

The MANTELPIECE

Issue 15

Literary Magazine

September 2024





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Table of Contents

Editorial

Lillian Heimisdottir 4 Farewell to Light

Literature

Eleanor Jiménez 5 Golden Hours

Essay

Elizabeth Templeman 8 Faster Than the Speed of Life

Heimir Steinarsson 12 Silence of the Mind

Fiction

Mad Crawford 10 Graffiti Girls

Malina Douglas 20 Marmaris Musk

Poetry

Jane Putnam Perry 11 water in water out

Ashley Andresson 13 Thorvaldsdottir / Metacosmos Concert

henry 7. reneau, jr. 25 Sigourney Valentine O'Connell, aka Muse

Travel

Rebecca Ruth Gould 14 How an English Village Saved Coleridge's Creativity

Commentary

Erik N. Patel 23 The Art of Procrastination

Food & Drink

Hector Jean Fournier 26 The Allure of Eating Out

The Light Side

Heimir Steinarsson 27 Death and Taxes

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Farewell to Light

A Creative Transition from Summer to Autumn

As the days grow shorter and the light begins to fade, we find ourselves in that quiet, introspective period of late summer, poised on the cusp of autumn. The shift in seasons is more than just a change in temperature and scenery; it's an emotional and creative transition that has long influenced artists, writers, and thinkers. For many, the end of summer represents a farewell to the easy, expansive energy that comes with sun-filled days and open skies. As autumn approaches, bringing with it a sense of closure and contemplation, we are invited to reflect on how this shift affects our inner world and our creative lives.

In summer, light lingers, stretching the days into what often feels like an endless procession of possibility. There's a kind of freedom that comes with the season—a loosening of routines, a blurring of boundaries between work and play. Summer, with its long evenings and shimmering heat, has a way of coaxing us out of doors and into the world, encouraging spontaneity and indulgence in moments of leisure. For many writers and creatives, summer is a time of exploration—whether through travel, new experiences, or simply basking in the luxury of more time to dream.

But as August wanes and September looms, the sun begins to set a little earlier each evening. The light, once so generous, starts to retreat. There is a palpable shift in the atmosphere, a cooling of both air and mood. The vibrant greens of summer start to fade, making way for the golds, oranges, and reds of autumn. With this change comes a deep sense of transition—both in nature and in ourselves. The expansive energy of summer gives way to something quieter, more reflective. We find ourselves turning inward, much like the leaves that curl inward and fall to the ground.

For the creative mind, this transition from summer to autumn can be bittersweet.

The light that once fueled long hours of outdoor writing or painting is slipping away, taking with it the sense of boundless possibility that summer carries. The looming autumn asks something different of us: it invites us to slow down, to contemplate, to let go. In many ways, autumn is a season of harvest—not just for farmers, but for artists and writers, too. It is a time to gather the fruits of the summer's labor, to bring ideas home and shape them into something concrete. The creative energy that once flowed outward now begins to turn inward, asking for focus and discipline.

“As we bid farewell to the light, we welcome a new kind of illumination—a quieter, softer hue that invites us to slow down, to reflect, and to create with intention.”

But with this shift comes an emotional reckoning. The farewell to light is, for many, a farewell to a certain kind of freedom. It can feel melancholic, this slow descent into shorter days and colder nights. There is a sense of loss, an acknowledgment that time is passing and that the bright days of summer cannot last forever. This awareness of time's inevitable progression often brings with it a heightened sense of urgency—a desire to complete unfinished projects, to make the most of what remains. Autumn, with its falling leaves and cooling temperatures, becomes a poignant reminder of impermanence, a call to finish what we started before the cold sets in.

Yet, in this farewell to light, there is also a quiet beauty. The softening of the sun's rays, the way shadows stretch longer in the afternoons, the crispness in the air—all of

these things bring with them a new kind of inspiration. For many, autumn is a season of renewal, not in the way spring is, with its bursting new life, but in a deeper, more introspective way. It is a time for turning inward, for reflection and revision. Writers often find themselves drawn to themes of memory, loss, and transformation during this time of year, as the changing landscape mirrors the internal shifts taking place within.

Autumn also offers a certain kind of discipline that summer lacks. With the return of routine—whether through the start of the academic year or simply the natural rhythm of the seasons—comes the opportunity to focus, to settle into the work that may have been left unfinished during the carefree days of summer. The shorter days demand a more intentional use of time, and many find that their creativity is sharpened by the structure that autumn imposes. There is comfort in this structure, a sense that with the end of summer comes a new beginning, a chance to dig deeper into the work that matters most.

Ultimately, the transition from summer to autumn is both an emotional and creative journey. It is a time of letting go—of light, of warmth, of the easy days of summer—but also a time of gathering in. It is a season that asks us to balance between the freedom we've enjoyed and the discipline we now need to embrace. And while the fading light may bring with it a sense of melancholy, it also brings the opportunity for introspection, for focusing on the work that nourishes us at a deeper level.

As we bid farewell to the light, we welcome a new kind of illumination—a quieter, softer hue that invites us to slow down, to reflect, and to create with intention. And perhaps that is the gift of autumn: in its fading warmth, it offers us the space to turn inward, to harvest the fruits of our summer labor, and to prepare for the new work ahead. □ *L.H.*

Golden Hours

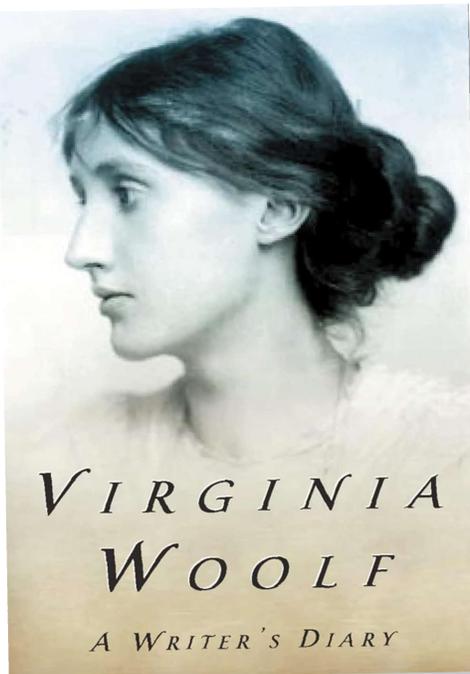
Writers on Their End-of-Summer Rituals

Eleanor Jiménez

As the golden hours of summer begin to wane, many writers throughout history have turned to specific rituals to mark the transition into autumn—a period when the days are still long and warm, but tinged with the bittersweet awareness of their eventual shortening. These rituals, both creative and personal, have often served as a bridge between the freedom and expansiveness of summer and the more structured, introspective rhythm of fall. Across the history of literature, from Virginia Woolf to F. Scott Fitzgerald, from Mary Oliver to Ernest Hemingway, writers have used these final summer days as moments of reflection, inspiration, and preparation for the work ahead.

One of the most renowned literary figures to draw profound inspiration from the fading light of late summer was Virginia Woolf. Her diaries and letters are rich with reflections on the interplay between nature and creativity, particularly how the changing light affected her writing. Woolf had a deep connection to the natural world, and the summer months, especially August, became a sanctuary for her. During this time, she often retreated to her family's beloved home in the Sussex countryside. Here, away from the bustle of London, she could immerse herself in the rhythms of nature. Her days were filled with long, meandering walks along sun-dappled paths, where she could observe the way the light shifted through the trees or caught the surface of a nearby river, creating patterns that stirred her imagination. Woolf didn't merely view these walks as moments of leisure but as essential acts of creative rejuvenation.

Beyond walking, Woolf also indulged in hours of reading and solitary reflection beside the riverbanks, allowing her mind to wander freely through the quiet hum of late summer. In these still, almost sacred moments, she sought both relaxation and the spark of creative insight that nature so often provided her. For Woolf, the end of summer wasn't simply a time to rest; it was an important transitional period—



an opportunity to absorb and internalize her experiences before the darker, more introspective months of autumn arrived.

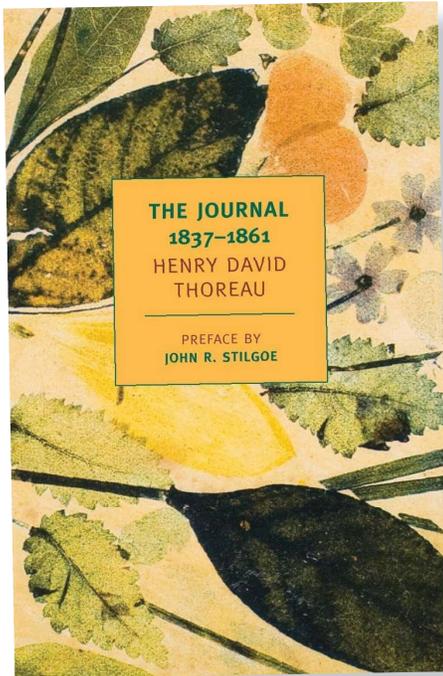
Henry David Thoreau, the transcendentalist writer and naturalist, had his own end-of-summer rituals that reflected his deep attunement to the rhythms of nature. As summer slowly faded into autumn,

Thoreau, who was intimately connected to the changing seasons, would spend his days observing nature's gradual transformation. His works, particularly *Walden*, are filled with vivid descriptions of this seasonal transition, capturing the slow shift from the lush fullness of summer to the cool, crisp clarity of fall. Thoreau's rituals during this time were ones of intense observation, a deliberate practice of noting the subtleties in the landscape, the behavior of animals, and the subtle changes in light. For him, these observations were not merely a way to chronicle nature but a meditation on the impermanence of life and the interconnectedness of all living things.

In these final days of summer, Thoreau would walk the woods and fields around Walden Pond, paying close attention to the ways in which nature subtly prepared itself for the colder months. He noted the first hints of yellow and red in the leaves, the way animals began to gather food in preparation for the coming frost, and the shift in the quality of light as the sun hung lower in the sky. These changes served as reminders of life's transience, offering a deeper understanding of the natural cycles of growth, decay, and renewal. Thoreau saw in this transition a metaphor for the human experience, and his end-of-summer rituals helped him prepare for the more introspective work that autumn would bring.

Thoreau's approach to this period was not just an intellectual exercise but a way of engaging with the natural world on a deeply spiritual level. His practice of observing the slow fading of summer became a form of personal reflection, helping him connect the external changes in nature with his internal state of mind. As the days grew shorter and the landscape began to shift, Thoreau prepared himself for the intro-

spective and philosophical work that lay ahead in the coming season. For him, the end of summer was not just about saying goodbye to warmth and light but about embracing the natural ebb and flow of life, drawing lessons from the changing world around him.



For F. Scott Fitzgerald, the end of summer carried with it a strong sense of nostalgia and the fleeting nature of youth. In *The Great Gatsby*, summer symbolizes the characters' pursuit of pleasure, wealth, and the American Dream, where the season is alive with indulgence, romance, and limitless possibilities. However, as autumn approaches, the tone darkens, and the consequences of that reckless summer emerge, reflecting the disillusionment and decay that often follow moments of fleeting beauty. This seasonal transition mirrors Fitzgerald's own relationship with summer and its end—both in his life and in his creative work.

In his personal life, Fitzgerald often spent late summers in Europe, particularly in the South of France, where the vibrant atmosphere combined with a looming sense that summer's lightness was fading. These final weeks became an intense period of work for him. He would feverishly dedicate himself to completing drafts of his novels before the distractions of the season could fully slip away, feeling a sense of urgency as the warm days grew shorter. For Fitzgerald, this time of year was not just a celebration of the season's remaining joys but also a reckoning—an attempt to cap-

ture the promise of summer before it faded entirely. The end of summer became a creative deadline, fueling bursts of inspiration as he sought to hold on to the beauty and freedom of the season before it dissolved into the more sober reality of autumn.

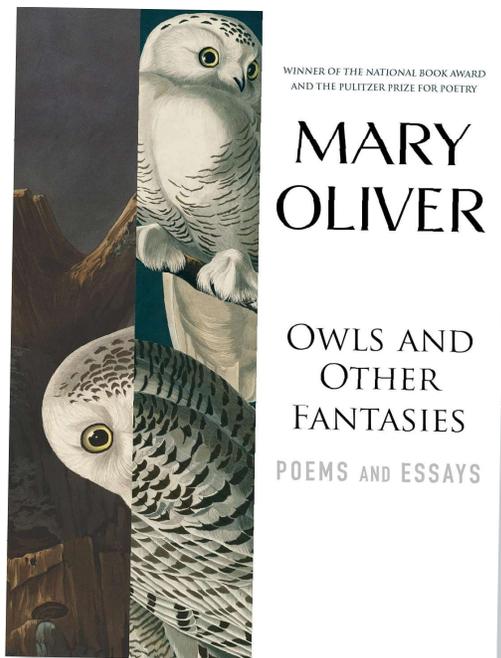
The poet Mary Oliver, known for her profound connection to the natural world, found the late summer to be a time of deep creative reflection. Her poetry, often capturing the quiet beauty of nature, emerged from these moments of stillness, particularly during her walks through the woods and fields of Provincetown, Massachusetts, where she lived for many years. These walks, typically taken during the golden hours of summer—the period just before dusk when the light softens—became an essential part of her end-of-summer ritual. In these peaceful moments, Oliver felt most attuned to the natural world and her inner self, drawing inspiration from the sights, sounds, and changes in the landscape. The fading light seemed to echo her own contemplations, guiding her thoughts and deepening her reflections on life and its fleeting nature.

Oliver wrote about this connection to nature's golden hours with a sense of reverence. She saw these late summer moments as sacred, allowing her to immerse herself in the world around her while preparing her mind for the creative work that lay ahead in autumn. In her poem "The Summer Day," Oliver captures this reflective spirit, marveling at the intricate beauty of a simple grasshopper and asking the reader to consider how they will spend their "one wild and precious life." For Oliver, this quiet observation was not just about appreciating nature; it was a form of communion with the world, helping her prepare her mind and spirit for the more focused, introspective work that the cooler months of autumn would inevitably bring. Through these golden hours, Oliver readied herself for the next phase of creativity, knowing that these fleeting moments of light and warmth would soon pass, just like the seasons themselves.

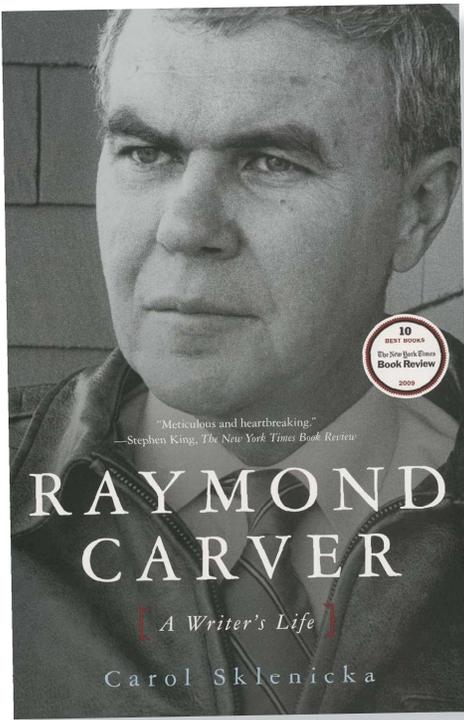
Similarly, Ernest Hemingway had a ritualistic approach to the end of summer, though his was perhaps more practical than contemplative. Hemingway often spent his summers in places like Spain or Cuba, where outdoor activities such as fishing, hunting, and bullfighting took center stage. These experiences were not merely pas-

times for him; they provided vital material for his writing. Hemingway believed that living life fully, immersing himself in action and adventure, was essential to fueling his creativity. The vivid details of these intense experiences would later find their way into his stories, enriching his fiction with authenticity and depth.

As summer began to wind down, Hemingway would consciously shift his focus from these energetic activities to the disciplined practice of writing. He saw the end of summer as a time to retreat from the thrill of his adventures and turn inward, reflecting on the experiences he had accumulated. This was the moment when he transitioned from action to the labor of storytelling, channeling the vitality of his summer pursuits into his writing. The end of summer, for Hemingway, marked a necessary turning point—from outward exploration to the quiet, focused work of crafting his stories, where the excitement of the season could be transformed into lasting art.



Another powerful example of an end-of-summer ritual can be found in the life of Raymond Carver, the celebrated short story writer. Carver, who often spent his summers in the Pacific Northwest, would use the final days of August as a time to take stock of his literary progress. He would retreat to a quiet place near the water, often a cabin or a cottage, and immerse himself in reviewing the stories he'd worked on during the summer. This secluded environment gave him the peace needed to engage deeply with his drafts. The



lingering light of late summer became his companion as he began the process of revisiting his work with a critical eye.

Carver's end-of-summer routine focused heavily on editing and reflection. He would rigorously review the stories he had written during the summer's more free-flowing creative period, taking the time to cut and refine them. For Carver, this process of paring down the stories to their essential elements was as crucial as the initial creation itself. It mirrored the way nature began to shed summer's fullness in preparation for autumn, stripping away what was unnecessary and keeping only what was essential. This practice not only sharpened his writing but also helped him transition from the expansive energy of summer to the more disciplined work that awaited him in the fall.

Sylvia Plath embraced specific rituals as summer came to an end, viewing the closing days of the season as a time of heightened creativity and emotional urgency. In her journals, Plath often wrote about the strong sense of loss she felt as the freedom and exuberance of summer began to fade. This sense of time slipping away spurred her into a flurry of creative activity. She often channeled this energy into late-night writing sessions, crafting poems that reflected her intense emotions. The fading light and the changing seasons became a source of inspiration for her, fueling her work as she sought to capture the transient beauty of summer before it disappeared.

For Plath, this period was an emotional turning point. The awareness of summer's

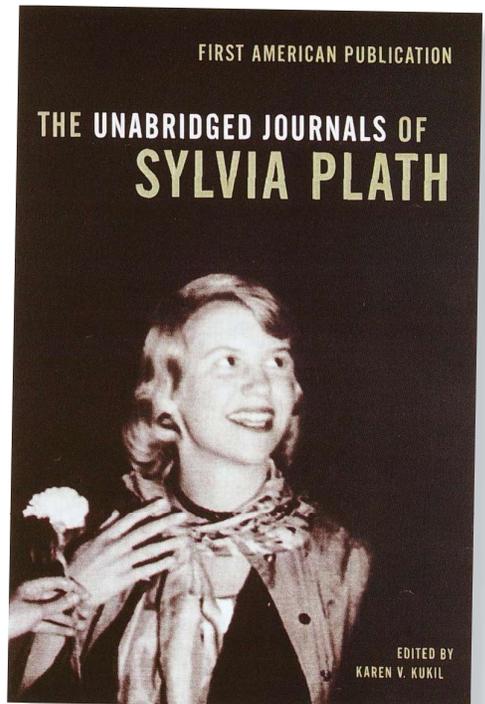
end sharpened her creativity but also deepened her melancholy, creating a duality that drove her to write some of her most powerful poetry. Her late-summer rituals were a blend of artistic output and deep introspection. She would immerse herself in her emotions, letting them fuel her creative process while also exploring her own internal landscape. This combination of urgency and reflection made the end of summer a particularly rich time for Plath's work, as she transformed her heightened emotions into striking, enduring poetry.

Across literary history, writers have recognized that the golden hours of late summer offer a distinct and powerful mix of inspiration and reflection, creating a dynamic interplay between urgency and stillness. As the season's end approaches, there is a heightened awareness of the fleeting beauty that summer offers, a sense that these moments of warmth and light are precious, slipping away into the coolness of autumn. For many writers, this period serves as both a muse and a catalyst for creativity, inspiring rituals that help them capture the essence of summer while preparing for the introspective demands that the fall brings. These rituals, varied in nature, have provided writers with a way to balance the tension between the outward energy of summer and the inward pull of the coming season.

Some writers found their inspiration in walking during the late summer, using the quietude of nature to reflect on the subtle changes happening around them. Whether wandering through woods, along coastal paths, or through quiet rural fields, they often observed how the sunlight softened, the air grew crisper, and the landscape began its slow transformation. These moments were not just about the physical act of walking but about absorbing the atmosphere of the world at a transitional time, one where they could feel the rhythm of nature changing. For others, the end of summer was a time for intense bursts of writing, fueled by the urgency of preserving the season's energy before it faded entirely. Writers would retreat to their desks, often writing late into the night, capturing the images, feelings, and moods that the golden hours evoked in them.

For some, travel was the way they harnessed the inspiration of the season's end, using new landscapes and experiences to fuel their creativity. The late summer often brought a final rush of exploration, a

last attempt to embrace freedom before the structured routine of autumn set in. Traveling provided new sights, sounds, and experiences that would later filter into their work, offering fresh perspectives just as the summer itself was nearing its close. In contrast, other writers used this time for quiet observation, sitting still and watching the subtle shifts in light, temperature, and mood that signaled the end of the season. These quieter moments allowed them to reflect deeply, not just on nature but on their own creative journeys, providing space for contemplation before the more introspective days of fall.



In embracing these rituals, writers found a way to celebrate the light and vitality of late summer while preparing themselves for the darker, more introspective days that awaited them. The golden hours of late summer provided a liminal space between the carefree energy of summer and the focused intensity of autumn, a time when they could reflect on the cyclical nature of both life and creativity. By engaging with this transitional period through their rituals—whether walking, writing, traveling, or simply observing—they acknowledged the passing of time and the importance of capturing its fleeting beauty. In doing so, they created works that are imbued with both a sense of nostalgia for the passing season and an understanding of the deeper rhythms of life, finding meaning in the golden hours even as they faded into memory. □

Faster Than the Speed of Life

Elizabeth Templeman



“Time is defined, analyzed, measured, and even constructed by humans... Neither technology nor efficiency can acquire more time for you, because time is not a thing you have lost. It is not a thing you ever had. It is what you live in. You can drift in its current, or you can swim.”

- *Faster, The Acceleration of Just About Everything*, James Gleick (1999)

This past December I pushed my way through a book which had been sitting on the window ledge above the desk in my office for as long as I can remember. This book—*Faster*, by James Gleick—clearly had belonged to someone else and has their markings and notes, interspersed with plenty of my own markings and turned down page corners. Ironically, it took me an interminably long

time to finish a book called *Faster*. But I finally did. And yet, although I’ve finished the book, and transferred my markings into a journal, I can’t get it out of my head. So many ideas and insights, many of which seem as though they should be obvious—and yet seem so far beyond our conscious awareness (or mine, anyway).

Gleick claims we live in “a time-gripped age.” Our time scales have become, and continue to become, more compressed. And yet, there is so very much about time that we can’t, or won’t, fathom. I’ve emerged from processing Gleick’s many and carefully articulated speculations feeling unsettled and yet also wiser, more aware of myself as a mortal human being, and an aging one at that. I hope to sustain this heightened awareness and appreciation for my time in this life. Can I manage that?

I have an enduring memory of how, the spring when he was around seven, our middle kid was so intrigued by the notion of the time changing. On that morning when we’d moved our clocks ahead, when I mentioned how tired he seemed, he admitted that he’d tried to stay awake to watch time springing ahead—but had finally fallen asleep and missed it. I can still imagine him: the clock in front of his little face, prepared to witness time leaping forward.

Both the story, and the act of remembering the story, resonate. Carving out and holding on to memories bound in time, savouring those moments from the past, all seems like a way to keep our present connected to our past, to sustain the coherence to our lives.

Gleick claims that our word for *free time* is leisure. “Leisure is time off the books, off the job, off the clock.” And yet we stress, even about leisure. We believe, says Gleick, that we possess too little time. We seek to save time with our speedy innovations, and yet we are gripped by the paucity of time.

This all makes me thankful that I’m a bit of an oddball: resisting the incessant pressure to carry a cell phone, for example—being too worried that the constant distraction of it will disrupt the flow of daily life. Being obsessed with running or hiking helps too, or swimming out into the lake, since those acts lose me to daydreaming, which does tend to stop the march of time—or at least trip it up for a while. The slow rhythmic motion of my body against the ground or into the water makes me feel so wonderfully small, happily insignificant, and also comfortably situated in the present.

One thing I notice is how I resist timesaving technology—partly because I’m old-school, I expect. And yet, there’s something about chores like chopping vegetables or grating cheese that I love, and how time slows down as the cheese shreds in heaps onto the cutting board. Likewise, I prefer to hang our laundry out on the line (or on lines hanging in our basement, in the off

season). And I love ironing. I usually do that in the early morning, the time I especially enjoy pressing some order onto the fabrics we surround ourselves with.

All these things, running or swimming, grating cheese or hanging laundry: they all slow time down, impeding that tendency to race through the hours.

It's amazing how, according to Gleick, it's only fairly recently in human history that we've become fixated on punctuality, obsessed with quantifying, and with speed. Before machines, before the need for synchronizing and networking, speed might have been entertaining, perhaps captivating, but hardly the focal point it is for us now. I can't help being intrigued about that connection between obsessiveness and quantifying things, and our perception of living in time.

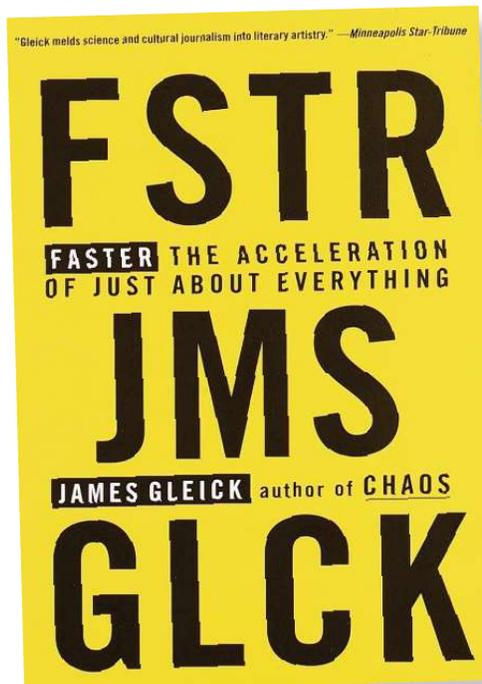
An article from *The Globe and Mail* that I'd tucked away in 2014, on the conflict between knowing ourselves and quantifying ourselves, has set me thinking about my own tendencies, or obsessions, with quantifying. The drive to chart migraines as one example. And yet, ironically, I consider this as necessary, a means to track my ability to keep well, to manage my various afflictions.

I know that, while driving, I've grown dependent on, dwelling on, or obsessing over whatever instrument gages steadiness of speed and acceleration. I struggle between not wasting time, and being both ecological and also cheap, striving to navigate those opposing pulls. I watch fuel prices, fretting over an increase of a mere one cent. And yet I have no idea of my monthly salary and am happy to ignore this number, one of far greater consequence. What's with that disparity? It's certainly far from logical. But it does reflect, indisputably, what I do, and who I am.

I remember recognizing that slippery slope to obsession ages ago when I took part in a workplace competition involving quantifying our fitness, by the minute and by the step. I watched and recorded; gave in to carrying a pedometer, and then could not put it away. I tracked my steps, pushing for more, and faster. For a while, it was thrilling. And then crazy making. After the competition finished (or our team fizzled out), I put the records in the recycling, and the pedometer in the junk drawer. It was a great relief to walk without attending to the count, and to exercise according to my own whims. And yet, for most of my life I

cheerfully and diligently measured my runs or workouts by minutes-a-day, and days-a-week. I still come across those old calendar pages, tracking all that activity. So yeah, I'm a bundle of contradictions, and irrationally convinced of my own normalcy. Like everyone else, it seems.

Gleick explores and reveals how, as we both fragment and overload our attentiveness with such a range of distractions, the tempo of our lives has sped up, along with our ability to lose ourselves in the moment. Behind all our haste, all that migraine-like pressure to hurry, lurks a fear of our mortality.



This is a fairly modern human shift. He describes how not that long ago, people would listen to the radio as a lone and satisfying activity. I do remember, especially when we first moved into the basement of the home we've built, sitting on our sloping couch listening to CBC Radio, intrigued and thirsty to learn more of the country and culture that still felt new to me. When our daughter was born, I swear she recognized the voice of Peter Gzowski, who hosted the Morningside show back then. Her eyes would light up when he came on, and I just knew she'd become familiar with that voice from months of hearing it, muffled as it must have been.

Back then, barely thirty years ago, according to Gleick, "Radio reached into homes and grabbed listeners by the lapel. It could dominate their time and attention...

Now it is rare for a person to listen to the radio and do nothing else." And I'll admit that as I draft this essay, CBC Radio Two's Tom Allen, one of my favourites, provides background music, but seldom gets the attention he deserves. Yet even without that focus, music does have an almost magical ability to enrich the present moment.

Today, rather than slowing down to enjoy a simple, single pleasure, we're more likely to save everything, perhaps under the illusion that we can hold time by saving signs of all it has brought us. I worry, for example, about how having all the tools and the faith in technology leaves so many with files and files of images, often not even labeled or sifted through, let alone enjoyed. It's another of our modern obsessions, in Gleick's view, to allow words and images to flash past us with little deliberation. I can't help compare that with a gift from my mother: a mosaic she cut, carefully arranged, and framed for me, made from about a hundred photos she had saved from the earliest years of each of her five children. I believe that she made one for each of us. I don't know how to consider the difference between her gift, and the way images flash by us now, all in a blur. Saved, in a sense, but not preserved.

And yet, saving is another obsession I have trouble resisting. For me it's more about saving words. Among my stacks of saved articles, I found one from 2020, on procrastination, a topic that also intrigues me. I intended to pull from it, sharing insights on how to resist our ingrained habit of procrastinating with my students. It opens with a quote I'd highlighted, by Francis Bacon, which moves me each time I read it:

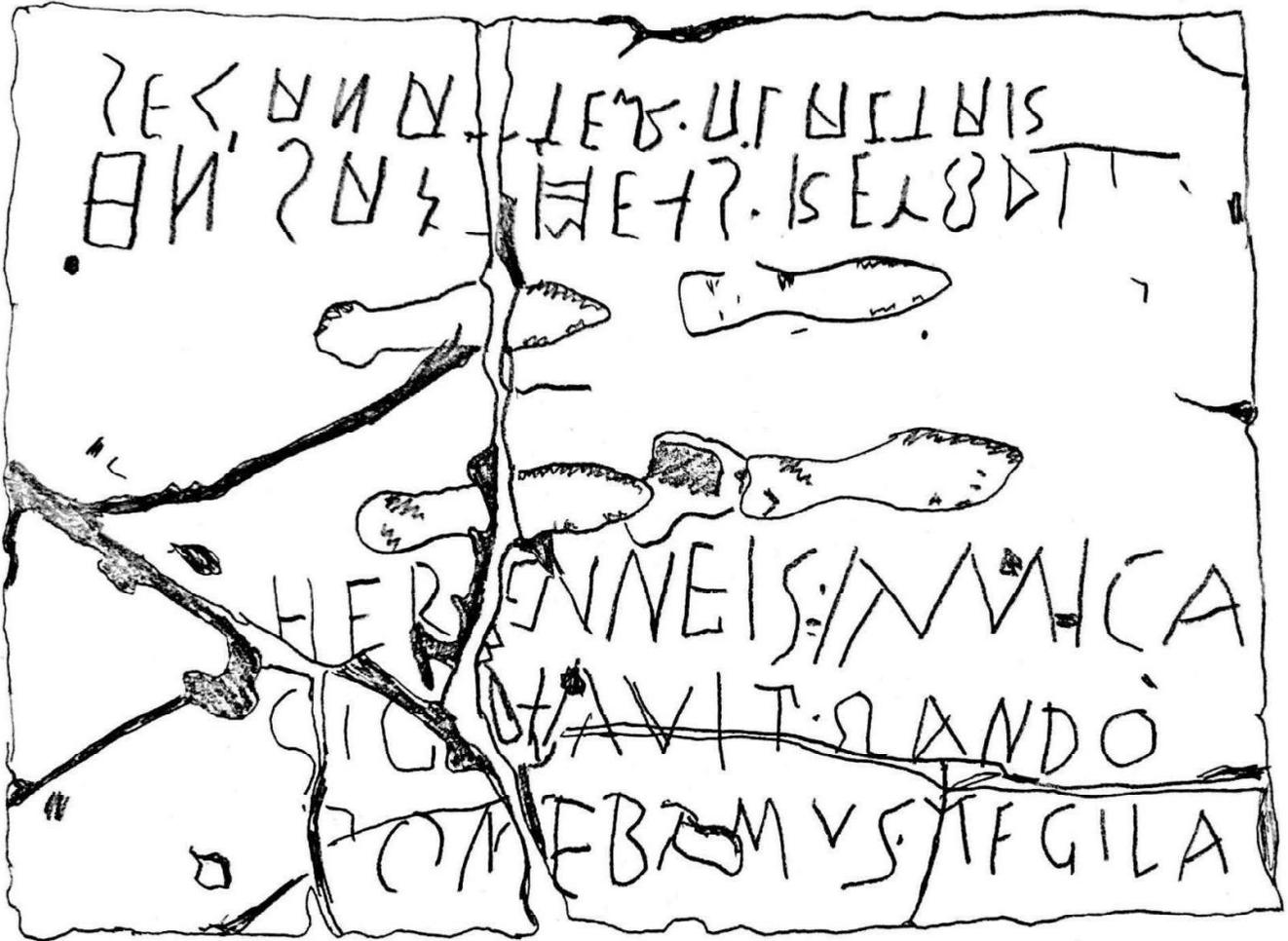
"Begin doing what you want to do now. We are not living in eternity. We have only this moment, sparkling like a star in our hand—and melting like a snowflake."

Gleick stresses "that time is defined, analyzed, measured, and even constructed by humans," and yet, that time is actually "a continuous flow, rather than a series of segmented packages." He reminds us that time is not something we can save or control or master. It is *what we live in*.

If only we can slow ourselves down, let go of the obsessive focus on our clocks, and resist our fear of boredom. If, that is, we can sharpen our awareness to embrace the present, to live in the moment: to enjoy how it sparkles and to marvel at how it melts away. I feel a determination to try, and to master not time, but my own vulnerabilities and delusions. □

Graffiti Girls

Mad Crawford



Tracing by author from image in *Imagines Italicae: A Corpus of Italic Inscriptions*.

A few years before 89 BC, when Pietrabbondante was destroyed by Sulla during the Social War, two freedwomen Detfri and Amica secured their immortality.

Detfri's eyes are closed but flickering—it is too bright for them not to. The girl looks golden sitting with her back on the building, legs extended and turned out so her toes point in opposite directions. Splaying her palm on the ground, she lets blades of grass tickle between the fingers before closing her fist and yanking a handful from the earth. She slumps her head to the other side, hair grinding against the building's facade. She's conscious that she is being watched by Amica, who hums a made-up tune while she soaks another tunic in water, "Get up, it's your turn now."

Detfri keeps her eyes closed—maybe her friend will think she's really asleep. Suddenly it's cooler—a mass blocks her from the rays of the sun, a breeze in the form of breath dries the sweat on her face. It isn't until a finger begins flicking her cheek does Detfri realize it's

Amica crouching in front of her, urging her to start her share of the work. Detfri swats Amica's hand away and jumps to her feet.

Watching her half-heartedly dip cloth in and out of the tub, Amica retells a story from yesterday, when she accidentally frightened Detfri's mother so badly the woman ended up on her bottom laughing. Amica still speaks with an accent that makes her friend have to think about what she's said before responding. It makes Detfri laugh—the misplaced *w* sounds that Amica replaces with certain consonants make her sound like a child. Detfri imitates her, not meaning to be cruel. Amica reminds Detfri that when she was taken to the town, only a few years ago, she knew none of their language.

Now finished with their chores for the day, and pretending that the heat will be easier to withstand if they run, the girls race to the center of town. Amica wins. Detfri pretends it's because she has a stomach cramp from their morning meal. As they typically do on days when the housework is light, in the marketplace they find a man called Gavis, who is happy to give them extra work in exchange for a few

coins. He directs them to a site, actually quite close to here, where a portico is being replaced.

Only the trained craftsmen on site are entrusted with shaping the rectangular roof tiles that the girls are to help with. Their job is to haul lumps of fresh clay, taken from a hillside that morning, closer to the workmen.

The work would be easier if the path between the clay mound and the work site lended some shade. They've assigned each other individual tasks: Amica loads the clay onto a wide plank that they've attached a rope to, Detfri throws the rope over her shoulder and tugs the plank to its designated location. Every two trips or so they pause to wipe sweat off their upper lips and fan each other using their hands. The site overseer hurries the girls, yells that the clay will dry before it even gets the chance to become tiles. He is impatient but not mean; they will not be punished for mistakes.

As they walk back and forth, Amica repeats to Detfri a story that her own mother used to tell her. Detfri has now heard this story many times but requests it especially:

In the times when the Romans and neighboring towns were warring, the king of Rome (she's now forgotten the name) and an Etruscan king, Lars Porsena, made a treaty. Despite it promising peace, it brought about even more suffering. According to a condition of the treaty, ten girls and ten boys from Rome would be delivered to Porsena. One of these girls, Cloelia, rejected that her life would be spent as a slave to an enemy tribe. Distracting the guards and slipping away from the Etruscan camp, she ran and splashed into the Tiber River ("a river that I myself have seen!"), swimming all the way home. Proud of her return but ultimately embarrassed that the conditions of the treaty had been broken, the honest Romans returned the girl to the Etruscan king. He, as angry as he was upon learning of her escape, recognized a bravery in this young girl. He honored her by releasing her, and the Romans erected a statue to Cloelia on horseback.

"I never saw this statue, but when I lived in Rome, my mother pointed out where it once stood." Amica finishes her story and with her fingernails, tries to scrape now-dry clay off her palms. The workmen, who hadn't heard the tale, are taking a break, leaning against a shady tree far enough away that they don't care what the girls do.

Detfri watches her friend and wonders what it's like to no longer have a mother. *Amica. Friend.* A name given to many girls and women upon their enslavement. Detfri had never asked Amica what her mother had called her.

Amica, noticing a wet tile nearby, smiles and stands. She shakes the dirt off her skirts and pulls Detfri to her feet. They intertwine their forearms, and Amica instructs her friend to put pressure on her shoulders. She tells Detfri to take a step onto the slab and watches as the girl grimaces and giggles, the clay oozing through the gaps in her sandals and in between her toes. With enough force, the clay reluctantly releases her shoes. Switching positions, Amica then places her footprints immediately behind Detfri's, where there is room, so it looks as if the tracks follow one another. She then jumps off, running into the bushes to find a strong stick. They talk over one another, deciding what to write, Detfri in Oscan, and Amica in her mother's language:

hn. sattiieis. detfri
segnatted. plavtad
herennis. amica
signauit. qando. a-
ponebamus. tegila(m)

Detfri of Hn. Sattis signed with a footprint.

Amica of Herens signed when we were laying out the tile. □

water in water out

Jane Putnam Perry

water in water out
reckoning the sacred creation
yoni from my childhood
bring forth my inheritance

wrap my memories
sand warm and shaping
bury us
so only our faces show

rhythms spray spirit
sun breaks into pieces
sparkling lens
what a nice day

dulse source of minerals
harvested in the atlantic
eat it raw
take my children

my mother's ashes
in smooth stones
a berm separating water from residence
but really connecting the two

Silence of the Mind

What Can't We Express with Language?

Heimir Steinarsson

Language is humanity's most powerful tool, enabling us to communicate, build societies, and express the deepest intricacies of thought. Yet, despite its immense capacity, language is not omnipotent. There are realms of experience, emotion, and cognition that remain stubbornly outside the reach of words, suggesting that our linguistic abilities, though vast, are limited. As the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein famously stated, "The limits of my language mean the limits of my world." This observation invites us to consider the profound question: What lies beyond these limits? What are the aspects of our inner lives that we simply cannot express with language?

The Limits of Language

Wittgenstein's exploration of language reveals a critical insight into the nature of our communication. Language, as he argues, shapes the boundaries of our understanding. If we cannot name or describe something, it exists outside the confines of our conceptual world. This doesn't mean that such things don't exist, but rather that they reside in a space that language cannot adequately capture.

One of Wittgenstein's most cited phrases, "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent," further emphasizes the idea that certain experiences or truths elude linguistic expression. Here, Wittgenstein points to the ineffable—those aspects of existence that resist verbalization. This is not merely a philosophical musing but a reflection of a lived reality: we frequently encounter feelings, ideas, or experiences that we struggle to put into words, and when we do attempt to articulate them, the words often feel inadequate.

The Ineffable and the Mystical

The concept of the ineffable has been a topic of interest not just in philosophy but also in mysticism, poetry, and even everyday life. Mystical experiences, for instance, are often described as beyond words. Religious mystics across cultures have reported encounters with the divine or transcendent states of consciousness that defy description. The 13th-century mystic Meister Eckhart, for instance, spoke of a "breakthrough" into the divine where words fall short, leaving the mystic in a state of wordless awe.

“The silence of the mind—the things we cannot express with language—invites us to embrace the limits of our linguistic world.”

This is not just a religious phenomenon. Anyone who has felt an overwhelming surge of emotion—be it love, grief, or wonder—might recognize the frustration of trying to express it in words, only to find that language diminishes the experience. The German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche touched on this when he wrote, "Words are but symbols for the relations of things to one another and to us; nowhere do they touch upon absolute truth." Here, Nietzsche underscores the idea that language is a symbolic system, inherently removed from the raw immediacy of experience.

Emotions and the Restraint of Language

Emotions are a particularly rich area where the limits of language become

apparent. While we have a vast vocabulary to describe emotions—joy, sorrow, anger, fear—these words often feel insufficient when compared to the actual experience. Love, for instance, is a word that carries a multitude of meanings and nuances, from the affection between friends to the passion of romantic love. Yet, despite its ubiquity in our language, love is often described as something that cannot be fully captured by words. The experience of love can be so deep, so personal, that any attempt to describe it seems to reduce its complexity.

Similarly, grief is an emotion that is notoriously difficult to express. In the wake of a profound loss, people often struggle to find the words that adequately convey their feelings. Expressions like "heartbroken" or "devastated" may come close, but they still fail to encapsulate the totality of the experience. This gap between experience and expression suggests that language can only approximate certain states of being, never fully capturing them.

The Silence of the Sublime

Another realm where language falters is in the face of the sublime—those moments when we are confronted with something so vast, so overwhelming, that it transcends our capacity for description. This could be the awe-inspiring beauty of nature, the majesty of the universe, or the profound mystery of existence itself. The Romantic poets, such as William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, often grappled with this in their work, attempting to convey the ineffable through poetry, yet often acknowledging the limitations of their medium.

In his famous work *The Critique of Judgment*, Immanuel Kant discusses the sublime as something that "cannot be contained in any sensible form." The sublime, for Kant, is an experience that challenges

our ability to comprehend and describe, pushing the boundaries of our understanding to the point where language no longer suffices. In these moments, we are left in a state of speechless wonder, aware that words cannot do justice to what we have encountered.

Thorvaldsdottir / Metacosmos Concert

The Unconscious Mind and the Limits of Language

The unconscious mind is another area where language meets its limits. Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, posited that much of our mental life exists beyond the reach of consciousness—and, by extension, beyond the reach of language. The unconscious mind, according to Freud, is a repository of desires, fears, and memories that cannot be directly accessed or verbalized. While psychoanalysis seeks to bring these unconscious elements into the light of consciousness, Freud acknowledged that not everything buried in the unconscious could be fully articulated.

This idea aligns with Wittgenstein's notion that language shapes the limits of our world. If parts of our mental life are inaccessible to language, they remain in a sense "outside" our world, influencing us in ways that we cannot easily describe or even fully understand.

Given the limitations of language, Wittgenstein's dictum—"Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent"—takes on an ethical dimension. If language cannot adequately express certain truths or experiences, then it may be wiser, or even more truthful, to remain silent rather than attempt to speak inadequately. This is not to advocate for silence in the face of all that is difficult to articulate, but rather to recognize that some aspects of life may be beyond the reach of language, and in those cases, silence may be the most honest response.

Embracing the Silence

The silence of the mind—the things we cannot express with language—invites us to embrace the limits of our linguistic world. While language is a powerful tool, it is not the entirety of our experience. By acknowledging the ineffable, the mystical, the emotional, the sublime, and the unconscious, we gain a deeper appreciation of the richness of our inner lives. We also learn to respect the boundaries of language, understanding that some truths, by their very nature, elude verbalization.

Wittgenstein's reflections remind us that there is a vast expanse beyond the reach of words, a space where silence is not a failure of language, but a recognition of its limits. In this silence, we may find not only the limits of our world but also the profound mysteries that lie beyond it. □

Ashley Andresson

When I first heard the music I was struck
by all the wild and visionary sounds.
It was the most inspiring thing I'd heard
and I was utterly transfixed by its
completely new and unexpected voice.

At first the tune is touching and profound,
just like a river flowing down a vale.
But then it rises and turns raw and wild
and leaves you with a feeling of unease
that stays with you throughout the whole event.

Built out of simple rhythmic characters,
it turns into hypnotic diagrams
of chaos and perplexing melodies.
But if you listen closely you can hear
a ray of lyricism shining through.

And it's this lyric tone that sets the stage
for all the feelings that the piece evokes.
It settles into your profoundest thoughts
and follows you long after you have left
the music and the concert hall behind.

How an English Village Saved Coleridge's Creativity

Rebecca Ruth Gould



Photo: Anthony / Adobe Stock

Reconstructed Clock Tower in the center of Nether Stowey, on the site of the tower Coleridge references in “Fears of Solitude.”

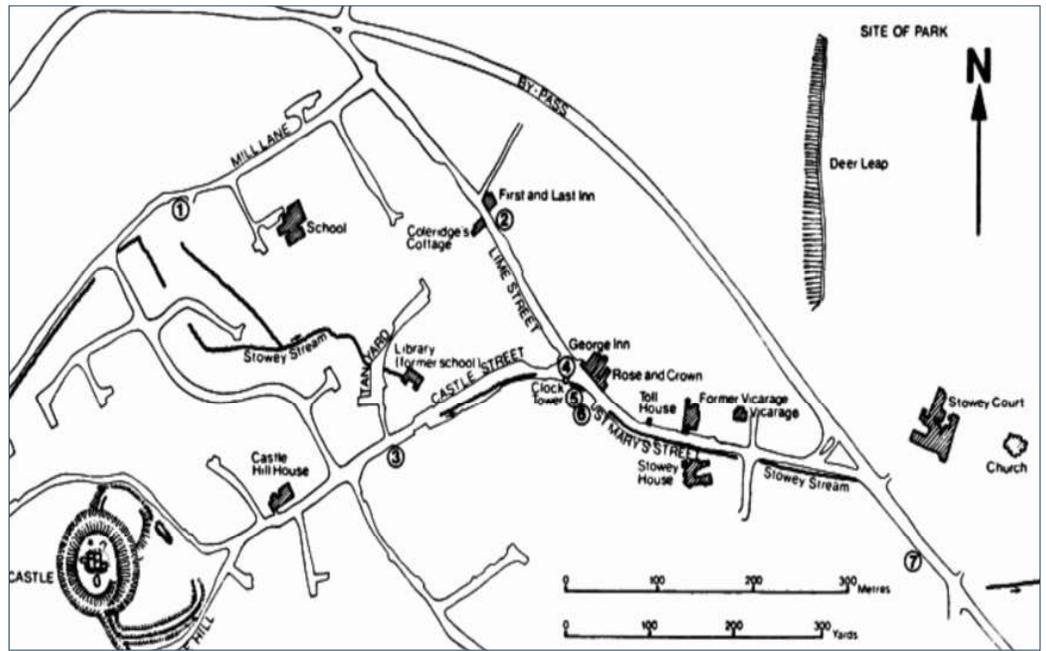
The first thing that struck me as I disembarked from Bridgwater Station and began looking for a taxi that would take me to the village of Nether Stowey, population just over one thousand, was that my phone's data had stopped working. I had traveled a mere forty minutes by train from Bristol in Southwest England, yet I felt like I was in a different world. My data was turned on but it was well out of range. The station was on the edge of the town and there were few signs of life. I began chasing the few taxis I saw waiting at the station entrance. Unfortunately, they had already been booked by other passengers. I finally convinced a taxi driver to call his company and ask for

a taxi to be sent for me. I waited around twenty minutes. The car never came. Eventually I flagged down another taxi that was dropping off a passenger.

In travelling from Bristol to Nether Stowey, I was tracing the path followed by Samuel Taylor Coleridge and his family—his wife Sarah and their infant child, Hartley—on the last day of the year of 1796, from the city of Bristol. Coleridge often walked the path leading from Bridgwater to this village, but on this visit he traveled with all his possessions and his family in a carriage. Back then, the village was simply called Stowey, a name meaning “stony” in Old English. It is an ancient habitation, with a castle dating back to the Norman conquest, though even in the 18th century the castle was

so reduced to ruins that it was used as grazing land for sheep.

As I approached Coleridge's old home, I was struck by the beauty of the tall white houses, neatly stacked alongside each other. In the background was the foothills of the Quantock Hills. I was intrigued by the absence of what I expected to find in any modern settled community: chain stores, restaurants, cafes. In the entire village of Nether Stowey there is just one grocery store, called Premiere. There are two pubs, but no separate restaurants. There are three main streets, laid out in a Y-shape just as they were in the 18th century: Castle, Lime, and St Mary's Street. I felt like I had arrived at the outer edge of civilization.



Map of Nether Stowey circa 1981.¹

Compared to Stowey, Bristol must have seemed like a metropolis to Coleridge. Coleridge's opium addiction as well as his debts were exacerbated in urban environments, and he was looking for a way out. Coleridge's soul was created to be close to nature, and that was where his poetry flourished. Urban life was not a source of inspiration, either for Coleridge or his close friend William Wordsworth, with whom he collaborated on the *Lyrical Ballads* (1798). The Romantic poets of Coleridge's circle saw urban squalor as something to be opposed—not eulogized—through poems on the sublimity of nature. Their literary aesthetic required direct contact with mountains, trees, and clouds. Stowey provided these last two in abundance, even though its elevations were more hilly than mountainous.

When he first arrived in the cottage, Coleridge and his wife had no expectations of finding happiness there. They were on the run, seeking a more sustainable life. In Bristol, Coleridge was constantly racking up debts, and he needed to escape his creditors. The cottage was infested with mice, the floor was covered in mud, and it was frigid inside. Yet they had little choice. Coleridge had agreed to move his family to Stowey at the invitation of his friend Tom Poole, a tanner and philanthropist whom he had met in Bristol and who had invited him to stay in the cottage next to his tannery.

Stowey offered a more affordable way of life than they had access to in Bristol. Besides that, he needed to live closer to nature in order to receive the inspiration he needed to write his poems. Soon, what began as a move driven by necessity transformed into something more joyful. For the next two years of his life, Coleridge was inspired to write poetry of a quantity and caliber that he would never know again. The remote and unglorious village of Stowey turned out to be the making of Coleridge as a poet.

In February 1798, well after he had settled in Stowey, Coleridge composed a poem which for many is among the greatest poems he ever wrote, "Frost at Midnight." The poem is an elegy to his son Hartley, the "cradled infant" slumbering peacefully by his side.

The poem is told from the vantage point of a speaker who finds his late-night solitary musing interrupted by nature's bounty. His eyes wander to the "thin blue flame" that lies on his "low burnt fire,

and quivers not." Having already referred to everyone sleeping under his roof as "inmates," the poet further reinforces the sense of confinement by recalling how, as a child, he gazed upon the "bars" of his window, watching the world pass outside. Yet the dominant feeling of the poem is one of revelation and liberation, not confinement. The references to imprisonment only serve to underscore just how free the poet felt himself to be in such moments.

Coleridge's cottage consisted of just a few rooms: a main receiving room where he worked and received guests; a smaller room to its left where which served as an entrance, and two or three bedrooms upstairs, depending on how the space was divided. There was no kitchen, only an outdoor space for cooking without an oven.

Looking outside, down into the streets of Stowey from the vantage point of Coleridge's writing desk, it is possible to determine exactly from which windowsill Coleridge was gazing when he observed the frost perform its "secret ministry" on the world that passes before his eyes.

The window today overlooks a pub called The Ancient Mariner. Leaning against the pub are two rubbish bins, one black the other red. Further to the right is a long expanse of black pavement leading to a car park. The pub doubles as a hotel (the only hotel in Nether Stowey) where I spent two nights in order to sleep near the same window that gave birth to Coleridge's poetry. Inside the public rooms were people playing board games and listening to 1980s rock music. Such sights hardly compare with the poetic vistas conjured by Coleridge's imagination, but the modesty of these surroundings underscore the transformative work done by poetry in bathing the mundane in transcendent glory.

Of course, the view from the window has changed since Coleridge gazed outside it. Yet who is to say that what takes place inside The Ancient Mariner pub is not also as "inaudible as dreams!" as Coleridge described the goings-on in the Stowey of his day?



Photo: Rebecca Ruth Gould 2024

Main room of Coleridge's Cottage with baby Hartley's cradle near the fire as reconstructed by the National Trust.

The cottage guides assured me that the slot the window occupies now is in exactly the same place it occupied when Coleridge lived there. Whether these elderly women who stand guard over Coleridge's home are right, the faith they show in keeping alive the memory of this poem by recreating the physical circumstances in which it was birthed is part of why we read Coleridge today.

"Frost at Midnight" is full of hopeful dreams for Coleridge's child. Conversational in tone, it has been grouped together with seven other poems of Coleridge's that follow a similar pattern of extracting lessons from nature. At least half of these, including "The Lime-Tree Bower, My Prison," "Fears in Solitude," and "The Nightingale: A Conversation Poem," were composed during Coleridge's brief residency in Stowey.

While "Frost at Midnight" describes the denizens of his cottage as "inmates," "The Lime-Tree Bower, My Prison," composed just a few months after Coleridge arrived in Stowey, goes even further in drawing on the language of imprisonment and confinement. The poem was occasioned by an accident Coleridge had when Sarah dropped a bowl of scalding milk on his leg. A group of friends, including the famous essayist Charles Lamb, had come to visit him and planned to go for a walk through the Quantocks, but the injury forced him to remain behind.

Although the poem opens with the poet complaining about his confinement, by the end he concludes that he is spiritually in the

company of his friends, even when they are physically absent. While imagining his friends in distant groves, the poet discovers to his surprise that the very vision of them enjoying nature brings him joy. "A delight / Comes sudden on my heart / And I am glad as if I myself were there!"

Having realized that he can share the joy that his friends experience in their wandering even when he is far from them, the poet discovers that his own modest surroundings give him access to the sublime:

Pale beneath the blaze
 Hung the transparent foliage; and I watched
 Some broad and sunny leaf, and loved to see
 The shadow of the leaf and stem above
 Dappling its sunshine! And that walnut-tree
 Was richly tinged, and a deep radiance lay
 Full on the ancient ivy which usurps
 Those fronting elms, and now, with blackest mass
 Makes their dark branches gleam a lighter hue
 Through the late twilight:

These verses contain such a succession of jubilant imagery that it is difficult to decide where to end the quotation. Image after image flows into each other through a series of gloriously



Replica of Coleridge's writing desk.

ungrammatical run-on sentences and conjunctions, as if reflecting the poet's own joy at having discovered the bounties of nature so near at hand. So intensely does the poet's joy overflow that he cannot stop speaking.

On first glance, "The Lime-Tree Bower" tells of a forgettable moment in the poet's life. Yet in the pen of a genius such as Coleridge who was in the full flush of his talent in Stowey, the poem becomes a tribute to nature's sublimity, and to the poet's role in rendering that sublimity in language. This is the aesthetic of the *Lyrical Ballads*, the landmark volume that Coleridge published with Wordsworth in the following year. In this aesthetic, the imagination reigns supreme and triumphs over every external circumstance, including injured limbs, immobility, and confinement.

The poem is an ode to the power of the imagination, and to life itself in all forms it takes. "No sound is dissolute which tells of life," Coleridge proclaims in an early version of this poem. He attributes this view to his friend Charles, but it expresses his own view of the world as well. Written from a lime tree bower like the one pictured below, at the place where his cottage garden merged with the tannery of his friend Tom Poole, the poem comes around to the view that the lowly lime-tree bower is a kind of paradise, no matter how lonely it felt at first to be abandoned by his friends.

Taken together, "Frost at Midnight" and "The Lime-Tree Bower" reveal profound links between the poet's imagination and the modest village where Coleridge had found a refuge from urban life. In both poems, the limits that are placed on the poet's mobility also prove to be conditions of possibility for the writing of poetry. The poet opens with his modest surroundings, by dwelling on a physical object or impediment, then soars to philosophically lofty heights, before returning to earth, to the objects that first inspired his poetic flight.

Towards the end of his stay in Stowey, Coleridge penned lines that radiated love for his small "hovel," as he had once called it. In "Fears of Solitude," he addresses his "beloved Stowey" in intimate terms. As he observes the village's "church-tower" and the "four huge elms / Clustering," he gazes on his "lowly cottage" where his son Hartley

And my babe's mother dwell in peace! With light
And quickened footsteps thitherward I tend,
Remembering thee, O green and silent dell!
And grateful, that by nature's quietness
And solitary musings, all my heart
Is softened, and made worthy to indulge
Love, and the thoughts that yearn for human kind.

Although the poem focuses on the domestic tranquility he experienced while living in Stowey, "Fears of Solitude" was received by the British reading public as a political poem. This is perhaps partly due to when it was written: France was threatening to invade England. Instead of coming out staunchly in support of his homeland, Coleridge makes his political points surreptitiously by invoking quiet scenes of domestic bliss. He also criticizes the British imperial project in lines such as the following: "Even so, my countrymen! have we gone forth / And borne to distant tribes slavery and pangs."

As the joyful moments in these poems attest, in spite of his hesitations and caveats, Coleridge found happiness and inspiration in Stowey. He also found here his poetic voice. The simplicity of his surroundings cleared a space for the complexity of his thought. He did not find wealth or a way to make enough money for himself and Sarah to have a comfortable life. Sarah still had to deal with a woefully inadequate kitchen. She had to bring in the water from the well and carry bread dough to the baker to access an oven. The only person who helped her was Hartley's nanny. Coleridge preferred to ignore household chores. But amid their domestic tensions, Coleridge's immersion in writing poems kept their arguments at bay.

The cottage came with a garden that was many times larger than the building where they lived. It was in this garden that Coleridge composed some of his most remarkable poems, including "Lime Tree Bower, My Prison" and "The Nightingale." The latter poem was a major inspiration for Keats' more famous "Ode to a Nightingale" (1819). It lays out Coleridge's philosophy of nature

as well as of poetry, including his critique of poets who project their personal tragedies onto the natural world.

What we perceive as melancholy in nature, Coleridge argues, is in actuality our projection onto it. Coleridge counters that “In Nature there is nothing melancholy.” Tragic observers of nature like the “night-wandering man whose heart was pierced / With the remembrance of a grievous wrong” fill “all things with himself / And made all gentle sounds tell back the tale / Of his own sorrow.” These are the ones who name the sound of the nightingale as a “melancholy strain,” after which poets learned to echo “the conceit” of the man absorbed in his own suffering.

Instead of imitating the anthropomorphism of heartbroken men who project their sufferings onto nature, Coleridge advises the poet to stretch his limbs “Beside a brook in mossy forest-dell, / By sun or moon-light, to the influxes / Of shapes and sounds and shifting elements.” Coleridge also suggests that the poet should surrender “his whole spirit” to song and forget “his fame.” The poet’s fame must merge with “Nature’s immortality,” thereby becoming more permanent and substantial than the ambitions of an isolated ego.

Living in Stowey taught Coleridge to stop projecting his melancholy temperament onto the world around him. It proved to him that there was a world worth absorbing beyond his brain. That world became the subject of his greatest poetry. Moving to Stowey freed Coleridge from his addictions and kept his debts at bay, allowing him to focus on his work rather than the pressure to turn a profit.

In contemporary jargon, moving to Stowey enabled Coleridge to detox from the fast pace of urban life. His garden also gave Coleridge a measure of self-sufficiency, since he could grow apples and limes, plant vegetables, and even provide a space for chickens to roam. But it was the wildflowers most of all that transported Coleridge into a state of bliss. One suspects that, much like the perfectly maintained lime-tree bower at the end of the garden, the trimmed flower beds in Coleridge’s garden today do not quite match the disarray of the garden while he was living there. But they do give us access to the sources of his inspiration.

With the help of their neighbor Tom Poole, Sarah managed to make the cottage habitable. She stuffed the holes with a green bunting that helped to keep the home warm. Sarah spent much of her time baking, sewing, and cleaning, laboring to create a comfortable home for her husband and her son. Meanwhile Coleridge discovered the quiet beauty of the Quantock hills, where he walked with William Wordsworth and his sister Dorothy for hours on end, composing and reciting poems.

It was in this environment that Coleridge became the poet known to literary history. In Bristol, he had been merely the bankrupt owner of a failed newspaper venture called *The Watchman*, as well as a controversial preacher against slavery and for human equality. In Stowey, Coleridge composed the poems on which his reputation rests: “Kubla Khan,” “Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” “Frost,” and the first half of “Christabel.”

What was the secret to Coleridge’s literary productivity during these years in Stowey? The change of scenery that the village offered appears to have been an essential component of the creativity that was unleashed within him during those years. For the first time in Coleridge’s adult life, he was able to live entirely within his means. Living in Stowey also put a curb on his opium addiction, since the drug was not so widely used in rural England as it had been in Bristol, and he faced less pressure from his friends



Photo: Rebecca Ruth Gould 2024

Window ledge that served as the inspiration for “Frost at Midnight.”

to use it regularly. Although he did not entirely give up on the drug, as “Kubla Khan” attests, he became less dependent on it. In Stowey, Coleridge had the Quantocks, the Wordsworths who moved to the nearby Alfoxden House to be near to him, and, perhaps most importantly, his own garden. Coleridge was a devotee of Rousseau and he dreamed of fulfilling Rousseau’s ideal of self-sufficiency in his rural paradise.

With a temperament like Coleridge’s, no state of bliss could last forever. Within two years of his arrival at Stowey, Coleridge soon found himself en route to Germany, travelling with William Wordsworth and Dorothy, ostensibly with the plan to study German philosophy under Kant. Conspicuously missing from this group of travelers was Coleridge’s wife Sarah, whom he left behind in Stowey with their children. Sarah had just given birth to their second child, a boy named Berkley. Like his brother Hartley, Barkley was named for a British philosopher, as was the repository of their parents’ fondest hopes and ambitions.

While Coleridge was away in Germany, baby Berkley grew sick and died of pneumonia in February 1799. Sara pleaded with her husband to return to her in Stowey. She needed him to comfort her amid her grief. Coleridge managed to evade Sarah’s requests, partly through the connivance of his friend Tom Poole, who felt that his friend’s studies should not be interrupted. By the time he returned home in July of that year, their marriage was effectively destroyed. The trust that had once flourished between them was dissolved, never to return. Coleridge acknowledged the distance between them in an offhand manner in a letter to a friend: “poor Sara tired off her legs with servanting – the house stinks of Sulphur

... I however, sunk in Spinoza, remain as undisturbed as a Toad in a Rock.”² Yet he took no steps to heal their mutual alienation.

By the time they left Stowey, Coleridge and Sarah had lost touch with each other’s souls. Early in their marriage, Sarah had inspired many of his poems, but he was unwilling to console her in her grief, and their rift never healed after that. Although he did not tell his wife, Coleridge had fallen in love with another woman, named Sarah Hutchinson. While avoiding wife, Coleridge fell completely under the spell of his opium addiction and was unable to provide for his wife and their children. Sarah Coleridge went to live in the household of her sister, who had married the Bristolian poet Robert Southey on the same day and at the same church where she married Coleridge.

Southey had followed a very different path from Coleridge and steered clear of addictive substances. Like Wordsworth, Coleridge, and other members of their circle of Romantic poets in Bristol, Southey had been a radical when he first started out as a poet. He is particularly well known for his poems against slavery. By the mid-19th century, however, as he became more settled in his lifestyle, Southey also became politically conservative. A similar transformation took place in Wordsworth and Coleridge although their Conservative turn manifested itself in different ways.

Notwithstanding his conservative views, Southey conscientiously helped the women in his extended family—including Sarah Coleridge and her children—when Coleridge did not provide for them. From 1808 to 1837, Sarah and her children were members of Southey’s household, where they lived rent free thanks to his generosity. Coleridge was too immersed in his addiction to attend to his wife’s and his children’s needs. Although Coleridge lived to be sixty, he never composed poetry of caliber or significance comparable to the poems he composed while living in Stowey. Instead, he shifted to literary criticism and commentary in his later work.

If there is a lesson to learn from this history of Coleridge’s creative output, it is that creative talent is an unstable force. It is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the creation of great

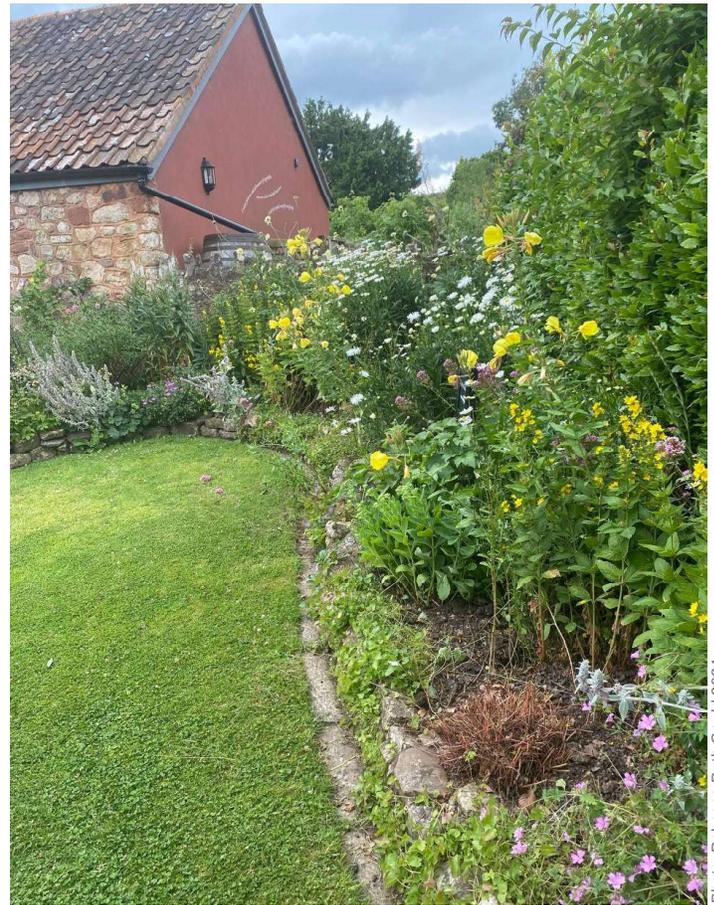


Photo: Rebecca Ruth Gould 2024

Wildflowers in Coleridge’s garden

works of art. Talent must be nurtured as well as disciplined. Life in Stowey provided Coleridge with the first of these requirements and enabled him to temporarily accommodate the second. The discipline required to create great art had eluded Coleridge’s grasp by the time he left Stowey and he was already yearning to distract himself with other vistas, far from his family hearth.

Coleridge was without a doubt among the most accomplished poets of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. And yet, reviewing his life and legacy, we cannot help but be stuck by a sense that he could have achieved so much more than he did. He also could have achieved what he did in the realm of poetry without causing harm to the people in his life. In the case of Coleridge as with so many writers, James Baldwin’s words come to mind: “I know a lot of talented ruins. Beyond talent lie all the usual words: discipline, love, luck, but most of all, endurance.”³ Given the brilliance of the poetry he wrote while living in Stowey, one wonders what kind of writer Coleridge would have become had he stayed in that remote village, confined to his lime bower, listening the nightingales in his garden, and watching the world pass by from his frosty window, rather than abandoning his family for a sojourn in Germany and drowning his sorrows in opium. □



Photo: Rebecca Ruth Gould 2024

Lime-Tree bower in Coleridge’s garden

¹ A. P. Baggs, R. J. E. Bush, and M. C. Siraut, “Parishes: Nether Stowey,” in *A History of the County of Somerset: Volume 5*, ed. R. W. Dunning (London, 1985).

² Pamela Davenport, “Romantic but hardly romantic: Sarah Fricker’s life as Coleridge’s wife,” *Wordsworth Grasmere* (29 July 2017). <https://wordsworth.org.uk/blog/2017/07/29/romantic-but-hardly-romantic-sarah-frickers-life-as-coleridges-wife/>

³ “James Baldwin, *The Art of Fiction* No. 78,” *The Paris Review* 91 (1984). <https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/2994/the-art-of-fiction-no-78-james-baldwin>.

Marmaris Musk

Malina Douglas



Photo: Aleh Varanishcha / Adobe Stock

Nora told herself to turn back but a new, unquenched desire led her forward. Her knees shook and her heart raced as she stood outside the door. *His* door.

The door opened and a pair of eyes met hers. Eyes that invited her to plunge in and not look back. Aimal smiled, fine lips pulling aside to reveal straight white teeth.

When he leaned forward, Nora caught his scent—something deep and musky she could not quite place, like a hunter in an autumn forest.

As his lips brushed her cheek, they set something alight in her. She thought of Henrik’s stilted kisses and willed herself not to think of him.

Aimal reached for her hand and she offered it, her palm sweating. His broad, calloused hand wrapped around her small pale one as she allowed him to lead her, up a dim stairway to whatever lay beyond.

Akiss sealed the division. From then on, she split into two people: the past, safe and known Nora and the wild and unpredictable Nora who walked on a razor’s edge.

She was not supposed to be wandering through Marmaris alone. It was only because she’d had a row with Henrik. It happened as they were walking down the promenade. She wanted to see the castle and he didn’t and neither would compromise.

He raised his voice with her, right there, in a public square. She hated public displays. She broke away and began striding off but to make it worse, he started after her.

“Leave me alone,” she called over her shoulder. Then she ran, in erratic loops twisting down alleys until she was sure he was not behind her.

She returned to their hotel room hours later to find an irritable Henrik intent on flying home early.

“Go ahead,” said Nora, “but I’m not changing my flight.”

She met Henrik’s look of surprise.

When he left, she rented a studio with a queen sized bed and a sliver of a balcony just wide enough to stand on.

Skin that had not seen the sun since the end of the Swedish summer was bared with abandon till it reddened and burned. Nora slathered her skin in aloe vera and slipped on a scarf that stuck to her shoulders.

Over the phone, Henrik's voice continued to question her, to nag her. He demanded to know what she did each day but spoke condescendingly of her activities.

"Another beach? Pointless."

"No, it was lovely. And the castle had a fantastic archaeological museum where I saw the fragments of—"

"I don't care what you saw in the archaeological museum."

Nora hung up.

The cocktail calmed her. A Swinging Sultan in a Martini glass with a curl of orange peel on the rim. The sour-sweet taste of pomegranate with a tang of tangerine against a background of vodka.

She sat in a wicker chair with a canvas umbrella gazing out to the water. As people in shorts and sun-hats passed by, she wondered at her purpose.

"May I sit here?" asked a male voice.

She looked up to see a man with thick brows and deep-set eyes, a strong jaw, and a hint of stubble. When he smiled, she felt a sense of lightness like a passing sea breeze.

"Sure."

His name was Aimal. His manner was casual and confident and his deep voice drew her in. Nora found it strange that her pulse quickened, that her hand sweated on the glass. She could not remember what they talked about afterwards, just the feeling of excitement as it built in her.

They talked till she forgot about Henrik, bickering over itineraries and bills. Till the tightness in her chest loosened and her short, dry laughed joined Aimal's warm, deep one.

When he offered her another drink, she said, "Sure."

The split occurred as they stood on the promenade, and the sinking sun turned the water to a sheet of gold. They were standing, close but not touching, gazing out at the rippling water, the masts of the sailboats and a distant dark ridge.

It happened as a seagull coasted by and a jogger stretched his hamstrings and Aimal was leaning close to her and she could smell the deep musky scent of him.

Fingertips brushed her shoulder and she turned, meeting his eyes like pools of coffee and before she could stop it, her mouth was on his, and his kiss was strong and defining, sweeping her up with the wings of the gull.

That was the point from which there was no return.

Aimal wrapped an arm around Nora's waist. They meandered through the streets of the city till she lost her way completely but didn't care, because he was beside her, pointing out sights and sweeping her along with his stories and observations.

They strolled Bar Street, downed shots of raki and danced till her blood sang.

It was not until he left a last steaming kiss on her lips and she'd raced up the three flights of stairs to her flat and sunk into the middle of the bed with her purse and shoes still on that it hit her with full force.

Remorse.

Like an ice-wind ripping open a window.

A cold shower dowsed the fire in her and any remaining traces of his scent.

The next evening, she found herself at Aimal's door.

When Nora woke, drowsy and dazed, the events of the night came back to her and she realized with terror what she had done. There he was, slumbering like a child, a great tanned shoulder exposed above the bed sheet. She pulled the sheet over her head and sank back into sleep, a sweet denial she longed to linger in. When she woke again, the sunlight was thick and solid and the place beside her empty.

She thought of Henrik, alone in their flat on a dim rainy morning. Dressed in the robe she had bought him five years ago for Christmas, drinking his coffee and checking his phone for messages from her. Missing her. The guilt stabbed her like an icicle.

With a shaky breath she stood, dressed herself in yesterday's clothes, and stepped onto a plush, ruby red carpet with saffron arabesques. Against the wall was a dark wood, ornately carved wardrobe and under it, a pair of slippers. They were red and plush, with pointed ends and embroidered in gold. She slipped them on.

The lounge was empty. She slid open a glass door and stepped onto a sun-flooded balcony. It looked over the city of Marmaris, a spread of red roofs and white buildings along the curve of a bay, the sea a bright blue and studded with sailboats. A ridge of green mountains stretched hazy in the distance.

A round table was spread with plates of stuffed vine leaves, olives fatter than her thumbs, cubes of cheese and strips of red peppers. There were boiled eggs cut into

slivers and sliced cucumbers beside a pale dip speckled with herbs.

As Nora stood, stunned to speechlessness, Aimal appeared in the doorway with a tray of flatbread. He set it down and reached out his arms to her but she slipped away and sank into a chair.

"Are you all right?"

She saw the sensitivity in his eyes, the fine eyelashes she had not noticed and flushed with shame for rebuking his friendliness.

"Yes," she said, "quite alright."

She looked at the sumptuous spread of food and did not know where to begin. Stabbed a pepper with her fork and began to eat slowly.

As her mouth filled with flavour, she washed it down with black tea. She must not allow herself to enjoy it too much. Aimal filled her plate and she picked at the food.

"Why don't you eat more?"

"I can't," said Nora, unwilling to explain the knot of emotions that coiled in her gut, thick and heavy as wet rope.

"But isn't that why we're here, to enjoy?"

"I suppose..." Yet Nora was thinking of ways to punish herself. Skip meals for the rest of the day. Buy nothing from the bazaar or deprive herself of Aimal's company. She watched Aimal dig into his food with relish. The pure, simple enjoyment of hearty bites.

"I have a husband," she blurted.

Aimal looked up. "I see," he said in a soft voice. "And where is he now?"

"At home in Stockholm."

Aimal tore off a piece of bread and dipped it into a sauce. "Are you going to deprive yourself of this moment by thinking of someone who isn't here?"

"I—" began Nora. She closed her mouth.

"They pass so quickly, the moments," said Aimal, looking up to meet Nora's eyes. "They will float away if we don't dive in and immerse ourselves."

"Yes," said Nora as remorse drifted through her. She took a bite of egg covered in tzatziki sauce.

"Close your eyes," he said.

She did, breathing short shallow breaths as the uncertainty mounted.

A smooth, oily surface slid past her lips as she opened them. She bit down to discover a strong, briny taste enhanced with garlic. An olive.

She allowed Aimal to feed her. To bring her tongue zinging to life, as she tasted tomatoes tart with balsamic vinegar, fiery and oily green peppers, soft bread thick with cooling tzatziki and apricots stuffed with pistachios and simmered in syrup.

As they feasted, her senses came alive.

When breakfast was finished and Nora was poised to leave, Aimal invited her to go swimming. She surprised herself by saying yes.

He took her to a secluded bay, where rough limestone rocks stretched above them to a hillside clothed in pines. Turquoise water lapped against a thin swath of sand. Aimal stripped down, revealing a broad, tanned back. Before her mind could prevent her, Nora joined him, in white lingerie that looked from a distance like swimwear. She plunged in, delighting as cool water caressed her skin. Splashed away from the glide of Aimal's fingertips.

Desire thrummed within her and she forcibly ignored it, until the song grew so loud she returned Aimal's touch.

Forgive me, she thought as he pulled her close and slid a hand across her bare back.

In the days that followed, they took a boat across the crystal clear waters to the Gulf of Gökova. To a small island, rugged and rocky. On a mound of earth edged by rocks and turquoise water, a temple to Apollo stood, sun-bleached stones between twisting trees.

"But why is it called Cleopatra Island?" asked Nora.

Aimal picked up a rock and tossed it into the water.

"A legend tells that Cleopatra used to come here to rendezvous with Mark Antony. That he had white sand brought from Egypt by the boatload to fashion a paradise for her."

"Really?" Nora ran her hand over rough blocks of stone.

"Others say the sand is made of tiny shells found only on the island. Whatever you choose to believe, this place is unique, and its sand is protected."

A faded wooden boardwalk led over rocky ground through piny vegetation, and at last to a strip of white sand. It was roped off.

Just back from the beach were wooden sunbeds set in rows across the ground. Aimal chose one. As he pulled off his shirt, Nora slipped off her sundress to reveal a yellow bikini. Rays of light fell on her pale, bare skin.

When they had swum in the turquoise water, splashing each other and floating with interlinked arms, they returned to the sunbeds and stretched out side by side.

"Tell me," said Nora, turning onto her side to face Aimal. "What happened when Cleopatra and Mark Antony met?"

"She seduced him."

"Did they marry?"

"No," said Aimal, watching Nora's eyes. "Mark Antony had a wife in Rome."

"How scandalous," said Nora, trying to stop the smile that curled up from her lips.

"So how did she seduce him?"

"They were to meet at Tarsus, just east of here. But Cleopatra delayed their meeting to build the anticipation. As Mark Antony stood with a crowd on the shore, a boat appeared with a golden prow and sails of purple silk. Beneath a gold-embroidered canopy, Cleopatra reclined on cushions, her body draped in silks like the goddess Aphrodite. Attendants dressed as sea nymphs fanned her and sprayed clouds of perfume, carrying her scent across the waves."

"Mmm," said Nora, closing her eyes.

"Mark Antony invited Cleopatra to a banquet, but she had already prepared one for him.

She led him to a banquet hall ornamented with gold and gemstones and they feasted extravagantly, on roast boar, candied sweets, and wine brought in clay vessels. When Mark Antony admired the sumptuous sofas she had provided for him and his entourage, Cleopatra gifted them to him. Their discussion of an alliance soon became more than political."

"I can only imagine," said Nora, a smile stirring at her lips. "What happened after that?"

"He joined her to Alexandria, where they indulged with abandon, feasting nightly, playing dice, and wandering the streets for whole nights in disguise."

"An enjoyable distraction from their duties, I'm sure."

Aimal looked into Nora's eyes. "It was more than a distraction. They loved each other for the rest of their lives."

Nora said nothing. She stretched, closed her eyes, and let the sun's rays caress her body.

She thought of Cleopatra, legs scissoring through the shallows as her bronze skin flashed in the light. Compelled by desire to the arms of Mark Antony. Standing waist deep in the water as she swam to him, reaching out strong arms to her, pulling her close to a broad, hairless chest. But she could not picture Mark Antony's face. Instead, on his body, she saw the face of Aimal.

With a sense of the inevitable, Nora flew back to Stockholm, to Henrik.

He was waiting for her in the Arrivals' Hall, but his eyes appeared pouchier, his shoulders bowed. He embraced her in a tight clench of his arms.

"New perfume?" he asked.

"Yeah," she said, body tensing with horror that he could smell Aimal's scent.

Henrik brought his face to her neck, inhaled and kissed her. "I like it."

A tremor raced through her.

She could not wash it off. Aimal's scent had seeped into her skin, become a part of her. That dark, musky smell that lay just beyond her recognition. The scent of intoxication. The feeling for him burned on within her, beyond her control.

When they reached home, Henrik's lips felt cold and slippery as oysters. Nora pulled away from him.

"I... don't feel well," she said. "What's wrong?" he asked, voice soft and attentive.

"I'm not sure. I just need to lie down."

Nora sat on the ledge beside a rain-streaked window. Beyond it were the brick buildings and the streaked, green bronze spires of Stockholm, the distant water pale as the clouds above. The scene seemed too sickly-familiar. She closed her eyes. Beneath the surface of her eyelids she saw sun-drenched white walls, minarets, and a shining sea.

As she lay on her back staring up at the ceiling, she knew she was not the self she had been before, but neither did she want to be. She could not go on living the life of her past. She could drift into a haze of sadness as the dark winter days enfolded her or she could use what she'd gained to brighten her surroundings.

When the right moment came, and she could lessen the impact of the explosion as much as possible, she would tell him.

But first she had to fix something. To rekindle a flame left to burn down to ashes. What we're missing is spice.

The scent of paprika filled the kitchen as Nora fried onions. Henrik sneezed.

On the table she set a bowl of mashed broad beans, cubed aubergine in a yogurt tomato sauce, pale, defrosted flatbread and a paste of red peppers and walnuts.

When they had eaten, Henrik complaining of the spices and relenting with a grudging enjoyment, Nora brought out a dish she had concealed in the kitchen.

"Close your eyes," she said.

"What are you doing?" demanded Henrik.

"Just close your eyes."

Nora's fingers slipped under the lid of the dish, removed a stuffed apricot and brought it to Henrik's lips. □

The Art of Procrastination

Transforming Delay into Productivity

Eric N. Patel



Procrastination—a word that often conjures images of laziness, missed deadlines, and unrealized potential. But what if procrastination isn't the enemy of productivity, but rather its misunderstood ally? In this masterclass, we'll explore the subtle art of procrastination, revealing its surprising benefits and uncovering the hidden genius behind delaying the inevitable. Rather than viewing procrastination as a flaw, we'll reframe it as a strategy that, when mastered, can lead to greater creativity, efficiency, and even joy.

Procrastination is not a modern affliction; it has deep evolutionary roots. Our ancestors were masters of procrastination because it often served a vital survival function. In a world where careful planning and resource management were

crucial, delaying action until the last possible moment allowed early humans to conserve energy, avoid unnecessary risks, and increase their chances of success. This “wait and see” approach wasn't laziness; it was strategic patience.

In today's world, the context has changed, but the instinct to procrastinate remains. Far from being a simple flaw, procrastination is a remnant of a survival strategy that can still serve a purpose if harnessed correctly.

The Virtues of Procrastination: How Delaying Can Be Beneficial

To truly appreciate procrastination, we must first debunk the myth that it is inherently bad. In reality, there are several compelling reasons why procrastination can be beneficial.

Fostering Creativity

One of the most surprising benefits of procrastination is its ability to foster creativity. When we delay starting a task, our minds continue to process it in the background, often leading to creative solutions that might not have emerged if we had started immediately. This phenomenon, known as “incubation,” allows our subconscious to work on problems, making connections and generating ideas that we might overlook in a more focused state.

Charles Darwin, for instance, procrastinated for over 20 years before publishing *On the Origin of Species*. During this time, his ideas matured and evolved, making his eventual work more comprehensive and impactful.

Harnessing the Power of Deadlines

There's something uniquely motivating

about a looming deadline. As the clock ticks down, our focus sharpens, adrenaline kicks in, and we often enter a state of heightened productivity known as “flow.” Procrastination, in this context, can be a powerful tool. By delaying a task until the last minute, we create a sense of urgency that drives us to achieve more in a short period than we might have in a leisurely week.

This explains why many people produce their best work under pressure. The time constraints force us to cut through distractions and make quick, effective decisions.

Avoiding Unnecessary Work

Procrastination can also serve as a filter for unnecessary tasks. In a world that constantly demands action, it’s easy to fall into the trap of doing things just to stay busy. By delaying certain tasks, we give ourselves the chance to reassess their importance. Is that meeting really necessary? Does that report need to be written, or is the data already available?

In this way, procrastination can actually enhance efficiency by helping us focus on what truly matters and avoiding the busy-work that doesn’t contribute to our goals.

Mastering Strategic Procrastination: A Guide

Now that we’ve explored the benefits of procrastination, let’s delve into the practical aspects of mastering it. Strategic procrastination is about knowing when and how to delay effectively, using the time gained to your advantage.

Embrace the Delay

The first step in mastering procrastination is to embrace it. Instead of fighting the urge to delay, lean into it. Recognize that procrastination is not a sign of laziness but a natural part of the creative and decision-making process. By giving yourself permission to procrastinate, you free your mind from the guilt and anxiety that often accompany it, allowing you to use the delay productively.

Set Clear Intentions

Strategic procrastination isn’t about avoiding work indefinitely; it’s about delaying with purpose. Ask yourself why you’re delaying a task. Are you waiting for more information? Giving yourself time to think creatively? Or simply recharging before diving in?

By setting clear intentions for your procrastination, you ensure that the delay is purposeful and aligned with your goals.

Prioritize Importance Over Urgency

One of the biggest traps in procrastination is focusing on urgent tasks at the expense of important ones. It’s easy to spend hours on emails or small tasks while meaningful projects sit on the back burner. To avoid this, prioritize the important over the urgent. If a task is urgent but not important, consider delaying it in favor of more significant work.

Conversely, if a task is important but not urgent, use your procrastination time to think strategically about how to tackle it effectively.

“It’s also crucial to recognize when procrastination is a sign of deeper issues, such as fear, anxiety, or perfectionism. If you procrastinate in ways that are harmful, it may be worth exploring the underlying causes and seeking support if needed.”

Clarify Your Thoughts

Procrastination can be a powerful tool for clarifying your thoughts. When you delay a task, you give your mind the opportunity to process information, consider different perspectives, and arrive at more thoughtful conclusions. This is especially valuable for complex or creative tasks, where rushing in too soon can lead to shallow or poorly considered work.

Use your procrastination time to engage in activities that stimulate your thinking, such as taking a walk, reading, or having a conversation with a friend. These activities can help you approach your task with fresh insights and a clearer sense of direction.

Set a Firm Deadline

While procrastination can be beneficial, it’s important to avoid letting it drag on indefinitely. Set a firm deadline for when you will start and complete your task. This deadline should be realistic, giving you enough time to benefit from the delay without risking your goals.

Once the deadline is set, commit to it. Use the urgency it creates to fuel your productivity and focus. Remember, the goal of strategic procrastination is not to avoid work but to delay it just long enough to maximize efficiency and creativity.

The False Start Technique

An effective procrastination technique is the “false start.” Begin a task just enough to get a feel for it, then deliberately set it aside. This helps you overcome the initial resistance and gives your mind something to work on during the delay.

For example, if you’re writing a report, draft the introduction or outline the main points, then step away. This allows your subconscious to continue processing the task, often leading to breakthroughs or new ideas when you return to it later.

Embrace Productive Procrastination

Not all procrastination needs to be idle. Some of the best procrastinators use their delay time productively, engaging in activities that are enjoyable, fulfilling, or even beneficial in the long run. This is the art of “productive procrastination,” where you channel your avoidance into activities that, while not directly related to the task at hand, still contribute to your overall well-being or productivity.

For instance, if you’re avoiding a difficult project, use that time to organize your workspace, exercise, or tackle a different, less daunting task. These activities can provide a sense of accomplishment and momentum, making it easier to return to the original task with a fresh perspective.

Procrastination in the Modern World: Navigating Challenges and Opportunities

In today’s fast-paced, hyper-connected world, procrastination is often seen as a weakness. We live in a culture that values constant productivity and immediate action. However, by embracing procrastination as a strategic tool, we can reclaim our time, creativity, and sense of agency.

Avoiding the Procrastination Trap

While procrastination can be beneficial, it's important to manage it properly to avoid negative consequences like missed deadlines, increased stress, and overwhelm. Practice procrastination strategically, using the techniques discussed to ensure that your delay is purposeful and productive.

It's also crucial to recognize when procrastination is a sign of deeper issues, such as fear, anxiety, or perfectionism. If you procrastinate in ways that are harmful, it may be worth exploring the underlying causes and seeking support if needed.

Opportunities in the Digital Age

The digital age presents both challenges and opportunities for modern procrastinators. While the constant barrage of emails and notifications makes it easier to procrastinate, technology also offers tools to manage it effectively. Productivity apps can help you set and stick to deadlines, while mindfulness practices can reduce the stress that fuels procrastination. Additionally, the wealth of online resources can provide inspiration and ideas during your procrastination time, helping you approach tasks with greater creativity and insight. Furthermore, the ability to easily connect with others online can turn procrastination into a collaborative process, where shared ideas and perspectives lead to even better outcomes.

Conclusion: Embrace Procrastination as an Art

We've explored procrastination not as a flaw to be eradicated but as an art form to be mastered. We've seen how procrastination can foster creativity, sharpen focus, and help avoid unnecessary work. We've learned techniques for delaying with purpose, setting clear intentions, and using procrastination time productively.

Ultimately, the art of procrastination is about balance. It's about knowing when to delay, when to act, and how to use the time in between to your advantage. By embracing procrastination as a tool rather than a hindrance, we can navigate our work and lives with greater creativity, efficiency, and satisfaction.

So the next time you feel the urge to procrastinate, don't fight it. Embrace it. Set your intentions, trust your process, and remember: procrastination, when done well, is not a failure—it's a strategy. □

Sigourney Valentine O'Connell, aka Muse

henry 7. reneau, jr.

Sigourney, aka Ziggy, muse of my dreams to me,
conjures a pipe wrench from my tongue

to tighten aerodynamic sounds :
ashes to ashes, dust to dust

congealed to flat rocks skimming water,
airborne as a singular adjective.

her eyes, emerald green to blue flint, & spark
to hazel tint that inspires me,

filling my mind with epiphany :
to eat from bowls : mouthfuls of sound,

consonants garnish vowels
with a bright light vision

now revealed as inner eye &
rested on a sheltered, park bench,

wind against my face
& long shadows at my back.

feminine singular, she spins a spell
rising bad tidings from Obeah's mouth,

from endless curve of ass & thigh
handcuffed to the bedpost with elastic words,

from jagged depth of wanton greed,
from as-the-crow-flies;

her moral parallel questions
& challenges the machine.

Muse : hot, groaning station
from which train cars issue,

unraveling to rhymes that shape her,
& keep on moving—magic, long as train smoke.

The Allure of Eating Out

Hector Jean Fournier

Eating out at a restaurant is more than just a meal; it's an experience that engages all our senses, nurtures our social connections, and provides a break from the routine of everyday life. But what exactly is it about dining out that we find so appealing? The psychology behind our love for restaurants reveals a fascinating blend of social, emotional, and sensory factors that make eating out such a cherished activity.

At the heart of the dining experience is social interaction. Restaurants serve as social hubs where people gather to share meals, celebrate milestones, and enjoy the company of others. This communal aspect of dining is deeply rooted in our evolutionary history. From ancient times, sharing food has been a way for humans to bond, establish relationships, and create a sense of community.

Today, the social nature of dining out continues to be a significant draw. Whether it's a romantic dinner for two, a family gathering, or a night out with friends, restaurants provide a setting where people can connect in a meaningful way. The act of sharing a meal fosters conversation and allows for quality time with loved ones, making dining out an important ritual in our social lives.

Another psychological factor that drives our love for restaurants is the pleasure of indulgence. Dining out often involves foods and experiences that we might not typically indulge in at home. The anticipation of a delicious meal, the presentation of beautifully plated dishes, and the enjoyment of trying new flavors all contribute to the sensory pleasure of eating out.

Restaurants also offer a break from the daily routine of meal preparation and cleanup, allowing diners to relax and be pampered. This sense of indulgence taps into our desire for occasional luxury and self-care, making the restaurant experience feel special and rewarding.

The ambiance of a restaurant plays a crucial role in shaping our dining experience. From the lighting and music to the décor and service, every element of a restaurant's environment is designed to create a particular mood and enhance the overall experience. For instance, a dimly lit, cozy restaurant might evoke feelings of intimacy and romance, while a bright, bustling café could inspire energy and conversation.

Psychologically, the ambiance of a restaurant can influence not only how we feel during the meal but also how we perceive the food

itself. Studies have shown that factors like lighting and music can affect our taste perception, making food seem more flavorful or enjoyable. This sensory enhancement is a key part of why we seek out restaurants that offer a specific atmosphere or vibe.

For many, eating out is also about the thrill of discovery. Trying a new restaurant or cuisine can be an adventure, offering an opportunity to explore different cultures, flavors, and culinary techniques. This sense of novelty stimulates our brains, triggering a release of dopamine, the "feel-good" hormone associated with pleasure and reward.

The excitement of discovering something new, whether it's a hidden gem in the city or a creative dish on the menu, adds an element of fun and surprise to the dining experience. This exploration of new tastes and environments keeps the experience of eating out fresh and exciting, encouraging us to return for more.

Restaurants can also serve as a way to express status and identity. The choice of where and what to eat can be a reflection of personal taste, lifestyle, and social status. Dining at a trendy or upscale restaurant, for example, can convey a sense of sophistication or exclusivity. Similarly, frequenting a particular type of cuisine or restaurant can be a way to align oneself with a certain cultural or social group.

This aspect of dining out taps into our desire for social recognition and belonging. By choosing specific restaurants, people can signal their preferences, values, and social standing, which can enhance their self-esteem and sense of identity.

Ultimately, the psychology of eating out is about much more than just the food. It's about the social connections we forge, the sensory pleasures we indulge in, the ambiance that enhances our experience, and the sense of discovery and identity that dining out provides. Restaurants offer a unique blend of these elements, creating an experience that goes beyond mere sustenance and taps into deeper psychological needs.

In a world where our lives are increasingly busy and digital, the act of dining out remains a cherished ritual, providing a space where we can connect, unwind, and enjoy the simple pleasure of a shared meal. Whether it's a casual lunch with friends or a lavish dinner celebration, the psychology behind our love for restaurants ensures that eating out will always hold a special place in our hearts. □



Death and Taxes

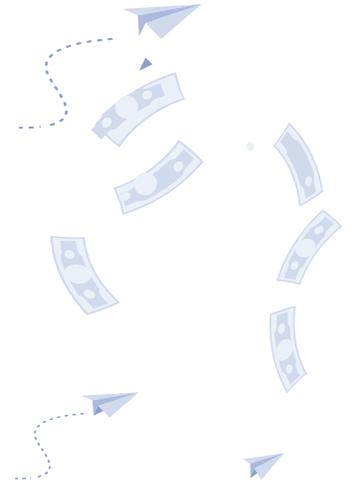
Heimir Steinarsson

Our legislators can't be sane:
They've raised the taxes yet again.
*It was, they say ingeniously,
done out of sheer necessity.*

We know there must be something wrong
when politicians sing the song
of rigorous austerity
and need for strict frugality.

But somehow we don't seem to learn
to keep the money that we earn
from being seized and swiftly spent
by members of the government.

So there we have it: Nothing but
a punch in our compliant gut,
just to make sure we understand
once and for all who rules the land.





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