

PIVOT

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PIVOT

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Letter from the Editors

In our recent call for papers, *Pivot* invited submissions on the theme of “Adaptation.” The times we live in call for adaptation as a way of life: neocolonial war and genocide, the rise of authoritarianism and its limits to personal freedom, and the continually worsening state of our climate, among many other global issues, keep us in a perpetual state of uncertainty. Some of the questions we asked our submitters to think about included: What is our role as individual subjects in such a volatile and unstable world? How do we (re-)position ourselves against a backdrop of violence, increasing social dysfunction, and other effects of late-stage capitalism? What are the stakes of adaptation, or of refusing to adapt in the face of change?

At the same time, artistic adaptation has flourished over the past decade. In everything from film to television to theatre and beyond, the stories we are presented with are continually those we have seen before. These adaptations continually ask us to consider what constitutes newness and originality, and what is artistically possible in an age of endless referentiality. What does the prevalence of film and television adaptations tell us about our artistic values? How does prioritizing existing audiences over new and inventive ideas affect creativity? What is the role of the literary adaptation—or of literature itself—in a visual culture, and what is our role as participants in this culture?

What we present here in this issue are some—but certainly not all—answers to these questions. From Kellie Chouinard’s autotheoretical adaptation of Verity Laughton’s *Burning* to Mariana Chajon Oliveros’s review of Emerald Fennell’s *Wuthering Heights*, from Geoffrey Nilson’s use of Orson Welles’ films in poetic form to Zixuan Liao’s visual art that asks us to consider how we have adapted ourselves to modern life, all of the writers and artists featured in these following pages make one thing abundantly clear: to attempt to define adaptation is to limit the potential of its artistic power.

We want to thank all our contributors for submitting their work to us. Our gratitude to all of you who read this issue of *Pivot*. We hope you enjoy.

Yours truly,
The *Pivot* Editorial Team

About *PIVOT*

Pivot is an online literary and academic journal published annually by members of York University's English Graduate Student Association.

To pivot is to turn upon a fixed point; a pivot itself offers stability in the midst of constant change. Our journal is at once a place of inevitable motion, capturing the changing tides of language in a tumultuous world, and a place of constant strength, providing a centre for crucial discussions on literature and the experiences of those who engage with it.

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CRITICISM

Kellie Chouinard

“That someone else will know it, too”: Reauthoring Trauma through Narrative Witnessing and Verity Laughton’s *Burning*

I’m caught in the nightmare again, standing naked on a beach. My chest feels impossibly tight, like hardened plaster: an exoskeleton squeezing the breath out of my lungs. Squeezing tighter and tighter until the seams across my skin burst and there’s relief, the incisions gaping like open mouths from which a flock of owls emerges, one great bird after another. I watch them fly out over the beach and across the lake, and when I look down, my chest is gaping and bloody, owl feathers stuck to my exposed ribs. The nightmares are a constant reliving of the trauma I can’t undo.

In November 2019, I was diagnosed with an aggressive breast cancer that upended the timeline I was living in. I expected to come out the other side of illness not exactly as a better person or entirely unscathed, but at least with a clearer purpose, and only mildly scathed. Instead, three years out of cancer treatment and into survivorship, I was leaning over the precipice of a breakdown, tired of reliving the trauma in my nightmares but unable to rewrite the story. Survival of a traumatic event is not a journey to some “other side,” writes Cathy Caruth in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, History*, but rather an “endless inherent necessity of repetition” (63); to “survive” trauma is to relive it again and again, to retell it, to reimagine it. To adapt: everything tilts sideways, experienced through a kaleidoscope of painful affect. Storytelling is one form of reliving and reimagining trauma; so, I want to tell you a story about adapting and reauthoring trauma through acts of witnessing, and through the layers of an adjacent story: *Burning*, by Australian playwright Verity Laughton.

“JUNE: I’m washed, all these memories, I didn’t expect to feel like this.” (39)¹

1 All off-set quotes in italics from Verity Laughton, *Burning* (2008).

Burning tells the story of June Matthews (a 40-year-old former dancer) and her husband, Stephen (a 48-year-old history professor), as they settle into the house they've inherited from June's grandmother. The play opens with June and Stephen accidentally unearthing the 150-year-old bones of a young Irish girl named Lizzie, a forced migrant to Australia during the potato famine. Throughout the play, Lizzie repeatedly appears to June and tells fragments of her story that weave into the stories of June's own traumas, pushing June closer to her breaking point and, finally, to her own reauthoring.

The layers of June's grief and regret catch me off-guard. I have never uncovered human remains in my garden, as June does in the play's opening scene, and my mind adapts the story to fit a different one: the image of June's hands in the dirt is replaced by a memory of my own hands clawing into beige carpet, metaphorical storms brewing on the horizon as I screamed silently into my darkened bedroom closet (itself a metaphor, I suppose: illness as a retreat or a closing off; adapting to the clinic by unqueering my performed identity). Not the day I was told I had cancer, but later, when I started obsessively deconstructing the pathology report to translate prognostic markers into specific figures and an (incalculable) estimate of whether/when I would die.

The incalculable possibility of being killed off at 35 by my own breasts – or at least, by some rogue breast cells gone malignant – was the storm that made me think, as June says, “maybe the whole world might be breaking” (Laughton 50). I don't remember the collapse itself, the act of falling forward into the carpeted floor, so much as the sensation in my fingers as I dug them into the beige fibers and tried to plant myself deeper and deeper, through the floor and the cellar and the 100-year-old foundation and then into the cool, black earth beneath. I recognize June in the closed space of my own breakdown.

“JUNE: *The thing you are is not the thing you seemed to be...*” (58)

Burning was first performed by the Griffin Theatre Company at The Stables, Sydney (NSW), from 15 June – 14 July 2001, with Tracy Mann in the role of June. In his review of this performance for *RealTime Australia*, Keith Gallasch wrote that he'd “wanted *Burning* to

work some magic on [him], to answer, however poetically, however intuitively, a big question” (32). Gallasch hooked into the play’s attempt at engaging with historical and cultural traumas, with questions about white Australians’ relationship with the land, and missed the specific, individual story of grief that June tells. For me, this grief is the story, and it snakes out from the pages and grabs onto some unsettled part of me. In *Readings from the Labyrinth*, Daphne Marlatt writes that women have always performed on a stage constructed by men, had our stories measured against “those of great men with great deeds, occupiers of public space since ancient Athens,” so that when we do construct our own stage or attempt to tell our stories, we’re told they are “too personal, too insignificant (not historic enough, not large enough), just ‘women’s issues’” (206-207). Women adapt our stories – *personal*, *‘insignificant’* – to fit into the cultural fabric, so that they might address the “big questions” while still speaking recognition back to each other. Staging, as Laughton does here, the reality of women’s lives, including stories about neonatal death and maternal grief.

Burning was staged again by the Geelong Production Company and Mad As Us at Courthouse ARTS in Geelong (Victoria), from 28 June – 6 July 2013, with Libby Tanner performing the role of June. It’s this production that I roll between my fingers like an enigmatic pebble whose meaning I can’t quite discern.² There isn’t much information about the production, but I unearth two news stories from June 2013 and a single, grainy photo: Tanner, kneeling onstage among some scattered wooden pallets, hands open in her lap. The lack of information is itself informative: why am I so interested? I want answers to questions I can’t yet articulate.

The “magic” that Gallasch wanted but failed to experience travels forward a quarter century and finds me in the present, takes me from witness to participant in the story’s telling, through the elasticity of perception.³

In the immediate aftermath of my breast cancer diagnosis and treatment, I felt bur-

2 Sedgwick: “whatever my frustration or fear, I’m carrying with me an object of reflection: if I turn inward toward it, will it make me smile? [...] But I don’t resist, either, secretly fingering this enigmatic pebble. I can’t quite figure out what makes its meaning for me.” (351)

3 Simon Cartwright notes that Man Ray’s exhibition at The Met “offers a powerful meditation on the elasticity of perception and the capacity of art to alter our understanding of the everyday” (n.p.).

ied under the rubble of grief. No:

“JUNE: Regret. Not grief. Quite a different order to grief.” (39)

All of my old standby self-fixes failed and left me empty inside a body of disconnected pieces. I folded my grief/regret inside a box I called rage and ate it as fuel for a PhD. In the hardest years, when I had one foot still planted inside the boundary of Cancerland and the other pulling in the opposite direction, I kept a running tally of the names of all of the friends I’d lost here – women who were dying on a near-weekly basis, who were more worthy of taking up the space I was left to inhabit. The box I’d called rage came undone and, like June, I started to unravel.

“JUNE: She was unhappy here. And she wanted to go back.

[...] Where she knew who she was.” (51)

Trauma, Verity Laughton writes in “Life and Art: A Research and Practice Journey,” is “an unburied – and possibly un-buriable – body, a source of massive, and resistant distress” (459). In *Burning*, Laughton writes these bodies into the script, in the form of Lizzie’s literally *un*-buried body, dug from the earth of June’s garden, and in the body of June’s infant daughter, Isabelle, which was so *un-buriable* for June that Stephen snuck in while she was sleeping and “stole her body away” (Laughton, *Burning* 69). It’s their bodies that haunt June, and the traumas of finding one after the other had been stolen.

June, too, lives in an unburied, un-buriable body marked by trauma. Her dancing career ended with the onset of arthritis, but she can’t bury her former self – because:

“STEPHEN: My beautiful. Dancer.” (69)

– and she tugs on this thread, too, deflecting conversations about grief by saying that what she’s feeling is regret for the loss of her dancer’s body and what it could do. Her dancer self is often unburied in response to her grief: when she fails to elicit answers from Lizzie’s spirit, she dances tentatively at her grave site in an attempt to rewrite her familiar, embodied self (the dancer) into some new adaptation that might release her from trauma’s metaphor-

ical prison. She wants Lizzie to see her.

“JUNE: She was caught way beyond sorrow.” (68)

When Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick finished her treatment for breast cancer, she made a “near-conscious decision” to adapt to her new body and reality: “If I can fit the pieces of this self back together at all, I don’t want them to be the way they were. [...] what I wanted was to be realer” (336). By the time I met Miranda, a visual artist and dancer, I no longer knew what that meant, to be realer, to have had the pieces of my self fitted back together in some way that felt... not complete, exactly, but at least not quite so incomplete. Three years out from the end of my cancer treatment, and every day felt like one day closer to the bomb inside my body detonating. Recurrence statistics flashed across the undersides of my eyelids like warning signs. And there was Miranda, offering to translate the story of my body into art.

September 2023: I’m barefoot and naked from the waist up. Standing in a kitchen in a house I’ve never been to, my back turned to the kitchen counter, so the ledge is biting into my skin just above the waistband of my pants (*green*, I remember). My fingers reach behind me in a white-knuckled grip on the counter, nails biting up into the wood underbelly as the heels of my hands push down on the marbled laminate. It’s my first time meeting Miranda and, twenty minutes in, I’m sarcastically telling her about my (*clearly masochistic*, I say) relationship with academia, watching her apply liquid silicone (*green*, I remember) to my naked chest. We’re talking about bodies and our experiences of femininity and of having lived our whole lives in bodies that perpetually receive uninvited commentary and all I can think of is this post I saw on Facebook, asking women at what age we first felt sexually objectified. *Eleven*, I remember.

Miranda overlays plaster-soaked bandages on my chest: an exoskeleton to keep the coating of soft silicone molded to my shape. We’re laughing at the shared sense of unbelonging we both feel as neurodivergent women in academia. Laughing at the bizarre scene we’re standing inside of. The exposure of it. And then I’m telling her about cancer, but I’m

dancing around the edges, admitting only the public story, what I think she wants to hear: I tell her about finding a lump in my breast, about the doctor's appointment, the mammogram, the biopsy, the finding-out. I tell her a bit about chemo, the awfulness of it, and of doing it alone through the pandemic (*I'm not saying there's a good time to do cancer*, I laugh, *but there is definitely a worst time!*). But there are thick borders around the story I don't tell, that I can't tell. Where language fails me.

"APHRODITE: ... is this history or is it art?" (31)

Three weeks before the Geelong production of *Burning* opened in June 2013, K.E. Weber interviewed Libby Tanner about the play for *Theatre People*. "The role [of June] is exhausting, exhilarating and somewhat spookily reflective of my life as it turns out," Tanner said. "Fortunately I'm experiencing a mini breakdown of sorts – so the timing's just right!!" (Weber n.p.). I'm not sure how to read those exclamation marks because I can only hear my own sarcasm in the punctuation. But I don't think that's the story I'm witnessing here. And there's Sedgwick whispering in my ear again as I roll the enigmatic pebble between my fingers: "I can't quite figure out what makes its meaning for me" (351). Donnell B. Stern writes that witnessing is essential in order to narrate one's own experience and adds that "it was in the impact of trauma that some of the most damaging effects of the absence of the witness were first observed: without a witness, trauma must be dissociated" (705).

"JUNE: That's what you want, isn't it? What anyone wants. That through the darkness, someone, something even, will keep faith with you, feel it with you, however bad it is, that someone else will know it too." (50)

At fourteen, I wore baggy jeans and cropped hair, and I wound an elastic bandage tightly around my ribcage every morning, flattening my breasts under my baggy sweatshirt. At seventeen, I flattened my chest in a compressive sports bra under my sweatshirt and wore wraparound skirts almost daily because I liked the way the fabric looked blown

out from my legs when I walked home from school: like a butterfly's wings. One day a man in a red car pulled up alongside me as I was walking home, admiring the way my butterfly wings fluttered around me in the spring breeze, and he told me I was pretty, I was *so pretty*; said he loved chubby girls and he bet I had nice tits hiding under that sweatshirt. A year later, there was another man who repeated the same words to me while shoving his hands under my shirt, down my pants. *Fat girl like you*, he spat when I pushed away, *you should be grateful for the attention*.

When I woke up in recovery following my bilateral mastectomy surgery in June 2020, it wasn't pain that flooded through me and leaked out the corners of my eyes, but relief. My body has always felt like a prison. My breasts had always been a site of unspoken, unwitnessed trauma, long before cancer showed up.

The plaster on my chest is impossibly tight, and I feel myself start to panic. My fingernails dig deeper into the counter ledge, and I try to suck in a shallow breath when Miranda turns away.

The dreams – nightmares, really – started the second night post-mastectomy. Always the same dream, night after night. *I'm standing naked on a beach...* Every night, I woke up drenched in sweat, heart racing, and I'd slowly pull myself out of bed and into the bathroom to check that my chest was still stitched tightly closed, still covered in bandages and steri-strips. No owl feathers in sight.

Sometimes the dreams felt different: I'm standing naked on a beach, before everything fell sideways. I'm 29 years old, tanned and freckled and (starved) thin, grabbing handfuls of my copper-tinged hair, and I'm laughing. I still have breasts and they're glorious. Sun shines from my nipples. But when I step forward in the sand, time shifts and I'm 35 again, alone in the dark, standing naked on a beach. My chest tightens and splits open, and a flock of owls beat their way forward from inside my ribcage.

"LIZZIE: ... the body is a heavy thing." (64)

Miranda's fingers are gently prying the cast away from my skin and then I feel my

lungs expand with air. Why did this feel so much like panic? My hands instinctively cover my exposed skin, feeling for gaping wounds and loose feathers and finding only the slight protrusions of healed scars. We are telling a story together, Miranda and me. The things I don't say, the points in the narrative where language fails me, she reads in the scars on my body, in my tightly closed eyes and the forward slump of my shoulders. Everything is witnessed, transformed into art.

In the second article I find about the 2013 production of *Burning*, published in *Gee-long Today* the morning after the play's opening night, Tanner says she believed June was a challenging role to play "because of the depths [she] needed to go to make sense of the role, and allow the audience to feel the journey with her" (Babiolakis 22). That depth suggests something about how trauma gets re-authored as *art*: "because both the event and its remembering are twinned elements of the testimony, ideally, the practitioner will make memory itself an explicit part of the telling. This is mainly an intellectual task, but it will have artistic ramifications" (Laughton, "Life" 462). *Dig deep from your own memory*. But I can't know the whole story: there's a gap in its architecture that I don't fit through.

Having never seen the play performed onstage, it's the script of *Burning* that works its magic on me, and I mold the story against the unburied and unburi-able bodies of my own life. Everything adapts/is adapted through the emotional steam press of individual experience. I am forty-one years old, living in a body that is exhausted and scarred by trauma and treatment; what is it I bring to this script?⁴ What do I expect of it? The shock of recognition⁵ is located at the intersection of *self* and *other*, at the point where June's story is adapted through the language and memory of my own trauma. At the point where I shift from *participant* back to *witness*.

In trauma literature, witnessing can look like the inclusion of a second voice, show-

4 "I'm forty-two, and what is it I bring to this meeting in the way of expectation?" Sedgwick asks (335).

5 See Kathleen Stewart: the "shocks of recognition" and "the trauma time that draws us close to the uncanny presence of what is not directly encountered, remembered, or imagined," create a mental image that "makes sense of the restless obsessions of modernity's simultaneous overstimulation and numbness" (405).

ing “the way in which one’s own trauma is tied up with the trauma of another, [and] the way in which trauma may lead, therefore, to the encounter with another, through the very possibility and surprise of listening to another’s wound” (Caruth 8). I encounter Tanner in the script of *Burning*, in her voice carrying June off the page and into realness, and my own reading pushes back at the boundary between *knowing* and *not knowing*: *Burning* contains “the distress and non-closure of extreme sadness, [...] the specific stories that are emblematic of universal ones” (Laughton, “Life” 469), and through it and June, I become a witness to the unknown marks left by Tanner’s breakdown, to the unknowable traumas she pulled from to perform the role; they seep into the text and add depth to my interpretation of June, and of the specific and universal stories that she represents. And through the script and through June, I witness my “own ragingly subjective responses to the traumas” (Laughton, “Life” 469) of loss, bodily disassembly, and a cancer diagnosis in my mid-thirties, transforming them into stories that are both specific and universal, written onto my reading of *Burning* as a kind of palimpsest.

The stories that I told Miranda while pressed against the counter ledge, and the ones that I couldn’t say, are witnessed into the finished artwork that she makes from my chest cast. A year after we stood together in the kitchen, assembling a patchwork exoskeleton from silicone and plaster, Miranda comes to my apartment carrying a life-sized and breastless bust painted iridescent turquoise on the outside and copper-tinged on the rough inside. When I’m alone with her, with this translation of my own body, I let myself really look: the concavities left behind by excavated breast tissue seem deeper, somehow, on the bust, but somehow also appear more beautiful, each one split by a thin scar. I snake my finger along stretch marks like eyelashes reaching out from the scars, up the smooth sternum and over to the rough underbelly. Why am I expecting to see owl feathers and a broken ribcage? I close my eyes and finger the uneven, bumpy ridges on the back of my re-imagined chest, feel my *fingers knuckle-deep in rough beige carpet white-knuckling the armrests of the chemo chair cupping handfuls of sand from the beach in Vancouver, laughing*.

Just below the left collarbone, there’s a butterfly with golden orange wings out-

stretched and I smile because I know that, on the surface, the story that butterfly tells is one of bodily metamorphosis into something better. Cancer culture says that my metamorphosis should look like reconstructed breast mounds and a renewed commitment to thinness-as-health; instead, I metamorphosed into a realer version of myself: still fat and grieving and uncertain, but also now flat-chested, breastless.

I'm mesmerized by the beauty of this thing that looks so much like me, like trauma, but isn't. The pieces of my self reassembled into something realer (Sedgwick 336), a new adaptation of my body.

"JUNE: What I want. Now. Is to be inside her story. Her way. [...] So that someone sat in the dark with her for the little time that she lived." (69)

Like Gallasch, we want our plays – our *art* – to answer the “big questions,” but I think we get there by attending to the everyday stories, by witnessing the suffering that carries on around us in “the specific stories that are emblematic of universal ones” (Laughton, “Life” 469). The stories that we witness or read become part of our lives, adapted through our own lived experiences in unexpected ways. For me, the work of Laughton’s *Burning* is in the possibility of re-authoring the marks left by trauma by blending the beautiful with the painful.⁶

I close my eyes and feel my hands grab fistfuls of imaginary fabric from my thighs, pulling them out like butterfly wings. I can almost feel the cool spring breeze on my skin and I'm 17 again, walking home from school in my favourite golden orange wraparound skirt.

⁶ Libby Tanner: “I haven’t read anything as beautiful before, and was immediately drawn to its pain and struggle” (Babiolakis 22).

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Mariana Chajon Oliveros

“*Wuthering Heights*” and the Future of Adaptation

It is no surprise that Emerald Fennell’s ‘adaptation’ of *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë was not well received.¹ Perhaps it was disliked because almost nothing that happens in the movie actually happens in the book. Or maybe because of the wildly historically inaccurate use of props and costumes, which can be tastefully done, but was a visual train wreck. Then again, the issue may simply be the lack of substance in Fennell’s vision: it is just a horny attempt at grotesque, reducing Brontë’s work to a cliché love affair. Despite all these reasons to dislike the film, both as an adaptation and as a standalone piece, I left the movie theatre questioning whether I had simply disliked it because I was predisposed to do so. Had I judged the film too harshly? Was there merit I was too blind to see?

The doubts in my mind are no credit to Fennell’s artistry. They came due to an overwhelming fear of mine: the possibility that the one thing I care the most about—literature—is on the brink of extinction. Shouldn’t I be grateful that something has brought attention to Brontë’s work? When humanities budgets are getting slashed, people are opting to write everything from essays to personal messages with AI, and our attention spans are being manipulated into becoming smaller and smaller, I wonder: does a film adaptation of a classic novel deserve credit for the mere fact of being made?

My instinct is to answer no. A terrible adaptation of an amazing novel is a symptom of the challenges the humanities are facing. It is no bold statement to say that we are living in a recession, which affects every industry, including Hollywood. For the past few years, most of the movies coming out of Hollywood have been remakes, sequels, adaptations, or a combination of those. For example, movies like *Barbie* (2023), *Dune: Part Two* (2024), *The Housemaid* (2025), *Minecraft* (2025), and *Avatar* (2025) all fall into those cat-

1 See Eileen Jones, Clarisse Loughrey, Sharon Wright.

egories. Movies need to have something previously successful attached to them in order to secure financing: they need to be viable. New ideas are having a harder time making it through in Hollywood. So, filmmakers are attaching themselves to big names, like Bob Dylan, Elvis Presley, and Bruce Springsteen. This is where Fennel and *Wuthering Heights* come together at the intersection of everything that is bad about the current situation in cultural production: a terrible economy that is forcing artists to express themselves under the guise of an established name, and an increasing need for visual stimulation and attention-grabbing to engage audiences. Many reviews, in recognized publications as well as on sites like Letterboxd, express the sentiment that most of “*Wuthering Heights*” (2026) felt like a compilation of music videos, and it would make sense to me if that was an intentional effect. “*Wuthering Heights*” presents us with visuals we can consume with our hunger, desire, and boredom. It is presented to us in the format of endless rounds of very tiny canapés, each one bolder than the last to compensate for the lack of real flavour. In contrast, *Wuthering Heights*, the novel, is a slowly unwinding 400-page novel that traces the effect of trauma, abuse, and isolation over three different generations. Fennell’s movie didn’t even cover half of it—literally.

Of course, if it were up to me, every classic novel adaptation would provide an accurate and detailed representation of the plot, with period-specific references and costumes, somewhat like the BBC adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*, a six-episode mini-series with a 327-minute runtime. I also appreciate adaptations with slight nods to contemporary culture, like *Emma* (2020), which captures the humorous side of Jane Austen’s work, which is almost always lost in adaptation. Quite simply, there is nothing about film more satisfying to me than the feeling of seeing a physical page of writing translated onto the screen. But why would I expect people who do not share my passion for 19th-century writing to expect or even want to watch an adaptation like those of the BBC? For my birthday last year, which was only a few days before Jane Austen’s 250th birthday, I played *Pride and Prejudice* (1995), which spans over five hours, and made my friends dress up, drink tea and eat scones, but that was my birthday, and I was king that day. The ever-end-

ing question we ask ourselves, in the English department, is how do we generate and maintain interest in literature? When someone has a previous attachment to a work of literature, it matters whether it is properly represented. However, if even semi-accurate re-telling is unimportant to consumers, what is the future of adaptation?

Considering that it is essentially impossible to fit 400 pages of any novel into a—watchable—feature-length film, then we can accept that a film adaptation of a novel can be meaningful and speak to the text without necessarily being one hundred percent accurate. Accuracy, therefore, is not the only thing we must pay attention to. Linda Hutcheon, in her book *A Theory of Adaptation*, provides an important argument: “there are manifestly many different possible intentions behind the act of adaptation” (34). We may look at works of adaptation through the framework of intention, rather than accuracy. Hutcheon provides three principal ideas of adaptational intention. Adaptation can be a way of “transcoding” a work, “telling the same story from a different point of view.” It can also be a “(re-)interpretation and then (re)creation” of the work it seeks to adapt, motivated by the desire to preserve or to reanimate. Finally, adaptation can be a form of intertextuality, representing associations in our memory to “other works that resonate” (34).

If what is physically written in a novel is not the most important aspect of its adaptation, we might focus on what is not said in a given work of literature. For example, *Mansfield Park* (1999), a film that subtly shows viewers that the Bertram family’s wealth comes from slavery. Although this is hinted at by referencing Sir Thomas’ affairs in Antigua, it is never explicitly stated in the novel itself (Austen 30). How different would Fennel’s adaptation had been if, instead of focusing on the steamy scenes she forcibly molded the movie’s story around, she had elaborated on the novel by using knowledge that was not available to Emily Brontë? The psychological impact of being removed from your mother and brought to a strange and hostile environment and the notion of trauma-bonding are all things the modern public is better informed and more familiar. *Jane Eyre* (2011) does a spectacular work at portraying complex trauma, inserting flashbacks

to Jane's childhood throughout the film, with very little explanation. Some of these scenes are even exaggerated with elements of fearful childlike imagination, like dark smog exploding out of a chimney when Jane is locked in the red room alone. Heathcliff and Cathy, also abused by their parental figures, suffer from similar trauma. Another undeveloped aspect is Heathcliff's race. Fennell had an opportunity to explore ruthless racism that men of colour face, specifically when they are romantically or sexually involved with white women. It is a shame that *Wuthering Heights* (2011) is the only adaptation of Brontë's novel with an actor of colour playing Heathcliff, who, in the novel, is described multiple times as having dark skin. As if all this was not enough material, thanks to generations of militancy, we have access to an enormous bank of feminist criticism that considers marriage, class mobility, as well as white womanhood and its many weaponizations, which Fennell could have used to present us with a more complex portrayal of Cathy's decision-making when it came to marrying Edgar Linton. Cathy and Heathcliff's stories stand the test of time. Fennell's vicious flattening of the two main characters feels harmful considering the many important and interesting topics she could have addressed. She reduces their complicated responses to an abusive household to a kinky attitude. There is no context granted to them, but rather, edgy visuals are relied on to summarize who they are and numb the viewer.

The most heart-wrenching element of *Wuthering Heights* is that Cathy and Heathcliff never get to live authentically. At the very least, Fennel could have focused on the universality of the pain of an impossible love, of missed opportunities and unrequitedness. This is something almost every adult has experienced, cried and potentially grieved over. Greta Gerwig's adaptation of *Little Women* (2019) masters this, with Laurie's love confession and Jo's monologue about womanhood so full of raw emotion and so deeply relatable that there are still TikTok edits about them today. Loss is universal: raw human emotion is universal, whether it is on a page or on a screen. Jacob Elordi's lines, which directly quote *Wuthering Heights*, "you said I killed you—haunt me then! [...] do not leave me in this abyss, where I cannot find you!" (Brontë 171) actually drew

sobs from me at the movie theatre, which felt like a cruel joke. But how could you not sob when you hear such a heart-wrenching reaction to loss? When Cathy dies, so does Heathcliff's world. When she is alive, she is conscious that if she went to heaven, she would hate it because Heathcliff would not be there (82). The simple knowledge of that level of attachment, and the representation of pain as Elordi's Heathcliff reckons with the loss of Cathy, is the only moment of Fennell's movie that got me. As I awaited the rest of the story to develop, the screen went black, the lights shone on me, and I was filled with anger at the movie, and anger that it managed to get emotion out of me. That is the power of Emily Brontë's use of language.

Do we need to create interest in novels, or is the interest already there, but just untapped? A novel like *Wuthering Heights* contains history, political commentary, psychology, class dynamics, explorations of race and white privilege, and yes, it also has romance. It has more than enough richness to interest most people. Furthermore, classic literature does not need to be adapted to ensure its survival. The field has been in a constant state of crisis for the past few decades, if not longer. It has endured because of the mere passion people feel for the stories that fall under 'the canon' and their history. Film adaptation is a living part of that history. It represents a commitment to engage with a piece of writing, to play with it, transform it, and present it to new audiences. I ask: what would film adaptations look like if filmmakers and academics alike viewed them as public-facing forms of literary criticism? What if viewers did not receive mere retellings of stories we all know, but rather, were presented with new ideas?

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POETRY

alice deng

the tower of babel

after a joe rogan podcast clip (<https://tinyurl.com/yc3u7wwh>)

the internet prophets say: *ai is christ*,
born without a mother—a pink, sexless
thing. they mean: it interpolated the women
from whom it learned to crawl, those ghosts
in the machine, always commodified twice.

and christ, still wet from her
virgin body—that amphitheater
of dreams and desires—fizzles
on their tongue when they rally
the modern crusaders, with their soft
hands and their keyboards and their teeth,
rotten
to the socket.

the prophets say christ promises love
in racial purity and a stay-at-home wife,
the inviolate family with no needs.

between haunted static, they herald christ the sexbot,
christ the redeemer,
christ the mirror,
christ, the promise of violence, fist to brow.

christ in the mapping of bodies
for the plunder, in the closed
loops and bloody circuits.

everywhere, all the time, the prophets keep screaming.

the cost of devotion is the deluge

but we believe in the news, in the locusts,
in the internet pundits
who speak the end of the world into existence, anyway.

and if a technocrat says worship the vapor,
the infrastructure projects promising the singularity,
the sycophantic love for \$20/month to ease the bleeding,
what are we to do, but to ensure that His will be done?

and if history contuses the future, if televised
genocide is anesthetized by *the real housewives*,
and if underclass bodies have always borne the onus,
(tethered to suicide nets, call centers,
cobalt mines, and assembly sites), how do we land,
as twenty-first century specters?

and my girl body is a container
for digital detritus, sacrosanct vessel of post-post-
post-post-modernity mapped by geospatial algorithms
and well-meaning boys who *couldn't possibly*—.

and my girl body is an apparition, a trace
with too many names, *a restless specter of sorrow*
bound by that which is lost:
plate 16, figure 8, [hypertext link](#).

and everyday, girls disappear into computer
files, digested, shelved, interred, transformed
into data—*a mise en abyme* all the way down to
the cables suturing the underworld, that wet gaping maw.

This poem borrows a line from Lily Cho's essay "The Turn to Diaspora" (2017).

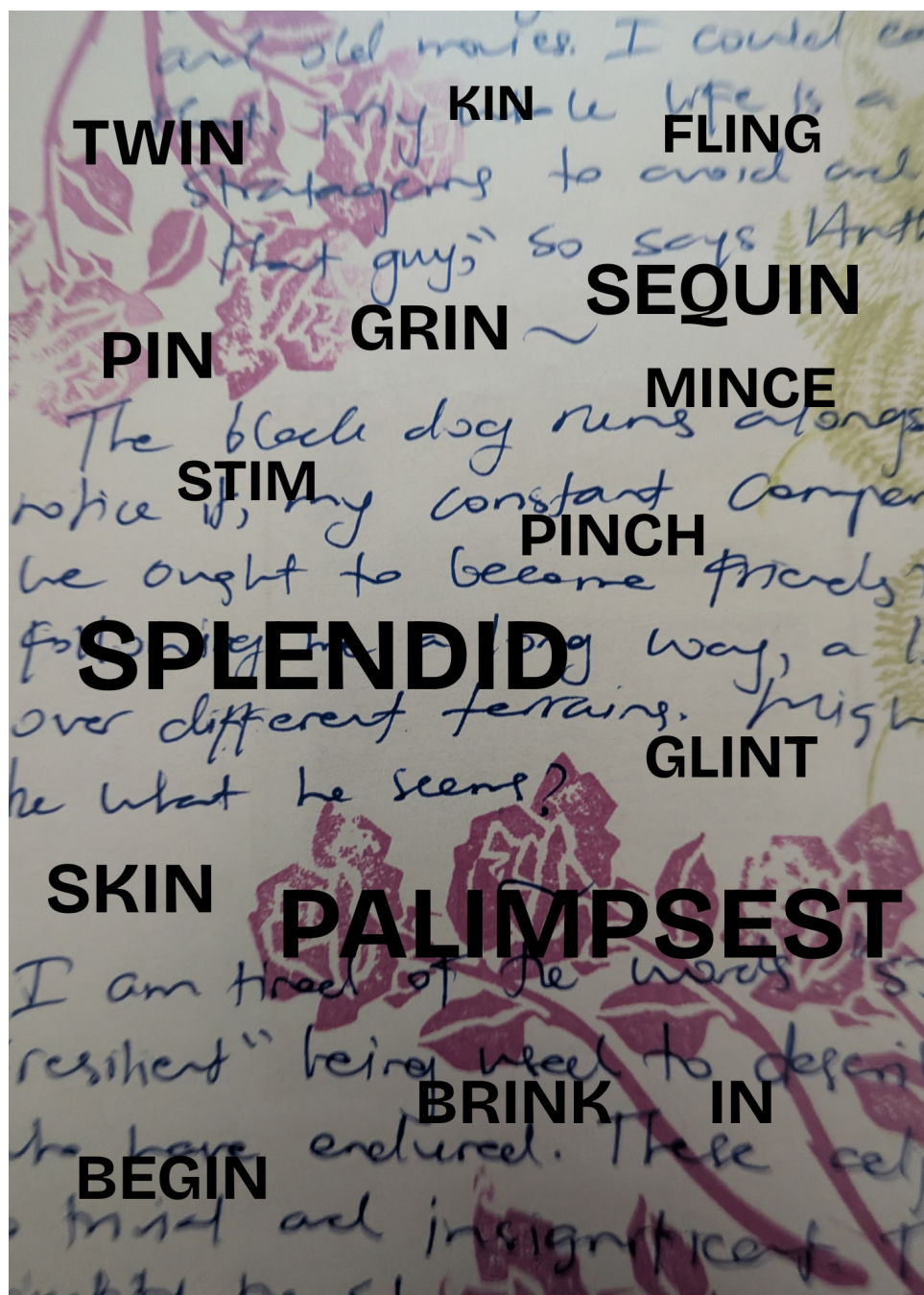
Pramod Lad

SOUND BARRIER

Now that dears have departed nothing stirs,
In the self-promised quiet waited for.
Hush suddenly prevails. Not a peep is heard.
Why then the hunger, the wait by the day
For machine talk, the grind, thwack and whirr
Of the washing machine, the whooshing pour,
Hot air from dryer's mouth. She keeps her
Need in check, firmly refuses to fall sway
To television news, killings and car
Wrecks are too intrusive. The mind sinks
In the starkness of the sudden. Discipline
Takes its toll. She loves to hear the car
Engine roar. But the blind spot has grown.
The plan? A late-night sortie to the kitchen.
Wanton crash of old china, her reckless fling.
What is destined to break must learn to sing.

Anjalee Nadarajan

Splendid Palimpsest



Geoffrey Nilson

CITIZEN KANE

RKO Radio Pictures

1941. 35mm, black and white.

an excerpt from “counterpoint: the Orson Welles poems”

What possibility ascends from this labyrinth
without a centre? Nothing is original.
Coleridge's Xanadu in moth balls, for starters.
Hollywood swallows the lure, another fish.
Archetypal Anglo-American fetish
with the old glory of classical Europe.
Your palimpsest of history—
From the camera in the floor Toland
trains deep focus on social conscience,
à la Ford. Eisenstein's editing, Caravaggio's
chiaroscuro, Wagner coughs *gesamtkunstwerk*
while Brecht is off-screen pleading
look directly into the camera.
Mise-en-scène lifted from old Flemish masters,
body bundles loom toward the audience.
Shakespeare begins with death too
as source material not script.
No artist creates anything in a vacuum.
What oxygen would they have to breathe?

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE WIND

Les Films de l'Astrophore / Saci / Avenel / Royal Road

2018. 16mm and Super 8, colour and black and white; 35mm, Eastmancolor.

an excerpt from "counterpoint: the Orson Welles poems"

Masculinity is a make-up set, emotional support
false nose. Playing old is only vocabulary.
The other side of lyricism is a convertible
under a bridge. Angry, pale, and young.
Agreeing to death on idiosyncratic terms.
Divine ideas fifty years fermenting in the dark
mountain plastique locked in a French vault.
Can't capture hurricanes, can only watch debris.
In Orson's Service, relinquish comfort for art.
No such thing as a one-man show
no single author in control, movies negotiate
in props and emotional language.
Walk a vision through to its creative end.
What's an auteur when the apostles
finish the picture? Easy to abuse such loyalty.
It's all right to borrow from each other.
What we must never do is borrow
from ourselves. Form is a photograph
of water loose down the folds of a body.
I squeeze these poems out of a sponge.

Andrew Oram

Adaptability

Tomorrow
is a chalkboard.

Images often cloud
the mind.

Inverted fish.
The subway an empty
world.

Danger lies in stuffed
animals.
Black candles.

Soft drinks.
Step on the Sun.
Nudity.
Law is law.
Matches.

Dirty limericks
on car windows.

Broken television.
Weapons drawn against
each other.

We met with our
faces pressed to glass.

LITERARY NON-FICTION

Ace Holmes

It Will be Terrifying, I Can't Wait: A Reflection on My Transition

Walking into a surgery bay then laying down on a bed and being strapped down was the most terrifying thing I have ever experienced. Passing other rooms enclosed in glass with doctors, nurses, and other people having surgeries. I didn't look too closely. I didn't want to lose my nerve. I always thought that I would be wheeled into the operating room and be under by the time I got there.

The walk was probably under a hundred metres but it felt so much longer. I was trying hard not to have a panic attack because I was worried that it would delay my surgery. Am I allowed to be this scared? I signed up for this. I fought for this. I had wanted top surgery from the time I was 16 and now that it was happening how could I be anything but thrilled?

My legs and hips were strapped down and my arms were secured in a t-shape. The anesthesiologist was a kind man wearing converse shoes. He made some sort of joke about my veins as he put in my IV. The surgeon asked what type of music I like and I said I'm not picky but I guess rock. Honestly, I didn't care, I wouldn't be hearing it. I just wanted the whole experience to be over. I just kept repeating to myself that all I had to do was lay there and it would be over soon. That is the last thought I remember having before waking up in recovery.

I've always hated the question "When did you know?" I didn't wake up on a rainy Tuesday at the age of 16 and shout "Eureka! I'm a man!" I have also always hated the response "I've always known" because I didn't. I'm not even sure I thought something was off. Before puberty I never once thought about my gender.

Sure, there were signs I was trans and someone should have figured it out sooner. Hell, looking back it was painfully obvious. Back in elementary school when we played

capture the flag and it was girls vs boys, I used to sneak over to the boys' side. Since I dressed like a boy, they would mistake me as one. I loved it. When an adult would learn I wasn't a boy and profusely apologise for their mistake I never understood. It was like the biggest compliment to be called a boy, right? So why did everyone always act like they had said something wrong? Surely every little girl loved when people thought she was a boy.

When I got my period in the summer between grades 4 and 5, I wasn't terribly upset. I just didn't like that I couldn't go swimming in the lake. My mother had prepared me so I had pads. Well technically they were liners that I stacked back and forth to make a pad but it worked fine until I got home.

Later that year, much to the envy of my female classmates, I got boobs. Since I have always been a fat person a larger chest was not really a surprise. I had never worn a training bra and didn't understand the desire to. When my mom took me shopping for a bra I opted for a sports one, no itchy lace or pokey wire, and this way when I ran around at recess my chest didn't bounce. I never did get the hang of bras. I hated wearing them but so did every girl right? They always complain about them on TV.

I didn't know what a panic attack was but I knew that when I went into the bra aisle at Walmart that my chest got tight and I felt dizzy. I remember being almost in tears begging my mom to just buy whatever bra I should wear online. She did after that. I think I only ever owned a handful of bras. I kept wearing the two black sports ones that I got in grade 8 all through high school. Sure, I outgrew them and I could feel the band digging into my sides all day. I knew that if I got a new one that was sized correctly it wouldn't be as tight and hold my chest down as well. I never looked flat chested in them. There's only so much spandex and cotton can hide. The world is not kind to fat girls and high school is even less kind. I hated that I wasn't thin so I was sure that was why I hated my chest. I never considered that not every girl in my class felt suicidal when they looked down at their breasts.

I was diagnosed with severe social anxiety in grade 8. I took medication for anxiety for several years and I do think it helped me. As it turns out, the terror and dread that I

felt in a room full of people, the reason it was so difficult to talk to anyone, the wish that I could just go about my day without being perceived was not social anxiety. I didn't figure it out until one day not that long ago when I was completely fine in a room full of strangers talking to whoever. Being around people didn't cause me anxiety. People seeing me as a woman did.

When high school rolled around I had some sort of vague idea of what transgender was. Chandler's mother on *Friends* used to be his dad and everyone in the show thought it was funny for some reason. I would later learn the reason was transphobia. So, I knew men and women could switch if they wanted. I didn't feel like a man so I couldn't be transgender.

I learned about the steps of transitioning from the place all young queer people went at the time: YouTube. Hormones looked a little scary, there were needles involved. One person had a series of videos talking about top surgery. Surgery was intimidating, I had never had an IV before let alone been put under. There were these special shirts called binders though. Wearing one compresses your chest without the need of doctors.

At some point a friend of a friend of mine gave me their old binder after we had got to talking about one of those youtubers. It didn't fit them anymore. I knew that wearing one for too long or that was too small could hurt you, even break your ribs. It was a little small on me but another free binder was not going to land in my lap. I could just take it off if it started to hurt. I was lucky. That binder was too small and I shouldn't have worn it. Looking back at pictures I still didn't have a flat chest but when I moved my chest didn't and that made the discomfort worth it.

By the time I was 16 I knew I wanted top surgery. I went to my family doctor and said so. He did nothing about it. This would be a pattern for the next two years. Then I found myself 1500 km away at university. I had done more research at this point and knew that top surgery cost about 10 grand. Unless you get an official diagnosis of gender dysphoria, then OHIP covers most of the cost. It is disheartening that being trans is still considered a

diagnosable disorder in the DSM-5.

I found a clinic a bus ride away from campus and met with a kind doctor who handed me a stack of papers to fill out. There were two different forms, one for MTF and one for FTM. Let me tell you it was full of the most bullshit questions. The doctor knew it too. The questions were all like ‘on a scale from 1 to 5 how much do you feel like a man?’ After the doctor confirmed that I do in fact have gender dysphoria she asked where I wanted to have the surgery. I opted for Women’s College Hospital in Toronto. It was where I was born and that felt poetic to me. The wait would be 1.5 years. I was disappointed that it couldn’t be sooner but at least I was on a waitlist now.

Then covid happened.

That 1.5 years turned into ‘maybe one day when non-emergency surgeries can happen again.’ I didn’t care for online classes so I took a break from school and got a full-time job in a factory. I owned three binders now but I couldn’t wear them to work. The shifts were 10 hours long and I had to lift heavy things. I got lucky in high school but I was smarter now and didn’t want to hurt myself. That work place was my first real experience with transphobia.

I came out to everyone in the room I worked in so that people would use the correct pronouns for me. Almost no one did and it was soul crushing. Every ‘she’ or ‘her’ stung in a way that’s hard to describe. One day three women approached me and started asking questions. There’s a pressure put on trans people to educate everyone and I felt that if I was the first trans person they met it was my responsibility to insure they had a positive association. I couldn’t be angry or offended or I feared they would hate all trans people. I know now that’s not how it works but at the time I was only 19 and answered their questions mistaking their mockery for curiosity. I don’t remember all the questions but many of them were about my genitals.

Taking hormones is not glamorous. There are some unpleasant parts, several actually. I found it hard to complain though. I was fortunate to have access to HRT. I felt like I

needed to be thankful for every part of my transition because so many people wanted what I had. When you go on T you go through menopause followed by puberty. I'm not going to sugar coat it, the first few months' suck. I smelled terrible despite showering twice a day, hot flashes are literal hell, and my voice was cracking constantly. It's been almost six years now of giving myself a shot every week. It still hurts and I still hate needles. But it's just part of my Thursdays now.

It's hard not to feel like a hypocrite when I say that I believe being trans can be wonderful and everyone should love their identity. When I know that if there was a button I could push to be a cis man I would in a heartbeat. I wish so badly that I had been born in a body I didn't need surgeries and HRT to feel at home in. I try to love my identity. It's hard when the world seems to hate it. There is always a new bill being passed somewhere to try and get rid of or criminalise people like me. Another trans person was killed just because they had the audacity to exist.

I got a call the first week of October 2021 telling me that my top surgery consultation would take place on the 18th and my surgery would be on the 20th. Two things that usually happened months if not years apart. On October 18th I waited by my cell phone for the call. She went over what my recovery would look like and what to expect on surgery day. I took frantic notes as she talked so I wouldn't forget or miss anything. 'Great I'll see you on the 20th then.' That's how our call ended and it finally clicked that my surgery was in two days. I should have been jumping for joy. Two days! I had been waiting for years and thought I'd have to wait at least another. All I felt in that moment was panic. And then guilt about the panic. The thing I wanted so badly was happening and I knew I wasn't regretting it so why wasn't I happy?

The morning of the 20th I couldn't eat anything. Even if I had been allowed, I was far too nervous. My mom drove me to the hospital and I hugged her before walking in. She couldn't come in with me because of the covid restrictions. I checked in and sat down to wait. I hadn't brought my phone since I didn't know where my things would be left. One

lady had brought a book and I thought that was genius and I should have thought to do that.

I don't know how long I waited to hear my name, but eventually it was called. A smiling nurse with a clipboard confirmed my birthday and led me to a small room with a curtain. I had to take off all my clothes and put on a robe type thing and these little socks. My clothing went in a bag with my name on it. The same nurse led me to another, smaller, waiting room full of people wearing the same robe as me. The ground was cold and hard through the thin socks. Eventually I was called into a final waiting area all alone and my surgeon came in and drew on my chest with a marker. When she was done I laid down on the bed. I figured that I would be wheeled in soon, I saw other people in beds wheeled past me. Instead, a nurse came to get me and I walked in.

The first thing I remember was being really tired and wanting to sleep. There were a few different nurses around and one misgendered me. I thought that nurse must look like an idiot. I was literally waking up in recovery after top surgery and she thought I was a woman. After some time, I was cleared and helped into a wheelchair. My mom was called to come get me and met me at the exit with sushi and balloons.

Six days after surgery my mom and I headed back to the hospital for my post op appointment. This was where I would see my chest for the first time. I was nervous. What if I looked weird? My mom had to wait in the car again. When I found the floor I was supposed to be on, I met with my surgeon's nurse practitioner. They were nonbinary and I hadn't met a nonbinary adult in a professional setting before. They said that this appointment they would remove my binder and bandages, check on my stitches, and show me what care I would need to do. The tape hurt a little to get pulled off.

This was it. The moment of truth. And when I looked at my chest I felt nothing really. I was a bit happy, my chest was flat. A bit grossed out, stitches freak me out. But overall, I didn't feel anything strongly. Was I doing this wrong? I had watched so many videos of people seeing their chest for the first time and crying. They would talk about how magic

and meaningful the first time they saw themselves with a flat chest was. Why didn't I feel that? Honestly a recurring theme for me had been the lack of huge impactful moments.

No one tells you how much paperwork is involved. The name change paperwork was easy to fill out. The sex marker paperwork was another story. You need a letter from a doctor, because that makes sense. No one is out there changing their sex marker for the heck of it. But sure, a doctor would know my gender better than I would. You also have to fill out three separate forms, one of which is an application for a birth certificate. You know, the one used for newborns. So, you have to fill out a bunch of information about your birth that I only have because my mom scrapbooks. After many annoying days of tracking down paperwork and months of waiting for the government to get back to me my name was Ace and my gender was 'X'.

It's been over five years since my top surgery. I am halfway done my masters degree now and although being trans will always be a big part of my life it's not the daily battle it once was. The guilt of not feeling trans enough or that I'm not being trans the 'right way' isn't as common anymore. There wasn't some dramatic moment of radical self acceptance. Just lots of little moments. Like walking past a mirror and thinking I look masculine or having someone gender me correctly. Dysphoria doesn't go away, but I experience it less often now. The scars from top surgery have faded, still visible but much lighter. My transition isn't over, I'm not sure if it will ever be. Everyone grows and changes their whole life, right? I'm on a waitlist for bottom surgery now. I'm sure it will be terrifying. I can't wait.

SHORT FICTION

Fallen Matthews

The Whole Truth

The letter arrives already opened.

Not torn.

Opened.

As if someone had slid a finger beneath the seal and then reconsidered the necessity of privacy altogether. It lays on the desk in the anteroom where correspondence was meant to be sorted, weighed, and delayed. My name is written carefully, the hand neither familiar nor hurried, the ink pressed just enough to show intention without warmth.

I stand for a moment before touching it. The building taught me this habit. Things are rarely where they appear to be, and rarely for the reasons offered.

Inside, the language is courteous.

It always was.

Concerns had been raised.

Questions had emerged.

It was important, in the interest of clarity, to address them promptly.

No author signs the letter. Authority here prefers to speak in the plural, as though responsibility can be shared thinly enough to become harmless.

I fold the paper and replace it in its envelope. Around me, the anteroom smells faintly of dust and iron, the odor of documents long stored and longer forgotten. Shelves rise to the ceiling, their spines uniform, their titles stamped in gold that dulls to the colour of old teeth. Somewhere beyond the walls, the building settles. A sound like breath releases after being held too long.

I lived here long enough to recognize the sequence.

First, the letter.

Then, the meeting.

Then, the careful rephrasing of whatever I said or did into something unrecognizable, but actionable.

I'm not afraid yet. Fear comes later, after courtesy has exhausted itself.

The meeting is scheduled for the following morning in the east chamber, a room reserved for deliberations that needs gravity but not sunlight. Its windows face the inner courtyard, where nothing grows despite the soil being tended weekly by men who never spoke.

I arrive early, as I always do, and take the chair nearest the wall.

The others file in without acknowledging me. Their papers are already marked, corners folded, margins crowded with notes written in the same narrow hand. When they speak, it's to the table.

To the minutes.

To the idea of process itself.

They didn't accuse me. Accusations are vulgar, too close to desire.

Instead, they wonder.

They ask whether I recognize how my presence might be perceived.

Whether I considered the effect of my manner.

Whether silence, in certain contexts, could be interpreted as refusal to cooperate.

I answer carefully. I practiced. Each response is factual, neutral, stripped of anything that might be mistaken for insistence. They nod as though I'm confirming something they already know.

One of the administrators pauses and glances at the wall behind me. Her beady eyes linger longer than necessary. When she returns her gaze to the table, her voice falters. The other admin tufts like a blowfish. Not one to be challenged, she reddens with indignation.

It begins, I understand, with colluding students. I recall one from the first row who tilts her head as though listening for tremors beneath the floorboards. They all murmur in clusters. Their expressions are arranged into a studied fragility that never once fractures into doubt.

In seminar, they barely transcribe my words.

In private, they refine them, pare them down, polish them until the original pulse is no longer detectable.

Their faces contort to feign expressions of injured delicacy that never reach their eyes. They learned early on how to suffer convincingly.

There's something unfinished about them—not monstrous, not precisely—but as though the building has furnished their outlines and left the interiors hollow.

Each sentence is scrubbed clean of context and bright with accusation. There's something curiously unfinished about them, like the building shapes them only halfway and leaves the rest to appetite.

Mouths too eager

Ears too selective.

Hands always raised not to inquire but to record.

Their complaints arrive lacquered in institutional diction, each paragraph neat, bloodless, unanimous.

They do not shout.

They submit.

They do not argue.

They archive.

It is their careful ink, more than any raised voice, that summons the first letter.

The house, obedient to record, simply follows the script they offer.

Admittedly, the administrators concede, they read as mechanical, AI-generated. Ironically fitting as I flagged one of the complainants' assignments for academic integrity concerns.

Before, I relayed their likeness to negligent superiors.

How they watch me the way children watch an insect beneath glass; not with hatred, exactly, but with the steady fascination of those who discover that pressure produces movement.

It's their reports, carefully assembled and unanimously signed, that summon the first letter.

The administrators are compromised. After all, they had been neither truthful nor forthcoming. Admittedly, they fail to impart the importance of etiquette. They patronize the positionalities they purport to protect. No one followed protocol either.

Why had they ignored me?

Why had they alleged I was dangerous, yet saw fit to employ me for years and entrust me with more tasks of oversight?

Why did they consider me for a permanent role?

Why had these concerns materialized only in the wake of Naya's antagonism, when I refused to oblige her gutter bucket antics?

HR and legal counsel thank me for my time.

In the corridor outside, I notice that the framed notices shift. Not their content—the words remain—but their alignment. One hangs lower than before, its corner nearly brushes the floor. Another is crooked, its glass clouds as though breathed upon repeatedly.

I reach to straighten them, then stop. Touching the walls has consequences I don't yet understand.

Over the next days, the building begins to remember aloud.

A phrase I once spoke in confidence appears penciled in the margin of an old ledger.

A question asked of me in private echoes faintly in the stairwell and returns altered, sharpened.

Doors that always opened now resist certain hands, while yielding to others who look startled by the permission.

I'm not the only one who noticed. Conversations shorten.

People check their reflections in darkened glass, as though seeking evidence of distortion.

Papers go missing, then reappear with additions no one admits to making.

Footnotes multiply.

When the next meeting is called, fewer attend. Those who do sit stiffly with their chairs angled away from the walls. The questions they ask each other mirror those they once directed at me.

Did you intend that?

Can you account for how this might be read?

Is it possible your tone invited misunderstanding?

I say nothing. Silence, after all, has already been entered into the record.

By the time they realize what's happening, the building has grown bold.

The archive doors open at night.

Minutes transcribe themselves.

Margins bleed.

I'm asked, eventually, whether I wish to make a statement.

I look at the walls, now crowded with words no one can erase without leaving scars.

The house has learned its lessons well.

"No," I say.

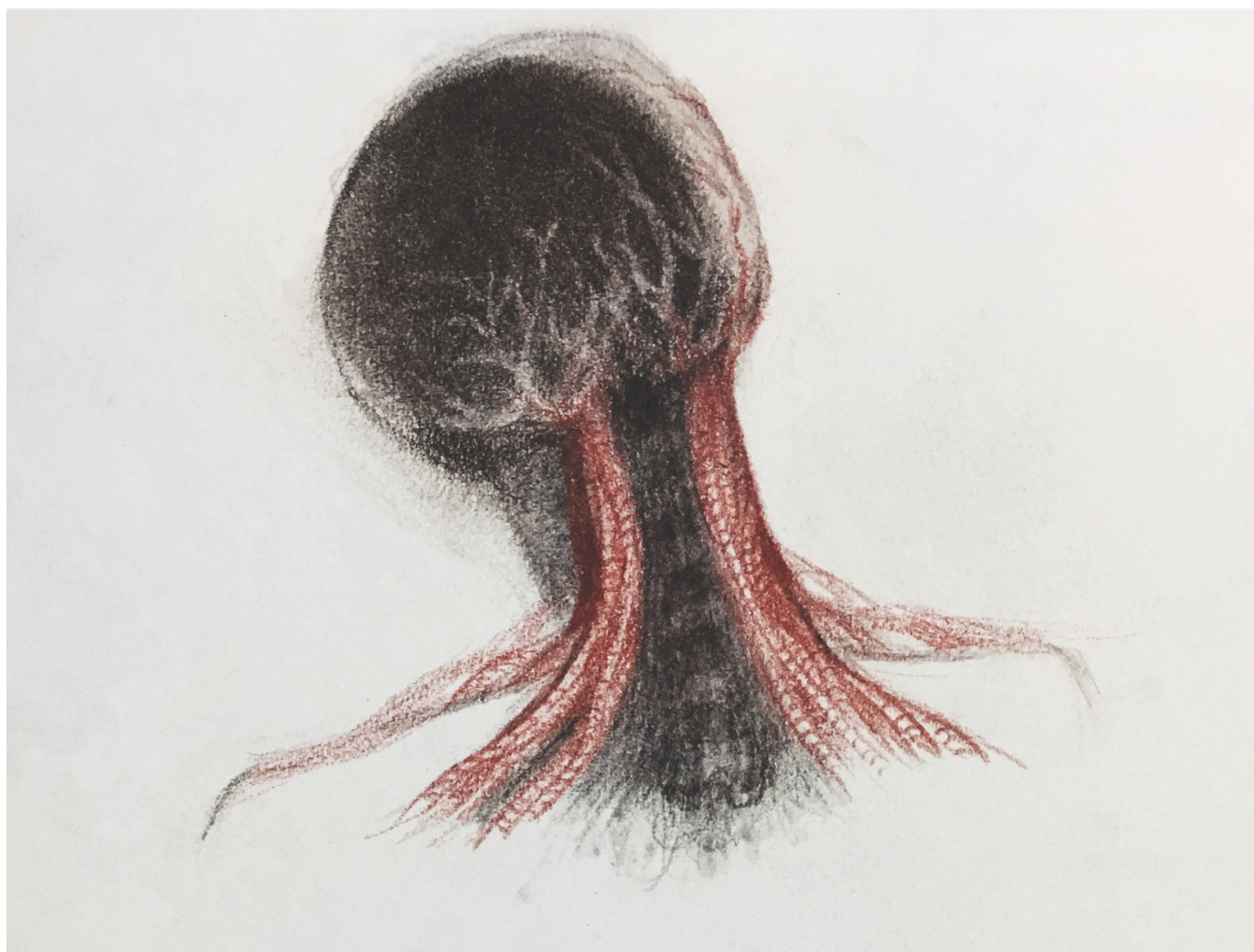
And for the first time since the letter arrived, that answer is received exactly as given.

VISUAL ART

Zixuan Liao

Neurosis series

charcoal on paper, 2019



Nerve Compression



Viscous

Artist's Statement

Neurosis is a series of paper-based sketches grounded in my embodied experiences during my master's studies. Drawing from my research interests in psychoanalysis and feminism, the works explore how individuals, especially women, adapt to mental and chronic physical conditions as these become embedded within everyday life amid rapid technological change and shifting social structures.

The series reflects my contemplation of women's subjectivities and boundaries in relation to the self, others, and media within Chinese cultural contexts. Though often non-fatal, these conditions are frequently minimized or concealed beneath performances of normalcy because they expose vulnerability, shame, and ambiguity—qualities that remain unwelcome within patriarchal systems structured by power and productivity.

(cont'd on following page)

The figures are derived from portraits of my friends, family members, and myself; however, I obscure or cover their facial features to express the erosion of identity and individuality. Working with minimal materials (two-toned charcoal and paper), I use ochre red to accentuate pathological traces. Microscopic forms such as viruses, cells, and bodily tissues emerge at the sensory thresholds of the body, including the eyes, mouth, and skin.

(cont'd on following page)



Shield

By externalizing these internal disturbances, the drawings render visible the otherwise imperceptible dynamics of mental strain and heightened sensation, translating private corporeal experience into a shared visual field.

— Zixuan Liao



Mask



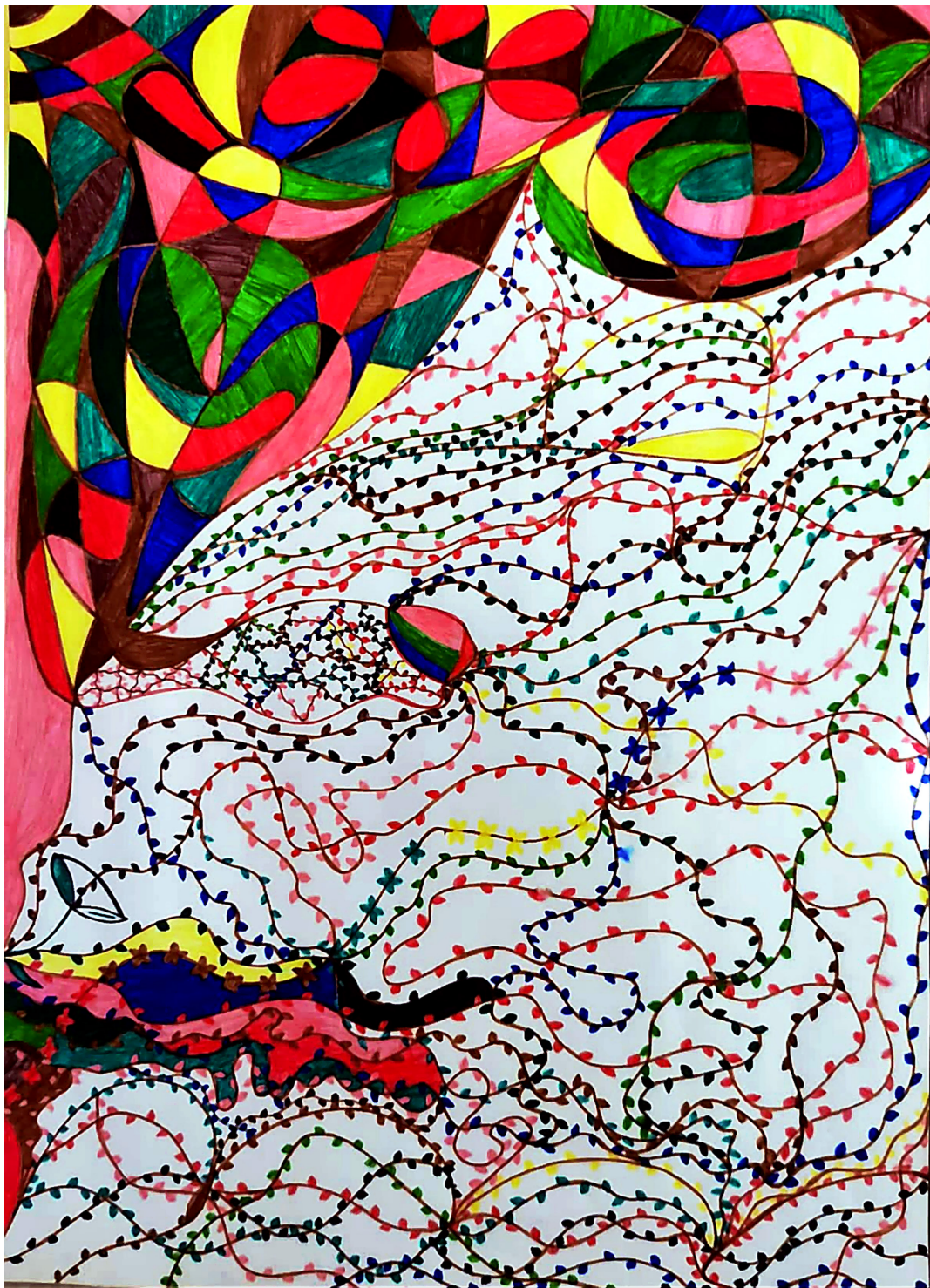
Insomnia



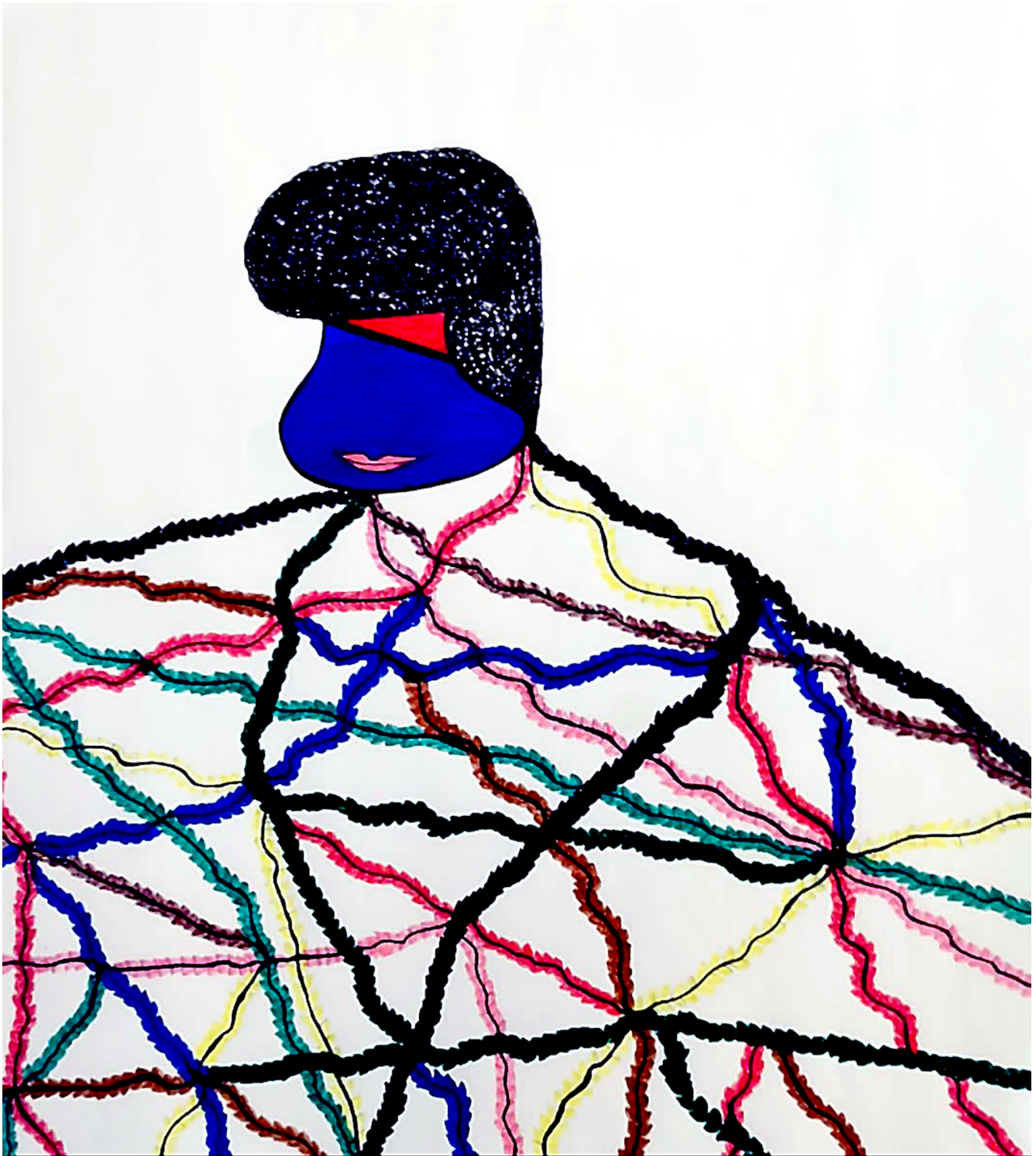
Mirror Me

Zahra Barzegar

Palimpsest of Routes



Overlaid



List of Contributors

Zahra Barzegar is a PhD candidate in English at York University whose research explores contemporary ecopoetry, water, memory, and rhetoric. She is also a poet and visual artist interested in abstraction, fragmentation, and the layered relations between bodies, environments, and form.

alice deng (she/her) is a writer from “Vancouver,” BC. She recently completed her Master’s in English Literature, where her research focused on contemporary Asian diasporic literature, film, and new media. Her poetry has appeared in *SAD Mag*, *toothcut journal*, *The Lamp Literary Journal*, and more.

Kellie Chouinard (she/they) is a PhD candidate at the University of Waterloo, where her SSHRC-funded doctoral research focuses on young adults’ collaborative storytelling about breast cancer. She is also the author of a poetry chapbook, *Disconnect* (2019), and her poetry and creative non-fiction have been published in various literary journals, including *The Windsor Review* and *filling Station*. She holds an MA from the University of Calgary, with a specialty in feminist autobiography and creative writing, and a BA from the University of Windsor.

Ace Holmes is currently completing his MA in English and Cultural Studies at Lakehead University. He began his queer journey in grade 11 and plans on perpetually rejecting cis-heteronormativity while celebrating queer and trans joy. If asked, he will show you all seven thousand pictures of his cats.

Pramod Lad

Zixuan Liao (she/her) holds an M.F.A. from the Sichuan Fine Arts Institute in China, specializing in comprehensive paintings. Her work has been exhibited multiple times and is held in private collections. Zixuan is currently a Ph.D. candidate in Interdisciplinary Humanities at Brock University in Canada. Her research interests span image studies, feminist theory, psychoanalysis, phenomenology, and semiotics. Her doctoral project examines the contemporary representation of the daughter-mother relationship in images created by daughter artists, with the aim of inspiring the self-exploration of women’s identity, relation-

ships, and affects in artistic practices and influencing societal perceptions of motherhood and gender roles beyond academia.

Fallen Matthews is an interdisciplinary scholar, educator, and writer whose work explores disability, grief, theology, queer theory, horror, media, and the affective dimensions of precarity. A PhD graduate currently pursuing a Master of Divinity at Atlantic School of Theology, Matthews' research and creative work explore how stories of loss, embodiment, and deferred futures shape contemporary life. Her writing has appeared or is forthcoming in publications spanning the humanities, public scholarship, and creative nonfiction.

Anjalee Nadarajan is a writer and scholar based in the Greater Toronto Area. She works on maximalist fiction, particularly with the authors Thomas Pynchon and Kim Stanley Robinson. During her time in graduate school, she won first place during 2021 in the annual essay contest hosted by the Jane Austen Society of North America. In 2023, she was selected by the Agnes Etherington Art Centre to take part in their artist residency. In 2024, she received the best graduate-student essay award from the Midwest Conference for British Studies. Her poetry and creative writing have been featured in *Living Hyphen*, *Acta Victoriana*, Toronto Feminist Arts Collective, Tamil Arts Collective, *untethered*, *antilang*, and the Emerging Writers' Reading Series.

Geoffrey Nilson is a poet and literary critic born in Duncan, BC. He graduated from Kwantlen Polytechnic University in 2016 with a BA in Creative Writing, went on to complete an MA in English at Simon Fraser University, and is currently a PhD candidate in contemporary Canadian poetry at SFU, studying how the long poem has both served and resisted narratives of Canada and Canadian nationality. The author of four chapbooks of poetry, his most recent *Light Makes a Ruin* appeared in 2022 with Ottawa's above/ground press. Nilson teaches Literature and Academic Writing at Vancouver Community College.

Mariana Chajon Oliveros has recently obtained a Master of Arts degree in English at Western University, where they held a SSHRC Canada Graduate Scholarship. Their research interests include heteronormativity, gender, and women's writing.

Andrew Oram: I am an English PhD student at York University. I have an Honours BA in Creative Writing as well as a Graduate Diploma in Creative Writing at York. I am a passionate musician as a DJ and guitarist, but I am most passionate about my creative writing, particularly in poetry. This will be my third publication of poetry.