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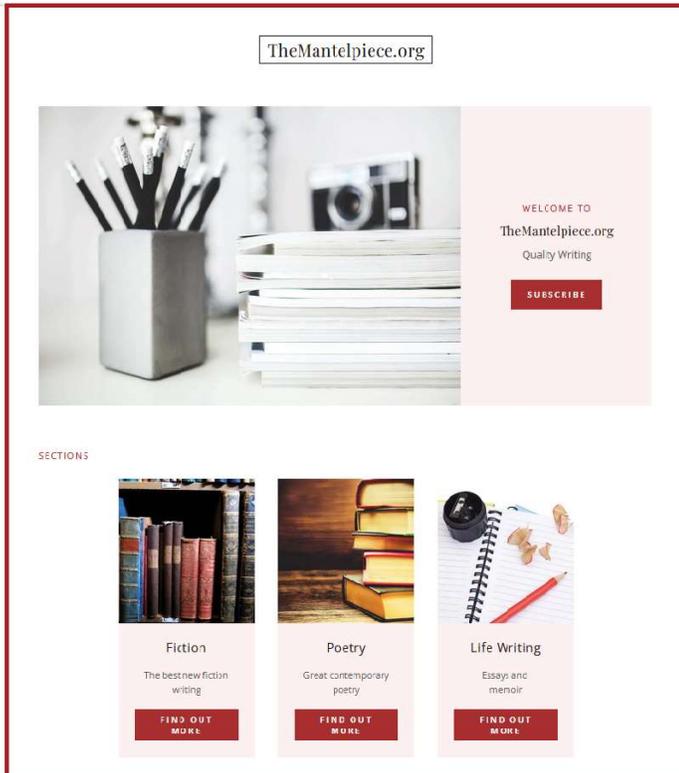
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Contributors

Lillian Heimisdottir is a writer and poet residing in Barcelona.

T. K. Howell is a fiction writer. He lives on the banks of the Thames and manages ancient oak woodlands ([web](#)).

Eleanor Jiménez is a writer from Barcelona ([web](#)).

Sarah Sands Phillips is a Red River Métis/British artist and poet, currently based in Tokyo, Japan ([web](#)).

Irena Martin is a writer from Oakland, California ([web](#)).

Erik N. Patel is a writer and digital nomad ([web](#)).

Hector Jean Fournier is a food writer from Marseille ([web](#)).

Thomas Smith is a poet from Austin, Texas ([web](#)). His book in verse

The Search for King: A Fable was published in December 2022.

Heimir Steinarsson is an Icelandic typographer and linguist.

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Editor: Lillian Heimisdottir (lillian@themantelpiece.org)

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Living in the Moment

Finding Balance in the Modern Age

In the breakneck speed of modern living, where technology and efficiency rule our daily routines, we are often driven to a point where we forget to savor the actual experience of life. We may lose sight of the present, constantly dwelling on past regrets or anxiously awaiting the future.

This lack of presence in the now has led to a loss of connection with ourselves, our surroundings, and the people we care about. But what does it mean to live in the moment, and why is it vital for our well-being? This in-depth exploration seeks to illuminate the profound significance of living in the moment in our fast-paced world.

Today's society is more connected than ever. With smartphones, social media, and a constant influx of information, we can easily reach anyone or access anything at the touch of a button. However, this hyper-connectivity often leads to a paradoxical disconnection from what truly matters. We become prisoners of the digital world, forgetting the sensory experience of life and the beauty of human connection.

Our daily lives are filled with tasks, meetings, and responsibilities. The constant hustle leaves us exhausted and disconnected from the present moment. Many feel the pressure to keep up with societal expectations, achieve success, and strive for a future filled with materialistic rewards. This endless pursuit often leaves us feeling empty and discontented.

Living in the moment, or mindfulness, is a conscious effort to be fully

engaged in the present experience without judgment or distraction. It involves being aware of our thoughts, feelings, and surroundings, embracing them without letting our minds wander into the past or future.

The philosophy of mindfulness has roots in various cultural traditions, including Buddhism and other Eastern philosophies. It's not about abandoning the world but engaging with it more fully. Practicing mindfulness enables us to see the world with a fresh perspective, recognizing the interconnectedness of all things.

By focusing on the present, we can reduce stress, anxiety, and depression. Living in the moment allows us to let go of past regrets and future anxieties, leading to greater mental clarity and emotional balance.

Mindful presence in our interactions with others fosters empathy, understanding, and genuine connection. By actively listening and engaging with others in the present, we build stronger and more meaningful relationships.

By grounding ourselves in the present, we can focus our attention more acutely, leading to improved creativity and productivity. Instead of being pulled in different directions by distractions, living in the moment allows us to approach tasks with greater efficiency and innovation.

Mindfulness can be cultivated through various practices like meditation, yoga, and deep breathing exercises. These practices are not only a way to relax but also tools to train our minds to stay in the present.

Living in the moment encourages us to appreciate the simple things in life. It's about slowing down, savoring a meal, enjoying nature, or spending quality time with loved ones. These ordinary moments can become extraordinary when we give them our full attention.

Taking breaks from technology and setting specific boundaries can help us stay connected to the present. Unplugging from digital devices allows us to reconnect with ourselves and the world around us.

Living in the moment is a powerful antidote to the frantic pace of modern life. It's a philosophy that goes beyond a mere buzzword, offering tangible benefits for our mental health, relationships, and overall quality of life.

In a world that constantly pushes us to look elsewhere, living in the moment invites us to look inward and around us, to reconnect with the essence of being human. It's a gentle reminder that our lives are a precious collection of moments, and each one deserves to be lived fully.

As we navigate through the complexities of the 21st century, the practice of living in the moment is not just a luxury; it's a necessity. It's a path to a more fulfilled and balanced life, urging us to be conscious, compassionate, and connected.

Living in the moment is not merely a concept; it's a way of life. It beckons us to slow down, breathe, and truly live. After all, the present moment is all we truly have, and it's in the now that life unfolds in all its splendor. □ LH

Tangier Night

Lillian Heimisdottir



Illustration: Fresh Lofi

“You’ll be safe with us”, the guys had said when I voiced my concerns about travelling alone as a woman in Morocco. I had met them on the ferry from Tarifa and they seemed like two decent blokes. Although being from France, they spoke English fairly well and looked like average college student travellers with their rucksacks and sleeping bags. Pierre and Jean-Luc. Those were their names. They came from a small town near Toulouse and they said they’d been to Tangier before.

They knew the city and all the cool places you needed to visit. And – best of all – they had contact to some local people and promised me that we would get invited to their homes and experience some local atmosphere.

And now we were here, in this shady looking house at the edge of the Medina, the old city centre of Tangier. Local atmosphere, my foot! The Frenchies had dragged me with them to a local kif-seller and were lighting up huge pipes containing some illegal substance that I didn’t care about knowing more about.

“I’m out of here,” I said and started to get ready to leave the place. “I’m going back to the hostel”.

“Ok, whatever,” Jean-Luc said. “You think you’ll find the way back on your own?”

“I don’t know. I just want to leave.”

I tried to open the door, but it was locked. “Open up and let me out,” I hissed at the Arab who had let us in earlier with an overly forthcoming ‘Welcome my friends’.

The man moved slowly across the room and took a large key from under his kaftan and opened the door to let me out. All the while he sneered contemptuously at me. I took a last look at Pierre and Jean-Luc, who were sitting on a couch amid a mountain of colourful pillows, sucking on their pipes and staring emptily into space. I stepped out into the night and wondered how to find my way back to the Riad hostel, where we had checked in earlier that day and where all my stuff, including my passport, was stored.

I tried to recall the way we had come here, but on our way we had made many stops and I really wasn’t sure even in which direction the city centre was. Besides, it was getting dark and the streets in the Medina were not lit up by street-lights. I decided that it was no use standing there, but that the only way was to keep going and see if my luck would not carry me to my destination.

I marched on through the labyrinth of winding alleys, running again and again into dead-ends which forced me to turn back and try another way. At times I thought I heard the noises from the Bazar, that was located near the centre, and smelled the food that was being sold there, only to wander off further

away and run into another dead-end. It was completely dark now, and the only light to go by came from the windows in the old houses.

After running around the maze of tiny streets, without seeing another human being, I spotted a group of young men standing at a corner in front of some kind of Hole-in-the-wall coffee shop. They stopped talking when they saw me approach and started calling out to me, first in Arabic and then in broken French.

“Ou est le Petit Socco?” I asked them, in the hope that they would tell me how to get to the main square. The men just laughed and pointed in three different directions, asking if I wanted to hire them as guides.

“I just need to get to the main square, the Petit Socco, where my hostel is located,” I said, not sure if they understood English, but too nervous to ask them in French.

One of them, the oldest in the group, motioned with his head in the direction of an alley leading to what I assumed would be the right way and hurried on, muttering a few words of appreciation. But I had not gone far when I noticed that one of the men from the group was following me.

“Where you going?” he asked. “I show you.”

“Thank you, but I’m just trying to get back to the main square, the Petit Socco,” I replied.

“I show you. No worry, I show you,” he said, and kept on walking beside me.

I wasn’t sure what to do. One the one hand, it was clear that I was lost and needed some guidance to find my way back. On the other I felt apprehensive of the man, who insisted that he was “my friend” and that I should “no worry.”

“Is it far to the Petit Socco?” I asked.

“No, no. Not far. I show you. No worry.”

But worry I did. I was here at the mercy of this overly friendly Moroccan, wandering the dark and winding alleys of an obscure and unfamiliar town, with no means of escaping, should he attack me and try to force himself upon me. I cursed myself for having broken every rule of common sense and safety for

solo female travellers, and stories about women being raped and murdered flashed before my eyes.

To my relief, we soon turned into an alley that was alive with people and open shops and coffee-bars. My self-appointed guide kept talking and asking me all kinds of questions that I answered as evasively as I possibly could.

“Where you staying? Where your hostel?”

“It’s near the main square. Is it still far?”

“You alone in Tangier? You travel alone in Morocco?”

“I have some friends waiting for me at the hostel. They are there right now, waiting for me.”

We walked on and after a while I started to notice places that seemed familiar. We came to a street with shops, selling leather bags and all kinds of fancy items to the tourists, where I had strolled through this afternoon, mesmerized by the sight of hand-woven rugs and carpets, hammered metal-works, argan oil and colourful piles of spices.

“I think I can find my way to the hostel from here,” I said.

“No, no. I show you.”

“I think it’s down here,” I said, picking up my pace, hoping to get rid of the fellow.

“Yes, yes. Here. I show you.”

He was clearly not going to disappear and I knew he was expecting a tip for his unsolicited guidance.

I took out a ten dirham note, the equivalent of one Euro and handed it to him.

“That’s for you. Thank you for your help.”

But he just looked at me with disdain and made it clear that this was not what he had expected for his services. He wanted me to pay ten times the amount and when I refused, he turned from being my “friend” to being quite aggressive and persistent. When I tried to walk away, he followed me shouting all kinds of insults at me, making it look to bystanders as if I had cheated him out of the agreed payment.

Luckily for me at that moment I

spotted Pierre and Jean-Luc, on their way to the hostel.

“Hey, guys.” I shouted and waved to them, making it clear to my obnoxious guide that I had detected some back-up.

This worked and the hustler finally backed off and left me alone, although not without shouting some obscenities at me as I hurried away.

“What happened to you?” Jean-Luc asked. “You just disappeared.”

“Yeah, you were suddenly gone,” Pierre added. “We had no idea what became of you.”

They were clearly still stoned out of their head, and didn’t feel like explaining myself to them. I went into the hostel and up to my room, where I tried to calm myself down after the unpleasant experience I’d just been through.

“Don’t panic now,” I told myself. “Don’t let this incident turn you paranoid and ruin travelling for you. Keep your wits about you and you’ll be alright.”

Eventually, I fell asleep and when I woke up the morning after, things looked brighter. I went downstairs to have breakfast and after two cups of stimulating coffee, I mustered up the courage to talk to some fellow guests, a couple from the Netherlands, who had been travelling in Morocco for some weeks and had experienced similar harassment from self-appointed guides and street hustlers.

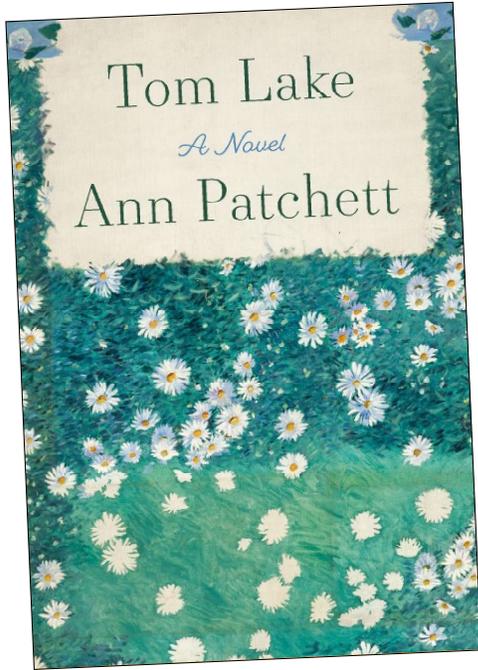
“You have to be firm with those guys,” the woman said and the man agreed with her.

“Yeah, just tell them to buzz off,” he said and laughed.

I laughed too, feeling relieved after having been able to talk to sympathetic people, who themselves had been through similar experiences and knew what was going on.

That afternoon I continued my journey, taking the train to Marrakesh and from there to the ancient city of Fez, promising myself to be more careful and to choose my friends more wisely in the future on my travels. □

New Fiction Books



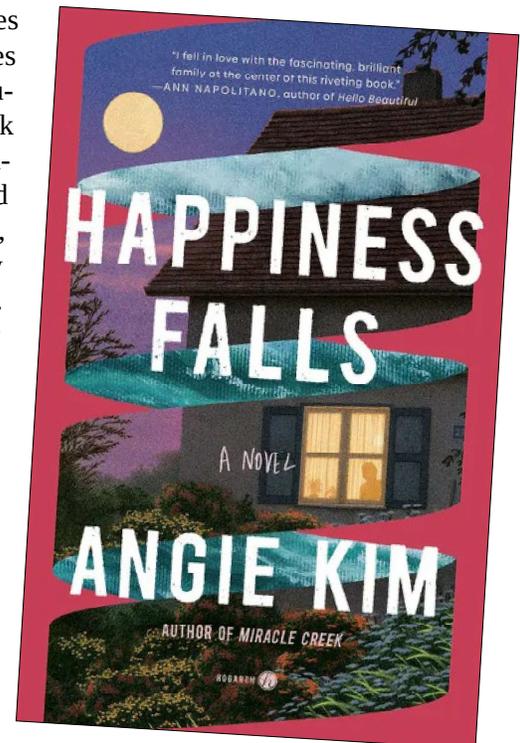
Tom Lake by Ann Patchett (Harper). In 2020, Lara’s trio of daughters come back to their family’s orchard located in Northern Michigan. Amidst cherry-picking, they implore their mother to share the tale of Peter Duke, a renowned actor she once had both a professional and romantic relationship with at a theater company named Tom Lake. As memories flood back, the daughters reflect on their personal journeys and bond with Lara, leading them to question their perceptions of life. “Tom Lake” captures an ambiance reminiscent of the 1980s, a time less dominated by parental oversight. The novel has a quaint charm, filled with the warmth of homemade pies, crafted quilts, pesky goats, and character connections like a middle daughter named Maisie, inspired by another grandmother’s name. Lara, in her later years, stands out in Michigan’s countryside, allowing many past connections to remain in the mists of memory rather than seeking them out on modern platforms like Facebook. Old-time expressions are scattered throughout, providing a taste of the era.

Patchett artfully weaves her own wisdom throughout the tale. Particularly noticeable is the character Pallace, an elegant Black character whose place in the theater setting feels a touch oversimplified. The substance of “Tom Lake” is of tranquility and reflection. It pays homage to the beauty in daily life and the importance of cherishing small moments. Its focus remains on familial love, the continuity of generations, and domestic peace. Patchett’s work invites readers to bask in the narrative’s warmth and soothing atmosphere. In essence, “Tom Lake” delves deep into early romances, marital bonds, and the hidden chapters in parents’ lives predating their offspring’s birth. It is both optimistic and reflective, probing the definition of happiness in tumultuous times. Patchett’s storytelling, coupled with her keen understanding of familial intricacies, results in a captivating tale that reaffirms her standing as a top-tier literary force. □

Happiness Falls by Angie Kim (Hogarth). In her latest work, “Happiness Falls,” Angie Kim presents a tale where the family of protagonist Adam Parson grapples with revelations about his life. During a 2020 summer day, Adam mysteriously goes missing on a hiking trip in suburban Virginia with his 14-year-old son, Eugene. Eugene, diagnosed with autism and Angelman syndrome and non-verbal, comes back distraught, with hints of a violent encounter. This forms the crux of Kim’s contemplative second novel. Though it has the trappings of a mystery, the book goes beyond the mere disappearance of Adam. Kim uses the plot to delve deep into varied themes, including the very essence of happiness, the Korean ethos of ‘jeong’, speech therapy intricacies, and most poignantly, society’s frequent misreading of the neurodivergent.

The narrative lens is offered by Mia, Adam’s 20-year-old daughter and a fiercely intelligent individual who’s returned home amidst the pandemic. With a razor-sharp intellect, Mia’s insights range from the philosophical to the pop-cultural. As she unravels her father’s abrupt departure, the story unfolds with the dynamism and unpredictability of a kaleidoscope’s shifting patterns.

Surprising clues unfold. Was Adam involved in an extramarital relationship, compelling him to elope? A disturbing video even hints at the possibility of Eugene playing a part in Adam’s disappearance. With each emerging clue, Mia crafts new theories, continually reassessing prior events. While captivating, Mia’s intense scrutiny can sometimes stifle the narrative, leaving little room for readers to draw their own conclusions. Mia openly professes her love for stories with twist endings, urging readers to revisit earlier pages with newfound clarity. True to her word, “Happiness Falls” culminates in a dramatic revelation that transforms one’s perspective on the entire tale. □



Tanka

Sarah Sands Phillips

Is It Obvious

The geometry?
We are all this in spaces
of gathered angles
Corners hitting measured hearts
that must move worlds, and be moved

Do You Remember

Do you remember
that time in the studio?
It fell out of me
dropped and rolled quick past my tongue
“I feel like I’m not living”

Cockroach

There is just something
about him that unsettles
me, makes me obsess
become a helpless digger
a shadow’s corners keeper



Prairie Grass

T. K. Howell

She'd found him with nothing more to go on than a first name given at last call on a Saturday night. It showed a level of industriousness and determination that Sam respected. As for her name? Charlotte perhaps? She looked like she could be a Charlotte. It wasn't in his nature to be cruel, but it didn't hurt to get their name wrong when they pulled this kind of thing.

The ranch sat on the edge of the Blacklands, on the lip of an openness that never seemed to end. The prairie grass in the paddock was baked thin. It was a poor diet and they were supplementing the horse feed. Indian grass spikes splayed out tall alongside switch grass, browning, fading. Every morning, Sam stared into the infinite emptiness of the prairie hinterland and thought of deep oceans. He'd been in the sea once. It terrified him. The wide-open space, the

idea that something huge and monstrous could be moving down there beneath his feet and he would never know.

Charlotte—or whoever she was—approached with the rising sun at her back. It was a long way to drive out of town so early in the morning. She was a handsome woman. Not beautiful, as such. Handsome. Strong features set in a broad face, framed by deep brunette curls. She stalked the wooden paddock fence line toward him. She'd brought a man with her. He stayed back at the ranch gate for now, leaning against her maroon Datsun. Sam rolled his eyes and spat on the floor. So it was going to be like that, was it?

"Sam?" she said when she was about twenty feet away. He didn't look over or acknowledge her. Instead, he watched the foal as it grazed. It watched him in turn,

waiting to see if Sam would move, if it would need to react. The foal was Sam's newest and he was working it slowly. That's what the owners wanted now. Back when he first started, when he was only fourteen and learning from that old soak Hirsch, it was about getting them broken and getting them fit to be mounted as quick as possible.

"Sam, I know it's you. A friend said you worked out here."

"Ma'am." He touched the brim of his hat. He was always amazed at how far such a simple gesture could go. He knew it was running into folksy, Southern, self-parody. But manners were manners.

The woman hesitated. "You didn't call me."

"Don't believe I ever made any promises to do so, Charlotte."



"Katie," the woman huffed. "You know damn well it's Katie."

It was early but already he was tired. Bone tired. He wasn't so young any longer. Fatigue. It was hard work, he was getting older, that was all. Perhaps he should cut back on the drink, on the bars, on the Katies and Charlottes.

"What can I do you for, Miss damn well Katie?"

"You didn't even reply to my messages. And you haven't been back to that bar since. You said you liked me."

Sam shrugged but didn't take his eyes from the foal. "Woulda thought it was obvious I did. Look, I wasn't looking for anything else. I'm not that kind of guy. I was quite clear."

"I guess you got what you wanted, is that it?"

"Isn't it what you wanted, too?" Sam asked, puzzled.

"Yeah, but..." Katie hesitated. "But upping and leaving like that under cover of night. Not a word after. It makes a girl feel grimy. Used."

"Well, you shouldn't. You're a fine woman, you should feel appreciated. There's no harm to it. No foul. Anyone judging you can go to hell," Sam said.

"I'm judging myself."

"Why?" Sam's brow wrinkled.

"Maybe... maybe because it's what people do. What grown-ups do, at any rate."

"Ma'am, I gotta get back to work. Now, who's the goon down by your car? Why'd you think you need a bodyguard, huh? He your little brother?"

"Who?" Katie turned and squinted back toward the rising sun, toward the gate. "Where?"

"Hmm." Sam watched the man as he continued to lean against the Datsun, arms folded. He was young and wiry looking and if it came to it Sam was sure he'd be out of puff before the kid had warmed up. He could throw a punch, maybe even two or three, but he couldn't brawl no more. Brawling took stamina. The Datsun kid wore a dark suit that made him look a little like an old-timey preacher and a little like a tax inspector. His shoes gleamed in the sunlight, even at one hundred yards. Sam was so captivated by him that he didn't register the rest of Katie's speech until she, too, seemed to flag in the morning heat.

"Ma'am, you're going to have to leave now. This is a workplace and my boss wouldn't take kindly to strangers on the

ranch," Sam lied. Markovits couldn't give a hoot. "Maybe I'll see you around."

"I don't know whether to laugh or cry," she said, exasperated.

"Try for neither?"

"You're going to die alone," Katie signed off. It wasn't original and it didn't cut him none. He never understood it. Why would he shack up with someone just for the sake of having company? Loneliness wasn't his enemy. Keeping house with another person, making nice every morning, and trying to think of brand new conversations over breakfast? It seemed so deadly draining.

He was filling up at the station when the Datsun Kid appeared, leaning against the hood of his truck. Leaning against vehicles seemed to be his primary disposition. Sam's mind had gone wherever it was minds go when the hands were pumping fuel into an empty tank. It was topping thirty degrees and the dizzying scent of petrol was heavy in the air. The fumes hit and the back of his brain felt like honeycomb dissolving in hot milk. He turned to put the nozzle back and nearly lost his balance, the head-rush tipping his senses upside-down. When he'd regained his composure, there was the kid. Now he got a good look at him, he wasn't quite so young. Mid-twenties, maybe. He had smooth skin and full, fair hair slicked back over a bare head. Sam's skin had been just as smooth once, before he had been at the ranch a while. He had liked the way it tanned in the sun, how the dry wind weathered it like sandpaper. From cherub to hardened old cow-puncher in two years on the ranch. It had given him something, he didn't know what. Gravitas? Some innate essence of masculinity that gave him an edge, out there in the night-time world. Through his late twenties and early thirties, he had studied and admired those lines, the toughness of them. Moisturiser was a sick joke played by advertisers on young men who didn't know the value of a face that had been lived in.

Now, with the once-distant shores of his forties homing into view, Sam looked at those lines and all that sun damage and knew there was no going back. The pattern was set. He would get old, and quickly.

"Fine day. Fine day. Short skirt weather, huh? Beautiful. Can you remember that one summer? Those long, bare legs that

wrapped around you and her lilting accent as she whispered in your ear? Oh, the discoveries. There's nothing to match it, is there? Finding it all out for the first time? Depreciating returns ever since."

Sam gripped the door frame of his truck and blinked. The kid tossed a coin and caught it. Tossed it, caught it. Over and over. Then he tossed the coin to Sam, who reacted too slowly, grabbing at empty air. It skittered to the ground, spiralling inward with a high, thin sound. When he looked up, the kid was gone. Sam stared at the space where he had been, then paid the attendant and gave the young man no further thought.

He drove on, replaying memories of Katie. But the memories were washed out, fading. Like two bad actors on a stage, it did nothing for him. It had only been a fortnight ago and it was already going, going, going. In the moment, it was everything. But after, it drifted on the breeze and into the prairie wilderness becoming thinner, until it was gone, gone, gone. How many had he forgotten?

The road into town was straight and empty through a flat expanse of biscuit-coloured soil and desiccated bluestem. His eyes sagged as he watched the still horizon. One swing of his arm and he could veer off into the tallgrass and just keep going, going, going out into the deep blue sea of wild indigo.

No. This road was his long, narrow bridge that led over the unknown fathoms. He wound down the window for a sharp snap of dry air and drove on, the sun sitting heavy over the truck. It reflected off the chrome wing mirror and dazzled his eyes. It blinded him for a second and he nearly missed the kid.

He was standing at the side of the road up ahead. Waiting. Hands in pockets. Bare head and dark suit in the afternoon sun. Sam pulled over and without a word passing between them, the kid got in.

"Where are you headed?" Sam asked. The kid didn't answer.

"Are you following me?" Sam snapped.

"Are you following me?" the kid grinned. "Town. We're heading to town, of course. I think we better get a drink. You're looking a little tense."

Sam didn't argue. "You gonna tell me your name, or do I have to guess?"

The kid smiled beatifically but again, didn't answer.

"John, right?"

"Why John?"

"Because you look like a John. That was my father's name. It's a solid enough name. Solid enough man."

"I bet he was the kinda guy who thought you could learn all you needed to know about a man by sidling up to him on a Sunday afternoon and asking 'what's the score?' Mine was like that. Talked about sowing wild oats a lot. Don't you remember me? It's Jack. I'm Jack."

Sam could only see Jack in his periphery. It was a long, straight road but he wasn't one to take his eyes off it. He caught the suggestion of the kid's smooth skin and unweathered face, the full head of blonde hair. His knuckles whitened on the steering wheel.

"We've met?"

"Jasmine," Jack said, ignoring him. "You remember the half-Mex girl who smelled of Jasmine?"

And Sam could. He could see her face clearly, even though it must have been fifteen, twenty years ago. Clearer than Katie had ever been. The scent was there, hanging in the air of the truck, saturating the upholstery, seeping into his clothes. He twitched his eyes at either side of the road, but there was nothing there but the same old brown earth and scrub, certainly no jasmine growing by the tarmac. He saw Jack smile and repeat "Jasmine", the scent came on stronger and Sam was gone. He was back at a college keg party, back in the days when he threw a mean spiral and could hit any guy on the field from fifty yards. Back before everything started to ache.

"Who are you?"

"The taste of her sweat, you remember? The way she wouldn't take her top off. You remember she had a scar? Heart surgery when she was younger. Made her anxious."

"It's going to be like that, is it?" Sam's lines wrinkled. "I guess I really need to get some rest."

"Do you remember her name?"

"No," Sam answered honestly.

"Me neither. Have you stopped keeping score?"

Sam's mouth twitched uncomfortably. "I grew outta that, I guess."

Jack chuckled. "Really?"

"I don't... I forget. No, it was immature. I don't even know who I was in competition with. Myself I guess. And I thought maybe that was the reason for it. To beat the other kids at college, you know? Now, I just like it, I suppose. The physicality of

it. Sex as sport. I don't see why they gotta try and make me feel ashamed of that. I don't see why they gotta play out some fairytale happy ending for us every time they come look for me ... I see you. I can see what you're thinking."

"It's not your fault they take you at your word," Jack said. Sam believed he heard an edge in the kid's voice.

"I don't lie to them," he said. "I don't make any promises. Did she send you? Katie?"

Jack shook his head. "It's not your fault they don't have the sense they was born with. Tsk. You tell them a story, you tell them about your work, you spin an old tale about the time that Overo died right underneath you when you'd ridden two hours out into the prairie just because you were young, just because you could, just for something to do. How you ran out of water, thought you was done for. How many times have you told that same story now?"

"Habit, I suppose. It's something that happened, is all."

"It all happened exactly that way, did it? You alone out there under then sun? And you don't think they hear that and imagine themselves in-between you and the great wide open. Tsk. You know what you're doing."

Sam grimaced and then rocked the steering wheel back and forth a few times, veering in and out of the lane dividers. His head bounced from side to side, catching the headrest. When he levelled out, Jack was still there.

"They warned me this might happen," Sam said.

"Tsk."

Up ahead, a car appeared out of the shimmering heat. It was the only other car on the road, the only car they'd seen for five minutes. Sam turned the radio up as loud as it would go and stared straight ahead. He leaned forward until Jack was in his blind-spot.

The sound of the car dopplered as it passed. Low-high-low. Sam blinked and they were in the parking lot of a downtown bar. He was stretched out in the back-seat of his truck and Jack was gone. It was still light out and would be for another three hours. He walked in and Jack was sat at the bar with two beers, waiting for him.

"You needed to rest," he explained.

"Long day," Sam answered. He must have slept a while in the parking lot. Didn't feel like he'd slept. Everything still ached. His joints were stiff and when he moved

his arms, twitched his fingers, he had the strangest sensation that they weren't quite where he expected them to be. It took him two grabs to take the beer and when he looked down at his hand gripping the cold glass, he was sure for a moment that it belonged to someone else.

"They always wanna fix you, right? They think you're a damaged kid inside that they can mend if they just show you enough love. Forget it. Remember bringing that stallion back from Benton City? You remember the daughter? She knew you were headed the next day. Those are the best ones. Heedless. No shame when they think they're never gonna see you again."

Sam smiled. "She sure was something. I had a rash on my back from the straw bales for a week. Had to sleep on my chest it itched so bad."

"It was worth it."

"It was."

Sam finished his beer. And then another. His eyelids began to feel like lead shutters.

"I think you should sit tonight out," Jack said, slipping his arm under Sam's shoulder and walking him back to his truck. "Sleep up. You're getting a little long in the tooth to follow a day on the ranch with a full night in someone else's bed."

"Like hell-"

"Easy," Jack said and before Sam knew it, he was laying down on his back seat again, and then it was sunrise and he was driving back to the ranch, the same biscuit-coloured dirt, the same tallgrass. His mind wandered and then he was working the foal in the pen, trotting it on a long rein. It was coming along, he turned and she would follow. She was trying to comply and he eased off the pressure. It was beginning to understand what he wanted from it. When to stop, when to move.

He didn't see Jack for the rest of the day and long before sunset he fell asleep in the little nook above the stables, draped in horse blankets, soothed by the gentle whinnying below. He woke after sunrise, wondering if he would ever see night-time again.

He took a simple lunch of eggs, bacon, and fried tomatoes at the truck-stop Diner two miles down the Highway. Katie, or Charlotte, or someone else he didn't recall, was sitting at the counter. She pretended not to see him. Outside, the hot baking sun had given way briefly to a thick band of white clouds. Disney animation clouds that you could reach out and pull a hand-

ful of candyfloss from. They sat over the prairie like God's eraser, ready to scrub it all out until it really was a featureless void.

Jack slid into the seat opposite Sam without a sound. With no signal or word passing between them, the waitress deposited a hot cup of black coffee on the table in front of him.

"You remember the cheerleaders? After the game and fresh from the shower and so ripe and you barely had to say a word and they were in the back-seat of your dad's pickup, your hand up their top? You'd just been knocked around a pitch for three hours, beaten and tackled and it hardly touched you, didn't feel it once you were out of your jersey. Now? It'd kill you."

"Go away, kid. Leave me alone," Sam snapped. His hands were holding the cutlery, slicing, cutting, putting food in his mouth. He looked at them, didn't recognise them, wasn't so sure. They were an inch or so wide of where his brain was telling him they were. If his hands could be in the wrong place, the whole world could be off its axis.

"Stop following me. Won't you please quit following me?" Sam's voice had a strained quality. He was shocked to feel the prick of something in the corner of his eyes.

"A blonde, a redhead, latino, black, asian, hippy, housewife, harlot. We gathered quite a collection."

"That's not what I was doing," Sam faltered. "I was just having some fun."

"Tsk."

Jack looked out the Diner window, past the cars rolling down the Highway and out across the Blacklands. He was looking at it the way a man looks out from the stern of a ship at home port retreating into the distance.

"Say, you wanna come for a walk, Sam?"

Sam followed Jack's gaze. His heart beat a tick faster. The eggs and bacon seemed to sit in a hard lump halfway to his stomach. He could feel the sweat at the base of his spine.

"No... no, I don't, thank you," Sam stammered. He found that nothing could compel him to turn his head and look at Jack, to chance meeting his eyes.

"That's OK, I'm in no hurry. You ever think about the old cowpokes, Sam? You ever think about how they broke half-wild Mustangs by the hundred? Sounds romantic, right? Until you think about what they

had to do. How would you break an adult horse that had only ever seen humans as something to run from?"

"There's no call for that nowadays. No need."

The Diner was filling up with a lunch-time crowd of truckers and ranch hands. The burble and chatter had been quietly rising and now, suddenly, it had become unbearable. Sam paid up and left. As the door closed behind him, the sound cut off like a chainsaw thrown into a lake. He was standing alone, looking up at a sky of white clouds the size of continents, the only sound the occasional rush of a car shooting past at eighty. He could walk off, right now, into the waves of tall grass. He could vanish out there, alone. The thought crept in and caught him unawares. He shrank from it, turning back to the Diner. Jack sat in the window, nursing his coffee. He gave Sam a toothy smile and nodded. Sam drove back to the ranch.

Markovits called across the paddock to him that afternoon, called him into the rotting old portacabin that sat behind the stables and served as his office. The ranch had money, and there were big, spacious rooms, but the boss had been in that portacabin for twenty years and nothing short of the roof collapsing would shift him. It smelled of moulding tax receipts and last week's lunch.

"You OK, Sam?" he asked. "I noticed you was limping a lot this week, the ache come back? You should go see a doctor. You know you's insured, don't you?"

"I'm fine, boss."

"You don't have to prove you're the toughest S.O.B. going no more, you know? And I don't want you suddenly keeling over and me losing you for months when it could be an easy fix."

"Just dog bone tired, boss. Not been sleeping too good, I think."

"You think?"

"Yeah," Sam answered and that seemed to be about all there was to say.

"Well... take it easy out there, Sam. I don't mind a guy getting loaded, but you been coming in some mornings I can smell you from back here. Like I say, go easy."

"Sure, boss. Sure."

Markovits looked down at some imaginary paperwork and waved him away, a difficult conversation half-had, his moral and professional duty upheld to the smallest degree.

The foal came along quickly that afternoon. It was nowhere near mounting, but

he could see the end in sight, the point when he could finally release the pressure and rely on command alone.

After an hour, he took one of the hacks out on a ride through the paddock to shake his muscles loose, remind them of the strength they had. With every step, his back jarred, his hips ached and pain crashed up his spine and into his hindbrain. He sat up straighter and kicked the hack into a trot, forcing the pain down, down, down until it was gone, gone, gone. But it was never really gone.

He took a well-worn path through the paddock and beyond, out into the dusty soil and rock that dipped into a crater for a half-mile at the reaches of the ranch. There had been an attempt at a quarry there many years ago. What they'd hoped to find was anyone's guess, but the land had never really recovered. He slowed the hack, picking through the uneven ground. For five minutes everything else disappeared from view as they trudged together through the shallow bowl of rock and brush. He couldn't see the ranch, couldn't hear the Highway, even the sun seemed to vanish. All he saw was the sky and the land and the place where the two met.

When he reached the small ridge at the quarry's end, he turned the horse and looked back at the ranch, the paddock, the foals. It seemed so far away, and yet it was barely a mile. He watched, testing his eyes, seeing what features he could pick out. His eyes, at least, hadn't failed him. They had always been sharp. He must have gone further than he thought. The ranch was not the Markovits ranch. He didn't recognise a single feature. Someone was working a foal on a long rein in an open pen, but Sam didn't know them.

"I'll take you back."

The voice didn't startle Sam. He'd been expecting it. He turned the horse and Jack was waiting, the long grass up past his waist, yellow-green against the immaculate tar-black of his suit. Sam dismounted and left the hack untethered.

"Will it take long?"

"Yes. But it'll be safer if you come with me."

"For whom?" Sam asked, trying to work a twinkle into his eye. Jack didn't answer, turned, and walked. Sam followed and was quickly swallowed up by the grass.

The hack waited for five minutes and then muscle memory kicked in. It turned and made its way back to the ranch alone. □

Hostel Stays and Heartfelt Tales

Chronicles from Global Backpackers

Irena Martin



Photo Pixsels/stock / Adobe Stock

Amid the intertwining streets of global cities, nestled between bustling markets, ancient ruins, and towering skyscrapers, one discovers hostels — the unsung gateways to myriad cultures, experiences, and tales. These aren't just mere buildings or accommodations; they are living, breathing entities teeming with life and narratives from every corner of the world. Each hostel is a microcosm of the globe, where boundaries blur and universes converge.

As I journeyed across continents, from the cobblestone lanes of Europe to the vibrant markets of Asia and the

rhythm-filled streets of South America, these shared dormitories became much more than just places to rest. They emerged as stages where life's dramas, comedies, and serendipitous moments played out, leaving indelible marks on my soul.

It wasn't just the rustic charm of a wooden bunk or the quirky artwork adorning the walls that lingered in my mind. Nor was it only the mesmerizing views from a terrace overlooking a city's skyline or the comfort of a worn-out couch in the common room. What truly transformed these spaces into treasured

memories were the travelers I encountered — each one an individual chapter, adding depth and texture to my ever-evolving travelogue. Their stories, dreams, aspirations, and even their silences echoed the very essence of wanderlust, making the hostels a tapestry of human experience, woven together by shared journeys and dreams.

Diego, with his infectious enthusiasm, was my introduction to Buenos Aires. A local who chose to stay in hostels during his city breaks, he became our unofficial guide. One evening, he whispered tales of an underground tango club, away from the touristy glitz. Following him through narrow alleyways, our group was led into a dimly lit room echoing with soulful melodies. Couples danced with intense passion, and Diego, with a mischievous glint, invited us to join. That night, Buenos Aires revealed a secret heart, all thanks to Diego's local insights.

Lena, with her sharp wit and laptop always at arm's reach, was the embodiment of the modern traveler. This digital nomad from Ukraine turned our Lisbon hostel's lounge into her temporary office. Over shared cups of coffee, she spoke of the freedom her lifestyle offered but also the challenges it bore. Safety was paramount. Lena recounted an unsettling experience in Moscow when an overfriendly co-traveler invaded her space. Since then, she often opted for women-only dorms, ensuring her security without compromising the communal experience. Her stories became a lesson in balancing trust with caution.

Mumbai's monsoon magic was best narrated by Ananya, a vivacious traveler with a penchant for poetry. We met in Rome, and while the city's ancient ruins left us spellbound, our late-night chats



Photo David Bokuchava / Adobe Stock

about home, wanderlust, and memories were equally captivating. Ananya painted a picture of Mumbai - the aroma of wet soil, the bustling local trains, and the savory taste of street food, making me yearn for a visit. She taught me that sometimes the most profound connections arise from sharing tales of our roots.

Then there was Tomas, the retired Spanish teacher whose life was a testament to the adage that age is just a number. Encountering him in Berlin, his tales spanned decades, from Franco's Spain to the contemporary European Union. Tomas reminisced about his youth, of times when hitchhiking was the norm, and hostels were safe havens for free spirits like him. One story that stood out was his impromptu trip to Morocco in the '70s. Without a plan, he and a band of travelers had crossed the Strait of Gibraltar, relying solely on their wits and the kindness of strangers. His tales, filled with nostalgia, reminded me of the timeless allure of the open road.

Traveling is a symphony of experiences. The vast landscapes—stretching from golden deserts to azure coastlines—cast a spell on the wanderer. Majestic architectural wonders, whether they are ancient

relics or modern marvels, narrate stories of times gone by or of the future envisioned. The vibrant festivals, pulsating with energy and tradition, immerse one in a sensory spectacle, offering a tantalizing taste of local culture.

Yet, while these elements weave a mesmerizing backdrop to our travels, it's the spontaneous interactions, the unexpected conversations, and the deep connections forged with fellow travelers that add profound depth to the journey. The landscapes may capture our eyes, but it's the people who captivate our hearts.

In my myriad journeys, I've been fortunate to cross paths with souls like Diego, Lena, Ananya, and Tomas. They were not just transient figures or faces in a crowd. Diego, with his boundless knowledge and passion for his city, opened up hidden worlds I would never have stumbled upon on my own. Lena, with her stories of resilience and adaptability, epitomized the spirit of the modern traveler, teaching lessons that extended beyond the confines of geography. Ananya's lyrical tales resonated with the warmth of her homeland, inviting me into a world painted with monsoons and melodies. And Tomas, a living chronicle

of decades of travel, was a testament to the timeless allure of exploration.

These individuals were the embodiment of the essence of travel. They were narrators, imparting wisdom from their lived experiences, mentors guiding me through the unwritten rules of the road, and kindred spirits, sharing fleeting moments that would be etched in memory long after our paths diverged.

Hostels, with their creaky bunk beds, graffiti-filled walls, and the aroma of communal meals wafting from the kitchens, provide more than shelter. They are sanctuaries where souls converge. The shared dormitories aren't just spaces to sleep; they are arenas of whispered secrets, passionate debates, and dreams shared under dim lights. The communal kitchens, often chaotic with a blend of cuisines and cultures, serve dishes seasoned with stories. In these spaces, every traveler becomes a thread in a vast, intricate tapestry, each tale intertwining, adding richness and vibrancy to the collective narrative. This realization dawns upon every hostel dweller: it is not just the destination but the shared journey and the souls met along the way that craft the most unforgettable stories. □

Myth and Archetype

Unveiling the Depths of Narrative Meaning

Eleanor Jiménez



The art of storytelling can be likened to a complex weaving where threads of symbolism, imagery, and thematic depth intertwine harmoniously. Among the foundational elements that enrich the fabric of literature, myths, archetypes, and universal symbols stand as timeless pillars. These narrative tools transcend cultural boundaries and epochs, embedding themselves into the collective human experience. When incorporated into literary narratives, they wield the power to shape characters and imbue stories with profound meaning, tapping into the subconscious currents that flow within us all.

Myths as Living Narratives

Myths, those timeless narratives rooted in the annals of human civilization, serve as the bridges that span the

chasm between the ordinary and the extraordinary. Like sacred tendrils connecting the mundane to the sublime, myths transcend the confines of historical epochs and cultural boundaries, encapsulating the very essence of shared human emotions, fears, desires, and aspirations. In the intricate interplay of time and tale, myths seamlessly meld with literature, unfurling as intricate threads that weave a rich tapestry of timeless echoes, reminding us of the enduring depth of the human journey.

Originating in the heart of ancient societies, myths have retained their significance through the ages by tapping into the bedrock of the human psyche. These narratives, often containing gods, heroes, and fantastical realms, delve into the profound, reflecting societies' attempts to comprehend the mysteries of existence, the cosmos, and their place within it. Through myths, societies externalized

their innermost struggles, enshrining them in stories that traversed generations, fostering a communal sense of identity and shared values.

When myths are interwoven with the fabric of literature, they become more than mere tales; they become conduits through which readers can traverse the corridors of history and humanity's collective psyche. These narratives transcend the ephemeral boundaries of time, inviting readers to embark on journeys that bridge ancient civilizations with modern sensibilities. Consider Joseph Campbell's iconic monomyth, the "hero's journey," which forms a pulsating heartbeat beneath countless narratives. From the epic wanderings of Odysseus in Homer's "The Odyssey" to the magical trials of J.K. Rowling's "Harry Potter" series, the hero's journey resonates with us because it mirrors our very own life trajectory—a voyage that entails challenges, growth, and transformation.

The allure of the hero's journey archetype lies in its relatability. Each step of the journey, from the ordinary world to the trials and ultimate return, resonates with the stages of our own lives. This archetype transcends temporal and cultural confines, tapping into the core of human experience that spans continents and generations. Through myths and their archetypal frameworks, readers connect not only with characters but also with the collective struggles, aspirations, and triumphs that constitute the human condition.

Moreover, the integration of myths into literature elevates the textual experience by endowing it with layers of depth and universality. Readers are beckoned to recognize the underlying truths of existence, truths that stretch beyond the surface of the narrative and touch the very soul of



our shared human legacy. As we embark on literary voyages guided by the compass of myth, we step into the footsteps of our ancestors, exploring the archetypal landscapes of heroism, love, sacrifice, and redemption.

In this symbiotic dance between myth and literature, narratives become not just stories but reflections of the grand tapestry of human existence. Myths serve as the chorus of our collective past, reverberating with universal themes that persist across time's canvas. Through the ages, these stories have whispered their wisdom to those willing to listen, offering insights into the intricate mosaic of human experience. And as myths continue to find their home within literature's embrace, they ensure that the echoes of the extraordinary, the archetypal, and the timeless resound eternally in the hearts and minds of those who dare to read between the lines.

Archetypes as Reflective Mirrors

Archetypes, those ancient and enduring molds of character, situation, and symbol, stand as unifying threads that weave through the rich tapestry of cultures and literary genres. Much more than mere narrative tools, archetypes serve as profound reflections of the collective unconscious, illuminating the very essence of human behavior and experience. Like mirrors held up to the soul, they reveal the timeless patterns that shape our thoughts, desires, and actions, resonating across time and space to foster a profound sense of connection between readers and the characters that populate literature's landscapes.

Embedded within the bedrock of cultures and traditions, archetypes possess an innate universality that bridges geographical and temporal divides. These elemental building blocks, whether embodied as the wise old mentor, the shadowy antagonist, or the innocent fool, transcend linguistic barriers and historical epochs. Their enduring appeal lies in their ability to encapsulate fundamental aspects of the human experience, offering readers windows into both the mundane and the extraordinary aspects of existence.

By harnessing the power of archetypes, authors draw from a wellspring of familiarity that resonates with readers on a fundamental level. As characters don the garb of these universal molds, readers recognize echoes of themselves, their neighbors, and their ancestors. The wise mentor's guidance, the antagonist's inner conflict, and the fool's innocence become pathways through which readers explore the depths of human motivations and emotions. This shared connection creates a sense of intimacy, as if the characters are not merely creations on the page but embodiments of age-old narratives that live within us all.

Consider the archetype of the "trickster," a figure that dances through myths from Norse legends to African folklore. This mischievous character embodies the unpredictable facets of human nature—crafty, elusive, and often disruptive. Its presence in literature, such as Shakespeare's mischievous Puck in "A Midsummer Night's Dream," evokes a fascination that transcends time. The trickster speaks to our love for the unexpected, our inclination to challenge conventions, and

our innate desire to explore the boundaries of our own limitations. In this way, the trickster archetype becomes a vessel for both our light and our shadow, a canvas upon which we paint the complexities of our shared humanity.

In the symphony of archetypes, characters harmonize with the chords of our collective past, present, and future. They become vessels through which readers access the universal stories that course through their veins—stories of courage, villainy, transformation, and redemption. Archetypes breathe life into characters, transforming them from two-dimensional figures to multi-dimensional reflections of ourselves, and, in doing so, they foster a profound resonance that transcends the confines of individual lives.

As literature and culture continue to evolve, archetypes remain steadfast pillars that anchor narratives to the enduring truths of human experience. In their recurrence across cultures and generations, archetypes become more than the sum of their parts; they become conduits that channel the primal currents of our collective psyche. Just as a single drop of water sends ripples across a vast ocean, the presence of archetypes in literature sends ripples through the fabric of our understanding, reminding us of the intricate connections that unite us all.

Universal Symbols as Bridges of Understanding

Universal symbols serve as profound conduits between the conscious mind and the enigmatic realm of the subconscious. These symbols are akin to linguistic



bridges that allow us to traverse the depths of our inner selves, tapping into emotions, experiences, and understandings that extend beyond the confines of everyday language. Emblematic of the essence of human existence, these symbols hold the power to illuminate the obscure and connect us to the timeless undercurrents of collective consciousness.

In literature, universal symbols function as threads woven delicately into the narrative fabric, carrying layers of meaning that resonate deeply within our psyches. Just as cultural artifacts or art can evoke a sense of *déjà vu* or primal recognition, these symbols conjure an inherent sense of familiarity, as if they are echoes from the depths of history. Symbols such as the journey, the crossroads, or the serpent span cultures and eras, echoing with accumulated human wisdom and experience.

When seamlessly integrated into a narrative tapestry, these symbols possess the ability to evoke emotions and associations that transcend the ordinary limits of language. They communicate with a part of our being that lies beyond the reach of mere words, resonating like music that stirs the soul. For example, the symbolism of light and darkness, as masterfully employed in Joseph Conrad's "Heart of Darkness," extends far beyond the realm of literal illumination. This contrast, where light symbolizes enlightenment and darkness embodies ignorance, creates a multi-dimensional allegory that serves as a universal conduit. It allows readers to delve into the intricate complexities of human morality, perception, and the eternal struggle between knowledge and ignorance.

As readers engage with such symbolic narratives, they embark on a journey that transcends the surface-level understanding of the plot. The symbolism functions as a decoder of hidden meanings, prompting readers to reflect on their own experiences and perspectives. Each reader's unique life journey interacts with the symbolic landscape, forging a personalized connection that echoes back to the universal human experiences that the symbols represent. This interplay between the collective and the individual underscores the power of universal symbols to forge connections across time, culture, and personal history.

In essence, universal symbols enrich literature by infusing it with layers of meaning that operate on multiple levels. They create a resonance between the text and the reader, invoking emotions, memories, and contemplations that linger long after the reading experience concludes. As we decipher the language of these symbols, we unlock the doors to the subconscious, opening ourselves to a deeper understanding of the complexities of human nature, the mysteries of existence, and the profound connections that bind us all. Through this profound interplay, universal symbols remind us that the narratives we encounter on the page are not confined to ink and paper; they are living vessels that carry the echoes of countless souls, bridging the gap between the tangible and the ethereal.

Influence on Characters

The infusion of myths, archetypes, and universal symbols into literary narra-

tives has a profound impact on both characters and the broader story's meaning. Characters become vessels through which timeless human struggles and triumphs are channeled. These narrative elements provide characters with layers of depth, making them relatable yet larger-than-life figures that embody the essence of humanity's eternal dilemmas.

Moreover, myths, archetypes, and symbols are more than embellishments; they are the lifeblood of narrative meaning. They serve as keys to unlock the doors of interpretation, offering readers access to allegorical layers that would otherwise remain concealed. An exploration of myths, archetypes, and symbols reveals thematic threads that link disparate cultures, eras, and genres. Through these narrative elements, authors communicate profound truths about the human condition, fostering a sense of universality that transcends individual experiences.

Incorporating myths, archetypes, and universal symbols into literature transforms mere words on a page into portals to the collective human experience. These narrative tools bridge cultural chasms, uniting readers across time and space by offering insights into the profound patterns that shape our lives. As we traverse the hero's journey, encounter archetypal characters, and decode the language of symbols, we embark on a literary odyssey that resonates with the core of our being. The narratives weaved with these elements remind us that, beneath the surface of diversity, lies a tapestry of shared stories, archetypes, and symbols that connect us to the vast tapestry of human existence. □

Zen and the Art of Serenity

Erik N. Patel

In today's fast-paced, burn-the-candle-at-both-ends world, where phrases like "hustle culture" and "rise and grind" are thrown around like confetti at a never-ending parade of overachievement, I've come across a groundbreaking, revolutionary concept: doing absolutely nothing. Yes, dear readers, I have unearthed the esoteric wisdom of Zen and the art of taking it easy.

The other day, as I was contemplating the existential weight of my own existence between my fifth and sixth cup of coffee, I pondered: what if, instead of rushing around trying to squeeze the juice out of every moment, we just... didn't? What if, instead of chasing after success, money, fame, and the perfect Instagram shot, we pursued the timeless art of lounging? What an epiphany!

The Zen masters had it right all along. Picture a monk, sitting perfectly still, breathing in, breathing out, perhaps contemplating the sound of one hand clapping or whether the fridge light really goes off when the door is closed. How do they achieve such profound wisdom? By understanding that there is supreme virtue in sometimes doing absolutely zilch.

You see, in our collective obsession with "living our best life", we've all been running around like headless chickens, hunting for a sense of purpose and meaning in the vast expanse of existence. We read self-help books, attend weekend seminars, and chase after every new trend and fad in the hopes that this, finally, might be the key to eternal happiness and contentment. And all along, the secret to true enlightenment was right under our noses, or more precisely, right under our behinds: sitting down and chilling out.

Just imagine, for a moment, a world where our calendars weren't blocked out

in 15-minute increments, where we didn't feel the need to check our emails during dinner or sneak a peek at our phones during a movie. A world where "busy" wasn't a badge of honor, but instead, a sign that perhaps we've missed the point entirely.

The Zen philosophy, so frequently misunderstood in our era of perpetual motion, is not a call to embrace laziness or to abscond from the duties that life presents. It stands not as an excuse to fade into oblivion but as a beckoning to truly live. It encourages us to recognize and deeply



appreciate those fleeting moments of clarity and enlightenment, which, paradoxically, don't always emerge from a frenzy of activity. Instead, they often appear when we allow ourselves to stand still, to breathe, and to simply exist in the present moment. In such instances of stillness, we find that the most profound revelations and invaluable insights unveil themselves, whispering the secrets of the universe into our eager ears.

This Zen perspective underscores the importance of equilibrium. In our mod-

ern world, a place that seems to perpetually oscillate between chaos and order, hope and despair, Zen teaches us to find that delicate balance — the golden mean — ensuring we don't lose ourselves amidst the relentless tides of time and circumstance. It's a gentle reminder that amidst the whirlwind of life's challenges, there's profound strength in poised calmness, and enlightenment in just being.

The next time the allure of proving your dedication nudges you to set that alarm for a brutal 6 am spin class, or when the pressures of modern life whisper seductively,

urging you to forsake sleep and burn the midnight oil just to get one step ahead in your work, pause and reflect upon the timeless Zen wisdom of peacefulness. Before succumbing to the siren call of ceaseless activity, consider an alternative: the artful embrace of relaxation and stillness. Slip into your most comfortable, fluffiest bathrobe — you know, the one that feels like a warm, reassuring hug. Brew a cup of your favorite tea, allowing the steam and aroma to soothe your senses. Curl up in your favorite nook, perhaps by a window or near a softly crackling fireplace. And in this cocoon of comfort, take a moment, maybe even several, to indulge in the radical act of doing absolutely nothing. Bask

in the luxury of stillness, letting the world pass by, and rediscover the unparalleled beauty of simply existing without the incessant need to 'do'. This is not negligence; it's a conscious choice to recharge, refresh, and remind oneself of the subtle joys that life, in its quieter moments, has to offer.

And who knows? You might just discover that the path to true enlightenment isn't paved with endless to-do lists and back-to-back meetings, but with leisurely strolls, afternoon naps, and the sweet, sweet art of serenity. □

Graffiti and Street Art

The Underground Pulse of the Urban World

Heimir Steinarsson

In the vibrant tapestry of urban landscapes, graffiti and street art emerge as bold strokes of creativity and self-expression. Often blurring the lines between vandalism and artistry, these forms of visual communication have become powerful vehicles for conveying messages, sparking conversations, and transforming the mundane into something extraordinary. Graffiti and street art, though often associated,

hold distinct histories, intentions, and impacts on the urban environment.

Graffiti, often considered the precursor to street art, has roots tracing back to ancient civilizations where markings on walls served as visual communication. However, it was in the late 20th century that graffiti truly flourished, particularly in the marginalized neighborhoods of major cities. Emerging as a response to social and political in-

equality, as well as a desire to reclaim public spaces, graffiti initially bore an underground spirit, often involving quick tags or stylized signatures. These tags were markers of identity within a subculture that felt overlooked by mainstream society.

Critics argue that graffiti, especially unauthorized tags on private property, equates to vandalism. Yet, it's essential to recognize that graffiti's act of defiance



Psychedelic Fish by the street artist El Pez from Barcelona.

Photo obscured / Adobe.Stock



and subversion has historically given a voice to the voiceless, serving as a visual outcry against societal injustices. Over time, graffiti evolved beyond simple tagging, encompassing elaborate pieces with intricate designs and layered meanings. These pieces demonstrate the skill and artistry behind the spray can, moving beyond mere rebellion into the realm of artistic expression.

Street art, on the other hand, embraces a more deliberate approach to urban engagement. Unlike graffiti, which often thrives on spontaneity, street art involves thoughtful planning and careful execution. Street artists may use a variety of mediums, from spray paint to stencils, stickers, and even installations. What sets street art apart is its inclination toward larger, more complex compositions that can convey intricate narratives and themes.

Street art frequently interacts with its surroundings, utilizing the environment to create a symbiotic relationship between the artwork and the urban space. The interaction can be harmoni-

ous, complementing the existing landscape, or confrontational, challenging societal norms and prompting critical thought. This genre of art often transcends its physical form, inspiring discussions, fostering a sense of community, and even acting as a catalyst for urban revitalization.

Both graffiti and street art challenge the conventional notions of art, inviting dialogues about what is deemed artistic and who holds the authority to define it. As these forms have gained recognition over time, the line between vandalism and art has begun to blur. Organizations and events like Art Basel and street art festivals have played a role in legitimizing these expressions, inviting renowned street artists to create murals that transform once-neglected neighborhoods into open-air galleries.

Yet, a tension remains between the rebellious origins of graffiti and street art's newfound acceptance. Some artists believe that the institutionalization

of street art strips it of its raw authenticity, turning it into a commodity for profit rather than a medium of genuine self-expression. Others argue that this evolution is necessary for the movement to thrive, allowing artists to earn a living from their talents while still retaining their creative integrity.

Graffiti and street art, while sharing common elements, diverge in intent, execution, and impact. Graffiti's roots in subversion and rebellion have transformed into a spectrum of intricate pieces that challenge societal norms, while street art bridges creativity and community, fostering dialogues and reshaping urban environments. Both have transformed from being seen as acts of vandalism to being recognized as potent tools of artistic expression, challenging the conventional boundaries of art and breathing life into the concrete jungles that make up our cities. As these forms continue to evolve, their legacy is sure to leave an indelible mark on the art world and the urban landscapes they adorn.



“Untitled”, a Basquiat painting from 1982, sold for \$110.5 million at Sotheby’s auction in May 2017.

In the ever-evolving world of art, the demarcation between raw street expressions and the more structured environs of galleries is fading, creating a captivating confluence of styles, mediums, and messages. From expansive urban landscapes that come alive with audacious strokes of graffiti, bearing witness to countless untold stories and rebellions, to the pristine, carefully curated walls of esteemed art institutions that echo centuries of artistic evolution, there exists a rich and dynamic interplay.

This blending of worlds hasn’t been a silent transition. It’s been heralded and shaped by pioneering artists who, through their groundbreaking works, challenged traditional boundaries and definitions of art. Figures such as Jean-Michel Basquiat, Keith Haring, Kenny Scharf, Banksy, Barry McGee

and Shepard Fairey have not just been participants, but instrumental catalysts in ushering in this new era of artistic expression. As we embark on this exploration, we aim to understand the profound ways in which the gritty authenticity of street art and graffiti have influenced, shaped, and immortalized the works and enduring legacies of these iconic artists.

Jean-Michel Basquiat: The SAMO Years

Starting his artistic journey as one-half of the enigmatic and boundary-pushing duo known as SAMO—an acronym cheekily standing for “Same Old Shit”—Jean-Michel Basquiat painted the streets of Lower Manhattan with cryptic, poetic graffiti. The SAMO tags, intriguingly mysterious in

nature, often married words and symbols, offering both a commentary and a challenge to those who happened upon them. These early street expressions, spontaneous and unfettered, undoubtedly laid the foundation for Basquiat’s subsequent evolution as an artist. When he transitioned from walls and subway cars to canvas, those graffiti roots remained palpable.

The raw, unfiltered energy and visceral quality of Basquiat’s later paintings draw a clear line back to his days as a street artist. Rich with deep, often confrontational commentary on race, socio-economic disparities, and the intricate tapestry of the human experience, Basquiat’s art carries with it the indomitable spirit of his graffiti beginnings.

Keith Haring: Pop and Subversion

Keith Haring’s unmistakable and iconic figures, which seem to pulsate, dance, and radiate with an infectious energy, originally took root in the gritty underground realm of the New York subway system. Using chalk as his chosen medium, Haring would spontaneously create on the blank canvases provided by unused advertising spaces. This underground gallery made his art not only public but also unexpectedly accessible to a diverse group of commuters, transcending traditional boundaries of age, race, and class.

Haring’s work wasn’t just about vibrant lines and joyful figures; it was deeply embedded with messages of social activism. He tackled pressing issues of his time, from creating awareness about the burgeoning AIDS epidemic to standing against the injustices of apartheid.

His artistry encapsulated the very essence and ethos of street art: to communicate powerful messages, provoke deep-seated thoughts, challenge societal norms, and, most importantly, resonate profoundly with the everyday person, making art a shared experience and dialogue.



Photo: Rgs25 / Wikimedia Commons

“We the Youth” is a 1987 mural by Keith Haring, covering a wall of a private rowhouse in the Point Breeze neighborhood of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The mural, with its vivid primary colors, poetic figures, and an essence of childlike wonder, embodies the signature style of Haring. Through this artwork, Haring’s vibrant energy and zest for life echo as his lasting legacy.

Kenny Scharf: A Cosmic Intersection

Merging the vibrant and often overlapping worlds of pop culture, the dreamlike quality of surrealism, and the raw authenticity of street art, Kenny Scharf’s artistic creations unfold as a vivid and captivating kaleidoscope of colors, patterns, and playful whimsy. Deeply rooted in the bustling and avant-garde New York’s East Village art scene of the 1980s, Scharf found himself in the illustrious company of other groundbreaking artists like Keith Haring and Jean-Michel Basquiat.

Drawing deeply from the vibrant mosaic of his surroundings and the influential voices of his contemporaries, he wholeheartedly absorbed the audacious and iconoclastic spirit that is the hallmark of graffiti and street culture. These artistic creations were not merely a testament to his exceptional skill in visual storytelling, but they also highlighted his innate knack for weaving together light-hearted, often playful aesthetics with deep, thought-provoking socio-cultural critiques. Through

his unique, unmistakable, and occasionally irreverent lens, Scharf delved into a myriad of topical subjects. He addressed rampant consumerism, the impact of technological advancements, and initiated dialogues on urgent envi-

ronmental issues. Moreover, his works often served as a reflection on humanity’s undeniable footprint on the planet, urging viewers to ponder the consequences of their actions in an interconnected world.



Photo: Rob Corder / flickr

Kenny Scharf: Mural on Houston Street and Bowery, New York City, December 2010



Photo Rob Corder / flickr

The “Voting Rights” mural by Shepard Fairey was painted in 2020 on the Colby Abbot Building, located in Milwaukee, Wisconsin and spans 7,400 square feet of wall space. The project promotes unity, equity and creativity and is a perfect example of how street art can be used to inspire people and promote racial and social justice.

**Barry McGee:
From Tags to Installations**

Barry McGee, recognized in the street art community by his alias “TWIST,” initiated his artistic endeavors on the dynamic streets of San Francisco. Through immersion in the city’s pulsating urban milieu, McGee carved out a distinct style, particularly recognized by its cluster arrangements and signature droopy-eyed figures. These symbols poignantly encapsulate the challenges of urban living and the alienation felt by many city residents.

As McGee’s artistry evolved, leading him from spontaneous street murals to meticulously curated gallery installations, he maintained a commitment to the raw spirit and authenticity of street culture. This evolution showcased his work as a testament to the synergistic dance between the rebellious ethos of graffiti and the polished realms of established art galleries, reaffirming his profound connection to the uninhibited voice of street art.

**Shepard Fairey:
A Confluence of Street Art and Iconography**

Shepard Fairey’s rise in the art world is intrinsically tied to his roots in street culture and graffiti. Originating from the skateboarding community, Fairey’s introduction to art was deeply influenced by the audacious spirit of street expressions. While studying at the Rhode Island School of Design, Fairey launched the “Andre the Giant Has a Posse” sticker campaign. This guerrilla-style project evolved into the globally recognized “Obey Giant” initiative, emphasizing the power of street art to captivate public attention.

Using bold graphics reminiscent of propaganda art, Fairey’s creations, like the renowned “Hope” poster of Barack Obama, seamlessly blend street art’s immediacy with a wider artistic appeal. Throughout his career, the essence of graffiti and the philosophy of public space reclamation remain evident, underscoring street art’s lasting impact on his oeuvre.

**Merging Worlds:
From Urban Alleys to Galleries**

At the very heart of these artists, with their diverse styles, narratives, and techniques, lies a deep connection to street art and graffiti. Their journey, transitioning from spontaneous sketches on urban canvases to celebrated works in elite galleries, highlights the transformative power of art originating from the streets. Their creations affirm that art is not confined to prestigious institutions; it can flourish, perhaps even more brilliantly, in the unsung corners and alleyways of vibrant cities.

By adeptly connecting the raw, unfiltered world of street art with the more formal and structured space of art galleries, these trailblazing artists have accomplished more than just a fusion of styles. They’ve elevated graffiti from its often-dismissed status to a celebrated art medium, simultaneously pushing the envelope and expanding the scope and appreciation of contemporary art in today’s culture. □

Molecular Gastronomy

The Fusion of Science and Culinary Art

Hector Jean Fournier



Photo Maksim Shebeko / Adobe Stock

In the vast realm of culinary arts, molecular gastronomy stands out, carving its niche as an avant-garde fusion of science and refined gourmet cuisine. This captivating discipline, far from being just a trend, dives deep into the intricate dance of physical and chemical changes that ingredients experience throughout the cooking journey. It's not just about creating food—it's about understanding its very essence, the underlying transformations, and the mysteries that have long eluded traditional chefs.

By seamlessly intertwining rigorous scientific principles with time-honored

and sometimes novel culinary techniques, molecular gastronomy challenges the traditional paradigms of cooking. It offers chefs a broader palette of tools and methods, allowing for an innovative approach not only to the preparation of dishes but also to their aesthetic and sensory presentation. Think of ingredients metamorphosing into foams, gels, and spheres or dishes being served with aromatic mists that engage multiple senses simultaneously.

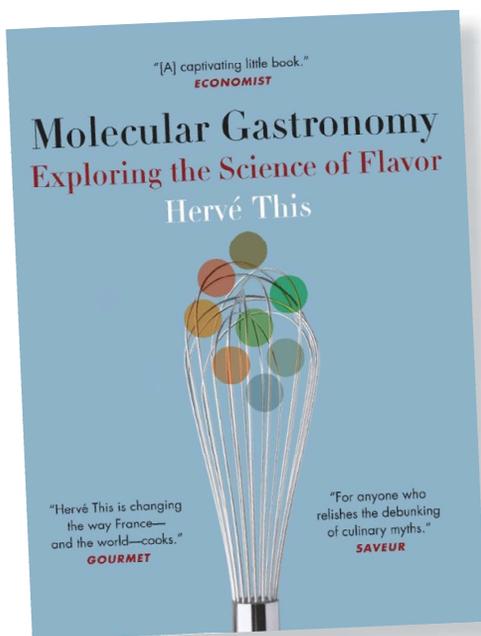
But the impact of molecular gastronomy extends beyond the kitchen and the chef's table. It has fundamentally re-

shaped our collective understanding and appreciation of food. No longer is dining merely about satiating hunger; in the hands of a molecular gastronomist, it becomes a multisensory experience, a theatrical journey that intrigues the mind as much as it delights the palate. In essence, molecular gastronomy, with its blend of science and art, has ushered in a revolutionary era, redefining the boundaries of gastronomy and crafting an entirely novel and immersive dining narrative.

The birth of molecular gastronomy, a discipline that marries culinary art with scientific principles, finds its roots in the latter part of the 20th century. It was during this period that Hervé This, a distinguished French physical chemist, and Nicholas Kurti, an eminent Hungarian physicist, embarked on a pioneering journey to unravel the intricate science underpinning conventional cooking techniques. Their explorations were not mere academic exercises; they sought to challenge the status quo, questioning and often dismantling long-established culinary beliefs that had been accepted without empirical scrutiny.

Their endeavors led to the debunking of numerous culinary myths, replacing anecdotal practices with ones grounded in verifiable scientific evidence. Their work illuminated the understanding of processes like emulsification, gelification, and the Maillard reaction, among others, providing chefs with a deeper comprehension of their craft.

Yet, the true culinary revolution, spurred by these groundbreaking insights, was to manifest in the subsequent years. Enter the culinary maestros: Ferran Adrià of the legendary El Bulli in Spain, Heston Blumenthal of The Fat Duck in England, and Grant Achatz of Alinea in the United States. These chefs, inspired by the revelations of This and Kurti, not only embraced the principles of molecular gastronomy but pushed its boundaries. With a blend of artistry, innovation, and scientific rigor, they transformed traditional dishes into avant-garde masterpieces, reimagining textures, flavors, and presentations. Their inventive approach led to a paradigm shift, redefining the very essence of haute cuisine and setting the stage for a new era of gastronomic exploration.



Molecular gastronomy, at its most fundamental level, delves deep into the heart of a seemingly simple yet profound question: “What underlying factors dictate the success or failure of various cooking methods?” This culinary discipline, with its roots deeply embedded in science, aims to dissect and comprehend the multifaceted transformations that ingredients undergo under different cooking conditions. It’s not merely about following recipes; it’s about understand-

ing the very science that underpins each step.

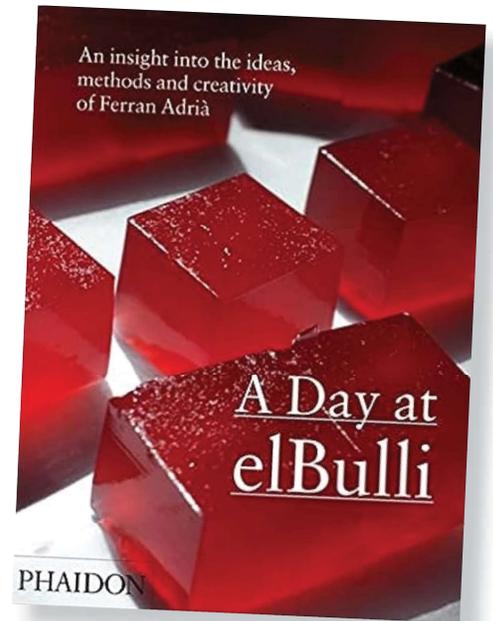
By gaining insights into these culinary metamorphoses, chefs are armed with the knowledge to sculpt textures, fine-tune flavors, and craft presentations in ways that were once considered unthinkable. Every ingredient becomes a canvas of potential, every technique a tool to unlock new culinary dimensions.

Consider some of the groundbreaking techniques that molecular gastronomy has introduced to the world. Spherification, for instance, is more than just a cooking method; it’s a venture into the realms of texture and sensation, turning liquids into tantalizing beads that burst with flavor upon the slightest pressure. Emulsification, on the other hand, defies our basic understanding of chemistry, merging liquids that nature dictates should remain apart, leading to velvety sauces and dressings with complex flavor profiles. Then there’s sous-vide cooking, a method that brings unparalleled precision to the kitchen. By controlling temperature down to the exact degree, chefs can achieve a level of consistency and perfection in their dishes that traditional methods could never provide.

All these techniques, and many more, serve as testament to the transformative power of molecular gastronomy. It’s a discipline that transcends the boundaries of traditional cooking, offering a deeper, more nuanced exploration of food and the science that shapes its very essence.

Embracing the tenets of science within the culinary realm has spearheaded a myriad of pioneering innovations that have undeniably transformed the way we perceive and experience food. Take, for example, the use of liquid nitrogen in modern kitchens. This super-cold substance empowers chefs to instantly freeze foods, achieving an almost surreal interplay of temperatures where sizzling hot meets icy cold within the confines of a singular dish. It’s culinary theater at its best.

Furthermore, the textural possibilities on our plates have been vastly broadened. Where once we were limited to the natural textures of ingredients, molecular gastronomy has introduced techniques that turn common ingredients into delicate foams, rich gels, and ethereal powders.



These transformed states not only add a visual allure but also surprise our palates with unexpected tactile sensations.

In the realm of flavor, the distillation of aromatics has become a cornerstone of the molecular experience. By capturing the very essence of an ingredient, chefs can craft gustatory landscapes that are intensely concentrated. These essences, when released, immerse diners in a multi-sensory journey, harmonizing the visuals on the plate with the aromas in the air, making dining a truly immersive affair.

The implications of these advancements go far beyond mere technique or presentation. They challenge our very understanding of culinary artistry, pushing the envelope of what we once thought feasible in the kitchen. More profoundly, they compel us to rethink and expand our notions about what constitutes “food.” No longer are we constrained by traditional definitions or expectations. With the marriage of science and cooking, we stand at the precipice of an exciting era where the culinary imagination is the only limit.

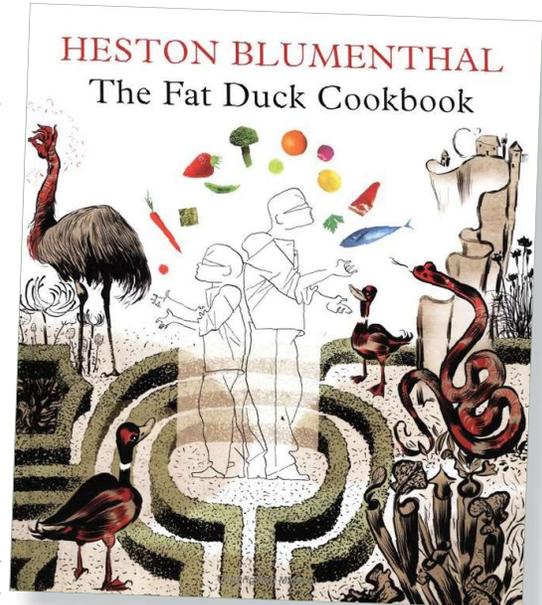
Nevertheless, as with any groundbreaking movement or art form that seeks to challenge the status quo, molecular gastronomy finds itself at the center of critical debate. Among the culinary circles, there are purists who believe fervently in the sanctity and purity of traditional cooking methods. For these individuals, the intricate techniques and unusual ingredients synonymous with molecular gastronomy seem to dilute the authenticity and inherent simplicity that classic cuisine celebrates. They contend that by over-complicating dishes and focusing too much on the spectacle, molecular gastronomy risks transforming food from a heartfelt expression of culture and passion into mere theatrical gimmickry.

Moreover, beyond the realms of tradition and artistry, there are also pressing concerns anchored in ethics and well-being. Some skeptics cast a wary eye on the practice, questioning the long-term sustainability and environmental impact of sourcing and using laboratory-engineered chemicals and agents in dishes. Are we, in our quest for culinary innovation, inadvertently contributing to larger ecological problems? Additionally, health-conscious critics highlight potential risks associated with consuming these chemicals. While many are deemed safe for consumption,

the broader health implications of regularly integrating such elements into our diet remain an area of ongoing research and discussion. In essence, as molecular gastronomy continues to expand its horizons, it's accompanied by a chorus of voices seeking clarity, reassurance, and reflection on its broader impact.

In countering the criticisms, advocates of molecular gastronomy ardently highlight its transformative power and the potential it holds to bring about a renaissance in the culinary domain. To these enthusiasts, the essence of molecular gastronomy doesn't lie in displacing or overshadowing time-honored cooking techniques but in augmenting and elevating them to new heights. At its core, the discipline serves as a magnifying glass, offering chefs and food scientists a more intricate and detailed perspective on the nature and behavior of ingredients. Such insights pave the way for not just enhanced flavor profiles but also a remarkable consistency in culinary outcomes. Beyond these technical merits, molecular gastronomy also champions a sustainable approach to gastronomy. It fosters innovative thinking that allows culinary professionals to tap into often-neglected or discarded components of ingredients.

Instead of letting these parts go to waste, chefs harness their potential, transforming them into exquisite and unexpected gourmet delights. This not only reduces waste but also pushes the boundaries of creativity, proving that sustainability and luxury can indeed coexist on the same plate.

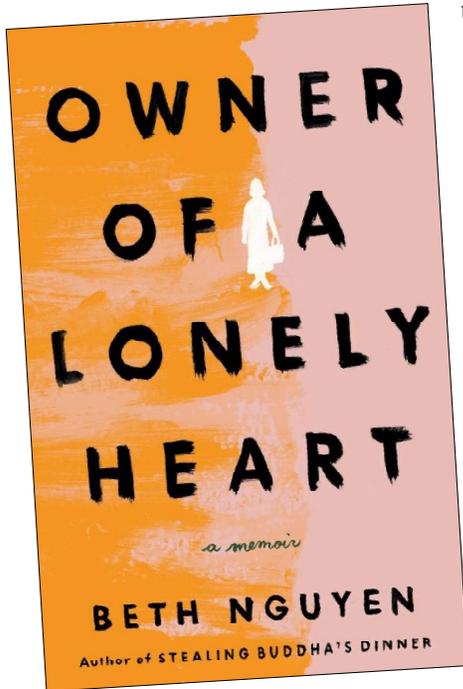


Molecular gastronomy emerges not just as a fleeting culinary interest but as a transformative force in the world of gastronomy. By seamlessly intertwining the meticulousness of scientific inquiry with the boundless artistry inherent in cooking, it ushers in a fresh paradigm in how we approach and understand food. This avant-garde culinary discipline doesn't just ask diners to enjoy a meal; it actively encourages them to probe deeper, to question their longstanding beliefs about food, and to embark on a journey where each dish unfolds as a tantalizing mystery. Some might dismiss molecular gastronomy as a transient culinary whim, while others perceive it as a groundbreaking shift that has forever altered the terrain of the culinary arts. Regardless of one's stance, it's incontestable that molecular gastronomy has introduced an unprecedented layer of depth and innovation to the culinary sphere. By doing so, it pushes both chefs and their clientele to venture beyond traditional boundaries, to challenge the norm, and to re-imagine what's possible on and beyond the plate. □



The innovative chef Grant Achatz looks after every detail at his restaurant Alinea in Chicago.

New Memoirs



Owner of a Lonely Heart: A Memoir by Beth Nguyen (Scribner). Beth Nguyen’s departure from Vietnam as an infant and her separation from her biological mother are central themes in her memoir “Owner of a Lonely Heart.” The memoir, marked by poignant nocturnal scenes, explores her deep introspection during these moments. The author’s continuous contemplation and writing during late hours reflect her curiosity about her mother’s emotions and experiences. As a refugee, Nguyen’s upbringing carries the weight of her family’s escape from Vietnam shortly before Saigon’s fall. Her father, sister, uncles, and grandmother were part of this journey, leading them through refugee camps in different locations before settling in Michigan. Throughout her childhood, Nguyen only knew fragments about her mother, who had seemingly stayed in Vietnam.

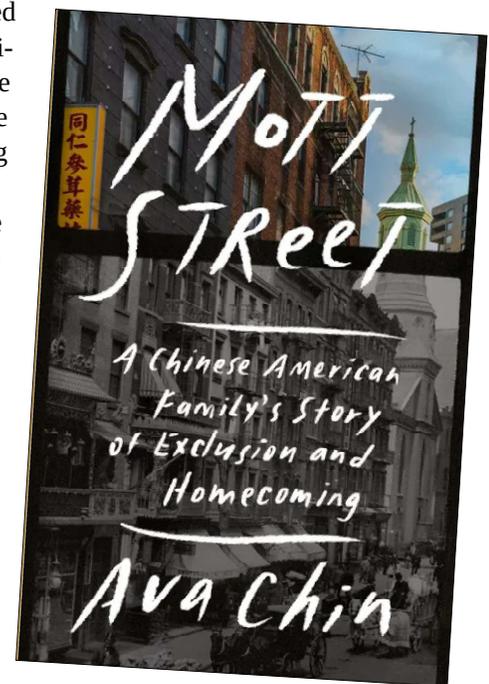
Although the narrative appears to set the stage for a mystery, it portrays the ordinary reality. At the age of three, Nguyen’s father remarried in Michigan, and she came to regard this woman as her mother. A decade later, Nguyen discovered her Vietnamese mother had relocated to Boston. Reuniting at 19, their subsequent interactions were sporadic, limited to six meetings over 26 years. These encounters were formal and cordial, rather than sensational as Nguyen humorously notes.

The Nguyen family shared silence as a common language, avoiding subjects like war, sex, and her mother’s story or whereabouts. The memoir explores the complexity of managing diverse worlds, suggesting that withholding information may provide a sense of safety in such situations. Nguyen expresses relief as her children age, as it means they are better equipped to handle adversity. She acknowledges that her own concerns pale in comparison to her family’s profound sacrifices. The memoir serves as a contemplative and therapeutic exploration, particularly suitable for late-night introspection. Eventually, the daughter gains insight into her parents’ viewpoint, appreciating the value of silence as a form of privacy, coping, and reflection. □

Mott Street: A Chinese American Family’s Story of Exclusion and Homecoming by Ava Chin (Penguin Press). Growing up as the sole offspring of a single mother in Queens, Ava Chin encountered a veil of enigma surrounding her family’s heritage. Her father remained an unknown figure, while the narratives her grandparents shared diverged from the historical accounts taught in school. “Mott Street” narrates Chin’s ardent endeavor to fathom the chronicles of her Chinese American lineage. Through years of meticulous investigation, she not only connects with her father but also unveils the significance of a particular building that provided refuge for her kin.

In her pursuit to unveil the concealed aspects of her family’s history, she confronts the ramifications of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882—a groundbreaking federal legislation that targeted immigrants based on their race and origin, thereby barring Chinese immigrants from obtaining citizenship for an extended six-decade period. Chin meticulously traces the sagas of her pioneering forebears who traversed the Pearl River Delta, braved a transoceanic journey, and endeavored to carve out lives in the American West during the mid-1800s. The narrative delves into their toil on the transcontinental railroad and the harsh prejudice they endured in frontier settlements, before their trajectories led them to the heart of New York City.

Within the confines of Chinatown in New York, a singular edifice on Mott Street emerges as a focal point—a place where numerous ancestors took up residence, established families, and forged fresh identities. Marked by eloquent prose, extensive research, and profound resonance, “Mott Street” uncovers a legacy of both exclusion and fortitude that resonates with the intricate tapestry of the American narrative, spanning across historical epochs and persisting into the contemporary milieu. □



Please Mr. Carnivore

With Suggestions for Volume when Read

Thomas Smith

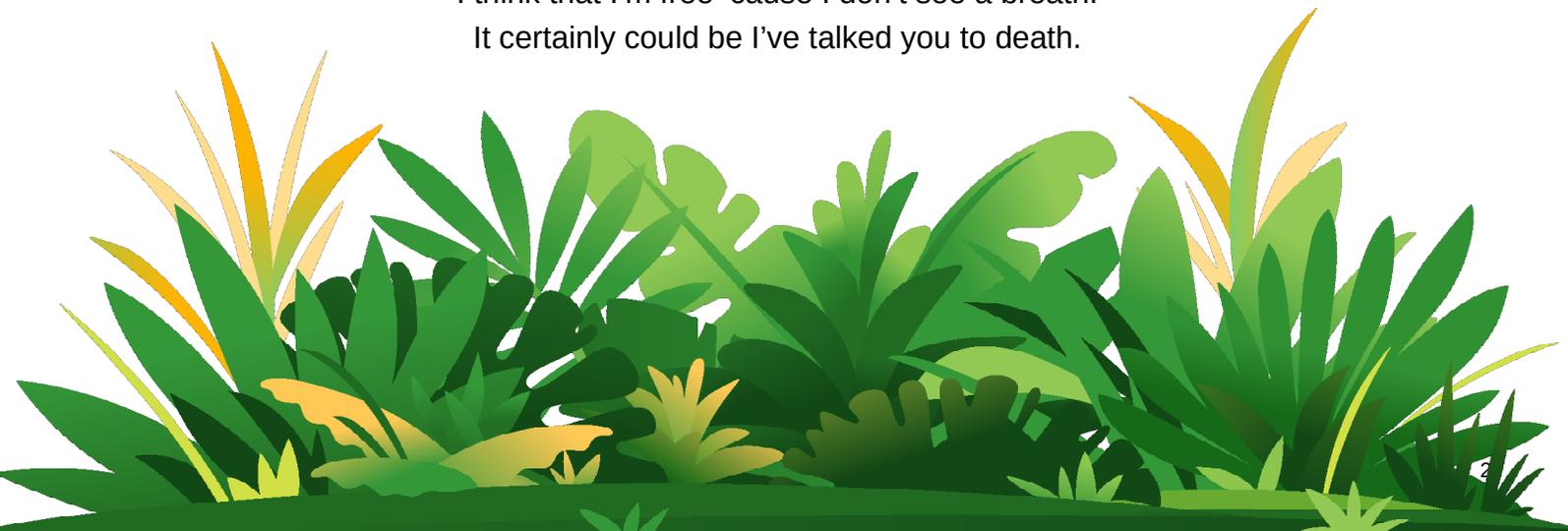
[pianissimo] My God, did you see it? Right over there!
Maybe a wolf or just maybe a bear.
I'm sure it looked hungry. *[forte]* Sir, I am so thin.
Please, Mr. Carnivore, please look again.

[forte] I am barely a morsel, I'm not an entrée.
My back is still hurting, I can't run away.
Eating me would be such terrible waste.
I doubt that you'd like how I smell or I taste.

[forte] You should be more careful. I have a disease,
It began on my feet, now it's up to my knees.
I have stomach acid, I'll burn going down.
You'll feel such discomfort from toes to your crown

[mezzo forte] You've come forward, advancing, then standing quite still.
[forte] I trust that you know that I bear no ill will.
I'd like to help out but t'would be at such price.
Being eaten by you doesn't seem very nice.

[mezzo forte] You've lain down on your side and you seem to be sleeping.
Perhaps it's undue that I've done all this creeping.
I think that I'm free 'cause I don't see a breath.
It certainly could be I've talked you to death.





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