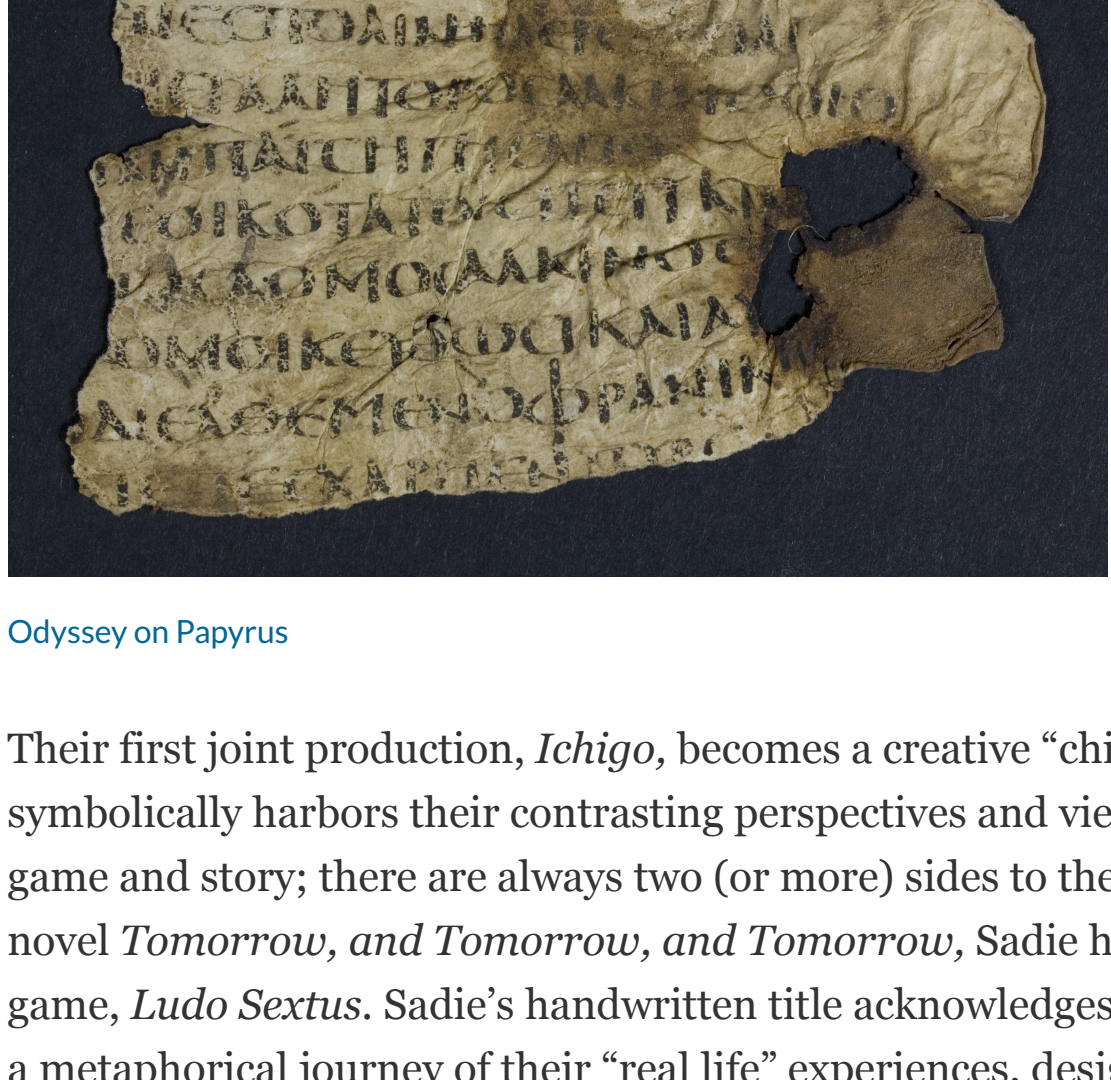


# Tomorrow's Odyssey

Love, Scars, and Change



Odyssey on Papyrus

Their first joint production, *Ichigo*, becomes a creative “child” throughout the novel. *Both Sides* symbolically harbors their contrasting perspectives and views channeled into a single experience, game and story; there are always two (or more) sides to the same story. At the end of the novel *Tomorrow*, and *Tomorrow*, Sadie hands Sam her budding idea of their next game, *Ludo Sextus*. Sadie’s handwritten title acknowledges the previous game they shared, *Pioneers*, a metaphorical journey of their “real life” experiences, designed and catered specifically for their relationship. In that game, Sam and Sadie marry and have a son called Ludo Quintus. *Ludo Sextus* thus forecasts the potential fruit of a new journey: a future collaboration. Their games, like scars, mark a specific moment in time in their relationship; however, Sam and Sadie’s love, like an apple growing from flower to fruit, matures and changes. In the way the “freight should be proportioned to the groove” in Emily Dickinson’s poem, Sam and Sadie fit proportionally together when it comes to playing, creating, and supporting their relationship. Is the end of *Tomorrow*, and *Tomorrow*, and *Tomorrow* only the beginning of their new odyssey?

## Ichigo

Sam and Sadie’s creative enterprise, *Ichigo*, features a main character, whose long and difficult journey home is expressed in his physical changes. Ichigo is three at the start of the journey, and upon his return home, he is ten. This characteristic was a challenging feature to portray. It was also a time consuming task, yet fundamental for both creators: “Sadie and Sam wanted Ichigo’s journey to be reflected in their character. Ichigo ages and takes the damage inflicted by the narrative and time itself, and by the end of the story, when they finally make it home, after about seven years away, they are unrecognizable to their family” (104). Sam and Sadie agree upon this unusual design feature, which highlights the value they see in the manifestation of *their lived* experiences on *their bodies*. This decision evidences how Sam and Sadie understood the inevitable dynamic of time and change. Odysseus also returns to Ithaca as an unrecognizable beggar and their nurse identifies him because she recognizes a scar on his knee. His scar speaks about the man who left, but also about the one returning. Regardless of where he had been, his scar immortalized a time in his life, and in some ways, preserved the memory as well as the moment in time. Odysseus’ scar travels with him on his journey and now anchors him to the present.

Sam and Sadie, like Ichigo and Odysseus, also change through the novel. After their intense hard work on *Ichigo*, Sam and Sadie feel satisfied and Sadie says to Sam, “No matter what happens, thank you for making me do this. I love you, Sam” (105). This is the first time Sadie tells Sam that she loves him and it is not until the end of the novel—sixteen years after Sadie first says it—that Sam says “I love you, Sadie” (397) back to her. This book-end gesture, where it takes nearly as long as it took Odysseus to travel back to Ithaca for Sam to respond to Sadie (it is in Book XVI of the *Odyssey* that Odysseus is finally reunited with his son, Telemachus), reflects their relationship’s endurance through time, multiple scars and inevitable change. When they reunite to revisit the topic of making *Ichigo III*, it will have been sixteen years since they made the first *Ichigo*. It takes this many years for Sam and Sadie to mutually acknowledge that they love each other verbally. Ichigo, the character as much as the game, epitomizes their relationship and its journey.

Sam and Sadie undergo significant changes throughout the novel and they privately acknowledge their changes and in time return to each other even when they have drifted apart. Their deep understanding of each other is reflected in their detailed physical descriptions of the other. Throughout the novel they “study” each other as their changes are perceived through time. An example of their deep love is shown in the text through the unspoken details that they identify of each other. They both learned more about each other by carefully observing themselves. For example, “Sam studied Sadie. He was an expert in her moods and colors” and “She studied Sam’s moon face, which was so familiar to her. It was almost like looking at herself, but through a magical mirror that allowed her to see her whole life” (339-140).

Through these careful observations, they also notice and acknowledge their changes. Sam had just learned about Sadie and Marx’s relationship when they are at the quixotic *Hearst Castle*. “Sadie studied Sam. The sun had changed angles in the time they’d been standing there, and she could see him again. He was twenty-seven and he had a mustache, but whenever she allowed herself to think of him as the kid from the hospital, her heart could not help but soften for him” (257). At this point in the novel they have grown apart and Sadie is now dating their mutual friend Marx. As evidenced in Sadie’s observations of Sam, he

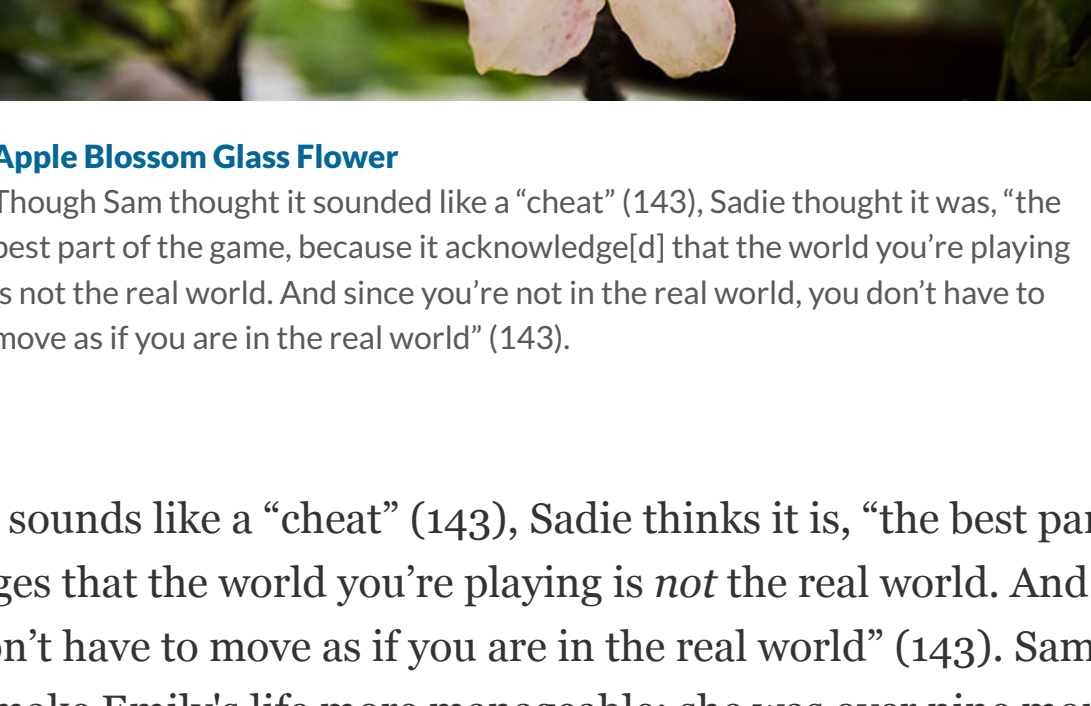
has already physically changed, but on that day he furthers his change by cutting off his curly hair. In appearance, he becomes unrecognizable to Sadie, just like Ichigo and Odysseus who both become unrecognizable upon their return home. Sam and Sadie’s deep understanding of each other, as well as their acceptance and forgiveness through time is their homecoming.

While Sam and Sadie’s powerful connection is evident from the beginning, their relationship ebbs and flows and they rift apart many times. They each experienced their individual mishaps. At the point when they are arguing about the lack of success of *Both Sides* (a metaphorical reflection of their inability to see and understand their different perspectives), as well as Sadie’s anger towards Sam for having sent her to Dov to get Ulysses to make *Ichigo*, Sadie discloses for the first time that she had an abortion (at the very beginning of the novel), “Sam looked at her outstretched **hand**, which he knew as well as any hand except his own—the precise pattern of the lines that made up knuckles, the particular creamy olive hue of her skin, her dilate wrist, pinkish, with a penumbral callus that must have come from Dov, the white gold bracelet she wore that he knew had been a gift from Freda on her twelfth birthday...*Tell me I don’t know you when I could draw both sides of this hand, your hand, from memory*” (210). This argument and their inability to see life from a perspective other than their own, reflects a climactic point in the novel: their relationship enters a period of silence and miscommunication. Nonetheless, they each express reverence towards their changing bodies and personas. With his knowledge of Sadie, Sam built the world of *Pioneers*; the game was filled with details that connected them.

## Pioneers

From the moment Sam and Sadie reconnect in Cambridge at the beginning of the novel, and Sam yells out to her, “SADIE MIRANDA GREEN! YOU HAVE DIED OF DYSENTRY!” (6) Sadie’s death is forecasted. While the reference draws from their past, it also stretches into the future. In time, Sadie recognizes the therapeutic importance that *Pioneers* held in her recovery from Marx’s death and possible postpartum depression. Sadie’s character in the game calls herself Emily (after Emily Dickinson) and her death in *Pioneers* acknowledges the passing of her current state of depression and grief, which is also emphasized by the end of her participation in the game. It is as if Sadie’s new “Tomorrow” starts in the final section of the book: her conversation with Dov at the tree-restaurant, reminiscent of Odysseus’ return to his tree bed frame; her return to MIT as a professor, in-lieu of the person who once held so much power over her, similar to Odysseus’ return to his place as rightful place as king after having been held captive, turned into a beggar, and many other transformations through his long journey; and her reconnection with Sam, her emotional homecoming, just as Odysseus reconnects with Penelope.

One of those details was when Dr. Daedalus, who had previously proposed to Emily to get married, showed up at Emily’s shop to present her with her new invention, she “did not mention the proposal. ‘I’ve made something for you, Em,’ Daedalus said. ‘I call it the Xyzzy portal. It’s to help you travel through Friendship’” (354). Sadie had first told Sam about the Xyzzy command when she was describing her idea for *Both Sides*. At the time she summarizes her full imagination to this particular command by saying “you can magically switch between two places” (143).



Apple Blossom Glass Flower

Though Sam thought it sounded like a “cheat” (143), Sadie thought it was, “the best part of the game, because it acknowledge[d] that the world you’re playing is not the real world. And since you’re not in the real world, you don’t have to move as if you are in the real world” (143).

Though Sam thinks it sounds like a “cheat” (143), Sadie thinks it is, “the best part of the game, because it acknowledges that the world you’re playing is *not* the real world. And since you’re not in the real world, you don’t have to move as if you are in the real world” (143). Sam thus creates this portal in *Pioneers* to make Emily’s life more manageable: she was over nine months pregnant and living by herself. In the “real world” Sadie was also living alone and either pregnant or with a newborn and was also grieving the loss of her partner Marx. The Xyzzy portal is a metaphor of what the game *Pioneers* was for Sadie during the time after Marx’s death. Sam creates a way for her to toggle back and forth between her real world and the game world. Their “failed” attempt of maximizing Xyzzy’s potential with *Both Sides* was finally realized in the game *Pioneers*. Sadie later recognizes the profound impact this experience had for her, understanding that it was thanks to *Pioneers* that she was able to move forward from her grief and depression. Upon their reencounter at the end of the novel, she finally shares with Sam her experience with *Pioneers*, “[A]fter *Pioneers*, I wasn’t able to feel quite as terrible about things. The main thing it made me feel was not quite so alone. I don’t think I’ve ever properly thanked you” (395). Sam caters the creation of *Pioneers* specifically to Sadie and to her needs, based on his keen observation and understanding of her. Just like the Xyzzy portal within *Pioneers*, *Pioneers* as a whole served as a portal in itself for Sadie to toggle to a place where time itself was frozen and flowed differently, a place where she could heal.

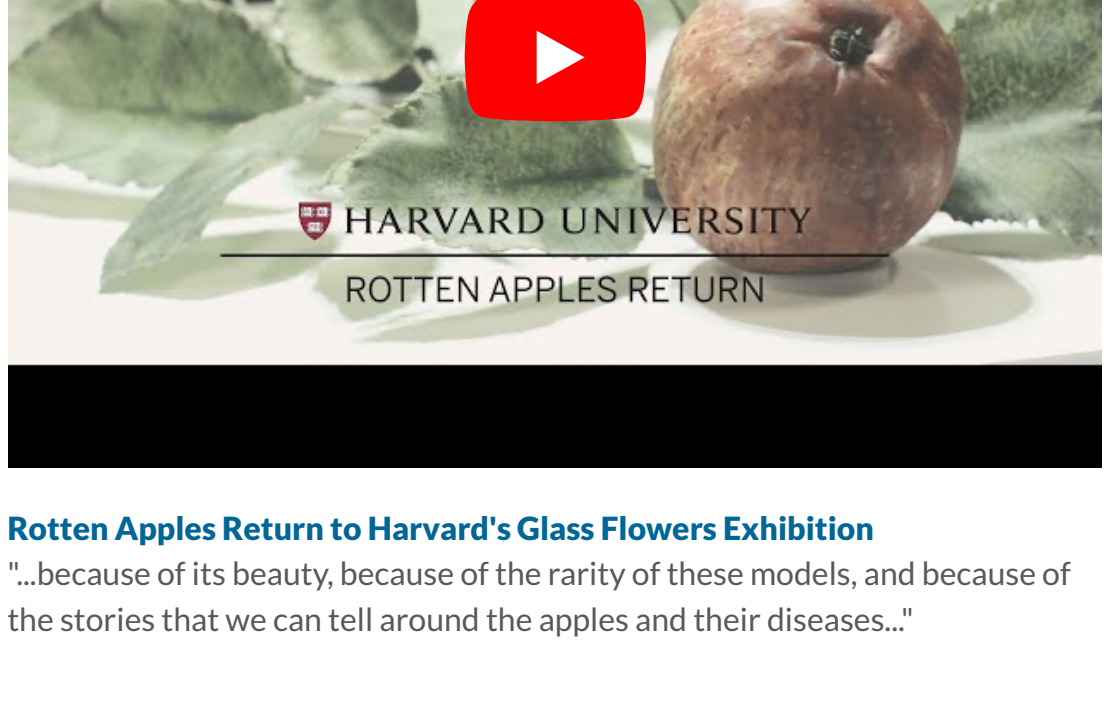
Before Sadie was able to recognize the healing power of *Pioneers*, Dov highlighted it in a conversation with her: “So, Sam builds an MMORPG to lure one gamer? Brilliant. Crazy, but brilliant” (370). And at the end of this final encounter between Dov and Sadie, Dov tells Sadie that he may have “no idea what women want ... But I must tell you. To build a world for someone seems a romantic thing from where I stand” (374). This is not the moment when Sadie reconnects with Sam, but this conversation continues her healing because Dov helps Sadie see Sam’s perspective and embrace both sides of their relationship. Sam evidently cares for her. Thanks to this conversation Sadie also returns to Cambridge as a professor at MIT, a physical return to where Sadie and Sam first created *Ichigo*.

Sam does not say “I love you” because he feels there should be something better than just those words; Sam feels their relationship goes beyond words. For example, his sincere interest in her creativity and their collaborations is a way in which he shows his love for her, “I love hearing your ideas. That’s my favorite thing in the world” (138). For Sam, actions mean much more than words. This is also evidenced in his creation of *Pioneers*. As Dr. Daedalus, Emily Marks’ wife, Sam says “I miss you Sadie, I want to be in your life... A mistake I have made in the past. There is no purity to bearing pain alone” (361), but Sam cannot get himself to tell Sadie how much he loves and cares for her. To him, actions are most important. At the end of *Pioneers*, Sam (as Alabaster) has the opportunity to define love from his perspective, “And what is love, in the end?” Alabaster said, “Except the irrational desire to put evolutionary competitiveness aside in order to ease someone else’s journey through life?” (355). For Sam, his love for Sadie is the engine for his life: he believes playing with someone is the best way to show love and he always sought to create this with Sadie. Through his love, and games, he sought to help carry the pain she was enduring. It took Sadie the entire novel to realize this because he could help bear her pain, but he never fully opened up to her about all the pain he was carrying, not with the loss of his mother, or the pain with his foot, or the loss of his foot, or even the pain he felt once he knew she and Marx were together, or the simultaneous loss of his best friends after Marx’s death and her recession into grief. Regardless of all the harm that Dov caused her, she always defended him (and often added that he was a good teacher) and still had meals and conversations with him. In contrast, she spent years without communicating to Sam. It took him an odyssey to say “I love you” and it took Sadie that same amount of time to realize that Sam had always created mazes to meet her on her journey.



The Great Wave off Kanagawa

Katsushika Hokusai, Japanese, 1760-1849; Publisher: Published by, Eijudo



Rotten Apples Return to Harvard's Glass Flowers Exhibition

“...because of its beauty, because of the rarity of these models, and because of the stories that we can tell around the apples and their diseases...”

a different world, but I am the same?” (141). Their relationship was constantly changing and these changes had a deep effect on her and how she felt. Her idea of *Both Sides* was directly linked to her experience of rejoicing with and loving Sam, and subsequently suffering his disappearance; but she does not share with him the details of her initial conception, which were deeply connected to him and his presence and influence in her life. Their love, however unspoken, is what kept them distantly connected to each other, helping them overcome the hurt and pain that they encountered.

When Sadie returns to the glass flowers in her thirties as a professor at MIT, she is reminded of the power of time. Her relationship with Sam endures through time and the glass flowers are a reminder of how time passes, yet it is frozen in the essence of the most precious relationships. When Sam and Sadie finish *Ichigo*, they have a special walk back to Dov’s apartment, “The combination of the pre-dawn light and the snow was magical, like being inside a snow globe, a discrete world of their own” (105). This magical enclosure harks back to the power of the glass flowers which have such a strong resemblance to real flowers. Amid their tumultuous relationship, this magical moment is presented as a Xyzzy moment, just like the glass flowers: “The flowers were magnificent, of course, but what struck her [Sadie] even more were the models the Blaschkas had made of decomposing fruits, their bruises and discolorations, in medias res, preserved for eternity. *What a world*, Sadie thought. *People once made glass sculptures of decay, and they put these sculptures in museums. How strange and beautiful human beings are. And how fragile!*” (67). The scars and the bruises from the struggles Sam and Sadie faced in life were the most beautiful part because they are evidence of their journey and the fruits from it. Conversely, the fruits as much as the bruises of their relationship are epitomized in their artistic creations: their games.

At the end of the novel, Sam and Sadie walk to the apartment in New York where Sam used to live with his mother Anna Lee, and Sadie, “imagined a child Sam, gazing out the window at her. He is perfect and unmarked, like her own daughter. But if Sam hadn’t been as traumatized as Sadie now realized he had been, would he have pushed them so hard? Would Sadie have been the designer she became without Sam’s ambitions for them? And would Sam have had those ambitions without the childhood trauma? She didn’t know. The work had been hers, yes, but it had equally been his. It had been theirs, and it wouldn’t have existed without the both of them. This was a tautology that had only taken her the better part of two decades to understand” (395). At the end of the novel, Sadie recognizes the bruising and scarring that Sam had already endured by the time they met. Their relationship helped Sam overcome his darkest times, and Sam supports Sadie through her hard times as well. Together they create, change, and heal.



Glass Fruit

What a world, Sadie thought. People once made glass sculptures of decay, and they put these sculptures in museums. How strange and beautiful human beings are. And how fragile! (Zevin 67).

At the end of the novel, when Sam and Sadie are saying goodbye and “I love you” at the same time, for the first time in the novel, they also shake each other’s hand, which connects to *Pioneers* and the importance of Daedalus—and Sam’s—hand: “Here is a thing to admit to yourself, if you’re able: there will never be a person who can mean as much to you as Sam. You may as well let go of the garbage—” “It’s not just garbage, Dov.” You may as well let go of your perfectly legitimate grievances, then, find the mysterious Dr. Daedalus, shake his hand—” Her hand. Her hand and get back to the deadly serious business of making and playing games together” (372). A fundamental detail about this conversation is that it is held at a restaurant in California that was built around a tree. This tree mirrors the trick question that Penelope asks the stranger that shows up at her door claiming to be Odysseus. Their bedframe, which was part of a tree could not be moved, but this was something only Odysseus could have known. While Sadie has grievances with others, including Dov, it is her troubles with Sam that hurt her the most, or that result to be the most enduring, just like the tree. Similar to Odysseus, Sadie may have experienced other relationships, but her “rooting” or “grounding” relationship was with Sam.

Despite their frequent arguments, distance, and lack of clear communication, Sam and Sadie find secret ways to express themselves with the other, similar to how Penelope and Odysseus’ archery game proved to be the key to getting rid of the abhorrent suitors. Penelope could find the man she loved behind a scar and his incomparable archery skills; Sadie and Sam could return to the acceptance of their love for each other after their odyssey of life. Sam and Sadie overcome their independent and collaborative odysseys and during their final encounter, Sam tells Sadie that, “Every time I run into you for the rest of our lives, I’ll ask you to make a game with me. There’s some groove in my brain that insists it is a good idea” (396-397). Sadie sees beauty in the frozen decay of fruit in the Glass Flowers exhibit; together Sam and Sadie recognize the potential behind an aging character such as Ichigo, despite the extra work involved; a magical moment at the completion of *Ichigo* spurs the birth of *Both Sides* and their tumultuous episodes featuring little communication; and their Xyzzy-like intimate exchange in *Pioneers* all reflect the many ways in which Sam and Sadie have changed and grown in their journey. Together they have steeped themselves in art: the glass flowers, the creation and play of their games, to make their lives, especially the hard times bearable. The crucial variable in their relationship is change. Since they change, how they relate to each other also changes, and what they create also changes. In the way the “freight should be proportioned to the groove” in Emily Dickinson’s poem, Sam and Sadie fit together when it comes to playing and creating their love. Could love be their final game?

That Love is all there is,  
Is all we know of Love;  
It is enough, the freight should be  
Proportioned to the groove.

—EMILY DICKINSON

## Works Cited

Unknown. Papyrus, “Homer, Odyssey Vi.” 4th Century CE, Museum of New Zealand - Te Papa Tongarewa, Collection: History; Gift of the Egypt Exploration Society, 1922, JSTOR, <https://jstor.org/stable/community.27028623>.

Katsushika Hokusai, Japanese, 1760-1849; Publisher: Published by, Eijudo. The Great Wave off Kanagawa (from a Series of Thirty-six Views of Mt. Fuji). Edo period (1615-1868), ca. 1830-32. Artstor, [https://www.artstor.org/asset/MMA\\_IAP\\_1039652476](https://www.artstor.org/asset/MMA_IAP_1039652476)

Hearst Castle, 2024, California State Parks, [hearstcastle.org](https://hearstcastle.org)

Glass Flowers: The Ware Collection of Blaschka Glass Models of Plants, Harvard Museum of Natural History, 2024, [hmnh.harvard.edu/glass-flowers](https://hmnh.harvard.edu/glass-flowers)

## Contents

1. Tomorrow's Odyssey

