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Artist Statement & Research  
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My illustrated stories use characters to paint stories that tell about my own personal struggles so that I can work through them and communicate to others who relate to the same issues and using a style that is approachable. I want to show that cartoons can talk about hardships' too and offer the first step towards moving on from the past. After being bullied and isolated the lingering effects of depression and loneliness plagued me. Narrative provides me a space to reflect on what had happened in the past and try to foresee a better outcome and follow through with this prediction.

This becomes an active process of rebuilding the self and to move on from the past- you know, live in reality and make the best of it. For example, due to being made fun of as a child I learned to block people's words. However, this becomes a problem later on because now no one is attacking me. Therefore, I created a survival tactic of blocking not only bad words but also the good ones from friends. The cycle of pushing myself down is kept by pushing both the bad and good out of my life. Instead, I imagine myself keeping those friends and appreciating the goodness and critique- learning to grapple both the negative and positive. It is not easy but it is an active step in the process of healing. A conscious goal is made to not repeat the cycle and empower myself to reach that illustrated goal at the end of the story.

How my experiences are illustrated in story form vary. There are some conscious stylistic choices between my two books, *The Skylight Companion* and *The Little Pumpkin Hen*. Both stories revolve around the themes of companionship, isolation and depression. Some of my initial stylistic choices stem from two artists, Daniel Merriam and Maruti-Bitamin. They inspired most of my visuals for *The Skylight Companion*. Daniel Merriam, an artist with architecture background creates highly elaborate dry watercolor paintings. I enjoy his fantastical style combining character elements into inanimate architecture. His use of architectural elements in *Courting the Muse* (Figure 1) inspired me to use window-like frames for *Skylight's* narrative to take place.

Maruti-Bitamin is the watercolor artist who paints rich and flowy illustrations, such as in *Untitled* (Figure 2), which I tried to imitate. Her whimsical art transports someone somewhere else. I relied heavily on Bitamin's loose style inside *The Skylight Companion*. Bitamin usually uses one or two human figures with a balance of very detailed and minimalistic backgrounds giving a sense of isolation in a big world.

These artists took special care to the attention of how the character and backgrounds corresponded. The background acted as a way to tell help support the character's personality, in some cases representing the character's internal struggles and dreams. In my case, *Skylight* is done in watercolor to emphasize a spacious dream-like space. *Little Hen's* background is kept black for the full glow effect of the candles to be seen. The jack-O-lantern based animals to show how any one person can be a light in a world that can be dark and hopeless.

To not fully understand every symbol and meaning is okay since they are based off of my own experiences and retold in my own art style. I do my best to keep the surface story understandable and approachable by both kids and adults. I allow room for kids to enjoy the narrative while giving experienced readers room to dissect the imagery.

It is important to me to make these stories appeal to both a children and adults because topics such as rejection and isolation are common challenges that everyone faces. I bring these personal experiences to a public view through a children's book because these topics are often avoided in polite company. Superficial chatter, such as the weather, is appropriate but when it comes to expressing personal matters like loneliness and depression the conversation drops. Discomfort is experienced when this is mentioned, why? Public society draws a line between private and public. This happens because we want to avoid the core to how we feel. We become vulnerable and fear judgment from our peers. I believe that those who deal with this should not feel ashamed since there are many other people with similar struggles and need support.

Storytelling with cartoons sometimes helps bring these personal topics forward in a more approachable form for kids and to challenge parents to openly recognize it in a supportive manner. To show that cartoons have substance and can be used beyond just offering a means for a quick laugh or an entire escape from reality- rather a means to work within it.

The St. Mary's Project challenged me to explore other artists who have used the figure (character) to carry meaning and narrative. I was surprised how my research found artist's using the body and story as means to discuss physical and psychological suffering due to social idealism. What first inspired me to write a story about anger with using animals were the folk tale collectors: the Grimm Brothers. *The Little Pumpkin Hen* is inspired by the Grimm Brother's tale, *The Death of the Little Hen* (Figure 3). It is a story about selfishness where characters continually meet their death because of their refusal to help those around them. I gravitate towards this story because it is a representative example of how people expect a lot more out of relationships than what they put in. My version of the Grimm's tale focuses on misdirected aggression towards people due to prior failures in social interaction. The story is about the little hen coming to terms with vulnerability and depression (weakness), but then ultimately allowing herself to get the help she needs and be secure enough to allow others to help her (strength).

The Grimm Brother's goal with collecting German folktales was to preserve peasant German identity. The old German beliefs, traditions and morals were contained in these folktales. The stories held lessons that both child and adult should heed. The experiences and values in the preserved folktales reflect the everyday lives of these past peoples. These outliers of civilization have tales that are considered wild with survival customs, so some would consider folktales primitive and un-relatable. These "primitive narratives" are the roots of Germanic identity in its most energetic and impulsive state. This impulsiveness refers to the process (events and experiences), product (the story) and context (the time period and social conventions) of an event in their lives<sup>1</sup>. These "tales are crude yet simple, rough yet sincere [thus revealing] a nation's identity through its weaknesses and aspirations for perfection"<sup>2</sup>. "The Grimm's adapt these survival stories in such a way that they convince children that "they are able to secure and defend their own

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<sup>1</sup> Oring, Elliott. "The Arts, Artifacts, and Artifices of Identity." *The Journal of American Folklore* 107, no. 424 (1994): 221. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/541199> (accessed March 12, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> Oring, Elliott. "The Arts, Artifacts, and Artifices of Identity." *The Journal of American Folklore* 107, no. 424 (1994): 214. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/541199> (accessed March 12, 2014).

safe haven (and themselves) in a threatening world when the adult population fails them.”<sup>3</sup> The folktales become relevant and interesting to the children and adults of the Grimm Brothers time as well as my time. The Germanic tales become a mixture of past and present issues with the Grimm’s efforts to preserve and spread these old tales.

For me, my stories are about preserving and retelling my own struggles and viewpoints I hold in the context of my own individual identity as part of the United States. I am not collecting other people’s stories, but rather, editing my own stories to make them relatable to a certain audience. The Grimm brothers preserved stories brought attention to the ignored culture of the Germanic countryside. My stories share the views of a growing population of depressed, misguided and fearful youth. Their lives are hidden and ignored. The common industrialized folktales of America in the forms of popular Hollywood movies look down upon this demographic and further their silence. The Hollywood stories lack substance in the form of realistic life learning examples. Hollywood movies are a route for escapism and some children’s books have followed suit with flat recitations of letters and numbers. These books have unchallenging themes for elementary school learning, ‘This is bob, watch bob run’. Elementary learning can be combined with life lessons that relate to kids with broken homes or are too scared to admit they are uncomfortable with who they are and terrified of what the future holds for them. The youth know more than what adults give them credit for and even deal with issues that are thought of as ‘adult only’ problems. The Grimm’s tales hold a mix of soft and hard-core stories that both mystify and terrify children. The tales imbue a sense of awe, teach morals and lessons towards dealing with the contents of the world. These kids become afraid to reveal their internal discomfort and tales of fantasy allow them to delve into topics that adults will not talk about. Even trying to tell a teacher about a fellow student assailant is seen as tattling and ‘bad’ so the child is stuck with no guarantee that adults will even resolve the issue.

I am sharing stories that reveal there are other people like them. For my story, *The Little Pumpkin Hen*, I went through a phase where I did not want to be taken advantage of anymore. But in the process I ended up hurting the people who cared for me. Being too

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<sup>3</sup> Clack, Maureen, “Returning to the Scene of the Crime: The Brothers Grimm and the Yearning for Home”, M.A. thesis, School of Journalism and Creative Writing, University of Wollongong, 2006. 8. <http://ro.uow.edu.au/theses/730>

defensive does not help a hurt person to grow in a better way. I learned it only makes you as bad as the people who hurt you in the past. The victim becomes the assailant. This story is a reflective piece of me coming to terms with my mistake and willingness to get past this pain and progress into a healthier, stronger way of dealing with problems from social interaction.

From story inspiration I needed to figure out how to present these heavy themes through characters and narrative. The first artist that used body to express suffering was the painter, Jenny Saville. Saville has a mastery of expressing the suffering and discomfort the human body can endure. Her paintings are raw and visceral, globs of paint emerging like obscene warts from the canvas, such as the meaty painting titled *Figure 11.23* (Figure 4). Saville is unapologetic depicting how the body is and revealing how it is both powerful and weak- she reminds me that I am only *human*, not a god and I have and will make mistakes.

Saville's truthful bodies carry feminist content, she questions the popular ideals of beauty dictated by society in its movies and television. Saville reframes the idea of what the human body is versus the popular notion of what it should be<sup>4</sup>. Saville does this by creating large paintings of these husky women and sickly bodies and putting them on a pedestal. They rise above and look down upon the observers, like in *Strategy (South Face/Front Face/North Face)* (Figure 5). This pasty-white woman would be considered a failure at being beautiful because she lacks a thin hourglass figure. Saville places her high above the audience as though the woman has pride for her body and it does not hold her back. Similarly, my past experiences have taught me lessons- such as being more cautious of whom I choose as 'friends' to avoid future bullying.

What I took away from Saville was how suffering can be beautiful and even fruitful. Past experiences can offer indispensable lessons on how to live with the bad of the world and treasure the good. My issue was that I survived but I am still allowing the past to hold me back from fully enjoying the good things. I am trying to ascertain why

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<sup>4</sup> Meagher, Michelle . "Jenny Saville and a Feminist Aesthetics of Disgust." *Hypatia* 18, no. 4 (2003): 23-42. <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1527-2001.2003.tb01411.x/abstract> (accessed October 28, 2013).

and progress from there. It has really helped to learn how to scoop in criticism then berry-pick the most useful grains since another person's advice will not always fit my circumstances. Not everyone's story is the same, so keeping it open and related to things everyone struggles with- bodily embarrassment, depression, loneliness- creates a far more engaging narrative.

After Saville I continued to struggle with how to use a character to carry meaning without grossing out kids too much, I do intend for my books to help a large group of people. I looked at Paula Rego used body language and stylistic exaggeration to reflect emotional states. Paula Rego's artwork is deeply rooted in her childhood memory and deals with the understanding brought upon by adulthood along with the ambiguity of imagination and reality<sup>5</sup>. Rego explores her themes through story telling in environment and character gesture<sup>6</sup>. Rego's artworks reflect the emotive state of the main subject. For Paula Rego, "[the] body is seen from her point of view. How [her subject] looks is how [it] is and how [it] feels<sup>7</sup>." In *Possession* (Figure 6) there are multiple paintings of a woman twisting and turning in a bed. The restlessness shown through the body illustrates the inner struggles within the main subject. The struggles that the main subject is in combat with are on themes on ambiguities' between reality and imagined ideal and cope with the world's anxieties. Paula Rego is [saying something] about her subject's coming-into-consciousness and its relation to her corporeality<sup>8</sup>." Rego stages a personal drama where the woman's body tosses around in an intimate violence, tottering between compliance and resistance in a tense balance<sup>9</sup>.

Rego pushes and contorts drawn bodies to enhance the reader's understanding of the subject's psychological emotive state. In the fictional tale, *Jane Eyre* (Figure 7), Paula

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<sup>5</sup> Barnes, Rachel. "That Would Be Telling." In *The Pre-Raphaelites and Their World*. London: Tate Gallery Pub., 1998. 250.

<sup>6</sup> Barnes, Rachel. "That Would Be Telling." In *The Pre-Raphaelites and Their World*. London: Tate Gallery Pub., 1998. 249.

<sup>7</sup> Cooke, Simon. "The Ever-shifting Kaleidoscope of the Imagination: Modern Illustration to the Brontes." *Bronte Studies* 30 (2006): 14.

<sup>8</sup> Rosengarten, Ruth. "An Impossible Love: Subjection and Embodiment in Paula Rego's *Possession*." *Association of Art Historians* 30, no. 1 (2007): 83.

<sup>9</sup> Rosengarten, Ruth. "An Impossible Love: Subjection and Embodiment in Paula Rego's *Possession*." *Association of Art Historians* 30, no. 1 (2007): 83.

Rego recreates the representation of the main character, Jane, through using different line weights and how expressively she portrays Jane. By doing this reader could obtain a clear psychoanalytic reading in visual form. I also change the style of how I present my characters in my story to match the mood I want to portray. The light watercolors of *The Skylight Companion* are sadder and sweet versus *The Little Pumpkin Hen's* digital sharpness. *Pumpkin Hen* uses heavier line weights so it feels heavier. I consciously use full-page spreads to make *Companion* feel more open to express a mood of hopefulness and adventure since the characters are exploring themselves and the world around them. The *Pumpkin Hen*, on the other hand, has contained pages for an oppressive feel because the characters are attacking each other.

The expressiveness of Rego's exaggerated gestures and expressions coupled with reflecting lines for both character and environment "project [the] inner lives <sup>10</sup>" of both subjects since it helps to "further develop [the] visual connections between characters and their settings<sup>11</sup>." In the instances in the book when Jane was strong and clear in thought Rego provides beautiful line-work with Jane's anatomically correct body with a smooth dress. When Jane was under distress and in uncertainty, Rego contorted Jane's body and made Jane's dress unclear and crumpled through crosshatched lines<sup>12</sup>.

My simplistic styled story characters are a way for audiences to easily associate with them and to meld into a vague yet detailed dreamy landscape. Both character and reader go on an adventure through isolation and endurance. Rego illustrates what she knows and that being is struggling and being recognized as a foreigner and woman. And so she creates artwork that tackles head on the moments in her life that caused her much distress, like the woman in *The Possession*. For me, the rabbit in *Skylight* and the Hen in *Pumpkin* reflect the emotional journeys I went through to not let the past hold me back. Similarly to how Rego did an adaption to *Jayne Eyre*, *The Little Pumpkin Hen* is a

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<sup>10</sup> Cooke, Simon. "The Ever-shifting Kaleidoscope of the Imagination: Modern Illustration to the Brontes." *Bronte Studies* 30 (2006): 14-16.

<sup>11</sup> Cooke, Simon. "The Ever-shifting Kaleidoscope of the Imagination: Modern Illustration to the Brontes." *Bronte Studies* 30 (2006): 14-16.

<sup>12</sup> Cooke, Simon. "The Ever-shifting Kaleidoscope of the Imagination: Modern Illustration to the Brontes." *Bronte Studies* 30 (2006): 14.

translation of my own experiences into the Grimm Brothers *The of the Little Hen* folk tale.

How am I going to bring together dark themes more approachable through cartoons? It turns out this had already been done- and successfully- by Cartoon Network's *Adventure Time* (Figure 8). The creator of the series is animator Pendleton Ward. What I got out of the show was how well its narrative and characters grow and mature while delving into dark themes such as depression, loss, failure and loneliness while still holding this charming silliness. At first glance most people wouldn't catch this show as 'profound' or have life lessons.

I tried to do this in *Pumpkin Hen*, including sticking to a digital media for a sharper and grungier feeling. I minimize the background so character interactions and expressions command the reader's attention. Some children may not understand the deeper themes right away but still appreciate the compelling storytelling. As the child grows up they understand more and more about the deeper content as they experience the same hardships these animated characters experience in the an easily digestible cartoon form. The show mostly revolves around two heroes: Finn the human and Jake the magical dog (see Figure 8) and their adventures in the land of Ooo.

Beyond the main heroes, *Adventure Time* contains a massive cast of supporting characters, who can each can stand-alone with their own unique array of personal issues. I will focus on the episodes *I Remember You* (Figure 9) and *Simon and Marcy* (Figure 10) featuring the characters Ice King (Figure 11), formerly known as Simon, and Marceline (Marcy) (Figure 12) the Vampire Queen. When you first meet Ice King he is easily perceived as the main villain, silly and awkward. He gets beat up a lot by Finn and Jake because the Ice King has a habit of trying to steal princesses and even trying to imprison the two heroes as the Ice King's eternal bro-friends. Of course, this does not work and hints at the King's need for companionship. Marceline is the Vampire Queen, she is a mix of vampire and demon. Marceline struggles with the powers she is born with and learned to drink the color red instead of eating blood. She does not drink blood because she saw how power corrupted her past friend Simon (now Ice King). Ice King lost not

only himself but also Marceline. Marcy did not want to repeat this and wants to keep her friends, which include Finn and Jake.

*I Remember You* and *Simon and Marcy* were co-storyboarded by the animator Rebecca Sugar. Both shows revolve around themes of loneliness, loss and fear of being overtaken by this world's woes. In *I Remember You* the Ice King visits grown up Marceline to write a song. When Marcy sees him, she's struggles with the torrent of painful memories to see her closest friend, Simon, reduced to a princess snatching creep. However, Marcy does not push Ice King away and helps him write the song. She tries to remind the Ice King that he was once a human named Simon (Figure 13 & 14). She shows Ice King old photos of a gentle looking man who had an avid love for science and reason. Marcy wants her best friend back and genuinely believes Simon will return once he is able to break away from the crown's curse.

In *Simon and Marcy*, more background is revealed in the friendship between Marceline and Simon. After finding a mysterious ice crown Simon undergoes a total change of character, and goes mad with the ice crown's powers. He drove everyone he loved away from him in search of his 'princess'. Before being totally consumed by crown's spell he searched for survivors after the Mushroom War, in the wreckage he finds young Marceline alone. They kept each other's spirits high and defended each other despite the despair that filled the environment (Figure 15 & 16). The peace did not last long and Marcy lost Simon after he used the power of the magical crown to save her from monsters. During the ordeal, in Simon's struggle to not be overtaken by the crown he sang and one of the verses, "Makin' your way in the world today takes everything you've got!"<sup>13</sup> describes Simon's fear of his inability to save Marceline from the evils of the world, much less save himself.

This moment becomes a metaphor for how some people can be overwhelmed and changed by the negative pressures and events thrown to us from life. Simon relied on a corrupted source of strength and lost himself. He wanted a 'break' from reality. But this

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<sup>13</sup> "Simon and Marcy Transcript." Adventure Time Wiki.  
[http://adventuretime.wikia.com/wiki/Simon\\_%26\\_Marcy/Transcript](http://adventuretime.wikia.com/wiki/Simon_%26_Marcy/Transcript)  
(accessed April 25, 2014).

is not how someone should deal with life's struggles. You cannot face the world inebriated otherwise the individual will continue to wander deeper into that aimless pit. My stories come from my own gradual realization that it takes awareness of what we have done wrong and what we need to do right to know what best for ourselves- we can't rely on other people one-hundred percent of the time to solve our personal battles. But it helps to have a shoulder to lean on when needed, so it's good for those suffering from depression to have some kind of support from a trusted friend.

Despite the weightiness of my underlying subject matter, my stories are simple to read and enjoyable to look at for kids to enjoy. I leave it to the experienced readers to dissect the layers of meaning behind my images. I choose a simplistic and whimsical art style because it is less intimidating. I use dark colors to achieve a solemn mood while using light colors to focus the eye. Typically, I use lighter colors to spotlight the character's expressions. I have used watercolor for softer images for younger audiences and digital to gain a bolder graphic look for kids who like comic books more. This way my stories can connect to kids and adults and the subject matter within is easier to digest.

Cited Images

Figure 1 *Courting the Muses* by Daniel Merriam



[http://www.danielmerriam.com/index.php?option=com\\_ponygallery&Itemid=0&func=viewcategory&catid=2](http://www.danielmerriam.com/index.php?option=com_ponygallery&Itemid=0&func=viewcategory&catid=2)

Figure 2 *Untitled* by Maruti-Bitamin



<http://maruti-bitamin.tumblr.com/>

Figure 3 *The Death of the Little Hen* by Brothers Grimm  
Cover Illustration by Tracy Dockray



•<http://www.tracydockray.com/books.html>

Figure 4 *Figure 11.23* 1997 by Jenny Saville



<http://luisioamclavijo.blogspot.com/2013/05/jenny-saville-individual-external.html>

Figure 5 *Strategy (South Face/Front Face/North Face)* 1993-4 by Jenny Saville



[http://www.saatchigallery.com/aip/jenny\\_saville.htm](http://www.saatchigallery.com/aip/jenny_saville.htm)

Figure 6 *Possession IV-VI* 2004 by Paula Rego



(Rosengarten, Ruth)

Figure 7 *Jane Eyre* lithographs by Paula Rego



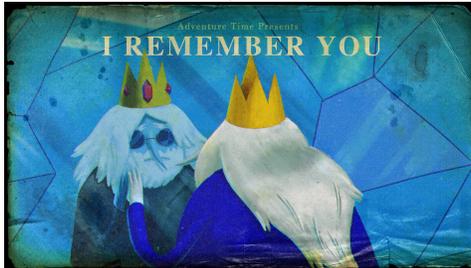
(Cooke, Simon)

Figure 8 *Adventure Time*, title card, creator Pendleton Ward



<http://www.fuelyourwriting.com/shmowzow-why-adventure-time-is-storytelling-at-its-best/>

Figure 9 *I Remember You*, title card, *Adventure Time*



[http://adventuretime.wikia.com/wiki/I\\_Remember\\_You](http://adventuretime.wikia.com/wiki/I_Remember_You)

Figure 10 *Simon and Marcy*, title card, *Adventure Time*



[http://adventuretime.wikia.com/wiki/Simon\\_%26\\_Marcy](http://adventuretime.wikia.com/wiki/Simon_%26_Marcy)

Figure 11 *Ice King*, *Adventure Time*



[http://adventuretime.wikia.com/wiki/Ice\\_King](http://adventuretime.wikia.com/wiki/Ice_King)

Figure 12 *Marceline*, *Adventure Time*



<http://adventuretime.wikia.com/wiki/Marceline>

Figure 13 *I Remember You*, animation still, *Adventure Time*



[http://adventuretime.wikia.com/wiki/I\\_Remember\\_You](http://adventuretime.wikia.com/wiki/I_Remember_You)

Figure 14 *I Remember You*, animation still, *Adventure Time*



<http://www.fanpop.com/clubs/ice-king-and-marceline-club/picks/results/1182230/excited-simon-marcy>

Figure 15 *Simon and Marcy*, animation still, *Adventure Time*



<http://jsvw.deviantart.com/art/Marcy-and-Simon-332873518>

Figure 16 *Simon and Marcy*, animation still, *Adventure Time*



<http://www.fanpop.com/clubs/adventure-time-with-finn-and-jake/images/34417207/title/simon-marcy-photo>