



*Hedera
helix*

2024





Hedera helix

Sigma Kappa Delta's
Literary Journal
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2024

Editor:
Bradley Sides,
Calhoun Community College

Purpose of Sigma Kappa Delta

Sigma Kappa Delta serves two-year college students who achieve academic excellence in English. Members need not be English majors but must demonstrate an interest and proficiency in literature and writing.

ΣΚΔ offers members opportunities for:

- Scholarships • Awards • Leadership • Competition
- Publication • Travel • National Conferences • Networking

Visit English2.org for complete eligibility requirements.

Hedera helix — the scientific name for English Ivy and the national plant of ΣΚΔ symbolizes resilience and individual growth. In keeping with the Greek spelling, we use the lower case “h” for helix.

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Editor's Note

It was only a few weeks ago that I was in St. Louis, with so many of you, at the annual International Sigma Kappa Delta Convention. While there, I kept hearing the popular nickname of the city - the "Gateway of the West." As I'm sitting here making final touches to this new issue of *Hedera helix*, I keep thinking about how this phrase ties so closely back to literature.

We write (and make art) because these very things serve as a gateway to ourselves - to understanding one another.

Through what we create, we better understand love, loss, pain, and pleasure.

The beautiful and inspiring work collected in these pages showcases how we seek to make sense of the bigger world.

I hope you enjoy reading this edition of our literary journal as much as I did. I think you will.

Keep creating!
Bradley Sides, SKD Editor



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These Metaphors, My Body

Mariah Crawford



I find it easiest to describe my chronic illness in metaphors. When asked how it feels to hold a chronic illness within my body, I perform a magic trick of words. With my words, the lights dim, the smoke machine whirls to life, and I become the wizard hiding behind the velvet curtain. Pay no mind to what you think you see. Look how I lay the yellow bricks with my words. See how the flying monkeys lay still at my command. Whenever I try to state it plainly, stripping it of all adornments and illusions, the words become a dry rag in my mouth. Every syllable comes out diluted and muffled. The polaroid in my hand develops backwards. The portrait I paint only obscures the underpainting. The words, said over and over again, chase their tails and come up with air.

Before I had a diagnosis, I had believed in the simplicity of language. I had believed in the power of a name. In all the horror movies I had watched as a young adult, the thrashing and foul-mouthed demon could only be exorcized from the young girl's body once its name had been spoken. No matter how much holy water or fervent whispered prayers dampened the air, only the unbearable weight of hearing its own name could expel it completely. At a sleepover when I was a child, I remember being shoved into the small hallway bathroom while a group of barefoot, pajama-clad girls held their ears to the door outside. I had been dared to say a name three times in the mirror. Sleepover rules were cruel and binding. Even as my muscles twitched with the urge to bolt, I stood with my hands on the sink basin to steady myself as I tried to say her name. Though I couldn't make out the mirror or even a glint of porcelain, my imagination was able to conjure a fully formed apparition just from the name existing in my mind. Bloody Mary...Bloody Mary...I couldn't say it a third time. In that dark, cramped bathroom I felt the



power of her name and the flimsiness of the veil that separated her from our night of Disney channel movies and popcorn bracelets. Though I emerged from the bathroom to the disappointed faces of my friends, I felt I had saved our evening from something we didn't want to face.

When I began searching for a diagnosis for the kaleidoscope of symptoms my body had presented me, I still held the same belief in the power of a name. I imagined the loops of identical waiting rooms finally unraveling with a name I could call out into the darkness. I didn't know if the name would expel or reveal, I only knew that once named it would no longer be a figment of an imagination left to its own devices. It wasn't that I was unafraid of what could come crawling out of the black, summoned by a white doctor's coat, just that whatever materialized would finally have defined edges. Whatever shape took form in front of me, however large and gnashing the teeth, I would be ready to stare into its red eyes and open mouth.

What I didn't realize, heaving myself off of the crinkly paper-covered chair in the doctor's office, was that the name of my chronic illness was not a crucifix I could wield against it. Instead, the strange combination of letters formed a Pandora's box I could never close again. The initial relief of hearing it spoken quickly dissipated when a landscape of medical jargon and Google searches unfolded in front of me. I said the name as many times as my breath would allow, yet the only image staring back at me from the mirror was my own body. As the days went on, I tried to picture myself as the heroine of her own odyssey, but the days before me weren't able to be vanquished or conquered. Each sunrise opened like the shaking of a magic eight ball, asking will you behave today? and my body responding not likely.

When the dust of new tests and old cures finally settled, I tried to use the language that had been given to me and move forward. Even if I didn't believe in the power of a name anymore, I had hoped it would hold sway with others. If speaking the name of my chronic illness into the



mirror did nothing but fog up the glass, maybe speaking the name to someone else would allow me to see the reflection in their eyes. Unfortunately, the more I employed the language given, the more I could see the word chronic rattling around in other's mouths like a tongue twister. It's hard to conceive of a story that has no ending. It's even harder to tell it. The majority of us would prefer our narratives presented as neatly tied bows instead of a box of tangled ribbons we have to attempt to make sense of. In the failings of this language, those around me attempted to invent their own. They employed new words like resilient, brave, and sensitive and pinned them to their portraits of me. For a while, I tried to own these words too. I tried to plant them like flags into the soft soil of my body, but they were never able to lay claim. Nothing captured the truth. Nothing captured the way I was able to recognize the texture of my own skin and yet my body still felt unfamiliar to me. Nothing captured the way the light played tricks on my own reflection, sometimes showing a young woman and sometimes a caged animal.

After years of being given words that did nothing to describe something I've grown to know intimately, I learned my own. I began to accept the ways in which every light comes in slant and every shadow can be a trick. I began to accept the way chronic illness shapeshifts as soon as it's pinned beneath the glass. I began to accept that to explain my chronic illness is to embrace the illusions of contradictions. My body is all at once a fortress and a prison. My days are all a balance of thriving and rotting. All wins, big and small, are slightly burned around the edges. These metaphors may not capture what a chronic illness is to a doctor or to a friend, but these metaphors speak the language of my body in a way it's never heard before.



How Did I Get Here? Brycie Bowles



One moment I am almost dancing as I socialize amongst a group of acquaintances, feeling inspired and motivated to experience the moment at hand. Next, I am burdened by thoughts that overwhelm my being. Suddenly the pressure of being in control or hosting a few, or many, has become much more than I can handle. The exact thing I had looked forward to for days, weeks, or months has become the exact thing I can't get away from quick enough. A constant need for reassurance cripples my confidence in simple social gatherings that only require my presence. How did I get here?

A few years prior to this moment I remember sleeping outside of a Taiwanese restaurant in the company of another homeless fellow that went by the name of "Squigy." I had met him about an hour earlier that day and managed to convince him to go inside the 7-Eleven and to buy me a forty-ounce Steele Reserve. After all, at the time I was underage and could not do so myself. Squigy had been homeless in the Dallas-Fort Worth area for forty years or so and was no stranger to the street life. It didn't take much to coerce him. Shortly after obtaining a few sips of the bittersweet muck, he pointed over to the mini-mall strip and reassured me I'd be safe there. Additionally, he could get us a few bites to eat, a "win-win" situation. I was not the least bit reluctant to follow; in fact, I had what I needed for the moment. The forty ounces of liquid confidence would cover my slump from the three-day binge, and a safe place to rest would momentarily suffice my need for security. As we arrived on the scene, it was clear that the strip was a common area for people like us to sit down and take a load off. As I looked down the way, I noticed several others set up shop in hopes to receive some scraps and change from those who were visiting at their own leisure. It isn't clear who the real

victims were the homeless and hungry or the men and women giving their hard-earned money to beggars who spoke ill of them when they went inside. This isn't the case for all people who find themselves in this unsettling situation. Many like myself though choose their addiction over stability and structure, but Squigy was a different character from the rest. He was more than content being this way and truly did not desire to change. He was happy and free; he was truly a vagabond. Squigy taught me that the quickest way to a person's heart, or their pocket, was to shower them with uncomfortable praises until they broke. He shouted out compliments at every patron walking by saying things like "you're so beautiful" or "you're the most b-e-u-tiful woman I have ever seen." He said almost the exact same thing to every person, not even waiting for them to fully get into the door before he said it to the next. As I examined the faces of his subjects, I noticed a discomfort in their expression or even a hint of disgust. To my surprise, thirty minutes and half a bottle later, there were two hot Styrofoam plates handed to us from a kind stranger from inside. I couldn't remember if this was one that had passed by before. At this point, my vision was blurred, and I was beginning to see double. Soon there was an outreach group that came by handing out pamphlets and their phone numbers as if I had a phone to call or a ride to get to their facility. I knew they meant well, and I genuinely needed their help, but at that moment, I was far past easy communication and their training probably was not for the likes of someone like me. After they left, I stumbled over to my little spot by Squigy, who sat right next to the door which chimed with every customer as they came in and went out, where I fell into a deep sleep that was well overdue.

Sometime later I am awakened by a well-dressed Latino woman who is accompanied by a man wearing what I believe to be a suit. As I squinted my eyes trying to make out my surroundings, I looked down to see the forty still in my lap, about a quarter bottle left, and Squigy was gone. The Latino woman asked me over and over "what are you



doing out here?” and “what is your name?” As I came to full consciousness, I realized that she wasn’t angry and was also grateful she also wasn’t the police. After telling her my name and that I was a “nomad” from out of town, she quickly helped me get to my feet and told me she would allow me to stay one night with her. That someone like me shouldn’t be out there. Though this was a kind comment, what set me apart from the others wasn’t clear to me. The woman’s name was Silvia Silva, and the man that accompanied her was her bodyguard, which she pronounced “body wad.” I particularly liked that about Silvia Silva. I admired the fact she picked up a random person from the side of the road, but I especially was fond of the way she spoke and carried herself. She clarified she was a wealthy woman who formerly was an actress from Argentina. She had now retired and settled to become a real estate agent. Throughout the day, she took me to a few places, not sure if it would be called uptown or downtown, but all were elegant, and I was clearly out of place. Unashamedly, she continued to show me her lavish style of living and allowed me the honor of seeing her penthouse. She proudly exclaimed it was the nicest penthouse in Fort Worth, and I too think it was so. She explained to me her dreams had carried her this far, and the next item on her list of success would be checked when her Lamborghini arrived. I was in awe of this woman and even dumbstruck to believe that a famous actress found me outside of a Taiwanese restaurant and wanted to spend the day with me. I almost think she saw me kind of like the actress in *Pretty Woman* and knew that one day I could become a success story too.

I am sure it was clear by this point though I did not make it verbally known that I was struggling with more than a bad roll of the dice, but I was also addicted to hard drugs and was beginning to come crashing down. I realized that the “body wad” was also Silva’s secret love, and I believed he would do anything to protect her, especially from someone like me. At some point, they decided it was best for me to stay at another location. They drove me across town to her real estate office. It was



furnished as a normal office would be. In the greeting area on the room's right side, there was a desk equipped with a desktop for the receptionist to sign in guests. Then centered against the wall was a comfortable couch waiting to seat the guests who were eager to buy their next forever home. Hastily they showed me around the area. Across the breezeway, there was a separate building that was under construction. Kindly, and with warm expressions, Silvia explained they wanted to design an apartment specifically for me in hopes of a fresh start. I was astounded at their offer and almost skeptical. How could they do such a spectacular thing for someone they just met? It felt as if almost instantly it became nightfall and they had to leave. Upon their departure, they left me a sandwich and explained to me that if I tried to leave or open any windows the alarms would sound, and the police would come. In that moment, everything changed, and the butterflies were gone.

As soon as the door closed, I began to feel claustrophobic and as though I was trapped. My addiction began speaking to me through the walls, growing an unsettling paranoia and an itch to get high that yearned to be scratched. The wet, ragged boots that carried me throughout that venturesome day caused an infection on my ankle to eat away a dime-sized hole. I was unsure what had caused it, possibly a spider bite or even staph. Whatever had happened, I was convinced it was causing me to hallucinate and that everyone, even the bewildering Silvia Silva was against me, and I had to escape. Months prior to this excursion, I had begun hearing voices that dictated most of my bad decisions and narrated my day-to-day life. The suspense grew inside of the walls, and the office began to shrink. I frantically began to turn inside out all the cabinets, vitamins, and files as if any of that had the answers to escape the life I was looking for. I screamed internally, panicking as though I was drowning. I ran from door to door, searching for a way out. I began checking the windows to see if any were unlocked, only to find they all were. I noticed that every window, but one had a security sticker on it. Tired of pacing, I took my chances and slowly unlocked the window,



gently sliding it open. With every inch, I awaited the alarm. When it was open enough for me to climb out, I mangled my way through and ran as quickly as I could. When I was far enough from the building that it could not see me, I decided it was time for me to get help. The voices were screaming and taunting me, tempting me to end it all. To silence the chatter and ensure that no one or nothing could imprison me anymore. I was afraid to die. I was afraid of them. I was afraid of myself. I was a stranger in a strange city, now completely alone again. I made an absolute decision that I would walk until I found the hospital, no matter how long it took, and no matter how lost and completely desperate I felt, I would keep going. A few hours later, I walked through the same neighborhood I had seen twice before. Subsequently, a man living on that block pulled up knowing I was lost and asked if I needed help. I explained to him that I had an infection on my ankle and that it was urgent that I get to the hospital, making sure not to mention my recent escape from the office of world renown Silvia Silva. The man chuckled as he explained I was walking in the wrong direction, but he would be happy to transport me to care as he worked as a chef across the street and was currently on his way there.

Upon my arrival at the hospital, I was greeted by the crisp, cold hospital air and a woman in scrubs clutching her clipboard demanding my reason for visiting. I explained to her that the infection on my ankle was causing me to hallucinate and the voices had gotten out of control, that they were pushing me too far. Also, I reinsured her I wasn't ready to kill myself, but the thought was running rapidly through my mind and was disturbing my inner peace. Quickly, the woman escorted me to a room where I was asked a series of questions, then into a smaller room, where they took my bag, then into an even smaller room, where they kindly asked me to remove my shoelaces and took my belt. They then exchanged my wet shoes for a pair of blue-gripped socks and gave me a blanket for my stay to be more comfortable. Evaluations were processed, diagnoses were set, and a series of medications began to treat my



peculiar sickness and mental instability. For a short period of time, I felt safe, comfortable, and accepted. The life inside of a psychiatric hospital can only be understood by the one experiencing it. I left there a month later, faking my sanity, only to be released in time to make my son's birthday. Unfortunately, this wouldn't be my last stay at a place like the John Peter Smith Hospital in Fort Worth, but it would be the first time I felt like I was going to be okay, that one day I could be free.

It's now five years later, and I no longer suffer with hallucinations, voices, addiction, or suicidal thoughts. I truly have been radically changed, and it was not by my own power or might. I am completely free. Yet sometimes, every now and then, I still find myself lost in the moment, anxious, drowning, suffocating, and wondering how I got here? Then, gently, I am reminded of the memories, and I smile to myself and think again how did I get here?

The River's Guide Kimberly Gomez



People outside Arkansas view it as the home of the hillbillies. Though that is true for some, it also features gorgeous mountains and evergreen trees. However, in between these luscious forests, you are luckier finding the best sight in the state, rivers. Rivers to me are not only the heart of Arkansas, but where my core sits.

As you walk toward a river, sharp rocks unrelentingly stab the bottom of your feet. Each step hurts without proper footing and brings life's painful challenges to mind. Growing up in a traditional Salvadorian household did not prepare me for the American lifestyle. I was taught to trust nobody except my family and avoid exposing vulnerabilities to "outsiders." This led to shallow relationships and self-reliance keeping me afloat. As my friends could complain about the rocks hurting their feet, I had to act as if I were walking on clouds. This came falling apart the day I was sexually assaulted by someone I thought was family, but what could I do? I was supposed to trust family and let it go. After two years, the weight on my shoulders seemed to give out, and I entrusted this horrible secret to my closest friend. I had failed in my parents' eyes, so I silently promised to never tell again. I recollected myself and kept walking with pieces of me left behind.

Even with the harsh path you must go through, the closer you get to the riverbank, the calming melody of the stream grows. These sounds temporarily relieve the pain as music has always soothed mine. Through my struggles learning how to effectively communicate with others, I have found solace in music. I have played the cello for 7 years, but it has never lost value. My issues dissipate, and life becomes just me and the cello. This desire to only play for myself changed once I became first chair of my school's concertina orchestra. What was a solo became an ensemble.



I learned to speak through bow strokes and crescendos which helped me appreciate listening to others instead of forcing myself to be alone.

Once you reach the river's edge, you can find a spot to rest. You take a breath and let yourself take in the environment flourishing nearby. Birds chirp overhead, and crickets sing below. Nature's way of communicating seems simple, but humans are an exception. One night, I was scrolling through YouTube and saw the title "Attachment Styles" based on Bowlby's Attachment Theory. It stated that your behavior in relationships depends on your child development. This video created a spiral of research. Why am I closed off? Why do I always feel alone? I had to know.

Soon, I had found the root of my issues. My upbringing. I will be the first to say I love my parents, but they have made mistakes. However, I can take it upon myself to find the right footing for the rocks of my past that still live underneath. To do so, I have forced myself to let my weaknesses show out. It was awkward at first, but beneficial. My friends began to help me anytime the rivers inside me began to storm, and I more often heard the stream's music. Though I know the storms will keep coming, I learned that rivers forever find their place of peace again.

With the benefit greater communication brought to my life, I wondered how many other people were still struggling through the storms. Were they all affected by their childhood? Unlike me, several people live with speech disorders such as stuttering or apraxia. To aid them, speech pathologists improve their patients' physical communication skills. If I could do the same, I would have the chance to help another person appreciate the beauty of their own life's river path. Everyone deserves a guide through them, and I aspire to be one through the expertise of speech pathology.

youll be a man my son
Sundance Hollingsworth



what does it mean to be a man
when everyone can
see that he
is struggling
when the nights
are longer than the days

what does it mean to be a man
when he paints his nails
and feels attractive
in eyeliner

what does it mean to be a man
when he wakes up and thinks
im still here goddamn it
and sometimes he wakes up and thinks
goddamn it
im still here

when all the men around him
like to turn wrench and screw
and all he really wants to do
is turn a certain phrase or two
to make something thats bright and new
and he doesnt know the
first thing about guy shit
anyway

what does it mean to be a man
when he is told
men dont cry
but
he has to take a knee
at videos of dogs learning to love again

when he is uncomfortable
in his skin but
right at home
in his mind

when the smell of rain on pavement
excites him in a
sleepovers and saturday morning cartoons
kind of way

when he looks at himself
in the mirror and
hes been told all his life
through candy coated screens and magazines
that
real men
look like greek myth and
he thinks that
he could maybe see dionysus with the gut if he squints and
thats not really what they meant and
besides hes too short anyway and
why is it that his face is clear but his thighs are riddled with fossilized
puberty and
does his smile look weird and should he get another piercing or is that
overkill and



why wont his beard just grow in regularly and

what does it mean to be a man?

fuck if i know man

i just work here



Career Day Rose O'Neal



When I was in middle school,
the smartest girl in my class wanted
to be a dentist.

On career day, she brought floss
toothpaste
and a toothbrush
in the pockets
of a little white lab coat
her mother had sewn for her.

I forgot it was career day
and I didn't have a mom
to sew white lab coats
so I lied
took out a pen
and a notebook
and told her I was going to be an author.

She played along,
asked for my autograph
to show off in the future
so when you get famous,
I can say I was your first fan.



She smiled at me—
all brackets and wires—
and you know, god,
I think she was the first person
I ever loved.



Noviembre
Roberto Díaz



Un paso en el desierto lleno de mis sueños,
con las estrellas iluminando mi corazón.
Una y otra respiración da vida a tu jardín bello;
mis lágrimas claman por tus abrazos.

Quiero seguir soñando a tu lado
y no quiero que la vida me ponga alto.
Mi alma anhela regresar el tiempo,
aunque el juego ya ha terminado.

Una voz del cielo me llama,
resucitando la juventud en tu canto.
Me vuelvo, para verte una vez más,
mas solo tu memoria es lo que queda.



Dig up Shakespeare and Kill Him Again: The Iagos are Taking Over Jesse Sneed



In the mid-20th century, a style of literary criticism called “The Death of the Author”, named after French theorist Roland Barthes’s essay of the same name, gained some popularity. Adherents to this theory asked readers not to simply try to decipher what the author of a text’s original intention was, but rather to analyze the text itself in its intersection with the reader’s time, place, and cultural context. William Shakespeare’s *Othello* has been picked over countless times by innumerable scholars, but a reader in 2023 might notice some dynamics of wounded masculinity in *Othello* that are surprisingly modern. Viewing *Othello* through this lens reveals that the character of Iago using Roderigo for his own vengeful aims parallels how misogynistic and reactionary factions in our current society have utilized the fervor of sexually frustrated young men in the “incel” and similar communities to further their aims.

Roderigo is an interesting character to study in this context because he is often either ignored or played for comic relief. His marginalization in the play echoes the marginalization of other sexually frustrated young men who call themselves “incels”, or involuntary celibates. The men in this community are joined together in their collective despair over being rejected by women. Roderigo similarly feels wounded by Desdemona’s rejection, which leads him into the grasp of Iago who promises him a way to alleviate his pain. At the end of Act 1, Roderigo is despondent and threatening suicide, telling Iago that “[i]t is silliness to live, when to live is torment, and then have we a prescription to die when death is our physician” (1.3.305-306). In Roderigo’s mind, death is preferable to living with the torment of romantic rejection. The resignation he is feeling is referred to colloquially in the incel community as “taking the black pill”, which is a term coined in the same vein as similar red pill/blue pill

allusions to the 1999 movie *The Matrix* that are popular in those communities. Black pill incels are the members of that community who have resigned themselves fester in their misery. They are furious that they have not received the attention that they desire (or believe that they are owed) from women and believe that their only recourse is violence against others or their own death. Marginalization, desperation, and resignation are the millstones around the neck of both Roderigo and modern incels, and they can feel themselves drowning, making them desperate to relieve their despair.

Every social movement worth its salt has a leader, and in this reading of *Othello*, Iago is representational of the modern anti-feminist reactionaries who turn sexually frustrated young men into their small army of pawns. Iago's motivation is revealed in the first scene of *Othello*. When explaining his motives to Roderigo, Iago says, "I know my price, I am worth no worse a place" (1.1.11). The place he is referring to is the position of Othello's lieutenant, which Iago feels is rightfully his, but which was given to someone else. Similarly, some men feel that the social power and capital that they are entitled to is being given to others. Perceived advances in the rights and social statuses of those they see as 'others', along with the effects of decades of neoliberal economic policy crippling the middle class that they might have once belonged to, have ignited a resentment in these men against women and minorities who they believe are responsible for their collective situation. Both Iago and his modern counterparts are experiencing an aggrieved entitlement of seeing others get something that they believe is rightfully theirs. Iago is a soldier in a soldier's world and believes that the promotion to Othello's lieutenant belongs to him simply because of who he is. Straight white men are brought up to believe, implicitly or explicitly, that the future is theirs and their preeminent place in it is secured. Both Iago and this subset of aggrieved men, rather than considering that they were not predestined to be in the position that they envy, turn against the those

that they feel have wronged them and plot their downfall.

Othello in this analysis is representative of these men's relationship to power and the possessor of the things that they envy. He has the power that Iago wants and the woman that Roderigo wants. Thus, they join forces to overthrow that power and violently restore what they believe to be the rightful order. Othello's history in the military and current position of power mean that all the communication between himself and the people around him is in the context of an explicit superior-subordinate relationship. In marrying Desdemona, he is experiencing, perhaps for the first time, an ambiguous power dynamic between him and another person. In falling in love with Desdemona, he is handing her the ability to wound him greatly in a way that no one else ever could. Iago exploits this dynamic by turning to the tried-and-true prejudice of misogyny. Similarly, modern hate groups tend to lean into misogyny as a gateway prejudice before getting into less socially accepted methods of hatred. Hence, there is a significant overlap between the incel community and larger online racist, xenophobic, and antisemitic movements. The misogyny works to align Othello to Iago's malicious goals, and after a few coincidences and displays of flimsy evidence Othello is turned, and cries, "Arise black Vengeance, from thy hollow cell!" (3.3.448). Othello is now ready to take the black pill. Modern hate groups such as the Klan or Proud Boys cannot go around just asking people to commit terrorism. Their recruits must be made to hate first. Likewise, Iago cannot simply ask Othello to ruin his life by killing Desdemona and Cassio. Othello must be made to hate them first.

Shakespeare may be dead, but the aggrieved attitudes and injured masculinities present in *Othello* are alive and well. The Bard could not have possibly foreseen the rise of internet based misogynist subcultures, or the backlash of disaffected white men that would occur in the United States after a black man was elected president. However, the seeds for these modern phenomena are present in the aggrievement that the characters of Iago and Roderigo display in their reaction to being denied



something that they feel is rightfully theirs. “The Death of the Author” asks readers to consider a work as it intersects with their own time, place, and experiences instead of the author’s. And one would not have to look very hard to find many Iagos peddling misogyny and racism to young men, or many Roderigos willing to go along with them to enact revenge against their objects of envy. Maybe there are young men in those online communities right now, who might read *Othello* and see the result of letting the hateful rhetoric win, and in seeing a part of their own id played out to its violent end might reevaluate what they believe and why they believe it. One can hope, anyway.

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Generational Trauma and Possibilities in Kazuo Ishiguro's "A Family Supper" Jesse Sneed



From the moment of birth, people are saddled by the cultural, political, and economic baggage of their time and place. It is easy then to imagine that there is no such thing as personal agency, and that everyone is fatalistically bound to act in a way that supports and reinforces the complex lattice of interconnected forces that they are born into. It is true that one's material conditions have a profound impact on their present; however, the future is not yet written. In every passing moment there exists an opportunity to take back the agency that was denied at birth. Upon first reading Kazuo Ishiguro's short story "A Family Supper", readers are probably left with similar thoughts; that it is a poignant vignette showing an estranged family struggling with cultural differences spanning both generations and continents that ends with the reader left to question whether the father had poisoned himself and his family to death. However, the point of the story is not whether the father did or did not poison them, but rather that the possibility exists, alongside all other possibilities for this family.

The effect of cultural baggage is made tangible in this story by use of sometimes figurative and other times literal ghosts of the past. The past for the narrator means growing up with an abusive father. When recalling a ghost he saw as a child, the narrator tells his sister, "I couldn't see very well. It was dark" (137). Later, when he recognizes a similar apparition in a picture, he doesn't recognize it. He has to be told that it is his mother in a picture taken shortly before her death. In response to his father admonishing him for not recognizing his own mother, the narrator says, "[i]t was the dark. I couldn't see very well" (139). Both the ghost and his mother are obscured from him because of the dark. That darkness could represent his father's inattentiveness and abuse, the pressure that

was placed on him to adhere to tradition, or both. The ghost and his mother could signify a possibility of ancestral and familial connection that is kept just outside of his reach. The father's past can be encapsulated in the scene where he is showing a model battleship that he built to his son. While holding on to the toy ship, a symbol of his past in the Japanese Navy, he looks for reassurance from his son saying "[p]erhaps I should have been a more attentive father" (138). He later criticizes his handiwork on the model, perhaps as a way of criticizing the past that has helped define him up until this point. Both characters, though not necessarily regretful, are in these moments becoming aware of how their pasts have led them here.

A close reading of the text, peering past the primary themes of generational and cultural conflict, reveals an underlying theme of duality. Early in the story, when discussing the father's ex-business partner's suicide, the father refers to Watanabe as "[a] man of principle" (134). Later, when the full horror of what Watanabe did to his family comes to light, the father admits that the failure of their business "must have weakened his [Watanabe's] judgement" (140). Similarly, Kikuko, the daughter in the story, is portrayed in her act of smoking as rebellious, and yet other places in the story as an obedient and studious daughter. She is also at a crossroads in her own life, speaking to her brother about her new boyfriend saying that "I haven't made up my mind yet" about whether to go to America with him (135). The narrator himself exists in this moment as a kind of superposition. He is not willing to commit to staying in Japan, but also reluctant to return to the United States. In all three of the main characters, through their relationships with others, themselves, or with their culture, this moment can be seen as a branching-off point. Not long from now, each character has a decision to make about his or her future, and each decision could have a profound effect on the others.

When coming to the end of this story, readers are naturally left wondering what happens next. Does the family die at this table, or



do they take steps toward reconnecting? The reality is that nothing happened. This is a story of fiction, written by an author who is trying to convey an idea. By ending the story as Ishiguro does, he has frozen this moment in time and is telling the reader that from this moment on, the story is unwritten. The point is not to find out what happened next, but to recognize the possibilities of what could have happened. Yes, the father could poison his family. He could also serve them a nice dinner and try to bring them together. The son could die at this table, but he could also reconnect with his family, or forego reconciliation and return to life in America. Kikuko could finish school and come home to live with her father, or she could elope to the United States and get killed by Ted Bundy while hitchhiking on I-5. The author is making the reader consider that from the moment this story ends, there exists an infinity of possibilities.

So, what lies at the end? These characters have come together for a family meal, dragging in all the weight of their pasts, haunted by the specter of suicide and familial violence, and then time stops. Their individual paths have been converging on to this single moment where they might diverge, stay colinear, or indeed end. In this moment exists the possibility for reconciliation and reconnection, but also for an end to all their collective possibilities. This story is an illustration of the fact that everyone is carrying the burdens of their past, and that no one can burden quite like family can. But it is also a reminder of the fact that from this moment, as from all moments until death, there is a possibility to wrest control from dogmatic patterns of tradition. There is a possibility to open a door for connection, and a possibility for forgiveness. Because just like this story, as long as someone is alive, their ending remains unwritten.

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All's Well That Ends Well?
Jamie Calahan



Boy meets girl; boy wants girl; boy takes girl, is a story so drilled into us that we barely stop to question the morality of it. It is a story well-worn in our minds. We accept it without hesitation. This is the way of things; this is how it's always done. Shakespeare changes one thing and in doing so, changes the way we experience it, forcing us to ask ourselves deeper questions about the narratives we typically accept without examination. In one of his most uncomfortable comedies, *All's Well That Ends Well*, Shakespeare subverts gender norms to help us analyze the morality of the actions taking place and forces us to confront the question: do the ends justify the means?

The story begins with obsession. As soon as we meet our heroine, Helen, we are introduced to her fixation on Bertram: "I am undone. There is no living, none, / If Bertram be away...The hind that would be mated by the lion / must die for love. 'Twas pretty, though a plague, / to see him every hour, to sit and draw his archèd brows, his hawking eye, his curls" (1.1.89-90, 96-99). Bertram, for Helen, is an object to desire. He has become something she would like to possess, "That I should love a bright particular star / And think to wed it, he is so above me" (1.1.91-92). She pines over him and yet never interacts with him. She fails to show any care of what Bertram is like as a person. It is his curls that have caught her eye. We are more familiar with this narrative when the genders are reversed. We are comfortable seeing a man view a woman through the lens of only her physical beauty with little to no care for her personality or her character.

When he is called away to be with the King, our heroine doesn't just devise a way to be near Bertram, she plots her way into marrying him: "Then shalt thou give me with thy kingly hand / What husband in thy



power I will command” (3.1.214–215). She shows no interest in Bertram’s agency as an individual person with his own feelings. She never speaks to him a single time in the play until she, with the help of the King, is forcing his submission in marriage, “Thou hast the power to choose, and they none to forsake” (2.3.57). Even in this moment, she does not ask Bertram what he desires, she just chooses him, saying, “This is the man” (2.3.112). This entitlement is not remarked on by the other characters in the play. No one objects to her demands, other than Bertram. If Helen were a man no one would question these circumstances, but she is not. Her gender is forcing the audience to question behaviors that, in men, have always been accepted.

Bertram responds to this in much the same way as many heroines who have found themselves in similar situations. He protests, “I cannot love her, nor will strive to do ‘t” (2.3.156). Then, when his protests are ignored and he is threatened by the King, he refuses to consummate the marriage and he runs, “Although before the solemn priest I have sworn, / I will not bed her...I’ll to the Tuscan wars and never bed her” (2.3.284–285, 288). Once gone, Bertram sends a letter to Helen that lists two impossible things that must occur for him to acknowledge their marriage, “When though canst get the ring upon my finger, which never shall come off, and show me a child begotten of thy body that I am father to, then call me husband. But in such a ‘then’ I write a ‘never”” (3.2.58–62). Though no one has asked him, he has made the strength of his feelings clear. He does not want this marriage.

This challenge doesn’t deter Helen from pursuing the possession of Bertram. She goes on a pilgrimage in the general direction of Bertram. On her journey, she meets a woman named Diana and her mother, a widow. While staying with the widow, she learns of Bertram’s desire for Diana. This knowledge leads her to conspire with the women to trick him into a non-consensual sexual act, “It is no more / But that your daughter, ere she seems won, / Desires this ring, appoints an encounter, / In fine



delivers me to fill the time, / Herself most chastely absent” (3.7.35–38). This will give her the opportunity to acquire the ring and hopefully to become pregnant. In the social order of the time, a man doing such a thing might be seen as upright and moral. He needs to protect the family name by consummating the marriage, even if he does so with an unwilling partner. By changing the gender of the one forcing consummation, Shakespeare creates enough discomfort to cause his audience to at least question the morality of the behavior. Forced intimacy can never be true intimacy. Helen’s actions are destroying the very closeness she hopes to achieve with Bertram.

At this point, Shakespeare has broken down the gender norms and social order and must restore these things in order to have a comedy. He attempts to do this, after first accusing Bertram of wronging Diana, by revealing that Helen is alive and has fulfilled the list of tasks given her by Bertram. His vague response, “If she, my liege, can make me know this clearly, / I’ll love her dearly, ever, ever dearly” (5.3.360–361), doesn’t feel genuine. Helen has pursued him and tricked him into non-consensual sex. We would expect Bertram to despise her more, to feel angry, to rebel against the system that has brought him here. His acceptance feels abrupt and confusing. Again, we see no reaction or objection to Helen’s behavior from the other characters in this play. Everyone sees what Helen has done and no one questions the morality of it. We, as an audience, are uncomfortable with the fate that has been forced on Bertram, even though we don’t particularly like him. This should cause us to feel uncomfortable with the current way social order, by way of marriage, is forced upon women.

Shakespeare wants his audience to feel the discordance of the ending with the events that have occurred. He is forcing his audience to get outside what is comfortable, so that they can see the social order from a new perspective and therefore critique it more objectively. He does this effectively by allowing the conqueror of the story to be a



woman. The immoral actions taken by his heroine in order to achieve and maintain marital social order forces the question of whether the ends can truly justify the means. The title, *All's Well That Ends Well*, would be better served with a question mark at the end.

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Dew Drop
April Singer



**Rescue Me
April Singer**



Into the Woods

Alexandria Lay



At the Water's Edge Sundance Hollingsworth



Ezra closed his eyes.

The last stretching fingers of honeyed August light warmed his cheeks and brow, and he brought the can to his lips. Crisp, light beer. He drank deeply, chased it with the hot smoke of his cigarette. Snubbing it out in his plastic ashtray, he mindlessly patted Rufus on the head and surveyed his property through the oatmeal cataracts that had begun to develop in his left eye.

Thirty acres of forest sloped down gently to a private lake he sometimes rented out to roadtrippers and college students. A thin, rocky path traced its way down the hill to the water, a remnant of racing younger paws. A trellis stood off to the side of the patio a few yards like the last traces of a lost civilization. The garden Abby had put so many hard hours into was nothing more than a petrified patch of overgrowth, punctuated by the trellis. It hurt him deeply to see the state of it, to know that he'd allowed the artifact of their lives together to wither and die.

He took the last drink of the hand-warmed can, crushed it with his boot heel, and scooted it under his chair to join the other casualties of his overflowing recycling bin.

Rufus pointed his milky eyes at Ezra, blindly stared into the middle distance, and wagged his tail. Ezra smiled and grabbed a beer and a stick of jerky from the cooler, and tossed the desiccated strip to Rufus. It bounced off his nose, and the hound stood with great effort to hunt down the morsel. His collar rattled as he descended the stairs. Rufus would never protect him like he had Abby, but a shared love of jerky had nursed a strong bond between the two old-timers. He cracked the beer with a clumsy hand and took a heartburn chug of the foam.

He stood, walked down the stairs with malty gracelessness, made his way to the trellis. A sudden irritation, sharp like the screech of a fork on flatware, crept up the soft hairs of his neck. She was gone a year next month, and every day he'd had to see the damn trellis.

Each thistle and bindweed seemed to push the thing up, hold it like an offering, a mocking reminder of what he'd become in her absence. He grabbed the trellis and ripped a slat from it in a one-handed attempt to pull it from the weeds. He threw the length of wood down the hill, the force from his throw pulling a childish wheeze from him.

A pounding buzz settled a few inches behind his sinuses, and it took him a moment to recognize the intrusion of a new sound—something like the light cracking of roasting embers from a distance. He glanced around. The sound resolved itself into smokey, whispered consonants. It was coming from the lake. A quick look to Rufus confirmed it; his ears stood erect, his body aimed toward the lake like a dart. Ezra shaded his eyes, but it was no use. The sun had sunk further, and bright light bounced off the water surface like a stray bullet, blinding him.

He took an unsteady step and beer spilled over his hand, wetting his sleeve. He cursed and turned to Rufus. “What do you think, buddy?” The old dog cocked his head. “Lost hikers?”

Rufus wagged.

“Alright.” Ezra dropped his can in the dirt and grabbed the empty twelve gauge by the door. “Come on, then.”

The sun was just dipping below the peaks, casting the woods in long purples and deep blues as Ezra and Rufus made it down to the water's edge. A chill came down from the mountains, wove between the trees, and crept up Ezra's spine. Unseasonal fog yawned awake above the shimmering surface of the lake.

Ezra looked around.

The whispering had grown more pronounced as they'd come down the hill, but as far as he could tell, there wasn't anyone down here. Rufus sniffed the air, the coarse hairs along his spine and at the base of his tail



standing on end. Ezra stood as straight as he could and tried to hold the shotgun in a way that projected a greater level of comfort with the firearm than he felt.

“Alright,” he boomed. “Now, I can spend the next twenty minutes rooting y’all out, or you can just come on out and be escorted off my property. No harm done, but if you make me look for you, both me and my vicious attack dog will be cantankerous as hell.”

No response, just the steady whisper that came from more than one direction.

“Alright,” Ezra said with a sigh. “Ready or not, here I—”

There was someone in the water.

Bald and sexless in the dark, a head sat half-submerged some fifteen yards out. The sight of them there, mounting fog swirling about their head, turned Ezra’s stomach. The whispering rose to a hushed mumble, and Ezra found himself desperately wishing he kept the gun loaded.

He cleared his throat as an anxious warble came from Rufus. “Look, just come on out and...” his words dried up and he took a step toward the water.

Rufus whined and nudged Ezra’s hand. He waved him off and took another step. He needed to know what they were saying, craved it deep in the pit of his stomach. There was an urgency to the words and he feared that if he missed them, some unknowable existential secret would be forever lost to him—the necessary course correction he was otherwise unwilling to acknowledge. His mouth was sticky and dry and beading sweat had begun to trace cool rivulets down his spine. There was a danger here, he could feel it, but it was distant and secondary to his hunger to hear the words. Another step, up to the water’s edge. Small waves lapped against his boots and Rufus bit his hand.

Ezra wrenched his hand out of the hound’s mouth and a malevolent rage passed over him that made him distantly worried for Rufus’ safety. He blinked what felt like sleep from his eyes and the anger passed.



Looking down, he realized he was no longer holding the shotgun, had lost it somehow.

He looked down, fever-heat flushing his cheeks. He was up to his shins in the water now. Rufus whined, dancing anxiously along the silty shore, and Ezra took an unsteady step back out of the lake.

Movement in the water stole his attention. The thing rose from the water and his mind fused shut.

It wasn't a person.

Slick limbs, dark and oily, writhed from the creature's torso. Its body looked like it had been assembled from ill-fitting parts, sharp, chitinous angles flowing down into smooth, infantile skin. Where a face should have been, two large holes rattled as it scented the air. An astringent smell, like processed meat and vinegar burned Ezra's nostrils and stung his eyes and an essential part of his sanity stretched taut and snapped like a steel wire. He would carry this image with him for the rest of his life, eyes constantly darting to dark corners and toward exits.

Prey.

He had become prey.

He nearly collapsed as he scrambled toward the tree line. A rushing crash of waves came from behind him and atom-splitting terror sparked down his spine. It was fast, he could hear it gaining on him, and it sounded more like a stampede than anything a single being could produce. He didn't dare look back.

A short sprint brought him crashing drunkenly into the trees, sleeves tearing and skin splitting where twigs were broken against his arms. He barely felt any of it. Saplings and low growth threatened to steal his legs and more than once he nearly fell, sprawling, to the forest floor. It occurred to him distantly that Rufus wasn't with him, but his mind had become radio static and there was no space for anything but the fear. He imagined it back there, the rolling gait of a thing unused to dry land, rattling scent glands following the sour smell of him. His smoke-hardened lungs gave out all in a rush and he stopped, stars popping and



fizzing in his vision. He turned and expected the thing to come down on him in a rush of thrashing limbs and hidden mouths.

Nothing.

Wild eyes darted left and right, but there was nothing with enough shape in the dark for them to settle on.

Then, a familiar face.

It was Abby, not as she'd been in her last months, but young and vibrant as when he'd met her. A dim glow surrounded her youthful features, smiling eyes meeting his own. It was the smile she'd given him when they'd first met, lingering eyes betraying a wit she'd been told was unladylike. Tears brimmed and rolled down Ezra's cheeks, flowing down the age-cut channels.

"No, this isn't... you aren't..." a sob caught in his throat.

"Jesus, Ezzy, did you go feral without me around?" She grinned. "What are you doing out here? Marking your territory?"

"Abbs?"

She held out her hand to him and he took it, habit overriding caution. "Come on, let's get out of here before we both break our fool necks." She turned and led him gently out of the forest as he cried quietly behind her. He knew it was a trick, knew it was impossible, but he desperately wanted to believe it really was Abby.

Fog had accumulated above the lake like a smothering pillow and it was country-dark now, the only light washing down from the moon and the endless flickering stars. A breeze came in over the water, parting the fog and filling Ezra with a wistful nostalgia. Maybe it was Abby. The hand he held was the same he'd held for the past four decades—verging on too warm, and coarse from years as a hobby gardener. She smelled like Abby too: rosewater and some fragrant combination of east asian spices.

She led him down to the water.

A tinkling of metal and a whining growl. Ezra turned to see Rufus standing a few yards away, head low, facing the two of them.

"Come here, buddy." Ezra wiped his eyes and patted his leg. Rufus



didn't move and his growl became more pronounced.

"So this is how you treat your mama, huh? Typical teenager."

"Rufus, it's mom."

Rufus barked a throaty warning and took a step forward.

Abby chuckled. "Come on, Ezzy, leave him."

Ezra cocked his head. "Leave him?"

"Ezzy..." Abby's grip tightened.

"He's just... he's blind, he doesn't recognize you.

She pulled him toward the water. "Leave him."

This couldn't be Abby. He tried to pull free from the vice-grip of her hand. "What the hell-

"Leave the fucking dog, Ezra." A sharp yank on his arm pulled his shoulder out and he screamed. In an instant, Rufus was sinking his weathered teeth into the thing that was no longer his wife. Ezra hadn't seen the change, but Abby was gone, replaced with the monstrosity from the lake. It released Ezra and with an inhuman, crocodile rumble, it hit Rufus with enough force to throw the dog ten yards up the hill. The dog hit the ground with a yelp and rolled a few feet before coming to rest on his side.

The thing turned to Ezra, scent glands rattling, and he shoved it as hard as he could manage. It wasn't much with one hand, and a strange gelatinous quality to the softer parts of it absorbed much of the force, but it bought him precious seconds. He ran to Rufus, trying to pull him from his collar. A gurgled whine came from the dog and Ezra released him.

He turned, expecting to be thrashed, and saw the creature down by the shore. It hadn't followed him. It paced back and forth on legs that seemed to shoot and retract from its body, scenting the air frantically. Ezra watched it for a moment and it watched him back.

"Ezra, help!" Abby's voice ushered from somewhere in the creature's undercarriage. "Ezra, help, I can't swim! Ezzy, please!"

He covered his ears and squeezed his eyes shut like a child as the thing continued to pace like a caged predator.



“Oh, god, Ezzy, it’s hurting me! Why aren’t you doing anything? Help me!”

“Stop it!”

It was quiet. He opened his eyes and saw Abby there, aged, papery skin separated from brittle bone by mere millimeters. Red fingers of blood ran down her face and neck where a recalled airbag had launched splintered steering column into her. Even now, seeing her like this again, he couldn’t wrap his head around it. A routine fender bender. How could that have done this?

“I needed you, Ezzy. I asked them to call you, you know.”

A wailing sob was ripped from Ezra’s chest like blubber in a shark’s teeth. “Stop! You aren’t her!”

The thing chuckled Abby’s chuckle, pumping red from the holes in her. “Okay, Ezra. Fair enough. Listen, this was fun. Same time tomorrow?”

“I’m not afraid of you.”

“Yeah, okay.” It mocked him in his wife’s voice and he was glad to feel anger welling where terror had begun to nest; It made him feel more himself. The thing turned and made for the water. “Catch you later, alligator.”

After a while, crocodile.

Then, silence.



Ezra cast his gaze to the derelict trellis. He’d spent the morning methodically clearing the desiccated weeds from its surface, one arm held in a makeshift sling, and righted it before gathering the graveyard of beer cans in a black plastic bag. He cried as he worked. The ripe, hoppy smell of cheap beer wafted up from the lawn and he wished he’d chosen a spot further distant from the porch to pour out his remaining collection. Already the craving was wrapping itself around his spine.



Rufus stood heavily and crossed to the stairs, ears perked, before ultimately deciding there was no imminent danger. Ezra reached into the cooler and held out a piece of jerky to the gray-faced mutt. He took it with a wag of his tail and laid down on his blanket.

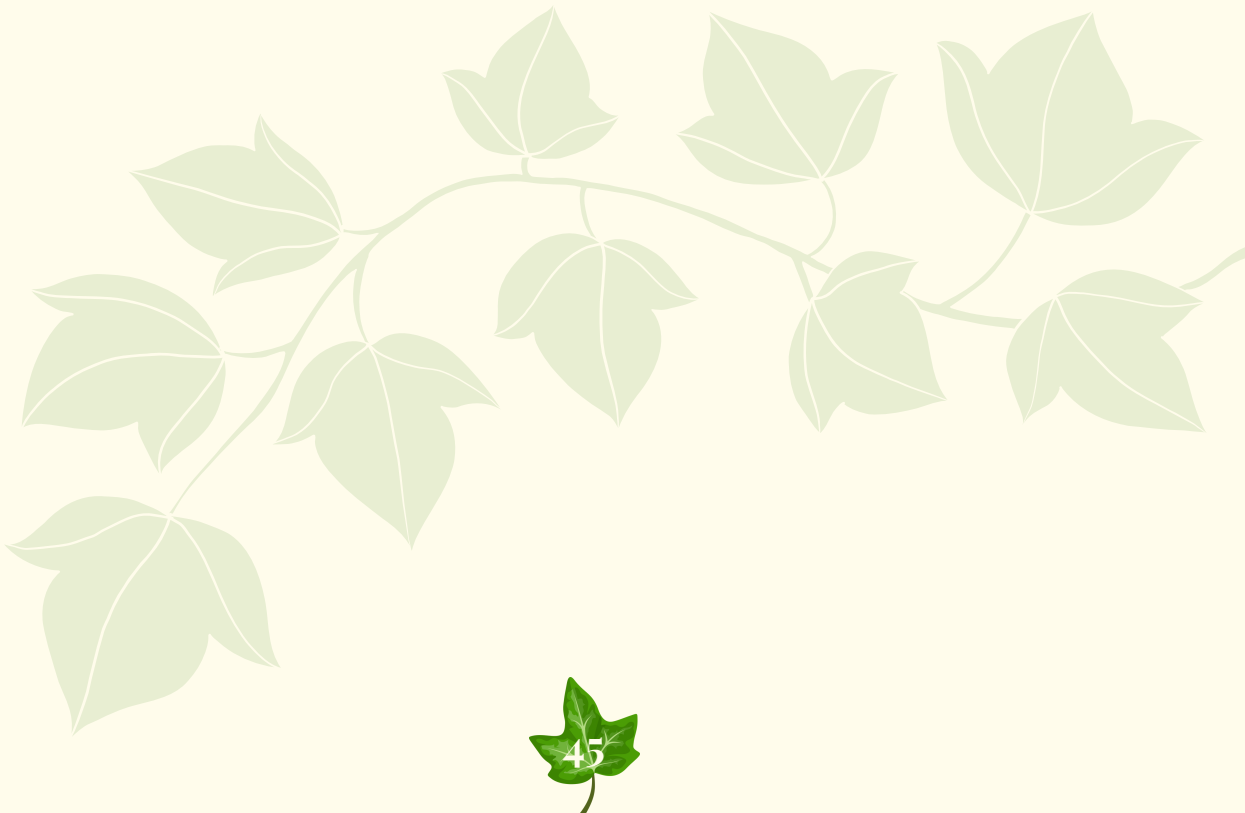
The sun was nearing the end of its afternoon descent and a flicker of stray light from the lake sent a bolt of panic into Ezra's gut. He looked toward the lake. Nothing. It might as well have been a pane of glass for all the disturbance in its surface. He set his hand on the shotgun and took a deep breath. This time he was prepared. At least as well prepared as one could be for something like this.

Ezra pulled one of Abby's old sparkling water bottles out of the ice and twisted off the metal top. It bubbled over his hand and he cursed. He set it down and lit a cigarette instead.

Quit that shit, Ezzy. I'll be pissed as hell if I outlast you over some dumb shit like that.

He smiled and wiped his eyes.

One thing at a time, Abbs. One thing at a time.



The Roach Jack Gahr



A little lamp by the television spit golden light on the floor. She moved her squinted eyes vertically along the panels, in painstaking parallel lines as if they were hooked and were being pulled by a mouse underneath the floorboards. Or a rat.

“Come to bed,” he said, sighing and hoping to give up soon. He was standing in the hall in his underwear, but his glasses were still on so that he could see her, her squinted eyes and what she was doing with the broom, and maybe could see the roach, but probably not. It had practically been sprinting along the wall when he’d seen it there earlier, and the size of it made him shiver and look away, losing it in the process. “I only meant tomorrow. If you’re not busy.”

“I’m not busy now.”

“You’re busy coming to bed.”

“I don’t think I am, honey.”

“Well, what about the fire?”

“What about it?”

“Do you need me to put it out?”

“No, love, I can manage. You go on to bed.”

She looked ridiculous in her red slippers, surveying the room from behind dense red glasses and her dry knuckles absurd and white around that broom, the dreadful, scrawny old thing he’d bought some years ago as her Christmas gift. It embarrassed him slightly to look at it now and think of the grin that cut along his face as she opened it, but it never occurred to her to think of it that way and she didn’t mind it all that much. She nudged a stack of freshly-washed towels aside with the dull end of the broom, and crouched to inspect the empty space where they’d sat. Frail skin tightened over her eyes in a squint and she removed the



glasses. Then she got down lower, on all fours now, and with a terse breath blew away a tuft of dust. She looked ridiculous.

“I just don’t want a cockroach scuttling around the place while we’re sleeping and while we’re eating, you know? I mean, you know.”

“I know.”

The Irish terrier, Bill, laid on the sofa in the middle of the room, looking anxiously between his masters. The man looked over and called on him to come along, and when the terrier, giving its final glance to the lady in the center of the room, climbed down and trotted carefully toward him, he sighed and turned down the hallway. The hall had been a crypt since last Thursday, when it got frigid on their street and the fire he built, or that often she built, roared well but even it could not reach all the way to the hall, which wanted its warmth badly and grew colder and dryer for it each night. He hugged himself very tightly as he walked through the crypt, and his hands were like ice.

It must be by the fire, she thought, because if I was a little bug and it was nearly winter and I was going to die soon in an old lady's house, I would want to be by the fire. She straightened her posture nobly away from the floor, and went over to the dancing flames, which swam in the fireplace and flickered playfully as she got near. Timid needles of heat moved to puncture her slight skin and she rolled down her shirt sleeves to catch them. Of course, she went on, it is not a little bug but a very large roach, and it cannot be here in my home. It must find a colder place to die because it cannot stay in here with us, she thought. She pushed the couch several inches out of its place and curled her weary back, looking in the dust and old crumbs and even with her fingers pushing aside dust bunnies for the animal.

She pushed aside a pair of salt crackers, which were blooming grimly now with age ([that man!]), and out from under them rushed a small beast with rust skin and long, slender antennae waving curious and independent. Her hand lie in its path and as the first insect limbs began probing her old skin, she reeled back and flung the bug off-course,



yelping mawkishly as she did so and immediately covering her mouth with the contaminated hand. She heard it land on its back and momentarily this made her shudder. In the bedroom, her husband opened his eyes and lifted his neck, made a wearied motion to get out of bed and retrieve his wife, thought better of it, and pulled another blanket up tightly against his chest. The fire did not reach the bedroom either.

The roach wrung itself acrobatically onto its feet and took off, [stupidly], toward the center of the room, which compelled her out of her disgust and forward with the broom. She wielded it slanted across her body and strode valiantly after the sprinting insect, and if she'd seen herself she would have laughed and probably blushed for how noble she looked. She approached it from behind and saw its stringy antennae flailing wildly for a vent or a crack in the flooring, but with the cold aim of an old woman for whom it has been many years since she last feared the discovery, and subsequent smiting, of a bug in her house, she brought down with much force the frayed and hardened brush of her broom upon the roach. The broom, by design of her plan, would not kill the bug, but it would trap him and she could pause to rest her cold and thin lungs, and to think of her next action. A small brown leg began to writhe and show itself hopefully from under the thinned bristles, and she wrenched the broom.

It won't be necessary to kill it, she thought, no, no. Especially not on my floor. But, if I'm not going to kill it, I'll need a glass. No, not a glass. God, no. A cheap cup. A plastic cup. She sighed and looked down at her broom, soiled irreparably now with the contamination of the bug, and pondered what to do with her prisoner. She knelt down, by now a strenuous motion, for a closer look. The fire, at last, choked quietly behind her. Damn it, she thought, it's dead. It was the revolting image of death. Two of the insect's legs were detached completely, nestled snugly in the brush [like crows on the elm], and the poor thing's head had rotated around to face in the opposite direction of what is natural. Its one remaining antenna was still. The entire body was very still. She rose and went to get a cup from the kitchen. I guess I don't know my own strength,

thought the little old lady. The wan grey light of the kitchen's single lightbulb dripped onto the floor still from earlier in the evening. She held within her a private but passionate broken-heartedness at the bulb's thin, revealing light. Her red slippers, which had been velvet under the cloak of the fireplace now appeared squalid, obscene. Her hands were pallid and withered like old clay that had not been glazed or polished.

The plastic cups, which her husband preferred and which they had healthy stock of, were in the highest cupboard to the very left. She opened a caramel-colored door and picked out a small, violet one, and with it returned to the roach under the broom in the living room. Passing by the labor of kneeling, she simply picked up the broom and flipped it over, and gasped sharply at the cleanliness she found. The roach, disembodied parts and all, was missing; her heart nearly burst as if she had discovered her own eyeball perched in the nest of the brush. She dropped the broom and looked excitedly all around her, but nowhere in particular. How? she thought, How could it move so quickly without its legs? Where is the rest of it? Where did it all go? And looking, though standing in place as if bolted through the feet, her gaze reached the hallway and she saw, standing nervously and expectantly, and licking his dark lips: Bill, the terrier. Her body loosened and she produced a lovely smile, but quickly abandoned it in the disgust of realization.

"Bill!" The old lady rushed over to her dog in the hall (Come in here, Bill, my God, it's freezing) and with sharp fingers pried open his jaws and peeked around his tongue, which was now flailing wildly about with glee, but the roach was already gone.

"Bill, you beast!" He licked his lips again and panted ignorantly. "Go, go on to bed with your father," and she turned the dog around and kicked him lightly, sending him shivering on his way. She took the cup and returned to the kitchen, placing it gently back on its shelf in its cupboard door. The window over the sink showed her the heavy blackness of the night, interrupted and brightened only by tufts of snow which gathered inconstantly in the trees, and was softly blue by the touch of the waifish

moon. There were no stars that evening, and it seemed to her there hadn't been for days. But of course, she thought, returning once more to the cupboard for her mug, which was [splendidly wrought] with a clay mold of grapevines and daffodils sprouting on all sides of it, it's rare that I'm ever looking for them this late. When she did sit up this late, though, she reveled in it, and descended herself into the completeness of the silence with a cup of tea, as she did now. In the fireplace, she saw the final piercing embers pop sleepily into their resting place before letting themselves extinguish. The heartbeat of the house slowed and a wide, thin veil of lavender draped itself over her furniture and finally doused the evening; she felt as though she sat lovingly behind time, between vague and uninteresting seconds. The world outside her kitchen slept on the other side of oblivion, one thousand years' time from then. The tea warmed her body and she felt the air around her respond in kind.

On the small poplar table beneath the living room window, a bony shadow leapt across the potted daffodils, which stood on the table blanketed by the far end of the kitchen bulb's reach. She rose, still sipping her tea, and slowly began to wander around the kitchen, inspecting, though she did not know where such a form of shadow might have originated from. The table and counters were clear, nearly spotless as they had been left, and the shadows of her kitchen revealed no secrets. Regardless, she thought, it's nothing to be worried about. I'm sure the shadows make all sorts of strange motions at this time of night, when I'm not around. It's none of my business. But laced within these thoughts, which she very deliberately articulated in her mind and closely envisioned the typography of, as to blot out her mind's eye, was an irresistible impulse for the eyes on her face to remain unsettled for several minutes, sitting here for a moment and just when they begin to rest and be comfortable, we must go, and be here, or might it be over there? But there was nothing anywhere, and besides, she thought, it was probably just a fly. There is nothing to be done about the flies. She took



another sip of her tea and realized, with remorse, that it would be her last. Perhaps she would read in bed, if she could find something to dull the lamp with. She stood up, unhurriedly, and started towards the sink.



As the second snowfall of the year began to tremble in the black clouds above, a cockroach with a turned-about face, one antenna and only four legs marched triumphantly across the kitchen table, stopping for a moment to sip from a pond of spilled tea the old lady had neglected to clean up.



The Opposition Game Nrydia Bonnaire Fils



The Golden Circle and Scarlett Roses weren't always rivaling societies. Axel Oliver, a senior at Cardinham Academy, was murdered in 1912. Axel was a member of the Golden Circle, one of the two societies within Cardinham which contains the most clever and intelligent students in the world. His body was found on the floor outside the door of his dormitory. Blood oozing out of the slit in his neck onto the scarlet velvet floors. Next to his lifeless body, a luscious scarlet rose was found. The symbol of the Scarlett Roses, the other society within Cardinham Academy, that didn't focus on book smarts but rather on the arts. A week later the body of Ruby Buckingham was found in the girls' bathroom. Her lifeless body swung over a bathroom stall door, her face and hands covered in welts and foam, oozing from the corners of her mouth dripping leisurely onto the floor. A dead dove laying on the floor below her. A dove, being the symbol of the Golden Circle. The deaths of Axel Oliver and Ruby Buckingham were both ruled as suicides. With the evidence found at the crime scene hidden from police, the dozens of deaths to follow were also ruled as suicides. The cause of said suicides were believed by the public to be due to the rigorous curriculum and intense academic expectation held by the school. But in reality, the cause of the deaths can simply be owed to the fact that one school, with two societies, was a dangerous, dangerous thing.

1971

Arya Alastair's head was cloudy, fogged with faint memories and thoughts of the previous night. She wasn't quite sure what happened last night, but all she knew was that now she was in the principal's office with her best friend and fellow Scarlett Rose, Lilia Walton. Standing on the other side of the office was Jamie Harton and Ashton Owens. Both of



whom were Golden Circles. Their arms were crossed and they were glaring daggers in their direction. The intimidating atmosphere of the office was rather overwhelming. The grand arched ceilings and unique tracery lining the windows exhibiting the school's antique architecture. The usual light airiness sourced from the schools high vaulted ceilings typically felt throughout campus was notably absent. The principal was rambling, stumbling over his words, as though he was trying to figure out what he was trying to say and what point he was trying to get across as he was saying it. He was rather old. 70? 80? Even older perhaps? His grey wispy hair resembling that of a bird's nest or an unkept flower bush. Arya couldn't think clearly. Her head was overflowing with thoughts. The principal's voice, tuned out of her head. It took a tug on her sleeve from Lilia to pull her back to life.

“All four of you, meet me in the Seminar room tonight at 6.” The principal announced.

The seminar room was cold. The air biting at the skin left uncovered by her skirt. She, as well as everyone else, was still in their uniform. All of them dressed in red and navy. The only visible form of society identification was a ring. All Scarlett Roses have gold rings, embedded with a pigeon blood ruby. The Golden Circles, despite their name, ironically, have silver rings, imbedded with jade stones. The room was echoing with silence. The arched vaulted ceilings remained the same but all of the desks, which were usually formed into the shape of a circle, were gone. Nothing lied in the room except a series of objects clustered in a group on the velvet floor.

“What is he going to do? Have us play chess and talk about our feelings?” Jamie scoffed.

Lilia rolled her eyes. “I think the day you learn to shut up will be an incredibly glorious day, Jamie. Just be patient and wait for the principal to come and give us instructions.” Lilia replied.

“That's pretty ironic coming from you Lilia. We are here in the first



place because of your little friend there.”

“To be honest I think she too was a bit too drunk to remember last night.” Ashton snarled.

Arya could hear the sound of Lilia’s heart racing.

“You both have a shitload of audacity to blame something like this on her. Aren’t you guys supposed to be the smart ones here? You guys literally have zero functioning brain cells.”

“Someone’s intelligence has absolutely no correlation with the number of brain cells they have in their neocortex.” Jamie replied.

“Brain cells make up the functional tissue of the brain. A person can’t properly function without them,” Arya said quietly.

“Oh so she does speak! I honestly thought you lost the capability to after last night. You know I actually thought this thing between us could actually work but, you know guys don’t like quiet girls very much.”

“You-” Lilia started.

The principal walked in, carrying a small shoe box-sized container. Looking slightly cheekier than usual. Among the items on the floor were six plastic shot glasses, a candle, and a glass Coca-Cola bottle. He walked into the middle of the room centering himself in front of the four of them.

“Thank you all for coming tonight.” His croaky voice said. “Instead of following through with the usual detention procedures, I thought we would play a little game.” The principal voiced with a smile. Jamie and Ashton gave each other a look. Their eyes expressing a thousand words. None of which were positive.

“We are going to play a game that was rather popular when I was your age. It’s called Spin the Bottle. Each of you are going to take turns spinning the bottle, and if it lands on you, then you have to pour a shot, of Coca-Cola, into your shot glass and drink it.” The principal explained cheerfully. “We are going to do that instead of the whole kissing thing.” The four of them stared at the principal blankly. Almost as though he had

gone insane. It looked as though Jamie and Ashton were trying to not burst out laughing.

“Wait so what’s the point of the game...like how do you win?” Jamie asked holding in a laugh like his life depended on it.

“Oh there is no winner! That’s the point of the game!” The old man chortled.

They all stared at him. “Oh come on it will be fun! I don’t think I need to teach the four of you how to form a circle now do I? Come on, all of you, sit on the floor and form a circle.”

The four of them separated, making their way to the center of the room to pick up a shot glass before stationing themselves in a spot on the floor. Arya was sitting in between Lilia and Ashton and across from Jamie, who caught her looking at him and smirked at her. Her heart plummeted to the floor. It felt as though the energy in the room shifted. Goosebumps formed on the back of her neck. Her eyes darted to the floor. The principal walked to the center of the circle centering the Coca-Cola bottle in the middle of them.

“Okay Jamie why don’t you go ahead and go first.” The principal said with a smile.

Jamie looked up at Arya. Giving her a look again, that made her insides feel as though they were collapsing, as though her lungs had filled with water. Jamie reached out, his fingers long and coated with thick silver rings, and gave the bottle laying before them a spin. The bottle cascaded in a circle, its head streaming over Arya again and again. The bottle came to a stop, its head landing on Arya. Jamie smiled.

Arya grabbed the bottle at the center of the circle and took her shot glass. She poured herself some and drank it.

She felt her body hurl back. Stars appeared. The walls were closing in and it felt as though her lungs had lost the ability to function. She couldn’t feel anything. She felt as though she was fading in and out of consciousness but when she was “conscious” she was not back in that



seminar room. She felt lifeless. As though she was no longer in control of her body let alone her mind. Was she dreaming? Had she simply gone mad? Everything went black. Flashes flew through her head. Her head flying through a hazing maze of thoughts. beer bottles. an empty corridor on the third floor. Jamie touching her thigh, her pushing away. Screams, her screams? Lilia's screams? Definitely her screams. Jamie persisting. Jamie trying to kiss her. Her pushing away. Tears. Yells. Silence. Her head ached. Her brain banging against the walls of her head. She felt the world around her come to halt. She could feel the familiarity of the velvet seminar room floors below her. Her knees were in her chest, and she was scrunched up in a ball. She peaked out from behind her knees and screamed. Instead of the Coca-Cola bottle being in the middle of the circle, she was in the middle now. Surrounding her was Lilia, Jamie, and Ashton. All laying peacefully as though they had simply fallen asleep. The only difference being that blood was oozing from their bodies. From their necks, from their ears, and from their mouths. Gushing lazily onto the velvet floors. Red roses laying lusciously by Jamie and Ashton's bodies. And a dove laying lifelessly next to Lilia. Arya started shaking, she felt herself starting to lose control. Perhaps she was still absorbed in this psychotic state. She looked around, she just needed a solution, an answer, something. To the right of Lilia and the left of Ashton, where her body was stationed earlier, laid a shot glass. Filled with what appeared to be Coca-Cola. She crawled over to the cup, desperate to return to her normal-minded state, grabbed the cup, and drank it. Once again, she felt her body hurl back. The stars appeared once again, and the walls were closing in. Just like before, she couldn't feel anything. She yet again couldn't control her body let alone her mind, and everything went black.



The principal walked into the seminar room. Closing the door quietly behind him. He walked over to Arya's body, placing a beautiful, lifeless, dove by it.



Sexuality, Patriarchy, and Symbolism in “A White Heron” Chloe Bollin



Sarah Orne Jewett’s short story “A White Heron” has been interpreted in several ways by feminist critics, each who, in their own way, understand the story to be symbolic of a young girl’s rejection of masculine domination. Micheal Atkinson argues in his essay “The Necessary Extravagance of Sarah Orne Jewett: Voices of Authority in “A White Heron” that the short story is one predominantly about innocence “preserved” rather than lost (72), and that the narrator’s direct intrusion into the story at the climax suggests a transfer of knowledge from the wise narrator (and reader) to the unwise Sylvia. In Rob Brault’s ecofeminist reading of “A White Heron,” he argues that the ornithologist is representative of patriarchal power, both in his interactions with women and his interactions with nature. The ornithologist’s interest in nature is one that requires him to exploit and own it, and Sylvia’s silence is her effort to subvert patriarchy and protect her wilderness home. Quite similarly, Elizabeth Ammons takes a feminist perspective and argues that Sylvia lives in an all female, private world, but is being drawn into the world of heterosexuality and “body-for-money bargain” (5) by the ornithologist. Interestingly, Ammons connects this story to the genre of fairy tales, which also provide a script for heterosexual interactions. For Ammons then, Sylvia’s refusal to give up the bird is also Sylvia’s refusal to join heterosexual patriarchy. My reading of Jewett’s short story is similar to all three of these analyses, in that I argue that the story is about Sylvia’s choice to preserve of her innocence and not join heterosexual patriarchy, and that Jewett’s use of symbolism about nature, the heron, and the ornithologist all reflect a divide between patriarchal control and the childhood innocence of Sylvia.

Throughout the short story, Sylvia is shown to be deeply connected



to the natural world, and this can be seen through the language surrounding her. Most prominently, Sylvia's name itself suggests her connection to nature. According to an online etymology dictionary, the name Sylvia stems from the latin *sylva*, meaning "wood, forest." Additionally, the name stems from the genus name of warblers, *Sylviidae*, which suggests the depth with which Sylvia is connected to the forest and its birds. However, her connection to nature does not stop at her name. When Sylvia is taking her cow, Mistress Moolly, home and it is beginning to get dark, Sylvia begins to identify with the forest, or rather, she begins to struggle to separate herself from it as she "feel[s] as if she were a part of the gray shadows and the moving leaves" (Jewett 73). In the next paragraph, Sylvia is a "little woods-girl" terrified to hear a whistle that is distinct from a "bird's whistle, which would have a sort of friendliness" (Jewett 73). The animals of the story, Mistress Moolly, the white heron, and even unidentified imagined birds, are Sylvia's community, and the setting of the forest is not just a space that Sylvia exists in, but rather a place within Sylvia. As Rob Brault argues, Jewett portrays a relationship with nature as an "individual secret" (5) and this individual relationship is shown through Sylvia's deeply personal, and potentially unconscious, connection to the forest. Rather than consciously thinking about her love of the outdoors, she moves through it, identifies with it, and fears intrusion and separation.

In contrast to Sylvia's reflection of a feminine natural world, the ornithologist in the story represents hetero-patriarchial domination, and Jewett shows this through phallogocentric imagery and his desire to dominate and own "the feminine." From the moment the ornithologist is introduced, Sylvia believes him to be "the enemy" and even just his "boy's whistle" tells her that he is "determined, and somewhat aggressive" (Jewett 73). With Elizabeth Ammons's argument that the forest functions as an "Adamless Eden" and a space that explores female separatism (8), the ornithologist's presence can be read as an intrusion—one that clearly

makes Sylvia feel unsafe. Weapons surround the ornithologist: he carries a gun with him throughout the story, often using it to shoot down whatever birds he wants, and he gives Sylvia a jack-knife. Guns and knives are phallic symbols, both because they are penis-shaped, and because—in a feminist perspective—they are tools of violence and oppression. As they spend the day together, Sylvia begins to develop feelings for the ornithologist, as Jewett writes “the woman’s heart, asleep in the child, was vaguely thrilled by a dream of love,” and Sylvia appreciates the phallic gift of the jack-knife “as if she were a desert-islander” (76). However, this crush and gift do not completely soothe Sylvia, as she becomes afraid each time he uses his weapon, and “would like him vastly better without his gun” (76). This sentiment suggests that Sylvia, consciously or unconsciously, sees the harm that patriarchy has on the feminine, natural world and that, although she accepts some patriarchal violence, as seen through her acceptance of the jack-knife, she is not yet willing to accept the totality of patriarchal violence.

As the central focus of “A White Heron,” the white heron represents the ideas of childhood innocence and purity, which is shown through the symbolism of the heron itself and Sylvia’s identification with the bird. Herons can symbolize several different things, including beauty, grace, and patience, as well as femininity, autonomy, and freedom (Clifford). The color of the heron is also significant, as the color white symbolizes purity and innocence. Understanding the character of the ornithologist to be representative of patriarchy, he most likely imagines the white heron to have the traits most desired by patriarchy: beauty, patience, and purity, while Sylvia identifies the heron to be the traits those that she values: freedom, pure femininity, and autonomy. After refusing to tell the ornithologist and her grandmother the whereabouts of the white heron, Sylvia remembers how she and the heron “watched the sea and the morning together” (79). It is this memory that stops Sylvia from sharing



the location of the bird, which shows that she understands and feels compassion for the heron, but also potentially that Sylvia has formed a narcissistic bond with the heron; she loves it because she sees herself within it. The bird is free within its nature-home, like Sylvia, but if the ornithologist captures the bird, it will be killed (its subjectivity destroyed) and put on display (objectified), just like if patriarchal gender roles capture Sylvia, she will be relegated to the domestic sphere (losing her subjectivity) where her role will be to showcase her family's class (objectified).

Throughout Sarah Orne Jewett's "A White Heron," she equates Sylvia to nature and the heron, and places the ornithologist as a patriarchal threat to the female forest. Nature within "A White Heron" is wild and uncultivated, like a child's budding sexuality; it has not faced the violence or control that stems from patriarchal civilization, even Sylvia's milk-cow, Mistress Moolly, has the autonomy to go where she pleases despite the frustration it causes Sylvia or Mrs. Tilley. Sylvia's close connection to nature, along with her age, suggest that she is developing her sexuality, and with the arrival of the ornithologist, she begins to experience her sexuality being developed *into* a heteropatriarchal feminine ideal. As she helps him search for the white heron, she focuses on how the ornithologist will appreciate and praise her, and how she can please him. She accepts the little power that comes with the jack-knife, and her perception of the man becomes more positive than negative. However, despite her small acceptances of patriarchy, she cannot move past the gun and its violence, "could not understand why he killed the very birds he seemed to like so much" (Jewett 76). Identifying the ornithologist as a representation of patriarchy, Sylvia's not understanding why his love of the birds manifests as the desire to destroy and own them can be interpreted as her inability to understand patriarchal love. Therefore, Sylvia rejects that love and chooses to protect the white heron, and herself, from destruction and objectification by patriarchy.



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Crisis is Olivia Knoedler



makeup, an ivory shade bursting
through a thinly squeezed tube
inside a backpack's unmatching skin walls.
This is junior high, where Walker Bossingham walks
the IGA grocery aisles sample
shades of themselves. Scouring for shades
is what becomes of this unwelcomed curiosity after
mom's ringed hand slaps a raspberry blush in
aisle 4, concealer is for those who fear
a *legal* crisis is nearby.

Cashiers are agents now.

Determining the price of everything. Crisis is when the
lost blood of today reaches for the bottom of a bookbag to find
the blue wrapping of a tampon isn't there. There another hand reaches in
checkout 9's grocery bag to remove a box of tampons
that aren't worth enough lost blood
for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.
SNAP out of it. Keep the line moving. No time to yank
at the bookbag's snagging zipper just
to result in false resurrection. Crisis is when a kid from the iPad generation
pulls out their iPad out of their bookbag after school and
they can't play Minecraft for any longer despite
the 10% battery notification. They cry in aisle 9 as there was no
notification from the Abbott Nutrition Facility
on February 3, 2022, when
the mother needed to buy baby formula.
The mother nurses the baby's tears



while trying to do the same for herself as
whispering winds tell her she is doing it wrong.
Crisis is when the bookbag shifts off the shoulders
and the lunchbox dividers can't avoid
the apple sauce spillage that touches
the clean-cut corners of the pbj sandwich. Soggy are these boarders
when Martinus is the carry out for the silver Volkswagen
and the customer says, "I know how
to carry, without freebies." Freed is the
double bagged milk that stretches
like a cat across an artisan rug
puncturing its nails
into a crisis of *white*
onto the ground.



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Abigail Johnson, Bossier Parish Community College

Dr. Don Perkins Service Scholarship

Glynnis Stout, Calhoun Community College

Dr. Susan LeJeune Service Scholarship

April Singer, Aims Community College (Greeley Campus)

Dr. Sheila H. Byrd Service Scholarship

Marcela Dolan, Calhoun Community College

Ms. Joan S. Reeves Service Scholarship

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