

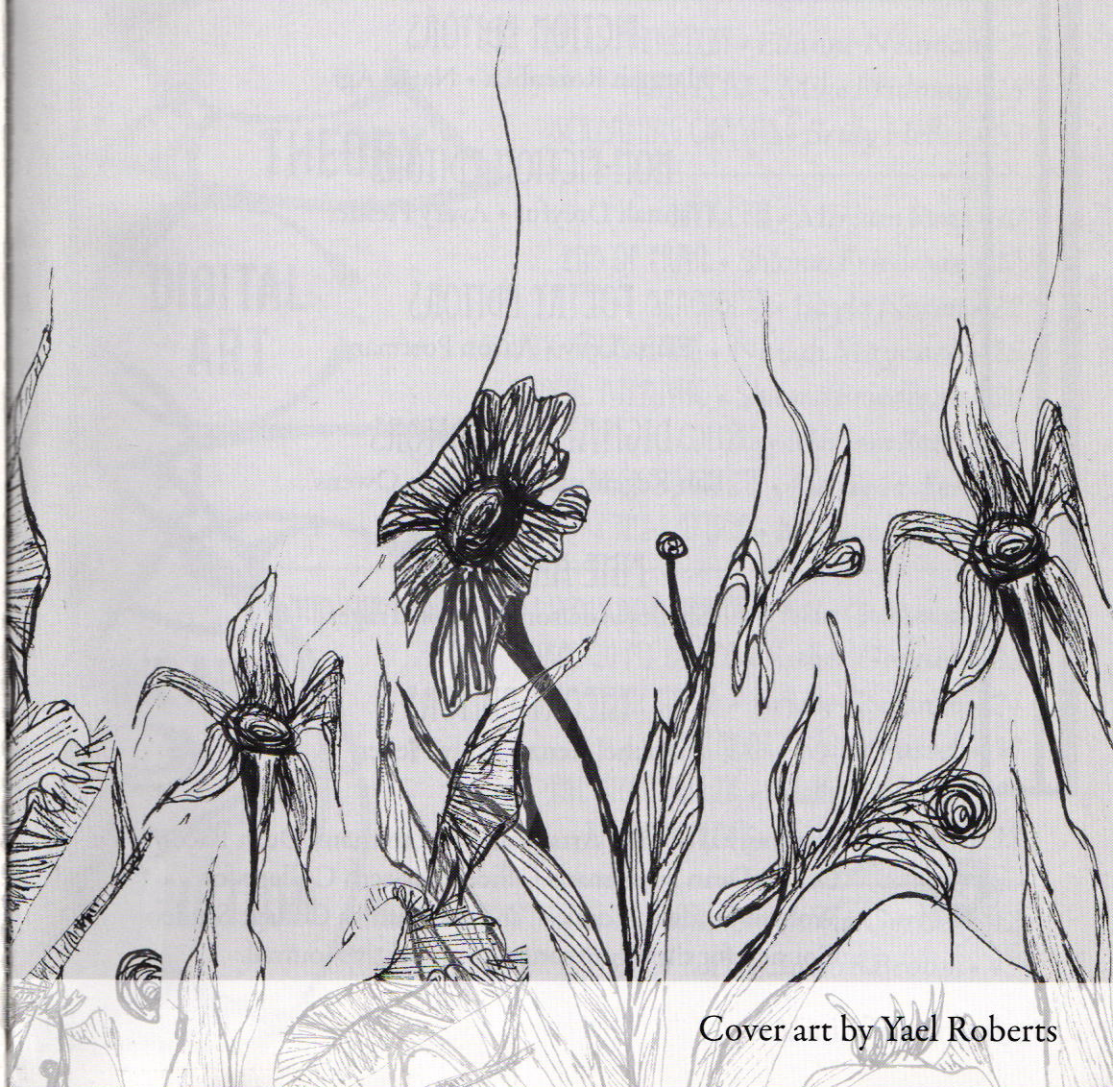
JOURNAL OF

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YESHIVA UNIVERSITY ♦ SPRING 2014



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A LESSON

Tova Ross

I buy sunflower seeds,
bring them home.
Plant them by the rosebushes
in fresh loam.
Water once a day.

They begin to grow,
though not as quickly as expected,
and the rosebushes
are adversely affected.
The gardener and mother talk.

The flowers are beautiful,
but they need their space.
I sigh, feeling oddly pained.
Such a waste.
Mother pays to have them removed.

A transplant costs just the same,
but she wants me to see the Consequences.
Her words are like thorns.
I know she considers me
a Consequence.

I dig in my roots,
face the sun.
Dad, if you ever
loved Someone—
make a return at Home Depot.

BRIGHT NOISE

Max Amitai Samuels

We sit in a circle of chairs. A red-headed boy on my left, whose glossy sunglasses protect his visionless pupils, gropes along the crevices of a rainbow-colored xylophone. On my right sways a boy so infused with energy that he rattles his little body more ferociously than the egg-shakers in his grasp. A young girl seated across from me, whose dark hair sulks over her squinting eyes, sluggishly caresses her dry hands along the shiny cymbals of her tambourine. In the corner, a lanky, curly-haired teenager saddles a piano bench and strokes the ivory keys. Everyone knows his or her assigned seat and exactly how many steps away from the doorway it is.

I am in music class with my students at Perkins School for the Blind; every Wednesday I lend my vision to those in need of sight. The class begins with a musical improv-session, during which the students perform an original song. The melodic talent displayed by some of the musicians present illuminates my imagination. Never could I have foreseen the fashioning of such beautiful harmony by artists who have never laid eyes on their instruments. I ponder over the notion that without sight, ears must perceive. But I am inspired by the prospect that with just sound, jubilation can be conceived.

The instructor agrees to share one last song with the class. Along with making their own tunes, the kids love listening to music. The recording rolls. Overpowering the catchy beat, the promising imagery of "Staring at the blank page before

you / Open up the dirty window / Let the sun illuminate the words you cannot find," floods the classroom. The Natasha Bedingfield song continues: "Today is where your book begins / The rest is still unwritten."

I taste the pungent truth of the lyrics. I am no longer in the same room I strolled into moments before. The room's width expands. The melodious tools come alive and dance to the track's echoing rhythm and rhyme. Blinding rays of sunlight pummel through the thick clouds above and crash through the window panes, leaving us in the music room basking in a shower of vibrancy. The rest of the class hums and drums to the beat, but I stay stuck to my chair, avalanched by awe.

The song's potency pierces my brain. The intense brightness impairs my mind. In desperate search of serenity I lock my eyelids shut, in deep concentration, beckoning the calm of darkness. While the song plays on, my eyes remain securely fastened, but my ears are wide open. My thoughts clear and my spirit settles. I listen with my eyes and envision with my ears.

An optimistic future, for my sightless friends and myself, unaccompanied by any confinement to the past, launches into being. No barriers can halt hope, no blockades can prevent potential.

The music fades away as I look up and glimpse the smiles staring back at me. All I see is possibility. ♦

Blinding rays of sunlight pummel through the thick clouds above and crash through the window panes, leaving us in the music room basking in a shower of vibrancy.



HE TEXT IS A PRETEXT:

An Analysis of Pater's and Wilde's Aesthetic Theories

Elianne Neuman

Two leading intellectuals of late Victorian England, Walter Pater, a professor at Oxford, and Oscar Wilde, a respected author and playwright, explore the topic of aesthetic theory in their respective works, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* and "The Critic as Artist." As members of a notoriously restrictive and moralistic society, both Pater and Wilde had to suppress their sexual orientation in order to be accepted by their contemporaries. While they do not explicitly discuss their homosexuality in their works on aesthetics, a close textual analysis of their writings indicates that their orientation led them to criticize Victorian society through their aesthetic theory. Indeed, their writings reveal their distinct coping mechanisms to deal with their repressive environment: while both challenge Victorian notions of morality by asserting the inherent worth of art, Pater turns inward and removes himself from the collective, whereas Wilde actively engages with his society by attempting to overturn its aesthetic hierarchy and, in so doing, the very social norms that condemned homosexuality.

Pater's support for subjective, impressionist aesthetic criticism in his book, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, was revolutionary in Victorian England. The topic of aesthetic criticism became the subject of much debate in

the Victorian Era following the publication of Matthew Arnold's essay, "The Function of Criticism in the Present Time," in which he advocates for disinterested aesthetic criticism and objective cultural standards. Although Pater seemingly voices his agreement with Arnold, the aesthetic theory that he sets forth in the continuation of that same sentence of agreement is, in fact, in direct contradiction to the position of his contemporary: "To see the object as in itself it really is, has been justly said to be the aim of all true criticism whatever; and in aesthetic criticism the first step towards seeing one's object as it really is, is to know one's own impression as it really is . . ." According to Pater, aesthetic criticism must be subjective, not objective, because "Beauty, like all other qualities presented to human experience, is relative; and the definition of it becomes unmeaning and useless in proportion to its abstractness." As such, Pater believes that the sole qualification of a competent critic is not his education or his status, but his appreciation of beauty: "What is important, then, is not that the critic should possess a correct abstract definition of beauty for the intellect, but a certain kind of temperament, the power of being deeply moved by the presence of beautiful objects." Pater differentiates himself from other Victorian theorists by advocating for an impressionistic, as opposed to an objective, aesthetic criticism.

By advocating for a life led in search of pleasure and ecstasy, for art for its own sake, Pater ultimately poses a great challenge to the Victorian notions of morality.

Although Pater did not affiliate with the Decadent movement in late nineteenth-century England, his subjective approach to aesthetic criticism was, in and of itself, a promotion of pleasure and passion. Pater writes that art should be judged based on the emotion it incites in the viewer and, as such, he instructs critics to ask themselves the following questions as they evaluate a piece of art: "What effect does it really produce on me? Does it give me pleasure? And if so, what sort or degree of pleasure?" While his Victorian contemporaries decried this pursuit of pleasure to be immoral, Pater asserts that passion is integral to success in life:

Not the fruit of experience, but experience itself, is the end. A counted

number of pulses only is given to us of a variegated, dramatic life. How may we see in them all that is to be seen in them by the finest senses? How shall we pass most swiftly from point to point, and be present always at the focus where the greatest number of vital forces unite in their purest energy? To burn always with this hard, gemlike flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life.

In Pater's estimation, these experiences of ecstasy were best achieved through "the love of art for its own sake . . . For art comes to you proposing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those moments' sake." By advocating for a life led in search of pleasure and ecstasy, for art for its own sake, Pater ultimately poses a great challenge to the Victorian notions of morality, to the very social norms that forbade him from revealing his true sexual orientation.

Not only does Pater diverge from his Victorian contemporaries by advocating for impressionist criticism and pleasurable experiences, but he also rejects their belief that culture ought to be collective. While Arnold advocates for universal aesthetic standards, Pater asserts that, since the human condition is one of isolation, aesthetic theory must be individualistic. According to Pater, there can be no collective cultural standards because:

The whole scope of observation is dwarfed into the narrow chamber of the individual mind. Experience, already reduced to a group of impressions, is ringed round for each one of us by that thick wall of personality through which no real voice has ever pierced on its way to us. . . . Every one of those impressions is the impression of the individual in his isolation, each mind keeping as a solitary prisoner in its own dream of a world.

Indeed, Pater's personal condition was characterized by loneliness, as he chose to remove himself from society and was known to be a recluse. It would not be unreasonable to conclude that Pater's subjective, individualistic approach to aesthetics is a reflection of his reclusiveness, of his self-imposed isolation from the Victorian society that showed no tolerance for his sexual orientation.

Like Pater, the popular novelist and playwright Oscar Wilde advocates for art for its own sake in his essay, "The Artist as Critic." While Pater is hesitant to criticize his contemporaries, Wilde structures his essay as a dialogue be-

tween Ernest, who originally subscribes to the standard Victorian approach to aesthetics, and Gilbert, who ultimately convinces his friend to recognize the virtues of aesthetic criticism. This debate between Ernest and Gilbert provides Wilde with the opportunity to forcefully refute Arnold's belief in objective criticism, as evidenced by the following passage:

ERNEST. The highest Criticism, then, is more creative than creation, and the primary aim of the critic is to see the object as in itself it is really not; that is your theory, I believe?

GILBERT. Yes, that is my theory. To the critic the work of art is simply a suggestion for a new work of his own, that need not necessarily bear any obvious resemblance to the thing it criticizes.

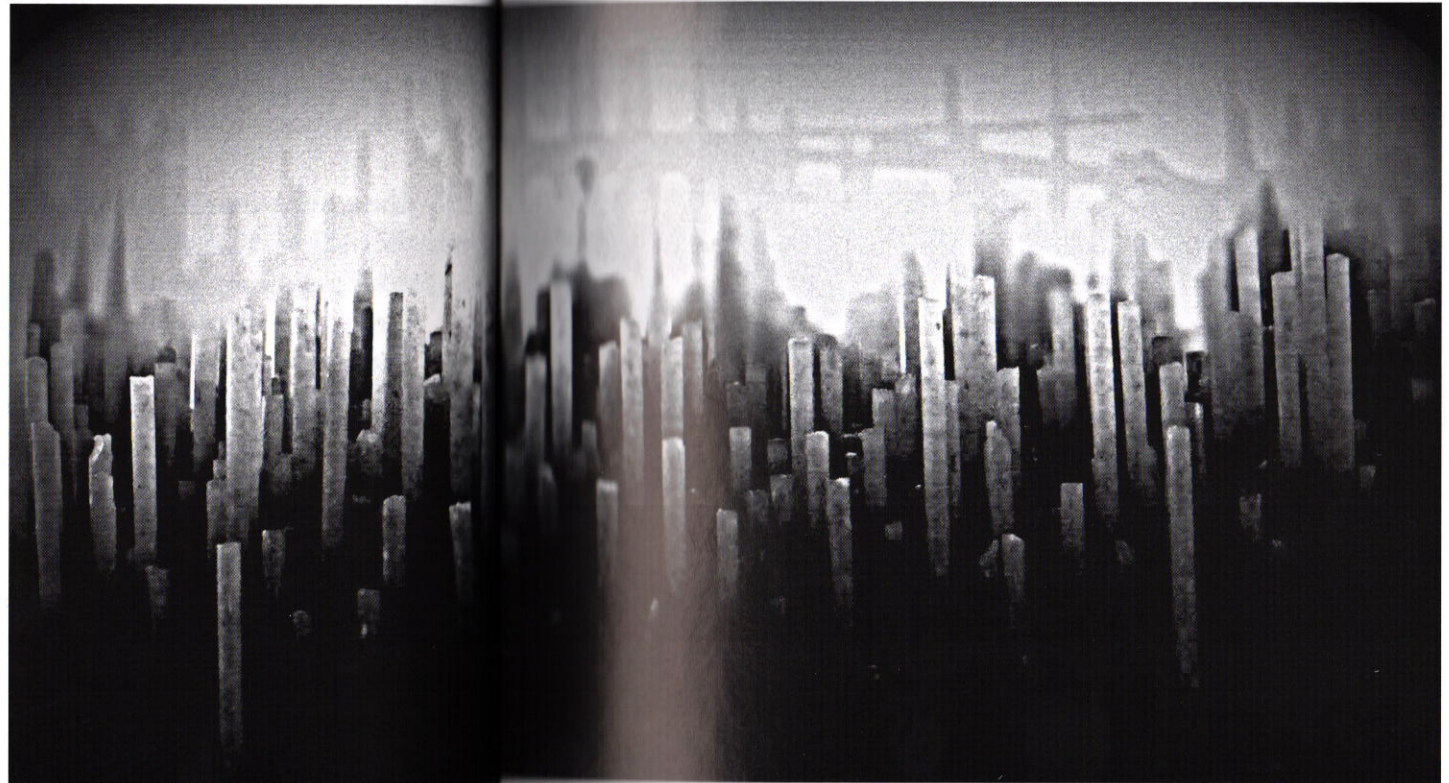
Wilde further strays from Arnold's position by upholding the aesthetic theory of the Decadents, who argued that utility is an inappropriate basis for evaluating art, "as it has least reference to any external standard to itself, and is, in fact,

its own reason for existing, and, as the Greeks would put it, in itself, to itself, an end." By promoting the inherent value of art, Wilde rejects the utilitarian approach to aesthetics and, in so doing, positions himself as a leader of the Decadent movement in late nineteenth-century England.

Wilde undermines Victorian notions of morality not only by asserting the inherent worth of art, but also by advocating that aesthetic criticism is, in and of itself, the highest form of art. In so doing, Wilde overturns the aesthetic hierarchy set forth by Plato in the Republic: everything in this world is just a shadow of an ideal form that is not visible to the human eye and, as such, art is pointless because it is simply a representation of a representation. The Victorians, having embraced this Platonic worldview, likewise maintained that aesthetic criticism is even more worthless than art, as it is just a copy of a copy of a copy of the ideal form. However, Wilde inverts this hierarchy by asserting that aesthetic criticism is the ideal form of art: "just as artistic creation implies the working of the critical faculty, and, indeed, without it

SPAGHETTI

Miriam Renz

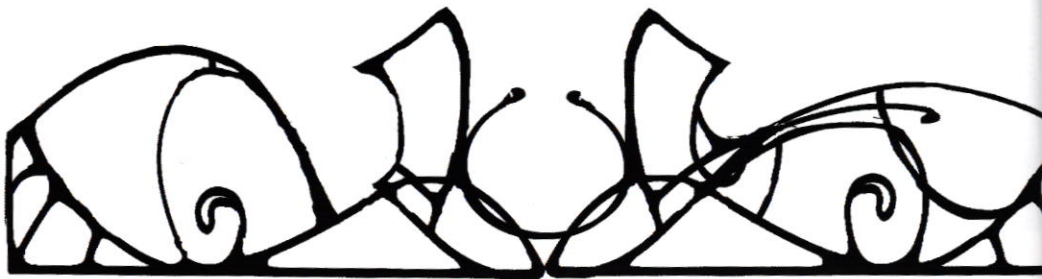


cannot be said to exist at all, so Criticism is really creative in the highest sense of the word.” Wilde asserts that “the highest Criticism, being the purest form of personal impression, is in its way more creative than creation.” By inverting the Platonic aesthetic hierarchy that his contemporaries had adopted, Wilde ultimately undermines Victorian notions of morality, the very social norms that censured the expression of his sexuality.

A close reading of Pater’s and Wilde’s writings on aesthetic theory reveals how they each react to Victorian society’s condemnation of their homosexuality. While both challenge contemporary notions of morality by advocating for pleasure and decadence, for art for its own sake, Pater disassociates himself from the collective and Wilde engages with his society by rejecting its aesthetic hierarchy and, by extension, its social norms. In both cases, the text is a pretext: since Pater and Wilde could not address Victorian moral objections to homosexuality directly, they turn to aesthetic theory as a proxy in order to criticize their repressive society. Ultimately, their rejection of Victorian aesthetic theory is an expression of their alienation from a society that regarded their sexual orientation to be not just deviant, but immoral. ♦

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NIGHT'S ARRIAGE

John Vahedi

Early, I stir to the crying call of my child
whom suddenly has come alive. Beguiled
by his smile, I carry him against my chest
in the hazy darkness. Awhile his tiny body rests
I wonder, am I possessed? Forever with you, in vain
I could remain obsessed. Escaping on an airplane,
his excitement a reflection of mine: clutching
him as to feel us as one. Embracing his faint touch,
nervous for our imminent departure. This silent sound
I suffer; when will his heart stop to pound?

I wake up to a boring hum and subdued light.
My eyes drift from far to near, from blurry to clear.
I extract from my mind where it had gone in fright.
And, within the frozen gaze of my heart, lives again my fear.

"M., * THAT'S SUCH A PRETTY NAME."

[A history of truth and credibility]

Dasha Sominski



This reluctance, he began to realize, was a product of fear. But fear of what? Of walking back into his own past? Of discovering a present that would contradict the past and thus alter it[...]" –*Paul Auster*



**Note: Names have been changed to protect privacy.
This piece has been excerpted from its original form.*

I took the battery out of my smoke alarm with a plastic cafeteria fork. It was a bother to force myself into shoes and abandon my sultry cubicle every time I needed to go out for a quick cigarette. That fittingly somber Sunday evening, lights off, I listened to an entire album of The Strokes and, very thoroughly, I cried myself into self-oblivion again: I liked to cry to "Chances" best.

Not even a week ago, I'd spent the night at the NYU psychiatry ward down on the corner of 33rd and 1st. I felt little but composed and quiet. Between the several sessions I had with the doctors I passed most of my time looking steadily at a filthy scrap of prescription paper (chlorpromazine, 200mg, take one pill daily for 3 weeks) stuck in the air conditioner and quivering.

"Sorry?" I had to pretend I was rubbing my eye because it was twitching and it made me uncomfortable.

"I said I think you are an intelligent young woman. I'm sure you've got this under control." A young resident doctor, he looked like Pierro in his nonsensically dichromatic scrubs. He was looking at me tiredly. The clock on the wall read 6:20am. The night shift was over in 10 minutes. "I mean, I see you are reading Truman Capote. Is it a good book?" He flipped the weathered paperback in his hand as if trying to measure its weight and put it back on my pillow. "Can you speak a little more about what happened?"



It's 8am and we are in my Brooklyn apartment, toast and jam and butter and the blanket is wretchedly hot and the hair on her temples is wet and sticky because we forgot to close the window, again. I resent the term but M. uses it all the time—we are 'best friends' and she sleeps over most nights. I'm subletting a room with inordinately high ceilings for June-July, and I have three uber-bohemian roommates. Jesse, a fervid socialist activist goes to meetings and does 25 pull-ups every morning. There is a colossal red C on his door; it glows in the dark and terrifies the hell out of Kenji, the cat, and if you listen intently at night you can hear him whimper. Jesse's twin sister Eva occupies the corner room with her boyfriend Jay; they have two imposing-looking rubber plants that they water in the bathtub every other week. Everybody is outstanding about washing their dishes on time; we drink cheap Trader Joes wine from teacups and leave sticky notes for each other on the fridge.

No one present at the time could confidently conjecture afterwards whether Shakespeare intended the work as a history or tragedy, but most people agreed that it did not matter much.

"Fuck-this-weather-baking-campaign" was recently introduced at apartment D1, and there is apple pie left in the kitchen from yesterday's storm.

It was a film-still perfect summer, and I never felt so close to anybody before. It was like I didn't know where I ended and the other person began, you know? And yet, we were unable to figure it out then, no matter how trivial the codes. My cozy

Ikea blanket—"a size of the Atlantic ocean," she once said—enabled us to hide from each other for so irreparably long; it muffled all the deep-drawn sighs and made mornings irritating and confusing. We both dated women and men alike and were fully aware of each other's sexual tendencies; notwithstanding, our

respective bodies remained forbidden territory. It was a tacit agreement not to devastate things between us. For whatever reason we both felt acutely that if we would acknowledge it, we would kill it.

♦

I follow my ripped garland of memories, trying to fix that which has overtime grown loose—because this is all I have left. There was one day that was particularly important. There I am, in a short dress, leaning on a granite monument, covering my thighs with my hands—where do those bruises always come from?—waiting. I see myself several hours later—hand pulling fabric down by the neck, I can't breathe, red trace on the collarbone. Why is she not picking up? Why is she not picking up? Why is she not picking up? There, head of security telling me to “please, keep calm, miss” and showing them photographs—her Facebook profile picture—“have you seen this girl?” There I am, reports, papers, looking under her bed—maybe there is a sign there, how absurd, now, I must really calm down. There I am, reading a simple message saying everything is ok but everything is not ok, it will never be ok now, how can it be ok. There I am, vomiting four consecutive times, by the toilet bowl. Thunder, thunder—in my head—my mind—lightning and thunder.

I never entirely understood why I reacted that way. The emotional paralysis that followed turned me so unobservant that I managed to earn a second-degree burn the next day after biking absently for several hours. Being stranded in my room (the burns looked so repulsive that I felt embarrassed to go out in the kitchen and Jesse always worked from home) only deeper augmented my general sense of hurt. I sustained myself with coffee and saltines and would fall asleep only after several bowls of weed, both arms supported by throw pillows to minimize the soreness.

♦

After two days of my echoing silence, a decisive, hysterical knock on the door revealed M., wearing flip-flops and a long t-shirt. She had taken a taxi from Manhattan, mid-shower. She said I should please forgive her, because she didn't know, and it was the first time I saw her really cry. “I even bought you wine and a card, Dasha, I forgot all of it, I just couldn't wait.” I think, without recognizing it, I found her apology profoundly offensive even then, because, after it all, she was still prepared to keep up with the conspiracy: “a sister, a friend” I was, and I felt destroyed and diminished and maybe I was a self-involved idiot, and

I was mistaken about her feelings and mine, and that was what I wrote in my notebook that evening when she was asleep—"your murderous vanity." For the first time, she felt foreign in my bed, and, for the first time, I burnt the toast I brought in on a tray the following morning.

It turned out, we would both opt for vilifying the other party—I cringed at the contrast of how secure I once felt with her, and she disapproved of how vocal I was about my hesitations. And so, we didn't speak for a month, with the exception of one disastrous coffee rendezvous at which I was indecently sulky and walked out blatantly just as she began sharing with me—something about a new hairstylist, she would refer me if I wanted to and I would get a 10% discount and oh, this guy she was seeing and then, Central Park, the trees. We would both admit later that it was one of the more surreal encounters we'd had. ♦

END OF TRAIL

Shlomo Friedman



KING LEAR:

From Poetry to Prose and Back

Mike Fridman

Prefaced with an accurate description of the play, and an ahistorical account of its production.

In a time of paramount chaos and unheralded misfortune, Britain underwent a state of dire crisis, bearing the unmitigated brunt of a ferocious frontal assault from an unexpected nemesis. The fate of an empire appeared wrested away from the gods themselves, to be subjected instead to the corrosive and deceitful schemes of barbaric and beastly men, the terrible and unforgivable acts of betrayal committed by traitors, scoundrels, adulteresses and their ilk. Parents mercilessly dismissed their dutiful children, but the revenge of disloyal children upon their parents proved yet more devastating. In like manner, subjects ruthlessly sought to disempower and disgrace their rulers, while the erring fathers of the illegitimate were blindly betrayed even by the very bastard-folk they accepted into their homes. Gazing with complete clarity upon this scene, powerfully conceiving even the smallest detail in his mind, one man—a poet by trade and a master of fictions himself—took up his quill and set out to render the vision in script and in doing so impacted meaningfully upon character, content, and the

broader constructions of genre and theme. The man's name was Shakespeare—and he had something to say on the subject.

Known to a few as a fellow with some skill in writing, his friends occasionally referred to him with reverence as the “Bard of Avon,” but more often they casually called him Bill. In his senior yearbook page, his classmates wrote “Bill doth possess far more ambition yet far less hair than his fellow Stratford-Upon-Avoners. Get ye forth Stratford Bear-Baiters, thrice victors 1566, 1574, 1575!” Sitting in solitude with quill and parchment before him, other times standing in a local

No one present at the time could confidently conjecture afterwards whether Shakespeare intended the work as a history or tragedy, but most people agreed that it did not matter much.

present at the time could confidently conjecture afterwards whether Shakespeare intended the work as a history or tragedy, but most people agreed that it did not matter much.

tavern scrawling upon half-used handkerchiefs, Shakespeare would write words. In this latter venue, Shakespeare wrote *King Lear* on a night remembered somewhat dubiously as a particularly rowdy yet amusing one. No one

Later that week, a janitor discovered separate versions of the play etched on half-burnt napkins lying about an uncomfortable bar stool with a thatched roof, constructed and often sat upon by the village idiot. A local scholar and bartender—incidentally the same person but not by definition—determined that a judicious mixing of the two versions into a single conflated text would, in fact, do nicely. Later upon redaction, an experienced publisher rechristened the play *King Lear*—changed from Loony Lear—characteristically averting all things abundantly alliterative. How fortunate for Shakespeare, too! This self-same publisher later had categorically refused to print *Love's Labor Lost*. In some measure of empathy for the unpopularity of that unfortunate play—he agreed to publish *Love's Labor Won*, but reluctantly, and only as a brief account. With much thanks for your audience I anticipate you derived a modicum of merriment from the above brief introduction and narrative. Now with your permission I will discuss *King Lear* as one of Shakespeare's finest plays and a masterful yet tragic portrayal of the human condition. ♦

EULOGY

Mia Guttman

And I thought
wrists once delicate spilling threads
unravelling.

And I thought
skin once porcelain encasement
secreting.

And I thought
veins once twisted blue roots
crumbling.

And I thought
lungs once fat with air
depleted.

And I thought
muscles once red ribbons woven
unsnarled.

And I thought
bones once ivory
tainted.

And the thought of the dirt is disquieting.

AND THE THOUGHT OF THE DIRT IS DISQUIETING



(Panels #1 and #2)

Mia Guttman



SEROTONIN

Bayla Neren



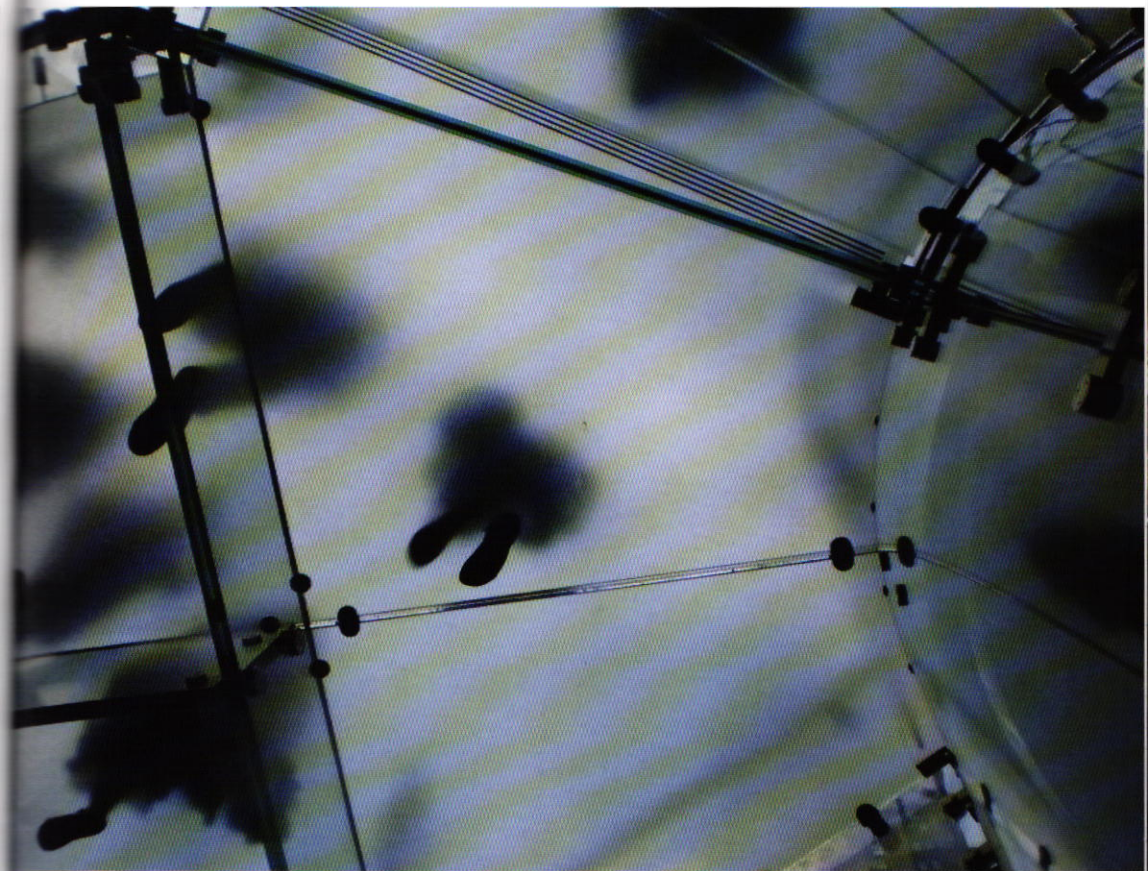
THROUGH MY HANDS

Esther Gersten



SILENCED

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LEAVING YOUR MARK

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TRANQUIL ATLANTIC

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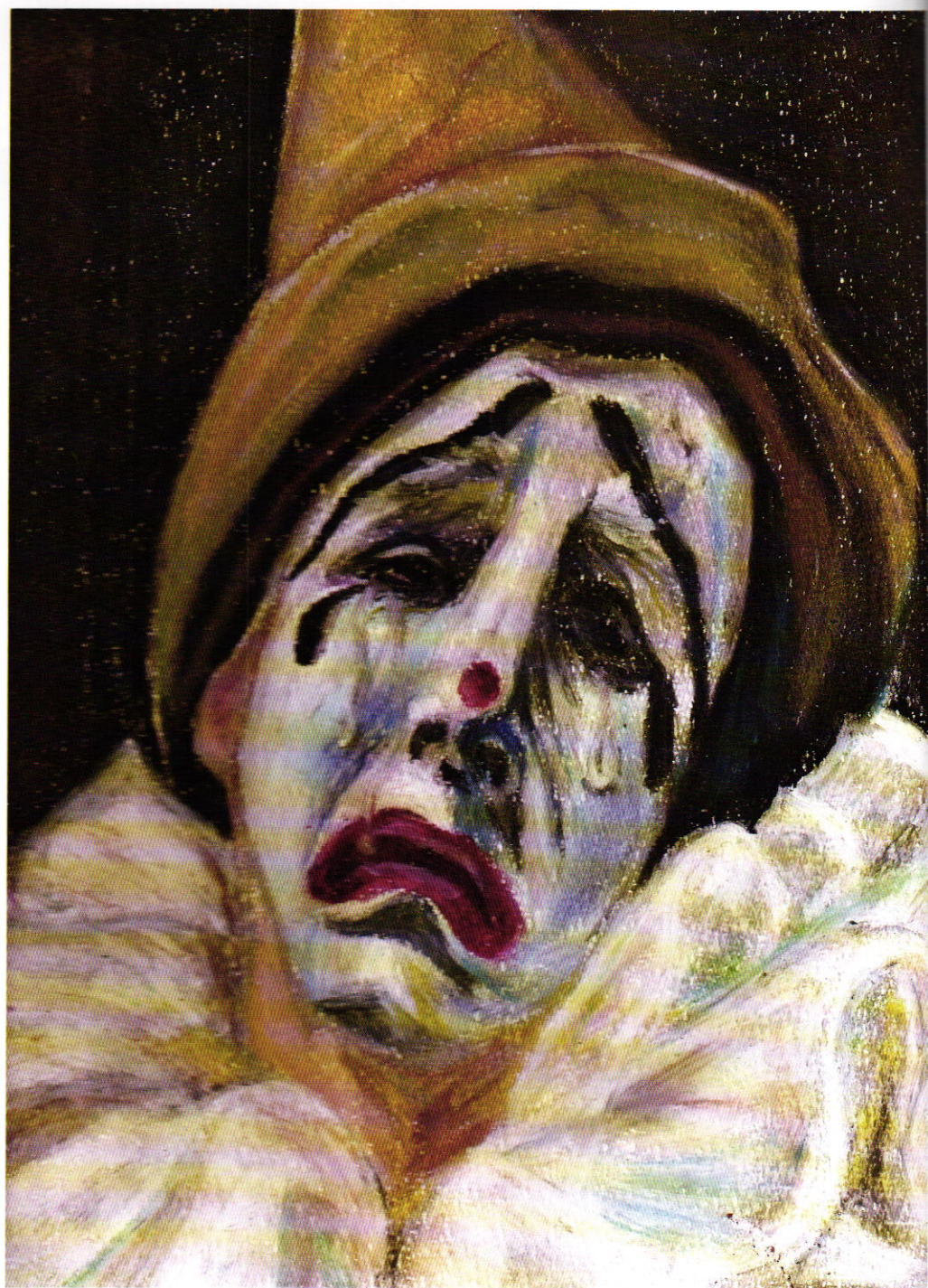
JACK'S SKYLINE
Ruthie Heller

THE LATTICE *Miriam Rubin*



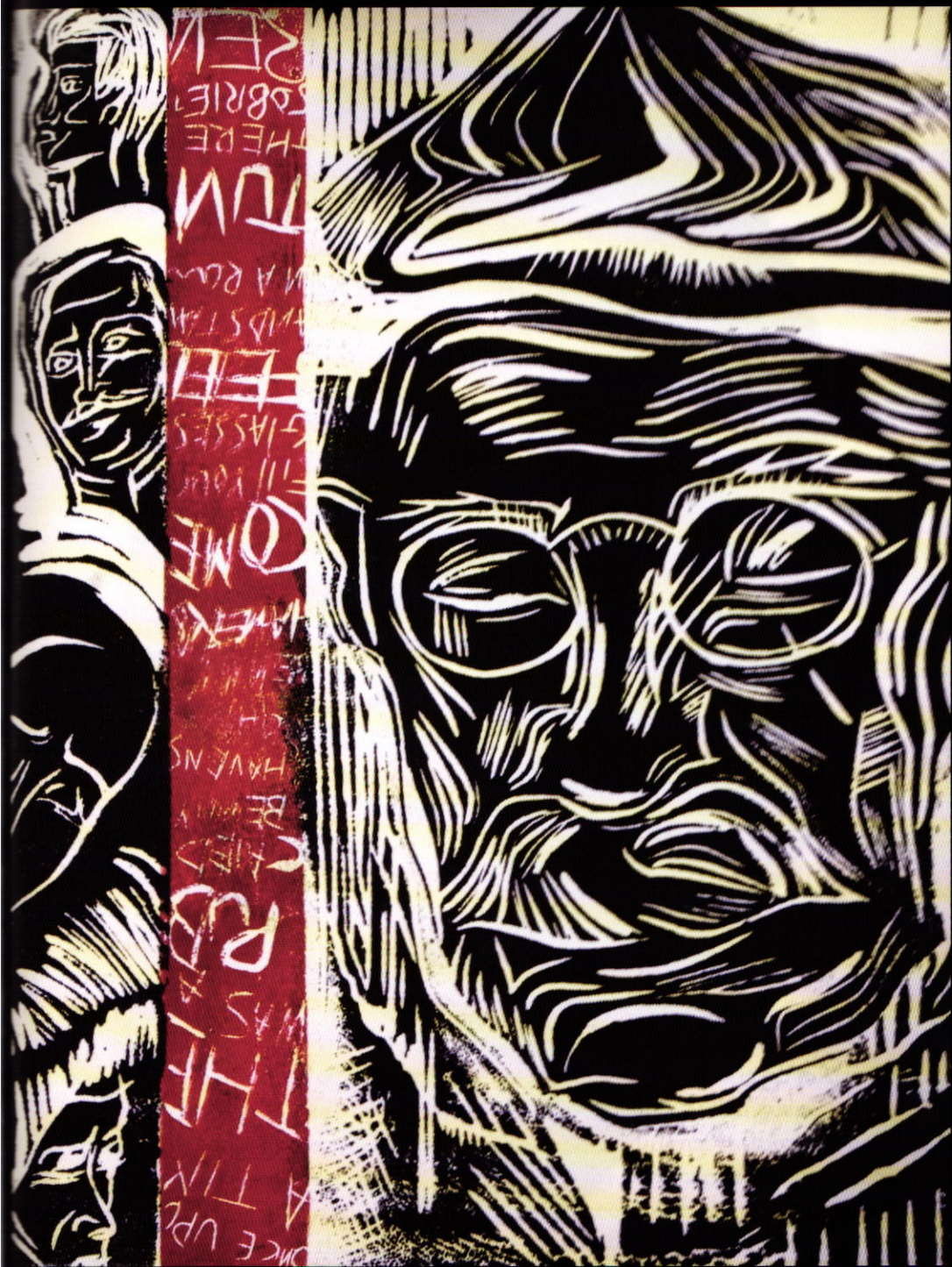
PITAKIM *Zahava Rothschild*

Splinters of spilt glass pour soundlessly over my
poor spiritual form body spilling over a prayer book
the bumps of the Wall push against my skin,
papers, splinters of paper splayed on my shoes
the glass glinting red in the
sunlight, the redness dowsing
my shoes like spilt blood
the shards of a shattered heart
poured from an abandoned barrel labeled
“bent hearts” stored on God’s thrown-side for sifting
but forgotten—
spilt by an abandoned kick of a heel,
and I, feet dowsed in their blood,
pour my weight against the cracked surface
the bumps pushing against my skin,
I pray.



PARADOX

Shira Russell



THE STORYTELLER

Shelley Adelson



SELF PORTRAIT

Daniel Trager

SCREAMING CHASMS:

Kafka's Rhetorical Nightmare and Salvation, Scored by Adorno

Sruly Heller

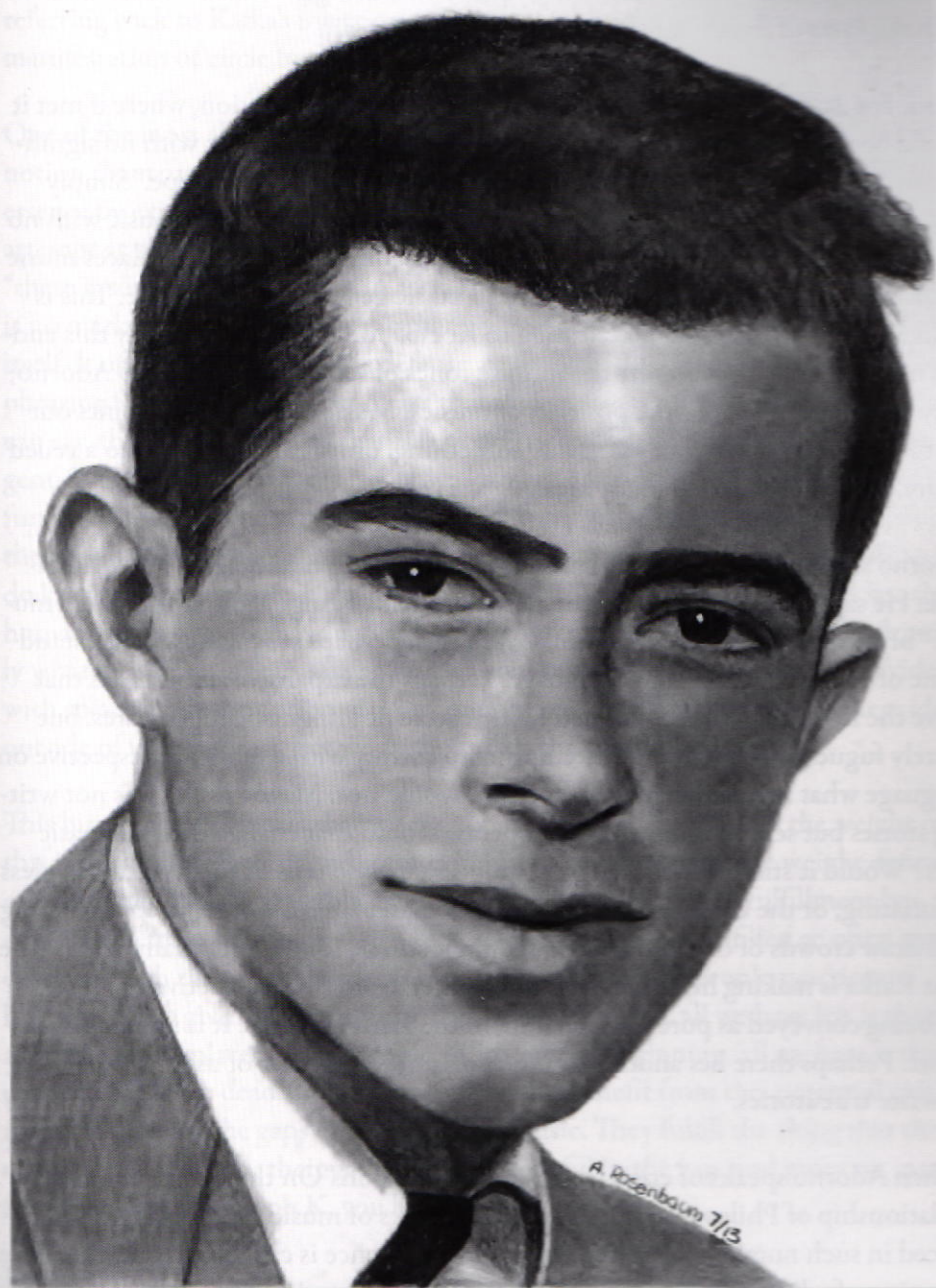
To speak of language under Kafka, and music as characterized by Adorno, is to speak of, as Richard Leppert puts it, communication in crisis. Regarding language, there is, according to Koelb, a rhetorical gap, a broken and endless bridge, between what language defines itself as, and how it actually behaves. In contrast, Adorno posits that "music that remains true to itself would rather not exist at all," that is to say, that music at its heart exudes such existential tension as to desire oblivion. The signifiers of language and music push towards oblivions of meaning, where language is underscored by wild gesticulation in place of sound, and music finds itself cast as language, the sound lost, a patently false skin according to Adorno. The plight of those attempting to communicate in either voice, only to find the meaning lost along the way, is the plight of the man in modernity. Meaning is on the tip of his tongue, but it lacks a ticket to ride. What is this gap in language, and how does it compare to the eternally reifying and nullifying oscillation of music? What is it that they want? Why do they then get it? These are straight questions, and they are rhetorical questions. They mirror their subjects in that way.

Koelb describes Kafka's employ of language as marked with aporia, that is, internal logical disjunction. He describes a branch of philosophy of language called Speech Act Theory, wherein speech is construed as locutionary structures, or speech that performs an act. These locutions take on two characteristics, illocutionary and perlocutionary. The former is an act accomplished in its utterance, from the perspective of the imposing agent, who is warning or commanding, etc. etc. The latter is embodied by its utterance, from the perspective of the receiving agent, who is warned or commanded. It is possible for perlocutionary statements to have illocution like effect, provided that the speaker carries the power to implement or render the action.

We see these terms all throughout Kafka. It's there in "The Penal Colony," where the Officer weaves through illocutions of power at the start but ends with begging, the rather more supplicating side of illocution, and one at odds with his role as Officer. There is *The Trial*, where from the outset, and continuing until his death, Josef K is imprisoned by various locutions. Only in *The Trial* do we see something strange, something that gets to the heart of Kafka's rhetoric. At the outset, K is told that "you can't go out, you are arrested." This comes at the very beginning of the novel, which is ostensibly about the arrest and trial of Josef K, except here, at this very first legal act, we see that there is no legal act at all. The man does not arrest K, he simply tells him he's arrested. It is a perlocutionary act, which means it necessarily has an illocution that preceded it, which in the context of *The Trial* would have been the original arrest, apparently one with the details of the crime. Kafka denies us this and propels the entire novel on the basis of a missing, and thus ambiguous action. Legal maneuvers, punishments, trials, executions, all these take place in the name of we're-not-sure-exactly, a distinctly Kafkaian set of circumstances. Josef K goes along with this perlocution, essentially rendering it ex post facto an illocution, from his perspective at least. The whole novel proceeds this way, stringing along the many illocutions and perlocutions of law and justice, all rendered farcical by its lack of cosmology. Kafka thus builds an entire novel that takes place in the netherworld between word and action.

Koelb then points out that in "The Judgment" as well, the father's "sentencing" of Georg has a perlocutionary effect, a rather clear and final one, but there is no preceding illocution to generate it. The story's title alludes to this mystery, for how is there a judgment without a judge? Yet Georg, like Joseph K, seems to accept this as binding, as illocutionary, and finds himself compelled to die. Koelb brings up other examples, but the point is made. As he says in his conclusion, the indeterminate locutions and constant rhetorical gaps have an infinite and yawning chasm between them, and it is this unbridgeable space that defines the world of Kafka's characters, spurring them on to action and death.

Adorno describes music as playing with gaps in a different manner. However, while the nature of its internal chaos might be different, it is similar in that these gaps are also as endless and consuming as reality itself, maybe more so. In his essay "Music, Language, Composition," Adorno starts out by saying that "Music is similar to language. Expressions like musical idiom and musical accent are not metaphors." From the get go, Adorno points out that, like language, music has a gap within itself, a rhetoricity. Adorno states that music is "a proposition at once distinct and concealed," its very corpus marked by contradiction, the aural circle in the square. This is in distinction to Kafka's words, which contain the chaos of



ZADY S.

Ayelet Rosenbaum

ambiguity in their meaning, not in their actual letters. If the language of Kafka can be likened to poisoned fruit, that which the body of is not inherently bad but its usage is, then music is like gas. Music is at once there and not there, bound by no meanings, and though occasionally poisonous like gas – thick and scented with the taste of fruit – it is still no more solid than air.

Music for Adorno is caught between the absolute of signification, where if met it would become language, and thus false, and the vacuity of music with no signification at all, a music that would “resemble an acoustical kaleidoscope.” Simply put, music that is all locution, all language, ceases to be music, and music with no locution is just that, music that is not saying anything. Here Adorno places music in the middle, in the chasm, as opposed to music generating the middle. This is unlike Kafka’s words, which according to Koelb, both create and occupy this endless middle. (This may be why the infinite tones of serialism appealed to Adorno; they accurately stake out the position of music). Music continuously points out that it is saying something, signifying something, only it always points to a veiled figure, painting arrows to foggy areas.

Adorno states that this is why Kafka elevated music to new heights in his literature. He says that Kafka treated the pure signifiers of language as if they were music, “broken parables” he calls them. Given this, perhaps we can now understand some of Kafka’s aporia ridden language. Perhaps the expansive ambiguities that drive the lost Karl and the doomed Josef K were not linguistic nightmares, but merely fugues and threnodies, attempting to convey with a musical perspective on language what regular language could not, would not. Maybe Kafka was not writing stories but scores, not novels but operas. Would that change their dramatic arcs? Would it still make the laughing policeman who tells us to give it up any less infuriating, or the Country Doctor any less emasculated? Would Josephine’s song still draw crowds of devoted youth? Would it still be song? And finally, if it is true that Kafka is making his language musical, then from the perspective of music, it’s being conveyed as pure signification, in the form of words. It is false music, in short. Perhaps there lies another grand aporia of Kafka, that of using false music to write true stories.

When Adorno speaks of crisis in music, as he does in “On the Contemporary Relationship of Philosophy and Music,” he speaks of music that is being produced in such numbers, that its very right to existence is called into question. The question of who said what and what they meant, in musical terms, thus becomes, “What right did they have to say it?” Music has become mired in such falsity that by mere virtue of playing, it becomes part of the ongoing falsity of modernity,

and thus testifies to its own worthlessness, its own knowingly false pretense, as an exception to the open lies of everyday life. Thus, those who make music, which according to Adorno is everybody, can either perpetuate the lie, or turn to an extreme, as Kafka does. Adorno does not say what this extreme is, but perhaps he is referring back to Kafka's injection of music into literature, an inherently extreme manifestation of circle in the square.

One of the most abrasive and striking ideas on music that Adorno presents is the notion that true music does not exist, wishes to not exist, wishes to not betray its essence by existing. In short, music wants to be music by not being. It is in music's attempt at self-nullification that defines its essence, as Adorno says. He says that, "there is something enigmatic in all music." He explains this by stating that there is no marker of any kind in music that points to a meaning or justification for itself. It offers no rhetoric in its defense, only the gap of what it is and wants. Paraphrasing Schoenberg, Adorno says that if music says something that only music can say, then it has a quality that is beyond comprehension yet entirely contingent. We don't know what it is, but we know it has needs. The rhetoric of Kafka functions much in the same way. We don't know what the characters are doing there, why they are there, and indeed they don't often know themselves. What we do know is that they need, are rooted in need, in desire, contingent on what their humanity can give them, which all too often in modernity isn't enough. Ultimately what music can give us says so much about what music is. Music can provide us with solace, with the notion of a way out, yet we often cannot abstract these ideas outside of it. It feeds us, but we are bound to the trough.

This binding, this shackle that we cannot account for, yet still feel the weight of, this is the world of words and sounds in Kafka and in Music. The weight defines our existence, indeed arguably generates it in music, as music's fulfillment becomes its demise. So too it is with Kafka, where the words fulfilled so often spell death, though the original order is never seen. The mouse people practice no history, and so give no accounting of why. Without why, all we have left is the gap, and here Kafka places us, the people. Without the beginning, all we have is the end. Thus it is the dead, after all, in Kafka, who benefit from this potential exit, made possible by the gaps of language and music. They fulfill the thing that the tones revolve around; their gap allows to them fill in the gap, and move on into forgotten history. Joseph K, you lucky dog. ♦

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CONFESIONS OF A COMPULSIVE WEDDING ATTENDEE

Yael Farzan

A gorgeous mad Staten Island wedding in midwinter. Outside, millions of sheep-white flakes swish twirl fall rain sprinkling on a three-tiered wedding cake of land, as the paper-white sky opens up pillows and feathers fall in slow motion on rushing white hats. Blurred images inside: silky dresses all glitter and sequins and wisps of hair and clinking and wine and glassing and leaning and sushi salad finger-food walking around, words whisper around the room like the scent of passing whiskey, sprinklings of Mozart and wafts of fancy tomato aromas. The people—women in gowns and men in hats—Men of the Hatten, some from Manhattan—stealing furtive glances at each other, stepping away, coming closer, shifting laughing glancing averting eyes, clutching phones desperately. (Someone is supposed to call them any minute, of course.)

One woman slaps the hand of the man next to her, who has already picked up a caviar bite. “Stop,” she hisses.

The same woman takes a proffered drink; someone inquires about her dress and

her cheeks flame while her heart and blush plump overtime. "Oh, the dress? This old thing? Ha..." Her voice shaking through raspberry-stained lips, she says it's either Badgley Mischka or Adrianna Papell or Yves Saint Laurent; she can't remember.

Anyway, the hall is a massive ornate intricate highbrow, this high-flung thing, this big tall piece of architectural glory, very posh. You walk up all these red-velvet-covered stairs—and "it's like the Metropolitan Museum," one girl says to the man on her right in the humble blue tie, of the Renoirs and Matisse's dotting the walls. She squints her eyes when she smiles, but it's a stretchy smile, like polyester trying to be silk, like her dress.

And here she comes, *here comes the bride, all dressed in white . . .* and she's essentially still the same little girl who used to sing this song during jump-rope at recess in elementary school, pretending at playing House and Mother, and I say *essentially the same* because yes, she's twenty-one, and not ten, but still, she's *twenty-one, for Heaven's sake* (which is what her non-religious aunts and uncles whisper amongst themselves behind their silken congratulations), and then, from playing Nun for twenty-one years she will most probably be playing Mum in one; and it's all because there is actually an ironic amount of truth to their mutterings of *For Heaven's Sake . . .* It really *is* for Heaven's sake, in their eyes.

So here comes the bride . . . and she's so Barbie-doll and delicate like the hand-crafted Bohemian crystal pitchers on the table, and petite and perfect and good and nice and the whole package deal . . . Anyway, the girl from before—remember her? Polyester-trying-to-be-silk, we'll call her—I see her shaky fingers as she holds her glass of wine. Probably Essie-painted fingers by a manicurist on the Upper East Side somewhere, frequented not because they're good but because *everyone* goes there, at least all the people *she* knows. Adjusting the strap of the clunky handbag on her broad shoulders, those shaky fingers weave through her hair while the music starts. The screech of the violin, the jolly Fiddler-on-the-Roof tune as the groom enters. The bride's eyes shine, she of the glistening Bare Minerals powder and the happy sweat of her cheeks, the flash of the photographer catching the diamond glint in her ears. Hair flies around her face when her groom comes to pick up her veil and gets stuck on the shiny MAC stain of her lips. She fingers her necklace and is whisked away by mother and in-law, as the giggles and gaggles of girls undergo a mass exodus to the ballroom, with a necessary stop at the bathroom, of course, to quickly touch up the lip gloss that has apparently rubbed off in the span of those three minutes.

Ah, these weddings.

At this point I have lost track of how many weddings I have attended in my life, and do not recall the specific number (Fifty? Seventy-five? One hundred?). But I know that I have attended most of them, and, as such, humbly consider myself well-versed in the anthropology of wedding culture.

By now I have received tens of paper-cuts opening countless wedding invitations, rubbed my fingers against hundreds of monogrammed initials, and filled out an equal number of RSVP cards that I always end up mailing late.

I have circle-danced the horah until my calf muscles protest, and in the process have had my poor feet torturously smashed by mile-high red-lacquered-soled Louboutins with sword-sharp points.

From my engaged and soon-to-be-married friends, I have learned the nuances between all the different shapes of a diamond ring (princess, pear, teardrop, square) and all the different kinds of white (off-white, cream, etc.).

And although many a summer dress has been permanently sweat-stained from the effort of lugging wrapped boxes of Libbey Wine Party 12-Piece Set or Godinger Dublin 10-Ounce Crystal High

Ball Glasses (you can never go wrong with wine glasses) five blocks from Bed Bath & Beyond to the subway, and then another ten blocks from the F to the apartment where the bridal shower is being held, I hope I have, on the upside, lost at least a few pounds in the long run.

I have gotten lost going to weddings more often than I would care to and have asked for directions ("The simplest ones possible, please") from bored subway station attendees ("Where is 201 McDonald? 36 Ross Street? Why does it say I am three hours and forty-five minutes away?") more often than anyone else I know.

I have circle-danced the *horah* until my calf muscles protest, and in the process have had my poor feet torturously smashed by mile-high red-lacquered-soled Louboutins with sword-sharp points.

I have chosen between Five Star Catering's "mushroom-barley" and "butter-nut-squash" soup many, many times, consumed dozens of breadcrumb-encrusted-salmon appetizers, and have watched, in silent exasperation, as waitresses swiftly whisk dozens of untouched \$100-a-plate-meals away in seconds.

I have also hugged countless of my friends in white wedding dresses, dashed to guests' tables to grab their what-I-hope-to-be empty goblets of water to revive a soon-to-be-fainting bride, and stolen embroidered napkins off plates to wipe off a sweat-shined forehead for the same reason. I have stepped on (and probably smashed in the process) dozens of clumsy toes that haven't moved out of my way as I try to break through circles to reach the bride in question with my rescue objects (the glass of water, the embroidered napkin, a chair for her to finally relax her wobbling knees...). And I have embarrassed myself more often than my friends know, crying silent salty tears into paradoxical smiles as I watch my friends walk the wedding aisles.

But, despite all this, I love going to weddings. I like the girlish anticipation and excitement of choosing a dress and putting on my makeup, like the crowds of people, the scene of it all, like seeing what kind of dress the bride is wearing, like the dancing and the feeling I receive, only at weddings, of being drunk on happiness and the life of it all. I like the roller-coasters of tearful emotions, laughing and crying all at the same time; like all the details of flowers and centerpieces; like the breathless, invigorated feeling when we all sit down, after the band has decided it is time to leave and all the guests have left too, and re-sing our favorites songs out loud — that pleases me immensely, and so does watching the bride and groom stand under the black-and-white *tallit*, the first touch of their hands after the groom steps on and shatters the glass, the first streaks of the violin that open up the yells and the clapping and the loud "Mazal Tov!"s; all the sweet promises these scenes hold of love and fairy-tale endings—I like them all. ♦



SHOTS ON CONNECTICUT AVENUE

Shoshana Gertler

My mama tells me I'm rotted through 'cause when I was nine years old and first started helping out my daddy in his liquor store out on Connecticut Ave, I killed him dead. My daddy, I mean. My mama wasn't there the day it happened but I was, so I know she's right. She knew it 'cause she knows everything. The cops didn't ask me who done it when they came by so I didn't tell them it was me 'cause I didn't wanna be put in handcuffs, so a bunch of them went round the block looking for someone who looked like they coulda just killed someone or for a gun 'cause there was only bullets left, and broken stuff everywhere. But I think they kinda guessed it coulda been me 'cause one of them waited there for my mama to pick me up so I wouldn't escape while they were all gone. We hadda wait a whole long while in the end 'cause my mama went to see my daddy in the hospital before she bothered coming round for me. I knew he was dead the minute I saw it happen—I guess killers just know things like that about the

people they kill—but the cops sent him off in the ambulance anyway ‘cause they don’t like when nine-year-olds know better than them so they don’t listen much when you talk if you’re only that old. Cops pretty much don’t wanna hear a peep of you except when they ask a straight question like, “What’s your address, sonny?” which they do if it’s late at night and they don’t wanna wait around anymore in a smashed-up liquor store for some kid—that’s me—to get picked up by his no-show mama. Then they don’t care if it’s just a nine-year-old they’re askin’, even though they think we’re dummies, ‘cause they just wanna dump you off and go on home. But I didn’t tell my address to the cop who asked me for it (even though I knew it already for near on five years) ‘cause none of them listened when I told ‘em my daddy was dead—and also ‘cause I didn’t much wanna go home to my mama ‘cause I knew she’d know it was me who done it. When my mama did finally come by she stood in the doorway, the little welcome

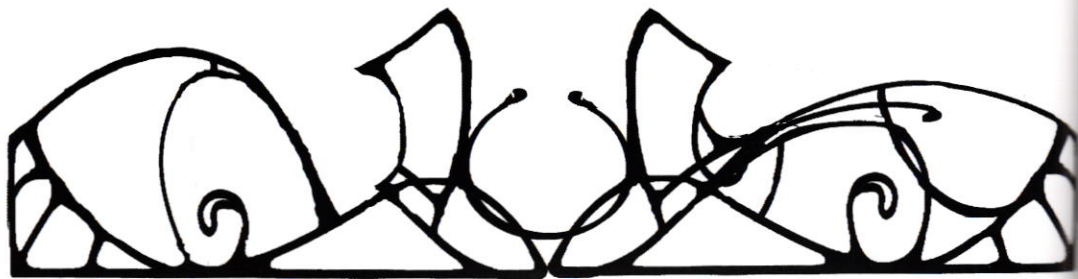
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bell jingled over her head, she looked something awful. She stared over the cop’s fatty bald head, at me, sitting up on the counter, swinging my feet back and forth, kicking my heels into the wood, she stared and stared and then “he’s dead,” but like I said I already knew that ‘cause

I’m the one who done it, I’m the one who shot him dead with a gun the cops couldn’t find afterwards. I musta thrown it in a dumpster somewhere round the block, that’s what killers do, innit?

Now, don’t you get the wrong idea, I liked my daddy all right. It wasn’t something I done on purpose. My mama says it’s ‘cause I’m rotted through, but I was just scared ‘cause I was nine years old and a liquor store is a scary place sometimes. My daddy would leave me alone at the counter while he went round back to pay bills, mostly, and to write letters to Nana up in Good Ol’ En-Why-See, he’d say, and it’d be my job to call for him if he had a customer. But I couldn’t holler, that was his big rule, ‘cause he said no self-respecting storeowner would let his employee holler the customers away, and my daddy was very self-respecting. He always wore a suit to work and his best dress shoes, excepting his Sunday shoes, and shined them every night after work, and he made me wear a button-down shirt and a clip-on tie so I could be self-respecting, too. But being scared makes you do all sorts of rotten things. Sometimes people come in that are so big their bellies wobble when they walk and they look like they could sit on you, just squash you flat, and like they’d wanna do it, too, like they get their

laughs sittin' on nine-year-olds. They think since there's no one else round they can do whatever they feel like and take stuff that isn't theirs and that there's nobody round to stop 'em. And I did it, I got scared 'cause of this one guy, he wasn't self-respecting, I could tell, 'cause he had on just an undershirt with giant wet circles under his pits and down his front and a sweaty little mustache—my daddy says every self-respecting storeowner oughta be clean-shaved—and no one else was round 'cause it was a slow time, right after lunch, which I think he done on purpose, and so I hollered like I'm not supposed to. My daddy came barging outta his back office with his tie loose, which he'd never a done excepting that I was hollering. The man sure didn't look too happy 'cause now my daddy was round to tell him what to do and he did, he told the man what's what, "We're closed, you'll have to come back later," good riddance, sometimes self-respecting storeowners lie about their hours, they're the boss so they can do that sort of thing, except the man didn't much like that and there was a gun and my daddy's hand on my shoulder pushing me off the stool under the counter outta sight bang bang bang bang no more window, just like that, just pieces all over the tile floor, wine seeping under the counter, the knees of my pants, the jingle of the bell over the door, my daddy lying face-up behind the counter, eyes open staring right at me, I'm hollering again, now the customers really won't wanna come round, not much help in a liquor store, am I, and I killed him, lips twitching like he wants to say something, I killed my daddy, but he's dead before he can say it—I could tell the minute it happens—'cause in real life you don't get no time for last words you just die and I killed him, didn't I, I killed my daddy dead. ♦



A GREY STRING OR A YELLOW ROPE

Gavriel Brown



Unwept, unfriended, without marriage-song, I am led forth in my sorrow on this journey that can be delayed no more.

-Antigone by Socrates



In the final moments before fleeing Tokyo he forgot to bring string, though it did not occur to him that the ash-colored cord leading off from the path in front of him belonged to another person. The forest was crisscrossed with these threads that led the lost back to the living, or led the living to the final resting place of the lost. He noticed the charcoal twine's first loop around a hemlock and turned towards it. He paused to listen to the silence.

Still holding his provisions, he stepped off the tightly-packed dirt and onto the supple moss. Aokigahara forest was dark now. The tops of the ancient trees had stolen most of the afternoon light. The forest—also known as, Jukai, the Sea of Trees—lay uneven, as if the tall trees had sprouted from an ocean, whose squalls produced valleys and crags. Every few feet lay boulders of ossified volcanic slag, a hint of the forest's foundation, ruminants of the Mt. Fuji's last eruption.

Ninety minutes from Tokyo, this forest seemed like an ideal escape from the cycle of shattering estrangement, from the chat-rooms and Internet cafes. One train, two busses and a box of pills: he knew getting here was the easiest part.

An internal battle always precedes the act. He knew that—planned for that—stuffing a simple fleece blanket, three pears and the pills in a bag slung over his shoulder. That was why the men and women who came to wrestle with the *Yurei* unraveled spools of thread; sometimes the dejected spirits would win, but sometimes the *Yurei* would lose, and the men and women would follow the string across the otherwise unnavigable forest, up the rocky ridges, across the dunes of moss, down the valleys, back to the dirt paths, and back to their towns.

He followed the grey string as it led him across a spongy bed of pine needles, and then turned sharply up a steep bluff. The roots of the trees sprung from the steep ground over and onto each other, clutching the rocks like spindly fingers grasping for a hold above a pile of limbs. He swiftly climbed up the notch. Sitting on a fallen tree to catch his breath, he turned back. He could barely see the faint line of string as it wound its way back to the path, now far out of sight.

He forced himself back onto his feet. The sun now cast a scarlet hue over the forest. Blotches of orange danced across the green forest floor. He lifted the string off the forest floor and encircled it with his thumb and index finger, feeling the twist of cotton fiber along his skin. He felt a small patch of his skin heat up as his fingers chaffed along the cord on the long stretches between the tress, reminding him of the burn he felt on his thumb after long spells on his computer. Three minutes later, the rope wrapped itself around a thin fir and ended.

The roots of the trees sprung from the steep ground over and onto each other, clutching the rocks like spindly fingers grasping for a hold above a pile of limbs.

He looked up from the tree: a sea of trees. But through the corner of his eye he saw a patch of blue and walked closer. In the distance below, a woman was spreading out a tarp across a patch of moss. His skin prickled under his shirt and his heart began beating in his ears. He froze, hoping he could turn away to his own patch of jungle—from the world. As she lifted the tarp again, their eyes met. Silence.

“I am not afraid,” she said, her voice cracking, just loud enough for him to hear across the expanse of forest. “Do not worry about me. I will be fine.”

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“Oh no, I am not—no, I am not one of the people on patrol,” he stammered and shouted slightly. He was surprised that the forest made no echo, feeling as though he was in a small bedroom, the moss forming a mattress under his feet. Afraid to make conversation in present circumstances, he hesitated. After a moment of thought, he began walking towards her and said, “I am, I am here for the same reason you are.”

“Waiting for the perfect time?”

“No, waiting to lose the final battle,” he said, lifting his shoulders as he walked closer.

“Rope or pills,” she asked.

“Pills,” he said, shaking his backpack to rattle the bottle.

“That’s the kind of death that scares me. The slow shadow of death, eating away the last moments of life, sapping your strength. You die because of exhaustion, I imagine.” she said as the corner of her mouth quivered into a smirk.

“So I guess it’s rope for you?”

“I think. No chance for regret. Unless, that is, you convince me otherwise,” she said.

“I’m not sure I have enough pills to share.”

“Just as well.”

He stepped across the pine needles, treading carefully above the rocks.

“You couldn’t bring your own guide string, you had to use mine?” she said, pointing in the fir where she wound up the final length of grey thread.

“Ya, sorry. I forgot,” he shrugged.

“So what’s in the bag?”

“A blanket, some water, and some fruit—and those pills.”

“I’ll take some fruit. You keep the pills,” she said, pointing to his knapsack.

He unzipped his bag and removed two pears. He peeled off the sticker, walked closer to the tarp where she was now sitting, and rested across from her on a fallen trunk.

“You aren’t going to wash them? Pesticides can kill you,” she said catching the pear he had thrown to her. He eyed her and they shared laugh. Each bit into the fruit, silently wondering if its sweet flesh would be their last.

Now that he had come closer to her, he could recognize her petite features. She was probably in her late twenties, with short purple hair, small lips, and wide cheeks. She was striking, and, despite her inflamed eyes and disheveled look, resembled the women of the red-light Roppongi district. Over a rose-colored t-shirt she wore a plain silver sweatshirt and on top of that, an unassuming black parka. Beside her on the tarp sat an empty backpack and a yellow nylon cord wrapped neatly in a figure eight.

“Really? Yellow?” he asked, “You couldn’t find a more feminine color?”

She smiled. “Sorry. Next time I’ll color-coordinate.”

They sat and ate silently, letting the forest shroud them in stillness. Five minutes passed. They avoided eye contact, and instead stared blankly ahead, watching as the forest slowly dimmed.

“I should get go—“

“No. Stay,” she said.

He was relieved.

“I guess I’ve been waiting so long for something to go right and it never did,” she said forwardly.

“Waiting for the perfect love?”

“No. Even I know perfect love is a grand delusion. I waited for someone to tell me that I mattered because I was his. I was waiting for someone to be my gravity

and he never appeared.”

“I’m sorry,” he said, thinking there wasn’t much else he could say.

“Too deep too quickly,” She paused, hugging her legs. “Sorry for the seriousness. Now I’m cold, and not in the mood for love or grand discussions.”

He unzipped his backpack again and pulled out the blanket. He walked across the crunching tarp, and placed it over her. She looked up and smiled, then rested her head back on her knees. He sat back on log. The forest had darkened, and under the cover of dusk they now glanced directly at one-another.

They made small conversation: about school, about work, about their friends. They agreed that their parents would miss them. That their friends would quickly move on. Death, he thought, made for good conversation.

“I am like a squash, with my insides carved out, thrown out on the carving board before serving, and I feel only the breath of empty space, standing in a handful of dust.”

“Poetic,” he said, thinking that he had heard the line in a song on the radio.

“Thanks.”

“Might you one day find something to fill the empty space?” he asked, seeing as she had made the line her own.

“I can’t find meaning if I always feel hollow.”

“Always?”

“Like going around in endless circles.”

“Yes.”

He breathed in deeply, loud enough for her to think he was brooding, when in fact he did not know how to respond. He excused her virulent renunciations. She was, after all, in Aokigahara, on the border of life and death—and, he reminded himself, so was he.

“And you?” she said, interrupting his thoughts. “Why here?”

“*Hikikomori*,” he said, using the unique Japanese word for digital withdrawal.

With a simple nod, he knew she understood. He felt empty, and suspected she felt the same. But she struck him as outgoing and confident, how could she have ended up here?

“Opposite problem, same forest,” she said, raising her shoulder, tilting her head, and smiling at him again. They both seemed comfortable in the stillness of the forest.

They continued to talk. She told him about her school-yard crushes, he confessed to her about his one summer romance with a grocery store clerk two years before. They both agreed that nostalgia was a toxic medicine.

She continued. “Love at first sight is silly, I know. It’s the most dangerous myth. But love after so much connection, is that too much to ask?”

“Maybe you are asking the wrong question?”

“Maybe.”

“What question should I be asking?”

“If I knew myself I would tell you,” he said.

“So you came here searching for a question?”

“I came here to stop the questions.”

“Same,” she said, pausing momentarily. “This conversation is heavier than cough syrup.”

“What did you expect?”

“I didn’t expect you to stumble unto my patch of forest!”

“Sorry again. If it’s any consolation, I promise it won’t happen again.”

"It is a consolation," she grinned, "and don't be sorry. You brought me this blanket. If this was a coincidence, than it's the kind of thing that can happen in stories."

She wrapped her hands around her knees tightly now, wrapping the blanket fast behind her back and stuffing the ends between her knees. The moon bathed the forest in a muted silver light. She was crying now, he could tell by a faint glimmer in her eyes and the sound of her breathing, but he did not know what to do: console her or let her be alone to fight with the *Yurei*, after all, wasn't that why she traveled to the forest and unraveled her grey string?

For the first time, he spoke. "Real life. I don't think I gave it a chance."

"Opposite problem number two," she replied. "I gave it too many chances."

"Are you going to give it another chance?" She asked.

He didn't answer. He stared into the distant shadow of trees, trying to distract the tightening of his heart, the watering of his eyes. He replayed the question: are you going to give it another chance? As if punctured by a needle, he felt a sudden surge of sadness, erupting first in his chest then traveling through his shoulders, down his limbs, and to his nose and cheeks. He could not hold himself back. He shook violently, his breathing broke, and he, too, wept.

"*Koko-ni Kuru,*" she said.

Legs quivering, he stumbled over to her and she covered him with his blanket. They lay, touching foreheads. Then she placed her small frame in his arms and he rested his nose on her hair. They could hear each other's tears tap lightly unto the tarp. They sunk into the moss and into each other's warmth. He held her, arms across her hips—a live girl with blood in her veins.

"It was good I followed your grey string," he said.

He felt the world pulsating in his ears and released a deep sigh. He closed his eyes. She turned to him and delicately kissed him to the sound of the wind rustling between the pines. Then her caresses turned passionate. As if on impulse, they slowly and silently completed each other's form.

After, he held her gently until her shoulders rose and fell rhythmically, until he

could feel the sonorous breathing of her sleep. He clamped his eyes shut, hoping that he could somehow burn the feeling of her weight, her muscles, her joints, and her oscillating movements into his memory. But a dreamless sleep closed over him quickly like a heavy timber door.

The morning light woke him, and he opened his eyes to a forest veiled in heavy fog. He rolled over, but found only a soft imprint into the moss where her body rested in the night. He sat up and peered across the opaque landscape. Beside him lay an empty backpack. Her neon-green nylon rope was gone, his last pear was gone, and his pills were gone. On the log where he had sat the night before lay her simple canvas shoes, tied together in a neat bow.

He gathered the tarp and folded his blanket. Her shoes were cold when he placed them in his bag. He walked up the hill and found the grey string. She would not need its guidance.

He unwound her loops around the thin fir and picked the sting up from the forest floor. He looped the twine carefully around his hand as he moved cautiously down the damp ravine. He was determined to prevent the now delicate string from unraveling under the weight of the morning dew.

He remembered the limbs he had used as footholds and shuffled down the roots of the trees, winding as he went.

By the time he reached the first hemlock beside the path, his hand had disappeared under the coils of string. The string, removed now from the forest, meant that the trees were again mute and empty, save for her body, hidden somewhere, forever, amid the tortured landscape.

With his heart heavy and his backpack light, he veered right onto the trail, towards the parking lot and towards home. And as he turned his head back down the path one last time, he caught sight of a small silhouette as it laid a new string from the path into the belly of the forest and walked farther and farther into the forest, fainter and fainter into the mist. ♦



