

Concept

Where Hyacinths Bloom follows Val, a maladjusted young adult trying to navigate life after the death of her best friend, Blue. In an attempt to have Blue resurrected, she seeks out Casimir, an old wizard known for his power and magical prowess. When he turns her down, Val must find ways to cope with her loss, a process which will be frustratingly difficult at times and require gentle attention and care to be successful. At its core, Where Hyacinths Bloom will be a film about grief, but also highlight the importance of interpersonal connection. The ultimate message being that while grief can be crushing, life goes on and there is happiness to be found if you look in the right places. Val's denial of Blue's death will be represented largely by her desire to have him resurrected. In a different story, Val's quest would end where her story begins, life restored to the way it was before Blue's passing, Real grief, however, is messy and I think there's something to be said for a story willing to play in a space where death is permanent and grief is hard but everyone winds up okay in the end regardless; forever changed by their loss but still able to go about their life. Throughout the course of the film, Val will learn that the real solution to her loss cannot be attained by pointing a magic wand at it but through reflection, patience, and a little help from the friends she picks up along the way.

Creative Inspirations

One of my main sources of inspiration early on was *Fuelled* by Killedthecat Productions. *Fuelled* is a 9 Min student produced animated short film. At its core, *Fuelled* is a story about complex grief and revenge. It's a great source of inspiration because it not only depicts topics I'm actively investigating in their most extreme form but also demonstrates the level of mature visual storytelling I aim to reproduce in my own work. While I intend to make my film more uplifting, I

need to know first what the stakes are. Loss is a heavy emotion that has the potential to fundamentally change a person. *Fueled* answers the question: what's the worst that could happen? Working backwards from there, the question becomes how do you avoid it?

Another source that has greatly informed my work is *Everything I never Told You* by Celeste Ng. The way Ng handles each character's response to the news of Lydia's death helps inform how I wish to handle Val's reaction to her own loss. Ng's novel underscores the fragility of the home, and the ways in which even the most loving families have the potential to fall apart under enough stress but, importantly, also highlights the ways new relationships can form in the gaps left behind. The novel demonstrates the kind of unabashed realism I want to address in my film while still treating the story and characters with a kind of tenderness that I think makes the story both gut wrenching and extraordinarily charming.

Worthikids is an animator and musician relatively well known on the internet for his animated shorts and independent series *Bigtop Burger*. His work is vibrant and playful and is a useful example of how to use a varied and bright color palette effectively. His short *Captain Yajima* specifically illustrates the type of nostalgic color palette I would like to incorporate in my film. It also exemplifies a fun and lighthearted sense of humor I would like to sprinkle into my own work.

Critical Research Resources

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichí's memoir, *Notes on Grief*, describes her experience handling the sudden death of her father. In the midst of the Covid lockdown, she recounts the days leading up to the death and the trying months afterwards. While grief is usually thought of in terms of the emotional, Adichí describes it as something which cannot be separated from the physical body. In one chapter, she explains the toll mourning takes on her body, the aches in her muscles, the

trouble with her stomach, and the way her grief affects her heart rate which she describes as beating to a rhythm at odds with her own. The memoir is particularly useful for me because it's an example of how grief operates outside of fiction. It is just one lived experience out of many but it's nonetheless informative.

The Smallest Lights in the Universe is a nonfiction memoir by Sara Seager. In it she recounts her life from discovering her interest in astrology, to meeting her husband, to eventually losing him to cancer. What is so important about this book is not just the complex representation of Seager's grief, but the ways in which, despite all the ways things fall apart, life ultimately goes on. Seager's whole world is turned upside down. She struggles to carry on, to make sense of the world in the absence of her husband. But, as time trudges forward, she rediscovers her joy in her children, in new friendships, and even in new love. *The Smallest Lights In the Universe* depicts grief as ugly, beautiful, destructive, and painful but, ultimately, as a chapter in a larger story with infinite space for happiness and love to persist.

Elizabeth Kübler-Ross' book *On Death and Dying* is about death and grief, primarily from the perspective of patients with terminal illnesses. The book coins the five stages of grief and explains how each of those stages operate. Though its ideas are a little outdated, there is a chapter or two on denial which I take interest in. Denial will play a key role in my film and *On Death and Dying* provides potent insight on how it both functions and how some patients were able to come to terms with their grief.

Materials, Processes, Techniques

The process begins with a lot of thinking. Sometimes this means sketching out ideas or jotting down thoughts about potential story arcs but, more often than not, the forefront of my ideation takes the form of what I can only describe as a jumble of nearly incomprehensible

thought garble which will later be condensed and translated into something more legible. In my ideation process, a lot of consideration goes into who my characters are outside of the confines of the narrative they will exist in. Many of these ideas will never make it on screen but this step is imperative regardless because it helps inform everything they will do and helps me determine how they might feel when put in certain situations. For example, thinking about who Val is, what she likes or doesn't care for, how she grew up, etc. helps me decide how she might behave when her last hope for resurrecting Blue turns down her request. Similarly, knowing who Blue was, though he will take up very little screen time - if any- helps me determine what life looks like in his absence.

The next step in my process is tying down the actual narrative. Usually this starts with a lot of messy notation and sketches which gradually take a more concrete shape and eventually get turned into a rough storyboard. From then on, the process is pretty straightforward. I like to make my rough boards in a digital sticky note style so I can move things around freely.

In terms of animation I like to rough out each scene individually, usually in order of appearance - although sometimes I like to tackle more complex scenes upfront to make sure they get the time they need. My rough animations usually come together using straight ahead animation, loosely based on the timing of my animatic. I like to use one key drawing which is sort of moved around and fussed with - kind of like a puppet - until I have the movement and timing the way I like it. Having a "master drawing" to work with ensures I don't run into any weird size discrepancies within a scene and cuts down on unnecessary time spent redrawing the same figure over and over - a painstaking process I will save for the cleanup stage. Roughing this way allows me to work out the timing and shape of a movement while also making the clean up process overall more easy to tackle.

Project Description and Materials

Where Hyacinths Bloom will be a roughly 3 minute short film created over the course of one calendar year. The film will follow standard film dimensions using a 16:9 aspect ratio and will be made primarily using TVP and Procreate and all final products will be digital.

Backgrounds and character design will be shape driven to create a cohesive and appealing style.

Using a color palette primarily inspired by Worthi Kids and early 2000s aesthetics, I hope to create a vibrant world for my story to take place in. The bright colors will be juxtaposed with darker, more muted scenes to represent shifts in tone and mood and help provide visual insight into Val's emotional state.

Summary

Where Hyacinths Bloom will be a 2D animated film centered around the main character, Val, as she tries to process the recent loss of her best friend. The film will depict certain areas of grief, specifically anger and denial as the story's point of conflict. The resolution to which is not to slap a bandaid on the problem and call it a day and is also not attainable through simply reversing the problem (necromancy/revival) but which takes time and gentle attention. While processing grief can be an individual experience and absolutely can be done alone, I want to delve deeper into the ways in which that process can be made easier by having someone around to help you through it while also showcasing the ways in which grief is not constant and does leave room for moments of levity. I want to play around with the combination of grief and healing and found family and think more about the ways those themes interact with each other.

Things to look into

Smith, Tracy K. *Ordinary light: A memoir*. New York: Vintage, 2016.

Hesse, Hermann, Joseph Delage, and Jacques Brenner. *Siddhartha*. Paris: Grasset, 2017.

Miller, Madeline. *The Song of Achilles*. Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 2022.

Paterson, Katherine. *Bridge to Terabithia*. Brantford, Ontario: W. Ross MacDonald School Resource Services Library, 2018.

Sam MacInnis Artist Bio

Sam MacInnis is a Portland based animator and illustrator.

The core of his practice involves being multifaceted with a drive to consistently pick up and develop new skill sets. From childhood, he has taken on numerous mediums and techniques, many of which have transferred into relevant skills that have enriched his work. His interest in art began with painting but has since expanded to music, sound design, illustration, animation, and beyond.

During his time at Pacific Northwest College of Art, he has approached his studies with a dual focus mindset. Pairing animation and illustration, he is able to infuse his films with information both relevant to making things move and to the overall design. With this approach, he has not only improved both areas of study vastly from where he started, but also— and most importantly— can delve into every part of the filmmaking process.

Sam MacInnis
Animated Arts

Thesis Abstract

Where Hyacinths Bloom is an abridged version of a longer film I intend to continue to work on over the summer. In its current form, it is a 2 minute 2D animated short film that explores themes of grief in a dark fantasy setting. In it, we follow Val, a maladjusted young woman who is visibly grieving the recent death of her best friend, Blue. As she goes through the motions of her day, she discovers a book of necromantic spells that has the potential to bring him back to life.

With depictions of cartoon blood and heavier subject matter, the film is not extraordinarily *graphic* but not suitable for younger audiences, and is geared towards fellow fans of dark fantasy in the 18-25 range.

WHB takes stylistic inspiration from the *Hellboy* comics and narrative inspiration from Killed The Cat Production's short film *Fuelled*, Celeste Ng's novel *Everything I Never Told You*, and Finji's game *Night In The Woods*. The layouts feature heavy, graphic shading inspired by a comic style, more specifically the work of Mike Mignola.

Val's character brings to light the numbness a lot of people experience during periods of grief between outbursts of overwhelming emotion. While her characterization has a life of its own, the way she handles grief is largely inspired by myself and the experience I had that inspired this project to begin with.

https://youtu.be/nluJ7_x_x2M?feature=shared

Sam MacInnis
Thesis Speech
Where Hyacinths Bloom

Greetings, **Thank you** for coming out to my thesis presentation this morning. I'm Sam MacInnis, I use he/they pronouns, and I am an animation major with a background in painting.

For my thesis project I created a 2d animated piece centered around grief. This was therapeutic for me to explore as I had recently undergone a period of grief myself and this project was a productive way for me to work through it.

In my short film, *Where Hyacinths Bloom*, we follow Val shortly after the death of her best friend as she goes about her day, just trying to get through it— until she discovers a book of necromantic spells that has the potential to reverse the loss entirely.

Before I say much more though, let's actually watch it.

cw: cartoon blood, depictions of dead animals

[show film]

What I've just shown you is an abridged version of a film I intend to continue working on over the summer.

I'll talk about the development process in a bit, but for now I'm going to give you an overview of concepts behind the film itself.

My Junior film was a black and white short about a man who falls in love with his friend, the ocean. He is ultimately rejected but the end of the film implies their continued close friendship. While the concept itself was a bit of an oddball, it did underline something I wound up continuing to explore in my thesis: the importance of platonic relationships.

While *Unrequited* was born out of a frustration with common discourse surrounding being 'friendzoned', *Where Hyacinths Bloom* explores the impact of losing a close friend.

Val and Blue are two halves of a whole. While much of this information is not in the film directly, I spent a lot of time determining exactly how their relationship functioned. In part, this was to help make the world I was creating feel lived in—but also it helped me determine how Val would behave in Blue's absence.

My initial idea was that Val and Blue are sword and shield respectively. While each has their own functions outside of the other, if you're used to having a shield, suddenly being without one would probably make you, the incredibly skilled fighter you are, feel unbalanced and vulnerable.

While I do think the themes explored in my film are *important*, I didn't go into thesis expecting to tell such a sad story. Many of the ideas on the table were lighthearted, comedic sketches, still likely centered around friendship, but much less gut wrenching conceptually. But my ideas quickly changed when, at the beginning of the SP24 semester, I found out my cat had cancer.

Where *Hyacinths Bloom* started as a way to try and process what was going on in my life. I knew I didn't want to make the film explicitly about my loss but didn't have it in me to make something entirely separate from it.

In fact, if any work was going to get done at all, I needed my project to be something cathartic, and something that could grow and change with me. Thus came the story of Val and her best friend who died young.

A lot of my starting research was tied to the grieving process. I didn't really *need* to research this to know what it was like but found it was a good way of grounding the film and myself in the beginning stages of this project.

I approached a lot of my early investigations from a social scientific standpoint but later expanded my scope to tap into a more personal perspective of grief. I started this expanse by reading a lot of memoirs and found that it was nice to be able to relate to people who were going through very different losses than mine but whose feelings were very similar. While it is logically obvious that other people experience grief, it can still be really rewarding to hold evidence of that fact. And, overall, I found this part of the process really healing.

Later, I expanded even further into the realm of fiction where I actually returned to a couple of books I had already read but were really important to me and the formation of this project.

Everything I Never Told You by Celeste Ng is a beautiful novel that explores interpersonal relationships, grief, messy family structures, and adolescence.

It is also one of my favorite books ever.

What I appreciate most about it is its honesty. Some parts of the story are incredibly tender, while others are a lot harsher. There is anger, hollowness, and beauty all wrapped into one.

While that's a lot to ask of a two minute short film, the way Ng. approaches storytelling was at the very least something that was on my mind during the creation process of my thesis.

In 2024 I proposed a 3-6 minute long animated short film that would take major style inspiration from the Hellboy comics and narrative tone from Killed The Cat Productions' short film, *Fuelled*.

I had some early visual development to show as a sort of proof of concept but would not start animation until this semester — more on that later.

The overall response was positive, however, nearly everyone I talked to thought that 3-6 minutes was ambitious at best, and crazy at worst. I was advised by my panel to find ways to simplify my ideas and narrow the scope of my project overall.

This was not the last time I would receive this note.

But, after workshopping my outline in a summer independent study Marilyn was kind enough to run for us, (breathe)

I started this semester with a revised version of my concept **of which** I promised to complete **half** by focus week.

In my sick and twisted mindscape, this was a good way to take a little pressure off thesis, keeping in mind that I would still be working part time at my dream job at Killer Burger (sarcasm) during the completion of this project.

To give everyone a vague idea of my day to day for the past two semesters I have provided this helpful graphic.

Add on a slice of crushing sadness and a collection of assorted life crises and you have a perfectly average thesis experience. (the audience boos in unison)

As I said earlier, I didn't start animating until this semester. That's because I spent a lot of time thinking about the story I wanted to tell and exactly how to even do it. There were a lot of heavy conceptual elements I was trying to balance while still keeping the overall film under the three minute mark.

As it turns out,

a story where Val goes on a quest to find then heroic wizard, now agoraphobic old man Casimir, who turns down her request to resurrect her friend when she breaks into his home— that portrays an equally healing friendship between two damaged individuals through gardening — Is kind of hard to tell in three minutes.

So I changed Val and Casimir's relationship to be something already established in the film. He would become the owner of Casimir's Tomes, an independently owned shop/library of grimoires, spellbooks, and other assorted magic items, and Val would be his apprentice, assistant, and employee.

Anyone who hasn't followed this story from the beginning is probably wondering what the hell I'm even talking about. To clear up any lingering suspicions, *no*, you did not fall asleep and miss something. Casimir did not make it to the final cut of the film.

For a character whose design I worked SO HARD ON, who was somewhat of a fan favorite in the early days of this project, he found himself on the chopping block suspiciously often.

In a perfect world, I would have been able to include him, but, when my voice actor left me hanging and his already dwindling number of scenes had to be re-evaluated, I was forced to really think about whether or not I needed him. And, ultimately, I discovered in this abridged version he was kind of only a remnant of an old idea— something I was holding onto because he was fun to work on and funny to watch — but not because he added anything essential to the story.

So, with a heavy heart, I bravely crossed out his scenes in red and put my time

towards the creation of 9 new shots that would turn my half of a fuller concept thesis into a short film that could stand alone as a complete entity.

That's not to say that there aren't still things that I'd like to add over the summer, but it did leave me with something I am pretty proud of. (there. I said the thing.)

Now,
Let's get technical.

Before I say anything, I'd like to acknowledge Mya Katz for literally saving a shot from getting cut from the film by kindly offering her assistance and doing the roughs for it, and Kyla Masamori for helping me do flat colors for my layouts.

There are 13 different backgrounds throughout my film, all of which were created in Procreate. To show versatility in skill and to create more visual contrast between shots, each background was created using one, two, three point, or radial perspective.

It's during this stage that I had a lot of fun hiding little references to my friends. From other people's past and current projects, to things as niche as an old group chat named "gooj smaple" — don't ask— it was not only a cute way to pay homage to the people that helped me get through this semester but also a fun way for me to reinvest in my project during a time when I was starting to feel kind of frustrated with it.

Once the line art was done (unless it was something I REALLY wanted to work on personally) I'd send the image over to Kyla along with either a general color guide or a really rough sketch in of what I wanted things to look like, once I got that back, I'd go in and do a few minor corrections and then light and texture the scene.

The final step was to add 5% grain and an effect called chromatic aberration. This last step is something I do to almost all of my art — sort of like a signature only it just kind of looks cool.

I'd like to take a second to talk about this one of my backgrounds

The animation was done over multiple programs. I started the semester working in TVP but later switched to Rough Animator when I realized it would feel a whole lot nicer to lay down and animate than it did sitting at my desk.

Some scenes, like the shot of Val sleeping were done by using the warp tool in Procreate and then exporting the PNGs back into RA.

For those who don't know, Rough Animator is a very simple, very inexpensive app, and is about as far from industry standard as you can imagine. It is quirky and prone to exploding into a million pieces if pushed too hard and I love it to bits. The decision to animate my thesis PRIMARILY in this program is a choice that may have some of the animators in this room questioning my sanity but I actually found it to be more intuitive than TVP for its simplicity and overall I don't regret it.

The sound was done using a mix of home recorded elements and edited sounds from soundsnap, both slapped together in adobe audition.

All scenes were composited in (the animation) program with no additional visual editing beyond a saucy grain filter thrown over the whole film for texture in after effects.

But how did you edit the film together before putting that saucy grain filter on it I hear no one ask. Well, if you absolutely must know,

I did it ... in imovie.

So what's next for WHB ?

This project is a good portfolio piece for the way it demonstrates both skills in animation and layout design. I intend to include parts of it in my reel as well as link the larger film in my website once the longer version of it is complete.

As for the film itself, I'd like to upload it to YouTube.

It's important to me that this film be accessible to people because of the concepts it explores and the catharsis it might be able to provide to anyone like me who has an interest in dark fantasy but also a lot of emotional baggage to carry around.

Beyond that, I would also like to clean up my storyboards from this project and make them look more professional to be able to include those in my portfolio as well.

In essence, I intend to use this film for everything it's worth.

Special thanks to Mya and Sarah for hanging out with me in the 'animation closet' this semester, Kyla for being a very excellent helper, Rough Animator for not crashing a single time, and everyone who woke up early to be here today. (and also Jason for helping me with this speech)

I will now open the floor for questions.

Bibliography

Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. *Notes on grief*. London: 4th Estate, 2022.

A memoir written about Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's experience with grief after losing her father during the covid lockdown. She expresses a profound permanent change in herself as a result of the loss, detailing her anger and feelings of denial. The book helps provide insight into how real grief operates--- specifically the way anger can manifest during times of mourning.

BERTMAN, SANDRA L. "The Language of Grief: Social-Science Theories and Literary Practice." *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature* 15, no. 1 (1982): 153–63. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24777755>.

An article summarizing the findings of multiple scholars and perspectives from literary sources to create an overarching understanding of grief and how it is written about.

Elrod, Daniel. "10 Flowers That Represent Memory: Reminder Blooms." *Foliage Friend - Learn About Different Types of Plants*, April 25, 2023. <https://foliagefriend.com/flowers-that-represent-memory/>.

An article detailing some interpretations of the symbolic meaning behind different types of flowers. It informed my decision for using the hyacinth as a representation for Blue.

"Fuelled | Animated Short Film 2021." YouTube, December 1, 2021. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uVzT6D-yhZg>.

A nine minute student produced short film. Fuelled is a complex film that uses visual storytelling to get its point across. It is not only beautiful aesthetically but painstakingly thought through and effective in its use of color and visual symbolism. Fuelled is both a source of visual inspiration for my work and thematically similar to what I hope to achieve.

Ng, Celeste. *Everything I never told you*. New York: Penguin Books, 2015.

A nonfiction novel by Celeste Ng about Lydia, a daughter and friend to the characters from whose perspective we read. The book is not only enjoyable but exemplifies the complexity of the ways interpersonal relationships can change during a time of great loss. Ng's writing is an example of treating grief both honestly but with immense care; something I want to accomplish with my film.

Night in the Woods. Accessed April 30, 2024. <http://www.nightinthewoods.com/>.

A fantastic platformer that is both heavy and extremely fun. NITW is both visually stunning and in depth in its story. It tackles topics of depression and anxiety while also staying mostly upbeat and lighthearted. Its careful balance of gut wrenching storytelling to potentially somewhat crass but childish humor makes for a rich experience. It is not only a nostalgic piece of media for me to revisit but also illustrates a type of storytelling I am interested in.

Seager, Sara. *The smallest lights in the universe: A memoir*. London: 4th Estate, 2021.

A memoir detailing Sara Seager's experiences after the death of her husband. The book is crushingly sad but also, importantly, shows the ways life can go on after such a

profound loss. Seager expresses that she has been forever changed by the experience but that love and light can still be found in the darkest of moments. Its imperative to my research because its a real world example of the key message of my film.

Smith, Cyril Stanley. *On death and dying*. Simon & Schuster, 1970.

In this book, Kubler-Ross coins the five stages of grief. It represents more social-scientific perspective on grief, telling the stories of patients with terminal diagnosis. While I have sort of outgrown my need for this paper and no longer believe it to be particularly helpful, it served as an important jumping off point for my research and thinking on grief.

Worthington, Ian. "Bigtop Burger: Season One." YouTube, August 23, 2020.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GyCagepF_T4.

A compilation of all of season one of Bigtop Burger by Worthikids. Its an entertaining series exemplifying a cohesive color pallet and excellent use of humor. I use it as a source of information for both of the aforementioned techniques.

Worthington, Ian. "Captain Yajima." YouTube, April 30, 2021.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l-TJm7HkzkQ>.

An eight minute short by Worthikids. Its a comedic film depicting a ridiculously fun adventure through space. It is an example of the type of nostalgic color pallet I wish to incorporate into my film.

Worthington, Ian. "Worthikids." YouTube. Accessed April 30, 2024.

<https://www.youtube.com/user/Worthikids>.

Worthikids' Youtube homepage. It has some information on who Worthikids is and what he does.