A Different Life

Brenna Dunn

“The Painter is here to transform my house” (104). The Painter is Here, by Cathy Warner is about a woman longing for a different life. The painter comes to transform her house, and she hopes it will transform her life. I have felt this many times, hoping something little will help change my life for the better. The woman is not happy with the life she is living because she feels she is not a good mother or a good wife. She looks at the painter with envy, seeing that he knows what he is doing in life and he is happy and secure. The woman longs to have a happy, more secure, life like the one the painter appears to have.

I made a call to Cathy Warner and asked her a few questions about the story she wrote. My main question to Cathy was, “What is the main idea behind the story?” Cathy’s response was, “The woman in the story is overwhelmed with being a mother and being married.” The following line helps show this idea. “The baby on the jar is smiling. He must have a different kind of mother” (104). She feels as though she is not an adequate mother. She doesn’t know how to be the right kind of mother for her child and she really wants to change. “I think he says that you should take the baby to the park. The fumes will be strong” (104). It is as though she did not think of this herself, the painter had to tell her what would be best for her baby.

The way the woman looks at the painter it seems as though she has some feelings for him because he is secure in his life. When I first read this story I thought this was the main idea behind it until I talked to Cathy. Now I see that there is just a little part of the woman that longs for the painter. “He’s done this everyday. He knows his life by heart” (104). She longs to have a life like his, probably wishing she were his wife.

I am here in the living room and painter is gone but he has arranged the stack of pictures I took off the mantle. My wedding photo is centered in its silver frame. We’re young and tentative in black and white, holding rosebuds and baby’s breath, Mark and I. Our baby’s pictures flock around it. That’s not how I’d display them, but they look better this way. (105)

She feels as though she can’t do things right. She envies the way the painter thinks, he seems to have his priorities straight because of the way he does things at her house. Arranging the pictures in a different way than she would is such a small thing but it really meant a lot to her. It showed her a different way to look at her marriage and her baby. The way he put her wedding photo in the middle of the baby pictures shows that
everything is centered around the marriage. This is the way I would have set up the pictures in my home. She needs to be focusing a little more energy on her husband and spending some quality time with him by getting away from the baby every now and again. This would help her and her husband build a stronger relationship.

I can relate to the woman in the story because I feel like I want to be in someone else’s shoes. I get tired of going to school and working every single day “like a paint by number”(104). I think many people feel like they want the life someone else is living. It is just like the saying, “the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence.” I know people who are successful and doing what they want to do and they appear to be really happy just like the painter, but there are always things we don’t see.

Cathy also informed me that there is some tension in the marriage, this can be seen in the following line, “The scratch of slammed doors and the gray scuffs of a shoe thrown across the room, the dent of a saucepan and the orange drip of tomato sauce that defied Comet have vanished”(105). This tension is what is really pushing the woman over the edge. Maybe her husband isn’t supporting her as much as he should be. When the line says, “that defied Comet had vanished” it shows that she had tried to erase the evidence of her bad marriage. In a way it was as though she was trying to scrub away her problems and when she couldn’t get rid of them it just makes her realize that her marriage problems are real and they won’t go away just as the scuff marks would not go away. “I want to erase it along with his memory of my walls before he disguised them”(105). The woman was ashamed of the scuff marks that were on the wall, she wished that the painter never had to see the evidence of her bad marriage. It is interesting that she sees the paint as a just a disguise. In the same way that she could not scrub away the scuff marks, she can not just paint over them and make everything all better in her marriage.

“Waiting for my husband to come home from work and leave his shoes at the door. Waiting for him to tell me Everything will be okay”(106). Even though there may be trouble in her marriage, she still misses her husband and feels like it may be easier to deal with everything if she has him there to help her. “The painter has gone but I wish he were here”(106). She feels safe being around someone who knows what he is doing in life. This line is a really important one because it makes it seem as though she wants to be with the painter instead of her husband but in fact she is just jealous of the life he gets to live and she was living vicariously through the painter.

Many people dream of having a better life. It is really hard to appreciate what you have until you don’t have it anymore. The painter probably has no idea that the woman envies the life he has. He doesn’t see how good of a life she thinks he has. Cathy Warner did a wonderful job of making a story and showing us what it is like to be living an unhappy life.
A Dog Who Changed the World  Jay Weber

When a dog exposes its feelings towards others it seems to evoke emotions and attitudes from different people. Because a dog can show character people are able to respect them, making the dog truly an animal that can be a friend to humans. The short story by Katie Frey, The Lift, does a really good job of exposing nature of dogs and their affect on humans. Does nature determine the way that dogs act and does this nature apply to humans as well? An aggressive dog has character traits that are similar to a human’s aggression. This story deals with aggression that is natural in life; because of this story people are forced to take a better look at their own behavior.

This story is based on a German family’s folk tale, which is interesting, because the story seems to tie in with what Adolph Hitler represented; the dog Peikie is the mirror image of Hitler. If Hitler was a dog he would look like Peikie, “He had a squashed up face, a stout terrier nose, a stupid little terrier under bite and dark beady eyes that darted about looking to assert terror”(131). Even this dog description is not far off from Hitler’s appearance and acts. Peikie is a little loud-mouthed dog that feels he has to make sure that the rest of the world knows that he is terribly dangerous. Hitler also did the same thing with his German Army making sure that the rest of the world was aware that Germany was not to be pushed around, which did cause terror in the neighboring counties. Because of this, the German people rallied around him—just like Grandma rallied around Peikie. The German people knew little of what terror Hitler was capable of, so they followed him blindly; this was the same for Grandma DuPree who blindly let her dog carry out his aggressions and was able to get away with these things that were unforgivable because his owner turned her back, “Peikie was quick and precise. He sprinted to the letter, peed directly on it, not even bothering to lift his leg, and ran straight through his doggy door. Grandma DuPree was inside watching Days of Our Lives and oblivious to the entire episode” (133). It seems in both Peikie’s and Hitler’s world the people who had control in the beginning turned their backs, and allowed these two to achieve the terror that greatly changed their worlds.

In nature neither of these two would have been allowed to go as far as they did due to the fact that the loud and small would get killed off. This seems to be the natural way in the world and this even holds true in human society; the small, loud guys are frequently destroyed while the one’s who learn how to control their mouth succeed. So it seems the small but noisy dog Peikie and Adolph Hitler were freak accidents in nature.

Peikie is the form of true evil and this natural character trait is ultimately the reason why Peikie is killed as nature comes full circle and
takes care of its freak accidents. For the first time Peikie starts to stick out in everyone’s mind at the dinner party when everyone tells their horrifying stories. The dinner party of animal lovers is the first sign the reader gets that the death of this dog is planned. So too, the Allies because of the great evils that Adolph Hitler’s committed against humanity while in power also planned his death. Peikie, a dog that has animal loving veterinarians plotting against him, must have severe character traits that must be eliminated. Dr. McKellin even expressed his wish for a bloody end for the hound, “These are all so tame,” Dr. McKellin slammed his fist on the table, ‘Where’s the guts? Where’s the gore?’ First he thought we could feed Peikie fiberglass, lacerating his stomach and initiating a slow death of internal bleeding” (136). This true hate toward this animal needs to be noted because when the actual event of the dog killing does occur it is all because of Dr. McKellin. He was the one who was able to get Peikie in the situation of the killing, which took place as bloodily as possible with no one receiving any of the blame. Putting all of the facts together proves Dr. McKellin’s guilt.

Of course, there is the other side to it, which could be that this story was just a freak accident and that one thing did not have anything to do with the other. Dr. McKellin could have been truly drunk that night when he made the remark about how he wanted a bloody death for Peikie. The recommendation to the hotel could have been out of pure friendship for Grandma DuPree and as for Dr. McKellin finding out first it would have been due to the fact that the hotel staff knew Dr. McKellin and felt more comfortable telling him the bad news. However, this story is so wide open, it could have gone either way, which is the beauty of this story.

The way the author builds up the character Peikie is very engaging, as and leaves the reader to be able to make many connections to what Peikie represents. As the reader we can see the way Peikie is uncontrollable, which is done by a very unique style of the author, which allows the character, Peikie, to be fully developed. Also knowing that the story came from Germany makes it possible to make the connection between Hitler and Peikie. If the author had not developed Peikie the way she had the story would have lost meaning, but because the author uses short stories within her piece to show the devilish behavior of this demon like dog, connections can be made. This is what makes this piece a humble but humorous piece of work.

The language of this story goes well with the writer’s style but it does also have its confusing points. If these areas could have been worked out I believe the story would have been one of the stronger pieces in the PGR. Another thing that would have made the story of higher quality would have been condensing the first five pages, which are good but I found I was over saturated with the evils of the little hellhound. The ending is strong and does a remarkable job of leaving the reader with a mystery, was
it fate? Or was the killing really planned by Dr. McKellin?

Looking at an animal’s behavior is another way for humans to take a look at their own actions and help judge themselves without feeling like they are being critical of themselves. Also, animal stories allow individuals to comment on things that they would normally not be able to, which seems to be the true theme behind *The Lift*. Peikie is a dog that forces people to look at his behavior, and then their own, and this may be the reason dog is called man’s best friend, because a dog forces people to look at their own behavior.
What Once Was Sacred…

Maia Yepa

I remember taking the train through Albuquerque, stopping at the station to pick up passengers, getting out to stretch my legs on the early-afternoon-crowded-with-sunshine-and-people platform. They were expecting us, it seemed, as the vendors smiled and hollered their deals through the thickness of bodies. Some passengers, weary of train food, were pulled to the cries of tamales and breakfast burritos; others were drawn towards cold drinks.

I headed for the table of gaudy looking souvenirs where a tall, white man with a sparse ponytail and a shiny bald spot on the top of his head verbally advertised his “authentic” goods. His female counterpart, a good deal shorter, but equally enthusiastic, held up a turquoise necklace. “Made with genuine Native American craftsmanship,” she boasted. They both wore pounds of silver-and-gemstone jewelry and southwestern attire that aimed to hint at forgotten cultures. “Just looking,” I informed the eager sales-couple, and I wondered if the Dreamcatchers on the collapsible card table were perhaps a little too symmetrical, as though the chemically-processed leather might be bound around a plastic hoop. I left the quasi-booth—now crowded by tourists besotted with the notion that they might impress their friends with a little piece of foreign territory—and re-boarded the train feeling betrayed by imitation spirituality and sacrilegious symbolism.

It seems it has become a fad to be Native American. So many people claim this heritage without any knowledge of what the culture is about. Ian Kleinfeld’s poem, “The Age of Aquarius, a Few Years Late,” represents to me the hypocrisy of a nation struggling to define itself culturally in the melting pot that is the United States. I feel this struggle all the time, in everything I do, when I look at myself in the mirror. I am a white girl, with just enough Red blood to make me wish I could peel off my skin and wear it inside out. Reading Kleinfeld’s words reminded me how much a part of the system I am—a system that destroys any hope for a fading culture’s survival, and denies a people of their freedom to practice their tradition of living in equilibrium with the earth.

Age of Aquarius: the supposed enlightenment era. The time when people realize their potential to live harmoniously with one another. The generation of respect and love and peace. Well, it came too late, as Ian Kleinfeld proposes in the title of his poem. In other words, was all of the destruction and rage and murder really necessary before our country’s sudden epiphany that people should coexist in tranquility? Did natives have to be thrown off of their land, the environment gobbled up, and our minds polluted with theories of mass production and global industrialization before coming to the conclusion that, hey… maybe these things aren’t
such brilliant ideas?

Europeans brought abuse to the Americas, and colonization meant brutal behavior against anyone in the way. Native Americans were slaughtered, housed on reject land, denied the freedom to live in harmony with their surroundings. They were despised, feared, treated with contempt and mistrust, and now their ceremonies and relics are commercialized for profit, much as the symbols of other cultures have been.

I was related a story once about a woman from India who called Santa Cruz “Jesus Town.” She said:

My gods are everywhere... on your tee shirts, your CD covers, your lunchboxes, even your shower curtains. Imagine if you came to my country and saw Jesus’ face plastered on everything in sight. Imagine how ridiculous that would be.

As Kleinfeld suggests, we have gone beyond exploitation for financial profit. We not only abuse other cultures—we claim their ideas for our own. Wearing turquoise and feathers in our hair makes us Indians, tattooing Chinese symbols on our bodies connects us to Asia. It seems that Americans suffer from culture envy and feel the need to claim the current trend in ethnicity. I can’t count the number of times I entered a retail clothing-store to find articles decorated with American-manufacturer interpretations of foreign symbolism. I used to wonder if the Chinese writing on the back of a hand-me-down Gap tee shirt I own was a plea for help from a desperate sweatshop worker. It turns out it’s a soccer team, but how would I know? I just wear it.

One could argue that we have innocently fallen prey to mass marketing, that we can’t escape or prevent the “borrowing” of intimate or sacred ideas, that we are simply enamored with the beauty of foreign design. It could even be determined that we gain priceless diversity through interweaving specimens of other cultures into our own. But is it fair to take a religious or spiritual element and use it as an icon for popular style?

With the use of marvelous sarcasm and wit, Kleinfeld has set this idea of false cultural-identification in motion. He has playfully exposed a relevant social matter that is taken for granted by American consumer culture. Kleinfeld emphasizes the focus of White abuse towards culturally sacred objects and traditions in American industry and profit market through subtle hints in his diction.

I just love those thangs
hangin’ from yer ’lobes, baby
fresh from the mines of Santa Fe’s
Wanna be Native American
Women of Pallor factory

Kleinfeld begins his poem with a cleverly dictated reminder that many of the “authentic” Native American objects that some call souvenirs, are in fact bulk, reduced-quality reproductions produced by moneygrubbers out to make a dollar off of the tourist market.

Although he never directly states that Whites are responsible for the desecration of Native American culture, Kleinfeld certainly points in that direction—especially with the above quote. It is possible that in using the word “Pallor,” he means pale in a sense other than the physical, for example as a means of comparison to describe something that is less than bright… like a close-minded human being. However, the last few lines—“I just love the way they sparkle/ in the fluorescent/ White light”—bring us back to the topic of race. Why the capital “w”? Is there a dual meaning in his use of the word white? It seems as though Kleinfeld is signifying the race as well as the object. In a sense, the “White” race has been invasive like an overhead fixture, flooding every last corner with its ideals and beliefs, and claiming everything in the line of its vision. But isn’t it ironic, that in the end, we envy what has been destroyed? We desire what has been condemned.

Kleinfeld’s poem seems playful at first, lightheartedly toying with his reader with sarcastic language and a story-like flow. But he has grasped his topic by the throat and squeezed a beautifully simple, yet dynamic array of ideas out of the tip of his pen. In just fourteen lines he shows not only the irreverence towards symbols from other cultures, but the poorly dispersed economy in the United States as well. How can somebody with no ties to Native American culture sit back in their “two thousand/ square foot adobe lookalike” with their feathers and their beads and claim a heritage that they know nothing about? Without participating, living, breathing and eating with a people, how can one truly know them? Why is indigenous apparel displayed like artwork in the homes of wealthy collectors? Where are the rich “injuns” with their museums of pilgrim-wear? It is a sign of White dominance and control that I cannot answer these questions. America is a trophy culture, and it doesn’t seem to matter if those trophies are borrowed, imitated, or ripped-off.

Kleinfeld’s poem embodies the frustration and grief of a dwindling culture—a culture whose ceremonies and beliefs have been overpowered by generations of ignorance and destruction and then lost in the plaster of America’s “sacred blood red tile roofed Anderson homes.” As Americans trying to define ourselves we must realize that culture is not something that can be bought, or sold, although we attempt to imitate it through commercialized products so often. To own a mask, or a feathered headdress, or a pair of moccasins is not a difficult task; to know the history and
the meaning of those items and to understand the people from which they came takes dedication and respect. Purchasing products that define culture as an up-for-grabs trend in international pop-style only perpetuates a system of degradation and abuse. Until we open ourselves to the existence of cultures outside of our own daily lives, the importance of understanding the symbols that we borrow from them will continue to be upstaged by plastic Dreamcatchers and “those thangs” that consumers just love.
Age of Appropriation: A Response to
Age of Aquarius, A Few Years Late

Susannah Moore

I look into the mirror and see silver earrings from many different countries running the length of my ears. A glance at my wrists showing bracelets and bangles from Mexico, the American Southwest, and Laos. In my living room, a set of southwestern-patterned couches resides next to a table draped with a tablecloth from Ecuador. The only ethnic heritage that I share with any of these items is a single earring from Italy.

In the poem the “Age of Aquarius, A Few Years Late”, Ian Kleinfeld addresses the twenty-first century’s fascination with the capitalization of native traditions that is becoming more and more prevalent in our country. I, like many others, have adopted a way of dressing and furnishing my home with the many ethnically inspired objects circulating throughout the American market places of today. Walk into any store in downtown Anywhere, U.S.A and you will see artwork, clothing, jewelry, and foods styled after the artifacts of many other cultures.

The title of the poem gives rise to the idea that this way of dressing and living is “A Few Years Late.” These items that so many of us purchase may have, in “the Age of Aquarius,” been authentic, as opposed to the mass-produced artifacts that so many buy today. The author pokes fun at the subject of the poem, “baby,” and her purchase of these mass-produced goods by referring to the jewelry’s origin as the “Native American Women of Pallor Factory.” While the reference inspires a quick laugh, this statement holds more serious connotations. Due to the rise in popularity of these “authentically” styled pieces, our economy has begun to single handedly support an industry based on the mass production of once native jewelry and artwork. The marketplaces of the southwest, the birthplace of the styles Klienfield refers to, is also being flooded with imitation arts and crafts. An article from October 17, 1993, written by Bill Donovan for The Arizona Republic highlights the newfound issue of imitation jewelry and imported rugs being sold as authentic Navajo wares. The Navajo Nation, governing head of the Navajo tribe, had begun to contemplate the creation of a Navajo trademark to combat the fraud that had been, and continues, to occur. The director of the Indian Tourism Board, Linda Lalio, stated that this counterfeiting has caused a profit loss of an estimated 40% to the native arts and crafts people.

These economic factors have created a change in the goods that do make it into the shops of America. Today, blankets once crafted with symbolic messages woven into the patterns are abandoned for the colors and
styles more popular in the eye of the new consumer. Paintings are
made to coordinate with the Martha Stewart color schemes and jewelry-
once simple in design- has become more ornate to appeal to the buyer.

Kleinfeld writes of the “adobe lookalike/sacred blood roofed
Anderson home.” The home style of which he speaks originated from the
native people of the Southwest using what resources they had to build a
home that was practical and suited for the environment in which they lived.
Now the home once build out of adobe for practical reasons are now being
mass-produced from California to New York in a convenient, instant for-
formula, no matter what the natural resources of the area may be. The floors,
onece packed earth, are now replaced with “plush wall to wall” carpeting;
the epitome of the developed nation in which we live. In the final line,
Kleinfeld capitalizes the W in “White light” in an attempt, I feel, to impress
upon the reader the ethnicity of the subject of his poem. The idea of the
subject being white and trying to steal this native American culture is quite
relevant to any who have noticed the commercialization of native south-
western art.

The author touches a subject that goes much deeper than many of
us realize. Consumers are paying thousands to purchase artifacts—authen-
tic or not—in an attempt to usurp a culture that is not their own. These
people see the traditions of this culture as something to aspire to, while in
actuality the members of many of these societies are not able to live the
comfortable life that the consumers enjoy in there “Anderson homes.” The
artifacts that are bought as works of art for display are, to many in the
artifact’s culture of origin, practical goods used in daily life. In an article
written on April 8, 1998, by John Shiffman for USA Today, Shiffman re-
ports tourists alone spent around 1 billion dollars a year on American In-
dian arts and crafts. He points out that many of the arts and crafts being
bought and sold are manufactured and countries such as Mexico, China,
and Pakistan. Shiftman goes on to report that over 40% of the arts and
crafts sold in the Southwest are counterfeit. The publisher of the Indian
Trader, a monthly publication focusing on the sale of native arts and crafts,
reported that “easily 60% of anything sold for less than one hundred dol-
ars is very suspect [of being fraudulent]—probably imported or at least
made by a non Indian.” Shifman goes on to remind us of a law put into
place on 1990 that prosecutes those selling supposedly authentic art. Un-
fortunately he also tells us that there is not a single full-time employee
assigned to the matter and there is, as of 1998, yet to be a person tried for
the violation of the law.

The native craftsmen and women who design these artifacts are
kept from profiting from their own creations. I believe that this phenom-
emon of cultural apporiation stems from the fact that many have lost the
traditions of their own ancestry. By growing up in this “melting pot” of a
nation, the heritage that we enculturate while being raised in one’s homeland is lost. This so-called American assimilation was encouraged until it was too late to hold onto the cultures of the nations our grandparents and great-grandparents immigrated from. Today, many are suffering the loss of a sense of a richer culture, an ethnic identity, and turn instead, like good capitalists, to material items. This is not to say that America does not have a unique and diverse culture. Klienfeld is explaining that “baby [‘s]”, like so many others’, need for these cultural icons that are not historically Anglo-Saxon or “White,” is rooted in a feeling of cultural loss. I believe that the support of native artists and craftsmen is necessary in order to keep America’s culture diverse, but instead of trying to adopt someone else’s culture, the “bab[ies]” of America should invest in their own; invest in themselves. Once you begin to respect your own heritage, you will find yourself having a much greater respect for the heritage of others. Perhaps I do as I look at the mirror, and “I just love the way they sparkle in the/ fluorescent/ White light.”
“Stop crying, stop crying damn it, or I’ll really give you something to cry about!” Unable to stop trembling, barely able to breathe, let alone stop crying, I would wait in terror for the storm of uncontrollable rage to be over. The waiting would be the hardest part, and I quickly learned—well before I was even four years old—to transport my consciousness out of this present world. Although I knew from the earliest age that this was not who my father was, he was not this monster and whatever crime I was being punished for was not the reason he was doing this, his actions were inexcusable. I also knew that my mother, who was always watching to be sure I wasn’t hurt too bad, did not really love him more than me. She just had too much broken inside her to be able to leave him.

When I was much older, I learned that one time, after I had been pushed down the stairs and my kidney was damaged, my mother did try to leave my father. However, the elders in the Jehovah’s Witness congregation that we belonged to counseled her to stay with him and they read her scriptures to prove that this was God’s command. My parents were very wealthy and to most people we seemed like the ideal family. Maybe the elders did not believe my mom, or perhaps they too were abusers. Only members inside a family usually see the cycle of abuse. The only certainty is that they had no business interfering with our health, safety and quality of life.

Although domestic violence takes on many forms and crosses over social and economic groups, through direct action and awareness we can change these cycles of abuse that have often been passed down though generations. In Susan Allison’s poem, “Breathing Room”, I could feel my own heart and breath relax completely by the end of the poem as I sensed the relief she seems to experience after having left her abuser. This is a beautifully written poem about a topic not addressed often enough.

Stealing another being’s peace of mind and undermining their self worth is abuse. Just as the author writes about white water tumbling over smooth rock, so, over time our personalities are shaped by environment. As she writes about her relief she seems to “breathe children’s laughter”, and I am reminded how important safety and security are to a child’s development. These are foundational to a healthy and happy human being. So many people are not living up to their full potential as adults because they are still looking for their needs to be met that were denied them growing up. We may never know how many until we start breaking the silence
and thus the cycle of abuse.

She starts off the poem with:

I can’t remember how many times
you threw furniture
while the children held
my legs and cried
faces buried in my dress;

And she goes on to tell of the minor incidents that might trigger a violent reaction like, “spilled milk”. This is uncomfortable to read as I imagine the frightened children and the poor mother trying to comfort these children in this storm of anger. I remember that the children or the mother did not do anything to deserve this kind of treatment and it is not even about them. This father needs to learn more positive and productive ways to cope with his anger. No matter whom he is with, this behavior will surface and only his family will see it, unless he gets help.

She begins speaking again, and it seems like she is taking a huge breath of relief:

Now
I sit by the Big Sur River…
Relieved
you’re not here to tell me
how to back the car
put up the tent
prime the stove;
you’re not here to tell me
I’m fat
or coerce me into sex
because
I left.

The way the lines alternate between margins left and indented makes me really feel the cycle of abuse that she is remembering. Things are blamed on the woman, and she is made to feel like nothing she does will work. This is largely because the abuser needs to make himself feel important because of his insecurity and feelings of inadequacy. Telling a woman she is fat, this is the ultimate insult to her appearance and it is an utterly mean way to undermine her self esteem. Then to have sex after she is broken down would be the complete symbol of conquering her. Having sex with her also could indicate the nice behavior that often follows the abuse. Just when a woman is ready to leave but lets herself be talked into forgiv-
ing the abuser who put on his best behavior until the next unpredictable explosion. She left this time though and is reveling in her freedom and happiness.

The voice of the author sounds strong. The feeling progresses with her thoughts of past trauma and flows like the river instead of becoming stagnant. A message of encouragement to men and women still caught up in the cycle seems to be the result of her poem.

The longer a woman stays in an abusive relationship without counseling the chances are that the abuse will get worse and this will make it harder to leave. The chances of being attacked after and/or during leaving are very high. The Woman’s Crisis Support and Shelter Services is located at 1025 Center Street down town Santa Cruz and their phone number is (831) 425-5525. This organization is available to woman and children trying to escape this cycle, and their services are always available. For men seeking to find alternatives to violence or unhealthy communication there is MOAB (Men Overcoming Abusive Behavior). Because of increased awareness about domestic violence, there are many organizations to help.

Placing blame or harboring anger and resentment will never solve abusive situations. By a woman (or man) simply leaving and not allowing your themselves to be treated in an abusive manner is often the beginning of change. First unhealthy communication needs to be recognized and outside support may need to be achieved. People and especially children deserve a peaceful and safe environment in which to grow. Seeking help from people qualified to deal with these kinds of situations may take a lot of courage and support, but the breathing room will make the step more than worthwhile.
Rule: A regulation determining the methods or course of a game or the like. rules of the game transf., conventions in political or social relations or the like. (OED 2nd edition Rob-Sequyle 228)

All relationships have rules. All games have rules. If a relationship is filled with rules, then is the relationship also considered to be a kind of game? Voices of children can be heard singing the rules of their games: “the last one there is a rotten egg”, “the first one who falls down loses”. In the case of Susan Coverdale Sumrall’s poem Playing By the Rules, the rule to the relationship game that she plays is “the first one to utter a word loses” (15). The rule to the game that many have played with anyone they’re close to (be it parents, children, or lovers) is the silent treatment.

The air filled with a silent treatment lies heavy on the shoulders of its players, air filled with heat that would wrap “itself around (us) like a snake, wrings water from (our) skin”(15). The silence of a silent treatment is as uncomfortable as the hot, dry, stagnant, air inside the passenger compartment of the silent car, on its way to Yosemite. This is the kind of silence which mingles between angry lovers long after a heated quarrel. Throughout Sumrall’s poem her metaphor for the anger and the cause for the silent game, is the stifling heat. She describes the situation as a resentment flaring, a “brushfire raging out of control”(15), and the words as “flammable”. She has made a point to illustrate the discomfort between the two filled with anger, in the midst of the quiet, through the use of heat.

The author has forgotten the lunch that would have sustained her and her companion on the long drive to Yosemite: the good things from home. However, water “now tepid” (15) was not forgotten, which was brought from home along with the tepid argument. In her hunger she notices the many signs that cling to the sides of the freeway advertising “freshly-picked peaches, plums, cherries” (15) and although she craves the refreshing fruits, she neither moves a muscle nor makes a sound: “unblinking, I stare straight ahead./There is no saliva in my mouth”.

Just when the last fruit stand sign passes them by, the driver makes an abrupt turn and parks the car in the shade and disappears “into the cool darkness of the fruit stand”. As the poem cools in language the emotion between the two appears to cool as well. He returns from the stand with refreshing beverages to share.

The title alone prepares the reader for a written work about rules, and brings thoughts of games, and although there are many gamelike comparisons there are also many metaphors for relationship issues throughout the language of the piece. The heat is symbolic of the resentment; the fruit represents the chance to make up, to forgive and forget. The joy to be expe-
rienced by making amends is demonstrated by statements like “Refresh-
ing! Sweet and Delicious!”(15). The author is telling us through the signs
that they must “Slow down now!”(15) or they may not be able to let go of
the resentment. Perhaps if they had not listened to the signs or turned
around, they might not have had the chance to turn around the anger from
the past, the anger they brought with them on their trip from home.

The poetry is without rhyme and is written in three sections. The
first section of seven lines sets us up for the poem, providing us with the
cause and setting of “the game”. The second section of eight lines describes
the struggle between the lovers to be in the right and to win the game, it
describes all that they must endure while “playing by the rules”. The third
and final section of seven lines tells us the outcome of the struggle. The
entire piece follows a downward slide from hot to cold in its emphasis on
the emotion from tensed to relaxed.

We are however left with questions: “What was the fight about?”,
“Who started the fight?”. Such questions are usually not clearly answered
in poetry, and are left up to the reader to decipher and interpret on their
own, however, when dealing with a subject such as rules, questions of de-
tail come up because we know that specific guidelines exist in the world of
rules and games. On the other hand, the final line, “Dark crimson stains
our lips, mouths, tongues, and kisses” (15) lessens the feeling of a winner
or a loser and the element of a game, finishing with the idea that the game
is less important as they both forgive and apologize with their embraces.

Sitting in the midst of a quarrel can sometimes leave a person at a
loss for words, frustrated. Perhaps this frustration is where the silent treat-
ment originally sprung. Arguments—especially between lovers—do not
always end with a winner and a loser. Sometimes, all that can be argued
has been said, and in the end there is still no agreement. Such cases bud
seemingly unending silence and the arguers are reduced to childishly try-
ing to get their way by sitting in quiet resentment. This final attempt at
winning an argument can only be resolved by someone giving in, the whole
thing being forgotten, or in the worst-case scenario: leaving the relation-
ship completely. Sumrall’s poem demonstrates the materialization of this
final possibility through the fruit stand signs: “You missed it! The sign says.
Last Chance! Turn around now!”(15). This is the realization that if the re-
sentment didn’t end at that moment, it may have never ended.

In writing “Playing By The Rules”, the author wanted to share her
experience of the triteness we all sometimes feel when stuck in an argu-
ment with a lover. Describing the desire to be right, yet also portraying the
discomfort and costs of turning matters of the heart into a game. What
makes this poem so successful is its ability to relate a universal occurrence
to the reader from her experience. All can relate. Whether the experience is
from giving the silent treatment to parents as a child, to the forever silent

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treatment of a divorce, we all know the discomfort of the gain of righteousness to the costs of love and festering silence.
“An Unexpressed Protest” captures the writer’s sentiments by portraying dual realities. This poem displays how life is relative by comparing. The contrasting of the lives of the men in charge, with the lives of the boys on the front lines paint this picture vividly. The most intense emotion this poem brewed inside of me was hatred for those few men who get to make life-or-death decisions for “thirty thousand or more” powerless boys. The author makes the reality of war harsher by forcing the reader to read the beginnings of war painted in between the lines.

The author displays the differences in perceived reality by going back and forth between the boy and the man. In the first two lines the gap in the chain of command between the two is shown with something as basic as what they drink. The man has the pleasure of prepared tea in a golden teacup, while the boy must gulp from a bloody canteen. It is shown how time is also relative to one’s perception by the way they drink. The boy has no time and “hungrily gulps down the water” while the man “la-zily” drinks his tea. This is metaphor for the whole poem, because the man has all the time and pleasure, while the boy has none.

The third and fourth lines reinforce the first two, while extending their theme. The man has enough time on his hands “to check for food between his teeth” while the boy is “praying to God that this will not be the last time he will see the clouds.” The sad thing is that God did not make the decisions that got the boy where he is, the man did. Too bad the man is not really God so he could hear the cries for help that he could stop. The contrast between the deprived youth and the self-righteous, conceited soldier intensifies the extremes in which the two exist. It is evident that the man caused the incident because the poem starts from the man’s point of view.

The author again shows us their vastly different views of war, or more specifically why wars take place and the people who suffer from them. The capitalistic drive that is so prevalent in our modern world is the cause for the war. “I want land, I want money, I want power.” While on the other hand “The boy whispers, barely able to form the words with his dried blood caked mouth, “I want my mother, I want a girl, I want a life.” The boy just wants what is natural while the man is obsessed with man-made things.

The oscillating emotions continue throughout the poem taking you to the top of the man’s career of destruction and the bottom of the boy’s painful destruction:
The man clenches his fists and boxes the wall, as if to show off his strength to the furniture and the air and the fly sitting in the corner. The boy clenches his fists in pain, the tear-blood solution seeping between his fingers. (50)

The boy is going through physical and emotional pain, while the man is causing it for others. Through his fight for recognition he is making many boys fight for their lives.

This poem drove home how much time the man has when it speaks of him looking at a calendar at dates to come. On the other hand, the boy “has no future’ because he will soon be dead. So the man can start more wars and the boy will not be around to protest. The man just wants “land, money and power” and he does not seem to care or notice how many boys he is killing to get it.

“An Unexpressed Protest” satirically implies the evilness of war. It spoke to me and said that young boys died without a chance to protest. With the supposed “men” reaping the benefits of the young boy’s sacrifices. The rich man, selfishly, is not letting his son out on the front lines. The cruelty of the class struggle becomes pivotal in that one man gets to decide the lives of many, including his son; while the masses fall subject to his autocratic rule. Life is very relative to your situation. The dead bodies are just a symbol of power to the man, while death is all too real to the boy.

If there are any crueler reasons for someone to die than to die from the impersonal disregard the powerful extend to the lower classes, I cannot think of any. There seems little in life as destructive as powerful men in their megalomaniac pursuit of land, money, and power. I wish I could offer a useful and easy solution but the solution is only for the man to change. One thing we can do is try to not let the boys of today end up like the men of today. They must learn that life is always precious, theirs and everyone else’s.
Redemption

Gabriel Anguiano

“The night before, I had told him how deeply sorry I was, but it didn’t seem enough. What can you say to someone whose young wife has just died? What can possibly be said that can help?” (Allison 67) Rita was another courageous warrior, that at the end lost her war against cancer. The Women’s Cancer Resource Center, says that on average every 6.4 minutes a woman in the United States will be diagnosed with a cancer, it strikes women in their teens as well as post menopausal women over 50. This malignant disease claims the lives of thousands of innocent women each year throughout America alone. Matt (Rita’s husband) represents the other side of the innocent victims of this killer. He was left alone to wrestle on with his life without Rita; and keep the memories alive of his loving wife. The central focus of this short story is that Susan Allison (the narrator) needs to redeem her impotence, and the only opportunity that she has is before the radiant sunbeams sweep the paradise-like landscape of Highway One, on her way to Pescadero.

“Mated Ones” is a sorrowful short story that has deeply touched the essence of my mortality. Susan Allison writes: “Rita was dead. And yet, Rita could never die for those of us at her bed side” (67), this passage has stirred up painful memories. Because I also, witnessed the wake of a young man—that will always de near to me—who became one of the thousands of victims to gang violence. According to the Eric Digest: “today a still-small number, between 4 percent and 10 percent of Mexican-American youth belong to gangs. . .and with the recent introduction of. . .weapons, however, inter group violence and homicides have spiraled out of control.” Eric Lopez innocently died at age nineteen in the arms of his mother.

“Mated Ones” is about Susan’s painful recovery, and her attempt to overcome the loss of her beloved friend Rita, and she also believes that two owls become a symbolic transfiguration of Rita and Matt. One owl has died, and the other seems to be injured, but is only stunned and grieving the death of its mate. “His deep yellow eyes blinked once or twice. . .and he looked so sad, but also seemed to be asking for my help. This was why I was here” (Allison 65). Susan quickly embodies the grieving owl and Matt’s sadness into the redemption that she needs. Thus she believes that a second chance has been given to her to redeem her frustration.

“Matt who after her death looked so drained...I wanted to do something for this owl hunched in the bike lane that I hadn’t been able [to] do for Matt.” (67). This grieving owl became Matt, hence she feels obligated to help this owl. Her emotions seem to be running her judgment about this symbolic transfiguration that she has created. Unquestionably she is certain that by helping this owl, she would be helping Matt; however, her
desire is only symbolic, for there is nothing she—or anybody—can do to make his pain any less. This is more of a “pill” to reduce her own pain and impotence.

Her experience I clearly feel and understand. Not just her writing style moved me, but also a similar experience. Eric’s death was a cruel irony. He was murdered on Halloween night and buried “El Dia de Los Muertos”—the day of the dead. It was an irony because those two days commemorate evil, and death, here in America and in Mexico.

Eric was murdered at his doorstep in Watsonville. The last minutes of his life he spent them on the phone, talking to his girlfriend. An expected knock on the door urged him to open it. A hooded man, pulled out a shotgun, and said, “here is your treat!” The deadly pellets of the murder’s shotgun thrust his chest from less than two feet away. His mother raced from the living room to the door. But, regardless of his mother’s unearthly clamors, Eric didn’t get up he just laid on his back on a pool of warm blood, while violently attempting to breathe. She then knelt to hold the head of her first-born boy. She saw the life of her boy vanish, she felt his last gasp of air, the only thing she could hold in her hands was her son’s blood. In minutes the blue and red flashing lights along with the sirens of the paramedics, fire trucks and police cars flooded and lit the night in Green Valley Rd. Eric was declared dead before he reached the Hospital. He was nineteen years old.

His wake lasted just past sunset. During the morning several hundred people came to see him for a last time. Eric’s pictures of his childhood, soccer team, and of his short-lived teenage years engulfed his open coffin; they all projected the live of a happy boy. The majority were young people wearing black sweat shirts that had inscribed in bold white, old English letters: “In loving memory of Eric Lopez.” Nevertheless, it was his father who was not willing to see his beloved son depart from this life. Being there I realized how deep Nicolas’ pain was. What is worst is that I cannot explain his grieve through words. However, if I did have to try to explain the pain of this man, I would say that he lost his sense of reality and drowned in his sorrow. His piercing screams fueled the cries of the multitudes at the wake. I however, did not cry. I manifested my pain in silence. Seeing Eric lie on his open coffin, I kept wondering if he could hear the cries of the hundreds of people. He looked so serene, as if he was asleep.

Some say that he was not affiliated with gangs, others say that he was. Nonetheless, this was a gang related death. The assassin was a violent gang member who had just been released from the State penitentiary. Eric’s death was a horrendous reminder, that I almost came to that tragic end, and all because of a color. I didn’t say anything to Nicolas, after all what can you say to a father that just lost his boy? I took a deep breath, exhaled slowly, looked at Nicolas and I just shook my head in awe. He
then lifted his head, and cried out “porque me mataron a mi muchachito!”—why did they kill my little boy! For a few seconds I was mute, I just felt his anger.

After I read “Mated Ones” I revisiting my disturb memories of Eric’s death. Then I thought about the lives of Rita and Eric. Regardless of how much I wish to find a logical answer that will dissolve the sorrow of those that have been struck by death, I can’t, I can only find more questions. Who do we blame for losing them? Is it God? Life? The Devil? Or do we blame ourselves? Is there a way to understand their deaths? Where do they go? Will they find peace in their new place? Will they remember us?

We are the ones that are left with all these questions, suffering and confusion. Susan went through all these chaotic feelings. All she knew was that her friend Matt was in pain and she felt impotent to rescue him from his grieve. Yet (some force or someone greater than us) sometimes, our impotence is redeemed. In her case, her redemption came symbolically. “I realized that I had been invited here. . .And my role had been to honor her passing (the owl). I had witnessed an owl in mourning for his mate. . .He was just not ready to leave her.” (Allison 67). Her lyric words keenly sink in my soul. This owl somehow, revealed its sorrow in a way that we—humans—can never put in writing; only, understand it. Although it is an animal, it has feelings to. “He seemed to sigh deeply, to rise up slightly. . .He now had his head tucked to his breast and looked so forlorn and resigned that I asked are you hurt; can I help you somehow?” (Allison 67)

This being was nearly hopeless. It felt the bitter force of death take its life-time mate from its side. Its grieve and Susan’s helplessness slit my emblematic scar—that time—had been healing, leaving my soul exposed to nostalgia. This nostalgia is not a longing for a joyful past. It is rather, a longing for a virtuous life and to understand my mortality. Their deaths remind me that life in general is feeble.

By honoring the death of the owl, she is honoring the passing of Rita; moreover she is also alleviating Matt’s hopelessness. There are times in life that we don’t perform accordingly to our sorrow, that’s when we become frustrated. Seldom we get a second chance to redeem that frustration. Her redemption is, honoring the “passing” of the dead owl, then this becomes an offering to the grieving owl. Moreover, this offering symbolizes the help that she couldn’t offer Matt when he needed it the most—so she feels. In her own way she’s created an outlet to her frustration, and this gives her satisfaction.

I however, don’t need redemption. For I know that there is nothing that I can do to take Nicolas’s sorrow away. Time is the only ally that he has to combat his war against his sorrow. Although I felt impotent when I saw Eric’s body lie in his open casket, and witnessed the agony that his father was under, I then, understood that death has no match. All that I
could do was to be by his side, and grieve the death of his son. Regardless of any explanation that I could ponder, I realized that death is our greatest enemy; and that we are all waiting to become part of it, in another words, our lives are bound to be annexed by this enemy of ours. Will our love ones need to redeem their frustration and impotence when you or I fall victims to the mighty hand of death? How will you redeem your pain when the one whom you love dies?
Once Upon a Time, I Met a Goose Named John

Donna Marinkovich

Goose Eyes: A Foul Diary may not be a typical Mother Goose story, but it is a goose tale with a moral: once we begin to break down our fears — rooted in the differences we see in others — through different ways of communication and understanding, we can attain beautiful relationships with those who initially evoke fear within us.

While reading Brian Voegtlen’s story I was reminded of the relationship I have developed with my house-mate John, a developmentally disabled man. John is not only my house-mate and friend, but he is my employer as well, so-to-speak. Needing both a job and a place to live ten months ago, I answered an ad for a live-in caregiver and, although having no experience (but a positive attitude) I was offered the job. Having little contact with the developmentally disabled in the past, I had some fears and concerns about John, as well as my ability to be an effective caregiver.

John has both physical and mental disabilities which result in many challenges. He is totally blind, has obsessive-compulsive disorder and is moderately to severely mentally retarded. He doesn’t talk, but communicates through a limited vocabulary of sounds and gestures. Because of his limited vocabulary and his mental state, he is not always able to communicate his feelings clearly, which results in behaviors such as self-inflicted pain, property destruction and aggression.

The author’s initial meeting with the geese was much like my first meetings with John. As with the geese, John’s behaviors and vocalizations were intimidating; I was afraid to get too close, especially after having been made aware of his aggressive tendencies. I heard story after story about John biting people and ripping all of his clothing to shreds in a few seconds. I was beginning to wonder if I had made the right decision to accept this job, but as I said, I needed the money and a place to live. I continued on my path, weeding insecurities and fear from my garden much like the author weeding his onions.

Mr. Voegtlen encourages us to see our fears of others through a different perspective, by placing ourselves in another creature’s shoes:

...imagine you have no lips to purse or pout, no mouth to turn up or down and twist around, no nose to wrinkle, no dimples, cheeks, eye brows or eye lashes, no wrinkles, no ability to squint your eyes or roll them or widen them, no shoulders to shrug, no hands to gesture with. Not a lot of communicative options. There you pretty much have the
situation of a goose...So how, as a goose, are you going to express things? Things in general: Questions, ideas, doubts, worries, wonderment, but more specifically friendliness, affection, love, caring? (101,102)

There you pretty much have the situation of John, and the millions of people in the world who are like him. Many of the developmentally disabled community are faced with yet another challenge beyond their physical and mental disabilities – the challenge of communication. Many of these people are non-verbal, and many of them can speak, however their brains are functioning at the level of a small child. One can imagine how nearly impossible it is for them to express their feelings or communicate their needs — conventional human communication is not really an option.

Like geese and all other species on this planet, humans are born with unique traits which make us different from others. These differences, whether physical, mental, cultural, economic etc. divide us, placing us in distinct groups. Our individual experience, and lack of experience with other group members can color our feelings and create fear toward these distinct groups, whether they are geese or the developmentally disabled.

The author recounts an experience with geese as a child which created an instilled sense of fear as an adult. It isn’t until he is forced to deal with his fear by having to deal with geese in close quarters that he is able to overcome his fear through examining and celebrating both the differences and similarities of geese and humans. That is the same experience I have had with John.

It is scary to have a goose come at you. I have been chased by a goose, too; a very large one who was interested in biting me. It’s also scary to have John coming at me, gritting and grinding his teeth as hard as he can, attempting to pinch or bite much like a goose. Fortunately with John, over time, I’ve learned to read the subtleties of his communication, and I can often de-escalate a potential attack by reassuring him and redirecting him to a less stressful situation.

As in Day’s Three and Four of Mr. Voegtlen’s journal, suspicion and mere toleration of each other lessened, and began developing into more of a curiosity and respect for each other. John and I worked at feeling out each others boundaries, and began to establish trust. Fondness and affection was growing between us; I began to feel more like his friend than his caregiver. I can now discern, through his personal vocabulary of grunting, singing, moaning, and the limited number of hand signals and body language, a myriad of emotions, needs and wants.

The last paragraph of Goose Eyes shares a beautiful sentiment of the new relationship between man and goose:
We just like each other’s company. She nibbles my pants leg, she bumps up against me. I talk about weeds or whatever’s on my mind. She can intertwine her neck between my weeding arms in a way that makes it very difficult to get any work done. And then she puts her head right on my kneeling lap. One eye looks up at me, wide open. I pet her. She doesn’t purr. She doesn’t wag her tail. She doesn’t smile. She just kinda huddles there. This is as much as I know. (102,103)

Just tonight, there were John and I, sitting on the couch. His head was in my lap, one of his blind eyes looking up at me as if he could really see. He grabbed my arm and intertwined it around his. He listened as I talked about the day’s events, my peeves and my triumphs, as if he truly understood.

It’s a trial and error process, and we’re both learning and changing as we grow to know each other. Sometimes I read him incorrectly and get the requisite pinch or attempted bite; sometimes he pushes my buttons merely to get a reaction. We have our bad days, but many more good ones as time has passed.

All I know for sure, is that I feel blessed to have John in my life, and I sense the same feeling from him. And even more profoundly important than that, I also have a greater understanding of a group of people in our society who, before I began this job, I was somewhat afraid of. It just goes to show you, goose eyes are indeed open to interpretation.
Think about your favorite memory. How does it smell? How does it taste? Consider its feel, its color, its sound. Who is in it? Memories help us define ourselves; we learn from our mistakes and our successes, if we remember them. Memories even surprise us with previously unrecognized insight into what is most important in life: relationships, friendships, and love.

“Breathing the Stories of Your Life,” by author Dee Roe, is a superb piece of poetry that takes the reader on a brief journey visiting highlights of a life via memory. The places touched upon in the poem glow with the comfort of friendship, family, and love, even as experienced through grief. Like an exquisite painting, “Breathing the Stories of Your Life” metaphorically begins with a blank canvas. Roe asks the reader to “shut your eyes” and “imagine how old you might be … if no one told you and you had to guess.” Thus, the reader approaches the poem with an open mind — no “word-pictures”, no hints, no inferences — yet already intrigued at the idea of not knowing how old you are, if “you had to guess.”

“Years line up like colored cups you sip from slowly.” Suddenly, at the beginning of the second stanza, Roe creates color, form, and weight upon the blank page, as cups from which the reader sips. The reader is drinking from the deep spring – memory, which has substance and flavor. We find the juxtaposition of “fragile white holding new birth” (a bird’s egg yet to hatch), with the “indigo of grief” (a dark-hued pool of sorrow). “Your heart wears all these colors.” In just these few lines, the author has given the reader swirling images from birth to death, implying everything in between. While birth and death are a part of life which everyone will experience, and thus ordinary, they are also momentous – the stuff of memories.

Vivid memories have sensory qualities to them. Most everyone has had the experience of a clear memory suddenly triggered by a certain scent. For example, the smell of a campfire could be redolent of one’s first time roasting marshmallows as a kid. The word redolent itself has the double meaning of odor and reminiscence, demonstrating (by definition) the strong connection between the two experiences (dictionary.com). As the poem continues, Roe describes a memory: “Your mouth remembers ripe tomatoes, their dusty scent filling the air as you moved with him in the neighbor’s field, red juice dripping onto the ground.” As described, this memory includes smell, taste, feel, and sight — a whole and living experience, as if it were happening here and now. “The skin forgets nothing; everything is there [emphasis mine].”

The memories recalled in the poem are for the most part personal
to the author, but she alludes to relationships throughout, as in “the flushed air entering like an intimate friend [emphasis mine, and] . . . as you moved with him [emphasis mine] in the neighbor’s field.” The author implies the experience of motherhood in “hurrying in the dark, the restless child [emphasis mine] waiting.” Her description of home evokes a strong and lovely sense of simplicity, security, and peace; although, the moment recalled must have been very mundane. “Your hands remember the quiet house, how it held you; the turning of the lamp calling to family through falling light, rooms filling with voices, the misted windows, home a safe steamer heading into the night.” The images of the warmth of a “lamp calling to family” and “rooms filling with voices” portray life’s most intimate relationships, those within family.

Having read the poem, the reader could infer from its title (“Breathing the Stories of Your Life”) that memories are stories, which enhance life. The choice of the word “Breathing” suggests that these memories (“Stories of Your Life”) are an integral part of life. Precious memories improve with age, changing over time with the telling – told a little differently each time. In the recollection (telling the “story” of the memory), one can choose what to remember, and how to “enshrine” the memory. “The parallel lines of memory and imagination cross finally and collide in narrative” (Marsh).

What qualities make a memory treasured or precious?

The stories one accrues...are the stories one dangles on a silver loop of memory and love, and become the means by which we hold such places dear and know them as treasures we don’t want to lose ... Stories are encased in stories, one within the other, like Chinese boxes, like Russian dolls, like beads and stones dangling from the silver loop of an earring (Coogle 109)

I believe that relationships and emotions make memories priceless. Feeling a memory brings life to the memory, regardless of how insignificant the moment may have seemed.

The final two stanzas present the reader with the possibility of what it would be like to be “an old woman with no surprises, waiting for the years to catch up to you”, or “…living in an early memory.” When I asked Ms. Roe what her favorite line in the piece is, and why, she quoted the aforementioned line, and then went on to say, “I like the image of an older part of us waiting for our lives to conclude, although I think that line has several layers to it. Sometimes I can’t even articulate them all! They’re feelings that I had writing the poem” (Roe).

“Light falls through trees as you turn around and around...” conjures up not only the image of a spinning child, but also of someone turn-
ing through corridors of memory. Roe concludes her poem by taking the reader full-circle to the existential moment (and the memory of it): “and realize for the first time; this is your life, your body, and you will travel all the places it takes you.” The poem ends with a beginning.

Is the cup half empty, or half full? Interpretation of experiences imparts meaning and value to the events of one’s life. Every life is lived in relationships (family, friends, peers, society) and includes a multitude of mundane happenings. Too often, it is in hindsight that one sees the real importance of individuals and ordinary events. By depicting the inherent beauty of the “simple things of life” in her poem, Roe brings a fullness and a light to the experience of memory. However one measures success, the love of friends and family are the true treasures of life.
The gleaming polish on the opening line of the poem instantly immerses the reader into the dark past with a vivid visual. With this one line you enter Mom’s world, a world that needed some forgetting “What I think of now are not the years of drinking, nights fractured to an obsidian edge,” a spotless house cleaned with dedication, where she hopelessly tries to clean and drink her darkness away. This poem illustrates that during times of social change it is the children that exert pressure on their parents to change.

There was a time when my mom’s world revolved around supplying the simple essentials of life; their rewards for toil and stability of the family were a cocktail and a cigarette. While reading this poem I became entranced in the fragile, seemingly familiar setting. The poem could be a commentary on the subtle progression and change of the roles of parents in society as times and values change. The cigarette is the only one that keeps Mom Company, as “she scrubbed tile to a hospital shine” (McMillan 8). The writer makes the constant image indelibly engraved as to the precise care with which “mom” did things, as in “cigarette balanced on the bathroom sink” (McMillan 8). The reader will visualize the setting. Mom’s toil and the soft vermilion lip prints become the symbol of love. The tedious work and lip prints placed with care, they speak of the dedication to order. The never-ending work of keeping the house shiny, made worthwhile by mom’s delicate companion, a cigarette becomes the symbol of “mom”. The predictability of the perfectly embossed Salem’s “always a soft, deep vermilion that barely touched the line” (8), always keeping mom company; this leads the reader into an understanding of Mom’s world a world more dark and fragile than it appears on the surface.

The two staring objects introduce the danger and impermanence of mother’s life. Obsidian: dark volcanic glass (Merriam-Webster 1440) can become dangerous shards of black glass if carelessly handled. Ash: “fine mineral particles from a volcano” (Merriam-Webster 1440) Ash and obsidian glass as being fragile states of existence easily disrupted by a change in environment, like a sudden breeze on a cigarette ash leaving only “the bright stains visible” on the remaining butt. The perfect world is only an illusion; it can all disappear in an instant.

While the rewards of parent may not carry any more weight than the ash of a cigarette, a parent must do what they can to cope day to day. The poem points to the life of a mother working to create a spotless, although imperfect environment. The setting is a homemaker filled with dedication to the physical environment of the family, mom keeps every-
thing shiny. The writer compares Mom’s life to the ash on her cigarette, “burning down it’s length each day, fragile” a life perceived as with out fulfilling external validation.

The focus becomes how mom coped with daily life; and the familiar object becomes who mom is, in the Child’s eyes. Mom’s identity is obscured by the child’s view of her mother’s role in life. In a time period long ago, an era where a mother was always waiting, she was always wanting to be there for her family. The simple traditions of an Italian immigrant in a world that was supposed to be fulfilled by taking care of the “family.” Mother’s world of simple pleasures, inflexibly clean, a world filled with Ajax, alcohol, and Salem’s (McMillan from interview with author).

The changes that occurred in the late 1960’s produced a generation subjected to new expectations of what is deemed a fulfilling life. The changes required both men and women to accept the evolution of the family. The family unit was drastically modified to allow women to step into non-traditional careers. This sudden move toward devaluing the role of a stay at home mother had many side effects on this generation. My mother had college degree in literature and music; she used this degree to run the household. This was a choice, my mother’s own choice. By the early 1970’s women very often became integrated into highly educated professions. This trend even led to a commonly used term “super mom”. This was a woman that not only had a career, but a family also. My generation had many different voices, many new expectations that we tried to subject our parents to. As children we may not accept there are times parents cannot live up to the dreams we have for them, mother has her own life. A child perceived her mother as failing to lead a fulfilling life; her college educated, artistically talented mother did not move with the times, circa 1970’s. A time of changing views of what constitutes a validated, full meaningful life for a woman in America; “Since the 1970s, the gender role attitudes of both men and women have become less traditional (Helmreich, Spence, & Gibson, 1982).

The importance of appearance is a focus for any theory of self that is developed; the perspective of symbolic interaction has lasting effects. The significance of life’s impermanence, that the appearance fades, that our work is never complete; with all our work it must be redone again tomorrow. Every day you have to get up and polish the tile, the shine will never last. In life you need to enjoy the tedium, for it will return every day. Although not even the shine of a spotless house will keep the fear away.

Many times in my younger days I wondered why my mother did not have a career, why she stayed home enveloped in boredom, doing the unnoticed errands that made my life so uncomplicated. After I started my family I found new insight, now, my favorite memories are ones of wonder, of how “magic” came everyday to make things happen in my world, in “my mothers mundane world.”
Nature in Humans

Seth Magnuson

“The Seamless World” is a poem written by Amber Sumrall, shows nature’s amazing network that surrounds Santa Cruz County. This poem has a well-balanced presentation consisting of thirty-two lines that have been arranged into sixteen couplets. The first two describe the setting of the poem, which takes place in the local area. As the persona gazes out of a “trailer window,” she begins to reflect on philosophy, childhood, and the neighboring wildlife. The connections between these thoughts seem to be somewhat loose, which gives the poem more depth because of the mystery that goes unsaid. However, there is a recurring theme throughout the poem that reflects human instincts to imitate and re-create nature.

Many elements from the surroundings have been integrated into the poem bringing with it strong imagery. The first stanza, “Fog lifts off the sea like dry ice, veils the forest. /Trees disappear, and the narrow, snaking road,” creates a clear image of the coastal fog. This also begins to develop the human desire to study their surroundings. The following couplet begins with “Wisps of cool grey stream past my trailer window,” again connecting humans with the drifting moisture; however, the image of the trailer creates a separation between the two. “I light candles, steep black tea with milk.” This stanza introduces the theme of humans re-creating nature’s color of fog with black tea mixed with white milk to a neutral grey within the trailer.

The author moves outside of the trailer bringing the reader with her to gaze at the images of native plants and animals such as “the redtail stops circling, /lands on a Monterey pine.” The majority of the animals that are mentioned have the ability to fly symbolizing the freedom of humankind. The persona studies the path of a swallowtail as it “flits from coyote mint to thistleflower” while “Dragonflies hover, thin bolts of blue lightning.” Throughout the poem, each species that is mentioned is directly associated with its natural habitat, which begins to reveal the complex inter-connections between all of the species. These descriptions of the native species display the associations the speaker has with the natural elements around her. Sumrall also uses a hummingbird, a fox and morning glories, which “Hidden inside each one is an ivory star, which opens in sunlight.” In the line, “When I call in its own voice,” the redtail stops nearby “to see if I am a match,” the speaker makes the connection stronger by imitating a voice of nature to communicate to another species and also the suggesting a courtship between the two.

There is a transition in the poem as the speaker moves from personal connections with nature into a conversation, making reference to two people, a man and the voice behind the poem. Sumrall indirectly introduces the acquaintance by stating, “your friend thinks all the birds are leav-
ing.” This is one of the more interesting lines in the poem, not only because it is the only time the relationship between humans and nature is mentioned in a negative way, but it also uses the third person to show the connections within this relationship are conflicting in some way. The line “Could this be what it’s like to lose ones prayer?” refers to the loss of hope within nature’s network. “That thought came out of nowhere, I said. / No, you said, it came out of everywhere,” reiterates the point that all around her are birds; their wings are symbolic of our freedom.

There is another transition within the conversation to reflect back on their childhood, perhaps to prolong the development of the dialogue that takes place in the poem. “The children we once were knock at the door.” The subsequent lines make reference to a boy jumping off of a roof with an umbrella. “You have to stop this trying to fly, your mother told you. /you don’t understand, you replied. I was flying,” combines both the imagination of a child, as well as directly relates to humans again trying to imitate nature by flying.

Throughout the poem there are a few lines that contain philosophical concepts. “Raised on miracles, apparitions, we looked outside ourselves, outside creation.” Still referring to growing up, the miracles and apparitions may be in reference to being raised with strong religious beliefs. After looking beyond self and past creation, she comes back to say, “simply to walk on the earth is a miracle.”

The speaker of the poem is closely related to the natural phenomenon that takes place around her. This is made very clear with the numerous connections that are mentioned throughout the poem. The characters imitate and become one with nature by steeping the tea, or trying to fly or simply ringing “Tibetan bells to clear the air.” This poem constantly dances on the delicate line we, as humans, walk to keep this seamless world and all of its inter-connections together. Then there are those who think that humankind has already interrupted far too many of these links within the complex web of nature.
"I Gave My Love A Cherry That Had No Stone"

Sara Cunningham-Farish

My father comes to visit every couple of months. He has slowly transported parts of his house to mine: a lamp he no longer needs, a stool for my kitchen, a rug for the garage where I have my sewing table and my husband’s music studio. And when he comes he wants to help me: with my yard, my homework, my computer, my landlord, my life. And I love to let him. I am entering the world of adults, with a marriage of my own, a home, a yard that needs mowing and weeding, bills that need paying, meals I need to cook. This is an exciting time; I march gleefully down aisles of sugary cereal and eat crackers in bed. But sometimes, when the car breaks down and I’m sick with the flu, I would rather be a child again; all of this just seems like too much for a child/woman of twenty-three. So last time when my father came and asked if I needed any help with my yard, I told him I needed to make a border for the flower beds because I was losing so much soil to the world outside my garden. These are the last vestiges of my childhood, of having someone who “knows best”. He can’t tell me how to be alive, but he can help me construct the borders of my garden, and provide the fleeting gift of an omnipotent parent. Women in particular have been encouraged by our culture to look outside themselves for authority, direction, and approval; the roles of wife, mother, and daughter all impose a kind of subtle submission. Finding a balance amidst these often-conflicting roles is imperative to developing a healthy sense of self.

In The Painter Is Here by Cathy Warner she gives us a snapshot of one woman’s life—married with a young child, like one of the many pictures arranged on the mantle—and the confusion she faces at finding her center. When a painter comes to repaint her house a kind of dream begins. The painter represents the archetypal omnipotent parent, the omnipotent father, the protector of the weak, and the decision-maker. There is the feeling throughout the piece that she wants him to change everything, with his brush and paint, and the white shade she can’t even remember picking. She wants him to erase the life/house she exists in, with it’s “gray scuffs of a shoe thrown…the dent of a saucepan, and the orange drip of tomato sauce” (Warner 104), so that she can begin clean, so she can forget that this is her life. Warner alludes here to violence in the home but in a restrained manner; not only does this allow the piece to remain more universal, but it also mirrors the often unspoken and unacknowledged presence of domestic violence in a home.

She is caught between the reality of the baby sucking on her neck, needing a diaper changed, and the illusion that someone or something is
going to save her, make the decision for her, choose the color that will break the spell. The painter is here and she waits. Warner uses simple language to convey the intricate relationship between women and power; even as we focus on the painter she shows us that this is not about the painter; he has a wife he calls on his lunch break, a job that neatly comes and “transforms” a house. But the narrator has created the image of him as a man who “knows his life by heart” (Warner 104). And she doesn’t. This is new to her; although she may have the “practiced steps of a mother” she is not familiar with the “stone” at her center, the compass in her heart. “I gave my love a cherry without a stone” (Warner 104), she says. She married a man without having a ripe consciousness about herself or a seed to sustain rot, growth and new life. Women who have not developed a complete self before marriage are entering into a very dire situation; the needs of the relationship and the birth of children can quickly drown out the desires of the mother/wife.

This lack of center makes the narrator a passive participant in her life throughout the entire piece, and the painter takes on the role of her guide. “Let me help you” (105) the painter uses his library voice. He hangs plastic bags from one wrist, diaper bag from the other and smiles at the baby while I unlock the door. I left the fan running in the baby’s room” (105). She allows him to know best about her child, the new life that she bore, for she lacks the will or strength to be the authority of her own life. She is also working through a fundamental conflict that many women feel after having children; she must reclaim her body to be inhabited by one after being the vessel of another. The realness of having another life completely dependent on her, the responsibility of “eyes that have only seen what I show them”(104) is profound. She is now the guardian that stands between the death of her father and the new life of her child.

She seems to have transferred her power to the painter from her father and her husband, latching on to the male who enters her home, relinquishing what she is not conscious of as the key to waking up. He is only a painter, he is really just a stranger with “hair speckled gray”, but to her he is more. She alludes to the fact that someone she loves has died. I think she is talking about her father or another important male role model. While driving home from the library she passes the “narrow lane that bisects rolling green dotted with marble in white and gray, words scratched in memorial” (104). Warner implies that the narrator usually does stop at the cemetery to spend time with her father, but “today she will not stop” (104) because the figure that she has lost is alive to her in her home.

The exchanges between the painter and the woman could be the conversations between her and the ghost of her father cast as a shadow on her newly painted walls. “Is it what you were hoping for...It’s the color you wanted, right?” (Warner 105) Daughter, is this the life you wished you
would have? Are you happy? “I have no idea what I want...but I’m sure it’s fine” (105). She means exactly that, to the painter and to her father. I am lost. “Well then, I’ll leave the bill for your husband” (Warner 105). The transfer of power goes from father to husband, the burden of reassuring her that life will be okay changes hands. “That will be fine” (Warner 105).

I am cornered in the house like a mouse in a box waiting for the paint to dry, waiting for the baby to take his nap, waiting for my husband to come home from work and leave his shoes at the door. Waiting for him to tell me *Everything will be okay*. Wanting to believe it. The painter has gone but I wish he were here (Warner 105).

Warner leaves us with those words to reflect on the weight that her short piece bestows; we have no real answers, only more questions about women’s relationship to power and place in society. If labor were more equally distributed would she be happy? If she had married a different man or never married at all? If...Warner leaves me wondering. The image of the painter like his paint will dry, leaving behind only the recollection of his visit, but the narrator will remain trapped by her life until she recovers the stone that is her birthright. Although we don’t get to see this woman escape from the *Wheel of Fortune*, I think this metaphor implies a rotating, a rising and a falling, what was once “hollow” will one day be full.
The first thought that comes to mind when you read the title, “Fuck” (33) is it’s going to be about sex. The prose poem does talk a bit about sex; on the other hand, author Roxan McDonald expresses her feelings from a child’s perspective about her aunt. The piece makes the reader question the way we deal with issues of relationships, AIDS, homosexuals and death.

Roxan begins to tell us about her aunt in a humorous way:

Aunt Becky liked to fuck  
she wasn’t exceptionally beautiful  
or even a slut but I knew she liked  
to fuck long before I knew what fucking  
was. It was something in the way she moved  
or breathed, or the way her big ass swayed in  
her jeans.

But we soon discover Aunt Becky’s boyfriend Ricky is bisexual which quickly changes the tone of the piece from being funny to profound:

When Aunt Becky fell in love Mom called her  
a fag hag and stopped sending me to sleep on  
hers couch. Ricky loved Aunt Becky I could tell that.  
He liked to fuck Aunt Beck too. I knew that too. I remember  
him as being nice and making her smile and playing frisbee  
with  
us in tight white shorts. What I didn’t know is that he liked  
to wear Aunt Becky’s clothes and fuck men too.

Roxan expresses that her Aunt really loved and cared for Ricky. However, it seems like an odd relationship since society tends to usually focus more on heterosexual relationships and homosexual relationships—not really bisexual relationships. It didn’t matter to her Aunt whether Ricky was homosexual or heterosexual, but all that mattered was that he loved her.

Then Ricky moved to Carmel with his mom. Aunt Becky  
brought me to see him. He was skinny and slumped and covered  
in big red sores.  
Aunt Becky kept kissing him and crying and he kept saying no no  
Rebecca it’s not  
safe. I believed him. I remember wanting to pull her off him and  
pour peroxide in
his mouth. Carmel was cold and gray and Ricky died there. Aunt Becky tried to explain A.I.D.S. to me but I already knew. It was about fucking.

What’s interesting here is how Roxan interprets how Ricky contracted AIDS. She doesn’t say he contracted AIDS from having sex with men, or having sex with women but leaving the curiosity of which he contracted AIDS from—a man or woman.

One of the things that made me wonder about this prose poem was Roxan’s choice of using the word “fuck” instead of saying “have sex.” In a phone conversation with Roxan, I asked about this and she told me “Those words make people listen.” Using profanity was the way she knew how to get people to listen. The word “fuck” is blunt, strong and forceful. Had she used “having sex” in place of “fuck,” the piece would have read very differently:

Aunt Becky liked to **have sex**

she wasn’t exceptionally beautiful

or even a slut but I knew she liked

to **have sex** long before I knew what **having sex**

was. It was something in the way she moved

or breathed, or the way her big ass swayed in

her jeans.

Now it reads weak and passive. Using “fuck” creates a completely different feeling. At the end of the piece, Ricky passes away and Aunt Becky’s personality dramatically changes:

Aunt Becky spent years crying over the dead Ricky. Her pants got looser, her laugh less thrown back. She almost never brought wine in a box over any more.

Aunt Becky deals with his death in a state of withdrawal. Roxan told me that when Ricky passed away, she never saw her Aunt with another man again. It’s like Ricky was her soul mate. They loved each other so much that once he passed way, there was no one else who could make her as happy as he did—he was the only one for her. It didn’t matter whether he slept with men, but that he loved her.

This piece shows us that love has no boundaries. It doesn’t matter what your sexual preference is, but what matters is how one person makes you feel. And that we sometimes feel when someone dies, a part of us dies with them that we can never take back again. Aunt Becky’s passion and love for sex died with Ricky and will forever stay with him. “I thought it was hopeless the way the / fuck just seemed to fall right out of her.”
Drinking with Ghosts: Presence

Shannon Drake

Memories are supposed to be shadows, gauzy things that recede as fast as you stretch for them. Mine are slaps to the face, delivered by the relentless, pursuing hand. And they are becoming more insistent. (Bentley1)

This is the opener to the short story Presence by Tom Bentley. From the beginning to the end this story left me with a presence, as if the whole story was some kind of living organism, like if I were to touch a particular word it would be there for the having, there to respond to my personal actions; like the story itself would change depending on the reader. The manner in which this short story was written I can see everything, he has really mastered the art of showing with his writing, not just telling us about a situation that takes place in the life of one of his characters. His claim is about the tainting that takes place during the average young person’s coming of age. He examines the idea that on the surface growing up and experiencing adolescence may only appear mildly corrupting—something that all children must go through in the process of aging, but that for some those experiences and actions that were committed in youth can haunt us for the rest of our lives.

In this story there are no adults, chaperons, or any one there to help guide or protect the children in this story, except for one: Amity.

She looked as though she was designed to be a drunk—forty-five going on several lifetime of ruin. Tangled, dirt-colored hair, thrown in every direction. Campfire-ember patches of red on her pallid face, blotchy nose crosshatched with veins, skin saddened by the burden of its slack stretching across the spindly body. She wore an improbable gypsy outfit of loose purple.(2)

Her character is one of the examples of the universality of this piece, she is that neighbor we all have had, that weird neighborhood outcast that no one could comprehend, that the adults ignore and the children find a morbid fascination with. I have been to just about every neighborhood in the Santa Cruz area, something that comes with parents that have to rent homes and find it “inconvenient” to stay in one place for more than a year after the rates go up. In every neighborhood there has either been some crazy neighbor that nobody ever saw; which of course made it necessary for us kids to make up stories about them, or there were the type of
crazy neighbors like Amity—that flaunted their “eccentric” life styles and made us want to find out more, obtain some type of tangible proof to expose this person to our parents. Or at least use them for excuses so that our parents would listen to us when we would cry that they stole our base balls or frisbees when in actuality we had lost those precious belongings on the roof, again, after our parents said that the next time that happened we would have to go buy, with our own money, a new one instead of risking our necks climbing around on a poorly shingled roof.

The main character, Cory, is the leader of the neighborhood kids, the one that all of the after school specials wore the rest of the “good” kids about, he seems like he’s ready to corrupt the entire neighborhood by the end of the story, but in the beginning he’s just like every other kid, it interesting to watch him sink into the down hill slide of becoming a “punk”. However, he is the one child that starts a relationship with Amity, not by choice, necessarily, but because she chooses him. She is the catalyst of this story, the one that moves the tale along—the serpent that tempts the naive—and even though her character could be blamed for the tainting of the pure and the perversion of Cory’s childhood, the author strays from using her as a scape goat, or an excuse for the final condition of the main character who eventually becomes a washed out alcoholic college professor. This was another strong choice that the author made, it made me want to examine everything else about the character himself: the other aspects of his childhood, the relationships he had with the other characters, and most of all this tactic kept me reading. Also by not blaming Amity for the character’s inevitable failure, it makes her character that much more fiendish, more relatable, more intriguing. After all the devil’s greatest trick was convincing man that he didn’t exist. If he had chose to place all blame on her, the story would be one dimensional, predictable, resolved, and it would make his evils that he committed against her that much more justifiable, where as it really shows how wicked the young can be.

But we called her many things, things born of the remarkable creative cruelty of children, just discovering the heady power of spite. Looking back at all that we did makes a man’s throat go dry—I’ll pour a little drink. I’ll see these things too clearly all the same, but a drink keeps me company; it’s sociable, in a gathering of ghosts.

(1)

In the story Cory tells us about how he would taunt Amity’s boyfriend Walter, with no mercy with out being provoked, he also explains that these attacks were unwarranted, but were merely used as bait to draw out Amity and to make her react; and of course when she did that just gave the neighborhood kids more proof of just how crazy she and her life style
was.

During the harassment that goes on between the kids and Amity, no adults appear to punish them for their aggravation, or to protect them from Amity’s some times unprovoked and irrational out lashes towards them, they are left to themselves to make their own decisions, to give into the temptation, or deny the desire to indulge in a little “harmless” taunting. They are really left to their own devices, which makes it necessary for Cory to accept the consequences of his actions years later as he’s reflecting on all the things that he did wrong in his youth.

The author made sure to show us just how important these events were in the life of his main character, and made sure that as readers we did not just write off the crimes of childhood as minor incidents. He does this by only briefly showing the other areas of Cory’s down falls and mistakes, like the abandonment of his wife and family, his failing career, but always returning to the resurfacing memories of what did happen, rather then going through the motions of what is currently happening. The other main claim in this story is alcoholism, not just Cory’s, but Amity’s and the link that he “inherited” many of his bad habits from her, but that he took those bad habits on with little encouragement from Amity herself. In the end of the story he explains that every time he sits down for a drink, he is drinking with Amity, the one “person” in his life who has stuck with him through his misfortunes and mistakes. That every time he takes a sip her presence is there with him, haunting him and keeping him company at the same time. This story has it all: alcohol abuse, sexual experimentation, good vs. evil, ultimate consequences, corruption, friendship, comedy, and death.

Tom Bentley shows us that the mistakes of our childhood are things we, and we alone can take credit for. He shows us that even though teasing and experimenting with sex and alcohol and other dangerous combinations like neighborhood politics and outcasts may seem harmless at first—something we need to experiment with to figure out what is right for us as individuals, in the end we could suffer great repercussions. On the surface our motivation may appear to be just curiosity and childhood exploration, but deep down it is our basic character that urges us to do, or to be certain ways, and that in the end we may realize where we went wrong, but by then it will have been too late: too late to place blame, and too hard to take full responsibility for growing up. This story is written with beautiful accuracy about how painful hind sight can be.
Revenge: More Bitter Than Sweet

Nigel Genthner

Revenge is a dish best served cold, or so I am told. I wouldn’t know because I’ve never gotten even with anyone who has betrayed me. Lucky for me I can live vicariously through Norbert who gets even with his ex-wife in a humorous, creative and totally outrageous way. I know I have always wanted to even the score with those who have wronged me; however, what I find through this story is that it really solves nothing. I find the idea that we have to “get even to get happy” very prevalent in the main stream media. In this story Norbert finds temporary happiness, but ultimately finds this is not a solution. In fact, Norbert’s attempt to escape his true hurt through revenge becomes his ultimate undoing.

In the first half of the story, we find Norbert in a state of euphoria as he screws his wife in return for her screwing some other guy. This, I believe, is the dream of every person who has ever been deceived by another; to find a creative way to really stick it to the other person.

Tuesday, he brought a thermos, took the Wall Street Journal and his hand-lettered sign: help make my wife HOMELESS. (115)

Norbert proceeds to joyously hand out money from his wife’s liquidated assets. How many people wish they had the guts to pull a stunt like that? This is where Norbert’s story finds its strength. In finding the humor behind what is obviously a very painful time in Norbert’s life. I couldn’t help but laugh when I read of this bold move, while wishing I had showed the same kind of audacity when I was betrayed.

I believe this want for revenge is in part driven by our society. We see this sort of story played out in movies, television shows, and occasionally on the nightly news. I am reminded of a movie that came out a few years back called Addicted to Love. In this movie we see two jilted lovers team up to exact revenge on their former partners. In the movie The First Wives Club, we see three ex-wives exact revenge on their former husbands. This is all glorified and applauded by audiences around the nation. However, what we rarely see in the media is the darker side of avoiding pain by taking revenge. This is where Applied Material Science differs from the main stream media and finds its uniqueness.

Fortunately for us, the readers, we are shown what the avoidance of Norbert’s pain leads to. The euphoria of revenge quickly begins to fade for Norbert as he is forced to remember the painful events that led to his divorce. Instead of seeking help to deal with this pain, Norbert seeks to
avoid it through revenge. In the second half of the story, we get to see how deep Norbert’s pain runs as he remembers both good and bad times. Here I began to feel sorry for Norbert. The pain of rejection and betrayal is not hard for most of us to relate to, and the author does a good job of putting us in touch with the pain of this poor guy. We start to see that the high from the revenge is fading faster and faster each time.

Norbert also begins to take a dangerous trip down the river of denial. We see that in his act of revenge, he is in some way, hoping to gain the attention of his lost love. He is giving the cash, gained from the sale of their items, to the homeless, to those in need. He even thinks to himself, “Claire couldn’t accuse him of being materialistic, lacking a social conscience, any more.” Even Norbert’s intense denial cannot block out the painful memories. He tries to push on with his revenge clinging to hope that this will somehow bring back his wife.

She would thank him for his generosity, for helping the homeless. She would pound on the condo door and beg him to take her back. (118)

In this daze of denial and revenge Norbert walks in front of a moving bus. This is what revenge and denial have led to.

This dark comedy is both humorous and sad, which I believe is the mark of any good dark comedy. But more importantly than its entertainment value, I believe it says something about our culture. Our culture places more importance on getting even and getting what’s yours than it does on dealing with real feelings. Perhaps if the media stops feeding us the lie that revenge leads to healing, then we might be able to save the Norberts of the world.
Hope Still Floats  
Ashley Smith

Although we are not always dealt the ideal hand of cards in this trivial game called life, we cling to what we can and it has its moments. When that brief moment comes we thrive on it, use it and live for the next one. We have hope. Hope that this game will change its course and we might win a hand, that things are different, that life isn’t so blasé. Ursula Lindsey’s poem, titled “Hope”, managed to float to the surface during the mind-numbing editing process for the Porter Gulch Review. When circumstances in life weigh us down, do we sink? We grasp onto whatever hope we have left that life will work out and be thrilling and that there is something we have been living for all along.

Entering adulthood gives one a real sense of that cast-out-upon-the-world feeling. Things feel uncertain in the future and yet this is the time when we are supposed to be certain of our decisions. Society and our culture have implied standards to when and what age we are to achieve specific goals such as “leaving the nest”. You are at the age were you truly begin to realize who you are and what the weaknesses of your past have become and how they effect your life presently. Our failures don’t go unnoticed or ignored. We are now at the age where we can’t blame our mistakes or actions on someone else because we must be a “responsible adult”. Being alone becomes more frequent because this is the time in your life when you are to be independent. As in the first stanza of this piece, I feel like I can relate all too well, perhaps to an unsettling degree. I also feel that being a woman and becoming an adult puts more pressure on an individual. I remember feeling uncomfortable because I had to act a certain way, sit a certain way and dress more like “a lady” because that’s what “adults” did. Fortunately for me I was able to recognize this stereotypical feminine mold, however, it made it that much more challenging for me as a female but also as a young person on the verge of adulthood.

Feeling shortchanged, we are left dangling in the wide-open space of this vulnerability called life. “This is a gyp, I say, this is such a joke!” (48) Our entire being becomes a slave to time and this world’s expectations. Fear and struggle become a daily occurrence and something we are intended to become accustom to.

You do things like dye your hair, smoke cigarettes and take drugs to pull from life what you need, the things you aren’t getting from this shitty hand dealt to you. We try repeatedly to milk life for things it cannot yield to us directly. When we final come to these realizations of why we do what we do, “Like a fiery revelation” (48), it’s depressing and forlorn. It’s easy to want to go to sleep again and never wake up. To just forget until there is nothing.
In the forth stanza I particularly like the imagery I get from the lines: “swimming forlornly, to the bottom of my bed” and “Like a magic wild fish Jumping out of water”). It’s a beautiful way of connecting this image. Although she feels all these things about life this is an example of one of the moments, “And yet” as if saying “but…” That amazing feeling of thinking about that someone and the possibilities it brings, the hope that it instills in her and all of us.

In the fifth stanza, the willingness to go through the daily garbage of life in hope that life will just jump up and bite. To suck out the dullness of life and be able to fill the voids of what is needed. “To shine by vampire stars; the night bit us beautiful”. Life leaves its mark on her like a bruise. “And bruised us with its love”. This is another point for great imagery using the words bit, bruised, spills, skids and falls all discuss bumpy road traveled in life.

Amongst these tumbles and falls, are small bits and pieces there is still hope. The last stanza gives me the impression of a newborn struggling for life, to stay alive. “Its stubborn, fighting chance; Bald head still soft to death”. Hope signified as being fragile and yet fighting for its chance to prevail in those dark moments.

There was a point in my life that I “lived life to the fullest”. I did the sort of things I did to make life exciting and to pass time. Fortunately it wasn’t a waste because I did get from life what I needed at the time. However, I do feel that every person try’s to accomplish that same satisfaction, yet we all find our separate outlets for it. Life for the most part can be quite boring and mundane but those intervals of excitement; fun, love and so forth are what I live for. I agree with Lindsey, I always have hope that things will be great in the future because if I don’t then there isn’t much of a point to the life that I live. Those exciting moments make life amazing and luscious and they are well worth the wait.

I feel that this piece is a strong addition to the Porter Gulch Review Spring 2001. The form of this poem fits the content well in the way that it develops in stages of confrontation, recognition and realization. Also depictive of the way hope comes in stages to the author. The familiarity of these words and summary of feelings quite possibly ring true for many. We have all had our moments that we cling to and the ones that make us ready to let go.
River Dreams

Life’s dreams may be born in the hearts of youthful spirits. Dreams may come from the core of one’s soul, or from wishful thinking. Julia Alter expresses her ideas about where dreams may come from in her poem “Born at the Mouth of Rivers”. She claims that dreams are born, as well as die, at the mouth of rivers.

Alter elegantly takes the readers through a journey, “somewhere along the banks / somewhere walking under the autumn elms, which follows the path of a dream”. The poem clearly illustrates a complete cycle, from the letting go of old dreams, to the rebirth of new ones. There is a sorrow of letting go, yet a relief and confidence that new dreams will once again be born at the mouth of rivers.

The path of the river begins with a dream of marriage, “the one where she walked with that blue eyed man / down the white blue aisle / down the aisle of the stained glass church / bleached paper dress”. The woman in the poem is letting go of that perfect dream of marriage. She watches as the gargoyles of the river, “diving with their tucked gray grimaces / carving down the river / away with her dream”. The dreams are being sunk to the bottom of the river by the gargoyles. The chilling imagery of the gargoyles is impressive, yet her wool shawl, her apartment, and the fact that dreams were born to spill comfort the woman. The realization that dreams can be “born in the echoes of other stained churches / in the arms of monsters graying in the mossy distance / born again at the mouth of rivers”, eases the pain of letting go.

The poem is filled with beautiful language that attempts to interpret the workings of the unconscious mind as manifested in dreams. Alter uses colors and precious gems to paint the vivid pictures of her dreams. Describing the church, she talks about the wind blowing “through the open topaz eaves”, and again when she is taking comfort in her apartment “with its garnet door”. The graying monsters with their gray grimaces add the feeling of cold, hard surroundings.

Alter opens her poem with a phrase from Rainer Maria Rilke’s Duino Elegies #3. Her poem “Born at the Mouth of Rivers” is reminiscent of Rilke’s work. The feeling of solitude is very apparent in Alter’s poem and she uses nature to reflect on a spiritual topic. Rilke too believed in the coexistence of material and spiritual realms. The tone of Rilke’s poetry is melancholic. Alter also has that tone within her poetry. The Duino Elegies meditated on time and eternity, life and death, art versus ordinary things. I think this is why Alter decided to use a section of the Duino Elegies to open up her piece. Alter reflects on all of those things in her poetry. Especially if you read her other three poems that were chosen for the Porter
Gulch Review, “Fresh From the Alter”, “Ay Mama”, and “Something Like Laughter”. Related themes include the identity of terror and bliss, and the oneness of life and death.

Alter’s poetry moves in and out of the physical world with ease. She often uses stained glass churches as her spiritual backdrop and gargoyles as eerie characters in many of her poems. Alter writes about gems, such as topaz, ruby, and garnet, she incorporates her family into her poetry, and often compares material objects to metaphysical ideas.

The Duino Elegies are a cycle of poems analyzing the artistic life, unsatisfied desire, and the longing for completeness. One would need to read all elegies by Rilke to understand the alienation he felt. Perhaps it is the same with Alter. One would need to read more of her poetry to fully understand the spiritual connection she attempts to make with the physical world in which we all live. And like Rilke, maybe it is the distance between the poet and the rest of the world that makes that connection.

Wherever dreams may be born, it is necessary to recognize them as an important part of all our lives. Dreams are born to die, as is human life. Eventually we come to accept this fact. Spiritually we can receive comfort from this thought, like a warm shawl. It can be dark and eerie, like a looming gargoyle. But as long as there is life still breathing energy within you, the dreams will continue to be born.
Share Your Sorrow

Exploring the indelible impressions that death leaves on the living can be both intimidating and painful, yet Susan Allison’s short story *Mated Ones* did so with tenderness and empathy. Attempting to fathom or explain the emotional impact of losing a loved one seems exceedingly puerile, but Susan’s story allowed me to better understand the unavoidable truth regarding death: It is the living that suffer the most. All pretentiousness aside, after the pain of physical death is over, it is those left behind that must carry on in its wake.

It was the death of her friend, Rita Collier-Michuda that inspired Susan to write a story about shared empathy and sorrow. After talking with Rita’s husband Matt, I discovered what a loving, caring and generous person she was and what a powerful impact she had on numerous people. For thirteen years, Rita served as a nurse at Dominican Hospital, helping and engaging an untold multitude. It is really little wonder that many PGR submissions were dedicated in her memory. *Mated Ones* is not only a requiem for the dead, it is an empathic tribute to the living.

In her story, Susan relays an episode when she removed a dead owl from the road, while in the company of its mate. During the experience, she is suddenly immersed with recollections of Rita. Her compassion manifests itself in an act that, for her, honored her friend’s passing. In some sort of spiritual, psychic or otherwise unknown coincidental manner, Susan was awakened the previous evening by owls, “hooting across the canyon”(65). Next morning on Highway 1 north of Davenport, “so warm, so content and on time for work”(65), she spots the body of an owl on the road. Overcoming her urge to keep driving, she “unconsciously”(65) pulls the car over to investigate.

Almost immediately, Susan notices the surviving mate, “darker...larger, the male of the two”(65) surveying the scene. A sublime connection occurs between them as she realizes, “this was why I was here. This was why I had been awakened in the middle of the night by owl voices: I had not understood before”(66). With the aid of a blanket, she transports the dead female owl to an embankment with sympathetic delicacy. Nearby, a pole decorated with lavender and white flowers marks the scene of another tragedy. Taken out of her routine and beginning to absorb the context of the situation, Susan sees the correlation between the owl and her friend Rita. Lost in the moment, she envisions the owl as her friend, who during her wake, “lay on her bed in her white, lace death-dress, surrounded by flowers and candles”(67). All the while, the surviving owl stands lonely vigil, attempting to perhaps comfort or comprehend his mate in death.

Matt too, was left to pick up the shattered remains of his life after
Rita died. Describing the owl, “his posture reminded me of someone, someone I had seen recently: the bowed head, slumped shoulders, the sighing and shifting”, Susan is, in fact, recreating another image. That of Matt, “completely spent”, having “held the grief for us all, carried it on his face and in his shoulders”. Emotionally depleted and physically exhausted, regardless of sleep, Matt had “hardly left her side for a moment while she was dying”, and it showed. Worse still, as Susan points out, “what can you say to someone whose young wife has just died?”(67). Words of comfort offer little solace in such times; instead they sound hollow and trivial.

During and after my grandmother’s death from cancer, I attempted to be brave and “keep my chin up”. Not that I was told to, but for some damn reason I thought it was the mature thing to do. Keeping my pain inside seemed to be the safest place for it, as I could then examine and feel it whenever I felt inclined. It is obvious that Matt is also attempting to bear his particularly difficult burden the best he can. The cold choking feeling is there though, just under the surface; where most of us keep it. For myself, that sensation occasionally occurs during reminiscence of my grandmother or lost friends. When Susan elaborates about the owl’s forlorn and somber behavior, “looking so patient and sad, but also seeming to be asking for my help”(65), I can imagine it experiencing a similar sensation too.

What we do and where we go from there, I haven’t a clue. I do not know if there is a Heaven or Hell, an afterlife, karma, reincarnation or if death is simply the end of the game, so we should enjoy our lives now while we have the chance. What we do with our grief is up to each individual; we can share it, ignore it or cherish it. Susan cried for the rest of the day, “for all the mates who die…for those left behind, for the great horned owl, and for Matt”(67), after her experience. As her story exemplifies, let us mourn for the dead and empathize with the living.
Amber Coverdale Sumrall’s poem, “Fear,” expresses the feelings of a woman overwhelmed by the fears of life in the real world. In the poem, the woman is trapped, both mentally and physically, within the strict confines of her kitchen walls. The woman may be “on the road to crazy” as the poem insinuates. For me there are many parallels to what this woman is going through and experiences I have had. Scared and obsessive, this woman lives inside her head trying to cope with a multitude of fears that torment her.

When I first moved out on my own, it was one of the most terrifying experiences of my life. I had not yet discovered, at the time, that I was Bi-polar (also known as Manic-Depressive). One in 100 people suffer from Manic Depression and 15-20% of all Americans will need mental health services at least once in their lifetime. In Sumrall’s poem, the woman who is written about is suffering from some mental disorder—most likely Manic Depression or Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder. Moving out on my own led to an unstable condition because I was without my family to comfort me as I had been used to for 18 years of my life. I moved to Chowchilla with my boyfriend of one year. Now Chowchilla is one of the worst possible towns to send a person to that has a chemical imbalance—the town ended up being the epitome of the kingdom of meth-amphetamines and it was a very scary place for me to be. Yet, despite all the warnings of both friends and family, I followed my boyfriend there.

The living situation there was all right, but the company was terrible, and there were absolutely no jobs available, considering the tiny population of this farming community smack dab in the middle of the San Joaquin Valley. I ended up feeling trapped and paranoid. I started to buy into the jokes kids would make, like, “Once you drink the water here, you’ll never leave!” I started to wish I had never taken one sip of that water. I ended up leaving after only two months stay there, and it is a place to which I never wish to return.

Much like the character in Sumrall’s poem, I felt trapped behind the walls of the four-bedroom house in which I was staying. And, with the emotionally abusive relationship I was involved in, I was very much controlled and told what to do, where I could and could not go, and whom I could or could not see. This was enough to drive me crazy—and literally, it did. Sumrall’s character in “Fear” is trapped, but we do not know by what or whom. It is likely that she is trapped by her own monstrous fear that is eating away at the inside of her soul. The narrator begins:

She wore it against her skin like sackcloth,
those long summer afternoons when she was the same age as I am now.
In the sanctuary of the kitchen, doors double-locked...(54)

In the first line, Sumrall uses simile to give us a clear picture that the woman—her own mother—is so full of fear that it embodies her like a piece of material. In the Bible, Jews wore sackcloth in times of mourning. It is clear here, that the mother is fearful and mourning. Perhaps she has felt as though something inside of her died, because in her depression, her happiness was dead. It is interesting to know that recently, during the 1990s, 17.5% of women in the U.S. were depressed. ³ The narrator is now the same age as the woman when these episodes began, and the woman in the poem feels safe only behind the kitchen walls—this is her “sanctuary.” She confines herself behind the doors of her kitchen and feels the need to double-lock the doors. She is terrified of what lies beyond them, beyond those walls. The poem continues:

shades lowered, she began collecting newspapers, magazines,
stacking them on windowseats, chairs, filling all the places she might have rested, perhaps permitting herself to speak the word, that one syllable, even once.

She sits alone in her kitchen with her obsessive-compulsive tendencies—stacking up piles and piles of newspapers. She is even unable “to speak the word, that one syllable, even once.” That one word is fear. As the poem continues, we start to see the bigger picture:

I am the age she was when her hands first started to flutter,
when the word began to take form in darting, birdlike movements,
in the way she never lighted on one thing for very long.

The narrator lets us know that she is now the age when all this craziness began—the time when the woman’s “hands first started to flutter,” the time when these “birdlike movements” all began. In addition, we discover that the fearful woman changes the subject all the time—a characteristic of a distracted mind, “on the road to crazy.”

And because I know this word, have felt its talons pierce me,
lift me from one landscape to another, I can name it for
her,
say what she could not say; I am afraid. This is killing me.

The narrator tells us that she too is afraid. She has “felt its talons pierce” her. And she can name the thing that the fearful woman cannot—she knows what it is that is eating away at her. She can vocalize the emotions that the other cannot when she says, “This is killing me.”

She swallowed the word like bitter medicine, offered it up for the poor souls in Purgatory, choosing the cage, the clipped wings, his cruelty. Though he was gone from the house she could not relax, worried about sunlight fading the wallpaper, carpet, wore her robe all day or stayed in bed sick with migraine. Her children stopped coming home after school.

When the woman finally understands her fear, she “swallow[s] the word like bitter medicine”. It is hard for her to finally accept that she is completely overwhelmed by this one emotion and all the time before, it seemed she had been in denial, trying to escape the feelings her fear evoked.

There is an absence of a male character (probably her husband) in her life and one can see that this causes her a great amount of her pain. It may have been the one thing that set off her obsessions. It is known that since the 1920s, the divorce rate has risen and it peaked at 5.3 per 1000 in 1981 before declining somewhat.4 One article noted that “…single mothers report higher lifetime and 1-year prevalence rates of depression than married mothers. …Recent increases in the number of divorces and births out of marriage...have broad implications for the psychological well-being of family members, particularly mothers and their children.”5 And the U.S. has a divorce rate of 40%.6 Once her husband has left her, she does not know how to go on with one simple thing—life. It is obvious that her separation has had broad implications affecting this woman’s psychological well-being. And now all her fears have taken over her life and inhibited her from taking the step back into the real world. In the last stanza, we see why her husband has left:

Nerves, he said, implying she was on the road to crazy.
She ironed, scrubbed floors, polished silver,
chopped onions and peppers, kept dinner warm in the oven
even though he was with another and would not be coming home.
At this point, the woman is becoming more and more obsessive, she is cleaning like crazy and keeping dinner warm for a husband that is most likely involved in an affair. Yet, the woman still hopes he will return.

She paced from room to room, listening for his car in the driveway,
Occasionally parting the heavy damask drapes to look out upon a world
She no longer inhabited, a place in which anything could happen.

Here the woman is becoming more and more frantic, realizing that she is terrified of what the real world, beyond the doors of her house, might bring—because the real world is “a place in which anything could happen.”

When I was out on my own for the first time, I closely identified with the woman in “Fear.” I was afraid of so many things—of the future, of how I would support myself, and how I would ever manage without the help of my parents or any family members. I too was seemingly trapped, but I was not trapped behind the walls of a kitchen, but in a relationship that was emotionally abusive. Just like the woman in “Fear,” I was unable to see clearly that what I needed most was loving people to surround me.

In “Fear,” this woman has become isolated to the world and every moment the fear digs deeper into her soul. She is not ready to step out into this world, so she remains locked behind the doors of her kitchen in this sanctuary she has created for herself. What she is afraid of is irrational, but because of the condition she is in, she is not thinking clearly, and all her fears embody her—whether rational or not.

1 Recovery Path.
2 Serious Mental Illnesses—Myths and Realities by the Alliance for the Mentally Ill in Delaware.
6 Ibid.
Visions of the Night

William Norteye

It came to her in a dream, the owls calling to her, sending across a message, but “she couldn’t quite catch it”. “She dreamt of tribal totems on the banks of narrow inlets, forested by thick pines and firs hearing owls call the names of those who will die”. In this deeply felt and emotional piece, Susan Allison travels into an unseen world through her dreams and reveals to us dark images of our world, visions of the night. Owls in certain cultures represent death due to their nocturnal habits. In her dream, however, Susan can not quite make out the image been shown her. It all comes to her as the events of the morning unfolded. A wounded bird cries for help, a lost soul patiently awaits her help.

Susan Allison’s *Mated Ones* travels back and forth each time relating her dream, the untimely death of a bird and heart aching passing away of a beloved friend. Whilst reading the *Mated Ones* I cannot help it but question the validity of the wounded birds story. Did this really happen or is Susan just inventing a story to help her come to terms with her friends death. Maybe it really did happen or maybe not. I know in situations such as the death of a loved one, its difficult for those left behind to cope. More often than not people in their subconscious mind tend to imagine situations in which they see a new life (angel spirit) after death. Only Susan knows if the wounded bird story happened. Anyhow, from my point of view, Susan is relating these situations in an attempt to comfort her and others and especially to convince her that she is doing her duty to honor a friend’s memory. My aim here however is not to determine the validity of her story but instead to make known once again, the torture, pain and sorrow we go through we a loved one is lost forever. This I believe is what Susan wants her readers to experience.

Susan’s kind-heartedness, guided by spirits of the unseen world, drew her attention to a white wounded bird lying in the road. It was the beginning of an end to a temporary everlasting relationship between two lovebirds, between a man and a woman. It was the commencement to the realization that death does not only steal what’s precious to us but devours the very state of our being and leaves us drowning in pain and torment. Susan beautifully incorporates imagery with thoughts as her dream; vision of the night begins to evolve.

“I got out of my car, but before I could decide what to do, I saw something else, a large, lumpy form a feet away from me in the bike lane”. “Curious I walked closer, not forgetting about the bird in the road, but somehow drawn to this other figure”. As her vision of the night grows, this writer in her subconscious mind begins to piece together the interrelationship between this death stricken bird, her involuntarily help-
less husband, and her friend Rita with her husband by her side as she nearing her death. Susan’s mention of the telephone pole covered in plastic flowers evokes the image of Rita on the death bed surrounded those she loves, those who will forever be bruised by her untimely death.

“Looking from one to the other, I realized this owl’s mate had just been hit…” “I found myself crying and talking to him saying, I’m so sorry, I’m so sorry over and over…” Here Susan associates her time with the owls to the night of Rita’s wake, when she sat by her husband, crying and trying hard to console him as he sat staring at the “highway”. The mention of the highway symbolizes the future ahead, what life without Rita holds. Just like the male owl, Rita’s husband looked on helplessly; stared endlessly, lost forever to the cruelty and devastation that accompanies death. He was vulnerable, crying and seeking help. This was why Susan laid awake in her bed that night as the owls sang to her, this was the song they sang, the message was clear now. Death has ripped hearts out; vulnerable men lie in pain waiting patiently and sadly for help.

It is her call, to offer to this devastated owl what she could not offer to Rita’s husband. She owes it to Rita, by “honoring this owl”, “I honor Rita, I honored her memory”. Rita’s death was a huge blow to all who knew her, “but it was Matt who held the grief for us all”. Feeling sorry is never for those left behind, that hole in the heart can never be filled, it is a scar for life, it depicts a strong bond that existed between lovers, friends and “mated ones”. Susan knew what she had to do for this male owl, something she had not been able to do for Matt, (Rita’s husband). She could not save Rita from cancer but she has a chance to make it up to her, by helping the wounded bed, she honors Rita. When Susan returned with help for the wounded bed he was nowhere to be found. “I stood on the side of the deserted road and looked up to see a redtailed hawk watching me from the fence, the redtail hawk often called the daylight twin of the great horned one; it made me wonder if the owl had shapeshifted and now watched over her mate in the sun light dawn ing around us”. As Susan’s vision of the night matures in the Mated Ones she takes us back to the spiritual world, a whole new realm, and gives us the notion that our dearly departed ones may no longer exist in this physical world. But somewhere among the unseen world they fly above watching over those left behind. The redtail hawk is the spirit of the dead owl, Rita is no more but somewhere in the heavens, her spirit soars watching over all who loves her.

As the events of the morning climaxed, Susan felt the pain Rita has left, she cried for Rita, she cried for the male owl, she cried especially for Matt and she cried for herself and all those who are left behind by their mated ones. Susan touches, not the minds, not the physical being but the very core of our soul and the bottom of our hearts with her vi-
sions of the night, the sad imagery, each very well dissected with meaningful words. “What can you say to someone whose young wife has just died?” “What can possibly be said that can help?” When death strikes, the worst victims are those left behind.
What Does the Story, *The Lift*, Say about Human Nature?  

Hao Huang

Many people think the short story, *The Lift*, by Katie Fray, is a story about a dog, but I think that *The Lift* is about us—about human beings. When I read *The Lift*, I see ugly human nature. It is always easier for us to hate instead of to forgive and human beings trust the outside of everything and judge by our standards. Peikie is a symbol of what we can’t forgive—a scapegoat. The writing of *The Lift* may not be the best I have ever read, nevertheless, the story makes me question whether humans were born good or evil. *The Lift* uses humor to explore a serious topic—humans naturally lack the willingness to accept and forgive.

The writer uses the point of view of a little boy to tell the story and thereby to make the story believable. It is interesting to find out the differences later between what the little boy and the adults around him think about Peikie and how he thinks about the adults. We also soon find out (in the second paragraph), that the way the innocent boy judges what is bad and good is by looking at the surface of things. “Peikie, for his own part, was a wiry old mutt, ugly as hell. He has a squashed up face, a stout terrier nose…” The little boy makes his judgment that the dog is evil—“inherently evil by every definition of dog terms possible…terrier manifested in Peikie as a single-minded drive to bite, maim, and destroy all other living beings.” There are only twelve lines in the second paragraph, but it already gives us clear ideas of what’s Peikie stereotype is and it introduces us to a basic fact that the stereotype is the very first thing humans will consider when they see something new. By looking at Peikie’s “stout terrier nose, dark beady eyes”, the boy comes out with a conclusion that Peikie is evil. In the real world, who would like to kiss a dirty, old homeless person? Who wants to have a messed up, smelly dog? Very few people will do that because we are “beautiful” people. We only like clear, nice looking things or lives around, everything besides that is evil.

The story goes on and tells us things that Peikie does to make people around the neighbors angry—things like attacking another dog, a Newfoundland that everyone likes and eating his little cute bone-shaped dog tag made by the kids. He urinated on dad’s letter and chased after the mailman and newspaper boy. The writer used two pages to list Peikie’s crimes. I have to admit that when I was reading those two pages, a lot of ugly thoughts come to my mind. “What a terrible dog. Too bad people here don’t eat dog meat.” The writer makes us emotionally involved in the rage against Peikie, just like the characters in this story. We start to feel the same as the characters in the story feel now—”Let’s smoke this evil dog.”
When I read the next three pages, I realized that in comparing Peikie to the people whom came up with bloody plans to murder the dog, he is a saint. People came up with a lot of interesting, bloody-as-hell plans to get rid of a defenseless animal. The dinner party becomes a gathering of conspirators. Their plans are ironic and clever. Mrs.Delancy, who owns two other dogs, who supposedly loves dogs herself, comes up with “operate on it—perform a dog lobotomy while Mrs. DuPree was sleeping.” Dr. Mckellin, a doctor who saves people’s lives, says, “I believe there would be no way to prove you were in any way involved.” His wife with “quiet kindhearted voice” suggested forcing Peikie to sit through hours of old Lassie reruns until he went insane. The hate toward Peikie rises as the party goes on. The writer chose the delightful words to describe those double-faces characters she is writing about. She speaks of “Childlike enthusiasm” to show how excited people get when they are talking about killing or destroying life. She calls this enthusiasm “childlike” because it is something that deep inside of human. It is like an instinct. It shows us that there is not different between kids and adult. Judging by stereotype, what the boy did at the beginning of the story, and now adults become childlike when they have the justification to murder an “evil” dog. It is more interesting when the characters like Jakowski, people who don’t know Peikie, who “didn’t even think knew Peikie, all had their own horror stories to tell”, get involved into this revenge game. People who in daily life are middle school teachers, doctors, educated people, put so much enthusiasm into an animal murder. Even the boy, who is witnessing all that, thinks the whole situation is “ironic.” My mouth was opened all the time during the reading of these pages. It is hard for me to believe, but I remember no more than 10 minutes ago that I had the same ugly thoughts as these characters in the story.

People may argue that this part of the article is phony; people wouldn’t be that cold blooded. But why could German people be easily used by Hitler and help him attempt extermination of Jews, who always were seen as the “Bad” businessman? Why did people burn “Witches” in Europe during the middle ages? People don’t easily forgive, and we judge by our standards. And so, they plot the murder of a dog (in the story) as if an entire people (in the holocaust or in more recent “ethnic cleansing” activities around the world). After using three pages to tell crazy ideas of “What is the best way to kill a dog”, the writer uses the boy’s thought as the conclusion—“Peikie, as far as being veil was concerned, had admittedly never directly injured a human.” The writer claims her points here. It makes people to question whether Peikie really deserve what people think he deserves?

The writer writes very little about Grandma DuPree, and I don’t think it is because she forget about it but it is instead, her propose.
“I often wondered how Grandma DuPree could be so naïve of Peikie’s continual villainy...I realized that Peikie was her only real companion.”

When people spend the entire time gathering together and talk about how to get rid of Peikie, nobody mentions poor Grandma DuPree. People didn’t think of what an effect will have on Grandma if they killed the dog. Nobody in the entire neighborhood cares about that old lady, who has to watch *Days of Our Lives* to spend her time. Peikie is her “only companion.” People love to talk about how to kill an animal then to make old lady feel happier. I think most readers, myself included, also have not thought about that up to this point.

The ending is disturbing and sad. Peikie was cut into half by the lifting elevator. “No one really feels comfortable.” It is not because Peikie is dead, but it is because the bloody mess he left. The writer points out that Grandma is alone now but “finally for us, it was a pleasant experience.” What Grandma say about Peikie’s death is very interesting, she say, “Peikie’s death was somewhat fitting for him, don’t you think?” What is she mean by that? I think there are two possibilities. One, is that she thinks that when Peikie was alive, he caused a lot of troubles, and now even his death caused troubles for hotel and the polices. The other possibility is that Grandma knows people hate Peikie and she expects that someday somehow Peikie is going to be killed bloodily by the people who hate him. Either way, it shows Grandma knows how people think about Peikie and she thinks that her beloved dog can finally be released from the hatred of people.

It is clear for me after I read *The Lift*, that what they did to Peikie was wrong. But I am not sure if I could really forgive Peikie and try to understand him when I am in the situation of the people who hate the dog in this story. The story tells us that the lack of willingness to forgive and to understand is deep inside every human and it influences us very easily. Misunderstandings and the desire of revenge cover our eyes and close our heart. We can’t see and we can’t feel. That is what *The Lift* has told us. It is a warning and a call. I hope people who read *The Lift* think about Peikie and give this ugly, evil, troublesome dog a chance—try to love him and not to judge his outside.
When I Think of You
Leah Quinn

Once you housed a vibrant pulse; it burned bright, its flames licked and swallowed the shapes of life. Now only ash is left; a powdery skeleton, dry and grey, laced with delicate memory of what once was. It is the memory of her mother that the author of “Ash” reflects upon in her piece. Joan McMillan provides powerful insight into the character of her mother in a number of ways. The content, symbolism, language and form are well developed and combined in such a way that they compliment and enhance each other. McMillan captures the vivid reality of painful memories and explores the way they haunt and revisit us through mental images.

The writer’s voice speaks calmly, absent of impulsive emotion. Though she reflects on a painful experience, we can sense that the author has reached a place of relative peace and acceptance of what has passed. She seems removed as if time has lent her perspective and the ability to see the deeply personal experience in a new light. The wound however is still there, we can sense it buried beneath the surface, but the raw edges have been smoothed and it no longer gapes and stings with freshness. Perhaps enough time has passed that the writer is left with only a thoughtful sadness and a weary heart. The tears have been shed, the anger unleashed and the pain numbed. The author seems to look back on her mother’s life like a series of photographs and one picture in particular has been burned into her memory. This mental image is so powerful that the writer has chosen to transform it into poetry for her mother.

Instead of remembering her mother’s drunken oblivion and the “nights fractured to an obsidian edge”(8), McMillan finds herself focused on the scene of her mother cleaning with a cigarette nearby “balanced on the edge of the bathroom sink”. It’s funny the way we remember particular things about people. Sometimes it is the way they smell, maybe a small bracelet they always wore, the cadence of their voice, or perhaps the way they pushed their hair away from their eyes, or the type of cigarettes they smoked. We often dismiss these seemingly insignificant details as being random and without real importance. However, I believe that if we look closer we often find that our subconscious instincts sought out that detail, trait or habit and marked it because it contained significant information about their character. I believe it is like this, that McMillan reflects on her mother, her cigarette and the way she cleaned. As these simple details of her mother’s life resurface in her mind, McMillan stumbles upon their deeper meaning and finds a striking metaphor in the nature of her mother and her Salem cigarette turning to ash right beside her.

The cigarette that accompanied her mother over the years, becomes more than just a simple habit, it becomes a symbol for the way her mother
lived and the way she deteriorated before her daughter’s eyes, “fragile, turning to ash, with all its bright stains visible”. The fragile ash represents the weakening of the spirit and the slow destruction that eats away at the insides of a person who is sick. The lipstick stains represent the outward indications of decay. They are the ugly and sour things that show in the skin, in the voice, the smell and our actions. The lipstick alone not the stain it leaves, is but a futile attempt to cover or disguise what one does not wish to be seen, it blurs the truth or masks an imperfection. The scrubbing of the sink to a “hospital shine” works against the enveloping saturation of smoke that can’t be washed away. Perhaps her mother cleans the sink till it’s immaculate because it is one thing she can still do, one thing she can still fix and thus, takes comfort in this small feat. It is as if she uses her scrubbing to compensate for all that is broken in her life and beyond simple repair.

The language in Ash is precise and clean. Each image is sharp and vivid. It is interesting to me that when I read the poem, I feel as though I am looking through a magnifying glass. The images are large and uncluttered by unnecessary background information. We are allowed to focus on the minute details such as the “line of menthol blue, thread-thin” or the “fissured print of her lips on the filter”. The magnification of the objects and the simple, lucid way in which they are described compliment the calm sadness of the author’s reflections and enhance the tone and mood of the piece. The physical format of the piece is also neat and controlled, showing composure and very deliberate word placement. The spacing, which is justified, left to right makes for a clean visual impression. The short block of writing with each line approximately the same length has flattering proportions that look complete to the eye and feel complete after having been read.

McMillan successfully combines all the right elements to make her poem a powerful and eloquent experience for the reader. It is hard to know exactly what the writer’s feelings for her mother are, but we have no doubt that a lot of pain has been felt. The connection is mother to daughter and this bond I know, is never simple. We get a glimpse into the shades of grey that compose the line between hate and unconditional love.

The relationships we exchange with the ones we love in our lives, though rewarding often contain the deepest kind of pain. It is the kind of pain that seeps into every pore and wrings your gut with sadness and anger. These wounds never completely disappear, but instead become a part of who we are. If we are lucky, we have the resiliency and strength of spirit to grow and forgive. I believe that the author of Ash has in a sense forgiven her mother. She has at least learned to see her mother and accept who she was and what passed. McMillan seems to have let go of her own struggle to change, improve, or punish the situation or her mother and found a reflective peace in simply what was. McMillan looks at the naked truth of
her mother turning to ash before her eyes. She shares her sadness with composure and the quiet grace and of a binding love.
Dad: I Love You, I Miss You, and There’s Something I Want You to Know

Janet Thelen

“A picture is worth a thousand words.”
– Chinese Proverb

“He’ll die before her eighteenth birthday/ and for the most of her
life he will be a memory” (23-24). Carol A. Housner shares with us a re-
membrance of her father in the poem “Picture of My Father”. The photo-
graph of herself with her father captures one moment in time—a simpler
time and place—and seems to have deeply effected her mind and heart.
The poem asks us to think about our parents and our memory of them. It
has a way of reminding us that our parents were doing the best they could
with what they had. Perhaps our viewpoint or perspective of our parents
and parenting will change after seeing through her eyes. Housner provides
a mirror for us reflect upon parents, parenting techniques, and family memo-
ries.

When I interviewed Housner she commented, “I was only four
years old when I wrote my first poem. The person I took it to first was him.
He was the one I would bring things to. He really recognized the creative
side of me.” She is a working mother of three and an accomplished poet.
Last year’s Porter Gulch Review, Spring 2000 contains two of her poems:
“Child Summer” and “Making Fudge”. When asked why she wrote “Picture
of My Father” Housner said, “It was a writing exercise for a poetry class at
Cabrillo College. I was taking Joe Stroud’s Creative Writing: Poetry at the
time. I made some copies of photographs and one of them was this picture
of my father. It is my favorite picture of him.” She has written a series of
poems about her father and continues to write poetry often inspired by
thoughts of her father. Housner shows the reader how her father has influ-
enced her throughout her life “she will bring pieces of it back to him on
paper/ and for most of her life he will be a memory/but she will keep
bringing him words” (22, 24-25).

The author offers the reader a glimpse into her childhood through
her choice of words. The reader can visualize a worn and tattered picture,
“darkness meshes the edges of the picture” that is full of loving and tender
memories of a young girl with her father (15). They are sitting on a couch
and she is unaware of being photographed, “holding her attention away
from the camera” (6). In the poem, the father is very attentive. He is focus-
ing all his attention on the young child, “arms curved around the sturdy,
diaper clad body of the little girl” (2). They are looking at the television
together “beyond the photo’s edge” (4). “But it doesn’t really matter what
he is saying” because the magic is in their conversation (11). The words they are speaking are left up to the reader’s imagination. It is the “cadence of his voice telling her/he loves her” that is the importance of the father/daughter relationship (12-13).

The father’s wisdom and experience contrast nicely with a young child’s innocence and naivété. Their physical differences of youth and maturity are seen when “they are both in profile” (3). A profile can also be defined as “a biographical essay presenting the subject’s most noteworthy characteristics and achievements” according to the American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language (1146). Housner presents her knowledgeable father “holding her attention away from the camera/ away from the flash” as accomplishing quite a feat as Housner’s mother captures a casual pose of the two of them (6-7).

Housner describes the father’s reassuring manner in the line “feeling the warm weight of his hands/safe around her waist” (13-14). A father is using his parental instincts of wanting to protect and nurture. The daughter is not pulling away but feels comfortable and mesmerized by her father’s presence “and her face is intent,/bird mouth slightly open and she is listening” (9-10). Young children, especially one still in diapers, are usually very active. They don’t sit still very long or stay in one place for any length of time. Their attention span is very short and can be easily distracted. I remember my children as acting silly and showing off at this age, if their dad was around. When I look at pictures of my children, while they were small, it evokes many feelings. Sometimes I can hear their young voices. Other times a certain twinkle in the eye, a characteristic smile or a particular way they hold their hand can trigger a pleasant memory as if it were just yesterday.

The images chosen by the author “the picture, threads/ into his black hair and her pigtails, perched at the top/ of her head like small starlings, poised for flight” are visually pleasing (15-17). The reader can see the picture she has created through her words. Housner looks at the photograph, which she gave me a copy of during my interview, as “her favorite” and conveys to the reader that the actual picture is showing its age from the years, c.1958. The images that stand out clearly are the contrasts between the light and dark “the disappearing gleam/ of her white maryjanes” (19-20). Rob Goldschmidt taught us in class that the contrast of light and dark shadow is called “chiaroscuro”. A photograph can engage us in a private conversation; a family picture can provide an opportunity to reconstruct the past or connect to it like a bridge. It is a psychological connection between the past and the present. The images are a key providing clues that can begin to unlock some of the mysteries of our childhood. Housner’s poem provides a visual link, a window into her childhood. She has the actual photograph that she wrote her poem about. The black and
white picture sits on her desk at work. In my recent interview Housner mentions, “It has been years and years since my father passed away but he made such an enormous impression on me that has shaped my life.”

There are milestone markers during one’s lifetime. Sometimes it can be birthdays like the 21st, 30th, or even 40th. We have a human tendency to attach importance to the events, marriage/separation or births/deaths, those special years of our life. My belief is that the human spirit has a resilience to the many tests and complications that happen along the way. Housner tells us that she lost her father during early adulthood “the day before her eighteenth birthday” (23). This tragic loss of her father will always be linked to her 18th birthday—yet she remembers her father as a loving parent—one who continues to be an important part of her life.

Housner points out the importance of the father figure, “but she will keep bringing him words/ and he will continue to hold her in place” (25-26). Children seek approval from their parents starting at an early age. The importance of family and sharing time together are some of the most memorable as we go through life. This seems especially relevant when we have our own families to look after. Child Psychologists: Mussen, Conger, and Kagan agree,

Some motives and personal characteristics appear to be acquired on the basis of reinforcement or simple imitation. However, complex integrated patterns of behavior and personal characteristics seem to be incorporated by means of identification with a model, usually a parent. Sex-typing (adoption of behavior, values, and interests appropriate to one’s own sex) and conscience development are two major products of the process of identification, which is motivated by the child’s desire to possess goals that his parents control—e.g., power, mastery of the environment, and love. Nurturant parents are more likely to be taken as models than rejecting ones. (375)

Housner tells me during our interview that she looks at the picture of her father often. Her memory of him brings comforting thoughts. Child Psychologists explain in “Child Development and Personality”, “A favorable self-concept (self-esteem) is essential to personal happiness and effective functioning, both in the child and the adult” (489).

Time has passed, “the little girl” in Housner’s poem is now grown but fond memories still comfort her (3). Life’s lessons that he taught her are still very important to her as an adult “he is pointing out the world to her” (21). She remembers these tender and precious moments by keeping his memory alive. Through her writing of “Picture of My Father” Housner
is constructing an image of her father for herself and the reader. His presence is as important to her now as while he was still alive, “she will bring pieces of it back to him on paper” (22).

The demands placed upon a parent by their family require an ability to think clearly while balancing schedules and commitments. The teenage years are perhaps the most challenging for a parent because you need to be aware of their feelings and emotions. My own children, presumed normal teenagers, often resented advice and help from their parents. This is the time in a young person’s life that they are seeking independence and wanting to make their own decisions. An interesting study conducted by Mussen, Conger, and Kagan concluded, “An essential element in the task of becoming a mature adult is the development of a sense of one’s own identity. The adolescent or adult with a strong sense of ego identity sees himself as distinctive and separate from others, but also as self-consistent, with a workable integration of his own needs, motives, and patterns of responding” (747).

A recurring theme in “Picture of My Father” is “holding her in place” (14). I think this made her feel closeness and gratitude toward her father throughout her life. Now she is more keenly aware of his importance and influence on her after his death. I felt sadness for the author while reading “and for most of her life he will be a memory” (24). I would be sad if my parents hadn’t had the opportunity to watch grandchildren grow up. There are times in your life that you want to share your pride with your parents. Having children is one of those times and especially watching them grow up. The grandparent’s view of grandchildren is much different than as a parent. My children had the fortune of having both grandparents living with them all of their childhood. The relationship and loving bond that was formed at an early age continues even now as young adults.

In my interview with Housner I asked her, “What are the one or two things you’d want to tell your father about if he was alive?” She hesitated slightly and answered, “I’d want to show him my children because I know how proud he’d be. I’d also want to show him my poetry.”

The poem shows us that, for Housner, time doesn’t affect a father/daughter relationship. Looking back through time at an old family photograph brings an essence of a memory. The past is an important part of the present, what you’ve become, and who you are. “A picture” may be “worth a thousand words” but it is also worth a lifetime of experiences, emotions, and memories. She has kept his memory alive by writing about him in her poem “Picture of My Father”. My feeling is that Housner’s father would be very proud of what his “diaper clad body/ of the little girl” has accomplished in her lifetime (2-3).
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Eddie c.1958 —Joy Rodriguez
She puts it all down here on the page, here before us, before herself, she puts it down and out of herself. She puts these words on the page to review. Rewind and fast-forward to the important times, to the special times, to their secret times. She gives up these times to an audience, and to the to the solidity of form that we often find in words. This form we hold in contrast to the fleeting circumstance of memory. We hold it literally now in our hands; in print, words inked on the page, permanent and present. Round and rolling like the sun setting or lights passing through teary eyes. Roxan gives up these words, like a penny proffered to a wishing well; bright and shiny in the dark beneath the cold; holding the wishes we can’t keep. This poem is her light in the night, and she holds it up for us. She holds up this light so that we can follow her into the darkness of remembrance. We follow her into the place where fingers tremble at the quaking of hearts unable to forget. This act, this physical act of writing, of typing, of fingers set in motion to the metronome of the heart’s beat; this act demands courage. This act demands the courage of one willing to name their fear, and to give it voice.

Recollection can often be spiteful; surprising us with the voracity with which it can tear at our hearts. Pain and distress are often accompanied by such memories; we suppress and repress them to protect ourselves. We inhibit them and hide from them as though fearful of what they can and do represent. In this poem we wade through her memories as thick as love or pain.

“If I were to write it all/from beginning to end/ I’d follow night-lights through the mess that/we were and the mess I am now” We too, follow these night-lights, through the darkness crowded about our own hearts. Moments clenched in the fist of your memory: the time you wish you would have, the time you wish you could have . . . The luminescence of this poem throws light to corners of our dark places. Daring and unabashedly undaunted by the darkness, Roxan takes us by the hand and shows us the painful places; the places that glimmer here, even in the dark. She brings us with her so that we can see them more clearly, so that we can see her here too. The narrative voice and lack of punctuation quicken the pace of the reading and set a rhythm to voice with which we follow along. Our voice becomes her own and we experience these memories as if they are in fact ours. We travel with her voice in our mouth across the page, and across the years of her love. We come with her to those places she’ll never give up. She takes us there and points to images; tattooed memories inked
in the dark. She rubs her thumb over them recalling: “I’d stay there for
days/ mulling over every single piece of that explosive feeling of knowing
you were a/Big one for me knowing I was gonna lose myself lose every-
thing I felt strong about and love my weakness.” The voice is smooth, quick
and clear. The poem was written to be read. It won’t wait for us to catch
up, but let’s stop to breathe here. A period, a breath, a moment to remem-
ber.

Roxan brings us there “to that night on/the rock”, and leaves us
“for days”, to steep in the beauty of what once was. She doesn’t step back
rather she pulls it to her in loving (rem)embra(n)ce. She won’t let go; she
won’t let us go.

She won’t let us go forward to the years of fear [she] spent hiding/
from you”. She won’t let us go forward to the years she spent being afraid
to let go of herself, of that special secret self the one who refuses to fall
into love.

I’d jump to that night on the rock and you holding me over the edge
and then I’d jump off.
I’d hear your gasp like the wind, subtle and surprised. I’d jump
because that’s what I did. And maybe falling for gravity would be
easier than falling for you. I’d look over my shoulder and see you
there, clearly now, standing alone. I’d see you standing the way
that I do. Now strong, now proud, save the downcast eyes. Your
eyes, mine, searching for love in the empty night.
I wouldn’t really have to jump I suppose. I could just let go. I
could just let go of that mess that
we were and the mess that I am now
I could let go of all of that. I could let go of you,
I could let go, but I won’t.

I spent a lot of time trying to pull details from her about this expe-
rience, about this poem. Her answers were always concise and clear. She
has the strength to admit her fears, and to admit us unto them. I think that
the memories inspiring this poem shocked her. I think that their power
and clarity pulled at her and I think that they scared her. This fear that
unexpected recollection can create, I think is the cause for the voice that
she adopts to tell her story. With the words, “If I were to write it all/ from
beginning to end” [emphasis mine] she starts the poem, evasively, she won’t
claim that that is in fact just what she is doing. She is endeavoring to fulfill
an impossible task. She is cataloging her memories of their relationship
“from beginning to end”. Roxan won’t let us go forward to the years she
spent being “afraid of getting hurt”, the years she says she spent “being
focused on the end” of this love.

One of the things that I find most remarkable about Roxan is her
honesty and her strength. The two come from a place deep within her. I see these as her core values; one provides for the other; within her, the two are inseparable. These qualities are clearly translated into her poetry and prose. In this poem however, these qualities are masked with irony. She says that she’d “skip over every part of . . . my fear of how big love can be and how/ much it can/ shrink a woman’s life. I’d skip over all that”, yet she doesn’t. Instead she records the recollection and saves it here in this poem, in this publication.

“I’d live for years/ . . . under the comforter I bought you that you sleep under now with/that sweet brown girl. I’d skip that part. No I wouldn’t. I’d sleep with that part under/ my pillow.” She wrestles with herself over the parts of the story she will admit to.

In another piece entitled “Pain”, Roxan asks, “If I allow my whole story to take root in my heart . . . will I have the courage to tell it?” The answer is difficult. But time and again she does not shy from the pain of remembrance instead bravely she confronts it. She confronts it with the truth. It is this truth that defines her. The distillation of emotion into poetry, leads her to this place: this honesty, this strength.

Yet ironically, it is this place of truth and power, that she feels the most fragile. It is this place that she admits to herself and us, her fear of loss: her fear of losing herself, and of losing love. In this poem it seems to her that the two are mutually exclusive, and cannot exist together. That love is loss and loss is weakness. This is the pain that her memory brings.

“I’d stay there for days/mulling over every single piece of that explosive feeling of knowing you were a/Big one for me knowing I was gonna lose myself lose everything I felt strong about and love my weakness.” The love she speaks of here is possessive; it is her love and her weakness. In this poem she incorporates these qualities into herself, and they confront directly the strength and self-reliance she has always known. This confrontation can be seen clearly in the last lines of the poem.

“From beginning to end”, we have followed her here, to “the mess” that she is now. This is the place of pain that memory has brought her to, as well. This is the place where she confronts herself with unanswerable questions, and with impossibilities. This is the end. Here she accepts this pain as a part of herself, and identifies it as the part,

that keeps me from the part of me that could
love you
the way I could
love you
if I weren’t
the way
I
am.
Strong and proud and honest and alone, Roxan brings us here to the end.