



The Creative
Arts Journal
of

Concordia
University
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Christ at the Center

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*This issue of **Motif** is in honor of
Dr. Richard Fischer's 50th Anniversary
at Concordia University Chicago.*



Richard Fischer, DMA
Distinguished Professor of Music
*Fred and Jane Wittlinger Endowed Chair
for Music Performance*

Dr. Fischer's impact on Concordia musicians has spanned five decades and reaches far beyond River Forest, Illinois. Through rehearsals and concerts, students, families, alumni, and friends have experienced the love of Christ and goodness of God. Thousands of students have played under his baton, and they have impacted countless others through education, performance, and worship.

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Radke/Sorenson Prizes for Writing 2024

The English Department and the editors of *Motif* are proud to include in the 2024 issue the winners of the thirteenth annual Radke/Sorenson Prizes for Writing. These \$250 prizes, endowed by an anonymous donor, recognize an outstanding poem and essay written by a junior or senior English major.

This year, for the second time in the history of the prize, the English Department is awarding both prizes to the same student. Jeremiah Schultz, a senior from Overland Park, KS, is a liberal arts English major enrolled in the pre-seminary program. He receives the essay prize for “A Defense of the Intellectual in the Love Poetry of John Donne.” His poem “Firebird” is the winning submission in the poetry competition.

The awards are named for two distinguished former members of the English Department, Dr. Merle Radke and Prof. Karl Sorenson. Dr. Radke, who specialized in American realist and naturalist fiction, taught English at Concordia from 1957 to 1987. He served for many years as department chair, in addition to editing the journal *Lutheran Education*. He passed away in 2017 at the age of 95. Prof. Karl Sorenson, who served in the English Department from 1965 to 1999, taught a variety of courses in British literature and drama. He also directed and acted in many plays, both at Concordia and in local community theaters. Prof. Sorenson passed away in 2004.

We also gratefully acknowledge the Dr. Merle and Ruth Radke Endowment Fund, which helps to fund the annual publication of *Motif*. The endowment was established in 2017 to honor Dr. Radke’s service to the English Department at Concordia.

A Defense of the Intellectual in the Love Poetry of John Donne

Jeremiah Schultz



“[John Donne] perplexes the minds of the fair sex with nice speculations of philosophy, when he should engage their hearts, and entertain them with the softness of love.”

— John Dryden (106)

Dryden’s criticism of Donne’s “amorous” verse represents a broader field of anti-intellectual poetic criticism, helmed by Samuel Johnson and his pejorative coinage of the term “metaphysical poets” to describe a particularly philosophical and, in his mind, deplorable kind of 17th century poet. In the 18th century, George Herbert, Andrew Marvell, Abraham Cowley, and their metaphysical predecessor, John Donne, were temporarily dismissed from serious literary study, or, at very best, considered an addendum to the poetic magniloquence of Milton and Dryden. Notably driven by T.S. Eliot’s “The Metaphysical Poets,” a polemic aimed against the critical assertions made by Johnson, and the Donnean fanaticism of Sir Herbert Grierson in “Donne and Metaphysical Poetry,” an essay defending and exalting Donne to the point of calling him “the greatest master of English poetry in the 17th century” (116), Donne’s love poetry has returned to the broader Western literary canon.

Despite Donne’s reemergence as an important literary figure, anti-intellectual poetic

criticism in the 20th century continued, as C.S. Lewis called Donne’s love poetry “parasitic,” claiming that it is reliant upon other overtly romantic or grandiose forms of poetry to show us “shadows cast by love upon the intellect” (158). From Dryden, to Johnson, to Lewis, to 21st century English students, Donne’s constant intellectualization and analysis of his widely nuanced emotions, “yoked by violence together” (Johnson 107) with the mundane to form complex poetic conceits, has consistently been abhorred. The negative criticism Donne’s work still receives revolves mainly around his intellectual poetic conceits, and the unconventional irreverence with which he executes them. Upon this basis, enduring contemporary critiques are unfounded, for by examining several poems from *Songs and Sonnets*, it quickly becomes clear that Donne’s intellectualisms, far from diminishing the emotional aspects of his work, serve to enhance them. His witty conceits and cheeky subject matters, far from being arrogant or grossly ribald, propagate an atmosphere of warmth and intimacy beyond the level of flesh, and help to describe a holistic spiritual love between two lovers. In “The Good-Morrow,” “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning,” and “The Canonization,” Donne accomplishes these poetic aims in the form of argument and paradox—defining tools of the man lauded by Grierson as a better poet than John Milton.

Part of the problem in Donnean criticism comes from critics who take the intellectual aspect of Donne’s poetry too far. Christopher Nassaar argues for a Platonic reading of Donne’s “The Good-Morrow,” claiming that “Plato’s cave allegory and his World of Ideas are integral to a full understanding of this highly complex poem” (20). Nassaar makes clever connections between “the Seven Sleepers’ Den,” Donne’s reference to a Christian legend of seven youths who slept in a cave for 200 years to avoid execution, and Plato’s cave allegory, while he also draws a link between the lady Donne writes to and Plato’s idea of beauty. While it would be appropriate to consider these elements of “The Good-Morrow” to be richly allusive, Nassaar’s Platonic reading overcomplicates a romantic and thought-provoking poem by reducing the verses to a puzzle to be solved. There is nothing meaning-wise here hidden from the reader untrained in Platonic philosophy. The charm of this poem is self-evident: a lover considers what he and his love did before they loved, wishing “good-morrow” to souls finally awakened and affirmed by the love of each other. Donne ends the poem with a clever analogy of love compared to the medieval view that human beings are made up of four parts—blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile—which, if not mixed equally, lead inevitably to death. He asserts that if his and his lover’s love is mixed equally, if their “two loves be one” (20), their love will never die. While this concept may be foreign to many modern readers, in Donne’s time this mixed love metaphor would have been accessible to nearly everyone. “The Good-Morrow” is immensely clever, but more importantly, comprehensible. With Donne, diving into fascinating metaphors and exalting philosophical interpretations as the focus of any given poem will often mislead readers from what Donne truly suggests. By focusing on a philosophic or intellectual concept a reader believes Donne to be expressing, they run the risk of identifying an argument Donne didn’t intend to focus on, or perhaps even make.

In his 1938 essay addressed to Sir Herbert Grierson, C.S. Lewis rightfully claimed that much of John Donne’s love poetry takes the form of an argument that an implied narrator defends before an implied listener (148). We naturally imagine the roles to be that of a lover with his love, as in the case of “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning,” or as a lover with a

friend or critic, such as in “The Canonization.” Herein lies a facet of the anti-intellectual criticism aimed at Donne, first with Dryden, and by many more: why would Donne spend his time crafting an argument to present to a woman, typically about his own emotions or the state of his relationship with his beloved, as opposed to writing about his beloved? In the minds of some critics, Lewis included, Donne’s poetry lacks much of the description required by Neo-Petrarchans to justify itself as admirable love poetry. However, this view presupposes that a woman wants to hear herself described in flattering descriptive verse, when, as Joan Bennet suggests, “it may interest her more to know what it feels like to be a man in love” (162). This, an expression of the love he feels for his beloved, Donne does exquisitely well throughout his *Songs and Sonnets*. In “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning,” Donne offers a warm and thoughtful argument to his love on the occasion of his leaving.

Donne opens the poem with a conceit considering virtuous men dying and passing “mildly away” (1). The metaphor prepares the reader for Donne’s main conceit of a compass while simultaneously establishing the reader within the poem’s rhetorical framework. Just as virtuous men—we can assume Christian men based on Donne’s life and work—die easily due to the nature of their faith in Christ, so must the lovers leave each other without tears or protest due to the nature of their relationship. As the poet continues, “‘Twere profanation of our joys / to tell the laity of our love” (7-8) by means of tears and sighs. It is clear that Donne is addressing an implicit listener whom he loves dearly enough to fashion a poetic explanation as to why she must not mourn their impending separation. David Novarr recognizes this intellectual effort to reassure his lover as highly compassionate, as “she will perhaps find some comfort in the very effort he is making to comfort her” (55). This thought reinforces that of Bennet as we consider what constitutes love poetry, and we start to see how the intellect can serve an immensely romantic purpose.

In the following two stanzas, there is a conscious plunge into the metaphysical as Donne exalts the lovers’ love as existing beyond physical touch, beyond the tangible planets (9-16). Because of a “love so much refined” (17), the lovers are “inter-assured of the mind” (19), and unbothered by physical separation, for their love goes much further, or so Donne suggests at first. After another metaphor comparing the lovers’ unified souls to gold leaf spread thin across distance (24), Donne breaks from his unified soul conceit to introduce a new and final one, that of the compass. Here, we can imagine Donne brain-storming metaphorical solutions to their current, tangible predicament. The compass conceit is exceedingly clever, as his beloved, the fixed foot, “hearkens after” (31) the implied narrator, the pencil side of the compass, as he moves away from her. The poem ends with the implied narrator considering coming home to his darling as her fixed nature helps him to complete a perfect circle. As some scholars have noticed, the conceit is illogical. As the fixed foot “grows erect as [the other foot] comes home” (32), the circle cannot be made “just” (35) while the implied narrator also “end[s] where [he] begun” (36), with his beloved at home—such an action as returning to her would disrupt the composition of the completed circle. The metaphor is, as Novarr argues, intentionally flawed:

Donne is sufficiently accomplished a poet not to huddle up an analogy; if his analogy is inexact, he means us to see that it is inexact and that its inexactness undercuts his overt argument ... he is so sensitive to [his beloved’s] feelings that he has used all his resources to make a case he can’t make successfully. (Novarr, 57, 61)

In this way, “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning” demonstrates the tenderness behind Donne’s intellectual conceits; he desires only the peace and well-being of his darling, and will consciously bend all metaphors to his will to save her grief. It is further important to note that Donne does not allow their love to remain in the metaphysical; by using words with erotic connotations such as “erect” and “firmness,” Donne adds a level of warmth and intimacy to the poem, reestablishing their relationship as something sensual and present. The rich ambiguity of the inconclusive compass conceit expertly sends the problem of their parting into a compelling paradox.

Paradoxical poetic moves are where Donne is at his best. In *Songs and Sonnets*, Donne often surprises the reader with brilliant juxtapositions which add nuance to complicated subjects. These paradoxes, while often enigmatic, are highly affective, and carry with them an emotional gravitas. Modern readers have trouble reading paradoxes in this way, as Cleanth Brooks explains that “our prejudices force us to regard paradox as intellectual rather than emotional, clever rather than profound, rational rather than divinely irrational” (179). We have no reason to regard paradox as necessarily intellectual, and yet modern readers often do, viewing it as a problem to be solved rather than a tension used to understand something. In matters of poetry, religious faith, and love, paradox becomes glaringly apparent, and often necessary, in describing profound mysteries. In “The Canonization,” Donne describes the love he shares with his beloved in the only way which allows for the level of nuance he desires—ingenious paradox.

In this poem, the main conceit Donne teases out is one of canonization, not in the literary sense, but in that of sainthood: Donne proclaims that he and his love will be canonized as examples of perfect, religious love. It should be noted that Donne, by writing such a religiously metaphorical poem, plays with a conceit many of his contemporaries wouldn’t dare touch out of holy and societal fear. In the poem, Donne’s relationship is being criticized, and he defends it by staking the nature of their love upon paradox. Donne quickly combats his critic’s implied complaints, essentially telling the man or woman to criticize something else, or to mind their own business, to “take a course” (5), “contemplate what [they] will” (8), but simply “let [him] love” (9). In the second stanza, Donne argues that no one has been “injured by [his] love” (10), and that the world goes on normally as “soldiers find wars, and lawyers find out still / litigious men, which quarrels move” (16-17); all this happens “though she and [Donne] do love” (18). In the third stanza, Donne enters into the first step of his paradoxical conceit, launching into a description of both the erotic and martyric aspects of his relationship with his love as they “at [their] own cost die” (21). This line references the medieval notion of the “le petite mort” or “little death,” a term used to describe the post-climactic effect of an orgasm, which scientists of the middle ages believed made people die sooner. Donne suggests that he and his love die due to what we can assume to be frequent sex. In the same stanza, Donne creates a resurrection motif, comparing he and his lover to “the phoenix” (24) as they “die and rise” (26), made “mysterious by this love” (27). Donne and his love die from sex, only to rise again, bonded in a new, mysterious kind of love. The irreverent implications are manifold, yet Donne continues into the next stanza. Aware of the impropriety of his claims, he knows that their love, though not perhaps socially acceptable, “will be fit for verse” (30), and they’ll “build in sonnets pretty rooms” (32), so that years later, when future generations read his poems, he and his beloved will be “canonized for

Love” (36). The poem ends with Donne musing over himself and his love as each other’s “hermitage[s]” (38), driving deeper the correlation between sacred and profane, as “countries, towns, courts: beg from above / a pattern of [their] love” (44-45).

Donne rather consciously ends this poem in the realm of paradox, and it leaves the reader with much to ponder. Donne suggests a thin line between sacred and profane love; he disregards toeing the line between the two sides in favor of muddying the waters. Perhaps the effect of such boldness is lost on modern readers living in a hyper-sexualized culture, but Donne’s “The Canonization” would have sent shockwaves through devoutly religious communities of his time. Still, Donne forces the reader to consider his or her own relationship to the profane and the sacred, to see how near to each other they often are, and how one can easily lead to the other. All this, Donne does through paradox, claiming sainthood through sexual martyrdom; and, compellingly, Donne’s paradoxical love becomes canonized for, if not Catholic, literary posterity, as he claimed it would.

Though the criticisms of John Donne are wide-ranging, the general problem for contemporary readers who can’t stand the poet tend to center around a critique of his intellectual musings. In Donne, certain modern readers misapprehend a callous or cold aspect to his poetry. This misapprehension mainly comes from a place of misunderstanding, where Donne’s intellectual musing is viewed as an end unto itself rather than the tool for poetic expression which it is. Perhaps by recognizing the argumentative and paradoxical aspects of Donne’s intellectualism, contemporary readers can begin to see Donne’s complexity as a poetic device, and come to appreciate the rich and intense love poetry of John Donne. If not, for a proper fill of love poetry, the contemporary reader need look no further than the Petrarchans. And, if in search of the grandiose, there is always Milton, and the magniloquent *Paradise Lost*.

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The Knockout Punch

Maggie Shasko

“There is no pain so great as the memory of joy in present grief”
 -Aeschylus

It’s stage managing my first college production
 remembering you came to all my high school shows
 and said you could see me having a promising career in theater

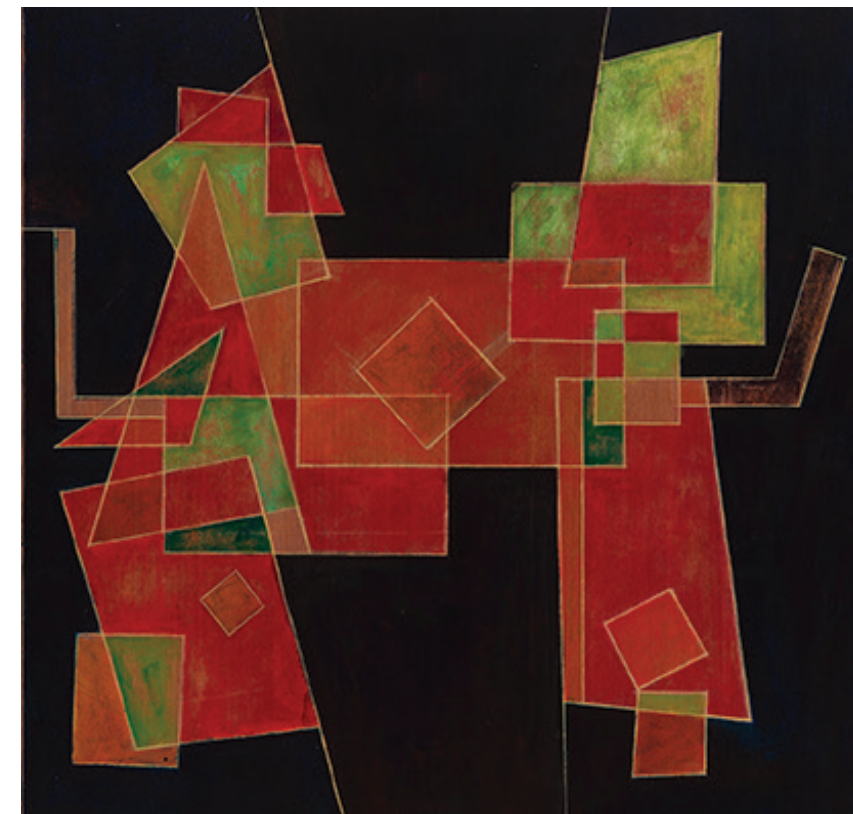
It’s needing you to tell me that everything is going to be ok
 remembering I can’t call you
 because someone else has your phone number now

It’s remembering that on my 19th birthday you texted me
 “I can’t wait to see how you change the world”
 thinking about it every birthday since, hoping that I’ll make you proud

Memories are most painful when joy and grief team up
 Trapped in joy’s falsely reassuring hug
 Grief throws the knockout punch, leaving me on the ground bloody and bruised

Disputa Resoluta

Bill Foellmer, Acrylic on Panel



Firebird*Jeremiah Schultz*

The sun's bleak light returns me to my desk,
 To stretch my yawning limbs and set a pot
 To boil, and once more find a pen to write.
 With meticulous care I select
 A record from my chest and set to play
 A music I recall and feel against
 My breast with strange, uncommon nearness.

For once inside a gilded hall I sat
 In pleasant expectation. While talking still
 And softly with my dear Sarah, crowds
 of aesthetes young and old arrived and flowed
 Slowly down the steep velvet crag into
 Their cushioned seats. A silence filled and built
 Inside the room until the conductor's swift
 Downbeat lifted a taut energy in
 The air, suspended high and pulsing toward
 Something breaking free.

Amidst this din,
 Sidelong I glance and glimpse my Sarah dear,
 Her speckled eyes enrapt by music more
 Divine than any we have heard. Her breaths
 Come quiet, charged, though her body rests still.
 And by the stage's glowing lights I find
 Her cheek—a blushing peony's dewdrops
 Streaking over the bloom and down a fair
 Pale stem.

Yet still I feel the climbing awe
 Slip, as freezing cords of pride and fear grow
 Within my chest and circle round my heart.
 With envy now, I deafly hear what God
 Has let Stravinsky do, and inward curl
 Upon my deepest vanities. For what
 Have I that could compare to such a work?
 In all the scrawls by which I've lost my sleep



And still concern my churning mind, there is
 No book or song to tell of love like this;
 I have not sung the holy sounds or fed
 On milk and honeydew, the clouds of heav'n
 Have not yet parted wide, nor have I cast
 Such radiance upon my Sarah's face.

And I could feed this state of dread and turn
 My mind to failings scattered widely through
 My life—the many poems and stories lost
 To the indifferent shrug, the dumb blank stare
 Of ambivalence.

But I can turn and see
 My love and hold her hand in mine, and feel
 The contrapuntal beating of our hearts,
 And hear the room alive and bursting forth
 With passions fierce. And I can feel a warm
 Wind floating in our cheap gallery seats,
 Urging me on, pressing against my chest—
 I must believe that every discarded work
 Is a prophet crying in the wilderness,
 The cloaks and palm fronds making straight a way
 For those works waiting within the depths of
 My soul for black letter life.

And so I drink
 My coffee black, and keep this music close—
 No longer slave to pride or fear, but to the
 Infant hope that my best words are yet to come.
 And be it less or more, I cannot say;
 The clouds may part and warm my tired hands all
 The morning long. I cannot track His flight.

O Hands That Held the Savior

ARMS OF MERCY

Elijah Kohlmeier, b. 2004

J. R. Freiberg, b. 2002

1. O hands that held the Sav - ior at the man - ger, The
 2. O hands that dipped the Sav - ior in the ri - ver, With
 3. O hands that beat the Sav - ior and that chained Him, Bare -
 4. O hands that took the Sav - ior down while weep - ing And
 5. O hands that touched the ris - en Sav - ior liv - ing Be -

5 Lord of All in lit - tle in - fant's face, The
 cam - el's hair draped on your rug - ged chest, The
 backed with flails and scour - ges in your grasp, The
 wrapped in lin - en God made man, now dead, Dis -
 fore He went to heav - en's might - y throne, We

9 shep - herd touched Him, to this world a stran - ger, Whose
 pro - phet felt the flesh that would de - liv - er The
 sol - diers nailed Him to the cross, pro - faned Him, And
 ci - vils felt the blood His wounds were seep - ing; They
 sin - ful ones, He comes all sins for - giv - ing; His

11.10.11.10.10.10

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2

O Hands That Held the Savior

13 in - no - cence was God's in peo - ple's place.
 lost and bring the wea - ry fin - al rest.
 gave Him wine be - fore Christ's fin - al gasp.
 took His corpse and laid to rest His head.
 death for our in - i - qui - ties a - tones.

17 See how His swad - dled arms lay by His side, the
 See how His wrists were drip - ping from the tide, the
 See how His blood - y hands stood o - pen wide, the
 See how His nail - marked wrists in cloth were tied, the
 His arms that stretched when on the cross He died Are

21 ones that stretched when on that cross He died.
 ones that stretched when on that cross He died.
 ones that stretched when on that cross He died.
 ones that stretched when on the cross He died.
 o - pen as He comes to meet the bride.

Battle Creek, MI*Gus Strenge*

Four months since I saw you last.
 You embrace me just like old times.
 Stepping back, I get a good look at you
 & for the first time I see what you are—
 tired, gray, beaten down,
 a hunchbacked old woman
 slouching sadly above the cornfields,
 abandoned by the factories
 that were once your backbone.

Before leaving, I hated you. Back then,
 I could not wait to flee from you.
 But far away from you,
 I realized how much you love me.
 I tear up, crossing into your limits,
 greeting each vacant lot and party store
 like the old friends they are.
 I still go back to that big city, but
 broad shoulders can't hold me like you.

El Stop California*Dan Zamudio, Polaroid Photo Collage***Portrait***Ronnalynn Fleming, Graphite*

City on a Hill

Alexandra Cima, Ink and Graphite



The Beatitudes (Matthew 4:23–5:12)

Translated by Rev. Dr. Patrick James Bayens

Jesus traveled throughout the region of Galilee, teaching in the synagogues, proclaiming the good news of Heaven's Reign, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. News about Him spread throughout all Syria; and they brought Him all who were ill, those suffering with various diseases and pains—demoniacs, epileptics, paralytics—and He healed them. And large crowds followed Him from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and from east of the River Jordan. When He saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain; and when He had sat down, His disciples came to Him. Then He began to teach them by saying:

The poor in spirit are *blessed*;^a

Heaven's Reign's already *theirs*.

The bearers of grief are *blessed*;^b

to *them* shall courage come.

The restrained in strength are *blessed*;^c

it's *they* who'll inherit the Land.^d

The starved of justice are *blessed*;^e

it's *they* who will be full.

The givers of mercy are *blessed*;

to *them* shall mercy come.

The pure in heart are *blessed*;

it's *they* who'll see God's face.

The makers of peace are *blessed*;

it's *they* who'll be God's sons.

The righteous harassed are *blessed*;

Heaven's Reign's already *theirs*.

You are *blessed*—

when you're harassed and insulted;

when every kind of evil is spoken against you falsely because of Me.

Rejoice and be glad:

your reward in heaven is *great*.

For that's how they persecuted the prophets before you.

^a In the Greek, the word “blessed” in each beatitude is in the predicate position and placed at the beginning of each phrase for emphasis, as is the subject (“theirs”/“they”) in the second line of each couplet. The English seeks to accomplish the emphasis through the use of italics. The translation renders the first eight beatitudes in iambic trimeter, the meter most commonly used in the spoken parts of Greek drama.

^b Following Luther, who translated *hoi penthoutentes* here as *die da Leid tragen*, “those who bear the grief [of others].”

^c “restrained in strength”: those who hold back from a legal use of force. The emphasis in the Greek is on the restraint of strength.

^d “the Land” (rather than “the earth”), reflecting the parallelism with Ps 37:9, 11, 22, 29, 34.

^e Literally, “those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.” This has most often been assumed to mean, “those who fight for the cause of justice” in society. The emphasis here, however, is on those who have been bereft (“starved”) of it themselves.

Confessions of a Clean Freak

Isabelle Campos

“Yo lavo y tu enjuagas?” I’ll wash and you’ll rinse?

My mom and I stand shoulder to hip at the sink. My toes lift me to reach the flowing water, a pink shirt with peeled-off rhinestones is drenched by my belly. The water is warm and my soapy hands are soon wrinkly. The clink of the spoons as I drop them into the cup they’ll dry in and the light off-key hum of Mami singing to El Buki on the radio. Wet curls frame my little face as I dry the top of my hands on my cheek. She’s really fast and eventually, she’s helping me rinse. When we’re done she thanks me for my help and tells me to change into something dry or else I’ll get sick.

The Dishes

I used to hate washing the dishes because they never ended. My mom used to say a “duende” or elf kept filling the sink with dishes to wash¹. Ten years ago, I was excited when we moved into our new house because it had a dishwasher machine. My dad would joke and say we already had a dishwasher and that it even talked. I was not amused. Nonetheless, the dishwasher machine was a taboo subject at home, and it was mainly used for storage of the Tupperware that belonged to my aunt². I got the sense that even though the machine did the same thing we could, it was a sign to my parents of losing agency over the most menial task. And the amount of water it supposedly used. Along with a little hand brush and stainless steel scouring pad, my mom preferred a piece of thin linen-tulle curtain that was folded over itself many times as her lather weapon of choice³. So I became a dishwashing expert against my will. My biggest grievances against the sink were as follows:

1. Wrinkly hands⁴
2. Lunch Tupperware
3. Starbucks and Yeti cups, each with their own coagulating mystery liquid.

I remember the time I wanted to throw a plate. The tips of my fingers were almost as pale as the porcelain of my mom’s pristine Corelle bowls as I was putting the dishes away. I think I was coming to the devastating realization, as many Mexican girls do, that “home-maker” is our birthright. “¡Ya te puedes casar!” *You can get married now!* A common joke within circles of Hispanic moms and aunts with their daughters. I heard it the first time I flipped a tortilla on the hot comal with my bare hand and scrubbed the kitchen’s grout until it was as creamy white as the day it was installed by my uncle. I love my brother, but, as a teenager, I often wondered why his life was so different from mine.

My grandpa was my dishwashing hero. Even now, I can still see him hunched over the sink, leaning on his left elbow, whispering in his all-knowing voice in Spanish to me, who was peeking from behind his shoulder. *You can’t just place the dish under the water to rinse it; use your hands to rub the soap off until you feel the friction of cleanliness.* I think of him every time I wash those damn dishes, of how much I miss him and how he would be telling me to let him take care of them.

The Bathroom

Growing up, my mom would always assign me to clean the bathroom. She said I knew how to clean it the best. Later, I would realize the weaponized incompetence of my siblings. They could do just as well as I did if they wanted to, but they didn’t need to because somehow I would always relent. I used to have the mindset that my mother would only be proud of me if I could make things sparkle. And I am very good at making sure every inch of porcelain, glass, wood, tile, and granite in the bathroom beams with pride. I have this disgusting fascination with removing any trace of grime, dust, and the invisible bacteria that I imagine more than I see. My high school graphic design teacher once told us of a silver-lined microfiber rag that is naturally disinfecting with only water, and my first thought was *no*. The slight smell of bleach is necessary for the process. Paper towels, gloves, Windex, a detail brush, using a broom to scrub the shower, steam, the smell of Pine-Sol, and my hands learning to wring the long white mop without splashing. Quick, efficient. Done correctly. A smile from my mother.

I used to use much more abrasive bleaches and acidic cleaners, in great amounts that probably hurt my young respiratory system because I didn’t know you weren’t supposed to mix Windex and bleach spray⁵. Cleaning the bathroom taught me that less is more when it comes to bleach and other things too. My mom would tell me that if a water drop ever stuck to the side of the sink it meant that the sink was crying because it needed to be cleaned. I think of that every time I wash my hands. I don’t know how to describe the feeling after cleaning the bathroom. Grim satisfaction? Relief? It’s unnecessarily cathartic, really, for something I do so often. I wonder if when I move out of my parent’s home that feeling will remain. There will be no one to validate my distorted perception of myself, as a woman, as a Mexican-American, and as my mother’s daughter.

The Laundry

Laundry is my guilty pleasure. I love the scent of clean clothes and the science of stain removal. I confess, there is often a fresh little coffee stain on my clothes that I can cover up with my hair or a coat. I hear my grandma’s voice: *Ay, don’t worry about that. A little bit of Zote soap and leaving it to dry in the sun will make it as good as new.* I trust her because I get my clothes-staining tendencies from her and her clothes always look immaculate.

I love the little song my machine sings when it’s done with a load of clothes. I sometimes dance to it. But nothing is better than the feel of a t-shirt straight from the dryer. When I was in elementary school, my mom would dump the basket of hot clothes onto the bed and I would fall face-first into it, the heat of her brass jean buttons pinching my skin. I would then sit on the edge of the bed and help my mom make pairs of socks, concentrating on perfectly rolling them from toe to ankle, just like she taught me. Today, I love re-watching *The Vampire Diaries* while I kiss t-shirts seam to seam and make neat stacks of jeans and dress shirts. I understand the time I give myself to fold my clothes is a luxury. When my

mom was going through her chemo and found herself unable to tend to the house in the way she used to, I suddenly understood the urgency in the loose folds she would make. My priorities changed from finishing an episode to making sure my mom wouldn't even have the chance to try and fold her clothes. The mindless thoughts in my head as I crouched down before the creaky dryer door turned into prayers that jumped back and forth from begging for a miracle and thanking God for my hands that were able to help.

I was taught to say 'love you' with a basket of folded laundry. I spend a lot of time Googling the best way to remove a stain. Watching TV without clothes or wet dishes in my hands feels unproductive to me. I get excited when laundry scent beads are on sale. At first, I was a little embarrassed to realize how much of my life, idiosyncrasies, and mind spaces are related to cleaning and the war it causes in my head. Yet I no longer harbor resentment when I look back and forth between the kitchen and living room during family gatherings. It's all we've ever known. As much as I participate in the expectations passed down to me from generations of homemakers, I am slowly coming to the conclusion that we are so much more than a clean house. I wish I could tell younger Isabelle, and every other daughter, that she is loved whether or not she spends three hours scrubbing the kitchen before Mom comes home. Cleaning is necessary for living, but not for loving. My ultimate resolve is to make sure my future daughter knows the difference.

¹ It was obviously all of us. But I suspect my brother had to do with the dishes that would appear overnight.

² I learned how to use it once, in secret. They take so long!

³ It was much better than a Scrub Daddy. You can't really clean a Scrub Daddy. They slowly get dark and perpetually greasy. Same with sponges; they have to be replaced too often. My mom's chunk of curtain, with a drop of bleach and a wash, was good as new.

⁴ Yes, we would have gloves, but somehow they would always get pinched with the knives and then I'd still have a wrinkly thumb.

⁵ By the way, don't mix bleach with Windex. Or bleach with pretty much anything. And even if you know this already, let the 12-year-olds in your life know too.

⁶ Zote: don't use on colors. Try OxiClean Stain Remover Spray.

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Sandra Ojeda

Smart kids know not to play outside before completing their homework. Like a prisoner under surveillance, my warden pushed problem number three towards me.

"Setenta más trece," I read.

"Setenta? Setenta? Es sesenta!" He yelled.

I tried correcting myself, "Setenta."

WRONG.

"Que no! Es sesenta!"

So, I tried again and again . . . and again.

"Sesenta," I thought I said every time.

But he only ever heard "Setenta."

"Se-sen-ta! Se-Sen-Ta!! SE-SEN-TA!!!"

The louder he said it, the more tears I shed

Because I knew,

Smart kids know the difference between setenta and sesenta.

Candy

Matei Werner, Colored Pencil



Bubbles for My Love*Emma Balma, Painting***Top Floor Swing Dance***Jeremiah Schultz*

I hold my hand outstretched and ask,
 “Would you like to dance?”
 To which she nods her head and says,
 “Of course,”
 slipping her fingers over mine,
 with a smile like warm weather
 and a laugh that reminds me
 God is really good.

Our feet go one two three
 on the top floor of a parking garage,
 to the rhythm of a song called
 ‘Coupe de Ville,’ a setting sun
 and a purple sky. We’re not
 thinking anymore—
 we just move like little kids
 told to stand still.

And we’re not great,
 but we’re getting pretty good
 and only getting better,
 as we get used to our
 mindless feet, whirling bodies,
 and the feel of each other’s hands.

Homily for the Conversion of St. Paul

Rev. Dr. James Lee

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit ✠

According to the Church's usual order and custom, we commemorate saints on the day of their death, with few exceptions. We remember the day of their death not with weeping and sadness but with joy and thanksgiving, for the day of their death is day of their heavenly birth. We don't mourn them. We rejoice that they have received the crown or righteousness. We celebrate the fact that they have "come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering." It is salutary for us to thank God for the good works that He has accomplished in the lives of His faithful.

But today is one of the exceptions. Today the Church of God rejoices in remembering Paul of Tarsus. But this day we do not celebrate Paul's heavenly birth—we will in six months. Instead, on the 25th day of the first month, we are bidden to remember and rejoice in the day that Paul's life was forever changed, when he met the Lord Jesus Christ. Neither his death, nor his birth; today, we observe Paul's conversion. But why? Why include this day, this event, in the life of Church, in her sanctoral calendar? The number of conversions within Church history borders on innumerable—why this one? Why this exception?

This story is so mystifying, so compelling, that it is all too easy for the reader to abstract from the text a theme or motif of conversion. Paul's story is so well known that we all too readily spiritualize Paul's experience and transform it, taking Paul's unique encounter and making it into a universal experience that every Christian undergoes. How many sermons, Bible studies, and devotions have asked the same tired, clichéd, worn-out question, "What's your Road to Damascus moment?"

To be sure, there is a meaning and interpretation to Paul's story that is applicable to the Christian life. And yes, there are theological themes and arcs within Scripture that are normative for our Christian life and the history of God's holy Church. But first, these stories, these historical episodes, are about the specifics, the particulars.

Paul's story is not some literary device. Neither can it we reduce it into some generic life-experience that everyone undergoes.

The people of the Scriptures—Abraham, Moses, David, Mary, Peter, Paul—they are not simply textual figures onto whom we simply project ourselves. They are the specific people whom God chose as His instruments to realize His eternally ordained work of salvation. They are the specific vessels through whom our Triune God has willed to bring about His economy of salvation. The celebration of Paul's conversion calls us to remember how God has so ordered and unraveled "the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints."

God's salvation is not some abstract principle that mystically fills the cosmos. It isn't karma, it isn't the Tao. God has unfurled His great salvation in time, with people, at places—on a road

leading to Damascus, to a man whose very life was diametrically opposed to the very Savior He would encounter, to a messenger whose persecution of the Church would be surpassed by the beautiful sufferings of Christ that would fill up his flesh.

Not me, not you, God chose Paul of Tarsus, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; a pharisee, the son of a pharisee, who studied at the feet of Gamaliel. Zealous for God; zealous for God's word, whose zeal would be manifest in his sharing in Christ's apostolic ministry, in whom the love of God was physically realized in 195 lashings, three beatings with rods, one stoning, three shipwrecks, and the spilling of blood and the giving up of the ghost in that eternal city that rested on seven hills, where his holy remains now lay at rest.

We celebrate Paul's conversion, because our Lord ordained Paul to be His unique instrument in spreading and proclamation of Christ's salvation. And so, the Church proclaims today,

O holy Apostle Paul, thou art the chosen vessel unto God to preach the Gospel throughout the whole World. By thee all nations have known the grace of God.

Last week, we also had another liturgical exception—do you remember? We celebrated St. Peter—not his death, not his birth—his confession. We remembered Peter's confession—"you are the Christ, the Son of the living God"—because it is the confession of the Church, the foundation of all her subsequent confessions.

In one week, the Church celebrates her two great pillars—Peter and Paul. One's confession; one's conversion. So today, with the Church scattered throughout time and space, we give thanks to God that He called to Himself brother Saul, who would suffer much for the sake of the eternal name given him in baptism.

But Saul is more than our brother; he is our father, for he is the father of the gentiles. And for this reason, the Church Catholic remembers Paul's conversion: for his conversion, the conversion of this Hebrew of Hebrews, is the gateway to the kingdom of heaven that God opened for Gentile sinners like you and me—and all those who were far off. The realization of "the mystery . . . that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the [body of Christ]" did not come to fruition spontaneously. Yes, God is the cause—but God works through agents, through instruments, through means.

If not for the blinding light of the Son of God that fell upon Paul, we would be a people blind in the darkness of sins. If not for the ardor of this son of Tarsus, we would still be children of perdition.

Receive our thanksgiving, Father, Son, and Spirit, for your servant and apostle, Paul. Teach us to be mindful of those whom you have used to bring us into your glorious fellowship, that we, like Paul, will one day gaze upon the brightness of your endless beauty.

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit ✠

The Woods*Sarah Gordon, Photograph***Ode to Shiloh***For Jonah, Mary, and Stephen**Jeremiah Schultz*

We never heard your little voice aloft,
 Or said our prayers before you went to bed.
 We never held your little fingers soft,
 Or joined our lips to kiss your tender head.
 Beautiful child! Your death undoes us all.
 We lay our harps and lyres upon the shore
 And bend to hear the mighty lion roar.

How can we search the hidden parts of God
 And not increase in fear and trembling?
 How can He break me with His iron rod
 And send me into senseless rambling?
 I fear Him in the night.
 I see Hell-fire on Sodom raining down.
 I see blood-soaked eyes peer through a thorny crown.

The evils of this world disturb my soul,
 And steal away a joy I once had known.
 I feel the hands of death upon me pull
 And taste the dread of life in every groan.
 My thoughts are soaked in darkness.
 My tears have been my food all day and night,
 I struggle still to see the present light.

Yet who am I to know the ways of God?
 To plum His depths or search His sacred wood?
 Though God took Shiloh's life and countless more,
 With all my soul I'll call Him good—
 And every tear will tell of good—
 For Shiloh's death has taught us now of pain
 But more so still of what we have to gain.

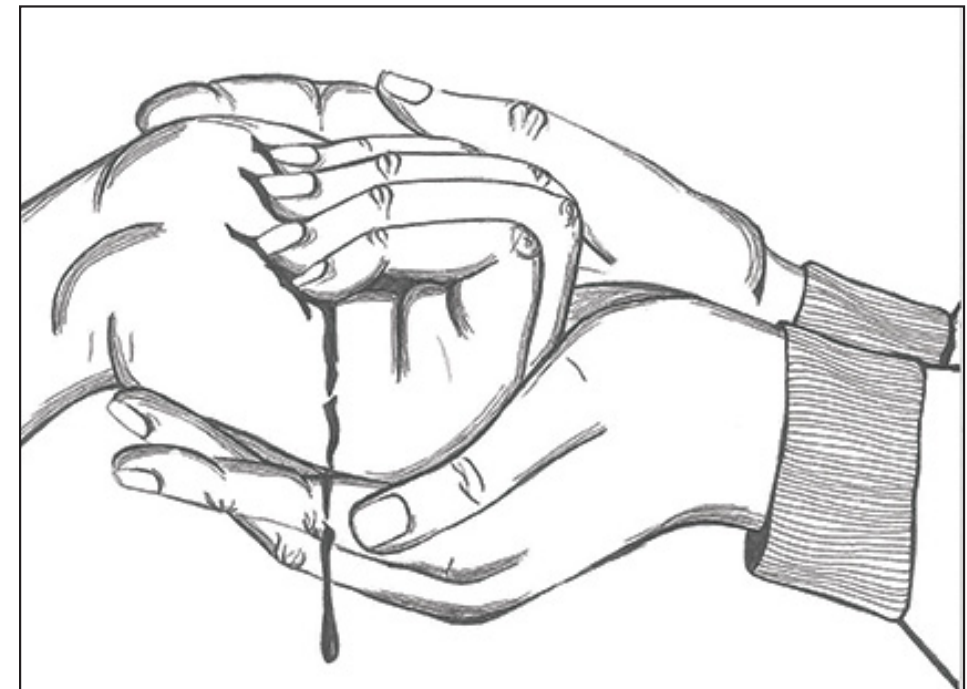
Dear Shiloh! Though we never saw your face,
 For four short weeks an unowed love you showed
 To pilgrims trudging slowly from this place
 To Christians winding on this weary road.
 O, blessed child! To be where you are now!
 Have angels gently laid you down to rest?
 Has Christ our God now pulled you to His breast?

Conchitas*Isabelle Campos, Ink***Manos***Isabelle Campos*

Pop of pain, flinching finger
 I drop the spoon into the pan
 There is now a red blot where the oil had jumped to
 and Abuelita insists I soothe it with mustard
 I read online that mustard doesn't help
 I put it on anyway

“Aye, mija, se te va hacer una mancha”
 Her worried words, apapachándome
 She takes my hands into hers
 Her hands
 scarred by blistering drops from a million meals
 chapped by pink bar soap and purple floor cleaner
 made crooked by neat rows of rhythmic stitches
 the frailest and strongest hands I know

Next to my own pink palms and soft fingers
 I wonder if my hands will ever look like hers
 if I can ever love like she does

Comfort Found in Gentle Hands*Maggie May, Drawing*

Impatient*Elijah Kohlmeier*

A youthful woman plunges in the lake,
 The sunlight slipping over warm, tan skin,
 And she emerges with a vibrant grin,
 Her hope sincere as sunrise, never fake.
 Her pinecone hair that swishes in her wake
 Flings little diamonds as she comes within
 My outstretched arms to rest beneath my chin,
 And just as we embrace, I snap awake.
 I sit up in my cold and hollow bed.
 I stare into the ebony abyss—
 Where still the words of love remain unsaid
 To someone I don't know and so can't miss
 But still I do—until the black has bled
 Into the dawn when I feel sunlight's kiss.

Bliss*Ronnalynn Fleming, Acrylic on Canvas***Bad Pasta and Good Times***Mariah Trevino, Mixed Media Collage***Umbrella Brigade***Darrell Carter, Photograph*

In the Clouds*Jordan Meier, Photograph***A Sonnet of the Morning***For Sarah**Jeremiah Schultz*

Fair rosy love has called and beckoned me
 To bind my hands to pen and page and write
 A verse to read with milk and morning tea,
 A verse to spill our waking love in light.
 From earthy beds where flowers lie in sleep,
 And starry vines of midnights lately gone,
 I'll glean my mind and leave my thoughts to steep
 Till sonnets bloom and ballads shine upon
 A face my truest words will never hold
 Between their hands in warmth of dawning day;
 For as we sit, hands bound to tea grown bold,
 Her presence makes the worldly slip away.
 No orchards ripe nor Heav'n's spheres above,
 Can rightly tell of mornings with my love.

In Flight*Richie Marsh, Photograph*

Plenty of Fish

Elijah Kohlmeier

The high-pitched whine of the line wheeling
away, then the gentle drop in the water,
next the mumble of murky waves sloshing
against the sodden bank. Its murmurs remind
me that I need to be patient; the River will give
the fish that I need when the time is just right.

I wish I lived near clearer waters, crystal
blue seas where I could see plenty more
fish in the waves, but the Giver says “I love
you, and I won’t let you go hungry long.”
Still I sit and let the swell speak,
brown water lapping on naked toes.

The bobber on black stained glass rises
up, lowering down with the brown humps.
I stare as it crests and hides behind another
wave, then another, and more come; I long
to see the fish flow with currents the River
provides, but instead I watch solid waves

until the bobber’s gone.

I feel a tug on the line.

The Pier

Sarah Gordon, Photograph



Third Bit

Noah Clark, Photograph



To Disrupt One's Timing

Anthony Pullano

A changeup is one of the most important pitches in baseball. It's irritating and infuriating to an opposing hitter, and crucial to a pitcher's arsenal. A changeup can be defined as a pitch utilized to disrupt the timing of the opposing hitter, taking the game plan they had before and completely turning it on its head. The changeup forces one to adapt, overcome adversity, or fail trying. I've been up against many changeups throughout my life, none of which came on a baseball field. I've had a gameplan, and it's been flipped on its head before. I've seen people have to adapt to changeups thrown their way many times, but one will always stick out in my head.

I first started learning how to throw a changeup when I was 11 years old, the same year my father lost his job. At the same time as I was attempting to master an extremely important pitch, my family was trying to figure out how to hit one. I was in my basement with a baseball in my hand when he arrived home, trying out new changeup grips. I moved my fingers across the seams meticulously, trying to figure out a way to make the ball feel comfortable in my hand. Out of ideas, I ran up my basement stairs to ask my father—who doubled as my coach—for some advice. I was greeted by the sound of yelling, by a conversation I wasn't meant to hear. I turned the corner to see my father, exasperated, and my mother with a rare look of panic on her face. I was aware, yet so oblivious. I knew this wasn't the time to ask him for advice, but I had no idea why; I just knew. My parents had a game plan, but they hadn't factored in a changeup.

As a 10-year-old, I wasn't aware of what my family was truly going through, as my parents tried their best to keep the details from me and my sister. My father was suddenly around the house more, much to my delight. There were a few weeks that felt like forever. Being able to talk about baseball with him, working on this new pitch, it suddenly didn't seem so impossible anymore.

What I know now is that jobs don't appear out of thin air. Once I found out the reason my father had been home so often, I felt terrible. I felt as if I had monopolized his time with futile questions. After a while, nothing had turned up and he had to adapt. He decided to take on a new job, driving a truck all over the Midwest during the winter time. The hours were long, and the weather was freezing. He wasn't at home nearly as often. All of a sudden my coach was gone, and I was left on an island by myself; this was my changeup.

This might be a personal thing, but some of my best ideas have always come out of loneliness. When I'm by myself, alone, with my thoughts, I can come up with some amazing ideas. One of these ideas was a phrase that I would say to myself. "Just keep going," I would say. I'm pretty sure I got it as a variant from *Finding Nemo*, but that's beside the point. Watching my parents adapt to the changeup life threw at them inspired me to adapt to the one thrown at me. I spent the latter part of the winter cultivating this new pitch, preparing to use it for the upcoming season.

I would always update my father on how it was coming along, but I didn't want to be a bother to him. I could see how tired he was, yet the genuine joy he got from hearing me talk about it was something neither of us could ever replace. The happiness we exchanged with each other was special. There were moments of sadness for me, and I knew that he felt the same at times. But there was something that always told me to just keep going, knowing that he was telling himself that too.

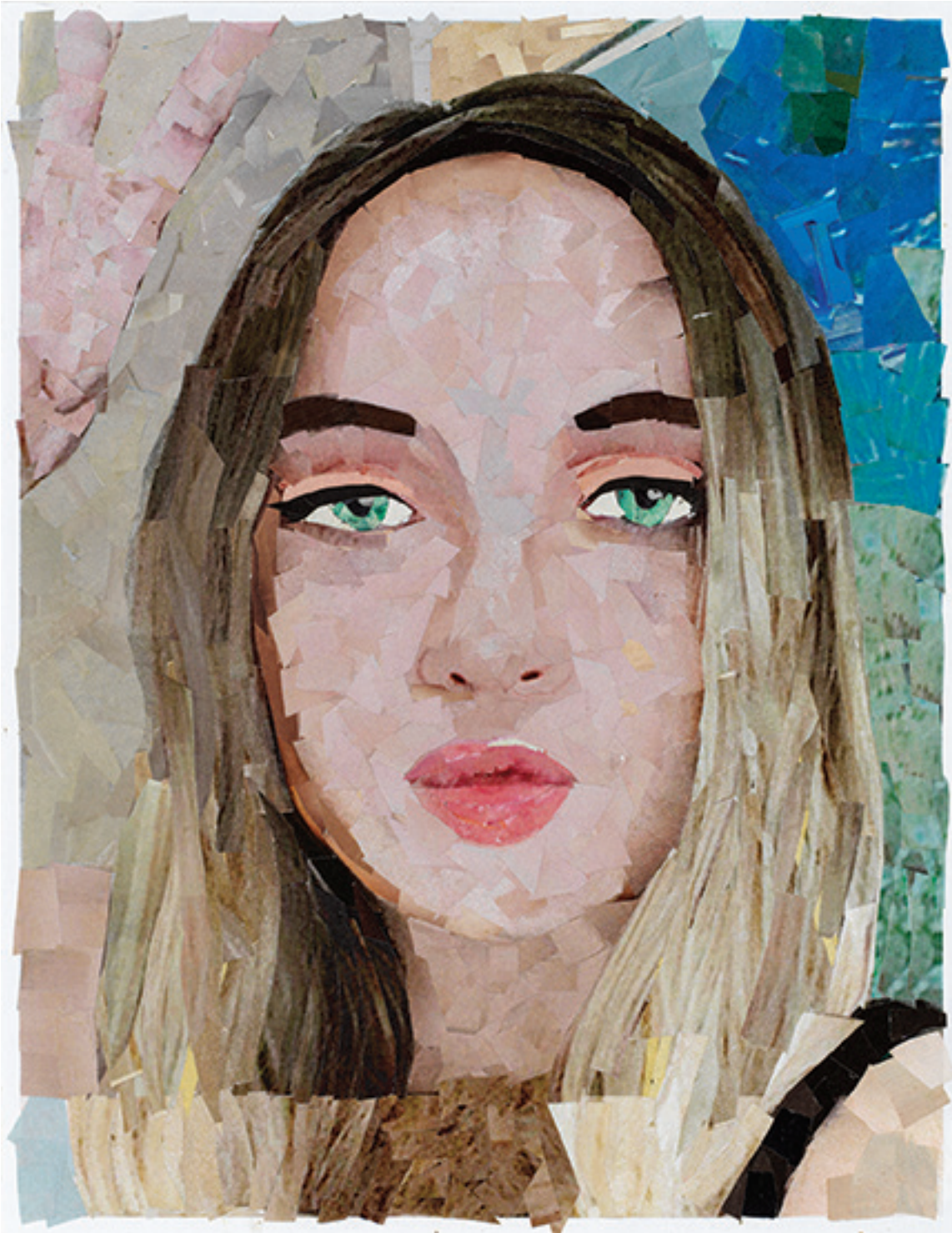
Spring had finally arrived, and I had become confident enough to throw my new changeup in a real game. One night, my dad was supposed to get off work in time to come and see me pitch. The first inning came and went, and there was no sign of him. I walked out to pitch my second inning, only to see my dad parading towards the field as fast as he could. He was still wearing his neon green trucker shirt, covered in grease and other stains he acquired from a workday he never told me about. My eyes quickly darted to his face. I'll never forget his smile, reassuring me that he was there as he bounded towards the field. I threw my changeup more times than I could count that day, and I made sure he knew about it when it was all over. "I'm so proud of you," he said after the game. I'll never forget what it felt like to hug him like that.

That whole year was a changeup for my entire family. Our timing was disrupted, and our game plan was torn to shreds, but when it came to my father's relationship with me, he never let it show. The adversity he went through is something I could never fathom, but the way he adapted to it is something I'll never forget. Even to this day, I don't think he's aware of the profound effect that this experience had on me. Every member of my family was thrown a changeup that year, and we were all forced to face it together. "Just keep going," is a phrase I say to myself to this day, and it all started with a baseball in my room; just me and my thoughts.

Hope Springs Eternal

Maria Gedroc, Mixed Media Print Collage



Pieces of Me*Emma Wisniewski, Paper Collage***I'm Really Sorry That Your Order Was Incorrect***Maggie Shasko*

Did you know that
 Even if your best friend dies
 You'll still get yelled at
 For putting onions on a Butterburger
 Because life goes on

You didn't know what to do
 So fifty-eight minutes after
 The ventilator falls silent
 You're making ten dollars an hour
 Flipping patties on the grill

You apologize profusely
 While screamed at
 Because it's a pandemic
 But people don't want excuses
 Just fries and normalcy

It's not their fault
 How would they know
 Sitting on the couch, you saw someone
 Take their last breath on FaceTime
 Because, for everyone else,
 Life goes on

Grapevine

Efrain Soriano, Stoneware



Irish Belleek Basket

Olivia Hitz, Ceramic



Between Two People

Kierra Mohalley, Gouache



Swiftie Sisters

Maggie Shasko

November 1st, 2022. The fateful day upon which Taylor Swift announced *The Eras Tour*, her first post-pandemic concert tour, encompassing a vast variety of songs from nine previous albums. I woke up that morning to see the news breaking on Twitter, overjoyed by the prospect of getting to see my favorite artist in concert. I was elated and I had to share this news with someone right away. I immediately texted my sister:

TAYLOR SWIFT IS GOING ON TOUR WE HAVE TO GO!!!

Why are you yelling? was her response.

It is important to note that my sister is a casual enjoyer of Taylor Swift music. She'll let me ramble on about Taylor Swift's cats or movie appearances or why *Reputation* is my favorite album; but after a little while, she'll get progressively more annoyed, rolling her eyes, putting her headphones on, hoping that I'll get the hint that she wants me to shut up.

Taylor Swift's music is one of the few common interests that I share with my sister. We're just very different people and in different stages of our lives. She's seventeen, I'm twenty-two, and to me she's always just been my younger sister.

I assumed that she wouldn't want to go with me to the concert, because I was going to be screaming with excitement, because it's a Taylor Swift concert, and I figured that she would find that extremely annoying. But as it turns out, she also wanted to go to this concert, and so it was set. June 9th, 2023, my sister and I were going to see the real Taylor Swift in person. After eight agonizing months of waiting, it was finally the day of the concert.

In my eagerness to attend this concert, I had forgotten how afraid I was of large crowds. Yet this was a concert with more than fifty thousand people in attendance. Things had been going OK so far. We got our tickets scanned and entered into the stadium -- Ford Field, Home of the Detroit Lions. Unfortunately, we end up going in the wrong entrance, and our seats are on the complete opposite side of the field. The longer it takes trying to get to the other side of the stadium, the more acutely aware I grow of the fact that I am trapped in an unmoving crowd. People are just standing in lines (for the bathroom or to buy merchandise) that wrapped around the stadium, many decked out in bright, colorful sparkly dresses, chatting loudly and excitedly with their friends. Trying to navigate this space feels like I'm trapped in a game of pinball, ricocheting off the wall, as I bounce around groups of people, while trying to make sure my sister doesn't get lost in the process.

It doesn't seem like we are getting any closer to where we're supposed to be. There's no clear path, and I start to hyperventilate. The world is closing in, and my breathing is shallow. I don't know how to get out of here. This has never happened to me before.

My sister sees the panic starting to set in on my face as I'm completely paralyzed with fear. Her eyes widen in concern, but she understands right away what is going on, that I'm having an anxiety attack. She grabs my hand very tightly and starts to pull me through the crowds of people. She pushes through and weaves around groups of people with polite but resolute *excuse me's* and *we need to get through here, thank you's*. I'm still panicking, and

though I try to stop it, silent tears are streaming down my face. People are staring at me, a crying adult, whose little sister is dragging her through the crowd, but I don't care and neither does my sister. We just need to get to our seats.

We finally make it, and I immediately collapse into the hard plastic stadium chair, completely exhausted and devoid of any energy. My sister doesn't say anything. She just sits in the seat next to me, knowing that I just need a little bit of space to regain my composure. After a few minutes, I get my breathing back under control.

I'm embarrassed. I'm supposed to be the older sister, the leader, the dependable one that can take charge of a situation. And yet, in that one moment, I was completely helpless. I later realized that my little sister doesn't always need my help, and just because I'm older doesn't mean that I'll never need her help. I can rely on her because I can't always do everything by myself. Since that day, I've made an effort to spend more time hanging out with my sister and to learn more about her interests. She's not just my sister, she's a friend.

And as for how the concert went? It was epic. Amazing. Life-changing. I could talk about it for hours on end. In the end, I guess I could say that Taylor Swift helped me become friends with my sister.

Candy Land

Emma Wisniewski, Colored Pencil and Ink on Paper



Bless You, Boys

Gus Streng

“I knew we were in for a long season when we lined up for the national anthem on opening day and one of my players said, ‘Every time I hear that song I have a bad game.’”

— Jim Leyland

At the threshold of the season,
I still get nervous before every game.
My heart flutters against my rib cage
with each deep fly ball, and a win
brings fantasies of a World Series.

Soon, I’ll be home, sitting with the
old men at the bar, listening
to them tell stories about Kaline and Kirk.
I just have to believe hard enough
and the glory days will come again.
When Cabrera puts the buggy-whip
on the ball, I feel my faith renewed
as it soars towards the warning track.

But, more times than not, it falls harmlessly
into a fielder’s outstretched glove.
The bar’s atmosphere turns foul,
minds drift back to losing seasons
gone by and the dire dog days ahead.

Dónde Estás Juventud

Efrain Soriano, Woodcut Chine-Colle



Bathroom Sock Hop

Lydia Smith

The light from the bathroom pours into my bedroom at an unmetered tempo, flickering at the pace of an overeager child playing the drums for the first time. I recall the videos I sent to the friends with whom I used to share that very bathroom, the videos I sent them of the spontaneously strobe-lit sink. “It looks like a rave in there,” they said. “We could have a dance party.” But how can we dance when you live in Canada, in California, in Alaska?

Images flood my mind of nights with steamy flat irons, scattered makeup brushes, scented lotions, mismatched earrings, too many girls crowded around a mirror hung too low on the wall with music thumping too loud; but also wet toothbrushes, rarely used retainers, near empty contact solution, tired eyes that smile and say goodnight with just a look.

I watch a man in black replace the fixture in the ceiling at someone else’s request. As he leaves with the defective light, he takes with him the discotheque dreams of one last casual bathroom sock hop with my once roommates. I now stare blinded by the new light of the new reality that my dancing days have already died away, and those four girls will never waltz within those four walls again.

Rear Victory

Velda Ndong, Photograph





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