



THE INDICATOR

ECOLOGIES OF CARE

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Letter from the Editor

Take care. Give each other care. Self-care. Be careful. Practice care. The sheer repetition of the word care slowly seeps its meaning from its form. The phrase becomes distorted, a lifeless shell of a sentiment so fundamental to life. In a global pandemic, the sentiment is well intended, yet as a greeting, a valediction, and as the body something is lost. The meaning of care becomes increasingly abstracted. I want to say thank you, but how? How do we give ourselves, each other care, when the world spirals and moves the lives of those around us with it?

Intuitively, I know it has everything to do with love, but the various forms of care are often inexpressible and take invisible, felt forms. This issue of *The Indicator* literary magazine explores the responses of our writers, editors, and artists to these prevailing questions. What are the webs of care we weave around ourselves during our most difficult times? How do we show ourselves and each other such care? What does it look like, feel like, smell like, sound like, taste like?

Upon first google of this word, I was immediately confronted with an article that prescribed nearly thirty self-care products for my apparently “on edge” body. I was faced with a shower wineglass holder, three different “clarifying” skin masks, a 90’s inspired candle, a satin sleep mask, a book to help you realize your goals, an under-eye mask, a bathrobe, nail polish, bath soothing salts, a foot massager, a wellness planner, house slippers, aromatherapy diffuser, and a box of “Zen” green tea. *What does self-care look like?*

The commodification of care not only distorts our understanding of all that it can be, but also limits our own imaginations about how to strive for it. That is not to say I haven’t enjoyed the occasional house slipper myself, but in what ways can we work to define it outside of capitalistic constructions? The harsh reality is that many individuals struggle to give themselves care in a world that does not care for them. This is a world that recognizes that the real self-care we reach for and need at times, exists outside the highly visible forms. Thus, care feels all the more ephemeral.

Reaching for self-care, in any form, is worthwhile. We must be gentle with our physical, spiritual, and emotional bodies. Care to me evokes a slowness, a tenderness, a smile, so much more than that which can be sold to us. I remind myself that existing is enough, even in a world that tells us that our value is in what we produce. Sometimes we give the most to the world when we notice the small intricacies of a flower, or sit with a friend in compassion, or take the chance to breathe.

And in the end, these ecologies of care are deeply personal and often undefinable. Yet it is always worthwhile to imagine these webs for ourselves. To imagine the ripples of compassion, of such love, outward into a world of healing.

What are the webs of care we weave around ourselves and each other every single day?
My answer is still changing.

Take care.

Your Editor in Chief,
Kiera Alventosa Class of 2021

Editor-in-Chief:	Kiera Alventosa	Letter from the Editor	Kiera Alventosa	2
Vice Editor-in-Chief:	Kalidas Shanti	Myth of the Garden	Sara Attia	4-5
Vice Editor-in-Chief:	Hannah Zhang	We Sell Care	Mikayah Parsons	6-7
Senior Assoicate Editors:	Kiera Alventosa	Conversations with my TikTok Therapist	Carolina Cordon	8-9
	Sara Attia			
	Ari Dengler			
	Jackeline Fernandes	Cosmic Poiesis	Jackeline Fernandes	10-12
	Yasmin Hamilton			
	Naviya Kapadia	Ecology of a Dark City	Spencer Williams	13-15
	Ross Kilpatrick	Ecology of a Beach House Love		
	Susan Lee			
	Karen Liu	The Art of Looking	Diego Duckenfield-Lopez	16-19
	Paige Reddington			
	Kalidas Shanti	Who are you, really?	Francesca Daniels	20-24
	Sam Spratford			
	Spencer Williams	Five Til Noon	Sam Spratford	25
	Hantong Wu			
Staff Writers:	Zoe Akoto	What the Fuck is Self Care	Ari Dengler	26-27
	Kiera Alventosa	I Am the Child of Scientists	Naviya Kapadia	28-30
	Cecelia Amory			
	Sara Attia	A Brief Odyssey of Grief	Zoe Akoto	31
	Thomas Brodey			
	Carolina Cordon	Captcha: A Villanelle	Ross Kilpatrick	32
	Leland Culver			
	Ari Dengler	An Alphabet of Film Studies Under Quarantine	Yasmin Hamilton	33-35
	Diego Duckefield-Lopez			
	Jackeline Fernandes	Synthesis	Leland Culver	36-39
	Yasmin Hamilton			
	Naviya Kapadia	The Ivory Tower	Thomas Brodey	40-41
	Ross Kilpatrick			
	Susan Lee	Hypnagogic Convergence	Jiwoo Han	42-45
	Karen Liu			
	Karla Muñoz	Love Letter to A Missing Novel	Karla Muñoz	46
	Mikayah Parsons			
	Kalidas Shanti	Food For Thought On Even Days	Kalidas Shanti	47
	Sam Spratford			
	Spencer Williams	A Prayer for Ella	Maggie Wu	48-49
	Maggie Wu			
		It's My Birthday	Mikayah Parsons	50-53
Staff Artists:	Cecelia Amory	Thoughts as the Hunger Kills You	Karen Liu	54-55
	Francesca Daniels			
	Grace Davenport	Violet Crocus	Kiera Alventosa	56-57
	Karen Liu			
	Hantong Wu			
	Hannah Zhang	A Woman, Alone	Cecelia Amory	58-59
	Tina Zhang			
	Jiwoo Han			

Myth of the Garden

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You have woken up for the first or last time in your life.

A. Apple Tree or Mountainside River?

If apple tree, go to B. If River, go to E.

B. Sometimes it hurts to breathe. The weight of what you haven't managed sits on your chest like a boar. Will you eat the apple?

If yes, go to D. If no, go to C.

C. In all the different timelines in all the different worlds, the one choice you were not supposed to make was inaction. Even damnation should triumph over stasis. You live a boring life free of pain or growth, and die under the Apple Tree you never dared disobey. YOU LOSE. Go back to start.

D. Congratulations! You have chosen to eat the apple.

You will now embark on a journey of self becoming from that which you were to that which to you will be, metamorphosing into something more new and terrible and brilliant than the last.

The APPLE becomes: your first meal. Proceed to H.

E. Welcome to the waterways, the place of birth, death, travel and omens sent downstream.

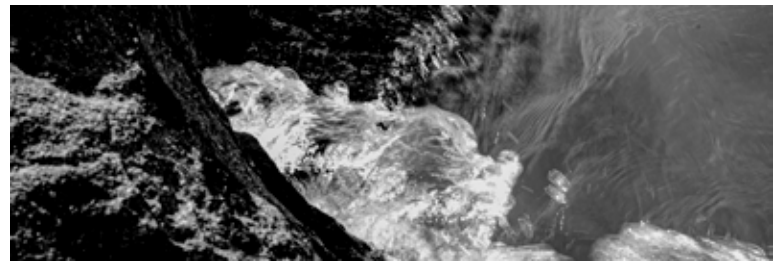
The sea verifies your brokenness. The lake proves your love.
Press F for Sea. G for Lake.

F. Your body drags you to the River and slowly that which you are dissolves. The water rushes in and picks the bones clean. Spits them out on the shore. Reassemble. And repeat. Reassemble. And repeat. Reassemble.

Proceed to I.

G. Your mother built you a raft when you were young. She'd hoped you'd use it, not to run away from her but to bring home the riches of that which was Not Here. You've disappointed her again. The raft transfigures itself into love, the River is a throat, and the world coughs and chokes and you end up in The belly of the beast. A great and monstrous thing that devours all it consumes. Life teems here.

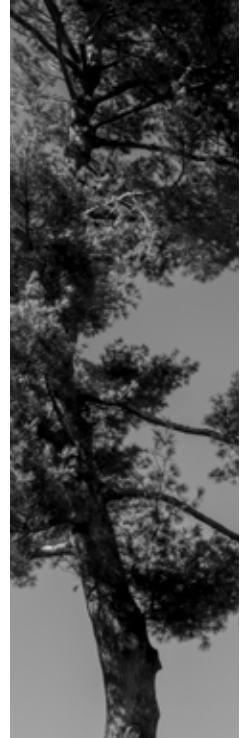
Proceed to J.



H. The curve of human history has consistently led itself to this given:
Growth and life and death
Meals and the potential,
even in aloneness,
to invent a new self to wear.
You eat the apple.
The curve of human history dictates you cut down the tree
And in that moment between consumption and deliverance the option for happiness appears
even in loneliness
even in the aftermath of destruction
Still
 you might plant a garden.

I. You are graceful when given the opportunity to remake yourself
reassembled, remodeled, reversed and inverse
the potential for life pushes out of the soul.
Your bones are indeterminate, ever-changing, stuck in
A pattern of self-immolation
But still there comes a point of healing.
The bones are not yours, they are you- and you sit with that which you have lost
And bury yourself into the soil.
Just for a moment. Just for a year.
 Just until you can begin to grow.

J. The beast shakes its battered body and
Begins to walk. It's shambling stride
hesitates
hesitates
moves on, worn and frail even in its hugeness.
You face a dilemma
the beast stops
you cling to your raft in the middle of an ocean
and hold a sad old creature's life in your hands,
The beast which carries all your love
And so much life in the lake
That is its stomach.
And you claw it open
 And fall into a garden.



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We Sell Care

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My gaze floats up to her lips, caked in red and drawn into a thin line with a slight upward tilt. She speaks as she looms behind the counter, “Yes, ma’am. So, you’ve purchased the basic package, which is really just the skeleton of the work we do here.” Her eyes widen, and she flips to an irrelevant catalog page. I eyeball the receipt book next to her, still awaiting her disorganized scrawl. Her raised brows betray her Cheshire-like smile. “Is that right?”

I hesitate, stumbling slightly over the syllables. “Y-yes?” I curse the unsteadiness in my voice.

Her filed French tips reach for a black pen with a feather on top. I watch with mild interest as she begins to write, but—as if on cue—her intern rushes through the front doors. The girl is short, large red frames sitting comfortably on her nose as she observes me. She wrinkles her nose, dropping the large box of self-care items cradled in her arms on top of the desk.

French Tips has restored the pen to its desk holder, but there’s no receipt on the counter. I blink, impatient, and prepare to ask for my money back.

“Oh, honey.” The intern walks my way, cute bob and gray pantsuit heavily influencing me. I back away from her abruptly. She pretends not to notice, grabbing my left hand. “Don’t you know what we sell?”

Blood rushes to my cheeks, and I shift my weight slightly. “I think so.”

Her lips are the same deep red color as her supervisor’s. But her dark brown skin is like my own. As if realizing this, she tilts toward me, dropping her voice low in my ear. “They sell products for people like us. Think about it.” She gives my shoulder a playful nudge. “The one place with our shades too.”

My voice catches somewhere in my throat, and I set my microchip down silently. Finally, I whisper, “And how much is the premium package?”

I don’t think I imagine it. For a split second, she looks disappointed. She looks like I’ve broken her heart. She fashions a sweet smile as she recites the price, adding, “And what a little price to pay with the benefits we sell.”

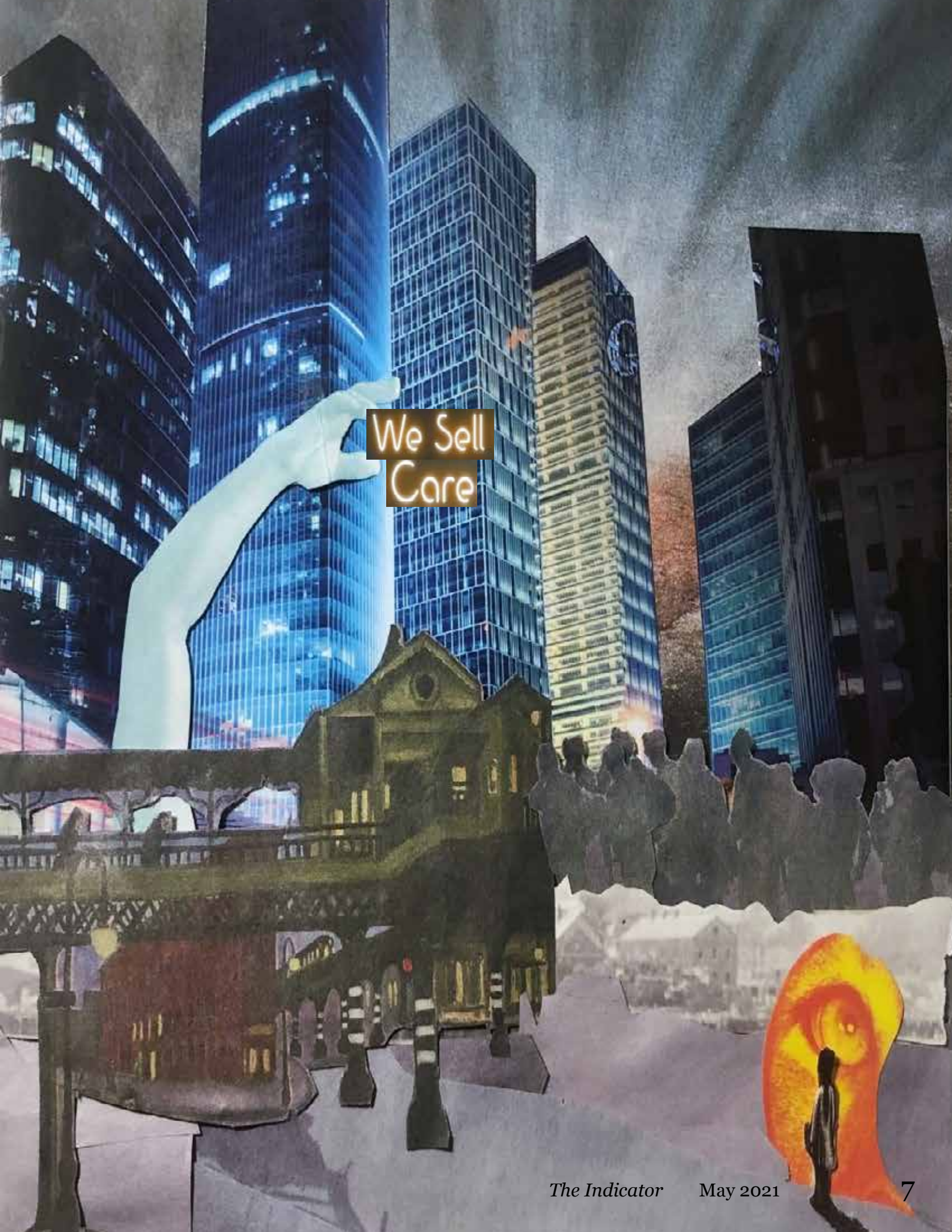
It’s on the tip of my tongue to ask exactly what they sell, when French Tips returns to the conversation. “Sweetheart, didn’t you hear? We sell care here.”

I don’t question my ability to care for myself. I don’t pursue a relationship with the persevering intern. I simply buy the product that they sell.

They sell care here.

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We Sell
Care

Conversations with my TikTok Therapist

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Hi there. I didn't see you.

Now that we're here together, let's take a deep breath.
Close your eyes. And

Inhale. Feel your lungs expand. Your muscles grow. Energy bubbling inside you.

Swirling. Swirling.

Fingers go numb. Skin gets tight. Then

Exhale. Feel your breath warm the air around you. Vibrating the molecules from your warmth and positivity.

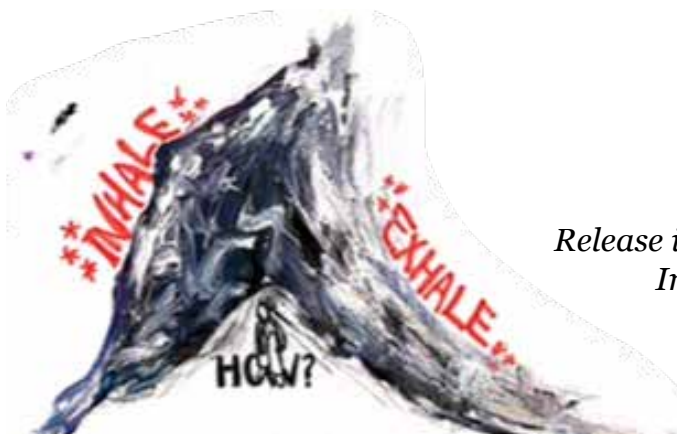
New energy is welcomed. Tension is released as your hair extends.

*Just for a moment,
I'm floating.
Eyes clouded in a sea of black.*

That felt amazing, right?

And then

*Is the bad stuff gone yet?
Have I gotten rid of the fear?
Will the thoughts stop swirling? Swirling?
Will my fingers stop scratching?*



*Release it all with the breath.
Inhale. Exhale.*

Gone?

*It's okay.
It's okay.*

Remember. With every breath, there is a new beginning.

It's okay.

This pain is only momentary.

*Inhale. Exhale.
Gone.*

Life is short. Don't waste it focusing on the bad.

It is as easy as breathing.

Come on, girly-pop!

Is something wrong with me?

If I can control my breath,

(What good could that do?)

*my knees won't buckle
my hips won't turn
my eyes won't cloud.*

This is your daily reminder. Repeat after me.

You are beautiful. You are smart. You are worthy of all love. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise.

*I can't release
Breath stuck
Throat*

*I am breathing.
I am standing.*

Take the deepest breath you have taken all day. Right here with me.

Inhale. Exhale.

*My pencil shakes
My rings curve-
making waves,
in the corner of my clouded eyes.*

*Stop it.
Let it go.*

You are strong.

You can do anything you set your mind to. Pick a goal and you will achieve.

Cross that assignment off your to-do list.

*(Now there is another-
no, two-
to replace the previous.)*

If someone doesn't treat you like a queen, dump their ass. You don't need them.

Hold me.

Men are trash.

I got you.

You are loved.

Am I?

Girlypop! Let your fire rage on.

Fires are destructive.

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When the world crumbled last March, I hadn't expected it to last so long that I would spin off course from my quotidian orbit around Earth, attracted by the unrelenting gravitational pull of Mars. I didn't know it at the time, but the email correspondence with a sophomore in my Letter Writing J-term class would soon become something more, something indefinable, rooted in a mutual appreciation for the graphemic, morphological, and semantic elements of language.

Dear Phobos, he began. (For the sake of anonymity, I'll use the moons of Mars as pseudonyms for us both). The timestamp on Gmail read 1:49 p.m. but he had written that he composed his letter at 1:40 a.m. and had waited to send it at a more reasonable hour. How strange, I thought, because the basic constructs of time were pulverized to nothingness in March. He was ruminating on a metaphor I had used in my J-term capstone project, a metaphor that highlighted a struggle in aligning myself with Earth's magnetic poles. The magnetic poles of Earth wobble around, he wrote. And even weirder, they sometimes swap. North becomes South and South becomes North. And then after a couple million years or so they'll swap back. Is it comforting that the world isn't even aligned on its own compass? That with the flick of a strange unknown geologic switch something as eternal and steady as the ground under our feet can do a full 180 degree turn and reverse itself?

I wasn't so sure I found it comforting. I found it rather eerie. His words reminded me of how the world had flipped upside down without transition, how human interaction had been reduced to low-resolution Zoom squares, how the steady ground that had once cemented humanity together became uneven and separated us all last March. I didn't know it at the moment, but his words were also a testament to what would be: the imminent, electrifying threshold I would cross; rearranging my whole world into bytes, into pixels, into sans-serif symbols as I emptied my thoughts into this vast digital void that spewed back moonbeams of metaphors from my fellow lunar companion, Deimos.

We fell into a sort of rhythm, oscillating steadily within our respective elliptical paths, as I'd wait a few days before writing back and he'd do the same. We talked about the limitations of perception and the powers of enigma, throwing ourselves into metaphors that cosmically expanded beyond our screens with every missive, the medley of which reflected an attempt to translate our anxieties about the world on the cusp of adulthood.

The general aura of his presence was a complete mystery to me, having never met him in person, yet reading his glowing words allowed me to analyze him in a way that would be impossible otherwise. I started to picture his head as a book and how his ready absorption of my inundation of words was influencing the story, his story, our story, but I desperately wanted to know how the book would end. I had never heard of a story like this one before. What character was I supposed to play? Where was my script? And who was taking it more seriously? Did it have to be me, as the younger girl? I wobbled on my lunar axis, dizzy from the vertigo of the incrementally increasing intimacy. Paradoxically, the distance created by our synchronously disconnected computer screens dragged me closer to him through the digital void, and I became nervous that it was all a hoax, that he would break it off with a single keystroke, so I played off the thought of our inevitable end as destructive beauty in my trepidation of heartbreak.

Dear Deimos, I typed. What if the unidentifiable beauty of this exchange of meaning between you and I—this alignment of temporally disconnected incorporeal gazes that penetrate past our epithelium and stroma and into the synaptic activity of each other's minds through blue light waves—is dependent on the perpetual sense of its precarity brought on by the intermittency of our responses, suggestive of the eventual obliteration of it all?

Time had become compressed in a high-pressure bottle. All of the orders of temporality were colliding, and I couldn't tell past from present or present from future or future from past. He was present in the incandescent words he sent me but at the same time a distant, pixelated

memory as a box on a Zoom screen, yet also a flickering light out of reach due to the inscrutability of the future of this arrangement. I wrote to him of the irregularity that had suddenly overtaken my life, how everything I saw reminded me of the intersections of time and language, how, in a strange way, the blur of cars on Route 9 reflected the inner workings of my brain in the gloaming hour of inky blues. The traces of obscured faces encased in glass windows as they rushed past, the quotidian rhythms of the workday all pulverized into dust, replaced by a sort of arrhythmia as the cars intermittently appeared and disappeared, accompanied by the vibrancy of red streaks amidst a darkening sky; those streaks of red light were like the firing of neurons that spurred the uncontrollable firing of words shooting across my grey matter, but the combinations of these words were fleeting, reduced to powder by time, supplanted by new words and new permutations. What I didn't tell him was that this arrhythmia also found itself within the palpitations pulsing from my chest whenever I read him, the book inside my head, within my mind, on my screen. I couldn't make sense of any of it.



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I became obsessed with the scintillating balls of light that studded the night sky. I was afraid they'd fall, disrupting the lines I had mentally drawn between disconnected star clusters. Were we cosmically connected even though we had never seen each other's atomic presences up close? Could invisible lines be linking us together, unbeknownst to us both?

Dear Deimos, I began. I was meditating on Stephen Hawking's Singularity Theorem, which proposed that the cosmos was born from a point of zero size—a singularity—that was so infinitely dense and compact until everything blew up. If this singularity theorem is correct, then there was a point in space where everything was so compact and dense and everything that we know was interconnected in this tiny dot. And if this interconnectivity is certain, then that must mean that all atoms still retain the origins of their interconnectivity despite the outward expansion of matter. But this makes me wonder what happens to abstract concepts like language and love that can't be reduced to atoms. I continued recklessly: If intimacy and words are inextricable due to some theory on cosmological interconnectivity—and, even if I can't visualize the beautiful, electrified atoms that vibrate with the hum of literary promise inside the person behind all the metaphors—does this mean I'm falling in love with the person writing them instead of the words themselves?

I desperately sought a way to transliterate my inexplicable feelings into the symbols of the English language, but everything sounded wrong and took the form of hieroglyphics. I was overtaken with physical pain at the thought that he wouldn't write back, that this literary relationship could quickly smash to atoms. I kept waking up at strange hours to refresh my inbox even though I knew he would take a while. I would die if it wasn't him, I thought as I checked my email with bleary eyes at 3 a.m. on a Monday. I was greeted by the daily student health survey instead.

I read through his letter several times and I still couldn't fully grasp the implications of what he had written. Something was thrilling, though, about tripping and stumbling over his words, about this unfathomability. It added to the captivation of his enigma. He described the soul as an intangible magnetic field that rises out of the interconnectivity of the atoms that make up the body. Language,

then, is also an emergent property that arises from these atoms but is not reducible to the atoms themselves, and intimacy can emerge from language as another intangible layer. Maybe most of the time we fall in love with the language, but sometimes, when we're lucky enough to find it, we fall in love with the intimacy, he wrote. Either way, in some sense we're falling in love with the magnets.

I was trying to incorporate his idea of the emergent soul with a previous metaphor that saw stained-glass windows as a representation of the derivativeness of art. The individual glass fragments are really pieces of influential inspiration from past artists that collectively result in the formation of an original, final product: an image that is projected onto the floor when sunlight passes through the stained-glass window. I indirectly described him as an interpretive observer of my stained-glass window. He steps forward into the projection and observes the faded reflections of red and blue and green now speckled on his skin, and he looks back at the stained glass in front of him, I typed. The intensity of the art, in all its effulgence, matches the intensity of his pointed gaze, which penetrates through invisible particles in the air, sharp with a desire to understand, and he does. He understands. The projections of color begin to seep into his skin and he internalizes the significance of the lead strips holding the pieces of glass together. His entire being, body and soul, resounds with the lineage of the art recorded in the individual fragments of glass and he becomes Time, but not ordinary time—he becomes Time as it is arranged by way of the artist, Time in its most unchronological but artistic form—and he is transported into a creatively constructed past that intermixes with bits of the present in the most original of ways.

As I typed, the accumulation of everything was starting to make sense—my distorted perception of time, the connection between us, the cosmic pulses, webs, and clouds that emanate from my art and seep into him in an impalpable overlapping of emergent artistic souls.

Art is

I started that sentence a while ago, Deimos wrote.

I don't think I can finish it.

Nothing had ever struck me as more fitting. The blank space succeeding those two fateful words

was mystifying and invited speculation, just as good art does. Art is, art is, art is. The words lapped and hurtled through my consciousness.

Art is he and I, I mused. I place the fragments of my soul under his interpretative, metaphysical gaze through the black monochromatic symbols I release into the digital void; and in return, he sends me his own fragments. We're both opening ourselves up to interpretation, building off of the other to form a concatenation of images that conflate all orders of temporality at once: our shared past, our distanced presents, and the cautious anticipation of a shared future. And this mutual unraveling is shrouded with an element of mystification that so often permeates artwork, stemming from our unfamiliarity with the corporeal existence of the other.

It feels so unreal, so impossible, that we've fallen into similar elliptical orbits around Mars. Similar, due to the gravitational pull of a common interest in writing, but also distanced as we continue traveling along the invisible trajectory of our dissociated, respective presents. Yet, in this alternate dimension we both find ourselves in, I'd also like to believe that our orbital paths cross in ways that cannot be visualized, intersecting at incommensurable points in space, making the impossible a possibility: the lunar collision of Phobos and Deimos. It seems that we were brought into existence as a product of our time. Apart from being the two sole moons of Mars, Phobos and Deimos are the Greek gods of fear and panic. As the world continued to collapse around us in January, gravitation towards an expansive cosmic web of need was inevitable, a lifeline vital to balancing the frightful cacophony of the entropic world with a desire for convergence in literary harmony. I'm well aware that we will splinter off our orbital paths someday; Phobos is due to crash into Mars in 50 million years, while Deimos will eventually be cast off into space and leave the lonely red planet behind. But for now, I'll relish in meeting the demands of this new chaotic universe, a world where connection depends on a different form of intimacy, a different form of nebulous love.

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Ecology of a Dark City

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I, Spencer Williams, hereby pledge I will return to this city.
I will watch the gray pavement dark with rain,
the steaming carts pushed by the street vendors
with ripped pantsuits and crooked smiles.

I will knead warm dough and brown the bread. I will pet a wolf,
her trusting tongue in my palm, as the buildings around us rise
like hydras. I, Spencer Williams, hereby pledge I will return
to this city.

I will watch the wind pass through bird cages
and hear the drumbeat of hammer on steel as
skyscrapers punch through the cloud line, the steel-toed
swords of tall and reticent knights.

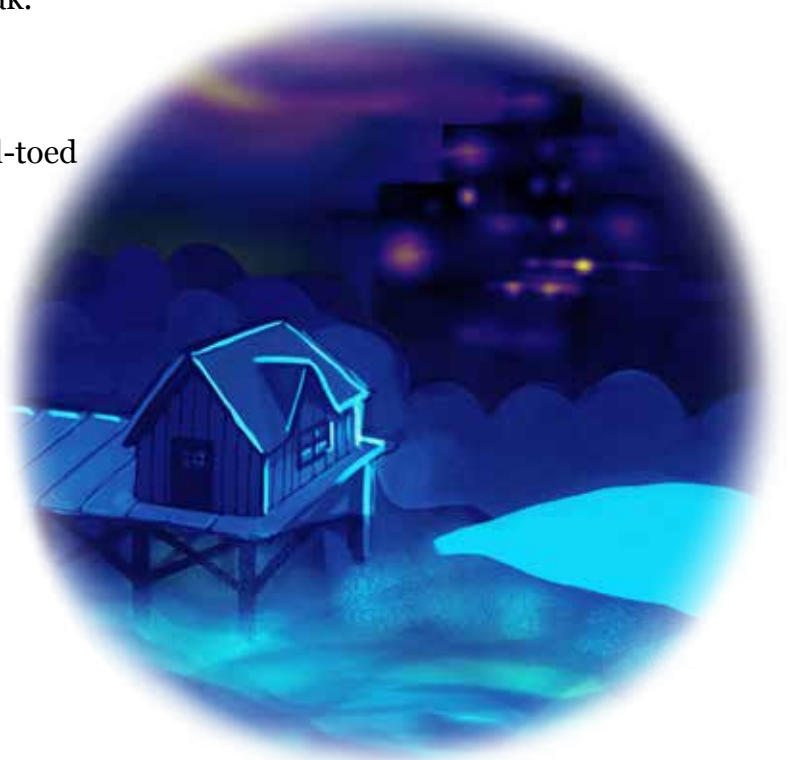
So I've been told that droughts happen slow. The spiders
with thirsty mouths lap up yellow pools
behind the hunter's backyard. I, Spencer Williams, hereby pledge
I will return to this city. I will listen to the music

of the dusty chimes, the beating heart of the rooftop shingles,
the throb and hum of the cracked pavement.
Do I have to talk about fear? So much
has been said of the firebrand skies,
the molotov cocktails in the woods. The needles
yearning to be lodged in the softness of an eye speak.

As the buildings around us rise like hydras, I will
hear the drumbeat of hammer on steel as
skyscrapers punch through the cloud line, the steel-toed
swords of tall and reticent knights.

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Ecology of a Beach House Love

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kind sun and gentle light
flutters rosy fingers behind pale curtains
and dips over your shoulders to settle and sleep.

at our feet the dog
siiiighs
and his lazy head drifts upward
with a smile :) toothy and warm.

all is quiet, safe, and calm inside this beach house.

outside now and the world's edges
like melted sugar, have been smudged
your fast ankles flash or dancing streams stuffed
the wind pale over the cliffside; soft
c u r s l with snow.
the hair nestling your neck and i think
when you were born the sun must have cradled you in its arms
and gave you a burnished heart with tulips
framing the soft center,
where you must have been kissed by – stars.

someday after our breaths turn metallic and your hair
splin ters at its ends
they will
bury
us
side-by-side.

the archeologists who find us will touch

your bones
locked
in mine.

and they will marvel at us.

how we believed everything we felt was brand new, with sweet lemon polish,
how we peeled each other fruits in the early dawn,
how we spent afternoons with the windows open and the piano loud.

but for now,
we have

time.
so we sit by the ocean

and watch the water crowding

o v e r
sandy bumps and shells.

let's do this again, again, again –
like each time something takes flight.
like each time a strawberry field wakes beneath cold kisses of morning new.

like each time

the dog siiiighs
and his lazy head drifts upward with a smile
:)
toothy and warm.

–

all is quiet, safe, and calm inside this beach house.

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The Art of Looking

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I follow a mysterious woman draped in a navy-blue coat with a turquoise diamond pattern. The camera, like me, follows her steadfastly, focused on her hood, which bounces as she walks, until it falls off to reveal a messy bun of bright, blonde hair. She bolts towards the cliff, my heart matches her speed as she gets closer and closer without slowing down; I chase her desperately but the wind pushes me back until she stops dramatically at the edge and we are freed by the expansive horizon. She looks back, revealing her intensely green eyes, her head completely engulfed by the ocean in the frame.

“I’ve dreamt of that for years.”

“Dying?”

“Running.”

These were some of the first images I saw of *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* (Celine Sciamma, 2019) at AMC Sunset 24, before a screening of *Parasite* about a year ago. I remember my partner, who speaks some French, corrected the translation to English from the film’s original title, *Portrait de la Jeune Fille en Feu*. “That means ‘portrait of a *young* lady on fire,’” they said. I was impatient to see it from that moment and I ended up waiting a while. The anticipation ramped up as the buzz continued to grow from screenings all over the world. I kept waiting, but AMC seemed to have faked me out; they never showed it there.

It was not until late February of this year that I finally quelled my burning desire to see the film, and at that point it had reached legendary status simply because of the near impossibility of finding a screening. I could not get the final image from the trailer out of my head: a young blonde woman standing in darkness with a resolutely calm gaze as her dress catches on fire. I had to find out what that image meant. When I finally got to see the film, I felt like an old-fashioned cinephile who had traveled to a different country just to see a rare film even though it was only a 5-mile drive to the Tower Theater in Little Havana.

The Tower Theater is one of those old school movie auditoriums with a high ceiling and two levels of seating. There were not many people in the theater, and I was the youngest by at least 30 years. I sat alone towards the front of the second level. I love going to movie theaters alone; I feel truly anonymous, yet at home, as I submerge into the darkness of the room full of strangers. Without the self-awareness engendered by being around people I know, it is easier to lose myself in the film. *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* made this exceptionally easy. What Barthes would have called, the “brilliant, immobile and dancing surface” of the film instantly hypnotized me. My eyes bobbed up and down involuntarily along with the boat as Marianne, the main character, traveled across an intense aqua ocean to the remote villa. I sunk into my chair, paralyzed until the credits rolled.

Portrait of a Lady on Fire is simultaneously a personal film and an epic. The film is about a painter, Marianne, who is hired to paint a wedding portrait for a woman named Héloïse. They fall in love but know their romance will be cut short by Héloïse’s inevitable marriage. The film tells a small and contained story with outsized emotions. The cinematography fluctuates between close-ups and wide landscapes like two different styles of painting to match this dichotomy. The screen dominated my entire field of view as I stared obsessively at each frame, hoping that each could stay in my mind forever. The fleetingness of the frames frustrated me but that’s also what made them so precious. Like Héloïse and Marianne, I knew my time was limited so I tried to

take in every moment. I looked deep into Héloïse and Marianne’s eyes as they did the same to each other. The film turned me into a third participant in the romance, one who was both within and outside the film. Invited to inhabit their gazes, I became as mesmerized as they were with one another. Each look communicated a myriad of emotions impossible to describe in words. I left the theater as if waking from a dream.

“**The film turned me into a third participant in the romance, one who was both within and outside the film.**”

My memories of my experience with this film have become more surreal in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* was the last film I saw in a theater. It’s been over 9 months. For this reason, any reenactment of the experience on a smaller screen would be underwhelming. I rewatched *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* in the Greenway dorms at Amherst College. The lights were on and I was not even close to being isolated. The experience was constantly interrupted by people speaking loudly about what they had done over the weekend or playing ping pong. However, it was still special to experience the film with others and if it were not for Hulu, I would not have been able to share this experience.

In his essay, “Everyone I Know Is Stay-in’ Home: The New Cinephilia,” James Quandt laments popular cinema’s transition from a public and social experience into a domestic and isolated one. He claims that films cannot be truly appreciated and analyzed when in a digital format. For Quandt, the new cinephilia is one where iPhones and computer screens replace movie theaters. Girish Shambu has a much more optimistic definition of new cinephilia that he describes in his essay, “For a New Cinephilia.” Shambu sees traditional cinephilia as narrow-minded and as only one of many forms of

love for film. To Shambu, new cinephilia is a direct response to old cinephilia, which is an ideology created by straight white men, largely concerned with the viewership of other straight white men. Old cinephilia emphasizes the technical aspects of film and the so-called purity of the theater experience. While old cinephilia often postures as apolitical, this guise further perpetuates its problematic ideals. In contrast, new cinephilia rejects the idea that films, both in content and viewing contexts, are neutral or apolitical sites. It explicitly values diversity in voices and celebrates film's digitization for increasing accessibility.

New cinephilia rejects the idea that films, both in content and viewing contexts, are neutral or apolitical sites. It explicitly values diversity in voices and celebrates film's digitization for increasing accessibility.

On one hand, so much of the enjoyment of *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* comes from the visual experience, and the movie theater enhances this experience. Some of the most memorable scenes in the movie are those when Marianne paints Héloïse. Marianne's makeshift studio is a cavernous, and mostly empty room with light blue walls. Light floods into the room through the giant windows. Héloïse sits still in a flowy, forest green dress as Marianne observes her and paints. The portrait sessions give them an excuse to look at each other closely and without interruption. Marianne tries to capture every detail of Héloïse's face, not just for the portrait but for herself. Every time that Marianne looks up from the canvas, Héloïse tries to catch her gaze so that she can savor every moment she has with Marianne. We do not only witness this interaction, but also experience it through close-ups. The theater screen magnifies their faces and the physical magnifica-

tion also magnifies the emotions. The larger than life intimacy shown on the cinema screen guides us to inhabit Marianne as she stares at Héloïse, and Héloïse as she watches Marianne paint.

Traditionally, cinephiles see the gaze as an objectifying force. The new cinephile, however, sees it as a powerful way to create empathy. The philosopher Michel Foucault offers a description of the gaze that aligns more with the new cinephiles' definition. Foucault devotes the opening chapter of his book *The Order of Things* to an analysis of *Las Meninas*. Instead of focusing on the technical or historical aspects of the painting, Foucault focuses on the relationships between the gazes of the viewer, painter, and subject. He starts by describing the painter, Diego Velazquez, who is visible within the painting. Shortly after, he brings in the spectator into the description and analyzes what they'd see: "The painter's gaze, addressed to the void confronting him outside the picture, accepts as many models as there are spectators; in this precise but neutral place, the observer and the observed take part in a ceaseless exchange." The spectator takes the position of the models for Velazquez's paintings which we can assume are the king and queen. This is confirmed by the mirror to the right of Velazquez that displays the upper bodies of the king and the queen. The spectator is both within the painting and outside of it. *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* has a similar effect on the viewer, but it is amplified by the film's ability to imitate life. Through the depiction of the creation of another visual medium the film creates a complex and nested web of gazes.

Portrait of a Lady on Fire inhabits a space between Shambu's and Quandt's definitions of cinephilia. It values the aesthetic inclinations of traditional cinephilia while also subverting this male-dominated cinephilia by using the gaze to engender empathy rather than objectify. The exchanges of looks between Héloïse and Marianne match the voyeuristic tendencies of the filmgoer and the film satisfies this voyeuristic urge by inviting the viewer to be part of the exchange. This aspect would excite the old cinephile because it takes full advantage of the visual medium. However, the film does not seek to satisfy the male

gaze by fulfilling a sexual fantasy for the straight male viewer. Instead, it acknowledges the women's sexuality while also respecting it. The film uses the viewers' voyeuristic tendencies to create empathy between the audience and the characters rather than objectify them. The new cinephile would love this because it humanizes the queer characters and takes advantage of film's political potential by engendering empathy for a marginalized group. Its understanding of film's tradition allows *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* to subvert the norms of old cinephilia to create something wholly new.

The experience of this magnification can only be simulated outside of a movie theater. During my second viewing, I did not feel the same sense of hypnosis because the TV screen did not dominate my field of vision like the theater screen did. The colors were not quite as vibrant, and the image quality was not as pristine since I streamed the film off Hulu. My laptop also kept displaying notifications that I could not turn off. Quandt would probably say that these imperfections would ruin the entire experience, but the experience remained special because I shared it with others and the film's central themes were not lost despite the imperfections. New cinephilia does not solely appreciate film for its aesthetic merit but also for its social importance. Many people that I know saw *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* because of its queer characters, not because they knew of Celine Sciamma and her work. The inclusion of queer characters in high art film empowers those who identify with the characters. For this reason, the digitization of film increases love for film by making it widely available. Films may be best experienced in a theater, but the stories they tell help us make sense of our humanity so they should be shared in every way possible.

Films are about looking. Humans make most of their observations about the world through eyesight. We've evolved to interpret emotion in facial expressions and eyes. So much of what we communicate is through body language, and films can display non-verbal communication that is not possible to describe in words. Understanding the limits of verbal communication, *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* uses close-ups and the motif of painting portraits to underscore the

importance of looking. Films exist in the present tense. Just like Marianne fails to paint Héloïse from memory, film viewers cannot reproduce films from memory. Like the presence of another person, films can only be experienced in the moment. I love this ephemeral quality of film.

Films may be best experienced in a theater, but the stories they tell help us make sense of our humanity so they should be shared in every way possible.

I love *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* for reminding me of the simple pleasure of just looking. I love films that say the most when there is no dialogue. I love when actors speak with their eyes. I love that film can make us appreciate the small details by magnifying its subjects. I love close-ups that are impossibly close, and I love landscapes that are larger than life. I love movie theaters with their pitch-black darkness and their giant screens. I love the internet for teaching me to love film. I love Blockbuster Video for introducing me to film and I love streaming for making the possibilities endless. My love for film is constantly evolving. Films have taught me how to see.

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Who are you, really?

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What started as a simple Intro to Photography self-portrait assignment turned into an emotional internal dialogue and deep reflection about body, mind, and the way one sees oneself in various spheres of life. I like to think of myself as free and spirited, energetic and lively, but upon conversations with family and close friends, was reminded that this isn't my whole story. I follow the rules, work hard, and try to plan ahead — there isn't much free spirit in that. I stepped away from these conversations feeling more confused and anxious, and overwhelmed by the uncertainty stemming from thoughts of graduation and entering the real world. I decided to let my guard down and be vulnerable, to use this project as a cathartic means of self-expression - a documentation of my struggle with this internal conflict of who I hope and strive to be and how reality plays out, the genuine ways that I am perceived by those who know me best. Through this experience I have come to appreciate, realize, and accept the beauty in the fact that I am a study in contrasts.



Franny Daniels '21









Photo series *Who are you, really?* by Francesca Daniels '21

Five Til Noon

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I first ran a lap in a scarlet sunrise, magenta clouds parting. Do you remember the way my hands shook as I tied my shoelaces in the humid mist, double knotted? Sprinting into the wind so quickly it was suffocating? Staring at blank, ruled lines was the same and my heart was pounding as I clutched your hand in chemistry, learning that too much oxygen could poison you. I guess there was such a thing as being too free.

I had only planned on one lap, but I squinted and turned the corner. I would catch my breath. It did happen, you know, when I flew back to Chicago on the first straightaway and found solace in a yellow-lit desk chair. Massachusetts winds howled through the cracks in the stucco, but they were warmed in the space between a bed and a dresser, an alcove above my childhood radiator. You were too far away to chill me, and so I turned the last corner at a slow jog, my footsteps keyboard strokes as I steadily clicked out a novella. A novella. It did happen, you know.

I had somehow outrun the wind, now at my back; I clenched my jaw and said it would stay that way. But by nature, you're not all that obedient, and I never was all that assertive, anyway.

Now, I am perched on the bleachers and biting away at the skin around my cuticles, like watching a televised war and feeling the hope of victory plummet from a bottomed-out stomach. Why? I remember my fate, and I am safe. Yet I still crane my neck back in suspense to inspect myself—a blurry figure going around and around in dizzying monotony and collapsing into the grass, swarmed by flies in the 11am sunlight.

I watch her crawl to lay under a leafy awning,
a maple tree fashioned for tire swings and picnic blankets.
She'd come back the next day with these relics but for now,
she slips off her shoes, the double knot unraveling like a sigh,
and liquid sunlight cools burning cheeks,
and the whole world exhales.

Back in my pavement-level bedroom, I invite you through open windows.
You brush against my bare shoulders and you are not a sharpened gale, but a
springtime breeze—nostalgia distilled.
For this final straightaway, I will invite myself into your passenger seat, hitchhike
on your pillowy back.
Promise me, and I'll promise you, that you will come as you are.



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There is a wolf trapped inside of me.

The wolf gnaws at the soft skin of my belly, digging sharp claws into whatever vulnerable flesh it deems suitable. It is ravished and unpleased, pacing up and down my spine, soft paws sending silent shocks throughout my body. Its howls emerge as sobs, its yaps as nervous chatter. I despise the wolf, despise its hunger for happiness, a hunger that leaves me drained, dull, deprived.

I have tried to control the wolf, tried to grasp its unruliness under my emphatic fist. Yet my attempts have felt a futile effort. My first attempt was calling Animal Control Services. They were empathetic but unhelpful; I was handed a leash and a handbook and instructed to tame my inner beast myself.

“My first attempt was calling Animal Control Services.”

My second attempt was a doctor’s appointment, an attempt that was even more miserable than the first. The doctor asked me to place my hand upon the part of my body the wolf inhabited. I gestured to my whole being. “How,” the doctor asked, her nostrils silently flaring, “How is there room inside of you for your heart, your lungs, your gut, if the wolf is everywhere?” I insisted on my statement, yet the doctor refused to believe me, demanding a second perspective. So I was shot into an MRI machine, my body scanned and examined, reduced to a specimen for scientific study under a microscope. When I emerged, the doctor bluntly told me “the wolf has infiltrated.” It was slinking through every part of me, through my heart, my lungs, my gut. The doctor grabbed a knife and tightly clasped it in her hand. “I’ll cut you clean,” she offered. Her nose flared. Her smile resembled that of the Cheshire Cat. I rejected the offer of surgery. My third attempt was talking to my friends and family. They

suggested self-care and a positive mindset. It was a foolproof plan to beat the beast.

So I embraced a lifestyle of self-care, carving hours out of each day to tame the wolf.

I added some soft music, some rose petals, all the shit I had seen in romance movies. The wolf danced to the classical and cleaned its fur in the overwhelming scent of floral.

I exercised, my legs searing as I pounded my way up the stair machine. I was a self-imposed Sisyphus, the wolf was my cackling Zeus. I started reading a self-help book and found myself overwhelmed by the plasticity of the words that screamed at me from the overly-positive pages. The wolf and I mocked it together.

I journaled, felt ridiculous for journaling, and promptly stopped journaling. I ate lots of salad and learned that I hate kale and love iceberg lettuce. I stressed out because iceberg lettuce has a reputation of being one of those non-nutritional vegetables (what an oxymoron). and it was bad that I loved it, because I had read on some reputable site, some health site, that gut health is linked to mental health and how the fuck could I kill the wolf if I was eating iceberg instead of kale? I went to counseling and learned that I hate counseling, peering eyes staring at me, attempting to suck my emotions out of me. All I could think of when my counselor, Sarah, stared at me, was Dementors, the shit from Harry Potter.

The wolf would be subdued at times. Self care could act as a sort of tranquilizer, leaving it dumb and unenergized. It would lay, tongue lolling out, watching the real me take control once again, of my heart, my lungs, my gut, but mostly, mostly my brain. But other times, I simply felt exhausted. The wolf would take reign, paws pounding against my being, rattling my insides and scaring away the real me to some dark, hidden corner of my exis-

tence.

I went to a different doctor and announced, loudly enough for the ceilings to be shattered by the intensity of my voice, “There is a wolf trapped inside of me.”

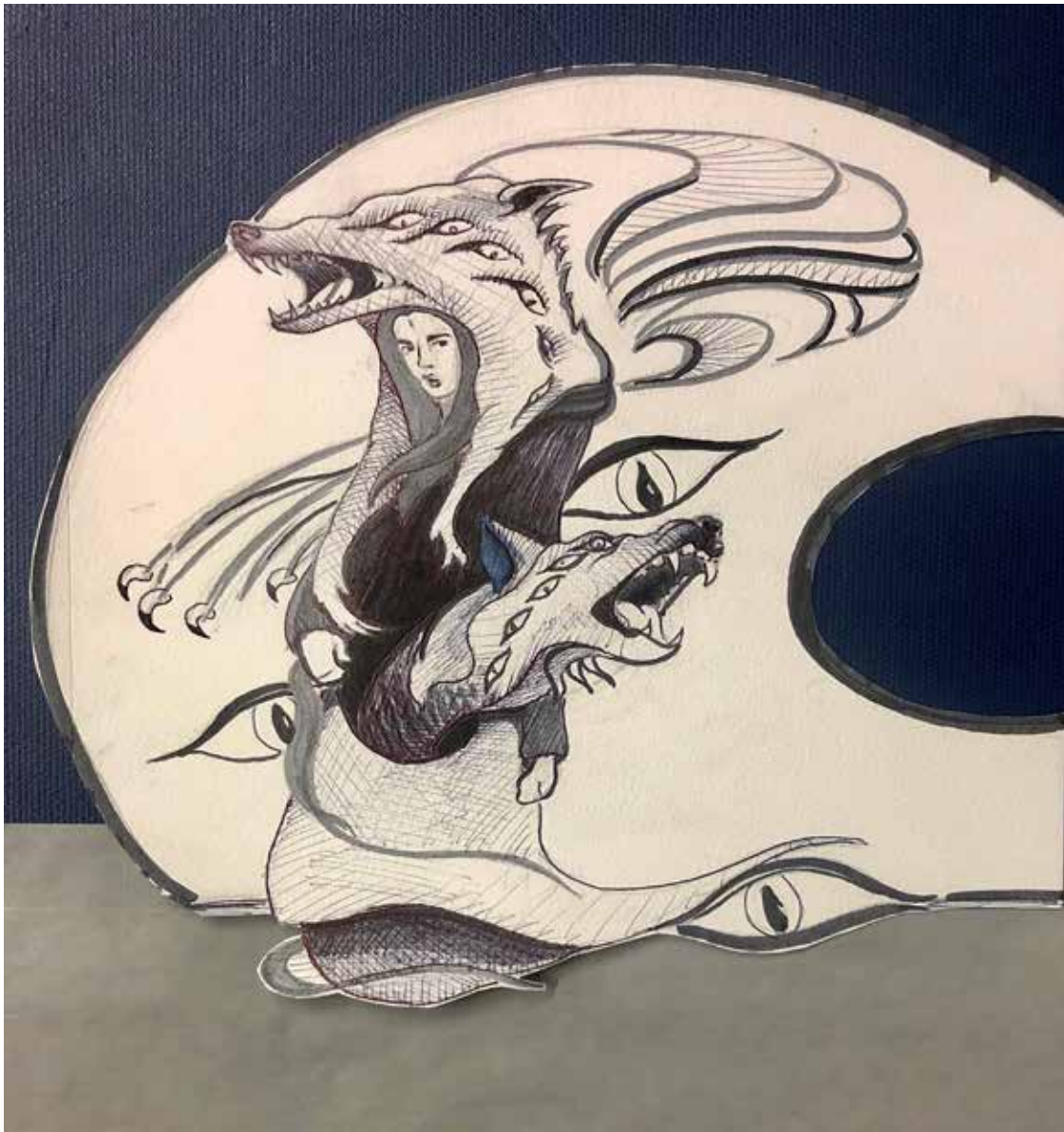
My doctor nodded. “This wolf,” she asked, “where is it?” “Everywhere.” And she believed me.

“What have you done?” my doctor asked. “To

kill the wolf?” I listed off what I had tried. “Is that enough?” I thought of the exhaustion. I thought of the wolf scraping at my innards. I thought of life before the wolf had emerged. “No. It’s not.”

She smiled at me.

“That’s okay,” she said, and I believed her, believed that the imposition of self-care didn’t need to be a save-all solution.



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I Am the Child of Scientists

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I am the child of scientists.

I analyze, I rationalize, I plan and I plot. I like charts. I like lists. I like numerical data—black-and-white, unambiguous, unemotional.

And when I think about what I like about myself, it's not my soft voice or my gentle words. It's not my accommodating nature. It's not my kindness. I'm not an inherently empathetic person—it's terrifyingly easy for me to hate people—frustratingly difficult for me to love them.

After years upon years of feeling inadequate—emotionally stunted, broken, defective in some way—I made a conscious effort to change. Someone made me change. Brandon made me change. I felt an emotion that didn't come naturally to me, welcoming the bone-crush, the inevitable fall from grace.

I was seventeen. I played lacrosse. I loved my friends. Getting a five on the AP US History exam was probably the most pressing issue in my life. I laughed loudly. I felt myself move beyond mindless crushes, silly infatuations that filled a sucking void, and I fell in love—unconditionally, unrelentingly.

I used to tell people it was perfect until it wasn't—but that's a lie. I was discouraged from dating him by mine and his friends alike, saying his sweet words and kind tone masked something.

He told me he loved even the worst parts of me.

He's too nice. Where are the red flags? You don't know him that well.

That's just how he is. He has none. We've been friends for a year!

I don't think I can love the worst parts of him.

The truth hit me like a fucking train six months in. It started semi-innocently. We'd fight. I'd cry. He'd sit there and laugh.

Then the fights became one sided.

Then the punches were mental

and then they were verbal

and then they were physical.

And I took all of it.

The same fingers I kissed pressed bruises into my neck when I cried.

He wanted me quiet.

It went on for half a year. I lost twenty pounds. I cut off all my friends. I couldn't listen to music. I didn't sleep.

After months of bending myself misshapen to salvage a relationship that nearly killed me, dismissing my instincts in order to be palatable, compassionate, and caring—the perfect female victim—I allowed myself to be angry. Passionately angry.

And because I am the child of scientists, I sought rationalization. I began planning. Plotting. I made lists—of people. I lived out the last months of my relationship at war with myself—the parts of me that hate, that burn bridges and spit fire clashed with the parts that consumed me wholly for the better part of a year, the parts of me that loved blindly through abuse and destruction.

I systematically went through those lists, telling people what he did to me—starting with my closest friends and moving wider and wider until there wasn't a single person at our high school who didn't know. Until there wasn't a single one of his college classmates who didn't know. Until even people at his old schools had caught wind. I sent the evidence to his family, our highschool, his college, his employers. I posted screenshots of his violent text messages on Instagram, put all the evidence in a 20-page long document that I sent to absolutely everyone who knew him. I wanted to take, and take, and take more—take everyone from him until he was left to deal with the wreckage alone, just as I was.



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People began rubbernecking. DMing me on Instagram, calling, texting. I got a “hey, how are you?” text every few hours from random high school friends I’d, for lack of a better term, ghosted. It was a template. It was horrifically cookie-cutter. *I’m sorry this happened to you. You’re incredibly strong. You’re going to do great things. He’s a horrible person. I’m so sorry.* I wanted to scream and cry and tell them that he’d ruined me and explain that the one time I allowed myself to open up I was *quite literally* beat down again. But I plastered on a soft smile, gave out hugs like candy, and comforted others about my trauma.

Self care supposedly meant not fighting fire with fire, not seeking revenge, to gracefully forgive and easily forget, but how? How am I supposed to let him live his life? How am I supposed to let him be free?

After the revenge bit was over, after I was satisfied with the destruction I’d created, I was comfortable in beginning to self-destruct. I contemplated smoking cigarettes, but could never inhale without my lungs convulsing and my mind echoing my asthmatic father’s disdain. I considered becoming an alcoholic, but my brain cycled through futuristic scenarios of liver failure and leaving my hypothetical children motherless.

I realize now that self-destructing would be letting him win—I’d be finishing what he started.

Maybe someday I’ll cry tears of bereavement—pretty, societally feminine tears I can romanticize and write poems about. Tears men will want to kiss away and protect me from. But for now, I’m content with my tears of fury. The ones that sting and burn, that scare those around me, because that’s self care. Feeling ugly. Feeling disgusting and horrific—navigating through the antediluvian and withstanding the flood. Independently. Viciously. Because my self-care wasn’t pretty: my self-care involved casting aside the love I’d nurtured for a year and destroying the boy who destroyed me. My self-care was reverting back to the worst parts of my personality I swore to leave behind. My self-care was realizing that I wasn’t defective—I still try to find the balance between the parts of me that loved and the parts of me that hated, between the parts of me that yearn to be a victim and the parts of me that crave revenge.

I’ll try my hardest, and when love finds me again, I’ll welcome it like an old friend.

I know I’ll heal someday.

I’ll learn to love myself.

I’ll love myself.

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A Brief Odyssey of Grief

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It's something like six a.m. when I roll downstairs
and you're already there, making coffee.

We manage smiles, faint good mornings
pre-caffeine triumphs, even on a good week,
and I slip past you, put on the tea kettle
and settle in at the end of the counter.

It'll take longer than it should.
I still fill the kettle for two cups,
less on instinct now and more
in defiance
and I wonder when I'll quit that.

And you have excellent timing
thanks to years of practice.
You can sense your coffee is close
and it's time to prepare your mug.

Reaching into the cupboard, you brush your hand
past the green one, with the stripes and the chipped handle,
that used to be Mom's go-to.
You opt instead for the black one
that bears your alma mater's logo—
unremarkable and heartbreaking and
a reasonable choice.

There's a silence that grips these morning exchanges,
a claustrophobic stillness, a perverse hug.
These days, I'm existential
in a way that's predictable,
if not suffocating and sturdy
and increasingly familiar.
This used to alarm me,
(and still does, sometimes, from certain angles)
but mostly, it's just a different kind of warm.

The cacophony of the unspoken,
kettles boiling, coffee grinding
sings like an early morning dirge,
and I wonder if this is life from now on.
But, with coffee now in hand,
you breathe a deep sigh
something like contentment, maybe resolve,
as if to say:
Let's hold on to our quiet, sit in it together
and wait for our pots to brew themselves.



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Captcha: A Villanelle

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You're nothing but a simple minded bot.
And before algorithmic gods give true accounts
Performing tasks without our feeble minds, so fraught

Click on all the hydrants, or sinners will be caught
And captcha will proudly announce
You're nothing but a simple minded bot.

The world hangs between one and naught
For binary minds. This we must denounce
Carrying out tasks with feeble minds, so fraught

Then rush the Luddites, crying out what ought
To be, and in slurring mouths mispronounce.
The enemy is simple; the bot.

Does this reactionary shot
Stir horror, or do robots fear renounce
Performing task without feeble minds, so fraught

Live long enough, with bots probing human thought
And mournfully we will say, it's a shame a human you are not
But neither are you robot
Performing tasks with feeble minds, so fraught

An Alphabet of Film Studies Under Quarantine

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B is for Barthes, Roland. In particular, his 1979 essay “Upon Leaving the Movie Theater,” my favorite piece of writing on the syllabus of my freshman year film studies course. Barthes explores the pre- and post-viewing condition of the movie-goer—what he calls the “cinematic condition.” He describes the condition of the viewer before seeing a movie in Freudian terms: as “pre-hypnotic,” the viewer having a “crepuscular reverie” that draws them to submit themselves to the “anonymous, indifferent cube of darkness” that films are (1). He explains that the experience of a movie theater, one of complete darkness, is hypnosis, aided by the darkness and unfamiliarity of the space and people around the viewer.

Something about Barthes’ writing struck a chord within me when I read it. Perhaps it was because Barthes so lovingly describes a mode of watching movies that my peers and I haven’t been able to experience in the past year because of the Covid-19 pandemic. During Zoom movie screenings, we viewed films through what Barthes calls the “opposite experience,” one where “the darkness is dissolved, the anonymity repressed, the space is familiar, organized (by furniture and familiar objects), tamed” (2).

However, as my classmate Maryam Abuissa wrote in our collective essay about watching a movie together on Zoom: “It is a different experience, surely, but there’s something kind of magical about the collective experience, distorted through space instead of darkness, through time instead of anonymity.” Even through the strife of virtual learning, a deadly global pandemic, apocalyptic wildfires, an unstable election and democracy, and so, so much more, my peers and I (distorted through time and space, and sometimes anonymity) were still able to become cinephiles. Through this “opposite experience,” we were able to find merits in it that Barthes could not.

C could be for cinema, or closeness, or connection, but I’d like to talk about cinephilia. In Peter Wollen’s “Alphabet of Cinema” (2002), he composes his essay in alphabetical order and through a list of terms that describe his brand of cinephilia. In

his essay, C is also for cinephilia. He describes it as “an obsessive infatuation with film, to the point of letting it dominate your life” (5). I was acquainted with a Wollen-like definition of cinephilia before the course, but I was not acquainted with the concepts of “new” and “old” cinephilia. A generational gap exists between cinephiles characterized by the emergence of the digital revolution and the recent accessibility of film.

In his essay “Everyone I Know is Stay-in’ Home: The New Cinephilia,” James Quandt laments the losses that come with viewing digital copies of films (Barthes’ “opposite experience”). Quandt likens the disparity in quality of a digital copy of a film and a film screening to that of a CD and a live concert, saying that no digital copy, “no matter how superbly produced, could ever replace seeing it in its original format and classic setting” (208). Initially, Quandt’s fixation on small altered trivial details frustrated me. For example, his focus on the color of a “pale pink dress in Demy’s *Model Shop* (FR/US, 1969)” showing as white seemed silly and irrational to me (208). Additionally, Quandt shows that he is self-aware and acknowledges that his comments could be called elitist. He attempts to dismantle this argument by attacking the word itself, saying that elitism is “a word that has become specious by ideological overuse” (208). I wondered: How could he say elitist and exclusive things, and then claim that he is not elitist because he does not like the word? More importantly, how could he imply that the movie-watching experience of my peers and me is any less valuable because of our inability to attend a theater?

As I’ve mentioned before, part of cinephilia in my film class has arisen from the difficulties and triumphs of connection and disconnection. Connecting with peers during virtual learning sometimes seems impossible. Although our course was entirely online, my peers and I were able to bond over the movies we watched. I showed my Zoom viewing group (composed of Majo Jaramillo and Maryam Abuissa) one of my favorite movies, *I Dream in Another Language* (Contreras, 2017). In our subsequent and aforementioned collective essay, we felt inspired to write about the unappreciated merits of our collective online (or “opposite”)

experience. We spoke of being able to see each other's faces as we experienced similar emotional responses and using the chat function to comment without disrupting others. Under normal circumstances, the darkness of a room or theater doesn't allow one to see the faces of their fellow movie-goers, and excessive commentary is a cinema faux pas. Neither of these qualities would have been possible without a digital copy of the film.

Our viewing group also watched *One Sings, the Other Doesn't* (Varda, 1977) on Zoom, attempting to sync our movie times by counting down to press play. The film is about two best friends being separated, meeting again, then separating once more—but staying in touch by writing each other postcards. The coincidence of watching this film during a period of separation and isolation was poignant. While Suzanne and Pomme see each other's lives flash by through the postcards, we felt their loneliness in their separation. In our collective essay in response to the movie, we compared the postcard writing of Suzanne and Pomme to our desire to stay connected while watching the film through our individual screens. The nostalgia that Suzanne and Pomme have for each other is matched by our nostalgia for watching movies in person with other people. Ultimately, I believe Quandt was right about the differences between traditional and digital ways of watching films. He was right not because of the quality of the movie, but because of the unique collective experience that one gains from watching a movie in a movie theater with close friends, enveloped in a crowd of people one may or may not know. Although there are some joys in viewing films virtually, they do not exceed the experience of the movie theater as a social and bonding event.

While I recognize that Quandt's claims have some merit, I still would not be as critical as he is about new cinephilia. Growing up, I watched most movies at home. I learned to love movies by watching them on my computer, in my bed, and surrounded by my most familiar objects. I don't think these experiences are less valuable because they were not the formative experiences Quandt had in cinemas. Ultimately, I am not a prescriber of either new or old cinephilia. People should be able to enjoy movies however they are accessible to them, without their experiences being looked down upon. I cannot deny that my first experiences going

to movie theaters were special occasions, rightfully so. The experiences of going to a movie theater and watching a movie at home are very different but equally valuable to the creation of cinephiles.

D is for dream sequences. Dreaming is very familiar to the experience of watching films. According to Siegfried Kracauer, the heightened consciousness of what Barthes describes as hypnosis invites dreaming, and movies can be said to resemble dreams at intervals (163-164).

Moonlight and *I Dream in Another Language* are very similar movies. They both feature a protagonist (Chiron and Evaristo, respectively) on the brink of adulthood who deals with questions about his sexuality. The protagonist is separated from his love interest (Kevin and Isauro, also respectively) for decades, and then reunited by the end of the movie. The movies have different social contexts and thus different reasons for the development of the protagonist's story. *Moonlight* shows the ways being black in America challenges the protagonist's identity and perception of self throughout his childhood and into his adulthood. *I Dream in Another Language* shows the long-lasting influence of Spanish colonialism on the indigenous culture and language of the main characters. For both movies, the use of dreams and the overall dream-like qualities are very intentional. *I Dream in Another Language* introduces the subject matter to the audience through its title. James Laxton, *Moonlight*'s director of cinematography, even said that he tried to “create a very immersive experience that's almost a dream-like state” (Gates 44). Both movies use dreams to portray their characters' states of mind in pivotal moments of their lives and the shame they feel about their sexuality.

In *Moonlight*, Chiron wakes up in the middle of the night and finds Kevin having sex with a girl outside. Kevin looks up at Chiron and asks, “you good, Black?” Chiron keeps watching them, and the viewer feels confused. Why is he still watching such an intimate act? The scene is cast in a green light that just barely separates it from the look of the rest of the movie, so we don't realize that it is a dream. Chiron promptly wakes up and so do we. The fear and confusion settle on his face, and the audience knows that Chiron is asking himself the same questions.



Jenkins, *Moonlight*, (1:07:29).

In *I Dream in Another Language*, Evaristo’s dream is even more elusive to the audience. Evaristo goes to find Isauro at the mission, where they take Spanish lessons from a missionary. Before he reaches the window of the classroom, he looks up and realizes that the statue of Jesus is crying tears of blood. He looks down and realizes that he is slipping in the puddle of blood. He falls back and wakes up, gasping for air. Like Chiron’s face, Evaristo’s reveals the panic and shock of what he’s just seen. Through the sudden nature of these close-ups, we are also ripped out of our dream-like state and vicarious dreaming through both Evaristo and Chiron. We feel the shame they feel and embody their terror, but we also realize that we are not actually dreaming. More importantly, we realize that we are completely at the mercy of what is in front of us—even, or especially if it is as confusing and nonsensical as dreams are.



Still from Contreras, *I Dream in Another Language*, (47:37).

E is for Jean Epstein and his focus on close-ups, **F** is for flashback sequences, and **G** is for Racquel Gates and her examination of the politics of image quality in black film and media. Each has been valuable to my evolving cinephilia, but I confess I must fast-forward through them, as I am excited to reach **H**.

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For **H**, I could go to Hitchcock and his intriguing way of looking at terror and suspense. But, like Wollen, I’m going to end this essay, and therefore my participation with my “Film and Writing” class with the beginning, with Barthes and his “hypnosis.” After consuming so many movies and immersing myself in the world of film theory, finishing my film class is much like leaving hypnosis, seeking “the oldest of its powers: the cure” (Barthes 1).

Showing the shifting nature of the definition of cinephilia, Wollen disagrees with Serge Daney’s definition of cinephilia as a “sickness, a malady which became a duty, almost a religious duty” (Wollen 5). Instead, Wollen has a more favorable view of the ‘malady,’ “not as a sickness, but as the symptom of a desire to remain within the child’s view of the world, always outside, always fascinated by a mysterious parental drama, always seeking to master one’s anxiety by compulsive repetition” (5). Removed from the periods in which Daney and Wollen write, nestled in my own social and historical context, I can see that their definitions share more similarities than differences. The main similarity: obsessively watching more and more movies is the cure to this illness, or fascination, or anxiety. And so, although I am leaving the hypnosis of Film and Writing, I take with me this obsession and desire to continue to walk in and out of hypnosis, for as long as I can and by whatever method that will allow me to do so.

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So I'm a hiker. Since I was little, I've been in love with nature. I've been through forests, canyons, prairie-country, even took an extended trip through the Sonoran. I'd like to walk the whole Appalachian trail someday. Can you imagine that? Surrounded on all sides by forested ridges, the noontime sun filtering calmly through the canopy. I'd need the money, though, and the time off work. Still, everywhere I go, I try to take the chance to hike.

I was visiting home in the Indiana Dunes last week, and I decided to take my old bike out and head down to one of my favorite places. My parents' house is really close to the Indiana Dunes National Park, and there's all sorts of really cool trails there. None of them go very far, not nearly as far out from civilization as some of the places in New York I've hiked, but growing up it still felt like I had a little piece of wilderness all to myself.

It was fairly cold that day, as Lake Michigan always is, and windy enough that I was glad for my windbreak as I made my way along familiar roads. It struck me as I approached the National Park outpost at West Beach that there was a trail there I never remembered following before, a little sand-covered path that dropped off the road before transitioning to a series of wooden stairs that climbed the dunes. It seemed a little odd to me, because I knew I had been here a hundred times before, and I distinctly remembered looking at those stairs from my bike, but for some reason I always passed them by.

I suppose it was at least partly coincidence. I had never felt the need to go up that particular path the way I felt the need to explore all the other Dunes trails. And since I had never walked it, it was never important enough to stick in my mind until the next time I saw it. It just lay there inconspicuously, hiding in plain sight.

So, of course, I had to check it out. I started off and realized immediately that the

sand was too deep to ride through, so I had to lug my old bike a frustrating two hundred meters through the sand until I finally reached the stairs. Luckily for my annoyance, I was able to easily stash the bike in the stairs' shadow, so I didn't have to drag it any further.

I recall there was something about the stairs that really irked me. Each step had an alternating black-and-yellow strip at the front of it, like an eight inch rise somehow warranted its own personal piece of caution tape. For sure, some people need that to see the stairs, or whatever, but it still felt frustrating. I was there to explore, and the garish signposting made me feel like I might as well have been still safely, boringly ensconced at home. I didn't want to be warned of all the danger.

Maybe that's why I did what I did. Can I blame the National Park service for being too careful? For riling up my emotions in a way that made me reckless? I don't know. Maybe it is a bad idea to disregard or avoid warnings. For all the technological progress humanity has made, we still cling to the safety of our walls and homes and carefully-placed markings. And not without reason.

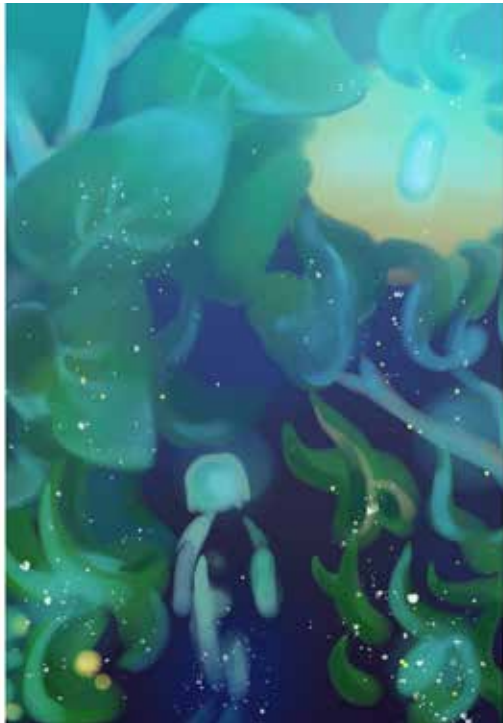
I climbed that carefully marked staircase, all the way up to the top of the dune, like I had wanted to. There was an overlook at the top, and from it I could see the whole complex squatting on the edge of West Beach. It was only a half mile away or so, but it looked so small even from that distance. I felt the whole world was spread out before me. I could see clear across the lake to Chicago, huddled under a cloud bank that looked no higher above me than the dining-room table would to a little kid.

And then I turned around, and I saw a place where a dirt path branched off the boardwalk. This was something new, something I bet normal people had avoided, or maybe even failed to notice. And that made me special for noticing it, and more special for following it. I vaulted over the fence and

dropped onto the dirt with a little whoof. The ground was a bit farther down than I expected. Then I set off without looking back.

I was running along an industrial corridor shaped like a half cylinder. All around me I could see dark water, occasionally lit by the light of an adjacent building, but quickly fading to blackness beyond. Fat drops of a briny, silty substance occasionally plinked on the glass roof like rain, before sliding down and building up on the ocean floor.

A huge, insect-like creature with four armoured legs appeared suddenly out of the gloom and I heard a gasp of delighted laughter from behind me. I looked around and saw I was holding the hand of a soft-featured teenager with wavy, mid-length hair dyed a brilliant cyan, wearing a sky-blue hoodie. My hoodie. Their eyes were fixed on the creature in awe.



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Though the path spiraled around, I quickly reached the top of another dune, where the path forked. I turned in a full circle, using the man-made features I could still see in the distance to mark my position on a mental map. I then chose the left path, and planned to head for a hill where I thought I should be able to catch that view again, and so gain a good idea of where the main boardwalk was no matter where I wandered next. I nearly fell over going down the other side of the ridge. The path was disused, and a torrent of leaves had fallen on it, making the journey up quite slippery. I felt a little tickle on the back of my neck as I began to walk again, like the brushing of a phantom leaf.

I took in a huge breath of fresh air as I reached the top of the next dune, much more than I would expect from the short climb. It was almost like the air was heavier down where the trees were thicker. I turned around, meaning to mark my place again, and realized I could not see any signs of civilization from here. All the buildings and artifice that had been extended into this forest was obscured by it. I couldn't see the last ridge I had climbed, either. I shrugged off the twinge of anxiety that came over me then, reasoning that, the next time the path forked, I could just call it a day and head back. I set my sets on another ridge and set off again.

I was running down a dark passageway, the rushing of rainwater through storm drains and the creaking of the vast spiderweb of human machinery the only sounds to accompany my footsteps. I darted through corridor after corridor, third on the left, second on the right, down four flights of the maintenance stairs, listening as a new sound got louder, one that I didn't want to hear but I knew I would find: the sound of growing.

Then I was inside a massive undersea dome, holding hands with that same person from before, the one with cyan hair. I was speaking in a voice that wasn't my own, telling them how my father and mother had built this place, built it as a refuge and an experiment. Inside the dome was a massive jungle in prismatic colors. Great oaks and Kapoks, vines, ferns, a thousand species of fungi, and the occasional flash of a jewel-bright beetle or butterfly all lay spread out before us. I squeezed their hand and led the way inside.

Quicker than necessary, I made my way along the path until I hit that other ridge, shaking my head to clear away the strange daydreams that had suddenly taken hold of me. Once I reached the foot of the next hill I realized it was far too steep to climb. That didn't seem right. It didn't seem that way from higher up. I took a breath in as deeply as I could and felt a strange pressure on my chest, like the air itself was reluctant to go in. I felt another stab of anxiety in my heart, and then shook myself, annoyed with how I was letting what must have been just a few tricks of the light get to me this way. I stepped off the path, searching around the base of the hill for a climbable slope.

That was my biggest mistake. I never found the path again.

The ground sloped sharply down, dead leaves whispering under my feet, threatening to send me to a bottom I could not see the hard way, forcing me to pay attention to the ground instead of my surroundings. When I finally looked up again, there was no sign of any ridge. I was in a dense, dead forest, strange, skeletal growths of oak, ash, and cottonwood leering out at me. I moved faster, but it was no use. I fled from the trees only to find more trees, the creaking in their dead branches sounding more like cackling than anything the wind would do. And at any rate, there should have been no wind anyway, so why were the branches rustling? They were dead!

Hours of tramping through dense, humid jungle. It was wondrous for the first hour, but for awhile now, we'd just been searching for a way out. The colors dazzled us and gave us headaches, and the bigger animals we saw looked much stranger than the ones we'd seen in books.

I stood on the edge of a vast chasm, the sound of growing loud in my ears. Every few seconds, a flash of purple Ley flame would illuminate the huge creeping vines that had torn open this rift and threatened to tear it wider. I knew I had to go down there. I stabbed a Photosingularity Recall Point into the most stable ground I could find and swan-dived into the gaping maw.

The ground continued sloping down, drawing me ever deeper into that creaking thicket as the visions assaulted me again. The air around me thickened, and I found I could hardly see ten feet in front of myself, although there was not a wisp of fog, as far as I could tell. I stepped as quietly as I could, but still the oppressive whisper and creak of the dead forest droned on and even grew.

Suddenly, the tree line broke in front of me, opening a door into a clearing floored by thickened and ancient roots, roofed over by more laughing branches. I didn't delude myself any longer that they were laughing. I'd stumbled right into their trap, and they weren't about to forgive my carelessness.

In the center of the clearing, the roots reared up, forming an almost-beautiful pillar of twisted, woven wood. Perched on the top was a great, yellow eye the size of my fist, wide and unblinking, gazing in all directions yet never moving an inch. I was sure this wasn't the heart of the forest - the trees would never let me see that - but for whatever reason they wanted me to see the eye.

I reached a hand toward it—

Still holding the cyan-haired teen's hand, I shoulder my way through a thicket of broad-leaved shrubs grown to my height and half again, revealing a small clearing. The vines and flowers here are alive, so much more so than outside. They're writhing, kowtowing to the ground and rising up again with seemingly no pattern, but all focused around a massive, closed pod in the center. I sense I am being watched, hunted, and I remember that we have long since stopped seeing any animals—

I am struggling against binding roots as they grow over me, trying to free my hand just enough to touch the Recall relay at my belt. A horrific mouth yawns open under me, a tongue of beating, rampant life stretching up to pierce my side and steal all that I'm worth. Above me, a massive burst of Ley fire begins crawling down the walls of the chasm, scorching and burning the shrieking vines, but not fast enough.

I gasped as the speed of the visions increased, and struggled to hold on to some sense of myself, as I was thrown from scene to scene. Now I was watching a huge cloud of spores descend on a city, taking over everything they touched. Now I was slicing open the throat of a chicken, and sluicing its blood over an ancient dead stump. Now I was crucified on living branches, singing praises in a tongue I did not know.

But I understood my mistake. I understood all our mistakes. All at once — none of us had the respect, the fear that was due to the Earth from whence we came. I raised my hands in surrender and shouted, my voice hoarse from breathing in the oppressive air of the forest.

“We're sorry! We didn't know! Let us go, please! Just let us go—”

I croaked out the final words and heard them echoed across a hundred, perhaps a thousand, visions, and I heard the crack of

thunder above. Instinctively, I squeezed my eyes tight shut and clamped my hands over my ears, too wise to make the same mistake twice. When I opened them again, the eye was spinning, bright white and rimmed with red, unseeing, and I turned and saw a gap in the wall that had closed around me.

I broke into a full run, pushing straight through the unwilling trees, branches whipping at me and leaves whispering their ghastly chorus underfoot. I felt stinging cuts on my face, and threw up my arms to protect myself. I might have been screaming; I have no idea. I just ran in darkness and fear, heart pounding, branches laughing, leaves singing, right on through the valley of death before whatever lurked in there could catch me and keep me forever.

Rain soaked me from head to toe, loosening the branches just enough that I could touch the Recall relay, and in a sickening lurch I felt my body drag itself back through spacetime.

A pool of brine bubbled up from below us, soaking and withering the writhing plants and driving our watchers away. I held them close as we raced our way back through the now-open foliage.

Somehow, I got out. I finally noticed that I could hear birds again, although I had never marked their absence. I heard the wind sighing through the branches, rather than that dreadful cackling. I opened my eyes. My arms were bloody with a hundred tiny cuts. A parting gift from Mother Nature. I clambered back onto the boardwalk, and walked, shell shocked, back to my bike. I never went back to that trail again.

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The Ivory Tower

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It's not often that you want to escape something you love. And yet often, that's how I feel about my alma mater. A liberal arts education is like nothing else in the world. Much like Rapunzel in her tower, we hear about the world outside, from a passing bird perhaps, or a glimpse of a far off land. We paint what we cannot see on the walls, and hone our minds and hands so that we can portray with perfect realism an image we have never seen. Like any parent, the alma mater teaches its children the very things that will eventually make the parent unendurable.

The ivory tower is no new idea. It's no surprise that I, and I'm sure, many others here, feel a wanderlust, as overpowering as it is directionless. But what does the direction matter, when our only destination is reality?

The idea that everything we have experienced is somehow not real, separated from a true life experience is ridiculous, but that doesn't make it any less seductive. For me, this delusion of a safe unreality is likely a product of an uneventful, relatively privileged childhood. But if a liberal arts education teaches us anything, it's that feelings are real, and every intangible urge speaks to something concrete.

That's the irony of the liberal arts education. We learn about problems in the world, about ways to materially affect our surroundings. But at the same time we are kept separate from the material world, cloistered... It's like learning music without an instrument.

Pervading the college experience is a promise, sometimes spoken but more often a silent assurance. The promise that we will, one day, be able to shape the world, to go out and have that grand adventure that is adulthood. Yet what are we to make of that promise, when the only sources we have are the fragmented stories of alumni, who seem to lose all interest in college the moment they graduate. Have they finally tasted reality?

I wrote the above text on the afternoon of March 9th, 2020, only a couple of hours before that fateful email which sent us all home, where

many of us still remain more than a year later. After so much time spent feeling like a passive observer to the world, I look at my words with a new perspective.

The Pandemic has put each of us in our own ivory towers. Often in times of crisis, people rush out and experience the material world more directly through physical action. But for many people, the safest and most helpful response to the pandemic is to remain locked away, engaged in whatever cerebral activities we prefer. In this, it's similar to how universities encourage students to emphasize theory and study over practice. From a certain perspective, the change from campus to quarantine is no great leap. Both are, in their own ways, ivory towers.

And yet, I miss Amherst with all my heart. I miss reading a book on the top branch of the tree next to Fayerweather. I miss sprawling on the floor of my friend's room, typing out a reflection on the cloistered Ivory Tower of Amherst. I miss sneaking into Grab and Go immediately after going to Val and stocking up on sandwiches, then being mocked by my friends for my immense sandwich hoard.

It seems that not all ivory towers are created equal. Amherst can feel restrictive and small, detached from reality. Yet within its limited grounds live other people who share your feelings of claustrophobia. With friends, I've done my best to expand the borders of our campus, with fantastical stories, groundbreaking ideas, and bizarre (sometimes unpublishable) adventures. People in a confined, detached space can work together to make their own reality. I think when people know, at some level, that their campus is detached from the world, they feel free to put whatever vibrant stamp they want on their surroundings, with the help of their fellow inmates. Above all, I cannot wait to complain about Amherst's ivory tower once I am reunited with my friends on campus.

Amherst College may be an ivory tower, but sometimes what matters is who's in the tower with you.

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Photo series *hypnagogic convergence*
by Jiwoo Han '23



Love Letter to A Missing Novel

Karla Muñoz

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You stood me up the other day.

I waited for you on the 3rd floor of Frost Library with my back to the wall. I wore my favorite satin black skirt too. Did you mean to call? I had my ringer off but I think I would have noticed. I always notice. I just never pick up.

Do you remember when we first met? It was on my 12th birthday and my uncle presented me to you. You wore red and gold and I was enthralled by your promise of adventure. And what a promise that was! We visited Paris and London and Scotland and when I couldn't bear the solitude of sitting in my desolate room in New York City, I met you again at the library and you took me to Macondo and we partied in Central City, Colorado and we hid away from Big Brother and took a trip with Ford Prefect and I cried at Lennie Small's funeral but you held me until the tears dried.

I used to talk about our adventures with a good friend all the time. Did I tell you that he knows you too? To tell you the truth, I'm a little jealous that he does. But it's okay because he adores you (so do I!) and even if sometimes he can't understand you, it's the mystery of wanting to know more that fascinates us. We don't talk anymore, but I still think about those conversations all the time.

Where were you? No matter how much time I put aside to meet with you, the will to see you becomes unbearable. Yet, I miss the engulfing magic of your words. But the last time we met, I could only stare blankly at you. Now being with you feels like everything and nothing at once.

We were inseparable once, remember that! I told all my friends about you I discovered love with you and heartbreak and forgiveness I came to you with a strain in my heart I came to you with laughs and a let's-forget-everything-but-us attitude. You were there with me on all my tedious MTA trips to school, in my lunch breaks and line waits you were the cause of each car sickness I had but I brought extra plastic bags with me just so I had more time to be with you and yet...

Frost Library is a never-ending spiral of knowing that you are there and yet, I cannot bear to see you. So you stood me up the other day. And there I sat, with my back to the wall and my favorite black satin skirt reaching down to my knees. You don't understand how badly I wanted to meet with you but the dread of having to face you again took the paperweight you left off my body. The only thing left for me to do was leave. I'm sure you saw me. I just wish you would have stopped me.

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Food For Thought On Even Days

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McDonald's pancakes sink
the only place to eat
this breakfast before the 6 am bus
this dinner once it drops you off late
never for you, for them on odd days
who live under your roof?
Your son in the Navy to go sea
where you only dream of
maybe you'd call that attachment
only remembering in photos
before you passed up college
staying back with kids
the age of five, a little more
not yours on the way
they all learn to hold their breath
a skill you lost when
you kissed air to your mother and
the kids leave you in the bedroom
for preferences are a luxury too
make brief lives in toothy exchanges

under syrup
for miles
children hope
it will be enough food
for their sibling's children
who's daddy somewhere
outside of this food desert
sunk in so much
he forget what home is
lying in a coffin rack's whiteness
no room for self or cleansing water
only the salt of depths
panicked drowning and fearing death
not his but take it anyway
at a young age
just old enough to no longer be a teen
all fossilized in sap
reminiscing trading free milk
soon your family will be unable to afford to
after air leaves your mother as they do too



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A Prayer for Ella

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Dear Ella,

Tonight marks three years. I think of you as I play the piano--you were my first teacher. I think of you when I see brown Converse--the shoes you wore. I think of you as I celebrate today--my college friend's birthday, and cut cake slices onto tea trays. You know, I met her only a few weeks after I lost you. It's uncanny, don't you think? That the universe, or God, should paint such beautiful patterns into this canvas--it's just wasted on someone like me.

As a child, I was an impulsive liar, excessively spoiled and self-reverential, and misanthropic to a sociopathic degree. Rarely did I bestow a compliment, let alone a kind word, on my peers, whom I found to be of inferior, frivolous intellects. It did not help that I was afraid of heights and had weak arms, so I could not join the girls in my class as they played on the monkey bars at recess, nor did I like to run, play tetherball, wallball, or do the other humiliating exercises that they enjoyed. From the sidelines of the playground milieu, I looked at their sweaty, pasty, underdeveloped faces as they shrieked about Disney channel shows that I had not watched, and I both envied and hated them.

I did not take naturally to other people, nor know how to love them, yet I desired to be loved. I did not understand what was wrong with going up to a classmate and saying that they were "annoying" or insulting another one's outfit--from a young age, I had a proclivity towards candor over opiate pleasures. I was rather a debased little glutton.

Still, my disdain could not possibly have extended to you. You, like a lantern in the dark, with your bushy, aureate head and sunny disposition--I saw you on the first day of second grade and I knew that I just had to be your

friend--the other new, short girl. You, who showed me kindness when no one else did--was it because you loved me or because of your God? I remember your extreme fidelity, your refusal to sing the "Dreidel" song during the holiday assembly because you weren't Jewish. And when we were supposed to bring five items that represented us in a paper bag to class, you brought your silver cross necklace: "I am a big Christ fan," you unabashedly proclaimed. "When I was a kid, I wasn't supposed to survive--I was born too little. I had to get seven surgeries and I almost died several times. But through God's love, I am still here." That was the first time I heard about your beginnings, your sufferings. You were the first person I knew who believed in anything.

God, you loved God. Your faith was blazing, you were so much better than any of us. After all, what does a seven-year-old in white Suburbia need God for when everything we wanted was right in front of us, or available with the whisk of our parent's credit cards? What is self-abasement to a new stuffed animal, what is suffering when we endured nothing? For your 10th birthday, you asked us all to give you old shoes so you could donate them to orphans in Haiti. I couldn't understand why you didn't want anything for yourself, so I got you something anyway. At night, I think about us at summer camp, of how you wrote me a jingle to help me learn how to climb out of my bunk bed and conquer my fear of heights. God, you were so much better than us. Even back then, you were so much better.

Still, I hate your God, and your blind faith. How dare He write you a beginning and fill you with light and devotion, how dare He leave you unfinished, barre you from the best years--your college years. He cut you off in the middle of a sentence, you were here,

ordering your cap and gown, and then you were gone; you never got to walk. How dare He, choking you in the hospital bed--I wonder if you died on an inhale or an exhale. I wonder if you died with God on your mind. Did you realize that it was all a ruse, or did you see the gates of Heaven?

And selfish, shallow me; silly, wicked me, who is evil and undeserving of living, was rewarded with the college acceptance season of my dreams. When you died, I had just gotten everything I wanted in an Amherst acceptance letter, and I was bopping off of the walls as you were lain to rest. And when they told me you died, I didn't shed a tear, because nothing could dampen the high spirits of reaching my dream. And all I could think about was how you weren't there to share in my reverie and superiority.

So here was the truth: no Christian God would do what he did to you and spare and reward me. I mused and mocked the religion that had sustained you and, by association, me. Camus, who you abhorred and I loved, became my solace as I stumbled back into the halls after spring break, to sit next to the vacant seat you once sat in English and History, to look into my teacher's eyes and know that they would never hold your hand as you waited to get your diploma. At your memorial, I performed with the rest of our string quartet, though the second viola now played your part. And I had an utmost wicked thought that finally--finally--that one teacher who thought I was bad at everything would finally see that I was great at violin. Only then did I sob, not only because I missed you when I saw a photo of us in the slideshow, but at my vile selfishness.

After a long winter, the crocuses usher in the warm tresses of springtime. Like so, the gentle indifference of the world moves on; only

we keep you in our memory. It's spring again, and again, and again, and I think of you each time, and lips that once shouted your name in the hallways have since whispered it in the dark, and will soon forget the shape of it altogether. You live an eternity in March, and I see the careless beauty of the daisies bloom, every year, without you. You never made it to April.

And the space you leave, the pastel, muted, perennial space that you leave--the murmur of melancholy forever staining the edges of my consciousness like watercolor--the universe may not care for you, but I do, my friend, I do.

Fondly,

Maggie



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It's My Birthday

Mikayah Parsons

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It's my birthday.
It's my birthday, and you were supposed to be here.
You were supposed to laugh as I blew out my candles,
To make the flames stutter over the birthday cake shaped like my heart.
Your voice, thin and wiry, would reach out to me,
Would stretch across the acres of our friends,
Who would taunt you for singing off-key,
And you would blush,
And I would giggle,
And the candles wouldn't go out at first,
And you'd help me.
You'd stop singing,
Though that would be more for yourself,
And you would wrap your arms around me.
And we would find each other,
The way two people find each other in a room full of strangers
Because they're not supposed to find anyone else.
You would find me.
You would find me
The way our limbs once found each other's in the dark,
The way our hearts once melted into one beat and I gasped against your chest
And begged you to hold me because the sound of my heart—our heart
Kept echoing off the walls of our house.

We were supposed to blow my candles out,
And I was supposed to smile softly while you looked away.
You would be thinking about whether I was happy.
And I wouldn't tell you this, but I would feel loved.
I wouldn't tell you because I wouldn't know.
I would know, but I wouldn't be ready to tell you.
How can anyone be ready to love
When love can hurt so much?
Because you didn't do all the things you were supposed to.
No, you—
You vacuumed over the contents of my body and emptied out my heart.
"Spring cleaning," you said in our first fight.
"Spring cleaning. That's what I need to do with you."

Damn it, you were supposed to be here.
I was supposed to make a mess, and you were supposed to clean it up.
"Ha," I snarled then. "What would that even look like?
You can't clean up your own act.
Just look at you."
And you were so hurt
That you wouldn't leave our guest room for a month.

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Hantong Wu '23 is a staff artist

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But that’s just who we are.
I hit your chest once,
And you grabbed my hands.
“Please, stop,” you said,
And I fell apart for you.
You took a chainsaw to my walls and turned me inside out.
I was putty in your hands,
The skeleton of a girl,
Cut up in pieces in your palms,
And you used my bones as gloves
To climb your way into my heart.

You made me a promise.
You would carve out a little place inside yourself.
And I would live there.
And I would fill you up.
You were supposed to celebrate me.
We were supposed to be celebrated.

You lied.
Your voice, though it would crack when you would sing to me,
Would be my favorite part of you,
But you lied.
You never came home that night.
“Running errands,” you had said,
“And a boy’s night too.”
And secretly, I knew.
I knew you were planning something for me,
So I let you do you.
“It was all so sudden,”

You thought it was a perfect fit,
But I felt scammed by you.
As I ironed my clothes, I said to you,
“How come you get to see all the stuff inside of me?
And I don’t get to see any part of you?”
I scowled, walked over, and unbuttoned the top of your shirt,
And you buttoned it back up.
You kissed me on the cheek and held me close to you.
“One day,” you whispered. “One day you’ll feel it too.”

Your mother told me in her living room.
She stirred her spoon in her tea
And never drank it.
“We didn’t know what it was.”
She sagged against the arm of the couch,
But I didn’t notice.
She had sat in that same position for so long that the couch was an appendage,
An extension of her,
Like when I became a part of you.
“Some virus,” she told me. Her eyes closed.
“Some virus they don’t know much about. Not sure how he got it. They asked if he traveled.”
And you did, but I didn’t know.
For my birthday,
You flew to Wuhan to visit my cousins
And bring my family back with you.
Instead of saying this, she glared at me.
It was as if she thought I knew.
I didn’t know where you had been, but I knew how I felt now.

“So your mother is racist?” I asked you when we started dating.
“She’s just old-fashioned.” When you looked in my eyes, you cleared your throat. “She’s racist, yeah.”
I held my breath and forgot about it—
Pretended I didn’t hear you,
Pretended not to notice when she asked me things like,
“Can you see well? The potatoes are over here,”
Or muttered, “Sorry, honey, I hope this selection is enough.
There are just some things we don’t eat,
You know?”

“I know,” I told her. There are some things I don’t eat too.
“I didn’t know,” I told her as I shifted on the couch, “Did he go somewhere?”
She looked outside her window and said,
“Looks like snow. Grab a jacket on your way out.”

You promised me that one day
I would feel it too.
It’s my birthday, and I can’t tell you
I love you.

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Thoughts as the hunger kills you

Karen Liu

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A low fire is always dying but never extinguished.

The low fire is **hungry**. I'd pour my blood and guts to make the fire bigger, brighter, but the low fire does not want my blood or guts.

It's hungry for something else.

The fire sparks and dims at random and casts **shadows** on my illusion of control, it flares when I'm not ready, and I'm never ready, so I turn away to the hands of darkness that reach out to me from the ether, dragging me through pools of silence, of rippling, chiming droplets, and the chill of their caverns seep into my blood, what little blood I have left to give, and the dreaded warmth is no longer inside me; it's at my back. It licks at the nape of my neck that's always exposed. It's always exposed. **It's always exposed.** It feels the warmth but I reject it. In the cavern, I'm unseen.

(Blankness gives comfort.)

I can lay myself bare, splaying my hands open, praying to an unknown mistress, and she doesn't care, but I know this; she has infinite draw and mysterious **desires**,

but I let myself fall into false compassion,

and I know this in the way some things are just felt **viscerally** and never sensed.

The dying embers glow purple in the ether, and the sparks are making me hollow. I feel myself, dipping deeper, deeply, and the low fire is steadily dying but not yet extinguished.

Where is my place?

The log drifts between the abandoned beach at the edge of the universe with its lonesome, abandoned bonfire, and the cave that hums haunting melodies beneath the sea.

...the **p u l s e** of the tide that approaches the flames,

re t r e a t i n g **a p p r o a c h i n g** re t r e a t i n g...

...the **p u l s e** sustains our heartbeats.

It dictates the grandiosity of our deaths...

(But not in its nature. No death is grand. All death is lonely when we close our eyes with the deep, unsettling sense of knowing, a knowing no breathing, beating human can ever know.)

...the **p u l s e** dictates our burials.

What happens to the bodies we bury? What happens to us?

Maggots creep into our gaping pores and ants make their tunnels through the hardened halls of clot-
ted blood.

We all belong to nature in the end.

So the fragments of our flesh **break** apart, they bleed their own little deaths. The underground builds its ghost mycelium, webbing outwards, grasping at all the other people particles we pave and devour as crops. It creeps into the **ugliness** of those caves beneath the ocean. It snags the ceaseless, trembling deaths of ants and the pathetic cycles of mayflies, the tulips that bloom.

Every day a new creature pushes a daisy.

Somnambulant **DEMONS** trip through my fields of daisies.

they toss their manes, shake their horns, and grunt

hymns to the weeds that squeeze and constrict my windpipes

The **DEMONS** caress my cheek and tell me, "I love you."

I sit and subject myself.

I let it happen while I watch **WOLVES** rip the throats out of **FAWNS**.

I crash into stalactites and feel the **warmth** dripping down my forehead. These drops don't ripple or chime; they **scream**.

I run back to feed the low fire.

(The light feels like the shaking, buzzing, soundlessness that grips your heart and yanks your soul from your lips. It's the trembling disbelief. The unfamiliar **warmth** that pools in your lungs and unfurls like a naked, blushrose bud, but you revolt because the absence of cold is so unfamiliar, you can't help but feel the heat and hear a **wildfire**. You try to dim it, douse it, smother it, but it's impossible. You can't escape the **love** of someone insistent on loving. It'll take you and beat you and hurt you until you learn to see petals instead of the ashes you expect. The consistent, warming, rosiness of a pain you welcome instead of the flickers that bite and burn you, licking at your heels like hellhounds.)

(Are the ants dreaming today?)

(I don't know, I **burned** them.)

I can't feel, or I might drown in the oceans hiding between my cells.

I can't speak, or I'll be torn into shreds by red-scarved foxes.

my lungs go to the **sun**,

my heart to the **earth**,

my liver to the **lakes** and

my kidneys to the **rivers**.

I always think I have nothing left to give, but the fire will keep demanding more. It will break me into pieces until my bones are dust and my meat is food for carnage. The fire does not want our hearts, nor our blood or our flesh or our guts. The only balm that can smother its violence but retain its **warmth** does not exist in what keeps our breaths steady.

It wants our souls.



Karen Liu '23 is a staff writer and artist for *The Indicator*

violet crocus

Kiera Alventosa

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I fell to my knees,
in reverence.
my feet were bare,
but my toes did not sink
deeply into the grass.

sometimes,
I have a hard time
intermeshing.

but the outside moved inside
the moment the soil
and the worlds within the soil
seeped into my bloody palms
and I curled inward
against feeling
too much.

my palms were *dirty* and red.
when I picked at my blister,
the edges of the living
clung to the dead
skin, not knowing
that it was over,
that my healing
had already begun.

a robin landed beside us and
pulled a worm from beneath
the surface.
and the earth changed
with your every movement
but I didn't have
the foresight to feel it.

and my soul still remembers
the harsh heat of the pavement
that birthed the blister, it was a living,
breathing pain
that led us to seek greener grass
on the other side of, trauma
blistered against my soles.

as I move closer to you,
violet crocus,
I apologize to the grass
crushed by my curled feet,
feeling each blade.

with every step, I measure
that which lies between us,
I hope it is not too far to cross.
the distance between us
is like knowledge that is
almost knowledge.

and I am reaching towards you,
like the way your face
turns to the sunlight,
and your green bends with growth
involuntarily,
and I care for you.

you sigh away
from my outstretched palm
you have learned to not trust
the hand that holds the blade.

I sit beside you slowly and
the shade above me is cast,
like an exhale blown from
the lips of the oak into
my open soul, my feet uncurl
themselves unconsciously.

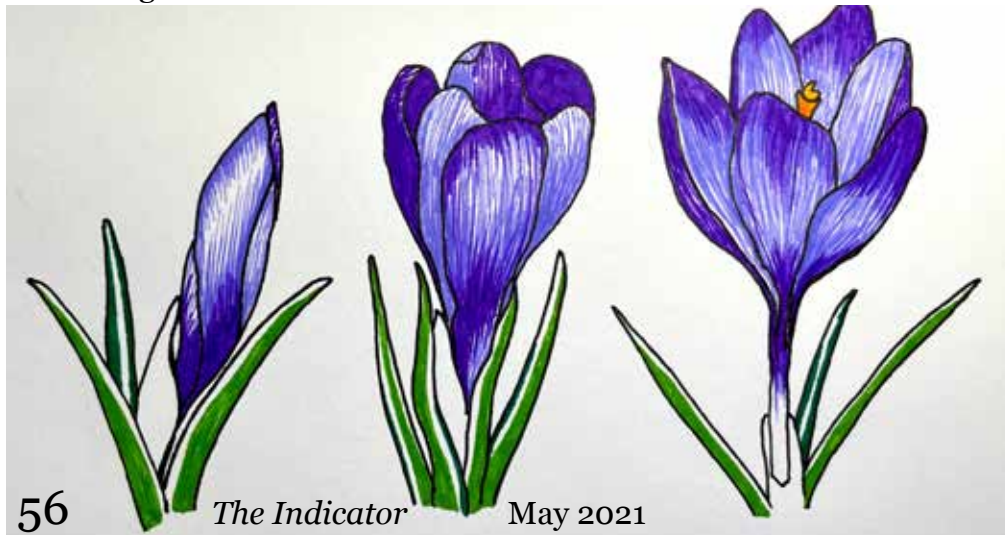
the breeze shifts your body
closer to me, and hints of
your violet presence
flashes in the light.
they say you spring up
when all *hope* is lost.

but those ants draw
my attention, as
they traverse across
my foot as if to say
do you feel us now,
my body bridges the
distance between us.

I wonder
at your size and your strength
and my size and my strength
and if we truly could be in
a web of care together, giving
and living, and resting and being
together.
coexistence feels
like an exhale.

I glanced away and the ants were
gone,
but I'm glad you stayed.
I see my friends,
hands and feet
like mine, across
the way and I usher them
towards me.

but I still wonder
will our human
presence be harm-
ful as I reach forward
with the edge of the blade.



a squirrel eyes
me anxiously
before uncovering
something buried not lost.

I move forward again
reaching towards you
because I cannot help myself,
and I find a
plastic splinter embedded
in your environment. it
shimmers around you *unnaturally*,
a mirage of strength beside
your cellulose
strength.

I pick at the blister
that lines my palm.
but the robin above me
said that *my salvation*
already pooled in the
ridges of my skin,
despite my pain.
I carve away at the melting plastic.

I bow my head
to look at you
with reverence.
how did you grow around it?
the stem of your body
waves in response.

those thin potholders didn't know
that when you were tossed aside
you would continue to move through them,
breaking your body free.

I say to you,
this part may hurt.
I have to break your roots,
from the ground
in order to cut
the plastic free.
I turn my palm over
to show you the potential damage.

*you argue against
my ideas of damage,
and you tell me:
there are many
ways to heal a wound, to split
a root, to dislodge the self
from the plastic that
surrounds it.*

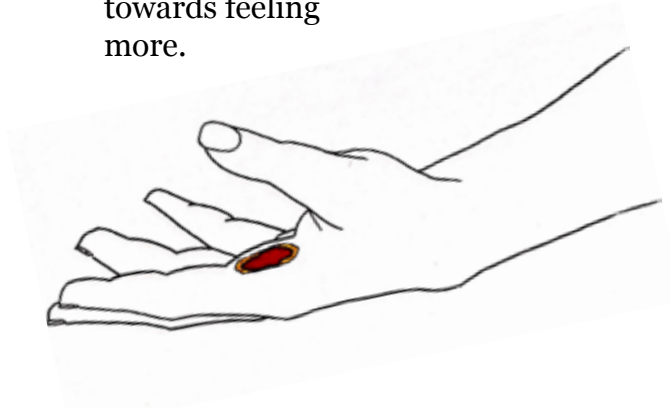
there are many ways
to bury your body, tenderly,
to soothe the temperature
of the soul, in the soil.

when all is melting and losing
strength, the body exhausted
by each spurt of growth
you remind me
that we are both
strength and struggle.

you remind me that
love will bloom again
and again.

the outside moved inside
the moment the soil
and the worlds within the soil
seeped into my bloody palms,

and I reached outward
towards feeling
more.



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A Woman, Alone

Cecelia Amory

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When she can, she likes to spend a few moments in her own company. She is aware, always, of her presence in the world, but it is often overwhelmed by things larger than herself. In the brief moments when she is alone, she is reminded by the sounds of her body that she exists not only as a small entity in a massive world, but also as the god of a million living depths within herself. It's at these times that she takes a slow inventory of the wilderness of her body, the hills and the caverns.

Sometimes she gazes at her face in the mirror until it becomes someone else's. She feels acutely aware of the space within her skull that supposedly houses a brain, casting around for some beacon of identification and finding only a dark, vast space that she cannot define or reconcile with her own concept of self. These depths are hers, only hers, and she feels the heaviest gratitude that she will always have a space that is separate from the bodies that pass her by. And she thinks that someday maybe her inner cosmos will intersect with someone else's inner cosmos and maybe they will share it as best they can, but always with the knowledge that they are separate.

Sometimes she caresses the skin beneath her shirt curiously, wondering what someone else would feel were they to trace the same path. Always, she's amazed by the softness she feels. Even her scars are soft. Can such softness really belong to her, when so often the roiling mess underneath threatens to break through the surface? How is it possible that the ugly thoughts that come to her unbidden leave no trace? How does her skin remain untainted when she so often thinks of what's touched her and can't help but feel defaced? What gentle resilience is it that despite all of the cruelty she has weathered, her skin endures, nearly as supple as the day it first felt air?

Such a paradox this softness is; softness that prevails as proof of some kind of strength. Her body doesn't showcase her pain with hard shells and fissures; rather it whispers defiantly to the world that it will take more than this to break her. More than all of this to harden her against the world. Her body reminds her that vulnerability is her power; that hardness can be earned, but is not meant for her stomach, her back, her shoulders.

Her fingertips, she notices, are callused. These hardnesses came not from anger or fear, but from beauty and creation, from hours spent hunched like an animal over her woodblocks, carving sloping lines, summoning images from the textured Shina plywood. She wears these calluses proudly as proof that she is a creator, a mother of her own art. Her elbows and knees, scarred as they are, shout to the world stories of happiness and abandon, and nothing else, and so do all of the other little bumps and marks mapped across her body.

Her body contradicts itself. Her softnesses boast hardness and her hardnesses hint beauty. What a magical thing she is blessed with, to keep and cherish for as long as she draws conscious breath. And this is only the surface; there is so much more underneath.

When she thinks about the systems that operate beneath her skin, they feel as removed from her as the concept of atoms, or the size of the universe. Try as she might, she cannot look in the mirror and envision the femur supporting her thigh or the lungs behind her chest. The inside workings of her body remain alien, mysterious, impenetrable. She doesn't understand how it is possible to feel so far from something that could not physically be closer to her. How the majority of her body and her mind are as foreign to her as someone else's astounds her. She feels honored to house within her skin an ecosystem that she cannot claim to own

She feels, in these moments, like an amalgamation of miracles, as though the tendons that strain through the backs of her hands and the heart that makes itself heard and the organs that sit warmly in the bowl of her pelvis are a glorious synthesis of little animals giving each other life. She feels separate from all of these webs that weave and work unceasingly in her, like her body is just a vessel for a world that isn't hers. She feels an innate sense of protectiveness over these foreign landscapes of her body, a need to nourish her ecosystem. Somewhere within this sense of separation, though, she feels an impossible closeness with herself. She is housed firmly in her own bones, her consciousness mingling among the creatures toiling inside her.

“She is her own mother, in the same way that she is the mother of her art.”

Accompanied by the living infinities within her, she will always have herself to turn to and to care for and to hold when there is nobody else. She becomes, in this way, both the caregiver and the object of care. She is a shelter, and she is the one being protected. She is her own mother, in the same way that she is the mother of her art. And she is the art, in the same way that she is the creator.

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