dwell

vol 3

The University of Maine

Student Journal of Philosophy

est. 2018

Edited by:

Kiera Campbell

Rehannah Baksh

Maggie Kastelein

Life is about not knowing, having to change, taking the moment and making the best of it, without knowing what's going to happen next.
-Gilda Radner

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the third volume of dwell. Following the success of the inaugural edition in 2018, and the second edition in 2019, we are so excited to bring the UMaine Philosophy departments student journal. Thanks to the wonderful students who submitted their work, and with the help of those in the department, we were able to bring about our third edition of this wonderful journal.

We would like to give a special thanks to Susan Bredlau for helping us coordinate the re-institution of dwell, and Jen Bowen for her unending support and her allowing us to contact the student body at large. We would also like to thank the students who submitted such wonderful work, and their commitment to this year's theme, 'The Nature of Uncertainty'. Our goal this year was to acknowledge the tumultuous experience of existing as students at a clear turning point of our society, and the submissions we received were very exciting for us to work with. We hope you enjoy the work of our peers.

Keep inquiring,

Your Editors.

Table of Contents

Act On It

Macky Feege

Constant whir of thoughts in my mind,
Want to move forward but I'm held back each time.
A continual pull that is dragging me from behind.

I have always wanted more, and to be bold.
A spark in me burns brighter each time,
So why can't I just act on it and do it without withhold.

It must be from some internal inferno inside of me.
A fire that builds and festers with time,
Because I can always feel it burning, waiting to be set free.

I have to get over the fears of what I cannot foresee.
Why must I hold back each time,
As if this isn't something I have always wanted for me.

Act on it already and just put those thoughts to rest.
Take the leap, the jump, the step,
Forget having to go over some sort of prep.
Act on it and let the relief unburden my chest.

"Whole"
I thought I wanted to stay that little girl forever.
To not grow up.
To not drift from my parents' arms.
To not leave what I had always been before.

I thought I wanted to leave that all behind.
To find a new self.
To shed an old skin to grow anew.
To become something of myself.

I thought I wanted to grow into a woman.
To be what I had always thought of.
To be what I had always dreamed of.
To be what I had yearned, reached, and wanted.

To be what was expected.

I know I want more than to be that.
To be more than a part of me.
To be more than a girl.
I want to be whole.

“Worried Ones”
Sitting in the winding-branched tree,
Hoping for someone to finally see.
No one calls, comes, or worries.
Maybe they are all in their head of hurries.

Wipe away tears, I hop from the branches.
Wonder why I have given people so many chances.
Wait around for people to notice.
After all, this might not be their main focus.

I shouldn’t be too harsh.
I shouldn’t approach this with such starch.
With wiped tears and now a clear mind,
I can now leave all of those thoughts behind.

Like the winding branches of trees,
People are dealing with complexities.
With things others cannot see,
Wait for someone to help set them free.

“Finality of Fluidity”
For most of my childhood I longed for boyhood,
Yet, the endearment and devotion of my assignment held me from what I could.
Can’t leave it all behind.
Cannot “make up” or simply change my mind.
I guess I will have to do with my body of a girl,
And the dirtied mind of a boy.

“Subjection [and] the Other”

Finlee E. LeBouef

Calling the figure of the dog:
beckon & heel
sit & stay
choke & chain.
The man at the leash-end speaks words: untranslatable
to the mutt mind, to the unlearned. But,
deft hand knows how to define:
good and want and bad and alone.
Favoring the tall shadow and loud voice, he says
I am not you and
you are not me and
you are the beast between us:
untranslatable.

Calling the figure of the word:
a word for every
day, every
me.
Today thinking *marmalade*, yesterday
embossed, and hoping for a tomorrow of
luminous, *entreated*, or *softened*.

Wake in the morning and taste the sting of bile and sweat and hate; know that all today could be is a cold rough *stone* and *steel* and *silence*. Grandmother says that all words come from god, probably not thinking about words like *spit* and *vile* and *sex* and *bitch* and *lonely*, unable to decide who gave them. Grandmother calls wise children *old* and foolish adults *young* and these are god words: simple, small, defined - like the little clay man in the bell jar garden with one rib too many.

Human must have been *animal* before the word:
sharp toothed and mean clawed in the garden,
a rose thorn without something to bleed,
a claw without something to cut.
Instinct carves
outward, curves
long and mean.
Cry in the night and Mother soothes with stories of changeling children.
Too bad, too bad they said the night baby was taken away, cradled in false spindly arms.
And they plucked the wings from her back,

and the hair from her head,
and the eyes from her skull,
to lay that baby back in that bed of mine.
Too bad, too bad they said *that we found something better. Could have kept you as our own, but we've found a baby with soft silk cheeks and corn golden curls and a smile that always stays, and she was just too sweet to waste.*

Calling the figure of the Other:
standing before
above
beyond
something like god, so
measure chances of stone throwing.
Other is singing:
I am you and
You are me and
I am you and -
that old lullaby trying to say
You are one with the World,
You are one with the World,
but I see the Other watching me,
and I feel the collar on my neck,
and I feel the scars on my back,
and I don't feel like I've become yet.
Quiet voice is calling:
Is the warm house with the soft room waiting?
Other doesn't answer, favoring
the tall shadow and stern hand.

Calling the figure of self:
turn inward, past
face & smile
skin & scar
bone & blood
and looking for the holy place
where the soul should be, seeing
only mirror and microphone.

"Bound to seek recognition of its own existence in categories, terms, and names that are not of its own making, the subject seeks the sign of its own existence outside itself, in a discourse that is at once dominant and indifferent. … Precisely at the moment in which choice is impossible,

the subject pursues subordination as the promise of existence. This pursuit is not choice, but neither is it necessity. Subjection exploits the desire for existence, where existence is always conferred from elsewhere; it marks a primary vulnerability to the Other in order to be,”

Butler, Judith. "The Psychic Life of Power." Theories in Subjection, 1997, p. 21.

(Creative) Vision Loss

Laurel Dorr

Although a commonly analyzed motif in Jorge Luis Borges' work is blindness and its connection to the author's own degenerating vision, his short stories also reveal an obsession with achieving his artistic vision—a goal that is never quite reached, even for an innovative and expansive writer like Borges, just as he cannot grasp or hold onto his own physical vision. This inability to reach artistic fulfillment is an essential theme in an intentional reading of Borges' work, offering insight into the implied author's creative ethos of resisting, yet succumbing, to the impossibility of achieving his literary vision. In this reading, Borges conveys this theme of creative restriction through masterplots of fragmented dream-creation and obsessively seeking unachievable spiritual fulfillment, both of which serve as metaphors for the creative process.

Borges' depiction of the dreamer-creator, as represented in "The Circular Ruins" and "Dreamtigers" is that of a flawed, limited creator. In both cases, the outcomes of the dreams are not what the narrator anticipated and craved. In "Dreamtiger" the dreamer fails repeatedly to bring forth a real, fully-fleshed tiger. Instead, the dreamt product fails to live up to the reality that the narrator has both seen with his own eyes (such as in cages at the zoo, or pictures in books), and imagined constantly in his mind for years. He points out that, even in retrospect (presumably at a time when Borges has become blind and can no longer physically see a tiger), he remembers those visual depictions of tigers better than "a woman's brow or smile" (294). Yet even this devoted and near-religious obsession does not allow him to perfectly conjure it into reality. Perhaps it is even a barrier somehow. Miraculously, he *does* actualize tigers out of his dreams, over and over again; yet they always have disfigurements or imperfections, ultimately making them un-tigerlike. This magical feat is nothing but a disappointment to this narrator, just as the admirable complexity of the implied author's writing is not enough for him.

In contrast, "Circular Ruins" depicts a more refined process of meticulously crafting a creation out of dreams, and the product *is* perfect. Yet even the most perfect creation cannot escape the reality of being a simulation, leading the narrator to regret that he brought this "son" (100) into the world at all. In the end, this act of creation not only "torment[s]" (100) him, but leads to a devastating realization that the narrator *himself* is a simulation. Rather than reveling in

the achievement of his creative vision, the narrator experiences "relief…humiliation [and] terror" (100) at the epiphany it provoked. If we read the narrator of this story as a vessel or metaphor for the implied author, Borges seems to view artists—including himself—as godlike creators, yet their creative power is inherently restricted. Even when he is technically successful, Borges still cannot be satisfied by the creative process.

In a similar way, the spiritual journey masterplot represents how the inability to satisfy obsession leads to spiritual ruin rather than enlightenment, or even insanity—mirroring writing as a constant search for creative fulfillment. Just as the "Circular Ruins" depicts the creative process as culminating in an agonizing epiphany, "The Aleph" approaches spiritual revelation as both miraculous and problematic. In a moment of trademark metalepsis, a version of Borges as the narrator encounters the Aleph in the Calle Garay building and becomes enraptured, to the point of near-insanity. He is afraid that his mind and emotions will be forever altered and distorted by the experience of seeing into the Aleph (Borges 284). He also notes that the residents of the building (Carlos Argentino and Beatriz) both suffered from insanity, describing Carlos as a "madman [along with] all the Viterbos, in fact…" (281) and blaming Beatriz's occasional "cruelty" (281) towards himself as an indication of madness. All of these statements point to the Aleph representing a spiritual and creative vision that can never be fully grasped, and reaching for that fulfillment leads to insanity or some other spiritual devastation (just as seeking creative satisfaction brought the narrator of "Circular Ruins" to his downfall).

Once the building is demolished, though, Carlos Argentino finally finishes and publishes his seemingly-terrible poem. This *could* mean that his creative ability actually improved after losing access to the enlightening Aleph as a creative inspiration. However, I suspect Borges is implying the opposite: that once Carlos Argentino lost the Aleph, he was freed from pursuing perfection in his poem. As Borges notes, "His happy pen (belabored no longer by the Aleph) has been consecrated to setting the compendia of Dr. Acevedo Díaz to verse" (285). He can now pursue prolificity and career success, but at the cost of achieving his true vision—even if it was undesirable to others.

Ironically, although narrator-Borges also lost access to the Aleph, he is unsuccessful in the same literary competition. This may be because he did not embrace the obsession and revelation of the Aleph at all when he had the opportunity. That would also explain his

resentment towards Carlos Argentino, who seemingly got to experience the best of both worlds. Without a willingness to be obsessed and to seek creative fulfillment, uncertain of ever truly achieving it, a writer cannot be successful; yet the obsession itself makes perfect creation unattainable.

"Blue Tigers" depicts yet another spiritual journey, although the narrator experiences both devastation and some measure of peace. Although the connection to creativity in this story is less obvious, the story begins with an intertextual link to the earlier fragment "Dreamtiger" suggesting a similarity between the obsessive pilgrimage in "Blue Tigers" and the elusive creative vision that the dreamer masterplot represents. Additionally, we immediately see a similar tiger obsession in this narrator as in "Dreamtiger" strengthening that connection between creativity (from the tiger motif) and religious obsession (just as the "Dreamtiger" narrator described himself as a "fervent worshiper" (294) of the creatures). After embarking on a mission to find the eponymous "Blue Tigers" the narrator discovers the stones that inexplicably increase and decrease in number. They are miraculous by any measure, but instead of being mesmerized, he is devastated that his legendary tigers were never real. They even become maddening to him—not unlike Carlos Argentino and the Aleph, or the torment experienced by the narrator of "Circular Ruins." Unlike those examples, however, the professor in "Blue Tigers" is able to let go of his spiritual (read: creative) torment instead of giving into it. In a move that most suggests another metalepsis, a blind beggar appears (likely representing Borges' own blindness—or perhaps God or fate, who inflict this blindness on him) to take the stones from the professor. Blindness becomes Borges' refuge from his creative obsession. He is released from a puzzle that cannot be solved, the miracle that cannot be explained.

In an intentional reading of this theme, where Borges grapples with the hopelessness of fulfilling his literary vision (just as he grapples with his real-life vision loss), this conclusion becomes even more potent. Notably, it closes out one of his last short stories, which itself is an intertextual expansion of a motif for creative obsession from throughout his oeuvre. The sense of both loss and release conveyed in the closing lines of "Blue Tigers" can be viewed as a reflection of Borges' own conflicting feelings on his sudden blindness, as well as its impact on his creative identity. "I did not hear the blind beggar's steps, or see him disappear into the dawn" (503). Borges, the actual author, may have used the wording "I did not… **see**" (503) simply to reinforce

the metaphor of losing his physical vision; but this sensory-dampening ending also conveys the emotional weight of the implied author being both forced to give up *and* absolved of the burden to perfect his creative vision. No wonder he compares this experience to religion and dreams. What else could be as equally feverishly tormenting *and* spiritually compelling as the obsessive mind of a writer like Borges?

Works Cited

Borges, Jorge Luis. *Collected Fictions*. Translated by Andrew Hurley, Penguin, 1999.

Potential

Marguerita Fairfield

Uncertainty Ghazal

Lu Markovitch

Is this the blue hour? Can you distinguish for sure
between raven and crow? Are laymen ever sure?

You paid a visit to Heisenberg's lab last spring.
Even while fever-dreaming you were madly sure

of the old institutions like evil. With such
weeping and gnashing of teeth outside, you thought sure-

ly the man would let you in, but he just built a
vague fire on the front steps. And since prophets are sure

to mark what mortals miss, you waited all night for
a word, a cough, something to distinguish for sure

a prophet from a great redwood, but nothing came
so you just stood and cursed him for wasting a sure,

perfectly good night shift. When the fever broke your
sweat rose off you like incense. You became half-sure

of some transcendent truth bouncing between your bones
like a photon, but where, you'll never know for sure.

HOMEBODY

Marguerita Fairfield

The body must build its own walls / when home is

I. only a place the soul knows
II. place within places / I criminally call my own
III. where I've danced and where I've dragged / my feet behind me
IV. the tide pulling out from under,
V. always a tide / and I am never ready.

Home is / why she laid down every brick in her heart
in the sweat of summer, dug up dirt, so her own path would be walked,

laying claim to bodies the only way it can be done
with the one she is inside, where they have all been at least once,

but *she* always will be – it's movements, autonomous, a hearth.
She says this with dreams tucked in the pocket of her shirt,

the only permanence, ready to be called to work,
where your hands have reached and your calloused bare feet,

that they might carry with them from whence they came
so that when I grieve it is not for mortality,

but embodiment / a walking ode / a responsibility.
My bricks are piled high in my esophagus

not a heart attack, the doctor said, just an excavation
– your core is a hollow axis too frightened to spin,

of finding itself flat, seeing stars on its back
– the diagnosis is unclear, symptoms are rather cyclical as they appear.

Many of my bricks have crumbled and fallen ill;
my spine is a game of Jenga and I am the will.

Tank Top

Finlee E. LeBouef

It's my last year of middle school, and my sister and I are going to different schools for the first time in our lives. She has long hair, box dyed black, and I have the same short bob I've had for the last 4 years. My mom keeps fussing about it – our hair, our clothes, too long, too short, too dark, too patterned. I'm supposed to dress nicer, cleaner, and more feminine. My sister is supposed to dress more conservatively, brighter colors, and smile more. She ends up with a shawl to wear around her waist, even though she's already wearing a jacket. My mom throws a red top and skinny jeans at me, and tells me I look cute.

All through high school, my mom tries to get me to wear more dresses. I like dresses, and tights, and skirts, but I keep getting taller, and I don't like worrying about where the hem line is sitting all day. Mini skirts are in fashion: pleated, patterned, striped, and leather. My sister, a budding fashionista, already has a trio of them, scavenged from malls and goth fashion shops. Every day she wears one, my mom catches her before she's out the door. *You sure you don't want tights with that? It's pretty cold out today, why not some pants?* In the same moment, she turns to me, eyes my baggy pants and dark sweater, and sighs that I used to dress so cute when I was younger.

The Railroad Pass Hotel was the first casino ever built in Nevada. It's historic, comfortable, and 15 minutes off the Vegas Strip. My sister and I are staying there for 3 days. My birthday was the weekend before, so everyone in our family thinks that the trip must be for me. A family friend gifted me ear plugs, vitamin C tablets, and breath mints. My mom paid for our hotel, and kept asking until the night we left what kind of drinks we're going to get, and if we're planning on bringing drugs. Really, me and my sister just like road trips. She's always been obsessed with 60s Vegas culture, and I love a good western, so it seemed the place to go. We've been going to museums all day: burlesque history, punk rock heritage, vintage vegas neon signs. My sister keeps fussing with her dress, not letting me take the picture for our Grandmother until it's just right. *It's too short, it's too short. She's just gonna say I look slutty.*

My sister and I are getting ready for a punk show. It's our first ever concert together, and my

first time seeing a punk band live. It's an 80s band on its last reunion tour with a local rockabilly singer opening. My sister bought the tickets hoping it would be a flashbang start of a new music journey for me. We never say a word about the other's appearance. Her hair is orange now, the sides of my head are shaved. She has half of a patchwork tattoo sleeve, I have a half dozen piercings. The only thing she says is to change my shoes to something more comfortable, she wants to dance. My mom snaps a picture on the way out the door, and reminds my sister to bring her jacket.

The venue is an old theater that's been converted to a music venue. It's packed wall to wall with the kinds of people my grandmother would scoff at. Gutter punks in unwashed clothes, old hippies and club goths with bright hair and eyeshadow, bikers in cowboy boots and leather vests. No one looks at us twice, and once we're in the crowd, we're just another part of it. The woman on the stage must be in her late 70s, but she's still wearing a lacy black dress, big stomping boots, and dragging around the mic as she belts across the room. When we step out of here, a man smoking outside will shout at us, asking my name over and over again. My sister will take off her makeup in the car, cover her shoulders with a cheap leather jacket. I'll brush out my hair, and when my mom asks me "do i really enjoy that loud music and those strange people?" I'll just say I guess. But for now, we're freaks among freaks, and there's nothing to do but dance.

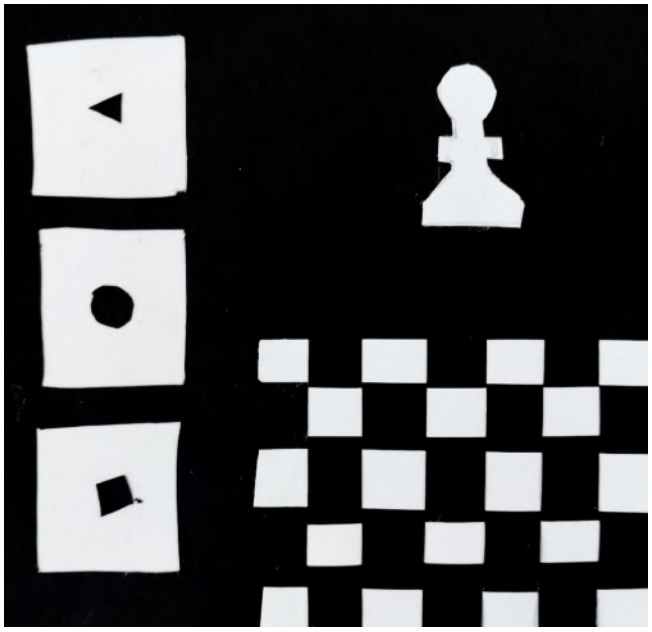
a ghost story

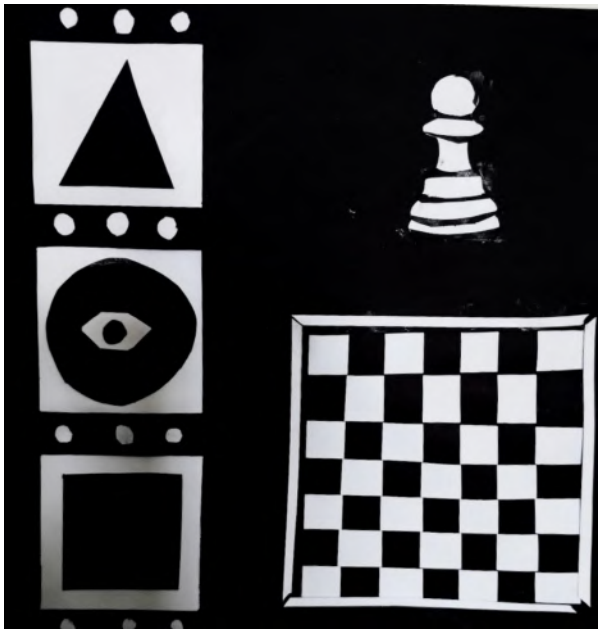
Laurel Dorr

the emerald wall sighs as something
melancholy passes through it.
the cat opens her eyes, slits of plausible
deniability. she doesn't stir, but tracks the ghost's
dance across the carpet. when the room is empty
again, she returns to her dream. she sees better
in the dark; no one will still be there by the
morning. there is no light
when the fridge creaks open. wind shudders
the curtains. something melancholy
once loved it here.

The Game

Finlee E. LeBouef





Three Stars

Kiera Campbell

Brian slept a lot before he died. I heard secondhand that every time he fell asleep he made plans for when he'd wake up, totally convinced he'd be good as new with a little shut-eye. For what might have been the first time in his life, he had a little too much faith in himself. While he was trying his hand at manifestation I started grinding my teeth in my sleep, I developed a habit of sticking a pen into the muscle at the base of my jaw and wiggling it around until something released, or someone caught me. I was going to town when I walked through sliding doors and made eye contact with security. Every time I stepped through those doors I could feel them trying to size me up, flipping through their repertoire for the right tone, expression, smile; was someone dying, or being born, or something in between? It was like they were worried I'd leave a bad Yelp review, and they only had about four seconds to figure it out before I was in front of their desk. I'd imagine they liked the older visitors better, the ones who gave them a little more time.

"Patient?" they asked.

"Visitor. Campbell, Brian. Room 206." I replied, lowering my pen.

"Take a sticker," he pointed to the pile of pale green 'Tuesday' stickers that sat at the top of his desk. He was going for informative today, straight and to the point, little-to-no eye contact. The safe option: three stars. "Stick it on your shirt, somewhere visible and you can head up."

"Thank you." I started to feel bad for not giving him enough time to figure me out. I stuck the 'Tuesday' sticker to the left side of my chest and pulled my hoodie off over my head before it had the chance to make me sweat. With the elevator to my right, I caught a glimpse of Brian at his last doctor's appointment, making his way up the stairs despite what his ex-wife had

started calling his ‘blockage’ and turned to the left to follow a hallway that, from the outside, I would have said was impossible. I kept my right hand on the wall as the hallway curved to the left in a way that made it look like it went on forever and held my hoodie tight in my left hand, ready at an instant to wave it around in a pledge that it is in fact ‘Tuesday’ and I was in fact there.

By the time I was halfway up the stairs, I could already feel the second floor. The nurses swimming in my ears, gurneys rattling their way up my throat, patients' voices pricking at the back of my neck like beads of sweat. I stopped at the top of the stairs for a moment, just watching the hospital move on the far side of the door.

Stepping through the door, I did my best to stay out of the way. I had to walk past the nurses station to get to his room and every time I had a totally unfounded feeling like I was walking past the mean girls table in the lunchroom, sick to my stomach trying to avoid their gaze and impress them with my nonchalant attitude. Though, on more than one occasion when I couldn’t stay in that room any longer, a nurse had looked at me like getting a juice box for a twenty-year-old on the verge of tears was the most important thing they could possibly be doing so I think it's safe to say they weren’t that mean, and I wasn’t all that impressive.

He was sleeping when I came into his room and for a second I thought I hated him enough to let him stay that way; I could just turn around and slink back down the stairs before I’d even have to figure out what we’d talk about and I could try again with a ‘Wednesday’ sticker. Before I had the chance to decide, his eyes slid open and found mine without moving his head and–in true dad fashion–he made it clear he was just resting his eye.

“I think I’m going to Europe,” I said as I sat down, quite unsure of where it came from.

“Where?” he asked as I flattened my hoodie across the back of my chair.

“Not sure yet, wherever I feel like.” I replied, “Where’d you live in Scotland?”

“Onich mainly, Edinburgh for a bit.” shifted slightly in his bed, like his bones weren’t sitting quite right under the Jesus figurine hanging from the wall, but he still wouldn’t turn his head. A quick Google search told me flights to Onich were upwards of $6000 and I wondered how much his life insurance policy was worth and divided the number I came up with by four.

“I think I’d need a car.”

“No, don’t do that.”

“What, why not?” I bit back. Good to know the daughterly instinct to fight back hadn’t died yet.

“You’d need a license for every country, is that really something you want to spend your time doing?”

“What? You think I couldn’t?” I asked.

“Do you want some bone broth?” he ignored me and glanced at the cart the lunch guys wheeled in like clockwork.

“Since when is bone broth vegetarian, Dad?”

“Sorry, kiddo,” he said, with a breathy chuckle that seemed to surprise him as much as it did me. “Where’s your Tuesday sticker?”

“I don’t know.” I lied, unsure why he still cared so much about the rules when we broke them more often than not.

The hospital's big rule was no more than one visitor at a time, more than one visitor will clog up hallways and cafeterias and bedsides, and the doctors won’t be able to do their job. What they don’t tell you is that when you’re dying, when there is no more job to do, that rule doesn’t matter anymore. So when Ward and Avery turned 18, Brian surgeon told the security guard to let

us all in at once, and he was relieved of the duty of having to figure us out. He handed all of us purple Wednesday stickers and pointed us in the direction of the elevator. Then, a nurse broke rule number two–no outside food allowed–when she bought a birthday cake because her dad died when she was 18 and, “Everyone deserves cake on their birthday.” But it was 10:30 in the morning, we were all nauseous, and it felt rude to eat in front of a man who had a feeding tube down his nose, so it sat untouched under Jesus’s watchful eye.

“They give them to you for a reason.” Brian said, closing his eyes again.

“I managed to make it here without incident.”

“Not the point,” he replied.

We were interrupted by the lunch guy coming back to get his cart, and a nurse asking if Brian wanted to try getting up and taking a few steps.

“Not now,” he said, “after I get some sleep.”

“Dad, come on,” I said, “can’t you just try?”

He didn’t say anything, just kept his eyes closed. I looked up to the nurse who also stayed silent, and thought about getting down on my knees to beg her to make him get up. I’d held onto his hands nineteen years ago when he taught me how to walk, now I could return the favor. I just needed her to make him get up. The lunch guy wheeled his cart out, despite none of the food having been touched, this conversation was certainly above his pay grade.

“Sure thing, Brian,” the nurse said, turning to follow the lunch guy out. “I’ll be back in a couple hours.” Brian and I sat there in silence, he still wouldn’t open his eyes.

I haven't thrown up since the last time I had pneumonia, third grade, but sitting there, watching his rib cage move up and down with his breath, I wanted to throw up—just to have something to point at next time a nurse comes in and asks how we’re doing. Part of me wanted to

lift him out of bed myself, prop him up on his feet and make them move, but I had a feeling the nurses wouldn't like that, and they'd probably stop getting me juice boxes if I pissed them off too much. So I got up to leave. I peeled my hoodie off the back of my hair and pulled it back over my head, displaying my Tuesday sticker again, and turned to leave the room. For just a moment I turned back and waited, as if he would tell me to stay, so that we could keep talking when he woke up. But he just sat there with his eyes still closed, and his chest moving softly up and down.

On my way back down the stairs I pulled out my phone to see if hospitals were even listed on Yelp. I learned that they are, and that this one accepts credit cards, and Bonnie thinks this place is so awful you shouldn't come here even on your death bed.

e.bret0520: 

They'll let your dad die, but they'll get you cake while they do.

INDUSTRIAL PLAIN

Marguerita Fairfield

You want to spread your seed, and
stretch yourself across the land,
leader of a V formation
which looks more like an I,
potentially invasive,
but we'll worry about that later. So
what does fatherhood mean to you? Is
it a polyamorous responsibility an
infinite love, egoless –
or a collection stored in a closet
too big for one body,
too excessive for the mind to
wrap value outside of commodity;
for you to try on and imagine how
it makes you who you are? My
body manifests in this
world, a curse.
It may betray me, or maybe
I betray it or maybe you
betray us both
who I try to see as one,
desperately.
The thing is
in this place you have
accumulated,
I can't help but see
my tools for hands
in front of me, each sensation
as a means to an end,
the labor within a food chain
while the mere consumers
come in and out
and I can feel them cramming
awkwardly against walls
that don't seem quite my own
and I squirm, and my voice
betrays me with the service
of a clone, on the edge
of termination
and no earth in sight,
no home.

Heidegger's Threshold

N. Eric Phillips

(TW: Child Abuse)

The soft yellow light fell through cracks between the wooden planks in the ceiling. It wasn't sunlight but some kind of sodium glow. As a child, Janus had seen tall street lamps staining the sky above Miami's poorest, most crime-ridden parts. He would sit in the car on the curb of some side street, waiting for his father as he made drop-offs and pickups with his "friends"—the same ones who would eventually execute him.

Sprawled on the floor, Janus lay with emaciated flesh. His hair was long, gray, and tangled. His t-shirt and jeans hung loose, meant for a muscular frame that had long since wasted away. A small rag, torn from his shirt, lay near his head. Between two wooden planks in the ceiling, a drop of water formed, bloated, and finally fell onto the cloth. When he first arrived, the drops came every few seconds. After weeks, more than two minutes passed between them, and he knew it would soon be gone. He reached for the rag, barely lifting it with a skeletal arm, and squeezed the tainted water into his mouth. It tasted of iron and algae but kept him alive—just enough to suffer. He drifted into a dreamless sleep.

Waking, he did not know how long he slept. His weary eyes turned toward the door in one of the four walls that enclosed him. There was no lock, just a handle. Sometimes, yellow light bled in beneath the door, but now it is dark. He had reached for the handle countless times and stopped himself limitless times. His imprisonment was torture—but whatever waited outside, it might be worse.

He had forgotten to replace the rag to catch the water again, and a small puddle had gathered. He pulled his head over it, ready to slurp the dirty liquid across his cracked lips. But then—his reflection caught his eye. It was not the gaunt face he expected. It was him as a child.

He sat at a plastic fold-out table stained with coffee rings in a basement. A bright lamp shone into his face, making him squint. On the table sat an open case and a beat-up lie detector inside. Its wires were connected to his chest, fingertip, and upper arm. Across from him, his father straddled a chair like a saddle, eyes on the strip as it traced the boy's vitals. His heart

pounded, each thump mapped in ink. His father, once a lie detector technician, had been hired by private investigators to catch employees stealing from their bosses. Too many sessions drunk had ruined his reputation. Nobody called him anymore. But he still liked to put the machine to use.

Sucking on a cigarette, he blew musty smoke across the table into his son's face. "Yes or no? Did you take five bucks from my wallet?" Young Janus hesitated. His eyes darted. "I need an answer. Now!".

"No, I didn't, Dad," the boy said, his voice wavering. The strip stayed unchanged.

"Liar!" his father spat, grabbing the wooden yardstick beside him. He whipped it across the child's face. The boy burst into tears, raising his hand to protect his cheek from another blow.

"Hey, crybaby. You had a choice. You could've said anything, but you chose wrong. You always do, son." He took another drag and laughed. "Course, if you'd admitted you lied, you would've got the same."

The vision fled. Janus' gaunt face stared back at him in the puddle. He had forgotten so much of his childhood, but sometimes it came back—in sharp, brutal flashes.

Again, he looked to the door. Yellow light was bleeding through the bottom once more. Knowing he would die in that room, he shook with strain as he pulled himself to his knees, then willed himself upright. He moved toward the door with slow, unsteady steps. Reaching out, his hand hovered inches from the handle.

He was a child again at the basement table for the briefest moment. The yardstick slapped him across his cheek

Janus pulled his hand to shield his face, but he was alone, still in the room. Still starving.

Overcome, he falls to his knees—weeping.

Below the door, the light faded away.

garden of paradise

Laurel Dorr

dew laps at my bare feet
everything i touch dies
for centuries to come
but this earth is green
my soles cut the blades
that won't bend
like the tree that drips
for me to harvest
from so far down
i am looking at the sky
when i take the first bite
it tastes like blood
and dust, and a shaft
of dark hangs over me
and the sky falls
and i could hold it up
with my frail shoulders
but i've hungered
for too long

Iridescent Uncertainty

Jazzmyne Haines

Dysmorphed

Marguerita Fairfield

I.

The mirror wiped in a fever//wherein cracked lips are smoking//the haze that adolescence was//never a reflection of this body//enclosed in a frosted chrysalis//hiding from the process//glossed picturesque//around the grotesque.

II.

I did not turn seventeen
but there is a picture of me
blowing down trembling flames
casting evidence, a shadow
over-toned bones hunched around
four frankensteined flavors of cake
but the origin is all fig;
Plath lying face down
on this body split in two.

III.

Padding around her confinement
with a pulse of stirring dust
a blue butterfly examines a padlock
slowly turning to rust.

Meet me in The Woods

Ellie Collins

Did you know that wolves have not been seen in Maine for years? The way the story goes, one woman drove them out completely. It was centuries ago now, when the rivers still ran clear and the woods were lush with trees and greenery. It was a time of excitement as the men who had been sent to fight during the civil war were finally returning, and their wives and children waited with bated breath to see them at the front door. Most didn't come home. According to locals, among the unlucky was a woman who had sent her son outside to enjoy the slivers of sun in between storms. She had just turned her back to open a letter notifying her of her husband's noble sacrifice when she heard her child scream.

With eyes blurred by tears, she burst out to find a pack of hungry wolves surrounding her son. She ran to her son, uncaring of the bared fangs and snarls, only to find him unresponsive. Gathering her skirts, she covered his face to protect him from the rain beginning to fall, and howled her grief to the woods. So deep was her mournful wail and so deep was the guilt the wolves felt for preying on someone so vulnerable, they turned tail and left the state entirely, chased by shame the entire way. This story ends here. Our heroine's, however, continues.

Despite the rain, she wept outside for hours. Her waterlogged clothes dragged her further down, drenching her in the weight of her tears. "Why me," she thought, bitter at the world. She remembered everything she had gone through, how happy she was when she got married, and then again when her son was born. They had wanted more children, but that was before her husband was called to war. "Please, God," she prayed. "I'll do anything, I'll give my life to you, please just don't let this be happening."

With shaking hands, she pulled the wooden rosary from her neck and fumbled her way through the motions. Her fingers trembled around the beads, her lips barely able to form words through her sobs as the heavens raged above. Would anyone grant her a miracle? The divine hand of God works in mysterious ways, and she tried to imagine Him guiding her to a world where she still had her family. Thoughts of taking her own life crossed her mind, but she knew that she would never see her son again that way. Instead, she bowed her head and showed her piety, begging and pleading for his heart to start beating again.

She tried to hold on to the memories of her son, the way he laughed, the way he looked up at her with his big brown eyes, the way he would ask when his father would come home. When her thoughts turned to her husband, she wept further. She hadn't had time to even mourn him, or tell her son he wouldn't be returning. "Well, now *I'm* the one who won't be reunited today." This thought struck her as so funny, she started laughing at her own misfortune. To any passerby, she would look insane.

It was only after she had cried all she could and laughed until her ribs hurt that she gathered up her skirts and prepared to walk home. When she was faced with the task of burying her son alone, bringing his cold body back home to where it would never warm up again, she stopped. She had laughed, she had cried, and now she was angry. Like she had turned her sorrow, she turned her ire towards God. "Lord, why have you forsaken me?" Her voice came out weakly, throat rubbed raw with sobs. Her anger consumed her, and in a fit of rage, she clutched the beads that had once brought her comfort and ripped them from her neck.

"A God that lets a child die is no God of mine." Before the scattered remnants of her rosary even hit the ground, she could tell something was wrong. The storm raged on, electricity hung in the air, anticipating her transformation. She felt hunger, then fear, and hunger even still.

It was a bone deep ache, a gnawing in her stomach that grew to her maw, and when she wiped her mouth, she realized she was drooling. She fell to her knees, clasped her cross in her hands, and waited to feel something, but there was nothing. Instead, she was no longer human. After all, a woman who has turned her back on God is no better than an animal.

She looked at her hands that were now unrecognizable. Her nails were clawed, her skin covered in a soft grey fur, and there were paw pads where her fingerprints used to be. Any evidence that she had once existed was now erased. She stood, still on two legs, although they didn't feel the same. With a glance over her shoulder, she saw that a bushy grey tail now brushed the ground. She brought her new hands to feel her face, which was longer, extended into a snout. Inside her mouth were sharper teeth, a different tongue. Her nose picked up the scent of her son, growing fainter. Her pointed ears burned from the sound of the wind ringing in her ears.

Her faith cast aside, she had little more to lose. In her mourning, it had gotten dark. Night had fallen, but she found she could still see. The faint flickers of the candles beckoned her to her cabin that now slept only one. Determined to do it right this time, she gathered her son and began the walk back home. She would bury him in the morning, even though the ground would be muddy and the work would be hard. It was what she deserved.

When she made it home, she stripped her son, washed him, and placed him in his bed. Then, she fell into her own, not bothering to change from her wet dress although she was sure to catch a cold. She slept fitfully, dreaming of fire and brimstone, waking every so often to make sure he was still asleep in bed. The sun streaming through the windows signified the end of the spring storms and new beginnings. She awoke with a jolt, remembering her nightmarish day. When she looked down, her hands were normal human hands. She felt everywhere that had changed the night before, but she had the same muddy fingernails, the same missing tooth, the same unruly hair, the rosary missing from around her neck.

After her self assessment, she checked on her son. If transforming was only a dream, perhaps he would already be awake, begging her to take him berry picking. She was not so lucky. He was still in bed, lying where she placed him, unmoving. She willed herself to cry, but the tears would not come, so she got to work. Her dirty clothes were placed to be washed, and she changed into the mourning gown she wore when her parents passed. The rest of the funeral preparations were done in haste, because she needed to dig his grave before the sun went down, in case the wolves came back.

Shoveling was hard work, and her husband had started the garden for her when they first moved in. The sun was high in the sky when she deemed it acceptable. Sweat dripped down her brow, tracing the contours of her gaunt face. It was then that she realized she hadn't eaten since two days ago. Once she finished burying her son, she would eat, and then decide to do afterwards. He was laid to rest with a soft toy resembling a dog, in his favorite clothes, with his blanket on top. She read a few verses from the Bible, although they felt hollow with her betrayal. Her son had not sinned the way she had, so it was only fair that he received as proper a funeral as she could give him.

Finally, he was dead, and gone, and buried below a tree with a hasty stone placed at the head of his grave. She returned home alone as night fell. There was little to eat, and she found that her hunger pangs had since subsided. She gnawed half heartedly at the crusty bread left over, and the hunk of cheese that they were saving for warmer weather. "No point in savoring it now," she said to herself. The creeping feeling of guilt crawled through her as the salty flavor bloomed on her tongue. Obviously, her son was eating better than her through the cold winter months, and the last time she had anything other than watered down soup was when they were all together and her husband had brought a wheel of cheese to celebrate the new barn he built for the town. As the last bit of sun dipped below the horizon, she felt a feeling she had felt only once

before. Her palms tingled, her ears grew, and she felt cold as she realized her punishment was not over. She was hungry again, but not for the meager offerings of cheese and bread that were available to her. The exhaustion of the day disappeared as her hunger returned, and she was no longer tired. Her cabin creaked around her, as if to tell her it was settling into the foundation and not going anywhere, and so she decided to leave.

The first few months were the hardest. Day after day, she awoke, a woman again. Waking up was less like she had fallen asleep, and more like her faculties were returning to her after a night of wolfish wandering. It happened when the sun went down, and she returned to herself when it rose. What she did under the cover of dark was for her, and her alone. Whispers of her condition had reached town after she was found curled up on the forest floor in the same tattered dress she had been wearing for weeks. She hadn't been to church in a long time, even before her son had passed.

The return to town was shameful, and she knew that she looked like an animal. When the gaze of a passerby lingered longer than was respectable, she was afraid she had sprouted ears, or that her face was no longer her own. She didn't have many friends to begin with, and no one wanted to associate with an estranged, Godless widow. If that was all she appeared to be to them, she was content. The only person to see the darkness she harbored was the priest from the local parish, having been essentially dragged to confession in order to absolve her of her sins. "My child, what troubles you so?"

Silence from her side of the room. The two sat in contention, with her staunchly refusing to acknowledge the faith that had done this to her. She felt ashamed of her condition, and didn't want to admit that the church's doors that were open to anyone were now closed to her. Still, she was raised to respect clergymen, and spoke at last. "Father, I've been having these terrible dreams. I can't sleep, I just wander all night and I've been so hungry. I just don't know what to

do.”

With the relief of her confession, she broke down in sobs. She hadn’t cried since she lost her son, and was comforted by the presence of a neutral party behind the partition. “It is as I’ve feared. I heard tell of your escapades to the woods, and I’m afraid you’ve only confirmed my suspicions. The forests have been empty of wolves for weeks, and yet every night the townspeople hear howling from their depths.”

“Is there a cure?”

“I’m afraid not. I will not tell you anything that can bring you harm, but if they find out, I cannot promise your safety. They fear what they do not understand. You are no longer under His protection.”

She thanked the priest, and left the confessional. Murmurs spread through the square as she walked out with her head held high, perhaps she had been saved of her heathen tendencies. People were no longer afraid to walk near her, to acknowledge her existence lest they be cursed themselves. As far as they were concerned, her mind had simply been unable to comprehend the deaths of her husband and her son, and she wandered to the woods to avoid sleeping in an empty house. Satisfied with this conclusion, they left her to her own devices.

Her unsleeping night time form manifested itself as she shed her inhibitions. Gone were the expectations of society. Instead, she sharpened her skills and let herself transform completely

into the very thing she had driven out. By letting go of her humanity, she could come and go as she pleased, fully human, fully wolf, or a mixture of both. She left her home and began to wander.