



LABY RINTH

COLLEGE OF SAN MATEO • THE WRITERS' PROJECT

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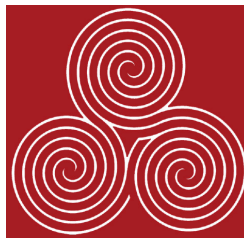
champion of the arts, Rebecca Alex,

the always encouraging ASCSM, for continuing to fund and support this journal,

and

the students who submitted their work to be considered for this publication.

*Keep writing.
Keep creating.
Keep learning*



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Letter From the Editor

We on the editorial team are proud to present this issue of a now two-time award-winning publication. It was a humbling experience to travel to Atlanta, Georgia, where Labyrinth was awarded second place in the National Collegiate Honors Council 2017 Newsletter competition. Meeting my peers and seeing the passion they had for their school publications was inspiring. I was reminded of the power of the written word and the connections it can make or break between us.

It is my hope that our readers, writers, and artists find connection with each other, with an audience, or with those of us on the editorial team who agonize over word, image, and interpretation. Labyrinth is how we celebrate each other and our pursuit of writing, creating, and learning.

Mondana Bathai
Editor in Chief





Awakening
Collection: Sunday Morning Dreams
Yuliya Krupnik

creative

Gold

by Maya Kattler-Gold

Gold:

A name given to me
by an officer at Ellis Island
who couldn't pronounce the Yiddish word
for dove.

I know they may hear Gold
and see bars stacked in safes,
guarded by greedy, big-nosed crows.

But I learned to see goldenrod
and dandelions
and the way my family's faces glow
in the golden light of our candles.

I trained myself
to hear Gold
and see the sun.

Gold:
A syllable I wear,
as many of us do.

I wear it like a yellow star,
knowing anyone could find me on a list.

I wear it like a crown.

The Trumpet Player

by Zachary Lo

He was playing a club when he first saw the monster.

It was Davis's *So What*, a jazz standard. Not the monster, the song. James Harris considered it as close to perfect as a song could get. There was something about the meditative calm of the bassline, the careless two-note refrain — a mantra — that made him feel like he was floating above the music. It was only when he was performing that he was actually happy. He was alone — nothing existed except the moment, the cool valves of the trumpet under his fingers, and the heavy reassurance of metal on his lips. He did not worry. He played.

He played into a microphone, and the speakers were in front of the stage, so he couldn't hear himself very well. That was good. James Harris hated the sound of his own music the way others hate the sound of their own voice on tape. Most people thought he had a great jazz tone, but it wasn't clean enough. The spotlights were harsh, almost enough that he had to squint, and he couldn't make out the audience through the club's darkness. That was good, too.

He also couldn't see the hulking outline silhouetted against the window. It smashed through with a huge furry paw, sending shards of glass soaring across the

room. His quintet lurched to a stop. The lights went out; sparks cascaded to the floor like fireflies. The crunching shriek as the monster dug its claws into the red brick window frame and dragged itself through the hole was a concert E.

Tables went flying as people ran. James Harris stood in the center of the tinkling glass dust as it settled. His drummer, Noah Gerver, tripped over the snare drum as he tried to escape. The hi hats crashed to the floor, and a young red-haired waitress screamed as a black tentacle looped around her torso. She tugged at it uselessly as the monster hauled her into its — mouth? He couldn't tell. Something snapped audibly, and her screams halted.

He ran towards the neon EXIT sign to his left. The monster's shrieks echoed in his brain. In the narrow side alley, he found Noah putting his sticks back in his bag.

"What are you doing?" he said. "We have to go."

"What?" said Noah.

"Did you not see that?"

"I thought it was okay." Noah smiled. His teeth were covered in blood, and a piece of the waitress's red hair was plastered with spit to the corner of his lips.

"What was that?"

"It's nothing," said Noah. He zipped his bag shut and walked back to the

van. James Harris stood in the alley and thought about being eaten.

The second time, he saw it when he was trying to land the changes in Davis's *On Green Dolphin Street*. He heard a snarl outside the door. He didn't look up at first, but when the wood started to creak menacingly, he glanced up and saw the small window covered in black tentacles like an invasive growth. He barricaded the door with chairs and stands. He went back to the beginning and played through each scale one at a time. At five in the morning, he gathered the courage to look back at the window. The monster was gone. That was the first time he slept in a practice room.

When he did sleep in his room, he had nightmares. Maybe it followed him. In the nightmare, it lurked at the foot of the bed, daring him to rest and let down his guard. He put on *Kind of Blue* to show it that he wouldn't. He slipped into something close to sleep, when his exhausted body drew a thin black veil across the world. He woke up doused in icy fear and smelling of sweat, suffocated by tentacles that weren't there.

Some days he wouldn't eat or go the bathroom because the monster was waiting for him with its many black eyes glittering in the dark. "Where are you from?" he

yelled at it. "Why are you here?" It did not answer except to lick its lips, as if to say, I am here for you.

Three weeks later, James Harris met Arthur Becker. He'd just finished a performance, Lee Morgan's *Ceora*, and he was about to leave when he saw the old man alone at the end of the bar. "Oh my God," said James Harris. "Are you Arthur Becker?"

Becker didn't really smile. The corners of his lips tightened in a way that might have been considered an approximation of a smile. It did not look like the grin worn by contemporary jazz legend Arthur Becker, the greatest pianist of the twenty-first century. That grin draped itself carelessly over his lips, but now his face was closed and hard.

The rest of the man didn't resemble his old self much either. His limbs had shriveled and his belly had swelled. His thin white hair was gathered in a greasy ponytail, and his nose and ears sprouted fantastic tufts of white bristles. "Yeah," he said. "I guess so."

James Harris sat down next to him. The club was playing something recorded, Coltrane's *Locomotion*, while they waited for the next band to come on. "You're one of my favorites," he said. "You were amaz-

ing.”

Becker made a noise of amusement, a sharp exhalation through his nose. He finished a glass of something and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. “Apparently.”

“I’m at the Rinberg conservatory. Playing jazz.” He didn’t like Rinberg. The college conservatory was world class, the best in the nation; that was why he’d come, but the town depressed him. It was small, with nothing around for miles except fields of dirt too dry to farm. The concert hall was the largest building by far. The rest of the town was a pale echo of the college’s prestige. Jazz clubs sprung up only because the students wanted places to play. There were no landmarks of note. It was forgettable. Sometimes, he felt the expanse of the emptiness around him, a vacuum of nothing and nowhere, and it made him want to scream. The nothing sucked at his feet like mud. He wanted to tell Becker this, somehow. He thought the old man might understand.

Becker glanced up and pointed at his glass; a barista refilled it with the same pale amber liquid. He took another drink. He swallowed. Coltrane tore through the changes.

“Do you still play? I mean, you haven’t performed in years. Are you going

to? Ever?”

“No.”

“Why not?”

Instead of answering, Becker finished his drink in silence. James Harris watched the old man. There was a low growl and a thumping noise under the floorboards. The air took on the scent of an abandoned basement, the scent of old meat rotting. James Harris knew the smell. He stood up and declared, “I have to go.”

“It’ll find you again,” said Becker. “It’s everywhere.”

James Harris stopped. The banging noises got louder. “Do you see it?” he said. “Can you stop it?”

“You can’t kill it,” said Becker. “Nobody can.” The floor trembled. The bottles on the shelves clinked together as they shook.

“Why does it want me?”

Arthur Becker’s eyes were ice over an endless lake. He suddenly seemed deeply sad. “It’s a part of you.”

The bar exploded in a cloud of sawdust; the shelves behind it split with a shattering of bottles. The monster dragged its swollen body out of the pit, clawing its way across the floor toward him. The old man did not move as it rose up behind him. “What are you doing?” shouted James Harris, backing away.

“There’s no point,” said Arthur Becker. “I’m already dead.” His eyes were boarded-up windows over an abandoned house. The monster lashed out and Becker’s limp body toppled from his stool, his chest ripped open by the wicked claws.

James Harris turned and ran away from the hideous beak and from the little old dead man, humming to himself on the ground.

James Harris ran alone. The crashing of the monster followed close behind him, never more than a block away. He thought about being eaten. The snap of the beak, the toothy embrace, the warm darkness. A mother’s voice, promising that it was okay. He could live like that, adrift in the ebb and flow. After enough time, his friends would forget about him. So would his family. He could stop running.

He thought about being eaten, but he knew he couldn’t do it. A survival instinct, some deep ancestral need to live, moved his legs. He imagined that instead of running away, he was running towards something. He believed he could run forever.





Untitled
Huan Du

To the Devil's Chagrin

by Karla Polanco

To the Devil's chagrin,
I keep fighting.
Those buzzing, berating thoughts and that blooming of fire in the chest make it hard though.
The looks, the comments,
Even the presence of people sometimes make the rose's thorns dig deeper into that carnal flesh of the heart.
Even worse, the mind.
That labyrinth of "what if's" and "could haves" and "should haves."
That place where Mr. Minotaur guards.
But mind games get past even him.
That's where it all goes to hell.

Think of the guy from the Tell-Tale Heart.
Think of that panic and paranoia in your head.
It's scary.
Overbearingly so.
So much so that half the time you don't even know what's going on.
You know something's wrong but have no physical or mental energy to stop it.

But to the Devil's chagrin,
I keep fighting.
It's hard.

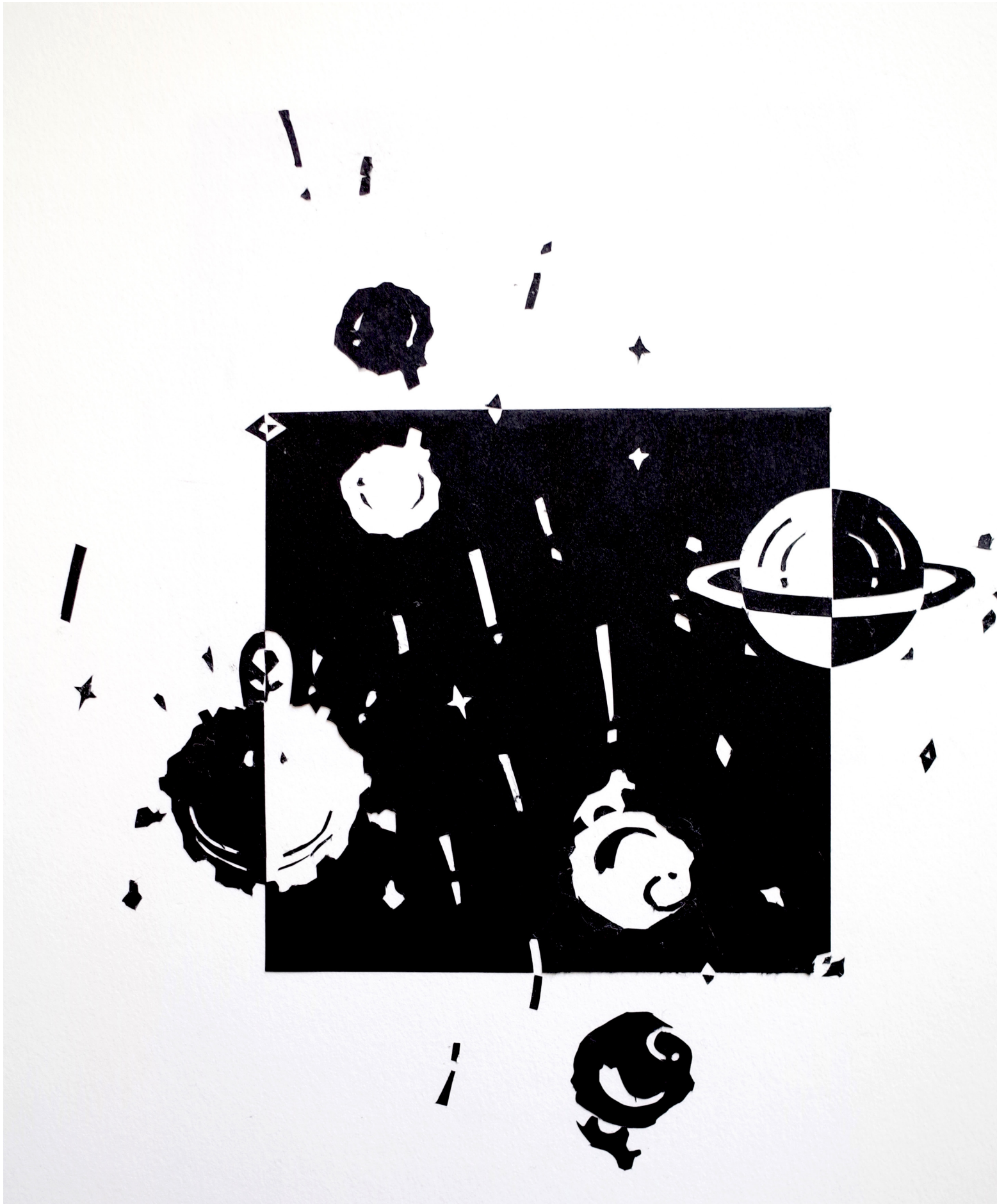
It takes a long time, and you struggle as the globules of refined sugar cane stick and won't let go.
As if you're beating yourself up with words.
Like an intense rap battle with such a spectacular use of rhythm that you can barely keep up.

But to the Devil's chagrin,
I keep fighting.
Because there are things worth fighting for.
Valuable, simple things you overlook.

It's hard.
I won't lie.
But it's better to struggle now than later.
It's hard, but that makes picking yourself up an even better reward.

Have patience.
Have faith.
It'll get better.
Even if the Devil himself wants to drag you down to the level of tar and tarnish,
Pick yourself up to spite him.

To the Devil's chagrin,
I keep fighting.



B613
Huan Du

A Boy at the Edge of the Universe

by Damian Wang

He thinks of a soft, soft boy with treble-clef hands,
a tremor to his lips
and a rainstorm brewing in his sky-high eyes,
rimmed with the dark red weight of living.

Fifty thousand desperate thoughts:
A guillotine in his mind,
neck ready at any moment,
suspended in defense.
In a defenseless attempt
being tested by a vicious jury,
yet he welcomes them
through a sagging of his shoulders,
a slump of his neck,
fingers that fall at his sides so limp,
and dead stars that plunge from his clamshell lips.

He thinks of how much he wants
to simply stand in the same space as this sad, sad boy,
nudge his shoulder with his own
and say, "I'm here, and I believe."



Moon Face

by Emma Ryals Ward

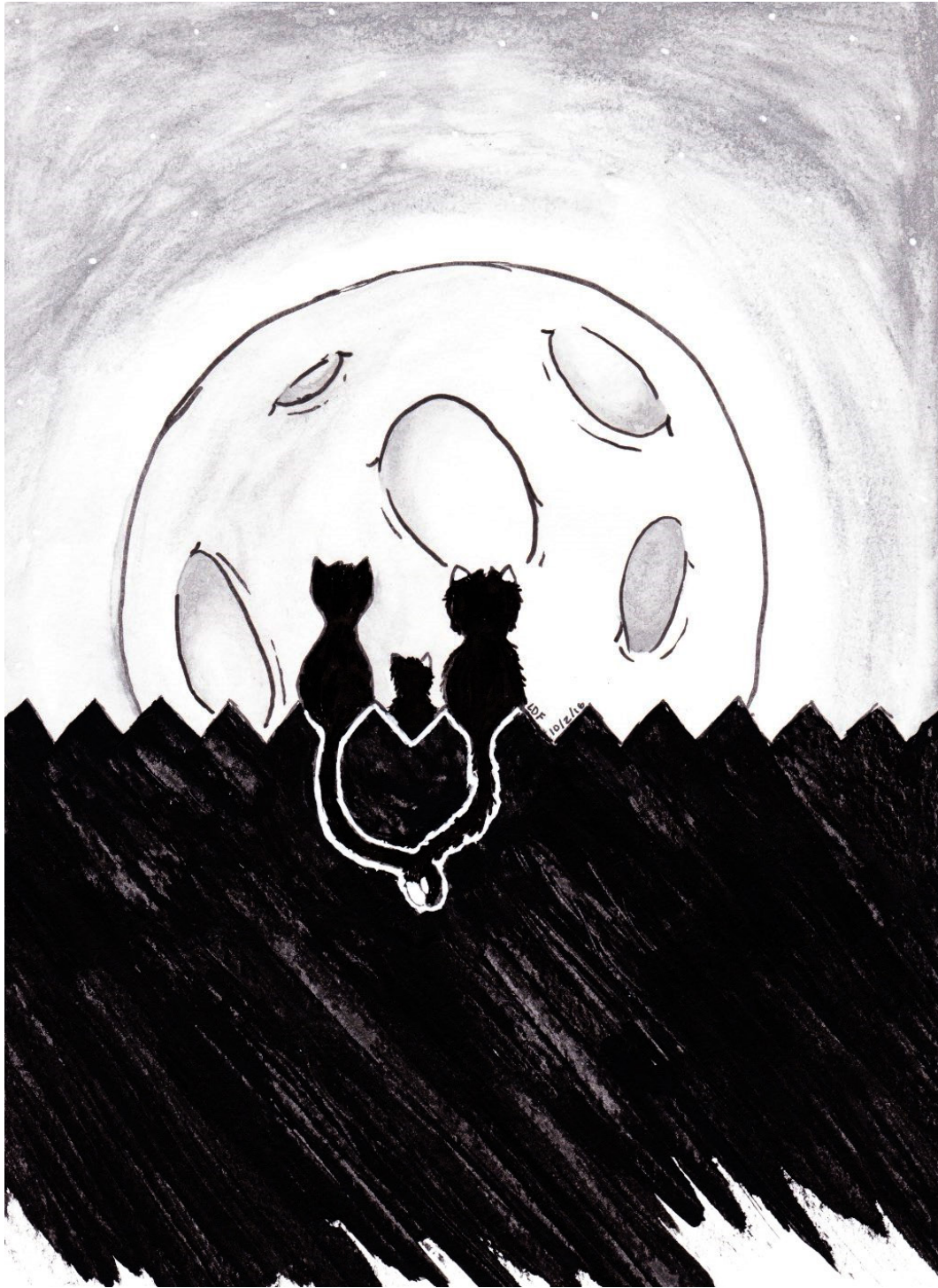
Isn't it beautiful
how the moon
and our oceans
give to one another
without taking?

My tides
have been moving
for long and beaded years.
I have felt your hands.
I have received
your gifts.

Now
I need only to see
your face,
your tide-moving,
gift-giving,
whole, miraculous
moon face.



Illustration by **Peijiang Xie**



Full Moon
Lea Danae Fisher

Thank You

by Emma Ryals Ward

I am the child of my mother's sunshine,
my father's earth.

I am the child of my mother's fears,
my father's depression.

I am the child of my mother's hips,
my father's eyes.

I am the child of their united love.

The garden that is all that was planted before them,
and all that was planted after.

I wade through their weeds, their flowers, their soil.

I swim through their lemon trees,
their blackberry bushes, their grape vines.

I lie down and feel the movement of our universe
beneath me, around me, above me.

This is what it is,
to know both of my creators,
finally.



Lover's Sunset
Tony Relator



The Lucky Ones

by Rosemarie Taylor

They say you're lucky if you're in love
And it's reciprocated
And healthy
And innocent
And pure.

So here's to us,
Our air is thinning
And it hurts like hell
But please,
Don't forget about me
When you've
Let it all go.

Grandpa's Recipe

by Maya Kattler-Gold

I wish I could bake,
without eating the batter until my stomach hurts.
But I'm like my mother in that way,
so I'm afraid that the marble cake recipe
will die with my father.

The marble cakes
that my father bakes.
It's grandpa's recipe.

His father never made more than 20,000 a year
in that tiny bakery in Queens.
He worked long days.
Every Tuesday
through every Sunday.

On Mondays, he took my father out of school
to the zoo, or to a picture,
or to the ferris wheel on Coney Island.

My father loved showing me the monkeys at the zoo,
but he never wanted to take me to Coney Island.
Maybe because it makes him remember the ice cream cones.
Maybe because it makes him remember the zeros on tests,
the mark of an unexcused absence,
the truancy officer showing up to their front door.

Not long after my grandfather had died,
when I still saw
my father's hands shaking
as he poured his antidepressants
into his palm,
he brought home a box of rainbow cookies—
almond sponge cake and raspberry jam.
He held those cookies
like a child holds his father's hand.



Untitled
Saber Mao

Balikbayan

By Tony Relator

Balikbayan Box: (Filipino luggage) is a ubiquitous corrugated box containing any number of small items and sent by an overseas Filipino known as a “balikbayan.”

By the time I reached luggage conveyor belt #6 at Ninoy Aquino International Airport, a herd of corrugated cardboard parcels had already queued. The gargantuan boxes, whose edges had been softened by rough handling from the stainless steel machinery, stood proud in the romance of arrival. Massive swathes of triple-layered duct tape cradled several. The extra security made them seem desperate, as if they were trying to smother both the hard-won stories that forced them from their homes and the cherished recollections that brought them back.

Right before I left, I had made the decision to prepare one of these boxes to share with my family back in the Philippines. I wanted to feel like

these proud balikbayans, smiling triumphant stories of success to the wide-eyed children of titos, titas, and kuyas.

The cargo marched off one-by-one into the hard-working, expectant hands of the Filipinos. Each was made from the sturdiest and cheapest of materials so that the maximum amount of penance could be paid, each a validation, each a price exacted from those who, out of necessity, left their loved ones for so long, only to later return as revered strangers. After about 50 minutes of waiting, a crew of six solid-looking baggage workers emerged from the cargo bay. Between the careful fingers of the porters a large plasma TV screen was cradled: the trophy of western promises. I watched as one of these altars was reverently offered to a man with sunburned skin. His triumphant smile wore earnest and true on his beaming face like it was the Filipino merit badge for courage under fire.

The final call for bags was given and mine was yet to be found. I headed over to the carrier service window to see if there had been a mistake. Panicked, I took one last look at the handful of unclaimed baggage and saw my own. My balikbayan box was not one of those authentic, slightly damaged, corrugated cardboard blocks. Instead, it was a knock-off luggage bag on wheels. I had purchased it that morning in a Chinatown gift shop a store famed for the kind of cheap economy you can enjoy when companies rape third world working conditions.

My cargo contained the closest approximation of what I felt should be in a Balikbayan Box. I had stumbled like a novice from gift shop to gift shop trying to imagine the picture perfect gift for relatives that I knew only from hearsay and tainted 15-year-old memories. My only saving grace was the wisdom gifted to me by my Dad and Tito Nonong, the true Balikbayans.

Relief at claiming my baggage cleared my sweaty brow, and I gathered up the immature offerings with ease. The new rolling wheels glided smoothly, the bearings free from dirt and grime. Compared to the sincere wheezing brown boxes, my stuffed suitcase felt surprisingly light.

Over an hour had passed and I

worried that I had kept my Tito Toto Nando waiting. Why had it taken so long for my baggage to be sorted? I looked again at the conveyor belt and hoped that my luggage was truly just a late delivery and that it wasn't that I had overlooked it from the start. Either way, I had arrived and was ready to embrace the names and faces familiar only through stories.

The airport's arrivals at MNL spill out into the sweltering tropic air. As the proud pinoyos crossed the wild city streets of Manila to their waiting families, I felt somewhat in limbo. I'm not quite the tourist who knows nothing of the significance of these people returning home. I'm not quite the balikbayan returning like a datu to his loving people. I tiptoe a thin line. I'm a Caucapinoy, a half-breed Filipino-American raised in the USA who knows so few words in Tagalog that their utterance is more suited as a gimmick, a joke among peers.

Perhaps this will change. Perhaps someday I will connect with this country in a way that, when I return here, it will be like coming home.

Not from Here, Nor from There

by Anonymous

Not until I was older
did I begin to feel trapped...
Wanting to go across the border,
with no chance of coming back.
I'm not from here, nor from there...
I was born in a beautiful city
that I haven't seen since.
Brought to this country
when I was just two years old,
I don't even remember
the faraway land I called home.

Just a few miles away,
separated by a border
A simple line drawn to divide
my corrupted country from
the land of opportunity and order.

They say we want to take advantage.
The reality is we're fleeing all the damage.
We chase the American dream,
which is not as glorious as it seems.

My whole life I've grown up
in this land that wasn't my birthplace.
The only thing I've known.
So when they say we need to leave,
I say, "Where?"
This is my home too.
I'm not from here, nor from there...
I wasn't asked to be brought here,
but this is where I want to be.
"Illegals... aliens... undocumented."
Your need to feel superior will not outshine me.

Despite your chants,
I am #HereToStay,
because I will fight for our justice.
We will fight
for our stories to be replayed.
Maybe they'll understand what it's like
to feel like you're not from here, nor from there.



Illustration by **Peijiang Xie**

academic



In the Reflecting Pool
Tony Relator

Black Women Rising into Formation

by Aneoma Kanu

Art is a powerful tool that has many capabilities, one of them being spreading information and making people feel better. Whether it be a lovely poem or a catchy tune, art has the power to reach so many people because the messages can be said in so many different ways. One important message in today's society is feminism--especially black feminism. Black feminism has become a very important subcategory of feminism since it involves not only feminism, but also racism and discrimination. It focuses on destroying stereotypes of black women as well as society's attitude towards them. Although written during different time periods, Beyoncé's song, "Formation," and Maya Angelou's poem, "Still I Rise," call

for the action, empowerment, and coming together of black women.

In both "Formation" and "Still I Rise," Beyoncé and Maya Angelou address the idea of black women coming together to find liberation and fight for social justice. They articulate their point in a very powerful way that may make some uncomfortable. Angelou delivers her point from the beginning with her title, "Still I Rise," which is a phrase mentioned in almost every stanza. The idea of black women banding together is emphasized with similes used to describe rising up, such as, "like dust, I'll rise" and "like air, I'll rise" (Angelou). It is not just one piece of dust or a little bit of air that people usually think of, but a large amount of dust

PEOPLE FORGET THE MEANING OF FEMINISM,

and air that, in this case, is rising up from the ground.

Angelou's use of similes helps the readers understand that as she rises up, she hopes that other black women will do the same. Although one person can make a statement, there needs to be many more to make a change, and Angelou addresses that through the process of rising.

"Formation" also touches on the same idea of black women coming together. The infamous line that has become extremely popular ever since the song came out is "Okay, ladies, now let's get in Formation" (Beyoncé). That powerful line is her hook and her call to action. She did not use imagery or metaphor like Maya Angelou, she simply states her claim and that is what makes it so commanding. The "okay" in the beginning of the line can be seen as a turning point or similar to someone saying that they have had enough and want to make a change. Being black comes with its racial issues and being a woman comes with its sexist issues. To be a black woman is to deal with accepting and acknowledging, not only one's blackness, but also one's womanhood. It is easier to conform to please the racist and the sexist, but Angelou and

Beyoncé champion the opposite. They believe that the only way to overcome the hurdle of racism and sexism in society is to work together to defeat them.

Another important topic addressed in both works is the concept of being content with being a black woman. Not only do both authors illustrate the pride of being a black woman, but also the appreciation of their sexuality. Angelou emphasizes this notion by asking the reader the question: "Does my sexiness upset you?" (Angelou). She even goes so far as to ask the readers if it surprises them "that I dance[s] like I've got diamonds at the meeting of my thighs" (Angelou). Beyoncé illustrates the topic of feminism and sexiness, but is more assertive and boastful. She states, "I slay" and "we gon' slay" repeatedly throughout the whole song, slay being a term used among millennials to indicate being the best and successful (Beyoncé). For black women, it is not uncommon for them to feel uncomfortable or unhappy about who they are because society does not necessarily give them the opportunity to do otherwise. We see not only black women, but women in general attacked for being a feminist, especially if they talk about their sex

WHETHER IT BE BLACK FEMINISM OR NOT.

life or if they show off some skin. Society has created the stigma that being a woman means being covered, physically and mentally. Both authors try to emphasize that it is okay to be happy with oneself and to be content with their femininity and sexuality.

Beyoncé is ridiculed repeatedly for her public stance on feminism and her flashy, revealing attire. In an article from *de Volkskrant*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie claims that Beyoncé's type of feminism is not her type of feminism. She believes Beyoncé's feminism is still derived from doing things based on what men want and think; however, that is not the case. Frequently, people forget the meaning of feminism, whether it be black feminism or not. The fundamental goal is to have equal respect and equal rights for men and women. If Beyoncé wants to wear barely anything and dance on stage, sing about seducing her husband, or—in the case of the song "Formation"—sing about buying him shoes and clothes, as a woman, she has the right to do as she pleases. Both Angelou and Beyoncé try to show that the freedom to choose what we want to do with our body, to be happy and prideful of our sexuality, and to

express femininity are what feminism is all about.

Although both poems are very similar, the difference between them lies in the tone of the two pieces of literature. One way to look at the differences in tone is to see how both authors address the topic of hate. In "Still I Rise," Angelou addresses the haters by stating, "You may shoot me with your words" and that "you may kill me with youth hatefulness" but those "bitter, twisted lies" will not phase her because she will still rise from them. She does not necessarily have a method of stopping the hate and anger but believes that simply being the better person in the situation and ignoring it will prove to the haters that she is superior. Beyoncé, on the other hand, has a more forceful tone when addressing her haters. She calls them corny, stating, "you know you that bitch when you cause all this conversation" and to "always stay gracious best revenge is your paper" (Beyoncé). Instead of ignoring the haters and not acknowledging them, Beyoncé believes we should boast and show how we are superior. She brings up the idea that the more people talk, the more that indicates that you are doing something right and that one's

ranking and the amount of money they make is another way to show your haters that you are better than them.

The main reasons for the different stances in their approach to hate and their tones throughout their story may be due to their ages and the time each piece of work was created. While Beyoncé is a woman of the 21st century, a time when women speak out in a more unapologetic and forceful tone, Maya Angelou is a woman of the 20th century. Angelou wrote the poem in 1978 when she was 50 years old and had already lived a very impactful life since she was very involved in the Civil Rights Movement. She was born in St. Louis, Missouri on 1928, 8 years after the 19th amendment was passed, allowing women the right to vote. Throughout Angelou's life, she was getting firsthand experience on how impactful the second wave of feminism in America, the Civil Rights Movement, and the important people involved like Martin Luther King Jr. had on society. Beyoncé, however, was born in Houston, Texas in 1981, in the fourth wave of feminism in America and with a different take on civil rights issues.

The fourth wave of feminism explores black feminism, which was not as prevalent during the second wave. The assertiveness in the song "Formation" and the lack of force in "Still I Rise" is partially due to how the topics have changed with society. Although women still fight for some causes that were emphasized in the second wave, such as equal pay, new causes have come into play: slut shaming and media's sexualization of women. Likewise, the women back then are not very similar to the women of today in that they have dropped many of the stereotypical roles that were only tied to women, such as only being good for taking care of children and cleaning. The women of today tend to be more outspoken and assertive, thus explaining the difference in tone between the two pieces of work.

Maya Angelou and Beyoncé are two very important and powerful black women who have made a large impact in the feminist movement, particularly black feminism. They used their positions as an opportunity to spread information and to call for action knowing that the topics may be controversial and



I Want to Stay Here
Xiao Li

Gender Guises

by Julia Thollaug

Chicken with Plums, by Marjane Satrapi, *M. Butterfly*, by David Henry Hwang, and *Woman at Point Zero*, by Nawal El Saadawi, tell the stories of vibrant characters who have been subdued by their environments. Whether trapped in an unhappy marriage, closeted in an intolerant society, or made to exist as a member of a lower class, the lives of Nahid, Song, and Firdaus display the ways in which persecution may inhibit emotional development. Thanks to their circumstances, each of these individuals have been deprived of power, which prevents them from flourishing as their true selves.

In Marjane Satrapi's *Chicken with Plums*, Foucault-Psychoanalysis exposes how the marriage between Nahid and her husband, Nasser Ali Khan, leaves her unfairly burdened and emotionally suppressed. Foucault-Psychoanalysis focuses on the power systems exhibited in a text, and this lens allows for critical study of the effects of the relationship on Nahid. Taken for granted by Nasser Ali Khan, Nahid is stuck in a difficult marriage to a man who, unbeknownst to her, never loved her in the first place: "Nasser Ali... You should marry her.' 'But, Mom, I don't love her.'... [time jump forward] 'You finally asked me to marry you!'" (Satrapi 47) Nasser Ali Khan's confession to his

mother reveals that he marries Nahid although he does not love her, while Nahid has loved him for many years: "I've been in love with you since I was eight" (Satrapi 43). Nahid agrees to the engagement believing that Nasser Ali Khan reciprocates her love when, in fact, he does not. This misunderstanding places Nahid in a fraught, unhappy marriage that she neither anticipates nor desires – a situation bred by Nasser Ali Khan when he keeps the truth to himself. In this case, knowledge truly is power, because when Nahid enters the marriage lacking a key piece of information – that Nasser Ali Khan does not love her – the power in the relationship lands in the hands of her husband. Nasser Ali Khan could have called off the engagement and spared Nahid years of discontent, but instead she spends years trying to comprehend how the man who loves her could treat her indifferently and consequently grows bitter and unhappy. Over time, Nasser Ali Khan becomes less and less emotionally present, leaving Nahid to undertake an unfairly large load in their lives: "It's not possible! I've had it with always having to take care of everything! I wash! I iron! I clean the house! On top of it all, I have to work!! In the name of god! You're the man! You should help support your family! But no!!!... Your hands

are too delicate for chores!” (Satrapi 42) Here we see how the balance of power has continued to tip toward Nasser Ali Khan. While Nahid is bound to her domestic duties, Nasser Ali Khan is free to do what he wishes – a quintessential mark of power. A comparable dynamic exists between Firdaus and Marzouk in *Woman at Point Zero*. Firdaus is expected to give Marzouk part of her earnings, while he reciprocates with essentially nothing and, in fact, adds to her worries: “Marzouk... enjoyed a good laugh as he watched me from a distance, striving in vain to find some way of protecting myself from him” (Saadawi 126). Firdaus’s efforts to defend herself confirm that Marzouk has secured power over her, though more intentionally than Nasser Ali Khan does in marrying Nahid. Had Nahid accurately understood Nasser Ali Khan’s feelings, she might have chosen a husband who could meet her needs. Instead, she lives a life of tense animosity, bereft of affection or companionship. Exploring the marriage of Nasser Ali Khan and Nahid using Foucault-Pschoanalysis shows that Nahid has less power in the relationship, and that the resulting emotional damage precludes her from living the life she dreamed of.

While Nahid is oppressed in an unhappy marriage, analyzing David Henry Hwang’s *M. Butterfly* through Post-Colonialism establishes that Song is oppressed both for his homosexuality and for the gender identity he is forced to assume. In working on behalf of the government, Song finds that in order to survive in communist China he must hide his sexuality and pretend to be a woman: “Chin: You’re wearing a dress... Song: It’s a... disguise, Ms. Chin... It helps me in my assignment... Chin: You’re not gathering information in any way that violates

Communist Party principles, are you?... Don’t forget: there is no homosexuality in China!” (Hwang 39) Fearing that the authorities might punish him for being gay, Song dons an identity that will allow him to desire men. Here, Post-Colonialism—which considers how a post-colonial society and the various ethnicities inhabiting it are portrayed in a text—indicates that, in dressing as a woman, Song loses control over his own life. Gayatri Spivak’s concept of the subaltern posits that white men have the most agency and power while women of color have the least. Song’s female character enables him to avoid persecution, but robs him of the agency and power societally granted to men. In addition, once Song appears to be a woman, his race causes him to be viewed as deferential, weak, and gullible by Gallimard and his French countrymen:

Song: The West thinks of itself as masculine—big guns, big industry, big money—so the East is feminine—weak, delicate, poor... The West believes the East, deep down, wants to be dominated – because a woman can’t think for herself... You expect Oriental countries to submit to your guns, and you expect Oriental women to be submissive to your men. (Hwang 62)

This passage demonstrates the concept of the subaltern. White, Western men, such as Gallimard, are predisposed to believe that a woman of color, like Song, is “submissive”—an attitude which costs Song authority in his post-colonial society.

In contrast, *Chicken with Plums* offers no evidence that Nahid loses agency and power due to her ethnicity or gender. Nahid, unlike Song, lives in an ethnically homogenous society, and thus does not face persecution for her race. Within

her fraught marriage, it is neither race nor gender but duty which claims her autonomy: “[I have] to take care of everything! I wash! I iron! I clean the house! On top of it all, I have to work!!” (Satrapi 42). Though Nahid is unhappy, she is unable to leave her husband because she feels responsible for her family and is bound to her duties. Song, as a citizen of Mao’s China, is also bound by duty, but he must hide his homosexuality so that he may continue to serve his country. As a result, what little power he retains as a man of color is stripped away when he is made to live as a woman of color. Hence, Post-Colonialism reveals that Song, subjugated for his sexuality, is dually oppressed for his race and assumed gender while his true identity as a gay man remains hidden.

While Song experiences sexism only after disguising himself, Firdaus, the infamous heroine of Nawal El Saadawi’s *Woman at Point Zero*, is born into a sexist culture which blocks her from attaining her own sovereignty. When scrutinized using Marxist Literary Theory, which studies class structures within a text and seeks to understand how social classes are represented and reinforced, it is plain that women are of a lower class than men: “[M]en were in control of both our worlds, the one on earth, and the one in heaven” (Saadawi 124). In this society, men are in control, which Firdaus experiences both in her interpersonal relationships and at a state level. Marzouk, the man who forcibly becomes her pimp, informs Firdaus that people are divided into two classes: “There are only two categories of people, Firdaus, masters and slaves.’ ‘In that case I

want to be one of the masters and not one of the slaves.’ ‘How can you be one of the masters? A woman on her own cannot be a master” (Saadawi 129). His statement reveals that Firdaus’s gender subordinates her to Marzouk. The use of the terms “master” and “slave” imply a radical difference in class between men and women, which is affirmed when Marzouk seizes power over Firdaus. This chauvinist societal oppression is buttressed by the local judiciary: “I found out that the law punishes women like me, but turns a blind eye to what men do” (Saadawi 126). As a woman, Firdaus is not afforded the same equal protection under the law enjoyed by men and therefore occupies a lower class. In *M. Butterfly*, Song encounters similar challenges from the leftover colonial establishment in communist China. Song’s female alter ego is subject to the whims of white men, who have “sort of an international rape mentality towards the East” (Hwang 62). This unequal power structure leaves Song vulnerable to the white men who exist outside native Chinese society. Firdaus, however, faces an *internal* rape mentality from the men *within* her society, including Marzouk: “One day he saw me entering my house and followed me. I tried to shut the door in his face, but he took out a knife, threatened me with it, and he forced his way in” (Saadawi 126). Facing this sort of oppression from all directions without any legal recourse, Firdaus is constantly under threat. Though she wishes “to be a free prostitute” (Saadawi 124), Marzouk’s enslavement of Firdaus robs her of the ability to achieve autonomy. Marxist Literary The-

ory illustrates that Firdaus, confined by her gender to a lower class, is restrained by a society which devalues her and prohibits her from living as a free individual.

Chicken with Plums, *M. Butterfly*, and *Woman at Point Zero* each feature characters whose autonomy has been compromised, preventing them from realizing their true selves. Marjane Sa-

trapi, David Henry Hwang, and Nawal El Saadawi have crafted narratives which stress the painful effects an oppressive environment—be that a fraught marriage, a homophobic culture, or a chauvinistic social structure—can have on an individual. The stories of Nahid, Song, and Firdaus highlight the significance of self-determination in a world that seeks to shape us in its own image.

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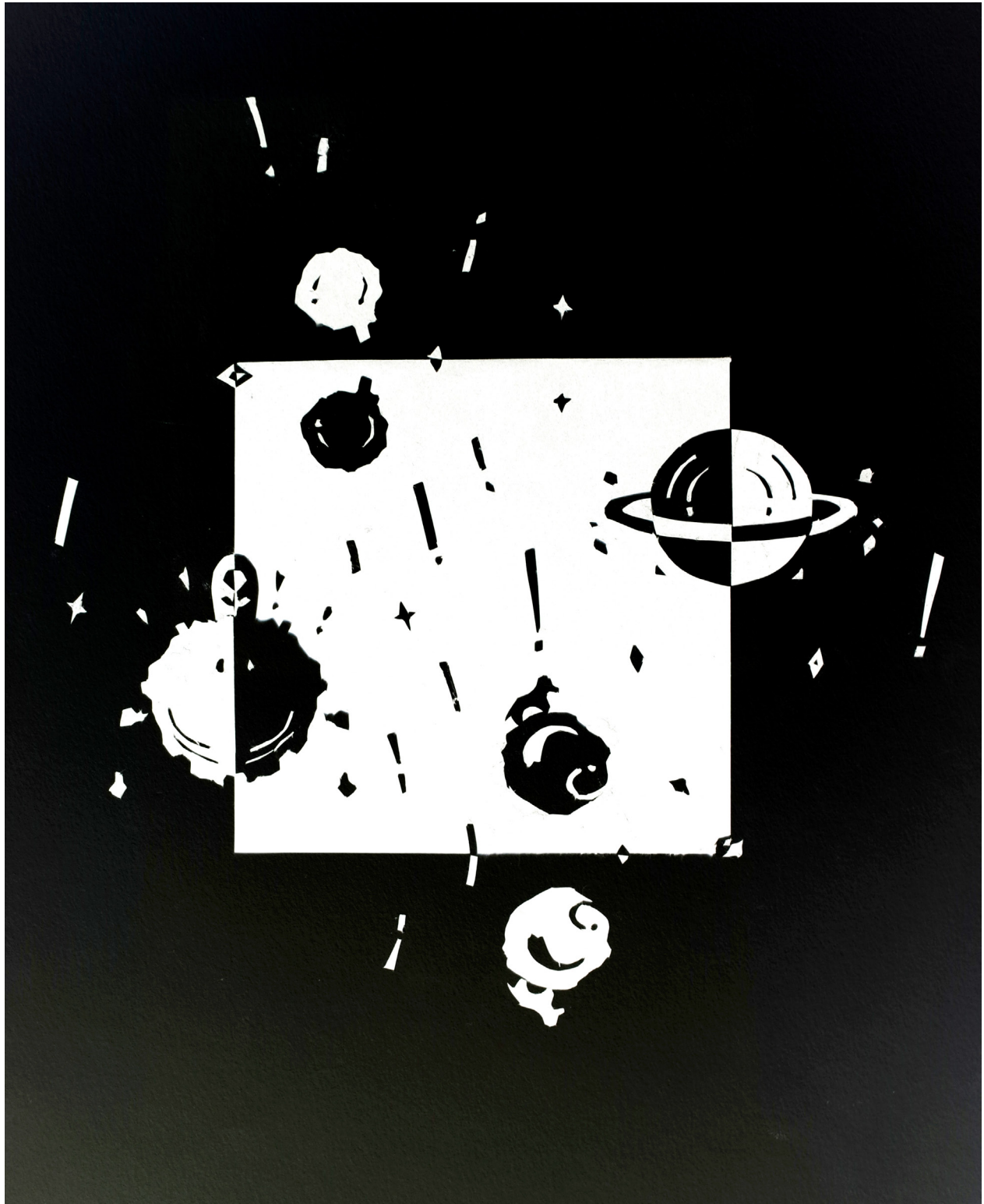
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