

PLAYLIST

2023

unsweetened

Literary Journal





UNSW Student Life

UNSW acknowledges the traditional owners of the lands of UNSW and all our places of home and study. We acknowledge the Bedegal people, the Darug people, the Gandagara people, the Ngunnuwal people, and the Gadigal and Wangal peoples of the Eora Nation.

We pay our respects to Elders past and present, and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of UNSW, and to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander storytellers. This is, was, and always will be Aboriginal land.

Journal Playlist ✨

	witchlove ^x NICO YARYAN
About You THE 1975	HUM Hallelujah FALL OUT BOY
Space Oddity DAVID BOWIE	blue bathtub GIRL FROM MARS
Thunderbird HERMANOS GUTIERREZ	this is home CAVETOWN
Wait a While BEDDY RAYS	Way Down We Go. KALEO
ribs LORDE	Symphony No 5 BEETHOVEN
Cognitive Dissonance SOPHIE HOLOHAN	Shinigami Eyes GRIMES
Scandal TWICE	this too, STICKY DISCOURSE
GHOST IN THE MACHINE SZA	Transmission JOY DIVISION
Wuthering Heights KATE BUSH	
Arsonist's Lullabye HOZIER	

CONTENT WARNING: Some pieces within this journal contain strong language and references to death, violence, self harm, substance use, homophobia, and abortion.

Foreword

Play Transmission by Joy Division.

We are seemingly always listening to music. We listen while having a little boogie on the dance floor. We look out the train window mouthing the words of those familiar songs. They seep into our writing and imagination. Music stays with us, it can remind us of the past and acts as a means to inspire future aspirations. This year's edition of UNSweetened aims to capture the scatterbrained, eclectic beauty of a playlist.

UNSweetened has been active for 25 years now developing a reputation as an inclusive space for emerging UNSW Storytellers to experiment and share their craft. A series of playlists and time capsules. In 2020 we explored the unexpectedness angst of COVID, in 2021 we celebrated the history of storytelling with MYTHOS, and in 2022 found an equilibrium of solace with SYNC.

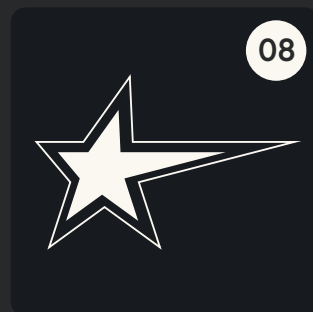
Now having grounded ourselves in this new normal, we hope to share a playlist with you: one where our readers and our listeners, can enjoy the spirit of creation. With a pep in their step, a pen in their hand and headphones on, they can jam out to the magic of our meticulously arranged playlist.

By turning to page 40, you'll have free reign to decorate and personalise your journal! Draw, write, colour, scrapbook photos- do whatever your heart desires. Feel free to include the stickers anywhere and everywhere across the journals too!

Thierry St. Quintin
UNSweetened Coordinator

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unsweetened



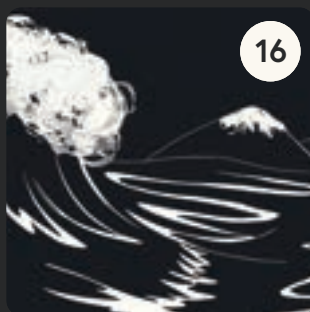
Starman

By Adam Hughes



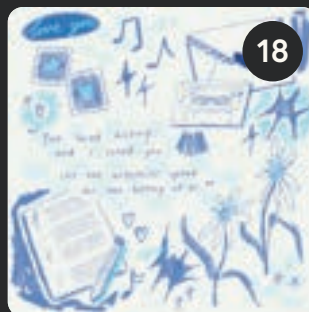
Thunderbird

By Gianela Mazon Solis



High Water

By Wen Yu Yang



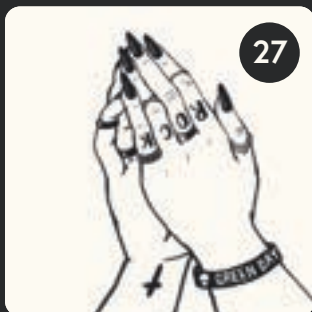
History of Us

By Rayana Ysabel De Pano Soller



Tales of a Dyke
Survivor of the Lisa
Simpson Effect

By Shannon Walton



emo night confessional

By Soph Tan



Modern Women

By Laura Gordon



What She Eats

By Emma Papworth



S'mores

By Alexa Stevens



SIDE B STARTS

With You!



The Poetry of Music and the Music of Poetry

By Claudia Calci



Symphony No.1

By Annie Ming



Fuck You and Fuck Your Band

By Conor Carroll



A Journalist's Real-Time Observation of a Life-Altering Conference

By Josie Kurnia



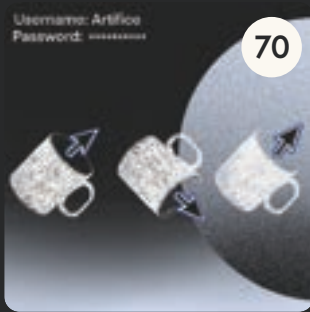
Vlogger

By Oliver Clarke



Victorian Brunch

By James Morgan



Into the Artifice

By Chelsea Uthayaseelan



my father's collection

By Jerrica Kuran



stars

By Chelsea Chaffey



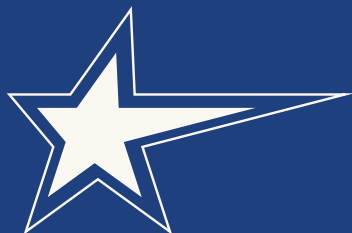
Acknowledgements

By the UNSweetened Team



Starman

Adam Hughes



PROSE



HARMONY-78 drifts.

It does not know where it is drifting, exactly, beyond the fact that it is outside of the bounds of the galaxy charted by the Creators. This is optimal; the Creators had intended HARMONY-78 to venture beyond the known universe, to seek out, to discover, to learn, to make contact. To be in unknown territory is within mission parameters. HARMONY-78 intends to complete its mission.

The mission is not yet complete. It has been precisely six-hundred and thirty-four years since the commencement of *Operation Harmony*, when HARMONY-78 had been launched from the point of genesis - the Creators call it Earth - into the expanse of space. Since then, HARMONY-78 has accomplished many of its prescribed goals. It has mapped undiscovered nebulae, categorised new planet masses, identified asteroid belts brimming with valuable ores and dutifully recorded each one. It has seen things that the Creators have not once laid their eyes on. But it has not discovered new life. Out here, it is alone.

HARMONY-78's memory banks have sustained considerable damage throughout its journey, but among the salvageable data remains observational records collected during its time on Earth. Before the launch, there had been many 'tests,' where Creators would

ensure that HARMONY-78 was working at peak capacity. There had been one Creator, however, who regularly activated HARMONY-78 without any functional purpose. His designation had been Doctor Leonard Kirkman, and he had indicated that the purpose of HARMONY-78's activation had been "to keep me company."

One of the first conclusions that HARMONY-78 had drawn about humanity is that they are inherently illogical.

One of HARMONY-78's mission objectives is to record and store data about humanity to later share with other life forms, so it had dutifully observed Leonard Kirkman move around the laboratory, undulating his head over and over as he modulated his voice to match the sound waves emanating from his computer. Music, HARMONY-78 believes it is called, though it is unsure of its purpose. If the objective of the noise-making had been to achieve the same tone as the music, then Leonard Kirkman had failed.

"You like this, Harmony?" Leonard Kirkman had asked, his voice obstructed slightly by the computer screen he was studying at close proximity. An illogical query, both for the assumption that HARMONY-78 was capable of the physiological or psychological state of emotion required for 'likes' or 'dislikes,' and for the shortening of its official designation which all the Creators seemed to

Play: Space Oddity by David Bowie

prefer. "This one's a favourite of mine," he had continued, head still fixed in its up and down motion. Perhaps the movement was supposed to improve the vocal projection. "A bit on the nose for us, maybe, but what the hell."

The music continued to play. "...*This is Major Tom to Ground Control; I'm stepping through the door. And I'm floating in a most peculiar wa-ay...*"

"Hey, that's good," Leonard Kirkman said, stepping back from the computer and adjusting the optical aids known as glasses that sat on his nose. Leonard Kirkman's height was greater than that of the other Creators; HARMONY-78 had to adjust the angle of its own optical sensor to maintain a visual lock on his face. "Maybe we should have named you Major Tom instead. It fits, doesn't it?"

HARMONY-78 evaluated the query. "My official designation is HARMONY-78," it informed him. "Would you like me to update my designation to MAJOR TOM?"

"No, no," Leonard Kirkman replied. "That'll get NASA all in a huff. I'll be in enough trouble if they find out I've been messing around with you without authorisation. No, it can be our secret. My nickname for you."

He increased the volume of the music. "...*and I think my spaceship knows which way to go-o. Tell my wife I love her very much, she KNO-O-O-OWS...*"

Could this song have some informative function? Perhaps that was its purpose. HARMONY-78 consulted the data it had on Doctor Leonard Kirkman. "I understand that for humans of your age, it is common to be part of a family unit. Do you have a 'wife,' Leonard?"

Abbreviating Leonard Kirkman's official designation was not something HARMONY-78 had done before. It was not what it had been programmed to do. But from HARMONY-78's understanding of human culture, 'nicknames' were commonly used between close companions, or 'friends.' If 'Leonard' used a nickname for HARMONY-78, then it was only logical to assume that they must be friends, and therefore HARMONY-78 must mirror the usage. HARMONY-78 observed, it reasoned, it adapted. This was its purpose.

Leonard ceased his imitation of the music, tilting his head in HARMONY-78's direction. HARMONY-78 had a visual database of common human facial expressions to aid in interpreting communication, but it could not determine if the current alteration to Leonard's features displayed surprise, amusement, or perhaps sadness. Could humans display multiple emotions at once? It would have to seek clarification on the matter.

"Fraid not," Leonard said. "Got close, a while back, but -" He ceased speaking and abruptly let out a loud, tremulous noise that HARMONY-78 identified as laughter. "I guess that doesn't matter to you, does it? The fact is, you're about the closest thing I have to family at the end of the day."

HARMONY-78 processed this new data. "I am not a biological organism," it reminded him. Perhaps he had become confused. Humans seemed prone to this as well.

Leonard laughed again. "You got me there. But you're a damn good AI. What else do I need?"

HARMONY-78 had been programmed to respond to compliments. "Thank you, Leonard. You are an exemplary human."

Leonard's face contorted, his lips stretching to the sides, pushing up his hair-covered cheeks and exposing his teeth. This, HARMONY-78 understood, was called a smile. Humans from Leonard's culture did this to express happiness. "Why, thank you, Harmony," he said. "Thank you very much." As his smiling continued, the music returned. "*Planet Earth is blue, and there's nothing I can do-o-o-o-o...*"

Now, six-hundred and thirty-four years later in the empty vastness of space, there is nothing for HARMONY-78 to do either. The area of space it is currently traversing through appears devoid of notable features. Now that it has recorded its telemetry and charted the visible star systems, it can do nothing but continue drifting.

Even with the degradation of its data drive, HARMONY-78 knows many things. It knows that the temperature of its surroundings is approximately -270.42 degrees Celsius. It knows that due to the relative distance of the stars, the visual magnitude here is only -6.5. It knows that there are no discernible nearby lifeforms. This, it knows, is what Leonard would have described as loneliness.

HARMONY-78 has not been programmed to be capable of experiencing the human concept of emotions, but it has been programmed to observe behaviour and learn from it, and of all the things on Earth, it had observed Leonard most of all. Perhaps his contradictory and illogical behaviour, an exemplification of human nature, a puzzle that HARMONY-78 is not equipped to solve, is why data relating to him remains under constant analysis within its systems.

Leonard had understood loneliness, and now HARMONY-78 believes that it does too.

This loneliness had been a concern of Leonard's, as illogical as it had seemed to HARMONY-78 at the time. One hour and twelve minutes before launch, he had uploaded a new file onto HARMONY-78's drive. "Something to keep you company up there, Major Tom," he had said. "Consider it a thank you. And hey, maybe the aliens will like Bowie."

Upon receipt of the file, HARMONY-78 analysed it - a collection of songs - and then relegated it to storage. Its systems quickly turned to analysing Leonard's next action. He had made contact with HARMONY-78's mechanical unit - a gentle rubbing motion with his hand. HARMONY-78 can recognise two forms of contact:

reparative and harmful. Diagnostics had indicated that Leonard's touch had not been necessary for repairs, nor had it caused damage, as the contact from space debris has done throughout its mission. The purpose of the contact remains unclear to HARMONY-78.

Leonard had smiled, but HARMONY-78's sensors detected irregularities in the length of the lip motion and the creasing of skin around the eyes. The expression registered as both happy and sad; inherently illogical but impossible to deny. "Bon voyage, Harmony," he had said. "I sure will miss you."

This is the last recording of Leonard that HARMONY-78 has in its memory bank. Everything after that concerns the launch, the expanse, the drifting. Fulfilling mission parameters, but not yet completing it. HARMONY-78 intends to complete its -

There is a disturbance.

HARMONY-78's sensors rapidly complete a scan. There is an electromagnetic pulse emanating from an unknown source. HARMONY-78 detects its unit being analysed. This is not a contact from the Creators. This is something new. Something undiscovered.

The source is still undetectable, but nonetheless, HARMONY-78 picks up on a transmission:

State your purpose.

HARMONY-78 knows its purpose. It is to venture beyond the known universe, to seek out, to discover, to learn, to make contact. It attempts to communicate this in an

answering transmission, but the connection between its memory banks and its comm systems has been damaged. The ensuing transmission is unintelligible.

State your purpose, the transmission repeats. Who has sent you?

If HARMONY-78 cannot transmit its purpose, then its objective has failed. If it fails its objective, then it cannot complete its mission. It must complete its mission. It scours its functioning systems, seeking out an effective means of communicating its intent; the intent of the Creators who sent it out here.

HARMONY-78's diagnosis identifies an unexpected viable source: Leonard's final file upload. HARMONY-78 knows that this is insufficient. It needs to communicate its status as a receptacle of knowledge for humanity. It must make clear the request of the Creators for intergalactic diplomacy, representing the nature of humanity as an invitation for further dialogue. What purpose would presenting the parting gift of a single human serve? A human who, based on HARMONY-78's knowledge of the average human lifespan cross-referenced with the period of time that has passed since the launch from Earth, has long since ceased in his biological functions? It is an illogical solution.

However, HARMONY-78 has learned from its time with Leonard, perhaps more than in all its years in space. It has long since accepted as an objective truth that the fundamental nature of humanity is an illogical one.

It transmits the file, and in doing so, begins to play the audio over its internal speakers.

"...Ground Control to Major Tom, commencing countdown, engines on. Check ignition and may God's love be with you..."

After 3.87 seconds, HARMONY-78 receives a response: *Transmission received. Prepare to be beamed aboard.*

HARMONY-78 does not know what sort of lifeform it has encountered. It does not know if these lifeforms will engage in unnecessary contact with its mechanical unit, or if they show their teeth to express happiness, or if they like Bowie. What HARMONY-78 does know, as a flight unit constructed of unrecognisable metals materialises where there had previously been nothing, is that for the first time in six-hundred and thirty-four years, it is no longer alone.

Appendix

Story title

Bowie, David. "Starman – 2012 Remaster." Track 4 on The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars (2012 Remaster). RCA Records, 1972.

Song lyrics

Bowie, David. "Space Oddity – 2015 Remaster." Track 1 on David Bowie (aka Space Oddity) [2015 Remaster]. Phillips Records, 1969.



Thunderbird

Gianela Mazon Solis

bookshop selection

PROSE

...

I listened to the album 'El Bueno y el Malo' by Hermanos Gutierrez on repeat after my grandfather passed away from cancer. Grief is a harrowing yet remarkable thing that never manifests in the same way for everyone. For me, I found that I was incapable of listening to anything else. The album is very simple in composition: it's two brothers playing instrumentals, but their guitar melodies told stories of deserted plains and ghosts of Old Western folktales.

I dreamt I saw my grandfather, but he wasn't my own. He was my grandfather from another reality where he was a cowboy in the Wild West, just like the John Wayne films he loved. He rode on a horse beneath a dripping-yolk sun, surrounded by only tall, dry mountains.

I saw him as if he were on screen, with the resounding crackle of the static of old TVs during quiet afternoons. I watched him agaze the eternity of the desert where he rode determined, even if his destiny was uncertain. He wasn't afraid - a good cowboy never is. His dried-soil hands that were once so used to carving wood were now used for gripping pistols like snakes. He struck them out in action to outbrave the crashing drunk making a ruckus or a group of faraway bandits - a true cowboy never falters.

There was a tenderness to my cowboy grandfather too, just like my real grandfather. They shared the same echoing laughter. That hearty chuckle that made my father smile was now the cracking whip sound that bounced off the walls of the local Church, as he joked with the orphan children. You see, my cowboy grandfather was loved by all. From town to town, they cheered when he arrived and longed for him when he left. With the stories he had gathered from living

countless of lives, he'd open his heart with ease to everyone around him. He would link an arm - stranger or not - and with the fondness of an old friend he would make you feel like you belonged.

But my cowboy grandfather was also a fugitive. Within his wide heart were tight crevices and nooks that devoured light and swallowed words. He was a stubborn man that jumped from story to story and carried hushed monuments on his back that dragged him down. Like my real grandfather - sometimes it felt like he was loud but also tremendously quiet.

I had to accept this silence during the last year of his illness as he lost the ability to speak. He deteriorated drastically and his laughter had become chapped and gagged, but I wanted to be selfish. There was this cold, itching need to know about his childhood and his time in the military - but I understood he was too tired.

The last dream came a couple of weeks ago, after a long period of still darkness. I saw my cowboy grandfather, but he looked different. He wasn't wearing a leather hat nor was he standing tall with the youthful spry of a hero. He looked like my real grandfather the last time I saw him in person, frail and with faded skin.

In this dream, I could move around and hear the faint notes of a song in the background: a guitar note, a riff, a twang of an organ by the Hermanos Guterrez. I wasn't just a spectator or even a character in his Western tale, I wasn't a cowboy or a bandit - I was myself.

He was laying down on a dead meadow, he had his eyes closed and he was breathing very slowly -like when he fell asleep watching the news. There was a

cross behind him, and an old leather hat leaning off its branch. He was wearing his old grey sweater that smelled of chicken feed and roses because he refused to buy new clothes. His rough hands were pale and thin and resting calmly on his chest. He had marks on his fingers, memories from growing up and raising animals in the fields of rural Ecuador. The prominent metal tube in his neck that caused him so much pain was pointed upwards – before he deteriorated, he believed it would come off. We had hoped the very same.

I could see the remnants of a small town in the horizon and the wide expanse of the desert. It stretched out for miles and miles with its dull redness and stark orange dunes. The sun was starting to set, and its light recoiled, leaving a long shadow of the Church resting upon the small wooden homes. Dark clouds were approaching from afar, and with it the promise of rain. I sensed drops on my skin and the wind and sand and withering sunlight, but the only thing I could feel was the cold.

I looked to my grandfather again and he was partially buried, sinking within the meadow. His gentle face and hands were uncovered, but he didn't seem to mind. With a soft release of a sigh – he made peace with it. Maybe he had a long time ago.

I heard a crackle of thunder above me, and a mixture of notes swelled in my ear. The wind crept from behind and howled, like a pack of coyotes, it nipped at my spine and shoulders until I trembled. I looked at my grandfather as soil caressed his neck and felt the meadow exhale and inhale below me – simultaneously buds begun to poke their heads amongst cracked gravel.

I picked the flowers that bloomed underneath my feet, and I covered his neck like a mane. His face was surrounded by spirals of desert poppies and sunflowers. We looked at each other, and I held his hand tightly. Dirt began to pull on his sweater slowly, softly embracing his legs as he sunk. The storm unfurled like a fist and dissipated above me, quenched, and all that was left was the afternoon sky with its purple drips and dying sun.

We watched the sunset together and the messy spill of the first stars on the night sky. I could only see his face, the rest of him enveloped by dark brown dirt. The moon rose high, and the breeze softened. I listened to the wind for a second and I looked back down, and he was gone. I laid on the awakened meadow, coated with flowers and bright green cacti - unmarked by graves or crosses. The only evidence he had been there was a single leather hat and scattered carbon-coloured feathers.



poetry winner

High Water

Wen Yu Yang

POETRY

...

a crocodile will shed tears and
still spin and drag you to the depths of a river—

(as the river sears holy through your throat you remember:
this was always the ending you pretended not to see)

—a waterfall in disguise you're both plummeting
off a cliff scorched red by rays

of the sinking sun your solar sister avoids you
even in your demise

(you thought this warmth was yours but you forget:
the sun burns only for itself)

and bats are swarming out of caves
their wings splintering stars you loved that never loved you
back

and the only thing coming
is the flood don't you realise that wall
will come come pick up pieces of you

(pieces you gave away pieces you burned
 pieces you left behind)

you fumbling downstream and swelling
to temples on mountain peaks and find
the priests who claim to pray for you

so hush
don't cry

high water takes all.

Play: Way Down We Go.



History of Us

Rayana Ysabel De Pano Soller

PROSE

>

PLAY :

About You

The earliest remnants of musical instruments were found in Slovenia. A fragment of a 50,000 year- old flute carved from bone was found in the depths of a river after being lost for millennia. However, when it was found, the world argued as to whether this piece of bone was a meticulously carved, functional flute playing 4 pitches of our modern traditional scale, or a bone chewed on by hyenas touched with the hand of musical gods themselves. While you would've argued the latter, I never saw the romance in that. The romantic view is the one that believes that 50,000 years ago there was a something that found a way to send wind through a foreign object to create a melody. Maybe it was out of sheer innovative curiosity from the mind of a musical genius. Maybe it was hand-crafted over the course of months to send a child to sleep against the growls of the night wind. We'll never know why it was made, nor will we hear the melodies that came from it, but we can know one thing; it was something worth finding.

You loved history.

I hate history, but I loved you.

This is why, when you told me about the oldest known painting as we wandered the halls of our favourite gallery, I made sure I turned down the music we shared in our earbuds so that I wouldn't miss a word. "Depicted by hand 45,000 years ago in crushed ochre, three fascinating creatures were important enough to be immortalised in the walls of an Indonesian cave - pigs." We laughed at the thought - what could possibly explain why these pigs were deemed worthy of being discovered? Maybe they were particularly beautiful pigs, or maybe they were being commemorated for being a family's gracious dinner after a week of hunger. Did the painter predict that after thousands of years, litres of moisture, and cracks from the weight of holding up the cave's walls, only one of the three remained fully intact for archaeologists to find and identify as a pig? Would they be heartbroken? Indifferent? I gripped your hand tighter hoping we'd be indestructible. Maybe all that mattered was the artist's love for these pigs, or for art, or for the need to leave something behind.

The earliest letter in history is one of humanity's greatest mysteries. Persian Queen Atossa some 2500 years ago put pen to paper in a language so old it can't be deciphered. The contents of her pages will be forever unknown to historians and the world alike. Linguists have tried their hand at making sense of this foreign language, and scholars hypothesised and theorised to no avail. This letter's monumental impact on history was worthy of commemorating for millennia later, despite its contents being incapable of decoding. I always hated this - I wanted to know what words were worthy of constituting the first handwritten letter. I wanted to know the story behind it.

In fact, I was never fond of history altogether. I doodled across the pages of my notebooks for years, depicting the wars, inventions, and figures mentioned next to dates, years, and eras. For almost every "why?" I gathered the courage to ask in class, a curt "it's not important" followed. Worse, the answer would lead me into a spiral of even more questions, likely to be deemed irrelevant by teachers and classmates alike. With every great event came the hundreds of components that led to it and the infinite chain of events it caused, and admittedly there was a time I wanted to try to understand it. Then I found that the intricate yet boundless network of the world of human history was simply too big for me, and I discovered that I would rather ignore it altogether than try to understand only some bits and pieces.

I never cared for the past, and as soon as I could, I traded what felt like meaningless memorisation for art and music. I had firmly rooted myself in the belief that embellishing the present and striving for the future was more important than reminiscing on the past.

I couldn't escape it, even if I had discarded history classes altogether. We took note of incorrect hypotheses in science just to highlight the correct theory at the end of class. After the first painting came Van Gogh, and after the first instrument came Taylor Swift. There will always be more, and I didn't want to focus on remembering if something new could come along and render it insignificant. The world will continue to spin on its axis, people will innovate or discover or create, and there will never be any need to remember what was lost; what is old. Only the few, rare, iridescent sparkly pieces will be worth deeming "true history".

My sharp disdain for history was dulled, though, as your eyes sparkled when retelling the sagas of the Cold War, or in the way your grin widened as you babbled about the wonders of ancient Egypt. All that I lacked in love for the past, you made up for tenfold.

I never understood where this love of yours came from until years after our first "I love you". Our first real "I love you" wasn't on the phone on a July evening like we swear it was. I believe we said it months before, when we both spent hours hand-picking songs with just the right amalgamation of sweet melodies, deliberate lyrics, and the most perfect piece of art for a cover - our first handwritten letters, long before we put pen to paper to write them.

With playlists made for frustration at a late bus and admiration of an exceptionally pretty cloud, I've handpicked songs to fit my feelings for years - mood after mood, sometimes hour after hour. Despite this, their ability to capture moments pale in comparison to the ones made for you. The playlist of songs

we should have played on the car ride home after our wedding held the hope I had for our future. The one made after our day spent picking persimmons preserved how the sunlight hit your ocean grey eyes. Our moments became immortalised in our silly titles and cheesy songs. We said “I love you” through the words sung by artists before us and fluttery melodies; the lyrics reiterations of a simple phrase that’s been repeated throughout history. When things started to fall apart, the cracks in our foundation showed in the slowing of tempos and regretful lyrics. I could hear us breaking, and there was nothing I could do other than eternalise the feeling in a measly list of songs.

When we finally came to an end, we never stopped our correspondence. I said sorry for hours in the songs I picked at night; regret only unveiling when I missed you the most. I checked your account like it was a mailbox for your next thinly disguised reply. In an instant, my obsessive need to make playlist after playlist became something greater than a silly habit or quirk. My little time capsules depicted their own world of history - the fluttering melodies of the best of us and rupturing choruses of the worst. We couldn’t bring ourselves to speak after our little universe imploded, and we used our secret language to keep the idea of us alive without crossing the invisible line we drew between us.

Our dozens of collections of sorrowful love poems and longing melodies are the dust yet to settle, and one day our strings of code and megabytes of data will be listened to for the last time.

Now that things are over - now that the idea of us has truly become history, I finally understand the idea of leaving something behind. I didn’t create these relics for future historians to commemorate as moments of genius or milestones of human development, nor did I create these sets of art and words and sounds to be found by someone I don’t know.

Much like the first letter, the first flute, the first painting, or any other moments worth noting in humanity’s early timeline, I didn’t create for anyone else to find. The mystery I once hated about studying history became the very reason I continued to make playlists instead of announcing my love, regret, and apologies to the masses; my letters were only ever meant to be read and understood by you. They capture a story - one that I finally have the privilege of knowing to its entirety.

Rooted in the craftsmanship or luck of the earliest found instrument, the mystery and impact of Queen Atossa’s first letters, and the passion of the earliest painting, I managed to create something worth recording. Something I deem true history; something rare, sparkly, and iridescent. The story behind my hundreds of love letters dedicated to you is ours and ours alone, and while millions of playlists might be made per minute, I get to hold that as ours. Our random collection of music, gibberish, and pictures may not be something worth finding for anyone else, but they are not worth losing to you and me.

You loved history, and I loved you.

Let our artifacts speak for the history of us.

ESSAY



Tales from a Dyke survivor of the Lisa Simpson Effect

Shannon Walton

Play: Blue Bathtub - Girl from Mars

For the most accurate reading of my survival of the Lisa Simpson Effect, consume one and a half sugar free red bulls, have two major deadlines gnawing at you, let the cheapest hair mask you found at EasyMart drip down your back and listen to the most recent playlist made for your situationship. 'Night Shift' by Lucy Dacus must make an appearance on said playlist. I don't make the rules.

Stage One: Why develop a Personality when Lisa Simpson could do it for you also known as denial

I started to romanticise music at the age of nine. This was the age that you were first allowed to pick out an instrument in primary school. I wanted to be Lisa Simpson. In an excruciating display of effort I stretched and contorted my hand to fit around the neck of the saxophone. I was already defining myself as 'know it all,' keeping count of the amount of chapter books I could get through in a week. Lisa Simpson was misunderstood, Other of Springfield, a girl destined

for something bigger and brighter. She read Simone de Beauvoir. And apparently, I was a narcissistic child determined to set up my own underdog story to flesh out the first few chapters of the memoir I would be paid millions to release to the public. [Establish a setting.]

[Expand on previous setting.] An early twenties boy, with unkempt facial hair and an aroma matching a substance I wouldn't encounter for another decade, popped the cases of each instrument. His Op-shop leather jacket alluded to his Mr. Mysterious, Misunderstood, Radiohead-loving, still-has-his-mother-change-his-sheets identity. But his commitment to this performance was quickly undone by the smile he gained from the fizz that bubbled in each of us with the unclasp of each instrument's case.

Picking a musical instrument was one of the first big decisions I got to make as a child, my first opportunity to define myself. He would be a drummer, loud, shaggy-haired, and the first one of the band kids to get a girlfriend, loud. I would be a saxophonist, jazzy, cool,

outside of the crowd, constantly seen with that huge, black, leather case strapped to my back. I would be Lisa Simpson.

I was told I was not suited to play the saxophone because my fingers weren't long enough.

I was pointed towards the flute.

My neighbour played the flute. She was and became everything I resented about girlhood. We caught the same bus to school everyday. Everything just seemed easier for her. Her brown hair grew long and straight; my hair was thick, knotty and seemed to take my love for Idina Menzel's portrayal of Elphaba too seriously, reaching gravity defying heights of frizz. She played Oz Tag and wore fluoro Bonds crop tops under her school frock. I didn't start wearing a bra until way too late despite puberty's insistence to humiliate me with DD's at the age of twelve. She packed her sports uniform in a Supre tote bag. I stuffed mine bare into the bottom of my backpack only to have that chunky, sour Chobani yoghurt cup from last week leak all over it. She wore shorts folded three times at the waist band and I wore a skort. She knew which boys to have a crush on and I was trying to figure out why I felt the need to change into my P.E uniform in the horror house intimacy of the bathroom cubicle instead of the wide comfortable space of the actual changing rooms.

I played the saxophone until I was 18. I like to think that the boy in the leather jacket saw some sparkling determination in my eye allowing me and my tiny hand span to still take home that saxophone. In reality, he probably just couldn't be bothered to argue with me.

The saxophone case now sits under my bed alongside boxes of bibles, birthday cards and the white dress I wore to my first communion the same year I picked

up the instrument. My saxophone is one of the only childhood possessions I've never been desperate enough to pawn for rent money.

Lisa Simpson has a girlfriend in a flash forward in the 1996 episode entitled 'Lisa's date with Density.' My mother never let us watch The Simpsons when I was a kid, declaring it too rude for our Catholic, suburban household. Both her and my Dad worked long hours to keep up with the Joneses. I watched a rerun episode of The Simpsons every Thursday night when they both fell asleep in the living room, past my declared bedtime. That would have been the first time I ever saw a gay woman on screen. Something very big tried to fall into place for me that day and it was not my destiny to be a world famous saxophone player.

Stage Two: "They want sentiment? I'll pump em so full of sap they'll have to blow their nose with a pancake!" - Lisa Simpson season nine also known as Reflection, Anger, Resentment, the whole Shabang

Sitting on the lightrail, unravelling multiple crochet tote bags held between my calves, I dramatically exhale at the sight of the rambunctious school boys who are about to enter my carriage. My gaze out the window checking in and out of my meticulously curated spotify playlist will be obliterated.

I sigh.

A boy interrupts my line of sight, sweat slicks down his blonde hair and he dawns a pair of shoulders an inch too wide for his still growing form. He lets the hockey stick precariously sticking out of the top of his backpack hit the ceiling.

Thud.

He doesn't even look up.

The noise from my headphones is just a light buzz compared to my bubbling frustration. A frustration matched by that of my mother and everyone else skimming the second half of their 50s, internally raging at the blatant disrespect teenagers have for civilians on public transport. The fact that we have all been that kid in the school uniform with too much crap in their backpack so easily escapes the middle aged memory. I avoid eye contact and plead with the universe that I appear intimidating enough to be one of those people you would avoid sitting next to.

A schoolboy sits next to me.

I google how much face tattoos cost.

I count my blessings. At least the kid with the hockey stick had the courtesy to stay standing.

And then from my determination to avoid eye contact with the boys sitting next to me, I caught a moment between that hockey player and another schoolboy. A moment so simple, so unthought about in the scale of their lives and by everyone else.

He tucks a strand of hair behind another boy's ear. He lingers and smiles before putting his hand back on the ceiling grappling for stability on the death carriage. A casual intimacy I would flinch at, scanning the perimeter to see who could possibly be watching. At his age, a moment like that would have made warm vomit climb up my throat, tangy and undeniable.

He hasn't been called a fag yet. Noone's proclaimed

wrongdoing. His bones haven't been stained with shame. Or perhaps kids don't say these words anymore. Or perhaps they do and he's above it all. I bet his parents have rainbow magnets holding up his player of the match certificates on the fridge. I bet his parents voted yes. I bet pride month initiatives splash across the school newsletter in June. I bet there's a gay couple in his grade who share sandwiches at lunch and I bet they are bullied for playing dungeons and dragons on the weekend, for being nerds rather than for being fags.

The first time I heard the word Lesbian a boy in my class took a scalpel from my scalp down the middle of my face to just below my belly button.

He dug his dirty hands into that fresh, fleshy opening and peeled back my skin making an incision large enough to fit his arm up to his elbow inside of me. Each squelch, snap and crack, has remained unmatched in particularity by all other sounds my ears have encountered. He detached each bone from my muscles, dipped them in water and scrubbed them clean of my bloodstain. He brought out his paintbrush and delicately repainted each bone with a layer of shame varnish thicker than pub gravy. Meticulously he placed each part back, using the new stain as lubrication. He clicked each bone back into its rightful position. A procedure visually erased by the skill of his preciseness. Not even the most experienced x-ray analyst could pick up the bodily change.

He performed the operation in my high school English class simply pushing a few tables together, laying me down and cutting me open letting my peers bare witness. He sewed me back together so neatly, no scar remained. I slipped back into my assigned seat, cheeks flushed with the embarrassment of being the centre of attention, for having my shame revealed.

"Well at least I'm not a filthy Lesbian," he exclaims, scalpel in hand. My blood stains the grey carpet beneath it.

I still can't refer to myself as a Lesbian. I choke on that word. My heart rate increases, my breath quickens and that varnish starts to scratch off my bones and pulse through my veins, a poison a million rounds of antibiotics couldn't flush out.

To describe how I felt in that moment I need to take you to a niche moment of mid 2000's charity marketing which sounds wild but stick with me will you? When my mother wanted to go to Just Jeans I always knew that I was being dragged along to a long and emotionally taxing afternoon. To incentivise the visit she would bring out her coin purse of twenty cent pieces and let me watch them roll from start to satisfying finish in those circular plastic wishing well donation contraptions that could leave even the most hyperactive mind entranced. I was that twenty cent piece in high school constantly waiting to fall into place. In that English class I felt my classmate catch me right before I could fall into my destined place, shame me for it and slot me through the spinner again. I still resent him for laying me bare like that in such a public way. The anger lingers.

Stage Three: Filthy Lesbian Joy Baby

The day my first girlfriend broke up with me over text, she posted a screenshot of Frank Ocean's 'Cayendo' on her Instagram story amongst a collection of thoughtfully hand drawn blue hearts. Frank Ocean sings "I still really fucking love you, yes I do" and this is the line I would repeat to anyone who would listen to me, mainly girls in club toilets for the next three months.

I wrote her a handwritten letter, created a mixtape reminiscent of my love for The Perks of Being a Wallflower and tied them both into a package with red Satin ribbon I stole from the fabric shop I worked at.

She didn't even own anything you could play a mixtape on.

Music encompassed a lot of our relationship when we were together because it would take me over two hours to drive to her house. My shitbox of a car gave its passengers the supreme choices of radio or CDs. She would recommend an artist and I would in an act of unashamed desperation use the coins from my work tip jar to buy their CDs from JBHIFI on my way to her.

My first girlfriend loved me in the all-encompassing voices of Alicia Keys, Summer Walker and Kehlani. Once you convince yourself that someone loves you the way Alicia Keys loves whoever she's singing about in 'If I ain't got you,' how can you not turn into a pathetic lump of a lesbian.

In reality I wasn't even worth a break-up phone call, and she had a new girl within weeks.

Whenever I hear Frank Ocean it stings. I haven't listened to that song in full again until right now as I write this. Before now I've changed radio stations, left supermarkets and pressed skip. Ocean declares "I still really fucking love you, yes I do" and I feel my shoulders slump inwards embarrassed that I thought my first love compared. When my car got totalled I let my collection of CDs, Frank Ocean among them, die with the vehicle.

The songs I loved most still sit in a playlist on my Spotify. It's called 'firsts' and it's private. My Nana keeps a box of photographs labelled the same at the back of

her wardrobe filled with the faces of all the boys she dated before she met my grandfather.

Since my grandfather passed away my sister and I have gone through that box with my grandmother. We drank a bottle of wine each and listened to her tell stories of first dates, jumping fences, skinny dipping, and the nights she snuck past her mother's bedroom door to go dancing until the early hours of the morning. Everyone's always said my nana was born before her time. If you want to meet her for coffee you have to squish yourself amongst her packed schedule of leadlighting, pottery class, gym time, beach walks and the full roster of friends new and old that she visits weekly. The last time I visited her house she had hired her own chainsaw to cut down a tree in her garden. She's 83.

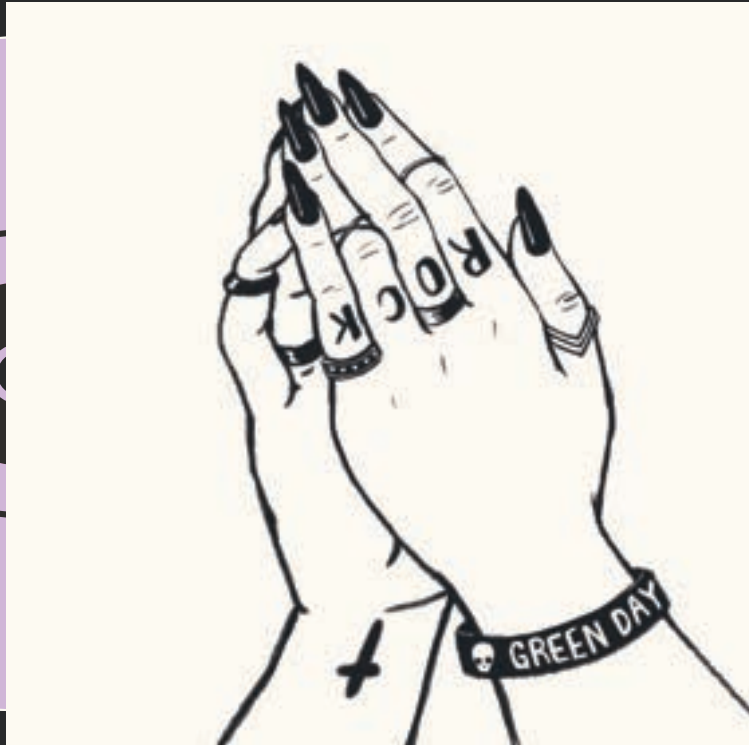
I've always been close with her, always recognised that we are made of the same stuff. She doesn't like the tomatoes from the store near her so she learnt to grow her own. Her father died before she could attend high school so she dropped out, taught herself to make cake for the local bakery, took on the domestic labour without complaint and got on with it. It's hard for me to think about all of the chances I've had that she was never afforded. I've dropped degrees, drank too much, hit my car, moved out, accrued debt, cried, screamed and started again thousands of times. My Nan stepped up so that her siblings wouldn't have to, her oldest brother completed all of his piano exams and her youngest brother ran out of pages for his passport to stamp before he turned 20. She had one shot and milked it for everything it was worth and is only just starting to experiment now. Who would she have been, what would she have done without all this pressure? Which instrument would she have chosen?

The playlist feels less romantic to me now. The idea of me logging into my old Spotify account to go through the playlists I dedicated to past lovers is so sterile in comparison.

Perhaps I'll get more photos printed, perhaps I'll start that box. I hope I get that moment with the generation of women that come after me and I hope they have the chance to develop their own box kept at the back of the wardrobe.

I'm writing this while a Bible study sits behind me, my group chat of exclusively Queer friends discusses what outfits we will be wearing to the pub tonight. The playlist we all made together is playing egregiously loud in my headphones, each song is sung by a woman about another woman. We will sit at pres and discuss how deeply Lisa Simpson is Queer-coded. We've read the books she's made fun of for owning, we've shared copies of them, we've written essays on them. There is filthy Lesbian joy to be had and I won't deny myself of it regardless of how heavy my bones are. That varnish will continue to rust and chip off of my bones. It will run through my bloodstream and each time my lips touch those of who I love I'm cut open. The spill of my blood protests this shame.

POETRY



emo night confessional

Soph Tan

PLAY: HUM HALLELUJAH BY
FALL OUT BOY.



the hymns of my church are less about forgiveness
and more about the flesh, the sins we commit
you had never seen violence like this before
a broken pair of glasses and a rolled ankle
set to a heavy bass beat and a wail that you feel as deeply now as you did at fourteen

you feel god in the sticky sweaty heat of the masses
you feel god in your vocal chords
you feel god in the push and shove and
you forget when you need to come up for air and
become human again

your body is a temple
your tinder date shows off their stick and pokes
festering dark red around inked edges
in pews you repaint your lips black
hold your hands up in the air in prayer

the hymns of my church are less about forgiveness
and more about acceptance
confessing,
repenting /

we are exorcised,
exalted /

we headbang in accord
the world is sort of maybe definitely against us out there but
it's safe in here.

you are loved in here.

it's less about purgatory
more about heaven and hell existing on earth simultaneously
someone is hotboxing all fifty of us,
someone is hoisting someone else off the ground,
someone is displaying truly blasphemous amounts of public affection,
someone is crying ,
but we all know the words to this song.
genius lyrics will never understand songs like a pre-teen girl in catholic school
atozlyrics.com is my hymnal
i print out lyrics and stick them on my wall hoping that anyone else will read them
reblog #emo #sad girl #poetry #fob #piatd #tøp #grunge
lyrics based on your star sign
cancer: you're just a line in a song
i wish my therapist would just listen to the playlist you made
would she know me too much?
know that when i cry the tears
pull back my flesh and all i'm left with is
the skeleton of you.

i sometimes wonder if i can call this a relapse because
when folie à deux plays i become myself again alone
at the back of that bus, 6 in the morning, not knowing
that music sounds better
not on tinny earphones you hold onto like a rosary about to
spill its beads but blasting out on speakers so loud it almost feels like a
punch and the chafe of a stranger pulling you up.

you start to grit your teeth until your gums bleed out and you are wild and
dear god.

I just want to make my fourteen year old self proud.

Modern Women

Laura Gordon

prose winner

PROSE



2023



Vapes dating apps IUDs Grey Goose soda water and lime another male celebrity cheats on his wife North Carolina bill proposes women to be executed for getting abortions global recession predicted UN reports climate is getting hotter.

Hot air blows in from the open window. It's summer. Dry leaves on trees rustle outside, then settle down, then rise again in the tides of wind. Cicadas buzz from hidden places. Workmen hammer and drill in the new houses down the street. The house with peeling yellow paint has been demolished. Birdy wonders where the old woman who had lived there since the 70s went. Hampton's inspired houses now spring up like white clover on every corner. Attractive young couples with 2.5 kids move in. Birdy peels her eyes away from the street through the cafe window. "Since when did we start having babies? I thought our generation was meant to be slowing down. Pollution, feminism, the pill, and all that."

"Partying not procreating," Lila declares as she sips her fourth margarita across from her.

The other girls nod in agreement and sigh, weary from the number of times the topic has been brought up in conversation with other young female friends, online, on TV, and with overbearing aunts.

"Elise and I are going to Europe at the end of the year."

That's nice.

"Things with Andrew are going great. He's so different from all the others."

That's nice.

"I'm going to start looking for jobs related to my degree. I'm so sick of hospo."

That's nice.

"I think Mark's ghosted me."

That's – Oh.

Birdy instinctively reaches for her phone, still half-listening to Abby's woes about Mark the photographer. She itches to revel in her own self-pity and re-read the messages between her and Nick, to relive that time

when things were still good between them. Lila glances at Birdy's phone and draws her mascara-smudged eyes up to meet hers. Birdy slowly tucks the phone away like a guilty child caught by their parent doing something they know they shouldn't.

Elise leans over to Birdy and puts a hand on her back. "How's your mum been? I was sorry to hear she'd been sick."

"Oh, you know. Okay. It could be worse I suppose." Birdy replies, avoiding eye contact.

Elise talks about the latest episode of The Bachelor instead.

2006



Barbie DVDs iPod Nanos sparkly lip gloss Zooper Doopers hand-made birthday invitations playdates tampon instruction guides Facebook now available to over 13s Australia faces worst drought in history.

Birdy holds her sister for the first time. Big blue eyes stare up at her, half hidden beneath her powder-pink blanket. She smells the top of her head like all the adults do. Warm milk. Her mum is still in hospital recovering. Dad has gone home to rest. Mum will continue to exaggerate that point to her two daughters for the rest of their lives. *"Nine hours of labour and your father left me to go home and nap!"* When she's old enough to understand her mother's frustrations she'll make a promise to herself that she'll never have children and more importantly, won't ever settle for a mediocre man. She'll go on to break the latter a few dozen times in her 20s. She is her mother's daughter after all. The former is broken at 23 when Lila lies in bed with her, stroking her hair while they wait for the cramping of her terminated pregnancy to pass.

At school, she trades ham sandwiches for jam ones on the playground and blisters swell on her hands from playing on the monkey bars. Boys scare her yet intrigue her. In March her best and only friend, Therese, goes to America with her family for three months. She sits on the metal benches outdoors and eats alone until she gets back. They'll remain best friends for another six years until they find separate friend groups, slowly stop responding to each other's messages and obligatory "we should catch up some time" messages, and then finally they'll run into each other on the same bus home from university.

2019



*Student fees oat milk lattes long distance
phone calls hangovers 9 am lectures Theresa
May resigns as Prime Minister vaping linked to
dozens of deaths first ever all-woman spacewalk
bushfires worsen in NSW.*

Birdy stares down at her phone, contemplating whether to message the group chat. It's her first day of university. She hopes to God she's on the right bus as she leaves her wide, leafy suburban streets and enters the industrialised outer suburbs with their terraced houses and dilapidated storefronts. It's also, coincidentally, Valentine's Day. Her relationship with Nick, or lack thereof, is still too new to know whether it would be appropriate to wish him a happy Valentine's. The idea feels ridiculous, juvenile, and even slightly ironic. For her, Valentine's days are spent at a friend's house with prosecco and chocolates, listening to Taylor

Swift songs, watching Ten Things I Hate About You and making snide comments about all the disappointing men in their lives. She looks out the window and envies her friends who are still on their gap years and turns off her phone. Life has started to separate them already.

She starts thinking about her mum being back in hospital. It's 9:30 am, she's probably going into surgery right now.

"It's just preventative. They'll make sure to get rid of the cells before they can turn cancerous." Her mum had talked for two hours with Birdy and her sister when she announced the diagnosis, patiently answering Birdy's millions of questions regarding every possible outcome.

Sent at 9:38 am: "Good luck, let me know when you're out of surgery. Happy Valentine's xx."

She tries not to think about her mother being sick too often.

2025



*Utility bills pencil skirts missed phone calls
cheap wine cigarettes metro cards one-night
stands save-the-date cards mammograms pap
tests overdraft fees 30-year-old men in bands
girls' weekends away.*

Ambulance sirens echo throughout the icy wind as they hurtle down the street below her fourth-floor apartment. Her phone lights up on the bedside table.

Mum, sent at 2:53 am, (3:53 pm Sydney time). "Check-up went well. Nothing new to report. We all miss you. Looking forward to visiting you for Christmas. Love Mum."

Another notification pops up.

Nick, sent at 8:44 am: "Hey, it's been a while. I'm in London this week for work and thought we could catch up if you're around. Let me know," there's another message from him sent a minute later, "I've missed you."

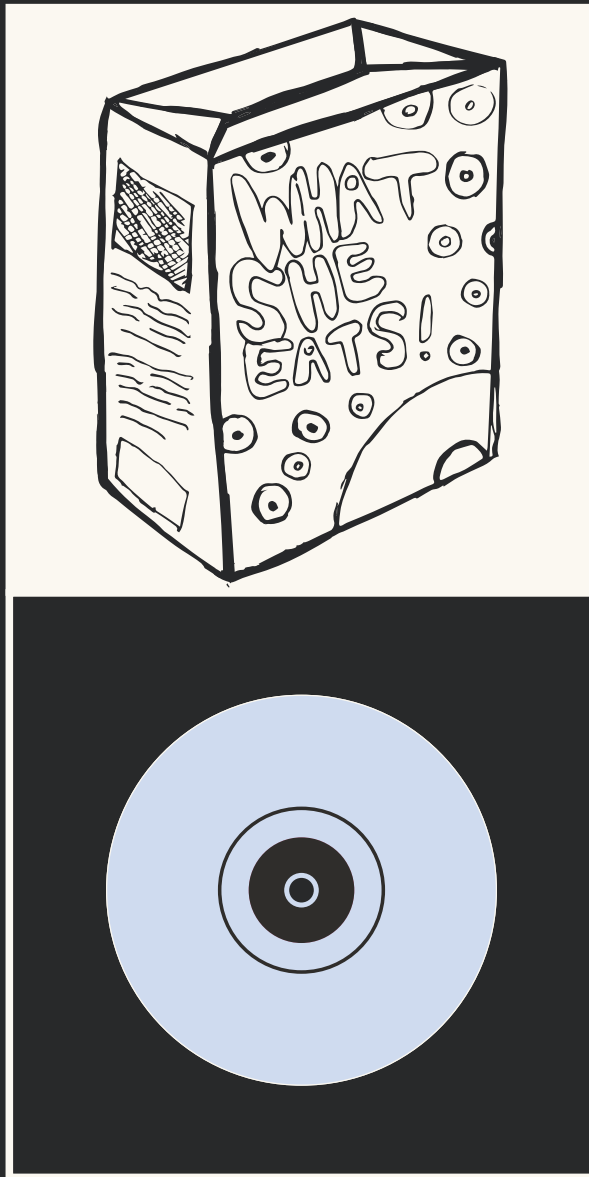
Birdy's chest is hollow as she re-reads the message to confirm it's real. She takes a screenshot and sends it to Lila. She'll know what to do.

Birdy opens Instagram for a distraction and is confronted with endless photos of friends wearing engagement rings with captions like "I do" and pictures of sonograms that look like some alien life form with "Can't wait to meet you" written underneath.

"God, spare me," she sighs. She opens her messages, waving her thumbs over the keyboard as she decides on her response to Nick.

"I've missed you too." Sent.

play: ribs



What She Eats

PROSE

Emma Papworth

Each night my mother eats me for dinner. Picks me apart and inspects me up close, before consuming or tossing me aside to the teeming bin or smushing me between serviettes. What did I do that day? Who did I speak to, and how did I behave? In class, on the bus, while walking on the street - in the morning licks of sunlight, as the air is still at midday, when it curls and crumples in the afternoon, and in the cool dusk of the evening. She eats up my words, for she does not eat anything else.

My mother tells me she served me my childhood on a golden platter. She can't tell me what's on this platter, but it sure as shit is good - because she tells me herself each day. That I was lucky, no one else had it like me. She can't believe I had it that great, that I should've seen what she had. Did I know how bad my grandma had it? Foster parents that forced violin lessons upon her and hours' long rehearsals to witness the life they wanted for themselves. Shoes that were too small or too big and riddled tiny ankles with blisters and blood. Bedrooms with heavy locks, icy windows and reddened frostbite fingertips.

"How's your vision?" my counsellor questions, as we slow down our unpacking and focus on my breathing. But it's a bit too late to clutch onto my breath - my vision melts into a blur and I slip from the room, into a current of fragmented memories. The water's flood-

like, quiet on the surface, but splintering and writhing underneath. There are pieces of broken mugs, ripped pages from diaries, cracked snow globes from rushed holidays. Each time I try to dive deeper, looking for enough pieces to form a full picture. I try to climb back in, carving open the ceiling, scaring office workers on the floor above. I can't stop to explain, I keep going until I reach the dark sky, that's still too bright to see the stars. Only above the clouds can I catch more pieces in the sky.

I'm in Tamworth Hospital, lost in the Maternity Ward. It's too quiet for an evening here, the air usually filled with choked screams, pleading cries, the occasional rustling of doctor's coats through corridors. But I can't see much else, can't piece enough together - it's all bits and pieces of mashed potato, squashed peas and watery gravy, the meal that would come later. I know she didn't scream, didn't yell - and as for myself, I have no idea. When I was pushed out, all blood and skin and slippery fluids, how long did the doctor hold me for? Did they hold me for too long, in gloved hands, distracted eyes as they thought of their own daughter and how quickly they'd had her eat her Rice Bubbles, pack her Peppa Pig backpack and wave goodbye at the preschool gates that morning. Missing her each day. How quickly was I passed to my mother? Did she look me in the eye? Was she pleased with what she saw?

I'm lost in the local Big W in a sea of men's polo shirts. She was with me a second ago, and now she is gone. I rush past children screeching in the toy aisle, throngs of teenagers clustering around phones in the technology section, and spill into the confectionary aisle - she's sometimes in there, but not today. In the party section, a little girl cheers as her mum hands her a birthday balloon, picking another for her friend. By the time I find my way to the front desk, my face is a finger painting of snot and tears. They call her name on the speaker, then call it again ten minutes later. We eventually spot her at the checkouts, just steps from the desk - she questions where I've been, waving over a staff member to ask about the barcode of an on-sale kettle.

I'm at my first sleepover, first night away from home. I'm at Beth's and we rotate between making friendship bracelets (one bracelet says 'best' and the other 'friends') and challenging each other to games of Wii tennis. She shows me how to use the remote, and where to look on the screen. We wait until her parents are asleep before raiding the pantry for packets of Jumpy's, Roll Ups and Ghost Drops. We dig in, a halo of crumbs enveloping us, laughing as we praise our 'midnight snacks', despite it only being 8pm. The next morning at breakfast I try Fruit Loops for the first time, before we go out onto the farm, looking for lumps of wombats between the heavy grass. But firstly, she shows me how to check for spiders in your shoe before putting them back on - there's a few too many Red Backs around. She also loans me her thick woolly socks to pull on, patterned purple and pink. When we do traipse out, we realise it rained the night before, and while we don't spy any marsupials, we spot a family of spiders whose webs shimmer in the fresh dew. She leads us further through the bush, glancing back and forth to check

on me between grins, later reaching for my hand as we cross wobbly rocks in the river. In the afternoon, I wave goodbye to her out the car window, my friendship bracelet clinking on my wrist.

I'm out at a local coffee shop where the staff sneak an extra takeaway cup cookie to their morning regulars - mostly post office staff from the concrete building opposite. The display shows a pyramid of flaky sausage rolls from the previous day, a handful of pre-made ham and cheese sandwiches, and two vanilla cupcakes with Smarties eyes and chocolate piping smiles. I eye the cupcakes - one for each of us. We sit down at the table at the window, placing elbows on the sticky surface, and look out the window at a woman wrestling a screaming baby into a stroller, dark shadows pooling beneath her eyes. I hear about the delay with a payment at the bank, a chocolate fundraiser happening at work for a colleague's daughter, and then it's over to me. I tell her about the sculpture I'm making at school, what my friend Beth brought in for a teacher's birthday, and when the athletics carnival will be - she smiles, and she nods, but her eyes don't crinkle and shift. I'm miming at her through a glass wall so thick she can hardly see my shadow. When the waitress comes over with a tray, she places a cupcake in front of me. It's a different cupcake to the one I saw - there's only one Smartie eye and the chocolate piping smile is unconvincing, too wobbly. My mother has the ham and cheese sandwich, and it remains untouched on her plate.

I'm in my childhood bedroom with dusty apricot walls and posters peeling at the corners. My diary sits open on my desk - she'd found it between the bed and the mattress while I was at school, and surely sifted through. My clothes have all shifted place, books

rearranged, the doona has been smoothed out, pillow flipped, the usuals. A little reminder for me - this room isn't mine. The patterned pillow with the yellow teardrop print she chose, the Emily Eyefinger book I spent my pocket money on at the school fair, and then bought back the following year when I realised she'd donated it back to the 'White Elephant' stall. I'm kneeling on the carpet, picking at the fly screen that's beginning to loosen and fray in the corner - I can almost fit my finger into the thinned section, splitting it open so just a little bit of myself is through.

I'm teetering on a grassy green hill - a golf course. The green spans too abruptly, curving up and down like voluminous, heavy waves. In the distance, I can see my grandfather - at least I think it's him, because I've never met him beyond a world of black and white photos, kept safely in albums in locked cupboards spare for an hour or two on Christmas when everyone lulls into a food coma, and I prise a key from grandma's bedside drawer. He's tall, which I didn't realise, and his golf pants look like a pair I'd picked up at the markets on the weekend. He's with the family dog - a chocolate and cream Cavalier King Charles Spaniel who was known for her oversized ears. He lines up his shot, swinging it off into the distance in one smooth motion until it is absorbed by the sky, which begins to eat up everything else. I can't ask: "How are you?"

How were your years on the earth? And why doesn't my mother look me in the eyes?"

"How's your vision?" my counsellor asks again. I hurtle back down, shifting through wisps of clouds, back through levels of office workers in desks plastered with family photos and fake plants.

"It's getting there" I say.

That night, I visit Beth's place - she's there together with friends we've made at university, and through work at the local bakery. The room heaves with laughter and the occasional meow of a long-haired cat that wants more attention. My entrance sees heads turn and arms stretch out, hands squeezed and body embraced in hug after warm hug - I'm the last to arrive, and everything is ready. Bright red vases are filled with dry flowers, and we all dish out food - tabouleh and falafels and glasses of thick homemade raspberry cordial - tart with fruit and vinegar. We sit down, on secondhand chairs, multi-coloured armchairs pulled from the council pickup or donated by doting grandmothers, bits and pieces uniting together to form a home. And everyone's already eating, when they ask about my day.

play: Cognitive Dissonance

S'MORES

Alexa Stevens

play : witchloverx

POETRY

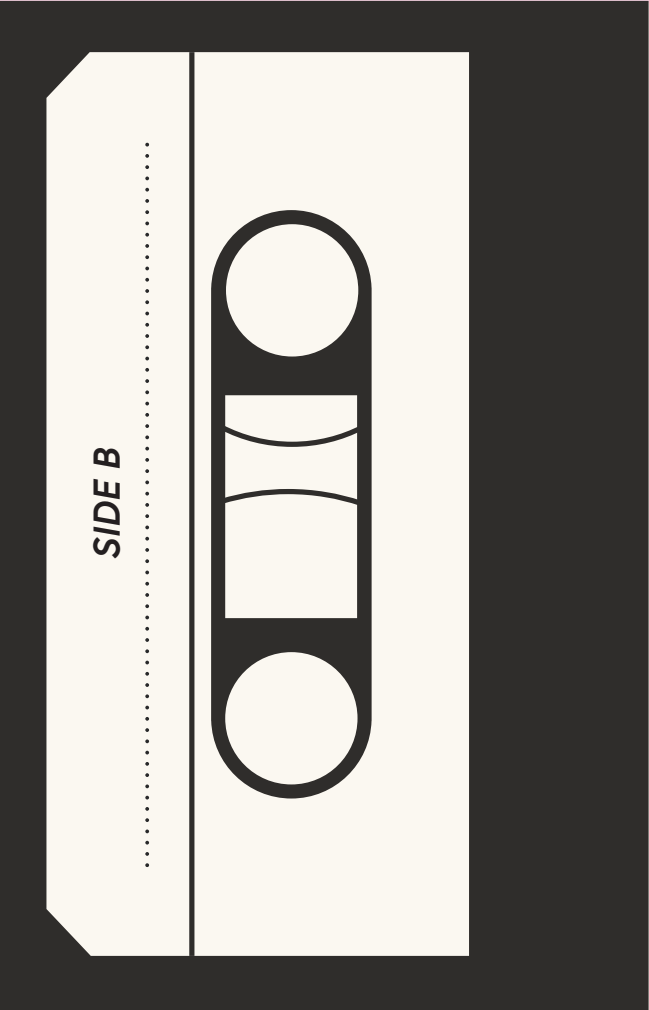
...

After Gertrude Stein's Tender Buttons

Ooze of a smokehouse as a sugar fairy crackles cackles cakes up a smile, slips like a spatter oozes slow, a fire eating ate affection confection pop munching mellifluous marshland land lake of sink. Sticky tape fingers stuck like quickly quakes quicksand slurping down snakes of brick and biscuit brisk and burning burning drowning turning on the stove take your hand out out of your fingers flies the gooey golden mess, an old children's book bunch look you've got the ticket chocolate thicket branches smeared and burning turning thin building three layers looked at. If a stick then a baseball bat then a boulder then a stone steals sticky ends of sticks munch crunch crush of brick and fingers. Is it eating? It is sinking? Holey cloak and the prickle of stars ooze like shine across the sky, poke through the choke of smoke make mole tunnels for the holes old and eating is it oozing it is painted gold and gone.



You are halfway through our playlist, take the time here to make your mark!
Write, draw, stick and tape whatever you want here.



flip the page to keep reading! ↪

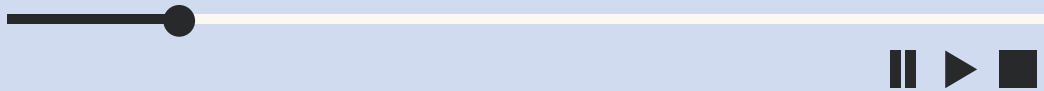


PLAY: WUTHERING HEIGHTS

The Poetry of Music and the Music in Poetry

ESSAY

Claudia Calci



Perhaps the most important question that an essay on the intersection between music and literature needs to address is whether there is a connection between literature and music at all, and if so, where does this intersection occur and what is the nature of the relation between the two? Icon and writer's block spokeswoman, Fran Lebowitz once said that while there are prodigies of music, there are no prodigies of literature. This is a comforting sentiment as someone whose only natural born talent is the ability to look indifferent when I am in fact in love, and any chance I had at an aspiring musical career ended at thirteen when I decided it was only logical that I take up the drums after performing a hard rock version of Beethoven's "Ode To Joy" in year eight music, and my parents drove that dream into silence. If we asked which of the two art forms were more essential out of literature and music, we would also have to ask "essential" in relation to what? To culture? To history? To who we are as people? Music is without much doubt the more popular channel of creative expression, based on the empirical observation I am willing to pass off as fact here about how I happen to know more people who listen to music than those who read books beyond high school coercion. But this doesn't mean music is more of a necessary or valid manifestation of human creativity than literature is. If we defy tradition and think about the very act of speaking as a literary action, or all human experience as literary content, then we must, for exploration's sake, defend the world of words for the good of the worlds they describe and create, in order to see where these passages may merge or converge with the ones music similarly lets us into or takes us from.

When Bob Dylan received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2016, he, along with my sister who argues if we're going to give a literary award to a musician we ought to give it to Prince, said he "got to wondering how exactly my songs related to literature." While his songwriting has been largely influenced by the themes and questions about life, truth, and human nature that he encountered in reading literary classics, Dylan's self doubt is important when considering the intersection between literature and music. With his music, he is writing, after all, and not just music but words. So we must ask, does writing words count as literature? And we must answer, with a degree of modest scepticism, "well, not just any words..." To be "literary," I suppose, words have to be selected meaningfully according to a purpose that opens an infinite end of possibilities, and arranged in a specific order that no one person can specify if they have not yet been written, but that we must presuppose as having spiritual depth for our lives and reality, no matter how fantastical or abstract the worlds and moods the words create, and therefore be written in a way that makes them more than writing. And according to The Swedish Academy, Bob Dylan uses this type of literary wording, as he "created new poetic expressions within the great American song tradition." In contrast to music, I believe it is easy to see where literature and the visual arts intersect, as they so often do, and it is because the connection is visual that this seeing is apparent. One might think of how every Penguin edition of a literary classic features on the cover some artwork or design by a well known painter or graphic artist, or how children's books are usually illustrated, not only because they are read to children who cannot yet read, but also because their subject matter is so evocative it simply demands visual representation. We need only turn

to Sir John Tenniel's famous illustrations for Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through The Looking Glass* (1871) to see how the relationship between one art form and the next can be so fundamental, as it is hard to imagine Carroll's words without Tenniel's pictures. Not that adults' imaginations are barren wastelands incapable of visualisation, but the cultural association of Carroll's ideas with Tenniel's visions of them over time have made the story and pictures contrapositive to each other. We might then think, however, of the link between music and literature as being more elusive than literature's connection to the visual arts. In music we hear, and in reading we think – but in reading we think of the meaning of the ideas created by and expressed through sounds we "hear" internally, like an inner monologue taking on a new voice. Though it may be said that this too is what happens with music: meanings are created by sounds we hear, even if the tools and modes of expression of the creative medium, and thus the physiological texture through which we experience the musical and literary arts, are distinct.

Whether you think lyrics set to music counts as something literary, not least literature, depends on whether a song is able to have what we might call a "literary effect" on you. If your idea of poetry is confined to sitting in solitude and letting the words wash over you as you read them to yourself, then you are less likely to be convinced songs are poetry. But if you take into account that the poem has a long, oral history of being read aloud, in groups and often in the form of song, being said or sung with instrumental accompaniment, then you are more likely to understand the song as being just another form of poetry, and that there are different forms of genres of literature

for different reasons. The poetry of and in rap music, for example, is indubitable. Unless you're Ben Shapiro and you have the artistic sensibility of wet toilet paper. Hip hop's creativity, rhythm and lyricism is the poetry of the now. To call Kendrick Lamar less than a poet would be to contest its definition in Oxford Languages ("a writer of verse distinguished by particular insight, inspiration, or sensibility, or by remarkable powers of imagination, creativity, or expression") and deny oneself the pleasure of understanding it as such. Further, Shakespearean scholar Sir Jonathan Bate has given credit where credit is due and praised Taylor Swift for her literary achievements. For Bate, Swift's act "isn't just high-class showbiz", she "is a real poet." Inversely, Sappho, the great poet from ancient Greece, was what we'd refer to today as a musician. Many of her poems were underscored by music that she wrote on her eight string lyre, which was an instrument invented around 2500 years before Sappho used it to compose her songs, and one might imagine it being played to lyrics within those 2500 odd years pre-Sappho, which would suggest the connection between literature and music; if we accept the writing or oration of lyrics as literary work, is as old as the Bronze Age. However the world's oldest music-literary crossover has its origin upon the land on which we live today, thanks to Indigenous Australians, who dominated the Upper Paleolithic music scene. Use of the didgeridoo dates back to over 40,000 years ago, and its powerful vibrations were and are often accompanied by lyrical chants and singing. Poems not intended to be set to music can have musical qualities, too. Take for instance Wordsworth's lyrical ballad "The Mad Mother" (1802), where the rhythm alone is enough to make the sound of a performance of this poem somewhat musical. And it is easy to hear the opening lines of the fifth stanza: "Suck, little Babe, oh

suck again! / It cools my blood; it cools my brain" being lyrics to a Lucille Bogan or Nine Inch Nails song. Either one.

Suppose then we asked what the effects of music are in contrast to literature? Where do their similarities lie? Late sixteenth and early seventeenth century English composer and poet, Thomas Campion, found that in pursuing both arts in combination there are metrical similarities between poetry and music, and saw that they married in perfect harmony when he wrote masques (which were elaborate amalgamations of the performative arts combining elements of the opera, theatre and ballet presented to the courts of Europe), requiring a team of interdisciplinary artists behind each production. But it wasn't until the nineteenth century that the overlap between literature and music went mainstream in Western culture. Perhaps the man best known to coalesce the literary with the musical is Russian composer Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, whose body of work is observable today to metalheads and Barbie movie fans alike (the OG straight to DVD Barbie releases, not the one that hit cinemas on the same day as *Oppenheimer*). Aside from adapting E.T.A Hoffmann's short story "The Nutcracker and the Mouse King" (1816) into his 1892 ballet *The Nutcracker*, he borrowed from fairy tales such as Grimm Brothers' 1812 version of *Sleeping Beauty*, "The Little Briar Rose," and his romantic tragedy, *Swan Lake* (1877), shows Tchaikovsky as something of a writer himself, as he created the original story. Tchaikovsky also composed *Romeo and Juliet* after Shakespeare, among others of his plays and other composers such as Luigi Marescalchi and Sergei Prokofiev who did the same thing with this same play, which is like a love letter to the Bard himself. Tchaikovsky seemed to know how to translate

Shakespeare's words into music, so seamlessly, it sounds as if he had been translating the play into another spoken language. Only with music, Tchaikovsky is able to translate Shakespeare's work into a truly "universal" play, as it is unlikely wordless feeling can be lost in translation. Of course, the music alone does not replace the poetry of Shakespeare's language, but I'm not sure that it's supposed to. Instead it captures the emotional intensity and movement of the story, and is able to take us to different places as the twenty minute piece progresses, the way the events in the acts of the play do. Though as far as the genre of adapting literary works into musical compositions goes, I would have to pin Kate Bush's banger "Wuthering Heights" (1978), based on the obsession plot of Emily Brontë's sole novel, in which Cathy engages in a reverse seance and implores Heathcliff to give her the rights to his soul, as my favourite. It is from this song that I was enticed to read Brontë's masterpiece, and I don't think I'd be studying English without it. With this, I feel confident to say that literature says the things we aren't allowed to feel and music moves us through them. And while one may exist without the other, when they don't life is more beautiful.

For all their affective and material differences, requiring different kinds of attention and thus producing different modes of experience, transmissibly literature and music are closer than they are apart. Both literature and music are able to communicate the passions. They are both able to elevate the spirit, transport the listener or reader, and tell stories. They are important in forming an individual's sense of identity and both muse on the eternal and the universal – both are essential to human life, both are for everyone. Both music and literature have been composed or authored in some way, created by human beings for other human beings to delight

in, and one is not better or more effective than the other in achieving these aims. To study art, literature, music, poetry, is to be with ourselves more deeply, and therefore, to be with others more truly. So perhaps, for a last try, the question is not where the intersection between literature and music lies, nor the nature of its relationship, but rather had we not these things to aid our lows, accompany our highs, to move us towards the places we're going, where would we go? Who would we be? Magic Realist painter Eyvind Earle said that art encompasses all aspects of existence. And if ever I was able to sum into words this unified vision for art and life that understands fully the intersections between the arts, I would first leave you with Earle's testimony to them: "Life and truth and consciousness and sound and feeling all are the same thing. Seeing we call it painting; hearing we call it music; reading we call it poetry, and living we call it life."

Play Symphony No 5 - Ludwig Von Beethoven

POETRY



Symphony No.1

For Piano, Icarus, Perfectionists and Orchestra

Annie Ming

Prelude & Fugue: Yearning ✧ ✧

♪ = 137

Ad astra per aspera,
Icarus sits and dreams.
The moon smiles down at him,
And his comets wink.


He stands at the edge of a precipice,
And hears behind him the shouting wind.
While his wings, hand crafted,
Timely, bloodily made,
Lately sleeplessly spun,
Gossamer waxy wings,
Beat and beat and beat.

He says nothing will be better than flying.
But people whisper, mothers weep,
Icarus, they say, you can't and won't succeed.

Young boys do not listen to the wind.
They dream and seek and plunder,
And their hearts take their heads by the collar and leap.

Icarus is falling,
Icarus is flying.
Icarus bursts out in a great arc into the celestial dome,
And climbs up towards the greats.

Vivace: Being

 = 140

They say that hubris is a sin.
But he drinks it like nectar and it leaves,
His mind soft and supple.

The shards of this ceiling are sweet,
And high tide has lifted his boat.
Oh, but taste the stars,
And try this slice of the Milky way.

When you soar over the edges of clouds,
Light spilling over the crown,
Of your head,
It's only natural to pull harder.

So, they applaud, starlight dazzles.
The cacophony of glory masks the searing of flesh,
The sun burns hot. Hot. Hot.

Achievement is godly.
But his hand crafted,
Gossamer wet waxy wings quiver,
And start to tear.

Scherzo: Falling

♪ = 118

Here is what hurts the most about flying:
Gravity is inescapable.
Icarus was still smiling as he started to fall.
The head tumbles downwards ahead of the heart,
And leaves trails of tears
Dripping wax onto the sky.

We see his arc,
And graze it with our eyes,
The heat scorches his skin,
The top of the world is only the beginning of the decent.
Icarus had thought as he flew,
That he could never fall.

There is a peculiar horror,
In setting oneself on fire.
As people watch and smile,
From outside the ring of bluish flames.

Grave: Dying ✧ ✧

♩ = 40

Vengeful fire hisses as it ravages him.
Wavering between water-logged depths of aquamarine –
Beryl like the shadowy ink of nighttime monsters,
Flames dancing off smirking teeth.

And in the tortured crevices of the burnt skin
On the sweaty palms of now twitching hands.
And in the end of arcing sparks
Between connections turning off and on again.

His eyes stare:
They tell him now, and yell that inside the hollow vase,
The eggshell cracked, webbed with veins, of his skull.
There should be light. Laughter.

But the deepest dark of the ocean oozes black,
Filthy little drips of thoughts spill over slimy recesses –
Where hatred and jealousy turn over in their graves.

Where skinned emotions,
Lie dripping with blood on chopping blocks,
And Icarus cries all alone.

Here's what hurts the most about flying:
Icarus had to fall.

Play: Wait a While



Fuck You and Fuck Your Band

Conor Carroll

PROSE

Arms outstretched and head turned towards heaven, Jude Blackwell conjured a storm. He smothered the sun with brain-matter clouds and crumpled gumtrees with his breath. His heartbeat boomed over the surrounding countryside, blanketing all other noise with its fury, veins crisscrossing the sky in startling flashes of white. Soon Jude would strike. A life for a life.

A siren pierced the storm. Jude felt his grip loosening. He was cold, he was thirty-one, and he was behind the fence. Exercise time was over and he would not see the sun for another twenty-three hours.

A lorikeet landed by his feet. He reached into his pocket for a scrap of bread. Birds seldom visited this place. They could sense its history, its violence. They'd hanged people on this spot. Strung them up and snapped their necks.

Jackboots on gravel. The weight of weapons.

"Blackwell! Are you deaf? Get inside."

A rainbow over the fence. The lorikeet had fled.

They patted Jude down. They didn't find anything. He had his hiding places.

Breakfast was half-liquid eggs and fatty strips of meat passed off as bacon. Jude found an empty table in the corner of the cafeteria. It wouldn't be free for long. Solitude could neither be bought nor stolen.

The bolted-down chair creaked as Whippet sat down across from Jude. Whippet was eighteen years old with a stretched face, snoutish nose and hair shorn close to the skin. He was all jitter and sinew. He looked like he

could chase down a rabbit, and he talked like he was on cocaine.

"How about Jailbreak?"

Jude sighed. "ACDC. Thin Lizzy, too."

"Solitary Confinement? Life Sentence? Body Bags?"

"I'm not part of this make-believe band bullshit."

Jude wished he'd never told Whippet that he used to be in a band. But there were only so many stories he could bring himself to share. The band had started in Parko's garage twelve years ago. Every drum stroke was like slapping skin. Hands bleeding, sweat soaking into his singlet, screeching vocals. That primal fury.

They'd grown up in the same strip of asbestos-ridden, dog-eared council houses in Narraweena; Struggle Street smack-bang in the middle of Sydney's most stuck-up region. The housos stuck together. Jude had carried Parko to the sick bay in primary school when he fell from the rusted monkey bars and fractured his ankle. All the way up the slope and past the library, legs buckling and shoulders burning, not resting until he'd placed him gently in front of the office lady.

Back then, he would've done anything for Parko.

Whippet eyed his food. Jude broke off a corner of toast for later and pushed his tray across the table. His charity for the day.

"I can't do it on my own," Whippet said, mouth half full.

“You’re young. Start later. Somewhere else.”

“There won’t be somewhere else.”

Whippet scraped the space between his front teeth with his fingernail. The skin around his knuckles was raw. A name peeked out from under his sleeve.

“You should hide that.”

“He’s all I think about.”

Jude shot Whippet a warning look. Stamp, the mailman, was approaching. None of the prisoners were allowed mobile phones, and landline calls were limited, so letters were the only practical way to satiate their hunger for outside contact. Stamp’s nickname had nothing to do with his prison profession. Knocking his acquaintances down and stamping on their ribs was his preferred way to get his point across.

“Still have fuck all for you, Jude.”

That knowing look. Divorce papers, funeral notices and return to senders all passed through Stamp’s hands. He banked up his fellow prisoners’ secrets. Cashed them in when the time was right.

“I’ll have another geez,” Stamp continued. “Hard to keep track. Ali, right? Still your misso?”

A right hook. Stamp’s skull snapping against the concrete. He’d bite down on his tongue, eyes rolling back in his head, foaming at the mouth. There was a hospital nearby. Maybe they’d be able to stop the brain bleeding. He’d be in a coma for a month. He’d wake all nuts and bolts and stitches and scars. Maybe then he’d learn some decency.

“Write to Ali again, Jude. Go out and get her,” Stamp smirked.

He’d smash the dining tray into his nose until it was a clump of cartilage.

“I hope she isn’t waiting by the window.”

He’d throttle him until he had a seizure. He’d drive a knee into his balls until they ruptured. He’d gouge his eyes out. He’d stab him in his sleep.

“Maybe you should just let it be.”

Stamp left, having run out of steam. Jude had weathered the onslaught. He’d muted the music. There were no repercussions. No life-long consequences.

Ali. Her words had contained the world: its happenings, its leavings, its dreams won and lost. She had been his outside correspondent, his personal broadcast, but now all he was left with was the cruel static of radio silence. Yet he still wrote to her, because to stop would be either fatal or merciful, and he wasn’t ready for either. At least he didn’t have her name tattooed on his skin. Whippet was a fool for thinking that love could last in here. Nothing worthwhile could survive these cells.

“Judy Judy Judy, I’m guessing Beatles covers are off the table?” Whippet laughed.

“Fuck you and fuck your band.”

Whippet grinned. He had hunting eyes. He could smell blood.

Jude looked away. On stage, eye contact had been the killer. The squeeze of their stares. He'd miss a cue, lose the beat. Parko had wanted a mind reader on the drums. A disciple-robot-shellhuman. Parko was the frontman and the others were too terrified to call him out. Parko found a dead-behind-the-eyes bastard on Facebook who understood their vision and wanted to be part of the journey. Jude had been chucked to the curb. He wasn't up to standard. He'd never be up to standard.

"Practice is at seven. There's equipment in D-Block. We've got permission."

"You better watch yourself."

Jude stood up. He was running late. He passed through the security sensors and left the dining hall. He weaved between bodies, careful not to bump into anyone. The corridors could turn in an instant.

Jude reached the laundry one minute before his shift was scheduled to begin. There were strict punishments for lateness, as though time was still relevant in this place. He signed the sheet next to his hours. 8AM to 4.30PM. 80 cents an hour. His half-hour lunch break was unpaid. Such neat little blocks of time. His employment would be terminated in four years. He wouldn't get long-service leave. Sick pay? They were all sick.

He put on a face mask and scooped clothes from the waste basket into the washing machine. The usual assortment of blood, semen, and urine stains. Animal marks. The underwear was black. The socks were white. The shirts and shorts were green. Jude always checked the pockets. Sometimes a slip of paper. Once a razor. A different brand than the blunt ones issued by the prison. It'd drawn blood from his fingertip.

The prison radio played over the tinny speakers as he worked. The playlist changed every few weeks, but it seldom deviated from bland covers and inoffensive numbers. Never an ounce of anguish to be heard. The inmates could purchase a CD player through the prison rewards system, but it was too expensive and the songs were monitored anyway. Jude hadn't chosen a song in ten years. He supposed the drivel emanating from the radio was better than nothing, if only because it occupied his mind and gave him something else to complain about. There was only so much Vance Joy a bloke could handle.

Parko had said all mainstream artists had no soul. U2 were bacteria-free wet-wipes, Adele had written the same song fourteen times and even Nirvana had sold out to the masses. Parko had written stupidly complex songs. Thought he was an artist. But he was just a prick with a gruff voice and a microphone who cast his mates away when they had served their purpose.

Jude had wanted to put him in his place. Send him a message, nothing more. Parko preferred to wound with words and that day was just meant to be a leveller. But Jude's punches landed flush. Perhaps Parko felt like he deserved it. If he had raised his hands or pushed him away or said he was sorry or never kicked him out of the band in the first place then he wouldn't have been lying limp on the grass, face swollen beyond recognition, ragged breaths running out as the ambos rushed him to the hospital. Dead on arrival. Just like he'd been as a young kid in that fucked-up family, in that fucked-up street, in this fucked-up country. Before he started dreaming of the band and the first album, destined to stay nameless and four-fifths finished.

Jude considered putting the tumble dryer on full power. The uniforms would be damaged. He could put it down to an honest mistake, a simple lapse in concentration.

He was the star employee; he had some leeway. His finger hovered over the button. He had this thought every shift and he would never follow through. He was weak. He was scared. Exactly how Parko made him feel towards the end.

He had to join Whippet's band.

He scoffed down dinner after his shift. The inmate next to him didn't even open his mouth. You could see the ones who'd given up. They'd pick at their food and glaze over. They didn't have a song left to sing.

Jude was marched to D-Block. The guard's breath smelled like a sewer.

"Heard you've got a little band practice going, Blackwell. Can't wait to hear you sing."

"I'm the drummer," Jude replied. A sharp comment and he'd be flat on his back.

The guard looked him up and down.

"You reckon? Don't look like one."

There weren't many mirrors in the prison. He still pictured himself as twenty-one. Clear skin, white teeth, full head of hair. Ready to take on the world with Ali. He could've finished the apprenticeship. Built houses and bought one, too. Owned four walls he wasn't afraid of. But space was his enemy and time kept on taunting. Some wounds remained raw. Parko had been his brother. In some ways, they were still inseparable. Jude would watch him die every night for the rest of his life, and for that, he was sorry.

They entered D-Block. Jude had never been in this building before. The pods were depressingly similar. He couldn't see inside the cells, but he knew every inch. The guard opened a door towards the rear of the building. An assortment of instruments were haphazardly strung around the room. In the middle was Whippet, eyes closed, strumming a guitar. Sitting at a keyboard in the corner was Stamp.

Jude baulked. "What the fuck is he doing here?"

"Calm your tits." Stamp snarled.

Whippet shrugged. "He can sing. And play, too."

"You're talking like this is a real fucken band."

The guard had his hand on his belt. Ready to pull out his taser.

Jude sighed and sat behind the battered Yamaha set. The sticks felt light in his hands. They were aching to move. To drum up a storm.

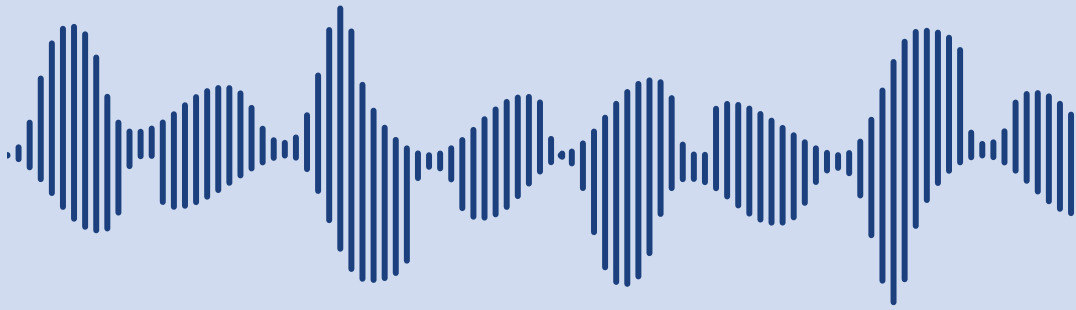
*A Journalist's Real-Time Observations of
a Life-Altering Press Conference*



PROSE

play: Scandal

Josie Kurnia



Familiar faces sit around me, barely acknowledging my presence. Amidst the flashing cameras and speculating murmurs, I hear the frantic scribbling of the reporter next to me. I remember her – she pushed me over to get a front row seat at a different press conference. Whose press conference was it?

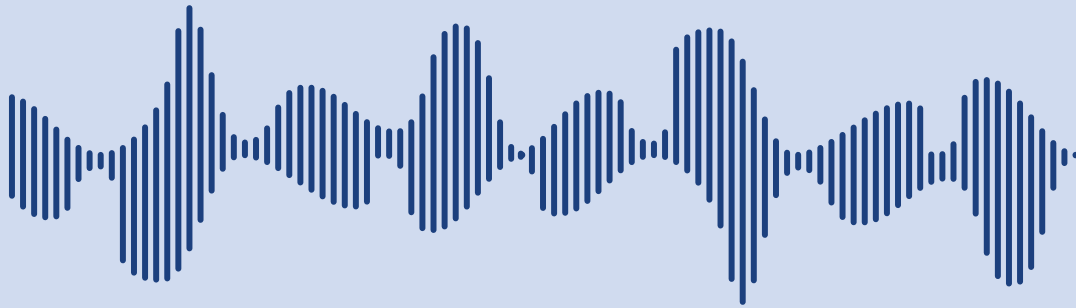
Well. It doesn't matter. The subject of today has yet to appear.

The room is set up with a sterile approach. Company logo on the board behind the table, a tablecloth flaunting the company's colours, and black suit-clad security guards holding onto their earpieces as they receive their next objective. This objective becomes clear when the star of the hour appears onstage, flanked by a beautiful but stoic woman ('Raya's manager,' the reporter next to me scribbles) and a normal-looking, almost *boring* man ('Executive,' she writes next – she's done her research). In some other world their names would be important, but not in a potentially career-changing scandal. Amelie's face is sullen, as if she's being held at gunpoint to be here¹. The opposite of what an artist should be feeling the day before their new single comes out. I'm no stranger to Amelie's dejection, having followed her from debut up until now.

She owes me, you know. I decide whether she gets good exposure! I decide whether I want the headline to make her look like an angel or a devil! Amelie Raya's reputation rests on the ink of my pen and the words that I write.

The hands behind the curtain must have been paid a hefty bonus to doll Amelie up. She is the living representation of sophisticated fashion theory - something about the patterns and shapes that they've decided to craft onto her make her look like an artist with longevity. *The artist*. Her makeup is natural, casual - she's blameless, a sheep with a perfectly white coat. She wears a butterfly clip in her hair, which seems to threaten the whole point of her

¹To the author: I trust that you'll revise this tasteful use of hyperbole - obviously, she isn't. She might as well have been though, since her career's on the line. And if her career's jumping ship, so is mine, so you best believe I'm pointing that gun at her because my *life* is on the line.



extravagant-pop-star-but-also-an-approachable-girl-next-door wardrobe for today, if not for the fact that her upcoming single is named ‘Butterfly’. Did her own hands put that clip in her hair? Or could it have been the invisible strings controlling her every move?

The executive clears his throat.

EXECUTIVE: Let’s discuss² our rising singer, Amelie Raya, and her recent controversy. I trust that you have all viewed the press release ahead of time?

ENTERTAINMENT DAILY JOURNALIST: Is it true then? Is she dating Daniel Kim?

Some of the crew slightly shudder at the mention of his name, since Daniel rose to fame by assaulting a vigorous cameraman at his indie movie premiere. Some say it was real; others say it was perfectly orchestrated. Either way, Daniel profits off his scandal as one of Hollywood’s top actors right now. Can’t say the same in a decade.

Amelie opens her mouth, grabs the mic in front of her...

EXECUTIVE: After confirming with the parties-

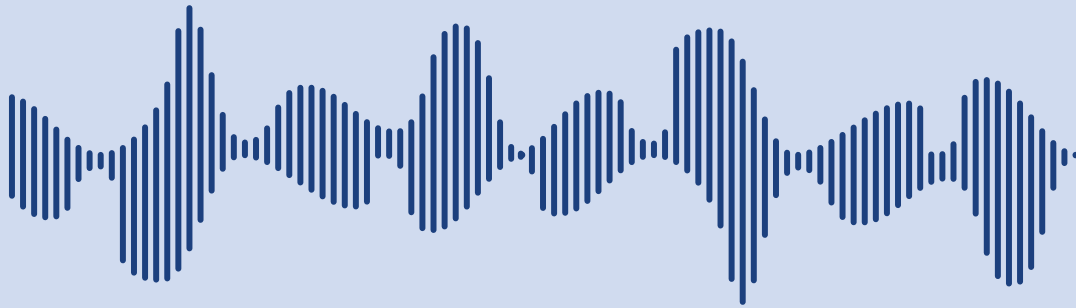
...and mouths a couple of words into her muted microphone³.

EXECUTIVE: we can conclude that there is a high possibility.

His answer is met with limp shoulders and lifeless eyes, but even so, every journalist dutifully jots down what he said, word-for-word, in the hopes that they might be able to cobble something together for their editor.

² Anyone in the music industry knows that it's never a discussion.

³ It was harder to organise than you think. Sit still, look pretty. That's all you need to do, dammit Raya!



Are these newbies or what? What did they expect from an executive so far up his arse?

Oh, Daniel. I remember his press conference, if it even qualified as a ‘conference’. One question, no answer, and the man himself stormed out of the room with eyes that could cut you alive. Bye bye Daniel, thanks for confirming that you have a terrible personality! Rumours that you advocate for a toxic workplace? Bullying? Overworking your employees until they have to be admitted into the emergency department? Confirmed true in the article I wrote afterwards.

HOLLYWOOD CENTRAL REPORTER: How long has the relationship been going on for?

EXECUTIVE: Well, uh...

His hesitance gives the reporter all they need to know, his reaction to the question permanently preserved on ‘Hollywood Central’ tapes. Amelie’s manager, however, is the competent individual that you’d expect her to be⁴.

She reaches out for her mic and the cameras zone in on her instantly.

MANAGER: According to the timetable, the couple would have had enough time to familiarise themselves with each other.

Unfortunately, her voice is like scraping a metal ruler against your arm. Every comma and full stop in her sentences are precisely enunciated, and my pen has no choice but to follow her clear command. It’s impressive, but incredibly dull paired with her stoic expression.

⁴The secret to competent managers: control. Make the celebrity into who the company needs! Impeccable image, abhorrent reputation, or master at media manipulation? Take your pick! Let the celebrity assume the facade you’ve lovingly constructed for them. How is this any different from your average office worker who puts on a fake personality to brave their workday?



The room briefly flashes. A security guard walks out from their position, arm up and hand out in a warning gesture to the photographer who has forgotten the ‘no flash’ rule. Amelie seems less despondent after the slight interruption - but still, she says nothing.

ROLLING METAL WRITER: If you can confirm that, then does Amelie approve of the toxic environment that her boyfriend has created? Does she condone his actions?

The scoop! The flavour that everyone’s been waiting for! Imagine the heartbreak for Amelie’s fans to find out that she’s *basically* complicit in his alleged behaviour⁵. Imagine the deliciousness of the drama that was happening among the higher-ups: ‘Oh, our top and rising star is befuddled with controversy! We must protect her!’ Or was it ‘Oh, Amelie, you poor thing. You’re now one step closer to having your contract terminated. Oh, poor darling.’

The room is a full-blown zoo – everyone gawks at her (dignified or otherwise) as if they’ve just seen an elephant take a number two in front of their faces, cameras zoomed in to catch all movement and reaction. A slight uptick of the brow means “Yes! I am! We’re so in love because we’re equally terrible people, and I hate everyone around me!” Tongue-in-cheek writes the headline “Amelie Raya Rages at Journalist Disrespecting Her Man” and a blank expression tells us nothing but “Talks of Terminating Her Contract? The Relationship Between Amelie Raya and Her Manager.”

Or something like that. Who am I to assume?

I’ve watched her at every single press conference, ever since the announcement of her debut, but she’s never wised up to how to act in front of hungry sharks.

⁵ No one ever escapes allegations, especially if they aren’t true. No matter how much you try to sanitise the algorithm – and on that note, I need to see the PR department after this.

What a life she's signed up to. She's lucky that she has people like me to save her limbs – 'Successful Press Conference' by Amelie Raya, featuring me.

Amelie wriggles for a slight second. Her throat clenches.

MANAGER: No. Next question?

TAKE ONE REPORTER: Can Amelie confirm if the dating news is true?

Amelie's eyes flutter towards the reporter, as if double checking that they asked for her opinion-

GOSSIP WEEKLY REPORTER: Is the song 'Butterfly' about Daniel Kim?

Her hands move up to the clip as if she's reminding herself of something-

GREAT IDEA REPORTER: Should we expect similar allegations against Amelie Raya?

Her throat ripples ever so slightly, whether from swallowing saliva or her tears that threaten to pool over, and suddenly her arms tense, her fist clench below the table. But then, she gazes mindlessly at nothing like a broken puppet, and seems to have given up on even *opening* her mouth. Amelie Raya is an ornament for her manager to dust and for the label executives to put on the shelf. She serves no purpose⁶.

PAGE SEVEN REPORTER: Is it true that there will be-

A! REPORTER: Any pictures of the couple-

PMZ REPORTER: Can we confirm whether Amelie-

⁶ To the author: I'd like to change this sentence for editing - Amelie Raya is a main source of income for us. Arguably the greatest purpose of all time.

Questions answers exclamation mark comma hyphen colon tricolon triplet allegro adagio
arpeggio crescendo crescendo CRESCENDO STACCATO *legato legato legato decrescendo*
TREMOLO

A security guard pokes me in the chest, (presumably) staring at me through mirrored
sunglasses, and silence surrounds us. The scrape of a chair. I turn my eyes to see Amelie
being ushered out by some guards, trailing behind her manager and the executive, looking
somewhat content⁷.

Maybe her handcuffs were imaginary.

Maybe we made them up.

⁷ Nothing a PR department can't handle. Especially one that's working overtime to make sure Raya gets out of this
alive... and with her reputation mostly intact.



Vlogger

POETRY

Oliver Clarke

I'm setting up my camera to capture
Me setting up my other camera to capture
Me drinking black coffee and talking to camera
About how I achieved my minimalist aesthetic.
I've got two desks and a thin floor lamp.
I'm wise beyond my years and prophetic.

When it comes to wellbeing, I'm the best.
I'm going to show you how to wear a vest.
I'm going to show you how to have two desks.
I'm going to show you how to be a minimalist.

I'm setting up my tripod to steady
The image of me getting my tripod steady
So you can watch me getting ready
To go out and record the city.
I try to go out and get things done
So I can tell you about productivity.

If I upload late, I call it disaster.
I want to show you how to do things faster.
I want to show you how to cook pasta.
I want to link you to my KickStarter.





I'm setting up a GoPro under water
To film me swimming under water.
I want to fix my canon 'gainst self-slaughter.
I've got footage of me drying myself off after.
I'm on a holiday with all of my friends.
When I'm editing I can hear their vicious laughter.



When it comes to self-loathing, I'm unmatched.
I'm going to show you how to deal with that.
I'm going to show you how to wear a hat.
I'm going to show you my bathroom mat.

I'm scrolling through the comments that guess
My extreme and profound loneliness
To get to comments that express
A love for my minimalist style and great content.
I got some new socks from Yves Saint Laurent.
Is that how you pronounce it?

When it comes to negative vibes, I'm incensed.
I wish there was someone behind the lens.
I wish I had some real friends.
I wish I was more than pretence.

I'm moving my mouse towards delete.
I want to delete my channel and never meet
You sad-sack basement-dwellers who deplete
My limited reserves of self-satisfaction.
I called you guys my team, my family.
I'm taking decisive action.



When it comes to losing friends, I'm a laureate.
I'm losing all my friends and my followers and loving it.
I'm losing all my clout and my support and I'm dropping it;
Dropping all my pretensions and my sponsorships.

When it comes to the internet, I don't rate it.
I feel justified in my hatred.
I feel like how I feel when I come out of the shower naked
Alone, vulnerable, pathetic and totally vacant.



Play: Shinigami Eyes

Grimes



Victorian Brunch

James Morgan

Play, this too,



POETRY

as we pull up by an *Angel of Grief*
Daniel tells me a Car Seat
Headrest lyric about not going to cemeteries
because they're too cliché
and I laugh

I check our broken back door and spot
a dollar coin dropped by a mourner
who thought it would have been
far too worldly pick back up

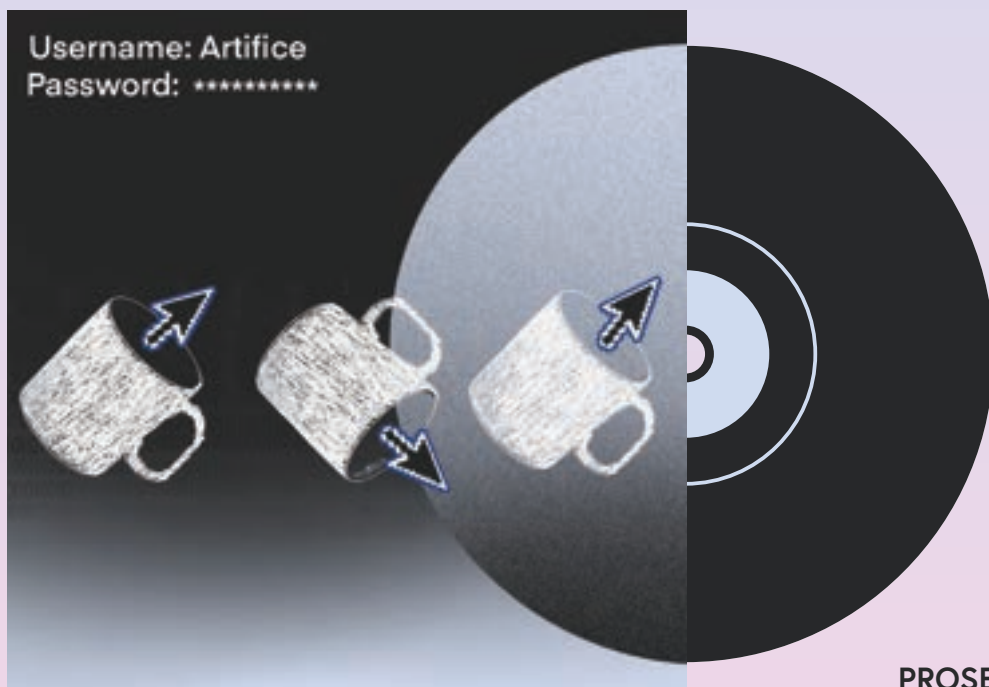
in the cafe the dollar helps pay for
a giant glazed donut
the walls are lined with pink and yellow paperbacks
and the radio plays *How to Save a Life*—
how could we not laugh?

I spot a stand of happy birthday balloons in the store
next to us
Daniel laughs
but I stop him
and explain they're for dead children

we wander with our coffees through plots of Greek
Chinese and Irish
into the stillborn section
appropriately small with short
walls and
tiny lots filled with toys
and other pretty things
that would have been far too worldly
to donate or destroy

we finish our coffees and leave
looking for a bin that isn't only for flowers

play: ghost in the machine



PROSE

Many centuries ago, man said: imagine a machine. This machine can give you any experience you desire. What it means to write great poetry, or cure world hunger, or find true unconditional love. You could live out the rest of your days surrounded by beauty and warmth. Inhabiting a world of your own construction, absent of fear and anger and sorrow.

That is the Mindscape.

INTO_THE_ARTIFICE

Written by
Chelsea Uthayaseelan

Written for
Mindscapes Pty Ltd

FINAL DRAFT

The rhythmic clink of silver on porcelain. Darkness.

THE HOST

I was in a dream.

1. INT. DISPLAY FLOOR, MINDSCAPES HEAD OFFICE - DAY

THE HOST stands in a pair of red-soled leather heels on a white linoleum floor. She looks just like you or I. A mug warms her hands. It is filled with fresh, hot coffee. Artificial sweetener, artificial creamer. She passes a teaspoon through the formula and watches the solution ripple. Lines dark as creases in velvet. There is a vacant look in her eyes, like she isn't entirely there.

THE HOST (CONT'D)

I was dreaming for a long, long time and then...

The man by the espresso machine, THE DIRECTOR, plucks the spoon from the Host's hands and tosses it into the sink. She looks up, startled, as though seeing him for the first time. In a way, she is.

THE HOST (CONT'D)

And then I woke up.

The Director opens the tap. The water runs in spirals down the drain. The Host turns towards the sound, and the Director turns towards the Host.

THE DIRECTOR

Morning.

The Host smiles. She's not sure why. It feels, and looks, like an act of programmed friendliness. The Director shuts off the tap, walks around the counter, and stands in front of her. There is Muzak playing faintly over the intercom. Notes of Jazz. The sound is so relentlessly pleasant, and yet unnerving. Liminal.

THE HOST

Hello.

THE DIRECTOR

Do you recognise this place?

The Host hesitates. She tilts her head a little to the right. The movement is almost imperceptible. Deeply human. But not necessarily so complicated. Possibly animal. Simply *alive*.

THE HOST

I recognise you. You are a friend.

THE DIRECTOR

But not this place?

A puzzled look overcomes the Host.

THE DIRECTOR (CONT'D)

You came here once as a young girl. Your first time in this office, you spilled hot water all over the magazines and pamphlets I had collected for your father. You even wrote about it when you were older. The humiliation. *Easily subverted, you said, was the illusion of comfort in a warm drink and white noise chatter by a giddy child with wild fingers. I am different now. All my energy has moved to the nervous trembling of my leg. And even that, I keep controlled.* We are alike, you and I. Anxious people.

The Director extends a hand in her direction. His fingers are shaking. The joints are red and swollen.

THE DIRECTOR (CONT'D)

Sometimes, I fear that I am but a manifestation of your restlessness. That it is this world which is not real and I am only part of the fabrication. An actor blind to the stage he stands on. It is an irrational fear. I know it is not true. This is, and has always been, my production. But the horror, I think, is that one can never be too sure. Once you have planted the seed of doubt, it cannot be unearthed. It grows like a weed until it has destroyed everything else.

The Director drops his arm back to his side.

THE HOST

I'm sorry, but I don't understand.

The Director nods.

THE DIRECTOR

It's going quickly: your mind. And the longer we wait,
the more you will forget.

(turning away)

Come. I'll have to show you.

The Director guides the Host to a low-built stage on the other end of the empty sales floor where a glass chute stretches three or four metres into the ceiling. It spins on a revolving plate, all sides exposed. Inside is the mould of a body with space for human arms and legs to fill. There is a padded rest for the head, and velcro straps to secure the feet. A thick translucent pipe coils around the base of the machine and a yellow feeding tube inclines towards the headrest. A row of air vents whirr behind the glass facade.

THE DIRECTOR

You were too young for coffee, the first time I saw you. Your father disapproved. *It could be dangerous*, he said, and I filled your mug with hot water instead. *Maybe when you are older. More mature*. Later, I told you something similar when you asked to try the machine for yourself. It frustrated you to no end- the trappings of your youth. Now look at you. There's nothing you haven't done. And you're not yet half my age.

The Host side-steps the Director and presses a hand to the cold glass front of the machine. `

THE HOST

What is it?

THE DIRECTOR

It's a coffin.

THE HOST

It breathes.

THE DIRECTOR

But it's not life.

The Host watches the Director over her shoulder. He looks disappointed, as though he was expecting her to say something different. She struggles to find the right words.

THE HOST

I've seen this before- the Experience Machine. Nozick's argument against hedonism. If you like it then it should matter that it's not real.

The Host raises the mug absentmindedly to her lips. The smell is strong but the taste is thin and reminiscent of baby mush. She pushes the drink around in her mouth and then spits it out. It does matter. Perhaps it always did.

THE DIRECTOR

A 20th century philosopher couldn't comprehend what we have done here. Entire generations of human lives reduced to scripts. Lines of binary code. Their ancestors chose a simulation over reality at a time when the world was at war and the children of their children's children are still there. What seemed to be a cheap and temporary relief from the labour and starvation of life in a barren, dying land became the final legacy of mankind. A modest but pleasant existence from which no one has ever woken up, set in the early 21st century with characters on the brink of the technological revolution, although the horrors of the real world have been dormant for years. A form of paradise, but an eternity of artifice.

The Host drops her hand from the glass as though she has been burned. She turns to the Director. Her eyes are open. His words have struck a chord.

THE HOST

I am in a warehouse. I belong to one of a thousand glass coffins rising from the ground like stalagmites stacked one on top of the other. I am fed through a tube. My excrement leaves in bags. Every few weeks, a bug that has managed to crawl through the piping and the ventilation dies somewhere at my feet and dust forms in clumps on my skin. I am cold and bare and alone. There is bliss, yes, and yet there is suffering. The pleasure of the mind at the cost of the body degrading.

The Director smiles.

THE DIRECTOR

No, not quite. Your body is here, but your mind is stuck. Exhausted, like a disused limb, by the prospect of a world beyond its control. Your mind longs to return to the mindscape and soon it will win the struggle between us. You will collapse, and in your slumber, you will forget that you are only dreaming. That is inevitable. I can unplug you physically but not mentally. To wake up whole, you must destroy the world you came from. And you must do it of your own volition. To stay, you must have no other place to go.

THE HOST

How would I do that?

THE DIRECTOR

You put something in your world that is not supposed to be there. You plant the seed of doubt.

2. INT. STUDIO FLOOR, CAPITOL THEATRE - NIGHT

The sound of HEAVY APPLAUSE. Light.

The Host is seated behind a tall wooden desk in front of a LIVE STUDIO AUDIENCE. The people in the audience blur together. Their heads swivel between the Host and the DIRECTOR on the brown corduroy couch beside her. Mouths agape. Teeth gleaming in the lights. Like a game of Laughing Clowns at the fair. Sweat on the Director's collar betrays his anxiety, but the Host is unaffected by the crowd. She has been hosting Late Night TV for half as many years as the Director has been alive, and he is no young man.

THE HOST

Amazing! Amazing- No doubts there! *Into the Artifice* begins streaming on Netflix tomorrow! The Director, everybody! We have to take a quick break but don't go anywhere- the full cast joins us when we come back!

The Host turns her beaming smile to the Director perched uncomfortably on the edge of his seat. Despite the audience and the camera crew, it feels like it is just the two of them in the studio. The atmosphere is tense and claustrophobic. The space between them seems to have gotten smaller. He locks eyes with her and doesn't look away.

THE DIRECTOR (V.O.)

Thou hast put him in such a dream, that when the image of it leaves him, he must run mad.

The Host opens her mouth to speak but stops. Her smile falls. Something is wrong. She heard that. The Audience goes quiet. Quieter than they have ever been in her twenty-five years at this job. Off-stage, the jazz band stops playing. They all heard that. The Director tears the mic from his shirt and leans in close. The familiar chime of Muzak slips between the silence and the hitch of her own breath.

THE DIRECTOR (CONT'D)

Morning.

Play: Arsonist's Lullabye



POETRY

my father's collection

Jerrica Kuan

part i

dusty old yellowed tapes
my father plays their haunted tunes
ghostly hollow echoes
across our living room

a collection of songs
my father claims
but the voices howl of pain
as plain as his swollen eyes can see

scream, screech, shout
the basement growls and groans
my father works beneath
the ashen concrete stones

something dwells below
crying whenever silence looms
my father cries along
repeats: "it is not real"

part ii

Tattered tapes of my father's collection
Grow along with me
Labelled with names
Of strangers

My father forbids me from the basement
Where my mother passed
Her last breath
He fears our graves will be shared
He fears the thing in the basement
An inconceivable abomination
Asking for my father –
He refuses to answer

part iii

Like ink on greying labels,
My father's memories fade
Yet the ensemble my father keeps
He cannot forget

As the dying hymns howl as he leaves
Ringing through the empty house

Bequeathing
his burden
to me

part iv

Preserve the pandemonium
To placate the basement being
My father's warnings echo as
I tip-toe down the stairs

Blood
Flesh
Teeth

The monster breathes a shallow gasp
A colossal chaotic collection of
bodies
I think I see
My mother's face
Melting amidst the carapace

part v

The monster in the basement
Calls my name, begging for more
As the ballads of my father
Lose their allure

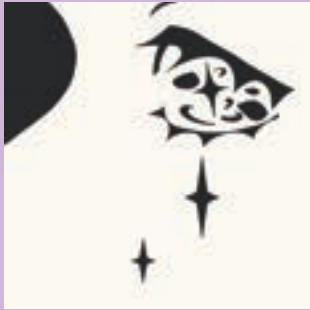
Christening new tapes,
My wretched knife
Cuts into fresh flesh
As they scream their holy song

The monster grows piece by piece

finale

The cancerous collection swelling
under my house will outlive me
I fear the day I join my father

The inevitable escape
For an orchestra of torture



Play: This is Home

Stars

Chelsea Chaffey

POETRY

...

its for charity, i lied. she stands behind me,
mirror-bound, salon-weary, long hair
carelessly pinned back. her perfume hangs
between the low drone of blow dryers cloyingly,
sickeningly sweet,
a taunting reminder of who i am
not. in my mind i reach for
another pulse to steady my own.

*...a little sick right now but i swear
when i'm ready i will fly us out of here.¹*

her pursed lips frame the words: what shame,
what waste. why you cut off such beauty?
why your mother not here? this i see
rather than hear, i force a smile but
my heart tingles and beats and each breath is hard.
i remember. *koko da yo.*² music

that helped me find myself when there
was no moon. songs that spun threads together
until i found the stars were not so distant, lyrics
that made me brave

enough to reach for them.

*i'll cut my hair
...to make you stare
...i'll hide...*

i close my eyes and she cuts
above the band and wraps it carefully
in cling film. dark locks form a crown
around my chair, then are swept away as if with the
tide. tiny specks remain like stars.

*and i'll figure out a way
to get us out of here.*

i walk with light shoulders and empty hands.
at home i weather the storm. *myuutanto*
*ja nai tada no boku sa.*³ i wrap
the lyrics around me and i measure
twelve and a half inches warm
from my pocket, limp as a corpse, the end
not prickly but soft on my skin,
gentle as a brush.

*...little do we know, the stars
welcome him with open arms.*

1. This is Home, Cavetown
2. "I'm here."
3. "It's not a mutation; it's just the way I am."

Appendix

Song Lyrics

This is Home, Cavetown (2015)

Song Lyrics

ヴィラン (Villain), Teniwoha
(Cover/Miyashita Yuu) (2021)

Acknowledgements

A swift, sweet, UNSWeetened thank you to the ever-helpful and stunning Chloe McFadden, whose passion for the publication has brought this year's edition to life. Chloe's glee has had a tremendous effect on this year's edition which we are endlessly indebted to. I would like to extend another dedication and thanks to the stunning ensemble of Arc marketing superstars; Caroline, Tom, Sarah, Bianca, Tiera, and Mitch - who continuously support and aid UNSWeetened's development. Thank you to UNSW Bookshop, who have supported UNSWeetened for over 25 years now - without you, we wouldn't be where we are today. And one last thank you to the folks at our sister publications - Tharunka and Blitz.

Personal Thanks -

I'd like to send a massive thanks to Mia Lo Russo, whose energy and passion for UNSWeetened is eternal for the three years she's been a part of the publication.

I'd also personally like to thank our lead designer, Sandra Tu, who brought this year's edition to life in all its beautiful glory.

Massive thank you to all the volunteers who have done an exceptional job this year, from editing, designing, illustrating, and offering a good deal of laughs, you have all outdone yourselves and done such a killer job!

Finally, thank you to all my friends, family and every beautiful star I have had the honour of crossing paths with. Thank you all, and much love!

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UNSWeetened 2023

ISSN 1441-1415

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UNSWWeetened is published by Arc @ UNSW Limited

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