Metaphor is Weber State University’s undergraduate, interdisciplinary journal, in its thirty-second year of publication. The journal is staffed entirely by Weber State University students.

Metaphor accepts submissions in visual arts, poetry, fiction, academic literature, and music from students of Weber State University, and selected pieces from national submissions to the National Undergraduate Literature Conference.

Publications in Metaphor are chosen through a blind submission process. The author, visual artist, or composer of each piece is unknown until that piece is selected for publication.

Metaphor is funded primarily through student fees and is distributed free of charge to students, faculty, guests at Weber State University’s annual National Undergraduate Literature Conference, and the community.

Copyright © 2013 is retained by individual authors, visual artists, and composers.

Printed in the United States of America by Weber State University Printing Services, Ogden, Utah.

Metaphor
Weber State University
1404 University Circle
Ogden, Utah 84408-1404

Visit us on the web: www.weber.edu/metaphor

Book Design by Cole Quartuccio
Cover & Motif Design by Aaron Fisher
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Each Metaphor is only as strong as its staff. This year’s staff was not only strong, but selfless, enduring compressed timelines and experimental projects with enthusiasm. For this, I thank you. Your patience, time, and friendship is in each page of this journal. I would like to dedicate this Metaphor to you. Thank you for your dedication.

Cole Quartuccio, our Creative Director, for his innovative design and patience with our extended editing process.

Brandon Petrizzo, Cindy Stokes, and the Printing Services staff, for answering our questions and helping us make this journal happen.

Robin Scott, Kim Webb, and the English Department staff, for helping us with advertising, questions, and directing students to our door.

The professors of Weber State University, for encouraging students to submit their work.

Dr. Kathy Herndon and Dr. Vicki Ramirez, for their continued support.

The undergraduate students of Weber State University for creating such beautiful pieces and being willing to share those with us.

The Weber State University Student Senate, for its financial support.

Jan Hamer, our Faculty Advisor, for guiding us through each step, making our ideas a reality, and encouraging us to be our best. You are our rock, and we love you for everything you do.

Joshua Nelson, my Assistant Editor, for keeping a level head when I began losing mine. Your support helped me be brave to try new ideas, and your advice helped keep those ideas under control. Thank you.

Stephanie Simonson, Michelle Paul, and David Harrison, for taking extra time out of their schedules to copy edit this journal.

The Section Editors of Metaphor, for helping guide our staff through the new editing process and meeting such compressed deadlines.
EDITOR’S NOTES

If you’re reading this, you might understand what goes into creating beautiful works of art. You may also have a great appreciation for such works, even if your background or understanding of the creation process is minimal. But what went on behind the scenes to form these pieces into the entity that is Metaphor?

Choosing which pieces to publish seems like a logical first step, but it begins with a rubric: a standard each year’s staff establishes to judge pieces objectively. Then comes the review process, involving weeks of reads and re-reads to ensure a piece is understood. And finally, the discussions, to make sure each piece is evaluated fairly, and that only the best is chosen.

This year, our staff took it one step further with our literature pieces. After the top pieces had been selected, our staff took the time to edit each piece, without affecting the author’s original meaning or voice. Even after establishing this, we still had two questions: 1) How much was too much? and 2) Do we have the right to change this? Asking permission for said changes from the authors was the only solution, and I believe it helped both author and editors see the piece more clearly.

It also helped me realize that we are not just a staff or editors, our artists are not just artists, and you are not just a viewer. We, everyone, is a little bit of everything. The staff must be an artist and a viewer in order to choose the most dynamic, memorable pieces. The artist must be a viewer and an editor to see how a piece will be received, and you, as our viewers, must be the artist and the staff to see the value behind these unique creations.

I am honored to have served as Editor-in-Chief for the thirty-second volume of Metaphor, and it is with great pride that I present to you this wonderful creation.

—Jennifer C. Sanda
Faculty Advisor
Jan Hamer

Editor-in-Chief
Jennifer C. Sanda

Assistant Editor
Joshua Nelson

Creative Director
Cole Quartuccio

Art Editor
Andrew Balls

Fiction Editor
Stephanie Simonson

Music Editor
David Glen Harrison

Nonfiction Editor
Shannon Beverley

Poetry Editor
Quincy Bravo

NULC Section Coordinator
Clint Kingsley

Website Manager
Michelle C. Paul

Publicity Specialist
Michelle C. Paul

Reviewers
Thomas Alberts
Alex Alfaro
Shelly Barker
John Bedford
Afton Fuller
Hayden Gainey
Carlee Nowling
Emily Oliver
Kyle Poppitz
Melody Skoubye
Michelle Stephens
Bryan Valdivieso
Nathan Woodbury
TABLE OF CONTENTS

POETRY

Introduction 10

Children of the Amazon
Amy Williams 11

My Burrow, My Threnody
Carter Holt 12

Sailing
Raymond Pratt 13

Every Distance Is Not Near
Quincy Bravo 14

After Reading about Jessica Ridgeway on a Tuesday Afternoon
Amy Williams 15

La belleza de una mentira/The Beauty of a Lie
Mary Katherine Metzger 16

Life Is a Pantomime
Quincy Bravo 17

Lunchroom lessons at fourteen
Jennifer Sanda 18

I Burrow
Megan Haymond 19

Nebula
Shannon Beverley 20

The Word
Jayrod Garrett 21

She Said
Brittany Andreasen 22

The Lap
Kory Wood 23

Songs
Elaina Erickson 24

Stargazing
Megan Haymond 26
A Summer’s Day
Above Lough
Derg, 1959
Raymond Pratt 28

The hair I hid behind
Jennifer Sanda 29

The Crisis
Alex Alfaro 30

Achilles Is in
Your Alleyway
Quincy Bravo 31

Hungry Eyes
Stephanie Quinn 32

There Is a Thunder
Alex Alfaro 33

To-Do List
Kory Wood 34

When Pisces met Virgo
Jennifer Sanda 35

ART
Introduction 36

Path
Shrapnel Lounge 37

Metaphor
Cover Submissions
WSU Students 38

Checkers
Manda Lewark 39

Fowl Industry
Katie Shurtleff 40

Sunshine
Jesse Jaymz Smout 41

Derelict
Tyler Brown 42

Nocturne II
Alex Alfaro 43

I Came to Know
Shrapnel Lounge 44

Sound of
Moving Metal
Rachel Rigley 45

Study in Solitude
Jennifer Sanda 46

Untitled
Louise Åkebrand 47

Inner Thought
Jesse Jaymz Smout 48

Photogram #5
Tyler van der Stappen 49

Convene
Alex Alfaro 50

Filtered
Juxtaposition #23
Tyler Brown 52

Heartbeat
Aimee Smith 53

MUSIC
Introduction 54

David Glen Harrison
Artist Bio 55

Jake Martin
Artist Bio 56

Mitchell McBride
Artist Bio 57

Alex Gerrish
Artist Bio 57
FICTION

Introduction 58

A Work In Progress
Emily Oliver 59

Culling the Fold
Joshua Nelson 62

Hanged on a Tree
Andrew Balls 66

Honey Lamb
Stephanie Simonson 69

The Run
Michelle C. Paul 70

Winter Hands
Erica Farnes 72

Zombie Apocalypse
Lawn Care & Estate Maintenance
Nathan Woodbury 74

NON FICTION

Introduction 78

Heaven’s Classes
Devan Bailey 79

The Legend of Mel Cassidy
Stephanie Simonson 84

On Endings
Devan Bailey 89

Victory in Defeat: NAFTA, Zapatistas, & the Ongoing Alter-Globalization Movement
Eladio Bobadilla 90

To the Rescue
Elaina Erickson 96

NULC

Introduction 98

Subway
Samuel Diener 99

The Princess and the Sky
Bobbie Gross 100

House Fire
Chalmus Davenport 101

The Black Ink Stain
Courtney Sandy 102

Ego Te Baptizo: The Typology of Baptism in Moby-Dick
Kathryn Mogk 103

My Grandfather’s Garden
Ashley Rose 114
INTRODUCTION

I’ve heard it said that anyone can write poetry. And yes, it’s true, many are capable of writing poetry, but note this: not all that is written is good. Writing poetry is one of the most difficult tasks an artist can undertake. It is a struggle, an undertaking with what seems like the impossible: to fully express an idea using the exact words in the perfect order to create a message that can be understood by others.

Few poems of worth are writ with little effort; most take time, energy, and edits. Poetry is not for the weak-willed or proud. It is a humbling art that will test your patience and your ability.

How frustrating it becomes just to write a single line: to write and rewrite, reword and edit, examine the etymology of every word—to spend several days on the construction of seven or eight words, only to scrap it entirely. But how joyful it becomes when the artist creates a successful poem: the elation that comes from being able to share with others a part of himself/herself—to give the reader insight into the artist’s perception of the world and the people that inhabit it.

Yes, anyone can write poetry, and I hope that everyone writes poetry, because I know of no better way to interact with the world.

— Quincy Bravo
Children of the Amazon

Amy Williams

Once a bone necklace alone against naked skin,
now graphic tees and elastic waists,
covering the brown skin of past gatherers and hunters,
Hunted themselves by settlers,
Confined today to square-foot properties,
Pillaged by those who see no beauty in the Trees,

Who breathe life into our world, resuscitating,
when we choke out our oxygen with endless exhaust pipes.
Trees exhausting themselves only to live a short life,
for their beds to become forgotten farms,
and their tall bodies, a table for the den,
covered with coasters, preventing rings from cold drinks.

Children of the Amazon, baptized to foreign churches,
because they fear burning for tribal songs of sin,
and a Jesus who whips the unsaved men.
Bearing no memory of their rituals past,
the ones that were exchanged for
matches, pots and pans. Cheap.

The last of the World’s innocence
stolen by entitled immigrants
who care more for the thread count of sheets
than the fate of an unknown people.
But when the Trees are gone and
the World cannot keep breathing—

Who will resuscitate those responsible
for the environmental thievery?
My Burrow, My Threnody

_Carter Holt_

A mild surrender of night to day
Seamless and fraught with tense notoriety,
Beginning a boundless melodic deluge

’Neath the tension azure-clear,
Remains a remnant unsure and sad,
Of lonely sailors—mending bow—
Amongst the fields of a lone nomad.

And but a surrender—trifling, warm—
Spilt upon that sandy trail,
Sagas of a landless eye, a homeless
Brow, are searching for a fleeting grail.

Even in dreams, the pillow is wetted.
Even in dreams a tear falls firm.
Sentiment crowded in each drop—
Dripping as a lesson learned.
Here am I in my element. To lie astern
Listening to the perfunctory glop
Of disturbed water; watching
The swing of the mainmast
Tracing ovals in a starlit sky.
Casting off familiarity—all recedes.

The slap of winds on soaking sails calls
Attention to the craft’s wayward yearnings.
Scudding clouds keep pace with
Phosphorescence, dancing at the bow.
The taste of brine, small droplets find
Their way to waiting lips, a sensual moment.

Still, the wind continues—unabating,
Shifting cobwebs, clutter, debris, flotsam;
Scouring deep against the hard-baked
Ridge of rutted lives.
Oh! For its clean sweep!
Times like these seem immeasurable
And sailing is, indeed,
Time subtracted from heaven.
Every Distance Is Not Near

Quincy Bravo

silent k, the runaway dream, with his broken cup & postcard face, spends his days reliving scenes that never happened in the first place, he says he’s nobody’s main character, just another failed attempt at making some noble hero, a knight in pawn’s clothing—he doesn’t try anymore, he’s got no drive, said it was stolen the instant he realized money comes & goes but time is constantly fleeting, to which he says, “it’s no new concept, just depressing as hell” . . . & little ms mary mary so damn ordinary sits laughing with a shiny, worm-bitten apple on her sleeve, she’s become the model student—the key, she says, is to stop thinking for yourself and start reciting passages from plato & shakespeare then fill your head with useless & pointless knowledge.

my beauty,

robin hood ain’t got nothing on you, at least he stole from those who could afford it. by the way, what are you going to do with the things you stole from me, last i checked you can’t sell hearts & dignity on the black market. but then again, maybe you stole them for yourself, just another trophy for your collection. well, keep ‘em, they never did me much good anyway, maybe i’ll function better without them.

your temporary landlord,

the beast
We had a code word, a word that only a family friend would know, so that I would never be sent home from school with strangers. I would not trust anyone who did not know the word I chose when I was seven—zig-zag. A word from the brain of a child, who imagines a weak word like zig-zag could prevent an unwelcome trip to the second location—never go to the second location. The world was changing, but the security of zig-zag let my parents rest at night. I am grown and never used the word. But in the paper, I see a picture of a little girl with light hair and light eyes, a school picture with a swirly blue backdrop. Underneath the picture is a headline that says: Body of Missing Girl Found in Field, Dismembered. Dismembered?
I thought that was reserved for horror movies and Steven King stories. I wonder, did she have a code word? And would it have mattered if she did?
La belleza de una mentira

Mary Katherine Metzger

Tu sombra
Está en mi vida
En vez del sol
Y la luz
Que tenía,
Que no era tanta,
Ahora no hay
Porque me ha pasado.
Ahora estoy
En un día de noche
Con todas tus palabras,
tu voz y tu canta.
Tienen mi vida
Y toda mi mente.
Este amor
Es como mis ojos
En la oscuridad:
No pueden comprender
La realidad de la gran ausencia
De las cosas verdaderas.

The Beauty of a Lie

Your shadow
Is in my life
In place of sunlight
And the light
That you gave
Was never a lot,
And now it is not:
It has passed me by.
Now I am
In a day made of night,
With all your words,
Your voice and your song.
They hold my life
And the sum of my mind.
This love
Is like my eyes
In the darkness:
They cannot fathom
The reality, the great absence
Of truth.
Life Is a Pantomime
Quincy Bravo

prometheus unwound has got a lot of nerve, he’s walking backwards around town professing his self-proclaimed individuality with a cup of lukewarm $4 espresso in one hand & a copy of kerouac in the other & the whole town is ready to give him plastic praise & back his every move—all except positively alice, the editor-in-disbelief of the local newspaper, she doesn’t buy into his claim that adopting thick black frames & a worn-out peacoat will make you an individual—instead, she spends her time trying to find her part in a world that just doesn’t exist, she looks around at all the hype & type & cries wonderland ain’t so wonderful when everybody’s trying to be a mad hatter.

   to the war-master general,

   look how far you’ve come & how far you still plan to go, j edgar hoover would be so proud, but the next time you want to start a war, please don’t lie to us. if you want us to kill, maim, & destroy for you so you can have a pay raise & a bigger office, just tell us. oh, & generalizing the enemy & calling them charlie is a nice touch, but it doesn’t change the fact that his face looks just like mine.

one of many concerned citizens,

   the man in red shoes
Lunchroom lessons at fourteen

Jennifer Sanda

1.
Dab the grease off the Domino’s,
a few napkins’ worth, avoid extra fat.
What a waste.
Follow the boys, let juicy oil drip,
slide, down your chin, your arm.
Save the napkins for clean up.

2.
Boys sit on one end, girls the other.
Only couples can sit alone together.
Appreciation isn’t shown from girls.
Tuck your dress under, elbow a space
between some chicken-fried steak.
Boys like company that’s developed.

3.
Elders meet the new guy first,
decide with whom he’ll be paired.
Age is so arbitrary.
Push forward, shake hands, lock eyes—
realize what piercing gaze means . . .
“Don’t eat the chicken-fried steak.”
I Burrow

Megan Haymond

There was something familiar
when the snow came last night
that painted ice on hard wood floors
and made my feet cold.
So I cranked up the heat.
Rumbling through the walls, trembling, and spitting.
It’s hot right here.
And I burrow.

There was something peculiar
when the snow fell today.
I couldn’t stop watching the yard,
fill.
My hands swaddle a steaming mug
and I wait for a kettle to screech.
Silence rides in cold air.
And I burrow.

There was something spectacular
when you blew through the door,
and felt you melt
on lightly kissed foreheads,
blowing out the storm.
So I wrapped you in my blanket,
and slightly melted more
against your chest.
And I burrow.
Nebula

Shannon Beverley

The room seems far away
as she sits in the chair, listening
to the lecture. Her eyes gloss over,
sweat beading on her face.
Damn the need for good grades.
The drowning of Einstein’s Dreams, time, space,
worlds and chaos. What do you dream?
Nostalgic thoughts of warmth and sleep?
The throbbing of her temple, swirling
black holes, wormholes, and the cheesy PBS documentary
on the big screen. Wouldn’t you like to visit the future?
Fantasies of luscious galaxies of pure bliss.
With a flick the room is illuminated.
Her shaky body delicate with its ghostly gleam.
Trying to anchor her psyche
round two will be avoided.
Feet flat as she lethargically presses forward. Syntax
to be eluded due to the cries from the dainty aqua quilt.
Slowly she treks down the hilly
campus. The saunter shuffle of her Toms
through the fall leaves. Trudging forward
into the vacant dungeon. Time, what is it?
Slinking into the darkness she pulls the comforter
to her chin, slithering sleeplessly into chimera.
The Word

Jayrod Garrett

Nigger! Jesus says you’re a nigger.
I heard he wanted me for a sunbeam,
But Nigger repeats in the chorus of that song now.
Is God a racist?
Does he let the babies in Somalia die
‘Cause they’re niggers?
Or does he punish the poor blacks in Harlem,
Because they speak differently than him?

My best friend said,
“You’re the whitest black man I know.”
Perhaps that’s why I’m safe.
’Cause I’m righteous like Fredrick Douglass,
’Cause I’m pure like Martin Luther King Junior,
’Cause I’m educated like Maya Angelou.

Isn’t the heaven that Christ proclaimed
Without blemish?
Well that shuts all us
Niggers, Chinks, Wetbacks, and Jews out.
But weren’t the Jews his favored children?
Perhaps they were too black,
When they crucified Jesus and he decided to treat them
Like the rest of us.

Next time,
When you tell me how white I am,
I think I’ll remind you,
How black you are.
With your backwards hats, sagging pants,
And XXX-Steelers’ jerseys.
Your privileged men sexing girls gone wild
While neglecting their children.
And how can we forget how uneducated you are
About the history of your religions, country, and women.

I think I read somewhere,
That God wanted
For us to love each other,
As he loved us.
But what do I know,
I’m just a nigger.
She Said
Brittany Andreasen

She said serenity,
and I smiled because I knew
it couldn’t exist without
forgiveness.
Regardless of what she might
have been told
and in that duplicity,
nothing is really achieved.

Your in-actions form
contradictions,
typically, to their own words.
She said to leave her
and so I did.
I am placid,
but I am not serene,
and in that lies the wonder,
like the AC/DC currents
running above my pretend head.
She said serenity,
like the tepid water
in the glass by my bed

which I do not sleep in,
and where I find anything
but peace,
in those brief moments
where I attempt to shut my eyes,
and go away.
She said serenity
in that empty space
between the steps and what
lies right before you
before you catch yourself,
or fall.
but I chose to
ignore the examples set before
me
when I decided that it was worth
the freedom,
and the fight. Once,
you made the same choice,
but you soon returned to the
original
with needles eviscerated from
your poor body.
She said serenity,
and lied.
Too much ketchup on my cheeseburger.
Sauce strayed outside
the standard circumference of the bun.

I don’t want to eat this, Dad.
There’s too much ketchup.
Eat it.
I bought it, and that’s what you’re eating.
I don’t want to.
Too much ketchup is gross.

Dad took the cheeseburger from my hands,
and examined it for a moment.

His tongue stuck out and held steady,
and his hands moved the cheeseburger
towards the moist tip.

With tongue pressed against bun,
his hands rotated the burger
like a record.

The tongue, stiff and dispassionate,
swept away the excess sauce,
but left a trail of spit.

He finished his lap,
and placed the cheeseburger back into my hands.

I sat
and wished I still had too much ketchup.
Songs

_Elaina Erickson_

The mother hangs out her laundry to dry, the washing machine broken from the night before,
The child cries as he loses his favorite toy to his cousin’s cruel hand,
The soldier ties up his boots, hoping for another day,
The teacher checks her papers, and counts the days till winter break,
The boy and his dog play the timeless game of fetch,
The two girls wildly lick the spoon dripping with cake batter,
The child holds a bit of life in his hands—his pet goldfish,
The grandmother picks tomatoes, and peppers, and prepares fresh salsa,
The filthy man waits for the bus, lonely for company, but content to have beer his substitute friend,
The fat man runs on the treadmill faster than he has ever before, anxious to sweat away the pounds,
The winner crosses the finish line first, gasping with happiness,
The loser slumps over at last, glad to be done,

The doctor rolls up his sleeves and examines another sore throat,
The student brushes away the dust from a long-forgotten book,
The police man writes his fifth and last parking ticket,
The poet creates a masterpiece and crumples it up in the fire,
The plumber takes a day off and combs the countryside looking for gold,
The artist blinks rapidly as he draws another tattoo, the ink sinking into supple skin,
The Wal-Mart cashier yells at the money changer to hurry up,
The Christmas shopper buys her own present: a book,
The janitor cleans last night’s trash, smiling despite the pain inside,
The stripper does her job, grateful to have a place to sleep,
The mailman brings bad news on a little slip of paper, never knowing the harm he’s carried,
The anorexic girl checks herself in the mirror, and longs to find escape from this world, but only sees herself,
The little boy pulls down his sleeves so his teacher won’t see his bruises,
The newly widowed woman buries her stillborn child,
The father leaves his wife for another woman: her best friend,

The groom loosens his twisted tie, anxious for the ceremony to be over . . . the bride smooth’s her new dress, ready for the ceremony to start . . .
the preacher hiccups, drunken from the night before,
The picnic sits forgotten on the blanket, two lovers entwined in each other’s arms,
The boy and his mother kick up the fall leaves, talking of dreams yet to be born,
The exhausted father plays games with his children,
The grandfather yells at his son, misunderstanding clouding his vision,
The young mother sews new booties and sighs for her lover,
The mother weeps into her hands because her middle child is fading to sorrow, the father upset for there is nothing he can do,
The old man dies, the young man begins anew,

The moss creeps slowly up the tree, never to reach the top,
The silence enjoys herself until the creation of man,
The ocean sprays the sand, welcoming the day with its voice,
The moth dies a violent death from a terrified screaming mother and a can of bug spray,
The pumpkins sit idle on the porch, ready for carving,
The feast is laid out on the table, the browns and creams against the greens and reds, mouths watering in anticipation,
The horse nickers softly, crunching on the juicy apple,
The lion roars in his cage . . . the tiger prowls in his cage . . . the camels sleep in their cage,

Little children go to bed with growling stomachs,
Blood running along the gutter . . . father and brother dead,
Religions fighting each other over the same reason—they cannot see how alike they truly are,

The years follow years
until centuries fall into one,
until lifetimes become one,
until all that was old is new,
and all that is new is old, ever changing,
ever remaining the same.
Ever growing into something better than the past before it,
but never getting to where it needs to be;
a single line stretching
into eternity
and stretching
forever behind.

This is the world going on—
All this in me,
all this in you,
making music few can hear.
The flowers’ petite smile stabbed at me
through my throat I felt her blossoming words that echoed
“light”—
and just like me, she flirted with the fine line of patience and distinct powers.

Poppy princess and lace look nothing like me . . .
yet deep in my shame I am a dragon-breath of charred leaves
scattered on the ground.
And no one picks me up.

But no matter.

A mother only wants what’s best.

But—
I can see your Aster anger. Your rippling petals quiver
with the word “no”.
You make towers crumble, my baby.
Delicate grenades bounce,
BOOM
and where is our knight in amethyst armor?

A shadow I fear.
His memory a slab of antique bone breath.

At this moment, all we want to do is yell . . .
to vibrate, and dive, in the rapids of “NO”.
And to run my fists into the river beds that we have never slept in—
shivers of steel fins pulling on each ankle.
I hang onto shore so I can plant your roots again.

and then we can imagine a place where
we go to the ball for breakfast.
Right now?
That burning in your belly love? The ruby fever . . .
Never goes away. And the fear of loneliness,
is what binds us to the soul—to the ground,
to the upside-down walkway above our brows.
When we star gaze.

Lumps of milk in her throat, still sweet
bitter and wet from glad mother’s neck
unforgiving confusion—young eyes reflect.
and Aster’s milk sets me to sleep
chalked up to nothing, still holding hands,
a crescent of my claws that grind into the sand—
boxed in.
Breath steady—
walking through this fairy tale I wrote long ago.

My flimsy starched apron, must have forgotten
that the ink was permanent.

There is no sword to force us through this foggy field of thorns
to rake us clean, back to the beginning.

no faint hope on the horizon of the morn
no shooting star to ride . . .
or shoulders to hold . . .
and yet
I have my princess.
and we are stargazing—

In a field of white flowers.
A Summer’s Day
Above Lough Derg, 1959
Raymond Pratt

High above the rare blue of an Irish summer sky,
The slow, lazy drone of some Douglas DC or
Super Constellation, inbound from Europe
For America, makes slow progress over
The shimmering Slieve Bernagh’s.
My father’s ear, always half-cocked to
Mechanical things and the rumble of
Cooling cylinders in descent, that might
Harbor a call for his innate proficiency
Later on, by the Shannon, in Rineanna.
Sunday—even the July air seems lethargic
And from my car-bound outlook,
Lough Derg’s tiny islets beckon like
Dark, forbidding emeralds, forever lost to
My swim-shy person in high declination
Above steepening shores and landings.
Mom and Dad engage in rapt collusion;
Sharing racy English newspapers, not
So subtly hidden from younger eyes,
Tut-tutting British social mores yet
Relishing its delicious rumor, its suggestion.
Not that Marie and I could have cared less.
We two, trapped in the rear of the black Austin,
Squirm about on hot, leatherette seats,
Blackguarding each other with
Childhood’s vicious abandon.
Every day I stood and let my mother braid my hair, French or fishtail, even a twist we invented while bored, giving me a look, a signature, unimaginatively named “the J braid.”

Every day I looked in the mirror at my round face, with its apple cheeks “like a cherub’s,” according to mom, and I’d wonder how different I’d be if I lost the fall of brown-black that hung down my back past my butt.

Every day until I was fourteen—the year my family fell apart, the year I found my voice, the year I knew about love and loss—the weight bent my shoulders, my head, gave me the unassuming presence I thought I should be.
The Crisis

*Alex Alfaro*

Spit out the sun-rusted blade across
the sky
And take up pale, soft arms
My friend,
Take your mistress out to sea
Pitch the heavy carcass over
the ledge
Drop a dime on a poor beggars head
Remember to feed the poets,
Abuse fellow verbs in the dark
after-hours
All forced to devour their own words
Fiddling with worlds deep into
the night
Falling on purpled knees
Scratching an encyclopedia of
tedium
Beneath the feet of mankind,
While the dimes thud against
your skull
With your nail-blood, bone
exposed
To the ink dripping off your
fingertips
The stem of the world
Has become too brittle to bend,
It will soon fall
It is no longer favorable
To be a man without meaning
With idle time
Wandering
In rows of the orchard in
moonlight

Where sweet dreams are hinged on
the branches
Where
Love becomes the difference between
a want and a need
Where the heart is a veined,
throbbing mirror
Whose surface glistens like the doubt
In my voice,
Where the children are left alone
In the abandoned house
Where snow falls
Where the starlight shatters glass,
Where I found her pale, soft arms
in the dark
Beside the glistening
crimson-shattered mirror
Where I am forced to abandon,
to devour and dream
Until the day
When I can make
A lowly shrub shake himself off
And emerge from the dirt: Alive
When I can make the last leaf of Fall
Tear herself from the ground
And sail back to the blue sky
When I can take the sun-rusted blade
from your wrist
Embrace your soft, arms around
And seal the wound with a kiss
When I can lift Death
Like a stone
And toss it
Into the sea
If only I could do this
Achilles Is in Your Alleyway

Quincy Bravo

charlotte in scarlet, with her two-sided dreams & broken pen, takes turns telling retired priests stories about man & god & law, maybe she should own a farm. she says men are easy enough, just flirt enough for them to keep coming back with gifts & jewels & you will never have to work a day for yourself—her latest capture, steel guitar louie is living proof, he's long since given up on his horse-mouthed girl & now takes love where he can find it & in any form, says it is better than spending his time & money strung out on bourbon . . . benjamin the wannabe dictator made his campaign rounds again today, buying votes for a smile & a promise, says “those in power are doing it all wrong, take me to the capital & i’ll make it all better,” what he doesn’t tell people is that he’ll side with whoever will listen to him, he has no morals or thoughts of his own, those died out years ago, now all that’s left is a vacant smile that’s ready to agree or disagree with anybody around him.

dear cowboy jim,

i couldn’t help but to hear the speech you gave about the importance of chewing gum in times of emergencies. you can’t keep going around making impassioned speeches like you’ve discovered the end all, be all of what it means to be human. you may have conviction, but you have no dedication, you are like some 13 year old boy who falls in love with every pretty face he sees. constancy isn’t just for the dead & dying, as if angels don’t exist outside of sunday. if you want a good example of how to be, be more like my uncle, he lives by only the duke’s set of rules and never falters.

your faithful wife,

fallen molly
Hungry Eyes

Stephanie Quinn

Stepping out of my Seattle apartment
I feel a nice cool breeze caress my legs
I lock the door behind me and dread paying the rent
I stop at my favorite café for an order of scrambled eggs
My heels click as I step off of the pavement
Why are all of their hungry eyes on me
I thought I looked the same as every other day
Same lip gloss and mascara and hair that flows free
The man with spiked hair licks his lips in a way
That is obvious what he wants to see
He whispers something to his friend with a gesture
And a cheeky grin on his face
The friend glances at me with humor
I take out my makeup bag and find my compact case
What are they seeing that is so amusing
I glance over my shoulder to find an empty chair
All I know is that men are so confusing
Is my beauty the reason why they stare
Two can play this game
I’ve been called quite a tease
I push my chest out and my body calls his name
I didn’t know my seduction would capture him with such ease
Spiked hair man casually struts over to my table
Once again he flashes his sideways smile
He asks if I’m feeling stable
I reply yes after a short while
His next question took a minute to sink in
He asks if I rushed this morning
I tell him yes confused yet again
He nods his head towards my toes and back up with warning
I look down and my face flushes red
My confusion is suddenly gone
He smiles at me and nods his head
I forgot to put my pants on.
There Is a Thunder

Alex Alfaro

There is a thunder
That lives beside me
I can hear it at night
Across the shadow of my yard
Through the black
Of my frost-patterned window
I hear it breathe an invisible flame
There is a thunder
That lives above me
Making shadows stretch and roll
Like wounded silhouettes,
Across the field, tumbling with the weeds,
Like ghosts running in the yard
Dark bodies reach across the quivering floor
There is a thunder
That lives beneath me
I feel it as I lie upon the ground
It trembles through the spine,
Its timbre grips the core
Splits the surface of the world
And lets in the cold
Rolling beneath, heading below
Falling to icy depths of the black quaking core
There is a thunder
That lives and dies
In the night
Like an ice crystal
Formed in the iris rim
Of your eye
It showed your breath on the night
But the only sound I heard
Was a snowflake falling
From your fluttering lids,
Landing soft upon the moonlit floor
And when
I approached you
Like a child awake at midnight,
On the velvet crunch of snow
Stepping across the carpet
Of the sleeping
Snow-covered world
While the thunder
Slept,
In the shadow’s hold,
Where the echoes
Swirled and died,
I knew
I would have to face
This cold new World
Without you at my side
To Do List

Kory Wood

Pick up at store—
- Carrots
- Canned green beans
- Other awful vegetables
- Pop-tarts™ (hide from wife)
- Formula
- Diapers
- Sense of responsibility
- Boring adult cereals with bran
- Something for the stress/ulcers
  - Pepto
  - Tums
  - Hard liquor (?)
  - Oreos™

Reminder—Babies need food, shelter, something else? (check with wife)

Call Steve and Dave, cancel all plans for the rest of time

Anchor bookshelves

Put rubber padding on sharp edges

Don’t run away and become a studio musician
When Pisces met Virgo

Jennifer Sanda

He was the earth—the virgin—
a bendable wheat firmly rooted in rocky soil.
I was the ocean—a fish without its mate—
my current fighting the pull of the land.

When ocean met earth, the change was slow,
a touch on the surface soaking deeper
with each crash and caress.
The rocks softened with grace,
gave shape to water in sand.

That was years ago, before the tether severed.
I swim alone now, drag through the water
a fraying cord I will not fix.
INTRODUCTION

Art is a means to understand something deeper than the surface of life. It is the way in which people cope with and handle the vast array of things that life has to offer. For the artist, art is not merely pictures, images, and constructs, but extensions of the soul trying to reach out into the world beyond this surface to a greater understanding of what lies beneath.

This ethereal element is what the artist finds and captures in whatever medium he or she chooses. The beauty does not end there, though, because the viewers then get to observe the work of art and experience it for themselves, either something superficial or much deeper. In this way, art is like water that is trapped by the artist, which allows the viewer to either reflect in its surface or dive deeper into its hidden depths of meaning.

Metaphor presents to you these works with the invitation to appreciate them at any depth. We hope that they may inspire you, as viewers, to look beyond the surface, and that, once seeing these depths, it may inspire more expressions of creativity.

— Andrew Balls
Path
Shrapnel Lounge
Metaphor Cover Submissions (left to right)
Aaron Fisher, Shirley Jackson, Cole Quartuccio, Ashlee Lloyd,
Tyler van der Stappen, Seth Pace, Michelle C. Paul,
Laura Parker, Issac Farley, Mandee Miller, Zheting Li,
Andrew Balls, Felisha Skinner, Antonio Moya, Travis Alexander
Checkers
Manda Lewark
Fowl Industry
Katie Shurtleff
Sunshine

Jesse Jaymz Smout
Derelict

Tyler Brown
Nocturne II

Alex Alfaro
I Came to Know

Shrapnel Lounge
Sound of Moving Metal
Rachel Rigley
Study in Solitude

Jennifer Sanda
Untitled
Louise Åkebrand
Inner Thought

Jesse Jaymz Smout
Convene

Alex Alfaro
Filtered Juxtaposition #23

Tyler Brown
Heartbeat
Aimee Smith
INTRODUCTION

Music is, put simply, a universal vehicle for change and expression. In music, we are freed from our usual hang-ups, and allowed to articulate our thoughts, feelings and ideas as we so choose. From the time we are born, we are surrounded by a world of music. Whether it’s classical music in toys or cartoons, or lullabies sung by a weary parent, we have a symbiotic relationship with music from the very beginning. As we grow, we find in music a license to be who we are, regardless of what else may be going on.

Music can be a relaxing presence in a world of stress and anxiety, it can be a way to bond with friends, and it can even be a catalyst for social change or awareness. At its core though, music is as simple as personal expression. A solo artist finds their voice, a band shows how they express themselves within the framework of each other, and the listener is opened up to a whole world of ideas and emotions, whether it comes with or without words.

This year’s music section is a brief overview of some of the talented musicians we have here at Weber State. I’d like to thank those who contributed their music, and those on the music staff who contributed their time and effort to put all of this together. Enjoy.

—David Glen Harrison
Music requires an open mind. I have been fascinated with music since I was a child. I used to make guitars with my Construx set, and thread rubber bands on them for strings. I got my first (real) guitar at 11, my first drum set at 12, and that was only the beginning for me. I grew up with a technical mind toward music, and have always favored the bands that do things a bit differently. I don’t believe that there’s one type of music that is better than every other intrinsically. I think that inspiration can come from just about anything, so long as it’s not complete garbage. When making music, I love the range of things I can do with a program, but my main love has always been with the instruments themselves. I’ve always believed that with each instrument one learns, one gains a greater understanding of all music. I play acoustic/electric guitar, bass, drums, laptop, djembe and didgeridoo. I also sing. Some influences: Fantômas, Frank Zappa, The Locust, The Dillinger Escape Plan (the first few, anyway,) The Doors, Cab Calloway, Damien Rice, Venetian Snares and Meshuggah.

**Inspiration**

“Bea Arthur vs. The Gooch”: I wrote this song, like so many others, while watching *Golden Girls*. I have always been fascinated with odd time signatures, especially when juxtaposed with other time signatures. With this song, I attempted to make various things (specifically 4/4, 6/8 and 7/8 time signatures, along with a triplet riff) fit together well enough to create the illusion that nothing out of the ordinary was going on. NOTE: In this version of the song, The Gooch wins the battle. There is a version where Bea Arthur wins, but it’s done at twice the speed, and is a devil to play correctly.

“Hailysong”: A few years ago, a friend of mine wanted to put on a performance of a play written by an old Englishman. The catch was, he told me, that he wanted to turn it into an opera. I was asked to do the score. While I was spending egregious amounts of time on this project, I was forced to neglect my then fiancée (for whom this song is named.) Although I had my hands full scoring the opera, I wanted to show her that she was still on my mind, and so I wrote this song using the same software on which the opera was scored. Even though the opera was successfully finished, this short, 2 minute piece is my favorite work from that time period.
Jake Martin

I guess to begin with, a little bio would be best. My journey to writing and playing music was the direct result of many variables. I started playing the violin in sixth grade, and over the years I learned how to play other instruments as well. My desire to sing came from the result of a cute gal telling me I had a good singing voice in guitar class. Guitar finally being the instrument I put most of my time into, I started writing songs with the song “Rolling, Going, Gone.”

Inspiration

“Rolling, Going, Gone”: The inspiration for this was my love for road trips and seeing new places. I had just come home from a road trip to Moab, and I had been musing the idea of the song.

“The Three L’s”: This was a flood of lyrics at one in the morning. The chorus came first and then all the verses came after. I was inspired to write that after listening to “The Weary Kind” from a movie. It also came after having a good discussion with my mom and dad. I was very appreciative of what they had done for me and taught me.

“Goodnight/Good Morning”: I met an extraordinary girl who was the inspiration for this. She lived an hour and a half away from me, but the trip to go see her was more than worth it. I penned those lyrics in my head every time I would head for home at one in the morning. Then the time came for me to leave, and I knew that things were going to be different when I returned, so the song was an anthem to her until I returned.
Mitchell McBride

Mitchell McBride believes anything is possible—even songwriting accountants. Studying at the Goddard School of Business and directing resource development for a local non-profit, United Way of Northern Utah, he has little time for his passion of writing and storytelling. Born in Ogden, but raised in Washington, DC, Mitch looks forward to a career in business doing something incredible. This past semester he was introduced to songwriting for the first time in a creative writing class and eagerly took to the challenge of writing his first song. (Special thanks to Dr. Victoria Ramirez and her support on this project.) He and his wife Jenny have a newborn daughter, Charley, and call Ogden home.

Inspiration

“Beyond Her Tears”: On 9 October, 2012, fifteen-year-old Malala Yousafzai was shot in the head and neck in an assassination attempt by Taliban gunmen while returning home on a school bus in the Swat Valley of Pakistan. Their failed attack was a response to Malala’s outcry on a BBC News blog that exposed the current war on women and their right to education in the Middle East. The people of Pakistan rallied behind Malala following the incident, waving signs that read, “I am Malala.”

As the youngest nominee ever considered for the Nobel Peace Prize, Malala’s courage has inspired more than just songwriting: she has inspired the world.

Alex Gerrish

Alex Gerrish is a junior in the music program, and is currently pursuing a Bachelor of Arts in Music degree. He enjoys all kinds of music, and loves playing the piano and singing.

Inspiration

“September Jazz Cycle”: This jazz set is a new concept for me, as it’s a jazz piece in movements. I love the fall, and I wanted to write a piece that reflected the general feeling and aesthetics of the season, with some personal events incorporated into each movement. It’s one of my favorite compositions. I hope you enjoy it.
INTRODUCTION

We all know the familiar line that fiction is “lying to tell the truth,” but we also know all too well that many published, financially successful writers have failed miserably at this. Though entertainment and escapism are certainly part of fiction’s appeal, pieces that truly speak to people are those written with raw honesty. While the story may be mostly false, little truths are scattered throughout the details. Fiction does not have to contain some overarching, universal truth in its theme; if a piece is written with honesty and a deep understanding of what makes us yearn for fiction in the first place, it will be somebody’s truth.

We had such an eclectic selection of fiction submissions this year, and some of us had to part with pieces that said something meaningful and true to us in order to fairly represent everyone’s opinion and keep the final cut diverse. And I think I can safely say our final roundup is nothing if not diverse. I was thrilled that our final results included a little bit of everything, from satire to romance, from the morbid to the innocent. I hope that everyone reads at least one of these stories and thinks, “Yes. This writer gets it.” Most of all, I hope something here inspires you to keep writing, or to start. We’re sure you have a good honest lie of your own to tell.

— Stephanie Simonson
A Work in Progress

Emily Oliver

Everyone knows the story about a girl and a boy and how they meet in that one math class where the room inexplicably smells of chalk, even ten years after the school switched to whiteboards. He has blue eyes that glitter as much as any ten-year-old boy’s eyes glitter to a ten-year-old girl when she first develop an infatuation with him.

She stares at the back of his head every day, dreaming of hand holding and kissing and whatever comes after that—she doesn’t know yet because her mother still covers her eyes and ears during movies, trying to preserve her innocence a little longer. Innocence that is shattered by the older girls in the locker rooms at the swimming pool the following summer. She doesn’t know what she’s dreaming of, but she dreams as only a child can of perfect dates where they share mint hot chocolate and cinnamon rolls and of happy endings with picket fences.

They enter their awkward teen years together, and one day he notices her staring. He notices because he’s staring too. They blush and look away and look back again like flies drawn to that beautiful light hanging above the patio in the back garden. They deny the attraction to their friends—at least until Truth or Dare at sleepovers that were supposed to be secret until they inevitably make their way through whispers in bathroom stalls and crowded lunchrooms.

They dance that uncomfortable dance that only seems to be found in darkened gyms that smell like corn dogs and sweat and a choking fog of body spray and perfume. That dance where nobody knows what to do with their hands and someone is definitely doing it behind the bleachers shoved up against the wall. Eventually they all end up huddled together in one big group, jumping up and down to a song with lyrics that, thirty years later, they will realize meant nothing. Except for our stunning leads, who dance closely as though they’ve discovered something glorious in the same four chords that have been playing on repeat for the past twenty minutes.

She looks at him with the eyes of a teenager in the thrall of her first love—and last love, if she has anything to say about it. They kiss under the paper streamers and white twinkly lights the decoration
committee bought after Christmas last year for thirty percent off and pretend they are the swirls and stars of some painting that somehow works its way into every cliché about mysticism and beauty. The world spins around them in that moment, and what a dizzy world it is, managing to spin out of sync around every teenager in that overflowing gymnasium.

He walks her home and tells her again that she’s beautiful as he kicks his shoes against the ground and loosens the tie he borrowed from his dad. They kiss again on the porch until the lights flicker on and off as her father decides that that is quite enough. She goes inside and leans back against the closed door—wrinkling the hundred-dollar dress she’ll never wear again, no matter what she told her dad when she convinced him to buy it for her—and she sighs that life could not get more perfect if it tried.

This is not that story.

Oh, they grow up together. She stares at his head and he catches her staring—as does the teacher, who would like to know if Michael’s head is more interesting than binomials. If she were witty (and honest), she would reply that yes, as a matter of fact, it is. But she is not and says nothing, instead turning a careful shade of burgundy and studying the craftsmanship that has been put into her desk.

He hears the rumors across the crowded lunchrooms and is nice to her, but they never talk about it. She never tells him. Instead he dates Courtney Wallace, as if there could be a stupider name. She watches them spin under the cheap plastic lights from the sidelines at those dances and pretends she can’t hear in great detail how ohGodohGod good the sex apparently is behind the bleachers. She dances once with the sort-of-friend she blackmailed into going with her so she wouldn’t feel like the third wheel to her best friend’s date. It’s awkward and he spends the rest of the night ignoring her. She’s home by eleven.

The last time she sees Michael, they’re strangers linked by a common diploma. They smile, sign yearbooks with an emotion that feels false. The next few years, she’s caught in a weird sense of limbo. Those that tell her she didn’t need no man shame her for wanting one, and those on another side shame her because she wanted one and did nothing. She learns not to talk about it and learns not to think about it until papers and reading take the place of sleep. She learns to set goals—pick a major already—but she forgets to dream. She can’t dream if she can’t sleep and this paper is due in six hours who needs sleep anyway? She acquires a taste for energy drinks that smell like candy.

She finds her way into a job with the government because if she learned nothing else in college, she learned to type at about a hundred words a minute. Her desktop is a rotation of cities she’s never been to and most of which she never will. She still doesn’t sleep well and they know her usual at the place on the corner with the niche name but damn good coffee. She falls in love half a dozen times—with the musician ahead of her in line, with the courier that brings her mail every Tuesday at eleven—but none so much as with that coffee shop.
A part of her will shed a tear when it’s sold to a chain store where they actually charge for extra cream and the biscotti tastes like cardboard. She has good sex and awful sex and one night of mind-blowing sex with a man she knows she’ll never see again and is strangely at peace with that fact. She attends a high school reunion where she sees old friends and a man she vaguely recognizes smiles at her from across the room. She smiles back, but nothing comes of it. The next day, her coffee tastes of peppermint and cinnamon and an odd nostalgia for the lost dreams of a young girl. But she takes one bite into the stale muffin she bought for breakfast and decides to find a new coffee shop.

The barista’s name tag once belonged to someone named Paula, but it’s been scribbled out, the name Trevor squashed underneath it in bold purple Sharpie. Trevor recognizes her from a class she took on journalism in college, and one day, when she goes to add nutmeg to her latte, she notices a heart drawn in the foam. He blushes. She kisses him over the counter, which is probably unsanitary, but she doesn’t care. They visit a few of the cities on her desktop that summer while he documents some things for his dissertation. He gets sunburned at a street festival and she laughs when he uses so much aloe gel that he looks green. He moves in when they come back. He graduates and gets a job in architecture. They find an old yearbook on her bookshelf with embarrassing pictures and slanted writing that declares “I wish I got to know you better” that she feels like she could have written herself so long ago. She sleeps a little easier with him as her little spoon, but he still makes her coffee every morning before work.

She gives journalism another chance and remembers that writing was more than transcribing once upon a time. She breathes life back into her pencil lead and secures a job where she doesn’t have to wake up at five a.m. anymore, but still does at the scent of fresh coffee. One morning, there’s a ring by her favorite mug on top of a note bearing a cliché pun and old song lyrics, and she gets flashbacks of a darkened gymnasium and twinkly lights. The ring is gone when he gets home, the note still on the counter with a large YES written in purple Sharpie.

This is not the story of a girl who fell in love with a boy. This is the story of a girl who fell in love with life and learning how to live it. She fell in love with coffee and even a little bit with complacency. She forgot and remembered how to dream. This is the story of a girl who grew into a woman. One who didn’t need a man, but she wanted one and when she found one that was more than just nice—one that made her happy—that was enough. He wasn’t the key to her happiness or her future. Her life did not end with that ring on her finger, nor did it begin. It continued—fueled by coffee and love and, most importantly, no regrets.
Culling the Fold

Joshua Nelson

The red clouds hang low in the sky, hinting at another dry day. They accent the pink dawn of our little town of Gastol. My wife has been laboring all night and now we have a beautiful boy—John, we call him. He is our sixth child, but our first boy. We were hoping for five boys and one girl so we could have more help with the sheep. That is what we are, a family of weavers and shepherds. My wife has taught all of my daughters to weave, and we weave for everyone. I raise sheep for the village. Here everyone has their own responsibility. We rely on each other, provide for each other, and everyone is taken care of.

The rain has been little for the past several years, and we have had to rely on the town more than ever. They are happy to help, of course; it is our way of life. They give us food, and when we have more, we will give back to those in need. Life is circular in Gastol. Sometimes we are on the top of the arc and sometimes we are on the bottom. Everything is constantly revolving and changing.

Some months back, the Fathers of our community asked me to change my career. They wanted me to be something besides a shepherd. I don’t know anything besides my sheep. They needed me elsewhere, they said. I told them it just wouldn’t work. My family has been shepherds and spinners for so long we know nothing else. The Fathers said we could learn anew and were certain that we had the necessary skills to do what they had in mind, but I declined again. My wife encouraged my daughters to follow the counsel of the Fathers, reassuring them that, as soon as she was able to leave John, she would be there with them. They put down their spinning wheels and looms in exchange for flour and yeast that was kept in the grain stores for times of drought. I wanted to follow the Fathers’ counsel, but my sheep needed me, and eventually, when the rains come again, they will be healthy enough to give usable wool. It is three months into the wet season now and the rains still haven’t come, for the sixth year in a row.

Every day I get up and look at the sky in hopes of dark clouds overhead, but all I see is blue. I walk with my sheep around the sloping hills, hoping for some grazing land. We have been around and through all these hills and they have consumed most of the plants. A few weeks ago, I decided to take some time away from my sheep so that I could
go into town and see what was happening. I penned them up and promised to spend extra time with them the next day before I walked down to town.

Gastol holds weekly meetings that anyone can attend to discuss their needs and the needs of the town with the Fathers. I figure this will be the best place to start. On my way, I peer through the windows of the bakery to see my daughters, and surprisingly, they are talking with some of the Fathers. My daughters are slowly nodding their heads, as if receiving instruction for something, probably a new recipe. I don’t want to disturb them, so I don’t knock at the pane. I arrive at the meeting a little late, so I sit in the back and listen. I only sit there for ten minutes and am getting bored. I am a wanderer and can’t be held to one place. The streets are hard under my feet. It has been so long since I have been in town; usually my wife or daughters are the ones who go into town while I am out caring for my sheep. And now I wish that I had spent more time in town. Everywhere I turn, strangers meet my gaze, all cold and unfriendly. I try to look into the bakery again, but I can’t see my daughters, so I turn back home.

The Fathers come by again, bringing more food for me, my wife, our five daughters, and our newborn son.

“Jeremy,” they say to me, “your five daughters are becoming fine bakers. They learned the skills required very quickly and are progressing along marvelously.”

“They wouldn’t be my flesh and blood if they didn’t,” I reply.

“Jeremy, the thing is . . . well . . . we want you to be there with them.”

“And leave my sheep and my newborn?”

“The sheep aren’t yours, Jeremy. They belong to the town, and as the Fathers of the town, we want you to leave the town’s sheep. Let your wife care for your newborn; come and work in the bakery.”

“These sheep have been in my family for generations. They are as much of a part of my family as my new son.” I am astounded at their persistence. I try to explain to them that I am a shepherd, not a baker. They don’t need me to be a shepherd anymore. They want a baker. I am not a baker. I spent my whole life talking to my sheep. They know my voice, they know what song I sing them when it’s time for dinner, they can spot me from one end of the valley to the other. I am a shepherd and will not leave my sheep.

“I don’t see why you just don’t go to the bakery like they want,” my wife says later that night.

“How can you say that?” I say. “You know how much my sheep mean to me.”

“They’re not your—”

“Don’t finish that sentence. They are my sheep,” I say. “Not another word. Let’s just go to bed.”

“I’m not tired. I will be along later, but I need to finish up some things.”

“Fine. Good night.”
Dead. All dead. Every one of my sheep is dead.

Last night someone murdered them.

I run straight to town, pound on the door of the Fathers’ house, and am greeted with a kind smile.

“Don’t you smile at me like that, you murderer,” I shout.

“What on earth do you mean?” he asks.

“I mean you killed all of my sheep last night.”

“What? Absolutely not. I did nothing of the sort.”

“Maybe it wasn’t you, but someone in this house murdered all of my sheep.”

“We did not, Jeremy,” he says curtly.

My fuming reflection is in the black of his eyes. I first looked into those dark eyes when I was much younger, a mere sheep hand to my father. A sheep was lost and it was my fault. The Fathers needed to know, so my dad sent me. I pounded on that same door in the same fashion and was greeted by the same dark eyes. They took me inside and sat me on a small chair. “Wool is precious,” they began. “We can’t have little boys like you losing sheep without being punished, but, because this is the first time, you won’t get beat.” Ashamed, I nodded, slid out of the chair, and slumped out of the house. Before I got to the door, a sheep bleated. I spun and saw the lost sheep in the hallway. The Father looked furious, but I hugged and thanked him for finding the sheep. My dad looked proud when I walked back to the house with the sheep in tow.

Now the dark eyes I look into hold the truth. “You killed them. I know you did.” The door thuds shut in my face.

I walk the long road back to my house. My thoughts are torn between casting the blame on the Fathers and on my own family. It had to be one of them.

My wife is the only one home when I get there; my daughters are at the bakery. I try to hold the tears back, but being so close to my sheep again causes them to flow.

“At least something good will come of this,” she says, taking me by the hand.

“What do you mean by that?”

“Now you can go to the bakery and work like the Fathers wanted.”

“I will never set a single toe in that forsaken bakery,” I say, pulling my hand away.

“You must.”

“Why? Because some old men tell me I need to?”

“You shouldn’t speak so harshly,” she says.

“I’m going out.”

“Where?”

“To bury my sheep,” I say.

***
Several months have passed. It still hasn’t rained. I questioned every person in town about the massacre of my sheep, but they said nothing. They were frightened sheep, afraid to bleat the truth. My wife did join my daughters at the bakery at the request of the Fathers, but I have never set foot inside that place. It is just my son and me at home now. The Fathers come by every couple weeks or so to try and get me to go to work at the bakery. “There are other people who have jobs to take care of children, there is nothing to worry about, he will be safe,” they say. I can’t believe them. Today, on their way out, they stopped and talked to my wife and daughters, who were coming in the front gate from the bakery. The conversation was a mystery to me, but my daughters and wife were slowly nodding their heads.

After dinner is over and we are cleaning the dishes, a brilliant bolt of lightning strikes the ground by the sheepfold, followed by an earth-shaking roll of thunder and then the most precious sound of falling raindrops dying on the dry, dusty ground. Outside I fly with my arms raised to the heavens, shouting with joy, each inhalation filled with the fresh, wet air. The rains have finally come. Then the realization: My sheep are still dead and I am still no shepherd. My knees hit the newly moistened ground and the cool drops beat against me. Suddenly I realize my daughters and wife are out in the sheepfold with me, carrying my crook and pairs of shears.

“It’s no use. I still don’t have any sheep,” I cry.
“They aren’t for the sheep,” my wife answers.
“What are you doing with them, then?”
“The Fathers wanted us to help them with something.”
“Stealing my tools?”
“No. Helping cull the fold.”
The clouds were hanged from the sky like outlaws from the gallows, a perfect backdrop for today. Alexi shivered as she looked at the rigging in the tree. Today she would leave the ground and dangle from the old acorn tree.

The wind whipped through the sagebrush, but Alexi ignored it as she mindlessly fingered the scars that created ladders of raised flesh crawling over her arms. Memories started coming to her, and she closed her eyes to embrace them.

She was looking in the full-length mirror in her studio apartment. Words were smeared on it in Goth-bitch purple lipstick. I HAVE FOUND THE JOY IN PAIN & THE PAIN IN JOY. All around here lay an orgy of unwashed clothes. They caught her blood, sparing her carpet.

Alexi watched as the blood trickled from the latest scar on her left arm and fell into a purple flannel shirt. She was not a fool. She knew the cutting was melodramatic, but it made sure Ian was coming over.

Ian had been a decent boyfriend, but they had been fighting a lot lately. So she had cut herself for him and sent him a picture, because she had given Ian a key. She wanted him to come in and find her bleeding, because it would lead to make-up sex. So Alexi stood as still as a mannequin as the blood drip-drip-dripped, waiting. Her savior would be coming.

He did not disappoint.

Ian walked in and screamed at her, clamping a hand down on her wrist. He screamed and all the violence excited her. She found his mouth, and they found their way to the bed.

Ian always had to go first.

It began to rain. The tree loomed before Alexi, the wind rustling its leaves. She smiled and watched as Ian was rigged to hang. He went first, and she didn’t mind; as usual, she knew she would get her turn. So she closed her eyes and smiled.
Ian lay naked and sound asleep beside her. He had stopped her from dying again, but the cutting/sex routine was losing the thrill. Ian had saved her, but was their relationship bleeding out?

Alexi needed to clear her head, so she sparked up a Virginia Slim and surfed the Web dressed only in Band-Aids and lovely bruises. Soon Alexi’s eyes widened in horror at the train wreck-like scene she found.

Alexi couldn’t tear away from the sight. People were being hanged in this day and age. She felt excited and disgusted by what she was seeing.

The cigarette burned her hand. Alexi put it out, grabbed a robe, and went outside to spark up another.

Alexi smiled at Ian, who hung lifeless from the old acorn tree, and took a drag from her cigarette. The rain continued to fall.

Alexi looked over to Monroe, who was watching Ian intently. He smiled at her. It was Ian who had found Monroe after she had shown him the site. Ian and Monroe had corresponded through email afterward. And then Ian had suggested that Alexi go with him to see what Monroe was all about. He said it might spice things up to try something new.

Alexi thought about that meeting, and she smiled back at Monroe before blinking away a raindrop. She fingered the rungs of scars some more as the memory came, the thought of walking into Monroe’s shop for the first time.

Porcelain faces were nailed up on the wall. Each one was cracked and broken differently from the others. Monroe had come out of the back and called them his study in humanity, because they were all broken in their own unique ways.

He and Ian shook hands. Alexi admired his self-inflicted scars, and the tribal tattoos that wound around his arms as she realized she could be one of the faces on the wall. Ian had been right; Monroe would make things interesting.

Monroe introduced himself to her after Ian. She recalled being in awe at meeting Monroe and seeing his shop. Now she could only remember one thing Monroe had said: “I am a disappointing shadow of the human being I could be.” She wished she could remember the context he had said this in, but all that came were the words. Monroe spoke in creative, poetic ways, and Alexi fell in love with his speeches.

Not long after that, Monroe had agreed to hang them.

Alexi’s eyes refocused as she flicked her butt to the ground, crushed it with her bare foot, and savored the slight burn it gave. They were lowering Ian’s limp body, which meant it was her turn to hang.

Alexi walked forward past Ian’s limp form. This is what it all had been leading to, a double hanging. Monroe whispered his poetics into Alexi’s ears as she climbed onto the chair. “We vivisect to dissect our own remains.”
Alexi smiled as she closed her eyes and mumbled those words like a mantra.

She recalled lying on a table at Monroe’s shop earlier that day. Everything was so sterile. Ian was holding her hand, fingerling her fleshy ladder. People stood around her. She felt like a frog in a science class, waiting for them to bury the knife in her to reveal her secrets. It was then that Monroe had said those words first: “We vivisect to dissect our own remains.” He then told Alexi to take a deep breath, and jammed the first hook into her back.

The pain came in a molten rush. She squeezed Ian’s hand and slammed her eyes closed.

Alexi stood with four hooks through her shoulder muscles. The wind and rain wrapped around her. Blood trickled occasionally, which left little red trails down her back. Chills now ran up those paths as she smiled while they rigged her up. The hooks were now connected to the old acorn tree. It was time to hang.

They began to hoist her up. Alexi’s eyes closed and vibrated, mimicking REM sleep.

Hands grasped her, holding her.
Alexi wished they’d let go as she fought to breathe.

The pain was exquisite, but she could endure. She even found she wanted it.

Soon the hands were gone.
She kicked the chair.
And Alexi hung by four hooks in her back.

She was amazed as the world let go.
The pain began to bleed into wonder, and she was gone.
Alexi’s mind went through all the images of cutting herself. Then it shot all the tawdry sex she had had in her life. Blood and sex was the story of her life, and none of it lasted.

The rainwater ran down her fleshy ladders as she fasted from gravity. She was pushed by what felt like a breeze, and vaguely she recalled the wind through the sweet pain.

Alexi hanged, and then they were bringing her down. Tears swelled in Alexi’s eyes as she fought to keep them open. She never wanted to come back down.

Ian came to her. Blood wept from their backs as the embraced. Two broken porcelain dolls, a study in humanity. Monroe smiled at them as Ian kissed her. Things were interesting again.
Honey Lamb
Stephanie Simonson

When I was little, I loved honey so much I would pour it into bowls and eat it plain with a spoon. My mother would laugh and call me Pooh Bear. I would eat it alone in my room with the door closed, as though it were a private act. I prefer to savor delicious things without being distracted or observed.

I can never remember the exact taste of honey until it is on my tongue, then I am newly amazed at how it fills my mouth down to the pore with such exquisite flavor. It baffles me that honey isn’t more revered. Why don’t people talk about it more, or with more awe? Its sweetness is unparalleled, and was there ever anything so pretty that was, happily, edible too? Like syrupy gold — or the blood of an angel. To think it is closer to being the excrement of an insect!

I don’t eat it plain anymore, as it burns my throat slightly in large quantities. But for watery tea and bitter medicine, I outweigh their flavors in honey. When I feel warnings of a cold, I drink it with hot water and lemon juice, though I’m careful not to dilute the flavor too much. I douse all kinds of fruit in it, as it’s the only way I can get my fruit down. I coat almonds in various flavors of creamed honey and put them in the freezer on a cookie sheet, though I usually eat them while the honey is still gooey because I can’t bear to wait so long. I eat it on bread too, of course, though never enough to spill off the edges, because I hate to get it on my hands. And when I was with Hailey’s father, I had more taboo uses for it.

Speaking of Hailey, she was not the prettiest baby. Her face was blotchy and bloated with pale, froggy eyes, but she would’ve been pretty later on. I liked making her happy; even if those vacant eyes never showed it, I could tell when she liked something. I knew she loved honey before she was even born. Usually, I go through a bottle a week, but when I was pregnant, I sucked through them like baby bottles, only stopping to soothe my throat with water.

I saw how she loved it when I fed it to her. Her soft, wide mouth closed like a fist around the spoon and sucked greedily, those big frog eyes fixed upon my face like she saw me for the first time, and I realized we were bonding, bonding over sweet angel’s blood.

“Yes, sweetie, little Pooh Bear, you love it, don’t you?”

I suppose I recalled, vaguely, that honey is toxic to infants, but it didn’t seem important at the time. And I’m not even sure that’s why she died. I always did doubt that something so sweet and golden could ever be deadly.

Even after she’d become that lifeless little lump, I decided to give her more of what she loved, as now it couldn’t hurt her — if, indeed, it ever had. I ringed her mouth with it until her lips were shiny and flaxen, and filled her to the brim with it, until it truly could have been her blood!
The monster waits for me outside. I smell its reeking stench, hear it sniff at the air, trying to find my scent. I see its wide, glowing eyes fixed on my hiding spot. It can’t get me here. It’s too big to fit into the makeshift entrance, and, not for the first time, I’m grateful to be able to fit in places others can’t. But I can’t stay in here forever, wasting away in this dank, moldy prison.

I think of my warm, soft bed, my careful store of food gathered on countless risky excursions like this one. I’ve been so careful to avoid the monsters. I’ve studied their habits, watched their movements, observed as they’ve hunted and killed the others. I thought I could outsmart them forever.

And yet here I am. Cornered. Trapped.

Eventually, I’ll have to move. I’ll have to go out in the open.

Out where it can get me.

It knows that. It’s studied me, too.

Something moves a fair distance away. I hear a scuffling as one of the others makes a break for it. The eyes watching me turn towards the new sound.

Alerted, eager and hungry. I thought that my heart had been racing before, but now it’s rushing like mad.

Go over there, I mentally plead. Go hunt them!

It’s a selfish thought. It’s one of my friends I’m wishing this monster on. Probably even a family member. I almost don’t care.

The monster moves. Smooth and lithe, a shadow that melds into

The Run
Michelle C. Paul
the dimness as it stalks swiftly away, hunting another unlucky soul. I bunch up my legs beneath me and focus on the next safe place, a small hole beneath an overhang across the vast open field. Not quite home, but it’s got more than one exit, most of them safely out of the monster’s reach. I creep forward closer to the entrance, my movements jerky, erratic, like my body’s fighting my control. I just have to wait for the right moment, wait for . . .

I burst out of my hiding place, my feet scrabbling for grip. My throbbing heart is nearly deafening, my gaze so focused that I’m barely aware of the monster whirling towards me in surprise at my bold stupidity. My stomach leaps into my throat, and my mind screams for me to take cover under the nearest anything, but I’m almost to safety. It’s just right there, right in front of me.

Out of the corner of my vision, I see one of my friends. He’s darted out from his own hiding place, a reckless bid for safety, and now the monster is confused. Which to chase, which to hunt.

The decision is apparently too difficult for its overlarge mind. It hesitates, just for a moment. It’s just enough time for me to dart into safety with a triumphant leap, even as the monster decides to come after me, as it bounds forward, loses its grip on the slick field, and crashes face first into the wall within a whisker’s width of the tip of my tail.

I rest just outside its reach as it angrily jabs its declawed paw into the hole after me, trying to scoop me from safety in payment for its self-inflicted pain. I wait, and before long, the monster gives up and slinks off in search of a better game.
Winter Hands

Erica Farnes

A stranger on the bus once told me I had feminine hands.

I’d never thought of them thus; “feminine” meant small and delicate and petite. A sort of Victorian femininity with wrists so fragile, waving in the wrong fashion would shatter them; women with hourglass waists as thin as my wrists. My fingers are long, something my piano instructor always lauded over. They grew up, not out, my fingers, and this skin stretched with them instead of adding more to hold space. My hands are often cold, perhaps due to the dispersal of insulation, which is why the stranger had them clasped in his own.

He abandoned my right hand and took the left with both of his, running his thumbs along the backside of my hand, taking deliberate moments to individually warm each finger.

It dawned on me how odd it was for me to immediately accept his perusal of my flesh. And, more than that, to so thoroughly enjoy it.

My feminine hands and I are not the sort to cavort in such a way with men. They are accustomed to occupying their time holding pen to paper and making a mad chicken scratch of consonants, often finding vowels to be a waste of calories to create. My words are my being: the only manner in which I am able to visibly communicate to the realm in which I dwell — to the musicians and artists and actors that somehow find depth in the creation of visual pictures splayed across the stage, screen, canvas, sound waves.

Words are all I comprehend. I see the world in metaphor, only seeing the visual as it is depicted in text.

I never saw my hands as feminine. I saw them as wide utensils manipulating the tools of my talent, creating in reality what my head
internally mimes. He told me what they were, and I could not cease to see it.

He returned my hand and I clasped it with the other, transferring the erotic warmth he’d left. I looked at him.

He rocketed to another topic of little to no application or importance, as I had well gathered through our discourse and hand-heating that he was prone to do.

I smiled and laughed when his charm reached relevance, trying to find passage into his head — ultimately, my slowly chilling hands reminded, his heart.

He had no reservations: he had taken the seat next to me holding several bags, and as the bus emptied, he spread his belongings to less obtrusive places.

I, with my bag cemented on my lap, was awed at his ability to trust and disregard the idea of theft so commonly. He passed through life and the bus as though no one could tarnish him.

He’d seen me before, he said. I couldn’t recall, but I had as well. He was the cavalier, well-dressed man who seat-hopped in the mornings, carrying a smile and conversation.

But not a bag. His items were always stored elsewhere.

I confessed I usually occupied my hour of bus time tuning out the sound of my surroundings, losing myself to a sublevel slumber or the lyrical poetics of favored musicians.

To discourse with strangers, to take the hand of another before names ever crossed lips, how freeing a life would be: to live it, not watch or imagine.

I looked forward, unable to hold his gaze for more than five seconds every half minute.

“Let me see your hand,” he said, his words drifting like the fog of his cologne about my shoulders, their warmth frigid by the moment they reached my hands.

I turned them toward him, moving my eyes to his profile — briefly — before observing too intimately his handling of my feminine entities.

“They’re not so cold now,” he smiled.
“Time to get up, lazybones!” came a voice from below, echoing off of the eggshell surfaces of the stairwell. Jorge ignored it and, closing his eyes again, plummeted instantly back into his pillow, searching hopelessly for the silver cord leading back to the lands of his dreams.

Gerald made no bones over who was the dominant male between them. After all, it was Gerald who had opened his door to a frantic Jorge escaping a herd of ravenous zombies a few months back.

Through the haze of half-sleep, Jorge could hear the heavy footfalls alternately thumping and creaking up the stairs, emphasizing his associate’s telltale limp. The door squealed open like a hundred keys scraping across a rusted paint job. He felt Gerald’s size-twelve steel toes rest between his shoulder blades and gruffly thrust him from his contented siesta.

“I said get your ass out of bed. There’s work to be done. Lawns ain’t gonna mow themselves.”

“But why I gotta get out of bed so early? Nobody gonna care when the work get done. You don’t do no work anymore anyways. Only me . . .” said Jorge.

“I care when shit gets done. So unless you got somewhere’s else to be, for the third time now, get your ass up. You got a row o’ houses to get done down on the PCH before it gets too hot.” Gerald gave a snort to clear his nose of mucus and straightaway left the room.

“Hijo de la chingada, puta madre, cójale en el culo sin la grasa, pendejo culero,” grumbled Jorge under his breath as he lifted himself up with his Zombie Apocalypse Lawn Care & Estate Maintenance

Nathan Woodbury
quiet but still intact Latino pride. He had given Gerald his word that he
would help tend the community lawns in return for the service of having
his life saved, and then spared, by his new benefactor. Gerald had given
Jorge the option to either help with his community beautification and
upkeep project or take his chances outside again. Jorge chose life and,
subsequently, servitude. He would not stain his honor and renege on the
deal, regardless of how pointless the task. Besides, it gave him something
to occupy his time and maintain the threadbare façade of his dwindling
humanity. Nevertheless, Jorge hated the idea that he was honor-bound to
this mad white man, a fact that Gerald never ceased to exploit.

It wasn’t altogether unsafe for Jorge to go out among the zombie
hordes roaming the streets of San Juan Capistrano. The area surrounding
the popular tourist destination really didn’t have a huge residency of
undead. At least, not compared to the scenes of horror to the north and
south of their location in Los Angeles and San Diego, respectively. As a
precaution, Gerald had raided the marine sciences academy just up the
coast at Dana Point. He pilfered a suit of chain mail used for diving with
sharks and an antique brass diver’s helmet for added protection against
the inevitable feeding frenzy that would be attracted by the noise from
the gas-powered equipment.

Jorge descended the narrow stairwell from their makeshift living
quarters that had formerly been the managerial offices of the Costco they
now called home. The windowless metal structure of the building made it
a perfect fortress compound for their base of operations in the area.

“You make the coffee, boss?” Jorge asked, though there was nobody
visibly around to hear his request. He was sure that Gerald’s precision
hearing would pick it up.

“Hell no, make it yourself,” echoed Gerald’s response from halfway
across the store on Aisle Fifteen, where he was perusing the meager
selection of breakfast cereals.

Jorge rolled his eyes and walked dejectedly to the loading bay where,
not too long ago, men and women would have unloaded the day’s cargo of
consumer goods. But now the barren warehouse only contained the tools
of his new trade loaded in the bed of an old crew-cab Dodge pickup truck
with a faded metallic-grey paint job. The confines reeked of gasoline
and motor oil entwined with the musty-sweet aroma of day-old grass
clippings, soil, and peat. It reminded Jorge of better, less fearful times.

By the time he had donned his suit of shark mail, Gerald joined him at
the back of the building and impatiently waited to open and close the bay
door. Jorge opened the creaky door of his truck and hopped in. He waited
patiently as the glow plugs heated up in the decades-old diesel motor
and fired it, a thick black cloud of exhaust choking the air. It was one of
the simple joys of his bleak life, to force Gerald, if only for a moment,
to breathe in the noxious particulates of spent diesel fuel. He smiled,
watching an asthmatic Gerald cough and sputter in the rearview mirror
as he trundled away in his diesel beast, the wooden-limbed gardening
tools clattering in the bed.
He pulled out onto a deserted Camino Capistrano and slowly headed west to the Pacific Coast Highway, where his morning’s work lay. But first, he had a little recreational stop for a different kind of grass. He made a quick detour to an abandoned medical marijuana dispensary, where he scanned the hundreds of strains and potencies of the medicinal wares. After settling on a particularly vibrant electric-blue-haired variety labeled “Hindu Purple Kush,” Jorge nabbed a pack of rolling papers to complete his supplies. He was never what might have been branded a “pothead” before the world went to shit, but now it was his bastion of calm. His way of mellowing mind and body in order to deal with the harsh dread of his new life.

He arrived at the stretch of eight houses a mile south on the PCH and mused to himself why rich white people would bother having lawns at their vacation beach houses when the ocean was only a few dozen yards away. What was the point of grass when you had the unspoiled sands of the coast immediately behind your house?

He quickly rolled a joint and lit it with the electric cigarette lighter in the truck. Cautiously, he exited the vehicle and scoured the landscape with his eyes, looking for any sign of undead in the area. There was a thick coastal mist hanging low in the sky that blotted out the sun in large patches, giving his surroundings a mottled grey tinge with the occasional gleam of radiance sneaking through. Jorge could see some jerky, shuffling silhouettes a mile or so down the beach from him. He would be able to get at least half of the lawns mowed before they had a chance to reach him. Regardless, he decided to strap on his protective headgear, just in case.

A dense veil of smoke from his joint quickly filled the spherical chamber of the diver’s helmet. A serpent of silver-white trailed out of the tube that would have been attached to a diver’s air supply. Jorge grabbed his small gardening spade and sluggishly made his way through the weeds of the flower boxes. He always started with the quiet work first before attracting the unwanted attention of the flesh-eaters with his rattling lawnmower.

As Jorge approached the final house’s flowerbed, he heard the unsettling rasp of a zombie that had spotted its meal. Frantically, he examined his immediate surroundings through the round, milky glass port of his helmet. He reached for the billy club dangling at his side, his only resource for self-defense, and still he saw nothing. But the croaky hiss continued.

Pointing his club wildly at an unseen foe, he backed his way towards the house. Jorge tripped over something soft but solid, and fell ass-over-teakettle backwards, his weapon landing halfway across the yard as his arms floundered to break his fall. The same something he tumbled over now mounted his legs and began chewing fruitlessly at the chain mesh that protected him. With a madness engineered by panic, Jorge peeled backwards, gnashing and tearing at the turf beneath him. The shrill blast of his terrified shriek bounced around his
helmet, temporarily deafening him in his escape.

As he struggled to regain his nerves and recapture his lost bludgeon, he finally noticed the groveling torso of his attacker. Its legs had been completely removed, hip and all — Jorge dare not imagine how — and its intestines trailed out unending behind it. The sandy, necrotic organs made the sycophant look like some sort of perverted squid that’d discovered a leap in evolution and made its new home on the pristine beach. The rabid creature determinedly scraped its way onward towards Jorge, still in hopes of a fresh meal.

He retrieved his weapon, approached the crawler, quickly bashed out its teeth, rendering it mostly harmless, and then gripped it by its arms to dispose of it. After all, he did have job to finish. The rotted flesh stripped off what was left of its decomposed musculature, as if removing a surgeon’s rubber gloves. Jorge cringed as he readjusted his grip and hauled the snapping upper body down to the ocean, where he wondered if it was capable of drowning and being removed from its curse for good.

He deplored violence. Jorge couldn’t bring himself to arm up with a gun. He could never make the mental commitment to kill a human, even if the enemy he now faced was reanimated dead flesh. He still viewed it as murder any way you cut it. He had his armor that protected him from bodily harm, and if he was going to defend himself, he preferred to disable his enemy rather than spattering its brains with a bullet. He figured if you broke out the undead assailant’s teeth, the worst it could do was attempt to gum you to death.

Jorge peered down the beach at where he had spotted the other zombies earlier. A pair could now be plainly distinguished lurching down the shore in his direction. They had closed half the distance that previously separated living from undead. One of them was clearly a local surfer, the torn wetsuit that still clung to its body flapping in the breeze like a black standard. It had its leg still strapped to the leash of the surfboard that dragged stuttering behind it in the sand. He needed to finish up quickly if he wanted to avoid many other confrontations. But first, Jorge needed to attend to the overwhelming nagging of his stomach, the unavoidable result of a severe attack of the munchies.
INTRODUCTION

It amazed me at the variety of pieces that were submitted to nonfiction this year. As we chose pieces to be represented in *Metaphor*, this year the staff decided we wanted an array of different pieces. Many people don’t realize the vastness of nonfiction. It’s more than just memoirs and educational pieces. As we picked our top pieces, we found educational pieces, philosophical prose, creative nonfiction, as well as pieces giving us a quick peek into the writer’s life. We’re thankful for the submissions and the experience we were given as a staff to work with some amazing writers.

— Shannon Beverley
Some have questioned Christianity’s traditional “binary” conception of Heaven and Hell. While I find the dichotomous problems with Heaven and Hell compelling, the more serious problem (or inconsistency, perhaps) pertaining to God’s judgment, so I will argue, resides in the designation of classes in which individuals are ultimately compartmentalized according to their merit (or demerit). A classification system is necessarily generalizing, and this is antithetical to a personal God, who must be sensitive to the individual. Thus, God’s traditional attributes of being omnibenevolent, personal, just, and merciful exclude the conception of any tiered reward-system of generalized eternal states. This analysis extends the scope of the original “problem of Hell” to include many religions that do not obtain the binary feature historically integral to the problem of Hell. It seems, then, I will in some sense invert the issue, as now a problem of Heaven.

Let’s first identify what is basically meant by the “problem of Hell.” Formulated in different ways, the argument tends to find the existence of Hell irreconcilable given God’s traditional attributes. Consider: (1) God is generally held to be omnibenevolent.¹ (2) Hell is described as eternal punishment in the Bible, which is held to be God’s word.² The question arises: Can a being coherently obtain both traits entailed by 1 and 2? It seems omnibenevolence conflicts with a conception of God’s justice that designates infinite punishment for finite failure (i.e., a faithless life). Theodore Sider has recently argued in this tradition with his own contribution to the problem, specifically with respect to vagueness.³ While his argument is compelling concerning the traditional Christian Heaven and Hell binary (either reward or punishment), there are religions with doctrine that entail tiered glory (classes of reward).⁴ Without the burden of eternal binary classes, apologists of these religions may initially see themselves in a more defensible position; that is, it may at first seem advantageous to have doctrine-based, nuanced tiers of Heaven to disperse at least some vagueness.

It is plausible that a multi-tiered heaven may aid the issue of “borderline cases,” as described in Sider’s “Hell and Vagueness.”⁵
Borderline cases are those in which one either barely makes it to Heaven or barely makes it to Hell. If we accept there is a criterion that God employs to determine the placement of individuals after death, we can visualize a line with a cutoff point somewhere in the middle: the righteous on the far right side, the wicked on the far left side. In the middle, then, there are both those who have barely satisfied God’s criterion, and those who have barely missed it. The problem arises, turning on the dichotomous concept in play, most poignantly in the relationship that these middle individuals share. They are in many ways similar: they led similar lives; they exited life with mediocre character. How, then, might a just God damn one to Hell eternally while lifting one to Heaven eternally? Here the multi-tiered heaven apologist might object on grounds that there exists a degree of glory appropriate to mediocrity. I unenthusiastically grant this objection to borderline cases, but I contend the solution of a multi-tiered heaven opens the floodgates to other problems; God’s hasty class designation is a doctrinal feature that is intrinsically flawed. I contend that unless the number of classes entailed by a multi-tiered Heaven is equal to the number of individuals who have lived, it is not sufficient for a personal God’s judgment. Consider an analogy invoking the basic social institutions of ‘justice’ common to us. Granting little nuance, I’ll proceed in basic terminology serving only for illustrative purposes. A legislator of elected members determines a legal framework locally and nationally. Law enforcement agencies made up of officers enforce laws. Finally, in courts familiar to western societies, certain anointed members have the role of judge; their assignment is adjudication within a legal framework.

Imagine David, D, appears in court accused of some crime, F, associated with financial fraud. On the day D appears in court, Elizabeth, E, also appears in court, for some crime, V, associated with a violent act. D and E are both convicted of their respective crimes, and they are both sentenced (different amounts of time) to prison, according to their crimes. To emphasize: although D and E are sentenced to the same institution—prison—D and E are first distinguished by varying amount of time, according to their crimes. To emphasize: although D and E are sentenced to the same in institution—prison—D and E are first distinguished by varying amount of time, according to their crimes F and V. Now when they arrive at prison, they are second distinguished in their placement within the walls of the prison. While offenders of any offense F are given relatively more leeway, so to speak, offenders of any offense V are generally isolated, surrounded by more guards, further confined, and experience an altogether different, more restricted experience than other inmates not convicted of V offenses.

In our real world, F offenders have vastly different experiences within the human institution of prison than V offenders. We have in effect multi-tiered prisons in which we have made a bona fide attempt to consider the subtleties of society’s criminals, in order to foster a more just institution. True justice is not served, however. Consider a V offender, who is sentenced to a month for getting into a bar fight, spending his days subject to the same environment as his cellmate,
another V offender, a lifelong hitman. While it seems unjust that these two criminals share the same space, as their crimes are of a substantially different magnitude, they are sentenced different times accordingly. God’s judgment, according to the doctrines I contest, is held to be eternal; the glaring ramification, then, is that God’s doctrinal judgment lacks even this temporally restricted nuance (i.e., specificity of duration) invoked by our human justice. Similarly, it strikes me as uncontroversial to say that no serious member of our society would suggest that our justice system is so perfect that it would resemble God’s justice. And yet, if we carefully examine what is unjust about our system of justice, these shortcomings adulterate God’s justice if we are to accept a multi-tiered Heaven.

Let’s assume, for our purposes, that D and E are rightly convicted of their crimes. This is important, to avert objections, because this is to say three things that put our story circumstantially similar to God’s position: (1) The legislature was right in legislating F and V to be against the law (by analogy, God is right to determine God’s law); (2) the police officer was right to arrest D and E (by analogy, God is right if God determines one has either abided or broken God’s law); and finally (3) the judge rightly sentenced D and E (by analogy, God rightly designates one a member of one of God’s classes of Heaven).

The idea I want to stress is that true justice is not reductionist. I will use afore described (3) to demonstrate the detriment of our imperfect justice system, and thus why God’s justice must not entail states or tiers. The reason human justice is not perfect is because neither our legislatures, nor our officers, nor our judges have the attributes of omniscience or omnipresence. Lacking these attributes, our handling of justice necessarily reduces individual offenders to types or classes of offenders (our offenses, literally, are compartmentalized in this manner: Class A misdemeanor, Class B misdemeanor, Class A felony, et. al), and when these types of offenders reach prison they are put in a type of environment. A perfectly just system would not compartmentalize the individual or his actions; a true judge would not make decisions based on an objective kind of behavior; a just God would not assign individuals to certain classes, because classes entail an entire predetermined environment that is not particularly tailored to the individual’s actions.

Though I’ve made preceding reference to these attributes, before continuing I will consider three attributes relevant to my argument: God is (1) omnibenevolent; (2) a personal God; (3) and just. Further, I will assume that God does not merely exhibit these traits, but maintains them always. We may extrapolate from these that a rightful deliberation that conforms to God’s attributes (by deliberation, I mean process through which God determines our eternal fate) is one in which, by a personal God, is made on a case-by-case basis. I contend that this must be without using any kind of impersonal information such as category or type, as this precludes each of God’s assumed attributes. Perfect justice would reasonably entail a sentence
based on your understanding, your experience, your ability, and your responsibility—and further, in an environment contextualized to all of these traits.

I will turn last to a brief discussion on environmental impersonality, the aspect I believe my argument hinges on. If God obtains 1 through 3, the punishment or reward God would entitle each individual must be environmentally neutral. When we contemplate a place, we invariably imagine the place’s environment. Even in cases when we have no empirical basis, we amalgamate a presumed environment. Consider the prospect of a multi-tiered heaven. We can imagine these tiers in terms of their respective features: those that entail good, better, and best. By implication, then, there are good, better, and best individuals. This generalization clearly undermines God’s aforementioned attributes. In the context of eternal designation, God generalizes an effect on us (i.e., we are classified; we are subject to the same environmental conditions others are), God fails to be a personal God. That we are accountable for our every action—thus the emphasis on our free will—we must accordingly be rewarded on the aggregate merit of our own action. The staunch individualism procured by religious traditions predicated on free will would be precluded if it were the case that Heaven was in fact multi-tiered. The advantage that a classless Heaven has is that for those who enter, it is environmentally neutral. Each individual is subject to the same environmental features, and it’s in a neutral context that God may let reign pure justice. I suppose further that tiers of reward, degrees of glory, levels of Heaven—they seem in short to try to see what it isn’t seen; to establish a place that is placeless.

My purpose in this paper is not to establish how God must justly determine our end; rather, it is to demonstrate the myopic nature that a tiered afterlife entails. From the supposition of a tiered afterlife, irresolvable concerns abound:

What is happening when people barely make it to the highest degree of glory? To what degree does God’s grace come into play? Why does God’s grace have limitations? For the individual who barely makes it to Heaven, it may appear an injustice to the righteous who firmly made it into the highest degree. It would appear that a tiered Heaven is the fabrication of manmade social constructs familiar to us in this life. Rather than our world’s class divisions reflecting the distant righteous class divisions of Heaven, I’m inclined to see the reverse: with a context we can understand (i.e., our less-than-perfect human systems), we have tried to frame the questions of Heaven.
Notes

1 Latin/English: omni/all, benevolent/good.

2 “Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power” (II Thessalonians 1:9; KJV).


4 E.g. (1) Islamic scripture describes, “Seven heavens one above the other” (Qur’an 67:3; Muhsin Khan). (2) Mormon scripture describes three degrees of glory: celestial, terrestrial, and telestial, respectively (Doctrine & Covenants Section 76).


6 Notice we needn’t discuss what particularly God’s criterion is; we need only to assume God obtains criterion for this to illuminate.
The Legend of Mel Cassidy
Stephanie Simonson

I recall only two things from my momentary stint as a Brownie: the first three words of the Girl Scout pledge were “on my honor” (which I read as “on my bonor” because of the font), and the head of the Brownie leader’s daughter popping up from nowhere like a mushroom, with a gap-toothed grin aimed right at me.

Mel Cassidy was a kindergartner at the time and a year below me in school. She was a waif-like little girl, with protruding ribs, pasty skin, watery green eyes and short, tangled hair that I would relish describing as “dishwater blonde.”

Our moms arranged the first play date when mine came to pick me up from our first Brownie meeting and found us racing around the gym together instead of sitting in the circle.

For the next five and a half years, Mel Cassidy practically lived at my house. We spent plenty of time at her house too, but usually we preferred mine. The Cassidys’ house carried the lingering smell of sour milk, and you could be sure to find a half-full cup of tepid water or the dust of a month-old cookie wherever you stepped or sat. Mel’s room was carpeted in naked Barbies and miscellaneous toy pieces, and we could walk into the living room at any time to find her mom breastfeeding Mel’s three-year-old brother.

Mel unleashed many traits in me that I’m ashamed to look back on. I don’t know if it was my oldest-child instinct coupled with the perceived superiority that came with being older than her, if I’d just been without friends for too long, or if I was just a sadistic little control freak, but I was brutal in keeping her ego in check. I never hesitated to shoot down anything she said with a “that’s stupid, Mel” and frequently implied that she was stupid, ugly, or a “pig.”

Surprisingly, I remember only one instance, relatively early in our friendship, of her telling me I was “so mean.” The rest of the time, she preserved her ego by openly competing with me in the department of who was more spoiled. When I began obsessively collecting Pound Puppies and Polly Pockets, she’d always be just one set behind me. When I got a Furby, she got a Furby Baby. When I got a beautiful new bedroom with a TV in it, she demanded that the downstairs TV room in her house become hers. When I proudly said that my new bed was
almost like a bunk bed because it had a pullout guest bed under it, she had her mother buy her a real bunk bed. When her mother hired someone for a day to clean Mel’s room, Mel wasted no time in telling me she had her own maid. When I got a twenty-dollar bill for my birthday, Mel made her mom give her a hundred dollars that year in lieu of any presents. And when my mom would pour us punch, Mel would compulsively scrutinize the glasses to make sure she had a little bit more.

“Poor Steph,” she once sighed after my mom had accidentally given her more punch than me. “I have two moms that like me better.”

After I reported this to my mom, she went out of her way to dote on me in front of Mel. If Mel got under my skin, it was nothing as to the effect she had on my parents. When Mel’s parents got divorced because “my dad slapped me for talking back to my mom,” my mom’s response was “There has to be more to the story. No one would get divorced just because he gave that little girl the smack she deserves.”

If there was one thing Mel could lord over me, it was her superior sexual knowledge. She would frequently allude to sex, prodding me to see if I knew as much as she did. In hindsight, she had more emotional baggage than I was willing to give her credit for. Her older brother’s friend had once taken her into the closet and asked her to take off her clothes, and then “had sex” with her. Once I’d learned the term “virgin” and employed it by asking a circle of friends to “raise your hand if you’re a virgin,” Mel glumly said, “I’m not.”

When I told my mom this, she said, “Oh, no, she still counts as a virgin. Her brother and his friends are still little boys. I’m having trouble believing his little friend could actually get an erection.” When I asked her to explain this, though, she seemed unable or unwilling to fully clarify the term right then and there. This resulted in her taking me to Red Lobster to soften the blow of “the talk,” which she delivered right there at the table. I missed the finer points when she brought out a mini-blackboard to draw a diagram; I was too busy praying no one around us was looking to take in anything I didn’t already know.

Mel and I mostly fueled our curiosities by enacting erotic romances with our stuffed animals. The writers and filmmakers who toil away at exposés of teenage life would’ve promptly shifted their attention to prepubescent girls had they seen the X-rated sex scenes we subjected Pikachu and Cuddles the Bunny to.

Mel, however, wanted a legitimate romantic outlet, and eventually decided my brother James was her boyfriend. My parents found her unrequited affection for James and her incipient thirst for romantic experience more amusing than anything — until she started to employ her feminine wiles a bit too aggressively.

At first, my dad chastised my mom, James, and me for making fun of Mel after she’d left about things like her throwing tantrums for not getting the last Capri Sun. After a certain series of events, he not only
joined us, but firmly restricted Mel to only two visits a week. The first time he was shoved from his pedestal of taking a higher road was when Mel developed the habit of urinating in our backyard. Apparently the indoor bathroom was too far, but this didn’t explain why she needed to strip completely naked in order to do it. She preferred to do this in full view of James, and on the side of the backyard that was visible to the street. When my dad witnessed this, all his disapproval of Mom’s and our hilarity at Mel’s expense died in the form of an original song about Mel’s peeing habits, to the tune of “Popcorn Popping on the Apricot Tree”:

“James looked out the window and what did he see —
Mel in the backyard takin’ a pee!
Mel had shown him such a nice surprise —
Mel’s butt right before his eyes!”

James soon made friends who inevitably slept over on nights when Mel was also there. One of these friends was Brandon, a slight blonde boy with whom Mel carved out the “banter” niche. During one sleepover, the four of us were engaging in one of our favorite sleepover activities, sledding headfirst down our staircase on pillows to a sea of blankets at the bottom. Mel wore a baby-doll nightgown that night, which spilled up over her waist as she slid down the stairs, revealing satiny heart-print underwear that I’d never seen her wear before. Still being at the age where the revelation of one’s underwear was one of the biggest humiliations we could imagine, we got a proper laugh at her out of it, but Mel seemed unperturbed. Later, an argument with Brandon culminated in Mel pulling down his boxer shorts. Long story short: his mother was incensed, my parents were mortified, and I saw a substantial (though temporary) decrease in my playtime with Mel.

Throughout all this, I craved Mel’s company steadily over the years. Whatever ugly side she brought out in me, she was equally good for me. She offered me the kind of flexible, unconditional companionship I longed for, always available and content to let me call the shots. I worry that I took out all the isolation and low self-confidence I felt at school on her and that she made it too easy for me; by allowing me full creative reign over our role-playing games, you could be sure that the evil prince would want to marry my character and address her character thus: “And you, Ugliness! You will be her maid!”

I also owe to Mel my biggest creative outlet as a child. When inspiration struck me, Mel and I would spend weeks writing our own chapter books on scratch paper and illustrating them with old crayons. I always got to choose the premise, and the writing process was very much a social one, so that even though we would both write our own book for whatever the premise of the day was—short stories about animals, an alternate-universe story in which we were princesses with pet unicorns, autobiographical stories, stories about first aid and safety like the videos they showed us in school—the results would end up nearly identical, and we rarely finished a project before moving on to another one.

We would write and perform songs, puppet shows, plays, musicals, and dance routines for my family. My family once called me on my
bossiness when I yelled at Mel in front of them for abandoning our
dance routine to Linda Ronstadt’s “Heartbeats Accelerating” (opting
instead to just jump out and start spasming bizarrely during the intro),
and I sulked for the rest of the day. Mel fancied herself quite the singer
as well, which made me all the more critical of her overzealous vocal
strainings and pinched facial expressions that accompanied them.

Despite my ideas being, by my own mandate, the driving force for
virtually everything we did, another of Mel’s noteworthy traits was
definitely her imagination—which might sound like a positive thing
and often was, but also bordered on dangerous delusion. She once
sprained her ankle and walked on crutches for a week because her
imaginary twin, “Ashley,” dared her to jump off their staircase. When I
reminded her that Ashley wasn’t real, she said, “I know, but I could tell
she just didn’t think I’d really do it. I just had to prove her wrong. So I
put on a blanket like a cape, and did it.”

I never had any problem calling Mel on any of her problems, but Mel,
to my irritation, seemed to find her own issues almost glamorous. “I
don’t know what to say, Steph,” she sighed. “I’m just born to be wild.”
When she actually got angry with me for my insults, she would sprint
away from me across the church’s lawn where we played, theatrically
tearing her clothes from her body and throwing them to the wind like
a scorned Amazon.

Mel may actually have saved my life once. One day when we were
playing at the church as usual, wearing bedazzled costumes for our
current game, a battered gray car started circling us around the
parking lot, a blonde-mulleted head sticking out the window to stare
at us. The third time around, the car pulled up next to the curb and the
driver called to us in a groggy, slurred voice. I, ever
the sophisticated adult, asked, “What?” and drew nearer to the car with
Mel cowering behind me.

The man mumbled something that sounded vaguely like “Wanna get
a burger?”

“What?” I said again, drawing closer to the window. The lifeless-
eyed man was toying with something in his lap that I would later
describe to my mom as “a big fleshy finger from a glove, I think.”

“He’s a stranger, Stephanie!” Mel moaned in my ear, and it hit me
with sudden force that all those videos they showed us in school
about “stranger danger” did, in fact, apply to this man. Here it had
always seemed like such a no-brainer not to talk to strangers, not to
fall for any of their obvious hooks, yet it hadn’t even occurred to me
in this context.

“Um, we have to go home right now,” I told him.

“Oh,” the man grunted, and drove off without another word.
We’re incredibly blessed he was clearly too stoned to take the very easy
opportunity I handed him. Or maybe he just wanted the directions
to Burger King. Either way, I couldn’t believe Mel had recognized the
situation for what it most likely was when I hadn’t, and I’d like to
recall that this increased my respect for her—though I know perfectly
well it didn’t.

When I was in sixth grade, Mel moved to Michigan with her mom and brothers. She stayed at my house for three days before, right up to the moment they left for the airport.

Our last night together was treated very casually. I remember we were watching Muppet Treasure Island when her mom came to get her in their loaded car. Before leaving, she’d drawn me one of the dinosaurs we’d written stories about, with a speech bubble saying “Byyyahuhuhuh!”

It sounded like a cross between “bye” and Goofy’s trademark laugh, and she told me that instead of saying goodbye, she was just going to say this to me.

“Bye, Mel!” I called out the door as her mom walked her to the car on our dark driveway.

“Byyyahuhuhuh!”
“Call, okay?”
“Byyyahuhuhuhuh!”
“You can come visit soon!”
“Byyyahuhuhuhuh!”
“Bye!”
“Byyyahuhuhuhuh!”

When they’d driven away, I sat in the living room for an hour, talking casually to Mom to keep any embarrassing emotion at bay.
On Endings

Devan Bailey

“O my soul, do not aspire to immortal life, but exhaust the limits of the possible.”
—Pindar, Pythian III

“And that’s it,” I thought, but I had thought it before. We’d been there before; we’d exchanged those words. My goodbyes are unclear and not decisive. My windows cracked open and my door unlocked.

“Always” is a predicate beneath concepts I hold. I’ve never changed my circumstances—my circumstances have always changed me. These universals demonstrate the always with which I am plagued. I am made in such a manner that I eternalize. I am not equipped to let go but for those whose lot renders me released. I stand examining—stirring, looking for something, anything.

Always is inflicting. One may spend years intent on unlocking a door that doesn’t exist. If unwilling, one isn’t faced with the end of something, for one never perceives an ending that one’s faith protests. The mind is too ready to reconcile: to persist in the path paved yet unfounded.

Time heals, but it too deludes. Whatever Dali meant to express in Persistence of Memory, it left with me an insight into the relationship between time and memory—that of bending, conforming, melting the past into an agreeable narrative. If there is anything Real, it’s not ours. We have only our perceptio—our interpretation. Our interpretation depends on our memory, always fading and rearranging.

An ending physically experienced is illusory; though we suppose an altered course, the departure or death of another ends nothing of us—in us. Another’s presence may loom that one warrants it. The nearest we experience the end of something is in what we forget; harrowing, then, what ends to us still never realized.

To regard oneself a speck on the dustpan of time would be presumptuous—but it still seems an honor to burn so bright, even if only this night. That something has not always been, it will not always be. I am, I will be, and someday I will have been. Yet, responding to Pindar as I lay tonight, I protest, perhaps too much: O, my soul, seek everything—to never cease from existing, for that it’s impossible, let it be so; I’ll die without having ever let go.
On January 1, 1994, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) took a groundbreaking step toward liberalized trade between the United States, Canada, and Mexico. Mexico was, as one editorial put it, supposed to be “celebrating the Mexican economy’s entrance into the ‘first world.’”¹

Instead, the Mexican people awakened to a revolution. Led by a mysterious masked man calling himself “Subcomandante Marcos” (Sub/Lieutenant Commander Marcos), Mexican peasants and farmers—mostly indigenous people—in the southern state of Chiapas had begun an armed rebellion against the implementation of NAFTA. The Zapatistas, as they called themselves in honor of Mexican Revolution hero Emiliano Zapata, saw NAFTA as their “death sentence.”² Though the rebellion was quickly put down by the Mexican army, the episode became a rallying cry for the anti-globalization movement and inspired a peaceful and sustained movement against “free trade” and resulted in the creation of fully functional autonomous indigenous communities in southern Mexico.

At the resolution of the decade-long Mexican Revolution (1910–1920), indigenous communities were promised land reform, but the party that had ruled Mexico uninterrupted since then, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), had ignored the issue and ignored the pleas of the poor, particularly indigenous, people. The signing of NAFTA signaled that the situation would go from bad to worse. Not only would the Indians be ignored, but now what little they had in the way of land and water was threatened. NAFTA pushed them over the edge. Their anger at “the erosion of the shared land and water rights of rural communities,” and their disdain for the Mexican government, combined with the signing of NAFTA, ensured conflict.³

New Year’s Day in 1994, the indigenous people rose up and took the Mexican government completely by surprise. They had created

a guerrilla army willing to die for their cause. The rebels were poorly armed; many of them had only knives or sticks. Still, the 3,000-strong guerrilla army took over San Cristobal de Las Casas and several other major towns, setting fire to government buildings and army installations along the way.

The better-equipped and better-trained Mexican army was called in and quickly put down the rebellion, causing heavy casualties through aerial bombings and “the mass murder of prisoners.” The remaining Zapatista fighters fled back into the jungle. The disproportionate response of the Mexican government angered Mexicans and international civil rights groups, prompting many to call for an end to the attacks on the rebels and for a ceasefire. The government agreed only after receiving pressure from the Catholic Church and expelling international human rights observers and engaging in what has been called “state-terror.”

The result of the uprising, in strictly military terms, was a resounding defeat for the Zapatistas. Strategically, it also appeared to have been a massive failure. Many of the rebels were dead, and yet the movement had failed to either stop NAFTA or to ignite a country-wide revolution, which they had intended. Despite the military defeat, the Zapatistas succeeded in bringing attention to the human problems caused by NAFTA and to inspire a worldwide anti-globalization movement.

Unlike many revolutionary and guerrilla movements, the Zapatistas came out of the conflict almost universally liked, even loved. Despite the initial violence, “the EZLN (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional) retained a strong, positive public image.” Much of this can be attributed to the Zapatistas’ masked leader, Marcos. Marcos, whose real name remains unknown, is believed to be a mestizo (mixed-race) or white man, possibly a former professor at Mexico’s prestigious National Autonomous University (UNAM). He left Mexico City in the early 1980s to live with the indigenous people of Chiapas, hoping to convince them to fight against the government and create a socialist state. Some accounts say the Indians were perplexed and “just stared at him.”

Marcos was initially disoriented by the encounter with the indigenous people. He recalled:

Imagine a person who comes from an urban culture. One of the world’s biggest cities, with a university education, accustomed to city life. It’s like landing on another planet. The language, the surroundings...

---

5 Ibid., 13-14.
6 Ibid.
are new. You’re seen as an alien from outer space. Everything tells you: “Leave. This is a mistake. You don’t belong in this place”; and it’s said in a foreign tongue. But they let you know, the people, the way they act; the weather, the way it rains; the sunshine; the earth, the way it turns to mud; the diseases; the insects; homesickness. You’re being told, “You don’t belong here.” If that’s not a nightmare, what is? 8

Eventually, however, he became not just accepted by the indigenous community, but an essential part of it, and a leader to them all. A well-educated, media-savvy man, he also gained the respect and admiration of most Mexicans, who sympathized with the Indians and their plight. Most Mexicans were, after all, poor or working class and living under the same autocratic regime. Marcos the revolutionary gained icon status, being seen by many as “the man responsible for putting the impoverished state of Mexico’s indigenous population in the spotlight.” 9 Marcos has since become something of an international celebrity, and most importantly, a global symbol of resistance to capitalist orthodoxy. He wears his trademark ski mask to hide his light skin and blend in with the darker people of Mexico as much as he does it to hide his identity from the government, who once sent orders for his capture. And he takes the title of a mid-ranking officer to signify both authority (among his enemies, the capitalist class and the Mexican government) and dignity (among his people).

When Marcos and the movement failed to expand their revolution into the cities in 1994, the Zapatistas adapted and modified their objectives. They became a completely peaceful movement. Since 1994 there have been no notable armed attacks on the government or the army, despite offensive posturing on the part of federal troops. Driven by an ideology that blends libertarian socialism and Marxism, the Zapatistas distanced themselves from the Mexican state, creating self-sustaining, democratic, anarchist communities. They created autonomous communes with democratically elected leaders, where “the people rule and the government obeys.” Governance and organization in Zapatista communities is based on two enmeshed principles: indigenous traditions and participatory democracy. They created “parallel ‘autonomous governments’ that deliver services, administer justice, and attempt to model an ideal of good government” based on “Mayan forms of governance.” 10 There are three levels of government in the Zapatista system, beginning at the village level,

8 A Place Called Chiapas, directed by Nettie Wild (New York, NY: Zeitgeist Films, 1998), DVD.
where leaders are chosen democratically from within. Delegates are also chosen to serve in municipios, the second tier of government, and arguably its most important, as this is where decisions pertaining to housing, education, health, and infrastructure are made. Political decisions are made at the highest level, the regional Councils of Good Government. Participation in the Zapatista communities is completely voluntary and there are no taxes. Rather, democratically elected delegates and officers “discuss needs with the community and take up voluntary collections based on the ability to pay, as well as soliciting voluntary community labor.” 11

In some ways, the Zapatistas are nothing short of a paradox:

“a revolutionary group with no interest in seizing power; an army shooting civil resistance and nonviolence; a social and political movement renouncing any public position; a locally and culturally rooted organization with a global scope.”12 The initial violence in 1994 was something of a warning to the national government that the Zapatistas were willing to use force to protect their limited resources. Nevertheless, they have shown remarkable restraint and a commitment to peace. They have also demonstrated that decentralized democracy and autonomy are possible, and have served as inspiration to the alter-globalization (sometimes referred to as the anti-globalization) movement.

After the 1994 uprisings, the Zapatistas began a series of campaigns to reinforce both their status as autonomous people and their message against corporate capitalism. In essence, the Zapatistas have created a Marxist post-capitalist utopia, though this is rarely acknowledged. As one woman says, “We the Zapatistas are free to organize ourselves, and to make our own decisions without being exploited by capitalist ideas. Because of that, we had the idea to build a new society and a new struggle.”13 Certainly, the Zapatista communities are anything but wealthy, but they are communities defined by mutual aid, education, equality of the sexes, justice, and an undeniable sense of dignity.

Though the Zapatistas and their global supporters are unlikely to scrap globalization, they have been successful in igniting a worldwide conversation about the nature of corporate capitalism, and they have caused many to wonder if there is a way to develop “a fairer and more humane ‘global capitalism.’”14 As the Mexican-American experience with NAFTA has shown, there is reason to believe the promises of

11 Ibid.
globalization, at least in the corporate sense, have failed humanity. They have, of course, created massive profits, but people are suffering as a result. It is not surprising that “apathy and a growing cynicism is widespread,” as one observer puts it. The NAFTA experiment has created a situation in which Mexicans are forced into factory work “in polluted, crime-ridden towns close to the U.S. border” or into migrating illegally to the United States, which, because of NAFTA, has become “increasingly reliant on low-wage labour,” which has hurt many American workers as well.

In Mexico, 70 years of one-party rule came to an end in 2000 with the election of Vicente Fox. Yet this did nothing to change the situation of the poor in Mexico. Consequently, the Zapatistas have continued their struggle, with the ultimate aim of creating a truly democratic state, which for them means “not simply . . . elections” and “not limited to the electoral aspect of democracy.” Instead, they want “a democracy that will create a new relationship between those who are governed and what [they] call ‘command-obeying,’” as is the case in the autonomous Chiapas communities. In other words, the Zapatistas have been fighting for an entirely new system of government and economics, one that is people-focused and not politician- or corporation-focused.

Since the 1994 uprising, the Zapatistas have received considerable support from around the world. Many people, even those in “rich industrial societies . . . recognize the concerns of the Zapatistas to be not unlike their own, despite their very different circumstances.” In other words, globally the Zapatistas have come to be seen as catalysts for worldwide change. The 1994 uprising failed in the short term, but it put a human face on the suffering caused by “free trade” initiatives, which have brought unparalleled profits, but only at a very heavy human cost. It is then not surprising that Zapatistas command such widespread support, not only in Mexico, where Zapatista leaders are routinely welcomed as heroes and celebrities, but in other parts of the world, where, as Noam Chomsky says, the historical context and ethnic identities are very different.

15 Ibid., 67.
Bibliography


The evening August breeze settles on my skin and ruffles my hair, playing tag with my loose papers that float around on the seat beside me. The windows are down because my car, an ’86 rusty Buick, has no working air conditioner. Not only that, but one of the handles won’t open on the inside, and the ceiling fluff falls like snow on the top of my head. The Trash Pot, or TP, has seen me through many high school days. Now here I am, a first-week college student on my way to Weber State University to drop off some work-study financial aid papers.

“Turn that radio up for that sweet sound, hold me close, never let me go.” I crank up the volume and sing aloud at the top of my lungs. Needless to say, the TP is not equipped with a CD player, so here I am jamming out to some oldies on the good old radio. “Keep the feeling alive, let me loose—”

KUCHUNK! “What was that?” All of a sudden, the driver’s side feels lower than usual. I look over to my left, confusion on my face, because the guy next to me gives me a weird look. “What is his problem?” Suddenly, the steering starts feeling shaky, and I know I should probably pull over to find out what is going on. Luckily, the Weber State University turnoff is just ahead, so I slowly coast over, wobble through the light, and pull over to the side of the road. “Phew! I’m safe.”

KA-BAM!

“Now what?” I think, trying not to panic. I turn my head just in time to see a lonely hubcap rolling down the hill. I get out of my car and brace myself for the worst. Yep, a flat tire—with no hubcap.

“No big deal,” I think calmly. I’ll just try to change my tire. My dad equips all of his girls with a car jack for whenever such problems occur. I pop the trunk and I look inside. Nothing: no tire, no jack, not even a spare screw. I close the trunk and sigh loudly. It is going to be one of those nights. I grab my purse, lock my car, and head for the Student Services Building. If anything, I can use the pay phone to call my dad. I don’t own a cell phone, but I always carry some spare change with me just in case. Once inside the building, I beeline it to the pay phones. I put in the correct change, dial the number, and . . . nothing. “Maybe I should actually read the instructions,” I think to myself. I read the pay phone instructions, just to make sure, but how hard is dialing a phone? And . . . nothing. I feel tears
start to well up in my eyes. I’m not usually much of a crier, but this is just too much for one soul to handle in one evening, dang it!

Just as I hang up the phone, an angel in chaps walks by. His mocha-colored skin is accented with white pants, a white polo shirt, and a white sweater tied around his shoulders.

“Do you have a cell phone I can borrow?” I say with slightly damp eyes. 

“Sure,” he says and pulls out his phone. Placing my call, I wait for my dad to pick up.

“Dad,” I say imploringly, “I need your help.”

“Elaina,” he sighs after I tell him about the flat tire, “why don’t you just let a nice young man to help you out?”

“Because,” I say impatiently, “there is NO tire for them to help out with.” My dad breathes heavily on the phone and says he will be there as fast as he can. I hang up the phone and hand it back to my heavenly angel.

“Thanks,” I say with a smile and head out the door. 

“What’s wrong?” he asks, and follows me.

“Oh, my tire decided it wanted to be flat,” I say with frustration, and then tell him the whole story.

“I wish I could help,” he replies.

“Me too,” I groan, and we part ways.

I head back up the hill to the TP and sit down on the grass as this fire-red Mustang pulls over.

“Can we help?” the driver inquires as he rolls down his window. Two guys with sunglasses, baseball hats, and tans look back at me.

“I wish,” I say sadly. “But I have no spare tire.”

“That sucks,” he says and turns his car around to roar off into the sunset.

“Well,” I think with a grin, “those are probably the nice young men my father is talking about.”

Two minutes later, another car pulls over, and another young guy gets out. Muscles ripple from his arms, and his black shirt clings to his toned chest. Holy crap, breathe, Elaina.

“Hello,” he says as he saunters over, whipping off his sunglasses and flashing a smile with a debonair flourish. “Can I help?” My eighteen-year-old heart hammering in my rib cage, I stand up and try to tell him the story without stammering. I open my trunk and I show him the empty tomb.

He shakes his head and takes a slow once-over look at my TP with a slight smile on his face. “Good luck,” he says with a smirk, and then he too gets in his car and disappears into the evening.

I close the trunk and flop back down onto the grass, hoping that my father will be here soon. Ten minutes later, he arrives and I fall into his arms. After a long hug, he tells me he wants to see my car. I show him that yes, my tire is flat.

“Pop the trunk, Elaina,” he says with a sigh. I unlock the trunk and gesture to the back.

“See, Dad, I’m not stupid. It’s empty.” That’s when I learn a valuable lesson.

My dad slowly lifts the trunk’s mat, and I see two things: my car jack and my spare tire.
INTRODUCTION

The National Undergraduate Literature Conference is an annual conference held at Weber State University. This year marks the 28th year of the conference, which continues to gain attention in Universities across the nation. Every year, selections from the conference are included in Metaphor, Weber State’s literary journal. We proudly present this year’s selections with the hope that the spark of inspiration that exists within these pages will burn in the hearts of others. It is an honor to be a part of NULC and witness the brilliant creativity of our undergraduate peers.

— Clint Kingsley
Subway
_Samuel Diener—Shasta College_

We sit in the subway
holding hands beneath the harsh electric lights.
Don’t know whose mind
has led us to this odd position
waiting for the last train
in the last station
Maybe it was boredom
kept us moving, watching people catching sleep
on the long trains that lead
you back to where you came from
if you ride them long enough.
Sometimes you need no reason for a journey
sometimes you wander
only to escape
yet end still with yourself.

You stir
I hear a moment later the hum and the clatter
The train is empty, and empty it sits
In twenty minutes it will take us home.
The Princess and the Sky
Bobbie Gross—Brigham Young University Idaho

The princess spun in her dress, giggling as the white cotton fabric swung droplets onto her face. She stopped twirling and teetered, looking out at the endless stretch of blue.

She had never realized that the sky was made of water or that it loved the land so much. Again and again and again she watched as the watery sky crashed kisses onto the sandy beach.

Its kisses tickled her ankles as she squished the wet sand between her toes. She knelt down to kiss the sand, but the jealous sky crashed into her open eyes and startled her upright.

“Poor sky,” she thought. “I’ve watched it kiss the land all morning, and not once has the land kissed it back.”

The princess knelt again and kissed the sky’s edge, and the sky kissed her back. She felt it slobber all over her face which scrunched as she thought of pretzels and salted apple slices.
While she slept, a cigarette fell from her lips. The flames, like sheets across her soft body.

The ceiling crumbled, and the smoke rose to the new moon.

A knock at the front door woke her. She glided down the hall and came to rest on her favorite chair, an old wooden rocker. Her body: a cracked amber.

The fire left her room, burnt the walls, and my grandmother sat, smoldered. The rescue workers beat the doors, tore the locks. She was seraphic in the shivering light.

---

**House Fire**

*Chalmus Davenport—Austin Peay State University*
The Black Ink Stain

Courtney Sandy—Wright State University

I don’t want to force myself into a man’s bed
No not for the hundredth time
I want to be invited, as I once was
“Would you like to join me?”
His eyebrow lifted, quizzically

No games were played
No code words exchanged
We’d been there before; I’d felt his sheets
Seen the black ink stain

That time was set apart
Perhaps because we were sober and vulnerable
Both unsure and scarred and aware
We were aware of how much it could destroy

I might easily find myself
Languid on a man’s bedroom floor
Underneath his weight
Arms wanton and legs askew
But I only want it with him

“Would you like to join me?”
His hand extended, invitingly

No words were left unsaid
No promises were guaranteed
We didn’t feign love or innocence
We’d been there before; I’d felt his caress
Seen the black ink stain

This time the stain was somewhere else
And he revealed it only slightly
Lifted his shirt and I saw it beating
Broken and shattered and barely functioning

I might easily find him
The alcohol coursing through his veins
Stumbling into me for a hug
Arms wanton and legs askew
But I don’t want to see that side of him

“Would you like to join me?”
His heart failing, hauntingly
In a famous letter to Hawthorne, Herman Melville reveals that Ahab’s delirious howl, “Ego non baptizo te in nomine patris, sed in nomine diaboli,” is the secret motto of *Moby-Dick* (*Letters* Nov. 17, *Moby-Dick* 421). I believe that this key sentence is important not only in reference to the “hell-fire in which the whole book is broiled” (*Letters* Nov. 17), but also in terms of the ritual and archetypal imagery of baptism. A reading informed by Biblical typology discovers potent baptismal echoes in far more passages than those which explicitly refer to the sacrament. Baptism appears in the novel as the washing away of sins, initiation into a new identity and community, second birth, initiation into mysteries, consecration for a holy purpose, and death and resurrection. In each example, however, Melville subverts the type; his baptisms are reversed, incomplete, or uncertain. Melville’s characters are not baptized into Christian community and spiritual life, but into a savage, pagan identity as whalemen; what is consecrated is not dedicated to holiness, but to violence and bloodshed; and for him death does not lead to resurrection, but madness, insoluble ambiguity, and final destruction. In the end, only Queequeg’s coffin offers a slight hope that the principles of baptism, though not its Christian origin, may have some power to save.

It is a commonplace in Melville criticism that sacramental rituals play an unusual and important role in *Moby-Dick*. As Daniel Hoffman notes, “The interstices of the action are braced by the enactment of rituals” (62), which consistently appear at key moments in the novel and resonate with powerful imagery and themes. The scenes most often cited in this context are the “communion” in which the harpooners ritually drink grog from the goblets of their canted harpoons and the “baptism” in which Ahab’s new-forged harpoon is quenched in the harpooners’ blood. These scenes, which are parodies or inversions of the two Christian sacraments instituted by Jesus himself, are central to religious readings of the novel. They exemplify the way in which Ahab’s rituals “literalize and desacralize the Christian ritual tradition, turning them upside-down or inside-out” (Patton 137). Noting the appropriation of ministerial offices for
unholy ends, one critic argues that “through the use of two rituals—communion and baptism—derived from The Book of Common Prayer, Melville indicates that the underlying role of Ahab is that of a ‘minister’ who allied himself with the devil” (Bullock 7). In addition, other writers note such rituals as the “marriage” of Ishmael and Queequeg, the “funeral” of Fedallah, and the sermons of Father Mapple and the cook (Patton 139, Hoffman 62). R. H. Winnick offers a fascinating reading of the chapter “The Candles” as closely and deliberately replicating the Easter Vigil service to create “an anti-sacrament of corresponding images, actions, and utterances . . . which appear to be modeled upon, to invert, and implicitly to mock their pious counterparts” (185).

However, fewer critics have observed that baptism, in particular, extends far beyond the famous ritual scene in “The Forge,” being in fact woven through the entire novel. In order to recognize just how pervasive, indeed ubiquitous, baptismal symbolism is within Moby-Dick, we must turn to the traditional form of Biblical exegesis known as typology. This method of reading works by a simple principle: “In the Old Testament the New Testament is concealed; in the New Testament the Old Testament is revealed” (Frye 79). Events and people before Christ are considered types, or figures, or foreshadowings, which have their fulfillment in the life of Christ. So, too, ritual observances may be considered as types of the spiritual realities they represent. By this method of reading, apparently disparate historical events, religious practices, and spiritual states are so closely identified with one another that they can hardly be separated. One of the most important such groupings includes the Flood of Noah, the crossing of the Red Sea, Jonah’s days in the whale, Christ’s descent into hell, and the individual believer’s baptism. Just as Christ descended into the grave and defeated the devil, and just as Noah by God’s power triumphed over the sea, so baptism “involves a descent into a watery grave for the supreme conflict against the sea beast over which the baptized person is permanently victorious” (Danielou 73).

These identifications, especially in this particular group of types, are not merely the product of medieval ingenuity; the Bible itself encourages them. For example, Paul clearly teaches that the individual Christian’s baptism is a participation in Christ’s death and resurrection: “Don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? . . . If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection” (New International Version, Romans 6:3-5). In addition, Jesus identifies himself with Old Testament types when he describes his death as “the sign of the prophet Jonah”: “For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matthew 12:39-40). As early as the Psalms, the Flood, the crossing of the Red Sea, and the defeat of the monster Leviathan are grouped together as sharing a single meaning (Danielou 71-72). To hundreds
of years of Biblical commentators, all these events have appeared intimately and organically connected, and their parallels have proved endlessly instructive.

The identifications are also enshrined in liturgy. The very Easter Vigil service which Winnick shows Melville to imitate includes readings about Creation, the Flood, the Red Sea, and the new identity of God’s people (Book of Common Prayer 288-291). This night, which lies between Christ’s death and his resurrection, is the traditional time for baptism of catechumens and the renewal of baptismal vows for the whole congregation (BCP 292). Thus theory becomes lived reality through the enactment of sacramental ritual. Since “Melville’s mind seems to have been saturated with [the Bible’s] stories, its ideas, its language” and he read not only the Bible itself but Biblical commentaries from Augustine to Calvin (Wright 6-7), he undoubtedly was aware of the watery typology of baptism, death, and resurrection and employed its symbolism deliberately in *Moby-Dick*.

The first form of baptism to appear in the novel is the initiation of Ishmael and the rest of the crew into a new identity and community aboard the *Pequod*. The ship itself calls to mind Noah’s ark, which in turn typologically represents the Church that will carry its members safe through tribulation, death, and the Last Judgment. Melville explicitly compares the whaler to the ark several times, specifically in reference to its ability to survive a second Flood. For example, he writes, “Did you carry [the whalers] the news that another flood had come; they would only answer—“Well, boys, here’s the ark!”” (330). The powerfully symbolic attribute of water is also omnipresent in the book. The ship passes through water, the physical element of the sacrament, simply by setting out on its voyage; as Melville several times notes, crew and cargo are literally underwater, “sunk . . . beneath the waterline” (38) when they descend into the holds of the ship.

The clearest evidence for the baptismal significance of the voyage, though, is Queequeg’s remarks about his intention in sailing. A faithful pagan, the cannibal fears that his years of association with “Christianity, or rather Christians, had unfitted him for ascending the pure and undefiled throne of thirty pagan Kings before him” (49). He will return to his home on Kokovoko only “as soon as he felt himself baptized again” (49). By sailing in the *Pequod*, Queequeg hopes to wash away the stain of Western civilization and once more become faithful to his native gods, just as in baptism Christians “wash [their] sins away” (Acts 22:16) and, “having our bodies washed with pure water . . . hold unswervingly” to a faithful God (Hebrews 10:22-23). And, just as Queequeg must be purified by his sea voyage in order to claim his inheritance as the rightful king of Kokovoko, so Christians are baptized to receive adoption as sons and become co-heirs with Christ. The one case is a precise replica of the other, although the direction of movement is reversed; in each there is a movement from pollution to purity and exile to inclusion, accomplished by the means of water.

Although Queequeg is the only crew member explicitly described
as seeking baptism, everyone on board the *Pequod* undergoes a similar process as they leave their old selves on shore and receive a new identity as sailors, whalemen, and members of a common crew. The immense and obvious pride which Ishmael takes in his title as a whaleman testifies to this powerful identification. Melville observes a profound change in men at sea, arguing that “long exile from Christendom and civilization inevitably restores a man to that condition in which God placed him, i.e. what is called savagery” (236). Even American-born Christians, like Queequeg, have the varnish of civilization washed away in the salt water of their nautical baptism. In another passage, Melville describes the *Pequod* as “freighted with savages” (366). Regardless of their previous identities—whether they were “boobies and bumpkins . . . who, by their intense greenness, must have come from the heart and center of all verdure” (52) or South Sea cannibals—the crew members can now all be identified by that single title. Ishmael himself had been “lording it as a country schoolmaster, making the tallest boys stand in awe” (4); now he proudly proclaims, “I myself am a savage, owning no allegiance but to the King of the Cannibals; and ready at any moment to rebel against him” (236). These changes correspond to the words of the New Testament: “That is what . . . you were. But you were washed” and received a new nature in Christ (1 Cor. 6:11). Again, the resemblance is exact but inverted; where Christians cast off their old identities as sinners, the sailors confirm or create an identity as savages and cannibals.

United by a common identity, a common goal, and a common initiation, the members of the crew form such a tightly knit community that Melville writes, “They were one man, not thirty” (475). This degree of unity and interdependence is precisely that of the universal Christian church described in the Bible. Melville elaborates his point in a striking epic simile:

As the one ship which held them all; though it was put together of all contrasting things—oak, and maple, and pine wood; iron, and pitch, and hemp—yet all these ran into each other in the one concrete hull . . . balanced and directed by the long central keel; even so, all the individualities of the crew . . . were melded into oneness, and were all directed to that fatal goal which Ahab their one lord and keel did point to. (475-76)

This simile closely resembles two Biblical images for the church. First, the church is imagined as the body of Christ, and each individual member of it as a part of that body (1 Cor. 12:12-28). The many different parts—hand and foot, eye and ear—must work together in harmony. Thus innumerable men together form a single man, Christ, who is called “the head of the body, the church” (Col. 1:18). Melville’s assertion that the crew members were “one man” and his enumeration of the ship’s many parts clearly parallel this scriptural idea. In a second metaphor with the same import, the members of the church are said to be “living stones” which are “being built into a spiritual house” (1 Peter 2:5), of which Christ is “the chief cornerstone” in whom “the whole
building is joined together” (Eph. 2:20-21). By echoing these Biblical passages, Melville further strengthens the Pequod’s identification as both ark and church. He also makes Ahab, as the unifying will and the “one lord and keel” of the whole ship, the Christ-figure for that church. Ahab’s mad and diabolical purpose reorients the community, so similar in form to the Christian church, toward an object antithetical to it. The baptism of ocean voyage which incorporates members into this pagan church is thus further tainted by the blasphemous exaltation of Ahab to the position of lord, head, and cornerstone.

In a major stage of Ishmael’s initiation as a whaleman, he confronts his fear of death, symbolically accepts it, and thus overcomes it. After his first encounter with a whale, which involved a stove boat and a long, fearful night separated from the ship, Ishmael for the first time appreciates the real dangers of whaling and concludes, “I might as well go below and make a rough draft of my will” (198). Thus, through what he refers to as a “ceremony,” he resigns himself to death; but, peculiarly, this very action frees him from all fear of death. He describes his new state of mind with two Biblical allusions: “A stone was rolled away from my heart” and “All the days I should now live would be as good as the days that Lazarus lived after his resurrection” (198). Lazarus’s resurrection is, of course, a prefiguring of Christ’s, as well as a foretaste of the final resurrection of all believers. Ishmael’s making of his will is thus clearly a type of baptism in its aspect of death and resurrection. Like a Christian in baptism, he chooses to accept and symbolically, ritually undergo death while still living so that death in the future will no longer hold any terror for him. The baptized person is told, “You died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God” (Col. 3:3). In a comically prosaic echo of this phrase, after he has stowed his completed will Ishmael thinks, “My death and burial were locked up in my chest” (198). This contrast captures the tone. Ishmael’s “baptism” is not spiritual, but secular; it is part of his initiation as a whaleman, something that every whale hunter has experienced. In addition, Queequeg, as Ishmael’s “lawyer, executor, and legatee” (198), takes the role of officiating priest, marking the sacrament as pagan rather than Christian. Thus, Melville subverts the Christian idea of ritual enactment of death and resurrection by placing it in secular and pagan contexts.

A similar strategy of comic reappropriation is also employed in the story of Tashtego’s rescue from the whale’s head. When Tashtego falls into the spermaceti case while baling it, Queequeg must dive into the water, cut into the head, and pull his fellow harpooner out. This “deliverance, or rather, delivery” is described in terms of giving birth; Ishmael praises Queequeg’s “great skill in obstetrics” and vigorous “midwifery” (289). Thus, Melville slyly links the incident with baptism, for that feat too is at once deliverance from danger and delivery of a new birth. The passage reads like a comically literal and grotesque answer to Nicodemus, who asked, “How can a man be born when he is old? . . . Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother’s
womb to be born!” (John 3:4). A womb is too small for a full-grown man, but a whale fits him quite nicely. Jesus’ answer, of course, is that “flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit” (John 3:6); that is, he means spiritual rebirth in the sacrament of baptism. On the general principle which Jesus has proposed, Tashtego, being born of a whale, must be a whale, or at least partake of its qualities. This bizarre proposition is borne out by other passages in the novel. Starbuck speaks of the sailors as “such a heathen crew that have small touch of human mothers in them! Whelped somewhere by the sharkish sea” (146). Tashtego’s second birth thus stands as the visible example of a process that all the crew members have undergone, an initiation which makes them more akin to the wild and inhuman ocean than to Christian civilization on land. In this episode, too, Queequeg is the savior who rescues from a watery death, the midwife who delivers the birth, and the priest who presides over a sacrament. Since Queequeg performs in Christ’s role as the one who descends into death to save others from it, he clearly marks this baptism as pagan and the new life it begins as savage. Tashtego’s birth from the whale is a grotesque parodic reiteration of the baptism motif, which, reduced to a literal, physical event, has lost its salvific spiritual significance.

Pip’s fall into the ocean highlights another element of baptism and provides a far more serious subversion of its meaning. When this castaway is abandoned by his whaleboat and left alone in the immensity of the ocean, he loses his mind. Though the ship eventually rescues him, they find that “the sea had jeeringly kept his finite body up, but drowned the infinite of his soul. Not drowned entirely, though. Rather carried down alive to wondrous depths” (359). Life and death mingle; in his descent into and re-ascent from the water, Pip symbolically and spiritually dies while remaining physically alive, powerfully recalling the rite of baptism. However, his death is not matched by a corresponding resurrection. The Christian leaves his sinful nature in the symbolic grave and receives in its place new and everlasting life; Pip leaves his sanity, his very self, in the depths of the ocean and receives nothing in return. Although his body was drawn from the water, in the deepest sense Pip never emerges from the depths: in his mad soliloquies he says, “Seek out one Pip, who’s now been missing long” (413) and “Base little Pip, he died a coward” (414), indicating that the body walking around the Pequod is but a shell, its inhabitant lost. In this story Melville both echoes and questions the great Biblical principle: “Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Matt 10:39). Pip, acting out of cowardly fear, jumps from the whaleboat to save his life, and for that very reason loses it, seeming to illustrate Jesus’ lesson. However, in another sense, Pip loses himself in a divine mystery. “He saw God’s foot upon the treadle of the loom,” and glimpsed “strange shapes of the unwarped primal world”; “the miser-merman, Wisdom, revealed his hoarded heaps” (359). He has found “heaven’s sense,” “that celestial thought, which, to reason, is absurd and frantic” (359). These secrets
of the deep recall “the mystery of God, namely Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3), a wisdom which seems foolishness to unbelievers (1 Corin. 1:18–25). Pip’s experience recalls the Biblical commentators who described the mystical life as a second and deeper baptism (Danielou 27). But while some mystics report experiences in which the self is annihilated or subsumed, Christianity affirms that in final union with God the soul is not simply swallowed up or melted into the whole, but on the contrary becomes more truly itself than ever before; individual identity and will are lost only to be found, given over to death that they may be raised to eternal life. In Pip’s case, however, this process is incomplete. There is no turning upward, but only descent and descent past any point of return, loss and death without the faintest hope of redemption. The mysteries into which he is so terribly initiated speak not of divine love, but the “dark Hindoo half of nature, who of drowned bones hast builded [its] separate throne somewhere in the heart of these unverdured seas” (426). This diabolic baptism mocks the hopes of Christianity, denying the resurrection promise and suggesting that the longed-for revelation of the mystery of God may be dark and sinister.

The making of Ahab’s harpoon, although referred to explicitly as a baptism, more closely resembles consecration. As Linda Bullock observes, “In baptizing the harpoon, Ahab was setting it aside, making it ‘holy’ to be used for one purpose only” (8). The consecration of an object, however, is closely analogous to the baptism of a believer, since both confer a high status and special purpose. In the Old Testament, objects used for worship and venerated as holy were consecrated for that use with blood: “[Moses] sprinkled with the blood both the tabernacle and everything used in its ceremonies. In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood” (Hebrews 9:21–22). The book of Hebrews interprets these rituals as a type of Christ’s sacrifice, noting that “the law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming” (10:1) and its promises were finally fulfilled “when Christ came as high priest” (9:11). This same sprinkling with blood is also a type of baptism, in which “our hearts [were] sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience” (Hebrews 10:22). By consecrating with blood rather than water, Ahab rejects the new covenant in favor of the old, moving backwards from fulfillment to figure, from reality to shadow. In addition, the harpooners’ blood takes the place of Christ’s, making this baptism pagan rather than Christian. Not only does Ahab twist the form of the ritual, he appropriates it for a purpose antithetical to its original meaning. The task this harpoon is set apart for is not one of devout worship, but blasphemous destruction. The power Ahab calls upon is not the holy Father, but the devil. The novel’s most explicit instance of baptism is also its most obviously and deliberately diabolic action, invoking the devil not only in allusion but by name: “Baptizo . . . in nomine diaboli” (421). This passage sets forth the principle behind Melville’s twisted types, which are “shadows” of reality not only because they are lesser copies, but also because their images are dark.
and distorted.

The penultimate baptism in *Moby-Dick*, faithfully Christian in its execution, remains ambiguous in its final effect. The *Pequod* meets the Delight in the midst of the burial of one of five men slain by Moby Dick. Unlike the savage and devil-haunted ship of Captain Ahab, in which all rituals are parodied or inverted, the Delight seems to be a Christian ship. We catch just a snatch of their funeral service: the captain says, “‘Oh! God—’ advancing towards the hammock with uplifted hands—‘may the resurrection and the life—’” (461). Even this stolen glimpse shows a pious ritual, obedient to Christian tradition; “the resurrection and the life” are some of the Bible’s most memorable words in response to death and a repeated phrase in funeral services. When the corpse splashes into the ocean, “some of the flying bubbles might have sprinkled [the *Pequod’s*] hull with their ghostly baptism” (461). The phrase “ghostly baptism” suggests several implications but confirms none. “Ghostly,” in today’s language, means only “of or pertaining to, or issuing from, a ghost, disembodied spirit, or spectre,” but definitions now archaic or obsolete include “pertaining to the spirit or soul; spiritual,” “concerned with sacred things, or with the church,” and “spiritual, devout, religious.” The recipient of this baptism, too, is left unclear; is it the *Pequod*, sprinkled with water, or the dead man, now immersed? Typology identifies baptism with physical death, for both are “an entry into Paradise” (Danielou 25). In one burial service, the prayers explicitly link the two concepts: “Grant that all who have been baptized into Christ’s death may die to sin . . . and that through the grave and gate of death we may pass with him to our joyful resurrection” (BCP 480). By referring to Christian burial as “ghostly baptism,” Melville may be implicitly comparing this purely spiritual rite with the secularized and literalized versions aboard the *Pequod*. In this interpretation, the Delight’s name is not bitterly ironic but accurate; the deaths the ship grieves for are a prelude to resurrection, an entrance into eternal joy. However, the dark and ominous connotations of the word “ghostly” in contemporary usage and the unsettling image of the corpse slipping underwater likely overpower any suggestion of consolation. In this reading, the captain’s prayer for “the resurrection and the life” is empty and unanswered; the sea’s watery grave will never give up its dead. Melville leaves the meaning ambiguous, holding both interpretations in tension.

*Moby-Dick*, of course, ends with the sinking of the *Pequod*. The ship, which as ark and church ought to protect its inhabitants from the flood and fire of God’s wrath, is overcome and destroyed by its adversary. Like Christ in medieval accounts of the harrowing of hell, it descends into the watery depths of the ocean; unlike him, it will never rise again to the light of day. Moby Dick, the leviathan, who in early Biblical commentaries is a type of the devil, is finally victorious. Melville’s version seems deliberately written against the psalmist’s lines of praise for God’s saving power: “It was you who split open the sea by your power; / you broke the heads of the monster of the waters. It was you
who crushed the heads of Leviathan” (Psalm 74:12-13). Instead, the leviathan splits and crushes its pursuers; the devil defeats the people of God. Read in typological terms, *Moby-Dick* asserts that the forces of chaos, evil, and destruction overcome civilization and Christianity; that the pattern of death and resurrection is broken, and the world sinks like a foundered ship. Here we find the fullest statement of the novel’s secret motto, the reality of which all its previous baptisms are various types. It is failed baptism, the very means of salvation from the devil utterly overcome by demonic power.

Ishmael, however, survives the wreck of the *Pequod*. His descent and reascent from the ocean and his miraculous salvation, first by the coffin and then by the Rachel, seem to mark him as a type of baptism. Is he a Jonah spit back by the whale, a Noah who has survived the ocean? In the epilogue, Melville explicitly refers not to any Biblical character associated with the baptismal type, but to the messengers in Job, who one by one report the destruction of Job’s possessions, livelihood, and family and end their stories, “And only I am escaped alone to tell you” (*Moby-Dick* 492, Job 1:15-19). These minor characters survive not because they are consecrated for a holy purpose or saved by their willing acceptance of death and loss, but simply in order that they may testify to what has occurred. Likewise, Ishmael lives to recount the tragedy of the *Pequod*, a witness and messenger. Also like Job’s servants, he has lost his home and family. When the Rachel picked him up, she “only found another orphan” (492). The shipwreck reverses the initiation that had given Ishmael identity, community, and purpose, undoing the effects of his first baptism.

The means of Ishmael’s salvation is Queequeg’s coffin, which has been transformed into the life-preserver for the ship. Although Ishmael remains on the surface of the water during the wreck, the buoyant coffin is dragged deep underwater with the ship and then “upward burst . . . rising with great force, the coffin life-buoy shot lengthwise from the sea” (492). Only this wood consecrated by the willing acceptance of death, which powerfully reminds us of the cross, both descends to and ascends from the deep. As Ahab says, more truly than he knows, “Here now’s the very dreaded symbol of grim death . . . made the expressive sign of the help and hope of most endangered life” (451). We could hardly have a better description of the cross; in it horrific torture and shameful death become “the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Corin. 1:24), the triumph over powers and authorities (Col. 2:15), the only cause for boasting (Gal. 6:14), the way of salvation. Ahab also muses, “Can it be that in some spiritual sense the coffin is, after all, but an immortality-preserver!” (451-52). This touches upon the typological identification of baptism and death, in which death itself is but another baptism into eternal life.

Once again, Queequeg, the faithful savage and cannibal, serves as the saving Christ-figure. Because he has transferred his own mysterious tattoos to his coffin, it stands as a symbolic representation of his body: “Queequeg gives up his
body to die for his friend, and gives up the sign of his body, his coffin, which will eventually surface to preserve the body and life of Ishmael” (Patton 146). The salvation of the coffin echoes Christianity in form and principle while remaining firmly pagan in execution. Although Queequeg himself dies without hope of resurrection, his acceptance of death allows another to preserve life.

Melville has reappropriated baptism for secular, parodic, and blasphemous purposes; he has inverted it and made it sacred not to God but the devil; and he has broken the pattern of descent and reascent, denying the final victory of life over death. Faithful Christian baptism, as witnessed on the Delight, holds out a promise of ghostly comfort whose efficacy Melville neither confirms nor denies. Along among Melville’s many baptisms, Ishmael’s salvation by Queequeg’s coffin suggests a dim ray of hope amidst the bleak waters. The salvation which Melville holds open as a possibility is not by the ark of the institutional church, not by the members of a Christian civilization, but by individual relationships, with people of any culture or creed, which enact the deeply Christian principles of sacrificial love and life-affirming acceptance of death. The way of baptism, which is also the way of the cross, is not finally rejected but adapted for a darker and more pessimistic world in which final victory may be impossible, but the human struggle for life and love still has meaning.
Works Cited


The breeze is chilly as I step outside onto our back porch. I’m high enough to see the full span of the property here. Our pool has been recently winterized and sits on the western side of the property, closest to me. The rest of the space is Avô’s. His grapevine spans the length of the northern property line and has been recently plucked clean of its fruit. Few leaves are left on the vine, since the colder weather has set in. It’s strange to see the garden this way and still think of it as his garden. His usually green grass is frosted over and has a tinge of grey, just like everything else in the garden. I pull up the deck chair and sit down, thinking about how many winters I have seen come and go in this yard.

Stiffy sits peacefully beneath the barren grapevine, tied to one of the sturdier vines. Poor old dog; he has seen nearly as many winters in my grandfather’s garden as I have.

I stepped through the gate and heard it click behind me. The roses were just beginning to bloom and creep up the side of the tool shed as we walked by. My mother held my hand and led me back around the side of the house, calling for my grandfather. “Dad! Dad, are you back here?” I saw it before she did, and I cried, “Mommy! Mommy! Avô killed a puppy!” She was concerned and confused by my reaction until she looked up and saw the scraggly-looking dog hanging from a tree branch by a chain. The fur of its neck was scrunched up where the chain looped around it. Mom gasped and spun me around to hide my eyes. It wasn’t until she stepped a bit closer that she realized the dog’s fur seemed faded and was missing in a few patches. The closer she got to the dog the more she was sure that is was stuffed. Sure enough, she poked the nose of our life-sized friend and what could have been a cold wet nose was, thankfully, a dry plastic one. I’m sure that I was old enough to understand
the difference, but from a distance, the dog really did look real.

I believed my mother, but I kept poking the hind legs—the only part that I could reach while the dog remained hung up—to make absolutely sure that Avô hadn’t killed the thing. Mom was yelling and started searching the yard for my grandfather. “Dad! What the hell did you do?”

Avô finally strolled out of the bulkhead that leads to his basement, completely unaffected by her shouts, as always. Other people’s emotions never did change his mood, whether they were good or bad. He made his way to where the dog hung and smacked the stuffed thing good-naturedly on the back—like someone might do to an old friend. Then he casually unchained him. Stiffy dropped out of the tree and looked much more like the stuffed dog that he was while he bounced—well, stiffly, off the ground. Avô just laughed and replied in Portuguese, “Ahh então você encontrou o nosso cão de guarda novo, não é? Eu tive que lavá-lo com a mangueira. Pendurei ele para secar.” He was completely oblivious to my mother’s fury and my discomfort around the dog with the dead plastic eyes.

“Ughh, yes, Dad! We’ve found the new guard dog! I don’t care if you washed it, it needs to come down!”

Mom kept yelling about how anyone who’d looked over the fence had surely reported a mistaken case of animal abuse and that animal control would be here in any minute. “If they do show up, I’m sending them right to you! I’ll let them think it was a real dog!” Avô didn’t listen to her. He never listened to anyone except his own stubborn whims. He proudly carried Stiffy to the back of the yard, directly in the line of sight of anyone who approached the gate. I had to admit, from that distance, Stiffy looked real and intimidating enough—except that he didn’t move or bark. Avô patted Stiffy’s head, and grinned at us as if encouragement would make Stiffy a better watchdog and confidence would make us believe in him. Mom shook her head and stormed into the house yelling, “Throw that dog out, or I’m going to stuff you, Dad!” I remember following her inside and watching Stiffy warily from the entry window.

Our skepticism did not deter Avô. Stiffy has been guarding our home and garden since that first spring when Avô rescued him from the Dumpster. More of his fur has fallen out during Avô’s hose-downs over the years. During bad weather, we can always find Stiffy seated comfortably in the basement, safe from the storm. His golden color has faded in the sun to a pale and unnatural yellow. One plastic eye was chipped a few years back by a shovel after Avô’s vision started to go. Stiffy’s in rough shape, but I’m sure that he and Avô have always been friends.

That’s the nice thing about Stiffy. He is always a friend to my crazy old grandfather. I’m not sure that I can admit to being consistently friendly with my grandfather. We used to argue and tease like the most vicious of siblings. Neither one of us is very easy to get along with. Instinctively, I look over to the cherry tree in the eastern part of the garden, on this side of the tool shed. That cherry tree has grown even taller than I ever imagined it would. It has also taken a beating over the years. I’m surprised it is still standing. Not many saplings can survive
being run over by a Barbie Jeep—and I did that on more than one occasion, growing up.

That Barbie Jeep was white with hot-pink wheels, and it could cruise at a speedy four miles per hour when the battery was fully charged. If not, it would slow down and make a devastating eerrreerrreerr noise as the little motor tried to find battery juice to run on. The passenger’s seat boasted an in-car cellular that rang every few minutes so that you could make shopping dates with Barbie. A cheery automated voice would pick up, “Hello, friend! I can’t wait for us to drive with the top down!” or “Don’t forget to meet me at the mall!” Every telephone call carried a different remark from Barbie.

I drove all over the garden, through bushes and over grapes, crunching them with the little pink wheels. Avô always kicked me out, yelling, “Sai das minhas rosas!” He’d send me out to the driveway to drive around in small and boring circles on evenly paved cement. I hated it. I would always drive right back into the rose bushes when he wasn’t looking. I can still remember him turning around abruptly when he heard the little wheels crack branches and leaves beneath them. He chased me all around, but my Jeep was no toy! Of course, he was faster, but if I turned that thing around and drove straight at him, I was always sure to run right over his toes! That slowed him down a bit. It also elicited a string of Portuguese curse words that I am sure that I completely deserved, now that I think back on those days.

While he hopped around and held his toes, yelling at me, I would drive straight into the trunk of his favorite cherry sapling. It was sturdy enough to take the hits, so no real harm was ever done—except for a few dents and scuffs on the trunk, but I was satisfied with that. I didn’t really want to ruin anything, and I never really hurt Avô’s toes or his garden; it was just fun to tease each other. He would kick me out and chase me around, and then sometimes he would let me get in a few good shots to his trees before stepping on the back bumper and lifting my front wheels off the ground so the little tires spun madly but did not take me any further. That’s when I’d give up and he would get some peace.

Well, we got as much peace as the other would allow us to get. It wasn’t long before we would be teasing each other once again in the garden. Usually this happened in his fig orchard lining the eastern side of the garden. He loved that orchard more than anything else in his yard—though the six trees were really very small in comparison to the average orchard, but when compared to the average garden, his figs were certainly unusual. Figs aren’t native to this part of the world, but somehow he made it happen. Avô always warned us away from the fig trees, telling us that the sap would make our hair fall out. In my teenage years, I swore that he made the story up to keep us out of his sanctuary. As an adult, I learned that the sap truly was a skin irritant and that there was some truth to his words.

The tool shed on the southern edge of this fig orchard, separated the space between this, his private sanctuary, and the rest of the garden which we were actually allowed to explore safely—while being considerate of his plants, of course. Each fig tree is as tall as the
shed where Avô keeps his tools, at least nine or ten feet at the highest point. You can’t see it now, because they are all wrapped in carpeting for the cold season, but when opened, their crowns are wide enough to overshadow the majority of the ground beneath them. Light and nutrients are stolen from all of the lettuce, carrots, and melons that used to grow closer to the ground. Now that the trees have grown so large, the vegetables struggle beneath the branches of these trees.

Twine weaves in, out, and around the branches, pulling them closer together and pointing the branches up towards the sky. Once they are close enough together to be managed, sheets of scrapped carpeting from our basement are wound around the branches and trunk to protect each tree from the extreme weather of winter.

There was a swing set back then. It was centered just in front of the grapevine, so if I kicked I could just barely reach the edge with my toes. I’d knock a few ripened grapes to the ground—just in time for my relatives to come harvest them for wine. I sat on that swing for hours after school, going as high as I could without flying right over the frame. I kicked faster and faster, my thick braid of hair thudding lightly against my back as I sailed so high. Avô was just visible through the wide, dark green leaves of the trees as he tied the center branches together. He never really concerned me. I would stay on my swing set, and I knew that he would stay in the branches of those fig trees until it grew too dark to find his way out again. He dressed in multiple layers of flannel, with thick jeans or work pants to protect his arms and legs from being scratched by stray branches. He tucked his socks up over the legs of his pants and wore these multiple layers inside his sturdy, hand-me-down work boots (a gift from my own father after one of Avô’s rakes ruined a pair of his running sneakers). His worn trucker cap was pulled tight over his ears and shaded his eyes from the sun as he climbed high into the branches. His long yellow dishwashing gloves would scrape against the bark of the trees in a manner that rubber dishwashing gloves were never meant to be used. He never took them off, though; the sap would make the hair on his arms fall out, don’t you know?

While I was swinging, he climbed down out of the tree, holding a small basket of freshly picked figs. He stacked them along the side of the shed, then climbed back up to fill another of the baskets to sell to the local grocery store. Climbing up and down the trees was easy for him since he had built his own makeshift scaffolding to move around in. The broomsticks and two-by-four pieces of wood that he nailed, glued, and tied together allowed him to walk from the first tree all the way to the last without ever setting foot on the ground. The boards and ladders wove in and out of branches, and by some miracle, they never broke under his substantial weight. I jumped off the swing while it was still in motion and Avô jumped off the board he was standing on with his full basket of figs.

I yelled, “Why can’t I climb the tree?”

“Você vai cair desta árvore! Volte nos balanços. Ou ir buscar o seu carro pequeno.” And that was that. I knew that if I tried to climb up the trees, he would just chase me back out of them. I turned around and headed back inside the house. I wasn’t interested in the swings or my pink car.
As soon as the broad, thick leaves of the figs would fall and the trees became barren, he would trim them down, twine them up and bundle them all for winter. I never knew how he managed to do it all on his own. The branches were long and thick, and the trees were wide and much taller than his sturdy 5’ 11”.

Regardless of the daunting task, there would always be a day when we came home from school or from work to find the five giant fig trees packaged up and readied for winter, before we even realized he’d been preparing them. I never questioned it. It was just something that Avô did each year.

I heard the steady sound of the saw and branches cracking and falling to the ground with a quiet thud. I should have been worried, listening to hear the louder thud of my grandfather falling out of the tree and hitting that same hard ground, but the thought never occurred to me. He seemed invincible. He certainly acted as if he was. I turned around and saw him leaning up against the trunk of one of his trees. He held his hand on his heart and was slumped a bit and he tried to catch his breath. I took a step back in his direction. “Avô?”

He saw me and straightened a little, still holding his heart. “Vá lá dentro. Sua avó precisa de ajuda com a roupa.”

“I didn’t think Avô needed any help with the laundry, but I’ll check.” He turned and put one foot back up on the scaffolding to lift himself up, climbing much slower than he did the first time. I didn’t think anything of it; I just went inside to check on my grandmother.

Shortly afterwards, Avô learned that he had multiple blocked arteries near his heart.

There are only two fig trees left in the garden now. One by one, the trees got cut down and the piles of firewood piled up high in the corner of the garden. We never told him to cut down the trees, and Avô never told us why he wanted to. The two left standing look smaller, somehow, than the powerful image of the jungle that was there once before. The size of the garden swallows them up despite how large they actually are. I’m an adult now and they remind me of Avô, always trying to take on something so much bigger than he is.

I hear the sound of the screen door and smile as he comes out to meet me. The trucker cap blocks the sun from his eyes and his socks look ridiculous pulled up nearly to his knees. His red checkered shirt looks stunning against his blue plaid pants. I laugh because I know that my words won’t do any good. “Avô, I told you that shirt doesn’t match those pants last time you wore them.”

“É claro que essas calças combinar! . . . Of course these pants match! Look, the little squares down here match the little squares up here!” He points to his shirt, and I nod as if I can suddenly see what he means, and roll my eyes to myself. It’s no use arguing with a stubborn man. “Are you going to tie up the fig trees for winter?”

“Você vê alguma mais figos sobre essas árvores? . . . Do you see any
more figs on those trees? Yeah, I’m gonna tie up the fig trees for winter! Or they gonna die.” I watch him make his way up the scaffolding, moving much slower and more cautiously than I remember him doing years ago. I’m sure it’s much slower than he would like to be moving.

“Avô, why don’t you go inside and relax? Your Portuguese soap opera is on and you’re going to miss it.” I know this won’t do any good, even as I say it. He shakes his head and gives me a dirty look, one that I recognize from my childhood, but it’s missing some of the energy that used to back it up. He sighs almost to himself, but I can hear it.

“Descansar. Por quê? . . . Rest. Why? If I go inside, then I sit on the couch and watch TV until I die. I’d rather die up here.” Then he takes a deep breath and pulls himself the rest of the way into the tree.

I turn back and am about to head into the house when I hear him call me. “Mas . . . but you can help me with this twine if you want.” Just like that, I know that is all he would ever allow me to do for him. I can help him accomplish what he loves, but if accomplishing that puts him at risk, I can never stop him from trying to do it anyway. Somehow, as much as I hate to admit it, he is right about his garden. There isn’t anywhere else in the world where he is happier.