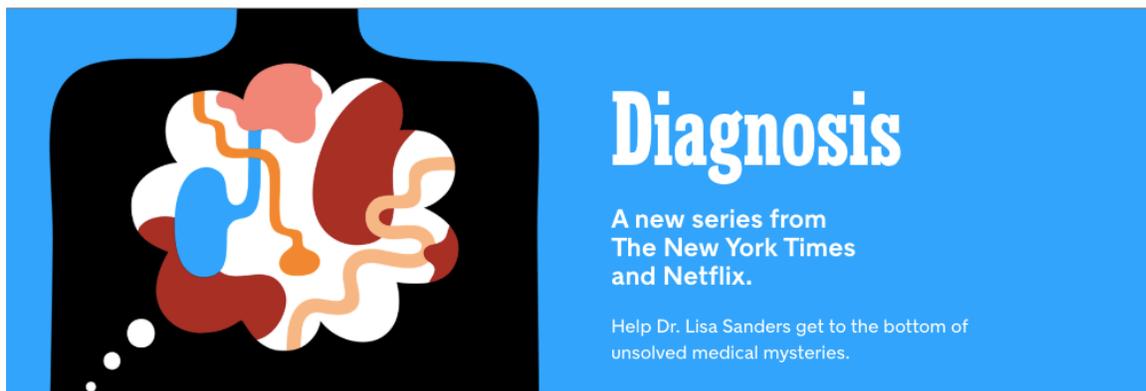


Bianca Cockrell Clips:

The New York Times Magazine



Editor's note: *Diagnosis* is a groundbreaking documentary series from The New York Times and Netflix which harnesses the power of you, our readers, to help find diagnoses for people suffering from mysterious medical conditions. In the story below, Dr. Lisa Sanders, the creator of the long-running column in the New York Times Magazine, shares details of unsolved patient cases for you to diagnose. Whether you're a doctor, a patient or an amateur medical sleuth, your ideas could potentially help save a life. Readers with the most promising suggestions may be included in an eight-part Netflix series that will air in 2019.

The *Diagnosis* Series

Provided all research materials; annotated, summarized, and compiled medical record documents; and contributed content and copy editing.

- “What is Causing This Woman’s Severe Muscle Pain?” <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/04/11/magazine/netflix-diagnosis-series-angels-severe-muscle-pain.html>
- “Repeat Seizures, Memory Loss, and Wild Mood Swings: What is Happening to this Man?” <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/05/21/magazine/netflix-diagnosis-series-willie-seizures.html>
- “He Can’t Stop Fainting. Is His Heart the Cause?” <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/05/04/magazine/netflix-diagnosis-series-matts-fainting-spells.html>
- “Doctors Don’t Know Why This Teenage Girl Can’t Keep Down Food and Drink. Can You Help?” <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/06/20/magazine/netflix-diagnosis-series-lashay.html>
- “After a Soccer Ball to the Head, Why Did He Develop ‘Brain Sloshing?’” <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/07/11/magazine/netflix-diagnosis-series-james.html>
- “Just 21 People Are Known to Have This Rare Genetic Condition. Can You Help Us Find More?” <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/08/23/magazine/netflix-diagnosis-series-kamiyah.html>
- “She’s Suffering from Life-Threatening Anemia. Can You Help?” <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/10/01/magazine/netflix-diagnosis-series-sherry.html>
- “This Little Girl’s Seizures Won’t Stop. Her Parents Need Your Advice.” <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/10/11/magazine/netflix-diagnosis-series-sadie.html>

Jan 21 The Body Remembers: A Review of
Jeannine Ouellette's *The Part That Burns*

Bianca Cockrell

<https://www.thelitpub.com/book-review-the-part-that-burns-jeannine-ouellette>

Jeannine Ouellette is no stranger to pain and chronicles it most beautifully in her new memoir, giving name and form to the multi-faceted circumstances that have produced her exquisite trauma. *The Part That Burns* holds a light up to these events, crystallized over time, and marvels at the rainbow prism that radiates outward. While pain needn't necessarily be productive, it is ever present; Ouellette demonstrates through strategic structures how her past trauma—and the generational traumas before her—live alongside her, shaping her choices throughout marriage and motherhood. And though healing might never be comprehensive, she demonstrates it can be clawed, bit by bit, out of life's indifferent hands.

It is first obvious and required to say Ouellette's imagery alone make this book worth an afternoon of careful contemplation. "A flat disc of moon hung like a nickel, slicing open black water with a sharp tunnel of light." The colorful streaks of pool balls rolling down a sidewalk. Her father, not a swan: his bones "not hollow inside his flesh." One might be tempted to think the beauty acts as a shield, softening the atrocities she chronicles in these aesthetic metaphors, bright details and a vibrant world both situating and de-centering the ugly. But another reading is this simply is Ouellette exulting, as any survivor might, in both the glory of the world around her and her ability to make it her own. A world that has given her a bad hand of cards is still home to pontoons on the lake, and Wyoming wildlife, and children.

Ouellette's slim memoir recounts the events of her childhood and early marriage in conventional, standard prose, then returns to these stories in other chapters via series of vignettes, conversations with her daughter, and her ninth grade autobiography. Some are structured by different members of a similar theme: when organizing herself via various childhood dogs or songs that hit number one on the charts on their respective New Year's Eves, she uses flesh and fur and Madonna to anchor us to her world. This cyclical structure echoes the cycles of generational trauma that flows from her grandmother to her own daughter but operates as a spiral, pulling us deeper into her understanding of the years of her life. She builds foundations of events in broad strokes, then returns later to sprinkle new detail, realized complexity, and a more full sense of self into the mix. How sobering, to read her molestation from her perspective as a four-year-old and then again as a mother, looking at her own toddler. We can collectively, but compassionately, wince at tenth-grade-Jeannine's confidence at her Spanish abilities as she sets off to Mexico alone and at the calamities that ensue. Her own mother's behavior often seems incomprehensible, until we learn her personal trauma includes being orphaned at seventeen, instantly losing two best friends (and, briefly, her ear) in a house explosion. Ouellette meticulously traces the ways our understanding of our pain grow and change when compounded and put into conversation with other experiences.

Some pages I wanted to cover my eyes and read between cracked fingers like one would stare at a smoldering car wreck—not to avoid them, but to shelter myself from the acute feelings she masterfully, and heartbreakingly, shares. Most jarring is her first postpartum sexual encounter, after giving birth to her daughter Sophie. We are transported to a hotel room: John, her first husband, has purchased crotchless lingerie for her, his parents are babysitting, and so deprived from six weeks of no sex, he is ready to “come like a freight train.” But between her cautioning him to be gentle and his first thrust, Ouellette sandwiches in the memory of her episiotomy. A doctor took a scalpel and cut “all the way through the thick, strong muscle of the vaginal wall,” rendering her unable to stand on her own for a week. (As someone who has never had a child, this alone is effective birth control.)

Forty pages later, we’re back in the hotel room where Ouellette invites us to another turn of the screw. She tells us that she “slowly recalled,” when first looking at her body post-episiotomy, John had slid down the wall, paralyzed in ashen horror, staring at his young wife. She bloomed with a “swollen bruise the size of a grapefruit,” in so much pain she couldn’t breathe. John, we remember, had requested she keep the bodysuit on during sex: the crotch hole providing all necessary access, the black Lycra providing all necessary coverage. Ouellette ends the paragraph there. What else is left to be said?

During their marriage, Ouellette tells John of the various abuses she suffered at various hands over the years. He offers his pains and embarrassments in exchange: a bout of constipation, drinking as a teenager, and driving his former girlfriend to an abortion clinic. The juxtaposition feels intentional, with its chasm of magnitude so grotesque: John’s long-married, attentive, middle class parents shaped a stable childhood entirely unlike hers (which he unfairly wields against her in arguments that she does not defend). She could easily play the oppression Olympics, pitting circumstances against each other to crown herself the ultimate sufferer. And yet Ouellette is generally earnest and sympathetic about his problems: solemn that he did not go through with his first wedding, acknowledging his long commute, long work hours after fights. To readers more prone to anger, she displays remarkable empathy here. (Or, as someone who has never been married, perhaps this is what it takes to sustain decades of almost-love.)

And while it is true that one can be sympathetic to a spouse and still upset about her own problems, Ouellette savvily understands where actions speak louder than her beautiful words, both in her life and constructing her narratives. John’s frequent selfishness—displaying sorrow “for the pain of wanting and not getting,” his would-be affair, and neoliberal attitude towards sex—willing to go to a sex therapist, but says, “You’re frigid, and nothing will ever feel good to you,” when it isn’t working—builds the case for ending their marriage even before Ouellette guiltily admits to falling in love with someone else. As a child, when she tells her neighbors Mafia is killing her mom, they decline to help and retreat into their home. When she orchestrates a drive to Duluth and pleas for refuge for Rachael with her grandparents, they turn them away (Mafia is in legal trouble for abusing another young girl). What did speaking up do for her?

Pain and sorrow so frequently warp and deform their recipients, but for all her woes Ouellette is externally neither bitter nor resentful. Instead, she turns her attention inwards and fixates on her own brokenness. Ouellette is accustomed to suffering in silence, a practice learned from her mother who “closes the book” on the “particular sorrow” of her abuse. This silence is gendered, of course: it is almost redundant to explain the ways women are taught to be silent, about everything, especially for survival. This is why Ouellette curls her toes and bites her lip to avoid complaining during sex. Foreplay and her own pleasure, she tells her therapist, isn’t of interest. As a child, she is ‘grounded’ frequently and lives the life of a ghost, sleeping in the basement, making separate meals for herself.

(And when she stays with a friend, her mother calls the police to forcibly retrieve her runaway daughter.) Most telling is in the basement of Trinity Lutheran. One member of the childhood sexual abuse support group is noticeably loud in discussion: she is moaning constantly, “a low, wet gurgle,” until tears spatter and stain her shirt. At the same time, Ouellette holds her breath to stop her body from vibrating, desperately focused on containing and suppressing her emotion. She hates this woman, she writes: “for being exactly like me—ruined—but letting it show.” She hates this woman for refusing to be silent.

Instead, Ouellette processes her world by escaping her own body, leaving the physical constraints of her circumstances. “I just pull myself through a doorway inside of me,” she explains after referencing her mother’s explosion, the tickle game with Mafia, and how jackalopes try to trick hunters to reach safety. She watches herself from above when she has sex with her first boyfriend; she dissociates: “my body is not me. I am connected to my body by a string.” Her mother takes long drives to nowhere, which Ouellette spends a chapter eulogizing: empty distance, barren country roads, the heft of the boat-like sedan encasing its inhabitants in safety. She eagerly searches for portals to another world in a canyon full of wildflowers. And she passes this practice to her daughter Lillian, who uses it after her own abuse. “My Self with a capital S—that’s what Mama says—would push against the boundaries of my skin,” the couch her boat, floating in the sea. Unanchored, unbothered.

Ouellette is keenly aware of the efforts healing requires to achieve only incomplete results, of the ways our bandages and scars layer on top of one another. From the way her new wedding ring, after replacing the engagement ring intended for the other Janine, catches on items around their home to how thick scar tissue finally replaces the pea-sized rock embedded in her knee, pain transmuted into new forms remains and adapts. She contemplates the metal pins in her mother’s shoulder. “Trauma is coded into our genes, mapped into our DNA,” she reads, to ask the question: can we eradicate our experiences? The ghosts of the past occupy the same physical space on our bodies and in our homes, lingering without a friendly neighborhood ghostbuster on the scene. Memories too are their own location that our minds visit, over and over, as she is plagued by thoughts of Mafia. Bravery, it would appear, is one solution; choosing love despite the circumstances. “Still, I had you,” she tenderly admits to Lillian. A decision once declined, now accepted. Despite the genetic propensity to inherit pain, abuse, fear. “Still, I have you.”

We receive an eponymous chapter in the middle of the book. “I am the part that burns,” Ouellette explains, as she tends to her fruitless garden; worries about toddler Sophie’s bad habits; confronts her mother about her childhood; remembers the explosive trauma her mother suffered; has her second child. She anxiously monitors all of her attempts at healing, knowing breaking the cycles requires growth, requires a venture into the unfamiliar. Repeated actions, her cycling through time, generate friction, fertile for a jumpstart. Her mother taps her cigarette before the explosion; she strikes a match on her marriage. “Fire starting is a felony, but workers need work,” she reasons. The burning, it seems, accompanies the healing; temperatures reaching a crescendo to melt and fuse broken pieces together. Cells and tendons knitting together to smooth over into a lumpy scar. Torn and whole, the body remembers. This memoir is her healing.



<https://heavyfeatherreview.org/2020/04/09/briskin/>

Orange, by E. Briskin. Seattle, Washington: Entre Rios Books, March 2020. 260 pages. \$18.00, paper.

Sitting at a coffee shop, I flipped through E. Briskin’s linked collection *Orange*. Its speaker, funny and cryptic and sad, sits also frequently at a coffee shop, remembering their dog, mourning the loss of their dog, and pondering the metaphysics of such a loss. The Seattle-based author’s debut collection is comprised of hundreds of short poems that zigzag through time, ranging from zero words to small paragraphs, sometimes footnoted with the studies and articles used to bolster the existential paths they wander.

An age old question—How do we define existence?—is one of the collection’s guiding quests, with a particular emphasis on interspecies differences. One poem references an internet commentator’s hypothesis about the amount of fur shed in a dog’s lifetime. After some quick calculations, our speaker reasons half a pound of the deceased dog’s hair should still be lingering around the house. Then they conclude, joyfully: “There is still more of her!”

Strands of fur may not be able to lick your face or fetch a ball, but this transformed existence is still valued and clung to by our devastated speaker: “When your dog dies / the world decides / to divide itself into two: / the world of people / who understand grief / and those who don’t.” A dog has completely shattered the world of our speaker. This dog was derided by the speaker’s friends as “that fuzz-wiry rat thing,” that “mud-tailed drooler.” A dog is not human, but still exerts great power over our emotions, so the speaker understandably mulls these exchanges over and over. Still some say dogs are just dogs. But what is a dog? What about them makes us feel this way: their millions of smell receptors? their ability to make choices? That they can feel splinters and the sun? And does this matter, the speaker asks, “Does this change the nature of my loss?”

These attempts to rationalize and understand grief—to dignify being wounded by something as small as a rat, prone to drooling—are part of the grieving process and of life itself. But most importantly, these attempts highlight the ways love transforms us: “I am no one without sticks for dogs.” Or: “When I pet Hero, I dream I am petting you.” When vacationing at [BlankBlank] Love cabins, “we changed love to dogs. Violet’s Dogs.” Love makes us vulnerable, love can embarrass us, make us irrational. Similarly, “Love moves us to sacrifice at least a considerable measure of dignity and rank in the interest of elevating the other,” Wilson Carey McWilliams writes in *Democracy and Excellence’s* “Minstrels, Kings, and Citizens: Mark Twain’s Political

Thought.” “Parents clown with children; philosophers return to the cave; God descends to man. And in that descent, love finds its own excellence and higher nobility.”

There are plenty of moments throughout the collection where the dog in question grows blurry, suggesting they could instead be a former lover or other source of grief for our speaker. If dog is just metaphor, our questions still apply to other animals, humans, and life itself. Meticulously, as individual strands of fur gather into a body that is colorblind but loves an orange ball, life is actualized; so too, humans and poetry must answer to these questions. How are we? Who are we? A voice belongs first to a body, then to a language, reads a different poem by John Berger in *And Our Faces, My Heart, Brief as Photos*. We are first ourselves, then society. Something must become itself before becoming a group. Perhaps something can't be missed until it is defined. Until it exists.

And it is through metaphor the speaker implores us to understand. See this verse: “We need you to explain ourselves to us!” Human, speaking to dog? Poet, to reader? Life, to another life? That's the crux of it: life does not exist in a vacuum. The existence of another allows us to exist in contrast. All marginalized art pushes against the hetero, patriarchal, ableist, cisgender, etc., tradition: the fact that each review of *Orange*, including this one, has noted the lack of a defined gender presence in the speaker is example of that.

Our speaker writes things down but takes them back or crosses them out; corrections and annotations are made, sometimes trivial, sometimes flippant. But this book's strategic arrangement and dizzying number of verses resists the easy, casual reading the conversational voice suggests.

While this collection requires strict focus to read properly, the multiplicity of ways you can read is a marvel. It will all mostly make sense whether vertically, horizontally, numerically, backwards, and so on. (Even the audio recordings of the book offer different options, organized by page numbers and then in chronological verse order.) I began reading first in a traditional order, page by page: verse by verse. Then I followed the story as I could, forming a zigzag across verses. On a reread, I started at the end to follow the middle storyline all the way through: compulsory verses. Each time I fit these puzzle pieces together in each possible format, they revealed new conclusions, new jokes, new meditations.

This organization is quite an accomplishment and is a beautiful reminder of what poetry can do. What poetry can be. And so too, the footnotes—articles and tweets are linked, asides are made, wherever possible, for study of the universe of grief. It is perhaps obvious to say this meticulous documentation reflects how we grieve: processing life in different directions, trying to make sense and reformat life without the thing that helped you understand life. Clinging to the formalities that provide structure to enable taking the first, small steps back towards the light. But the ability to construct such work speaks to the deep love that underlies, that warrants, such a grief. The love that, both in its heyday and in the wake of its ending, inspires us to construct our masterpieces. Grief, love's last act. *Orange*, not E. Briskin's.



ABOUT STAFF A LIST OF WOMEN DIRECTORS SQ PODCAST OUR PARTNERS TWITTER TV REVIEWS
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DECEMBER 17, 2019 • 5

The Obtuseness of Man: Analysing Gender in ‘Marriage Story’

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<https://screen-queens.com/2019/12/17/the-obtuseness-of-man-analysing-gender-in-marriage-story/>

You’ve probably already seen one of the many monologues from *Marriage Story* circulating the Internet. In it, divorce lawyer Nora (Laura Dern) is preaching the inequities women experience while parenting to Nicole (Scarlett Johansson). She seethes at the higher standards women are held to, created by our Judeo Christian “whatever” that venerates Mary, Mother of Jesus. Mary had a child, but she was a virgin! And God, the father, was never there.

Men have always sat absently in parenthood, the idea of “good” fathers only invented “like, thirty years ago.” Men operate in the world according to their own desires and own plans while their wives function as facilitators and caretakers. *Marriage Story* lives and traces a modern woman’s theorised liberation from this employment and a modern man’s confusion at this development.

Charlie (Adam Driver) and Nicole have decided to end their relationship—but not get a divorce. We don’t need to do this with lawyers, he posits, and she agrees. We want to stay friends. Yes. We want to live in New York. Yes.

As their separation begins and Nicole starts a new job in Los Angeles, she delights in the opportunities now afforded to her: opportunities that were suppressed, ignored, and curtailed in her marriage through both Charlie’s obtuseness and her own acquiescence.

Like so many other artists’ partners before her, Nicole was relegated to the silent muse, the secretary, the wife who would type her writer husband’s manuscripts for him, editing and improving without recognition. Charlie tells her the MacArthur grant he wins is their award, that he couldn’t have won it without her. But if her presence was so integral, her intelligence so useful, why did he never allow her to direct at the theatre company? (When she finally directs an episode of her show, she’s nominated for an Emmy. Charlie at first assumes this is for her acting; when corrected, he offers a simple, “Congratulations.”)

The announcement of the unhappiness and sacrifices Nicole endured during the years of their marriage, paired with the embarrassment and pain that accompanies divorce negotiations, hit Charlie like a freight train when he’s served divorced papers. “You were happy, you’ve just decided now that you weren’t,” he fires at Nicole, without realising her unhappiness could exist beyond his awareness; feelings are legitimate regardless of who sees. He is sad—and while it is natural to empathise when someone is sad, why should we empathise with him?

Having previously written a film about his parents' divorce, director Noah Baumbach is now writing about his own and it is not a stretch to suggest his bias towards the subject places Charlie in the position of sympathy. Though we are told Nicole's side of the story through her initial conversation with Nora, we live Charlie's side of the story.

Charlie feels ambushed by Nicole's hiring a lawyer; he meets with callous, expensive lawyers who scare him and, anyway, he can't afford them; he learns Nicole and Henry are going to stay in Los Angeles after a disappointing Halloween. We live his nervousness, embarrassment, pain as he awkwardly pushes the evaluator's purse handles up her shoulders, then smears his blood on the door as he hulks over her to unlock it.

We accompany Charlie to the theatre, busy at work choosing props, giving notes, making decisions while juggling calls from attorneys. The one time we see Nicole at work serves three purposes. She refuses to hold the alien baby incorrectly, because that will tell the viewers her character is a bad mother, thus proving she is a Good Mother. (It is this skill as a mother that later gets her into the director's seat.) She meets the "flirty grip"—he becomes her first hook-up post-Charlie and another example of her newfound power. She sets the terms: I only want you to finger me, she instructs him. And she talks with one of the show's producers, who introduces her to Nora. Both of these meetings assert her independence while also (in)directly hurting Charlie. At every stage, we are encouraged to sympathise with him.

The viewer's empathy, while something Baumbach wants, doesn't serve Charlie the character in his story. What he needs—despite Nicole's admiration of his "self-sufficiency"—is a caretaker, and Nicole can't escape that habit, that urge, that ball and chain. For all her success and gained independence, she continues to take care of her ex-husband. When he comes over during a power outage, she cuts his hair. When they fight and he says he wishes she had died, she lets him sob and hug her legs. When he can't make up his mind ordering lunch, she orders for him, swapping the salad's usual dressing for his preferred lemon and olive oil, and he grunts approval. She knows what he wants even when he doesn't—a problem that, historically and ironically, she had assigned as her own.

And truly, without a female presence, what can Charlie do for himself? Donna from the theatre company makes his and Henry's Halloween costumes. (In a refutation of that domesticity, Nicole buys the costume Henry ultimately wears). He Skypes a female coworker from the theatre company to help him redecorate his new apartment. And when Henry brings up the "knife trick" to the evaluator, perhaps due to the lack of Nicole's stabilising eye or presence, Charlie forgets to close the blade and slices his arm open. His response is to cover it with his shirt sleeve to hide it from the evaluator. His response is to say no each of the three times she asks if he's okay. His response is to blot with a roll of paper towels, attempt to cover with two small Band-Aids, and lay weakly on the kitchen floor. I texted my friends as I watched, 'Is Charlie going to bleed out? Is that how this ends?'

While Nicole wins the divorce—Nora even sneaks in an extra day of custody, which Nicole neither asked for nor wanted, because "we won!"—the film ends with Nicole, after saying goodbye, running across the street from her waiting boyfriend and dinner plans to Charlie and Henry. Nicole kneels down, almost prostrated, and taps Charlie's foot twice. Without a word, she ties his shoe for him, then jogs away as he quietly thanks her. Victory does not allow women to transcend their womanhood.



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Tuscany's Other Puccini, the Artist

TOP NEWS STORIES

<http://www.magentaflorence.com/tuscany-s-other-puccini-the-artist/>

Just a few minutes' drive from the Forte dei Marmi train station, the mountains part, funneling rays of sun into a spotlight onto Seravezza's Medici villa. Two large rectangular towers stand imposingly, joined by an arched doorway and a blue banner heralding the opening of their new exhibition: a celebration of Mario Puccini and other post-Macchiaioli artists.

Entitled, "The Passion of Color," the show takes visitors through Puccini's tumultuous life, intermixed with his friends and influences. Giovanni Fattori's "Oxen Grazing" is the first room's signature piece; depicting oxen among the grass in a forest next to a man on a log, it exemplifies the Macchiaioli vision Puccini learned from and would emulate and expand upon.

Comparable to the subsequent French Impressionism, works from this late 19th century movement, named for "macchie" used to describe loose brushstrokes lending above all a sparkling quality. Composed of multiple layers, and a marked separation between the foreground and the background, canvases of this period capture the interplay of natural light. This effect is seen in the bright white "Oxen" poking their heads through the trees; yet, as each remains differentiated, the work is considered an example of early modernism that would influence Puccini.

Born in late 19th century Livorno, Puccini's talent was recognized early, and he was sent to Florence's Academy of Fine Arts at the age of 15. Very shortly after graduating, it is believed he learned of his girlfriend's infidelity, which sent him into a depression that was later diagnosed as mental illness, resulting in a six-year stay at the Siena Psychiatric Hospital.

Three self-portraits best explain his transformation during this period: in 1890, before diagnosis, his color palette is traditional, with a solid, neutral dark beige backdrop and tones of browns and blues. Twenty-five years later, he painted two others, both washed in light blue tones, with scraped and dashed lines behind his head.

This night and day difference characterized the rest of his career; for though most of Puccini's work during his hospitalization was lost, everything after has been marked by his innovative use of color.

Dubbed the “Italian Van Gogh,” he modified Divisionism, a close cousin of Pointillism, to fit his own style, sweeping the canvas with longer, thicker brush strokes instead of the tiny dots. Chunky orange and yellow rectangles are stacked one on top of the next to form the sunset spilling out onto the water in many of his paintings featuring the port of Livorno.

Puccini’s palette was also dependent on his location. While staying with his brother in Digne, sober navy blues and browns were most used, whereas in Italy, his landscapes exploded with intensely bright blues, crimsons, gold, and greens. He complemented this duality with different signatures: French pieces were signed “Pochein” instead of his Italian surname.

The exhibition displays paintings by contemporaries, showing both the masters Puccini learned from and the influence his works radiated into the community of artists who followed him. This juxtaposition highlights his deviation from standard practices, comparing strict adherers to Divisionism, such as his friend Plinio Nomellini, to his own efforts.

Human figures are of little to no importance: while cattle and other details of nature are in realistic, crisp detail, people’s faces are blurred. When the movement’s collective focus shifted to landscapes, bodies become little more than small smudges on canvas, unless specifically requested: a story tells that a patron returned “La Metallurgica” to Puccini, requesting he add people to the boatyard scene.

Llewelyn Lloyd’s “Church of Tonnarotti on Elba” is particularly noteworthy: though depicting a simple white building and its orange roof overlooking the ocean, the piece demands to be seen in person. Its canvas is textured with hardened rivers of residual paint that no print can accurately capture; every natural shade piled one on top of the other. The roof’s shadow cuts a jagged outline onto the walls while the indubitable serenity of the landscape radiates from the picture.

Though related to popular styles, the post-Macchiaioli movement and its host of artists linger in relative obscurity, neither celebrated nor discussed often today. Despite their bright colors and use of light, in true Tuscan fashion, Puccini and his friends are hidden gems.

“To the Condominium”

a pastiche of *The Office*'s “Dinner Party” (Season 4, Episode 10) in the style of Virginia Woolf

Well, there was nothing he could do about it, Jim supposed, reluctantly, annoyed at the lengths Michael had gone to for the mere sake of sharing a meal with them and frustrated at the success of his efforts; he was not excited about the premise of spending additional hours with his strange coworkers outside of the office. At the same time, he could not help but feel, deep down inside, a small sense of pleasure and satisfaction to know he and his girlfriend were so valued, and regarded so highly, by their boss; he had asked them to dinner not two, not three, but nine times—there was something to be said about feeling wanted.

Upon hearing the plans being made, Dwight asked what time he should be arriving to join the dinner party.

“Dwight, it's couples only. And besides, I only have six wine glasses,” said Michael.

“And, Andy and Angela will come,” he added, realizing there had only been four people mentioned; while Dwight, hurt, grappled with his feelings at being excluded and viewed as subordinate, to Jim but to others as well, time and time again. He wanted their approval. He wanted it so badly that he would go to great lengths, ridiculous lengths (some might say even peculiar lengths).

They arrived at the condominium. Jim felt himself cringe inside as the door was opened; he had forgotten the unpleasant nature that radiated from Jan Levinson. She was demanding; she was rude; and, he suspected she was insane; he knew her only from the workplace, and he shuddered to think how these qualities could be exaggerated when outside of corporate's close observation. He had not wanted this dinner to happen for many reasons.

Their greetings were pleasant enough, Pam thought, and maybe less uncomfortable than she had expected. She idly wondered when they would begin eating as she handed over a bottle of wine—it had been her idea to bring a gift for the hostess; she thought, back through her past, fondly, wistfully, of her mother, who had always reminded her of the importance of manners, the need for social graces, a quality she knew to be missing from her hostess, who confused her to no end. This will be perfect for cooking with, Jan remarked—though the beef would take another four hours, at the latest, before it was entirely ready. “Four hours from now, or four hours from when you started at maybe five o'clock?” She found it rather difficult to hide her annoyance; it was inconsiderate, it was rude! for dinner was the most important part of this evening, as far as she was concerned, because after dinner they could leave, leave the eggshell white walls, the pop art styled self-portrait, the broken glass door, the twenty-four inch plasma screen television, the video camera left on its tripod in their bedroom, and the image of Jan swaying to a song sung by her former assistant, leave and return home, and yet they were stuck here; it was dinnertime, at a dinner party, and yet there was no dinner; there was just a game of charades as the beef broiled and stewed, bubbling away.

But why will she still not admit it? Jan thought, frowning, checking on the food. She just knew that the rumor was true, that her boyfriend and Pam had been together at one time, they had dated, they had been intimate, and yet neither would confirm and give her the satisfaction of knowing, the feeling of vindication she craved. She was angry still, at the conversation they had had.

“You have no idea the physical toll three vasectomies have on a person.” Michael said, violently. (Why was he sharing this in front of his guests? Jim wondered as their argument continued, disregarding the party.) It had struck so suddenly—Dwight had arrived, to some of the group’s displeasure; he was an unusual man, they had not wanted him to join them; the argument with Jan started. He did not understand, it did not make sense the way they acted; he watched the exchange, becoming more uncomfortable and confused at how two people were together, obviously so unsuited for each other, Michael fun and childlike, Jan uptight and greedy, both miserable and lonely, both determined not to be, both failing. What was the purpose of this? Is this a functional relationship? It was impossible to say either way.

I hate my life, she said, in a mutter to herself, retreating to the kitchen.

Dinner was served. At last, it was almost over; with food on the table, leaving was soon and home felt near. The conversation stilled. Silence fell; a fork clinked on the wine glass. “That’s disgusting,” she said to Michael, “stop doing that.” This was it; he had had enough; he excused himself. He could not tolerate her comments, the constant insults and inconsiderate words grew to be overpowering. He was not going to be put down by her; why should he let her? He wanted to love her, he wanted to make it work, he wanted, so much, to have a family, and to have friends over for dinner; well, he thought, basking in the blue glow of the neon beer sign he had returned to its place on the wall, well, he at least had that.