

Table of Contents
Jace Grewal
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1. Bipolar Thoughts
2. "20 things I've learned at 20" 1331 words
3. "What love is not" 440 words
4. "Untitled" 244 words
5. "Elsewhere Home book review" 1149 words
6. "Slaughterhouse 5 book review" 908 words
7. "Critical Commentary" 916 words

Bipolar Thoughts

I feel the way I felt when I would catch moths and butterflies in India with Daddaji

I would watch them fly around the house

Scared and fascinated at the same time.

I suddenly wanted to free all the moths and butterflies

I felt bad for trapping them for my enjoyment.

Ever since I've been scared of moths

But I would love a moth tattoo.

To remind myself not lose who I am for the enjoyment of others

I feel the way I would feel when I would go eat Chinese food at Crystal Mall as a kid

I would walk by the Hello Kitty stores and the loud crowds.

I would feel nauseous with overstimulation

I feel the way I would feel when I woke up on Boxing Day

I watched Franklin with my breathing mask on

I spent Christmas in the hospital

But here I was, on the couch near my parents.

I felt grateful to be alive which is a weird way to feel as a kid
when you're not even really aware you're alive yet.

I felt the way I would feel when my little brother ran by the ocean on vacation
I ran after him and saved him.

Thrilled that he was alive

Thrilled that I really could run when it was a life-or-death situation.

I feel the way I would feel when I went to a queer drop-in for the first time in person.

I hid in the corner and only talked to Han.

Now I say my goodbyes to him as we both move on with our lives

His heart breaks every time he shows up to work

I don't blame him for leaving

I feel the way I would feel when I listened to Noah Finance sign Asthma Attack for the
first time

I was obsessed with his YouTube channel

I felt so comforted that someone else felt the way I did

Being trans felt like the end of the world but it was a little bit easier knowing that
someone else has felt that way too

I feel the way I would feel when I would play I Spy for hours looking inside of my picture
book

Straining my eyes, getting lost in the pages and drawings for hours.

Frustrated yet stimulated.

Ashley's name was on the cover, she gave me the book as a gift.

I never saw her again, we both had to move on with our lives

I feel the way I would feel when I fell off my horse while horseback riding.

I fell off and everyone rushed to me and asked if I was okay.

I was completely fine even though I shouldn't have been.

I think what I'm trying to say is that the world rips me away from people before I am ready and somehow despite it all I'm still here. I am a collection of other people, a human memory box.

Here I am dreaming about a boy

He bought me a blanket

They spend hours with me

I can't tell if I just fell in love with anyone who's kind to me or if this is different

I can't deny that I like them at least a little bit But if they just wanted to be my friend and read books while they studied and sat in silence and stargaze

That would be more than enough

Laying in the blanket they bought me

I'm not used to feeling special

I'm not used to feeling like someone's number one

For once I understand jokes I can always tell when he's joking

I never feel like I'm falling behind or pretending

My whole body is the tensest it's ever been yet the most relaxed it's ever been around him

I don't know what he sees in me

But I see the world in him

I follow them with stars in my eyes

They make me want to follow them everywhere

For once I feel like I'm being cared for in a way so very few have

In all the places in the world, in all the courses I could choose from I ended up right next to him

I wonder what would happen if I fall further in love with Wales

Would I ever want to leave?

I don't know how he feels about me, but I can get over a crush I've had before.

I just don't know if I can get over this place and leave with my back to the door.

I got called lovely

And I live in a lovely place

Lovely

The boy who took me to see the stars

Cooked me dinner and found out that I can only eat half a slice of pizza

He knows one problem with me

Soon he'll find out more. I wonder how many problems it will take

Before he leaves me

I can't believe I'm in a boy's bedroom

Now when I look at the stars I think of you.

When I see daffodils I think of you

When I see birds I think of you

Why did I think anyone could love me?

I want his hand on my stomach

I want him to magically take away my cramps with his palms and my problems with his lips.

I've never written happy poetry before.

I've never been asked before being touched before.

This is different.

I love being around him but I also hate it.

I hate how when he touches me I feel that man on the skytrain instead.

I don't want to break up with him I just don't know if I can do this

I thought cutting my skin was the best feeling in the world but now I know it's his lips.

I thought I was cool but I'm not

I thought I was special

He told me that he sees her as a sister

Then he went and he kissed her

I want to stay here forever

I feel like I'm always caring for his needs and would rather be alone.

He doesn't love me, he loves that I'm a people pleaser.

Love pours out of my eyes and down my cheeks

I throw up stars

lovesick

The Jaime effect is when you can't help but fall a little bit in love with him.

20 things I've learned at 20 (inspired by Dylan Thomas)

1. Everything happens for a reason or at least that is what I like to tell myself to keep me from going insane.

2. It's hard to be grateful and jealous at the same time

Everytime I catch myself thinking

I wish I was her

I wish I looked like her

I am doing a disservice to myself

I compare the worst parts of me to the best parts of them like that's fair

I put myself down like it's my job

Whenever I look at what other people have

I am never focusing on what I have

And what I have should be

Enough

3. Live in the present. Life goes by too fast not to!

4. Karma is real

My best friend ignored me at the peak of her life, now she is at a low but I know better than to ignore her

My dad has been horrible to me and lost my mom in the process

5. When faced with a decision choose the one that scares you

I have always been scared of making mistakes

Not in fear of disappointing myself but in disappointing others

Others have always been more cruel to me than myself

Even when I would cut up my arms

I am used to having to shout for what I believe in

For standing up against my parents and bullies

But sometimes in fear of losing a false sense of comfort

I give up the opportunity to grow

I almost didn't accept my scholarship to study in Wales

Because I was scared of making a mistake

I was scared of being treated worse abroad than in Canada

In some ways I have been

But doing what I really didn't want to is what set me free

I have never known what it felt like to have friends

To fit in, to be liked and loved

Now I am even starting to love myself
Everyday I am becoming a better, more authentic version of me
Even if it hurts sometimes
So next time I have to choose between something in or outside of my comfort zone
I will always choose the harder option
I will always choose the one that makes my heart race and makes me want to throw up
Because then I will truly live

6. Be yourself even when you don't want to be

I had hid my gender for so long hoping I could be the daughter my parents wanted
But that only hurt me more in the process
I am the happiest when I am myself
So that is what I will be

7. You are never alone

I think about this a lot when I look at the stars at night. How many other people are
looking at the same sky?

8. Always do what Han would do

Han is my youth worker
He saved my life when no one else was able to
Don't get me wrong my friends, teachers, parents, psychiatrist, doctors they all tried
But Han was the only one to succeed
Because he treated me like a human
Not an illness
He respected me when no one else did, he believed in me when no one else did
He told me that he's proud of me
That is all I've ever wanted
Is to make him proud
I am eternally grateful for the kindness that this man radiates
He gives his everything to his job, he treats us lost broken youth like his own kids
I have never told him this, probably never will
But I treat myself and others better because of him
I ask myself would I like it if I did this? And the answer is clear.
He is the reason I am happy, he is the reason I kept going and fought to be here
Breathing and living in Wales
I hope when I am his age if I become at least half the man he is
That would be enough

9. It's your parents first time living too

"Don't expect an ocean from your parents when they only have a drop of water"
I am the type to always want more
I always want more than what my parents could give me
I wanted unconditional love but my dad couldn't give me that

I wanted respect but my mom still struggles
She tries and that's what matters
They were never taught how to love, how to raise kids, how to live
We are all just doing our best with what we have
I think a part of growing up is realizing your parents are human just like you
My mom was also a little girl once and that little girl is still inside of her
She carries that broken child around every day
How can I expect her to give me her all when she doesn't know how?

10. You are lovable

I thought I wasn't because I have never received love to the extent I have gotten in Wales. I thought there was something wrong with me. Turns out I was never the problem.

11. Advocate for yourself. You know your body and you know when something doesn't feel right

I had a bad feeling about my moms best friend
Turns out I was right and she ruined my moms friend group
I had a bad feeling about my boyfriend
Turns out I was right and he love-bombed me
I had a bad feeling about my iron infusion and asked them to do allergy testing beforehand
They ignored my request and I had an allergic reaction
When I don't trust my gut I get myself into shit

12. Do what you love

When I do what I love that is when I feel the most alive

13. The good and bad don't last forever.

I don't take praise to heart or criticism
The same way I appreciate the good and bad and wherever my day happens to land along that scale
Life is too short to whine about the bad and to wish for the good
Life is what's happening now

14. Everything is constantly changing. Stop fearing change and start embracing it.

15. It's okay to relapse if you continue to try again, that's just part of healing. It's okay to call the crisis line and it's okay to make mistakes.

16. The world is a better place with you in it. You belong

17. Don't hide the real parts of yourself to make others comfortable. The people that matter will love all of you.

18. It's not your fault Jace you didn't ask for it

19.

Can I touch your thigh, my boyfriend asks?

Yeah

Every time I'm touched I feel like throwing up. His touch sends me back to that day on the skytrain. I can feel that man's hands all over me

Are you okay?

Yeah i'm fine

I have never worn that same outfit again. The clothes must have been the problem I asked for. Ever since that night I choose to sit next to girls whenever I can and I never walk home alone in the dark. That must have been why I wasn't being careful enough.

I had a great time today!

See you later

I retch into the toilet bowl and nothing comes up. My eyes sting. I will never feel clean or okay.

20. Always try to be a little bit kinder than necessary. Every bit of kindness I received while I was struggling I treasured. So I make sure to try to spread as much as I can so I can be who I need in the world.

21. Love isn't exclusive to people.

I feel love when I paint,
when I see something that reminds me of my mom,
when I sing
when i read and write.

A boyfriend doesn't soak up all of my love when you have so much to give to the world

What love is not

All I've ever wanted was to be loved
So I shatter my walls
This time I will let someone through
I break myself
Piece by piece
Until I am naked and yearning
Scared and burning
When we kiss I feel nothing

I lie and keep touching
If we kiss harder I'll feel something
Eventually
My mouth says yes while my whole body screams no
Do you love me yet?
Every piece of myself I lose in you
I believed it when you told me that I completed you
I am nothing
Now I am finally lovable
This must be what love feels like
I say as I wander
How my no's turn into yeses
I can feel the word on the tip of my tongue
No
It lingers there all-day
But never leaves my lips now chapped from kissing
His desire never filled
He could kiss me until I died and still want more
He could kiss my corpse and wouldn't be able to tell the difference
I am half alive when in his arms
His love hurts but this must be what love is
Look I think I'm finally lovable

He tells me he loves me
I tell him I like him
I think I like him at least.
I like that a boy finally likes me, I like that I make him happy
I have realized that I have been made for men to use and throw away when they
please.
This time a boy asks before talking and just like that he's my boyfriend.

What even is love?
Is it my boyfriend pleading to see me every day?
Pleading to touch my bleached hair and kiss my sticky lips

Is love the way I kissed my little brother's cheeks just one more time at the airport? Our
tears stained my sweater
It stained my heart.

Is love the way my mother always wants what's best for me and always has good intentions for me? Is it the way she pours love into everything she does? She loves people I have no problem hating. I think she is the strongest woman I know.

Is it love when my first friend in Wales drunkenly took me to see the stars? He was Dizzy with alcohol stumbling over his feet and his words.
I was dizzy with anticipation.
I thought this could be it
He could kiss me now
But he never did.

Is love the way he kissed my friend while I was sleeping?

So when my boyfriend says I love you I realize I barely know what love is

But I know this isn't it

"Of course, she'll come to accept it. That's the whole point. It's inevitable but you could have made it easier for her, that's all." p.75

When I came out as transgender to my mom I was worried that she would never understand

My counselor at the time told me something similar
that it's inevitable and she will understand
it's just hard for her and it will take time

When you are challenging someone's worldview it will take time

But will she change her way of thinking for her son?

I cried to my counselor

I need her to accept me

All of me not just the parts she picks and chooses

She will he told me

She will

But I could make it easier for her

I have tried to be gentle to her when she wouldn't be gentle with me

Every wrong pronoun and deadname I excuse

I wore dresses for her comfort

While pushing mine to the side

in the hope that she will understand in her own time

I never had supportive parents who took me to pride and baked rainbow cakes
I had to learn to be comfortable with being misunderstood

I think Elsewhere Home is all about trying to understand people whose worldviews are different than your own

Although I am not religious I found home in this book

I know how it feels to try to explain your version of freedom

Whether that is in religion or gender

This book is about becoming comfortable in the uncomfortable.

A Muslim author tries to explain Islam to the Western World

Of course, people don't understand

Book review of Elsewhere Home by Leila Aboulela

"Elsewhere Home" is a collection of 13 short stories written by Leila Aboulela. This book for me is about finding a sense of freedom and peace in your everyday life which is shown through the way Muslim Women practice religion. This book is designed to make the reader uncomfortable with dissatisfying endings and taboo topics centered around women, of course, people dislike it and of course, it hasn't been covered in many reviews. I think this book is ahead of its time despite my classmate's critiques about its simplicity and two-dimensional characters. I find that the heart of the text is there, whether the book is written poorly or if the characters are two-dimensional or not is up to their own opinion. I am here to defend this book after watching it get torn apart by my white classmates. This is a book attempting to educate the very people who are criticizing it, it seems to scream on every page "Everything you know about Islam through the news and media is wrong" and "We are human too." As a non-religious person myself I have found freedom and a new sense of understanding in this book. I can relate to how no one else seems to understand you when you are part of a minority group that the right wing finds scary.

This book is also about trying to show how human everyone is, even when they are different from you. I get a similar message with every story from the first to the last page. We are met with morally gray characters, vague and confusing at times which mimics real life. This is particularly relevant in the last story "Pages of Fruit" where we are shown a woman trying to justify her parasocial relationship with her favorite author. The readers are supposed to empathize with the women but once looking deeper into it the line between right and wrong blurs. "I got into bed and started to read my favorite

novel again" (p.214.) After the main character meets her idol and is met with disappointment at the end she still reads the author's book. I think the message here is trying to show that we are all only human, and like anyone else we have our bad days and make mistakes, and despite how hard we try we may end up being the villain in someone else's story. This story is one about how art can sometimes transcend the author itself but I like to take the more humanistic approach which ties into the theme of the novel. I think Aboulela does a great job of showing us the vulnerable side of humanness that so few can depict. She somehow can make us hate and love every character she has ever developed once you take the time to sit with the book. This is not an easy read despite the simple language, it challenges narratives we build in our heads about humanity and Islam to the point that I think so few take anything away from this book. I like how her technique is very shown but doesn't tell. Not once does she say Islam is good or bad, but she shows us the beauty and peace found within it, something the news does not. Not until you experience something yourself do you understand the way other people view the world, by taking us to different heads of different Muslim women it makes it easier to empathize with their worldview if you let it.

The Scottish man who marries himself into Islam and marries a Muslim girl is another example of humans. He is not a great character, he makes a lot of mistakes and acts like a whiny man but I think that is intentional. He acts just like you or me, the point being that Muslims are not brainwashed or alien, they are human. "He had turned his back on these customs and returned them as if they were borrowed" p.44 I feel like that can be related to any human on earth who has ever felt out of place. For the main character religion is what gives him his sense of community, his sense of inner peace which I never understood until I read this book. I thought religion was for losers looking for a sense of belonging and looking for a way to justify their hate and disguise it as love but this book has shown me something different. We are all looking for that same sense of belonging.

This book will change your life if you let it. Of course, it has its faults. I find myself wondering why the author decides to make certain choices in her work. I would say that her form is the opposite of flowery, she writes very simply which could upset some people if they are looking for more description. Her writing style is much more contemporary which focuses on the characters more than the overall plot of the setting which just happens to be my favorite type of book to read but can not be everyone's cup of tea. "Which one of them agrees with what's written on the walls" p.93 A word used to oppress brown people was written on the wall but we don't have much detail about the way the writing looks or the wall for that matter, we get more detail about what the main character thinks about it rather than a real description of what's going on which can make it difficult for the readers to properly visualize.

I would say the book was written to share about Islam and to try to show the world how human Muslims are when they are portrayed in such a horrible racist way, especially on the news and social media. Even right now with the genocide in Palestine, the world cares but would care a lot more if Palestinians were white.

I could tell Aboulela wrote this book with a sense of passion that seems to bring her stories to life. This book shows the ugly parts of religion too, the abusing and antifeminist parts where women are treated horribly. But that can happen in any religion, to anyone.

In conclusion, I liked this book. It's good for other people on children of immigrants to read because it can be incredibly relatable at times, and it is also used as a way to educate white people. This collection of short stories will find a way to teach and empathize with you. If you have ever felt different in your entire life you can empathize with the book and enjoy it if you only give yourself the chance. Is it perfect? No, not at all. Some of the stories can drag on, especially for readers that are not people of color but this book is brave and I think that's far more important.

Book review of Slaughterhouse-Five by Kurt Vonnegut Jr

What the book is about

I found slaughterhouse five to be one of the most confusing and thought-provoking books I've ever read. Slaughterhouse Five is about a soldier's life where he tells his story about World War 2, but he also gets abducted by aliens. If the aliens are real or not, well that's up to the reader to decide, the aliens are certainly real to the main character though. This is an anti war book which grapples with PTSD, the way the memories are scattered throughout the book in no coherent or logical order is a metaphor for PTSD itself. The very nature of the aliens is also a response to trauma if we choose to interpret the book that way. The main character is a weak soldier which is chosen on purpose to show that when you are sending people to war you are sending children. The author could have chosen a brave main character that is good at fighting but that would defeat the purpose of the whole book.

This book is also about death. The same phrase "So it goes" is repeated over 100 times throughout the book but I can't figure out what it means which is part of what makes this book so great. As an antiwar novel, you would assume it goes by a negative saying that someone says when someone dies but it seems like almost the opposite. Why is every death in this book treated so mundanely? Is it a critique of war itself and the way the world is? If the phrase was replaced with a paragraph of agony would that have the same effect? I like to believe that it means whatever you as the reader want it to mean. The alien planet the main character gets stuck on is what I assume is the way the

author would like us to think about life. The aliens don't believe in free will, only fate. Why is that? They laugh at the idea of war. Why? I read this book and lay in my bed at night questioning why Vonnegut writes these things. I think that's the point though, the point is war doesn't make any sense so why should this book? In being confused the reader feels a fraction of the frustration activists feel when they question why people go to war.

"There is no way" p.63. When the main character asks why he was chosen to go to the alien planet he is told that there isn't a reason. I connected this to when people ask why bad things happen to them or why certain people are sent off to war to die while others live. The idea is that there is no rhyme or reason and that is just the way things are, similar to the repetitive "So it goes" quote. I think the writing of the book was amazing, as the pacing and the way the story is all messed up and confusing, it leaves its desired impact. I admit a lot of things do go over my head, especially with the challenging work we have dealt with this semester but I think this book is supposed to intentionally confuse you. It can send you into a full-on existential crisis if you aren't careful.

My only critique of the book would be that it is a bit clearer and contradicts itself less. You would assume a war book is anti-death but this book seems pretty meh about the notion of dying and I'm still not sure why. "If you think that death is a terrible thing then you have not understood a word I've said" p.117 "It had to be done" p.163 is another example of the weird view of fate that the aliens and the war general have. I guess it's supposed to show that war doesn't make sense.

This is a very old man's book if that makes any sense. This is a type of book an old man would enjoy and praise the same as the Hobbit. They are written kind of boring and maybe a bit politically incorrect at times and are written in the voice of a man about men by a man. I would have liked to see more diversity but given this is a historically accurate book women weren't allowed to fight, and other minority groups weren't given the light of day. This isn't Vonnegut's fault at all but I think it's still something to consider. This isn't a critique of the book but more so just something I thought I should mention. I would say the author writes very deliberately, a bit flowery but not poetry-like, and that makes it confusing on purpose.

Overall I liked this book, I didn't love it since classics aren't usually my cup of tea. I love contemporary novels where nothing happens and I'm not sure why. That's usually people's least favorite type of novel but I did like this one. I would say a contemporary version of this is "We are the Ants" which is about an LGBT guy who is convinced he is being taken by aliens soon and the readers don't know if the aliens are real or not. Now that I've read this book I've realized that the severe bullying the main character goes

through could have caused PTSD which could be where the aliens stem from similar to Slaughterhouse 5 but I'm not sure.

1,000-word critical commentary

My work is heavily inspired by Dylan Thomas, Leila Aboulelia and Kurt Vonnegut Jr. I have experimented with the form of my writing, the morbid themes about death from Slaughterhouse 5 and Dylan Thomas, and trying to educate and write about challenging topics that others might not understand like Leila Aboulelia. In this essay, I will be talking about how my work has been inspired by them and how I am growing as a writer and as a person.

First, the form of my writing has changed ever since I've taken this course. I am now more experimental and am trying to mess up my work on purpose. Admittedly that is harder than it seems since I've been told to follow certain rules and instructions for most of my academic life, I've never been told to break them and make it confusing. An example of this is how the form of Slaughterhouse 5 mimics someone with PTSD, similarly, I have done the same thing with my poems trying to mimic my Mania of being bipolar and the depression that comes with it. I try to abruptly change the feeling of my poems with no rhyme or reason and I try to make the reader feel as deeply as I do about every little thing, or nothing at all which is similar to how someone with bipolar disorder would view the world. (put a quote in here)

Second I try to incorporate the idea of death which is inspired by Dylan Thomas's birthday poem where he writes about death and the state of the world. I try to do something similar and write from my point of view. I try to add aspects of how the world is falling apart due to climate change and war. There is always war. I also try to incorporate the so-it-goes mentality from Slaughterhouse 5, where death is inevitable but that doesn't make it meaningless. I tend to get reflective on my birthday, sometimes I feel like I'm wasting my life away which is a really dramatic thing to say at age 19. I think Dylan Thomas and Kurt Vonnegut would argue to pay attention to the individual stories in humanity which is a very modernist way of thinking. The way that everyone's individual daily stories and lives are just as important as the big ones, as the celebrities and religions that run this earth are just as important.(put a quote in here)

Thirdly, my writing is the most inspired by Leila Aboulela in how she is not scared to bring up topics that not everyone will understand and face them head-on. Her short stories are full of religion and are heavily influenced by Islam, she is not scared of being too much, she shows as much as she possibly can from her heart in the hope of educating others. That is exactly what I try to do with my poetry specifically, I try to make

it as me as I can. I add every aspect of being trans and dealing with mental health disorders, both taboo things and I try to give the world my perspective on the matter. People may argue that Leila Aboulela writes about nothing, and that is the point. It may be nothing to you because that is not your life. Every time she writes about a character praying or fixing their hijab that might seem like nothing but in reality it does say something. That is their everyday life, so I try to give you all a glimpse into mine and I try to show you all how human I am. (put a quote in here)

In conclusion, my critical commentary shows that I am heavily inspired by the work we have read in class and am really into breaking boundaries and trying to show who I am through my poems and writing. Everything that the stories we read have in common is that they are authentically themselves and that they are ahead of their time by doing so. Sometimes I'll read a quote from a modernist and it sounds like they are predicting the future and that they are writing about our lived reality now. I am inspired to be as brave as all the writers we have worked with and inspired to continue to grow and change through my work. To add to all of these ideas I did try my best to make my writing as authentically me as possible even though I am influenced by other authors I don't want my work to become a lesser version of theirs. I was scared of being too influenced by their work which is why I picked and chose things I thought they did well rather than trying to become the next Dylan Thomas. Sometimes when you spend hours upon hours reading someone's work it's hard not to sound a little bit like them since they are not part of our human experience and are part of who we are. I remember a quote we were shown at the very beginning of the course where someone said to not write about yourself but I think that's fundamentally impossible. There will always be a little part of every book I read in my work just because it's so hard not to be influenced by other people, especially in the creative field. I am very aware that I may not have added as many of the other authors as my peers but that was intentional.

Sources:

Negotiations of Scottish Muslim Identities in the Fiction of Suhayl Saadi and Leila Aboulela by Jessica Homberg-Schramm