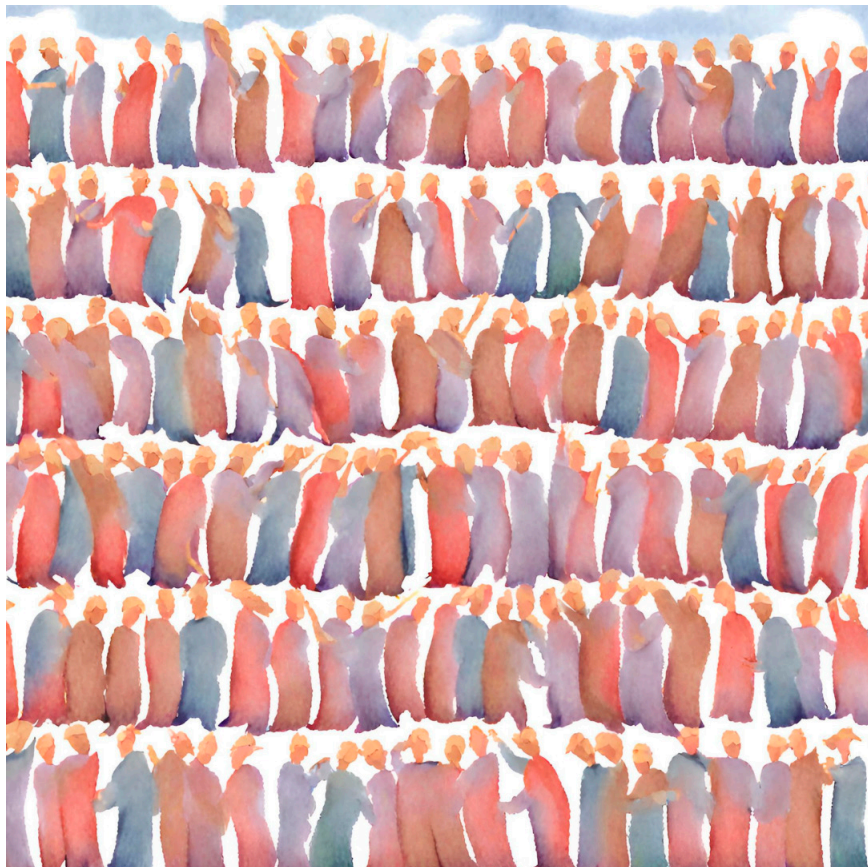


# *Noted*

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# *Editresses' Letter*

AICHA BOUCHELAGHEM AND NORA ZUFFEREY

We could not think of a better way to represent multitude than by resorting to Artificial Intelligence (AI), arguably a metonym of multitude itself. When prompted on the notion of multitude, an image-generating AI offered our cover illustration. We are shown what seem like rows upon rows of wavy water-color specters... Observing the artificial result, it seems as if the figures are speaking to each other – but looking longer makes us wonder: “are they watching us?” Like many other AI-generated images, this one leaves the bitter aftertaste of a multitude that, though it seems without origin, could be slowly overpowering the human. But lest this eerie feeling linger too long, let us introduce original, human-generated contributions that – just like the water-color specters on the cover – resonate with each other in gentle, though sometimes tumultuous, harmony.

Opening this issue are two academic pieces that reflect multitude in various conceptual meanings. Sam Mylan’s essay imagines the early twentieth-century Harlem Renaissance movement as a “spectacle of colors” and argues that the poetry of Langston Hughes, the iconic African American poet of the Harlem Renaissance, generates visual multitudes. Alina Sacco’s contribution stays within the realm of poetry but takes us back in time as it reflects on the multiple ways in which Early Modern English poetess Isabella Whitney imagines gendered differences.

The great geographical mobility enjoyed in the Western world has brought attention to the ways in which traveling might multiply our personality, so to speak. David Bovet and Mathilde Vaudano reflect on their year or semester studying abroad, and on how this experience led them to discover new facets of themselves. Miranda Althaus shares her thoughts on the construction and instabilities of personality, in regard to the popularity of personality tests and with an insightful reference to the celebrated film *Everything Everywhere All at Once* (2022).

Unlike the cover image, the creative pieces gathered in this issue were made by human contributors. These artistic works span both written and visual forms, from short stories and poems to a collage and a drawing. In Sonja van Lier’s short story, salamanders wrestle a human over the meaning and ownership of the damp, liminal and eerie space that is a bathroom. Humidity turns to snow in Lorraine Devillard’s short story, where a daughter and mother walk through white-covered forest to uncover the magic that unites them. “Droplets” delves into the powerlessness felt by Christina Zholdokova’s speaker as they face abundant hurt and destruction through war. A fitting symbol of the

multitudinous world into which industrialization propelled us is the washing machine and its 1000 to 1800 revolutions per minute. As a witty poem by FFJ shows, such frenetic spinning also makes the washing machine an appropriate metaphor for emotional turmoil. A similar distress is echoed in Anastasya Criscenti's short story "I don't want to miss you". A. G.'s words and visuals close our artistic section and highlight how, sometimes, words and images can haphazardly come together.

Our Varia section features Noted's classic gentle grilling, in which Professor Swift, our new Head of Department, looks back to his first-year self and conveys this experience with glittering details. The issue closes with a creative opening: Leila Chatti's poetic cootie catcher holds a multitude of hypothetical poems. We leave it up to you to create your own, thus generating multitudes after closing this issue.

"Multitude" as a word refracts multitudes, but the contributions of this issue are anchored in definite personal experiences and individual artistic expressions. As we began writing this letter, the multitude of shapes it could take felt daunting – a brain does generate 17000 thoughts a day. But we're done now, and we hope this issue will ignite plenty of thoughts in its readers.

# ACADEMIA

# *Defining the Harlem Renaissance: A Time of Liberation*

SAM MYLAN

The Harlem Renaissance, which spans the 1920's and 30s, is described as a period of expanding and flowering African American art. Artistic domains such as literature and music were highly affected by this renaissance. The Harlem Renaissance begins within the first Great Migration, which started in 1910. During this time, nearly six million African Americans moved from Southern states to the North of the United States (and from rural regions to cities within the South) to seek better living conditions. A significant number of these six millions of people settled in New York, more precisely in Harlem. New generations of African Americans started the exponential creation of pieces of art which communicated their journey to (racial) self-liberation. Langston Hughes is one of the most significant writers of this period. His work defined the artistic style of the Harlem Renaissance and painted a picture of the society in which black people were living in the early twentieth century. With the combinations of modern literary practices and tributes to African American cultural heritage, Hughes' work reflects a period of resurrection for artistic practices that had been silenced for years and shows the sense of liberation that belies the aims of the Harlem Renaissance. Key to this movement was also the Harlem nightlife; indeed, the atmosphere of the Harlem nightclubs was synonymous with freedom and power. Entertainment such as drag shows reclaimed the beauty of queerness and combined with African American creative forms (especially in the performance arts) to create a new culture and heritage. Hughes' work reflects a straight and white-dominated society in which black (queer) people searched for self-determination and desired to end racial prejudices.

Throughout the Harlem Renaissance, many African American artists and intellectuals aimed to deconstruct stereotypes and prejudices towards their community. They desired to show that they were capable of the same intellectual and economic achievements as middle- and upper-class Anglo-Americans, even though they still suffered racial discrimination. Harlem soon acquired the importance of a cultural capital for African Americans. Since many were living and working in close quarters, a sense of community and common criticism of white supremacy and the dominance of white-authored history was created. Through art, music, literature, theatre, opera and other performing arts, Harlem became rife with creativity and imagination. The entertainment industry developing in Harlem also attracted white people. However, there was controversy in the ways

that different African American artists and intellectuals wanted to portray the experience of black people. While some artists wanted to portray the ancestral cultures of African Americans (and of the black diaspora more largely) and communicate the political and socio-economic struggles that African Americans had been undergoing in the U.S., others desired to represent African Americans as anchored in modernity, and claimed the former group of artists were nourishing the preconceived idea that black people were unurbanized. Michael Borshuk writes in his review "Noisy Modernism': The Cultural Politics of Langston Hughes's Early Jazz Poetry": "[t]he exclusion of jazz from the Renaissance intellectuals' design hinges on the factors that range from a desire to resist stereotypes circumscribed by primitivism and exoticism to a heightened class consciousness among 1920s African Americans" (5). The tension between these two points of view is a central debate within the Harlem Renaissance. Some artists, such as Langston Hughes, combined the two: while the idea of modernization and the urbanization of the black community informs their literary style, they honor the heritage of both U.S. and diasporic black artistry, for instance by using the themes and the structure of blues.

In 1925, Hughes published a poem called "The Weary Blues," which is considered one of his most important works in relation to the influence he had on the Harlem Renaissance. Significant attributes of Hughes' jazz poetry can be seen in the structure and the content of this poem. It recounts a night in Harlem during which the speaker attends a blues performance by a black man playing the piano. The poem opens with a rhyming couplet: "Droning a dowsy syncopated tune, / Rocking back and forth to a mellow croon" (1-2). Throughout the poem, Hughes regularly uses couplets followed by a third, shorter line. In his own performance of the poem, Hughes emphasizes the assonance of the sound [o] in the first couplet reflecting the lethargic feeling of this "tune." We can also hear a five-beat meter throughout the poem. However, the rhythmic pattern is irregular: the placement of these beats is influenced by the words around creating a feeling of speeding up and slowing down. This feeling is called syncopation and it is specific to blues structure. The lyrics themselves reflect the technique of syncopation; for instance, the line "[r]ocking back and forth to a mellow croon," recalls this feeling of speeding up and slowing down again. Understanding the orality of the poem is necessary for a comprehensive reading of the poem. By pronouncing the words in a certain manner as well as referring to the blues structure, Hughes not only grants the reader or rather the listener access to his own narrative, but also gives voice to a musical genre created by black people. Therefore, he gives voice to the black community's cultural history in addition to his own. The "Blues" is the central point of this poem, and it is physically and directly attached to the black player and his community's cultural identity. The speaker knows with certitude that he is "hear[ing] a Negro play" (3) after recognizing a "syncopated tune" and swinging "back



and forth” to the music. The third line could have been placed as the first line which would have looked like so:

- (3) I heard a Negro play,
- (1) Droning a drowsy syncopated tune,
- (2) Rocking back and forth to a mellow croon

This line structure would have made sense, but the statement given by Hughes in the original opening lines would have been lost. The first two lines in the original poem can be seen as a definition of a blues “tune.” By choosing to define the blues genre first and only then address the performer of this “tune,” Hughes associates blues directly with the black community. In the next couplet – “Down on Lenox Avenue the other night / By the pale dull pallor of an old gas light” (4-5), Hughes indicates the time and space of the poem. He refers to Harlem at night, when the streets were the most alive and active. The rhyming words “night” and “light” contradict one another, giving rise to an ambiguity between darkness and light. The next two lines (6-7) are unexpected in the reading of the poem because they repeat the same sentence – “He did a lazy sway. . . .” – and the caesura breaks the rhythm and creates an ambiguity of time and beat.

The poem is divided into two stanzas. In the first, Hughes sets the tone for the poem and claims the owners and history of the blues. He also confronts the blues and the performance of the black man with white musicality. The contrast made in line 9 between the black “ebony” man’s “hands” and the ivory key shows this confrontation: blues is a black musical form that comes into existence through Western European instruments like the piano. The attribution of the adjective “poor” to the piano and the choice of the verb “moan” in line 10 dramatize the scene and implies that, through his playing, the performer expresses suffering, a cry which directly refers to the blues. The speaker uses words like “melancholy,” (17) “troubles,” (22) “died” (30). The Blues originated partly from songs of cry and suffering which enslaved black people were singing while working in the field. Singing in this way had become a form of coping with the pain of forced labor and racial violence more broadly. There is a sense of desolation, and of an immeasurable sadness in these songs which define the blues genre as melancholic. Hughes expresses this desolation by making the musical instrument of the black performer embody this sadness.

In the second stanza, Hughes focuses on the actual performance and how the speaker feels afterwards, once they have returned home. This stanza seems more morbid as it delves deeper in the feelings conveyed by the player. The ambiguity between the per-

former and the speaker grows. For instance, the performer sings “I wish I had died” (30) and the speaker in the last line is said to be sleeping “like a rock or a man that’s dead” (35). The close relation between the performer and the speaker is intriguing and it seems to be thoughtfully created by Hughes. Hughes, in this poem, imagines the black community as a group of people who share the same heritage and the same experience in society.

While writing about life in Harlem and making visible the orality of the Blues, Hughes also signifies the history and the legacy of African American culture. The merging of orality and history creates an overlap between past and present significant to both jazz poetry and Harlem Renaissance poetry. As Farah Griffin (Columbia University) states, “in the most repressive time, we create the most extraordinary art” (blackhistoryintwominutes.com). Through these works of art, Harlem is painted as a physical and temporal retreat where racial history and the very perception of reality are not based on Western European philosophy but on the silenced cultural history of African Americans. A Harlem night should have felt like a deliverance for a subaltern continuously oppressed by society during the daytime, as many voices of the Harlem Renaissance tell us.

Harlem was not a place of liberation restricted to straight African Americans but also provided creative space to queer people. In a chapter of his autobiography *The Big Sea* (1940) called “Spectacles in Color” Hughes talks about the night balls that took place in Harlem, more specifically the annual Hamilton Club Lodge Ball, which dates back to 1869. The ball experienced its height during the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920’s. The Hamilton Ball was attended by various people from various parts of the country, of various ethnicities, straight, queer, middle-class and upper-class individuals. Hughes recalls this time as “the tourist invasion of Harlem” (273). We can feel in this chapter that, because of Harlem’s custody of creativity and celebration, queer folks could express themselves openly without facing prejudice. That goes to show that Harlem, especially at night, was an interdimensional space of retreat and release. Heteronormativity and sexual biases did not regulate the streets of Harlem. As Harlem was regarded as a place of mere entertainment and foolishness, visually pleasing to privileged white people, repressed groups such as queer African Americans had the opportunity to assert their identity as individuals and as a community by testifying their colors in front of the straight white normative world. In “Spectacles in Color,” Hughes illustrates the queerness of these balls and of Harlem in a wider sense. His account of the queer community and culture makes possible the voicing of its history. Although Hughes’s depiction suggests that people disregarded the queer community in Harlem, he also shows that queer entertainment culture was perceived as “grand” and magnificent.

Years of oppression and silenced queerness were thus resurrected on the Hamilton Ball

stage, enhancing the idea of Harlem as a renaissance. Hughes gives a sense of this culture in the third paragraph of “Spectacles in Color,” when he talks about “the presence there of many former ‘queens’ of the ball” (274). He describes these former queens as “aged men” and deems their presence pathetic. Here, Hughes’ judgmental and diminishing view of these “spectacles” is noticeable as he sees these former queens as ridiculous. Further in the paragraph he specifies his point by pointing out that the highlight of these balls was the “younger competitors, in their smart creations, bid[ding] for applause.” Hughes stresses, here, the importance of the new generation and the novelty that they bring to the culture. Even though Hughes seems dismissive, the mention of the former “queens” testifies for their presence and illustrates a stratified organization where past and present look at one another. While paying homage to the history of a culture and honoring its pioneers is key to the continuity of this culture, accepting and welcoming modernity and innovation is as important. Harlem would be, in a sense, a drag queen itself, building “spectacles” of “color” on ruins and heritage. Defying sexual norms and nourishing an ambiguity of genre, Hughes describes Harlem as a place of possibility and diversity. At the end of the fourth paragraph, he talks about the music of the various drag parades that were running down the streets saying that it “was grand” (275). “Violins and mandolins and banjo and guitars” (275) played altogether in a cohesive way, advocating for a diverse culture. This sense of variety and diversity is noticeable in other texts written by Langston Hughes.

In the poem “Gospel Cha-Cha” from the jazz poetry collection *Ask Your Mama* (1961), Hughes talks about the history of Haiti and uses Caribbean influences to talk about music and nature. Caribbeans were also part of the Harlem population and their culture had a decisive influence on jazz and house music.

2        WHERE THE PALMS AND COCONUTS  
 3        CHA-CHA LIKE CASTANETS  
 4        IN THE WIND’S FRENETICS FISTS  
 5        WHERE THE SAND SEEDS AND THE  
 6        SEA GOURDS MAKE MARACAS OUT OF ME

(Mood 7: Gospel Cha-Cha, 2-6)

This analysis is based on the poem and the 2013 performance of “*Ask Your Mama: 12 Moods for Jazz* Live at the Huntington Library,” composed by Ron McCurdy. In the poem, just like in the “Weary Blues,” Hughes uses vernacular language and African American musical principles in order to transcribe the orality of the subject addressed - here, Caribbean history. The importance of orality is implied in the way the performer

pronounces Hughes’ words. In the 5 lines quoted above, the performer emphasizes the [s] sound, mimicking the sound of maracas. The voiceless fricative and the voiceless sibilant submerge the noun phrase “frenetics fists” and the alliteration of “s” in line 5 provokes an explosion of air and reflect instruments such as percussions. The poem is sensorially and lexically spiritual. Hughes uses religious diction, though in a way that challenges dominating Judeo-Christian perceptions of spirituality. The poetic setting established by Hughes seems exotic, and nature is the main character: the poem mentions “palms,” “coconuts,” (2) “wind,” “sand,” (4) “moon,” (8) “sun,” (9) and many others. The reference to “[e] rzulie” in line 7 evokes a polytheist spirituality. Spirituality is voiced through nature. The first line – “in the quarter of the negroes” – seems to be the central motif of the poem as the performer’s enunciation of this sentence is emphasized and dramatized. It is, also, repeated in line 13. In lines 11 and 17, Hughes talks about “tourists” and the “first white tourist up the mountain.” While this poem refers to Haitian history, it could also recall Harlem’s “invasion of tourists” that Hughes mentions in “Spectacles in Color.” Hughes confronts these tourists with the word “shadows” in line 18, which is emphasized twice and repeated in line 19.

19        WHERE THE SHADOWS OF THE NEGROES  
 20        ARE THE GHOSTS OF FORMER GLORY  
 21        TOUSSAINT WITH A THREAD  
 22        THREAD STILL PULLS HIS  
 23        PROW OF STONE STONE  
 24        I BOIL A FISH AND SALT IT  
 25        (AND MY PLANTAINS)  
 26        WITH HIS GLORY

The “shadows” are the “ghosts of former glory” (20), which can be seen as ancestors living within the community and contributing to the heritage. The music in this part of the poem grows busier and the syncopation more striking. The lines become shorter, and the performer takes time to emphasize certain words and syllables over several succeeding beats. The second “stone,” for instance in line 23, is emphasized in the sounds “st,” as well as the “sh” sound in line 24. The importance of orality in how the poem creates meaning can also be perceived in the difference between the transcription of the text and the performance of it. Line 26, for example, is written one time in the text but is repeated three times in the performance. Therefore, the use of parentheses indicates that there might be fluctuation in the way this line is said out loud in a performance. After line 26, there is an instrumental interlude indicating the climax of the music. The music then slowly fades away. Lines 27 to 39 seem to work as a transition. Multiple words, sentences like “where



on “calvary.” There are multiple changes in the tone of the voice, the production of the music making the intensity of the poem go back and forth in speed and power building and pulling back the tension. Hughes’s diverse references to spirituality, from a polytheist view to a Christian monotheist one, creates a syncretic landscape and challenges normative views of religion, which typically exclude all pre-Christian beliefs. This poem could be, to an extent, seen as a masquerade, a drag ball, where history, rather than being linear, is a meeting point with no disregard toward past beliefs and no biases towards modern ones. A place where gender and class are not important markers of belonging. Queerness seems to be a good adjective in defining the literary style of Hughes.

Hughes’s literature helps define the Harlem Renaissance as a whole. His work asserts the perspective of marginalized groups by sharing stories of the working-class African Americans who came to Harlem to seek a better life. His literature records the journey of these people arriving in a new environment filled with possibilities, seeking novelty and modernity. It also records the journey of these people to self-liberation without underestimating the pervasiveness of racism but rather focusing on the growing confidence of black people coming together and creating a subculture, a vernacular island, a time and space owned and made by black folks. Hughes also stresses the importance of honoring the community’s ancestors and their experience while going forward fighting for agency in society. His literature brings people together, which is performed rhetorically by creating ambiguity between speaker and performer, just like in “The Weary Blues,” to assert the sense of community and common aim. Queerness is a key point in describing the Harlem Renaissance as a literary movement. Hughes celebrates the musical and visual androgyny of the Hamilton Balls. A movement for self-liberation was disguised as spectacles of mere entertainment. White “tourists” attracted to drag shows were in fact attending a renaissance, a reclaiming of cultural power. With his work, Hughes defines the Harlem Renaissance and dedicates his words and performance to (queer) African American subcultures, which makes his texts a converging point of beliefs, music and culture of the black diaspora, merging together past and present in hope for a more powerful future. For Hughes, a renaissance should not only be focused on modernity or on history, but it should also syncopate between both.

the sea sand and the sea gourds” (32) and “in the wind’s frenetic fists” (34) refer back to the beginning of the poem. The metaphor in line 29, which represents a sunset “stained with blood,” is surprisingly beautiful, and also gives rise to an idea of sacrifice. The “water” in line 30 joins the “blood” as being sacred liquid in the religion. As said earlier, blues songs come from cry. In line 31, Hughes seems to refer to the blues with “the cry that turned into music.” Line 40 marks a turning point in the poem. Hughes and the performer are speaking without music. “Jesus” (44) is then mentioned for the first time as the music takes a complete turn and change into a faster tempo.

45 I TRIED  
 46 LORD KNOWS I TRIED  
 47 DAMBALLA  
 48 I PRAYED  
 49 LORD KNOWS I PRAYED  
 50 DADDY  
 51 I CLIMBED  
 52 UP THAT STEEP HILL  
 53 THE VIRGIN  
 54 WITH A CROSS  
 55 LORD KNOWS I CLIMBED  
 56 BUT WHEN I GOT  
 57 JOHN JASPER JESUS  
 58 WHEN I GOT TO CALVARY  
 59 UP THERE ON THAT HILL  
 60 ALREADY THERE WAS THREE  
 61 AND ONE, YES, ONE  
 62 WAS BLACK AS ME.

This part of the poem recalls the chorus of a gospel song. The lines are short, easy to remember and there is a lot of repetition, as the phrase “Lord knows I...” appears in lines 46, 49, and 55. This shift in pace reflects the title of the poem, “gospel cha-cha,” with the first part of the poem being influenced by Caribbean sonority and final part being a blues gospel song. The multiplication of the first-person singular pronoun “I” is more than noticeable as it appears in most of the lines in this part. This poem seems to celebrate diverse African-descended cultures. It refers to different influences, religions, environments, and histories, making the poem somewhat colorful and spectacular. It celebrates the history of the black diaspora and claims, or rather declares the existence of black people in the official so-called History. The performer, for instance, asserts the presence of a black man

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## Gender Roles and Dichotomy in Isabella Whitney's Poetry

ALINA SACCO

Isabella Whitney is often considered by scholars to be the first English female poet and professional woman writer. With such a title, there is a progressive quality that is almost axiomatically attributed to her. Progressiveness, or the lack thereof, is often mentioned in relation to gender roles and the place of women in society. It is therefore interesting to explore Whitney's own approaches to gender in her poetry, and to observe that men, women, and the opposition between the two, hold a central position in her poems. She brings out differences between the two genders in many different ways. She constructs dichotomies in sensory and elemental experience so as to emphasize the divide between men and women. This division is one that relates and that is put in correlation to their relative differences in terms of virtue. In this essay, I will approach this topic in five thematic parts: the first will take a look at the dichotomy through the senses; hearing, eyesight, touch, and smell. The second part will look at this dichotomy through the angle of the elements, specifically water and fire. The third part will analyze how Whitney uses these differences to reflect a more fundamental divide between men and women in terms of virtue. The fourth part will look at Whitney's use of these differences in relation to sixteenth-century biological theories of the sexes. Finally, the fifth part will engage with Whitney's use of traditional gender expectations to advance her own message.

In Whitney's poetry, the sense of hearing is one that is very recurrent. When keeping in mind her intention to illustrate differences between men and women, it is interesting to notice that hearing is used in a binary way: either to express the experience of hearing lies, or that of hearing truth. In "I.W. To Her Unconstant Lover", in which the speaker writes to her unfaithful lover, the lies/truth opposition is at the center of her motivation for writing the letter. In stanza one, the speaker complains that her lover kept his wedding a secret from her: "As close as you your wedding kept/yet now the truth I hear:/Which you (yet now) might me have told/what need you nay to swear?" (1-4). The "truth" of the first couplet is the lover's dishonesty which is mentioned in the following couplet. Not only was she not made aware of the wedding, but the use of the verb "swear" indicates that her lover even lied to her and denied the fact. In stanza seven, the lover is again presented as a liar: "So shall the promises be kept,/that you so firmly made" (25-26). Again, we are given the impression that the man in question is speaking falsely: he made promises, and the speaker is implying that he is unwilling to

keep them. The accusatory nature of these two quotes is strengthened by the solemnity of the language used: to “swear” and to make “promises” are acts that imply a certain level of importance; so not only does the lover lie, but he presents his lies as earnest truths.

This idea of men using their voices to lie is even more pronounced in “The Admonition by the Author”: in this poem, men are deceivers; they lie, deceive, and flatter women into believing them. There is a lexicon that relates to lying and deception: “fair and painted talk” (13), “flattering tongues” (14), “deceit” (25), “fained lies” (32). The meaning that Whitney is conveying through this choice of vocabulary is that the voice, that which is heard by the other, is something that is false in the case of men. This idea is emphasized by the mermaid conceit in lines 15-16: “The mermaids do pretend no good/for all their pleasant songs”. Mermaids are considered deceitful creatures because of their voice; just as mermaids use their voices and sing to lure men into death, men use their voices to lure women into a false relation of trust. For men, the voice becomes a tool for manipulation. For women, hearing becomes a sense that needs to be treated with caution.

The sense of falseness that is associated with men is particularly emphasized through the fish metaphor that is introduced in the last part of the poem. On stanza 30, the speaker uses sibilance: “suspecting still that prick” (118) and “wherewith the fishers strick” (120). The effect of this particular literary device is to create a sort of “hush” sound, as if to reflect the fact that men keep things from their lovers, they are “hushing” things, keeping them hidden. The “s” sound in general, when repeated, gives an impression of silence, or of quiet and whispered speech, which again aligns with the idea of secrecy. Depending on a reader’s interpretation, the repetition of the “s” sound may also be reminiscent of the hissing sound serpents make; in this case, the intention would still be to point out men’s dishonesty: serpents, especially in Biblical interpretation, are associated with deception, because it is in the guise of a serpent that Satan tempted Eve to taste the tree of knowledge and precipitated the Fall of man.

As we have seen, sound is not used randomly in Whitney’s poetry, and it is filled with meaning when used by men. Although there is a lot less insistence upon sound in regard to women, there is still an interesting instance: in the beginning of “The Admonition by the Author”, the speaker assures her women readers that she can give them the good advice that she herself was lacking. She says “Oh, if I could good counsel give/my tongue should not be slack” (7-8). Here, the speaker is presenting herself as an honest figure, who is simply looking out for other women. As we can see, the sound coming out of her mouth is not at all associated with falseness, but it is on the contrary associated with truth, and an important truth as well, which needs to be heard. In Whitney’s poetry, sound holds a deceitful nature when used by men, but not when it is used by women.

The sense that is most present in Whitney’s poetry is sight. In “I.W. To Her Unconstant Lover”, men are actually associated with the lack of sight: the secrets they keep lead them to try their best to conceal the truth, therefore keeping it out of women’s eyeline. In stanza ten, the speaker mentions Theseus, a man who is “stealing away within the night” (39). Here, Theseus is keeping things in the dark in a literal sense, and he acts as a metaphor for men keeping the truth concealed more generally, whether it be during daytime or nighttime. There is a theme of men escaping out of sight: “leave” (34), “stealing away” (39), “took his ship and fled away” (49), and “scape” (55). In this poem, the action of “seeing” is a danger to men, as it threatens to expose them to the consequences of their actions; the sense of sight is figuratively removed from women, as they are not given a chance to see for themselves the faults of their lovers.

In “The Admonition by the Author”, sight is used in relation to false appearances. An opposition is constructed between what seems to be and what is. On line 33 of the poem, the speaker advises “Trust not a man at first sight”, and she later says, “For trial shall declare his truth, and show what he doth think” (37). The speaker is explaining that the “first sight”, in the case of men, only shows what seems to be – more specifically, what is intended to be conveyed to their interlocutor. The testing of a man allows for the transcendence of superficiality, and for the truth to emerge. By saying “show what he doth think” and using the verb “think” instead of “say” or “show”, the speaker makes it clear that sight has to be surpassed in order to attain the truth: the truth is known, it is not seen. In stanza twenty-six, the speaker says, “O that thou hadst had Lynceus’ eyes/for to have seen the hook” (103-104), meaning that women could not have seen men’s bait without having the same sight as Lynceus. As he is a character from Greek mythology who is known for his extraordinary and inhuman eyesight, the speaker is implying that it is simply impossible to see through men’s lies. This metaphor implies that there is a “blindness” that is associated with women: as we have seen before, their sense of sight is lacking. However, the speaker does not use this feature pejoratively: it is presented as a consequence of men’s actions, not as women’s inability to perceive the truth. Overall, in Whitney, perception is deceitful: it is used by men as a façade to present a mirage, and trust should only be granted to a man once he is known on a level deeper than can be seen by the eyes alone.

A third sense used by Whitney is that of touch. In “I.W. To Her Unconstant Lover”, the speaker wishes her lover’s new wife to have the “chasteness of Penelope” (99). Chasteness, as in the quality of being morally pure, is often used in reference to virginity – an attribute that is traditionally deemed essential for women. All the other attributes she lists are moral: beauty, constancy, and truth. It seems as though important attributes associated with women are all of a spiritual nature. Inversely, qualities that are associated with men are of a ma-

terial nature: “Thereto I wish King Xerxes’ wealth, /or else King Cressus’ gold” (129-130). Wealth and money, as well as fighting, which is conveyed through the listing of mythical warrior heroes, all involve physical touch, even physical violence, and are palpable. It seems as though in Whitney’s work, men are more earthly creatures, associated with the sense of touch, and women are almost transcendent creatures, whose qualities are of the realm of the spiritual and of things that cannot be attained by the body. Here, it seems almost as if the dichotomy between men and women extends to one between the body and the soul.

The fourth and final sense used by Whitney is smell; however, it is used differently from the other. The other senses were used to create a division: the senses of touch, hearing, and sight all conveyed different meanings depending on whether they were used in association to men or women. Here, on the contrary, Whitney wants to destroy the gender dichotomy of smell – she wants it to convey the same meaning both for men and women. In her 1573 poetry collection *A Sweet Nosegay*, Whitney uses olfactory imagery to symbolize a move from domesticity to authorship: the sense of smell, when it comes to women, is usually associated with domestic life, but Whitney re-associates it with literary production. During this time, literary collections were sometimes metaphorically called “nosegays” or “posies”. Within her metaphor, the beautiful smell that emanates from the flowers of a nosegay, is emanating from the words of her poetry. English professor and writer Cora Fox asserts that “Although associated in general with women and the intimate, domestic spaces of women’s work in the sensory order of pre-modern Europe, smell in Whitney’s hands is the vehicle for movement away from the intimate female sphere to the sphere of public engagement with the masculine literary tradition”.<sup>1</sup> Here, Whitney is recuperating and re-defining typical associations of smell, trying to induce a movement from the feminine sense joining the masculine one. This is one instance in which Whitney is deconstructing a 16th century dichotomy to instead express an aspect of life in which men and women have the power to be the same: literature. Therefore, she is making a progressive point, and by calling her work a “sweet nosegay”, she is asserting herself within the Western literary tradition.

In addition to these differences brought forward by sensory experience, Whitney also creates a partition when it comes to the elements. In “I.W. To Her Unconstant Lover”, water is presented as a masculine element: “Neptune ruled the sea” (58) and “the surging seas” (53). These citations both suggest masculinity: the first because the seas are ruled by a male God, and the second because there is a brutal, masculine quality that is associated

1 - Fox, Cora. “Isabella Whitney’s Nosegay and the Smell of Women’s Writing.” *The Senses and Society*, vol. 5, 2010, p. 134.

with water. In “The Admonition by the Author”, water is constantly linked to men and their lies: “The mermaids do pretend no good/for all their pleasant songs” (15-16), “Some use tears of crocodiles” (17), and “they wet their cheeks” (20). Perhaps because water can create mirages on its surface, and create illusions regarding the true size and colors of objects, it is of a dishonest nature and should therefore be associated with men. This is again used extensively towards the end of the poem, when the speaker establishes a metaphor in which fish represent women, and men’s lies are depicted as fishing hooks. In this comparison, the body of water, whether it be a sea or a lake, is the world, which is to say that women live in a man’s world, a patriarchal world. They live in their very environment and therefore, are at their mercy.

In Whitney’s poems, there is no element that is linked to women as insistently as water is to men; however, there is a subtle but regular connection that is established between women and fire. In “The Admonition by the Author”, women are presented as passionate creatures, a quality that is used to explain their blindness towards men’s dishonesty. In the very first stanza of the poem, the speaker talks about women as virgins: “Whose hearts as yet with raging love/most painfully do boil” (3-4). The phrase “raging love” suggests intense passion, which is often associated with fire, and “boil” shares the same extreme warmth as fire. The fact that water holds the power to put out a fire emphasizes the dichotomy even more: men and women are not only associated with different elements, but elements that are opposed and cancel each other out.

As we have seen in the previous paragraphs, Isabella Whitney establishes differences between men and women through various mediums. These differences reflect Whitney’s perspective on men and women’s qualities: every time, the dichotomy created serves to point out characteristics that she associates with them. For men, she wants to illustrate their dishonesty and deceitfulness, which are presented almost as inherent features of their gender. She does mention one honest man in “The Admonition by the Author”: “Hero did try Leander’s truth,/before that she did trust:/Therefore she found him unto her/both constant, true, and just” (73-76). Leander is tested by his lover and shows himself to be true; however, the speaker then specifies that he is an exception: “But like Leander there be few” (85). We might think that Leander’s case is used by the speaker to show that although men are generally dishonest, we can find exceptions. However, the speaker might be making a more radical point. Although Leander proves himself to be honest, he then meets a dark fate because of it: “For he always did swim the sea,/when stars in sky did glide:/Till he was drowned by the way/near hand unto the side” (77-80). Leander’s honesty is directly what causes his death. He made the choice of being an honest man, going against the nature of men, which is dishonesty. Perhaps that it is because he was

going against his own nature that he ended up drowned: Whitney might be implying that this way of being is anchored into the nature of men; that God would be displeased by seeing Leander going against what he intended, and would punish him for it. Either way, it is clear that Whitney's gender dichotomy puts men on the side of dishonesty.

If men are on the side of dishonesty; women, on the other hand, are on the side of almost innocent honesty. In her poems, she often defines women as being "simple". In "The Admonition by the Author", she says "Less craft than this god knows would soon/us simple souls beguile" (27-28). The adjective "simple" is not used by the speaker to describe a pejorative stupidity; but instead to convey a sense of honesty. Because women have "simple souls", their innocence makes them honest. There is a sort of purity that is associated with women's honesty. The speaker also implies that their honesty is born out of love, and the willfulness that it causes them to have: "Ye Virgins ye from Cupid's tents/do bear away the foil,/Whose hearts as yet with raging love/most painfully do boil" (1-4). The love they have is so intense that it makes them act in wilful hope towards their male lovers. Therefore, Whitney's dichotomy places women in direct opposition to men by pointing out the virtue of their honesty – and even more so by justifying their "simplicity" as being a result of honorable causes.

This essay has established that Whitney creates a gender dichotomy, and how this dichotomy has as an objective to point out virtues in women and faults in men. However, it is interesting to note that her dichotomy reflects her world view: she suggests that men and women are different, but not in the same way as someone else might do during her time. In the sixteenth century, a predominant biological theory is the one-sex model, which argues that there only exists a single sex of which men and women are variations. In this theory, because of their inwardly "reversed" genitalia, women are a defective version of this single sex – the proper and functioning version being men.<sup>2</sup> By creating a gender dichotomy, Whitney is advancing that men and women are entirely different beings, and is therefore contradicting the one-sex worldview. But more specifically, the fact that her dichotomy is built around physicality and bodily senses, shows that men and women are different physically. This emphasis on physical difference is aligned with the two-sex model; a theory which, in contradiction to the one-sex theory, makes a claim for the separation of men and women based on biological criteria. Whitney's gender dichotomy is one that illustrates both physical and mental differences between men and women, going against the misogynistic

2 - Jordan, Jennifer. "That ere with Age, his strength Is utterly decay'd: Understanding the Male Body in Early Modern Manhood." in Fisher Kate and Toulalan Sarah, *Gender and Sexualities in History*, 2011, p. 29.

ideas of sixteenth-century biology. If anything, Whitney's poetry presents men, and not women, as dysfunctional beings, thereby presenting a highly progressive view on gender.

Despite the existence of the one-sex model, the 16th century is in many ways constructed around a binary worldview, which differentiates men and women: men should go to work and women remain at home, men should be authoritative whereas women should be docile, and so on. Whitney's poetry makes use of this patriarchal social order to advance her own message. This is particularly striking in "I.W. To Her Unconstant Lover", in which the female speaker conforms in many ways to what early modern English society would expect of a woman. However, this is only used as a literary tool, as there is actually a hidden, underlying discourse. Throughout the poem, it seems like the speaker is playing the part of an innocent and well-meaning woman: she raises above her anger to wish her lover good things, which makes her appear wise and temperate to the reader. Even though it contains criticism, the poem is made to look like the speaker is morally sound and chooses the high road by wishing her lover and his new wife happiness. But the speaker is actually playing on gender roles and expectations. She is seemingly well-intentioned, when in fact her aim is to criticize her lover, and perhaps even win him back: "These words I do not speak, thinking/from thy new love to turn thee:/Thou knowest by proof what I deserve/I need not inform thee" (109-112). She says she does not need to inform him of her worthiness, but by saying that she is doing exactly the opposite. The words are intentionally chosen carefully so she can get away with it, while still reminding her lover what he is losing by leaving her.

The same thing happens when she wishes her lover's wife to have a certain set of feminine qualities: "I rather wish her Helen's face,/than one of Helen's trade" (97-98). However, in Greek mythology, Helen's beauty is the cause for her misery. As Paul Marquis puts it, "Helen's beauty is what makes her desirable to many men, and leads to her seduction and 'rape'".<sup>3</sup> Similarly, the other women listed, Penelope, Lucrece, and Thisby, are also all known for their qualities leading them to terrible endings, such as suicide or rape. If she seemingly is wishing the wife good qualities, it looks like the underlying discourse might be that she wishes her fate to be the same as the ones of the women listed. The same thing happens again when she says, "Thereto I wish King Xerxes' wealth,/or else King Cressus' gold" (129-130): both of these characters are known as men who have suffered immensely in their lives. Again, she does not wish her lover wealth, but she wishes him to suffer.

The speaker is conforming to traditional gender roles in order to communicate her mes-

3 - Marquis, Paul. "Oppositional Ideologies of Gender in Isabella Whitney's Copy of a Letter." *The Modern Language Review*, vol. 90, no. 2, 1995, p. 318.



sage subtly, without being accused of behaving in a seductive, unfeminine, or morally unsound manner. By seemingly conforming, Whitney is able to use her voice and make the points she wants to make. In a way, she uses 16th-century gender roles and hides behind them to advance her own understanding of gender and the differences that she perceives to be accurate. It is clear in her poetry that Whitney does not agree with the typical sixteenth-century social roles: the fact that she is confronting her lover in “I.W. To Her Unconstant Lover”, is already subversive enough in itself, because women in her situation are expected to remain silent about the abuse, unfaithfulness, or general mistreatment they receive from men. In fact, she goes against the norms simply by being a woman writer, which is not deemed an acceptable occupation for a woman of her time. It is safe to say that whilst Whitney uses 16th-century traditional gender roles in her poetry, her own perception of the gender binary and what it constitutes of is a much more progressive one.

In conclusion, Isabella Whitney utilizes the senses and the elements for her poetry to convey a gender dichotomy. Through hearing, sight, touch, and smell, as well as through the elements of fire and water, Whitney places men and women at opposing ends of a virtue continuum. Where men are dishonest and unfaithful, women are constant and trustworthy. It seems that through the vision of gender differences which she presents, Whitney criticizes her society’s willful blindness to men’s wrongdoings: “Though it may be shameful, the fact is that historically the treacherous acts of men towards women have been immortalized in the great narratives of western culture” (Marquis, 318). By using mythological stories, she re-utilizes tales of dishonorable masculine behavior that already exist, but re-tells them in a critical way. By being anchored into a criticism of sixteenth-century gender roles and social acceptance of male dishonesty, Whitney’s perception is certainly a progressive one – one that expresses a desire to break with social outlook on men and women, and on the man-woman binary relation.

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## Research Sneak Peek...

WITH CHARLOTTE POTTER AND ANDY REILLY

*This edition's Research Sneak Peek features Charlotte Potter and Andy Reilly, both post-doctoral research associates on the research project "Shakespeare's Lyric Poetry." The project is funded by the Fonds National Suisse and led by Professor Lukas Erne, who is head of Early Modern English Literature at the English Department.*

### 1. Describe the project in 5 key words

Innovative, editorial, collaborative, meticulous, and fun!

### 2. What motivates you to pursue this research project?

Charlotte: I love working on Shakespeare! This project combines my interest and previous work on Shakespearean drama with a new focus on lyric poetry. It is fascinating to look at the plays in a new way. The work is both methodical and creative, which is very satisfying. And working as part of a team is really motivating.

Andy: Like Charlotte, I also love working on Shakespeare! In my previous work, I focused on some famous editors of Shakespeare from the past, and always wondered what it must be like to do this job. Now I'm getting the chance to find out. It gives me a very different perspective on the plays and on Shakespeare as a poet, and I'm also getting to learn a lot during this process. I really enjoy working in a team too.

### 3. What phase of your project are you currently in, and which tasks are you carrying out to complete it? (And . . . what will be next)?

We're exactly three months into the project today! We're currently working on the first of two editions and this one will be called "Shakespeare's Songs and Poems in His Plays". When people think of Shakespeare's poems they tend to think of the 154 sonnets and the narrative poems such as *Venus and Adonis*. But there are actually many poems and songs scattered throughout his dramatic works. Rather than thinking about Shakespeare as a dramatist who wrote some poetry, the project asks us to think of Shakespeare as first and foremost a poet, writing dramatic, narrative and lyric poetry.

We currently have around 170 songs and poems on our list, and we're working through

them play by play. We started working on them individually, but more recently we've begun editing them together, starting with four poems from *Othello*. The process begins by going back to the earliest authoritative text and making a transcription that includes the original spelling and punctuation. We then create our own modern English version of the text, add a glossary for any difficult words or expressions, and do a bit of formal analysis. We then add a headnote that analyses the text as a poem and another note that places it in its dramatic context. Depending on the length and complexity of the poem, this can be anything from a couple of lines to several pages long. We also collect some interesting secondary literature and include that as further reading for each poem.

We meet with Lukas on a weekly basis and discuss the poems we've been editing that week. We find that we're constantly coming up against interesting problems or questions that help us to refine our work and develop our approaches. It's always followed by a very collegial lunch, usually at Uni Dufour!

What is one text – literary, theoretical or otherwise – you would recommend to anyone interested in finding out more about your research domain?

If we had to recommend any book, it would have to be the First Folio. This was the first collected edition of Shakespeare's plays, famously organised into the three genres of comedies, histories and tragedies, and published in 1623 (seven years after Shakespeare's death). For many of his plays, such as *Macbeth* and *Twelfth Night*, the Folio contains the only authoritative text, and without it we'd have a completely different view of Shakespeare. This hefty tome celebrated its 400th birthday this year! Almost all of the poems we are working on are collected in this volume, and one of the key arguments of the project is that the early modern book containing the greatest body of lyric poetry by Shakespeare is not the 1609 quarto with his 154 sonnets, but rather the First Folio! Sadly you probably won't be able to purchase a copy yourself (unless you have over a million francs to spare!) but it is completely digitised online by the Folger Shakespeare Library. You can check it out by visiting the Folger Shakespeare Library website at <https://luna.folger.edu> and searching "STC 22273 Fo.1 no.05"

CULTURE

# Reflections on a Year Abroad

DAVID BOVET

I find it quite hard to start this article, as this past year has impacted me in various ways. I am definitely not the same person I was a year ago, before I left for the UK and I can clearly state that these changes would not have occurred had I stayed in Geneva. Do not get me wrong: Geneva is a nice city and there are a lot of people whom I love here, but this experience was different. Allow me to underline that this paper, whilst aiming towards a more academic tone, is solely based on my observations, and should not be taken as gospel. That said, let us not scatter around and try to compose this reflection with a semblance of common thread.

First of all, I would like to address the duality of bilingualism. Yes, shocker, there is the prefix “bi-” in front of “lingualism” which literally means two (languages), so it seems logical that there should be a duality. This duality, however, might be far greater than one would expect... Indeed, behind “just” a language, there is a whole culture, a whole social context, and being bilingual (allow me to hover over the technicalities of bilingualism here) means to some extent to grasp the cultures of these languages. And yes, English has multiple cultures linked to one single language (though in a multitude of regional and social varieties) – I shall not address this point either, as the reflection here is on the social rather than linguistic aspect of my experience. In that sense, bilingualism is way more than “just” a linguistic feature. Although the language in itself plays an important role in bilingualism, the context surrounding it is just as important.

Let us address the difficulties surrounding living in a community where the main or societal language (SL) is different from one’s own language, the heritage language (HL).<sup>1</sup> Such an immersion requires having sufficient proficiency in SL – in my case, English – to be able to comfortably communicate with native speakers of SL, but does not have SL as a HL – my own HL is French. In that sense, even though I was able to sustain meaningful conversations with other individuals in English, it was always easier to connect with

1 - Sharon Armon-Lotem and Natalia Meir, “The Nature of Exposure and Input in Early Bilingualism”, in *The Cambridge Handbook of Bilingualism*, ed. by Annick De Houwer & Lourdes Ortega (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp.193-212 (p. 194).

speakers of French. The ability to speak in another language than SL gave me a sense that I belonged to a community. Furthermore, having at least two, if not more, lexicons, I was doomed to code-mixing, i.e. saying words in French whilst speaking in English and vice-versa. Even though code-mixing is widely spread in bilingual communities, it is important to note that it is not common to all bilinguals, but affects a sufficient number of them to register as a trend.

And while code-mixing does not impact one’s ability to communicate with others, it can create a feeling of isolation from speakers of SL. I realised that most English speakers might not feel the need to learn another language to make themselves understood in another country – something that, as a French native speaker, had never occurred to me (having been brought up in Switzerland, I had started to learn three languages by the age of ten). In that sense, it created a feeling of isolation because, although some people spoke French (and there were not that many), I was surrounded by non-speakers, and thus, could not help but feel isolated at times.

Going abroad to better one’s language skills, one must expect to improve not only in lexical and syntactical capacities, but also to be exposed to a whole socio-economic context which is entirely different from that which one is used to. It is in that sense that I wanted to show how bilingualism is much more than “just” the knowledge of two languages. By going abroad and improving my English, I exposed myself to new ways of thinking that clashed with – or, on the contrary, supported – my own, which in turn encouraged me to reflect. This set of values and ways of thinking can be considered as “foreign” as it was unlike anything I knew. It was interesting to reflect on how new cultural ideas differed from my own, and I integrated some of them. I never felt that I had to favour one culture over the other, but was able to select the best of what I knew and what I encountered during my stay abroad. As my “home” persona collided with a new set of values and ways of thinking, I created an “abroad” persona for whom some English values remained “foreign.”

I suppose an example might help to better understand this. My “home” persona has always been taught to help clean up the table when invited to someone else’s house, and to offer help whenever possible. For my “U.K.” persona, it was common to sit back and let the host do everything, without offering help. This was truly difficult for me to understand, and at first, I took offense when friends were over and no one would offer to help clean up. However, this specific custom stayed in the “foreign” set and did not go through to the “abroad” persona, as I deemed my home custom to be more in tune with my own personality.

Another point I want to share is how coming back from England challenged my sense of belonging to my home. Rediscovering my environment after being away from my landmarks, friends, family and culture triggered quite a peculiar feeling. In short, it was like having to learn how everything back home worked all over again. But the most striking feeling was the one of not being home at home, of not belonging. Having had my ideas of home challenged, it was hard to come back to an environment where those ideas were prominent because they did not concur with my new, transformed idea of home and self. Likewise, it was hard to come back to my friends at home, as they had continued to be exposed to the same ways of thinking, the same sets of values, whilst mine has been challenged, and sometimes friendships had to end as we had less values in common.

However, it is hard to feel like one fully belongs to a country, and in my case to the community I found in England. And whilst it was possible to feel this belonging at times, there were always small (and sometimes bigger) occasions where I was being reminded that I did not belong. Be it through mockery of my linguistic abilities in English, cultural shock (which I have already touched on above), or simply through missing home cuisine for example, there was always a way by which I would feel either left out, or lacking something, namely, that “home” feeling. Thereupon, I imagine it is an everlasting struggle for people spending years abroad to feel like themselves, when they are no longer home, nor totally immersed abroad.

That said, I want to underline how this is merely a temporary state, and not a definite state of mind. These two personae coexist, each trying to undermine the other, to take more space, in a never-ending battle – the point being, there will probably never be a winner. Through many more experiences, these personae will have to learn to coexist, to live in harmony, and to finally merge and blossom into one entity, with the best of both. Whilst they create both a sense of disparity and multitude, they will hopefully unite to create a new sense of self. It is a journey which takes time, and which may be never-ending, but it is a journey which everyone must undergo in their search for their own personality.

Finally, allow me to underline that, although this paper focuses mainly on the negative aspects of this year abroad, it has also been a genuine pleasure. Meeting so many new and different people, being exposed to a new culture, learning new ways of thinking and of living was life changing. This paper reflects on events that took place over a year abroad, and whilst positive events did have an impact, I truly believe that negative events had the bigger impact, solely because I had to adapt to overcome them, while they also challenged my own ideas and perceptions of the world. Therefore, throughout the events described

in this paper, I can say that the past year has been a very enlightening journey now filled with many good memories. This journey has helped me grow, understand myself and the world a little better. More specifically, this year abroad enabled me to acquire a new and more complex sense of who I am.

# Expanding Horizons: Studying Abroad

INTERVIEW WITH MATHILDE VAUDANO BY ELISA FRACCAROLI

*Mathilde is currently completing her BA in English and Spanish at the University of Geneva. She has spent the semester of Spring 2023 on mobility at King's College in London and has gracefully accepted to share some of her experience with Noted.*

## 1. Why did you choose to go abroad?

I have always wanted and loved experiencing new lifestyles and new environments in foreign countries since I was very young. I did a year abroad in Dublin when I was sixteen and when starting university here at UNIGE, I realised that I wanted to have a second experience abroad, but this time at university level. When I made up my mind, I applied to King's College London, whose school fees are very dear, but since I was leaving as part of the Mobility OUT, I had to pay the UNIGE fees, which makes going to another university affordable and hence, possible. What also really motivated me was the possibility of continuing my studies but at another university and in a new city while still validating my credits here at UNIGE.

## 2. How was the experience at the university abroad?

The experience was wonderful and I loved being at King's College and in London. I met new people from all over the world with whom I am still in touch. I also met my host family who helped me around and gave me so many tips about London and what to visit there. London is a great place to study. Although the city has some negative aspects, there is so much to discover and you are always just a stone's throw away from something to visit or do. It is a very resourceful and lively city where you cannot be bored. Regarding King's College, the school system and the classes are very different from UNIGE. The university has its flaws and qualities, but overall, I am so happy that I have experienced a new university life and system because it is a once-in-a-life-time experience. It has impacted me forever and I feel very lucky that I have been able to live in London and go to King's College.

## 3. How was it to adapt to a new environment?

As I had already been in Dublin for a year, I was already used to changing environments and having to adapt. Even if it was the second time, it was still scary and stressful because I did not know the university, the city nor anyone in London. Luckily, as human beings, we have a high capacity to adapt to new environments or situations, and after a few weeks, I got used to the city, to the university, and I quickly made new habits. Befriending other study abroad students also helped me to adapt because we were generally going through the same changes, we wanted to visit the city and we made the effort to get to know each other because we were in the same situation.

## 4. What did you find particularly striking about this experience?

What I found really striking was how much the city and the host university felt like home after a few weeks. It always surprises me how quickly we adapt to new environments and find new habits. I loved being able to go to a museum, a park, a new café or sightseeing after my classes. However, what strikes me most today is how much I miss being a study abroad student in London every day.

## 5. Did you encounter any difficulties before and during the abroad period?

Yes, I did encounter some difficulties before and after, but not during. The most important difficulty that I had to encounter was two months before going abroad: The list of the English department's modules at King's College that had been given to me a few months before was not accurate. I had planned my courses for the fall semester here at UNIGE according to the false list and as a result, I had to change several times my "plan d'études" because I could not take the modules that I was supposed to at King's College. It was a very stressful situation as it changed all my plans, and the Global Office at King's College was not being understanding and simply told me that either I changed modules or I could not come. However, I needed to plan my modules according to the UNIGE English department's "plan d'études," but fortunately, with the help of the UNIGE English department, I was able to find a solution. I also had some difficulties after coming back from my Erasmus because of the grading strike taking place at King's College. The teachers would not correct the exam papers of the exam session that took place in May last term and as a result, the university could not release any results. It caused me a lot of anxiety because I could not give any grades to my teachers or to the mobility office here at UNIGE, but my teachers and the mobility office here were all very understanding about this situation, which affected my results until the end of October.

6. *What advice would you give to future abroad students?*

Although planning an Erasmus involves many difficulties and stressful situations, it is all worth it once you are there. You will forget about these struggles and enjoy your time. If you are scared of going out of your shell and talk to new people, try to talk to students who are also doing an Erasmus. There are often events organised by the host university where the study abroad students can meet. Other study abroad students will be very open to meeting new people because they are in the same boat as you since they are also in a new environment and do not know anyone. Finally, I would say that you need to appreciate every moment of your Erasmus, meet new people, make new experiences, and really live it because it goes by so quickly and next thing you know, you are already coming home.

## *Anyone, Everyone, All at Once*

MIRANDA ALTHAUS

Life's chaos leads people into categorizing themselves into boxes and labels, trying to define themselves according to a pattern that was set by a combination of social norms. Even though that can be comforting from the perspective that one would have less responsibility or choices to make, it is also unrealistic because no matter how hard the attempt, people simply cannot fully fit into these categories due to various social factors.

Taking the MBTI<sup>1</sup> test to find out one's personality has been popularized in this generation and is one of the prime examples of this innate need that individuals have to know where they fit. It's proven that the test is neither accurate nor reliable in view of how non-gradable it is, contrary to a person's personality. With this persistent attempt of people to include themselves into a large group, usually so as not to feel alone, they miss the incredible variety of characteristics that makes them unique. Personality is a spectrum and is variable depending on several things. It's very unusual for a person to be talented or proficient in only one topic because people have aptitudes, but they can also learn skills or decide the things at which they want to be good. Such choices all factor into people's character and who they decide to be.

This is an interesting topic to relate to the booming topic of multiverses which has gradually been getting more popular and talked about. The interest in this idea peaked with the movie premieres of the *Spider Man* franchise, but this idea has been here and developing for a while. Individuals have always wondered what would have happened if they had chosen another path and that precise wonderment plays into the multiverses concept. Due to the endless options, people have multiple choices to make and things they could be. Wouldn't that factor in their character and plurality of selves? It most definitely would if you credit the belief that people are what they do. A great example of this is shown in the movie *Everything, Everywhere, All at Once* (2022) in which there's a powerful illustration of the wide gaps that a single choice can create in an individual's life. The movie shows different multiverses where the main character sees herself leading totally different lives in each parallel universe, all depending on specific circumstantial choices as it's stated in "[e]very rejection, every disappointment has led you here to this moment" (*Everything Every-*

1 - The main personality types according to the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator are divided into thematic pairs - i.e., Introverted/Extroverted, Intuition/Sensing, Feeling/Thinking, Perceiving/Judging, Assertive or Turbulent.



where *All at Once*) which exemplifies how each one of these factors and instances has “led” the person to who they have become at that specific moment in time. This relates to the commonly used phrase “I don’t even recognize myself” that refers to the feeling of not being able to come into terms with some aspect of our character that has had a development.

All of these exemplifications are factors that come into play and demonstrate why this is such a polemic topic. This discussion puts into perspective what is actually the meaning of life and who we are, and if the essence of being is something innate or if it’s something subjectively constructed. The best answer to these questions would be to say both. It obviously has an innate element since there are traits that a lot of us from completely different backgrounds happen to share, but there are also traits that are acquired, it being an illustration of the socially constructed factors that influence our multiple selves.

A great example of a social factor that impacts the emergence of various selves is relocation. It can be observed that a lot of people who have moved neighborhoods, states or even countries tend to develop slightly different personalities for each environment. Sometimes the gap is big depending on the cultural effect of the spot they moved to. In my case, moving from a Latin American country to North America and then to Europe had definite effects that led me to have different selves for each area. This is a more concrete concept because it does not entail the discussion regarding the existence of multiverses or if fate and destiny are real. This is a concept that can rather be widely perceived when talking and meeting people that have moved around a lot. For instance, when I’m in my home country, my personality tends to be a lot sloppier and more serious whereas in the US, my tone turns more sarcastic and my hopeless romantic side comes out. On the other hand, in Europe, I have come to notice that my dark humor and controlling side comes out more. Of course, this all depends on various other elements like age which influences what part of your brain is developing at the moment, and also the environment and people themselves. Social interactions have a huge weight when talking about how a person is how they are. When spending time with really friendly people, a person tends to be more relaxed and friendlier themselves, or it can have the opposite effect and turn the person into a way more pessimistic person than they truly are. It’s not an exact science but it can definitely be agreed that the concept of self is not a singular notion: it encompasses and depends on way too many factors for it not to be plural.

Having a plurality of selves is often considered negative and is sometimes even conceived as having a “turbulent self image” (MBTI, 1962) which contains a pessimistic connotation but can be overridden by the simple belief “the more the merrier” (*Pearl*, 850) coined by the Pearl Poet, who, centuries ago, already had valued plurality. Containing multitudes

can only add richness to personal character and provide the tools and flexibility that individuals need to succeed in any kind of environment.

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ART

## *An Account of Salamanders in a Bathroom*

SONJA VAN LIER

The five-legged spider stared at me from the window ledge. I glared back at it from across the uneven, earthy floor. Its singular left leg twitched as it snuck itself into the rusted frame. I resigned not to go anywhere near the window, now that it was hiding the stuff of nightmares. The water belching out of the hose pipe broke the cadence of the cicadas' nightly screams.

Besides running water, the cream-coloured bathtub was the only trace of modernity in the makeshift bathroom. The water was connected to a same rusty heater, so that all of it came out near boiling, and with a familiar putrid odour: the smell of the egg carton you forget about before a three-week holiday. Waiting for the tub to cool, I looked back to the window frame. A five-legged spider is unnerving, but all the more so if you lose sight of it. I was not sure if it was even there anymore, but the beast was better left to its devices. Some dead and dying black flies floated about and occasionally stuck to the ceramic sides of the tub. I tried very hard not to think of the few caught between the strands of my hair. After inhaling some yellowish bathwater through my nose and nearly choking, I spun around to see if I was again in the company of disgruntled strangers.

\*

When I opened the sliding door the night before, I had interrupted some great conference of salamanders. Only the smallest ones scurried away, but a particular orange, banana-shaped salamander gave me such a condescending look, I could almost imagine it lifting an eyebrow at me. I stood dressed just outside the doorway quite unsure about going in. I was warned by the owner of the cabin that the bathroom tended to welcome unusual guests, and that I should not scream should some caterpillar appear in the wash basket. But I had not expected salamanders, let alone so many of them. I undressed nervously, making sure to fold each piece of clothing tightly so that nothing could crawl into them. I took special care with my underwear and tucked them into my rolled-up trousers. With uneasy steps, I scanned the floor for any unsuspecting worms I might accidentally squish on my way across the bathroom.

When I say bathroom, I do not really mean 'bathroom,' but more a room with a bathtub in it. Well then again, it was not quite a room either. Technically, it did have four walls

and a ceiling, but the large south-facing window was nearly falling apart and permanently open. The impressive number of tall tropical plants and fresh soil on the ground also made the space rather unusual. Luxury hotel chains should take inspiration from the setup, but maybe not have the water come out of an old garden hose.

The ground directly underneath the bathtub was hand-poured plaster with little blue and yellow marbles studded into the crumbly mass. I was never really one for D.I.Y. projects, but I did remember wanting to do something similar with the ones I had as a child. Swaggering in the schoolyard to the rhythm of a dozen marbles tumbling about an old pencil case, I had long been the envy of the mid-morning break. For all the world, I cannot remember what happened to the marbles. My brother says I never had any to begin with and that they were actually his – They most certainly were not. Regardless, they are now nothing but lost childhood trinkets.

“Oi!”

I crumpled myself into a corner. Nobody was supposed to be here but me!

“Over here, you big idiot!”

The disembodied voice came from the window. A blotch of orange was opening and closing its tiny jaws. The sight of the offending banana-shaped salamander was oddly cute, but scary in equal measure. Not scary in the way a haunted house is scary, but rather in a 'you tossed the football over M. So-and-so's fence one too many times' sort of scary. It stood on the ledge of the window with one leg on the ceramic tub with its fiery little chest all puffed up. Its two black, beady eyes stared me down with righteous fury. Though it would be more accurate to say it stared me up. It was a little salamander after all.

“Oi! You listening? What the hell is wrong with you? Are you some kind of hippie or other?”

I had no comeback. The tangy flavour of a fruit fly crashing onto my tongue made me realise my mouth was hanging open.

“See here? I'm trying to enjoy game night with my friends, and in barges this lumbering idiot scaring 'em away! If your size didn't do it then stripping down certainly did! Have you gone mad?”

I babbled an incomprehensible apology out of confusion rather than shame. After all, it was perfectly natural to be naked in a bathroom, wasn't it? Dirty laundry balled up in hand, I swiftly returned to the main cabin – still in my birthday suit, and smelling very

un-like a garden of roses. By morning, even the walls stank of me.

\*

My nostrils were still stinging when I peeked behind the paddle-like blades of the birds of paradise, but I did not see my wily friend anywhere. Perhaps the salamanders were off playing Monopoly in someone else's dingy bathtub. I closed my eyes and sank into the eggy warm water.

"You really upset him you know," piped a tiny voice. Poking my head out of the tub, I spotted a much smaller blue salamander.

"Who?"

"Gary."

"Gary?"

"Gary! You really upset him yesterday. Ruined his whole night!"

"How did I ruin his night?" I did not try to hide my disbelief at the accusation.

"Well for one, you spoiled the round of Uno, and then you offended him by getting naked! He's a very decent fellow Gary. Doesn't want to see anyone naked. Ever! Not his thing. He once got so cross, he didn't speak to me for a week after I moulted my tail over dinner," spoke the little salamander very matter-of-factly, as if he were making small talk in an office over mediocre coffee.

"Ah."

The constant buzz of insects coming through the cracked window did little to drown out the uncomfortable silence. The blue salamander looked up expectantly.

"I think you should apologise."

"To whom?"

"Gary."

"Whatever for?"

Befuddled, the little blueberry of a creature sputtered before shouting:

"For ruining game night! He'd been planning it for weeks! Sent out invites and everything!" He was starting to steam like a kettle near boiling.

"Well shouldn't he apologise to me for ruining my bath?"

"YOU burst into HIS house and then got NAKED!"

He loudly enunciated every syllable, but added a particular slow sort of emphasis on each sound of the word 'naked.'

"It's your fault!" He squeaked angrily.

"This is Gary's house?"

"Well, technically it's ours, but he does cover most of the mortgage," he answered sheepishly.

"And who are you then?"

"Craig."

"Craig?"

"Yes, Craig."

"Nice to meet you, Craig."

"The feeling isn't mutual. Apologise if you see him."

On that, he spun and marched off towards the plants. His small feet made the slightest plap-plap on the rough plaster as he stomped away with the haughtiness of someone that believes they have won a moral argument. I successfully washed for the first time in the cabin. If I had any voyeurs, I took no notice of them.

\*

The relief of not smelling of sweaty hiker anymore is one of life's small, but sorely underrated treasures. I had gotten a fair amount of laundry done and dry by the following afternoon. I did, however, run out of gas for the little stove that provided my morning coffee and spicy noodles. A long walk to the small shop down the valley, and an even longer walk back later, the indulgence of a bath became very tempting, even if it did vaguely smell of rotten eggs.

I opened the sliding door again. Curled up like a fist next to the tap was fiery, banana-shaped Gary. He pretended not to notice me. Though I think he was just refusing to acknowledge my presence.

"I'm sorry I ruined your night, Gary."

He mumbled something unintelligible in the way all old men do.

"Are you planning another game tonight or can I use the tub?"

"Not after you spoiled Uno for me, I'm not. Just keep your bloody clothes on this ti-AHH!"

The salamander looked on in horror. I had slithered out of my khakis.

## Great Mystery

LORRAINE DEVILLARD

"Mummy, tell me, where are we going?"

The snow was heavy under my feet and that which was falling from the surrounding trees came into my eyes. I couldn't see where we were going, didn't know.

"To a place that you are going to love."

"But what if I dislike the way there? Will it be worth it?"

"I'm here with you, sweetie."

My mum's soothing voice was only of little comfort as I really wanted to know why we were walking on this cold wintery night. My mum had a bag with her and she offered me some tea, to help me find strength within. We stopped under a big tree. For once, I couldn't understand what my mother was doing, why she was taking me there, to an unknown place on such a night. She'd always been close by, and even if the tea was comforting, and her presence as well, there was something I couldn't grasp.

Once I had drunk enough, we started walking again. The snow felt lighter under my feet and I became more willing to walk. My mum seemed to perceive this and she had a little mysterious smile on her face. For the first time, I looked at her as a grownup sister and a woman, a woman other than my mum. She had a beautiful face that seemed to glow from the inside. She also seemed to perceive the surroundings from every pore of her skin, as if breathing at once with the wild world around her. I was about to turn twelve and wondered how it was possible that I had never seen this in her. It suddenly felt like discovering the dark side of the moon, and realizing that it is even more beautiful than the visible face.

My mum winked at me. Her eyes had stars in them. Had she perceived my thoughts too? The silence of the night was so thin that my thoughts felt like noise and disturbances. My mother did not seem to be bothered by anything. She showed herself in her utmost vulnerability, like a deer standing with her family in her greatest tenderness.

"We're almost there."

Her voice sounded soft as the snow. She was in her element. Why have you waited 12 years to show me who you truly are? The question remained silent, although it burnt my lips. Deep inside, I knew that I had already met her before. It felt that I had even chosen her to be my mother.

"I chose you to be my child. It was a pleasure to expect you, a deep joy that found expression in the greatest silence. A moment where everything opens and unites at the same time. This was the deep connection with life's greatest principle, the deep mystery."

I wasn't sure I understood the feeling, but I knew that these words rang true in me. Was I going to experience this once in my lifetime?

"I wish you understand this tonight."

Her words tuned in fluidly with my inner dialogue. I was touched by the magic of the moment. I supposed that the last time I had felt such a deep connection with her was when I was in her womb.

"Some encounters need time to prepare."

Our feet, now buried in the snow, had led us to the side of a lake. Night was about to fall, and we could still see the remnants of a stunning sunset; a thin purple line on the horizon. The sides of the lake were frozen, but the middle gleamed with the sky. The purple line reverberated in the depths of the lake.

My mum turned to me and took me in her arms.

"Thank you for having walked this hard way with me. I have been willing to show you this place for a long time, but I did not know if you were ready. You are right when you ask if it is worth walking a way that we dislike. I did not want this place to be tainted with negative feelings."

"Oh, it can't, mummy. I think it knows how to protect itself."

Her whole face shone at once. These words had touched her truth within. We remained silent for a while, sharing the beauty of the instant, in communion with one another and the landscape around us. The purple line disappeared from the lake. The horizon had become dark. I saw a first star light up in the water. My heart was opening to a mystery I had almost forgotten. It sang a melody, reminding me that this place of beauty is always

accessible to me. Engraved at the core of my heart, it is ready to be sung. My lips opened and the melody came out by itself. I never knew that I could sing like that. Such sounds had been until now reserved for my mother when she lulled me at night. And sometimes when she cooked or went out and enjoyed the presence of nature around her. In any case, my throat kept letting beautiful tones out. My heart and my mouth were bound by a golden thread, a golden way for secrets to emerge. I was singing to the lake and the stars that were slowly appearing, as many hearts their presence, attracted by the wish to sing in unison. But they waited and listened to these mysterious sounds I was making, as big brothers and sisters kindly watching over their little sister. They knew the beauty of the first moment when someone discover their voice, and respected it. Their glow added to the beauty of the moment. And... it even felt that they glowed even stronger.

When the last tone came out, I turned towards my mother. Her eyes had tears in them. Tears of joy. Tears of beauty. I suddenly understood that the crystals making these tears were as deep and delicate as those of the crystalline lake in front of us. Her tears and glistening eyes were a lake and a nightly sky. The universe is a gift, reachable at one arm's length. I fell into my mother's arms.

We stayed there a couple of minutes, feeling each other's heartbeat against our chests. It was an instant of pure surrender to life's beauty, and of tenderness. Two heartbeats according to one another and to the forest's, the lake's, the surrounding nature's. It felt like the whole universe beating in unison, celebrating the awakening of a heart, the simple and powerful remembrance of itself.

At that moment, I knew that the whole universe celebrates each time a heart remembers itself. And this time, it was mine. I was welcomed in the great dance of the great life, a life that celebrates the sacredness that binds all living beings and cares for them. I knew that I had changed forever, that my eyes would from now on see the world in a different way, through different lenses than before, forever.

No turning back  
just like a birth...  
No turning back...

Yet I also knew it was for the better. My heart now had the ability to share its secrets to my consciousness. No lesser step. I became thankful to my mum for having waited for this perfect moment, for the time when I would be ready to open the eyes of my heart.

"Thank you."

She looked at me and I could see in her eyes that she considered me her sister as well as her daughter. The many parts of her – the newborn, the child, the teenager, the young woman, the mother – recognizing the many parts in me – the newborn, the child, the teenager about to be, the woman already there somewhere, and the mother too, the grandmother. All the aspects of what I am. Eternity looking at eternity. Pure understanding.

"We've shared such looks already. As you were a tiny newborn in my arms, I could already see eternity looking back at me, and teaching me. Thank you for the bliss of choosing me as your mother. You have encouraged me so tenderly to dare expressing the purest, most vulnerable self and offer the treasures it carries. The treasures I came to reveal. You are part of them."

I didn't know, or rather had forgotten, that a life time would be punctuated by such moments of grace, such thresholds of deep communion. Yet, somewhere, it makes such perfect sense that the beginning of teenagerhood would bring forward the echoes of our own birth and first months of life...

"I gave special care to you as you were very little. I knew, already then, that you were a sister to me and would become a beautiful woman, though I couldn't tell the shape. This is offered to the marvel of walking an earthly journey. We can sense the potential and direction, but we will always be surprised by the form. This is the marvel of life."

"Was it like this when I was born?"

"It definitely was. I knew I was holding a baby within, but the moment I saw you, there, perfectly finished, so delicate, with almond-shaped eyes, a beautiful nose, a finely drawn mouth, ears all round that reminded me of little seashells, the eyelashes, the nails... Your sight looking for mine as you were tracing your very first movement upwards in airy environment, finding support no longer in my body but on it.

It all took another dimension.

The eyes and heart of a mother awakening."

Some tell that this is the moment that saved humanity. This moment of bonding where motherly love pours on two human beings, the mother and her child, and maybe more... The feeling of the moment flowed back to my consciousness. It appeared that we never really lost that connection. Somewhere in each of us, there is this place of pure communion, where our souls can find support when needed. If one of us needs to remember, to come back to that feeling of total envelopment, nourishment, deep love, we can go back to it. A sacred realm that will forever empower us, with tenderness.



And somewhere in the middle of the forest, all surrounded by snow, a daughter took her mother's hand. Or maybe it was that of two sisters. Or friends. All at once... The two shapes remained there for a while. You could sense peace and bliss emanate from them and the place. Two human hearts beating as one with one another and with those of the lake, of all the trees, the stars, the snowflakes, the cells and atoms of what was surrounding them.

How they came back and when? I'm not sure they did. You may want to dive in and see by yourself if you can still feel two figures holding hands and breathing in unity.

## *I don't want to miss you*

ANASTASYA CRISCENTI

It didn't end the way it does in fairy tales. No, it didn't have the cliché happy ending. Our story didn't have a happy ever after, as I so hoped for. Turns out people lie, leaving behind broken promises. Turns out fairytales are nothing but fake. You have taught me how not to fall for the sweet and tempting trap of fairy tales that used to seduce me.

I had all of you and then most of you, some of you and now none of you. And here I am, months after our breakup, still haunted by the ghost of you. Silly as it might sound, I always keep the door of my heart unlocked in case you might change your mind. The ringer on my phone always stays on, I don't want to miss your text. I don't want to miss you. I don't want to forget you. But as days pass, your face becomes blurry; in fact, time damages it, and there's nothing I can do to prevent it. Mom told me that love always finds its way back, but the truth is, even though I waited endlessly for you, you never returned.

People say long-distance relationships aren't meant to last, but I had hope. You gave me hope. I saw forever in your deep blue eyes. I knew that you and I were meant to be from the moment we first looked into each other's eyes. I loved you on your good days and on your worst nights.

I remember the way your eyes shone the instant you saw me after two years apart, how your smile lit my heart, and how the smell of your cologne made me feel safe. I remember how you softly caressed my hand while we were holding hands on our first date. It brought a sense of warmth on this cold night of December. I had butterflies in my stomach, and I couldn't stop smiling with those red cheeks when I came back home. Loving you was the best thing I ever did, and yet it was the hardest lesson I ever had to learn.

I had many reasons to leave, but I chose to stay. You had many reasons to stay but you just gave up on us so easily. You wiped off everything we had, everything we were and could

have been with a single phone call, and left me with absolutely nothing but memories to cling on. You told me that you didn't want to lose me, not again. But you've done the exact opposite of what you said. What kind of love do you really have if you don't fight for it? I know you and I weren't perfect, but I can't imagine my world with you gone. I hope that one day we will meet again because our story wasn't meant to end like this.

## *Droplets*

CHRISTINA ZHOLDKOVA

Droplets falling from the sky.  
Muscles ache, but still go by.  
Battled hands greasy hair stroke.  
Silent shakes overcome soul.

I put one foot in front of the other.  
And one might think that I am not bothered,  
But my heart aches with muffled cries;  
Hopelessness lives within me – nigh.

How could my favorite color  
Turn to strongly suggest horror?  
Nothing red can now bring me peace:  
Flames, blood, insides, and sovietism.

No one I loved on the street lies;  
Maybe that's why you'd think I'd sigh.  
But when I see pools of blood, limbs,  
Brain matter, and torn dirty clothes,  
I know they belong to my own.

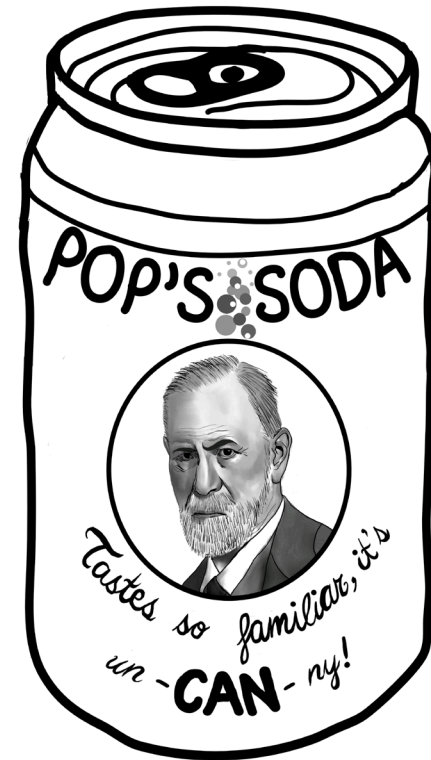
My child, my sister, my brother,  
My uncle, my aunt, my parents.  
Our ancestors – please heal this land!  
Let us – nation – be strong again.

Through this forced divide, a lonely heart sprouts.  
Let's cherish these buds, and denounce this plight.

## Washing Machine

FFJ

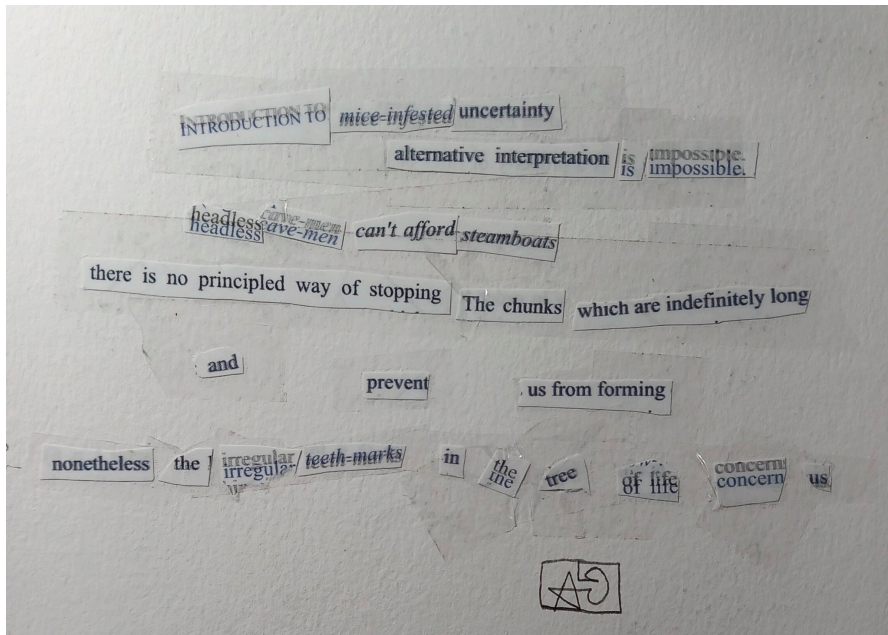
I can feel my heart trembling in my chest  
 Like all the tiny shreds of it  
 skittering at the same time  
 Rejections, and heartbreaks, and fears  
 I stuck my heart in a washing machine  
 And put the program on “delicates”  
 But someone came by and bumped the buttons  
 And suddenly it’s on at 70 degrees and going fast  
 There goes my heart  
 It comes out smaller and all wrong-sized  
 Of course, with time and patience and softener  
 I could stretch it out again  
 But for once I would simply like it  
 if the other person actually  
 took care from the start  
 and kept taking care after the wash  
 put my heart up to dry in a soft breeze  
 and then folded it so delicately  
 took it out to wear on the days they need comfort  
 and hug cats while wearing me  
 I want to be soft to people, I do,  
 I would also like for people to be soft on me too



# [Untitled Collage]

A. G.

The following collage originates in the glitch of a printer, resulting in the words from a textbook chapter being scattered all over the page. Instead of lingering in frustration, A.G. started cutting out the words and arranging them. In the contributor's own words, this collage "illustrates the multitude of paths and possibilities we can explore through language, even in the context of seemingly bland textbook material". A.G.'s collage shows how language is infinite, and how "its scope spans from sterility to surreality".



VARIA

# A Gentle Grilling

PROFESSOR SIMON SWIFT

*Simon Swift is director of the English Department, although he has been professor of Modern English Literature in Geneva since 2015. Professor Swift specializes in Romanticism, but his research interests span modern and contemporary thinkers from Hannah Arendt to Gayatri Spivak. He is also interested in the interaction of literature with (audio-)visual media such as painting and film. In this short interview, Professor Swift has agreed to muse on his interest in Romanticism, and more.*

1. *When did you choose your academic speciality – and why?*

Sometimes I feel like it chose me. That's to say, it wasn't likely that I would become a Romanticist, which is what I am, since all of the professors who specialized in Romanticism were on study leave in the third year of my BA, and my director of studies (the person who looked after my learning), who was a Romanticist, up and left. I ended up doing lots of Modernist poetry and Elizabethans, which felt like they went together pretty well (or at least I was told that they did), and went off to do an MA in Victorian literature at Leeds. But that proved really boring, at least for me, and so I started studying postcolonial literature (because the people doing it seemed less boring) and theory (because it sounded cool and European). Then I realized that by studying Romanticism I could do all of those things. The Romantics were the first internationalists – which is to say, anti-bigotry in an age when England was becoming bigoted and close-minded, passionately devoted to local places but also interested in massively abstract German ideas, elegantly cool, vaguely unhinged, and worried about colonialism – basically they felt like people I wanted to be my friends. But the shorter answer to your question is that an amazing teacher made me a Romanticist. There used to be a TV advertisement in England encouraging people to become teachers that had all of these famous people, pop stars and comedians and whatnot, saying names, like “Mr Jones,” “Mrs Reid,” and the tag-line was, “no-one forgets a good teacher.” You realize afterwards that even people on TV – everyone – remembers the names of their teachers. It's true. I honour you, John Whale, Professor of Romanticism at Leeds, and maker of coffee in seminars. Every bad joke I tell in BA1 is basically your fault.

2. *If you could make the world read any book, which one would it be?*

The answer to that question probably changes quite regularly. It needs to be funny, but also to make you cry, and think about who you are and how you treat others. So right now there are three (is this cheating?!): Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*, which is the best book on the horror of English social class – the horror of being brutalized in a working class home, and the horror of finding yourself an alienated bourgeois without a home at all – but which is also funny, and makes you cry, and care; Barbara Taylor's brilliant book *The Last Asylum*, a personal and critical account of mental breakdown while writing a book about feminist pioneer Mary Wollstonecraft as mental health services in Britain broke down in the 1980s, thanks to Conservative government; and the third is Art Spiegelman's *Maus*.

3. *What piece of advice, wisdom, or encouragement would you give to your first-year past self?*

It's ok not to be ok.

4. *What's your favourite English word or expression?*

We all know that the best words in English can't be said in polite company, so I'll give you the grandmother-friendly version. It's a toss-up between “Hallelujah” (which, like most good English words, isn't English) and “Whip-Ma-hop-Ma-Gate” (a street in York). Also, I really love “evensong.” And I'd also throw in “undersong,” which John Keats coined, in order to make me sound less ecclesiastical.

5. *Which talent would you most like to have?*

The capacity to be fully present. That's all you really need, I think.

6. *Which fear have you successfully faced?*

Other people.

7. *Who is your favorite poet?*

Andrew Marvell.

8. *What is your most marked personal trait?*

Bad jokes (cf. John Whale).

9. *Comics or essays?*

I reserve the right to contradict myself! Just because the world needs *Maus*, doesn't mean I prefer comics. Given the way we teach BA1, it has to be essays. Give me Charles Lamb any day or a copy of *The New Yorker*. But I really like my son's collection of *One Piece* too.

# Cootie Catcher

LEILA CHATTI

Leila Chatti is a Tunisian-American poet and laureate of the Academy of American Poets Prize, among other awards. She is the author of several poetry collections, including *Deluge* (2020), in which she uses the theological image of the Flood as an entry point into an exploration of such themes as grief and gender; *Figment* (2022), which approaches grief from the point of view of language and tries to “articulate the inarticulable”; and *The Mothers* (2022), a poetic conversation co-authored with fellow poet Dorianne Laux; along with many other projects (leilachatti.com).

Crucially, Chatti helps us think of poetry beyond its mainstream formats. Who ever said that a poem should be written, read, or spoken in a linear sequence? Chatti's interactive “Cootie Catcher” proposes an alternative. Find a reproduction of “Cootie Catcher” below.

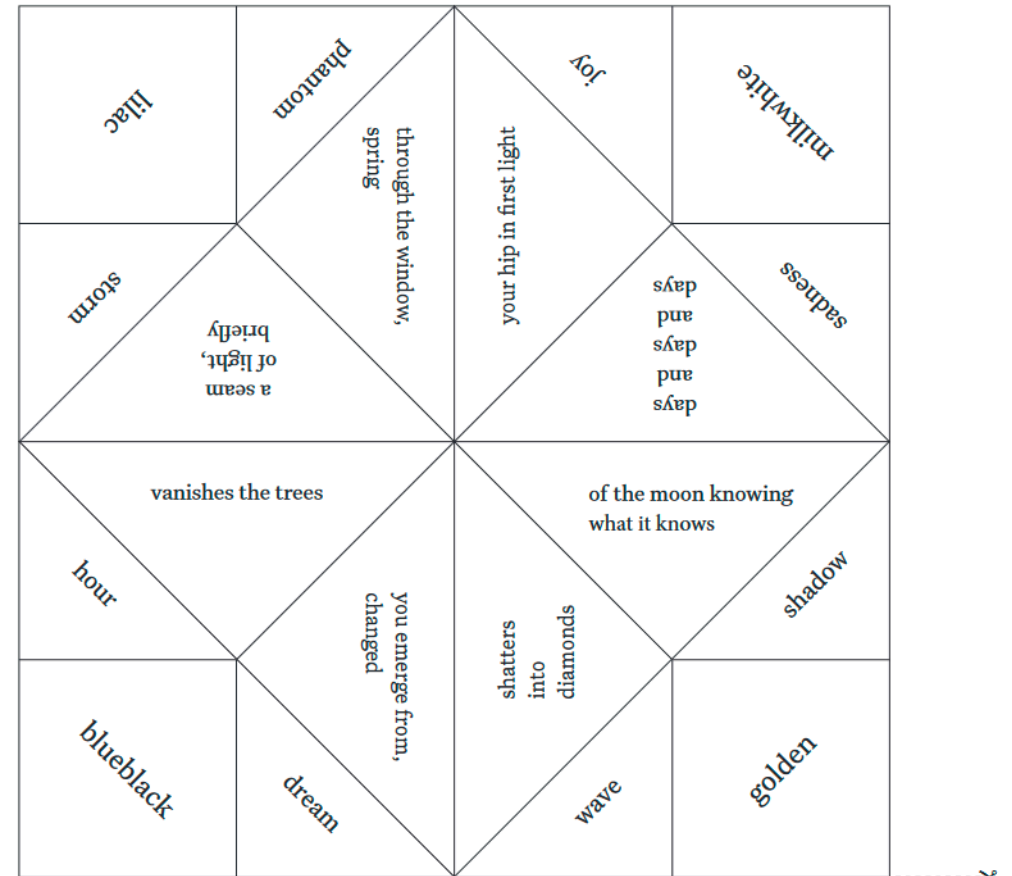
Source: Chatti, Leila. “Cootie Catcher.” Poetry, February 2022. *Poetry Foundation*, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/157106/cootie-catcher>.

## Instructions

- Cut along the outside line of the cootie catcher [find the model on p. 59]. You should have a square when you're finished.
- Flip your cootie catcher text-side down and fold each corner to the center of the paper, so that the color words now face you and are touching. You will be left with a smaller square: words (colors and nouns) on one side, and phrases on the other side.
- Flip your cootie catcher over again so that the color words are facing down and you are looking at the phrases. Fold each corner toward the center. You will be left with a smaller square with the nouns now facing you.
- Fold this square in half twice: first vertically, then unfold it, and then fold it again horizontally, to get it flexible.
- Put your fingers under the tabs (the color words) and gently push your fingers together. With your fingers inside, the cootie catcher should now resemble a flower, with the color words meeting in a point.
- To create your poem, pick (or have someone else pick!) a color. Write this down on a spare piece of paper. Then spell the color out, opening and closing the cootie catcher for each letter and alternating the direction each time (up and down/side to side).



- Once you finish spelling out the word, you should have it open to four nouns. Pick one, write it down on your paper, then spell out the word just as you did with the color. You'll see four nouns again. Pick one, write that noun down on your paper, then open up the flap. Write that phrase down on your paper. You've got yourself a mini poem!





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Contributions, comments, and suggestions are very welcome, and can be sent to [noted-lettres@unige.ch](mailto:noted-lettres@unige.ch)

Thank you for reading *Noted!*

