

UC Merced

The Vernal Pool

Title

Vernal Pool Issue 2 All

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6h50z2tp>

Journal

The Vernal Pool, 1(2)

Author

Pool, Vernal

Publication Date

2015

DOI

10.5070/V312026267

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Peer reviewed|Undergraduate



**THE
INTERNAL
POOL**

2

THE VERNAL POOL

ISSUE TWO
SPRING 2015



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is the Undergraduate Literary Journal
of UC Merced.

It appears twice per year.

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THE VERNAL POOL ISSUE TWO

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BRITTNEY KNAUF
THREE POEMS



THE VERNAL POOL

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The Clocks Start to Melt

After Salvador Dali's 'The Persistence of Memory'

Bill got laid off, so we're all working late.
Steve's been here awhile, so he's gone through this
before. "You know how, at three,
time starts moving slower?" he asks.
"Well, at five, the clocks start to melt."
I laughed. I stapled three hundred
documents, made photocopies, sent faxes,
and made myself a slave to the boss lady.
Sitting at the computer task after task,
the glare hurt. We made more coffee.

Five came, and sure enough the clocks were
melting. By seven, I was on a beach and there
was one hanging off a tree and one clinging lazily
to the edge of my desk.

The Bus

I rode the bus home. I
looked up from my book
and took out a fine-toothed black
comb that brushed the dandruff
from a girl's hair.

I wished I could shampoo it.

I went shopping and I was
alone – women
on the other side of the aisle
didn't see when I waved at them.
I smiled. "That wouldn't look good
on you." *Nothing!*

Sometimes I wish I could sit
with a book and take the bus,
or sit in a café. Sometimes
I wish I could just watch
like the light bulb
that lives in a dome glass case.

First Day

Silent flashes of striking light
speckle the room, speckle
the girl's new white
curves; the pole is stagnant
as a headstone for an empty coffin.
She is a mouse to the hawks'
pivoting eyes as she spins,
like the sound of an empty room.

The others darken circles of experience
under their eyes that allow them to smile
and step up and ask. They are as haggard
as their regulars who sit like businessmen,
watching the window of yet another plane.

A man pays extra and, like the lone
caught fish, the girl is taken; her eyes
blank and nostalgic for the water.

WAIL KARAJEH
PALESTINE



THE VERNAL POOL

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What Remains

A mother with wet cheeks
holds her child.
Her blood was his blood.
His tears were her tears.

The thunder of bombs
and storm of bullets
couldn't decimate prayers.
Heads to the floor
"Allah hu akbar"
echoes among
demolished columns of the mosque,
pale corpses, and stains.
A girl holds the bloody
hand of her best friend.

Death
shepherds any age.

Ten years old --
watching his mother with moist eyes
hold his younger brother --
the translucent child whispers,
*Let's move on
from this burning*

Palestine.

**PIERCE CHANG
BOVINE AERODYNAMICS
IN TERMS OF FUZZY
LAGRANGIAN DYNAMICS**



THE VERNAL POOL

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Bovine Aerodynamics In Terms Of Fuzzy Lagrangian Dynamics

Physicists often work in the realm of smooth surfaces, massless ropes, and spherical cows. When asked to tackle a problem, physicists usually make assumptions that simplify the math, and more often than not, the theoretical result is close to the experimental one. We assume that the wind resistance of a falling object is negligible, that the inertia of a rope won't noticeably affect the motion of a pulley, or that a cow's uneven weight distribution won't affect its trajectory when launched from a catapult. These assumptions work well for simple systems, so we can apply Newton's Second Law to find the equations of motion. However, these simplified models start to fail for complex systems. For more complicated systems, we can apply a new set of tools called Fuzzy Lagrangian Dynamics, which not only allow physicists to tackle complicated physical systems, but also allows scientists in other disciplines to analyze nonphysical systems as well. These new tools may be the basis for a plethora of possible future applications, ranging from the dynamics of a catapult to the dynamics of an economy.

Sir Isaac Newton gets a lot of credit for his equation governing motion, reproduced below, where F is the net force on an object, \dot{p} is the time derivative of its momentum, m is the mass of the object, and a is its acceleration:

$$\vec{F} = \dot{\vec{p}} = m\vec{a}$$

Unfortunately, this equation has one major shortcoming. It works fine in standard "x, y, z", or Cartesian, coordinates, but the math gets messy if you introduce rotations. While not necessarily impossible, it can get cumbersome and tedious to make the necessary transformations between Cartesian and spherical coordinates, like carving a turkey with a pocket knife.

There have been several attempts to reformulate Newtonian mechanics to more easily accommodate spinning, and one of the more famous attempts was that of Joseph-Louis Lagrange, an Italian mathematician who lived in Berlin in the late 18th century. Lagrange formulated a new equation, reproduced below, that can accept any coordinate system without requiring transformations, making it much more adaptable, but also requires more complicated math. In the equations below, q is the general coordinate, \dot{q} is that coordinate's velocity, and L is a quantity called the Lagrangian, given by the kinetic energy T minus the potential energy V :

$$\frac{d}{dt} \left(\frac{\partial L}{\partial \dot{q}} \right) - \frac{\partial L}{\partial q} = 0$$
$$L = T - V$$

Referring to the elegance of Lagrangian Mechanics, Dr. Robert Adair, in his book *The Great Design: Particles, Fields, and Creation*, asserted that “Indeed, at the present time it appears that we can describe all the fundamental forces in terms of a Lagrangian. The search for Nature’s One Equation, which rules all of the universe, has been largely a search for an adequate Lagrangian.” In other words, Adair is arguing that this equation allows us to describe complex motion in relatively simple terms, given the system’s energy. An adequate Lagrangian that describes the energy of the entire universe, once found, would allow us to derive the behavior of the universe, and all things in it, in terms of whatever coordinate system is convenient.

How do Lagrangian mechanics actually work, though? Lagrange’s equations work based on an idea called the principle of least action. It works a little like this: Imagine that you want to go to a friend’s house. There are infinitely many paths that lead from your house to theirs. You could walk there directly. You could walk down the street and take a bus. You could drive down the street and then turn onto theirs. You could ride in a wagon pulled by a

bear around the city a few times before heading to their house. If you ask your GPS for directions, though, it will suggest the path that takes the least amount of time. Lagrange's equation works similarly. There are infinitely many ways that a system could have a specific energy, but Lagrange's equation finds the most efficient path, which minimizes a quantity called the "action". This means that, knowing the initial conditions of a system, we can accurately predict what it will do.

However, precisely understanding the starting parameters is the sticking point in most experiments. If you were to model a cow catapulted off of a building, you could easily predict where the cow will land. Now suppose that you actually conduct the experiment with 100 cows. After you finish explaining to the authorities why you thought this was a good idea, you'll notice that the cows didn't all land in precisely the same spot. There are many unknowns acting on the system that you, the experimenter, have little to no control over. Each time you launch a cow, something will be different: each cow varies in mass and shape, the catapult isn't always compressed the exact same amount, the catapult might shift a little between firings, the wind may blow sporadically, and the cow could tumble in mid-flight, all of which would affect the trajectory of the cow. This means that there's a certain amount of ambiguity in exactly how much we can understand about the behavior of a system. This kind of ambiguity creates a problem for scientists, since we have to find different ways to accurately model a system's behavior.

One of the ways we can tackle ambiguity is with something called a fuzzy set. Fuzzy sets were introduced in 1965 by Dr. Lofti A. Zadeh, a mathematician from UC Berkeley, to help better understand systems that we only have an approximate, or 'fuzzy', grasp on. Instead of containing a specific set of points, they describe a relationship between points, given by a relationship function. It's like two different ways to give someone an address. You can give the accurate street address, or you can say their destination is between two landmarks. While the latter isn't as

precise as the former, you may not have the knowledge to give the precise answer, and the person will eventually find their destination either way.

Dr. Uziel Sandler, a professor at the Jerusalem College of Technology in Israel, recently published a paper merging the concepts of Lagrangian Mechanics and Fuzzy Set Theory. According to Sandler, when we do not precisely understand a system's initial parameters, it makes sense to instead describe the results as a domain. Applying it to our cow example from earlier, instead of saying that we think the cow will land on a specific point, we can accurately say that the cow will land somewhere in a specific region. Taking this a step further, instead of saying that the cow is at a position x at some time t , we say that there is a probability it is near position x at time t . We can apply the same thing to the velocity, and now we have physical quantities as probabilities and relationships. Using Dr. Sandler's equations, we can predict the flight of the cow knowing only imprecise parameters about the cow's initial condition.

Launching cows is one thing, but warfare has long since surpassed the need for controlled aerial heifers. Instead, the military favors missiles, mortar shells, and more recently, rail-guns. While launching an explosive piece of metal at someone we don't like is an art that has been well-explored, more advanced technology means we can create smarter, more complicated weapons. Some anti-tank missiles, for example, launch several smaller munitions after the main payload has been shot, and then each individual payload drops molten copper onto the targets below. This system exhibits a complicated chaotic behavior, and Dr. Sandler's equations could help model such behavior, allowing weapon designers to create more efficient payloads that minimize collateral damage and civilian casualties.

The beauty of these equations, though, is that they are generalized; they are not bound to the realm of corporeal matter. We are not restricted only to farm animals launched in increasingly

complicated ways. Consider a stock market, an abstract system which at first has little resemblance to either a hypothetically propelled heifer or the realities of aerial warfare. A stock market has position in terms of money the way a concrete, physical system has position in terms of meters. An economy is a system with quantifiable characteristics and identifiable trends that affect long term behavior, so why not model it the same way you'd model a physical system with forces acting on it? The field of econophysics came about for this very reason, although it had traditionally suffered from ambiguity in how much you can truly understand about not only what the current state of a market is, but what its future state will be. This is where Fuzzy Dynamics comes in, lowering its shades as it calmly says "Stand back, I've got this." The ambiguous nature of economics lends itself perfectly to Sandler's probabilistic model, where we can now account for wide range of initial and future conditions.

Why limit ourselves to economics, though? In politics, for example, we say that candidates "race" to win votes for an election, the same way that runners race across physical distances during a competition. If we can find a runner's velocity during a race, then we could also model the rate at which candidates acquire votes. This analogy only works, however, if we assume that the runners are constantly hurling banana peels at each other. The tumultuous nature of political machinations does not lend itself to the simple analysis we'd use to model the relatively constant motion of someone running in a straight line, but does lend itself to the probabilistic model used in Fuzzy Dynamics. We can use historical data to create a model of the "motion" of a campaign based on the rate at which money is spent and the quality of the people running it, like a NASCAR race that runs on lies instead of gasoline.

There is, however, a minor caveat to all of this. The probabilistic nature of Fuzzy Sets means that Fuzzy Dynamics produces something called a differential inclusion, which is a strange type of solution that we have little understanding of, like a mathematical platypus. The only solutions we can meaningfully

obtain usually come from numeric methods, which is a fancy term for having a computer crunch numbers. The newness of Fuzzy Dynamics also means that its membership functions will need to be derived from experimentation, or analysis of historical data.

Although these details will need to be addressed, the framework of Fuzzy Dynamics is still a strong foundation. A foundation for what, though, is still yet to be discovered. It may become the new industry standard for weapon engineering firms. It may be the basis for all future stock market analysis. It could be used to model the spread of a disease, and save millions of lives during major outbreaks. It could even be used as an excuse to launch cows out of catapults. The possibilities are truly endless.

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STEPHANIE MCCLURE
“ELSEWHERE”



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“Elsewhere”

She’s just in time.

Nobody notices her going outside when the aroma of breakfast envelopes the kitchen. Papa pours a cup of black coffee, mumbling something about a flat tire to no one in particular. Abuela methodically stirs a pot of beans furiously boiling on the wood stove. Heeding the call of an invisible voice, Zita climbs out the window in her princess jammies, dragging her tattered blanket over the splintery windowsill. Her dark eyes squint before a spark of light rising over the orchard, forming crescent moons. Crows squawk high overhead and black feathered angels herald the dawn. Silent as a field mouse, Zita creeps beneath the sagging porch, across a path of damp earth, and ascends the trunk of an old walnut tree to her thinking spot. Cool air fills her lungs as she inhales the scent of hay, ripening fields, and decaying leaves beneath her perch. As the earth slowly shifts beneath, increasing sunlight reaches her periphery and Zita discovers she is not alone.

“Thomasito?”

Perfect silence. Zita’s skin prickles against a breath of wind, or something soft and tender. Her twin’s face peeks from behind a tree nearly twenty feet away. She giggles and reaches a thin arm to another bough as she stands high in the tree, looking through the canopy of leaves. When he disappears from sight, Zita balances herself, stepping on the blanket to cushion her tiny feet. Noticing a translucent tightrope of silk spanning between two branches, she marvels at its beauty, searching for the artisan. How does it know where to climb, she wonders, as the spider makes its way to a spiraling web. Her eyes follow nimble legs radiating from a bulbous body.

“Where are you going?”

The force of her breath propels the spider to action. In a matter of moments, it climbs more than a foot above her head and then, as if pausing to analyze her motives, the spider hesitates. The fragile thread sways rhythmically in the breeze. Stretching on tip-toe, Zita meets her companion face to face. Her childish faith persists as a finger, tiny in comparison to the tree yet massive relative to the spider, approaches the point of contact. She turns, anticipating her brother to climb up and join her.

He must be elsewhere.

Birds explode from the flora. Slapping against the doorframe, the porch screen shuts. Boots crunch across the gravel to a faded pickup bolstered by a metal jack. Her father never leaves for work without saying good-bye so she must return to the house without getting spotted. From the lowest branch, she jumps. Retracing her steps, Zita weaves through the orchard and around the house before scrambling up through her window. Moist crumbs of orchard trail from the bottom of her feet. Thundering steps approach the bedroom, the pace echoing her panting breath while fresh blood, full of oxygen, leaves her lungs and reenters the heart. Papa quietly opens the door. Assuming she must still be asleep, he shuffles softly to her bed laying a massive, calloused hand on her head. Can he feel the throbbing pulse, she wonders, beneath decades of toil and labor in those calloused hands?

He smooths her hair to the side and she peeks an eye to spy his mood. His gaze drifts across space and time to a photograph of the twins on the dresser, two toddlers clasping hands, smiles wide as a sunset. The worn expression in his eyes makes Zita sad.

“He visited me,” she confesses.

Papa smiles, expecting the statement to reflect her dreams. She regrets her words, knowing he would give anything to receive such a vision. Tucking an arm around his wrist, she snuggles close, offering the gift of unconditional love to her father, a man afflicted by the cruel reality of brokenness. Outside the window,

crows signal each other with wails of alternating anguish and affection. The perfect melody for such an occasion.

PHIL MIKE COBA
LA NOCHE DE LOS LAPICES



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ISSUE TWO, SPRING 2015

La Noche de los Lápices

I loved visiting my grandfather when I was younger. He always had the best stories. Growing up in Argentina for him was quite different than the life I was used to as a kid. He talked quite heavily about *los tiempos fáciles*. If I let him, he could talk about that till the end of time. One time he had us both stay up till three in the morning talking about going to the panadería as a kid for his mom to get free pastries for helping them sweep the porch and all the different stories he heard while being there. Or the time he and a couple of his friends decided to grab a bunch of inner tubes and float down the river. Halfway down the river the tube got ripped on a fallen tree branch forcing them to stop early and walk home dripping water the whole way home. Grandma was not as amused as I was by this story nor did she enjoy me staying up that much past my bed time.

The first time he told me one of his stories, I was too young to remember. He recalls walking to bed and saw me struggling to relax, so he lifted me out of the crib and tried rocking me to sleep. After an hour of rocking he tried pleading with me to go to bed. He insisted I found his sadness entertaining and a dark comforted smile drew itself across my face. He said he finally decided to tell me a story and that his voice comforted me to sleep. It was probably because his deep and robust voice drowned out the sound of the gunshots in the driveway.

Ever since that night, I could always rest assured that before I boarded my plane to leave Argentina he would wake me from my slumber and lead me into the sitting room where a glass of warm chocolate milk would be waiting for me. The smell of his filterless cigarettes were imprinted on the couch cushions. Grandma did not let him smoke in the living room but he knew I wouldn't tell.

There were numerous stories he would tell me. Like the time he ran down the hill into a barbed wire fence and came home tangled. The wire stabbed itself into his eyebrow and blinded him with blood. By the time he made to his house the blood had gotten itself into his nose and it became difficult to breath.

When I was five he told me about a story about how he became a hero.

“I was preparing for this day for weeks; the awesome fight. I was ready to make history. When people read in the history book they were going to see my name Alfonso Walter Coba. I reached into my drawer and pulled out my magical bandana that gave me strength and wrapped it tightly around my head. With my louuuuuud voice I screamed away the evil demons with the help of my own army of friends and was seen as a hero.” He had this little glimmer in his eye a glimmer of white hope and inspiration.

This story motivated me. My own grandfather, a war hero. I never understood what he was fighting about all and that did not matter, all I needed to know is that he kicked ass. He fought the monsters. My grandfather was in the history books all over Argentina and possibly the world. I talked about my grandpa when I was at the playground, when we were at the supermarket, and when I was with all my friends.

When I was ten my parents sent me back to Argentina for Christmas break and I looked forward to the day my grandpa would rescue me from that mildew-smelling room with sheets that poked into my skin. Sure enough two days before I left he shook me awake and led me to the living room where a glass of warm chocolate milk and a blanket were waiting for me. We talked for hours, he was really interested in America. He had numerous questions about the schools and the food, or just about California. I didn't want to talk about America, though. That was not the story time I remembered; the story time I longed for all those years away from him.

After regaining control of the conversation I asked him,

“Abuelo, cuéntame la historia de cómo fuiste un héroe.” “Ahhhh” he replied with hesitation, “Sí, yo me acuerdo de esa estoria.”

“It was a dark day, I knew what I was about to do was a noble thing for my friends. The local teachers’ protest, what a great way to help rally up our fellow classmates to support something. I searched for my red bandana long and hard. I’ll have you know I spent three whole months of saving change to buy the fabric that went into that bandana. It was not pretty, the stitching was clearly off and the scissors I used to cut the fabric were old and rusted but I made it with my own sweat and tears. I wrapped it tightly around my head and went off into the recently awoken morning. The police, they fought us hard but we yelled back harder. I remember how my close friend Juan almost got beaten to death by two cops but we pulled them off him, real crazy. But we did it we marched all the way to the podium on the steps of the Casa Rosada and spoke what we felt about this whole bullshit situation—don’t tell your grandma I used that kind of language—But anyways, we were there for about an hour just speaking our mind. Some of us were logical. Others, not so much. But we were all passionate that day and all to this day still feel righteous about doing what we did”. The faint glimmer was in his eyes again, a light coming from a man who did something he knew was right.

I could not believe my ears. I did not think my grandpa could become an even more powerful person. He rushed me off to bed shortly after and I had dreams for years of a big protest with all these people wanting to do good and the police trying to stop them. Then, one person emerges from the piles of passed out bodies, none other than my grandpa, and he ran past all the horrible men to get to that podium. And once he did his voice calmed everyone down, the police stopped fighting, citizens stopped to observe what was happening, even the president came out to apologize for what he had done to anger my grandpa.

It had been a few years till my parents and I could afford to send me back to Argentina. It was not until shortly after my

nineteenth birthday that I went back to visit. My grandpa was terminally ill and had very little time left to live, so between the whole family we salvaged together enough money to send my dad (his son) and me to visit him. He insisted to us that none of this was a big deal and he'd always had heart problems; but we all knew it was a big deal. He was no longer the same grandpa I grew up with. His skin no longer resembled that of a human but more so a decaying banana. He was constantly out of breath and always sleeping somewhere.

I did not care too much though. I came to Argentina for two things alone that time; partying and women. With a legal drinking age of 'being simply old enough to hold the beer' I was in teenage heaven. I spent most of my time and money playing Mr. Moneybags buying all my new friends drinks and taking pictures with beautiful women coming home at five in the morning. I had figured out that if I lifted the front door before pushing it it wouldn't squeak, letting me sneak in.

One of my last nights there I walked into not a dark sleeping house but one full of life. There was my grandpa sitting in the chair he has been using the last twenty years. And there was my chair, with the same blanket I have been using for almost twenty years. I glanced at the table expecting a hot chocolate milk to help wash the tequila shots from earlier out of my mouth, but instead there was a beer. "Sit down por favor" he said with a certain worry in his voice. He offered me a smoke but I refused. "I always tell the esstory desde the manifestación ahora, here is the other part.

"After coming home from the rally my parents were mad. They overheard horror stories of left wing citizens missing because the police decided to do something about it. I thought this was going to be a positive change, but what we did was set up the dominos for the biggest shock of all history. I got into all the history books, I was famous, I was a hero but the cost... I sometimes wonder if it was worth it. That same night I came home the government thought enough was enough, and implemented a marshal law policy on the

country. Everyone had to have their ID on their person at all times. You're wondering what happens if you don't have it? Just wait a bit mijo I'll get there. Those sons of bitches don't care where they get you, or who is there with you all they want is to do physical and emotional damage, I was asleep in bed when they came in. They beat my father up in front of me and blamed me for it, telling me this was my fault for not being a good citizen. It didn't stop there. They pulled me out of my own house and shoved me into their old bright green ford falcons. Blindfolded and gagged, they take you to a building outside the city where they could fuck with you all they wanted without having to worry about laws or witnesses. Have you ever sat in a urinal for more than about five minutes? Gets uncomfortable right? That was my bedroom bathroom and kitchen for five months; don't you understand these people are pigs who knew they were messing with human lives but kept pushing on. Do you know what it's like to go to sleep to the sound of girls being raped in the stalls next to you? Do you know what it's like to have one of those men come inside and violate you because his favorite girl is too swollen and infected to have sex? Have you ever been raped mijo? It something I don't wish upon even my worst of enemies. And the tortures, their favorite to use on me was to tie me to an old metal bed and spray me with water, touching a car battery to the bed. The electricity surging through my body and reverberating in my brain. I actually looked forward to passing out in hopes that I wouldn't wake up... There are costs to everything, mijo."

There it was, that faint glimmer in his eyes again. All along I thought it was passion or bravery, but it was none of those things.

**HUGO LOPEZ
TO EVAN WHITE**



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ISSUE TWO, SPRING 2015

To Evan White

Life is a leaf, hanging
from the fragile branch
of an ancient tree.

I didn't know you;
I couldn't call you my friend.
But from your close ones
I learned your name.

Life is a leaf waiting
for the autumn wind;
it hangs from the fragile
branch of a dying tree.

Your friends and I waited
for you in a library room
as you raged against a dying sun
on your iron steed.

Life is a leaf. Yours hung
from the branch of a living tree.
The autumn breeze ripped it
and took you on its arms,
without permission, without advice.

The wind of fall caused your leaf to fall
and kept you from meeting us while
we kept on waiting. In the end all that arrived
were memories of you that echoed
in a room with an empty chair.

Life is a leaf --
Might ours join yours
At an autumn sunset.

Evan White was a student who died in a motorcycle accident in November 2014. He was the public relationships officer of the Martial Arts Club and had arranged a meeting with another organization a week prior to the accident. He never made it to the meeting.

MICHELLE M DOWNER
THE GOLDEN LOCKET



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The Golden Locket

It's been six months since anybody has even looked at me. My neighbors are as lonely as I am. We are equally old, equally darkened, and equally forgotten. It has been too long since a chest has warmed my back, too long since golden hair entangled me, and too long since somebody called me their treasure.

*

She held me close. "I love you. I love you. I love you." She repeated my words back to me. Sometimes they fell from her as a sigh, a quiet whisper of a future wish. Other times it was nothing but a question on innocent lips. Most people forget my words just as easily as they read them. She didn't. She held me close.

*

It was cold and I was covered in dirt. I lay beaten in the earth, crushed beneath the boots of worn fathers and the sneakers of deviant youths. The horn of the early morning train shook me to the surface. This is where her father found me.

*

The tarnished bells on the door moan as a tired woman enters, a small child clinging to her like the January cold outside. The frail girl finds me once she is shaken from her mother's coat tails and, as she holds my gaze, I feel beautiful for the first time in too long. Her golden hair reminds me of the one who left me here. Has she said my words to another?

*

She was older the next time I was placed in her hands. She had forgotten me. She would still repeat my words to me but her tone was bitter, brimming with disbelief. She had learned that the words engraved into my skin were so often destructive. She once wore me close to her heart; but those days have long since been lost. Her father is gone and she has sold me to a stranger.

ADAIR SYN GEARY
MELTED TURQUOISE



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With Regards to What I Have Left

Casting no shadows from the confines of his tomb,
a veritable Belphegor in form,
the gargoyle had once rested on the wardrobe above
a room where the drinks were always lukewarm.

The prince of imps has no dreams,
only a regard for his position.
He had mastered how to watch
moments.
Contemplating the door
with eyes like a humid swamp,
I remember seeing
his shadow against it.
In the midst of tears,
his expression could have been
a curved moon of a smile.

She always told me
gargoyles were watchful
because they were crafted
to protect, like a baroque
angel.

This Prince of Hell
thrives on waiting
and watching.

But Belphegor casts no more shadows,
acting only as a neighbor to ashes
with all I have left of that time.

The Cookie Jar

Porcelain is apt to break
and spill out its remains
onto the freshly shampooed
lemon scented
carpet of my new sanctuary,
built on top of
what I try to forget.
The strange fate of the cookie jar
that isn't filled with the pleasant
aroma of sweets
or even the pungent rotting
of those we forgot to bury.
It's heavy with a sterile dust
that I can't even
bring myself to smell again
for fear of getting my nose to close
to where a soul was burned.

I miss when the cookie jar
had the kiss of chocolate chip.
What was once something
I yearned to sneak and steal
is now something I can't
bear to unseal.

This Land Belongs to an Unforgiving Lord

Similar societies under the sun,
born into a land of ashes and harsh dust
flooding their faithful hearts.

The unforgiving lord who rules this land
has delegated his workload
to the flawed minds of men
who value rockets and missiles
that kick up the same dirt
Adam was conjured from.

Two apostles
in this land of sand
flip a coin.

A symphony of arms,
the melody of angry men
is the coordination of explosions
and the slaughter of faithful hearts.

Seven trumpets ring out.
The two apostles continue to argue,
refusing to notice
that they are returning to the dust,
returning to the dust that birthed them.

An Eye That Lingers in the Strange Room

“The Portrait” by René Magritte

Pray to Him, that he might become soothed by the understanding that you are aware of what He has watched. Glass, it tastes empty and wants full, so you shall pour until it flows out of the mouth. Fork and knife, they want softness to move and encapsulate them, dominate their way and style.

The plate is Sisyphus. Eat what it bears but it knows that tomorrow the weight will be just as heavy, close to a little more. Not enough to shatter it.

An eye gazes at you, the open stare. You sit in the seltsamraum and your food watches it all. There are others, but none know exactly what situation you find yourself in. You glance at an eye that lingers beneath you and discover that it is much deeper than you had anticipated. Overwhelmed and submerged in the stars that linger above you, a cosmic spiral twists in the direction of the future. It's unsettling and terrifying but you knew that there would be a point in your life when you opened your third eye. You never wanted this though. You never asked for an eye that lingers in the strange room.

On My Island

(Dedicated to Ashley)

The ocean is like melted turquoise
with its pale, white fingers sliding
along the soft sand of my shore.
Boats hide long legs beneath their hulls
that reach and push against
onyx cliffs, deeply submerged.

Late at night, when the waters
are empty, I put my heart in a bottle
and leave it to the gentle massage
of the sea's smooth curves.

Even though you are miles away,
I wish that I was with you
every day.

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ABSOLUTION**



THE VERNAL POOL

ISSUE TWO, SPRING 2015

His body sagged against the cross while his head was tossed back and pointing upward. His skin was pale and taut against his bones, his ribs jutting out painfully against the nearly translucent tissue. Nails pierced his hands and feet as a crown of thorns cut his head. Blood dripped from each open wound, including the long gash that ran parallel between his ribs. The skin around his eyes was sunken, dragging down his sharp cheekbones. His eyes wide with red veins seeping in from the corners as the pupils aimed upwards, pleading to his father, God, to spare the ones who have put him there. His mouth hanging open, you could almost hear his screams.

The purpose of the crucifixion as a strong symbol of Catholicism still remains extreme to me. Its purpose is to make sure I remember that Jesus died for my sins by showing me his traumatic death. It's suppose to make me understand that I should blindly worship this sacrificial son and his seemingly benevolent father. It all seems so...*drastic*.

My mother made sure that we went to church on Sundays and prayed the Rosary once a week during Lent. I was expected to know all the stories, rules, virtues, vices, and prayers. It became so ingrained that even after years of not practicing, if someone simply says, "...with you," my first impulse is to say, "and also with you." As a child, I believed fully in my God and the teachings of the Catholic Church.

Attending Catholic school from kindergarten to eighth grade skewed my perspective on reality. They taught me abstinence, the sacredness of marriage, and the very basics of science that didn't allow me to question Creationism. Things became foggy when my mother sat me down and explained to me what contraceptives were and what sex exactly was while explaining to me that pre-marital sex wasn't as bad as I had previously thought. I began to struggle with my thoughts between what my mother taught me and what my teachers taught me.

During my eighth grade year I began learning about other, more *sinful* things. Words that shouldn't be uttered. Acts that shouldn't be dared. Cursing so vile that it had the old white

women in my church clutching their pearls. Drinking alcohol that I was obviously too young for. Engaging in sexual conversations with boys that held devious glints in their eyes. Immoral behavior that occurred at a time in my life when I found myself the most religious. I was faithful to God, that's what really mattered. This was at least the balance I found between what I was learning in school and what I was learning outside of school.

Once I entered high school, my first experience at a public school, my beliefs became even more muddled. Just being in my freshmen Biology and Health classes caused me to learn about things that had nothing to do with Creationism and Abstinence. Charles Darwin was a person that was a staple in all my sciences classes. I was captivated by his teachings and became utterly convinced by his findings that humans became the way they are through Evolution. In high school, I began to learn that the world wasn't black and white, but rather it was a gray. I started to doubt my previous teachings about whether or not Catholicism had it right when it came to the world and people.

Despite being confirmed while I was in high school, I still had my doubts. I actually started to doubt my faith more because of Confirmation. Confirmation being the Catholic sacrament where you are admitted into the church as a complete member. Confirmation is a year process and you have to learn a lot about what it means to be "Catholic." Admittedly, it was nice seeing the kids I attended elementary and middle school with because we were no longer awkward preteens dealing with puberty, but it was such a drag. Night classes, retreats, tests? I hated everything about it. Another necessity that hardly seemed necessary.

I specifically remember a time when I was in San Diego for a Catholic retreat that was required for my Confirmation. We were at the University of San Diego with dozens of other church groups. There were performances by a cover band that played popular gospel music and speeches by relatively young people about their journey as Catholics and their connection with God. At the end, a priest came out with the monstrance for the Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, a task that blesses the

congregation after they worshiped the body of Christ. The priest began to walk through the stadium aisles, holding the monstrance above his head as an altar server followed him swinging a container of burning essence. It was a time meant for silent worship and blessings, but it began to change into a series of melodramatic breakdowns. People were sobbing hysterically, screaming through their tears in pure agony and distress. I watched in horror as people got carried out of the auditorium, their bodies' limp and completely knocked unconscious.

All I could think was, "What the hell is going on? This can't be normal." I simply couldn't comprehend how people could be so moved that they passed out or mentally broke down. I never, *ever*, felt so out-of-place and awkward in my life. But a part of me was jealous. How did all these people feel so strongly about something that wasn't even tangible that they felt this overwhelming wave of emotion? Why didn't I feel this way? Wasn't I supposed to? I mean, if God and Jesus are these generous beings, shouldn't I love them unconditionally?

My entire family believes these things and I don't understand how I am the only one to really question it. My brother and sister went through college and still, they remain Catholics. My brother ended up even *more* religious than he was before. I asked hypothetical questions about atheism to my extremely liberal and open-minded mother, and she told me she has her doubts about it. She explained to me that she doesn't believe there are any true atheists, that those people who claim they are, are going through a phase. I remember sitting with her dejected and insecure. Was what I was thinking wrong? Was I just going through a phase? I *should* believe in God. I *should* follow his teachings. I *should* not doubt him.

I stuck with it for the remainder of high school, but I started to have my doubts about the actual church and its teachings. Mass seemed incredibly unnecessary and no matter how much I groaned and complained, my mother dragged me out of bed and into church where I spent an hour alternating between sitting, standing, kneeling, muttering the prayers and sayings that

could be said without conscious thought, and listening to a priest drone on about how we should be acting or how we might be living in sin. I would stare at the various stain-glass windows and silently disagree with the priest. Who was he to judge my choices and my life? He wasn't God. I would scold myself immediately after and quickly forced myself to believe that his intentions were good and I should listen to him and the word of God, but I began to lose the motivation to.

It was in my freshman year of college that my beliefs started to disintegrate. I was roped into a Christian club on campus and it changed me. I sat with them through their bible studies and their club activities. The judgment that poured from their eyes when I told them I was Catholic was hard to miss. They would subtly comment about how strict and rigid the religion was. They failed to even begin to understand why Catholics believed in Saints and implicitly mocked the religion for it. They never explicitly told me that I should believe in Christianity, but I could hear it laced into their polite words like a snake in the grass. They would kindly suggest that I go to church with them and pray with them, but rather than a suggestion it came off as an ultimatum: Do this or be ostracized.

This club left me feeling in a constant state of embarrassment and wariness. I wanted to say the right things as to not upset them, but everything I said was just another lie slipping through my teeth. I prayed and worshiped, but I could feel my own deceit slither down my spine. Every murmured prayer, every half-hearted song sang, every downturned head and falsely closed eyes, it was all a lie that I kept spouting just so I didn't have to be embarrassed any longer. I let them string me along to all their events that I didn't want to go to, I let them drive my friend to tears just because she didn't want to lead prayer, I let them force me to agree with whatever righteous thing they were spitting at the time. I was their puppet and my voice held no worth.

I stopped going to that club. I didn't belong and I started to think that I didn't want to belong. My thoughts and beliefs continued to collide in the confines of my mind, the sounds

of their impact reverberated off the sides of my skull. It was begrudgingly that I finally acknowledged that what I was thinking and what I *should* be believing were opposite. As much as I wanted to believe that there was someone out there for me—that *God* was out there for me, I couldn't bring myself to fully do so.

I can't deny that there might be some supreme being out there, but I know now that I can't completely believe there is one. I found that the feelings that I was experiencing, were not how religion is supposed to make you feel. The feelings of misguided duty that gnawed at my skin, the feelings of insecurity that swam beneath the surface, the feelings of shame that sank on my shoulders, no, religion is not supposed to be like that. In that moment of utter surrender, it was then that I understood religion is not for everyone and with that realization, my freedom followed.

