

THE DARK SIDE



OF THE RAINBOW

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Dear Reader,

Welcome to the very first edition of *idiosyncrazy*.

I came to UNC last year after growing up in the Bay Area of CA, including attending high school there. I knew no one coming here, and everything being online because of corona probably didn't help. I began researching organizations to join, including literary journal teams, but they were full. So I started one instead. I don't have any experience in running a literary magazine, and neither does pretty much anyone on this team. But that's the beauty of it; somehow we ended up here.

I personally have as much of an interest in the people and stories behind submissions as in the actual works. For this reason, we've included alongside submitters' pieces the inspirations that fueled their creations.

We've also included other elements of human interest, including philosophical takes. The minds of others fascinate me, and while our submitters have presented great stories to us through their art and writing, they as people embody equally interesting tales. Our primary goal is storytelling in all its forms.

idiosyncrazy is an offbeat undergraduate literary magazine that focuses on the quirks of contemporary times, aspiring to push the NC community to learn and relearn what they thought they knew about their neighbors, to think and rethink what literature and art entail.

We therefore accept work from everyone regardless of age to maximize readers' growths in perspectives. In this inaugural edition, we've included creations that range from the early college-day hobby writing of a now Pulitzer-Prize-winning author to local children's art and views, kids who one day may become Pulitzer Prize winners themselves.

We received far more submissions than expected and are sorry we couldn't include everything but will hold all submissions for consideration in future editions. We hope you enjoy! And, of course, any feedback and thoughts are always welcomed.

Sincerely,
sarz savage
(*Editor in Chief*)

This edition's theme focuses on odd synchronicity in daily life. First up is an article that takes two works of art you would not typically think to combine but somehow harmonize to produce a novel concept popularly referred to as The Dark Side of the Rainbow: *The Wizard of Oz* and Pink Floyd's *The Dark Side of the Moon*.



hollywood bowl, october 2021

This month I saw one of my favorite bands, The Neighbourhood, perform at the Hollywood Bowl (pictured above), site of the 1972 Pink Floyd tour of *The Dark Side of the Moon*. It was as incredible a night for me as I imagine it was for Pink Floyd fans almost 50 years ago.

-sarz



THE DARK SIDE OF THE RAINBOW

by Charlie Savage

[Pink Floyd's Dark Side of the Moon. The film version of "The Wizard of Oz." Two profoundly successful pieces of pop art you would think are completely unrelated. Yet there exists a connection—no, really a synchronicity—between the two that escapes logic or understanding.]

Let lapse, momentarily, your reason and your belief in a sense of order to the universe. (Suspend, too, your belief that we might be doing some very serious drugs.)

Then rent "The Wizard of Oz," turn off your television sound, put Pink Floyd's The Dark Side of the Moon in your CD player and press play at the exact moment the MGM lion roars for the first time. (Some people advocate the third roar, but I've found that the first works better for me.)

The result is astonishing. It's as if the movie were one long art-film music video for the album. Song lyrics and titles match the action and plot. The music swells and falls with characters' movements.

Don't expect to be overwhelmed. But do expect to see enough firm coincidences to make you wonder whether the whole thing was planned. And expect to see many more coincidences that would be definite reaches if it weren't for other parts lining up so well.

If you're not really familiar with The Dark Side of the Moon, it will help to have a lyric sheet handy. But always keep an eye to the TV, lest you miss something. (Don't try the pause-play-pause game; being three or four seconds off would really neutralize the effect.)

Half the fun of exploring this marvel is watching with a group of friends and shouting out the correlations as you make connections. So we won't spell out all the details. Here, however, are a few major examples just to get you started:

- During "Breathe," Dorothy does a tightrope-like walk along the holding pen to the lyric "and balanced on the biggest wave."
- The line "no one told you when to run" from "Time" is sung just as the scene switches to Dorothy running away from home to save Toto.
- "Home, home again" from the "Breathe" reprise is sung as the fortuneteller tells Dorothy to go home.
- "Don't give me that do goody good bullsh-t" from "Money" comes as Glinda the Good Witch of the North floats in as a bubble.
- "Black...and blue" from "Us and Them" is sung as the Wicked Witch of the West appears dressed in black. That is shortly followed by "and who knows which is which" (witch is witch) as she and Glenda confront each other.

- “Brain Damage”—which begins at almost the same time as the movie’s “If I Only Had a Brain”—contains the lines “The lunatic is on the grass” and “Got to keep the loonies on the path.” This is just as the Scarecrow flops around like a madman on the grass and then on the Yellow Brick Road.

The numerous lyrical coincidences between the movie and the album are only part of the story. Often, the actions seems choreographed to the music.

For example, the wordless moan-singing of “The Great Gig in the Sky” is almost perfectly matched with the tornado scene, rising as the storm gathers, falling to a lullaby when Dorothy is knocked out by the window, rising again as the house spins up in the sky, then falling again as the house returns to earth.

The song begins with the gathering storm and ends just as the house hits the ground. Dorothy gets up in silence, walks through the house, and then just as she opens the door to reveal Technicolor Munchkinland, the opening sound effects of “Money” startle the listener. (Moreover, “Money” was the first song on the LP’s second side; Munchkinland is the opening of part two of the film.)

And then there is the clincher: The album’s dramatic ending heartbeats sound as Dorothy listens to the Tin Woodsman’s empty chest. It’s bizarre, uncanny. And it’s more than a little puzzling.

There is no obvious reason why a classic art-rock album recorded in 1973 would be even remotely related to the 1939 film, which is based on the story by L. Frank Baum.

After all, it’s hard to imagine Roger Waters, Dave Gilmour & Co. painstakingly writing their music to the movie’s timing. It’s even harder to imagine that a band so gimmicky-minded (it stuck a blinking LED light on the CD packaging of its latest release, PULSE, for example) would keep quiet for 22 years if it had done it purposefully. And at least for now, no one is talking. Several calls and a faxed request to a Pink Floyd publicist at Columbia Records were unanswered.

A slightly less inside source, Fred Meyer, the secretary of the International Wizard of Oz Club, said this: “What? I don’t know anything about that.” He added that he had never even heard of Pink Floyd.

All of which makes the origin twice as shrouded in mystery. Why would anyone just randomly play the album over the the film, timed with the MGM lion’s roar?

In April [1995], someone posted about it on the Internet Pink Floyd newsgroup, saying he or she'd heard about it from "some people down in Los Angeles." Most users told the poster to go back to his drugs. And a recent posting on the alt.music.pink-floyd newsgroup asking for help in the mystery produced no clues to the origin of the oddity.

In the end, the synchronization was either intentional or a cosmic coincidence—the musical equivalent of the "Infinite Monkeys on Infinite Typewriters Eventually Producing the Complete Works of Shakespeare" effect.

Perhaps all it means is that when everything under the sun is in tune, including two peice of cult-status entertainment seemingly completely separated by time and genre, it will seem as strange as when the sun is eclipsed by a moon.

Charlie Savage is a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and author who writes for the New York Times and also happened to popularize the Dark Side of the Rainbow phenomenon (he didn't actually discover it though!). His article was originally published in the Fort Wayne Journal Gazette in 1995 when he was a freshman at Harvard.

A note from the author: How did this article come to be?

"Someone else posted about it on an early Internet messaging board called Usenet. Those archives don't seem to be preserved so it's lost in the mists now. I had gotten into Pink Floyd in middle school because [my older brother] got into it in college and introduced it to me when he came home; he gave me a couple concert t-shirts he had acquired, which I wore a lot in the eighth grade. When I was in the twelfth grade, some friends and I went to Indianapolis and spent the night in a hotel to go see a Floyd concert. So when I got to college the next year and discovered the then still-new Internet, the Usenet discussion board about the band was one of the things I started paying attention to for awhile."



MORNING SICKNESS

It makes my stomach churn,
 how I can never shake you.
This disgusting ritual,
 waking up
 and seeing your face.
Some form of self-punishment
 where I do nothing but think of you.

A sin I must have committed long ago
now disguised as molding fruit.
 An apple, right there on the counter
 with the rest of your things.

And this is all I know: the fruit,
 that counter,
 your things.

And this is the truth:
I don't live here because I want to,
 it's just I have nowhere else to go.

Here I am: a tumor,
 foreign, unfamiliar.
To the naked eye,
 a snot-nosed child.
Fat fingers wrapped around your pant leg,
 crying in the supermarket.
 Making a scene.
Sorry,
 I forgot you're not my mother;
 I'm not your kid.

A cancer back from remission.
Cells annihilated and then reformed to think of only
you,
 that face,
 those things.
 An apple sitting, rotten on the counter.
And who are you thinking of?

About Madeline Litty: I'm a UNC sophomore from Laurinburg, NC majoring in Dramatic Art and minoring in Writing for the Screen and Stage. In my free time I can usually be found avoiding social interaction by staying in my dorm watching films or working on an original screenplay which I'll probably never get around to finishing.

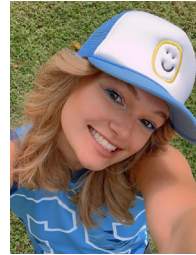
This came from a place of being completely devoted to a person who isn't as devoted to you, whether it's because they can't be or because they just don't care enough. And then knowing you're constantly putting yourself in the position to be hurt or let down by this person but not being able to stop yourself because of the hopeful 'what if' that lingers despite everything.





Mondays at the Mill

About Lucy Froelich: I'm from Greensboro, NC and am a UNC junior studying Media and Journalism on the Ad/PR track with a minor in Sociology. I've always loved art, as it's a great form of self expression.



I was so grateful to complete this mural for my internship this past summer; it was truly an amazing experience! It was for the apartment complex Revolution Mill in Greensboro, NC, and I worked on it every Monday and solely Mondays, hence the title. My design was inspired by muralists Kate and Jess, local NC artists. It was an awesome project to be a part of and I'm super happy with how it turned out!

THE ROCKSTARS ARE DYING

I was thinking about The Who when my mom announced that she would be starting a job as assistant librarian at the Whispering Lake Public Library. We were setting the table together while late sunshine cast patterned shadows on the wallpaper.

“Maureen, are you listening to me?”

“Yes,” I said, but I was actually lamenting over Roger Daltrey’s hair, and how beautiful it was in the sunlight, and how tragic it was that he’d decided to cut it all off.

“We’re going to have to figure out how you’re getting to and from school. I might be able to pick you up in the afternoons when I’m done working, but I don’t know what we’re going to do about the mornings. Maybe you can get one of the neighbors to drive you.”

“Can’t I just walk?” I asked, and my mom shook her head.

“Tell your father we’re eating dinner now,” she said.

I sighed, still thinking about Roger as I walked into the living room. My dad was on the couch, where the muted television blinked pale lights across his sleeping face.

I approached him and his eyelids snapped open. “Maureen,” he said, beginning to sit up. “Did you know they’ve been talking about a Beatles reunion on TV?”

“I heard,” I said. I’d started counting, and this was the third time this week that my dad had mentioned a Beatles reunion. I switched off the television for him and it blared static for several seconds. “Dinner’s ready, Dad.”

My mom thrust open the curtains and I glanced into the yard. It was fall now and the leaves were all a thousand different colors, the trees in the window like prisms in the sun. I sighed, because it almost looked how Roger Daltrey’s hair used to shine under the stage lights before he’d cut it all off.

Later that week, my mom introduced me to my neighbors, the Marriotts, who would be giving me rides to school from now on, and who, despite having lived next door to me for most of my life, I knew almost nothing about.

“You must be Maureen,” a girl smiled. She had feathered hair and Jordache jeans and lipgloss that was sticky and red like maraschino cherries. “I’m Jodie.”

Jodie kind of smelled like bubblegum. Not the smooth kind of bubblegum from a gumball machine but the chalky kind you might’ve found in the checkout line at a gas station convenience store that sort of tasted like wax.

“And I’m Chris,” grinned a boy about a head taller than his sister. “Sorry to hear about your, uh, dad.”

“Oh,” I said. “That’s alright.” We all smiled at each other. There wasn’t usually much for me to say after that.

I soon discovered that Chris loved the Ramones. He played their songs so loudly on the way to school that they rattled against the frame of his car, vibrating “Sheena is A Punk Rocker” through those little spaces between the windows and doors so that all of Whispering Lake could hear Joey Ramone as he sang about the surfer kids going to the Discotheque Au Go Go and the girl who just couldn’t stay.

I also soon discovered that Jodie hated the Ramones, and specifically, Joey, their lead singer. Every morning, she would ask Chris if someone could just go ahead and sedate him already, and every morning, Chris would tell her to shut up, while I sat in the backseat, saying nothing.

In the afternoons, I started waiting in the school gym until my mom picked me up.

Sometimes people went to watch the basketball team practice after school, which meant I could go there and be alone and purposeless and no one would know.

I sat on the bleachers and looked at all of the basketball boys, boys in short shorts and striped socks, boys with long, feathery hair, boys with puka shell necklaces and soda tab bracelets, boys who probably only exceeded me by several inches, but were built tall and lanky because they grew too fast, too fast to notice anyone was watching them.

“Um, hey,” a voice said, and I startled because I realized that a boy was talking to me. Not a basketball boy, but a boy in jeans with a Sony Walkman and a corduroy jacket lined with Sherpa. He stood in front of me on the bleachers. “You got any batteries? Mine are about to die.”

“Oh, no, I don’t,” I said. “Sorry.”

“That’s alright,” he shrugged. Then he sat down next to me. “I’m Andy.”

“Maureen,” I said.

He nodded and began to rewind the tape in his Walkman. I tried to think of something else to say to him, but I couldn’t think of anything, so instead I stayed quiet and counted all the boys in the Whispering Lake High School gymnasium. There were sixteen now, including him.

My mom soon realized how long it had been since she’d had a job, and that she was going to need more than two sweaters and a pair of dress slacks if she was going to be working full time at the library now. She asked me to come shopping with her one day after she picked me up from school, and we soon found ourselves rummaging through the defect clearance section at the Hudson Belk in downtown Whispering Lake. The lights burned dim over the fraying carpets and the faint noise from the store speakers sounded like muffled elevator music. I picked up a knee-length tweed skirt with a missing button and my mom shook her head.

“I can’t wear that, Maureen,” she said. “I’m bending over all day.”

“You could wear tights with it,” I suggested, but my mom was already hooking the hanger back onto the crowded rack.

“Why don’t you go try those stores up the street,” she told me, her expression matching that of the faceless mannequin in a Laura Ashley gown that stood near the dressing rooms. She picked up a plum-colored pantsuit that was two sizes too small for her and I left the store. I crossed the street to the front of the Whispering Lake Discount Theater, where a row of posters for discontinued movies were lined up in a neat row against the brick wall. There in the middle was a shadowy image of Roger Daltrey as Tommy, with dark sunglasses and a cork in his mouth, back when he still had long wild curls framing his face, inverted over itself like a reflection in a pool of black water. *Your senses will never be the same*, it read across the bottom.

I’d missed Tommy when it first came out in the theaters a few years ago. I thought about Roger Daltrey and his curls and decided that I couldn’t miss it again, that this might be my last chance to ever see it, and that I would have to find someone to go watch it with this time. Movies usually played in the discount theater for about two months. I’d find someone before then, I told myself. I’d have to. I decided to count the rest of the movie posters.

My mom emerged from Belk several minutes later with a large shopping bag and a scowl on her face. “Maureen!” she called, and I met her on the other side of the road where our station wagon was parallel parked near the A&P. “What were you doing?” she asked me, turning her key to unlock the front door as she tossed the shopping bag carelessly into the backseat.

“I was looking at the movies. The discount theater is playing Tommy.” I said.

“Who’s Tommy?” my mom asked.

“You know,” I said. “The pinball wizard.”

“The *who*?” my mom asked.

“Yeah, The Who,” I said. “It’s their rock opera.”

“Oh,” my mom frowned. She scattered some leaves aside as she opened the driver door.

They were everywhere now, in fading colors, like remnants of confetti no one had bothered to clean up.

I was silent as the station wagon spat itself into its familiar low hum. My mom switched on the car radio, where Mick Jagger was singing about various types of dissatisfaction.

“Ugh,” she grimaced, and flipped through the rest of the stations. She paused on one where Don and Phil Everly were harmonizing against some upbeat twangy guitars about saying hello to loneliness and feeling like they could die. “Much better,” she smiled, and I saw her eyes in the rearview mirror, all distant and forlorn and unapologetic.

I continued to spend my mornings listening to Chris and Jodie bicker over the sound of “Now I Wanna Sniff Some Glue” or “Beat on the Brat” or “Teenage Lobotomy” or whatever variation of the Ramones’ punk acrimony Chris felt was suitable for that morning’s drive to school. Every morning, still, Jodie would make an unfavorable comment about Joey Ramone, Chris would tell her to shut up, and then they’d argue back and forth while I watched the trees quietly from the window.

Chris smiled to me now in the hallways, but I didn’t know if it was out of kindness or sympathy. That smell of Jodie’s never really went away either, and she carried it with her through school like a cloud of chemical perfume, though whether it was chalky bubblegum or wax, I wasn’t quite sure anymore.

I thought about asking them to go see Tommy with me, but I figured maybe I should wait, that I should get to know them better, and maybe then we could all go together and I wouldn't miss it again in the theaters.

One morning, much to Jodie's dismay, Chris was playing a Ramones song called "I'm Against It," an angsty anthem in which Joey Ramone screamed out a long and comprehensive list of the things that he fervently and undoubtedly didn't like, which included, but was certainly not limited to: politics, communists, games, fun, Jesus freaks, circus geeks, summer, spring, sex, drugs, water bugs, poverty, playing ping pong, the Viet Cong and Burger King.

"What could Joey Ramone possibly have against Burger King?" Jodie yelled. "Doesn't he sing in that other song that met the love of his life in Burger King?"

"Maybe he changed his mind," Chris said.

"He can't just change his mind."

"He's Joey Ramone. He can do whatever he wants."

Jodie whipped her head in my direction. "Do you think people can change their minds, Maureen?"

I could see the flakes of her hairspray up close. "I mean, I guess?"

"Ha!" Chris exclaimed. "See, I told you."

Jodie began to toss her head and forth in frustration, and Chris yelled at her to cut it out. She refused, and the next song on the tape, ironically, was "Suzy Is a Headbanger."

Later that afternoon, Andy asked me if I wanted to listen to some tapes with him on his Walkman. I was a bit surprised. We'd been sitting next to one another on the bleachers for almost two weeks now without saying a single word to each other.

"Sure," I said. He moved closer to me so that our ankles were touching. Then he handed me a headphone and Side A of *Sticky Fingers* by the Rolling Stones began to play against my left ear.

"Oh, my mom would hate this," I smiled.

"Why?" he asked.

"My mom hates Mick Jagger," I said. "But she loves Don and Phil Everly to pieces."

"Hm," he said. "Do you like conspiracy theories?"

“What?” I asked.

“I think I know a conspiracy theory your mom would hate,” Andy explained. “The girl in ‘Wake Up, Little Susie,’ you know, by the Everly Brothers—some people think she’s the same Little Susie the Rolling Stones sing about who thinks she’s the queen of the underground.”

“Oh, my mom would definitely hate that.”

“Yeah,” Andy nodded. “And I don’t know if your mom hates the Beatles too, but you can tell her there’s this other theory that they secretly got back together a few years ago and went under the name Klaatu.”

“Really,” I said, and I could hear the basketball boys and the high-pitched squeaks of their shoes resounding across the walls of the gym in short, curtailed echoes. “Why do you know all of this stuff?”

“It fascinates me,” he shrugged. “I think you can tell a lot about a person by the kind of conspiracy theories they believe in.”

“That’s kind of weird,” I told him.

“Yeah,” he agreed. “It is.”

He and I continued to listen to the rest of *Sticky Fingers*. I decided then that I liked Andy, not just because he was weird, but because he seemed like the kind of person that you could tell things to, like that you hated life, and instead of feeling sad or sorry or sympathetic, he would just nod his head and say, “Me too.” When we got to “Dead Flowers” on Side B, I smiled a little every time I heard the name Little Susie. I wondered if by any chance she was also a headbanger.

I was raking leaves in the front yard while my dad sat in a chair in the driveway, sulking. He’d told me it would be alright if we just left the leaves there this year, but I told him if we did that, they’d get all brown and crunchy and dissolve into the ground. My mom said I should just go ahead and do it, that my dad probably only felt bad because raking leaves used to be his job, and if we left them there this year, then they’d never get raked again.

He was watching me now while he finished off a cup of coffee. “You want to take a break, Maureen?”

“I’m alright, Dad. Just a few more left.” I stretched the rake to the end of the yard, near the Marriotts’ house, and I looked up at their windows. There were four on the side of their house. I wondered which of them, if any, were Chris and Jodie’s rooms, but I couldn’t tell from outside.

“Frank!” my mom yelled from the edge of the driveway. “What do you think you’re doing?”

I looked over and my dad was leaning out of his chair, one hand pressed on the siding of the house for balance. “I’m just getting some more coffee,” he said.

“Sit back down,” my mom shook her head. “I’ll get it for you.”

“No. Don’t do that,” my dad said, slumping back down in his chair. “I changed my mind. I don’t need any coffee.”

“I’m going to be late for my shift,” my mom frowned. “How do I look?” she said, and she turned so we all could see her slacks and sweater. Thankfully she hadn’t chosen the plum pantsuit from the clearance rack that day at the Hudson Belk.

“Like a real crazy librarian lady,” my dad said, and my mom swatted a dismissive hand in his direction.

“Watch after your father, Maureen,” she said to me.

I raked the rest of the leaves into a pile at the edge of the yard, and as my mom drove away in the station wagon, my dad frowned, staring into his empty cup.

“Do you want me to get you some coffee, Dad?” I asked.

“Please,” he told me, so I propped the rake up against a tree and walked across the driveway.

“Oh, Maureen,” he said. “When are the Beatles getting back together? It better be soon. I’m wasting away over here.”

“Well, Dad,” I said. He handed me his mug and it was surprisingly cold in my hands. “You ever heard of a band called Klaatu?”

Andy asked me later if I wanted to listen to tapes with him on his Walkman again, and I said sure. Then he changed his mind and asked if I wanted to leave this place instead.

“What place?” I asked.

He shot me a weird look and then laughed. “The gym, Maureen.”

“Oh,” I said. “Okay.” So, we left the bleachers and I followed Andy behind the school and past the trees, where there were cigarette butts and paper wrappers and broken bottles buried everywhere between the scattered dead leaves. We reached a wooded pit near the road where I knew people liked to go sometimes to smoke and make out and cut class, and Andy crouched down on the ground behind the empty trees.

“What are you doing?” I asked.

“We’re gonna watch people hitchhike,” he said.

“Why?” I asked.

“Why not,” he shrugged.

There was a woman standing near the road in a pair of short white boots, the kind that Nancy Sinatra once wore but were so painfully out of style now, with stiff shoulders and a frown as she tossed her thumb backwards. A backfiring pickup truck slowed to where she was standing, and a large burly man with a mustache and the sleeves of his t-shirt cut off rolled down his window.

“His name can be Cliff,” Andy whispered. “And she can be Sandy Jo.”

We watched as Sandy Jo and Cliff drove away and Andy explained to me how we could turn it into a game. “We name the hitchhikers,” he said, and I sort of liked the idea, pretending we could know something about these strangers and their lives when really we knew nothing at all.

“Alright,” I said. “This is weird, but alright.”

We named them all, these sad men whose cars smelled like stale popcorn and tobacco, these confused girls who listened to Heart and Jethro Tull and radio static, these quiet boys who wore big, round sunglasses to hide the hotness in their eyes, these lost women in bright orange halter tops held by only a little string around their neck. There were a lot of these kinds of people in Whispering Lake, I realized.

Andy asked if I wanted to listen to music on his Walkman as we watched them, so we shared his headphones again while Led Zeppelin IV played in our ears.

“When did you first start doing this?” I asked.

“I’ve always done it,” he said. “Everyone does it. People do it to us too.”

“People watch us through holes in the trees?” I asked.

“No,” he said.

“They watch us through holes in something else?”

“I don’t know, Maureen,” he said. “People just watch us, that’s all. You learn stuff about people by watching them.”

“I don’t know if that’s true,” I said. “I have these neighbors who drive me to school every day, and the only thing I’ve learned about them is that the sister really hates Joey Ramone.”

“You’re not really watching them, then,” Andy said, and he tilted his head back.

I glanced up where he was looking. It was an empty sky, all pale from the cold and the stiffness of the daylight through the empty veins of the overhead tree branches.

“You say some weird stuff sometimes, Andy,” I told him, but maybe he was right.

We were quiet after that. “Going to California” was playing and Robert Plant was singing with mandolins and guitars about leaving to find a girl with love in her eyes and flowers in her hair. Sometimes people used to say that Robert Plant kind of looked like Roger Daltrey, but I could never see it. Roger’s hair was much prettier.

Tommy had been in the discount theater for a while now, and I knew it probably wouldn’t be there much longer, which meant I would have to think of someone who could go see it with me, and soon. My parents would never watch it, and I didn’t know Jodie or Chris well enough to ask either one of them. Maybe I could ask Andy, I thought to myself, as I laid alone on my bedroom floor, tracing my fingers over all of the records on my shelf.

I found my Tommy album. It wasn’t exactly the same as the movie soundtrack; the movie had been based off of the album and had new versions for each of the songs, but I liked the way the original soundtrack looked, with shadowy figures, who I think were supposed to be the members of the band, glancing through little diamond-shaped holes of a background of blue and clouds and birds. It made no sense. But then again, the album made no sense. It was about a boy who couldn’t see, hear, or speak, who suddenly becomes famous for playing pinball, gains back all of his senses, and then starts a cult. I’m sure the movie would make no sense either, and that’s part of the reason why I’d wanted to see it so badly. That and the fact that I’d get to see two hours of Roger’s beautiful hair.

I put down the album and wistfully picked up *Who Are You*, the last Who album released before Roger Daltrey had cut off his long curls. I looked at the cover. The whole band seemed to be staring menacingly, except for their drummer, Keith Moon, who looked confused as he sat backwards in a chair labelled “Not To Be Taken Away.” He’d died unexpectedly after the album was released.

I had a lot of Beatles albums too, ones my dad and I had bought at the Records and More a long time ago, their “pre-reunion” songs, as he liked to call them now. I thought about putting one of them on for him so he could hear it from the other room, but I didn’t know if he was sleeping or not, and my mom told me I shouldn’t disturb him. I put all of my records away and came to a decision. I was going to ask Andy to go see Tommy with me at the discount theater. I just had to figure out how to pose the question.

Andy and I walked to the ditch again after school, and this time we listened to *Morrison Hotel* by The Doors on his Walkman. We watched people through the trees again, and halfway through the tape, Andy decided to put away his Walkman since the batteries were low again. I thought that it might be a good opportunity to ask him about seeing Tommy.

“Hey, uh, Andy?” I asked as he folded up his headphones. “Do you like The Who?”

“Yeah,” he shrugged. “They’re dying now, though.”

“What?” I laughed.

“The rockstars are dying,” he said, and I realized that he was serious.

I narrowed my eyes. “Is this another conspiracy theory or something?”

“No.” Andy shook his head. “You’re watching them die right now,” he said. “We all are.”

A bunch of ex-hippies came by, probably following the Grateful Dead. Their Volkswagen van drove past us with doors covered in big, circular flowers that looked like they’d been painted and painted over about a thousand times.

“Andy, the rockstars aren’t dying,” I said. “I mean, I know Keith Moon is dead, but—”

“Not dead, Maureen.” Andy said, clipping his Walkman onto his jeans. “*Dying*. Which is worse than being dead.”

“How is that worse than being dead?”

“When something’s dying, you have to sit there and watch it die. You don’t get it.”

“Of course I get it.”

“No, you don’t.”

“Yes I do,” I said. “Andy, my dad is dying.”

“Oh,” he said. His expression went blank, and he didn’t seem to be looking at the trees, or the road, or anything anymore. “I’m sorry, Maureen.”

“It’s alright,” I said. “You didn’t know.”

“No, but—I’m sorry.”

“It’s alright,” I said again. “Please don’t be sorry.”

When it was time for me to walk back to the front of the school so my mom could pick me up, he told me I could go ahead without him, that he’d be fine right here by himself in the empty trees and the shriveling leaves.

“Do you ever get tired of watching people?” I asked.

“Sometimes,” Andy said.

“What do you do then?”

“I don’t know,” he said. “I guess I find other people.”

I stood up from the ditch and turned to leave for my mom, and watched him intently, hoping he might change his mind and come with me.

“I’m really sorry about your dad, Maureen.”

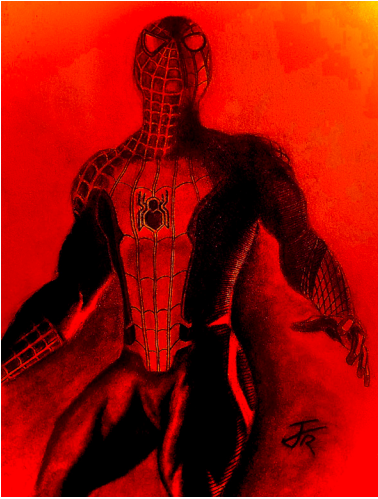
“It’s alright,” I said. “It’s not like it’s your fault or anything.” I waited another moment before leaving, but Andy didn’t say anything back. I wasn’t even sure if he heard me say goodbye. He was right there beside me, but really he was gone.

End of excerpt. See the full story on our website!

About Emily Clemente: I’m a UNC senior from Fuquay Varina, NC studying English & Comparative Literature.

This piece incorporates the ways people’s stories and lives sync up and create distance at the same time through the thematic elements of weirdness, conspiracy theories, rock music, watching others and converging paths through little ‘holes’ in the universe. I chose the backdrop of the changing music scene of the early 1980s to exemplify these connections, but I feel as though many of these topics are still relevant and translate into how we can connect with and relate to one another in contemporary times.





Spiderman

Infect the Rainbow



About Justin Farmer: I'm an 18-year-old student at UNC who loves to draw people, usually celebrities and fictional characters from pop culture.



Inspiration for Spiderman: It is heavily rumored that the previous Spiderman actors will reprise their roles to play in the new movie *Spiderman: No Way Home*, so I combined the suits from each Spiderman incarnation into one singular body.

Inspiration for Infect the Rainbow: Pink Floyd's *Dark Side of the Moon* and the character Venom from the 2018 movie with the same name. A dark and ominous monster (similar to Venom) is crawling on a rainbow and is slowly turning it black as if it were infecting the rainbow.

UNDERSTANDING THE SOUL

What is the soul? Do humans even have souls? Do other creatures have souls too?

These are just a few of the questions that have plagued philosophers and curious minds alike for as long as thinking has been possible. Questions, many would consider, that are unanswerable. To an extent I agree that finding a true answer, a scientific resolution to the existence of a soul, seems impossible. However, I will offer a brief take on why souls might exist in this short piece and encourage you to think about it. For context, I am not affiliated with a particular religion but do believe there is much to be gained by learning about different religions and perspectives.

Furthermore, I will not be citing any famous philosophers or backing up any of my claims throughout this piece. This is merely a collection of thoughts by me on the soul. If you have absolutely nothing else to gain from this, you can at least rest knowing there is someone else out there who is thinking about something while mindlessly scrolling through social media.

To begin, I will pose a question to the reader. Can you think of something that does not exist? Now, don't be so quick to answer. If you are thinking of something like a dragon or a fairy, you would be right in thinking that they don't technically exist. The issue is that these things are rooted in reality. For example, a dragon is basically a mix of a giant bird and a dinosaur (or lizard if you prefer). A fairy, stereotypically at least, is represented as a tiny human (sometimes with wings). While these things might not exist in the sense that we cannot go out to the park and find a dragon or a fairy, they exist in the sense that they can be derived from reality.

They are no more than extensions of something that exists. So, I'll ask you once again to conjure up something that does not exist. For instance, try to think of a color that does not exist. Not so easy, right? You can think of a color you might not have seen before, but you do so by blending colors that already exist. If you think about it, asking someone to imagine something that doesn't exist is a silly question. You cannot do it, because if you did then that thing would exist, and it wouldn't be something that did not exist anymore.

Now I will pose my second question. Why can we think of the soul if it doesn't exist? Why do we all possess the ability to think of the concept of a soul? Previously, when I asked you to think of something that did not exist it was likely quite easy to find the reality root of what you thought of. For the sake of consistency, I will stick with referring to the dragon example. It was easy to point to the objects which the dragon mimics. The same cannot be said about the soul. What aspect of reality is the soul mimicking? When we finally arrive at an answer, it's typically not quite as concrete as the dragon. We usually must resort to phrases like "It is the essence of life" to describe the soul. However, phrases like these often contain other extreme abstractions, which lead to issues. In this example, the term "life" is being used. The issue is you cannot describe life in simple terms like bird and lizard but only in terms of an outline.

It seems the only way we can provide meaningful descriptions of the soul is through outlines, similar to how we describe the concept of life (or, better put, reality/existence in general). There is a collection of concepts which fall into the "outline" category. These concepts seem to be the limit of human knowledge and description. The soul and the human experience of life are so close to our understanding yet so far away at the same time. It's like looking through a microscope, but the magnification is too strong. The harder we try to look, the blurrier and more abstract the subject becomes. So, again, I ask you to ponder: Why can we understand the concept of soul? It seems we can hardly describe it, yet the concept exists because we can think of it. We cannot necessarily prove its nonexistence, yet at the same time it's equally hard to prove its existence.

Does the soul fall into a concretely describable nonexistence or is it subjected to the outline category? Perhaps the soul is something better understood through experiences, away from the blurry microscope many skeptics (including myself) like to put it under.

About Edward Baker: I am a 3rd-year UNC Computer Science major from the Triangle area who enjoys playing bass, trying new foods and running in my free time.



I spend a lot of time thinking about life, for better or for worse. These are just some of the thoughts I managed to write down on a concept I find very intriguing: the soul.



Forbidden City

About Evan Liu: I'm a senior double majoring in Business and Computer Science. I'm half-Chinese and grew up in Beijing.

This was one of a couple snowmen we found outside the Forbidden City after a rare snowfall in 2015. It doesn't snow often, so people will go out of their way to have a little fun anywhere!



CONFESSIONS

What do belts, tucked in polos, and pressed khakis have to do with my faith?

Does giving up soda for forty days cleanse my soul?

Oh wait, I forgot! Modest clothing and an annual fast promotes a modest life.

And a modest life is a faithful one.

Modesty reduces lust, and lust leads to sin (or in other words sex sssshhhh).

Duh.

Oh yes! And sex is the transmission of the world-famous Original Sin!

But wait! Isn't that pillar of Christianity simply a misreading?

A misreading of Augustine's *Confessions*.

Didn't Augustine write that Original Sin is a sin of the soul, not the body?

So Original Sin doesn't have all that much to do with sex. Right?

And isn't Augustine is our most renowned theologian,
shouldn't our doctrines align with his?

And why does the pope reign from Rome?

Romans were the ones who nailed Jesus to a tree.

Am I supposed to lead a life of modesty
and brutal irony too?

Oh, and about the pope.

Ex Cathedra, right? Infallible.

All his doctrines and decisions come straight from the chair of St. Peter.

Even when he sold tickets to heaven or sent devoted men
to slaughter Jews in the Second Crusade.

I'm sure St. Peter would have certainly done the same.

Besides, that was a thousand years ago, it doesn't matter, right?

But what do I know?

A lot. I think.

The more I learn, the more I know, but the less I care.

And that's sad.

But so is living with my belt buckled, polo tucked, and khakis pressed.

I am not sorry for these and all my sins.

For my penance? I think I'll crack open a cold can of coke
and find myself a pretty girl.

About Will Donohue: I'm a UNC junior studying Business and History. I was born in Glen Ridge, NJ and moved to Cary, NC when I was 9. After years of admiring song lyrics, I tried my hand at writing my own songs during my freshman year. Since then, I've taken several poetry classes, and writing poetry has become one of my favorite ways to pass time. I hope you enjoy my work and the awesome material from all the talented contributors to this month's edition.

My sophomore year I took a very interesting Medieval Christianity class that examined a lot of the doctrines and historical events of the Catholic Church. I grew up attending Catholic school for twelve years, and the class shed light on the reality of the Catholic Church's history, the bias ingrained in my theology classes and how that bias affected my beliefs as a kid. As seen in the poem, I ended up fairly displeased with the 'lessons' I learned in my Catholic school.





Florence

About Sarah Frisbie: I'm a 19-year-old artist, independent curator and researcher studying Art, Art History and Global Studies at UNC. Having only worked in dry media for much of my childhood, I first picked up a paintbrush in 8th grade on the sudden, instinctive conviction that I was a painter. Since then, I've concentrated in acrylic and oil painting, along with several curated exhibitions, works of sculpture and performance. Art @sefrisbie.art!



These were taken in Florence, Italy in the summer of 2021—the one of the many Davids is from a souvenir stand, and the puppets were in a collectibles store window (Pinocchio was born in Florence!).

IN STONE

Language of the dull flame:
my fingers pressed into the open wound
as cream spills onto fresh linen.

He reverses into my driveway, hand behind the headrest:
language of the humming engine, white noise
of the movie projector.

Hands buried in the crop field at dusk,
rain clouds on the horizon that remind us
how dry the air is here.

He descends onto me
as the rain falls gently.

It feels like a song stuck in my head:
language of his hands leaving mine, of skin
breaking apart.

I have feared the breath of time, of the season's reaping, of the combustion of
the engine,
and I fought against it all:

Language of the stone,
language of strata and of antiquity.

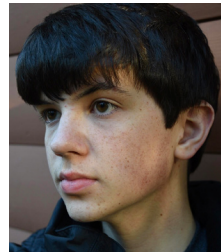
Language of his eyes, his clothes, his head
resting on the nape of my neck.

The way his hair shone like amber in daylight,
rupturing like molten steel, cooling in twists of golden twine:

Language of the Earth opening to us like a chrysalis,
and of everything that we spoke into its abyss.

About Kevin Zimmerman: I'm a senior at UNC. I study Film and Video Production and am a writer and artist. My writing and art tend to focus on my experience as a queer/genderqueer person.

The inspiration for this piece was a field. One afternoon I remember from some years ago. How it was influenced by and mirrored the environment it was spent in.





Crossroads



About Blair Newsome: I am a 17-year-old senior at West Forsyth High School in Clemmons, NC.

Given the prompt of a high contrast self portrait and being more prominent in painting, I did an 'emerging out of the dark' portrait. Inspired by Caravaggio and lately being in the dark regarding college decisions, I portrayed my emotions on a black canvas.

YAMS WITH A SIDE OF SELF-HATRED IS A COMMON FOOD EATEN BY THE GHANAIAN DIASPORA

I hate yams. That's the only thing my mother ever taught me to make. She said, Efuwa, you don't know how to make Ghanaian food; I said, Because we're in America. She sulked and taught me how to cook yam. I hate yams.

Slice, wash, still brown, scrub. Still brown. Why is it still brown—I didn't peel it.

I don't like the way it tastes, bland and sometimes bitter, and starchy, and food that Ghanaians eat because they farm a lot and need energy. I'm in America, I'm American, I need salads so I can be a little skinnier, I can't be lighter but I can be skinny, *skinnier*, not too skinny. And I can't be lighter, yet. *Yet.*

Peel, wash. Okay, it's white. Boil, spill. Spill? Crap. Spill.

There's a napkin, but I can't take it because it's not for cleaning spills. That's another thing Ghanaians do, they sort kitchen napkins. Their food stains so much you can't use just one, two or even three napkins.

Wipe, squeeze, wipe, squeeze.

Why do *I* have to make the yam? I'm tired, she said. Not tired enough to skip this week's Bollywood show. That's another thing about Ghanaians, they love Bollywood, and Nollywood, and a few others. They also like Hollywood, only their movies though, or cartoons for the kids.

You can eat Yam with anything, she said. Can I eat it with mayonnaise? No, then I can't eat it with anything. Don't annoy me, she said. I scoffed, she pinched me. Her pinches are painful, that's another thing about Ghanaians. Downright sadists they are. Their parents I mean. My parents. My mum. Sometimes. Other times she's fun. When she's not being so Ghanaian.

"It's ready."

"You didn't add salt."

I didn't add salt. She saw that and didn't bother to mention it. "I can't do much about that, it's ready."

"Drop the attitude."

"What attitude?"

"*Akua.*"

My name is Jennie. That's another thing about Ghanaians, they name everyone after the days of the week. Monday to Sunday, there're names for each.

Adjoa, Abena, Akua, Yaa, Afiba, Ama, Quashie for girls.

Kojo, Kwabena, Kwaku, Yaw, Kofi, Kwame, Kwesi for boys.

Sometimes it's their first name, but often it's one of their middle names. Even if that name isn't on your birth certificate, it's still your name. That's just how it is. Call 'Akua' in Ghana and ten people will look your way, same for every other name on that list. Jennie works better. We're in America.

"Yes, mum," I groaned; she frowned.

"Infact, ko. Wo jiji mi." That means: In fact, leave. You're annoying me. She should speak more English.

Ghanaians call their parents 'Mummy' and 'Daddy' no matter their age. Maybe 'Ma' instead of 'Mummy' sometimes. Always 'Daddy' though. But in America, 'Daddy' is only used by kids. That's what Sara says. She's my friend from school. She's American.

She doesn't lie to me like my parents. They tell me I should be proud to be Ghanaian. But Sara told me why all the kids at school laugh at me—it's because I *am* Ghanaian. There were a lot of reasons, but they were all things I do because I'm Ghanaian, or because I'm black, or because I'm dark-skinned, or because I have kinky hair. You'd think that one would imply the other, but no. They like to compartmentalise, Americans, I mean. I got unlucky in all departments. So they never run out of things to laugh at.

Except my face, and my body. Here I'm slim. In Ghana, I'm too skinny, not well endowed. My art teacher once told me I had a 'Eurocentric' nose when he told us to draw self portraits. I found it strange because I know many Africans with small noses. That's, like, an East African thing, isn't it? Africans are very diverse looking, didn't everyone originate from Africa?

I didn't say that to him, because I loved that he had said it. Some boy in the back of the class told me after class that I would be prettier if I could ditch the accent and my hair was less 'nappy'. I said that he had the accent and I hadn't taken a nap so I didn't understand what he meant. The whole class laughed, and he said that at the very least I was funny.

It turns out that Africans are starving monkeys or circus monkeys in the eyes of Americans. Monkeys nonetheless. Not me, though. I have straight hair now, talk white, and I will save enough money so that I can bleach my skin and be lighter.

"Akua!"

"Yes, Ma!" Silence. That's another thing about Ghanaians, parents will make you come to them before sending you; oftentimes, they will send you back to where you came from to get an item that was right next to you. I ran to the kitchen. It was hot from all the steam, and she held my phone. My phone with a long list of things that weren't acceptable in school. Most of them were Ghanaian.

"If you peel the skin off of yam, it's still yam." Why does she always speak in parables?

"But it will be white yam, Ma." She looked sad. "We eat the white part."

“I suppose we do.” She took my hand in hers, “Akua?”

“Yes, Ma?”

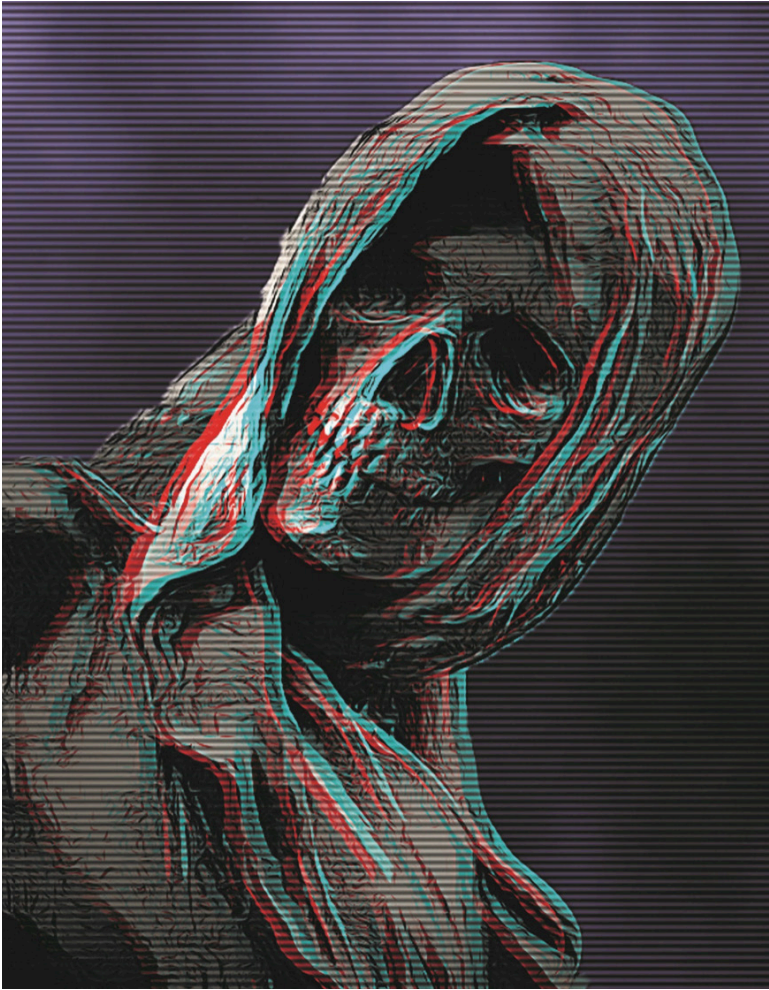
“You are not yam.” Wasn’t it her that brought yam up? “If you peel off your skin, you’ll only bleed.” She grabbed my sides and looked straight into my eyes, “You’ll only bleed.”

The tears slipped from my eyes and I didn’t understand why. She held me in her arms and soon the quiet streams turned to stifled sobs in her chest. I wanted to go home. I want to go home. I hate it here. I hate stupid yams.

About Anna Ofori-Som: Hi! I’m a sophomore majoring in Pre-Business and looking into getting a minor in Creative Writing. I like to binge horror movies and do anything creative. Thanks for reading my work. :)

I wrote this specifically for the Ghanaian/African Diaspora that moved to America after living their whole life in a different place. That first few months can be hard on you, you’re not alone!





Death Is Inevitable

About Deja Boone: I am a UNC junior majoring in Advertising & Public Relations and Studio Art. I'm a huge marvel fan and my hobby is making art.

Death is a very interesting topic to me and I thought it would be cool to make something experimenting with different elements in Photoshop.



THE MAD HALLUCINATIONS OF HERBERT LEWS (PART I)

Herbert Lews hated a large number of things, prominent among which were what he termed ‘irritating social functions,’ a category that for him included most gatherings of more than ten other people. He was something of a misanthrope, popular with no one, and when in company did little besides pick needless fights over trivial issues—he was, in short, a lawyer—such that he might have received very little pressure to attend social gatherings of any sort. But he had a career to advance, and he was still on reasonably good terms with a successful, well-connected former partner of his who gave him endless ‘networking’ opportunities and regularly nudged him into taking advantage of them. Lews generally acquiesced to his colleague’s recommendations, though he made few connections advantageous either to his legal practice or to the political career by which he had long aspired to illegalize some of the objects of his boundless disgust. His introversion always caused him largely to keep to himself, and his blustering indelicacy when he did take up a conversation usually just made those with whom he spoke eager to escape.

But at one of the numerous cocktail parties which he cursed God and government for making vital to his ambitions, Lews, by some incomprehensible twist of fortune, managed not only to keep up a conversation for more than two minutes, but to do so with a prominent lobbyist for various causes in the state government of Virginia. This Lobbyist had recently been the object of extensive public attention after vocally advocating for a bill in the House of Delegates that would eliminate virtually all penalties for the use and sale of several hallucinogenic drugs. Now, mind-altering chemicals were quite high—even higher than cocktail parties—on Lews’s interminable list of detestations, so he could scarcely keep his mouth shut in defending the bans that the Lobbyist hoped to see repealed.

“It’s a simple matter of freedom,” he insisted—“people should have the right to do what they want with their own bodies as long as it doesn’t hurt others. I’m sure even you would agree with that.”

“The problem there,” retorted Lews, “is thinking that drugs don’t hurt others. We’ve got D.U.I. laws for a reason—I’m sure even you don’t want to get rid of those. Look at it like this: Drugs mess with your head, and when that happens you can do all sorts of insane things, not just behind the wheel. Say a guy takes some LSD and thinks he’s getting r-ped by a werewolf or whatever. He fights back, and then when he sobers up, he realizes he’s cut Grandma’s head off with a kitchen knife. Ever heard of Big Lurch, the rapper who ate his girlfriend’s lungs while he was on angel dust?”

“Hang on; you can’t confuse LSD with PCP,” said the Lobbyist. “That’s like comparing a land mine to an H bomb. I don’t endorse the really harmful stuff, but a little bit of acid never hurt anyone. Have you ever known anyone who used hallucinogens, Mr. Lews?”

“No,” said Lews. “But I don’t need to know anyone personally to know the effects.”

“Then you only know the *possible* effects,” countered the Lobbyist, though of course he knew little more than Lews. “Drugs can actually enhance some people’s thinking, you know.”

In response to this, Lews loudly ensured that everyone listening knew he thought the value of this statement equal to that of a heap of cattle manure. “Show me,” he continued, “how drugs, especially hallucinogens, can do anything but impair the brain.”

“Well,” responded the Lobbyist, his smile broadening with each word he spoke, “that’s kind of a hard thing to ‘show’ in conversation without any on hand.” The sycophantic cluster of listeners and hanger-ons raised an uproarious laugh. One might doubt how natural a laugh it was, but displays of appreciation toward influential men are always likely to earn one favors in the future, and that is surely something to laugh about.

Lews, at any rate, was the only one who did not hide his unamusement at such a witless excuse for a joke. All he said was, “Is that supposed to be funny?”

A few of the Lobbyist’s toadies zealously muttered affirmations that it was extremely so, but they were drowned out by Lews’s continuing: “Of course, though, I can see why you’d hide behind excuses like that. You can’t prove your point because it’s not true. I mean, if it’s all about my-body-my-choice freedom, how about tobacco? Let’s get rid of restrictions on cigarettes, too. It is only yourself you’re giving cancer to, huh?”

The Lobbyist, however, heeded only the first part of Lews’s rebuttal. He prided himself on his own wit and was never rebuffed like this—besides, it was probably for the best that the “progressives” were kept ignorant about how much his views on smoking resembled his views on other vices. At any rate, there was a slight tremor of suppressed rage in his voice as he said, “Well, maybe you’re right—about drugs, I mean, not about my joke.” He chuckled weakly at this even poorer jest, though everyone except Lews helped to compensate for this weakness by laughing even more immoderately than before.

When at last the bedlam had died down, Lews was too disgusted to say anything at all, and the Lobbyist, in an effort to keep himself solidly out of the way of further criticism, asked, “Would you like something more to drink, Mr. Lews?” casually slipping his right hand into his pocket and gesturing to Lews with the empty glass in his left.

Lews said he guessed he would, if the Lobbyist was offering something, and one of the bootlicking Myrmidons obsequiously volunteered to get both Lews and the Lobbyist drinks. The latter was effusively grateful for this display of insincere kindness. He even shook the man's hand (in an oddly Masonic fashion, as it seemed to Lews), but said that he wanted nothing for himself, and simply named a drink which he insisted that Lews should try.

As the Lobbyist gave his empty glass to his toady, Lews thought he saw something else change hands—a small, colorful object which he could not properly distinguish—but was immediately distracted from this when the same hanger-on offered to take Lews's empty glass as well. The Lobbyist was anxious to use this interruption to steer the conversation away from drugs and his own sense of humor, and began to ask Lews some personal questions—about his career, his plans, his ambitions, etc. The man who had taken the glasses returned after a few minutes with a new drink for Lews. He found the peculiar cocktail which the Lobbyist had requested for him remarkably to his taste, and downed the entire thing within three minutes, as he responded to the Lobbyist's inquiries.

Once he had finished the drink, however, he was suddenly overtaken by a lightheaded, vaguely ill sensation. He was unsure what the cause could be—he never had trouble holding his liquor—but the haziness of mind waxed steadily greater, until the Lobbyist's words were almost totally incomprehensible to him. His surroundings began to seem unreal—like a dream—and the men and women inhabiting it nothing more than a babbling lot of incognizant mental projections. (Admittedly this was not much different from how he normally perceived others.)

He was drawn partly out of his trance-like state for a moment when, after he had failed to reply to the latest question put to him, the Lobbyist said with a curiously broad grin, "Mr. Lews, are you feeling alright? You think you need to go lay down?"

Lews, putting his hand to his head and setting his empty glass down on a nearby table, muttered something which was supposed to be, "Yes—lie down—that's it." He then stumbled away—thinking that he heard a laugh from the Lobbyist behind him—toward an adjacent room, where there was a large sofa onto which he did not lie down so much as trip. Directly opposite the couch was a fireplace, situated between two bookcases filled with what looked like the host's display selection of philosophical works he had never read. A fire had been lit, but was dying. Lews stared at the rising and falling tongues of flame with stupefied amusement, and mentally traced the shapes—now a dragon, now a crown, now a hand—that formed and dissipated in the fire itself and in the blackened, crumbling wood.

As he lay watching these burning ephemeral phantoms, his perception of everything around him became still dreamier, until he might have thought it just as likely that something would leap from the fire and drag him into it, or that the books on the shelves would fly out to attack him, as that the fire would at last disappear. In another moment, his eyes were closed. He may or may not have actually fallen asleep.

His eyes were, in any case, open again in what seemed another minute or two. He sat up and looked around. His head was entirely clear now, though it took him a few seconds to remember where he was. The time since he had lost consciousness, if he had actually done so, must have been greater than it felt. He was quick to deduce that from the absence of so much as a single glowing ember in the fireplace. But there was no clock in the room, and it would have done no good in the darkness anyway. Lewis was left with no idea what the actual time was; since he heard no chatter of voices outside the room, he knew the party must have dispersed. He could see almost nothing—only the general outlines of the furniture.

He started to rise from the sofa, but stopped suddenly when he looked over to the fireplace. From the remains of the fire that had held such fascination for Lewis's hazy imagination, there had begun to emanate a dim golden light by which Lewis could see that the heap of ashes was quivering, as if a small burrowing creature were churning its insides. He gawked as, suddenly, a small human hand, immaculate, though it had been digging around in cinders, emerged, followed by another. Having in a moment cleared away enough blackened remnants of the fire to suit their purposes, the hands gripped two bars of the grate above, and their owner hoisted itself up. The creature that appeared looked like a man, but was the size of a small child (albeit still too large to have been buried in that little pile of ashes, or fit through the gaps in the grate), and was dressed in the costume of a mediaeval court jester—a sort of elf, or imp, or leprechaun.

Lewis at last grasped what was happening—at least what he assumed must be happening. "I'm hallucinating," he muttered aloud, raising a palm to his forehead.

The tiny Fool, having stepped out from the fireplace, addressed itself to Lewis. "Well, Mr. Herbert, sir, are you ready to come along now?" Lewis stared at the creature, grimacing: Its acknowledgment of his presence made the delusion more bizarre somehow. "I need an answer now, sir: yes, or no?" persisted the Fool, after several seconds of silence.

"What are you talking about?" said Lewis, deciding to act as if the thing before him were real, just to see what would happen. "Come along where?"

Strange to say, the Fool responded intelligibly to this, though the response was cryptically nonsensical: "To the Realm of the Wise, of course. Now, are you coming or not?"

It looked back to the fireplace, which still emitted its eerie glow, as if to hasten Lews to a decision.

“Ah,” said Lews tentatively, who had never hallucinated before.

“Sure.”

“Good,” said the Fool. “We were all hoping you would. Just follow me now.” It turned back to the fireplace and leapt into the ashes. The instant it landed, a large hole, from which the yellow light shone brightly, opened like a mouth under its feet, and it fell out of sight. Lews rose, strode hesitantly over to the fireplace and looked down upon it. It appeared that some sort of portal, wide enough for him to pass through, had materialized beneath the grate—a circular hole in the brickwork in which nothing could be seen but that same golden light. Lews considered whether to try to follow the Fool or not—for, when the thing had spoken directly to him, and replied to his question, Lews had begun to almost doubt whether the little man were not after all as real as himself. It was absurd, but so was the thought that he had spontaneously begun to experience such vivid hallucinations. At the least, to try the apparent portal could do no harm—the fire was dead, and at worst he would only get some ash on his shoes. He stood indecisively for a moment, whereupon the voice of the Fool cried from below, “Well, Mr. Herbert, we don’t have all day!”

That resolved him—he would go down the Rabbit Hole, if indeed it were actually there. He put a knuckle to the grate first to determine whether it was still hot. Finding that it had cooled, he removed it from the fireplace, and set it on the carpet next to him. He regarded the shining portal for another second or two, then sat down, as if at the edge of a pool, and stretched out a leg—it passed directly through the floor. He put his other leg out, and it, too, disappeared through the portal. With this apparent assurance of the hole’s reality, Lews pushed himself closer to the edge of it, and finally let himself drop.

End of excerpt. See the full story on our website!

About Bradford W. Lenmar: I’m originally from the environs of Allentown, PA and completed a B.A. in English and Classics at UVA in 2015. Since then, I’ve been pursuing a PhD in English at UNC, specializing in medieval literature.

The earliest version of this story was written during my first semester at UVA. The story’s theme is drawn mainly from (1) recollection of pointless arguments about politics and various other topics I engaged in while in high school and (2) a book on the concept of ‘worldview’ I read in 11th grade.





Reflection of Serendipity

About Zion Hughes: Currently I'm a UNC junior with a major in Neuroscience and minor in Chemistry with a concentration in pre-medical studies. I am a fan of art in many forms such as music (jazz), poetry and appreciation of architecture!

The inspiration for this piece was Downtown Roxboro, NC on a Sunday afternoon, meeting up with friends I haven't seen in a while.

THEIR SCREAMS

A baby,
born on a Monday
night, red and slimy,
screaming for his mom
in the back of our
rig, rushing to
the ER.

A crowd,
watching football
on a brisk Friday night,
screaming after every tackle,
as we wait on standby
in case someone
breaks a leg.

A husband,
with his ex-wife,
throwing anything from
fists to paint cans, and screaming.
We dab the red paint and ice
the purple splotches, but the
painting ain't fixed.

A beggar,
tattered clothes
and a battered body,
screaming about ending it all.
Jumping off the overpass
and feeling regret once
feet hit water.

A mother,
finding her son's
head blown open with
the family's .22 and wondering:
Was this her nightmare
in broad daylight?
Was this maybe
her fault?

We drape the blanket over
the boy, but they don't train you
for screams like this. Screams until
there is no air left to give.
Screams you can
never forget.

About Rahul Menon: I'm a senior studying Biology at UNC, and I work as an EMT. In my free time, I enjoy playing guitar, baking and writing.

The inspiration for this came from my experiences as an EMT.





aesthetic, bunny ears, parties & youth



About Chloé Holleschak: Hello! I'm an aspiring UNC college graduate and current amateur photographer. I love taking plant photos of all kinds, and you can find my full nature photography portfolio on Instagram @plantoie!

MATH CAN BE MYSTICAL

According to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Mathematical Platonism[1] *is the metaphysical view that there are abstract mathematical objects whose existence is independent of us and our language, thought, and practices.*

In lay terms, mathematical Platonism is the belief, or understanding, that numbers (and other mathematical objects) actually exist and aren't just made up. There are plenty of people who would argue against this view, but this is something that even children naturally tend to believe. If you ask any third grader what $1 + 1$ is, they will tell you 2. If you ask them whether 1 or 2 is larger, they will tell you that 2 is. They will also be able to provide you with examples of one and two things to demonstrate. They may use a Phoenician numeral system, but the logical structure to their thought is independent of the written system and closer to a system of tallies (1 finger, 2 fingers, etc).

The idea is that the numbers exist: If I talk about subtracting 7 from 10, I am taking 7 objects from 10 objects mentally, or arithmetically. Note, though, that the fact that there is always only one correct answer implies we are accessing something fundamental to reality: $10 - 7 = 3$, no matter how we slice it, and independent of time and place (ignoring some higher complications, like modular arithmetic and vectors). There is nowhere in the world where this 'truth' or these two objects ($10 - 7$ and 3 are two separate objects, or expressions in algebraic terms, but they are equal in the numbers) are not equal. When mathematicians 'do math,' they usually are not concerned with the numbers themselves (unless they are prime). This leads us to the next point.

The term 'Platonist' derives from the theory of forms and, more specifically, the dialogue 'Meno' by Plato, in which Socrates teaches a child geometry by showing him that he "already knows it". The question (and implied answer) are "How can someone know something they do not already know that they know?" and "Because it is a feature of nature and being, or an ideal form we know innately, or are born knowing, or a past life..."; something metaphysical, of course.

Mathematical Objects

An advanced math student may tell you that they do not work with numbers at all. This is usually close to true! What they work with is mathematical objects. (*Definition: A mathematical object is an item, relationship, set, system, or combination of these things; a mathematical object need not be any particular thing, as it is as general as possible.*) In lay terms, it's an object.

If you can think of a combination of things, and name it with one name, it is an object. A great example of this would be geometric objects, such as a circle. Some objects are given certain requirements while others aren't; mathematics, in this more general sense of the study of mathematical objects, studies objects which arise out of numbers, number systems and geometric systems. These are all axiomatic, so mathematics arises from "rules" of how things interact. These rules, for the vast majority of math, do not get conjured out of thin air; there is some physical object that motivates them.

Instantiations and Instances: This is where the synthesis lies. Mathematics is the only language that can be used to describe such things as the general theory of relativity.

Let that sink in. The only language which has been capable of approaching such problems is the mathematical one.

Some link can then be presumed to exist, where we use the correspondence theory of validity: Something in the world is a priori mathematical because we assume that some set of mathematical models can be used to understand it.

Now, an 'instance' of a certain number may be cardinality, or ordinality, or any number of other things. So why do we distinguish between things which are instances physically and things which are instances 'symbolically'? The realist may not.

For example, the number of letters in the word 'NuMbErTiMe' is ten. The number of capital or lowercase letters is each five, and the number of syllables is three. But there may be a way to rearrange these into another word without altering the case or order, such as 'ME' (Can you find any others? How many?). There may be some number of ways to cycle through the capitals, such as NMeTM, MeMTN, MMTNE, etc. How many of these are there in total? How many total permutations are there? Questions are endless, and answers may be found by counting.

But the more fundamental question: How many of these orderings of numbers admit this exact set of re-orderings, listings, and importantly, subwords? This is a characteristic of this particular listing of symbols. There may be different orderings, but are they fundamentally different objects? If so, why?

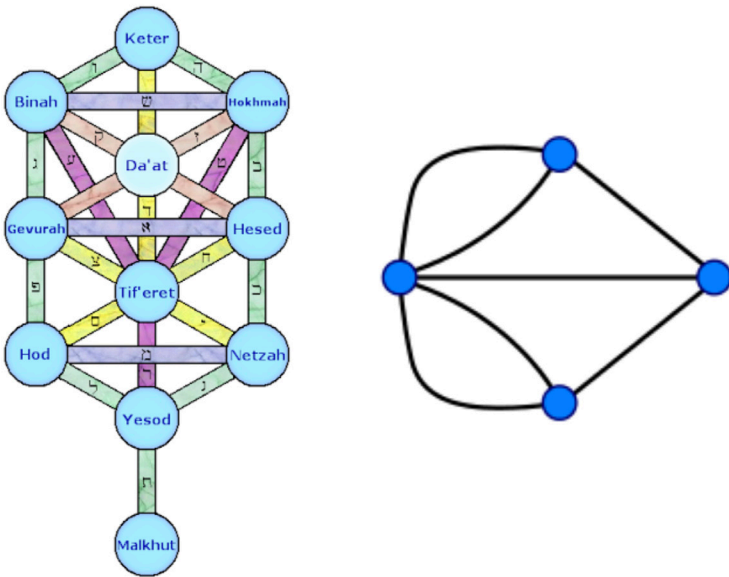
The Kabbalists

The Kabbalah is a system of study created by the Jewish community from roughly the 9th to the 15th century that assigned metaphysical meanings to numbers, symbols, and words. The set of rearrangements of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet was seen as the set of names of God; it was no less valuable to have a 'new' or 'meaningless' word because letters were valued as such.

Similarly, there was a broader system of Jewish mysticism in which this was a part; it all comes together in a program reminiscent of today's abstract algebra. Permutations, symmetries and even things such as rhymes are imbued with meaning.

The underlying concepts of modern mathematics are often encoded in such systems, such as infinity, zero and the empty set. They are approached through what is mostly a meditative scholarly tradition. Lack of rigor is not seen as an issue so much as a relationship with the objects of study.

A beautiful example: Just take the parallel between these two images:



The first image is the sephirot, a mystical symbol from the Kabbalah. It's a descriptor of the ways in which god expresses himself through the world, as well as our place in it; it's also known as the 'tree of life'. The second is the graph which Euler used to solve the Königsberg Bridge problem. The aesthetic and metaphysical usage of a network to represent real or platonic objects is an extremely deep, broad and beautiful subject.

Kabbalah also came with a rich oral tradition with much memorized poetry. These works are available in print form or online but many have not yet been translated. What the poems often did was encode these mathematical structures in mnemonic form by permuting Hebrew words in a 'punny' but noticeable way.

Conclusions

Clearly, mathematics has been a language used by governments, priests and various 'societal' features for millennia. One who masters geometry and mathematics has a unique claim to truth, but this stems from an idea of 'reality' given by numbers. The idea of assigning number to something gives it seeming weight and officiality. Ledger keeping and geometry began to arise in earnest with the systems of peonage that arose in early Egypt, Babylon and Sumer; often, the king needed to measure land near the river to better levy taxes, and accounts needed to be kept in ledger books about who owned how much. Money itself was not really exchanged so much as a quantity of goods that was 'proportional' to some kind of moral or existential debt. It is with this tie to the king, officiality, and hence the nation-state and god that ideas of number arose.

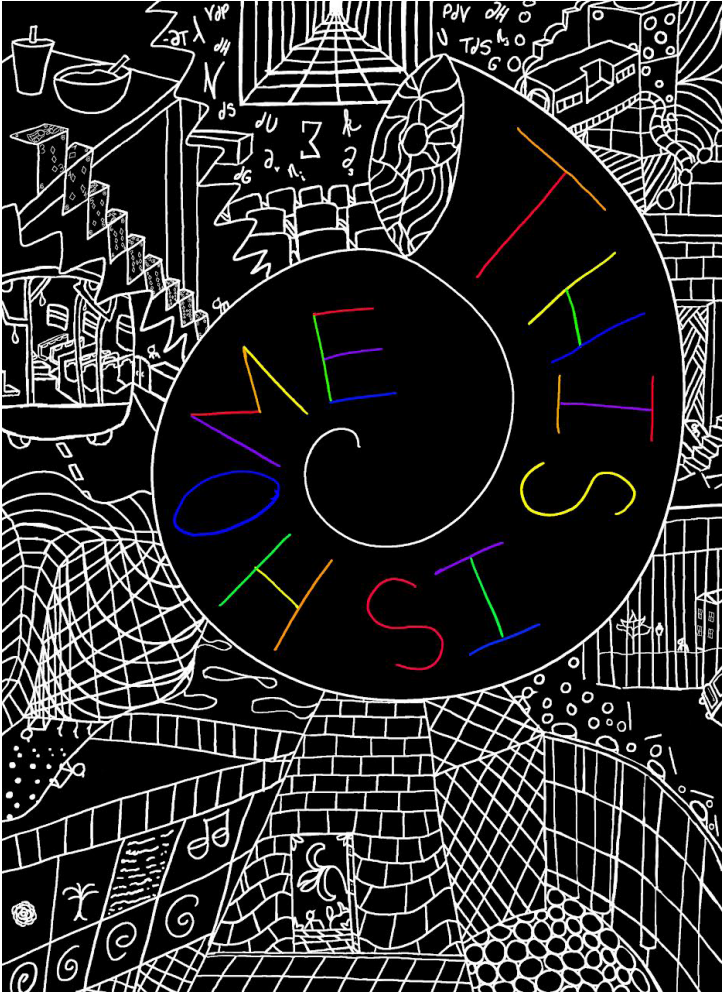
Whether number can be divorced from its financial and human cost remains to be seen, but I believe it can be based on the fact that many mathematicians decidedly do not work in 'useful' mathematics.

[1] <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/platonism-mathematics/>
(Photos Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)

About Aidan Lytle: I am a Math graduate student in NC, and I write philosophy. I'm interested in the aesthetic and mystical aspects of mathematics.

I wrote this in my free time to hopefully help people understand that our systems of mathematics are not 'pure and beautiful' but rather tied to a history of mystical and occult thinkers. I feel that this actually makes the process much more human. I'm hoping to one day turn this into a book.





This is Home

About Alex West: I'm a UNC freshman hoping to major in Studio Art! I like to sing, listen to music, play video games and (of course) sketch!

The inspiration behind this piece was moving into the dorms (and to campus in general)! Each section of the art piece is from me sitting somewhere and using the architecture (or lecture) as inspiration to create something eerie and cool. I also missed my dogs, hence why there is a small 'dog' in every piece.





Light

About Mika Travis: I'm a UNC sophomore majoring in Media & Journalism.

THE OCULUS

The eye that is the moon stared into the neighborhood of the Lower South Side which sprawled out on the hill below Tempest Street until it met the harbor docks. That unblinking eye sat over the neighborhood and watched. It followed the movements of the brave and the careless who dared step into the wide-cobbled streets. And it saw those who remained indoors just the same.

The eye gazed into every corner of the neighborhood. It saw through the window panes, carelessly left unshuttered or carefully shuttered alike. The light wormed its way through the cracks in the boards and the seams around doors, peering into the deep recesses of the stores and homesteads that lined the streets of the Lower South Side. Its gaze passed through gaps between stacked cans and books in teetering piles, slid beneath armoires that sat in front of thrice-locked doors.

Those who left the supposed privacy of their homes tried to hide from the moonlight. It watched them as they hugged the edges of buildings with hunched backs and pulled-in limbs, attempting to melt into thin shadows; any spot of darkness was seen as a refuge from the moonlight.

But this was, of course, only fantasy. No matter what sense of security the shadows seemed to offer, the moon found a way to pierce darkness. It cast its light upon unshuttered windows and pools of rainwater in potholes. It bounced off the windows of newspaper boxes and reflected off the mirrors of cars. Like a pupil, the reflection silently moved from one surface to the next, following you as you walked. No matter how fast you turned, it was always behind. Never was the eye in front.

It would've been easy to escape the moon. All you needed to do was exit the Lower South Side by crossing Tempest Street and entering the warm embrace of the darkness enveloping the streets of the Upper South Side and the rest of the city beyond. But cruel eyes still watched. The black cars of the Ministry sat, hiding in the shadows, waiting to drag their prey over the hill and away to some unknown fate.

God had taken note of the Ministry's cowardice. The day they no longer crept into the Lower South Side was the day the moon began its perpetual watch over the neighborhood's labyrinthian streets. Denizens never ceased in their futile efforts to conceal their actions. Packages of contraband arriving on minuscule, sea-worn sloops from the distant shores were still wrapped ten times in thick brown paper before being boxed and passed discreetly through portholes into the withered hands of the local shopkeepers who waited below. Clerks still hid amethyst diadems and obsidian blades stolen from the graves of ancient Estonian warlords or Egyptian alchemists in matchboxes and biscuit tins, stacking them in lopsided pyramids in the front windows of their shops.

Booksellers still covered their thick, leather-bound tomes with pages written in ink from wolves' blood and powdered jade in the nondescript dust jackets of Tom Sawyer or Moby Dick before tossing them haphazardly onto the shelves, turning their shops into uncanny displays of sanctioned literature warped and deformed in shape and size. But these efforts were wasted. The moon still saw those unholy wares through the seams in their boxes and book jackets.

The homes remained unchanged as well. Thick lead curtains were stiff as wood and still covered most windows from the inside while the splintering, waterlogged shutters remained bolted tight from the outside all hours of the day and night. But these efforts were wasted. The moon never required keys to pass through a door. The keyhole itself was enough.

Yet as the gaze of the moon penetrated the Lower South Side and revealed its secret horrors to God and the Ministry, there was one place it couldn't see, a place deep below the twin basements of the boarded and barricaded home of the oldest resident of the Lower South Side, down a staircase hidden behind stone as thick as an arm was long, deposited into a chamber too low to stand in and barely wide enough to hold the single figure who sat there now, a figure yearning for vengeance against God and the eye of the moon, a figure who held a candle with a wick the color of the seafloor that burned a black flame and illuminated the object before him with the faintest light: a smooth sandstone block one cubit cubed in size through which a wide and perfect circle had been bored, the runes of a long-dead language etched into the rock.

Here, the moon did not watch. The eyes didn't see what happened deep beneath the city streets that night.

About Jack Spencer Gentry: Hi! I'm currently a UNC sophomore majoring in English with a concentration in creative writing, fiction track. I have a long-running affinity for film and aspire to work as a screenwriter in the future. I have more 'favorite' films than I can count, but *Parasite*, *Coraline* and *2001: A Space Odyssey* make my shortlist. As a general rule, if a movie is pretty and weird with a dark edge, I'm probably going to love it! I try to capture a similar feeling in my writing, taking simple premises and (hopefully) twisting them around into eloquent and otherworldly thoughts. Nice to meet you!

This piece is based on a prompt from class to write a story while only describing the landscape. I was playing a game at the time called Cultist Simulator, in which you have to slowly piece together the religion of an occultist group to escape your character's looming death. The haunting ambiance of the game's music, along with its endlessly cryptic dialogue, created a very evocative world of unsettling and unexplainable sorcery. I chose to try my hand at creating my own world like those found in Cultist Simulator and similar Lovecraftian works.





Stars

About Nicole Schroder: I'm a UNC junior Advertising/
Public Relations and Public Policy double major.



I took this picture on the Mosel River in Germany while observing the night sky. It reminds me of how vast our universe is, but I find comfort in the fact that the stars connect everyone on Earth, even if you are thousands of miles away.

ELEPHANT ROCK

8:22 am

Bleary-eyed on a pillow of
unmet dreams

8:37 am

Bikes off hurriedly
The end of dreams.

11:59 pm

A day is a deadline.

How easy it is!

To claim origin with neo-Serpent

Who says

“Onward! To the next!”

With jubilant cries

We dig.

(Who has the shovel and who’s in the hole?)

The refuge of anti-society

(Come alone, it means.)

Past the road, quite inconspicuous really

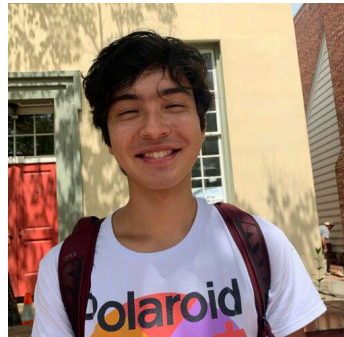
On that forested back slope

The timelessness of worn stone

Eternity through impermanence

About Andrew Withrow: I’m a UNC junior studying Chemistry and Korean. I love spending time in nature, listening to music and contemplating life. I value honesty and beauty in all forms of art. This is my first time submitting to a literary magazine.

Elephant Rock is off a trail in the NC Botanical Gardens that runs by a creek. It’s a really nice place to just chill and disassociate, to fly away free.



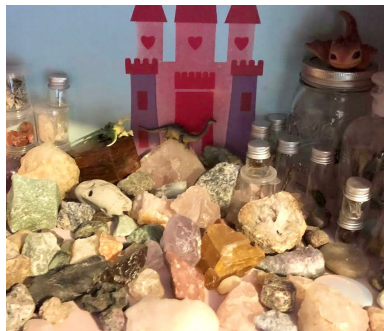
CRYSTAL COLLECTING

I first started collecting rocks around 1st grade and got seriously into it around age 16. I collect any sort of pretty rock, I'm not too into the meanings or anything but I absolutely love it if it's shiny. I've been collecting rocks since I was a kid, with my first being quartz. Now I have about 20-30 crystals at home, some found and some bought. I enjoy wrapping them into necklaces or holding them in my pocket for good luck! My favorite stones are labradorite and blue opal, as they



flash different colors in the sun. Overall, rocks are really neat and super comforting to me, as they remind me of my childhood. Pictured above is one of my favorite stones I wrapped and below is the collection! :)

About Zan Maley: I'm a UNC undergraduate with an English major and a Creative Writing minor. I love crystals, playing guitar and collecting antiques. I'm originally from Charlotte!



MIND OVER BODY...OR MIND OVER ITSELF?

Why don't we have complete control over our bodies? I mean, we can't *ask* our eyes how they work; instead we have to learn about it in school and trust our brains relay back accurate information. We don't even really know *how* the brain works at my age anyway, and yet we use it every single day! My brain supposedly knows all these answers, but if I asked it, "How do the ears work?" my brain would be asking that question to itself, so it *must* know the answer. But I don't because it can't even explain it to me even though it's *my* brain!

It's like we have two brains: one for the functioning of the body and all these workings and then the other for our soul, our mind. Like the concept of mind versus brain. But even that wouldn't sufficiently describe it! Because the brain part would be further split into a right and left side, with the right half being for creativity and the left being for logic. Yet neither of these accounts for my essence. So who, exactly, is controlling me?

And another thing: Your body tells you things through pain. For instance, if I burned my hand, thoughts wouldn't arise in my head that say, "This is hot, take your hand off." Instead, my hand starts hurting, even though that is exactly what my brain was already thinking.

Finally, I'd like to say that we are just walking around as blobs. We've never seen our own insides, just the shells of each other, our skin. We all *kind of* know what the insides of the human body look like—again, from school—but what about *our* insides; are we assuming they look like everyone else's? We can't just look inside of ourselves to find out!

So I guess all this to say our minds and bodies are somehow *creepily correlated* to each other...and we don't even know how. Or, at least, I don't.

About Anna Savage: I'm 12 and in 7th grade at Durham Academy. I moved from the Bay Area of CA a few years ago. I have 4 dogs and was born with a hole in my heart. I love making stop motions in my free time and editing!



What inspired me? Well, I was at Disneyland this past summer and said to my 18-year-old cousin, "Hey, why can't we ask our eyes how they work?" and she said, "I'm not sure."



Even with a clouded vision, love shines through

About Lottee Whitaker:
I am a bright 11 year old
with an interest in art and
poetry!



TRAIN 7C

I have always hated the subway station. It's dull and plain and full of strangers. The weird thing is, I love the subway train. The excitement of not knowing what is in front or behind you.

"Hurry! I think our train is here," calls Sylvie.

"We're fine. It shouldn't leave for a while. And, anyway, I don't see ours," I reply.

Sylvie still hasn't gotten used to riding the subway. After all, she just started. I mean, last year we didn't due to the global pandemic, and before, she just had to walk a couple of blocks to middle school. We find a bench and plant ourselves onto it. Lucky us! I seldom find an empty bench. Another thing I hate about the subway station.

"Omg, I can't wait 'til we don't have to wear these stupid masks anymore," Sylvie complains. "These stations are so stuffy and hot, my glasses fog up soooo much."

"Train 7c now boarding!" the loudspeaker announces.

We get our bookbags and make our way toward the train. "Wait, look! The tunnel is closing in or something!" Sylvie cries.

"Oh, come on. Don't be so dramatic, it's probably just a turn," I say. But when I look up I see that Sylvie wasn't kidding, the tunnel really does look like it's closed in. "Okay, we clearly have a problem."

I look behind the train and I can't really tell, but it kind of seems like there is a wall of stones behind it. This isn't looking good. Other passengers are noticing something is up and the train slows and comes to a stop. Everyone is taking their phones out but no one can get a signal.

"We need to get out of the train," says a college student. "Maybe we can dig out of the tunnel. We need to assess the situation."

"Let's try to pry open the doors," says Sylvie.

People take things out of their bags and put them through the tiny gap in the doors. We rush to get inside. I find blankets, lanterns and flashlights, different battery-operated tools (including saws) and a battery charger. We also find a radio, but when we try to turn it on, it only has static. Everyone grabs a handful of stuff, and some head back to the car.

Everyone looks in and gasps.

The sight is terrifying and unexplainable. The driver isn't there. In fact, nothing is. Not a steering wheel, nor a dashboard.

We see that other cars are trying to open their doors. Some people rush back to the car to put their stuff down so they can help.

"Let's go around and say our name and our profession, or if you don't have a job what grade you're in," says the woman with a kid. "My name is Ann, and I'm a social worker."

“Ellie, and I’m in fourth grade,” says her kid.

“I’m Ethan and a junior in college,” says the college student.

“My name is Sylvie, and I’m in tenth grade,” says Sylvie.

“I’m Sam, and I’m in twelfth,” I say.

“Hi, I’m in tenth also, and my name is Gabe,” says another high school student.

People are also getting out of other cars and joining our gathering. I glance at my watch and realize it’s lunchtime.

“This isn’t very much food,” she says. “I don’t think we’ll dig out that fast.”

“Yeah, I guess. But I think we can make it last longer, we just won’t eat as much as we’re used to,” I say. After that, there are objections and groans from kids and adults alike. “Listen, I know we’re all going to be a bit hungrier than normal, but from the looks of it, we’re gonna be here awhile. But the more people helping to dig the better. So, anyone who is physically able to be helpful, come stand over here.” I motion to an area where no one is standing. Naturally, some people are reluctant. I also see kids going to the group.

“We should split everyone into three groups. One for food, one for supplies and one for taking the seats out,” Ethan says.

To my group, I say, “Every car needs one or two lanterns. Also, some people need to bring blankets and pillows to each car. I would say seven to ten pillows and fifteen to twenty blankets in every car. Oh, also people who are doing lanterns, put one flashlight in.”

...

Sylvie and I sit on chairs from the train eating a small serving of popcorn and some salami from a sandwich. Ethan and Gabe are also sitting with us.

We find a car that has enough space for all of us and find ‘beds’. The ‘bed’ is a blanket on the ground with a pillow and a blanket.

“Wow, so comfortable,” says Sylvie.

“Please don’t. Some people are having to sleep on the filthy ground outside, would you rather that?” I say. “I would be happy to move you out there.” Sylvie rolls her eyes at my comment.

“I’m going to the restroom, be back in an hour,” says Gabe.

“Seriously, could we have chosen a car a little closer? I’m gonna waste the battery of the flashlight.”

“Don’t go then! I know this isn’t ideal, but I think we are lucky we have all the supplies and food that we do,” I say.

“I’ve got to agree with Sam, we have tried really hard to make this more manageable for you, but you just can’t appreciate it,” Ethan says.

Gabe stomps his way out of the car and toward the restroom.

“People really are getting rude,” I whisper to Ethan. “They don’t appreciate our hard work.”

“You have to remember that they’re younger than we are and not as mature,” Ethan whispers back. “They may not see the world the same way as we do. But we need their help, so try to stay on their good side. Like it or not, they are going to be a big help with all the younger kids.”

...

The next morning we get to work digging out. All the people who are unable to do other things. The doctor helps diggers who’ve hurt themselves. Mr. Davis, a teacher onboard, looks after the kids with Sylvie, Gabe and other teenagers. A lot of people are helping to take the rest of the seats out of the subway cars.

My job is really everything. I mostly help dig and take chairs out.

...

A week later, we have really created a community! Every night, after dinner, we sing and dance and play music. A lot of kids from band and orchestra have their instruments with them so we really have live music every day. We even have a COVID protocol! Everyone has to wear a mask when they aren’t eating or sleeping. You have to eat in your car, so that means that we kind of have pods because we only really have our masks off when we are with those people. Sylvie and Gabe have become friends. Ethan and I are also close. I met another person in twelfth grade, and they’re really nice. We often dig together. We’ve all forgotten about the empty driver car, but occasionally someone will joke about it.

“I think you need to come over here and see this,” says Ann.

“What is it?” I say.

“The wall of stones is a lot thicker than we thought. We thought we were going to be out in the next few days, but we drilled a very small hole into the wall and it’s more than five feet thick,” says Ann. “This means we’re going to be here at least another week. Maybe a month!”

“Okay. Sam, help me get everyone together. Ann, go get Ethan and tell him to meet me at our car,” I say.

“Okay, will do,” says Sam. Ann goes to find Ethan.

A few minutes later, Ethan is racing toward me.

“Did Ann tell you?” I ask.

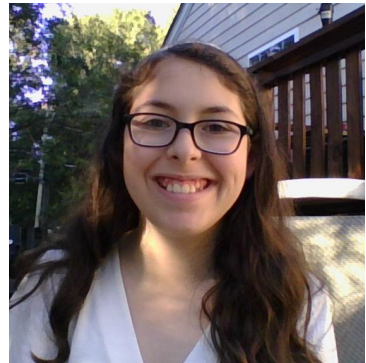
“Yes, of course. I checked our food supply before coming here. We have enough for another week if we go down to two meals a day. But to last a month, we need everyone to trade off days. One day you eat one meal, the next none. The days you don’t eat, you don’t have to work as hard, sound good?” Ethan explains to me.

“Yeah, but the problem is getting everyone on board. We already aren’t eating nearly as much as we used to,” I say. “And the kids will have a really hard time. But this is what we need to do. Are you gonna tell them, or am I?”

“I’ll tell them. This was all my fault, anyway,” Ethan says. He fades away.

In place of him is the dead driver.

About Sydney Lippman: Hi! I’m in 8th grade at McDougle Middle School. I live in Carrboro, NC. In my free time, I write (of course), read, craft and play with my 7-year-old sister. My favorite quote is by Charlotte Bronte: “There is no happiness like that of being loved by your fellow creatures and feeling that your presence is an addition to their comfort.”



I enjoy writing dystopian-like short stories and novels!

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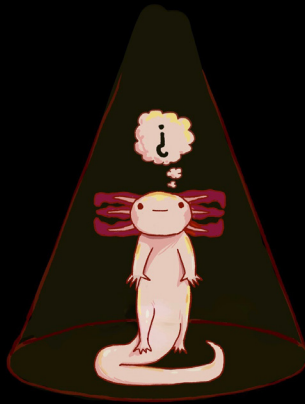
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Did you find Alex's dog? :)

