To Drown or Not to Drown: Self Discovery Through the Lens of Formalist Theory

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To Drown or Not to Drown: Self Discovery Through the Lens of Formalist Theory

When Janis Ian, and later Nina Simone, soulfully sang, “We always have a story,” truer words had never been expressed. Stories have been the center of my studies as a writing major; thus, I learned that they exist everywhere in our world, from the classic literature that remains in school curriculums to the advertisements strewn across newspapers, magazines, and computer screens. Since human beings have always been storytellers, it is only fair that our societies are built upon stories. I thought that this was a realization unique to writers and artists, but research led me to a field that also holds this view: narrative psychology.

A postmodern, social constructivist view of therapy, it “investigates the value of stories and storytelling in giving meaning to individuals’ experiences… and in defining themselves and their lives” (American Psychology Association). Therefore, at the center of narrative psychology and therapy is the idea that everyone has a story. Society is built around stories and then people establish their own stories and the others that they exist in; there are essentially stories within stories within stories. It is also a flexible form of therapy and adapts to suit the needs of the client, which has produced various therapeutic forms like narradrama, narrative sculpture, or narrative graphics. Narrative therapy looks to identify strengths, development/progress, themes, identity, and resilience by encouraging clients to examine themselves in their stories. Through this process, it aims to guide clients to the realization that they are characters in their own stories, thus providing them with a sense of agency and control (Du Plessis).
Therefore, the purpose of my research project is to study how using creative nonfiction writing as a strategy in narrative therapy can aid in the process of self-discovery, self-awareness, and self-reflection. I also asked whether writers would benefit from self-analysis and would narrative therapists benefit from applying literary criticism to their client’s narratives.

Self-discovery, self-awareness, and self-reflection were the primary terms I considered as measures for my research project. According to the *APA Dictionary of Psychology*, self-discovery is “the process of searching for and finding one’s unique self or identity.” Self-awareness is defined as “self-focused attention or knowledge,” and clarified that self-focused meant “the capacity of an individual to analyze and evaluate his or her mental and emotional states” (APA Dictionary of Psychology). The final psychological concept I considered in my project was self-reflection, which is “examination, contemplation, and analysis of one’s thoughts, feelings, and actions” (APA Dictionary of Psychology). I distinguished between self-discovery and self-awareness because the former is a process whereas the latter is a condition. Every human being has the capacity for self-awareness, but the processes of self-discovery and self-reflection can improve people’s self-awareness, drawing attention to parts of the self that they may not have noticed otherwise. Not only did my research project exhibit this result, but it also found that creative nonfiction is an effective tool in narrative therapy and guides the journey of self-discovery, self-awareness, and self-reflection.

1. **Methodology**

To study how creative nonfiction can aid narrative therapy practice and the process of self-discovery, self-awareness, and self-reflection, I first analyzed my own work. I selected three creative nonfiction pieces I had written for portfolios in the fall semester of 2019: “Underwater Blue,” “Forever Blue,” and “The Knowing.” These stories were organized chronologically and chosen due to the traumatic nature of the memories they contain. This
element paired well with the narrative psychology portion of this project. Also, the memories in these pieces are part of my current life story, another concept within narrative psychology. I believed this to be the case due to the self-defining memory contained in “Underwater Blue.” According to the life story scheme, self-defining memories are “more developmentally critical and thematically central to the immediate life story and its exigencies” (Singer and Pavel 232). I found this to be the case for “Underwater Blue” after completing my examination of all three pieces.

For the literary analysis process, my goal was to be as objective as possible. I assumed that if I examined my work with a lens, I would be sure to find evidence that supported my research question even if that was not the case. To avoid this, I chose a literary theory that would examine writers’ craft tools such as setting, images, and languages. This was formalist literary criticism. According to Mary Klages, author of *Key Terms in Literary Theory*, formalism analyzes the text and only the text. These particular critics only consider what they call the “literary facts,” which refers to language (qtd. in *Credo Reference*). Therefore, I examined each piece with this in mind.

To begin my analyses, I briefly summarized each work, identifying the major events and themes. I also discussed the genre of the text and the elements contributed to my categorization. Then, I studied the structure of the piece, starting at a sentence level and then branching out to the paragraphs. After counting the number of words that appeared in each sentence, I produced a range that would apply to each analysis. One- to 15-word sentences were considered short while longer sentences were 16- to 70-words long. Also, larger paragraphs were considered to be longer than two lines in length due to my consistent use of one-line paragraphs.

The other structural elements identified and then explained varied from piece to piece. For example, stylistic decisions in word choice were highlighted in the analysis of “Underwater
Blue” whereas punctuation was more important to “The Knowing.” Many aspects could have been further examined, but I chose to discuss the elements that were vital to the meaning of the respective pieces.

What was also important to my formalist analysis was to look at language and imagery, and figures of speech were vital to establishing each of these. I highlighted the figures of speech that would most often appear in the piece and then focused on the ones that most contributed to the piece’s theme. They would often be connected to the prominent images that appeared. These images, however, were also more abstract concepts. For example, “Underwater Blue” exhibited movement not just in the descriptions within the piece but also in the structure of sentences. The goal of identifying these images and concepts was to find the ones that were consistently used in each piece, making them the most significant.

Once I completed the analysis process for each text, I then wrote about all of the significant elements. At first, I referred to myself as “the author” and “the writer” to keep the process as objective as possible. However, due to the creative nature of this project, I was later advised the using the personal pronoun “I” would be acceptable. Therefore, I revised the entire project to include first-person pronouns.

Originally, I had planned to use my discoveries from my formalist analysis as discussion points during narrative therapy sessions. I would attend at least three sessions with a qualified individual in the Summerour Counseling Center and had made arrangements to do so. Unfortunately, this plan had to be adjusted because of COVID-19, so instead, I examined the text again using narrative therapy analysis. The techniques for doing so were available in *The Handbook of Narrative and Psychotherapy*. According to Gonçalves et al., the narrative analysis focuses on the narrative plot (104). For this, I used the Narrative Process Model, first focusing on the External Narrative Sequences. This requires a description of what happened in the story (Angus et al. 88-89). I also extended this analysis to include a study of narrative
themes and the self, which connect with the elements covered in my formalist analysis as well as other writers’ craft tools. Theme and the self are also important to the next step in the Narrative Process Model: Internal Narrative Sequences, or explaining the feelings that the events caused (Angus et al. 88-89). However, these feelings were only understood through self-analysis. Jerome Bruner, a psychologist whose major contributions are related to cognitive psychology, explains that the self is both a personal and cultural and societal construct. Each of these factors significantly influences a person’s selfhood (4). Therefore, my analysis of the self included the societal and cultural roles identified in the stories. I discussed all of these factors after the formalist literary criticism sections of each text.

To complete my study, I compared the three pieces, looking for the aspects they held in common. I then reflected on what these similarities revealed about me as a writer as well as an individual. This fulfilled the final step of the Narrative Process Model, which is Reflexive Narrative Sequences, or analyzing “the articulated experiences to construct new meanings and perspectives on situations” (Angus et al. 88-89). In my conclusion, I addressed whether I fulfilled the overall goal of my project – to determine whether the combination of creative nonfiction and narrative therapy analysis aided my self-discovery, self-awareness, and self-reflection.

2. Formalist Analysis of “Underwater Blue”

Categorized as a memoir, a subgenre of creative nonfiction, “Underwater Blue” relives my near-drowning experience. I introduce a total of four characters, including myself: her father, who I refer to as “Dad;” and my two sisters Saniah and Sahlay (Appendix A). The story follows my family’s trip to “Glass Bottle Beach,” and this serves as the main setting. It includes not just the physical beach but the dock and the stairs that are also part of that area. The only other settings mentioned are “[Dad’s] house” and the cemetery, but these simply provide context and a sense of location for the primary setting. I write in great detail about
the steps in my family’s journey to the beach and the activities we partake in while there, primarily snorkeling. I also follow a linear process, meaning that “Underwater Blue” has a clear beginning, middle, and end. The main themes present in this work are that of adventure, survival, and, most importantly, existence. The latter theme is primarily shown through the near-drowning experience that serves as my first encounter with the finite quality of my life.

Despite its brevity in length, “Underwater Blue” is labeled as a memoir because it meets the genre requirements listed in the definition. According to Jessica Dukes, a writer featured on the Celadon Books website, a “memoir is a narrative, written from the perspective of the author, about an important part of their life.” What distinguishes memoir from autobiography is the perspective from which the memory is written. In memoirs, writers will write about their perspective of a memory rather than expand that perspective to others to make the memory as factual as possible, which would be more important to an autobiography (Dukes). In the memoir, “the author’s feelings and assumptions are central to the narrative” (Dukes). Since “Underwater Blue” is a narrative and my point of view is the only one represented, this piece can be considered a memoir.

At 26 paragraphs in length, “Underwater Blue” is comprised of a nearly even ratio of short and long sentences, 12 to 14, respectively. I consistently juxtapose short sentences with long sentences, but there is no strict pattern. However, it should be noted that the short sentences are not obvious to the reader until closer examination.

There is also no distinguishable pattern displayed in the usage of short and long paragraphs. Long paragraphs are the style primarily used in this piece, with short paragraphs used sparingly. However, that is not to say that I do not given any attention to detail in the structure of this piece. Both short sentences and short paragraphs are used frequently during the climax of the piece when I experience the panic of near-drowning (Appendix A). Here, no sentence is longer than six words and even lack the subjects or predicates that would
constitute a complete sentence, meaning that these are sentence fragments. For example, paragraphs 15 and 16 are filled with these: “No air. Just water. Salty, acrid water. Invades my mouth. Kick myself up. Spit it out” (Appendix A). In these, there is either a subject and no verb or verbs with no subjects. These sentence fragments also function as short bursts of action, as if, during this moment, I cannot express clear thoughts such as “I am scared” and can only utilize motions to express fear. One could argue that using descriptors such as “salty” and “acrid” in the sentence fragment, “Salty, acrid water,” (Appendix) show that I can comprehend taste in this particular moment. This would mean that I am still capable of experiencing more than just panic and, therefore, the descriptors do not fit the method I use to illustrate single-minded fear. However, this can also be excused because I am reliving the memory without experiencing the same level of emotion that I did in the past.

This use of sentence fragments to illustrate panic is not the only stylistic choice evident in this piece. For example, in the same section, I write, “Scream it” (Appendix A). Since I am being pushed down beneath the water, as is shown in the previous paragraph, the strikethrough through the sentence shows that my cries for help are being cut off. There is also the sentence stylized as “Please...” (Appendix A). In creative writing, italics are used to represent thoughts or internal dialogue and to stress the importance of words; both purposes are exhibited here. Once my screams have been silenced by the water pouring down my throat, all I have available are my thoughts thoughts, and the longer that I go without receiving the help I need, the weaker and more frightened I become. Similarly, I use italics and nonconventional word choice by writing “…tiredtiredtired” to emphasize the exhaustion that I feel. Due to the way that the words have been blended, it gives the impression that it is an all-consuming experience. This is also aided by the full sentence, which reads, “Arms, legs screech a mantra of tiredtiredtired” (Appendix A). Since I have neglected to use my thoughts as the subject of the sentence, which I could have accomplished by simply using the word
“my,” it shows that my descriptions have been reduced to my body’s sensations. However, the most important stylistic decisions lie in the formatting of paragraph 11 and the foreshadowing found in paragraph two.

In paragraph 11, I illustrate the moment that I am pushed below the surface of the water by arranging the structure of the sentence to represent the experience. I break apart a single sentence into four one-line paragraphs, creating a series of sentence fragments:

And I’m
pushed
back
down. (Appendix A)

I first draw attention to this particular paragraph by disrupting the established norm of paragraph indentation. In the original document, the first line is without indentation. This jars the reader and then the ensuing sentences draw the eye downward, mimicking the way I am pushed down.

My next prominent stylistic decision takes the form of foreshadowing. At the beginning of the “Underwater Blue,” in paragraph two, there is a brief description of the walk that my family takes to get to Glass Bottle Beach. I talk about how, when it was just my and my dad, we would go through the cemetery, which was so unruly with “cane grass” that we would need to push through it like adventurers on a safari (Appendix A). I then explain that since my dad and I are traveling with my “smaller” sisters, who “are clumsy in the art of adventure,” we are unable to take the original path. This context could have been removed from the piece without any disruption as the main focus is the current trip to Glass Bottle Beach rather than the ones we have taken in the past. But this sentence serves a key purpose in foreshadowing the subsequent events, particularly the phrase, “my sisters are smaller, clumsy in the art of adventure” (Appendix A). The main reason why I nearly drowned in the
first place was that my sister Sahlay was both too short to stand in high-tide water and a, presumably, inexperienced swimmer due to her age. Therefore, when faced with those conditions, Sahlay panicked and used me to “propel herself above the waves” (Appendix A). The key phrase in paragraph two foreshadows both of the problems that cause the primary conflict of the piece, the near-drowning experience, which makes the otherwise removable sentences vital to the text.

In addition to foreshadowing, “Underwater Blue” also exhibits various figures of speech: anaphora, rhyme, polysyndeton, alliteration, anadiplosis, simile, and personification.

Anaphora, rhyme, and polysyndeton are minor figures of speech considering how infrequently they appear in “Underwater Blue.” According to The Princeton Handbook of Poetic Terms, anaphora occurs when writers repeat “the same word or words at the beginning of successive clauses, phrases, or sentences” (qtd. in Credo Reference). This can be seen in paragraph two: “I don’t need a floatie. I scoop up a snorkel instead. I slide the goggles over my head” (Appendix A). This line also displays rhyme with instead and head. Another instance of rhyme can be seen in the first line. “I’m old enough now that the me has become three…” (Appendix A). Although rhyme, like anaphora, is used sparingly in “Underwater Blue,” it still adds to the overall rhythm of these select sentences. Similarly, polysyndeton, which uses “several conjunctions in close succession” even when they could be “omitted,” is only used once and can be found in the final line (Collins English Dictionary). “I look out at an ocean that stretches behind the horizon, vast and infinite and blue” (Appendix A). The rare appearance of this figure of speech serves to emphasize the ending of the piece, and the linear appearance of “vast and infinite and blue” builds up the image of the horizon.

In contrast to the limited use of anaphora, rhyme, and polysyndeton, I utilize alliteration throughout this piece. However, this method of expression is most prevalent in the beginning when the writing is more reflective and calmer, as shown by how the paragraphs are longer in
length than those that illustrate the fear of near-drowning. For example, in paragraph two alone, I write, “through the treacherous jungle,” “art of adventure,” and “wave-worn glass” (Appendix A). As the story builds to the eventual conflict, alliteration is found less frequently, and even once I have been able to escape to safety, this figure of speech does not appear as often as it did before the traumatic experience. This may be indicative of the unconscious change that occurs within me.

Anadiplosis is another figure of speech that is most often seen before the primary conflict. According to *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, this is word repetition that links two phrases, clauses, lines, or stanzas by repeating the word at the end of the first one at the beginning of the second (qtd. in Credo Reference). This can be seen in the first sentence of the piece, which reads, “I’m old enough now that the me has become three, three sisters in total” (Appendix A). There is another instance of anadiplosis in paragraph two. “So Dad leads us down the stairs, down to sand riddled with wave-worn glass” (Appendix A). In both examples, the repeated words of “three” and “down” between the clauses signals the use of anadiplosis. Similar to alliteration, it becomes rarer after the beginning of the piece and this may also reflect a change in me.

Another figure of speech I utilize is a simile, indicated by the use of the word “like” between two unlike concepts. The primary example of this is in paragraph five, which reads, “Under the surface of the waves, the ocean crackles like fire” (Appendix A). In this sentence, I make use of two contrasting elements, water and fire, to illustrate my auditory experience swimming underwater. I add to this sensory description by adding an autobiographical context through another simile in the paragraph that follows. “(I had never seen a real fire – there was never a need – but I heard fire on TV. It sounds like eardrums drowned in sea.)” (Appendix A). Another example of simile can be found in paragraph two when I describe the path that my dad and I would take to Glass Bottle Beach. “When it was
just me and my dad, **we would walk through the cemetery** and its decaying gravestones, **parting the sea of cane grass like we were on an adventure**” (Appendix A). Although this sentence does not compare overtly contrasting concepts such as water and fire, the context of walking through a cemetery differs from the context of going on an adventure, especially emotionally.

The last of the major figures of speech found in “Underwater Blue” is personification, which takes center stage in the middle of the piece. When I almost drown at the hands of my sister, I describe the experience by personifying the ocean. For example, in the series of fragments in paragraph 15, I write, **“Salty, acrid water. Invades my mouth”** (Appendix A). Although separated, the reader can clearly understand that the sea is the unacknowledged subject of the second fragment, meaning it is what invades my mouth. Another example of this can be found in paragraph 18. “I swallow the sea. It **lives inside me**” (Appendix A). Not only does this emphasize how much seawater I have swallowed because I was pushed under while calling for help, but it also personifies the ocean, giving it a human action.

I also use personification in reference to my body. Once I managed to free myself from my sister and make my way back to the shore, I am still operating on instinct alone, meaning that I am not conscious of my current actions and have dissociated, allowing my body to take control. I illustrate this by personifying my body parts. For example, I write, **“Arms, legs screech** a mantra of tiredtiredtired” in paragraph 18. In paragraph 21, I continue, **“Fingers, palms, knees, swim-shoe covered toes kiss the sand, press themselves closer in reunion”** (Appendix A). By not including myself as the subject of the sentence, I show the readers that my body is taking the brunt of the experience. In other words, I have dissociated while my body continues to go through the motions. This is supported by sentence structures in paragraph 21. After my body takes her back to shore, it continues to be the unacknowledged subject of the subsequent sentences. **“My body takes me back to shore, Sahlay abandoned**
for solid sand. **Drags me over** the water connecting with wave-worn glass and tinkling.

**Collapses on all fours** where the earth is less rough” (Appendix A).

My purpose in using these figures of speech is unclear beyond speculation since I cannot remember my original intentions. The way that the figures of speech are prevalent at the beginning of the piece and become rarer at the end could show that I have been changed by the experience. Instead of the various intentional deviations from ordinary speech, I am reduced to a few creative thoughts amid mere repetitions of physical sensations.

I vomit up my stomach where the sea sank in and my throat stings with salt once more. I vomit it all up…. I don’t cry. The sensation is there, beneath the tremor of arms, legs, stomach, throat, beneath the ache. I don’t cry…. Dad asks if I’m okay. I hear it but I don’t hear it. I don’t know what to say. (Appendix A)

I can only speculate. However, these figures of speech contribute not only to the overall structure of “Underwater Blue” but to the prominent concepts and images that appear throughout. The most obvious of these is the ocean, which is integral to the overall setting of the piece and is the location of the traumatic experience. Several figures of speech add to its vivid description.

Firstly, I use simile to draw a comparison between water and fire and aid the readers’ understanding of the underwater experience. The sensory details that this produces contributes to the image of the ocean. However, I do not rely entirely on simile to accomplish this. I also write about the setting using alliteration, personification, anaphora, or a combination of figures of speech. For example, the phrase “wave-worn glass” is alliterative (Appendix A). I also describe how the ocean interacts with the environment as well as me by using combinations of alliteration and anadiplosis along with anaphora and anadiplosis.

There’s not much to see this close to the shore. I’ve never ventured beyond where my toes can touch, where the rocks breach the surface and erode with the ebb and flow. I wonder
what Dad sees when he goes further, when he leaves me looking for a glimpse of his snorkel sneaking above the water…. We don’t notice when the tide rolls in. The water gets higher, gets deeper. We follow sergeant majors and butterflyfish on their journeys through the seaweed. We stumble across sea moss and coral overtaking concrete blocks and glass bottles. We never swim beyond the rocks. (Appendix A)

It should be noted that the sheer descriptive and detailed word choice is vital to the reader’s ability to visualize the ocean at Glass Bottle Beach.

In addition to simile, alliteration, anadiplosis, and anaphora, personification also adds to both the image of the ocean and the overall sensory experience. However, this figure of speech is more present when addressing the dangers that the ocean can bring. In lines such as “Invades my mouth” and “Pours down my throat,” the ocean serves as the subject of the sentence, performing the action that is described (Appendix A). It takes agency and becomes a force that dominates me. In addition, due to my panic, the ocean is all-consuming and one of the few elements that I can perceive when nearly drowning. This is supported by the line in paragraph 18: “I swallow the sea. It lives inside me” (Appendix A). I also personify her own body, and this shows how I have been reduced to sensations rather than coherent thoughts.

“Arms, legs screech a mantra of tiredtiredtired” (Appendix).

Figures of speech, specifically anadiplosis and rhythm, also emphasize the image of the number three. Readers find this in the first sentence of the piece. “I’m old enough now that the me has become three, three sisters in total” (Appendix A). Also, I establish rhythm, or cadence, by rhyming the words “me” and “three.” The combination of these figures of speech are what establishes the number three as an important image; if I had used only one, then this line would have been overlooked. However, this is not the only reason why the number three is a distinguished image. Despite only appearing within the first sentence of the piece, it lends itself to the more repetitive image of symmetry.
Symmetry is exhibited throughout the beginning of the piece and eventually falls apart after the near-drowning experience. It is most visually present – meaning that symmetry is displayed in the structure of the sentences – and is influenced by select figures of speech. Alliteration, anadiplosis, and anaphora most clearly contribute to the image of symmetry through their repetitive qualities, whether that be of letters, words, or phrases. Each creates a visual line for the reader to follow beyond the traditional format of sentences on a page. One can argue that alliteration creates more of a balance to a sentence, but balance is also important to establishing symmetry.

In addition to symmetry are the concepts of the cycle versus decay, which appear, symmetrically, before and after the traumatic experience. In the opening journey of “Underwater Blue,” I introduce the path that my dad and I used to take to get to Glass Bottle Beach, which ran through a “cemetery and its decaying gravestones” (Appendix A). The presence of death, therefore, lingers in the setting of the piece and is later connected to my brush with death in the ocean. I then contrast this image of finality and the finite nature of existence with the idea of the cycle, showcased in the endless movement of the ocean. “From my perch on the dock, I watch the waves roll in, over and over, and constant cycle. I look out at an ocean that stretches behind the horizon, vast and infinite and blue” (Appendix A). Although this final passage exhibits both alliteration and polysyndeton, other references to the concept of the cycle versus decay are displayed using vivid imagery and structural decisions regarding select sections of “Underwater Blue.”

This cyclical image of the ocean is also assisted by my various references to movement. In paragraph seven, I write about the water’s “ebb and flow” and how it “gets higher, gets deeper” in paragraph nine (Appendix A). The later passage utilizes anadiplosis as a method of describing the process of rising tides. However, the fact that I describe the movement of not just the ocean but my body separates movement as its prominent image. I write about the
process of putting on a snorkel, wading into the water, slipping underwater, coming back up
to adjust my snorkel only to be pushed back underneath over and over, dragging myself back
to shore, and finally venturing off without my family to sit on the dock and watch the waves
(Appendix A). Movement is prominent throughout the piece, which adds to its overall
descriptive nature.

3. Narrative Analysis of “Underwater Blue”

To reiterate, the essential plot of this piece is this: On a trip to Glass Bottle Beach, my
younger sister Sahlay and I were caught off guard by the high tide while snorkeling. Sahlay
was scared and used me to keep herself from drowning but, in the process, almost caused me
to drown. After saving myself and swimming back to shore, I separate myself from my
family and sit on the dock, watching the waves. Before nearly drowning, the emotions I
experienced during this memory were first positive ones, like contentment and wonder. These
feelings were soon replaced with those of shock, panic, exhaustion, and loneliness. There are
clear narrative themes at work in this story, specifically the themes of agency and
communion.

According to McAdams, these are the two constant and critical themes found within
individuals’ life stories (qtd. in Veglia and Fini). Agency is the umbrella term for several
concepts, the most relevant of which are separation, independence, and control/power.
Communion is another important overarching theme in “Underwater Blue” and involves all
levels of interpersonal relationships (qtd. in Veglia and Fini). However, it should be noted
that while these themes are present in this work, they are represented negatively. Both agency
and communion have positive connotations in narrative psychology, but since I could not find
the opposing terms within the literature, the themes in this work are labeled as agency versus
no agency and communion versus no communion.
The former theme is represented in the drowning experience as this is a moment over which I have no control. However, I eventually do take agency when I remove my sister’s hands from me and swim back to shore. “Shove off the hands and escape” (Appendix A). Once I calm myself down, I move away from my family and sit on the dock instead. This was a frightening experience for me, but even when my father attempts to check on me, I don’t share my true feelings. “Dad asks if I’m okay. I hear it but I don’t hear it. I don’t know what to say. Nodding is enough; he leaves me be” (Appendix A). Due to this reaction, I don’t establish the sense of unity that I truly need despite the opportunity to do so, hence the theme of communion versus no communion. The existence of these themes breaks the rules of the self that are established at the beginning of the piece.

In “Underwater Blue,” the self is indicated to be both an older sister, a daughter, an islander, a child, and self-sufficient. Each of these roles is already dichotomous, at least in my culture. Firstly, being an older sister is a role of responsibility while being a daughter is a role of deference and reliance. For example, when my sisters and I go to Glass Bottle Beach with my dad, he “leads us” (Appendix A). However, as a responsible older sister, I am allowed to watch out for my younger sister Sahlay while we snorkel. “Sahlay wants to come with me, so my Dad stays on the shore…” (Appendix A). He trusts both me and the familiar environment. This could also be because I am an islander, meaning that I understand my current surroundings. This establishes a sense of self-sufficiency because I understand my capabilities and limitations. For example, I realize that I can swim without a floatie, but I do not venture beyond where I can stand because I am also not a strong swimmer (Appendix A). At the same time, “Underwater Blue” presents the self as a child, meaning that I make mistakes, get distracted, and can have no sense of self-preservation. This is what contributes to my eventual near-drowning despite also being an islander. However, the dichotomy within
the selves is further disrupted over the course of the story due to the narrative themes and other layers of the self.

The drowning experience brings about the themes of control/power and agency in that I have a desire to survive. However, this requires that I forsake my role as an older sister – to be responsible for Sahlay – and therefore, I abandon her to potentially drown so that I can save myself. This also disturbs the self as a daughter because I rely on and expect that my dad will save me, but he does not. As a daughter who also admires her dad, indicated by the line, “Dad’s cooler than I am,” this creates a feeling of betrayal (Appendix A). "A sound. Supposed to be “Dad.”...He doesn’t see. Doesn’t hear….he leaves me be – his big girl, his pumpkin bread – and in the fading background, he’s checking up on Sahlay” (Appendix A). This adds a new layer to the part of the self that exhibits self-sufficiency. When “I walk away from my family,” I still “stay within sight” (Appendix A). This act of separation shows that I am still fulfilling the deference role of a daughter but not reliance. I realize that I can no longer rely on my dad to protect me from danger and will need to do so myself. Therefore, following the drowning experience, the self presented at the beginning of the piece changes.

4. Formalist Analysis of “Forever Blue”

“Forever Blue” is a personal essay is about the epiphanies that occur when falling down the rabbit hole of contemplation. I sit in church on a beautiful day and imagines what my death and subsequent funeral will look like. I do not focus on any grotesque details about the cause of my death but rather the nature and appearance of death, calling it “oblivion” or “that dark and endless void” (Appendix B). Similar to “Underwater Blue,” I follow a linear thought process by writing about life after death, taking a Christian theistic worldview, which is indicated by the concepts of Jesus and Heaven. Although the writing takes on a cynical tone through the parenthetical thought of “(us, it’s almost laughable)” when referring to the Christian concept of the Second Coming, I contemplate the concept of “happily ever after”
and “forever” (Appendix B). From there, I spiral, questioning what forever would look like. In paragraph 11, I utilize connected but opposing images such as sleep and love to illustrate how I believe forever appears but ultimately conclude that because my understanding of forever ends—or because I have yet to see a real-life example that truly illustrates the concept of forever—forever must also end. I reiterate my Christian theistic beliefs about life after death and Heaven, but, with this new information, am unable to perceive these beliefs in the same manner and tone shown in previous paragraphs: cynical but accepting. “Forever Blue” ends with the same structure found at the beginning of the text, but it is reversed. In other words, the first paragraphs and the last paragraphs of the piece are similar.

Although “Forever Blue” relies more heavily on narrative to express its key themes than the traditional personal essay, this piece is still best classified as such according to a few characteristics of the genre. According to Philip Lopate, editor of The Art of the Personal Essay: An Anthology from the Classical Era to the Present, the personal essay is intimate, “sharing thoughts, memories, desires, complaints, and whimsies,” as well as autobiographical details with the readers (xxiii, xxix). It is also honest and requires that authors share not only their uglier experiences with the world but also point out the uglier aspects of themselves (Lopate xxvii-xxviii). These include the opinions of authors that disagree with the status quo or “popular opinion” (Lopate xxx). For example, in “Forever Blue,” I refer to one of the common beliefs in Christian theism, the Second Coming, and question why Jesus would ever return for his sinful creations. Furthermore, this genre is both centered on the perspective of the author, indicated by the use of the personal pronoun “I,” as well as on “a subject, a mood,” or “a problematic irritation” (Lopate xxxviii). “Forever Blue” displays all of these characteristics.

This text is 21 paragraphs in length. It utilizes several one-line and one-sentence long paragraphs throughout its beginning, middle, and end. There is always one to three of these
shorter paragraphs between the larger paragraphs. Although there is no clear organization of longer and shorter sentences, I utilize both throughout the piece, producing a range of one to four short sentences between the longer sentences. The further that I delve into the abstract and uncertain concept of life after death, the more the one-line sentences or paragraphs appear. In this vein, the beginning of the piece has fewer one-line paragraphs than the end, producing a ratio of 1:4. The middle is the most split by these one-line paragraphs, with a total of six one-line paragraphs, one at the top of the page, two after the first large paragraph, and three after the second large paragraph on the page.

The most significant structural aspect is the parallelism between the first four paragraphs of “Forever Blue” and the last four. This parallelism is indicated by repetitions in words and concepts; however, paragraphs one through four and paragraphs 18 through 21 are mirrored or flipped. For example, “Forever Blue” begins with the line: “The sky is a vivid blue, and I’m thinking of funerals” and ends with the line: “The sky is still a vivid blue” (Appendix B). Furthermore, the first sentence of the fourth paragraph reads, “I know what this will feel like” and then goes on to illustrate what death will look like using everyday examples like going to sleep or closing one’s eyes to pray. Then last four paragraphs of “Forever Blue” begin with the signal phrase, “But I know what it looks like” (Appendix B). This matching structure is only broken by the line, “When the sermon ends, I leave, stepping out into the sun. I don’t look back” (Appendix B). Otherwise, there are obvious parallels between the beginning and end of the piece.

The language of “Forever Blue” is also integral to its overall presentation. To creatively express my thoughts, I rely on select figures of speech: alliteration, rhyme, anadiplosis, asyndeton, and polysyndeton. There are several instances of alliteration in the piece. For example, in paragraphs three, six, and eight, I write “buried beneath,” “collected and consumed,” “smooth slabs,” and “oblivion and oblivious,” respectively, and there are many
more examples throughout the text (Appendix B). I have a clear preference for alliteration as a tool of figurative speech, at least in “Forever Blue.” There are also a few rhyming words in this piece. In paragraph two, I use the phrase “clear view of blue skies,” with “view” and “blue” being the rhyming words, and in paragraph six, I rhyme the ending words of the following sentences: “…but oblivion will close my eyes again, cover my ears. (These words are not mine to hear.)” (Appendix B). Although not exhibited as frequently, rhyme is still important to the rhythm and cadence of the piece. Similarly, there are a total of two examples of anadiplosis. These can be found when I repeat the words “heaven” and “forever.” I end paragraph six with the line, “…they will see me again in Heaven” and then begin paragraph seven with “Heaven” (Appendix B). Similarly, when closing paragraph eight, I write, “…and we’ll live happily ever after, forever” and then begins the one line of paragraph nine with, “Forever” (Appendix B).

One of the more prominent figures of speech found in the text is asyndeton, which means that a list of words or clauses is structured without coordinating conjunctions such as “and” or “but.” The most prominent examples of asyndeton within this piece can be found in the paralleled paragraphs at the beginning and the end. Paragraph two reads:

Here, in a church, floating on a carved wooden pew, feet submerged in a sea of bright red carpet, in a room where other kids my age reside, next to my very best friend, facing a clear view of blue skies – I am sinking through the floor into the dirt below. (Appendix B)

The lack of any conjunctions like “and,” especially in the final clause indicates that this sentence utilizes asyndeton as a figure of speech. Paragraph 19 follows a similar structure with minor differences in wording. Another example of asyndeton in the text occurs in the paragraph that illustrates my understanding of forever, paragraph 11. “I read about and witness young couples in love, their smiles, their tears, their kisses…” (Appendix B).
I also utilize polysyndeton, which is similar to asyndeton, but it structures a list of words or clauses with coordinating conjunctions. This can be seen in paragraph 15 when I write, “Jesus will take us back to Heaven and we’ll get to see God and ask Him all our questions and He’ll tell us the answer philosophers and kinds and everyman spent their lives puzzling out and we’ll be gifted with mansions more beautiful than any home we’ve ever seen…” (Appendix B). However, the most intriguing aspect of this paragraph is that I use polysyndeton to express these ideas at all. This section immediately follows the sentence, “I unravel,” and one would assume that the best method to represent this unraveling would be to show disconnectedness by breaking up the sentences into shorter fragments or even replacing the conjunctions with commas and making asyndeton the primary figure of speech. After all, according to The American Heritage (R) Dictionary of the English Language, asyndeton comes from a Greek word that means not bound together or unbound (qtd. in Credo Reference). Instead, I use polysyndeton and show a tangled, jumbled thought, almost as if I am clinging to the few connected ideas I have about my worldview. This is further exhibited when the sentence ends with, “and we’ll never get tired, never sleep and” (Appendix B). The connections presented abruptly end with no m-dash to lead the reader to a larger, more important thought. It is simply followed by a paragraph break and a new realization about the world order: “The string ends” (Appendix B).

The way that I utilize the same images as I did at the beginning of the piece shows that nothing has truly changed, and to a lesser extent, that I have not been changed. My understanding of the world is still based in familiarity, but as shown in the way that I change the way that I write about those images between paragraphs 18 and 19 and two and four, there is a difference in the way that I perceive the world before her epiphany and after. In other words, the objects – such as the church pew and the room – remain the same but my perception of them has changed.
Thus, repeated images and concepts that appear in the text are the most important to interpreting the overall meaning. The ones that are the most often used are the image of the ocean and the verbs associated with the ocean and oblivion and death, which are illustrated using the sub-images of (1) sleep and closed eyes, (2) the wooden pew and the wooden casket, (3) the grave, and (4) endings as depicted in stories and string.

The ocean appears as a metaphor in paragraph two, one of the paragraphs that is later replicated. This image is integral to my dissociation, which begins my journey down the proverbial rabbit hole. I establish the metaphor with the opening, “floating on a carved wooden pew,” creating the image of a boat floating on the water (Appendix B). Then I talk about how my “feet” are “submerged in a sea of bright red carpet” (Appendix B). Although I am innocently sticking my feet in the water, this action sets up the eventual drowning experience, indicated by the word “sinking” (Appendix B). This appears in the sentence, “I am sinking through the floor into the dirt below” (Appendix B). Here, I begin to drown in my thoughts, but the lack of reaction in the following paragraph shows that this is not an unwelcome experience, at least not initially. “Because that is where I’ll be, eventually…” (Appendix B). This line segues into this piece’s next prominent image and theme: oblivion or death.

I use several other concepts to present my idea of death. I first equate this experience with one that appears in my everyday life: closing my eyes and sleeping. For example, at my religious school, I am often asked to close my eyes for prayer and at night time, I will “bury” myself “under layers of blankets” and fall asleep (Appendix B). These activities reveal to me the face of death. These examples also appear when I struggle to understand what forever looks like despite not having any concrete examples to refer to. “I close my eyes and open them. I drift off to sleep then claw myself awake” (Appendix B).
Comparing the wooden pew and the wooden casket also contributes to my image of death. Being that these are the only physical structures I add to “Forever Blue,” it is natural to draw connections between the two of them. Both the wooden pew and casket hold my body at different points. The pew is used firstly as a vessel to ferry me to my contemplations and eventual drowning and then as a tangible connection to reality once I am wrenched back into it. “Here, in a church, on a hard wooden pew…” (Appendix B). In contrast, the wooden casket appears solely as my final resting place following my death. “My body lying in a shiny wooden casket, arms crossed over my chest, eyelids brush closed with intangible fingers” (Appendix B).

In addition, the wooden casket is connected to the eventual grave. I outline the entire burial process, starting with the funeral in paragraph 6 and leading into the moment when I am lowered into my grave. I describe it as being “under six feet of earth” and “enclosed with smooth slabs of concrete painted white…” (Appendix B). I then connect the grave to death at the end of the same sentence: “…and there I’ll lay, rotting in oblivion and oblivious to the world above” (Appendix B).

Finally, the concept of endings, which I illustrate through my experiences with stories and the example of string, is also connected to the idea of death. However, it should be noted that death is not explicitly mentioned in these paragraphs. Rather, I allude to this theme when addressing my lack of understanding about forever. All of the examples that I present, in particular, the process of reading and experiencing a story, have endings just like I, ultimately, find my ending in death (Appendix B). I also narrate a moment in my life when a pastor tried to explain the eternity of heaven using the example of a string, by sectioning off a small part of it and explaining that our eternal lives span the length of the larger portion of the string (Appendix B). However, I soon realize that this, just like the stories and just like me, ends too.
Forever is also an important idea in “Forever Blue.” It is the very concept that I struggle to understand throughout the entirety of the personal essay. However, by the time I have drowned myself in my thoughts and come back up for air, I am no closer to understanding forever than I was at the beginning. Because death is so concrete and connected to many images within my life, it is the dominant concept by the end of the story. But I have not gained any new insight. Yes, I have been irrevocably changed by my journey down the rabbit hole, but the world around me remains the same. “The sky is still a vivid blue” (Appendix B).

5. Narrative Analysis of “Forever Blue”

After imagining my funeral, I begin to question the eternal life promised in Seventh-day Adventism. With no frame of reference for the concept of forever, I spiral into an existential crisis that results in me leaving the church. My feelings in this piece are at first accepting, as the concept of death is almost familiar to me, but then I become horrified by the idea of forever, so much so that I run away them by running away from church.

Like in “Underwater Blue,” the drowning experience appears, bringing with it the theme of agency versus no agency. From the beginning of “Forever Blue,” I am drowning in my thoughts. “I am sinking through the floor into the dirt below” (Appendix B). However, the same sense of panic found in the original drowning experience does not appear until the line “I unravel,” which shows when I lose control over my thoughts. Again, I reestablish agency when I take control again and reassure myself by comparing the end of forever to what I already understand about the end of life (Appendix B). This is where the narrative theme of truth appears.

According to Veglia and Fini, truth is necessary for the “search for meaning” and is “the foundation for building meaning.” They also explain that when people fail to accept a narrative truth and “integrate it” into their stories, it creates a sense of “self-deception.” This is what occurs during the resolution of my primary problem in “Forever Blue.” The truth is
that I do not know what forever looks like, but instead of accepting this idea, I avoid it by
talking about the end of forever because I can better equate it to what I already know about
death. Also, when attempting to find an example of forever in my own experiences, I fail to
realize that these comparisons are least constant even if they are temporary. However, there is
a truth that I reveal in this piece that I did not in the previous story: My parents are divorced
(Appendix B). This would not be immediately understood upon reading the latter work, but
my parents divorced before my sisters were born; I just did not explicitly state that in
“Underwater Blue.” In contrast, I explicitly go through my routine as a child of divorced
parents in “Forever Blue.” Therefore, there are some truths that I have accepted and adapted
into my narrative, but the fact that I do not know what forever looks like is not one of them.

The theme of communion versus no communion appears again in this piece. In this case,
 despite being surrounded by people and sitting beside my best friend, I am still isolated by
my introspection. Even after I have pulled myself out of my crisis, I do not reach out to
anyone to talk about my experiences. I just leave. “When the sermon ends, I leave, stepping
out into the sun. I don’t look back” (Appendix B). Similar to my experience after nearly
drowning in “Underwater Blue,” my moment of taking agency does not come with comfort. I
do not talk to my friend about what I was feeling, just like I did not talk to my dad. This is
just one of the many parts of the self presented in “Forever Blue.”

In addition to the self as introspective, I am also a reader, a writer, a student, a daughter of
divorced parents, an older sibling, and a friend. Although these roles are merely mentioned in
the story, the latter three roles are connected to the theme of communion versus no
communion and are then disregarded by my self-isolation. The self is also aware, meaning
that I understand the cliché about blue skies and funerals, indicating a connection to
sociocultural meanings. Because I am of a certain again, I also understand that I will one day
die even though my sisters do not. “My mom, my dad, perhaps will cry. My sisters won’t.
They’ll be too young to understand. Dolled up in their best dresses, quiet and somber for reasons they don’t know…” (Appendix B).

Most importantly, the self is indicated to be Adventist I believe in God and attend a church and an Adventist school. However, this part of the self is also disrupted due to the narrative theme of value. It is commonly known that religious beliefs are “moderately associated with” or “can have positive effects on self-esteem” and personal value (qtd. in Veglia and Fini). However, this is not the case in this piece. “Jesus will come back – all my teachers say He’ll come back for us (us, it’s almost laughable)…” (Appendix B). This last line exhibits low personal value and, more specifically, “doubt and uncertainty about self-worth” (Veglia and Fini). This theme becomes most important in the final work “The Knowing.”

6. Formalist Analysis of “The Knowing”

“The Knowing” is the second in a series of three interconnected prose poems about identity and the struggles it brings. In this particular piece, I address the devastating emotions I experience upon realizing that my face is a curse. I describe this epiphany as an “inescapable anathema” and as such, it follows me throughout the narration. At first, I attempt to ignore this revelation, focusing on “more pressing concerns,” but like many ideas that get swept away in the flood of everyday life, it is eventually brought back to the surface following the catalytic event that I call “the knowing” (Appendix C). I write, “It hummed beneath the surface. And so it remained until months later when you shrugged off the knowing you wear like a second skin…” (Appendix C). Then I drown beneath the weight of the realization that my face is a curse as well as the subsequent insecurities that quickly devolve into self-contempt. Although the last stanza reveals that I am seeking out help for my problem, the final repetition of “Your face is a curse” ends the prose poem, showing that I have yet to heal.
This entire piece is written in the second person, as indicated by the use of “you” and similar second-person pronouns. This was meant to cause the readers to experience my emotions firsthand.

As a prose poem, “The Knowing” utilizes several poetic conventions along with a typical prose structure. For one, poetry is usually formatted with single-spaces between the lines, which can be seen in this piece. Another element that distinguishes “The Knowing” from a typical prose piece is the repetition of the phrase, “Your face is a curse” (Appendix C). It appears six times in the piece between each of the five long paragraphs. This repetition is one of the significant stylistic choices found in this piece. According to Reem Ahmad Rabea and Busaiba Adel Almahameed, researchers who analyzed the hybrid nature of Jamaica Kincaid’s “Girl,” repetition is a “primary poetic device” that draws the reader to “certain thoughts and emotions” that are especially significant to the text (159). Writers like Kincaid accomplish this using repetitive literary devices like an anaphora and epiphora.

This text is a total of 11 paragraphs long, the shortest of the pieces selected for analysis. Like the other pieces, I use a combination of long and short sentences. Similarly, short sentences are far more prevalent in this piece than long sentences with 24 short sentences compared to ten long sentences. There are several structural and stylistic choices exhibited in the sentence lengths, the first of which can be found in paragraph six.

In paragraph six, I describe how I was overtaken by the truth I had previously ignored. I write: “And so it remained until months later when you shrugged off the knowing you wear like a second skin to be met with a tidal wave equal parts suddenness and foreboding” (Appendix C). The sentence that follows is 52 words in length, the longest in the entire piece, and it is connected by a series of long dashes that lead the reader into the same realizations that I experience. In this way, the sentence structure represents a tidal wave. The words continue on and on, which contributes to the feeling of being engulfed in the rising tide.
Stylistic decisions are also found in the more minute details of the piece: the punctuation. Of course, I use commas and periods to appeal to grammar conventions, but there are select punctuation decisions that contribute to the readers’ overall understanding of the meaning of the text as well as the emotions I experience throughout. For example, the first sentence in paragraph two reads “It weighs you down, this terrible truth you can never un-know: the pallor of your skin, the slope and point of your nose” (Appendix C). This follows the first use of the repeated phrase, “Your face is a curse” and shows that this is the “terrible truth” that I am referring to. However, just as the reader might be confused by what that could mean, the sentence includes a colon that leads the reader to my explanation. According to the text, the features of my face, “the slope and point of your nose,” have contributed to my realization that my face is a curse. I further support this by explaining, “They are stains of which you will never be rid…” (Appendix C). Without this particular punctuation choice, the “terrible truth” would be vague and left to reader interpretation.

Another punctuation form that I use is the em dash. The sole example of this is in paragraph six when I write about how the loss of “the knowing” acted as a catalyst to my being overwhelmed by a tidal wave composed of all my insecurities:

You are steadily engulfed in the way your skin bursts with red at the slightest irritation—the way your hair is less of a curl and more of a wave—the way you will never look as pretty as other girls—the way you are so completely and devastatingly inadequate in comparison. (Appendix C)

The use of the em dashes in this sentence mimics the rising motion of the tidal wave mentioned in the preceding sentence. Then the reader is led further and further along the overwhelming realizations. According to Grammarly, this is what em-dashes should be used for. Similar to the colon, the em dash “amplifies whatever came before.” However, whereas
colons are “more formal,” em dashes are “more emphatic” and can “generate strong emotion” (Grammarly).

A contrasting effect to that of the em dash usage in paragraph six can be found in paragraph eight when I use semicolons to create one of the few long sentences in the piece. It reads:

It’s getting sucked under rising sea-salt waves and sinking; it’s wanting to scream, open your mouth wide and release it; it’s wanting the sound to take everything-of you, wanting it to dissipate into the atmosphere and leave the hollowed-out-husk-of you. (Appendix C)

The “it” in this passage is primarily used to refer to my reaction to drowning beneath my realization and the self-contempt that followed. As I state in the sentence prior, I am not fighting against it; I am letting it drag me down. The semicolons connecting these phrases assist in presenting this message. Unlike the em dashes in the previous stanza, which acted as a rising tide, the semicolons act as the anchor that drags me down by interlocking the clauses. They have been sewn together with semicolons forming a long chain of though, and it contributes to the feeling of sinking.

The final stylistic choice exhibited in punctuation usage is, ironically, the lack of traditional punctuation on the various repetitions of “Your face is a curse” (Appendix C). In other words, I never end this sentence with a period as would be expected. The use of periods in the longer passages show that I do follow traditional grammar conventions, therefore, the lack of periods in the repeating lines is a deliberate decision. Periods, overall, create a sense of finality for sentences, meaning that they indicate the end of the sentence and, without a period, the sentence is unfinished and can continue. “Your face is a curse” exhibits the latter sense. In other words, the lack of a period contributes to the lack of resolution. This fits well with the tone that I have established for this sentence: this realization followed me throughout my reaction to it and still follows once I seek help from the “nice lady” (Appendix C).
I make other stylistic choices in my language and word choice. For example, I use nontraditional descriptors and verbs such as “un-know, hollowed-out-husk-of-you, and everything-of-you” to address the psychophysiological reaction to my epiphany. I also utilize my characteristic figures of speech to creatively narrate my experiences. Anaphora is present in the line “...no matter how hard you scrub, no matter how much you are tempted…” (Appendix C). Chiasmus is one of the rarer figures of speech that I use, and it occurs when words or phrases are repeated in reverse order. This is found in the line, “…it’s wanting the sound to take everything-of-you, wanting it to dissipate…” (Appendix C). Beyond these are the figures of speech that contribute to the overall meaning of the piece: personification and alliteration.

I personify the epiphany that my face is a curse throughout the piece. Every time I use the phrase, it is followed by stanza beginning with “it.” For example, “Your face is a curse…it weighs you down…it stole over you…it hummed beneath the surface….” (Appendix C). The realization always performs some form of human action and often does so against me, which contributes to the overall tone of passivity in the piece. If I had instead written, for example, that I felt weighed down by the knowledge that my face was a curse, that would be considered active voice. However, I consistently use the passive voice, which contributes to the idea that I am simply experiencing these feelings. This passivity also works well with my decision to write in the second person because the reader must now undergo my emotions.

Alliteration, the other consequential figure of speech, becomes more important in paragraph eight rather than throughout the piece. This is also where the device becomes visually prevalent. In this passage, I describe not only my metaphorical drowning but also how I must keep moving in the real world. I talk about the “hollowed-out-husk-of-you,” which is the representation of how my body goes through the motions of my established routine while I have dissociated. “There is the husk, the corpse of you, and its painted and
packaged prettily, and its walking to class and taking notes and smiling with all its teeth, mouth stretched like a rubber band” (Appendix C). However, I admit that the “everything-of-you” is still present despite being “buried six feet underwater” (Appendix C). It, too, has obligations to meet. “Buoyed by the balance of a GPA, the bingeing, the weekly calls home, tethered to them, too. It surfaces in little lift smiles” (Appendix C). The use of alliteration in these sentences adds a sense of repetitiveness to the activities that I perform, which fits in with the idea that I am simply going through the motions to keep myself from fully drowning. Even though the “everything-of-you” is trapped underwater, the academic and familial obligations keep it afloat.

Both of these figures of speech contribute to the primary images and concepts that appear in this piece, the first of which is experiencing versus responding, passivity versus activity, and absence versus presence. No one term encompasses these ideas, so they have all been included under one heading.

The majority of the piece finds me, and by extension the reader, experiencing and being passive or absent. For one, “The Knowing” is written entirely in the second person and primarily in a passive voice like I am watching myself go through these experiences in what would be considered a detached manner if not for the severe emotions indicated in expressions such as the sentence in paragraph two: “They are stains of which you will never be rid no matter how hard you scrub, no matter how much you are tempted to dig your nails in and peel the flesh from your face until all that is left is weeping muscle” (Appendix C). I still possess these feelings, but I have decided to unload them upon the reader instead.

Personification also contributes to the idea of passivity and experiencing because it allows the object or concept to act instead of the subject, which is me. In addition, the passage of alliteration in paragraph eight produces the image of going through the motions, which is significant to the larger concept of experiencing and being passive.
The subtheme of absence versus presence only becomes clear in the final paragraph stanza when I write, “You talk to someone, this nice lady who lets you ignore the reason why you’re here…” (Appendix C). The use of the word “here” is significant because, throughout the entire piece, there is no established setting. Instead, I narrate about introspection with metaphors rather than concrete imagery. Therefore, “here” is jarring to the reader. It begs the question, “where is here?” However, even in the passage that uses this word, I provide no physical location. Instead, readers must conclude that “here” refers to the idea of being present in the moment. The fact that the paragraph begins with “you” rather than “it” like in the previous stanzas also establishes the idea that I am now present, responding instead of experiencing and being active rather than passive. And since I have also established that I am now present, readers can assume that I was absent throughout the rest of the piece.

In addition to this compounding theme of experiencing versus responding, passivity versus activity, and absence versus presence, “The Knowing” also exhibits the images and concepts of death, both its appearance and process, which are connected to the theme of drowning. I also utilize the image of the ocean as I have done in the other pieces selected for analysis.

Both death and drowning are interconnected images. I describe the appearance of death in reference to the “hollowing-out-husk-of-you,” which I also call a corpse. I explain that this part of myself is “painted and packaged prettily,” and this alludes to the practice of cleaning up the deceased before they are displayed during the funeral. However, despite being called a corpse, the “hollowed-out-husk-of-you” does not exhibit the physical response of death because it is still moving around, “walking to class and taking notes and smiling with all its teeth…” (Appendix C). Therefore, the concept of death simply explains my emotional state following the drowning experience.
Unlike what one would expect drowning to look like, I write about how I am overtaken by my epiphany in the form of a tidal wave and how it simultaneously drags me down. “And it isn’t a fight,” I say, “it isn’t resistance” (Appendix C). I allow myself to sink. I may want to scream and have that scream take all of the hurt and self-contempt that I feel, leaving nothing but death behind. But, as I later explain, I do not need to do any of that to be split into the “hollowed-out-husk-of-you” and the “everything-of-you” because it has already occurred (Appendix C). What is intriguing about this drowning experience is my sheer lack of reaction. I contemplate acting in the way that is expected of a drowning victim, but it is as if I have been exhausted by the force of my feelings. It is as if I know that I am alone in this fight and that any reaction would be pointless.

The final image that appears in this piece is the ocean, and it has appeared in each analyzed piece. But rather than the, at first, calm sea that I described in “Underwater Blue,” the ocean that I depict in “The Knowing” is overwhelming. It takes the form of a “rising tide of presentness,” referring to the other concerns that I focus on while choosing to ignore the epiphany (Appendix C). It is also a “tidal wave” that consumes me and buries “the-everything-of-you” beneath its surface. The ocean here is entirely metaphoric, but it does not diminish its significance to this piece and the others.

7. Narrative Analysis of “The Knowing”

Within “The Knowing,” I experience a sense of self-loathing about my appearance that I, at first, attempt to ignore and invalidate. After the catalytic event referred to as “the knowing,” those feelings return like a “tidal wave,” overwhelming and suffocating, and I am split into two selves, “the-hollowed-out-husk-of-you” and “the everything of you” (Appendix C). The former maintains the routine of the college student, and the latter is “buried six feet underwater” and drowns in the self-loathing (Appendix C). Following this is a moment that goes unmentioned, but it prompts me to get help from a therapist to deal with these feelings.
Several recurrent themes appear in this piece in addition to the previous works. Firstly, the drowning metaphor displays the theme of agency versus no agency: “And it isn’t a fight. It isn’t resistance. It’s getting sucked under rising sea-salt waves and sinking; it’s wanting to screen…” (Appendix C). However, this idea of no agency is consistent throughout the piece due to the passive voice. “It weighs you down…It stole over you…It hummed beneath the surface…” (Appendix C). Agency only manifests at the end of “The Knowing” in the last stanza, when the sentence structure suddenly becomes active: “You talk to someone…” (Appendix C). This line also reflects the theme of communion versus no communion. Throughout the prose poem, the “you” is the only character that appears, meaning that I am isolated in my experiences through introspection. The last stanza is the only time I introduce another character, the “nice lady,” and with her comes the one moment when I reach out to someone and establish a sense of communion.

Other prominent themes in “The Knowing” are the narratives of truth and personal value. Similar to “Underwater Blue” and “Forever Blue,” I ignore my feelings rather than come to terms with them. In this case, these feelings are of self-contempt. “Your brain, in its infinite preoccupation, shelved it alongside your existential horror, hid it from your scrutiny.” Also, the feelings that were hinted at in “Forever Blue” – (“us, it’s almost laughable”) – appear again but ten times worse. The language I direct at myself becomes far more abusive and harmful. “…no matter how hard you scrub, no matter how much you are tempted to dig your nails in and peel the flesh from your face until all that is left is weeping muscle.”

The self depicted in “The Knowing” revolves around these narrative themes. I am very much introspective as shown by the lack of other characters in the text. This also makes me appear fixated and comparative. My feelings very quickly devolve from insecurity to self-loathing, becoming violent, yet I am also deceitful because I am aware that feeling this way
causes problems but still choose to invalidate them. Finally, this decision, or lack thereof, reveals that the self is passive.

8. Findings: Interconnections between Formalist Criticism and Narrative Analysis

Through my analyses of “Underwater Blue,” “Forever Blue,” and “The Knowing,” I unearthed several commonalities. From my formalist criticism, I identified the writers’ craft tools that frequently appeared in the pieces. These included alliteration, rhyme, personification, and metaphor. I also found that the latter two tools were especially important in creating the prominent themes and images that connected to my findings from my narrative analysis.

Each of the pieces also depicted the following themes: agency versus no agency, communion versus no communion, truth versus self-deception, personal value versus insecurity/self-loathing. I also noticed that these themes appeared in varying degrees of importance. For example, the narrative theme of personal value versus insecurity/self-loathing was much more important in “The Knowing,” whereas it was merely introduced in the prior piece, “Forever Blue.” Similarly, it was only through analyzing “Forever Blue” that I was able to notice the allusion to the narrative theme of truth in “Underwater Blue,” which is only connected to one line and is implied through my reaction to nearly drowning.

Next, I noted the consistencies in the self that appeared in all of the works. Since the self is created through personal analysis along with societal and cultural influences, I found that the self was not only introspective and isolating, it was also displayed the roles of a daughter, sibling, and friend.

All of these elements were key to the interconnections between formalist criticism and narrative analysis, but I found that theme of the drowning experience was the main link. In my creative writing, this was established through the two components of the ocean and death through drowning. “Underwater Blue” is where this first appears since it is about a literal
near-drowning experience from my childhood. In the lines, “Salty, acrid water. Invades my mouth,” I personify the ocean to illustrate how I feel helpless against it (Appendix A).

“Forever Blue” and “The Knowing” both use drowning as a metaphor. For example, the introductory sentences use words and phrases such as floating, submerged, and “sea of bright red carpet” to establish the ocean as a metaphor and having established this, I then write, “I am sinking through the floor into the dirt below” to begin the drowning metaphor (Appendix B). Both of these are also used metaphorically in “The Knowing” when I write about the tidal wave that overtakes me and how I sink beneath it. “And so it goes…and goes…and goes. And it isn’t a fight. It isn’t resistance. It’s getting sucked under rising sea-salt waves and sinking; it’s wanting to scream…” (Appendix C). The way that this drowning experience continually appears in the memories that chronologically follow “Underwater Blue” shows that this particular story contains a self-defining memory. Nearly drowning was linked to other memories “based on shared emotions, types of events” and “outcomes” and is, therefore, “developmentally critical and thematically central” to the life story I have currently established (Singer and Blagov 232).

My narrative analysis of all three pieces supported this assessment. It showed me that the significance of the drowning experience as a metaphor extended beyond creative writing and into my very self. I discovered that the drowning experience was necessary to the themes of agency versus no agency and communion versus no communion, which came together to establish a behavioral pattern of maladaptive independence. More specifically, the drowning experience is a metaphor for moments in which I have no sense of agency. Since “Underwater Blue” contains the memory in which I nearly drowned and occurred earlier than the other works, it, therefore, serves as the origin for feeling as though I have no agency. This is why I use the same metaphor when I have no control over my intrusive thoughts and
feelings in “Forever Blue” and “The Knowing.” Where the theme of communion versus no communion occurs is when I finally take agency.

In “Underwater Blue,” I present myself as a daughter and an older sister. I came to understand that these were conflicting as, in my culture, the former role requires reliance and deference whereas the latter role connotes responsibility. Therefore, these aspects of the self are already conflicting, but nearly drowning only exacerbates this. As a daughter, I expected my dad to be the one to rescue me, and I even call out to him for help. However, from my perspective, my cries go unnoticed: “He doesn’t see. Doesn’t hear” (Appendix A). Thus, I have to return to shore on my own. The text shows that I am very much frightened by these experiences, and it is only made worse by the feeling of betrayal that soon rises:

Dad asks if I’m okay. I hear it but I don’t hear it. I don’t know what to say. Nodding is enough; he leaves me be—his big girl, his pumpkin bread—and in the fading background, he’s checking up on Sahlay… (Appendix A)

Although imperceptible, placing the nicknames that illustrate my close relationship with my dad immediately after the phrase “he leaves me be” shows that I feel betrayed. This is also evident when I write about how he then moves on to take care of my sister. Following this moment of betrayal, “I walk away from my family,” and this is when a change in the self occurs (Appendix A).

Through this action of separation, I take agency. Once I have calmed down, I am in control of my body once more and I choose to sit on the docks away from my family. However, since I “stay within sight,” I am still fulfilling the deference role of a daughter but not reliance (Appendix A). After nearly drowning, I realize that I can no longer rely on my dad to protect me from danger and will need to do so myself. This is also where the theme of communion versus no communion becomes important and where the pattern of maladaptive independence begins. When my dad asks me if I am okay, this is an opportunity for me to tell
him how I feel. But I am unable to speak. However, this is not the only moment when I could have communicated with him. By the end of “Underwater Blue,” I have not left the beach and my family, including my dad, is still nearby. Therefore, I could reach out to any of them and talk about my feelings, thereby establishing communion, but I do not. Instead, I separate myself, sitting alone with my thoughts and the trauma.

This pattern occurs again at the ending of “Forever Blue.” Once I pull myself out of the metaphorical drowning, I am still in the church setting with “other kids my age” and “my dearest friend” (Appendix B). This is where I would be allowed and expected to commune with the people around me and share the fears that I have experienced. However, like in “Underwater Blue,” I choose not to. “When the sermon ends, I leave, stepping out into the sun. I don’t look back” (Appendix B). My act of agency leads me to isolate myself.

“The Knowing” is set up in a similar way, although I can only argue this through difference. In other words, it is only in the last stanza of the text that another character is introduced. “You talk to someone, this nice lady who lets you ignore…” (Appendix C). Other than this, the “you” is isolated. However, the way that the “you” interacts with this new character displays another change in the self. Although maladaptive independence is present throughout the text, this is the one moment when I talk to someone about how I feel rather than alienate myself. This does not mean that this pattern within the self’s behavior has been entirely replaced, but it does show that I am learning alternate ways of coping with the moments when I have no agency.

9. Discussion

Although I was unable to engage in narrative therapy, as per my original methodology, completing this study has not only revealed parts of myself that were previously undiscovered, but it has also shown me that the self is truly inescapable. My desire to be independent is characteristic of me, so much so that it appeared in all of the selected pieces
even when I had not decided to include it. However, learning that this behavioral pattern has been maladaptive, as shown by my reaction to the stressful situations in the texts, is novel. Although my analysis uncovered that this habit emerged as a response to my near-drowning, it is difficult to determine why I have consistently behaved similarly when confronted with the lack of agency. Perhaps when I felt that I had not received the help that I needed in “Underwater Blue,” I learned that there was no point in asking for it. While a logical conclusion to draw, it is still speculation. Investigating the thought process behind my maladaptive independence would be a key step in replacing this coping mechanism with a healthier option such as the one displayed in “The Knowing.” However, recognizing detrimental behaviors is still an important part of the growing and healing process.

10. Conclusion

The purpose of this project was to explore whether or not the combination of creative nonfiction and narrative therapy would aid in the process of self-discovery, self-awareness, and self-reflection. Even though there were complications that changed my original methodology, I still fulfilled my goals. All of my analyses took me on a journey of self-discovery as they lead me to search for myself as both a writer and a self. I learned about my preferred writers’ craft tools as well as the metaphors I use to more clearly express my feelings. I was also able to identify the origin and meaning of these metaphors. Thus, I have seen a sliver of the formulation of my language. For example, the drowning experience was such a significant event in my life that it became a means to communicate the feeling of having no agency.

Also, due to my self-reflection, I was able to discern emotions in memories that I had not previously recognized. When I wrote about my near-drowning experience in “Underwater Blue,” I had no idea that I had felt betrayed until I analyzed the self as a daughter and older sibling and the cultural and societal meanings of those roles. Both processes of self-discovery
and self-reflection have improved my overall self-awareness in that I learned how my helpless feelings promoted unhealthy coping mechanisms in the form of maladaptive independence. I realize that all of these discoveries do not entirely represent who I am as both a writer and a person, but they are significant pieces of the complex puzzle that is the self.

Therefore, other creative writers who would like to learn more about themselves and their writing should analyze their own work using literary criticisms such as formalist criticism. This process revealed so much about how I write creative nonfiction that it has prompted me to give more attention to form when I revise the pieces I selected for this project as well as those I write in the future. Narrative psychologists could also benefit from utilizing literary analysis as another tool in narrative therapy; it would improve their ability to identify and understand the underlying issues reflected in clients’ written narratives.

Creative writers should also consider engaging in narrative therapy to alleviate clinical issues they see in themselves and aid in the process of self-discovery. Although I was unable to complete this process myself due to issues with COVID-19, examining my work through the lens of narrative therapy analysis uncovered hidden parts of myself as a self. However, I acknowledge that my assessments would have been more accurate under the assistance of a therapist who was licensed to practice narrative therapy. This could be helpful even to those who do not consider themselves to be creative writers but communicate more effectively through story. Narrative therapy could improve their mental health as well as their ability to self-reflect and be self-aware. Finally, those who do not write at all – as opposed to creative writers who intentionally write and those who do not consider themselves creative writers but also write – could process their own psychological experiences by using writing in narrative therapy.

Regardless, as storytelling creatures, it is only fair that we use our stories to better our lives and ourselves, no matter what form those stories take.
Appendix A

I'm old enough now that the me has become three, three sisters in total. Sierra, Sahlay, Saniyah. Three S’s, three years distance between us, perfect symmetry. And today, Mom lets Dad take all of us swimming at Glass Bottle Beach down the hill from his house.

When it was just me and my dad, we would walk through the cemetery and its decaying gravestones, parting the sea of cane grass, like we were on an adventure. In the treacherous jungle, wary of predators that see us when we can’t see them. But my sisters are smaller, clumsy in the art of adventure. So, Dad leads us down the stairs, down to sand riddled with wave-worn glass. We rest our towels on the stone wall of the dock.

I don’t need a floatie. I scoop up the snorkel instead. I slide the goggles over my head.

Inhale. Suction the rubbery plastic to my nose. Exhale and readjust, I slip the snorkel into my mouth and let it stretch my lips.

Sahlay wants to come with me, so my Dad stays on the shore, in the shallows with Saniyah. It’s Sahlay and I now, submerging ourselves in cool-to-the-touch water. Wade waist-high first, then chest-high. Then glide beneath the surface and fill our ears with the ocean’s secret burning.

Under the surface of the waves, the ocean crackles like fire. (I had never seen a real fire — there was never a need — but I heard fire on TV. It sounds like eardrums drowned in sea.)

There’s not much to see this close to the shore. I’ve never ventured beyond where my toes can touch, where the rocks breach the surface and erode with the ebb and flow. I wonder what Dad sees when he goes further, when he leaves me looking for a glimpse of his snorkel sneaking above the water.
Dad’s cooler than I am. Does so many cool things too. Sometimes, he dives to the
bottom - dipping his snorkel into the ocean – fills it up then blows it out in one huge burst,
like the whales I’ve seen on T.V. I try it too. It’s not the same.

We don’t notice when the tide rolls in. The water gets higher, gets deeper. We follow
sergeant majors and butterflyfish on their journeys through the seaweed. We stumble across
sea moss and coral overtaking concrete blocks and glass bottles. We never swim beyond the
rocks.

My snorkel fills with water. Just enough that I can taste. Not enough to blow it out. I
come back up for air.

And I’m

pushed back down.

No air. Just water, Salty, acrid water. Invades my mouth. Kick myself up. Spit it out.

Once, accident. Two, coincident. Three times...

A sound. Supposed to be “Dad.” Not enough, just a letter. Drag the rest down with
me. Try again. Scream is. Not enough. Again. Again. Please...

He doesn’t see. Doesn’t hear.

I swallow the sea. It lives inside me. My lungs ache. Arms, legs, screech a mantra of

Don’t think.

Sink. Shove off the hands and escape.

My body takes me back to shore, Sahlay abandoned for solid and. Drags me over the
water connecting with shaven glass and tinkling. Collapses on all fours where the earth is
less rough. Fingers, palms, knees, swim-shoe-covered toes kick the sand, press themselves closer in reunion. It hides the tremors.

24a I vomit up my stomach where the seaweed in and my throat stings with salt once more. I vomit it all up. And when I'm done, emptied out, I draw in my first unencumbered breath. My throat shakes with it. Oxygen is a strange feeling but my lungs drink it in all the same. It doesn't ease the trembling.

25 I don't cry. The sensation is there, beneath the tremor of arms, legs, stomach, throat, beneath the ache. I don't cry. The ocean drank up my tears.

27 Dad asks if I'm okay. I hear it but I don't hear it. I don't know what to say. Nodding is enough, he leaves me be—his big girl, his pumpkin bread—and in the fading background, he's checking up on Sahlay, who had noticed the high tide before I did when she couldn't stand without sinking and grabbed my shoulder for support and propelled herself above the waves. The ghost of seawater and stomach acid reminds me that the ocean's prettier from afar. I walk away from my family but stay within sight, climbing up on the dock, traipsing over peeling wooden planks ravaged by hurricanes past.

From my perch on the dock, I watch the waves roll in over and over, a constant cycle. I look out at an ocean that stretches behind the horizon, vast and infinite and blue.
Appendix B

The sky is vivid blue, and I’m thinking of funerals.

Here, in a church, floating on a carved wooden pew, feet submerged in a sea of bright red carpet, in a room where other kids my age reside, next to my very best friend facing a clear view of blue skies— I am sinking through the floor into the dirt below.

Because that is where I’ll be, eventually, buried beneath the earth as the world continues on, as if I never existed.

I know what this will feel like. I’ve seen it when my teachers tell me to close my eyes for prayer, when the moon rises and I bury myself under layers of blankets, pressed into sleep. Its face is oblivion. And now that I’ve seen it, it follows, echoing my footsteps with its own hollow sounds, gripping my mind when it wanders and is alone. And in my ear, it whispers the story of the end of me. And the scene begins with this:

My body lying in a shiny wooden casket, arms crossed over my chest, eyelids brushed closed with intangible fingers.

The people I love most will be in attendance. My mom, my dad, perhaps, will cry. My sisters won’t. They’ll be too young to understand. Dressed up in their best dresses, quiet and somber for reasons they don’t know, they will sit amongst a throng of people to mourn one they knew in name and not much else. Mom, dad, perhaps, my friends will write passages about me, about how I was a beloved daughter and sister and friend, an avid reader who collected and consumed books with every Scholastic order, fueled my imagination to write stories in ancient workbooks they will preserve in my memory – and in lieu of reading these words to me, they’ll recite them from a pulpit overlooking a crowd of pews. I’ll strain my ears to listen, peek my eyes open to see the imprint of my life on these familiar faces, but oblivion will close my eyes again, cover my ears. These words are not mine to hear. And a pastor will assure my loved ones that they will see me again in Heaven.

The sky is vivid blue, and I’m thinking of funerals.
They'll bury me under six feet of earth, my tomb enclosed with smooth slabs of concrete painted white, and there I'll lay, rotting in oblivion oblivious to the world above.

Until the heaven the pastor spoke of. Jesus will come back — all my teachers say He'll come back for us (it's almost laughable) — and take the people of the earth to the next plane of existence where the suffering of our world is just a distant, unpleasant memory, and we'll live happily ever after, forever.

I close my eyes and open them. I drift off to sleep then claw myself awake. I take a pink and blue bus to school. I walk up mountains to get back home. I南通 through pages of a book, pausing line after line and conclude the story with the last one, moving over it in a reverent hushing moment, then close the book. I read about and witness young couples in love, their smiles, their tears, their kisses all for each other. I travel between the houses of my divorced parents, mom during the week, dad on the weekends, and they see each other in passing, remain cordial for my sake. A pastor holds up a long piece of string, separates a snippet with a clothespin and says that our lives are but the smallest part and what stretches beyond is our eternity with God in Heaven, happily ever after.


Jesus will take us back to Heaven and we'll get to see God and ask Him all our questions and He'll tell us all the answers philosophers and kings and everyone spent their lives puzzling out and we'll be gifted with mansions more beautiful than any home we've
The author uses the same images at the beginning to show that nothing has changed and to a lesser extent that she has not been changed ever seen and we'll visit the planets that God created and kept from our grasp and we'll rejoice and we'll sing and we'll never get tired, never sleep and never die. The string ends. That is all. The string ends.

What happens when forever ends? I have been asked this question many times. In the beginning, the character reaches a conclusion. The answer she's been waiting for. She turns around and the structure of the piece begins to unravel. Here, in a church, on a hard wooden pew, feet digging into bright red carpet, in an isolated room with other kids my age, next to my dearest friend, staring out at the sky from nearby window— I have seen the end of all things. When the sermon ends, I leave, stepping out into the sun. I don't look back.

The sky is still a vivid blue.
Narrative Psych

Fever Blue

Plot: - b. what happened?

After imagining my own funeral, I begin to question the eternal afterlife promised in Seventh-day Adventism with no frame of reference for the concept of forever. I begin with the view of chaos which results in my leaving the church.

Themes:
- the drowning experience (looking through the floor, par. 4)
- agency versus no agency - I have to control every thought
- "I unravel" until I have control again, observe myself (This what my body looks like, par. 10), my self of agency does not concern comfort. I don't talk to my friend about what I was feeling just like I didn't tell my dad in a near death experience.
- death versus eternal
- narration of path - the truth is that I don't know what forever looks like, but instead of accepting this truth, I avoid it by talking about the end of forever; I don't realize that the companions I make before forever are at least constant if temporary.
- isolation
- communion versus communion - despite being around people, I am isolated through introspection. Even after I pull myself out of the chaos, I leave by myself.
- Self

...Aware - I understand the views associated with blue skies and funerals (par. 4). I understand that I will one day die even if my voice doesn't (par. 3).
Appendix C

Your face is a curse.

(1) It weighs you down, this terrible truth you can never un-know. The pallor of your skin, the slope and point of your nose. They are stains of which you will never be rid no matter how hard you scrub, no matter how much you are tempted to dig your nails in and peel the flesh from your face until all that is left is weeping muscle. This image, in particular, intrudes persistently. It is your inescapable anathema. Another way to hate yourself.

Your face is a curse.

(2) It stole over you like most epiphanies, quiet and unassuming. Your brain, in its infinite preoccupation, shelved it alongside your existential horror, hid it from your scrutiny. Because all little girls becoming women think their faces are curses. It was a rite of passage you regurgitated more times than you could count. And you had more pressing concerns. You thought it faded away in the rising tides of presentness.

Your face is a curse.

(3) Hummed beneath the surface. And so it remained until months later when you shrugged off the knowing you wear like a second skin to be met with a tidal wave equal parts suddenness and foreboding. You are steadily engulfed in the way your skin bursts with red at the slightest irritation, the way your hair is less of a curl and more of a wave, the way you will never look as pretty as other girls, the way you are so completely and devastatingly inadequate in comparison.

Your face is a curse.

(4) And so it goes...and goes...and goes... And it isn’t a fight. It isn’t resistance. It’s getting sucked under rising sea salt waves and sinking, it’s wanting to scream, open your mouth wide and release it, it’s wanting the sound to take everything of you, wanting it to dissipate into the atmosphere and leave the hollowed-out husk of you. Part of that is true. There is the husk, the corpse of you, and its painted and packaged prettily, and its walking to class and taking notes and smiling with all its teeth, mouth stretched like a rubber band. But the everything-of-you is still there, too, buried six feet underwater. Buoyed by the balance of a GPA, the bingetizing, the weekly calls home, gathered in them, too. It surfaces in little fits and smirks. And both of the hollowed-out husk of you, and the everything-of-you pretend that they’re not carrying terrible truths. Both of them avoid mirrors.

Your face is a curse.

(5) You talk to someone, this nice lady who lets you ignore the reason why you’re here laid bare before her, letting her disinfect the cuts, the scrapes, the tears, the blisters marring your skin. Because when you touch a hot stove and get burned, you learn never to touch it again; but you’re the idiot who went back and touched and got burned and had the gall to act surprised and...you’re tired. So now you’re here.
Correia

1-15 words = short
16-20 words = long

Fig. 11. paragraphs in length
- divided into 4-word-long one-line paragraphs and long paragraphs
- 4 one-liners and 5 long paragraphs

The one-liner is repeated “your face is a curve” -- repeated, poet.
- As poet: conventional = single space structure
- Definite is the fact that there are no 4-word long sentences other
- than the repeated phrase and the last long-paragraph line:
- “So now you’re here.”
- Short sentences: 44 -- most prevalent in Para 6 (minor discussion
- line in underlined
- space)
- Long sentences: 10
- a series of short sentences connected by semi-colons

Paragraphs 2, 4, 6, 8 repeat the use of it but the last paragraph 10,
- use “you” as if the author is finally taking agency. Everything
- experiencing responding
- this is active

Stylistic Choices
- very much connected to repeated
- repeated use of it (see above 4)
- punctuation: dashes in para 6, semi-colons in para 10
Correia 52

Narrative Psych

The Knowing

Plot: what happened?

I experience a sense of self-learning about my appearance that I had to
attempt to ignore and immature objective catalyst event referred to as
"the knowing." I use the drowning experience as a metaphor to express
how this self-learning comes back to surface, overwhelming and suffocating.

Another moment that sees an enhanced prominence might be the
experience to deal with these feelings.

Themes:

- agency versus agency
  - the drowning experience as a metaphor to express overwhelming
  thoughts and feelings (p. 2)
  - understanding self-learning

- narrative of truth — I ignore the way I feel instead of confronting
  it, compared to Underwater Blue (null the themes) and Forever Blue ("There"
  - personal nature — the feelings lurked at in Forever Blue ("As it's
  almost laughable" appear against terrible wave. I imagine drowning/
  being myself
  - communication vs no communication
  - I'm aware of my experience initially but I talk to someone, which
  reflects a change in the self and the pattern of taking agency
  - self
  - inconceivable learning

- drowning?

- aware but uninhabiting

- retrospective
passive

fattened, comparative

moral, burger, keep

violent → "Forever Plaid" deals with the subject of death but doesn’t describe
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