



The Nassau Literary Review

solace

The
*Nassau
Literary
Review*

Winter 2023

“Solace”



Dear Readers,

This semester has been one of renewal and tragedy for our community on campus and beyond. After months of virtual classes and testing regulations, we eagerly welcomed the first class of students in two years to enter Princeton without COVID-19 restrictions. But at the same time, we held our friends and loved ones close in the wake of personal tragedies and humanitarian crises across the world.

This issue of *The Nassau Literary Review* captures the precise duality that students have experienced this semester as we seek comfort in the face of personal and social challenges.

Solace can be found within the relationships we cherish most. As does the speaker of “My Grandmother’s Hands,” we can find solace in the haptic memory of a loved one. As Zoe Montague’s “Thoughts on Theodora’s Birthday” suggests, *family* refers to the people who remind us of the past and of ourselves. They connect us back to our childhoods, cultures, and identities. Sometimes, our relationship with family is fraught, as is the case for Maria from Daniel Viorica’s “Bogași.” Though Maria at times finds comfort in her mother and sister, it is the outside world and the possibility of escape that gives her relief in the end.

Amid the stressors of campus life, the ability to step away into nature can be its own source of solace. The poem “A little leaf floats” depicts a leaf’s gentle trajectory on the wind, capturing the safety of suspension in haiku form. Several pieces in this issue show us how varied artistic mediums can convey the beauty of nature, whether it be in the botanical impression of Juliette Carbonnier’s “Carrot Cyanotype” or in the transcendental unity of the herd found in “happy sheep.”

Finally, we ought not forget the solace that storytelling can provide. As Daniel Yu deftly shows us in the nonfiction piece “Seeing Double,” we can find refuge in films that offer meaningful representation: stories that simultaneously leave our minds pulsing and give us a sense of peace. Stories serve a higher purpose, as in Katherine Ren’s “Bookshop,” where they are literally painted into the sky to be remembered indefinitely. In the story’s own words: “Grief is powerful. Endings are powerful.”

We hope you find this issue, in all of its beginnings and endings, to be powerful and a source of solace. As some of our staff members expressed, we want these pieces to make you feel something, whether that be joy, sorrow, or something in between.

Uma Menon and Claire Schultz
Editors-in-Chief, *The Nassau Literary Review*

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a little leaf floats

Luke Shannon

A little leaf floats
on the wind. So light and so
slow. So safe. Like so

happy sheep

Luke Shannon



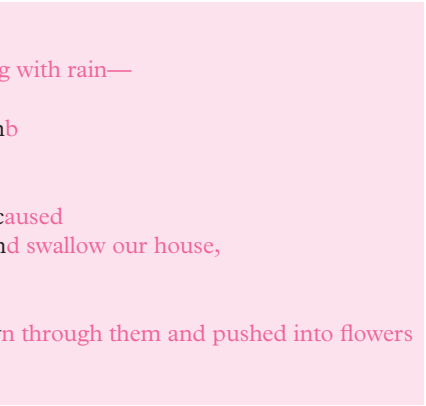
happy sheep happy
sheep happy sheep happy sheep
happy sheep happy



Thoughts on Theodora's Birthday

Zoe Montague

To wish things were different
would be to erase you, my small hands
sweeping leaves off the pavement flushing *with rain—*
to wish I was different
would be to change you, your small thumb
smudging the chalk.
Sisterhood of scooter accidents,
the not happening of which would have *caused*
that little crack in the sidewalk to open *and swallow our house,*
or your accident blood on the porch
to not drip onto the lawn, to not
sink down to the grass roots and be grown *through them and pushed into flowers*
and died and rotted and lived again.



A Gothic Mirror: Reflections on Abjection in Frankenstein

Elliot Hyon

Madison Davis

Camera Obscura



I've never had my own mirror at Princeton. I return from Los Angeles every semester with a neatly furnished room on behalf of Summer Storage and a perpetually unchecked checkbox in the Reminders widget on my phone: "buy dorm mirror." The U-Store sells them for \$25, or a discounted \$22.50 if you have a membership. I could also ride the Weekend Shopper to Target and find the same rectangular one for \$7. Or I could choose the unconventional route of four grand mirror tiles on Amazon for the price of \$18.

But for four semesters, I've never bought a mirror, and that's not something I'll ever change. People are always surprised when I mention this. They question how I can walk out of my room, unencumbered by the burden of how I look. But I haven't rejected all mirrors: just

the gaze that the full-length mirror imposes. I exist as a murky figure, darting between hazy bathroom mirrors after showers and my phone camera on the way to class. I've made a lurching half-peace with not seeing the totality of myself.

I avoid mirrors because there is something haunting about the gaze they impose. We grow up seeing our reflections in the mirror and believe it registers reality only to find out through photos that they are actually a reversal. When we look into mirrors, our brain corrects disproportionate features—eyes that are different sizes, a nose that might not be so straight, eyebrows at different levels. This correction does not take place in real life. We are not as symmetrical as we once thought we were and we are forced to confront this distortion.

But I cannot elude all mirrors. Some reflective surfaces are disguised. Like mirrors, people reflect back a vision of yourself that is unfamiliar. My sense of self is shattered because I cannot escape the eyes of others that mirror a distorted view of myself. I am plagued by the burden of knowing that other people are projecting their own thoughts and beliefs onto me, rendering me conscious of my very being without my consent or power to do anything about it. I cannot be ignorant of this fact when it shapes my daily life: how others perceive me and in turn, how I perceive myself.

And so there is something so liberating to me about eluding perception. I lower my head to the ground, reject all eye contact, and march out of my dorm in sunglasses, a face mask, and a thick jacket. I am an amorphous shape moving through the world. It is only when this disguise is shattered with exclamatory greetings that I realize how illusory this projection of anonymity is.

I mirror my own struggle with consciousness in the plight of Frankenstein's creature. Rejected by his own Creator for an existence he never asked for, he laments, "but how was I terrified when I viewed myself in a transparent pool! At first I started back, unable to believe that it was indeed I who was reflected in the mirror; and when I became fully convinced that I was in reality the monster that I am, I was filled with the bitterest sensations of despondence and mortification."

The creature realizes that in contrast to the graceful, beautiful forms of the humans he admires, he is a monster stitched together and cast away from his Maker at birth. In spite of his physical disfigurement, his soul is pure and compassionate. He cannot act on this kindness against the ubiquitous countenance of human terror and isolation because his appearance does not align with the normative standards of beauty. He experiences abjection when the distinction between his personal image and monstrosity collapses

and he must come to terms with his malformation. Abjection is queer; it is the transgression of all that is normative and sacred.

Abjection is when my mother looks at me through the rearview mirror of the car as she is picking me up from the airport and reminds me that every day she prays to God that I will settle down with a Korean wife and be blessed with many children. Abjection is when my father shakes his head as he sees two girls kissing and I turn my eyes away to absolve my own guilt. Abjection is when my younger brother is interrogated by old friends from church about my sexuality, forcing me to come out against my will.

The process doesn't end when I exit one community to seek refuge in another. When sexuality sees color, acceptance becomes conditional. My flesh betrays me and I become ornamental—simultaneously sexualized and barred from sexuality. When I travel to Lisbon with my friends for spring break, I am greeted with *ni hao* from men trying to hit on me in a gay club. Wrong country, but at least they didn't slant their eyes.

A boy I meet in Georgia asks me if I am from "the country with sushi" and that Asian cultures are the most beautiful in the world. Nothing he said made me feel beautiful.

In all instances, my existence is being constructed by other people against my free will. It is a contradictory life to endure rejection from every community that affirms one part of you and denies the other.

When I look in a full-length mirror, my own reflection engages me in the cycle of abjection. Awkward limbs hanging down, bones jutting out, the rejection of a body I did not choose and desperately struggle to bring myself to love. Acne scars etch tapered grooves against the tan skin I spent my childhood working to lighten with milk and lemon juice. Two dangling snake earrings are my signature statement among jewelry that I shed whenever circumstances dictate the need to shift how I present myself. Like the creature, I know that I am stitched together, parts of me existing in tandem that should not be and never have been congruent. I see myself and I know—I am queer, I am Asian, I am abject.

"Abjection is queer; it is the transgression of all that is normative and sacred."





Red Marbling

Juliette Carbonnier

Vincent Gerardi

The Creature Under Old Post Road

Like ribbon pulled with a scissor
The pavement of Old Post Road
Curled up over itself, leaving the
Organed underbelly of the street.
A heart, still beating, now exposed,
Squirted streams of Kool-Aid blood
Onto the evergreens, trimmed
Into hedges. And the bleeding
Creature almost pecked its head
Out of its cell, and joined its sister
At the bottom of the lake, and its
Father at the courthouse, before
The county had the street repaved.

Bookshop

Katherine Ren



Goerli Orchids

Luke Shannon

The souls of butterflies smell the nicest.

They're small, sparkling puffs of memories: simple moments of flying amongst emerald blades of grass and stopping at the small daisies between. Their souls don't stink of death.

Most human souls smell so strongly of death that it blankets everything else about them. They can't stop speaking, can't stop bleeding regrets, bleeding losses until their stories turn pale and hollow. I usually try to catch a few of their memories before they go rotten.

I carry a decade's worth of good stories in butterfly silk and daisies, grasping them by the beginnings with swirls of wind. There's someone I must share them with and a place I must go back to, so I float along, pulling the stories behind me.

I arrive at the small town's dock. They've carved the wooden sign into intricate designs to cover up the cracks, and they've replaced the old arcade games with vending machines. Seaside shops glow with shiny new

trinkets and bright lights, so unlike the old bait shops from decades before. Still, the scent of wanderlust lingers softly over the younger sailors, as does a thick, nearly opaque fog that prods at their rosy cheeks and stings their hope-filled eyes. The fog catches sight of me and settles.

His name is Warren. He used to like telling stories of the sea. I settle on the wooden planks beside him.

"It's all over," He says to me in lieu of a hello, looking out across the shore. "I s'ppose I can go anywhere I want, eh?"

"I guess so," I reply absently. I gather swirls of clouds from the sky and drag them closer to the sea, feeling them turn to ocean mist and fall away from my grasp. I didn't come here to speak to Warren. He doesn't say very much anymore.

"You can too, boy."

"Suppose so." I smell Warren's wistfulness spilling into the cool sea air. Grimacing, I pull a gust from the waves.

The wind whistles through us, and I feel like Warren's narrowing his eyes at me. Which is stupid. He doesn't have eyes.

"Where d'ya think I should go?" He asks me, his voice coarse, as if every word drags its way across a gravel road.

I don't say anything, but I listen.

"Yer right, kinda. Nowhere left to go, really. Spent my whole life going and learning and not enough time coming back and knowing. I learned so many languages, saw so many things all over the world." His whisper was hoarse. "Thought myself a deep man. Thought experience made ya complex, made ya better. Turns out I just skimmed the surface. I learned things, but I never stuck around long enough to really *get* them."

I relax my thoughts for a while, letting them spread out in the wind, floating above rooftops, and feeling the scent of salty, ocean-chilled air wash through me. It's the feeling of Warren, of the ocean and a sting in the air, a thick, thick atmosphere that wraps around and crushes you.

Warren will never tell me how he died. I don't need to ask. His hazy memories hang around him like a cement noose, and he constantly floats in himself, in that sickening sludge.

In the distance, I see a gust of sky blue memories rise from a tree.

"You think that was a bluejay?" Bird souls are always hard to differentiate, all of them lilting and free and colored with memories of clouds and treetops.

"What's a bluejay?" Warren asks, sounding tired. He always seems tired. "Been dead for a while. I only remember the important things now."

I frown, or I try to, anyway. I've been here far longer than Warren, but I suppose it'd be rude to point that out.

A cruel part of me wants to scoff, wants to ask him what "important things" he remembers and point out that every "important thing" is just a different regret, that he'd keep forgetting everything besides the regrets he holds so dear and eventually dissolve into the atmosphere, his final breath just another wheeze of self-pity.

Instead, I ask, "What do I smell like?"

Warren sighs. "I don't remember the name of it."

I seep in Warren's soul for a second longer. Sometimes, Warren's stories are vibrant: memories of foreign festivals and the joy of docking and traveling and the peace of the sea. With every passing day, Warren seems to sail further away from those stories. I reenact them in pictures in the clouds and shapes in the wind. If I forget, no one will remember.

Hours pass. The ocean below my foggy companion calms, and I clear the sky to match. There's time to spare yet before I need to meet with my friend.

It's a lovely day to go to the park.

I watch children tackle each other in a race to climb to the top of the jungle gym, muddy sneakers

"the scent of wanderlust lingers softly over the younger sailors, as does a thick, nearly opaque fog that prods at their rosy cheeks and stings their hope-filled eyes. The fog catches sight of me and settles."

squeaking on the painted metal. The colors of the playground are bright, but the eyes of the children are brighter.

A child slips and scrapes his knee on the ground beneath. A soft soul named Jolie kisses the wound, sending a warm puff of wind over teary eyes and bloody legs.

"That was nice of you," I say.

"Oh." Her voice sounds quieter than it used to be. Colder, too. "Hello, dear. Thank you. I do what I can. Sit with me, sit with me. Just for a second."

She ushers careful autumn breezes through the sun-kissed hair of a freckled little girl. She'd usually whisper short stories about each child as they skipped up to their parents to leave, but today she's silent. I remember her stories for her.

I swirl them together in the sky: the pink of a doll's ripped tutu, the purple of a small bruise, the blue of the old plastic slide.

"A sunset? Oh, *darling*, for me?" Jolie sounds like she's smiling.

It doesn't make it easier.

"So you know, then, don't you?" Jolie's voice gets quieter.

It's dumb, that it doesn't get easier, no matter how many times it happens.

"I'm fading."

"I know." I force my voice through a sharp hiss of wind. Where Jolie used to feel like memories of fondness at first words and delight at first steps, she's now just the cold feeling of a hospital and an unnatural fullness, like an IV pumping a body swollen. She's cold. Not refreshing-cold, but prickly cold, like cold alcohol sterilizing skin and leaving shivers and uncertainty in its transparent track.

"You'd think an old woman like me would be alright with passing. But I can't stop thinking about it." Her voice sounds like the soft beep of a machine.

"I know." I refuse to look at her.

"I'm forgetting. Rather quickly, too."

"Yeah."

“In a hospital. In a hospital, I died. Nasty business, that. They really should’ve just kept me at home,” she sighs wistfully, pausing. The pink and orange sky spills onto the playground in front of us. “Did I have a son? I don’t remember anymore.”

“His name is Cody. You liked the way his hair was in a perfect little blonde cowlick when he was born.” The words feel like they rip me apart as I say them.

“Oh yes, that’s right, isn’t it? I would’ve liked to see his kids.” Jolie is looking at the sunset. Or, I hope she is. I hope she isn’t looking at me. “I’m sorry, dear.”

“For what?” I ask, but I know.

She chuckles. “When I first came here, you told me not to get too caught up in my death, or I’d start to fade. Grief is powerful. Endings are powerful. So powerful they swallow up the rest of the story. I’m sorry I couldn’t stay with you longer, dear. Or, maybe not ‘dear,’ maybe ‘old friend’ would be better.”

“‘Dear’ is perfectly fine,” I reply, and I feel like Jolie is smiling at me.

I cradle purple and pink clouds in the sunset above. Jolie watches on in cold silence. She reeks of death, but I don’t try to fight it.

“How long do you reckon you’ll stay for, dear?” Jolie asks softly.

As long as butterfly souls continue to flutter from green fields. As long as new people join me, with stories too big for them to hold forever.

“I’ll stay as long as stories need to be told.” I paint Jolie’s stories in the sky.

“And you? What about your story? I never asked.” There’s more regret in her voice, and it clings to me, bitter and cold.

“Mine doesn’t have an ending. Not one I know, anyway. No ending then, no ending now.” My admission hangs in the air. Jolie is silent, waiting, so I continue. “I was a young kid. Didn’t have any regrets, didn’t have any grief. I just... chased birds and ran in fields

of reeds and caught butterflies. I didn’t have an ending. I just fell asleep... in a garden... all dandelions.”

“Is that what you smell like? Dandelions? You kept asking.” Jolie sounds tired.

“Yeah.”

“What’s a dandelion?”

“It’s a type of—” I cut myself off. “Forget it.”

“I will, dear,” Jolie’s voice is the most somber I’ve ever heard it. “I will.”

We both turn towards the sunset, watching the rising darkness wring Jolie’s stories dry. The night brings a chill in the air, and by the time I turn away from the sky, Jolie’s warmth is nowhere to be found.

“Goodbye, old friend,” I whisper.

There’s no response.

I collect Jolie’s forgotten stories from the sky, and I continue on, floating past an emptier playground and waiting for the cold night to pass over me. When the morning comes, I’ll meet my friend. Even so, the fluorescent light of the quiet streets feels just a bit lonely.

I watch the sun rise over a small bookshop with crooked letters hanging above the door. The bell doesn’t chime as I come in, and the door doesn’t creak.

The dusty old shelves are filled to the brim with books, arranged in crooked and disorganized shapes. Piles of books lie in small mounds,

their spines worn and their ink faded. Streams of sunlight flutter through the blinds and flecks of dust dance in the light, floating around the shop like small stars.

In the mesmerizing dances of these unsung stars, I find a familiar soul, shaping the settled dust into hearts and pictures on the covers of books.

“Good morning,” I say.

“Hello, hello *hello!* You’re a bit late! I’ve been waiting *weeks!*” Leo greets me enthusiastically. I continue to look down the aisles, checking for new marks in the worn shelves and new spines in the rows of novels. “Good morning Leo, it’s been a decade. I missed you ever so dearly, Leo, how are you? Why *thank you*, Julian, it’s so *nice* of you to ask.”

“I didn’t ask—”

“Yes, well I’ve actually been getting quite a tad frustrated with people while I’ve been waiting for you in this bookshop. A lot of adults have this awful tendency to start a book and skip straight to the end. It’s a waste, is what it is. Shameful, honestly. A travesty, an absolute insult—!”

“Get to the point, Leo, please.”

“Only because you asked so nicely. I’ve started thinking recently — well, sometime in the past decade — about what exactly makes us fade, and here’s what I’ve come up with. Adults fade. Children don’t.”

“And why’s that?”

“Think about it, Julian. Children have the terrible tendency of getting

“Endings
are powerful.
So powerful they
swallow up
the rest of the story.”

bored with a book after reading its first chapters. So do adults, but adults have the even more terrible tendency to skip to the end anyway, just to see how it turns out. Children hop from one beginning to the next, completely content without an ending. Adults are obsessed with endings, and it swallows them whole.” Leo begins to get worked up, and the dust from the covers of old books and crooked shelves rises into the morning sun, swirling above me.

I tend to entertain Leo’s theories, even if I don’t completely believe them.

“Are you and I still children, then?”

“Yeah,” Leo hums. “I mean, what makes a kid a kid? Maybe it’s not the ignoring of an ending, but just the quiet belief in a happy ending.”

The words still me. Leo allows me a rare moment of silence. In the distance, I see a gust of sky blue memories rise from a tree.

“You think I believe in happy endings?” I finally look at Leo.

“I don’t know, do you?”

I think about the old stories I hold close to me, about Jolie’s memories of holding her children for the first time, about Warren’s memories of diving into icy water and feeling the thrill of the sea in his blood. They’re snapshots of life, small bursts of joy. I only tell the butterfly stories of human souls.

I love those stories, and I love the souls they came from. When the soul fades, I wish them farewell, and it’s lonely, but it’s not grief.

“Is it wrong to?” I ask.

“The opposite, I think.” Leo laughs. “I think people *should* believe in happy endings, regardless of whether they exist or not. Everyone should. It makes the journey so much more fun. It’s sad, that somewhere, when you aren’t looking, you grow up and you stop believing. Then again, you and I didn’t exactly get to grow up. Thank God for that.” Leo is smiling at me.

I grin back.

“Thank God we didn’t grow up,” Leo repeats.

There are only stories, wisps of experiences and emotions that are greater than themselves. All we can do is stand idly by, catching what charming willows of life we can. There are no gods here.

“Thank God,” I reply anyway.

“So? Julian, what do I smell like on this fine, fine day?” Leo does a complicated twirl, and the movement flips the weary yellowed pages of the open books surrounding him.

It’s our test, a simple question to check our memories of small stories, of bird souls and butterfly souls and meadows, of “important things.”

The familiar feeling of Leo drapes over me, warm and inviting.

“Apple cinnamon.” I snort. “I cannot believe your last memory is just some *pie*.”

Leo is beaming anyway. “And you still smell as flowery and dandelion-y as ever, Julian. Now, do you want to go

first, or shall I? I’ve had an absolutely wild decade, absolutely insane.”

“As if you’re the only one with stories, Leo,” I say, settling myself in a corner of the bookstore. There is a decade of stories to trade, and forever to trade them.

A small bookshop in a small town is one of the only places that doesn’t smell like death. The scent of apple pie sticks to some of the old novels, and the scent of dandelions seems to be painted on every shelf, even if there are no customers to notice it.

This story is my favorite: a young teenager with bags under his bright eyes, dressed in old ratty jackets, climbs on shelves and reads books covered in dust. I sit on the carpet, listening to him narrate classics in terrible accents and offer rambling commentary. We collect scenes we like, little paragraphs of inked joy on old pages, and ignore everything else.

Two children in a room with infinite stories, forever.





the oculus, or visiting ground zero

Ethan Wang

7/8/21: "they built a mall here?"

i don't believe anyone who'd tell me
the breadth of a world could rest in an eye.
they routed the nerves—electric lights,
ran veins as their pillared lines.

tight-lidded, we stare here upon only the sky.
we cannot hold ourselves, left now to enterprise,
and we will want it kept that way.

it is so garishly american, the entrails.
dreamt neon shops upon debris, imagined
love in price tags marbled. we built glass
as still concrete-bound, still by gasoline riverbed.

nations unnerved by crusting blood
will mar our stateside beach shrines,
and when that greater war recedes from crystal
shore, we will sell the black tar sand,
us broken children free of charge.

at the entrance, a man asks his friends
where the nearest bar is.
they laugh, but sometimes i wonder too, if

there might be a day when a life will be named
by our dead. if they will find themselves in the
pin-tip floor of a bottle here, and discover
there is no more to be drunk.

Caged

Eliana Gagnon



Juliette Carbonnier

Protest

*CW: gun violence, school shooting violence
dedicated to Kendrick Castillo (2001-2019). rest in power.*

humanity's original shame, sharp intake breath, boulder of a bullet in the chest,
first blood blown against a young girl's hands, bright and reddening
the edges of her sleeves and the white tiled floor of emptying
classroom turned butcher-row kill box, juvenile target practice,
against a boy's breaking ribcage, putting down pressure and cotton t-shirts
to stop the ache, holding eyes in hatred with he who hath committed sin, waiting desperately
for a reprieve and receiving only thoughts and prayers, humanity's great shame

in a showcase of humanity's shame,
we meet in the stained glass alcove, after, to pray
for fallen soldier, who now lays on throne
of white satin and black oak
lost in the line of duty
protecting the rights of "true americans"
through this sacrifice of soul, the heroism he promised
his father that he would never commit, promise cracked by an airborne bullet, and
there is no purple heart to be given in this war,
the blame scattered reckless, and left in the wake of this silent explosion,

a community in mourning of such bravery,
brothers in arms and in black,
and pallbearers just old enough to understand
what it is a pallbearer does, moving soullessness
from grip to ground, to un growing up under 6 feet
of a father's grief -- father left shaken, father left speechless
asked to speak so many times, and so many fathers left grateful, and angry,
his mother, who everyone hugged, what else could we do in this charade of healing,
where tears are mistaken for a catharsis no one is given, a relief that is only ever shattered by
the next empty bullet casings in a classroom, young world's continued sorrow,
the shadow of a grave marker determined
to keep alive memory of what came before

keeping alive the memory of what was to come after, before
it happened, a celebration of 12 struggled years,
of tests and tears (but never tears like these)
how they tell us to stand and mimic
strength, or apathy, here in the shadow of loss
it all looks the same,
as life becomes a drama class on
how to not break down in the middle of a black and blue ballooned gymnasium
playing pomp and circumstance as a funeral march
to the beat of the bullets against bare walls,

and try not to cry when the fireworks
sounds too much like gunshot reverberation,
absorb the sound inside yourself and become an unending echo-chamber
of unlistened calls for action

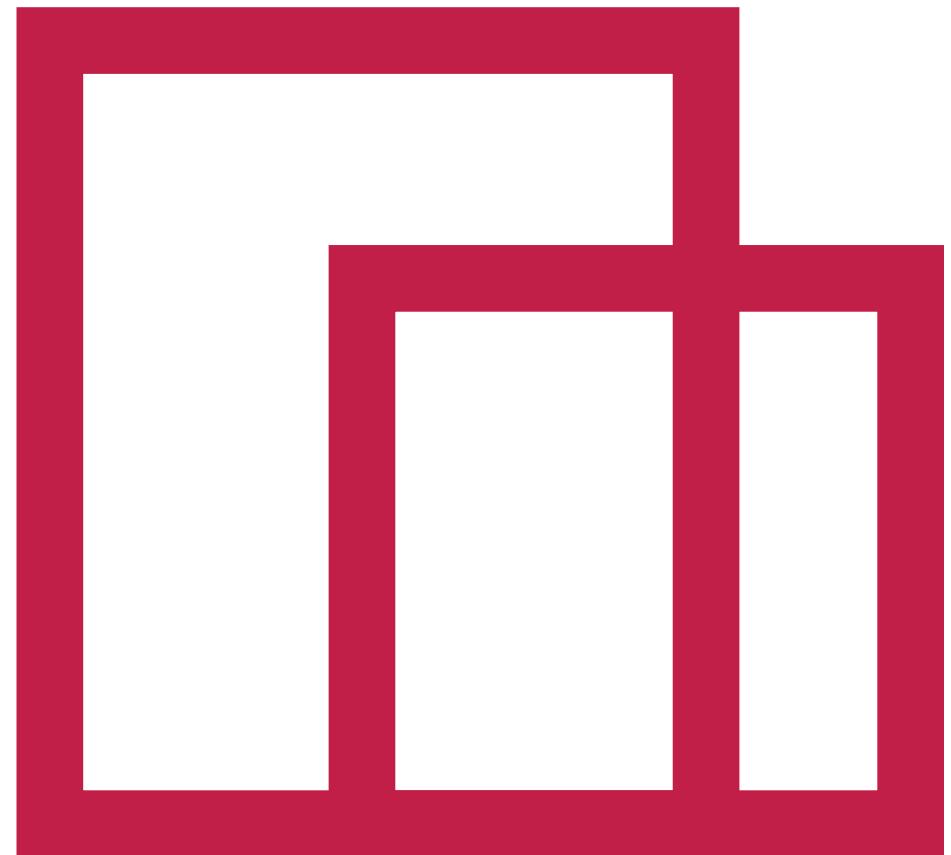
inaction stands in the middle of the room in a black suit and a u.s. flag lapel pin,
and gives a speech on how difficult
it must be to be here, in this over-candled room, breathing in sacrament and cinnamon,
when lungs have already become hardened and static
from gasping out grief to a 25-minute therapist
who tells you to take walks more often
you tell inaction to take a walk and walkout
together, because you now do everything together
because he did it alone,
last week you wished that you could see your friends every day of summer
and now the party never ends because the mourning never ends

that morning, they set out
an open seat at the front for Kendrick, with a diploma earned,
but never to be claimed, three days was all he never received,
in the three days before, we barricaded the teachers parking lot,
and cooked hot dogs on camping grills,
Kendrick with spatula at hand on the grill, and
we had not said hi yet, not in a while, the year was almost over,
and we had all been so busy,
just counting down the days, willing ourselves success and survival

who can call themselves a survivor here? who a victim?
for a year, i called myself neither victim, nor survivor,
but still carrying survivor's guilt
in a clear backpack, to be seen by all
how many survivors did Kendrick make out of almost bodies
a line of children with thankful mothers and fathers
for the sacrifice of a son not their own, but
his parents still line the gravestone with flowers, every morning,
because mothers and fathers are supposed to die
first, what (almost) all children must brace themselves for

all american children must know how to brace themselves from such violence
before, they taught us to brace desks and electric projectors on wheels
against the door frame and close all the windows and lock the doors
don't make a sound, for fear of showing your position,
playing call of duty with your life and you are always in sight of the enemy

and the enemy is always in sight of the guns
they sell at Walmart for \$50 a pop and some change
for a few bullets, how many do you need to exchange lives for bodies
one is usually enough but he got 7, buried them
in shoulders and against the ear, grazing past into the wall of the next room,
where a little girl sat with hands over her ears,
young boy crying in the corner
and teacher praying praying praying that today
would not make her children into bodies



Seeing Double: The Spectacular Incomprehensibility of *Everything Everywhere All at Once*

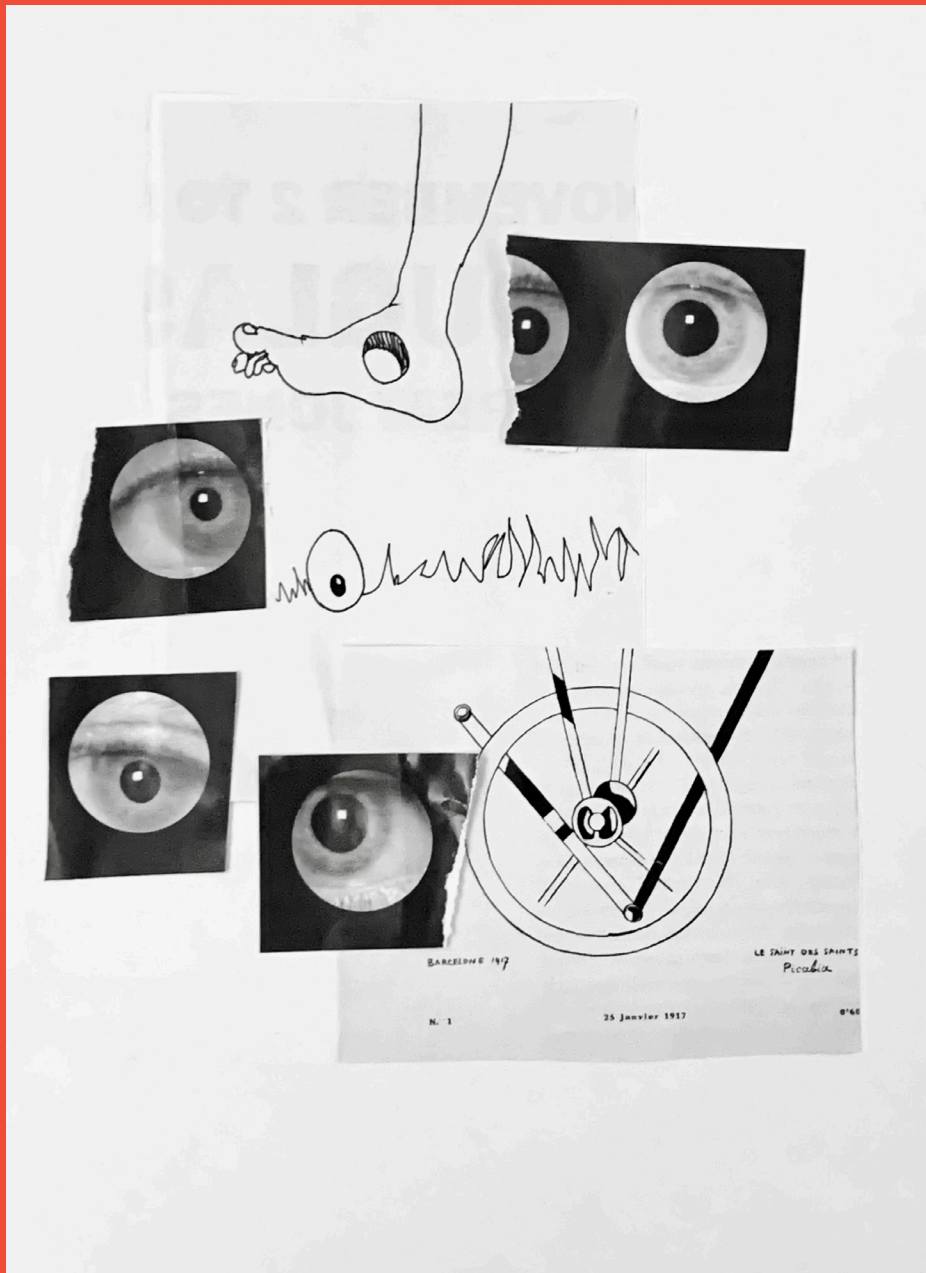
Daniel Yu

I left *Everything Everywhere All at Once* and decided I would never be a writer.

It was April. The weather in New York was just beginning to turn, and I stepped out from the theater onto the sidewalk feeling like something in my chest had been wrung out and left to dry. It was a feeling I had never encountered before: that a piece of media captured my experience so specifically, so truly, that I had nothing left to say. I wondered briefly if this was the feeling that my white friends had all the time. Then I wondered how I would explain it.

Everything Everywhere defies summary. “A multiverse movie — no, not like *that*,” I find myself saying. The trope feels inadequate, unworthy of the film’s self-awareness, insufficiently descriptive of its surreal creativity. But “a love story,” “a film about parenthood/migration/assimilation/trauma,” “a gay movie,” “an Asian movie” all seem equally inadequate. The film is at once all of these and none of them.

Even the plot itself, in all its absurdism, is difficult to fashion into linear narrative. Daniels (the co-directing duo of Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert, who share the best



Untitled Collage Maggie Chamberlain

name out there) move effortlessly from trope to trope, world to world, tone to tone. It is part science fiction movie, part comedy, part adventure, part drama.

This instability in genre is accompanied by an instability in character: as is the nature of the multiverse, characters are split into different selves, with different personalities belonging to different ‘realities.’ Several months after I see *Everything Everywhere*, my father tells me about the time his job sent him to South Africa during Apartheid.

“They didn’t know what to do with me,” he says, shaking his head. “White or ‘colored’ — half of them sent me to one category, half to the other.”

He is using the past tense, but I understand he is talking about the present.

It is not a new idea that Asian-Americans exist on the margins of Asianness and Americanness; the myth of the perpetual foreigner, white-adjacent but never fully white. There is scholarship on this matter. There is also my professor who, six weeks in, is still calling me by the only other Asian student’s name. I like to sit in class and pretend that I am him, 6’3 and on the rowing team. I wonder how I exist inside my professor’s head, taking up too little space to even warrant my own body. Instead, I share one with Adam, who is 10 inches taller than I am and looks nothing like me.

After all, there is also a lot of body-sharing in *Everything Everywhere*. Joy/Jobu, Waymond/Raymond; even Raccacoonie operates another’s

limbs. The various consciousnesses that inhabit the body have no hierarchy, no truth. Evelyn begs Jobu to give her her daughter back — until she learns she cannot kill Jobu without killing Joy.

Back ‘in the real world,’ Joy herself is undergoing a sort of *doubling*: there is her life with her parents, her Asian self, and life she is constructing with her girlfriend, her queer self. Just as Joy is first herself and then Jobu and then Joy again, she finds these two selves cannot exist at once. She oscillates between them, the lines blurring, the two halves closing in on one another and then drifting apart. Switching from language to language, genre to genre, she exists in the threshold between these worlds.

It is sunset in Chinatown and I am sitting in the darkening park with my friend Evan, who is Chinese and has jokingly nicknamed me “halfie,” a reference to my mixed heritage. Another splitting.

He is telling me about the girl he likes, how he took her to the dance and they made out. As I nod, I wonder if he senses another *halfness* in me, another splitting barely papered over by my squared shoulders and set jaw. How my voice rises with uncertainty when I tell him I don’t have a girlfriend. How I call him “bro” in every other sentence, practice what I’ll say in my bedroom at night, the words a low rumbling in my chest, the rhythm just off in a way I can never quite place.

How my body — the movement of my hand, the lilt of my voice — betrays me. The femininity lurking in the beats between sentences, talking

to men yet another dialect I never learned. Sometimes I am so full of contradictions I wonder how I will survive.

And yet we do — Joy and I, Joy and Jobu. In the end, Jobu herself is not destroyed. The film’s climax is told in flashes across time and space, reality after reality where Evelyn chooses her daughter. We are told the whole movie that, for Joy to be saved, Jobu must die. But the truth is that, for Joy to truly live, Jobu must live, too. Evelyn must see that her daughter’s other ‘self’ is not a threat to her daughter’s true consciousness, but is instead equally human. Equally Joy.

In this sense, the film defies conventional narrative arc. Instead, it is composed of several different narratives, which make little sense on their own but cohere together, each one finding tension in another’s climax, fulfillment in another’s resolution. These worlds — these *selves* — are simultaneously contradictory and interdependent. They do not negate or dilute one another; they are the conditions of one another’s possibilities.

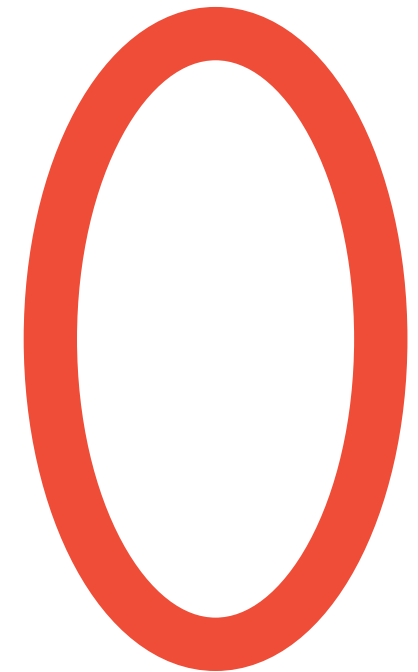
This is the strange and wonderful liminality of *Everything Everywhere All at Once*. Perhaps a white film critic would expect Evelyn to renounce her old ways and apologize for her intolerance, saying she was wrong to have put the weight of her expectations on Joy. That she will never again criticize, that she will understand. Certainly, white narrative convention would demand it. Part of the drive towards assimilation is towards *comprehensibility*, where every question can be answered, each part

of your history picked apart and laid open on the ground for consumption.

But this film operates in the in-between spaces, in those gray and hidden thresholds between love and negation, redemption and hurt. For me, it is enough that Evelyn holds her daughter, both of them crying, standing in the parking lot together. For me, it is enough that they are together, even for a moment.

“What a fascinating movie,” my father says. It is June. We are walking down the sidewalk past rows of parked taxis, the sun having long set, the theater’s lights glowing behind us. Then, he asks: “Is it about us?”

I don’t trust myself to speak. I watch our reflections pass in the dark glow of a taxi’s window, and I can almost mistake my face for his.





Samantha Blysse Haviland

Under the Influence of Evolution

I bought you a cactus at CVS and three weeks later you made me stand in the outdoor gardening section of Home Depot. I cursed the sun and balanced on the edge of the cart. You want to go stargazing

and I tell you that the sun *is* a star. You hate when I speak in technicalities. You want me to use words more fluidly, to abandon the subjective. You lose my brother's bong. I don't care—because you still lose. Isn't that fluid, isn't that something. Bring me coffee and we can debate all day about nothing, still smelling of mulch and weed killer and weed, plants

and dirt. Nitrous acid in my coffee, or is that espresso. We are the last things, but will not be the last thing. Evolution has not finished with us—just look at the vestigial tail they dug out

of your back before lacrosse season. And the skull the scientists found in that well. Not human, but close to. At home, you mix drinks, and bloody marys spill down the hatch before noon. Eat your eggs

with salt, but what came first? The chicken? The nest? You or me? I guess the sun came first, but time is not linear so it doesn't *really* matter. In the end, we are all just broken skulls, blooming.



Burton's Preserve

Kaitlyn Hay '10

Alumni Feature

Why Have You Come Again, December?

Michael M. Fried '59

I loved you once as I love tomorrow:
The burnished promise of the dawn
Shone in your hair and from your eyes;
Now visions of soft rain persist . . .
Why have you come again, December,
With "I hope you'll not resist,"
And then, "I hope you won't remember?"

*From the Archives * Spring 1956*

Bogați

Daniel Viorica

Bogați, 1951

The girls are thirteen and twelve, and they are sweating because mother has just lit the fire and it's filling the room with smoke. Their house isn't large. Just this room as a kitchen and one in the back where all three of them sleep, so even in the winter they can stay warm without burning too much wood. Clever. It's a well-constructed house, Maria thinks. And yet I hate it. She wants to lean over to her sister and speak, as quietly as she can, of how tired mother looks stirring the pot on the stove but Ilinca isn't paying attention, tugging at a loose thread in her dress. Her eyes are glazed. She spent all day in the house. She might even be sick.

Mother takes a long stir and sets her spoon beside the pot.

There's something we need to speak about.

Maria had spent the day outside, with the sheep. She never disliked it: in the morning there were moments in the woods when the sky lit blue, precisely the color of a gas fire's center, and the undergrowth brushed wet against her socks. When the sheep were back from grazing, she knew where to find mushrooms and strawberries in the dirt. She would wrap them up fresh in the fold of her shirt, wash them in the well water. Coming home mother would ask, what is that on your shirt, and

Maria would say, I found food, and she always left the house sobbing. Though afterwards she had once caught mother reaching carefully for the pile of berries, eating the brightest one whole.

We're starving, mother tells them. The sheep aren't selling. All the money is in the city. It makes them worth nothing.

But we have the garden.

Mother shakes her head. Three people can't live on what we grow in the garden. We don't have enough money to buy food.

At first it might have been the smoke, or else the steam coming out of the pot, or a trick of the firelight but mother's eyes are wet, as if filled with tears. Beside her Ilinca lets out a choked sob. Taking a moment to put a hand on her sister's arm Maria stands up to find the dried herbs hanging from the wall: *tei* and *leoștan*. She picks the latter, crushing it in her hand, walking to the stove.

Would this make it better?

The soup?

Yes.

Of course it would, yes, of course.

So she opens her hand above the pot and dust falls into the pot. It

doesn't integrate, as she thought it would, it waits a pile unmoving and unappetizing on the surface. Her mother runs a hand through Maria's hair as she hasn't for a very long time before brushing her aside. She takes back up the spoon and stirs swiftly, expertly. The *leoștan* disappears. You always were the clever one, mother says.

Last night when mother was gone Maria and Ilinca stayed up talking. The full moon came through the narrow window and lit objects as if by magic: a woolen blanket, mother's coat, a novel from the city, shears hanging from their metal peg on the wall. Not for the first time Maria wondered what it was like when father built the house, so carefully.

He's not coming back, you know, said Ilinca.

I know.

Mother told me that he has another family. In *Ploiești*. He's had them since the beginning and mother knew about it the whole time. And all of them knew about us: he would talk. You and I were the only ones who didn't know.

The next morning Maria woke early to bring the sheep to pasture, feeling each in its budding wool and calling each by name. On the way she'd emptied all the *țuica* bottles into a ditch, with some satisfaction. Dangerous, rebellious, necessary.

There are jobs in *București*, says mother, quietly.

Maria bends her head, stops, looks back up at her mother. And the

firelight casting yellow flickers on the wall. Ilinca is close to sobbing, and that's when Maria realizes her place in this. Taking her sister's hand and holding it. When are we leaving, she asks. Mother pauses.

You know, in the city, there are jobs. Even for you.

She's not looking at Maria, she is looking down at the pot.

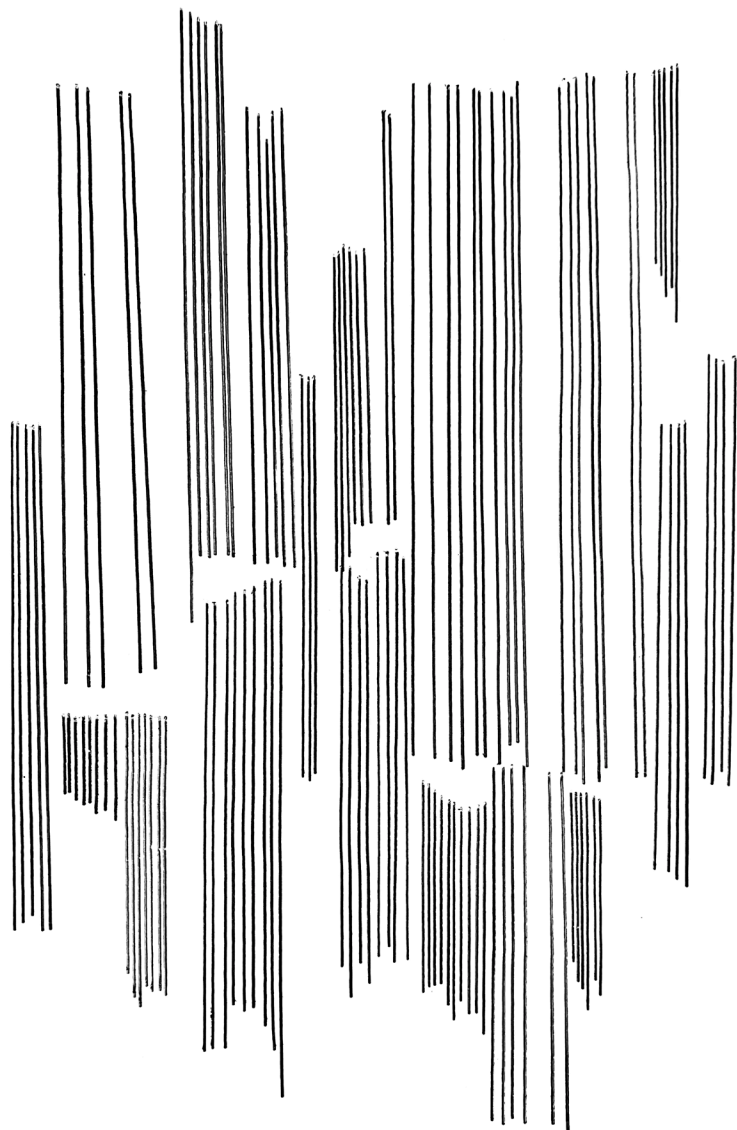
A factory will take you. And if you do well— you might even go to high school. Your father worked it all out: he found a driver to take you, and a place for you to stay. A kind family. And you can always come to visit us, your sister and me. Maybe we could even visit you in the city, you could take Ilinca to the fair. . .

It was then that Maria felt the tide opening up between them, vast and black. She'd never seen the sea but thought of it often. It must be like water from the bottom of the well, brackish, but stretching impossibly far, reeking of salt. Tears filled her eyes, and the heat of the room was suddenly insupportable. She would have stormed out but she couldn't, could only half-collapse onto the wall and feel her sister beside her, holding on, so light as to be insubstantial compared to the weight that had settled behind her eyes.

She packed her bags that night, to leave the next day. Only in the morning when she went to graze the sheep did she feel something like a smile growing on her face.

Lines

Maggie Chamberlain



A dorm room looks
like a plaything. Like a block
with curved edges. I lie

on my back in the bathroom
and stare at the bottom
of my sink. At the zip ties

holding the pipes together
between the porcelain
and the wall. I've been trying

to be more honest—or maybe
open is the right word. Staring
at the bottom of the sink

helps. So does testing all the outlets
and realizing only half of them
work. At home my dad

would rip down the walls
and mess with the wires himself
or whatever you're supposed to do

when things stop holding a charge.
My desk looks like a frying pan
covered in scratches—I hang

collages above my bed,
and a calendar that doesn't start
for another four months. I stick

post-it-notes to the wall. *Laundry,*
homework, buy more Cheetos.
My roommate's shampoo bottle

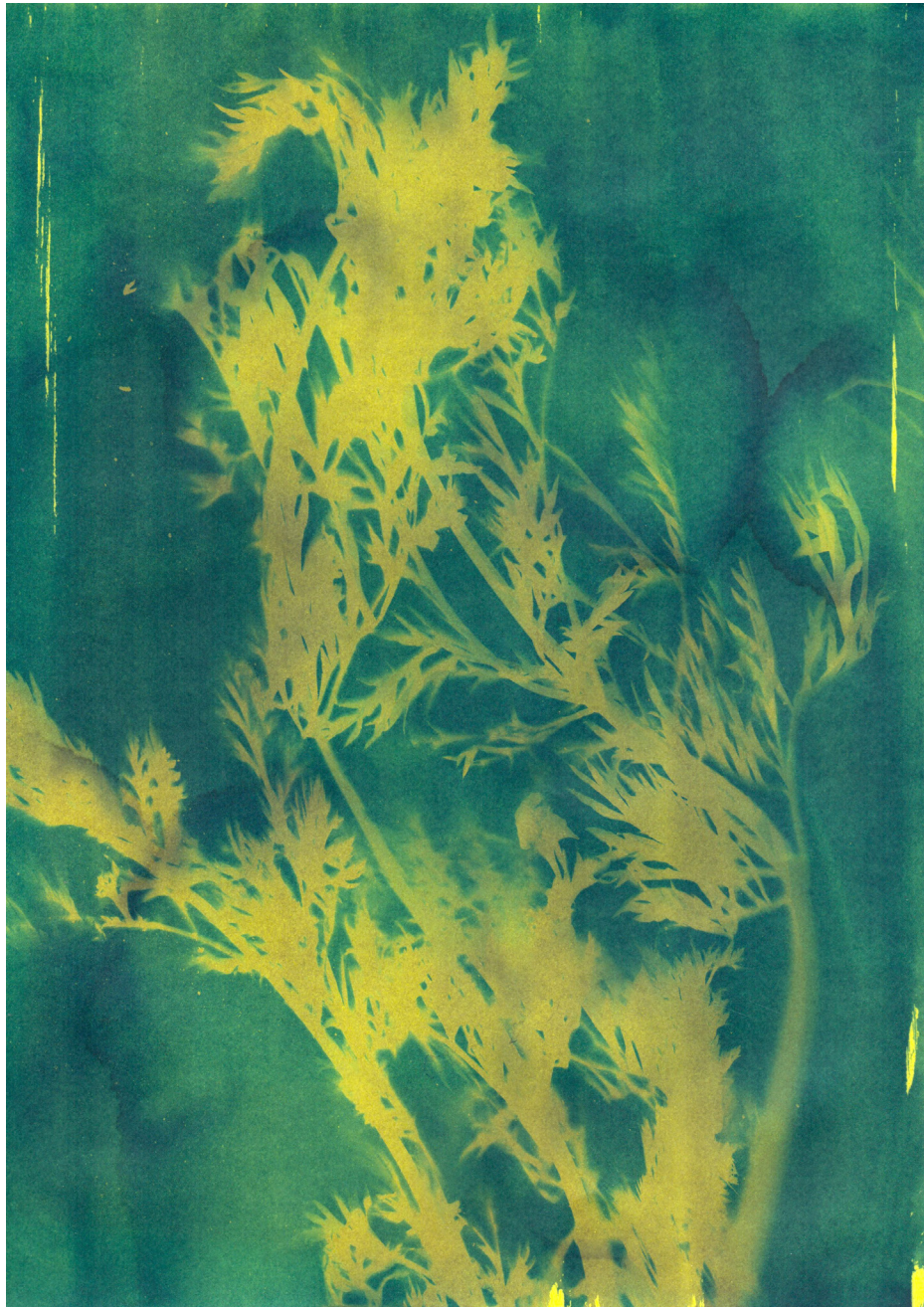
falls and hits my foot in the shower,
now there's a bruise that feels
like pins and needles when I run

my hand across it. There are stacks
of playing cards and tarot cards,
I read fortunes while waiting

for the new year and count the books
on my shelf that I'll never finish.
Everything reminds me of Jenga.

Collapse

Samantha Blysse Haviland



Carrot Cyanotype

Juliette Carbonnier

My Grandmother's Hands

Dana Serea

The Danube River flows from her veins,
down calloused palms and ridged layers of skin,

through fingernails encrusted with soil,
her proud warrior scars.

Her knuckles are the Carpathian Mountains
that I climb to reach her beating heart.

These are the hands that gently braid my hair,
their textured wrinkles folding over my locks,

the hands that comb through spring blossoms
and whisper lullabies to slumbering lambs.

They're the hands that light the fire in the stove
and roll out pastry dough,

the fingers that brush luscious egg wash
and sprinkle pungent caraway seeds.

They guide the scissors and needle through fabrics
to make dresses in the colors of zinnias.

When I leave, they're the hands that wipe my tears,
a soft touch that caresses our last embrace.

Each summer, I ask my grandmother to hold my hand
even when we're far apart.

Zoe Montague '24 is an avid journal keeper in the Religion department. She loves Vermont, ultimate frisbee, cool shapes, and discovering new kinds of great conversations.

Vincent Gerardi '25 is a writer from Long Island, NY, studying English with a focus in Theatre and Humanistic Studies. His favorite quote is from Gwen Verdon: “Everyone is born beautiful, but only some people are born funny.” At least Vincent was born beautiful.

Ethan Wang '26 is a freshman from Katy, Texas who plans on studying Economics. He listens to enough music to consider it a bona fide hobby, but falls just short of qualifying as a Music Opinion Haver. He is working hard towards that end.

Rooya Rahin '23 is a poet and politics nerd from Highlands Ranch, Colorado. Rooya is a politics major, helps run Songline Slam Poetry, and works on The Daily Princetonian. If you're reading this, they're glad you exist.

Samantha Blysse Haviland '26 is a freshman from Mamaroneck, New York studying English. Their work has previously been published in Okay Donkey, Ninth Letter, and Lumiere Review. They enjoy writing in all genres and are especially fond of experimental work.

Dana Serea '26 is a freshman from Rutherford, New Jersey studying English with plans of obtaining certificates in Creative Writing and Spanish Language. When she's not writing, she loves baking and photography. If you stop by her dorm, she may be making cookies.

Katherine Ren '26 is a freshman from the New Jersey suburbs studying computer science. She sings (badly) while she codes and stays in lecture halls after class to write little stories about pretty things. She's rather satisfied with her lot in life.

Daniel Viorica '25 is from New Mexico.

contributors

Juliette Carbonnier '24 is a junior from New York City studying English with certificates in Music Theater, Theater, and Creative Writing. She enjoys long walks in the rain and has recently reconnected with her passion for fingerpainting.

Maggie Chamberlain '23 is a senior at Princeton majoring in Art History and pursuing a Visual Arts certificate. She loves working in a variety of media—from ceramics to collage to watercolors. The list goes on. She's so excited to be featured again in the Nassau Literary Review!

Madison Davis '26 is a freshman from southwest Florida, and due to their indecisiveness, is “undecided.” Madison is always creating something—there's a pair of bright red jeans on their floor with an absurd amount of holes in them, ready to be stitched up into something probably too violently avant garde (as most things they make) for most of the Princeton audience. They love to share their art with others by any means they can get.

Eliana Gagnon '23 is a senior from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania concentrating in sociology with a certificate in visual arts. While making her art, she enjoys catching up on cooking competition shows and psychological thrillers.

Luke Shannon '24 (lukeshannon.xyz) is a generative artist and painter exploring rules, randomness, and infinity through code.

Audrey Zhang '25 is an artist from New York, and she wants to major in Art & Archaeology (Art Practice Track) with a potential certificate in Creative Writing. She is passionate about art making, sustainability, and learning about anything and everything. She also likes baking desserts, dancing, and connecting with people.

Elliott Hyon '24 is a junior from Los Angeles (818!) studying English literature and creative writing. He finds joy in vintage jewelry, Gothic literature, and swimming in the sea. Also with the number three.

Daniel Yu '26 is a freshman from New York City. He enjoys going on walks and meeting people's dogs.

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