

Creative Writing Manuscript
PNEUMA

Yonathane Rodríguez Sánchez

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

Date:

Department of English
College of Humanities
University of Puerto Rico

Approved by:

Dr. Maritza Stanchich

Reader

Dr. Yolanda Rivera

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Abstract

The journey taken by the protagonist in a story told through a multimedia platform that uses picture book elements, sequential art, and graphic novel styles of narration is a search for wellness in a world made of internal struggles. The emotional factors become antagonistic forces to be overcome in the mind of the main character. This, in turn, classifies him as the antihero of the story. The world he enters has the aspect of being dark because it is created by him, in a maze of his own fears and insecurities. His awakening is essential to the process of the journey.

As the hero embarks on his mission to find something he needs, portions of what is bad and good inside him are personified in the characters he interacts with. These characters become a guide to stay away from the past, not worry too much about the future, and focus on the present. Presence of the mind is the goal even if the main character does not know it. Wellness is the element the hero/antihero is looking for.

PNEUMA

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Acknowledgements

Illustrating my own stories was something I never thought I could do. This accomplishment of learning how to narrate stories through both sequential art and text was thanks to all the people who had the time and patience to take me by the hand and show me a new world of possibilities in specific moments of my life. I would like to give my gratitude to my childhood friend for illustrating my first idea and introducing me to the world of Frank Frazetta. Our many hours of reading comics, watching tv, and playing video games while creating stuff of our own will never be forgotten. Also, my thanks to my first love for telling me not to buy the video game. To my second mother and all her teachings, I give thanks. Her guidance took me places I never thought to look for. Gratitude to my crazy family, as in its craziness I found the support I needed when I didn't even know I needed it. My mother deserves all the thanks in the world for being who she is and for giving me tough love when she sees fit. A great thanks to my father for pushing me to do anything and for every moment we sat at abuelita's table and talked about dundies.

When one is lost, the universe sends guidance in the form of well-placed variables. To the great and powerful Marcus, thank you for helping me understand that I am not the only crazy person in the world. None of this would have been possible if my friend Jose Belaval were not sitting on a bench that day to point me in the right direction. Thank you for still doing that. To my old, bearded friend, Eugene Speakes, you will always have my gratitude for not letting me walk alone in the dark and showing me how to get out. And to my friends in Ze Lounge, the respect and the love I have for all of you is monumental. Thank you for all the stories, the laughs, and the memories.

I also must mention a long overdue thank you. Almost a decade ago, I took my first class in the College of Humanities with professor Dannabang Kuwabong. When the class finished, I

called my wife, and between tears and sobs of joy, I said to her “I’m home.” Thank you for showing me a different way to see the world. To Professor Mark Pedreira for his tales and his teachings. And to Professor Lorretta Collins, my thesis adviser, who introduced me to other realities, expanded my curiosity of them, and then guided me, my appreciation. Her positive attitude and motivation, not to mention patience, helped me find my voice. Thanks to her, now I know what comes next. My thank you, as well, to the other members of my thesis committee, Professor Maritza Stanchich and Professor Yolanda Rivera for taking the time to walk into my world.

This project was completed with the help of many people, but my wife wins the prize. I am sorry for stopping conversations just because I had an idea and needed to write it down, for all my art messes in our home from trying to make ideas come true, and for all the moments I was here and not there. You made this possible by giving me the time and space I needed. Thank you for being my shield, my friend, and my shoulder every time I thought I could not do this. You are everything I need and more.

To my grandfather:

I wish you were here.

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Introduction

Chaos rules my head. It has been the problem and the solution to many of my creative escapes. I call them escapes, not because they are what bring me peace in times of turmoil, but also the fulfillment to create something that is not real. I take something that is inside and make it appear in front of you. Using my hands to create a world, takes that world out of my head and makes a little more space for tranquility, a little more space for Pilule (my defender) to work with. As a teenager, I used to create pictures on index cards to illustrate what I believed I saw in dreams. I would then give them to a friend, who was an art student, to improve them. During this time, I believed in my incapacity of ever having the artistic prowess to illustrate anything. Of course, life happens and everything changes, creating even more chaos. To control it became one of my primary missions.

It all started in my younger years. An English teacher observed my eyes drifting every time I had nothing to do in the classroom. One day she asked me to stay after class. It was that day that I was gifted with my first journal. She instructed me to write everything I was thinking, feeling, and inventing. She told me that it did not matter if it made sense. From there on I could not stop writing stories that even though they might have made no sense to others, to me they were incredible. The problem was my persisting feeling of the need to have them illustrated.

Trying to find simplicity in the thousand images that cross my mind, a professor introduced me to the work of Leo Lionni. Lionni's style was so simple in message and illustration that I thought it impossible for me to achieve something similar with my storm-like ideas. His text in books such as *Frederick* flows straight to the point. Each page has a simple work of art and a sentence to add progress to the story. Another author who uses simple art and text is Shel Silverstein in his work *The Giving Tree*. On every page you see a passage of time and the

progression of human existence alongside nature. This complicated theme was simplified in that book.

Throughout the course of my life, my insecurities about storytelling increased. I kept writing chaotic stories, never showing them to anyone, nor finding someone who would illustrate what I saw in my head. I still had not found a way to put onto a page an idea that felt simple, flowing, and entertaining. While taking a creative writing class a few years ago, I was able to give voice to some of my stories. Because of this, I felt the need to go back and try again. With the help of my mentors in the M.A. program, I created a fictional world that dealt with the idea of a “jumble inside” that still resonated with other people.

My stories most of the time do not follow a particular set pattern or theme. This is because my mind is constantly creating images that go back and forth, over the fence, and into a tunnel to another form of reality. In my stories, not only is the perception of time constantly changing, but the point-of-view of the characters in it is, as well. The story “Pneuma” started out as the adventure of a young man searching for an item that would help a little girl find her way home. Searching for a spark of imagination based on a memory from long ago, I went to the island of Culebra to do my project-related research.

I also read and viewed many books and videos by Australian artist and writer Shaun Tan. His creative process takes him from an image he has in his head, to basic drawings, and then a creation of a world from that image. His way of creating worlds and illustrations have no fixed pattern. The ideas and his eclectic and imaginative characters take him in the direction they want to. I had this experience at the beginning, as well. There was in my mind a perfect image (or memory?) of a boy watching a house with no entry way or access to the front door. The door was ten feet off the ground. It looked creepy, incomprehensible, illogical, and dark. The first day I saw

it, my imagination, my curiosity boomed. So many stories came from that house and why it had no entry way. I needed to see that house to begin the journey.

Arriving at the island, I felt something was amiss. The stores were closed, transportation was not working, the beaches were off-limit, and what was worse was that the house I was looking for was a total misconception of reality based on memories of a child. I thought it was a waste of time to pursue the image for a story. The recent pandemic brought economic restructuring, and that was foremost in my mind. However, whenever I talked about that day in Culebra, the more I found moments that stayed with me; images and interactions with the people kept coming back in their own weird way. Sometimes the everyday inspirations are right in front of one.

While I was writing the story, the chaotic storm of creativeness swallowed the old idea completely, leaving in its wake something similar, but slightly different. There is a girl who is lost, and there is a young man trying to help. What turned the idea upside down was telling the story from the perspective of the young man searching for something that he lost through his encounter with the eyes of other characters and their stories. The image I had of the house started changing the moment I started to write and illustrate. This gave me the space to create a world seen by someone that cannot see beyond the musings of his troubled mind. The question was, how can I illustrate a world by representing the agonies of a person with mental health difficulties trying to survive a day in that world? What does he see when journeying through his days? To create these visuals in this adventure I had to find the medium in which to do it. Tan's picture book *The Red Tree* has elements of chaos and darkness, but also of self-worth and growth. These elements are represented by the images, colors, and shadows. With each illustration, readers can feel identified, and even those who may not can understand what his artworks represent. This book by Tan inspired me in my search for sequential art possibilities for my story.

I felt that what was on my mind could never be drawn by myself. I do not have the necessary education to accomplish it by hand drawn illustrations. I have never taken art classes, and at this very moment I can honestly say, I do not know how I managed to accomplish what I did. The wanting and the expectation of having the illustration exactly how one imagines it, was the first barrier Pilule the defender had to destroy. This journey, his and mine, is about finding different ways to express a world not known to anyone but the character himself. Characteristics of mental illness and health appear as characters and defenders in the story. To demonstrate the chaos, different artistic mediums are used to play with the different emotional states of the main character. He took me by the hand, making this story even more chaotic.

Journey: Inspirations

My journey began the day I bought the novel *The Hobbit*. Not because I wanted it. It was at a forty-percent discount, and I also needed to impress a girl. From there a friend recommended to me to buy R.A.Salvatore's *The Crystal Shard*. Three days later, I bought every Salvatore book I could afford. Salvatore and Tolkien became inspirations not because of the action and the adventures, but because each story has a character that does not belong. When their part in the story ends, they must go back to their own reality. The way I saw it, these characters were using their imagination to escape. "There and Back Again" was written by Bilbo Baggins to escape the boredom and depression of living alone.

Likewise, Drizzt Do'Urden in the book *Passage to Dawn*, needed to escape his harsh reality living in The Underdark and the only way to do it was through a never-ending maze of tunnels that lead to the surface. In this part of Drizzt's story he becomes insane and starts to name himself "The hunter." The moment he believes reality is beginning to fade away, a friend appears

and offers him a home. So, he escaped from his home and then from his mind. These were my first interpretations of stories of escape from the entrapments of both a situation and the mind.

I understand the point of these stories is not that, but they pushed me to look for other stories that explore the concept of losing reality and entering another world. A lot of inspiration came to me through movies, too (Thank God for Block Buster). Movies such as *The Never-ending Story*, *The Labyrinth*, *Willow*, and *Pan's Labyrinth* all have the same element.

From text to illustration

After I read and started to see the books by Salvatore as an inspiration for writing my own stories, many of my stories were also inspired by the author Neil Gaiman. The first book I read that was written by him was *Neverwhere*. The protagonist is thrown into a world without a choice, a world of darkness, magic, and evil men. Using the help of a girl named Door he escapes that world only to feel sad when leaving it. Gaiman's work was like reading poetry. The flow of different elements and how they came together even if those had no logical connection was magic. Gaiman also uses the graphic novel for storytelling.

A. Lee. Martinez, an author I found by mistake, writes incredible fairy tales that do not follow traditional structures. His imagination flows, and he writes in the direction it takes him. He stated in an interview that he does not believe people read his books. The stories make no logical sense in their construction. In one story there is a Werewolf and a Vampire eating at a diner. Below the diner, there is a portal that could cause the end of the world, and the girl who works in the diner is the key to everything. *In the Company of Ogres*, a man wakes up in a land full of ogres only to find he is a god. Every time he dies, he wakes up in another reality. In this one, the ogres keep

killing him, and he keeps waking up in their world not knowing why. Every page in his stories is a jump from idea to idea; everything is unexpected.

Tales From The Night Side, a saga by the author Simon R. Green, begins with a private detective taking on a missing person case. This first case takes him to a house made of a flesh-eating entity that devours anybody that enters. The house is in the oldest city beneath London called the Nightside, a city in a perpetual night. The inner dark city is the most important character of the twelve books. It is the home of every tortured soul in need of escape. Every character in the series ends up there by mistake or because there was no other place to go. They believe that whatever they need, good or bad, will be found in that city. The personification of feelings like sadness, depression, vanity, and time became part of the work. Each representation creates a character also lost and searching. In my story the elements of fight or flight, panic attacks, and the ability to be present are represented by characters created by the protagonist. Each one wants something different. Green's saga influenced how I thought about character creation.

To find or want something, but not knowing what, became a theme in all my writings. But my ideas always came in a non-sequential manner. I had to ask myself how I would connect and organize them?

I had the opportunity to be present at an interview with writer Sylvain Neuvel. His novel *Sleeping Giants* is written in the form of an interview. The interviewer has nothing to do with the actual story. The aliens, the army, the characters, the robots, and the story is told by his notes during these interviews. Neuvel said it was difficult to find something that connected all the elements of his book. The interviewer did just that. He was the only device connecting each story and each point of view. In my stories, the connection is my character and his journey.

Getting There

While I was trying to create something simple in the chaos, I was introduced to the works of Shaun Tan. The first book I “read” was *The Arrival*. Read is the wrong word, I saw his work. *The Arrival* is a story of displacement, of venturing to another place to find something “better.” The story is illustrated, without the use of a single text, caption, thought or speech bubble. Every illustration, sometimes thirty in one single page, follows the progression of a character dealing with the trappings of immigration. Concepts that are not unfamiliar became fantastic images of a world different in the eyes of the main character and the “reader”.

His illustrations are perfect. His use of panels makes each one seem like the passing of a frame in a movie. You can feel the art while you are looking at it; I do not know how else to explain it. Each page is a work of art all by itself; as is each panel. The colors throughout the book stay the same, monochrome, but the illumination changes to accentuate the mood of the scene. *The Arrival*'s world is also majestic and vast. Some pages present a metropolis with all its moving parts; others present the backstory of the people in the city through war and migration. There is a whole world seen through the eyes of the characters living it.

There were other Tan works that brought me back to the days of Leo Lionni. These were *Cicada*, *The Lost Thing*, *Rules of Summer*, *eric* and *The Red Tree*. These picture books have elements of misplacement and escape, using illustration to tell most of the story. *Rules of Summer* is about two brothers using their imagination to play and escape their boring summer, *The Lost Thing* is about a man finding something lost and helping it get home. The ones I like the most are *The Red Tree* and *eric*. The symbolism of leaves falling from a tree inspired me to look for a way to represent something negative, like insomnia and panic attacks, into something that can be touched, observed, and countered against.

I needed to create the visuals for my project. I wanted to create the images and the only way I thought was possible, knowing that my drawing skills were on the negative side, I started to sculpt the story. Before I got to the sculpting part, I needed to learn how to sculpt. This was a great part of my process; it was therapeutic. The clay begins to take the shape you want, but then for some reason it takes the shape it wants. It becomes alive in your hands. I spent months trying to find a style that resembled my ideas. The sculptures also needed to be simple in their making and materials. After months of trying to perfect the art, I did not go back to the idea of simplicity. Instead, I searched for balance. Balance became the key word for the stories and the art. Following artists and taking courses, I came upon the work of Spiramirabilis. The artist's name is Lucas Pina Penichet. His sculptures have a beautifully complex level of reality. Specifically, through the softness of the character's skin, and how the movement was represented, each sculpture told an appealing story. Researching him, I found an interview where he specified what materials he used and how he did his work. Out of the entire interview one thing stood out, his sculptures were about three inches, some even smaller. I got the opportunity to communicate with him. He told me it took at least three weeks to do one sculpture.

I cannot have an idea rolling inside for "at least three weeks" because my mind won't stop. My process needed to be faster and more attuned to how I think. I needed to do a multimedia creation that could explain the changes in style, mood, and direction of the story.

Arriving

As I have mentioned, my story is about wellness. It is a journey taken by the main character through his mental perspective. In his search for awareness and reality, he answers a call made by a memory. He believes that memory will have an answer. This answer or this wanting is never specified in the story. As he walks the path towards that goal, he enters different states of reality.

In these realities, time is not linear, and his imagination begins to come alive as a defender to his inner disruptors. He becomes the hero, anti-hero, and villain.

As the journey progresses, he meets strange people trying to help him by relating a story. These stand-alone stories use different styles and elements to assimilate the mood and state of the main character.

Stand-alone Stories

The Little Girl

In the first part of the story the illustrations are drawn to unfocused, loud, and dreamlike. Once the protagonist enters another world, there is a connection between reality and dream. The illustrations are created with real material items, with parts of the frame emanating color. These images are created to be in graphic novel form. Each panel portrays a continued motion and aspect of his grasp on reality. I could have used thought or speech bubbles, but caption boxes felt correct for these interactions.

The little girl that appears in this transition of reality is key to the rest of the story. She is the first representation of going down the rabbit hole and never coming back. Of being stuck inside and letting awareness slip by. Here the protagonist becomes the hero, promising to save her when he gets back.

Pilule

I wanted this character to represent the way a child would look at his/ her defender and have the illustrations look like a picture book with a mouse as the hero. Thinking about Shaun Tan's *Cicada* in its simplicity, I made the panels seem like a story for children, simple, and to the

point. At the same time, I wanted to give the story the seriousness it needed. For the photos, I used simple things you can find in a house: pieces of wood, pen tips, and cat toys. Since Pilule lives in his own mental landscape, the pics' macro gives the feeling of him living in a bigger world that we do not see. One technique I used for the flow of the story was the continuation between focused and unfocused perspectives and close to far, in order to transition between parts of the page and the text. The last page of Pilule's tale shows a skull with him running inside the wheel. This represents the continual struggle to find freedom and awareness. When the character is attacked, he feels like he just ran a marathon, but he stays glued to the spot. No matter how much Pilule runs he will never move.

The Boat Man

“The Boat Man” was a comfortable transition between realities. I used digital art, photography, and sculpture to make a picture book-like story. It was a way to keep the world of the character and the reader in the same universe. It felt like a gateway, so I turned it into one. The mix of colors, darker or brighter functions much like in the movie *Coraline*, in which when characters enter the tunnel to the other world, the colors become vibrant. I used this vibrant world for the rest of the story, giving the story its vibrant dream scenario. As the story progresses, the vibrant colors stay. There are two reasons for this. One is that vibrant colors tend to make one squint and see out of focus and the other is to make the reader understand that no matter how much the character wakes, some part of that amorphous world always lingers.

The Man Who Still Works

The man who still works exists on the island. He had a dream in which he won the lottery. What confused him was why in the dream he kept waking early and going to work. The story is

figuring out why. This is the introduction of “The Little Robot.” The figurine that is this character is a little robot made by using wires, screws, pieces of forgotten tools and magnets. It was never planned or drafted. I took a little pile of stuff and made it come alive. He really wanted to be in the story. The robot is the part of consciousness that always wants to do the opposite, always wants to turn back, or hide. Through the story of “The Man Who Still Works”, I imagined the little robot visualizing what that man was saying. Having it interact with the story humanized it, giving him curiosity and pain throughout it.

The Little Things

“The Little Things” was a great story to compose, from beginning to end. It was a simple idea. I used toys, macrophotography, digital art, and nature to tell a story of little things in their search for whatever they need to reach happiness. Each illustration is a story all by itself. Every little thing had a different outcome, and the point of it is clear. This small part of the entire project felt like an accomplishment.

Albondi Guen Guen

This short tale introduces the character Albiondi Guen-Guen. This lovable Koala comes from a faraway land and has the luck of being stranded in front of an old lady who cooks. I wanted it to feel different, more like an actual picture book. Here the conversation turns into Spanish and code switching happens between the inner thoughts and the actual conversation with the old lady about why Koala lived with her.

Three Wise Men

This collection of mini-short stories has transitions from one mini-book to the next.

“Heaven”:

“Heaven” is the description of feelings when something wonderful happens unexpectedly. It integrates into the story that sense of presence, of being in the moment, and enjoying what is right in front of you. The character that tells this story is the fun one of the three.

“The Test”:

It began as a graphic novel. It was supposed to be about a young man in front of a door waiting to be called for a test. Each panel was a progression of that character changing, growing, and leaving behind everything he must pass through. It is a story of growing up in a moment. Later, the text took on more life than the pictures did. In the end there was a balance between the text and the images. The story became like a quest-tale so that readers follow the panels to see in which step the character is in.

“Waiting on Mental Health”:

Having the experience firsthand of dealing with Veteran’s mental health issues while deployed, and then coming back and having to deal with my own was a difficult transition. Seeing and living both sides of the coin gave me the motivation to write this short story. The noises are written in bold letters to represent the intensity of how the character hears them. These noises that start the story are real; he is hearing them because of where he is. In this waiting room, he sits down after he speaks to the woman at the counter. Her speech is also in bold because it is what is real in the story. Everything else that is not written in bold is in his mind. This last story, told by the middleman, is the one that begins to awaken the main character.

The Test

The young man walks the mile. It feels like three. It is more. Much more than anyone can take. The music inside sounds chaotic. He looks at his feet while doing so. Every step recounting his journey, every decision, every nook, every rock, every tree to the left and every shadow to the right. Struggling to lift one sneaker after the other. Each one a story. Even the socks? He questions. What tales they have. Some happy, most of them complicated. Growing up below beds mounts to a conglomerate of situations to chronicle. But those do not matter anymore. Just a few steps more, he thinks. Just one step at a time, as always. As one learns while trying to grow up. One never grows up. The only things that grow are debts and depressions. He stops and reaches for his backpack. Puts it on the floor and looks at it. He cannot take everything with him where he is going. But what to leave? What to hang? What to cover? What to forget? What to remember? He opens the first zipper, the biggest one and breathes. Inside, life screams and laughs and tries to stay afloat in the vast sea of possibilities. A plethora of creatures, movie stars, unfinished games, and unplayed cards. Reaching down he grabs the one thing, the little black book. Tiny arms try to grab it from inside the backpack clawing. He hears a silent bark, a moaning, and a cry.

“Don’t worry”, he says, he smiles at them, all of them afraid. He smiles a reassuring smile. “You will always be with me”, he promises. The journal is almost full, and the pages are greeted with hope every time they are opened. “How can I dispose of this?”, because really, how can you? He puts it aside in a corner. Just a few steps from the door. The bell is about to ring. He knows. It's almost time. But the gods sometimes, a few times, once in a lifetime, offer gifts.

He looks at his superhero watch. The hands are not moving. The music stops. The wind moves slowly. There is peace in the mind. Chaos has stopped. Tranquility, rhythmic, tranquility.

“Thank you,” he whispers. Looking down to his opened backpack like a god to his life’s sea, he identifies Alboni, his plush toy, his security, his partner in crime. The toy is looking back. Remembering the stories, the horrors, the wonders, his eyes water. He remembers everything. But to pass, to move, to continue, there can be no more quarters for the machine.

“I have no more tokens for you my friend, thank you. You will be missed. Please know, you will be missed.”

He takes the toy and as he puts it in the trash on the other corner of the door, it crumbles. He sees the pieces turn into jigsaw. Every piece an image and every image distorted remembrance. Nostalgia creeps in. Its teeth eating his breath. A shallow feeling. Something is gone, he sees it. Slipping away. Waves consuming the steps. An old lady sweeping the leaves. The bottom of the bottle. Burning off a book. Panic! Breathing. Shallow. Breathing. He is breathing. He breathes. He breathes. He breathes.

“Just breathe”, he tells himself. Closes his eyes and breathes. One and two and three and breathe.

Then he stumbles. His right foot is pointing at something. A tear drops, and he reaches to the floor. A hand, a plushy hand is left. Not everything needs to be left behind. Now he has a new key chain.

“Cool,” he thinks, “best keychain ever.” Only two more zippers to open. The middle one has stuff, but it's stuff that one does not need. One wants but does not need. An old movie stub, three receipts from other stories, a lingering lipstick, one balloon, three books that have been read three times, an old newspaper, a photo, and a string. All went to the trash.

Not the photo and the string. They remain. In the photo he sees his father talking to a pig. The pig is being cooked. There is a steel bar going through it. His father is telling a story to the

pig. In the story, he demonstrates how to never get in a situation like that ever again. And the pig listens attentively. What a great storyteller he is. The picture goes in the back pocket. The string dangles from his thumb. It is an especially important string.

The watch starts, he hears the tick fighting the tock. He breathes. Only one zipper. And in that small part of the backpack, a golden pen. Feeling the perfect balance and the flow of ideas, he writes on the top of his right hand, "What comes next?" Sometimes we need reminders. The backpack, the stuff, the toy, and one last look at his watch.

"How come everything I am is in this backpack?" He feels disappointed. What comes next? Let us focus on that. With only a pen, a journal, a lucky totem, and a string, he opens the door. He stops, turns back, and throws the watch in the trash. No need for childish things. The ringing starts and he sprints to his chair.

The green board in front is covered with old chalk, but his chair is clean. All the bubble gum has disappeared. This seemed odd. Maybe it's part of the process? He questions.

He hears the coming of feet. Sees the woman enter. This symbol of authority, this entity that controls his future. Why is she so beautiful? Because the gods also have a sense of humor. She walks towards her big, polished marble, handmade desk. Her briefcase needs a code. She opens it and takes out the paper. The ultimate test. Not the last, but one of the worst. She hands him the test. He takes the paper and looks up. She looks back with fear and intensity. She wants him to pass. He must want to pass, too. She sits down and waits. He turns the paper. In and out, the chest goes, in and out. Air goes into the filter, starts to clean, takes some bad critters along the way, and comes out. He writes his name, makes a mistake, but quickly corrects it, this alone is worth many points. Writes the date. And reads...

“Choose the best answer!”, it commands with an exclamation point. He reads the only question and ponders, looking at the possibilities of each answer. A through E. Just five different possibilities. But one is never ready. He was not ready. She was not ready. “What can I answer? What is best for me? What happens if I fail? How much time do I have to complete this?” he ponders. In and out, the breath travels. The golden pen is touching the paper. It is done. He slowly stands with the test in hand. He looks at her sitting down looking up at him. He puts the paper on the desk, and she looks and sees....

Do you want to have a baby? e

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Maybe
- d. None of the above
- e. - - - - -

He fails.

Heaven

What is better than drinking good beer, smoking great weed, and having the best intense, hot, exotic sex you could ever have? I will tell you. It is thinking the night is finished, feeling satisfied with yourself, wondering what dreams your slumber might trap and then..... walking to the kitchen and seeing a box full of doughnuts. Your heart skips a beat. It is unexpected. Where? How? What? Is this a gift from God? you wonder. You get the tallest glass in the kitchen and enjoy the milk slipping from the container like silk. You can taste it already. Taste buds anxious for that flavor, that otherworldly feeling of consuming something delicious. Looking for a place worthy of this magnificent moment of gobbling up happiness, you see your reading chair, the chair that takes you places, the chair you spent decades searching for, the perfect chair to enjoy stories and disappointments. There you sit, take a breath and bite, slowly, tenderly, efficiently. First the tip of the tongue touches the heavenly glazed roundness, sending waves of electricity that cover your whole body and end in the tip of your pinky toe. The hairs on the back of your neck become rigid. There is a small tremble coming from your chest with no metronome to guide it. And this is just the first bite. Just like moments before, you start slow, methodical. There is time, no rush. Looking at it half devoured you whisper, "What did I do to deserve you?" On cue, Heaven opens its doors for your satisfaction. Light is touching your soul. Saliva sloppily caresses your fingers while screaming at God, "YES!!" In that moment, time has no meaning, control has no power, rules are nonexistent. You are a primal creature whose only instinct is self-satisfaction. And then..... Climax. Crescendo. Peak.....death. But.....

this is not it.

Your partner comes into the living room and asks, "Are you coming to bed?"

You contemplate the beauty looking at you and think, “What could be better than this moment?” Complete, uncanny satisfaction.

Before walking away your companion points at your face, “Baby. You have a little something there.”

Without knowing, without thinking the tongue gets out and licks the corner of your lips. There a piece of heaven lingers. The last remnants of pleasure. And just when you think it's over, right on top of your lips, the mustache. Sweet, silky, milky mustache. Once again, control goes away. Your tongue becomes a serpent slithering all over. This is it. That second. That extra. That tiny extra. That reminder. A lingering heaven. What could be better than this?

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Conclusion

Pneuma: the vital spirit, soul, or creative force of a person.

I chose to write a story that could represent the search of and for self, stepping away from reality. This disruption was essential for the changes in style I used in the project. Some of the stories have elements of displacement, balance, and freedom, moving the main character through his self-conquering adventure. As stand-alone stories each one represents a conquered giant in the search of making simple ideas into tales. The process of research, reading, travelling, planning, crafting the figures, drawing, doing the digital art and photography, and writing the texts was exhausting, but every time a page was finished, or a picture was edited, the joy that I felt was overwhelming. This project made me grow as a writer and an artist. It made me question why I didn't do this a long time ago.