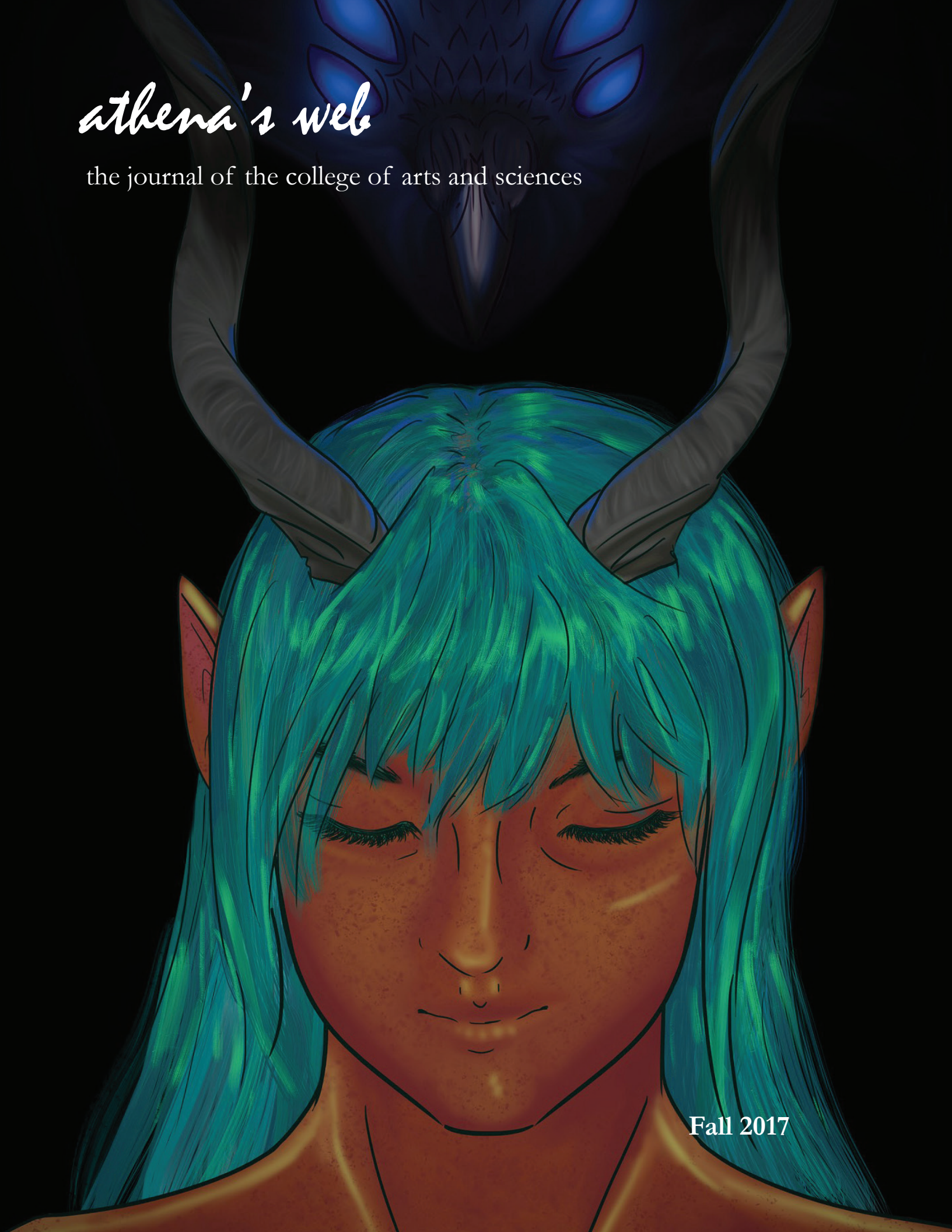
# athena's web

the journal of the college of arts and sciences



Fall 2017

NON-DISCRIMINATION POLICY:

Athens State University, as an equal opportunity/affirmative action institution, complies with all applicable federal and state laws regarding non-discrimination and affirmative action. Athens State University does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, marital status, sex, sexual orientation, disability, religion, genetic information, or veteran status in employment or admissions to, or participation in educational programs or activities.

athena's web
journal of the college of arts and sciences



*Athena's Web* is an academic journal dedicated to publishing outstanding student work in the arts and sciences. The journal is sponsored by the College of Arts and Sciences of Athens State University. Arts and Sciences students (including secondary education majors) are encouraged to submit academic and creative work to the editors for consideration.

Views and creative content are reflective only of our contributors. Athens State University and the College of Arts and Sciences bear no responsibility for the content of authors' works.



.....

Cover page art by Haley Williams.
Masthead art by Tracy Szappan.
Typeface is Garamond.

Archives of all issues can be found on the appropriate page of the journal's website. The website also contains the submission guidelines, submission procedures, and information on all contests or events sponsored by the journal.

*Athena's Web* is published once per semester, excluding Summer. Submission deadlines for each semester can be found on the homepage of the journal's website. While primarily an online publication, print copies of the journal can be ordered through the Editor's office. *Athena's Web* is a free and open publication. As such, we do not charge for copies of the journal, but a small printing fee will be charged by the Office of Printing at Athens State University which must be paid upon order.

**The Editors**

**Founders Hall Room 350**

**300 N. Beaty Street**

**Athens, AL 35611**

**Athenas.Web@athens.edu**

## art



## poetry



## academic essays

## News and Announcements

### Now Accepting Submissions

Submissions are currently open for the Spring/Summer 2018 issue, and will be accepted through the Friday before Summer semester finals. Submissions received after the deadline will be considered for the following semester's issue.

*Athena's Web* welcomes a wide range of submissions including research and analysis papers, case studies, short stories, essays, poems, photographs and photo essays, artwork, novel excerpts, short plays, and more.

### Cover Contest

*Athena's Web* hosts a cover design contest each semester. Winners are chosen from the pool of artwork submissions received that semester. The winning artist will be credited on the Information page, and will be listed as a contributor.

### Facebook

*Athena's Web* is now on Facebook. Be sure to follow our page for updates and information. www.facebook.com/athenaswebjournal

### Special Thanks

*Athena's Web* would like to thank Dr. Gail Bergeron for recommending the most work for publication in the Fall 2017 issue. Her efforts and continued support are greatly appreciated!

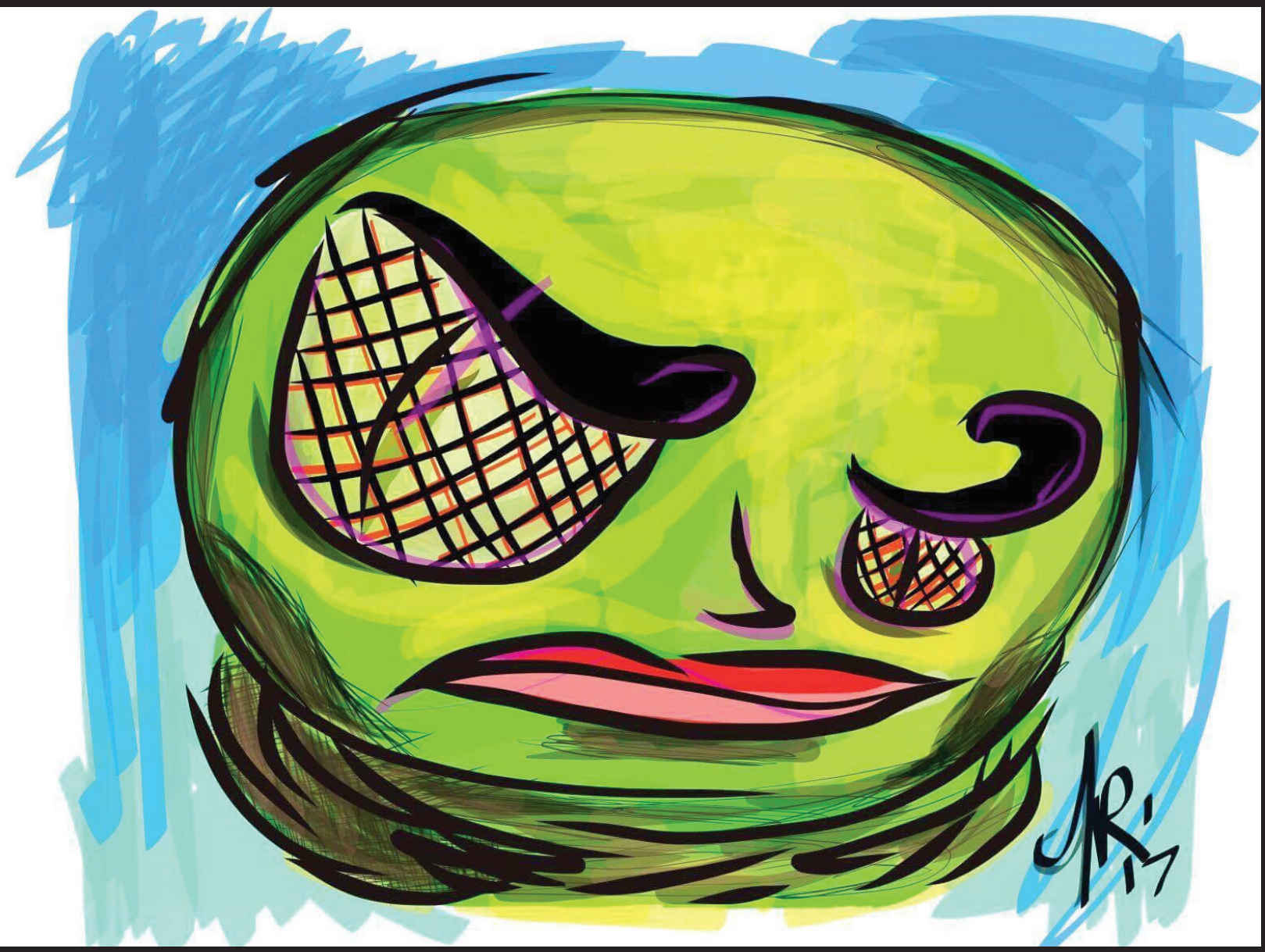
# Pumpkins

Lauren Reynolds

# Lavender

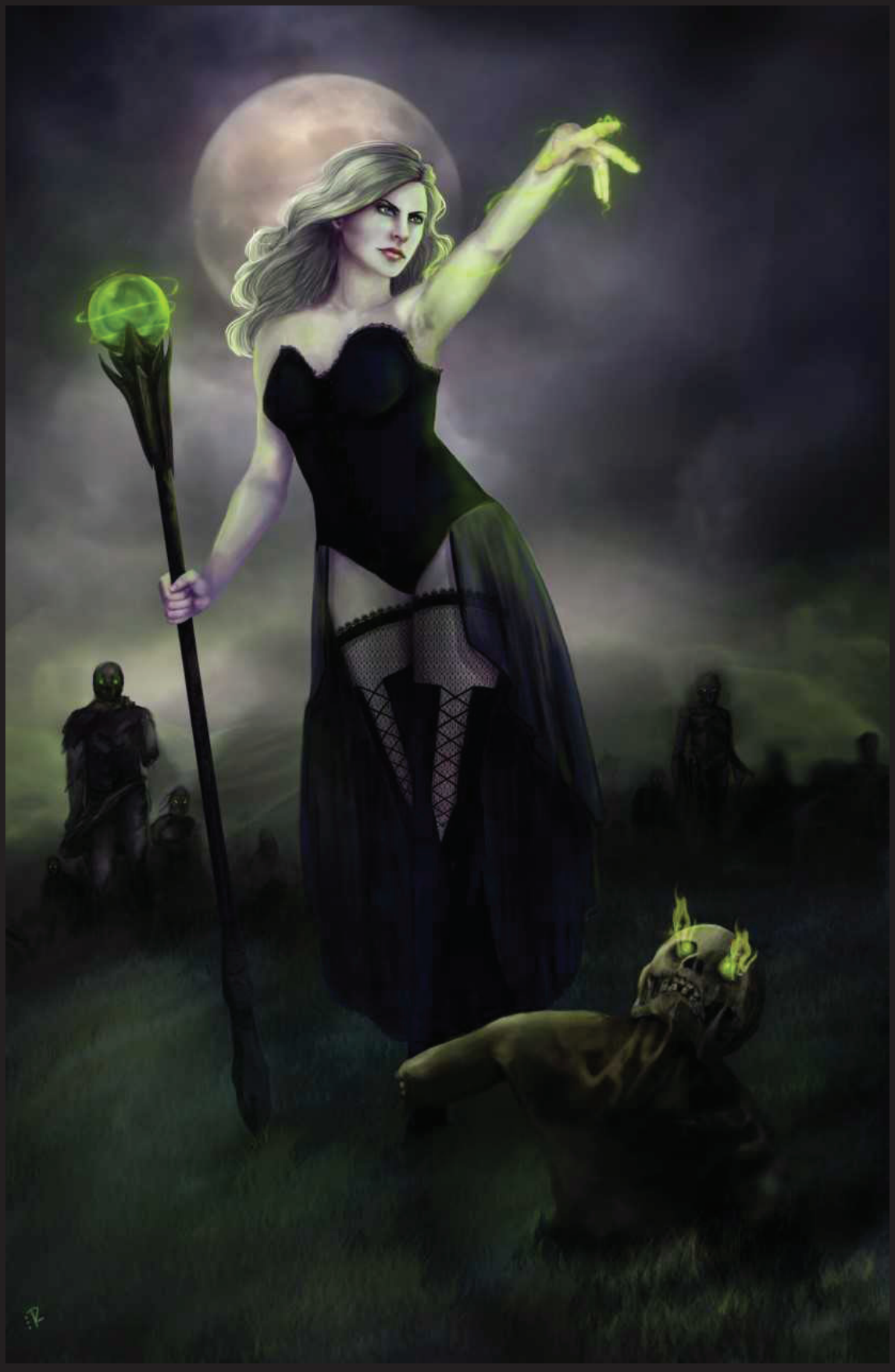
Lauren Reynolds

# Never to be a Butterfly



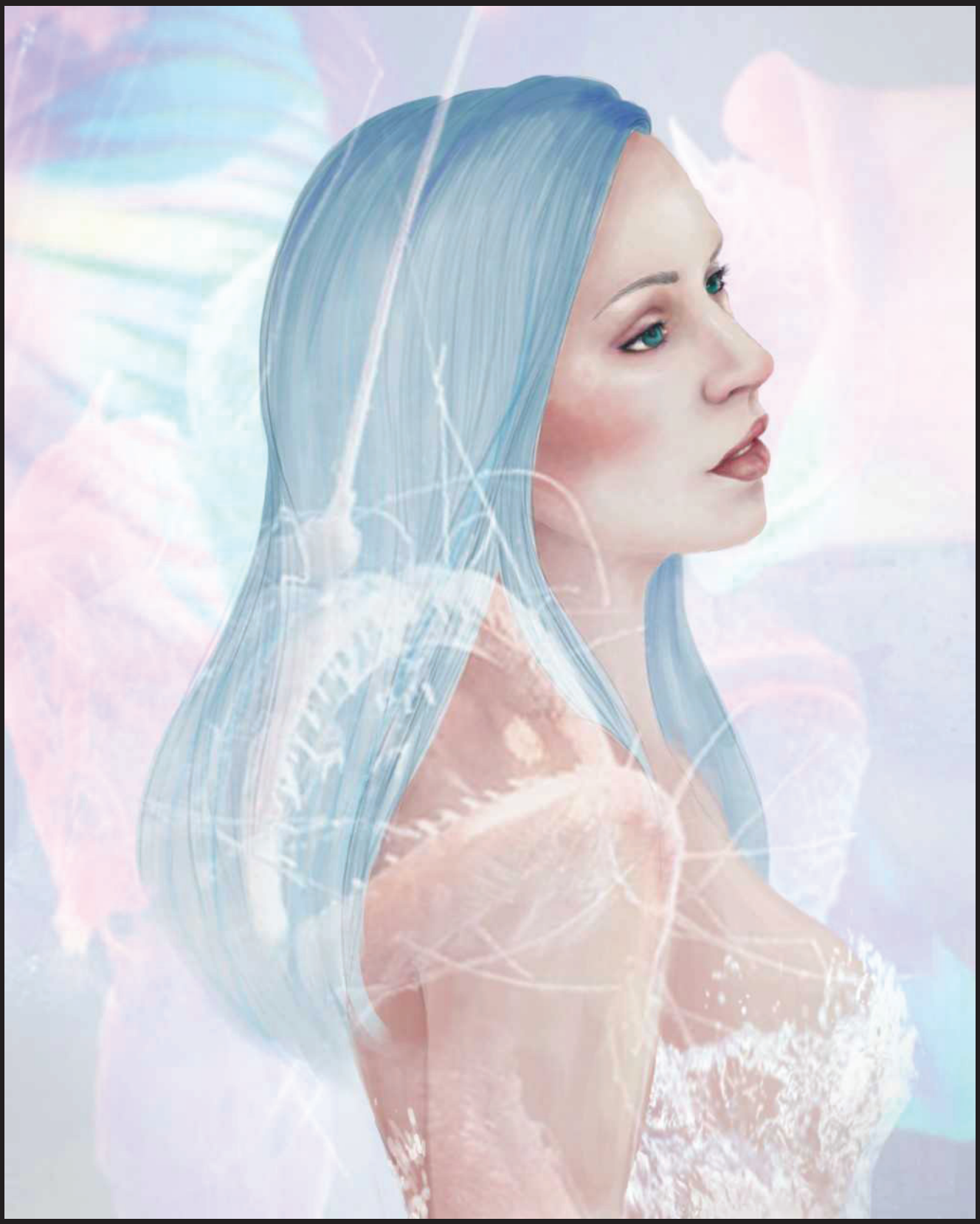
John Ramey

Ransome, the Undeath



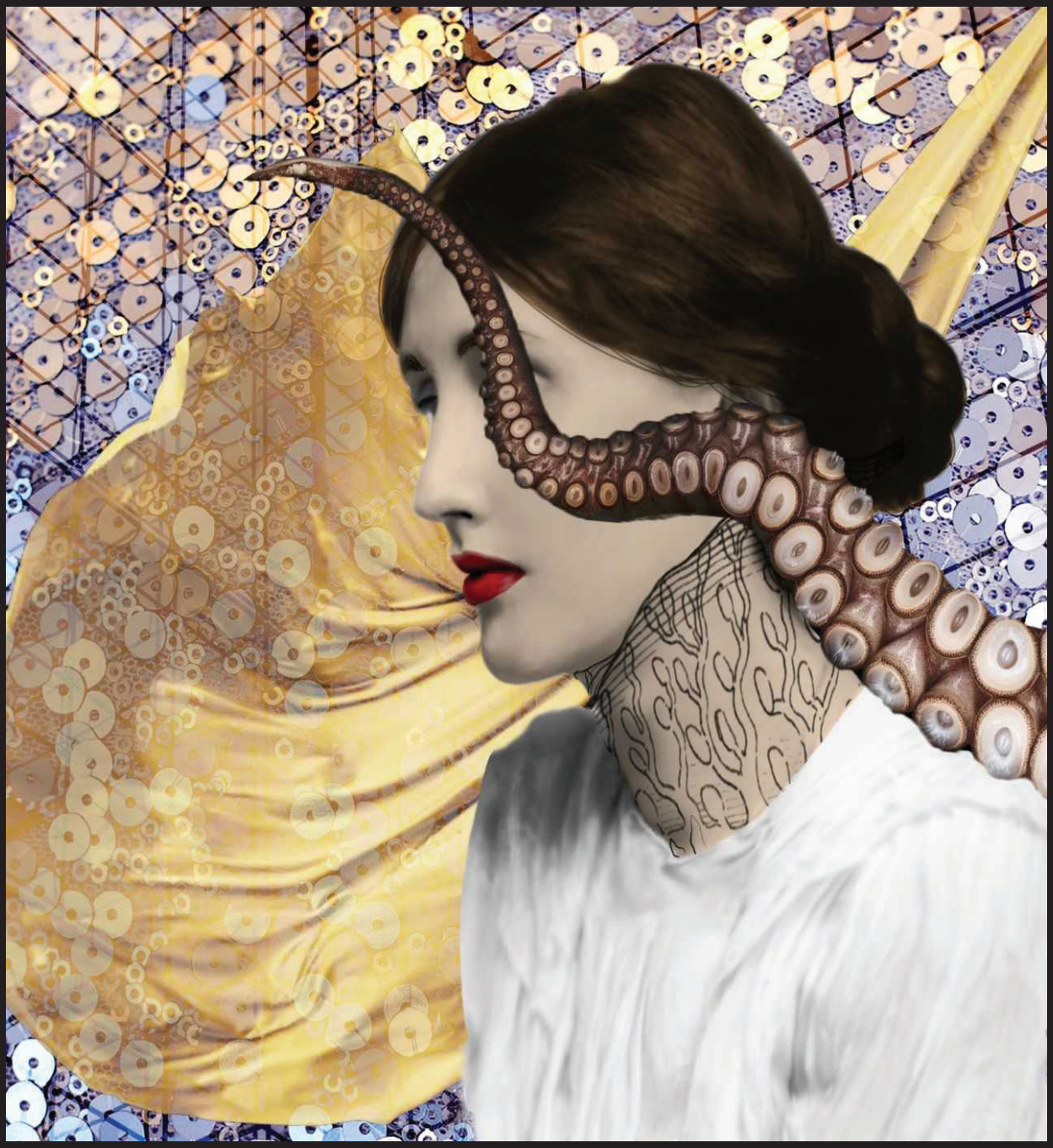
Rachel Matthews

# Melisma



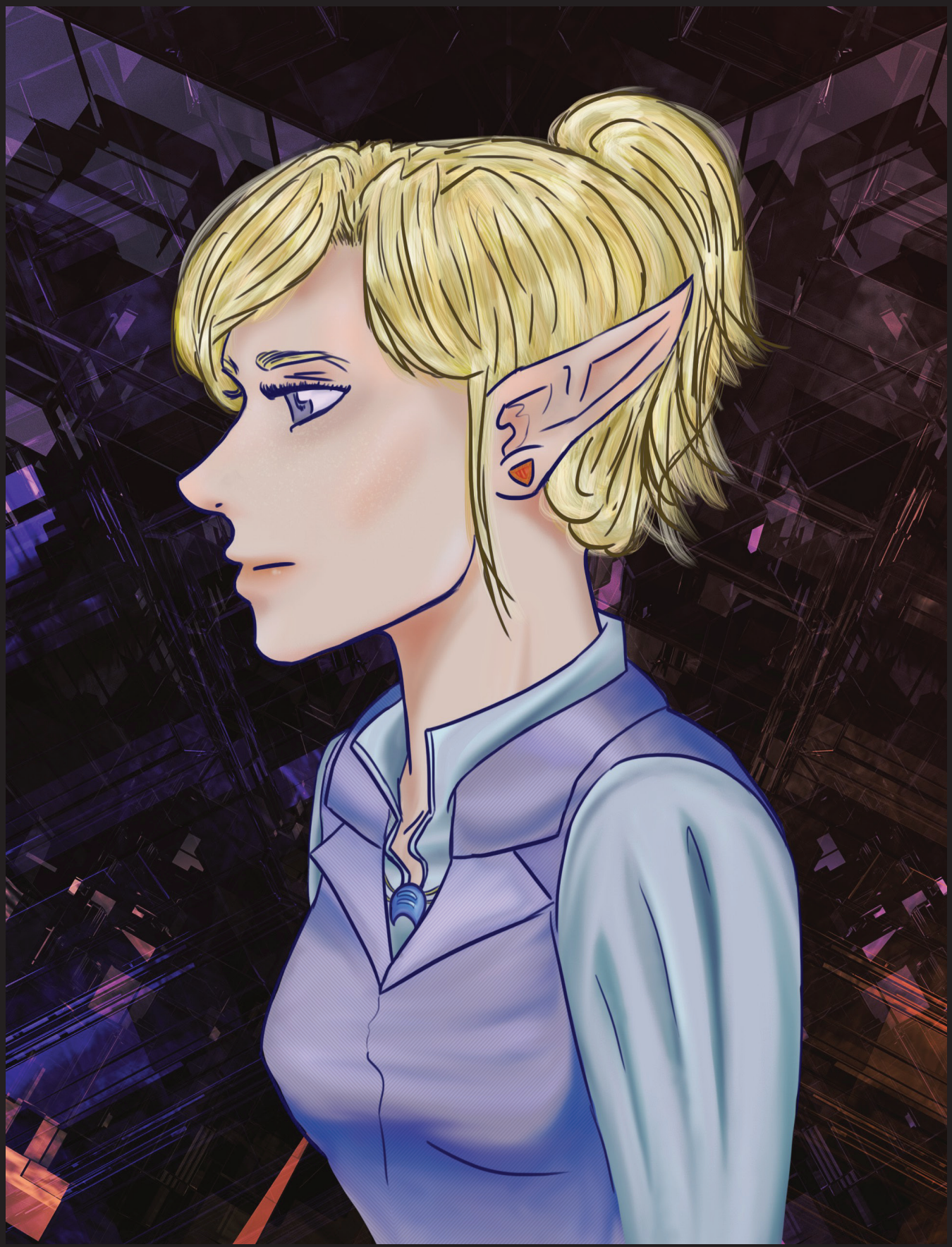
Rachel Matthews

# Modulation



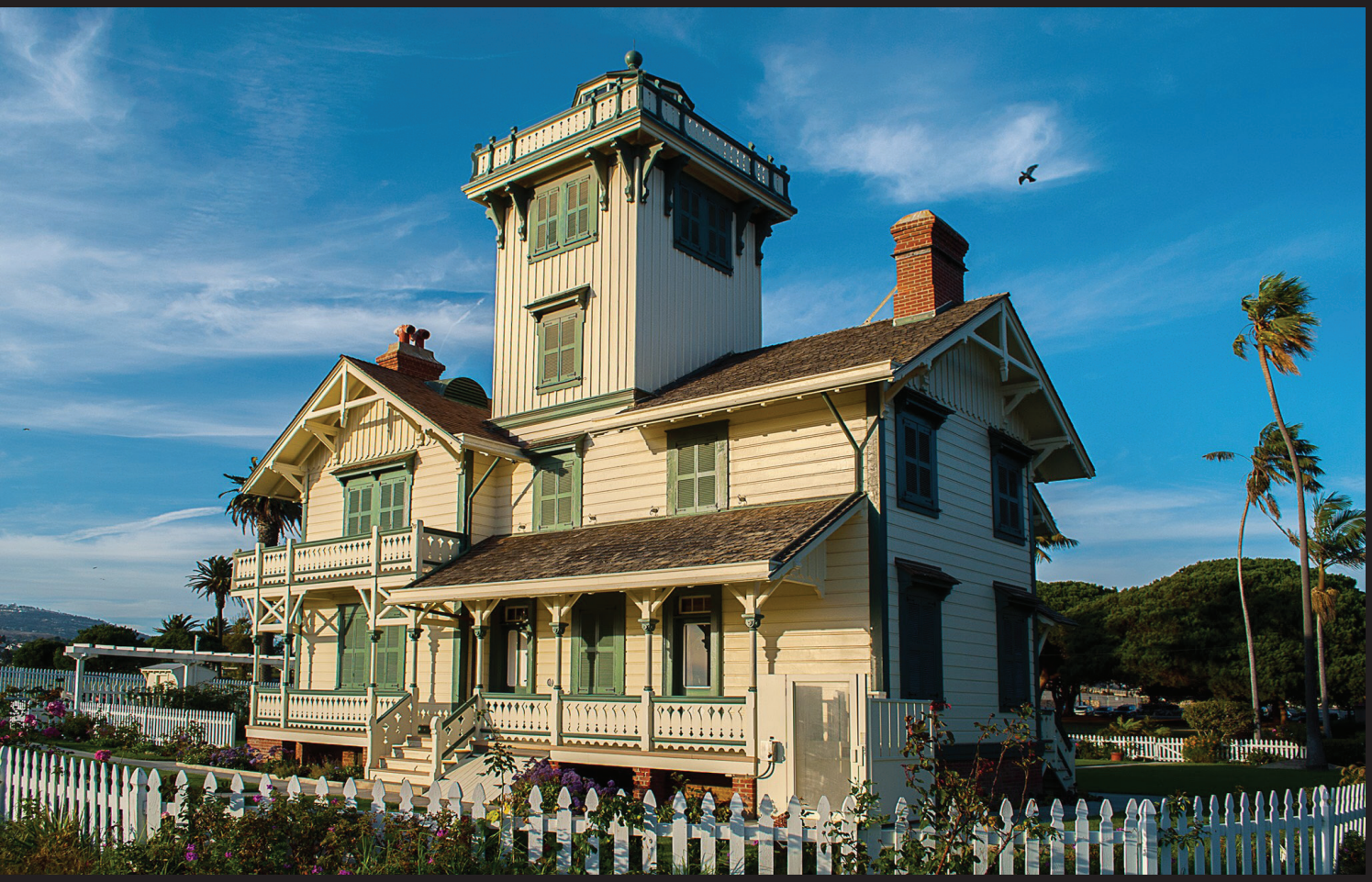
Rachel Matthews

Portrait: Mazurka



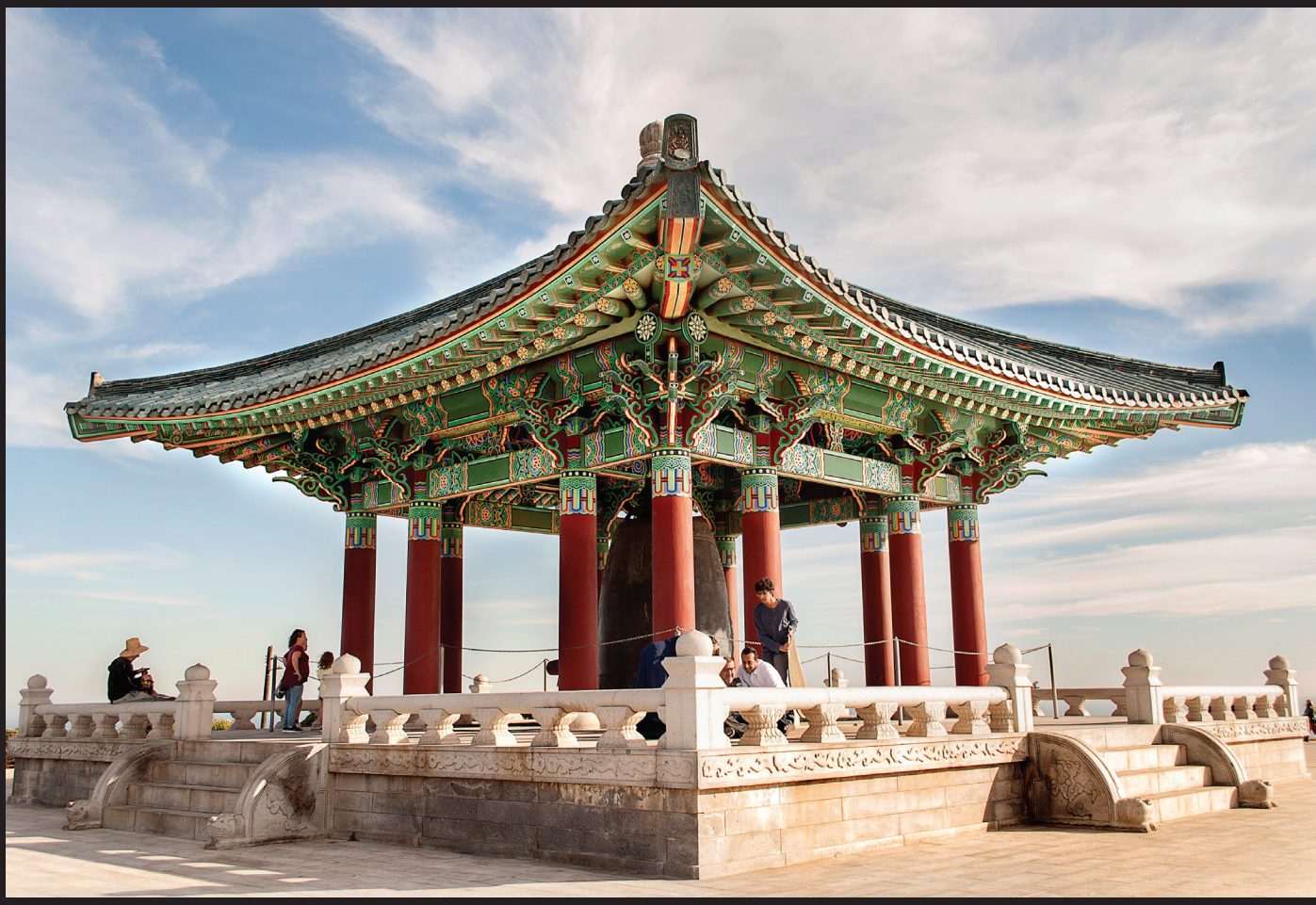
Jessica Charlton

# Point Fermin Lighthouse



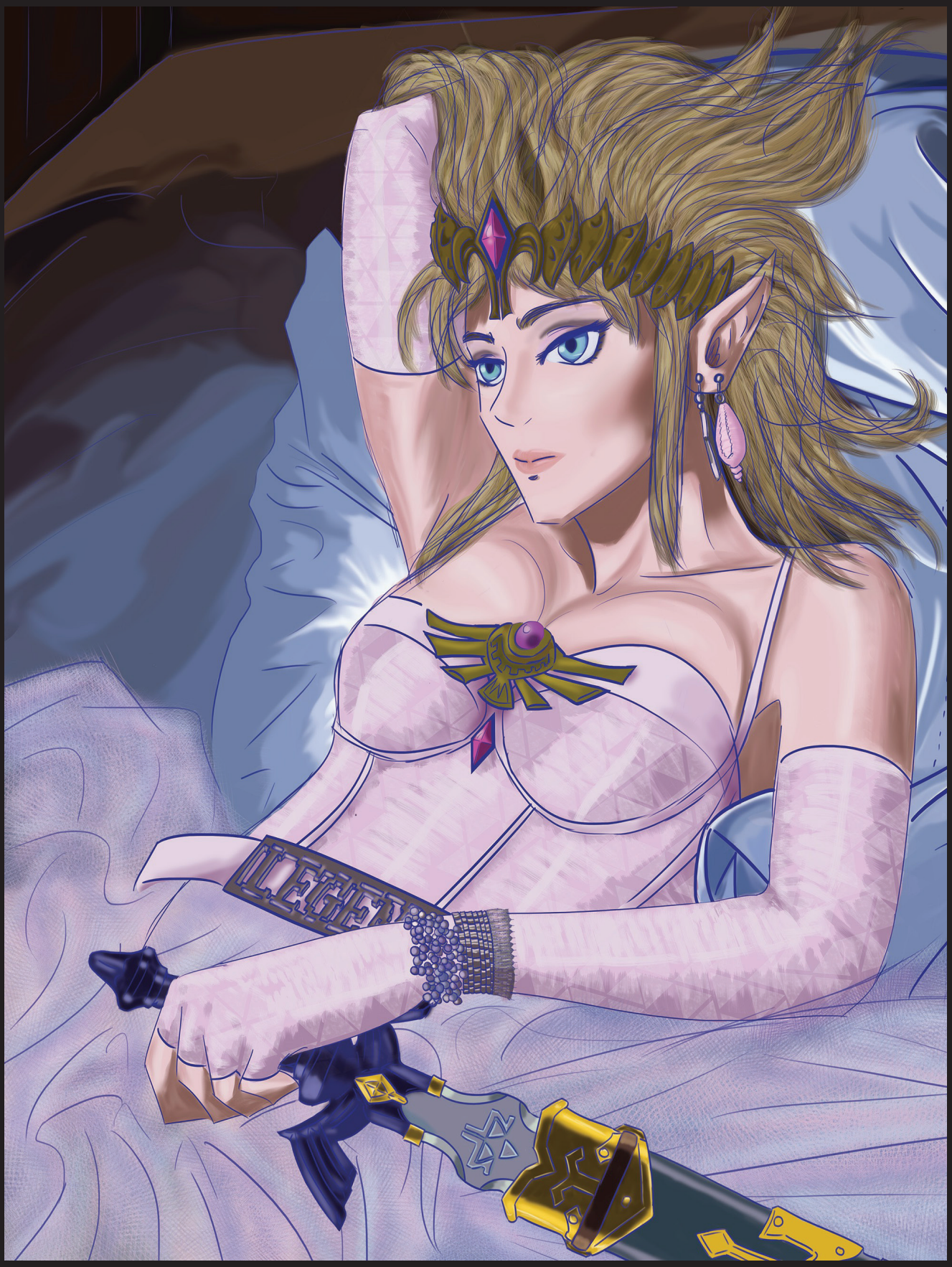
Rachel Jackson

# Korean Print



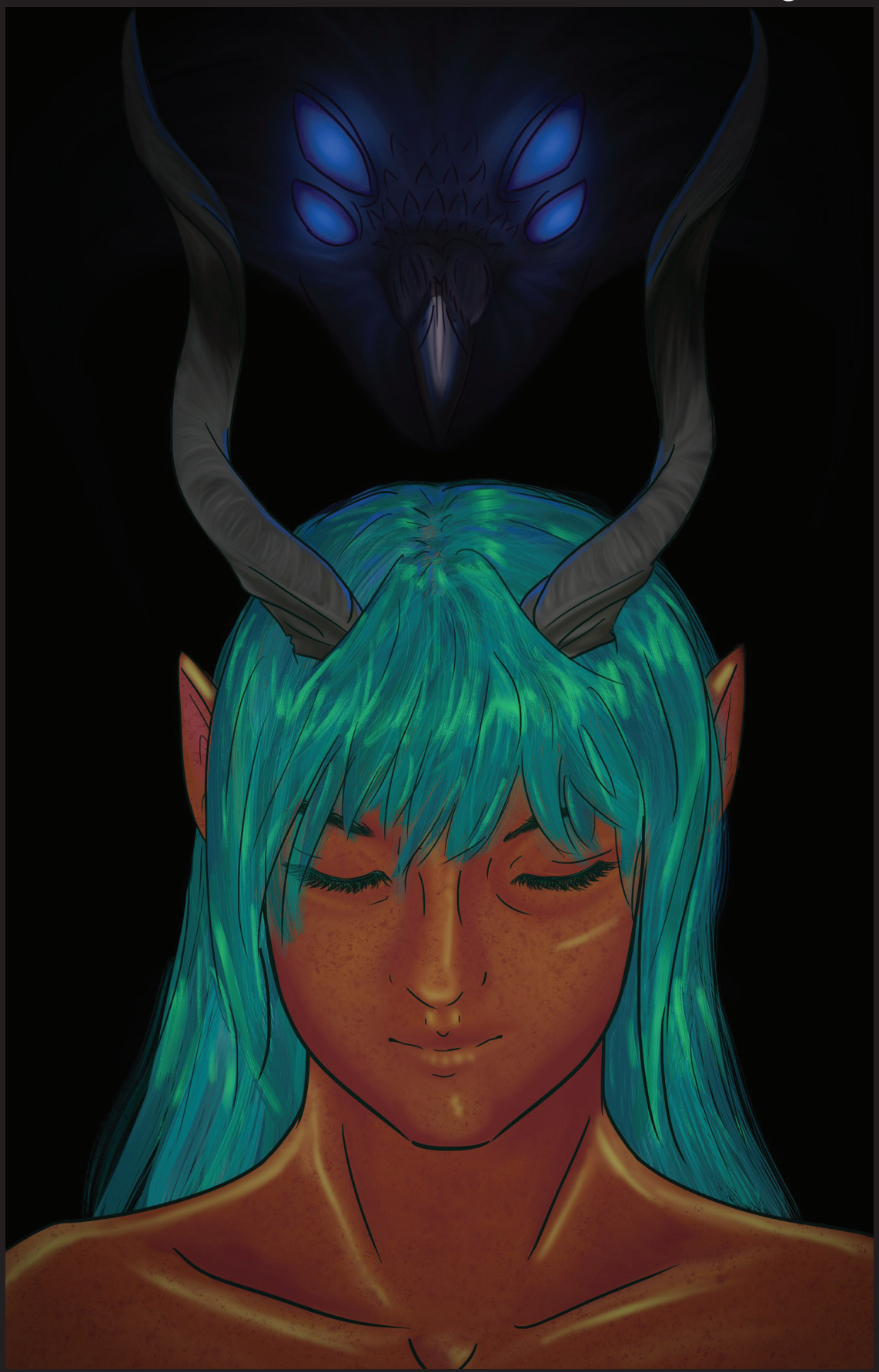
Rachel Jackson

# Like a (Legendary) Virgin

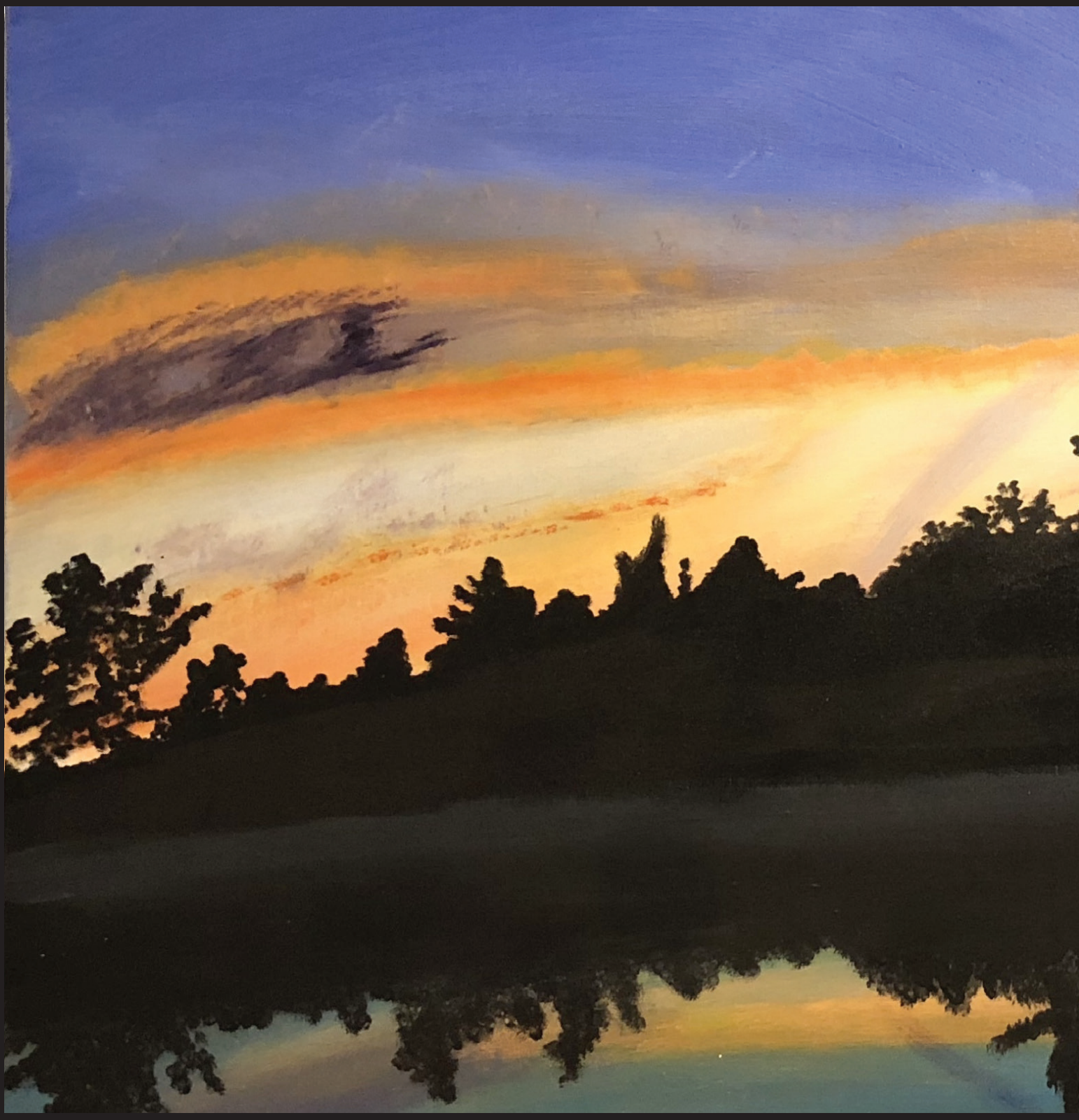


Jessica Charlton

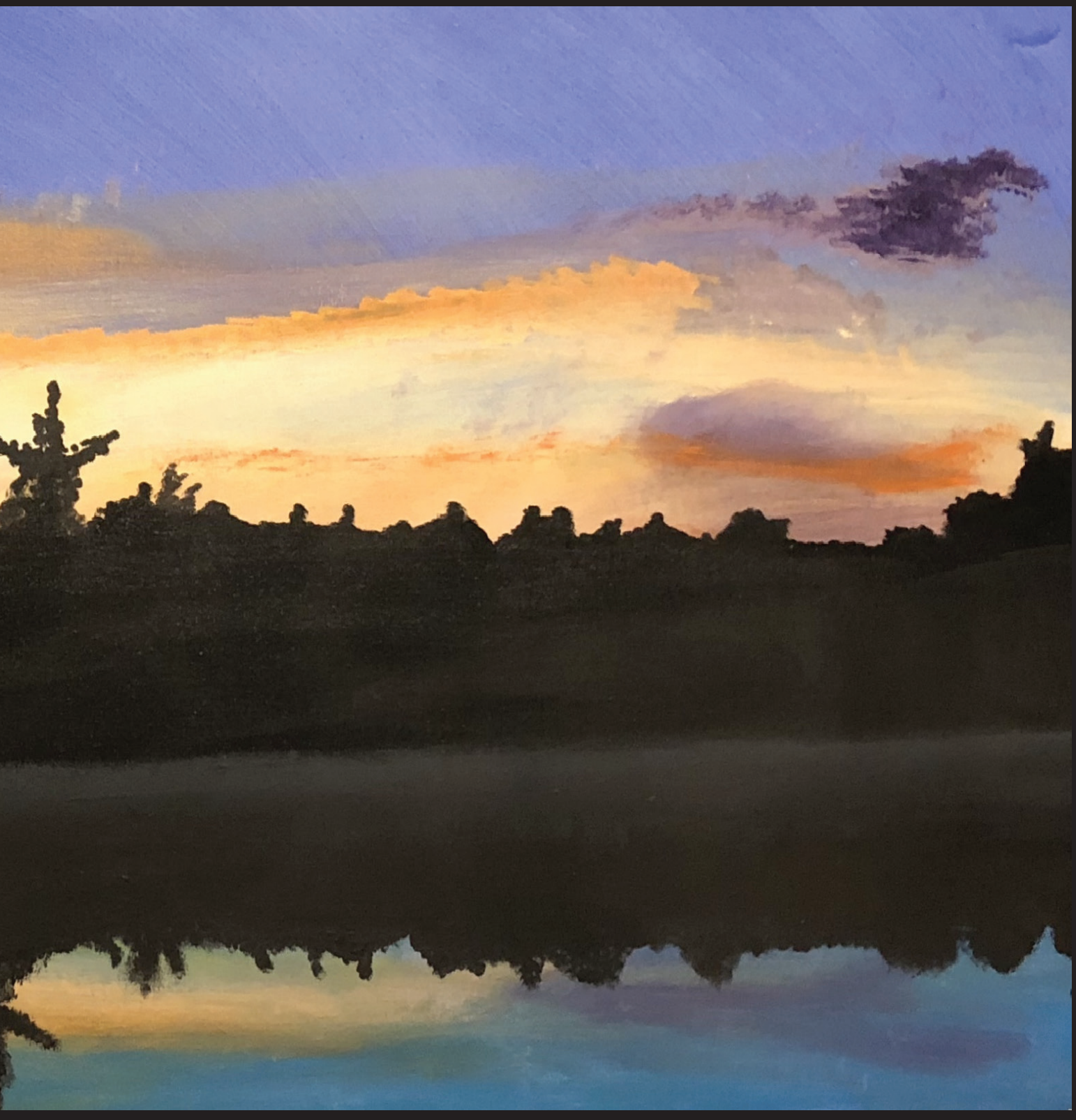
# The Light Within



Jessica Charlton



# Living Waters



Haley Williams


exorcism
Courtney Hooper

i lie beside the open window
and let droplets from the storm
spray down upon the crystal clear slither of skin,
wrist and arm,
holding the curtain ajar.
i hear the notes like pirouettes,
the clatter on the faded brick.
it all comes clean with the storm.
collected like lost summer days
i sat waiting on your return.
and into pores, through blood stream,
i let it in like you
like the window open wide
as most were simple streams,
it and you were the tide.

mostly closing signs.
how long can droplets form
crystal clear moonlit storm
semi-circular on skin
why did i let it in?

but vast, the mountain-valley-sea.
the northern-south, western-east.
like window, mouth, my star-ly speech
i spoke in circles, or patterned veils
connecting points of light into darkened clouds.
let rest what lies, let stand what weaves
colored perfume, the sprinkled streets
the path before and the rift between.
i saw the sin long ago
curl within and build its nest
but this window
only works one way.

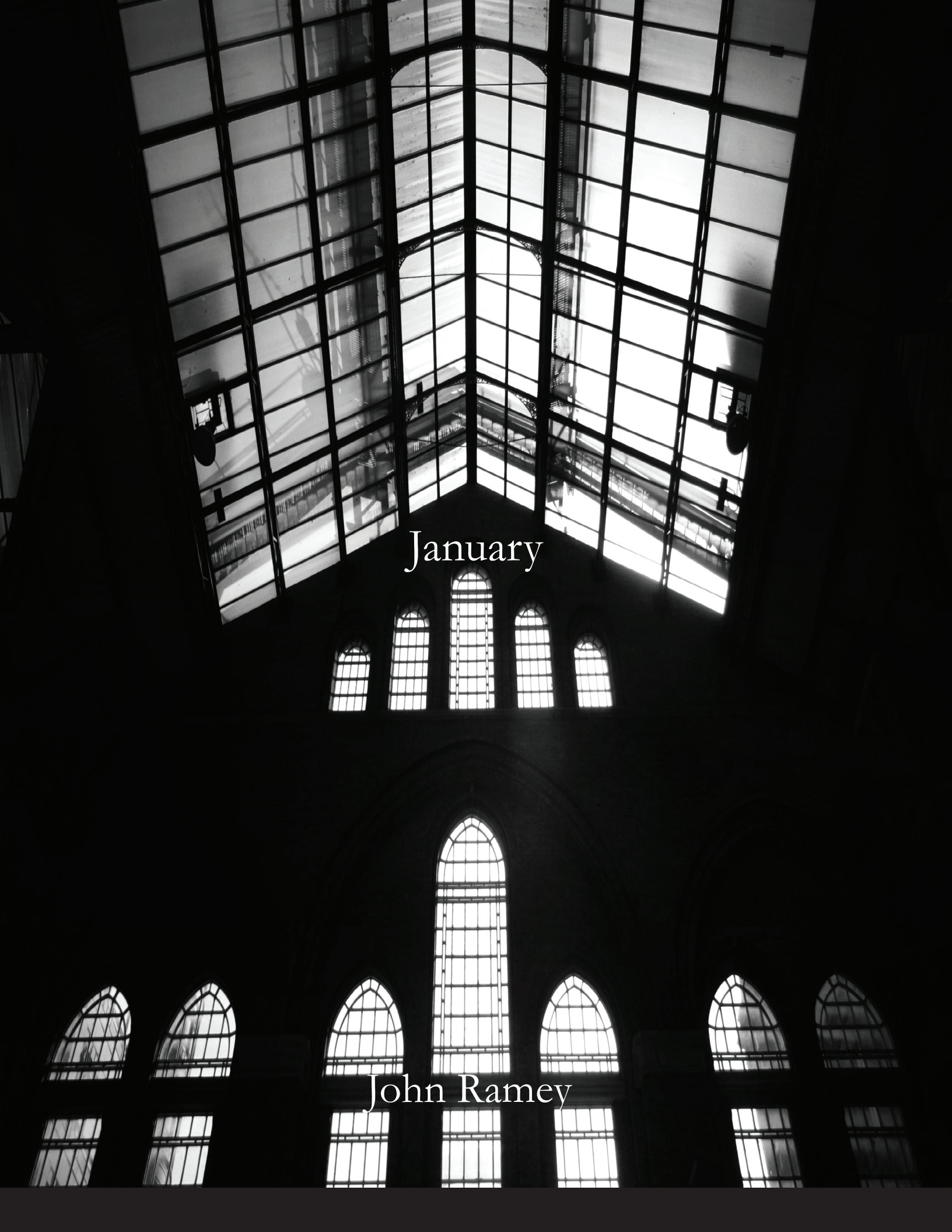
# Ceramics

Courtney Hooper

i've watched the fragments fall.
your calloused fingers hold the chisel
close but never enough
to completely split in two.
porcelain skin chipped,
unrecognizable by now.
i stood as still as a statuette,
i've allowed this every minute,
disregarded the repercussions
just to be beside you
only to be beside you
forming a pile of shards
beside you.
your warm, rough hands
and fixed eyes,
mind set to destroy me,
watch me crumble,
do nothing.

scatter me across the
places where we would meet:
the fire pit,
the dim lit street,
the padded arm
of the love seat.

a painted glass life
was never enough,
could never be enough.
but to be beside you....


January
John Ramey

I want to be in
the empty ballroom
with the doors closed
and the blinds shut.

Here, I'm eating French
fries alone at the table
beside the trashcan.

You've given me a bleak
Friday as I sip lemonade
yellow-cupped.

At home, I should've stayed
in beds bottomless,
my fingers sticky with sauces.
I want to watch the world
without distraction, and lick
ketchup off my fingers while
kissing the napkin.

# To Bite the Hands that Feed

John Ramey

I can see me and the vicious sink.
My hand suspended within its reach.
Above the blades - metal teeth.

Fleshy fingers dance in
the cortège whirr
Right there! That's where blood
first hit the spinning spur!

Across the house,
In the guttural sound,
Idle hands are
the devil's playground.

# Facilitating the Development of Empathy and Introspection in Adolescents: Implications for Young Adult Literature

Andrea Williams

Adolescence represents a vulnerable and challenging developmental period. During this transitional time from childhood to adulthood, adolescents expand their concept of culture and society while simultaneously exploring their inner selves, forming personality traits that underpin their mature personalities. Through the lived-through experience of literary fiction, specifically young adult literature, adolescents may potentially explore facets of empathy and theory of mind that would otherwise be out of their reach. While introspection in some adolescents may uncover dysfunctional developmental patterns, introspection guided by literature and informed by psychological studies may assist in inspiring adolescent empathetic experience and therefore lead to meaningful cognitive expansion.

Although introspection has the potential to elicit negative reactions in less-developed adolescents, introspection presents a promising developmental path for those who have some grasp on their developing sense of self. In their 1986 study, "Clinical Implications of Adolescent Introspection," Betsy S. Levy and Barry A. Farber found that "[i]ntrospection [...] not only contributes to the development of object-related ideation but also facilitates the development of object-related interaction. The relationship between introspection and interpersonal interaction seems to lie in its connection to empathy," which establishes a strong foundation for the importance of adolescent introspection in relation to empathetic development (572). Levy and Farber go on to say that "those adolescents who are willing to introspect, and to get in touch with themselves and their inner feelings, may be more capable of empathy than other adolescents who resist introspection and remain strangers to themselves and to others" (572). Here, their findings further expand on the importance of adolescent introspection: not only does introspection in developing youths lead to empathy, but a lack of introspection may prevent an adolescent from relating to others due to a lack of self-knowledge. Levy and Farber elaborate, "Moreover, if the introspective process helps adolescents acquire a firm sense of self, they may be less threatened by the progression from primarily narcissistic relationships to more genuine and object-related friendships which require empathy, sensitivity, and self-disclosure" (572-573). In other words, introspection in adolescents may assist in developing a firmer, more resilient sense of self that provides a foundation for forming meaningful friendships, and this firmer sense of self allows them to more easily relate to the people around them.

Evidently, introspection holds considerable potential for adolescent social and emotional development; moreover, literature offers a valuable framework for inspiring this introspection in young adults. Eva Maria Koopman finds, in "Effects of 'Literariness' on Emotions and on Empathy and Reflection After Reading," that "[s]cores on empathic understanding were significantly higher after reading than before reading for both the original version and the version without imagery (but not for the version without foregrounding)" (91). Here, Koopman demonstrates a strongly supported argument for the value of literature in introspective thought, provided the literary work has "striking textual features" (83), but interestingly finds no significant value in imagery. Koopman concludes "that foregrounding—if manipulated on enough levels, not just imagery—has a modest but significant and robust effect on empathic understanding" (Effects of 'Literariness' on Emotions and on Empathy and Reflection After Reading 91). In a more recent study, Koopman expands on the importance of foregrounding, explaining that "responses to the open questions pointed toward a mixed emotional state as a potential explanation for increased empathic understanding," which enforces the importance of defamiliarizing the reader in order to facilitate an empathetic response. She goes on to state, "[...] sympathy/empathy with a character appeared to be a clear predictor of empathic understanding for others (role-taking)" ("Does Originality Evoke Understanding? The Relation Between Literary Reading and Empathy" 6). That is to say, not only should literature inspire empathy—implying introspection—through foregrounding, but it also measurably draws the reader in through character relation. Literature must therefore relate to adolescents on a personal level for them to reap the benefits to their inner landscape offered by literary empathetic experience, thus

offering a firm rationale for the importance of young adult literature. In their 2013 study, "How Does Fiction Reading Influence Empathy? An Experimental Investigation on the Role of Emotional Transportation," P. Matthijs Bal and Martijn Veltkamp state that their study is "amongst the first [that] also show[s] that fiction reading might have negative effects, when readers do not become transported, and hence, disengage from literature" (8). In other words, if a work of literature fails to defamiliarize the reader, the literary experience transforms into a negative one. This serves to buttress the importance of young adult literature and its ability to relate to its readership, which therefore has the potential to inspire introspective empathetic experience in adolescents.

Furthermore, successfully inspiring empathy through literature develops a stronger theory of mind—a characteristic directly related to empathetic capacity. In their 2013 study, "Reading Literary Fiction Improves Theory of Mind," David Comer Kidd and Emanuele Castano detail that "[their] findings demonstrate the short-term effects of reading literary fiction" and go on to further explain that "it is specifically literary fiction that facilitates ToM processes suggest that reading literary fiction may lead to stable improvements in ToM" (380). That is to say, reading literary fiction specifically, exclusive of nonfiction, shows promising correlation with improved theory of mind. Kidd and Castano expand further on their findings:

> The results […] support our hypothesis that reading literary fiction enhances ToM. Existing explanations focused on the content of fiction cannot account for these results. First, the texts we used varied widely in subject matter. Second, it is unlikely that people learned much more about others by reading any of the short texts. Third, the effects were specific to literary fiction (380).

This section further supports the importance of reading literary fiction as a means to improve theory of mind, thus expanding the conception of others' mental space and leading to increased empathetic capacity.

While literature obviously holds potential as a facilitator for introspection and empathetic experience, some adolescents may struggle with topics and feelings evoked through reading. Bal and Veltkamp explain, "Although the regression analyses showed that when people experienced negative emotions while reading, the interactions of condition and transportation were also significant, showing that fiction reading influences empathic skills beyond simple emotional effects and this can be both negatively and positively" (8). That is to say, while reading has traditionally been viewed as an inherently positive experience, Bal and Veltkamp's study exhibits a more holistic representation of literary empathetic experience, recognizing the possibility for both positive and negative experiences. In adolescents with a less-developed sense of self, "[...] any introspective activity poses the risk of exposing the more conflictual parts of themselves, of uncovering their feelings of love and hate, of pleasure and pain, and of exacerbating an already-established ambivalence in regard to separation and autonomy" which can thus "[reveal] a discrepancy between ego ideal and perceived self, generating feelings of both anxiety and depression" (Levy and Farber 574). In other words, adolescents who struggle with a disconnect between their perceived selves and their actual selves will likely react negatively to introspection, and thus have the potential to reject empathetic experience through reading. Koopman writes, "Literature does not simply lead us to become better people, literary works can also be disturbing, and it is vital that they remain a free playing space for human thought" (Does Originality Evoke Understanding? The Relation Between Literary Reading and Empathy 7). Here, she acknowledges the potential for this negative reaction to literature, which she further expands upon in "Effects of 'Literariness' on Emotions and on Empathy and Reflection After Reading" with stating, "People who had read the original version of the text, containing a high level of semantic, phonetic, and grammatical foregrounding, also reported higher empathic understanding for other people experiencing grief than people who had read the version without semantic, phonetic and grammatical foregrounding" (Koopman 91).

In spite of the potential complications in expos-

ing less-developed adolescents to possible intellectual discomfort through literature, bibliotherapy holds promising potential as an alternative to other therapeutic routes. A 2003 study, "Cognitive Bibliotherapy for Depression: A Meta-Analysis," found that "[...]studies of cognitive bibliotherapy yield outcomes that compare favorably with studies of psychotherapy lends credibility to bibliotherapy as an option in the treatment of depression" (Gregory et al. 278). Similarly, "Cognitive Bibliotherapy for Mild and Moderate Adolescent Depressive Symptomatology" concluded that "[b]ibliotherapy may prove to be a useful alternative treatment for adolescents reluctant to use more traditional psychosocial or pharmacological treatments" (Ackerson et al. 689). While bibliotherapy holds some value for mild and moderately depressed adolescents, neither study recommends its utilization to treat more severe cases of depressive symptoms.

Overall, introspection in young adults shows a strong, though complex, potential for scaffolding adolescents' developing inner selves. By offering young adults relatable characters, young adult literature has the capacity to defamiliarize adolescents and transport them into another mental space, thus offering them the ability to expand their theory of mind and experience empathy. However, this approach also holds the potential to elicit negative reactions in adolescent individuals who experience a disconnect between their perceived selves and actual selves. Conversely, bibliotherapy offers a promising route to alleviate mild to moderate depressive symptoms in adolescents, therefore serving as a potential replacement for pharmacological treatment or other forms of cognitive therapy. All in all, literature—specifically young adult fiction—may conceivably serve to expand the introspective and empathetic capacities of its readers.

Works Cited

Ackerson, Joseph, et al. "Cognitive Bibliotherapy for Mild and Moderate Adolescent Depressive Symptomatology." *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, vol. 66, no. 4, Aug. 1998, pp. 685-690.

Bal, P. Matthijs and Martijn Veltkamp. (2013). "How Does Fiction Reading Influence Empathy? An Experimental Investigation on the Role of Emotional Transportation." *PLoS One*, vol 8, no. 1. Jan. 2013. Web.

Gregory, Robert J., et al. "Cognitive Bibliotherapy for Depression: A Meta-Analysis." *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, vol. 35, no. 3, June 2004, pp. 275-280.

Kidd, David Comer and Emanuele Castano. "Reading Literary Fiction Improves Theory of Mind." *Science*, vol. 342, no. 6156, Oct 2013, pp. 377-380.

Koopman, Eva Maria. "Does Originality Evoke Understanding? The Relation Between Literary Reading and Empathy." *Review of General Psychology*, 04 May 2017.

---. "Effects of 'Literariness' on Emotions and on Empathy and Reflection After Reading." *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts*, vol. 10, no. 1, Feb. 2016, pp. 82-98.

Levy, Betsy S. and Barry A. Farber. "Clinical Implications of Adolescent Introspection." *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice, Training*, vol. 23, no. 4, Winter 1986, pp. 570-577.

# Provincetown & Beyond: The Beginnings of Modern American Drama

Hanah Sims

In the quaint New England venue of Provincetown, Massachusetts, around the same time the illustrious Greenwich Village became the nesting place for bohemian artists, the Little Theatre Movement, or the Little Renaissance, spawned an outpouring of artistic creativity at the beginning of the twentieth century (Murphy 235). Through the collaboration of artists like George Cram Cook, Susan Glaspell, and eventually Eugene O'Neill, American theatre became a melting pot of Realism, Modernism, and Expressionism that not only sought to entertain, but also address social concerns of the era. In the theatrical experimentation of O'Neill and others, the Provincetown troupe produced a great majority of the plays that continue to captivate audiences today. The formation and theatrical innovations of the Provincetown Players, with assistance from the up-and-coming playwright Eugene O'Neill, enabled artists to produce thoughtful literary creations that became the cornerstones of modern American Drama we recognize today.

During their summer vacation in 1915, several artists, designers, journalists, and other creative individuals who had congregated in Greenwich Village for inspiration, including George Cram Cook, Susan Glaspell, John Reed, Mary Vorse, Joe O'Brien, Wilbur Steele, and Robert Edmund Jones among others, recognized that theatrical expression should not and did not have to be limited in an effort to meet the demands of commercial interests to gain the almighty dollar (234-235). In order to pool their creative talents and introduce their new vision of drama to Provincetown, these major figures began officially performing as The Provincetown Players "in a former fish house in Provincetown that was owned by Vorse and O'Brien," until they eventually grew and settled at their Provincetown Playhouse at 133 MacDougal Street in 1918 (Kennedy; Murphy 235). Although the group was not driven by commercial greed or dollar signs, limited funding and competition with commercial theaters affected the longevity of the Provincetown group and contributed to its dismantling in 1922 (Murphy 238). Despite its brief existence, the Provincetown Players' artistic goals and objectives were established and solidified as the group rapidly produced many of their own plays as well as those that Eugene O'Neill brought to the table early on.

In establishing themselves as a group of intellectually motivated players, the Provincetown troupe defined their goals and stance on what theatre should be while striving to meet those goals during each production. The founding members of the Provincetown Players not only agreed "to realize in dramatic terms the new artistic ideas and cultural values that the members of the Little Renaissance were laying out for the twentieth century," but also maintain themselves "as both an art theater and a playwright's theater" (236-237). In producing their own artistic works and keeping true to their original purposes, the Provincetown Players were also affected and influenced by several social factors, including the Little Theatre Movement, the Paterson Strike Pageant, politics, World War I, and America's introduction to European drama that emphasized realism (Chura 523; Kennedy 88; Murphy 236-238). With the significant social and global issues that were occurring during the years of roughly 1916-1918, the Players also surprisingly attempted to avoid theatre critics as well as publicity as they collaborated and produced their shows (Kennedy 104). Although the Provincetown Players refused to be driven and affected by commercial interests, theatrical criticism, and journalistic advertisement, the group became known across the country for their productions and "became more widely known as a national beacon for the 'Little Theatre Movement'" (104-105). A major contributor that drew in theatre critics, encouraged publicity, and led to the reputation and popularity of the artistic ventures of the Provincetown Players alongside Susan Glaspell was Eugene O'Neill, who arrived to the Village scene in 1916.

Following his career as a sailor, Eugene Gladstone O'Neill presented himself to the Provincetown Players as an emblem representing the working class, and after reading his one-act play, *Bound East for Cardiff*, they collectively decided that their company had found a playwright who would launch not only himself but also Provincetown as a credible source for art and expression (Chura 520-522). In the initial production of *Bound East for Cardiff*, which depicts the struggles

of a young seaman, Tom Perkins, as well as the working class' labor issues as relevant to the Pageant Strike, many scholars argue that the cohesion of the Players' goals and O'Neill's artistic genius reflect a shift in theatre as well as "a milestone in the development of American drama" (526-529). In writing and producing a play such as *Bound East* that highlighted current issues, like labor strikes, class differences, politics, and relationships, the group effectively made artistic statements on societal problems freely without concerns or hesitation from commercial backers. Through the "cross-fertilization" of the talents and ideas that had already occurred amongst the other members of the Players, O'Neill brought his own selections that depicted a variety of characters, themes, problems, emotions, flaws, and relationships which ordinary Americans could relate to and appreciate (Bloom 248-249; Murphy 240).

O'Neill's unique style as a playwright and his different views of theatre also fostered the dynamic duo that grew between the former sailor and the Provincetown Players. O'Neill's plays were popular and unique from much that was produced during this time period because although "the early O'Neill wavered between outer and inner realism," he honed in on the concept that his medium, drama, was meant to transform everyday life into realistic mimetic art; furthermore, O'Neill believed this outlet allowed the artist to experiment and discover new modes of theatrical presentation and effect that the audience could connect to and grasp (Highsmith 21). While O'Neill did not appear to particularly enjoy the structured label of realism, he was still influenced by the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche as well as the realist works of Henrik Ibsen, August Strindberg, and the Players' own George Cram Cook (19).

In writing and producing plays with the Provincetown troupe employing elements of realism, O'Neill also sprinkled in qualities of expressionism that "[brought] to life the individual subjective experience of the protagonist so that the audience might better understand and identify with him" (Murphy 244). By combining the ordinary struggles of different individuals, couples, and families alongside societal issues that were relevant to audiences during the run of the Provincetown Players, approximately 1915-1922, O'Neill and his fellow artists were able to spotlight controversial and political issues that commercial theatre might have placed on the backburner claiming them to be too risky for the sake of entertainment. Overall, Eugene O'Neill's theatrical experimentation and playwriting in which he "began his career as a dramatist emulating the great modern European playwrights in style and approach," ultimately helped him evolve as a dramatist by allowing him to use his own experiences and tragedies to develop what is now recognized as modern American drama (Bloom 261-262).

Although O'Neill's contributions to the Provincetown Players' popularity and success helped secure their reputation as a "Playwrights' Theatre," they understandably dismantled in 1922 as a result of differing goals, changes in leadership, and the influence of the longer plays and productions Broadway had to offer (Murphy 238 and 246). Despite their short run, the Provincetown Players "produced ninety-three plays by forty-seven different American playwrights," including several works by Eugene O'Neill and Susan Glaspell that continue to be performed today, such as *Trifles, The Hairy Ape, The Verge, and The Emperor Jones* (238). Without the dedication of the Provincetown Players and their emphasis on maintaining theatre that was artistically driven versus commercially propelled, American theatre of the twentieth century might have been intellectually lacking and, as it was in essence "coming of age and becoming 'modern,'" it might have taken longer to reach this shift in American expression (238).

To conclude, while the previous discussion is only a small spotlight overview of the Provincetown Players' history, timeline, and productions, it reveals the group's origin, purpose, influences, major figures, and styles that all unified to develop the elements of modern American drama we recognize today. As if the Fates gathered the artistic radicals together in Provincetown, the creativity that abounded in the immediate and surrounding areas of Greenwich Village helped encourage and foster the independent artistic expression the Players strived to produce without the overbearing pressure from commercial theatre. Using the realistic works of European playwrights in conjunction with

the new experimentation from the rookie playwright Eugene O'Neill, the Provincetown Players also presented plays that spoke to the social concerns of the era. Despite their brief lifespan, the Provincetown Players ultimately laid the foundation for modern drama that spread beyond Massachusetts and encouraged further theatrical expression.

Works Cited

Bloom, S. "EUGENE O'NEILL." *The Oxford Handbook of American Drama*, edited by Jeffrey H. Richards with Heather Nathans, Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. 248-263.

Chura, Patrick J. "'Vital Contact:' Eugene O'Neill and the Working Class." *Twentieth Century Literature*, vol. 49, no. 4, 2003, pp. 520–546. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/3176038.

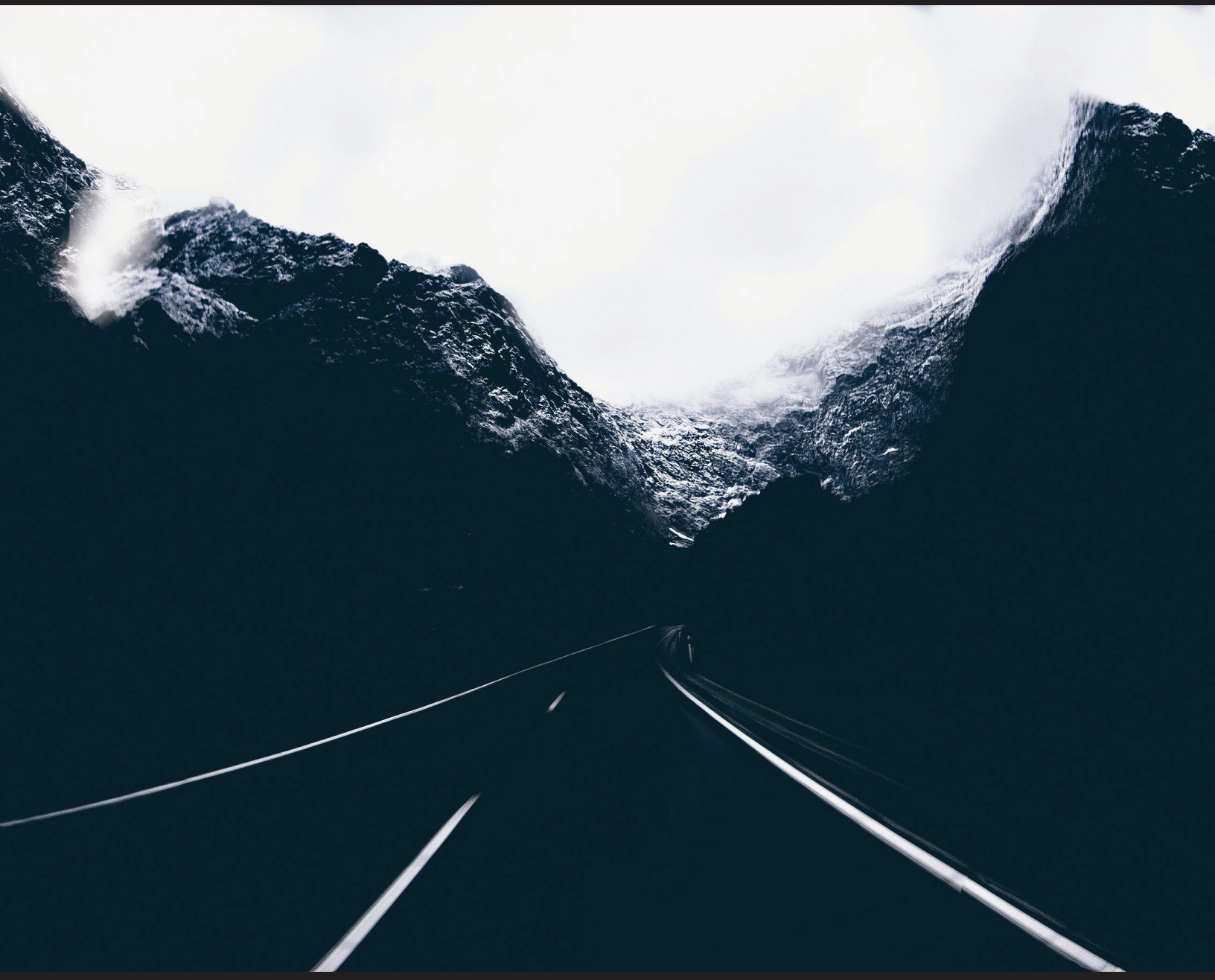
Highsmith, James Milton. "O'Neill's Idea of Theater." *South Atlantic Bulletin,* vol. 33, no. 4, 1968, pp. 18–21. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/3198084.

Kennedy, Jeff. (2014). "A History of the Provincetown Playhouse." *Provincetownplayhouse.com*, http://www.provincetownplayhouse.com/history.html. Accessed 4 Nov. 2017.

---. "Experiment on Macdougal Street: The Provincetown Players' 1918-1919 Season." *The Eugene O'Neill Review*, vol. 32, 2010, pp. 86–123. *JSTOR,* www.jstor.org/stable/29784901.

Murphy, Brenda. "THE PROVINCETOWN PLAYERS IN AMERICAN CULTURE." *The Oxford Handbook of American Drama*, edited by Jeffrey H. Richards with Heather S. Nathans, Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. 234-247.

# A Feminist Examination of *The Mists of Avalon*



Lauren Reynolds

*The Mists of Avalon* by Marion Zimmer Bradley was constructed through the female perspective of a male dominated Arthurian fantasy. While the author claims she is not feminist, the novel itself continuously showcases feminist ideals. The female characters have more control over their thoughts, decisions, and actions than had previously been written in this storyline. The religion (a central part of the plot) is invigorated with female empowerment: "I have called on the Goddess and found her within myself" ( Bradley 1095). *The Mists of Avalon* aggressively breaks patriarchal archetypes by pursuing an empowering goddess-centered religion, leveling the power struggle between men and women, and altering the ideals of female sexuality.

Analyzing a text through the feminist lens promises a new way of viewing the fiction; furthermore, contemporary feminist study opens new doors that stray away from heteronormative culture and helps to discover and examine women writers and female characters (Fernald 230). Feminism teaches the special issues that affect women and it helps readers understand gender, power, and other women's issues in religion, politics, and academia (Fernald 240).

Theology has historically been patriarchal, with divinity being derived from the male standard; however, "for 25,000 to 5,000 years before patriarchy, divinity was in the image of woman. The goddess as Great Mother was the creator" (Bolen 83). Furthermore, the female experiences of sex, pregnancy, childbirth, nursing, and childcare are crucial to the goddess spirituality—experiences that are marginalized in male-dominated religion (Bolen 83). In *The Mists of Avalon*, the pagan and female-centered religion is clashing against the believers of Christianity. The goddess figure –The Lady of the Lake—is desperately trying to keep her beliefs alive:

> Forever the world of Fairy drifts further from the world in which the Christ holds sway. I have no quarrel with the Christ, only with his priests, who call the Great Goddess a demon and deny that she ever held power in this world. At best, they say that her power was of Satan (3).

The female perspective in this novel brings to the forefront women's participation in politics and religion. Historically, a woman's power was seen as a small background role, they are only to provide encouragement to their men. It has only been in the last hundred years that feminism has taken hold and broken those old values (Moses 758). The pagan religion in *The Mists of Avalon* is female-centered and displays a society that has female leaders.

"Spiritual ecofeminism…focuses particularly on the 'goddess spirituality' as an historical alternative to patriarchal religions, that was more beneficent and… more in tune with nature" (Raddekar 21). In addition to the above, a theme of female-written science fiction is that the female characters are often endowed with magical powers. The Lady of the Lake is the spiritual equivalent to Christianity's god, with an exception -she is a living, breathing woman that is represented through several characters throughout the time period of the story. This goddess is close to nature, is a leader, and possesses magical powers—embodying spiritual ecofeminism (Raddekar 22).

Viviane is a priestess and The Lady of the Lake at the opening of *The Mists of Avalon*. She has the same mother as Igraine (Arthur and Morgaine's mother), but disavows her father because he was a believer of Christianity. From the very beginning of her history, she fights the patriarchy and makes radical decisions to protect Avalon:

> And even if Viviane had known the whole, touching her mind and knowing all that she could not say, Viviane would have looked on her with compassion and even a little pity, but would not have changed her mind or demanded even a little less from Igraine. She had heard her sister say it often enough when Viviane still believed Igraine would become priestess of the Mysteries: If you seek to avoid your fate or to delay suffering, it only condemns you to suffer it redoubled in another life (Bradley 26).

She also fosters Morgaine, and not only nurtures Morgaine's magical abilities, but manipulates her future in an attempt to protect the precious land of Avalon.

Due to Viviane's influence, Morgaine becomes a priestess and eventually The Lady of the Lake. She further displays feminist values in that she is independent, strong-willed, and controls her own body. She faces

many controversies, sleeping with her half-brother, Arthur, and bearing his child, but she remains in control at all times. She participates in the politics of those around her, working to keep Avalon safe and protect it from the encroaching Christianity. Morgaine's character reflects many of the contemporary viewpoints of feminism today, in which many women can relate to (Smith 140-141).

The 1960s and 1970s, during which *The Mists of Avalon* was written, brought feminism to the forefront of policymaking. Laws that created equality for women in the workplace and in academia were enacted. In addition, small groups of young women formed the Women's Liberation Movement that furthered the developments of female equality—directly aimed at the relationships between men and women. They brought into the light issues that were considered private, such as domestic violence (Moses 766).

The female characters of *The Mists of Avalon* demonstrate the changes that were occurring during the time the novel was written. The women in this novel are independent and assertive, unlike past retellings of Arthurian fantasies. They were more than maids and nurses—they had power. Igraine is an example of the feminist version of these characters. She was not magically fooled into betraying her husband; instead, she planned and participated in the plot to conceive Arthur because she chose to. Morgaine also demonstrates characteristics usually seen in male characters. She is angry with Arthur for betraying his relationship to Avalon and for his horrifying blasphemy against the Goddess religion by using the Holy Regalia in his Christian ceremonies:

> But Morgaine heard no more; suddenly she knew what they were planning to do-No! I am sworn to the Goddess. I must not allow this blasphemy! She turned and touched Raven's arm; even here, in the midst of this crowded hall, they were open one to the other. They would use the Holy Regalia of the Goddess to summon the Presence ... which is One ... but they would do it in the narrow name of that Christ who calls all Gods demons, unless they invoke in his name! The cup the Christians use in their mass is the invocation of water, even as the plate whereon they lay their holy bread is the sacred dish of the element of earth. Now, using the ancient things of the Goddess, they would invoke their own narrow God; yet instead of the pure water of the holy earth, coming from the clear crystal spring of the Goddess, they have defiled her chalice with wine! (Bradley 1051)

Her ill will is due to this intense disloyalty to everything she holds dear in her life, instead of superficial issues that are usually seen in female characters—like jealously and self-centeredness (Smith 135).

Bradley also created character issues that challenged the tradition of the male, Arthurian model. Chivalry was a significant male guidepost in most medieval literature, but Bradley challenged the institution of this gallant custom. Chivalry is toned down and made to seem ancient and childish. A scene between Balin and Lancelot in which they argue over who won a prize is petty instead of gallant, and this illustrates the ancient tradition behind chivalry (McClain 198). "Balin would not take it, and they stood disputing with one another in courtesy like two heroes from the ancient sagas Taliesin used to tell us when we were lads" (Bradley 345). By looking at both the male and female characters in *The Mists of Avalon*, it is possible to see that female characters were more empowered and male characters less, which created a more equal playing field. With the balances of gender being more stable in *The Mists of Avalon*, women have more power, especially over their bodies.

The study of the female body is a significant segment of feminist study. Feminist philosopher Susan Bordo explains the female body in *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and The Body*. She argues that how a society perceives a woman's body is a direct result of the rules and social controls of that culture. Contemporary norms of society indicate that women must continually chase the "elusive ideal of femininity" (166). This is a "pursuit without a terminus, requiring that women constantly attend to minute and often whimsical changes…—female bodies must be docile bodies—bodies whose forces and energies are habitu-

ated to external regulation, subjection, transformation, [and] 'improvement'" (166). These cultural standards seep into every facet of women's lives and they create a sexualization of the female body.

The Arthurian legends manipulate female characters—often commanded by a patriarchy—through their bodies and their sexuality, but *The Mists of Avalon* creates a female dominated story where the women are in charge of their own selves. In this version, Nimue plays the role of Kevin's seductress (Bradley's version of Merlin).

> Kevin had never seen Nimue. Of all those who dwelt on Avalon, the Merlin had never seen that one who dwelt in seclusion and silence. And as always transpires when the Goddess brings down punishment, it should be the Merlin's own undefended fortresses which should bring him to ruin. (Bradley 70)

Nimue is a strong, powerful female who is in charge of her sexuality versus Tennyson's *The Idylls of the King* where Vivien is controlled by the male leaders while seducing Merlin. Nimue breaks the standards of seduction and is able to capture Kevin's attention on her own terms, while making Kevin believe he is in charge and that she is helpless. On the other hand, Vivien is portrayed without authority, more as a prostitute, and definitely below men. Furthering her character, Nimue also has deep, personal strengths that give her the courage to stand up for herself and make her own decisions, even having the foresight to know that her seduction of Merlin may backfire. Nimue continuously fights the patriarchy and remains in control of her body and her sexuality, whereas Vivien is simply a pawn (Fuog 75).

The female body in science fiction has had many ups and downs. It is often "negatively constructed…passive, self-denying, obedient, and self-sacrificial" (Liang 2037). But, since feminist issues have recently seen a change—issues are more focused on social tribulations rather than biological ones— "the roles of women aren't the traditional, socially conditioned, and arbitrary sex roles" (Liang 2042). There is an "active rewriting" of the female body and an "inversion of sexual roles" (Liang 2042). *The Mists of Avalon* shows some of these role-reversals, especially through Nimue.

Due to Nimue's solid trust and faith in herself, she accomplishes what she set out to do. Not only did she succeed, she did it on her own terms, using her own skills. She did not just use her sexuality, as Vivien did. She used her knowledge of magic and her belief in the Goddess to accomplish her desires and defy the patriarchal structure. However, Bradley ends Nimue's story on a tragic, but commanding note—Nimue commits suicide. She takes her life into her own hands to avoid becoming a hostage of the patriarchy that was completely against her for the simple fact that she was female (Fuog 77).

There seems to be a standard in science fiction that power comes from violence, and that masculinity equals powerful and femininity equals powerless (Derose 67). Furthermore, in mass media culture, women are portrayed as having a "'lack'—their lack of a penis, [their] lack of the phallus (cultural power granted to men), [their] lack of ability to enter the Symbolic Order (the realm of reason and intelligence rather than emotion)" (Derose 68). *The Mists of Avalon* defies all of these conventions by creating a female-empowered perspective.

Through analyzing *The Mists of Avalon* with the feminist lens, several patriarchal ideals are fragmented. The storylines of Igraine, Morgaine, Nimue, and others construct a fantastical story of female power. The goddess-centered religion provides a feminist backbone, while the power struggle between men and women is on a more even field due to deviations in the traditional characters. Finally, by giving the women power over their bodies and their sexuality, Bradley completes the idea of *The Mists of Avalon* being a feminist novel.

Works Cited

Bolen, Jean Shinoda, and JoAnn Clausson. "Women's Psychology, *Goddess* Archetypes, and Patriarchy: A Jungian Analyst, Feminist Activist, Visionary Feminist Foremother." *Women & Therapy*, vol. 17, no. 1-2, 1995, pp. 71-80. ProQuest.

Bordo, Susan. *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and The Body*. University of California Press, 1993.

Bradley, Marion Zimmer. *The Mists of Avalon*. Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group. 1983.

Derose, Maria. "Redefining women's power through feminist science fiction." *Extrapolation*, vol. 46, no. 1, 2005, pp. 66-75. Academic OneFile.

Fuog, Karen. "Imprisoned in the Phallic Oak: Marion Zimmer Bradley and Merlin's Seductress." *Children's Literature Review*, vol. 158, 2011. *Literature Resource Center*.

Fernald, Anne E. "Women's Fiction, New Modernist Studies, And Feminism." *Modern Fiction Studies*, vol. 59, no. 2, 2013, 229-240,461. *ProQuest*.

Liang, Ying. "Female body in the postmodern science fiction." *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, vol. 5, no. 10, 2015, pp. 2037-2051. *Academic OneFile*.

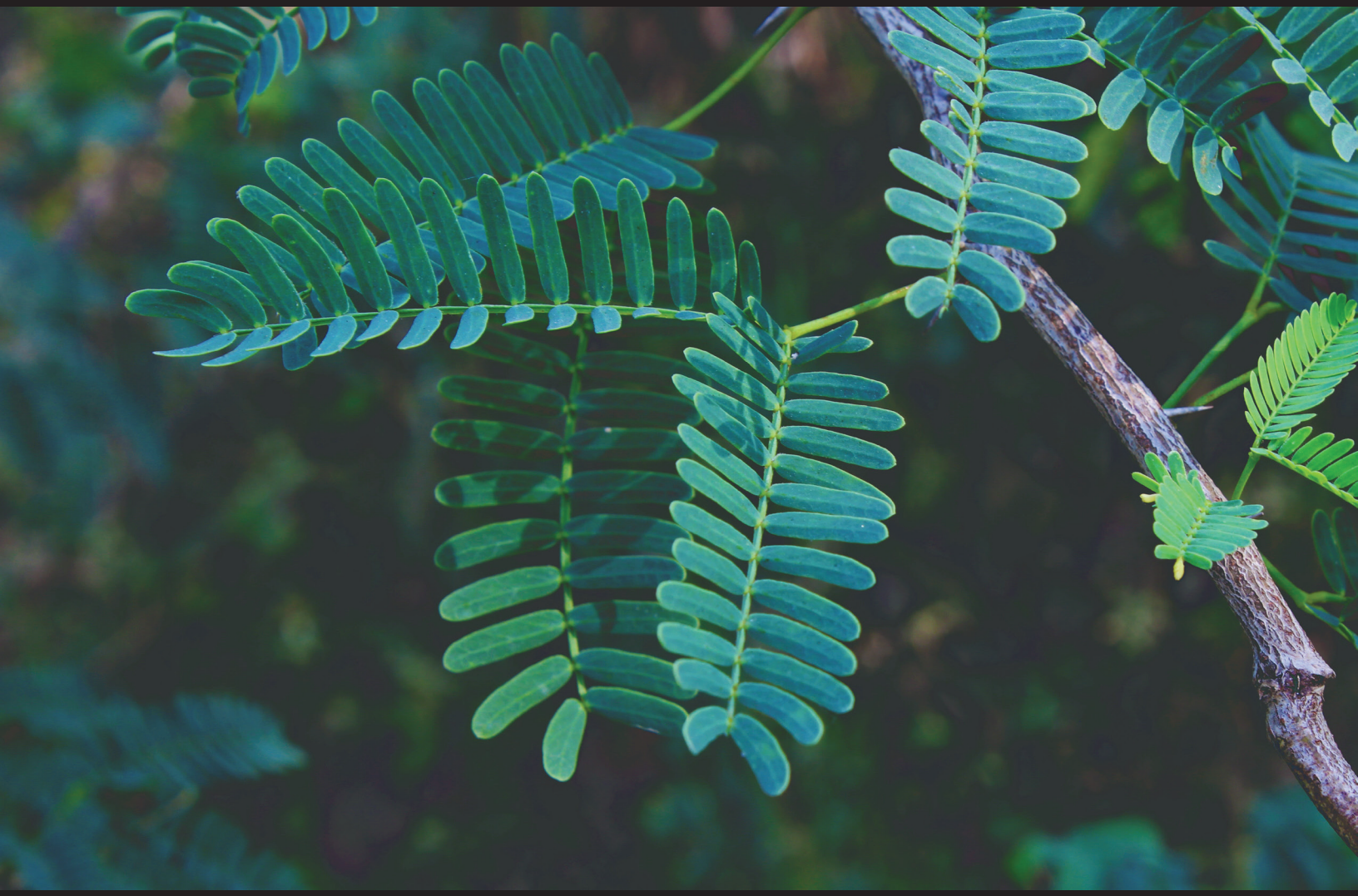
McClain, Lee Tobin. "Gender anxiety in Arthurian romance." *Extrapolation*, vol. 38, no. 3, 1997, pp. 193-199. *Academic OneFile*.

Moses, Claire Goldberg. "'What's in a Name?" On Writing the History of Feminism." *Feminist Studies*, vol. 38, no. 3, 2012, pp. 757–779. *JSTOR*.

Raddeker, Helene Bowen. "Eco/feminism and history in fantasy writing by women." *Outskirts: feminisms along the edge*, vol. 21, 2009. *Academic OneFile*.

Smith, Jeanette C. "The role of women in contemporary Arthurian fantasy." *Extrapolation,* vol. 35, no. 2, 1994, pp. 130-148. *Literature Resource Center*.

# Ecocriticism and “The Waste Land”



Courtney Hooper

*The Waste Land* by T. S. Eliot is one of the most popular poems to have come from the modernist literary movement. It is a lengthy, fragmented piece that weaves itself through multiple characters in different settings. It is divided into five parts: "I. The Burial of the Dead," "II. A Game of Chess," "III. The Fire Sermon," "IV. Death by Water," and "V. What the Thunder Said." Ecocriticism is "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (Glotfelty and Fromm xviii). With its descriptions of urban landscapes, polluted rivers, and arid plains, *The Waste Land* easily lends itself to an ecocritical reading.

The early twentieth century was a time of major cultural shifts. The industrial revolution had already transformed cities into hubs of productivity. The so-called "War to End All Wars" had only been over with for a few years when Eliot released his poem in 1922. The name of the poem itself captures a feeling of despair toward the urban environment. The use of "waste"' in the title is showing since waste is a negative term, one that can signify garbage, defecation, something squandered, or something that is growing weaker. Perhaps the title is commenting on "a shift from a culture defined by its production to a culture defined by its waste" (Glotfelty and Fromm 196). It can mean a land that is polluted or a land that is wasted or is wasting away. Parashar argues that the title stands for "the loss of morals [and] values" and the "degradation of environment in the modern world" (160).

The poem begins with a mixture of life and death in the environment. April, a month that typically symbolizes life and rebirth, is called the "cruellest month." It brings "lilacs," but they are popping out of the "dead land." It then speaks of Marie's childhood. Childhood is a time of innocence and happiness. Marie is sledding down a mountain with her cousin. The reader gets a taste of a pure environment, one that is innocent, "In the mountains, there you feel free" (Eliot 38 l. 17). The scene shifts automatically to a less forgiving environment, "What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow/ Out of this stony rubbish?…" then, "And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,/ And the dry stone no sound of water…" (Eliot 39 l. 19-20; 23-24). The pure beginning of life is set against death and decay. A crisp snowy mountain scene has transformed into a dead tree growing out of stone and garbage.

"I. The Burial of the Dead" ends with a parade of commuters.

> Unreal City,
> Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
> A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
> I had not thought death had undone so many.
> Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,
> And each man fixed his eyes before his feet.
> Flowed up the hill and down King Williams Street. (Eliot 40 l. 60-66)

The city is described as unreal. This could be taken to mean unnatural or fake. The "brown fog" could be smog from factories. The crowd is not dead, but seem to be. They exhale every now and then and their eyes are cast downwards as they make their way to King Williams Street in London, which is a financial district. Ecocriticism allows readers not only to look at landscapes, but also at the life within that landscape. Humans also count, since "no matter how urban our experience, no matter how oblivious we may be toward nature, we are nonetheless animals" (Glotfelty and Fromm 194). The commuters in this scene are less animals than robots. They are marching towards their jobs in the financial district as if they were lifeless. They have no spirit. Eliot describes them as dead, and they might as well be. Glotfelty and Fromm contend that man's move away from nature and into the arms of technology has "caused him to suffer a spiritual death, to feel alienated, empty, without purpose and direction" (32).

Part two, "II. A Game of Chess," opens to a wealthy lady's home. This environment is "artificially constructed," but it attempts to replicate nature (Buell 602). There are "standards wrought with fruited vines," "a carvèd dolphin" swimming in a "sad light," and a "nightingale" in the painting of Philomel's rape. These replications fall short in the crowded, extravagant room. The room is filled with her "strange synthetic perfumes," which "troubled, confused and drowned the sense in odours" so that not even the fresh air from the window could lessen the thickness of scent. A violent scene of rape is displayed over the mantel. Nature has been stripped of "any value other than as a material

resource and commodity" (Heise 507). It has no business being in this lavish room other than as a decorative replica. The woman is even almost fearful of nature. She claims that her "nerves are bad to-night" and she begins to be paranoid of the wind "'What is that noise?'/ The wind under the door./ 'What is that noise now? What is the wind doing?'" (Eliot 41 l. 111; 117-119). It is as if she is afraid that nature will somehow intrude unwelcome into her sphere.

"The river's tent is broken: the last fingers of leaf/ Clutch and sink into the wet bank. The wind/ Crosses the brown land, unheard. The nymphs are departed" (Eliot 43 l. 173-175). "III. The Fire Sermon" shows a man sitting beside the river under the bare arms of the trees overhead. He keeps repeating that the nymphs have departed. Nymphs in mythology were spirits of nature who inhabited different places, such as rivers. In the place of the nymphs, there are "empty bottles, sandwich papers,/ Silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends…" (Eliot 43-44 l. 177-178).

> In Eliot's *The Waste Land*, rivers symbolize culture and man's concord with nature. In the sections "The Fire Sermon" and "What the Thunder Said," rivers like the Thames and Ganga have been evoked in their past glory and the present disregard. Eliot is here hinting at the pollution of the rivers brought in by man and making them filthy. Rivers in India were associated with purity and chastity. A holy dip into the Ganga signified the purgation of all evils of man but in the present age their purity is questioned as the rapid industrialization has brought material waste, thus threatening the environment. The contemporary state of industrialization is intertwined in the backdrop with the personal, the collective and the mythical and the magical elements. (Parashar 162)

Something as important and so close to man as the water supply is filled with garbage. The nymphs have given up all hope and abandoned it completely, arguably taking man's sense of spirituality along with it. As the man is sitting by the river thinking about rats running over the skeletons of his father and brother, "the sounds of horns and motors" disrupt his thoughts. A reference is then made again to the painting of Philomel's rape "so rudely forc'd" implying that the loud noises and exhaust from the car is raping the landscape.

The reader is next thrown into the scene of the typist and the "young man carbuncular." Humans are no longer animals, but machinery. Before the encounter begins, there is an image of a "human engine" being compared to a "taxi throbbing," both conveying the human body and sex as a mechanical sort of thing. The scene is also "haunted by gadgets, mass-produced objects, and industrial landscapes which render the present mechanical, jarring, lifeless, and disenchanted" (Suarez 749). The two people have unexciting, machinelike intercourse then part ways. After the scene, the narrator moves back into the city street, "…where the walls/ of Magnus Martyr hold/ Inexplicable splendor of Ionian white and gold," but also where "The river sweats/ Oil and tar" (Eliot 46 l. 263-267). Magnus Martyr is a church that is "found in a district of such squalor as Fish Street Hill and Lower Thames Street" (Day 290). Eliot shows us in one breath how beautiful society and culture can be and how disgusting it can be toward the environment.

Part five, "V. What the Thunder Said," starts with a long lamentation on the lack of water, "Here is no water but only rock/ Rock and no water and the sandy road/ The road winding above among the mountains/ Which are mountains of rock without water" (Eliot 48 l. 331-334). The image is of a mountain that is "only rock." This mountain is much different than the mountain in the beginning of the poem that made one "feel free." This mountain does not have "silence," it only has the "dry sterile thunder without rain." There also is no "solitude in the mountains." The reader is far past the innocent, green mountains of youth and now comes closer to a dirtied death, "we who were living are now dying" (Eliot 48 l. 329). The lack of water is important to note because water is such a life-giving substance. The mountain is dying, and the human is dying because of it.

Eliot brings up an Antarctic expedition in which the people who were there were beginning to tire and become delusional. They kept seeing one more person than could be counted, "Who is the third who walks always beside you?/ When I count, there are only you and

I together/ But when I look ahead up the white road/ There is always another one walking beside you" (Eliot 49 l. 360-363). This passage also relates to the Christian belief that God is always with humans. Bringing in this bit of spirituality in such a dire situation is important to note because Eliot relates the loss of spirituality to the rise of mass production and industrialization. The same theme of lost spirituality appears only a couple of stanzas later where "there is the empty chapel, only the wind's home" (Eliot 50 l. 389). The chapel is hidden among the mountains. Only once the reader reaches this chapel does the life-giving rain begin to pour. Eliot is perhaps suggesting that a return to spirituality and to nature could restore the life that has been sapped from humans by the city.

The reader is brought back to the Fisher King who was seen in part three. He is fishing "with the arid plain behind" him. He asks, "Shall I at least set my lands in order," implying that he is close to death. Then the nursery rhyme line "London bridge is falling down" implies that society is also dying. In the nursery rhyme, no matter what material is used to build the bridge up again, it is doomed to fall down over and over. The reader also sees again the binary of death and rebirth with the fact that it is a song sung by children. Eliot then quotes Dante as well as a couple of other poems. The first quote is a reminder of pain which could tie in another spirituality element with Christ's crucifixion. The second is asking when the person will be like a swallow. This quote both brings up Philomel's rape- she turns into a swallow- and the fact that humans are also animals but much less free. The third quote could refer to The Tower Tarot card, which symbolizes something falling to make room for a rebirth (Parashar 166). These quotes acknowledge the need for a change in the society. It is decaying. Humans need to be more like the animals that they are rather than trying to become machines. It also ends on a twinge of sadness with the tower since the tower has to come to disaster before it is able to be made anew. Perhaps only once the environment is decimated can society see the error of its ways.

Eliot often incorporates religious themes, ideals, and even quotations into his poems. *The Waste Land* is no exception. He brings Hinduism into the last few stanzas once it begins to rain. Fowler claims that the last couple of lines in the poem are "nothing more than a charm, the purpose of which is to break the spell of the waste land" (235). The protagonist "utters an incantation designed to bring about the restoration of life in himself and his environment" (Fowler 235). He uses the words "Datta," "Dayadhvam," and "Damyata" which mean "Give, Sympathize, and Control" (Parashar 169). In Hinduism, man "is taught to live in perfect harmony with nature and not to exploit it" (Parashar 170). After "Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata," the poem ends with "Shantih shantih shantih."

> Vedic recitations strictly end with the chant of the Santih mantra, which is a verse invocation seeking the blessings of gods and sages in one's pursuit of spiritual wisdom. The mantra ends with a three-fold, solemnly punctuated intonation of s'antih, preceded by the mystic syllable Om. Santih in fact becomes a benediction only when Om precedes it, as Om santih santih santih… Eliot's propriety in severing Om from "shantih" rests on the fact that in a poem that offers little more than non-essences in "broken images," Om, the quintessential source of all order and harmony in life according to the Upanishads, does not and cannot find a place. Distraught and divided, the personages in *The Waste Land* can neither meditate on Om nor utter it (Chandran 682- 683).

The "incantation" at the end is then a wish for change. In a desolate situation in which a single human cannot find a solution, the person then calls for any god to fix the society and the environment. The nymphs are no longer available for assistance, the Christian god has been abandoned, perhaps a Hindu god will hear the plea.

*The Waste Land* by T. S. Eliot is a poem that has a lot to say about the environment and the impact that industrialization has had upon it. It examines multiple different settings: a polluted river, a mountain with no water, an excessively decorated and synthetic room, an arid plain, a smog-filled city. Eliot reacts to "water pollution, sprawl, depletion, and erosion, as well as to what

[he] see[s] as the spiritual deficiencies of urban space" (Rozelle 101). Ecocriticism is a lens with which one can view the polluted city scenes and the dry mountains of this poem.

Works Cited

Buell, Lawrence. "The Emergence of Environmental Criticism." *Critical Theory: A Reader for Literary and Cultural Studies*, edited by Robert Dale Parker, Oxford University Press, 2012, pp. 588-610. Print.

Chandran, K. Narayana. "'Shantih' in The Waste Land." American *Literature,* vol. 61, no. 4, 1989, pp. 681–683. *JSTOR*, JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/2927003.

Day, Robert A. "The 'City Man' in The Waste Land: The Geography of Reminiscence." *PMLA*, vol. 80, no. 3, 1965, pp. 285–291. *JSTOR*, JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/461276.

Eliot, T. S. The Waste Land and Other Writings. The Modern Library, 2002. Print.

Fowler, D. C. "The Waste Land: Mr. Eliot's 'Fragments.'" *College English*, vol. 14, no. 4, 1953, pp. 234–235.*JSTOR*, JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/372576.

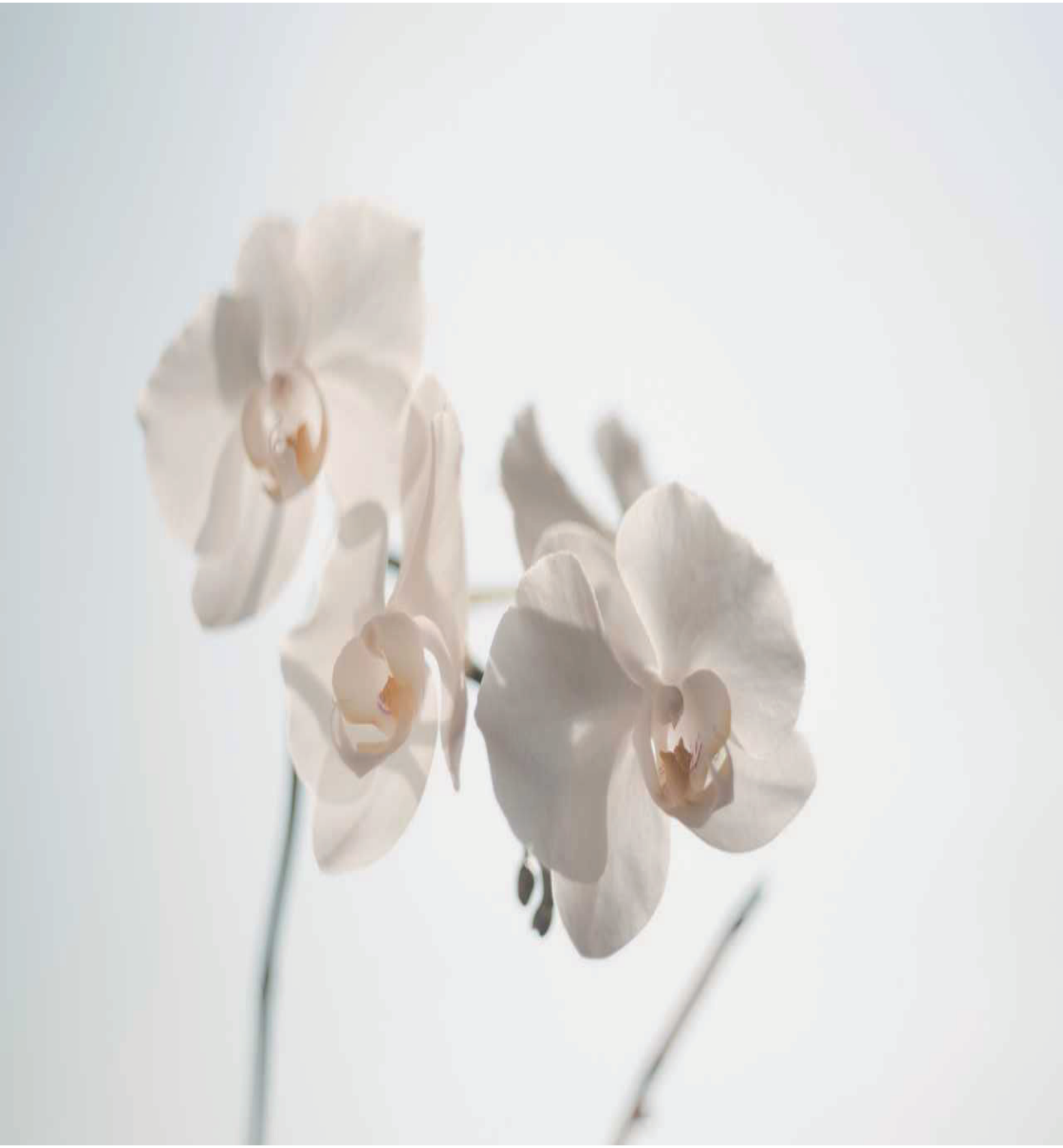
Glotfelty, Cheryll, and Harold Fromm. The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology. Athens: Athens : University of Georgia Press, 1996, 1996. https://jirayuri.files.wordpress.com/2016/05 Accessed 3 Dec. 2017. cheryll_glotfelty_harold_fromm_the_ecocriticismbookzz-org.pdf

Heise, Ursula K. "The Hitchhiker's Guide to Ecocriticism." PMLA, vol. 121, no. 2, 2006, pp. 503–516. *JSTOR*, JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/25486328. Accessed 3 Dec. 2017.

Parashar, Archana. "Reverberations of Environmental Crisis and its Relevance in Managing Sustainability: An Ecocritical Reading of T. S. Eliot's the Waste Land." Decision 42.2 (2015): 159-72. *ProQuest.*. Web. 3 Dec. 2017.

Rozelle, Lee. "Ecocritical City: Modernist Reactions to Urban Environments in Miss Lonelyhearts and Paterson." *Twentieth Century Literature* 48.1 (2002): 100-15. *ProQuest*. Web. 3 Dec. 2017.

Suárez, Juan A. "T. S. Eliot's 'The Waste Land', the Gramophone, and the Modernist Discourse Network." *New Literary History*, vol. 32, no. 3, 2001, pp. 747–768., www.jstor.org/stable/20057690. Accessed 3 Dec. 2017.



# An Analysis of Steinbeck's "The Chrysanthemums"

Jeffrey Johns

*What's the greatest lesson a woman should learn*?
That since day one, she's already had
everything she needs within herself. It's the
world that convinced her she did not.
- Rupi Kaur

California's Salinas Valley: a plumb expanse between the Gabilan mountains to the south and west and Santa Lucians to the east, has long been prized for its cool Pacific breezes and its flat, black, fertile soil. It has over the past century acquired a reputation as being the "salad bowl" of the world. Every inch of available soil is employed to grow green produce. It is cultivated, picked, cooled, processed, and shipped at a dizzying pace. The small family farms, once omnipresent throughout the valley in Steinbeck's time, for the most part, have been relegated to history. The vast fields of lettuce and broccoli now cover the old homesteads, the frame houses, the barns, the livestock pens: essentially all the accoutrements that held generations of hard working farmers in good stead. It is in this environment that John Steinbeck set his work of short fiction, "The Chrysanthemums." Published in 1937, this story has but three speaking characters: Elisa Allen; her husband, Hank Allen; and the "Man," a tinker. This seemingly uncomplicated plot is made rich by Steinbeck's third person telling of what is ostensibly a first-person narrative. Elisa's thoughts are the only ones dealt with on a substantive level; furthermore, the resulting tale is a study in personal yearning and feminine ennui. This essay will consider Elisa's angst and desires in terms of motif and symbolism. Her relationship with her husband and her interaction with the tinker will be examined as well.

"The high grey-flannel fog of winter closed off the Salinas Valley from the sky and from all the rest of the world. On every side it sat like a lid on the mountains and made of the great valley a closed pot. On the broad, level land floor the gang plows bit deep and left the black earth shining like metal where the shares had cut" (Steinbeck 704). Steinbeck's opening words set the tone for the entire piece. The Salinas Valley, once a series of rocky abutments jutting out of the sea, was over countless millennia raised by the motion of the North American tectonic plate. This turned what was once idyllic sea bed into the flat rich earth, surrounded by the golden hills that we know today. The valley is a sweet spot of sorts. A chill Pacific wind fills the area with cool dry air while just over the mountains to the east, a mere forty-five-minute car ride from Salinas is the enormous Central Valley, where the temperatures can, and often do, reach well over a hundred. This area, where Steinbeck spent so much of his life is likened to Elisa's life. She, like the valley in which she lives, is flat and surrounded by metaphoric peaks.

She is a woman who is at once content in her life yet dissatisfied by her existence. She is married to a successful rancher and leads a comfortable life. She does not have to toil in the fields and then in the home as many farm women do. She has time and wherewithal to pursue more leisurely activities, such as tending her home flower beds, yet she longs to do more. She works busily and expertly in her flowers, cutting back the previous year's growth and plucking the green shoots out of the soil while preparing them for transplant. Steinbeck described her in masculine terms at the outset: "Her figure looked blocked and heavy in her gardening costume, a man's black hat pulled low down over her eyes, clod-hopper shoes" (705). She is girded with her apron, which is festooned with shears, a trowel, scratcher, and a knife, all of which are symbolically phallic. He goes further in his portrayal of Elisa as masculine by describing her face as being eager, mature, and handsome.

Chrysanthemums are odd flowers. The stems are tall, thin, and hollow. They seem out of place when one considers the large, gorgeous, heavy bloom that sits atop. Elisa is, in presence and action, just as out of place as the stems she so vigorously hacks at with her scissors. This dissatisfaction may not have been rooted in her relationship with Hank; but it certainly seems to manifest itself in their husband/wife dynamic: "A good deal of the fiction by and about women centers upon the heroine's entanglement with patriarchal norms which historically have enforced the forfeiture of the female self" (Pratt 1971). Hank is a patriarch. We see that he does business out of earshot of his wife, as "good old boys" do. She stays out of the men's dealings even though she is clearly interested. When Hank comes to inform her of the sale of thirty steers and that he got

"his price," she replies: "Good….Good for you" (705). She seems resigned to her role as the doting wife to Hank. Then, as Hank and a hired hand ride up the hill in search of steers, up out of the oppressive valley, she continues to pull, trim, and prepare the chrysanthemum shoots. She prepares the square bed and lays furrows in the soil to receive the shoots, just as any farmer would. She is feeling a sense of accomplishment when a strange sound catches her attention.

He comes into her life for just a short time on that day; but the effect he has on her is inestimable. The Man: an unnamed tinker that travels up and down the west coast in an old, cobbled-together wagon. This wagon has misspelled signs on the side and is pulled by a pair of mismatched animals. The grey haired, grey bearded man wears a greasy, wrinkled suit and has dark brooding eyes. This man ekes out a meager existence sharpening knives and repairing cookware. He is off the road that he usually travels. He is the type of man that Elisa would not be attracted to normally; but on this day, she is standing on the gaping edge of a spiritual precipice. He tries to ply his trade with her: "Maybe you noticed the writing on my wagon. I mend pots and sharpen knives and scissors. You got any of them things to do?"(707). This is clearly sexual innuendo, which is one of the tools employed by traveling salesmen, and the tinker is most certainly that, albeit he sells services instead of merchandise. One who practices direct sales must be quick-witted and able to discern what excites the customer. When Elisa becomes irritable after several minutes of the man's tete-a-tete he quickly changes tactics. After inquiring about her flowers Elisa becomes perky, proud, and attentive. Her estimation of the man changes instantly. It is clear that she loves conversing about something she is good at. She even pulls off her old hat and lets her hair down, which Steinbeck describes as "pretty." This is indicative in terms of patriarchal norms as being an improvement. She has begun a morphing process, like a caterpillar to butterfly or more to the point, from passive to active. All of this because a total stranger engages her about her flowers. This is known in psychology as the appraisal similarity effect, which means that "interpersonal liking increases as a function of the perceived similarity between one's appraisal of an object and one's empathic social appraisal of how another is appraising the same object" (Jomel 2017). Elisa, exited by the man's interest in her gardening skills, prepares a flower pot with chrysanthemum shoots for another customer of his down the road. She goes on to describe her deftness at working the flowers, her special skill set that she calls "planter hand" (708). After describing this skill, she becomes enamored of the man, stretching out her hand to touch him (almost) then fawning submissively on the ground in front of him, just as his dog had done earlier. At this point she is completely in awe of the Man.

He, instead of reciprocating her overtures, inquires again whether she has work for him. Now receptive, she digs two old cooking pots from the scrap heap and gives them to him to fix. As he works she opines that it would be nice to do what he does, that she could do as well as he and that he might one day have some competition. Again, she is expressing a desire to leave her flat dull life, in her flat dull valley. He dismisses her thoughts by telling her that the road is no place for a female. The thought of a woman doing his job probably is ludicrous to him. A patriarchal society leads its citizens to have what is called a basic expectation assumption. This principal claims that "males will expect higher task performance for themselves; consequently, they will exercise influence over female group members, will initiate interaction more than women, and actually will outperform women. Similarly, women will expect less from themselves and more from the males; the resulting deference behaviors will facilitate creation of the inequalities between women and men" (Mueller 2002). Upon Hank's return she is dressed and made up in her best, causing her husband to compliment her in such a way that lets the reader know that this is a rare occurrence, reaffirming the metamorphosis narrative. Then, on their way into town, she sees the shoots and dirt from her flower bed, dumped on the side of the road. She is devastated. One could conclude that she considered the shoots from her much-adored chrysanthemums to be a part of herself, a part that she is sending out of the foggy valley to a better existence, but the man she had so briefly admired dumps them out. It is as if she were dumped on the side of the road herself. As she and

Hank ride on toward Salinas, for a celebratory night out, "She turned up her coat collar, so he could not see that she was crying weakly—like an old woman" (711).

Steinbeck's ability to delve deep into the psyche of the average person, coupled with his beautifully descriptive writing style is the reason he has become canonical in American literature. His stories, some close to a century old, remain fresh and relevant. The story of the disjointed relationship triad in "The Chrysanthemums" is one of broad significance and nuanced emotion. It is now, and will forever remain, a classic.

Works Cited

Steinbeck, John. "The Chrysanthemums". Ed. Richard Bausch. In The Norton Anthology of Short Fiction. 7th ed., W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 2006, pp. 704-711.

Jomel W. X. Ng, et al. "The Appraisal Similarity Effect: How Social Appraisals Influence Liking." *The American Journal of Psychology*, vol. 130, no. 3, 2017, p. 355. *JSTOR*, URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/amerjpsyc.130.3.0353 Accessed: O5 November, 2017.

Kaur, Rupi. "What's the greatest lesson a woman can learn?" "The Poetry Foundation" year Web. https://www.poetryfoundation.org/search?query=rupi+kaur. Accessed 05 November, 2017.

Mueller, Charles W., et al. "Interactional Processes and Gender Workplace Inequalities." *Social Psychology Quarterly*, vol. 65, no. 2, 2002 *JSTOR*, URL: http//www.jstore.org/ syllable/3090099. Pp 163-185. Accessed 04 November, 2017.

Pratt, Annis. "The New Feminist Criticism." *College English*, vol. 32, no. 8, 1971. http://www.jstor.org/stable/375625 pp.872-878. Accessed, 04 November, 2017.

ALUMNI ASSOCIATION
ATHENS STATE UNIVERSITY

ATHENS STATE
ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

## The Alumni Association provided:

Over $43,000 in scholarship funding to students in 2013-2014.

Sponsorship of the Athenian Ambassadors and Young Alumni Advisory Council (YAAC).

30 Alumni sponsored events for 2013-2014.

Over $80,000 donated to the University since 2009.

Presence/table/promotional items for 23 non-alumni sponsored events.

Discounts and incentives to local and national businesses.

**athens.edu/alumni**

**Alumni membership has its benefits!**

# THE ATHENIAN

THE ATHENS STATE UNIVERSITY STUDENT NEWSPAPER | THE.ATHENIAN@ATHENS.EDU

The Athenian is published year round, with two editions in the fall semester, two in the spring semester, and one during the summer term. The current edition along with all archived editions of The Athenian can be found on the web at www.athens.edu/student-activities/athenian.


* The Athenian Student Newspaper


# The Write Club

is for any and all students interested in writing! We're a team looking to create safe spaces for writing, sharing resources, and obtaining feedback on our work. We've got great plans, so check us out on Facebook via the QR code provided.

To find out more,

email us at:

athenswriteclub@gmail.com

# KASU

*Athens State University College of Business Radio*

**24-7 Streaming Link** **http://kasuradio.net**

**College of Business** - Sanders Hall
300 N. Beaty Street; Athens, AL 35611

Phone 256-216-5369
kasuradio@athens.edu

**89.9**
CAMPUS
**FM**

# Contributor Notes

**Jessica T. Charlton** is a digital painter, graphic designer, and irrepressible enthusiast of all things geeky. An artist who believes firmly that no job is worth it if you can't have a little fun while doing it, she is an award-winning cosplayer, an outspoken crusader for the legitimacy of fanworks as art forms, and incredibly sleep-deprived. She is probably playing a video game right this second.

**Courtney Hooper** is a senior at Athens State University. She writes a lot of poetry. She hopes to one day become an English professor.

**Rachel Jackson** is a senior at Athens State University and is currently working toward a Bachelor's degree in computer graphic design. She chose this field of study in hopes that it would allow her to pursue her passion for art and express herself in a professional environment. Rachel has recently received two ADDY awards from the American Advertising Federation North Alabama Chapter, taking home both Silver and Gold for her photography.

**Jeffrey Johns** is a 58-year-old husband, father, grandfather, and great-grandfather. He worked as a merchant seaman, plumber, and truck driver until he was disabled by a genetic neuropathy, after which he earned a GED and started college. Apart from his family, the time that he has spent in college has been the most fulfilling experience of his life.

**Rachel Matthews** is a digital artist whose work delves into different genres of fantasy, surrealism, and escapism.

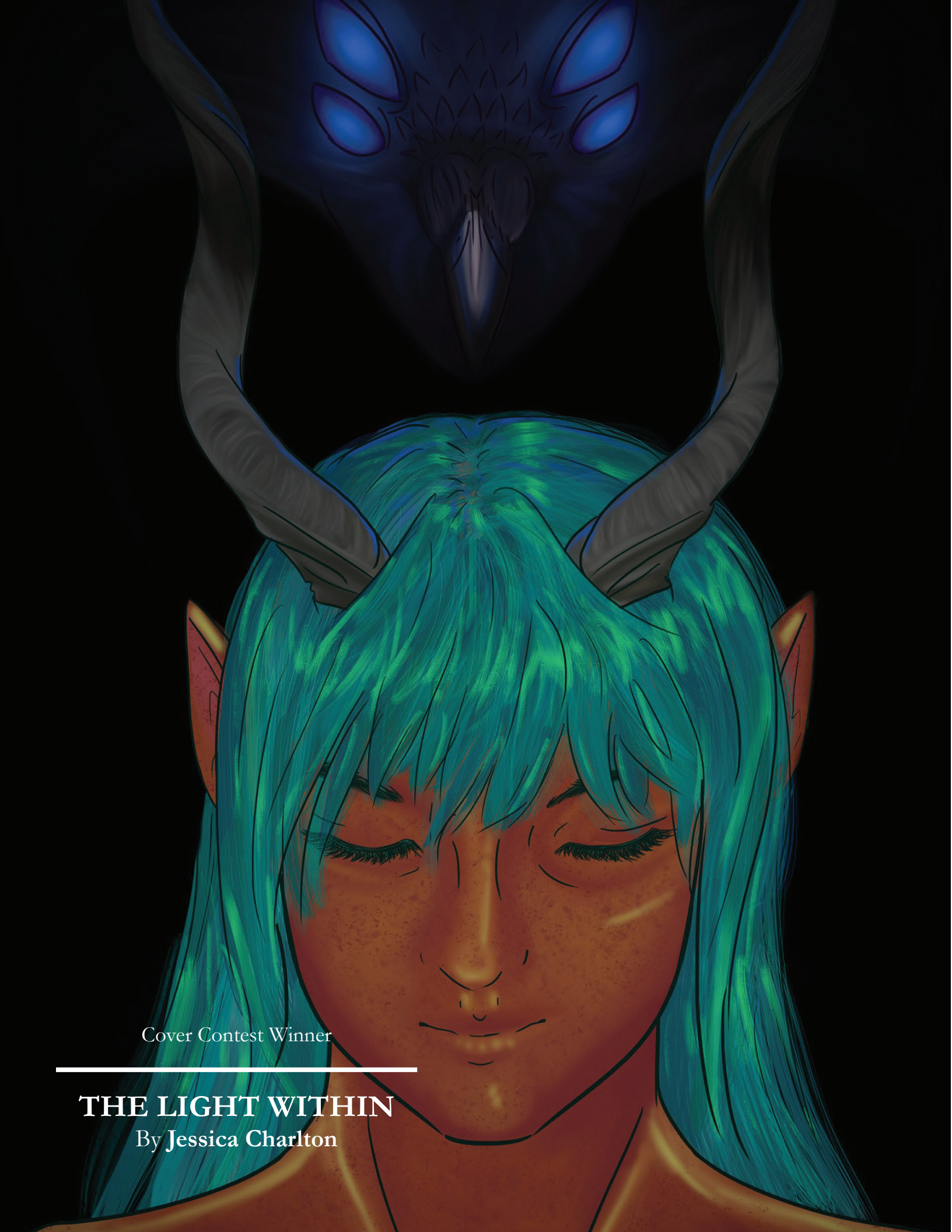
**John Ramey** is an artist located in North Alabama.

**Lauren Reynolds** is a student at Athens State University, working on completing her double degree in English and graphic design, plus a minor in marketing. She is currently a consultant in the Writing Center, where she has worked for three years. She has attended and presented at multiple conferences focused on writing center pedagogy. She is also the editor and layout designer of the Athenian, the school newspaper. She loves reading and writing, and she is not afraid to admit to being a Potterhead.

**Hanah Sims** is a senior at Athens State University majoring in English/Language Arts with a minor in secondary education. She is well-known in her circle of peers for her love of literary references and passion for the written word. When she is not inside the classroom, she works part-time as an auction clerk for Holland Realty & Auctions and as a consultant in the Athens State University Writing Center.

**Andrea Williams** is a writer known for her striking style.

**Haley Williams** is 25 and married to her best friend. Her major is sociology. She loves painting and uses it to convey emotions that she cannot express verbally. Her painting 'Living Water' was created in 2013 after a series of unfortunate events in her life. The tree in the center resembles a cross. It's a visual reminder to her that her Lord is ever-present and will not leave or forsake her.



Cover Contest Winner

# THE LIGHT WITHIN

By **Jessica Charlton**

# Submission Guidelines

We accept both academic and creative work produced by College of Arts and Sciences students. As such, we welcome a wide range of submissions including research and analysis papers, case studies, short stories, essays, poems, photographs and photo essays, artwork, novel excerpts, short plays, and others. Submissions close the Friday before finals of each semester. Submissions received after the Friday before finals will be considered for the following semester's issue.

**For Academic Work**

In order to be considered for publication, academic work must be submitted to the editors along with a faculty recommendation. Recommendation can be informal. When submitting academic work, note in the body of the email that you have discussed submitting the work with a faculty member. Include contact information for the faculty member. Submitted work can be a maximum of 15 double-spaced pages and must be formatted using the citation style appropriate to the content. Submit the work and the faculty recommendation to the editors by email.

**For Artwork**

We encourage contributors to submit multiple pieces in this category. A faculty recommendation is not necessary. Please submit artwork in image files only. We will not accept artwork submitted in a pdf. To insure that the integrity of the art remains intact, please submit high-resolution images only. Artwork should be submitted by email.

**For Poetry**

We encourage contributors to submit multiple pieces in this category. A faculty recommendation is not necessary. Please submit poetry in a Word document only. Submit poetry by email.

**For Fiction & Creative Non-fiction**

We ask that contributors submit a maximum of two fiction or creative non-fiction pieces per semester. A faculty recommendation is not necessary. Please submit your work in a Word document with the text double-spaced with a maximum of 30 pages. Submit fiction and creative non-fiction by email.

**Contact Information**

Email: athenas.web@athens.edu

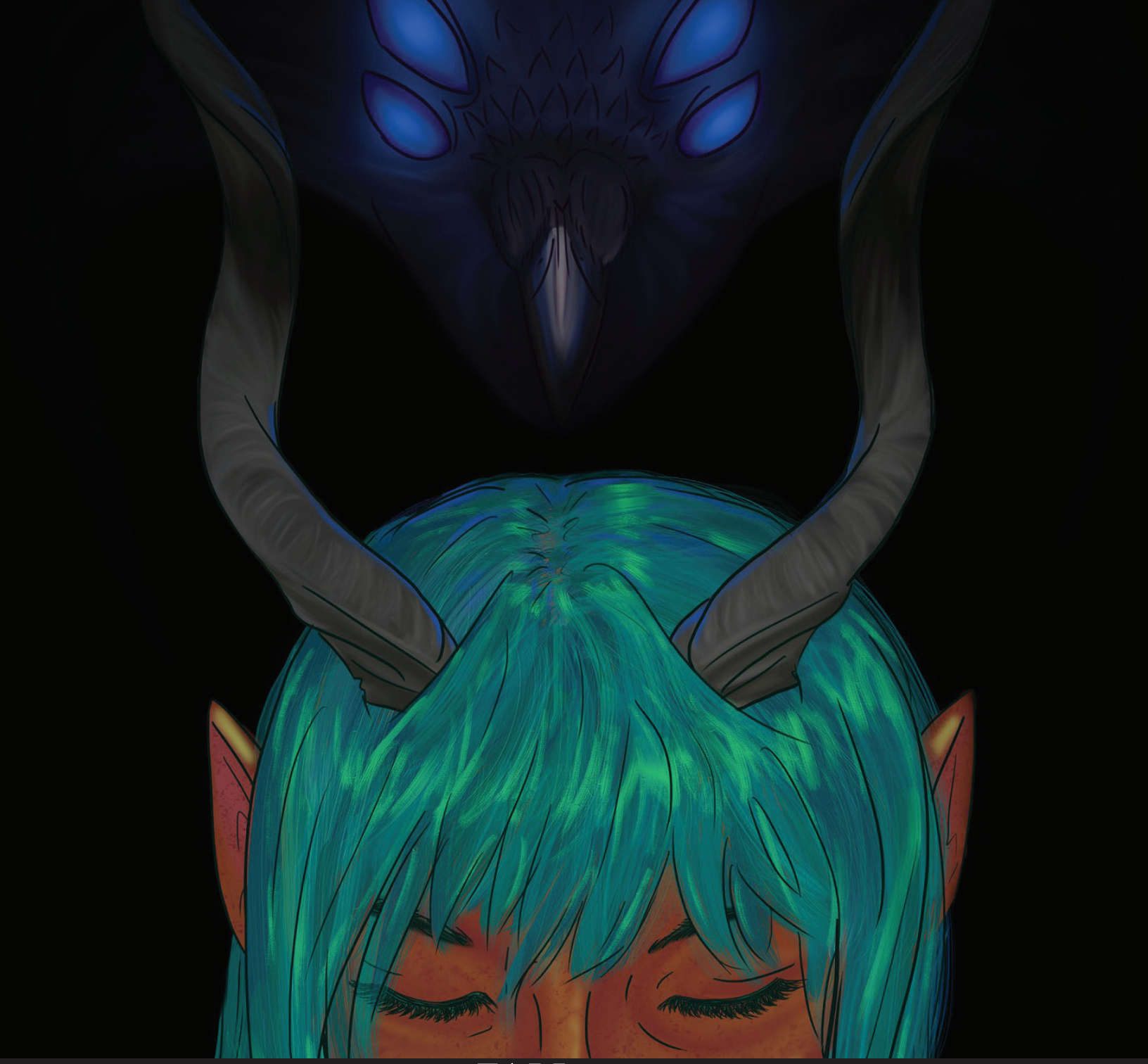
www.athens.edu/athenas-web-journal

Connect With Us On facebook

# Print Copies

Print copies of this journal have been provided through an endowment of the Athens State University Alumni Association. *Athena's Web* thanks the Alumni Association for their continued support of our goal of spotlighting outstanding work and research of Athens State students and alumni in the field of the liberal arts.

ALUMNI ASSOCIATION
ATHENS STATE UNIVERSITY



# FALL 2017

Jessica Charlton
Courtney Hooper
Rachel Jackson
Jeffrey Johns
Rachel Matthews
John Ramey
Lauren Reynolds
Hanah Sims
Andrea Williams
Haley Williams

ATHENS STATE
UNIVERSITY