

THE HARRIS *Archive*

GUIDE BOOK



© 2026 Cheyenne Worrell, Charley Babb, Crystal Jones, James Roche

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The Harris Archive

This is a collection of different works from the students of English 412A's 2026 Spring Semester class. It contains a range of different ideas and perspectives regarding different writing technologies the students have worked with or experienced. These pieces range from nonfiction and essays, to fiction and poetry. Some of these pieces explore real world writing technologies and others focus on a more hypothetical and creative side when it comes to writing. This archive blends and highlights the difference in ideas following different forms of writing technologies.

Across this collection, readers can see how writing is not limited to one form or genre. Writing technologies can be analyzed and inspected in an infinite variety of ways. Through the lens of a moral story, or under the scrutiny of a personal essay, it's a vast genre with a vast array of responses and ideas, all of which can be found below.



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Fiction: Exploring Imagination Through Writing

The first section we're diving into is some fiction works from a variety of different writers. This section highlights the imaginative interpretations of different writing styles. Each piece is unique in story and plot while emphasizing the importance of writing technologies. Fiction writers play an important role in shaping the human connection through imaginative experiences. We are immersed into the head of these writers and see where their mind takes them on the page.



Just A Touch, written by Katelyn Berry, follows a grieving woman returning to the back to scatter the ashes of her lifetime friend. This story follows themes of grief and letting go of someone you once loved. Much of this story is told through memories and the eyes of the narrator. It showcases how memories shape Dylan's present.



Just a Touch

By Katelyn Berry

Introduction

The sun was almost halfway down by the time Dylan could bring herself to open the car door. Gold and violet hues shimmered off each cresting wave that gently caressed the shore. In the distance she could hear the pleads of ever energetic children begging to stay in the cool waters just a bit longer. Otherwise the beach was quiet and empty, as if it knew she needed to be alone.

Reaching over to the seat beside her, she lifted the ornate, pearly heart from its place. Faintly she could see the outline of it against the, now slightly sunbleached fabric seat. Carefully, she carried it tight to her chest while marching slowly through the shifting sand. Looking back to the car every now and again wishing for a way to run back and drive off. But she didn't. She couldn't. Eventually her eyes dropped to the odd footprints her pitch black heels left in the sand. Each mark looked as if someone had shoved their finger deep into the earth. It reminded her of Skye.

Blue Paint

"Why are ya cryin'?"

Dylan jumped at the sudden noise behind her. She sheepishly peered through her puffy red eyes at the beautiful girl turned wild from the paint. A different shade of paint swathed each finger, her overalls were a mess of splatters that would never fade, and baby blue paint gelled in her blonde hair, expertly matching her seafoam eyes almost shut from her wide grin. Dylan couldn't speak for a few moments as the living painting watched her, before finally swallowing enough tears.

"I don't want to get my fingers dirty." Dylan looked at the girl's attempted dye job and quickly added, "or my hair."

“Aw, but that’s the best part! Ya get to paint yourself while ya paint the paper.”

“But it’s so gross and sticky,” Dylan instinctively wiped the snot running from her nose at the word ‘sticky.’

“Nuh-uh, it’s just like face paint. Don’t ya like that?”

Dylan paused for a moment or two in disbelief at the sensational revelation and simply muttered, “Yeah.” Hearing that, the painted girl lit up, her cheshire grin stretching even further.

“I can paint yer face, and then you’ll already be covered,” she gasped, “then you can paint my face! Whaddya want me to paint? I wanna be pretty like my mama!”

“A...a cheetah,” Dylan couldn’t help but be taken by the pace of this hurricane of a girl.

“Lemme go grab some orange and black!” The girl rushed off to a nearby easel in a hurry. As Dylan’s eyes followed the girl she caught a glimpse of what the painted girl had drawn. It was good. And not good for a five year-old, it was simply good. No, it was beautiful. A bed of flowers exploded to life on the white sheet, each finger line overlapped into a melody of petals, the insides textured with fingerprints. At the bottom was a hand print the same blue as her hair signed below, somehow immaculately from a finger tip, was the name ‘Skye.’ Later on, Dylan would learn that Skye couldn’t paint with a brush. When she was older and finally had the words, Skye said she couldn’t feel the paper or the art through anything but her hands. She preferred the intimacy of her fingers gliding across the page. She even insisted on signing her marriage certificate with her finger and an inkwell she brought so it would have her best possible signature.

But for now, she impatiently, yet deftly, drew a caricature of a cheetah upon Dylan’s face. In return, Dylan took a bit of deep red paint on her thumb and pressed it against Skye’s lips to match the shade of lipstick her mom had always worn. Dylan continued to add the improvised makeup to Skye until she looked a little too much like a clown, but she seemed happy nonetheless. Although, it didn’t help her uncanny smile.

“Can ya paint now?” Skye’s words carried that innocent and earnest tone children grow out of too quickly, a push to a question Dylan otherwise might not have answered.

“I don’t know what to paint.”

“Well...” Skye started to speak but instinct quickly took over as she dipped her pointer finger in more paint and took Dylan’s canvas for her own. On it she quickly, but elegantly, scrawled, ‘What’s your favourite colour?’ in her signature blue. “Now ya write the answer.”

Dylan studied the various paints before her. A timid finger finally found its chosen hue and, in a legibility befitting a child her age, wrote, 'pink'. Below it she added, 'yours?' Then they went on, writing questions and answers until the canvas was covered in a rainbow of letters and Dylan had forgotten ever hating the sensation of paint on her fingers.

This was their language. When they were tired of playing or had nothing better to do as kids they would write in the dirt. Mud soiling and dyeing their fingers with earth until it crept to the base of their nails. By the end, Skye's porcelain skin looked no different from the shades of Dylan's red clay skin. They even did it when they went to the beach.

The Beach

They had only been to Dredger's Cove that one time when they were no longer children, but certainly still young and foolish. Sun-tanned and exhausted from the ocean, they wrote along the shore. Where the waves could cool them and clear their canvas with each ebb and flow.

'no seriously I wanna celebrate'

'It's just college everyone goes'

'Im not'

'Yeah, but you do...'

The water interrupted Dylan's finger. "You don't need to," she finished aloud.

'I cant'

Skye's water pruned finger drilled deeper into the sand in mild frustration.

'You should come with'

'where?'

'College'

'live where? your dorm?'

'Sure'

"Be serious Dede," this time Skye spoke aloud, flicking grains of sand from behind her pink tipped nails. "You know I can't afford to leave my Dad's."

“You could sell your paintings, wasn’t that the plan anyway?” Dylan spoke aloud now as well.

“Well yeah, but I’m not good enough yet.”

“You’ve been good enough since middle school. Your stuff’s amazing!”

Skye paused for a breath before returning her fingers to the shore.

‘you think everything I do is amazing’

Skye’s finger was determined as it carved the sand into words.

‘They are’

Dylan returned Skye’s determination in kind. But after that, both of their hands slowed and moved more with a gentle melancholy.

‘why do you even want me to go that bad?’

‘We’ve never been apart’

‘youll be fine without me for a while’

‘No I won’t’

“You sound like you’re my clingy boyfriend or something,” Skye joked as she stood up, finished with their writing, the darkness of night growing closer. Further down the shore Dylan’s father was lighting a bonfire and shouting to Skye.

Dylan took advantage of Skye’s distraction. She wrote slowly and deeply in her own frustration and truth, a spiteful glacier carving a path in the earth. A part of her almost wished Skye would turn around, but she grew more and more impatient for the shore’s cleansing wave. Her muscles tensed as she went to carve five new deeper scars into the sand, but something in her froze as she saw Skye start to turn towards her.

Although it was dark, the newly lit bonfire illuminated the words more than the setting sun had, enough to make Skye certain of what Dylan wrote.

‘Maybe I want to be’

Immediately Skye dropped to her knees, it was only when she was face to face with the sand that she hesitated. In an uncharacteristically sloppy script her words gently glided onto the surface of the shore.

‘please do!’

Closing

Dylan was sure this wasn’t the part of the beach where they had written all those words, words she still couldn’t believe she wrote or read, but it didn’t matter. She placed the elegant heart on the ground where it left another imprint. The black curtains of her pants legs folded in as she knelt to the ground. She shifted her focus from the grains of sand to the wrinkles that now lined her fingers, now from time rather than water. Sand filled them in and sanded them smooth again as she began to write. Each stroke was patient, delicate, but firm; an extension of the gray-haired woman she had become. Looking down at the finished script she let out a deep sigh and reached for the heart. Removing the top, a bit of gray fell out. Carefully, she let the rest fall into the deep channels she had carved until the ashen canals were filled. She struggled against her knees to get back up, but she managed. Looking down she saw her final message.

‘Goodbye my love, thank you for staying as long as you could.’

‘Skye Elisabeth Williams-Eckelhart’

The tide flowed in, flooding the letters and scattering the ashes along the surface. When it pulled away the words and ash were gone.



The Stimulation Of It All, written by Rachel Pritchard, follows the life of a college student who is falling behind academically. Throughout the stress of college, Adam begins to use AI to fulfill his assignments. This story follows temptation, responsibly and having a moral code. It demonstrates how small changes can have real world effects.

The Simulation of It All

by Rachel Pritchard

Before

The sun shines down on Adam's face. After months of cold, dreary winter, the bright, albeit brisk, day is a welcome change. His walk on the uneven sidewalk is no different than any other day, but the air and the wind smell different. It's as if Oxford has finally shaken off the grip that winter had on it. The fresh day has given Adam a new perspective on his priorities; he's been slacking off with school and needs to get back to work. Despite the end of the semester quickly approaching, he's been going out with friends without making sure his work for his classes is done first. But, that's all going to change because of this day. Adam has a test coming up in his Business and Management class, so he's going to meet a friend at the library to get a head start on studying for it. He doesn't feel like it'll be too difficult, but it's not like he got an A on the last test in this class, so he needs to step up his game.

As Adam rounds the corner to the library, he gets a ping on his phone that David, his friend, grabbed a study room for them. He secretly hopes that David has better notes than Adam does, since he didn't care to pay attention in class the past two weeks, or even attend on occasion. He's going to really need to lock in to get a better grade on this test. Adam enters the library and beelines for the stairs. He heads down to the basement and wanders the children's lit section until he spots Adam in a study room. He knocks on the door and David lets him in.

During

Adam sits down beside his friend and starts to get out his things.

"There are so many new terms to memorize. This test is going to *suck*," David complains to Adam, who doesn't even know what the terms are. His bright, shining morning is a long way away in this basement he's found himself in on a Sunday morning.

“How the hell are you going to memorize them all?” Adam baits, hoping to just do whatever David does.

“Well, I was hoping to just listen to them on repeat. I don’t really have the time to read them again and again.”

“What do you mean listen to them? How?” Adam presses, confused as to who would read his terms out loud for him.

“I was going to use this text to speech software. Here – look at this.” David turns his laptop screen so it’s facing Adam. “So I type in my notes, or, like, copy and paste them. Then I just hit play and...”

A robotic sounding voice fills the small study room. His notes came to life all around them, reading off definition after definition. David hits the pause button on his computer, halting the voice.

“What’s that site called?” asked Adam.

“It’s Speechify. They have all different types of voices you can select, too,” David answers.

“How did you even find that?”

“It was advertised on another AI site I use. They’ve both been super helpful when it comes to studying. It’s not cheating if it’s not writing it for you.”

Adam hadn’t known that the text-to-speech generator was AI. He’d never used AI before, not because of any specific reason, but just because he hadn’t really known what it was. He’d seen memes online of people using AI to do all their work for them, and he’d heard his teachers warn him of the dangers of using AI, saying that it would be plagiarism. But this, using AI as a tool, didn’t seem inherently bad. It seems like it would help him study, instead of using it to get off easy. David was a great student, if he was doing it, why shouldn’t Adam?

“That’s really cool, man. I’m gonna have to check that out. Do you mind sending me your notes, too? I want to make sure I got all the definitions down.”

After

Adam goes home that day, feeling much more prepared for his test coming up. He has a paper to write tonight, too, but that site that David told him about stays on his mind the entire walk home. As Adam reheats his dinner, he puts his notes into Speechify. That same robotic voice fills the room, reading off his own words and David’s notes.

As soon as he was done eating, Adam tried to lock in on his paper. But, he just couldn’t think of

where to start. He thought he might use one of the sites that David mentioned, just to get a jumpstart on it. Only an outline, he thought, it couldn't hurt. So Adam brought up ChatGPT, the only site he could remember by name and typed in the prompt for his paper. Before asking a question, he just hit enter. He didn't even mean to, but ChatGPT already was responding. And just like that, there was an entire paper filling his screen. He started reading it, and it wasn't bad. It was already late, and Adam was tired from studying all day, so he just submitted that. It wasn't on purpose, he thought. He would make sure to write the next one. Adam went to bed.

Little did Adam know, but his professor added extra precautions to prevent students from using AI. There was white text within the prompt that didn't show up until it was highlighted, copied, and pasted somewhere else. The AI wrote about a case that isn't real because the prompt told it to do that. Adam failed the paper, and his professor turned him over to the Academic Integrity Office. Adam will have to go to explain what happened, and most likely fail the class. If they believe he plagiarized, he'll get a mark on his record.

What started as something small, something that might help Adam better himself as a student, ended up hurting him far more than losing an hour or two of sleep. Adam wasn't the type to use AI, but what seemed practical turned out to be quite the opposite.



Light And Dark, written by Em McGowan, follows an interpreter struggling to learn an alien language. This encounter between alien and human opens up a breakthrough in communication between both species. This piece explores themes of language barriers, cultural perception and how different meanings can change depending on perspectives.

The Light and the Dark

by Em McGowan



Lieutenant Kendra McGivens clenched her stylus under the table to hide her nerves.

“I’m sorry,” she said. “I don’t know that word, *dezh-ti*. Could you please define it?”

She’d repeated the phrase so many times over the last few months she *should* be beyond making any mistakes with it, but apparently not.

The alien sitting across the table from her rippled his hair tendrils softly in a gesture she now knew preceded a gentle correction. “*I*,” he said slowly, using a form of ‘I’ that she belatedly realized didn’t match up to the form of ‘you’ she’d used to refer to him, “would be happy to define *it*.”

Shoot. She’d messed that up, too. Seriously, screw this language.

She bowed slightly in her chair to hide her embarrassment and raised her shaking hands to the tablet sitting on the table in front of her, stylus poised to write. “Please, instruct me.” The traditional phrase to indicate acceptance of criticism, at least, was simple. She’d long ago memorized the pronouns she’d been told applied to her.

He raised three fingers—and *boy*, had it freaked Command out that these aliens had almost entirely the same appearance as humans—then gracefully lowered the first. “I am *vuk-ta*,” he said.

Kendra furrowed her brow. “Forgiveness, but how is *vuk-ta* different from *vuk-ti*?” *Vuk* meant ‘male,’ and both *ta* and *ti* were particles that indicated masculine grammatical gender.

And pronouns. She couldn't forget that they were also both pronouns to indicate masculine gender in general.

"Different from *vuk-tim*," he gently corrected her grammar. Then he cocked his head to the side, and his tendrils coiled then released in a shrug. "*Vuken-ti* are of the light, while *vuken-ta* are of the dark."

Ugh, this again. No one in the translation crew had yet been able to get a straight answer about all this light and dark business.

And it appeared today wasn't the day, either, as he lowered his second finger. "*Dezh-ti* is *ti*, not *kib*."

Oh. Okay, note to self, the forms of 'it' were just as complicated as the forms of 'I' and 'you.'

The final finger lowered, still outstretched, to point at her stylus. "*Dezhen-ti* are very similar to that," he said.

"My 'stylus'?" she said, pronouncing it in English.

"Yes. Though we would call yours '*stylus'en-ta*.'" He placed a plural inflection from his own grammar on the word and changed its gender slightly.

Kendra considered the stylus in her hand, barely seeing it through her thoughts. "*Ti* is of the light. *Ta* is of the dark," she murmured. But both were masculine?

He smiled. "Yes."

"Why?"

He cocked his head, and only one side of his tendrils coiled up, staying there in an expression of confusion.

She clarified. "Why is mine a *dezh-ta* and yours a *dezh-ti*?" She used the correct 'you,' this time, at least. Rarely did she make the same mistake twice.

He waved at her tablet. "You write darkness into the light," he said. "We write light into the darkness."

This again. "I don't understand." And she didn't expect to be taught, either. Not when it came to light and darkness.

But he surprised her.

“Here,” he said, and waved at the center of the table. She pushed her tablet and stylus closer to him, happy to see where this went.

He picked up the stylus and drew it across a blank spot on the screen. A streak of black pixels followed, trailing across the blank white.

“Now, watch.” He reached into his formal robes and pulled out a black square, which he unfolded twice and set beside her tablet. From another pocket he retrieved a stylus of his own, and drew a similar line across the dark page. A streak of white followed the nib.

Kendra looked back and forth between her tablet and the alien’s, and quietly despaired. This language would kill her. It already had close to *two hundred* distinct pronouns, one for every possible variant of person, case, sex, gender, and plurality, and now she had to deal with pens that changed grammatical gender *based on what color ink they drew?!*

It seemed he picked up on her distress, however, because he hummed a short comfort-melody as his tendrils swayed toward her like an air hug. “Do not worry too much,” he said. “*Dezh-ti* and *dezh-ta* are formal. Most will not care if you simply say *dezh*.”

Really? “Does that apply to all nouns?” she asked. It would certainly make her life a lot simpler.

He shrugged his tendrils again. “Most. But you are an interpreter, yes? You will be formal much of the time.”

Drat. Well, if she was going to be stuck with it, she might as well have fun.

She reached out and switched the tablet’s settings to night mode, then drew another line across the screen, parallel to the one the alien had left. This time, it left a trail of white on the black background.

The alien’s eyes widened, and his tendrils poofed up like they’d been hit with static.

“*Dezh-ti?*” she asked, smirking a little.

He nodded numbly.

She switched it back to normal and laid down a third line. “*Dezh-ta?*”

“How?” he whispered.

Wait, they really didn't have this in any of their tech? They were so much more advanced than humans in a lot of ways, it kind of blew her mind that they didn't have something as simple as a night mode toggle.

Feeling a little bad about her jest now, she shrugged. "This is light mode," she said, then flicked it once more. "And this is night mode."

The alien stared at her tablet for a long time, his tendrils waving around wildly. She just waited him out.

"I think," he said at last, "that it might be time to speak of the light and the dark."

Kendra blinked. "Wait, what? Why?" Why her, why now? Her division had been trying for ages to get them to open up about this, and every single diplomat they'd spoken to had been rather close-mouthed about it. What had changed?

He raised his eyes to meet her own. "We did not think you"—he used the general plural form of the pronoun, indicating all humans—"understood about the light and the dark. But you do. So now we will tell you."

God, her boss was going to have kittens when she told him a *UI setting* unlocked the mystery they'd been after for *years*. She dreaded making the report already.



Galatea, written by Cheyenne Worrell, follows Pygmalion, the protagonist who requests the help of Aphrodite, to bring his 'Galatea' to life. As Pygmalion prepares to achieve his goals he is overwhelmed with the amount of responsibility thrown onto him. This story explores the themes of longing, and blurred the boundary between imaginary and reality.

Galatea

by Cheyenne Worrell



On a rainy night, the city's glow is diffused by the mist,

Pygmalion's steps echo on slick pavement,

His mind an intense whirl of dreams and desires,

Towards Aphrodite's club, where gods and mortals intertwine.

Galatea, his creation of ink and thin-pressed paper,

Haunts his thoughts with warm yearning,

He seeks Aphrodite's favor,

To breathe life into his scripted love.

In the rain's rhythm, there exists a symphony of longing,

As he approaches the threshold of divine intervention,

Hope and desperation mingle in the downpour,

Pygmalion's silent plea echoes in the night.

Approaching the door of Aphrodite's club. Pygmalion begins knocking three times, the door swings open before he has time to pull away. As the door clips his knuckles, Pygmalion draws his hand back, curling it into his chest as his other hand cradled it close. His eyes trails up to meet that of Hephaestus, the corner of his lips twitching as he attempts to ease himself, rubbing his wrist one last time before letting his hands drop to his waist. "I-I'm here to see Aphrodite?" Pygmalion stutters, his eyes flickering across the man's face.

The man's left eye has a golden sheen over it, a shimmering scar crossing over the socket and digging into the hairline of his buzzcut. He stands stagnant for a moment, his eyes trails down and then up again, judgmental as an uncomfortable amount of silence passes by. "Hey 'Dite, he's here," Hephaestus calls out, not turning to the empty bar behind him, stepping to the side to let the wimpish man in, tugging his hood down as he enters.

In the empty bar, devoid of revelry's usual hum,

Red and purple neon lights bathe the space in a sultry glow,

Aphrodite, draped in a tight-fitted white dress.

She sits at a table, smoke swirling from her cigarette,

A solitary goddess amidst the serenity of the night.

"Pygmalion, it's so lovely to see you," The woman charms, a smile spreads over her glossy, wine-stained lips. Stretching her arm out, she pats the empty spot table. "Sit," she orders, though the pleasantries in her voice made it seem more like a request of a friend.

"Yeah, yeah. Um – it is." The man returns, slithering down into the chair and fidgeting with his hands as he looks around slightly. "S-so... about Galatea..." Pygmalion starts only for his thoughts to be interrupted by the haunting laugh of the enchantress before him.

"Oh, tish tosh. You're so quick to do business. You don't even want to ask how I'm doing? I'm doing you such a big favor, after all." Aphrodite almost threatens, her gaze hardens as she stares at him with her emerald hues. Pygmalion swallows hard, clearing her throat.

"I – um... I'm sorry." he apologizes, readjusting himself. "How are you, Aphrodite?" he asks, fidgeting as a wave of nervousness washes over him.

“Just fine, darling.” She replies curtly, snuffing out her cigarette in the ashtray at her side, a thin plume of smoke swirling in the air. “So, about that favor,” she starts again, reaching into her rhinestone-bedazzled clutch and retrieving it.

Galatea’s breath.

The small glowing vial, filled with light and potential of life.

Embossed with intricate patterns, pulses with silent power,

Its surface is a glimmer of iridescent purple,

A beacon of potential, positioned to bring life to Galatea.

Within its compact frame lies a universe of technology,

A fusion of ancient alchemy and cutting-edge innovation,

Whispers of creation echo within its humming core,

As it hovers above Galatea, a promise of awakening.

“Here it is,” Aphrodite introduces, spinning the pulsing cylinder around in her hand.

Amazed by the small yet earth-shattering piece of technology before him, Pygmalion presses his lips together, taking in the sight for all that it was worth. A wonder. “So... how do I use it?” he asks, unable to draw his eyes away from the small vial in the woman’s hand.

“Well, you put it in a quill and write with it, I figured that was obvious,” she replies dryly. “This is important, as well, Pygmalion,” she starts, her emerald green eyes settling into something of a more serious nature. “This ink, when you put it in the quill, be sure you mean every word you write. Don’t spare any detail when describing your love,” Aphrodite warns. “Do you understand?” Aphrodite asks, her voice grim.

“Yes.”

“Good,” Aphrodite returns, setting the glowing vial on the table, watching as Pygmalion gently lifts it up. “Be careful with her, Pygmalion.” She mentions one last time.

Pygmalion's hands tremble as they grasp the glowing cylinder,

A surge of anticipation courses through his veins,

As if life itself pulses within his very grasp,

The weight of creation is heavy yet exhilarating.

The cylinder hums with a gentle warmth,

A heartbeat of energy that resonates with his own,

Each touch a connection to the life he yearns to bestow,

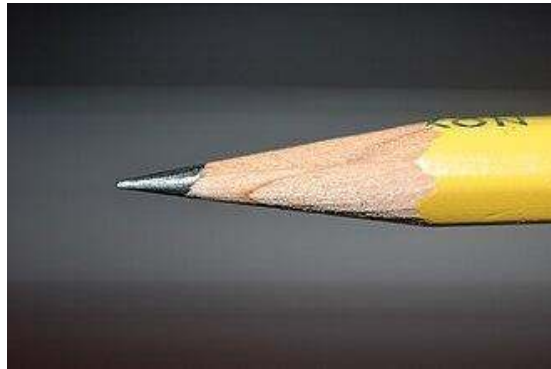
Galatea's form awaiting the touch of his transformative hand.



Number Two, written by Ruthie Schmeichel, follows the life of a number two pencil from the moment it was chosen in a store to future years of usage. This story explores the themes of attachment and change as the pencil is swapped for a mechanical one. It shows how relationships can change over and so can the way people choose to express themselves and their writing.

Number Two

by Ruthie Schmeichel



The No. 2 pencil is a staple of grade school.

He's proud of the fact. Of course, his brethren are constantly used by professionals: bakers, engineers, scientists, you name it. But he has always had a soft spot for children.

He can still remember the way the Woman pulls his box off the shelf for the Little Girl. They take no notice of him. To them, he is just another item to check off. But he beams from the box anyway. Now he will be of use. Now he will help this Little Girl, and she will love him. They will be together forever.

He is still beaming as the Woman dumps him (and some of his siblings) into a clear plastic box, which she snapped closed and shoved into a bag on the Little Girl's back. He bounces around in that bag, in the dark, listening to the sounds of the outside world—hissing and rumbling and screeching, like the truck that dropped him off at the store he was bought from; high-pitched voices inside that rumbling; the rustling of clothes against fabric; footsteps and more voices, deeper voices like the Woman's.

Then, a ripping sound, and the light of day. He blinks up at the Little Girl from his place in the

box, as he watches the way her face tilts as she sets him on the table. Her hand reaches toward the lock, the box opens...

She picks him up. Smiles at his perfect point. Rubs her finger against the soft, neat eraser.

Yes.

He watches as she lowers him to that pure, white paper, already imagining the words that will flow out of him.

As she makes the first stroke, he sighs in contentment.



Over the years, the Little Girl loses all her pencils but him. Him she keeps, and oh, the things they write together! He starts by filling in blank spaces on worksheets with big letters, squares with pictures, and eventually solitary questions in small black text. At some point, he moves to thinner paper with blue lines and writes *a lot* about endlessly boring topics. Sometimes she has to trade him for a pen, but he can tell that she'd rather have him—whenever he's in the box, the Little Girl writes furiously, always shaking her hand out, stress digging lines into her face. Eventually, the paper itself is blue or green, and all he does is fill in bubbles for hours.

The Little Girl turns into a Young Woman. The writing comes faster and more frequently, and sometimes it's not words at all, but he doesn't care. All that matters is that she's still using him, dulling his point and then sharpening it again, until he has shrunk in his old age. His eraser is gone, and she's forced to use a big, blocky one instead. By the way she sighs as she hunts for it, he knows that she, too, misses the younger days.

The first time the Young Woman pulls out the mechanical pencil, he thinks she's just trying it out. A one-time use out of curiosity. With a sting of jealousy, he notices the wide grin blooming across her face as she sets that pencil to paper. He consoles himself by saying that she's just curious. The mechanical pencil is new. Soon her curiosity will be satisfied, and she will return to her trusty, well-loved No. 2 pencil. They've gone through too much for it to be otherwise.

She does return to him, but not as much as before. Now half of her time is spent with the mechanical pencil. Then three-quarters of it. Gradually, he stops being used at all.

His lead heart sinks.

Now he lies forgotten—peppered with teeth marks, stubby, and graphite-streaked—at the bottom of the Young Woman's pencil pouch. In the stillness and the dark, all he can do is wonder what happened.

Has he gotten too old? Too short? Is his point too dull? Has she gotten tired of his lack of eraser, or of having to sharpen him?

Really, what does the mechanical pencil have that he doesn't?

Even if that pencil does everything else better than me, he grumbles, he doesn't have my heart. I'm sure he doesn't care about the Young Woman as much as I do! Isn't that the important thing?

And then comes the day when the pouch zips open. Through the other objects in the pouch, he sees the Young Woman staring down at him, her brow furrowed. His heart leaps at the sight of her face. She's older now, but within her eyes he can still see that Little Girl he used to know.

Utensils clatter as she empties the pouch onto the table. Her hand sweeps through them all, spreading the contents out along the wooden surface. He is breathless as she begins to put the objects into piles. The mechanical pencil immediately joins the left-hand pile, along with other new pens, some glue, and scissors.

He waits on that table, wondering about the piles—but then every thought leaves him as he feels her fingers close around his yellow body. She lifts him from the table—lifts him!—and finally, he is close to her again. A thrill ripples down to his long-dead eraser as her eyes dart over him, and she rolls him in her fingers.

He flashes back to the old days, the days when he was her everything. She held him like this in those days. Maybe this means he'll be everything to her again.

Her lips twitch, and he expects her to smile. Instead, those lips purse into a thin line. Her eyes harden.

She places him in the right-hand pile. Her hand descends again, this time to sweep the pile up. But she doesn't dump them into the pencil pouch. Instead, she turns.

His lead point breaks off as she throws him into the trash can, but it's his heart that truly shatters. Because he knows, then, that the Little Girl is gone. She has let him go, and there is no going back to her.



Tom Hessin Feature, written by Trey Poling, follows a man navigating through an artificial world, where everything around him feels almost fake and lifeless. The narrator is frustrated with the lack of creativity around him as he notices a fountain pen that has been carefully crafted and manufactured, soon after his perspectives change. This story involves themes of authenticity and the value of one's own creativity.



Tom Hessin Feature

by Trey Poling

The sun beats down on tired eyes.

On brown-burnt broken glass.

On cigarette ash, kicking below his feet. It was his last.

Rotten. This is no place for a prophet, much less a poet.

But he's not one to talk.

His pencil: lost. And he is too.

He wanders and curses.

Each store lies as he passes.

Fake purses. Fake watches. Fake dresses.

There were once decent people. Where have they gone?

Fake shoes. Fake belts. Fake wallets.

His clothes aren't any different.

Sickening. His hands clench.

Fake prices. Fake guarantees. Fake quality.

He peers into a window and recognizes a brand.

A child must've sewn those pants.

Do they have a family?

Will they ever?

An irritating light beams.

His retinas are burned. And he's furious.

He blindly runs, tripping over sidewalk cracks.

It's a broken car mirror. Dangling. Catching the sun.

And catching the image of a store.

A stationery store.

The man's shoulders fall, still staring at the reflection.

There rests the sight of craftsmanship. Of decency.

A fountain pen. Walnut wood barrel.

A gunmetal cap and steel nib.

Five stars engraved, and a floral decal.

Price: \$62

Nib sizes: XF, F, M

Custom engravings upon request.

Tom Hessin Revolution Collection Rustic Fountain Pen

\$62.00 (plus shipping and tax)



The Revolution Collection Rustic fountain pen takes the writer back to simpler times with its lightweight wood barrel, and metal detailing. Its precise construction pays homage to Tom Hessin's past and the legacy of Birmingham craftsmanship.

This pen includes gift packaging, an ink cartridge, and a converter. Custom engravings are available in a print and cursive script. Purchases of this pen include a two year warranty.

Includes:

- Gift box packaging
- Real walnut wood barrel with metal decorative detailings
- Clip engraved with legacy five-diamond design
- Pen card, ink cartridge, and converter
- PVD coated JoWo nib

About the nib:

The nib, designed by JoWo, and manufactured by Opus 88, is durable, stylish, and luxurious. Made of stainless steel, it is sturdy and corrosion resistant. The stunning gunmetal black was produced with PVD coating (Physical Vapor Deposition), guaranteeing the hardest coating available on market. The

floral decal is sure to surprise and delight. The nib is available in sizes extra fine, fine, and medium.

About Tom Hessin:

Tom Hessin is a name that spans generations and serves as a testament to the care of the family that's kept it alive. In 1870, Andrew Charles arrived in Birmingham, the heart of pen making at the time, and founded *T. Hessin & Co.* It was named after his grandmother's maiden name, but not a year later, a son was born to Charles and was named Thomas Hessin Charles. Thomas, raised in craftsmanship, would later inherit the company and modernize it through the changing world. Under the pressures of war time, their founding principles stayed true, and they continued to contribute knowing the importance of pens as tools of communication and expression. The spirit of Tom Hessin continued as the company passed from son to daughter and son again, finally ending in the hands of Charlie Stockbridge. The company has continued to modernize and adapt while exhibiting the craftsmanship which Andrew Charles created in the company's founding. The legacy spanning 150 years and five generations is honored by the five diamond motif appearing on pen caps today.



Pencil Watching People or Watching People as They Watch Me, written by Nya Hodge, follows a writer inside a coffee shop analyzing the people coming in and out. The author begins to document the people, writing on each and everyone's fleeting moments. They capture the art of human interaction, and connection. This story dives into themes of perspective and creativity, showcasing the relationship between the writer and the ones being written about.

Pencil Watching People *or* Watching People as They Watch Me

by Nya Hodge



There's this coffee shop on East and Third, where the baristas all speak pig-latin, and the consumers speak it too, and somehow they end up caffeinated and buzzing. I dropped my pencil there once. My good one; the pinnacle of technology. Nice quality lead, a roll-up eraser, my last name engraved on the side.

It felt good to drop a pencil in that coffee shop on East and Third, because it meant that you were writing, and if you were writing, then you were as close to God as you can get on Earth.

The downside to dropping your pencil is that your thoughts go with it. On the floor, puddling, causing the need for a wet-floor sign or a mop and a bucket. Both, probably, if the thought is slippery enough and the worker diligent enough. That's the danger of being a writer in view of others; what goes on when you go to the bathroom, if someone's eyes lace over your words before you can perfect them. Or if your thoughts slip out of your pencil and onto the red-glazy terracotta floor of the coffee shop on Easter and Third, how do you get them back? How do you dip the thoughts back onto paper?

I gave all of myself, in that coffee shop, to that pencil. My stories, my last name, my number, to the one barista who spoke something close to English; all of it came from the folds on the pink-interlocking folds of my brain through the conduit of that pencil, which at some point, fell on the ground.

And if a pencil can make you close to God, then dropping it is sacrilege.

I remember the raised eyebrows, the cashmere and cotton and polyester (This coffee shop crosses class boundaries, and thus the clothes cross from comfortable to performative.) sweaters all rustling in disgust. My pencil was clunky, kept in its own pouch, inside of my own purse. It clanged around on the terracotta tile floor of this new-aged coffee shop. But I lived for it. I was a writer with so much to say that my hands, my fingers shook with the weight of it.

How many people could say that?

I went back to writing, nonsense, really, the weather that day, whatever musings my mother had to say over the phone that morning, and the color of each and every person's sweater in the coffee shop. My eyes and ears, the paint, my pencil, the paint brush, my thick papered notebook, the canvas.

This coffee shop serves shitty espresso and worse lattes; burnt, too much milk, and no sugar-free flavor options, but the views are magnificent. My pencil and I know these people, we've fallen in front of these people and lived to write about it.

There's a woman who hates her husband; I know because she tells him so over the phone. I wrote about it. There's a girl in love with her best friend; I know because she dips her fingers into the other girl's hair and winds it around her finger like she's touching pure silk. I wrote about it. There's me; frizzy haired, perpetually surrounded by others, with graphite-stained fingers. To write about myself, however, is an injustice to the vivid color around me.

I know myself already. I know the worst parts, the bad parts, the middling parts that aren't quite offensive and not totally intolerable. I know the good parts, the best parts. That's all there is. There's no half-way point of my goodness, all those things lie in the middling parts of myself.

But that woman who hates her husband, that girl who is in love with her best friend, and me, and my pencil, we all watch each other. We lock eyes for a moment, and they watch my face contort into understanding and I write down something completely unrelated to what they're experiencing. But I want them to know that they're important enough to be written down. Their lives, so involved, and mystic to me, someone who doesn't know them, uses her pencil, the nice one, in the coffee shop, the one on East and Third, and takes note of them.

I come back like a vulture, or maybe a dove. No, a vulture. And I feast on these little moments of

people's lives. I wonder if they've got laptops, e-ink to remember *me* by, or real blue Bic pen notes about the way my hair curls against the wind and around my ears.

I hope so.

If anything, I hope everyone who flits by me remembers if I made them feel something, or if my pencil watching made them feel something.



Creative Nonfiction: Writing in Life

While the fiction stories in this collection invites the reader into the imagination of the writer, showcasing their creative interpretations and such, the Creative nonfiction section of this Ebook grounds storytelling in the reader's reality, exploring how our writing language and styles exist in everyday life. These nonfiction pieces showcase truth and narrative, showing how real moments explore different writing techniques and technologies.

Beyond the realm of writing, it has never been just about words on a page. It lives in the cyan Post-it tucked behind a picture frame, in the spray-painted panther prowling a city alley, in the worn spine of a notebook that has passed through too many pockets to count. The works collected here ask us to look closely at the spaces, objects, and moments that make writing possible — and at what it means to leave something of yourself behind.



For When You're Older- Aaron Wanko. This story is author Aaron Wenko's personal account lamenting his family's constant use of post-it notes. Wanko recalls how post-it notes were a common fixture in his early childhood. However, after tragedy strikes, Wanko deepens the meaning of post-it notes and what they symbolized to him in the wake of a family tragedy. Wanko's section particularly stands out in this genre because it masterfully uses its narrative to draw on the reader's emotions.

For When You're Older

by Aaron Wanko



I look for the Post-It behind the picture.

Sometimes my mom or dad would leave these little Post-its around our house. Little notes like *I love you* or *How's the weather?* You know, stupid little stuff like that. I always got annoyed with it, how my friends would always mention it when they came over. I'd immediately shut it down, sticking the little notes into crevices before my friends could see them, with fear that they would think that it's somehow embarrassing to have your parents be cute with each other.

My parents did this, in part, because of their conflicting work schedules. My dad had the early morning shift at a local bakery, where he would get up at 2 a.m., and come back to sleep around 10 in the morning. My mom, on the other hand, worked a typical 9-5 civic job for the city. I think this was their best way of staying in touch, especially in an age where we didn't have everyone at the call of a button.

Our family photos have this particular trait as well. If you peel off the little cardboard backs to the framed pictures on our walls or living room tables, you'll find a post-it note with a quote by somebody that day (like the 4th of July photo with a quote from my dad on the back: "No party quite like a

nationwide freedom party”). I remember at one point, my parents got rather fed up with me constantly taking down the Post-its, given that this was *their* thing, so they told me that I wasn’t allowed to mess with them.

“You can someday, though” I remember my dad telling me when he sat me down on a weekend afternoon. “How about I grab you some at the store when we go there next? That way, once you’re old enough you’ll have some on hand”

I was probably pretty fed up with him at that point, so I did what any self-respecting first grader would do and called him a butt. He laughs about it to this day, but I think that was just because it was one of his last happy memories before Mom passed.

During my second-grade year, the cyan-colored Post-it notes that had practically become her trademark were all but gone. My dad stopped leaving them around the house too, since mom was spending most of her time in the hospital anyways. By that point I had almost outgrown my rebellious streak, so I had started to become a trusted member of the post-it society, as my dad called it. It was really simple stuff, like him leaving me instructions on how to reheat dinner or asking me if I could take out the trash, but my favorite moments were the scavenger hunts.

I think he used them both as a way to distract himself and to keep me occupied. There was only so much fun that could be had on your own before turning on the TV became the most appealing option, but to his credit he really did try. He would stick little messages from Mom behind photo frames, things that said, *I hope your day went well, sweetness. Dad was telling me about your project for science, and it sounds like it’s going really well. I’m so proud of you*, all in shaky letters. I think she was worried about me seeing her, frail and skeletal, so I was never invited to go into her hospital room.

But one day, all that changed. I was busy trying to figure out how to spell the word *because* on a red post-it note that was an appeal to why we should buy ice cream at the store, when my dad suddenly rushed into the room, telling me with a wide-eyed look that we needed to get to the hospital right away.

We didn’t make it in time.

I don’t think I fully processed what was happening. As an elementary school age kid, the concept of death was rather foreign to me, but all I knew was that I was seeing dad a lot more, and mom much less. My dad stopped writing as many Post-its for me, since the advent of cell phones meant that we could communicate more easily from afar. I think that he just didn’t want to think about her all that much, though.

Time passed, and some wounds healed. My dad gifted me a small box of items for my tenth birthday, all of them being pictures of my mom and our family. He told me through watery eyes, “I

think you're old enough to have these now. These are pictures of mom from a while ago, and she— she wanted you to have them.”

I looked at the photos. As far as I could tell, these were just regular photos, not too dissimilar from those that remained up in our living room. I looked at him, confused but as I did he brought out a frame wrapped in cloth. “This was her favorite picture of us,” he said through a shaky breath. “And remember to look for the Post-it behind the picture”

As I carefully held the image, I saw the familiar smiles of my parents, beaming into the camera as they held a little baby me in their arms. At first, when I flipped it over, I was confused why there was a small stack of cyan Post-its, the color my mom always loved to use. Only once I read the topmost note did the tears finally start.

Written in shaky handwriting, it simply read, *For when you're older.*



Ruins as Technology: How Place Shapes Thought — Cayla Caldwell. Author Caya Caldwell examines how Guatemalan ruins are integral to preserving a society's past and identity. Caldwell further details how even new buildings/construction is built around ruins without damaging them, as a manner of respect in preserving Guatemalan history. The experience of stepping into these ancient ruins with friends is also recounted, giving the essay a more down-to-earth feeling.



Ruins as Technology: How Place Shapes Thought

by Cayla Caldwell

In Guatemala, the past is not something you visit. It is something you live alongside. Ruins appear where you least expect them, woven into homes, streets, and everyday spaces, as if they have always belonged there. They are treated with a kind of quiet reverence, not as artifacts to be removed or displayed, but as pieces of history that must remain in place. In fact, there is a law that, if you are building a house, restaurant, or any structure and you encounter ruins, you must build around them. It is prohibited to remove or alter the stones, preserving them as a constant reminder of the people who came before us and the lives they lived. I remember going to an event at one of my mom's friends' houses when I was younger, and she had glass floors with ruins underneath. It was surreal to see the past literally built into the present.

That same presence of the past extends beyond individual spaces and into the broader landscape of Guatemala. It is a country defined by culture, color, and history, where echoes of the past appear everywhere. Walking through town, you pass buildings that are hundreds of years old, woven seamlessly into everyday life. Much of this history traces back to the Maya, whose presence still shapes the country today. But even with all of that richness, there is something different about my favorite ruin site. It strips away the noise and the color. What remains is quiet, muted stone and the weight of history.

The ruins I love most sit right next to a busy road, surrounded by constant movement and noise. Cars pass, people go about their day, and the chicken buses (old school buses that have been spray painted and turned into public transportation) fly by, with ayudantes hanging out of the doors yelling their destination “¡Ciu Vieja! ¡Ciu Vieja!” so loudly and so often that you start to wonder how their voices even hold up. The noise feels constant. But the second you step into the ruins, it's all gone. You can no longer hear any of it. The air feels clean, like what I can only describe as watching my mother hang sheets out to dry in the summer. The sunlight feels warmer on your skin, and everything is so still that you begin to notice small details like birds flitting in and out of the openings in the stone, or the texture of the walls. It slows you down without asking you to.



I usually go with my friends, most of whom are Guatemalan. I say this because you must pay to get in; 5 Quetzales for locals and Q25 for tourists. Even though I grew up there from a young age, I did not look like most of the people around me, so I kept my head down and spoke only Spanish. There is something strange about feeling both like you belong and stand out at the same time. Once we are inside the ruins, though, that feeling fades. We are all just people in the same space, sitting in the same quiet. My friends and I are normally loud and constantly talking, but every time we go, we end up sitting in silence for a while. Not because we have to, but because the space invites it. It does not matter if you know the full history of the ruins. Being there makes you think about the past anyway. I find myself wondering what life was like when the buildings were complete, who walked through those spaces, and how different everything must have been. Sometimes I think about how many other young girls may have sat where I am sitting, taking in the same view at a completely different time.

This is where I began to realize that place itself can shape thought. Writing is often associated with tools like laptops, notebooks, or phones, but those tools are only part of the process. The environment we are in plays a role, as well. In the ruins, my thoughts slow down and become more reflective and observant. I notice things I would normally overlook, and I spend more time sitting with ideas instead of moving past them. Because writing comes directly from thought, this shift in thinking inevitably changes the way I write.

In contrast, when I write on my phone or laptop, my thoughts feel faster and more scattered. Notifications, distractions, and the pace of everyday life make it difficult to stay with a single idea for long. Writing becomes something to complete rather than something to experience. The ruins do the opposite. They remove distractions and create space for deeper thinking. In that sense, they function as a kind of writing technology, not as a tool you hold, but as a space that shapes the process itself. The ruins act as a kind of invisible writing technology, shaping not the tool itself, but the way thought forms before it becomes writing.

It was not until later that I learned the name of the ruins I kept returning to: Ruinas de la Recolección, “the Ruins of Recollection.

A perfectly fitting name for a perfect place. Recollection is the act of remembering, of gathering thoughts, of piecing together fragments of the past. If writing is the act of capturing thought, then recollection is where that thought begins. Without asking anything of you, the space slows your thinking and turns your attention inward, allowing ideas to surface in a way that feels natural rather than forced. In a place built on memory and preservation, writing becomes less about producing something new and more about noticing what is already there, waiting to be understood. The ruins do not give you words, but they change how those words come into being. In that sense, they are not just a place I go to write. They are a place that teaches me how.



Graffiti — Jack Pettit. Author Jack Petit in his piece, invites the reader to envision themselves as a rebellious graffiti artist. He imagines a graffiti artist in a bustling big city who adventurously looks to showcase his art. This piece stands out because it asks the reader to step in an imaginative world of sorts, and think of what their life would be as a somewhat mischievous figure.



Graffiti

by Jack Petit

A wall: built of brick and mortar creates a city of blank slates. A city of symmetrical brick organized in offset lines calls for greater disorder. Disorder that reflects the messy human condition on the walls that house that disorder.

Shake up the can. Listen to the metal ball rattle around the cylindrical sides, beating against their confines. Hear the spray of the paint from the nozzle onto the untouched red brick. Trace across the lines of your mind, blurring the straight lines of mortar bordering the brick. Impose disorder through the uneven sprayed paths of the can. Take a step back and admire your color and breathe in the fumes of expression. Small sprayed paths will create a greater image with time and noise. You can already see it on the wall, like a modern day cave painting, you can leave your mark. Invade eyes with your hunt, your struggle. The metal ball rattles, and the spray echoes off the walls, soon to be marked.

They're looking for him. His graffitied signature has saturated into the colors of the city and they can't stand seeing themselves in his dirty mirror. They can't stand seeing themselves in the wild colors of each passing train car. They can't stand seeing themselves in every dark alley and every abandoned tunnel. They can't stand and his sprayed paint does. His sprayed paint walks and stares through the dark spaces, the overlooked spaces of the conscious city. They sense his eyes and his colorful marks, clawed into the foundations and they grow increasingly uneasy. A sprayed panther of his making prowls in the city's crevices and they will lock him up for freeing it, if they knew who he is.

If they knew who he was, for he is now everywhere and nowhere. He is now the passing paint of the daily commute. The flash of color in an otherwise exceedingly dull path. The one that catches the eye. He has finally been seen. He has weaseled his way into the neural pathways of the cities and tainted memories with the reality of suffering. They can't ignore him now. They hear the rattle of your paint can amidst the noisy honks of traffic and the late night barks of chained dogs. They see his sprayed lines in the dark. He has tempted the public into the darkest alleys of the city and shown them a painted passage. A passage that is inherently dangerous to them. They who trapped him and you. They who keep him trapped by blocking out the sky with concrete pillars, they who inspire worship in their

advertisements, they who live outside of the confined city. He's forever creeping inside.

"Squash me," he pleads to the flashing blue and red light parade just outside your small apartment window. He's sitting in the dark, the blue and light flashes on his face. They aren't here for him, but there's a large part of him that wishes they were. There's a part of him that wants to be handcuffed and thrown in jail, behind real metal bars, just so the world can become a little more clear. "Find me and spray me with your best poison already. Just like a spider, swat me away. Crush me with your powerful black boot. I've already made my web. I've already spun my story."

I remember tagging a train just last week. A long train of vast metal cars sitting in the yard of tracks that you frequented often with a black hood draped over my cheekbones and dark sunglasses that I found abandoned off of Main Street. The train sat, extending its metal lengths into the dark horizon, waiting for a greater purpose than industry, waiting to become a canvas. I wanted to turn every train in this dull city into a great art exhibition riding along metal tracks into the sightlines of everyone but the art critics. After propelling up the 8-foot tall chain link fence with just my determination, I checked for cameras for the hundredth time. I never knew when they would replace them after I broke them with a rock last time. I climbed up on the tracks, simultaneously rattling my metal can, preparing to paint my masterpiece. Sadly, spray painting is often an art form that falls victim to a strict time constraint. This strict time constraint leaves room only for diligent sprays, with layering sprays often acting as both a background color and a contour. The limited time and space leaves the graffiti artist simultaneously present and incredibly absent. Each graffiti artist in this city (and there's not many of us) has to rely on a specific style and, usually, a select few colors. We definitely aren't rich enough to buy more than three or four cans of paint at a time (if we had money, I assume we could resort to a different artistic medium) and even if we could, it's hard to jump a fence and create quickly with seven cans of spray paint rattling around in your backpack.

I liked graffiti though and couldn't see myself doing anything else in my free time back in those days. I loved the anonymity, the darkness, the time constraint, the contrast between my color and the metal car, the contrast between my art and a business man's eye, the way my art weaved between grey skyscrapers and concrete. The way the colors flashed with the train's speed, the way the people absorbed my sprayed marks but didn't really see them like advertisements on side-of-the-highway billboards. I felt both fleeting and incredibly present, a presence that is far from curated or intended. I was the rattling rage of the people of the city. The people that go to work everyday, just to go back home to their run-down apartment building to try to catch some sleep in the smog. The people that use the honks of traffic as white noise, the people that feel uneasy walking through their own street's alleys. I wanted to create that uneasiness for the people that are too insulated to feel it, the people in the high-rise apartments looking over the business district, the people of the clouds. I wanted to tell them, "Welcome to the rain, the wet, the dry, the loud, the silent, the contours of the people embedded in the gravel, the people slinking through the crevices." I know they felt my yellow-slitted eyes in the dark of

the alleys because they'd seen my sprayed claw marks, scratched into the metal of movement.

Someone laid on the horn and I jolted from my artistic trance. I sprayed my graffitied signature and stepped back to admire my work in the dim light before pulling my hood tight and leaping back into the grey. Handcuffs soon followed but I, at least, got to sink my fangs in.



Tales of a Notebook — *Jocelyn Gale*. This piece examines the author's relationship with her notebook. Author Jocelyn Gail emphasizes in this piece things like the contents of her notebook and what the cover and pages look like. This chapter is on a much more personal level than the others in this section.

Tales of a Notebook

by Jocelyn Gale

My notebook is small, it slips into my back pocket, or gets lost completely in my tote. In its spine, I keep a robin-egg-blue mechanical pencil, with the pocket clip broken off, that I borrowed from my boyfriend on our first date. It's been two years, and somehow, there's still lead in there.

I revel in the longevity of my teeny tiny notebook. Of its lined pages, sometimes filled in neatly—others scrawled on from days when I felt like throwing caution to the wind. Games of hangman played in little corners next to soon-to-be published works and bus ride thoughts. On the way scribbles of words and doodles bleed onto the pages at their sides from months of being stuffed in the close quarters of pockets and bags and being passed from hand to hand.

No page is left blank in my notebook, so I just cram words in illegible spaces between year-old self portraits and grocery lists. Its cover is cardboard brown, with deep green screen prints of beavers and ducklings on a lake that stretches from the front cover to the back—and I am not ready to part with the ecosystem. The holes that the spine threads through have eroded to slip the cover and pages without catching, and the weathered edges are smooth from hitting against my digital camera, dog eared lit mag, and smushed granola bar.

When my hands need to be busy, I find a spot and write what I see in my little notebook. Old man eating yogurt and drinking a cappuccino, same shoes as my dad. Two college girls, laughing. A woman with her feet up on the chair in front of her, wearing flats. I read memories of a cafe, my dentist's waiting room, and the DMV. Of strangers who had cool pants and ringlet curls. Of nosy thoughts about surrounding conversations.

I follow patterns of penciled ants crawling between cursive and print, watching as they circle the dotted pathways of the ladybugs and dragonflies in the margins. I read my attempt to try long division, unsolved and sporadic. I read grocery lists meant to fit certain diets, unfollowed and sad. I read communications with my brother, unanswered and wrinkled in tears. Little beetles hug the words.

I hold it in my hands, swirling it in them, feeling the grains of recycled paper in its cover and the smooth spirals of the binding flip across my palms. I run my finger over my eyebrow, feeling the hair follicles in their unruly growth and the slick enamel of my crooked front teeth. They all feel the same. I scrunch letters in the white space between one story and the other, telling my notebook it looks just like me.

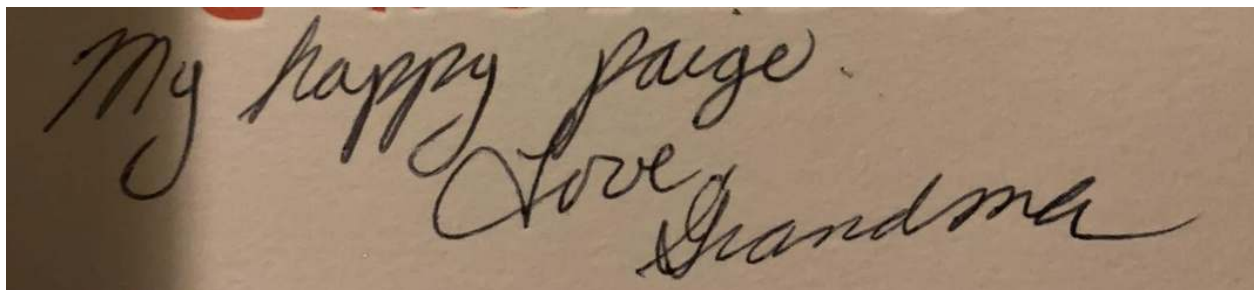


Ink That Remains: What We Keep When We Let Go — Paige Auxier. Author Paige Auxier explores her personal experiences with handwritten notes. Auxier argues that handwritten notes/letters carry a unique value in today's digital age since they are a rarity in terms of use compared to electronic forms of communication. By exchanging handwritten letters, two individuals can add more depth to their connection.

Ink That Remains: What We Keep When We Let Go

by Paige Auxier

I get a sudden, incessant urge to organize my bedroom once every handful of months. I keep a fairly organized space and pride myself on my capacity to efficiently, and maybe impulsively, part with objects that serve me no direct purpose. I'm sure, if I thought long enough about when, where, and from whom I received an item, I could easily attach arbitrary significance to it and indulge in the passing pleasure of reminiscing on pleasant days gone by as I gaze upon it before inevitably returning it to its more permanent state of uselessness. However, in the vast majority of instances, I choose to instead enjoy the more long-term satisfaction I derive from maintaining an organized space by tossing it out. This, however, doesn't extend to all items or objects, which is a fact I'm reminded of each time I act on my urge to organize. I have never once, while sitting on my bedroom floor surrounded by piles of trash, bags of donations, and yet to be sorted contents of my wardrobe, considered parting with any of the handwritten cards I've received and collected from friends and loved ones throughout the years that sit in a towering stack on the top shelf of my closet.



In one past episode of room reorganization, I momentarily paused my tidying to sift through the contents of my card collection and momentarily indulged in reading over the sweet messages written in them. While doing this, I came across a card penned by my late grandmother. At the time, the wound of her passing was much fresher, and upon staring at the short note, "Merry Christmas, my happy girl," I felt a bittersweet knot of emotion form in the back of my throat. The message itself lacked any significant depth, mostly due to it being so short; her handwriting, however, struck me heavily, as I realized just how much it symbolically represented her as an individual. Her twirly lettering was as

delicate, feminine, and timelessly elegant as she was, and the sight of it brought forth recollections of hydrangeas blooming in her garden, the soft blue fabric of her nightgown, the sweet chime of her charmed bracelets, the taste of her homemade chocolate chip cookies, and the crescendo of her voice alongside her piano. Through this, I was enlightened to the fact that the appearance of one's handwriting can often serve as an extension of who they are. Like a secret code or message, analysis of an individual's penmanship can provide insight into what they're like. My father, for example, has a small, stiff, and neatly compacted style of lettering, a representative of his practical, efficient, and organized nature. While my mother, on the other hand, writes with much larger letters that swirl haphazardly across the surfaces they're etched into with inexplicable capitalizations, which could signal that her personality is bold, unique, and unpredictable.

From this, I began to realize that there are benefits to hand-written notes and letters that can't be derived from other mediums of communication. And my cherishing of cards was proof that I had, for a long time, inadvertently valued said affordances without ever having consciously recognized them. Failure to recognize and appreciate the virtues of writing and receiving handwritten notes, however, is a large part of what has led to the art being lost amid the recent advancements in technology that accommodate rapid and effortless communication.

One special quality of hand-written notes is their tactility. The grooves left in paper by pens form mountains and valleys of meaning for their readers. There's also, as I mentioned earlier, much that can be discovered from the characteristic curve of a person's penmanship. For within each arch, swirl, and slant of a letter is something to be gathered about the person who wrote it. Handwriting is as inconsistent, unpredictable, and imperfect as the people, relationships, and emotions dictating its contents and composition. Words are bound to be misplaced, misspelled, and crossed out, which in turn makes hand-written messages feel more authentically human. In giving a letter, an individual is granting someone else access to their inner thoughts and feelings towards them. By tacking a stamp onto the corner of an envelope one is saying, "These are my thoughts, they're yours to keep, do with them what you will, shove them in shoe boxes, toss them in wastebaskets, hide them between the pages of your books, let them collect dust in hidden corners, or place them upon your desk and permit them to stare back at you day in and day out as a physical reminder of me and of what I've said, what I think, and how I feel for you." The feelings one writes about will all inevitably pass, the paper they're etched into might wrinkle, and the ink they're written in may eventually fade; however, the sentiment is eternal so long as it exists physically.

The process of writing and sending a letter adds greater depth to a person's message, too, requiring both intentionality and patience. To send a letter, one must first deliberate over what they wish to say, determine how they wish to say it, perhaps by writing and rewriting several drafts, figure out where and how to send it, and lastly, endure the grueling waiting period between sending it off and receiving a response. Abandoning the ease of instant communication causes a heightened sense of

vulnerability; so when sending a letter, one is not only sharing a message but also notifying its recipient that they cared enough to face discomfort for the sake of sending the sentiment.

All things in life are fleeting, experiences end, feelings are impermanent, and relationships change. In a lifetime, one experiences so much, and amid all there is to do, see, and worry about, a lot is bound to get lost in translation. So, upon reminiscing on experiences, it's no wonder that we often end up revising or rewriting our personal histories so that they follow more favorable narratives. In time, we inevitably grow out of touch with feelings we once felt, and tell ourselves inaccurate stories that might eventually wind up vanishing from our recollections altogether. So, in instances where one feels a certain way for another and shares that sentiment through a handwritten letter, they're in turn making their feelings permanent, ink can't be revised or erased. By sending a letter, we not only submit to sharing our feelings with someone else but to doing so in a manner that's eternal and undeniable. In this way, hand-written letters function similarly to photographs, creating snapshots of who their composers were when they wrote it.

Composing an honest letter to someone else also requires you to at least partially embrace the mess that it is to feel, for emotions are in and of themselves dynamic and volatile, bleeding into one another and branding your heart like ink printed on a page. The medium itself doesn't readily accommodate quick revisions either, you're given no access to backspaces or autocorrect. So, by sending a letter you're allowing a messy part of you to exist elsewhere in the hands of someone else who can eternally keep and refer back to it.

I wonder too if hand-written letters now mean more than they once did, as they're no longer the standard for long-distance communication. Perhaps we've grown so accustomed to the emotionless nature of digitalized, always accessible, and instantaneous correspondence that we've forgotten how much it can mean to send a message to someone else. So, by rediscovering the art of letter writing, can we, in turn, add more depth to our connections, learn to embrace the mess that it is to feel, rediscover how to productively ruminate on our feelings, and grow more emotionally stable and intelligent by taking the time to consider and articulate our thoughts independently without backspaces, autocorrect, or AI-generated suggestions? Perhaps I'm giving letters too much credit or disregarding how the experience of writing or receiving a handwritten note may be of great value to some and of less to others. Regardless, though, it's a kind gesture that we've undoubtedly lost touch with over time. So, if you have someone you yearn to share a heartfelt sentiment with, consider sending it in a letter.



Journal Documentary 2017–Present — Anna Blasinski. Author Anna Blasinski details her various journals she has written in throughout the course of her life. The events covered in each respective journal range from Blasinski's experiences in Middle School to her life ever since high school graduation. Each journal also differentiates from one another in terms of artistic style and different types of pages/covers.

Journal Documentary 2017-Present

by Anna Blasinski



JOURNAL ONE: 2017- 2018

Origin: Gifted to me by Emerson – who else? She was my only friend who loved writing just as much as I did. We spent fourth grade inventing poetry, short stories, and even inspirational quotes (which were just as cheesy as you'd imagine).

Style: This journal featured a cover with two hot air balloons, one blue and one pink, floating over

gold hearts on brown cardboard. The cardboard later became torn and ragged, barely hanging on to its gold wire spiral. That's how much I wrote in it, using the pens Emerson also gifted me. PaperMate InkJoy gel pens, to be exact. They came in a pack of three — one purple, one pink, and one green. With each poem, I alternated colors. For some reason, I centered the poems on the lined paper instead of starting from the left margin. Sometimes, I would try to write in cursive. So, yes. It looked pretty messed up.

Substance: Almost unbearable to talk about or even think of. I get whiplash when/if I dare to look back on it. There will be a poem about spring, followed by a poem from the point of view of a random book character, followed by a poem about some boy I had a crush on. Never let a fifth grader write poetry. However, I do admit I could stand to regain some of her unabashed confidence.

JOURNAL TWO: 2018 - 2020

Origin: Unknown. It could have been a gift, or something I picked out myself. Either way, I don't think I used my own money on it. Sixth graders don't have money

Style: Thus began my love story with stationery from Peter Pauper Press. Their journals are the perfect size. The pages are lined and rounded. The endpapers are brightly colored. This particular cover was cream, with beige and blue flowers growing from the bottom. I still used my purple, pink, and green pens, although I finally wrote starting at the left margin like a normal person.

Substance: Imagine middle school, and what it was like for you. Now imagine somebody trying to make metaphors out of it. And there you have Journal Two. It is comforting, however, to see my personality become ever so slightly less mortifying by the end. Maybe I should be kinder. It was middle school, after all.

JOURNAL THREE: 2020 - 2021

Origin: I know I picked this one out. I think it was purchased using some birthday money, or a check from Christmas. I went to Barnes and Noble, and scoured the tall, dark, pre-renovation shelves until this journal caught my eye.

Style: The eggshell-white cover stood out to me, and the coral-and-chartreuse birds flying across it. Peter Pauper Press again, because we are in a committed relationship. The same pens, too, although towards the end of this journal, I had to buy new ones.

Substance: This one comes the closest to achieving a comprehensive narrative (not that I'm trying to create a comprehensive narrative of my own random life experiences). It began immediately with a

death, then a pandemic, and spanned until I returned to school in person. I started to use poetry more as a diary than a way to make art. No more poems about nature, really — just my thoughts on a year of high school spent alone in my room.

JOURNAL FOUR: 2021 - 2023

Origin: Purchased online over the summer, off of the Peter Pauper Press website, which I was elated to discover. I wanted to move away from the light, creamy colors with this one. I was entering high school in person now, and I could do with something more mature. Which, yes, is an admittedly cringeworthy way of thinking, but I specifically remember the thought crossing my mind.

Style: That's how I ended up with a navy blue journal, covered in purple flowers and stars like a garden at midnight. I don't know if the silver celestial decals could be called mature, but it was a change, and I was ready for a change. I ran out of ink again, although this time, I didn't have to buy more. A friend had gifted me a rainbow set of PaperMate InkJoy gel pens, including purple, green, and pink.

Substance: A normal, conscious, self-aware person wrote this one, which is refreshing to see (picture that as a blurb on a book jacket). Sure, it's obvious that I was freaked out about a lot of things — homework, friendships, looming college applications. But I was also seventeen and having a good time, so it was more than just misery.

JOURNAL FIVE: 2023 - PRESENT

Origin: Purchased off of the Peter Pauper Press website again, because why go to Barnes and Noble when they renovated the store to look like a minimalist millennial hellscape?

Style: Muted cornflower blue with gold butterflies and white flowers. Perhaps my favorite design yet. My pens are almost out of ink, but I don't think they sell the colors as a set anymore. The worst is the green pen. It clearly still has ink left, but I can never make it give me more than a few sentences before it peters out into dry, green-tinted scratches onto the page.

Substance: I've had this journal for the longest amount of time, because I don't write as much anymore. Somehow, it feels like so much effort to make my thoughts into something worth writing down. But this means that each entry is more calculated, more developed, more interesting. This journal has seen me through high school graduation, the dawn and demise of relationships, and two years of college. The chunk of remaining blank pages is getting thinner. I'm almost done.

CONCLUSION

Let me read your mind —

But Anna! Who cares? Who cares about the colors of your journal covers and your favorite brand of pens and how your handwriting changes? Who cares that you used to write poems about spring and now you just kinda write about your life? That's what everyone does! That's what a journal is!

Fair points. I guess what I'm trying to say is that I think it's at least a little interesting to have documentation of how your mind has changed, shifting through shades of purple, pink, and green. I've always been the kind of person who writes everything down. So why not write this? Why not write down the evolution? Because I've learned something from what has changed and what has stayed the same. Whether my poems started at the center of the page or the margin, whether my handwriting was legible or not, whether I was writing about homecoming dresses or death, I have always told myself the truth.



The Temporary Masterpiece — Maddie Kaltenmark. This piece by Author Maddie Kaltenmark invites the reader to recall childhood memories drawing with chalk. Kaltenmark suggests that traditional, handwritten activities like drawing with chalk still have an important place in society, arguing that an increased reliance on technology has contributed to greater laziness. Kaltenmark urges readers to put down their phones, get their hands dirty, and engage meaningfully with the world while they can.

The Temporary Masterpiece

by Maddie Kaltenmark

Every sunny afternoon in the neighborhood is a good one when you have the almost endless color wheel on your chalk sticks. Inviting others to join in on your driveway after making it past your elaborate obstacle courses and hopscotch. Letting them pick which color they want to write their name in, one of the few things you know how to spell at the elementary age. Before long, the tan pavement becomes an almost serial killer-like work of art. With a mix of scribbled lines and weird little doodles splattered all over the pavement. But there is something notable about putting your name down for all to see. Making it known to others that you aren't just another person, you're Luke, Bree, or Joe. Someone who has marked the world, if only for a moment before the colored dust gets washed away. Chalk is similar to life in that way, your mark on whatever you touch only lasts so long before blurring with the others who've come before.



As a kid, you're not comprehending this thought. All you care about is how pretty your handwriting is and if the color purple suits your name. Plus, getting either parent to see your

masterpiece. Yet the simple movement can inspire the brightest kids to go off and be the most creative people you'll ever meet. Though not everyone. Some doodle with their chalk sticks while others watch, not bothering to pick up the messy writing tool alone. Picking up the chalk when you're by your lonesome is when it makes the biggest impact, because there is no one around to ask when you get stuck on what to draw next, or to help you when your dog begins to look like a horse. You make mistakes that, in the moment, only you can fix. It's a critical point in childhood. How can I get unstuck without help? Many will fail and give up, but the ones who stick it out are the people you will want by your side when things fall apart. It's unfair to say that these kinds of people never give up. Because they do...all the time. They're just the ones to "get back on the horse" and try again.

In this day and age, something similar happens later in life. These creative kids go through each stage of schooling, pushing themselves to make it into the college that will give them the best opportunities for a job and stable future. But along the way, most will burn out and start taking shortcuts. Using generative AI to complete simple homework assignments or going into midterms blind because they got too drunk the night before. These are your future doctors, lawyers, and politicians who used to be bright kids now crippled by their addiction to taking the easy way out. This shift in mindset can be seen in young kids as well, with many parents giving tablets and phones out to their children too early. Where they rot their brains on YouTube and online games like Roblox. Losing the feeling of getting their hands dirty, whether it's from falling off their bike or writing their name with chalk.

This is not to say that technology should go away completely because it does have its pros. But it's all very new and already heavily ingrained in our society. Staring down at a screen all day makes it hard to feel connected with one's peers and surrounding landscape. No wonder many mental health specialists say to do something physical with your hands to ground yourself, like a craft or workout. "Some recent studies have found people report a higher level of vitality, enthusiasm, pleasure and self-esteem, and a lower level of tension, depression and fatigue, after they have walked outside" (Better Health). Connecting is what humans are made to do. We're social creatures for a reason. Because otherwise, the world is vast, and gets lonely really quickly. Why else do little kids say "hello" to strangers while walking down the street? They are the foundation of what we as a species are meant to be, social without fear. Social without judgement.

Many of you might remember running around your street, knocking on front doors, trying to find anyone to play with. Whether you've known them for years or just met them that day on the bus. All you wanted was companionship on your adventures. While you try to touch the sky with your toes on the swing, or defend against pirates invading your playset. Where's the fun in having to be alone with one's thoughts? So go out and doodle with your chalk sticks. Life is messy. At least with this writing tool, though, you get to choose how messy you want to get.



Humans write for several reasons, one of which is to be remembered. If only for a moment. Take chalk on the pavement of your childhood driveway or sidewalk for instance. Although the art is temporary, the creativity and motor skills that come from the summer activity are immense. Opening up the endless possibilities that AI and iPads are taking away from our kids and ourselves. The chance to be imaginative without a digital parasite dragging you down. It's a hard thing to come by these days, even if you forgo tech. It's so ingrained in our society that it almost becomes a part of everyone's personality. Some even become shells of who they could be, if only they put down the phone and ChatGPT to look people in the eye to see their true intentions and gain knowledge about the world around them.

This disconnection makes it hard to be real with anyone, as you're not sure if they're being 100% real themselves. Given how disconnected we've become, we might want to try to connect with the ground and the place we inhabit. I know there is a saying, among other brain rot, that says "I need to go touch some grass". But there is truth to the statement. Why would we care about cleaning the house when we can watch puppy videos for two hours instead. It's still gonna look and feel awful but, hey, you giggled for two hours straight.

Technology can be helpful, but don't allow it to take over your whole life. Not when there are literal mountains and rainforests that could be explored. Enjoy the little things and make each worthwhile because we won't be on this earth forever. So go sit in your driveway one night after dinner and get your hands messy while brainstorming your next writing project. Because, like the chalk and the Christian saying, "remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return."



Thought to Text—Kennedy Monroe. Kennedy Monroe explains in this section the process of formulating thoughts into written text. Monroe describes scenarios like her imagining a word in her head, and then subsequently writing/typing that word out. She also talks about feelings and doubts about diction and word choice. This section can be very relatable to any writer.



“Thought to Text”

by Kennedy Monroe

I used to write slowly, like each word had to be carefully caught and held before it disappeared from my mind.

I would sit with a pen or stare at a screen, waiting and hoping for the right sentence to arrive at the right moment.

Sometimes it came together clearly, but most times it didn't and I was left trying to piece it back together.

My thoughts always seemed to move faster than my hands, and I could feel ideas slipping away before I could fully hold onto them.

I would forget what I meant halfway through a sentence or change it because it no longer sounded the way I intended.

Writing felt like chasing something I could almost reach but never fully keep in my grasp.

Then everything changed when I started using my brain to text, a small device resting against my head that worked quietly and almost invisibly.

It did not write for me or think for me, it simply listened in a way that felt completely new.

Not to my voice or anything I could hear, but to something deeper where words begin before they become sound or action.

Now I can sit completely still and the words come as quickly as I think without any delay or interruption.

There is no pen to pick up, no keyboard to type on, and no physical movement required to get the words out.

Just thought turning directly into language at the exact moment it forms in my mind.

A sentence appears fully written the moment I think it, followed immediately by another and then another without pause.

Nothing feels lost anymore because every idea, every fragment, and every half formed thought finds its way onto

the page.

It feels powerful in a way I had never experienced before, like I have finally closed the gap between who I am and what I can say.

It feels like I am no longer translating my thoughts into words but simply existing and letting those thoughts be seen as they are.

But even with that power, something begins to feel different in a way I cannot ignore.

I do not stop anymore to think about what I am saying or take time to sit with a sentence and question it.

I do not rewrite or rethink my words because they arrive already formed and ready to exist. The device does not hesitate, and because of that, neither do I.

I start to wonder if this way of writing is actually better or if something important is being lost along the way.

I think about how writing without effort might also mean writing without the same level of care or intention.

I remember how it used to feel to struggle through a paragraph and finally get it right after multiple attempts.

I remember the satisfaction of finding the exact word that perfectly matched what I was trying to say.

Now every word feels certain, even in moments when I am not completely sure of what I mean.

There is no space between thinking and writing anymore, and I begin to wonder if that space used to matter more than I realized.

Maybe that space was where meaning lived, in the pause, in the doubt, and in the moment when I had to decide what I truly wanted to say.

Now everything happens immediately, and my thoughts appear before I can question them, change them, or even fully understand them.

And that leads me to wonder if these words are really mine if I never had to shape them or actively choose them.

If they simply arrive through a device that recognizes when I am thinking, what does that say about the writing itself.

I keep writing because I can, because it is easy, and because there is nothing stopping me from continuing.

The page fills faster than it ever has before, becoming a complete record of everything happening inside my mind.

It is unfiltered, unpaused, and uninterrupted in a way that feels both freeing and overwhelming at the same time.

But even with all of that, I start to miss the slowness that used to be a part of writing.

I miss the quiet moments when I had to sit with myself and take the time to figure out what I actually meant.

I miss the mistakes, the unfinished sentences, and the messy pages that showed evidence of my thinking process.

Now the page is always full and complete, but I am not sure if it feels the same as it once did.

When I read back what I have written, it sounds like me, but also like a version of me that feels unfamiliar.

It feels like a version of me that never hesitates, never doubts, and never changes direction once a thought begins.

The brain to text device continues to listen without judgment, without questioning, and without ever asking me to slow down.

And maybe that is where the problem begins, because writing used to ask something of me in return.

It used to require me to slow down, to choose my words carefully, to revise, and to truly understand what I wanted to say.

Now it only asks me to think, and even that feels different when every thought becomes permanent the moment it exists.

I begin to wonder if I should turn it off, even if it is only for a moment.

Just to feel the silence again between idea and expression and to remember what that distance felt like.

Just to experience what it was like to reach for words instead of having them instantly arrive without effort.

Maybe writing was never just about capturing thought as quickly as possible, but about taking the time to shape it into something meaningful.

Maybe it was about becoming someone who could say exactly what they meant through effort and intention.

And maybe in this new way of writing, where everything is immediate and effortless

I am still learning what it truly means to mean something at all.



Essays and Nonfiction: Exploring Writing Technologies

Following after the Creative Nonfiction pieces in our collection are our essays. Still focused on writing, they cover a broad range of topics, but many deal with prospects of advancing technology and the history of writing itself. They ponder what writing itself may look like far in the future, while others show how writing has evolved and changed.



Our first essay was written by Charley Babb, titled “*Longevity and Tradeoffs in Writing Technology*”, it covers how writing technology has grown and evolved through millennia, from the hieroglyphics to modern digital technology, with a focus on how the limitations of mediums influenced writing itself.



Longevity and Tradeoffs in Writing Technology

by Charley Babb

I've always found it fascinating how long different writing techniques and technologies can last. Both in usage, but also physically, it's always been fascinating to think about how long the written word can last.

It's changed over the thousands of years that humans have been writing, but it's always been a concern for writers. In the earliest days of human literacy, writing was exclusive. It was the realm of skilled craftspeople, working on the order of kings and pharaohs. Early writing was expensive, time consuming, and difficult. Cuneiform tablets had to be pressed from clay, inscribed with the language and words they were to carry, and then fired in kilns to set them into the shape.

The ancient Egyptians had to carve their hieroglyphs into literal stone. The process was even more difficult, both due to the complexities of learning the language, and the physical materials themselves.

The Egyptians did have their hieratic script, a much less well known writing system derived from the hieroglyphs. While the hieroglyphs were primarily used for religious purposes, carved into tombs and monuments, the hieratic script was used for more bureaucratic purposes. It was the language of scribes more than pharaohs, but much less survived. Easier to write with, using ink on papyrus, subsequently much less of the script has survived to the modern day. Ease of use traded durability.

That trade off never faded. In medieval Europe, paper only became available in the late 1400s (depending on country), and without a local substitute such as papyrus, scholars and writers had to find a different solution. Parchment, the prime writing tech, was made of special treated animal skin. It had to go through days of preparation, in order to even prepare a single animal's hide for use. Books could take dozens of pelts, fundamentally limiting the number of works that could be produced and recorded. There was a hard limit on the amount of parchment that could be produced. Parchment could last a long time, well kept examples from the medieval period still exist after all, but it forced choices. Many works were lost, the scholars and monks tasked with upkeep and updating them unable to copy the originals down before they were destroyed.

Paper changed things. Made of fibers, primarily from trees, it was substantially easier to produce. With the nearly consecutive development of the printing press, paper allowed thousands more books to be produced, for significantly cheaper and much easier. Books and writing quickly became much more than they had been in previous centuries. Books were no longer such intensive pieces of art, monuments to thousands of hours of labor, they could afford being used on things beyond the most sacred and important works. Proper literacy took

decades longer, but with paper and the printing press, the written word could actually make its way into the mainstream.

The technology behind printing has progressed further, but hasn't changed a lot in the fundamental ways. We're still printing works on paper, just doing it at a scale that would blow the minds of the early adopters of the printing press. With the rise of archival, acid free, paper, it's easier for works to last longer too.

But of course the biggest change in the world of writing is the advent of digitization. Now, books can be scanned and preserved digitally. It gives them a theoretically infinite life, although one much more practically limited. In fact, digital preservation may even be substantially less long lasting than physical archival copies. While something physical is subject to physical threats, it can also be preserved with care and effort. A digital copy isn't liable to the same type of physical threat, but it has a whole new set of issues. Data corruption is the prime one, errors and glitches adding up to render a file inoperable. But there is also no guarantee of comparability. Digital introduces the issue of whether upgrades will make past works unusable, or if the software gradually becomes more and more obsolete, with no path to recovery. Digital allows a work to be saved, theoretically, nearly infinitely, while allowing anyone who wants to make their own easy access. It's a revolution, but revolutions do always have consequences.

It's fascinating how the physical limits of the technology used to write has changed what has been written, and how the lifespan of these mediums changed with the times. Writing has not always been as accessible as it is today.



The next essay covers a similar topic, written Kerigan Moore and titled “*Writing: A Technology*”, it focuses on the earliest periods of human literacy, pondering how those ancient scholars thought and dreamed, how writing turned into the technology of thought itself.

Writing: A Technology

by Kerigan Moore

At the Iraq Museum in Baghdad, across from the diagram explaining the process and benefits of oil fracking, there is an exhibit with only two items. One item is an ancient votive statue used in the earliest forms of anthropomorphic religions, with roots stemming from the Persian plateau. The other item is, by contrast, less visually interesting; sitting on the black display block is a cracking, molded slab of clay, no larger than the palm of a hand.

Daily, hundreds of people approach the glass which houses this small lump of soil material, brown and frail and dried with time. These visitors peer beyond the glass and analyze the seemingly arbitrary bumps, divots and slices embedded in the clay’s surface, as if the piece has been pressed into aggregate; leftovers from sitting pressed against an uneven ground. How unassuming, they think. Why does the hunk of bumpy mud sit isolated in the display, offering a place of importance among artifacts made of gold and pearl?

Many scholars believe that the unnamed clay tablet is one of the first pieces of one of the earliest forms of writing: cuneiform. The tablet records the amount of beer and grain being given to someone, for something in return; like an ancient receipt. On the tablet, there are five wedge-shaped indentations placed next to a pictograph of an upright jar with a pointed base, meaning five units of beer. Seven wedge-shaped indentations are next to a pictograph of a bowl tipped towards a schematic human head, equaling seven units, plus the sign for “to eat,” or grain.

Fascinating, the guests of the Iraq Museum decide, after having read the paragraph description accompanying the tablet. How cool is that? So cool!—and, perhaps, a little disappointing. Ashamed at their own private reactions, they skitter away to oil fracking, thoughts occupied.

What were the earliest humans doing, recording the sale of beer? Where are the deep contemplations on human life and civilization? Where are waxes on the universal truths that transcend time? Our ancestors are supposed to be wise; old things are meant to inform.

The earliest forms of writing can be traced back to 3400 BCE. For those who don’t feel like doing math, that’s 5,400 years ago. That’s equivalent to two cycles of the entire history of ancient Egypt, the

longest lasting civilization (about 3,000 continuous years), or twenty one lengths of the United States. Incomprehensible numbers, and yet, if one subscribes to the belief that humans appeared in Africa 300,000 years ago, writing is relatively late to the game. If all of human history was a single, twenty-four hour day, writing was invented at 11:00 P.M.

At 11:01 PM, or a thousand years later, humans get writing artifacts a little more satisfying to our existential sensibilities: *The Epic of Gilgamesh* in Mesopotamia, and *The Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor* in Egypt. These stories help humans explain themselves, and are vital to identity and civilization building. Egypt would later strike again with *The Book of the Dead*, and ancient Iraq would produce the *Code of Urukagina*. The “complaint tablet to Ea-nāšir,” a clay tablet written in Akkadian cuneiform, is the first recorded customer complaint. Hammurabi created his famed Code a few years later, contemporaries with the elders in the Shang Dynasty inscribing prayers onto oracle bones. Once humans start writing, they’re addicts. Inevitable, of course, writing was always meant to be—right?

Hundreds of years later, around the time the paranoid Essenes are huddled away in their coastal Dead Sea caves, fixedly scribbling on scrolls, Socrates, one of the foundational thinkers of Western thought, has had enough of this writing thing. Plato, his most notorious student, records Socrates’ famous critique in his dialogue *Phaedrus*:

[Writing] is an aid not to memory, but to reminiscence, and you give your disciples not truth, but only the semblance of truth; they will be hearers of many things and will have learned nothing; they will appear to be omniscient and will generally know nothing; they will be tiresome company, having the show of wisdom without the reality.

Socrates believed that writing was too finite, too fastened. The famous debater imagined that once an idea was written down, the idea held too much authority; how could the belief be challenged, and later changed, if needed? People who write will become forgetful, he argued, relying on external sources to conduct basic recall and thinking. Writing will allow people to become “hearers of many things” and critical learners of none. Socrates believed that writing was dangerous to authenticity, to genuine knowledge. The person detailing the sale of five units of beer and seven units of grain is missing out on a chance to flex their cerebellum. Plato, by writing down his teacher’s lectures, boxes in the dynamic, flexible nature of belief.

New technologies have always been intimidating; old sentiments will ultimately be exchanged for efficiency. The advent of the lightning-fast railroad killed the contemplative, reflective, beautiful trot across the countryside. Why linger and meditate over a textile when a factory can produce five times what a weaver can? No one wants to write letters, penning every word laboriously, thoughtfully; they want to call. There’s no reason to feel the water rock under your feet when you can fly much quicker in the clouds.

Nicholas Carr, an American journalist, author, and political thinker, believes that “Socrates was right.” His 2010 book *The Shallows* posits that the Internet now does what Socrates feared writing would do back in 400 BCE. Whether or not growth and innovation is always advantageous is a tricky, long-contended topic, and perhaps a tad uninteresting in the age of perpetual metamorphosis.

The pivotal point comes when humans get to wonder what is worth forgetting, rather than what is worth learning. What do we throw away, in order to make more room?

Socrates was arguing in a time when writing was exclusively for the elite; 95% of the population was otherwise illiterate. Perhaps writing has made humans too certain in their own belief—but writing enacts agency, identity, and ideology that transforms and connects on a much larger scale. Maybe such connection and mobility is worth letting the cerebellum, our memory, rest every once in a while.

Every time one thinks, growth happens—but to have enough room for such growth, one must discard old ways of thought. Writing, as a technology, offloads the mental load of remembering every detail, allowing for increased exploration, sharing, and cross referencing; indeed, humans are “hearers of many things.” As a species, we are constantly seeking stimulus, and thirsting for more knowledge. The visitors to the Iraq Museum in Baghdad wander away from the clay tablet, perhaps completely indifferent, perhaps disappointed at the lack of groundbreaking antiquated wisdom—and yet, they are active witnesses to the process of discarding, and, in turn, to growing. A blunted reed wedged indecipherably into a block of soil is one of the most significant inventions of human history: writing, the technology of thought.



Bridging the gap from the ancient past to the distant future is Kenneth Dougherty's "*A Glimpse at the Future*". It focuses on what potential future writing technology could look like, from brain computer interfaces and AI influenced transcriptions.



A Glimpse at the Future

by Kenneth Dougherty

Introduction

In the past decade alone, the advances in technology in writing have been numerous. In the first five thousand years since humans began writing, progress was limited, and not entirely awe-inspiring. We began with singular symbols and icons, carved with our fingers or smaller implements into soft materials. We began to use alphabets next, creating small systems of letters to formalize the process of putting words to a physical form. Primitive paper, pens, and books came next, and soon exploded into mass-produced newspapers and letters. The digital era topped everything off, turning writing from a physical ordeal (who would want to write thousands of pages by hand?) into something almost as easy as talking

The timeline of these advancements is a unique thing to look at. Hundreds of years spanned between each minor advancement, up until a few centuries ago. After the introduction of more modern writing implements and machines, it seemed that writing was reaching the pinnacle of its development; the physical act of writing is now a scarce fraction of all writing that occurs. A writer can have their work seen by hundreds or thousands with far less effort on their part. For all the work and stress that writing is, modern writing is easy compared to the eras before it.

For timeline purposes, I would say that the "modern" act of writing ended about a decade ago. People could type away on laptops in secluded environments, in bustling coffee shops or quiet classrooms. Writing was easy enough that almost anybody could do it.

Now, with the introduction of AI, barriers that may have prevented people from creating works (notice that I hesitate to call it "writing") are all but gone. A single prompt thrown into a chatbot can create a relatively complex piece of writing that would normally have taken days or weeks to plan. There are books on the market (none that have sold too well, thankfully) that were entirely written by an artificial intelligence. This isn't a thinly veiled insult; the "authors" take pride in the fact that the ideas and worlds they had in their minds can be put into physical form immediately.

It takes a generative AI seconds to write pages of content. Compounded over an entire book series, I would estimate that for a contemporary generative AI to create it couldn't be more than a few minutes.

At first, I wanted to speak about how writing is only ever getting faster. What started as a few words that took hours to dry in the sun slowly moved towards digital writing over a hundred generations. Letters created with the press of a button, pasted onto a bright white screen from anywhere in the world. Writing has already reached the peak of its speed. Humans cannot physically write faster than we can now (barring some absurd biological improvements in the future). Most of writing is thinking about what to write next. The limit of speed isn't on the technology, but on the mind of the writer.

Which is, obviously, where AI begins to break the limits of human creation. Generative AI doesn't ponder. It doesn't need to think about how a sentence will be interpreted, or if one word or another will be perceived better by an audience. It doesn't deliberate over one of its lovable characters and wonder if the story will benefit more from their death. It just *does*. It writes what it is told to write.

Which leads to this experiment of thought; how much farther can "writing" (again, I hesitate to call it that, but it's the only word available to contain the entirety of any literature) proceed from here? What technologies might exist in the future, and which ones will stem from what we already have now?

I was curious to see what I could come up with.

Vocal Writing

Voice-writing exists already. We speak, it transcribes. People use the technology for texting, but it's still too unwieldy for actual literature. What could change

If it was ever to come into existence, I imagine creative generation through AI would be pushed into the process. A writer speaks into their phone. They lay out the idea for a character they had. The city they live in, the problem they face. Word for word, with as much accuracy as it can manage, it is transcribed and pushed into some digital machine of incalculable size.

It spits out the product; a full story, created only from speaking some random thoughts and words into a microphone. What would usually be saved for back-room idea generation is now all that is necessary to create a major piece of writing.

This is a tiny step forward. I would imagine this already exists, but has yet to be fine-tuned enough to be a replacement for writing prompts.

“Hand-Holding” Writing

It’s not uncommon to teach through filling in blanks. It’s prevalent in schools as a way of forcing students to memorize a word’s relation to its definition, rather than just associating an idea with it. How could writing be pushed forward through this?

To no surprise, AI would be involved. A series of increasingly complicated questions would all but craft the narrative for the author

At the start, they would be simple; what genre are you trying to write? Are there any major themes or emotions you’re trying to strike?

They would rise in complexity. What’s the main character’s relation to the plot? What problem would they be attempting to solve? If these are too complex for the author to answer, the AI would go smaller, or even all but write the work for them; this character is plagued by a problem that stems from their upbringing: what person in their childhood might have caused it? Directed, pointed, and almost impossible to fumble an answer for because most of it is already presupposed.

At this point, the AI would be asking questions to the author and writing in the background. Each answer the author gives would further entrench the information into the fictional world. It could be the most intertwined, complicated story to exist. A writer can only add so much into their work before the information becomes overwhelming. Not so for an artificial intelligence.

Thought-Writing

The Sci-Fi nerd in me is simultaneously obsessed with and terrified of the potential for a system like this.

An author thinks of an image of a character or location. Somehow, through some neural interface, a description is given of what they are imagining. It is evocative and deeply descriptive

Next, they imagine an *emotion* that they wish to convey with the image. Again, a description is given. It’s accurate to the emotion the author imagined, complete with reasonings and deep, plot-relevant points with almost no fine-tuning needed from the author

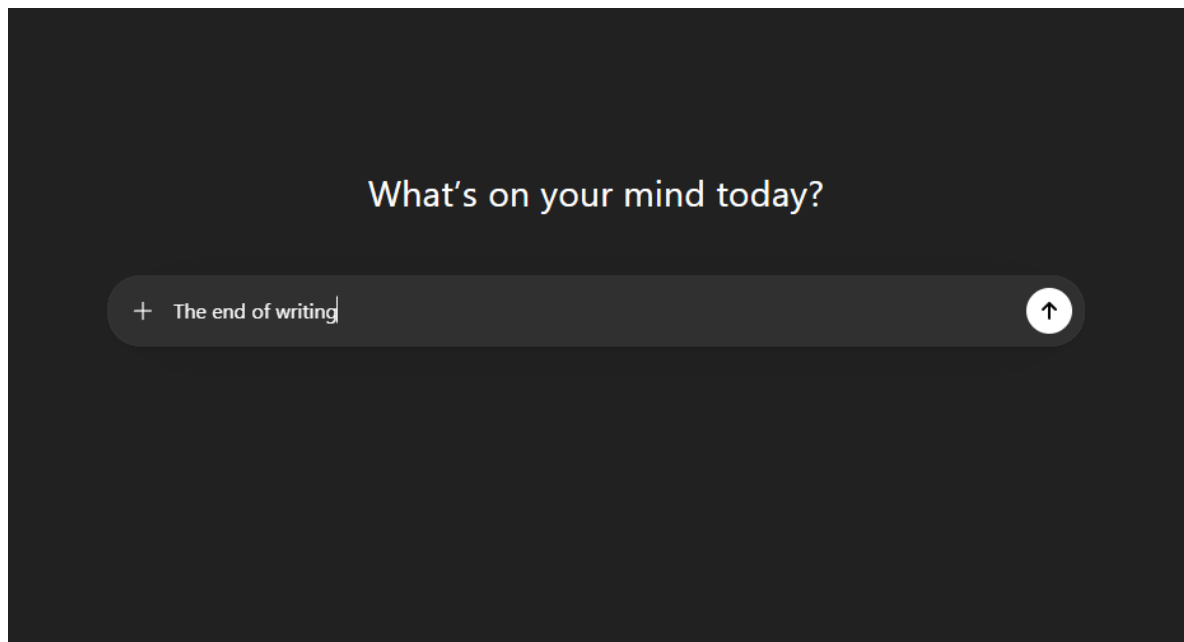
After several iterations of this, it all melds together; the descriptions and feelings the author sought to invoke through their world is put into writing at a level of detail never before seen. The words strike a chord with the readers because it was created through the identification and enumeration of emotions that are usually impossible to put into writing.

It would be comparably slow next to the previous options, but much more suited for complex

worlds

Conclusion

There are obviously infinite numbers of different technologies and machines that could be used in the future. These are a few that I found either most likely or most intriguing. My main points are twofold. Firstly, I want to specify again that writing is *not* getting quicker. It's getting phased out. The physical act of writing reached the limits of its speed with the introduction of the computer. Anything past this point is not writing. Instead, it is *defined by the lack of it*. Second, I was hoping to show that technology related to writing is nowhere near its end. When humans began writing on paper, none could imagine the printing press. When humans began typing, none could imagine a program that would do it all for you. And now, with generative AI that can create complex worlds with only a few sentences, we shouldn't have the hubris to believe we know what comes next. We can only guess and hope we are wrong.



Carrying on the theme of Generative AI, James Roche's essay, "*Artificial Intelligence and Writing*", deals with the very real and very contemporary impacts that Generative AI has had on the modern world, about its potential drawbacks and any of the poised uses of the technology.



Artificial Intelligence and Writing

by James Roche

Forms of writing have continuously evolved throughout the course of history. Specifically, writing has advanced in various ways from cave engravings to quill and parchment, to the pencil, and to now typing on a phone or a computer. Even in current times, writing takes many forms and many shapes. It continues to evolve and grow thanks to the emergence of new and exciting technologies. Recent developments of these new technologies include voice diction, texting, and emailing.

A most recent emerging technology used to help advance and guide writing is Artificial Intelligence. Artificial Intelligence is unique in the sense that it is different from previous new writing technological tools in that it does not merely aid writing, but can write for you. It has also rapidly evolved since the invention of tools like ChatGPT in 2022. Not only can Artificial Intelligence write entire essays for an individual, it has also been used to create or generate images and videos. It is ultimately an extremely powerful tool that's used very frequently and is multifaceted. Debate also exists on the rapid nature of the evolution of Artificial Intelligence and if it can be dangerous in the future. Many people in the general public and in the Artificial Intelligence industry are lobbying government officials to introduce some sort of parameters or regulations to counter the said rapid rise of Artificial Intelligence. It is a tool that has completely changed many things in our society, and is undeniably one of the biggest technological achievements/advancement in human history.

When it comes to Artificial Intelligence and writing, the possibilities are truly limitless. Unlike previous technologies invented to help with writing, Artificial intelligence doesn't just help aid writing for an individual, it can do the entire job for them. For example, I could type into an Artificial Intelligence program like ChatGPT or ClaudeAI telling it to "generate me a well-crafted 5 page essay detailing the history of Great Britain", and the program would generate me that 5 pages in less than 10 seconds, with little to no faults detectable. That hypothetical happenstance really puts into perspective just how powerful Artificial Intelligence is when it comes to its ability to craft writing material.

Generating entire essays or prompts is not the only thing Artificial Intelligence can garner. As previously mentioned, it is a multifaceted tool that can be used for many things in both our society and

in writing. Hypothetically, I could use it to generate an email or formal message to a work supervisor or school professor. Furthermore, in addition to generating entire essays, Artificial Intelligence can also edit and check large or short pieces of writing for things such as cohesion issues, punctuation errors, spelling errors, and grammar problems. It can do this as well with little to no room for error. Normally, you would have to hire someone to edit a piece of writing for you (an editor), but you can hire Artificial Intelligence to do this for you for free.

Questions have also been poised by many people in various industries about the problems Artificial Intelligence may cause in the sense that it could replace jobs. The writing industry is no different. As previously mentioned, Artificial Intelligence can do extraordinary things such as writing essays/pieces of writing, editing entire documents, and rewriting sentences. These are things usually done by people with a job such as authors, professional writers, and or editors. It truly remains to be seen whether or not Artificial Intelligence has the capacity to erase those mentioned jobs when it comes to writing since it is a new form of technology. Nonetheless, it is interesting to see how this situationship will play out.

The impact of Artificial Intelligence has been felt in writing in many ways. When it comes to education, this impact has been seen as largely negative. This is because it has been speculated that students nowadays use Artificial Intelligence to cheat in school. What this specifically looks like is using it to answer test questions, generate entire papers, or analyze and complete homework assignments. Professors and members of the academic community are trying to navigate how to mitigate the use of Artificial Intelligence in the school setting. Nonetheless, finding solutions to this problem is difficult because it is so easy to cheat with Artificial Intelligence, and students will go to great lengths to cover up academic dishonesty. Professors have employed the use of Artificial Intelligence checkers such as ChatGPTzero to detect cheating. In addition, professors/teachers will sometimes check the word choice of a sentence or essay, and if it deviates from the traditional form of writing from that student, they may charge said student with academic dishonesty. Nonetheless, doing this is harder said than done, and many students still get away with cheating using Artificial Intelligence. Hopefully, new technology will be invented that is better at navigating the use of Artificial Intelligence by students.

As previously mentioned, Artificial Intelligence is a new form of technology that has changed the game in terms of writing, and our greater society as a whole. Its impacts have been seen in many subsets of writing as a whole, whether it is in the academic setting, job industry, and the abilities of Artificial Intelligence to generate entire essay prompts. The use of Artificial Intelligence in writing will only grow, as it continues to become more intelligent and advanced. It will also be imperative to take note of how Artificial Intelligence will evolve, as there is growing debate on whether or not it needs government oversight and regulations. Nonetheless, the invention of Artificial Intelligence represents one of the greatest technological advances in

writing throughout the course of history, and its situation is ongoing.



Our next piece, written by Savannah Slater and titled “*The Modern Writer*” takes a different approach to artificial intelligence, in a think piece about how modern writing and the literary marketplace has changed over the years.



The Modern Writer

by Savannah Slater

Left To Our Own Devices

I have a friend who can only write on her laptop or on a piece of loose leaf paper to transcribe later and, every so often, tells me that her writing isn't good (a claim that is common among writers, but wholly unsubstantiated on her part). I have another friend who nearly exclusively types on their phone, has only ever used paper for one outline as long as I've known them, and has to finish a piece within a certain window of time or the inspiration will run out and it'll never get done. I prefer to write on my laptop, though I will resort to using my phone if it's more convenient, and I despise outlining (or writing any larger creative work, for that matter) on paper. The scribbles of ink and eraser marks and poorly-shaped letters are grating to me now that I've had beautiful, neat, digitized outlines that I can add to or subtract from at will.

Though it's worth mentioning that I still keep an inordinately large collection of pens in every color and thickness.

The modern writer is spoiled for choice in terms of medium. Paper is, as always, a classic. Both antique and new typewriters are still available. Digital technology offers a slew of word processors and beckoning text boxes, from Microsoft Word to the humble Notes app. There are countless places to keep your writing, no matter the subject matter, and almost all the writers I know have their work split between multiple. Many of us try to be neat, but good digital housekeeping is a constant uphill battle, as anyone with multiple email inboxes will tell you.

But on some level, this isn't new. Art has always been a messy process. Some of the greatest creative geniuses of our time have written, painted, or otherwise created works that felt like pulling teeth at the time or almost weren't finished at all. The advent of such a wide spread of options hasn't changed our nature as artists—it's merely changed the channels through which we create and share our creations. In a lot of ways, from the printing press to the internet and self-publishing, new technologies have often democratized writing. We'll come back to that later, but first I want to point out the elephant in the room that is modern writing: the recently crowned star of writing technology's hopes and dreams—but not necessarily *writers'* hopes and dreams.

ARTificial

First of all, anything that fabulously rich people and companies promote so aggressively as a panacea for all the world's ills (and, of course, a way for them to get fabulously *richer*) deserves every bit of the intense scrutiny AI has been put under. We all know that by now—if something is dressed up in frills and hawked as being almost too good to be true, it probably is.



Figure 1: “In Defense of Bad Art” by Savannah Slater

I didn’t have a name for this phenomenon, or for the intense distrust I harbored for it, until I got an email on a sleepy December day from my only Substack subscription. “Manufactured Inevitability and the Need for Courage,” an essay discussing the rhetoric surrounding AI by L.M. Sacasas from the sixth volume of his publication, *The Convivial Society* (which is a fantastic read, but for our purposes here, we’re only visiting it briefly). Now, if you’re like me, you have an intense dislike for being constantly told that a large language model can do your job—and your hobbies, for that matter—better than you can, and you can’t quite rationalize why everyone continues to *insist* that it can. This essay in particular caught my attention.

Manufactured inevitability. That’s what I had been raging against all this time alongside artists, writers, and massive IP lawsuits alike. It seemed like every person and every field was rushing to adopt AI in every way they could all around me, while I could do nothing but grumble and install a Firefox extension to prevent me from having to see an AI overview every single time I wanted to know how

many feet are in a mile or when a film I'm looking forward to is coming out. The fact is that resisting or even simply not using AI makes you somewhat of a rare bird in today's technological landscape. If that's true, why do we keep resisting?

For some, the answer is likely spite, and that will serve you just as well as anything else. But beyond that, there is also our love for art—and, going hand in hand with that, our love for humanity. Art is a hallmark of human civilization, from the first cave paintings to a child's scribbled crayon stick figures. Art is deeply personal, existing to express and communicate and connect with others. If we keep this definition of art in mind, centering the process of creation by a living being, anything written or produced by AI doesn't qualify for the title of art in the first place.

The struggle to create, the struggle to express yourself, and the struggle to be proud of what you make are all hallmarks of the artist's experience. Writers and artists of all mediums, hobbyists and professionals, we all share common threads that connect us no matter how new or how experienced: love (or sometimes love-hate) of our craft and the choice to struggle on, because it's worth the struggle. Because the choice not to outsource, the choice to feel and connect and experience, is ours to make.

Fanfiction To Published Novel?

Now, back to the conversation of democratization in terms of the internet and self-publishing. If you're paying any kind of attention to the publishing industry, the shelves of Barnes & Noble, or book-related social media, you've probably noticed a trio of trends, all of which often go hand in hand: the rise of self-publishing, the rise of fanfiction name-changed and carefully edited to be published without violating IP laws, and the recent stardom of the subgenre known as romantic fantasy (or, as coined by social media, *romantasy*).

The decline of stigma around self-published books and the general upset of tradition in the publishing industry as technology and culture shift around it have both marked the advent of a new publishing market; a publishing market that values its own survival enough to shift priorities toward resonating with the modern audiences that can keep it alive. That shift in marketing strategy centers around appealing to a social media-informed public—and, often, one that browses for books based on existing tropes and familiar content (tropes and content which find their roots in fanfiction, where they were grouped and named).

However, this shift toward pre-existing details and character archetypes (as well as the publishing of edited works of fanfiction, which presuppose an audience connection to the characters around whom these works are based) has also caused a sort of collapse of context—something I've referred to recently as BYOF, or “bring your own feelings.” In prioritizing marketable traits in writing, I've found that a great many recently-published books fall flat in terms of character work and development (and even romantic plot—many of these pairings read in the end like low-budget romcoms, sometimes even

becoming so tropey as to be uncomfortable to read). The emotional stakes of the books themselves are propped up on a base of existing reader buy-in, and can collapse entirely when that buy-in isn't present.

Self-publishing isn't the end of the world, and neither is the imperative of the publishing industry to change to meet the changes around it. Though it's been oft debated whether or not these things "degrade" the value of publishing, many complaints about such degradation come from a place of condescending distaste for the romance genre as a whole and the tastes of that genre's audience, which is mostly women (but that's another essay on its own, and I don't have time or room in my word count to unpack it). There are many valid concerns about the content of newly-published books (such as the issue of BYOF and over-reliance on tropes) and the level of weight marketing carries in the decisions involved in what books reach the shelves, but there are also many concerns that are, frankly, not raised in good faith. Even with its recent gains in social capital and in publishing, fanfiction as an art form still experiences a high level of stigma.

Like most things, it's a matter of opinion. But whether you love it or hate it, in today's environment, fanfiction and online fandom have become a training ground for future writers, and romantasy is here to stay.

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Crystal Jones wrote the next piece, titled “*Interactive Story Telling in Virtual reality*”, which ponders the role that virtual reality systems, and other associated technologies, could play in the way people make and tell stories in the near future.

Interactive Story Telling in Virtual Reality

by Crystal Jones

Imagine wanting to experience a book in ways that others cannot. Diving into the story of your choice as yourself. You see your favorite characters, and the setting of the story within your own eyes. The details of the world within come to life. And you can read a book in a whole new way. Virtual reality, also known as “VR”, storytelling is a new form of storytelling that throws you directly into a story of your own personal choice. VR storytelling adds a whole new element to your reading experience. It blends writing, gaming and visual storytelling. This technology is still adapting over time and soon many others will be able to all experience a story in a different light.



Virtual reality was developed in 1968 by a computer scientist of the name Ivan Sutherland. Ivan created the first mounted head display, often jokingly called ‘The Sword of Damocles’. It was an early 3D graphics VR system. As time went on others adapted and improved the fundamentals of VR. The name, *Virtual Reality* was coined by Jaron Lanier, who was the founder of the visual program lab, VLB that developed a range of research over virtual reality. Virtual reality, over various systems and devices, currently has over 171 million users worldwide. It wasn’t until the late 2010s, when virtual reality started to become mainstream. Around 2016, the first wave of consumers for virtual reality

arose.

Virtual reality's initial use was primarily for gaming, though creators have found ways to adapt interactive storytelling into the virtual reality world. In VR storytelling you don't have to flip the page to find out what happens next, you can see and experience the plot of the story yourself. Unlike more traditional books or movies, VR storytelling plunges you into an unforgettable experience, to where you can interact and change the narrative itself. Writers for these interactive stories have to think about the setting and unique new directions. Being able to see in a full 360 degree arc around yourself forces writers to reconsider the way they add additional details to their stories. For example, writers may now be able to add hidden clues that wouldn't be able to be included in more traditional stories without spoiling.

So what does this mean for the average person? It could mean that with the advance of technology, you might no longer need to pick up a phone, tablet or book to read or experience your favorite story. You could throw on your VR headset, and now you're flying with Harry Potter, or in the *Hunger Games* with Katniss herself. With the adaptation of technology, many people believe this way of storytelling will not only be more effective than traditional reading, but more entertaining as well. With the rise of AI, artificial intelligence, the possibilities for virtual reality storytelling remain endless.

Some current VR stories are *Red Matter 2*, a sci-fi puzzle and adventure interactive story, where you travel through a dystopian world and reveal hidden environmental clues around you. Another iconic story would be, *The Walking Dead: Saints and Sinners*, which is an interactive horror story that throws you into an apocalypse with zombies that makes the player deal with actual story changing choices, that make you choose your path within the story. An additional popular interactive story is, *Moss*, another adventure puzzle where the reader travels through their world learning about the main character and deciding his fate. People who enjoy gaming with VR, also enjoy these interactive stories as well. All of these interactive stories are available on the Meta Quest store for purchase, along with many more. There are hundreds of different stories the consumer can choose from. Ranging from horror, to adventure, to romance, to murder mysteries and everything between. These interactive stories aren't limited to one genre,

Beyond just reading alone, virtual reality opens doors for new people to create their own stories and experience it for themselves directly. New possibilities are waiting for the future of storytelling. Aspiring writers may now have the drive and opportunity to create their own world and story in their own virtual realities. People may be able to collaborate on these interactive stories, making the writing experience not only easier but more fun for all those involved. It wouldn't just contain an editor and writer alone. It could have any number of roles, like illustrators, game testers, engineers, and more. With reading and writing, comes learning as well. History can be taught through these interactive stories, letting readers experience earlier events and experiences. It could also teach the reader

compassion. Letting you step into the shoes of someone else in a way that a normal history book cannot. Virtual reality storytelling lets the reader experience these moments, safely and immersively.

The power of storytelling in virtual reality is immersive and thrilling to those who want to step away from traditional movies and books. People want and crave to be inside their favorite stories and experience it for themselves. New stories are bound to be written for the new users of VR storytelling. It paves way for new experience, new jobs, new ways to learn, and new ways to go about your day to day lives. In the future many predict VR to be an everyday piece of technology, so the hope is that people will continue to create their own stories, and read others' pieces in this new technology as well. Storytelling will never die, it will just adapt to the newer world.



The next piece, titled “*Written in Sparkles*” and written by Abby Borcoman is a more personal essay, about how the author refuses to stop using glittergel pens, and how there is something sacred and unique in the glitter marks and stains.

Written in Sparkles

by Abby Borcoman



There’s a preconceived notion that glitter gel pens are childish and only work in certain contexts. I yearn to challenge this. Writing tools differ in the messages they convey to ourselves and our audience: typing is fast and efficient, a pencil is a never permanent learning experience, a fancy black pen is formal and can signify status, while a glitter gel pen is widely viewed as cute, silly, and dramatic. When you turn a certain age, the amount of fun you have dies even in the smallest of ways such as solely writing through typing or with plain black ink. I’m a firm believer that bringing back a sense of whimsy in accomplishable little ways can exponentially increase your connectedness with positivity and fun. Writing in glitter gel pen allows me, a confused, uncertain young-adult woman who knows what she wants but not how to get there, to connect with my most free self, my inner-child. She knew exactly what she wanted and although she didn’t know how to get there, she didn’t care and didn’t have to. She danced wildly in her room to Hannah Montana music, played dress-up with her little sister, and drew and wrote everything in bright sparkly letters. When I write this way, it’s like letting a piece of that little girl who knows no limits out again. Glitter gel pens aren’t just about visual aesthetics, as a writing technology they shape how and why we express things.

Glitter gel pens reflect the highs and lows of girlhood. From scribbling crushes’ names in sparkly pink hearts, to crossing those same hearts out in bright red “X’s” when your heart was inevitably

broken. From drawing nonsensical pictures in your notebook, to filling in the non-existent audience of your journal on how your friend let you down again. Glitter gel pen puts me back in those moments so closely, almost dangerously so, as nostalgia is a mind trick in a way. It can soften the hardest moments so much so that in hindsight, you forget just how hard it was and idealize it. But, if nostalgia and writing in glitter gel pen are connected, then writing in glitter gel pen also allows you to soften the very ideas you're writing about. Even when the content is serious, glitter gel pen has a way of making things feel lighter, just as nostalgia does.

At the Nashville Songwriter Awards in 2022, Taylor Swift, arguably the world's biggest pop star and voice of girls everywhere, defined her more carefree, upbeat, pop songs as written in "glitter gel pen" (Nicholson, 2022). She too understands the positivity and lightness that comes with writing with a glitter gel pen. It's a form of pure joy and release that reminds you how far you've come from when you first began writing with it. And this metaphor is easily understood because so many people have lived this experience themselves.

Physical journaling has become wildly popular for teenagers and young adult women again. It's a warm sense of comfort in a cold, comparative digital age. It allows you to create something just for you, not for your followers. The return to physical journaling marks a craving for nostalgia and for a time when our thoughts were important enough to last longer than an Instagram story post. Glitter gel pen and journaling, for me, go hand in hand. Using a glitter gel pen to write in my journal is a return to youth, when things were fun just-because. Digital writing can feel performative and detached. When doing an assignment for class, most of the time I type it all out, rushing to meet a deadline or move on to the next task. It's submitted and forgotten about, never to be read again. When posting an Instagram story, I anxiously check if followers and friends have viewed or liked it. Twenty-four hours later it's already on its way to becoming a distant, foggy memory. Texts between friends, family, and lovers pile up and no matter how much they mean in the moment, they're lost in a sea of messages over time, difficult to return to. On the opposite side of this, journaling allows me to intentionally get in touch with my feelings and by picking up the same book and flipping through each page each time I do it, I'm forced to reflect on how much I've grown from the previous entries. Glitter gel pen is an extension of this. When journaling in glitter gel pen, I'm allowed to feel however deeply I want to, unafraid of responses or views. In the current day, digital writing is a careful and curated performance, my journal is a reckless book of pure unabashed feeling.

Now I write, not waiting for the glittery ink to dry, because I'm trying not to care if my hands are covered in blue sparkles for the rest of the day. I would like to say I'm making my 9-year-old self proud with this, but in all honesty it's something that would never have even crossed her mind as a concern. As a young-adult woman, I am continuously balancing how to coexist with my younger self without forgetting her, while still focusing on moving forward into my adulthood using all of the experience and knowledge I've gained. I will continue writing my deepest, most depressing thoughts in my

journal. But, writing can still be serious even with a glitter gel pen. It simply reminds me of a time when not everything had to be. My journal is full of my highest hopes and crushed dreams written in sparkles, because although life's hard, it doesn't always have to be serious.

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Fitting for its title, Gwen Engelhart's "*The Pilot G2: The People's Pen*" focuses on the titular pen, taking great care to outline the utensil's history, in a clear love letter to a pen that is very special to them.

The Pilot G2: The People's Pen

by Gwen Engelhart



If I was trapped on a deserted island, and I could only take three stationery items, it'd be three Pilot G2 0.7mm pens.

I'd worry about the paper later.

This pen has been with me since the beginning. From childhood days scribbling small drawings on a legal pad to drafting my college admissions essay, the Pilot G2 is the pen I'm always reaching for. I'm always sure to have one lingering around. I keep two stashed in my car, at least five in my backpack, and a cup full on my desk (there are 15 in that cup, I counted.)

If anything is noteworthy, I'm using the G2 to write it down.

Crafted With Care

Pilot, the largest pen manufacturer in Japan, debuted the G2 model in 1997. The pen gained notoriety for its retractability—a feature that set it apart from the other gel pens of the era. This retractability has saved me from marking up my papers or pockets with involuntary swipes—unlike your traditional capped pens. Though being one of the cheaper (if not the cheapest) pens on the market, the G2 continues to outperform its pricier competitors regarding construction and performance. The ergonomic grip isn't bulky, allowing for comfort and minimizing the chances of an aching hand after an all-nighter of note taking. The ball of the pen is made of tungsten carbide, ensuring wear-resistance, no matter the pressure.

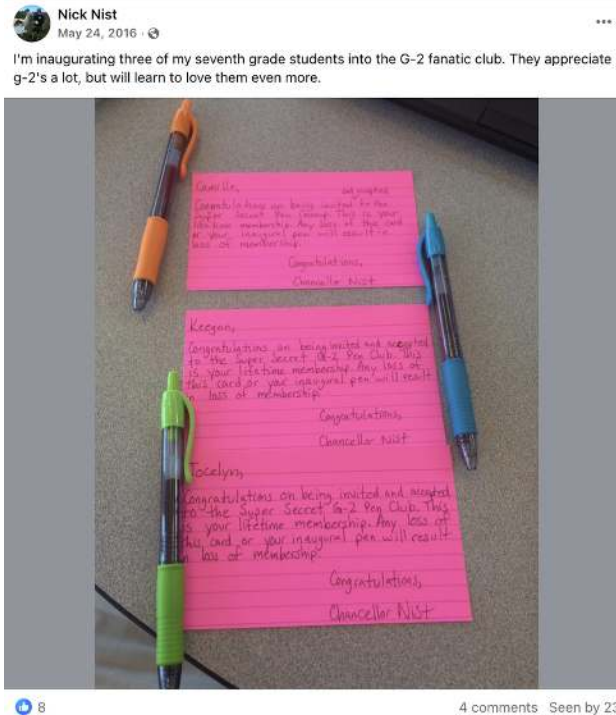
What I and many of the G2's fans celebrate is the ink. Though critics bash its relatively slow drying time, it's a sacrifice I'm willing to make for its rich pigment that jumps off the page. My personal favorite is the classic 0.7mm model in all black, but the pen also comes in a whopping 31 different colors. There's a reason that the Pilot G2 is America's #1 selling, longest writing gel ink pen; the ink never falters.

In addition to being a well-built pen all around, you can feel better buying a new pack. The Pilot model is committed to being environmentally friendly. Across its various types of pens, Pilot uses recycled materials—its most environmentally-friendly line, the Bottle-2-Pen (B2P) pens, are made of 89% and 86% recycled components. The body of the G2 is made from 70% recycled plastic, and can be refilled with replacement ink cartridges that pop easily into the barrel of the pen.

The construction and performance of the pen can explain in part, the wide network of superfans the pen has garnered. However, I believe the explanation for its loyal following goes beyond recycled plastic and long-lasting ink.

The Community

Loyal disciples of the pen can be seen across the internet. [Writers at major outlets](#) muse and sing the praises of their beloved G2. Even [wars on Twitter](#) are fought to assert the G2's place as the best pen of all time. Though I'd gladly partake in the battle, if need be, I prefer a more pacifist-type approach to celebrating my favorite pen. It was this pacifist pursuit that led me to an old Facebook group, "Pilot G-2 fan club!" As I idly scrolled through the community's posts—the most recent from 2025 to its first, in 2009—I reflected on just how much of my life I'd navigated with a G2 by my side. Among these fellow G2-lovers, I saw a bit of who I was, who I am, and possibly where I'm headed.



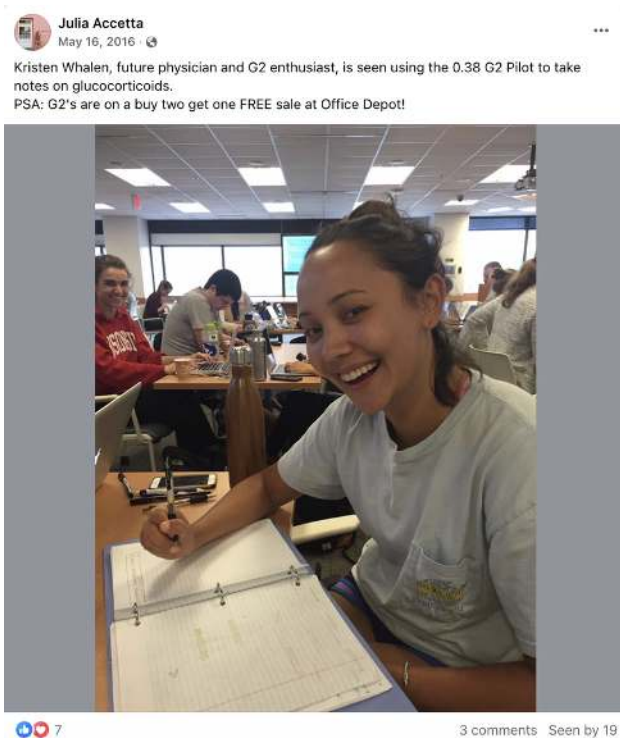
My love for the G2 is amplified by my love to share it with others; it's a treat to be able to loan someone my favorite pen. Back in grade school, I, like the post above, sang the praises of the G2 far and wide—successfully turning my friends into converts.

This post also reminded me of a lost art. Before schoolwork went digital, the necessity of needing a loaned pen held the possibility of meeting a new friend. It was an accessible way to speak to someone you otherwise wouldn't have, and an easy opportunity to share a bit of kindness with another person. Sharing a pen could lead to sharing a connection, however briefly.



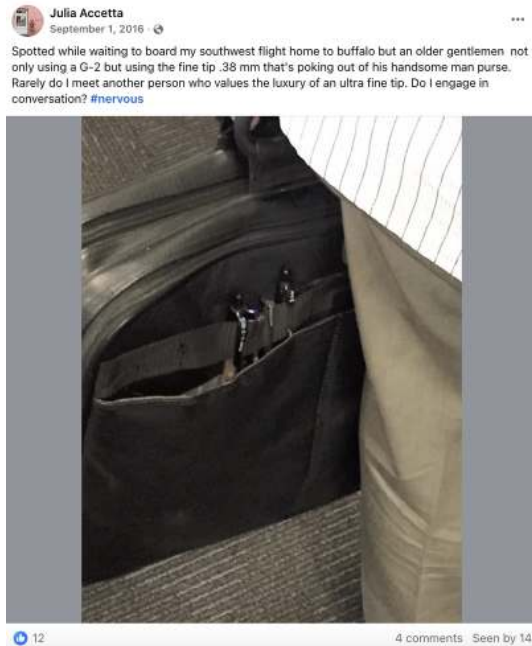
Unwilling to fully break the bond between Pilot and I, I turned to their FriXion erasable pens for a time. A few unforgiving math teachers had grown tired of my scratched-out answers and apologetic marginal notes, so I needed something with a little less finality.

Though the FriXion pen did divert me temporarily from G2 use, it accommodated me when I was more wary of mistake-making. I've long since abandoned the FriXion, as it paled in comparison to the G2, but it provided me valuable lessons, nonetheless. I came to understand and welcome my scratched-out answers and notes as part of the process. I found that a sense of finality doesn't have to be a deterrent. A learner is a "mistake-maker."



The G2 has carried me through my career of college notetaking. I've filled countless college-ruled notebooks with lecture notes on every subject. It's been there through lectures, studying for exams, drafting essays, and planning out my semesters.

I, like Kristen Whalen in this post, hope that my diligently recorded notes from my courses will pay off in my future career. I hope that some future wisdom can be gleaned from presently recorded insights.



Ultimately, this Facebook group serves as a reminder that the most niche and seemingly inconsequential details of our lives—like our choice of pen—weaves us together. It's not just a writing tool. It can be the difference between a new friend or stranger; an opportunity capitalized upon or squandered.

The Only Pen I'll Ever Use

There is no other pen I'd rather use. In my life, the G2 has contributed to the creation of countless to-do lists, bucket lists, birthday cards, thank you notes, doodles, essays, annotations, planned trips, half-baked ideas on napkins, signing for my first car, and drafting applications to college, jobs, and other opportunities. It's seen shoddy portraits of friends, comic strips, sticky notes tacked to doorframes, written condolences, the pockets of my apron at work, and weighing decisions via pros and cons lists.

This brilliant tool helps me look back, note the present, and plan for my life ahead. It's imbued with personal hopes and wishes, and the hopes and wishes of others.

There is no pen I'd rather use.



Katy Sue Malt's essay, "*The Carvings We Leave Behind*", focuses on the art of tree carving as literature. She tours through the infamous Croatan carving, Native American traditions, and more contemporary cases of messages carved into trees.

The Carvings We Leave Behind

by Katy Mary Sue

Growing up in North Carolina meant learning the story of the Lost Colony of Roanoke, England's first attempt at a permanent settlement in the New World. Roanoke Colony's fame naturally arose from its disappearance. The colony had been in desperate need of supplies, but when provisions arrived after three years, the settlers were nowhere to be found. The only message left was carved into a tree: *CROATOAN*.

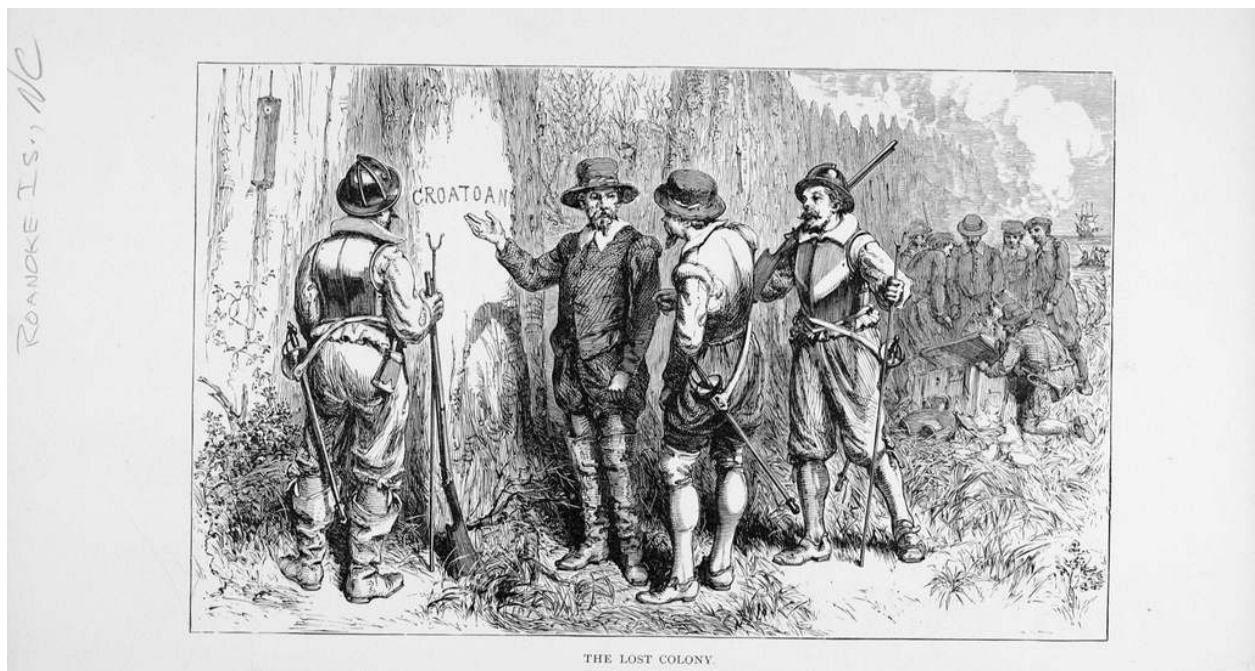


Figure 1: *The Lost Colony*, English Explorers read Croatoan on Tree 1876

This was the first time that I considered tree carving to be anything other than a teen's act of boredom or a way to deface and mark up a tree. Tree carving could leave a message. It could be a form of writing.

The act of carving on trees goes by many names: arborglyphs, dendroglyphs, silvaglyphs, or simply tree carving. Humans have been carving symbols, messages, drawings, and names in trees for thousands of years. As the tree grows, the writing will change and stretch with it. The tools range from knives to fingernails, with the tree's bark providing a canvas that can last for decades if the writer is lucky. But if the writer is unlucky, so is the tree. Tree bark provides a layer of protection similar to human skin, shielding the tree from fungi, diseases, and pests. Carving writing into a tree often damages this outer layer of defense, compromising the tree's health. At times, the human desire to leave a mark can be detrimental to the tree's life.

In the poem "Letter to the Person Who Carved His Initials into the Oldest Living Longleaf Pine in North America", author Matthew Olzmann showcases the disrespect of this human desire to leave a mark directly on nature's skin. When I first encountered this poem in my creative nonfiction class, I expected it to begin with an accusation. Instead, it felt like a conversation. The narrator asks "what it's like to live without / curiosity, without awe." (Olzmann, 2022, lines 1-2). This pine tree, also in North Carolina, is believed to be around 470 years old. It was decades old when the English first attempted to create a settlement at Roanoke. But where the engraving of *CROATOAN* served as a message, the initials carved in a historic natural feature represents something closer to hubris. "To take it all in and then, / to reach for your knife." (lines 16-17). As Olzmann wrote, too often humans look at the wonders of the natural world and desire to make their cruel, selfish mark.

But how long does it take for a mark to turn from pedestrian to historic? The Basque Carvings in the American west are heralded as historic landmarks. The U.S. Forest Service website describes these carvings and symbols as historic, showcasing how sheepherders from the Basque region in Spain carved

on aspen trees, providing a glimpse into human history and the old west. Since these trees only live around 100 years, these carvings and their messages are disappearing. At the end of the article, a bold message warns that "It is illegal to carve on aspen trees on the national forests and grasslands!" (U.S. Forest Service). While the Basque shepherds carved without causing damage to the aspen, the fear is that new writers would not be so careful. The fear is that humans would carve and carve until beauty is lost.

In areas where tree carving is not prohibited and there is precedent, the marks are pervasive. I recall seeing bamboo lining zoo walkways and a bamboo forest at an orchard, carved over and over by knives, nails, and sticks. They went as high as people could reach, with names, initials, dates, drawings, and words from humans wanting to leave their mark. Of course, the more vulgar writing is saved for latrinalia, i.e. words scrawled on bathroom walls. Instead, carving on trees has long been devoted to initial pairs. Young love has frequently turned to engraving on trees for permanence, with inscriptions like 'A + C' or 'K loves B'. A famous example in media has to be from Disney's animated classic *Robin Hood* (1973), where "R. H. + M. M." is surrounded by a heart on a tree in Nottingham, England. While some of these romances are fleeting, their marks are not, growing and warping with the trees they haunt. This romantic gesture has been practiced for thousands of years, with tree carving being referenced by Greek and Roman writers, the oldest description of writing on tree bark dating back 2300 years ago. Today, we have countless other canvases to profess our love on, and yet many people still rely on trees.

It has been over 400 years since the Roanoke Colony disappeared, and there is still no conclusive answer for their vanishing. The most popular theory is that, after starvation and drought, the

remaining colonists joined a local Native American tribe, the Croatan. According to the National Park Service's page on the Lost Colony, John White, the colonist's leader who left for supplies and was delayed by conflict with the Spanish, "found "CRO" carved into a tree and "CROATOAN" carved into a palisade" (U.S. National Park Service, 2025, 1590 Voyage). Although the colonists had agreed to write their destination should they move before White's return, relations with the Croatan were questionable. But while White's books had been destroyed and his armor rusted, the colony's messages remained carved for people to find. Today, you can see a recreation of *CROATOAN* on a tree in the North Carolina Museum of History (under construction as of 2026), showcasing what the colonist's message might have looked like. The fate of the Lost Colony remains unsolved.

From the Lascaux Cave to modern-day latrinalia, humans have long desired to leave a mark. One continuous method of human engraving is arborglyphs, or tree carving. Whether it was left by a lover or a message carved by colonists, writing through trees is a widespread practice that is both revered and despised. Whether you mourn the marks left on living trees or delight in the humanistic desire to leave a legacy, tree carving endures in myth and in practice even as writing technologies advance from physical to digital.

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About



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