

6-2015

That Which Binds Us

Tracey M. Dover

California State University - San Bernardino, dovert@coyote.csusb.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/etd>

Recommended Citation

Dover, Tracey M., "That Which Binds Us" (2015). *Electronic Theses, Projects, and Dissertations*. Paper 220.

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Office of Graduate Studies at CSUSB ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses, Projects, and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of CSUSB ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@csusb.edu.

THAT WHICH BINDS US

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Fine Arts
in
Creative Writing:
Fiction

by
Tracey Marie Dover

June 2015

THAT WHICH BINDS US

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

by
Tracey Marie Dover
June 2015

Approved by:

Julie Paegle, First Reader

Merrill Feitell, Second Reader

©2015 Tracey Marie Dover

ABSTRACT

This novel follows three individuals struggling with isolation and loneliness. Rina, a twenty-two year-old college student is studying abroad in Japan when she learns of her grandfather's death. As his last living relative, she decides to leave her studies and a burgeoning romance to take care of her grandfather's final affairs. At his funeral she meets Marcus, a mysterious man whose past ties in with her own. Marcus gives Rina the opportunity to uncover secrets surrounding her family and forces her to question not only her grandfather's past but also her own identity. Tilnu is an immortal with a foggy memory of the past. He believes he is a fallen angel trying to reclaim his place in heaven by devoting his life to the hunting and killing of demons. After fighting a particularly powerful demon, he finds himself indebted to a young woman who guilted him into being her companion and prompts him to doubt his convictions about his own place in the world. Marcus, a demon able to live on Earth by making bonds to people, is caught between a rock and a hard place. After meeting Rina, he is unable to ignore his memories of past mistakes. With his time on Earth suddenly limited, and the persistent hunter Tilnu on his tail, he fears it may be too late to make up for his past sins against Rina and her family.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I want to thank my family; my parents for being loving and supportive and weird, and my brothers for having the ability to make me laugh so hard my face hurts from smiling. Chris, your passion for music always inspired me. Brandon, your dedication to your art and the instinctual way you take to a canvas or sketchpad is a constant push for me to better my own craft. Mom and Dad, thanks for always being a source of information and wisdom, and for always seeming too excited to read my stories.

Thank you, Mrs. Katie Osburn, for releasing custody of Tilnu to me for this project and for traveling with me to another dimension to settle interspecies conflicts. That takes a true friend.

To Maritza, Rosie and Orlinda, thanks for always getting me home safely and keeping me sane these last two years. I wouldn't have survived without you. Or had as much fun.

Finally, thank you to all my professors at Cal State San Bernardino. Chad Sweeney, if you hadn't been so dedicated to running the open mics and readings, I probably wouldn't have become involved in the writing community as an undergrad and joined the M.F.A. Juan Delgado, your workshops and poetry classes were some of the first that made me believe I could do this seriously, and your support since has been invaluable. Julie Paegle, thank you for stepping in when I needed you and for being a source of inspiration, support and feedback. Merrill Feitell, thank you for giving me some of the most important writing advice I ever received and for challenging me to truly own my stories.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
A STATEMENT OF PURPOSE: <i>THAT WHICH BINDS US</i>	1
An Invocation of Sorts	1
A Novel in Various Stages of Existence	6
The Demons in My Head.....	13
WORKS CITED	22
APPENDIX A: THAT WHICH BINDS US.....	23

A STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

THAT WHICH BINDS US

An Invocation of Sorts

In the days of Greek epics, storytellers such as Homer and Hesiod would make an invocation to the Muses. This invocation was meant as an appeal, an invitation for the Gods to speak through their bodies and imbue their stories with truth and wisdom. Socrates too claimed such a spirit which was often referred to as his *demon*. In Ancient Greek, the word which *demon* was translated from (*δαίμων*) held a relatively neutral connotation and could be defined in a myriad of ways. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, its possible meanings included, “god, goddess, divine power, deity, destiny, fate, good or evil genius of a family or person”. In accordance to these denotations, Socrates’s *demon* has prominently been attributed to his creativity and intellectual genius. Semantically, this sense of the *demon* did not change until the rise of Judaism and Christianity. This change in meaning began in the translation of the Old Testament and Hebrew Scriptures and continued throughout Christianity’s spread. During the Middle Ages, the gods of non-Christian religions and belief systems were being transposed from their own mythologies and pushed into the uniform classification of pagan deities. *Demons* were no longer a source of inspiration or divine wisdom, but the subordinates of evil—the toadish imps of hell whose only function in life was to tempt and torture humanity. This Christian meaning of the

word reflects a narrow view, held by most of the Western society, Christian or not, that any superhuman influences not directly attributable to “God” are unholy and dangerous.

My novel, initially entitled, “Grandfather’s Demon”, does not deny or refute this image of demons, nor does it endorse it. Instead, I hope the novel uses demons as a means to explore the binaries of the divine and infernal, to challenge centuries-old views of good and evil, and to invite readers to question their own moralistic convictions while following the lives of three individuals doing the same: Rina, Tilnu and Marcus. I invite you to join in the drama of their lives; their pain, their joys, their mischief, their love affairs, their murderous tendencies, their taste for pancakes, their morning sickness, their stubbornness, and maybe even their last seconds on Earth.

Most cultures include some story, some mythos that contains some version of the demon. In Japan, where my novel starts, there are *yokai* and *oni*, spiritual entities and monsters that exist unseen or unnoticed by the human population. These two words are general terms in Japanese describing a vast group of creatures. Their stories place them alongside human society, on the outskirts in forests, as well as in the dark corners of the home. Some are more malevolent than others. A *kappa*, a demon that looks like a bipedal turtle with a lily-pad bowl on its head, will drown you in its pond if you don’t offer it a cucumber when you meet it. A *kitsune*, a shape-shifting fox demon, can act as a guardian, offering wisdom and fortune and can even disguise itself as a woman

to be close to the human they like. What interests me, is that even within these two creatures exists the potential for complexity. In some stories, the *kappa* became the victims of samurai, and some *kitsune* played the role of trickster. That setting in which reality and mythology blend is not only the initial setting of my novel, but also a place to which my characters return to in their dreams and memories.

Arabic mythology also has a rendition of demons known as *djinn*. Before the rise of Islam in the Middle East, *djinn* were seen as gods, spirits worthy of tribute and even worship. *Djinn* were beings of fire who travel on the wind and live among the sand dunes of the desert. After the rise of Islam, however these *djinn* were demoted to a brother race of mankind. Allah created them with fire and created man from the clay of the earth. *Djinn*, like humans, were given free will. Their souls, as were those of humans, were to be judged in the end times.

Though on the surface my novel makes use of a more Christian mythology, the *djinn* are actually a closer model of the demons who capture my imagination. The demons in my story exist as beings of energy, such as fire and electricity, and must bind themselves to a physical being, a human, in order to live in the physical world. When they are not attached to a human, or when the human they are attached to dies, they must use more energy just to manifest a physical form. But slowly that same energy eats away the demon's body until they literally don't have a leg to stand on.

Growing up in the Catholic Church I had very rigid ideas of good and evil hammered into me from a young age. This isn't to say I didn't enjoy going to church. I liked the sleepy smell of incense, the people in elaborate robes, the many voices singing as one. I loved the stillness of a hundred people sitting in silence. The homilies and readings were spoken in a range of voices that could demand attention or lull the listener to sleep. I stood when it was time to stand, kneeled when it was time to kneel, sang when it was time to sing. I followed the directions of this pew-anchored dance, had it memorized in my muscles. I went through the motions perfectly, while in my head I felt nothing more profound than going through a ritual for the sake of the ritual alone. I enjoyed being a part of it, yet I couldn't put my heart into it. Though a figure of omnipotence and unconditional love sounded fine and good, I preferred the humble comfort of ambiguity. The idea that everything in the world was not known actually gave me a sense of security and peace of mind. Also, the finer points of doctrine spoiled religion for me. Petty intolerances, the contradictory nature of gospels that preached love in one moment and condemnation in the next—these are what distanced me from my faith early on. It felt wrong and arrogant to believe that my Catholic life was the only life that led to paradise. I could not hold the conviction that the afterlife that was set in stone, that anyone not following the same dance as me was damned, or that there was anyone, human or demon, who deserved to live an eternity suffering.

Perhaps in an unconscious rebellion against my Catholic faith, by high school I was secretly enamored with the mythology of demons. My parents had given me my first laptop, and I spent countless nights reading websites on the arcane, researching different “pagan” deities, and creating my own mythology to explore. During this time, Marcus was born. He was originally named “Marchosias” after one of the demons in the *Lesser Key of Solomon*, a grimoire with a list of demons King Solomon supposedly had control over. I started writing about Marchosias as if he was a part of my reality. If I had a bad day I would write about it but include Marchosias in the narrative. I would write the sarcastic things he would say to me when I was acting like an angst-ridden teenager. I would write how he would embarrass me in front of my friends, or make the popular girls jealous because he was, like, oh-my-god-so-hot. I would write about him trying to be evil and failing because, really, wasn’t subversion more fun?

My novel, if nothing else, is an homage to Marcus—who in my head will always be Marchosias—and the gleeful insanity he fostered in my mind. He’s become much more than a character to me over the years. He’s been my imaginary friend, my anti-hero, my silly pervert, my alter-ego. He’s all the suppressed *fucks* and *damnits* I didn’t yell when I wanted to. He’s the rebel I never got to be growing up.

He answered my teenage invocation and has stayed with me ever since.

He is my muse.

He is my demon.

He reminds me that inspiration arises from both.

This story's for him.

A Novel in Various Stages of Existence

My novel, currently entitled That Which Binds Us, will eventually be told in three major parts. Each part acts as a movement centering on one of the main characters. The first movement belongs to Rina, a twenty-two year old college student from Southern California. She is studying abroad in Japan, enjoying the first real taste she's had of freedom and independence. She's in a new place, having her own adventures, learning things, and getting swept up in the romance of an overseas love. She feels whole in a way she never has before. Rina's experience with family has been a series of losses. She never knew her father, and her mother abandoned her when she was seven. Her grandparents took her in, but her grandmother passed away shortly afterwards. Her grandfather has been the only stable connection she's had in her life. While in Japan Rina receives a call from home informing her of her grandfather's death. She comes back to California to take care of his funeral and affairs. At the funeral, she meets Marcus, an attractive stranger in sunglasses who claims to be a friend of her grandfather. Marcus gives her an opportunity to discover more about her grandfather's past, to uncover what made her mother leave, and to negotiate her own heritage and identity in the process.

From the beginning of her section, Rina's world is repeatedly shaken; first literally in an earthquake while she is in Japan, then by the news of her grandfather's death. Both combine to subject her to a series of aftershocks ranging from her grandfather's misplaced corpse at the funeral to sudden startling changes in her own body. Her companion and guide through these turbulent events is Marcus, the man she gradually realizes is more than just human, and who may hold the key to Rina finding what makes her whole.

Our second movement belongs to Tilnu, a centuries-old individual with memory problems. He believes that he is a fallen angel and that the only way to redeem himself is through the expulsion of demons from the earth. Since demons are beings of energy, they must make a bond to someone on the earth if they are to live there in a physical body for a prolonged period of time. Tilnu roams the world searching out demons and their hosts, and violently dispelling them from the mortal plane. We join Tilnu on a hunt that culminates in the back parking lot of a bar where he inadvertently stops a man from kidnapping a young woman. She in turn ends up saving him when the demon he faces overpowers him. The young woman, Lilliana, shaken by the events of the night, convinces Tilnu to come home with her. Tilnu quickly finds himself thrust out of his ascetic existence and into a burgeoning friendship with Lilliana that frightens him in way he does not understand. Lilliana's presence is a catalyst for Tilnu to doubt the convictions he has held about the world and himself. When he comes into contact with Rina, a friend of Lilliana, he is stricken by how familiar she feels to

him. This curiosity as well as the scent of another demon, Marcus, in the area force him to either stay the course of violence and loneliness he has lived so far or reconsider his identity and take responsibility for the brutal acts he previously thought were justified.

The final section of the novel takes place in Marcus's memory. It is a guided tour of the past, led by Marcus in a shared mental space between him and Rina before he dies. In this movement we are given a glimpse of the full extent of Marcus's existence, who he is, who he was, who he wishes he could be. We see how he is connected to Rina's grandfather and the rest of her family, and what he has been running from. For the purposes of this project though, this section may be replaced by a quick epilogue to ensure I meet my thesis deadline.

In a way, each of these characters—Marcus, Rina, Tilnu and Lilliana—is running from or towards something, whether it's loneliness, responsibility, love, pain, innocence, experience, or a terrible truth. They desire something. Demons or no, this is the most basic plot of every story. *Somebody wants something.* Living in a state of want is part of the human condition. It's part of what defines humanity as a whole. I would even go so far as to venture, our individual desires distinguish us as individuals. To figure this out in regard to my characters has been one the most difficult and exciting parts of writing this novel.

More often than not, my characters started out as extensions of myself. They were given my best and worst traits, given my fears, my experiences, my anxieties, my humor, even my loves. They took it all, swallowed it like a sponge,

and soon they were taking things that were not mine. They moved in ways I had not anticipated, said things I wasn't expecting. Little by little, I discovered the people they were by writing their stories.

Rina's character was most like this, for the reason that she is the newest character of my three leads, the one with which I've spent the least amount of time. She started out as a reflection of my high school-aged self, the girl I was when my own grandfather was living with our family. Rina was naïve and innocent to the point of fault, and her character had a special brand of optimism that prompted her to seek the goodness in everybody. In these earlier drafts of the novel, Rina's situation mirrored my own. Her family was whole and close-knit, and her grandfather had come to stay with them due to sickness. Her desires at this point were not very developed. Her grandfather was dying, and she wanted him to live. What I realized after further writing was that this was not her character. She was more selfish than this, more cynical. And for good reason. She had come from a harder life. She felt stuck and unable to move on in the place she was. She did not count on people to be there for her. The one person that remained in her family was her grandfather. He became the one constant in her life, the father-figure she was denied at birth.

Marcus's role in the story also changed as I wrote, though not as drastically as Rina's. He began more demonic, more antagonistic. He took advantage of Rina's innocence and reveled in causing petty chaos. If anything he has gone through a bit of taming in the current draft. His subversive, trickster

persona has been layered under the centuries he's lived. In the first drafts of my novel, Marcus acted juvenile, like a kid who suddenly had powers and enjoyed only making mischief. I realized that a being that has existed for so long would get bored of living for the sole purpose of causing chaos. Marcus would surely grow out of this after the first century or so. What eventually surfaced was the fact that the way he stayed in the physical realm was also the reason he wanted to stay. Marcus, my perverted ever-loving flirt, falls in love faster than Walt Whitman. The way he differs from other demons who find themselves on the mortal plane is that he genuinely loves people. The bond he creates to an individual to stay on the earth is one of love as well as energy. Whether this ability is supernatural or not, Marcus's penchant for falling in love and enjoying life on Earth is what motivates him to find someone to which he can attach his life over and over. Marcus evolved from a selfish, anarchy-loving juvenile delinquent to a selfish, polyamorous, gender-fluid being whose one want in life is to continue existing in the physical realm. Essentially what he wants is immortality without the risk of being literally burned from the mortal plane.

Tilnu, my adopted son, is all that and a bag of chips. He is immortal without the need to attach himself to anybody. He does not know how he got to be this way, but has somehow become convinced that he is a fallen angel. Since his inception into my story, his character has not changed much in this regard. I call Tilnu adopted because he did not originally come from my brain. His character is actually the creation of a friend who gave me permission to use him

in my stories. Perhaps for this reason, in the first drafts of my story I did not so closely follow Tilnu's character. He remained an unrelenting, self-righteous antagonist, much like Javert in Les Miserables. His moral dilemma and the discovery of his true identity were initially not important to the story.

At this time, I was still thinking of my novel under the title, "Grandfather's Demon". Originally, Rina's grandfather was one focus of the plot, and a thread of the narrative was going to follow his history through the Vietnam War when he met Marcus. The story was going to focus mainly on Rina and Marcus, and their individual strange developments as their relationship progressed. While these narrative arcs are still in place, they have been added to and complicated. For one, instead of focusing on Rina's grandfather's history, we focus on Marcus's. The Vietnam War becomes a footnote in Marcus's movement rather than the central core. Furthermore, all three of our main characters are not only dealing with the developments that come with these new relationships they find themselves in, but also the inherited identities they previously had not known. This is why I decided to change the title to, That Which Binds Us. The new title makes reference to both the physical act of the demons binding themselves to humans, as well as the emotional and relational bonds each character is discovering.

My novel and its characters exist within a series of cycles. They recycle and repeat over the course of years and centuries and millennia. Patterns repeat within individuals and families. Some are necessary, like traditions and stories,

while others can be destructive. Yet within each cycle is the potential for change and differentiation. Early in her section, Rina gets the news that she is pregnant. This event dredges up memories of her own mother, and forces her to rethink the bitterness she has felt over the years now that she is faced with similar circumstances. Her eventual peek into Marcus's memories also gives her further insight into her mother's situation at the time.

It is my hope that the cycles intrinsic to my novel mirror those in life. Traditions, trends, bodily fluids—everything is in a constant state of movement. The entire volume of blood in the human body circulates through the cardiovascular system about once every minute. Count sixty seconds and one cycle is complete. There is no end goal for the blood; it continuously works, picking up oxygen and carrying it throughout the body till death. The value in the blood's existence is its continuance, not in any end product or accomplishment, but in its ability to unfailingly be pushed through our veins. This is how I understand the existence of my characters and myself. Life versus Living. The value is in the verb form of the word. *To Live*. The value in human life is not an end result, it is not one big achievement or some tallied score of virtues and faults taken when you're dead. It is you and me, and everyone else living together and finding things in which to take pleasure and people to enjoy. It's suffering. It's boredom. It's finding lint in your belly button and flicking it at your brother. It's laughing unrepentantly at crude jokes. It is feeling sick with anticipation and anxiety before stepping onto an airplane. It is the continuance of

our own existence for the sake of existing. We complete a cycle and go onto the next.

The Demons in My Head

I grew up in the high desert of Southern California in a small town called Piñon Hills far removed from shopping malls and regular human contact. I was the middle child, the only girl of three children. My parents were loving and a supportive presence in my life. They worked hard running a successful air conditioning and heating mom-and-pop shop. My brothers and I were close—unless Legos or dirt-clods were involved. We regularly went to war with each other, playing out battles within the hallway of our house or in the makeshift forts we built in the Juniper trees outside. It was a good childhood, absent of the dramas of suburbia or intercity neighborhoods. However, it fostered a tolerance, maybe even a preference, for isolation.

While my brothers played video games, I liked to read. I liked to read in my room, lying in bed or sitting at my desk. I liked to read in the green and white chair that sat by the window in our living room. I liked to read on the porch in the backyard that looked out over the rest of the desert. I liked to read outside on top of my two dogs' houses while they tried to lick my hands and legs. I liked to read under the 138 bridge that went over the dry wash running down from the mountains. I liked to read in the car on our way to church, to the store, to Laughlin for family vacations, and down to Rancho Cucamonga to visit my mom's

sisters and brothers. In high school, I developed reading obsessions and found every book of a given author I could get my hands on.

The first major obsession I had was with Diana Wynne Jones. While other fantasy novels, such as Harry Potter or Lord of the Rings, make magic feel unattainable in their own worlds, Jones's stories keep magic close to a possible reality. Magic is something intrinsic to the world; it exists for both those with supernatural abilities and without. Jones was also amazing at writing families and capturing the naïve wisdom of children. She wrote love and satisfying endings without being blind to the realities of a "happily ever after." One of her novels, The Ogre Downstairs, follows the two children of a woman remarrying. The children's perception of their new stepfather and step-siblings is forced to change from a Cinderella-type victimized sensibility to the understanding that love is shown in different ways. The man who began in the children's minds as an "ogre" is realized as a true father figure in the end. Jones's style fully occupies the point of view of her protagonists to the point that their discoveries become the reader's. This is something that, as a writer, I have come to envy and attempt to capture in my own writing. My favorite novels of hers are Howl's Moving Castle, The Dark Lord of Derkholm, and The Merlin Conspiracy.

When I got into college, I stumbled upon the graphic novel series, The Sandman by Neil Gaiman, which launched me into my next obsession. After the graphic novels, I read Anansi Boys, Neverwhere, and American Gods. Gaiman, like Diana Wynne Jones, has the ability to spin a story full of magic yet keep it in

the real, in a world both recognizable and intoxicating. His characters, though fantastic and insane, are believable, even haunting in how grounded they are in the familiar. They are people I know, people I feel as though I have caught glimpses of in real life. For this reason, the fear and dread I feel when the witch in The Ocean at the End of the Lane seduces a little boy's father is much more palpable. Gaiman does not waste time explaining away the feasibility or mechanics of the universe or characters that inhabit it. He simply writes them. He pulls the gods down to earth and has shown me that even they require coping methods for getting through life. He places the society of the magical, the realm of the gods just out of sight, yet within reach of our reality. This is something I try to create in my own novel, a sense of the familiar world imbued with the fantastic. I also have to admit that the dynamic between Rina and Marcus is partly reminiscent of that between Shadow and Mr. Wednesday in American Gods.

While Jones and Gaiman have nurtured my taste for fantasy and horror, Herman Hesse satiates me on a more philosophical level. I first read Siddhartha my senior year of high school. It was a time when I was trying to make sense of my lackluster attitude towards my Catholic faith and religion in general. The short novel, a fictional account of the life of Buddha, put into words the questions and sentiments I had been hiding in the back of my mind during the arduous sacrament of Confirmation—a necessary series of classes to attain full participation in the Catholic church. The story chronicles the life of a man, not a god or prophet, just a man who finds that there is no one set path to

enlightenment. Every person's journey is different, but equally important. He realizes that his life is connected to everything and everyone. Hesse is also the one responsible for instilling in me the idea that the world works in cycles. His other novels, Demian and Gertrude, while not as spiritual, speak to matters of aesthetics and art and the nature of good and evil. Demian especially demonstrates the implacable restlessness that takes hold of many young adults on the cusp of self-awareness and total independence. The title character, Max Demian promotes open-mindedness and free-thinking, and he challenges our main character, Emil Sinclair, to question everything he is taught and to form his own opinions regardless of whether they follow convention.

This challenge is something I have since adopted for myself. When my family moved from the far-removed house in Piñon Hills to the far-removed house in Apple Valley, my practice of Catholicism stayed behind. I could no longer pretend to believe in the church or in heaven or in a god like the one they preached. I no longer cared about finding a paradise after this life. I decided my energy was better put to creating my own paradise here on earth and finding what made me happy to be alive.

More recent literary influences include Haruki Murakami and Gayle Brandeis. Both write with an abandon that makes nothing off-limits in their work. I first read Murakami's novel The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle when I started the M.F.A. program at California State University of San Bernardino. Having earned a minor in Japanese as an undergrad and completed a short study abroad

program at Hakuoh University in Tochigi, I had developed an interest in Japanese literature. Murakami's narrative and style was different from anything I had ever read. It was like stepping into someone else's way of thinking. His stories are largely movements of the mind. They are contemplative and take their time with each moment. Images and actions within the novel are repeated, but with each repetition they accomplish different things. In Murakami, like Hesse, I have found a writer who appreciates the existence of cycles in storytelling. My experiences in Japan and my desire to someday join in that literary culture have prompted me to include the country as one of the settings of my novel.

I began reading the works of Gayle Brandeis after she gave a reading here at Cal State. I was enamored with her down-to-earth characters handling extraordinary situations. The first novel of hers I read was Delta Girls, which begins with the narratives of two lives that eventually come together. The way in which the two threads are interwoven astounds me, and when it is revealed they belong to the same woman, it is simultaneously unexpected yet completely perfect. This revelation demonstrates the fluidity with which identity can work, and shows the resilience and beauty of which a woman is capable. Her way with descriptions also encourages me to not shy away from writing the nitty-gritty details of the human body.

The last two influences I will name are Jhonen Vasquez and Marjane Satrapi, graphic artists as well as writers. Jhonen Vasquez's work on the

television series Invader Zim is what initially peaked my interest in his art, but it was his wildly violent graphic novel, Johnny the Homicidal Maniac that made me a dedicated follower. Along with writing and reading, I've always loved drawing. As a teenager, Vasquez's drawing style began influencing my own—sharp angles and an acute attention to detail that could render any scene grotesque. The sketchy quality of the lines also appealed to my own aesthetics of drawings that showed the process lines and had a work-in-progress type of feel. Vasquez's use of over the top violence and gore is also somewhat reminiscent in parts of Tilnu's section. Marjane Satrapi, though a more recent influence than Vasquez, has demonstrated to me the weight a comic can hold as a serious piece of literature. Her autobiographical comic, Persepolis gives a personal narrative of what it was like growing up in the Middle East when Islamic law came into effect. On an artistic level, both graphic and written, her autobiography as well as her illustrated story, The Sigh, demonstrate a great skill for conjuring a world and culture not familiar to everyone. Her sentences and drawings are relatively simple and make use of every word, every line in a way that is meaningful. Though I've always drawn for my own sake, if I were to incorporate graphic art into my writing as illustrations I would try to make the work as beautiful and individual as hers.

For me, writing began as a way to escape. My favorite books, as evident from the influences listed above, were those that included characters who face

seemingly insurmountable challenges. They are pulled out of their familiar worlds and dropped in places where magic is real and there is adventure.

Feeling alone in my desert as a kid, I wanted that.

The more I read about these other children in these other worlds doing amazing things, fighting against monsters and nightmares, using their cleverness and intelligence to overcome trials, the more I started to wonder if I could do the same. I wondered if I could be brave.

This is what writing gave me as a child; it provided a means of leaving the safety of my own life. It allowed me to imagine and play out situations where I was the one being challenged, and I only had myself on which to rely.

When I took my first creative writing classes in college, my writing began to shift from personal fantasy fulfillment. I tried to curb my attention to the words and structure of the story. I wanted to write “good.” Really, what ended up happening was, instead of writing in my own voice about things I was passionate about, I wrote about things I thought were the right things to write about. Which was stupid. It made writing into a chore, and for a while there was a schism between writing for fun and writing for school.

The project I was writing for fun was a collaborative series of novels with a friend from high school—the same friend who gave me Tilnu. Together we wrote three almost completed stories, each story being about 80,000 words in length. Altogether, that added up to almost 240,000 words—a pretty hefty amount of work for a couple of years. My output of stories written for the creative writing

classes during that time could not even remotely compare to this. It took me two years in college to realize that I needed to merge the two ideals and make what I had to write for essays and creative writing class what I wanted to write.

This was when I realized there is a power in storytelling, an energy that can be manifested when there is genuine passion and interest put into the words. I stopped trying to write a certain way and began exploring what my real voice sounded like. This exploration felt odd to say the least, like finding a toy I hadn't seen in years, or stumbling over pictures of myself I didn't remember being taken. I was seeing myself from an objective view for the first time. I tried to make myself interested in everything I wrote, whether it was a short story about a girl facing Death, or a linguistic analysis of footing shifts in a family interaction.

That doesn't mean I'm not often prey to writer's block or periods of stagnation. I've probably become too fond of wine in the last year, and the employees at my local Starbucks are getting too familiar with my face. Procrastination and self-doubt are my constant companions. But I grab hold of my Venti White Chocolate Mocha with a double-shot of espresso and power on.

The most resonant themes in my novel are the ones I never intended to write. Much like my characters, these themes began welling up seemingly of their own volition. Loneliness and isolation are central to almost every character because they are something I've had to deal with in my own life. This wasn't a physical loneliness brought on by the abandonment or loss of my family, like Rina, nor was it a self-imposed isolation in response to the delusion that I needed

to redeem myself in the eyes of God. This loneliness is something that I think everyone battles. It's part of the human condition, a never-ending cycle of people being afraid to fully expose themselves—body, mind, and soul—to another. It's both a fear of rejection and a fear of acceptance.

Marcus, formerly and inherently known to me as Marchosias, was the entity through which I exposed myself to myself. In my writing, he started as a reluctant demonic partner to a little girl, became an antagonistic friend to a teenager, a realized lover to a young woman, and has now reached the status of father, savior and force of nature. He was a coping mechanism when I needed someone always there, a secret that existed solely for me.

Now I am grown, and I can voice my loneliness without fear. I understand that no demon or lover or friend will be able to take my vulnerabilities away. But these days, I don't want them to go away.

They are mine to keep. Mine to own. Mine to write about.

My desire to move away from a state of loneliness and self-doubt is part of what defines me.

These are my demons, and I do with them as I will.

WORKS CITED

"demon, n. (and adj.)." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, March 2015. Web.
14 May 2015.

APPENDIX A
THAT WHICH BINDS US