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Salem: The City of Fog

A Novel on Activism and Conformity

By
Cheyan Swan

An Honors Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for Graduation from the
Western Oregon University Honors Program

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June 2021

Acknowledgements

I can't thank my thesis advisor, Lars Söderlund, enough. You have been a massive support throughout this entire process, and I doubt I could have finished this thesis without you. You offered so many resources and truly helpful critiques, all the while providing me with an endless supply of encouragement. Your excitement for this project has been absolutely contagious, and I appreciate the time, skill, and compassion you've brought to the table. You've been an invaluable mentor, allowing me to grow as a writer while also engaging in deep discussions about my novel's topics and any other fascinating side-tracks that pop up during our meetings. Although I'm elated to finally complete this thesis, I'll dearly miss our bi-weekly chats.

Next, I'd like to thank Gavin for quite literally keeping me in college. There were a multitude of times when I felt overwhelmed by the path to graduation, but you broke down the requirements for me and eased my concerns. You're an incomparable resource, full of empathy and determination, and WOU is beyond lucky to have you helming this Honors Program.

Thank you so much to Lisa Catto, my supervisor for over two years. You created such a friendly and open workspace where I could improve in my writing and learn so much more about the marketing and technical sides of writing. You've listened to so much of my groaning about classes, professors, and thesis work, and you've offered an abundance of empathy and advice. You've become such a huge role model for me in these past couple years, both as a professional writer and as a lovely human being.

Thank you to Amber for listening to my rants about my characters, for having those hard conversations about activism and compassion and bravery with me, and for reminding me that I am good enough—that my writing is a skill to be proud of. You helped me grow into myself and allowed me room to thrive, as difficult as the process was for both of us.

Thanks to Erin for helping me survive until graduation. You've always been one step ahead in your thesis project, and in turn, had all sorts of answers and reassurances for me during my own project.

Thank you to my parents for your support: financially, physically, and emotionally. You helped me start and finish this journey of higher education, and you encouraged me to be proud of my own accomplishments. Plus, there are no words to describe how grateful I am for the care you've given to my pets, Toby and Azuki. You know how much I adore my animals, how passionate I am about writing, and how much of a struggle the initial years at WOU were. But because of you, I made it through.

Thanks to my siblings, Ashley and Jayden. Ash, you gave me options when I thought I was running out, helped keep me in school, and offered so much support throughout all four years. Bub, you poke at each of my nerves and engage in arguments about subjects I truly care about. You make me actually utilize knowledge I've gained from my Sociology courses, and at the end of the day, you're my favorite person to get dinner or watch a movie with.

Finally, thank you to Grandma Arlene. You made so many trips between Monmouth and Hillsboro for me. You've fed me, housed me after stressful and sleepless

weeks, and always have kind words and candy to spare. You've been my biggest supporter since I started writing over a decade ago, and all that you do is filled with love. I can only hope to be as kind, enthusiastic, attentive, and forgiving as you someday.

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Abstract

Salem: The City of Fog is a speculative fantasy novel set in the American 1950's, the plot revolving around the era's heavy themes of conformity. The story is driven by protagonist Kella Flynn, a young woman trapped in a strict career and limited by a misogynistic society. She clings to safety in the face of a government and culture that would happily set her aflame for any misstep they can blame on "witchcraft," and she is only to coaxed to act outside her own interests following unusual circumstances. While writing this novel, I set out to engage in critical discussions on activism and the many gray areas within it. When a world undoubtedly needs to change, as one powerful groups thrives off the exploitation of others, the activists within must question what counts as justice. Where do they, and we, draw that moral line?

Novel Excerpt

Chapter One

A clear creek, bubbling over smooth stones, ran through halfway point between the hundred or so miles separating our home from where Dad's sister lived. It was a three-hour drive full of playing cards and squabbles. Eleanor insisted on the break, said the car was too hot, and she ought to dip her feet into the frigid waters.

Mom liked to step in to her calves, pulling Eleanor along with her, searching the creek bed for colorful rocks or glass. She was a collector, although I couldn't tell you what she did with all her trinkets—the wildflowers she plucked from the side of the road, the misshapen fruit she bought at the supermarket, the odd knickknacks she found while thrifting. We never had the money to support her habit, but she insisted on giving the unwanted a “second life.”

As Eleanor climbed over mossy stones and attempted to catch the swift little fish that passed by, Dad submerged himself to his ankles and watched me hesitate at the shore.

“You coming for a dip, Kells?” He called.

I wrung the hem of my dress and my shook my head. Ronny in first grade said water will sweep you away, just grab your feet and knock you down. It happened to his uncle—it could happen to any of us.

“Just leave her be, Jack,” Mom chided, reaching out to snag Eleanor’s wrist before she slipped. “She’s not the exploring type.” Even while frowning, Mom was pretty.

I remember Dad’s parents teasing about how much of a catch Mom was. Her straight auburn held its shape after overnight curlers, and she didn’t need a dab of makeup. I was a bit jealous Eleanor looked so much like Mom, from her hair color to her heavily hooded eyes. But my sister did, unfortunately, get Dad’s wild curls.

As much as Eleanor enjoyed swimming, she shrieked over how much the moisture volumized her hair, made it a massive, frizzy mess. She was careful not to slip.

“But she could be,” Dad argued, his bright red curls blown astray with the gust of breeze. “She just needs a bit of moxie, Hazel.”

Eleanor snorted. “She’s got no moxie!” She shouted, grin gleaming in the late spring sunshine. “Kella’s a flighty bird—huh, Kells?”

Dad ignored Eleanor’s challenge and extended a hand towards me. “One step in, and you’ll find it’s not so bad.”

“Ronny says—” I spoke up.

“I know what Ronny says, but I’m gonna bet he’s as prone to bluffs as his old man. You gonna listen to loud little boys like Ronny your whole life?”

I bit my lip raw and glanced at the sparse woods behind us. “No?”

“Then c’mon, Kella. One step in.” He arched a brow, his palm upturned.

I dug my toes into the shore's pebbles, watched yellow rays glint off the rippling surface of water. Birds chattered all around us, as mocking as Eleanor, as insistent as my dad. I raised my hand, hovered, and yanked it back down to my side, clenching my fist. Every excuse stoked my fear—the creek's too cold, the rocks too slick, the current too strong. And I'm not sturdy, I thought. I'm a flighty bird.

“Kella,” another voice called, its pitch much higher than Dad's. It seemed to emanate from right beside me, blown in through the trees. “C'mon, Kella. C'mon.”

I felt a tug at my arm, and I was no longer at that creek in Montana from my childhood, but a trolley downtown on the Pacific coast. The bustle of other passengers flooded in, and I could see a couple rousing from their seats to shuffle toward the exit.

“This is our stop,” Sabine stated, her round eyes, straight nose, and long face craned up toward me. She shook my arm. “We gotta go.”

I nodded, still gathering my thoughts, and wobbled upright, tugging the young girl along. Sabine patted down her frilled dress, a stark signal of wealth amongst the middle- and lower-class riders. We squeezed through the aisle, and I stepped off the trolley first, offering a hand for Sabine to take as she hopped down to the pavement below.

We waited to watch the trolley start up again, setting back on its course with a couple cheery dings.

Our favorite supermarket was at the top of the city's tallest hill. Port Omelas was a small island comprised of rising, winding slopes, with bustling docks at its base. The city's east side faced the mainland, connected to the rest of the state by an imposing

silver bridge. The west side faced the sea, some flatter land stretching out below the hills, dotted with the wealthiest citizens.

Sabine tugged me along the street, and I checked my purse to ensure my belongings were still intact. I glanced down at Sabine's head, noticing her thick braid had been worn messy and loose.

I sighed. "Sit down for a moment," I said, guiding her toward a bench nestled in front of a brick-faced shop. I was eternally grateful Sabine had grown into an obedient girl, thanks only to myself, in all honesty. If she was raised by her parents, she'd likely be a rampaging brat. Even if she was spoiled, she ought to experience some discipline, too.

I slipped her hair tie loose, then ran my fingers through the long, blonde strands. I neatly parted her hair into three sections and began weaving all over again.

Sabine swung her legs off the edge of the bench, eyes wandering. She waved at a few familiar faces, clucked her tongue at some pigeons that trotted past. If I didn't know any better, I'd assume Sabine was years younger than her actual age of eleven. She had quite the manic attitude of a six-year-old, still wildly curious about the world.

"Alright," I concluded, tying off the braid. I patted her back, urging her to stand. "Be more careful. You must've been rubbing your head all along that trolley seat, yeah?"

Sabine puffed out her cheeks as I stood. "I was just lookin' out the window. The trees are getting orange now."

"Uh huh," I quelled, offering out a hand for her to hold.

The city was always busier on Fridays, and although it made getting around a little more difficult, Sabine enjoyed being amongst the bustle. She didn't leave the estate much, only to visit her mother's family out east. Her parents enrolled her in a private academy, limiting the number of peers in her classroom. Even after that, extracurriculars took place solely at home. Our shopping runs were her small taste of the real world.

Sabine rushed from window to window, peering into the shops to spot what was new. She dragged me along the block, and the oval locket strung around my neck bounced against my chest.

I occasionally reminded her that, as per usual, my shoes had heels that ached with sudden movements. The girl's jostling shook a couple strands loose from my hair, and I paused to tuck them back into my tight up-do, the ties holding it together perpetually strained and close to bursting. Oh, the troubles I endured to look like a proper lady.

Sabine halted in front of a bakery and laid her palms on the glass. I knocked them down—she'd been scolded enough about leaving handprints on windows.

"No pastries today," I stated. "Miss Tucker's making a pie with dinner tonight."

Sabine shook her head. "I know that. I was looking at the new sign they've got. The design is different."

I leaned over her shoulder to take a gander at the poster plastered to the glass for myself. It displayed the city's usual slogan: "Notice any suspicious activity? Contact your nearest police station." Underneath the text, however, was a caricature I hadn't spotted in these parts before—a green-skinned woman with a hooked nose and jutting chin,

sneering at the viewer. She was holding a bubbling bottle of bright purple potion, the liquid oozing over the rim.

“D’you think witches actually look like that?” Sabine asked.

I snorted. “No. They look like regular people; I suppose that’s what makes them so scary. They’re not just monsters in our closets.”

Sabine turned away from the window. “Have you ever met a witch, Kella?”

I backed away from the shop in turn. “No, I don’t think I have. Unless they…” I paused for dramatic effect. “Bewitched me into forgetting our encounter,” I whispered conspiratorially. When Sabine leaned in close enough to listen, I lurched forward to tickle her sides.

She shrieked and shoved me away, wracked with giggles.

“Alright, ankle-biter,” I said with a short chuckle. “That’s enough silliness for today. Let’s go do our shopping.”

Sabine was happy to trot along until we reached the supermarket. She waved at the kids left in strollers outside the entrance, squeezing a little boy’s fist as he reached for her. The number of children waiting outside stores had dwindled over the years—I remembered the occurrence being much more frequent in the smaller towns where I grew up.

Sabine liked steering the cart, so I let her pick a favorite and clack along behind me, the girl often claiming she was practicing her steering for the inevitable day she received her driver’s permit.

I rummaged around my purse for the grocery list, noting the separate sections for what the cook needed and what Sabine and I merely wanted. There was no difference when it came to payment, though; Sabine's father gave me a generous allowance for these types of outings.

We meandered through the aisles, pausing in a fairly long line for the butcher. Sabine tried to sneak a few snacks off the shelves, dropping them into the cart mere seconds before I plucked them back out.

"Too much sugar," I said with a shake of the head. "I can cut up fruit or cheese when you're snack-ish." I was already immune to Sabine's responding pout.

We finished our shopping within the hour. I allowed Sabine to carry the lightest bag, while I hauled off the other two. After we exited the shop, Sabine pointed at the block across from us.

"You think the fountain's still running in the square?" She asked.

"Might be too cold now, but we can sure check," I replied, glancing at my wristwatch to ensure we had a couple hours before sunset.

Sabine and I strolled to the paved intersection of walkways, signifying the center of this large shopping district. While the tall, tiered fountain was indeed running, the east side of the square was occupied by a new structure. We noticed the display after closing in on the fountain, the wooden building no longer obscured by the towering brick walls of old shops and offices.

I stopped a second before Sabine, color draining from my face. Sabine simply meandered closer to the fountain to sit at its concrete edge. “Didn’t know they were hanging people here,” Sabine grumbled, convinced that the three swaying bodies ruined the beauty of her favorite fountain.

A gibbet had been constructed in the week or so since we’d last been here, small, creaky, and surely temporary. The bodies still hung from their nooses, rather fresh and lacking decay. While I stood stock still, visitors continued to mill about the square, barely paying the gibbet any attention. Public hangings were the norm in big cities, I’d learned. Punishment for the accomplices to witchcraft weren’t kept to private cells or dealt with at a shooting range. At least the city officials hadn’t set up a stake, instead. The scent of burning flesh would spread past even the supermarket.

“I don’t see why they had to put it here,” Sabine complained with a huff.

“Because it’s a popular area,” I explained, voice void of much tone. “You want to send a message when there are people around to really see it.”

“What’d these gals do?” Sabine went on, leaning forward to squint at the swaying corpses. She knew there were tags tied to the criminals’ ankles listing their heinous deeds, but she didn’t seem bothered enough to move closer and read them. “Probably sheltering witches. It’s usually sheltering charges.”

I cleared my throat and hefted the grocery bags higher. “Hey, let’s head home. I need to get these veggies to Miss Tucker before she starts making dinner. And we’ve still got laundry hanging on the line. Don’t want it to start raining, huh?”

“Yeah,” Sabine agreed with a heavy exhale, hopping off the fountain’s edge. “It’s always raining off and on here.”

I hummed, loosening up once we left the gibbet behind. “At least we’ve gotten past the summer storms.”

“I kinda think the autumn fog is worse. You can barely see three inches in front of you!” Sabine exclaimed, holding a hand in front of her nose for emphasis. “That’s worse, ‘cause we gotta stay inside all day.”

“Well, if you cross your fingers and hope hard enough, snow will come early.”

Sabine bounced between steps. “Then the violin tutor won’t be able come, and we can spend all afternoon playing!”

I side-stepped to bump her shoulder, smiling.

Up ahead, the incoming trolley chimed.

Personal Interest

Much of Salem arose during the time I spent with my grandma. During many freshman and sophomore weekends, I stayed with her in Hillsboro, where we played cards and chatted while listening to “Golden Oldies.” She talked about her family, about growing up in San Francisco in the Forties and Fifties. She helped me envision foggy drives and two sisters dancing to the home radio. The dresses were pretty and cinched, and hair was a woman’s pride. When Grandma spent a summer with her aunt in Virginia, she bought a used red Beetle, then drove it home with a couple little siblings.

It sounded like a romantic era: “pom-pom girls” performing at high school football games, cheap burgers and sodas, teens and kids watching American Bandstand, and Grandma and her closest sister trying to tip-toe out of the house before their dad heard any door hinges or floorboard creaks. Communities were tight, families even tighter, because reputation was everything.

The backdrop to this suburban idealism was intense conformity in the wake of the Second World War, in the midst of the Red Scare and fathers haunted by years past, smoking away their worries until their lungs gave in. The Fifties have been especially fascinating to me since childhood, for all these reasons and more. Yes, the women were pretty and sweet, and the young men were suave, but under the surface, tensions boiled, raring to burst in the coming years.

In early college, I started to draw connections between “then” and “now,” as the misogyny that my friends and I were battling was mirrored by secrets from the picturesque era of my grandma’s youth. Women were often burdened by their family’s

secrets, tasked with mending the harms that exploitative men in their lives caused. In those first couple years at WOU, and now as well, I felt anger for my grandma and her sisters, and I felt anger for myself. Power structures from half a century ago persist, mending glass ceilings and urging anyone with a uterus to stay in their place—to care for the kids and let the boys get the real work done.

When I visited a crafts store with my mom during the Halloween season and spotted a hanging wooden sign depicting your stereotypical green witch—with warts, a jutting chin, a hooked nose, an evil sneer, and all—the maelstrom of ideas in my head snapped into place.

I love fantasy fiction, consumed myself with it throughout middle and high school. Therefore, a sort of contemporary fantasy was the perfect way to express my feelings about vintage conformity and sexism, accentuating themes that very much persist today.

I knew I needed a setting I could clearly picture, so I shaped the primary setting of Port Omelas around San Francisco: foggy city, steep and rolling hills, and trading docks where many visitors could come and go. Anyone who has taken our honors program's freshman philosophy courses will understand that the concept of this city is directly drawn from Ursula K. Le Guin's "The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas," in which a beautiful, lively city persists at the expense of one neglected child locked away from the populace's sight. I'm immensely intrigued by the concept of a larger group flourishing merely because they force a smaller populace into horrid conditions. The ruling class exploiting the disadvantaged is, after all, more reality than fiction.

Then came Port Omelas's counterpart, Salem: a haven for the exploited, and in this world, those at the bottom of society's rungs are "witches." To the men in power, it doesn't matter if the women accused of witchcraft actually possess any magical capabilities. Labeling someone as a threat to a peaceful, thriving community is enough to silence them, and in public spaces, make them an example for anyone else hoping to speak out. So, witches and their allies have formed hidden nations across the globe, the island Salem being one of them.

The city state is divided into five factions, four of them ruled by high matriarchs, and the center fifth managed by an old, global Order of Seven. Laws are dictated by women, the factions are mostly democratic, and the city as a whole operates within a socialist economy, where legal safety nets exist to catch any citizen or refugee in need. The populace itself, although magical and rather free-spirited, is not always aligned in its ideals. The high matriarchs implement different leadership styles, along with differing goals for their districts and the whole of Salem. Politics, as with anywhere else, are tumultuous, and the general public involve themselves in discourse.

This novel's theme of activism aligns with its conformist settings, and ultimately, the morally gray spaces within activism drove the plot and many of my characters. As a queer person, I understand a lot of our history with social movements, and I know that any meaningful shift in culture requires much hard work and action. Following the summer of 2020, this fact became more prominent in the public sphere, and I found myself engaging in arguments with an intelligent, informed, and passionate friend about the actions and rhetoric of the Black Lives Matter movement.

As a white American, my voice is not important to the subject of race-based police brutality and systemic racism. However, I listen to the voices that do matter, and I also try to formulate a mental image of an ideal future, as well as how we could achieve it. Morally, I am a pacifist, so I prefer to not engage in violent protest. Yet, I acknowledge the impact of the Black Panthers, and relative to my own community, I acknowledge how historically vital the Stonewall riots in 1969 were.

There is rarely incentive for privileged groups and classes to pause, listen, and go out of their way to uplift marginalized groups—more so, to alter a biased system that was designed to work in their favor. In turn, the only way to truly garner their attention is to disrupt their norm. In America's past, that has frequently involved violence and material destruction. As much as I personally disagree with violent activism, I often force myself to question where I'm placing my grief. What is more important to me: my morals, or the world at large? A looted department store, or a Black American shot or strangled to death by an authority who is supposedly meant to protect all citizens equally? Again and again, I align myself with the philosophy of author Robin DiAngelo and ask, "Where does your grief lie?"

In the fictional universe I crafted, this argument is paramount to the communities of witches who must gather to survive. There are many groups in Salem who wish to live peacefully without interacting with the outside world. Alternatively, there are activists striving to change their countries of origin, either seeking revenge or justice, however they may define it. Throughout the plot, I tried to entertain multiple definitions of justice, because in reality, I don't know what the right answer is. I never want to portray myself as righteous, or as any sort of authority in civil rights issues. Yes, I am affected by

homophobia, transphobia, and misogyny. Yet, I struggle with my own activism, and I believe that discovering what's truly "right" is a lifelong endeavor, and I've barely scratched the surface.

What I do know is that protest matters, activism matters, and voting matters. In my world of Salem, these marginalized women need to fight to attain any basic rights, and their fight to be heard and to create a safer world for themselves is dangerous and too often deadly. They know that action is necessary; it's only a matter of where to draw the line.

Kella and Delgado

My writing style is intensely character-driven. Any plot must be based upon a primary character arc intersected with new and evolving relationships. When considering the setting for Salem, I needed a protagonist who was at odds enough with their surroundings to relate to an audience's confusion and potential fascination. I needed a character who was unsure of their place in a grand world and searching for answers amidst seemingly unachievable goals.

Many of Kella's characteristics stem from my experiences as a teen and the queer internet circles I inhabited. She's wary, lacks confidence in herself, and is hesitant to address the parts of her identity she sees as dangerous to her societal wellbeing. She's the would-be activist, if only she could get her shit together and develop some courage. For anything significant to happen in Kella's arc, she required a shove—one that ultimately ties back to her internal struggles and her traumatic past.

Kella's journey was a matter of turning external motivation into internal. She begins this novel's plot acting upon her own self-preservation, subduing personal desires to reconnect with family and seek peace. Only through a string of disruptive events does Kella gain the opportunity and strength to pursue what, and who, she truly wants. In turn, she is able to fully blossom into herself and advance her character.

Delgado, in many aspects, serves as Kella's foil. She's lacked the security that Kella has largely experienced in her life; thus, she is much more independent and self-serving. Although she's free of Kella's cowardice, Delgado is equally as stubborn as the

protagonist. Their cold, concrete demeanors clash, highlighting their differences, and more importantly, their mutual faults.

While Delgado's purpose in this story was originally to challenge Kella's worldviews and urge her to act on her own behalf, Delgado created a life and narrative of her own in the processes of development and writing. I noted the potential she held as a very powerful queer individual—someone who was unapologetically gender non-conforming in a strictly conformist society. She possesses great magical ability, but she doesn't go out of her way to be a hero, much like Kella. At the start of her character arc, Delgado sees little fault in her own lack of activism, claiming she does what she can while maintaining careful self-preservation. She's survived this long for a good reason.

Kella, Delgado, and their interactions with the supporting cast were intended to carry the story, because I believe intriguing storytelling requires characters that real people can see themselves in, as well as fairly criticize. I hoped that through their arguments and discussions, Kella and Delgado could fully engage in real-world subjects, prompting audiences to consider certain topics themselves, while the characters continued to develop and grow.

Characters make or break any story, and from the beginning, I aimed to craft individuals that readers would gladly latch onto and dissect.

Influences

I love fiction; fantasy is an ideal stage for escapism. As a child, my cousins and I pretended to be Power Rangers. My brother and I uncovered mysteries with Scooby-Doo every weekend. My mind was absolutely blown over super-powered female cartoon characters like Katara and Toph from *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, She-go from *Kim Possible*, and Raven from *Teen Titans*. Even upon entering high school, I immersed myself in speculative fiction novels. Throughout weekdays, I finished assignments early to sit back and read in the classroom. I rushed through homework to hurry into my room and resume my spot in the latest story.

My greatest inspirations from my early teen years and beyond include a litany of novels, most notable of which is Laurie Halse Anderson's *Speak*. At the age of fourteen, *Speak* introduced me to the notion of the silenced woman, trapped by her circumstances and terrified of the world beyond due to trauma. While this novel helped me find my own voice through artistic expression, just as the protagonist Melinda did, I carried its messages with me for years after. I love the notion of girls finding their strength despite adversity and lack of outside support. I love the journey of a suppressed girl to an empowered woman. I hoped to reflect these themes in my own work, like Salem, by including women who faced their oppressors without destroying themselves in the process.

Girl Mans Up by M-E Girard was a large inspiration for the character of Delgado. This book follows the journey of a butch lesbian accepting her identity and confronting those who wish to limit her expression. The novel encouraged me to accept both the

masculine and feminine sides of myself, and I was eager to explore this further in my fiction, particularly with gender non-conforming characters like Delgado. A person who refuses to adhere to binaries is a powerful example for queer and non-queer people alike. Stories like *Girl Mans Up* reflect how we are not limited by labels or societal precedence.

Robin Talley is an author I generally admire for her lesbian storylines. *Lies We Tell Ourselves* is very striking due to its confrontation of intersectionality, especially in eras and settings of life-threatening conformity. This romance takes place during the American 1950's, when schools in the South were first facing desegregation, and it follows a privileged white student clashing with a new Black classmate advocating for herself and the local Black community. The characters' actions and discussions speak poignantly on privilege and how our upbringing shapes our worldviews and biases. Confronting our harmful biases is very difficult, but never impossible, and using one's privilege to act outside of themselves is an increasingly important and pertinent message—a message I was determined to incorporate into Salem and Kella's growth as a person.

Finally, Ursula K. Le Guin's "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" is a short story I read in a freshman philosophy course that stuck with me thereafter. It details a thriving city with hidden atrocities, where the greater populace is allowed to live in luxury due to the horrifically poor treatment of one child. It highlights class divides and how many unbalanced societies function, and I noted how well it related to the settings I was developing for my novel. I eventually named the city Port Omelas after Le Guin's fictional Omelas, due to their shared prosperity built upon the oppression and mistreatment of a select few—in the case of the former, witches and underprivileged women. This short story serves as a great fictional depiction of a very present theme in

our reality, as our success is too often built upon the backs of exploited and villainized groups who were never meant to share in our prosperity.

Obstacles

Side-stepping the elephant in the room that is COVID-19, my greatest obstacle throughout this process and particularly this past year was my mental health. I'm sure that being in quarantine, isolated from contacts outside my bubble and being disrupted from my routine, worsened my already poor condition.

Any work I do is a battle against my own mind and its natural lack of serotonin. I sometimes can't get myself up in the morning, and in other instances, I can't fall asleep for hours and hours. It takes time for me to prepare myself to write or do work, and the acts themselves sap a lot of mental energy. Coupled with my tendency toward perfectionism, I find myself waiting for the "perfect moment" to get anything I deem significant done.

I procrastinated on beginning the novel. I wrote the first chapter in the spring of Junior year, and I didn't touch it for the summer following. I only added two more chapters toward the end of the following Fall Term. First, I was thrown off by the pandemic's disruption to prior plans and schedules, then I allowed myself to get swept up in the beginning of Senior year. I allowed myself to procrastinate and believe that I had enough time, that the deadline was far enough off.

I only got back on track with the assistance of Lars Söderlund, my thesis advisor. I failed to communicate with him properly in the summer and fall, but coming up on Winter Break, he encouraged me to set up a meeting schedule and check-in system with him. Knowing my break would be entirely free of academic and workplace distractions, we placed a ten chapter goal for the month of December, and each Monday, I needed to

describe to him my progress for the previous week. I managed to write about three chapters per week, and once we reached Winter Term, I was on much better footing to actually finish this novel.

We started a bi-weekly Zoom meeting schedule, and at each check-in session, we were meant to discuss the two chapters I had written in that time span—it was a ten week term, I wanted the novel to be about twenty chapters, so my goal was to write a chapter per week.

As much as I hated opening my laptop and fiddling with an empty Word document every weekend, I knew Lars was going to be waiting for a progress report that following Monday, whether that report be given through Zoom or text message. Finally, I had an incentive to keep my word and follow a schedule, because I had smaller and more tangible deadlines rather than the huge, looming deadline of graduation.

I, admittedly, spent a few Sunday evenings hurriedly typing out a few thousand words, convincing myself that I wasn't doing it for me; I was doing it for Lars. I understand my desire to please instructors that I respect, so if Lars told me I needed to get a certain portion of the novel done, there were no excuses—I would do it.

Of course, in reality, Lars is an empathetic person and would understand a harsh depressive episode or a family emergency, and he wouldn't force me to work if I absolutely couldn't. But the reminder that there was someone waiting on the other side of that Zoom call, someone ready and excited to read my work, motivated me to truly write the thesis, and to do it well.

My setting wasn't ideal, as I wasn't close enough to the WOU library to drive and study there often, and my roommates are busy and noisy. I require silence or white noise to write, so I learned what ten-hour YouTube videos of rain sounds worked best, or when fire crackling and storm clouds worked better for the Salem scenes I was developing. No part of working amidst the pandemic was ideal, but I managed, and I believe a lot of students learned how capable of adaptation they truly are.

Finally, I struggled with picturing my own success, and again, Lars helped immensely with that. Honors students are particularly driven, and I think we're more likely to find ourselves trapped by perfectionism. When I write a novel, poem, or essay, I want to produce the best result possible. Anything less, in my mind, isn't worth my effort. Therefore, during the times I doubted my novel, my skill, or my future, I felt my motivation drop. I couldn't see the purpose in continuing the project if it wasn't going to be a masterpiece.

Lars's enthusiasm for my writing, however, was contagious. When I expressed doubts about certain scenes, themes, or characters, he talked it through with me. When I tried to downplay my dreams of publication, he enlarged the picture, told me I'm capable of finding success greater than I can imagine. There's something so special about a personal cheerleader, about receiving unwavering support from a person who you know is skilled in their own right, who has found success on their own career and life path. Despite my doubts, he pushed me forward to the finish line.

Even if this novel isn't a masterpiece, I poured just about everything into it, and I ought to believe it was well worth the effort.

What Happens Next

My plan from the beginning for this novel was to pursue traditional publication, and that plan has not changed. Lars and I have approached every step of this project with the intention that it would extend beyond the thesis and beyond my college education. I am, at my core, a fiction writer, and while this thesis was an exercise to demonstrate the skills I've learned at WOU through my Writing major and Sociology minor, it is also a step toward my larger goals and career.

Lars and I agree that further revisions to Salem will likely be necessary even after the thesis is complete. I will not be nitpicking at the book for the rest of time, though. This summer, after giving myself a week or two to rest, I will start to search for agents and query them. My hope is to eventually find an agent to represent me and present my work to publishing companies. Thereafter, any suggested revisions this company has would be taken into consideration.

I understand that traditional publication is often a very long and tiring process. Although I will fight for this book to be published for as long as I can, I also plan to keep writing in general. If struck by another book idea, I'll develop and eventually write it. I'll work to survive, and I'll aim to land a writing-based job so I can continue to hone my skills. Being a novelist means playing the long game, and this novel is just the start.

That said, I'm happy to share the draft that I have now, even if it's not posted anywhere public. The story and characters are dear to me, and I wrote this novel with the intention of other eyes observing and appreciating it. While the first chapter is part of the

published thesis, I plan to share the rest of the book with close friends and family.

Additionally, my WOU peers are free to contact me if they're interested in reading the current complete draft.

The future, as I see it, is undoubtedly daunting, but I feel much more capable of confronting it given all that I've learned at WOU. I have gained invaluable contacts and guidance, and I hope to communicate with certain contacts even after graduation. There's a whole lot more to come.

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