

The Bread Loaf Journal

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Writings
from the School of English

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INTRODUCTION

There is loss in every verbal expression. Farther. Faster. I did not used to believe this. But Frost and Tolstoy think so. Himali Singh Soin thinks so. Elizabeth Bishop's One Art. This summer was the first I read Foucault. He gave me old Nietzsche nightmares, leaving me oddly content. Meaning exists but can only be grasped in an act that loses (something) some of it.

If in defining we obscure, what is gained when we erase? Marks on pages. Communal almost understandings. Continually eliding the signified in the expression of sign taxes our most basic metaphor. Our construction of knowledge seems more fragile than the impulse to take meaning apart in most elegant, heroic failures. There is loss in every verbal expression.

This collection of writing from the Bread Loaf School of English is both expansion and contraction, an exercise in losing gainfully, a paradox, signifying. Marks on pages. Presence and loss. Of. "Longing, we say, because desire is full of endless distances." Thank you, Robert Hass. It appears we are the language. What we say. I am with that. (Write it!)

This volume is a guide to loss, losing, signs, yourself, the desire beneath.

—John Milton Oliver '13

WHAT

Himali Sing Soin

we say, we say,
We say we write, and the words
means
no word for
and we have no word for
no words for what
Maybe why
why maybe the
mysterious seemed to be what
or standing silent in
art
as grand as
of a hundred
of what
this
desire in the spiral
is What
loss
erases
presence
Or
there is no
word what
everything dissolves:
I remembered how
I felt presence
like
Longing full
of so much
what

POEM FOR MY FATHER AFTER THE BRAIN INJURY

Suzanne Callis

You are missing
half of your front tooth.
Your eyes, once ice-blue,
are ink blotted voids,
swollen from medication.
It must be terrifying
not to trust
your feet. Your arms
can barely squeeze
my now-adult body.
Like your brain, you are
atrophying.

Your garbled speech greets me.
You don't even know
I've been gone—
you knew once.
You don't remember
hiking blueberry hill,
writing me letters at camp.
You don't remember
telling me I wasn't
your daughter. You don't remember
the restraining order—
you never really did.
Those memories, live
only in me.

When I see you,
this you,
for the first time
in four years,
I think you are a changeling.
I imagine my father, never able
to return,
waiting for you
to come back home. Waiting
for you to tell him
what closure feels like.
My father is dead,
and I am left
with you.
I tell you "I love you"
hoping that you
will get that message
to him.

THE NEW SINGING POLICY AT INDIAN BOARDING SCHOOL

Grant Swanson

based on Martin Espada's 'The New Bathroom Policy at English High School'

The *wincincalas* sing *alowan*
in the washroom
while mother superior
eavesdrops from her privy

The only lyric she understands
is *Wakan Tanka*
and this clogs her up

So she concludes
to ban *alowan*
unless to Jesus

Now she is relieved

Notes:

- 1.) *Wincincilas*: Lakota for 'little girls'
 - 2.) *Alowan*: Lakota for 'a song of praise'
 - 3.) *Wakan Tanka*: Lakota for 'Great Mystery' or 'Great Spirit'
-

NAME IT

Lorena German

Look it in the eyes.
Square up in its face
shoulder to shoulder.
Don't
be
scared.
Part your lips
and from the diaphragm
Name it.

FOR YOU

Sarah Getchell

“...seek and learn to recognize who and what, in the midst of the inferno, are not inferno, then make them endure, give them space.”—Italo Calvino

Our house floats
above the Pacific.
We have almost nothing
but space. Are these
four thousand ninety two miles
enough? I don't now how
our string has stretched
this thin. A house like a kite,
I'm gripping

my tightest. I'm praying;
we're playing charades. You laugh
at Woody Allen jokes, and also
walk quietly through nine miles
of darkness to kiss me. We
have climbed cedars together,
but coffee tables and cars
and time and dust
and discarded stories stand
between us now. Charades—

I pantomime
Edward Scissorhands,
and they laugh, but it's my life
that I'm cutting
to bits
in the air. I look
for our house, like a word,
like a ghost—and it's here,
but there
are hearts and pages flying out
from the windows, into the salt,
into the night air.

THIS IS IT

Livingston Miller

I began by addressing
no one
in particular

a song for the beloved
when you have none

solitude is so discontinuous
that is, the solitude
of waking

what reference?
this, we are told

the world will come
to us in stories
getting there

with no words

how will it speak?

you sit down to write yourself out of yourself and it fails
thinking, how do I meet the sky on its terms

the perspective of
the lack of perspective

we are moving, and so
is it, it being here, and we

neither nothing nor
never or ever

do you see how difficult
it is to speak
when you are not situated—
I don't mean fixed.

if you must—
name it,

see where it takes you.

and it knows a certain lack

it knows that I
Do not own what I cannot share:

Moving through darkness
Best I know how

SEEDS

Amy Lafty

When I was only three feet tall, you
showed me how to remove a door
from its hinges, handed me my first,
red Craftsman toolbox, taught me how
to discern one wrench from another.

When my eyes scaled walls
of tea pots and dolls in the toy store, you
weaseled me away,
planting Matchbox cars
in my purple-speckled fingers.

When my hair grew too long, you
forgot to condition at bathtime,
raking the little black comb through
every knot and tangle.
When I marveled at the ballerinas
in the dance school windows, you
tied me up
in karate belts, guitar strings, cleats.

When I bore you a grandson, you
cradled him with both hands,
thanked God,
wept.

Finally,
I got it right.

THE TOP 5 WEIRDEST THINGS I'VE EVER SEEN

Stephanie Margherio

Number one is the video
the man at the desk showed me
once he found out I was living and working in Turkey,
a place he was proud to have visited
because it proved he had some money, you know,
and Africa is nothing if not known for poverty these days.
So on this tiny screen
his plane flew past all the ugly, enormous apartment buildings
out by Ataturk airport
and he asked if all of Istanbul was like this and I said
sort of, I suppose some is, but not all of it, and not where I live,
and this was after he'd given me
a soft-spoken spiel, a touch bored, or maybe it was
a necessary detachment,
about the memorial or museum or whatever it really was
that I was headed into
and if I wanted headphones for it
but my friends who lived there were sitting in the car
at the gate and they didn't want to come in because
they didn't want to leave the car unattended
outside the grounds, you see,
so I actually intended to rush through
so as not to make them wait

which I ended up doing anyway
because once I got around back
to the school's classroom blocks,
there of course were the famous rooms,
the ones with all the preserved skeletons in them
that you see as the accompanying photo, you know,
when someone's written about it,
except this wasn't a picture, this was really
the skeletons lying on benches with tarps
underneath them, there on a sunny hill in Murambi
surrounded by all the other beautiful Rwandan hills,
a choice spot, it was, for a school to be,
(a technical college, as I recall.)
even though it never got used as a school, since, what happened was,
the grounds had been in the final stages of construction when
the whole thing began and then afterwards
it must have just made sense,

this abandoned place with all these rooms,
and I suppose that the people charged with
memorializing those three days must have thought,
given the numbers,
why not, after all

I guess the other four things
don't really compare with this so
maybe I'll leave them out, but
I do think this poem is like
one of those photos
where there is very little skill involved—
it's the scenery that does the work,
there's really no need
to set anything up or wait for the right light,
it's mostly just about
getting there and then
holding your hand steady
enough.

EXCERPT FROM "FAYTH"

Mathew Kimball

I Soaked and Spinning

MAMA AND DADDY SPENT THEIR Sundays in silence. If that don't prove God exists, I don't know what does. In all my seventeen years, I learned that the only three forces powerful enough to stifle their screams are sermons, whiskey, and wine. Mama came home from the Reverend's with the sweet magnolia scent of her favorite white wine hanging loose on her breath. Daddy didn't wake until noon most Sundays, but he slept with an empty bottle of Jim Beam and some hillbilly whore from down at the Pink Pony who smelled like cheap cologne and menthol cigars. Mama slept on the couch. She never said nothing, but it don't take words to show the cracks in a broken woman.

Mama didn't always have them cracks. I remember when I was just about ten or so, Mama used to take me and Will out to the river on Sunday afternoons. Those were our best times. With Daddy sleeping, we could go most anywhere we pleased. Me and Will'd sit for hours next to the sweet fern and milkweed and watch the butterflies scramble out of their cocoons. Mama'd sit and braid my hair or hold Will by the waist and tell us butterflies are the animal that's most like a human. 'Ain't another living thing 'sides people and butterflies that can take something so ugly and make it pretty,' she'd say. Will always thought that tadpoles and frogs mighta counted, but Mama said frogs weren't pretty enough. I think I agree. Every fall those butterflies would fly down the river, dancing over the fiery leaves flowing on the river's glassy surface, and we would count 'em until the sun dove behind the hills. Those skies were the most beautiful I can remember. Each one glowed in its own distinct shades of violet and amber, tangerine and fuchsia. It was then, just as the clouds seemed to burst into a flurry of color that we would leave. We could hardly pull ourselves away, but each sunset was followed by a sickly bruise across the entire sky, and we knew it. Dark purples outlined by nauseous shades of yellow hovered around the edges of those memories. As sure as the river could catch fire and come to life with the setting sun, the rising moon left the world fearful and cagey in its shadows. Our feet would drag on the walk home. The walk back was unavoidable, but we figured if we could just increase the friction, we might slow down enough to never make it back. Whatever peace we found by the river evaporated when we returned to Daddy's trailer.

COURAGE POEM

Sungbae Park

The teacher said,

Write a courage poem.
Say something difficult.
Brace yourself...and be brave

So

I go wash my hands, grit my teeth, take a deep breath
And unscrew the top of my head and gently set it aside
Using a handheld mirror, I pick the gunk off my brain
Peel off its onion skin—it's soft underneath, like caviar
But easily bruised—I touch a spot, still tender, sends a zing
Down my spine and memories ooze out, drip down my chest
(Getting to the heart is not so easy)
I have to dig the knife in to undo the stitching
Break some ribs with a hammer
Pry my cavity open with a garden spade
Stick my hand in—
I can feel it in my fist, beating, breathing...
(How long can it breathe outside of me?)
But the arteries are caught on something
And when I pull, the threads inside become undone

And it all f

l
s
o
m
y in,nards
t, angled in
bu nch e s
an d
k nots
all over
t he flo or

In the pile of guts, I find a piece of paper
It says,

I am sorry.
Please forgive me.
I wanted to save you.
I wasn't strong enough.

INTERPRETIVE TRAIL RIPTON, VT

Cathe Shubert

Alone on the wooden path,
my feet speed-read the space
between ribboned roots and stuttering stones.
The air is steeped like tea, or a fine embrace.

I breathe it in and out, emptied and then filled.
The cascading light collides a scope
through branches and distills
to the ground a golden hope.

The scene is saturated with sweaty sap
and sluggish flies that bang into my face
unlike accidents. The electric leaves shiver
in the sun and whisper over and over “grace,”

or “pace,” or “chase.”
—No. They do not speak or speculate.
Mine alone to envy their roots.
Mine alone to wonder, seek, sate,

and beg of their breath with my own
churning past, and yet to know
that they will not, oh will not
tell me why—only where to go.

WHAT THE POEM WAS DOING

Melanie Corning

She's late again.
A sin I could forgive
if I knew that she had been up all night
catching fireflies on her tongue and devouring
them like radiant snowflakes.
Or swimming in midnight
rivers with familiar strangers,
the icy thrill shocking her drowsiness away.

She would have thought
to check the time only after
the first light of star-fading dawn
glowed into the clouds.

She slept fitfully
and through the alarm—
I tell myself
so that I won't turn her away—
slipped clumsily into wrinkled clothes
and ran with unbrushed hair
to beg forgiveness
with pleading eyes
that say, "I'm sorry.
I'm so sorry. I won't do it again."

(She will do it again).

"There you are," I sigh,
pulling her into the house.
"I've been waiting for you."

FRAGMENT 36

Findlay

Robert Fagles

Look with full-wide eyes at the spruce scented rain
As it falls onto lips together—
Still I taste it, watching a lover smudge
The lees of heady wine on a half-closed mouth
Whose face looks down and away with darkening glance

Louise Glück

I watched the rain spill through the spruce
onto your upturned lips, carrying needles to prick
The corners of your eyes. Now, they look down at the cup, coyly,
While you touch dregs to lips with stained fingers.

H.D.

See
with your languid eyes
the rainwater cascading
through spruce needles—
how it drops, bitter,
on our lips?
Ah, that scent I taste
looking tonight at you
you who glance down, flushing red
at the man daubing sour wine
on your just-parted mouth.

Literal Translation

. . . glance
. pouring down
. spruce needles
water. bitter
.
at her looking
. wine must
. two lips. and
reddening

Sappho

.] . . . [.
.]σηθεο[.
.].απεδ[.
.].τησ.νε[.
.] [.
.]κ[.
.]. ρι[.
.]ζ[.] [.
.]εσ χθό[.
.]σθ' έ[.]σι[.
.

UNTIL

Clare Costello

A bead is a bone until you bore a hole in it. It is a bone, too, when you dye it blue and string it up, and it's a bead when it breaks and cracks back to earth like tiny dead beetles. There's something between bone and bead, but once it's bead it will always be bone.

ART IN NATURE, NATURE IN ART

Molly Popkin Lemieux

The lessons of weaving(s) in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Edmund Spenser's *The Fairie Queene*

At the cores of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Edmund Spenser's *The Fairie Queene* lie deep uncertainties about what orders the universe, whether it can be ordered, and the role art plays in that process. Questions about the possibility of permanence amid the inevitability of change permeate both poems. Because of the anxieties that underlie the poems, these works address the conflict between masculine and feminine ideologies and forces at play in the world. Ovid and Spenser both make use of traditional definitions of masculine and feminine ideologies—the former representing rationality and order, the latter mutability and change—while challenging their incompatibility. Neither author ignores nor diminishes the cultural values that dictate social and moral expectations, treating all their characters, both male and female, as fallible but—when deserving—redeemable. Nature, the nature of humans, of the gods, of Time, of death and rebirth, is a fundamental theme in both poems. Discussing the daughters of Minyas in “Ekphrasis and the Theme of Artistic Failure in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*,” (who are turned into bats by Bacchus for refusing to participate in “the god's orgiastic rites” (Ovid 4.2)), Eleanor Winsor Leach writes, “. . . the Minyeides . . . both in their weaving and in their narrative . . . express their resistance to the chaotic forces of nature” (100). Studying in detail other tales involving weaving in Ovid and tapestries in Spenser suggests an alternative desire in the poets' own art. Certainly, both Ovid and Spenser see chaos in the forces of nature, and though there are moments of resistance and fleeting attempts to structure that chaos, ultimately, that is not their aim; instead, they strive for balance. Only in equilibrium, in the marriage of art and nature, of the masculine and the feminine, of structure and chaos, can any permanent wholeness be realized.

The scenes of weaving and weavings in the two poems serve as microcosms of the authors' attempts to work through their anxiety surrounding the forces of art and nature, permanence and change, order and chaos, and the simultaneity of their opposite pulls. Each poem has two tapestries that must be read as parts of a whole, Arachne's and Minerva's tapestries in Ovid, and Malecasta's and Busyrane's in Spenser. Both Arachne and Minerva weave scenes of the gods, but to very different effects. Leach suggests that “Both Minerva's and Arachne's versions of mythology and metamorphosis assert the power of the gods: the one as a force of order, the other as a force participating in the flux of nature” (103). Ovid's descriptions of the tapestries and the tapestries' narrative ability support Leach's assertion. Minerva's tapestry depicts a single, central scene (the contest for the naming of Athens, with four smaller, contained images in the corners warnings about the fate of humans who claim superiority over the gods), “bordered . . . with peaceful olive wreaths” (6.113). Conceived on the classical ideals of order and balance, Minerva's piece is static and its narrative ability limited; there is no movement, no change, and little interpretative possibility.

Both women are skilled weavers, but challenging Minerva's well-made but stagnant work are the scenes in Arachne's tapestry, which come to life with her immense skill: “Arachne depicts Europa deceived by the false bull, /But you would think the bull real, and the water too” (6.115–116). Although weaving numerous incidents of gods deceiving women, “Arachne gave each / A local setting and a face” (6.133–134). For Arachne, balance is achieved not in a formal structure but in lifelike representations that work harmoniously to tell a cohesive story rising from the many. Despite the consistency of Arachne's work, its narrative pos-

sibility is more open. Leach argues, “Arachne does not, by her representation, make a moral judgment upon the loves of the gods. It is Minerva’s interpretation that makes the subject immoral” (117). Although “Neither Pallas, nor Envy personified, / Could carp at [Arachne’s] work” (6.143–144), the enraged goddess immediately destroys Arachne’s tapestry, suggesting no easy answer to the question of which style, which message, is valued more.

Malecasta’s and Busyrane’s tapestries provide contrasting thoughts on love that yield no simple solutions either. Telling a single story, Malecasta’s arras “In which ... was pourtraied/The love of *Venus* and her Paramoure,” encourages a life of pleasure-seeking. Both Venus and Adonis follow whim and desire with little regard for consequence—Venus in her seduction of Adonis, and Adonis in his insistence on hunting “greater beasts” (III.i.34, 37). In *Spenser’s World of Glass: A Reading of The Faerie Queene*, Kathleen Williams links “the chase of love” and “the hunt of death,” writing that, “the two often and ominously merge ... Venus ... begged Adonis to have nothing to do with the pursuit of the great beasts, the boar and the lion ... because in it the destructive forces of nature are unleashed against beauty and tenderness. ... this motif ... fittingly suggests the trivial state of affairs in Castle Joyeous” (148). The consequence of pleasure-seeking in the tapestry emphasizes this triviality, “when [Venus] saw no helpe might [Adonis] restore, / Him to a dainty flower she did transnew, / Which in that cloth was wrought, as if it lively grew” (III.i.38). The metamorphosed Adonis is the one piece of the tapestry described as lifelike, and it seems paradoxically emblematic both of the perils of love/nature and of the inconsequentiality of failed pleasure. Busyrane’s tapestries, however, make manifest the danger of “*Cupids* warres” (III.xi.29) and the chaos they create. Like Arachne’s tapestries, Busyrane’s depict the affairs of the gods, but so too do they portray “Kings Queenes, Lords Ladies, Knights and Damsels gent/... heap’d together with the vulgar sort, / And mingled with the raskall rabblement, / Without respect of person or of port, / To shew Dan *Cupids* power and great effort” (III.xi.46). In this awful parody, no one is exempt. To intensify the horror, Spenser insists again and again that the tapestry is “So lively and so like, that living sence it fayld” (III.xi.46). Should we seek pleasure, or fear the destruction inherent in its pursuit? Should we give in to nature, or attempt to structure it in a knowable way?

A cursory reading of the four tapestries cannot yield definitive responses to the questions posed above because the poems do not allow for either/or answers. Both *Metamorphoses* and *The Faerie Queene* strive to create a coherent whole that still acknowledges eternal changeability. Part of achieving this wholeness is balance, and though seemingly dichotomous, masculine and feminine ideologies are not exempt from this leveling tendency. Weaving is traditionally thought of as woman’s work; this is made eminently clear in another weaving myth, Ovid’s story of Philomela and Tereus. After raping her, cutting out her tongue, and imprisoning her in a stone hut, Tereus allows Philomela one comfort, a loom. He sees no danger in a women’s art. Yet all of the tales of weaving suggest that identifying weaving as no more than a woman’s art aligned fully with feminine ideology is perilous, distorting and reductive. Tereus’ assumption certainly demonstrates the peril—Philomela’s tapestry becomes the catalyst for filicide and forced cannibalism as revenge. In this story, feminine chaos adopts masculine violence to horrific ends.

Though less sensational, the stories surrounding the four primary tapestries encourage more nuanced discussion of the conflict between masculine and feminine ideologies. Malecasta—both “badly chaste” and a “male castle”—aligns more readily with masculine ideology. She is characterized by her “fickle hart,” “For she was given all to fleshly lust, / And poured forth in sensuall delight” (III.i.47, 48). While this may seem to be more in line with feminine ideology—defined by change and mutability—Malecasta does not change, only the object of her desire does, and in Canto Three, that object is Britomart, whom the reader knows to be a woman. The tapestry decorating her castle tells a single story with a static outcome and “is like Malecasta herself, ... a practiced pretender to the death wish of hopeless passion” (Williams 112). The Lady of Delight’s life is ordered by a single principle, the pursuit of pleasure. Reading Malecasta—and her tapestry—as embodying masculine ideals does not recommend highly the adoption of masculine ideology alone in the pursuit of permanence.

Similar to Malecasta’s tapestry in its singular nature is the one woven by Minerva. Rigidly classical in its production, it, too, can be seen as a reflection of its creator. Patricia Klindienst Joplin explores this connection in her essay, “The Voice of the Shuttle is Ours”: “But who is Athene? She is no real female but sprang, motherless, from her father’s head, an enfleshed fantasy. ... Athene is the pseudo-woman who tells the tale of right order” (49). Minerva, then, is the ultimate masculine production, and she competes against the female artist, Arachne, who indeed weaves mutability and change. Arachne’s flawless feminine production, though, is violently ripped apart by the masculine-aligned Minerva. The final destruction of Arachne and her tapestry might be read as a triumph of masculine ideology, except that we know that Arachne was really victorious. Minerva’s paroxysmic rage, followed by sudden pity, seems pathetic. Ovid, like Spenser, leaves strictly-masculine ideology hollow.

Arachne’s destroyed art finds rebirth in the tapestry in Busyrane’s house. The scenes woven by Arachne are reproduced nearly image-for-image in Amoret’s tapestry—for indeed this is Amoret’s tapestry; Busyrane and his house (her prison) are the physical manifestations of her fear and misunderstanding of sexuality, chastity, duty, and love. The tapestries contain the same images, but they do not tell the same story. What is presented in Arachne’s tapestry as the gods’ deceptive shape-shifting to fulfill

carnal lust is not so simple in Amoret's. For example, Jove's victims are not all innocent—"Whiles the proud Bird ruffing his fethers wyde, / And brushing his fair brest, did her invade; / Shee slept, yet twixt her eielids closely spyde, /How towards her he rusht, and smiled at his pryde" (III.xi.32)—and Apollo is more laughable than threatening—"He loved *Isse* for his dearest Dame, / And for her sake her cattell fedd a while, / And for her sake a cowheard vile became" (III.xi.39). Amoret's tapestry twists the tales chosen by Arachne and adds a number of new ones to reveal the arbitrariness and supremacy of Cupid; the tapestry represents feminine ideology, yes, but feminine ideology perverted by perceived masculine expectations of courtly love.

Extending the parallel between Arachne's and Amoret's tapestry, both meet the same fate, but in destroying Amoret's tapestry, Spenser rewrites the ending of the Arachne/Minerva myth. Arachne kills herself; Amoret, with Britomart's guidance, saves herself. Williams proposes, "Britomart can save Amoret from Busyrane ... because she provides the perfectly balanced chaste affection" (111). Britomart realizes this "perfectly balanced chaste affection," however, by uniting within herself masculine and feminine forces, and so she is able to break through both the perverted feminine and the perverting masculine powers at play in Amoret's self-imprisonment. Britomart earns passage through the flames of desire at the gate of Busyrane's house because she is female, but it is her phallic sword that penetrates the flame and that menaces Busyrane as he unmakes his spells. The bad guy is destroyed, the hero is triumphant, and the innocent is saved; and Britomart, the embodiment of both masculine and feminine ideology, achieves it all.

The harmony of masculine and feminine energy reaches its apex in Spenser's Garden of Adonis, specifically in Venus' Mount, which also serves, perhaps, as an ideal representation of what art—for Ovid and for Spenser—aspires to be and to do. This perfection is achieved through nature, but would seem a product of art:

Right in the middle of that Paradise,
There stood a stately Mount, on whose round top
A gloomy grove of mirtle trees did rise, ...

And in the thickest covert of that shade,
There was a pleasaunt Arber, not by art,
But of the trees owne inclination made,
Which knitting their rancke bruanches part to part,
With wanton yvie twyne entrayld athwart,
And Eglantine, and Caprifole emong,
Fashiond above within their inmost part ...

(III.xi.43-44)

The trees and plants do not behave at all as would be expected in terrestrial nature, but Spenser ardently insists that no art is involved. The reader can neither forget nor ignore, however, that Spenser's art creates this natural perfection. Venus's Mount is both nature in art and art in nature. The arbor's use furthers Spenser's portrayal of art's possibility: "There wont fayre *Venus* often to enjoy / Her deare *Adonis* ... for he may not / For ever dye, ... All be he subject to mutability, / Yet is eterne in mutabilitie, / And by succession made perpetuall, / Transformed oft, and chaunged diverslie: / For the Father of all formes they call; / Therefore needs mote he live that living gives to all" (III.vi.46-47). True art, like the girding myrtles, circumscribes a generative and self-generative whole that is both masculine (Adonis) and feminine (Venus). Williams observes that "Adonis is made, not immortal, but perpetual" (147); extended to art, perhaps eternity does not have to be statically immortal, but can be achieved in perpetuity.

The artistic ideal that Spenser proposes through Venus' Mount exposes an anxiety intrinsic to his—and to Ovid's—poem while simultaneously offering the possibility of a resolution. Ovid and Spenser see only changeability in nature and creation, yet their art strives for some kind of permanence, and it seems folly to suggest they do so hopelessly. Danger lurks in artistic creation, the women weavers are proof of that—Arachne dead, Minerva reduced, Malecasta self-deceived, Philomela perverted, Amoret self-imprisoned—but art does not have to be doomed to failure. Those same women weavers, when taken as parts of an artistic whole, demonstrate that chaos and structure do not have to be, should not be, fully at odds, and that art does not have to compete with nature; in their searches for wholeness and balance, both masculine and feminine ideologies are valued in Ovid's and Spenser's art. Perhaps because they struggle with anxieties and explore themes in their writing that transcend time and are continually relevant, Ovid and Spenser prove that art seems to be the one thing that has the ability to persist. Ovid writes in the *Envoi* to *Metamorphoses*, "And now I have completed my work, / Which cannot be undone ... By fire or sword, or corrosive time. That final day, / ... has power only over my body, / ... my name will never die. ... and if a sacred poet / Has any power to prophesy the truth, / throughout the ages I will live on in fame" (15.981-984, 988, 990-992). Time has not yet proven him wrong. Even if "All

things are changing” (Ovid 15.184) and “formes are variable and decay” (Spenser III.vi.38), Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* show that in change, in the endless mutability of their poems, is permanence, the lastingness of artistic production.

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SOUR, SOUR VICTORY

Jennifer Brewer

Black lines embroidered boxes on paper, like darkened stitches on color be-speckled fabric. Save 25 cents on off-brand rice. Save 50 cents on off-brand hot dogs. Save 63 cents on off-brand egg noodles.

Save. Save. Save.

You cut with such surgical precision, turning the corners with speed and grace. The scissors never slowed... they simply turned, smooth and even, operating on a dying budget.

It was your most colorful Sunday ritual—a couple hours spent matching what our empty cupboards needed to what deal was being offered in the paper. As you worked, I would peruse those shelves. They were lined with old newspaper that I helped you glue to the cheap particle board when we first moved in—a decorative attempt to make them less white. Yet the vastness of cupboard was unnerving, as if it knew it would never be full.

It even smelled empty.

“Mama, I’m hungry.”

“I know, Sugar Bear. There’s rice on the stove for lunch.” Your words neglected to slow your determined cutting.

“Again?”

The scissors were set patiently on the table, and you moved your bifocals to your forehead. After you rubbed them, your eyes grew even more tired than normal. “I put a beef bullion in it. It should add some flavor.” Then you picked up those scissors to resume making perfect cuts as if the cashier would notice or even care about precision.

That bouillon cube was your apology, but that was how it always smelled. That was how it always tasted.

In the store I’d follow you, the Sunday afternoon coupon-warrior. I would walk down aisles and aisles of food that I wished for but knew you would never buy. You held a small calculator in your hand to round up numbers to anticipate taxes, but everything that went in that basket would never be enough to fill it.

Sometimes I would watch other kids as we shopped. They held tight to Little Debbie Snacks or a Snickers and pointed to cheap dinosaurs and dolls displayed in that one section by the milk aisle. Anyone who was ever child or parent knows the place I’m talking about. It’s next to the Crayola Crayons and the office supplies, and you never let me venture down it.

But their parents? They would smile indulgently, despite any tantrum thrown, and I would try not to be jealous for their luck in the parent draw.

I learned that asking for much was usually met with disappointment, but I always found a way to inquire about one thing:

“Was there a coupon for pickles?” I asked. It was a sour question, and it held a sour hope. But my tastebuds still wobbled at the thought.

“Sorry, Honey,” you’d always say.

I hated the newspapers. They never thought to offer discounts on pickles.

But every once in a while, you’d find a way to move numbers around. You’d find a way to do without an item on your precious list or discover an in-store coupon, and those were the Sundays that were best. “Honey Pot, guess what!” you’d say. You’d bend down low so that your green eyes met my grey ones, and you’d smile that smile that meant you could give me more. It was a rare smile, but it was my favorite.

It was a smile that sent me running down the aisle to the holy grail of jars. I was Dorothy examining the Emerald City, and the green that was everywhere struck awe into my heart.

I’d examine several jars to find the one that seemed bursting, and I’d select with reverence the prize so rarely given. You’d take it from my small hands to set it in the cart, and we’d proceed to the cashier stand. I wouldn’t take my eyes off the jar as it traveled the conveyor belt, made machines beep, and underwent suffocation by the plastic bag. I’d wait for you to meticulously count out exact change, and an eternity would pass as we unloaded the bags into the trunk.

And the pickles would ride in my lap in the car. We wouldn’t even wait until we left the parking lot before the lid went POP and the juices drizzled down our chins... our fingers... our arms. They would be warm—fermented in everything cucumber and dill, and my crooked teeth would break through the skin, crunching and crunching and crunching the taste of victory.

Sour, sour victory.

EL METATE

Sarah Kate Neall

Gran doesn’t like spicy food, she sure does hope they have an alternative to spicy here. How long has this place been here? Meme reaches a polished finger to her smooth silver hair, pushes it delicately away from her face with the back of her index and middle fingers, and declares that it’s fairly new, and she “chose this restaurant because she thought Sarah Kate would like it.”

My grandmothers, both quite sharp, one eighty-nine and the other eighty, don’t converse so much as they take turns speaking sentences. I sit next to Meme and across from an empty chair, diagonally to Gran and her floral patterned cane and her hearing aid, which she calls her ‘ears.’ They have together decided to take me to lunch while I am home. (Connecticut is just where I live and work; clearly, it is not home, and although they do not say so, my grandmothers probably think to themselves what my Aunt Karen said aloud to my mother when cousin Jacob moved to Brooklyn: “Jane, what is it about us that makes our children want to move to the North?”)

Meme, with an eye toward the next day’s meet and greet at Signal Mtn. Presbyterian, asks me very specifically about Choate. Because she knows, canny, mannered elegance that she is, that People have heard of it. I answer briefly and then order tacos.

As mountains tend to do, Signal Mountain overlooks the valley, where you can see the Tennessee river carving slow and serpentine through a basin of embarrassing histories. On especially bright days, the river glitters through the fresh green middle of Chattanooga, once a strategic Civil War railway junction, now a hotbed of millennial gentrification, ironic frisbee leagues, Chaco-clad triathletes, and more bandwidth than you can shake a stick at. The outskirts, I think, have more of what my Choate colleagues associate with the South (Ringgold, Georgia Resident Kills Rooster with Coca-Cola Can). Within the city itself there is a more familiar kind of progress: my Chaco-wearing dad recently reports, “Yeah, some foodies just turned the old gas station into a farm-to-table restaurant where you can wait a long time for your ‘coffee experience.’” So I guess by most lights Chattanooga is growing, affirming all the right trends. But Signal Mountain sits cool and complacent, pretending it is above the frenzy.

The waiter is bringing the tacos and a quesadilla and more salsa to go with the chips, and before they even taste the food, my grandmothers are already in careful negotiations over splitting the quesadilla, setting one slice aside for a to-go box. Meme remarks that on occasion she meets ladies from the Garden Club here at El Matate. I am not sure what Meme is doing in the Garden Club. She doesn’t have a garden. Meme says then, with the same singleminded intensity that gets people to serve on committees, “Oh, Peg, why don’t you order a dessert; you and Sarah Kate can split it.” She does not herself want ice cream, but confusingly wants us to want it. I am not consulted.

Now, Gran is no pushover. She was sent by design to a boarding school of all girls and then by historical chance to a college with no men, which happened as she tells it, “well, because there was a war on!” She majored in theater. She hosted a radio show in Atlanta in her twenties. She taught school. She directed musicals with my grandfather for years, she had three kids, and when I was seven she absolutely told me to eat the crusts off my sandwiches. “The depression is over, Gran,” I had protested. To which she had replied, “The depression has barely begun!” Gran is fine with smiling and telling people, particularly other women, how things ought to be. But she orders the ice cream anyway.

As for Meme: give her a church, and in just a few Sundays she will be pronounced by all of your middle school friends and their mothers the most elegant Southern lady who ever lived. If you are ever so tacky as to disagree with her, she will utter a thoughtful but noncommittal “Huh.” Placid with our compliance on the matter of the ice cream, Meme leans and tucks her leather purse more securely under her seat while I eat the dessert she bullied Gran into getting. The waiter approaches with a stack of to-go boxes; these are for the food Meme has daintily set aside as impossible to eat right now. The little tower reminds me of the lunch conversation itself—statements, teetering in a stack, one on top of the other, Gran with memories of her own days as a teacher. Meme, every few minutes declaring her association with the Garden Club and the Circle of Prayer ladies’ group at church. They sit across from one another, rehearsing the stories and declarations they are accustomed to saying and that I know now to expect, and eventually they fuss over splitting the bill, and they are just so glad we had a chance to visit, just delighted, want to see me again before I go back to (and they say it carefully) Connecticut.

The bell over the door jingles as we step into the baking heat of the parking lot, and they are so content, and at eighty and eighty-nine they seem either staggeringly sure of themselves, or not sure at all. Either way, they deliver a verdict amid goodbye kisses at the car—the meal was just right, and not at all too spicy.

MI FAMILIA

Flor Estella Mota

I.

Mi Familia

We were all born in Brownsville, TX, which borders the Mexican town of Matamoros, Tamaulipas, and is 30 minutes away from South Padre Island. We are first generation United States ciudadanos. I was the last in my family of four: Roberto Mota Jr. arrived on October 22, 1965, Ana Maria on November 13, 1966, Enrique on June 30, 1970, a miscarried child in 1973 or ’74, then me, Flor Estella Mota, on February 27, 1976. While I was growing up, my mother would often tell me that it was my brother Enrique who named me. He used to touch my mom’s pregnant belly before I was born and tell her that there must be “leones” in there. What else could be causing such gurgling and so much kicking other than some wild animal? Still, he named me after one of his many kindergarten girlfriends.

“Me gusta Flor Estella por que la llevo al zacatito y le doy besitos.”

He was a five-year-old Casanova who thought he was probably naming a kitten. But soon there was little love for “la mugrosa” who had dethroned him. Enrique would soon rename me “Florifuchi,” stinky Flor.

I cringe when I hear the phrase “the baby of the family” because that suggests that I was the most immature. In traditional Latin culture, the youngest daughter is usually trained to be the one who takes care of her aging parents. My father would soon lose that right. But the caretaking of my mother would begin when I was five or six soon after my parents separated.

She kicked him out with bitter screams and lots of tears.

“¡Hijo de la chingada! ¡Salta de esta casa!”

I can still see the hairbrush she had bought from Avon, with the pretty tortoise-shell finish and thick, wiry, compact bristles, leaving my mother’s hand flying over my five- or six-year-old head aimed at my father’s furious face. And out he ran through the wooden side screen door onto our paved driveway and through the chain-link gate. It wouldn’t be the last time I would have to duck from the onslaught of flying objects. There would be ice cube trays, pots, and the occasional sharp item. But it is that hairbrush that I remember most. It was the first shot in the long war between Antonia Salinas Gíron Mota and Roberto Mota Pier.

She was born on April 3, 1940, he on June 2, 1938. They met in Veracruz, Veracruz, Mexico, when they were teenagers. She always thought he was cute; a bit of a bad boy, but cute. After my father had died, and she made peace with him, my mother would sometimes explain her decision to me.

“Tu papa era muy guapo.”

My father *was* handsome: a full black moustache, long, thick sideburns, dimples that my sister and I would inherit, and black hair that he would comb back then forward with the Mexican equivalent of Brylcreem into a greaser’s pompadour. My mother had short, dark, kinky hair, full thick lips, cocoa-colored skin; she was beautiful, with Afro-Cuban features that she never recognized as such. We all would inherit those lips from her, and later when my parents separated then divorced, her regret, pain, and anger. All I know of their dating comes from one fading photograph: my Tia Constantina is serving either as chaperone or lackey, surrounded by lots of other relatives that I never met. They were an attractive young couple celebrating at a Veracruz Carnival, wearing funny hats, and posing for a memory. They were not smiling; I don’t recall them ever smiling much.

After he left, she was devastated. I slowly came to realize the severity of the situation when my mom started preparing me for the divorce:

“Te van a preguntar con quien vas a querer vivir. ¿Y que les vas a decir?”

“Pues, con usted.”

There was never a question I would not choose my mother. But she often primed me in case I had to go up to a judge during the divorce. At the time, I had no understanding of this, and thankfully, it never came to pass.

I’m not sure when I found her in the bathroom—whether soon after that fight with the Avon brush flying through the air, after the divorce, before that?—with a plastic bag over her head. She screamed when I came in.

“¡Salte de aqui!”

I was startled at the words more than what I saw. I did as she said, closed the door, and walked away not knowing what I had just seen. When she left the restroom, no words were exchanged between us. It took me a while to remember that I even had to pee. It was not till years later that I understood what she had been attempting.

Until my father died, she lived her life with bitterness and hatred towards the man she had loved so much, the man who had fathered us, the man who, I later learned, had thrown it all away in a moment of stupid passion with my mother’s niece, or perhaps she was her cousin. I never quite understood how Teresa was related to us. It seems she had just appeared in our house one day after crossing the Rio Grande River to start a new life.

I came to find out a many months after the fight that it was Teresa who my parents had been fighting about that day the hairbrush flew through the air. She had a baby in her arms, Roberto Mota Jr. The second Roberto Mota Jr. Her daughter Laura would arrive a couple of years later. Both were my father’s children, but I would never know either of them as intimately as I knew my “real” siblings, who one by one, left. Even though my Roberto stayed in Brownsville, his active social life, his brief

local college career, and his job kept him out of the house enough to maintain some sanity. Ana took the grander step of moving six hours away to Austin to attend the University of Texas, drop out, and remain in Austin to avoid home and all that it meant. Enrique would leave for Harlingen to attend a two-year technical college, and then move outside of Dallas to work for Texas Instruments. I would stay alone with my mother until I graduated high school and moved to Austin myself to attend the University. I often dreamed of never visiting home, but I knew better. My mother needed someone. She needed me. And I would continue to take care of her until her dying day.

II.

Dia De Las Madres

The light from the window speckled her face. I studied her hollowed cheeks, her chapped lips, her rich brown skin, her sunken eyelids. I traced her paper-skinned arms, which had an endless circuit of bruises inflicted upon her by so many needles too many times. Her salt-and-pepper hair and her overgrown sideburns revealed months of neglect. She hadn't been to a salon in more than a year.

I remember when she took her final breath. It was Sunday morning, May 9th, 2010, Mother's Day. The entire family had joked the day before about her possibly making a grand exit.

My sister, her daughters, my great aunt, and I had stayed all night, sitting vigil by my mother's side. We tried to sleep on the dirty, vinyl, Pepto-colored chairs that seemed to have a time limit manufactured into them that no one but the chair knew about. Once you felt a spring sticking it to your butt cheek, you knew the chair had had enough. We also had a vinyl full-sized mattress that we dropped on the floor next to her bed. I magnanimously gave it to my sister and her girls, who were 15 and 12 at the time. But they didn't look any more comfortable than me and my great aunt, who had both decided to settle into those awful vinyl chairs. Comfort was something no one truly cared about that night anyway.

"Pobre Tia Consta." I thought. My tia—the one who had accompanied my parents on that Veracruz Carnaval so many years before—had just arrived from Mexico City on Saturday morning. An 18-hour bus ride that most of us knew well. So there we were, four generations squeezed together into a sterile nursing home room as we watched my mother sleep, slipping ever closer into the inevitable. I had tried to decorate it as she had her bedroom at home: family portraits—her four children, her seven grandchildren, her grandparents (who would welcome her "Al cielito," she would often tell me)—her favorite cross and rosary, a framed picture of John Paul, her favorite pope, and a huge, blood-red silk rose that hung above everything. I always thought it was gaudy, but my mom loved that thing. I have no idea where she bought it, but I knew why. Roses had always been my mom's favorite flowers. If I could have dug up one of her many rose bushes to bring into that nursing home room, I would have. Unfortunately, the gaudy, silk one had to suffice.

The moment finally came the next day after everyone had left to take showers and eat breakfast. After years of medication upon medication—Micardis, 80 mg; Clonazepam, 1 mg; Prednisone, 10 mg; Prograf, 1 mg; Novolog, 100 u; Novolin N, 100—to make sure her new liver would not reject her body, morphine was the only drug she was taking now. I was grateful that she and I were alone. This is the way it needed to happen. After all, I was the first person she told of her diagnosis twelve or thirteen years prior.

"Hepatitis C." she muttered.

We were on the phone, I in Austin, she in Brownsville. Curiously, the disease is exactly the same in English as it is in Spanish; one only has to change accents to translate it. Still, I had to ask her to repeat what she had said. The second time, she almost screamed it.

"¡Hepatitis C! Hepatitis C. No ay remedio."

I had a vague idea of what this was since I had read about many an alcoholic rock star that had contracted the same disease, David Crosby probably the most prominent at the time. But except for the occasional *cervezita*, my mother never drank. She recounted her conversation with the Brownsville Clinic doctor to me:

"¿Usted toma alcol, usa drogas, es prostituta?"

"¿Que! ¡No! ¡Por supuesto que no!"

"Pues, esta muy enferma. No ay nada que puedo aser para ti."

My mother left in tears.

He was the first of many doctors, and the worst. He had accused my mother of drinking, doing drugs, and being a prostitute, didn't believe her response when she denied all three, and sent her on her way without so much as hope.

Drugs! Please. She would often tell people who remarked on our last name, "Mota," because it's slang in Spanish for "weed." The kind people smoke, not the things you pull out of your flower beds. Really.

"No mas por que somos Motas no es que vamos a fumar la mata."

Prostitution? Oh lord, my mother never so much as had a boyfriend after she and my father divorced when I was six years old. I'm also pretty sure she hated sex. But I'll never know for sure. Catholic Mexicans do not speak of such things. Especially not Catholic Mexican women.

My mom nursed the news for at least two weeks before she told me what was wrong. I insisted that she needed to go to another doctor, one with some sense of a bedside manner, one who could possibly explain how she had contracted the disease and what we could do, if anything, to stop it.

The bigger blow came as the conversation continued. She had apparently done some research and forced herself to remember how the hell she could have ended up with this disease. She finally told me of the miscarriage she had two years prior to my conception. How she was losing so much blood that she had to be rushed to Matamoros, the Mexican border town, to receive a blood transfusion at a local clinic. In the 1970s, no country was screening blood for possible contaminations.

"Tienes que ir a que te chequen tu sangre."

I understood immediately. She was concerned that I had the disease as well since she was pregnant with me after that tainted blood transfusion. The next day, I hurried to the newly renovated UT Student Services building, which housed the clinic. The whole process was not long, and I don't truly recall most of it. I just remember that the doctor assured me that I was probably fine, and these words: "Hepatitis C and many other similar diseases cannot penetrate the placenta or umbilical cord." My mother's body, my mother, had protected me from a disease that lay dormant in her for the next two decades.

What most fascinated me in these last moments with her were her hands. They had always been slender and smooth; she hardly ever needed to use lotion since they were so naturally soft. But she worked these hands hard all her life. These hands made 76 dozen tamales stuffed with chicken, others with mashed, refried beans, and still others full of jalapeños (those are called "borrachos" because you have to be brave enough, or "drunk" enough, to eat them), all made in the span of two weeks for a community gathering one Christmas, and hundreds of dozens more for my family while I was growing up. These hands manicured our expansive lawn with a gasoline mower, pruned every bush, transplanted every mango tree. These hands prayed often for health, love, and good fortune.

It was with these fingers that she pinched me and my siblings (and probably a few grandchildren, when we misbehaved). It was these fingers that would maneuver through the body of a nopalito, carefully scalping the inedible thorns before she would dice them, sauté them with onions, tomatoes, and chile piquin to make taquitos. It was these fingers that were constantly pricked for her morning, lunch, and dinner blood glucose checks.

As I held her hand, I whispered, "Ya mami. Hora si puede descansar."

I was half-hoping for a response, but I knew she was not going to whisper anything back. Even to scold me, as she often had all my life. That was over. She could finally rest. And so could I.

III.

Flor

I'm the only one of my siblings who has not had children, and I do not plan to. For so long, my mother defined who I was, so much so that I often get lost in her narrative. But I've come to realize that as much as she was my mother, she was also my child. My mother and I exchanged roles as I grew up and she grew older and sicker. And once she was gone, I had no energy to mother anyone else.

WHAT DO COLORS TASTE LIKE?

Jessica Fillion

I ring the doorbell, just once, even though inside I am banging with my fists, pushing the doorbell frantically, and kicking the door in. Why is it taking so long to answer the door? Pura opens. “Is Jazmin home?” I ask. “Yes, but you’ll have to come in, we’re about to pray the rosary.”

The hallway is dim. Especially in contrast to the Florida sun. The white on white stucco tiles feel oppressive. The central AC hums. We walk down the short hallway for miles.

I follow Pura into a bedroom, couldn’t say whose. When Jazmin sees her mom she immediately gets up from the bed and walks to the closet. She hasn’t seen me yet. Pulling from either side Pura and Jazmin open the closet doors. In the closet an altar sits atop a dresser. Requisite picture of Christ wearing his crown of thorns, white candle, glass of water, rosary beads, no cloth covering the dresser. He is looking at me. He knows. He knows. He knows what’s happened.

I don’t really know how to pray the rosary. My family isn’t that kind of Catholic. But I know my Ave Maria and mi Padre Nuestro. Nos presignamos, the sign of the cross over our bodies commencing the prayers. I am going through the motions, letting the rhythm of Pura’s and Jazmin’s intonations carry my own. Santa Maria Madre de Dios. I grip Jazmin’s hand tighter every time we talk about forgetting sins. Feel as if I’ve already gone to the confessional and the priest has given me my penance. Padre nuestro que estas en el cielo. Feeling the strength in my grip and the clamminess of my hands, Jazmin finally looks at me. I don’t know what prayer looks like in English.

The words trip over themselves, run into each other in a whirl of ahs and inhalations. I am a hummingbird in a cage. I am worried that I’ve been gone too long. But who can leave in the middle of a rosary? You can’t. I know there’ll be hell to pay when I finally do make it. No matter. Por los siglos y los siglos. Amen.

I decline the offer of water and leave the dim air conditioned whiteness. I trudge across the parking lot hoping the boys told the parents where I’d been.

“Yesenia, where the *hell* have you been?” Guess that answers that question.

“Mami, I..”

“Nevermind where you were. Who do you think you are? Tu crees que te gobiernas? You were supposed to stay with the boys and Chucho. Grab your things—we’re leaving right now. I can’t believe you would disappear like that! You know better.”

You’re the oldest. You were supposed to watch over your brother and cousins.

I hang my head and find where I left my book. I have no desire to walk down that hallway. I’m running a list of ways to bribe my brother Bobby, or AJ, to go get it for me. Luckily I don’t have to, the book was sitting on the kitchen table. At least Stephen King can take me back to *Carrie* while I’m in the car, so I don’t have to listen to the continued chastisements.

Stupid traitorous boys. I *told* my brother and cousins where I was going. I mean I was half running away from them when I said it, but I *told* them.

It’s *their* fault. No. It’s mine. For following their lead, for thinking I could be just one of the boys. Forgetting I’m a *girl* always gets me into trouble. I’m never allowed to forget for long, something always comes. The letters on the page stop being still. I might throw up, so I look out the window. I don’t see the usual markers on the ride home, no Fun Spot Go Kart land, no Universal sign, no Metrowest pointing the way.

So, one by one, the boys, Christian, Mark, AJ, and Bobby, emerge from Chucho’s room, gleaming eyes, dollars in hand, lured by Mr. Softee’s call. Chucho’s one of these uncle-not-uncles. I think he’s related to Brenda, Tio’s wife, but I’m not sure. He doesn’t stink, but looks like he should. He has this big round belly and tufts of grey-white hair that sprout from everywhere. I mean, who grows grey hair on their hands!

The song serenades me too. I can taste the red, white, and blue rocket pop already. But I’m the mature one, the newly minted teenager in a sea of nine year olds. But damn if that rocket pop wouldn’t be sweet right now, and Mami didn’t leave us any money.

I guess I can follow suit. Why not? You’re never too old for ice cream. How did I not see the hungry look, the strumming

fingers? Chucho was back in the sala. The boys were outside. Mr. Softee still crooned. So I swallowed my parents' litany of admonishments over what girls can and can't do. "Never be alone with boys. Never ask people for money..." Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. Besides, they were the ones who left me alone. Duh! With Mami and Brenda gone, I'm the only girl.

"Chucho, can I have a dollar, too?"

"Ta bien. Ven."

Oohh-kay. Not sure why I have to follow him to his room. Why can't I just wait in the sala? Where's his wallet?

The rocket pop dances behind my eyes, and I worry the song will end before I get outside. I stand behind Chucho awaiting my dollar. He gives me the dollar and I turn to go. Rocket pop here I come!

Before I can make my exit complete, his hands are on me. His hairy, rough, disgusting hands are on me. I'm trapped in a bear hug, my breasts in his hands. His breath is on my neck, in my ear. Inside, I'm yelling let go of me and pushing him off. He only feels me frozen. I feel his stiffness on my butt.

"Mm, you feel so good."

He lets me go. I leave.

ERASURE

Himali Singh Soin

What. Is left behind.

Emptiness is made up of the same invisible atoms as is concrete. Our dreams and our waking life are equally filled with happenings. The world, comprised always of a dialectic, insists on a third argument, an extra eye. This is to say, everything is all things, as they are and as they are not. It is in our instinct to never cease exploration, to find possibilities even at the end. Writers, starkly conscious of both the breadth and banality of the lexicon, have always sought new methods, made new manifestos, for finding the infinitude of possibilities within the finite system of language, gnawing at our negative capabilities in order to excavate from oblivion a kind of extra-sensory knowing. To leave behind, without words, what we know to be true but which we cannot classify. Or something. Or not.

An erasure is one of these renewals. In a society of appropriation, an erasure utilizes an existing text and makes it disappear in measures. What is left behind does not simply refer to what was; it comes to assume an identity of its own. It speaks about absence, about loss. Yet, it is held together by the attractive force between itself and its prior existence. The words are, we might say, held together by love. The process is one of grueling repetition, repositioning, obverse censorship. Still, it does not attempt to simply be an analytic alienation of meaning, rather, a synthetic tendency in which feeling and sentiment are not denied in the irony of the process.

Language is made up of signs only; we must believe that it is free of its signifiers even as they are inherent. Everything is an act of editing, finding the word in the whole, leaving behind a hole. Denying mutability means we are forcing the world to function as fallacy. An absence is the presence of itself. Darkness illuminated. This is self-conscious elision, an act of aesthetic violence that might reflect a larger, political act of violence. It is an act of rebellion, it is an act of parodying posterity. (It is simultaneously an act of reverence.) It questions author-ity, it offers that the reader—the subject—in her interpretation, might be the sovereign. What survives is not only a remnant, but a self-contained—albeit without an arc—story. The act of erasure loves the pen that can forget and still make memory mean.

All poetry is fragment: it is shaped by its breakages, at every turn. It is the very art of turnings, toward the white frame of the page, toward the unsung, toward the vacancy made visible, that wordlessness in which our words are couched. [Heather McHugh, "What We Make of Fragments," *Broken English*, P. 75]

The Bread Loaf Journal

Writings from the School of English

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The curation of this literary journal was a labor of love in many respects. As much as words, page limits, time, and money restrict us and distance us from Virginia Woolf's "thing that lies beneath the semblance of the thing," there are many gains and much kismet in the formation of a collection of work. Even absence can be a sort of presence. Robert Frost said that Elinor M. White was "the unspoken half of everything I wrote and both halves of many a thing." There are, of course, many spoken and unspoken halves within these pages. These poems, prose pieces, and essays are in conversation with each other and with the broader Bread Loaf community as well as the world beyond. I'd like to think that an acknowledgements page that acknowledged all people and things invoked here would be nearly endless—the absences and presences in the individual and collective work would spiral out from Ripton, Vermont (where I'm writing this paragraph) to Santa Fe, Oxford, India, Australia, Mars, imagined galaxies, and beyond.

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—Sarah E. Getchell '14

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