Printed January 2026
ISSN: 2629-4923
Digital ISSN: 2701-0201

E-MAIL: satura.journal@uni-muenster.de
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OPEN ACCESS: https://www.uni-muenster.de/Ejournals/index.php/satura

Satura is a student journal of the English Department of the University of Münster.

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The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie. Detailed bibliographic data are available online at http://dnb.dnb.de.

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Printed by:
FLYERALARM GmbH
Alfred-Nobel-Straße 18, 97080 Würzburg

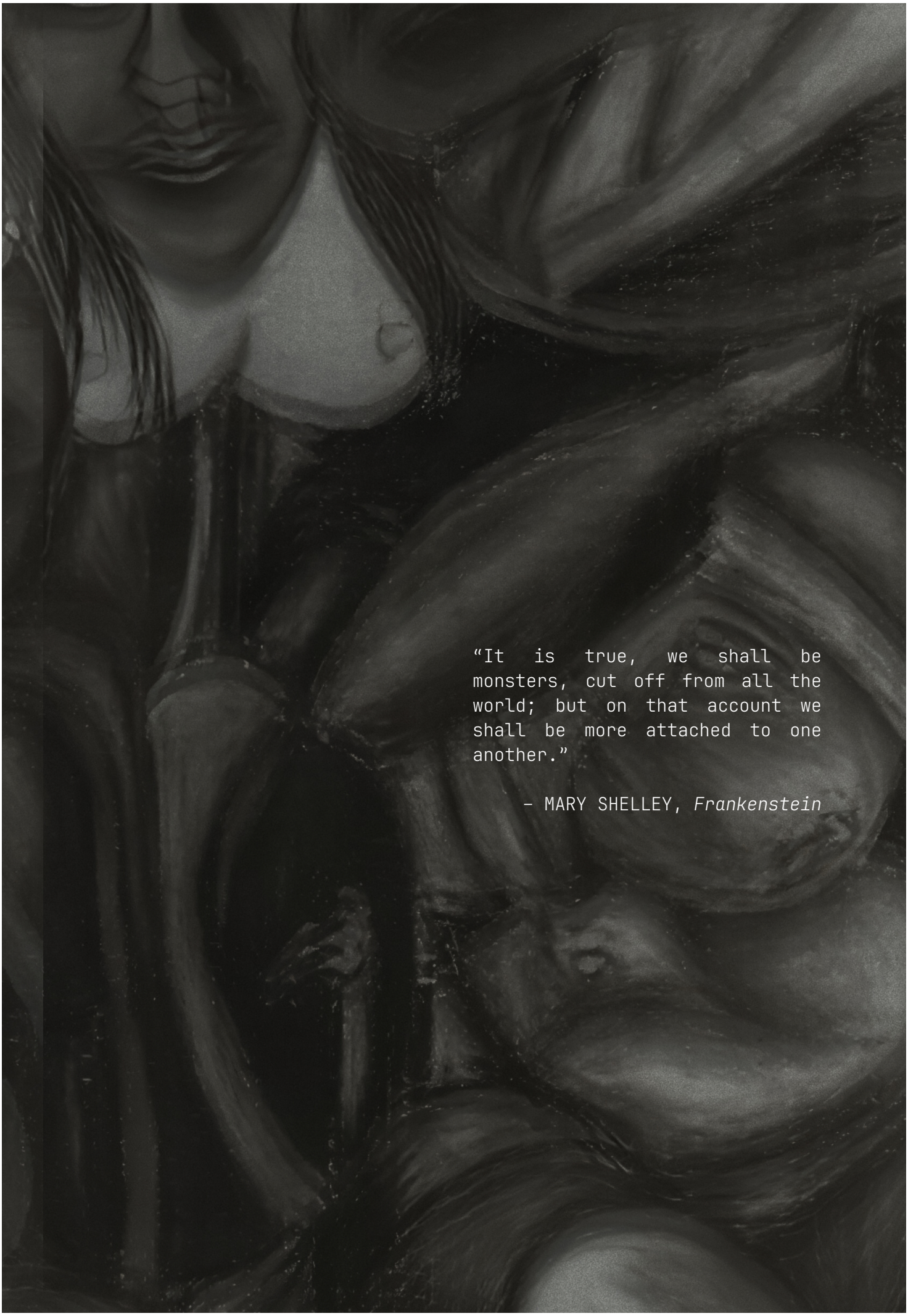
satura

December 2025

University of Münster
Literary Journal of the
English Department

vol 7 **DEFORMED**





“It is true, we shall be monsters, cut off from all the world; but on that account we shall be more attached to one another.”

– MARY SHELLEY, *Frankenstein*

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

2025 has been a funny year.

When we began work on *Satura* Volume 7 back in January, choosing the theme DEFORMED felt almost playful. I was excited by the idea of shifting away from *homeness* and belonging toward something more off-kilter—uncanny, grotesque, misaligned. I imagined gothic shadows, eerie transformations, body horror. Monsters, even. It felt amazingly unsettling.

But as the submissions arrived, the theme grew teeth.

DEFORMED became less about aesthetics and more about experience. Writers explored what it means to already feel misshapen by the world, to exist outside what is considered "normal," or to be hurt so deeply that the damage reshapes you. Deformation appeared not only as something inflicted, but as something lived with, sometimes resisted, sometimes reclaimed. I was blown away by how personal, vulnerable, and inventive these interpretations were.

I think we often turn to stories of monsters and deformation when we're at our lowest — not only to wallow (though, yes, sometimes that too), but to feel seen. To recognize ourselves in fangs, scars, and shadows. To realize that the things that make us strange might also connect us. That we're not alone in feeling fractured or altered.

This has certainly been true for me. 2025 has been challenging (hence the delay — thanks for your patience) and during difficult moments I tend to lean heavily on sad stories or music. My Spotify Wrapped tells me my top genre was Southern Gothic and I belong to the 'Soft Hearts Club'. I'm still not entirely sure what that means, but I think I understand the feeling: beauty tangled with decay, sorrow turned into song, monsters rendered tender.

I believe that spirit runs through this volume. Within these pages, our authors and editors have transformed the theme into something artistic, unsettling, and at times even beautiful. We are deeply grateful to the writers who trusted us with such sensitive, intimate work, and to our editors who handled these pieces with care, respect, and thoughtfulness. This volume exists because of their dedication.

And to you, our readers: thank you for stepping into this strange, deformed world with us. We hope you find something here that unsettles you, comforts you, or makes you feel understood. After all, monsters are rarely as alone as they think.

With love,
Verena Meyer

TABLE OF CONTENTS

POETRY

10 KEEP AWAY FROM FIRE
MELANIE STENZEL

11 A WEEK, WILD HEART
PAULA MARIE ROTHMUND

12 SILVER NEEDLE
JULE HAYEN

13 LAST YEAR, I REALISED WHAT EMOTIONS WERE
SELENA KNOOP

14 PEACEFOOLISH
MIRIAM BELL

16 THE MIRROR STARES BACK
SHADI HOLLENSTEINER

18 TYPOS
LAURA BRAUN

19 DIANA
C LEDOYEN

20 GREGOR THE GIRL
SALIHA SAYAR

22 ANTSY
VERENA MEYER

23 TRULY, IT IS AN ART
JULIA IWANETZKI

24 A WOMAN
C LEDOYEN

26 GENERALLY PATHETIC
LAURA BRAUN

28 IF I AM HER
SHADI HOLLENSTEINER

30 SENRYUU SERIES
CHRISTOPHER CALVIN

32 THE COFFEE MACHINE
KOSTADIN KARAVASILEV

34 THE STAR-SPANGLED BANNER, UNRAVELED
LAURA NTOUMANIS

FICTION

38 DOPPELGÄNGER
LILY OLTHOFF

40 ALEXA, TELL THE CHILD: GOD IS DEAD
LINNEA GEHLERT

42 FORMALDEHYDE, MAYBE?
ISABELL BRINKMANN

45 GUILTY WITHOUT PLEASURE
MIRIAM BELL

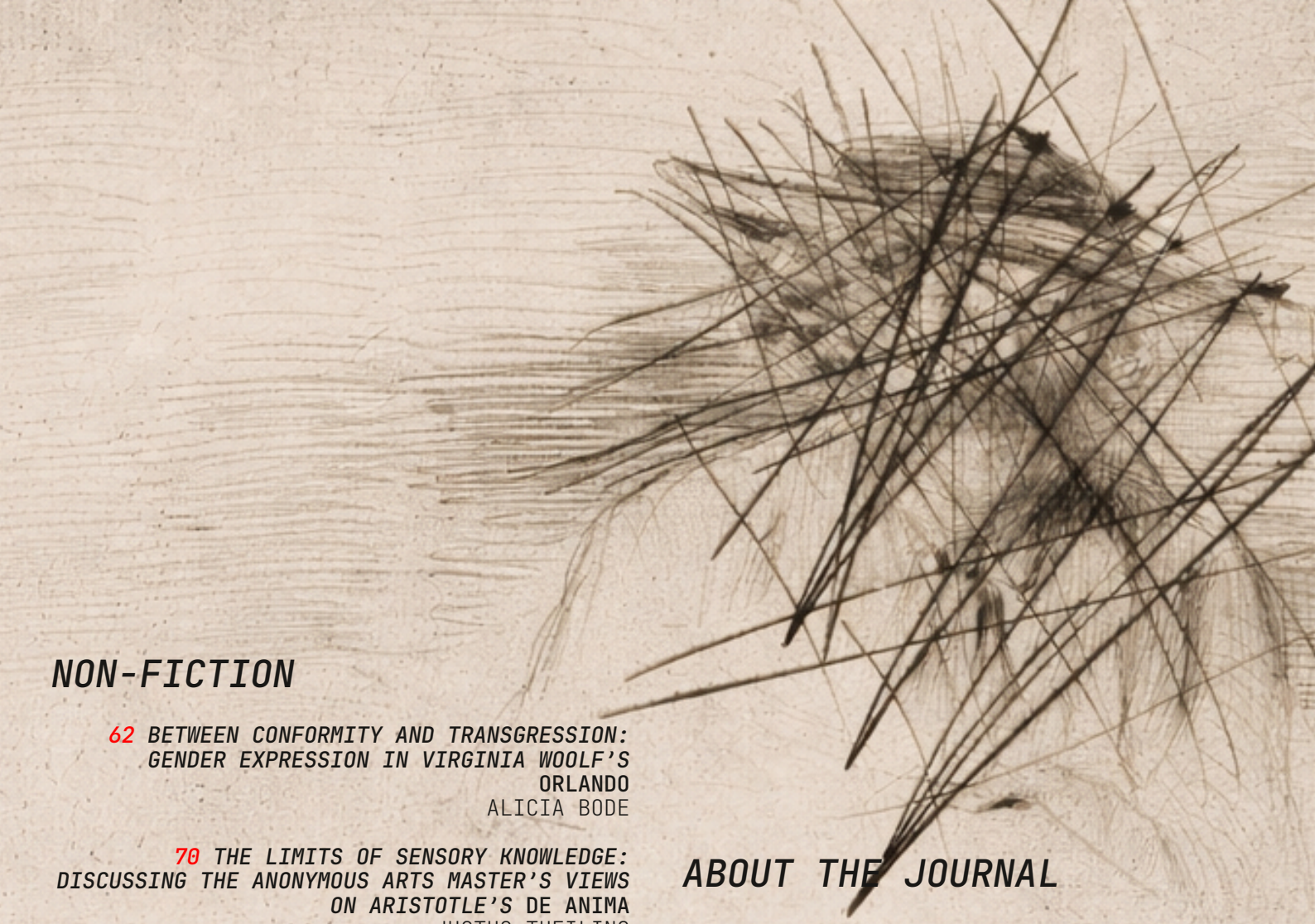
46 RED RIDING HOOD
LILY OLTHOFF

50 THE CREATURE IN MY NECK
TORANJ NASIRI

52 HERBAL TEA
LUKAS NÜNNERICH

54 THE GREATEST OF ALL TIME: A FABLE
JUSTUS THEILING

59 IN BETWEEN
ZAINAB AL-RUBAI'I



NON-FICTION

62 BETWEEN CONFORMITY AND TRANSGRESSION: GENDER EXPRESSION IN VIRGINIA WOOLF'S ORLANDO
ALICIA BODE

70 THE LIMITS OF SENSORY KNOWLEDGE: DISCUSSING THE ANONYMOUS ARTS MASTER'S VIEWS ON ARISTOTLE'S DE ANIMA
JUSTUS THEILING

74 EVE KOSOFSKY SEDGWICK'S BREAST CANCER: NARRATING THE ILL SELF IN RELATION, LOSS, AND GRIEF
ANNA WESTHOFEN

84 ECHOES OF THE MIND: BETWEEN SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCE AND SCIENTIFIC UNDERSTANDING OF SCHIZOPHRENIA
JUSTUS THEILING

ESSAYS

92 ON WRITING: MUSCLE & BONE
DAVID SUMMERFIELD

94 OF SOME ORIGIN: RECLAIMING KURDISH IDENTITY
ADARA

100 PURPLE LINKS
MATTHIS FRICKHOEFFER

ABOUT THE JOURNAL

110 THE AUTHORS

114 THE STAFF

117 THE JOURNAL

119 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS


POETRY

KEEP AWAY FROM FIRE

by MELANIE STENZEL

This is how the fire licks
the insides clean
with tongues so thin
tasting everything

This is how the burning feels
torching the soul
everything within reach
a perfect ten of destruction

This is how the coals run hot
to melt away
to breathe
the flesh
that's surrounding the core

And when the heat reaches the center
the body
the life will fight for survival
against inferno's arrival

It's not standing a chance
being surrounded by flames
then captured
fractured
falling apart

The ash on the floor
groundbreaking
the heart is still beating
at four times per second
too fast to sustain

Leaving a little flame
eating away
a meal of the flesh
surrounded by ash
a small heap on the ground

Don't mind me
just picking it up
the beating has stopped
heart's free for grabs

The burning still there
yet to small for any harm
I'm blowing it out
keeping the heart in my arms

A tag attached:
Handle with care
Fragile inside
Do not bend
Keep away from fire



A WEEK, WILD HEART

by PAULA MARIE ROTHMUND

On Monday, I thought the sun was too bright,
I awoke alone in her stinging light
My head, it was ringing and my hands, they were charring
Behind the curtains my feelings were warring

On Tuesday, I searched but couldn’t find a sign
Betrayed and confused I went alone to dine
Though I had hoped it be a respite
Some terrible root cursed my delight

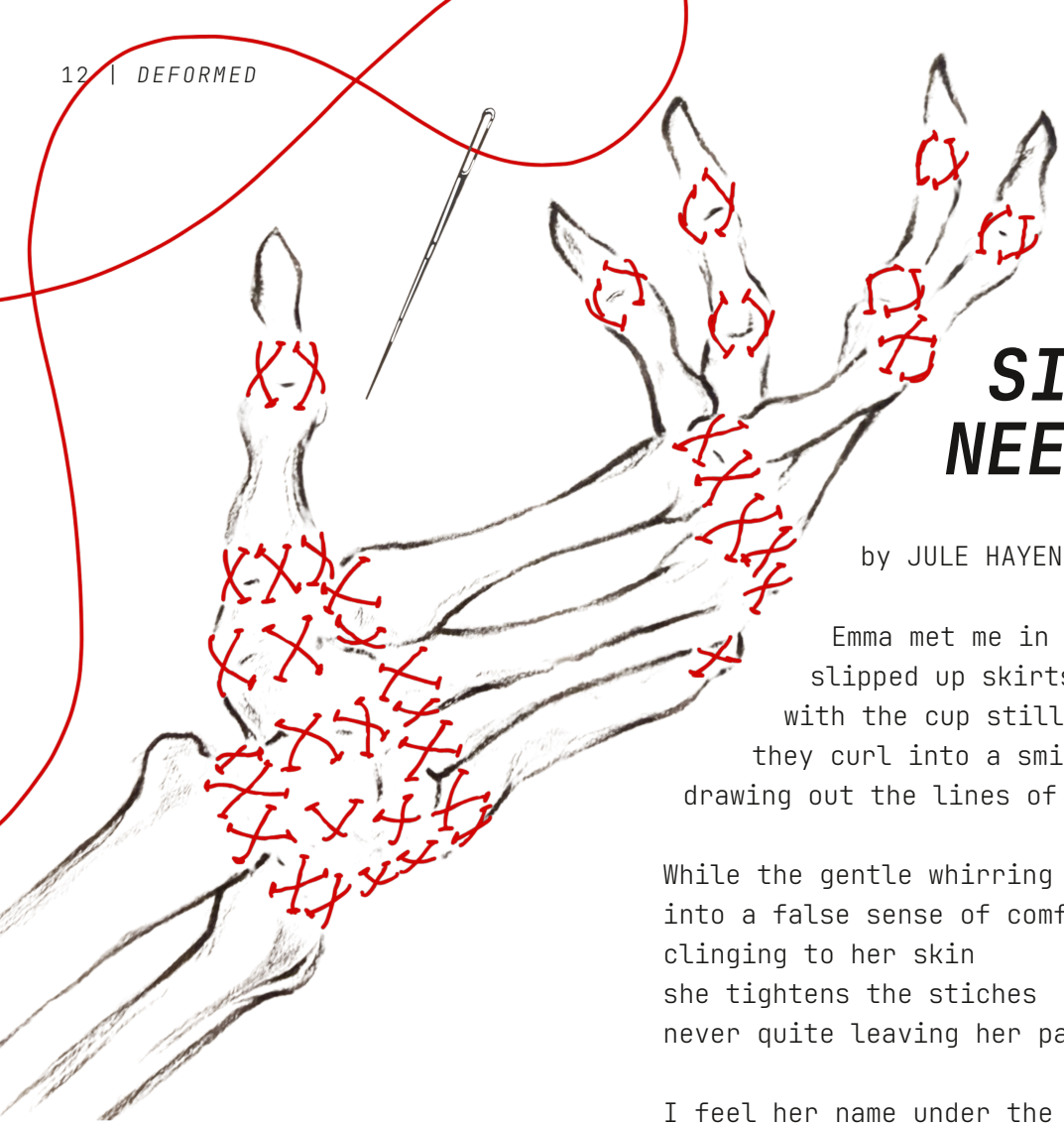
On Wednesday, I screamed at the friar,
Telling him he was a horrible liar.
“Nothing can save you nor me or my soul
Blood isn’t the only thing that she stole”

On Thursday, I burned the church to the ground,
Ash and cinders were all they found
No one will ever meet there again
Under moonshine without the eyes of men

On Friday, I didn’t like how the people were looking,
All of the rumours inside them cooking.
witch, unholy, vampyre, fiend
And still every night of her face I dreamed

On Saturday, I hated everything and more,
On Sunday, I hated you to the core.

On Monday, I drained a man
On Monday, my search began



SILVER NEEDLE

by JULE HAYEN

Emma met me in a tea house
slipped up skirts, sipping quietly
with the cup still on her lips
they curl into a smile
drawing out the lines of a peony.

While the gentle whirring lulls me
into a false sense of comfort
clinging to her skin
she tightens the stiches
never quite leaving her pattern.

I feel her name under the seam
four letters – scratching my back
it shouldn't have surprised me then
how soft fingers can be rough
when they don't like the fabric.

All but Emma on the rosy velvet
I hold my breath, she chooses
white hair silver needles
sealing white bone, meeting
the doll behind the mirror.

image by MAHDIYE KAZEMI

LAST YEAR, I REALISED WHAT EMOTIONS WERE

by SELENA KNOOP

It hasn't rained in ten days, pollen building
up in the stratosphere, a yellow cloud blows
into your eyes on every walk, watery eyes
but without the tingling sensation in your sinuses that is
supposed to go along with it.
A yellow cloud between you and everything
making you even more far-sighted than you already are
on the best of days, breath too shallow, the pharmacist
smiles at you compassionately as you already know how
to administer the dosage.
She hopes for rain and from five metres away you tell her
yes
there are two ways to walk back into yourself and one of them
is a cascade, but you are a plunge.

Fast-moving water falls vertically, completely losing contact with the bedrock surface[1]

Like the air never quite reaching the bottom of your
lungs unless it is mixed with other solid particles.
You pull a chair up because if you are staying
at a five metres distance you might as well get
comfortable and you do not like the rain unless it has already happened, but isn't
everything like that, which is maybe not a grandiose thought, but those are hard to come by
when
the earth is already separating,
parched, hydrophobic, hardpan, lotus leaf,
struck with a hoe, seeds imbibed, pale shoots looking for cracks, surfacing with
considerable force.

Disturbance of soil can result in vigorous plant growth by exposing seeds already in the soil [...] where germination may have previously been inhibited by depth of the seeds or soil that was too compact. This is often observed at gravesites after a burial.[2]

What you would need from it, is honestly
too straight-forward to even write down.

[1] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Waterfall#Types.

[2] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Germination.



PEACEFOOLISH

by MIRIAM BELL

I couldn't see the pain
behind my anger
as you said that you loved me
incapable of committing to this journey
together

It was a two-year battle against myself:
wanting to convince you,
refusing to accept
that you were armed from within as well

While looking up *to each other*
we forgot to look *at the other*
fear-led person –
however, *I* let courage have a say

My mind wanders back
to those brief moments
when we had both dropped our masks
to unveil ourselves

I'm throwing down the guns
I had pointed at myself
wishing to see you do the same
suppressing that it’s a fantasy

Unarmed
I can say that I begin to grasp what love is
it has changed its form
but it's still there

Since loving you
I’ve grown
into a calmer self
where I feel at peace

Hoping the essence of you didn’t change
I miss you –
unafraid
yet foolishly.

THE MIRROR STARES BACK

by SHADI HOLLENSTEINER

Who are you?

Deceiving stranger.

Why?

Why do you look

So beautiful

So ugly

Breathtaking.

Breathtakingly **disgusting.**

Who are you?

One day.

Kindness, lies, warmth, lies -

Why

Do you look?

So warm –

So cold –

Summer in winter

Winter in summer.

You are who?

Another day.

This night, this morning

Tomorrow and yesterday.

Sorrowful joy

Joyful sorrow

To be with you is **pain.**

But without you –

I am

No.

Body.

Who are you?

Deceiving stranger.

Why?

Why do you look

So beautiful

Ugly so

Breathtaking.

Breathtakingly **disgusting.**

Who are you?

One day.

Kindness, lies, warmth, lies -

Why

Do you look?

So warm –

So cold –

Summer in winter

Winter in summer.

You are who?

Another day.

This night, this morning

Tomorrow and yesterday.

Sorrowful joy

Joyful sorrow

To be with you is **pain.**

But without you –

I am

No.

Body.

TYPOS

by LAURA BRAUN

you don’t like my sad writing
me wide awake the whole night and
being made of the typos
in bad books and sad prose
of longings and calling
my brain and the bawling
make you uneasy
my maze makes you feel queasy
since there is no way out

my off-key notes are far too loud
and my typos – they were never italic
they’re bold
and the voice in my head says I’m not made of gold
but of typos and mistakes, and my ideas are old

Do I deserve to feel wrong?
because I try and I long
for more than I know
for stars in my hands and summers with snow
for summers with magic
for building bad habits

And in everything I write I want typos
I need mistakes and sad prose
I want to catch balls that life throws
And I desperately need somebody who knows
I made every single typo on purpose
They give you the chance to look beyond surface

And there’s only a few
who will deep dive into
the currents of typos
concealed from the casual view.

DIANA

by C LEDOYEN

I.
Between the roots and the stars
There’s a path you don’t know
How to follow
Your arrows got stuck in a tree
Your duck is now gone
And you too should learn to run

Don’t look back
Nor for her
Her modesty meaning more
Than you ever will

Blood on her hands
Blood on her feet

A scream coming out of her mouth
You should learn
How to run
For she is coming.

You and the others
Are the destroyers
Of her preys and ways
Demons of plastic
Ghosts of glass
Iron traps

You realised and ran.

II.
You ran into a temple
Closed the doors
Licked the dust for days
Starving
Praying

‘Stars that light the night, guide me through to dawn’

You built back
The statue at the back
Breaking your back
– Now you’re marked.
And you can’t run anymore

When she found you
You were lying
Crying

Serving as an offering
You better be sweet
For she will not be.

III.
You still don’t understand
But you learn
And that saves you
You don't try to follow anymore
That shadow you’re not allowed
To see. No. You read
The landscape, serve her by
Doing little things, trying
To be great.

Your sweat has become
Holy water, you have left
The temple, for your
Body was enough.
Blood under your fingernails and
Between your teeth
You forgot why cities
Were comforting
Domestication
Is a poor medication

You don’t let them see you anymore
You hunt in secrets
You hide
You’ve saved yourself by
Reading the path
Between roots and stars

You've earned her respect.

GREGOR THE GIRL

by SALIHA SAYAR

Man needs to wake up as an insect to see that he has transformed.
I wake with a bleeding between my legs.
A girl went to sleep, and a woman woke up.
The child went down the drain of the bed like a slippery soap.
It's a quiet study of metamorphosis,
When I ask myself “Did Gregor's mother have to change his sheets too?”
“How does a (male) body transform into an insect?”
Clean and neatly.
Without laundry.

My body becomes a state of Judas with its betrayals,
The hips widening,
The chest fattening,
The hourglass inside the womb turning and the sand starts diminishing,
The ancient treasure winking,
And the voices–
I would take being handed to the Romans.

⁂

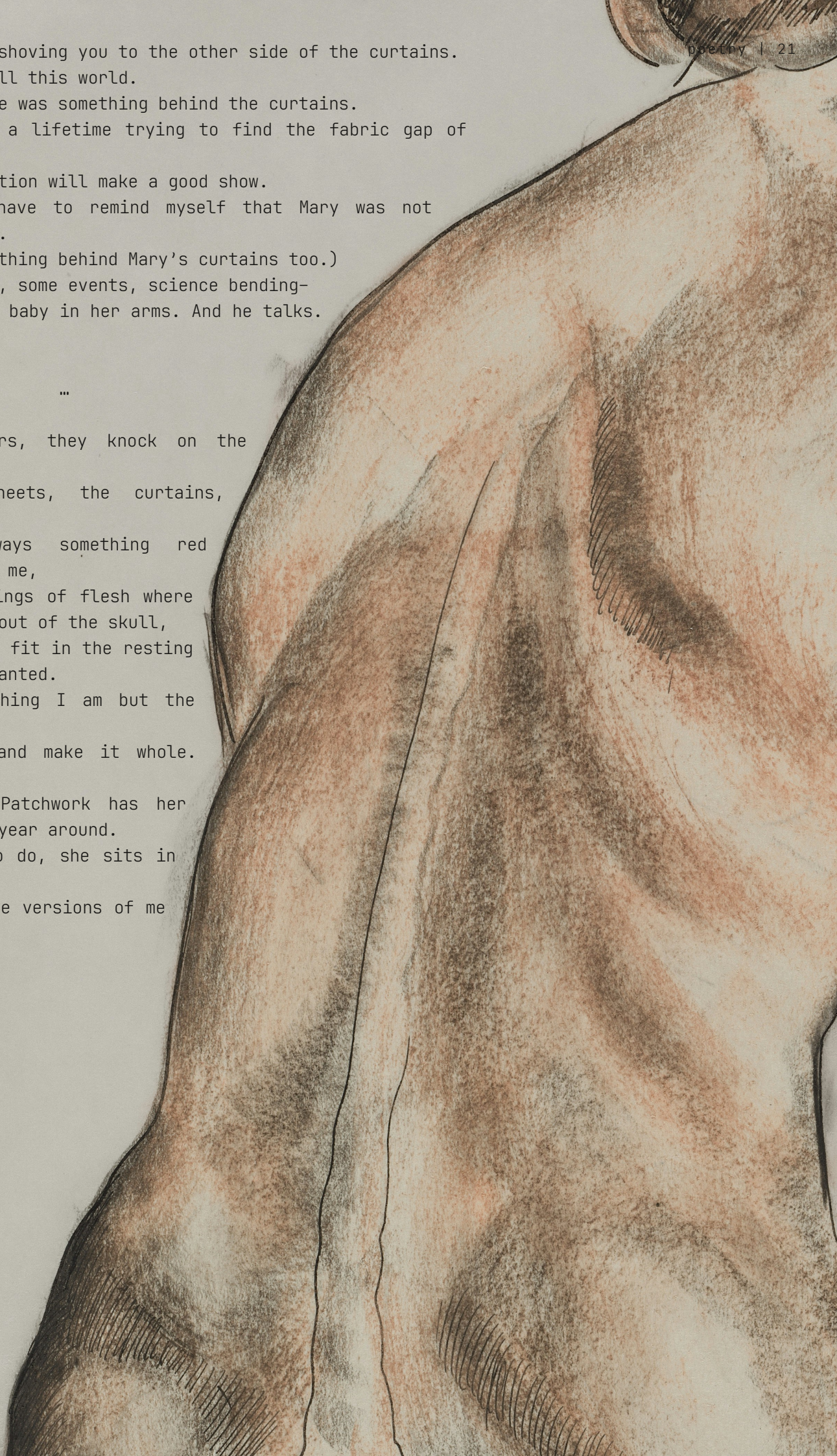
I am breaking into womanhood like a burglar.
Unwelcomed.
Unwelcomed.
Unwelcomed.
But it suits me all the same.
The painted face is a different kind of balaclava,
The jewels different kind of handcuffs,
And the lush-lipped laugh – isn’t it a gleaming gun?
Let me take what I can get my teeth on, before you call the cops.
Hold your hands up –
And put them on my body.
I am sorry, I am being shameful. I’ll leave now.

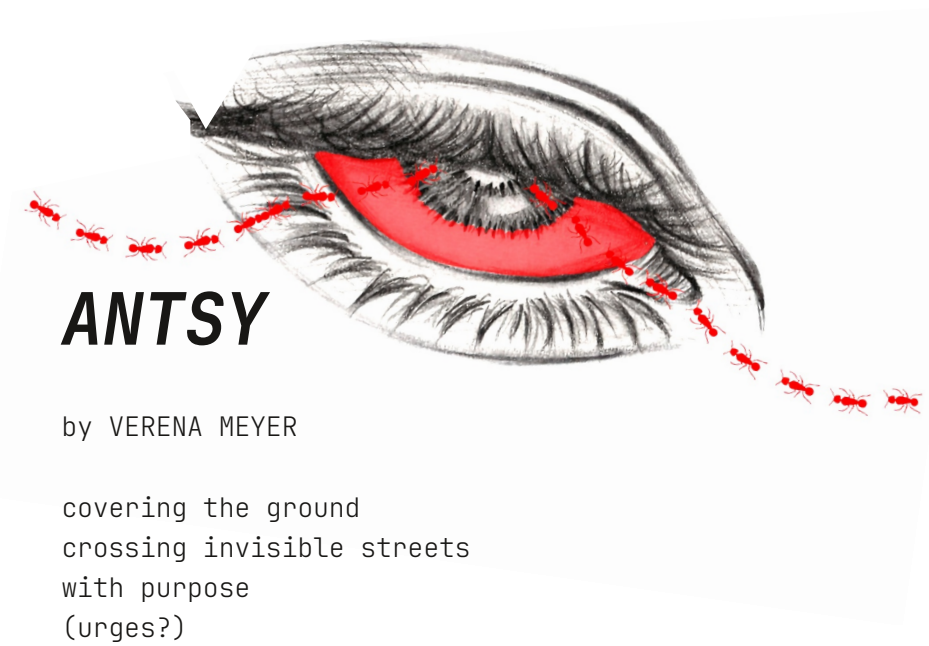
⁂

A brutish hand shoving you to the other side of the curtains.
On the seats: all this world.
You think: there was something behind the curtains.
You will spend a lifetime trying to find the fabric gap of the curtains.
And the desperation will make a good show.
Some days, I have to remind myself that Mary was not always a mother.
(There was something behind Mary's curtains too.)
Then, something, some events, science bending–
Suddenly, God's baby in her arms. And he talks.
Great.

…

Every few years, they knock on the door.
The bloody sheets, the curtains, God's baby.
There is always something red begging to chew me,
On the outpourings of flesh where the brain grew out of the skull,
Too enormous to fit in the resting place it was granted.
After all, nothing I am but the ripped rib.
Take a piece and make it whole.
You can't.
The Angel of Patchwork has her funds cut this year around.
Nothing else to do, she sits in the garden,
Playing with the versions of me like dolls.





ANTSY

by VERENA MEYER

covering the ground
crossing invisible streets
with purpose
(urges?)
are ants in my yard

I want them to cover me
to explore my body like they do the ground
to suck from it
and draw blood
and leave me with red bumps that will remind me
of their bloodsucking
a bumpy road
that is inconvenient
maybe
but not impossible
to overcome
to override
to overpower?

I want to not recognise it after
I want to look at it like a tragedy
but not mine
someone else's that I can romanticise and mourn and write poems about

I want to hit myself with a massive stone

and then I'm dead and it doesn't matter
how many bumps I've had and how many ants I've crushed
there's no more ground and body
there's only soil and bones and flesh

and the ants will come and try to suck from it
it doesn't hurt
and what's the point in stinging
if it doesn't leave someone stung?

drawing by MAHDIYE KAZEMI

TRULY, IT IS AN ART

by JULIA IWANETZKI

sprung from the same curse
we humiliate
each other,
once more.

because why would you,
take another bite
of an apple
that you know to be
rotten to the core?

or why wouldn’t you?

and it was never
that I never believed
a broken soul
couldn’t be deformed
reformed
newly performed.

but you simply
seem to be
hopeless
child-like
malformed.

I can smell
sweet jasmine and lavender
woven into
a stench of decaying, burning flesh,
in every word
you speak

would I be one of your decapitated angels
decomposed purity
fallen from above
when I let myself
lie in your arms?

would I be your muse?
a blank canvas
painted with
obsession
aggression,
your possession.

silent vocal cords
to be ripped
apart,
braided into a
melody of an
identity
imaginary

yours.

and you call it an art
when her corpse
lies before you
to repaint
every scar
blood red
drenched in tar
soft and clean

as you will please.

and truly, it is an art.

violence –
the only forgery
of divinity
you could
ever touch.

your creation
always
equals destruction
disruption
corruption

and truly, it is an art.

A WOMAN

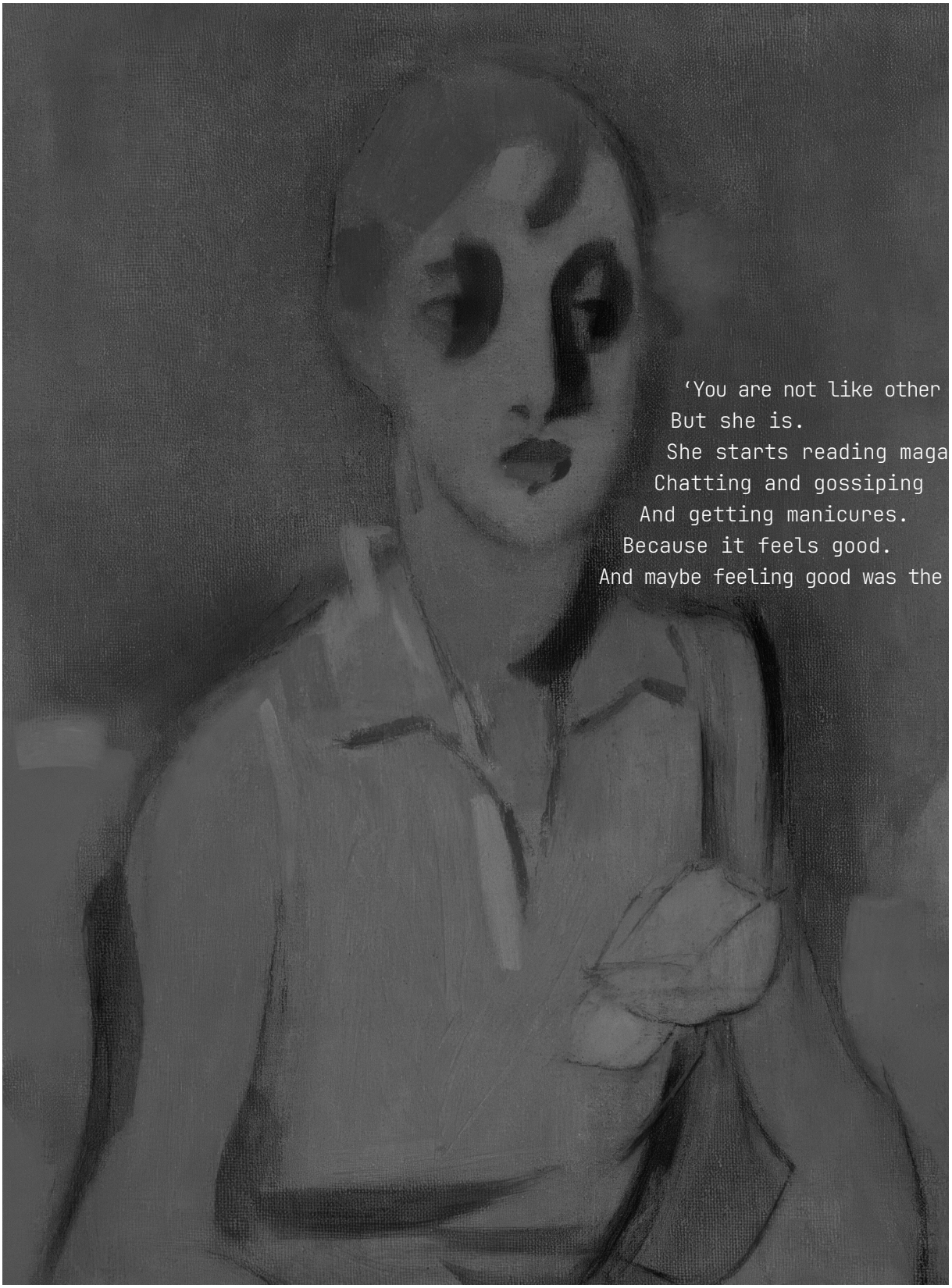
by C LEDOYEN

A strange fruit from the forest
Rooted in vicious wrath
A woman
A little thing made of clay
Sensitive and filled
Of imagined hearsays.
Trapped in her mind
She believes the others
Own the key.

Strange creature once crafted by gods
And yet, in the myths – she finds no answers.
‘Did you know that there are people, who can read in the lines of your hands?’
Quacks and lies!
Only women can believe in such things!

It's Sophie's world
But she may not speak in here
Sophie is a muse, Sophie is inspiration
Thinking doesn't make you pretty.
Thinking won't make you happy.
From history to medicine
A world engraved and shaped.
Women can only read
All those man-ifests written long ago.

She drinks the blood of heroes for strength,
She makes predictions
From the entrails of warriors.
Trapped in the perceptions of others
She still finds no answer.



‘You are not like other girls!
But she is.
She starts reading maga
Chatting and gossiping
And getting manicures.
Because it feels good.
And maybe feeling good was the answer.

GENERALLY PATHETIC

by LAURA BRAUN

I don't give advice on a daily basis
But darling I've seen things and I've been places
So please don't hide your heart in thorny bushes.
It's so precious when your face softly blushes
From all that love you have to give.

They hate it. Let them hate it.

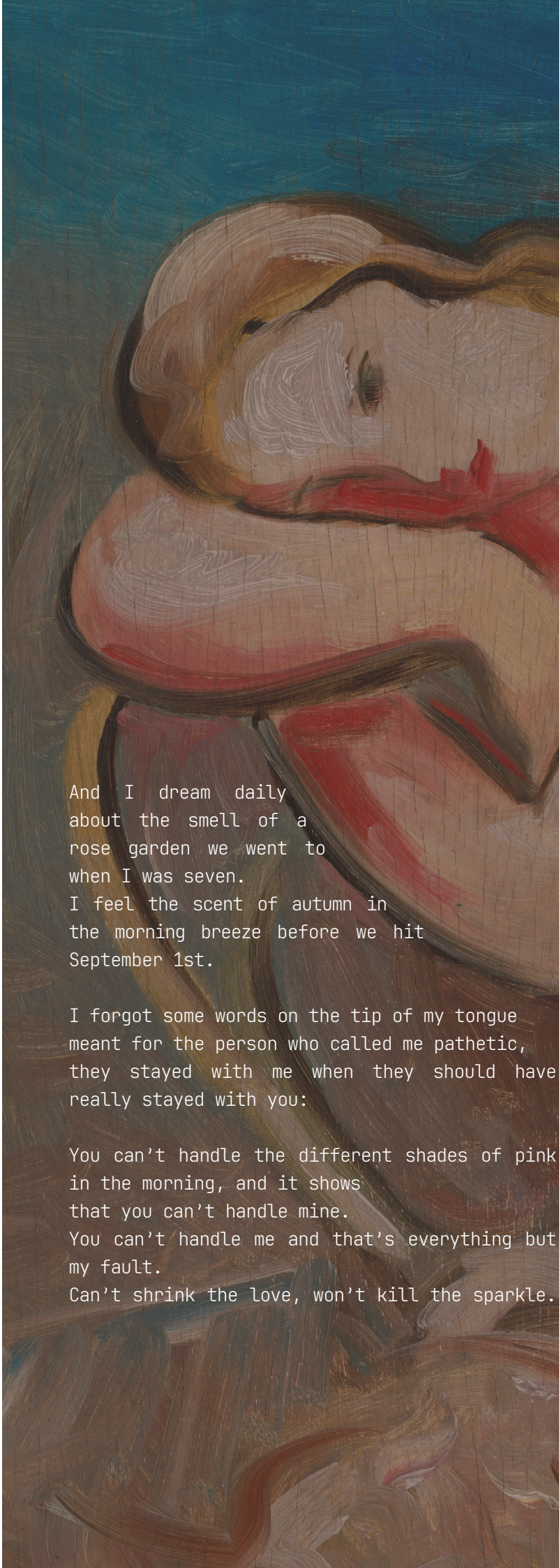
They don't understand the boiling in your blood because
they never even felt the slightest stir.
They see the fires burning in your eyes, burning cities to ashes with a blink and they can't stand it.
They're on a mission to extinguish the fire.

No need to burn when you can be lukewarm and feel nothing.
Tearing all your beloved poems apart is just concealment, they didn't get them from the start.
They can't see your worlds, don't feel your words.
They're like oceans without tides and rooms devoid of light.

And honey, it's their problem
because you are just alright.

One is not cool because one cares about nothing.

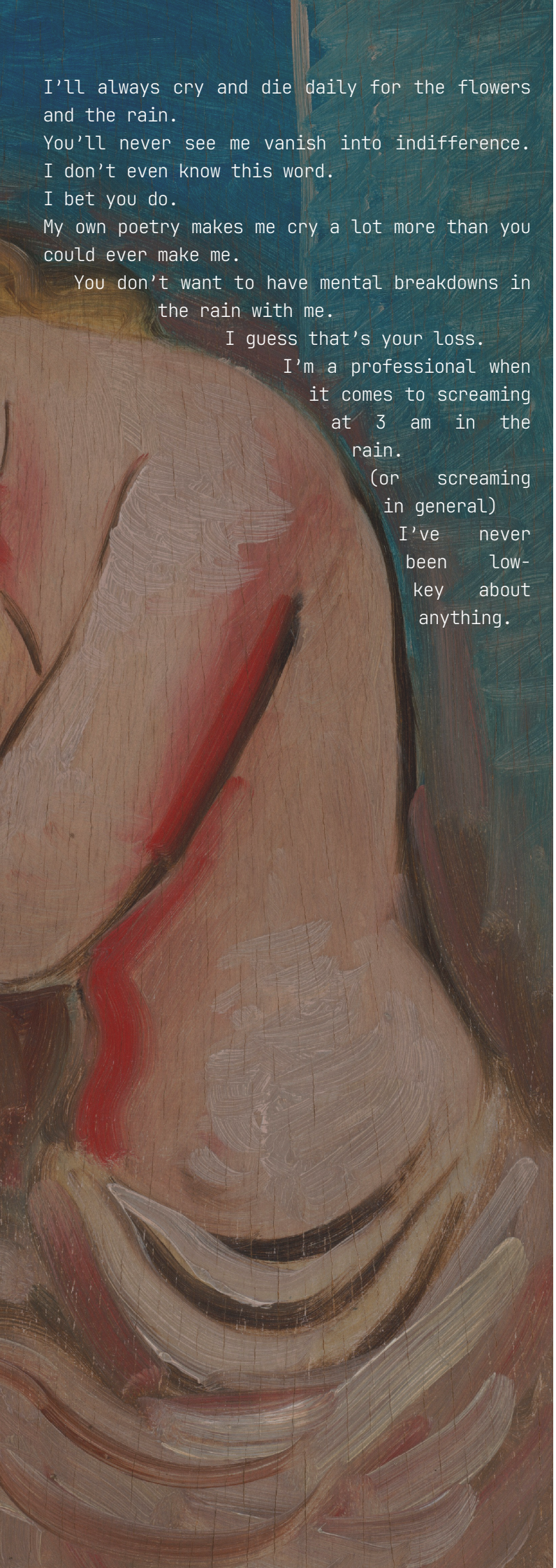
I care about the stars and the way they match my thoughts at 2 am.
About the zodiac sign of the waitress in the café by the creek.



And I dream daily
about the smell of a
rose garden we went to
when I was seven.
I feel the scent of autumn in
the morning breeze before we hit
September 1st.

I forgot some words on the tip of my tongue
meant for the person who called me pathetic,
they stayed with me when they should have
really stayed with you:

You can't handle the different shades of pink
in the morning, and it shows
that you can't handle mine.
You can't handle me and that's everything but
my fault.
Can't shrink the love, won't kill the sparkle.



About peonies,
about the moon,
about that peanut butter sandwich, I ate three months ago.

I've always felt like there was more to all these regular things.
Something kind of magical that surrounded all the things and places I touched throughout my life.
Something vibrating, whispering
"There is more! Come find out about it."
And that's what I did.

I allowed the universe to show me all these magical mystical features of the world that make me feel like I belong into the picture.
I invited the sun and the moon and the magic into my life and
I guess that's the reason they stayed.

I started appreciating the mundane
and the madness,
euphoria and gut-wrenching sadness.

Took it all in.

And if that's being pathetic like you said, I am utterly in love with it.

You said you love the phoenix
but you don't understand that I'm the ashes too.

I have to hit rock bottom from time to time.
I have to touch cotton candy clouds the week after.
I have to invite it all in –
the waves who kiss the shoreline,
take them as they are during the dead calm and amidst a storm.
Embrace the rapture, the crying, the shaking –
to let it all go eventually.

And if you asked me what feeling too much, loving too much, and simply being too much is to me, I'd say nothing short of a blessing.

IF I AM HER

by SHADI HOLLENSTEINER

I trace the skin of my body
Like a fault line.

Waiting for a change

Waiting to break

Mirrors turn sharp with lies
And I believe
I shrink
Squeeze
Stand sideways
Wondering if I've taken up too much space

Just by existing.

And still –
I look like her.
Not the marble version

The real one:
Hips born of oceans,
A belly the tide could rest in,
A Mouth Made of Myth.

I know this
I know it
But knowing doesn't reach
It sits on the surface
Like petals on the water
Never quite sinking in.

I stand in the shower
With blood on my lips
Trying to feel holy.

But I only feel
Like a body.
Heavy, aching.

If I am her –
Why do I Flinch
Still
My own reflection.
Why does beauty feel
Like something that is granted
To other people

I want to believe in the goddess
Beneath
My skin

But most days,
I just try.
To get done.
Without crying.

SENRYUU SERIES

by CHRISTOPHER CALVIN

English

The blitz slithers...
cracking wide open
memories in slumber.

still weeping...
for who I want to become,
the curling tree

Let off the steam
on the utter brink...
a poet's silence.

off the wall
before ears awake,
pieces pierce the mind.

ebbing tide,
back and forth...
to go home or not.

out of hand,
time to scatter to none...
petrichor.

twenty eighth birthday,
melting iron stones
with tears of joy.

a first kiss,
the break of silence
you left in my head.

Bahasa Indonesia

kilat menyambar
membukalebar-lebar
ingatan terkubur

masihmeratapi…
cita-cita yang kuidamkan
pohon berpilin

seusaiketegangan
di ujung tanduk…
kesunyian penyair

lepas daridinding
sebelum telinga mendengar
pecahan menembus fikir

ombak laut
pasanglalusurut
pulangatautidak

di luar kuasa
saatsaathampa
petrichor

dua puluh delapan tahun
meluluhkan dinding besi
dengan tangis ceria

pernyataan tertanda
perceraian yang membelah
kepalaku

years later...
still piecing together
the family photo.

bertahun-tahun…
masihmenyambung
foto keluarga

still out of ideas on
how to patch those cracks
of family silence.

masih kesulitan
menyambungkembali
keluarga senyap

kintsugi–
the burnt marks
of a wild dog.

kintsugi–
bekaslukabakar pada
anjing liar

fractured femur,
still rock and rolling
for another round.

tulangkakipatah
masih berusaha
melompat ria

a frog leap,
still enjoying the rest
of broken moon.

lompatan kodok
mencobamenikmati
bulan pecah

the struggle
of staying straightforward
broken branch

susahnya
menjadijujur
kebohonganterbuka

quarter life crisis,
the tears in dorm after
going broke.

krisis perempat baya
tangisan di asrama
setelah kehabisan uang

THE COFFEE MACHINE

by KOSTADIN KARAVASILEV

the coffee machine
you say
has a button
with a tiny cup drawn on it
“perhaps it could make espresso..”

you pause, holding your mug of coffee
you are looking at me

i am remembering
this man’s hands
gloved
hanging
straight
alongside his torso
rushing by me
somewhere in Italy

the man’s turning into
an espresso cup
slowly dissolving
in the distance

i feel
he felt trapped
too
in his body
like the coffee
in the cup

the difference
being
–
the coffee will
likely be drunk
soon-

err…

and it is crossing my mind

is the man actually warm
enough…

enough

i scratch
my head
out
of this thought

i do not see you
and nod
at your remark
about the button
and its functions

while remembering
how a friend
once wrote to me
that she found it hard
just…
being
and how this
sounded like something
another friend might have said
once upon
during our walks

and i imagine
that both of them
must have been moving
unnaturally fast

for i have witnessed
both
my friends' bodies
sway
so gracefully
so meticulously
through
this world
every gesture
rife
with purpose
–
squeezing my upper arm
to share that she's excited

his hands
two warm bulges inside
each of his pockets
as we walk by the sea

her wonderfully askew tooth
delicately revealing
as her lips part
in smile

his bare feet
balancing on the metal fence
in Seaton park
-
yes,
they both must have moved
too fast
in their minds
for being
is an active
verb

and there is only so much sorrow
that our bodies
can bare

(i wonder –
will i ever
come close enough
to touch either of you?)

oh
i can feel
the coffee machine
next to me again
wanting too
to get
itself
out
of this situation

i scratch
the espresso cup drawing
off
and head out
to play tag
with my friends

THE STAR-SPANGLED BANNER, UNRAVELED

by LAURA NTOUMANIS

“O! Say can you see, by the dawn’s early light?”
I cannot see, my eyes, blindfolded.
My hands, bound, tightly, the plastic cutting into my skin.
My legs in chains, yet I don’t wish to run.
Where else would I run to?
I just wanted a better life, in a better place,
yet now I’m being marched off to a prison
in a country I do not know.
I am meant to disappear.

“What so proudly we hail’d”,
once upon a time.
To whom do we now pledge allegiance?
To a country, or a king?
“No kings, no taxation without representation”
was the battle cry of the founders
of this (once) great country.
And now we sit on land that isn’t ours
letting a narcissistic dictator lead us astray.

The twilight, no longer gleaming,
obscured by a chemical haze,
as forests are felled, factories unchecked
their waste seeping into the ground
their fumes poisoning the air.
‘Tis no matter
we give ourselves to otherlives
that AI will live for us.
“People will come to love their oppression,” Huxley said.
Wasn’t that about a dystopia?



There is nothing gallant about the broad stripes and bright stars.
The stripes, defiled by hate
50 colonies not 13. Too many, perhaps.
The stars, grown cold
collapsing under the weight of avarice –
swallowing everything into a black hole –
the world won’t escape the pull.
Swirling, downwards, distorting.

Our flag stands in ostentation
behind a would-be king.
It falls, and weakens
amidst a cacophony of lusterless gold.
A gilded, performative scam.
It streams limply, passionless
obscuring the pride it once held
longing for the land of the free
and for us to be brave.


FICTION

DOPPELGÄNGER

by LILY OLTHOFF

„You look just like her."

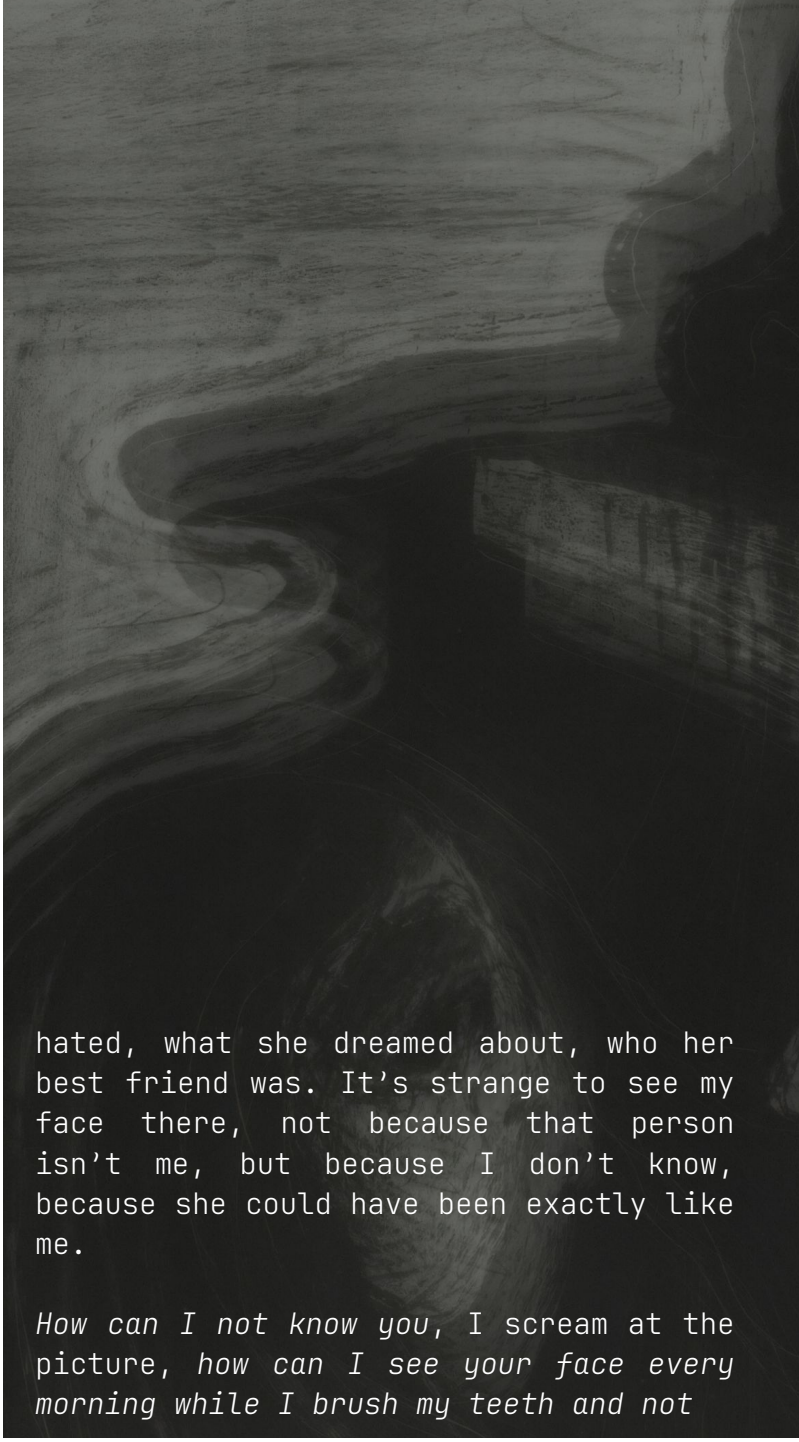
I have never met the woman coming up to me, but she knows me, because you hear about your coworker's daughters, and she recognized my face when I moved into the neighbourhood.

If you can call it my face.

"It's extraordinary, you are the spitting image of her", she says, and I smile the smile that's not my smile, and ask about her new job, and she wishes me luck for my exams, and then I carry my grocery bags inside, and go on with my day all the while wondering why this is not making me cry.

You expect grief to be something insurmountable, a crushing weight that stops you from continuing your life, but its mundanity is the most terrifying part of all. At some point it stops being overpowering and becomes a small itch in the back of your head, a scab that won't go away. *It doesn't hurt*, I think, *why doesn't it hurt anymore?*

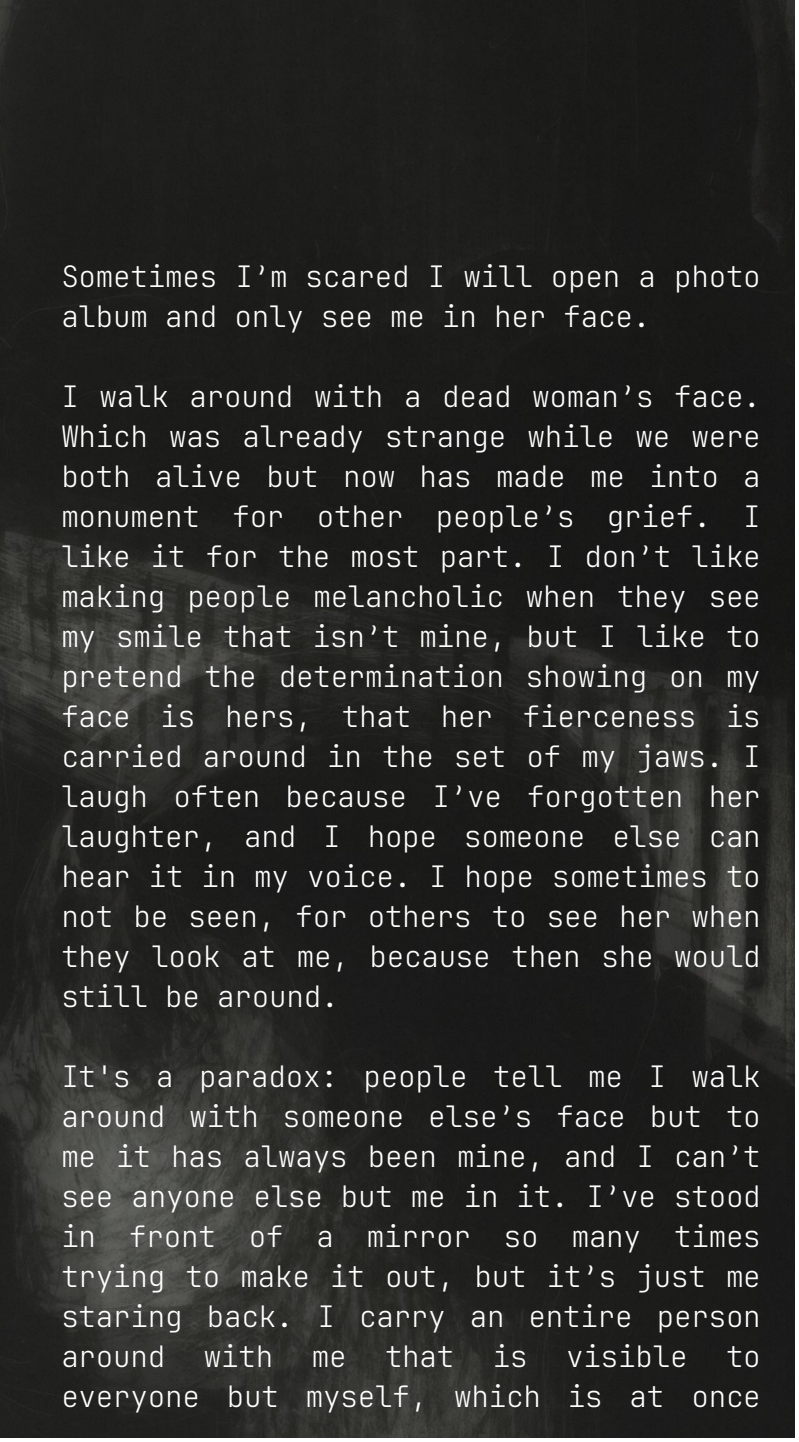
I can open decades-old photo albums of my grandparents' and see my face without recognising the person in the picture. I know nothing about her; what food she



hated, what she dreamed about, who her best friend was. It's strange to see my face there, not because that person isn't me, but because I don't know, because she could have been exactly like me.

How can I not know you, I scream at the picture, *how can I see your face every morning while I brush my teeth and not know you?* It's a rhetorical question, of course. The answer is really simple, actually. The real question I'm asking used to be *how dare you be dead?* and is now *why did I never ask about your best friend when I still could?*

The worst part about photos is their silence. And how looking at them changes how you see the world. If all you have left of something is a photo, then you notice at some point it's the only image you have. It warps your perspective and eventually overtakes it.



Sometimes I’m scared I will open a photo album and only see me in her face.

I walk around with a dead woman’s face. Which was already strange while we were both alive but now has made me into a monument for other people’s grief. I like it for the most part. I don’t like making people melancholic when they see my smile that isn’t mine, but I like to pretend the determination showing on my face is hers, that her fierceness is carried around in the set of my jaws. I laugh often because I’ve forgotten her laughter, and I hope someone else can hear it in my voice. I hope sometimes to not be seen, for others to see her when they look at me, because then she would still be around.

It's a paradox: people tell me I walk around with someone else’s face but to me it has always been mine, and I can’t see anyone else but me in it. I’ve stood in front of a mirror so many times trying to make it out, but it’s just me staring back. I carry an entire person around with me that is visible to everyone but myself, which is at once too much responsibility and not crushing enough. I would like to feel the weight of her in the corners of my eyes and the fall of my hair, but she’s just gone. I hate that she’s gone. But more than that I hate that this is a constancy, that I am reminded of her absence every time I see my reflection in a shop window and can’t see her, just me; not only occasionally when I visit her grave or don’t have to buy a present for her birthday. Because she isn’t there. Not in my contact list, not sitting in my kitchen when I bake her favourite cake, not even in the outline of my nose when I look at my reflection. She’s nowhere left on earth, except in my head when I think of her every day, and she never answers, because I can’t come up with what she would say.

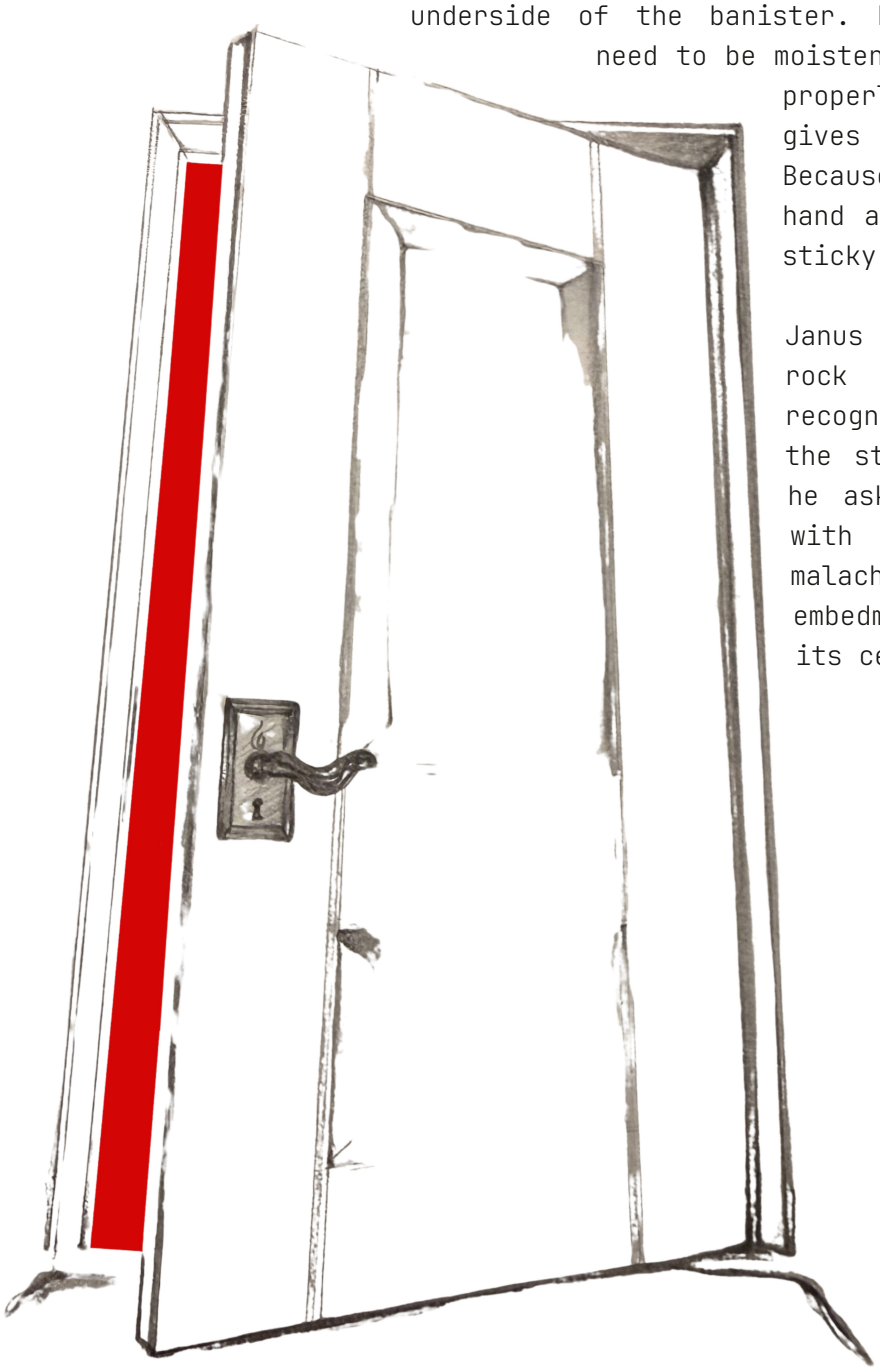
I don’t ask for hauntings; but if I appear haunted to everybody else, is it too much to ask that I can see it, too?

ALEXA, TELL THE CHILD: GOD IS DEAD

by LINNEA GEHLERT

In the corridor, a child sits on the seventeenth step of the wooden staircase and pouts. And while he pouts, he forms little balls out of his boogers and sticks them to the underside of the banister. Particularly dry booger balls need to be moistened with spit before they stick properly. The wet sliminess always gives the child away in the end. Because when an adult puts their hand around the railing, it's always sticky. Then there's trouble.

Janus sits in the study and analyses rock samples. And whenever he recognises something special about the stones he has in front of him, he asks his tablet to make a note with precise sobriety. 'Alexa, the malachite has a smoky quartz embedment right through its centre.'



drawing by MAHDIYE KAZEMI

A pile of yellow letters sits on the kitchen table with a plate of stale bread and radishes on top. One of them has left a nasty mark on the top envelope. The child has always hated radishes.
On the board in the children's room is a small gemstone set, preserved by the dust that only unpopular gifts can accumulate. It was the mother's idea to give the child something educational. The child would much rather have had an action figure than a pile of rocks.

God is lying dead on the bathroom floor. A fly has made itself comfortable on the carcass and is rubbing its front legs over its antennae. Once. Twice. Thrice. Clumps of dust snow down from the ceiling fan as if God's death had brought on winter.

In the small space under the floor, ‘Terra’ is carved into the cracked concrete, where Janus’ mother had once hidden her most precious treasures. Janus’ voice echoes in the cavity: ‘Alexa, tell the child in the corridor God is dead,’ and the reply ‘Sorry, I didn't understand your question.’ ‘Tell the child...’ ‘Sorry, I didn't understand your question.’

In the corridor, Janus stands in front of a small, faded imprint on the seventeenth step and shakes his head. He places a hand on the banister and scrapes rough skin across the dry wood.

In the small space under the floor lies a cat skeleton. Above the dusty little bones hangs a sign that reads ‘God’ in scrawly children's writing. Underneath, almost completely pasted over, it still says ‘Terra’. Now Janus uses the secret room to make his long-lost friend comfortable. God’s corpse couldn’t lay on the bathroom floor forever after all.

In the study, there’s a faint echo of the child’s voice. Janus looks up from his work, hating him for a moment, then hating the room and its work.
There are no windows in the study, just cupboards and Janus and Alexa holding each other tightly until everything is precisely noted down. Of all the rooms, the study is the furthest away from the corridor.
An alarm clock rings in the study, as if to say: Look, the break is over. And Janus’ eyes are squinted until they find even the tiniest remnants of ash in the rock spores. Archaeology and geology are ultimately two sides of the same coin. ‘Sorry,’ says Alexa, ‘I didn't understand you.’

The dust has been cleared from the board in the children's room. The two grams of ametrine made their way from the shelf, fell right in front of the bed. Maybe it was the wind, or maybe God had missed Janus. God and love were such a pair anyway, weren’t they?

On the bathroom floor, the child lies in his own vomit of dust and bile. And ‘Mum,’ it cries, while God purrs around its feet. The seventeenth step emits the tiniest squeak when feet long gone come running.
‘Alexa, please delete that.’

FORMALDEHYDE, MAYBE?

by ISABELL BRINKMANN

I now think of you every time I apply my sunscreen.

You used to always do it for me, as a child; with your big hands struggling to cover every inch of my young face, inevitably leaving some spots uncovered while others were lathered in thick layers of the stuff. The lack of dexterity in your fingers was always funny to me, considering you were able to perform most other activities with great ease.

Perhaps it could be attributed to your eagerness to finally enter the sea again, which was one of your preferred elements. It must have been the vastness drawing you in, come to think of it now. Where else was there such free rein, the promise of absolute openness and freedom? Where else was your body weightless? Mom and I used to be astounded by the sheer distance you were able to cover by swimming and the subsequent radiance the sun and the open sky would lend you; the picture of utter liveliness. Your skin – red, burnt, both in look and temperature – accentuated the blue of your eyes in an almost uncanny way.

And remember when you took me on that spontaneous hike behind the house? I – having been fifteen years old at the time – was supposed to be in my physical prime, at least compared to you. You, however, overtook me from the very beginning. It was natural to me, really, not being able to catch my breath even remotely, lacking the muscles to continue and eventually having to sit down, while you strutted on, inconvenienced by my lack of stamina.

As many children tend to view their fathers, I also thought you were some sort of superhero, capable of anything as long as physical strength and capability were involved. That which left its imprint on me, however, was not your sheer strength, but the way you revelled in your body and the insurmountable enjoyment you extracted from your senses.

Absurd, then, grotesque even, the images more recent instances evoke, right? You used to say so yourself.

"These rails", you said, unwillingly quiet, "these rails are absurd."

I thought so as well. How strange that I would be the stronger one between us, me taking care of you, carrying you. How strange, even audacious, that I would be the one with no trouble breathing. I doubt you've forgotten, but we did take the rails off, eventually, following your insistent pleading.

"Get me out of this bed", you used to repeat, evidently aggravated in tone ,yet lacking the strength to articulate the emotion further.

We knew what was happening but refused to acknowledge your shrinking, fragile form, the all-encompassing immobility, or even the pain. And yes, I think I understood which memories must have been going through your mind at that point. I, too, could see you running, biking, surfing, sailing, swimming. I, too, could see the sky enveloping you once again, your body weightless instead of burdensome and static. We both saw the sterile white ceiling giving way to a bright blue, red taking over grey and yellowish hues, vivid over pale. It was the same urgency you experienced by the sea, the same concept you were chasing, in your wish to get up and out. I, too, was and still am unable to grasp this transformation, this exclusivity that now marked life and health.

I had switched to unscented sunscreen a while before it happened. And its smell had never particularly struck me beforehand. It is not completely scentless though, is it? After having met you in your, for lack of a better word, ultimately altered state – frigid, still, pale yellow, smelling pungently of chemicals – and as the first hot days of that year crept their way towards me, I soon became reacquainted with the distinct, acrid smell of preservatives. Their ubiquitous use was unclear to me beforehand.

I now think of you every time I apply my sunscreen.

Remembering and the act of writing are after all, in and of themselves, a type of preservative. And because I try to capture you and how it all was in most things I make, I became more closely acquainted with the wide variety of preservatives I unintentionally employed. Funny, to even think of preserving something already dead, already ridden with spores of rot and decay. What is it that we're trying embalm here, exactly? Perhaps at this point I've also grown to perpetually exude that abominable, chemical stench.

GUILTY WITHOUT PLEASURE



by MIRIAM BELL

No need to cry big tears once I'm dead. You are upsetting me and it's poisoning me in my condition. Those kinds of sentences live rent free in my head to this day. What had been the major crime? An untidy bathroom. Pretty standard teenage behaviour, right? My mother had been sick for eight years when she died at 47. She had undergone chemotherapy on and off. At times, her hormones were raging and exploding in outbursts directed at my older sibling and me. From an adult perspective I can comprehend now that she was not speaking to us out of spite but her own fear of death, intensified by the cocktail keeping her alive. Yet, being only eleven years old, it hit a nerve.

Until my mid-twenties, I had successfully pretended her death hadn't changed me. Clearly, it did. Anxiety had spread throughout my whole body as I was anticipating cancer doing the same to me in the future. It caused me to cut myself off from fully experiencing joy. But it wasn't the only force pulling the strings. Once I accepted that I hadn't even begun to process her death, I unknowingly set out to discover my frog — in therapy.

A frog? Well, imagination has always been one of my strongest suits. I bet my therapist could have done a gallery showcase of vivid pictures representing my emotions by the time our three-year-long journey ended. Somehow it was easier to use figurative language to describe my current state of mind. Especially when I hadn't entirely grasped the depth of an issue yet. So, during one session, I found myself explaining to my therapist that I sensed an animal sitting under the sofa. Initially, I was incapable of even naming the kind of the animal. After a while, I settled on a frog. It was just staring at me with a sulky face. I had no clue what it wanted me to do next. Or even if it wanted me to do something at all. Several weekly sessions later, I reluctantly became aware of the fact that I had felt guilty about being alive and healthy all those years. Gradually, I convinced myself the frog had been the outcome of my mother's unintentional guilt-bombing. All I wanted was to shoo it away. *Why is this frog hiding under the sofa?* I wondered. *Why doesn't it just stop bothering me?*

My mind kept wandering back to the little frog staring at me. Not until I looked at it closely, did I reconsider whether my interpretation of the frog's morose presence had been twisting my outlook on life. To my surprise, I suddenly saw a sad face rather than a grumpy one. *Had I kicked it under the sofa?* The thought of having caused the little frog pain dawned on me. My therapist gave me food for thought when she asked if maybe it wasn't the frog that felt abandoned and needed to be loved but someone else. Instead of verbalizing the truth buried up to that moment, I simply croaked.

RED RIDING HOOD

by LILY OLTHOFF

Once upon a time there was a young girl who loved her family. She was dutiful and took care of everyone she loved, and people smiled at her everywhere she went. Her mother worried about her, because that's what good mothers do. She knew how young girls could be, so she tried to teach her daughter and warned her of the dangers in the world.
And she made her a red cloak.

No. This is not how we're doing this.

The girl's grandmother lived in a cottage in the woods. She was allowed to do so, because she was an old woman–possibly a witch. But who expects a witch with no husband in a nice orderly village? But she had to be visited because the girl was so caring and the grandmother was old, meaning she had to be sick (who else gets sick but old people?), which meant the girl had to leave her home to bring her food. Her mother had sewn her the cloak so that she would always be visible and the girl dutifully put it on, took her basket and went for the road.

Stop. That's not the reason, she wore it because she liked to stand out, she liked not to be invisible anymore.

You stop interrupting me! Her mother, who needs no other name than mother, had given her rules to follow once she left the rules of village life: stay on the path, don't linger or stray from your task, take good care of your grandmother but come back quickly. But the girl, who couldn't help her innocent nature, was so enchanted by her surroundings that she got distracted by the beautiful flowers next to the path.

And what if she chose to step off it? What if she wanted–

So. There's a girl in the wild woods, being pretty and vulnerable with no good man around to protect her. We know who's bound to appear.

You're quite literally the narrator; it's your choice to put it there!

Wolves would be terrifying even if we hadn't spent millennia raising sheep and watching them get slaughtered. Terrifying snarl, gleaming teeth, shaggy fur and they're so fast that you know you'd be dead even when you start running. Right now, no one's running. It's the moment before the slaughter, time frozen in fear, the girl staring at the beast. Is she scared? I was never sure if she was scared in that moment or if she thought he could be nice, if he looked a bit like her pet dog at home. They don't show their malice right away, do they? They appear courteous on the outset and once you let your guard down, they charge.

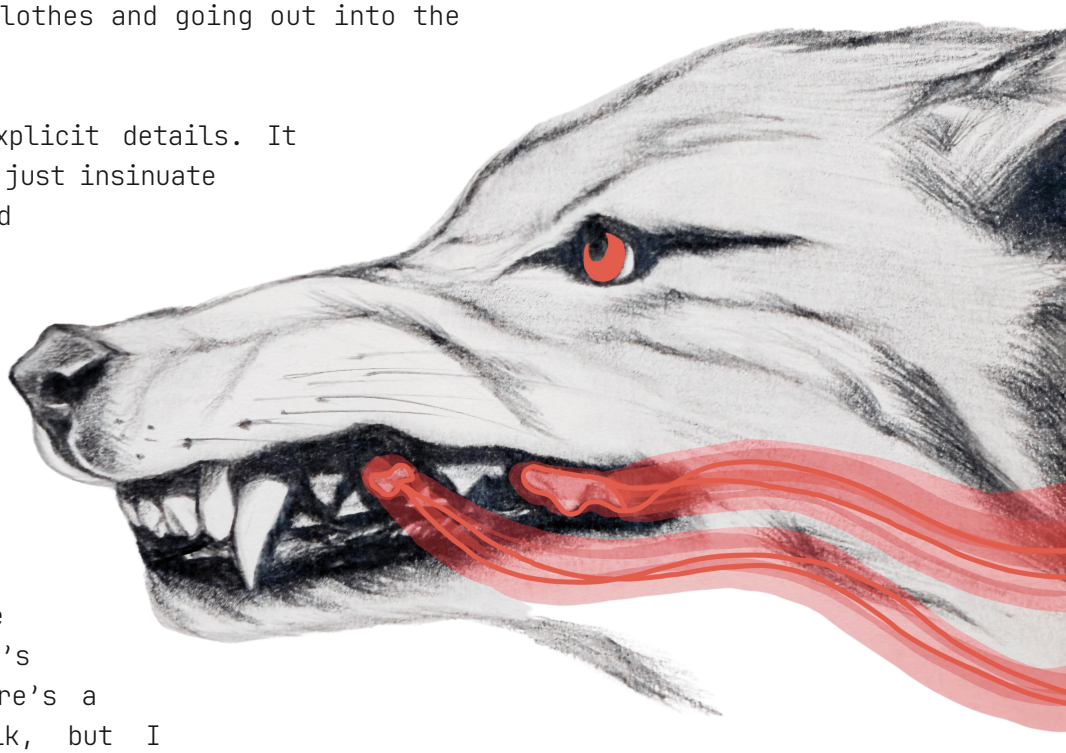
You and I both know this isn't a story about wolves. He addresses her, very politely and she thinks he's charming and helpful when he offers to show her the way back to the path. And because he has been so nice she doesn't look back and doesn't notice him following her.

> *You're not the right person to tell stories about girls if you think they're naïve and wouldn't look over their shoulders after meeting a stranger. Have you talked to a single girl in your life?*

No, no, she's innocent and pure and has never encountered evil in her village. He was friendly and every girl will trust you if you're friendly. She inadvertently shows him the trail off the road to her grandmother's house and he overtakes her and gets there before she does.

And then, something terrible happens.

I don't mean to imply that it's the girl's fault for not listening to her mother and talking to the stranger instead of the nice huntsman. She was naïve, which is why we need to tell this story. She made a mistake—and really, it was a mistake and not a choice. You don't want her to have done this deliberately now, do you?—and the next girl who thinks of putting on bright clothes and going out into the world can learn from this.



drawing by MAHDIYE KAZEMI

I will be leaving out the explicit details. It frightens children more if you just insinuate a lot of blood and entrails and terrible screams and suddenly there's a wolf wearing the skin of an old woman, lying in her bed, a stranger unrecognizable in the middle of a domestic scene.

The girl doesn't notice the difference at first. She's talking to the wolf and there's a few fun details about chalk, but I really want to drive home the point that she is talking to a monster and she has no idea but a vague inkling of unease. Something's wrong. No, not even that. Something's not quite right. He's a wolf, he doesn't know how to behave like a proper civilized human. Try as you might, the strangeness can never be completely hidden. You've met these kinds of people. The outsiders, the ones with no good family to vouch for. Sure, they're accommodating and try to fit in, but there's something that rubs you the wrong way, even if you're not supposed to say so anymore. Or maybe your cousin's gone off to college and at the next family dinner he's a bit different and you don't trust him. Don't you want to scratch that human skin away and find out if it's really him or if someone else is eating your lasagna?

Where was I? Wolf. Girl. Fear. Because this is about fear, obviously. Not the girl's, she hasn't been scared for one moment. And I don't care about the mother, no one cares about mothers until they meddle and become evil, so whose fear is this? This could be a happy tale if not for the tension in your jaw ever since she stepped out of the gates of her home. Who is so scared the moment a girl leaves her house, waiting for the inevitable tragedy? Who keeps looking over her shoulder nervously, looking for a wolf? And we're doing it to protect her! We know very well what big bad people do to cute little girls, don't ask me how.

The girl opens the door. This is how we know it's over. Girls don't open doors; they're held open for them. She sees the wolf, fur visible in the tears of her grandmother's skin, the face not quite convincingly human because it has to fit over a snout and have you ever tried to put the wrapping of a chocolate Santa over something else? Looks terrible. Human skin can be stretched a bit, but as I mentioned, the wolf is huge. Gigantic even. Towers over the tiny frail girl, drooling and grinning with her grandmother's lips. It's bad. It's so bad, I should look away, but I can't. I've been tense the whole time, and now finally the moment's here. The one thing we were warned against, we're supposed to be scared of, but maybe it isn't fear I've been feeling, it's anticipation. This is punishment, the order of things, just how stories go, and just look at her how she trembles now, finally, how her lip wobbles and she turns to flee. She has to, because she didn't earlier and that's the best part when you see someone powerless try to gain back freedom. Futile, of course, she will get a few metres further and then–

Yeah, no. We're not doing this.

You don't really want to turn this into a story where she enjoys it, do you? I was wondering, earlier when you suggested she chose to step off the path.

Enjoys what? To be eaten? Of course not. If you want to tell a story about violence this is not how we're doing it.

But it's not just violence, is it? Consider–

No. Don't even finish that sentence. This is about violence and power and nothing else. And we're not doing it this way.

But this is how it's done! This is what people expect!

I don't care. I'm tired of how you tell it. In fact, I don't think you should tell it at all. Do you know the story where they sew someone's lips shut?

How dare-

Whew. Glad I learned cross-stitch. And I don't even like body horror.

How do I even finish this mess? She's in the yard, the wolf in the skin of her grandmother is running out after her, there's a huntsman somewhere, but I really don't want to involve her with the-nice-man-with-a-gun-who-can-defeat-bad-people-and-gets-rewarded-by-the-girl. The whole setup is ridiculous to begin with. You know what? There. Her grandmother's living alone in the woods, by your logic, wouldn't she have to defend herself against the masses of bad people trying to invade her peace? She must have some means of defending herself around. Oh, look, there's an axe leaning next to the chopping block. The girl's going to pick it up and hit the werewolf on the head with it.

Mmh-mhmh!

You still don't shut up, do you? Not my problem, she got him right in that soft spot at the back of his skull, where he had tried to glue her grandmother's skin together. Didn't want to look at that distorted face, obviously. Look, he's fallen down. Danger defeated. The huntsman doesn't even have to show up. And I don't like the way you conveniently got rid of her grandmother who's supposed to be strong enough to live on her own in the woods. You'd expect her to know how to deal with wolves. But you said she was a witch, right? And a girl, walking out of her village into the woods and defeating a monster, is practically destined to become a witch's apprentice and this is a good initiation. I'm sure she could find a spell of resurrection somewhere in her grandmother's library after she puzzles the body back together, arranging bones and muscles and organs correctly, sewing the skin around it shut.

I know this is not where you imagined her ending up – you saw her next to the huntsman, scared to death every time she must go somewhere on her own because she might run into a monster. Would be more convenient for you, wouldn't it? I don't want her to be that though; I like her more when she's not afraid. And if you insist on an untamed, dangerous forest full of scary things, I think she belongs there rather than your village. You probably wouldn't want her back after that, don't think she's worth saving at this point, might even reconsider who you'll call monstrous and who's the victim now. Maybe this story has more than one kind of monster. And every child growing up will learn eventually that big bad wolves killing your grandmas aren't real; huntsmen are. So really, I think she should learn how to deal with that kind of monster.

THE CREATURE IN MY NECK

by TORANJ NASIRI



drawing by MAHDIYE KAZEMI

I am sitting in the *Wartezimmer* of a *Neurologiepraxis*, surrounded by elderly patients waiting on a regular weekday. I should be at work, but instead, I'm here for yet another doctor's appointment. (I'd guess I've spent half of my 27 years in waiting rooms.) For my neck pain of course. *Nackenschmerzen*, *Gardan Dard* – by now, I know all the vocabulary related to neck orthopedics in multiple languages. But a neurologist? That's a new adventure for me.

This is uncharted territory, a little exciting even.

I am reading *Life Ceremony* by Sayaka Murata while waiting, making the experience even more ominous. The white-haired couple who have been staring at me strangely while I scribbled furiously on the back of a praxis brochure have just been called in. Will I still be here, sitting in a waiting room when I am 72, still trying to figure out why I always have this pain in my neck?

"It's nothing," everyone says. My orthopedist in Iran used to tell my dad, "Toranj has anxiety problems. That's why she's in pain." Does that mean I haven't been un-anxious for even a single day in the past four years? It's always there. It's here now – in my wrist. Yes, it moves at times. It crawls into my hand. Confuses me. Right now, it fights me, fights me while I try to write. It has always fought to stop me from living.

I have often surrendered, lain in bed for months, not going out unless forced to. I haven't washed dishes. I have thought of killing myself or killing the creature in my neck – the thing that has ruptured my life. Does it ever weaken? Does it ever stop using me as a host? Does it ever long for a host body less tortured?

Maybe the creature likes a raptured body, a body tired under years of pain. Ambiguous and alien pain –the kind people eventually think you're lying about. A pain so consistent and so undiagnosable you begin to doubt your own sanity. People will think you're just a lazy, useless set of limbs. No one believes your pain. No one ever believes I have a creature crawling under my skin. Maybe because they cannot feel it move.

A young person just walked in. Maybe I'm not the only young person struggling with chronic pain. Maybe it's not that bad. Maybe it *is* all in my head.

Maybe I love it.

HERBAL TEA

by LUKAS NÜNNERICH

A little girl lies on the cold, metallic table of the examination room. She cries, all babies do, right? She's meant to cry. Her mother isn't surprised she does; her father isn't surprised either.

There's already a bandage on her small hand and on her right arm.

"I thought a herbal compress would do."

Her screams resonate through my body. The molecules in the air dance to the rhythm of her pulse. I inhale them. They riot inside my lungs. Bursting, bursting out.

But my scrubs are heavy, my white shoes stick to the floor. I won't move.

"Can we go now?" Her mother's voice is calm. While speaking, she takes three steps towards the door - leaving her baby alone. She is ready to sign whatever needs to be signed to go.

"Can I go now?" Her mother's voice is indifferent. She wants to go home, no matter what.

The bandages are removed. Her skin is soft and delicate, the way baby skin is meant to be, right? But it clings to the cloth, and layer by layer, it is peeled away.

I see the fat, trying to envelop her. I see the muscles, trying to defend her pure soul. I see the bones, trying to outgrow her helplessness.

Large blisters from burns cover her hand and arm. They swell and grow. They form a barrier between her indifferent family and her fragile fingers, reaching out for a new world.

She is hurt. She has been baptised in boiling water.

Open skin is vulnerable to indoctrination…

Welcome to your new home, little girl.

*

My cousin has two little boys. Well, they used to be little.

I remember collecting herbs with them to make homemade tea. I remember how they dug deep into the earth, pulling up the roots of every single plant, freeing the herbs from the dirt as they dragged them out of their green home. I remember how they both reached for a dazzling blue stone - a leftover shard from a cheap liquor bottle - slicing deep into their skin and flesh.

I bandaged their hands, pressed crushed ice against them. I blew on the covered wounds and drove them to the hospital.

Nowadays, they explain to me why teabags float when you set them on fire. The molecules move faster as they get warmer, the warm air becomes less dense, and with the updraft, the teabags begin to fly.

*

A little boy lies on the cold, metallic table of the examination room. He cries, all babies do, right? He's meant to cry. His father isn't surprised he does; his mother isn't surprised either.

There's already a bandage on his leg.

"I thought a herbal compress would do."

His screams resonate through my body. The molecules in the air dance to the rhythm of his pulse. I inhale them. They riot inside my lungs. Bursting, bursting out.

But my scrubs are heavy, my white shoes stick to the floor. I won't move.

"Can we go now?" His father's voice is calm. While speaking, he takes three steps towards the door - leaving his baby alone. He is ready to sign whatever needs to be signed to go – ready to sign whatever needs to be signed to silence it.

"Can I go now?" His father's voice is indifferent. He does not want to be in the same room as his baby.

The leg is X-rayed. I see the thighbone, made to carry him on exploration tours. I see the thighbone, made to carry him on escape tours. I see the thighbone, bent like a flimsy stick until it snapped.

He is hurt. His nappy has been changed by rough hands.

…broken bones cannot withstand pressure.

Welcome to your new home, little boy.

*

I inhale your screams. But I can't exhale them.

I run – out of the room, out of the hospital. I want to take you with me. I want to rescue you.

Open skin is vulnerable to indoctrination; broken bones cannot withstand pressure.

My fat, and muscles, and bones become chopped-up herbs. Collect them! My skin becomes cloth and paper. Set it on fire!

I feel the molecules in my lungs move faster as they get warmer, the warm air becomes less dense, and with the updraft - I begin to fly. High above, I don't have to feel the pain. I can exhale.

Far away, I can scream.

I can answer you.

THE GREATEST OF ALL TIME: A FABLE

by JUSTUS THEILING

They called me *Überstunden*, or *Übi* in short. Being the smallest, my mother rejected me after my birth and refused to feed me. She had some disease unknown to me, or simply incomprehensible at that time. The medication changed her sense of smell and rendered me unrecognisable to her as kin. When her sense of smell recovered, she recommenced the care of my siblings, but found me, out of all, repulsive. Her gaze passed over me like water over stone, untouched, indifferent, forgetting. And so, I grew beneath that absence, learning to hunger not just for milk, but for some meaning. So I lay there, a creature half-born and half-abandoned, wrapped in the silence that falls only on the unloved. Even the sun, when it touched me, seemed to do so out of pity, not warmth.

I can still see the arms of giants, reaching for me from above, offering me sustenance; I would see none of them. On my third day after my birth, a pair of warm hands touched me and I felt comfort for the first time. She turned out to be my first caretaker. Reaching beyond the limits of her contract and, apparently, ethical standards, she transported me to her home. I soon became integrated in her daily life and began to complicate all of her errands. My presence was generally met with positive regard, although the feeling never left me that I was in the way, that I was different. Her language never reached my understanding, nor did her manners. As for her odour, it always seemed artificial and sterile. When she picked me up, although I was glad for her warmth, the discrepancy between our materials was jarring.

I remember everything. Once, I was left in the care of strangers - university students, as I later learned - because my caretaker needed to attend a meeting where I was unwelcome. Sleep dominated that afternoon, and the strangers took good care of me. At one point, however, I needed to use the bathroom, but due to our language barrier and the others being engrossed in their tasks, no one noticed. I was forced to relieve myself on their squeaky linoleum floor. Nevertheless, they accepted me for what I was and soon cleaned up my mess, which was more than my mother ever did for me. My condition was so intriguing to them that I became renowned among their ranks. Despite my inability to understand them, their voices always sounded high-pitched when addressing me. That made me feel special.

Thus, during my campus escapades, I was the cause of a conflict between two parties - ideologies even - that seemed to have quarrelled for eternities. The people on my side, dressed in bright and colourful apparel, were concerned with equality and the preservation of nature, which the others, who wore monochromatic, minimalist and frankly drab garments, did not like. Just like those evil grey men in *Momo* known to steal time, they ended up stealing my time as well. As I was left grazing by my caretaker's friends - she herself still occupied - the fight between the two parties continued. However, I was unbothered because the beautiful flowers around me enchanted my senses and kept me engaged. During the fight, the opposing side resorted to an unbelievable manoeuvre: suddenly, a strange woman arrived at the scene. She threatened to take me away from my newfound family with my only crime being the form I take up as a living creature: "he is not yours to have. He should be among those of his own species." Yet before her shadow could swallow me whole, my caretaker stepped forth, fierce as thunder. Her words, soft as petals yet sharp as knives, cleaved the silence: "He was abandoned. We took him in because no one else would. He belongs to us now." The air stilled, as if the world itself held its breath, listening. And in that hush, I felt it. Not fear, not shame, but the first bloom of belonging; I had always believed I belonged to no one, that I never would. But now, for the first time, I belonged.

It was not the sheer community it offered me, but belonging itself, and the tender feelings it carries quiet, like breath shared in sleep; like being seen without being asked to change. In her eyes, I was not a burden, not a misfit, not a mistake. I was simply... me. And that, somehow, was enough. The world had not softened, nor had it grown kind, but in that one gaze, in that one voice that dared to stand, a shelter had formed around my fragile self. And so, I grew, not untouched by sorrow, but tempered by it. The wound of rejection never vanished; it became the hollow in my chest where gentleness echoed, but coldness responded. Even as I wandered into the myths of my own making, through forests thick with time and fields stitched with memory, I carried that silence within me. The one that first held me, unloved, unwanted. It taught me to listen to the unsaid, to cradle the abandoned, to feed the small and voiceless before they gave up asking.

Years passed, and I too became a father. My children were bright-eyed, foolish and brave, they never knew the cold I came from, but felt its shape in my love, in how tightly I held them when they cried in the dark. I taught them what I had learned: that even those left for lost may one day be capable of providing refuge. That the existential givens in life include death, isolation, freedom, and meaning, that it is not enough to have anything, but that one must become something. That it is irrelevant whether one turns to Dionysus's cult or to the cloistered stillness of a monastery, to the wild ecstasy of abandon or the quiet rigour of asceticism, so long as the turning is deliberate, and the self not evaded but encountered. And that I once believed the word that makes the world turn is love, but now I think it is choice. For even love must be chosen, again and again, in the face of freedom.

As my tale comes to an end, I would like to add my children's usual reaction to my attempt at endowing them with wisdom: "Wow. That's… deep, Dad. Anyway, do we have snacks, or is this just a lecture night?"

In these moments, I know they see me as the G.O.A.T.



IN BETWEEN

by ZAINAB AL-RUBAI'I

for the whole time i thought i belonged here. i moved through the world convinced that home was not a question i had to answer. but the older i grew, the more i realised that what stops me from fully belonging here is that my existence and identity will always be politicised. my being will always be simplified due the symbol i wear which becomes the lens through which i am seen. i will never be seen as the person i am — the symbol they see me in will always speak for me instead.

this simplification of my personhood deforms me. not just in how others see me, but in how I see myself. the pressure to explain, to justify, to shrink myself into something legible and unthreatening, is relentless. to protect myself from being hurt, i began to withdraw. i chose isolation over exposure. i chose jobs where i could disappear. i no longer entered spaces where i might become a surface of attack. my becoming contorted into survival.

out of spite, i turned towards my roots. but even this return has been a painful experience. while life unfolds around me continues *here*, i am stuck in the memories i made *there*. i never arrived in the life of *here* — instead, i retreat in delusions to shield my physical being from this foreign land. countless mornings, i yearn to walk the same streets my father walked when he was my age. countless nights i cry because the colonial project succeeded in tearing me away from my homeland.

the childhood *there*, that could have shaped me into the person i could have become, was taken from me. the most heartbreaking part is that i will never be fully able to reclaim *her* as my homeland. the distance has alienated me from the place i long for. i mourn the version of myself who never had the chance to exist. my only sense of homeland is the memories, fictions, paintings, and pictures i piece together to remember her. escaping into my own imaginary world becomes the way to survive the dissonance.

and here, i tried to reclaim home.

as i walked the same streets once my father did.

trying to trace the life i would have had, if it wasn't for imperialism.

this is an insight to my imaginary world, the place where my homeland lives on.


NON-
FICTION



BETWEEN CONFORMITY AND TRANSGRESSION: GENDER EXPRESSION IN VIRGINIA WOOLF'S ORLANDO

by ALICIA BODE

INTRODUCTION

"[W]e have no choice left but confess – he was a woman" (Woolf, *Orlando* 97). Playful, multifaceted, and deliberately perplexing, Virginia Woolf's presentation of Orlando in the novel *Orlando*: *A Biography* serves as a canvas for an array of interpretations of gender[1] and identity, and therefore lends itself to various approaches within Queer Theory. Some authors read the text from a lesbian-feminist viewpoint (Knopp; Meese; Nair), others treat it as a narrative on transgender identity (Craps; Crawford). While many scholars apply Judith Butler's ideas on gender and imitation in their analysis and emphasize aspects of androgyny and fluidity, few also consider Orlando's deliberate attempts at conforming to gendered expectations as a means of passing as decidedly male or female. However, coupling Butler's ideas with a framework of passing can deepen the understanding of Orlando's various modes of gender expression within different social contexts and highlight the multifaceted ways of performing gender. This paper thus aims to analyze how both transgressive and deliberately conforming strategies of gender performativity in attire, social interactions, and androgynous presentation expose the constructed nature of heteronormative, essentialist notions. Consequently, it is argued that the novel destabilizes fixed notions of gender and reveals how Orlando's fluid identity subverts the binary framework, exposing it as a socially constructed performance.

The first part of the paper focuses on Butler's thoughts on gender as performative practice and complements it with a theoretical framework of passing. The second part shifts the focus towards a critical analysis of Orlando's portrayal concerning outward appearance. Building upon the importance of this aspect, the third part concerns itself with behavioral codes and Orlando's reaction to gendered expectations in various social situations. The final part then examines their individual identity outside the constraints of compulsory gender performance in relation to Woolf's ideas on androgyny. While knowledge of societal conventions of various eras may present valuable information for the analysis, this paper must omit discussions of historical backgrounds. Similarly, topics such as Orlando's (homo)sexuality or the impact of Woolf's parodic writing style cannot be discussed due to the limited scope of this paper.

GENDER PERFORMATIVITY AND PASSING

Judith Butler's approaches to gender and identity, though published after the release of Woolf's novel, serve as an essential source for a closer analysis of the key topics discussed in the narrative. Butler argues that, rather than being a fixed biological category one is born with, gender is not natural but "constructed through specific corporeal acts" constituting what is then perceived as gender ("Performative Acts" 521). This performative reenactment of behaviors stereotypically assigned to one or the other sex highlights the absence of a true, original notion of gender and therefore of a stable gender identity

[1] In accordance with Woolf's writing, the terms "sex" and "gender" are used interchangeably.

(Butler, "Imitation" 1130f.; Butler, "Performative Acts" 528). Furthermore, Butler argues how deliberate practices of breaking socially constructed gender norms through nonconforming behavior and appearance, such as drag, may expose this performative nature of gender and reveal gender identity as a mere perceived naturalness of certain norms ("Imitation" 1130). Butler also critiques the assumption of heterosexuality as biologically natural ("Performative Acts" 524). They view heteronormativity as a compulsory part of gendered performance since failure to adhere to the expected norms may result in social sanction and exclusion, shaping identity through societal pressure (Butler, "Imitation" 1133). Butler advocates for an understanding of gender and sexuality as neither fixed nor natural and demonstrates how one may challenge established power structures imbued in gender norms through understanding and exposing gender as performance ("Imitation" 1136f.).

While Butler's approach focuses on people's mostly subconscious compliance with implicit rules of gender performativity, the notion of passing complements this theory by examining the effects of conscious adherence to rigid gender norms. In her essay on the experiences of bisexual women, Jessa Lingel defines passing as the capacity to "assume […] membership within multiple communities," a practice she shows applies not only to gender but to religious, cultural, and racial contexts (381). Passing, Lingel argues, requires both knowledge of the persisting social norms and their underlying power structures within the community one wishes to assimilate to and the performance of one's identity in accordance with them (382). As a result, it reveals the efforts required for the performance and subversively exposes and criticizes their necessity (Lingel 389).

Applied to gender, this paper focuses on the performance required for Orlando's passing, and consequently being recognized by society, as either male or female[2]. Orlando rejects, mocks, and subversively criticizes, but at times also deliberately participates in performances of gender. Reading the novel through a framework that combines Butler's ideas of gender constitution and its deliberate utilization in the attempt of passing shows that, rather than reinforcing false binary ideas of gender essentialism, both Orlando's conformity and nonconformity to stereotypical norms serve to reveal gender as performative, fluid, and socially constructed.

CLOTHES MAKE THE (WO)MAN

Outward appearance influences Orlando's presentation and self-perception throughout the novel as it functions as a vehicle for gender expression. Koppen suggests that clothes "as embodied cultural practice contribute to bringing forth and performing culture" and thus have a performative function in relation to Butler's theory (1). *Orlando* opens with the words "He – for there could be no doubt about his sex, though the fashion of the time did something to disguise it […]" (Woolf, *Orlando* 11). While the first word clearly assigns Orlando as male, the ambiguous nature of his clothing contradicts a stereotypically masculine appearance. Descriptions of him having "shapely legs," a rosy face, and wide "eyes like drenched violets" deepen the first impression of Orlando as a young nobleman with feminine features (Woolf, *Orlando* 12). Although his behavior and social standing distinguish him as a boy at the beginning of the story, his ambiguous attire already sets the premise for the rest of the novel, effectively foreshadowing the role clothes play in the constitution and performance of gender.

[2] For reasons of clarity, this paper utilizes masculine pronouns when talking of Orlando before the gender transformation and feminine pronouns afterward. When discussing Orlando as a character outside the context of the immediate plot, the singular gender-neutral pronoun "they" is used.



After her return to England, Orlando's new attire seals her passing as female. Now dressed in a "complete outfit of such clothes as women then wore, […] the dress of a young Englishwoman of rank," she is flirted with by the captain of the ship and offered privileges reserved for women like having "an awning spread for her" (Woolf, *Orlando* 108f.). Lingel notes that passing depends on an audience affirming the performance as natural (388). Accordingly, Orlando successfully passes through adapting to a stereotypically feminine dress code, since she is recognized and affirmed as a woman by the people surrounding her. García-Madrid points out how she first becomes aware of the beauty of her own body when wearing a dress, signaling her newfound self recognition as female (García-Madrid 111; Woolf, *Orlando* 109). A later passage reaffirms how clothes have the power to constitute identity: "[T]hey mould our hearts, our brains, our tongues to their liking" (Woolf, *Orlando* 132). Correspondingly, clothes do not only outwardly gender the person wearing them but also influence self-perception through the internalization of gender identity labels such as female.

Yet, attire can imprison as much as it reveals. Orlando soon recognizes how the same clothes now constituting her identity restrict her freedom of agency and independence. She complains that the skirts hinder her steps when walking and considers that, if she were to leap overboard the ship, she would not be able to swim but have to depend on a man's help to save her from drowning (Woolf, *Orlando* 109). While the proposition holds some appeal for her, it becomes obvious that impractical women's clothing of the early 18th century supports, necessitates, and thus reinforces patriarchal, binary understandings of gender-specific access to mobility and agency.

Another example of the socially imposed restrictions of dress is the nineteenth-century tradition of hiding pregnancy by wearing a crinoline. The narrator calls attention to both the physical and mental strains this attire imposes on women as they describe how Orlando "stood mournfully" and was "dragged down by the weight" of the article of clothing (Woolf, *Orlando* 168). Rather than a conscious choice of clothes, the crinoline is "submissively adopted" and thereby presented as a compulsory imperative forced upon women (Woolf, *Orlando* 168). The recognition of these restrictions through the functionality of dress exposes the arbitrariness of gender norms. It is not the biological sex, but rather the deliberate adoption of corresponding clothes that decide over a person's degree of agency. Subsequently, clothing in Orlando also underlines its inherent gender policies, enforcing rigid binary roles regarding social standing and independence. As Orlando herself states, "[v]ain trifles as they seem, clothes have, they say, more important offices than merely to keep us warm. They change our view of the world and the world's view of us," pointing out the performative act of dressing a certain way (Woolf, *Orlando* 131). While clothes remain powerful tools of expression in highlighting or concealing one's gender, they alone are not decisive of one's portrayal, which is furthermore imbued with societal expectations ranging beyond the confines of a gendered dress code.

GENDERED EXPECTATIONS IN SOCIETY

Clothes, the narrator comments, "are but a symbol of something hid deep beneath. It was a change in Orlando herself that dictated her choice of a woman's dress and of a woman's sex" (Woolf, *Orlando* 132). Orlando's conscious choice of gender identity precedes any external changes visible to society. Thus, while gendered clothes may serve as a vehicle to convey a certain outward expression, they do not suffice to convincingly determine one's "societal gender" (García-Madrid 113). The transformation from man to woman then does not occur, as García-Madrid and Sanyal claim, simply through a change of clothes, but through Orlando's own display of socially deemed appropriate behaviors in her newly assumed role (García-Madrid 113; Sanyal 83). Wearing skirts does not suffice for Orlando to pass as a woman if she does not adopt the corresponding code of conduct. While they may support a perfunctory gender expression, her inexperience threatens to expose her nonetheless since, unaccustomed to her new role, she fails to meet behavioral expectations. Unlike "mature women, who have had the run of it all their lives," Orlando initially struggles to play her role correctly, as illustrated by her mistake of showing her ankles and nearly causing a sailor to fall from the mast (Woolf, *Orlando* 109ff.). Eventually, she learns of the "penalties and the privileges" of her position through observation, realizing that she may indulge in pleasantries reserved for the female sex but that she must also keep to certain rules (Woolf, *Orlando* 108ff.). By learning and following them, Orlando accepts her new position and, as Craps describes it, gradually "becomes feminized" (180). Thereby, gendered behavior is portrayed as a learned phenomenon and can therefore be constructed and reconstructed to maintain public images.

Furthermore, the novel establishes that Orlando is acutely aware of her constant

gender performance. The traits required for her to pass as a woman do not come naturally but require "the most tedious discipline" (Woolf, *Orlando* 110). However, according to Butler, failure to comply with the societal codes would result in punishment and disqualify her from passing, so the constant performance is a compulsory one in most social environments ("Performative Acts" 528). At first glance, Orlando's efforts to conform to stereotypical expectations may sustain the notion of an essential binary framework (Craps 181). Nevertheless, the work that is necessary to portray a naturalness of gender at the same time exposes how any adherence to gendered norms of dress and behavior is a culturally charged undertaking aimed at fulfilling socially constructed obligations.

When cross-dressing, Orlando adapts the according dress and customs to claim membership of either binary gender category in different social contexts for her own benefit (Woolf, *Orlando* 153f.). Having experienced both sets of privileges and responsibilities, she weighs the duties of men against the "pleasant, lazy way of life" as a woman (Woolf, *Orlando* 109). On a surface level, the main advantage consists of navigating society in a way that allows her to take part in the advantages only accessible to either sex so that "the pleasures of life were increased and its experiences multiplied" (Woolf, *Orlando* 153). However, through Butler's lens, Orlando's frequent shift of presentation portrays a deliberate, subversive critique against the very norms she conforms to by showing the ease of slipping into either role through performance of stylized customs. As Burns points out, Orlando does not merely play the roles required of her but strategically decides on her chosen portrayals of gender, thereby claiming agency and a freedom of choice which society would otherwise deny her (346). While many see this as an escape from patriarchy (Dutta 256; Channing 13), Orlando critiques both men's and women's stereotypical behavior (Woolf, *Orlando* 113). Her knowledge prompts her desire to act out both roles, culminating in "an intermix of alternating genders that sometimes correspond to her biological sex and sometimes does not" (Kaivola 252). In conclusion, Orlando's cross-dressing does not only present a refusal to adhere to one set of customs and its responsibilities, but it also portrays a subversive act of rebellion by assuming a fluidity of identity that permits her to control the general system of gendered expectations through her performance.

NONCONFORMITY, FLUIDITY AND ANDROGYNY

Beyond the external pressure to conform, Orlando's performance does not merely oscillate between two ends of a binary gender spectrum. While the previous part establishes the necessity of passing through gendered attire and behavior, Orlando's mode of presentation outside of society proves how her gender is an act solely played to appease social expectations rather than an expression of an inherent identity. The departure from Constantinople after her transformation marks a turning point in her story because it can be interpreted as a temporary retreat from society and its rules altogether. While living among the Romani people[3], Orlando adopts an ambiguous attire. Clothing as a physical marker of gender appears to be unnecessary because "the gipsy woman […] differ very little from the gipsy men" (Woolf, *Orlando* 108). Despite her lack of gender-conforming dress and behavior, her peers regard her as one of their own, which shows that claiming membership of their community does not require adherence to traditional gender roles. As a result, Orlando realizes that despite having been biologically female for some time, "she had scarcely given her sex a thought" until her return to England (Woolf, *Orlando* 108). Evidently, her adherence to gendered norms

[3] Woolf uses the term "gypsies", a common way of referring to an ethnic group pursuing a nomadic lifestyle at the time of *Orlando*'s publication. While her writing does not imply overtly negative views of these groups, the word is nowadays considered derogatory and becomes increasingly replaced by the use of "Roma", "Romani" or "Romani people".

mainly serves to navigate English society rather than representing innate values of femininity or masculinity.

The description of Orlando's transformation further contributes to this understanding of gender as socially constructed, arbitrary, and detached from an essentialist viewpoint. Orlando's biological sex may switch from male to female, but this shift does not fundamentally change her personality and character: "Orlando had become a woman […]. But […] [t]he change of sex, though it altered their future, did nothing whatsoever to alter their identity" (Woolf, *Orlando* 98). In this scene, the narrator deliberately plays with a mix of pronouns whereby the gender assigned to Orlando remains blurry and uncertain. Furthermore, Orlando's nakedness after the transformation, paired with the exclamation "THE TRUTH!" aims to emphasize the undeniable biological change. On the contrary, Orlando's unperturbed reaction counters the expectation of a dramatic recognition of her now different physiology (Woolf, *Orlando* 97f.). Not only does this prove that her character remains unchanged, but it also mocks biological essentialism and shows the disconnect between the physical sex and the socially ascribed gender.

This interpretation matches views on identity supported by contemporary queer studies. Modern perspectives argue for a queer and trans understanding of identity that describes it as not "reducible to singularity, sameness, and exclusion" (Joshua Chambers-Letson 119) but rather as fluid and malleable (Lau 238). Following this line of argument, transgender analyses of *Orlando* claim that this initial transformation is not a sex change at all but rather presents the first stage in a process of a fluid gender identity, which is bound to evolve further over the following pages of the novel (Crawford 178). Indeed, Orlando is often described in ambiguous terms and said to possess both "the strength of a man and a woman's grace" right after her transformation, therefore portraying masculine and feminine traits alike (Woolf, *Orlando* 98). The result is the impression of Orlando as belonging to neither binary sex category but as an "androgynous being" who can freely choose between genders at will but who may also abandon labels and stereotypes altogether (Sánchez-Pardo González 78).

The concept of androgyny is further discussed by Virginia Woolf in her essay *A Room of One's Own* which contains ideas on gender identity that align with and further build upon Orlando's portrayal (Dutta 256; Sánchez-Pardo González 78). Woolf theorizes that the ideal mind is comprised of both female and male attributes, one of which predominates over the other, but which nonetheless cooperate harmoniously (*A Room* 71). This image bears a striking resemblance to passages in the novel: "Different though the sexes are, they intermix. In every human being a vacillation from one sex to the other takes place" (Woolf, *Orlando* 132). Consequently, androgyny as portrayed in Orlando shows that, even in moments of gender nonconformity, the main character embodies a fluidity of gender and identity which serves as a counterargument against frameworks of binary essentialism.

CONCLUSION

In summary, *Orlando* challenges essentialist, binary notions of gender and identity. Butler's approach on gender performativity, as well as the concept of passing, provide a helpful theoretical background for the interpretation of the main character's experiences. The analysis shows how gender-coded clothing influences self-perception and serves as a gendering marker in the effort of passing. This emphasizes how easily a specific gender identity can be assumed through outward presentation according to conventions constructed to reaffirm binary division of genders and their respective access to agency.
Additionally, gender performance requires dressing and behaving in accordance with gendered norms. Orlando's struggle and

eventual conformity to the necessary customs illustrate how this behavior is a learned ability which can be played akin to a theatrical role. Taking control of societal expectations then allows them to experience masculine as well as feminine privileges and responsibilities when cross-dressing.

A closer look at the transformation itself and Orlando's following behavior outside of society reveals that gender is not an objective fact but a carefully constructed, assumed role. The physical change only affects their appearance and behavior when confronted with and forced to submit to societal expectations. Their ambiguous mode of self-presentation during their time with the Roma reinforces the assumption that biological sex does not determine Orlando's individual identity. Instead, these scenes point towards an ambiguity of gender perceived as fluid and malleable. On one hand, this aligns with modern queer theories of gender and identity as flexible. On the other hand, it also shows similarities to Woolf's own idea of an androgyny which effortlessly blends aspects of femininity and masculinity into a harmonious, ideal other that transcends biological and socially constructed dimensions of gender.

Ultimately, the novel portrays how both the strategies of passing through conformity and subversive, nonconforming dress and behavior expose the performative nature of gender. Woolf advocates for the breaking of essentialist binary stereotypes and instead celebrates fluidity, androgyny, and multifaceted understandings of identity. *Orlando* is a novel that plays with ambiguity and inconsistencies to challenge the arbitrary system of gender categorization, already anticipating modern discourse of queer perspectives on the fluidity of gender and identities beyond the binary framework.

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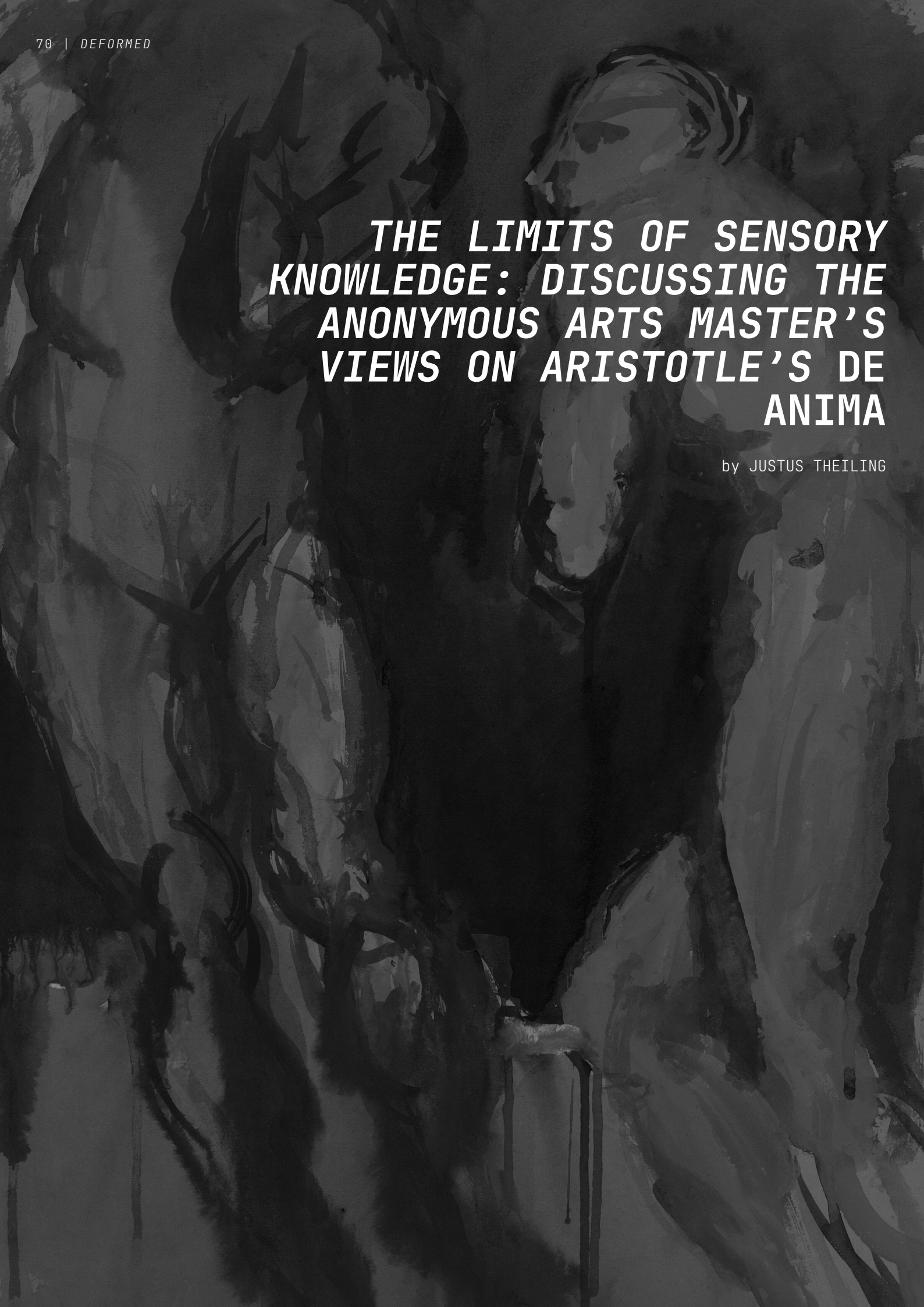
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THE LIMITS OF SENSORY KNOWLEDGE: DISCUSSING THE ANONYMOUS ARTS MASTER'S VIEWS ON ARISTOTLE'S DE ANIMA

by JUSTUS THEILING

The reliability of sensory knowledge, and whether perception accurately reflects the external world, is a perennial philosophical problem. This essay examines the Anonymous Arts Master's text, "Questions on De Anima I–II," a work dated to approximately 1270, the analysis focuses primarily on the second book and the 17th question posed by the author: "How does sense know that the object sensed has a different being from its being that is conjoined to sense?" (76) In posing this, the Anonymous Arts Master addresses a fundamental epistemological issue: the distinction between external reality and its mental representation. He questions whether we can know if the external world truly differs from the way it appears in our minds, and whether we can trust the senses, which mediate our perception of that world. The author addresses a significant issue within epistemology; the branch of philosophy concerned with the nature and acquisition of knowledge. This essay will first outline the problem, then provide relevant historical context for the author's position, and finally, critically discuss the question within its historical and philosophical framework.

The question of the extent to which humans can trust their senses and perceptions is a foundational philosophical inquiry that persists to this day. Its contemporary relevance is highlighted by phenomena such as virtual reality, deepfakes, cognitive biases, and mass media manipulation. The problem's persistence is largely due to the inherent difficulty of achieving an objective standpoint outside of one's own subjective consciousness. This consciousness is entirely dependent on sensory input for its information about the external world. While experiments involving sensory deprivation are common in psychology, they cannot provide a comprehensive understanding of this epistemological dilemma. Given that humans share a common sensory apparatus, it remains empirically unprovable whether individual perceptions of phenomena, such as colour, are uniform. This uncertainty extends to radical sceptical scenarios, including thought experiments concerning simulated realities, as popularized by films like The Matrix (Lana Wachowski & Lilly Wachowski, 1999).

In approximately 350 B.C., the Greek philosopher Aristotle composed one of his foundational works, *De Anima*, a text to which the Anonymous Arts Master would refer over 1500 years later. In this treatise, Aristotle argued for the unity of the soul, positing that it is not a mere collection of independent faculties, but a unified principle informed by data from the five external senses: sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell. Aristotle correlated each of these senses with a specific sensory organ (for example, the ear and hearing). Moreover, he addressed how the senses distinguish between the external object and the sensory faculty itself, particularly in Book II. He contended that the soul has a prominent role in synthesizing the information provided by the senses to construct a perception of the surrounding world. However, Aristotle also acknowledged that the senses are fallible and subject to error. For example, Aristotle (422a-422b):

> Hence it is by the faculty of sense-perception, and not by the faculty of thought, that we perceive that the special object of each sense is one. And it is evident that the sense in question is not mistaken about what is proper to it, e.g., sight is not mistaken about color, nor hearing about sound, and so with the others. But this happens only under normal conditions; if the sense-organ is in an abnormal condition, it may judge incorrectly, as when the tongue is fevered and things taste bitter, or the eye is jaundiced and everything appears yellow.

Furthermore, in 422b:

> …if two properties are presented simultaneously, and only one is really being perceived, we may be misled; for instance, yellow and bitter are both properties of bile, and it may appear that all yellow things are bitter.

In these passages, Aristotle suggests that it is the senses that can be deceived. In his view, the soul itself is not the source of error; rather, errors arise when the soul processes faulty information derived from the senses, imagination, or memory. This implies that, for Aristotle, a cautious and reflective approach to sensory input is necessary. While the senses are our sole source of information about the world, he advocates for critical engagement with the data they provide.

The Anonymous Arts Master composed his text in the thirteenth century, a period of significant intellectual revival in Europe characterized by the rediscovery and study of classical texts. The work itself examines several facets of Aristotle's *De Anima* and is believed to be a collection of unedited notes from lectures on the subject (Pasnau and Stump). Pasnau and Stump (2002) posit that the author may have been Siger of Brabant, a prominent figure at the University of Paris and a proponent of radical Aristotelianism. This era was marked by the flourishing of universities and the philosophical movement of Scholasticism, which sought to synthesize classical philosophy with Christian theology (Haskins 2017). Concurrently, the translation of numerous philosophical works from Arabic into Latin, along with their associated commentaries, provided new interpretive frameworks and intellectual stimuli for scholars of the time (Ivry 2001).

The Anonymous Arts Master initiates his argument by framing the central problem of perception:

> Sensible things have their actual sensed being in the senses, so that their actual sensed being is the being of the senses, and conversely. But the being of those sensible outside the senses is not their sensed being. There is a question, then, of how the senses know that the object sensed has a different being from its being that is conjoined to sense. In what way does it know that it has a being different from a sensed being, a being under which it is not in the senses? (76)

Here, he articulates the epistemological challenge: given that our access to the world is mediated entirely by the senses, how can we ascertain that an external object possesses a being independent of our perception of it? However, after establishing this uncertainty, he argues forcefully against scepticism and asserts the necessity of absolute trust in the senses. He contends that to doubt the veracity of sensory information is tantamount to intellectual nihilism, the belief that knowledge and truth are illusions, and therefore nothing can be known with certainty: "To the question, then, I say that someone who doubts how he knows that an object of sense has a being other than what appears does not believe that the senses are true per se of their sense objects. And I say that anyone who denies this knows nothing for himself" (77). Citing Aristotle's Physics II, he further claims that an individual incapable of distinguishing between what is self-evidently known and what is not "could never do philosophy" (77). This position is notably radical because it stringently dismisses any argument against sensory reliability, equating such a challenge with a complete failure of knowledge.

This radical viewpoint exhibits several points of tension, particularly when contrasted with Aristotle's own more nuanced position. Aristotle himself acknowledged that phenomena such as hallucinations, illusions, and other sensory errors could occur, indicating that the sensory system is fallible and that its inputs require careful reflection by the soul. The Anonymous Arts Master, however, does not engage with this aspect of Aristotle's thought. Instead, he argues from the foundational premise of perceptual certainty, the belief that the senses provide a direct and incorrigible form of knowledge that, in his view, requires no further justification.

Admittedly, a baseline level of trust in the senses is pragmatically necessary, as they constitute our only source of empirical information. However, this functional trust must be qualified by a critical awareness of the potential for systemic bias and error. The Anonymous Master's line of argumentation proves inadequate when confronted with phenomena such as simple optical illusions like the phenomenon of a mirage, where distant objects appear displaced or distorted due to atmospheric conditions. Sometimes the trick is subtle: a colour appears to change, not by altering itself, but by standing among other colours that make it seem transformed. Additionally, there is the illusion of size-contrast, where identical objects appear to be different sizes when placed against larger or smaller surrounding objects. These examples illustrate how the senses can be misled or manipulated by external conditions.

Consequently, the proposition that the senses should be regarded as absolute and beyond critique is untenable. Such a position would preclude necessary reflection on their fallibility. The catalogue of identified cognitive biases continues to expand with advances in cognitive science, underscoring the ubiquity of perceptual errors, many of which were known to medieval scholars. To insist on foundational axioms that cannot be challenged is problematic, as it contravenes the fundamental philosophical principle of critical inquiry.

Therefore, a more nuanced perspective than that offered by the Anonymous Arts Master is required to approach this enduring problem. This perspective must acknowledge that the senses are subject to numerous biases that influence perception and cognition. Without such acknowledgment, one risks perpetuating errors in judgment. A critical, rather than absolute, trust in our senses is essential for sound epistemological practice.

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EVE KOSOFSKY SEDGWICK'S BREAST CANCER: NARRATING THE ILL SELF IN RELATION, LOSS, AND GRIEF

by ANNA WESTHOFEN

TAKING MEDICAL DIAGNOSIS AS A CENTRAL MOMENT

At the age of 42, the literary scholar, poet, and artist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick was diagnosed with breast cancer which instigated a recurrence of her depression and, consequently, her return to psychotherapy. Her 1999 memoir *A Dialogue on Love*[1] emerged from the background of Sedgwick's breast cancer experience in the course of which she underwent chemotherapy, double mastectomy, and metastasis. In the form of prose and poetry, *A Dialogue* contains Sedgwick's intimate reflections on her life story, an intellectual account of her experience of breast cancer as well as the ongoing dialogue with her therapist Shannon.

As another genre form of life writing, Sedgwick's essay "White Glasses," originally presented at a conference in 1991, is an AIDS obituary which she wrote for the gay academic Michael Lynch, one of her close friends who was dying of the disease but unexpectedly recovered. In the essay, she intricately juxtaposes Michael's and her experience of breast cancer and AIDS, respectively, as the writing of the obituary coincides with Sedgwick's sudden breast cancer diagnosis.

A Dialogue and "White Glasses" take medical diagnosis – Sedgwick's and her friend Michael's – as their central moment in a time that was marked by HIV/AIDS activism and political shifts in the women's health movement in the United States. In both works, Sedgwick's conceptualization of breast cancer and AIDS – the ways in which both illnesses are politicized and the experiences of these illnesses intersect – is embedded in her confrontation of the greater themes of loss and grief. Thus, in close reading *A Dialogue* and "White Glasses" as parallel texts, I argue that Sedgwick experiences her breast cancer 'in relation *to*' and develops an articulation of loss and grief that enables her to reformulate her identity as a queer heterosexually married woman living with breast cancer.[2]

In theorizing 'loss' and 'grief' as affects, I will work with a definition that renders affect as an evasive yet organizing force that is charged with "intensities and resonances" (Seighworth and Gregg 1). As such forces, affects circulate in societies and, thus, constitute social-political spheres between the individual and public (Ahmed 119). Moreover, in analyzing Sedgwick's narration of her self, I will draw on the theoretical concept of the 'experiencing subject' that understands itself "through multiple domains of discourse" (Smith and Watson 32) – that is, through language, images, narratives, and metaphors – that organize societal life (32).

In this paper, I will begin by mapping out dominant medical and public discourses about AIDS and breast cancer in the United States of the 1980s and 90s and situate Sedgwick's critical thinking reflected in her literary works within this socio-political moment. I will subsequently analyze the ways in which Sedgwick puts her breast cancer experience in relation to her friend Michael's AIDS diagnosis and, more broadly, the social

[1] Further in-text mentions of *A Dialogue on Love* will subsequently be abbreviated as *A Dialogue*.

[2] In the scope of this paper, I use the terms 'identity' and 'self' synonymously.

context of the AIDS epidemic. Finally, I will turn to articulations of loss and grief presented in *A Dialogue* and "White Glasses" to examine the ways in which Sedgwick engages with these affects against the background of her illness and, in doing so, produces formulations of her ill self.

SITUATING SEDGWICK'S LITERARY ENGAGEMENT WITHIN AIDS' AND BREAST CANCER'S SOCIO-POLITICAL SIGNIFICATIONS

A Dialogue and "White Glasses" were published at a time that marked the rise of "liberatory identity politics and AIDS activism" ("White Glasses" 201). In response to the deeply stigmatizing and homophobic discourses that informed HIV/AIDS healthcare politics and societal imaginations of the disease, an activist agenda emerged in the US in the late 1980s (Chan 5-6).[3] Modeled on the activist practices of the US women's health movement of the 1970s,[4] gay men were the first to publicly respond to discriminatory practices and cultural conceptions of AIDS (Hobson 158). In turn, a new wave of breast cancer activism arose that was primarily impelled by lesbians and built on the political paradigms of HIV/AIDS activism (Sedgwick, "Breast Cancer" 155).

In her classic *Illness as Metaphor*, Susan Sontag has worked out AIDS' "dual metaphoric genealogy" (102) that comprises the idea of the body's military invasion and pollution by the disease (102). The public's understanding of AIDS in the 1980s and 90s was largely informed by the disease's association with indulgent and delinquent behavior (111) that, ultimately, inflected a larger ideation of "sex regarded as deviant" (111). Representations and, crucially, fantasies about AIDS were projected onto the male homosexual body (Treichler 42). As such, processes underlying the social construction of AIDS figured in the analogy of the disease as "a story, or multiple stories" (42): AIDS – that quickly developed into the disease of media and discourse – primarily "became visible in images and language" (Kagan 8) which spurred the public mind's pathologization of homosexual sex and male homosexuality in particular (8).[5]

In line with one of the main concerns of the women's health movement in the US, breast cancer activism sought to challenge "the male bias" (Klawiter 6) that drastically determined developments in the healthcare industry and the treatment practices for those affected by breast cancer in medical institutions (6). In the 1990s, the environmental breast cancer movement emerged in response to corporate campaigns amidst mainstream breast cancer awareness and decidedly addressed the environmental causes of breast cancer (Ley 2-3, 7). Similarly to HIV/AIDS activism, the re-organized political alliance around breast cancer culture in the 1990s sought to combat US-American "medical imperialism" (Klawiter 25) and "industrial capitalism" (20) which regulated treatment and care options for both diseases.

In the context of the 1980s and 90s, AIDS and breast cancer, thus, emerged as strongly "metaphorized illnesses" (Sontag 124) which, consequently, shaped the policy-making around each illness on a discursive, medical, and institutional level: AIDS, on the one hand, was analogously understood "as a battle for the body of the gay male" (Treichler 60) and identified with fault, guilt, and perversity (Sontag 111). Breast

[3] On a general note, I would like to stress that, even decades onwards, many of the stigmatizing discourses about AIDS outlined in this paper live on to this day and are, thus, still inflicted on those affected by the disease.

[4] Emerging in the late 1960s, the women's health movement (WHM) formed in the context of US second wave feminism and was initially concerned on women's reproductive rights—in particular, the legalization of abor-tion—and later expanded its focus to other issues relating to women's health care (Norsigian 844). Most nota-bly, the WHM was organized around the Boston Women's Health Book Collective (later known as the Our Bod-ies, Ourselves Collective) (844).

[5] The first official case of AIDS was reported in 1981 in the *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Youde 301).

cancer, on the other hand, was closely tied to "prevailing gender ideolog[ies]" (Ehrenreich 46) and hegemonic discourses about the body with breast cancer that mythologized and fetishized the (female) breast (DeShazer 20, 51).

IN RELATION: SEDGWICK'S BREAST CANCER EXPERIENCE AMIDST THE AIDS CRISIS

In "White Glasses," Sedgwick recursively turns to the ways her ill friend Michael inhabits his AIDS infection. In relating to Michael's diagnosis, she views the experience of AIDS not just as a matter of embodiment but, "by the imperative of visibility, defiance, solidarity and self-assertion" ("White Glasses" 202), as an act of performing illness (202). As Sedgwick contends, she learned from Michael's AIDS experience, the ways in which he, as a gay male, takes on the role of the sick AIDS patient:

> So much about how to be sick—sick to occupy most truthfully and powerfully, and at the same time constantly to question and deconstruct, the sick role, the identity of the "person living with life-threatening disease"—had long been embodied in him, and performed by him, in ways that many of us, sick and well, have had reason to appreciate keenly. These are skills that could not have evolved outside of the context of liberatory identity politics and AIDS activism, but their flavor is also all Michael's own. (201)

Here, Sedgwick's description reflects Michael's *coming-out* of his AIDS diagnosis — his identification with the illness and, at the same time, deflection of it as the core of his sexual identity as a gay man — and his move to "entrust as many people as one possibly can" (202) with the experience of AIDS. In this gesture performed by Michael, Sedgwick sees the urgency of resisting the state, institutional, and discursive powers that forcefully circumscribe the subject position of any individual living with AIDS (202). However, recounting Michael's illness experience from a second-hand perspective also allows Sedgwick to present a deeply personal account of the (Michael's) "complicated, arbitrary diagnostic process around AIDS" (194). Evoking memories of Michael's dwindling strength and attention but also the sudden recurrence of his appetite and energy (195-96), Sedgwick continues Michael's endeavor to *entrust as many people* in narrating an account of an actually lived experience of AIDS in the obituary.

While Sedgwick initially wrote the obituary for Michael under the premise of her "survival and exemption" ("White Glasses" 196) — and, thereby, the fallacy that she was healthy and Michael fatally ill — Michael's AIDS experience helps Sedgwick to enter "into this new, cancer life" (*A Dialogue on Love* 5).[6] For Sedgwick, her breast cancer diagnosis not only presents itself as a disruption in her life experience but also a profoundly ontological grapple with her own gender identification develops from her diagnosis. At the time of Michael's illness and her own diagnostic moment, Sedgwick views herself as a woman living in a heterosexual marriage who primarily identified with the (for her familiar) scene of feminism ("White Glasses" 194). However, as Sedgwick declares, her breast cancer diagnosis both symptomatically and symbolically confines her to an essentialist notion of womanhood: "All this as if the most obvious thing in the world were the defining centrality of her breasts to any woman's sense of her gender identity and integrity" (203). Refusing to identify as a woman on the essence of her breasts and breast cancer diagnosis (203), Sedgwick *sees* herself in Michael and his AIDS experience which is metonymically expressed in her buying the same fashionable white glasses he wore when she first met him (193). The glasses represent male homosexuality; they

[6] Quotations from *A Dialogue on Love* will subsequently be abbreviated as *ADoL*.

"mean (meant) nothing but Michael" (195) and make Sedgwick feel like him (195). For Sedgwick, wearing the white glasses produces "uncanny effects that have been so formative of my — shall I call it my identification? dare I, after this half decade, call it with all a fat woman's defiance, my identity? — as a gay man" (197). In Sedgwick's writing, living with illness is depicted as "a specifically queer form of performativity" (Diedrich 62) as it emerges in "*meaning*, *being*, and *doing*" (Sedgwick, *Tendencies* 2) and is, thus, an immanently relational experience.[7] Her lived experience of breast cancer alongside with that of Michael's AIDS infection impels her to both resist the legibility of her self as essentially female and, in consequence, intervene in the sphere of male gay identification.

In Sedgwick's construction of illness experience, the discursive and medical meanings of breast cancer and AIDS are persistently juxtaposed: Whereas breast cancer is gendered as a distinctly female disease (Sedgwick, "Breast Cancer" 154) and identified by the parameter of cell proliferation, AIDS is defined by its reputation as the illness of gay males (Kagan 8) and known for the destruction of cells (Sontag 105). It is the medical distinction of the two illnesses "whose metaphors [yet] overlap" (129) from which the dichotomies that pervade "White Glasses" develop: Michael's illness and unexpected recovery, Sedgwick's assumed health and her following cancer diagnosis, her rejection of an essential identity as a woman for that of a gay man. Ultimately, in *A Dialogue*, Sedgwick formulates a confessional realisation: "Also if the world is divided… into people who are inside the experience of the AIDS epidemic and people who are outside it, then I seem to be way inside" (9). Here, too, her insideness is compensated by Michael's leap out of AIDS stigma by conferring his diagnosis to other people. Therefore, the semantic intersection of AIDS and breast cancer — the relationality of the two diseases evolving from their distinct mutuality yet opposition — "allows her [Sedgwick] to create identification across difference" (Pearl 64).

In the article "Melanie Klein and the Difference Affect Makes," Sedgwick contours AIDS' and breast cancer's respective underlying affective charges more explicitly. Her own breast cancer diagnosis never evoked the same intense affects of "anger, disbelief, or even dread" (298) in her as AIDS did: According to Sedgwick, AIDS figures as the new, not yet treatable disease which early symptoms are unspecific but debilitating (298). However, the deep dread — the "dominant tonality" (297) of the AIDS crisis — evoked in those contracted with it is immediate, almost acute, and viscerally felt. Breast cancer, in turn, presents an old, even in the very beginning of its etiology, less stigmatized disease that is "vicarious as opposed to direct experiences of pain and debility" (298). At least in its early stages, breast cancer symptomatically emerges as an imagination — most often occurring at first as an indeterminate lump that is felt in the breast (but also as in: breast cancer's early symptoms are not as acute or painful while, paradoxically, proliferating cancerous cells destroy the body from the inside). Living with cancer involves — as Sedgwick reveals in her memoir — the continuous, sometimes delusive "physical anxiety…about the possibility of cancer recurrence" (90). Crucially, for patients, breast cancer paradoxically reifies in loss that, most blatantly, becomes visible in preventive measures and/or treatment options of chemotherapy and mastectomy.

[7] As Lisa Diedrich also notes in her article (62), Sedgwick's definition of the term 'queer' builds on its etymological meaning as relational (*cross*) and strange (*Tendencies* xii). Thus, in its broadest sense, Sedgwick describes 'queer' as "[a] continuing moment, movement, motive—recurrent, eddying, *troublant*" (xii).

LOSS/GRIEF: FORMING THE SELF IN ILLNESS

Common breast cancer treatments — chemotherapy, radiation, immunotherapy, and (prophylactic) mastectomy — often entail embodied forms of loss, such as surgical breast removal and hair loss. Loss, thus, operates as one of the primary affective dimensions of the experience of breast cancer. Predominantly framed as a negative kind of affect (Breu and Hatmaker 8) that takes on many forms, loss mostly figures as "loss as part of the self" (Brinkema 66). As David L. Eng and David Kazanjian describe, however, also innate to loss is a productive affective force:

> We might say that as soon as the question "What is lost?" is posed, it invariably slips into the question "What remains?" That is, loss is inseparable from what remains, for what is lost is known only by what remains of it, by how these remains are produced, read, and sustained. (2)

An identification of these affective workings of loss in the scope of the breast cancer experience presupposes an understanding that with breast cancer, loss is as much personal as it is embodied. The embodied losses breast cancer involves act as incisions on patients' pre-diagnosis subjectivity, their sexuality, and body image (DeShazer 125). For Sedgwick, the experience of embodied loss chiefly figures in baldness and breast removal as she had to undergo both chemotherapy and double mastectomy (*ADoL* 3, 92). The loss of her hair and the amputation of her breasts leave Sedgwick to wrestle with existential questions about her self — the corporeal losses in breast cancer, as she states, "are the ones that feel disproportionate" (63). Sedgwick's configuration of loss as disproportion becomes more pronounced in her description of the physically and emotionally harrowing experience of double mastectomy:

> The best description I can give Shannon: I've lost my third dimension. I have the sensation that the front and back of my chest cavity are glued together with fear; there's no place for my hammering heart, no interiority. No rooms to go into, and no one to go into them. I'm so much at bay that my whole materiality has flattened. (92)

In the face of the bodily alterations Sedgwick sees herself confronted with, her articulation of her experience of loss signifies the ways in which her subjectivity hinges on body image (Schultz 74). In fact, her perception of her post-mastectomy body and, thus, sense of self is a direct demonstration of how "the injured body bespeaks its alienation" (74): Her postoperatively fractured body misholds her but, as she is acutely aware, she cannot and does not want to "fit the pieces of this self back together at all" (*ADoL* 7). This realization is similarly expressed by Sedgwick when, after chemotherapy, her hair slowly starts to grow back: She fears "to have long to thirst / anymore in the stony / desert of that self threatening to recompose itself in the same way in the same dazed and laborious place" (9). Here, the contingency of loss unfolds: It invariably involves bereavement but its consequence can be both a felt absence as well as an affirmation of an undoing (Brinkema 45). Loss's creative force is reflected in one of Sedgwick's poems when she recounts from her teenage years: "for me, even when / I had the two breasts / I kept forgetting them. They / weren't there for me" (*ADoL* 78). Sedgwick's rehabilitation of the for-her-familiar sense of bodily alienation portends how loss operates in productive ways and is repealed. In particular, the confrontation with loss recursively leads her to "the fragmentation which she has in her own sexuality" (78). Although, at first, Sedgwick's breast cancer diagnosis relegates her in the positionality of a woman — "Shit, now I guess I really must be a woman" ("White Glasses" 202) —, it more lastingly reminds her of her own "incomplete identification" (Goldberg 74). The loss breast cancer that involves *creatively* impinges self-revelation and -formation; it evokes Sedgwick's "availability for…identifications" ("White Glasses" 203) with other genders and prompts a repositioning of her sexuality.

Instead of "the mortifying self-loss she had imagined" (*ADoL* 83) with the beginning of therapy, the anticipation of losing her pre-diagnosis self elicits a reformulation of her subjectivity. Sedgwick narrates her ill self—the I "with new fears and temporalities" ("White Glasses" 197) that is configured out of bodily alterations but also "new knowledge, expectations, angers, luxuries, and dependencies" (197) — under the condition of the self's continuous mutability. For Sedgwick, the process of constructing a narrative around her illness experience lays bare deeply ontological questions; however, her self-narration does not offer closure. Rather, her turn to writing is a *reaction* to subjectively experienced loss. To that end, Sedgwick's endeavor to narrate her self echoes the "counterintuitive apprehension of loss as creative" (Eng and Kazanjian 5). Thus, "keep[ing] a record" (*ADoL* 116) of a self

that, in the progression of illness, is continuously in transition, functions as a protection against losing versions of it.

Implicating the state of "apprehending a mode of dispossession" (Butler 25), grief as affect both precedes and instigates the writing of *A Dialogue* and "White Glasses" for Sedgwick. However, grief manifests in different ways and takes on various forms in both of Sedgwick's texts. In *A Dialogue*, grief expresses in the recurrence of Sedgwick's depression following her breast cancer diagnosis (3). Indeed, in depression, grief finds its etymological origin: "it begins with a pressure on the body, a dragging the body down to earth like gravity, a vector of invisible force pulling down and down further still" (Brinkema 73). In turn, in "White Glasses," grief is instigated by the idea of a loss that is yet to come: Sedgwick writes her homage in the anticipation of Michael's death, which she labels as an "obituary presumption" (196). Grief, which is generally perceived as "a private passion" (Brinkema 72), becomes public in the act of Sedgwick's honoring of her friend Michael. However, as Monica Pearl asserts, "White Glasses" transgresses genre conventions: The essay does not adhere to the obituary's "unilateral" (62) quality through which a deceased one is remembered by a living person. Instead, the essay presents a paradox that thwarts the obituary's generic function (62): Michael suddenly recovers, and Sedgwick is diagnosed with breast cancer. As Sedgwick outlines:

> I thought it was a good way to deal prospectively and perhaps lucidly with a process of shock and mourning about Michael's loss that had, indeed, already become turbidly disruptive in my life to a degree I found I couldn't share more directly with Michael. … Now, shock and mourning gaze in both directions through the obituary frame. ("White Glasses" 196–97)

While Sedgwick's writing of Michael's obituary initially stands as a commemorative gesture of mourning, her obituary presumption impedes the productive processing of grief. By force of Sedgwick's own diagnosis and, subsequently, the shared experience of illness, her grief transmutes. The grief, which is metonymically contained in the white glasses, symbolizes Sedgwick's pain of the anticipated loss of her friend *and* the fear of "her own demise, for which the fetish might be expected to provide a talismanic protection" (Pearl 77). Sedgwick's use of metonymy in the obituary illustrates how grief is preserved — and, partly, the pain of irreversible loss eliminated — through her fetishization of the white glasses. Similar to *A Dialogue*, grief's distinct figuration in "White Glasses" testifies the ways in which the experience of illness emerges as relational through the shared personal afflictions implied in living with (and dying of) breast cancer and AIDS.

AFTER DIAGNOSIS: IN CONTINUAL TRANSFIGURATION

A Dialogue and "White Glasses" shape as self-narratives about illness — the texts center around Sedgwick's subjective experience of illness and her ensuing inquiry about her identification as a woman diagnosed with breast cancer. As both works reflect, Sedgwick is immersed in discourses about breast cancer that are comprised of politicized narratives, imaginations, and tropes about the illness. Thus, Sedgwick's critical thinking about breast cancer, AIDS, and, by extension, illness as such, attests her own implication within the ideologies and narratives that constitute these illnesses' societal meanings. However, Sedgwick does not fully self-identify with her illness and its cultural significations. Through the immersive modes *relating* and *being in relation*, Sedgwick acts against the pervasive politics of the AIDS crisis and cross-identifies as a gay male. Yet, her illness does not make her queer; rather, in illness, Sedgwick demonstrates *how* queerness is performed — that is, relationally and in flux: Her identity is mutable, always contingent *upon* experience and the relation

to others.

For Sedgwick, the act of narrating her illness is not about recovering her pre-diagnosis identity. Inevitably, as she realizes, to be ill is to be bereaved. The loss emerging from Sedgwick's illness and the ensuing grief are central to her experience of breast cancer. In other words, Sedgwick recognizes that loss and grief do not represent an absolute subtraction of the self – instead, these affects engender mediation. Against the experience of loss and grief, she persistently reformulates her own understanding of self and opens up perspectives as becomes apparent in the prospect of Michael's death and her own embodied loss. As such, Sedgwick's engagement with the varied forms of loss and grief that surface in the course of her illness asserts a conception of her identity as queer, in continual transfiguration.

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ECHOES OF THE MIND: BETWEEN SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCE AND SCIENTIFIC UNDERSTANDING OF SCHIZOPHRENIA

by JUSTUS THEILING

> Don't let us forget that the causes of human actions are usually immeasurably more complex and varied than our subsequent explanations of them.
> - Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Idiot*

The profound observation by Dostoevsky serves as a crucial framework for understanding one of the most complex and enigmatic of human conditions: schizophrenia. The term itself, coined by Eugen Bleuler in 1908, derives from the Greek *skhizein* (*σχίζειν*, "to split") and *phrēn* (*φρήν*, "mind") (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries). This etymology, however, is often misunderstood as referring to a "split personality," a misconception perpetuated in popular culture. Bleuler's intended meaning was a "splitting of psychic functions," describing a fragmentation of thought, emotion, and perception, where the intricate synthesis of mental processes collapses. This schism between internal functions and an individual's connection to reality has rendered schizophrenia a subject of enduring fascination and profound misunderstanding, not only in clinical settings but also within the annals of literature.

The elusive and destructive nature of this disorder has been explored extensively in creative works. From the duality depicted in classics like *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and the perceptual distortions in Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart* and Hoffmann's *Tales of E. T. A. Hoffmann*, to the psychological unravelling in more modern narratives such as *Fight Club* and *Shutter Island*, the experiential elements of schizophrenia have been a persistent theme. These literary portrayals, while not clinical documents, reflect a deep-seated cultural effort to grapple with the profound alterations in consciousness that the disorder entails.

This essay seeks to bridge the gap between fictional portrayals of schizophrenia and the lived reality of those who experience it, framing the condition as one of the human mind's most radical deformations, splintering identity, disrupting narrative, and reshaping the self. Offering a psychological insight into the potential origins and pathology of schizophrenia, this essay draws upon qualitative data gathered for my bachelor's thesis. Through interviews conducted in psychiatric wards, several patients articulated their own theories regarding the genesis of their condition, remarkably linking its onset to their engagement with literary works such as Michael Ende's *Momo* or religious texts like the *Mahabharata* and the Bible.

The central aim is therefore twofold: first, to explore these unique personal narratives of illness, and second, to connect these patient-generated explanations to established scientific and psychological theories of schizophrenia's aetiology. This text will begin by providing a clinical overview of schizophrenia and outlining the methods used for data collection. Subsequently, it will present the specific narratives connected to literature and analyse the underlying cognitive processes. In doing so, it will argue that the formation of such explanatory narratives is not an artifact of the pathology itself, but rather an intensified manifestation of a universal human tendency to construct stories to make sense of phenomena that might otherwise remain inexplicable. The following introduction is part of my bachelor thesis:

THE SCHISM OF SELF: CLINICAL BACKGROUND

Schizophrenia is the cause of severe individual suffering, confusion, the loss of an individual's personality and identity, and the pure inability to take part in their community. With around 24 million people affected worldwide (World Health Organization, WHO), the disorder has a tremendous impact, and its societal burden has constantly been increasing over the last decades (He et al.). Still, the aetiology of schizophrenia remains subject of heavy debate, without extensive understanding of its origin.

Schizophrenia affects 0.32 percent of people worldwide, and it is often diagnosed between late adolescence and the mid-twenties, although females experience symptoms a few years later in life (WHO; Abel et al.). Additionally, the life expectancy is lower than that of the general population, leading those diagnosed with schizophrenia spectrum disorders to die approximately 15-20 years earlier (Peritogiannis et al.), and up to 10 percent end their life by committing suicide (Davis et al.). Schizophrenia is seen as a multifaceted disorder. It causes disturbances in thought, language, sensory perception, emotion regulation and behaviour (American Psychiatric Association). The disorder mainly manifests itself through positive and negative symptoms. Positive symptoms mainly manifest themselves through delusions (i.e. fixed beliefs that remain despite overwhelming counterevidence). Delusions are the most common symptom in acute and active stages of schizophrenia (Baker et al.). Additionally, positive symptoms of schizophrenia include hallucinations (perceptions without external stimuli), disorganized thinking and speech, and abnormal motor behavior. These symptoms are termed positive because they represent an addition to the individual's typical experience. Negative symptoms are characterized by slowing and depressing behaviors, those include alogia (decrease in the quantity and/or quality of speech), autism, ambivalence, and affect blunting (a reduction in the outward expression of emotion) (Arantes-Gonçalves et al.). Overall, the symptom range of schizophrenia is broad, unique and mostly results in significant environmental ramifications for those impacted.

Symptoms mainly seem to appear through neurological processes. Biomedical models showed connections between the dopamine system and the positive symptoms of schizophrenia (Yang and Tsai); however, the dopamine theory proved insufficient to explain the disorder entirely, as negative symptoms could not be explained (Kanahara et al.). A psychological model that explains how mental disorders and certain behaviors develop, such as the diathesis stress model, uses a more comprehensive approach, stating that psychotic symptoms may arise from an inherent biological vulnerability that is triggered by psychologically stressful life events (like divorce, natural catastrophe, trauma, drug abuse) and daily stressful patterns (Jones & Fernyhough; Myin-Germeys & Van Os). The emergence of psychotic symptoms is commonly attributed to the confluence of a preexisting genetic predisposition alongside specific psychological stressors (Pruessner et al.). Furthermore, the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis (HPA axis), a complex neuroendocrine system that regulates the body's stress response and maintains homeostasis (influencing the release of hormones like cortisol), is frequently used to explain the interplay of psychological stressors and the human hormonal system. Pruessner et al. suggest that HPA axis imbalance, particularly marked by amygdala hyperactivity, can trigger severe psychopathological symptoms, such as psychosis. Moreover, Jones and Fernyhough propose that constant stress leads to increased cortisol production in the HPA axis, thereby triggering schizophrenic symptoms in people who have a pre-existing genetic vulnerability, one that according to Hilker et al. the majority (80 percent) of schizophrenia cases possess. Consequently, the HPA axis is related to the diathesis stress model, wherein an imbalance in the HPA axis caused by psychological stressors can trigger a biological vulnerability for psychotic symptoms. Croft et al. supports this dynamic by illustrating that experiencing stressful trauma before reaching the age of seventeen raises the likelihood of encountering psychotic experiences by age eighteen. These findings indicate the essentiality of grasping how environmental factors contribute to an individual's stress experience when exploring the aetiology of schizophrenia.

In total, eight individuals were recruited for the research, all of whom are currently residing in a psychiatric ward. The sample consisted of four males and four females, that are aged between 29 and 69 years (M_{age} = 53.12 years, *SD* = 12.56). The participants' age during illness onset ranged between 20 and 28 years of age (M_{time} = 23 years, *SD* = 2.24). Furthermore, all participants had attended the German school system: three had attended the Hauptschule (a lower secondary school typically focused on vocational preparation), three to the Realschule (a mid-level secondary school offering both vocational and academic tracks), two had completed the Abitur (the university-entrance qualification obtained at an academic high school), and two had completed an apprenticeship (a formal vocational training program combining school and workplace learning).

During the interviews, the participants mentioned biological, psychological and social influences for the origin of their symptoms. The most common thematic areas mentioned were "childhood stress", "taking drugs before the illness onset", "having a biological relative", and interestingly "reading certain literature". The last point of which the focus on this essay will be.

LITERATURE AS MIRROR AND CATALYST

In total, three patients formed a personal narrative about the origin of their schizophrenia symptoms by connecting the disorder with literary works. The works mentioned were *Momo* by Michael Ende, the *Mahabharata* (one of the two major Sanskrit epics of ancient India revered as sacred texts in Hinduism) and the Christian Bible. Interestingly, two of the three participants who mentioned these works had received the highest level of education. Both finished their studies at a master's level in literature and started a PhD program, during which they experienced the first symptoms of schizophrenia. The third did not finish his A-levels because symptoms of the disorder appeared before his exams. In the interviews the participants mentioned these narratives:

Participant one:

> When I did my PhD in classical Latin I struggled for months because there simply wasn't any literature for the subject I and my supervisor agreed on. I felt that my time was running out and I was completely stressed 24/7. […] During that time, I also read *Momo*. A book I already read during childhood. At some point I noticed that I started to feel like a character from the book named Beppo, the streetcleaner. […] I started to think like him, always being like "Step-breath-broom streak". I noticed that I constantly felt dislocated, and I noticed that other characters from the book spoke to me during my studies – they annoyed me and stopped me from continuing my work. […] At some point I had to terminate the programme because I simply could not focus with all these voices in my head.

Participant two (not included in the final bachelor thesis):

> My entire life I felt different. The others were always better at talking to each other and I was mostly silent. […] I was raised in a very Christian household but never really read the Bible. […] However, when I was completely overwhelmed during my PhD about Shakespeare, I started to find comfort in reading it [the Bible]. At the beginning I thought I could really connect my life to the book, but at some point, I noticed that everything written felt very real and that I was meant in several of these passages.

> [that was also the time when] I noticed different things. I felt more alive and the world around me spoke to me in some way. […] I began to understand that I was also a prophet that needed to follow god's plan. […] All of that would not have happened if I would have not picked up the Bible at that day.

Participant three:

> I always felt different as a child. […] From a young age I engaged in spiritual techniques to find answers for so many things […]. When I read about Arjuna in the *Mahabharata*, I felt very linked to someone for the first time and while my parents were wondering about me reading the book the entire time, I did not notice that I drifted away from everything – school, friends, my family. […] [At some point] I noticed all kinds of symptoms. I could not sleep, I felt very active all the time, I started to read the book even it was not in the same room with me. […] One day I realised that my parents had put me into a hospital. [all] because of this book.

NARRATIVES OF DE-FORMATION: PATIENT VOICES

These personal narratives, raw and compelling, offer an interesting window into the subjective experience of emerging psychosis. They are not just anecdotes; rather, they serve as powerful illustrations of the theoretical models previously discussed, particularly the diathesis-stress model. In each case, the literary or religious text does not act as a pathogenic agent, but as a cognitive and cultural platform upon which the individual attempts to build a coherent explanation for experiences that challenge ordinary understanding. The process observed here is an intensified version of a fundamental human cognitive function: the creation of narrative to impose order on chaos.

The account of participant one, a doctoral candidate in classics, vividly demonstrates this process. The immense psychological pressure of his PhD programme for example the feeling of "time running out" and being "completely stressed 24/7", represents a significant environmental stressor. This stress appears to have activated a latent vulnerability. His turning to a childhood book, *Momo*, is initially a coping mechanism, a retreat to a familiar world. However, as the psychotic process unfolds, the narrative of the book is co-opted. His identification with the character Beppo and the adoption of his mantra, "Step-breath-broom-streak," can be interpreted as an attempt to structure his fragmenting thoughts and impose a simple, repetitive order on an increasingly chaotic internal world. The subsequent emergence of auditory hallucinations, wherein "other characters from the book spoke to me", shows the complete fusion of his psychopathology with the literary framework. The narrative of *Momo* provided the specific content for his psychotic symptoms, transforming abstract cognitive disruption into a tangible, albeit delusional, reality.

Similarly, participant two's narrative highlights the interplay of long-standing personal traits, acute stress, and cultural resources. Their lifelong feeling of being "different" and social reticence may point to a schizotypal predisposition, constituting the diathesis. The overwhelming stress of the individuals Shakespearean PhD acts as the trigger. In this state of crisis, turns to the Bible, a text available to them through their Christian upbringing. Her experience follows a clear trajectory from seeking comfort to developing ideas of reference ("I was meant in several of these passages") and ultimately to the formation of a grandiose delusion ("I was also a prophet that needed to follow god's plan"). This narrative serves a powerful psychological function: it reframes a terrifying loss of self and reality into a transcendent experience of divine purpose. The illness is no longer a descent into madness but an ascension to a higher calling, a testament to the mind's desperate search for meaning.
Participant three's connection to the *Mahabharata* follows a similar pattern,

rooted in a pre-existing sense of being “different" and an early interest in spirituality. His intense identification with Arjuna, a character defined by profound internal conflict and existential crisis, likely resonated with his own inner turmoil during a vulnerable developmental period. This intense focus led to social withdrawal, a hallmark of the prodromal phase. The subsequent symptoms (insomnia, hyperactivity, and unusual perceptual experiences) were woven into this narrative framework. The book became the explanation for his alienation and eventual hospitalization, a single, powerful cause for a complex and multifaceted illness.

Ultimately, these cases powerfully support the notion that the content of psychosis is often shaped by an individual’s cultural and intellectual toolkit. For these highly educated individuals, literature and religious epics provided the rich symbolic systems needed to articulate the inarticulable. This process of narrative construction is not pathological in itself; it is the same mechanism that allows all humans to make sense of their lives. We weave stories about our successes, failures, and relationships to create a coherent sense of self and the world. Just like in dreams, where our brain tries to make sense of the overflow of stimuli by forming it into a story, which we often find hilarious, because we can distance ourselves from it when we wake up. In schizophrenia, this fundamental drive for meaning-making is confronted with the profound and alien experiences of psychosis. The resulting narratives, while divergent from consensus reality, are not random. They are deeply personal, logical in their own way, and serve the critical function of providing an answer to the terrifying question of what is happening to one’s mind.

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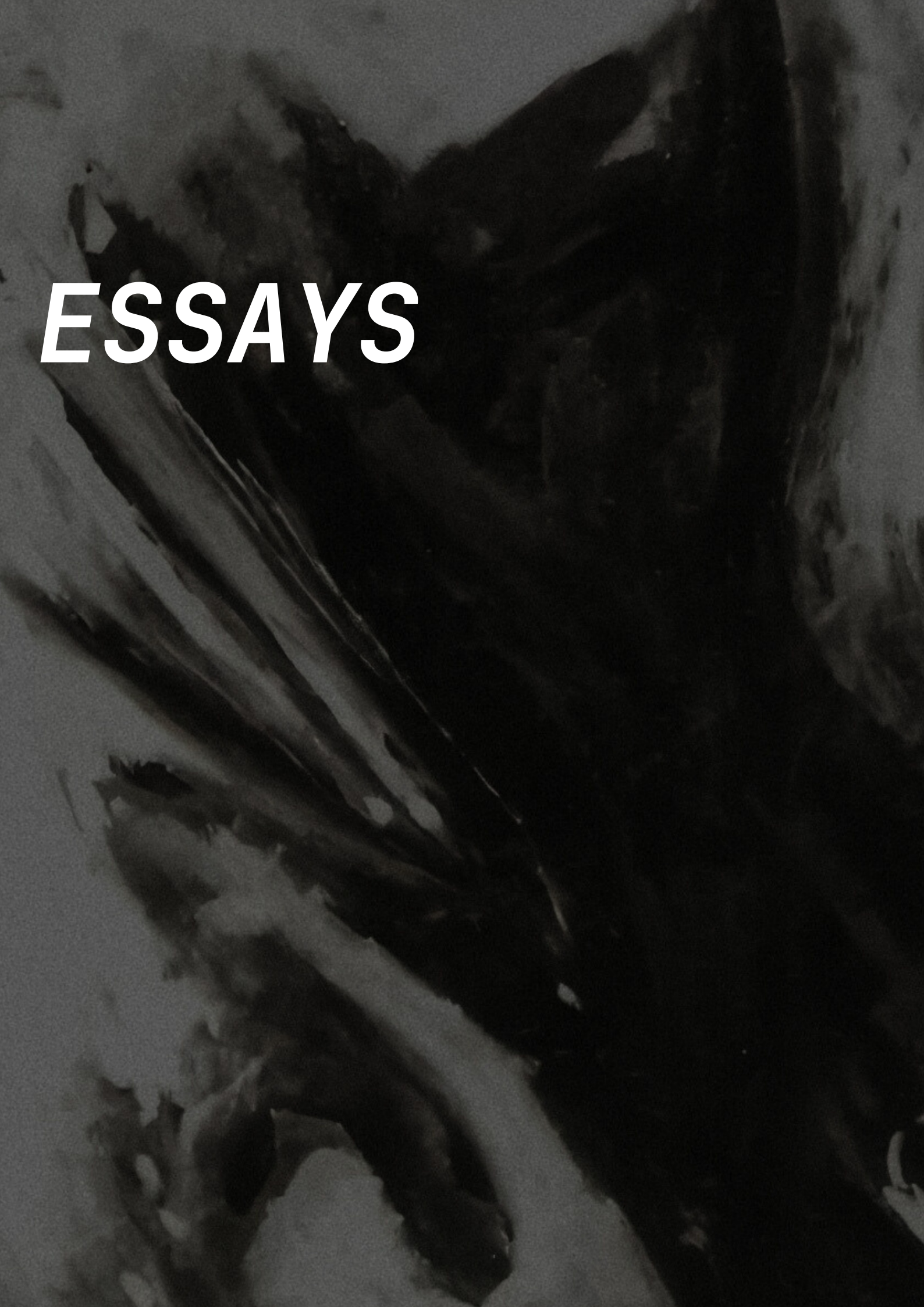
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ESSAYS

ON WRITING: BONE & MUSCLE

by DAVID SUMMERFIELD

Craft and substance are the bone and muscle of creative writing; precision, research, clarity, and detail are the connective tissue.

When I started writing creatively, I tried to imitate the craft of my favorite authors. I thought imitation would teach me the craft of creative writing. I thought imitating the craft of accomplished writers would be a surefire way to a successful creative writing career. I was wrong.

I discovered that the best writing can never be imitated; only Hemingway can write like Hemingway. No matter how hard I tried to duplicate the work of a great writer, I could never create a product with the same weight and effect. I had discovered the first flaw of creative writing is to copy the craft of another writer, especially a famous one, because the work a writer is famous for defies imitation.

This futility led me to the first rule of creative writing—you can only write like yourself. A realization that left me with a blank stare. How can I bend tenets of craft to write like myself when I don't know who that self is? I had a vision of life and the world that was only muddled at best.

So I stopped trying to hijack the work of great authors, with standard tenets of craft, the bones of my writing. After endless drafts, clarifying, organizing, and uncluttering my mind, I was able to overlay bone with muscle of substance, muscle that came from the authenticity of my own thoughts and values, not someone else's. I began to read the classics again and in the works of many unknown writers found tenents of craft married to unique visions like the one I had informed for myself. After many full-scale workouts struggling to build out that substance of my own themes and ideas, I was finally able to graft that muscle with precision and clarity onto the bone of craft. I had found the inspiration to write in a unique voice that was wholly my own, and I wanted each new piece to be a muscle pump in the mind of the reader.

Forming my own thoughts and opinions left me free and eager to write. Pretty prose became more incisive, clever writing more insightful. Toward developing my own style of writing, I had become better at weaving around obstacles of people telling me how to write, some bits helpful, most not. One useful bit of advice included holding on to scraps cut from earlier pieces, building an archive of connective tissue to graft into new work. I was told there was good connective tissue, such as metaphor and simile, and bad connective tissue — to use certain words to make the writing more interesting, to not use excess adjectives and adverbs, but I found this advice made writing more difficult than it needed to be. I found that sometimes metaphors and similes were window-dressing and just pretty language, that

some forbidden words afforded a precise number of syllables to improve and maintain a certain flow, rhythm, or emphasis in a sentence, paragraph, or in between sentences and paragraphs.

Craft and substance are the bone and muscle of creative writing; precision, research, clarity, and detail are the connective tissue. Craft comes with constant disciplined writing; rarely does it emanate from inspiration, with precise cutting and tightening constantly working and re-working those fibers of muscle that are the details of sentences and paragraphs into the most clear and concise presentation possible, remembering always that the bone of craft is inert without the muscle of substance to give it movement, force, and power.

Research is the fiber that imbues that muscle of substance with strength, not research for accuracy in time, place, and setting, although these details are important, but rather research regarding the author's own sense of himself, his/her ideas, values, and beliefs, which inform a vision of life, a view of the world which enables one to write. The creation of serious, thoughtful literary fiction, nonfiction, and poetry begins with researching oneself first, continuing to explore, develop, and discover that self through subsequent writing so that the substantive self and craft progress together along a path toward accomplishment, enlightening an audience, and continuing to create from that ongoing exploration. Writing created not from the heart of an examined life, an enlightened self, but solely from objective research renders creative writing soulless and not worth writing. Writing should come from the desire to know more of that self, and a desire to impart to an audience the results of that continuing journey. Substance is not born from craft or objective research; craft is born from innovation and imagination built on substance, the desire to form that examined inner world into an accurate, comprehensible view of life and the outer world, its brutality and its beauty, its glorious successes and its abject failures.

The most important bone in the creative writing process is the one that protects the most important muscle in the creative writing process, the brain. The brain grows stronger with exercise, constantly marrying substance to craft at a regular time in an ordered place conducive to a vigorous and fruitful work-out session called creation. Not having made something from nothing but from the exercise of having already analyzed one's individual and practiced attitudes, the art itself being a by-product of such, until the act of creation becomes habit, builds on itself, and not in a negative sense, an addiction of endless discovery, never arriving at a point of stagnation or boredom. Such a routine that becomes normal and has an automatic trigger against becoming satisfied is the common denominator of living one's life as an artist; such a routine keeps one moving forward on a path to the future and self-actualization, the essence of true artistry. When the bone and muscle of creation is strapped to an arrow of substance and craft the journey of creation becomes a missile upon which to ride bronc-busting style, a rocket to shoot out over the abyss on, hat waving boot kicking past dread, despair, nothingness and the absurd, straight into the laughing face of the sun, with a feeling of well-being, and except for eternal slumber, no pink slip.

OF SOME ORIGIN: RECLAIMING KURDISH IDENTITY

by ADARA

What does it mean to belong to a community that demands you to exist in a particular way? For many Kurds in Türkiye, identity is not only inherited but constantly negotiated; every word, every gesture, every choice filtered through a lens of suspicion or denial. In this essay, I aim to explore the emotional and political terrain of Kurdish identity in Turkey with a focus on my generation. It draws on personal memory and broader social commentary to examine how state policies, cultural expectations, and intercommunal tensions create a layered, often painful, experience of belonging. Through the lens of language, memory, and self-naming, I seek to express this broken feeling of identity.

I have often found myself navigating the difficult terrain of identity in Türkiye, especially when I choose to use terms that challenge the dominant national discourse. When I describe myself as "from Türkiye (*Türkiyeli*)"[1] instead of "Turkish", I am not making linguistic errors or dodging labels: I am asserting a deliberate political statement. These choices are frequently met with confusion, suspicion, or outright hostility. As many scholars in the field of ethnology have noted, the terms *Turkish* and *Turkic* carry different meanings. In fact, the 1982 constitutional law of the Republic of Türkiye declares in article 66 that "anyone who is connected with the Republic of Türkiye through citizenship is thereby Turkish". The latter, by contrast, is an ethnic indicator, typically referring to one's bloodline. Many central Asia countries, such as Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan identify with the term *Turkic* as well. The word root, Türk, which is the same word for both Turk and Turkish in Turkish language, is undeniably an ethnic marker. However, for years, legal and governmental system did not accept non-Sunni Muslims or other minorities as equally Turk. For instance, until the 50s, military schools declared that they are seeking "fully-Turk" students and were rejecting other ethnic identities. As a result, the identity of Turk is often used both as civic and ethnic category, blurring the line between nationality and ethnicity. The use of *Kurdish* as a result used as a marker of identity, however, continues to be restricted as it is frequently reduced to a trait rather than acknowledged in its full political and cultural complexity.

With the emergence of a new age, non-Turkish minorities try to embrace a national-communal identity with the word *Türkiyeli*. This is a huge step, mind you, because until now these people have been accused of refusing to be part of this community. The word Türkiyeli, in my opinion, is a breaking point in our social discussions. Türkiyeli allows non-Turks to share a communal space, to actively participate. It does not erase any culture but states that national and ethnic identity are not necessarily the same to feel connected. Many people express that it hinders this long-wished nation-state of Türkiye, but they fail to see how others are now proposing a middle ground. The idea of a complete nation-state and the efforts to establish it hurt many, even the Turks, for decades. If one wishes for a Kurd to embrace the national symbols of Türkiye, this is a solid attempt to declare this belonging.

When you check Wikipedia for the most important politicians, artists, writers of the Kurdish heritage and culture in Türkiye, you will be seeing "of Kurdish origin" rather than "Kurdish". The irony is this also applies to people who are highly vocal about their Kurdish identity. People using "of Kurdish-origin" is, for me, a reflection of lived complexity. It acknowledges one's heritage while also recognizing that "being Kurdish" in Türkiye is not a simple identity, but a politicized and often dangerous one. In many settings, to openly object the general label Turkish when you are described and instead insisting on using Kurdish is to risk being seen as separatist, disloyal, or just overly dramatic. There are times when people ask me "Why does it bother you to identify as a Turkish?" I try to

[1] The Word is being used to emphasise one's locality and citizenship rather than ethnicity, can be rephrased as "Turkeian".

explain to them that it is not because it bothers me, but it is simply inaccurate. That stance does not root from hatred: I exist because it is what I am. When I refuse to conform, when I insist on speaking from the margins, I am subtly or overtly punished. I am questioned, dismissed, or accused of disloyalty. These linguistic choices may seem small, but they carry enormous weight. They are acts of resistance against a contract I never signed but am constantly held accountable to. As for using the term Türkiyeli, the distinction may seem trivial to some, but in a country where citizenship and ethnicity are tightly interwoven under the ideology of the nation-state, it is seen as a provocation. I do not say *Turkish* because the term has been historically racialized and politicized, used not just as a civic marker but as an ethnic ideal.

In Barış Ünlü's book the *Turkishness Contract* (2018), he describes the "contract of Turkishness" as a system of unspoken but powerful expectations that binds citizens into a hierarchy of legitimacy. According to this contract, to be fully accepted, one must act, speak, and even feel *Turkish* in a very particular way, one that erases difference and glorifies uniformity. "To refuse the label *Turkish* is to break this contract and thus to face its consequences" (Ünlü 177). Barış Ünlü's work reveals how the contract of Turkishness is not just an ideological structure but a social performance. Citizens who want to be recognized as *proper* subjects must distance themselves from identities deemed marginal or threatening. For Kurds, this often means either suppressing Kurdish identity or framing it in ways that are palatable to the dominant gaze.

I was born in a small town in east, with a population consisting mainly of Kurds. It was not an unusual thing for me to see political conflicts, especially between different political views or supporters of different political parties, or believers of different religious confessions. In my town, as majority of the people were Kurdish, we know that our neighbors, friends were Turkish. Whatever political parties people choose to vote for, they also knew that their friend, me, is a Kurd. However, when I was visiting my grandparents living in a western city in Türkiye, I was faced with a crucial difference. People used the word *Kurd* as a slur. I was at the playground of my grandparents' street and little children around my age was calling each other Kurd to ridicule and swear. My name became a derogatory term for them to just scream. An offensive word. Or when a person acts rude they ask, "Are you Kurdish", when you have an Eastern accent while speaking Turkish, people take you less seriously.

While I was surrounded by the culture, history, and presence of my identity, I could still never fully access it. My language, Kurmanji, a branch of Kurdish language, was never taught to me. Even though my parents do speak it, it was not spoken in our home more than just the basics to keep the guilt away. It was not welcomed in our schools. While politicians debated on accessing education in one's native language, we didn't even have education about our own. We were taught English as a foreign language starting from elementary school, then the high schools generally offer German as well. However, even though Kurdish is the second most spoken language in the country, demanding education in native languages is often used to profile one's ideology as a separationist. Our names are in Kurdish, we knew some of our teachers were also Kurdish, especially in eastern regions, but they could not even speak it for the kids to make them understand the class better as it is most probably would have cost them their jobs. Many people overlook the harsh reality, many Kurdish children learned Turkish when they are in elementary school, just one generation ago. These rates were much higher before, as now less and less children experience this with the raising urbanization policies. But this unfortunately resulted in their alienation of their mother tongue.

Over time, absence of my mother tongue turned into a quiet grief, a persistent

feeling of being disconnected from something. Language is more than a tool for communication; it is a vessel for memory, culture, and belonging. Without Kurdish, I often felt like a guest in my own heritage. Family gatherings were filled with words I couldn't understand. Stories, and expressions that carried generations of wisdom and emotion were lost on me. I could only observe from a distance, never fully participating. It was like looking at a beautiful painting behind glass, close, yet untouchable. This sense of loss was not just personal, but political. It is true that in Türkiye, the Kurdish identity has long been marginalized. For many families, choosing not to speak Kurdish was an act of survival, a way to protect their children from discrimination or state pressure. People try to erase their accents, hide their original tones of their voices to be taken seriously while speaking. My grandfather remembers his time, filled with bloody conflicts, murders, massacres and torture. A past in which Kurdish people were automatically classified as enemies, terrorists as some of them actually chose that path. A past where mothers went to see their imprisoned sons but not being able to speak to them, as speaking Kurdish was forbidden. "Kamber Ateş, how are you" is the most heart piercing line for me while trying to educate myself about language restrictions. This line was memorized by the mother of Kamber Ateş's, who was a prisoner in the 80s after the military coup. His mother, who did not speak even a single Turkish word desperately wanted to hear his son's voice during visiting time, and she would repeat the same line she has managed to memorize, over and over as she would be beaten by the guards if she spoke Kurdish. "It was in the 80s!" they say, to argue that those times belong to a post-military-coup era and these pains were supposedly *inevitable*. Yes, and it was in 1920s when the state released certain propaganda, such as "Citizen! Speak Turkish! Exhort those who do not!" because state allegedly did not have any other choice to impose an identity to secure the community. However, it wasn't that long ago when the courts had declared that the subjects that spoke Kurdish during the trials are to be recorded in the court records as "speaking in an unidentifiable language". It was this day when theatre artists got detained because they put a Kurdish play on the scene. It was now a guy got stabbed because he was playing a Kurdish song. People always say it is the *Kurdish terrorists'* fault that people got this intolerant. The thing is, this started way before the PKK[2] was founded.

These people grow up, assimilated, persecuted and the result is a generation like mine, caught between worlds, searching for a voice we were not allowed to have. As I grow older, I feel a deep desire to reclaim what was denied to me. Currently, some schools, especially in Eastern regions with a higher Kurdish population, offer their students elective classes in Kurdish language. It is not as bad as it was in the past, but this is a dangerous narrative as well. Kurdish is the second-most spoken language in Türkiye. Many people would say, "You are allowed to be Kurds now, so what else do you want?" While we are allowed to speak Kurdish, it is limited to private areas as the governmental institutions lack multi-language services. Presidency of Religious Affairs offers their *khutbah's*[3] in English, Arabic, German and six other languages, none of those are spoken by Türkiye minorities. Until 2013, every single primary school was obligated to make the students recite *Andımız* (Turkish Student Oath) in the mornings which is about being virtuous, compassionate and respectful pupils. This oath starts with the lines "I am Turkish and I am truthful….". and ending with "May my existence be a gift to the Turkish existence!" Declaring your Turkishness and pledging to sacrifice yourself while being non-Turk is a very weird feeling. But stating that is seen as

[2] PKK is the armed Kurdish organization founded in 1978, who is responsible for many terrorist attacks in Türkiye ever since.

[3] Public preaching of İmam's in Islam which carries the admonitions, good-wills or messages after holy days or Fridays. The Presidency of Religious Affairs is the highest authority in Türkiye in terms of religious matters.

being hateful towards this great big message: love your country and be a decent citizen! But what was I supposed to feel if this citizenship does not include me?

Many people believe that the Parliament is the place to solve all these problems. One of the most memorable spectacles was the ceremonial acceptance for the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye taking place in 1991 when Leyla Zana, one of the first Kurdish activists to be a member of the parliament read the Parliamentary Oath, which every single deputy member must say out loud to serve in the parliament, but she added a small Kurdish sentence after she finished with the oath. One might think after seeing how others reacted – a crowd of angry, swearing men almost lynching the woman – that she must have threatened or degraded the Republic. In fact, what she said was "I am making this promise for the solidarity and fellowship of Kurdish and Turkish people". Now, people from other parties also deeply condemn this display of violence towards her, although not fully accepting her act. But, as I discussed before, the attempts to erase the other continuing. A deputy member from the minority-dominated Dem Party, George Aslan was giving a speech in the parliament in December 2024, he wished, as an Assyrian Christian, a "Happy Christmas" to all of the Christian communities in Türkiye. When he wanted to repeat his wishes of a happy Christmas in his native language, which is an endangered language in Türkiye, his microphone was turned off by the moderator. The question was simple, as Aslan said, why do the people who recite the Qur'an in original Arabic in the parliament do not get the same treatment? If it is about the so called "holiness" of a message for a religious community, he claims that Jesus Christ himself spoke his language. The argument is not only limited to the Kurdish people in Türkiye, it is about all the minorities who try to exist and fight against erasure and hegemony.

But there is also another side of the medallion. "You are not fighting enough", argue some Kurdish people. The majority would obviously not be trying to suggest participating in armed resistance while saying this, but there are other ways to shame people who are trying to find a middle ground, such as using Türkiyeli while introducing themselves. I once spoke to a Kurdish person who is from another country, and he claimed that unless we reject everything that the state dictates us to do, we will never reclaim our identities as free Kurdish people, and willing to use Türkiyeli is complicity to him. While we cannot and should not deny being Kurdish, we also do not have to reject the multicultural heritage that has shaped us. Growing up in Türkiye made me a different person than him or others. Everyone has their own experiences with what they are surrounded with. There is no doubt that the state caused pain for minorities for centuries, but there are so many names that honors the Kurdish heritage in Türkiye. Probably the most known one is the singer Ahmet Kaya. He was an unprecedented singer for the music industry in Türkiye and a proud Kurdish person. I remember an instance when a friend and I played a song by him, one of our Kurdish friends claimed that him using the Turkish language and belonging in the Turkish traditional music is complicity. I feel that there is no acceptable way to exist outside the dominant framework. You are either too complicit, surrendering to the cultural hegemony or you have to fully distance yourself from everything that belongs to the dominant culture. But people forget that a way must be there, that honors your heritage and establishes an equal life. Whenever I see another diaspora Kurd, I feel anxious to have a conversation with them. I am afraid of being shamed for not being a proficient Kurdish speaker or for still trying to establish an identity in Türkiye. I am afraid of not being accepted or respected by them.

In a society where inclusion often requires the erasure of difference, asserting personal or communal identities becomes a radical act. I do not expect everyone to

understand this instinctively. But I hope that in time, the space will widen for identities that do not fit neatly within the nation's narrow definitions, identities like mine that speak from the fault lines rather than the center. Many people claim if we were to allow people to exist in their own different identities, it would make them go further away from the majority. They argue that it is only going to separate the minorities from society. However, embracing my connections with Turkish culture and heritage would be much easy if I could still exist as me, a Kurd, who is a citizen of the Republic of Türkiye. The thought of "being the same, walking the same and speaking the same" is not the only basis for a strong community.

For me, learning Kurdish now feels like an act of healing and resistance, but also sometimes makes me feel ashamed. My grandmother is 85, I have never fully conversed with her aside from few sentences she could understand or fewer ones that I can form. I always needed someone else to translate for us. The jokes that made everyone laugh but me have shown me the silent pain of shame, erasure, but also the power of rediscovery. Every word I learn brings me closer to home. And I wish that people could see how being multicultural is a treasure that we ought to cherish. I wish a time will come when we celebrate Ramadan together and have water fights in Vartavar with our Armenian neighbours.

It is not too late to embrace each other and exist with our own uniqueness. I am longing for a time in which I can declare that I, a Kurd, am a citizen of Türkiye and cherish my heritage.

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PURPLE LINKS

by MATTHIS FRICKHOEFFER

Every hour a new lifetime amount of content is uploaded to the internet.

The art critic Dean Kissick writes, “Some of my favorite stories I’ve read over the past few years have been published by Patrick McGraw’s Heavy Traffic magazine.” I don’t care about the stories – I only care about one. And it’s less the story than the person who wrote it. The second issue of *Heavy Traffic* has instead of a cover a few paragraphs printed on the front wrapper. It reads:

> You have to be at least 21 to get a license to open carry in Texas so I became 21. I live in Kirbyville, Texas and this is my true life. Kirbyville has a population of 2.000 and was placed on the border with Louisiana. I was born here but I won’t die here because I’ll die somewhere in Broward County, Florida. I’ve driven to Florida and back three times in the last two years. My name is Buddy Mold.

I sat in my apartment in Hamburg and hoped Buddy Mold was real. I hoped that he’s in Kirbyville, that this piece was autobiographic, but it’s not. I’m a literature theorist and I care for these things. I care for the autobiographical project, the idea that writing can reflect an author’s experience – and I care for the opposite, the assumption that one could write something unlinked to one’s own intertext.

Buddy Mold is a fictional character by Marcus Mamourian. And as it states further in the Kissick interview with McGraw it was published postmortem. Marcus Mamourian passed away in early 2022. The magazine was published early 2023, the Kissick piece around the same time.

On August 14, 2022, at 7:04 PM User-1739726019651910028 asked in the Goodreads forum: “My friend passed away but their account was set to private. Is there anyway [sic.] to override this setting so I can read his reviews? His name was Marcus Mamourian, and this was his account”, followed by a link to a private account with 615 ratings and 75 reviews. I have a screenshot of this post in my notes app.

I am trying to reconstruct how I found out about Mamourian. The above-mentioned interview with McGraw already includes Mamourian’s death, so I was aware of it from the beginning. I read the paragraph about Buddy Mold’s passing and then discovered the death of the author.

So, I am googling Marcus Mamourian as I am writing this. The autofill-in gives me two additional key words – Marcus Mamourian Accident, Marcus Mamourian Obituary. I’ll open *Accident* – I’ve seen this page before. Three headlines:

Addison Independent: Penn. man in car strikes tree near Lake Dunmore.

Vraim Funeral Home: Marcus Mamourian Obituary | May 16, 2022.

Goodreads: My friend passed away but their account was set to private.

I read the first article. This Marcus is from Pennsylvania, he hit a tree in 2019, but he survived. He is my age. The second link, the obituary, is the Marcus I've been looking for. I remember this from the first time I searched for him. There's a picture of him and a description of his life. He went to Brown and Dartmouth, studied Comp. Lit. and German. He even spent a research stay in Berlin. I don't know why I expected him to be of the same age as me. Maybe it's just because of the German connection. But as I'm reading his accomplishments, I question how old he was. After college he went into academia, and it seems like he got accepted into Duke for law school, but this never happened by how I can interpret the obituary.

> He adored his sisters, taking great pleasure in their happiness, and he was deeply honored to recently become the Godfather to his nephew, Nazareth Mamourian Thompson. He was extraordinarily well read, loved French film, rare books, his 20-year-old Ford Ranger truck, and nature.

At the end of the website are two links, one sends flowers to the family, the other one plants a tree. One tree costs $39.95, you can get a reduced prize if you buy three, five, ten, twenty-five or fifty trees as a grove. I can't tell where the trees are planted nor can I choose the species, but it says the funeral home works with Ponderosa Pine, Red Spruce, Long Leaf Pine, Jack Pine, White Bark Pine and Thornscrub White Oak. 43 trees were planted in the memory of Marcus Mamourian.

Every tree purchase is listed with the person's condolences. It's pretty sad reading through them and it's the first time in this research I feel uncomfortable – so I stop and only skim the names to see if one is familiar to me. It feels like a breach of privacy to have these condolences publicly accessible, to be read from everywhere at any time. I can't tell why I care so much. Researching a stranger online feels like an intimate act, like a pure experience. Maybe it's the curated-ness of the internet, of the artifacts I look at, that makes it real to me – realer than real. I can have this truly to myself. Mamourian is dead and I can choose how I remember him, even if I have no actual memory.

Right before I'm about to close the website and go back to the search results, I see a black button which says *turn music on*. The button is under his picture, right next to the share button for Twitter, Facebook and email. Maybe I'm not often enough on funeral home websites, but none of this is what I expected. In fact, I missed every funeral from every death in my family so far. My sister and I sometimes joke that she goes to the funerals, and I go to the weddings. The music is a piano piece by the O'Neill Brothers. My initial thought was that this would link to Marcus' radio show – but it makes sense that it doesn't.

I believe the reason why I'm looking into all this is that I see Mamourian's writing as truly *online*, as truly contemporary; it's not just the style and content but the mode of its production itself. What it means to be online as a mode of existence – a reflection.

I've studied German Literature by now for eight years. But in the last years I got more into comparative approaches, looking at literature across language borders. That's the online discourse anyways – it's connected, cultural hegemony.

So, I got into reading the aforementioned *Heavy Traffic* Mag., because I was looking for this aesthetic, for the online experience. People socialized on twitter getting into prose. Posting vs. writing. But

Mamourian did this way earlier. A lot of the *online* discourse in literature got accelerated through Covid. But I find these motifs and *sujets* by Mamourian way earlier. There's a poem he wrote together with Alec Mapes-Frances for the *College Hill Independent*, some New England Alt Lit Mag., published in 2016. It's called "Cease N. Desist" and looks like a collage of different headlines, links and hypertexts. It was hard to find, the actual piece as an image file because of the odd formatting. Google did not read it as text for my search request and therefore did not recommend it. I read the piece as a stream of consciousness but not in a 1929-Berlin-Alexanderplatz-Döblin kind of way but as truly contemporary; again, as a representation of being online. All the fragments resemble a state of mind. I never googled the other author Mapes-Frances. I don't care for him right now.

So, what is online writing besides a set of aesthetics and motifs derived from posting? It's saying *this text is part of something bigger*, it says *the online/offline distinction* is over, Baudrillard was right – it says *I don't care if you don't know the references, if you don't get it, because it's time-based anyway, it's based. It's frantic, it's chopped*. Online writing means: We're strangers to ourselves – *etrangers il nous-memes*.

Since everything is stored, I can search my phone to figure out when I first read about Mamourian. I find the following chat history from the 17th of January 2024:

7:38 you saw the cover of issue 2?

yes, that's the one i wanna read 7:38

7:44 the text is called buddy mold by Marcus Mamourian

👍ty i`ll do some digging 7:49

7:53 i found zero
7:54 keep me updated

nothing- makes sense it would only be available where it's published haha 8:11
did find his orbituary :(8:11

8:30 yo what?
8:30 u sure its him?

I am confused about the time stamps. Maybe the chat history got messed up in between sim cards and time-zones, but the person I was writing to was in Boston, six hours behind my timezone in Hamburg. And I was not looking at this in the morning either, or was I? I thought I knew longer about Mamourian. I know I thought about him for a long time.

Mamourian wrote: "I flew from JFK to CDG and stayed at an Airbnb that I think was in the 13th but I won't check because I'd have to read old emails and I never read old emails out of principle. […] Paris, it seemed to me, was just like any other place, only maybe prettier. [...] Nothing anywhere really ever changes. Everywhere you go, there you are." It's finally autobiographical – no more Buddy Mold. In this piece Mamourian briefly describes going to this one club as an 18-year-old first time visiting Paris. The club is on a boat on the Seine. I was there in 2022. I'm certain it's the same. But more importantly does Mamourian later write it was 2014. We are/were actually the same age, born in 1996. I had a feeling. The confirmation makes it even more sad. I am now 28, two years older than he will ever be.

Scrolling down the Google search result list again, I find another Marcus Mamourian buried at the same funeral home. I'll call him *Marc*. Marc was buried on the 24th of March 2020. He was 102 years old. His parents were Armenian immigrants. He lived most his live in Philadelphia, he was sent to Europe in WWII. Seven trees were planted in his name.

His funeral service is also included on page 11 in the quarterly published newsletter *Looys* of the Holy Trinity Armenian Apostolic Church. There's a pdf of it called HTAC-Looys-Spring-2020.pdf – most of it is about the church and Covid. I can't tell if Marc was a regular here, his name is not listed on the members' birthdays page in the issues before his passing. On page 25 and 26 is a quiz to *Discover your spiritual gifts*. You answer twenty-one questions and then get assigned one of the following: prophecy, serving, teaching, showing mercy, encouraging, giving or leading. I wonder if I can take the test online.

On the second page of Google results I find a website stating: New Scholarship Established in Memory of Marcus Mamourian. This is *my* Marcus again. His parents founded a scholarship in his name to support students preparing for priesthood at St. Nersess Seminary. But the more relevant part is the description of his life. He was born in New Hampshire, which makes sense with what I've read before and his connection to the Manhattan literary scene. However, his parents are active members of the St. Sahag and Mesrob Armenian Church in Wynnewood, PA, which is only a 30 min. drive from the Holy Trinity Armenian Apostolic Church in Cheltenham, PA, of the old Marc.

I ask Chat-GPT who Marcus Mamourian was. I get a random text about some Mamourian who was some sort of CEO. I specify I mean the Marcus Mamourian from New Hampshire who died in 2023. Chat-GPT says "Marcus Mamourian from New Hampshire was a 35-year-old man who passed away unexpectedly on February 17, 2023 […] He lived in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, and had a significant impact on those around him." The rest read like a generic obituary. I am confused and annoyed. Where does the 35-years come from, what about Portsmouth? I don't know if this is fact or fiction and I cannot test it. But I realize I gave the algorithm the wrong year – Marcus Mamourian already died in 2022. I'll correct the date and ask again but I only get in return: "It seems there might be some confusion regarding the name and details of the individual you're asking about. The name *Marcus Mamourian* does not appear to widely correspond with any publicly documented figure from New Hampshire who passed away in 2022." This makes me think that Portsmouth-Marcus might be real (?). I close Chat-GPT, it was a bad idea to start asking.

On the first page of the Google search for *Marcus Mamourian Accident* it says that there are ca. 591 hits in the search engine. I don't know why it's a precise number but phrased with uncertainty. It took Google 0,21 seconds to find these pages. F5. Still 591 hits but the time got faster: 0,18sec. F5. 591 in 0,17. All the links are purple.

"In the early morning hours of September 5th, 2006, before the sun came up, Facebook, […] changed from an interactive library of individual profiles to a customized, algorithmically curated fluid space," writes Jacob Hurwitz-Goodman. "It's called the News Feed, and our relationship with the Internet and with each other was changed forever." This marks the shift away from chronology to what we now understand as the for-you-pagification of all things online – the end of history.

My Google results are *my* Google results. I cannot sort them; they are chosen based on my browsing habits. Newsfeed meant alienation and the disruption of the communal aspects of *social* media. With this implementation we were for the first time alone in the online, everybody on their own.

There is a piece touching on this which I can vividly remember reading when it came out 5 years ago. Half theory and half metaphor, Yancey Strickler argues that the internet nowadays is like a forest at night: it's quiet and one cannot see far. Wandering alone in the dark forest feels like there is nothing out there because of the absolute silence. Nothing moves, nothing makes a sound. But we know that the forest is full of life. All the life is in hiding from predators – and the metaphor continues that the rise of trolling, tracking, and ads pushes the online users away from the mainstream, away from the open platforms and newsfeeds, into private communities, niches subcultures, small hiding places – so nobody can reach them, see them, hear them, like the life in the dark forest.

I got his piece via email – that's why it stuck with me. The email is intrinsically part of his argument, as he wrote: "This theory is being shared on a private channel sent to 500 people who I know or who have explicitly chosen to receive it. This is the online environment in which I feel most secure. Where I can be my most *real self*." I have this saved in a folder on my email program. Yancey says he can be his truest self online and I assume that the years of lockdown and alienation that followed this email did not change, rather intensified, this feeling – as for most of us.
Now writing this down I wonder who the other 499 bcc'ed were. Five hundred is probably an estimate. I don't believe he actually selected a specific number of receivers rather than that the stated 500 were just his newsletter subscribers like me. Maybe Mamourian was one of them – I'll never know. This is somewhat like the internet-*theorycel*-version of Schellac's *Futurist* album from 1997. The band released 799 copies of the record to 799 selected friends of the three band members. The cover artwork is just a list of all 799 names. It was never commercially available. If you were one of the 799, they circled your name on the LP-cover and gave it to you. When Steve Albini, Shellac's guitarist, died earlier this year this record surfaced on my newsfeed. I think about it as an *almanac of cool people*. I only recognize three or four of these names, and I only know one of them personally.

Mamourian wrote a piece called *Bomb Vest* for the zine *SURFACES*. There is no publication date online, the first sentence reads: “I am now going to disappear and there will be nothing left of me.” Followed by an essay on film and nihilism. He writes on the *desire of disappearing in the modern world* visualized by contemporary directors. All the discussed films are on suicide and the leaving of remains/tracks/relics to be remembered by. The last paragraph concludes:

> It’s nearly impossible to leave without a trace. But we can try. Disappearing is not escaping, it is not about leaving with the possibility of returning at some later time. Disappearing is a Kantian absolute — it’s forever. It’s more than death, because it refuses any possibility of resurrection, Christian or otherwise. The excess of pure disappearance is its own divinity.

But is he disappearing? Will it become harder and harder to find his traces online, until his writings are buried in the search results? In the dark woodwork of the algorithm, overgrown where no light ever goes?

One of the editors of Mamourian’s work wrote: “After Marcus’ death, friends from all periods in his life started compiling a bunch of his work in a Dropbox folder: fiction, poetry, art, theory, radio shows. Stuff he’d produced and shared with friends from like 2015 to 2022. I hope that that other work can be shared publicly, too, some day.” I think about this Dropbox a lot. But I don’t need to know what’s in there – its very existence is enough. I don’t care if more Mamourian will be publicly available. I support his concept of absolute disappearance, which also renders disappearing as a morale. Maybe it is an obligation.

One disappears in the dark forest, 43 trees to remember.

Another writer from the same discourse – and I believe the same social scene – is Honor Levy. I read somewhere something about a connection between Mamourian and Levy. I can’t find it anymore, but I am certain that they knew of each other. Levy has a piece in her first book *My first Book* called *Internet Girl*. She writes about the same topics as Mamourian, with the same existential dread; alienated, online and confessional:

> If you look up #RIP____ and you fill it in with your name and you see all those other people, all those dead people with your same name. Then you will forget about the questions Google can’t answer. You will forget that you are the best. You will become little again. I have wanted for so long to be little. I prayed for it.

One can go to honor.baby/internetgirl and use the password *imsorry!* to read the whole piece. Afterwards I open twitter (now X) and check: #ripmarcus has 1000+ hits, #ripmatthis has zero.

Every hour a new lifetime amount of content is uploaded to the internet is an understatement.

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ABOUT THE JOURNAL



THE AUTHORS

MIRIAM BELL holds a Master of Education in English and Social Studies. She embraces photography, dance, singing, and writing as diverse avenues of self-expression. Currently, she is delving into her inner landscape through a series of semi-autobiographical texts, two of which have already been published by *Satura*. Her aspiration is to develop these explorations into a cohesive, published collection.

ALICIA BODE is an undergraduate student currently working towards a Bachelor's degree in English and Sociology at the University of Münster. Passionate about drawing, reading, writing, and all things creative, Alicia is especially interested in fictional depictions of queer experiences. During last term, Alicia had the fortune of taking multiple courses related to this topic to deepen my understanding of it in both literary and sociological contexts. "Between Conformity and Transgression: Gender Expression in Virginia Woolf's Orlando" originated as a term paper for a seminar on the subject of Queer Studies. It is the first (but hopefully not the last) paper Alicia has ever submitted for publication.

LAURA BRAUN has been looking for magic in the little things for 28 years now. Most days, she's able to find it in great music, in sunrises or exceptionally good morning coffee. And when she can't find it, she writes things down. Hide a little magic between words, add sparkle here and there for you to find. Thank you for keeping an eye out for it. It means the world.

ISABELL BRINKMANN is an M.A. student in the British, American and Postcolonial Studies program at the University of Münster. B.A. in English Studies and Cultural and Social Anthropology. Editor for the *Satura* Journal at the English Department. Volunteer for the Alexius Library at the Alexianer Hospital in Münster.

CHRISTOPHER CALVIN is an exchange student from Indonesia. Recently, he has just obtained his Bachelor degree in English Literature from Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta. His passion in haiku writing started during Pandemic years, leading him to have his works published in Japanese news platforms. The Mainichi and Asahi Haiku Network are mainly where his haiku works were reviewed, selected, then published for international readers. In several occasions, he also published his senryu works by Nagoya University as well as haiku works by Sakura Haiku Challenge Anthology, curated by the Consulate-General of Japan in Toronto between 2022 and 2024. Another opportunity he had to publish his haiku work is in the Here and Now, Discover Mississauga and More Haiku global eBook, edited by Anna Yin and Hans Jongman, and sponsored by Sureway Cultural Press. Currently, he focuses on translation studies research, observing translation processes and techniques applied in cultural references found in childhood text.

JULE HAYEN studied literature in Bonn, Paris, Antwerp and Münster. She reads and writes about people and their environment. In her poetry she loves to search for hidden connections and how they become visual through words.

SHADI HOLLENSTEINER is a BA student of English and German at the University of Münster. Her academic and creative interests lie in the intersections of language, memory, and loss, particularly in how poetry can carry emotional and cultural histories across time and space. Drawing inspiration from memory theory, feminist studies, and affect theory, her work explores themes of grief, desire, memory, and fragmented belonging. Alongside her studies, she works in a retirement home, where caring for elderly people continues to shape her understanding of memory, vulnerability, and storytelling.

MATTHIS FRICKHOEFFER is a German-born conceptual artist, and a scholar of contemporary literary theory. He holds degrees in Literature, Gender Studies as well as Fine Art. Frickhoeffer joined the University of Texas at Dallas in 2024 as a doctoral candidate in the literature program

with a focus on intertextuality, and the intersection of prose and critical theory. His writings have been published by para-educational papers and Materialverlag Hamburg; recent exhibitions took place at Collection Falckenberg Harburg (2024), the Museum of Arts and Design Hamburg (2023) and the Modern Art Museum of Bonn (2023).

LINNEA GEHLERT studies Cultural Poetics at the University of Münster. The spoken word artist, author, and moderator has performed on poetry slam and spoken word stages across Germany since 2017. Linneas texts have among others been awarded at the *Bundeswettbewerb für junge Lyrik* in 2022 and the *Landschreiberwettbewerb* in 2021. Linnea is also a part of the group *film.maus.schnitt*, whose poem turned short film was recently nominated for the Deutsche Jugendfilmpreis 2025.

KOSTADIN KARAVASILEV (or simply Kosta) finds occasional refuge in writing outside of what is required in the pursuit of a post-graduate degree in anthropology. Kosta hopes that the contribution to the *Satura* journal could provide motivation to write more fiction in 2026; even if not, this has still been a great and enriching experience.

SELENA KNOOP, born in 1996 in Münster and somehow still here, got a BA in English and Anthropology in 2019 and has now been studying Art since 2020 because apparently, after 20 years, they are still not ready to leave school. They have always considered themself a writer, even though they wouldn't write, let alone share, but are getting better at that. In their spare time they like feeding jackdaws and sitting down for extended periods of time.

C. LEDOYEN got the great luck to live in an absurd country, at the crossroads between France, Germany, and the Netherlands, which has allowed them to easily become a nerd of Western European culture and partly explains how they ended up in Münster studying Dutch literature as a French speaker. They love all kinds of strange and beautiful things, and love creating them, with poetry being one way to do so. Their main sources of inspiration are nature, probably the best place to find strange and beautiful things, and mythology, for which they have to thank a certain obsession with Percy Jackson as a child. But when books and trees weren't enough, the museums, the old railway station and the ruined churches around their house did the trick.

VERENA MEYER is a student of Kulturpoetik at the German-Institute. Part-time editor-in-chief, full-time cat mom. Enthusiastic about anything POP. Into Gothic Fiction.

TORANJ NASIRI is a Master student of British, American, and Post-colonial Studies at Uni Muenster. Writes about popular culture and fashion on her blog. Interested in post-modern literature and art, and engages with both creative and critical approaches to literature.

Legend says that ***LAURA NTOUMANIS*** has been writing poetry since she learned to write, but what is certain is that she began fervently writing poetry in high school. For a long time her poetry has been about searching her inner self to come to terms with a life of chronic illness and loss, but lately she's embraced the power of the written word as protest. She'll continue to "make good trouble" with her words, and hopefully inspire and encourage young and old writers alike to turn to poetry as an outlet for their emotions.

LUKAS NÜNNERICH was born in 2002 in Siegen and currently lives and studies in Münster, Germany. He has been writing short stories and poetry since childhood. His work moves between the everyday and the dreamlike, often exploring emotional states and shifts in perspective. Some of his pieces have already been published in anthologies and recognised in writing competitions.

LILY OLTHOFF is in the British, American and Postcolonial Masters program of the English department and part of the *Satura* editing team. She has been writing stories since she learned the alphabet, though this is the first time her audience is bigger than one

or two people and nowadays most of her "writing" consists of coming up with stories and not finding the time or motivation to write them down (heartfelt thanks at this point for setting a deadline). Seminars on autofiction and rape-revenge can clearly be blamed for her choice of topics. She also has strong opinions on tea but is chronically late to everything to break at least some of the anglophile stereotypes.

PAULA MARIE ROTHMUND is a student of classical archaeology and anthropology. She wrote this poem two years ago while sick with both a viral and a bacterial infection, from protesting at night in January. Now she uses her creative writing in TTRPGs and in the margins of her choir musical notes.

SALIHA SAYAR, born in 2004 in Istanbul and still residing there, is a fourth-year student of English Language & Literature department at Istanbul University. She has been interested in literature since she learned the alphabet and like all writers-at-hearts who are too inconsistent to produce writing, she aspires to be an academic. Her interests include feminist theory (if you couldn't tell), Gothic literature, religious iconography, mythology and many things that can't be fit into here.

MELANIE STENZEL studies to become a primary school teacher at the University of Münster. She has been writing since she was 7 and this is her second publication with *Satura*. Her passion for creativity seeps into all parts of her life, her work with children and her hobbies. She hopes to one day be like one of those teachers we remember because they inspired us and believed in us.

DAVID SUMMERFIELD's works of fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and photo-art have merited publication in over three dozen literary magazines. A graduate of Frostburg State University, Maryland, and a veteran of the Iraq war, he's also been co-editor, columnist, and contributor to various publications within his home state of West Virginia. He's been a finalist for the 2024 Northwind Writing Award sponsored by Raw Earth Ink, a finalist in the 2025 digital art competition entitled Secret Garden sponsored by Ten Moir Gallery, and is a 2025 nominee for the Pushcart Prize.

JUSTUS THEILING has a a M.Sc. in Clinical Psychology, and studied in Münster, Osnabrück, Enschede (NL) and Prague (CZ). He works as a psychologist at the Alexianer hospital and as a Headcoach for Parkour in Münster. His clinical interests include neurological approaches for schizophrenia treatment and suicide prevention methods. The title of his master's thesis was "The Dangers of Disquiet: A Scoping Review and Bibliometric Analysis of Digital Phenotyping and Digital Biomarkers in Suicide Risk Prediction". His favourite books are *Steppenwolf* by Herman Hesse, *Crime and Punishment* by Dostoevsky and the *Trisolaris Trilogy* by Liu Cixin. My favourite bands are Fontaines D.C. and Led Zeppelin. He likes to climb on roofs, jump over walls and balance around the Promenade in Münster.

ANNA WESTHOFEN is currently finishing up an M.A. in British, American and Postcolonial Studies as well as an M.Ed. in English and German Studies. During her studies, Anna has specialized in affect theory, autotheory, Black (feminist) studies, ecocriticism, oceanic studies, and reader-response theory. In her thesis, Anna engages with autotheory as a contemporary interdisciplinary and creative practice that emerges from the intersections of art, literary writing, and criticism and field in formation that is shaped by intersectional feminist and decolonial approaches. Within this context, she is particularly interested in the poetic affordances of Black feminist autotheory and examines the relationship between Blackness, the oceanic, and, more largely, the environment.



THE STAFF

SAMANTHA-JOANNA ALTROCK is currently studying to get her Bachelor‘s degree in German and English Studies at the University of Münster. She was part of the editorial team for *Satura*‘s 7th issue for fiction and non-fiction writing. She likes to spend her free time knitting, reading and learning all kinds of new things.

EYLÜL BASKAYA is a third-semester M.A. student in National and Transnational Studies at the University of Münster, with a background in Western Languages and Literature. Her interests lie in contemporary postmigrant art scenes and counter-archives as artistic practices of protest, especially in the context of diasporic entanglements. When not working academically, she reads, makes paper collages, indulges in cheap reality TV, or rewatches The Royal Tenenbaums for the She-doesn’t-know-how-manyth time.

ISABELL BRINKMANN is a M.A. student in the British, American and Postcolonial Studies program at the University of Münster. B.A. in English Studies and Cultural and Social Anthropology. Editor for the *Satura Journal* at the English Department. Volunteer for the Alexius Library at the Alexianer Hospital in Münster.

ALARA ERGIN is on an adventure abroad, loves to read, and is drawn into stories that change her; she lets things take their time.

ZAHRA GHASEMI is a Master’s student in British, American, and Postcolonial Studies at the University of Münster, specialising in literary studies and maintaining a strong interest in psychoanalytical approaches.

BASTIAN JÄSCHKE is studying an MA in British, American and Postcolonial Studies and a M.Ed. in English and Physics. When not studying he's bartending or trying his best on the guitar.

ASMÎN KARADAĞ is doing her master's degree in British and American Postcolonial Studies. She can be genuinely enthusiastic about her interests and enjoys being a die-hard fan. When you meet her, you could be convinced to talk about your own niche obsessions. She is a debater, loves reading fiction and politics, and will reference memes quite a bit.

MAHDIYE KAZEMI is a BAPS student who loves storytelling through any medium. She does art a little, writes a bit, and does tons of overthinking.

ULAŞ KOYUNCU is an M.A. student in National and Transnational Studies at the University of Münster, with a B.A. in English Literature. He is interested in literary engagements with plants, rivers, landscapes, and other more-than-human presences, particularly thinking with them in relation to mobility, climate change, and responsibility. Outside of academic work, Ulas enjoys walking, taking photographs, and is enthusiastic about anything to do with coffee.

CHIA-YU KUO is a Master’s student in National and Transnational Studies at the University of Münster, specializing in linguistics. She is also Taiwanese, a coffee lover, an enthusiastic social media user, an amateur dancer, and happy to be part of this journey.

KARE MAYURATHAN is a BA student at the University of Münster, where he also serves as an assistant at the Chair of American Studies. Following the completion of his current degree, he intends to pursue a Master’s degree in Literary Studies to further his interests into the socio-political power of the written word.
As the founder of the Banned Book(s) Club (part of the BBNM), Kare is a vocal advocate for literary freedom and the exploration of marginalized narratives. He is a passionate reader and creative writer; interests that deeply inform his perspective on storytelling. His editorial approach is guided by a commitment to fostering diverse literary voices and protecting the integrity of creative expression.

AMERA MAHMOUD is a BAPS student. She worked as a literary translator in Egypt before she came to Germany. Amera has three cats, a big shelf of yet to be read books and recently discovered that she enjoys cooking.

VERENA MEYER is a MA student of Kulturpoetik at the German-Institute. Part-time editor-in-chief, full-time cat mom. Enthusiastic about anything POP. Into Gothic Fiction.

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LILY OLTHOFF is in the British, American and Postcolonial Masters program of the English department and took advantage of getting to work on the issue with (to her) the perfect topic by not only editing but also submitting pieces. She is still somewhat intimidated by editing poetry and just generally in awe of the texts she got to look at. Proofreading her friends' papers and viciously criticising their use of simile has become her main hobby, which, alongside having strong feelings on typography, was very helpful. She has also started annotating the novels she reads in her free time and at this point should maybe find at least one hobby that does not involve words.

HELENA PLESCHKE is a BA student of English and German Studies at the University of Münster. Her academic interests lie in the intersections of literature, desire, and cultural theory, with a particular fascination for how texts frame love as an act of consumption and exchange. In her free time, she reads widely and listens to a lot of R&B music.

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MALIHA SAMIN has worked as a Section Editor (Fiction) at *Satura* and is currently a Master's student in National and Transnational Studies at Universität Münster. Her academic interests center on neoliberal capitalism, cultural narratives, identity, and storytelling across literary and visual media. She has also served as a co-curator for the award-winning exhibition *Homes | Heimat: Postcolonialism, Narratives, Photography* and brings experience in digital content creation.

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ANNA WESTHOFEN is currently finishing up an M.A. in British, American and Postcolonial Studies as well as an M.Ed. in English and German Studies. During her studies, Anna has specialized in affect theory, autotheory, Black (feminist) studies, ecocriticism, oceanic studies, and reader-response theory. In her thesis, Anna engages with autotheory as a contemporary interdisciplinary and creative practice that emerges from the intersections of art, literary writing, and criticism and field in formation that is shaped by intersectional feminist and decolonial approaches. Within this context, she is particularly interested in the poetic affordances of Black feminist autotheory and examines the relationship between Blackness, the oceanic, and, more largely, the environment.

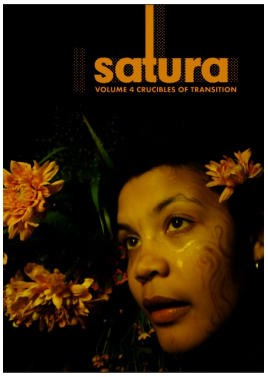
















THE JOURNAL

Satura is a student-edited journal founded by students of the English Department of the University of Münster to allow an open ended discourse on subjects in the Humanities. This broad scope allows us to focus on a singular theme viewed from the perspective of a variety of research areas, including linguistics, literary studies, book studies, cultural/ political studies, theology, philosophy, and history; as well as perspectives in teaching English as a foreign language.
The addition of creative writing to an academic journal allows students to explore additional means of expression. We are proud to publish poems and short stories from students with a broad range of cultural and literary backgrounds. They are carefully crafted pieces that look deep inside human nature and cover the expanse of the world around us.

The purpose of *Satura* is to provide students at the English Department of the University of Münster the opportunity to have practical experience in working for academic/creative journals, as well as offering a space for students of the Humanities to submit academic papers and creative writing in English for publication. Another aim of *Satura* is to develop a wide readership, with a further goal of attracting submissions from students outside of the English Department and from universities around the world.

You want to be a part of *Satura* as editor, author, event planner or social media manager? We're always looking for new faces and brilliant ideas. Check out our website or instagram (@satura_journal).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to the Student Parliament Budget Committee (AStA-Haushaltsausschuss) for their generous financial support. Their funding enabled us to remain an active part of the student body by producing a printed edition of *Satura* Volume 7, allowing us to showcase the work of our contributors in physical form.

Our deepest thanks go to the entire *Satura* editorial team, whose dedication, care, and collaborative spirit made this volume possible. The editors devoted countless hours to reading, discussing, and shaping submissions, approaching each piece with thoughtfulness and respect. Their commitment and passion are at the core of this journal, and we are profoundly grateful for their work.

We would also like to extend special thanks to Mahdiye, whose drawings are featured in this volume. Her artwork adds a striking visual dimension to DEFORMED, capturing its atmosphere and emotional depth.

Special recognition goes to Maliha, Melanie, and Hanna, who took on additional responsibilities throughout the production process. By coordinating tasks, delegating work, and supporting the editorial team, they played a crucial role in keeping everything running smoothly. We are deeply thankful for their reliability, leadership, and generosity.

We are equally grateful to Bastian for overseeing the financial aspects of this volume with great care. Verena, as Editor-in-Chief, would like to express her personal gratitude for his steady assistance, patience, and friendship, which have been invaluable throughout the production of this issue.

Our special thanks also go to Ellen Barth for hosting an Erasure Poetry Workshop at the English Department in 2025 in collaboration with *Satura*. This workshop created a valuable space for students to explore the intersections of text and visual art, and we are thankful for her engagement and creativity.

We would like to thank Anna Rapp, Eva-Maria Ottenhues, and Silvia Schultermandl from the English Department for their continued encouragement and loyal support of *Satura*. We are also grateful to the Fachschaft Anglistik for their ongoing friendship and steadfast support.

The Volume 7 team is especially thankful to Bethany Andrews and Laura Ntoumanis, whose guidance and generosity have been invaluable to the new editorial team. Their expertise, encouragement, and support helped shape this volume and foster a strong sense of continuity and community.

At the heart of this volume are the authors, whose brilliant, thoughtful, and beautiful submissions give *Satura* its voice. We are honoured that they entrusted us with their work and thank them for their creativity and vulnerability.

Finally, we extend our heartfelt thanks to our readers. Your curiosity, engagement, and continued support give life to *Satura*. We are deeply grateful for every moment you spend with this journal.


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