

Hayley Harvey

“the beginning of the end”

Carrie Conners, *Species of Least Concern*. Main Street Rag, 2022.

Carrie Conners’ *Species of Least Concern* is an intriguing series of prose and poetry about human nature’s tendency toward existentialism—or the seeking out of a discernable explanation for one’s existence in fear that the meaning of one’s existence isn’t definable. Over the course of the collection, readers are taken on a journey involving the meaning of life, the purpose of experience, and the strength necessary to find meaning in one’s existence. Conners introduces us to the machinations of people and places looking for meaning through metaphors of land, water, and air.

Realizing the world works through instances of cause and effect, and not just a series of disconnected elements, means taking what Conners’ “Odd Jobs” implies about ignorance and evolution of the self and comparing it to the progression of growing older and how adulthood alters one’s view of the world. The matters the narrator “learned to avoid when [she was] young”—the merry-go-round, responsibility, and relationships—manage to connect to how she lived and viewed the present. Through this, seemingly disconnected subjects, such as her father’s bad attitude, getting sick after spinning too much as a child, and what it cost her to labor as an adult, all serve the same function of relaying her condition at the time of perception. Nothing is disconnected, and the cause-and-effect precision of life fuels the existentialism seen throughout Conners’ *Species of Least Concern*. If our understanding of the world is shaped by what we’ve gone through, what does it really mean to make decisions for ourselves? Does what we do and who we are matter in a scheme that grand?

In “Winter Burial,” the layers of a metaphor of snow on top of a metaphor of shit detail an origin for one’s process of dealing with the world. “Everything gets buried in winter”: the dog’s shit and the narrator’s problems. The longer she ignored her issues, the harder it was to address them. The snow continued to bury her burden, and with “another few inches” of snow covering her issues, she “gave up” dealing with them. As a result, she was left with guilt from burying her problems, “knowing” they would resurface and ruin her next chance to relax in “the sun.” Conners’ acknowledgment of her usage of metaphor highlights the weight of the acceptance: knowing you’re doing some-

thing harmful and then doing it again is more detrimental than doing it unconsciously

When the narrator feels a connection to a song in “But I Won’t,” she despises the similarity she feels in her own life. This was a song she “secretly want[ed] / to scream along with” as a child because it was silly then, and she didn’t have to deal with the way the “confusing lyrics” made sense to her like they did as an adult. All the “double-negatives” and lack of correct grammar that the song displays feel much more in tune with her overwhelming and harsh adulthood. Life was simpler when dealing with alienation as a child meant hiding in deep water. Dealing as an adult meant acknowledging and finding solutions for issues because ignoring them led her into deeper, darker waters in which she had no business treading.

Through this examination of life, the fear in “Landscape Lessons” that the “cacti [that] only blooms for a few hours each year” would “turn to powder,” is cleansed by the narrator’s strength to move forward from the past. The memory of the ingenuity of desperate peoples who built “tunnels” for “smuggl[ing] drugs and people” pushed the narrator past the “faceless . . . beings” that represent obstacles and troubles encountered as she moved through life. The human experience is portrayed as a journey to find meaning for existence through those obstacles. The narrator relays to the readers that in escaping her vulnerability and alienation, her “stiff arms” loosen with a more positive outlook on the future, and even through the “puncture wounds and irritation,” she can believe there will be a time where she doesn’t have to “[protect herself] from the world.”

In the end, Carrie Conners makes us focus on what we readers value about our lives and asks us to contemplate how we ignore our issues, how the world moves on without us, how we may control our lives, and what we stand to lose by recognizing that the end of one moment doesn’t mean the end of everything, just the beginning of something new.