

THE FACEBOOK SONNET

Welcome to the endless high-school
Reunion. Welcome to past friends
And lovers, however kind or cruel.
Let's undervalue and unmend

The present. Why can't we pretend
Every stage of life is the same?
Let's exhume, resume, and extend
Childhood. Let's all play the games

That occupy the young. Let fame
And shame intertwine. Let one's search
For God become public domain.
Let church.com become our church.

Let's sign up, sign in, and confess
Here at the altar of loneliness.

—*Sherman Alexie*

thing," Larsen said, and, to prove his point, he took a pen and, like a surgeon with a lancet, attended to Merida's face. "She's too sad. Let's make her more angry." With a decisive flourish, he added a harder, straighter line to the eye and the brow, and bingo: she looked like thunder, and immediately twice as Scottish. "The story starts telling you what it wants to become," Larsen explained—a strange and graceful concept that I have heard on the lips of novelists, possessed by their own tales, but seldom from the makers of films. Larsen was eager to be led on, like Merida, by his own light. As for me, I wanted to know only one thing: was the cottage a safe haven, or a trap?

What needs to be emphasized is that none of this exists. Sure, Larsen exists, a genial and bearish figure in a woollen cap. The animators exist. Pixar exists. But the storyboard? It's not there. What Larsen drew on was a digital sketch pad, and he held an electronic pen. There was no board. Likewise, the flip book is not a sheaf of whispering pages that you leaf through at speed but a parade of digitized frames which proceeds at the poke of a button. Everything that you see, when you view a Pixar movie, is what an empiricist philosopher of the eighteenth century would call an impression. It

was born and cradled in the mind of a computer, and there it lived and grew. When Robert Anderson, the director of photography on "Brave," took me through the same sequence with Merida, and discussed camera angles, we entered into a wonkish discussion of focal lengths on the lenses available to him. ("On 'Wall-E,' they shot with a very narrow depth of field, racking the focus like crazy," Anderson said.) But there are no lenses, or none that you can hold in your palm. They are purely options on a toolbar, and you scroll between them. To someone from the outside world, we must have sounded like Alice and the White King, talking about an empty road. "To be able to see Nobody! And at that distance, too!" the King remarks.

This looking-glass sensation was redoubled as I spoke to Sharon Calahan, the queen of lighting, who has been at Pixar for nearly seventeen years. She was the director of photography of "A Bug's Life," back when everyone was struggling to pin down, on a computer, precisely how the sun shines through greenery. (As Lee Unkrich recalls, "She'd only go home to do her laundry.") She held the same position on "Cars 2," the latest Pixar release, which comes out on June 24th. To demonstrate the effects of her work, she

brought up, onscreen, before-and-after shots from the new film. "We think of it as normal moviemaking," she said, sounding like an astronaut explaining that, yes, he *does* prefer to eat lunch out of a tube. You wouldn't expect a story about cars to open at sea, but this one does, with a boat approaching an oil rig, and it threw up instant challenges. "We had to hand-plant twenty-two hundred industrial lights on this oil platform: thousands of individual lights that we've added one at a time," Calahan said. She switched them on, with a click, and the platform bloomed from an illustration into a place. For her next trick, she showed me an elevator scene, in a museum. "I wanted to do a glowing, underlit floor in the elevator," she confessed.

"Why?"

"Because it looks cool."

That was the most clarifying moment of my time at Pixar. Nobody can resist the tidal pull of that aesthetic: it looks cool. I felt it in the character-modelling department, where Andrew H. Schmidt, the senior modeller on "Cars 2," talked about Lightning McQueen, the sporty leading vehicle from "Cars," who returns for the new installment. This time, Schmidt said, "McQueen looked kind of dorky up against the international cars—very ugly, very Nascar—so I made him a little bit sexier." That meant reconfiguring the geometric net of points—the spots where lines converge onscreen—which is the modeller's essential tool. Schmidt presented a simple sketch of a car, consisting of around two hundred points. And how many would you need, say, for a complete McQueen? "Around a hundred and fifty thousand," Schmidt said. He had also played God with Holley Shiftwell, a luscious new car, to whom he had assigned, he said proudly, "female hips." Sharon Calahan took over: "We really blinged out her headlights, so it looks like she's wearing jewelry." The outcome was a joy to Emily Mortimer, who provided Holley with her purring voice. "I will never look so glamorous again," Mortimer told me. In animated films, she said, with a sigh of relief, "there's no hair to worry about."

Well, not for her. There are people