

A vintage-style illustration of two women in a kitchen. The woman in the foreground is wearing a red dress and a pearl necklace, smiling. The woman in the background is wearing a blue dress. They are standing near a white kitchen counter with a fruit basket containing apples and bananas. The background shows a window with vertical blinds.

# niche

AN NCH STUDENT CORONAZINE

*issue*

# 02

*prompt: home*

APR 2020  
ISSUE 02

# niche

AN NCH STUDENT CORONAZINE

02

home (n.)

the place where one lives permanently, especially as a member of a family or household.

(*of an animal*) to return by instinct to its territory after leaving it.



APR 2020  
ISSUE 02

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## a note from the editor

Dear all,

Thank you so, so much for the support of and contributions to our inaugural issue. **Issue 01: Isolation** was a huge success and I was so impressed by the quality and quantity of submissions, as were many students and members of staff. It was so much fun to put together and I was just as blown away and entertained by the creation of our second issue (I especially thank the faculty member that sent in their NCH Bingo submission).

Our second prompt, "**Home**", came from Eliza Brandreth, for which I thank her immensely. Home is a tough subject because it's something that encapsulates so much: identity, family, domicile, community, security, geography, sociology— the list goes on. It also inspired the theme for this issue: the 1950s 'happy homemaker' aesthetic is a nod to traditional views of the home and hopefully provides some playful contrast with the more up-to-date opinions and thoughts they serve to illustrate. (That, and I've spent far too much time recently pouring over Norman Rockwell illustrations. Thanks, Lana del Rey.)

Even without the added chaos of corona, home is a constantly evolving concept that defines and delineates us, our friends and our families. How do we define what our home is? Is a place, a person, a feeling, an idea? How does race, gender and sexuality play into what an individual considers their home? Can we ever truly be at home? What does it even mean to *be* at home?

From Freud's *Unheimlichkeit* to Heidegger's concepts of thrownness and *Dasein* to Kafka's musings on the homeliness of existential guilt in *The Trial*, the Humanities are no stranger to these questions. It is my sincere hope that this issue will shed a little light on the myriad of possible answers and that - hopefully - some of you find some sense of normalcy and home in these pages.

STAY SAFE, STAY CONNECTED

Victoria Comstock-Kershaw



# Poetry



# motherland

Nicolás Maurokefalidis

You lost the sounds of your land  
when you moved an ocean apart,  
all that's left now is the picture of your mum  
grinning by the bedside, oblivious,  
next to your hypodermic needle display.  
When asked what it is you miss most  
you circle back over the same things,  
never mentioning the self-importance  
afforded by a city too small to ignore you.  
Now, the movie poster above your door frame  
roars 'Buenos Aires Lights,' but the English  
dulls the image. You cut your mother tongue  
and grew ten more; in a fortnight  
you'll lie in bed and won't recognise yourself,  
you'll turn to the picture only to find  
that the symbol no longer does it.



# Homefront

ANON.

Along the Homefront  
Cries a Singapore child  
With an old cloth strapped to his back  
And a temper to match the stormy jungle behind him

The child slowly plods a dirt path  
With a basket of wild flowers  
Picked by the river and carried back home  
His sisters had begged and he had kicked them

Tears stream down his dusty skin  
Leavings small tracks through the dirt  
He is tired and angry and sore

The Homefront glimmers above the floating muck  
His mother waves, leaning over a stove outside  
His sisters run to hug him from their places by the fire  
And, like an Oasis, emerge from the hot dusty air

They plait the flowers into their black hair  
Rivers of blue and white blooming from melted tar  
They make a crown for their king  
Wash the grime from his face  
Feed him mango and fish  
And tickle his feet

Among the Homefront  
Over the crackling of fires  
Darting dragonflies rush between children's laughter  
And the sweet smell of shrimp and wild rice

Blessed by the Homefront  
Cries a Singapore child  
His mother wraps long brown arms around him  
They smile together  
He is tired and sore  
But he is home

# give a dog a bone

Birthday Boy: no older, no  
wiser

We never thought this chance could come our way,  
Me and Spot, the dog, gifted a home.  
A flat at number nineteen Covid Close,  
So safe, so warm, so lucky — seize the day.  
The years we've spent together sleeping rough,  
Spread-out enjoying summer nights in parks,  
Or cold one's circling London's Underground,  
Till mindless guards or police would kick us off.  
This flat's a prison, claustrophobic hole.  
Oh state, evict us, please, if not now, when?  
We crave invisibility, our role  
At home, Up London, begging with real friends.  
You Winners, please Just Give, if not, ignore,  
Don't urinate upon us in a door.



# Hom(m)e

Victoria Comstock-Kershaw

*(For the women that made homes  
Out of places that they loathed)*

For the Monroes sewn into Sequins who learned how to sing  
Who bore the sons of dead Presidents and long-hated Kings

For the Medicis missed by mourning sisters and towns  
Who found God in the folds of husband-gifted ballgowns

For the Victorian girls who abandoned bright-breasted lovers  
For six ugly children and a crosshearted mother

For the Elizabeth-pressed flowers in Milanese mansions  
And the hallway-hung portraits of their lovers unhandsome

For the Japanese princess who gave up her life  
For a silk-burned kimono and the title of wife

For the brown-skinned daughters of brave Southern slaves  
Who for twice in their bloodline gave up their last names

For the poets and painters who burned all their bridges  
And hung up aprons and dreams in their suburban kitchens

For the dykes, faggots and dreamers who all married young  
Who held state-of-the-art toasters in exchange for holding their tongues

*For the women that made homes  
Out of places that they loathed  
And to the men that ensured  
They would get the last word*



# Prodigal

Elliot Riley

I brought with me a soft miasma;  
Of riotous living and the weight of a suspended blade.  
Maybe sharp. Maybe not.  
The silent journey spoke of clearer lungs,  
Green tunnels and the chance tone my city-fattened calves.  
Offset by late nights and dark spirits.

It's a strange reprieve  
Daily washing dries the skin  
And the incessant lull of wave on wave makes the ticking tock seem drunk.  
The clank and whistle of steely skin sit skin deep  
Though old friends, they are no friends unless they're there for show.

My frequency is high, but it also hurts  
Bubbling at half-skilter down a pebbled beach  
A toe-stubbing, sole destroying freedom  
Which leaves me cold and salty,  
So I turn and in three minutes  
Have surrendered to a mug of tea.

Does fear of the handle make me agoraphobic or responsible?





# Home

ANON.

You.



# a hiaku

ANON.

home is where heart is  
tidy up to make a mess  
this does not spark joy



# Prose





# Untitled

ANON.

Home was with you, drinking shitty Lidl wine together in bed whilst watching *Strictly Ballroom* for the hundredth time.

With you, blasting *Dexy's Midnight Runners* in the car. I can shut my eyes and feel that exact moment; the warmth in my bones, genuine, rare happiness.

When you'd lost yourself and I knew exactly where you'd be. Sitting on damp leaves under the trees opposite the meadow. I put my coat around your shoulders. Your hands were raw.

Going to watch your performances. Not understanding them, but always bringing gladioli to throw. You insisting upon reading my essays. 'I don't know what any of it means but it sounds bloody good.'

Listening to Bowie on a park bench in the early hours of a cold June morning, both incredibly drunk. We wanted to see who could drink a pint of prosecco fastest. (It was me, but I did **not** feel as if I'd won, particularly.) Is it 'Lenin's on sale again' or 'Lennon's on sale again'? 'Got to be Lenin, he's talking about workers.' 'Nah it's Lennon am sure of it.' 'Google it.' 'It's Lennon.' 'Bollocks, it's Lenin.'

'Text me when you're home!' I was at home, I'm going to my house.

I keep the feeling of home with me on the walk back from the station. I always listen to The Jam's **English Rose** - it makes me think of you. *No matter where I roam // I will return to my English Rose// for no bonds can ever tempt me from she.*

Not *The Jam's* best song, and I'm sure you've never heard it. But it's home. I'll be home again soon.

x

# Dje Heimat (Kindertransport)

ANON.

"Girton College?" Aunt Brassfield squints at me through iron eyes. It is 1928 and I am, as of yet, entirely uncertain of the type of woman she is. She shifts in her chair and the velvet squeaks beneath her thighs. "I suppose I've sponsored worse," she sighs resolvedly as a column of smoke billows upwards from her thin lips. I fiddle with the dull crystal of my glass and say nothing. The conservatory was musty and air tasted heavy. I was told that before the war the Stadttempel manor had been one of the fine houses, ruined only by its inhabitants and their neglect. Women don't know how to care for a home alone, I've been told. The sherry is certainly cheap.

"Give me a reason to," she continues.

"The Americans are fond of it," points out Elif. She's a bright girl, a little beyond her years, German or Austrian - I hadn't though to check at that point in our engagement. I glance at her and dance my fingers along the seams of my armchair. They feel rugged and dead beneath my skin.

"I don't really think Americans know much about women," shrugs Brassfield. She stubs out her thin cigarette on the ashtray resting on the table and my eyes travel over the porcelain. This one is expensive: a horse pattern, modern, new. A bright orange plait runs around the edges, entwined with a gold thread and glimmering in the early afternoon light pouring through the French windows. Too modern, too new, especially against the cracking white British wood of the conservatory windowframes.

"No more or less than the English," grumbles Elif. She too fiddles with the basketwork of her chair, delicately balancing a skinny cigarette between her boney brown fingers. The ash tumbles to the ground and I wince.

"Apologies, aunt Agatha." I mutter as I sweep the grey beneath the table with my foot. "What Eli means to say is that—"

"Hush, idiot." snaps Brassfield. "If your skinny little mouse of a girl-friend has something to say about my lot, she can say it herself." Again, I wince. The last time I had introduced a fiancée to Aunt Brassfield had been a few years after the war — a sweet girl, as far as I can remember, who had helped nurse me back to health — and she had left Vienna in tears. I had not heard from her since.

"The ashtray's too pretty to stub in." mentions Elif as she leans forward and drops her cigarette into the pot of a large brugmansia. The wet soil steams beneath the embers. I dig my heels into the floor and prepare to leave.

"Why college at all?" repeats Brassfield. "You're engaged. Seems a little—"

"Idiotic?" interrupts Elif. Once again I grind my reddening heels into the marble.

"...unnecessary." finishes my aunt.

"Well, they let you smoke there."

Brassfield swells against the dark sunlight. "What did you do during the war?"

The question is mean, unexpected. It is especially nasty as Brassfield knows precisely how I feel about those whose answer was—

"I stayed at home while my brothers died." replies Elif immediately. There is no quiver in her voice, no hesitation. She speaks as a soldier. My knuckles knock against the wood-rotten armrest and I draw blood. Bombs sound in the distance of my mind. Brassfield watches her.

"And why now? You could settle down. Start a family."

A child coos. He is not yet born. He does not even rest in Elif's eyes.

"Did you?"

I cry out. "I say, Eli, how beastly of you—"

"I made other sacrifices," answered Brassfield shortly.

"As did I, in a way."

The walls crack. Smoke rises between the three of us as fine paper burns against gifted porcelaine. I bleed and grip the side of rough velvet. The conservatory swells.

"What for?"

"For conversations like this."

There is a purgatorial silence. Aunt Brassfield drops her cigar against orange British brugmansia and a grin creeps across her crooked lips.

"Welcome home." she coos.

The ashtray became a wedding present. Brassfield was too sick to come to the celebration itself, her lungs collapsing under years of tar and sadness, but sent it wrapped in white satin and enough money to send Eli and her daughters to school. We gave it to our children as they left Vienna in 1938, thick rods of currency wrapped in strings and tied to orange porcelaine.

"They'll be safe, won't they?" asks Elif as she nestles the package between hankerchieves and books.

"Of course," I mutter. I do not mention how lucky they have been to qualify at all; I gave up my citizenship years ago. They would carry the cases to Wien Hauptbahnhof along with the weight of their mothers' sin, and then to England.

"I'm should have gone to Girton, all those years ago," she stutters, tears brimming down her brown cheeks. I hug her. "You can go with them," she howls into my neck. "Please— you're still British— just go *home!*"

I close her lips with a kiss and call the children into the bedroom. A rotting Torah lays atop the ashtray. Elif hurries to snap shut the cases, turning the wetness of her face away from the door.

"Are you ready, *puppen?*" I ask. The youngest looks the spitting image of Elif. The eldest is a little uglier; she has inherited the graceless curl of her great aunt's lips. I kneel to hold out my arms and the pair grasp at my shoulders like drowning sailors.

"We go to the station now, yes?" I coo in my terrible Austrian, stroking their desert-inherited hair. So thick, so dark, so frizzy. Another sin. "And then to your new home, mhm? *Aufregend!*"

"I will stay home in Vienna with you and mummy." whispers the eldest conspiratorially. "Ester can go alone to England. I do not like her very much today and she is always sick on trains."

I laugh and get to my feet. "There will be plenty of other children to look after her," I say gently. "Come now, kiss your mother." She stares at me resentfully.

I cup Agatha's small square face near mine. "*Wir werden bald zusammen zu Heimat sein.*"

I return to the rotting conservatory later that afternoon to find Elif standing at the barren windowframe. The white wood is peeling now and the glass lies shattered at her feet. There is shouting from down the street, followed by the sound of a hound barking and a revolver going off.

"It's funny," she mutters at the glimmering shards. "But my first thought after the disturbances on Wednesday was, *I must remember to clean up the glass tomorrow morning, or the children might cut themselves.*"

She pauses and runs a shaking hand over the jagged sill. More shouting from the street outside, closer this time. "*Dieses haus, sagen die nachbarn!*"

"I'm not sure there's much use now." whispers Elif. "We'll never call this place home again."

I put my arm around her and the marble crunches beneath my feet. The brugmansia has died long ago. Someone knocks at the front door.





# Music & Artwork





# Home with Bob Ross

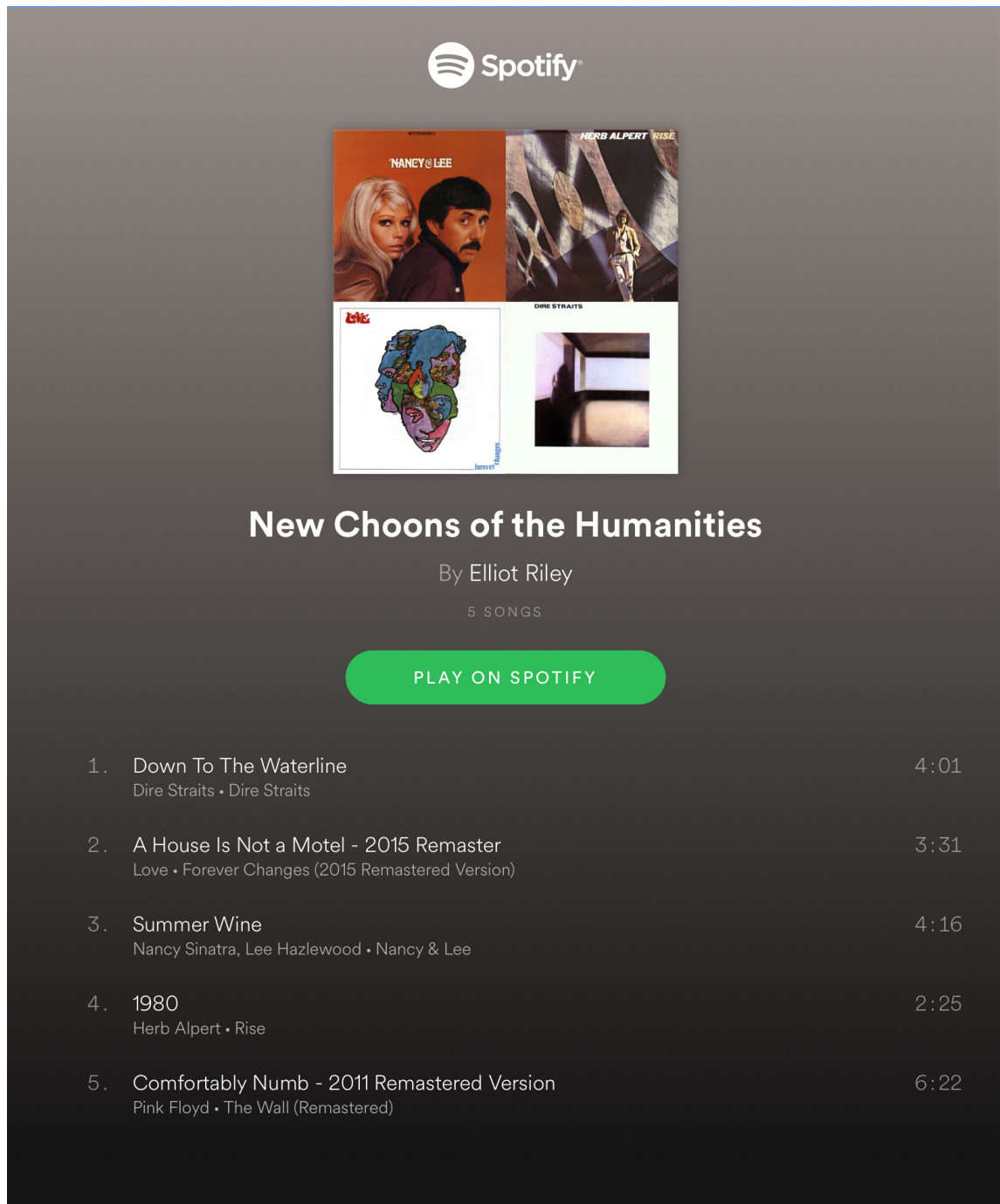
A.ZOUEV





# New Choons of the Humanities

Elliot Riley



**Elliot Riley** has created a collaborative Spotify playlist and it's our job to add a choon of our choice which we think follows best from the last song of the playlist. To add, simply look up "New Choons of the. Humanities" on Spotify or follow this link: <https://spoti.fi/2V7zQ23>. Get adding!

# The Comstock-Kershaws on the balcony (sketch)

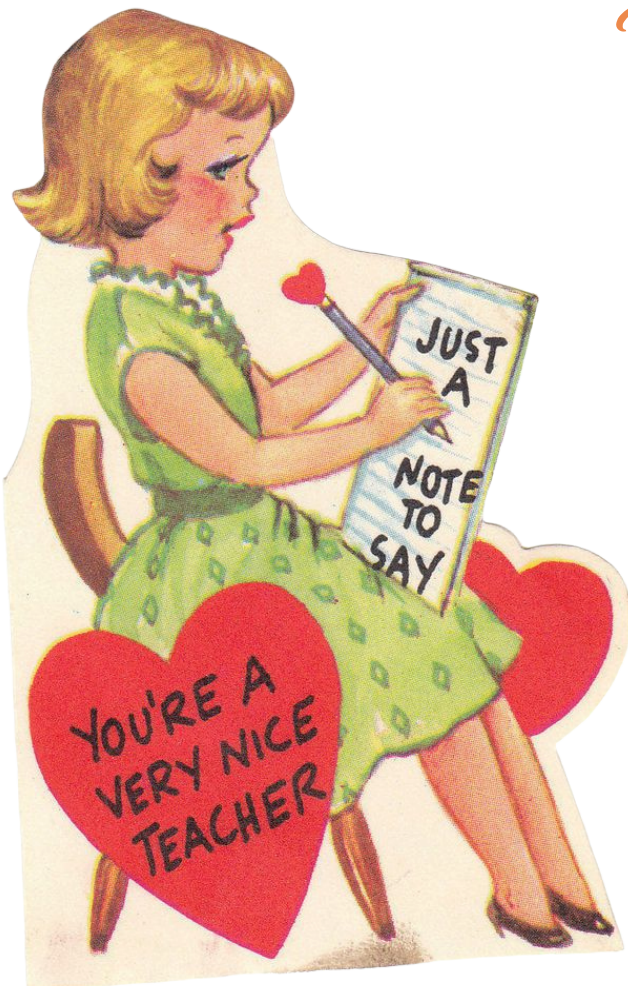
Victoria Comstock-Kershaw



# NCH Bingo

ANON. FACULTY MEMBER

*Faculty edition!*





# NCH Bingo

ANON. FACULTY MEMBER

*Faculty  
edition!*



Arrange yourself for a nap in such a way that it will look as though you are reading a book if anyone comes in	Observe a student shopping online during a colleague's lecture but decide not to say anything	Reach the turning point in a colleague's lecture in a discipline not your own when they suddenly move from stating the blindingly obvious to stating the completely incomprehensible	Smugly pay 49p for a Pret filter coffee in your own cup
Wish that you had had professional skills training whilst you were at university	Discover that the Senate House Library exhibition has closed on the very day that you had finally decided to take a look at it	Wish that you knew substantially more about the topic that you are giving a tutorial on	Give advice at a Collection that you are perfectly aware you have never been able to take yourself
Pull an all-nighter to finish a lecture	Hurriedly change desktop/window because something non-ideal has appeared to a class when trying to set up a Powerpoint	Lose your thread half way through a sentence during the fourth of four back-to-back tutorials	Become certain that a student is lying to you
Reach that point on a commute for a 9 am start when you realise you have yet again forgotten that your journey always takes 20% longer at that time	Overtake a student whilst walking towards College for a lecture that you will be giving and they will be attending, for which you are both late, hoping that they have not seen you	Become aware that you are shifting the mode of an Ottoline Club meeting from the analytic to the emotive	Compare a student to what you remember of your past self at their age
Marvel at NCH students' creativity	Wonder whether you have overstepped the mark by making a political comment in a class	Admire NCH students' generosity	Admire NCH students' generosity

**BINGO!**

# niche

AN NCH STUDENT CORONAZINE

## 03

### spring (n.)

the season after winter and before summer, in which vegetation begins to appear, in the northern hemisphere from March to May and in the southern hemisphere from September to November.



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RELEASE

# niche

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Please sent all submissions, comments,  
complaints or suggestions to  
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anonymously via the link sent via email

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