

On the Last Day of the Semester, the Library Is So Crowded with Raucous Historical and Literary Figures It's Hard to Tell People Apart

By Brad Aaron Modlin

But here, on the left, past Gilgamesh
doing handstands on the checkout desk
and shout-reminding everyone he was *twice*

crowned homecoming king!— past him, and
past giggly Johann Gutenberg photocopying
trashy romance novels for his frat brothers—

beyond Pope Joan, and Joan of Arc, and Jonah
who lurks by the two women and makes whale calls,
hoping to mate with either one in the microfiche room—

is the quiet corner window where I sit with Telemachus,
son of Penelope. But he's difficult to recognize
because he's lost the all-American smile

The whole campus loved. In front of his face,
he holds a crumbled copy of *The Iliad*. He sets
the book down on stacks of flash cards, and I see

he's been chewing his lower lip again, a nervous
habit he doesn't realize. Freshman year deserted
us too quickly, and now everyone's parents

are arriving with moving vans. *You could stay
in my basement*, I say to help him. *We have a couch*.
But he's too distracted to hear. A highlighter slips

from his shaking fingers.
he glances from me. *This summer, I am learning
to talk to my father*, he whispers.

And then he hands me the book, stares
out at the road people like us never stop traveling,
and asks me to quiz him

on the lyrics and meter
of Trojan battle cries.



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