

Pelican's Plume

DWELLING





Pelican's Plume

John Paul the Great Catholic University
Student Literary Journal 2023



MISSION STATEMENT

Pelicans, in times of famine, nourish their young with blood from their own breasts. This phenomenon inspired our journal's title; for, just in this way, artists sacrifice themselves to slake the world's constant hunger for beauty. Pelican's Plume seeks to honor such artists and to foster—for them and our readership—a sensitive, discriminating community that values the beautiful. In each issue, you will find poetry, prose, and visual art produced by students and alumni from John Paul the Great Catholic University.

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FROM THE EDITORS

From the beginning, we knew this issue would be special. Our team was intrigued by the concept of dwelling—physical, mental, and spiritual. The term evokes a full range of emotions; to be sure, our featured artists have produced a strange and striking diversity of work. Some pieces made us laugh out loud; others drove us to somber contemplation. As Christians, we felt that the theme was acutely appropriate for this time of year; we just passed Christmas, an annual reminder that God dwelt among us in human form and felt all that we feel. For we all dwell in hope and despair, in agony and ecstasy, in the past and the future. Perhaps some lucky few succeed in dwelling in the present.

And no matter where we are, God abides in us, alive and personal, as long as we abide in Him. He dwells in the darkest corners of our minds, in our moments of ingenuity, in the pleasure of a day well-spent, in the pain of time wasted, in the painter's dry spell, and in the poet's triumph. Successful art does not have to be commentary on this; certainly, we do not believe in imposing meaning upon others' work. Still, after reading through this issue's pieces, we cannot help but recognize our own desires for the transcendent reflected in them. Our best and brightest hope is that, in some small way, this work might draw you nearer to dwelling in the peace that this recognition affords us. Enjoy and thank you so much for reading.

- EDUARDO JÁUREGUI MARTÍNEZ & ANGELA WHALEN CROWELL
Co-Editors-in-Chief

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THE GOODNESS OF CREATION

“

And both delight,
now filled with
love / Before the
lights obscure
the stage.

”

- ANGELA WHALEN CROWELL, "BABY"



GRANDEUR
Evan Mock

FROM ABOVE

Kaylee Harrod

As human beings, God instilled in us the ability to experience wonder, something so elusive, yet all around us. Wonder, as hinted above, is difficult to grasp and define as well as understand. It is that serene contentment one has to simply “be” and enjoy the beauty, most often within nature, that captures the heart and soul. It is a contentment free from worry, free from the bonds of time. It is a pure and simple state of being, the closest connection and attentiveness to God’s creation, as well as the mindset to be satisfied with not knowing all the answers to the questions posed by the mind. It comes upon one so unexpectedly that it is common not to recognize it until later, and it can only truly be understood through personal experience. This wonder caught me by surprise while climbing to the peak of Mount Victor in the Windy Mountain Range on a 21-day backpacking trip.



Imagine climbing up a steep mountain, bathed in cold gray shade, with burning thighs while the morning sun begins to color the sky behind the peak with soft pastel colors. Nothing is desired more than to reach the peak, greet the sun, and feel its warmth. Eventually, that desire is fulfilled, and you climb out of absolute shade into sudden brightness all in a single moment. That sudden light is like the purifying glory of God. It's as if you've been reborn and are privileged to stand in His presence. The light pierces into you, and all the secrets of the heart are unburdened. There is nowhere to hide, and nothing that can be hidden. All of the sudden, the past and the future fade away, as if they never existed. That is how I felt, standing atop a peak gazing at the world around me. Everything was in harmony, and I along with it, simply existing. This feeling, this complete contentment, I later realized was wonder.

As I stood there in awe, such speechless awe, I felt no urge to question why things were as they were, or what caused them to be as such. A peaceful serenity befell me. It was not a complacency to be ignorant, but a contentment to simply enjoy the beauty as it was, right here, right now, in this very moment. Questions could be answered later; for now, I allowed myself to be carried away by the beauty around me.

“YOU CLIMB OUT OF
ABSOLUTE SHADE INTO
SUDDEN BRIGHTNESS...”

The sun was a single orb, shining freely in the ocean sky, free from the pure white clouds that commonly swam in the atmosphere. The sun's rays were free to reign down upon the earth without obstruction, giving the light it provided a striking clarity somehow unfamiliar to me. I saw smaller mountains, yet no less majestic, surrounding pools of blue-green water. These isolated ponds sparkled brilliantly in the sunlight. Turning a slow circle, I observed several other mountains, all snow-tipped, reaching to the sky in the distance. It was barren around them, yet their magnificence did not suffer from want of company. Out in the far distance, dark green pine trees grew proudly, creating a forest that seemed impossibly dense. There were also pines of a shier nature that separated themselves from the rest, offering peaceful clearings for the weary hiker to rest in. A river, flowing from a brilliant dark blue lake, wound its way throughout the woods, seemingly in an attempt to escape. It curved this way and that, until it achieved its goal and rushed into the embracing waves of another lake, merging and becoming one with it. Such a picturesque scene, caught within the embraces of time, yet seemingly timeless in the bond nature and I shared.

As I stood atop that peak, looking as far as the eye could see at the beauty rolling out before me, I was filled with peace. An inner quiet spread over me and all I wanted was to stay in the silence, feel the warm sun on my back, and gaze at the beautiful harmony of nature. I felt one with nature and one with the Creator. It was such a powerful moment that words do not fully describe the feeling. It can only be experienced to truly know it. What I would give to experience such a feeling again! Once tasted, one longs to feel the power, the harmony, the contentment of wonder. These moments simply descend upon the unsuspecting, suddenly and unexpectedly, as if it creeps up on you and captures your heart, leaving you awestruck. It was a scene I had no desire to leave, but the meandering trail below beckoned and called me to new adventures, and the peak had to be left to reach for the endless sky on its own.

SANCTUARY
Aaron Cantu



BABY

Angela Whalen Crowell

Clinging to the hip of her
Whose frame adjusts to bear the weight;
Wriggling wide-eyed wonder wild
Whom she may bless but still berate—

Reaching, roving, why, for what?
Insatiate thirst from birth ordained?
A star below, a star above
Scepters, lovers, more to gain?

Something pulls him from her curve,
Someone beckons from some throne,
'Adam,' sweetly, 'This is yours,'
'Adam—you are not alone.'

Curling fist with members new
Uncurls to touch what has no age,
And both delight, now filled with love
Before the lights obscure the stage.



A PERSONAL STILL LIFE
Ella Skipworth

AT SHOWCASE

Amira Sain

Lying on my back
In the wings of stage left
I stare up at the battens
Black velvet either side
The stage
warm-lit
is a comforting cave
Empty
Silent within
Though music echoes from beyond the walls
The shut green fluted curtain walls
Where outside
An event proceeds
Musically, clappingly, beltingly
Not here
No one else will come here till the end
of Act 1
If I died
Had a heart attack and
Died
 right here
Would anyone find me

Or would I dissipate away into invisibility
And be forever entombed
In this gold-lit cave
With soaring roof
And scarred old floor
Would my soul meld into the walls
Resonate at curtain calls
Entombed as one more memory
In this peaceful cove made of dreams

THE DAYS OF INNOCENCE

Michael Richardson

I remember the days of innocence.
The days seem to move by so smoothly.
The days of innocence were as sweet as honey.
The innocence that I had was beautiful.
How I did not have to worry about the troubles of the world.
How sweet it was to not yet worry
about the troubles of the world!
The days of innocence were like the days full of childish
laughter and wonderful memories.
How wonderful that memory is to me.

How I lived as if I lived in yet another world.
A world that was free of many troubles,
I long for something like this again.
But the days of innocence seem long gone now.
For I am a man and no longer as innocent as I once was.





THESE THINGS STAY

Heidi Ranschaert

There's a magic in the word home.
You see beauty in the stones, moss, air.
The trees are your trees
The streets are territory tread
The water calls your name.
The mind holds it fast,
And memories surface like crests of waves.
These things stay with us.

Even the sky is familiar,
The rays of light warm a deeper part of you.
Shall we ever forget this place?
No, never.
Not even if we wish to.
Not even if we run away.
Home is where the heart is.
Home is where things remain.

THE ILLUSION OF ART: INTERVIEW WITH PAINTER DARREL MCPHERSON

Angela Whalen Crowell

On Saturday, November 4th, 2023, I stepped beneath a quaint, forest-green awning into Darrel McPherson's studio gallery on East Grand Avenue in Escondido, California. The doors were wide open, so the brisk autumn air and boisterous street noise drifted in with me. The gallery's an inviting place, well-lit and papered with paintings; vibrant colors pop against crisp, white walls, and fixed to the ceiling are miniature white lights, directing the attention of visitors to McPherson's extensive work. There are tiny folding tables everywhere and each is the same—functional, unobtrusive, and speckled with oil paint: one holds a coffee maker and an eclectic assembly of mugs; all others serve as workstations. The studio seems small from the outside, but the little room opens to another and extends far back on the right. Crumbled paint tubes and hog hair brushes are scattered everywhere, a full table sitting deep in these recesses. This is no stark, vogue gallery; this is the unpretentious workspace of a master craftsman.

Although our subsequent conversation has been edited for length and ease of reading, you can imagine McPherson rising to greet me, clutching a sage-colored mug of black coffee in one hand. We start talking, and gentle classical music from the back room mingles with our voices.

Crowell:

We talked about this when I first met you—but for the sake of this interview, would you tell me about when you first started painting? Do you remember a specific moment in your life that revealed this calling to you?

McPherson:

Well, I didn't have an "aha" moment, but my earliest memories are of drawing smiley faces, and that was probably at two or three years old. In kindergarten, I remember playing with finger paints, and you could just, like, see a forest—and as I put my fingers in to paint more, the forest was receding. I thought, "That is so cool." [Crowell laughs.] I had good guidance through school, in art. In my regular classes, I was considered a little bit of a troublemaker, so I spent some time in the corner or in the hall. But I found art very creative and inspiring, so I always painted. I learned a lot of my basic process in high school. I had a very good art teacher. I never thought about it being a career or doing it for anything other than pleasure. But, as time evolved, it became more important in my life.

Crowell:

Right, right. Well, you've answered this a little bit, but what was your impetus for painting when you began, and how has that changed over the years? Do you have a specific philosophy of art?

"I FOUND ART VERY
CREATIVE AND INSPIRING,
SO I ALWAYS PAINTED."

McPherson:

Yeah, well, it's kind of convoluted, but I think for anybody aspiring to be in art, knowing art history is a good start. I made a major transition—because I was more of an abstract artist; I could do representational, but I liked to do the surreal and abstract. So, I did have a real focus point. When I was in Memphis around 1988, I was working in an art museum called the Dickson Gallery Gardens, as a security guard. And I was painting on Wednesdays with John Torina, an artist in the mid-South. He's got collections all over the world. And he was basically an Impressionist. I was working at a museum that has the largest repository of Impressionistic art in the mid-South.

And all of a sudden, everything was coming together, where more than representational, [my work] was more expressive and I was able to quickly render ideas, rather than laboriously working on them—which I still do, but that was a transition moment for me. So that's the closest thing to a new direction. And it took me a good fifteen years or more to fully grasp it. And involved in that is landscapes, probably more so than portraiture, although I think it's fine to go into portraiture as well. I found myself a little bit stretched when trying to do too much of a wide variety of things.

“FOR ANYBODY
ASPIRING TO BE IN ART,
KNOWING ART HISTORY
IS A GOOD START.”

Crowell:

Got it. So, you found the need to find a specific niche and fill that niche, instead of just doing lots of different kinds of art.

McPherson:

Yeah. Once you have a reduced area of interest, like landscapes or something like that, you have less dead time and more time that you can actually use to come up with great ideas. Because you're simplifying the process.

Crowell:

Right, and because then you can become an expert in that specific field, whereas when you're thinking about everything—well, you can't be an expert in everything. [Lightly laughs.]

McPherson:

Yeah. You never have the direction. So, that helped me to focus. Today, I'm going a little retro, into my surreal past, with the caveat that all art is more or less surreal. Because it's illusionary. And Degas said art is an illusion; the illusion is the art.

And I think, “Well, what's the difference between painting a still life or landscape, or painting something you imagined?” Because it all goes up into the mind and gets processed, and you're never painting what's actually there. So, photorealism I'm not really enamored with, though I'm always amazed at the workmanship. Because it is from a photograph, so how much of the photograph is involved in photorealism? That's probably most of it.

Crowell:

Right. So, you've been painting for quite a few years now, but you haven't been full-time painting that whole time. Over the years, how have you balanced painting with your other obligations?

McPherson:

I was an environmental inspector on pipelines, and fiberoptic lines, and various jobs in that arena. When we were on the projects, I'd be traveling throughout the country, sometimes in one location for a year or so. And these different landscapes were just beautiful. So, while the other guys were going out to the bar, I would be working on my daily report and then my paintings. And if we ever got a day off, I'd go off on these linear constructions that went on for miles and cut through everything, trees and stuff. When they cut through a tree line, you'd get to see this exposed area of wilderness that'd never been seen before from that angle.

Crowell:

[Hushed.] Ohhh. A new landscape.

McPherson:

Yes, and it's pristine. And right here, you're in dirt, and right there is all the nature and animals. So, I did quite a few paintings along the way that way. I was selling them from Kansas, in frame shops.

Crowell:

So you just slowly fit it in throughout the years?

McPherson:

Well, that's the key. Before I was doing the kind of work I'm doing now, if I was doing ten or twenty paintings a year—not counting sketches, of course—I thought that was pretty good production. But the Impressionists would go to the art dealers with a box of fifty, and try to offer them for whatever they could [in order to] get ahead and pay the rent.

So, I thought to myself, "Fifty paintings? Well, how many paintings does it take to do an art show? Thirty, probably. So, you have thirty paintings in your entire collection—are they suitable to do the show? Probably not." So, the production should be more like a hundred to two hundred paintings a year.

Crowell:

Is that what you produce now?

McPherson:

That's what I strive to produce, yes. So, like the little paint sketch I did this morning in an hour and a half—I might just leave it like that; it is what it is. And when I do a plein air, I'm out there for three or four hours and end up with a painting. So theoretically, if I'm like Van Gogh, I could go out there every day and paint. Except I have this shop in mind. And that's how you can get up to the quantity of paintings that Van Gogh did.

Crowell:

Wow. So, is this what you do full-time now?

McPherson:

Yeah. I do it for as long as I can; I'm not getting wealthy by any means. I do classes, I do restoration—it's good to do everything in the art circle, with the understanding that if you find a very profitable area, you've got to make sure that it doesn't take over what you do. For instance, if I started selling

"IT'S GOOD TO DO
EVERYTHING IN THE
ART CIRCLE."



pictures, picture frames, stuff like that, then I'd be turning into a frame shop. And that's not the direction I want to go. I call that a karma trap. We want to keep our karma going towards a direction, our desires and goodwill.

Crowell:

That makes a lot of sense. So, you did touch on this when you were talking about photorealism, but as far as artistic styles, how would you classify yourself as a painter?

McPherson:

Oh, I call myself an Impressionist, but a lot of my art doesn't look Impressionistic. And some of it does look photorealistic, like my fairy series. And then I have some surrealism, like my piece with the arches and the girl with the hoop. And that's an homage to Paul Delvaux. But I know that if I dwell entirely on landscapes, then that diminishes what I can actually do. Some friends of mine are really well-known landscape painters, including my friend John and Daryl Millard, and... [Reflects a moment.] Don't associate what I say next with those names, okay?

Crowell:

[Laughs.] Okay.

McPherson:

Just because you're a good landscape painter doesn't mean you can paint a portrait. Doesn't mean you can paint figures. And it doesn't mean you can paint cats and dogs. So, in that regard, I consider myself a kind of a... [The rumble of a passing automobile drowns McPherson out.]

Crowell:

A what?

McPherson:

A Generalist. Not like a General, but y'know—an ist. [McPherson and Crowell laugh.]

Crowell:

Well, it's funny—then there's a balance, right? Because you mentioned finding a niche to focus on, yet now—if I'm correct—you're saying that you don't want to get too obsessed with that niche, to the point you become unable to expand.

McPherson:

Yeah, to the point where you lose the ability to do some other basic things in art. But look at the Impressionists. Monet would paint boats, trains, everything around him. He'd paint people having coffee or tea. He'd paint architecture, landscapes, marine landscapes. And so, they didn't really limit themselves. They also didn't go under creeds saying that you have to do a painting, if it's a plein air, go out and you can only do it if it's outside on that day at that moment. They'd take their works back to their studios, and work on them, perfect them.

Although, I admire others—and myself, as well—for doing a painting in one sitting. If I can go out and paint a beautiful landscape, and not have to touch it, and do it in this accelerated time frame, I say, "Whoa, that is so nice. Nothing has been altered." But the Impressionists didn't have any problem with altering. Van Gogh would change the color of his bedroom, he did that in a famous painting. And for really good reasons. You look at a painting, and here you've got, let's say, a green bed and a blue wall and it

just doesn't evoke any excitement. But you change the wall yellow, and all of a sudden, it looks really nice.

So, I tell everybody I paint with: "Ultimately, what you have to come up with is a good painting. However you derive it or do it is up to you, but at the end of the day you want to have a good painting." And a good painting can be graded on a scale. You have master works, great paintings, good paintings, illustrative or acceptable art, and then work by someone who doesn't know what they're doing. But what separates a masterpiece from good paintings? Sometimes we think it's the fact that the artist is famous, but there is a difference between a masterpiece and a good painting. The difference is very subtle, and only the collectors and the trained eye of the artist can see those differences. And if they don't see it, they'd better start looking harder.

"AT THE END OF THE DAY
YOU WANT TO HAVE
A GOOD PAINTING."

Crowell:

What would be some examples of those differences?

McPherson:

Well, try to paint the Mona Lisa. The process that Leonardo Da Vinci used was a process called sfumato, or smudging—no hard lines. And it's just putting tiny little blips of paint down that melt into the surrounding paint, and it's very, very time consuming. It's very akin to pointillism, in a way, but blended. Another thing too—these subtleties, which are obvious to me, of the way this artist paints these beautiful sunsets, the colors, the way the colors are arranged, tell me that the artist knew what they were doing. It evokes this mood. Compare that to another painting of the same type of mountain, the same landscape, and the second one just looks flat. There's no dimension or color. Color has a lot to do with it. Shapes are important.

Crowell:

The composition.

McPherson:

Yeah, and even if the composition is the same—let's say somebody's trying to copy a painting. If they don't know what the subtleties are, they can't capture it. It's hard to explain this visual concept; I'm not sure I have all the vocabulary.

Crowell:

Well, that's funny, that leads me right into my next question—what are some of your favorite artists, as far as the great masters?

McPherson:

Hm. Well, let's see. I still like the surrealists, like Paul Delvaux, a Belgian painter. When I was in high school, I liked Salvador Dalí. Now I think he was kind of a sham. His great paintings were done when he was still in France, or Europe. I like, oh...I'm having a brain block...with the Nighthawks?

Crowell:

Oh—Edward Hopper.

McPherson:

Yeah, Edward Hopper, yes. A Minimalist.



Crowell:

I love Edward Hopper.

McPherson:

Yeah, he's very evocative, mood-wise. I like just about all the Impressionists, some of the classical Renaissance artists...but the modern art is like, you can admire Pollock without wanting to do a Pollock. So when you see a painting and think, "Wow, that is so great. I'd like to do something like that." So if I look at a Pollock, I feel like I'm drunk. I think art has to be contact with the person, with the media. I think it has a metaphysical property and can't just be something generated by the computer and stained with color. There has to be the mind-to-hand coordination, to evoke, to change the canvas into an illusion, that communicates to other people what the artist intended.

"THERE HAS TO BE
THE MIND-TO-HAND
COORDINATION...TO
CHANGE THE CANVAS
INTO AN ILLUSION."

Crowell:

Right, I heard someone say once that great artists are putting a filter on reality; they're creating a lens through which other people can see the world they already see in a different way.

McPherson:

Yeah.

Crowell:

And I think you're right in saying it can never be done in the same way by computers, because we need our human intellect to view something, to process it.

McPherson:

It's very organic, in a way. Constructs can be very interesting to look at, and entertaining, but ultimately, climbing into an igloo with lightbulbs in the inside—you can't argue that it's not art. You know, it's art. [Hesitates.] But then again, so is making a cake. And then you go down the ladder of...

Crowell:

Of, what is art? [McPherson and Crowell laugh.]

McPherson:

So, I'm going to define art primarily, from my point of view, as an illusionary process. And usually...well, you get big three-dimensional sculptures, don't get me wrong...but the art that I do is two-dimensional and has the illusion of three dimensions.

Crowell:

Mmm. [In understanding.] That's true. [Pause.] I want to ask you a question about your technique, going back to what we were talking about earlier. One of the art professors at John Paul says, "Beneath every good painting, there's a good drawing." Do you always start with a drawing, or do you find it helpful to sometimes go right into the painting process?

McPherson:

Oh, I go right into painting, usually. Sometimes, I...I have about six different processes. [Crowell laughs.] One is drawing it out, one is India ink, one charcoal, watercolor pencil, whatever...I don't use graphite, I don't use things that bleed

through...then I have a process with charcoal, water and brush, and that's a lot of fun. And then there's painting with the brush, like Van Gogh. And then, one thing I like to do is put a wash over the canvas—mineral spirits with a little oil, so it doesn't dry too fast—and I go in and start wiping away, removing the color. You can do amazing things with that, very quickly.

It goes back to finger painting. It was the way I would do some of my abstract pieces, when I thought I'd never do representational. But why can't you do one subject one way, and another subject another way? So, the drawing is important—because if you can't visualize it enough to draw it, you won't be able to draw by smudging, you won't be able to draw through paint strokes. You'll just end up at a loss, with a mess. So, yeah, I always say the underbelly, the very backbone to the painting is the drawing itself. But how we draw, it could be with paint, or with a rag, or could be with charcoal.

Crowell:

Oh, that makes sense. I like that a lot. [Pause.] From where do you draw your inspiration? I know you do a lot of paintings that reflect the earth's natural beauty, but is there any literature or anything like that which inspires the work you do?

McPherson:

One book—well, two books. Edgar Payne's *Composition of Outdoor Painting*, if you can find a copy. That's kind of like the classical, California plein air book. And the other book is a little bit more rare. If you can get a copy, it's worth a hundred dollars. Rene Gimpel's *Diary of an Art Dealer*. [McPherson walks over to a small bookcase by the door and selects a large clothbound volume, tan and rather timeworn. He hands it to Crowell.] If you want to know the Impressionists...

Crowell:

Read this book? [Lightly laughs. Examines the book.] Is this part of what inspired you to be an Impressionist?

McPherson:

No, no, this was after the fact. But this book loaded me with lots of information that's not well-known or espoused in popular books about the Impressionists. Now, the ones based on their letters and stuff like that are telling, but he actually goes and talks to the artists like Marie Cassat and Monet, and he has a photographic memory. So when he goes back to write this book, he's writing down the conversations verbatim.

Crowell:

Oh, that's amazing, wow...that must be quite the experience, reading those.

McPherson:

And a lot of the artists he mentions, I'd never heard of before, so it'd make a nice dissertation or something to take one of those obscure artists and try to find out who they were.

Crowell:

What a beautiful idea. I might just have to steal that! [Laughs.] Well, that goes along with this—with respect to painting, what's the best piece of advice you've ever received, and how does that advice affect the way you approach your craft?

McPherson:

In a way, probably the best advice I got was not what I intended. And if I had

gone ahead and painted what I intended, I would have had a great painting. But I was seventeen or sixteen at the time, and I was going to do a nude from my imagination. I was going to do it in the manner of Matisse or Cézanne, and—Cézanne, by the way, was a mentor to Matisse with his preexisting concepts and ideas—so I was going to do everything more symmetrical, and it wasn't supposed to look real. It was just supposed to be symbolic or something like that.

But my teacher says, “Darrel, you need to work off of a real form.” So he got Terry Trammell up on the table, because she was not interested in painting at all. [Crowell laughs.] All fully clothed, of course, but the form was there. And so he straightened me out that the hips are not a circle, but they have a saddle shape with the bone, and so I did pretty well but I didn't get the foreshortening correct, so her legs looked like she had some issue with being able to walk.

But it still was a wonderful painting, and I overheard him talk to my mother—who was aghast that her young boy was painting nudes—and he said, “You know what? I was thinking of maybe buying it myself.” Because he was a collector, and I overheard that and I was like, “Ah!” So, what you have in mind for a great painting, might be a great painting, but something interjects—off to the side—and alters the course of that and ultimately forces you to be a better painter.

Crowell:

Mmm. In what way does that affect you now, do you think?

McPherson:

Well, I pay attention to hip bones. [Crowell laughs and is joined by McPherson.] So, I think that paintings have a natural rhythm and flow and you can take it for that, but also sometimes it's helpful to think outside of the box.

Crowell:

Was there ever any advice or critiquing you ever received, whether it was from a teacher or someone else, that seriously offended you or made you doubt your abilities?

McPherson:

I get offended every once in a while, still, today. I think the self-doubt thing is ubiquitous among artists, because if you don't self-doubt then... why? You look at other artists and say, “Look what he did, look what she painted...how did they do that?” You know, and you even know the process they used and you're not able to replicate it. Well, somebody might be looking at me and saying, “How did he do that?” And they know the process and are unable to replicate it. And there are artists I admire who never perfected certain aspects of their paintings, and I don't think it's necessary. What's important is that you do your art and it stands on its own. And you've got to be careful. By modifying too much, you lose your technique and style.

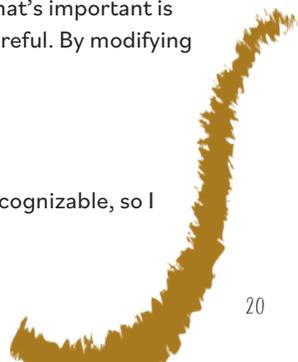
Crowell:

Mmm. So you lose what sets you apart.

McPherson:

I think that's it. [Jokingly.] People tell me that my work is recognizable, so I

“WHAT'S IMPORTANT
IS THAT YOU DO YOUR ART
AND IT STANDS ON ITS OWN.”



strive to make it as unrecognizable as possible going into the future with fairies and stuff like that, and dancing trolls, I think, coming along soon. [McPherson laughs and is joined by Crowell.]

Crowell:

Wow. Well, I'd love it if you could tell me a little bit about that series. Tell me what you're working on right now, and for our readers—just tell us a little about your latest fairy series.

McPherson:

It goes back a long time ago. I always had interests in mythology and archeology and folklore...and so, the thought of the fairies, going along with Tolkien's Lord of the Rings and all that...

Crowell:

Did you read Tolkien?

McPherson:

Oh, sure.

Crowell:

You know, he's a big hit at our school. Everybody loves his books, so that'll go over really well. [Laughs lightly.]

McPherson:

Yeah, yeah...I read all the books, and that was way back, when they first came out in paperback.

Crowell:

Oh, really? Wow. [Pause.] Well, as we wrap up, do you have any final thoughts? Any parting advice you'd like to give to our student readers, many of whom are artists themselves?

McPherson:

Mhm. Well, do whatever it takes to produce art. And by produce, I mean do lots of it. You can do paper, you can have a stack of paper with a thousand drawings or paintings and it doesn't take up any space at all. Only starts taking up space when you start using frames and stretched canvas. You could be using wood panels, maybe.

“DO WHATEVER IT TAKES
TO PRODUCE ART.”

So, you might have to take a day job, you might have to do something else for a living, but there are plenty of famous artists who worked throughout their lives so they could paint. Pizarro is an example of one. Unless you can generate multiple streams of income, you're going to have to do things that are maybe not great. You can find an occupation that you like to do, like maybe being an art historian, maybe at the college level, maybe teaching or something like that. That doesn't mean you can't paint. As an artist, be true to yourself. And in the meantime, find out what sells. [McPherson and Crowell laugh heartily.]

Crowell:

[Warmly.] Well, thank you so much, Mr. McPherson. This has been such a wonderful interview and I'm sure the students will find it very helpful.

McPherson:

Yeah, well, I'm sure you'll have to abbreviate most of that. [MacPherson and Crowell laugh.]



Darrel McPherson is a luminous painter of Southern California. His traditional landscapes articulate forms and colors from nature, particularly in scenes from the Southern California and Arizona regions. He can usually be found painting at his studio gallery, Art Tradition Gallery in Escondido, California.

THE ROTTENNESS OF THE FALL

“

A single glimpse
came to me
before the dark
devoured me.

”

- EDUARDO JÁUREGUI MARTÍNEZ,
“CATATONIC EPIPHANY”

I'M QUALIFIED

Jaden Michael Doyle

Yeah, I'd say I'm qualified. I can't do Tuesday mornings, but that's about it. What hobbies have I been doing recently? Well. It's a little odd. No, not too bad. Here—it'll sound better when I explain it. I've taken to talking to inanimate objects in my house. It, uh, started when I muttered "hello" when I would come back from the store with groceries, but now I feel bad if I don't greet all of my utensils individually. I feel like it both keeps me grounded in normalcy and at the same time shreds any semblance of it out of my psyche. Because of it—the talking to objects, that is—my neighbors spoke to me for the first time since moving into my condo. The building I live in has thin walls, and I bumped into someone in the lobby who said something about how I was talking on the phone for a while last night. I'm pretty sure what they heard was me talking to my cutting board about the Digirno's pizza I was heating up in the microwave, at least I hope it was. If they heard me talking to the lamp next to the couch, I don't know what I'm gonna do. I said some pretty embarrassing personal stuff to him. I hope they didn't hear any of that.

I've stopped watching T.V. because I think that everyone else would get jealous if I spent too much time with her. The last thing I want is to hurt any of my stuffs' feelings, especially the knives—I really don't want to see them mad. I've just been sitting on the couch most of my free time. Then I realized they might get jealous of the couch so I just started to lay down on the floor. I've grown quite close to the floor over the past few weeks, and I think that she's developed feelings for me. I don't really know what to do, since if I mess things up with her I'd have to avoid her. It'd be awkward if I still saw her around. But she's the floor. I can't not use the floor. Maybe I'll move. I was looking at different locations on Zillow, but the door caught me in the middle of it. I asked him not to tell anyone else about it, but I don't think he kept his hinges shut. I need to get some WD-40. I just know he squeaked to the rest of them. There's a palpable difference in the way the furniture doesn't move or speak. I can sense it when I eat cereal. The bowl feels betrayed. The cereal gets soggy faster. I can't start projecting feelings onto the food or I don't know what I'll do with myself. I think I'm already too far gone. I went to look up if this was normal, which I really knew it wasn't, but I looked it up in front of the T.V., who was immediately jealous over the fact that I was using a different screen. So hard to change her mind when she gets an idea in her head. I went to walk over to her but tripped and landed face first on the floor, who I was trying to avoid. Awkward for me, romantic for her.

I cut my losses and just left. I haven't been back there in two days. Been living in my car. I think I'll be exclusive with her. Thinking of eloping. Anyway, that's one of my main hobbies, although I'm not sure how that will improve my performance as Assistant Manager if you hire me at this Chili's. No, I don't know Excel.

IN ANTICIPATION

Joe Donelson

in anticipation of worrying things; myself:
understand that i will not be a light thing
and that i will change too much
and be the same forever
and turn at night
before i fall asleep.
even if you are warm.
even if you are singing softly.



THE SWAMPY SORCERER'S SANCTUARY

Ella Skipworth

WINTER FLOWER

Eduardo Jáuregui Martínez

On the nook of hidden drowsy,
There she is, fine and dainty,
White-blue flakes gown of stars
Of ever-bright Moonlight darts
Piercing thru' daisy-eyes, sea of sighs;
Aching, longing such porcelain hush
Of ephemeral joy, dead by Narcissus rush.

Will-flower ever-sought! Broken paths now remain,
Slit by the enemy, declared today.
Infamy under maggot-green smiles,
Sour, sour, sour rumor Echo his lies,
Bewitched himself, dazed, bee-faced,
In his fulgor gone, in his prime dis-ceased.

Epicurean star of sparrow call.
Summer slides, Autumn marches
To the rounds of a Prussian band;
A thousand requiems, long-stand
To a hollow space, dim-light remark
Its blue-crystal frame, memento dark;
Solstice of overflow pale tears,
Her voice, her call, her song, snowdrop to my ears.

PINK CARPET

Joe Donelson

Pink Carpet:
Today, all shaky and song,
rain and movie,
Gramma called.
I told her about stories, and Aunt Cathy,
she says God doesn't get any anger,
but he does get conversation.
things about being lonesome.
things about her daughter.

Today, things change,
she reads off a poem about God
taking the best ones.
I say,
I remember wheelchairs, wigs, pink carpet.
I remember my best shot at
conversation.

THE BURNING RESOLVE

Lauren D. Fulter

Her older sister had taught her two things: Never go into the woods alone and that anything could be healed. And her entire life, Perpetua had believed both faithfully. Anything can be healed, she repeated to herself as she dragged her fingers across the windowsill.

That's all that remained of the window, of course, if you didn't count the shards of broken glass that were useless against the strong winter breeze. The woods went out as far as her eyes could see. She could see a streak of smoke rising from the trees.

She lifted her hand from the windowsill, her nose scrunching as she saw her fingertips coated in ash. She wiped it off onto her skirt. She was so tired of smoke.

She still had a nasty cough, and no amount of scrubbing would ever get the smell out of the walls. Perpetua would know. She'd spent five days dragging buckets of water from the nearby stream. Her hands were cut up raw, and the red swelling on her palms hadn't gone in days. Her fingers could hardly close, and the poorly wrapped bandaging probably didn't help. That was always Amma's job. She always insisted anyone could heal. Her older sister knew ointments and bandaging as well as the beads of her rosary.

Which was nowhere to be found. Perpetua had checked. She'd checked everything.

She turned to face the one-room cottage. The table and chairs that they'd so proudly purchased after saving their pounds from egg sales all spring had been crushed, splintered into unsalvageable pieces. The little fireplace that had cooked years of meals had been smashed and burned beyond repair. All that survived was the cauldron wedged underneath the rubble.

She could hardly bring her eyes to the opposite wall where their bed had once stood. She'd spent late nights watching Amma stitch together each square of the quilt. Of course, the blanket had gone first in the fire, along with Amma's collection of books that had once lined the walls—the now barren, torched shelves.

Anything can be healed.

But no matter how much Perpetua had swept and scrubbed and tried to cut the wooden slabs to patch the walls, the house still smelled like smoke. Nothing could be brought back from the fire. Not even Amma.

Perpetua picked up her bag by the doorframe, slinging it over her shoulder. She stepped out past the curtain she'd been using to replace the door. She took one glance back over her shoulder to her home. No, it wasn't home any longer.

There was no home if there was no Amma.

She would find the people who had done this. She tightened her grip on her bag, checking for the knife on her belt. There was no turning back now. She took a deep breath, whispering under her breath. "I'm sorry, Amma."

She turned away from their dwelling one last time and headed for the woods.



RAVEN
Stephanie Franco

CATATONIC EPIPHANY

Eduardo Jáuregui Martínez

My surroundings were dusted and cluttered by shadows.

I walked slowly into this forgotten realm, if it was ever known in the first place; a relic from a time long-passed when midnight seemed to thrall over us. To most, those tales may seem like the entrance to a land akin to fairytales and merry folk songs, equally mystical and far away, yet close in a constant, almost endearing reality, part and parcel of what it meant to be sons and daughters of Noctubria the old. If only they remained that way, miscellaneous guests of fairy courts and proverbial obstacles of unnamed heroes' glories.

But I knew that was not to be the case any longer.

The city had been in a frenzy recently, dark rumors eventually reaching the all-hearing ears of the Tribunal, answers to be searched and extracted, no matter the cost. The lamphrae, scions

“THE CITY HAD BEEN IN A
FRENZY RECENTLY..”

of the night, were getting restless in their dark alleys of civilization, their catacombs whispering with suspicion in the plight of dusk. It was my duty, then, as judicial executor of the Tribunal, to squash those murmurs of woe before they could threaten our everyday peace.

Forward I went, into the old passageways and tunnels of the old city, no crook to leave unchecked, no shadow to not be dispelled by the light.

And yet, my search had come empty, nothing but the faint echoes of time in the long hallways of the undercity. Until one voice appeared, at first but a mumble, easily compared to the squeal of the rats, arose in force, in vigor, in contempt.

“All souls hail the Night, for he comes this way, for he devours in unquenched thirst.”

My lamplight posed to the origin of such words, a crooked creature, clothed in a mess of rags, hidden underneath the fabric, his form not easily distinguishable.

“Stop right there!” I said, directing my lamp toward him. “This area is sealed, so explain your business, and do it fast.”

The thing jumped on his feet—a vague human form revealed. His face was grimly pale, the blue lines of veins distinguished in mirror clarity. But what most stood out to me was his arm, dragged along the ground in rigid motions, gangrenous black, and still, by any sorcery, still pulsating. Something wasn't right with him.

“Soon enough, you too will bow to him.”

The parody of a man jumped me, his dilapidated arm pointing at my throat, not a sign of pain in his face.

I reacted faster.

Grabbing my short sword from its sheath, one quick slash followed by the howling cry of the now handless brute. It wasn't a cry of fear or pain, but of hate, now unable to concretize. He stood back, hissing, but not attacking again, his options limited. And then, a stiff grin appeared in his mouth, a new diabolical idea coming to his mind.

He jumped again, this time into the dark galleries of the tunnels yet explored, a loud laugh resounding through the walls.

It was obviously a trap. I could fall back into the surface and report to the Tribunal the mysterious tidings creeping under their noses, and further teams would be sent to deal

with the abomination. But I couldn't bear to leave things this way, the cryptic words of that thing resounding in my mind. They could well be the product of insanity, but I couldn't convince myself of that. Dark tidings were happening in the city, and this wasn't the time to cower before the first obstacle in the way.

So I ran after the creature, assured that answers were waiting for me on the other side. It was getting harder to breathe the air down there, with its crone relics from eons immemorial. The galleries became confused, my sense of navigation lost in the rush, the map in my hands a blurred mess.

This way.

An insistent whisper in my head seemed to say, not recognizing in its deep tones my own internal voice, but that of a stranger. I tried to avoid its call, but abandoned myself to it, following the directions demanded by the ever constant, ever louder whisper now more a yell, a scream, erupting from my sides, pouring its rough words until—

Crush!

The voice dissipated, conscious as I now was of the gray spot squeezing under my foot. It was a rat, or what remained of it.

Before me, stone gates elevated from side to side, no sidetrack on view, a cold invitation to enter into them, or make all my march folly. "Better force my way out," or so was my plan, weapon at the ready on my right hand. The door, already slightly open, ceded without much force, bidding me welcome inside. I could swear, when crossing to the inside of the compound, a mocking laughter, familiar by now, ringing in my ears.

The gallery was damp and cold. Throughout it, dim lights of a bluish hue prevented the room from being engulfed into total darkness. A shudder arose from my spine as an air current passed by, whispering, spiriting away, in its invisible steps. The entire tunnel before me was cold, like the rare rain in a winter, but this deep into the undercity, something was different. An obsessive chill, hitting through my body as if I was naked; a consistent, unescapable whirlwind of despair, not physical in any way. It was not the sensation when venturing outside when snow falls, with the comfort that comes when you just put on a coat to warm you up. There was no such hope here.

A block of marble came to sight, protruding from the floor in a large, rectangular symmetry. Engraved in its frame, nightmarish scenes were partially conserved. Chimeric fiends, more beasts than men, lording over them a tall figure in the center, its limbs elongated but not frail, its face lost forever by time.

I moved away from the sarcophagus and into the other side of the galley. I tried to move away. Something didn't let me go. A red gaze pierced through my soul, ravaging me like a locust swarm. I looked around, a desperate search for the one responsible, ready to find the same ghoul from before, his trap succeeding, his vengeance at hand.

"Did you think I would let you go that easily?"

Night himself had awoken, never to rescind his throne. His voice rang through the entire place, a Necropolis—too late understood. The shadows engulfed the derelict walls, the bare vestiges of light extinguished without remorse. A single glimpse came to me before the dark devoured me. An animal semblant, savage, grotesque in its forms and proportions, more like an insect than a man. A monster from a past better erased.

Only the legends could save us now.

"THIS WASN'T THE TIME TO
COVER BEFORE THE FIRST
OBSTACLE IN THE WAY."





JAILBIRDS
Margaret Alvine

LITTLES

Joe Donelson

I dream of your small, your golden,
your little being, little hands and cheeks and
I am too much older,
I cannot help it,
time has become a Midwestern goodbye,
slipping away and out the door,
but I think of you.

Of course,
in my head I've ruined everything already,
I've been destructive or missing
from the most pivotal anything's of
your life, and
left you wilting on the balcony ledge.

Of course,
I am wasting every second out here,
and I will come back,
and you will have dealt with things
I was to keep you from.
And suddenly you will be too much like me.
Too sad, broken,
familiar with all the wrong things,
I will be back and
watching you limp,
when I could have saved you from it,
and of course,
you will say that I've been good to you,
and I will be able to count only the ways
I haven't
with all the freckles on your cheeks,
and up and down your arms,
but at least I will hold your hand
before I leave the way I must;
slipping away and out the door.

THE STRUGGLE FOR TRANSCENDENCE

“

Your dark night
is gone,
let the past be.

”

- HEIDI RANSCHAERT, "GOLDEN"

GOLDEN

Heidi Ranschaert

The light. The light!

Do you not see it?

Look up, look out, wipe away the tears that blind you.

There, not far off, glinting gold.

It glows through the trees, now rimmed with fog.

You cannot miss it, you have only to look.

There!

A fire, a passion, it's burning just for you.

Do you not see it?

Lift your head, stand, it won't be long now.

The King, your lover—he is waiting for you.

And ages upon end he would wait.

For you are his love.

Forget yourself, come, run. Fall at his feet.

Your dark night is gone, let the past be.

Let go.

Breathe.

He is yours, and you are his.

HOME

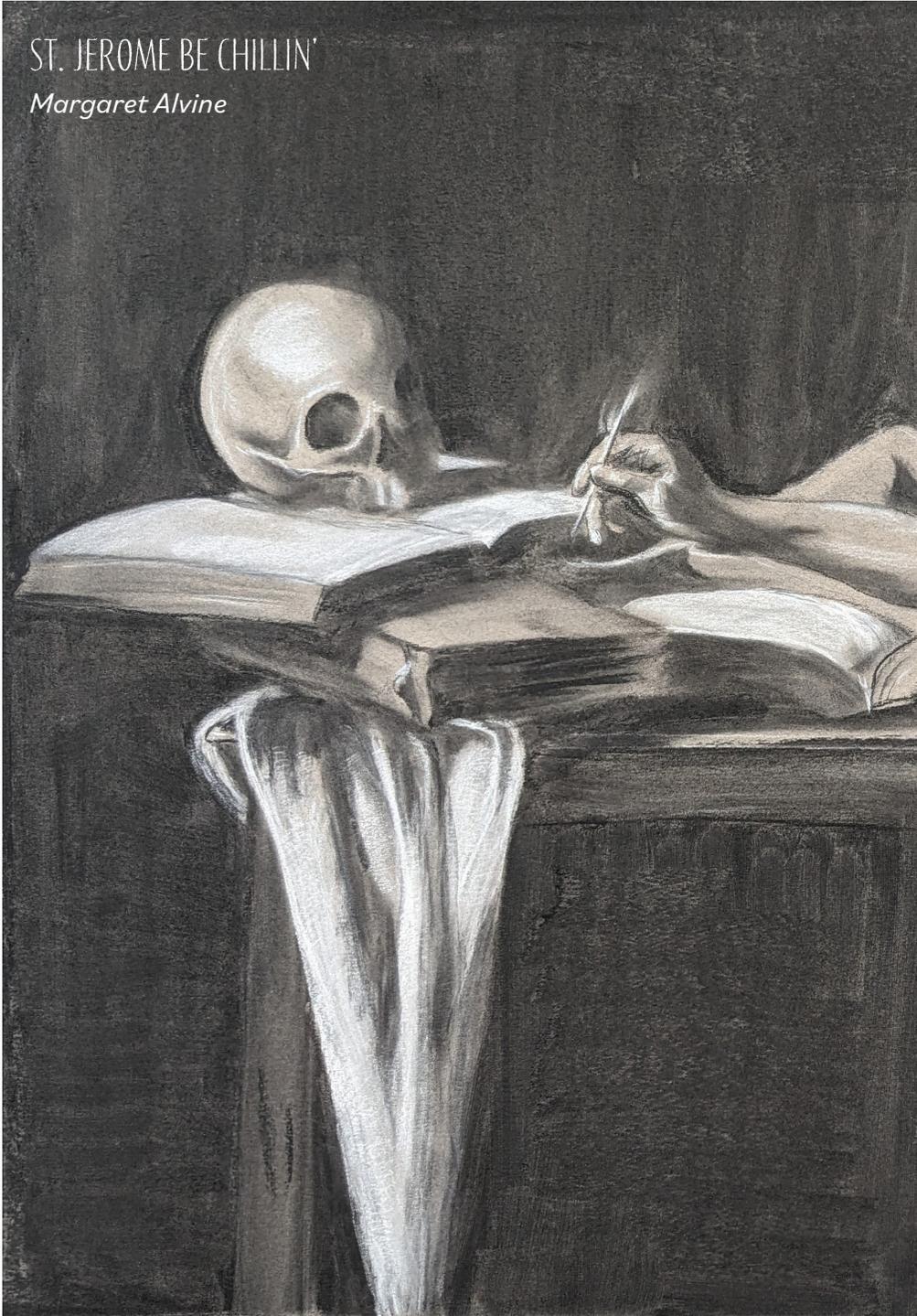
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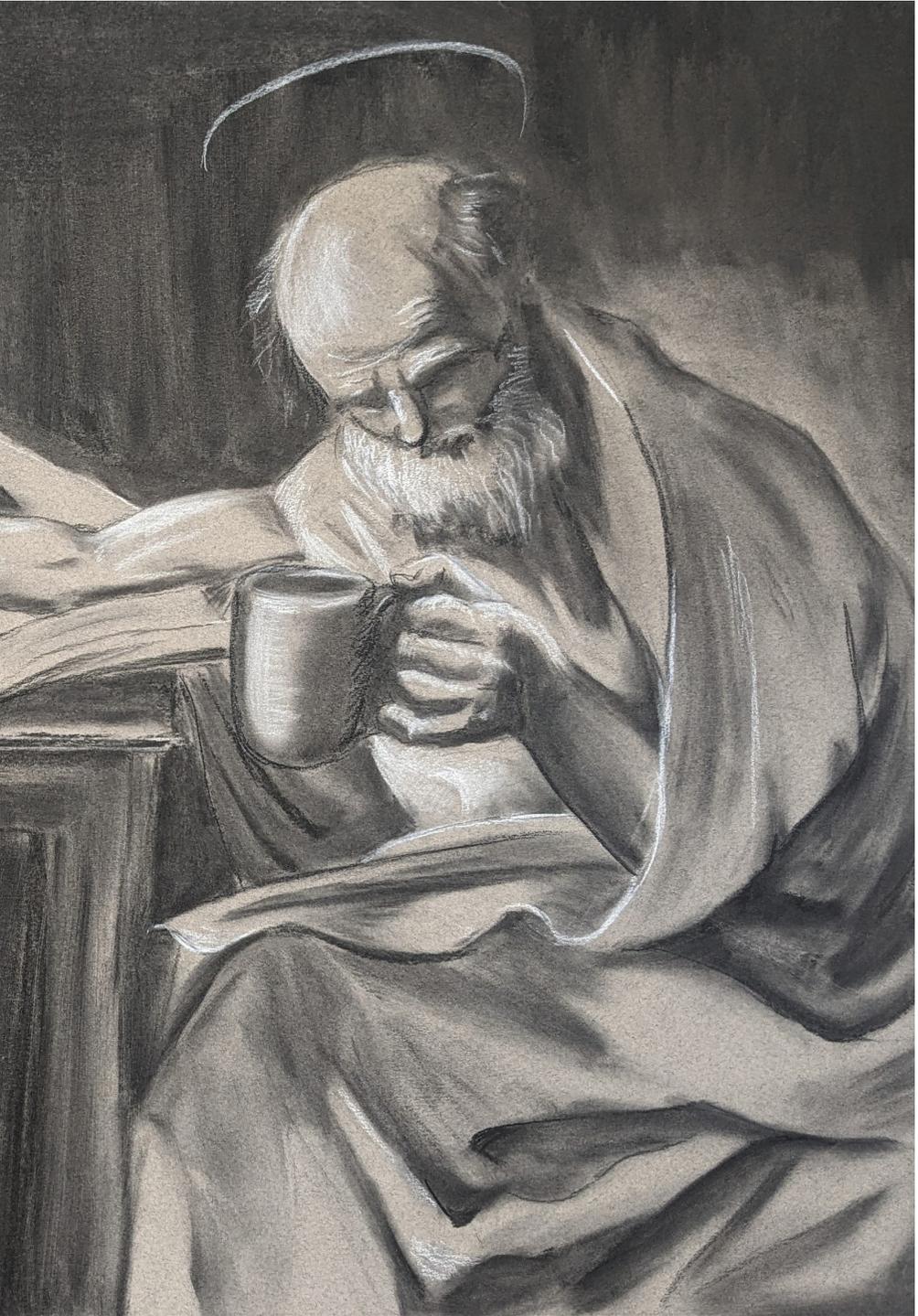




ST. JEROME BE CHILLIN'

Margaret Alvine





CO-SUFFERING TO TRANSCENDENCE

Sophia Kramer

Everyone reacts differently to suffering and pain. Some try to explain it away, some take their suffering out on others, some blame themselves or an unknown force. Whatever reaction, almost everyone who suffers wonders: Why is this happening to me? Why does suffering exist? This is precisely what main characters Greg Gaines and Rachel Kushner ask in Alfonso Gomez-Rejon's 2015 film *Me and Earl and the Dying Girl*. Although the characters resist it at first, they eventually each choose to walk together through their suffering—rather than walking alone.

In this story, Greg suffers from flawed beliefs about himself and the reality of life while Rachel is suffering from rapidly progressing leukemia. While neither of them realizes it, Greg and Rachel co-suffer together throughout the film. This idea of co-suffering, as articulated by Monsignor Lorenzo Albacete, is an essential part of human relationships and both affects and is affected by our view of the afterlife. In the film, co-suffering with Rachel challenges Greg's core beliefs about the meaning of life and the essential question of human transcendence, offering Greg the ability to heal and to live a life of hope in the midst of suffering and death.

“ALMOST EVERYONE WHO
SUFFERS WONDERS:
WHY IS THIS HAPPENING?”

Me and Earl and the Dying Girl is adapted from Jesse Andrews novel of the same name. The story is a reflection on the hard reality of accepting death, especially at a young age. Andrews wanted to write a story that showed the complex and often messy process of accepting death rather than the tidy stories often portrayed in the media. In an interview with *Filmmaker Magazine*, Andrews says, “There’s all this radiant sunshine-y wisdom that comes from this tragedy. I wanted to make something that paid a little more attention to the difficulty and ambiguity of it.”¹ At the end of the film, Greg does not get an answer to his questions; what he does receive, however, is a new perspective that launches him toward discovering his identity as a human with the capacity for transcendence.

In watching the film, the viewer understands early on that Greg has severe self-esteem issues, referring to himself as, “terminally awkward...” and having “a face like a little groundhog” (Rejon 00:23:55). Greg belittles himself and does not seem to acknowledge his worth as a person. He is afraid of rejection, which leads him to refrain from authentic relationships with others. For example, at the beginning of the film, Greg’s refusal to have relationships based on genuine, loving care for the other can be seen in his referring to his friend Earl as a “co-worker” instead of as a friend (Rejon 00:16:10). The closest relationship Greg chooses to have is based on this productive “co-worker” partnership in film-making; the only other friendship the audience sees him develop among his peers happens because his mom essentially forces him into

¹ Macaulay, Scott. “I’ll Come Running: Alfonso Gomez-Rejon and Jesse Andrews on *Me and Earl and the Dying Girl*.” *Filmmaker/Quarterly Magazine*, The Gotham Film & Media Institute, 28 Apr. 2015, filmmakermagazine.com. Accessed 17 July 2023.

it. Put simply, Greg is afraid to become friends with someone on the basis of genuine companionship because he is scared of rejection.

Focusing his relationship with Earl solely on this external exchange of benefits is a coping mechanism for Greg. This makes the friendship less personal: If Earl rejects Greg, then Greg can figure that he's not rejected for who he is, but rather for not keeping up his end of the deal in their film-making venture. This way of thinking ensures that Greg will never have to face the pain of being rejected for who he is. By trying to avoid one kind of suffering, Greg may be ensuring that he will not fully experience real connectedness, which social scientists (among others) point out is essential for human well-being.² To the viewer, it seems that Greg will suffer mentally and also possibly physically if he continues to go down the hole of self-isolation—without allowing himself to be touched, so to speak.

Not only is Greg lacking in authentic relationships, but he also believes that life is “confusing and possibly meaningless,” leading him into an existential dread. Albacete describes spiritual pain as “lacking in our sense of self.”³ (32). Greg does not realize his identity as a human being capable of transcendence. It is difficult for Greg to find meaning in the face of inevitable death. This belief that life has no meaning further supports Greg's decision to stay away from relationships because if they do end up hurting him, the pain will have been needless as the relationship meant nothing in the grand scheme of life.

When they first meet, Rachel and Greg are suffering in two different ways. Rachel's suffering starts out as more of a physical suffering. At the start of the film, Rachel is diagnosed with Acute Myelogenous Leukemia, a rare cancer affecting the blood and or bone-marrow. Throughout the film, Rachel's physical health declines rapidly. Rachel, however, did not seem to be suffering much in terms of her spiritual life. She had friends, loved ones, a positive outlook on life, and the ability to find value in the small and often overlooked things. While Greg is suffering spiritually and doing fine physically, Rachel seems to be thriving spiritually while suffering physically. Of course, this physical suffering will soon lead to Rachel's spiritual suffering much like how Greg's spiritual illness will eventually impact his physical well-being.

During the course of their friendship, Greg and Rachel experience co-suffering together. Albacete says, “To co-suffer is to question why, to be a companion, and to walk together towards transcendence.”⁴ Three phrases in this quote—“to question why,” “to be a companion,” and “to walk together”—are key to helping us unpack the idea of co-suffering. When we question why there is suffering, we are acknowledging something is not as it should be and that there is a higher reasoning which helps us to deal with the reality of suffering.⁵ To

“TO CO-SUFFER IS... TO
WALK TOGETHER TOWARD
TRANSCENDENCE.”

co-suffer does not mean to share in the exact afflictions of the suffering person, but it

2 Seppala, Emma, et al. “Social Connection and Compassion: Important Predictors of Health and Well-Being.” *Social Research*, vol. 80, no. 2, 2013, p. 411-30. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24385608>. Accessed 1 Aug. 2023. p. 420.

3 Albacete, Lorenzo. “*Cry of the Heart: On the Meaning of Suffering*.” Forward by Cardinal Sean O'Malley, Slant Books, 2023. p. 33

4 Ibid., p. 6.

5 Ibid., p. 33.

is “to share in the existential questioning of the sufferer.”⁶ Greg does this by indirectly questioning the meaning of Rachel’s suffering. When Rachel tells Greg that she is going to stop chemotherapy and essentially accept her nearness to death, Greg becomes angry with her for giving up. He believes that if she gives up, it will confirm his beliefs that suffering and life are meaningless, because in the end, her suffering has gotten her “nowhere” and her existence ceases with her death. Greg does not understand why Rachel is going through this or how it means anything at all. Greg, like so many people, asks why his friend’s suffering exists.

To co-suffer and to ask why, one must be a companion. Throughout Rachel’s illness, Greg is simply “there” for her. He has no way of relieving her pain, and he has no words of consolation: All he can do is accompany her as she deals with her leukemia and treatment. A few weeks into her illness, Rachel is upset because she thinks she is ugly due to her hair falling out and tells Greg that it is hard when people come to visit her. She says, “I’m ugly, Greg! I’m so ugly. Everyone feels like they have to lie to me and no one realizes how insulting that is. Everyone thinks they’re helping, and they’re not” (Rejon 00:42:04). Greg tries to console her, but then stops and instead offers her a new film of his to watch. He does not try to convince her that she is not ugly; he does not offer her advice or cliché wisdom. He just lets her talk about her struggles and offers to stay with her a while longer before he goes to make another film. Regarding this scene, educator and writer Garry Westmore states, “Suddenly, Greg’s shortcomings and inexperience as a friend become apparent: he resorts to jokes when Rachel is in tears following the loss of her hair, and he is quick to depart, unsure as to what to say and how to help.”⁷ According to Albacete’s idea of co-suffering, what becomes evident is that even Greg’s poor attempts or seeming failures at being a friend lift Rachel’s spirits more than any of the people who have tried to visit her before because he is, in fact, learning to walk with her little by little.

Albacete says we do “violence to the human heart,” if we try to extinguish this cry of anguish in the face of suffering. In fact, a 2015 study on what Jaehee Yi, et al, calls “posttraumatic growth” (as opposed to posttraumatic stress) of cancer survivors shows that empathetic listening, validation, and acceptance promotes psychological growth.⁸ Greg is one of the two people in the film who does not try to explain away Rachel’s suffering because he acknowledges that he does not have an answer. Through this companionship, however imperfect, Greg co-suffers with Rachel.

In turn, Rachel co-suffers with Greg in his existential questioning of life and his inability to see his own value. According to Albacete, “Co-suffering affirms the wounded personal identity of the sufferer through our willingness to expose our identity to the questioning pro-

⁶ Ibid., p. 42.

⁷ Westmore, Garry. “No Man Is an Island: Finding Friendship in *Me and Earl and the Dying Girl*,” *Screen Education/Quarterly Journal, Australian Teachers of Media*, no. 83, pp. 42-47, Spring 2016. Accessed 10 Jul. 2023, p. 45.

⁸ Jaehee Yi, et al. “Posttraumatic Growth Outcomes and Their Correlates Among Young Adult Survivors of Childhood Cancer.” *Journal of Pediatric Psychology*, v. 40, n. 9, pp. 981-991, Society of Pediatric Psychology, 18 Aug. 2015, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jpepsy/jsv075>. Accessed 31 Jul. 2023.

“HE IS, IN FACT,
LEARNING TO
WALK WITH HER
LITTLE BY LITTLE.”

voked by the sufferer's pain."⁹ Rachel does not offer Greg solutions or cliché advice for his struggles. Rather, she actively tries to pull him out of himself, suggesting that he join her circle of friends at lunch the next day instead of sitting secluded in his favorite teacher's office. Later, while Greg visits Rachel in the hospital, she helps him see his real potential and convinces him to apply to a few colleges. Although the viewers do not know it yet, Rachel is slowly coming to the realization that she will not be able to go to college. Despite this, she helps Greg see opportunities available to him and acknowledge that fear and doubt are what hold him back from embracing them. She never claims to have the answers to his existential questions, but she encourages him to keep looking and not give up just because things seem hopeless. This asking is co-suffering: "Suffering is not a problem to be solved, but a mystery to be lived."¹⁰ Rachel's genuine reaching out in friendship is the opportunity for Greg to delve deeper into the meaning of suffering.

This brings us to a third element that pertains to co-suffering, and that is the idea that suffering leads us to the reality of the transcendent, according to Alpacete: "Death reveals to us the existence of ultimate meaning."¹¹ If Greg did not experience the death of a loved one so early in life, he might continue to believe that life has no other meaning. He does not want to look for ultimate meaning, but to encounter Rachel's death is to encounter this ultimate meaning. When Greg is angry with Rachel for wanting to stop chemotherapy, his anger seems to stem from fear—of what? Perhaps of discovering that life goes beyond this world or that his own life will continue even after the death of his friend. By facing someone else's death, we face our own, and perhaps this is why Greg has avoided relationships. Greg has been so afraid of his own death that he did not want to experience someone else's. But by denying death, we make life mean whatever we want, and in doing so, it ends up meaning nothing. When Greg finally accepts Rachel's inevitable death, he is able to see that, because the death of a loved one is painful to experience, there is meaning in engaging more deeply in the life of a friend.

"BY FACING SOMEONE
ELSE'S DEATH,
WE FACE OUR OWN."

The film depicts how Greg's identity and beliefs are wholly challenged by his relationship with Rachel. When prompted by his mother, he asks Rachel to hang out with him as a favor to get his mom off his back. However, a one-time hang out turns into another, and Greg quickly finds himself on a mission to cheer Rachel up in spite of her illness. This act of kindness, however forced at first, challenges Greg, who has tried to avoid suffering and difficulty in relationships. It is ironic that only by experiencing more suffering does Greg begin to learn how to come to terms with it, even if he doesn't understand what it means.

Enter Mr. McCarthy—Greg's history teacher and mentor. After getting into detrimental fights with both Rachel and Earl, Greg finds himself in Mr. McCarthy's office in a low state of mind. It is here that Mr. McCarthy plants a seed in Greg's mind: "...[E]ven after somebody dies you can still keep learning about them." Interestingly,

⁹ Alpacete, *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

this idea of abstract existence after death has never occurred to Greg. At first, he does not take it well and claims that his teacher is trying to turn his situation into a lesson. He does not realize yet that Mr. McCarthy has opened up the doors of belief in the possibility of transcendence; the possibility that humans cease to have meaning upon their death, that humans may surpass the physical world. The reality of Heaven aside, just the fact that people's lives continue to affect us after they die suggests a deeper meaning than our knowing them by their physical presence. Although not expressed fully in the film, this idea of someone's story continuing to unfold after death suggests transcendence. The fact that we suffer and die, that we question why and keep searching for answers, gives us reason to believe that death is not the end of our relationships and that they extend beyond our life on earth. Despite the temporary separation death imposes, many people continue to be influenced by and deeply connected to their beloved dead.

"DEATH IS NOT
THE END OF OUR
RELATIONSHIPS."

While Rachel is still living, and after their terrible fight, Greg goes to reconcile with her in the hospital. He finally shows Rachel the film he has been making for her, even though he says it is "not exactly what I wanted to say to you..." (Rejon 01:24:53). Letting go of his perfectionism

and his need to control how other people perceive him, he shows that he trusts Rachel and is finally willing to let her see him—and he does this of his own free will. Until this point, Greg's actions have all been prompted by other people's desires: His mom wanted him to befriend Rachel; Earl was the one who gave Rachel their films to watch; and Greg's love interest, Madison, was the one who told Greg to make a film for Rachel. But now, Greg finally chooses to show Rachel his unfinished film because he wants to. No one tells him to, no one pressures or coerces him. Greg freely chooses to let himself be vulnerable for Rachel. Shortly after he's made this decision, Rachel passes away.

What is significant is that Greg has finally entered into a relationship with Rachel that is not based on mutual benefits but rather on self-giving love. This relationship helps him come face to face with the reality of death, looking at his fear that life is possibly meaningless as well as his bigger fear that life does indeed have meaning. A life full of meaning is scary because it means we have to live with purpose. Accepting this belief means that Greg has to be responsible for his life and his decisions. Rachel is not shown as having all the answers about life's purpose, but we see her encouraging Greg to take some direction in his life. She encourages him to apply for college and continue making films for others instead of continuing with the lonely goal of self-isolation. She encourages him to keep asking why because she has some sense that he is capable of finding answers.

Going back to the idea of our relationships continuing on after death, Greg experiences this first hand at the end of the film. While reflecting on the time he spent making the film for Rachel, Greg says he spent zero time working on school (Gomez-Rejon, 01:00:49). The result is that Greg's college acceptance is revoked. After Rachel's death, her mother gives Greg a letter from Rachel. In the letter, Rachel explains that she sent the university a letter explaining why Greg's grades dropped and that they would be wrong to overlook this matter. After reading the letter, Greg discovers hidden treasures around Rachel's bedroom. He realizes how little he knew about Rachel, but that

her death is actually an invitation to learn about her and to continue being impacted by her life. The lesson he learned from his teacher becomes tangible as Greg slowly comes to realize the reality of human transcendence, the possibility of life beyond death.

Even though Greg loves and loses Rachel, in the end Greg gains an outlook that he carries into the rest of his life. This reading of the film is accessible to most viewers and is also pointed out in an academic review of *Me, Earl, and the Dying Girl* by Skjerning and Clemmensen.¹² In Albacete's terms, Greg has co-suffered with Rachel, opening up to her in friendship, and is—we hope and expect—able to move beyond self-loathing and making films that he never watches with anyone besides his “co-worker” Earl.

The insight Greg gains allows him to live in hope that life has meaning and that its meaning goes even beyond death; he no longer has to walk through life avoiding relationships and the pain that comes with being attached to others. With this insight Greg has gained through co-suffering with Rachel, he can finally enjoy the goodness of relationships while accepting the pain and suffering that comes with it. For us, their story gives no definitive answers to our personal trials, but rather offers us an invitation to ask why suffering occurs—especially when it happens to our loved ones—and to explore the possibility of transcendence. If we are like Greg, unduly accepting this invitation, we might more deeply question life's meaning and seek ways to answer, in our own lives, how that essential question leads us into the reality of transcendence.

¹² Skjerning, Halfdan, and Louise Clemmensen. “Squirrels With Scissors.” *PsycCRITIQUES*, v. 61, n. 29, American Psychological Association, Feb. 2016, DOI: 10.1037/a0040029. Accessed on 31 Jul. 2023.



COME CLOSE

Trinity Mette

Come close my child, do not wander far.
Be near to me, as I draw near to you.
I pray you have strength, for the world will beat you down.
More than you may ever realize.
But for the time being, take a moment to rest.
Take a breath, my child, and inhale my breath of life.
Be filled with my strength, my courage, my spirit.
Be perfected in me, that you may find peace.
Take courage, my child, and trust.
For I will never give you more than you can handle.
Though I will push you, my child, so that you will become
greater than what you could have ever imagined.

Still.. I hope for you.
I hope that you have the strength to rely on me.
I hope you have the faith to trust in times of doubt.
I only wait for those few small words, the quietest whisper, the
humblest invitation. Just say the words,
and I will fill you with strength.
Say the words, and I will be your comforter in times of darkness.
Say the words and I will guide you, lead you,
into my loving embrace.

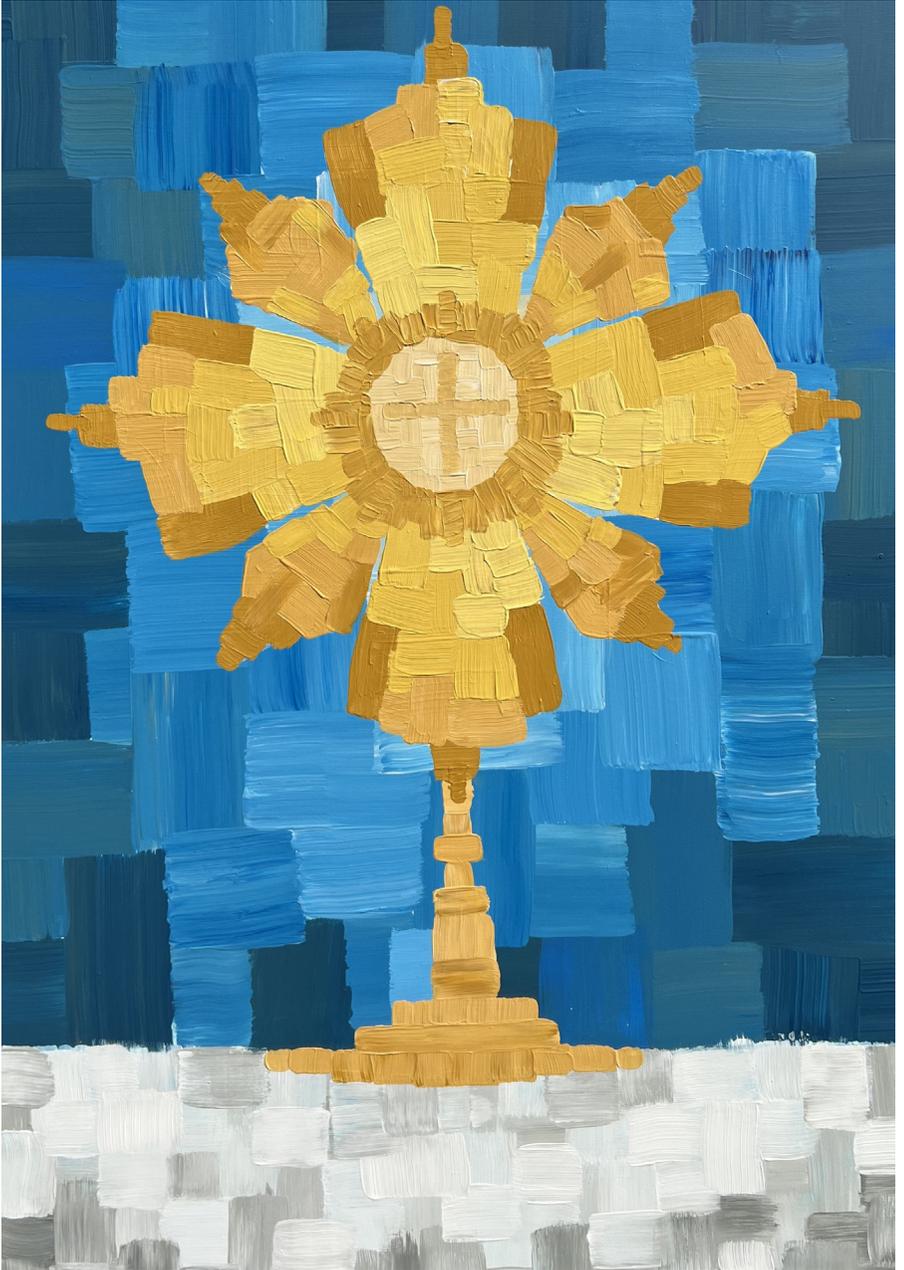
Take comfort my child, for the war will soon end.
I make your bed in my heavenly kingdom,
that you may one day soon find rest.

I prepare your room, that you may one day live in comfort.
For the time being, rely on my strength.

I am near to you, though you are far from me.
I am strong, though you are weak.
I am your victor, though you feel defeated.
My sweet little child, have you any reason to fear?
Fear not, for I have conquered the world.
There is nothing that could prevent you from me, except yourself.
If you grant me the smallest invitation, I will not hesitate.
I will not shrivel in fear. I will not ponder or question.
I long for you more than words could possibly describe.

Though you cannot see me, I promise I am here.
Though you cannot hear me, I promise I am listening.
Though you cannot feel me, I promise I am near.
My child, I implore you, have faith.
And if you lack the faith to stand, then please, let me pick you up.
For I know you well.
I know your weakness and your strength.
I know your courage and your deficiencies.
I am not asking you to bear strength on your own accord, but
instead allow me to be your strength.

I love you, my child. I am here.



EUCCHARISTIC VISION

Emily Robeson

ONE CORINTHIANS 6:19

Audrey Daniels

In receiving Him unto this temple, He
Overwhelmed my senses.
He helped me to see,
A tiny piece
of the delight He finds in me.



HOLY GROUND
Delaney Rayner

UNDER THE FISHERMAN'S HUT

Donald Conklin

On the western shore of Japan, a salt-stained hut sat upon an outcropping of black rock, buffeted by the sea. The planks that made up its walls had been worn down, leaving large gaps between them. Through the cracks, an assortment of nets and poles could be seen covering the walls. The hut was compact, with little other than a small kitchen and a tattered old cot, both of which had fallen apart after years of abuse at the hands of the sea.

The landscape surrounding the hut was a mess of jagged rock, lined up rank and file along the shore, battling the sea and its ruthless rhythm. Each churn and crash echoed throughout the rolling hills whose shadow engulfed the little shack. The foundations of other little houses were scattered around the hut, the rubble surrounding them smoothed over by the sea's endless onslaught. Some time long ago, a fishing village stood on the jagged shore, but now the only thing that drew breath there was the wind.

It was in that salt-stained hut, through a small trap door in the rough-hewn floorboards, where Father Adrian and Brother Castor were hiding. The two Jesuits had arrived a little more than a year earlier by way of a Dutch trading vessel, and after some months within the underground Christian communities in Nagasaki, they had been discovered. Their little congregation of Japanese Christians tried to keep Father Adrian and Brother Castor hidden close by, but eventually, under cover of night, the faithful had secreted the clergy away and brought them to the abandoned fishing village of Arashi. The clergymen bid their farewell and assured their friends that they would return to Nagasaki as soon as the danger had passed.

• • •

The chamber under the hut was walled with wet black rock that reminded Father Adrian of the dark, cramped crypts he had explored underneath his home parish as a boy. Now this was his parish and crypt; he sat with his back resting against one of the four wooden beams that sat snugly in the four corners. One of his hands clasped his waterlogged missal, and the other one ran his fingers—with nails chewed to the quick—over his rosary beads. His dark eyes looked forward at something unseen as he recited his prayer to God. Above him, a steady, salty drip leaked through the floorboards; the odd drop hit his head and ran into his eyes, and he tried to pay it no mind.

“NOW THIS WAS
HIS PARISH
AND CRYPT...”

In another corner, sprawled in despair, was Brother Castor. Ravaged crab parts lay strewn about his feet. Mixed in was a missal and rosary, both in irreversible states of disrepair. His chin sat on his chest; every few moments, he lifted his head, swaying it back and forth indecisively before snapping it back and striking the wooden beam behind him—thud!

Thud, thud! Each knock shook the frail hut. The ringed handle of the trap

door jangled and rang. Originally, Father Adrian had thought the incessant crashing of the waves would drive him mad, but they now offered respite from Brother Castor's thudding.

"How long has it been? I want to see the sun," Brother Castor whined. Father Adrian gave no response, his fingers busy with the rosary. He had no answer. In

the first days of their hiding—their imprisonment—he had attempted to keep track of the time passed. However, even Father Adrian eventually lost track as time smeared and stretched forward.

"I'm sick of crab," Brother Castor's voice echoed off the black rock walls. Father Adrian turned his eyes to the ground, looking at the bits of crab at the young man's feet.

"We are wasting precious time. What are we doing here in this country? Either the people here have abandoned us, or they're in desperate need of our help!" Brother Castor's questions stirred something in Father Adrian.

"What would you have me do?" Father Adrian's eyes turned to the young man.

"Something! Anything! We could find some way of alerting The Holy See to the injustice here!" Brother Castor implored.

"I am doing something..." Father Adrian gripped his rosary tightly.

"Oh, yes, that's it, you're really storming the gates!" Brother Castor sneered.

"Precisely," Father Adrian said soberly.

• • •

Brother Castor watched Father Adrian sleeping soundly and felt sure that his superior didn't dream. The old priest's face never changed—as if it were etched in stone. Even the horrific storm of their solitude could not erode it. To Brother Castor, this solitude was catastrophic, threatening to tear him to pieces slowly and steadily.

Boom! A wave startled Brother Castor out of his stupor. The waves had become so monotonous that they had become a kind of silence, thick and ominous, and now his ears registered only the odd crash or boom from the sea: A random crash would strike the silence where whispering, baleful thoughts lived, burrowing deeper and deeper in his mind like an internal scream. He began to shake the old priest awake: "Father... Father... Father!"

Father Adrian woke without changing positions.

"What is it?" asked the old priest.

"I want you to give me confession," said Brother Castor.

Father Adrian raised himself from the floor, searched for and found his stole without a word, then turned to Brother Castor to say: "May God, who has enlightened every heart, help you to know your sins and trust in his mercy."

Without a moment's hesitation, Brother Castor began telling his sins: "I have been impetuous; I've tested and questioned the wisdom of Father Adrian. My thoughts are venturing beyond my control. It's difficult to maintain discipline in this place."

The old priest looked up at him, saying the words of absolution but no words of encouragement. He gave him his penance, shifted on the floor, and slumbered on.

• • •

"HOW LONG HAS IT BEEN?
I WANT TO SEE THE SUN."

Father Adrian began his work after the last streaks of twilight faded from the slits in the floorboards. First, he took up the water bucket, which had its position in the center of their cramped cellar. In the other hand, and from the far corner, he picked up the bucket they used as a chamber pot. He handed the water bucket to Brother Castor, and gathered crab shells into the chamber pot while Brother Castor checked and then double-checked that the coast was clear.

They crept out from beneath the hut, through the trap door, and into open air. Father Adrian took large gasps of the fresh night. Brother Castor stretched his contorted back.

“Moonlight doesn’t compare,” Brother Castor said.

Father Adrian looked toward him, confused.

“Even the sunlight that leaks through the floorboards is better than this. The moon is so... apathetic,” said Brother Castor.

They separated. Brother Castor took the water bucket up the shore toward the hills where there was a well. Father Adrian stayed behind and emptied the chamber pot into the froth, taking care not to let the ocean wind blow the contents back onto him. Then, his skeleton aching and creaking, he maneuvered down the rocks toward the water, trying not to shrink from the pain.

He came to a small wooden peg that had been lodged in a crack between two rocks: His makeshift hold had endured another day despite the conditions. A wheat straw rope rubbed taut against the black rock and led down into the water.

Brother Castor appeared with his bucket and helped Father Adrian hoist the rope up from the waves to reveal a crab pot bursting at the seams.

“Seems that these little creatures are as hungry as we are,” Father Adrian said, avoiding the pincers of a crab as he lifted the pot.

Back in their crypt, and folded like crabs, Father Adrian led the two in prayer.

Brother Castor joined in colorlessly.

Father Adrian found the young man’s recent disinclination towards prayer troubling. Brother Castor had been a novice full of ardent zeal and love for the sacraments when Father Adrian first met him. He appreciated reconciliation—yet perhaps due more to fear of hell than love of God. The oppressive confines of the chamber had, over time, seemed to squeeze him dry of zeal.

Brother Castor no longer made impassioned pleas for leaving the hut and returning to mission work. Instead, he only made comments about home and how it compared to their current confines. Father Adrian had little patience for this. He had spent most of his life as a missionary, and when it had been difficult, he learned that the first to falter always made comparisons. They were not home; no use wishing for it.

After prayers, Father Adrian grasped along the wooden pillar behind him. He removed a well-placed rock, which revealed a hollow spot in the wood. Inside, Father Adrian had hidden the sacred vessels from the rain or anything else that could do them harm. He took great care to ensure the vessels were clean and that he rationed their

“BACK IN THEIR CRYPT,
AND FOLDED LIKE CRABS,
FATHER ADRIAN LED
THE TWO IN PRAYER.”

dwindling bread and wine.

For Brother Castor the last pious pursuit for which he had any remaining passion was confession. He slept. Then, when he woke, pale as a ghost, he would scramble to Father Adrian and beg him for confession. Father Adrian never spurned the younger man's requests.

He would pull his stole from inside his frayed cassock and offer himself for reconciliation. Most sins a man commits while trapped in an enclosed space are those of the mind. Thoughts pass by in an instant and are often hard to recall, especially under severe duress. But though Brother Castor might hesitate over his words, he seemed able to recite, with detail, everything that had even flashed across his mind since he confessed last: "I stole one of Father's crab legs. The legs are the only part I can stand, and I wanted more," Brother Castor kept his eyes pointed strictly at the ground as he spoke. "I had thoughts about a woman... a girl that I knew before my commitment to the Jesuits. These thoughts were impure... I thought about running away... I hate this country... it hates me..."

After each confession Father Adrian gave Brother Castor his penance, and Brother Castor, in his separate corner, would begin his silent lamentations.

• • •

Thunder jolted Father Adrian awake. The frantic drips from the floorboards above now overflowed their water bucket; the freshwater they depended on flooded meaninglessly over the rock floor. Storms had come in fits and starts over what Father Adrian assumed must have been weeks, and each storm brought a deep expanse of clouds that warred against the sun. There was no telling whether it was day or night at times. And while Father Adrian was now used to a lack of sun, the knowledge that it was there had at least given him some comfort.

Whereas Brother Castor had slept and slept, now he rarely slept, and when he did, it was a restlessness sleep during which he cried out and spasmed. His waking hours were no better.

One day he leapt up, holding a jagged chunk of raven-colored stone over his head: "This is my Excalibur!" he shouted from his gut, "Its name is Crab's Bane—behold its power!"

He swung the rock from above his head down onto the squirming body of a crab. It was dead with the first strike, but Brother Castor struck three times before he regarded it sufficiently gored. Water and viscera splattered the floor.

Father Adrian thought Brother Castor's gluttonous obsession with crabs somewhat ironic. Through the tyranny of the storm, Brother Castor focused only on the promise of a fresh trap full of crabs. Father Adrian would watch as the young man teased the creatures, shaking and poking at their cage. They reminded him of himself in a most uncomfortable way.

"I hope this new appreciation for crab means an end to your complaints," said

“...EACH STORM
BROUGHT A
DEEP EXPANSE
OF CLOUDS THAT
WARRED AGAINST
THE SUN...”

Father Adrian.

“Hush! Be struck deaf and dumb and blind by the glorious glint of my blade!”

Brother Castor’s voice echoed off the walls. “Lest I smite thee!”

Father Adrian resigned himself to solitude, leaving Brother Castor alone to his imagination.

• • •

“You are in no state to go,” Father Adrian said curtly.

“You can’t do this to me! I can’t stay trapped in here!” squealed Brother Castor.

A storm had subsided, though the clouds hadn’t. Father Adrian still hadn’t allowed Brother Castor, flailing around the floor in protest, to leave the hut. In truth, Father Adrian was in no state either. His eyes were dry, his gums tasted of copper, and his fingernails had stopped trying to regrow.

“I cannot allow it,” Father Adrian ordered, his voice low and tired.

A biblical shriek erupted from Brother Castor’s gullet. His cassock tore as he rocked on the floor like a distraught child, wailing as he did. Father Adrian was growing impatient: He had also not been unable to leave the hut during the storm and wanted nothing more than to leave, to find some peace.

“Bring lots of crabs!” Brother Castor cried as—thud!—he whacked his head on the beam.

From above, Father Adrian closed the hatch, locking Brother Castor away.

Father Adrian gasped. Through the sea-battered ceiling, he glimpsed the naked night sky. It was dark but lighter than the shadowy hut and seemed to offer solace. He rushed out, buckets in hand, to be greeted by a quiet sea. The waves rolled steadily, refracting moonlight. The purple-black rocks glistened. All this was peace to his eyes—the glittering stars and this convergence of infinity.

The calm sea was a welcome respite, and he began his routine, though this time aware that he’d suddenly seemed to have grown gaunt and weak and now floated about his chores like a specter.

After emptying the chamber pot, Father Adrian set on his way to fill the water bucket. He struggled to make his way over the small null at the foot of the hills, but eventually managed to reach the well. While hoisting the bucket, he saw a flicker of light out of the corner of his eye and ducked beneath the brim of the well.

He listened. There, in the distance, was a campfire casting shadows through the trees. There, by the fire, were several men speaking Japanese, though Father Adrian couldn’t hear what was said.

He realized how quickly hope had risen in him—he longed to see a kind soul from his parish at Nagasaki. But hope was replaced with fear; these were not men he wanted to be discovered by. Moving back down the hills, he tried not to spill the precious bucket of water and not to touch it to the emptied chamber pot in his other bruised hand. When he finally made it back to the hut, he opened the hatch, let himself

“ALL THIS WAS PEACE
TO HIS EYES—THE
GLITTERING STARS AND
THIS CONVERGENCE
OF INFINITY.”

down the ladder, and reached back up to the hut's dark floorboards to bring down each bucket.

"Crabs!" said Brother Castor expectantly.

"No crabs," answered the tired priest.

"No, no, no! Why didn't you bring back crabs! I only have two left!"

"I said no crabs today!" said Father Adrian in a sharp whisper.

Brother Castor's face warped as if he had come to some horrific conclusion.

"Oh, they've found me out!" he laments, raising his rock above his head as if offering it to God. "They know of Crab's Bane. They'll stay far from our traps now."

"No, fool!" Father Adrian's impatience grew.

"Where are the crabs then?" Brother Castor growled.

Father Adrian thought about telling him about the campfire and men. Instead, he hunkered in his corner, opened his missal, and ignored Brother Castor's wails.

"Father... I wish to reconcile," said Brother Castor after some time.

Father Adrian sighed. He couldn't refuse the request, not only for the love of his work as a priest but now also for fear of Brother Castor's violence. Reconciliation had become Father Adrian's shield against the young man's more savage episodes. He maneuvered around the chamber toward Brother Castor. Almost touching knees, he began, "May God, who has enlightened every heart, help you to know your sins and trust in his mercy..."

The pair fell silent. Then, Brother Castor said in a voice as fragile as glass: "I hate Father Adrian... I hate him for bringing me here... to this forsaken land. I think about killing him often. I think about killing him and then absconding from this country, cursing it as I go. I fear to suffer, Lord; I should not, but I do. I have spent my life attempting to escape damnation, and yet it has found me on Earth." Father Adrian tried to mask his reactions.

"I cannot go much longer without human warmth! He is a cold, cold man, and I can find no solace in him!" Brother Castor said angrily.

Father Adrian told himself he'd heard enough and tried to pray; God would listen whether the priest did or not. Brother Castor repeated himself, naming the same sins, growing more and more tired.

Father Adrian prescribed the usual penance and returned to his corner. Brother Castor opened his missal, turning the pages and moaning as he did. In a deep low grumble, he recited some ancient hymn.

• • •

Brother Castor's bones ached as Father Adrian opened the hatch and left the chamber, allowing a cold draft to sneak through the passage as he did. When the hatch closed, the moonlight left, though the cold remained. He lay there for some time, imagining someone warm holding him. That helped a little. He fortified himself in that warmth. Allowing it to envelope him from the icy phantoms that stalked beyond the shadows and the rumor-whispering waves.

Eventually, his mind could no longer sustain the illusion, and he felt how broken and alone he was, his mind a shattered pane of glass. He tossed and turned,

"HE FORTIFIED
HIMSELF IN
THAT WARMTH."

“...HIS PASSION HAD
TURNED TO DESPAIR,
HIS DESPAIR FEEDING
ON HIS EVER-
GROWING FEARS.”

battling his desire to escape his suffering. He told himself that all he needed was to keep the faith, and someday, he would see the sun again.

The longer they were in hiding, the more certain he became that Father Adrian was making no plans to leave. The priest was too stalwart for his—for their—own good. He would stoically keep the faith even if it meant their demise.

The young Jesuit envied his superior for that. Even when they couldn't tell day from night, Father Adrian was steadfast, disciplined. For all of Brother Castor's passion, he did not have the unrelenting mechanism of faith that was in Father Adrian. Passion requires an object to be directed at, and that had been absent for some time. Instead, he knew, his passion had turned to despair, his despair feeding on his ever-growing fears.

His stomach growled. He hoped that soon the old priest would return with a trap of wriggling crabs to undo the monotony of waiting and living in sleep and half-sleep.

Finally—there was the scraping sound of the hatch. Though he knew it must be Father Adrian returning, he was held fast by fear and reached for his jagged rock, his Crab's Bane.

The hatch opened slowly, and to Brother Castor's horror, what lowered itself through the passage was not the familiar old priest but a crab the size of a man and the color of bone. Its spindly legs entered the chamber first; along each of them were vicious barbs. At the ends of its two front-most legs were pincers. One was long and sharp as a razor, and the other was mammoth, built to crush men's bones. Milky eyes protruded from its barnacle-encrusted head, scanning the chamber till they found him cowering in the corner.

The crab spoke in a watery and brittle voice: “Stay in here! Stay safe! Out there, death awaits!”

But Brother Castor slowly rose to his feet, Crab's Bane in his hand and fire in his eyes. With the jagged rock raised above his head, he cried, “You come for me at last! What laid waste to your children shall now do the same to you! I fear nothing!”

He leaped towards the creature and plunged Crab's Bane into one of its eyes. Then, wrapping his hand around the stalk of the other eye, he wrenched it from its skull. The beast shrieked and watery blood leaked from its orifices as he hacked its body with Crab's Bane. With one final kick Brother Castor finished it and escaped through the hatch.

• • •

Salt and waves were all of Father Adrian's new lightless world. Warm liquid leaked from his side and pooled around him. He couldn't hear Brother Castor within the chamber. He must have left, he thought, devastated that the men he had seen near the shore would surely see the young friar.

With a heave, he turned himself onto his belly. Blood rushed to his head and out the hole in his side. Cproing around the floor, he worked his way around the chamber. After some difficulty, he found the damp wall and began to follow it till he

came to the first wooden beam. He felt around for a moment and then continued to the second corner, feeling around again—to no avail.

Creeeak—the hatch was opening. Father Adrian froze, listening closely.

“Father?” Brother Castor’s voice was full of pity and shame.

“Did they see you?” said Father Adrian steadily.

“Did I do this to you?” Brother Castor murmured.

“Did they see you?” Father Adrian repeated.

“They did. But I’m sure they didn’t see me return here. How could they?”

“Help me find the vessels. We haven’t much time; you need confession, then I will say mass.”

Brother Castor was incredulous: “What are you? Don’t you see what state you’re in!?”

“It doesn’t matter,” Father Adrian spoke quietly, patiently.

They waited. Silence. Father Adrian could hear a rustling behind him.

“I have them,” Brother Castor’s voice was faint.

Father Adrian sat against the chamber wall facing the exit. Through his obscured vision he could sense light through the floorboards. He could hear Brother Castor tearing his cassock and winced as Brother Castor wrapped the torn piece of cloth around the wound in his side.

Without words, Father Adrian pulled out his now crimson stole, and the young man knelt next to him. Brother Castor wept: “Father, forgive me for I have sinned.... I hurt you.”

The old priest put his hand on Brother Castor’s shoulder, then began to prepare for mass as best he could, whispering the prayers under the sea’s thrum and too softly for the devil to hear. As he recited the Gospel, footsteps pounded overhead. They had been found.

As he consecrated the host, the hatch’s lock jingled like bells. They steeled themselves as the priest raised the Eucharist. Even the waves hushed in fealty. Suddenly the trap door was flung open.

“The sun... It’s warm... oh, sun...” Brother Castor murmured.

The invisible shadows entered the dark chamber, their mission soon to be finished. Through the trapdoor, trickles of the morning sun found the old priest’s face, and Father Adrian felt an intense warmth that he had never felt before, embracing him as he was sent far, far away from under the fisherman’s hut, and into a place that is never cold, never dark.

• • •



“

We dwell in,
and we dwell on,
a good, but
fallen world...

Only Love can
transform,
restore, and
empower us
to live fully.

”

CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

Margaret Alvine was born on the East Coast and grew up on the West Coast. Homeschooled through high school, she is now pursuing a double major in graphic design and illustration at John Paul the Great Catholic University. She often ties her love of books into her artwork, and is always happy to read, discuss, or bask in the presence of books.

Aaron Cantu is an animation student who was born and raised in McAllen, TX. He is growing in his faith and as an artist at John Paul the Great Catholic University. The artwork shown, *Sanctuary*, is meant to be a glimpse of a world that he strives to one day animate. More of his artwork can be found on his Instagram @aarondreamsart.

Donald Conklin is a writer and filmmaker from Atlanta, GA. He enjoys overcast weather and reading manifestos. He now attends John Paul the Great Catholic University where he studies film and is the Vice President of the Young Augustine's Fraternity.

Audrey Daniels is a former humanities student at John Paul the Great Catholic University. Her passion for writing led her to work as an intern in the Communications Department of the Diocese of Tulsa and Eastern Oklahoma. She currently works as the Chancery receptionist there. Her publications appear in *Out of the Cave*, *Kelp Journal*, *The Eastern Oklahoma Catholic Magazine*, *Pelican's Plume: A College Collage* (2021) and *Pelican's Plume: Bearing Gifts* (2022).

Joe Donelson is a senior film student at John Paul the Great Catholic University with a passion for all forms of art, poetry in particular. Originally from Colorado, much of his work focuses on his family and home. Joe's poems were published in *Pelican's Plume: Bearing Gifts*, and he is excited to share more poems in this issue as well.

Jaden Michael Doyle is a post-production student from Southern California. He enjoys creating and learning at John Paul the Great Catholic University because it is an environment that prioritizes God. He has directed and written several independent short films in his tenure, and is currently in pre-production for his senior project, *Emerald Quest*.

Kiran Edwards grew up in Farmington, NM. He studied graphic design at Fort Lewis College before transferring to John Paul the Great Catholic University to study illustration and creative writing. He worked as a storyboard artist on the feature film "No Reception."

Stephanie Franco studied animation and game design at John Paul the Great Catholic University and graduated in 2015. Her illustrations were commissioned by the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem, and by a Barnabite priest for a children’s book. She now works at her alma mater in the Information Technology Department, but continues posting art on her Instagram.

Guillermo de la Fuente attends John Paul the Great Catholic University. He is pursuing his bachelor’s in humanities with a double emphasis in creative writing and screenwriting, and theology and philosophy. He is currently writing a full-length science fiction feature, *Ignoramus*, about a gifted young man who is drafted into an epic alien contest to prevent the Earth from being enslaved. When he is not neck-deep in writing assignments, he generally enjoys playing a good video game, losing arm-wrestling matches, and attempting half of a pull-up.

Lauren D. Fulter, who started publishing at age sixteen, is the author of *The Unanswered Questions* series. While her siblings say her entire personality is writing, she can also be found eating cottage cheese, obsessing over Spiderman, and wearing sunglasses for unclarified reasons. She is a member of the Catholic Writer’s Guild and is studying creative writing at John Paul The Great Catholic University. Find her at laurendfulter.com or [@laurendfulter_author](https://www.instagram.com/laurendfulter_author).

Thérèse Gretencord is an illustrator from Austin, TX, who has been commissioned by various private individuals and Christian organizations—including the Christian Academy of Performing Arts (CAPA), St. Louis King of France Women’s Club, and a women’s ACTS retreat. Her artwork has been featured on concert programs, chocolate bar wrappers, and the official Wingfeather Saga Instagram page, as well as on the sets of stage productions of CAPA’s *The Sound of Music*, *Seussical*, and *Brigadoon*. When not working on illustrations, she enjoys reading thick fantasy books, going for walks, and spending time with friends.

Kaylee Harrod was born and raised in South Dakota. She attended Wyoming Catholic College, where she tackled theological and philosophical questions while traversing mountains. Upon acknowledging her passion for creative writing, she transferred to John Paul the Great Catholic University to pursue a bachelor’s degree in humanities. In her free time, she loves exploring the outdoors, playing her guitar, and drinking a good old cup of coffee while watching anime.

Eduardo Jáuregui Martínez is from Irapuato, Mexico. Right now he is pursuing his undergraduate degree in creative writing at John Paul the Great Catholic University. When not worried about college assignments, he enjoys brewing coffee with his Moka pot, reading books by long-dead authors, and writing about

faraway worlds. You can follow him on Instagram at @eduardo_ajm.

Sophia Klein is an award-winning published illustrator and author who grew up on a farm in Oregon with her seven siblings. She won the Catholic Daughter's art contest and has received an honorable mention from *Pennon Magazine*. She is basically addicted to swing dancing and using white charcoal pencils. Sophia plans to illustrate books.

Sophia Kramer is studying communications media at John Paul the Great Catholic University. When she's not studying or writing for classes, she is usually writing screenplays or non-fiction that explores theological elements in modern film, literature, and music.

Trinity Mette is an evangelist from Illinois who strives to lead people to God. She traveled as a musician and speaker for six years, and in 2019 published her first work in a compilation of poetry and prose, *Pens Set Aflame*. In 2023, she moved to California to continue her college education at John Paul the Great Catholic University.

Heidi Ranshaert is a senior at John Paul the Great Catholic University. From Grand Rapids, MI, she loves to capture beauty and truth in artistic form, both in illustration and writing.

Delaney Rayner is a senior graphic design student who is passionate about the intersection of beauty and communication. Originally from San Antonio, TX, she discovered her love of visual storytelling—particularly through graphic design and photography—while serving on her high school yearbook staff. She began her college career at Franciscan University in Steubenville, OH, and after studying abroad in Austria, the Lord called her to California. The Lord has given her many sweet gifts, especially her fiancé, family, and friends.

Michael Richardson is a humanities student at John Paul the Great Catholic University. He loves to read and write about faith and God's love for humankind. He enjoys a good conversation with friends and aspires to become a teacher and author.

Angelo Riodique is a native of San Diego who now lives in the Escondido area. He is a graduate of Saint Augustine High School, where his desire to learn about theology and philosophy grew. He continues his pursuit of knowledge at John Paul the Great Catholic University. Two of his recent essays, *On the Sacrament of Culture* and *The Anecdote for Noise in the World*, examine how modern culture benefits from Catholic understandings of Truth, Beauty, and Goodness.

Emily Robeson is a freshman at Saint Louis Community College in Missouri, and is friends with students at John Paul the Great Catholic University. She traveled

the country for four years in an RV with her family. She now creates artwork that showcases the beauty of God and His creation.

Josh Rosales is currently a student at John Paul the Great Catholic University in pursuit of a humanities degree with an emphasis in theology and philosophy. He is an altar server for the Traditional Latin Mass at Saint Anne Catholic Church in San Diego. He enjoys reflecting on God's perfection in nature, music appreciation, reading, gardening, cooking, hiking, walking along the beach, and getting some ice cream or frozen yogurt with his dogs and family.

Amira Sain is a freshman studying creative writing with a business minor. She placed five times in the Oakland Diocese Young Authors' Faire during grade school, co-won her high school's Class of 2023 English Department Award, and won the 2021-22 Brown University Book Award. Outside of juggling school, church, and extracurriculars, she enjoys theater (onstage or backstage!), reading, singing, birdwatching, building/making things, diving down nerdy rabbit holes, and sometimes video editing. She hopes to become a copyeditor.

Ella Skipworth is an animation student enamored with the arts. She finds joy in merging her interests—especially illustration, dance, music, and games. She can dance en pointe in ballet; has received awards for her achievements in art, choir, and dance; and has developed a board game catered towards younger audiences. She is grateful to have her work featured in this journal as she continues to reflect on her creative past and future.

Cormac Tully is a communications media major from Houston, TX, pursuing an emphasis in film production. He has been doing videography and photography since his junior year of high school. He also enjoys swing dance, sports, singing, and improv. Cormac's work can be viewed at cormactully.weebly.com.

Angela Whalen Crowell is a writer and illustrator finishing up her bachelor's in humanities at John Paul the Great Catholic University. She has a background in academic children's tutoring and currently works in religious education. At the invitation of Moorpark College, she joined the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society and the National Society of Leadership and Success in 2022. In her spare time, Angela loves to cook for people, copyedit her husband's fantasy novels, and go running in the early morning. She lives with her husband, James, in Valley Center, CA.

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