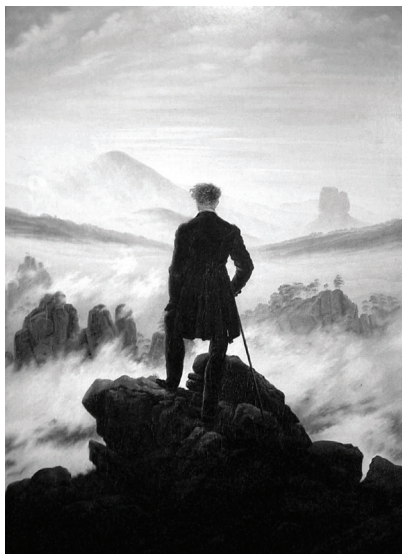




LOST PIECE

an undergraduate journal of letters



VOLUME I, ISSUE II
Beauty or Beast

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VOLUME I, ISSUE II

Beauty or Beast



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Something of a Mission Statement

From the Editors

Lost Piece exists to facilitate undergraduate reading, discussion, and writing of an intellectual nature beyond course curriculum and without distraction from the grade point average.

Lost Piece seeks to help undergraduates to complement and even unify what they learn in their classes with their own personally driven intellectual pursuits.

The goal of Lost Piece is to combat mediocrity in all things, and particularly in all things intellectual.

Lost Piece holds that the goods proper to intellectual activity are ends in and of themselves and are to be sought regardless of whatever recognitions may or may not be extrinsically attached to such activity.

Meet the Writers

These groups have contributed to the writing of the Fall 2010 Edition of Lost Piece. We encourage you, as an undergraduate, to contribute your writing to future editions whether individually or as part of any such intellectual society. You can send your writing and feedback to the editor at slechner@nd.edu.



The Program of Liberal Studies:

So it turns out that PLS students don't only like to talk about such trivial things as "free will" or "the meaning of life" as approached through the lens of certain Great Books, but they also like, even need, to engage ideas wherever they can find them. That's why a few of them got together to watch movies every week, first as a social event and later more as a discussion group. They like to think they are staying true to the spirit of the word "seminar" (which literally means "seedbed") by holding profound conversations on their own from which they hope to bear the fruits of new ideas, serious dialogue, and lasting friendships.

Istum:

(Also called *That Thing*) Three years ago, a group of friends decided to get together every

weekend to start a literary society. Its members include students from the Colleges of Arts and Letters, Science, and Engineering, but strangely none from the college of Business. They write, simply put, despite the obvious fact that they are only tyro writers, and they criticize each other's writing as best they can. One of their goals is to bring back the essay (which literally means "an attempt") as a form of writing and as a rhetorical work of art. The group takes its name from one of Cicero's orations.

The Philosophy Club:

The Philosophy Club is a group of a few dozen undergraduates who enjoy arguing, using big words, attempting to answer "life's great questions," asking more questions, and arguing.

T:

T is a group of undergraduates who meet together to discuss issues of importance, ranging from theology to philosophy to current issues in any and all fields. It is a casually structured, socially engaging event that welcomes the opportunity to find both common ground and a multitude of opinions on topics. And they drink tea, too.

The Orestes Brownson Council:

As a club, OBC is focused on better understanding the Catholic intellectual tradition and its interaction with philosophy, politics, and culture. It takes its name from the American Catholic political thinker who is buried in the crypt of the Basilica of the Sacred Heart, Orestes Brownson.

Beauty?

An Introduction

Stephen Lechner
Class of 2011
Editor in Chief

When we first began thinking about this journal, I never would have guessed that the topic of an entire issue would be “beauty.” Is beauty really all that interesting to a crowd of undergraduates? But apparently it is.

I guess that’s fair though. Homer, after all, attributes the entirety of the Trojan War to a divine conflict concerning beauty. Diotima, in Plato’s *Symposium*, claims that anyone who sees Beauty face to face is one who achieves true immortality. Aristotle listed beauty among the transcendentals, a title that only “good,” “truth,” and “one” share. Don Quixote embarked on his quirkily heroic errantry for the sake of his Dulcinea, the peasant woman whom he saw as some kind of zenith of beauty.

You will soon read exactly what John Keats thought about beauty, and, although “beauty” might be a stretched translation in his case, Robert Piersig holds “quality” to be the one, the basic component of all existence in his American classic, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*.

So beauty is a subject for intellectual discourse, but perhaps a bit abstract? Well, so I thought. But Joey’s essay has a point—we find ourselves dealing with beauty all the time, and not at all in an abstract way. We’re surrounded by entertainment, and I might add, entertainment on which we are passing judgment all the time: *The Dark Knight*—“great movie!” *The Dark Crystal*—“ugh!”

Hopefully, you will find the following pieces helpful in putting this abstract notion of “beauty” into context within your own life. After

all, we’re all familiar with the fairy tales that Tess considers in her research paper, and, as Conor points out, we all do have some particular reason for going to the movies whether or not we are aware of this reason. Perhaps someday I will understand Raymond when he says “everything is beautiful,” though by the way he speaks of it, I imagine it’s all much more mysterious than I yet realize. In any case, I’ll stick by my guns on this one: beauty is something of

which we seem to greatly lack perception, and I envy those persons who supposedly had the capacity for that perception at one time.

Perhaps by turning to Dostoevsky we can find just what place beauty enjoys, or should enjoy in our lives, and to this effect I quote his *Demons*. For therein an old man, half mad, cries out helplessly to thousands of young revolutionaries, trying futilely to convince them that beauty is not only important, but essential to human life.

“And I proclaim,” Stepan Trofimovich shrieked, in the last extremity of passion, ‘and I proclaim that Shakespeare and Raphael are higher than the emancipation of the serfs, higher than nationality, higher than socialism, higher than the younger generation, higher than chemistry, higher than almost all mankind, for they are already the fruit, the real fruit of all mankind, and maybe the highest fruit there ever may be! A form of beauty already achieved, without the achievement of which I might not even consent to live... Oh, God!’ he clasped his hands, ‘ten years ago I cried out

in the same way from a platform in Petersburg, exactly the same things and in the same words, and in exactly the same way they understood nothing, they laughed and hissed, as now; short people, what more do you need in order to understand? And do you know, do you know that mankind can live without the Englishman, it can live without Germany, it can live only too well without the Russian man, it can live without science, without bread, and it only cannot live without beauty, for then there would be nothing at all to do in the world! The whole secret is here, the whole of history is here! Science itself would not stand for a minute without beauty—are you aware of that, you who are laughing?—it would turn into boorishness, you couldn't invent the nail! ... I will not yield!' he cried absurdly in conclusion, and banged his fist on the table with all his might."

So what do you think? Is there some "beauty" that makes, as Dostoevsky's character suggests, human life worth living, without which all humanity "would turn into boorishness?" And is it to be found in our daily lives, or does Trofimovich's challenge to the Nineteenth Century Russian way of life stand as a criticism of our own?

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Entertainment, Art, Enlightenment

An Essay

Josef Kuhn
Class of 2011
Program of Liberal Studies

If you walk down Charterhouse Street in London late on a Saturday night, you will find a long queue of teenagers and twenty-somethings in tight jeans and trendy jackets, waiting patiently to hand over their £18.00 to get into Fabric. Inside, the deafening bass will rattle their ribcages as they dance their heads off after popping some MDA. Wednesday midmornings, you can barely find room to walk between the gaggles of senior citizens shuffling through the rooms of the National Gallery. Every day, in Trafalgar Square, Piccadilly Circus, or along the embankment of the Thames near the London Eye, crowds of tourists race from "living statues" to church steeples, eager to

fill up their cameras with pictures. These are the benefits of living in a big city—entertainment, art, what people call "culture." These entertaining attractions purport to be able to make us happy. But I find it hard to believe that the hundreds of people standing in line for five hours at the premiere of *Alice in Wonderland* just to see a glimpse of Johnny Depp's face were any happier because of it.

This past semester I studied abroad in London, and it was the first time I had ever lived in a large, world-class city. From the beginning I was overwhelmed by the constant availability of an almost infinite variety of entertainment. On the walk to school, no matter which route I took, I could not help but pass at least 17 theatres and see at least 6,000 advertisements, exhorting me to buy cereal

from the side of a bus or sex from the inside of a telephone booth. But the majority of the ads I saw were for entertainment—musicals, plays, concerts, books, etc. You would think that people in London never have to work. Just looking at the events listed in *Time Out* magazine for one night could give a person a panic attack. With so much freedom, how exactly is one supposed to choose how to spend one's time?

As if to mirror the superabundance of entertainment around me, three of my five classes last semester (London Writers, Seeing Britain on Screen, Images of Britain) were about some form of the arts, or in other words, entertainment. I was saturated with entertainment. For example, in one day of classes I discussed the novel *Oliver Twist* and the short story "The Machine

Stops," listened to music from the opera *Lucia di Lammermoor*, and watched the movie *Brassed Off!*, then went to see *Phantom of the Opera* with some friends. But at the end of this day, I was not left with a feeling of pleasant satisfaction. Filling my entire day with entertainment only left me feeling unfulfilled. I was faced with these nagging questions: what is the point of all this art and entertainment? Is art just a pretentious form of entertainment, meant to amuse us and pass the time, or is it something more? Where do you draw the line?

In my PLS Great Books Seminar last semester, we read and discussed the *Pensées* of Blaise Pascal, a mathematician, natural philosopher, and theologian in the 17th century. Pascal suggests that all entertainment is simply an attempt to ward off serious reflection. For this reason,

he says, a king (or any very rich person) always surrounds himself with objects of enjoyment and attendants whose only job is to divert the king. But even a king, left to himself in his room with no diversion, will have to "consider and reflect on what he is." And reflecting on what he is, Pascal says, he will realize that he is not happy, because he is certain of nothing. We humans cannot comprehend the infinitely big, or the infinitely small; we cannot see any end to our researches in outer or inner space, for both may go on indefinitely. Likewise, we cannot discover any comforting bit of truth by tracing back a chain of causes through time, because we either hit a wall, or find the chain goes back forever. We do not even know what happens to us after we die. As Pascal points out, this

ignorance is "so miserable that nothing can comfort us when we think of it closely." And so, "We do not seek that easy and peaceful lot which permits us to think of our unhappy condition, nor the dangers of war, nor the labor of office, but the bustle which averts these thoughts of ours, and amuses us." We humans are restless creatures because we cannot find the answers to the questions that plague us. Hence, the attraction of city life, where the diversions of entertainment never run out.

Pascal found the answer to this inherent dissatisfaction in Christianity. This worked for him, but for many other people religion just seems to be another empty artifice, constructed by humans to distract us from our own ignorance. So others turn to art as the highest human calling. What does art have that mere

entertainment does not? Both of them give us something to do when we are not working; they amuse and delight us; they help us to relax. These are all good effects. But art is different from entertainment in that entertainment diverts us from reflection, whereas art stimulates reflection. Of course, this is a very rough differentiation, and there is grey area between the two categories. But think about the difference between, say, *Jersey Shore* and a Shakespeare play. The former entertains you; the latter entertains you *and* provokes serious thought. There is a reason why humans burn fewer calories when they are watching TV than when they are sleeping: the mind is more active in sleep (by dreaming) than it is when watching TV. Perhaps *Jersey Shore* can provoke serious thought if you view it with a critical eye, but it is not

intended to do so, whereas a Shakespeare play is supposed to be thought-provoking. One definition of art that I have heard is that it presents something to us as an object of contemplation. That is why a toilet seat in an art exhibit is art, whereas a toilet seat in a bathroom is not art. If entertainment is mere diversion, then according to Pascal's theory it can never really make us happy; it can only temporarily distract us from our misery of ignorance. On the other hand, art provokes the mind, stirring it out of its false sense of relaxation. According to Pascal's theory, wouldn't this simply make us more miserable, by focusing our attention on what we do not know? Well, yes, if that is all that art does. But art has other powers as well.

What are art's redeeming graces? Some think it is the beauty of art, the perfec-

tion of the form itself. As John Keats wrote, "Beauty is truth, truth beauty—that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know." Around the end of the 19th century (the "fin-de-siecle" period), a movement arose in Britain and America that attempted to sever art from any pedagogical function, claiming that the value of art was in its own inherent beauty, regardless of content. This school of thought is still widely influential today, but it has not gone unchallenged. Oscar Wilde was one of the major proponents of the "art for art's sake" movement, but he seems to have had some reservations about putting too much value on art in itself. For instance, his poem "Les Ballons" seems to be a criticism of art that is beautiful yet empty, symbolized by ethereal balloons. Going back further in time, even Shake-

speare seems to have been troubled with the apparent futility of a life spent dedicated to art. In *The Tempest*, which is generally regarded to be Shakespeare's last work, Prospero conjures spirits to put on a fanciful show for his daughter's wedding, but in the middle of the show he suddenly grows disturbed and gives this famous speech, worth quoting in full:

*You do look, my son, in a moved sort,
As if you were dismayed. Be cheerful, sir.
Our revels now are ended. These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits and
Are melted into air, into thin air;
And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with sleep. Sir, I am vexed.
Bear with my weakness: my old brain is troubled.
Be not disturbed with my infirmity.
If you be pleased, retire into my cell
And there repose. A turn or two I'll walk
To still my beating mind. (Act 4, Scene 1)*

Prospero is often thought to embody Shakespeare himself, for like Shakespeare, he uses his deep knowledge, gleaned from books, to create a crowd-pleasing play. But Shakespeare/Prospero realizes that the play is nothing, a mere flight of fancy

to amuse and distract us. He has an existential crisis in the middle of the play when he is reminded of the frailty of our lives and the darkness of our ignorance. In the epilogue of the play, Prospero directly addresses the audience, asking for

them to grant him release and forgiveness after a life spent on enchanting artifice.

But if art is merely an “insubstantial pageant,” what should we put in its stead? In my film class last semester we watched a movie called *Brassed Off!* about a brass band in a struggling coal-mining town. At the end of the movie, after the coal mine has been shut down and several lives nearly destroyed in the process, the conductor, Danny, gives a rousing speech that begins: “Truth is I thought it mattered—I thought the *music* mattered. But does it? Bollocks! Not compared to how people matter.” Art is created by people, so its importance will always be second to theirs. It expresses their joy, their pain, their hopes—and if it’s good enough, it can turn us back to people, to the real matter of life. One of art’s powers is

its ability to connect people—think of how many bonds you have created with people over a favorite song or book. But art is always considered as subpar to direct experience, to physical reality. This hierarchy of importance seems to be ingrained in our minds intuitively, so that everyone agrees with it even without thinking about it. Think back on the fondest memories of your life, or the most tragic, or the most powerful. Most likely they involve your own direct experiences—with other people, with nature, with God, with yourself. They are probably not memories of a play, a song, or a museum exhibit. And one does not even have to go to a show or read a book to experience art—for living itself is a kind of art. This is what Virginia Woolf recognized when she wrote through the eyes of Mrs. Dalloway, “Such fools we

are...For Heaven only knows why one loves it so, how one sees it so, making it up, building it round one, tumbling it, creating it every moment afresh; but the veriest frumps, the most dejected of miseries sitting on doorsteps (drink their downfall) do the same; can't be dealt with, she felt positive, by acts of Parliament for that very reason: they love life." Because every person has this glorious ability to create art, if only in the mind, every person is worthy of the utmost dignity. But although art may be unimportant compared to humans, in reality art is as inseparable from human nature as thinking. We cannot always be at physical labor, but when we rest our bodies, we cannot completely rest our minds (although we can temporarily divert them through entertainment). As

long as our minds are active, we always have longings and desires and questions, and in our leisure time, we express these through art. It is art's power of self-expression that draws people together. But art is not merely a means of expression; it is also a means of understanding. Every piece of entertainment or art that you imbibe has an effect on your brain, for better or for worse, and you can never go back to your previous state again. While your life is measured in your direct experiences, your reactions to those experiences and ideas about them are informed by works of art and entertainment swirling around in your mind. The irony of art is that, while it is only an imitation of life, the act of viewing or hearing a work of art is itself a life experience. When you experience good art, it raises

questions and sparks your imagination, which leads you to new and better thoughts and may even inspire you to create your own art. Thus, art is a self-fueling, ever-renewing process. We are all consumers of entertainment and art, but in addition to being mere consumers, I urge everyone reading this to try to be both a *critic* and an *artist*, in the broadest senses of those words. Do not just passively receive impressions; come up with your own judgments about the world around you. Seek answers to the unanswered and seemingly unanswerable questions raised in your mind by art or experience. Creating art is an exploratory process in which you find out things about yourself and the world that you can't find out through other means, such as scientific experimentation

or academic research. The act of creation is a means of growing an answer, of groping toward an ever truer approximation of the answers to our biggest questions. For this reason, art's stimulation of reflection does not merely end in misery; it proceeds to provide possible answers that quell our dissatisfaction, even if they are merely possible. Pascal, when he wrote about the futility of diversions in his *Pensées*, was actually developing an answer to his dissatisfaction by creating a work of art. And this essay, too, is a work of art, seeking an answer to a never-ending question. Every Monday and Wednesday last semester, as I mounted to the fourth floor of the ND London Centre for Great Books Seminar IV (my "diversion" for those afternoons), a line from Theodore Roethke's poem "The Waking" popped into

my head: "The lowly worm
climbs up a winding stair."
Roethke's poem embodies
what I see as the highest
calling of art, as well as the
highest calling of each and
every one of us. As we travel
through space and time in
our lives, we are all on our
own journeys for truth, journeys
that are both individual
and interconnected. As I
approached the bright sky-
light at the top of the stairs
in London, I always imagined
it as a sign that, despite
my human ignorance, I was
drawing closer and closer
to the truth. And I believe
that my imaginings were
not completely in vain. ❁

A Paradise Lost

A Poem

Stephen Lechner
Class of 2011
Istum

*The beauty long ago all men could see
Is nothing now to our poor blinded eyes.
In ages past, men's sights soared high and free,
While ours are trapped by low and falling skies.
How far men used to journey by their light;
Now far men have to journey for their glow.
Their wise men used to study them at night;
We lack their lore and beauty lore would show.
But though we cannot see them, so you say,
Our rockets strong will bring us to their might.
I'd rather man would fail to see that day
And children always sing their reachless height.
They sing, O twinkle, twinkle little star,
And singing, now I wonder where you are.*

Everything is Beautiful

An Essay

Ray Korson
Class of 2011
Istum

One year ago, a group of friends and I engaged in an evening of conversation over a topic that is rarely discussed in modern discourse: Beauty. You may ask, what kind of college students are you? Shouldn't you be out drinking or something, having a good time? I admit that this gathering may not have been your typical undergraduate social event, but it was fun nonetheless. Our particular discussion turned into a wildly heated debate, which involved caffeinated gesticulations and forthright obscenities, when the nature of beauty was called into question—specifically, whether beauty is inherently objective or subjective. At the peak of the debate, one individual pulled a Tom Cruise, jump-

ing up and down excitedly atop his seat on the couch like a little hobgoblin in defense of his argument. The discussion became unruly, even absurd, as each of its participants bickered around each other with their independent lines of reasoning. The evening ended with the issue hopelessly unresolved, demonstrating only that we were all missing the mark due to ill-defined terminologies and stubborn biases for our own arguments. We parted that evening, agreeing with one thing, however: beauty is not easily defined and its definition should be left to more capable minds that have had more than a mere two and a half years of exposure to higher education and scholarship. For my part, I turned from that conversation deeply troubled and highly unsatisfied. My

friends and I had stumbled upon a topical goldmine of irresistible importance. The allure of that unsettled debate has provoked the writing of this essay, which will attempt to elaborate and offer insights on the questionable objectivity or subjectivity of beauty, arguing, as I did that fateful evening, that beauty is inherently objective. In fact, I will purport that beauty *must* be objective if it is to hold any value at all.

To begin, I wish to call to mind beauty as it is understood in modern society. A random survey of pedestrians will point to a wide array of objects as being beautiful including particulars such as a Monet painting, a banana-split sundae, the Willis Tower, a Taylor Swift song, a harvest moon, a keg of Guinness, George Clooney, or a beachside sunset. The common understanding

of beauty is that of sensual pleasure, something that provides delight for the senses. Once in a while, a person will respond by claiming that the love of family and friends, a warm smile, or the gift of service or sacrifice is the pinnacle experience of beauty. Beauty often is understood, then, both in tangible and intangible terms, appealing to both bodily and emotional or spiritual sensuality. Clearly, opinions on what is beautiful are widely subjective as they are based on personal preference. The common denominator in each instance, however, is the same: the object of beauty *exists*. We can see, feel, and hear it in a variety of ways. We would not be able to do any of that unless the object which we ascribe as beautiful is present in some form. By noting the beauty of an object, we are identifying an essential qual-

ity of that object. Beauty is intimately united to its object, and vice versa, because neither can be without the other. In short, beauty is substantial.

To elaborate, allow me to divulge an account that serves as an analogy for this investigation of beauty. Just the other day, I witnessed an elderly couple, seated on a bench outside of an ice cream parlor, holding hands and watching the sunset. I became slightly repelled when the old man puckered up and kissed his wife with passion befitting that of an infatuated, hormonal adolescent. The scene was reminiscent of a late-night commercial for Cialis or Viagra, which always make me cringe, as I would rather not think of *that*. I turned my attention back to my root beer float to cleanse my palette, but I soon found myself questioning my reaction. I was not con-

cerned that I did not find the man's wife attractive because, young and spry as I am, I would expect nothing less than viewing females closer to my own age as attractive. No, what bothered me was the *difference* in my perception of beauty from that of the animated old-timer. The man obviously loves his wife and thinks she is beautiful. I admit that, perhaps, in her younger years it is likely I, too, would have found her attractive, but at that time I could not, with honesty, say that she embodied what I think of as beautiful. This realization led me to contemplate the prospect of my own wife. When I meet her, surely I will think of her as beautiful, but will my appreciation of beauty change as she grows old, wrinkled, and haggard? The Beatles, hardly considered philosophical lyricists, ask the same question when

they sing "Will you need me, will you still feed me, when I'm 64." Alternately, will I begin to appreciate the beauty of older women with aged features as well? Will my perception of beauty evolve? I concluded that the change must occur within myself, for beauty itself cannot change, but why would I reach such a conclusion? What is beauty that it is not subject to change? My thoughts were interrupted when I suddenly realized that—simultaneously with my rambling musings—the old couple and I were appreciating the beauty of the *same* sunset.

After thinking this incident over, I realized that the old couple had fallen victim to my shallow perception of what is supposedly beautiful. My initial aversion was triggered by the sight of the old woman's wrinkles, the man's balding scalp, and their own

set of dentures (as far as I assumed) and the aberration of their affection for each other. I realized afterward, that I was perceiving beauty from a biased and superficial point of view, unconsciously ignoring the interior beauty of the couple. Looking at popular culture, I noticed that our society praises the beauty of youth and discourages the look of old age, implicitly deeming it as inferior. There has been a rise in plastic surgery and Botox procedures and nearly every other TV commercial advertises a product to stay physically attractive to others. Youthful beauty has been preferred and, therefore, normalized by the majority. As a result, this perception continually ostracizes the natural beauty of humans in other stages in life. By this same standard of "young and beautiful" I too quickly judged the

elderly couple and labeled them instantly as “ugly.”

Recalling my rash judgment and the previously stated observations of popular culture, I concluded that this is a collective, though no less personal, problem of society. I realized that I am a product of a society that presents beauty as something merely superficial, skin-deep, if you will. I cannot hold myself, or anyone else, accountable for this error, for the pervading force of society’s influence is strong and, for the most part, undetectable. I do believe, however, that one can be made accountable if they come to the same conclusion that I have, namely that everything is objectively beautiful. We merely have to open our eyes to see beauty for what it truly is. For instance, if I took a moment to break through the societal mentality of superficial

beauty, I would have seen the long wrinkles that accentuated the old woman’s smile, the callused hands of the old man’s labors, the look of joy in each of their eyes, and the kiss of love’s remembrance all as *beautiful*. I could have seen how all of that represents, for the couple, life dedicating to loving fidelity and filled with toil, sorrow, and joy. If I looked a little closer, I would have seen the transcendent quality of that scene, and I would have called it beautiful.

My point is simply this: beauty is *there*, objectively present, you just cannot see it right away. We tend to think of our perception of beauty as purely subjective because our vision of it is narrowed and we fail to recognize the objectivity therein. Without seeing its objectivity, you can see why beauty would appear to be subjective. But beauty is more than an opinion. It

is a reality, and like all of reality, we need to open our eyes in order to appreciate it.

Opening our eyes, in this case, implies an expansion of vision. For this, I turn to Saint Thomas Aquinas, a great influence on my personal philosophy, for elaboration. Aquinas calls beauty a “transcendental property of being” and describes the appreciation of beauty as a result of a “gifted perfection of seeing”. This conclusion is reached under the assumption that all of creation shares the property of beauty because it enjoys the same creator, God, who imparts the attribute of *being* to all members of reality, which partakes in the truth, goodness, and beauty of being as such. This, perhaps, is where objects attain the quality of beauty, through participation in reality. This is also how all of creation is objectively founded, be-

cause all shares the property of being. Aquinas implies that it is up to us to deepen and enhance our vision to recognize the dimension of beauty in all things because everything radiates from an entity—God—that is perfect truth, perfect goodness.

I cannot help relate the abstract notions of truth and goodness in my discussion of beauty because I believe they *must* share the same quality of objectivity as beauty does. Think about it: What would be the significance of truth if there were no objective standards for it? Can we not maintain that “two plus two equals four” is a true statement? Would that statement mean anything if we could not prove it to be true? The same can be said for goodness, for it is not impossible to distinguish good from evil. Can we not assert that donating money to a charitable

foundation is good whereas robbing the same institution is wrong? Would the decision to rob or donate mean anything if we could not distinguish between the two? Truth, beauty, and goodness are all highly abstract and are, therefore, difficult to grasp at times. It is important to realize, however, that truth, beauty, and goodness must all be rooted in objectivity if they are to hold any sort of value. Truth and goodness are terms that should be raised in correlation with beauty because there is truth and goodness in that which is beautiful. It does not take an Aristotle to see this. For who grimaces at the cascading hues of a brilliant sunset or glowers at the beaming smile or warm touch of a loved one? Who fails to delight in the presence of beauty? We may not identify

this delight as the recognition of the true and the good in the created world, but we cannot deny that beauty is intrinsically good and true.

Without imposing a philosophy, I invite you to consider what sort of vision is required to see the inherent beauty in reality. Referring back to the affectionate elderly couple, I would not deny that the old man has a deeper sense of appreciation for his wife's beauty because he possesses the gifted vision of her inner beauty. He alone was meant for his wife, and perhaps the vision of her beauty helped him to realize his vocation to marry her. This is not to say that onlookers cannot share in the man's appreciation, however, for we can surely acknowledge the woman's beauty if we withstand the inclination to judge beauty with the super-

ficial standards of modern society. The appreciation of beauty requires a vision that recognizes and subsequently disregards the subconscious impositions of civilization to acknowledge the beauty that is objectively present in all things, in ourselves and especially in others. This requires, first, an understanding of the inherent problem of subjectifying beauty and reserving that quality simply for the "young and beautiful" by accepting the truth in the beauty of all things. Beauty should not be subjected to discrimination, nor could it if it was widely understood that beauty is an objective quality. Though it may seem, initially, that beauty is merely subjective, it is important to realize that beauty would be meaningless if that were so. Our current society places heavy emphasis on the authority of the individual, and some-

times this is for the better. But it is the worst insofar as it leads us to believe that an object is beautiful because we say it is so—others may disagree, "but it is beautiful to us," so it is. What we may potentially fail to recognize is that an object is beautiful because it *is* and *was* long before we ever recognized it as such. If the quality of beauty is not essentially united to its object, it simply becomes an abstract concept that is condemned to limbo, unsubstantiated and bouncing off of the walls of a relativistic void. Rather, beauty's nature is objective and lies outside of, yet open and exposed to, subjective human experience.

Seeing the beauty in the ordinary requires a supernatural vision, one attained from contemplating the sublime nature of beauty. Doing so will yield a deepened appreciation of beauty by

acknowledging that beauty encompasses something much more profound than superficial observation. It seems to me that beauty, as it is used today, is depreciated or divorced from its proper value because its objective transcendence has been lost to a society that identifies beauty with shallow standards. Beauty is, therefore, used both casually and selectively, so the inherent beauty in other worthy objects is rarely noticed. The remedy lies in a personal challenge, a challenge that charges you to expand the depth and breadth of your perception to include that which initially appears as unsightly or mundane to be, in fact, beautiful. This enhanced vision is a challenge that will, perhaps, restore reverence to beauty as a value that tries to describe the indescribable. Though beauty, as a simple

English term, may seem woefully inadequate to capture the true essence of beauty, I believe that such a vision cannot fail. It is said that beauty is beheld in the eyes of the beholder. This statement is true, if taken as such: that it is up to us, cognizant individuals that we are, to see and contemplate the beauty that lies right before our very eyes. Let's take a deep breath, open our eyes, and see. ☉

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An Afternoon Coffee

A Poem

Anna O'Meara
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T

*We couldn't have asked for better weather, whether or
not you brought your leather jacket or I my sweater.*

*These sounds and scenes only exist in dreams, art textbooks
and magazines. The lake shines a blue like Listerine.*

*We sift through water molecules and quarks like artists; we found
a secret school of Marxists that will mold the universe together.*

*Your anecdotes and your caffeine are antidotes and my vaccine
comprised of the obscene mind of God composed of a symphony by
Bach that harmonizes this coffee shop and molds our lives together.*

Why We Go to the Movies

An Essay

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Whether you are a film buff or someone just looking for fun on a Friday night, we all go to the movies. But few of us have ever stopped to question why we do so. I have asked a lot of different people and I have received many different answers. Some people say it's a social event – like going to a high school football game. A movie is something you go to with your friends on a weekend night. But the difference between attending a high school football game and going to the movies is that the latter involves little or no conversation. During the football game, you talk to each other after every play or so. During the movie, you are not giving a scene by scene review to your

friends. What I find interesting is that, after a movie is over, most people rarely talk about it for more than a minute or two. The conversation following a movie usually revolves around what scenes you found particularly enjoyable and rarely goes much further. By the time you and your friends are in the car, you are already talking about something else. Everyone who has ever made the mistake of taking that special someone to the movies on a first date realizes that the movies are not the best place to socialize.

So what did you spend \$10 on? Some people say they want entertainment. They want to see explosions, sex, a couple plot twists, and perhaps some clever dialogue. These are the people who enjoy movies like *Casino Royale* and *The Dark Knight*. Not wanting to think too

much, these people would like to turn off their brains for a while from the stresses of their everyday lives. There is absolutely nothing wrong with this. Everyone needs to take a time-out every now and then from the natural worries that come from their schoolwork or various personal issues. Some people do so via the entertainment cinema.

Other people dislike the entertainment cinema and say they want to turn their brain on. They go to the cinema because they want to see art. These people enjoy movies like *The Fountain* and *No Country for Old Men*. They like movies that are intellectually engaging and require them to think about deep issues such as life and death, love, war, and human nature. These people enjoy analyzing movies just as much as they do watching them. They provide food for thought,

but also food for discussion. Sometimes these people will continue talking about the movie long after it is over.

It is not uncommon for someone to occupy a middle ground between these two positions. They enjoy movies that are exciting yet make you think a little bit like *Memento* or *V for Vendetta*. These are people who want the best of both worlds. They want a movie with explosions, yet they also want intellectual stimulation. *V for Vendetta* has plenty of action scenes, but it is also a reflection on the role of government. *Memento* has a mystery plot told in a unique form that will keep the casual moviegoer guessing, but it also makes one think about the nature of memory and objective reality.

But what all these three groups of people have in common is that they share the same underlying need

that drives them to the theater. When we go to the movies, we sit in the dark and become totally immersed in a new world. The worries and fears of our real lives disappear for the next two hours. The only emotions we have are our sympathies and antipathies for the characters onscreen. True, they are total strangers. We have never seen them before and have no idea what they are going to do next. They are foreign to us.

Yet at the same time, they are so like us. They experience happiness, anger, sadness, fear awkwardness and loneliness just like we do. They enjoy small victories and suffer major setbacks. They laugh and cry and they invite us to share in their sorrows and triumphs. In a dark little room in the cinema, something magical has happened. We do not see costumed actors or actresses on the screen

but the hearts and minds of characters. We identify with certain characters and want them to be rewarded with happiness and we reject the values of others and want them to be punished.

We are driven to go to the movies because we desire an emotional catharsis. We want to get emotionally invested in the plot and characters. This emotional investment stirs up a desire to see things through to the end. We want to see a character's world get complicated, get more complicated, and then we want to see it fixed. If a movie is any good, chances are it will alternate between scenes of conflict and brief resolution. A character will face an obstacle, overcome it, and discover there is an even bigger obstacle to face. A good movie will develop a *rhythm* between these scenes, and the term

rhythm is applicable because what a movie does is similar to what a piece of music does. It alternates between dissonant and consonant chords with a resolution in the end. Think of that chord at the end of the song that resolves everything. (Fun fact: That's called the tonic. Now you can impress all your friends by sounding smart)

We want to see a character undergo some horrible ordeal like a war, the Holocaust, or personal romantic and financial troubles and then we want to see them make it out on the other side. And if they die, we want to see them die heroically and tragically. Their death involves slow motion and perhaps a sweeping score courtesy of Hans Zimmer or Howard Shore. Their death almost always has some higher meaning. The hero has sacrificed his own life for the greater good of country.

The patient lost to cancer has influenced posterity. Maybe we are attempting to reassure ourselves that our own deaths will not be meaningless.

Some people say they like these death scenes or tragic parts in movies, claiming they go to the movies for "a good cry." What constitutes "a good cry?" In a 1964 interview, Alfred Hitchcock described it as "the satisfaction of temporary pain." Famous for his suspense films, Hitchcock attenuated emotional tension to a maximum, but always found a way to resolve that tension by the end of the film. And his audiences loved him for this. Whether you go to the movies looking for adventure, romance, thrills, shivers, or just a laugh, we still want an emotional cleansing when we walk out of that movie. You may disagree with me and think you have a differ-

ent reason for going to the movies. If that is the case, I welcome such disagreement. But I hope that the next time someone asks you, “Wanna go see a movie?” you will stop and think why. ❁

Moral Philosophy in Puppet Shows and Fairy Tales:

*The Role of Myth and Children's Fantasy in
Chesterton's and Tolkien's Beliefs
A Research Paper*

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Catholic journalist and author Gilbert Keith Chesterton never had children of his own, yet he considered it a compliment when his critics attempted to insult him by calling him “childish” in his humor and interests. Later author, university professor, and fellow Catholic J. R. R. Tolkien shared Chesterton's love for children's stories and games, focusing much of his considerable intelligence and writing talent on constructing imaginative stories for children. Their shared emphasis on childlike interests and fairy tale stories was not merely a passing diversion

but was a notable component of Tolkien's personal philosophy and was absolutely central to Chesterton's. Both men, particularly Chesterton, considered their childhood experiences to be the foundation for their beliefs and actions throughout their lives. An examination of their writings on the subject, with special attention paid to Chesterton's views on toy puppet theatres, makes clear that their personal ethics emerged largely from the ethics of “Fairyland.”

Tolkien's love for fantasy stories included not only children's fairy tales but also the vast spectrum of folklore, especially ancient mythology. A glance at a common dictionary will reveal the

following definitions for the word “myth”: “any invented story, idea, or concept,” “an imaginary or fictitious thing or person,” or “an unproved or false collective belief;” as commonly accepted as these definitions are, Tolkien would have revolted firmly against them. He considered myths to be true in a way that is truer than physical reality. His views on the subject are best defined in a conversation he recorded having with his close friend and fellow Oxford don C.S. Lewis in a poem titled *Mythopoeia*. The conversation on mythology ironically began with the true account of Christ’s Resurrection. This conversation clarified Tolkien’s own thinking on the subject and played a crucial role in Lewis’ acceptance of Christianity and eventual conversion. Early in his study of Christian belief, Lewis expressed his

confusion about the purpose of Christ’s Crucifixion and Resurrection from the dead. How, he asked, could such a story help modern people, “except in so far as [Christ’s] example could help us?” Tolkien urged him to consider the story as Lewis viewed his beloved pagan myths – that is, to be so inspired and moved by it that it could become immediately relevant to him. Lewis responded, “But myths are lies, even though lies breathed through silver.” Tolkien’s response to this accusation – “No, they are not” – is foundational to understanding his emphasis on mythological, apparently fictional accounts.

According to his own account, Tolkien at this point “indicated the great trees of Magdalen Grove” and explained to Lewis that “You call a tree a tree, and you think nothing more of the

word. But it was not a ‘tree’ until someone gave it that name... By so naming things and describing them, you are only inventing your own terms about them. And just as speech is invention about objects and ideas, so myth is invention about truth.” In Tolkien’s view, even stories that contain factual error and that bear no resemblance to literal reality will contain the truth of the human experience and will reflect in some part God’s eternal truth. The inventing of stories allows man to participate in sub-creation with God. No matter how misguided an ancient myth may seem, it begins to lead towards God simply by virtue of being a human story. This insight is “the centre of [Tolkien’s] philosophy as a writer.” For Tolkien, then, the creation and telling of fairy tales, like the practice of ancient myths, necessarily leads

to awareness of God’s reality. Fairy tales are a means of coming to know and love God, allowing mankind to participate in God’s creative act in a way that reveals foundational human truths.

G. K. Chesterton’s reliance on fairy stories to explain his personal philosophy goes much farther than Tolkien’s observation that fictional stories narrate the basic truths of human existence. To begin with, Chesterton held the opinion that his early exposure to fairy tales, particularly in the form of toy puppet theatres, shaped his later views on right and wrong. He held that the lessons contained in fairy tales were the most “noble and healthy principles,” maintaining that “the things I believed most [as a child], the things I believe most now, are the things called fairy tales... Fairyland is nothing but the

sunny country of common sense.” He enumerates the immense practicality and universality of these laws:

“There is the lesson of ‘Cinderella,’ which is the same as that of the Magnificat – exaltavit humiles. There is the great lesson of ‘Beauty and the Beast’; that a thing must be loved before it is loveable. There is the terrible lesson of the ‘Sleeping Beauty,’ which tells how the human creature was blessed with all birthday gifts, yet cursed with death; and how death also perhaps may be softened to a sleep.”

Chesterton recounted how his earliest childhood memory was a swaggering young man with a curly moustache and gold crown crossing a mountain chasm, who happened to be “about six inches high and... made of cardboard.” This circumstance, however, did not mean that the scene was “unreal” but merely that Chesterton saw it through the proscenium arch of his father’s homemade toy theatre. Whatever the story’s objective reality, it profoundly influenced Chesterton’s burgeoning principles

and understanding of morality. His early exposure to his father’s fantastical stories led to his conclusion that “fairy tales are more than true — not because they tell us dragons exist, but because they tell us dragons can be beaten.” On one level, then, Chesterton was passionate about fairy tales because they were his earliest form of moral instruction and because he, like Tolkien, recognized the inherent truths they contain.

Chesterton’s passion for fairy tales as formative to his beliefs is only a part of his

reliance on them. He held the almost radical notion that life itself is a kind of fairy tale, in that human beings navigate a mysterious world governed by laws they cannot fully comprehend. Comparing the reality of human existence to the form of most fairy tales, he concluded that “when we step into the family, by the act of being born, we do step into a world which is incalculable, into a world which has its own strange laws, into a world which could do without us, into a world we have not made. In other words, when we step into the family we step into a fairy-tale.” In Chesterton’s view, fairy tales essentially offer microcosmic portraits of the basic human experience, a view shaped by his early and thorough exposure to his father’s fairy tales.

The content of his father’s stories were only part of their impact on the young Ches-

terton. Equally important was the way in which his father presented them. Edward Chesterton not only gave Gilbert his first book of fairy stories, George MacDonald’s *The Princess and the Goblin*, but he was also the “creator of the toy theatre which formed the first universe Gilbert discovered.” The tradition of toy theatre performances remained important to Chesterton throughout his life. As an adult, Chesterton regularly held extensive puppet shows for neighborhood children. Chesterton’s neighborhood productions were not merely an outlet for his boundless creative energy, but also provided a means for him to share with other children the same enjoyable lessons in moral philosophy that his father’s theatre had given him. He consistently affirmed that “the philosophy of toy theatres is worth

any one's consideration. All the essential morals which modern men need to learn could be deduced from this toy." Chesterton's belief in the toy theatre as a means of moral instruction has recently led to a revival in the use of toy theatres amongst those familiar with Chesterton's work, notably home-schooling Catholic families. The construction and use of such theatres offers not only a creative outlet and an opportunity to teach young children basic moral principles, but also functions as a forum for discussion between parents and older children.

Chesterton devoted such time and energy to these small dramas that at age thirty-five he wrote, "But though I have worked much harder at the toy theatre than I ever worked at any tale or article, I cannot finish it; the work seems too

heavy for me. I have to break off and betake myself to lighter employments; such as the biographies of great men." This somewhat facetious description shows that Chesterton shared Tolkien's view that fairy tales are a means of sub-creation that reveals fundamental human truths, and that Chesterton accordingly felt all the burden of this task.

Both Chesterton and Tolkien were men of extraordinary intelligence and vast talent, whose colleagues respected them as experts in their fields, yet both valued the mythical and fantastical stories that shaped their childhoods as highly as they valued their most significant intellectual contributions. Their love for the "childish" world of make-believe and fantasy stems from their shared belief in mythical stories as repositories of uni-

versal truth. Tolkien's interests veered towards ancient mythology, while Chesterton emphasized the colloquial oral tradition of story-telling through his regular use of the toy theatre. The emphasis they both place, however, on childlike interests and fairy tale stories makes clear that Fairyland deserves the place they give it as the first site of moral understanding.

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When I Say “I Love You”

A Story

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Istum

Sharon found her eyes wandering uncontrollably. They dashed over the plush, green lawn that had once glistened in the morning with its thick drops of morning dew suspended in a thin layer from each pointed blade. It used to be mowed and trimmed meticulously, and Sharon always found satisfaction catching the scent of freshly cut grass wafting and churning in the breeze, but now the yard stood four inches too tall. Where is that Collins boy, she wondered. I don't pay him ten dollars a week for my lawn to look like *this*. She would mow it herself, she told herself, if her knees didn't tremble so. Besides, she would break her back yanking on that stubborn rip

cord, trying to revive the old, rusted mower. She had tried to start it before and got it to roar to life, but only for a moment, before it sputtered into a death rattle and died.

Her gaze drifted steadily over to the deck, glancing over her granddaughter doggy-paddling in the pool, over to the ivy vines growing wild and infectiously over the latticed fence lining the pool deck. Bernard never did like that weed, she reflected, but she had put up with it for the sake of the occasional flower that would blossom from the tangled mess in early spring. There were no flowers anymore, but she let it be.

“Granma! Granma! Lookatme, lookatme!”

Sharon snapped out of her reverie, blinking her eyes hard as if a speck of dust had been caught beneath her eyelid.

“What? What is it?” she asked, placing concern in her voice.

“Watch!”

Sharon obeyed and watched as the little girl, standing in the shallow end of the pool, wearing a tight life vest and a flowery one-piece bathing suit, bent down and shoved her head beneath the surface of the water, gurgling loudly while thrashing her arms and legs dramatically. She stopped suddenly and squirmed awkwardly back on her feet, coughing and spitting up water as she parted soaking locks of black hair from her eyes.

“See? Just like mommy taught me!”

Sharon clapped her hands politely and smiled. “That's wonderful, Shirley. You'll be swimming in no time, won't you? Just be careful not to swallow too much water, you hear?” Shirley bobbed her

head fiercely and grinned mischievously with her gap-toothed grin. Sharon thought about the sizeable gap between her own front teeth. She was so self-conscious about looking hideous in pictures that she always kept her lips tightly pressed together whenever she smiled for a camera. Bernard said he didn't mind it, thought it was cute, in fact. She dismissed his reassurance, convinced that he was only buttering her up, but he had married her anyway. That was forty-three years ago. She swore the gap had grown noticeably larger since then.

“Only a few more minutes now, Shirley. Your mom will be here soon.” Shirley just smiled without looking up and doused her chest with a pail full of water instead.

Free again, Sharon allowed her eyes to roam, searching every crevice of

her once tidy and beautifully pruned flower garden and grimacing at the sight of every shriveled rose, wilting daisy, and blackened petunia. Bernie had always picked her bouquets of her own homegrown flowers before they blossomed. She scolded him, when he did so, but as soon as he turned away, she pressed them to her chest and bury her nose in them, diving into the sweet blend of fragrances that barely escaped from inside the tight, bud-ded petals before sinking altogether into a reverie.

As usual, her eyes came to rest on Bernard, seated rigidly in his chair. It was always the same. The same vacant stare, eyes fixed and lost in the distance, a small tuft of silvery-white hair parted tenderly to the side with a soft brush, sunlight reflecting and shining off his brow from where hair used to

hang lazily, just barely grazing the top of his eyebrows at the slightest turn of his head. His hands, the same ones that tightly squeezed her own, smoothed her hair, and fiddled with the ring on her finger, clenched the ends of his armrests in an eternal, vise-like grip. He always had amazing strength in his thick fingers, Sharon mused. He would rap his fingertips rhythmically on the dining room tabletop as he sipped on cognac after dinner, and his knuckles knocked so confidently when he came home with a bag of groceries, having forgotten his house key once again, but now they were brittle and white as they gripped the armrests tightly as if holding on for dear life, as if his wheel chair was about to roll over the brink of a ravine.

Sharon glanced back at the pool to see Shirley dunking

a naked Ken and scantily-clad Barbie into the depths of the pool. She pulled a hanging lock of grey hair behind her ear and listened to her breath quicken in short, gasping pants as she helplessly watched her hand drift toward her husband. Her fingers ached as if they had been tearing down a wall of dry tar for years, but they finally came to rest on Bernard's shoulder. He didn't blink. Not even a twitch. No reaction. He was completely still.

"Where are you?" she asked, retracting her hand to her own cheek, feeling the wrinkles sag beneath its weight. "Who are you?"

Every once in a while, Sharon would work herself up to placing her ear against Bernard's chest, listening for his heart, making sure it was still there, beating.

Sharon shuddered away a hot tear and busied herself

with her knitting. Her only daughter, Katie, was expecting a baby boy, and Sharon had taken it upon herself to make the child a matching assortment of hats, sweaters, and socks. It was a new hobby that began with Shirley, who was now three and a half years old. Three and a half. Has it really been that long? She asked herself. She had never seen Bernard smile as he had when he held Shirley for the first time, rocking her gently to and fro and humming "Hush Little Baby" until she fell asleep.

"Aaaah! Help! Aaaah!" Sharon jumped up, her eyes frantic and her pulse jumping. She grabbed at her heart and began to relax, realizing that Shirley was still playing dolls. Barbie doll was drowning and needed Ken to save her before a giant octopus squeezed the life out of her. Shirley kept screaming in her play, igno-

rant of the stir it had caused. "Shirley!" Sharon shrieked. Shirley froze in place, the Ken doll suspended in the middle of a heroic dive into the churning waters. She could tell she was in trouble.

"Don't scream like that! Ever! You hear?" Shirley simply stood in place with her mouth slightly agape and her brow furrowed in curious bewilderment.

"I said, do you hear me, girl?" Sharon reiterated, raising her voice intensely and dropping her bottom lip slightly to reveal her bottom teeth in a sort of snarl. Shirley shook her head, but stopped, realizing that she should nod her head instead. So she did, in an unintentionally exaggerated manner. A tense moment later, Sharon sat down again, still glowering as she watched the child rub her leg with a foot underwater and chew on a fingertip

nervously. Sharon resumed her knitting without another word and Shirley gingerly began playing again. Bernie saw it all. His eyes glistened as if tears were gathering into drops, glazing the surface of his pupils, or maybe it was just the sunlight glimmering in the hollow space where his eyes used to see.

Stitch. Stitch. Another stitch. The time ticked away with the even click of the needles. It took Sharon half a minute to hear the sound of Shirley's voice and the small tug of the child's wet hand on her sleeve.

"Yes, yes, what is it, Shirley?" The little girl took a small step back and began fiddling with her fingers, as if they would fall off after too much inactivity.

"Granma, is it lunch time yet?"

"No, it isn't."

Sharon resumed her knit-

ting and Shirley kept playing with her fingers for a long, silent minute.

"I'm hungry," Shirley replied, "and I'm thirsty, too. Mommy makes me Kool-Aid when we go to the pool."

"Well, I'm not your mother," Sharon replied, her eyes fixed on her stitching, "and I don't make Kool-Aid. Disgusting sugar water. You'll just have to wait for your mother." Unsatisfied by this answer, Shirley stuck out her bottom lip, crossed her arms as tight as she could around her life jacket, and turned on her heel. She pouted quietly for a few minutes by the side of the pool before her Barbie dolls caught her attention. She picked them up and started brushing their hair with a small plastic comb.

Shirley stopped playing to concentrate on unbuckling her life preserver. Shirley left the jacket on the pool

deck and gathered her dolls in a bundle to take them over to Bernard, who sat motionless and expressionless in his wheelchair. Shirley started playing again, using Bernard's lap as a platform for her make-believe Barbie world. Sharon's hands slowed and stopped as she inquisitively watched Shirley play out of the corner of her eye. She wondered if it hurt Bernie when Shirley dug the pointed Barbie toes into his thigh as she made them walk and dance. Couldn't he feel it? She wondered if Bernard could hear Shirley talking in high and low pitches to voice dialogue between Barbie and Ken as they went on "dates." She wondered if Bernard would be scandalized and click his tongue if he could see how Shirley made the two dolls kiss provocatively. Where'd she learn to do that, she questioned.

"Play with me, grandpa," Shirley said, thrusting the Ken doll hard into Bernard's stomach. Nothing. Shirley took one of Bernard's hands with both of hers. It was heavy. She managed to drag his hand over onto his lap, letting it plop down lifelessly. The Ken doll fit snugly into his big hand, but he couldn't clasp it with his thick fingers. Shirley grabbed his fingers and curled them around the doll but they snapped back into place, splayed out like the stiff wires of a rake.

"Grandpa! You have to hold it. Like this!" Shirley waved her own doll wildly in front of Bernard's eyes, but they didn't follow. Shirley tried to close his hand again, but it flopped open once again. Shirley growled softly in frustration. She picked up the Ken doll again and climbed up onto Bernie's lap, pulling on his shirt

to uncover a patch of white chest hair. She propped her bony knees against his chest and began patting his cheeks with sharp slaps, yelling, "Grandpa! Hello? Grandpa!"

Sharon couldn't take it anymore. She slammed her stitching to the ground and stood up, eyes crossed at the child who was now trying to stuff the Ken doll forcibly into Bernard's front shirt pocket. With surprising strength, Sharon grabbed the girl right under her armpit and ripped her from her perch atop her husband. She spanked her once. Twice. Harder. And Harder. Not a word was spoken. All of the little girl's energy was focused on the pain, absorbing it with tight wincing and sharp inhales while Sharon ground her teeth together, slapping harder and harder with more deliberation and ferocity. She stopped sud-

denly and let the child go, who slid pathetically down against her leg to the ground.

"He can't play! He can't! Can't you see that?" Sharon screamed, shoulders trembling, knees quaking. Shirley sobbed pitifully with her head resting on the deck and a hand rubbing the red welt on her backside.

"But he always plays with me," she managed to reply, through lips soaked with tears and mucus running from her nose.

"No, he can't. He can't! He can't hear you, can't see you, can't feel you! He can't even love you! How can you expect him to play with you? He doesn't even know you're here!" It was too much. She had gone overboard, and she knew it. Sharon could feel hot tears cascading from her own eyes as she backed away. She turned around suddenly to see her

daughter, Katie, staring at her. Their eyes exchanged what words could not. Katie grimaced at her mother with narrowed eyebrows and squinted eyes as she rushed past Sharon to console her daughter, still curled up and sobbing on the paved deck.

Sharon ducked inside the house. She uncorked an open bottle of cabernet from the fridge, splashed a generous portion into a plastic cup from the cupboard, and gulped it down greedily. She found herself gasping for breath when she finished. She set the cup back down on the counter and wiped her lips with the back of her free hand. The porch door squeaked open and Katie joined her moments later. Sharon's hands leaned heavily on the counter, her back facing her daughter. The two of them hung like rose petals in the silence, waiting to

fall. Sharon broke the hush.

"How's Shirley?"

"As good as you would expect a child to be after she is thrashed by her grandmother," Katie replied, breathing heavily. The silence was thick as a block of cheese. Sharon poured herself another helping of wine.

"What was that all about, anyway? Why did you hit her? Did she do something wrong?"

Sharon took another gulp of wine and placed the cold cup against her right temple, shutting her eyes tightly.

"No, she didn't. It was nothing. She was playing with Bernard...I overreacted...I don't know. I've just been thinking a lot, and something set me off. I can't explain it...I don't know. I just snapped." Sharon could hear the floorboards creak as Katie approached her slowly. A tear dropped from

her cheek and dripped into her wine cup as she felt her daughter's arms wrap around her waist and head lean up against her shoulder blade.

"I miss him, too," she said.

"It's just been so hard, Katie. I need him. Always have," Sharon replied, squeezing Katie's hands. "It's just hard to have him here, so close, yet so far away."

"I know. I know."

"I remember the day he forgot my name, my face. I was baking a batch of persimmon cookies. His favorite. He was outside, pruning the hedges with those rusted shears. I called him inside, but he didn't come. I went out to him. Called him by name, but he just stood there. I went closer to him. He stuck the blades out, keeping me back. 'Haha, very funny, Bernie,' I told him, 'now come on in. I've got a treat for you.' 'Who are you,

he asked me. I asked him back. He couldn't tell me."

"Oh Momma, I'm sorry."

Katie held her tighter.

"He needs a home, Kate. He needs a home. I can't take it anymore. I'm living with a complete stranger. I can't even take care of him anymore, and I can't afford to pay Jessica anymore. She does a wonderful job, but it's just too much."

"It's up to you, Mom. I'll help you find a place. I think it's a good decision. It's really too much for you."

"Thank you." They embraced quietly as the tears dried.

"Do you hear that?" Katie asked, loosening her hold.

"Hear what?"

"I thought I heard Shirley scream."

"Oh," Sharon chuckled, "she's just playing. She's been doing that all day." Suddenly, both heard

a loud splash in the pool and Shirley's screams, definitely not playing.

"Shirley!" Katie gasped as she rushed to the back door. As they threw open the patio door, Shirley's sobs grew louder. Kate and Sharon froze in place, jaws dropped and eyes narrowed in disbelief.

Shirley was shivering with cold and shaking with tears on Bernard's lap. Her arms were slung around his neck and her head was buried between his neck and shoulder. Bernard was stone-faced as usual. His eyes were fixed on some vanishing point in the distance as if there was nothing going on at all, no granddaughter sobbing on his lap. His arms were fixed to their places on the side of his chair, hands gripping the armrests tightly. His hair was wet and clung to his pale scalp while drops of water dripped from his ears and

slid down the creases in the wrinkled skin of his neck like a slide. Droplets rolled down his face as well, following the long lines in his cheeks that emerged from the corners of his eyes, making it look as if he was crying. He was wet all over, in fact, but for some reason, his clothes only looked damp as if he had forgotten to dry himself before dressing after a shower.

"Shirley? What's wrong? What happened?" Katie asked, drawing near. Shirley gathered herself, calming herself enough to reply.

"Barbie fell in the water, and I couldn't reach her. I fell in, too, and grandpa saved me!"

"Oh, honey!" Katie took Shirley up in her arms and caressed her head softly, grabbing a beach towel that was slung over a lawn chair to cover her daughter.

Sharon stood, transfixed.

She inched closer to Bernard, who looked utterly and catatonically apathetic. She knelt down and looked him straight in the eyes, searching, looking, hoping. She reached out and placed her hand flat against his chest, cold and wet. She smiled.

"Shirley," she said, still looking at Bernard, "I don't have Kool-Aid, but how would you like some fresh, hand-squeezed lemonade?" Shirley nodded her approval and her shuddering sobs slowed as she rubs her eyes with her little fists.

"Call Jessica, will you, Katie?" Katie nodded and went inside, rubbing Shirley's back soothingly.

Sharon took Bernard's hand and held it tight, rubbing his knuckles with a free thumb. She stood up, letting his hand slide back into its place.

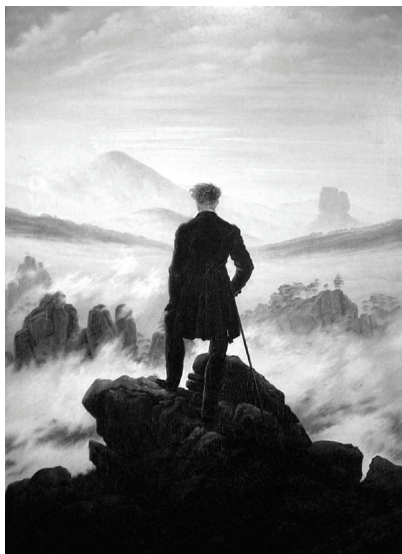
"I love you," she said

softly, and she kissed him gently on the forehead.

Towels. She needed warm towels to dry him. She headed toward the door but turned around to take another look at Bernard. From that angle, she swore she glimpsed a corner of a smile stretching and blossoming across his cheek. It lasted only for a moment before it collapsed back into a thin, flat line. ❁

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