



TEXAS A&M ENGLISH DEPARTMENT

THE ENGLISH AGGIE

**DECEMBER 2021
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Gwynn Worbington on her Debut | Student Poetry | Book Recommendations

Bearing Her Old Soul

Gwynn Worbington, Class of 2024, on her debut, *Old Soul, Wilder Spirit*



Gwynn Worbington is not your typical sophomore English major. She recently published her debut work—a stunning collection of coming-of-age poetry—at twenty-four years old. Worbington began reading and studying poetry at a very early age. She was homeschooled for the entirety of her education prior to attending Texas A&M University, and her parents

allowed her to have a large amount of input in her education. Her mother introduced her to poetry, and Worbington read Frost, Poe, Whitman, and others; however, it was Emily Dickinson who truly resonated with her. She was fascinated with the biography of Dickinson in her poetry collection and became “fixated with the idea of this woman whose words had gone unnoticed and unrecognized for such a long time.” In a way, she saw herself in Dickinson. Both lived a rather secluded life yet wrote passionately and vividly about human experiences. Worbington says that this created “a very immediate connection that really made poetry very real” to her at a young age.

While she has always loved literature and learning, Worbington has not always loved school. At fifteen, she first began taking dual-credit classes and felt a disconnect between her education and her life goals. As a teenager, she thought that writers didn’t need or benefit from a degree. As she got older and graduated high school, she decided to try writing first and then consider a four-year university. She wrote and designed *Old Soul, Wilder Spirit* and pursued publication. After completing that process, Worbington felt a sense of surety in her decision to pursue a writing career. By this time, she had also decided that she still had more to learn. This decision led her to Texas A&M University, and her experience has been very different from her initial dual-credit experience. She loves her current school experience and “definitely feel[s] like pursuing an English degree so far has been extremely beneficial.”

***“old soul, wilder spirit
they didn’t come for free”***

Dr. Elizabeth Robinson’s ENGL 343 Fairy Tales in the English Tradition has been especially beneficial. In addition to her love of poetry, Worbington has also expressed an early love of words in the form of stories. As long as she can remember, she has been telling stories, from writing skits for her siblings and cousins to transcribing her favorite Disney films word by word. She has always been absolutely “enamored with stories and words.” Dr. Robinson’s class allows her to continue to explore that love. Worbington has taken many English classes throughout her life, but she has never taken another class so fun or enjoyable. She contributes a lot of this to Dr. Robinson; her passion and love for the material really shines through. Knowledgeable professors are a large part of why Worbington decided to pursue higher education. She said, “I think there’s really only so much research you can do on your own and having people like Dr. Robinson to guide and direct, it’s huge.” Worbington has thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to explore her own interests, such as researching *Peter Pan* for her research paper. Class discussions have a similar freedom, which reminds Worbington of being homeschooled. Students can share their ideas and interpretations about tales without the fear of being disregarded. Worbington loves that “there’s room to discuss and go down some rabbit trails and say well maybe what if we did look at it like this?” Fairy tales warrant these deep discussions because they are so deeply connected to the human experience. The tales “track the horror of growing up at times and the feeling that everything is much bigger and much grander than maybe it really is as an adult.” Worbington explores this in her book, which is ultimately a coming-of-age story about a young woman finding her identity. She asked herself “enormous and life-defining questions” about who she is as a daughter, sister, writer, lover and how her many identities can coexist. The book’s final poem says that her “old soul, wilder spirit, they didn’t come for free.” Sacrifices have been necessary to discover her identity and pursue her writing career.

Like Gwynn Worbington, her publication process was also not typical. What is now *Old Soul, Wilder Spirit* originally began as her personal journal entries. When she realized that the entries were actually poems and decided to construct a poetry book, she knew that she wanted to create something that would be accessible. She “didn’t want it to be difficult or unapproachable just for the sake of it being ‘poetry,’ but [she] also didn’t want to feel like [she] was cutting any sort of artistic corners either.” This desire led to a beautiful final product that, despite taking time and hard work, “came together very naturally.”

“It came together so naturally. It just sort of fell into place.”

The oddest thing about her publication process is, perhaps, that she was living with her publisher, Rebecca Dias, while working on the project. *Old Soul, Wilder Spirit* was published by Paper and Seed, an indie-hybrid publishing company solely run by Dias. It was Dias who suggested that she include her illustrations in the book. Worbington was hesitant at first because she did not consciously intend for her artwork to correspond to her poems; however, after examining the poems and the illustrations side by side, the connection was obvious. She is grateful for Dias’s encouragement and support during what “was really a fascinating process and a unique experience that most writers probably don’t have.”

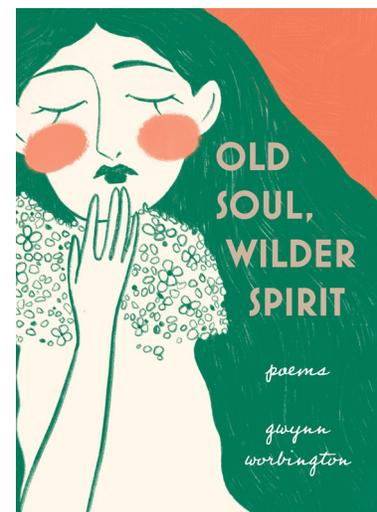
“It seems to have it’s feet in two worlds, which is very much how I felt growing up.”

The experience that Worbington writes about in her collection, however, is easily recognizable. *Old Soul, Wilder Spirit* is very much a coming-of-age story, and there is a familiarity in the messy process of growing up. One of her favorite parts of the book is that “it seems to have its feet in two worlds, which is very much how [she] felt growing up.” Worbington felt like a contradiction as both a rural homeschooled girl and also someone harboring aspirations of literary greatness. She describes these formative years through comparisons to folk tales, fairy tales, and Greek myths, which were her “life vest” as she navigated childhood and adolescence. She grew up with the *D’Aulaires’ Book of Greek Myths*, and the images of iconic figures like Diana, Icarus, and Circe have remained with her through the years and can be found in her poetry as a way to interpret her own experiences. It may seem bold to compare her ‘ordinary’ life to great Greek myths, but Worbington explains that “it’s just life; it’s not an epic. It’s not a tragedy; it’s just my life. And I think at the end of the day, the Greeks were just writing about life, too.”



Purchase a paperback copy of Worbington’s *Old Soul, Wilder Spirit* on [Amazon](#).

Purchase an ebook also on [Amazon](#).



Purchase the handmade, special edition with color illustrations of Worbington’s *Old Soul, Wilder Spirit* on Etsy at [SummersEndArt](#).

Read the full article and find out what’s next for Worbington on [The English Aggie Blog](#).

Maps

Poem by Dafne Martinez, Class of 2025

My dad used to
Hold up his palms in front of me.

He would lay both hands flat
Where they would meet the curiosity
In my eyes.

He would press them next to each other,
And I'd watch as both palms formed vast plains of land.
And when he cupped them,
I'd watch the depressions of his creases
Form paths he once walked on.
Paths he dug into roads.

Roads with dried cement.
Where his footprints tattooed
The skin of the ground
Because the impatience to walk further
Ran past the safety of waiting for the past to dry.

And when the sun licked the thin veins in his pale skin
I could see the flow of the rivers.

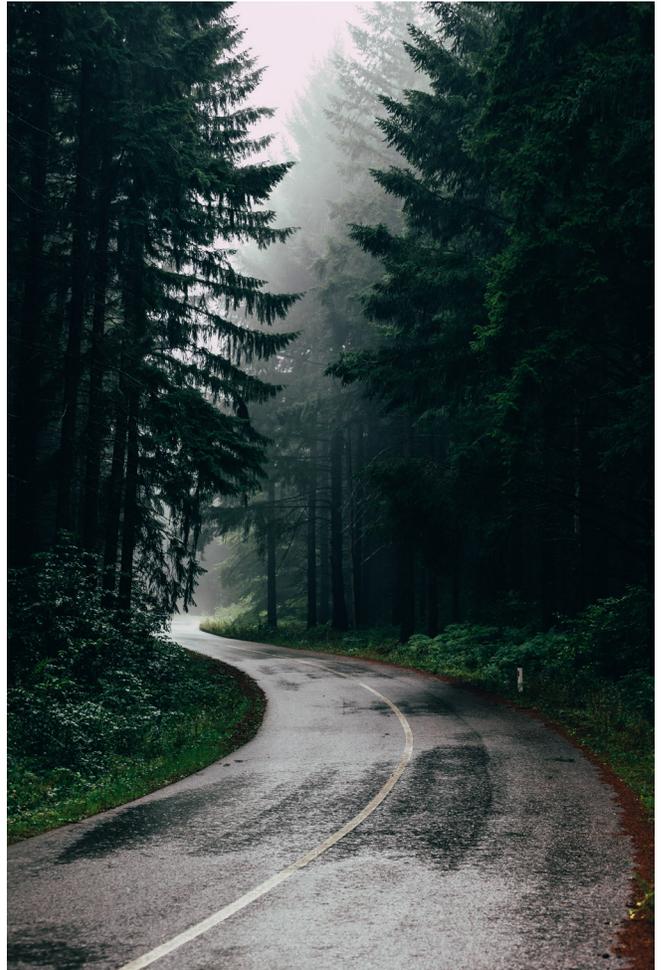
My dad--he used to say:
"We all carry a map of our lives in our hands."

But soon after my parents divorced
My dad left the house.

Packed the map with him.
Made me realize, for the first time,
That despite the engravings,
Maps can also be inaccurate.

Sometimes I look at my own palms
And see the ghost of his map
Draw itself in the thin sheet of my skin.

Still, my eyes search my palms
For his dry footprints at the edge of my map.





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Congrats!

TO THE NEW GRADS

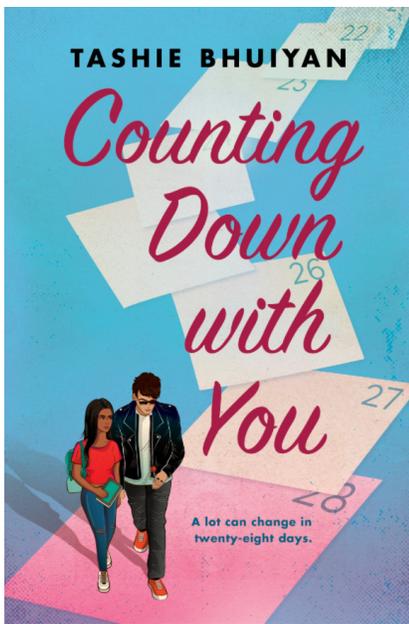
Good luck on your new journey!
From the Texas A&M English Department

Books for the Break

Recommendations from the Intern

Best of 2021

Counting Down With You
By Tashie Bhuiyan



Counting Down With You is a young adult romance by Tashie Bhuiyan. English students can likely relate to the main character's struggle to reconcile her love of English with other people's expectations. Karina is restricted by her parents' strict rules and high expectations, but when they leave the country for a whole month, she agrees to a fake relationship with the mysterious Ace Clyde. Will she be able to go back to her old life when her parents return?

Immersive Read

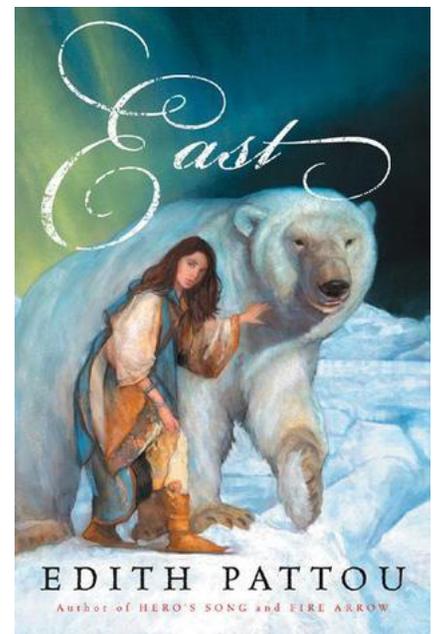
Caraval
By Stephanie Garber



Caraval is the first novel in a young adult fantasy trilogy by Stephanie Garber. It's an immersive read that will capture readers in the magic and worldbuilding. Scarlett and her sister Tella have finally been invited to the yearly Caraval performance. They decide to attend to escape Scarlett's arranged marriage and their cruel father. After Tella is kidnapped, Scarlett must play and win the game to save her. Scarlett is immersed in the magic, romance, and pain—but how much of it is real?

Winter Read

East
By Edith Pattou



East is a middle grade fairy tale retelling of the traditional "East of the Sun and West of the Moon" tale. The novel by Edith Pattou is fast-paced and told from different perspectives. The snowy setting makes this book a perfect winter read. Rose leaves home when a white bear appears and promises her family good health and riches to support themselves—if Rose leaves with him. Together, Rose and the White Bear begin a journey full of adventure, romance, and the breaking of a curse.

Science Fiction and Fantasy Creative Writing Contest

Attention:

Submit your speculative fiction piece for a chance to perform your piece at a public reading and win cash prizes!
All pieces of speculative fiction are accepted.

You must be a currently enrolled Texas A&M undergraduate student to submit.
Submission word limit is 3000 words.

Submission Link:
<https://bit.ly/SciFiContest22>

Submission Deadline:
February 14, 2022

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