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Dear Radix readers,

For many of you, stories that begin with “when I was a child…” generally invoke an eye-roll or two, but I will risk the reaction. When I was a child, I spent large amounts of time on my grandparents’ acreage, on the outskirts of Edmonton, Alberta. Despite the bitter, long winter months, the summer was quite lovely, and my grandmother had somehow managed to maintain several large gardens, which boasted a wide variety of fruits, vegetables, and flowers. To this day I am amazed that raspberries endured the cold to reveal their fuchsia jewels in late July, and that the orange knobs of carrot-tops peeked through the soil every spring.

Despite lack of access to television, Internet, and other media which have now become so commonplace as to be mundane, I never ran out of things to do on the acreage. I attribute this entirely to my over-active imagination and flair for the dramatic. My cousins, sister, and I would spend hours upon hours exploring the forest patches sprinkled throughout the expansive prairie fields. We would create alternate universes in which fallen logs became treacherous bridges, my older cousins became brave soldiers, and grass mixed with water became soup (since we were stranded, of course, and had no access to other sources of food, my grandmother’s kitchen notwithstanding). We would plunge our hands into the cold, wet soil and dig for earthworms; collect wild chamomile and attempt to make ‘tea’, much to my grandparents’ chagrin; and we would embark on expeditions to catch a glimpse of the furtive foxes who had taken up residence in a nearby abandoned farmhouse.

Silly things like catching frogs in knee-deep grass, poking sticks into cow-dung, and searching for mice in hay-bales took on a life and purpose of their own. It was truly magical.

As you flip through the pages of this issue of Radix, I invite you to consider how the poetry, art, photography, and reflections transport you to a time, space, or place filled with wonder, mystery, imagination, and…dare I repeat it…magic. For some, this might overlap with your spiritual practices; for others, not. Regardless, discover how the intangible, the inchoate, and the in-between reveal themselves to you, through both the following pages and in your daily lives more generally.

See you on the other side!

Kimberly Seida
Radix Co-Editor
The First Letter
Daniel Galef

Daniel Galef is a U1 International Student at McGill University, born and raised in Jefferson, Mississippi. He can be reached care of the Redpath Library or the Redpath Museum, pretty much any time of day.

PHOTO BY TRISTA XIANG
As a glyph, the first letter—with its origin in an ox’s head—has meant several different things to numerous groups, including the Egyptians, Phoenicians, Arabs, and Hebrews.

The Midrash states that the first letter is the most humble, as it was offered its place at the forefront of the Torah, but declined in favour of the second. It was rewarded by being allowed to begin the Commandments.

It is the letter of life inscribed on the cold, clay forehead of the Golem, which completed the Holy Word that animated it. It lies, effaced, still hiding in the attic of the Old New Synagogue, where it has lain dormant since the sixteenth century, with the exception of the time a Nazi agent ascended the forbidden stairs to destroy it and was killed.

It is the traditional Carnival greeting in the German- and Dutch-speaking world.

Where some look too deep and see disproof, Georg Cantor looked deeper, looked into mathematics and saw God. He glanced upon the ineffability of the infinite and the sublime beauty of the elegant and fostered a new understanding of the universe and our place in it. Then he went mad.

According to Borges, it is everything that is, was, or shall be, every point of space and time in the universe in one point, and exists in a mysterious stone column of the mosque of Amr in Cairo, one of one hundred and fifty of varying (and often unknown) origin and composition.

Now it’s a Japanese terrorist cult (based on the writings of Nostradamus and run by a man calling himself Christ) known for gassing the Tokyo subway in 2005.

It started as a yoga class.
Hymn to Him
Anonymous

Said the human to God: I want to know you.
Please teach me how. Lead me your way.
God said: Start with these small drops of rain
And dig your knuckles into earth’s fragrant terrain

Once you see, you cannot unsee.
With only two eyes, sip tenderly.
Magic is Alive.
In everything, there is infinitely more Growth
So wake the morning with your roar An Oath
Open your mouth like a baby bird stretching its view
And let the sweet words of prayer speak you
Now is infinitely true Chronos
A Fractal is, in fact, a cracked vessel, a floating lotus
So play with timetables and fold them into child knots
And seek the teacher who will unveil your blind spots.
You only own that which you give away.
Trust the magic pulsing through your sauté
And know that I will never lead you astray.
If you’ll lead me your way.
Nicole Zhu is a first year Marketing and Computer Science student. She uses most of her spare time on designing websites and graphics for various clubs, and hope you enjoy her works.
The Sungone
Nina Ciffolillo

I draw contours in palms,
embracing featureless form,
black as the lichen-biting crow on an oak branch out my window,
dark as garden rot, Medusa’s pupils,
black as the sungone ocean
beats latched dinghies.
Seabreeze sweeps off
with our first wool layer of warmth.
I am boats.
I am a bird, curling ocean waves.
I am bemused by bodies in bodies:
brown, soft, giving;
confused by bodies, thinning and
heads ballooning.
I am cars and townhouse windowpanes.
Disrobed of my skin, enclosed in my eyes,
I am beetles, I am sun, I am women.
I am seven heavy dog heads.
I am a bookstack on a school library shelf.
I am waiting.
I am straddling dirty water, celebrating multitudes of thick paint.

Nina Ciffolillo is an undergraduate studying Economics and the Earth’s Environment, with a special interest in Latin America. She likes to create things, especially poems and pictures.

PHOTO OF PHOTOS BY JENNIFER HAMILTON
The water is purple, 
hands are white, kissing 
the bass’ teeth and tall people. 
We run the shoreline’s length, impaling 
pebbles with our toes. 
This sand is lighter than the rest. 
The living men are small. 
The lids on soup pots stilled. 
The river never dried. 
The water robes the rounded rocks, 
the branched leaves and feet. 
All of it, it glistens like a morning snowy peak.

Nina Ciffolillo is an undergraduate studying Economics and the Earth’s Environment, with a special interest in Latin America. She likes to create things, especially poems and pictures.

PHOTO OF A PHOTO BY JENNIFER HAMILTON
Vita Azaro was born in London, UK. However, she has spent the last 8 years of her life in Italy living near the mountains. She is now a UI student in Arts and is majoring in History and Political Science.
The mountains of the Sybil. The ‘Sibillini’ mountains, as they are called in Italy, the country whose Appenine spine they adorn. They also happen to be the view I see every morning when I wake up at home in Italy.

Much myth surrounds these mountains, confounding scholars and laypersons alike; however, I shall attempt to untangle some of their greater mysteries and dangerous phenomena.

For those familiar with Greek mythology, the Sybil instantly conjures up memories and images of the Delphic oracle. My Sybil, as I like to call her, is indeed ‘related’ to these ancient, pagan priestesses. She too was a prophetess and sorceress. In Italian she is known as the ‘Sibilla appeninica’, in reference to the Appenine grotto she inhabited, the entrance to which I have hiked many times. She was so well described in the Christian-inspired Wretched Guerrin, written in the 1400s by an Italian poet that the French Antoine de La Sale was inspired to go and investigate the grotto, and it is from his travel journal that we have the most detailed descriptions of its inside. However, her most popular claim to fame is that of having served as inspiration to Wagner’s Venus and her grotto in Tannhauser.

Enough about history. The story I want to tell is more mysterious. It blurs the lines between reality and the miraculous, be-
tween the divine and the demonic; it lures us into understanding how medieval peasants continued to indulge in pagan practices and superstitions, but we can also find connections with modern day scientific explanations. It is most definitely magical.

The Sibylline mountains have not lost their claim to magical fame since medieval times. My mother is a more avid hiker than I am and is also part of the local Alpine club. She and several fellow hikers have happened across circles of black robed and hooded people when hiking alone in the mountains, but have maintained a wary distance and have never approached these people. These encounters happen rarely, but it is common knowledge that some people still come to the mountains for these purposes, whatever they may be.

The Sybil’s grotto itself is inaccessible. Not so long ago the Catholic Church secretly dynamited the entrance, causing rocks to fall and block the entrance. They were wary of the threat of people discovering whatever was in there. While it may now seem preposterous the rocks have still never been cleared from the entrance, despite the fact that both the cave and surrounding mountains are part of a National Park and could benefit from tourism.

While superstitions have faded into the past and secular beliefs have spread to the various hill-towns at the foot of the mountains and also to the tiny mountain hamlets, there are times when one can but wonder at the meaning of nature…and of the supernatural.

One night there was a natural manifestation that for want of a better term I shall call a storm. It started in all the usual ways, fierce and ominous like the storms characteristic of the area, but soon became increasingly formidable. I woke up to the sound of the wind howling, beating against the house, and I got up to look out of the window. All was black and blustery outside as thunder rumbled in the distance. At a certain point, as I was about to turn back to bed, I noticed lights running down the mountains. As I peered at them it became clear: massive balls of electricity rolled down the craggy
slopes of the mountains. I could not see how they ended because my vision was obscured by foothills, but they made for an awe-inducing sight. Already amazed, I was then startled when the thunder was replaced by an eerie silence and suddenly the lights came on. I do not mean the lights inside the house, but rather as if the sky was a series of continuous flashlights. The surrounding landscape was as brightly lit as if caught by the flash of a lightning bolt, though its duration precluded the possibility that it was merely lightning. Lasting a full minute the light then disappeared only to come back a minute later and this time lasted longer.

This process continued for a while, so much so that I started counting the minutes. I also noticed the precise crown clouds had formed around the peak of Mount Sybil, near the Sybil’s grotto. While I had previously seen the crown clouds, I was more amazed by the omnipresent light. Never again did I witness such a phenomenon, though I and others have seen balls of electricity other times, as well as odd cloud formations. The storm was most likely an electrical storm – the only explanation for such abnormal light – but it nonetheless left its mark.

It should be noted that the Sibylline mountains rest on fault lines and strong magnetic points. Their magnetic energy is for the most part positive. You can actually feel this when living there. Although the zest and energy you feel is due to the clean air, abundance of nature, pure spring water and many other joys that come with mountain living, it is more than just that. I am convinced that it is this magnetism that drew the Sybil in the first place. It is that energy that still calls spiritually to all around. It may also be that energy that draws stronger electrical and elemental forces. It is not at all hard to imagine how medieval peasants always viewed the mountains as deadly, dangerous and magical. It is not difficult to imagine a prophetess crouched in her grotto, in a mountain crowned by clouds. When you see the first evening star rise just above Mount Sybil every night, and you feel the majestic presence of those mountains every day, it is not hard to sometimes sink to your knees, facing them, and pray to the Sybil, to the mountains themselves, to the elements and to nature’s magic.
Gingerly I step onto the hardwood floor, the boards warm against my slowly thawing feet. Finally, a reprieve from the bitter, bone-deep cold. It takes some minutes to get accustomed to the silence, when my day has so far consisted of café murmur, student laughter, email notifications, and background music. There are already several others prone on their mats, practicing their Ujjayi breathing and making the transition out of work mode.

I choose a spot toward the back, quietly rolling out my mat, then arranging my water bottle and towel beside me before I unroll, vertebra by vertebra, down to my mat—my old friend—to collect my thoughts before class.

<<In, out…I should make pasta for din- no, in, out, in….Maybe I’ll go to the gym instead..in, out…yes, I’m getting better at this medit-, shoot. Ok…. In, out, in….relax your jaw, relax your eyes….in, out, in…Take the garbage out when I get home…seriously? Not even a minute?…. Don’t judge yourself, just accept the thought, and let it pass…. In…out…in…..out……god, this studio is hot. But I shouldn’t complain, at least it’s not…in, out, in out……>>

<<Hello everyone, please find a seated position on your mats as we begin today’s session>>

My attempt at meditation is interrupted by my instructor’s soothing voice as she guides us through the first couple of movements. Though my body feels slow and heavy, my mind is racing, anxiously trying to relax but sensing it to be a futile exercise.

…

Swimming in the dark currents of platelets, erythrocytes and water, I ride the waves between pain and release, stopping at points to unbraid a striation before continuing my exploration.

I don’t know how or exactly when it happens, but my spinning thoughts surrender to my greedy lungs, aching, happy legs, and shaking hands. In this moment I am neither in my head nor on my mat. I am somewhere in-between, where sensations are observed and felt, harmony and tension coexist, peace and frustration battle for control of the mindscape.

This is it.
ASHTANGA OPENING CHANT
translated by Ashtanga Yoga Research Institute:

I bow to the lotus feet of the Gurus,
The awakening happiness of one’s own Self revealed,
Beyond better, acting like the jungle physician,
Pacifying delusion, the poison of Samsara.
Taking the form of a man to the shoulders,
Holding a conch, a discus, and a sword,
One thousand heads, white,
To Patanjali, I salute.
Love Faith
Daniel-Pasquale Cinelli

Sense lay slyly far away

Dots on a line contain the world

The microcosm that is us expands

somewhere in between things phosphorylate,

excite and become real

Daniel is an aspiring author currently involved in understanding the art of Science, as well as Religion. He has recently achieved a consciousness above that of his previous self and finds himself rebelling at the self who rebelled not so long ago. Today life is beautiful and he has high hopes for his Medical School applications.

PHOTO OF A GENOGRAM BY JENNIFER HAMILTON
4pm

the screen is now dark

its translucent tale was pale

pushed the door of the theatre

and dived in the blue blur

turned bright by the city light

Snow

no

H2O is no quenching word.

Son of sea and sun

Sleep Caliban see

the mystery

of this isle
Marek is undertaking his MA in Hinduism Studies. Of all the things in this world, he most enjoys vowels, incense, navy blue, red guavas and balalaikas. And snowflakes.

lullaby sung above
tears of cloven birds
froth of love, thunder, glory
or cloak of a goddess of old

The white drops spray
the roots and leaves so red
of that flame tree
of that isle
flowering in my mind

nebulous water
churned and crafted
into an earthly cloud

stream
turned
dream

Marek is undertaking his MA in Hinduism Studies. Of all the things in this world, he most enjoys vowels, incense, navy blue, red guavas and balalaikas. And snowflakes.
PHOTO OF PRESBYTERIAN CHAPEL BY JENNIFER HAMILTON
 Tonight, the sky is an illusion,  
   A flat sheet of glitter sewn into the sky,  
   Rotating on an invisible wheel,  
   Singing the song of a magician:  
   
   Red, green, blue  
   And the cows go moo.  

 Tonight, newspaper lies under  
   The kindling which supports the log  
   To illuminate the sturdy ground.  
   Sparks of fireflies conquer the night:  
   
   Yellow, orange, red,  
   The grass feeds bread.  

 Tonight, the sky still feels as flat but  
   The dome, that white and simple but  
   Red home, states clearly, pointing firmly  
   With a telescope—  
   
   Purple, orange, green  
   Saturn really has a ring!  

 Tonight, the sky becomes the only reality,  
   Becomes not just glittered heavens flat,  
   But a void filled with glowing light, let go;  
   Let go of constellations, let go of reminiscence  
   
   Red, green, blue  
   And the cows don’t moo.
The Golden Crisped Clouds
Ethan Yang

I wonder why society has decided to burn the Garden of Babylon, leaving it an eternal myth undecipherable by science.
I wonder by winners are taught to build themselves a pedestal, constantly advancing as though by acquiescence.
So I perused through history and recreated the Garden:
  I rested on the luxurious green,
  I chuckled at the immaculate blue,
  I marveled at the iridescent red.
And in the garden I built a pedestal, and rooted myself atop:
  I awed at the newfound view,
  I lay on the comfortable bed,
  I smiled at the eternal serenity.
Yet the pleasure did not last,
  As the destructive force manifest within me, I longed for the tattered field, the smog-grey sky, the arsenic fire. I wanted the anxious competition, the harmful war, some unpredictable earthquake.
The libido wanes as aggression triumphs, and I remained bedridden,
  wondering how I should burn the Garden of Babylon, hoping that I can somehow imagine a pedestal.
Suddenly—and finally—I see a stripe of thick, dark clouds, crowned with golden crisps, defaming the sunset,
And I smile, knowing that I am back—in the real world.

Ethan Yang is a U3 Biochemistry who is also the president of McSWAY, McGill’s only performance poetry group. He writes about science, and the philosophy that it reveals about life. His work can be found at http://friendethan.tumblr.com. In his spare time he also bakes cupcakes and cheesecake.
PHOTO OF BIRKS CHAPEL BY JENNIFER HAMILTON
Radix is looking for Volunteers.
Like what you see?
Believe in student creativity, and inter-faith collaboration?
Help us do it better! We can always use help in marketing, web-development, research, distribution and much more! Email us to join the community. radix@mail.mcgill.ca

Zen meditation
Every Friday morning at 8:30. Zen monk, Myokyo offers guided Zen practice in the Birks chapel (3520 University Street, 2nd floor).

The McGill Office of Religious and Spiritual Life (MORSL)
MORSL is located in the Brown Student Services building, suite 2100. Please feel free to stop by our Meditation/Prayer room any weekday from 9:30am to 4:30pm! You’ll find a full-spectrum light therapy lamp, CD’s for guided meditation and relaxation, a serene space with floor pillows and meditation stools, and some suggestions on how to meditate in different traditions. Take time for some serenity and zenity, brought to you by MORSL.
Stay connected with McGill Office of Religious and Spiritual Life on Twitter @SpiritualMcGill or like us on Facebook: www.facebook.com/morsl

OIKOS Project –what’s life worth to you?

Economy – Ecology – Ecumenism

Join the conversations!
neil.whitehouse@mcgill.ca
McGill Ecumenical Chaplain
Ancient Wisdom Lies At Your Feet
It’s free! Just bring yourself. Try walking meditation using a labyrinth on campus. Every Tuesday afternoon from noon to 3pm, the Labyrinth will be set up in the Madelaine Parent room (SSMU Building). For more information visit: Labyrinth-McGill on Facebook.

Oikos Education Walk
Oikos Walk for Life is offered by our ecumenical Protestant chaplain every Wednesday afternoon at 4pm. This contemplative walk guides students both inward to their goals and aspirations and outward to their tangible environment. (This Winter, join us as we stay out of the cold and explore McGill’s underground tunnels!) Oikos walk encourages students to answer the question, “What is Education For?”.

Newman Centre
Newman Catholic Centre, 3484 Peel Street, is a home away from home for Catholic Students. Visit www.newmancentre.org to find out more about this centre for Catholic spiritual, social, and intellectual life on campus!

The Rabbit Hole Café
Food for Thought’s vegan collective, cooking up vegan lunches every Friday at 1:00 p.m. Drop by, pay a toonie, enjoy the company and eat up! All proceeds go towards maintaining this Yellow Door program (3625 Aylmer).

The Radical Christian Students’ Association
Enjoy a free vegan meal every Thursday at 6pm at Presbyterian College (corner of University and Milton) at their worship/discussion meetings.

McGill Student Parents’ Network
The MSPN provides support to McGill students who are parents. Regularly we offer free of charge to McGill students: in-home babysitting, support group meetings, study sessions for parents with babysitting for children. Interested families should contact the MSPN at mcgillspn@gmail.com.

Russian Orthodox and Ukranian Orthodox Christian Students
Join our weekly student meeting. We also have monastery visits, picnics, and movie nights. Contact the Orthodox chaplain, Father Ihor for details: ikutash@gmail.com.

The Muslim Students Association of McGill
We aim to provide spiritual, social & educational services. We offer weekly study circles, free Islamic educational materials, Ramadan services, lectures/conferences, and a wonderful library called House of Wisdom. We also have many community events to serve others (ex. Project Downtown), as well as exciting social events (ex. ski trips, cultural dinner nights, MSA Frosh, and so much more!) Come drop by & say hi to us in our office (Shatner building, room B09.)
iF? group (Interfaith Forum)
iF? is a student group that meets for weekly dialogue Monday afternoons at 4pm at the Diocesan College (“Dio”) 3475 University Street. They “strive toward an inclusive future where dialogue is the main tool in finding common understanding.”

The Jewish community at McGill
Visit www.hillel.ca and www.chabad-mcgill.com for information on shabbat meals, holiday celebrations, educational programming, and fun social activities!

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