

Introduction

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In late February of 2023, the ESA hosted a Careers in English event. One of the panellists was a graduate of UVic's English program and, chatting to her after the event, I discovered she had also been a founding editor of *The Albatross*. She was amazed to learn that the journal was still alive and well; for my part, I couldn't overcome the feeling of awe this interaction brought over me. As editors and contributors to *The Albatross* we walk in the footsteps of scholars we've never met. And as human beings, this sense of vast legacy is something to be considered from all angles, time and again.

It is only fitting, then, that the seven works featured in Volume 13 are all critically engaged with both transient and perennial facets of the human experience. Thirteen, commonly condemned as an unlucky number, came to represent for our team a point of expansion and creativity. The work of our forebears has left us a journal that is strong in mission, vision, and foundation. We give back to them a thirteenth volume of essays that pushes the boundaries of undergraduate criticism and challenges us to rethink the very structure of academic writing.

Our first three articles tackle complex issues of identity creation and society. Holding the aestheticization of Nabokov's *Lolita* (1955) against a feminist interpretation of Ursula Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), Nicole Paletta illuminates the inextricable relation between mass consumerism and female subjugation. Paletta challenges us to read Le Guin's novel as an entity that "defies

the inalienable link between sex and consumerism which typifies mid-century American culture” (25). Approached in this manner, the text intentionally disrupts a consumer culture that was designed to control and mitigate the power of women. Meanwhile on the high seas, Kara Hagedorn examines the brief presence of Captain Brierly in Joseph Conrad’s *Lord Jim* (1899) through the lens of Sara Ahmed’s queer phenomenology, excavating the linguistics of Brierly’s interactions to reveal their queer undertones. Hagedorn demonstrates how “the colonial frontier doubles as a place for queer men to hide under the guise of imperial expansion” (30), offering us fresh insight into the ongoing relevance of Conrad’s novel as a queer-oriented space and challenging us to rethink the narrative significance of Captain Brierly. Hopping across the Pacific, Ella Cuskelly shines a light on Yōko Ogawa’s subversion of Japanese “Normal Life” ideals in *The Housekeeper and the Professor* (2009). Drawing on cultural scholarship and historical context, Cuskelly demonstrates how “Ogawa depicts domestic labour as skilled, intellectual, and separated from gender roles” (45), and thereby overturns socially constructed frameworks of the Japanese nuclear family.

Our next two articles tackle text and visual art across two centuries. In a pertinent examination of Kate Beaton’s 2022 graphic memoir *Ducks*, Kalea Furmanek-Raposo takes a dual textual and visual analytic approach to examine Beaton’s portrayal of liminality in the Albertan oil sands. Dissecting everything from the memoir’s narrative intricacies to its physical arrangement on the page, Furmanek-Raposo demonstrates how Beaton’s artistic strategies “visually complement the liminality of the world that her charac-

ters inhabit” (49) and call to the foreground not only a set of moral questions about life in the oil sands, but the very limits of human psychological endurance. In an ambitious bridging between critical analysis and readerly affect, Erin Kroi illuminates James Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1920) through an articulation of her own response to Robert Amos’ painting *Dedalus on the Shore* (2016) and its Felskian phenomenological implications. “The novel lends the reader its experience through the reader’s intuitive experience,” Kroi argues (63), advocating for an approach to *Ulysses* that extends beyond its canonical status to “the influential power engendered by its essence, and our delight in its stylistic whims” (55).

Our final two articles are concerned with core notions of humanity in the Victorian and medieval eras, respectively. In an analysis of Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette* (1853), Colleen Bidner examines themes of humanity and mortality behind the Victorian obsession with flowers, revealing how the protagonist’s romance plot is humanised by the presence of floral symbolism throughout the text. Bidner demonstrates that if “flowers offer a path for humans to see each other’s souls and humanity” (73), then the clarifying power of romantic relationships is shifted beyond a topical infatuation and into a deeper, more transcendent experience of human bonds. In Jocelyn Diemer’s innovative approach to Edmund Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* book three (1590), the narrative symbolism of the hyena blurs the human-animal boundary. Illustrating the complexities of the medieval bestiary and its reinscription of our sense of distinction as a species, Diemer asks: “Should we try desperately to reinforce the boundaries between human and animal and risk blurring them even further? Or should we immerse ourselves fully in

the pleasure of trans-animal exchanges and encounters and risk becoming monstrous?" (84). The answer, they assert, can be found if we "accept our own creaturely double nature, and perhaps even seek out positive opportunities for interspecies encounter and collaboration" (85).

The reach and ambition of our contributors cannot be overstated. From oil sands to shipwrecks, these seven authors bring us a set of refreshing, carefully constructed perspectives on the human condition. Reaching beyond their academic scaffolding, they ask us: What is love? What is art? How do we create ourselves? How do we *know* ourselves? And when we know ourselves, what can we do with that knowledge?

Though it may be our collective fate to be eternally lacking a set of clear answers, these articles have perhaps brought us one step closer to understanding the mysteries of our social and personal experiences. I invite you to turn a page, hang on their words, and prepare to question everything. Without further ado: *The Albatross*, Volume 13.

