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CONTRIBUTING ARTISTS

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6 Spring 2021

EDITORS' LETTER

s a collegiate publication, *Wilder Voice* operates within a set of nonnegotiable time constraints: the 15-week semester, the two-semester academic year, the four-year bachelor's degree. These limits are helpful, providing a ready-made arc to our work and dictating the steady tempo at which it advances. They're also, well, limiting. There's only so much that can be done in a single semester, and with a collective memory that rarely extends beyond half a decade, inconsistency over time is practically baked in. But limits breed creativity; inconsistency is just a synonym for experimentation. (And besides, there's no motivator quite like a hard deadline.)

Like last semester, the magazine you're holding in your hands (or, more likely, reading online) took form against a backdrop of specific, coronavirus-imposed restrictions: the abbreviated academic term, the class of 2023's conspicuous absence from campus, and a student body burnt out by over a year of Zoom-based learning. The rules might be new and different (and worse), but they're differences of degree rather than of kind. This issue, like any other, is where the ideal rubs against the real. It's a collective attempt to wring meaning out of, and instill meaning within, transience. A good story is a good anchor: it's something to hold onto.

n the spirit of finding opportunity (and continuity) within I have used this semester to expand our website by digitizing previous editions of WV. You can now view any piece published from fall 2017 onward at wildervoicemag.com. Plumbing Wilder Voice's recent past has been an instructive experience. We saw names move up the editorial masthead from semester to semester as a generation of Obies shared important reported stories and wrote through perennial and perennially urgent concerns—gender and identity, personal history, family narratives and their multivalent meanings, political activism and performance—with clarity and precision. The pieces differ in focus, from the history of Mercy Hospital to the founding of the 'Sco, from exploring death as exemplified by a beloved family cat to a series of meditations on the body. What ties them together is a willingness to engage and reengage with big questions and established narratives, to examine what's been received and endeavor to understand it in a new light—or perhaps rethink it wholesale.

To further this commitment to complexity, we've encouraged our contributors in this issue to write longer and deeper, giving their voices more breathing room on the page in order to grapple with events and ideas in all of their intricacies. Lila Templin describes their disillusionment with Oberlin's culture of wealth and the ways that students conceal their class privilege ("Unequal Footing," page 22). Lilyanna D'Amato returns to her favorite children's books and relearns to see the world in a new way ("The World from Below," page 17). And Jemma Johnson-Shoucair explores hubris in the second Star Wars prequel and the groundbreaking technology behind it ("The Lucas Effect," page 44). As always, their work is presented alongside striking student artwork, including Vincent Zhu's photo series Cracked and a series of collages from Katie Frevert.

"The Lucas Effect" is one of two essays appearing in this issue under the heading "Diagnoses." In this new department, writers articulate and interrogate problems of their choosing, exploring the "why" beyond the "what." It's not a space for crankiness so much as a space for synthesis through criticism; the intention is not simply to dunk on vexing phenomena, but to understand them.

As the spring semester comes to a close and we enter a summer of optimism and uncertainty, negotiating limits will remain a pressing task. After an unconventional but rewarding year serving as Wilder Voice's EICs, we are excited to hand off the first-ever summer installment of Wilder Voice to our incoming Senior Staff: Alexander Saint Franqui, Dorothy Levine, Clara Rosarius, and Fiona Warnick. Their talents have already helped shape the magazine, and we are confident that they will continue to make Wilder Voice a home for Oberlin's talented body of writers and artists.

Nell Beck and Sam Schuman Editors-in-Chief, Wilder Voice



Vincent Zhu, Crack (series)

"First of all:

I am tired.
I am true of heart!

And also:

You are tired. You are true of heart!"

-Dave Eggers

met Lizzy on the first day of gym class, almost exactly in the middle of high school. Having spent all of my adolescence concerned, and not particularly satisfied, with the ways friendship functioned in my life, making a new friend at this point was like coming to a clearing halfway through a long, uphill hike. As a kid my shelves were filled with stories of forgiveness and generosity, companionship a force so strong in these books that it shimmered above the page. I loved to imagine myself as half of one of those duos of friends who were completely fulfilled by the company of the other person and thus unafraid, even content, to stand together against the rest

of the world. When the characters you hope to see in yourself pass loyalty between them like breathing, building secret worlds that resist all time and distance, it's nearly impossible to keep your expectations from getting lost somewhere among the rafters of the library ceiling.

Then all of a sudden it becomes true: You meet someone, just as I met Lizzy on that morning many Januaries ago, and it feels like the most fortunate gift of chance you've ever received. I know now that luck is only good for the first few minutes; it's not enough on its own to propel a friendship toward longevity. I couldn't see then exactly how this friendship would

VOICES / CHASE

take shape—you reach that depth of understanding only with time. But the class periods I spent getting to know her were pockets of joy in otherwise-monotonous winter days. Fifty-five minutes on weekday mornings turned into eating her Teddy Grahams at lunch and watching The Bachelor on Monday nights so we could whisper about it between yoga poses. And on Good Friday, on the first truly warm afternoon of what I remember as an unusually sunny spring, I took Lizzy's school bus back to her house and sat around a bonfire with her family to hear stories of their days and lives.

If meeting Lizzy was a gift, each day I know her is a day I get to keep unwrapping it. I suppose we all wish our friends could see themselves in the ways we do, because everything Lizzy touches ends up better than how she found it. Being a witness to this magic makes me more sure of my words before they come out of my mouth, and pushes me to think longer about what is really the right thing to do. Her thoughtfulness forgets no one and nothing; her careful consideration borders on an indecisiveness we share. I hear her words of compassion and insight long after I've hung up the phone, but the look

of tranquil concern on her face as she listens to me says enough. Devotion can be the simplest thing, so simple that we don't need words for it. She shows me that a good friendship coaxes out the parts of us we may never see animated if not for a person who has taken the time to understand them.

All I've read has told me that throughout time, friendship has been a room where philosophical as well as emotional exchanges paper the walls and cover the floors. My own experi-

ences confirm this idea; friendship has manifested in exactly the right places and in enough ways to prove itself a necessity that is, like all traditions worth observing, simultaneously changing and continuing. Yet as I've gotten older I've also seen how abruptly a friendship can shift—one person's energies get redirected, a very different object of love takes up space where there was none, and time falls away.

Having a friend means you hope unequivocally, as you know she hopes for you, that the easiest, most comfortable kind of love finds her at the moment she most needs it. Lizzy and I have been there before, where something so wonderful fell into her lap that she needed to hold it with both hands. The hands that had been around my shoulders, that had reached down to pick up anything I had dropped. It was a dazed, disconnected year for me, feeling cut off at the knees, driving home alone after school. Not quite knowing how to carry Lizzy's bounty and my loss at the same time.

And yet it passed. We hardly bring it up anymore; that time

reflects harshly on us both, and it seems ridiculous, impossible even, considering all that we have now and all I have learned since then. Now, from the other side, I spend time wondering how life would be if we treated friendship and partner romance with the same reverence, two pillars of intimacy meant to bear equal amounts of our emotional weight. I have an idea of what that could look like; my future has a Lizzy-shaped space drawn into it. It's a relief to know this expectation is not just an intention, but a fact I can take for granted. Now it seems the endurance of this friendship will make the unknown future ahead of us bearable, even welcome. In her memoir Truth and Beauty, Ann Patchett writes about her late friend Lucy Grealy: "We were better off when we were together. Together we were a small society of ambition and high ideals. We were tender and patient and kind. We were not like the world at all." Lizzy and I talk of grad school together, of sharing an apartment, of our children tacking "Aunt" in front of the other person's name. I have dreams of the two of us at a kitchen table, after all partners and kids have gone to sleep, the last night of a dreamlike summer week. (No doubt we will have

> deliberated all year between the beach and the mountains, each person hoping the other would just make the decision for us.) We are sitting beside each other in comfortable silence, mugs of tea between us, wondering which of us played every single one of her cards right.

> Lizzy and I have other dreams, too, ones not so much rooted in time but in feeling. Like maybe one day, we won't have to wonder any longer when it will subside—that sensation of waiting for some-

thing, for our directions to line up with our destinations. The gauzy clouds of uncertainty that seem to surround us as we move through our lives will part, and we will find an understanding in the daily goodness of the world and our purposes in it that lets us forget about the looming what-ifs. And one day, the vague and fickle sadness that sneaks in through some drafty window is suddenly unable to push its way through, and the contentment we've been searching for will be just

As much as Lizzy and I may anticipate whatever lies on the other side of now, the past will always be next to where we stand; it's true that we may be too comfortable there. In college they teach you that the more you recall a memory, the more vulnerable it becomes. Every time you think of it, that old image of what really happened mixes with your present state of mind to produce a more or less false account of the truth. But much of my time these days I supplement with remembrance; just looking at the way the wind moves through

there—will have been just out of view this whole time.

Sometimes when I eat ice cream, I think of sitting together in the Ben & Jerry's by the college I didn't want to go to, the one my parents were silently rooting for, the one Lizzy would enroll in come September.

the grass makes me think of riding my bike behind Lizzy on Balcom Street on any given day last summer. And still, sometimes when I eat ice cream, I think of sitting together in the Ben & Jerry's by the college I didn't want to go to, the one my parents were silently rooting for, the one Lizzy would enroll in come September, not fully imagining until it was too late what it could have looked like to spend four more years with a person who knew as well as I did that I would always ask for chocolate sprinkles on my cone.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton said of Susan B. Anthony, "So closely interwoven have been our lives, our purposes, and experiences, that separated we have a feeling of incompleteness." And while physical separation keeps me and Lizzy apart apart more than anything else (recently we realized there will be a single day between when she returns home from school and when I start my next semester), just layering a moment we shared many months ago onto a day we spend apart makes it complete. It isn't that I want to remember my way back into the past so much as I hope to bring the past up to meet me where I am. That way, when the sun sets over the river I walk to every week, a hat pulled over my ears and my raw frozen hands stuffed into my pockets, the sky I'm seeing is the one Lizzy and I stared into at the beginning of last July. Each night that weekend we sat with our feet dangling off the dock, watching as a burning sun poured itself out for us in shades of pink against the sky, before it sank down to become the dark smooth ripples of the lake. I figure if such a moment of light lodges itself behind my eyes, why shouldn't I let it refract onto an otherwise unremarkable instance and paint the whole thing a warm, Lizzy-tinted shade?

In some ways I feel no one knows what it is to have a friend the way I have Lizzy. Yet in other ways it is even more special to imagine there was a version of our friendship that existed between other people long before we came along. Because really, it always happens in the same way—Ann and Lucy, Elizabeth and Susan. First you find someone you can grow up with, and as you two become yourselves alongside one another you can't help but take in parts of the other person. And the pieces of herself she decides she no longer likes, or has grown out of, or wants to change completely—you put those in your pocket. You keep the endless versions of who she was and who she hopes to be right next to those versions of yourself, so one day when you're both old women, you can say to each other, "I saved this for you, because I thought you may want it later," and you can spill everything out onto the table, sifting through the memories you share and the ones you don't, because at this point it's all the same. You will find that everything you have lived she has lived, because she has stayed with you in every way imaginable.

So the story of me and Lizzy goes on every day, whether we know we're writing it or not. Thoreau offers that the language of friendship is not words, but meaning. And while what Lizzy and I do best is talk and listen, we struggled with how to say our most recent goodbye, with how to make the other person

understand. Not that we didn't have any words left between us, but what could I possibly say to express how I sleep better at night knowing Lizzy also has dreams? To express that when loneliness sits down with me at my desk, I imagine Lizzy at her own as if we are looking at the same wall, fixed to the same spot that exists somewhere between here and there, in which the other person is always reflected back to us. Why would I try words, when what I really wanted was to put stars from the summer sky into a jar, for her to take back to the place where it is always winter?

But that sky was far away now, in a state I won't be backback to for a while. So instead of trying to make meaning out of a separation that, in the end, severs nothing, I stood on the steps of my apartment and watched Lizzy move farther and farther away into the landscape of a waning January. Just when I thought her back had turned for the last time, thought I wouldn't see how the cold air flushed her face until the following winter, she would turn around and send out another wave, her shining eyes holding mine, until I had to be the one who climbed the stairs slowly up toward my room.



LIAM

ASHBROOK









Interviewed by Clara Rosarius

Visual Processes

LIAM ASHBROOK, ARTIST **STATEMENT**

hat does it mean to think and express a thought linearly? What does it mean to conceptualize yourself in a linear fashion? When trying to express who you are, at the core of your being, can you tell a straightforward story? Your creation is a compilation of many facts of your upbringing, stories you tell yourself, moments of joy and sorrow that seem crystalized in their vividness, and fuzzy forgotten days, weeks, years. It is the objects you've accumulated, the loved ones you've made and lost, places you've lived, dreams you once carried; it is the way you understand the world and conceptualize yourself in it. You are not a linear story; you are all these things and many more, and you are the push and pull between them—you exist in the threads that tie all these things together.

My art practice Attempts to capture these complexities of life, taking a simple thought or Idea and stretching it to its extreme. Trying to map out a thought process, putting different thoughts in conversation with each other to make them greater than the sum of their parts. On their own, the pieces are intentionally complicated and oversaturated with visual information to more authentically express a complicated inner dialogue that doesn't always operate linearly, which allows patterns, themes, and characters to easily repeat.

For my senior show I am making a map or network of interconnected paintings and found objects (in an attempt to) express myself. I am doing my best to holistically express complex ideas and narratives. I am being honest with myself and with the viewer, giving as much as I can, not paring down the story to make it simple or palatable.

Because of the density of these pieces there are some that reward careful looking-some of these layers and symbols are made explicit while others are obscured or require careful looking to uncover. There are coded messages, and a more complex narrative and image is available to the viewer who looks attentively. The works exist as conversations between the viewer and myself, where if the viewer engages in the conversation by looking carefully and bringing in their own experiences and vulnerabilities, they will have a deeper connection and conversation. Because of the plethora of information, there is room for the viewer to develop their own narrative from the image, to bring in their own life experiences that allow them to see unique connections and strings between the images.

INTERVIEW BY CLARA **ROSARIUS:**

s I walked into Liam's studio, I was in awe of the treasure-filled wonderland before me. Paintings propped against the wall, paint-covered stools, childhood photographs, and a table with an assortment of found animal bones, some of them complete skeletons found in Oberlin. I sat down with Liam to chat about their artistic process, pandemic experience, and their work for the upcoming Senior Studio Installation.

Clara Rosarius: So to get started, could you introduce yourself? Who are you, what do you do?

Liam Ashbrook: Sure! I'm Liam Ashbrook. I'm a fourth-year, I use they/ them pronouns. I'm an art history and visual arts double major and politics minor. And I make art. I mostly work in paintings, mostly with acrylic and oil painting, but also in collage and assemblage and work with found objects and paint on found things. I guess that's a good introduction.

Can you speak a bit about your daily practice?

Well, for one I try to be in here most days because if I take too much of a break I can get stuck in my own head. But my work is pretty intuitive. I generally have an idea of what I want to express, and a general vibe that I'm going for. But I usually don't know what a piece is going to end up as until I start working and just start building. I work messily and with a lot of layers. My philosophy is if I spend enough time with it and keep adding to it, it will eventually turn into something that I like. And I think people know when you put a lot of care and effort into a thing and a lot of the time that comes through in the end. So I just try to spend as much time and get as much care into these pieces as I can until I've done all I can.

Do you usually work alone? Do you listen to music or podcasts?

There are times when I'm really in the zone and can't listen to anything. Those



times are sometimes really nice. But for the most part I listen to music or listen to a podcast and it just depends on the vibe that I'm going for. I like sitting in one spot and working on detail work and I listen to a podcast where I can focus on that. And if I'm thinking of ideas and, like, running around and putting new things together, trying to come up with crazy new ideas, I'll listen to something energetic. Listening to things just helps me get in the zone. I'll listen to one song on repeat for like an hour, just to have something going. Embarrassingly I listen to a lot of-not necessarily embarrassingly-but I listen to a lot of musicals because they're energetic and like, "Yeah, let's go!"

Do you have a notebook, or a place you start off a new piece such as a drawing, text or an overall idea before you first start on the canvas or with a found object?

Yeah, I try to do a little journaling exercise and center myself and figure out what I'm trying to say and who I'm trying to say it to. Then I'll do some thumbnail sketches. But there are definitely also times when I just start going and see what happens. Like with this (points to piece on wall). I didn't really do any planning. I just was like, "I need to make something." I'm just gonna go for it. So it's like 50–50: some things I plan, some things I don't. I just make it up as I go.

Are there any artists that you're influenced by or you feel like you come back to when you're working on your own projects?

I've been trying to look at contemporary artists who use mixed media and make layered, textured, and complex work, like Mark Bradford, Luis Cruz Azaceta, Robert Bittenbender, Julian Schnabel, and Gisela McDaniel.

I'm noticing a lot of texture in your pieces as you bring in collage, so they also become sculptures in a sense. What kinds of materials do you use other than like acrylic and such? I can see you have some photographs next to the paintings, are they part of the installation?

Yeah! These are paintings of me as a baby and these are the baby pictures that I pulled from. And I want to have those in the installation. And this is an old sign, from outside of Stevie, a menu board for Biggs that I grabbed.

All the paintings' "canvases" that I have around here are things that I like, either old things that I've gotten from Goodwill and thrift shops, or from dumpster diving and things. I really like building from already-used materials because I think it's an interesting practice of trying to not buy new things and trying to take things that other people have discarded and reuse them. And find the beauty and the artistry in them.

It's easier to start on something when there's already something there to build off of. And these pieces still have the energy of the things that have come before them, and I get to build on that and have a new conversation. If I'm doing a bunch of paintings on the same canvas, I'll use the same process each time. But if I'm doing a painting on a mirror or glass or plastic, it's something different. I get to explore and discover something new, which is something I really like.

I'm trying to move more into sculp-

ture and trying to move things off of just the wall. So I am experimenting with clay and with other found objects such as bones.

I tend to collect and hoard a bunch of things that have material importance to me. And then I try to think of when I can incorporate those into the things that I'm making.

Yeah. That's really cool. I like the idea of kind of building on something that already exists, like adding to the history of it.

Yeah, there was a project I did last semester where I made this map of objects that people had left in my life that were gone either because we had a big fight and they left, or they died, or something. I was exploring how these different objects held not only that person, but also who I was in the moment that I knew them and how they let me transport back to that time and that different person. I think that's true for a lot of objects and stuff. They hold different ideas and times in them. And that's something that I like to think about and play with.

How does your own identity, whatever that means to you, influence your work? How does that come into play in your work, if it does?



No, I think it definitely does. My work often has an underlying theme of gender, because that's just something that I'm thinking about often. I think that often shows up because of me being trans and always thinking about gender. And I think also about my lived gender. I don't know if this sounds odd, but my lived experience of being trans is also very related to my spirituality and my spiritual practice, which is also important in my art-making. Most of my pieces are to some degree self-indulgent and self-reflective, where I'm trying to just express all the thoughts that I have and put them out in pictures because I don't know how to put them into words. Just translating things that I've experienced into things [I make].

I grew up in a strict Protestant household. I think I still see that culture around us, like at Oberlin: it originated as a Protestant institution. I've just been thinking about the mythos of Adam and Eve and the idea that all people are inherently separate from the earth and should be shamed because of that separation. I've been thinking about that shame and how it relates to colonization and the destruction of the land and a bunch of other things.

An underlying thing that I've been thinking about recently is this shaming and the trying to bring other people into that shame and pass it along, whether that's through the Protestant work ethic or missionary things and the way that it's spread. This is partly a practice in my own mind of trying to unlearn and break those things down. This is what I've been thinking about and meditating on while I make these specific pieces. I'm not entirely sure if it fully comes through, but it comes through to me. And I think that's true in a lot of my making. It's just processing what's around me and trying to understand myself in the world and my place in the world by just making pictures about it.

Do you feel like you're still part of the Protestant community or connected to it spiritually?

Not really. My experience growing up in the church was mostly negative. And it's the thing that I've moved away from. But I think when I moved away from it, I at first shunned spirituality and religion all together. Especially this past year, having to be with myself most of the time has made me do a lot of self-reflection and I'm trying to reclaim a spirituality, a connection with the greater force that doesn't have this

baggage connected to it. I guess both personal and also political.

There was another work that you sent me from last semester's midterm show that also had religious elements inside, like inside the vulva was a religious figure. And then the halo around the three people dancing in a circle. Can you talk a little bit more about that piece?

Yeah, definitely. That was a self-indulgent and self-reflective piece. Well, the other context is that I'm also an art history major and I study mostly medieval Christian iconography and have a lot of historical knowledge about Christian iconography. It's interesting from





a geopolitical standpoint, especially in the Middle Ages, which is what I study. So that also seeps into my work and seeped into that Mother Mary and the baby Jesus there. But that piece was about spirituality and a spiritual awakening that I had. Over the summer, like after quarantining and getting tested, I got to visit my friend who was living on a commune. And we had this really wonderful experience, just hanging out in nature and being together. After being so disconnected from the world, I felt very connected to other people and to the earth in a way that I hadn't for a while. And we danced naked under a waterfall. And that was a painting of the three of us doing that. That was part of it. In all honesty, that painting was just me trying to capture that essence and that feeling of what it felt like, because I just didn't want to lose that. It was really impactful and beautiful and made me feel like, "Oh, the world is scary and really pretty bad right now, but there is hope and beauty in things." I've been also trying to tap into making art from a place of joy and connection rather than rehashing the same trauma to make art out of it.

Looking at your paintings, there is the hyper realistic mouth and hand, mixed with the simple abstracted body. That seems to be like a pattern in the work you're doing now.



Yeah, I was thinking about this; it was partly a technical experiment for myself. I was like, "Can I make something that, from a distance, looks like a collage and then you get up close and you realize that it's all painted?"

I think it's visually jarring and interesting and also just about being able to pick and choose what parts of your life and what parts of yourself you want to make permanent and put on the gallery wall of your life.

One thing you talked about in your artist statement was stretching an idea to the extreme. Can you talk a little bit about that?

Yeah. So for this senior studio project, there were so many directions that I wanted to go in and there were so many things that I wanted to explore. I felt like every idea that I had branched off into these different ideas and those things were interconnected in different ways. And then I was having such a hard time narrowing it down and trying to choose one thing. And then I was like, "Why am I trying to fight this impulse for complexity? Why can't I just embrace it?" So I'm trying to just embrace it and make these things that look like my initial

"I keep learning and relearning that there isn't one path to being an artist."

thoughts, like Adam and Eve but they are pushed to an extreme where it's not entirely recognizable. They will simultaneously be like Adam and Eve and also be like other characters and other things.

Like I said, I like working these layers. I think I'm just trying to make

something that is complex enough and has these different layers of meaning so that you can sort of come into it and take away what you need and make your own connections.

You also talked in your artist statement about wanting to create conversations between the viewer and the piece itself, or the viewer and the artist. What are you hoping those conversations will be like?

I try to reward careful and close looking. I think especially last semester I included codes in all the paintings that I made. One of them has a bunch of poems and then there were highlighted words in the poems that you could put together to make a new poem. And one of them was a painting that closed and then had a lock and if you unlocked it, you could open it up to find another painting on the inside. I think I want to continue with that where I want people to be able to engage, like, really engage with the work. I'm putting effort and time and thought and emotion into this. And I want people to have the option to come in and get real close and think about it and uncover the codes. There will be more information if they want it. And if they don't want it, they can also just look at it and it's nice to just look at. I want it to be a choice that if people want to engage in a deeper conversation they can. There is a choice to be able to do that.

Once you come to a piece and you're like, "I'm deciding to get up in it and look at all the close details and figure out what they mean," you're also bringing in your own context of your life. And then that's another layer of interest and importance. I'm thinking about connection and community. It's trying to make a connection, express the things I want to express. And hopefully people will understand what I'm trying to say. But I also hope that people will engage with the pieces on their own terms and like the conversation.



Do you think there are certain classes that you've taken at Oberlin, or just like in general outside of Oberlin, that have really influenced or impacted how you make art and your ideas around it?

Oh, that's such a good question. Honestly, freshman year, I took Color Theory and that class has stuck in my head. It was the first time that I worked purely with color and not with concrete shapes; it was a new experience for me and pushed me really hard. I also took Icon Painting and then TA'ed for the class, which was where you make icons in the traditional Russian iconography style and make your own paints. You're supposed to be making spiritual religious art, which is at least partially the vibe I'm going for. I think it was intentionally a meditative process and involved a lot of layering of things. And I think that really stuck with me. Even though I don't work with the same materials anymore, that process still stuck with me.

The artistic practice can sometimes be really isolating. Do you find that difficult or do you try to collaborate with other artists? How do you manage being alone with your thoughts all the time?

That's something that is really hard about this year in particular and about the senior year and COVID-19. In previous years, and in the junior studio last year, we would go and check out what each other were working on and stay in the studio late at night together or go out for drinks or whatever and become an artist community. And we're not really able to do that this semester. I'm lucky that my roommate is also an artist and we can bounce ideas off of each other and work together in the same space. It is sometimes difficult, especially when I'm really excited about an idea or unsure about an idea. So that's another thing I hope for in the future, to be able to collaborate more.

Collaboration requires vulnerability because here I can show you what I've made and talk about it, but to collaborate, someone will sit in on your creation process, which for me is even more personal than the pieces. So that's something that I'm slowly but surely getting better at: being vulnerable, vulnerable about throwing out ideas and making mistakes with another person also there.

I am also thinking about the art world and wondering how you feel artists fit into society in general. Navigating the art world is so difficult.

I've been talking to some different artists. I got to sit down with a former Obie who's a curator at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) on Monday and have a brief conversation. And that was really illuminating where she told me her experiences. Her advice was just like find artists that you really admire and ask if they need studio assistants, and just put yourself out there and DM people and also name-drop other artists that you know because it's a weird community.

The other thing that I keep learning and relearning is that there isn't one path to being an artist. There are lots of ways that you can be an artist. You can sell your stuff as stickers and things online. And you can work academically and become a teacher or professor. You can become a curator or you can just make art in your free time and put it up in the world without anyone's permission and just be a person. I don't know if that's entirely helpful. The truth is that I'm still discovering what the art world looks like, especially for me and how I can, and hopefully will, fit into it.

Are there directions you hope to go in the future with your work or trying different mediums or something experimental, something you haven't worked with before?

Definitely. I want to play with bringing stuff off of the gallery wall, [causing] this conflict between the rectangular frame on a white wall and bringing stuff out of that. Part of the way I want to do that is by trying to work sculpturally, which I'm kind of scared of because I don't have a lot of practice. Putting objects together in a not-wall space is something I want to try. I also just want to try to go bigger and

see how big I can go, how crazy I can get. Those are the things that I'm thinking about, future things I want to explore, at least for the rest of the semester.

What are your plans for after you graduate, where you want to go or...

That's also a good question. Well, actually, just today I sent out an application. Not this past Winter Term, but the Winter Term before, I stayed at a commune in West Virginia. And I'm applying to live there for three to six months, to keep working on my portfolio and to establish more of an online presence and to live out the rest of the pandemic. And figure out what I'm going to do next. The art world is big and scary, but it's something that I at least want to try to give it a shot, because that's something that I really love doing and I will probably continue to do for the rest of my life whether or not I get paid for it. So it would be nice to get paid for it.

Is there advice you'd give to artists or aspiring artists when they're first starting out?

I know this is incredibly cliché, but honestly, just make work. The only way that I got better is that I just spent a lot of time making stuff. I would also say just take risks both in what you're making and also in showing it to people. I think way more people are artists and have the ability to make art than they realize. I've had friends who've been like, "No, I'm not an artist." And they show me their collages and they're gorgeous. And I'm like, "you just have to have the confidence to call yourself an artist and show people or post it online." If you take yourself seriously as an artist, other people will take you seriously as an artist. So I think just taking yourself seriously and just making stuff and taking risks, allowing yourself to try something new. These were all kinds of experiments that I just liked. And so I put it up on the wall and I said, this is art now. And people just agreed with me.

Check out Liam's work on Instagram @lem.arts

The World From Below

The best children's literature sees the world from below; revisiting it as an adult is an act of returning to oneself.

by Lilyanna D'Amato

he night after my 21st birthday, deep in the throes of a mid-quarantine identity crisis, I found myself sitting on the floor of my bedroom, surrounded by my favorite childhood books. Fox Tale Soup, I Wanna Be a Cowgirl, Miss Suzy, Sleepy Bears, This Land is Your Land. I had stumbled upon them late at night while digging through the linen closet for a particularly elusive fitted sheet: 15 books crammed into the bottom right-hand corner, wedged between an old school project and a long-unused hamper. I pulled the stack out, carried it down the narrow hallway to my room, and began sifting through the pile. One by one, I read them aloud, embarrassingly pretending to show off the illustrations to some imaginary kindergarten class, relishing the visceral nostalgia and momentary distraction they brought me.

Halfway through, somewhere around A Story for Bear, I started to think about the person I had become since setting those books down for the last time. Did I like her? Was she all that different from this former me? What, really, had changed?

When I called my Mom a few days

ago, I asked her what she thought. "Well, I think you let other people get in the way now."

uring my sophomore year of college, I read Virginia Woolf's To the Lighthouse. In my favorite passage, the beloved, ever-perceptive Mrs. Ramsay describes solemnly shrinking into her interior self, finding solace in her own wedge-shaped core of darkness invisible to others. As a child, I often felt this way: deeply familiar with my inner self, as if we were two separate people in conversation. I've always thought we were sort of like friends, this inner me and I. When I was younger, this deep-seated introspection about the life I saw around me allowed me to be curious and imaginative, independent and compassionate. Because of it, I was, for the most part, unafraid to belong to my

As I've gotten older, though, I've begun to feel increasingly removed from myself, as though I had lost a little bit of that inner dialogue which had, for the majority of my early life, defined my sense of self. It always told me how I felt and who I wanted to be. Growing up meant starting to feel adrift, disconnected and completely out of touch with who I really was.

I had spent the summer before sophomore year and the majority of the fall living with my boyfriend's family in a small town right on the border of New Hampshire and Vermont. By mid-June, the two of us had fallen into a pattern of waking up around 9:00 or 10:00 in morning, drinking our coffee and reading for a few hours below the pear trees in his front yard, silently working on opposite ends of the long, oak dining-room table until 3:00 or 4:00 in the afternoon, and then driving through town around 4:30 to take a swim in the Connecticut River before dinner. I was giddily happy, content to exist in a faraway place for a little while.

But, sometime around the beginning of August, I began to feel as though I was looking out at the world from someone else's eyes. Instead of hearing my own voice, one that had always been so central to my sense of self, I was hearing his. I wouldn't have the words to express it until several months later, but that summer I came to devote every part of myself to a life that didn't real-

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ly belong to me, rarely engaging with my inner self so as to fully ingratiate myself in someone else's thoughts and opinions and routines. My self-image had become untenable because I was constantly living out another person's fictionalized version of me. By the end of September, it became clear that I had become so concerned with belonging to someone else's life that I had seemingly forgotten to belong to my own. When the relationship ended in November, I was left without any understanding of who I was without it.

A few weeks after, on that night when I sat enveloped by all those artifacts of my childhood, I recognized that my conception of my most authentic

self and my innermost truisms were all wrapped up in those books. As I ran my fingers across the front covers of Lili at Ballet and The Adventures of Frog and Toad and The Twelve Dancing Princesses, I imagined myself at four or five years old, my auburn hair poking out from behind my ears as I sat tucked under my father's arm in the cushy brown leather chair that used to sit in the corner of my brother's bedroom. I can almost hear the soft rasp of his voice as he reads me Sleepy Bears before bed. Then Baby Bear yawned a BIG yawn. As he

reads, I can hear my mother brushing her teeth in the bathroom down the hall, our cats Wonder and Punk mewing below her feet. My brother rustles in bed. The old oak tree that used to loom outside my bedroom window still stands tall. It fell down suddenly in 2007 after being struck by lightning, but for most of my childhood it was the last thing I saw before I fell asleep.

Now, all these years later, once again hearing the rhymes and cadences of my childhood, I felt closer to myself than I had in a very long time. I realized that the books I read as a child have come to represent a time when I was just be-

ginning to understand who I wanted to be and yet, paradoxically, knew exactly who I was.

I don't think mine is an isolated experience. Children's literature is often one of a child's first introductions to empathy, imagination, and self-awareness. These books influence the way we navigate the lives around us; the way we come to understand the world is entirely shaped by the sites and experiences we explore as children. They offer a vocabulary for children to construct their identities, yet are never deemed especially consequential because of their seemingly elementary lessons. Unlike complex opuses like Steinbeck's *East of Eden* or James Baldwin's *Another Coun-*

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try, children's literature is rarely seen as self-defining. What if we considered Margaret Wise Brown's *Goodnight Moon* or E.B. White's *Charlotte's Web* or Maurice Sendak's *Where The Wild Things Are* to be as powerful as any other piece of literature? Could it be that those books were some of the most formative, provocative, and honest ones of our lives?

In Bruce Handy's Wild Things: The Joy of Reading Children's Literature as an Adult, he argues that "the best children's literature is every bit as rich and rewarding in its concerns, as honest and stylish in its execution, as the best adult literature" because it introduces ideas

and stories which often go unexplored by adults. These books deal with deeply personal issues—loneliness, death, and the loss of innocence, to mention a few-in imaginative and honest ways, helping children to broaden and stretch their minds, flesh out the complex bonds they have with those around them, cope with conflicting emotions, understand their role in families and neighborhoods, and define the journey from childhood to adulthood. Even more important, Handy contends, is the act of revisiting these works as an adult. In one early chapter he quotes speculative fiction author Ursula K. Le Guin, who says that while "revisiting a book loved in childhood may be princi-

> pally an act of nostalgia"she had known a woman who reread The Wizard of Oz every few years because it helped her to remember being a child—"[in] returning after a decade or two or three to The Snow Queen or Kim, you may well discover a book far less simple and unambiguous than the one you remembered. That shift and deepening of meaning can be a revelation both about the book and yourself."

few summers back, I $oldsymbol{\Lambda}$ wandered into my favorite bookstore in New York City: the wooden cathedral that is the Housing Works Bookstore on Crosby Street. I've always said that buying a new book is one of the most exhilarating experiences a person can have. Curiosity swells and a desire for a new reality percolates just below as you find another world to imagine yourself in. On this particular day, I climbed the winding staircase above the mystery section to stand before the one-dollar bookshelf. There, hidden beside a monstrous poetry anthology, I rediscovered The Little Prince. I had read it once or twice as a child, enjoying its

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sweet illustrations and to-the-point dialogue, but only as a freshly coronated 20-something did I really discover its remarkable power.

The book begins with the narrator drawing a boa constrictor swallowing its prey whole-only to adults, the drawing looks like a hat. When the narrator shows his masterpiece to the grown-ups, he asks them whether he has frightened them. "Frighten? Why should anyone be frightened by a hat?" When the narrator tries to further explain that the drawing depicts a boa constrictor digesting an elephant, the adults advise him to lay aside his drawings of boa constrictors swallowing their prey whole and instead focus on geography, history, arithmetic, and grammar. Frustrated, he declares that "grown-ups never understand anything by themselves, and it is tiresome for children to be always and forever explaining things to them."

American novelist and academic Alison Laurie is fascinated by this moment in The Little Prince. She calls it subversive, because it mocks unsympathetic adult life by looking at the world from below. In her book Don't Tell the Grown-Ups: The Subversive Power of Children's Literature, Laurie explains that the most discerning children's authors "have the ability to look at the world from below and note its less respectable aspects, just as little children playing on the floor can see the chewing gum stuck to the underside of polished mahogany tables and the hems of silk dresses held up with safety pins." These books appeal to the questioning, rebellious child within all of us. Sitting on my bed that night, encompassed by my childhood memories and associations, I came face to face with the reality that I had lost my inner self to the confining realities of adulthood, narrowed my conception of myself and the world around me. Those books were a glimpse into a bygone sanctuary.

But not all children's literature is as illuminating. The New England Primer, largely thought to be the first piece of American children's literature, was published in Boston around 1690. It's prescriptive and condescending, very obviously written by an adult to serve adult expectations. In one of its numerous editions, the lesson reads:

> Love God. Use no ill words. Fear God. Tell no lies. Serve God. Hate Lies.

I don't know any child who would enjoy that. Often, as is apparent here, unsuccessful children's literature is filled with pragmatism, offering a "realistic" portrait of what adult life is actually like. Unimaginatively and pedantically, these books attempt to prepare children for the rigid, commercial ways of the world. But, according to Laurie, this adult society doesn't exist: "the world [is] full of hostile, stupid giants."

he most perceptive children's book authors somehow manage to stay children all their lives, never losing the ability to see the world from below. In an interview with the New York Times, Maurice Sendak criticized contemporary children's literature for catering too much to parents, going by the "rules that children should be safe and that we adults should be their guardians. I got out of that, and I was considered outlandish. So be it."

Sendak's entire children's book philosophy is dependent upon the idea that children shouldn't be kept from the world, locked within a safe haven where nothing bad happens. Instead, he argues, children's authors should simultaneously reckon with childhood innocence and the harsh realities of life. His books deal with the darker sides of growing up, creatively and authentically helping children to process the hardships they face. In Where the Wild Things Are, a disgruntled little boy, Max, is sent to his room without supper. As he stews in bed, a jungle grows around him and he sails off to the land of the wild things, populated by huge monsters with claws. Fearlessly, Max tames the wild things, who roar that he is the wildest of them all and make him their king. Max screams, "Let the wild rumpus start," and he and the wild things dance in the moonlight and hang from the trees, until Max realizes he misses his mother's love. Although the wild things beg their king to stay, young Max returns to his bedroom, where his supper is waiting for him.

Met with mixed reviews when it was published in 1963, the book has since been heralded as a classic, celebrated for its depiction and acceptance of children's emotions, particularly anger. What I love most about this book, though, is that Sendak doesn't hide anything. He's not trying to coerce anyone to be anything other than who they are, or teach someone a valuable lesson. He has no motives other than to tell a story about the way he sees the world. It's not a very pretty world—it's full of seemingly cruel people who do seemingly cruel things—but it is real. And not real in the way that The New England Primer is real. Where the Wild Things Are is not prescriptive; it's not trying to get you to be a better part of society or get you to buy into some larger conventional narrative, it just introduces you to the way you work. To the thoughts you may or may not have when faced with frustration or disappointment. It looks at the world from below, warts and all.

Although Sendak's work will forever be near the top of my list, E.B. White, author of Stuart Little, The Trumpet of the Swan, and—one of my favorite books of all time—Charlotte's Web, will always remain my favorite children's book author. In preparation for this piece, I spent the better part of one Thursday evening rereading White's transcendent monument to children's literature. I had coincidentally stumbled upon the book while perusing a public bookcase in Oberlin and realized I hadn't reread it since the end of first grade. So here I was, a 21-year-old, mixed-up, hungover college student, sobbing her eyes out to Charlotte's Web at in the afternoon. I couldn't even make it through the first

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sentence without tearing up: "Where's Papa going with that ax?" Forget it. I called one of my friends from elementary school and we both started reminiscing about the first time we heard that sen-

In our class, we would pick a new chapter book every month to read aloud. That April, the majority ruled that after lunch everyday, Mrs. Downs would sit back in the plush armchair in the corner of the classroom, 20 seven-year-olds nestled on the floor at her feet, and read Charlotte's Web. I think it was the first book that made me cry. Like Sendak, White's prose is spare, but burgeoning with fearless and beautiful honesty. The book is about death, plain and true and harsh, but it is also full of life and all of the things that make it worth living. In one of the most compelling scenes, Fern, a young girl who saves a newborn piglet from being murdered, confronts her father as she explains the horror of killing the pig:

"But it's unfair," cried Fern. "The pig couldn't help being born small, could it? If I had been born very small at birth, would you have killed me?"

Mr. Arable smiled. "Certainly not," he said, looking down at his daughter with love. "But this is different. A little girl is one thing, a little runty pig is another"

"I see no difference," replied Fern, still hanging on to the ax. "This is the most terrible case of injustice I ever heard of."

A queer look came over John Arable's face. He seemed almost ready to cry himself.

As a child, Fern sees the world from below, unclouded by convention and cynicism. White's language is subversive, pointing out the flaws in grown-up understandings of life. Arguably, this moment is more illuminating for adults, juxtaposing the world as it is, as a child sees it, with the warped world we have all come to accept. Charlotte's Web is about serious, traumatic experiences,

and yet, it isn't hard to comprehend. White's portrayal of death reminds me of a sentence in Margaret Wise Brown's children's book The Dead Bird, which reads, "Every day, until they forgot, they went and sang to their little dead bird and put fresh flowers on his grave." That's how you write about death. White and Brown alike get straight to the heart of things, unfettered by wordy ruminations and tangents.

In one of my favorite essays of White's, his introduction in the third edition of Strunk and White: The Elements of Style, he praises his former college professor William Strunk for instilling in him the case for "cleanliness, accuracy, and brevity in the use of English." The book, a collection of writing dos and don'ts, hasn't left my side in the last couple years because I'm so enamored with its vigor and pith. Just like Sendak (and Didion and Vonnegut and Bukowski), Strunk and White don't want to trick you. They want your writing to be beautiful and thought-provoking and electrifying, but never complicated. Never so difficult that you have to put a book down to understand what it's trying to say. This, to me, is what makes Charlotte's Web so important. There's nothing superfluous; it gives the reader room to come up with how they feel on their

I think this is what makes children's books, and the act of revisiting them as an adult, so invaluable. In a way, you are returning to a thing and a time that is decidedly simple—and I don't mean in a stupid or banal way. On the contrary, I think good children's literature gets to the root of what it means to understand the world and people around you, to embrace selfhood, and, really, to understand the essence of what it means to be human without writing a sentence that is three pages long. It delivers information in no uncertain terms. There is no overwriting or overstating or big, scary, fancy words; there is just the world as a child sees it. There is just the world as it is. To revisit these books as an adult, Laurie says, offers "a way into a lost world, not only of childhood, but of universal power and meaning."

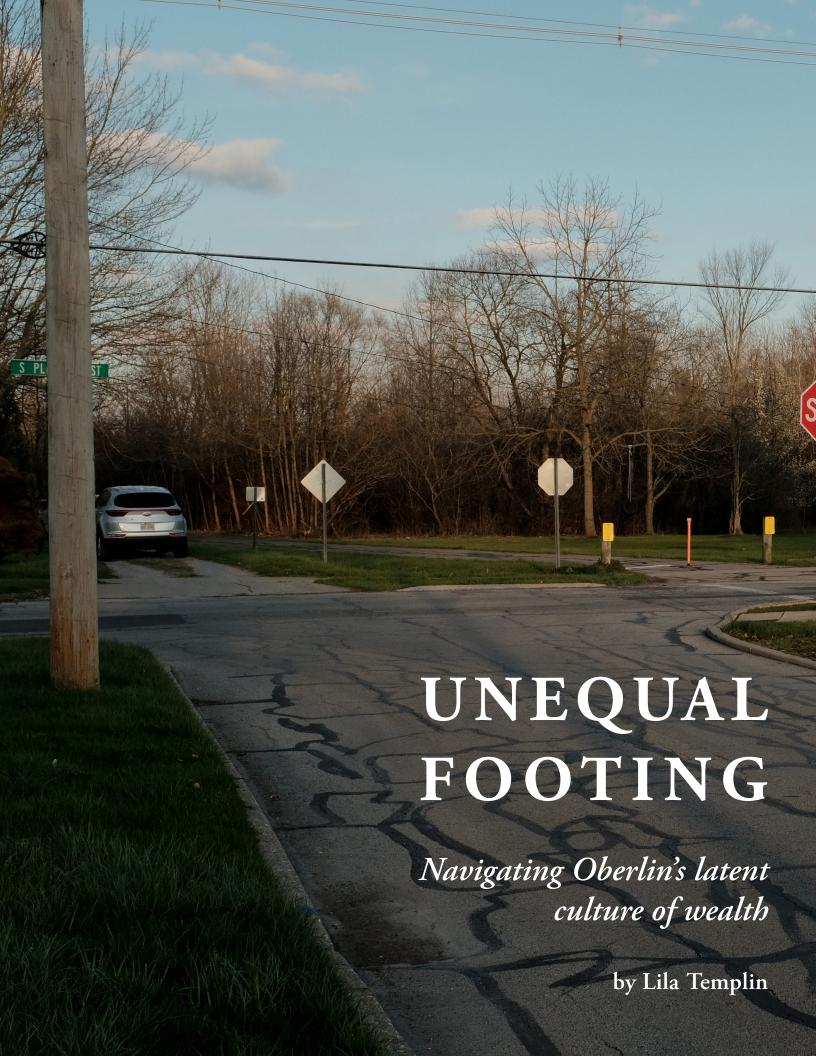
She encourages readers to return to their children's books as a way to reconnect with their childhood selves. There, she argues, lies the foundation of our most genuine, fulfilled, and actualized selves. Too often, Laurie writes, "as we leave the tribal culture of childhoodand its sometimes subversive tales and rhymes-behind, we lose contact with instinctive joy in self-expression: with the creative imagination, spontaneous emotion, and the ability to see the world as full of wonders. Staying in touch with children's literature and folklore as an adult is not only a means of understanding what children are thinking and feeling; it is a way of understanding and renewing our own childhood."

It is through this act of rediscovery that we begin to sew ourselves up again. Throughout our lives, having endured suffering and embarrassment and rejection, we become fragmented by judgement and cruelty, both readily given and received. As a result, we lose touch with who we actually are, with our cores of darkness. We feel the way that I felt in Vermont: like a stranger, alienated from my interior self. Children's books help you to relearn and embrace the world as a child does, with levity and resolute selfhood, offering us a vital opportunity to return to the world as it is, without all that complicated, unreadable, pedantic junk flying around. I think we spend the majority of our lives chasing the high of childhood, chasing a time before we let our perception of the world become muddled by the hurt of adulthood.

Now, as I sit at the desk in my dorm room, again surrounded by piles of my childhood books, I realize I don't have any new answers. As cheesy as it sounds, I feel as though I had them right in front of me all along. In these past months, having read Fox Tale Soup, I Wanna Be a Cowgirl, Miss Suzy, Sleepy Bears, and This Land is Your Land over and over and over again, I feel as though I've returned to myself. I've found solace and comfort in this world from below, in this world as it is.



Image by Katie Frevert





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was nine when I was first thrown into the world of wealth—and realized I didn't belong. I had a playdate with a classmate, a pushy, awkward girl who evened out my quiet, introverted qualities. We spent recesses drawing Warrior Cats with crayons or sitting very still to try and see one of the rabbits that lurked on the edges of school grounds. When she'd suggested the playdate, she insisted I come to her house, and since she was the pushy one, I obliged. She lived in the hills of western Massachusetts, and my mom had to drive me over an hour through the woods until we finally found her mile-long private driveway. As her house slowly rolled into view, I thought I was looking at a statue or moder art piece instead of a home. "Jesus," my mom whispered as she put the car in park.

It was the true kind of modern mansion—the kind that didn't look like a mansion at all. Only two stories tall but wide and sprawling, with glass walls and a roof that only slanted one way, like a very expensive mistake. I thought it was ugly, but I was also keenly aware of its difference from my house, or any other house I had ever seen. I could sense, quickly, that this difference was deeper than just the architecture.

My friend came out to greet me and bring me inside. She had the attic all to herself. The basement was her playroom, but she also took over the home theater when she wanted to. She owned more Barbies, DVDs, and makeup kits from Claire's than I could ever fathom one person possessing. When she asked if I wanted a snack, she called for a maid (who had been lurking just out of sight) to make us mac and cheese. I felt small, sitting at the island in the middle of the incredibly expansive kitchen that bled into the living room, dining room, and office. My stool was too tall, my shoes dangling feet above the floor. Suddenly, my friend didn't seem the way she had at school—at school we were equals, given the same desks and books and toys, the same space to play and work in. School had been a neutral place where I always felt we were on the same footing. Here, she towered above me. I was desperate to run back to my mom's beat-up minivan by the end of the afternoon.

"It should've been fun," I explained. "But it was just weird." "Maybe she can come to our house next time?" My mom suggested.

"Yeah," I said, even though I knew that would be worse— I would never want her to be able to compare her life to mine the way I just had, and realize how far below her I was.

Instead, I continued going to her house. Neither of us had many friends, and I kept giving in to her requests. There were countless weekends my mom drove me through the mountains to the cold and unforgiving house in the woods—but no matter how many times I stepped inside, I was always daunted by the cold tile and vast emptiness. I could never make myself big enough to match the space.

We lost touch when we went to different middle schools. She went on to boarding school, and I went to my county's performing arts charter. True to the arts, it was a school full

of passionate and inspired people that was barely scraping by each year. It accepted students from over 30 towns and there were no requirements for admission, so even though we had a performing arts curriculum, many of the students were just trying to avoid their districts' public schools. Almost all of the student body were middle class or low-income, so even though I worked all through high school, drove a car that was older than I was, and had to thrift my prom outfits, I still felt I was one of the more privileged students. After all, I was one of the seniors who was expected to go to college, even a private one even, through a miracle of financial aid, a school as expensive as Oberlin.

berlin, like elementary school, was supposed to be a neutral space. We were all given the same dorms, classes, food-equal footing. This, of course, was a farce, but I wouldn't realize it at first. Everything and everyone at Oberlin looked cheap, but was apparently worth quite a lot. I already knew the things—the dinged-up dorm rooms, the classroom chairs with sinking bottoms, the rubbery dining hall meals had to be expensive, because I saw the bill for them. Slowly, I realized that the people were worth quite a lot, too. Oberlin students were obsessed with looking thrifted, gave themselves messy haircuts, wore shoes with tearing soles, and of course lectured at any given chance about the importance of redistributing wealth. But while presenting themselves, however consciously or unconsciously, as cheap, their wealth was impossible to hide.

In my first month I was eating lunch in the center of campus with a new acquaintance. It was one of those "testing the waters" moments that define the beginning of college. We both smiled too much and made safe jokes, unsure of who we really were or if we would like each other in a week. About halfway through my salad, as we talked about how we were liking Oberlin, I joked, "Thank God for financial aid." It was a phrase I threw around so often at home, with my family and friends. My lunch-mate gave a forced chuckle—clearly the joke did not land. But instead of moving on from it, they paused, taking on a very solemn expression.

"I... actually have to tell you something," they said. "I'm not on financial aid. It just felt wrong to laugh about it."

They said it with seriousness, and a nervous edge in their voice, as if they were coming out to me and unsure how I'd respond, as if they were revealing some deep and shameful part of themselves. But I was the one who burned with sudden embarrassment.

"Oh yeah, haha," I laughed, desperately trying to return to the light atmosphere we had been so carefully curating just moments before. I almost wanted to say, "Me neither!" just to put an end to the moment, but of course I couldn't. My cheeks flamed, and I checked over my shoulders, both to avoid eye contact and to see if anyone else had seen my humiliation.

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They mercifully brought up a new topic, and the lunch continued until we both finished our meals and promptly left. I knew we would not become friends. I was careful who I brought up financial aid to after that.

While direct displays of wealth like that one were not rare, what was worse were the much more frequent occasions when the gap in wealth was addressed more subtly. The girls in my dorm who ordered entirely new spring wardrobes, abandoning their old ones to the free store. The times people told me about the trips they had taken the summer before college, to which I had to tell them I had worked the summer in a sweltering deli with no air conditioning. The people who had brand-new cars, which had been "college gifts" (wasn't college itself supposed to be the gift?). The time I was put in a five-person English class discussion group where every other student bonded over having gone to boarding school—I obviously had nothing to contribute to the conversation. These incidents were all followed by displays of performative pov-

erty—showing off a funny trinket they had bought at Goodwill, or joking about being a starving artist after graduation. I felt insane listening to two friends debate which form of communism was superior in the living room of a party. I wanted to scream. "I know for a fact you both have trust funds! What are you talking about!" Instead I went to get another drink.

When it mattered, they didn't hesitate to use their money: when it came time to buy books for classes,

while I scoured the internet for resells; when there was a vintage jacket they just had to spring for; when they wanted to go abroad for Winter Term with no funding. Then, there was suddenly no issue in dipping into that wealth. There were times I was genuinely left out of things, unable to afford a show, get a plane ticket, order an expensive dinner. I felt I had no way to explain this to them without overwhelming embarrassment. To address this fundamental difference between us would be to shatter the illusion that we were equals—after all, we were at the same school, in the same dorms, the same clubs and classes. Oberlin was the same kind of neutral space elementary school had been so long before. The last time I was forced to address the inherent difference between me and my rich peer in the hideous modern mansion, my friendship had never truly recovered. I didn't want to risk that again.

I discussed all of this with my friends from high school who were now on financial aid at other private colleges-Middlebury, Pomona, Yale. "It's so weird," one of them said when we met for coffee over Thanksgiving break. "It's like walking through a sea of Canada Goose and Prada."

I agreed, even though Oberlin wasn't like that at all. So many Oberlin students, overly aware of their privilege, wore exclusively secondhand pieces, old JanSport backpacks, handmade hats and scarves, and acted as if it absolved them of their richness. Everything looked so familiar, which made it even harder to realize that I was, in fact, intrinsically different from those around me. I almost wished that they did wear their money with pride instead of trying to hide it. The former was upfront—the latter felt almost like a cruel trick.

But to complain about it felt privileged and tone-deaf. After all, I was not, by any margin, poor. I had been so lucky to grow up in my lovely little house with my amazing parents who paid for dance lessons and occasional big vacations. I was aware of the financial toll that an unexpected medical issue would take, but never worried where I'd find my next meal. If the Ober-

> lin experience was difficult for me, I couldn't imagine how it would be for a person below the poverty line. To weep as if my life was so hard because my family wasn't well-off enough made me no better than the other well-off students who performed poverty. Still, insecurity slowly bubbled up in me over the course of a semester, and I couldn't rationalize it away.

So many Oberlin students, overly aware of their privilege, wore exclusively secondhand pieces, old JanSport backpacks, handmade hats and scarves, and acted as if it absolved them of their richness.

t's not that I feel out of place," I told

my mom over the phone—my mom, who was spending such an unbelievable amount of money, even after financial aid, to help pay for my tuition. My mom, who had always told me I would go to college, and that I would love it there. Who hadn't gotten the chance to go to a school like Oberlin, and had once told me how jealous she was that I got the small liberal arts experience she'd missed. How could I possibly complain to her about this? I finished the sentence, "It's just weird sometimes." That phone call was in the winter of my first year. Within a few months, the supposedly neutral space of Oberlin's campus was suddenly gone—COVID-19 forced these simmering insecurities into stark light. I once again felt like I had left the playground and was staring at the huge emptiness of my friend's modern mansion.

It was immediate and obvious, even through a screen. People who were electing to rent Airbnbs with their friends, or whose families were moving to their second homes. The girl

CULTURAL MIASMA / TEMPLIN

who apologized in a Zoom class because she was outside at her family's beach house, and you could hear the waves in the background. Safety was also, suddenly, very physical, almost tangible. There were people who could afford to stay quarantined, and those who could not. I, along with many of my friends back home, started looking for jobs once it became clear we were not heading back to campus. Some of my Oberlin friends who I mentioned this to said I was being so brave, and that they would never work in-person with these conditions. I had always had a job—I was not being brave, I was just avoiding the pit of guilt in the bottom of my stomach that grew the longer I went without having one.

I don't need to explain and don't want to dwell on how brutal quarantine was. I moved through the end of the spring in a haze, bombing several of my classes. I was miserable with myself and my work, culminating in a full day of sobbing when my final transcript was released. I was wasting the college's money, my parents' money, my future self's money, only to perform like this? I quite literally couldn't afford to do any worse—we wouldn't be able to budget an extra semester.

The summer, like the spring, was a timeless blur, and then, by some miracle of coronavirus safety, I was back in Oberlin in the fall. I podded with my close friends, so I interacted much less with others. Additionally, many richer students hadn't even bothered coming back for this semester—they were able to find other, better, more expensive options. I did my strange three months of a semester and returned to Massachusetts. I immediately moved out to Boston to find a better job (I ended up being a barista) and to be in a city with better public transportation (since my high school car was long gone). It was a new place where I wasn't expecting my insecurities to follow me.

Of course, that was naive. I talked to a few other Oberlin students living in apartments and quickly realized—due to their complaints of having too much free time, and the neighborhoods they ended up in—that their parents were paying their rent. Mine never would have offered, and I never would have asked. As I started working, I became jealous. I knew my parents would always be there for me, but I almost wished they would coddle me in this way. Work was hard, and unlike my working friends who were doing it for pocket money, my paychecks were immediately eaten by food and rent. I knew this would be my future, too, while those who were living off of their parents' money (without having to live in their homes) would continue to do so as well. They would be able to get unpaid internships and move to big cities out of college. It would undeniably lead to different job opportunities, meeting more important people. Their whole lives were shaped by wealth. For the first time, I truly started resenting that mine wasn't.

Boston was where the gap between me and my rich friends was the most pronounced. I tried making plans with an old acquaintance who was also attending a private college and on leave in Boston. We decided on coffee. When I asked where, so I could find a bus route, she offered to drive me.

"I'm fine on the bus," I insisted. When she didn't respond I added, as if to prove it to her, "I like it. Gives me time to read." "But why take it if you don't have to?"

I was at a loss, for a second. I knew that her car was the better option—it was faster and safer and meant less work for me—but the bus was mine. It was what I took every day, and having it dismissed as such an obvious inconvenience unexpectedly stung.

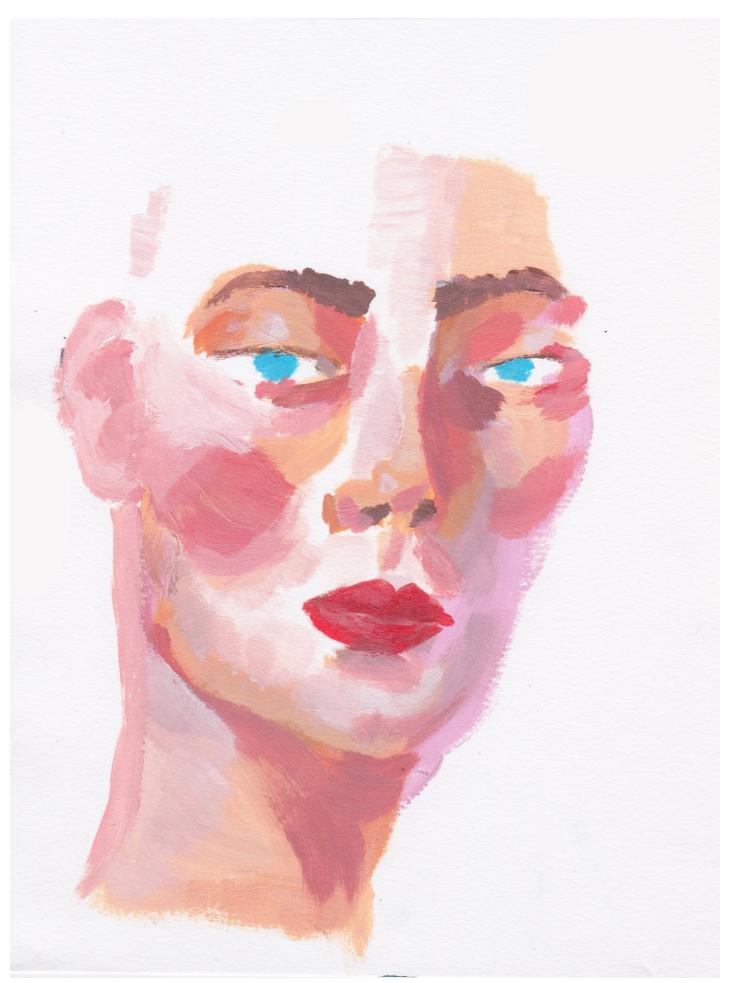
"No, I wouldn't want to make you do that," I finally said. She paused before saying, "It would actually make me more comfortable. I just think it would be safer."

I didn't bother bringing up the fact that I took the bus almost everyday. That I worked in a café. That I was never going to be up to her standards. Before, I hadn't been able to afford to meet my rich friends' criteria for social activities or tripsnow I couldn't meet their criteria for safety.

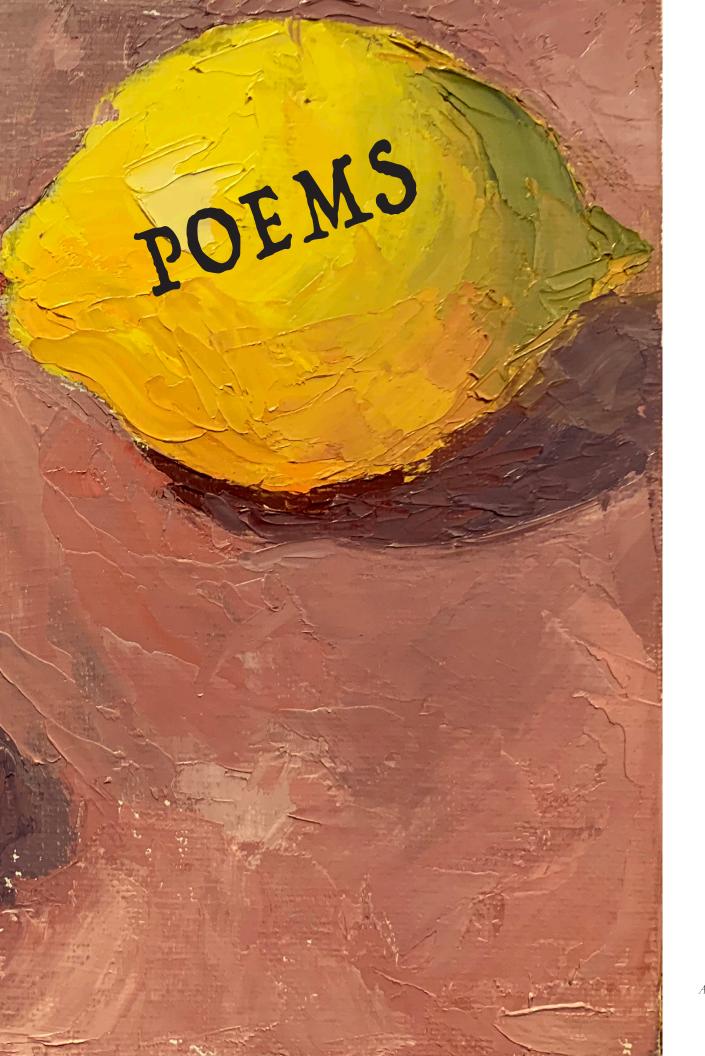
Instead I just said, "Oh yeah, of course. Thanks." We never followed through on coffee-maybe because she put together the pieces and realized that I was always going to be a danger. While the barrier between me and my rich peers had once felt unspoken, it was suddenly physical. I was not able to see them, because I could not live like them. I had always felt a bit out of place, but now I felt truly dejected.

I love Oberlin, in spite of and because of its weight and students who want to play at going against the grain. I love Oberlin, in spite of and because of its weird rich arts deeply love the friends I've made, the classes I've taken, and the experiences I've had. But the longer I've been there, the more out of place I've felt. I arrived as a first-year feeling as if I'd found my new home, and then slowly realized that I did not fit in with my new "family." It's as if there's some piece they all have that I'm missing, and won't ever be able to find. Of course, that piece is money, the culture of wealth. If I hadn't realized this at Oberlin, I would've realized it later, as I entered the job field, as I started looking for a house, as I had children. But to enter Oberlin assuming I was on the same footing as my peers, and have that illusion slowly peeled away, was an especially jarring experience.

As a kid I was able to overlook the differences between me and my rich classmates. The older I've gotten, the harder it's been to deny, even when I want to. Now, still, I don't want to address it for fear of seeming rude, lesser, or self-absorbed. But all it's done is create resentment. I don't want to be sour towards my peers. I don't want to wish my parents could give me more. To say so is juvenile. I always thought of college as the transitional space between being a kid and being an adultand what is more fitting for this transition than facing hard truths? The facade of a neutral space—the playground, the classroom, the campus—has faded. Still, sometimes, I childishly wish I could see it again.







Ava Chessum, Lemons

SEEDLINGS

by Dorothy Levine

Mama picks up maple leaves and ties stems together the same motion used to tie my shoes and undo necklace knots her rings shine against dry, freckled skin. "Isn't this cool?" She shows the gap between her teeth. "Yes, very cool." I smile. I feel her love seeping through as she points out each tree to identify. She wants to plant knowledge in my head so when I walk through these same trees lonely and homesick I know what is around me: ginkgo, sweetgum, maple—a red one, not sugar horse chestnut. "This one is called an Ohio buckeye," I tell her. We pick out two buckeyes one for her to take back on her plane to rest on her nightstand and shrivel up to its hardened core and one for me, to keep in a pocket until it's forgotten. But for now, she holds both in her palm.

LACUNA

by Madeleine Feola

the betta fish is regrowing his fins. they come back frayed and translucent, the slightest edge shimmering the water around him. we had steeped him in antibiotics that turned the tank green, dredged the life from his pores. whatever was eating him alive.

living is an ugly thing, I've learned. at the frayed ends of it you're making phone calls and buying medicine. paying hospital bills.

oh god but it's tremulous and yours.

my life used to be large enough to drown in— a cup of blood, a pillar of salt. is this what getting better feels like? cutting down the heavy flesh that killed you slowly, that made you, until you hit the bone?

these days I'm that kind of slender. I walk home in the dark, peering into the corner spaces of people who are not me. the cooks locking up, walking past the quiet shadows of tables and chairs, the boyfriends waiting outside, awkward hands in their pockets. these things mean more to me now—more than me, maybe, more than you.

THE MATHEMATICIAN

I am following an ant, watching its shiny black carapace scuttle, (patriotically), into battle.

Ш

I've read that they smell each other (or, whatever an ant's understanding of smell might be) and separate themselves from the enemy with olfactory banners. I myself having no scent of war, am invisible.

Ш

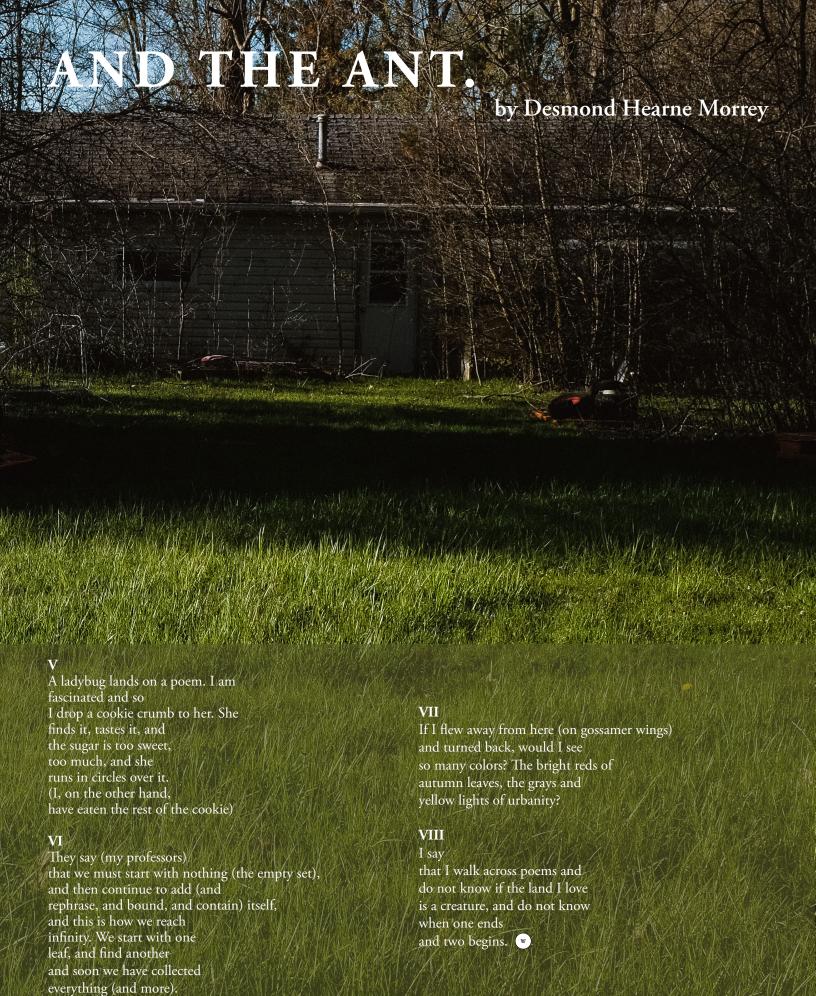
My friend tells "Spiders are don't know that they're on a creature a whole But centipedes will fuck you

IV

The color of differentiates
The same light and I touch these grasp and rip them set them up in a One thing, two

me:
fine, they
creeping around
(a person,
subjective unit)
up."

the world (on bright days)
things, and I find joy in their multiplicity.
reflects, refracts, many times, many ways,
borders of brilliance,
from each other, and
little row.
things, three things...



ORCHID STORY

by Ally Chase

My grandmother told me a story about an orchid in her garden. She said the orchid is white, she said she does not water it. She does not move it into the sun, or away from the sun, never from beneath the sprawling clarity of the kitchen window. I said I don't understand, she said she only touches the orchid to finger the weight of its soft, dense petals.

Everywhere she turns now, after fifteen years in the lush green of her home, there is an orchid. Some hang suspended from the gnarled branches in her yard. Some have put down roots in the dark Florida earth, and she tends to these in a wide brimmed hat, bending gently to the soil beneath a solitary palm.

These are the orchids which have allowed for her devotion, yet she chose to tell me about the only one that receives nothing. I try to make sense: there are the orchids she must touch to keep alive, and there is the one that refuses her hands. Together these hands are all my grandmother has to offer, but somehow it is nothing for her to fold them together, to accept the presence of wonder with ease.

She expects the orchid to bloom because by growing, it has created her faith. How can faith keep her hands from wringing over what she cannot give this anomaly of nature? Instead she trusts that her eyes see what she knows. She looks at this orchid—a glance and then a glance away. She witnesses a miracle.

But a sense of peace, like the white flower, feels so precarious. Still the story doesn't make sense, and I haven't seen an orchid since my last visit. Now I can only watch through the phone as the miracle replaces the central act of her hand. There in the window is the orchid's final reflection, and there is my grandmother, ending a life she thought went on without her, just by sitting down to rest.





Image by Katie Frevert

HALLOWEEN

Terror and tedium in New York.

3:20

can barely hear the gunshots when they go off. Yet somehow, they are the loudest thing in my memory. In the moment, though, what's loud is Ms. Brando's voice, desperately trying to keep the class's focus on the role of the president when there's only 15 minutes left of 10th period on Halloween. A guy in a giraffe jumpsuit bounces his knee violently, while Batman next to me scrolls through Twitter on his phone. When the shots ring out, Ms. Brando doesn't stop talking. But suddenly everyone's heads are up and alert, looking around confused. I twist around in my seat to see Michelle's face, and mouth, "Did you hear that?" She nods with a furrowed brow. Someone raises their hand to ask Ms. Brando what that sound was. She didn't even hear it. The PA system crackles to life:

"This is Brian Moran speaking: we are now in a soft lockdown. This is not a drill. Students may not leave or enter the building. Teachers, keep your students in the classroom, even after 10th period ends. We will be back with updates on the situation outside soon."

The room doesn't erupt into panic like we later found out other classes did. We are all seniors and don't get nervous easily, although maybe we should've. We've practiced lockdown drills before but it was never something that felt serious. Still, everyone takes out their phones and starts texting parents and friends, trying to figure out what could be happening outside. Ms. Brando doesn't know what to do with her class that no longer cares about learning about the government. She stands at the front of the classroom until a girl in a witch costume gets up and asks her to pull up news channels on the smartboard.

3:24

t takes the witch a couple minutes to find anything. It makes sense because she doesn't really know what to Google. Finally, she finds a CNN blast with an update about two dead in a terror attack. We all stare with blank faces at the smartboard. Two dead? Were those the gunshots? If there was an active shooter outside our building, then this classroom was more like a prison than a safe haven. We are on the third floor; someone could easily aim and shoot through our open windows. I wasn't the only one thinking this way. A kid in a hoodie slams down the window next to him. Batman is our Student Union President and he ducks out of class before Ms. Brando can say anything. A few minutes later he comes back with a handheld radio. He's not even supposed to have it and keeps it tucked under his desk. He tunes into the channel the security team uses. Over the line, Mr. Moran says something about a school bus. Batman leans over and whispers to me. From the Student Union room he could see bodies on the Hudson River bike path.

"I think there's more than two people dead."

3:40

here's nothing to do in this room. I try to read American Pastoral, but it's hard to give Roth my undivided attention

TEMPORAL REFLECTIONS / SUTLIFF

when there may be a terrorist attack outside my school. That's what the news is saying at this point. It's all over Twitter. Terror attack in downtown Manhattan. Two dead, four dead, five dead and at least 10 injured. Social media is really a blessing on this day because our school officials have said nothing, besides reminding everyone that we are still in lockdown. Conversations are whispered, heads tilted towards phones with glances up at the smartboard. No one knows how long we'll be here. Some lament Halloween plans that will surely be called off. Because people have died, and that puts a damper on our chipper Halloween mood.

3:52

s. Brando lets me out of the room to use the bathroom. M She's maybe a bit hesitant, but the hallways don't feel dangerous. The garbage can overflows onto the floor. At the sink I run into Michelle vigorously scrubbing her face with a rough, brown paper towel. I don't even remember her leaving.

"I just had to get the makeup off my face."

It's then that I notice Michelle was dressed as a skeleton today. There's not much she can do with the bones painted on her black t-shirt and leggings, but her skull makeup can definitely be fixed. It's odd how people's priorities shift when in crisis. A terror attack happened yards away from where we were sitting in class, and she can't bear to be associated with the image of death anymore. So, she scrubs desperately at her face with something that is (practically) sandpaper. The skull pattern isn't visible anymore, but her face is tinged a ghastly gray, so abnormal from her usual pink cheeks. When she asks if she looks bad I have to say no, she looks fine.

4:10

fter leaving Michelle, I go off to look for my friends who A have 10th period free. They stayed inside because we had wanted to take pictures after school. The halls are empty and washed out in artificial light. I find them in the third-floor atrium, an outlet circling the theater with a ton of lockers. They slump against the lockers, along with at least 40 other students, mostly upperclassmen. But even in this crush of people, the noise is capped at whispers. It's strange that the administration is letting all these people chill in a hallway when we are in lockdown. It's strange my teacher has been letting us wander the halls too. I think she doesn't know what to do either. It's strange that we know next to nothing about the incident. My friends thank God that they didn't decide to leave the building. They were about to go to the deli during 10th when the attack happened. Apparently, the security team let kids standing outside the building run back inside. They really shouldn't have. An attacker could've run in with them. But there was a man on the street waving guns, Sage tells me. Did he shoot people, were those the gunshots? She doesn't think so,

but she doesn't really know anything. We take a couple of selfies in our costumes together, right there in our locked-down school building, but it's not very fun.

4:33

am back in Ms. Brando's classroom when my phone starts ringing. I assume it's my mother, but the caller ID says Lina. Lina worked with me at the New York City Aquarium this summer. She just started college at UMiami.

"Hey, are you ok? Your school is on the news."

Stuyvesant High School is on the news because it is now the site associated with the biggest terror attack in New York since 9/11. And my friend in Miami knows more about the situation happening outside my window than I do.

4:40

he PA comes to life. One of the principal's secretaries comes on the line. She tells us how a man drove a truck down the Hudson River bike path. He got on at Pier 40, the city pier that we use as our home baseball and football fields. It's nearly a mile away. He killed eight victims, and seriously injured many more. He pulled off the bike path in front our school and promptly crashed into our school bus for students with disabilities. He exited his truck with two guns in hand and ran into the street waving them. Police fired several shots, eventually hitting him in the stomach. Upon investigation, the guns he held were a paintball and pellet gun. He was now in custody and had been since 3:30 P.M.

4:58

he principal comes on the PA for the first time today. "Due to the situation happening outside, homework for all classes is cancelled."

It's a relief because no one can focus anyway. It is Halloween and for half a minute I debate if I could make plans. But that feeling doesn't last; all I want is to go home.

5:02

might hate this classroom for the rest of my life. I hate the trapezoidal desks. I hate their blue rims and gray tops. I hate their U-shape arrangement. I hate the smartboard with not enough information. I hate everyone's shoes. I hate the yellow wood and thin silver handles of the closets. I hate the posters with the first 10 Amendments, particularly the one about the right to bear arms. I hate the chair I sit on. I hate the people who are dressed up, and I hate the ones who aren't even more. Mostly, I hate the boredom. Being on my phone feels superficial, and I want to save my charge so I can give my mom

"Due to the situation happening outside, homework for all classes is cancelled."

updates. Which leaves only my surroundings to entertain me. But after nearly two hours, there's nothing new to observe. Some people sleep, most just look blank. Nobody knows what to talk about.

5:06

e are stuck in this room. My body still feels laced with adrenaline, yet there's nothing we can do but wait to be released. Police need to clear the area and secure a route for the 3,000 students to get to the subway so we can get home. And we aren't the only school on lockdown; there's also a middle school and a city college within a block. A whole block full of sitting ducks, easy targets.

5:30

ave you seen Trump's tweet yet?"
"In NYC, looks like another attack by a very sick and deranged person. Law enforcement is following this closely. NOT IN THE U.S.A.!"

(Later on: "We must not allow ISIS to return, or enter, our country after defeating them in the Middle East and elsewhere. Enough!"

"My thoughts, condolences and prayers to the victims and families of the New York City terrorist attack. God and your country are with you!"

"I have just ordered Homeland Security to step up our already Extreme Vetting Program. Being politically correct is fine, but not for this!")

5:33

y mother won't stop texting me about how I'm going to get home. She keeps asking if I want Daddy to come meet

me. He works on Wall Street and could easily get to me. But she doesn't understand that the whole area is closed. The trains are skipping our stop. There's no traffic in our vicinity. He could come on foot but I don't know where we will go once we leave these walls and I don't know when we'll be able to leave.

5:46

detective stops by. He's white, maybe mid-'50s. He's bald A on top, with silvery buzzed hair over his ears. He asks if anyone saw or heard anything. We tell him gunshots and he leaves. He promises that they'll start dismissing us soon. Since we are on the third floor we'll get out soon. It's too bad for those kids on the 10th floor, he says, they won't be home for a long time.

6:03

ut on the street it is already dark. We walk out through the main entrance into a swarm of police and school officials. Students file out in a thin stream and are guided away from the intersection where the truck crashed. If you choose to look over your shoulder, you see the school bus that the terrorist crashed into. All along our route to the train there are police and teachers, a startling juxtaposition of calm people in control and frazzled adults who never expected this when they went to work this morning.

"Oh, look at the pretty angel!" one policewoman says to her colleague.

I give a small wave and smile. Because that's me. I'm an angel. I have a white tutu on, wings that have begun to lose feathers, and a headband with a fuzzy halo attached to it. It all seems silly now. We walk in silence to the subway station—an angel, a boxer, Wanda and Cosmo, a witch, Batman, a skeleton—just a bunch of kids.

(RE)CREATING THE PAST

The distinction between "correct" and "true," or what we talk about when we talk about "history."

by Sam Schuman

n elementary school, I loved few events more than the Scholastic Book Fair. The Halloween costume parade and Field Day were a treat, but they paled in comparison to giving up a whole class period to venture down to the library (or sometimes a requisitioned art classroom) where I could revel in the glossy covers advertising the latest and greatest in kids' lit. It strikes me now that this is a relatively wholesome way to transform children into consumers, but I digress.

I was a bookworm, always finishing my classwork early so I could head over to the library nook and bury my nose in How to Eat Fried Worms, or an installment of the Boxcar Children. The Book Fair was the logical next step: a whole room lined wall-to-wall with shelves and tables advertising all manner of material for the up-and-coming reader, from the Magic Tree House to Frindle.

Every year, I looked out for the 10 True Tales series, written by Alan Zullo. The conceit was self-explanatory: each book contained 10 nonfiction stories organized around a theme. Some topics were intense, but unobjectionable: Young Survivors of the Holocaust, Surviving Sharks and Other Dangerous Creatures. But zoom out a bit, and a

recurring focus emerges: Teens at War, Battle Heroes: Voices from Afghanistan (and a similar book for Iraq), D-Day Heroes. Many of these books are essentially nationalist military histories, recounting deeds of heroism committed by intrepid GIs as they fought for the American way at home and abroad. Reading the series as a kid, I hung onto every word, picturing the battles that Zullo narrated at the pitch of fiction. Children don't read books with a critical eye to ideological framing; Zullo called these men heroes, and I believed him.

Teens at War is typical of the series. The description from Zullo's website

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starts out alright: "Ever since the American Revolution, teenagers have risked their lives to serve in every war this country has fought." A paragraph later, though, some out-of-pocket framing emerges: "In warfare, most underage soldiers showed their zealous spirit and raw courage, but few were properly prepared for the horrors they would experience." We've now entered what seems to be a pro/con list for letting children serve in the military, although we're never quite told whose judgment is being applied. The next sentence describes these minors, as young as 12, as "warriors." Scholastic's publisher's description labels their military service "patriotic" and their stories "inspiring."

With the benefit of hindsight, I see 10 True Tales as pretty gross. But, ideological window-dressing aside, these books are, in an objective sense, accurate. The series boasts that it is "based on true events ripped from the headlines or taken from little-known moments in history." And that's the problem: these books are sold to kids as "history" because the events are "true," which tacitly implies that their rhetorical framing as heroic, inspiring narratives is also somehow "true." Zullo admits to dramatizing events and recreating dialogue (which sometimes includes racial slurs, "for realism"). But there is still a false consonance between factual veracity and narrative validity in how these "true" tales are presented. And while a kids' author like Zullo might seem an unlikely point of entry for a screed on the blurry line between historical fact and truth, this is exactly where much of the trouble lies: to make the past accessible, works of popular history conceal the process by which masses of historical documents are converted into ideologically active stories. To understand this process, it's important to ask: apart from telling a "true" story, what does history do, and what is it for?

he American historian Hayden White spent 10 years researching and writing in order to offer a possible answer in his 1973 book Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe. The book studies a number of influential historians and philosophers, tracing the development of the discipline and the idea of "history" across the 1800s, but its analytical framework is fundamentally atemporal. It is a study of history as a rhetorical practice of writing and storytelling, or a "verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse," in White's own heady phrasing.

White is concerned with how history, as a linguistic construction of the past, is created through a specific mode of thinking which he terms the "historical consciousness," or how past events are strung together to create a recognizable historical narrative. Historical consciousness manifests in the formal aspects of a historian's narrative, evident in their choice of "emplotment" (what sort of dramatic plot arc does a historical narrative take? Comedy? Tragedy?) as well as their historical "grammar" and "syntax"—in other words, the process by which historians fit the past into a coherent story. This formal question of how histories are structured is fundamental to what White calls the "problem of historical knowledge:" what does it mean to think about something "historically," and what is the point of doing

It's here that we arrive at the distinction between a "fact" and a "truth"or, to be snarky about it, the difference between something being "wrong" and "dumb." Metahistory argues that a historical narrative always implies an ideological perspective by virtue of the way it is told. Any history will have characters, and some of those characters tend to emerge as heroes or villains, at least relatively. Certain historical entities are identified as problems or obstacles, and consequently more or less ideal. To take Zullo as an example: American child soldiers are heroes, and anyone trying to kill them is a villain. Other countries are the problem, and the American military is the solution. A historical story is told

through facts, but its "truth" occurs at what White terms the "precritical" level. The historian must decide what kind of story to tell before telling it.

The historical discipline differentiates between "history" and "historiography." Catch-all definitions are unwieldy, but broadly, "history" is the study of the past, and "historiography" is the study of the historical discipline and its methodology. A "history" is one story, built on specific historical evidence and most often presented as a linear narrative. It attempts to explain why a particular thing happened in the way that it did. Historiography encompasses many histories, and often explains why many things happened the way that they did. It is, as White held, a fundamentally existential pursuit: a particular historiographical viewpoint amounts to an argument about the way the world works. And it's at this level that history might be "correct" but also "wrong." Historical whos, whats, whens, and wheres are often settled, and it's fair to judge a history as more or less accurate on those grounds. But the historical why is virtually never a provable fact. It's a product of interpretation and argument.

t my parents' house, there is an A entire shelf dedicated to housing a series of nonfiction books that my dad grew up reading in the '50s called Landmark Books. Published between 1950 and 1970, the series employed wellknown contemporary authors, some of them Pulitzer Prize winners and not one of them an academic, to cover a wide range of American historical topics, from Paul Revere and the Minute Men to The F.B.I to a Shirley Jackson-penned telling of The Witchcraft of Salem Village. They're packaged as factual histories, and their perspectives are exemplary of post-WWII American historiography, with all of its assumptions about American exceptionalism and a triumphalist notion of historical progress.

The 54th book in the series is Robert E. Lee and the Road of Honor, written by

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journalist Hodding Carter. According to one biography subtitled "The Reconstruction of a Racist" (note the implied redemption plot arc), Carter had been a white supremacist until graduating college, after which he fought for an end to Jim Crow. Authorial intrigue notwithstanding, the book is essentially a hagiography of Lee, chronicling his life from birth to death as a "great American who was guided by something he believed to be the most precious quality in life... a sense of honor." The book is researched: it quotes primary-source letters at length and offers plenty of historical tidbits about Lee's upbringing. It gets the "facts" right. The problem is that those facts are used to turn Lee into a hero. What is emphasized is not his role as the Confederacy's military leader, but the admirable "sense of duty and honor" to his home state of Virginia which compelled him to side with the South. "Honor"—a term never explicitly defined—is used to separate Lee's assumed motivations from his actions, trumpeting the former and downplaying the latter. The book's penultimate page claims that "gallantry is our common inheritance, whether our ancestors lost with Lee or won with Grant." As with Zullo, the facts are right, but the conclusions drawn from those facts are ideologically blinkered—relative and debatable.

Hayden White offers a solution to this nebulous problem of historical objectivity (or lack thereof) in accepting that historical meaning is ultimately subjective: it is formed, rather than found. History is not and can never be value-neutral. "The historian performs an essentially poetic act," he writes, "in which he prefigures the historical field and constitutes it as a domain upon which to bring to bear specific theories he will use to explain 'what was really happening' in it." Before explaining what a history means, the historian has to construct that history. The past is only—is always—a product of the present.

This idea was (and perhaps remains) controversial, and critics of White who decry the relativism inherent in his po-

sition have raised the polemical "Nazi question:" if historical meaning is constructed, imposed rather than essential, then on what historical grounds is one to challenge fascist historiography or even outright Holocaust deniers? White offers several responses, my favorite being his dry observation that "The Nazis were anything but relativists." But a more instructive answer is that history is ultimately a moral and aesthetic pursuit rather than a scientific one, so fascist history can and should be dismissed precisely because it's fascist. White cautions against treating historical revisionists "as if they were engaged in the same enterprise... instead of treating them with the contempt and derision they deserve."

There is no objective position within history. It's a destabilizing idea, one that denies history as a neutral proving ground for ideas. It's impossible to argue, for example, that the collapse of the Soviet Union is proof that socialism is an unviable economic system, or, for that matter, that the Russian Revolution is proof that monarchy is an unviable political system. Those conclusions are theorized, not merely discovered. It may be true that, as The F.B.I. recounts, J. Edgar Hoover was nicknamed "speed" in high school, and that he chose to put his own life at risk in New Orleans in 1936 when he was among the FBI agents who arrested prolific criminal Alvin Karpi. But those isolated facts only become meaningful or usable as historical "evidence" once assimilated into a broader narrative about the FBI that has its own subjective viewpoint. The book's ultimate historical stance that "every American, young or old, can be proud of his F.B.I." is a value judgment, not an objective conclusion.

L ike 10 True Tales, the Landmark Books series is for kids, and it's particularly easy to dunk on with the benefit of a half-century's hindsight. But contemporary histories, even didactic ones, still position themselves

as purely expository, containers for information sans angle or bias. My high school history textbook, the American Pageant, certainly did. Like many a history textbook, the AP purportedly offers an accurate history that walks a neutral line through historical debates—as if it were possible to find a stance that is not itself an implicit position. Its 16th edition starts with the "Founding of the New Nation," and asks, "How did the colonists overcome the conflicts that divided them (assumption one), unite against Britain (assumption two), and declare themselves at great cost to be an 'American' people (assumption three does this even mean anything)?" The answers: "reverence for individual liberty, self-government, religious tolerance, and economic opportunity."

Along with this self-congratulatory telling is an acknowledgment of the dark side of the early American mentality (or at least *AP*'s telling of it): "a willingness to subjugate outsiders," including Indigenous Americans and enslaved people from Africa. A putative commitment to exploring both the good and bad of history obscures that the *American Pageant* has already made a litany of presuppositions about what constitutes "good," "bad," and "history." At no point is the reader pushed to ask if there is another way to tell this story.

My high school history teachers were progressive. We read some Howard Zinn, and we were taught from the first day of our Civil Rights Movement unit that race is a construct intended to mitigate class conflict. Liberal critiques of American history were common, even encouraged. But dark historical facts never contradicted the fundamental historiographical truth of American progress, of the strength and wisdom of our institutions. Besides, even if they had wanted to (and I suspect they might have), my teachers couldn't have strayed too far. The textbook was the textbook, and we had an AP exam to take at the end of the year. To my knowledge, only two teachers in the school assigned the Communist Manifesto while I attended. They both taught English.

I took AP United States History over two years, with a different focus each semester: social movements, war and conflict, economics, and finally a history of Revolution-era philosophy. This last focus, known as intellectual history, was particularly interesting to me at the time, and has since become my primary research interest. How did people think in the past? I learned about the enlightenment philosophers: Locke's and Hobbes's theories about people in the state of nature, Rousseau's social contract, Montesquieu's separation of powers. We were taught that these were the seminal ideas that led to the American state, and, implicitly, that these ideas were superlatively good, if not flawless.

The buck stopped there. With few exceptions, our history of ideas began and ended in the 18th century. You'd think no one had had a worthwhile thought about government since the ink dried on the Constitution. Our philosophical history was strangely ahistorical, because it had been intensely "prefigured," to use White's term, intended to contextualize (and legitimize) American institutions more than to stimulate curiosity beyond the clear predetermined takeaways. Ideological questions were presented as done deals. I got As in history, and I believed that the study of history was important, but I graduated high school unable to articulate exactly why. What was the point of asking questions when the answer was the same as it ever was?

n my first semester at Oberlin, I started a history major, and things began to click. Professors could explain clearly why the study of history was important, why it was an urgent task. I learned that the "past" is often not really past, because historical memory is a building block of identity. I learned to look for historiographical slant: If this is the story, then what is its lesson? Hayden White is sometimes taught in Historical Methods, the major's required methodology course. I finally figured out that the point of history isn't to be "objecHistorical whos, whats, whens, and wheres are often settled, and it's fair to judge a history as more or less accurate on those grounds. But the historical why is virtually never a provable fact. It's a product of interpretation and argument.

tive" or unbiased. Historical narratives imply a historical viewpoint, which implies a historical subject, which in turn implies subjectivity.

Reading Metahistory for my own research this year, I learned that academic, source-based history dates back less than two centuries. Thucydides and Plutarch wrote "history" millennia ago, but their historical consciousnesses were drastically different from those of modern historians. For much of its existence, history has been a branch of politics or rhetoric. In the 19th century, the first recognizably modern historians gave the discipline its own autonomy by claiming that it could be purely rational and objective, scientific in the way that the natural sciences were. From there, history has alternately been defended as "science" insofar as historians deny any distortion of the facts, and as "art" insofar as it doesn't have a unified formal method. Whatever it may be, our conception of "history" is itself historical. There's no escape.

Which is all well and good. White wrote that the purpose of history is to educate people of "the fact that their own present world had once existed in the minds of men as an unknown and frightening future, but how, as a consequence of specific human decisions, this future had been transformed into a present." In understanding how we created the present, we become better equipped to create our ideal (defined subjectively, of course) future. Such an understanding of history doesn't foreclose upon the importance of getting the facts right. History is not fiction; its claims to reveal something about the real world only work if they attend to things that actually happened in that real world. But the facts are the beginning, not the end, of what makes history "true." Historical narratives exist because someone wants you to see the past in a particular way, and by extension to feel a particular way about the present-and facts, at the end of it all, have very little to do with that.

by Jemma Johnson-Shoucair

THE LUCAS EFFECT

Hubris, tragic boredom, and the groundbreaking digital effects technology behind one of the biggest letdowns in 21st-century cinema.

> frequently lack the confidence to fail. Twentyone and a recovering perfectionist, anxiety stays close as I begin any new project. Am I good enough to be doing this? jabs at the back of my skull. If I might be terrible why would I even try? flutters around with thoughts of the pandemic and remembering to feed my cat. But for some people it's easy. Standing in the public eye, they swagger up to the metaphorical plate, put their dreams on the line, swing, and miss. Strike after strike. Unfazed. I want to learn this technique. To grin in the face of ridicule and trust my gut, no matter how misguided. Almost a year into quarantine, I found an unlikely teacher lurking deep in the Disney+ streaming options.



Normally, I like bad movies, but George Lucas's writing could drive anyone to drink. It was November 2020, deep in the bowels of isolation, and my friends and I hoped to maintain our sanity by watching all nine Star Wars movies in order. Our last coping mechanism quickly turned into a painful drinking game when we reached the dreaded Episode II: Attack of the Clones. We looked up rules and made some of our own. Drink when a lightsaber is drawn; drink when someone is beheaded; and the one that dragged us through the movie: drink whenever there is an awkward moment between Anakin and Padmé.

Anyone who has seen the prequels can guess how our night ended. And anyone who has seen the prequels might also have this image charred into their brain: Anakin and Padmé flirting in a luscious, green hillside meadow. Even while inebriated, I knew something was off about this movie. Beyond the terrible dialogue, the computer animation appeared jarring, but I couldn't place why. The meadow scene stands out as one of the only moments in the movie that seems unaltered—no green screens, no animation—but that assumption would be wrong. To its detriment, Attack of the Clones was one of the first movies made to have every frame of every shot carefully digitally enhanced.

Released in 2002, Attack of the Clones reflects the ideas of its time. New technology was everywhere—in music, phones, film—and people were just learning how to harness it. The general consensus in pop culture was

excitement: more is more. More computer-generated images (CGI), more over-synthesized pop music, more drama. The year 2000 marked a new era of entertainment with the creation of digital cameras designed to replace their film counterparts in the movie industry. Attack of the Clones hit the box office charts as one of the first movies ever filmed 100% digitally, pairing digital cameras with digital effects. The result? A revolutionary film exemplifying the importance of failure. It is a product of its time. A product of two years worth of computer animation, bewildered actors in plain blue rooms, optimistic fanaticism, and a couple of very confident white men.

ntranced by the original Star Wars, fans around the world stood in line to watch their favorite characters come alive again in the prequels. Many people left the theaters disappointed and confused, but still trekked with little optimism to sit through the next movie. Soni Gupta saw the original Star Wars as a child."We had never seen anything like it," she tells me from my computer screen. She describes the wonder she felt from watching the X-wings race through the Death Star trench, tense and exciting. And how she watches each new Star Wars movie, including Attack of the Clones 25 years later, "wanting to recreate that feeling... and it never does." But even now, any time another sequel gets released on the big screen, Soni and her group of faithful Star Wars friends journey to

see it, still hopeful.

Another Star Wars fan, Hal Sundt, was 12 years old when he saw Attack of the Clones in the theater. Thrilled at the prospect of the prequels, he entered the loud, dark room with high hopes. He returned devastated. Years later he tells me over Zoom, "I do distinctly remember walking out of Attack of the Clones being like, 'what the hell was that?""

Every Star Wars fan I know chases the same feeling. With each new movie there is a moment of stillness when the lights dim, and words slide out across the screen. Your heart lifts as you give in to the reality of aliens and humans fighting for a peaceful future led by a Republic protected by magical monk cops. But the prequels disappoint, with Attack of the Clones the leading offender. Soni and Hal were at very different ages and stages of life when they watched the second Star Wars movie, and they both use the same word to describe it: "unmemorable."

aunted by the startling computer animation, I needed to confirm the tugging feeling in my gut that Attack of the Clones held more odd production secrets than your standard bad action movie. Mark McGuiness speaks in a charming northern Irish accent that's subtle enough for some Americans to think he's Canadian. He lives in Belfast and is in his eighth year working as a special effects technician in the film industry. It's about 1:30 P.M. (6:30 P.M. in Ireland) on St. Patrick's day, and in between statements about Star Wars,

With each new movie there is a moment of stillness when the lights dim, and words slide out across the screen. Your heart lifts as you give into the reality of aliens and humans fighting for a peaceful future led by a Republic protected by magical monk cops. But the prequels disappoint, with Attack of the Clones the leading offender.

he sips his Guinness to celebrate. Some projects Mark's worked on include Game of Thrones and The Northman, and as a nerd and "film buff," he excitedly agreed to talk to me about one of the worst Star Wars movies. "Somebody had to kind of do it first for everyone to realize that it's just not how you really want to make a film," Mark says, regarding the unique and unfortunate use of CGI in Attack of the Clones. I reached out to him about a month after I began my research, already deep into a rabbit hole, with everything I learned increasing my suspicions that there was something off about this movie. It only took about 10 minutes of geeking out with Mark to confirm my intuition.

Attack of the Clones was revolutionary in its use of computer animation, the process of digitally rendering moving images. In 2002, Hollywood animators were just beginning to refine the computer animation technology developed in the late '60s. Looking back on Episode II, the digital effects are laughable. But the first computer animation was released just 35 years prior. Compared to the slow, shaky lines of the 1967 computer animation Hummingbird, a fully animated Yoda jumping around with a lightsaber rivaled witchcraft.

Unlike computer animation, green screen is an ancient film technique. Green screen, or matting, consists of using a single-color background to extract the foreground image and then change the background image. Patented in 1918 by Frank Williams, a black-backing matte was used in the '30s horror movie The Invisible Man, and a white matte background was used in '20s Disney cartoons. In the '50s and '60s, engineer and inventor Petro Vlahos invented the basis for all blue and green screen technology we have today. In the Star Wars prequels, Lucas used matting in a completely new way. He filmed actors inside plain blue rooms and relied on visual effects artists to fill in the rest, a process made easier by the creation of digital cameras.

Sony and Panavision built the HDW-F900 digital cinema camera for the filming of Attack of the Clones. Writer and director George Lucas thought that digital film, with cameras relying on sensors instead of celluloid, looked better, and he wanted to embark on creating a film 100% digitally. Besides the debatably more attractive image of the still-developing cameras, this tech also offered a new speed. Film cameras required scanning the film into a computer in order to render digital effects. The HDW-F900 camera spat out a cassette tape and within 50 minutes the images could be edited on a computer. To a director pining for digital effects in every shot, these cameras were the future.

When George Lucas birthed the original Star Wars trilogy in 1977, he felt constrained by traditional film practices. Shooting on film requires a certain order for capturing and editing shots. Digital cameras paired with CGI allowed Lucas to put together each shot element by element, the way he preferred. In regards to the assembly line-like process of traditional filmmaking, Lucas said, "I don't work that way. I'd much rather kinda go around, put things together, look at them, then move them around again, then look at them until I get them the way I like them." Lucas likened this process to painting and cooking. He worked to construct a whole image from various elements, sometimes taken years apart, rather than capture a scene in a single take.

When I tell Mark that the frantic "Droid Factory" scene with Anakin and Padmé, an example of quintessential Lucas filmmaking, took four and a half hours to shoot, his mouth hangs open for a second. "Wow. That's in-SANE. I remember spending 12 hours filming a bush in Game of Thrones... So the fact that they did that in four hours is..." and trails off. In contrast, Lucas directed the Droid Factory scene as a fast-paced action sequence where our heroes, along with C-3PO and R2-D2, fall onto a droid-making assembly line and have to frantically escape without being maimed by any of the deadly looking construction machines. The scene wasn't even in the original cut of the movie, but Lucas added it in reshoots because he wanted a fast-paced section to cut up all the dialogue-heavy scenes. It was filmed so quickly in part because the set consisted of a single blue conveyor belt on a blue stage. The actors then ran around fighting, jumping, and interacting with their invisible environment. At one point, Natalie Portman, who plays Padmé, pauses from running on the conveyor belt, looks down at Lucas, and says, "This is ridiculous. This is just a mean joke. This isn't part of the movie at all."

Lucas responds with the confidence of someone financing his own movie franchise: "It will look good."

ayering images in film is nothing new. Walt Disney composited animations over people in his first cartoons, and George Lucas used miniature models as set pieces in the original Star Wars. But the editors working on Attack of the Clones added a whole new, well... layer. When I started researching this film, I was under the impression that the movie was created with an insane amount of blue screen. This is true. But many of the indoor sets were also built as scale models. The Kamino set is an example of this. Lucas filmed most of the scenes set inside the buildings on the water planet Kamino in an entirely blue room, giving the actors general guidance as to where to walk and look. Then, the art department built a to-scale miniature of the set.

For anyone who hasn't seen the movie, imagine a long, bright glass hallway with sterile white flooring and crossbeams. Once built, the camera shot the interior of the model as if it were a regular set. Then, George Lucas-style, the shots were compiled in a computer where the actors were virtually placed into the model, and the blue screen outside the model was digitally altered with a background that suited the set. Finally, everything in the scene was digitally enhanced to create the look Lucas wanted. To Lucas's credit, this process does save time and money.

But to his discredit, most of the characters in these scenes appear as if they were placed in a strangely lit sci-fi drawing.

Mark points out that when you watch these scenes, "It's almost like you're seeing them pass through [the set]... There's no texture, there's no weight." Weightlessness has an incredible effect on our perception of reality, especially in an art form dedicated to illusion. Humans possess a talent for distinguishing virtual reality from our own, even with the most incredible CGI. So forming scenes with multiple mediums layered onto each other gives us the impression that something is off, even if we don't know the exact issue. I ask Mark if, in all his eight years of working in cinema and 29 years of film buff-ery, he's ever heard of another movie produced in this way. He offers up a validating and unsurprising response: "That seems to be very unique to that film."

uch of post-production was dedicated to creating digital characters in a "real world." Against the keen human eye, visual effects artists must work diligently for a digital character to blend seamlessly into a scene with real people. Included in the film were multiple fully animated characters, including the slender gray-blue Kaminoans, the infamous fully digitally rendered Yoda, and Dexter, an alien with a mustache who is present for one scene. Dexter is a large tan creature with four arms, a saggy chin pouch, scaled head ridges, and a mustache with human hair. He only exists to tell Obi-Wan Kenobi what planet a poisonous dart came from. In a scene populated mainly by extras wearing alien costumes, Dex feels out of place. While the animators were excited to create a completely computer-animated creature, there isn't much payoff in the film. Not only does Dex move in an unsettling way, but the animators faced a problem when Obi-Wan and Dex hug. During filming, Ewan McGregor, who played Obi-Wan, was instructed to hug the air. When the

animators formed Dexter in post-production they discovered an issue: McGregor's arms didn't line up with Dex's body line. Their solution? Animate McGregor's arms to fit the shape of a digital character.

People were paid to animate Mc-Gregor's body an unnerving amount of times throughout the film. Teams of animators worked to recreate his entire body for certain action shots from the slippery fight against Jango and Boba Fett outside the cloning facility. There's even a rumor that his beard was computer-animated in some scenes because the consistency and texture change noticeably from shot to shot. While this could have been due to bad makeup, Lucas deciding to entirely animate Obi-Wan multiple times was a very unusual decision. The use of digital stunt doubles was only popular when a stuntman couldn't safely perform a task, like the people falling from the deck of the Titanic as it sank. Even now, the incredibly CGI-heavy Avengers franchise opts for real-life actors and stunt doubles rather than digital ones. Lucas's attitude towards this bizarre choice to repeatedly animate a main character can be summed up by his response for why he only used digital cameras for the movie: "People say why am I doing this? You know, the real question is why not?"

ne of the first scenes I mention to Mark is Dex's diner. He immediately agrees that it's one of many unnerving moments in the film and points out the fake harsh sunlight dominating the characters' faces throughout the scene. "The technology really wasn't there... [CGI] should be used to help further a story as opposed to just building everything around it." Mark laments that we loved the original Star Wars movies for the characters. Han Solo, Luke Skywalker, and Darth Vader uplifted our childhoods more than the environments of Endor, Hoth, and Tatooine. So in revolutionizing digital filmmaking, Lucas sacrificed our beloved characters for not-that-impres-

sive backgrounds. We watch characters walking, talking, and sitting for most of the movie to allow for fantastical, unrealistic landscapes. The world grew to accommodate digital effects, instead of digital effects enhancing the world.

Two years of animation development culminated in one of the most forgettable scenes in the movie. Rooted in Star Wars lore, Lucas wrote the film excited to finally depict the hallowed "Clone Wars" referenced in the original Star Wars film, A New Hope. In the third act, for about eight minutes that feel like 20, we get to see the anticipated Battle of Geonosis. The beginning of the Clone Wars. Rob Coleman, the animation director, describes the scene, saying, "It had everything that we as teenagers of the '70s and early '80s saw in those original movies, and that's what you do it for." All the directors—of animation, animatics, etc-were ecstatic to finally watch the epic battle play out. Except they were so excited to create the battle that they missed an incredibly important part of Star Wars: the characters. Instead of observing our heroes navigating a treacherous battlefield. We sit idly as CGI clones and droids destroy each other, only occasionally cutting to the reactions of people we care about. Once again, we witness the creators of the film sacrifice our connections to characters so they can use visual effects to play out their childhood space-war fantasy.

The fact that the men creating Attack of the Clones believed they were doing something incredible is more tragic than Anakin and Padmé's forbidden love story. My heart goes out to the excited Star Wars fans who went to the premiere of this movie where all they got were dragging CGI battles with confusing context. I must've been around 10 years old when I saw Attack of the Clones for the first time, but that didn't stop me from feeling disappointed. Now, 11 years later, I am incredibly frustrated that Lucas and company passed over an incredible story in favor of unconvincing visual effects. During our interview, Mark sums it up best: "If I grew up in the '60s and was a child

in the '70s and watched Star Wars, and then was an adult watching [the prequels] I would feel so betrayed." Unfortunately, the directors were so enthralled with manipulating their current technology that they lost sight of what made Star Wars more than just another action series.

To be fair, no one should be sur-

prised. George Lucas got lucky with the original trilogy. We could look past the clunky writing in the '70s and '80s to enjoy, as Mark puts it, an "operatic space western" filled with tough, relatable, and entertaining characters. But Lucas had help making these films hits. He only directed the first film, and his now-exwife was responsible for editing the originals into the series we know today, including the Death Star trench battle and the de-

cision to kill Obi-Wan Kenobi. Now we have the Lucas-run prequels. With the success of the originals on his hands, Lucas himself acknowledged, "Very rarely do I not get what I want." No one wanted to say no to Lucas—a white man who strides through life with the reality that failure usually has fewer repercussions for him. Ben Snow, the Visual Effects Supervisor, even admitted to feeling like he was part of a weird science experiment in how the animators were pushed to further digital technology. From the start, digital effects were more important than any connection with the story. And so we lose our love for the ancestors of Luke, Princess Leia, and Han. We lose the excitement and tension of X-wings veering across the Death Star, and we lose the feeling of Star Wars. All for one man pushing to revolutionize a field years too soon.

A s with most tragically boring films, *Attack of the Clones* hides

heroes in the most unexpected places. The protagonists of this story sat behind computers, drawing tables, and workbenches. Under the misguided direction of George Lucas, a team of 60 animators and 340 artists and technicians labored tirelessly to draw this fantastic failure of a movie into existence. Ironically, thanks to the visual effects staff, some shots

of a movie, flaunting the hubris of its directors in our faces as we suffer their consequences. Sure, failure means less when this is your ballgame, your plate. Your fans will cheer you on no matter what. But you lose an important skill along the way. True growth comes from failure, but you can't learn when the score is rigged for you.

We watch characters walking, talking, and sitting for most of the movie to allow for fantastical, unrealistic landscapes. The world grew to accommodate digital effects, instead of digital effects enhancing the world.

had just the right amount of CGI. For example, in the Clone Factory scene where our characters dodge invisible metal stamps and escape from caldrons, you need to look closely to see that our favorite droids C-3PO and R2D2 are computer-animated. In a movie saturated with unnecessary effects, there are about eight shots of subtle reprise: it feels like our Star Wars again. Amid the smoldering pile of ashes that is *Attack of the Clones*, the visual effects staff laid a framework for future animators to adopt. It only took failure in approximately 1,992 other shots to get there.

I no longer want to strive for the George Lucas swagger, swing, and miss. White men have always dominated writing, directing, and starring in action movies. Their presence in this genre is the norm, and it's an exception for anyone else to be allowed the same visions and mistakes. Lucas and his team of directors pushed the digital frontier bolstered by the prospect of fewer financial and social consequences if they failed. We have *Attack of the Clones* as a result. A mess

Instead of a white man kind of confidence, I hope to cultivate the animators' quiet and passionate determination. It takes a lot of love for what you do to sit behind a desk for hours staring at your hand, wondering how Yoda would move his. Sitting with a problem and trying, trying until something clicks. Advancing technology through something you love instead of acting out of ego and desire for fame. This method of failing is a whole new ballpark. I hold such appreciation for the people who made the harsh lighting in Dex's restaurant, Yoda's unnerving wobbly ears, and Ewan McGregor's arms. They were people manipulating an art form that originated from slow, squiggly lines. We can look back now, laughing and ridiculing their work, only because others repeated their successes and created their own failures. Now, we have faster-moving and better-lit squiggly lines, thanks to the animators, spending hours tirelessly trying to create something new, innovative, and revolutionary.





