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AUM's Literary & Arts Magazine

FILIBUSTER



Editor's Note

Dear Readers,

I'm grateful to have the opportunity to present you with the 2022 edition of AUM's Literary and Arts Magazine, *Filibuster*. Over the last year, we've seen major changes in the world for women and groups of marginalized people. We now have the first female vice-president and she is a woman of color: this is no small victory for women and communities of color. However, we've also seen states attempt to strip us of some of our basic rights.

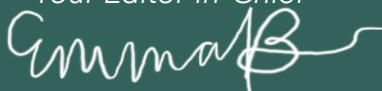
I was inspired by Hélène Cixous's "The Laugh of the Medusa," Sandra Cisneros's *Woman Hollering Creek*, Ilene Beckerman's *Love, Loss, and What I Wore*, and the life-writing of Michael Field. Alongside these literary inspirations are some wonderful people: my nanny Emma (my nakesake), my mom Deanna, my best friend Abby, Trixie Mattel, Prince, Jonathan Van Ness, Dolly Parton, Dr. Heather Witcher, and my many classmates. This edition comes forth at an unprecedented time in our world, and I felt it was important to highlight Voices of Women and Marginalized People as our theme. It is meant to inspire writers to consider themselves as more than a commodity of a predominately male gaze. The theme wasn't intended as an exclusion of certain voices, but, rather, an inclusion of voices we so rarely have the opportunity to hear.

This edition wouldn't have been possible without the support of my family and friends; a piece of each of them shines in this edition. I would like to thank my remarkable editorial staff: Angela, MariCaitlin, Mikia, Robby, and Tyson. I would also like to thank McKenna & Nolan Odom for all of their help and support through this time. The help they contributed, I could never repay, even with a million chocolate chip cookies. It was important for me to craft a team of individuals each with different backgrounds and views to ensure that this edition was as inclusive as it possibly could be. Each of them donated their time and effort to *Filibuster*, and for that (and putting up with me) I am eternally grateful. This editorial team helped me comb through our many submissions and aided me in making some incredibly difficult decisions. They all contributed both to this edition, and to my life, in ways I could never possibly repay. Dr. Heather Witcher served as our Faculty Advisor, and she provided wonderful insight into the edition alongside serving as a mentor and someone I could rely on. This edition genuinely wouldn't have been possible without Dr. Witcher's innumerable contributions; my entire team is grateful to have worked with Dr. Witcher.

Finally, I would like to thank my many mentors in the Department of English and Philosophy: Dr. Gooch, Dr. Kelley, Dr. Quaney, Dr. Reno, Dr. Sterling, and Dr. Witcher (yes, again, no one should be surprised). Each of these individuals has inspired me and pushed me to reach past my limits, and without their help, this edition wouldn't be half of what it currently is. The impact they've had on my education and who I am as a person is unmatched. A special thanks to Mrs. Tara Edwards for her devotion to the Department as a whole and to *Filibuster* specifically.

As you take in these works, I encourage you to seek out and appreciate these voices we rarely hear and acknowledge the value each of these contributors has to offer.

Thank You Dearly,
Your Editor-in-Chief



Emma Butler



Edward Greene Malbone, *Eye of Maria Miles Heyward*, 1802. The Met. <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/20414>



Paul Gauguin, *Merahi metua no Tehamana* (*Tehamana Has Many Parents or The Ancestors of Tehamana*), 1893. Art Institute of Chicago. ©CC0 Public Domain Designation. <https://www.artic.edu/artworks/60812/merahi-metua-no-tehamana-tehamana-has-many-parents-or-the-ancestors-of-tehamana>.

Team Members Filibuster 2022



Emma Butler (she/her)

Editor-in-Chief & Graphic Designer

Emma is a senior at AUM; she graduates in May of 2022 with an English major and a Spanish minor. After graduation, Emma intends to return to AUM for her MLA. Emma currently holds three positions within the Department of English and Philosophy. She is a Peer Mentor, a Research Assistant, and the Editor-in-Chief of *Filibuster*. When Emma isn't at school, working, or studying she enjoys antiques, watching YouTube, cooking, going to her local bookstore, and, more recently, playing Animal Crossing. Emma enjoys reading works from Joshilyn Jackson, Sandra Cisneros, and Hélène Cixous. Emma was published in the 2021 edition of *Filibuster*.



Dr. Heather Witcher (she/her)

Faculty Advisor

Dr. Heather Witcher serves as the faculty advisor for *Filibuster*, and is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English and Philosophy. When she isn't wrangling three young children, she loves to play with her dogs and use her kitchen for culinary adventures. COVID and kids have made her homebound, but, in a previous life, she loved to travel. Her courses and research focus on Victorian poetry, 19th century archives, issues of gender and sexuality, and digital humanities.



Robby Bradford (he/him)

Co-Editor

Robby Bradford is a senior at AUM, majoring in English with a minor in Visual Arts. Robby plans to graduate in the summer of 2022. Robby enjoys classic films, antiques, art of any kind, and spending time with loved ones. He would like to pursue a graduate degree in Art History and further pursue a career in museum curation or as a teacher. Robby enjoys the works of Gertrude Stein, Carson McCullers, Ina Garten, and Richard Wright.



Angela Caver (she/her)

Co-Editor

Angela is a senior and a May 2022 graduate. She is an English major with a business minor. Angela currently works as a High School English Teacher for The School at Sylvan, which is a non-traditional school that offers students an individualized learning experience. She also tutors for the Sylvan Learning Center of Montgomery. In her free time, she enjoys thrifting, crafting home decor, and nature photography. Angela enjoys reading works from Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, Emily Dickinson, and Edgar Allan Poe; for a more modern, young adult audience, she reads novels from Sarah Dessen and Kelly Elliot.

Mikia Holloway (she/her)

Co-Editor

Mikia earned her Bachelor's degree in English, graduating with *summa cum laude* honors in December 2021. She served as a student research assistant in the Spring and Summer semesters of 2021. In addition to being published in the 2021 issue of *Filibuster*, Mikia's writing has been recognized by the South Atlantic Modern Language Association (SAML) and the International English Honor Society Sigma Tau Delta.

Mikia's primary passion is writing, but her other hobbies include exploring new music, playing tenor saxophone, and playing video games. Mikia now works as a Grant Writer in AUM's Office of Sponsored Programs & Research.



MariCaitlin Riggles (they/them)

Co-Editor

MariCaitlin, or MC, is a junior here at AUM. They are an English major planning to graduate in the spring of 2023. MC's interests include film, music, art, and dyeing their hair fun colors. They would like to pursue a career in writing and/or editing with their degree.

MariCaitlin joined the *Filibuster* as an editor in the fall of 2021.



Tyson Wilson (he/him)

Co-Editor

Tyson Wilson is an English major in his junior year. He is pursuing a minor in creative writing. His favorite genres are poetry and drama. In addition to his work on this year's edition of *Filibuster*, Tyson works at AUM as a peer tutor at the Learning Center.



McKenna Odom (she/her)

Editorial Consultant

McKenna is an English major and Communications minor at AUM.

Her ambition is to obtain a Master's in Library and Information Science. When she's not reading for school, she can be found with a cup of coffee enjoying a fantasy or adventure novel. McKenna lives in Montgomery with her husband and two cats.



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James McNeill Whistler, *Green and Blue: The Dancer*, 1893. Art Institute of Chicago. ©CC0 Public Domain Designation. <https://www.artic.edu/artworks/111164/green-and-blue-the-dancer>.

Song of a Woman

McKenna Odom

I sing the Song, not for myself,
But for Women-kind:
Daughters, Sisters, Wives, Mothers -
Created and Creator.
For what am I but a cog in the ever-revolving machine of Life?

I sing the legacy of foremothers,
Those who bore the unrighteous burdens of the world on their backs
Which leave my life unencumbered.
For what am I but the product of life longed for, fought for, died for?

I sing for the feminine, both soft and hard,
Those women who play the part of Mother and Father;
They are reason enough to sing.

I Am only because I am Woman.
I, who have known pain and joy, love and hate,
Experience trauma and sorrow, swallowing it before it swallows me.
I am but one voice in the chorus of Women.



Pablo Picasso, *Mother and Child*, 1921. Art Institute of Chicago, ©2018 Estate of Pablo Picasso. <https://www.artic.edu/artworks/109275/mother-and-child>.

What makes you a woman?

Maya Freed

Do you become a woman
when you develop breast?
When boys start to notice your plump chest?
Or is it when your hips become round
and people notice your butt as you sit down?
Is it when you apply a layer of foundation
and learn to do your makeup?
Or is it when you go bra shopping and purchase a D cup?

Is it the day you start your period,
or change your first pad?
Is it the day you shed blood
when you lie on your back?
Is it the day you get pregnant
and have your first child?
Is it the day he proposes,
or when you walk down the aisle?

Do you become a woman
when you move out on your own?
or is it when you turn a house into a home?
Is it the day you send your kids
to the first day of school?
Or when you sit your family down
and tell them the house rules?

What makes you a woman?
That's an age old question
Womanhood is submerged in many lessons.
A subtle kiss, a gentle smile
Every woman once blossomed from a precious child

Mother Nature

Mikia Holloway

The beauty of woman is that of nature.
Her luscious locks ripple down,
Creating a greater wave than any ocean I've seen.
With more variety, too.
Her eyes—those golden orbs—
Were crafted from earth's finest minerals.
The curves and dips of her body—pure and sculpted
Could be compared to the world's greatest canyons.
She even competes with the bold bald eagle,
Her sweeping lashes mimicking its flapping wings as she blinks.
That's why they call her mother nature.

Her Lively Ghost

Tyson Wilson

timidly, she limps,
surveying the rooms in which
she raised abstractions.

occasionally,
i've glimpsed Her Lively Ghost, but
moments are fleeting;

sadly, she too seems
to understand that something
is wrong, for she cries.



A SMILE MEETING FATE -for Iqbal Zaiid

Amana Diab

Got a memory of you
We carry in our souls
Wrap it close around us
When the nights get cold

You bestowed wisdom on the future
In a humble home space
At first only a handful of seats
Then a school of God's word it became

Got a picture of you
Hanging on the wall
Open our eyes and see it
When the road gets dark

We'll look into your eyes
Feel your touch from the frame
Reach out for your warmth
And sense the comfort all the same

You left a mark on this world
You left tears in our eyes
You left a loving husband
You know he'll do your memory right

We're not afraid of the truth
It's just heavy on the heart
The vision of your eyes closing
And your hands falling soft

Seeing your resting face
Feeling your skin snow-like cold
Not far gone, the warmth of your smile
Your children longing for your motherly hold

We rested your body under the dark soil
But your soul flew to become star-like bright
God took you away from your son and daughters
To place you by His side

You were the mother of all your children
From where you began til the end
To all of us you were a hero
I'm sure you can see it from where you stand

My Fairytale Succubus Prince

Mikia Holloway

When I looked at you, I saw the future.
An adventure to remark,
on which I was fervid to embark
as the prize caught with your winning lure.

"This is the one," I told myself
and everyone else, too,
praying not to be a fool
while clearing this space on my shelf.

That queen bed down in the Big Easy
felt like it was named after me,
and no Frenchman could convince me
our little Paris didn't beat the one across the sea.

Now, when I look at you, I see loss.
All my time you froze.
Said I was your garden's prize rose
But treated more like the moss.

Your whole world, by your own words,
and I suppose I can't disagree,
considering the fatal catastrophe
we've sent our planet towards.

Though I doubt that holds a candle
to the devastation your love
wreaks on my heart's cove,
which it, through tried, could not handle.

But soon, when I look at you, I'll see victory.
None of the pain, none of the ugly memories.
Only the good ones, 'cause I fought your fight
And you couldn't end me, though dared as you might.

I'm sure you'll regret your disregard
Of my being. The way you'd discard
with each use. Because you couldn't've known
The last time'd be so soon. Icky, how close to the sun you'd flown.

Watch, on my return, how swiftly I strut down those Crescent City streets
without the weight of extra baggage slowing my feet.
Free from the neglect which filled me with scorn,
it won't be only Jazz that, here, was born.

Stronger than ever, I am born anew,
as I bid adieu to you and all your abuse.
Though you may, briefly, have succeeded in influencing my doubt,
to a False God like you, I could never be devout.

Your loss, you see, was betting I'd fall
as easily as your other subduals.
Just as my worth eluded, did my power.
A queen this strong could never, by you, be slain.
So, once I wipe these tears, you won't ever again bring me pain.



The Lady of Grandview Manor

Mikia Holloway

She awoke in a startle. She found herself in a foreign bedroom—though it somehow seemed familiar—with no recollection of how she got there. Pillars surrounded the circular room, all arching up to the domed ceiling and meeting in a star shape in the middle. The burgundy wallpaper, which probably once covered the whole room, had now been torn back to reveal the weathered, cracked walls. The ornately paned stained-glass windows were so large that they completely lit the entire room.

“Hello? Max?” She called out, but the only response was her own echo bouncing back through the cracked door. It was only just ajar enough that she could not see what was on the other side held, teasing her with the possibilities. The darkness peering through the crack almost seemed to call her name, and she, the adventurer that she was, was too weak not to welcome its invitation.

Outside the door was a hallway just as baroque as the room from whence she came. The walls were lined with large paintings every few feet and gold candle holders were mounted between each one.

“Someone must be here,” she mumbled to herself, having noted the lit candles. But overwhelmed by the ornamentation that surrounded her, she didn’t know where—or how—to begin looking. The hallway seemingly went on as far as she could see in any direction.

“Hello? Is anyone there? Can someone help me. . .” What started as a howling yell diminished to more of a whisper as she gave up halfway through, realizing the futility of her actions. If no one had come to answer her screams yet, she thought, a continued attempt seemed like a waste of time. Besides, if this place was as big as it looked, she knew her voice wouldn’t travel far. Cupping her hands into her face, she started to feel that her efforts were hopeless. Not only did she have no idea how to get out of here, she had no clue where “here” even was.

Suddenly, her ears perked at a faint tune being hummed in the distance. She chased the song down a long spiral staircase—the tallest one she had ever recalled seeing—the song growing louder with each descending step. Everything about this place, she thought, seemed so grandiose for no reason at all . . . but that only made her feel more drawn to it. She couldn’t shake the feeling that, somehow, she knew this place. She’d seen it all before, she knew she had.

“Ah, you’re awake, madam!” A man appeared behind her causing all but the tips of her toes to leave the ground.

“Wah!” Startled, she swirled around to be met by a dapperly dressed young man in a white collared shirt underneath a black vest with black pants to match. Pale faced, he promptly swept aside a few strands of his jet-black hair which managed to escape the pomade’s hold.

There were definitely worse sights to have been frightened by, she thought. At the very least, she was intrigued by this strange man. “W-where did you come from?”

“Sorry to have startled you, miss. I was just getting some cleaning done. Was I making too much

noise? Did I wake you?"

She wondered why he was speaking with such familiarity. And why, perhaps more puzzling, did she not mind it? "No, don't worry. I was just. . . just-w-who are you?"

"Miss, what ever do you mean? Are you feeling okay? You did hit your head really hard on one of the low doorways earlier."

"I-I did?"

"You were just so excited to see the place you were running all over and—well—right into it. Doesn't look like there's any swelling, but if you're having trouble remembering, then maybe you should get to a doctor . . ."

"No, no! I'm starting to remember." She lied; however creepy this place is, she thought that a hospital would've been much worse. There's no way, she thought, that she was going there alone. Not without . . .

She froze. "Wait. . . where's Maxwell!?"

"Right, the young gentleman you mentioned was supposed to be meeting you here. I haven't seen him. I suppose he hasn't arrived yet, you did only take a short—"

"Meeting me here? No! That doesn't make sense, why would I say that? We always travel together!"

"Well, I only know what you told me! I believe you mentioned an inn nearby where the two of you stayed for the night. You said the excitement of finally being so close to this place kept you awake, and you didn't want to wait any longer to finally see it. So, you hitched a ride when the sun rose and left a note for Max telling him to meet you here. At least, so you told me, madam. I had no reason to assume that wasn't the truth."

Could that really be true? Sure, she had no issue believing that with all her pent-up excitement, she'd want to arrive super early—perhaps, too early. She's always had a thing for old treasures and whatever tales accompany them and, well, this place clearly has a lot of history.

But what she couldn't believe was that she would arrive on her own, without Max.

"Are you sure you're okay, miss? Here, maybe you should have a seat." He approached

her with an outstretched hand, gently placed it on her shoulder, and guided her to a nearby chair. So gentle, that even as she watched his hand make contact with her body, she could hardly feel his touch. She could almost swear that she was pulled to that seat sheerly through the power of the spell his eyes casted as they locked onto hers.

"Yeah, no—I just—I don't understand why I would do that. . ."

"Well, actually a lot of people try to get here early! We don't book in advance, after all, so it's a first come first serve basis!"

"Here . . . as in . . .?"

"Why, the Grandview Manor, of course!"

"Grandview. . ." Her words trailed as she tried to remember why that name sounded so damn familiar, steam almost coming from her ears. And, then it hit her. She'd seen this place before. Well, pictures of it, at least. She had been obsessed with The "Grande" Grandview Manor for years, putting countless hours into her incessant research of the legends and lore. She knew almost everything there was to know about this place. Almost.

"Yes, of course. I'm . . . I'm starting to remember now . . ." She and Max had been planning this trip for months, but she'd been dreaming to see this place for much longer. She knew Grandview probably attracted a few tourists—the diehard haunt hunters like herself, well with it supposedly being haunted and all. But she was surprised to learn that it was such a popular attraction that they

took reservations. After all, no one she would ever ramble about the place to had ever even heard of it. She had taken this trip only expecting to be able to view the house from the outside—and she would've been wholly content with only that. To be standing inside the gorgeous piece of history was more than she ever expected this trip would lead to.

How, she wondered, could this reservation option not come up in her research?

"How long has this place been an attraction?"

"Geez, how long? Who knows, really! Feels like forever sometimes!"

"It's just . . . I know a lot about this place. More than most people, I think. And I had no idea you could actually reserve rooms here."

"Hm. Well—" For the first time his chipper smile vanished but for only a split second

before bouncing right back. "Well, would you like to explore more of the manor? There's still so much you haven't seen! It is the "Grande" Grandview after all . . ."

His voice grew quieter and quieter with each syllable. The girl looked up to realize a great distance now existed between the two, finding herself on the complete opposite side of the room and noticing how much larger it is than she previously thought. He waved for her to join him, and as she rose to her feet to comply, she swore that she saw the room enlarge, one more, right in front of her. With each step she took towards him, she somehow ended up farther away, and he continued to motion for her to follow, again and again. This went on for only a few moments before she grew too frustrated to continue the insanity. Stopping in her tracks, she closed her eyes and smothered her face with her hands. "What's going on?! How are you doing this?! Stop!" She uncovered her face just in time to catch a final glimpse of the stranger before he disappeared into the doorway of another room. "This is crazy. . . am I crazy?" She whispered to herself, taking a moment to catch her breath. A heavy exhale escaped her mouth, accompanied by the single tear rolling down her cheek at the same time, along with the rest of the tension which simultaneously released from her body. "Well, at least the room stopped growing." She joked, wiping the moisture from her eyes. It wasn't until the blurriness cleared that her refocused vision revealed that this nightmare wasn't over. Somehow, though she had not, herself, moved, she was no longer in the same room in which she began. Or perhaps it had just changed so drastically that she could no longer recognize it. Neither option made her question her sanity any less. The whole room, once fully lit by candles throughout the room, was now almost completely dark with only one candle barely flickering in the middle of the room. The room that she was now, covered in cobwebs, completely contrasted the spotless room that had just finished being cleaned when she entered.

She tiptoed through the dimly lit room, outstretching her arm to help guide her way. She focused on the spot in the darkness where she knew the door that he left through should be, doing her best to follow the man's path as closely as she remembered.

"Hello?" She called out, hoping that the strange man from before—or really, anyone at all, would answer. But she had no such luck. She wandered in the dark for a few minutes, looking for a way out that she was starting to fear didn't exist. Having walked the length of the wall three times over, feeling for the door that the stranger disappeared through—which has now seemed to disappear itself—she expanded her search to the room's entire perimeter. She had lost count of how many times she'd circled this room before the doorway to another room formed before her. Slapping her hands to her thighs in frustration, she felt a brick-like rectangle in her pocket, reminding her of the vital tool she had forgotten about thus far. If that man was right and she had come here without Max, she knew that meant he was still somewhere on the outside and safe from this place. Still, she thought, she'd better confirm that. Her slimy fingers left trails of sweat down her phone screen as she frantically scrolled to find Max's contact.

She said a silent prayer. Never in her life had she ever been so nervous to make a phone call. Either

Max would answer and come and rescue her from this hellish funhouse, or . . . well, he wouldn't, leaving her mind to wander about all the horrific things that might've happened to him. But right now, the phone's dial served as a sound of hope.

"C'mon, pick up, pick up, pick up," her heart rate increased with each ring. Each second felt like an eternity passing as she—

"Hello?" The chime of his bright voice interrupted her thoughts.

"Max, thank God you answered! . . . No, listen, you have to help me. I'm trapped in Grandview Manor . . . yes, I got in, but . . . No, Max I'm serious! Something weird is going on here. I think I need you to come get— What? . . . HELLO? MAX?" She looked down at the phone to find that the screen was completely black. "No. No. No. No." She pressed every button but to no avail. "Fuck! It's dead!"

"Just like everything else here," responded a disembodied voice from the darkness.

"Who—who the hell said that? Where are you?" She demanded, doing her best impression of a guarded stance. She spun in circles, no idea which direction the voice originated from. The tall blacked out curtains, which had been doing their duty blocking every bit of sunlight from the room, had now been suddenly drawn back to reveal a mysterious looking woman standing there beside them. She was dressed in a pink Victorian era ball gown, adorned with bows and ruffles. Her luscious brown hair fell past her shoulders in perfect rag curls.

"Oh, calm down, dear! Don't get your knickers in a twist. I didn't mean to scare you, but sometimes you've gotta take whatever opportunity you get to have a little fun around here."

"Thank God. Are you on staff here, too? Your costume looks so . . . authentic."

"Staff? What on earth are you talking about, child? Do you really not get what's going on here?"

"No, and quite frankly I don't care anymore! I just want to go home."

"You poor thing . . . you don't know what this place is do you? Why you're here?"

"I was here to explore the place. Be a tourist, I guess. Rent a room, all that jazz. But now I just want to get out of here."

"Darling, this is no tourist attraction. And it certainly isn't a hotel. I mean, don't you know this place better than anyone? After all, that is why she chose you."

"What? Chose me? Who? What are you talking about? That man I talked to—"

"Let me guess, the guy with the black vest? Going around cleaning the place? Look, some people just can't accept that they've moved on and will create their own false realities in which they can hide from the truth. But those are the weak ones. You're not weak, are you?" She stepped closer, hand outstretched as if asking to be joined.

"W-what are you talking about? You're—you're crazy, lady. Please just leave me alone!"

Slowly backing away, the poor girl deliberated whether or not to run. But where, she wondered, was there even to go? The mysterious woman didn't seem dangerous or threatening. And to her, any company at all was better than being alone right now.

"I know this must be hard, but if you won't believe me," she disappeared into the shadows for a moment before pulling back another set of curtains, illuminating a whole new part of the room that was previously out of sight, "maybe this will open your eyes. Don't be shy," she gestured towards the window, "come look." In the newly revealed portion of the room, there was a large door leading to the outside. That was it! Her way out was finally in view. With that clear escape route in mind, she slowly approached the window.

"Is that? Oh my God, Max!" His old beat up pick up crept down the long dirt driveway. She

unclenched every part of her body, feeling that her nightmare was finally over. She ran towards the door, imagining herself running straight through it and directly into Max's arms. But she was brought back to reality when the knob's refusal to turn left her body slamming into the door. She turned back towards the woman, who was now standing, arms crossed, with a devilish smirk on her face. "Please just open the door. I just want to go home!" She was unable to hold back the ocean of tears with her begs. Turning back, she pounded the door as hard as she could, almost expecting to pull back only bloody nubs. She tried everything—kicking, even trying to ram it down with her shoulder—nothing worked.

"If only it were that easy."

"Why are you doing this to me!?" She stepped closer to the womanly figure until there was barely any distance between the—as if the snot flying from her nose was going to intimidate.

"It's not me who's keeping you here," she gestured towards the window once again. Max was nearly to the front of the driveway. Only now, someone was standing there waiting for him. From behind, she couldn't tell much. Only that they had long, brown hair which was effortlessly tossed into a messy bun.

"Who is that?"

"She's the reason you came here last night. And the reason you'll never leave."

"You can't keep me here! Max would never leave without me! And when I get out of here, I'm calling the police, you crazy bitch!"

"Yeah, what good that'll do . . ." she mumbled under her breath. "Look, your friend isn't leaving without you. At least that's what he thinks."

"What the hell does that mean?" She asked, face contorted. Once again, the woman points out the window. The brunette woman was still standing out there, waiting to greet Max.

She watched as her best friend stepped out of his truck and began walking towards her. The distance from the outside of the window to where Max was standing couldn't have been more than a few yards, but for her never felt farther from him. "MAX!! MAX!!" Banging on the windows, she yelled as loud as her lungs would allow, hoping to get Max's attention. Her screams only ceased after catching eye of a scene her brain refused to accept as real. Max approached the girl with the messy bun with his arms wide open, swooping her up into a tight embrace. "What . . ." the girl's whisper cracked. He lifted her up and spun her around and, though her face was only visible for just a brief second, her image was seared into the onlooking girl's brain forever. The woman looked . . . like her. Exactly like her, save for one small difference: her eyes were piercing red.

"You claim to know all the legends of this place, but you don't even know about The Lady of the House?"

"I don't actually believe any of those ghost stories . . . I just think they're interesting."

"So, then you do know her story?"

"You mean . . ." hesitating as she began to piece it all together, "how her family had kept her locked away in this house and never let her leave for her entire life? And how she died in this place, leaving her soul trapped in the godforsaken place that also stole her freedom in life."

"Good, so you're aware of this house's refusal to let passed souls rest? And how poor Lady has spent the last hundreds of years searching—"

"—for a vessel? A vessel for her soul," defeat washed over her face.

"Good to see you catch on so quickly!" Her enthusiasm was met with silence. "Oh, now, don't look

so sad! Besides, there's no reason to be sad for her, anymore!" She looked the poor girl over once, glanced out the window, then back at her. "It looks like she's finally found the perfect vessel."



Carl Blechen, *The Interior of the Palm House on the Pfaueninsel Near Potsdam*, 1834. The Art Institute of Chicago, ©CC0 Public Domain Designation. <https://www.artic.edu/artworks/144969/the-interior-of-the-palm-house-on-the-pfaueninsel-near-potsdam>.

Butterfly

Maya Freed

Ding Dong

"I hope that's not him," I muttered under my breath. I began to quickly curl my hair and burned my forehead in the process. My makeup was scattered across my bathroom counter and clothes drowned my bed in result of me looking for an outfit. My shoes were sharks on the floor, and I managed to step on a heel trying to get to my purse. This was my first date in years. Four years to be exact. That's how long it had been since Adonis broke off the engagement. I couldn't eat, I couldn't sleep, I couldn't live without him. In my mind the sun rose and set on Adonis. He was the star that illuminated my life and the day he left my world stopped shining.

Ding Dong

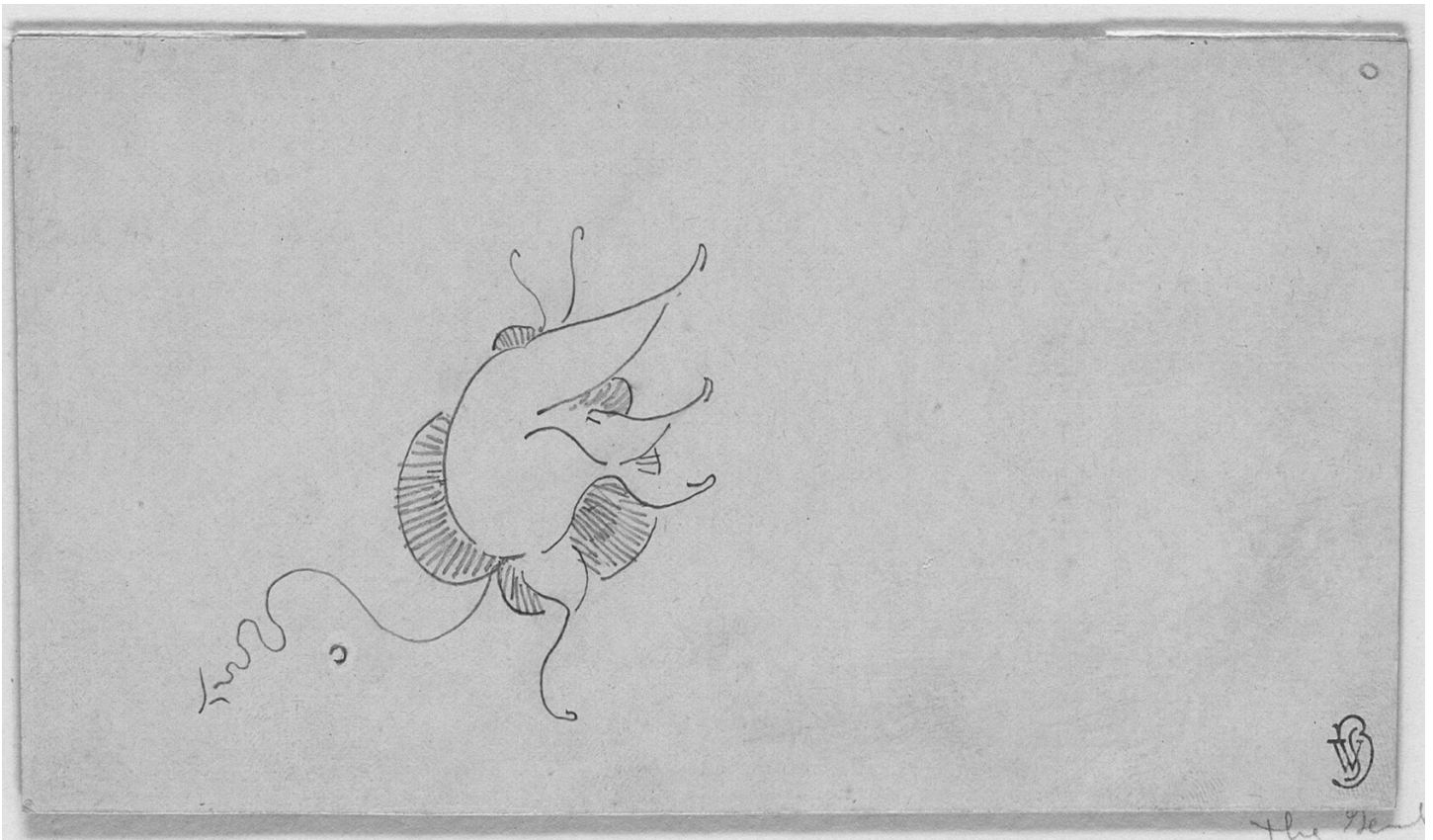
"Just a minute," I yelled from upstairs. I rushed and buckled my clear heels. I'm not one to be on time for much, but I planned on being promptly dressed and ready for my date with Lance. I glanced at my phone to check the time. I still had 30 minutes before he arrived. I didn't see a text indicating he'd be early, so I was curious as to who was on my doorstep. As I approached the door my anxiety slowly engulfed me. What if I wasn't ready for this? What if this doesn't go well? What will make this time different?

I took a deep breath to calm down. You got this I thought to myself then proceeded to open the door. I have a bad habit of opening the door without asking who's there, and this time I regret not asking.

The ghost of my past lover stood before my eyes. He haunted me for years following the breakup, and now here he was live in the flesh with blood pulsing through his veins at my front door. Right before my eyes stood the man who broke me to the core. I stood there in disbelief. I hadn't seen or heard from Adonis since he left me. The last time we spoke he told me he wasn't ready to get married and make a serious commitment. He said we were still young, and he had some soul searching to do. He wanted to see what else was out there, and then he left. So, as Adonis stood in my doorway a thousand emotions ran through me. Anger, sadness, happiness, disbelief, rage. My face displayed none of what I was feeling. I just stared at him blankly while tons of questions buzzed in my head. I scanned his body over. His moisturized mocha skin gleamed in the sunlight. His physique more chiseled than I remembered. After what seemed like an eternity of staring, I parted my lips to speak. Before I could say a word Adonis stopped me. He spoke as if he had just come to a revelation. He spoke hurriedly and happily. "ReGine, I know you're wondering what I'm doing here. I want to start by saying I'm sorry for the way I left. It was unexpected and I know I hurt you in the process. Four years ago, I was boy who didn't know better. In this time apart I've grown into a man, and I realize you're the woman for me. I haven't found another woman who loves me the way you do, who is supportive, and accepts me for all I am. I haven't found someone who worships God the way you do, who has unwavering faith, and who is as spiritual as you are. I haven't found someone as caring, loving, or creative as you. I have longed for you so many times while I was away. I missed your bright smile and gentle touch. I missed your handwritten secret love letters. I missed the way our bodies feel next to each other. I loved how you challenged me to think and oh baby have I been thinking about you! ReGine, I missed everything about you, and I was a foolish man for walking away." He pulled me in and kissed me passionately smudging the red lipstick I had just neatly applied.

I pulled away from him shocked he'd just kissed me. Stunned he'd showed up at my doorstep

after all this time with this so called "I want you back" speech. As I pulled away from him I noticed Lance's black Camaro turning into my driveway. I pulled the door closed behind me and locked it. I turned away from Adonis not uttering a word and walked confidently towards Lance's car, my hips gracefully swinging side to side. "Where are you going?" he asked confused. "Didn't you hear me?" I replied sassily, "A date. Had you called before you just magically appeared it would've saved your time and gas." I stopped mid stride and turned to face him, my long black curls bouncing on my shoulders. I looked at Adonis once more and gave him a longing glance. The man I fell in love with years ago was long vanished. The woman he once knew had now metamorphosized into someone else. I smiled at him. "You have a little something on your lip," I said as I winked and continued to the car. I got into the Camaro and began to reapply my lipstick in the passenger sun visor mirror. "Who was that?" Lance asked as I entered the car." "Oh, just a man looking for a little hope." I replied. "Well, did he find it?" He asked curiously. "No," I paused, "but you did" and I smiled as we pulled away. Leaving Adonis hopeless, like he once left me.



James McNeill Whistler, *Butterfly*, 1890. The Art Institute of Chicago, ©CC0 Public Domain Designation. <https://www.artic.edu/artworks/14490/butterfly>.

Me

Angela Caver

For the first time in my life,
I love who I am.
I admire my strength.
My perseverance.
My will.
Thankful for each obstacle
That led me here.
Thankful for each gain
That created this new version of myself.
Not every moment radiates happiness.
Not every moment drowns in sorrow.
But every moment
Shaped the woman I am now.
Every moment drove my past self
Into becoming more open.
More accepting.
More flexible.
More like the me I always dreamt of being.
Now I am her.
From longing to be,
To admiring what I achieved.
I am unapologetically Me.



Lynn Pelham, *Underwater beauty contest*, 1959.
©Time Inc. <https://images.google.com/hosted/life/a337a8b644de50a9.html>

A Call From Florence

Lacey Sewell

Cold. That is the only word that accurately depicts my experience thus far at Venable Acres Nursing Home. The tile on my bare feet, the hands of the young nurse helping me dress, the chicken noodle soup that I have been served for the third time this week... all cold. Let me be clear in saying that I did not come here by my own volition. My children's concern for my well-being (amplified by my last visit to the doctor's office where I received my Alzheimer's diagnosis) is what landed me in this wretched facility. However, I am not so sure of the doctor's conclusion regarding my state of mind. I am not forgetful. In fact, I remember things most people do not consider important enough to store in their thoughts. I can recite the names of the cast from *Golden Girls*, and I also know the order in which they passed (save the beloved Betty White). I remember the telephone number of my best friend, Florence. However, I admit this fact is not as impressive considering her number has not changed since the late seventies. I also remember the hand of my husband, Hershel. I remember every wrinkle, dimple, freckle, and crevice. That hand spent the better half of fifty-four years holding mine. I am convinced the world had never experienced a love like Hershel's and mine. His absence these last few years have left me hollow, and I only live to better myself in order to someday join him in the heavens. However, I admit that my thoughts concerning the nurse who is assigned to my room do not help my case. I feel the need to repent after every occurrence I have with that young woman.

My thoughts are interrupted by the sound of the telephone ringing. I slowly raise my arm off the bed, and I answer the phone. I hear the sound of Florence's oxygen machine before I am even able to muster a word. She asks me how I'm doing, and I reply with a sigh. We do this little dance every time she calls. She asks me how I'm doing, I sigh, and she goes on to name all the reasons she hasn't been able to visit. Although I hear Florence talking, my attention is set on the television. I wonder how it is people are still interested with *Days of Our Lives*. I stopped watching after the death of Alice Horton. I flipped the channels for what seemed like an eternity, then I settled on *Wheel of Fortune*. I remembered that I was on the phone but quickly hung up. I do not know why I even bother answering the phone. No one ever calls me except for the people trying to reach out to me about my car's extended warranty. I spend the rest of my afternoon waiting for Hershel to get home from work. I wonder what he'll want for supper.

A Song of Myself, VOL. I

Emma Butler

I smell like flowers and clean laundry
I love the way my Nana smells, but she is part of the reason I don't think I'm beautiful
I am one of the vainest people I know
I look thirty-five or twelve, there is no in-between
I hate the way I look—or think I look
I'm working on it: the self-loathing and the vanity
I love wearing white dresses because I feel pretty
—Also because you can't see sweat stains
I sweat all the time and I'm riddled with anxiety

I like to appear mild-mannered, but I love to fight sometimes
I love everyone to the best of my ability
I love serif fonts and antiques and old houses
I want Fleetwood Mac and ABBA played at my wedding and funeral
I am incredibly particular about everything

I hate my last name and my accent
I regret getting rid of my birthmark
I long for a fulfilling life, but I'm terrified of change
I want everyone to like me all the time
I am independent to a fault
I don't know what to do with my life
I talk too much, but not about important things
I'm not perfect; I need to get over the idea that I have to be.



imprints
Emma Butler

Invisible Highlights

Travionne Davis

“ Without words, she gazed at my black skin, my brown eyes, and my dark, curly hair. ”

“I would like to thank you for all your time, and I hope you will consider me for this astounding job opportunity,” I said over my Zoom job interview. As soon as the video was over, my false, enthusiastic attitude ended as well. The time had come to unmask the character I was presumed to be. My smile disappeared as fast as it appeared when my potential boss came on the screen. My shoulders dropped as if they had been uplifting boulders and someone had finally come and removed them. Finally, I could let out a real breath of fresh air. There I stood, in my room, alone. I never knew silence could be so loud in the wake of a victory. My eyes focused on nothing as if I had just been swallowed by an abyss of emptiness.

As soon as the zoom began and the woman and I made eye contact, I saw the look of surprise in her eyes as she put a face to the well-worded e-mails and job application, she received from me. Without words, she gazed at my black skin, my brown eyes, and my dark, curly hair. It contrasted with her loose, blonde hair, white skin, round face, and blue eyes. She looked me up and down and noticed my well-dressed appearance and quickly attempted to find my eyes again before I noticed what she was doing. Fortunately, this was not the first time I had gotten this look of shock and, sadly, I knew it would not be the last, so I ignored the observation and homed in on her focus. I knew I had her attention when I heard her in awe at my vernacular. Before the closing of this interview, I had made her laugh with jokes I did not find funny, and smile with the confidence I exerted. This theatrical facade was draining. I walked into my living room where my mother had been sitting while folding laundry. It was bright. The curtains had been pulled back which allowed her to see the entire neighborhood but gave the sun every

bit of permission to come in and stay for a while. The television was on. The sound of firing guns and running horses filled my ears. She always loved to watch Gunsmoke while she cleaned. I sat on the couch and looked around, past the sun, to see the pictures we had plastered on almost every inch of the four white walls. There was me winning my first spelling bee in the fifth grade. There I was again winning my first poetry competition that same year. The next year, I competed and won an oratorical competition and placed first for reciting and writing. All these pictures shared my mother’s teachings and me. She was the reason I’d won so many awards. You see, my mother has taught me the trade of achievement within the world. She has given me something greater than gold. She taught me the art of code-switching. That would be using appropriate grammar among others who don’t expect to hear it coming from someone of my appearance. Hence why I did not have to do it around family and friends. I remember her telling me at the age of eight, “You don’t have to show us how special we already know you are, but you should always remind a stranger.” My mother started these methods from as early as me riding my first unicycle. She didn’t let my slang get far from me. By the age of six, she’d changed my “yeah” to “yes”. My “nah” to “no” and my “huh” to “pardon me”. Not only did we work on speech, but we also crafted my handwriting as well as what I should write. With my writing, she did in fact have trouble with explaining to me why there were three variations of “to”, which I take more as a math joke these days. The most difficult for me to learn, and for my mother to teach, was pronunciation. Sounding out words didn’t seem the hardest thing in the world, but it was the fact that there were so many words that had a correct

way of being pronounced. I became excellent at the craft, however, I felt forced to do so by my mother because she knew of the cruelties society has in store for African Americans. Before my first oratorical competition in the second grade, I muscled up the nerve to ask why this was all so important. She explained to me that I would need this not much later in life. That life she spoke of came soon. A part of it came the day of the Zoom interview.

"How did it go?" she asked me. "Went as it always does," I told her. "How did what go?" my younger brother, Taj, asked while joining us on the couch. "Your brother's interview". Mama replied. "That's why you were dressed up and was talking funny in your room?" he asked me. "That is exactly why," I told him. "Talking like that is gone get him whatever he wants in this world." Mama said with a smile while looking over at me. That is a promise she made, and she had not been proven wrong. Not by me at least. "I want everything, Mama," I said to her after breaking my silence. I had gotten quiet because the inside voice in my head had gotten so loud. It was asking a question that boomed like thunder on a stormy night. "Why is it assumed that black people don't know the proper way of things?" This was a question I had no answer for. I didn't think Mama had an answer for it either, so I didn't ask. I just looked at her. Her strong, brown eyes investigated

mine as her warm palms covered my shaky hands. "And you'll have it, my love," she told me. I'll have it using my literacies. This power that I now possess has allowed me to be a human chameleon, blending in with whatever and whoever I must while destroying stereotypical attitudes in the process. I must say, seeing that shock in a person's face who thought they knew so much about me from my outer appearance is a sight I never get tired of seeing even though I wish I did. I also wish that I wasn't angry that the norm is a brown person being considered illiterate. For a long time, I thought my mother pushed me beyond my limits to start at the same starting line as any other race, but then I realized she was pushing for me to be able to compete in the same race as them. All blacks are still pushing to be in the same race as everyone else. But, because of the stereotypes formed against us, we are killed for valuing equality. We are murdered because we are not looked at as being human and not being smart enough to be treated equally as everyone else. It's good for everyone to obtain the talents of reading, writing, and speaking grammatically correct. But for black people, it's not a choice. It's a requirement. Those skills highlight to others the presence they don't see because our skin color isn't enough to be acknowledged. Literacy didn't give us life, but in this world, in this society, and for forever in a lifetime, it will be all that matters.

Isolation Therapy

Mikia Holloway

I watch as the cloud of my body's last remaining heat escapes from my mouth. It grows for a moment, then dissipates. In this moment, I'm fully aware of all the muscles in my right hand as it tries to push the pencil just an inch across the paper to finish the "t"—which was far harder to write than the "r" before it, and it the "o" before it and it the "p" before it. The beginning "R" felt like a cakewalk in comparison. Who knew "report" could seem like such a long word? I use one final gust of willpower to quickly jot down the date: "10-11-22". I can barely finish the last "2" before shoving my already thrice layered fist inside the lush of my parka, in a movement far too swift to be conscious.

"I'm making a difference," I tried to remind myself. "I'm making a difference. I'm making a difference. I'm—" I repeated this mantra until even the words from my mouth were frozen in the sharp breeze. This cold didn't even give me the chance to believe that lie. It's not like anything all the way out here in this frozen hell could actually hold any value to anyone. No true value, anyway. Well, that can't be true, I guess, or I wouldn't be out here looking for whatever goddamn algae these people think are worth risking my damn LIFE over!! Sigh. You know what does though? Have value? My life. My life has value. And, though, I might struggle to see that sometimes, my life deserves more than to be risked over some study that isn't going to significantly benefit anyone ever.

No, I signed up for this for a reason. I'm going to make a difference. If not for anyone else, at least for other Black women in my field. That's what matters. Even if I'm not around long enough to reap those rewards. Even if these rewards are only the result of my almost assured death. Especially if that.

And maybe freezing to death isn't such an awful way to go out. At least my death would be for a purpose—which is more than I can say about my life.

"Life." My mind lingers on that word for more than a moment. What is life, anyway? My life, I mean. Can what I was doing back at home even be called a life? I sure as hell wasn't living. But what I'm doing now isn't living, either. It's barely surviving. So, why now, when the cold makes it so hard to do so, does this feel like my first time breathing?

But no, I shouldn't think like that. I'd be selfish not to appreciate the life I had back home. My mom always said that I didn't appreciate them enough, but I don't think that's true. How could I not? They're. . . we'll they're family. And I love them. Because that's just what you do, right? I had no idea how much I'd miss them all out here, though. I can quite literally hear my mom's voice now, spewing her usual rhetoric: "Come spend some time with us! You're just gonna stay holed up in here by yourself for the rest of your life? One of these days—"

"I'm not gonna be here, and you're gonna wish—blah, blah, blah." I've heard the spiel so many times, I know what she's going to say even in my daydreams. My mom is—well, she's a mom. But she's always loved me and been there for me to the best of her ability. And so have my siblings. Although, I am the oldest, so most of my relationship with my sister and brother, Trinity and Khalid, has consisted of my being there for them—and boy have I been though some shit for them. But I don't mind. It's what I'm supposed to do. As their big sister, they need me to take care of them. That's my job as their big sister. To take care of them. To be there for them while mom does what she has to do to provide for all of us. That's been my role for so long that, I admit, I do feel a tab bit guilty being all this way away from them. I can almost hear their annoying little whines now. Even right now, I can imagine them running into my room, tripping over one another, barely making it through my door frame before exhaling their requests.

"We're hungry!"

"Mom said you need to make us dinner!" I stare forward, past the less than football field's

length view that my vision will allow me in this blizzard, to see a shadow forming—almost cutting through the snowfall like a burning blade through the ice. It was Trinity and Khalid, running into my room just like I'd seen them do a million times. I could even see the doorframe when Khalid miscalculated the width of the door—or either the width of himself—and smacked right into it when squeezing through the door at the same time as his much smaller little sister. As an indestructible seven-year-old, though, he of course was unscathed. Their mouths are moving 50 mph, and I swear I can almost hear their sweet little voices ringing through my ears as they scream, “Can we have chicken nuggets!?”

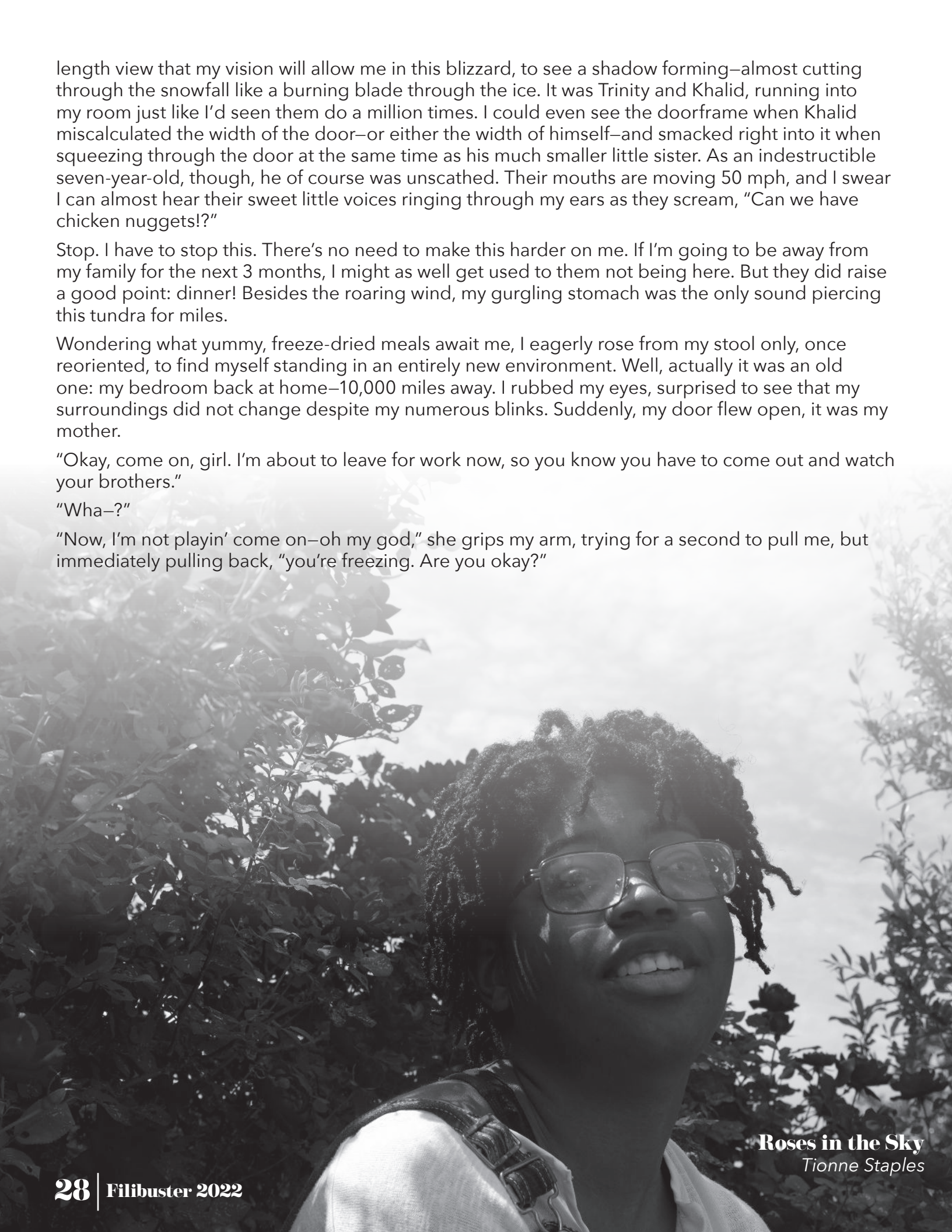
Stop. I have to stop this. There's no need to make this harder on me. If I'm going to be away from my family for the next 3 months, I might as well get used to them not being here. But they did raise a good point: dinner! Besides the roaring wind, my gurgling stomach was the only sound piercing this tundra for miles.

Wondering what yummy, freeze-dried meals await me, I eagerly rose from my stool only, once reoriented, to find myself standing in an entirely new environment. Well, actually it was an old one: my bedroom back at home—10,000 miles away. I rubbed my eyes, surprised to see that my surroundings did not change despite my numerous blinks. Suddenly, my door flew open, it was my mother.

“Okay, come on, girl. I'm about to leave for work now, so you know you have to come out and watch your brothers.”

“Wha—?”

“Now, I'm not playin' come on—oh my god,” she grips my arm, trying for a second to pull me, but immediately pulling back, “you're freezing. Are you okay?”





Vincent Van Gogh, *Corridor in the Asylum*, 1889. The Met. <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/336327>.

“Push”
A Renaissance Poem
Daniel Phelps

PUSH!!! The Universe screams as she gives birth to the universe.

The vultures peak down looking for a curse.

Nothing visible yet

Complications intensify, doctors still deny... the agony and uneasiness of a black woman's pain

Expecting it'll be another statistic. Slap it on the booty and assuming it'll be a misfit

A delinquent in solitary confinement.

Crooked smiles and polite conversations mask the intentional neglect.

Hoping to kill off the world's original intellect.

PUSH!!! Hold her hand. The black man has always been a fan of the universe that is she.

PUSH!!! Surround the universe, the baby to seal its doom.

Crooked smiles all around the room.

This is no J. Cole song. This has been going on far too long.

Black women, the universe screams in pain while her assigned vultures look with disdain.

Ugh, another one of them they say. Faking? No, she's whipping her tears away.

Egypt is in her womb, Science in her breast. No, this is no comprehensive history test.

This is the addressing of potential murder on America's delivery table. This speaks on the

Stereotype that black women are tolerable to pain. Just ask J. Marion Sims

A known butcher. But we honor him and his medical contributions throughout America's higher

Educational institutions. Implementing initiatives addressing complications is in vain

We fail to address the stain that is heavily saturated in America's dress.

But I digress. IT may be here to stay...but.... PUSH.



On the Train Ride Home

Samantha Mejia

The darkening sky seemed inviting from the cool window that fanned her flaming cheeks. The emerging dancing lights glowered at the clasped hands between the two drowsy girls.

Her clammy grip tightened around the other girl's hand.

While the view on the other side of the glass seemed inviting, she could not let go of the brunette for even a second, fearing that she might forget the memories they created over the past two days. The day before yesterday seemed so far away, almost forgotten. But as the train rushed towards her reality, it seemed as if that day, and those words, intensified with each mile.

With a small shaky smile, she turned to caress the sleeping girl's pearly cheek as she choked on her mother's words.

God made us... a man and a woman.

While she feigned confusion as soon as those words erupted from her mother's unholy mouth, she knew deep inside the threat those simple words carried.

Don't come back home.



Paul Gauguin, *No te aha oe riri (Why Are You Angry?)*, 1896. The Art Institute of Chicago, ©CC0 Public Domain Designation. <https://www.artic.edu/artworks/16496/no-te-aha-oe-riri-why-are-you-angry>.

The First Visit

Emma Butler

[*The THERAPIST is seated across from a first time patient, DANIELLE. Danielle's INTERNAL MONOLOGUE is a character, invisible to the Therapist and Danielle and addresses the audience directly. INTERNAL MONOLOGUE is outspoken and lively. THERAPIST is seated in a large comfortable chair, legs crossed, wearing an expression of concern and comfort; THERAPIST is scrawling notes on a legal pad. DANIELLE is seated in the middle of a couch, ankles and arms crossed to protect herself. DANIELLE is clearly uncomfortable and nervous about this visit because she's had bad experiences with therapists before. There is muddled conversation occurring between the two, questions and answers, concerns and longings, but this is indistinct to the audience over the hum of a "soothing" noise machine.]*

Therapist

(The hum fades out.) "Have you ever been sexually assaulted?"

Internal Monologue

(*Almost yelling. She's standing at the end of the couch.*) "I've seen almost every episode of Law & Order SVU. I know that I haven't experienced what the women in that show have gone through, but I also know that sexual assault comes in many forms. What kind of question even is this? Shouldn't this be like a second or third session question? And why is she writing so much? Is something seriously wrong with me? No, Danielle, stay on topic."

Danielle

(*DANIELLE'S nose scrunches as she pictures the societal image of sexual assault. She is thinking of how to respond.*) "What do you mean...what applies?"

Therapist

"Well..." (*DANIELLE doesn't hear the rest of her response.*)

Danielle

(*Interjecting*) "Does coercion count?"

Therapist

(*Matter of factly, almost in disbelief at the question.*) "Yes."

Internal Monologue

[*Coming to the guttural realization and picturing all the sexual encounters she's ever had. She's actually yelling out of disbelief and a cry for help. She's pacing the room, searching for some kind of comfort in a place where she is wholly uncomfortable.*] "Why would she answer such a question so matter of factly? This isn't like when you're at the hospital and the doctor has to tell you plainly that someone is dead. I am alive. I've never been confronted with this information before, and she answers like she talks about this every day. Maybe she does, BUT still she could've handled me with more grace or offered some sort of solace. (*Mockingly.*) Yes."

Danielle

(*Cooly, as if she's accepted this fact long ago.*) "Then, yes."

The Inner Complexity of “The Angel of the House” in “The Blessed Damozel”

Sydni Fuqua

Pre-Raphaelite, Daniel Gabriel Rossetti illustrates an image of the “New Woman” in various art mediums during his life. The New Woman is a rejection of “The Angel of the House” composure that women were expected to uphold in the Victorian era. Rossetti focuses on the true complexity of women beyond their role as the domesticated and virtuous servant to the household. As a Pre-Raphaelite, Rossetti also aims to expose the tensions between the transitory literary and societal movements, taking past works of art or literature and presenting a new perspective on their content. Rossetti illustrates a conflicting image of a complex woman that also possesses the ideal qualities of the domesticated “Angel of the House” by 19th century standards for women in “The Blessed Damozel.”

“The Angel of the House” would be expected to uphold moral values and be an example of a virtuous Christian to her children and/or peers. The subject of the poem is the Damozel, a 19th century spelling of damsel. A classic damsel’s very nature is one of innocence and whose virginity is an essential component of their character. The idealized “Angel of the House” is rooted in her Christian faith. The Damozel’s robe is adorned with “a white rose of Mary’s gift” (Rossetti 9). This is an explicit notion to the Damozel’s virginity. The Virgin Mary is often associated with a white rose, representing a pure and untouched gift that is one’s virginity. This is not a belief that has died out. It is still in many cultures absolutely crucial to protect the women of the family and ensure they stay virgins until married. The real issue in the Victorian era is the lack of sex education. Many times, women did not even know what sex was until they were having it for the first time. The Damozel in this poem has a lover on Earth and what weighs on her so heavily is that she died before she could marry him and consummate the marriage. The very fact that she has a concept of her lover on Earth negates what is stated in the Bible which says there are no Earthly titles or relationships in heaven. The Damozel’s ignorance of this biblical fact illustrates an inconsistent image of an angelic being virtuous enough to make it to heaven. Despite this, Rossetti continues to paint this picture of an angel loyally looking down at Earth, begging God for a reunion with her lover. The poetic speaker describes the angelic figure with “stars in her hair” looking down at her lover on Earth (6). The seven stars adorning her head serve as a halo of sorts, an image use by many 19th century artists like Rossetti to give the impression of angelic quality or allude to the subject being an actual angel. The physical description of the Damozel as being an angel in heaven, but ignorant to biblical facts that should be well known to “The Angel of the House” paints a more complex image of a woman that values her romantic love above her love for God. The Damozel brings into question the validity of her virtue and the loyalty of her lover, begging the question, “Are not two prayers a perfect strength? / And shall I feel afraid?” (71, 72). This questioning of God is a major contradiction to the blind faith that “The Angel of the House” would be expected have. One would also assume that an angel would never question God because they were granted a place in heaven by him. The entire spectacle of not only marrying for love, but also disregarding the laws of heaven while an angel is a really interesting sacrilegious approach to a love story.

The ideal “Angel of the House” is expected to present herself in manor that is glorifying to God and exudes an air of natural beauty. The Damozel possesses an effortless beauty illustrated by “Her hair that lay along her back/[...]yellow like ripe corn,” blonde hair being an extremely desirable physical characteristic during the Victorian era (11,12). The natural and effortless physical appearance of women is not only desirable by 19th century beauty standards but also today, begging the question of how much has really changed. In contrast, Rossetti alludes to her more daring or seductive side when describing her attire. Her dress is described as “ungirt from clasp to hem” (7). This loose and relaxed disposition can be interpreted as simply the carefree nature of heaven or could be a hint to a side of the Damozel that is more in touch with her body and disregards the

standard early 19th century fashion for women. This sense of autonomy by her choice of dress is an essential characteristic of the "New Woman," taking back her freedom and expressing her true self with her appearance despite the strict and conservative norms of the period. As a woman, I find this medium of self-expression as something crucial to the female experience. The way we can use fashion to find what brings out the most authentic version of ourselves is something I feel we may take for granted sometimes. There still lies this hyper fixation on women's appearances, so "The New Woman" is a movement I feel that a lot of women can relate to. If you have ever changed up your style and garnered a lot of unwanted attention you can definitely relate to their struggle. "The Blessed Damozel" acts as a precursor to "The New Woman" movement by exposing the tensions surrounding faith, love, and freedom.

"The New Woman" is one of autonomy and individualism. She is more than a domestic servant to the household and has complex thoughts and feelings, it is almost like women are real people. Dante Gabriel Rossetti is aware of these complexities and strives to change the view of women by society as simple creatures of submission. This is entire prospect is especially interesting because of Rossetti's adulterous tendencies. He had a terrible time trying to stay faithful to his wife who he painted as a humble and Godly figure. His sister's criticism of his attempts to explain women as a man reveals more about his true ignorance to what it means to be an autonomous woman. With Rossetti's multiple muses and affairs in mind, one could argue that his attention to the progressive movement of women was used for his own benefit. Is it possible that Rossetti's works that praise the self-actualized women acted simply as a lure for independent women that he could start an affair with? I think this conversation is one of great importance and relevant to the conversation of gender equality. The issue is no longer a repression of the female gender, but rather a lie told by "male feminists" that try to convince you that they are on your side with the intention of taking advantage of you. Whoever is telling you they will fight your fight for you is lying.



Abbott Handerson Thayer, *Winged Figure*, 1889. The Art Institute of Chicago, ©CC0 Public Domain Designation. <https://www.artic.edu/artworks/59798/winged-figure>

Vocal Commodity in Ma Rainey's Black Bottom

McKenna Odom

In *Capital*, Karl Marx writes that the commodity is a "mysterious thing," both tangible and intangible. Anything consumed is, in essence, a commodity. Within commodity culture, humans tend to fetishize products. This "fetishism" happens when consumers attach themselves to the production of these commodities. In other words, fetishism happens when objects obtain value for merely existing in demand. They are not, however, separate from those that create the commodity. In the relationship between product and production, labor exploitation can occur, whether intentional or not.

Ma Rainey's *Black Bottom* by August Wilson exemplifies a specific type of commodity: the commercializing of the Black American voice. In the play, Ma Rainey sells her voice for profit. By selling her voice, other people "consume" it, thus allowing her voice to serve as a commodity. Ultimately, Ma is successful in recording and selling her music. However, this only happens after she has worked harder than other musicians – namely white musicians – to earn respect for herself, her band, and her nephew. Likewise, bandmember Levee attempts to make a profit by selling his own music to the record company. But by the end of the play, he is only offered a small settlement for his music, far less than what it is worth. Either his style of music is not in high demand by the public, or the record company is using him for his labor. Regardless, the appropriate value for both Ma and Levee is not attached to them. They are mere commodities in a consumerist capital.

Ma's voice functions as a commodity, but there is a dark undercurrent to the process of recording and consumption. Her voice, as a commodity, is fetishized. Her music has value because the market says it does. But the capitalists in the music industry remained prejudiced. Ma is all too aware of the disparity between herself (a Black musician) and other musicians that come to this recording studio (the racial-typical white musicians). She is also aware that they are using her for her voice, and once they get it, they will have no more need for her or the band. And so, she voices her wants and desires, her needs and the band's needs, calling attention to the inequality between the way white musicians and black musicians are treated. The record company only sees the value in what she can offer them monetarily. The same is true for Levee. However, Levee is far less successful than Ma and represents most laborers who are used for their work, workers who are often undervalued and underpaid.

Not only is Ma's voice representative of commodity culture and music capital, but it also represents the limited nature of capitalism. It is limited in that not everyone receives equitable benefits. The system does not work for all people, namely people of color. Some, like Ma, had to fight for what they deserved. Others, like Levee, tried to receive fair treatment yet were unable to profit from the system. Furthermore, the capitalist system is manipulated to favor a specific race and class of people. Ma was wanted for her voice and the income it would provide the music studio. The effort she put into it was of no consequence to them. Her labor, like so many others, has been exploited.

The Abjection of Mrs. Dalloway

McKenna Odom

In her article "Approaching Abjection," Julia Kristeva describes the abject as a vehement rejection of something. Sometimes this abjection is represented through visceral, bodily responses, such as vomit. However, it can also manifest less physically. Abjection of self, for example, is more internal than external. Loss of self is, if less guttural and physically violent, a form of abjection. This sense of abjection is exhibited in literature through the use of liminal spaces. A liminal space reveals a truth about a character or circumstance. Liminality, thus, can unveil certain abjections in life to demonstrate discontent and even disgust.

Liminal spaces occur throughout Virginia Woolf's novel *Mrs. Dalloway*. Perhaps the most obvious example used is a window. Toward the end of the novel, there is a window open during Clarissa Dalloway's party. The window provides an opportunity for the reader (as well as Mrs. Dalloway herself) to examine the space between the two trajectories her life could have taken. Through the open window and fluttering curtains, Clarissa's guests note how popular she and her parties are, representing her prominence and life of luxury. What the readers have come to understand at this point, however, is the life of passion she gave up with Peter to obtain this life of luxury with her husband, Richard. Windows are again mentioned during the party as the object from which Septimus committed suicide earlier in the novel. In this instance, the window is a liminal space for Septimus, representing a transition between life and death.

The open windows are liminal spaces that reveal the abject in Clarissa Dalloway's life. Her party and the revelation of Septimus's suicide offer a glimpse into the discontent and abjection Clarissa feels. She masks her revulsion by throwing parties and appearing outwardly to be content. For Clarissa, the window is a space that reveals missed opportunities and dark desires. While Clarissa does not go to the extremes that Septimus does to escape the abject in her own life, she does acknowledge that she feels that suicide is the only release from the abjection. Ironically, Clarissa processes her abjection entirely internally, never expressing it externally. Septimus, alternatively, performs the ultimate escape from the abject in life by performing an abject act: suicide.

In the case of Mrs. Dalloway, the abject is not the traditional form of revulsion (i.e., vomit). The abject is simply a disgust with the self. In this way, it is entirely subjective. The abject that Clarissa Dalloway experiences is quite different than what Septimus experiences. The abjection presented in her life offers a sense of the sublime. The dichotomy between what could have been and what is creates her awe-inspiring attitude toward life. This sublimity may be why she admires Septimus's decision of suicide without feeling the need to take the same drastic measure. Though Clarissa's case of the abject is less visceral, it still qualifies as abjection. The open windows expose how her choices impacted her life and the lives of those around her. The reader is left wondering whether living with the abjection of self or committing suicide is the ultimate act of abjection. Perhaps it is the action that offers the most powerful sense of sublimity.

Adultification *Maya Freed*

She is only 14.
Almond complexion,
Sun shining on her shea butter moisturized skin.
Her Bermuda shorts cling to her forming hips, and her ribbed crop top highlights her breast; protruding like plums.
She's peaking
She's growing into her body, into her skin.
Her brown curly bangs cover her acne prone forehead.
Her lemon flavored lip gloss is stacked upon her lips like chicken grease
Her gold "Scorpio" necklace lay perfectly on her sternum
White gel polish covers her natural nails.
She's a child with tainted innocence,
But the world doesn't view her that way.
They see a black woman, not a child.
They sexualize everything about her,
They fantasize her,
Fetish her,
Yearn for her blood.
They forget,
She's only a child.
They prematurely label her.
In essence, they adultify her



Who I Want To Be

Angela Caver

I know who I want to be,
But I'm not her yet.
I want to be decisive.
I want to make a decision
Without second guessing myself
or asking a million other people for their opinion.
I want to be strong.
I want to pick myself up
Without needing the confirmation
That I am enough, even for myself.
I know I want to be
Like those who have it all together.
They are their best selves.
They are decisive and strong.
They are completely and totally in control.
Or maybe, they don't have it all together.
Maybe, they also second guess their choices
and thirst for validation from others.
Maybe, they're all actually like me.
Maybe the women who inspire me
Are still on their path to becoming their best selves.
Maybe, we can take the journey together.
Instead of second guessing alone
Or seeking validation in the wrong places,
We can support one another, side by side.
I know who I want to be.
Although I'm not her yet,
With the right support, I know I will be.

\$145.00

Emma Butler

one-hundred and forty-five dollars
that's what the price tag says
i see her
each time i visit the antique store
i see her
i consider her
but i never buy her—
why not?
she is just as worthy of love
as the other trinkets i take home
but i am not worthy of her

i approach her
with pointed prow
and hair unbrushed, frizzy
the statue of a goddess
stone on granite base
with broken nose
and curly tendrils
tossed into an elegant bun
a masterpiece
she is a reflection
not of me
but of the woman i want to be
a reflection of all women
powerful and tender
she is every woman,
but i am not



Giorgio de Chirico, *The Eventuality of Destiny*, 1927. Art Institute of Chicago.
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On Remembering, Living & Teaching Southern Geographies

Dr. Catherine Gooch

When I started graduate school, I felt like I had no idea how to be a graduate student. Instead, I tried to be what I thought a graduate student was—an over eager, over-achiever who was a little pretentious, and who was really into “the classics.” Semester after semester, I fumbled my way through, learning new nuggets of information along the way that could help me figure out how to exist in an academic setting despite feeling out of place. On one hand, I learned to cling to mentors who could help me navigate this strange, unfamiliar landscape. On the other, I learned to be quiet when people talked about “summering” in Maine or going to the country club with their families. I continued this way, hiding pieces of myself, perpetually adapting, softening my rough edges, just so I could blend in.

I hit my breaking point after an “advisor” chastised me for choosing to go to University of Kentucky for my PhD because “who in their right mind would choose to live in a backwards place like Kentucky when they could live somewhere else?” I don’t know if this condescension activated my hillbilly urge to stan my birthplace, or if it just energized my pettiness on a cellular level, but this moment restructured

my approach to graduate school, teaching, and research. Why should I, a born and bred Kentuckian, be ashamed to attend University of Kentucky? More importantly: Why should I hide my roots? Why should I shy away from claiming the rich histories and experiences that have shaped my upbringing? In that moment, I decided to lean into those parts of myself, and those places, that I had tried so hard to hide.

I read, write, research, and teach about Southern literature because it is a way to highlight experiences that have long been ignored or dismissed. I feel a deeply rooted sense of kinship with these voices and experiences in my bones. It helps me make sense of the family history that I carry with me and think about every single day. It is not lost on me that my mom was given up for adoption because she was the product of an interracial relationship in a small town, before *Loving v. Virginia*. It is not lost on me that my grandparents picked cotton in Mississippi. It is not lost on me that my great-grandma couldn’t read or write. It is not lost on me that my mom’s great-great grandmother migrated to Kentucky from Louisiana, where her grandmother had been enslaved. And I



Jules Adolphe Breton, *The Song of the Lark*, 1884. Art Institute of Chicago. ©CC0 Public Domain Designation. <https://www.artic.edu/artworks/94841/the-song-of-the-lark>.

am here—a mixed girl who went barefoot in the mountains of Eastern Kentucky and who went to the “hood” school and who came from peoples, Black and white, who were “meant” for nothing more than labor—I am an Assistant Professor of English. I read and write every day with the knowledge that many of my ancestors—some in very recent history—couldn’t do so. And I don’t share details of my life or my family as an attempt to preach some type of individualistic bootstraps narrative—quite the contrary. I share it so that my students know they aren’t alone, and so that they, too, can learn to value where they come from. I want them to understand that the things that are mocked in the media or looked down upon from the ivory tower, like our accents, vernaculars, or hidden (and not so hidden) histories, are assets that can be further explored and even honored.

Geographies can be deeply personal and deeply political, and that is especially true for folks from the South. That idea alone is not groundbreaking. But what is groundbreaking is a radical acceptance and love for our southern roots. Approaching our experience of living in the South with profound empathy, rather than shame or disdain, presents an opportunity for us to reframe and reclaim this familiar landscape. And if we bring our unabashed love for these places and histories into professional and academic settings, we can finally be our whole selves, which is a truly radical act.

“ i share it so that my students know they aren’t alone...”



Left: **dysphoria**
Below: **daydreamer**
Emma Butler

A Note About Filibuster

For more information on the Filibuster or ways you can contribute to the next edition, please email Dr. Witcher at hwitcher1@aum.edu. Or send your creative works as an attached file to filibuster@aum.edu.

The deadline for the 2023 edition is December 31st, 2022.

We are always available and happy to answer questions!



