it is significant that Leontes finds it necessary to describe what the statue looks like from his own perception, at several distinct occasions. His first reaction to the statue is one of surprise and disbelief, at its likeness to his wife:

Her natural posture.
Chide me, dear stone, that I may say indeed

Thou art Hermione. (V.iii.23-25)

In this same speech, he makes his famous remark about the statue’s wrinkles: “Hermione was not so much wrinkled, nothing/ So aged as this seems” (V.iii.28-29). In response to Paulina’s claim that the carver has made the statue of Hermione “as she lived now,” Leontes responds, “As she might have done” (V.iii.32). Leontes further describes the statue when he asks, “Would you not deem it breathed, and that those veins/ Did verily bear blood?” (V.iii.64-65), and finally, when he asserts, “The figure of her eye has motion in’t./ As we are mocked with art” (67-68). All of these questions and statements create an impression in language of the extremely lifelike appearance of the statue: the natural posture, the wrinkles, the veins, the motion of the eye. But it is important, too, that Leontes frames all of his descriptions in the form of questions or statements of seeming; he never makes a completely assertive judgment about what the statue actually looks like, or does. All of his descriptions make clear that he cannot be sure whether the statue is alive or not, and the uncertainty in his language has the effect of creating a kind of fragmentary *ekphrasis* of the statue; Leontes points to a written, or in case of performance, spoken, description of the visual statue, and in some places, the description is amazingly detailed—his highlighting of the wrinkles and veins, for examples, creates an extremely clear picture of what the statue looks like. But it is a description only in parts, and one that ultimately cannot be complete, because it is a doubtful, or skeptical one. The written description of the statue of Hermione in the words of Leontes is fragmentary in its uncertainty, and I think, as an audience, we must take this account when we look at the statue ourselves. If, like in Act I, scene ii, the language of the play asks us to view Hermione through the perspective of Leontes, his
description of her statue asks us to do the same thing at the end of the play. Hermione's statue is present visually on the stage, but her presence is fragmentary.

Barkan, in his book on the rediscovery of antique sculpture in the Renaissance, defines the fragment as that which "has been robbed of its completeness by time" (119). The broken, fragmentary statues that became objects of fascination in the Renaissance—the Lacoön or the Apollo Belvedere, to name two famous examples—are revered, precisely because they are not complete; even works that are complete in their parts, he argues, "become fragments if they brandish an identity without fully revealing it" (124). Barkan's argument points to the necessary fragmentation of Hermione by time, even after she is re-presented to the world of the play as alive. Hermione says very little after she is revealed to be alive, and notably, nothing to Leontes. The only indication she gives of where she has been for the past sixteen years is to tell Perdita that she has "preserved" herself, but it is unclear what that word means in this context; Hermione certainly does not clearly answer the question of whether or not she has died or remained alive while absent from the world of the play. Her reticence at the end of the play contributes to an identity that is not, and cannot be fully revealed, even though it has been presented, brandished, on the stage in the form of a statue. In this sense, the last scene of the play is the visual presentation, and analysis, of the fragmentation of one's existence by time, as a necessary condition of living in time. Hermione's continuity has been fractured as a result of living in time, and when she returns to the world of the play, she must come back as a fragment.

Taking into account Hermione's necessary fragmentation as the result of time, perhaps it is more apt to compare her to a sonnet sequence rather than a single sonnet, as a more traditional reading of time's role in the dramatic narrative would suggest. Hart makes the point that Shakespeare's sonnet sequence is by nature fragmentary, "for [the sonnets] are discontinuous in
a way that plays are not,” although it is my point that the sonnet sequence and this play, in
particular, are more alike than we might think. He goes on to argue of the sonnet sequence:

The narrative is not straightforward: the telos vanishes and the story is not a
simple series with named characters who develop in linear fashion. This tension
plays out in the language of this great sonnet sequence as the words seek to move
beyond the limits of love, lust, and death but reinscribe boundaries. (179).

The final scene of *The Winter’s Tale* points to the tension of an existence in time that is
necessarily marked by gaps, breaks, and discontinuities. By the end of the play, Hermione is
perceptually, and therefore epistemologically fragmentary; her presentation as a statue is the
visual reminder that the gaps in one’s existence that are the result of time must remain
unknowable, even as one can imagine them being filled.
Works Cited


The Intersectional Politics of “The Beach of Falesa”

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The Intersectional Politics of “The Beach of Falesá”

In “The Beach of Falesá,” Robert Louis Stevenson uses the first person narrative of a white, British, working-class trader named Wiltshire to create a realistic portrait of cultural relations at the turn of the nineteenth century. The story opens with Wiltshire recalling his approach to Falesá at a time that was “neither night nor morning” (Stevenson 188). This description establishes a temporal obscurity and blurred division between light and dark that dominate Wiltshire’s narrative. Living in a culture of mixed ethnicities and morals, Stevenson uses Wiltshire to present a “complex reflection of and commentary on late Victorian attitudes towards race, Empire, and sexuality” (Linehan 359), a reflection that concludes with the production of Wiltshire’s biracial children. As they are neither white nor native, Wiltshire tries and struggles to socially categorize his children, particularly his daughters. The complicated social identities found in Stevenson’s novella recall the feminist concept of intersectionality (Hulko; Shields). As intersectionality argues, social identities “mutually constitute, reinforce, and naturalize one another” to “create both oppression and opportunity” (Shields 302), culminating and merging to form what Hulko calls one’s “social location” (48). Through the lenses of intersectionality and the postcolonial studies concept of hybridity, which examines the new cultures and group identities formed as the result of colonial cultural mixing (Shields 305), this paper argues that Wiltshire’s characterizations bestow distinct levels of privilege and oppression based on convergences of racial, ethnic, and gender identities.

In “The Beach of Falesá,” whites hold the highest social privilege, and Stevenson casts both white missionaries and traders in cycles of dynastic power over South Seas natives. Wiltshire arrives at Falesá as the latest successor to the island’s colonial trading post. Kucich notes Ann Stoler’s argument that imperial colonists “constructed their identities… over against
the lands and peoples that they dominated” (Kucich 18). Wiltshire, who admits he is no
“gentleman,” would likely be at the bottom of the social hierarchy in England as a working class
trader (Stevenson 216). However, he gains privilege in the racially and ethnically diverse South
Seas where as a white male, he can assert himself as a successful tradesman and agent of empire.

Despite areas of privilege, Wiltshire feels threatened by missionaries like Mr. Tarleton. He
complains that the missionaries marginalize the white traders in favor of the local people,
explaining, they “can always find civility for a Kanaka, it’s us white men they lord it over”
(Stevenson 217). While Wiltshire may hold authentic feelings of judgment, his marginalizing
and racist tendencies mark him as an unreliable narrator and raise the question that perhaps
missionaries are right to suspect traders. Wiltshire accuses Tarleton of using his missionary
authority for a “meanish kind of revenge,” simply because Tarleton promises the natives that
Wiltshire will “deal fairly” with them (Stevenson 244). Tarleton merely halts Wiltshire from
exploiting his social position, but Wiltshire interprets Tarleton’s act as oppressive. Wiltshire’s
frequently suspect claims correspond with a trope of “[defamiliarizing] standard imperialist
attitudes by objectifying their narrator’s thoughts” common to imperialist fiction (Kucich 17). As
Kucich explains, questionable narrators like Wiltshire create a form of “distancing” that
“[estrange] the narrator’s more conventional assumptions” to “maneuver the reader into a
skepical, questioning role in relation to the narrator” (17).

While Wiltshire’s critique of missionaries reflects his own problematic relationships to
natives, he also offers legitimate condemnation of other white traders. For example, he
dehumanizes the exploitative Captain Randall by casting him as a carcass on which the now
dominant “Case and the negro were parasites” (Stevenson 194). His retrospective descriptions of
Case further reinforce Stevenson’s concerns that white traders hold misplaced privilege. As
Wiltshire remarks, “it was clear [Case] came of a good family and was splendidly educated” (Stevenson 190), contributing to Case’s high esteem. That Case pronounced the native priest’s nickname with “the French quirk,” Wiltshire claims, “was another reason we had for thinking him above the common” (Stevenson 202). Despite Case’s apparent privilege, Wiltshire later declares, “if he’s not in hell today, there’s no such place” (Stevenson 190). Case asserts his dominance to extremes that jeopardize everyone in Falesá to his rule. By including selections of Case’s speech such as, “I don’t know where the impudence of these Kanakas’Il go next; they seem to have lost all idea of respect for whites” (Stevenson 205) and his prejudiced remarks discouraging Wiltshire from meeting with native chiefs (Stevenson 206), Wiltshire highlights Case’s attempts to replicate and use racism to distance Wiltshire.

Throughout Wiltshire’s narrative, he compares natives to children and animals, casting them as uncivilized and in developmental limbo. As Linchan recognizes, Stevenson’s “account of apparent growth into heroism through love for a ‘kanaka’ (native Polynesian) is full of arrogantly bigoted present-tense pronouncements about natives” (360). Despite Wiltshire’s apparent assimilation, his biases persist into the present narrative. While Linehan notes that Stevenson condemns the mistreatment of Polynesian natives in his personal letters, calling them “God’s best – at least God’s sweetest – works” (Stevenson, as cited in Linehan, 362), she also recognizes Stevenson’s own racist tendencies, particularly in his support of recapitulation theory. The nineteenth century theory purported that different racial and ethnic groups follow distinct stages of human development and commonly characterized natives as childlike (Linehan 363). Both Wiltshire and Stevenson’s personal letters exhibit recapitulationist notions. Wiltshire’s generally suspect narration become problematically indeterminate from the author’s own views when Wiltshire claims:
It’s easy to find out what Kanakas think. Just go back to yourself any way round from ten to fifteen years old, and there’s an average Kanaka. There are some pious, just as there are pious boys; and the most of them, like the boys again, are middling honest yet think it rather larks to steal, and they are easy scared and rather like to be so. (Stevenson 232)

Wiltshire reduces natives to male children by focusing on children as emblematic of natives and in his reductive descriptions of adults as childlike. In one of his first descriptions, Wiltshire lowers children to an amalgamation of foreign, masculine bodies and animalistic noises, claiming that they “came trotting after with their shaven heads and their brown bodies, and raising a thin kind of a cheer in our wake, like crowing poultry” (Stevenson 192). He later compares a group of “young men and children” circling his house to “pointer dogs” (Stevenson 198); and when he frightens the boys, he describes how they run away “singing out like pigs” (Stevenson 199). By repeatedly reducing natives to a hybridity of children and animals, and particularly male children, the narrative suggests eternal inferiority for natives with no hopes of growth or reproduction.

Stevenson offers a complicated portrait of native men and children through his own implicit stereotypes and Wiltshire’s extreme racism, but his most complex examination of nineteenth century marginalization occurs through Wiltshire’s relationship to Uma. Wiltshire first sees and objectifies her female form, recalling, “She had been fishing; all she wore was a chemise, and it was wetted through” (Stevenson 192). Despite his growing love for Uma as the story progresses, Wiltshire decides not to discuss his fears of taboo with her, for he claims, “it’s a bad idea to set natives up with any notion of consulting them” (Stevenson 205). This statement not only replicates harmful prejudices native women like Uma faced, it also reveals Wiltshire’s
resistant to change, for he claims it in the present tense. His choice to trust Case instead of Uma allows Case to continue manipulating him. While Uma repeatedly provides Wiltshire with critical advice displaying a nuanced understanding of her circumstances, particularly the threat of Case’s approach in the bush, Wiltshire continues to portray Uma as static and childlike. He attributes only predictable physical change to her, remarking, “she’s turned a powerful big woman now... but that’s natural in Kanakas, too” (Stevenson 245). Wiltshire also seems to blame his own stasis on Uma: after he apologizes to her for yelling, he describes how they “cooked each a dish, helping and hindering each other, and making a play of it like children” (Stevenson 211). By declaring, “I saw I was clean gone; and if she was to make a fool of me, she must,” he attributes his childlike foolishness to her. Stevenson’s context suggests, however, that the “fool” Uma brings out of Wiltshire is a positive lowering; as Linehan also recognizes, he is “brought low in a way the story implicitly asks us to recognize as a moral advance” (Linehan 370). As Wiltshire falls for Uma, his shame surrounding their relationship shifts from racially driven bias, for feeling “so much moved about a native” (Stevenson 197), to a more morally complex shame about his role in marginalizing Uma through a false marriage. However, Wiltshire’s transformed guilt still contains prejudice as well; his remorse about yelling at Uma, for example, stems from feelings of paternalistic superiority: he claims to feel ashamed because “she was a woman, and my wife, and kind of a baby besides that I was sorry for” (Stevenson 211). That Wiltshire upholds these prejudices despite clear signs of Uma’s resourcefulness and moral strength suggest that Wiltshire himself may be the one who is developmentally stunted by his racist and sexist attitudes.

Locked in the identities of female and native, Uma not only receives Wiltshire’s racist judgments about natives and his sexist judgments of women, she also receives judgments unique
to her compounded identity and social location as a “native woman.” For example, when Uma wants to pray, Wiltshire remarks, “I thought this seemed unlike a native, and a native woman, and a woman that had new clothes to show off” (Stevenson 204). He struggles to associate Uma with a complex belief system particularly because she is a native woman, assuming only the immediate and material would appeal to her because of her gender and race. The complex social location of native women leads Wiltshire to both patronize and fear them. When he meets Uma’s mother, he simultaneously fears and dehumanizes her by describing how she crawls on the floor of the trader’s hut (Stevenson 194), and his first descriptions of Uma include both feelings of paternal protectiveness and seduction:

I was one of those most opposed to any nonsense about native women... but she looked so quaint and pretty as she ran away and then awaited me, and the thing was done so like a child or a kind dog, that the best I could do was just to follow her wherever she went on, to listen for the fall of her bare feet, and to watch in the dusk for the shining of her body. (Stevenson 196-7)

Here, Wiltshire merges descriptions of pet and child, shining and sensual to display that he is simultaneously lord over and fixated by Uma. As Uma leads him into the bush, Wiltshire couples a childlike game of hide and seek with erotic appeal and temptation. From his first descriptions of Uma’s appearance as “a [sly], strange blindish look, between a cat’s and a baby’s” (Stevenson 192), he doubly removes Uma from human agency. By casting her actions as catlike and infantile, he renders Uma powerless; he highlights his attraction while removing her agency from the process of seduction.

The story’s reoccurring theme of the “devil-woman” directly follows Uma’s social location as a native woman, prefigured by Wiltshire’s considerations of her as a seductive though
curiously dehumanized native. To warn Wiltshire of the dangers of the bush, Uma recounts the myth of six siren-like temptresses who lived in the caves near Falesá and attempted to seduce a boat of six young native men. While one of the men averted his eyes, Uma explains, the other five succumbed to the women’s temptation and return “sickened, and spoke never a reasonable word until they died,” slain “by the love of the women-devils” (Stevenson 228). Wiltshire brushes off Uma’s story, teasing her, “You’re all the women I want, and all the devil too, old lady” (Stevenson 228). Despite his claim that he has “no use for the women-devils” (Stevenson 228), as he proceeds into the bush to destroy Case’s monument, Wiltshire admits, “It wasn’t Case I was afraid of, which would have been common-sense; I never thought of Case; what took me, as sharp as the colic, was the old wives’ tales, the devil-women and the man-pigs” (Stevenson 238). Plagued with fear, Wiltshire sees a shape “coming right up out of the desert and the bad bush” and declares, “there, sure enough, was a devil-woman” (Stevenson 238). In fact, Wiltshire’s devil-woman turns out to be Uma, his savior, who came to report that Case’s aide Black Jack overheard Wiltshire’s plan and likely reported it to Case. Although Wiltshire admits that he “thought her yarn serious enough,” he nevertheless remarks, “well, anything was better than a devil-woman” (Stevenson 239). The scene highlights how Wiltshire’s racist attitudes lead to misplaced fears: while the white Case remains a suspect in the deaths of several men, Wiltshire fears native devil women the most, although his own “devil-woman,” by reporting on the situation with Case, likely saved Wiltshire’s life.

Wiltshire’s misplaced fears for and about natives and women receive a final reinforcement through his description of his biological children. He explains that he stayed in the islands because he does not “like to leave the kids” (Stevenson 245), a statement that could equally apply to his paternalistic view of natives as to his literal children. While he claims his children
are “better here than they would be in a white man’s country,” he also brags that his son goes to
school in New Zealand “with the best;” that really, his concerns rest with “the girls” (Stevenson
245). In his daughters, Wiltshire compounds his patronizing judgments about native women,
fears of their sexual status, and concerns of how that status touches him. “They’re only half-
castes,” he acknowledges; “I know that as well as you do, and there’s nobody thinks less of half-
castes than I do; but they’re mine, and about all I’ve got. I can’t reconcile my mind to their
taking up with Kanakas, and I’d like to know where I’m to find them whites?” (Stevenson 245).
Although he married a native and his daughters are part native, he still worries about finding
white husbands for his girls, implying that non-whites, including his daughters and wife, are
inferior. Wiltshire endows his “half-caste” son with privilege seemingly equal to whites, while
his daughters remained burdened by his paternalistic views of natives particularly due to their
social location as biracial women.

Through Wiltshire’s characterization of race and gender in “The Beach of Falesá,”
Stevenson both implicitly reifies and progressively questions imperial morals and group
identities at the turn of the nineteenth century. He deconstructs racist and sexist stereotypes by
juxtaposing Wiltshire’s prejudices against whites and natives with his life experiences of evil
white traders and righteous natives like Uma. By comparing Wiltshire’s characterizations of
Uma and his daughters to whites and male natives (including his biracial son), “The Beach of
Falesá” reveals how native women faced compounded marginalization due to their social
location. As Wiltshire casts Uma as both child and devil, an object of adoration and of guilt, and
questions the multi-faceted hybridity his daughters, he both represents and radically critiques
nineteenth century views of group identities.
Works Cited


The Impossible Adventures of Supernova Jones

2012 Creative Winner
Dramatics Club of St. Louis Contest

Aaron Senser
THE IMPOSSIBLE ADVENTURES OF SUPERNOVA JONES
"The 3rd Planet is sure that they're being watched
By an eye in the sky that can't be stopped
When you get to the promised land
You're gonna shake that eye's hand"

- 3rd Planet, Modest Mouse
SCENE ONE

A darkened room. There is a single screen in the middle of the far wall. Suddenly, loud, epic music begins playing as the screen flips on to reveal the title cards for an old sci-fi TV show.

ANNOUNCER

And now, Channel 12 is proud to present the next exciting installment of *The Impossible Adventures of Supernova Jones!*

(The screen shows black and white footage of

**SUPERNOVA JONES**, a dashing space explorer, as he confronts various poorly made alien fiends)

ANNOUNCER (CONT’D)

After the mysterious destruction of the Earth by unseen forces, the surviving humans on the Lunar Federation sent out a single hero to travel the universe and find the perpetrators. That hero is **SUPERNOVA JONES**! Tonight’s Episode: “ Supernova Jones VS The Sons of Cain!” When we last left our hero, he was being held captive on his own ship by Lamez, one of the nefarious Sons of Cain, the dastardly group of space bandits with one sole purpose: to defeat Supernova Jones!

(The screen shows black and white footage of **LAMEZ** sneaking on board **SUPERNOVA JONES’** ship, hitting him over the head with a space pistol and tying him up)

ANNOUNCER (CONT’D)

Will Supernova Jones be able to escape from his infernal bonds? Can he defeat Lamez and regain control of his ship? And just what is the Sons of Cain’s master plan? Find out on tonight’s episode of *The Impossible Adventures of Supernova Jones!*

(Lights up on Supernova Jones’ ship cockpit. A spacious area with various consoles and lights around the perimeter, with the screen in the middle of the far wall functioning as both a window and video screen. There are two doors, one of which leads to an unseen section of the ship, and another which is the air lock. There is a single cushioned chair in the middle of the room, to which **SUPERNOVA JONES** is currently tied to. **LAMEZ** strides triumphantly around the room)
SUPERNOVA JONES
You’ll never get away with this Lamez!

LAMEZ
Oh, Supernova Jones, don’t you see, I already have!

SUPERNOVA JONES
Ha! Just you wait!

LAMEZ
For what? The Sons of Cain have been monitoring this ship for quite some time and we know that you’re the only life-form aboard this ship. We’re millions of light-years away from the nearest civilized planet, and I’ve disabled all of your communications. You’re completely alone!

SUPERNOVA JONES
Curse you Lamez! Curse you and all of the Sons of Cain!

LAMEZ
Sticks and stones, Jones. Now...

(LAMEZ begins adjusting dials at the head of the ship)
Let’s just see what you’re little ship is doing so far out here in the Space Wastelands.

(The screen changes to a space map. There is a small icon representing Supernova Jones’ ship, “The Sunspot” that has a dotted line behind it showing the path the ship has taken. The path is a completely straight line and stretches across the galaxy)

Wha-! Are you kidding me? You’ve just been flying completely straight for this long?

SUPERNOVA JONES
My onboard navigator broke down. I’ve been completely lost, so I figured the best solution is the simplest one. Shortest distance between two points and all that.

LAMEZ
Hmmm...But where are you trying to get to is the question...Now, what would the famous Supernova Jones be looking for way out here in the fringes of the Universe? Don’t you know this sector is a dead man’s land?

SUPERNOVA JONES
I told you, I got lost.
LAMEZ
You’re Supernova Jones! The Shinning Star of the Federation! You don’t get lost!

(SUPERNOVA JONES turns his head away)
Well, no matter. I’m not in any hurry. It’s not like you’re going anywhere. Still, it must get so boring out here by yourself. I wonder if you’d like to play a game.

SUPERNOVA JONES
I’m not playing anything with you, Lamez!

LAMEZ
Oh, but you’ll like this one...

(LAMEZ reaches into a pouch by his side and pulls out a long sword)
It’s called “Let’s Torture Supernova Jones Until He Talks!”

SUPERNOVA JONES
That doesn’t sound like a fun game at all!

LAMEZ
Tough!

(LAMEZ advances upon SUPERNOVA JONES, holding up his sword. Suddenly, from the side of the room, a small robot, S.A.M. sticks his head through the door. Although he looks like a child, a large gear sticks out of his back. SUPERNOVA notices S.A.M. and whistles. S.A.M. slides a sword across the floor. SUPERNOVA catches it, cuts through his ropes and blocks LAMEZ’s attack just in time)

SUPERNOVA JONES
En Garde!

LAMEZ
I-Impossible! But the reports said there weren’t any other life-forms!

SUPERNOVA JONES
Impossible? Ha! Nothing’s Impossible! S.A.M. is 100% pure robot!
LAMEZ

Curse you!

(SUPERNOVA JONES AND LAMEZ exchange blows as SUPERNOVA forces him backwards)

LAMEZ (CONT’D)

How can this happen?! Those ropes were made out of Crystal Diamonium, the strongest material that’s even been found in the entire universe!

SUPERNOVA JONES

Well then I guess you’re just going to have to keep looking!

(SUPERNOVA JONES smashes a button on the wall opening the back door, which leads directly to space and kicks LAMEZ out of the ship)

LAMEZ

This isn’t the end, Supernova Jones! You haven’t seen the last of the Sons of Caaaiii-

(The door shuts, cutting off the last of Lamez’s words. S.A.M. runs out and embraces SUPERNOVA JONES)

S.A.M.

Gee, that sure was something, Supernova! I sure thought we were done for this time.

SUPERNOVA JONES

Oh, S.A.M, that was nothing!

S.A.M.

No, I mean it! I haven’t been this scared since the time we fought the Undersea Strangler on Splortine 7. I don’t know how you managed to remain so calm.

SUPERNOVA JONES

Simple! Even when things get rough, I know you’ll always be right behind me, pal.

S.A.M.

Well, shucks!

SUPERNOVA JONES

But enough idle chit-chat! We have to call the Commander and let him know about this little incident. You think you could get our Comm-Systems up and running again?
You got it!

S.A.M.

(S.A.M. takes a panel off the main control panel and begins fiddling with the wires inside)

Ok, try it now!

S.A.M. (CONT'D)

(SUPERNOVA turns a few dials, but the screen just shows static)

Nothing! Wait! One second!

(SUPERNOVA JONES)

(The static eventually gives way to reveal the face of the COMMANDER)

COMMANDER

J-nes! Jon--! C-n you he-- me -ones!

SUPERNOVA JONES

Commander! Come in!

COMMANDER

Jones! Ah! There we go. Good to see you’re alright.

SUPERNOVA JONES

Same here. These Sons of Cain fellows just don’t let up.

COMMANDER

Yes, I must say, it’s quite worrisome. Do you think they’ve figured out your mission?

SUPERNOVA JONES

You mean my ongoing mission to reach the True Center of the Universe? Unlikely. Lamez began to piece something together, but no one will be hearing from him any time soon.

COMMANDER

Good, good. I must say you’ve been doing a bang-up job recently. Everyone here at the Lunar Federation is really impressed.

SUPERNOVA JONES

Thank you Commander.
COMMANDER
Do you have any estimate for when you’ll be reaching the True Center of the Universe?

SUPERNOVA JONES
Well, you know how it is Commander. If it’s not the Sons of Cain trying to take me down, it’s some slimy space slug, or a fleet of warmongering battle vixens. Delay after delay...

COMMANDER
Yes, and you’ve bested everything that’s come your way.

SUPERNOVA JONES
I don’t plan to show any signs of slowing down now.

COMMANDER
Just what I wanted to hear. Well then, I’ll let you go for now. Keep up the good work.

SUPERNOVA JONES
Thank you Commander. Supernova Jones, signing off.

(The screen cuts out)

Hey, S.A.M. how about you mix us up some drinks to celebrate our victory, eh?

S.A.M.
One Pan Galactic Gargle Blaster for you and one Cup of Oil for me, coming right up!

(S.A.M. scurries off)

SUPERNOVA JONES
Mind if I put on some music, buddy?

S.A.M.
By all means, Supernova!

(SUPERNOVA JONES turns a few dials and classical music begins playing on the loud speakers. S.A.M. comes back in with the drinks)

SUPERNOVA JONES
Thanks pal. Here’s to being one step closer to finding the True Center of The Universe

(They clink glasses but only SUPERNOVA JONES drinks)

S.A.M.
Say, Supernova...I’ve been meaning to ask you something.
SUPERNOVA JONES

Sure thing, pal.

S.A.M.

Well, it’s about what you just said about us being closer to finding the True Center of the Universe.

SUPERNOVA JONES

Yes, it’s great, isn’t it?

S.A.M.

Well...yes. But I was just wondering...Are we actually closer?

SUPERNOVA JONES

Come on! You saw that map Lamez pulled up! We’re heading in a straight line. We’re getting nearer by the second.

S.A.M.

But how can we be sure that we’re actually heading in the right direction? How do we know there even is a True Center of the Universe!

SUPERNOVA JONES

S.A.M! I’m surprised with you. For a robot, you’re pretty clueless sometimes. If it’s the True Center of the Universe, then we can simply go in any direction to get to it, right?

S.A.M.

I’m not so sure-

SUPERNOVA JONES

And as for it’s existence...Well, let’s just call it intuition.

S.A.M.

But it’s impossible to know if-!

SUPERNOVA JONES

Impossible? Ha! Nothing’s Impossible! Listen, it’s something your robot mind could never understand, S.A.M. Us humans, we don’t question something as trivial as whether or not something is “possible”. We just blast ahead and crash through our obstacles until we get where we need to be.

S.A.M.

Well...I guess that makes sense. Gee willikers, Supernova, you sure are smart. I hope to be just like you someday!
SUPERNova JONES
Oh, S.A.M., you’re special just the way you are. Now run along now.

(S.A.M. heads off to his room)

SUPERNova JONES (CONT’D)
Robots. I’ll never understand those guys. Now then...Computer, call up Lunar Residence #3611B

(The screen flips to a "calling" screen. After ringing a few times, a woman, EVELYN, appears. Behind her is what looks to be a sleek and futuristic gray apartment room)

EVELYN
Well, well, well. Supernova Jones. Good evening.

SUPERNova JONES
Is it evening? It’s always the same out here.

EVELYN
Come on, you call me at the same time every night.

SUPERNova JONES
Ah. So I do. Is it too much of a routine now?

EVELYN
No, of course not. With you, anything that bares any semblance of normalcy is a relief.

SUPERNova JONES
Now what’s that supposed to mean?

EVELYN
Oh you know. (speaking like an announcer) “The Impossible Adventures of Supernova Jones! Watch as Supernova battles a giant radioactive hamster from the Planet Vort!” I’ve seen the films they’ve made about you.

SUPERNova JONES
Yes, well, you know, those are all exaggerated.

EVELYN
I’m just saying. When’s it going to be “Supernova Jones Comes Home To His Loving And Lonely Wife”?
SUPERNOVA JONES
Evelyn, you know I can’t do that yet. The mission isn’t over.

EVELYN
The mission is never over.

SUPERNOVA JONES
The True Center of the Universe is a long time away.

EVELYN
I thought I was your True Center of the Universe.

SUPERNOVA JONES
Evelyn...

EVELYN
What’s there anyway that’s so important?

SUPERNOVA JONES
Come now, you know I can’t tell you that. Classified Information.

EVELYN
And heaven forbid the perfect Supernova Jones break his orders.

I’m doing this for you, Evelyn.

SUPERNOVA JONES
How? By leaving me alone on the moon for God knows how long? It’s so cold here. Without the Earth... You think that your world is off in the farthest reaches of space, but it’s not. I’m here. Come back to me and let’s start a family together. A legacy. A new Earth.

SUPERNOVA JONES
And where do you suggest we do that? The Moon? Mars? Those aren’t the types of place to raise a kid!

EVELYN
Those are the only options right now.

(beat)
Sometimes it just seems like you’re running from me.

SUPERNOVA JONES
Supernova Jones doesn’t run from anything!
EVELYN

Then how come you seem to be drifting further and further away?

SUPERNOVA JONES

Well, that is the essence of space travel-

EVELYN

Dammit, I didn’t mean literally!

(Although she is upset, she can’t help smiling at his joke.
Seeing his opportunity, SUPERNOVA JONES jumps to action)

SUPERNOVA JONES

Say, did you ever instal that gift I had sent to you?

EVELYN

You mean the new video glasses? Sure, but don’t change the subje-

SUPERNOVA JONES

Just, hear me out. Put them on.

(EVELYN glares at him but eventually puts on a pair of dark wrap-around glasses)

EVELYN

I don’t see what this has to do with-

SUPERNOVA JONES

Computer, activate Holo-Ray

EVELYN

What are you-

(The screen cuts to a sign that says “Holo-Ray in Progress” A hologram version of EVELYN walks into the room. She looks around.)

Jones, what’s going on? Where am I?

SUPERNOVA JONES

On board “The Sunspot”

EVELYN

Your ship? But that’s impossible.
SUPERNova JONES

Impossible? Ha! Nothing’s Impossible! You’re simply being projected here via hologram. It’s new technology, very hush-hush. Supposed to only be used for missions. I guess the “Perfect” Supernova Jones doesn’t follow every order, does he?

EVELYN

You did that for me?

SUPERNOVA JONES

I did indeed.

EVELYN

Oh!

(EVELYN runs to hug SUPERNOVA JONES but has trouble touching him)

I can’t feel you!

SUPERNOVA JONES

Yes, that is one of the few problems with it. You are still just a hologram after all.

(EVELYN moves away and frowns)

EVELYN

Well then what’s the point?

SUPERNOVA JONES

I’ll show you.

(He moves a few dials on a console and Frank Sinatra’s “Cheek to Cheek” begins playing. He begins dancing to it)

EVELYN

It’s not the same thing.

(SUPERNOVA JONES reaches out for her)

No, I’m still mad at you.

(He begins singing along as he dances. Eventually she gives in and begins dancing with him, although their bodies don’t touch, their hands hovering just over the other. For a brief moments, everything is perfect. 

(MORE)
EVELYN (CONT'D)
As the instrumental section of the song begins, EVELYN leans in to kiss SUPERNOVA JONES, but of course, stops just centimeters from his face. She breaks away.

I can’t do this.

SUPERNOVA JONES

(EVELYN goes over to the consoles and tries to turn the music off, but she is unable to do so)

EVELYN

Turn this music off! Turn it off! Goddamnit, turn it off!

(SUPERNOVA JONES turns the music off)

I told you it wasn’t going to be the same!

SUPERNOVA JONES

Of course it’s not the same, but it’s as close as we can get right now.

EVELYN

I want you to come home.

SUPERNOVA JONES

I can’t.

EVELYN

Then I want to know what’s in the True Center of the Universe that’s so much more important than I am.

SUPERNOVA JONES

You know that’s classified

EVELYN

Classified information, right. I’m leaving.

(She begins to leave)

SUPERNOVA JONES

Wait! You can’t leave!

(EVELYN stops and turns around)

(softly) Why not?

EVELYN
SUPEROVA JONES

It's a hologram.

EVELYN

Gaah! That's it! Goodnight, "Supernova Jones".

(EVELYN walks off while making a motion as if to yank off the glasses. The screen cuts to a message declaring "Call Disconnected")

BLACKOUT

SCENE 2

Morning on board "The Sunspot". SUPEROVA JONES sits at his chair, fast asleep. S.A.M. quietly sneaks into the room, holding a large knife and a bag. He gets closer and closer to SUPEROVA JONES, the blade shining in the artificial light. Just as he gets right next to SUPEROVA JONES, he shouts:

S.A.M.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

(SUPERNOVA JONES shoots awake and yells as S.A.M., completely unaware of his shock, rushes to a side closet and pulls out a small folding table.)

S.A.M.

What in the name of Ogloron 12 do you think you're doing?!

(S.A.M. pulls a small cake out of his bag)

S.A.M.

Celebrating your birthday, silly!

(He takes out a party hat and places it on SUPERNOVA JONES's head)

For he's a jolly good Captain, For he's a jolly good captain, For he's a jolly good captain! Which nobody can deny! Which nobody can-
SUPERNOVA JONES (OVERLAP)

S.A.M....S.A.M....S.A.M!!!

(S.A.M. stops singing)

Are your circuits fried?! Today’s not my birthday.

S.A.M.

What?

SUPERNOVA JONES

Today...Is Not...My Birthday.

S.A.M.

Well don’t be silly, of course it is.

SUPERNOVA JONES

And how do you come to that conclusion?

S.A.M.

Well golly, my internal memory banks state that it’s someone’s birthday today, and it can’t be mine on account of I ain’t actually alive, so that only leaves one option.

SUPERNOVA JONES

What exactly do your memory banks say?

S.A.M.

Let’s see...”January 4” that’s today, “Birthday of S. Jones”, that’s you isn’t it? Supernova Jones! Supernova Jones? Say, you don’t look so good.

SUPERNOVA JONES

What? No, no, I’m fine, it’s nothing. You must have gotten a virus or something.

S.A.M.

Well, gosh, I feel fine...

SUPERNOVA JONES

Well clearly you aren’t fine if you’re going around throwing people birthday parties when it’s not even their birthday! What would happen if we were fighting a Remelian Mudman from Sector Q and you just happened to think it was his birthday? Would you make him a cake?

S.A.M.

Of course not, sir. Everyone knows Remelian Mudmen can’t eat cake.
SUPERNova Jones

S.A.M! Just...put all of this away, alright?

S.A.M.

Gee, I messed up pretty bad, huh?

SUPERNova Jones

It's fine. Try to get some rest...or whatever it is you robots do.

S.A.M.

Ok...

(S.A.M. packs up the cake and birthday hat and begins to leave)

Just out of curiosity, sir...When is your birthday?

SUPERNova Jones

Don't be silly, S.A.M, it's practically a national holiday. My birthday's on...

(SUPERNova stops, at loss for words)

S.A.M.

Sir?

SUPERNova Jones

Well that's odd.

(Suddenly, an alarm goes off. SUPERNova Jones snaps back to normal)

A transmission! S.A.M, who's it from?

S.A.M.

(checking a console) It's from....no, that can't be right.

What is it?

S.A.M.

It looks like we're getting a transmission...from Earth.

What?!
S.A.M.
It must be a glitch. Everyone knows Earth was destroyed by unseen forces. There’s nothing left to even send a transmission from. It would be completely impossible.

SUPERNova JONES
Impossible?....Nothing’s Impossible. Patch us in.

S.A.M.
Are you sure?

SUPERNova JONES
Dammit, I said patch us in!

(S.A.M. moves a few dials and the screen cuts to a indistinguishable blurry image. After a few seconds, it cuts to what looks to be an old home movie recorded on a camcorder. The date in the top reads “1/04/01” On the screen is a normal looking house, in front of which is EVELYN’s face, only her hair and clothing are not futuristic, like when we previously saw her. She pouts at the camera playfully)

EVELYN
Ah! Don’t film me! Don’t film me! I look terrible.

SUPERNova JONES
What is this? Evelyn?

(The CAMERA OPERATOR speaks, and his voice is that of SUPERNova JONES)

CAMERA OPERATOR
Don’t be silly, you look beautiful, as always.

EVELYN
You’re just saying that.

CAMERA OPERATOR
No, I mean it. You’re my shining star.

SUPERNova JONES
Evelyn! S.A.M, what the hell is this? Why can’t she hear me?!
S.A.M.
I don't know! I think it's just a recording!

(The camera follows EVELYN and we see that the house is set up for a birthday party)

EVELYN

How's it look?

CAMERA OPERATOR

I gotta say, I like what I'm seeing.

EVELYN

Oh, you. Stop it!

(The CAMERA OPERATOR leans in to kiss EVELYN and a nearby mirror in the shot shows that the CAMERA OPERATOR is SUPERNOVA JONES himself)

SUPERNOVA JONES

Shut this off.

S.A.M.

What?

SUPERNOVA JONES

Shut it off!

(SUPERNOVA JONES begins trying to shut the recording off. On screen, EVELYN opens a refrigerator and takes out a cake, the same one S.A.M. had earlier. She lights the candles, picks up the cake and begins singing Happy Birthday. The camera follows her as she walks to another room but the cuts out suddenly when SUPERNOVA JONES rips out a series of wires from a console. He slumps down)

S.A.M.

Supernova Jones? Are you ok?

(SUPERNOVA JONES is silent and motionless)

Supernova Jones!

(Suddenly another alarm goes off)

Ah! What now?!

(MORE)
S.A.M. (CONT'D)

(A rocket hits the side of the ship)

Great galloping gophers, we're being fired at!

(A voice sounds over the system)

METHUZAEL

Supernova Jones! I have come to...why can't I see anything?

S.A.M.

Oh, sorry, our screen is broken!

METHUZAEL

Well, fix it! Who is this anyway?

S.A.M.

Uh, hi. I'm S.A.M. The Robot. I don't really think Supernova wants the screen to be fixed right now.

METHUZAEL

Well let me speak to him then.

S.A.M.

He's a bit...indisposed.

METHUZAEL

Nonsense! Fix this screen or prepared to be destroyed!

S.A.M.

Ahhh! Supernova Jones, I need to fix the screen or else we're done for!....Well?!

(SUPERNova JONES doesn't respond)

I'm going to take your silence as a yes. Sorry!

(S.A.M. takes the wires and begins installing them back into the console. The screen flips back to life and shows two of the Sons of Cain, METHUZAEL and MEQUZAEL)

METHUZAEL

Ah, there we go. Attention Supernova Jones! It is I, Methuzael, one of the Sons of Cain! I have come to-

MEQUZAEL

Wait, what about me?
What about you?

You’re going to introduce yourself but not me?

Mequzael, why do you always do this when we’re trying to be intimidating?

Because you keep forgetting about me!

What’s going on? We’re kind of busy here!

Busy?! BUSY?! How dare you be too busy for Methuzael-

And Mequzael!!

Two of the Notorious and Powerful Sons of Cain who-

We have you completely surrounded!

I was just about to say that!

You always get to say it!

Because I’m better at saying it! You’re not frightening enough.

Well, how can I sound frightening when you keep shutting me down?

Uh. Guys? Can I help you or something? Because right now really isn't the best time.
METHUZAE
Of course it’s not the best time! When the Sons of Cain attack, it automatically becomes the worst time!

MEQUZAE
Even for us?

METHUZAE
Of course not! Now is a great time for us because we’re the attackers.

MEQUZAE
It’s just...because you said-

METHUZAE
You know what I mean!

S.A.M.
No, he has a point.

METHUZAE
Silence! I refuse to be contradicted by a robot. Let us speak to Supernova Jones.

S.A.M.
I told you, I can’t! He’s...sick. Or something.

METHUZAE
I see. Cowering in fear from the almighty Sons of Cain.

S.A.M.
No, he was like this before you came.

MEQUZAE
Maybe he sensed us coming and preemptively began cowering?

S.A.M.

Nope.

METHUZAE
No matter. If Supernova Jones refuses to acknowledge us, then we will simply have to blast you to pieces.

MEQUZAE
Actually, if you think about it, we’re kind of lucky. Don’t need to deal with any counterattacks.
METHUZAEL
Yes, but it just isn't the same when you can't hear them cry for mercy before unleashing the proton torpedoes. Now, unleash the proton torpedoes!

(S.A.M. begins shaking SUPERNOVA JONES)

S.A.M.
Come on, Supernova, wake up already! Now's when you're supposed to save the day and all that!

(A countdown appears in the corner of the screen from "10")

MEQUZAEL
10 Seconds and counting.

S.A.M.
Wake up!

MEQUZAEL
You know, after what happened to Lamez, I was kind of worried, but killing Supernova Jones was a breeze.

S.A.M.
Supernova!

(The timer gets down to "1" and just before it hits "0" the screen cuts to black and a loud explosion is heard. S.A.M. takes cover, but nothing happens)

Are...are we dead?

(The screen flips back on to the smiling face of HASH, a space cowboy from his own ship)

HASH
Yechaw! Geez, that was a mighty close one. If I hadn't blasted those buggers out of the sky you'd be one fried fellow right now.

S.A.M.
You beat them?

HASH
Those weaklings? I wouldn't even call it a fair fight. The names Hash. I was cruising around when I saw those good for nothing Sons of Cain firing at ya.
S.A.M.
S.A.M. Not that I appreciate it, by why risk yourself to help us?

HASH
I figure if those punks are taking the time to try to kill ya, then I might as well try to save ya. The enemy of my enemy is my friend and all. Plus, I’m not going to pass up the chance to meet the legendary Supernova Jones!

S.A.M.
You recognized our ship?

HASH
Hell, I might be an out of touch space bumpkin, but everybody who’s anybody knows “The Sunspot”, official ship of Supernova Jones and Crew. I assume you’d be the crew then?

S.A.M.
Oh! Yes sir! But I’m afraid you won’t be able to meet Supernova today. He’s not really feeling well.

(S.A.M. kicks SUPERNOVA JONES lightly. He slumps even lower)

HASH
Well, today’s your lucky day, because I just so happen to have a Cure All remedy for any kind of bump, bruise, sickness, mumps, measles or just plain old down in the dumps feeling you’ve got.

S.A.M.
(skeptical) Oh, really?

HASH
Hey, you slither around the underbellies of the universe as much as I have, and you’re bound to pick up some special...talents.

S.A.M.
So what’s this “Cure-All” remedy you’ve got?

HASH
Let me on board and I’ll show ya.

(S.A.M. hesitates)
Well? He ain’t getting any better.
S.A.M.
There’s a lot of people out there who are willing to pay a lot for the body of Supernova Jones, especially in those “underbellies of the universe” you mentioned.

HASH
Is that what you’re worried about? Come on now, I did you one and zapped those Sons of Cain fellows. You owe me the benefit of the doubt at least.

S.A.M.
...Fine. But just so you know, the last guy who tried something funny on this ship got a one way ticket into deep space.

HASH
Relax. You know, for a robot, you’re pretty emotional.

S.A.M.

Well, I-!

(*HASH cuts his side of the video. S.A.M. bristles, but presses a few buttons and the air lock opens. HASH strides in*)

HASH
Thank ya kindly. Now...

(*HASH leans over SUPERNOVA JONES*)
I never thought I’d see the day where Supernova Jones simply sits by as his prized ship is almost blown up and lets a stranger on without a proper greeting.

S.A.M.
Can you help him?

HASH
I said I could, didn’t I? Still, whatever happened to him must have been quite the shock. Now let’s see...

(*HASH examines SUPERNOVA JONES*)
Mhhh...Mhhh...Well, the good news is there’s nothing physically wrong with him. This ain’t gonna be easy though. I hate to ask this, but do you think you could leave me alone with him?

S.A.M.
Absolutely not! I have sworn myself to protect Superno-
HASH
Yeah, yeah, yeah. Goddamn robots. Here, what about this?

(HASH holds out his pistol)
Gimme 5 minutes. Anything happens, you just burst right in and shoot me down, alright?
You want him back to his old self or not?

(S.A.M. considers telling him off. but takes the pistol)

S.A.M.

5 minutes.

(S.A.M. exits. HASH walks over to the door and rips the wires out of the control panel)

HASH
You know, Jones, you’re completely at my mercy. To find yourself in this position, man, you must be really off your game today. You’d be in a lot of trouble if I didn’t have your best interests at heart. Or at least if your best interests didn’t happen to fit so snugly with mine...but sometimes the stars just seem to line up perfectly and...well. Let me tell you a story. Might just be one you’ve heard before.

(The screen shows a cartoon slideshow of Hash’s story)

Once upon a time there was a little tiny galaxy in some far off corner of the universe. And in that little tiny galaxy was a little tiny planet, three spaces over from the sun, called “Earth”. Now this “Earth”, although comparatively young, managed to thrive and grow. Sure, there were a few close calls, a missed comet here, an ice age there, but over all, it looked like it was gonna make it. Until one day, something unexpected happened. There was a great big fire that consumed everything around it and when that fire disappeared, the Earth, and everything on it, was no more. Luckily, there were a few survivors, people who made it out on time. And despite everything they had lost, they began a new life, step by step. Except for one man. One man wasn’t going to let go of the Earth so easily. So he built himself a rocket, a small enclosed space where he could take shelter from everyone and everything that reminded him of his Earth...and he flew away. He flew to the True Center of the Universe. Tried to at least. Didn’t tell anyone how long he’d be gone or what he was looking for. Probably didn’t know himself. But then again...I can probably take an educated the guess. You see, this man believed that he could find God in the True Center of the Universe. Big G, Elohim, The Lord, whatever you wanna call it. Point is, our hero decided that he’d have a good ol’ sit down with the guy, a little one on one chat. See if he could convince God to turn back time a bit, prevent the Earth from being destroyed, stop that fire from ever happening. Doesn’t matter if that seemed a bit far fetched. Doesn’t matter if it was impossible. Impossible? Ha. Nothing’s Impossible. This ringing any bells?
...Who are you?

HASH

Ah! And the hero awakes! Hallelujah!

SUPERNOVA JONES


HASH

Hash

SUPERNOVA JONES

I’ve never heard of a “Hash”

HASH

Universe is a big place. And I know all the cubby holes.

SUPERNOVA JONES

Why did you come here?

HASH

To help you.

SUPERNOVA JONES

I don’t need help.

HASH

Jones, look at yourself. You’re a wreck.

SUPERNOVA JONES

I would like you to get off my ship now.

HASH

No.

SUPERNOVA JONES

Get off.

HASH

Make me!

*(SUPERNOVA JONES jumps up)*
SUPERNOVA JONES

GET OFF!

HASH

Yes! That’s it, that’s the Supernova Jones I know!

(They exchange blows)

SUPERNOVA JONES

Don’t you dare come onto my own ship and claim to know me!

HASH

Come on! Harder!

SUPERNOVA JONES

You worm! You snake!

HASH

You call that a punch?!

(SUPERNOVA JONES knocks HASH to the ground. Beat. HASH rubs his jaw)

Good. Feeling better?

(There’s a knock on the side door)

S.A.M.

Supernova Jones! That dastardly cowboy locked the door and I can’t get in! Are you alright?

HASH

Well?

SUPERNOVA JONES

...It’s fine, S.A.M. I’m fine.

S.A.M.

Oh, thank heavens!

SUPERNOVA JONES

Had enough?

HASH

I told ya, I’m not the bad guy here. I want to help.
SUPERNova JONES
Trapping my robot and trying to hurt me? Some help.

HASH
I got ya back to normal, didn’t I?

SUPERNova JONES
Remind me to thank you later.

(SUPERNova JONES grabs HASH by the scruff of the neck)
Now how about you tell me where you learned that little story of yours?

HASH
What, God and the True Center of the Universe? It’s simple really.

Humor me.

SUPERNova JONES
Let me go and I’ll tell you.

HASH
You think I’m going to fall for something as easy as that?

Let’s look at the facts. You’re currently barrelling towards an unknown destination on an impossible mission-

SUPERNova JONES
Impossible?

HASH
Yeah, yeah, nothing’s impossible. Spare me. I’m just saying, since when have you ever been the type of guy to let caution overpower curiosity?

(Beat. SUPERNova JONES lets him go)
That’s my man. Now...You were asking how I know what I know.

(He reaches into a pouch on his side. SUPERNova JONES gets ready to fight. HASH pulls out an apple)
Voila. My “Cure-All” solution to just about anything. All the knowledge of the universe in the palm of your hand.
SUPEROVA JONES
You’re kidding.

HASH
Cross my heart and hope to die. Look, Supernova Jones. I’ll be blunt. You’re trying to get to the True Center of the Universe, but you don’t know the first thing about it.

SUPEROVA JONES
Hasn’t stopped me before.

HASH
What do you call your little break down back then? You were about to give up.

SUPEROVA JONES
No! I would never give up on my mission.

HASH
Your “mission”. Jeez, forget the True Center of the Universe, you don’t know *anything* about anything.

SUPEROVA JONES
Watch it.

HASH
You don’t even know who you are!

SUPEROVA JONES
Don’t be idiotic. I’m Supernova Jones.

HASH
Ha! You want to get to the True Center of the Universe, talk with God mano a mano? I’m all for that. I’ll even point you in the right direction. But it’s gonna be useless, until you know the truth.

SUPEROVA JONES
And what’s the “truth”?

*(HASH holds up the apple. SUPEROVA JONES takes it from him)*

And this will help me bring the Earth back?
I swear to God.

(SUPERNOVA JONES hesitates, takes one final look at HASH, and then takes a bite of the apple. He walks forward a bit and suddenly falls to his knees)

Ahh!

HASH

Shhhhh. Relax.

SUPERNOVA JONES

What did you-

HASH

Everything will be fine. Shhhhh.

SUPERNOVA JONES

I...

(SUPERNOVA JONES passes out)

HASH

For when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened. See you on the other side, Supernova Jones.

SCENE 3

A darkened room. The constant beep of a heart monitor going at a steady pace.

DR. SOLOMON

Patient: Jones, Adam. Age 31. Heartbeat seems stable.

(Lights up on a hospital room. There is a single bed, with various consoles around it, and a window on the far wall. On the bedside table is an apple with a bite taken out of it. DR. SOLOMON and EVELYN stand by the bed, where JONES is sleeping)
EVELYN

So he's going to be alright?

--DR. SOLOMON--

We've given him a sedative that should keep him calm for right now.

EVELYN

I just don't understand why he would act that way...

DR. SOLOMON

Trauma, shock. The human brain is a complicated thing, Mrs. Jones. Sometimes, when we're under mass amounts of stress, the brain might go into a sort of emergency lockdown. It's not uncommon for a person involved in a traumatic situation to suppress those memories in their deep unconscious.

EVELYN

Yes, but the things he was saying-

DR. SOLOMON

He just needs some time to recover, perhaps some time with a psychiatrist. For now, try not to mention-

(JONES begins to stir)

EVELYN

I think he's waking up.

DR. SOLOMON

Just take it slow. Mr. Jones, how are you feeling?

(JONES sits up and looks around)

Can you hear me, Mr. Jones?

JONES

Where am I?

DR. SOLOMON

You're in a hospital. You've been here for the past two weeks. Do you think I could ask you a few questions?

JONES

Evelyn!

(JONES tries to get out of bed but doubles over in pain)
EVELYN

Careful!

DR. SOLOMON

Please, Mr. Jones, you've been involved in a serious accident. You need to lie down.

JONES

Evelyn, what's going on?

EVELYN

You're hurt. You've been-

JONES

Are you ok? Where's Hash?! Did he do this?

EVELYN

He's still acting that way-

DR. SOLOMON

Let's just see. Mr. Jones, can you tell us your full name?

EVELYN

Please. Everything is fine, just answer his questions. For me.

Mr. Jones? Your full name?

JONES

Supernova Jones.

EVELYN

Oh god-

DR. SOLOMON

Why do you keep calling yourself that?

JONES

You asked me for my name, didn't you?! What planet is this? Where's "The Sunspot"?

EVELYN

I told you, he keeps saying-

DR. SOLOMON

Mr. Jones, please listen to me. There is no such thing as "The Sunspot". There's no one by the name of Hash, there's no such thing as these "Sons of Cain" you've been mentioning. None of these are real.
JONES
What?! How do you know about-

EVELYN
Listen to him. Please. You’re not who you think you are. You’re not some...space explorer.

JONES
How could you of all people say that?

EVELYN
Because it’s true. You’ve been ranting about this whole “Supernova Jones” thing and it’s scaring me. I just want my husband back. I need you to reach down and find him.

JONES
My god, they’ve completely brainwashed you.

EVELYN
Goddamnit! Listen to me!

Evelyn...

DR. SOLOMON

EVELYN
No! Look at him, he has no idea who he is anymore!

DR. SOLOMON
It will take time. For now, he needs you to be there for him, even if he doesn’t know it.

SUPERNova JONES
What’s going on? Evelyn...Please.

(Beat. DR. SOLOMON’S beeper goes off)

DR. SOLOMON
Shoot, I need to check on some other patients. Will you be alright if...

EVELYN
He’s my husband, no matter what he says. I’ve dealt with him for years, I can deal with this.

DR. SOLOMON
Ok, well let me know if you need anything, I’ll be just around the corner.

(DR. SOLOMON exits)
JONES
Evelyn, now’s our chance. Take these tubes out of me and let’s make our escape before someone gets back!

EVELYN
Please, enough already. God, what’s happened to you?

JONES
I should be asking you the same question.

EVELYN
Don’t you remember anything?

JONES
Of course I do. I was on board “The Sunspot” looking for The True Center of the Universe when-

EVELYN
Don’t you remember anything real?

JONES
Those are real!

EVELYN
What about before “The Sunspot” then? What about your life as a child? Your parents? How we met? Anything besides being “Supernova Jones”?

JONES
Don’t be silly, how could I forget about...

(He stops)

EVELYN
You don’t, do you? Our first date? Our wedding?

JONES
No.

EVELYN
What about right before this? Do you know why you’re here? Try to remember. There was a fire...

JONES
Who are you? You’re not Evelyn! You can’t be! Help!
EVELYN
Stop. Stop it! Look at me. I’m Evelyn. I’m your wife.

JONES
My wife is on the moon. Lunar Residence #3611B-

EVELYN
No. I’m right here. Next to you. On Earth.

JONES
Preposterous! The Earth was destroyed-

EVELYN
Stop saying that!

JONES
We saw it happen! You stood next to me as the Earth went up in flames!

EVELYN
Look outside!

JONES
The Earth went up in flames and yet we survived!

EVELYN
You have no idea what you’re talking about!

JONES
We escaped while the Earth died and I’m the only one who tried to save it!

EVELYN
You left me when I needed you the most!

JONES
I’m doing this all this for you!

(He doubles over in pain again)

I’ll bring it all back. I promise.

EVELYN
You can’t promise something like that!

(DR. SOLOMON rushes in)
DR. SOLOMON

Evelyn, stop! You can't reason with someone in his state. I'm going give him another sedative and we'll try again when he's feeling better.

(DR. SOLOMON goes to the IV connected to JONES)

JONES

What do you think you're-

(He hunches over again)

Ahnh!

DR. SOLOMON

You're going to be fine Mr. Jones. These things take time. Do you want to stay with him, or...?

EVELYN

No, I'll come with you.

JONES

Wait...

EVELYN

Come back to me. Please.

(EVELYN and DR. SOLOMON leave. JONES lies down again)

ANNouncer (o.s.)

Is this the end of Supernova Jones? Will he be doomed to live his life as a miserable failure?

SUPERNOVA JONES

Who said that?

ANNouncer

Find out, on the next episode of:

(HASH enters, still looking the same as before)

HASH

The Impossible Adventures of Supernova Jones!
SUPERNOVA JONES

You!

HASH

Heya, Jones

(He hands JONES a "Get Well Soon" balloon)

How ya feeling?

JONES

Where am I? What did you do to me? Why’s everyone acting so crazy?

HASH

Woah, woah, slow down there. One question at a time.

JONES

What’s going on?

HASH

You heard the doctor.

SUPERNOVA JONES

You expect me to believe this is Earth? That that’s my wife out there?

HASH

Believe it or not, kid.

JONES

You must think I’m crazy.

(HASH laughs)

What’s so funny?

HASH

Nothing, nothing.

JONES

I should never have trusted you.

HASH

Well, it’s too late for that. And you’re gonna have to keep trusting me if you want to get back home.

SUPERNOVA JONES

What do you mean?
JONES
So what, this is some sort of vision? An illusion?

HASH
It's fate. The destiny of a man who gave up.

JONES
Then why bring me here if I can't change anything?

HASH
Who said you couldn't change anything? Fate can be whatever you want to make of it.

How?

HASH
Find the True Center of the Universe and you can control your own destiny. Don't want to spend your time in a hospital bed slowly loosing your sanity and the love of your life? Then get up and get going. S.A.M.'s waiting for you.

JONES
He is? But what can I do? I...think my legs are broken.

HASH
Oh come on...

(He picks up the apple from the bedside table)

Since when has a little thing like that ever been able to stop Supernova Jones?

(JONES takes the apple. He hesitates, and then bites into it.)

BLACKOUT

SCENE 4

The Sunspot. SUPERNOVA JONES lies where he collapsed earlier. All the machines have stopped. The Sunspot is dark and cold, a ghostship.
SUPERNova JONES lies where he collapsed earlier. He stirs and sits up.

SUPERNova JONES

What the-Hello? S.A.M? Evelyn?

(anyone? (He checks his legs. The seem fine. He stands up)

(He walks around, checking the consoles. He presses a button and the screen flips on to show the COMMANDER)

COMMANDER

Supernova Jones? Do you come in?

COMMANDER

SuperNova Jones

COMMANDER

SuperNova Jones, are you there?!

COMMANDER

I'm right here!

COMMANDER

Damnit, Jones! Come in! Blast it!

(EVelyn)

(EVelyn to EVELYN)

Hey, Jones. You didn't call me last night...That's a first. Too busy fighting giant enemy crabs? I miss you.

(EVelyn to the COMMANDER)

COMMANDER

SuperNova Jones, it's been a week since you've failed to contact us. If you think that you can just take a vacation from duty, you've got one thing coming! Report back as soon as you get this.

(The screen cuts again)
EVELYN
I see how it is. It's finally happened, hasn't it? Your life out there is more important than the one back home. Well, I can take a hint. You just go off on your stupid galaxy quest, and don't come back, you jerk! How could you? You promised...  

(The screen cuts again)

COMMANDER
3 months, Supernova Jones. 3 months, and no word from you. I don't care if you're a famous space hero, but you still need to follow protocol like everyone else! Contact us immediately!  

(The screen cuts to IRAJ)

IRAJ
Uh, hey there. Anyone home? I was planning to attack your ship and all, but... I dunno. It looks like you're already dead. Maybe? Come on, man, I don't want to go back to the Sons of Cain empty handed! They're all going to laugh at me! Fine, whatever, if anyone asks, then tell them Iraj of the Sons of Cain totally beat you. Ok? Man, I fly all the way out here and- 

(The screen cuts again)

EVELYN
Jones, where are you? I'm so scared... 

(The screen cuts again)

COMMANDER
I hate to do this, but you've left me with no other option. It is my duty at Commander of the Lunar Federation, having received no contact in a year, to officially declare Space Explorer Supernova Jones Missing in Action, and to terminate all action on the mission... I'm sorry.  

(The screen cuts again. EVELYN sits looking at the screen, a candle burning at her side. It cuts again, and she's older, it cuts again and she's older, it cuts again and she's older, it cuts again and she's gone. Supernova Jones tries to use the transmitter)

SUPERNova JONES
Hello? Is anyone out there? Can you hear me? This is Supernova Jones! Hello?  

(Static. Supernova Jones throws the microphone down)

(MORE)
SUPERNova JONES (cont'd)

Damn it! HASH! You lied to me! You said I could change it! That it didn’t have to be this way! How am I supposed to get to the True Center of the Universe with a broken ship and no crew!

VOICE (O.S.)

You could just give up.

SUPERNova JONES

Who said that?!

(ENOCH enters, carrying a large briefcase. SUEPRNOVA JONES jumps up and draws his gun)

ENOCH

Please, Supernova Jones, do we really need to fight?

SUPERNova JONES

Sometimes it feels like fighting’s the only thing I got left.

ENOCH

Yes, and look where it’s gotten you.

SUPERNova JONES

Who are you? How did you get on my ship?

ENOCH

Ah, ah, ah. You didn’t say the magic word.

(SUPERNova JONES charges his gun)

You really do plan to go out guns blazing, don’t you?

SUPERNova JONES

You better start talking.

ENOCH

Relax, that’s what I came here for. You could say that I’m trying a new approach, especially after what you did to the rest of my crew. I believe you know them?

SUPERNova JONES

...The Sons of Cain. Which would make you...
ENOCHE
Enoch. The last of the Sons of Cain. Or, the first, depending on how you look at it. And as for how I got on your ship, well, after 500 years with no use, your security system has gotten a bit lax; I should say.

SUPERNOVA JONES

500-!

ENOCHE
Don't look so surprised. You make a deal with the devil and there's going to be some unexpected...side effects. Besides, what's it matter anyway?

SUPERNOVA JONES
What's it matter?! My wife...my friends...everyone back on Earth is-

ENOCHE
Dead? So what? Were you ever really planning on seeing them again? This was a suicide mission, and you know it.

(SUPERNOVA JONES begins to speak, but doesn't)
Yes, flying off into the great unknown, bravely sacrificing yourself to bring back your precious Earth. The perfect martyr. But I'm afraid I can't let that happen.

(ENOCHE sets down his briefcase and begins opening it.
SUPERNOVA JONES prepares for the battle)
Oh please, don't look so worried. I told you, I'm not here to fight. Well, not in the way you think of it.

(ENOCHE removes a small folding table from the case and sets it up. He takes out a small box and sets it on the table)

SUPERNOVA JONES

What's your game, then?

ENOCHE
I don't know, chess maybe?

(ENOCHE opens the box to reveal an ornate antique chess set)

SUPERNOVA JONES
You're kidding.
ENOCH
Think of it this way: You want to reach the True Center of the Universe, and I don’t want you to. Classic opposition. Immovable Object meets an Unstoppable Force. I tried to do things your way; sending fighter after countless fighter against you. Battles of strength and daring feats, because that was the way your world worked. But times have changed, and I simply don’t have the ability to keep this charade up any longer. So consider this a last ditch attempt on my part. One game. One final fight. Winner take all.

(SUPERNova JONES considers)

SUPERNova JONES

Deal.

ENOCH
I’m glad we can agree on something then. White or black?

SUPERNova JONES

Do you even have to ask? White, naturally.

ENOCH

Why am I not surprised.

(They begin playing)

SUPERNova JONES

You know, I’ve been on a lot of missions, but this is certainly the strangest.

ENOCH

Playing chess?

SUPERNova JONES

Yeah, I guess. Most villains aren’t usually as calm as you are. Certainly not any of the Sons of Cain.

ENOCH

Tell me, Jones, you don’t find any of this odd? Flying around, fighting monsters and aliens?

SUPERNova JONES

For a moment, I did, but then I realized that if you want to get anything done, you can’t dwell on distractions like that. If this is the life I need to live in order to bring back the Earth...then I’ll rush ahead without looking back.

ENOCH

Just like your knight...which I’ll go ahead and capture, thank you very much.
SUPERNova JONES
Humph. Alright, my turn. Why are the Sons of Cain so dead set on killing me?

ENOCH
Killing you? Stop you, sure. But we’ve never tried to actually kill you.

SUPERNova JONES
What about all the attacks? The lasers and missiles?

ENOCH
Smoke and mirrors. Plus, I never said we weren’t trying to slow you down a bit.

Oh come on.

ENOCH
What?

SUPERNova JONES
You’re lying!

ENOCH
Believe me if you want, or not, it doesn’t change anything. If I wanted to kill you, you’d be dead already.

SUPERNova JONES
Likely story. I’ve been around the block a few times, Enoch, and if there’s one thing I’ve learned, villains never kill the hero without gloating about their master plan first.

ENOCH
Master plan? You still don’t get it, do you? That’s not how real life works, Jones. There’s no such things as “heroes” or “villains”. Everyone has good inside of them, and everyone has evil.

SUPERNova JONES
Some more than others.

ENOCH
Fair enough. But how do you measure it? You can’t just look at life as black and white.

SUPERNova JONES
The way I see it, if someone is trying to bring back the Earth, he’s good. If someone is trying to stop that guy, he’s bad.
ENOCH
Your modesty never fails to impress me.

SUPERNova JONES
Laugh all you want, but that’s the truth.

ENOCH
Is it then? And what happens when our “hero” destroys the lives of others in his journey?

SUPERNova JONES
I haven’t destroyed anyone’s life!

*(ENOCH snaps his fingers. EVELYN’s last messages begin playing on the screen again)*

EVELYN
Jones, where are you? I’m so scared....Jones, where are you? I’m so scared. Jones, where are you-

SUPERNova JONES
Enough! She knew...this was the only option.

ENOCH
Yes, of course. Such a selfless hero. Check, by the way.

SUPERNova JONES
What do you know about us, huh? How dare you-

ENOCH
You failed your promises to her. You abandoned her. Make your move.

SUPERNova JONES
This has nothing to do with you!

ENOCH
You are in check, Supernova Jones. Either make your move, or give up.

SUPERNova JONES
If I can make it to the True Center of the Universe, I change everything. I can make us whole again. That’s why I can’t fail, not when I’m so close.

ENOCH
And her sacrifice will be worth it in the end? Check.
SUPERNOVA JONES
She's not the only one suffering! I've been fighting, day after day, for her sake.

ENOCH

Oh? This is all for her sake?

SUPERNOVA JONES

Of course it is.

ENOCH

Interesting. Out of curiosity, where were you when the Earth was destroyed?

SUPERNOVA JONES

What?

ENOCH

Oh, you know. Just wondering how something so terrible could happen with "Supernova Jones: Supreme Protector" watching over it. Check.

SUPERNOVA JONES

If you're implying- I risked my life to save the Earth!

ENOCH

You watched as it burned. Check.

I can bring it back.

SUPERNOVA JONES

ENOCH

It's gone, Jones. You failed. Check.

SUPERNOVA JONES

No, I can fix it all.

ENOCH

By wallowing in your own guilt? You're loosing yourself. Check.

SUPERNOVA JONES

I haven't lost yet.

ENOCH

And just how long can you keep fighting? Check.
SUPERNova JONES

As long as I need to.

ENoCH

You’ll give up eventually, Supernova Jones. It’s impossible to go forever. Checkmate.

(Beat. Supernova Jones slowly begins to laugh)

What? What’s so funny?

SUPERNova JONES

Impossible? You want to talk to me about impossible, Enoch? Let me tell you something I once told a friend of mine. Us humans, we don’t question something as trivial as whether or not something is “possible”. We just blast ahead and crash through our obstacles until we get where we need to be. You say, it’s impossible for me to go on forever? Then you clearly haven’t met me.

ENoCH

A deal is a deal. You’re finished.

Look at the board.

SUPERNova JONES

Stalemate.

ENoCH

Nothing’s impossible.

SUPERNova JONES

ENoCH

You...did that on purpose, didn’t you?

SUPERNova JONES

I don’t know what you’re talking about. Now, I guess because it’s a draw, I’ll just be on my way and you can try fighting me some other time.

ENoCH

But that will just lead to stalemate again and again! If no one wins...then this really does go on forever. One eternal conflict. And that’s what you want.

SUPERNova JONES

My journey will end when I need it to.
ENOC"
I see.

(*ENOC crosses over to a window*)
Tell me, Jones. You’ve spent all these years traveling though space, but have you ever looked outside?

SUPERNOVA JONES
Of course not, there’s nothing to see. It’s just a bunch of black.

ENOC"
Yes, an endless expanse of nothingess, punctuated by a few lifeless planets. Stretching on forever. Do you know why we call ourselves the Sons of Cain? Because just like Cain, we have been cursed to constantly wander these barren wastelands until the end of time. We are non-entities, ghosts who were never born, baring the burden of our fathers and forefathers, tracing a line back to the first son and the first sin. And we know, more than anyone else, the futility of trying to turn back time. We all must pay for our transgressions. Even you, Supernova Jones. You can’t keep running.

SUPERNOVA JONES
The hell I can’t!

ENOC"
You blind fool. There’s no reasoning with you, is there?

I guess not.

(*He takes out his blaster*)
Now, if you could get off my ship.

ENOC"
Look where your delusion has left you. No wife, no ship, stranded in space. No one to carry on your legacy. And after all that, you’re still willing to fight?

SUPERNOVA JONES
I’m going to get to the True Center of The Universe, and I don’t care what you do to try to stop me.

ENOC"
I just can’t convince you, can I? How do you even plan on getting there?

SUPERNOVA JONES
As long as I’m willing, I’ll find a way.
ENOCH
You’re a frightening creature. And I’m just an old shell who’s been wandering for far too long. Well, I tried.

(ENOCH snaps his fingers and the ship slowly reboots back to life)
You want to go to the True Center of the Universe? Go. Although nothing but pain awaits you there...if anyone could withstand it, it’s you. Just don’t say I didn’t warn you.

SUPERNOVA JONES
You’re giving up?

ENOCH
I sent countless soldiers and monsters after you, concocted thousands of schemes, spent years and years of my existence just to stop you. If I none of that worked, nothing will.

(ENOCH begins to leave)
You know, after all this time, you never asked why I’ve been doing all this. You’re not even curious why I want to stop you from getting to the True Center of the Universe?

SUPERNOVA JONES
What’s it matter? I wanted to get there, you didn’t want me to. What else needed to be said?

ENOCH
Of course. I should have guessed. Goodbye, Supernova Jones.

SUPERNOVA JONES
Alright. Next stop, True Center of the Universe.

(SUPERNOVA JONES hits the gas. The ship enters warp speed. Warning lights go off on the screen)

COMPUTER VOICE
Emergency: Temperature Reaching Critical Level

SUPERNOVA JONES
Come on...

COMPUTER VOICE
Emergency: Hull Breach in Sector 5

SUPERNOVA JONES
Come on!
COMPUTER VOICE

Emergency: Reality Stabilizer Corrupted

SUPERNova JONES

...

COMPUTER VOICE

Impact Imminent. In 5...4....

(The voice fizzes out and the ship hits a rough patch. Blackout. Crash.)

SCENE 3

An ethereal bright light rises in the distance. It grows. The light fills the windows of the Sunspot. The ship is in disarray. Everything is destroyed. SUPERNova JONES is collapsed against a wall. HASH simply walks on from off stage. He crouches near SUPERNova JONES.

HASH

Hey. Hey buddy. Up and at ‘em.

SUPERNova JONES

Wha...

(He rises, still dazed)

Where am I?

HASH

End of the line.

SUPERNova JONES

Hash? What are you-

HASH

Don’t worry about me. I just wanted to thank you. Couldn’t have gotten here without ya.

SUPERNova JONES

I don’t understand.
We all have our own journeys. Even though our paths might intersect at times, we never truly see anyone else's full story. We just make do with the glimpses we got. My story ends here. Been a long time coming.

SUPEROVA JONES

Who are you?

HASH

Nobody important. Just a guy who made one too many mistakes. Look, kid, I gotta go. Maybe I'll see ya around again some time.

(HASH heads off into the light)

Hash!

SUPEROVA JONES

Yeah?

SUPEROVA JONES

That world you showed me. Is that my reality?

HASH

Only if you want it to be.

(HASH exits. SUPEROVA JONES slowly stands up. He looks around)

Hello?

(SUPEROVA JONES slowly stands up. He looks around)

EVELYN

Ah! Don't film me! Don't film me! I look terrible.

CAMERA OPERATOR

Don't be silly, you look beautiful, as always.

EVELYN

You're just saying that.
CAMERA OPERATOR

No, I mean it. You're my shining star.

EVELYN

How's it look?

CAMERA OPERATOR

I gotta say, I like what I'm seeing.

EVELYN

Oh, you. Stop it!

(On screen, EVELYN opens a refrigerator and takes out the cake. She lights the candles, picks up the cake and begins singing Happy Birthday. The camera follows her as she walks to another room. Inside is small table, where a young child with a birthday hat is eagerly waiting. It's SAM. The screen freezes on his face. SUPERNOVA JONES looks up. SAM is standing on the deck of the Sunspot)

SUPERNOVA JONES

Sam...

SAM

Hey Dad.

SUPERNOVA JONES

I'm...I'm so sorry. I couldn't protect you. I couldn't save you.

SAM

Dad...

SUPERNOVA JONES

It was too much...I tied...but...

SAM

It's ok.

SUPERNOVA JONES

IT'S NOT OK! I was supposed to be there for you!
SAM
You were there for me.

(Beat)
Right before I closed my eyes, I saw you, holding me-

SUPERNOVA JONES
No! I can fix it, Sam. I promise. And then we'll be together. You, and me, and mom...

SAM
She misses you. She's waiting for you to come home.

SUPERNOVA JONES
Not without you.

SAM
Dad...I'll be ok. But mom needs you.

SUPERNOVA JONES
What good am I to her?

SAM
You can start over. A new legacy.

SUPERNOVA JONES
And what?! Forget about you? No. I've come this far, I can't just turn around and give up. I've gone through so much...Don't tell me to start over. I can only run so far. I tried being strong, Sam, but I'm not. I'm just one man! Tell me! What am I supposed to do?!

SAM
You have to let me go.

SUPERNOVA JONES
...It's impossible.

(SUPERNOVA JONES cries. SAM walks up to him and hugs him)

I'm sorry. I failed you.

SAM
No, I got to go on an adventure with my Dad. I'm glad we got to spend all this time together. Thank you.
SUPERNOVA JONES

Sam...

(SAM exits)

SAM! Don’t leave me! I love you! Sam!

(Silence. The screen flips back to life again. JONES hands SAM a present)

JONES

Here you go, bucko!

(SAM opens the present. It’s the space helmet SUPERNOVA JONES has worn throughout the play)

SAM

Woah! Space Captain Hash’s helmet!

(SAM puts the helmet on)

Stop evildoer!

JONES

You can’t stop me, it’s impossible!

SAM

Impossible? Nothing’s Impossible, ha ha ha!

(JONES gives the camera to EVELYN and fake fights with SAM)

EVELYN

Come on, you two...

(The recording cuts to various shots of SAM’s birthday. Eating cake, laughing, etc. It cuts to later in the night. JONES and SAM are playing with action figures. Music plays in the background)

JONES

Come on, Sam, it’s time for bed.

SAM

I’m not tired!
Sam...

JONES

(The music changes to Frank Sinatra's "Cheek to Cheek begins playing)

One last song, ok?

(JONES jumps up and dances with SAM. Back on the Sunspot, SUPERNOVA JONES watches them dance. As the song continues, he silently goes to a side compartment and takes out a space suit. He laboriously gets into the suit. He places his helmet on his head. He turns back to watch the recording for a moment, then hits the air lock button on the side of the ship. The door opens revealing pure white. As the final beats of "Cheek to Cheek" plays, SUPERNOVA JONES steps into the light. The door closes behind him)

BLACKOUT
Paradox, Time, and a bit of Pure Mathematics in Samuel Beckett's 
Endgame

2012 Critical Winner
Dramatics Club of St. Louis Contest

Natalie Grybauskas
Paradox, Time, and a bit of Pure Mathematics in Samuel Beckett's *Endgame*

*Endgame* uses repetition and paradox—its framework of timeless nothingness—to shed light on the absurdity of the human condition: the futile and compulsive attempts to scrape meaning from misery, the linear perception of time as a collection of moments, the constant state of decay of all physical things, in particular, the human body. Beckett reveals the inadequacies of abstract attempts to pin down universal truths, utilizing the dramatic form to convey and evoke a subjective existential experience, particularly emphasizing the human misconception of time as a culmination and progression of incremental moments.

Abrupt, cyclical dialogue and hindered movement permeate the play, beginning with the first set of stage directions that describe Clov's "stiff, staggering walk" and jerky movement between the windows and the stepladder; a "brief laugh" punctuating each segment of his back and forth cross-stage travel (7). Coupled with the barren room, Clov's fragmented motion and laughter seem practiced and pointless, like that of a madman or a prisoner in solitary confinement. He addresses the audience in cryptic, repetitive speech, commencing the dialogue with "Finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished...Grain upon grain, and one day, suddenly, there's a heap, a little heap, the impossible heap"(8). Clov's speech invokes the feeling of—without explicitly stating—the repeated phrase throughout, that "something is taking its course." Indeed, there is Clov's winding course around the room, and the ambiguous thing that "must be nearly finished"—yet there is a sense of nothingness pervading the play, of a distinct lack of anything taking any course. Albert Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus* describes this paradoxical duality as a successful portrayal of the absurd: "Performing these two tasks simultaneously, negating on the one hand and magnifying on the other, is the way open to the absurd creator. He must give the void
its colors" (Camus 114).

Ambiguous language constantly arises and repeats in *Endgame*, creating cyclical dialogues and sometimes blurring the meaning of verbal affirmatives or negatives. Hamm's question "Have you not had enough?" elicits an immediate "Yes! [pause.] Of what?" (11). Clov answers in the affirmative without thinking, out of habit, evidencing the routine and compulsion contained in the play's verbal intercourse. But had Clov considered the question before saying "Yes," the meaning of the answer could easily be confused— *has* he had enough, or *not* had enough? Speech conventions allow for either, and Beckett plays with double negatives, negative affirmation and vice-versa, as well as with very general language. He intentionally leaves these exchanges unspecified, allowing the words take on multiple contradictory meanings. The dialogue is frequently vague enough to mean nothing at all, or all at once. In response to Clov's "of what?," Hamm clarifies "Of this...this...thing" to which Clov unquestioningly responds "I already had" (10-11). In the context of a barren room, the demonstrative "this" does not describe a physical object— for there are so few nearby and Hamm indicates none of them by a pointed finger or directed nod— and so "this" necessarily describes something abstract.

Whether "this" refers to the hellish half-light of the empty room, corporeal pain and limitations, caring for Hamm, or simply the grim meaningless existence of a conscious brain that knows there is nothing besides "this"— whatever "this thing" may be, it must be some aspect of the trappings of existence— perhaps even the stage itself, the scripted dialogue, the carefully timed descent of the curtain. "This thing"'s avoidance of specificity describes everything, yet means nothing, and contains truth only in the individual's subjective understanding— whether or not the audience is aware of doing so, they assign their own comprehension to the ambiguous. And so *Endgame* says nothing, does nothing, and yet imparts a meaning upon its perceiver that signifies
his personal interpretation, the result of his natural (and possibly unconscious) response of extracting purpose from the vague and the meaningless.

True articulation is thus impossible, and the abstraction of ideas into language is fruitless, but the compulsion to do so remains and the play continues. Clov gives an answer the second time, despite Hamm's equally vague clarification of his vague question, because Clov acknowledges the impossibility of reaching a shared understanding through language, which is necessarily distorted by perception, and simply articulates his truth in his own veiled words. Similarly, his response to "Did you ever think of one thing?" is "Never" (46). The absurdity of this abstraction—of the infinitely complicated human brain considering just one thing—of attempting to single out truths and try to impart them to others, is clearest to Clov, the only character capable of sight.

His sight and mobility make him essential to Hamm's physical existence, but Clov is also essential as a companion—the two need each other's presence, even as they constantly discuss separating from one another. There is a frenzied compulsion in their interactions, in their repetitions of "the same questions, the same answers"(12). Hamm needs Clov to handle his bodily functions and to tell him what's going on outside, and Hamm provides Clov with food and shelter. But these are nothing but pointless habits in the context of a bleak nothing-space—there is nothing to see, so why look—there is nothing to do or be, so why stay alive? But each Clov and Hamm give the other a purpose, so they stay wrapped up in their cyclical routines, because merely staying alive is the only activity left, and each acts as a provider for the other.

Hamm is blind and confined to his chair, but his grandiose playacting and storytelling and demands for attentions have an audience in Clov, who cannot sit down, but can move around, and Hamm's requests give him something for which to move. Clov's complaints do not amount to anything more than complaints: "I can't be getting you up and putting you to bed every five
minutes, I have things to do" (10). Obviously Clov can and will continue to get Hamm up at his behest; and the repeated claim that Clov has "things to do," eventually questioned, garners Clov's response, "I look at the wall" (19). Just as Hamm constantly commands Clov because Clov obeys—just as Clov obeys because he is capable of movement—Clov looks at the wall because his eyes are in working order, and as Hamm puts it: "Every man his speciality....We do what we can" (17-18).

Each of Endgame's characters have limitations on their capabilities, but none more so than Nagg and Nell who, beyond blindness and immobility, live inside separate dustbins. The lids of the dustbins act as a constraint on their capacity to perceive the others, and to be perceived. Their physical situation then limits their very existence—esse est percipi—to when their lids are removed and they are able to reminisce about the past. The eldest characters most evidently represent "victims and prisoners" of time, as described in Beckett's Proust: laden with memory, crippled by their inability to perceive the continuity of time. "There is no escape from the hours and the days....There is no escape from yesterday because yesterday has deformed us, or been deformed by us, and irremediably part of us, within us, heavy and dangerous" (Beckett 512). Nagg and Nell's age guarantees that they are more deformed by the human perception of time, and exist in literal representation of their lives as a collection of discrete moments, progressing linearly as one ages—a progression that has halted in Endgame, which exists in a single infinite and infinitesimal moment of stagnancy.

Endgame's context of blindness and an absence of most objects and living things has eliminated the visual reference point of physical change and decay, ordinarily serving as a constant reminder that time has passed, and will continue to pass. Upon waking, Hamm asks Clov a series of questions:

Hamm: What time is it?
Clov: The same as usual.
HAMM: Have you looked?
CLOV: Yes.
HAMM: Well?
CLOV: Zero.
(11)

By removing the context of ordinary life and the normal spatial world, *Endgame*’s setting prevents and indication of forward progress—time has stopped, so all its victims and prisoners exist in a single inescapable moment before death. Robbed of the reference point of time, the characters are stuck repeating themselves in a static emptiness with no certain end. As Hamm says, "outside of here it's death" (16). The only "outside" can be outside of the present moment: the future, then, is death.

Acknowledgements of time, references to signifiers of the past or future, have a distinct air of falsehood and irony throughout the play. As Nagg says to the unsympathetic Hamm, "One day I'll ask you for some, in return for a kindness, and you'll promise it to me. One must live with the times" (64). The idea of this occurring "one day" is either sarcastic or delusional, because Hamm is unforgiving and somewhat brutal to his parents. Exclamations and frustrated mentions of "Once!" and questions about "yesterday" imply an obvious skepticism of the measures of time. Perhaps Clov captures it best when Hamm asks him to describe the view out the window: Clov responds, "The general effect? Just a moment" (82). He does not follow up with any description, because he is sarcastically using the phrase to inform Hamm. In this timeless space, this moment before the end stretches indefinitely, but its lack of duration likewise makes it zero.

For time is continuous, and merely a dimension through which things move, just as they do through space. Attempting to divide it into moments naturally begs the question—how long, exactly, is a moment? Can a fraction of something infinite be measured? These ideas have plagued the conscious thinker since he has been conscious. The seemingly paradoxical principles behind
time, motion, the infinite and the infinitesimal, were famously illustrated in Zeno's nine paradoxes, subtly referenced by each Clav and Hamm. Clav's mention of "grain upon grain, and one day, suddenly...the impossible heap" is reinforced by Hamm's "Moment upon moment, pattering down, like the millet grains of...that old Greek, and all life long you wait for that to mount up to a life"(78).

The is a direct reference to the paradox of the Grain of Millet, in which Zeno states: if a bushel of grain falls, it certainly makes a sound, but a single grain dropped will not, seeming to contradict that a whole is made up of its parts. Similar ideas come up in some of Zeno's other paradoxes: dividing something into its smallest possible parts means those parts will have zero magnitude, since there is no limit on how many times something can be divided– to then attempt to reassemble the whole will create the problem that a sum of many zeros can only be zero, so either the whole is also of zero magnitude, or the division into such parts is necessarily impossible– this composition of zeros into something of substance is Clav's "impossible heap."

Zeno's paradoxes have long since been explained by modern calculus, but they presented a challenge that had philosophers and mathematicians scrambling to disprove these seemingly impossible, yet obviously incorrect, paradoxes. The human brain has difficulty comprehending infinity, whether infinitely large or infinitesimally small, and particularly when the two are placed side-by-side in the paradox of plurality. Another relevant paradox proposed by Zeno is of the arrow in flight. If there is an arrow flying through the air, examining the arrow at a particular moment yields a conundrum to the concept of motion. An object at rest occupies exactly its own space, and the arrow is doing exactly this at a specific moment, yet it is still undeniably in motion– how can the arrow's flight, undeniably in motion, be made up of moments in which the arrow is at rest? The flaw is in the idea that time can be divided into distinct units that have magnitude– time is
necessarily continuous, so a "moment" can only be a durationless point: imagine a number line, and someone saying "what is the distance from 3 to 3?"

But human perception is not logical as mathematics are, and centuries have been spent solving these problems and defining the notions and axioms of our current understanding of the realm of math. Abstract mathematics necessarily cannot truly explain the tangible, try as they might— but manage to ring true in many tangible scenarios. It is no coincidence that humans can explain and define many phenomena of the natural world, but that is merely because the knowledge of mathematics is the combined efforts of many men—some of whom went mad, committed suicide; some of whom were wrong, but many of whom were right—to create a field of study, a body of work that describes their own perception of the world with accuracy, hoping to discover something beautiful along the way. The aesthetic beauty of pure mathematics lies in its lack of aesthetic: its ability to self-describe and reinforce despite the absence of tangible forms. "The game the mind plays with itself according to set and measured laws takes place in the sonorous compass that belongs to us and beyond which the vibrations nevertheless meet in an inhuman universe" (Camus 99).

The apparent consistency and constructed guidelines of mathematics, however, guarantee that it is yet another form of expression that abstracts itself into falsehood, most clearly in its inapplicability. But the appearance of consistency does not guarantee perfection— math is rife with paradoxes, simultaneous truths and untruths. For instance, Russell's Paradox, which asks one to consider a set constructed of other sets, under the restriction that they are only sets that do not contain themselves. This set simultaneously contains itself and not— for if it does, by definition it cannot, if it does not, by definition it must. Perhaps a convoluted example, but the abstract aspects of mathematics allow for the impossible, both in the physical world and in our comprehension. As
a result of Russell's Paradox, the axiomatic basis of Zermelo-Fraenkel Set Theory contains a stipulation (an axiom, if you will) that no set can contain itself to correct for this. And while this particular set of axioms is the most useful and commonly accepted basis of set theory, mathematics are actually not simply a group of unmovable stone pillars labeled "AXIOMS." A set of axioms could be constructed in which $2+2 = 5$, instead of 4; there are infinitely many ways to model mathematical systems that do not jibe with the mathematical system of arithmetic taught in the required schooling of adolescents. (Gödel's incompleteness theorems state an extraordinarily interesting yet inappropriately difficult to elaborate upon idea— that no consistent mathematical system can prove itself consistent, and that every consistent system contains both true and false statements that are impossible to prove either true or false.) Like language, math is based on a set of rules, and can be manipulated to show truth and falsehood, to create beauty and ugly confusion— it proves and contradicts itself, and outside of an individual context, says and means nothing. This has fascinated human beings since long before Zeno's time, a natural result of the human brain's desire to explain and describe— the endless search for meaning forms rules, creates contradictions to those rules, makes rules about rules and then contradicts those— it is a beautiful and imperfect farce. Despite existing in an "inhuman universe," it is distinctly human in its efforts to understand. It is no coincidence that so much literature seems to ooze with abstract theory to the mathematically inclined.

Even though many young students with a knack for mathematics can now easily explain the flaws in Zeno's paradoxes, they cannot solve the problem of memory— that we perceive our lives as a timeline of memories that occupy moments in time, while simultaneously experiencing the continuity of time in the present moment— which itself should have no duration— for duration requires an initial value and an endpoint. Time, and this moment are both durationless, and both
stretching infinitely into the past and future. Beckett's notion that time is deformed and deformative is undeniable as the human brain attempts to assemble time into something forcefully linear, and finds the discrete where there is only continuity; time is simply a measure of duration, a dimension like length or width, another variable with the simply property of measurability— it is merely a space through which to move. The arrow in motion does not perceive itself in motion (let us suspend our disbelief about the conscious mind of an arrow), rather, it perceives space moving around it— as humans view time as a vast, propelling force that eventually brings decay and destruction to the physical world and their fragile skeletal forms, constantly reminded of the ticking countdown to their own end—the existence of time guarantees death.

This crushing presence in every hour and every day, the boundless fear coupled with pointless activity, the frustrated inquiries of existence and purpose— these are unavoidable in the conscious mind, which can't help but sense itself as a Sisyphus of sorts, "in which the whole being is exerted toward accomplishing nothing...If this myth is tragic, that is because its hero is conscious"(Camus 120-121). Magnified to the point of absurdity by Endgame's empty stasis, the human brain is painfully aware that death will surely occur as an endpoint of the finite life, and faced with the contradictory notions that it must do things— "I have things to do"— and that doing things would be pointless because of the temporal quality of one's own life. Unexplainable paradoxes— unlike Zeno's propositions, long since explained— are the driving force behind the inexplicable urge that is distinctly human, the inevitable result of a conscious mind in an unknowable world— the urge to express, to define one's own experience, and the desire to find a common ground of understanding amongst fellow humans, knowing full well that language, art, mathematics, any and all fields of knowledge and expression that try to put things in some kind of order, will inherently fail because of the shortcomings of these abstractions, because any
accomplishment in the looming face of death is meaningless. The human condition entails that we are miserable, meaningless, and yet we strive to say something about it—like Sisyphus,"one always finds one's burden again"(Camus 123), but at the same time, "The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart."

Works Cited


Education

2012 Winner
Carrie S. Galt Fiction Contest

Maria Xia
Education

What is an education? He thinks of the first time he fell in love—at thirty-five, he still calls it his “first,” as though there will be more. In his mind, love is a season. His, he hopes, will last—like summer in the tropics, or winter at the poles. For the first time in a long time he feels happy. He begins to understand those Christian sentiments shipped from overseas: love is kind, love is forgiving. He thinks of love as a blessing, or a rare gift, these things by nature precious and free, bestowed upon him to illuminate his mind. At the same time, he feels at its mercy, as though it could vanish just as it came—a balloon punctured by some careless mistake—and so he watches with both caution and joy. This doesn't come difficultly for him, for he has always been a man devoted to learning.

***

When Lin was a young man, he had been attracted to the promises of the New Oriental School. As a man who took the scholarly calling seriously, he had found
something stifling about the more mainstream educational systems. He could sense that something chewed away at his fellow classmates, many who yearned to one day leave the country. China was too crowded, too impersonal; the government prized numbers and efficiency over the cultivation of individuals. Yet everywhere there was dirt and avarice. His classmates wanted to escape to countries like Britain, America, or even Germany, where there would be time and space for them to lead honorable lives.

In college, rumors circulated about the way America taught its students. Someone always had an American cousin, and could explain how, over there, colleges let students choose their fields of study. Furthermore they taught their students literature and history, made them Americans in their hearts and minds. To Lin, those stories provoked thought more than envy. That is what we need, Lin theorized. We need an education that would make us proud to be Chinese—we cannot simply pantomime the West. Despite how his friends complained about China, Lin still believed in its promise, revered its buried power. He had a picture in his mind of slender, ghostly mountains—they reminded him of the intellectual heights that scholars once tried to attain.

After he graduated from college, and began his studies in a doctoral program for literature, Lin started to flock with that group of students who called themselves the New Oriental School, who would meet in the private homes of its members on occasional weekends for discussions of culture and politics. It wasn't a School but a Society; it was radical, self-important, and exclusive—almost like a secret book club. Perhaps many of its members would be embarrassed now at how seriously they took themselves back then. Still, they would never regret it. It was a part of being so young. Out of their earnestness, they would learn so much. Their New Oriental education was thorough because it was
self-motivated; they read Western social theorists and criticized Mao Zedong, and they mined old literature in search of a national essence. In the beginning, their discussions almost always devolved into a struggle with identity. “Is China experiencing a spiritual crisis?”

One of the members of the New Oriental School was in the same doctoral program as Lin, and during the week Lin frequently saw the man around the university. But Lin, too introverted to strike up conversation, was fortunate that the man was friendly enough to seek him out. On the day they first met, the man sat down next to Lin in Rhetoric class, and leaned over to greet him. “You're Lin, aren't you?”

“Yes, that’s right. And you are...”

“Rumin. I recognized you at the last meeting of the—you know.”

They shook hands quickly under the table.

“Man, I could really use a smoke,” said Rumin, leaning back and stretching his shoulder blades. “This class makes an hour seem like an afternoon.”

Lin nodded in agreement. “It really does.”

“Hey, are you going to the meeting tomorrow?”

“I'll be there.”

“I can't wait.” Rumin leaned in conspiratorially. “Did you seen the new girl last week? You know the one.” His hands moved suggestively. “Didn't you like her?” His grin was disarming, and Lin tried to match it. “I can't wait,” Rumin said again, then turned back around in his seat. They passed the class without speaking to each other.

“You don't talk much, do you?” said Rumin after class was over, regarding Lin with his steady, open friendliness. “That’s all right. I've heard what you said at meetings,
and to me you're brilliant.” From that day forward, Rumin took Lin under his wing. Through Rumin, Lin slid into the New Oriental School's social scene; Rumin shuttled him to parties, introduced him to interesting and like-minded people. They became best friends; they were the sort of friends who would die for one another. In later years, Lin would think back to graduate school as among the best days of his life.

It is an unfortunate fact for the New Oriental School that, inevitably, such organizations begin to fray. It begins when the founders grow up and move on with their lives. Then comes a day when the more senior members start to wonder why the newer ones seem so radical and opinionated—surely they themselves had been a more reasonable bunch. Factions of thought arise. A subgroup of the School becomes intensely interested in Marx. Another wants only to talk about human rights; yet another wants to write poetry and perhaps spearhead a new literary movement. The passion is as keen as it ever was, but the channels have been poorly constructed from the beginning. When Lin left the New Oriental School after three years, he had the feeling that it was left in poor hands, that soon it would disintegrate or implode.

Rumin left the New Oriental School around the same time. Afterward, Lin sensed that Rumin began to orbit him more insistently; he would sit next to Lin in the classes they shared, and when class ended, he would follow Lin outside, hoping to continue the class discussion with a New Oriental angle. “Did you agree with the essayist's portrayal of Confucius as an obsolete artifact, rather than an active influence in our modern literary culture?” would be the sort of question he might pose to Lin. It was a familiar, almost worn-down thrum. Lin did his best to answer; often their discussion went in circles until it lost steam, but it did the trick of lathering their minds for dissertation. Lin suspected
Rumin was suffering from nostalgia for the founding days of the New Oriental School. He couldn't be blamed. Lin was aware that they were both trying to fan the fire for the remainder of their degree; without it, there would be no zeal with which they could justify and sustain their studies. It was a masquerade they had to weather.

It is to mollify men such as these that the saying goes, "First comes the bitterness, then there is sweetness and wealth and honor for ten thousand years."

When Lin and Rumin graduated with their doctorate, they both took jobs at the same newspaper. They started at the bottom rung. They were under contract to proofread, fact-check, and perform general newsroom slave work for two years. They would work long hours for little pay, doing work that they were overqualified for. But as single men, they didn't need a lot to live on. The hard-earned doctorate degree had proved useless for many of their fellow classmates in an economy that was prizing engineers; they felt lucky to be employed. Here, at least they knew they would perform the requisite two years of slave labor, and then they would slowly inch up.

As soon as he began his job, Lin noticed that the weeks began to pass with remarkable speed. The parties were fewer and farther in between. Rumin, in any case, had begun to chase women in earnest—at heart he had always been a family man, despite his lewd jokes. He offered to set Lin up with single women, but Lin wasn't interested in chasing love. At least, he was of the camp that believed in waiting for it; in a way, he was even more of a romantic than his friend. As a result, Lin saw less of his friend in the evenings. Instead he brewed tea in his apartment, read literature, and broke his smoking habit. He had begun to crack sunflower seeds—a methodical motion of bringing the
hand, holding the seed, to his lips—which reminded him of smoking. He passed many of his weekday evenings in this manner; weeks turned into months.

In six years, the two men reached the level of beat reporters. Rumin signed up to work for the city government beat, and he encouraged Lin to do so as well. Lin declined. Rumin pressed him further—he asked if Lin could recall a more idealistic time in their lives, when, over a table littered with cigarette butts and watermelon peels, raised voices argued about the importance of fearless journalism and governments held accountable. Lin said yes, he remembered. But what had changed? The memory was too vague to be effective; it was something from which he had become detached, a short and dark movie clip. What had they even argued about? Had it even been substantive, or had they only fed off each other's words like macaws?

With regard to reactionary posturing, he had grown weary—he was weary, he realized, with too many aspects of his life. He was no longer twenty-three, with a mind full of creeds. More importantly, he was no longer convinced of its application to himself. The slipperiness of ideas, the intransigence of the daily grind—these had made themselves known. The affairs of the world and the affairs of the individual separated, grew apart. One wanted not revolution, but companionship. One thought less of politics and bureaucrats, one thought more of the soup boiling onto the stove.

Instead, he signed on to “city faith”. He chose it in part because it was the smallest beat, and therefore the easiest on its reporters. And it was partly whimsical—in the evenings he had begun, in his unhurried and methodical way, to read the Bible.

* * *
Ai Ling went by “Eileen” in America. It had pleased her to find a name so similar to her Chinese name. Ma An, or “Mary,” had suggested it to her. Mary's daughters were born in America, so they had come up with the name easily.

Mary was a middle-aged mother of two—her girls were eleven and sixteen. Years earlier she had brought them to China on a business trip. She was being welcomed as a research fellow for the university that Ai Ling was attending as an undergraduate; she was an accomplished biologist, Ai Ling was a biology student. Ai Ling volunteered to accompany the new guest on a leisure trip around the region, which the university would pay for.

Mary was almost old enough to be Ai Ling's mother, but she was a petite woman who had aged well. And she was instantly fond of Ai Ling because the girl was quiet and respectful, but still had a certain grace in the way she carried herself. She had a repose that Mary wished her own daughters could have—why not admit it? In a way Ai Ling reminded her of herself at that age. She felt the impulse to take this young girl by the shoulders, steer her clear of life's pitfalls. Mary had blundered once, and it took her many years to recover from it. Thank goodness she was madly ambitious. In Ai Ling, she saw a girl with potential, who might learn from her mistakes.

Ai Ling saw in Mary a strong woman beset by loneliness, who wanted someone to talk to. Mary's two daughters were flighty and spoiled, and she barely spoke of her husband, who hadn't come on the trip. But she was very open with Ai Ling, and her eagerness for conversation showed itself in a brightness about her eyes and a fluidity about her lips. “Study hard,” Mary told her. “It is important to establish a successful
career for yourself. Women these days have opportunities that would be criminal to waste." She became tipsy during dinner at the Szechuan Palace, and told Ai Ling about all the steps it took to become a doctoral student in the U.S. As a last note, she said, "Remember this." She leaned in close to Ai Ling, and her words fell on her ear in wisps. "You should never think about settling down until you have secured a career. Take it from me. A husband is a husband. But career, influence, and pride in your work—that is everything."

Their friendship would cement on their hike through the Jiuzhaigou Valley. It was their first time in the mountain range, and the weather was obliging. The sun reflected off the many rivers and falls, and occasionally the low-lying clouds parted to reveal a snow-capped peak. They began their day at the gates of the mountain. Mary's daughters were quiet, subdued by the prospects of the dizzying heights and depths lying in the day ahead. As the bus climbed, they watched the guardrail flicker past the way they would watch a film, though Mary kept her eyes closed. The journey was harrowing even to Ai Ling—the bus driver had a practiced ease with which he threw the van around the bends. Ling hoped he wasn't showing off and playing with their lives, and asked Mary if she felt all right. She passes around a bag of spiced nuts.

But at every disembarkment, Mary's step was light. She had a large camera slung around her neck, but as interested as she was in the view, she was also drawn to the roadside sellers. Dark locals with leathery mountain skin were selling crafts and small goods they claimed have been harvested from the mountain: dug from its insides, then molded with mountain hands and varnished with mountain chi. It was apparent that Mary itched to bargain—that she wanted these mountain trinkets, but she also wanted to feel she
hasn't been cheated by these mountain people; she wanted to prove her nativity to a haggleful country. She wanted to feel mountainous herself.

Mary with a camera reminded Ai Ling of a woman with a vanity mirror, who always prefers a reflection, and holding the instrument of reflection. She also limits what the eye can see to what the mirror can fit—to her, cutting a mountain in half is an artistic choice. It is a different beauty, Ling surmised. She would like to see the pictures.

They piled back into the van, which took them to the highest point, marked by a sign. They were firmly inside of a cloud. Mary's daughters huddled by the sign so she could take a picture. (The older one has a more melancholy smile; the younger one is prettier.) Ling offered to take a photo for the family. Mary climbed up to join her daughters and wedged herself between them. She beamed; Ling fumbled with the large device.

The bus stopped at the end of the day at the edge of a perfect lake. It was framed by two great hills that slope downwards and overlap in the middle of the lake, where, presumably, the waters snake around one base and then the other. The waters were still, and the sky was a vivid blue unimpeded by the dry atmosphere. Mary took breathless photographs of her daughters standing by the fence, then they took a picture for her, and then Ling took a picture for all three. Finally, Ling took a picture with Mary, standing together at the fence. Ling peered into the black hole in the lens of the camera and imagined Mary on the other side, looking at the photograph in a month.

Before she left China, Mary put her hand on Ai Ling's arm. They stood in the middle of the airport terminal. "I can see you are a capable girl," she said. "I hope you will take what I said to heart." She smiled as she spoke, but Ai Ling noticed bags under
her eyes. She looked older than she had the days before.

Ai Ling bid them goodbye. She stayed to watch the plane take off, saw it pierce the belly of a cloud. There was a lightness in her chest and arms. An impression had remained in her of Mary in Jiuzhaigou Valley—her face was flushed gently from hiking. She was leaning in to say something; in her eyes, the lakelight danced about.

* * *

On a winter afternoon, having not seen each other for three years, Rumin visited Lin in his city. Rumin had left the newspaper after he married a woman from Chengdu—he had followed her south, and they had a passionate marriage that went up in flames. In his occasional letters to Lin after the divorce, he exuded depression. “I want to visit soon—I miss you, my old friend.”

When he finally made the trip, four weeks later, the first thing he noticed when he entered Lin's apartment was the cross hanging over the door. “What's this, Lin? Are you a Christian now?”

Lin explained. His work at the newspaper had asked him to cover the activities of the city's new church—its congregation was growing quickly enough to attract attention. While he never joined—that would have been unprofessional—he continued to read on his own. After three years, having read the entire Bible, several books on apologetics, and the writings of some contemporary theologists, he made his own conversion. It was his personal faith, he said, it had nothing to do with his job. Although if the paper found out, he would probably be fired or severely warned.
“A Christian,” Rumin marveled. “Of all things, I never would have guessed. What happened to our old ambitions?”

Lin didn't know how to answer. It was too difficult to explain, how he once revered those Chinese mountains, and the figure of the lone scholar, tucked away in the peaks with his work. Over the years, the setting changed—it was an apartment, and the figure was cloistered in a cozy study, bent over the word of God; from somewhere in the room came the faint cracking of sunflower seeds.

“Of course I don't judge you,” said Rumin. “Smoking, radicalism—you've kicked all the bad habits. And gone Christian!” Shaking his head in wonder, he took a swig of beer. At thirty-five, Rumin was already gaining a little bit of spread—a round belly hung on his tall frame. “Time changes a person. So what? Look at me. Perhaps I've 'strayed' even farther than you. I'm not a journalist anymore, not an intellectual, not even a handsome guy. Nothing more than a divorsee.”

Lin's pity for his friend's carried with it a larger hopelessness about society. Rumin had been so lively and cheerful in the days of the New Oriental School. Everyone was sure that he would be the first to settle down and make an excellent husband. He was, in everyone's opinion, a family man. It pained Lin to see that even for those who tried so hard in that regard, familial happiness eluded them.

“Rumin, you should try internet matchmaking,” he suggested. “The trend is growing popular in the cities. The paper gets wind of new success stories every day.”

Rumin shrugged. “I scorned internet matchmaking for a long time, you know. I used to think—what kind of man needed a third party to help him find a...” His voice trailed off. “But things are different now. I just want to keep things simple. Wife, kid,
happy home. One thing's for sure; I won't be looking for the love of the century. Lin, we're past that age now, aren't we?"

Lin hesitated. "Yes. I'll be praying for you, Rumin."

"Praying? Oh right. Yes, of course."

Several days after Rumin got back to Chengdu, he received an email from his friend. *Be persevering, my friend. Take heart from the words of the Bible—even if you aren't a Christian, you can find the words here encouraging and true. I Corinthians 13:4, "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud."*

* * *

Before long, Lin received a reply. "I've followed your advice. I just met someone I think is a good fit for me. She's a little old, but not without hope, if you know what I mean. As always, your advice was sound. Come visit Chengdu? You can tell me what you think. Rumin."

When Rumin came to pick Lin up from the train station, his face was apologetic. "Bad news, Lin. I asked her to bring a friend to dinner, so you wouldn't just be a third wheel. But she said she just moved back to the city not too long ago. I'm sorry. This isn't what I planned."

Lin said it was fine; he wasn't looking to meet anyone. He was here to visit, like they had agreed.

Rumin described his date: she was a biologist, thirty-five, working in Chengdu city's main hospital. "I was pretty curious as to why she was single in the first place," he
told Lin. "She's pretty nice, she seemed smart, and she's definitely not bad-looking. Then yesterday, she finally told me the reason. She went to America to get her Ph.D—smart lady, right? I could tell she was smart, but I didn't know she was a genius—anyway, she spent practically nine years there. First studying, then working. And here's what's great: she told me, *I didn't meet any man there that I liked.* How do you like that! Nine years in America, and she didn't meet a single man she liked—and now she's back in China!"

Rumin mouth was opened wide in laughter. "And now she's met—the great Rumin!"

Lin laughed at the return of Rumin's old humor. "I'm glad to hear she's a good fit for you."

"Well, we're different, don't get me wrong. But we have the same attitude about this damn dating thing, and that's what's important."

But over dinner, Rumin showed none of his sureness or lightheartedness. He was even a little awkward, something Lin had never seen in Rumin. But he could see why. The woman, Ai Ling, gave off a strange vibe. Her eyes were deep-set and calmly alert, her mouth was small and patient. She had the air of someone highly intelligent; her demeanor felt both distant and watchful—to Lin, it amounted to a sterile attractiveness.

Rumin had ordered a steaming plate of fish and a round of drinks for everyone, but it was as though he himself tasted nothing. Lin thought the atmosphere was like that in a matchmaker's office. Rumin was responding to Ai Ling's personality by being overly stiff and business-like. "Tell me," he said to her, "do you like children?"

"I like young children, but not teenagers," Ai Ling replied.

Rumin nodded: "I've always wanted children, myself. I'm sure Lin could tell you."

He looked at Lin, then looked at his hands. "I always was a family man."
"That's right," Lin said. "We used to tease him about it in college. We told Rumin to take his future wife over to America, so he could have all the kids he wanted. Just get an American ranch, and let them run around and graze!" He looked to his friend—Rumin smiled gratefully.

"That's lovely," said Ai Ling. "I like that image... of children grazing in the field."

Her response brought silence to the table, and for a time the thought of children in tall grass hovered before them.

"There was a book I read once," Ai Ling continued. "In it, thousands of children are running in a field of rye."

Lin started. "I know it."

"You know what?" said Rumin.

"I recognize that line." Lin furrowed his brow. Ai Ling watched him from across the table. "Where did I read it?"

"Do you?" she said. Her voice was gentle. "It's an American book."

"That's right." The title came to him. "It's called, Catcher in the Rye." In his mind, he could see the book—a dusty library book with block letters—resting on the end table next to an ashtray. It was graduate school—he had picked it up to improve his English. He sighed involuntarily. "That book brings back good memories."

Ai Ling nodded. "It reminds me of America."

Quietness overtook them again; for a moment, it was as though the two were in lost in the same reverie. In the pause, Rumin looked from one to the other. "Well!" said Rumin, with a sudden puff of authority. His voice had suddenly regained its usual boisterousness. "If I ever had a son, I would name him after Lin over here." He slapped
Lin on the shoulder. “I’m telling you, this man is a walking encyclopedia.” He turned to Ai Ling. “The smartest guy I ever knew.”

It was Lin who walked Ai Ling home after dinner. For the rest of the meal, Rumin had acted as if he were restored to his old self. He dominated the conversation with his jokes and easy banter, he ordered drinks. “To friendships!” he toasted. “To kindred spirits!” He paid the bill, and then, despite Lin's emphatic protests, said he had to go home—there was something he had to attend to.

“Walk the lovely Ai Ling home,” Rumin instructed his flustered friend. “Do it, or our friendship is over!” When Ai Ling wasn't looking, he gave Lin a meaningful look.

And so Lin found himself walking with Ai Ling through the streets of Chengdu. The warm atmosphere of dinner dissipated outside the restaurant, and suddenly Lin felt shy. He asked Ai Ling if she had liked *Catcher in the Rye*.

“I did,” she said. “Then again, a very good friend had lent it to me.” They walked a few paces in silence. It was the peak hour of Chengdu's nightlife, and young people bustled around them, their festive voices grating on Lin's ears. “It made me miss mountains,” she said.

“Mountains?” Lin realized he had lost track of the conversation.

“Yes—the mountains of Jiuzhaigou Valley. You see, it's a very American book. Cities, parks, hotels. I can't quite explain it, but it made me ache for a mountain. A Chinese mountain.”

They turned onto a quieter street. Lin was stirred by the phrase, *Chinese mountain*. It reminded him of something in himself.

“I didn’t miss China back then,” she continued. “Almost never. But many years
ago I hiked the mountains of Jiuzhaigou with this friend. She always said we would return.” Her voice was soft and measured. “Their scenic power has never left me.”

“Yes, you're right,” Lin mused. “I grew up by the ocean. I have never lived by mountains. But I always thought the cloud-ringed peaks had great powers of suggestion.”

She nodded at him, and then they walked for a long time in silence. At the door of her apartment complex, he bid her goodbye at her door, but she called out to him before he had walked very far. “I haven't been to the Jiuzhaigou Valley in years,” she said.

“Perhaps we can go together.”

His heart was pounding, but he replied as calmly as he could. “Yes, I would like that.” She waved, and went into her building.

Rumin was the first to give him his blessing. “I know a match when I see one,” said the good and loyal friend. “It was obvious. I'm going to continue my search—that shouldn't be hard—and I want you to keep in touch with Ai Ling. She's an admirable woman.” He winked cheerfully. “She's too reserved for me anyway. Definitely a virgin.”

Lin had continued to protest, even as he thought of her at her door.

Rumin was insistent. “I'm telling you, there's nothing personal to it. I told you, I wasn't looking for love; what I want is a simple life.” When Lin didn't respond, Rumin took it as a good sign. “All right, here's what you do. It's very straightforward. You go on the trip, have some conversation, maybe even do a 'test drive' if you care about that. If anything is a catastrophe, don't marry her—otherwise, do. Got it? Things move quickly at this age.”
Lin said nothing. *I haven't been to the Jiuzhaigou Valley in years.*

Rumin looked at his friend closely to read his expression. What a rookie, he thought. Those looking for love have no patience for logistics.

** * * *

When he asked, she said she had left America on account of a misunderstanding; she wouldn't elaborate further. In the Jiuzhaigou Valley, Lin fell in love. She brought him to a lake, enclosed by two mountains that overlapped at their base—a picture-perfect scene from a book. “It hasn't changed,” she said. “It's the same as it was sixteen years ago.”

To him, the two mountains weren't as tall or as imposing as the mountains he used to envision, but they were gentle, brown, and stalwart. Most importantly, they were here, and surrounded by the natural wonders that must exist alongside: valleys, rivers, lakes. He thought if mountains were the intellectual heights, what were the rest? Valleys of death, perhaps a spiritual basin. The glittering lakes, reservoirs of emotion—the rivers possibly moral inlets. And love was a season, enshrouding it all. He thought, how whimsical I've become.

She was standing a few feet away, at a spot along the fence. “First comes the bitterness, then there is sweetness and wealth and honor for ten thousand years,” she quoted. “Have you ever thought how strange it was, as an instruction to mortal men?”

Her hand gestured towards the lake, and it was as though she were sweeping at it with her fingers. “In my mind, this was always the ten thousand years.”
He went to her and placed his hand upon her hand. He was full of words he thought were too significant to be spoken. She glanced at him, then looked back at the lake. Her fingers shifted, and gave his hand a light squeeze.

As he hoped, they had come to an understanding.

* * *

He was self-conscious on his wedding night. He had always been uneasy about his libido—the few times in his life he'd had sex, he felt he couldn't keep up. Particularly, the older the women, the more exhausted he was by their sexual hunger. But Ai Ling had lain quiet as a dream, her body soft as fur. Their intercourse was unhurried and methodical. He rolled off of her and savored the coolness in the absence of her body.

“What was graduate school like in America?” He felt sleep coming over him and resisted; he didn't want to be rude.

“It was hard work,” she replied, as if used to the question. “But adjustment is easier than you would expect.”

“I mean how was the education? Did you have inspiring discussions?”

“I was a biology student. We didn't have many discussions.” She gave the question more thought, and continued. “But you want to know about the students. I would answer—I have always found discussions between Chinese students to be more passionate, more sincere.”

He was pleased by her response. Daily, she rekindled his love in these small ways. He had been fortunate, after all these years, to have indeed found someone so like him in
mind and spirit. He had trusted; now he was justified. He turned onto his side and looked for the outline of her face.

"Have you heard of the New Oriental School?"

"I haven't."

He shifted back onto his back. "Not many have. It was an organization—I guess an extracurricular activity—I was part of in graduate school. We had many discussions..." He chuckled to himself. "We were so young and foolish... But at least I met Rumin. And thanks to him, I was able to meet you." When she did not respond to this, he wondered if she had drifted off to sleep. Good, he thought. I can sleep too.

_Did a little intellectual debate ever hurt anyone? Never—it never did, so it could not be called a waste. It fostered a fine, fraternal environment—together, we read and discussed some of the greatest works ever written, in the history of China, in the history of the world. And the parties!... Friends who would die for you. Watermelon peels on the tabletop... even the cigarette butts..._

He closed his eyes, and before drifting to sleep, murmured, "The best years are behind me... in graduate school, I lived the best days of my life."

Her voice rose up lightly beside him. "Yes—so did I."

* * *

She should have told him before the marriage, or not told him at all. She realized it too late, and regretted her mistake. She thought it would pay to be honest; however, she essentially witnessed the breaking of his heart. "I see," he said, when she explained. He
wandered out of the room, sat down in an armchair.

At some other point in her life, she might have left. She had been content, years ago, to abandon the difficulties of men, to sit in the evenings with Mary. But that was before the misunderstanding made that impossible, and she went back to China; before the months passed and there arose in her the wish for a child. How could she have been so careless with this new life? Finally, the bitterness had been tamed, the honor was about to begin. Now, the past would always be with them, a sort of helpless second body.

Mistakes made about love can inspire a cruelty keener than hatred, she knew. But would it matter if she could atone? After all, she had always thought that, for women like herself and Mary, the bitterness would never abate. She was accustomed to it. She was not introspective, she would not begrudge the tolls of consequence. She would not shy from the duties of penance; in the end, the ten thousand years would come.

As for Lin, his love had lost its footing. But in time he was able to fall upon old pillars. He recalled the Christian sentiments about love he had once preached to Rumin: love is patient, love is kind. The verse chastised him. He had thought that love could be a wound; he had been unlearned. *I forgot to have grace under pressure,* he thought. *I wish I always did have it.* She was sorry and she was agreeable; so, by nature, was he. At least they would eat together, go to bed together, and create a family—these were rare blessings, if not the rarest. It was best to think of the missing thing as a tax; adult life was full of them. Whatever he lost was a small price to pay for his education.
Paired is Lost

2012 Winner
Andrea Goff Memorial Poetry Contest

Emily Berger
Paired is Lost

Missing stops missed a mother under running a son
he stands sits slant on a chair, slouched ballerina l
couldn't care less. Standing sitting a boy is missing
stops caring of museums on floors he sits picking hands.
Stupid was sitting, was standing, was an afternoon spent
on a train, close eyed accordion muse a boy is pulled on. Track
it is a test, this missing stopping and waiting does he
worry not knowing where we worry the door is cracked
unnoticed it's late. Night slips a boy through cracks after
sleeping is slept. Is this where we wait? The boy can wait
can’t he? Can’t stop standing slant, a parently embarrassed
we’re side by slant. Ballerina slouched and sleeping, a boy is
nodding patient of a muse he talks of girls in shops we’re
off, he stays on. We're waiting, at times one stays, the other’s
missing curfew missing the cracks of doors not shut. A boy
slouched beneath a movie we watch words in French.
Baader-Meinhof: A Meditation on Terror and Violence

2012 Winner
Roger Conant Hatch Poetry Contest

Olivia Cook
Baader-Meinhof: A Meditation on Terror and Violence

Deny you drew the map of shock
the metal stairwell follows
narrowly the dark path down.
Deny you knew any of them.

Black, how the night takes on
characteristics of hair and water
and lips, which insist on offering
terrible silence to the room.

All deaths were once an illness.
Not all suicides are first tries.

You wonder how you ended up
abandoned, shown in photos
taken from another's quarters,
timeless phantom terror for the masses.

You were copper wire strength
until you ran underground.
You re-wrote great works in dark,
denied arson on your own front lawn

until all eyes were spoken for,
until conforming was the breaking thing.

Gerhard Richter, *Tote 1 (Dead 1)*, oil on canvas, 1988

You misread all cells for stars,
traded your best accomplices for risk

and morning, The afocal lens shows
a rope as necklace,

a quick displacement: once
intrepid skin held color stronger
than a photograph's.
Once I asked for the truth
but all the teachers refused.
White is the way we lay
our broken shapes down,
as if to ask how could you
doubt the world
when the world is just the invention
the virtual machines of terror
controlled by dozens
with steady hands, have fastened.
Take down the screen for the living
and see the plot repeated over
in the character of a father,
in the headline opening
of the lecture hour
on misunderstanding.
Equal model violence is not
a model at all, but a practice. I told you
not to turn away, but I did.

Gerhard Richter, Tote 1 (Dead 2), oil on canvas, 1988

Dead, dead, dead.
The photographic
paintings ask for an age,
sex, place of origin,
murder weapon that axed
an innocent victim.
It doesn’t matter, really
it only asks us to want
to live. We hate feeling,
detached from a face
and of the details
to the woman I've given
he has chosen
to obscure the past
to fit the now, so now
at three I've nothing,
no fear left to give.

Gerhard Richter, Tote 3 (Dead 3), oil on canvas, 1988
Slack Water

2012 Creative Winner
Harriet Schwenk Kluver Contest

Lara Sichi
“Slack Water”

On my fourteenth birthday the forecast is selkies.

“A fisherman spotted the pod late yesterday night,” says the weather guy, who right now is an orange shadow. Lately our TV has had this problem where the saturation levels fluctuate. The color seeping in and out like water. “They appear to be heading for Miramar, and if they maintain course they’ll reach the coast by six tonight,” says the weather guy, while his face whitens slowly onscreen.

I wonder what color he is when he isn’t in a box. Even if we got a new TV, one that reported light pixel for pixel, he would still be stuck in his fake classroom. True, sometimes animated rainclouds move across the map, or he opens an illustrative umbrella and makes a joke. But the sky never touches him.

He must go outside sometime, I reason.

The weather guy doesn’t have an umbrella today. He has a skin. It hangs in sheeny folds from his outstretched hand. And it looks heavy: and wet, sloppingly wet, its texture bound up in that complex gloss. The weather guy steps into it, awkwardly, shuffling around with the skin bunched at his ankles. The zipper is on the back and he’s clearly not too happy about its zipper locality, but he makes it work.

Eventually he pulls the empty head over his face like a hood. There are holes for his eyes, and whiskers, long as hands.

“What is this?” asks my dad, coming in from the kitchen. He has a cup of something, probably coffee, cradled to his sternum. “Performance art?” he suggests, and sits down next to me.

On TV, the weather guy barks.

My dad and I live in a trailer two hundred feet from the beach. Technically, we’re on
the beach, but most of the trailers in the park are on scrubby dirt, and there’s a perimeter of ice plants between us and the sand. In spring they bloom purple, and pale green blades poke out of the old leathery mass like blonde tourists in Chinatown. And this is spring, kind of. It has to be. It’s not anything else.

The ice plant flowers have slim, dense-growing petals, and are more or less ordinary looking; they make uneasy crowns for their fat stems.

If you break off a piece of ice plant, you can see that the flesh inside is translucent, like a grape. When I was a kid I used to play at being stranded in a desert. I would crawl across the dunes on my knees, and talk to driftwood, and when I reached the ice plants I would say “Hallelujah”, with a hard j. I would listen to the ocean at my back.

My dad’s birthday present is a day off from school. “Fourteen!” he says. “You’ve earned it.” My dad is the kind of guy who thinks that cleaning your plate is an accomplishment. He talks about survival like it’s some special talent. Like you can be a prodigy just by living.

“Honey, there must be something else on,” he says now, I guess re: the weather channel. “Have you tried MTV?”

“I just need to know if it’s going to rain.”

“Well,” says my dad, “now you know that it’s going to selk.” And he takes the remote.

There are a lot of presents I would have picked before the chance to play hooky. Like an iPhone, or a day with my mom—although that would also be a day off from school.

Obviously I’m not about to tell my dad that. Instead I call Louise.

“Yes?” says Louise’s mom.

“This is Aggy,” I say. “Can I talk to—”
"I'll get her," says Louise's mom, cutting me off. Her voice sounds a little funny. Chalky, like she has a cold, her consonants crumbling to a fine dust. I hope Louise doesn’t have a cold.

"Hello?" says Louise.

"Hi."

"Hey, Aggy."

Louise is homeschooled. She lives two streets away from me, but we would probably never have met if it weren’t for the fact that my dad once sold her dad a boat. She tends to speak softly on the phone, a low rush of sound.

I explain the birthday situation. I ask her if she wants to hang out later.

"Whennish later?" she says.

"Whenever later," I say. "Later now, if you want."

"Okay."

There’s a short conference with her mom.

"I have to do some algebra," she says. "But I could meet you in half an hour?"


She laughs, after a second, in the way that people do when I make them laugh, where it sounds like they’re surprised that I managed to. Not mean, or snotty. Just surprised.

My father puts on an episode of Buffy the Vampire Slayer. Someone is being tortured: tastefully, in a dark room, with blue light lying like snow on tied hands. The only background sound is the steady drip of water. The screams are the foreground, and dry.

"Shouldn’t you be leaving for the shop soon?" I say.

"On your birthday?" he says, and smiles at me. He is wearing one black sock and one green. The hair on his shins runs obliquely across the rise of bone. I move my head to one
side, like, “okay,” my hair curving against my shoulder.

But so okay: the beach. Which is, for the record, where we always meet.

Louise is waiting when I get there, bundled up in a light blue parka. The wind is fucking up her hair, which is very susceptible to that kind of thing. Wind, I mean. She doesn’t straighten it, so it’s just this big soft thing of curls. It feathers around her chin like a dry paintbrush.

“Happy birthday,” she says, when I get down over the shallow dunes to where she’s standing.

“Thanks.”

“Have any plans?”

“Not really,” I say. In fact, I have a lot of plans. Sometimes it feels like I can’t do anything without planning it for hours beforehand; without wearing away at my own stillness. But not the kind that she means.

“Right,” says Louise. She seems to be thinking about something. Wind pulls a long diffuse streamer of her hair forward, across her face. She takes one hand out of her pocket and tucks the strands back. Her glasses are a little bit askew.

It’s kind of late for it, but we head out to the tide pools. Even when the tide pools are mostly tide, they’re interesting. The water moves differently over stone. You can feed snails to anenomes.

And it turns out it’s one of those days where midtide leaves long crests of rock uncovered, like the spine of something sleeping in the shallows. Slick with spray, but uncovered. It’s a little tricky to walk from ridge to ridge in sneakers, but I’m reluctant to take off my shoes. There is a part of me that still thinks it is going to rain.
“Why do you think they talk about selkie sightings on the weather channel?” I say. “Isn’t that more, like, biology?”

She’s sitting on her haunches, looking in, her hands braced behind her on the rock. The underside of her fingertips have gone yellowy from pressure. There is a line, like a seam, where the brown back of her hand changes over to the pale flat of her palm.

“I suppose,” says Louise, “it’s because we don’t understand selkies that well. I mean, there’s not a lot of science on the subject.”

“No,” I say. “Basically no science at all.”

“I mean that we don’t know why they go where they go,” she says. “They’re more like a storm than a species, really.”

“I thought you didn’t believe in the stories,” I say, lightly.

She glances back over her shoulder. She opens her mouth, and closes it.

“Well,” she says, “storms don’t marry people.”

In the pool, something moves. The whole pool is shivering, a little bit, and there’s a clear rivulet of water feeding in through a crack in the rock. But the something moves out of sync with that stately tremble. Where its medium hums in time to itself, it creeps horizontally across the depths.

“Hermit crab,” says Louise. To me it just looks like an energetic smudge, but I believe her. And after a minute I even see the legs poking out from under the shell.

Louise and I have known each other since fifth grade. I have a bad head for numbers, and Louise doesn’t remember things she doesn’t care about, so it took us a while to get down each other’s phone numbers, and addresses, and birthdays. But after three years I have a constellation of Louise facts in my head, like coordinates, pinning her down to latitude and longitude and her hands cupping the air in emphasis when she talks. I pretend not to
remember as much about her as I do.

“I actually have a present for you,” she says, raising her voice to be heard above the wind.

This is later, by I don’t know how much. The sky is white with fog and the sun looks like a hole. Against the beach, water breaks cavernously. Wind whips the surface to a downy grey, but the inside of every wave cuts darkly out of the foam.

“Well,” I say, a little stupidly, “cool.”

We are zig-zagging toward the pier. In the distance it looks delicate, like it was built from bird teeth. “Not a giftcard,” says Louise, with a lopsided smile, and I smile too.

“Good,” I say. “I think Target was starting to get suspicious.”

“About your giftcard hoard.”

“Last time I went the cashier practically accused me of being part of the giftcard mob.”

“The Giftfather,” says Louise, in a bad Italian accent. Then: “I left it at my house.—I was a bit distracted this morning.”

She looks at me expectantly. Under the cloudy sky, she casts no shadow, but there are areas of delicate shade on her raised face: in the scoop of her ear and the corner of her eye, gathered feathery at her hairline.

I don’t go to Louise’s house very often.

“I don’t have anywhere else to be,” I tell her.

Louise lives near the beach, too. Up a hill, and by a road that isn’t a highway, but close. Her house has grass on three sides and sidewalk on the fourth, and there’s a fence, and a porch, and a mom on the porch, sitting and looking down at the sea. I think for a moment
that she is there for Louise, that Louise didn’t tell her how long she was going to be out for, that she’s mad, but Louise’s mom barely looks up.

The door is open. Inside a documentary about selkies is playing, on the television. The voiceover drifts outward tinnily.

“Hello, girls,” she says. She wears her hair in dreads, but they’re starting to unravel. They look more like sinews than ropes.

“Hello,” I say. I get shy around Louise’s mom, which as far as I can tell is pretty much the only thing she has in common with Louise.

She nods at me. Louise is taking her shoes off, on the steps, her head down and her back bent. And I kind of notice that her mom isn’t wearing shoes or socks, and even though her skirt drags long, the toes of her right foot are exposed. Her toes are very dark, darker than the wood of the porch. The fleshbeds under her toenails show pink.

Her big toe’s nail turns pale near the base, right where it sinks back into the flesh. A perfect white half-moon, like either the nail is opaque at the root, or else the blood has retreated entirely from that crescent of skin. I’ve seen it on my own toes, and sometimes even my fingers. I’ve never looked at anyone else’s toes before, except Louise’s, when painting them, and Louise has little toenails set deep in, like half-buried shells. The color of them uniform until you reach the edge.

“Does your friend want some tea?” she says, to Louise. She is sick, I think. She sounds sick. I wonder what she is doing outside on a cold damp day with no socks when she’s sick, but she’s not looking at me.

“Uh,” I say.

“No,” says Louise.

“Selkies are supremely dependent on their skins,” says the documentary.
My dad is richer than Louise’s dad. You wouldn’t know it to look at Louise, but it’s true. That’s because Louise’s dad is a fisherman, who has to buy boats from people like my dad, and then has to sail through rain and hail and water turbulence and selkies just to bring home the sea bacon. They call abalone that in Louise’s family: the sea bacon. Louise’s dad doesn’t actually do that much abalone-diving, though. You are only allowed to catch two dozen a year in California. But I don’t see the other fish he catches, so I tend to think of him as an abalone hunter. One-sided shellfish seeker dude.

It’s because of Louise and her family that I know that I don’t like abalone stew, and that abalone are simultaneously some of the most beautiful things and one of the ugliest species in the ocean. But you don’t find out that they’re beautiful until you kill them and detach them from their shells and look down at the clinging iridescence on the inside of their stone skins.

Actually, the meat is iridescent too, but not in a pretty way. The difference between mucus and mother-of-pearl.

The inside of Louise’s house is dark and clean. There are windows, of course, but the windows-to-walls ratio is a lot smaller than in a trailer. Louise’s algebra textbook is still open on the table, along with a box of biscotti. There’s always something weird about food in other people’s houses; the things they think are normal snack material, the unfamiliar leftovers in the fridge. Not that I’m checking out the contents of her fridge. I’m not really hungry.

“Do you think ‘unfamiliar leftovers’ is a paradox?” I ask Louise, following her into her room. Louise goes straight to her dresser and starts rummaging through the top drawer. I’m not positive, but I’m pretty sure the top drawer is the socks drawer. I hope that my present isn’t socks.

“Sometimes it’s a way of life,” says Louise. Her back is to me. In the wall above her dresser is set a little fan-shaped window, and white light rests in broken curves at the
diffusing edges of her hair.

She turns, and white light catches her profile, her three-quarters view, edge replacing edge. She hands me a little box, about two inches square. Wrapped in silver paper. I run my thumb along the taped-up side, and instantly decide to open it later.

“Thank you,” I say. I really mean it, which is the nice thing about presents you haven’t opened yet.

“You can’t thank me until you know what it is,” says Louise, but she doesn’t push it.

We sit on her bed and talk about school. I want to go back to the beach, but I don’t mention it. I don’t know why.

We both hear her mom come inside. The dry noise of her footsteps.

The door to Louise’s bedroom is ajar, and through it filters sound and some tactile impression of shifting air. Louise’s mom has just dialled a number on the landline. Louise does something that she has only ever done before in games: she puts a finger to my mouth, shh.

It’s warm. The finger.

Her mom says, “Richard,” which is her dad’s name.

“Yes, I know this is unexpected. Good thing you have service out there, isn’t it?”

A pause. She laughs, lightly, delightfully, in a series of lapping sounds. “Don’t ‘Now, Pearl’ me, honey. I was just commenting on a fact, which is that it’s practically a miracle, the places you can get cell phone reception these days. The times.”

He says something.

“I wasn’t going to ask.”

A longer pause, this time, while she listens to the other end of the line.

“The truth is,” says Louise, quietly, “I didn’t forget your present. I need your help.”
She puts her hands together in her lap, the lacing of her fingers clean. She moves her thumbs around each other. Slowly, at first, and then faster, until the tips compose a blurring orb.

"I don't care if she's white," says Louise's mom, right outside the door. I am instinctively embarrassed. I am instinctively ashamed: of my pale hair and my thinline mouth and my hands, which are pink on both sides, continuous and limp. Of the fact that I am sitting in a strange adult's house, listening to her lie.

Louise's mouth twists, at the corner. "I called to tell you that, since you're not on a fishing trip, maybe you could stop by tonight and see your daughter," Louise's mom says to Louise's dad, and this is about the point at which I close my eyes. I wait for Louise to explain what I am doing here.

One more pause.

"Then don't," says Louise's mom. Her name is Pearl. I've never thought about that before, ever. I remember her telling me her name, and filing it away, and never thinking about it at all.

She hangs up.

I have lived my entire life next to the beach. I have never been outside California. I know about earthquakes, and not much else. But I've read about the feeling before a storm: the weight and tang in the air. The nonexistent smell, like a promise from tomorrow's sky.

"I need you to help me follow her," says Louise.

(My mom, by the way, lives inland. She tells me she misses the sea, and that she loved it more than my father ever did.)
“Okay,” I say. “Is she going somewhere?”

Louise jerks her head at the door. Her mom is moving around, restlessly, shuffle-and-step, her long skirt probably sweeping the floorboards, drawn along by the gravity of her long hips. “Louise?” says her mom, and Louise lies back, slowly, her hair fanning out fluidly on the sheets. “Louise,” her mom says, “have you and Aggy had lunch? I could,” she says, “I could make you—“

She falls silent.

I think she is next to the door, because there is a shadow on the slice of wall we can see. The shadow changes shape, broadening and then narrowing. She turns away. The rasp of her heel on wood like a solid thing rolled in under the door. She sucks in one moist breath.

“Louise,” she says, “I’m leaving. Now. Lessons are cancelled for the evening. If you want to stay over with Aggy, you can. I won’t be home until—late.”

Louise sits there for a minute in silence. Her mom says something too low for me to make out.

Louise gets up and opens the door.

It’s weird to see a space you’ve been eavesdropping blindly on; you expect it to have been altered by the sound. You look to see if the conversation bent the walls. Not that I can actually make out much of the living room. Louise and her mom are in the way. Louise is, from where I’m sitting, standing right in front of her mother, like a partial eclipse only with the light all on her back. Louise’s hands hang loosely curled at her sides.

I roll onto the area of bed she vacated. I rest my face in the warm depression, the shadow of her weight.

If I had gone to school today, I would be sitting in my last class right now. It would be too warm in the classroom, and I would feel like a bubble, with no existence at all except for
a fragile outline. My whole body would be waiting for the bell. Or maybe not. Maybe fourteen is so different from thirteen that the next time I go to school I will listen. I used to think that growth was regular and that my adult height could be extrapolated from careful analysis of the pencil marks on the bathroom wall: but I am fourteen years old and my breasts are bigger than Louise’s and I know that growth can happen all at once, like the end of the world.

"Bye," says Louise.

Her mom doesn’t say anything. She walks out, and I don’t hear her put her shoes on.

I ask.

“What’s going on?”

“I don’t know.”

Outside of her mother’s presence Louise always looks diminished; she turns back into a kid. Around her mother, Louise was a promise.

“Where is she going?”

“I don’t know. No, wait. The pier, I think.”

“Why are we following her?”

“Because,” says Louise. “I’m afraid.”

She meets my eyes.

“So are you coming?” she asks, and I turn my hand over. Palm up.

(It isn’t hard to follow, anyway.)

When Louise was ten and we were only just acquainted, we played dress-up, badly. We were too self-conscious to play it well, and too lonely and boring not to play it at all. I liked survivor games, as I mentioned. Louise preferred the heists. She had a black pillow with
holes cut in, which she would slip over my head, carefully, and tie in at the neck. The holes were made for her and not for me, and their placement didn’t suit the dimensions of my face, so that for about half the time I found myself looking at the cottongy interior. The weave of the pillowcase was loose, and light filtered in through it, grainy and brilliant as floating sand.

Close up the pier is longer than I remembered. There isn’t really anywhere to hide; it’s just a long wood stretch on stilts, with pier stuff. Piles of things, and a faint crusting of salt on the poles, and no people. That’s it.

Louise’s mom looks like she might be part of the water beyond the pier’s far end, her skirt billowing fluidly behind her. The top of her head just breaks the horizon.

Louise and I sit down, ten paces from her, next to a coil of discarded rope. There doesn’t seem to be anything else to do. “We can jump off if she turns around,” I tell Louise, who may not hear me. Below us the water is green.

In a way we’re safer here than we were at her house. The wind carries away the evidence of us.

What happens, though, is this: Louise’s mother doesn’t turn around. She doesn’t move. She stands there, like a shimmer on the waves, with her arms folded and her skirt flagbright.

I don’t know how long we’re there. Hours, it must be, because the sky rearranges itself and the sun sinks and sharpens while we wait and even the wind dies down, the wind-whipped water settling back into coherent facets; but I don’t know how many hours, or how to measure them. And the funny thing is that I have never waited until now. Not like this. I might never wait like this again, without knowing what I’m waiting for, or how. In the minutes before class ends, or before a parent comes to pick you up, you burn just a little with
the prospect of escape, your mind momentarily pure. But I'm not burning. I'm just cold, and lonely, and here.

At some point, Louise falls asleep. She lies down on the pile of rope, and she sleeps, her glasses askew on her face. I want to suggest that she rest her head on my shoulder, but we are not saying anything. I wonder how late it really is, but the sky is only beginning to bruise.

I look at Louise. There are reddish marks on her cheek from the rope, and asleep I can see how shiny her eyelids are, peeled down over her eyes. The weather is clearing up; the shadow of her nose on her cheek is sharp and dark. And something weird happens. I sit there by her side, looking down at her like I have done hundreds of times, and I realize that Louise is a person. Louise, like me, is fourteen years old, and she has existed for that whole time. When I didn’t know her, she was still out there, somewhere, with her thin fingers and her big blunt nose and the place at the corner of her jaw where the light gathers. She was thinking about her mother and herself and the weather. She wasn’t made for me; she was made for this, for this moment and every moment after it, even though right now she’s not really experiencing the moment or anything else. There is a place in the world carved out for her.

Which sounds stupid, because of course I know all that stuff. But I realize it. It sweeps through me like relief.

And then I think oh, gosh. Because I might have missed something, just now. That minute where I was thinking, all I remember is Louise’s side. Like the world had contracted to the inward curve of her shoulder. And anything could have happened in that minute, outside the periphery of me.

There is no sound except for the water, and the far-off cry of gulls.
I turn around. I believe, for as long as I am turning, that I am going to find the end of the pier empty except for a pile of clothing. I believe that I will see a pod of dark heads in the water, barely distinguishable from the shifting darknesses of the waves, and that I will see them swim away.

This is what has happened: Louise’s mom has turned around.

She walks towards us, slowly, silhouetted by low sun. I am aware of the shape of her; the length of her arms and the belling skirt and her brief throat. And then she walks past us, like someone put a pillow over her eyes. And she’s gone. She’s vanished onto land.

Or maybe what happened was this.

Pearl stood there with her toes hooked over the very end of the pier, the wet grain of the wood a pleasure to her soles. She watched.

The selkie, when it came, was alone after all; the rest of the pod had stayed out in the free ocean. Pearl took off her clothes, and the selkie smiled a seal smile, its black eyes glossy as stone in its gray face. It slid out of its skin, and Pearl helped it up from the water, cradling its naked body to her naked breast. The selkie craned its neck to whisper something in her ear, her hair falling over it.

Pearl did not reply. She brought the selkie to its knees and kissed it, and while their mouths were moving just like in the movie’s, open and close and open, she picked up its skin. They were of a height, and she stepped into it with no trouble at all. There were no zippers. The pearlescent skin just closed across the span of her bare back. She felt the alien eyelids seal up around her eyes.

And the selkie said, in a human voice that was like a singing pain, “No.” But Pearl had already leapt. She had already slid noiselessly beneath the waves.

The selkie picked up her skirt, and looked at it, turning the fabric over in its hands.
No.

"Let's go home," says Louise, when she wakes up, and I don't disagree.

We go barefoot. Louise has her socks balled in one hand. By now the ocean is almost up to the foot of the cliff, but the band of bare sand above the waterline shines in the twilight. Walking on it makes water glop out of the sand in little bursts. As if someone under the earth is pushing up against our heels, hard, with hands and mouth.

"Do you see any selkies?" says Louise.

"Nope," I say. I haven't been watching for them. I'm just walking.
Rings of Spectators in
*Troilus and Cressido*

2012 Critical Winner
Harriet Schwenk Kluver Contest

Beatrice Gantzer
Rings of Spectators in *Troilus and Cressida*

A recurring theme in Shakespeare’s *Troilus and Cressida* is that of spectating and judgment. Characters perform for each other, like Patroclus mimicking the Greek leaders to entertain Achilles; lie to each other, like Agamemnon pretending not to notice Achilles; and spy on each other, like Thersites sneaking after Diomedes; passing moral judgment at every opportunity but always being exposed as flawed themselves. Through Pandarus’ insulting addresses, Shakespeare applies this theme to the general audience. The characters of *Troilus and Cressida* are so dishonorable as to be practically unrelated to their representations in other texts, inviting the audience to a sense of moral superiority, but the idea of rings of spectators leaves the audience members themselves vulnerable to judgment.

Ulysses attaches an unsavory connotation to performance and spectating in Act 1, when he describes Patroclus’ mocking imitations of the Greek leaders as “scurril jests, / ... ridiculous and silly action” (1.3 152-153). He denounces the idea of turning real-life foibles into fodder for entertainment, indignantly saying that “Success or loss, what is or is not, serves / As stuff for these two to make paradoxes” (1.3 187-188). Set in the first act of a play, which itself lampoons the idealized historical figures of a romanticized war, this speech is deeply ironic; Patroclus is condemned for mocking Agamemnon, but Shakespeare himself mocks him by painting him as an ineffective leader who resorts to asking others, “What is the remedy?” (1.3 145). This conveys the sense that no one is above ridicule; the Greek leaders may try to silence Patroclus, but they cannot escape the judgment of the playwright and audience.

Ulysses’ speech also implicitly takes the audience to task in his criticism of Achilles. In describing Achilles’ reaction to Patroclus’ mimicry, he paints an unflattering picture of “Sir Valor,” who forgoes duty and instead “dies, cries ‘O, enough, Patroclus, / Or give me ribs of
steel! I shall split all / In pleasure of my spleen’ ” (1.3 180-182). Achilles, traditionally one of the
great heroes of the Trojan War, becomes in Shakespeare’s hands a lazy fool with an inflated sense
of self-worth, “overproud / And underhonest, in self-assumption greater / Than in the note of
judgment” (2.3 130-132), feeding his ego more with the ridicule of others than heroic deeds on
his own account. Shakespeare makes the characters of Troilus and Cressida so flawed and
contemptible that it seems an invitation for the audience to mock and judge them, but the
unbecoming glee of the spectator Achilles makes it impossible to do so comfortably.

Another instance of both performer and spectator being shown in a negative light comes
in Act 3, when the Greek leaders under Ulysses’ direction parade past Achilles’ tent while
pretending not to notice him, a snub that reaches fantastically juvenile heights:

ACHILLES. What, comes the General to speak with me?

You know my mind: I’ll fight no more ‘gainst Troy.

AGAMEMNON [to Nestor]. What says Achilles? Would he aught with us?

NESTOR [to Achilles]. Would you, my lord, aught with the General?

ACHILLES. No.

NESTOR. Nothing, my lord.

AGAMEMNON. The better. (3.3 57-63)

This performance, greeted by Agamemnon as a brilliant plan, actually degrades both the
manipulators and the manipulated. It turns Agamemnon from a powerful General into a fourth
grader sticking his fingers in his ears and shows that while Achilles is impervious to reasoned
appeals to duty, one snub sends him into a fit of insecurity. Only Ulysses, the playwright, as it
were, is actually in control of the situation, perhaps a bit of self-aggrandizement on
Shakespeare’s part; just as Ulysses can make a follower of a General and an insecure buffoon of
a Greek celebrity, Shakespeare can degrade the heroes of the Trojan War and manipulate the audience in whatever way he chooses.

Achilles’ enjoyment of performances makes him incapable of realizing that they can cut both ways. He delights in Thersites’ unrelenting verbal abuse of others, calling him “my cheese, my digestion” (2.3 44-45), and dismisses Patroclus’ anger at being called a fool by saying “He is a privileged man. -- Proceed, Thersites” (2.3 60-61). He mistakenly conflates Thersites’ contemptuous tirades and Patroclus’ sycophantic performances, believing that Thersites presents the flaws of others out of pure admiration and the desire to amuse. However, when out of earshot of Achilles, Thersites’ remarks reveal that he despises Achilles as much as he does the others, saying “Would the fountain of your mind were clear again, that I might water an ass at it. I had rather be a tick in a sheep than such a valiant ignorance” (3.3 325-327). Achilles believes that his role as a spectator prevents him from being exposed to similar mockery, but Thersites’ spiteful asides make it clear that when an audience laughs at a play, the actor may well be laughing back.

Thersites passes judgment on every character he encounters and is the play’s most unrestrained spectator, but he remains vulnerable to the judgment of Troilus and Cressida’s audience. When he sees Diomede going to visit Cressida, he rails against Diomede’s lust, saying “They say he keeps a Trojan drab and uses the traitor Chalchas his tent… Nothing but lechery! All incontinent varlets!” (5.1 104-106). Thersites undermines his own moral superiority, however, by threading the same speech with decidedly voyeuristic intentions: “I will rather leave to see Hector than not to dog him… I’ll after” (5.1 103-106). Thersites can pinpoint a shortcoming with accuracy and denounce it with flair, but the rapaciousness of his desire to find fault in others becomes in itself a flaw. This same overeager watching is evident when the battle begins and Thersites says, “Now they are clapper-clawing one another. I’ll go look on” (5.4 1-2),
taking pleasure in watching a bloodbath. Furthermore, the epithets he applies to the warriors, “dissembling abominable varlet... Greekish whoremasterly villain... crafty swearing rascals” (5.4 2-10) come back to haunt him when, to save himself from Hector, he calls himself “a rascal, a scurvy railing knave, a very filthy rogue” (5.4 30-31). Once the danger is past, Thersites says “God-a mercy, that thou wilt believe me!” (5.4 33), implying that his self-vilification was insincere, but in fact it was accurate. Thersites’ cowardice, voyeurism, and general unlikability emphasize the theme of spectators not being above criticism.

Through Pandarus, Shakespeare extends this theme to the real life audience. In Act III, Pandarus coaxes Cressida and Troilus into confessing their love, then avidly presses them to consummate it, breaking into their sentimental speeches with “Go to, a bargain made. Seal it, seal it... Amen. Whereupon I will show you a chamber with a bed, which bed, because it shall not speak of your pretty encounters, press it to death” (3.2 199-211). The immoral and sacrilegious tone of this low, prose speech makes the affair seem sordid, but the audience is not permitted to hold on to a sense of moral superiority for long: immediately afterward, Pandarus directly addresses the audience with “And Cupid grant all tongue-tied maidens here / Bed, chamber, pander to provide this gear” (3.2 212-213). This couplet, sounding like a perversion of a love poem, ruins the idea of sweet, chivalrous first love by telling every virgin in the audience that their first romantic attachment is not about finding a soul mate, but instead hinges on managing to have sex. This aside also forces older audience members to think back to their own first sexual experience; if their affair was no holier than Troilus and Cressida’s, they have no right to feel superior to their own onstage sin.

Pandarus implicates the audience even more distastefully in the final lines of the play, saying:
Good traders in the flesh, set this in your painted cloths:

As many as be here of panders' hall,
Your eyes, half out, weep out at Pandar's fall;
Or if you cannot weep, yet give some groans,
Though not for me, yet for your aching bones.
Brethren and sisters of the hold-door trade,
Some two months hence my will shall here be made.
It should be now, but that my fear is this:
Some galle'd goose of Winchester would hiss.
Till then I'll sweat and seek about for eases,
And at that time bequeath you my diseases. (5.11 48-59)

This ending is offensive on several levels. By demanding that the audience sympathize with "Pandar's fall" rather than with Troilus or any other character, Pandarus implies that the audience has more in common with him than they do with any even vaguely heroic warrior. With his references to "eyes, half out" and "aching bones," he assumes as a matter of course that the audience is riddled with venereal disease. Perhaps the line that would most upset an English audience, however, is the very last. In Shakespeare's time, the English identified strongly with the Trojans; heirs of Troy, they would expect their inheritance to be heroicism, nobility, and valor. Instead, Pandarus "bequeaths" his diseases to them, turning England's emotional tie to Troy from a source of pride into one of shame. Shakespeare reinforces this degrading link by using the obvious anachronism "galle'd goose of Winchester," complaining about a Trojan's syphilis in English terms. These degrading comments are particularly potent because, unlike Thersites' blatantly combative insults, they align the recipient with the speaker; an outright
verbal attack would be easier to repel than Pandarus' companionable salutation of "brethren and sisters." In the end, the character perhaps most morally repugnant to the audience becomes the one with whom they are equated.

There is no nicely-wrapped morality tale at the center of Troilus and Cressida; there are no spectators or moral commentators who escape criticism themselves. By demonstrating that spectators are not immune to criticism but creating characters with nearly no redeeming qualities, Shakespeare dares the audience to pass judgment on them. If the audience does manage to cling to a sense of moral superiority throughout the play, Pandarus' closing speech obliterates it, calling the audience diseased and tying them more to the base go-between than any of the warriors. The repeated theme of layers and rings of spectators gives the audience an ominous sense that they can mock the characters of Troilus and Cressida as much as they wish, but they themselves will someday be judged.
(A girl is running....)

2012 Graduate Winner
Norma Lowry Memorial Fund Poetry Contest

Aditi Machado
A girl is running. Two boys follow her. One of them knows her like a childhood sweetheart. The other is a new interest. A girl is running and I am running with her, or behind, or around, like a mind hovering against the skin of things, her legs maybe, her arms, very thin, inside which even more thinness celebrates bone. A girl is running. Two boys chase her. One of them is a sweet menace. He shouts that he knows her hiding place as she runs across a hilly field. I am in the vicinity, but do nothing. In not doing, one is more. I become more and more, a thing whitening as it withers, becoming shrill. She runs across the hilly field and the boys follow. I follow them and god, they can run. In following her wind, I am a kite. A girl runs. Two boys chase her. One of them knows her. The other does not. I am their witness. I am not the one to which this happens. Like a tree whitening as it withers, the whitening happens more to the viewer than to the tree or the winter. The shrilling grows loud. Heavy bee. Heavy hills. Breathing like thuds one after the other, the sound of the ground shaking up footsteps, all footsteps ever been committed. If a girl has been followed across a field, what are her chances? The girl runs, the boys follow, they are laughing. From where I am, they sound like demons. I know her hiding place, shouts the sweet menace, his face fresh as a nettle. They run in a straight line, but the real running happens in all directions, everything fleeing itself in turn, because of danger. Let's follow them away from here. Let them be here while we disappear. Let's come back later. A girl could run, two boys could follow, no one would know. Sweet flowers shut down, their factories having worked up a storm. Sweet flowers have filled the bees until heavy. Heavy bees are spilling. Faraway, a window opens to the final bee. A kite is stuck to a girl's skirt. She is running away. Two boys are two men, there is no difference. Two men are a man and a woman, there is no difference. A girl is running away, she might as well be old. In witnessing, I am interested in their camouflage and their courage. They have neither. They have very little, like skin on bone. Skin most lightly perfumed. A girl is running. A man and woman follow her. As they run, they grow older. I know her hiding place, says one. The girl grows smaller and smaller. I grow larger, a kind of power surviving. A heaviness of air filling with water. Moisture is a signature of rain before and after it happens. Moisture loves girls. Girls love rain. This girl too. I follow her, I follow her, it rains. Whatever she says is forgotten. I know her hiding place. Everything has gone elsewhere. I am here and so is menace. I am sweetness and heavy. A girl is running. A girl is running, can't she run faster?
Human Mountain Crossing

2012 Undergraduate Winner
Norma Lowry Memorial Fund Poetry Contest

Olivia Cook
Human Mountain Crossing

To abandon, as in to learn
to unclench one’s fists when running.

I walked an old man to the top of a mountain
In California I walked a stranger to the top to see
the way the clouds see trees: other clouds,
a reflection of our walking is breathing.

At the top the world stood still for us, we imagined
falling into canyon browns, and the purple
of Jupiter’s eye watching from shifting ground.
I threw twenty thousand dollars to the wind.

Goodbye is the car the old man drives me in.
We drive to the edge of Alaska. I think I want to adopt you
he says, and I am disappearing through the passenger side
window, I am wading in the river border.

Alaska is your winter hat punctured
by a branch through. You mark the distance
of my life. To abandon, as in Thoreau
once said the soul demands not fortune but solitude.

Silence breaks the land in two,
one half untouchable, the other, accident.
Boat

2012 Winner
Julia Viola McNeely Poetry Contest

Alex Liu
Boat

Beneath the golden crown
of the sun lies a boat in the vast sea.
Your lover mans the boat with you.
You brave both storms and silence.
She takes the telescope and tugs your sleeve;
your heart threads and weaves.
The horizon gleams orange.

Waves shatter
all sides of the boat.
The end appears near—
those harrowing ridges jut
out of the sides of the dark cliff,
and that initial crevice in the starboard
splinters and widens as the water coagulates
so she heaves the seaweed water over the edge
as you let loose the anchor and chains.
You draw up the mast against the south-bearing winds,
as she plugs the leaks with scrap.
Torrential daggers stab through the heavens,
and the two of you find refuge in the cabin.

Nothing exists outside of this room.
Why should it?
Her hair lank with salt water, body draped
with drenched clothing and eyes aching with red.
You can hear her heart thrum across the wooden walls.
Slowly, the world settles into a gentle rocking.

The water is cold enough to break rocks.
After teeth-chattering, the hurt,
a slow fire breathes life into your shuddering frames.
The shadows bob like dancers. She closes
her eyes and lies in your lap.

It has been years.
You think it’s time, and you clutch her hand
on the tiller, gently guiding the rudder.
She places her other hand on the back of your neck.
You place your hand on the small of her back.
The shallows arrive, and the hull scrapes
the bottom.
What are you waiting for, and is the bus
2012 Winner
James Merrill Poetry Contest

Olivia Cook
What are you waiting for, and is the bus

definition of life? You would take it anywhere from
the skyscraper that splits the street in two,

the city is anyone's reality, faint recognizable trait.
The city is the transformable body
the sidewalks widen to accommodate.

The even wider bodied crowds
shuffle along from one news stand to the next
at the corner of Here and a too familiar There,

but there you are stilled. Your eyes
chase after the woman with the chignon,
she's waving at the other you, she's having all the children

and balancing both spheres in her hands
while you gawk in awe, the way the face hold shape,
make-up sticks and characters slip in and out of view.

Say something truer for the picture,
say something other than that's her
but with your own mute eyes.

Fashion is the thick black bow
of your bandeau, under the window
of the thirty seventh floor. Fashion is power she said

before she slipped into a linen blazer,
lit a cigarette and walked out.
You swear you've seen Miss Number Twenty One

somewhere, a pretty thin face in film.
The role is every expectation, and the scene,
a transparent backdrop

as empty as the house on Pleasantville street
you never grew up in. But you know
we can't all play the part of lovely Lisa,

where back home the martinis are mixed, sipped and offered
sometime before three. It's two thirty in the afternoon,
and you're caught eaves dropping again,

something's happened, you decide.
You draw the curtain of the sliding glass door
to the left (yours) with a tilted glass, and peek outside.

You convince the saucer hat sunning
on the chair it's lucky,
we could have been the victims fainting white,  
with the calico cat as witness. Off camera  
they're dragging filled black stilettos past the garden  
she buried her dirty photographs in.

Poor Mrs. Kitten with the twins, what was she thinking  
when she sat her girls down at the table,  
each with a cookie in hand  
and told them to wait twenty minutes,  
maybe a dozen more will appear.  
Maybe next year I'll be thin and useful,

like a clutch she tucks her smile into,  
but the conclusion doesn't end there,  
still they're measuring the infinite angle of beauty,  
the delayed gratification of a life  
trimmed in ribbons around a pose.  
The expectations fall as the sparse scene folds  
at the hands of the directors gloves. Pull the ribbons  
from your lids and see me, the human dilation  
of your eyes as you turn the page.

Say something truer for the picture,  
say something for her.
Deep in Bigfoot Country
2012 Winner
Washington University Fiction Contest

Glen Lindquist
Deep in Bigfoot Country

We all keep cans of gorilla piss at the heads of our sleeping bags, right next to our blissfully snoring faces. That way, if we’re awakened by rustling of unknown provenance, we crack open the cans in order to lure said rustler. The theory is that bigfeet love gorilla piss.

Suppose the source of rustling is a grizzly or a mountain lion or a recently bereaved moose with a score to settle?

“Well if that happens to be the case, you’re a goner whether or not you crack the can,” Dr. Peltier says, “so you might as well crack the goddamn can.”

Suppose the source of rustling is actually a bigfoot?

“Bigfoot is a gentle mistress. Fact is, she’ll take the male gorilla piss as the first step in a complicated courting ritual. She’ll mount one of the nearby trees, which we’ve taken the trouble to what? To bait with sedative-laced tree nuts. She’s out cold because we all know—a bigfoot can’t resist a good pecan.”

Suppose the bigfoot is not a mistress but a mister?

“Same story. Bigfoot lovin’ is a pansexual free for all. Mr. Foot gets a whiff of that piss and he’s going to release a stream of his own. To show that he’s down to get freaky. Then he’s going to climb one of the trees to find the original pissner. Bigfeet are tree fuckers. Only fuck in trees.”

I glance over Lorene’s shoulder as she jots something down in a small notepad, a potential title for a potential poem, “The Desire to Make Love in a Tree.”

Lorene’s the youngest of us, twenty three years old, with a full head of dreadlocks tied back in a black bandana, one of Peltier’s grad students, though she claims that academia is just a pastime and that her true dream is to become a poet or, if that doesn’t pan out, her backup dream
is to become a ghostwriter of pop-country tunes. She cites Karl Marx and Aretha Franklin as her two main influences.

I inquire as to the frequency of bigfoot copulation.

"Hard to know without having some hard data," Peltier says. "Five, maybe ten times nightly. Major stress relief, I'm guessing. Explains why no one sees them. Spend all day resting in the den, all night humping in trees."

Spade makes the scrunched up anticipatory face he makes when he's about to say something offensive and unfunny. "Five times a night? I've been with five women a night. Chump change. Or should I say chimp change?"

The face doesn't lie.

As with all of his own jokes, Spade finds it a real knee-slapper. He's doubled over, gasping for breath between laughs. "Chimp change, Doc! Get it?"

No one knows Spade's real name. He's fifties-ish, a failed chiropractor from Seattle—the details are unclear on what exactly "failed" means in the realm of chiropracting, but we've been led to believe waist-down paralysis was involved ("One snap is all it takes"). He's got two kids whom he regularly refers to as "mosquitoes," as in: "These goddamn blood-sucking mosquitoes are draining me for every penny—good thing they can't find me out here in the woods, right?"

My bio is populated by a degree in Environmental Biology and a brief stint in jail (breaking and entering, burglary—ex-girlfriend's apartment, long story), which led to parole-sponsored employment for the Forest Service. Winters on avalanche blast. Summers as a smoke jumper.
Last summer I saw four men get roasted on a slope south of Burley. We were digging trenches between two tree lines, preventative measures to ensure that the forest fire didn’t travel over the next peak, where Idaho governor C.L. “Butch” Otter’s vacation home was located. But the wind took an ugly turn and fed the flames faster than expected, driving them down the slope, right into our faces.

“Looks like we got ourselves a real scorcher,” Braunwalder yelled.

The rest of the men hollered, laughed, and chanted, “In it to the end.”

The air turned to smoke made orange by the ambient light of the fire. I dropped my gear and began to run. I heard the others shouting after me, “Pussy. Dickless prick. I’d rather burn out here than burn in hell!” But I kept running, far enough to reach safety, but not far enough to drown out the sound of the men screaming, or maybe it was just the sound of trees screaming as their sap turned to steam and made them explode.

When I returned to gather their corpses after the blaze died down, the wind picked up and peeled their skin away like the black husks of neglected s’mores.

Higher ups cited “emotional instability” when they transferred me to a desk job. I quit after a week spent filing the complaints of families who lost dogs in National Wilderness Areas, probably eaten by bears or adopted by wolves. I locked myself in my apartment, pitched a tent in the living room, and subsisted mostly off the instant potato flakes that I’d eat both in jail and while bivouacking in bluffs of sagebrush. I would boil these flakes up by the gallon, dump the mash into a salad bowl, and sit at the table watching trails of butter melt down fluffed white peaks. Sometimes the bodies of my charred brothers, all skeletal, would sculpt themselves into the potatoes and speak to me.

“Mother Nature is a harsh bitch,” Higgins would say.
“Ruthless,” Hanks would say.

“I’d like to give her a piece of my mind,” Steele would say.

“I’d like to give her more than a piece of my mind, if you catch my drift,” Braunwalder would say, awkwardly groping for his mashed potato pecker, ever poignant, even in the afterlife.

I would douse them with salt and devour them mid-sentence, leaving them to argue and grope amongst themselves in the comfort of my stomach. After my body refused to accommodate any more possessed potatoes and my electricity got cut off, I applied for an ad in the Thrifty Nickel classifieds that read, “SEEKING ABLE BODIED HUMANS TO LOSE THEMSELVES IN THE WILDERNESS AND SOLVE LIFE’S MYSTERIES.”

So here I am, lost in the wilderness, life’s mysteries still unsolved.

Peltier (pronounced by him, roughly, “Pelter”), a tenured PhD up at U of I—Evolutionary Anthropology—is in charge of our little group. He excels at growing a wizardly beard, securing money from eccentric millionaires, and teaching classes like “Avant-Garde Evolution.” He supposedly descends from a long line of French mountain men and brothel-women, often speaking to the resilience of frontiersman blood (“Hard working scum”). He funnels most of his energy and money into his brainchild, The Idaho Bigfoot Project. Hence our little expedition.

Our mission: to live as the feet live. To get inside the head of a foot. And, once we’re in there, to scrounge around and try to figure out if/where the hairy dudes are hiding. Peltier promotes what he terms, “total immersion phenomenological research.” Soap is a no-no. Shaving is a no-no. Cell phones are a definite no-no. Mud baths are suggested to keep the horse flies away. We chew tree bark in lieu of toothpaste. Sweeten our coffee with tapped ponderosa sap. De-wax our ears with moss wrapped around twigs. Toilet paper is supplied but not advised.
“Nothing feels quite like taking a shit in whitewater,” Peltier says, “and besides, a little scat is good for the river. Keeps it wild.”

Rations are mostly weenies and beans, with the exception of scavenged mushrooms, berries, speared river trout, or snared hares. Peltier is the only one of us with any regular success in hunting and foraging. The rest of us have become highly proficient with the can opener, securing our food from a large bunker that Peltier dug into the soil during the off-season. Enough food to live for six-months, he says. Though we’re only contracted for two.

This morning we’re treated to Spade’s take on roasted squirrel. Higgins, Hanks, Steele, and Braunwalder have all taken up corporeal residence in the squirrels.

“Don’t let this oaf eat me,” squirrel-Steele says. “Please.”

Spade, unaware, rips off one of his thighs. “Could use some ketchup.”

“This guy’s an asshole. You should push him off a cliff or send him into a bear’s den or bash his face in with a rock,” squirrel-Steele says.

I nod in agreement and take a bite of squirrel-Hanks, who tells me that it tickles.

Lorene is eating squirrel-Higgins, snoring loudly, apparently napping.

Squirrel-Braunwalder is getting cold on a rock, waiting for Peltier. “Goddamn, I want in on the fun,” he squeaks.

Peltier comes traipsing through the brush as if on cue, galloping on all fours, gorilla-style (“Bigfoot knuckle-walking is definitely not out of the question, despite the sensation over bipedal footprints.”)

“Big news,” he says, out of breath, watery eyes. “Droppings.”
We’re in the middle of the Frank Church Wilderness, near the bank of a stream that runs into the upper fork of the Salmon River. Most bigfoot scholars claim that bigfoot territory is in the remote reaches of northern California and southern Oregon. “Hotheads and hippies,” Peltier says. “The feet moved inland in response to coastal development. She’s a sensitive critter. Smells the avarice of man and his machines from a hundred miles.” So we’ve hunkered down at the mouth of a valley between two ridges that meet in a steep ‘V,’ a topological trap for potential foot activity.

Camp is a barebones affair. Tents covered by brush so as to appear natural, fires kept small. Peltier sleeps in a pit that he covers with long pine boughs, emerging at sunrise as if raised from the dead by Mother Nature herself. He sports only a loincloth sewn from the pelt of some animal he once killed, probably with his bare hands. His skin is somehow both taut and creased, tanned the reddish-brown of Arizona silt.

Spade is a fan of the Hawaiian shirt, size XL.

I came with jeans that have since been torn to shorts and white tees that have since been dyed yellow with sweat and soil.

Lorene wears simple white tanks and knee-length khaki shorts that she somehow keeps immaculate. Something in her not-primped-but-clean demeanor gives me regularly occurring erections.

She seems to hold a strange unspoken sexual authority over all of us. A combination of the fact that she’s the only woman we’ve seen for the last month and the fact that she recognizes the previous fact and lords it over us—slathering her shins with mud in the middle of the campsite, suggestively rubbing sticks between her palms to start a fire, commenting daily on the ruggedness of our beards.
Peltier walks around with his member telescoping out of his cloth for what seems like most of most days. He generally cracks a joke concerning *Homo erectus* if he catches you sneaking a peak. On more than one occasion, I’ve witnessed him standing on a rock, basking in the sunlight, head tilted back, engaged in a session of mid-river masturbation, adding to the list of his bodily contributions to the riparian ecosystem. It’s impossible to say whether his mind was filled with images of Lorene or one of the hirsute evolutionary cousins that otherwise occupy his thoughts.

Spade confided in me once when we were checking each other’s scalps for bugs that he was in love with Lorene and would “kill for her—if given the opportunity.”

“You mean ‘if you had to—if necessary’?” I asked.

“Yeah, sure,” he said, “because, I mean, she’s got a real case of the Grand Tetons.”

His favorite geographic fact, incanted daily, is that Grand Tetons means “big tits” in French.

Lorene confided in me—during a separate scalp-picking session—that she slept with Spade in the first week, only to better understand “how mediocrity and failure manifest themselves in a middle-aged man’s sexuality.” She wrote a poem based on the experience, entitled “Thrusting Toward Oblivion.” I find the whole thing a bit unsettling, partially due to the fact that Spade is both physically and mentally revolting, partially due to the fact that Spade’s kids are Lorene’s age. Though Peltier will be the first to tell you that it’s probably not uncommon for bigfeet to fornicate with their parents or children or sometimes both simultaneously.

I steer clear of Lorene in situations with a possibility for escalation to arousal because, frankly, her cold confidence intimidates me, and I don’t like the thought of becoming
murderously gaga over her, à la Spade. Consequently, I’ve become pretty good at knapping lithics in order to alleviate sexual frustration. Mostly crude Acheulean hand axes but also a couple more detailed points that have been hafted onto sticks for Peltier to use hunting and fishing. Quality rocks are hard to come by, found in disparate patches of boulders deposited by the long-ago liquefied glaciers that scoured adjacent valleys. So I have to pace myself when it comes to the rock crafting, lest I’m caught off guard by Lorene sunning herself on the bank of the river, me without any shards of obsidian to divert my attention.

The droppings-look human, save for the abundance of hair. Spade’s snarled face seems to read, “I could make better droppings than that.” Peltier is inches away, sniffing, measuring the log in finger-lengths. “Absolutely fascinating,” he says. Lorene says something about the birth of the Fecalist movement in contemporary poetry.

“We march at midday,” Peltier declares, standing up.

“Where exactly? This isn’t exactly a lot to go on,” I say.

“Yes, she’s very close now. I can feel it.” His eyes are closed and his arms are stretched out, as if to hug the air, the breeze, the shade of the surrounding pines and firs.

So we all apply a fresh coat of mud and set out from camp at midday, traveling light. Spade and I carry packs with food, tarps, canteens, other supplies. Lorene wields a machete. Peltier carries a long spear and a tranquilizer rifle, the kind I imagine a ringmaster using to take down a circus elephant who’s been pushed too far.

He stops at irregular intervals and crouches to the ground, examining broken twigs and fallen branches, pointing us in seemingly arbitrary directions, a winding line that inevitably moves toward the vertex of the valley. We move slowly, Lorene up front, hacking our way
through the thick undergrowth—a rebounding result of a fire that swept through here maybe twenty years ago. The Forest Service let the fire burn and die on its own accord within the confines of the Wilderness Area, an experiment to see how nature responds to cataclysm without intervention. The ground is still littered with charred logs and some blackened tree skeletons still stand upright, threatening to topple in a slight breeze.

Spade is lagging behind by twenty feet, picking up sticks and slamming them against trees, giddy at the prospect of exploding wood. Peltier keeps looking back and smiling zen-like as if to say, “Keep up the good work, Spade. All part of the plan.”

“Remind me why he’s here again, Doc?” I ask.

He breathes in deeply and doesn’t say anything for a few minutes, a tactic my father used to employ to avoid answering questions, assuming I would forget in the silence. But Peltier speaks. “To find an animal, you need to think like an animal. You need to be an animal.”

I wait for him to elaborate. He doesn’t. “Right,” I say.

He scampers ahead to caress the needles of a three-foot spruce.

Maybe an hour before sunset we set up an interim camp, tying a rope between two trees and hanging a tarp to form a makeshift communal tent. Spade says something about it being an adequate “love shack,” bringing a deep clammy cold to my skin. Peltier stands up, tells us not to worry, he’ll be back, and then walks away, lost between the trees in seconds.

After dinner, Spade pulls a bottle of “emergency whiskey” from his sack and proceeds to drink without offering any to Lorene or me.

“You know,” he says to me in slur, “I consider you to be a good friend. You get me. I get you. We’re the same kind of guy, you know?” He slaps me on the back. “And Lorene, you’re a
very good friend. Very dear to me, dear.” He places a hand over his heart and smiles with apparent sincerity before standing, turning his back to us, and peeing into a shrub. We call it a night and crawl under the tarp, Spade falling asleep instantly, me lying next to him, Lorene on my other side. She wishes me sweet dreams and turns her back to me. Peltier is still out there in the dark.

I can feel the heat coming off Lorene and the movement of her body with every deep sleeping breath. I concentrate hard on smashing rocks together in my mind, but all I can picture are flashes of fire and bare skin. Spade is spooning up against my thigh. He’s murmuring in his sleep, “No, Mona, I promise I can change.” I feel him begin to get stiff so I try to wriggle from my sleeping bag, but his thick arm is draped over my shoulder, locking me in place. “It’s okay, baby,” he says, “I’m here. I’m not leaving” I scoot away from his fleshy probe, closer to Lorene. I feel the outline of her figure through the sleeping bag, and when my groin makes contact, her body responds by pushing back.

There’s a noise outside the tent.

“Hey dickhead,” Braunwalder’s voice says, “you left us sitting around as squirrels. We thought you were coming back.”

I take it as an excuse to pry myself free from Spade’s death grip, from the inviting curve of Lorene’s body. Four mountain bluebirds flutter onto a nearby branch.

“Save the apologies, pal. Glad to see you haven’t forgotten how to abandon your friends,” the bird I recognize as Steele says.

“Don’t worry though. We’re not going to leave you,” Higgins says.

“No, we’re here for good. No getting rid of us,” Hanks says.
They all laugh through their beaks.

“We just wanted to let you know that you’re gonna die out here,” Higgins says.

“Yeah, you’re a goner. That old dude is off his rocker. We flew by him,” Steele says, “and he’s out there in the dark, just running around and howling. It’s fucked up.”

“Point is—when you die, we’ll be waiting,” Braunwalder says.

“All will be made right, my friend,” Steele says.

In the distance there’s a deep guttural groaning, and the birds take off, squawking an approximation of “Fuck you, dead man” as they circle above.

Back under the tarp, Spade is making his own groaning noises.

Morning comes, we pack up camp, and there’s still no sign of Peltier. Birds are making a hubbub in the surrounding trees. None are speaking English, but they all seem to be watching, their songs merging into the discordant melody of a dirge.

“I don’t know,” I say, “maybe we should head back to the main camp.”

“You just need to embrace uncertainty, embrace the chaos and chill,” Lorene says.

“Yeah, embrace and chill, man,” Spade says, looking to Lorene for approval, which he does not receive.

“Besides, the Doc knows what he’s doing,” Lorene says.

And with that she sets off at a brisk clip, machete swinging, Spade close at her heels.

For three more days, we move deeper into the valley. Every night, the howls, shouts, and groans grow louder, coming from different angles, bouncing off rocks and trees, playing tricks on the mind. Spade nervously laughs at the noises. He keeps saying, “Man, that must be one big
dog.” Lorene takes copious notes. She attempts to capture the phonetics of the noise, ending up with pages full of vowels. She attempts to howl back, but her calls fall flat after a few feet.

We find Peltier on the fourth day. He’s lying on a large rock at the edge of a streambed, quietly moaning, covered in bruises and what looks to be dried blood.

Spade says, “Umm, Doc, you doing okay?”

Peltier rolls over to face us and makes the shuddering motions of a sob, but he doesn’t appear to have enough bodily moisture to produce tears. The tranquilizer rifle and spear lay at his side, shattered to shards and splinters. Lorene kneels down beside him, trickles water into his mouth, and Spade tries to cradle him, stroking his matted hair.

“I’ve seen her,” Peltier whispers, “and she’s beautiful.”

“We’re sure, Doc,” Lorene says. She splashes water on his wounds, deep gouges in his back, lacerations on his face.

“She told me things. Unknowable things.”

Spade begins to hum a lullaby.

“She looked at me, and she knew who I was.”

He’s staring at me, so I pretend to look through my pack for gauze that I know don’t exist, but I give up after a minute and meet his gaze. He points to me and then to the cave and then back to me. Spade tells him not to overexert himself.

Four mountain bluebirds settle down on a rock behind him. They don’t speak, just shuffle around, nervously nudging each other, watching.

The cave is a three-foot wide crack between two glacial boulders. I admire its cramped form, the way you have to turn your body sideways to fit inside. The boulders are rough to the
touch, not like the stones in the stream, but from some distant place, carried here by ice creeping slowly for tens of thousands of years. The cave breathes warm, moist air that smells like smoke. Voices and grunts come from inside. They seem to be calling to me, saying, “Welcome, brother. Don’t worry. We understand.” And from the darkness, I feel eyes trained on me, pulling me forward, casting me powerless, vibrating a deep fold in my brain, my whole body turned warm, burning up, feverish and willing.
Paper Boats

2012 Winner
Alena Wilson Memorial Prize Contest

Caroline Wilkinson
Paper Boats

Daphne picks up a bowl and goes to the stove. From a pan on the burner, she spoons out eggplant to put in the dish. She and her lover are going to a potluck dinner. As soon as this dish is ready, they will leave. They will walk up the road to the converted milk house on this estate. Daphne has never been to this home but knows it’s falling apart. This estate is so rundown that nothing on it can escape the rot. But just how is the milk house decaying? Are the roof shingles coming off? The window sashes falling? Daphne doesn’t know. The house is hard to see, being set down from the road and surrounded by a tall fence. She wonders if it is falling apart in the same way this converted greenhouse is.

In the kitchen, roses are growing. The flowers have pushed through a window with a broken sash; and down in the bedroom, wisteria has slipped around a loose casement. The vines are growing toward a bookshelf. With their thin leaves, they hover by the volumes, as if choosing some summer reading with great care. Is the milk house changing in the same way? Is it becoming what it used to be: a place where cows were milked? And what would such a change look like? Daphne will find out soon enough. The milk house is only a few minutes away, and the dish is ready.

Dinner began an hour ago. The dog—they call her name—has left, it seems. Even though they are late, they walk up the road slowly. Daphne feels thick-limbed and awkward.
The two of them almost never go to events on this estate. "Tell me why we're doing this,"
Daphne says as the windmill creaks. The sound is short; the windmill has just two blades left.

"The ritual. We need to see what it is."

Yes, the ritual. It will begin after dinner. But what will it entail? Daphne doesn't know. Maybe it will have something to do with the date: June the twenty first, the longest day of the year. The land is bright, even to the east where the earth dips down behind two barns. The sun, shining into this dip, reveals dame's rocket and rambler rose. The plants are messy but also curiously neat with the sun sharpening their edges. The stems, blossoms and leaves stand out. The volume of detail, coupled with its brightness, makes Daphne turn her gaze.

In the corner of her eye is the sun. It presses down into the mountains to the west. In her squinting eye, the sun turns hard and small, like a diamond. Yesterday Daphne saw two tiny diamonds. They were set in a ring with a small emerald. She found the ring in a storage box in the kitchen. Its literal value wasn't much, but it meant something to her when she was a teenager. She tried to remember this lost meaning yesterday. She stared into the ring until all she could see was the emerald. The gem was a dull, uniform green—nothing like the green that has appeared to her right. They have reached the main road, which is lined with juniper trees to the south. The junipers are a rough, vibrant green. With their shadows, they scrub the brightness from the earth. As they scrub, they uncover a blue tint to the clayish dirt.

The shift to shade is sudden and smooth. In recent weeks, Daphne's mom has changed as quickly—or at least it seems sudden, her mother's choice to join the ministry. Daphne hasn't seen her mom in so long that she can't know what's sudden with her. Maybe the woman has wanted to be a minister for years. Daphne found out about the career choice from her atheist sister. God isn't as real as a shadow in her sister's world—but that's not the right way to think of
it. Her sister doesn’t think much about sunlight and its negation. She cares about math above all else. For her, God isn’t as real as a zero. Daphne laughs.

“What’s so funny?” her lover asks.

“The idea of God.” Daphne laughs again—but a movement ahead silences her. The fence for the milk house is up on the left, and a child’s head is rising above the pickets. It is rising and then falling again, as if the child were being tossed. Her lover says, “Funny as a crutch.”

Daphne gazes back down at the road. Beneath the trees, it looks like dusk: tremulous but increasingly certain of its darkness. “You make me shiver,” she says before looking down at the eggplant. She stares into the bowl blankly, as if trying to divine the future in the lumps.

Across the road from the barns is “the yellow house.” Unlike most rental units—the milk house and hayloft, the windmill and gatehouse—this place has always been a home for people. Back when the landlords had their fortune, a caretaker lived in it. Its clapboard is many shades: lemon, canary, gold, mustard. The home has been painted in cans of leftover yellow. The couple who lives in the house are new tenants. They have made a garden near the road. The seedlings, while small, are identifiable: the spidery start of cosmos, the small thrust of corn, the symmetry of the tomato plant. All the seedlings will be tall when full grown except some lettuce. The edible leaves are close to the road—so close, in fact, that Daphne, looking at them, imagines tire tracks in salads. She has expressed her feelings about this cramped garden before but repeats them: “That garden depresses me.”
“Don’t look at it.” This remark comes quickly and quietly without much movement of the mouth. Daphne recalls how her lover was once accused of being a spy by a coworker. The accusation proved to be impossible to refute.

Across the road, the door to the milk-house gate is closed. Conversations are coming from the other side of the pickets. Individual words, lobbed over the fence, fall on the road. “On the boatsslip?” Slurred, soft consonants break and vowels spill out. “Pleeaasse...not before d-aaawn!” Daphne opens the gate.

Inside is a crowd. People are standing and sitting in a long, sunken yard. Below the fence is a concrete wall about a yard tall. Daphne, staying by the gate, looks over people’s heads toward the milk house. The building is one story and sticks out from the barn. Its roof is green with moss, and the wall bordering the yard is green too, but not with moss. Its color comes from morning glories. The vines grow on wires that stretch vertically to the low eaves. The blossoms have twirled shut for the day. Daphne’s thoughts, as she looks at the vines, are closed too. *Why go in? These people*—she glances down at the crowd—*are near strangers.* But when the word “Go” is whispered behind her, she walks down the steps.

Some of the faces in the crowd are bright and squinting. These people are looking west. The ones looking east, while turned away from the sun, seem illuminated too. The shade and shadow in this yard sharpen features. One woman is listening with her eyes. She opens her mouth fast, as if struck by a sudden need to speak. The man looks down at a paper plate held up near his chin. Not many people have food. Other than the man, only a few people have plates and plastic utensils. Their forks scrape and wiggle through bean salads and meat.

“Where—” Daphne finds only more faces when she turns. “Where do you think the eggplant goes?”
‘I don’t know... We’re very late.’

One of the landlords is in a corner of the yard. He is the patriarch of this estate, or to use the Dutch term he prefers, the patroon. He loves to eat. The best way to get him to repair something in a rental unit is by making dessert. Daphne, searching for the food table, walks toward him. His old figure is slouched and smudged with motor oil. Besides eating, he loves fixing engines and igniting combustibles: tree stumps dressed with old gas, roman candles. But he is not going to be exploding anything in this crowd. He leaves through a door that leads to the barn. Behind him are two dogs: one has a bent tail and lives in the gatehouse; the other has a light step and lives in the greenhouse. Daphne says ‘Hey’ to her dog, but the message is too late. Her pet has trotted out.

The woman who lives in the milk house emerges from the crowd. Her eyes are widely spaced and soft and, at the moment, heavy-lidded. She is a recipe-writer who works and drinks hard. The mix usually leaves her with more tasks to finish long after she’s gone over to the heavier side of tipsy. Right now her job is to get people ready for the ritual. It’s time, she says, to make paper boats. ‘They’re going into the river,’ she says, taking the eggplant from Daphne. ‘You need to get cracking.’ Her tone is so deadpan that any response will seem effusive; and indeed, when the lovers say, ‘Okay’ and ‘Sounds good,’ they seem enthusiastic even though they have spoken with, respectively, pure speed and mild interest.

Following their eggplant, they walk toward the food table. Not far from it is a girl jumping on a small trampoline. Every time she jumps, she peeks over the fence at the sun. Then she drops under the ridged shadows of the pickets. It must be the child whom Daphne saw from the road. The girl is unknown, but the trampoline is too familiar. It has a hot-pink border with a rip in its vinyl. It’s Daphne’s old trampoline. She left it by the dumpster last fall. She bought it
years ago on a whim in a mall in Albany and, since then, has done her best to control whims in malls in Albany. She threw it out soon after getting Lyme disease. Her illness finished off whatever impulse she had to jump over and over.

“That’s my trampoline, you know,” she whispers loudly. Now she is the one who sounds like a spy, albeit a bad one.

“Volume.” It’s their codeword for *not so loud.* “They might think you want it back.”

After eating, they see a man and woman their age. This couple once lived in the greenhouse. While in their early thirties, they look younger. Sitting on the grass, they have crossed their legs Indian-style. Both of them have long hair. His is dreaded and rough and brown, like a welcome mat made with coir, and hers is straight and blonde. It hangs on the sides of her face, causing her to perpetually look ahead. This couple used to eat at the restaurant in Tivoli where, up until this week, Daphne worked; the business was just sold and closed for renovations. This couple would sit in her section all night. They never ordered a lot, but Daphne didn’t mind much. Their conversations, quiet and self-contained, set them apart from other diners. They didn’t need much after being served their meals except, at times, more water.

Daphne asks, “May we join you?”

They smile in different ways. The woman aims wan approval at the man, who says with blunt warmth: “Sit down.”

On the grass are materials for the paper boats. Pieces of heavy paper rest near a plate of chicory and what look like instructions. The man places chicory in a boat, while Daphne reaches
for the page that has writing and diagrams. Nowhere do these instructions say what the ritual is for. What meaning will these boats carry? Daphne wants to ask, but not now. This corner of the yard is quiet. Her thumbnail scrapes across the paper as she makes the first crease.

A distant train roars by. The train always passes down by the river. It stops south of here and, to the north, goes by Tivoli. Daphne could hear the train at her old job. She would listen to it while taking out the trash at the end of her shift. It was dark and late as she walked through the back lot. The whistle would say mournfully and as a matter of fact, Somewhere else, as the branches above the lot stirred. Their leaves would stitch black lace onto a black backing and, with a shake, let it all fall at her feet. There is always something I am trying to say. Her lips would move in silence.

Her boat, she decides, will carry something of the sky, but not what she found on those nights. Instead, its cargo will be bright, like this dusk. The only flowers on the plate are chicory. Their stems are thick and make sharp turns. She looked up these flowers in a book after making a bouquet of them. She had seen the blossoms in a field and had brought them into her home. When cut, the flowers closed like clams pulled from the sea. The other name listed in the book for chicory was “blue sailors.”

Those blue sailors are as closed as the morning glories on this home. When she first saw those vines, she wanted to understand this milk house, but that desire is gone, at least for now. She makes the last fold in her boat. A message comes in her ear, hushed yet loud in its closeness: “We need better flowers.”
They run home for better flowers. They'll pick lupine and tick weed—or maybe chamomile and catmint. These last two die well and will leave behind a scent while floating off. Daphne tries to avoid the holes in the road. The man who lives in the hayloft has always fixed the potholes, but ever since he broke his leg a few months ago, he doesn't bother with this extension that curves in front of the greenhouse. Daphne's heels come down hard on the smooth part of the earth. The flowers are close; the blossoms of the tick weed, yellow and fat, hover by the front door. They look especially tall next to the low, limp purple of the catmint. Daphne, reaching the door first, fumbles with the lock in the loose knob. To her right are the overgrown roses, their branches pushing into the clapboard.

Daphne rushes into the house, crying, "I'll get the scissors!"

But she just stands in the kitchen. The room is empty except for a cat reclining on the floor. The animal stares at Daphne with a gaze that's both amused and judgmental, as if some gaffe had been made—nothing recent and fixable but something further back involving the evolution of Daphne's species. In the back room, the closet is being opened, its sliding door squeaking across its track.

Daphne goes over to a cabinet under the counter. From it, she pulls out a cardboard box. Yesterday she searched this box for her social security card for her new job waiting tables. While looking through forms and manuals, she found that emerald ring. She finds the metal circle again, the prongs around the gems pushing into the tips of her fingers. Those diamond chips, while dull with dust, remind her of the sun. They are like the sun as seen in the corner of a squinting eye.
She runs outside. There is more catmint than anything else. The plant smells sweet but has a muskiness that burns the throat. The flowers are flat and parted, like thick hair. Daphne lifts the matted purple and cuts. Dogs bark in the distance. Two barks. Silence. Another bark. The sound is less wildly expressive than curtly conversational. As soon as Daphne hears the front door shut, she throws the scissors in the dirt. “You have to take some!” she cries, gathering the dusty blossoms. “What a mess!”

“It’s necessary. Those blue flowers are unacceptable.”

They stand with their flowers. As they jog up the road, Daphne asks, “What do you think’s going to happen to those boats? Do you think they’ll get lit on fire?”

The answer, “Nooo,” goes up and down in pitch, the insinuation being that the question is nutty. Or maybe the wavering pertains to the fact that, as they jog, everything, including their voices, gets jostled. The whole scene—the trees, the wildflowers—looks as if it were strapped to the back of a bouncing flatbed truck. “Well, they have had fires at things like this before,” Daphne asserts. “Remember that circle?”

“If they have a circle like that, I better not catch you in it.”

“I would never!” That would be hell, being trapped in a circle of flames with a bunch of neighbors.

A pale blue light has closed over the milk house. The matriarch of the landlords is near the gate to the yard. Unlike her husband, the patroon, she is clean. Her handsome face is freshly scrubbed and made-up. Her eyes, perpetually furtive, look up suspiciously from beneath penciled brows. She draws those brows in cobalt blue. Daphne used to think those lines were a
dare. *Ask about me,* they said. Daphne declined—a prudent choice. This landlord, who is Russian and an artist, doesn’t like talking to tenants. She chafes against the role of the landlord. When performing the part, she delivers lots of tense asides while rolling her eyes. Those brows now seem like a demand, both authoritative and rebellious, for silence.

Daphne keeps her eyes on the ground. In the grass are forks, bright and cracked. A little girl glances around at hips and butts. She looks as befuddled as the zigzagged part on top of her head until she finds a pair of men’s chinos and grabs one of the back pockets. She holds on tight, while Daphne pushes ahead. The crowd thins. Near the fence is the plate with chicory. Only a few blossoms remain. Daphne puts the catmint over them. Her lover says, “We’ve brought catmint.”

The words elicit blank stares from the couple.

Daphne adds, “Cats like the smell of it.” The truth is cats like it so much that it’s a wonder the plant survives, what with all the cats that drop by to sit on it.

The man and woman look at each other, silent and seemingly befuddled.

*What’s the point?* Daphne thinks, not knowing the point of the thought. It’s dull and aimed at nothing and everything.

The man says, “These boats we’re making—they’re for our cat. He’s been missing five days. We don’t expect him back anymore, so the boats—” He’s flushed and smiling. “They’re for saying goodbye.”

The woman, turning toward him, disappears behind her hair. “Thanks,” she says. It’s not clear if she is grateful for his remarks or the flowers or both.

Condolences come quickly: “I’m sorry” and “That’s terrible, your cat wandering off…” In their tone, these expressions of sympathy are vague, appropriately so, since neither the man
nor the woman seems sad about the loss exactly. The woman is watching her hand travel to the
catmint with tired curiosity, as if moving through a too-detailed dream, and the man is smiling
inexplicably, like a cat staring at floorboards.

*At least their boats make sense.* Daphne’s boat was supposed to reflect the sky, but the
catmint, unlike the chicory, is darker than the air. The ring with its diamonds isn’t lending any
brightness to the boat. It’s still in her pocket. Why risk it falling out on the way to the river?
Her boat has nothing but catmint in it, and the same goes for her lover’s. What exactly was
taken from the closet back at home? Daphne says, “What did you make—”

“Everyone?” The woman who lives in the milk house is by the door of the fence. “It’s
time to start so…” Her voice, while loud, is hoarse…“so let’s zip the lip, shall we?” She must
always be this tired at these events. Daphne has heard of some of the meals that this recipe-
writer has served. More than once she has converted a gourmet recipe so that she can serve a
fine meal out of a cauldron. This potluck dinner must have been less taxing to pull off. Even so,
her hand is limp as she waves in the direction of the blue-browed landlord, who takes the stage.
The landlord steps up to the door.

She explains the ritual. It comes from her hometown in Russia. Maidens in the spring
write down the names of the men they want to marry. Then they put the names in paper boats,
which go into the nearest river. The landlord, as she speaks about young women and their
wishes, moves her head downward and across, as if reading from tickertape. Her tone too
suggests the transcription of news. Even when she speaks of “the bloom of desire” and “summer
heat,” she sounds as if she were relaying facts from tickertape—soybean futures flat, corn
closing up. The speech ends with a mention of the “fulfillment of the harvest” followed by a
quick “Let us go now.” With a turn, she heads out on the road.
The crowd follows. The boats sail out of the yard, buoyed by arms and hands. The fleet moves through the door to the fence. The boats are high above the earth as they head out onto the road. They drift up to the yellow house. The home’s many shades make the color yellow seem sinuous. The house is muscularly cheerful. The boats float past its flexed joy. The ritual has begun!

The crowd walks down the road under the junipers. Ahead is a pack of dogs. The animals are milling in front of what remains of the sun. The shadow of one dog’s tail is bent. The shadow acts like a right-angle wrench, undoing the pack’s anonymity; the tail belongs to the mutt from the gatehouse. The dog is ambling from one spot to the next, never stopping long. The other dogs linger more before moving on to piss again. All the animals have dark fur. One has white speckles too, as if barnacled. The animals begin to loom as large as whales when the boats come close. Broad-backed, the dogs stick together. On the starboard side of the fleet, the animals speak to each other through odor and movement, stirring in silence.

“Where’s our dog,” Daphne says without really asking. The animal must be somewhere among those creatures. “I don’t see her.”

“There!” The answer is loud as if it came from her, but it didn’t. It came from her lover. “Down there!”

Ahead the road dips. Below this ridge are open fields. Their dog is down in the fields by the road where, a week ago, baby rose grew. The patroon razed the shrubs. Their dog sniffs a hole in the pocked dirt and sneezes. Again the animal’s nose dips into the hole and jerks out with a sneeze.
Daphne laughs—but it comes out as a hard breath. “Yes, I see her.” Her voice sounds distant and close, like the fields. The sloping land seems far away even as Daphne moves into it. These fields are too large for humans. A person entering them must become something smaller, like a dot of color—yellow or blue—that a distant eye then blends into green. The boats press on, while the grass ripples. The dogs, all of them, rush into the fields. The grass is not as dark as the emerald in Daphne’s pocket. It has been a dry spring, and the fields are paler than usual. They are, however, a truer green than the emerald. The gem looks dyed. Dyed and cheap.

*How could I have taken that ring?* The thought seems far away. It is as distant as a wrinkle that lies down in the fields. This crease runs between two swells in the earth and looks small but actually holds a wide thicket. The dogs, running toward the dark wrinkle, don’t get far. Soon the pack stops to sniff, dipping their heads into the grass.

*How could I have asked for that ring?* Daphne asked her father for it. He had given it to her mom for Christmas. Her mom had asked for an emerald but rejected this one for being too cheap-looking. The spurned ring sat on the sideboard for weeks. Come February, Daphne asked her father, “Can I take this?” She spoke in the monotone of a teenager who knows nothing for sure except that the world is bullshit. Her father answered, “Yes,” in a voice just as flat. That “yes,” which was as flat as a cut emerald, showed that he wasn’t cheap. He didn’t need a refund for the ring. She could take it.

The road, sloping more, turns rutted. When it rains, water runs down the ruts toward the river—but this evening is dry. The hair on Daphne’s arm stiffens. She and her lover remain
close, their boats lifted and their bare arms brushing. Their skin is dusty and dotted with the leaves of catmint. The fields seem soft, being new in their greenness, but the grass rustles dryly. It almost hisses in the breezes. When the boats reach the dogs, the grass slides around the pack, brushing sun-warmed fur.

Daphne moves more softly, like grass. Gone is the awkwardness from earlier; when leaving for the party, Daphne felt thick-limbed, like a cactus. “You and I,” she says to her lover, “we’re plantlike. At a party, we’re like cacti, prickly and weird. We’re haunted by that greenhouse, and it’s true for all the tenants: Everyone here is haunted by the buildings. Look at that milk house with its spirit of generosity—forced generosity—and look at the tenant. She gives too much, like a cow. And the gatehouse. That place...it’s...”

“Hard to crack.”

“Yes.” Daphne laughs. The two of them never go to the gatehouse. The small home sits out by the county road. Beside it is a gate of wrought iron. The black metal curves decoratively in front of the entrance to the landlord’s road.

The tail of the mutt from the gatehouse moves through the grass, bending the blades like a dull, useless scythe. “I don’t know about the people in the gatehouse,” Daphne says, “but their dog...he’s got a tail like a key—” or a scythe or a wrench. “A skeleton key. It goes everywhere!”

Her lover looks over and, after a pause, smiles. Daphne smiles back. The two of them have entered a new darkness, walking so far down this road that the sun can no longer reach them, it seems. This dark feels deeper than the earlier light, as if time were layered and midnight were the nadir of this valley. The truth is that the sun has gone behind the mountains ahead. Fireflies light the dark capriciously, one spark, another.
To the right, a birch tree grows on a hill. Its trunk is dark yet bright, as if the hill held a buried moon and the tree were rooted in it.

"The people at the windmill," says the lover. "They've left, you said."

Daphne went into the house last week, led by the dog. The cabin was empty, except for a smell in a corner that kept the dog occupied. "Yes, they're gone."

"They blew away."

Daphne laughs, then shivers. How the windmill towered over the wood cabin! The metal creaked like thunder so rusted it could barely move. "Yes, they blew away..."

A boat with roses is in the corner of Daphne's eye. Tucked among the petals is a figure of a human or animal; the boat belongs to the landlord whose brows are the color of the air now; those blue lines resemble the darkening sky. Drums have begun to sound at the back of the crowd. The rhythm is slow. Behind the landlord, fireflies move languidly to it.

"Good evening," Daphne says and smiles.

"We were just talking about the buildings on this estate."

These words linger in the air conspicuously, as if born with bright tails. **We were just talking about the buildings on this estate.** They came not from Daphne but from her lover, who can turn assertive in conversation, Daphne remembers. These turns always come after great care has been taken not to offend a soul. Always in such moments, some private theory is shared, usually one as weird as the landlord's eyebrows. "The milk house causes you to give too much," the lover says. "And the windmill..."

Daphne wonders why the tenants in the windmill are gone. Did they have to move out after offending one of the landlords? And the former tenants of the yellow house, why did they leave? Daphne's throat tenses. The landlord's brows are arching over a look of horror.
“What a lovely evening!” Daphne exclaims. “And this ritual—how wonderful to be here!” She goes on to compliment both the landlord and the weather. Her tone is unthinkingly warm, like bread heated within one minute of a customer’s arrival at a restaurant. Her compliment ends with a “Thank you!” Her feet have grown heavy. She slows down, moving to the back of the crowd. Her feet are as heavy as the clay pounding under her soles.

Daphne is alone on the road. Ahead are the crowd and her lover. To her left is a line of trees. It is the same line that looked like a small crease from above. Up close, the trees seem not only large but hard. They pool in the dent in the earth, like blood in a cut. The thicket is as hard as a scab and as peelable; the trees lift from the ground with each step. Daphne can’t catch up with the crowd. Her feet ache too much. The ground is as hard as the nearby thicket.

On the mountain, the trees seem softer. Rising beyond the river, the mountains carefully hold whole towns in their bands of green. These gentle bands hover above the crowd ahead. Daphne should be up with that crowd where her lover is. The two of them live down here with these people. They don’t live up on the mountains where, in the snowy months, the evergreens close like umbrellas, their branches weighed down by white. They live down here where the snow, when it melts on the mountains, falls in a roar.

Daphne trips on a rut—but recovers. The boat has been jostled, but the flowers remain in it. Daphne takes the ring from her pocket and puts it on the catmint. *What did you make so fair and bright?* What’s that line from? It came to her at the milk house. Wasn’t she going to ask her lover, “What did you make so fair and bright?” Or has her mind turned an old thought into
something more beautiful than it really was? The line originally is from Yeats—but Daphne has remembered it wrong.

The small ring rests on the flowers. Her father found meaning in how she took it. Her wearing of the emerald held some significance for him. It marked her in his eyes as cheap. After she took it, he would look at her lasciviously even when she was speaking of something as mundane as groceries. *How could I have taken it?* Of course maybe it was a coincidence, his smirks coming when they did. Maybe they had to do with the privacy he enjoyed when Daphne was fifteen. Her mom was usually at work, being a lawyer, and her sister was off at college. Her sister, when calling home, sounded as far away as she was: a thousand miles. Daphne once asked after a long pause, “Did you hear me?” The answer she got was “Epsilon.”

“What does that mean?” Daphne asked.

“A little.”

She knew it meant less than that. In math, a “little” is almost nothing.

Behind Daphne, a truck rattles in the distance. It is the patroon’s pickup at the top of the fields. She steps off the road into the blue sailors. Far off to the right of the truck is a mansion. Pillared and white, the house sits on top of the sloping land to the south. Daphne keeps her gaze on the old truck and smiles. The expression doesn’t hurt her face, being sincere.

But why does she feel kindness toward the patroon? The other day he came into the greenhouse without warning and took the woodstove. He didn’t cover the hole in the wall where the stovepipe went, and a swarm of bees flew through it. Daphne, leaving the bees to buzz on the windowsills, walked over to the patroon’s mansion. In his kitchen, she asked him (how slowly he now drives, taking care with his own truck!) for a new stove. As she talked, her dog barked at a long-lost friend: the patroon’s old, barely mobile mutt. The animal was curled up in
a corner of the kitchen. To stop the barking, Daphne had to put her hands over her dog’s eyes. The furred eyelids brushed against her palms.

The patroon’s face emerges from the evening’s shadows. Stoically, he peers from the thin steering wheel of the truck. He led Daphne behind his mansion after she asked for her stove back. Behind his home, the trees grew too close to the walls, threatening to reach through the windows and rummage through vanities and muskets and whatever other things his ancestors had left behind. He led her to a clearing where a woodstove sat in the grass. The stove was bright brown and covered in drips of sap. The drips sweetly blended into the stove’s rust. Daphne wanted to laugh. Obviously, the stove had been used to make syrup.

She listened to the patroon. He spoke of the scene forged on the stove’s side: a relief of men cutting a tree under the watchful eye of a reindeer. The scene, he said, was a Czechoslovakian copy of a Norwegian theme. Daphne felt at home, standing there and listening. She felt secure, looking up at the stovepipe rising in the air. Never would she lose this house with its ceiling made of sky, she thought. Even if the landlords threw her out, she wouldn’t lose that hearth of grass stretching on and on.

Daphne still is smiling. On the driver’s side of the pickup, the window is open. The patroon’s arm is crooked out of it. Passing, he lifts his hand in a simple wave. Daphne waves back.

She follows the bumper. The crowd is farther ahead. They are almost at the trestle at the end of the road. The people are parting, moving over into the fields, to let the truck pass.

Daphne begins to run. She belongs on this estate with its ceiling of sky and its boats that sail on an ocean of air.

“What do you make so fair and bright?”
That line is the correct one from Yeats. The poem is in the present tense.

"I build a boat for Sorrow..."

The land slopes into a thicket with bittersweet. The vines are pulling down the trees. As Daphne and her lover and the fleet pass the thicket, the drums get louder. The hands striking them seem to hold some enthusiasm for the mean, ragged vines and the road's end. From the packed earth emerges a honeycomb of iron, the beginnings of a trestle. A bridge stretches over a two-story drop, going over train tracks. Its metal blushes deep red with rust.

The dogs step on the trestle first. The gaps in the honeycomb of metal are not much smaller than their paws. The narrow bands of iron make the animals prance slightly. They don't seem afraid of what the gaps expose: the drop to the train tracks. They keep their heads lowered, never looking to the left and right. Empty spaces run along both sides of the bridge's floor, like gutters in a bowling lane. The dogs keep away from the edges. The sides of the bridge are made up of triangles. These shapes are large with thick, shared legs. While they can support much weight, they don't lower the possibility of falls much. Their hypotenuses are longer than most children.

The boats form an orderly line—not a mathematical one with a width less than epsilon—but a practical line that, in its narrowness, keeps people away from the edges of the bridge. Other than the drumming, not much sound comes from the crowd. The fleet moves toward the western side of the trestle where, to the left, a tower is blinking in the distance. The structure is metal and open. It looks like a radio tower. The dogs, reaching the end of the bridge, canter
across the soft dirt. Veering left, they head toward the tower. The structure is, in fact, a
lighthouse.

"What do you make so fair and bright?"

The line is about to rust; Daphne's boat is done; it needs nothing more than flowers and
the remembered ring. So why keep repeating this line? Because this ritual needs repetition. It
needs the sort of repetition that lends structure to church services. Right now, it lacks the lines
and stories, written down and repeated, from the liturgy and the Bible. Daphne heard such
stories at the age of fifteen when her mom, turning to religion, suddenly believed in such things
as talking snakes. With attentive anguish, her mom listened to the Gospels and lessons. One day
when Daphne was fifteen, she thought of these stories as real. She had to lie down on the floor
of the kitchen, the linoleum was so cool and her face hot. With her cheek against the tile, she
had one ear to the ground. She could listen to what lay below in the earth where the mustard
seed of the parable fell. As she lay there, she soon forgot about the water she had gone to the
kitchen to get. Her throat hurt. On her side, she looked with her lower eye at a magnet under the
fridge. The magnet was an aqua letter held in dust. It belonged to a lost set of the alphabet. The
house was silent and, except for Daphne and a cat that always hid, empty. Below the floor was
the mustard seed and, above the roof, a sky that could rain fire.

Those Bible stories made her burn with fever then. Repeating, the tales created
something as hard as these triangles on the bridge. The last triangle ends in the dirt and shade of
an embankment.

"I build a boat for Sorrow..."

Repetition should come together to create structure. The Bible stories, though, created
chaos in Daphne when she was a teenager. These boats do the same thing. This ritual is chaotic
with too many stories, all of them different. Daphne can see flowers and objects in the vessels (a piece of silver-colored metal rests in her lover's boat), but the stories behind the cargo are hidden. The tales carried by this fleet are obscured, like the sky; the boats hover in the shade. The crowd is standing above the beach near the lighthouse. The path down to the shore has steps of stone. Some of the stones are rounded, others tilted. A few move when stepped on.

The dogs have walked down them already. Most of them are in the river like water buffalo, cooling themselves up to their bellies. One dog takes a few running steps before biting the water. Stopping, it opens its maw wide and hacks. The water is clear enough to see through at a few inches but quickly turns opaque. One brown lab swims in loops around the shores of a small island. The lighthouse sits on top of this island, which is actually a manmade pile of stones about twenty feet across. The blinking on the tower is as slow and as calm as the lab's swimming. Some dogs remain on the beach to sniff a tangle of torn tree roots. The river has scrubbed the roots clean of dirt while blackening them with rot. A plastic bag like a bored wind sock flutters from the roots.

Some of the humans join the dogs in the river: the woman from the milk house, and the couple who lost their cat, and a man who just built a workshop in the barn. He takes off his shirt but keeps his long shorts on. The army-green fabric gets soaked as he wades to the island. On his back is a tattoo, coiled like a snake or the long neck of a dragon. “Put a candle in your boat!” someone shouts wistfully as if calling out an adage to a loved one leaving town. *Don’t take any wooden nickels! Better to ask the way than go astray!* The tone makes the command sound extraneous—but when a boat appears with a candle inside, Daphne grasps that specific advice has been given. The boat with the votive candle glows on the water. It gets pushed out further
by those who have waded in. The boat drifts out to the swimming dog whose head glows in the soft light.

The head turns away from the boat, continuing in a circle.

In the light of Daphne’s votive, the ring shines. In her lover’s boat is a key that shines too. Both things, the key and ring, are relatively light and small. Others must take objects from their boats to make room for the candles, but not them. They put their boats on the water and push them out toward waiting hands.

The first boats to go in have travelled far. Each boat in this vanguard is no wider than a pinkie. Hands are not the only things that have moved them; currents have too. The bows of the fleet aim at the middle of the Hudson and slightly south. The candlelight reveals the river’s scope. The glowing boats look as small as insects—beautiful insects tinted the colors of flowers. They are like dragonflies drowning on the surface: pathetic in their smallness. But while the river makes the boats seem powerless, it doesn’t extinguish their flames, and so the light makes the river look kind too.

That emerald is not kind. It shined before leaving but never evoked anything like kindness. How far will the ring travel? And how will the boats fare? Will they sink before they light on fire, their flowers blowing into the flames? Or will they continue on their southern course until they get caught in weeds? Will they get to Rhinecliff or make it down to West Point? Wherever they go, they’ll sink. The ring will fall to someplace as cold as Daphne’s mom, who recently said the Church is her real family. The news infuriated Daphne’s sister even
though it is old news. It is as old as the fever that made Daphne burn against the floor with thoughts of Lot’s wife turning to salt. It is as old as Lot, wifeless and without a home, having sex with his two daughters. How Daphne’s flesh used to burn and shiver with chills. Soon the ring will slip down from a burning boat.

And the key will fall too. It will slip to the riverbed where it will unlock the opaque, cold and lost.

How peacefully the boats move. The drums have stopped. Daphne has stared at the fleet so long it seems impossibly bright. Looking to her side, she is surprised that her lover’s face doesn’t reflect the boats’ light. Beyond the dark profile is the patroon’s shadow. He is further down the beach, and so is a dog with tortoiseshell fur. The animal’s coloring makes it blend into the weeds and rusted metal that has drifted ashore. The dog is upside down and scratching its back on weeds.

It stops, frozen, when a loud suck of air comes from the beach. Then comes a sizzle. A flame flares near the patroon. A firework—he has lit one!—screeches upward. The dog with the bent tail runs. The animal is heading toward the train tracks. “That’s the wrong way!” Daphne shouts. Her lover calls for their dog. The sky booms high and low, the air pounding the water. The river turns red and blue.

Daphne is up on the trestle again. The iron glitters silver and gold. The sky sizzles. Below the bridge down on the tracks, the dog with the bent tail runs. It darts here and there. Farther away are the lights of a train. Above those lights are windows that, with their narrowed
squin, show a focus on destinations and timetables. The dog with the bent tail runs toward the train and then away. In the last bend of his crooked path, he reaches the eastern side safely. While he won’t get hit by the train, he is far from any house on this estate. He has gone too far south.

The train, reaching the trestle, shoves hot air upward. The gust roars with the speed of blurred metal. Daphne and her lover follow their dog across the bridge. The train continues in a rush. In the sky, a pink firework competes to make more noise—and loses. The color fades as the last train car speeds by in a blur. The only noise is the clacking of the dog’s nails on the bridge.

The clacking stops. The dog has reached the other side. She canter up the slope of earth. The lovers follow. The fields move upward, reflecting a sky of silver. The color sparkles across the wide grasses. The fields, while revealing the display, seem unimpressed. They have their own drama down at the roots where seeds gather. These seeds could undo the fields in a season if no one came back to mow. Within a year, they could start to turn these fields into forests. The mansion at the top of the land stares down with long, uncovered windows. With its pillars and bald stare, it looks proud of its position. Its windows turn from gold to pink. It never becomes the shade that Daphne, turning, sees: gray. In the sky is a huge gray spider. It is made of smoke and has long legs. It drifts down and across the sky. It is the memory of a firework.

Daphne turns and runs from it.