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Whalen Symposium

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*These Shapeless Rooms*

When I began working on my Senior Project, I knew that I wanted to write about my familial relationships and history and how I have and continue to struggle figuring out who I am by looking at where I came from. I wanted to write about relatable experiences and touch on the themes of marriage, love, loss, divorce, religion, death, and absence. I wanted to write something that would be shareable and felt. By sharing my experiences, I wanted that to be a kind of larger invitation to openness and a rejection of the kind of silent, private suffering that I have consistently witnessed members of my family subscribe to.

The form of the piece is experimental because the moments are not chronological and some of them at first seemed to have very little connection with each other, while some pieces felt much more like they should go together. I had difficulty envisioning how this would look as a cohesive piece since I put most of my efforts at first towards generating material and figuring out what exactly I wanted to write about and how. As I progressed, I started to imagine the individual pieces like images. This forced me to visualize what moment I was trying to capture and why it was important through trying to pinpoint small details and getting them to the page. A goal that I had was to refrain from explaining too, but I think that the accumulation of these small details in each piece started to say something through the scenes I was trying to capture.

The form matched content as I was trying to I think understand something about myself and my familial relationships, my parent's divorce, my relationship to my father, and my own ideas about love. The pieces feel isolated from each other and yet still connected and I think offer

only small glimpses into these moments, just enough to get an idea and then moving onto something completely different. This acknowledges that we never can have access to the “full-view” or the whole story. We try to understand by fitting these fragments of memory together to make a larger story and call that some kind of “truth.”

Descriptions of rooms and spaces became very important to the feeling of the piece, coming to represent my navigation of identity through the family. Each space had a distinct purpose and feel, some were welcoming and some were not, some were open, some private. These spaces ended speak to my exploration of memories and my attempts at understanding. This process can feel like walking down unfamiliar, dark hallways, looking for the light switches, which is why it made sense to name the piece “These Shapeless Rooms.” I hope that my work is something that can connect people and open up conversations rather than shut them down, something that I think everyone struggles with and relates to especially in the context of close relationships.