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**attic salt**  
2022

# attic salt

noun (Latin, Sal Atticum)

- 1 Graceful, piercing, Athenian wit.
- 2 An interdisciplinary journal which accepts submissions in any genre, format, or medium--essays, original research, creative writing, videos, artwork, etc.--from the entire LMU undergraduate and graduate community--and now from the Honors programs of AJCU institutions nationwide.

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The University Honors Program  
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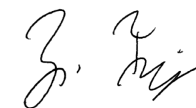
# from the editor

*Attic Salt* is an eclectic journal. Our mission is broad - to promote excellent student work done by the LMU and AJCU community. The variety of student work poses a challenge for a journal which must select only a few of these pieces for publication. On what principles do we compare a poem and an essay? With what authority does an English major judge a photo collection? Of course, we can say that research papers should be well-argued, photographs should be well-composed, poetry should be well-written. But this does not give us much. And as an interdisciplinary team of undergraduates, we have little of the experience necessary to claim we have selected "the best of the best." So what have we done?

We start with the belief that each person, in their own way, is capable of recognizing excellence. That is why selection decisions at *Attic Salt* are always done collectively. Together, we can approach something like a complete view of the merit of a work. It is also why we have leaned into the eclecticism of our journal. Our lack of experience with the rules of each field enables us to use rules we find to be common to all fields. That student work should be exploratory and explanatory. That the creative and the original should be prized above the customary and the familiar. That each piece should give you something that you didn't have before, whether that be knowledge, beauty, or a story. And that these rewards should be accessible to all our readers. As a result, this year we published our most wide-ranging selection to date, including essays that analyze anime, and food, illustrative paintings and abstract collages, short stories about students from the asteroid belt, and the apocalypse, and poetry that reminds us of our beginnings and our ends.

I sincerely appreciate the many people who contributed to the creation of this journal, and would especially like to thank Dr. Alexandra Neel, our faculty advisor and for whose help in editing the journal we are grateful. I would also like to thank the LMU Honors Program, Dr. Trevor Zink, Dr. John Dionisio, Nubia Valenzuela, and Dr. Andrew Dilts for their continued support. Without the invaluable design contributions of Dr. Garland Kirkpatrick and Lauren Cassiano, we could not have published this journal. And of course, without the submissions from our authors, there would be no work to display. My deepest gratitude is to the *Attic Salt* staff, whose hard work has made all of this possible.

I hope that you enjoy these works, and most of all, that you find them interesting.



**ZACH IRVING**  
Editor-in-Chief

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# LEXISS MORGAN lexiss morgan

## EUPHONIOUS

### CREATIVE WRITING

Lexiss Morgan is a junior at Loyola Marymount University studying both psychology and English. She has always been a creative person, with her ideas being expressed through writing, drawing, and music ever since early childhood. She came to LMU in hopes of understanding just what makes humans tick and to improve her skills as a writer. As she continues with her education, she wishes to attend graduate school to pursue a master's degree in psychological sciences.

Callie's last addition to her collection of junk was a chewed up mechanical pencil she found in front of the high school. She dropped it into her worn bag, along with three individual shoes, a jewel-encrusted dog collar, a rusty socket wrench, a bike chain, and a half-used Chapstick that appeared to have something growing on it. The haul wasn't that big today, understandably so. At this point, Callie had picked the entire town clean, and she didn't have the time to waste going to the next town over to explore. She would have to make do with what she'd gotten.

*Done so soon, Miss Harper?*

"I think I've got enough items for tomorrow. I can stuff them in The Machine and see whether or not my final week of junk hunting has been worth it."

\* \* \*

The Machine. Callie stumbled across The Machine about 400 days ago, when only a handful of people were left walking around aimlessly, looking for any last bit of meaning to give their life before they faded into the wind.

She had been breaking into empty houses in search of a Walkman, something to occupy her mind while on scavenges for lost items. SkyVo suggested her next target: a shabby little house that had a roof with several tiles missing and damaged and crumbling stucco. The front lawn was unkempt and overgrown with tree stumps dotted around the grass; it resembled a chess board that children could run and dance upon.

In contrast to the drab exterior, every inch of the interior was decorated with glistening machines of various shapes and sizes, all adorned with colorful bells and whistles. SkyVo had told her how the house belonged to a reclusive scientist named Dr. Alistair Wordsworth, and how he quietly tucked his inventions away for no one to see. Something about the common people being too unappreciative — or too unintelligent — to understand his genius motivated him to hide his brainchildren from the world. Callie admired the machinery laid out in front of her: alarm clock radios labeled "Time Travel Aid, Trial 16," metal helmets reading "Animal Motor f(x) Transfer," and countless devices that ought to have a home in a national

science museum rather than on Jackson Street.

Callie continued through the halls and ducked in and out of the rooms, marveling at the technology that surrounded her. "All of this is so amazing," Callie said in awe as she browsed the gallery of machines. "It's too bad Dr. Wordsworth never shared his works with the world. Now he can't even be recognized posthumously since everyone's dead."

*Well, you are here to recognize his work, Miss Harper. Would you not think that is enough?*

"No. I'm not enough, SkyVo," Callie said, defeated. "I don't know how to work these machines, and I'm quite literally one of the last people in the world, if not the last person, to see all this." She looked at her distorted reflection through a gadget that resembled an automatic can opener, her gaze dropping down to the number on her left wrist. A solid black '409' was tattooed on her skin, a bitter reminder of how many days she had left to live. Looking around at these incredible gadgets, Callie found her awe growing into frustration, angered that the scientist squandered his talents.

"You happy science dude? That no one will ever see your inventions? These could have done some real good." She kicked a rogue lightbulb that was sitting on the floor, shattering it to pieces.

*It is best not to dwell on the actions and inactions of other people.*

"Can it."

Callie was about to leave the house when she decided to check the garage, curious if there was more to the museum. She was glad she did. Inside, she found a hollow rectangular prism made of what looked like titanium, about three feet taller and wider than her, fastened with colorful coiled wires and buttons. Intriguing. Callie examined the surrounding area to gather any information she could on the fancy box. She found a water-damaged notebook and loose papers with blueprints of The Machine but couldn't make any sense of them. The only indication of the box's function was a single music note etched on the front left side of the prism.

Put something inside.

What was that supposed to mean? SkyVo had a knack for giving instructions that got right to the point but created many questions as a side effect. It was like that on the day its voice first came from the sky. *Attention everyone*, it said. *If you take a moment to look at your left wrist, you will notice a black number equal to or less than 450. That is how many days you've left to live. Carry on with your daily activities and may the rest of your life be lived as happily as can be!* Fortunately, Callie had grown accustomed to the ways of SkyVo and pushed away the questions that immediately popped into her head. She looked around the garage, found a pair of goggles, and put them into the prism. Callie half expected the goggles to disintegrate as soon as she put them inside The Machine.

"Now what?"

*Press a button.*

Which one? She could press any of the billions of buttons on The Machine. After analyzing for a minute, Callie pressed the biggest button closest to the music note on the front left panel: a soft purple button that resembled an evening sky. It must have been the right one to press because The Machine hummed and lit up. There was a moment of silence. Then, a soft minor melody rang from The Machine. The notes sounded detached from one another, as if each individual key tried to be its own song. As the song progressed, Callie couldn't help but feel as though it was trying to gain somebody's attention, anybody's attention. It was reaching for something it had no chance of gaining.

*Do you sense the longing, Miss Harper? Dr. Wordsworth had quite the complicated feelings toward his life's work.*

This was the song of the scientist's life. Callie's eyes widened as she realized what this machine could do: allow her to listen to the life of any individual through a personal belonging. In that moment, she unconsciously made it her mission to find the belonging that produced the most beautiful song.

"SkyVo... I don't think I need that Walkman anymore."

\* \* \*

Callie stared at the sunset on her way back to Dr. Wordsworth's house. She walked slower than usual and held a firm grasp on the bag that contained the items from her final collection day. Callie weaved in and out of cars with broken windows and flat tires, nearly tripping on bottles and grocery bags that littered the street. In the cars she'd see the occasional handbag or clothing item or other personal belongings. This made Callie wonder, had someone else been in her position, what would they think if they saw the remainders of her life? Just what made her life special enough to last over a year longer than any other person?

"Hey SkyVo, why did you give me so many days?"

*Please elaborate.*

She sighed. "You know what I mean. When you suddenly appeared and made that announcement, you said people had a maximum of 450 days left to live. You gave me 831 days!" Her voice boomed in the empty streets. "Do you think it's fun knowing that every other person in the world is dead? My family? My friends? And it doesn't help that you keep reminding me about it!"

*For that I have no definitive answer you can understand. My apologies.*

Callie scoffed. "Of course. My tiny brain wouldn't understand the laws of the universe. Well... then how about this? Why our world? Isn't there some other planet you could have done this to?"

*Are you familiar with what your kind call the Fermi Paradox?*

"Kinda," Callie said, losing motivation to continue the conversation. "I've definitely heard of it and I know it has to do with alien life, but I don't know much other than that."

*You are on the right track, Miss Harper. In simple terms, it is the idea that if the universe is really teeming with extraterrestrial life, why has your kind not made contact with them yet? Well, my job has*

*something to do with it. One of your solutions to this paradox is that the spans of time in which intelligent life exists in the universe are too spread out, so the intelligent species are never able to meet. That is actually done on purpose. I end intelligent life on planets before they've the chance to meet, so as to protect the safety of the universe.*

"So... you've killed everything else," Callie stopped in her tracks and looked up at the sky, her face grim. SkyVo's upbeat, robotic voice started to get on Callie's nerves, so much so that she wished it had a body she could strangle. Callie took a deep breath and resumed walking, this time at a hastier pace in a futile attempt to run away from SkyVo.

*That is what I just said, yes.*

"Meaning... I'm the last one ever?!"

*Not ever. Just until new intelligent life springs about again— which is quite soon might I add. You are so full of questions today, Miss Harper! It makes me happy that you wish to converse with me!*

"God, I hate how peppy you are!" she exploded at SkyVo. "You think I want to talk to you? You're my only option! Especially since you took Dad away... then Mom... an- and Calvin." This was the first time Callie lashed out at SkyVo. All the stress of knowing that her end was near and all the sadness she had kept pent up released in this very moment.

*My apologies Mi—*

"Save it," Callie said sharply. SkyVo listened.

The orange sunlight grew weaker and the purples and blues of nighttime slowly crept in. Callie continued walking home, her footsteps the only sound of life in the streets.

\* \* \*

After nearly an hour, Callie reached Dr. Wordsworth's house. Before she walked in, she looked up at the sky — now completely dark. Neither she nor SkyVo had said a word since their argument, but Callie was not one for the silent treatment. She took a deep breath.

"Earlier, you mentioned how I'm 'so full of questions today,'" she said quietly, but sternly. "I always have questions, but I pushed them to the side since I was always afraid of the answers... I didn't want to hear you say that I was the last one. It's scary being here alone... but, it's easier dealing with that pain with you around, SkyVo," she choked. "And even though you are *technically* the reason I'm going through all of this... I'm sorry I yelled at you like that."

SkyVo stayed silent.

Callie made her way to the garage where she set her haul neatly in the small pile of the other items that she had collected earlier that week. Before going upstairs to turn in for the night, she looked at the scattered mountains of items she had collected over the past year: credit cards, coffee pots, jewelry, aprons, dirty socks, spoons, cigarette butts, action figures, stuffed animals, baby teeth, video game controllers, and a plethora of other trinkets. She remembered how she obtained nearly every item, all the time spent searching for them and listening to the music they produced. And finally, Callie's scavenger hunt had ended: tomorrow, her last haul of lost items would turn into music, and she would potentially complete her quest to find the most beautiful song. Callie resolved to accept the outcome, whether or not she found it. The very thought of it made her stomach turn.

Callie went into the master bedroom and plopped onto a makeshift bed she'd made of wooden crates, pillows, and blankets she took from a department store; she wanted nothing to do with Dr. Wordsworth's bed. She used the light from the moon shining through the window to look at the number on her wrist: a black '3,' which would soon change to '2' when the remaining clocks hit 12:00 a.m. She closed her eyes.

*Miss Harper?*

"What is it, SkyVo?" Didn't SkyVo get the hint that she was trying to fall asleep? Though Callie was glad to hear it was speaking to her again.

*What are your plans for your final day?*

"I don't have anything in particular. I was going to



re-listen to my favorite items and then eat that can of peaches I've been saving. Other than that..." Callie didn't want to think of her final moments. Even the people with the longest time to think never got used to the idea of death. She wasn't like the celebrities who televised their death to a world that had already lost too much to care. Nor was she like the gullible suckers who fell for the tricks of the doomed misers who'd prettied up their words and promised a glorious passing as their numbers hit 0. And she definitely wasn't like the ones who took matters into their own hands and administered their own departure.

*If I am not overstepping my boundaries, may you save your final moments for a request from me?*

Callie thought for a moment, uncertain of SkyVo's intentions. "As long as it doesn't get me killed."

*Then I retract my—*

"It was a joke, SkyVo. Yeah, we can do something in my final moment. But for now... I really want to sleep. Good night, SkyVo."

*Good night, Miss Harper.*

\* \* \*

Callie's penultimate day consisted of a major melody here, a minor one there, and the occasional chaotic cacophony. All of these lives that she had collected in the past week started to sound the same. She had a few items left to listen to, unenthusiastic about the music they'd make, but decided to take a break before finishing the last batch.

What was the point of continuing this quest? She'd found plenty of beautiful melodies produced by The Machine, and she'd made peace with her inevitable end. What was she still searching for? She was just as caught up in trying to give meaning to her life as were those who went all out for grandiose deaths. Callie leaned up against the wall and let out a sigh of disappointment. Even though she somewhat knew she wouldn't find what she was looking for, it still stung knowing that her labor bore no fruit.

Once Callie finished listening to the rest of her collected items, she concluded that her final week of

junk hunting was not worth it. The insipid melodies of the last few items helped Callie realize that she was no different from anyone else who just wanted to believe their life had purpose.

What a crummy way to spend her second-to-last day alive. But, on the bright side, she would listen to her favorite items' songs tomorrow... even though the best songs *still* missed that 'point' she was searching for.

She didn't dwell on it and went to sleep — tried to, at least.

\* \* \*

Callie was a wreck; she paced frantically back and forth throughout all the rooms in the house and vigorously chewed at her nails. She was definitely not ready for this to be her last day alive. She thought she had come to terms with SkyVo ending life on Earth, and that she had her emotions under control. Her racing pulse told a different story. And unfortunately for her, the music of her favorite items — a glow in the dark retainer, a preserved flower necklace, and a paintbrush — didn't soothe her nerves. Neither did her can of peaches. For the next several hours of what was supposed to be a time to accept her fate, Callie was dealing with a nightmare.

*What troubles you so, Miss Harper?*

"My impending death, oh omniscient Sky Voice! Shouldn't that be obvious?" Callie said sarcastically.

*I thought you were prepared for it.*

"I thought so too. And now it's the end of the day and I feel like I wasted all this extra time I was given! Collecting trash? What made me think that was a good idea? God, the extra 381 days were wasted on me. Wasn't there a better candidate for your little extended-life program?" Callie said, now picking at her hangnails.

*Now, now, Miss Harper. No need to worry. You spent your time beautifully, and all will end perfectly!*

"Easy for you to say. You just have to wait around until life gets intelligent again and you can play your games with them."

*I know you may not think it, but it is sad for me too. It is lonely. After watching them grow and develop, I must destroy my only friends. And though I wish I could, I cannot change the rules of the universe. It is a beautiful thing to be alive. To be always alive, however... it is painful. So, in my eyes, death is just as beautiful. I do not think you should be afraid, Miss Harper, you have done just fine. You have lived well.*

Callie's mind raced. She didn't know what to say. There was nothing to say. She just had to make sure her days counted. But wasn't it too late for that? How could she make the days count when she'd run out of them? What counts? Callie could count the days she had left (none)... but how could she make the things that she's counting, count? No, no, no. Callie took a deep breath. Thinking like that wouldn't do. Especially not after hearing SkyVo's perspective on life and death. She took another breath, closed her eyes, and took one more. She collected her thoughts. It was nearing midnight.

"Thanks, SkyVo... that actually kind of helped," Callie said, much calmer than before. "I was so caught up in how lonely I was that I didn't even think about how you felt. We're in this together, huh? I guess now I just sit and wait for the inevitable."

*But wait, Miss Harper, you still haven't done my final request!*

"Oh sorry! I forgot because I was kind of having a crisis. What was it that you wanted?"

*Could you step in The Machine?*

"Huh?"

*Step into The Machine, Miss Harper.*

Confused, Callie traversed through the labyrinth of the years' worth of clutter that she had created. The Machine was in the center of it all, and it almost looked like it was at the top of a hill — a hill made of people's songs of livelihood. She stepped into The Machine.

*Press the button.*

Callie reached out of The Machine to press the

button on the front left panel. For a second nothing happened, and she wondered if she'd somehow broken it. But then... The Machine produced a sound. First, a major melody, then minor, then major again. And suddenly... all possible melodies rang at once, all somehow producing one coherent sound that could only be described as euphonious. Euphonious was the last life on the planet, the life of Calliope Harper, and her song would shatter the world through to its core.

In an instant, Callie had tears of joy streaming down her face. She found what she had been searching for: the most beautiful melody was the symphony of death. How ironic, that she learned her reason for living as soon as she started to fade away. She watched the number on her wrist dissolve, as well as the rest of her body.

"Thank you, SkyVo, for giving me this extra time and for being a friend to me until the end... even though you were a pain in my ass a lot of the time." Callie sniffled and unsuccessfully tried to hold back her tears. "Because of you, I was able to experience a life I never would have otherwise. I'll miss you."

*Thank you, Miss Calliope Harper. Thank you for giving me this last song. Thank you for being my friend, and I hope we can meet again.*

# سام يازيجي sam yaziji

## DRIFTING TIME MISPLACED

### POETRY

Sam Yaziji is a junior English major attending Loyola Marymount University. His first collection of poems, 'A Monstrous Roar of Negation,' is set to be published in mid-2022.

## DRIFTING TIME MISPLACED

An old man walks down the hallway of a funeral home.  
Cup of lukewarm wine clutched in his hand,  
modest casket sitting in the back.

*Its dark veneer like marbled endpaper,  
elegant walnut swirls bordered by blue crescents,  
harsh red lining shielding the body inside.*

The full cup sloshes lazily onto his knuckles,  
hands shaking with measured turbulence.  
He pulls aside his daughter for a word—  
she sits in the back, speaking quietly to a woman he doesn't recognize.  
His cuffs, stained earthy burgundy, cast his hands into shadow.  
They jitter slightly, dark lines hewn into the terrain  
of his rough palms. She reaches to his wrist and pulls  
the suit jacket over the tinted shirt sleeve, removing  
the cup of wine with her other hand.

*The humidity of time bears down  
with brutish force—  
gray, listless dread—a rainforest where  
bits of twig and decaying leaf  
shuffle beneath his feet,  
signifiers drifting on the slender  
edge of discernment.*

He ambles over the cheap carpet covered  
in loose staples and severed threads  
and wonders why he hasn't seen his wife all afternoon.  
He turns away sharply as it comes surging back—  
the sensation painful,  
*sharp tack of absence lodged in his cerebellum  
suddenly removed.*

He drifts back to the center of the room—  
*buttresses soar up to the ceiling,  
sun brawls with shadow axles,  
afternoon light flits through stained glass.*

The Mother of God, an apparition,  
arises in the fringe of his vision—  
icon suspended beside the casket,  
head resting in her hands as she kneels over  
her son, golden disks encircling their angular faces.

He approaches the casket now,  
*steps muffled beneath the coiling bluster  
of quiet conversation that ricochets  
damply across oblique white  
walls and arched brown ceiling.*

The slight form inside, throbbingly familiar—  
the feeling of the woman's curls cauterized in his memory.  
He reaches out to run his hand through them.  
*Her gaunt cheeks still contain vital rosiness, lingering life.*  
He clutches the side of the casket and sways, finding it difficult to inhale.  
After a moment, he seeks out his daughter again,  
hands shuddering violently, breath bursting  
forth in acute gasps  
*Who's that in the casket?*

# Clarabelle clarabelle sullivan

## CONSUMED

*PAINTING / Oil on canvas, 20" x 16"*

Clarabelle Sullivan is a freshman at Loyola Marymount University. She is a Studio Arts major with a concentration in drawing and painting, and is also studying vocal music. She strives to portray the beauty of the human experience in her paintings while representing people from diverse backgrounds. Her love of nature is also present in her art, which she incorporates into her imagery. She is also passionate about social justice issues and has explored topics such as racism and feminism in her paintings. She has done several murals in the Los Angeles area and hopes to further spread her art to inspire others and to promote awareness, compassion, and an appreciation for life.



# kate chappell

## kate chappell

## LEFTOVERS

### POETRY

Kate is a junior History and Secondary Education major from San Pedro, CA. While she's excited to teach middle and high schoolers about anything history related, her dream subject would be a high school US History or Government class. In her free time, Kate loves playing basketball, card games, and hanging out with her two pet rats, Winston and Arlo.

### LEFTOVERS

Your name takes up too much space in my mouth.  
It's hot and sour soup,  
Left out for three years--  
Spicy, sweet, heavy, familiar  
--That coats my teeth and burns going down

Even stale,  
Your name tastes like hating myself.  
And feeling loved.

Tastes like there's no way you loved me.  
But I think you did.  
I know you did.  
You had to have.

My cheeks pucker at school dances  
and standardized tests  
and free periods.  
I burn my tongue on bus rides to your college  
and being snuck into your dorm room  
because I wasn't 17 yet.

I go back for more  
I can't help myself  
I couldn't help myself

Your name tastes like being loved  
Tasted like you loved me  
Tastes like you had to have.

# taylor dischinger

## ASCENT

### CREATIVE WRITING

Taylor Dischinger is a junior at Loyola Marymount University studying English and marketing. He enjoys reading and writing fiction, and is drawn to the potential for characterization and commentary in speculative science fiction. After graduation he wants to work in marketing and PR for the entertainment industry.

“Classic spacer crash-landing,” came a mocking voice from above, as a pair of spotless turquoise slippers stepped over Theo’s head with exaggerated caution.

Theo Metzli’s face, already flushed with the adrenaline of a gravitational accident, was stained darker by embarrassment, anger, and resentment. A noxious combination he had become far too familiar with. “Hey gluefoot, fu—” Theo’s hasty retort was cut short by the all-too-familiar patter of Dean Kimathi’s rapid footsteps.

“Theo, are you alright?” the dean inquired anxiously, her voice drifting downward to the concrete where Theo remained sprawled.

“I’m *fine*,” Theo grunted. The blood dripping from a scrape on his cheek belied the statement, but he had brushed off far worse accidents than this.

“I’m glad that this time wasn’t anything serious. However, once again, I *strongly* suggest that you consider taking advantage of the university’s complimentary gravity adjustment exoharnesses.”

At this, Theo’s already potent supply of anger and shame surged, giving his emaciated arms the strength to push himself into a sitting position. “And once again,” he replied, glaring fiercely into the dean’s comically overstated expression of concern, “I refuse to strap myself into a crutch. You keep waiting for me to break down and admit that I can’t handle this transition by myself, but I ‘strongly suggest’ you focus on the wannabe gluefoots who actually want your help.”

Theo’s tone, and his casual use of the slur, broke through Dean Kimathi’s well rehearsed maternalism. Her face hardened—a bit too quickly for her previous concern to have been genuine—and she snapped, “Very well. But I warn you Mr. Metzli; while the concept of respect may not mean much to someone from the Kuiper belt, here on Earth we still expect it from our *subordinates*.” And she bustled away, her footfalls impacting slightly harsher than they had previously.

There it was. Even from someone whose title was “Dean of Nonplanetary Student Support.” The always-reliable gluefoot contempt for those who had dared

to elevate themselves off an archaic hunk of rock. As Theo watched his class continue past him towards the battered Atmo-Hopper at the far end of the landing pad, he reflected on the irony of his situation: here, at the prestigious Ethiopian National Academy of Extraatmospheric Studies—where every student was purportedly driven by a fascination with the vacuum of space, Theo had encountered more terrestrial bias than any other place he had visited during his brief time planetside.

Although nonplanetary individuals looked down on planetary residents as “gluefoots”—a defensive measure intended to blunt the sting of planetary prejudice—Theo had decided that the students at NAES deserved their own epithet: bent-necks. They looked up to the sky with zeal and enthusiasm, but looked down on those who actually inhabit the empty abyss.

Theo’s parents, eager to put to good use the wealth they had scraped out of lonely meteor fragments at the edge of the solar system, had insisted that Theo attend college. And Theo had chosen NAES out of a naive belief that he would be accepted there—perhaps even admired as someone who had spent his life in the heavenly expanse to which the university was devoted to studying. In the few short weeks he had been there, Theo had been quickly disabused of this notion. His underdeveloped muscles, albino skin, and elongated frame, which he had always prized as a testament to the rugged life he had led on the boundary of human civilization, were greeted with disgust; his practical and form-fitting bodysuits were ridiculed as pathetically drab in comparison to the billowing fabric that distinguished luxury style on Earth.

A sharp burning sensation brought Theo out of his reverie. Looking down, he discovered that his fall had opened up a gap between his glove and full-length shirt sleeve; in the short time he had been sprawled on the tarmac, the relentless sun had blistered his near-translucent skin. Everything on Earth was sharper, harsher, and more aggressive. Hurriedly Theo adjusted his sleeve and, fueled by more shame and anger, laboriously tottered upright. He methodically stepped his way towards his classmates, who were congregated around the airlock of the waiting Atmo-Hopper, itself the only reason he had registered for this class. On the bottom of the syllabus for Orbital Physics 212: Microgravitational Kinesiology had

been a small note that read, "This course includes extraatmospheric day trips." Theo had immediately signed up, eager for the chance to return to the familiar comfort of zero gravity; to return home, even if only for a few hours.

Now, as Theo stepped carefully through the door of the airlock, a peace diffused through him. The thrusters' slight rumble beneath his feet did more to stabilize him than an exoharness ever could; the dim artificial lighting eased the throbbing pain behind his eyes; and the recycled air rejuvenated him like a draught of spring water. He felt condescending eyes linger on his bloody cheek, and almost believed he could hear the folding of skin as lips curved into smirks. But this time, he did not lower his eyes to the ground. He met the stares, and returned them with a glare. The familiar toxic sludge of anger, resentment and shame still boiled within him, but now a new element had been added to the cauldron: confidence. This was a space he understood intimately, a space where for once he could move boldly while others stumbled.

Theo sat down next to a pretty girl wearing a flowing pastel blouse and pulled the safety harness down over his head. He briefly locked eyes with the girl, and behind the fear dominating her face, thought he identified something else in her expression besides judgement. Curiosity, perhaps? Theo hurriedly banished the thought, and turned away to face the front viewport. These bent-necks would never accept him. He was irrevocably misshapen in their eyes.

An abrupt hush fell over the class as the outer airlock hissed shut, sealing out all external noise and leaving only the gentle hum of the idling ion thrusters. Dean Kimathi stood up from the front row of seats. "All right class," she called, "Now that everyone is here—" and her eyes flicked briefly towards Theo—"We will begin the liftoff procedure. If this is anyone's first spaceflight, I invite you to sit next to me in the front row. I would be more than happy to explain any flight procedures you may have questions about, and to help address any no-g sickness that might develop." No one moved. The girl next to Theo shifted uncomfortably. After several uncomfortable moments, Dean Kimathi continued, "Very well. We are in one of the university's Atmospheric Ascent ZT12 space craft, more commonly known as an Atmo-Hopper. The craft is designed for brief forays into low Earth

orbit. We will complete two orbits of the Earth over an approximately three hour period. During that time you will each conduct tests for your microgravitational kinesiology research project, and you will also have the option of partaking in a two-minute, tethered, extra vehicular activity."

At these last words Theo, who had only been half listening, snapped to attention. He wasn't the only one. All around him, gluefoots broke out in excited whispers. These pathetic bent-necks had probably never dared leave the comfort of their cabin, Theo thought savagely. They actually found the idea of dangling on a string beside a ship thrilling. He, on the other hand, had spent thousands of hours drifting on the edge of infinity. Not that he wouldn't do the EVA, of course. He desperately missed the peace that came with floating in a sea of nothingness.

Pleased with the effect her words had wrought, Dean Kimathi sat down. The whispers petered out as the Atmo-Hopper rotated upward ninety degrees. With the ship and its passengers now oriented skyward, the ion thrusters flared to life with a low whine, and the hull's gentle rumbles became markedly more violent.

With smug satisfaction, Theo noted that several students around him clutched their safety harnesses far more tightly, their knuckles turning white. Although Theo would never let it break through his well-constructed shell of casual indifference, he felt a twinge of fear as the ship's thrusters lifted it gently off the ground. Prior to his arrival at the university he had only ever experienced a few planetary rendezvous, and never on a planet with as thick an atmosphere or as strong a gravitational pull as Earth.

The ship's slow climb through the atmosphere gradually accelerated, and with that came an increase in the crushing pressure that tried to pull Theo back down, through the hull, to Earth. He took a savage pleasure in resisting gravity's pull, in rising skyward in spite of the planet's futile attempt to stop him. As the atmosphere gradually slipped away to be replaced by the soothing silence of airless space, Theo's heart ascended at a faster pace than the ship itself. The apex of his joy arrived when he looked down and saw his sleeve floating, unsupported, above his wrist. He was home.

Suddenly and without warning the thrusters shut off and the Atmo-Hopper settled into its orbital trajectory. Nervous giggles broke out as people toyed with their undulating clothes, the nebulous clouds of hair around their heads, and water droplets that leaked out of unsealed bottles. A soft ding announced that the class could now move about the ship's cabin. A cacophony of clicks followed as safety harnesses were unhooked, and a few daring individuals began to inch off their seats before being pulled back by their more cautious friends.

Unable to tolerate the ineptitude of those around him, a newly emboldened Theo shrugged off his own harness. And while the other students fumbled clumsily, fawns staggering without a mother's support, he slipped out of his seat like a dolphin reentering the water. Without saying a word, he propelled himself to the cargo hold, retrieved his kinesiology experiment, and began to conduct his tests. He could feel other students' eyes on him, but for once their attention did not confer shame or embarrassment. Now they were the weak ones, while Theo's spindly limbs and depigmented skin marked him as superior.

Theo ignored the growing clamber around him as more and more students began to inexpertly navigate the small ship. The occasional thump would announce a painful collision, whether with a bulkhead or another person, and elicit from Theo a tiny smirk.

"Ok class, please pause what you are doing for just a moment." Dean Kimathi floated at the front of the cabin, stabilizing herself with one foot touching the frontmost aisle of seats. "For those of you who desire to do so, we will now begin preparing for individual two-minute EVAs. Spacesuits are at the rear of the cabin, and the flight crew will help you select and put on the appropriate size."

About a quarter of the class blundered their way towards the indicated area; the rest looked on with a mix of apprehension and secondhand excitement. The girl to Theo's left did not leave her seat, but she did look inquisitively at Theo, clearly surprised that he had not rushed to the front of the line. "I'll let them go first," he replied, not unkindly, to her unasked question. "I've done this enough times to know that nothing's more uncomfortable than waiting around in a spacesuit."

Theo continued to work diligently on his research, analyzing a Martian orchid's photosynthetic system in zero gravity. But he could not stop himself from glancing through the viewport every so often. He could also not resist the heady rush of judgement that overwhelmed him whenever he saw one of his gluefoot classmates float by, clinging to the umbilical cord tethering their spacesuit to the ship, as if fearful it would detach itself and abandon them. Although they were provided a handheld propellant gun to navigate in the vacuum, no one was able to execute a movement more graceful than dizzying and uncontrolled circles.

Each time Theo witnessed such embarrassing displays, his own sense of self-importance inflated. As did his desire to reinforce his superiority. To prove, incontrovertibly, that no matter what happened planetside, his supremacy beyond Earth's atmosphere could not be challenged.

When his turn came, Theo would take full advantage of his EVA. With his spacewalk, he would establish a reputation that would extend back down through the atmosphere and remain around him, a shield deflecting the barbs his spacer status would otherwise attract. Each time a student glided back inside the airlock, the manic, reckless need to impress swelled within Theo. He would no longer be the recipient of mockery—he would be liked, respected, *admired*.

Finally, with no one else waiting for their turn, Theo made his way to the rear of the cabin. The back of his neck prickled, and he told himself it was the feeling of every eye watching. But for once, he did not resent the attention. His classmates were, he knew, waiting to see if he could justify his sudden burst of confidence. Theo suited up in silence, brushing away the flight crew attendant offering to help him into the spacesuit. Back home, with both parents focused on remotely maneuvering the delicate laser drills, Theo had no choice but to suit up alone before making the perilous jump from airlock to asteroid.

Now, fully encased in his pressurized shell, Theo awkwardly maneuvered towards the airlock door. The attendant held out a propellant gun, but Theo waved that offer away, as well. His motion spurred a bevy of whispers among his classmates, the disappointed tones of which he could hear even through the carbon

fiber of his helmet. Let them think what they want; in a moment, he would reveal just how masterful he was in this, his domain.

With the umbilical cord drifting behind him, tethering him safely to the Atmo-Hopper, Theo stepped out of the airlock into the endless expanse of stars and silence. As the hatch sealed behind him he pulled from an exterior pocket of the spacesuit a small scalpel, which he had been using to dissect his orchid, and had surreptitiously slipped into the pocket while he was pulling himself inside the suit.

Theo took a deep breath. What he was planning to do was stupid, foolhardy, and rash. If he had been on a commercial mining ship, it would get him immediately dismissed and ejected towards the nearest settlement in a life pod. But he wasn't in the Solar Periphery any longer. He was floating a few hundred miles above Earth, and he would soon have to return to its surface, resubmit himself to the dominion of gravity, and resubjugate himself beneath the contempt of gluefoots and bent-necks.

"45 more seconds, Mr. Metzli," crackled Dean Kimathi via his helmet's short-wave radio. Her voice was monotonous and disengaged. Clearly, she was ready to be back on solid ground; she had done her part, filled in for a sick teacher, but she longed to sit behind her desk, offering patronizing assistance to the poor spacer students who just couldn't adjust to real gravity. Unbidden, Theo's mind jerked back to her sharp dismissal from earlier: "*...while the concept of respect may not mean much to someone from the Kuiper belt, here on Earth we still expect it from our subordinates.*"

Anger and resentment crashed through the levees of Theo's mind. But this time there was no shame to weigh him down; there was only a cold confidence. Hesitant no longer, Theo flipped the scalpel around. And cut the umbilical cord.

The helmet radio flared with an explosion of voices. The captain, clearly shocked but striving to maintain an aura of professionalism, ordered a rescue drone be sent out and told Theo to stay put; various students debated enthusiastically on whether or not he was committing suicide; and Dean Kimathi issued panicked, impotent threats of immediate disciplinary action.

With near preternatural calmness, almost unconsciously, Theo reached up to the helmet and switched off the radio. The silence that followed roared far more loudly than the radio's cacophony. Theo sank into it, wrapping it around himself like a warm blanket.

Secure in his element, Theo refocused himself. He adjusted the scalpel, pointing it towards the center of his gloved index finger. Dimly in the back of his mind, a small voice warned against what he was about to do. He had successfully pulled this trick off a few other times in his life, but only when the alternative was imminent death. To do it now would be to risk his life for no reason other than pride.

Pride, and respect.

Purposefully, Theo pressed the scalpel downward. Compressed air immediately hissed out of the minuscule hole he had created in his glove's index finger. Theo made a finger gun, pointed it towards the shocked faces peering out of the ship's viewports, and let the rapidly escaping oxygen propel him across the heavens. Watching continents roll beneath him and the ship recede into the distance, Theo felt the return of a contentment that he feared had not survived the 190 billion mile journey from home.

The sense of transcendent peace gradually faded from Theo as his helmet's holographic heads up display warned of his rapidly dropping oxygen level with increasingly aggressive alerts. Once his O2 dropped below fifty percent, Theo reluctantly shifted the angle of his finger, spinning himself around one hundred and eighty degrees. He pressed his thumb over the hole in his glove, momentarily blocking the escape of his life-supplying oxygen. Carefully aiming his finger gun for a second time, Theo released his thumb and allowed the suit to resume the expulsion of its internal atmosphere. His velocity gradually slowed until he stopped, and, far too gradually, began moving back towards the waiting Atmo-Hopper.

The holographic bar representing his oxygen level switched from yellow to red as it continued to shrink. The confidence that had swelled in his chest began to shrivel, and fear poured into the gap left behind. Perhaps he had overestimated himself; his impetuous grasp for respect could very well result in his death—the ultimate embarrassment. A new alert popped onto

his HUD, informing him of a heart rate precariously high in light of his swiftly vanishing air supply. Theo became acutely aware of the sweat amassing on his forehead as he unsuccessfully attempted to slow his breathing. Glancing over his shoulder, Theo estimated that 400 meters separated him from the ship and safety. He attempted to do the calculations in his head, concluded that his oxygen would not last, and shifted all of his energy, mental and physical, to the effort of holding his breath.

The well-worn Atmo-Hopper loomed behind him, almost close enough to touch. At some point in the previous few hundred meters he had exhaled the last of his oxygen; his jury-rigged propellant thruster had run out, and if his trajectory was not perfectly aligned with the ship's airlock, he would die in moments. But Theo would not die. He refused to let himself fail when he was so close to finally earning respect.

A red film obscured the edges of his vision, and Theo was only dimly aware of pulling himself through the airlock. In spite of the oxygen deprivation fog that filled his mind, a core command burned bright through the confusion: *don't show weakness*. If he did, all the danger, all the idiotic risks he had just taken would be for naught.

And so, when Theo finally removed his helmet, he forced himself to breathe slowly, calmly, through a genteel smile. He adopted a casual demeanor that ran counter to every biological impulse in his body. A mass of bodies surrounded him; voices angry, concerned, and confused colliding in an aggressive discordance.

Without a firm understanding of how he got there, Theo found himself back in his seat, next to the girl with the pastel blouse. The descent back to Earth passed in an indeterminate blur of time. Despite his fatigue and confusion, Theo became aware of an aura around himself. His classmates had long possessed a contemptuous familiarity that emboldened them to disparage him; now, some emotional force kept them at a distance. Theo knew he was the subject of every whispered conversation, but he could not tell what was being said about him. This in itself attested to the success of his gambit; his classmates had never before extended him the courtesy of lowering their voices when disparaging him. Even Dean Kimathi, when she informed him of the disciplinary hearing he

would immediately face, did so with averted eyes, in a voice carefully devoid of emotion.

Theo barely noticed the enormous forces of atmospheric reentry. Gravity's hold greedily stole over him, tugging him back to Earth yet failing to erase the triumph of the last few hours. When the Atmo-Hopper gently touched down on the same landing pad it launched from, the thump of the landing gear hitting the ground carried a decisive finality. Theo waited for the class to file out of the airlock into the harsh sunlight; the girl he had sat next to hesitated and opened her mouth, but seemed to reconsider and hurriedly rejoined the crowd.

When Theo finally stood up, his knees buckled under gravity's oppression. He lurched his way towards the forward airlock, leaning on seats and handrails. He arrived at the top of the stairway leading down to the ground, and, harnessing his newfound confidence, continued on to the first step without pausing to gather himself.

Theo fell.

He tumbled down the stairway and landed on the asphalt with a nauseating thump. Fresh blood spurted from his cheek. Theo waited for the customary rush of anger and resentment. But it didn't come. To his shock, he found tears dripping down his face. Nothing had changed, he thought. Gravity would never release Theo from his bondage, and Earth would never accept him. He ashamedly wiped away his tears and looked up, hoping against hope that no one had witnessed his fall from grace.

His class stood in a group twenty feet away, watching him. No one asked if he was ok, or offered to help him up. No one said anything. They simply watched.

A confused Theo waited for mockery to begin raining down on him. But none came. And then, an even greater shock was delivered by a new, unfamiliar emotion sprouting in the pit of his stomach. He tried to identify it, this delicate potentiality within. And as Theo defiantly pushed himself back to his feet, stretching himself skyward once more, he realized what it was.

He cautiously stepped forward, cognizant that it was the first since arriving on this planet that he did so with pride.

# taylor crowell

## HUMAN ZOO

### POETRY

Taylor Crowell is a freshman English major from Loyola Marymount University. She is from Camarillo, California and is proud to call Southern California home. Ever since she was little, Taylor has dreamed of studying English and becoming a storyteller of her own one day. She loves the power that writing and books can give to create whole new worlds and people, just by configuring the alphabet. Some of the authors Taylor takes inspiration from include Betty Smith, Sandra Cisneros, Anthony Doerr, and F. Scott Fitzgerald.

### HUMAN ZOO

Boa constrictor across my chest.  
Butterfly garden fluttering in my stomach.  
Sunflowers wrapped around my heart,  
Aching aching to see the Sun.  
Jackalope knocking in my head, antlers bouncing,  
My favorite numbers are evens – did you know? – not odds.  
Hate odds. Bad luck.  
Sometimes there will be penguins in my head, though, instead of jackalopes–  
Swimming down to my toes.

I hold a whole zoo inside my body  
A human zoo,  
A zoo not of humans, but a zoo of animals inside a human, smiling.

It's a secret zoo, one just for me.  
How lucky! It must be an even day.  
I didn't always have a zoo – just a few strays here and there,  
Maybe in a wrist or a knuckle.  
But those sunflowers are as old as I am.

Stranger, do you like me?  
Teacher, do you like me?  
Friend, do you like me?  
Sister, do you like me?  
Mom, do you like me?  
Dad, do you like me?  
Zoo, do you like me?  
Because sometimes I really hate that zoo.

Zookeeper, zookeeper  
It's ok.  
The Boa constrictor won't always be squeezing so hard.  
The Butterflies must sleep sometime.  
The sunflowers – well – they will be ready to stretch soon. Just a little while more.  
The Jackalope, he's always going to be there. We're friends, actually. Old friends.  
The Penguins, they only swim down once in a while.

Zookeeper, zookeeper  
Look down one day –  
You have the keys to the cages on your belt loop.

Zookeeper, zookeeper.  
It's ok.



lauren  
ahlburg  
rechner

## BUNT IM DREIECK II

*Clear glass, New Yorker magazine clippings, mirrors on card stock paper. 8.5 in. x 22 in*

Lauren Ahlburg Rechner is a senior at Loyola Marymount University. Her childhood love of cello and piano inspired her to pursue a degree in art history. She especially enjoys the works of Vasily Kandinsky, and she plans to continue her studies to receive a master's degree in Museum and Gallery Curation abroad in the fall of 2022. Lauren currently serves as the Publicity Chair for the Collage Artists of America, and she has a great passion for assemblage.

bunt im dreieck II



lauren ahlburg rechner

# **harrison hamm** **harrison hamm**

Harrison Hamm is a senior double major in Screenwriting & Women's and Gender studies at Loyola Marymount University. Throughout his undergraduate career, Harrison has conducted extensive grant-funded research projects, spanning academic explorations of queer theory, critical pedagogy, and Gothic media. Throughout his time at LMU, Harrison has also worked as a teaching assistant for two Honors courses - "Intro to Honors" and "On the Technological Sublime" - as well as the FTVS course "Queer Television," which he co-created with long-term mentor Dr. Sue Scheibler.

Having grown up queer and mixed race in rural Tennessee, Harrison approaches poetry, screenwriting, and scholarship with a commitment to those on the margins of society. In both creative and academic pursuits, Harrison seeks imaginative paths toward a more loving world, often focusing on themes of healing and survival. Harrison's current capstone projects engage the subversive powers of camp and queer dark comedy from creative and critical angles. Outside of LMU, Harrison has interned with Outfest, the world's leading LGBTQ+ film festival, empowering queer storytellers to drive meaningful social change. Recently, Harrison was also named a 2022 Fellow in Diverso's The Minority Report, an industry-vetted fellowship program for the top student screenwriters from historically marginalized backgrounds. After graduation, Harrison plans to further hone his artistic craft and to continue collaborating with Dr. Scheibler on their sabbatical study of the Showtime series *Penny Dreadful*.

## *POETRY*

**THE PEDAGOGY OF FIREFLIES**

**THE DAY THAT BOWIE DIED**

**PAINTED FOR SLAUGHTER**

## *ESSAY*

**VIOLET EVERGARDEN:  
HEALING THE SHOJO SOLDIER**

## The Pedagogy of Fireflies

Fade into a simmer...

After supper. Before bed. The backyard stretches years into night country. August. It isn't quiet. No, the ground hums sticky and I am unafraid in a way that I won't know again. Brother is excited too. The wheat and weeds outgrow us little monster men. We stomp, race, laugh-run through the empty field. I watch the barn. It watches me.

We were friends I think.

Mason jars ready. I hunt as if my Father is watching, and this is the only sport I'm good at. Limbs like twigs and cotton-fuzzies in my hair. Wilderness can be sweet too, I think. Ice cream bowls and dead deer.

Yeah, I'm born for blood. The Moon knows it too. I'm going gone – a loose dandelion in the dark. I breathe God in. I breathe you out.

This is how they dance.

A flicker. Then another. Mother calls the eve late. I sweat. A harsh bark. The neighbor's bulldog is named Jellybean, and I hate him. Again, a flicker. No time to laugh. The barn grows bigger. Brown eyes too. Now, thunder. I hear centuries of cicada at work under my skin. It burns and so I sprint into a settled wait. So young. So strange. Brother at left. Here goes:

I steal like a boy should.

Disappear. Magic trick. Leave a glow. Hollow bone.

They'll trace, skybound and still. Behind the Door. Hide bright.

That crack between the Hinge and the Wall. Know your place, Honeysuckle.

Growing pains. Body kindled into hot marmalade-smoke.

Can you see me now? Lit by a danger only I've learned.

I run so fast I break from the ground, fluttering insectile  
And free – like a swarm of ghosts.

## The Day That Bowie Died

A black boot crushes the remains  
 Of a sand-filled beer can,  
 Litter like foam upon the rising shore.  
 Guitar case open with the twenty you placed,  
*Wild is the wind*  
 Until my callouses rust over  
 And the morbid jokes sweat  
 Like omens do – metal melting at the tongue,  
 Seaside fog broken by a runaway sun.

Elliot Smith never sounded so good  
 As when my dad woke me to promise,  
*God Bless America.*  
 Ash leaked from a hole in his chest.  
 Sometimes, I find a leftover speck in the bed when he leaves.

I know the house is haunted.  
 Because you're fully clothed, and I'm bare.  
 Body to body.  
 Man to man.  
 Smoking in the morning,  
 Mountain-sky in view, I know if I jumped –  
 If I threw a punch in that off-road bar,  
 You'd pull over,  
*And piss off the cliff with me too.*

I watch chrysanthemums freeze over,  
 Forest fire still raging through the hospital window.  
 The secret tattoo you saw on my dad's back:  
 A phoenix  
 Dancing in the ashes.  
 Faith of a pickup truck romance.  
*You can keep your prayers.*

My mother never sang on pitch,  
 But a velvet dream, so soft I can still feel:  
*Telephones, opera house, favorite melodies...*  
 While an airplane flew over Los Angeles.  
 His hand on my knee,  
 The one stained green from prayer.  
 Black Pacific sinking the church I once knew.  
*So many mothers sighing...*  
 And I played piano, though I haven't played  
 Since my teacher died of cancer in the 5th grade.

*News had just come over...*  
 That year when Colorado wildfires gave me hope  
 That we might be zombies.  
 So if Hillary lost, we'd learn  
 Why Dylan dropped out of college  
 To follow Guthrie to the mental hospital.  
 Or why the day that Bowie died,  
*You said you loved me even more.*

My shoulders slink onto the bar – looser than careful.  
*At first, we just met up in his car after school.*  
 Before we could hear that gunshot in Connecticut,  
 Or know the price of autumn.  
*Dad caught us in the garden – in the shed.*  
 I never felt silence weigh so much.

*People stared at the makeup on his face.*  
*Laughed at his long black hair... his animal grace.*  
 And the distance between him  
 And who I've been  
 Is an unfinished script,  
 Reclaimed with scissors.  
 Now, I savor the memory of corduroy  
 And the salt of snow on the beach.

Note from the author: "The Day That Bowie Died" borrows phrases and images from my unfinished screenplay *Smoke Signals* and collages these words alongside lyrics from David Bowie's album *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust* and Bowie's cover of Johnny Mathis' "Wild is the Wind."

## Painted for Slaughter

I do not see your body  
— but a canvas.  
Burlap suffocating a rank emptiness.  
You are hollow.  
Something I can crawl inside of  
and set fire to  
when I'm bored.

Your touch  
— plain as woodgrain.  
Manufactured to rot, and infect, in the cold.  
I swallow you whole.  
Lick my fingers poppy yellow  
and curse Southern California  
for trying you on.

When you speak  
— I reach for the plaster.  
Work my generosity to the bone.  
Only to laugh  
like moss on your headstone,  
creeping up statues, back rooms, your old house.  
Heart ripe for the blender.

Your name  
— a papercut.  
And I bleed dark blue  
like the Van Gogh's do  
when you're at the museum, but leave  
seconds after tasting your own insignificance.

In my back pocket  
— a salmon hilt blade.  
Monogrammed gift from a premature wedding.  
If you said "hello"  
I wouldn't know whose front teeth,  
I would cut out first.

But I would cut  
— and cut slowly.  
Sharpened by the lives I spent  
hiding in the parking lot,  
living in the walls of my own home.  
Betrayal: a staircase creak.  
Killer's scent in your white-fucking-sheets.

Behind your eyes  
— a mirror.  
A private show  
as I rip the lights out  
lie-by-lie.  
Cello played with your spine.  
How sweet, the purple of petty screams.

See, you only breathe  
because  
you were painted for slaughter.  
And I've studied the Expressionists  
only to see  
your smile,  
curled red in cracked scabs across the sky.

# Violet Evergarden: Healing the Shōjo Soldier

harrison hamm

Originally a light novel series written by Kana Akatsuki, the anime *Violet Evergarden* (2018) follows the titular hero, a military weapon-child, as she adjusts to life postwar. Violet begins work as an Auto Memory Doll, a ghostwriter hired to help people express their emotions in written word or to type for those who are unable. Raised solely for war, Violet lacks understanding of complex human emotions and struggles in her new vocation. Nevertheless, Violet persists, desperate to understand her dear major's final words on the battlefield: "I love you." Each episode, Violet engages a new client with an increasingly emotionally complex situation and writes a letter on their behalf. These letter-writing experiences lead Violet to slowly comprehend her own feelings, process her own trauma, and ultimately become more human.

Such a process creates a series structured by healing. As Violet recovers from constant violence and unacknowledged trauma, *Violet Evergarden* expands upon an interesting trend in anime – the *shōjo* soldier. While "*shōjo*" conjures a broad genre of anime marketed toward young girls and connotations of "innocence, purity, and vulnerability" (Sugawa-Shimada, 55), the *shōjo* soldier refers to various young femme characters, preoccupied with battle efforts and often utilizing weapons and war technology. In her article "Mechanized Bodies of Adolescence: Weaponized Children, National Allegory, and Japanese Anime," scholar Amanda Landa identifies "the contemporary repetition of mechanized children in Japanese anime" (16), which becomes grounds for her argument that recent anime demonstrate "the *shōjo*-fication of mecha" (23). In agreement, Dolores Martinez's "Bodies of Future Memories: the Japanese Body in Science Fiction Anime" discerns, "these new female heroes are 'cyborg goddesses' who offer an imagined salvation from the present's dilemmas" (71). Hence, both scholars articulate an archetypal *shōjo* warrior whose character grows through combat. Indeed, the anime analyzed by both scholars, such as *Saishu Heiki Kanojo* (2002) and *Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex* (2002-2005), build narratives around heavy action, wherein young femme bodies fight. *Violet Evergarden* distinguishes itself by opening immediately following a war's conclusion. This beginning positions the anime to disentangle the *shōjo* soldier from war and trace a unique character arc of post-traumatic growth.

Though typically absent in "cyborg goddess" anime, *Violet Evergarden*'s bent towards restorative, postwar emotional progress appears consistently in *mahō shōjo* (magical girl) anime. These stories showcase young girls who become empowered via fantastical powers as opposed to military skill or weaponization. Central to *mahō shōjo*, *kawaii* aesthetics accompany female power-ups and metamorphosis. In her article "*Kawaii* Asian Girls Save the Day! Animating a Minor Politics of Care," Sharon Tran repurposes the *kawaii*, or "cute" aesthetic in *shōjo* culture, as "an alternative form of heroism

grounded in an ethics of care" (20). Here, Tran challenges common critics and argues that *kawaii* aesthetics prescribe pacifism and affective bonds as potentials for different, transformative forms of agency. Read through Tran's framework of *kawaii* as pacifist, caring, and embodied agency, *Violet Evergarden*'s approach to the *shōjo* soldier can be understood as challenging the conventional militarist, affectless hero via *kawaii*. As the stoic, clinical battle girl transforms into an empathetic, expressive letter writer, *Violet Evergarden* heals the *shōjo* soldier.

To explicate this metamorphosis, I continue to use the writings of Landa, Martinez, and Tran as well as introducing other relevant anime scholars. This paper's initial goal will be to identify the character Violet Evergarden as a *shōjo* soldier and establish what her *kawaii* distortion to soldier narratives engenders. Following, I will deconstruct images from the series in order to communicate how *Violet Evergarden* visually expresses post-traumatic growth and positions viewers in empathy. Then, I will explore how Violet's letter writing engages Zen artistry, which builds upon themes of reflection, growth, and complex emotion. Finally, I will offer interpretation of the anime's Western influence and historical commentary, which further create new possibilities for healing. Ultimately, this paper seeks to prove that *Violet Evergarden* rejects the indifferent, violent potential of "cyborg goddesses" in favor of a pacifist, empathetic, and healed version of the *shōjo* soldier.

## I. Identifying Violet as Shōjo

To identify Violet Evergarden as a new kind of *shōjo* soldier, a definition of *shōjo* and its exemplification in her character grow necessary. Indeed, what is *shōjo* and how does *Violet Evergarden* as a character and anime both evoke and complicate this concept? To begin to approach this question of *shōjo*, Hiromi Tsuchiya Dollase traces the history of *shōjo* linguistically and culturally in her book *Age of Shōjo: The Emergence, Evolution, and Power of Japanese Girls' Magazine Fiction*. Beginning with the *Daijirin* dictionary definition of *shōjo*, Dollase recognizes *shōjo*'s literal indication of "girls of age between 7 or 8 to 14 or 15": in other words, school age" (xii). Yet, this textbook definition excludes the social implications of the term. Dollase writes,

The term *shōjo* should rather be understood as a cultural term, formed amid the give and take between modern educational policy and consumer culture... *Shōjo* may be physically mature and recognized as capable of reproduction during this period, but they are temporarily partitioned in the space of a school. As long as they are in this space, they are free from social obligations, including marriage... detached from the productive economy of heterosexual reproduction. (xii-xiii)

Therefore, *shōjo* connotes a certain youth, free from adult obligations and consequently able to operate in ways that challenge gender normativity. Despite this liberty, *shōjo* culture's feminist characteristics often function

inconspicuously. In her article “Girls Are Dancin’: *Shōjo* Culture and Feminism in Contemporary Japanese Art,” Emily Jane Wakeling addresses “the closed, girl-only space of *shōjo* culture” (3) and explicates that this exclusivity “is one reason why a *shōjo*’s gender transgressions are typically not a politically didactic public statement” (4). By adopting *kawaii* aesthetics which focus on hyper-feminine, youthful visuals, *shōjo* art echoes third wave feminism’s embrace of the female body. Though *shōjo* and *kawaii* aesthetics may at first be read through a heteronormative script (i.e. the male gaze’s co-opting of these stylizations), *shōjo* maintains “the juvenile existence... prior to the adoption of adult femininity” (4). In this manner, the feminist workings of *shōjo* art acknowledge the looming duties of womanhood, while simultaneously developing a space and time to negate these stereotypes.



Figure 1: “Episode 3,” *Violet Evergarden*

To explore the *shōjo* ethos of *Violet Evergarden*, a critical analysis of the protagonist’s aesthetics becomes crucial. Per the image above, Violet can be immediately identified within *shōjo* according to *kawaii* aesthetics. In her journal entry “Magic, *Shōjo*, and Metamorphosis,” scholar Kumiko Saito isolates key features of *kawaii* in the *shōjo* protagonist, “such as cuteness (*kawai-sa*) characterized by slim limbs and big round eyes ‘like a doll in a picture’” (150). Indeed, Violet exemplifies such features and embodies the *kawaii* doll figure in-text with her work as an Auto Memory Doll. Further, Violet’s face is narrow and light, or young and pure. In context, the image’s setting further establishes Violet within *shōjo*. The clocktower on which Violet stands is mentioned by her missing major in a flashback. He tells her that when the war is over, she must see the view from the clocktower. This knowledge grounds the image in a postwar world, where Violet finally lives out the wish of her commanding officer. Such story elements continue to position Violet within *shōjo*. As Saito explains, “*shōjo* manga owes much to the visual staging of the girl’s purity and beauty against the backdrop of foredoomed calamity” (150). Here, that calamity can be understood through Violet’s history as an emotionally stunted, fourteen-year-old ex-soldier now struggling to adapt to life post-war. The dichotomy of Violet’s tragic lack of sensitivity in a war-torn nation and her beautiful, young character at sunset create a painfully new, but explicitly *shōjo* innocence.

## II. *Kawaii* Distortions to the *Shōjo* Soldier

At this juncture, Violet begins to remythologize the battle girl archetype with *kawaii* politics of care. Unlike conventional *shōjo* soldiers who reject empathetic narratives in favor of violence, Violet Evergarden develops empathy and learns *kawaii* qualities of pacificism and community investment over the series’ course. Though Violet’s visual stylization immediately establishes her within *shōjo* and *kawaii* aesthetics, “Episode 3” of *Violet Evergarden* begins the healing of Violet as a warrior when she attends Auto Memory Doll training school. Intrinsicly tied to images and narratives of school, *shōjo* makes itself explicit in the anime with this episode through setting and an emphasis on emotional subtext. Violet initially approaches school as a soldier. Violet salutes her teacher, performs with maximum efficiency, and acts without social sensibility for a girl her age. At first, Violet’s militant dedication serves her well, earning top marks in grammar, vocabulary, and spelling; however, the task of composing a letter for someone impedes her success. Partnered with classmate Luculia, Violet clinically relays Luculia’s heartfelt sentiments into harsh, to-the-point wording devoid of emotional resonance. Here, the complicated emotional subtext of *Violet Evergarden* begins to unfold and engages Tran’s *kawaii* framework of empathy. When the instructor declares that she has failed the assignment, Violet cannot comprehend why – the reason being: Violet is so psychologically stunted as a child-weapon that she is beyond emotionally incompetent. Hence, the challenge of empathizing in order to write letters leads Violet along an arc of rehabilitation, thereby re-imagining the battle girl through care. In essence, Violet must overcome the militant machine in herself by experiencing the poignant stories of others, like her clients each episode.

Interestingly, Violet’s journey towards becoming more human and emotionally conscious centers around another machine: the typewriter. In the image below, Violet approaches the tool.



Figure Two: “Episode 1,” *Violet Evergarden*

Barely surviving the bomb raid that ended the war in which she fought, Violet lost both of her arms, and, in her coma, they were replaced by metallic prosthetics. Immediately, Figure Two displays a thought-provoking comparison between Violet and the typewriter as both are machines in some way. I argue that the typewriter serves as a foil to Violet, highlighting the reading of Violet as a detached, inhuman weapon and the typewriter as her emotionally capable potential. Despite the image's seeming lack of embodied humanity, these metal parties are tasked with translating human experience into written form. In turn, an emotional undercurrent breathes in the frame.

Landa names this human-inhuman experience with tech the “*shōjo*-fication of mecha” (23). As she dissects the anime *Saikano* and its “cyborg goddess” Chise, Landa discerns that “*shōjo*-fying does not distract from her empowerment, but instead humanizes the machine” (24). *Violet Evergarden* follows suit, then, by using the typewriter to humanize the cyborg goddess in Violet. Yet, the terms “mecha” and “cyborg” may seem inapplicable to Violet as her prosthetic arms are added to repair her body not enhance it or weaponize it. Landa, herself, defines mecha as “robotic armor or body parts as a source of empowerment” (30). Still, I argue that Violet calls upon the cyborg goddess figure and mechanized adolescent through her role as a child-weapon, the aesthetics of her metallic arms, and her detached demeanor. Though her background is uncertain and her physical presentation in flashbacks is human, these traits align Violet with the cyborg goddess and mechanized adolescent archetypes, and simultaneously with *shōjo*. Further, if Martinez recognizes cyborg goddesses to be “female bodies... augmented by machinery in a variety of ways” (82), then who is to say that the typewriter is not that machinery through which Violet's abilities expand? In fact, Violet herself refers to the typewriter as a weapon.

### III. Animating Post-Traumatic Growth

Having identified Violet's character as a *shōjo* soldier and begun to explore how her *kawaii* distortion to the archetype stimulates empathetic narratives, *Violet Evergarden* further embodies healing work in its very animation style. The aesthetics of *Violet Evergarden* employ a number of distinctly anime visuals, like “oscillation” as explored by Christopher Bolton in “Interpreting Anime” and “the poetics of space” as studied by Dani Cavallaro in *Japanese Anime and Aesthetics*. Such visual stylings specific to anime dramatize the emotional drive of the series. Thereafter, attention paid to how *Violet Evergarden* animates post-traumatic growth will continue to contextualize the pathos of the anime and supply new evidence for how the series heals Violet's *shōjo* soldier.

In “Episode 13,” the finale to the anime's flagship season, Violet finally manages to cry. By this point in the anime, Violet has learned that her dear missing major is, in fact, dead. Because Violet has learned how to process complex emotions by writing for her various clients throughout the series, Violet's ultimate, tearful mourning marks the culmination of her character

development. Now emotionally equipped to handle her major's death, Violet releases her sorrow and writes a letter for herself for a change – one addressed to the fallen major. The animation of this scene encapsulates various ways in which *Violet Evergarden* illustrates post-traumatic growth with distinctly anime aesthetics. For example, consider Figure Three below:



Figure Three: “Episode 13,” *Violet Evergarden*

As Violet cries and writes her feelings for the first time, gorgeous string music plays as a montage of images translates Violet's post-traumatic growth into affective animated visuals. Figure Three depicts one of these visuals: Violet's glimmering tear slowly morphing and falling through an abstracted space of violets. Other visuals interwoven within the montage include: a letter in an empty flower field; a flashback of Violet's deceased major walking away; more tears falling past Violet's emerald necklace; city lights fading out; and more. This quick succession of poignant images beckons Bolton's identification of “oscillation” as a unique aesthetic power of anime. Here, “oscillation” refers to “anime's ability to move the viewer very rapidly back and forth between these poles of immersion and distance” (11-12). Oscillation therefore appears in this sequence of *Violet Evergarden* as images move seamlessly between character-specific visuals of Violet or the major and distant, more scenic visuals like the flower field and the cityscape. Further, Bolton deconstructs how another anime, *Read or Die*, creates affect through anime aesthetics of light refraction. In the *Read or Die*'s opening sequence, a character shatters glass which explodes in fragments reflecting the character. On this, Bolton writes, “[s]uch complex reflections are a specialty of anime, which can portray intricate optical and lighting effects that might be difficult to capture in a live-action film or even a manga” (9). Further, Bolton recognizes that these shards might “represent mediation... and isolation.” Indeed, these intricate images that Bolton describes constantly use stylizations of light refraction as means to suggest introspection and nearing epiphany.

Returning to Figure Three from *Violet Evergarden*, I employ the phenomenon of oscillation that Bolton explores in *Read or Die* to read this sequence of Violet's emotional upheaval. As the single tear reflects light and changes form amid cuts between other emotionally charged images, *Violet Evergarden*'s



formal use of anime's oscillation imbues the viewer with profound affect – just as Bolton finds in *Read or Die*. Within Figure Three, Violet's entire emotional growth as character manifests in an ephemeral moment where the lonely reflective, teardrop floats against the backdrop of a violet flower field. Between frames of flashbacks to the major and Violet's real-time crying, this poetic moment conjures profound melancholy and invites the viewer into Violet's emotional space. If Bolton identifies the power of anime oscillation in moments of fluid, quick montage and puncturing affect (11-12), then *Violet Evergarden's* climactic catharsis in "Episode 13" explicitly exercises this anime-specific aesthetic choice to illustrate Violet's post-traumatic growth.

In addition to oscillation, Cavarallo's discussion of "the poetics of space" further contributes to my interpretation of Figure Three. Cavarallo introduces, "[i]n its approach to space, Japanese aesthetics relies on concepts which Western philosophy has conventionally regarded as synonymous with negativity: incompleteness, emptiness, absence, nothingness" (25). Whereas Western thought frequently perceives lack of value in such emptiness, Cavarallo recognizes that "Japanese thought embraces the principle of meaningful emptiness, proposing that space does not need to be 'filled in because it is already filled in with itself'" (25). This meaningful emptiness, Cavarallo traces, evokes "*ma*, an aesthetic term, originally Buddhist... meaning something like 'empty' or 'space' or even 'gap'" (26). The poetics of space in Japanese aesthetics, then, emerge in Figure Three's minimal, yet profound imagery. If *ma* alludes to "the space between events, as it is being perceived by someone" (28), then this image of the tear against the violet garden can be read as both the *ma* Violet senses through her newfound emotional capacity and the animators' interpretation of this "sensually perceived space." Indeed, the anime portrays Violet writing her letter inside her room; however, this image interjects the sequence, imagining a new space – one that can be understood as the *ma* Violet feels. In this way, Bolton's understanding of oscillation is complimented by *ma* and Japanese aesthetics of meaningful emptiness. Because oscillation relies on a montage-like succession of disparate images, the Japanese poetics of space, associated with *ma* and meaningful emptiness, enable oscillation to track affect across these images, creating an emotionally cohesive and affecting anime moment. Thus, *Violet Evergarden's* oscillation and affect through empty space co-construct Violet's post-traumatic growth in a way that is specific to Japanese anime aesthetics.

#### IV. Zen Artistry in Letter-Writing

Not only do the visual aesthetics of *Violet Evergarden* heal the *shōjo* soldier through anime conventions, but Violet's narrative goals as an Auto Memory Doll beckon Zen artistry as a healing force. Here, Cavarallo's *Japanese Aesthetics and Anime* again contextualizes how historically Japanese styles and practices influence anime. Commonly praised for the bodily discipline required, Zen arts often evoke ideas of diligence, practice, and patience, such as the careful attention of Zen calligraphers or painstaking

detail and form of Zen painting. However, Cavarallo more interestingly points to how such bodily performance generates new ways of being and expressing the individual. Cavarallo writes:

The ritualized, formulaic and repetitive patterns of motion one finds in the Zen arts are not mimetic in the sense that they are supposed to reflect, mirror or imitate immutable realities. What matters most is the performer's ability to construe, and internally process, those patterns as vehicles for the communication of something personal. (63)

Though Cavarallo does not explicitly explore letter-writing, I situate Violet's work as an Auto Memory Doll within the Zen arts per its structuring etiquette and pursuit of "the communication of something personal." By interpreting Violet's efforts as an Auto Memory Doll in line with Zen artistry, the story elements of *Violet Evergarden* continue to heal the *shōjo* soldier in ways that are specific to Japanese aesthetics.

"Episode 7" of *Violet Evergarden* perhaps best portrays the Zen artistry within Violet's letter-writing attempts. In this episode, Violet travels to the home of Oscar Webster, a famous playwright who has recently lost his daughter to illness. Grieving his daughter's loss, Oscar struggles to find the creative capacity in himself required to write dramas; however, he is desperate to finish a play in honor of his late daughter. Hence, Oscar hires Violet to scribe his work as he muddles through complex feelings of grief and loneliness, while attempting to write. At this point, Violet still finds difficulty in processing deep emotions. In turn, Violet approaches her job with Oscar detached and militant in many ways; however, I want to consider how Violet's approach to writing with Oscar works within frameworks of Zen artistry.



Figure Four: "Episode 7," *Violet Evergarden*

In Figure Four, Violet sits upright with perfect posture. Her arms gently rest against the typewriter, ready to translate Oscar's words onto paper. Her head is slightly bowed and she speaks only when necessary. Violet's overall

presence communicates elegance and discipline. To that end, Violet can be read as engaging Zen artistry with her typewriting, given her connection to the attributes Cavarallo describes in the Zen arts: bodily restraint, standardized form, and humble precision. In her article for *Anime Feminist*, Katie Randazzo recognizes the healing potential in Violet's approach to writing. She claims, "[a]s she works with others as an Auto Memory Doll, Violet begins to accept and rationalize her own emotions, which sets her on the path to healing" (par. 20). This orientation towards healing through letter-writing embodies the Zen arts further per their potential to process and express highly individual affective positions.

Interestingly, Cavarallo connects the Zen arts to Japanese warriors through *bushidō*, or "the way of the warrior" (67). Cavarallo explains Zen's relationship to *bushidō* as the ethical system "stresses the discipline of the whole person, the training of the psychological and spiritual aspects of the warrior as well as the physical" (67). In this manner, *bushidō* emerges within Zen thought's use of bodily specialization to explore the internal self and discover greater modes of being. Violet then echoes a history of Japanese warrior-artists, defined by Cavarallo as: "emperors who were exquisitely cultured individuals, Zen masters who were consummate swordsmen, and warriors who were exemplary men of letters" (69). Thus, Violet's connection to *bushidō* places her within a Japanese lineage of balancing combat with Zen artistry and its connoted self-reflection. Therein lies the influence of Zen on her characters' healing. Not only does Violet's letter-writing afford her access to interiority, but *Violet Evergarden* remythologizes the *shōjo* soldier with a connection to Japanese Zen-warrior history.

## V. Beyond Cyborg Goddesses and Wartime Ladies

Building upon the Zen legacy of the warrior-writer, *Violet Evergarden*, like many Japanese anime, comments upon histories of war in relation to gender. As mentioned prior, the relationship between *shōjo* and military often emerges in the "cyborg goddess" figure as examined by Dolores Martinez. These battle-girls and *shōjo*-fied mecha frequently appear in anime as "bright-haired, enthusiastic, energetic, strong female heroes with impossible young bodies" (84). Martinez declares these weaponized women "are not just saving the future; they are a passionate antidote to contemporary life" (84). Through Sharon Tran's *kawaii* politics of care, I have demonstrated how *Violet Evergarden* distorts the *shōjo* soldier. In review, Violet does not embody the cyborg goddess figured as defined by Martinez. Rather, Violet's *kawaii* aesthetics heal the *shōjo* soldier, positioning the former militant towards pacifism and empathy. Violet's Western wartime aesthetics and their merging with *kawaii*, though, remain unexamined. To remedy this, I consider how *Violet Evergarden* challenges the postwar narrative, troubles gendered conventions, and invokes Western aesthetics all while healing the *shōjo* soldier.

In her journal entry "Girls on the Home Front: An Examination of *Shōjo*

*No Tomo Magazine 1937-1945*," Dollase studies the magazine culture within wartime female youth. She writes, "During wartime, young girls had no choice but to... transform themselves from *shōjo*, which connotes adolescent playfulness, into *gunkoku shōjo* [girls of a military nation], girls with home front responsibilities" (324). Such responsibilities of wartime and postwar ladies within *Violet Evergarden*, though, maintain *shōjo* through *kawaii* aesthetics. Rather than "growing up" and losing adolescence during wartime, *Violet Evergarden* subversively emphasizes the femininity of Violet with her *moe* (youthful innocence), large eyes, delicate features, and ruffled dresses. Indeed, Violet and several of her peers like Lucuila appear *shōjo* in aesthetics and narrative conventions. However, this does not fully place Violet within *shōjo*'s youth culture either because she served as soldier. More accurately, Violet occupies a subject-position between the innocence of *shōjo* folly and the horrors of war, doubly breaking gendered conventions of girls aging into dutiful homefront women or not involved with war at all. Read this way, *Violet Evergarden* heals the *shōjo* soldier by consciously deviating from historic gender systems in wartime. Yet, the starkly Western world of *Violet Evergarden* becomes more essential to interrogate when considering the intersection of gender and the postwar state.

Anime is no stranger to Western influence whether seen in its global market, character designs, or use of genre. In *Anime: A Critical Introduction*, Rayna Denison discusses instances when "anime fails to be recognizably Japanese" (10). For some, *Violet Evergarden* may be read in this lens, given the European appearance of both its characters and world. While race and national identity do not become explicitly raised in *Violet Evergarden*, the series joins a whole history of anime (like *Attack on Titan*) that rely on Western details in architecture, technology, and character names to help viewers "locate" the series. Highlighting such details, Randazzo interprets *Violet Evergarden* as specifically rewriting World War I narratives. For her, Violet reimagines women in military service during this time. Whereas women "usually worked as nurses on the battlefield, or helped... by working in factories" (par. 12), Violet works as both a soldier during the war and a typist after the war. Further, Violet "follows a wave of women who became typists and ghostwriters during the Victorian era and WWI era worldwide" (par. 26). Hence, *Violet Evergarden* does not have a Western setting in-text, but rather, the anime plays off Western aesthetics and histories, unique to Europe in World War I. As a result, Violet becomes a character not clearly Japanese or European, but still echoes narratives and aesthetics associated with war, using Western details. Because war narratives frequently fixate on historical accuracy and explicitly engage distinct nations, *Violet Evergarden* can hence be read as a more accessible war narrative, untethered to real-world conflicts and yet still evoking affects connected to Western war histories.

*Violet Evergarden*'s brilliance in portraying healing postwar then stems from the anime's fluid approach to trauma, identity, and space. To Randazzo, "Violet is a liminal figure. It is within that liminality – that space between 'civilian' and 'soldier,' 'women's world' and 'men's world,' 'military' and

'domestic,' – where Violet can truly blossom" (par. 23). In this liminal space, Violet neither aligns with the cyborg goddess nor the wartime lady fully. Instead, the *shōjo* soldier is afforded space to heal through emotional work as a typist. Again, it cannot be understated that Violet's characterization as a young, femme, disabled veteran complicates both war narratives and the anime's Western influence too. Because Violet occupies such varied and fluid identity markers, Violet transcends singular approaches to healing. Instead, Violet develops through a liminal, affective space like *ma*, augmented by the fluidly transnational setting. As such, *Violet Evergarden* heals the *shōjo* soldier by absolving her of categorical limitation.

## VI. Conclusion: An Archetype Rehabilitated

In this essay, I have attempted to demonstrate how *Violet Evergarden* heals the *shōjo* soldier – a figure long defined by cyborg goddesses and battle girls. Rather than fulfilling the violent, detached potentials of *shōjo* figures in combat, *Violet Evergarden* has been observed to prioritize pacifism, empathy, and emotional growth per *kawaii* politics of care. By first identifying Violet within the archetypal *shōjo* soldier, I have laid evidence for how *kawaii* aesthetics heal conventional narratives of anime's warrior girls. In examining how the series animates post-traumatic growth in elements distinct to Japanese anime, I have argued that *Violet Evergarden* further creates a space for introspection and affective development. Attending to Japanese aesthetics in the series, I have also examined how Violet's letter-writing mirrors the Zen arts and its transformative qualities. Finally, through its Western influence, I have also explored how *Violet Evergarden* heals the *shōjo* soldier in its movement beyond categorical limitations concerning nation and gender postwar. Thus, *Violet Evergarden* illuminates new ways for conceiving the *shōjo* warrior's role in anime as the series heals this figure. Beyond portraying a character's healing arc, *Violet Evergarden* ultimately restores and reinvigorates the aesthetic, political, and affective potentials of *shōjo* warrior anime.

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# gabrielle gabrielle gabrielle johnsen

## SELF-PORTRAIT WITH VOTIVE CANDLES

### POETRY

Gabrielle Johnsen is a senior English and Theatre Arts double major at Loyola Marymount University. She is currently completing her final semester of college in Bonn, Germany, where she is studying abroad with an ensemble of LMU actors. Gabrielle's creative work centers around her interest in the intersections between art forms and the interplay between aesthetics and emotions. Other poems of hers have previously appeared in *LA Miscellany*. In 2019, she was awarded 1st place in the Denise L. Scott Memorial Poetry Contest and the Frank Sullivan Memorial Short Story Contest by the LMU English Department.

### Self-Portrait with Votive Candles

A virgin match scratched and blazing, greedy for heat,  
ungenerous, blackening its own wood, it refuses to lend  
a scrap of fire to novice wicks on votive candles bearing  
icons of it-girls instead of saints to intercede for me.

*Anya Taylor-Joy, pray for me. Bella Hadid, pray for me.*

A dream cut short of my forehead, kissed. Waking, I reached for the lips, but  
nothing, save my fingertips,  
shriveled from lingering in draining basins.

Icons of cautionary tales instead of saints to intercede for me.  
*Lana Del Rey, pray for me. Anna Karenina, pray for me.*

I drove past a lone smoker  
one glum August night, perched on her porch steps  
among smug colored lights: *Nameless Stranger, pray for me.*

A cough. A century ago, my ancestor died from kissing her boyfriend  
during the Spanish Influenza: *Marie Bennett, pray for me.*

Icons of authoresses instead of saints to intercede for me.  
*Beatrix Potter, pray for me. Jane Austen, pray for me.*

When I close my eyes, I see a technicolor mummy  
wandering the tangerine deserts of a cartoon  
Wild West. I am tied to the train tracks in love  
with the rope binding my arms to my sides to the steel below, waiting for you  
to either cut me loose  
or throw another shovelful of coal into the steam engine  
and martyr me.

Icons of storybook heroines instead of saints to intercede for me.  
*Alice in Wonderland, pray for me. Goldilocks, pray for me.*

Birthday candle blow out. Television static,  
pins and needles in my idling feet, wisps,  
simpers from the flames extinguished.  
Whir, snap, opalescent flash — perhaps a perfect photograph.  
For a dear moment,  
I could've lit up your screen in black and white, I could've  
slid into the newspaper obituaries.  
I always thought burning would be the worst  
way to die, but — oh, how the smoke  
creeps up, sweet as its wax.

The wick isn't taking. Drop the match before my fingers light instead. But, then again,  
wouldn't I like to know how it feels to carry the flame, to bear the prayers  
through succulent haze, to meet my end in an almost-kiss  
from the lips of my patron saints?



# stephen huffaker

## KOSHER FOOD, HALAL FOOD, AND THE MAINSTREAM AMERICAN DIET

### ESSAY

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### INTRODUCTION

Various factors and characteristics influence the formation of identity, and for many, religion is a defining characteristic. In particular, religious eating practices often assist in the construction of religious group identity. As major world religions, the influence of both Judaism and Islam impact the eating practices of adherents on a global scale. Through the requirements of eating kosher and halal food, Judaism and Islam implement similar dietary restrictions. Due to these restrictions, both kosher (acceptable under *kashrut*, Jewish dietary law) and halal ("permissible" in Arabic) food tend to diverge from the mainstream diet of countries in which Jews and Muslims are minorities. In the United States, where many Jews and Muslims are recent or post first-generation immigrants, halal and kosher food hold significance to ethnic, national, and religious identity. In examining the food practices of Jews and Muslims in the United States, it is important to compare kosher and halal food to one another as well as to the mainstream American diet to identify the ethnic and religious significance of each. Despite their similar origins in Abrahamic religious eating practices, kosher food is historically more closely aligned with the mainstream American diet than halal food, and Jewish people used kosher food to identify with their American nationality. In contrast, halal food primarily defines a Muslim religious identity, and tends to be coded with Middle Eastern or South Asian ethnicity and non-American nationality.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework of intersectionality is highly applicable to kosher and halal food. Though intersectionality is primarily utilized to analyze race, class, and gender, it can be expanded to examine additional characteristics of identity, including religion and ethnicity. In the context of kosher and halal food, there is significant intersection between religion and ethnicity, as well as race in the case of halal food. Both kosher and halal food are intertwined with ethnicity despite being founded in religious practices.

Intersectionality emphasizes the association between social identities and power structures. As Parker et al. write in their summary of feminist intersectionality in relation to food studies, intersectionality “foregrounds power to underscore the social construction of social identities shaped by structural, political, symbolic, and material realities” (2019:4). As a result, intersectionality is highly applicable to an examination of dominant practices such as the mainstream American diet.

Questions of power and oppression are particularly relevant to potential discriminatory attitudes towards halal and kosher food in the United States. Because of the ethnic associations of halal and kosher food, discrimination against adherents may include prejudice based on ethnicity as well as religion. In addition, opposition to halal food consumption may be predicated on race. Due to the fact that race is a social construct based on perceived physical difference and many Muslims are visible minorities and immigrants, halal food tends to be associated with various Middle Eastern and South Asian ethnic identities, and more broadly, an Asian racial identity. Because of their potential status as recent immigrants and visible minorities, discrimination against Muslims may include racism and xenophobia as well as Islamophobia. In contrast, kosher food tends not to be associated with a minority racial identity because a significant portion of Jews are perceived as white and, historically, post-first-generation Jewish immigrants were able to assimilate into the mainstream by virtue of whiteness and symbolic ethnicity. Rather, kosher food is coded with an ethnic and religious Jewish identity, and ethnicity and religion tend to be collapsed within antisemitic sentiment. Therefore, antisemitic discrimination is often predicated on perceived ethnic and religious difference, but not racial difference. An intersectional analysis of halal and kosher food thus reveals their uniquely intersecting stigmas of religion, ethnicity, and, in the case of halal food, race.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review is based on published academic literature regarding the relationship between kosher food, halal food, and the mainstream American diet. Additionally, many of the following texts include a focus on the food of immigrants. I have organized the following sources according to three broad topics: the construction of identity regarding religion, ethnicity, and food; kosher food and identity; and halal food and identity.

## Religion, Ethnicity, Identity, and Food

Both religion and ethnicity are highly significant to the formation of identity. Oppong (2013) asserts in his review of philosophical and sociological literature that religion is central to identity construction for individuals, and that religion and ethnicity are related characteristics within the context of identity. Oppong concludes that there is a positive correlation between religion and identity construction: “Evidence from the existing [literature] suggests that religion is positively correlated with identity formation. This implies that identity achievement is highly related with internalization of religious commitment” (2013:15). It is likely that the internalization of religious commitment will manifest itself in outward practice. In regards to food, this could include practices such as adhering to religious dietary restrictions like *kashrut* and halal. Citing several scholars’ findings and using Jews as an example, Oppong also asserts that ethnic and religious identity are tightly linked: “Participation or membership in a religion that is characteristic of one’s ethnic group is mostly found to be highly correlated with the degree of one’s ethnic identity” (2013:13). This is applicable to both Muslims and Jews. A close relationship between one’s religion and ethnicity thus contributes to the establishment of ethnic identity. Oppong’s findings demonstrate the highly influential role religion plays in defining identity and the critical relationship between religious and ethnic identity.

Similarly, in Ternikar’s (2014) literature review, “Ethnicity, Ethnic Identity, and Food,” she writes that food is highly significant to the maintenance of ethnic identity. This is particularly true for both recent and post-first-generation immigrants. Ternikar defines ethnicity as “a social construction based on shared cultural heritage” (2014:2). She discusses the historical and modern significance of ethnic food to immigrant identity. Immigrants create and consume traditional foods to maintain a connection to their home culture and construct an ethnic identity. Food thus functions as a form of cultural preservation. This preservation of cultural practices is often viewed as the domain of women. One way to achieve this preservation is through the creation of “memory food,” traditional dishes which are passed matrilineally from one generation to the next (Ternikar 2014:2). Ternikar also highlights the research of Diner and Gabaccia to explain how ethnic food became a marker of identity for Italian and Jewish immigrants by the 1920s (2014:2). She also comments on the significance of ethnic food for modern immigrants noting that “more recently, ethnic food is a marker of ethnic and religious identity for Latina, African, South Asian, and Middle Eastern immigrants” (Ternikar 2014:2). Ternikar’s article establishes the important association between food and the formation of both ethnic and religious identity, particularly for immigrants. She also highlights the historical distinction between the ethnic identities of Jewish and South Asian and Middle Eastern immigrants. Food has clear connotations of ethnicity and religion, often simultaneously.

Kosher and halal food are no exception. Both contribute significantly to the formation of identity for Jews and Muslims, particularly religious, ethnic, and

national identity. Eddyono (2007) interviewed Muslim students regarding their personal definitions of halal food and how they determine whether a food is halal or *haram* (“forbidden” in Arabic, denoting something which is not halal). Some interviewees cited the ethnicity of the seller as an indicator of halal status (Eddyono 2007:44). However, even those Muslims with similar ethnic backgrounds to the interviewees were viewed as other if their definitions of halal differed: “Based on the different definitions of halal, ‘the other groups’ refers to the others who do not share the same meaning of halal, regardless of their similar ethnic backgrounds” (Eddyono 2017:49). Muslim consumers thus place greater emphasis on religion than ethnicity as defining a shared identity.

Solomon (2014) highlights kosher cookbooks of the 19th and 20th centuries as important in defining identity for Jewish housewives in the United States. Kosher cookbooks such as *The Jewish Home Beautiful* and *The Art of Jewish Cooking* exemplify the conflicting relationship between cultural preservation and assimilation which Jewish immigrants experienced. As discussed by Ternikar, food frequently functions to maintain ethnic identity for immigrants as well as to preserve cultural traditions. Kosher food illustrates this concept, and the example of Jewish cookbooks highlights how cultural preservation was regarded as the responsibility of Jewish women. *The Jewish Home Beautiful* focused on instructing Jewish housewives in the preservation of religious traditions and history. It primarily included Eastern European recipes meant specifically for Jewish holidays such as Hanukkah and Rosh Hashanah (Solomon 2014:32). In contrast, *The Art of Jewish Cooking* included recipes for Americanized Chinese and Italian food, as well as American dishes such as hamburgers (Solomon 2014:36). Research indicates that there does not exist a comparable Islamic cookbook industry in the United States, perhaps due to the significant ethnic and racial diversity of Muslims and the accompanying diversity of their cuisines. However, as demonstrated by kosher cookbooks, the creation of kosher food plays an important role in defining religious identity for American Jews, with a particular focus on the adaptation of *kashrut* to an American context.

Thus, one point of comparison between kosher and halal food is their similar roles in defining the identity of Jews and Muslims. Both allow consumers to identify with their religious identity and are also relevant to ethnicity and nationality. However, they diverge in that halal food is generally associated with non-Western, non-American ethnicity, while efforts to make American food kosher are more common and American or Americanized kosher food may serve as a vehicle for Jews to associate themselves with the mainstream American diet. This brief comparison serves as a useful basis for further analysis of kosher and halal food.

## Kosher Food

The Americanization of Jewish culture in regards to the regulation and certification of kosher food is discussed by several scholars. Lytton (2014) outlines how the community-based *kehilah* system of *kashrut* regulation in the United States was succeeded by the establishment of kosher certification organizations, such as the Orthodox Union (OU), in the 20th century. He asserts that this shift exemplified the mutually influential relationship between Jewish and American culture. Yoskowitz (2012) writes that the Orthodox Union began regulating the kosher status of food on a national scale, and developed its kosher symbol (the letter U inside a circle) in order to allow Jewish Americans to easily identify kosher food. This symbol would eventually become the most widely used kosher symbol in the world (Yoskowitz 2012:74). The OU mounted a significant effort to convince large American food corporations to produce kosher products, with notable success. Highly popular and mainstream American products such as Wonder Bread and the Oreo became kosher over the course of the 20th century. Yoskowitz asserts that “The mere fact that corporations were pandering to a Jewish customer base and soon Jews could eat the same nutritionally deficient foods as most Americans was cause for celebration” (2012:75). Through this consumption, Jewish customers demonstrated their desire to simultaneously eat kosher food and participate in the mainstream American diet.

Perhaps the most significant American processed food product to become kosher is Coca-Cola. Horowitz writes that Coke was one of the first “iconic American foods” (2016:20) to become certified kosher, and that its certification led to the general expansion of kosher food in the United States. Correspondence between Jewish consumers and rabbi Anthony Goldstein, who wrote a column answering questions about various foods’ standing in regards to *kashrut*, indicated that observant Jews were eager to partake in popular American foods such as Coca-Cola. Manufacturing company Procter & Gamble exerted considerable energy and funds working to transform Coca-Cola into a kosher product, which it eventually became in the late 1950s. According to Horowitz, “they accepted the need to invest tens of thousands of dollars to accommodate Jewish religions [sic] requirements” (2016:43-44). Food corporations were willing to cater to Jewish consumers, thus facilitating their increased participation in the mainstream American diet.

In addition to processed food, Americanized ethnic cuisine played a significant role in the construction of American identity for Jews. According to Liu (2010), Jewish immigrants were among the first consumers of Chinese food in urban centers such as New York City. Chinese food became a Christmas tradition for many American Jewish families, as they did not celebrate Christmas as a religious holiday. Despite the fact that Chinese food was often *treyf* (not kosher), Liu asserts that it was viewed as “safe *treyf*” by many Jews, who had no qualms about consuming it regularly. According to Liu, by the time of its “safe *treyf*” status, Chinese food had become a popular American food. The consumption of Americanized Chinese food such as

chop suey allowed Jewish immigrants to construct an American identity: "In their adaptation to American society, Jewish immigrants made eating Chinese part of their American identity" (Liu 2010:81). Through the consumption of *treyf* American food, Jewish religious identity was subordinated to the construction of American national identity.

Diner (2003) highlights the changes to Jewish identity following immigration to the United States from Eastern Europe. Generally, Jewish immigrants aimed to assimilate into mainstream American culture, but also desired to maintain the ethnic and religious aspects of their Jewish identity. According to Diner, Eastern European food "anchored" them to their home culture (2003:178). This maintenance of ethnic identity largely occurred in the home, where kosher Eastern European foods such as *gefilte* fish were consumed. Minnie Fisher, a Jewish immigrant from modern Belarus, reflects, "Where it came to your home life, life went on as if it were a continuation of the European experience" (Diner 2003:179). This is an important example of cultural preservation achieved through food. In terms of religion, most Jewish immigrants desired to maintain a religious identity as well. They were, however, simultaneously eager to assimilate into American culture. As Diner summarizes, "many [Jews] renegotiated details of Jewish religious practice, but few questioned their basic identity" (2003:180). Meat, which had been a relative luxury for many Jews in their home nations, was embraced as standard American fare. Kosher meat was sometimes difficult to come by, but they tried to find it whenever possible. Because consuming meat frequently was viewed as an American practice, Jewish immigrants used the consumption of both kosher and *treyf* meat to identify with the mainstream American experience. However, kosher food simultaneously allowed them to maintain an ethnic and religious Jewish identity. Diner's research highlights the significance of kosher food to religious, ethnic, and American national identity.

## Halal Food

The significance of halal food to the construction of identity is discussed by many scholars. Ahmed (2010) utilizes his fieldwork in a Pakistani and Indian immigrant community in Houston, Texas to argue that a transnational economy has emerged in the area. The community produces many South Asian products, including halal food. Pakistani immigrants are the primary producers of halal food products in the area, and Pakistani ethnic identity functions as a shorthand for Muslim religious identity. The presence of halal products is used to identify Muslim and Pakistani or Middle Eastern grocers: "Halal products also provide a significant context for distinguishing between Indian (read: Hindu) grocery stores and Pakistani and Middle Eastern (read: Muslim) grocers" (Ahmed 2010:414). Ahmed's research provides an important basis for the implicit association between Middle Eastern identity and Muslim identity, both signified by halal food. The availability and consumption of halal food is linked to religious identity, Middle Eastern ethnic identity, and non-American national identity.

A transnational lens is also relevant to Kinder's (2016) analysis of an Arab Muslim community in the East Dearborn suburb of Detroit, which is composed significantly of first- and second-generation Shi'a Muslim immigrants from Lebanon. Two interviews conducted with Lebanese immigrants demonstrate the relationship between halal meat and Middle Eastern ethnic identity, as well as halal meat and mainstream American foods. Interviewee Rashad owns a halal slaughterhouse and store in East Dearborn. Most of his customers hail from Middle Eastern countries including Yemen, Iraq, Palestine, and Lebanon. Reflecting on her interviews with other community members, Kinder writes "conversations with neighborhood residents revealed that, for some customers, Rashad's meat market functioned as a touchstone that connected them to their transnational spiritual community" (2016:909). Halal meat transcends nation to create a sense of shared religious identity. In this way, Rashad's customers emphasize that the consumption of halal meat primarily functions to define their religious identity. However, the ethnic and national coding that halal food does possess is decidedly non-American, as it typically signifies a South Asian or Middle Eastern country.

Kinder's findings also include an interview with Nabil, another Lebanese immigrant and owner of an American-style burger joint that serves exclusively halal food. Kinder states that Nabil's branding was deliberate in identifying that "this Americanized aesthetic was an intentional marketing strategy that Nabil used to bring 'American' experiences to Arab Muslim customers" (2016:910). According to Kinder, the creation of halal American food allows Muslim immigrants to identify with mainstream American culture, and enjoy the "fetishized American hamburger experience" (2016:911). However, Kinder also indicates that Nabil's American halal restaurant is rather unique in this regard. While halal food is sold in the ethnic grocery stores and Arabic restaurants of East Dearborn, there are very few American restaurants which provide halal options to customers. For example, a McDonald's near East Dearborn was one of only two locations in the county which offered halal chicken, but this offering was eventually discontinued due to a lawsuit regarding halal fraud (Kinder 2016:910). There is little overlap between establishments such as McDonald's, which offer mainstream American food, and establishments which offer halal food.

In her ethnological research into restaurants in the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood of Brooklyn, Zukin (2014) similarly found that for consumers of halal food, religion is the most important aspect of identity, superseding ethnicity and race. She writes that "[the halal restaurants in the area]...create post-racial spaces with a dietary regime founded on Islam...and an explicit welcome to a multi-ethnic clientele. In these restaurants, religion and lifestyle rather than race are the cultural signifiers that matter" (Zukin 2014:142). Halal restaurant owner Chowdhury, who serves a wide variety of cuisines at his restaurant, including Indian, Caribbean, and Southern food, states, "The idea is that the nation is not important. The religion is important. So I united all the food!" (Zukin 2014: 142). As Chowdhury indicates, this multiplicity of



cuisines highlights the relative unimportance of ethnic or national background when it comes to eating halal. Halal food spans many nations and cultures, but does not privilege one over another; in this context, cultural identity is pluralistic. Halal food's primary identification is with religion rather than nation, race, or ethnicity.

Notably, Kinder's and Zukin's interviewees are Muslim immigrants, and speak from an inside perspective to Islam and Middle Eastern or South Asian culture. Muslim immigrants such as Chowdhury are creators of post-racial spaces, and by extension, post-ethnic and post-national spaces. A shared religious identity is viewed as central to the consumption of halal food by the consumers themselves, and racial, ethnic, and national identities are deliberately subordinated to religious identity. In contrast, however, non-Muslims tend to see halal food as a marker of ethnic and racial difference due to many Muslims' status as visible minorities.

Armanios and Ergene (2018) discuss the spread of halal food as a publicly consumed good as well as a globally significant type of food which is often consumed by non-Muslims. In the context of the United States, Armanios and Ergene focus on the highly recognizable halal food carts of New York City popularized by the Manhattan-originated food chain the Halal Guys. They assert that the Halal Guys chain, created by Egyptian immigrants, is viewed as representing vaguely "Middle Eastern" food by its non-Muslim customers, who make up 95% of the Halal Guys' customer base (Armanios and Ergene 2018:233). For non-Muslims, halal food is associated with a Middle Eastern ethnic identity. However, according to Armanios and Ergene, "Halal Guys take pride in having pioneered what they have characterized as a sort of American-halal fusion" (2018:233). While the Halal Guys frame their food as quintessentially American, the fact that they claim to have created a unique fusion of halal and American food highlights the disparate relationship between the two; fusion implies that two apparently irreconcilable cuisines have been brought together, despite the fact that most foods can be classified as halal. Halal food and mainstream American food are thus viewed as distinct from one another, even in instances in which they become more closely linked.

Armenios and Ergene also argue that the halal food carts of New York City have allowed Muslims a public expression of religious identity in a culture that holds Islamophobic sentiment. They summarize "for immigrant, first-generation, and second-generation Muslims, Halal Guys and other halal food eateries represent a pivotal culinary and cultural triumph at a time when American Muslims are increasingly vilified and shunned for their faith" (Armanios and Ergene 2018:234). Islamophobia thus shapes halal food consumption in Western nations.

Religious identity, food, and Islamophobia are also highly central to Ruiz-Benejaro's (2017) analysis of halal products in global markets. While focusing particularly on the European Union, Ruiz-Benejaro's analysis is

also relevant to the United States due to the fact that Western nations tend to hold similar attitudes towards Muslims and Islam. Ruiz-Benejaro asserts that due to a boosted economy in significantly Muslim regions such as the Middle East and the Asia-Pacific, the halal market provides significant growth potential: "This tremendously attractive market niche, combined with the slow growth of the economies of Europe, Canada, Australia and the United States, has prompted many industries to seek halal certification" (Ruiz-Benejaro 2017:130). In response, there has been an increase in Islamophobic sentiment targeted at halal food. Online campaigns such as "Boycott Halal" have gained ground worldwide, with the aim of combating the creation of halal products in Western markets. For example, there was significant online backlash against the globally popular Cadbury Creme Egg becoming halal certified, resulting in a significant loss of profit for Cadbury: "According to the press, Cadbury...was reported to have lost in 2016 more than £6m in the product line" (Ruiz-Benejaro 2017:140). For reference, £6 million is equivalent to over \$8 million. Though plenty of foods are halal by default, some Westerners refuse to consume even popular and mainstream products once they gain the public signifier of halal certification due to the stigmatization of Islam in Western nations.

## KOSHER FOOD VERSUS HALAL FOOD

The halal certification of popular products such as the Cadbury Creme Egg provides an important point of comparison between kosher food and halal food. Similar to Procter & Gamble with the creation of kosher Coca-Cola, Cadbury did attempt to cater to a specific religious customer base by altering the product to adhere to religious dietary requirements. However, the response by mainstream consumers was entirely different. While analyses of kosher certification make no mention of significant opposition by non-Jews, halal food is stigmatized and certification of popular products is explicitly condemned by non-Muslims. The creation of global movements such as "Boycott Halal," which is present in Canada, the UK, and other nations, indicates the extent to which halal food is viewed as diametrically opposed to the mainstream diets of Western countries.

The certification and mainstreaming of halal and kosher food are also distinct in terms of history as well. Kosher food has enjoyed a significantly longer presence in the United States than halal food. It was introduced to the country in the early 20th century by Jewish immigrants. Popular American foods such as the Oreo, Wonder Bread, and Coca-Cola achieved certified kosher status throughout the mid- and late 20th century, contributing to the early mainstreaming of kosher food and the consistent presence of kosher American food in the following decades. In contrast, only in the 21st century has there been an increase in popular foods such as the Cadbury Creme Egg becoming halal. The creation of halal American food is a relatively recent development, and the expansion of the halal food industry has been curtailed by Islamophobic sentiment. The popularity of the halal food produced by the Halal Guys, while framed as a victory over Islamophobia, highlights

how modern halal food in the United States and the wider Western world has been shaped by discrimination. Instances of halal food maintaining a successful relationship with mainstream American culture are seen largely as exceptions.

Most importantly, however, the disparate relationships of kosher and halal food to the mainstream American diet demonstrate significant dynamics of identity. The consumption of kosher food primarily defines an American identity for Jews. Though kosher food is also coded with an ethnic and religious Jewish identity and Jewish immigrants historically desired to maintain these identities, they prioritized Americanization over the maintenance of ethnic or religious identity. For example, in the case of Americanized Chinese food, Jews consumed *treyf* food in order to construct an American identity, showing the relative importance of American identity over maintaining a religious identity, which could theoretically be achieved by keeping completely kosher. The American food they consumed which was kosher, such as Coca-Cola and the Oreo, was mainstream and served to help them identify with American culture. Despite its association with ethnic and religious identity, the central maintenance of identity which kosher food serves in an American context is the creation of an American national identity.

In comparing halal food to kosher food in terms of association with identity, there are several apparent distinctions. As stated by Zukin's interviewee Chowdhury regarding his halal restaurant, the offering of halal food is more significant to religion than to race or to nation. Eddyono's findings similarly indicate that shared notions of halal food, a religious classification, are more significant to creating identity among Muslims than shared ethnicity, as even those with similar ethnic backgrounds may be viewed as other if they have a different definition of halal. This is not to say that halal food contains no ethnic coding. For non-Muslims in the West, it often signifies a Middle Eastern or South Asian ethnic identity. As a result, it is often viewed as alien to the mainstream American diet. This perception of halal food manifests itself in opposition to the halal certification of popular foods, as in the case of the Cadbury Creme Egg.

Kosher and halal food are similar in that they were originally introduced to the U.S. by minority immigrants and consumption has served to preserve culture for these groups. Kosher Eastern European ethnic food such as *gefilte* fish functioned to maintain the ethnic heritage of immigrant Jews in the 20th century, while modern halal food of various cuisines functions to connect Muslim immigrants to their home cultures in the Middle East or South Asia. In addition, in the United States, kosher and halal food are both the food of minorities. Muslims and Jews are both religious minorities in the predominantly Christian U.S., and both tend to be ethnic minorities as well. Muslims in particular are often visible racial and ethnic minorities as well as religious minorities. Again, however, priorities differ for these groups; kosher food was primarily utilized to identify with American culture, while halal food primarily defines a religious identity.

Thus, both kosher and halal food are coded with ethnic and religious identity, though their emphases differ. While it is possible that kosher food may be conflated with Eastern European ethnic food, it tends to be seen as less distant from the American mainstream than halal food, though both are religious classifications of acceptable food rather than ethnic cuisines. While Jewish consumers of kosher food tend to use it primarily to construct an American national identity rather than to maintain ethnic or religious identity, halal food primarily serves to identify consumers with a religious identity and halal consumers disregard characteristics such as ethnicity, race, and nationality as relatively unimportant.

## CONCLUSION AND FURTHER RESEARCH

Overall, kosher and halal food are highly significant to the role of religion in maintaining ethnic and national identities for religious groups. Though both are coded with religious and ethnic identity and share similarities as the food of immigrants and minorities, there are several important distinctions between the two. In comparing kosher and halal food, it is apparent that kosher food is far more closely aligned with the American mainstream due to its extended presence in the U.S. and the certification of popular American foods as kosher. While kosher food, particularly Eastern European ethnic food, does allow Jews to maintain a religious and ethnic identity, these identities are subordinated to an American national identity through the consumption of kosher American food. Conversely, halal food has a significantly shorter history in the United States, and its spread in the nation is a relatively modern development. Popular American food is much less likely to be halal than it is to be kosher, and the relationship between halal food and American food is generally viewed as discordant, a perception not applied to kosher food. This is partly due to the Western association of Islam with the Middle East and South Asia, which results in a perception of halal food as inherently Middle Eastern or South Asian. For halal food consumers, however, unlike Jewish Americans, halal food is more important in defining religious identity than ethnic or national identity. Thus, within the context of the United States, both kosher and halal food demonstrate similar centrality to the construction of religious, ethnic, and national identity, though their relationships with the American mainstream are quite different.

For further research on the subject of religion and food in the United States, it may be useful to include an analysis of the diets and dietary restrictions of Christian religious traditions, particularly Protestantism and Roman Catholicism. This review does not take into account the relationship of Christian diets with kosher food, halal food, or the American mainstream. Additionally, it largely approaches mainstream American eating practices as secular or cultural rather than religious practices, despite the fact that Christianity is the dominant religion of the United States and a significant portion of participants in the mainstream American diet are Christian. Further research might examine the Christian elements of the mainstream American diet, as well as comparing kosher and halal requirements with Christian dietary restrictions such as abstinence from meat on Lenten Fridays.

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*PHOTOGRAPHY*

**AHEAD**

**WONDERS OF DELICACY**

**RIPPLES**

**“HEAVEN IS UNDER OUR FEET  
AS WELL AS OVER OUR HEADS”  
- HENRY DAVID THOREAU**

ahead

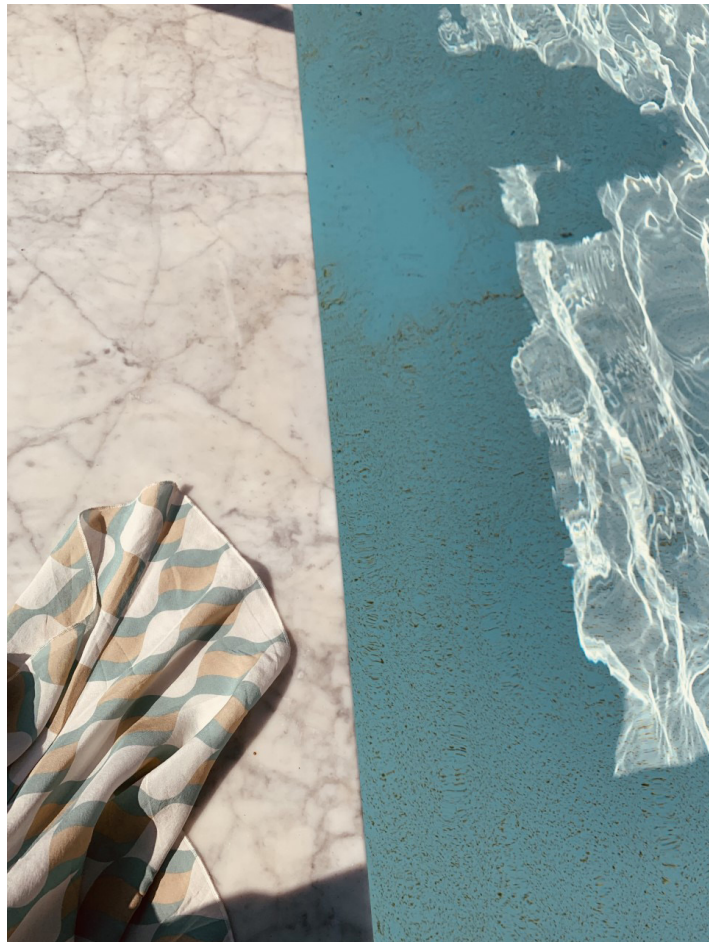


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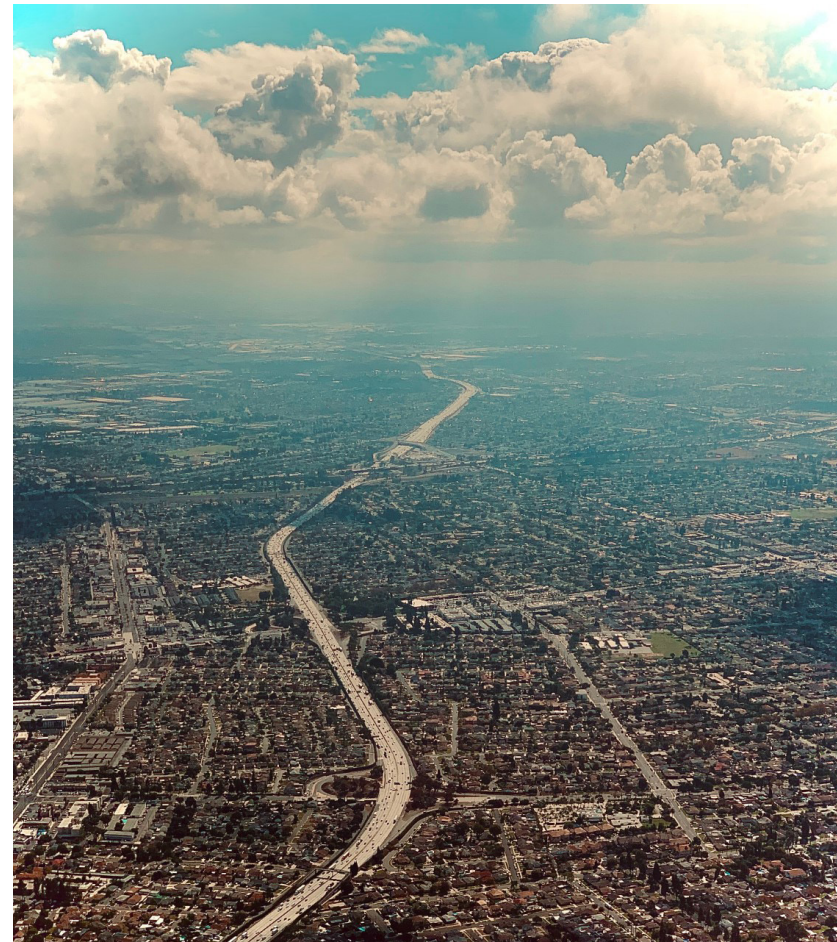
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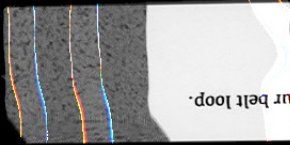
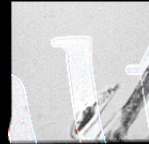
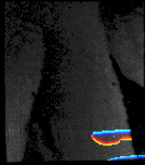
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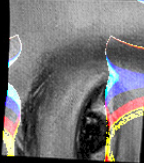
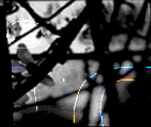
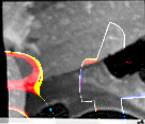
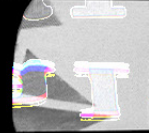
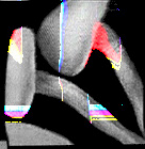
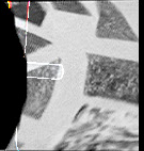
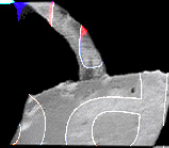
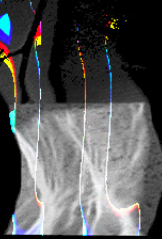
"heaven is under our feet  
as well as over our heads"  
- henry david thoreau





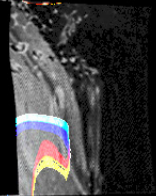


ur belt loop.

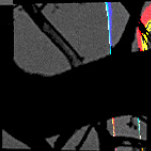
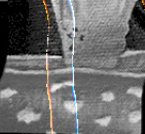


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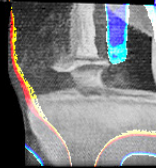
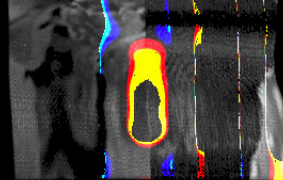
Body to bod  
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The Day T  
A black boot  
Of a sand-fill

