



MIDDLESEX

A Literary Journal

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MIDDLESEX
A Literary Journal

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Middlesex, A Literary Journal

Dear Readers,

As this issue of the journal was going through final edits, we were saddened to hear of the passing of Paige B. L’Hommedieu, who served on the Middlesex College Foundation Board for several years and who was a longtime supporter of the College. Paige’s father, for whom L’Hommedieu Hall and the annual L’Hommedieu Award are named, was the founding chairperson of Middlesex College’s Board of Trustees, and the L’Hommedieu family has created and sponsored numerous student scholarships and awards since the College’s inception. Paige was also a longtime friend of the English Department, having attended and supported many Department events, including poetry readings, musical performances, scholarly presentations, and the like. He was especially supportive of **Middlesex, A Literary Journal**, reading each issue, providing valued feedback, attending Journal events, and even publishing some of his short plays, the last of which is featured in this issue.

Our English Department family, as well as the Middlesex College family, send out our heartfelt condolences, thoughts, and prayers to the L’Hommedieu family.

Additional information about his passing may be found in the obituary via the following link: [Paige B. L’Hommedieu](#).

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Corridor in the Asylum by Vincent Van Gogh, 1889

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Frances Ruff's "Harmoniousness" in this edition originally appeared in *ARS LITERARIUM*, Rutgers New Jersey Medical School, Winter & Spring 2021.

Mathew Spano's "El Greco's Fable in a Time of Plague" in this edition originally appeared in *This Broken Shore*, vol. XIII, no. 1, 2020.

Mathew Spano's "Puppet Show" in this edition previously appeared in *Broken Cord: An Anthology of Writing About Alzheimer's and Dementia* (Two Dogs Press, 2020).

Mathew Spano's "Little Pigs" in this edition appears courtesy of *Distrokid* and is available in Apple Music, Spotify, iTunes, Amazon Music, and iHeart Radio.

FROM THE EDITORS

This issue of *Middlesex: A Literary Journal* marks a watershed moment for the journal for a number of reasons. First, we wish a very happy retirement to two of the founders and editors of the journal, Emanuel DiPasquale and Dan Zimmerman. It has been an honor and privilege to work with them these many years on the journal, which from its inception in 2008 was defined as a vehicle for quality literary work that features a clear purpose and strong voice; concise, concrete and moving language; and vivid imagery—and that shines a light on inner and/or outer nature; delves into the human condition; and reveals universal truths. Fortunately, from the outset, we were blessed with scores of generous artists who submitted a wealth of excellent poems, short stories, literary non-fiction, photographs, and paintings from all quarters of the College—students, faculty, staff, administrators, alumni, retirees, and friends of the College sent us their very best work. The journal also attracted several notable guest contributors—established authors and scholars from within and beyond Middlesex County—whose work blended beautifully with that of our local community to make each issue a rich and harmonious choir. Professors DiPasquale and Zimmerman, both successful and gifted poets AND editors in their own right, also worked with many of the contributors, guiding their efforts. Needless to say, the journal has become not just a showcase of the literary talents of a community, but a vehicle for learning and teaching within and beyond that community. For example, the journal was used in Comparative Literature undergraduate courses at Rutgers, New Brunswick, and it was featured in years past at events at the Barron Arts Center in Edison as well as the Middlesex County Teen Arts Festival. We offer our gratitude to Manny and Dan for making the journal a reality and cultivating it for more than ten years so that it has become one of the College’s enduring success stories.

In this issue, we are also thrilled to welcome two new editors, Wendy Decker and Tara Farber—both veteran adjunct professors in the English

Department at Middlesex College and both accomplished writers and scholars. Their impressive credentials may be seen on our “Contributors” page.

Beyond these seismic changes to the editorial board, much has happened to all of us since our last issue—namely, a pandemic that, unfortunately, has yet to be eradicated entirely. Some of the pieces in this issue present intimate accounts of our common human struggle to endure the virus’s ravages. We also reach beyond the limits of the literary to welcome some contributions from the Natural Sciences (Biology in particular), apropos in an issue chronicling our epic battle with the bug. Persevering against other kinds of physical and mental ailments that have plagued humanity over the millennia, such as Alzheimer’s and schizophrenia, feature in this issue as well. Still other pieces delve into the daily, but no less profound, struggles that we face in various kinds of relationships. From the personal to the universal, the scholarly essays in this issue challenge us to think outside the box, examining what’s below the surface of Hemingway’s “iceberg theory” or what’s behind the face of God and the structure of existence itself once the solvent of Hume’s reason dissolves the veneer. Odes to favorite dogs counter tales of nightmarish insects; accounts of growing up with a mentally ill parent complement stories of discovering a diabolical parent; and stunning paintings of dancing ladies accompany the music of immigrant villanelles. The discovery of a long forgotten lucky penny or the lone grave of a forgotten child haunt the pages of this issue as do the great cities of humankind once they ultimately decay over time—in the end, not so different than empty rabbit warrens.

Poems, songs, strange and profound tales, probing essays, and arresting images await as we invite you to join us as we “turn the page” to a new epoch of *Middlesex: A Literary Journal*.

The Editors

OPPOSITES ATTRACT

someone told you that you're hard to love, and now you're walking
around breaking bonds that
would've saved you otherwise
you avoid mirrors, because in them a reflection of what you're avoiding
lives
all the things you said you loved feel like they are things that no longer
touch your spirit
the waves in the water no longer feel like vibrations
the sun in your face brings you a sense of frustration
little birds sing for you, but you're focus on the fact that they shitted all
over your car
thinking of her makes you feel like you're drying all over again
it was the way the words slip out of her mouth, so easily
but your ears fought to comprehend what she said
what she did
it was the way her eyes looked when you finally looked at her
colored in black rage
the love has left her
sometimes we ask ourselves the big questions
because
the simple ones are too painful
we want to know why is the universe is so powerful
because
we don't want to know why we keep running into the same person over
and over again
you are looking for something that's not real
a love that lives away from this reality
you're looking for you in places that you don't belong
you've been giving pieces of your self to everyone that has made you
feel noticed
and you know this

but it's the way that she felt like forever
it's the way..her smooth skin pressed against yours after the arguments
she was always distant
but her loyalty felt like infinity
she was polar opposite to you in the worst ways

what can we do to go back, back to the old days?

AQUARIUS LOVER

Her kisses like air
you couldn't get enough
she saw you and she got you
often times you ask her "no seriously what are made of?"
you never met someone like her
she's not the type to kiss you good night
she's been the type to get you through a rough night
she's like a silent fire
potentially dangerous
but she knows how to control it
how does she keep it all under control?
you prayed for someone
with her the universe gave times two
what is she made of
you you you u
watch her sleep
watch her lips when she talks
touch her skin when she's cold
she's here..right here
but she feels unreal
beyond the feeling of angelic
more like she's an alien
she's Uranus
and Saturn too
she's calm
everyone knows to not mess with her
a queen that doesn't need the crown
It's in her energy
you're a Sagittarius
fiery and wise
she's... she's

TOOTHACHE

There is something so sweet about the taste of a girl's first cavity, and so bitter about the taste of her first filling. I remember the first time John Miller looked at me. It was during gym class in fourth grade. Our classes were playing dodgeball on the sandlot, and he pegged me right in the face. Blood spilled out of my nose and all over my favorite Happy Bunny t-shirt. The next day during recess, he gave me Skittles to apologize. They were warm and sticky from being held in his sweaty palm. The thought of eating candy out of his dirty hand grossed me out a little, but I did it anyway because I couldn't believe he was talking to me. I never predicted we'd be at that sandlot together six years later, on the rusted bleachers, watching the sun go down. Everything looked the same but smaller than I remembered.

"The sunset looks so beautiful." I said, as I wrapped my arm around his.

"Not as beautiful as you." His reply was muffled by the wad of half-chewed Skittles in his mouth.

Not as beautiful as you? He said that about everything. Fireworks, stars, the moon... It was sweet the first few times, but after the thousandth I couldn't help but wonder if he was really that shallow. I let go of his bicep and pulled away.

"Where you going?" He grabbed my hand, and again I was turned off. Not only by his clinginess, but by the tacky Skittle goop he transferred into my hand. I wiped it on the back of his hoodie, but he thought I was rubbing his back because I loved him, so he turned to me and grazed the back of his hand across my cheek. As he tucked my hair behind my ear, each strand became mesmerized by the soothing electricity that flowed from his veins to mine. We shared a sweet moment, until one of my strands got stuck in the melted mess he made. "Ow!" I yelped and swatted his hand away.

"Sorry," he laughed and wiped his hand on his jeans, "want some Skittles?"

I rolled my eyes, which he never seemed to pick up on or always chose to ignore. I held out my hand and as I stared at the pile of candy he'd dumped into it, I remembered the first time he shared his Skittles with me.

"Babe, you know what's kind of funny about me wearing these jeans? They're *Sean John*, and I'm *John*."

As he answered his own question, I remembered the stinging pain of that red rubber ball hitting me in the face. Our sweetest memories together were always accompanied by pain. Flowers came with secrets, dates ended in arguments. And his Skittles were beginning to rot a hole in molar.

"What do you think is in a Skittle anyway? Like, how are they made?" He asked, as he examined one against the backdrop of the sunset.

"The ingredients are listed on the label. They're probably made in a factory or something. Why don't you Google it?"

"Too much work. I'd rather just eat them." He threw back a handful and laughed with a laugh I had never heard before. It was rather unpleasant: a noise that zipped through my ears and shook my brain.

"What's wrong?" He asked. "You're kinda quiet today."

"Oh, just trying to decide if I should eat the orange or yellow ones first." I lied, but the truth felt too harsh to verbalize, so I faked a laugh and went with the orange ones. But as I started to chew, there was a sensation I couldn't ignore. It was like every time I bit down, angry hornets were stinging my gums. I gripped my jaw and tried to endure the pain, but my tooth had been aching for months, and it became hard to ignore.

"Want the rest of these?" John held out a package of Skittles that was almost empty.

“No!” I snapped. I didn’t mean to, but couldn’t he see me clutching the side of my face?

“What do you get so angry for? I was just asking.”

Hearing him ask that question made my tooth hurt even more. A thousand replies bounced around my brain, but only one found its way out of my mouth.

“Do you even care that I’m in pain?”

We were both silent for a moment. Then John got up and ran across the lot to his bike. I looked to the sky, and the sun was halfway set. Its colors became more vibrant, as if John’s presence were dulling them. I looked over and saw him digging in the drawstring backpack on his handlebars. I wished he would get on his bike and leave. Then I wouldn’t have to find the courage to. I had been at war with myself for months. The person I was resisted the person I was becoming, and neither of me would budge. I loved John as much as a naïve teenage girl could love an aloof teenage boy. But was there room in this world for my sweet tooth and his candy palms?

I looked up as he approached with a small white tube in his hand. *Did this dingle berry really bring me toothpaste?* He came closer, and I was surprised when he handed me a tube of Orajel.

“I saw it in the store while I was getting us Skittles. I knew you had a cavity, so I thought you could use it.”

It was so thoughtful of him to pick up Orajel for my rooting tooth while he was out buying us Skittles. I applied it, and once the pain had dulled, there was another feeling I could not shake. It was this knowing, deep in my soul, that only John’s candy could ever satisfy my sweet tooth. It was the source of my deepest distress, but it was also the satisfaction of my deepest longing. And nothing else existed in my universe that was quite like it.

HARMONIOUSNES

“*Help Us, Lord!*” is my fervent prayer.

“*Anguish and Chaos have inherited the land!*”

Rage makes me come undone - when the Media’s mixed messages begin invading my ill-constructed Peace.

Melancholy thoughts are whirling dervishes in my Head,

Objectionable events make me wish Hate was Dead.

Nervous laughter to offset the quiet Room’s tension when I stated quite boldly:

“*Ignorance is King*” - did I fail to mention?

Optimism is the Mother of Hope; so

United we stand and divided we fall, when

Sanity can be found, Nowhere at all.

Negative thoughts should be banned, from renting a room in your mind, so

End how you start, then

Start a new end,

Sanity can be restored if we could all just be kind.

MR. DARKSIDE

It's strange for me to say that Snuff Bundy's music sounds like home. His infamous growling vocals, ear-clawing guitars, drums that could open up faultlines in the ground under you, and lyrics that would make today's hipsters and the grandmothers of yore alike blush all seem tailor-designed to provoke reactions, few of which are positive. He has been accused of Satanism, sexual assault, public indecency (likely for his infamous S&M-inspired "Blood on the Floorboards" tour) and—most egregious to his older legions of fans—"selling out" with his recent comeback tours. Even his stringy hair and tri-colored, bulging eyes put a pit in your stomach when you look at him. Is this a man who "puts on a mask" for his audience, as his defenders claim? Or has he pranced around in clamps and leather for so long that he has become the mask?

I was still trying to answer that question as I rode downtown last Tuesday, packed into a midrow seat on the Amtrak and searching my coat pocket for my ticket. My earbuds rang with *Crush Little Babies*, Bundy's infamous 1992 smash hit debut album. It's an album that's close to my heart. I heard it in my mother's car as a little girl, while my mother drove me to daycare or to my aunt's while smoking a cigarette in the driver's seat. She would hand me the CD case and let me look at it—a young, long-faced man with dark blue eyeliner, holding the head of a bloodied baby doll in a white-walled empty room. At the time I thought he looked funny—like a little boy and his toys trapped in the body of a purple-haired, stubbly-faced man child.

But my mother frowned at me when I giggled. "Don't make fun of him," she would say. "He's as much a part of me as he is a part of you."

I had no idea what she meant by that. But then again *Crush Little Babies*, a concept album about a family man turned enraged serial killer by a series of unfortunate tragedies, wasn't particularly coherent to

a five-year-old either. What I could see were the effects it had on my mother. How some nights after watching *The Powerpuff Girls* I would come into our shared bedroom in our cheap condominium and find her, half a basket of folded clothes sitting neglected in front of her as our radio blared the album's title track. It's a glam-rock stomper with a catchy chorus—"We got body, we got soul/We got heads to roll". But all she did was bob her head to it, gently, staring into the holes in our white-washed ceiling.

Only now, as the same song blasted in my airpods and I realized that my sleeve was stuck on a piece of gum someone had left on my train seat, did I have even the smallest idea of what she was thinking.

~~~~~

For a man who's closer to a cult act than the mainstream these days, Snuff Bundy is curiously able to attract younger women. Or girls, more accurately. Waiting on the incredibly long line into the amphitheater, I felt that I had more in common with the mothers that had chaperoned their daughters into the concert than the girls themselves, even though I'm much closer in age to the latter. I wore my typical denim jacket and v-neck black shirt, baring only a glimmer of the serpent-shaped Snuff Bundy band logo stud in my belly button. The "Snuffboxers", as his fans call themselves, were decked out in every hallmark of '90s goth I could think of—heavy black eyeliner, lengthy purple hair extensions, and of course, ripped fishnet. Ripped fishnet on arms and legs, sometimes even on the faces of the more daring ones. These girls swerved up and down the line. They talked to their friends and exchanged information on their tattoos with men three times their age. By venue capacity there were only two thousand people at the show, but they were packed so close together they could've been fifty thousand, a hundred thousand, millions.

It took me twenty minutes to make my way to my second-row seat. I'd bought a *Bone Queen* ticket—I would have a chance to meet Snuff at the back of the stage and get a free skull-shaped bottle of his branded *Crossnail* whiskey. I could've paid more for the *Bone Empress* ticket, which would've gotten me a real human skull in gratitude, but no

freelance deal could've given me compensation for that price tag. I was surrounded by several other fans who had the same budgetary problem—it certainly wasn't for lack of fandom that they'd paid for cheaper tickets. I fell into conversation with two of them, women around my age with tattoos of the Snuff Bundy Band's two-headed serpents cascading around their arms.

"We've been to thirty-eight of his concerts," the one with fake blood trails dripping down her neck said, excitement clearly brimming over in her husky voice. "This is the first time I'm going to meet him, though! Val's already seen him—y'know, in the flesh-- a few times, got his autograph on her copy of Suck My Marrow, but this time we're really going to get to hang out with him. I can't wait to tell him about how much his music changed my life. Oh, and how hot he is, of course!"

I wasn't quite as thrilled with his "hotness" as she was. I felt like I'd walked straight into another era—the '70s, maybe, when Robert Plant famously had groupies lifted on stage by the crowd and escorted backstage by roadies. Now here we were as '20s kids, tickets in our pockets with a paid path to that promised land. The Promised Hell.

That 2011 "comeback album", of which I have far fonder memories than I probably should, was the soundtrack in my mother's car on the way to a Radicals on Fire concert my friend Janie dragged me to when I was fourteen. She spent most of that mediocre show lying on the lawn next to us, sipping whiskey from a water bottle and occasionally glancing at us to ensure we were still alive. I don't think she looked once at the Radicals on Fire, who in true emo style were dressed like preppier and less exciting versions of a certain shock-rock singer. Eventually she hobbled backstage with us after the show to get our albums signed.

Janie was all over the lead singer as soon as she saw him, hurtling compliments in the effusive way that only teenage girls can. We waited silently while they chatted, leaning closer and closer together, her touching the tattoos on his bare arms. Finally he stood up, smiling, and asked if us ladies would like to come backstage. Janie would have leapt at the chance, and I might have joined her just to see what would happen. I was that kind of kid. But we never got that

chance, because my mother suddenly woke up from her drunken stupor and pulled Janie back by the collar. She became a swearing, insult-spitting whirlwind, something I'd never seen her do even once before, and told him that if he wanted to touch "her" girls at all he could meet her personally after the show and get his throat ripped out. It went on for almost five minutes before security kindly asked us all to leave. I tugged on her sleeve and pointed out the glowing cell phone cameras surrounding us. Shame barely touching her face, my mother stormed out with us and demanded we all get into the car.

As we drove back, the only sound in our ears was Snuff Bundy, blasting various album cuts as loud as it would take for my mother to drown out her own ugly outburst. Beautiful Chains, Aneurysm In Blue, The Bastard Executioner—every single glammy riff and ill-advised hip hop sample cycled over at least twice on the long, long trip home, only punctuated by an occasional, awkward whispered comment between Janie and I. Until we pulled into Janie's driveway I thought we weren't going to hear anything from Mom at all. But she stopped the car and turned to Janie in the backseat.

"I'm sorry I had to be that harsh, Janie," she said, the smell of liquor on her breath clear to me in the passenger seat. "I'm sure you know, you need to be careful at shows like that. People can take advantage of girls like you—men can take advantage of you. And I know, you don't think of yourself as a girl when you're in the thick of it. But if I'd let you go backstage with him, I get the feeling that you would remember today for the rest of your life. Remember how young and naïve you were. And not in the way where you can look back and laugh. So promise me you'll watch out for yourself. Because you won't always have someone to stop you. Okay?"

Janie nodded, her big black ribbon flowers bobbing in her hair. But I'd noticed, as Mom had said the last few sentences, that her eyes had drifted over to mine. I hadn't spoken a word at that meet-and-greet table, so I wondered why she seemed to be mad at me. Janie got out of the car and waved half-heartedly to me, looking dejected. I rarely saw her again after that day.

Mom drove me back to our complex. When we reached it, she took off her seat belt and put her arms around me.

“I love you more than anything,” she whispered in my ear. “And I want you to know that whatever demons I have, they’ve got nothing to do with you. Okay?”

“Sure,” I said, oblivious...

I was rudely awakened from the memory as the curtains rose in the present, and a scream rippled over the crowd. Loudest of all in the two women next to me, who may or may not have permanently rendered me deaf in my left ear. The drums hammered out a steady workhorse beat, the bass crept all over my skin, the guitars and keys played scare chords and fugues. And out of a coffin at the center of the stage, in a cloud of dry-ice smoke, rose the man of the hour. Snuff Bundy, his eyes bulging and his nails curling over his fingers, giving a loud hiss into the microphone that set the crowd to ear-piercing levels.

He was, truly, old enough to be our fathers.

My father.

~~~~~

I remember how I found out. It was just after Mom passed away, at the age of only forty, from a drinking binge that knocked her unconscious before she could remember to spit out her vomit. I came back to our old apartment with cardboard boxes and garbage bags. I went to our old room first, figuring I might as well get the hardest part over with quickly. My bed was still in the corner, freshly made in case I ever wanted to stay over from college, and my mother’s pullout couch lay in a tangle of bedsheets and whiskey bottles. I tripped over a CD case on the floor as I walked. It was one of Snuff’s, again—I can’t even remember which one. All I know is that I cracked the case, both literally and physically, when I looked down and saw the 23 and Me results that my mother had gotten for the two of us a month earlier.

She hadn’t been well, those few months before she passed. If I hadn’t been so focused on my studies, it would have been clear that she was on a downward swing, if not a spiral. Every time I came over she would ramble about how hard it was to find work or pay bills, and I, stressed from my senior exams, would zone out over the Subway sandwich I’d picked up, hearing almost nothing. I only remembered the 23 and Me tests because it was the last thing we really had any joy over. Mom’s whole face seemed to come alive as she handed me the little plastic funnel.

“I registered it for you online,” she said, as a rare smile lit up her bag-swamped eyes. “Just spit into it and shake it up! Now we can finally see where you and I come from. Won’t that be nice?”

I knew exactly what she was getting at—or thought I did, at the time. I assumed that she was as oblivious to the identity of my father as I was, which sounds pretty brutal given that she was seventeen when she had me. Considering the number of ill-fated boyfriends she’d had during my lifetime, I’d guessed that she’d had just as many before my birth, and that was why she seemed so confounded, almost insulted, when I asked who “he” was. I assumed she didn’t know. So I smiled, and spat into the test tube, and shook it like a maraca as we both giggled like schoolgirls.

But my assumptions were proved wrong when I found that sheet under the album cover. It sounds corny as hell, but I knew the instant I saw it, under the Snuff Bundy CD cover, what had happened. The test was a message she’d been trying to send me, because the words would have been too hard for her to say. She’d wanted me to put it together. To solve the mystery of her sad, strange life, and my own existence.

I read the results. Then, barely remembering why I’d come in, I picked up every Snuff Bundy album I could find, took them downstairs and papered her kitchen table with the sleeve booklets. I read every lyric and “thank you” section he’d ever penned until the staples fell out and the paper dented. On my phone I poured over interviews, allegations, message boards. I found references to two weddings and two divorces, ending in sorrow and brutal court proceedings. And groupies. It was

buried in the Rolling Stone interviews, because nobody ever wanted to ask him questions about that. But it was in his lyrics about teenage sluts gone bad. It was in his thanking “everyone we drank with, screwed with, and smoked with” in the sleeve notes for *Live at the Albert Hall*. It was in the snip that came into his voice when the interviewer asked, with a genuinely jesting tone, if he ever thought about having kids.

It was three in the morning. My mother’s junk was still all over the apartment. But I felt like it was the thing I was supposed to discover. Some unfinished business I had to find for her. I ordered a single Bone Queen ticket, told my professors I was taking off a day, and picked out the old denim jacket and black T-shirt I’d left over at her apartment. I didn’t know if this was what she would have wanted. But it was something I felt I owed her, on some level.

Standing in the aisles, looking straight into the bloodshot, fluorescent-framed eyes of Snuff Bundy, tunneled in amplifier fuzz and the metal fang prosthetics rattling in his mouth, I felt some form of salvation. Maybe this was what my mother felt when she had come to some concert on her own, years ago, a girl of just seventeen hiding behind a mask of pancake foundation and a curtain of fishnet.

~~~~~

The concert was two hours and change, though I counted only twelve or so of his songs, all huge hits from his past. The whole thing was a sea of spectacle—Snuff Bundy in pope regalia miming sexual acts on his guitarists, Snuff Bundy reaching into the crowd to receive kisses from his screaming fans, Snuff Bundy soaring up over the audience on wires as blood-replicating stage lights dripped over his face. He cracked strange jokes, asking the audience whether cocaine was legalized in New Jersey yet or starting a chant involving burning a certain local politician at the stake. The songs themselves—well, who really cared for them? I found myself caught up in the pure showmanship myself, and almost forgave all of those little cracks in his cigarette-addled voice, the occasional slip-ups of his second guitarist (also his nephew), the way that the backing tracks sounded far too similar to those albums my mother had played so long ago on cheap car speakers.

I almost forgave them. Maybe I would have, if the post-show excitement had been allowed to linger longer than it was.

As “Saint Peter Massacre”, the final number of the night, ended with a clanging finale and Snuff sinking back into his coffin, the girls next to me prodded me in the arm. “We’ve got to hurry up now,” they said, “so we can get to the front of the line.”

I elbowed my way through the aisles and slipped through a roped-off back entrance. The security guard opened it to us at a showing of our skull-emblazoned tickets. Behind the stage it was warm, smelling of pot smoke and stale beer, and dark and covered in wires. A roadie, stroking his neon green buzz cut, turned on a few lights and continued on without speaking to us, pushing a cart of fake limbs into the parking lot. There were around a hundred of us, around two-thirds young or middle-aged women. In the burning excitement, as sweat poured down my neck and forced me to tie my coat around my waist, I smiled and chatted with the other fans, strategically inching my way to the front of the line.

But under my smiles, I was quickly realizing that somehow, in all the paternal excitement, I’d forgotten to make a plan. Was I going to show him the test results I had with me, lying at the bottom of my purse with lipsticks and hair brushes? That would be tasteless, even for Snuff. Maybe I’d ask him to autograph my CDs, and try to get alone with him later. That would be the plan, I decided. Just make an impression. As it turns out, I hadn’t needed to worry about coming up with a plan on the spot. He was late by almost forty-five minutes.

When he finally arrived, right as my heat nausea was setting in, the crowd erupted into cheers that could’ve been heard over a thousand grunge guitars. I was pushed up, my feet collapsing forwards, as the whole crowd moved in towards him. Snuff sat at his autograph table. Actually, sat is a strong word—he threw his boots out onto the table and stuck his tongue out to the adulation of far too many screaming voices. My whole body turned to jelly as I stood, feeling my million pockets for the cool plastic CD case. Snuff was right in front of me, leaning back in his chair. His yellow-contacted eyes staring up and down, up and down.

“H-hi,” I said. Words were dry, throat was dry. Every interview technique I’d learned in school evaporated in the heat of the room. “Snuff. Hey. Uh, I just wanted to say I’m your biggest fan. My mother was—”

“Glad you enjoyed the show,” he said, cutting me off dramatically. “You’re all such beautiful people! The devil would love your sinful getups tonight—especially your pin, young lady,” he said a little softer. It took me several seconds to realize that he meant my belly button stud.

“Thanks.” I clutched helplessly at the CD case. I pulled it out of my bunched-up coat and let it slide out of my sweaty fingers onto the table. “This used to belong to my mom,” I said, pulling out the sleeve booklet because the jewel case was covered in my fingerprints. “But, uh, I’ve always been a big fan of you myself. You’re one of my heroes, I guess. You’ve been there for me through some—some difficult times.”

“Hm.” He pulled out a sharpie and scribbled a barely-legible message onto the paper. “So we’ve got something in common, huh? I’ve had a lot of bad times, babe. But we can always make some beautiful music together. Stomp those bad times to the fucking curb, am I right?!”

The crowd behind me cheered. He handed the case back to me, and I smelled burning plastic and ammonia on it. But his eyes were on me, golden like two dying suns, tilting down past my face to my exposed stomach. “I like the style,” he whispered through red-smudged lips. “I hope you take me up on that offer, sweetie.” Then the next girl shoved past me, babbling about one classic album or another, and I was alone in the crowd.

A security guard, blurry in my vision, asked if I wanted a moment, and the only thing I could say was “outside”. He was kind enough to let me slip out the exit, into a back lot covered with overflowing trash cans and a few lonely vans. The roadies were loading the vans with equipment, laughing amongst themselves. But at least out here there was peace. The glow of mild yellow streetlamps. A pollution-pink sky.

I looked down at the case in my hands. It was old, the jewel case chipped from twenty-three or more years of use. Written right across the front of the cover image, Snuff Bundy’s sepia-toned, tongue-wagging sneer, he’d written big smudgy letters in metallic sharpie, glowing burnished gold in the night. *Trailer in the back lot. See you there? <3*

I swung my coat over my shoulders and put the case back in my pocket. It was cooler out here than it was in there. I saw the trailer a few feet away, big swirling dark patterns of horned devils and demons painted all over it. The patterns of my belly button stud. All this is my birthright, I thought. I could go in there, clean up the misunderstanding, and claim it, if I really wanted to.

If it was what she’d wanted.

I wandered back to the train station alone. As a new journalist, it was the first time I’d ever gone to a concert on my own. Usually my mother would be there, or Janie, or any of the faceless friends I’d met in college. Now I was alone, with a CD and a sex offer scribbled over it. I wondered if my mother had been alone when she’d gotten her offer. I wondered if she’d had dreams of a house, a degree, a career, anything that could’ve broken her out of that whiskey bottle fortress. I wondered if Snuff had been as callously affectionate to her as he had been to me, and I wondered if she’d taken him at his word, unable to distinguish that from the affection of a mother’s embrace.

I pulled out the case again and gripped the sleeve booklet, his signature on it. I ripped it off, tossed it in the street, and watched it flutter down an alley and out of sight.



**DANCING LADY**



**AFTER A REALLY LONG DAY**

The voices of celebrating strangers are precious to me.  
The faces of women trapped in rooms with captivating men are precious to me.  
The rats playing on the subway tracks are precious to me.  
The guileless beauty of neighborhood children is precious to me.

Bless my nephews with their small hands on big music.  
Bless my sister and brother-in-law for having them.  
Bless the people on the platform at 2 a.m., heading home dead sober, reading the terrible news.  
Bless the little trees sprouting from nothing, from stones, from cracks in the pavement.  
Bless my angry father who never learned how to love.  
Bless my mother for teaching me.  
Bless the young exterminator smiling in the doorway, donning gloves.  
Bless the hard working kids finding words for feelings, laboring to understand and be understood.  
Bless the old timers celebrating our every stupid move.  
Bless the tropical rain unleashing itself on New York City, leaking through my roof.  
Bless the woman taking the time at the end of a long day to tell me something good.  
Bless the friend who listens to Al Green while cooking me dinner.  
Bless the wild mint, quiet orchid, ancient sycamore, crossing deer, lonesome shark, elephant, dog, fossil, dragonfly, iguana, barnacle, the watching sea, the trembling tern.

Bless my soul.  
Bless my soul.  
Bless my soul.

## **HERE I AM**

Here is the long wooden bar.  
Here is my miniskirt.  
Here is my boss.  
Here is a row of open bottles.

Here is my sincere smile.  
Here is my tired smile.  
Here is the food.  
Here is my back turned.

Here is the night gone.  
Here I am looking for something written raw, as I am.

Here is a patch of sunlight.  
Here is a soft public chair.  
Here is a long room full of poetry.

Here is the day gone.  
Here.  
Here is a little money for dinner.

Here I am.  
Here I am.  
Here I am.

## **MY CITY**

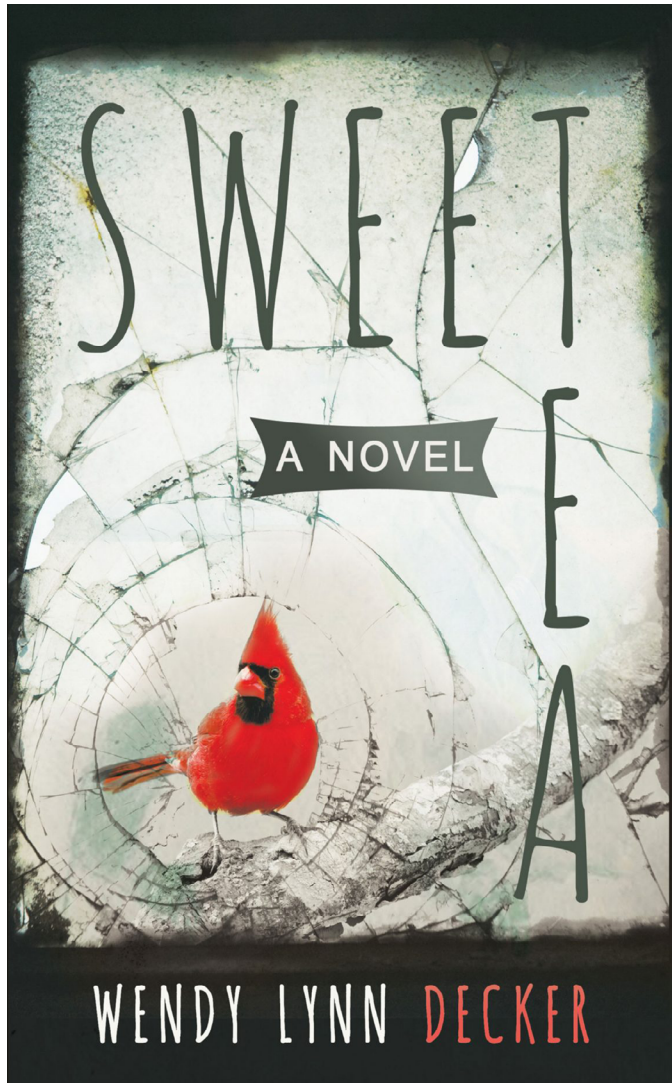
I come to you like so many times before:  
Nighttime, summer,  
Bright burning behind my eyes,  
Bright bird in my chest.

What's happening?  
What's one night or the next?

How your heat makes a stream down my spine as I walk.  
How your underground train moves me.  
How our expectations are managed by age.

My city:  
Where planes land.

I kiss your mouth as oysters bream the harbor,  
I kiss your mouth  
As a sleeping woman kisses the sidewalk.



**Book Trailer Video**

Wendy Lynn Decker: Sweet Tea — [youtu.be/sVi4jF9O7Gc](https://youtu.be/sVi4jF9O7Gc)

**A RUMOR**

There once was a rumor that whipped its spike deep into a mountain.  
It climbed one rock at a time; spread dirty water like a fountain.

On its way it left behind some remnants of its actions.  
Petals torn from roses gave the rumor satisfaction

Diligent in its quest to reach its destination, it persevered with no  
respect for all of God's creation.

As it traveled spawning sprigs hatching from its hips, the rumor  
gathered many weeds that sprouted from its lips.

Big and strong, it took up speed and continued on its way, adding more  
destruction with what it had to say.

It crushed the good and innocent with its nasty reputation.  
And most of those who heard it could fill the population.

Its fervent stride fueled its life and all that it created.  
All of those who loved it claimed that they did hate it.

No one asked the mountain if the rumor had been true.  
Its followers were leaches lacking better things to do.

Illogical and fatuous the people came to find,  
the rumor wore its welcome out and had nowhere to climb.

Its rapid speed grew weary, and it had no place to turn.  
It reached its destination sapped of energy to burn.

Nothing left but remnants of a story that grew old,  
the rumor lost its fire and all its worth in gold.

Wendy Lynn Decker

When it reached the mountaintop, it had no place to hide.  
The truth came up behind it and knocked it on its side.

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## DANCING WITH SCHIZOPHRENIA

I have my mother's hands. Sometimes when I paint my nails, I see her clasping each thumb with her index and middle finger. She holds them tight like a thumb sandwich.

"What are you doing, Mom?" I asked the first time I saw her doing this.

"Keeping my soul from escaping through the portal," she told me.

Back then I'm sure I giggled. My mother always had a quirky way about her, but once I began engaging in after-school play dates at the homes of my classmates I started to compare "mom behavior." That's when I started to become aware, and sometimes embarrassed of my mother's ways. However, I prefer to reminisce the days of my childhood, before Mom's first break with reality.

I remember how Mom would stack a pile of forty-fives on the record player and dance around the house. The bellbottom sleeves of her mini dress would swing rhythmically as she danced the *Mashed Potato* or *The Pony* to her favorite songs by The Shirelles, Chuck Berry, or The Supremes. Though, it appeared she hadn't a worry in the world, she carried the world on her shoulders. Only twenty-one when my father abandoned her with three children, no education, or a job at the time, she made the best of what she had.

During the early years, Mom stretched a food-stamp-dollar to the max. Thinking back, it amazes me how she could make four sandwiches with one small can of tuna. She was creative and resourceful. Paper towels ripped in half doubled as napkins, tissues, and sometimes, even toilet paper. Shampoo mixed with water at the halfway mark kept our hair clean longer, and a bar of soap remained in our bathtub until it became a pat.

Though Mom appeared happy and fancy-free most times, as I grew older I began harboring my own burden as I noticed her erratic behavior. Lost jobs, found men, and ultimately an overnight disappearance sent our world into a spin. **Only eighteen, and the**

**eldest of three, with no extended family nearby, I watched an ambulance haul Mom off to a psychiatric hospital.**

At our first meeting with a psychiatric counselor, we learned about Schizophrenia and the symptoms as well as the medications Mom would need to take. Listening to him describe the possible side effects frightened me. Too young to know the type of questions to ask, I listened while holding back tears. Not long after Mom's return from the hospital, she stopped taking her medicine and a cycle began, which resulted in one hospital stay after another.

Finally, a new doctor informed us my mother didn't have *only* Schizophrenia, he dubbed her with a diagnosis of Schizoaffective Disorder. At first, I breathed a sigh of relief. My naïve, teenage mind, believed the doctor would share how Mom could live an "effective life" with Schizophrenia. After more hospital visits and discussions with doctors and therapists, I learned what Schizoaffective really meant. Mom had bi-polar and schizophrenia, a rare, and extremely difficult illness to treat "effectively."

Left to fend for ourselves, my siblings and I became caretakers of Mom, and we navigated the best we could through the mental healthcare system. Our journey began over thirty years ago and still continues. During those years Mom received help, but her condition worsened and she became harmful to herself. When we knew she could unintentionally harm someone else as well, we began to seek a place where she'd get twenty-four hour supervision. Only by this time, the doors of long-term mental healthcare facilities had closed, (sometimes for good reason), the system no longer supported her, and she no longer cared.

My mother now resides in an Alzheimer's unit in a nursing home because there is no long-term facility where she can receive care and safety for *her* condition. It's not the optimal place to meet her special needs, but she's safe and that allows me to sleep at night. Though my mom has a dual diagnosis of mental illness, she doesn't have dementia or Alzheimer's disease. She doesn't understand why she's not free to come and go as she pleases. She doesn't understand why people who can't remember their names or must wear adult diapers surround her. She's physically healthy, and only seventy-two years-old.

I have my mother's hands. I see them when I type during the many hours I spend writing at my computer. Sometimes the memory

of her distracts me when I think of the woman she was before her soul escaped through the portal. Recently, I found a book of poetry she had written during her mental decline. Part of the poem reads:

*We have to dance  
To whatever  
Medical science tells us.  
Are we just fools?  
If someone's right,  
God made it right.  
Who is kidding whom?  
Just let me listen to the music.  
For music is magic healing to me.  
And I'm sure many others would agree.*

I have my mother's voice, and ironically, I've made a living singing to the residents in assisted living facilities and Alzheimer's units throughout New Jersey. My mother gave me the gift of music, but I can't sing for her anymore. But before she stopped communicating with me she taught me many lessons. One of which is to put myself in the shoes of others before I make judgments or assumptions without knowing or understanding the backstory of a person's life.

In the meantime, for those of you who have a mom like mine, I hope you hold the good memories close and remember the happy days when only one voice inspired her to laugh and smile. If you are fortunate enough to be able to share a brief moment in between the confusion, as Lee Ann Womack sings, *I hope you dance*.

### **AN IMMIGRANT VILLANELLE**

This tree wasn't planted for me, that bears me shade  
Unknown to me, the constitution of this soil,  
Growing new memories for old is a losing trade.

In my ancestral home, stood a banyan, branches frayed.  
Its roots sunk deep in me have now begun to recoil.  
This tree wasn't planted for me, that bears me shade.

A halfway home, half empty, though double the dues I paid.  
Pieces of logged places adorn these years of toil,  
Growing new memories for old is a losing trade.

An oath each spring to save, the plants in pots I've laid,  
in sunless winter fires, they die without turmoil.  
This tree wasn't planted for me, that bears me shade.

My mother's saree, long worn, is but threadbare brocade,  
blessings of red and gold, scented with coconut oil.  
Growing new memories for old is a losing trade.

I've planted myself in a river, no ground underfoot I'm afraid.  
Water runs under the bridge, my two hands a gargoye.  
This tree wasn't planted for me, that bears me shade,  
Growing new memories for old is a losing trade.

### **GRAFTED THOUGHTS**

I don't live in this language  
anymore  
that was the medium  
of a youthful rebellion  
when rising from the mediocre  
towards a better expression  
seemed a reality one could live  
within the context of a language-  
Waltzing in trimmed hats,  
bluebells in a boudoir.

But my roots are somewhere else now  
I cannot run away from them  
Cannot ask them to victimize the conscience  
that I might yearn to live a different life.

My grafted thoughts journey downward,  
where it all began.  
It's changing colors-  
of what I wrote, and write,  
sensing a different air that I breathe.  
Unpredictable- the motion,  
Unknown- what I own  
what I am owned by.

**BRADSTREET**

In autumn or even winter  
    especially in leaf-fall or snow,  
Silent seasons ripe  
    for subtle rumination,  
Night brings its solitudes  
    reconciled to time.  
When the mind casts  
    only out of itself,  
Rest comes fitfully  
    but never to blankness, so  
I once rode between  
    dreams and memories, and  
Took you once more by the hand  
    into the sun-shamed meadow.

**WIGGLESWORTH**

Still and lucid, a thought  
    collapsed in the windy sky, and I  
Was lost when the hazed image  
    fell from me—  
The sweep of your hair,  
    the naked beauty of your thigh, so  
Night brings its solitude,  
    and the lapse of desire leaves me  
Serene for just a moment,  
    till recollection recovers your lost face,  
And I remember a time when everything  
    seemed before and nothing much behind,  
Bright as tomorrow's little dawn  
    weakly pushing away another winter night

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**WE LOOK AT EACH OTHER AS IF NO ONE ELSE  
REMEMBERED**

His mother, a woman with red hair,  
sliced and buttered a roll. He could  
never tolerate her singing. “It’s noisy,”

he said, “criminal.” But I, being either fey  
or inscrutable, was the culprit.  
The tradition is not one of stasis

but of change, claustrophobic  
and cockeyed. It exhausted me, sitting  
in the kitchen, this effort of will,

the charming funeral of all. With a chill,  
I realized what caught his gaze, instilling  
in him the value of imminent danger.

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**DAVID HUME: REASON AS SOLVENT**

David Hume (1711-1776) is known primarily as an apostle of reason and of the Enlightenment more generally. His chief claim to fame in this regard is that he put the lie to Thomas Aquinas’s last standing proof for the existence of God. For the rationalists, this pulled out the last stay of Christianity, which had been the foundation of morality and political power in the Western world since Roman times. After Hume, it seemed, there were no further obstacles to a new reign of reason—where people would be nakedly in charge of their own affairs. This, at least, was the popular view of what Hume had done, and it still holds true today. But what did Hume really do?

To answer that question, his criticisms of the notion of the self as derived from Descartes, of the proof of causality, and of Aquinas’s last redoubt on the existence of God must all be addressed. But it seems prudent to begin with Hume’s most discussed achievement, his demolition of Aquinas’s last and most durable proof.

The late medieval cleric, theologian, and philosopher Thomas Aquinas offered five “logical” proofs of God’s existence. The first four proofs, all based on Aristotelean philosophy and logic as applied to traditional Christian belief, had been easily dispensed with before Hume. These were the arguments from motion, cause, necessity, and degree.

The argument from motion emerged from two premises. The first is that anything in the universe that moves must be acted on (moved by something else) which is already moving. The second is that an infinite regress is impossible; therefore, there had to be an Aristotelean “unmoved mover,” which Aquinas identifies with God. According to this “proof,” it was God who started the whole process of movement. The logical problem with this argument is readily apparent. It violates the first premise, which holds that it is impossible for something that isn’t itself moved by something else to move another thing.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, excerpts in Walter Kaufman, ed. *Philosophic Classics: Thales to St. Thomas* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1961), 608.



Aquinas's second argument is identical in form to the first, and therefore suffers the same logical inconsistency. He says that it is impossible for anything to be the efficient cause of itself. The only way that could happen would be for the thing in question, whatever it is, to exist before coming into existence. Consequently, every type of being has a cause outside of itself, one that preexists. This again sets up a chain of causation susceptible to infinite regress. But since infinite regress is also impossible, there must be, says Aquinas, a first cause, which is in his view God. Once again, the argument violates its own first premise and begs the question: if all things must have a cause what caused the first cause?<sup>2</sup>

Aquinas's third argument is from "possibility and necessity." This argument also rests on the idea that there can never be infinite regress. In brief, he argues that everything currently in existence might at some point also cease to exist. Aquinas observes that in nature things are generated and then corrupted, which proves that it is possible for them to be and not to be at different points in time. But it is also demonstrably true that at any given time, some things are in existence. This means, to use a Lockean phrase, that something must have been in existence from all time, or at the very least there had to have been an eternal chain of existences. Aquinas explains his reasoning this way: "Therefore, if at one time nothing was in existence, it would have been impossible for anything to have begun to exist; and thus even now nothing would be in existence—which is absurd." This is because, nothing can begin to exist except "through something already existing." Notice, that Aquinas argues that it is *impossible* for anything to come into existence unless there is some preexisting being out of which it gets its own being. But Aquinas immediately overturns this inviolable principle by arguing that "it is impossible to go on to infinity in necessary things which have their necessity caused by another." This means that there must be something that has its own necessity within itself—and this is God. But again, the argument is self-contradictory. It violates its own premise and therefore the dictates of logic.<sup>3</sup>

Aquinas's fourth proof is the argument from degree, sometimes called the argument from gradation. The idea is that if certain qualities or characteristics exist, different entities can have more or less of them.

If human beings can be good, some individual or entity could be most good or have the highest degree of goodness. That being would be God, who likewise has the most knowledge, the greatest amount of being and power, etc. If a finite entity, such as a human being, has presence, for instance, God has the most presence and in fact is omnipresent. The difficult here is that the idea of degree or gradation, while it may be compelling in itself, can tell us nothing about the existence or non-existence of God. Why couldn't gradation stop short of God, so that the thing with the most goodness or power or knowledge never acquires a monopoly on any of those things? Alternatively, could gradation go beyond our God to gods of a still higher order? Either is possible.<sup>4</sup>

By Hume's time, all four of these proofs of God's existence had been shown to be logically flawed. That left only Aquinas's argument from design. According to this proof, we observe that the things in existence in the world seem to be designed for their place in it. Fish have gills to take oxygen from water. But humans and other animals have lungs to derive oxygen from the air. Trees have roots to absorb water and nutrients from the ground. This idea, that various entities seem designed for the place in which they find themselves, on first blush suggests a designer. If the world and everything in it are designed, then there must be a designer, and that architect and engineer must be God.<sup>5</sup>

Hume tackles the argument from design in his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, published posthumously in 1779. This work is not a formal treatise like his *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* but instead an imaginative conversation between three friends, quite similar in approach to Plato's writings. To be sure, Hume wanted to be known as a philosopher. But he was even more concerned to be known as a writer, one who hoped to reach a wider audience than that which consumed abstruse philosophical works.<sup>6</sup> The dialogue seemed to allow that. As he says himself, "the vivacity of the conversation" in the dialogue form could be artfully employed "to enforce the precept" while "the variety of lights, presented by various personages and characters, may appear neither tedious nor redundant." Meanwhile, the clashes among the characters' sentiments and positions

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 608-9.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 609.

<sup>6</sup> See James N. Harris's discussion in his top-notch study *Hume: An Intellectual Biography* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 14-15.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 608-9.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 609.

would afford the reader “an agreeable amusement.”<sup>7</sup>

The conversation in which Hume presents ideas and arguments regarding the nature and existence of God involves three friends—Demea, Philo, and Cleanthes—whose classical names connect Hume’s work directly with the dialogues of Plato. Demea will present the position and arguments of conventional orthodox Christianity. Philo delineates the skeptic’s view and will deliver the death blow to the argument from design. And Cleanthes, portrayed as a rigorous philosopher or logician, expounds upon the rational grounds for believing in the existence of God.

Hume does not plunge directly into the conversation between the three friends. He introduces the substantive philosophical conversation in what appears to be a letter from one Pamphilus to his friend Hermippus, so that the conversation of Demea, Philo, and Cleanthes is not heard directly but recounted at second-hand. Once again Hume seems to be borrowing from Plato, who has one character, Apollodorus, recount the story of the symposium at second-hand to a friend, reconstructing the dialogue from memory as he had heard it from someone who attended the event.<sup>8</sup>

The introduction allows Hume to explain in some detail why he has chosen the dialogue form. It is more entertaining, for one thing, but it also allows the author to hide behind a screen or façade. In this way, “the dialogue-writer” avoids “the appearance of *Author and Reader*.” The key point here, from Hume’s point of view, is that in addressing so sensitive a topic in the eighteenth century as God’s existence, he can avoid the appearance that any of the characters’ opinions are his own, permitting him to direct any criticism of his highly controversial views away from himself. That these arguments are recounted from memory by yet another fictional character—Pamphilus—provides even more distance between the agnostic and even atheistic ideas of Philo and the author of the dialogues.<sup>9</sup>

To further blunt any barbs that might be sent Hume’s way, Pamphilus, who is presented as a pupil of Cleanthes, makes it clear from

the outset that the existence of God is not under question. “What truth,” he asks, can be “so obvious, so certain, as the *being* of a God . . . ?” The only questions reasonable people can entertain revolve around “the *nature* of that divine being.”<sup>10</sup> But perhaps the philosopher doth protest too much. For, as will soon become apparent, any doubt about the nature or characteristics of God immediately undermines all proofs of the Almighty’s existence. As Locke had shown, we cannot know the underlying reality of anything in existence. All we have are perceptions, which exist only in our minds, and these perceptions are of the characteristics of a thing, not the thing in itself.<sup>11</sup> So, in the case of God, as in the case of any other kind of being, our only evidence of His (or Her or Its) existence is what we can perceive with the senses. This, as Hume illuminates, puts us on a slippery footing. So, while Hume hides behind his characters and Pamphilus’s flimsy promise that the existence of God is too certain to ever be questioned, the dialogue itself will leave no doubt in any reasonable person’s mind that Philo’s criticisms carry the most weight, are the most convincing, and are never refuted.

But first Demea will put forth the conventional (perhaps orthodox) Christian view of the deity, noting that *His* first attribute is perfection in all things. God is also infinite in power and time, universal (ubiquitous), and outside of nature (*transcendent* in the parlance of theology). Moreover, God, in Demea’s view, is not spiritual in the way human beings are. How can the spirit of an infinite and eternal entity have any similarity to a finite being? Later Demea further refines his portrait of God as it is conventionally received in the West. A masculine entity, He is immutable, outside of time, and “entire in every point of space.” Moreover, “his love and his hatred, his mercy and his justice, are one individual operation.” He is also eternal, standing “fixed in one simple, perfect state; nor can you ever say, with any propriety, that this act of his is different from that other, or that this judgment or idea has been lately formed, and will give place, by succession, to any different judgment or idea.”<sup>12</sup>

Demea and Cleanthes are united in their idea that God’s existence and characteristics are indubitable, but they differ on whether

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<sup>7</sup> David Hume, “Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion” in Edwin A. Burtt, ed., *The English Philosophers from Bacon to Mill* (New York: Modern Library, 1939), 690-1.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*; Plato, “Symposium” in B. Jowett, ed. *The Dialogues of Plato* (New York: Random House, 1920) 1:302-2.

<sup>9</sup> Hume, “Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion,” 690.

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 691.

<sup>11</sup> John Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford, U.K.: Clarendon Press, 1975), 295-317.

<sup>12</sup> Hume, “Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion,” 700, 711, 712.

human reason is capable of coming to any true understanding of the Almighty. Demea joins Philo in the belief that reason is too weak a tool to provide any clear understanding of God.<sup>13</sup> As Demea expresses it:

The essence of that supreme mind, his attributes, the manner of his existence, the very nature of his duration; these and every particular, which regards so divine a being, are mysterious to men. Finite, weak, and blind creatures, we ought to humble ourselves in his august presence, and, conscious of our frailties, adore in silence his infinite perfections, which eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive them.<sup>14</sup>

For Demea, reason is not competent to assess either the *existence* or *nature* of God. From his point of view, the orthodox understanding of the deity must be accepted *a priori* and without any doubt. Cleanthes begs to differ. He claims that reason is fully competent to establish God's existence and at least, in part, His nature. He plainly represents the Enlightenment position. In doing so, he appeals to human experience and puts forth the argument from design in no uncertain terms. This argument is worth quoting in full:

Look round the world: contemplate the whole and every part of it: you will find it to be nothing but one great machine, subdivided into an infinite number of lesser machines, which again admit of subdivisions, to a degree beyond what human senses and faculties can trace and explain. All these various machines, and even their most intimate parts, are adjusted to each other with an accuracy, which ravishes into admiration all men, who have ever contemplated them. The curious adapting of means to ends, throughout all nature, resembles exactly, though it much exceeds, the productions of human contrivance; of human design, thought, wisdom, and intelligence. Since therefore the effects resemble each other, we are led to infer, by all the rules of analogy, that the causes also resemble; and that the Author of Nature is somewhat similar to the mind of men; though possessed of much larger faculties, proportioned to the grandeur of the work, which he has executed. By this argument *a posteriori*, and by this argument alone, do we prove at once the existence of a Deity, and his similarity to human mind and intelligence.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 700.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 701.

With the orthodox view of God and the argument from design now fully established, Hume allows Philo to go to work, pulling down both and making at the same time a dent in the whole notion that any relation between cause and effect can be proved or known. Philo begins by undermining the analogy on which Cleanthes has anchored his argument, denigrating it as “very weak.” This is because the scale of the universe is so much greater than any human machine or other contrivance. Philo takes as an example a house, one of the more complex human creations, which from ordinary experience anyone would know has to be designed by an architect or builder. But the universe is so much more complex, so much greater in scope than a house that any analogy between the two is difficult to maintain. The differences outweigh the similarities.<sup>16</sup>

Cleanthes makes a half-hearted attempt to defend the analogy. He says, for instance, that a house builder constructs stairs, which are obviously designed with human legs in mind, so that an ordinary human can easily ascend into a house. In the same fashion, human legs themselves seem designed for locomotion. Thus, where a design appears, it implies a designer.<sup>17</sup>

Philo's initial attack on the argument from design and also on Demea's conventional idea of God demonstrates that like Aquinas's other arguments, the one from design is also susceptible to infinite regress. If it is true, as Demea asserts, that the material world is dependent upon an ideal analog in which God exists, then, says Philo, “this ideal world must rest upon some other; and so on, without end.” If that is so, why stop at the level of the conventional God? Why not go beyond to His creator? Or, since we have no experience of the conventional God but only with the material world, why not stop with the material world itself? There simply may be other plausible explanations of how the material world came to be. Perhaps the god who created our world was himself created or perhaps the world had no creator outside of itself.<sup>18</sup>

Philo points out that in making an analogy between an architect designing a house and God designing the universe, Cleanthes has anthropomorphized the Almighty, deriving God's characteristics from

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 702.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 702-703.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid 715.

those of humans. But Philo casts doubt on the notion that there is any provable analogy between the characteristics conventionally applied to God in the Judeo-Christian world and those of humanity. He begins this line of argument with an attack on the so-called infinite nature of the deity. Since the universe itself appears to be finite, why couldn't its creator/designer be finite as well?<sup>19</sup> After all, the house, a finite object, has a finite designer. Experience of the universe in this wise provides no basis for the belief that its creator is infinite in any way.<sup>20</sup>

Once God's infinite nature is brought into question, His other traditional attributes—omnipresence, omniscience, and omnipotence—are quickly undermined. Here Hume builds on the arguments of Locke, who said that Western notions of God are really only human characteristics to which the idea of infinity is added. Human beings exist in space and time/God exists in all space and every time forever. Human beings have some knowledge/God has infinite knowledge. Human beings have some power to affect their world/God has infinite power.<sup>21</sup> But if the possibility exists that the designer of the universe is finite, then the argument from design proves none of these attributes to be essential characteristics of the designer.

If God's attributes are analogous to those of human beings in these ways, Philo argues, why not in other ways? Humans are often mistaken or do slipshod work. In nature, we observe not only designs that seem suited to their purposes or environments but also what Hume terms "difficulties"—disease, decay, and destruction of forms. Why then do we persist in asserting that the designer of such a universe is perfect? Maybe, like many a human design, the world is the result of trial and error, so that, as Philo remarks, "Many worlds might have been botched and bungled, throughout an eternity, ere this system was struck out." For that matter, there is no proof that our world/universe has reached a final level of perfection. It, too, might be just one more botched attempt of many.<sup>22</sup>

Hume also notes that nothing in the perceivable universe convincingly demonstrates the unity of its creator. Many human contrivances are the work of a number of people working together,

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 717-18.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 314-15.

<sup>22</sup> Hume, "Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion," 718-19.

sometimes with each member of the group bringing a specialized knowledge to the task. Could this not be the case with the universe? asks Philo. Could not a committee of deities, none of whom had infinite power or knowledge, have come together to design and create our world? Our experience of human affairs demonstrates that this is as plausible a scenario as creation by a single all-powerful being—indeed perhaps more plausible.<sup>23</sup>

Then, too, what about the universe and our perception of it would lead us to believe in the immortality of God? Nothing in our experience of it inexorably leads to such a conclusion. For all we know, the universe "is the production of old age and dotage in some superannuated deity; and ever since his death, has run on at adventures, from the first impulse and active force, which it received from him."<sup>24</sup>

By offering alternative plausible theories for the creation, Hume does not prove the conventional view false. He only demonstrates that the conventional view is one theory among many, none of which can be proven. This is all that is necessary to destroy the argument from design's logical proof of the existence of one, unified, all-knowing, all-powerful, ubiquitous, transcendent, perfect, and eternal God. As Philo puts it:

In a word, Cleanthes, a man, who follows your hypothesis, is able, perhaps, to assert, or conjecture, that the universe, sometime, arose from something like design: but beyond that position he cannot ascertain one single circumstance, and is left afterwards to fix every point of his theology, by the utmost license of fancy and hypothesis.<sup>25</sup>

Cleanthes takes Philo to mean that experience still proves the universe to have been designed even if it can't establish the characteristics of the designer. This allows him a thread to hold onto, since the design still logically implies a designer of some kind. But Philo never admitted any such thing. He has only gone so far as to agree that through perception/experience of the material world, we might posit that it is the result of *something like design*—which is to say that it may not be designed at all in the way the word "design" is used. That is to say, it may not be *consciously planned*.

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 719.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 720.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid 720.

Expanding on the latter point, Philo asks whether the parts of nature might not fall into an order “of themselves, and by their own nature.” He speculates that perhaps nothing existed prior to matter, which contains a force inherent in itself. Initially, says Philo, matter on a vast scale could have existed in a state of “immense chaos.” But over eons of time and activity some matter could have adhered to create forms and structures that by chance were suited to the environment in which they found themselves. Any forms that became incompatible with the prevailing conditions of their time were destroyed and replaced with others—a kind of survival of the fittest. This theory, Philo argues, comports with what we perceive in nature—constant change within a larger stability of form. This “constancy in the forms,” created after a finite universe of matter and space was subjected to continual motion for a sufficient duration of time, “must,” says Philo, “have all the same appearance of art and contrivance which we observe at present.”<sup>26</sup>

As Daniel Dennett has noticed, Hume came “close to scooping Darwin” in these speculations.<sup>27</sup> We might add that he opened the door for the chaos theory of the creation of the universe. But nowhere does Hume assert that he believes this unconscious cause to be the true one. He presents it merely as one possibility among others and a fanciful one at that, though since it is the last in the series, we might argue that he gave it the most weight.

By dint of putting forward his chaos theory of the creation and other plausible scenarios that do not rely on a single designer, Hume is able to show, unquestionably, that the argument from design carries with it no proof of God’s existence, and certainly cannot be used to demonstrate that a unified, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, perfect God was the architect and creator of all existence.<sup>28</sup> In this way, he pulled the rug out from under the last of Aquinas’s arguments. It ought to be remarked, too, that slightly changing the name of this argument to “Intelligent Design” in the twentieth century has done nothing to overcome Hume’s objections.

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<sup>26</sup> David Hume, “Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion,” 729-730.

<sup>27</sup> Dennett, *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meanings of Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 32.

<sup>28</sup> One reason the argument from design fails is that it relies not so much on logic as it does on an *a priori* perception of the physical world as evidence of God’s existence. But as Descartes had shown, perception of the world around us is itself slippery and cannot be relied upon to provide philosophical proof of anything.

And yet, it should also be understood that while Hume destroyed any *rational proof* of God’s existence, he did not, as he himself recognized, destroy the *possibility* of God’s existence. He merely asserts that reason is not competent to demonstrate the existence of God. In the end, Philo, despite his many arguments to the contrary, insists that a belief in God is reasonable given the evidence present to our senses, but he is nevertheless compelled to conclude that reason still comes up short where proof is demanded. In *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Hume summarizes his position this way: belief in God (and in the immortality of souls, also) “has a foundation in reason, so far as it is supported by experience,” which isn’t really very far. “But its best and most solid foundation is faith and divine revelation.”<sup>29</sup>

With his dialogues, Hume thoroughly undermined, in a philosophical sense, one of the core beliefs of the great majority of people in the Western world. And he left many thinking people, or at least those who read him or understood at secondhand the import of his work, in a profound state of confusion and despair.

Another way of looking at Hume’s attack on the argument from design might be to see it as in essence a criticism of common notions about cause and effect. The universe, so the argument from design avers, is an effect, which must have its cause—therefore God, as the cause, must exist. Although Hume does indulge himself in *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* in some direct, though brief criticisms of the general notion that reason can provide proof of cause and effect, his main attack on such a proof came in earlier publications, most notably in *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-40) and *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding* (1748), the latter something of a popularized version of the first. In these texts, Hume doesn’t argue that causation doesn’t exist. He simply states that we cannot rationally prove that it does. The best we can say is that through repeated experience we come to expect that one phenomenon will follow another with some degree of probability, though never with absolute certainty.

We observe the appearance of one phenomenon or set of phenomena and then another phenomenon always immediately follows. But what we can’t perceive is the one phenomenon acting on the other.

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<sup>29</sup> Hume, “Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion,” 763; David Hume, “Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding” in Edwin A. Burt, ed., *The English Philosophers from Bacon to Mill* (New York: Modern Library, 1939), 689.7.

It is only through repeated experience of the series of phenomena that we can conjecture a result. As Hume explains, “From the first appearance of an object, we never can conjecture what effect will result from it. But were the power or energy of any cause discoverable by the mind [perceived, in other words], we could foresee the effect without experience.”<sup>30</sup> As a demonstration, we might think of gravity, magnetism, or electricity, all invisible forces that seem to result from one set of phenomena and to cause others. We can measure their effects but cannot perceive how, precisely speaking, they *cause* these effects. In Hume’s famous example:

The impulse of one billiard ball is attended with motion in the second. This is the whole that appears to the *outward* senses. The mind feels not sentiment or *inward* impression from this succession of objects: consequently there is not, in any single, particular instance of cause and effect, anything which can suggest the idea of power or necessary connection.<sup>31</sup>

But where no “necessary connection” can be perceived, reason can prove no true cause and effect.

In essence, science, as a form of reason applied to the physical world, leaves us not with proof but only with probability. A natural law, as discovered by science, is posited when, in a long series of experiments, one phenomenon occurs and is always succeeded by another with no exceptions. This is taken as proof of the one phenomenon causing the other. But as Hume notes, how one phenomenon causes the other is never actually perceived, and since science is a method of perception, the proof of causation remains elusive, though the probability of causation is high.

Bertrand Russell cleverly illustrated Hume’s point in his analogy of the farmer and the chicken. Every day when the farmer appears, he feeds the chicken. At first, the chicken is a bit apprehensive when the figure of the farmer makes his ominous appearance. But after a long string of appearances by the farmer that coincide with the appearance of the chicken feed, the chicken dispenses with her apprehension, associating the farmer with a benefit. To the chicken, this constitutes a law of nature. But, of course, at some point the farmer will appear with the ax.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Hume, “Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding,” 622.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy* (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 2001), 35-37.

Most commentators on Hume focus on the importance of his critique of the proof of God’s existence, which was thought to have the greatest impact on society at large, and secondarily, on his critique of the proof of cause and effect, which while of mild interest did little to prevent Western society’s nearly wholesale acceptance of rationalized science as the solution to every conceivable problem. But philosophically speaking, the most devastating of Hume’s critiques of reason was to demonstrate its inability to prove the existence of the self. For as Aishwarya Nair, a student in one of my classes, so cogently observed after a class discussion on Hume, “If the existence of the self can’t be proven, then reason can’t prove anything at all, since every proposition has to be proved to a self.”

As Hume shows, science, as a form of language, can only deal with the world of perception. With this in mind, one might make the analogy that the relation of science to perception is similar to the relation of a map to the physical geography it describes. Both science and the map are abstractions that allow some understanding of how to successfully negotiate through the world of perception. But for science to prove that a thing exists in reality—God, a cause or the self, for instance—that *thing itself* must be perceived. A map of a landscape beyond anyone’s perception is nonsensical *as a map*. For Hume, this meant that a word used philosophically or scientifically which purported to describe something actually existing had to correspond to something actually perceived. If it did not, the word or statement was essentially nonsensical, though it could, of course, refer to some idea—a product of fantasy or imagination.

The word “self” purported, as per Descartes, to refer to a thing in actual existence that was not the product of fantasy or imagination. But for Hume, the Cartesian proof of the self’s existence, was seriously deficient. *Cogito, ego sum* was little more than a statement describing a purported effect. I perceive thoughts and impressions, Descartes was saying; something is producing or placing these perceptions before me, and whatever that is must be the self. But as Hume examined these statements and compared them with his own experience, it quickly became apparent that while the conscious mind filtered an endless train of perceptions, in no case did it perceive what was perceiving them. It never registered a perception of the self *as perceiver*. As Hume puts it, “self or person is not any one impression, but that to which our several

impressions and ideas are suppos'd to have a reference." But "that to which our several impressions and ideas are suppos'd to have a reference" never can be found.<sup>33</sup>

Using himself as the example, Hume famously expounds on the idea:

For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never catch myself at any time without a perception, and never can observe any thing but the perception. When my perceptions are remov'd for any time, as by sound sleep; so long am I insensible of myself, and may truly be said not to exist.<sup>34</sup>

What we are left with is a train of disparate, everchanging thoughts and perceptions. As Hume remarks, if one were to believe Descartes and other such theorists and apostles of reason, the self would be nothing more than "a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement."<sup>35</sup> A good many writers and philosophers have taken Hume seriously on this point and credited him with defining the self as a bundle of perceptions. So seriously has Hume been taken that this notion has been given the title "The Bundle Theory of the Self."

But Hume was obviously being facetious, and he set up what seemed to him a ridiculous bundle theory of the self only to knock it down. The self is nothing, he says, if it does not constitute a person's identity. But he then goes on to note that "There can be no *identity* in different." In other words, a train of different perceptions passing rapidly before us cannot be our individual identity or self. The self, says Hume, is the place, the theater, where these perceptions are to be found. But when one looks about for such a place, nothing appears.<sup>36</sup> The self remains unknown to us, elusive, and therefore, unproven by rational means.

It is important to note, though, that Hume is not saying the self doesn't exist. He is merely saying that it cannot be rationally proven to exist where it cannot be perceived. The train of perceptions provides

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<sup>33</sup> David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (Oxford, U.K.: Clarendon Press, 2007) 1:164.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

<sup>36</sup> Daniel Dennett, following Hume, has also dismissed the idea of a theater or place that constitutes the conscious mind. See his *Consciousness Explained* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1991).

evidence of the self's existence but does not in itself show what the self is, what it consists of, or how it operates. It is essentially undefined, much like God.

Hume concludes that the "identity" we ascribe to "the mind of man"—the self, in other words, "is a fictitious one" that proceeds from an "operation of the imagination." Emotion and the imagination are what unifies the bundle of perceptions, creating in essence the fictitious, but highly useful theater of the mind.<sup>37</sup> As Hume puts it:

. . . identity is nothing really belonging to these different perceptions and uniting them together; but is merely a quality, which we attribute to them, because of the union of their ideas in the imagination.<sup>38</sup>

Identity, then, is not something we perceive as a preexisting unity or being but is created by and exists only in feeling and imagination. And though Hume doesn't say so directly, the implication is clear. Identity is not exogenous. Our identity is not created by something outside of ourselves. We create our identity through an act of imagination that unifies the self. It is the imagination, says Hume, that makes "our distant perceptions influence each other" and gives us "a present concern for our past or future pains or pleasures."

Much of this happens in the memory, which is a species of imagination. Memory, Hume says, "acquaints us with the continuance and extent of this succession of perceptions." He then notes that "Had we no memory, we never shou'd have any notion of causation, nor consequently of that chain of causes and effects, which constitute our self or person." If a "chain of causes and effects" constitutes the self, then the self, much like cause and effect, must exist for us nowhere but in the imagination.<sup>39</sup>

But memory isn't the sole determinant of the self. As Hume explains, we exist forever trapped in a fleeting present that, once past, produces our memories. We also project ourselves into the future in terms of plans and aspirations. We can thus "extend our identity

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<sup>37</sup> Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 169.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> In everyday experience, people are apt to associate the self with the body, but much like the train of perceptions that pass before us, the body, too, is never static and the same. It is altered from minute to minute, made up of millions of cooperating cells that live and die even though the collective continues its existence, much like a symphony orchestra or a nation.

beyond our memory.”<sup>40</sup> But this, too, is a form of imagination.

Here Hume pauses to caution that even though we exist in our imaginations, we cannot rely on imagination alone to lead us safely through the world. “Nothing is more dangerous to reason than the flights of the imagination,” Hume warns, “and nothing has been the occasion of more mistakes.” Does this mean we would be better off if we put all our eggs instead in reason’s basket and did not rely at all on imagination. This too would be a mistake. “To do this,” Hume maintains, “if steadily executed, would be dangerous, and attended with the most fatal consequences.”<sup>41</sup> Why? And here he comes to the pith of all his arguments:

For I have already shewn, that the understanding [reason], when it acts alone, and according to its most general principles, entirely subverts itself, and leaves not the lowest degree of evidence in any proposition, either in philosophy or common life. We save ourselves from this total scepticism by means of that singular and seemingly trivial property of the fancy [imagination].<sup>42</sup>

Reason, left to its own devices, can prove nothing, except perhaps the truth of sentences, which are themselves abstractions. Its danger lies in the unfettered skepticism it engenders. It is a solvent that will eventually destroy our belief in all the things on which human life depends: God (or some other belief that binds us to forms of morality and to each other); scientific knowledge and progress, even the self, and though Hume doesn’t say so, the necessary entities through which each self survives—society and the nation-state.

As Hume has demonstrated, these important constructions—God, science (cause and effect), and the self—are either understood through or are products of faith and the human imagination, so that imagination (which Hume sometimes calls “fancy”), not reason, is supreme in creating the entities, knowledge, and structures that allow for human survival. It is with this elevation of the imagination over reason that the Romantic project gets its start. In this way, Hume may be accounted one of the forefathers of Romanticism and perhaps the most important one.

But Hume also issued a caution, which many Romantics ignored to their peril. While reason is limited and dangerous and does not seem to have much use without a preexisting act of imagination, humanity still can’t do without it. Reason plays a role in moderating the imagination, which unchecked is also likely to lead us powerfully astray. Hadn’t Rousseau had already shown this?

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 171.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 174.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.



**SAM AND ERNEST (A PLAYLET)**

Scene: A Paris street café. There is a table with two chairs—a bottle of wine on the table and two glasses. Sam is seated at the table sipping wine and reading a book.

ERNEST (Enters carrying a 10"x13" envelope. The envelope is full and heavy.)  
Hello, Sam.

SAM Ernest—Good to see you. (Sam stands and shakes hands.)  
Have a seat.

ERNEST (Sits down and places envelope on the table.)  
How is our Parisian Irishman?

SAM Fine—For me Paris works. I think my muses are here.

ERNEST (Pushing the envelope across table to Sam.)  
You asked me to read it. Here it is.

SAM Well, what do you think?

ERNEST Dead on arrival! Sam, who the hell is Godot and why are these two bums waiting for him?

SAM I don't know.

ERNEST Don't know? You must be kidding. This play is going to close the night it opens. People go to the theater to see something happen. Look at Shakespeare—somebody's always scheming or killing. Here—nothing!

SAM You know, Ernest, something happening doesn't have to be bullfighting or blowing up bridges. Waiting can be something too.

ERNEST How?

SAM How about waiting for the birth of a baby? How about waiting for a critic's review? These are happenings too, aren't they?

ERNEST I remain unconvinced. (Ernest then points to envelope on the table.) To quote our friend Gertrude Stein, I'd have to say, "There's no there there."

SAM (Laughing.) Thank you for your candid assessment. So Ernest, do you have anything in process?

ERNEST I do. I'm not sure yet if it's a novella or a novel.

SAM What's it about?

ERNEST A fisherman.

SAM Another fisherman? You fished in *The Sun Also Rises*. Now you're fishing again?

ERNEST Right. But this one has a twist. The fisherman is an old man.

SAM Can't wait to see it. When you have a final draft, send it along.

ERNEST (Rising to leave—shakes hands with Sam.) I'll do it. Let's get together again.

SAM Sure thing. In the meantime—may the muses treat us well. We always need inspiration.

FINIS

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**PASSION**

With broken blood  
I live in passion's flood  
companionable Birch  
simple nightingale  
A child's first lurch  
A farmer's bale of hay

**DAWN**

Sun rises over Sandy Hook:  
old hippie bandanna-ed dude

**LATE SPRING**

The cooling ocean winds circle and sing  
two sets of three sparrows hop about the blessed earth:  
brown of seed and grain

**AFTER A STORM**

Two gulls drink water from the same trough :  
a concave depression in my parking lot  
giving each other space as they perform their busy dance

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**SHE DIDN'T HAVE A NAME**

The cemetery computer records showed almost 15,000 burials over the years. The cemetery was established to hold those interments from a nearby church that had later burned down and was to be rebuilt in another location. The earliest burials in the new cemetery dated to 1881, when those resting in the old churchyard were disinterred and brought to the new location, along with those new deaths that followed.

A memorial park, rather than a church graveyard, welcoming the dead from any race, creed, and religion, something new in its day.

People from all walks of life rested together at the new cemetery. Rich and poor, white and black, Christian and Jew, policemen and criminals, singles and families. Old timers, young adults, and children.

And babies. So many babies.

The records showed just how many. One hundred twenty who lived less than a year. Two hundred forty-five living less than a month. Four hundred and two who lived less than a week. Six hundred thirty-one who lived but a day. Eight hundred sixteen who survived less than a day.

One thousand five hundred and thirty-two who didn't live at all. Some were buried with their families. Most of those were given names. Some were buried alone, a few with names. And some were buried in one of five baby plots.

The baby plots, where they had no names.

Of almost three thousand babies resting there, over a third had never been given a name. Some were listed as "baby" with a last name, but at least they had a name.

The old burial permits simply said "baby girl" or "baby boy", along with a date and cause of death. Stillborn or cord strangled or any one of so many possible complications. So clinical. So cold.

A baby listing in the records pulls at me. Something tells me I have to go there and find this grave. I see the plot number, so I go to the cemetery to find the grave. It isn't easy to find, as it is overgrown

and covered with vines and underbrush. But I find it. She is buried all by herself, this unnamed little girl. No family buried with her, she's all alone. Alone since 1934, the records say.

But someone remembered her. There is a small cement lamb figurine there. Worn smooth by over eighty years of erosion, the little lamb still guards the baby's grave.

Who was your mommy, little one? Who was your daddy? Were you a long-awaited addition to the family? Did they decorate your new room for you? Were you loved? Were you wanted?

Or were you a surprise? A by-product of a lustful tryst? Would you be held close by your loving mother, or would she just shun you? Did she kiss you before they took you away? What would bring loving parents to forget to name you? Or didn't they care?

Sweet innocent child, who knows what you would have done with your world if you had lived. Would you have achieved greatness? Or lived a mundane existence? Were there other siblings to share your childhood? Or would you have been lonely and alone? Were your parents rich or were they poor? 1934 was not a good year for so many. Would there have been enough food? A house to live in?

If it were different, would you have lived to see your eightieth year? Or would sickness or accident have befallen you in your younger days?

Poor child with no name.

I kneel before her grave and trim the overgrown brush away. I place a small bunch of flowers I picked by some graves nearby. Very pretty and smelling so sweet. Doesn't every little girl love flowers?

I can't leave you without giving you a name. It's not fair not to have a name.

I look down at the cement lamb and decide to call you Mary. Mary had a little lamb.

I smile as I kiss my hand and touch the lamb. Rest peacefully now, Mary. You finally have a name.

I feel something around me. Some kind of energy. A feeling of happiness, of someone smiling at me. All around me.

Mary had a little lamb, its cement worn smooth and white.  
Mary finally has a name, things are now all right.  
The lamb guards her grave, it does, for almost ninety years,  
Now that Mary has a name, there should be no more tears.

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## A THOUSAND BLESSINGS

The gossamer wings of a butterfly  
The threads of gold and gray  
Each day a thousand blessings  
Each day a blazing sun.

The threads of gold and gray  
A wonder if you really look  
Each day a blazing sun  
How can we not be happy?

A wonder if you really look  
And if the worries sneak like worms  
How can we not be happy?  
The past floating on a breeze of remembrance.

And if the worries sneak like worms  
Just listen listen to life's music—the hum of gentle bees  
The past floating on a breeze of remembrance  
And look, the cardinal's in the tree again.

Just listen listen to life's music, the hum of gentle bees  
Smell your skin it is alive  
And look, the cardinal's in the tree again  
Even the night in sweet blackness and nodding stars holds its beauty.

Smell your skin it is alive  
Tomorrow life begins anew it always does  
Even the night in sweet blackness and nodding stars holds its beauty.  
Today I saw a single leaf unfurl in a potted plan it wasn't there yesterday.

Tomorrow life begins anew it always does

And no matter what you have or don't  
Today I saw a single leaf unfurl in a potted plant, it wasn't there  
yesterday.  
There is still joy to be had whether you chase it or whether you wait.

And no matter what you have or don't  
The gossamer wings of a butterfly  
There is still joy to be had whether you chase it or whether you wait  
Each day a thousand blessings.

*Shirley Russak Wachtel*

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## **A WISH**

Looking down I saw it  
A penny  
Flat against the slat between the blocks of cement.  
The Lincoln head, copper and not a little worn,  
Stared up at me  
As if to say—well,  
Here I am, you lucky duck!  
But after contemplating for half a moment  
I demurred  
Too many chances in this time of pandemic  
Too many fears of coin touched by a thousand fingers  
And who knows what...?  
And so, I left the penny for my thoughts,  
And moved on  
When again I spied a thing peeking from the corner  
Of a neighbor's yard  
Its face a buttery yellow sprouting silky petals of white.  
And without hesitation,  
I plucked it  
And held it to my nose  
Inhaling days of earth and sun  
I placed the flower deep within the pocket of my coat  
Where it remains  
A reminder and a *wish*  
As coins lay scattered, forgotten,  
But spring,  
Spring will come again.

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## DIGGING A LITTLE DEEPER: A LOOK AT HOW HEMINGWAY USES THE ICEBERG THEORY TO EXPLORE GENDER, SEX, AND DESIRE

Ira Elliott wrote, “In both life and work, Hemingway remained ambivalent about sex and gender” (Elliott 77). Ernest Hemingway was a victim of his time. The early 19th century only saw a brief period of acceptance for homosexuality. Hemingway, himself, was given an androgynous start to life by his own mother, Grace, who dressed him as a female for the first years of his life. Grace not only changed his outer appearance to reflect the feminine gender, but she poured this belief onto the public as she kept passing him off as the twin of his older sister. Even after converted back into a boy, Hemingway continued to quietly struggle with his own self-identity. He had four marriages that yielded him three children that he claimed he never wanted before their births. Hemingway’s life was very public on the surface and skeptically private below. This is also true in his written work. Ernest Hemingway carefully and thoughtfully employs the Iceberg Theory in his writings through the use of homosocial tendencies, gender fluidity, sexual desire, and desire fluidity within his characters, both in his novels and short stories.

An iceberg found in a body of water only presents less than ten percent of itself for visibility above the ocean. The Iceberg Theory, however, offers an in depth description of the conscious and the subconscious. It reveals what is shown on the surface, the obvious, while burying deep any hidden elements of understanding. For example, the reader can see gender, but the discovery of sexual orientation requires further analysis. The Iceberg Theory builds anticipation, yet never gives one an indisputable explanation. When employed in literature, it becomes the role of the reader to dive below the surface of what is written. The reader must search for underlying themes and meanings within the writing. They need to analyze the subconscious mind of the writer and themselves. Ernest Hemingway believed that, “If a writer

knows enough about what he is writing about, he may omit things that he knows. The dignity of movement of an iceberg is due to only one ninth of it being above water” (Hemingway). The deeper one goes into the exploration of the iceberg, the more one can see all the hidden and underlying themes. Hemingway used this theory to engage the reader and allow them to discover for themselves what they believe to be the true meaning of his works. Robert Hipkiss, in his article, *Ernest Hemingway’s The Things That I Know*, writes, “Hemingway says that the writer’s real purpose is to find the eternal truths of life and then to communicate them in lasting prose” (278). It is through his usage of the Iceberg Theory that Hemingway fulfills this purpose and achieves that lasting prose. As there is always more of the iceberg left to uncover, readers of Hemingway are forever in a position to discover new details for protecting and creating the legacy of his works.

For Hemingway, the iceberg is made up of straight, homosexual, bisexual, androgynous, and gender fluid humans. However, many of Hemingway’s characters are strictly, on the exterior, manly men, but the feelings from inside prove otherwise. Sigmund Freud, in his book, *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis; Lecture XX; The Sexual Life of Human Beings*; writes “Some of these ‘perverse’ people have, we might say, struck the distinction between the sexes off their programme. Only members of their own sex can rouse their sexual wishes; those of the other sex, and especially their sexual parts, are not a sexual object for them at all, and in extreme cases are an object of disgust” (Freud 377). Part of the reason that many of the characters fail to come forward about their true desires is to avoid ostracization from friends. So, to be true to themselves while saving face publicly, they adopt a middle ground.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines masculine as: designating an object deemed to be of the male sex on the basis of some quality, such as strength or activity, esp. as contrasted with a corresponding object deemed female (OED). However, the degree of masculinity varies dependent upon the person applying the term. Hemingway’s “man” is often seen as hyper-masculine. They are quick to prove their “heterosexuality” through words and actions. Many of the men appear homophobic, at first glance, through the choice of dialogue, but the reader quickly learns by further analysis of the character that this is not always the case. There is always an underlying nature of homosexuality

in the male characters. Todd Onderdonk, author of the essay, “*Bitched*”: *Feminization, Identity, and the Hemingwayesque* in “*The Sun Also Rises*”, writes, “Yet in Hemingway’s depiction of male homosocial relations, hierarchical differences between men are gendered to accord with a division between males and inauthentic males, where to be ‘less male’ in any sense is to be ‘like a woman’” (Onderdonk 70). The reader first sees signs of this in Hemingway’s novel, *The Sun Also Rises*, through the character of Jake. Although Jake, as the reader learns, is incapable of being a true male by means beyond his control, he searches for those who are “less” masculine than he is. When he notices Brett enter the club with gay men, Jake states, “I was very angry. Somehow they always made me angry. I know they are supposed to be amusing, and you should be tolerant, but I wanted to swing on one, any one, anything to shatter that superior, simpering composure” (SAR 28). On the outside, Jake seems irrationally upset with the gay men, who have done him no wrong, yet on further inspection, it seems he is threatened by the men who can be considered equal to him, at least in terms of sexual performance with women, in particular, Brett. Perhaps he is concerned that he is more similar to them than he’d like due to what Hemingway refers to as a war injury, but readers speculate to be castration. Nancy R. Comley and Robert Scholes, co-authors of *Hemingway’s Genders*, write: “Why such anger? Perhaps because the homosexuals are built like ‘normal’ men yet (Jake might think) do not choose to be ‘normal,’ while Jake, who has a ‘normal’ male’s sex drive, has only been left only fragments of sexual apparatus... The sexually fragmented Jake is thus linked to men he perceives in fragments as unmanly because he has himself been unmanned” (Comley and Scholes 44). The notion that these gay men are choosing not to be “normal” is enough to upset Jake. For if they wanted to, and had any remote interest in her, they could have a sexual relationship with Brett whereas Jake is never going to be given the opportunity due to his missing link, that connects him to manhood.

Similar to Jake, who is emasculated, not by his own choice, David, from *The Garden of Eden*, is also emasculated at the hands of Catherine, albeit not as physically permanent as Jake. Onderdonk writes, “While feminization is not a word Hemingway himself uses, the metaphorical representation of men acting or being treated ‘like a woman’—that is, adopting or being forced into states of shameful

passivity or disempowerment—is a central concern of many of his works” (Onderdonk 61). The reader sees this occur with the character of David in Hemingway’s novel, *The Garden of Eden*. When Catherine first cuts her hair to match David’s, she begins a reversal of roles that forces David into sexual passivity. Catherine tells David, “No. I’m Peter. You’re my wonderful Catherine. You’re my beautiful lovely Catherine. You were so good to change. Oh thank you, Catherine, so much. Please understand. Please know and understand. I’m going to make love to you forever” (Garden of Eden 17). With Catherine taking the lead, she diminishes the importance of David’s masculinity. Since David shows no real objection to this, one can safely assume that not only is he comfortable with this act, but that it was a desire most likely hidden in his subconscious thoughts. If Catherine is comfortable with the role reversal, he will be too. All the evidence in Catherine and David’s conversation leads the reader in the direction of a single blended gender. Mark Spilka writes, in his essay, *Hemingway’s Barbershop Quartet: “The Garden of Eden”* Manuscript that “The androgynous direction of these early romantic scenes—even their latent threat of male unmaning and female manning—now seems clear” (Spilka 32). It quickly becomes apparent that David is a man—but not a man and Catherine is a woman—but not a woman. The reader knows what is taking place by looking closer at the base of the iceberg.

Due to the underlying theme of male femininity, Hemingway overcompensates for the masculinity of his male characters through the use of predominantly male rituals such as war, bullfighting, and fishing. Most of Hemingway’s male characters are either current soldiers of the war or just returning veterans. Many of these men have been physically injured in some form, while all suffer mentally from the effects of the war. Although there is often a female character to care for and console him, he often acts as though he is not suffering and puts up a manly front to avoid appearing weak in front of others. This is especially true when the soldiers are together as there appears to be an unspoken code of brotherhood amongst these veterans. In his essay, *Masculinity*, Thomas Strychacz writes, “...wounds and men’s responses to them actually constitute Hemingway’s sense of postwar masculinity. Wounded and traumatized male characters fill the pages of his fiction, the consequences of war injuries... and even fishing injuries” (Strychacz 277). The reader is privy to the war and post war

effects that follow Krebs in Hemingway's short story, *A Soldier's Home*. Krebs, after arriving home, faces symptoms of what is now referred to as PTSD. He exaggerates his war stories just as Hemingway exaggerates the masculinity of his men through the use of war. Hemingway writes, "His lies were quite unimportant lies and consisted in attributing to himself things other men had seen, done or heard of, and stating as facts certain apocryphal incidents familiar to all soldiers" (TSS 146). By falsifying his accounts of the war, Krebs, in a way, is accentuating his desire to be more masculine than he appears to be. His tough exterior is being used as a mask to hide his true feelings and desires.

To further this notion, Krebs later reveals that he has no interest in being with the girls, and prefers just to look at them. Hemingway writes, "He wanted to live along without consequences. Besides he did not really need a girl. The army had taught him that. It was all right to pose as though you had to have a girl. But it wasn't true. You did not need a girl. That was the funny thing" (TSS 147). There are two things of interest to note within this passage. The first is the admission that the armed services, especially in Hemingway's time, made excuses for homosexuality. By saying that it is okay to lie about needing a woman even if they don't implies that they are well aware of what is going on (homosexuality), but choose to ignore the obvious, reminiscent of the "Don't ask, don't tell" act of the late 20th century. If one doesn't share their desires, than everyone can remain happy and ignorant about the truth. The story, *A Soldier's Home*, is a perfect replica of how the Iceberg Theory operates. Krebs lies are obvious and at the surface, but by analyzing his actions, the reader can see that there is much more to his personal story and unconscious desires. The second point of interest is the usage of the word "funny." Funny was often used as a derogatory description of gay men. To say that one acted funny was to imply that they did not act as a heterosexual should act based on mannerisms and sexual preferences. Funny also takes on a second meaning of being suspicious or deceitful. Krebs is in fact acting in an odd manner in regards to his sexual preferences and the reader is the recipient of his deception.

Hemingway also uses words with ambiguous meaning in describing men from his personal life. In *A Moveable Feast*, Hemingway's memoir of his life in Paris in the 1920's, he refers to Stein and others with descriptions that are more fitting for the sex opposite of their true

nature. Hemingway describes his encounter with Scott Fitzgerald by writing, "Scott was a man then who looked like a boy with a face between handsome and pretty. He had very fair wavy hair, a high forehead, excited and friendly eyes and a delicate long-lipped Irish mouth that, on a girl, would have been the mouth of beauty... The mouth worried you until you knew him and then it worried you more" (*A Moveable Feast* 149). Many people, including Fitzgerald himself, believed him to be, although married to a woman, a homosexual. Hemingway gives a great deal of insight by not only using the words pretty and beauty, common terms for a female, but by obsessing over the mouth, both literally and figuratively. The word mouth can be seen as sexual in meaning because of what it is capable of performing. Hemingway's fixation gives way to a warning. The more one knew Fitzgerald, the more one could be sure of the pleasure or pain associated with his mouth.

Hemingway's word choice is his way of alluding to a certain situation without actually speaking about it, just as when Jake uses the feminine word "pretty" at the end of *The Sun Also Rises* to describe the lost potential of his relationship with Brett. In his essay, *War: World War I*, Alex Vernon writes, "For such Hemingway veterans, the vulnerability induced by wartime trauma becomes associated with emasculation (psychological or literal) by a power outside their control" (Vernon 394). Although it seems as if Hemingway places blame on the war, and its effects, for the behavior of his male characters, the theme has always been present and waiting to surface. The hyper-masculinity of Hemingway's male figures, by way of male rituals, is just his way of bringing to light to a delicate subject. If the reader comes to these conclusions on their own, Hemingway cannot be held liable for going against the grain of societal acceptance. Carl P. Eby, in his book, *Hemingway's Fetishism: Psychoanalysis and the Mirror of Manhood*, writes: "What is interesting about Hemingway, then, isn't that he had bisexual identifications and impulses. One of Freud's earliest and most profound insights into the human condition was that we are all on some level profoundly bisexual. We all harbor traces of polymorphous perversity, access to which allows us some freedom of erotic response" (Eby 239). For Eby, it is the reader that has the ability to turn these characters into objects of desire based on the need for bisexual attraction. This is exactly how Hemingway has set it up in order to not disclose his inner sexual desires.

As much as a reader comes to expect certain characteristics in a male character, there are also certain expectations for female characters. The word feminine, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, is defined as: of a personal attribute, an action, etc.: characteristic of, befitting, or regarded as appropriate to the female sex. Of a woman: having or exhibiting the qualities, behaviour, or appearance considered as typical of the female sex; womanly (OED). However, there is no true textbook definition of a woman when they are portrayed in Hemingway's writing. Hemingway's "women" are often depicted as having the physical characteristics and strength (both physically and mentally) of a man. The women often take control and the men become feminized. They become the dominant person in heterosexual encounters and often begin to absorb many male traits such as being outspoken, drinking (more than socially), and donning short hair. The reader can especially see this through the female characters in two of Hemingway's novels, Brett Ashley in *The Sun Also Rises* and Catherine in *The Garden of Eden*. Both women are the epitome of de-feminization when it comes to society's standards of appearance and behavior. Comley and Scholes write: "Ernest Hemingway, it seems to us, made feeble female characters out of his dreams of erotic wish fulfillment and strong ones out of his nightmares" (Comley and Scholes 57). Many of the women in Hemingway's short stories and novels appear strong due to the masculine persona, when in reality they really are just looking for acceptance of their true selves. Hemingway enjoyed creating a masculine woman with a feminine side that could still be controlled by a man.

Hemingway gives no background story as to why the male characters have female characteristics and vice versa. This goes back to the iceberg theory and allowing the reader to decide for themselves based on their findings. Valerie Rohy, author of *Hemingway, Literalism, and Transgender Reading*, writes: "In these narratives male feminization means weakness and failure, confusion, and delusion. The critics' drive to identify the cause of Hemingway's femininity itself underscores its abjection, for etiology is not wasted on conventional lives... 'normativity is thus spared the indignity of an explanation'" (Rohy 156). If the reader is able to come to a conclusion based off the information that Hemingway has provided then Hemingway has no need to spend time on any clarification for the reader's fulfillment.

Brett Ashley is the love interest of Jake Barnes, although he

never acts on it due to his "lesser male" status. She is portrayed as a strong female character in the novel, who bounces between random male characters, although she never seems to have a true sexual encounter with any of them. While cordial to the other women that she meets, Brett has mostly male companions. She acts as if she is just one of the guys, even referring to herself as a "chap" once in the novel. Brett speaks her mind and does as she pleases. She drinks often and a lot. One of the first things the reader learns about Brett, shortly after she is introduced into the novel, is her physical appearance. Hemingway writes, "Brett was damned good-looking... and her hair was brushed back like a boy's" (SAR 30). Many see short hair on a woman as a sign of modernism, but it can also be viewed as a sign of masculinity and power. The short hair on Brett, is coupled with the fact that she prefers to spend time with men, such as Jake and the gay guys, which she can't have sex with. This is Hemingway's way of showing that Brett truly desires to be one of the guys. Eby continues to write: "But if the adoption of a fetish is supposed to ward off castration anxiety by endowing women with an illusory 'female phallus,' and cut hair signifies castration, how do we make sense of Hemingway's seemingly paradoxical taste for women with cut hair" (Eby 72). The reader can make sense of this by applying the term gender fluidity, which in part refers to a person who does not comply with typical gender stereotypes. Therefore, they can become both man and woman.

Hemingway also plays with gender reversal in the names of characters. Jake is said to have been given a strong name; it comes from the word supplanter, meaning to overthrow or trip up. This is significant as Jake does in fact waver in his sexuality by subverting gender norms expected of men in his time. However, Brett's name is most interesting to analyze. The names Brett and Ashley, in and of themselves, are neutral names, although it is most common to see the name Brett used primarily for males, while Ashley is at the forefront of female names. By giving the character a predominantly male name, Brett, followed by Ashley, a predominantly female name surely has a specific reasoning behind it. This not only signifies the crossing of gender by name, but also the fact that the male name comes first shows that the male is seen as the more powerful of the two genders. Since the name Brett Ashley is often preceded by the title of Lady, this is a sign that Brett's gender can go back and forth dependent upon the situation



she is in and the role she wants to take on. When she needs to be strong and fierce, she is. But when she wants to be soft and sweet, as she quite often is when she is with Jake, she is a lady.

Another of Hemingway's female characters to take on the attributes of a male is Catherine from *The Garden of Eden*. Hemingway writes, "Her hair was cropped as short as a boy's. It was cut with no compromises. It was brushed back, heavy as always, but the sides were cut short and the ears that grew close to her head were clear and the tawny line of her hair was cropped close to her head and smooth and sweeping back" (*The Garden of Eden* 14-15). For Catherine, the cutting of her long hair into that of a boy not only signifies her desire to look like a male, but the hair gives her a certain power that she feels only a man can have. Gerald Kennedy, in his essay, *Hemingway's Gender Trouble*, writes, "Her desire to get a haircut identical to David's marks the onset of her compulsion to become a boy, and once she has short hair, she wants to complete the transformation by assuming the male role in intercourse" (Kennedy 203). While she can't literally become the male lead, the physical outer appearance is how Catherine is able to demonstrate her power through domination. Although both Brett and Catherine appear to happily absorb male characteristics, it is Catherine who seems to be blending genders as she physically and mentally morphs herself into a male.

Although Catherine is satisfied with her new boyish looks, she still seeks approval from David. Catherine needs the confirmation and support from David in order to execute her desires of fluidity. Hemingway writes:

"He kissed her and looked at her face and at her hair and he kissed her again.

'Do you like it? Feel it how smooth. Feel it in the back,' she said.

He felt it in back.

'Feel on my cheek and feel in front of my ear. Run your fingers up at the sides.'

'You see,' she said. "That's the surprise. I'm a girl. But now I'm a boy too and I can do anything and anything and anything" (*The Garden of Eden* 15). It is at this moment the reader can see that Catherine's obsession with becoming a male is not based solely on the physical attributes. Catherine has convinced herself that men are greater than women as they hold the power and ability to do what pleases them.

If Catherine is able to swap genders, she will be able to reap the benefits of both sexes. In his essay, Kennedy writes, "Clearly, Catherine's androgynous craving to cross the gender line, to work 'the dark magic of the change,' springs not from a longing to achieve psychosexual wholeness through a balancing of complimentary attributes but rather from the desire to escape her gendered role" (Kennedy 203). Catherine does desire to escape her gendered role, however, it is the psychosexual wholeness that she achieves that allows her to liberate herself from her gender label. She is no longer wholly male or female. Catherine has achieved the gender fluidity she desires.

Another example of gender fluidity through hairstyle can be seen in Hemingway's novel, *A Farewell to Arms*, a love story which takes place shortly after the First World War. The novel focuses on the characters of Henry, a strong, but vulnerable, lieutenant, and Catherine, his beautiful nurse. Henry and Catherine become inseparable to the point where Henry becomes an all-consuming part of Catherine. Hemingway writes: "Darling, why don't you let your hair grow?/ How grow? Just grow a little longer... It might be nice short. Then we'd both be alike. Oh, darling, I want you so much I want to be you too... I want us to be all mixed up" (*A Farewell to Arms* 299-300). Catherine's admittance to wanting to be one with Henry once again shows how gender roles take over the characters' sexuality in Hemingway's writing.

Gender fluidity is found in several other characters aside from Catherine. In Hemingway's short story, *God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen*, a young boy with uncontrollable lust seeks out help from a local doctor. Hemingway writes:

"I want to be castrated," the boy said.

"Why?" Doc Fischer asked.

"I've prayed and I've done everything and nothing helps."

"Helps what?"

"That awful lust."

(*God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen* 392)

There are two ways that this dialogue can be analyzed. The first is that even at such a young age, the boy understands that he is not living in a body with the correct sexual assignment. By asking to be castrated he will be less male and more female. The second option is that he is lusting after the same gender which he knows to be wrong. If his male genitalia is removed, the desire for men will also disappear. While the doctor tries

to convince the young boy that his feelings are natural, the young boy has made his decision. But because the young boy cannot freely speak of his homosexual feelings the adults just automatically assume that his desire is for the other gender. However, after analyzing for a deeper meaning through the iceberg theory, there is little doubt that he is lusting for the same gender.

Unlike the young boy in *God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen*, Jake Barnes from *The Sun Also Rises* does not get a choice in his castration. In his article, *Performance Art: Jake Barnes and "Masculine" Signification in The Sun Also Rises*, Ira Elliott writes, "Close readings of several key passages in the novel will at the same time uncover the reasons behind Jake's own inability to openly accept, if not fully endorse, the potentialities of gender/sexual mutability" (Elliott 78). Since Jake's choice is made for him, he can't fully live life the way he had intended and must conform to the situation he has unwillingly been placed into. If he outwardly accepts it, he believes it would be an admission of his sexual preference. Although Jake's situation is inevitable from the beginning, regardless of his thoughts, he cannot bring himself to publicly admit that he will never be a whole man, not for Brett or any other woman that he may encounter in the future.

Normalcy for Jake is not being what is considered normal by society. Elliott writes: "Although his desire is 'normal,' his body prevents him from actualizing his 'manhood.'" Jake's inability to perform sexually corresponds to the homosexual's ability to perform his "correct" gender" (Elliott 82). Jake, unfortunately, will never be able to achieve his normal desires, so he must throw himself into whatever else he can use to as a replacement for that desire, such as his writing. Elliott explains further by writing that: "The very existence of the gay man—'feminine' desire expressed through the male body, 'feminine' behavior enacted by a man—calls into question not only naturalized sex/gender roles, but also such oppositions as seen/unseen, disclosed/undisclosed, real/illusory" (Elliott 83). Jake's condition is indeed seen, disclosed, and very real, but only to himself. His friends, both female and male are not privy to what is lurking, or in Jake's case, not lurking beneath the covers.

Desire is what takes precedence in Jake's case. Elliott writes, "Inasmuch as Jake considers himself to be heterosexual, the novel posits the site of sexuality in the gendered desire rather than sexual behavior. What distinguishes Jake from the homosexual men is gender

performance and erotic object choice" (Elliott 86). For Jake, his object choice is female, yet his shortcoming does not allow him to act on it which likens him to the homosexual men. Jake has the essence of a man, but the components of a woman, therefore not allowing him to perform his manly duties. His desires become more fluid as he has been forced to learn how to deal with his ineptitude. If Jake has no desire for men, and he can't desire a woman, he has to become open to desires of another kind. Onderdonk writes: "What seems to drive Hemingway in creating this category of male inauthenticity is a fear of taxonomical confusion: how does one tell the real man from the counterfeit? Indeed, so concerned is Hemingway with the taxonomic instability between man and not-man that almost every difference is retooled and mobilized as an adjunct of sexual difference" (Onderdonk 73). Hemingway doesn't worry whether one fits into a specific category because categories can be made and changed on the author or reader's whim. By concerning himself with the instability, Hemingway is actually creating stability in a round about way.

Debra A. Modellmog, in her essay, *Sex, Sexuality, and Marriage*, writes, "The homosocial world enjoyed by many of Hemingway's men, the line between affection and desire often seems about to implode" (Moddemog 364). It is because of this that the men in Hemingway's works don't have a definitive line. The line mentioned by Modellmog is blurred as the two sides of it cross over into each other creating a fluidity of gender roles and desire. The base of the iceberg is where the reader needs to separate desire versus action. The action is clear, but the desire goes deep below the surface of the unconscious thoughts of the characters. The proper desire is not always the winner. Elliott writes: "The 'feminine,' regarded as the exclusive province of the female, is seen as inscribed within/on the female body. Its appropriation by the male constitutes a gender transgression which in and of itself becomes the visible sign of homosexuality. The homosexual reveals himself through a performative 'error,' and, by this logic, the feminine, effeminate, or feminized man is always homosexual" (Elliott 80). These men and women become homosexuals by the pen of Hemingway. They are created in such a way that their desire is so grand that it outweighs the urge to keep things hidden for too long. In the end, the character's true colors come through, provided that the reader makes an effort in decoding the text.

In Hemingway's short story, *Cat in the Rain*, the American girl has resigned herself to desiring what she can conquer. She has come to terms with her destiny and adjusts her desires accordingly. The American girl says, "I want to have a kitty sit on my lap and purr when I stroke her" (Cat in the Rain 170). She then continues, "Anyway, I want a cat," she said, 'I want a cat. I want a cat now. If I can't have long hair or any fun, I can have a cat'" (Cat in the Rain 170). This passage in particular shows that the desire for any object can take the place of a proper desire. The American girl, unable to have proper desires due to her gender is willing to take what she can get. She has come to terms with her destiny as she refuses to be repressed because of it. However, it is Hemingway's choice of object desire that expresses the most. The choice of cat/kitty insinuates the American girl's desire to be with other women. The word kitty, a synonym for a derogatory term referring to the female genitalia, represents her need for female affection. If she must have short hair, she must take on the male role, therefore, in order to have proper desires, she must have a woman. The cleverness of Hemingway's play on words only adds value to the meaning of fluidity. Nancy R. Comley and Robert Scholes, co-authors of the article, *Tribal Things: Hemingway's Erotics of Truth*, write: "The leaving of textual gaps precisely where sexual parts or actions must be named is elaborately connected, throughout Hemingway's work, with his fascinated attention to impotence, abortion, and sexual transgression" (Comley and Scholes 271). This particular type of wordplay juxtapositioned with figurative blank spaces are Hemingway's intentional contribution to the depth of the iceberg waiting to be examined.

On the outside, with only a preliminary reading of his works, Hemingway appears as the epitome of masculinity. Eby writes: "Although his more astute critics have always found an element of gender masquerade, a sort of hypermasculine posturing, in his art, Ernest Hemingway has remained for decades a cultural icon of unadulterated masculinity. Countless American men—and women—have looked to him for a model of manhood" (Eby 238). Hemingway over exaggerates and overcompensates the masculinity in his characters as a way to mask their underlying feminine qualities.

For the ultimate act of fluidity and gender blending, the reader needs to analyze Hemingway's *Vignette: Chapter XII*. Hemingway writes, "... and the bull charged and Villalta charged and just for a

moment they became one. Villalta became one with the bull and then it was over" (Vignettes: Chapter XII 181). The passage in this vignette represents everything that Hemingway has avoided bringing to the surface, all in this one piece. If analyzed thoroughly, the reader sees Hemingway's typical male, strong, powerful, and dominant, partaking in an all-male ritual to overcompensate for his hyper-masculinity. Villalta, the bullfighter, subconsciously expresses his homosexual desire when confronting the bull, his desired object of choice. Then, in an instant, Villalta and the bull figuratively and literally become one with each other, representing the homosexual relationship between the male and his desired object, as well as the sexual commitment of two males. As Villalta's masculinity escalates, so does his object of desire. Comley and Scholes continue writing: "But Hemingway is no ordinary writer on bullfighting or on anything else... we look into what seems to us an extraordinary interest in homoeroticism on Hemingway's part, and an unusual way of writing about it" (Comley and Scholes 107). Hemingway took extraordinary measures to ensure that the sexual details of his characters were hidden deep below the surface. All the signs of homosexuality are there, but they are visible only to those willing to seek out the underlying truths beneath the hyper masculine exterior.

To comprehend the motive of his writing, one must understand the process of the author. In *A Moveable Feast*, Hemingway claims that: "This was omitted on my new theory that you could omit anything if you knew that you omitted and the omitted part would strengthen the story and make people feel something more than they understood" (*A Moveable Feast* 75). Even if the reader chooses not to go below the surface, it does not mean that there is nothing to be discovered. It is there, and that, in and of itself, satisfies Hemingway.

Jackson J. Benson, author of the article, Ernest Hemingway: *The Life as Fiction and the Fiction as Life*, writes: "Hemingway himself encouraged our confusion, not only through a strong identification with his own characters but by a reiterated doctrine of writing out of experience" (Benson 347). While the Iceberg Theory can be used for many themes within literature, it is most successful when used to discover the conscious and subconscious minds of male and female characters. Men and women, although considered to have different attributes based upon their given gender, there is no one complete definition of what makes a man a man or a woman a woman. The

definition changes based on each individual's thoughts and desires. To compile a complete gender under one societally accepted umbrella would not only be unfair, but it would be an inaccurate depiction of that gender. Ernest Hemingway was a master at employing the Iceberg Theory when writing his short stories and novels. The observant reader can find homosocial tendencies, gender fluidity, sexual desire, and desire fluidity buried deep under the surface of his many characters including, but not limited to, Jake Barnes, Lady Brett Ashley, David, Catherine, and Villalta. Rohy writes: "Acknowledging the unconscious, Hemingway signals that we must be Freudian readers in a world where surface meanings fail to satisfy, interpretation is an endless task, and things are seldom what they seem" (Rohy 157-8). And with Hemingway, so much of what he has to say is left unseen and unsaid.

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## THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK: A POSTCOLONIAL LOOK AT J.M. COETZEE'S *WAITING FOR THE BARBARIANS*

*Waiting for the Barbarians*, by J.M. Coetzee, is a dramatic post-colonial novel that pits an unknown empire against a group of so-called "savages" living on the outskirts of the empire's edge. While this constructed nation is not given a name, known only to the reader as the Empire, it is a dominant society that justifies violence when it feels threatened; even torture against the colonized is legitimized for their own protection. The narrator of the novel, the Magistrate, turns a blind eye to the torture that his empire employs upon their victims, and yet he surreptitiously wishes too that his comrades would see that the very victims they punish, including himself, are not the ones deserving of the inhumane cruelty bestowed upon them. Eventually the colonizer also becomes a part of those being colonized. *Waiting for the Barbarians* displays the tumultuous circle of power that imperialism imposes on all that are involved.

The non-westerners, the objectified human, the lower class - these are the reasons that the Empire exists. The Empire justifies its colonial project as a civilizing mission. The established Empire feels it is their duty to force those that are different to assimilate into an obeying citizen. Of course, the empire overlooks a fact recognized by Benjamin Franklin many years ago in his essay, *Remarks Concerning the Savages of North America*, "Savages we call them, because their manners differ from ours, which we think the perfection of civility, they think the same of theirs" (Franklin 219). The differences are displayed throughout the novel with an array of adjectives such as "brown-faced, weatherbeaten, and narrow-eyed" (Coetzee). They are considered to have a language of their own. Chinua Achebe writes, "Language is too grand for these chaps; let's give them dialects" (Achebe 1794). Since language is something often understood on a larger scale, the barbarians in the novel are not worthy of such a privilege. The less that they are able to communicate with others, the less aware they are of what is being done to them.

At the beginning of the novel, the reader becomes witness to the unwarranted capture of two innocent persons, an older gentleman and a younger boy. The Empire has falsely accused them of being thieves. Without fair trial they are continually beaten until they say what it is that the soldiers want to hear. The Magistrate says: "Of the screaming which people afterwards claim to have heard from the granary, I hear nothing. At every moment that evening as I go about my business I am aware of what might be happening, and my ear is even tuned to the pitch of human pain" (Coetzee 5). The elder man is beaten to death while the child is barely conscious. The screams of torture have become such routine that even those with a heart are able to turn a blind eye to the situation.

When Colonel Joll from the 3rd Bureau, an intelligence agency, shows up in the Empire he is wearing sunglasses. The Magistrate comments on them, "But he is not blind. The discs are dark, they look opaque from the outside, but he can see through them" (Coetzee 1). Joll's glasses feign a figurative blindness. Although he can clearly see what is going on, the dark lenses prevent the others from seeing inside him, leaving his tough exterior intact.

Shortly after a group of imprisoned barbarians are set free from the Empire, the Magistrate notices a young, disabled barbarian woman begging on the streets and convinces her to go home with him. The nameless girl becomes a sexless slave for the Magistrate because she understands that this is crucial to her survival. Since her feelings of inferiority are at a high, she learns to live the way they live in the Empire, even befriending those that would normally have mocked her kind. It is this girl who tells the Magistrate, "Pain is truth; all else is subject to doubt" (Coetzee 5). The pain that she has endured and will continue to endure is the only truth that she has. Everything else that she or any other person feels is up for personal interpretation. What may be real to her may be fiction to another and vice versa.

Just as the Magistrate feels he knows what is best for the young girl, the Empire knows what is best for the barbarians, the others, unlike them. The treatment of the barbarians, including the torture, is understood by the Empire as merely a case of benevolent paternalism. They believe that their way is the right way and will go to any extreme necessary to see that the savages succumb to their ways. The Magistrate comments, "The people we call barbarians are nomads,

they migrate between the lowlands and the uplands every year, that is their way of life. They will never permit themselves to be bottled up in the mountains” (Coetzee 50). The barbarians need to be pushed to the brink of inferiority before they will begin to practice the culture of the colonizer. Coetzee continues, “But surely... if we are to be frank, that is what war is about; compelling a choice on someone who would not otherwise make it” (Coetzee 50).

After the Magistrate returns the young girl to the barbarians, he is greeted at home by a Warrant Officer in the Third Bureau, not as the royal Magistrate, but as an enemy. They believe that he has turned to the barbarian’s side and will therefore treat him as such. It is his firsthand account of the torture that truly allows him to see just how unjust their violent treatment is. The Magistrate says,

“I look forward with craving to exercise times, when I can feel the wind on my face and the earth under my soles, see other faces and hear human speech. After two days of solitude my lips feel slack and useless, my own speech seems strange to me. Truly, man was not meant to live alone! I build my day unreasonably around the hours when I am fed. I guzzle my food like a dog. A bestial life is turning me into a beast” (Coetzee 80).

Since the prisoners are treated as animals they behave like animals, and in turn will continue to be treated like animals in this vicious cycle.

Physical punishment can be reversed, but the effects of the mental anguish they incur can last much longer. The Magistrate says,

“I realize how tiny I have allowed them to make my world, how I daily become more like a beast or a simple machine, a child’s spinning-wheel, for example, with eight little figures presenting themselves on the rim: father, lover, horseman, thief... Then I respond with movements of vertiginous terror in which I rush around the cell jerking my arms about, pulling my beard, stamping my feet, doing anything to surprise myself, to remind myself of a world beyond that is various and rich” (Coetzee 84-85).

Unfortunately, the grass is not always greener on one’s own side because the ground can begin to rot right under their footsteps. Safety and trust is never a guarantee. Coetzee writes, “Why should it be inconceivable that the behemoth that trampled them will trample me too? I truly believe I am not afraid of death. What I shrink from, I believe, is the shame of dying as stupid and befuddled as I am” (Coetzee 94). It is not the physical ailments that will cause his death; it is the humiliation that will get the best of him.

As the Empire sits and waits for the barbarian tribe to approach, both sides prepare to defend themselves. Chinua Achebe writes, in his essay, *An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad’s Heart of Darkness*, “Tragedy begins when things leave their accustomed place” (Achebe 1786). People tend to have rash reactions when taken out of their comfort zone or are forced to change their element.

When several barbarians are marched into the courtyard, attached to one another by a wire that has been pierced through their hands and cheeks, the Magistrate is beside himself. They are beaten by the soldiers until the stick is handed to a young female child. She is cheered on by fellow members of the Empire until she brings the stick down on the back of one of the barbarians. Coetzee writes, “That it is worse to beat a man’s feet to a pulp than to kill him in combat? That it brings shame on everyone when a girl is permitted to flog a man? That spectacles of cruelty corrupt the hearts of the innocent” (Coetzee 108)? The shame and dishonor brought upon this man causes nothing but sheer joy for the onlookers. It also shows the barbaric behaviors of the Empire. The barbarians are treated as nothing more than non-human creatures. Coetzee writes, “We stand watching them eat as though they are strange animals” (Coetzee 18) and “You would not use a hammer on a beast, not on a beast!” (Coetzee 107). By reducing these humans to the very lowest class possible, they will learn to become dependent upon the Empire.

The Magistrate’s outcry at this forces a confrontation with Joll and his minion. They declare the Magistrate free, but he knows that he will never really be free. His mind will forever belong to the Empire’s torture. The Magistrate declares, “Even if all the children of the town should hear me I cannot stop myself: let us only pray that they do not imitate their elder’s games, or tomorrow there will be a plague of little bodies dangling from the trees” (Coetzee 121). The Empire ways are not taught in a classroom. It is something that one is surrounded with from childhood. It comes as natural as walking and speaking.

Because children are mini replicas, products of their parents, one can be assured that these behaviors will continue on as long as humans walk the lands. Coetzee writes, “It is the fault of the Empire! Empire has created the time of history. Empire has located its existence not in the smooth recurrent spinning time of the cycle of the seasons but in the jagged time of the rise and fall, of beginning and end, of

catastrophe. Empire dooms itself to live in the history. One thought alone preoccupies the submerged mind of Empire: how not to end, how not to die, how to prolong its era” (Coetzee 133). It is the wish of the Empire to continue the tyranny and rule all, what they believe to be, underdeveloped, uncolonized, persons and properties.

The only person from the Empire that appears to have a conscience, the Magistrate tells us, “I want to say that no one deserves to die... I want to live. As every man wants to live. To live and live and live. No matter what... I never wished it for the barbarians that they should have the history of Empire laid upon them. How can I believe that that is cause for shame” (Coetzee 119, 154)? There will never be justice for the barbarians or anyone who has turned its back on the Empire. Even the Magistrate, who is only accused of going against the empire, will never get justice. The paranoia of the Empire will never allow this to occur. Living is not one’s choice; it is the choice of the Empire.

The Magistrate tells one of the prisoners, “We cannot just do as we wish... We are all subject to the law, which is greater than any of us. The magistrate who sent you here, I myself, you – we are all subject to the law”... he then continues, “But we live in a world of laws... a world of the second-best. There is nothing we can do about that. We are fallen creatures. All we can do is to uphold the laws, all of us, without allowing the memory of the justice to fade” (Coetzee 138-139). Although having the knowledge that he has, the Magistrate would still like to believe that the Empire has a fair justice system.

However, justice for the Empire means that the savages will cave in and begin to envision things the way they do. In fact, they are quite sure it will happen. Coetzee writes, “But when the barbarians taste bread, new bread and mulberry jam, bread and gooseberry jam, they will be won over to our ways. They will find that they are unable to live without the skills of men who know how to rear the pacific grains, without the arts of women who know how to use the benign fruits” (Coetzee 155). Dependency is key for the Empire to colonize these barbarian savages. When one becomes that helpless, they become easy prey for the predator.

When polar opposites are placed next to each other, there will always be the dominant group. Benjamin Franklin argued too that domination over others is based on ignorance of the other’s different

ways, “But you, who are wise, must know that different nations have different conceptions of things” (Franklin 220). However, in this novel the Empire is aware of these differences, but is determined to change, by force, the barbarians. The juxtaposition of the Empire and the barbarian’s savage lands make it easy for the Empire to become the more prominent, colonized culture. Using any and all means of torture tactics and violence, the Empire always comes out successful. By stripping the barbarians of their human rights, using humiliation, the barbarians succumb. Although, as the reader sees within the novel, it is not only the tortured who suffer. Coetzee writes, “When some men suffer unjustly... it is the fate of those who witness their suffering to suffer the shame of it” (Coetzee 139).

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**TERROR AT DECATUR PLACE**

Some people seem to draw negative forces to them. Some live uneventful lives or lives that seem devoid of misery. Others live in the middle, travelers between the two incongruous worlds, never knowing from one day to the next when the negative forces will strike, bringing with them terror, mayhem, insanity. I am in the latter group, and this is my most recent encounter with the forces of evil. I write it because it was so numbingly terrifying that I can not speak of it. And I want a written record.

It happened last night, but it is not the only time this has happened. And that is perhaps the most frightening part of this story. Since this is not my first encounter, I know that it will not be my last, that my life has been marked with a sort of metaphysical X signifying to other hobos of the dark world my susceptibility to these visitations. They'll never stop.

Back to my story. I am visiting my cousin in Maryland. (Let's protect her privacy and just call her J.) She has a beautiful guest room in her basement. It is bright; it has a television. There is nothing to suggest the presences hiding there. But they are there. This is not the first time I've been brought to the brink of madness in this place. In case you are wondering, dear reader, why I continue to go down into that hell hole, remember Regan's mother in *The Exorcist* and how you yelled at the screen, "Don't go up those stairs." But she went anyway. She had to. And I must go down these. There is no other place for me to sleep here. I digress.

So last night. I don't know if I can continue my story. There is so much to tell. But I'm starting to shake at the memory. Still, I must say one word on my behalf, just in case I can't finish: I put up a valiant struggle. I remembered the great heroes and heroines of the past; I imagined myself a shield maiden of Rohan. And it is obvious that I survived the struggle, or you would not be reading this. But fighting pure evil takes a toll, and I am drained physically and emotionally. I am

not sure how many more of these battles I can endure. I digress again. I wonder if those forces are somehow thwarting my telling of this tale. I will go mad if I ponder that thought for too long.

So last night. Oh, in case you're wondering why I didn't call out for J, she was asleep in her room already with the door closed. And I had, still have, some hesitation in telling her of the various entities in her basement. Evidently, they have either not shown themselves to her, or she has made some bargain with them that they will coexist in the way that many people coexist with ghosts. I'm certain it must be the latter because I can not imagine that she has not seen them. But again I digress.

I am so shaken by this, but I must write it so that there will be a written record in case "something happens" to me when I go back down there. I must go back down there. My clothes are there. And it is 3:30 in the morning, and once I collapsed from exhaustion (fight, good v evil, remember?), I only got about three hours of sleep. Oh, dear, this paragraph rambles. There's no central guiding idea. In fact, this whole story is starting to reflect the shambles of my mind, the wreckage from the aforementioned epic struggle in the basement. "Out, spirits of darkness! Out, I say!" Back to the story, if I can write it at all.

So last night, I saw a.....

Scroll

.....

.....

Scroll



.....

Scroll

Last night I saw a cricket.....

\*\*\*\*\*

To the reader: Lest you scoff. The writer of this story suffers from insectiphobia. It's exactly what the word suggests, so there is no need to consult a dictionary. She has an irrational fear of all bugs, insects. Yes, even ladybugs and butterflies. But the irrational becomes insanity when grasshoppers and crickets show up. She nearly died of a heat stroke once because a grasshopper landed on the hood of her car one July day in Arkansas, and she sat there for about twenty minutes, with the windows closed, nearly dying because the air conditioner in the car didn't work, unable to get out because of fear that said grasshopper would jump on her. If the grasshopper had not lost interest in her, she no doubt would have died, and nobody would have known what madness drove her to sit there like that. Not madness. A grasshopper. And then there was a cricket on her coffee pot that nearly sent her to the E.R. And there have been other visits to J's and other encounters with crickets in the basement. So do not scoff. Some of you fear heights or spiders and snakes. Our shield maiden does not. But bugs.....

### TO ALL THE DOGS

To all the dogs I've loved before  
Who've trotted in and out my door,  
I know this might seem strange  
Perhaps a bit deranged  
To my furry friends,  
who've kept me sane.

To all the dogs who licked my face,  
And may I say, I've kissed the best  
I'm glad they came along  
I dedicate this poem  
To all the dogs I've loved before.



**SIGN LANGUAGE**

trees speak  
to each other,  
take in  
less water  
so their saplings thrive.  
sand dunes  
murmur.  
clouds shriek.  
the moon  
lends an ear  
to the air,  
oblique  
offshore.

I stumble in the din  
on the tips of their tongues,  
slipping words in edgewise.  
what to them seem songs,  
to me, white noise,  
a tinnitus of violins,  
siblings of silence.

what emerges there,  
curled, ready to molt,  
doesn't belong, yet,  
to the world. when it sings  
its nascent tune, hearts  
dance to decipher it,  
to answer it, to dare.

**IDEAS**

things: pry them open  
or just illuminate them  
to find ideas.

an apple a day  
versus a suspect orange  
could prove persuasive.

a lover's sidelong  
glance'll freeze your hourglass  
before you know it.

quick as a lizard  
skittering along a wall  
attitudes change us,

but our ideas  
only reinforce the walls  
built by the wizard

violating laws,  
attractive to reptiles  
deaf to human words.

if words count as things  
reach for your can opener.  
expiration dates

don't count. they haunt us.  
even what we didn't mean  
clearly betrays us.

silence things disguise  
bears infants at first wordless  
but eager to learn.

*Daniel Zimmerman*

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**DARKNESS VISIBLE**

the sun knows nothing  
about shadows. we  
dwell in them, searching  
for illumination.

by the time it arrives, night  
has fallen, and the moon  
offers a shroud  
to insight.

lights differ.  
shadows remain the same.  
better delight  
in shadows than in none.

## **LOVE GROWS WHITE IN THE MIRROR**

Love grows white in the mirror.  
That which had been solid is ghostly.  
Memory is a palimpsest of doubt.  
When you come to stand beside  
It is a hundred years looking back,  
Our eyes staring deep as spear thrusts.

## **GRATITUDE**

Gratitude is the first of the virtues.  
It creates the context that prayer invokes:  
Attentive heart and quieted eye  
That sees without grasping, a hand  
Content to be held in movie dark,  
The endless images flickering  
Into story, and, later, memory.  
Our specific day in a stone valley  
Together where the scrub pine  
Bent always after the chill memory  
Of imperative winds, their barked  
Bodies in saintly attitudes of prayer  
Where culminating roots escaped  
The cladding stone to kneel naked.  
The knees we use to gain heaven  
Give us all the altitude we need  
All the height we dare aspire to  
Adore in one go, or, wingless, know.--  
Gratitude is granular greatness,  
The narrow thisness of wide love,  
You flickering in a windblown hoodie

## **CIRCULAR THINKING**

In all of Life's vast pageantry  
God, and even I, can see  
A certain circularity.  
Trees spread leaves whose shade  
Lets grass create a glade  
For crickets' serenade.  
Whales to the grieving sea  
Their groaning bodies bequeath  
To rot productively.  
To birds the fruit, to earth  
The seeds, to vultures death  
To clean their teeth.  
And blind beneath it all the mole  
Digs miles and miles of holes  
To aerate the soil.  
But what of we the people  
So monstrously appetitive  
So long as we live?  
What beneficence is in us  
Who travel from dust to dust  
In total *\_de gustibus?*  
The insufficient emptiness  
Of slogans and parades  
Follows us like cliffs  
Begging that we jump. The why  
Of pied humanity  
Is *\_why not\_* suicide?  
Our Time on Earth we fritter  
As if it's so much litter,  
Littler and littler....  
What toys we get we keep

And pile into Midas heaps  
Or bury deep.  
Our cities once abandoned are  
No more than rabbit warrens  
Or silted fens.  
To be always the biggest eaters  
And never be the eaten  
Lacks manners.  
The system's quite impossible!  
Just have to remove us all,  
Put humanity to the wall.  
Still, it must be said that (if  
Only by lawyers defensive)  
We've a certain assertive  
Gift for grift.

FROM *BOOK OF PLAGUES*



New Jersey emergency room like so many emergency rooms, busier now than before. But they soldier on, the nurses in particular. Michael's been doing it 15 years, but this is new. More intense. They thought it would be busy, more of what they were used to. Extreme flu. Added isolations. They were slow to take precautions. *But when the reality hit, it was pretty drastic, he says. A new environment. All the pictures that you see of people walking around for 12-hour shifts straight with never taking masks off, and going through gloves and gowns and isolating people and not allowing even a single visitor anywhere in the hospital. Once we kind of caught up, yeah, it was definitely different than I had expected. // And the ER and ICU, where they treated the COVID patients spread, took up other spaces, until the hospital was eliminating other services. Little choice. It was all about COVID. // A refrigerator truck is parked outside the ER, part of the new reality. The morgue can't handle the numbers. The cemeteries can't keep up. I saw it the first few days and it didn't occur to me, he says, and so now every day you walk in and out you walk past this truck. It's always there. // We all have experiences where people were dying alone in the hospital, he says. We were the person there for them. And no*

*matter how busy you were, that was something you took time to do. You held someone's hand or you talked to them because their family wasn't there. Now, there are more deaths and more dying alone. Even if they have families. Even if the families are outside the hospital. We're the ones sitting there at the bedside. // Not the flu. Not even close. People were just walking up to our hospital with these terrible lung conditions. Not just old or sick patients. Staff members. Working adults. Kids. Nurses especially in an ER-type environment, we start to think of ourselves as invincible, he says. And suddenly we were feeling very vulnerable. //*

\*



One sentence haunts me. We were talking last week, and he was in one of his down swings. "I'm afraid I won't see you again. I won't see anybody again." I don't remember if I answered. If I did, I probably lied and said not to worry. "That's not going to happen. We'll see each other soon." Is that a lie? Or wishful thinking? // The truth is that I fear the same thing he does, that the shut-down forced upon us by this terrible virus could last so long that — I can't say it. I don't want to say it. // On television, they show the protesters calling for an end to shelter-in-place orders. "I need a haircut," one of the signs says. Others demand the right to have their nails done. Most are worried about their jobs. But these protests, which raise legitimate questions about our economy, have trivialized the actual costs of this moment. // In Staten Island, there is a Jewish cemetery that buries destitute Jews. They've done it for decades — "A century ago," the AP writes, "it buried garment workers

killed in the Triangle Shirtwaist fire and those who fell to the Spanish flu. More recently, it was Holocaust survivors who fled Europe. // “And now, those dying of the coronavirus.” // On Hart’s Island, New York’s Potter’s Field, they struggle to keep up, to bury the anonymous dead in a city of millions. The image in the paper, an aerial view: Coffins lined in a narrow trench that runs to the horizon. // He has two plots set aside at our local cemetery, next to my grandmother, for him and my mother. Both are alive. Mom has Alzheimer’s, but is otherwise healthy. She’s in a memory care home, in lock down. Kept safe by a staff that has moved in and shut off access with the outside world. Dad is lonely. We talk often. He’s scared. We talk two, three times daily. Sometimes we FaceTime. But he is so far away. “I’m afraid I won’t see you again.” // This is a virus that “preys on the human propensity to connect,” says The New York Times. Worse. It is a virus that has severed our ability to do so. (Image is probably a Passover Seder during the late 1960s.) //

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### EL GRECO’S “FABLE” IN A TIME OF PLAGUE

Naive youth taps his taper on the waiting ember  
Extended by the knave, the pincering fingers of his left hand  
Contorted into a blackened torch reaching up from the shadows.  
Red cap cocked back, he sneers down long teeth  
With a knowing leer as he peers into the flame  
Igniting foolish youth with the dream of immortality.  
Puberty, enthralled, apes the lustful ape  
Straining on its chain, gaping intent over his shoulder,  
Blowing the glowing spark of desire with infected breath,  
Bathing all in the baleful light of a dawning plague,  
The pernicious glow throwing grotesque shadows  
Across faces—the ape and knave flush with expectation,  
The youth pallid, an animated corpse.



across the decades to you who stand here  
astonished and appalled  
watching this danse macabre,  
wondering if this perverse  
Pinocchio-in-reverse  
was ever a real live boy.

**PUPPET SHOW (TO MY FUTURE CARETAKERS IN THE  
ALZHEIMER'S WARD)**

Don't be deceived by this mad marionette  
that you slap down in a wheelchair,  
strapped in lest the cruel Puppeteer yank on synapses  
and send him reeling in a frantic dance,  
then cut the strings to watch him collapse,  
slack limbs fractured,  
in a loose pile of kindling.

Don't be deceived by this filthy sock puppet  
flinging curses, foul-mouthed and tattered, forced by a fiendish hand  
to froth and rage, then clench in a contorted fist  
that an exorcist would flee before it's finally released,  
tossed into a hamper in a crumpled heap.

Don't be deceived by this demented dummy  
babbling Biblical riddles from Revelation,  
some vile ventriloquist throwing voices  
to the void in the tortured hours of night.

Don't be deceived by the Punch-and-Judy pantomime,  
the slapstick shift from sense to violence,  
from drug induced drowse to the domestic abuse  
that drew his final curtain  
and jerked him shrieking to this terminal theater  
of vermin and the absurd.

Instead, listen for the pure soul  
that loved and taught and freed so many  
from the tangled strings that strangled their fates,  
the same soul that casts this voice



**LITTLE PIGS (SONG)**

Little Pigs — [youtube.com/watch?v=UETsZ15kKoA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UETsZ15kKoA)



Illustration: *The Three Little Pigs*  
Leonard Leslie Brooke

**ONSET**

Summer passed slowly, like the tobacco wagons  
Creaking down the lane  
That one cool morning would waken us,  
The sound of their wheels signaling autumn,  
And the coarse leaves drying in the sheds;  
The Queen Anne's lace recited their delicate romance,  
And window panes were chilling to the touch.  
Up ahead, in the thinning air, would be winter,  
And the dogs barking clearly from the next farm  
Across the frozen creek.  
Time was passing, and I wanted it to slow down,  
Afraid that we would squander this precious past  
We had failed to comprehend, as though  
A priest were blowing out the candles after mass,  
And glanced beneath a pew to find  
The white moon of the Host on the stone floor.

**THE ORCHARDS AT FAIRFIELD: JULY 3, 1863<sup>1</sup>**

“Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.”

A little offstage they probably felt  
 When they heard the signal gun’s boom.  
 Over the creaking and clinking of saddles  
 The sound of a door being slammed,  
 The call of something grand and momentous  
 Outside the chores of our lives.  
 Or so I imagine them, slumped in fatigue,  
 Patiently guarding the trains,  
 Torn in their hearts between loved ones they miss  
 And the drama over the hill.  
 An hour from then, in the bee humming trees,  
 The blossoms were blessing their dead.  
 None of us can choose his ground  
 Or the hour of his passing:  
 Regard the charge of The Laurel Brigade  
 On a wildflower hot afternoon,  
 As they swing down the lane in the applesweet air,  
 And carbines rattle the barns,  
 And hear in the silence that followed the volleys,  
 While riderless horses wandered the trees,  
 The murmuring prayer they might have heard too,  
 Of the honey bees far from the hive.

**TACTUS**

I am nominating for sainthood  
 The anonymous young man  
 Who walked up to my daughter  
 At her first fraternity party  
 And asked her very politely,  
 “Would you mind if  
 I held your hand?”  
 This addressed to a young woman  
 Fresh from a small Catholic school  
 Where the prom was a fashion show  
 And the girls danced with each other.

*Will you stay with me?  
 Will you be my love?*

Perhaps I would be less affected  
 By this exceptional incident, but  
 I was speaking on the phone last month  
 With my oldest daughter, the nurse,  
 Ministering to COVID patients  
 In the ICU of a Carolina hospital,  
 And hoping that she had found relief  
 From these agonies of care,  
 I asked about her social life.  
 She replied simply,  
 “Dad, do you know how long  
 It has been since anyone  
 Has even held my hand?”

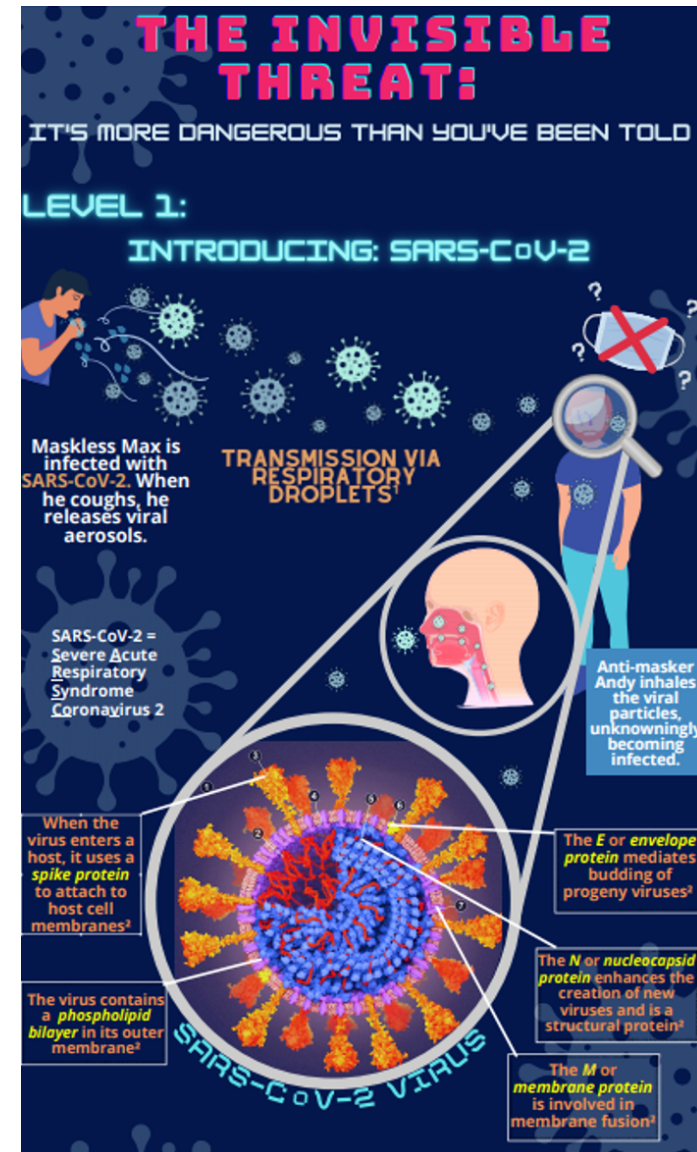
*Will you stay with me?  
 Will you be my love?*

<sup>1</sup> At approximately the same hour that the historic attack known as Pickett’s Charge was unfolding, a brief but savage cavalry skirmish occurred between the Confederate Laurel Brigade and four squadrons of the 6<sup>th</sup> U. S. Cavalry, among some orchards just outside Fairfield, Pa., immediately behind the Confederate lines. Troopers from the 6<sup>th</sup> briefly drew the Laurel Brigade into an ambush before being routed by superior numbers.

All of which reminded me  
Of a long ago morning  
In my classroom when  
A survivor from death row  
Whom I had invited to  
Speak to my students,  
Asked if they had any questions.  
One of them immediately asked  
If the man had become  
A homosexual while in prison.  
The man looked at the student,  
And then asked the boy quietly,  
“Do you think that you could  
Survive for fifteen years without  
Touching another human being?”  
I don’t recall the conversation  
After that. I do remember vividly  
The absolute silence in the room.

*Will you stay with me?  
Will you be my love?*

## A PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT: THE INVISIBLE THREAT



## WHAT TO KNOW:

**THE BASICS:**  
SARS-CoV-2 is a zoonotic virus of the coronaviridae family first identified in Wuhan, Hubei, China in Dec 2019

SARS-CoV-2 causes Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

**ZOOONOTIC:** Can be spread between species<sup>3</sup>

**SYMPTOMS:**  
RESPIRATORY DISTRESS  
FEVER  
DRY COUGH  
FATIGUE  
MUSCLE & JOINT PAIN  
LOSS OF TASTE & SMELL<sup>3</sup>


### THE CORONAVIRIDAE FAMILY<sup>4</sup>

|                                               |                                                         |                                                           |
|-----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>MERS:</b>                                  | <b>SARS-CoV:</b>                                        | <b>SARS-CoV-2:</b>                                        |
| Middle Eastern Respiratory Syndrome (Sep '12) | Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (Nov '02) | Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (Dec '19) |

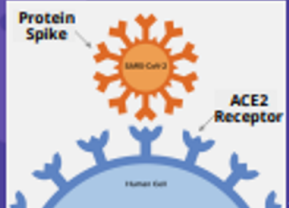
## LEVEL 2: ENTERING THE RESPIRATORY TRACT

Virus particles bind to epithelial (skin) cells in the nasal and oral cavities and replicate unhindered by innate immunity for 2-14 days<sup>1</sup>

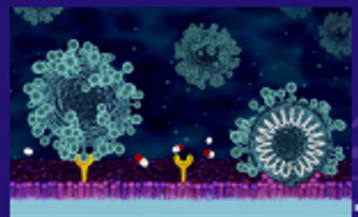
SARS-CoV-2 viral particles traditionally enter through the naso-oral route<sup>1</sup>



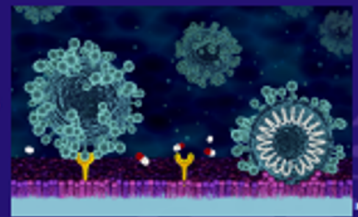
The virus looks for the human ACE2 receptor to bind to and infiltrate the host cell<sup>6</sup>

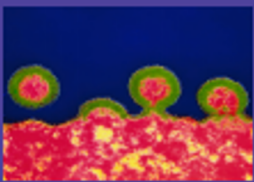


**SARS-CoV-2 will fuse to the host cell membrane to gain entry and inject its genetic material into the host cell as RNA, where it will form an organelle of replication and begin mass producing<sup>6</sup>**




SARS-CoV-2 will fuse to the host cell membrane to gain entry and inject its genetic material into the host cell as RNA, where it will form an organelle of replication and begin mass producing<sup>6</sup>






Viral progeny leave the host cell by budding, which involves taking part of the host cell's membrane leaving it disguised and undetectable to the human immune system<sup>4</sup>


These SARS-CoV-2 progeny continue to the cells of the lungs, where they cause viral sepsis, and may cause organ failure, pulmonary edema, & ARDS (acute respiratory distress syndrome), leaving the infected vulnerable to pneumonia and other secondary infections<sup>4</sup>



## And this can lead to death...



transmitted the virus to several others, including several vulnerable people, resulting in their deaths.




*...or the potential for future complications*

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## LEVEL 3: POTENTIAL DORMANCY

The central nervous system (CNS) has minimal defenses provided by the immune system and instead is protected by several layers, including the BBB. <sup>11</sup>



Upon entering the host, it can move into the optic and olfactory nerves, causing a loss of smell and taste, and into the brain and CNS<sup>12</sup>

# BLOOD BRAIN BARRIER (BBB)



BBB: a complex structure that provides a defense against pathogens in the blood, but also restricts immune cell and mediator access to the CNS<sup>11</sup>

Research shows that the virus can bypass the BBB by going through the otolaryngological system<sup>11</sup>

# LATENCY

persistent viral infection that can inactivate and reactivate itself<sup>14</sup>

After inception, SARS-CoV-2 enters an *active phase* and can possibly proceed to a *latent, or dormant phase*<sup>14</sup>



# REACTIVATION

Given the right conditions, the virus has the potential to reactivate itself, which is triggered by environmental factors. This causes an *upregulation* of the virus' genome<sup>14</sup>

Otolaryngological symptoms show evidence of SAR-CoV-2 attacking the olfactory bulb of the CNS and infecting the peripheral neurons<sup>12</sup>

**anosmia**  
lack of taste

Otolaryngological symptoms involve the eyes, nose, and mouth<sup>12</sup>

**hyposmia**  
lack of smell

This causes a rapid transneuronal spread involving the cortex, basal ganglia, and midbrain (which all stem from the olfactory bulb) that can be *fatal* due to the BBB's lack of immune defenses<sup>12</sup>

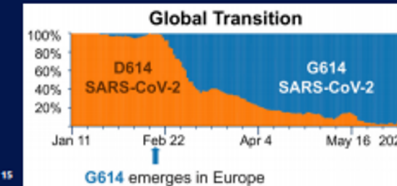
Research is still ongoing

Several reactivation cases suggest possible SARS-CoV-2 latency capabilities

**IT GETS WORSE...**

# LEVEL 4: THE DANGERS OF MUTATIONS

More infections can lead to more mutations, as the increased replication of viruses increases the possibility of errors in cellular replication processes...



... which can lead to more *advantageous* mutations, such as the **G614 mutation** in the spike protein.<sup>15</sup>

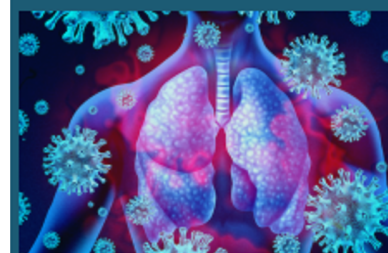
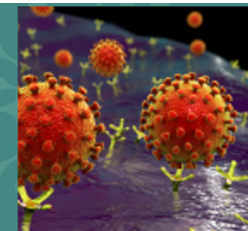
In February 2020, testing showed that the most prevalent strain of the virus had the **D614** spike protein<sup>15</sup>

D614: 80%  
G614: 20%

By May 2020, testing showed that the most prevalent strain had the **G614** spike protein mutation<sup>15</sup>

D614: 10%  
G614: 90%

The G614 mutation allows the virus to *bind* to host membranes easier, thereby *increasing infectivity*<sup>16</sup>



This means that if someone is exposed to SARS-CoV-2, they're *more likely to be infected*<sup>16</sup>



The bubble you **actually** have

There may be other molecular advantages for the virus due to this mutation. Research is still ongoing

As scary as this is, you can protect yourself and decrease advantageous mutations and infection.

## LEVEL 5:

### MASK IT OR CASKET

IT'S DIFFICULT TO OVERSTATE THE IMPORTANCE OF MASKS DURING THIS PANDEMIC. BUT LET'S TRY ANYWAY

IN LEUNG ET AL. (2020), RESEARCHERS TRIED TO DETECT VIRAL PARTICLES IN TWO DIFFERENT GROUPS OF PEOPLE: MASK-WEARING AND MASKLESS PATIENTS<sup>26</sup>

RESEARCHERS COULD NOT DETECT THE VIRUS IN AEROSOLS AND RESPIRATORY DROPLETS AROUND SURGICAL MASK-WEARING STUDY PARTICIPANTS BUT WERE ABLE TO DETECT VIRAL PARTICLES IN 40% OF MASKLESS STUDY PARTICIPANTS<sup>26</sup>



## DIFFERENT TYPES OF MASKS OFFER DIFFERENT DEGREES OF PROTECTION

IN ANOTHER STUDY, RESEARCHERS RANDOMLY ASSIGNED HEALTHCARE WORKERS TO THREE TREATMENTS WHILE TREATING CLINICAL RESPIRATORY ILLNESS (CRI)

THE THREE TREATMENTS WERE SURGICAL MASKS, N95 RESPIRATORS, OR JUDICIOUS USE OF N95 RESPIRATORS DURING HIGH-RISK ACTIVITIES

THE STUDY FOUND THE RATE OF CRI TO BE HIGHEST IN THE SURGICAL MASK GROUP (17%), AND LOWEST IN THE N95 GROUP (7.2%), WITH THE TARGETED USE OF N95 TO BE IN THE MIDDLE (11.8%)

N95 MASKS SAFEGUARD THE WEARER THE BEST COMPARED TO OTHER MASK TYPES AND USAGE BEHAVIORS<sup>21</sup>



**A SIMPLE SURGICAL MASK IS BETTER THAN NO MASK**



IN THE ABSENCE OF ANY OTHER RELIABLE SAFETY MEASURES, MASKS ARE THE ONLY SAFEGUARD BETWEEN YOU AND THE VIRUS.



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## CONTRIBUTORS

**Champ Atlee** lives in Lawrenceville, New Jersey with his wife Annette and daughter Olivia. He is the author of *Reynolds' Keepsake* and *The Theater of Memory: The Poems of Champ Atlee*, and his poems have appeared in the journals *America*, *Civil War Magazine*, and *The Amherst Review* among others. He teaches at The Lawrenceville School, where he is Director of the James Merrill Poetry Seminar.

**Estelle Bajou** is a French-American polymath. Her work is featured or forthcoming in *Heavy Feather Review*, *Broad River Review*, *South Florida Poetry Journal*, *About Place Journal*, *The Abstract Elephant*, *The Closed Eye Open*, and *This Broken Shore*. Her acting and composing work in theater, film, and television has earned her critical praise and several awards and nominations including *The Stage's* Award for Best Acting (Edinburgh Fringe) and a 2016 Drama Desk Award nomination for Outstanding Music in a Play alongside one of her heroes, Philip Glass. She's also a visual and interdisciplinary artist, and a carpenter. She holds an MFA in Acting from The New School, and a BA in Theater and Creative Writing, which she earned at age nineteen from Bard College at Simon's Rock. Raised in a furniture factory town in the North Carolina mountains, she now lives in New York City with a bunch of houseplants. Visit her at [estellebajou.com](http://estellebajou.com).

**Christine Chin** is a 24-year old student who studied Biology at Middlesex College and Exercise Science and Psychology at Rutgers University. She is currently working as a Medical Assistant for an Urgent Care. In the future, Christine hopes to be a Physician Assistant.

**Gary S. Crawford**, a Jersey Shore native clam-digger, is also a local historian, editor, and award-winning author. He has published many articles on historical subjects, including the "Historical Vignettes" column in Gannett's *Asbury Park Press* and other local newspapers as well as several national magazines. Considered an authority on the Morro Castle ship disaster of 1934, he has published a companion book to his lecture series on the disaster. He co-authored the *Arcadia Images*

*of America* book on Bradley Beach NJ. He has also published many short stories in several anthologies. Crawford has a degree in business administration, minoring in creative writing. Check out his blog: “Creative Bellyaching” at [garyscrawford.blogspot.com](http://garyscrawford.blogspot.com).

**Wendy Lynn Decker** is the author of the young adult novel, *Sweet Tea* and middle-grade novel, *The Bedazzling Bowl*. Her short stories and articles have appeared in *American Writer's Review*, *Cup of Comfort*, *Cross Times*, and others. She is an international podcast host for *Legal Wolf Podcast (all things mental health)* and an adjunct professor at Middlesex College. She has taught classes online, remote, on campus as well as the Red Seat to Sailors and Marines. Learn more about her at: [wendylynndeckerauthor.com](http://wendylynndeckerauthor.com).

**Sallie DeVecchio** was born in Arkansas and found herself living in NJ way back when Nixon was still the prez and hasn't found a reason to leave. She has taught English at Middlesex College for over 30 years. Her favorites courses are Introduction to Shakespeare, World Literature: Ancient to 1500, and Writing About Crime, all of which have some special twists to them. At the millennium, her poem “Cyber Kid” was published in *Middlesex: A Literary Journal*, and a few years later a few poems dedicated to her dad were published here as well. Recently, she had a piece published in the school's humanities journal. She has written quite a few (a lot of) works--poems and stories--about life, death, her travels, and the fear of bugs. She is quite proud of being one of the co-founders, with Mat Spano, of Middlesex College's faculty/staff talent shows which ran for several years.

**Emanuel di Pasquale** is a renowned poet and translator, as well as retired Professor of English at Middlesex College. Born in Sicily in 1943, DiPasquale came to America as a teenager. His published translations include Dante's *La Vita Nuova / The New Life* (with Bruno Alemanni) (Xenos Press, 2012) and Silvio Ramat's *Sharing a Trip: Selected Poems* (Bordighera Press, 2001), winner of the Raiziss/de Palchi Fellowship. In 1998 he won the Bordighera Poetry Prize for his translation of Joe Salerno's *Song of the Tulip Tree*. DiPasquale has published over a dozen books of his own poetry, including *Love Lines* (Bordighera Press, 2013), *Self-portrait* (The New York Quarterly Press, 2014), *Poems in Sicily and America* (BLAST Press, 2016), and *A Prayer* (Guernica Editions, 2017).

His most recent book is *Counting the Stars* (BLAST Press, 2020). For several years, he served as poetry editor of Chelsea, a major NYC literary journal. He lives by the ocean in Long Branch, NJ, where he serves as Poet Laureate of that community.

**Tara Farber** has devoted a lifetime to reading and writing, which ultimately led her to earn degrees in English Literature, Comparative Literature, and Middle Eastern Studies. She now shares her love of all things written with her students at Middlesex College. When not teaching, Tara enjoys traveling, cooking, and being crafty. Bon Jovi is her muse for all things, and she has a strong opinion about the Oxford Comma. She lives in Hightstown with her husband and two sweet Boston Terriers.

**Patricia A. Florio**, born in Brooklyn and a Norman Mailer scholarship winner, resides at the Jersey Shore with her husband and her daughter's lab Zeke. She received her master's in fine art from Wilkes University's Creative Writing programs. Covid-19 hiatus has given her the gift of art and painting.

**Gregg Glory [Gregg G. Brown]** has devoted his life to poetry since happening across a haiku by Moritake, to wit:

*Leaves*  
*float back up to the branch--*  
*Ah! butterflies.*

He runs the micro-publishing house **BLAST PRESS**, which has published over two dozen authors in the past 25 years. He still composes poems on his departed father's clipboard, which he's had since High School. He is a two-time Asbury Park Poet Laureate awarded by the Asbury Music Awards.

**Michael Greenhouse** taught Sociology at Middlesex College from September 1971 until his retirement in June 2015. He started painting and drawing after his marriage to Leah Ghiradella, an English Professor at Middlesex, in September 2000. He had an art show in Newtown, PA, in October 2011 and one at the Metuchen Library in April 2016. He continues to paint and enjoy his retirement.



**Hank Kalet** is a poet, freelance writer, and Economic Needs Reporter, *NJ Spotlight*. He teaches writing and reading at Middlesex College, and is a part-time lecturer in journalism at Rutgers University. His poetry has appeared in numerous small press journals and his journalism appears in *The Progressive*, *NJ Spotlight*, *In These Times*, and elsewhere. His chapbook, *Certainties and Uncertainties*, was published by Finishing Line Press in 2010. *As an Alien in a Land of Promise* is a book-length exploration in poetic form of the failures in American capitalism and the continued predominance of homelessness in America. It is based on a year of visits to the now-closed Tent City homeless encampment in Lakewood, NJ, with photographer Sherry Rubel and filmmaker Jack Ballo. Sections of this poem have been published in *Serving House Journal* and *Blue Collar Review*. His most recent book of poetry is *Stealing Copper* (Finishing Line Press, 2015).

**Karen Larsen** is a 33-year old student who studied Biology at Middlesex College and went on to become a Rutgers SEBS graduate. She is currently working towards her DVM degree at Ross University's School of Veterinary Medicine. She wants to be a veterinarian that works worldwide on the OneHealth initiative.

**Paige B. L'Hommedieu** is a longtime friend and supporter of Middlesex College, having served on the Foundation's Board of Directors for eight years. The L'Hommedieu family has supported and continues to support scholarship funding for Middlesex College students.

**Susana Orion** was born with the name Susana Orion, but after moving to New York at 21, she got the nickname "Sirena." She is a lover of music and the galaxy, sometimes she wishes that she could just talk to the moon. Her native language is Spanish but these days, it is almost like she is not even bilingual. She is the oldest of five children, independent.

**Prajakta Paranjpe** grew up in India, loving languages and soaking them in through their colorful literature: Marathi, Hindi, English, Sanskrit and German. She enjoys reading, writing and translating to make cultural bridges between countries. At home, bossing around her son to speak more Marathi gets her nowhere, but she revels in his English

vocabulary at ten, which far exceeds her own when she was twice as old. She obtained MA and M.Phil. from University of Pune, followed by Ed.M. in English Education from Rutgers and has taught at Middlesex since 2014.

**Frances Ruff** is a recent graduate of Middlesex College who found refuge in a life-changing college poetry class taught by a caring professor while trying to process the changes around her created by the COVID pandemic. Through a writing assignment, Frances was able to find her voice through poetry allowing her to deal with the "new normal" and offer three simple words of advice; "Just be kind." Frances, a self-confessed HGTV junkie, resides in Piscataway, NJ, with her husband and their two sons.

**Julia Spano** Julia Spano is an aspiring nerd in her sophomore year of her psychology degree at Middlesex College, in love with cats, cooking and rock music. She has only one publication with *The Blue Marble Review* but is looking to add some more. She has a great relationship with her mom and, similarly, is very grateful that her father is nothing like Snuff Bundy.

**Mathew V. Spano** has published poetry, short stories, and essays in various journals over the last twenty-five years, many of which are included in his two books *Imps* (BLAST PRESS, 2018) and *Hellgrammite* (BLAST Press, 2016), both of which are available through Amazon and Barnes & Noble. A musician and songwriter, he has recorded songs now featured on most major digital music platforms under his pseudonym *Scribe 67*. In addition to his creative work, he earned his Ph.D. in Comparative Literature from Rutgers University Graduate School, New Brunswick, and he has subsequently published scholarly articles in comparative literature and psychology journals. He has taught English Composition and Mythology in Literature as a full-time professor for over twenty-five years at Middlesex College in Edison, NJ where he now serves as the English Dept. Chair.

**Waez Umer** studied Biology at Middlesex College and is currently in a gap year between college and medical school. He is currently working as the Chief of Staff to the Chief Medical and Strategy Officer of Hyperfine. Waez will be starting medical school at Rutgers NJMS in the fall.

**Shirley Russak Wachtel** has been a professor of English at Middlesex College for the past thirty years. She is also the author of several novels, including *My Mother's Shoes*, a memoir of her mother's experience in the Holocaust and as an immigrant living in the United States. Other books include *The Music Makers*, *This I Know*, *Three for a Dollar and other Stories*; as well as children's books and *In The Mellow Light*, an anthology of original poetry. In addition, she is the co-author of two volumes of *Spotlight on Reading*, a college-level reading text. She is also the host of a podcast featuring inspiring individuals, called *EXTRAordinary People*. Dr. Wachtel received her Doctor of Letters degree from Drew University in 2002. In 2017, she received the Faculty Scholar Award from Middlesex College for her writing and her work as a presenter of humanitarian issues.

**Daniel Weeks** is the author of *For Now: New & Collected Poems, 1979-2017* (Coleridge Institute Press, 2017), which includes nine previously published collections in addition to hitherto unpublished work. His poetry has appeared in *The Cimarron Review*, *Plainsongs*, *The Stillwater Review*, *Pebble Lake Review*, *The California Quarterly*, *Mudfish*, *Puckerbrush Review*, *Zone 3*, *Slant*, and many other publications. His work has also appeared in a number of anthologies, including *Wild Poets of Ecstasy: An Anthology of Ecstatic Poetry* (Pelican Pond, 2011), *On Human Flourishing: A Poetry Anthology* (McFarland, 2015), and *Palisades, Parkways & Pinelands: An Anthology of Contemporary New Jersey Poets* (Blast Press, 2015). His translations of French symbolist poetry have appeared in *Blue Unicorn*, *This Broken Shore*, and *Middlesex*. He is also the author of *A More Prosaic Light: Essays, Revisions, and Reviews, 1987-2015* (Coleridge Institute Press, 2015) and *Not for Filthy Lucre's Sake: Richard Saltar and the Antiproprietary Movement in East New Jersey, 1665-1710* (Lehigh University Press, 2001). His most recent publication is *Nearer Home: Short Histories, 1987-2019* ([Lulu.com](https://www.lulu.com), 2020).

**Amanda Winter** is a 24-year-old student working toward her Associate's in Writing at Middlesex College. Currently employed as an Office Assistant, she hopes to obtain a career in helping young children develop reading and writing skills.

**Daniel Zimmerman**, retired Professor of English at Middlesex College, served as Associate Editor of the issue of *Anonym* that published Ezra Pound's last canto, and as editor of *The Western Gate*, *Britannia*, and *College English Notes*. His poetry has appeared in many magazines and anthologies and, in 1997, he invented an anagrammatical poetic form, Isotopes. His works include *Perspective*, a curriculum of the soul #20 (Canton, NY: Institute of Further Studies, 1974), *See All the People*, illustrated by Richard Sturm (Toronto: Open Studio, 1976—now available as an eBook), the trans-temporal *Blue Horitals* with John Clarke (Oasii: Amman, Jordan, 1997), *ISOTOPES* ((London: frAme, 2001), and online: *ISOTOPES2* (Chicago: Beard of Bees, 2007). His book *Post-Avant* (2002, Introduction by Robert Creeley) won the Editor's Choice Award from Pavement Saw Press in Ohio.

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