

# Forward We Travel

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A Creative Fiction Thesis

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The boy waited eagerly for the coming guests. His father, a man of forty now, was cursing to his mother from their bedroom upstairs.

*Do we have to Lorraine? Is it too late to cancel? You know I hate birthday parties.*

*Oh just put your tie on and keep your mouth shut,* his mother responded and smiled at the boy with a sneaking laughter in her tone. She wore an apron embroidered with bright colorful flowers twisting about one another as if natural bouquets delicately weaved together across her front. Stoic, she looked printed upon the white tile of the kitchen—a picture upon a white page. She could have been mistaken for Eve, for her dress was cut thin across her shoulders and the apron appeared to be cloaked across her naked body. Then, turning in the kitchen light, the boy could see the outline of her dress lightly draped across her shoulders. The black cloth of the dress was a bold contrast against the paleness of her skin.

The boy watched as she pulled meringues from the oven. She drew them out swiftly and holding the tray in front of her she swept her bare hand across the atmosphere of the cooling sugar and egg, wafting the smell towards the boy. Then winking at him, she said, *Go greet our guests*, and he hurried forward to the front with eagerness.

He moved to the entry window, a large arching piece of glass that showed the entirety of the golden-lit street; an empty space painted by the dullness of the lamplights. Car headlights slowly filled the usually torpid streets. One after another the automobiles

would pull in, headlights first into the drive, their bumpers and car ends hanging off into the street. He examined a 51' Buick Skylark and a brand new 53' Nash Airflyte. He even saw a car he had only previously seen in his magazines—a British Ford Zodiac, apparently one of the fastest cars in the world from what he had read. Each car parked in an inordinate manner, zigzagged, and each one blocked the next ones apparent path of exit.

As the guests entered the boy waited at the door. Arms extended, they would drop their coats on him without recognizing he was there at all.

*Nice car sir, how'd you get one all the way over here?* he asked.

*Thanks there,* the man uttered limply and walked away unbuttoning his sports jacket and putting a thumb beneath his waist and his belt.

*Where are the parents there kid?* another asked and he obliged and pointed towards the living room, his fingers barely visible under the heavy load of coats bridged beneath his outstretched arms.

Finally, a thin man slipped through the door. The man looked curiously familiar and yet somehow foreign. He entered alone and bent to one knee to speak as he dropped a brown three-button sports jacket across the pile in the boy's arms.

*Here is a tip for you,* he said and he slipped a dollar bill into the back pocket of the boy's slacks. The man's voice was soft and delicate.

*Where is your Father* he asked, dragging his fingers about the thin goatee circling his mouth.

*In the Kitchen sir,* the boy said from beneath the pile of coats.

*Good gent,* the man said and patted him on the back.

As the boy dragged their coats upstairs he watched as the man swiftly marched toward the dining room. Something in the way the man talked and moved alarmed him. He felt the odd inclination that the man was not invited and intended to surprise his father. The boy knew his father hated surprises.

As he reached his parent's bedroom he dumped the coats down on the bed, (as neatly as he could) and then continued back down for the next round. By the end of the night there were fifteen or so jackets on the bed, a pile that got so high that eventually he had to start taking them one by one from his parents room through the communal bathroom to his small room on the other side; an effort in which he slipped each jacket on for the moment's walk between the two rooms; a moment where the heaviness of the jacket across his shoulders suggested to him that being an important man was simply about wearing the correct clothes.

After placing the final coat across his back, he went to the bathroom and lingered in the mirror, appraising his age as the coat was oversized and it made him look like an old man wasted in a young man's jacket. He combed his hair over with his father's comb. His hair was dark and thin, not as full as his father's, but the color was very similar. In it he could see the resemblance to his father. However, the boy's small, sloped shoulder's reminded him he was still young.

In the mirror he turned his chin side to side. His face was small, almost baby-faced, but his jawline showed signs of masculinity and his teeth were perfectly straight and white. He put on his deodorant, and then, upon slipping the jacket from his shoulders, he snuck back into his parent's room. He dropped the coat unto their bed, and then, remembering his father's small leather chest under his parent's dresser, he moved

towards it quietly looking over his shoulder at the bedroom door. On his knees he pulled the chest out from its enclosure and opened it slowly. He had done it before many times but each time he was careful like opening a coffin nervous he may let out a sheltered spirit.

Inside were several pictures of his father in uniform. There were also small patches obviously torn from enemy attire. There was a watch that no longer told the time. There were small metal clasps and letters held together by a woman's white garter. Behind it all was what the boy had wanted to find most. A green cologne bottle, half full, sat under the grouped letters. He pulled the cologne from the chest and took it back to the bathroom. In the light he read the bottle's marking. *Avanti*, it read, and on the back, *Un prodotto di Italia*.

*Avanti*, he said again and again.

His habit of reading over labels was something his mother always called his own form of poetry.

*Say it again my dove*, she would sing to him and he would repeat a name over and over in a tone of excited pride. He would often sneak through his mother's albums and repeat the names of songs in a rhythmic method; *Stardust, You Always Hurt the Ones You Love, As Time Goes By*. She would find him hunched over the vinyl like an old vagabond in an alleyway, the images on the covers keeping him company.

*Onward to bed my little collector*, she lullabied and would pull him by his feet as he clenched to an album and would laugh and tell her to let go. After a while he repeated names without knowing he was speaking at all. The repetition was conditioned in him like a bird's song.

As he turned the cologne over in his palm, he felt the weight of the thick blown glass. He measured it by slightly bouncing it on his outstretched fingers. The green color of the glass made the bottle seem like a strange shapeless like object. He sprayed some upon his wrists and then again on to his neck, smelling at the sharp aroma of pinecones.

Then, as he turned and twisted the bottle in his fingers, the glass, as though all the sudden like mercury, sunk between his outstretched hands and fell hard against the tile floor.

He quickly grabbed for it and held it to the light and searched for fractures in the bottle. As he turned it over in the refulgence of the white tile and vanity, a small bead of flaxen colored liquid formed at a hairline crack at the bottles rounded midsection. It hung, for an instant, frozen like a moment only recognizable in a memory, and dropped down, splashing silently against the dark brown felt of the his shoes. He quickly replaced the bottle back to the chest, pushed the chest back beneath his father's dresser, and returned to the bathroom. He turned the faucet on hot, and scolding as it was, he washed his hands repeatedly and scrubbed at his neck until he imagined the smell gone.

Afterward, he dried his hands and neck on the towel behind the door and combed his hair again across his scalp. As he came down the stairs he shuffled slowly and repeated, *Avanti, Avanti*, unmindful to the reality that he was making any sound at all.

As he reached the main floor he saw that the crowd was large and everyone flocked to the main dining area like ants to the food. It was a large group, all dapper and finely dressed, all eating something with one hand, a glass of liquor in the other. They talked, one to another, all turning in half circles, never fully rotating, only shifting like some sort of carnival ride mannequins.

The boy shifted by to the kitchen, his head at their waists. He found his mother still there; lipstick and cheeks still red as an apple.

*Did you get everyone's coats up all right?* she asked in a casual tone.

*Yes Mother,* he replied shyly.

*Are you hungry?*

He nodded yes.

*Onward you go then,* she said and waved him towards the dining room table.

Looking forward he saw all the partygoers were in high spirits. Some gathered around the dining room table but others began to make their way to the fireplace in the main room. All the women wore high heels and the men suits and sports coats. Women talked to women and laughed and the men drank and ate and talked seriously in tones of grumbles and coughs.

He traveled under the crowd, sometimes noticed by the ruffling of a coat jacket or the bumping of an elbow to a knee. Mostly he went unnoticed, anonymous like a pickpocket.

The food on the table seemed mountainous. *Avanti, Avanti,* he repeated as he stared at the food. He reached for a slice of ham, pulling it aside quickly from the bone and leaving the table to again travel through the crowd. He moved quickly as though he had gotten away with some great crime, his eyes behind him watching the men and women chatter.

As he moved he looked back upon the table full of fruits and candies and meats, wondering if he should have taken more with him. He intended to return back, but just then, hitting what he at first he thought was a wall, he fell to his bottom and the piece of

ham stuck in his mouth half hanging like a clown jabbing his tongue out to the room. Then looking up he saw it was not a wall but his father, standing like a building above him staring down seriously.

He was embarrassed and unable to move and instead only whispered under his breath, *Avanti, You Only Hurt The Ones You Love, Starstruck.*

The room at first laughed at the mishap, but his father, a strong man, hair wet and to the side, grasped the boy by the armpits and raised him to his feet. He bent to one knee, pulled the remaining ham from his son's mouth and tossed it over his shoulder.

*What was that? Repeat it?* his father said seriously. The boy then fell silent and began to search the room for his mother.

The guests went quiet, the chime of the glassware and ruffling of plates rebounded through the room and though everyone turned slightly away, their eyes were fixed on the two.

As the boy searched for his mother, he instead met glances of many men and women, some with pity and nervous energy in their eyes, while others' eyes held a rare form of curiosity.

*Look at me,* his father spoke in an unhurried tone that was both soft and sturdy; a businessman's voice.

He did as he was told. His father's survey was deep and unchanging; his irises a dark green, skin slightly toned and rich looking like that of young leather. His face was shaven and his chin, muscular and handsome, framed his heavy lipped mouth.

*Did you find my cologne? Answer me now, did you go through my things again?* his voice still deliberate.



*Yes Father.*

A light smack to the face surged an insipid noise from the crowd and again everyone began to talk amongst one another. The boy's eyes again rolled about the guests' faces. This time he met no regards of sympathy but only that of a practiced obliviousness that felt colder than cruel laughter.

*Do not use things that are not yours. These things are dear to me, you hear? They are not yours to play with. Do you understand me?*

*Yes sir.*

His father rose back to his feet, straightened his jacket, and grasped a glass from a shelf behind him and walked past assertively. The boy looked toward the kitchen, finding his mother in the hallway watching as his father neared closer to her. He passed her without a glance or word. His father's expression changed quickly as he saw the skinny man with the goatee from before waiting by the dining room table. He spread his arms out wide and embraced the man with a strong hug.

*You came*, he said in a smooth tone, an excitement in him that was new to the boy but seemed practice between he and the thin man.

*Of course I came*, the thin man said and they stayed embraced for another long moment. *Of course I did*, he repeated.

The boy looked to his mother who was by the kitchen door. She watched as the two men embraced and began to talk closely. Then, looking back to the boy, she smiled lightly and turned, placing a single hand upon her hip and slowly trotted back to the kitchen, her eyes on the glass in her opposite hand as she walked away.

The boy walked under the crowd hastily. He found the stairs and climbed them to his room. Inside he began to spit repeatedly in his hand and slicken the hair across his scalp. Then, when firmly matted to his head, and hand greasy with spit, he cupped his neck and forcefully rubbed at his skin with ferociousness.

Exasperated, he fell over onto the coats scattered across his bed. As he laid his head down, his shy whimpering abruptly ceased as his temple hit something jarringly hard and oddly shaped. From the pocket of the brown three-buttoned sports coat that the thin man had handed to him at the entryway, he pulled what looked like a square pocket watch from the inside slit. It was black on the outside, gold trimmed, and when opened its face was a shiny white with a golden needle wavering in an attempt to find north. It was not a watch but a compass. On the white face small gold dots outlined what looked like stars all scattered across a night sky. At the top, a large single gold star, specific in its outline, its points sharp and well marked just below a black N. As he turned it over he noticed the back was engraved and it read *La Stella De Nord*.

The boy felt that it was a treasure and he held it tight in his palm, feeling the weight of it against his skin. It seemed something that he could have found in his father's secret chest. It was old and scuffed but the weight of it made it feel rich and expensive. He wondered what the words meant. *Avanti* and *La Stella De Nord*. He let himself question what the curious sounding words said, trying to forget about his father and the broken cologne bottle.

He opened and closed the compass over and over. Then, hearing footsteps coming from the stairway, he threw it back into the pile and heard it as the metal skittered across the various coats and hit hard against the far wall. It made a loud clanking noise

and then another loud noise as it fell through the crack between his mattress and the wall until finally coming down hard against the wooden floor beneath his bed. He straightened and leaned forward putting his hands in his face.

As the door creaked open he listened to himself mouthing out the words softly over and over in a singers tone, *La Stella De Nord, Avanti, La Stella De Nord, Avanti.*

His mother appeared in the doorway. She snuck through the frame carefully, closing the door behind her slowly and tenderly.

*Still hungry?* she asked.

He shook his head and continued his song, now humming the words rather than speaking them; a cub's rumble to the night sky.

*What was that?* she asked, but he only fell silent and turned his head away and stared off as he fingered at his bedpost.

A small plate in his mother's hand held some cheese and crackers and a small meringue that looked wilted and tired. He took the plate, sat it by his side, and sat still avoiding meeting her sympathetic eyes and forgiving face. She sat next to him, right on top of the coats, and petted his head slowly, pulling her fingers across his scalp in a continuous motion that made him feel calm and safe but also somehow angry in the realization that she could produce such a reaction in him. He was quiet and so was she. She arose to leave when a swift voice rang from below.

*Lorraine, don't coddle him.* His father's voice was stern but also tender; he was loving in his own way.

The voice trailed off and he heard the door to the back patio shut and cut the lingering echo of the voice like the stifling silence of revolving doors opening and closing to an outside drone.

The mother looked back to the boy and then again carefully opened the door and left without another word.

Once gone, the boy shuffled through the jackets to find the compass. He pulled through leather, plaid, and other materials. He crawled over them and through them, rummaging until he reached the wall and his window on the far side. He grasped downward toward the floor for the small piece. His fingers inched along the wood, creeping like carnivorous insects. Finally he grabbed ahold of the small metal piece and pulled it upwards. He opened the face to peer inside once again. As he did he could see that the needle pointed straight up without moving or wavering in the slightest. He shook the watch quickly in short motions and then checked again with no better a result. He knew he had broken it. The needle was set and the boy looked for some way in which to remedy it. He spoke to it softly, *Please, Please*, but as he opened it the needle no longer trembled in an effort to tell direction any longer. Instead the needle simply remained still and pointed north. He shook it again, this time angry, but before he opened it he caught the image of his father's figure through the window.

His father walked gently and casually through the backyard with the skinny man at his side. The boy forgot about the dollar the man had tipped him. Remembering, he reached to his back pocket and grasped for it. He pulled it to his eyes and looked at it for only a moment before slipping the bill into the pocket of three-buttoned brown jacket

where the compass had come from. Then he slipped the broken compass into his own pocket and again looked out through the frosted window.

He watched the two men carefully, bringing his face as close to the cold glass as he could; his breathe fogging at the window. Both the father and the man inhaled on cigarettes and exhaled beautiful white arabesques. They talked without looking at one another and both took short unpredictable strides. Each held one hand in a pocket and one hand to their mouth. One would look down and the other would look up. They mirrored one another in an odd manner like some strange puppet act.

As the boy watched them he glanced upwards to the sky but could not see any detail for the glare of his face on the window only shadowed the darkened starlit night. He had a better chance of staring into his own impression, looking into the pupils in his reflection and seeing in them a perfect picture show of his father, this man, and the vast sky that enveloped them like small desolate creatures on a darkened dry plain. At that moment the boy wanted to sneak down, get close to them and hear not what they were saying but simply the rustiness in their voices. He imagined being beside them and walking deep into the trees beyond and looking up into the sky. He would ask them questions of astronomy and ecology. He would try and sound intelligent and manly and he would lower his voice to try and meet their timbres.

His father and the man then sat down in metal lawn chairs, their feet crossed at their knees, and their backs rested sturdy against the mesh of the chairs. The other man, though hard to see, was obviously skinny, very tall, and was wiry in his movements. Each pull from his cigarette felt long, as if time was somehow slower in the cold. After they finished their cigarettes they stayed and continued their intermittent conversation.

To the boy it seemed that both their minds were in far off places and on some serious and concerning matters.

Another man then came out from the back pulling irritably at a pack of his own cigarettes. He yelled to them.

*Eh, happy birthday there champ. Forty years sure do go by fast don't they?* The slightly rotund man patted his father on the shoulder and laughed loudly, a noise that even muffled through the window left a stinging in the ear like that of a rooster call in the morning. The man then lit his cigarette. Both his father and his companion seemed instantly perturbed by the man's presence and they shuffled slightly in their chairs so that no part of them faced the man.

*Cigarette?* He offered, but before he could extend his hand to them, both his father and the skinny man reached into their own pockets and pulled a cigarette from their own pack and lit it without acknowledging the other man's offering.

The rotund man smoked his cigarette down quickly, stumbling about them and talking loudly, heeding no response from the two. He offered both of them a second smoke but then saw that they had hardly degraded their cigarettes enough to consider a new one. The man pulled his arms to his chest, mumbled some farewell and then retreated back inside.

*Too damn cold anyhow,* he said as he walked back.

After a moment of silence and distinct stillness, the wiry man and the father came to their feet. They backed away from their chairs and faced toward the house. For an instant they stopped, faced each other and embraced with a long heavy hug. Then, coming apart as lovers would, they kissed deeply and passionately, holding one another

closely and rocking into the kiss in a well practiced fashion. The father, looking upwards to the taller man, pushed his chin forward and their lips met with great intensity and force. It was quick, so quick that it might have been missed—so quick it would seem easy to convince oneself that it had not really happened at all. Yet it had, and the boy saw it clear and gripped down hard on the windowsill. He had never seen his father in such a state; looking upward almost weakly; being held rather than holding; being someone else's.

For the moment the boy seemed to slip away from reality. All seemed to concentrate on them as if the nighttime slowly closed in around them, framing them as the only two men on earth who somehow slipped past invading limbo with the ease that lovers sometimes radiate; a type of aura replete with inevitable comfort. Then, parting, they both walked back to the house and entered as if only coming in after a quick cigarette.

The boy's bedroom door cracked open and the thick-bodied man from outside stood in the doorway light.

*Looking for my coat kid*, he said.

The kid jumped from the bed and lunged forward, placing his hand in his pocket and feeling the metal of the compass against his fingertips. He ran by, his shoulder hitting the man's leg and twisting him around in a quick fit of astasia.

*Hey*, the man yelled after him as he twirled and tried to place his eyes on something solid to gain his balance back but by the time he was settled the boy was already gone.

He came down the stairs quickly, taking each flight with gymnastic dismounts, landing both feet flat which made a sound like a hard clap of a heavy hand on a stern back. He ducked behind a woman and then behind a small alcove under the stairway. From there he could see part of the dining room and most of the living area. The boy was not completely inconspicuous but with the heavy traffic in the hallway he was practically invisible.

He watched his father and the man walk into the living room, the man first and his father after. The tall skinny man licked at his thin goatee as he sipped from his drink. He had thin cheeks and thin tight lips. He held his glass lightly, letting it sway from side to side with ease. His suit fit over him well and made him seem young, but the boy could see the age in and under his eyes. He was obviously a man that took care of himself, someone who looked in the side mirror before leaving the drivers seat of his car.

The mother, now without the apron, sat in the far chair behind the man and spoke with a woman who stood but bent at the waist to converse with her. The room, though not large, was aligned in a way in which each four corners of the space held a large yellow felt chair that was too large for single person but small for the likes of two. A large bookcase on the far wall held an assortment of knick-knacks. His grandfather's picture stood supreme, a large photo of him in his officers uniform with perfect posture and that practiced civil smile that both he and his son seemed to so commonly share.

To both sides of the bookshelf crystal light fixtures gave of a faint amber color as if the light was thrown from a mild fire. Streaks of darkness caressed the room and though it felt natural, the light (and the guests huddled within the room) made the area feel far more formal than the boy ever noticed it to be.



Maybe ten people converged in the room. The mother sat in the corner closest to the dining area, and as the father came through the room, he took the seat cattycorner to her, as if they were pulling an imaginary net between themselves and splitting the area, one entertaining one side, one focusing on the other. They shared a quick stare and then reproached their gaze as if they did not know one another or acknowledge that their alignment in many ways was a tactical execution of entertaining by high standing gentleman and their wives.

The tall skinny man talked by the bookcase, holding himself up with a sharp elbow. His thin black hair scraped across his head and twirled lightly at its ends. Occasionally his father and the man would meet eyes, stare sternly for a moment (again a moment breakable only by a small gasp of air) and then return their focus unto another partygoer. The father reached behind him to grab a large decanter and he poured himself a drink and placed it back down by his feet. Many people circled about him, congratulating him, some shaking his hand, some women kissing him on the cheek, and then they would circle away joining into another conversation. He was very much like a manager, taking on the crowd with ease and strength as though it were all just a common occurrence of the day. He crossed his legs swiftly and sat back in the chair, watching the room as one might watch while directing a staged play.

Then, the mother, gazing at the tall skinny man, arose and came forward to greet him tenderly with two kisses on each cheek. It was cordial, and though it seemed only friendly, there was hint of reconciliation in the greeting. Then, after only a moment of speaking, the mother turned away and consumed the last of her glass of champagne. She retreated back to the kitchen with long strides and the boy slowly followed her.

Again he flowed below the curtain of legs and waists like an undercurrent swept in the tides of the room. In the kitchen he saw as his mother reached high above to a cabinet and pulled down a clear cylinder container that was filled with red candies. She pulled a glass bowl from another cupboard and began to fill it with the small sweets.

*Mother*, he said, but before he could finish she had cut him off.

*Does your Father know you're down here?* She came to one knee and began to rub her thumbs in circles around the boy's neck. Then she moved to his wrists, staring at them intently as she rubbed them over and over.

*Ouch*, he said.

*Get back upstairs before your father finds you down here.*

She then raised and collected the bowl, straightened her dress down to her knees and began to walk back towards the living area with an un-shattered form of grace in her posture. Her sharpness made him feel, for the first time that night, as though he were the only insignificant attendee of the party.

*I saw dad and that man.*

He said it like it was a knife, exhaling it into her back so she would understand the brevity at which all these events seemed to be arranged.

She stopped suddenly when she heard it. He could feel the rigid movement in his spine. As soon as the words transpired in the air the room seemed all the sudden frigid and small. For the moment, the boy wished he had said nothing. He wished he had simply stayed upstairs, never touched that cologne or seen the tall skinny man. His hand again sunk into his pocket and he felt for the cooling smoothness of the compass metal.

Finding the watch still there relieved him and he held it in his fist firmly beneath the cloth of his pants.

As his mother slowly turned to look at him, her face was neither angry nor pleasant. Her lips were set, aligned and unperturbed, but her eyes had some exasperation in them; a sense of tired frustration that taxed her in a way he knew he may never truly understand. As she walked back towards him it seemed instantly clear that she knew, had known all along. He pressed and remembered that quick moment before between his mother and the skinny man and he instantly hated himself for not understanding the greeting as more than a formal gesture but instead as a mutual understanding of dichasial lovers; flowers of the same stem.

Her movement towards him was soft like a dancer. Normally you could hear her shoes slap like excited wooden paws against the floor but now there was no sound. She arranged the bowl of candies to one hand and held them statuesquely to her side as if posing for some picture; advertising them without really knowing she was holding anything at all. However, her movements seemed to him more sly than comfortable. Her hips moved side to side, rocking in a way in which it looked as though she could shuffle forward without moving her feet at all.

He felt guilty and stupid for bringing the subject up. His fear had quickly subsided into embarrassment, feeling now as though he unraveled a piece of his mother's favorite sweater by accidentally stepping on a loose strand.

She approached him, leaned over by the waist, laid her hand on his shoulder (still holding the bowl in the other hand) and kissed him lightly on his forehead. He felt how

soft her lips were and he was immediately paralyzed in the confusion of what the kiss indicated.

*These things, she said, need not be dwelled upon. These things are meant to be left alone. It's like the story of the dove. Do you remember it?* she asked. He shook his head no and tried to not look at her directly.

*Well it goes like this, she explained. One day a young boy came to his window and found a beautiful dove was perched upon the sill. He admired it so and began to feed the dove, hoping that it would return the next day. And so he fed it bread and the dove left. The next day the bird returned, and he sat at the windows ledge and again the boy fed it, admiring the dove and its peaceful flight. And so this pattern followed, and day in and day out he fed this bird, giving into it more and more, until one day, the dove no longer came to his window.*

She paused and stared into his eyes with great wonder. It was as though she was telling the story for the first time.

*He had fed the bird too much and because he had, the bird had become too fat to fly. You see? This peace he desired from this beautiful dove—his good intention weighed down the dove he so admired and so, that dove never could return. Neither of them benefitted nor found any peace from his constant feeding.*

She pulled back straight and plucked a single candy from her bowl and placed it in her mouth slowly, sucking on it and then slipping it to one cheek.

*You understand?* She said and she reached down with another candy and placed it into his mouth.

The boy was unsure if he truly did understand. It all seemed so imaginative, and yet, he knew the relationship she was describing was serious. He felt in that moment such sadness, not in himself, but for the boy from the story. He began to speak but he restrained and held there for a moment.

His head nodded yes, declaring that he did indeed understand. He cupped his hands around his chin and spit the candy from his mouth, and then, walking to the trash, he threw it away and came back to her.

*Yes, I think I understand*, he said in a low solemn voice.

*Yes you do*, she said pleased, *you are very smart*, and she smiled pleasantly. He felt for the moment a quick patter of pride. Soon after, the pride subsided, and instead the upwelling of sadness again occupied him.

She lowered the bowl to the level of his eyes but he refused.

*It is okay, you can take one, I promise*, she said.

*I am not hungry*, he said. *You have known all along*, he whispered lightly but she pretended not to hear.

*Onward then my love*, she said and walked past, letting her fingers linger on his chin for a moment before passing by like a draft of warm air.

He started back to the main room in a frenzy, walking away with sweat beading on his forehead. He felt chilled and disoriented. He could not help but think of the story of the dove and the image of his father and the man. He tried hard to relinquish them from his mind but when he did all that was left was the blaring images of his mother's knowingly frustrated eyes. He tried to think of war and gunfire, of meteorites and atomic

bombs, but all he could see was the spectral image of his father and his mother, and that tall skinny man, hand in hand staring at him with deep tired eyes.

His perception of the party had changed, had dissipated from what once was a wild circus of excitement (something that felt weeks old to him now) to a gathering of cadaverously boring men and women.

The staircase caught his weight as he sat down and stared once again into the living room. This time, he was visible to all who passed and his father looked over his glass and caught the boys strained eyes. For a while the two were locked in a single gaze, a knowing fret for one another. The room seemed to slow and all that seemed to remain were the two, silent, still, watching one another and both calculating, both trying to understand the situation from the other's perspective. A weakness came through in his father's glare, a defeat that told the boy that his father knew that the secret was no longer invisible to his son.

Just then, a glass fell and shattered leaving an echoing sound like the crest of a wave crashing through a windowpane. The echo was followed by a small yelp that came from the shallow lungs of a woman who stood beside the radio.

At first the boy thought the scream was his own, a small cry jutting out of him unannounced, but soon after he realized the shuffling of all the partygoers towards the radio. They circled about it and listened intently. The boy only heard the drowned out sound of the radio as if he were underwater. All of the partygoers were quiet at first, none knowing exactly what to do. All stayed transfixed by the radio but no one attempted to move or help or speak. The radio announced the Russians launching of a spy satellite into orbit.

The boy did not hear this but the insipid chattering of the men and women alarmed him that something was wrong. He continued to stare at his father, eyeing him as though he were measuring him for sale. Their gaze was broken when the tall skinny man came to his father and grabbed him by the wrist and hoisted him up. The father broke the connection only for a second, looking the skinny man in the face, their eyes close and noses practically touching one another's. After the brief moment of intimacy, his father's eyes returned back to his son's face; it looked tired, tendered by the night's findings.

The boy's eyes then traversed the scene, looking upon the uncomfortable crowd of people and watching as his mother shuffled through the mob and wedged herself before the receiver. He could feel his father's eyes still on him.

The faces of the partygoers all resonated a dull worry and confusion. The crowd looked dumbstruck, unable to piece together what the news might mean. His mother was now on her knees and listening intently to the broadcast. She was surrounded by all the well-dressed men and women, and for the moment it seemed a strange depiction of a woman fallen amongst a crowd of lost souls.

The boy did not know what to focus on, so he watched it all, grasping only the entirety of the scene. Then a sound, an incessant beeping came from the radio. It reverberated off the walls and sunk into the ears of everyone like an unwanted probe into their thoughts. The beeping came every few seconds and each time it rang out the crowd buzzed a bit, their grips tightening around their glasses.

*What do we do? Are we in danger?* one person finally said from the crowd.

*They launched. They did it, it is sending out a signal,* another said and suddenly everyone was talking.

*What do we do? What does this mean?*

*Do we listen? Do we stay?*

*Is it only a satellite?*

*The broadcaster said we are perfectly safe.*

*But how do we know it is just a satellite. That beeping, it's up there and it's sending a message.*

From there, a stampede of words trailed from one throat to another; a mess of language becoming comingled and hanging in the room like a clutter of decorations limply holding to the rafters. Hysteria on a small scale began to sputter about the room and the beginning flutter of soft sobs, the delicate damming of the throat and wincing of the eyes, all began slowly like the beginning flecks of snow traversing down before a small snow-slide.

The father was static as he watched his son. The corners of the boy's eyes seemed to twist down and it was apparent that the boy barely felt the presence of the moment beyond the view of his father and the man standing next to him pulling at his coat sleeve. They both heard the beeping and it seemed to alarm both of them in a very different manner.

The boy caught his father's eyes once more. They had turned from stern to languid and then to an almost relaxed even weightless guise. And then, he was gone, masked into a swarm of partygoers. His voice rang from beyond them all and he overtook the room.



*Everyone calm, he bellowed, down to the shelter, there will be enough room for all of us. There is a radio down there and we can listen and wait.*

The chatter quieted and as the shuffle began towards the back doors the boy began to climb the stairs as quickly as he could manage. He jolted forward, thumping each landing hard with both feet. He twisted around the corners with great momentum as he grabbed at each wall and thrust himself around them like a trapeze swinger gaining momentum in their contorting and lunging just before their release for another swing.

He pushed the bathroom door clear and wrestled down a towel from the hook behind the door and then carried it through to his parents' bedroom. He lunged forward for his father's chest and flung it open harshly. He laid out the shower towel on the floor and then began to pile the assortment of items neatly in the center. Then, he twisted the towel at each end and thrust the heavy bootlegged rucksack over his shoulder. He then went back through the bathroom and quickly to his bed. His fingers crept back to the compass in his pocket. He pulled it out, opened it, and stared at the stagnant compass needle pointing directly upwards.

*La Stella De Nord*, he said as his fingers brushed over the engraving in the back. Even though it was obvious that the compass was broken, for the moment, it made him feel at ease knowing he had the tool with him.

*Where are you? Where are you?* his mother yelled from below. Her voice was deep and rusted and you could hear in it the throat filled fear that uncertainty tends to breed. He paused when he heard her and listened intently, slightly hoping she would scream out again and again and ask him to come to her. Then he leapt to his feet and began to push at the window. Finally, with both hands pressed against the clear pane,

transferring all his weight from his feet up, the window gave and a jab of cold air rushed into his chest and filled the room. Slowly he stepped over the ledge of the window with great care onto a small landing that overlooked the vast backyard and woods in the distance.

As he stepped outside he could feel the cold through his body and he worried that the ledge may be iced over. His feet took to the landing carefully and he was surprised to find that the landing was not slick. He closed the window softly, pulling the towel close to him. Then turning and breathing deeply, he looked into the dark night, staring out towards the trees in the distance. A slight tickle in his stomach extended up through his collarbone as he saw the vast space that rolled out below him.

He heard footsteps up the flight of stairs and he slowly shuffled to the side as to not be visible through the window. His bedroom door flung open and he heard his father quickly swing through the bathroom into his own room. Then, the boy heard him quietly walk back through the bathroom. The boy knew his father had found the small chest empty upon the bedroom floor. For a moment it was silent. Then, the father let out a large frustrated sigh and he cursed quietly. Again there was a short silence before the father left, closing the door softly behind him.

From the awning the boy could hear a commotion within the house. He could hear feet shuffling like a herd of small cattle being slowly driven into a small space. He could hear the voices so clear that he presumed they were outside, right below him and around the corner where the concrete patio was. His body held tight to the wall and he shuffled nearer towards the roof that slanted over the back room and towards the back patio.

As he reached the verge of the awning and the roof, the distinct clank of the shelter door rang out and he could tell it was from someone lifting it and letting it fall down hard on the concrete of the patio. Then came a rush of clattering feet all hurrying towards the noise. Voices came like birdcalls in the night. They felt farther away than the trees in the distance but they were in fact right below his feet.

*What does this mean?*

*How could they manage this?*

Some were whimpering slightly, more in disbelief than in worry. Others prayed under their breath and others even laughed, the stale taste of whiskey still in their mouths. It was an odd assortment of emotions. Some took it much more seriously while others let it simply wash over them as though it were a common occurrence.

The scene of people was peculiar; all were dressed formally, all out in the cold without jackets, huddled together, some talking calmly while others' faces were taught with concern.

Some women held their heels in hand and tiptoed across the cold concrete to the stairs leading down to the shelter. Some men still held their drinks and some even carried bottles beneath their arms like a clown holding a can of seltzer ready to spray. Some held smiles of wildness, of entertainment and of glee as though the party had never really stopped but instead was only being moved to another location. Some trembled in the cold night air, the taste of inquietude pasted on their lips.

They all crawled into the small space, the air tasting of the moistness of soil. Two single bulb lights swung from the ceiling, throwing shadows across the room like a

marionette's shadow against the curtain of a dark theatre. Many huddled together for warmth, but a few sat alone without a partner, fingers crossed in their laps.

Once inside the radio was switched on and the buzz of static filled the room until the correct station was found. Then, the beeping continued and everyone in the shelter fell quiet and listened to the unnatural sound that was being emitted from miles above their heads.

The boy could hear the muffled beeping of the radio from the rooftop. Then, his mother swerved into the vast lawn below him just as the final guests were being tucked away into the basement shelter. Her dress swayed from her rapid movements from side to side. She had no direct line of action. She stumbled as a drunk might in the middle of a dimly lit side street. She yelled out for him.

*Where are you? Come now.* Her voice was desperate and held a hint of guilt draped across the uneasiness in its timbre.

*I'm sorry, Just please,* and then she stopped, her voice plugged by her exasperated breathing.

His father came quickly to her side, grabbed her by the shoulders and began leading her back towards the house.

*Stop, stop, I'll find him, let me find him,* she said.

*I'll do it. Lorraine I'll do it. Just get in the shelter. You're overreacting and just scaring the boy. Get down there and I'll find him. I promise, I'll find him. He has to be close by.*

She cried out, *No I'll do it. Let me do it. He trusts me. Please, please, please.*

She struggled against him in an almost playful manner, letting her weight swing in his arms as though it was a type of dance step.

*I'll do it Lorraine. I'll do it.* His father's voice was confident and settled.

With that final push she gave in, falling into his arms exhausted and letting him help her to the shelter door. All of the sudden, she was gone, the door closed with the quick snap of wood against concrete and the sound of the metal clasp swung swiftly closed leaving a ringing sound in the open space like the ping of a wine glass coming in contact with the bottle. Then his father went back inside. As the door to the back room shut, the yard suddenly felt eerily empty and the night fell silent except for the muffled beeping coming from the shelter.

The boy waited a moment and then he tossed the heavy towel down to a small grassy area below the roof. It came down harder than he expected, the grass less giving in the cold. He heard the crack of glass and waited to see if his father had heard it. The backdoor remained shut. The boy slowly bent to his knees, grasped at the ledge and balanced carefully at the edge of the roof. Just before his feet fell into the air, swinging like the brass dial on a grandfather clock, he felt the uneasiness of heights settle once again in his stomach and before he could pull himself back to the awning his feet were below him and he hung, only for second, before falling.

The fall was quicker than he expected it to be and the first thing that pushed through his senses before the pain was the vigorous smell of his father's cologne; *Avanti*, he whimpered.

His leg throbbed in pain but the momentum of the fall somehow left him on his knees, upright as if praying in a pew. He groggily took to his feet, his eyes sweeping past

both the back door and the shelter door. Then he limped slightly to the towel and all its belongings spread across the grass. The cologne bottle was splintered about and the small green slivers stuck into the cotton like a crushed peppermint. He grasped each item and replaced it in the towel and again swung it over his shoulder and began to limp away towards the trees. The smell of the cologne was thick in his nostrils and after only a moment of walking he had to breathe heavily through his mouth as the scent was far too strong and it seemed to burn at the inside of his head.

He was tired, panting heavy in the cold night's air. As he looked back he saw the downstairs light leap through the windows with curious tendencies. A single shadow swept by like a passing trolley car through the homes interior.

The boy's breathe, a swelling cobweb in the cold, seemed to illuminate the night. His house in the background was boxed and white and yellow, and it slowly faded away in the darkness. The yard seemed endless as it led through tall grasses toward the heavy wooded grove. He moved towards them, taking one small step at a time. As he moved he watched the house over his shoulder, the curtains swaying just slightly, just enough to notice that there was life inside; his father's movement was sporadic and forceful in his search.

Behind the curtains his father's shadow felt even larger and more myth like. It was only matter of time until he came back outside. The boy knew it would not be long. He tried to move faster but he was tired and his leg hurt badly. From a distance he looked similar to a wounded animal slowly limping for refuge; the only thing distinguishing him was the towel twisted and thrown over his shoulder.

The smell of the cologne was overpowering, and softly the boy spoke to himself.

*Avanti*, he said.

Then he felt to his pant's pocket and the outline of the compass was still present against his leg.

*La Stella De Nord*, he wheezed in the cold and coughed as he tried to continue forward.

His mind moved at a greater pace but his feet could not seem to keep up with him. *How could this all be? He thought. Why his father, and that man? Why them, and why his mother, knowing and pretending? What was that hypnotic and incessant beeping from the radio?* It seemed too much for him all at once. He was exhausted. His eyes began to swell and his feet began to stumble and he slowed with every step.

From behind he heard the back door open and close. He knew that in the open he was clearly visible to his father. He did not want to look back. He just wanted to curl back up inside all the guests' jackets, cuddle in them like an insect under a rock, the weight holding him practically still, letting him only breathe and sink further into the warmth and softness of his bed.

The darkness surrounded him and he felt a sinking feeling, sinking slowly, sinking tiresomely, as if he was pushed forcefully by gravity through the floorboards of his house only to find the cold dirt and grass below him to be indeed cold and wet and without any sympathy, and all of the sudden, with swift speed and silence, everything had comingled in his mind, everything intertwined like that of mended and hammered metals. He could not assimilate the difference of one intuition from another. Thoughts rushed through his head and he could not tell, in all his earnest and tiresome efforts, which ones to focus on.

He reached for the compass and held it tightly in his grip. He clasped it in his fist and pulled it towards his heart as though he were vowing for some great hope. Nothing had seemed so important and yet so distant all at once. His thoughts disparaged in his mind. He tried to center only on the compass, and he wished dearly that if he opened it, he would find that it would be fixed.

*Where are you going son?* His father's voice was lighter than he expected.

He attempted to move on, at a slow trudge, almost a crawl, but it was as though the world only spun under him and with every push forward the world and the house and his father gained ground without any effort at all.

*Come back here, we got to get down and listen, your mother's worried,* his father yelled. *It is time, enough is enough. Come back. I'm not angry. We can talk about all of it,* his father said.

The boy refused to go back to him. He was disoriented and the trees that looked so close before suddenly looked as if it were a portrait distance; an image that can be seen but never reached. He began to cry. The sucking of wind through his throat made a shrieking noise like that of an animal in pain. The sound carried through the cold night air with the clarity of wind void of any friction; a pure cry like train whistles in the night.

The boy laid down cold and exhausted. His father's items again scattered out among the grass. The cologne had seeped through the towel and into his shirt and the smell was consuming. The scent smelled of pine tree and thick liquor. As his father came closer, the urge in his stomach to run subsided as he saw his father's eyes, two emeralds in the night. His father reached out to him and grasped him below the knees and back and raised him to his own chest.



His father looked over his shoulder as he turned and saw the bath towel laid out like a strange picnic basket of pictures and memories. The broken bottle of cologne was splintered and the pungent smell gave the night a repellent aroma. The boy curled in his father's arms, still feeling as though he may sink even further, but also feeling the solid muscle of his father's chest and the comfort that it gave him to press against it. The rocking of his father's feet was consistent and as he rocked his son's breathing slowly dissipated and his weeping gradually slowed.

*I'm sorry, I'm sorry,* the boy said as he hugged closer into his chest.

His father was silent and stopped almost immediately after the words were spoken. The boy looked up to his father's face, expecting a maddened stern look or a look of forgiveness (he so deeply hoped for both at the same time) but what he saw on his father's face was only describable as an intense focus. His eyes were on something specific ahead. As the boy turned he found a large snake at his father's feet about eight feet before them camouflaged in the darkness and the grass.

The snake hissed and curled and moved in waving motions of great aggression; in and out like a ribbon. His father slowly lowered his son to the ground and came to one knee next to him.

The boy was about to run when his father stopped him.

*Don't run,* he said softly in his ear. *This is an animal that thrives on movement and fear. He would not chase you but rather sneak up behind you when your attention was elsewhere. You must look him in the eyes. Be steadfast. You cannot be distracted*

The snake watched them as they watched it. Its movements were orchestrated. Everything calculated, everything specific.

*Its aggression suggests it is large and dangerous but it is a show, a dance for us. We assign it the meaning we allow it to have over us. Are we afraid?* His father's voice was soothing and it seemed to charm the snake into a more tranquil slithering.

Then his father casually pulled a pack of matches from his back pocket. He plucked a single match and held the packet over it and in a single aggressive movement he lit the match and brought it forward like a descending fracture of the sun towards the snake. Its green rubber like scales were almost translucent, but also bright like that of a reflection of broken glass on a hot day—a spectral ghost of color.

The boy watched as the snake wriggled as if it were under pressure, its tail pressing into his middle and his middle pressing into his head and the movement consistent throughout, a twisting pattern that seemed almost a resilient movement. It seemed as though the snake had another being inside it, an exorcist moving it as it pleased; a puppet snake.

The scales, a glittering show that dazzled the boy, drew him in and suddenly he was walking closer to the snake, his father's arm on his back.

*Slowly*, his father said. *Slow now*.

He approached and his father's words were like sand beneath his feet, his toes softly slipping through them.

The snake's eyes settled on the boy. Its glare was unmistakable. Both of its eyes on either side of his tightly woven nose were fixated on him. He stopped about a foot away from the snake and saw in it the wiry man, his father, his mother, himself. Its constant movement hypnotized him and suddenly his mind went blank. *Where was he*

*other than here, now?* He felt nothing else but this thought running again and again in his mind. It was him and the snake alone, static and watching one another carefully.

*A snake in the grass is no more dangerous than a snake in the open,* his father spoke slowly. *It is all how we perceive what we think we see. How the world is relative to us in the moment and how we move past it like the hands on the clock; the winding only the beating of our hearts,* his father's tone suddenly low and uneven in its pacing.

*Awareness, that is the unfortunate reward of mankind, for we cannot slow it, stop it, or control it. We are hands on a clock. Directed only in the way life may take us. Remember this moment son, for it will all be lost on you the second it slithers away, we will ring in a new hour and this one will be gone from us forever.*

The boy nodded. His gaze still fixed upon the snake. Its movements now slowed as if enchanted further by his father's words. He boy continued to watch it and an ease entered his body that gave him great confidence.

His father's arm slid from his back and he arose and walked next to his son. Both gazed at the snake. His father, his hands in his pockets now, looked into the sky as if looking for something specific like a second moon. Then, he forcefully stomped at the ground with the soul of his right shoe and the snake slithered away in the grass as if moving in a fast stream.

*What does it mean, Avanti, what does it mean,* the boy asked his father without looking directly at him.

*It means Forward son, it means Forward and much more,* his father said, and then he took his son by the hand.

*And La Stella De Nord,* he asked?

*Where did you hear that?*

*What does it mean*, the boy begged.

His father paused for some time, breathing deeply and looking at the boy with great amazement.

*It means The Northern Star.*

The father looked upwards. He looked into the darkness with a purpose. He then scooped up the boy again and leaned him on his shoulder so that he was sitting perched upon him. His father continued to look skyward and so the boy looked up as well.

Then the creaking noise of the shelter door swept about the open yard. Slowly his mother, the wiry man, and the rest of the guests climbed out of the small opening and began walking towards them. Many still held bottles and most of the men had stripped of their coats and hung them around the shoulders of their wives.

*They said you will be able to see it as it crosses. The man on the radio said that you could see it*, the mother shouted out as she walked quickly towards them.

She joined them and reached up to put her hand to the boy's back. She rubbed at him tenderly and her head fell lightly to the father's shoulder. All the partygoers gathered about them and the skinny man shuffled beside his father and mother. Everyone's eyes were looking upwards, their heads tilted backwards and chins to the sky like singing coyotes.

*Where is it son?* his father asked.

He looked into the sky and could not find it, all their eyes searching; his father's, his mother's, the tall skinny man, the women heels in hand and feet bare, the men with

drinks in one hand and wives in the other. The boy's eyes swept the sky for a subtle movement miles and miles away.

Then, he remembered, and from his pocket he pulled the compass and opened it and stared at the golden needle that pointed directly ahead. Still the needle was fixed upright, resolute in its prediction. The boy's eyes followed the needle's line, creating a path from the compass to the sky like a sea captain using a sextant. Above, a small flitter of light reached past his pupils and he pointed up silently towards it. Across the expanse of darkness the single light travelled like a flare in the early morning dawn. Its movement was slow and it sparkled only for an instant; a small speck in the galaxy; a nothing in comparison.

There they all stood, transfixed in the open yard. Fifteen or so people, all standing in the middle of the night, staring into the sky, and with their eyes their minds followed, all one hundred miles above the earth; all in the sky. The wondrous excitement of that moment unstoppable, unflappable, and in that instant no one felt the grass beneath their feet, the wind upon their cheeks, the hands of their loved ones in their own. No one felt the slither of the snakes in the grass or heard the call of the doves in the grove beyond.

The boy sat perched on his father and thought now only about space and how infinite it seemed right then. The sky was clear and it seemed for that moment that the earth shuddered slightly below them and raised them closer to the flicker of light overhead.

The boy could no longer feel his mother's hand upon his back and his father's shoulders below his legs. For that instant he was floating up above with the evanescent

dot, swaying weightless. In that moment, as he soared overhead, he felt the pocket watch in his hand and he chanted; *Avanti, Avanti*, and for that second he wondered sincerely if the only real direction may be north.

Abstract  
*Forward We Travel*

*Forward We Travel* is a novelette engrossed in the concept of progression. Moving forward through life's restraints is the thematic principle that outlines this text. Beyond such themes, the story describes a connective narrative of a boy who looks up to an indifferent father. In the midst of his fortieth birthday celebration, the father attempts to subdue his son's inquiries and keep his relationship to the past a secret. As the boy's admiration and curiosity continue, an uncovering of both the history and present nature of his father are revealed. In the midst of all of the drama, the realization that a satellite has been launched into space only presses upon the already tumultuous night. As the partygoers listen to the radio and tramp to the family's shelter, it seems quite unclear what the boy should make of such incredible and life altering events. Along the path, the boy must grow and develop as the obstacles of a night filled with celebration, fear, and commotion push him in directions never before journeyed. In the end, it is an understanding of progress and movement, an acceptance that looking forward is the only way to keep going.

Annotated Bibliography  
*Forward We Travel*

Carver, Raymond. "Neighbors." Trans. Array *Raymond Carver: Collected Stories*. The Library of America. 3rd. New York City: Literary Classics, 2009. 8-14. Print.

Carver, Raymond. "the Cathedral." Trans. Array *Raymond Carver: Collected Stories*. The Library of America. 3<sup>rd</sup>. New York City: Literary Classics, 2009. Print.

Both these pieces are a personal favorite of mine. Raymond Carver flawlessly dictates a beyond the pale attitude toward most of his short stories. This piece influenced my own through his decisive unveiling of seemingly average people through the reality and secrets they hide so well until they can be held for no longer. His minimalistic style always motivates me to keep my own writing simple and concise.

Hunt, Laird. *The Impossibly*. Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 2012. Print.

Though the context of this piece very much differs from my own attractions, Hunt's use and misuse of grammar in such a prolific manner seems to have seeded an attempt of my own.

McCarthy, Cormac. *Blood Meridian*. 1st. New York City: Vintage International, 1992. Print.

McCarthy challenges language in a manner that inspires my own writing. In *Blood Meridian*, the excitement is drawn not from the narrative but instead from the unbelievable dictation of timely language and setting. The amount of detail in referencing the time and period that this novel was set inspired me to write a piece that



was dated to a specific time in history. It also motivated me to attempt the variation of language that McCarthy so flawlessly seams throughout this piece.

O'Connor, Flannery. "Good Country People." Trans. Array A Good Man is Hard to Find. Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1955. Print.

This piece has developed my ability to create characters beyond the first or second dimension. O'Connor's use of context in order to create such perfect and organic character driven plotlines always inspires me to completely and fully understand my characters.

Porter, Katherine Ann. "The Grave." 1935. Web. 1 February. 2013.

This piece contributed greatly and was really the first fallen domino of my thesis. The imagery of the animals was what first drew me towards writing this piece. My own dedication to the metaphors of animals in my piece stems directly from the language used by Katherine Ann Porter in *The Grave*. The family dynamic in the piece also gave me confidence in my choice to write a story based around a young boy and his family.

Wolff, Tobias. "Bullet in the Brain." New Yorker, 1995. Print.

One of my favorite pieces of all time, I fashioned my story around similar details in sound and language within *Bullet in the Brain*. Tobias Wolff's ability to attach sound to insightful and in depth meaning really inspired me to challenge my characters voices' and movements'. His knack for writing endings that leave you feeling wistful was another aspect I admired and have continuously attempted in my own writing.

Dickson, Paul. "Sputniks Impact on America." . PBS, 11 Jun 2011. Web. 9 February 2013. <<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/space/sputnik-impact-on-america.html>>.

Kennedy, Ian. "The Sputnik Crisis and America's Response." . University of Central Florida, n.d. Web. February 11 2013.

Launius, Roger. "Sputnik and the Origins of the Space Age." . NASA. Web. February 1 2013. <<http://history.nasa.gov/sputnik/sputorig.html>>.

These three online sources were my primary resources to study and understand the influence and American reaction to the launching of Sputnik. Through much time and effort I was able to come across these articles that corresponded to my assumptions of how a middle-income suburban family may react to the historical event. Though there seemed to be widespread difference in the initial reaction to Sputnik, it seems clear through these works that many families did react in a similar way when informed of the initial launch.

"Popular Men's Colognes of the 1950's." *Yahoo* . N.p.. Web. January 21 2013. <<http://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20090109004435AAQuaIB>>.

"Popular Songs of the 40's." *Digital Dream Door*. N.p.. Web. February 21 2013. <[http://www.digitaldreamdoor.com/pages/best\\_songs-1940s.html](http://www.digitaldreamdoor.com/pages/best_songs-1940s.html)>.

"1950 Collector Cars." *The People's History*. N.p.. Web. February 23 2013. <<http://www.thepeoplehistory.com/50scars.html>>.

Many of the decisions I made while exploring the time and setting of my piece were constructed around searching for as many lists and articles I could find in order to best

pick a car or song that mended well in my piece. I attempted to only select intertextual items that in some way made the story more cohesive. I really worked hard to accompany a brand name or model name that fit into the specifics of the piece.

Bradley , Becky. "American Culture History." KC Library. N.p., n.d. Web. 4 Mar 2013.

<<http://kclibrary.lonestar.edu/decade50.html>>.

"Italian Campaign." History. History Channel. Web. 11 Mar 2013.

<<http://www.history.com/topics/italian-campaign>>.

"Italian to English Translation." Google Translation. Google, 10, Mar 2013. Web. 10 Mar 2013.

"Italy WWII." Prisoners Among Us. N.p.. Web. 10 Mar 2013.

<<http://prisonersamongus.com/story.htm>>.

"The 1950's." History. History Channel. Web. 20 Mar 2013.

<<http://www.history.com/topics/1950s>>.

When the idea came to me to connect the physical objects of this story to a historical piece of context, I was overjoyed by the possibilities it would surely create for this piece. However, as I looked into it further, I immediately realized I was unaware of the historical knowledge necessary to provide such opportunities. The above references really made my choice to use Italy as my language marker for the compass and the cologne an easy one. After reading of the United States direct role in Italy during WWII, I felt immediately certain that the father character would be connected to this specific point in the war.

*American Beauty*. Dir. Mendes. 1999. Film.

*Revolutionary Road*. Dir. Mendes Yates. 2008. Film.

These films really inspired the voice and style I hoped to provoke in my writing. Both films are confined by the ideas of normality and simplicity. Yet, behind the fashioning of a normal family, there is always a secret that can tear it apart. Each film really captures a sense of drama that depicts normality in a grotesque manner. I didn't want to push too heavy upon the grotesque but tried dearly to unravel what I hoped to be a normal family dynamic.

Johnston. Joe, dir. *October Sky*. Dir. Hickam Homer. 1999. Film. 10 Feb 2013.

This film was the first piece of cinema that I thought of before writing this piece. From the beginning of my process, I knew that I wanted to challenge the idea of space with the use of the satellite. In order to appreciate that spacing I felt I needed some form of relativity to connect my writing to. In this film, the relationship between the father and the son very much mirrors my own attempts to create a relationship based off an enormous physical gap in both the setting and in the understanding of the personal differences between characters.

Lee, Spike, dir. *Miracle at St. Anna*. 2008. Film. 11 Mar 2013.

This film was the jumping off point for me to include the aspects of WWII into the narrative. I found this specific film continually in my mind while writing the passages concerning the cologne and the compass.

