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MALS Quarterly Mission Statement

The Dartmouth MALS Quarterly is the journal for the Masters of Arts in Liberal Studies program at Dartmouth College. The publication is broad in scope, and accepts submissions of any scholarly or creative work from current MALS students and all MALS alumni. It is a priority that all work is accessible to a full disciplinary range of MALS community members.

Our primary goal is to publish the best current work being done in MALS from the four tracks: Globalization, Cultural Studies, Creative Writing, and General Studies. Through publishing this work, we intend to initiate and encourage scholarly dialogue within the MALS community.

Submissions may be sent to: MALS.Quarterly@dartmouth.edu

Cover Photograph: DEWAYNE HAYES

Master of Arts in Liberal Studies Quarterly 1
Editor’s Note:

Dear Readers:

As it is in so many places, spring is a time of transition for the MALS Quarterly. As we bid farewell to those students who are graduating and moving on from Dartmouth, we are excited to grab the reigns of a publication that represents the talent and academic diversity of the MALS department.

Ellen Anderson provides an in-depth analysis of the surrealist works of Sarah Moon in “Capturing the Mind’s Eye.” Comparing Moon’s work to such surrealist stalwarts as Raul Ubic and others, Anderson provides a new and interesting perspective through which to view the career of an often overlooked but undeniably talented artist. On the globalization front, Daniel Durcan provides a quantitative analysis of the success of democratization efforts in Portugal during the 1970s.

Creative writing has always been a popular theme of the MALS Quarterly, and this issue does not disappoint. Thea Caltri-Martin and Danielle Cayton share uniquely heart-breaking accounts of loss and love in their respective pieces, “Goodbye” and “Sage,” while Jennifer Currier bares her poetic soul in “It’s not enough.” Each writer represents the diversity and depth of the creative writing program here at Dartmouth.

Julian Fenn, who is pursuing a globalization studies concentration, allows us inside (or, perhaps more accurately, OUTside) his passion for the natural wonders of New England and beyond with his photo essay, “Bird Watching.”

As Kemi and I take over the helm of the MALS Quarterly, we’d both like to thank Steph for her time as Editor-in-Chief. Within the past year, she implemented numerous aesthetic and editorial changes that not only strengthened the Quarterly, but will stand as her continuing legacy to the publication. She, like all of our graduating peers, will be missed.

Erin O’Flaherty
Managing Editor

Kemi Adedokun
Managing Editor
Ellen Anderson:
I hail from the northeastern hamlet of Ely, Minnesota, an area with more lakes than roads. Upon completing my English degree at The College of St. Scholastica in Duluth, Minnesota, I packed my car, strapped my bike and skis to the roof and drove east. My road to graduate school was a tortuous journey; my initial career goals revolved around excellence in Nordic Skiing and Biathlon, but during college I developed strong academic interests in English and International Studies. A semester abroad in Oslo, Norway convinced me that I wanted to continue combining literature, international politics, and culture in graduate school. It is difficult to study one without the other, and I chose the MALS program for the chance to continue pursuing these interests in an interdisciplinary manner with students from all over the world.

Thea Calitri-Martin:
This is my second semester in the MALS program. I teach elementary music full time, so I’m traveling the winding path of a part time student - enjoying both sides of the learning equation as I pursue creative writing. After teaching small people with very high voices all day, I balance myself by playing the French horn in any venue that will have me. I’m the Principal horn with the Vermont Philharmonic and I’ve been growing as a jazz horn player for the past few years with the help of Dartmouth’s ever patient Fred Haas. I graduated from Skidmore College before Disco.

Jennifer Currier:
Jennifer Currier is a second year MALS student in the creative writing track. She earned a degree in biology from New Mexico State University and dappled in dolphin training and teaching before attending Dartmouth in an effort to gain experience in the creative arts. She is grateful to have had the opportunity to experiment with different genres of creative writing, particularly poetry, oral history, and narrative non-fiction, the genre in which she is currently writing her thesis.

Danielle Cayton:
I grew up on a tobacco farm in rural North Carolina, where I developed a love for animals and the charm of Southern country. I recently completed my fourth term in MALS within the General Studies track. I work full-time as a Recovery Aide at Valley Vista Treatment Center, specializing in alcoholism and substance abuse recovery for women. I will begin my thesis in September, an oral history of women attempting to reconstruct their lives after prison. I am thankful for the doors Dartmouth has opened for me, particularly the privilege of community-based learning and serving.

In my spare time, I enjoy playing with my golden retriever, Duncan, quilting, and reading literature my classmates discuss so I can finally contribute to the conversation. Also, watching Friends with Jenny Currier.

Daniel Durcan:
I am from the North of England. Before coming to Dartmouth, I studied politics at the University of Hull. For my undergraduate thesis I looked at legislative resources and their impact on the quality on democracy. My MALS focus, on a very different note, is on Globalisation studies and my particular interest for the moment is Critical Theory and its implication on interpretations of democratization.

Julian Fenn:
Julian Fenn is from Wilson, New York. A graduate of SUNY Geneseo, he is a fourth-term MALS student on the Globalization track. Julian detests writing biographies about himself, and in fact did not write this one. He does, however, like birds.
Ethan Allan Express from Rutland to New York City:

The sun rose warm and hazy on this September morning. My husband Bruce and I were going to see his younger brother, Brian. The first fifty miles took almost two hours. Worn out railroad tracks could no longer cope with Vermont hills - good thing the scenery was pretty.

Bruce was buried in his own thoughts, trying to read a book. I watched the landscape. Transplants from the Hudson Valley, we'd traveled this route too many times to count. Each town the train stopped at had added its own flavor to our lives.

Fair Haven:

Driving alone on a snowy night, Bruce had not seen the drunken man staggering across the road. Muscles loose with inebriation, the man bumped off the hood as the car slid to a stop. Terrified, Bruce helped the man up. He was not injured and definitely not anxious to see the police. Rapid heart beats slowing, they resumed their ways more slowly through the storm.

Whitehall/Fort Ann:

Through the train window, I spotted the old sign that proudly proclaimed the birthplace of the U.S. Navy. Sad brick buildings, dusty windows and empty store fronts. Not so proud anymore. I had been through the locks near here as a child. Inside, with the pungent canal water bubbling in under the heavy metal doors, we would secure the boat by tying a rope to the rungs of a ladder slimy with sea weed. As the water level rose, the rope had to be constantly retied, until it became coated with green. Finally the water level inside the lock matched the canal on the other side of the door and we swished the rope off and coiled it neatly on the deck.

Saratoga:

The home of race tracks, amazing architecture and my Alma Mater. Bruce had transferred to Skidmore the year after we met, and we had spent our senior year living in an old carriage house. This train station was new, built after our Saratoga days. A group of current students got on. Slight but strong young women, talking on their cell phones, slinging wheeled suitcases that weighed almost as much as they did. I wondered if they were nursing students headed to Skidmore’s residency program in New York City, or perhaps flying out of Kennedy Airport for a year abroad.

Albany:

Returning to school from vacations, I used to speed-walk the half mile between the old train station and the bus terminal. Sweating and anxious, I was never sure if I was going to make my Saratoga bound Trailways bus connection. If I had to wait for the next bus, I would blockade myself with baggage and pretend to read as I observed the seedy characters who hung out at the terminal.

Below Albany, the train picked up speed, cruising beside the Hudson. The Hudson is my Mississippi. I’ve
boated on, swum in and swallowed its muddy waters. Now I looked for sand bars and islands, wondering if frog’s eggs tasted anything like shad roe.

Norrie Point:
The river banks are punctuated by beautiful estates, built in the 1800’s by church organizations and the wealthy. Bruce and I used to wander through the Ogden Mills Estate, fantasizing as we explored the old “camp” buildings that were really small mansions. Brian was often with us. Walking fast, as usual, or jogging backwards, his pleasantly raspy voice joined in our musings. Not one for idle fantasy, he usually changed the subject to girls, soccer and how he was going to make money.

Hyde Park:
Bruce’s home town.

Bruce first brought me to his house when we were nineteen. He was the third of four brothers, (names all starting with the letter B). Brian was the baby - a friendly thirteen year old kid with shaggy blond hair and light blue eyes. Brian hated school and loved soccer. Well built and small, he was a talented but feisty forward - always getting yellow cards. Weaving around the field, he would call on team mates to attack, aggressively bumping opponents, scoring more often than not.

As I entered Bruce’s world, Brian became my little brother too. I watched him grow up as their parents got divorced; their father declared himself an alcoholic and their mother struggled every month to keep the house. Brian’s role models became his older brothers - all in their immortal, experimental twenties. Parties were constant. Smoke anything, drink anything, and a very under aged Brian was there, wanting to join in. Enthusiastic, warm hearted. In over his head.

When Brian was just out of high school, Bruce and I lived in a cute cabin next to a small lake. Brian would often come to stay with us for the weekend. At night we’d watch T.V., play Hearts and drink beer, but during the day we’d play in the lake. Brian was a piss-poor swimmer and had no patience in a canoe, but he loved the water. When he swam, he panted like a dog, and in the canoe, he would paddle as hard as he could - to Hell with directions. Steering from the back, you’d be constantly dragging the paddle and trying to balance Brian’s crazy rocking as you shouted and gasped with laughter.

Poughkeepsie:
I was listening to Neil Young on the ipod. “...I’ve seen the needle and the damage done, a little part of it in everyone. But every junkie’s like a setting sun....”

We came down to Poughkeepsie from Vermont when Brian got married. Everyone loved Grace, thought she was good for Brian. They bought a trailer and Brian got a job as a night orderly at a psychiatric hospital. He and a buddy would stop at a bar on their way home to chill out, but the drinks kept coming and the marriage fell apart. Brian married again and had a son, but he was on an alcoholic slide that just got steeper and finally broadened into crack. Lovable Brian began forging his mother’s signature on checks. Things disappeared from her house. He became abusive, rejecting help, and the family pulled away in self-preservation.

In 2002 Brian dropped out of everyone’s lives - sleeping rough, living homeless in New York City. He didn’t return when first his mother and then his father died. Seven years passed. Bruce had only started to get phone calls from him last July - when the inheritance was about to become available. Brian sounded thick-tongued on the phone, but his voice was the same, giving us the phone number of a book store where a friend let him use the phone. No matter why Brian was calling, Bruce was happy to be able to reconnect with the brother who had been almost like a son. In August, Brian said that he was going into the hospital for a simple “procedure,” but his liver failed on the operating table.

Penn Station:
Emerging into the soupy city air, we took a taxi to the hospital. Anxiety and dread fought in our stomachs.

As we entered Brian’s room, the doctor confirmed what we already knew: liver failure, organs shutting down. Coldly compassionate, she wanted to be sure that we understood…. Brian’s son David had been to visit the day before. Barely eighteen, this was how he had seen his father for the first time in seven years. Bruce’s older brother Bill had been with David, and they had not understood. We had to tell them.

At first we couldn’t see our Brian in the comatose body that lay in the bed. Wild hope - maybe it wasn’t really him? Nose pushed down by a tube, tongue out, hair a dirty ashen gray instead of sunny blond. I recognized his foot. Toes shaped like Bruce’s, but slightly bent by years of kicking the ball. His hands.

Bruce held his little brother’s hand and talked to him. I sat on the window sill and sang whatever songs came to mind, my voice soft: “You are my sunshine, my only sunshine...” A few tears appeared in the corners of Brian’s closed eyes and he shifted a little. I hoped he could hear us. I hoped our renewed offering of the love that had been missing would surround Brian as he slipped away; as we all moved through this unbearable place in time.*
The unanswered question, “Who am I?”
escapes from her lips as she lies alone, asking
God for peace. The echo of despair
resonates within her, and she seeks
the very thing that she’s been missing.
Only now it’s too late
to go back in time and start over.
She wants nothing more than
to forget the demons of her past,
to walk and not grow weary,
to love and to be loved.
but the truth is that it’s not enough:
to love and to be loved,
to walk and not grow weary,
to forget the demons of her past.
She wants nothing more than
to go back in time and start over,
only now it’s too late.
The very thing that she’s been missing
resonates within her, and she seeks
God for peace. The echo of despair
escapes from her lips and she lies alone, asking
the unanswered question, “Who am I?”

It’s not enough

Jennifer Currier
How Successful was the Process of “Democratic Consolidation” in Portugal?

Daniel Durcan

The third wave of democratization began on April 25th, 1974 with the Carnation Revolution in Portugal. Disillusioned soldiers in the left-wing Armed Forces Movement launched a successful coup against the military dictatorship. This opened the path to democracy, encouraging the other states to follow.

The main cause of the coup was the Portuguese regime’s fight against colonial independence movements. Wars were continued at great expense, in both financial and human terms. Whilst a process of liberalization had begun after the death of the strongman Salazar, the new administration continued these conflicts resulting in its downfall. The immediate post-revolutionary period saw instability, with coalition Governments led by the military.

This essay focuses on the consolidation of the new democracy. The beginning of this process is not the revolution but the end of the transition period. The term “democratic consolidation” requires some attention. Magone defines it as: “The process of stabilizing the institutions of a new political system… It creates routinization… (which) feeds the process of consolidation.”

The definition and tools to judge the progress are contested. Di Palma points to the process being the period when regime change completes itself. Huntington focuses on institutions acquiring stability. Due to the multitude of approaches to the topic, Schledler propose that the term is meaningless, the only test being if the democracy fails. The case of Portugal gives a different picture, in that we can see the value of these developments with alongside empirical evidence of increasing democratic stability.

So what ought we to look at to determine the effectiveness of the consolidation process in Portugal? Ultimately this could be any number of observations-giving Schledler some credibility for his concerns. However if we are looking at the stabilization of the new political system, then what? For a successful consolidation, the state must simultaneously be accepted as the legitimate and guarantee rights to civilians. Social movements must on the whole act within the legitimate parameters. Political scientists also look to a stable party system and economy (though the ability for a new democracy to survive economic crises can be viewed as a test) as these factors indicate the stabilization process.

The Military

One of the crucial factors in the democratization process is the role of the military. What stands out with Portugal is that they were the main agent of change, and not, as is more common, a supporter of the previous regime. This did not remove the threat of the military but shifted the area of concern. The notion of the military re-establishing the old dictatorship was dismissed with their submission of a right-wing counter-revolutionary movement in April 1975. They also had not stopped the counterrevolutionary actions of the Government in November of 1975 against the

increasing militancy of the left.

The MFA, heavily influenced by Marxism and the revolutionary left, was committed to both democracy and socialism. It appeared they could side with either the moderate or radical sectors of the country. The 1976 constitution gave the MFA an official role within the political system through the Revolutionary Council. The concern of the moderate political forces was that they could choose to interpret this in the revolutionary context. An account of one soldier stated gives an example of the situation:

“We were told to go to troubled spots, such as factories that were taken over by the workers, but when we asked them what they were doing, often they were just, and we let them do as they wanted.”¹

Whilst there was the concern that they would act with the revolutionary socialist movement, the leadership of the MFA ultimately seceded power. The election of Eames (the chief of staff of the military) as President in 1976 ensured that this post controlled the armed forces. This important step set a precedent of the supremacy of Government over the armed forces.

In 1980, the process went further with the election of the Democratic Alliance—a right wing Government. This administration was committed to removing revolutionary excesses forcing the de-politicalization of the army, pushing them firmly into the hands of the Ministry of Defense.² In 1983, the Government was successful in dismissing the head of the army-Garcia dos Santos, signalling the subordinacy of the military and their inability or reluctance to challenging the elected administration.

Portugal avoided giving the military a long-term constitutional role as happened with Turkey. Whilst there was opposition to the changing role, most importantly through the left-wing April 25th Movement,³ this did not materialize into effective resistance. This aspect of consolidation was completed.

Elections and Political Parties

The 1976 election was a defining moment in the consolidation process. The Governments before this were broad coalitions providing strong representation for the far-left. The result was instability, with six provisional governments from 1974-6. The legislative election of 1976 provided a mandate for moderate parties, in particular, the Socialist Party (PS).¹

The first ten years shows the mixed results of the process of consolidation. Democracy was sustained, there was rotation of office, with PS and the centre right Democratic Alliance (AD) Governments. A high turnout also gave legitimacy to the democratic process.² However there is a degree of instability, in this period, no government lasted a full term, the average length of each administration was 11 months.³ According to Mainwaring and Scully, this is a poor sign of consolidation, as routinization fails to take hold.⁴

The Vote of the Communist Party (PCP/APU) can be interpreted to represent a rejection of the post-revolutionary path, after all, it is an anti-capitalist party. It does consistently admirably, averaging 16.8% in the first 10 years, showing a significant minority favouring an alternative strategy.

From 1987, things begin to look up. Marina Costa Lobo points out positive signs of routinization, with the number of effective parties dropping from 3.47 in 1976 to 2.61 in 1999. Further to this, 1987 saw the election of a centre right majority Government, which would be followed by far more stable administrations alternating between the right and centre left.⁵

³ This was a group within the armed forces totalling around 1900 members—Maxwell, K., The Making of Portuguese Democracy, Cambridge University Press, 1995, p76.
² Typically around 80%, see Bruneau, T. C., MacLeod A., Politics in Contemporary Portugal, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Colorado, 1986, p36.
Social Movements

One of the concerns at the outset of the revolution was the militancy of social movements. These groups, often dominated by the far left, gave an impression that there was a desire to establish a socialist democracy. Workers were taking over factories, soldiers on the ground often supporting them. This type of action was not just limited to workers and industry. Squatters were taking over empty buildings as a direct solution to the housing shortage. Construction workers refused to let members of the Constituent Assembly out of the Parliament (or food in) until their demands were met. In the countryside, landless workers were taking over large farms.

These social movements created a challenge for democratic consolidation because they were outside the legal structures of a liberal democracy. The MFA had backed such actions, legitimizing them, and resulting in the military to siding with the social movements. In November 1975, the counter-revolution against the left saw momentum wane. Whilst diminished to an extent, there was still strong militancy within social movements. However, this was not as revolutionary as it may have seemed at the time. An article by Pedro Ramos Pinto argues that the base of these groups had limited demands. The far-left made a great deal of progress early on. However, once, for example homes had been seized, the rank and file were reluctant to continue what was presumed to be a path towards a model of socialist direct democracy. Membership dropped. Elections of these group’s executive committees resulted in moderates being returned. There was a substantial decline of activity and enthusiasm.

Things stabilized with the continued election of moderate parties, the show of popular support for the moderate path reducing the legitimacy for the revolutionary strategy. Above anything, this could have interrupted the early period of consolidation. The military had the potential to support grassroots action and not the Government. However consolidation progressed quickly, with social movements abandoning the strategies of the revolutionary period.

The Economy

Another barrier to normalization were the economic issues the country was facing. The colonial conflicts sucked up a large portion of its GDP, encompassing an estimated half of state spending before the revolution. The revolution itself added significantly to these problems. The loss of the colonies coupled with a global economic crisis hit Portugal badly. Nationalization—a key strategy of the Revolutionary Council was an ineffective solution to these problems, nevertheless, it was religiously pursued. An estimated 244 enterprises were taken into state hands during this time, much of the management and higher skilled worker purged from the organizations for their allegiances to the dictatorship.

The election of moderate governments began the remedies to these problems, albeit at a high price. There were two fairly brutal IMF stabilization plans in 1977-8 and 1983-85. However the Portuguese were successful in joining the European Economic Community in 1986. Economic performance has been cited as one of the key factors in the success of the consolidation process. Portugal seemed able to overcome obstacles of slow and unstable economic growth. Magone points out that GDP per capita fell in the decade after the revolution. Contrary to the claims of Przeworski, this wasn’t the key factor in consolidation, faith in moderate parties was maintained and the process continued.

Conclusions

Ten years after the beginning of the consolidation process, Portugal had undoubtedly made head-

1 In 1974, there was a shortage of 700,00 houses in Portugal, Maxwell, K. Portugal in the 1980’s, Dilemmas of Consolidation, Contributions in Political Science, Number 138, 1986, Greenwood Press, London, p21.
headway. The two most imminent threats in 1976, the military and social movements, had been pacified. Democracy was established, albeit one facing continuing challenges, with routinization failing to take a proper hold. However towards the end of the 1980’s further progress was made, majority Governments established and economic growth stabilized.¹

Portugal still faces significant challenges to this day. The country is a liberal democracy as sources such as CIA World Factbook and Freedom House will confirm, and has a reasonable level of acclaim from human rights groups. However there is still, as there was in the 1980’s, a significant minority who support anti-capitalist parties. The economy is in a poor state as a consequence of the recent recession, unions are still very militant.² We may not be looking at a perfect consolidation, but the main threats in 1976 do not exist, normalization and routinization have occurred. •

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1 Economist Intelligence Unit, accessed online at www.eiu.com on 4/21/2011.
BIRD WATCHING

A photo essay by Julian Fenn
It’s funny how much your perspective of the world can change when you start paying attention to the little things. I don’t remember caring much about birds as a child, or for that matter nature, which I took for granted growing up on a farm. But with time I’ve found that my life often makes more sense when I happen to be sitting alone in the middle of a pine forest than it does walking down the streets of Hanover or sitting in a classroom. I’ve found peace beside rivers and lakes that the civilized world could never provide. In large part, our winged friends to thank for that.

At first thought, sitting on a stump at the edge of a swamp might not sound like the ideal day, but when you know what you’re looking for—when you wait long enough to actually see the little things around you, it can turn out to be something pretty great. Suddenly, after a bit of quiet sitting, a bug ridden cesspool will burst to life with innumerable creatures, including dozens of birds of all shapes sizes and colors—and a cacophony of lively noises that only the patient know. Bursts of red and yellow and a beautiful cerulean blue darting through the sky or landing just by water’s edge almost close enough to touch. A hawk or an eagle swooping down at 70mph in search of a meal. Most people don’t even notice such things. I know, because I see it in others every day. Often, we are so trapped inside our own minds and social worlds that we don’t bother or can’t see the beauty right in front of us.
I find bird watching rewarding because it can be challenging. It can be done anywhere, even Union Square in New York, where I once studied an enormous hawk perched on a limb for over an hour. Or along a dirt road like Nations where I saw my first American Kestrel perched on a fencepost at the edge of a sheep pasture no more than thirty feet away. The attention to detail and appreciation for things bleeds over into other facets of life. Suddenly, you find yourself observing things have gone under the radar, little details that fill the day. You feel fresh in the world again when you notice something perfectly unique for the very first time. It takes a bit of patience and good eyesight but I can definitely say my adventures off in the wilderness have been some of the most memorable days and nights of my life. Birding has taught me far more than I have the talent to convey.

Just the other day I saw a Pine Warbler, a pretty yellow bird with a beautiful song, resting on a branch near the BEMA. He let out a few notes and, startled, flew off to sing his song elsewhere. Mind where you are and you may see one too. It’s incredible how much is out there if you take a moment to take it all in.
Capturing the Eye’s Voice
Ellen Anderson

Every photo in Sarah Moon’s book, Coincidences, leaves an impression on the viewer. At first, the book is overwhelming, because every photo is rich with both real and indistinct details. The viewer senses that these photos are stolen moments snatched out of someone’s dream. In one photo, a gull in mid-flight stares directly at the camera, as if daring the audience to fly with him. In another, a chic woman walks away from the camera with a small dog following her. In nearly every photo, the viewer questions what happened before and after the shot. Where did the gull come from? Where is the woman going? What is Sarah Moon trying to reveal through her photos of elusive moments?

As a photographer, and particularly as a fashion photographer, Sarah Moon is fascinating because her work is an exception among the glossy centerfolds that define fashion photography. A closer examination of her work, her connections to the surrealists, and her artistic development reveal the contradictions that make Sarah Moon’s work successful.

Sarah Moon fills her world with hallucinations. Her optical unconscious reveals itself through ephemeral photos—both subject and photo seem likely to float away or crumble. In many ways, she shares similarities with the surrealists; she uses doubling, “explosante fixe”, the informe, and above all, she believes in capturing the unexpected moment. Her photos skirt the divide between dream and reality, but she discovers these elements instead of forcing them together.

However similar her techniques are to the surrealists, she differs from the Surrealist movement in important ways. In particular, her depiction of women diverges from the mostly misogynistic vision of the female as presented by the surrealists. In this category, her photos are also a departure from the fashion photos taken by her peers, Guy Bourdin and Helmut Newton. Yet she became a photographer of international renown. In comparison to these men, her work is an anomaly, and her strength lies in her unique vision. Whether or not her differences—the way she portrays women, her refusal to create a polished image—limit her artistically is up for debate.

Before she could change the rules, however, Sarah Moon had to employ them in her work. In addition to the more technical aspects of doubling, “explosante fixe”, and the formless, perhaps what aligns Moon closely with the surrealists is her motivation and philosophy for photography. She uses “explosante fixe” in a photo taken in the summer of 1989. In the photo, a young girl spins a cartwheel beneath a tree. Moon blurs her horizontally striped pants and her feet, and this gives the picture motion. It is static and active at the same time—much like Man Ray’s photo of the flamenco dancer.

Sarah Moon also gains inspiration from Raoul Ubac. For example, her photo titled “Statue” is very similar to Ubac’s burned photos. Here, however, Moon is not working with the informe to castrate or neutralize her subject. The subject of this photo is actually gender neutral; the viewer cannot tell whether it is a man or a woman. For Ubac, it was about the informe and taking control over his subject by burning her image and making her obscene. For Moon, this photo is more about the fleeting essence of the photographic medium. She is concerned with time as it relates to the moment captured in the photo, and the photo itself. Her photos are both absent moments and present objects, and they are forever decaying. On the corroding nature of photographs, she says, “It relates to time, degradation, the ephemeral […] it is the idea of beauty with the worm already inside the fruit […] the photo surface is as sensitive and fragile as if it was alive and destroying itself little by little” (Moon 154).

This differs from the surrealists’ use of destruction in photography. The surrealists had to destroy their women in order to create because of their desire for control. Here, Moon seems to be relinquishing control to the effects of time, and finding inspiration
in the process. There is an edge to the softness in her photos, because she is aware of the bitterness inherent in sweet, fleeting moments. Moon's optical unconscious does not reveal a fetish for dolls or masks. Instead she describes discovering the photo: “It's not what I want to say that reveals me, the exposure comes from what escapes me. I think the most creative side of one is the side that is still close to childhood” (Moon 155). This sentiment also alludes to the importance of childhood as described by Breton in his Manifesto of Surrealism. Breton says, “The mind which plunges into Surrealism relives with glowing excitement the best part of its childhood” (Breton 24-25).

Sarah Moon does more than relive childhood; she creates new worlds and entire visions. Hers is not a concrete imagination. Robert Delpire marvels at the way she “avoid[s] the obvious and slip[s] into a fragment of time, on the edge of a terrain that would become [hers]” (Moon 280). This terrain is populated with models and children, circus animals and a few men.

The viewer can speculate that Sarah Moon’s vision of women was influenced by her experiences as a model and as a female photographer. Fashion photography is often dominated by overt sexuality, but Moon refuses to portray her models as sex objects. She describes her work in fashion as a relationship: “I believe the relationship I have with my models now is one of complicity. There are exterior signs of sexuality—a coded language of symbols created by men. But men don’t see when it is faked—women are intuitive about this” (Harrison 242).

Complicity is a novel idea, especially when compared to Newton, Bourdin, or the surrealists. Newton and Bourdin’s women evolve from male fantasies. For example, Newton’s woman, perched on a bed with a saddle on her back, looks ferociously at the camera. The connotation is so clear it becomes vulgar; the woman is comparable to a horse, ready to be ridden. It’s memorable because is shocks, but does that make it art?

Bourdin’s crudeness is slightly classier. He rarely has the woman look directly at the camera, and they are often disembodied. When they do have a face, their expression is often the same—head thrown back, eyes closed, mouth slightly open in ecstasy or pain.

The surrealists often explored the ambiguity between pain and pleasure in their pictures of women. For example, in Man Ray’s pictures “Woman with Leather Mask”, the woman’s mouth is open in half scream or laugh. The viewer is left to determine whether or not she is compliant or being manipulated. The viewer understands, however, that these women are depictions of male fantasy.

Male fantasy has a strong presence in the glamorous fashion industry. To a certain extent, fashion photography fulfills the goal sought by the surrealists, because of its ability to change and shape today’s world. In our current society, image is king, and consumption is everything. This development is described in the Archeology of Elegance: “All needs are served visually—nothing in this society is meant to be inconceivable, all is open to consumption. Everything is there—just look around! Fashion photography is the polydiscursive time code of our visual culture” (Poschardt 10). This visual culture is influenced by the power of seduction, and male photographers like Bourdin and Newton work within this construct.

The portrayal of seduction and its ability to reel in the viewer is epitomized by glamour fashion photography. Fashion photographers sell more than clothes; most importantly they sell attitudes. These attitudes come to life through the creation of visual, unattainable worlds. In this world, “existence is not inhuman, just neo-human—the commodity is the polished mirror surface of the human body which was once defined by virtue of having a soul at its core. The beauty of these images becomes an agency of socialization […] the pictures are a breeding ground for desires and wishes (Poschardt 23).

The viewer desires to be part of this world, even though it is a surreal fantasy. In order to sustain itself, fashion photography must constantly innovate to remain beyond the reach of mere mortals. As a result, the subjects become marvelous commodities. All of a sudden, the real world and the desired dream world become intertwined. People:

“wish no longer to have to be an ego but to dissolve into a staged scene, to don an alien identity—this also reveals the lack of political alternatives in the closing decades of the twentieth century. Glamorous fashion photography entails the search for the greatest possible beauty […] opts for the false rather than the true, for the transition rather than truth, for the occasional rather than the durable” (Poschardt 24).

The thrill of seduction only lasts so long, and by the time the consumer buys the advertised product, their desire for it may have dipped. This is where the importance of dreams enters the relationship between consumer and advertiser. Glamour becomes a “dream factory […] glamour occurs and represents reality in the
This is the point where Sarah Moon’s vision departs from other fashion photographers. In many of her fashion photographs, the models have their backs turned to the camera. For example, in a 1990 photo for Marie Claire featuring Dior, the model is turned away from the camera, with her arms out in surprise. Moon employs “explosante fixe”—there is implied motion in her hands, and the whole picture seems shaken. In another photo for Marie Claire, taken in Spain 1989, the model appears to be moving away from the viewer. She uses this same pose in a photo for Elle in 1997, showcasing Yohji Yamamoto’s designs, and for Marie Claire Bis in 1989.

These women appear to be suspended in time, as if they are waiting for something or someone. Unlike Newton’s women, they don’t even look at the camera. They lack pretension; they do not lord their glamour over the non-glamorous aspects of the photo. Instead of adhering to “the better you look, the more you see” rule, these women turn their backs to the viewer. In some of Moon’s photos, like “Spotted Dress”, taken in 1996, the woman covers her eyes and essentially refuses to see. These women are not polished or neo-human. Instead of being pulled into a hyperreality, the viewer falls into an abstract reality—it is a vague, sometimes blurry, and apprehensive world. These models are aware of the beauty in their mortality. Sarah Moon may create illusory worlds, but they remain real because of her emphasis on the reality of the decaying effects of time.

The search for these moments, and her ability to extricate dreams from the clutches of time, shapes her work. “Even in the beginning, I always preferred something that would distance me from the coded language of glamour. It was something more intimate that I was looking for. It was the back stage that interested me […] the in-between second before the gesture is complete, a movement in slow motion […] like for example, all those women seen from behind walking away” (Moon 112). These models embody a different type of glamour; it is an attitude that is secure in its femininity instead of being purely sexual or seductive.

This is not to say, however, that her work is naïve or saccharine in its innocence. The world inhabited by these models is intensely private; the audience feels as if they have intruded on a moment. Moon is master of the contemplative, serene attitude, but there is an undercutting edge to the serenity of these poses. In the photos for Marie Claire, the models are engrossed elsewhere, and their bodies are either in motion or slumped. This begs the viewer to question what they are looking at, and wonder if it is something sinister. When her models cover their eyes, the viewer is curious as to whether or not the subject is scared or disgusted. Or perhaps the model doesn’t want to see the voyeur; she does not welcome the intruder.

Somehow, Sarah Moon managed to escape the idea that sex sells in fashion photography. In many ways, she is innovating. Her eye developed in a unique way; she started off in the industry as a model, working and modeling for men like Helmut Newton, Irving Penn, and Guy Bourdin (Frankel). She began taking photos by snapping shots of her friends who were also models, and progressed from there. She worked for the French label Cacharel for twenty years, as well as Harper’s Bazaar, Vogue, Nova, and the Sunday Times Magazine (Harrison 242).

When she started working in the 1960’s, there was a general decline in the popularity of women’s magazines due to the women’s liberation movement and the shift towards greater independence, responsibility, and social mobility for increased numbers of women. Ernestine Carter credited Sarah Moon with ushering in the new “mood of decadence” that would change and define fashion photography in the 1970’s. Martin Harrison describes this shift in his book, Appearances: “The opening gun was, oddly enough, fired by British Harper’s Bazaar–Sarah Moon’s first major assignment–for the March 1969 Paris collections issue. Fashion photography of the 1970’s—no longer incorruptible—would follow the lead of photographers such as Helmut Newton and Bob Richardson.” Ernestine Carter goes so far to say, “pornography, having taken over films, the theatre, and literature, took over fashion photography too” (Harrison 230).

This, however, is a misconception because Sarah Moon’s photography is not pornographic. Newton’s images of “Office Love” can be described as pornographic, but Sarah Moon’s photography falls squarely on the romantic side of seduction. As a result, however, of their vision, many of the controversial images were printed in French Vogue, because Vogue in the United States
Photographs (clockwise from top to bottom):
Sarah Moon, *Suzanne in the Tuileries*, 1974
Sarah Moon, *Statue*, 1995
Raul Ubac, *Portrait in Mirror*, 1938
was afraid of offending current and potential advertisers. Sarah Moon’s early 1970’s contributions to French Vogue, along with Bourdin and Newton, made Paris the “centre of ‘daring and important fashion imagery’” (Harrison 242). Fashion photographers continued to be inspired by Paris in the same way the city inspired the surrealists decades before.

Like her fellow surrealists, Moon lived in Paris, but she did much of her work in the studio. Similar to Man Ray, she respects light as the very essence of the photographic medium. She describes her work as “looking for the light of the shadow” (Moon 113). “This is reminiscent of Man Ray’s proclamation: Light can do everything […] I make shadows. I make light” (Baldwin 106).

As a result of Moon’s respect for the medium, she does very little to retouch her work. She says, “Of course, if something is really bad then I will retouch it […] but only very little and never trying to make a woman more beautiful. I don't need to do that. They are beautiful and it is my job to work with the light” (Frankel). This statement is striking because her depictions of women are so different from Man Ray’s. Both work with light, but Man Ray sought to control light and his subject. Moon, on the other hand, seeks to work with the light and complies with her subject instead of manipulating it.

Moon took other techniques from the surrealists and put her own stamp on them. She believes strongly in the decisive moment, and her philosophy echoes Henri Cartier-Bresson’s ideas about photography. In an interview with Sarah Moon, she quotes Cartier-Bresson: “One doesn’t take the picture, it is the picture that takes you” (Moon 154).

Although she does not quote him further, it is useful to look at Cartier-Bresson’s words in comparison to hers. He says: “To me, photography is the simultaneous recognition, in a fraction of a second, of the significance of an event as well as of a precise organization of forms which give that event proper meaning. I believe that, through the act of living, the discovery of oneself is made concurrently with the discovery of the world around us, which can mold us, but which can also be affected by us” (Cartier-Bresson 42). Sarah Moon strives to repeatedly capture the fraction of a second as described by Bresson. She believes the “repetition of this accident” creates good photography and emphasizes the importance of listening to one’s own voice while working.

The importance of working for oneself as a photographer is an attitude shared by Eugene Atget and Brassai. Moon’s statements seem to stem directly from these men. Concerning the artistic legacy of photographers, Brassai says, “A thousand strands attach this man to the […] great draughtsmen […] his love of the transient; his sense of the magic beneath the surface of reality […] his desire to get beyond the anecdotal and to promote his subjects to the dignity of types. He too culs the ephemeral beauty of the present moment” (Brassai 283-284). This could read as a description of Sarah Moon’s photography; she manages to capture the ephemeral beauty at the backstage of a circus, in an empty ballroom, or in the curve of a woman’s back.

She sees these moments in otherwise dull places. Often her pictures depict empty rooms because the people have packed up and left. She favors abandoned landscapes, things people don’t usually take the time to stop and see. This is reminiscent of Eugene Atget’s photographs. Atget roamed the streets of Paris in order to impart his vision of the city through his photos. According to Ben Lifson, Atget “possesses the Paris he describes” and he “created a world […] where art […] joins nature”. He goes on to state, however, that Atget’s work is fiction that is a “reverie of a dying era” (Lifson 7-10). Sarah Moon also creates her own world; her photos have a distinct style, but there is a strong sense of decay. Although the viewer knows the photo is fictional, there is an inherent sadness in many of her photos. For example, the photograph “Morgan” taken in 1984 is a vision of colliding worlds. On a dark, otherwise empty city street, a little girl stands in front of a canvas backdrop depicting a forest. She stands on a pile of dead leaves, eyes closed and face turned towards the sky. Her dress and hair appear to be blown back by the wind, and the light is concentrated on her face.

This odd, beautiful photo plays with the viewer’s sense of reality. First of all, there is the actual reality—the street where the photo takes place. This street is dark and dying; the leaves and grass on the sidewalk are decaying. The darkened doorways stretch back beyond the viewer’s vision. The cobblestones suggest this is an old, uninhabited part of the city. The picture within this picture—the canvas backdrop—showcases nature stuck in the middle of the city. The little girl appears to be dreaming...
or perhaps she is lost. She complexes the viewer who is forced to wonder whether she is dreaming of playing in the woods instead of living in the dying city.

Whatever Sarah Moon was trying to say, it is clear that this is her vision and her world. As a photographer, she is in full possession of this image. Her distinct photography is a result of several techniques she consistently uses in her work. Like in the photo of Morgan, Moon often uses narratives in her pictures. She also uses close cropping, compacted space, elimination, multi-figure compositions, and relationships between subjects. Her subjects often appear to be waiting or suspended in time, and there is a sense of déjà vu in their dream-like attitudes.

Moon has been criticized for being limited by her distinct style. The critics, however, have a difficult time pointing out how she is limited. Although her individual style is easily recognized, she manages to convey a plethora of complex emotions. Her subjects are serene yet disquieting, relaxed and dispirited, dreaming but apprehensive. These paradoxes are difficult to recognize, much less photograph.

As a photographer, she also manages to stay edgy without succumbing to the seduction that overt sexuality sells photos. There is an underlying naughtiness to her photos, and the strength of her work lies in the many ways they can be interpreted. For example, in one of her most famous photos for Cacharel, a model lies on her stomach beneath a giant sewing machine. The doll-like model slumps over the table, the giant needle of the machine poised for action.

For the viewer, this photo brings up many associations and questions. Is Moon referring to the exploitation of women in the fashion industry? In glamorous fashion photography, models appear to be made, much like the clothes they wear. In this interpretation, the viewer could interpret the needle as a phallic symbol. The model, however, appears to be neutralized. Through a surrealist lens, this photo could be interpreted as castrating the woman so that she becomes a doll at the mercy of the machine. She has been stripped of her autonomy and succumbed to the needle. Or perhaps Sarah Moon simply wanted to showcase the model’s dress, shoes, and hat in a novel way.

Sarah Moon’s photos are surrealist in the sense that they defy easy explanations. On the surface, her photos could be dismissed as dreamy fantasy, but beneath the obvious there are many complexities at work and her symbols are difficult to decipher. Unlike Newton or Bourdin, Moon’s work doesn’t slap the viewer in the face. Rather, her meaning seeps out of each photograph, slowly pulling the viewer into her world. Strangely enough, she dislikes describing herself as an artist. She considers it “pretentious [because] you can’t decide you want to make art. You can decide to have an artist’s approach […] but it’s just a label” (Frankel). Like Brassai, Moon is aware that we cannot explain everything in reality, least of all talent. She accepts that part of her talent lies beyond her control and depends on the decisive moment: “the gift that doesn’t depend on us” (Horvat). Sarah Moon took the best parts of surrealism—the belief in chance, the collision of dreams and reality—and made them her own. Like the surrealists, Moon understood that it is “the surface that hides the depth” (Moon 154).

Works Cited


There is a picture taped to the wall above my antique white desk that captures the essence of my father. He is standing on the front porch of our farmhouse in North Carolina, dressed in a Hanes t-shirt and jeans, hands in his pockets and a lit Marlboro resting between his lips. This picture makes me feel poignantly close to him, even though I am now far away in Vermont, 15 hours and 806 miles from my Southern roots. Next to this picture is a favorite quote of mine by Emily Dickinson. It states, “You ask of my companions. Hills, sir, and the sundown, and a dog as large as myself that my father bought me. They are better than human beings, because they know, but do not tell.”

Some of the loneliest days of my life have been days in which I did not immerse my cheeks, my nose, my eyelids, in the warm fur of an animal. My favorite music is the sound of paws descending a hardwood staircase as I remove my key from the lock of a door.

I was raised on a small tobacco farm in the rural town of Madison, North Carolina. Now, when I inform my educated, culturally aware New England friends about my upbringing, I always see a unique look spread across their face. It’s a certain slow grin, a slight nod of the head, a dreamy look in their eyes. I can recognize their visions of my childhood taking on a certain kind of romance, a Gone With The Wind-esque Southern civility. Perhaps they think I had a Mammy and that she made all my dresses for garden picnics out of curtains. I never tell them the truth, which is that we were the kind of Southern family you don’t want to fantasize about, the poor kind. I am hesitant to ruin this image for my well-meaning friends. Plus, it could make for a really awkward moment or tense conversation.

I, too, am guilty of mythologizing my own childhood. I reflect specifically upon the pleasant memories, like the image of deer grazing in the fields in the early morning fog, the crisp dewy air embracing my face as I walked to the bus stop at the top of our dirt road. Or how my mother would save Mason jars for me every summer, so I could catch lightning bugs in the humid August evenings before bath time. I choose instead to focus on these moments instead of the others, like when my parents would argue over how we were going to pay the light bill that month, or how I would sleep in front of the living room furnace because it was the only semi-warm area in our century-old farmhouse. The one aspect that I could never over-romanticize, however, is my relationship to animals, specifically the dogs I cared for and loved as a child.

I earned the nickname “Ellie May” as a little girl, an homage to the caricaturized, ignorant daughter from The Beverly Hillbillies. If we happened to have guests or family visiting the farm, they would jokingly ask my mother, “Hey Elaine, where’s Ellie May?” She would casually reply, “Oh, you know. Outside playin’ with her critters.” I was the youngest of all my siblings and essentially grew up an only child, as my sisters had already left the home to work and start families. Dogs were the primary company I kept, among numerous cats, horses, chickens, and even goats. Each day I would arrive home from school and hurriedly complete my schoolwork. Afterwards, I would swing open our screen door excitedly and run out onto the porch, my chestnut pigtails bouncing as I hopped down the steps one-by-one. There, I would be greeted by one of our many dogs, a pack composed of strays that had somehow meandered mysteriously onto the farm and lonely mutts my father had picked up on the side of the road. We would run together to the back of the house, the canines galloping gracefully behind me with their long tongues leaping out of their mouths, their jowls flapping like a chorus, exposing milky, razor-edged teeth. I was
all elbows and knees as I clumsily retrieved a stick along the way, their pace and focus intensifying as I reached down and swooped up an old piece of oak branch with my right hand. As we entered the backyard I would whip around unsuspectingly and freeze, bending my knees and gazing at each dog intentionally. The pack, surprised at my halted stance, each stood to attention awaiting my next move. I would slowly move the stick in front of them, taunting them with the alluring limb. I am always amazed at how dogs cannot hide emotion. The body of the canine can be completely stoic, focused on whatever potential trophy the master holds in her hand, but the tail hides nothing as it wags happily; comparable to the way my foot shakes anxiously whenever I am nervous or lost in thought.

When I felt they had endured all the anticipation they could take, I would toss the stick in a grand gesture in the air, as each dog sprang up aggressively, back feet lifting off the ground, body twitching in the direction of the branch. After I saw which dog was lucky enough to obtain the stick, I would run towards the stables in an attempt to distract the other dogs and ward off a possible fight. My horse, Strawberry, would stand at the edge of her pasture and eye us suspiciously, wary of the aggravatingly energetic canines and patiently awaiting her afternoon sugar cubes. I would grab the other end of the stick not in the winning dog’s mouth and tug, as the dog would perch his rear upwards, back feet dug in the ground and front feet grinding, pushing against the dirt. Eventually he would be strong enough to pull the stick away from me in order to run and hide the treasure from the other dogs, stealing away underneath the porch or inside my playhouse.

I would run with the remainder of the pack somewhere else in the yard, to the edge of the field or the side of the house by the old oak tree. Telling stories to the dogs, I would recap with them what happened at school that day as they sniffed and licked my fingers. Sometimes I would sing to them, gospel songs I had heard in Sunday school – red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in his sight – or the song my first grade teacher, Mrs. Slater, taught her students so they could memorize the order of the months. These are the months of the year, oh, these are the months of the year. Fill them with joy and with cheer, the months of the year. I would tell them about how that stupid boy, Corey, always fell asleep on my shoulder in the mornings when I rode the bus. I didn’t reveal that Corey was disabled, as my 7 year-old self had little sympathy or tolerance to the way he disgustingly breathed through his mouth and fogged up the bus window, drool draping from lip to chest, after I had violently pushed him off of me. The dogs wouldn’t have judged my classmate the way I did, they wouldn’t have cared or noticed the difference of his mental retardation. They inherently knew a form of grace towards people that would take me a long time to learn.

The names, faces, and personalities of each dog we owned on the farm seem to blur together. I loved each one but understood their impermanent presence with us. Many would wander off to unknown places; none had collars or tags, and I don’t think we even owned leashes. We definitely didn’t have an Invisible Fence. Several I found run over in the road, a collage of blood and fur that I never looked at too closely, immediately running to the house to get my mother. I learned the danger and fragility of a dog’s curiosity, and the apathetic fear of humans, indifferently driving away after crushing the bones of the gentle body with the tires, undoubtedly hearing a brief whine, bark, or cry before the pup’s death. Although we would lose each dog inevitably, from a passing car, old age, or an attack from a lurking coyote or fox, my father never ceased in showering me abundantly with the gift of dogs. I’m sure he wanted to see that look of happiness on my face again, after a few weeks would pass and I had stopped crying over the death of my friend, the swelling around my eyes subsiding. But I also think he was subconsciously teaching me an unspoken lesson, that I will always risk pain in my love for animals, but I should never cease in opening up my child’s heart to loving them, over and over again. He did not want to see that beautiful resilience disappear, that quickness of recovery that only children can possess.

My mother would jokingly chastise him each time he drove up into the yard with a new mutt in the back of his rust-colored Chevy Silverado. “Charles Cayton, if you bring another God-forsaken mongrel home in that truck of yours, I swear I’ll divorce you.” But my father and me, we knew better. We knew my mother adored the fact that her husband had such an open heart, that she possessed a secret pride in being married to a man who would do anything in his power to see his daughter screech and jump in delight after weeks of sadness. That’s just the kind of man he was. That is the only man I can remember, my father, who adored, worshipped, and devoted himself to his child, as if she were religion.
There was one particular dog my father was partial to, a black Labrador named Bear. Bear had been the resident Alpha male of our farm since before I was born. I cannot remember how he came to be so adored by my father, or how he came to us. Probably another stray picked up on the side of the road, or maybe he wandered onto the brickyard while my father worked his day job as a bricklayer. I do remember how alertly Bear would rise in the mornings, awakened from his peaceful slumber on the porch by the screen door, to greet my father as he would leave for work at 5 a.m. He would still be on the porch at 6:30 when my father would arrive home, meeting him at the door of his truck with his black tail wagging. I had no idea how old Bear was, but I knew he was aging by the swiftness in which he stood to walk my father to and from his truck, the arthritis in his hips and legs progressively worsening. Bear possessed many of the qualities I associate with my father: gentleness, patience, wisdom. Bear never snapped his teeth at me when I would take him by surprise and throw myself on top of him, my head resting on his neck, arms draped down, palms gripped around the top of his front paws, belly against his spine, balancing my hips on his own.

Of the few dogs in which I can recall precisely how they died on our farm, Bear is one of them. It happened on a searing hot day, the month I cannot remember. In North Carolina, extreme heat can present itself anywhere from April to October. My father was loading something in his truck, probably tobacco leaves, as they began to ripen in preparation for curing in early September. Sometimes Bear would sleep behind the back wheel to avoid the blaring sun, but would always move when my father started the engine of the truck. The leaves needed to be transported to the barn, and the old Chevy roared as my father put the truck in reverse. Bear could not stand up fast enough, betrayed by the arthritis in his legs. I did not see my father run over Bear, as I was immersed in play in the tobacco field, but I did hear him scream. I am not sure there is any sound on earth that compares to the wail of a dying dog, but it catches you. It surprises you like an ocean’s violent, hungry wave; you’re lucky if you can remain standing when it happens. I will pray tonight that you never hear it, because I live in fear of that sound. I ran to the truck as my father crouched despairingly by the back wheel where Bear lay motionless, his back legs broken, twisted. The black skin across his ribs pulsed, as he breathed heavily. My father rubbed his chest as he attempted to comfort him. I was sent inside to tell my mother, where she ran out of the house and demanded that I stay on the porch. I watched as she examined Bear. They talked for a few minutes, heads nodding, hands on hips, my mother biting her bottom lip.

Eventually my mother walked towards the porch and led me into the farmhouse, where she stood close to me and watched out the window. She did not want me to see what was happening, but I was able to witness my father carrying the limp body of his beloved black Labrador past the barn, towards the end of the field. I knew that Bear was too old to undergo surgery, nor would we have had the money to pay for it. My mother stood behind me, hunched over with her head bent, lips against my scalp. She raised her hands and cupped them against my ears. We waited silently and both jumped when we heard the pop of the rifle. We stood together for a moment, and soon I turned and wrapped my arms around her. My father did not come inside for a very long time.

He died of a massive heart attack shortly after Bear passed, my father. We sold the farm and moved to the suburbs. We did not own any dogs afterwards for many years, as my mother could not bear the idea of becoming attached to another living creature, only to know they would one day disappear from our lives. My mother and I embodied loss, shaken from our displacement from the land, grieving the death of my father and the ways in which he held us together. Gone was the roar of his old Chevy truck, the faint crow of our rooster at dawn. We sold his cherry-colored Farm-All tractor at auction. I no longer smelled sawdust in the stables, and I ached for the thick, leathery feel of Strawberry’s saddle against my palms. Most of all, I missed the comfort of a dog constantly underneath my feet, the gentle hum of his breath as he slept at the foot of my four-poster bed. Our screen door was gone, and when I stepped out onto our new cement porch, the only greeting was a car turning in the cul-de-sac. My pack was gone and there were no attentive pups to sing gospel songs to. I don’t remember sleeping at all during those years.

After I graduated high school I moved to the city to attend college, and longed for the steady companionship of a dog. It was as if I could feel a tangible absence inside me. My junior year of college, after much thought, I decided it was time to bring an animal back into my life. I drove to the far outskirts of Charlotte onto the farm of an old widow, the land aged and neglected. As I walked to the back of the house and stood by a picket fence, I saw the fluffiest, dirti-
est Golden Retriever I have ever seen. He did not bark or become excited as I approached him. He merely looked at me, as if he had been patiently waiting for me to come get him since birth, as if he had very important puppy-like things to accomplish and my late arrival was hindering his agenda. This puppy was the last of the litter, as his brothers and sisters had been taken to forever homes earlier in the week. Even though I never had any choice, there was no other dog meant for me, and we both knew that. The widow charged me 25 dollars less than her asking price, because I hadn’t the chance to get my “pick of the litter,” as she said. I named him Duncan Sage, affectionately nicknamed my “clearance puppy.”

That feisty puppy has grown into a 4 year-old dog, and he lives a much different life than the dogs on the farm. The relationship I share with Duncan differs from the pack I loved as a child. I am protective of him, as his safety depends on me. At my home in White River Junction, we have an Invisible Fence to keep him from running into our street, Victory Circle. While he is more protected than our farm dogs were, he is much less liberated. Duncan will never know the experience of herding chickens in the mornings, running at full speed into their congregation as if the birds were bowling pins. When we go on walks, he must be attached to his leash and harness. He will never know the joy of running freely beside me down a dirt road, racing towards an old farmhouse, stopping to chase a fearsome squirrel along the way. Duncan will never possess the autonomous spirit I so cherished in my former pack.

Dogs center me. They force me to live unselfishly because of their innocent nature. More importantly, their presence personifies security, as the being of my father no longer shelters me. Dogs are grace in living, breathing form. They are the closest things to divinity I have ever found.