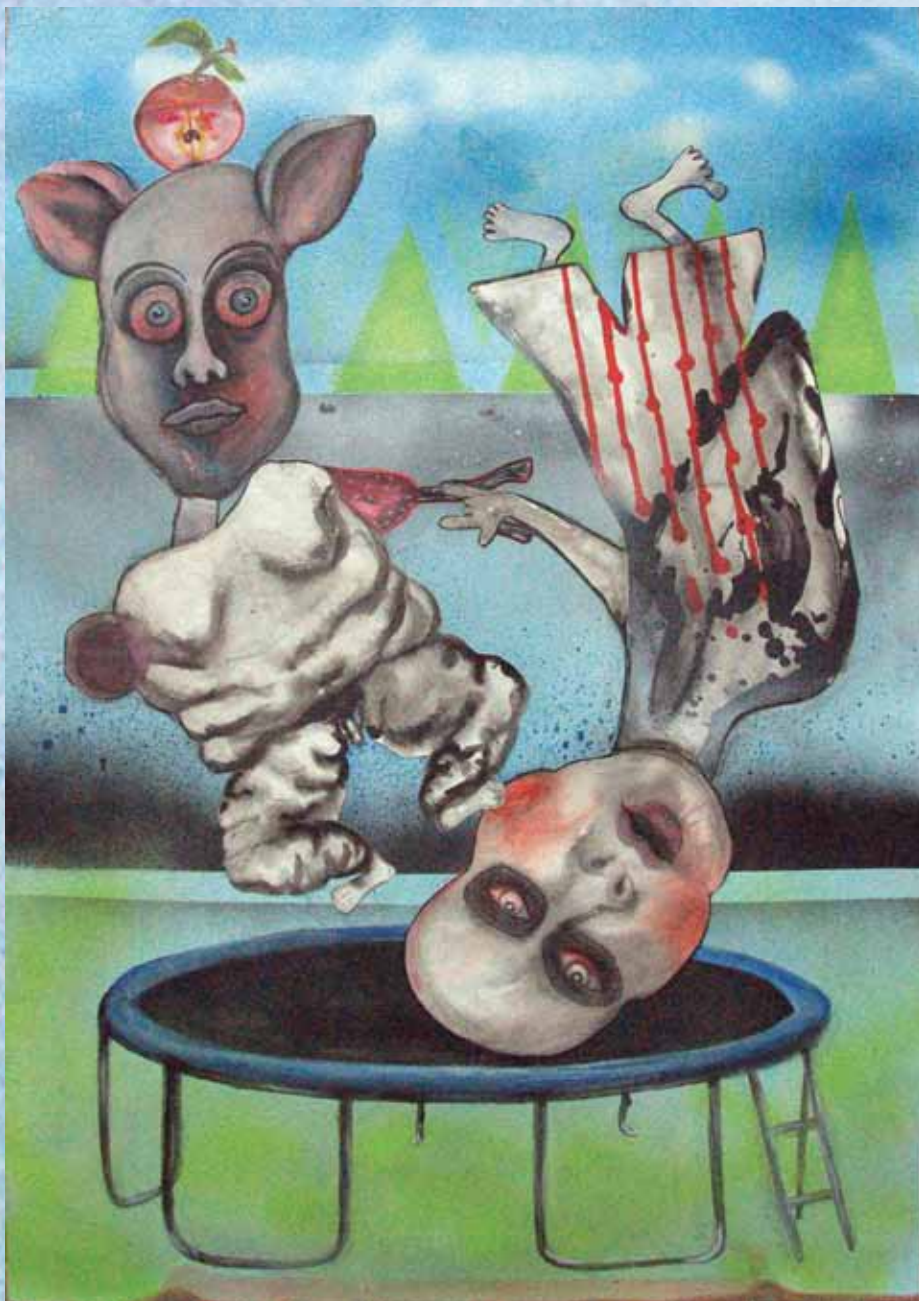


# MEAT FOR TEA

VOL 8 ISSUE 1  
THE VALLEY REVIEW

Eighth Anniversary Issue: CHRYSANTHEMUM





## Meat for Tea: The Valley Review

Meat for Tea: The Valley Review was founded by Elizabeth MacDuffie and Alexandra Wagman. We are a non-academic affiliated magazine committed to recognizing and featuring the work of the artists, writers, and musicians living in western Massachusetts and beyond.

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### Special thanks:

Mark Alan Miller and Justin Pizzoferrato and Sonelab, Kate Bodendorf, FraHo156, Amherst Books, Broadside Books, Booklink, Food for Thought Books, White Square Fine Books, Platterpus Records, FOE Gallery, Nash Gallery, Nina's Nook, Doris Madsen and the ECC, The Stink, Party Wolf, and all of our sponsors.

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Vol. 8 Issue 1, March 2014, first printing

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Salutations from the Editor	4	Accidental Landscape & Bill of My Rights	33
Yahooisms in Pronunciation and How to Get Rid of Them	5	<i>Brad Garber</i>	
<i>Frank Zahn</i>		Shortcut	34
Metamorphosis	8	<i>Laura Jean Schneider</i>	
<i>Ina Iansiti</i>		It's Possible My Neurosis is Slipping	35
Toward a Glossary of Imaginary Sorrows	9	<i>Kevin Pickens</i>	
<i>Moneta Goldsmith</i>		What They Don't Tell You	36
Mutton	10	<i>Kevin Pickens</i>	
<i>Katelyn Stover</i>		Possession: a re-story	37
Reincarnation	11	<i>Brendon Bayo</i>	
<i>Christi Moon</i>		The High Priestess	39
Mouse Eats Cheese: an Old Signature	11	<i>FraHo156</i>	
<i>James Baxenfield</i>		The Gift	40
Chao Mung (Welcome)	12	<i>JoHanna Hoshstetler</i>	
<i>Cindy Rinne</i>		Today You Decide Against Color Pleasure & Nerves Scatter on Egg Shells	42
Purity & Renewal	13	<i>Gary Lundy</i>	
<i>Cindy Rine</i>		The Atrocity Sink	43
Pre-tet Dinner	14	<i>George Sparling</i>	
<i>Cindy Rinne</i>		Curiosity	48
The Star Gazers	15	<i>Margarita Gokun</i>	
<i>Pippa Anais Gaubert</i>		Sympathy	49
Tangle	20	<i>Anne Colwell</i>	
<i>Elizabeth MacDuffie</i>		Chocolate	50
King of Aces	21	<i>Doug Bolling</i>	
<i>Gary Glauber</i>		The First Floor of the House Built on the Body of the Mississippi	52
		<i>Wes Solether</i>	
		poetry in Five Pillars–	53
		<i>Wes Solether</i>	
		Insomiac	54
		<i>Tom Gumber</i>	
		Miyazaki Love	58
		<i>Jenna Szuch</i>	
		Why Kabede Wrote Poetry & Kabede's Inappropriate	59
		<i>Lynn Hoffman</i>	
		Kabede Goes to the Whorehouse & Kabede Knows	60
		<i>Lynn Hoffman</i>	
		Obituary for Kabede	61
		<i>Lynn Hoffman</i>	
Grand Opening	22		
<i>Gary Glauber</i>			
Underpass	23		
<i>Gary Glauber</i>			
Roadside	24		
<i>Adam Gianforcaro</i>			
Can't You Remember the Antimatter?	25		
<i>George Djuric</i>			
Girl with Octopus Tattoo	32		
<i>FraHo156</i>			



- 62** Moving  
*Amélie Olaiz*
- 62** Thoughts  
*Margarita Gokun*
- 63** An Archangel on the Steps,  
Defanged & Mercy  
*Amélie Olaiz*
- 64** Breakfast with Love  
*Milton Erlich*
- 65** Courting the Meal  
*Adam Deutsch*
- 66** Her Problem  
*Adam Deutsch*
- 67** The Dump Heap, Turnaround  
& On Yeats' "Innisfree" Inheritance  
*Christopher Mulrooney*
- 68** Tangle  
*Elizabeth MacDuffie*
- 69** A Miniature Replica  
*Susan L. Lin*
- 76** At Mother in Law's TownHome,  
New Mexico & Butchering Day  
*Kirby Wright*
- 76** The Tasters  
*Brian Flynn*
- 77** The Movie House  
*Brian Flynn*
- 78** Anxiety of Coincidence  
*Brian Flynn*
- 79** What the Poem is About  
*Brian Flynn*
- 80** Adult Conversation  
*Tim Miller*
- 84** Gripping  
*Kari Wergerland*
- 85** Bear Boxes & Delay  
*Kari Wergerland*
- 86** A Ghost Walks Downtown  
on a Snowy Mid-afternoon  
*Samuel Vargo*
- 87** Hunk of Moon & Final Act in Paris  
*Kirby Wright*
- 88** Four Short Talks on Booksellers  
*Moneta Goldsmith*
- 92** Contributor's Notes

## salutations from the editor

As soon as my foot hit terra firma back here in the land of the Puritans, I realized why, as the geese and the elderly do, I flee to warmer climates at winter's first knock.

Winter, cold silent and impassioned, does not suit me. The shortest day only reminds one of how fleeting our time is and with its exit this year I say farewell to my dear friends Pete, Bo, and Bob impassionate. It was during the flight back from Tangires, my thoughts on a new acquaintance and how Steinbeck's line, "Kind of a long-stemmed flower. Looks like a quick puff of colored smoke." drifted in my thoughts. Rarely, do I enter the gate of the Chrysanthemum, our next issue, but alas it has beckoned me.

I invite you to join in the festivities of the Cirque De Loups Puantes to enjoy the company of new and old acquaintances and to relish in the art of Kate Bodendorf, Penelope T. Evans, and FraHo 156 and the rock of The Stink and Party Wolk. It will be a night of creative fun including a magnificent puppet show by Solomon Scratch.

besos y abrazos

Meaty Gonzales

# yahooisms in pronunciation and how to get rid of them

Frank Zahn

Americans are prone to pronouncing words and phrases in ways that do not correspond to their spelling. That is, they often pronounce words and phrases in ways that either include the sounds of letters that are not there or exclude the sounds of letters that are there and should be included when speaking English phonetically correct. These are dubbed yahooisms in pronunciation because they suggest that people who speak them have not completely left behind the proverbial “old neighborhood” or “the farm” in which they and/or their ancestors were born and bred. Example of yahooisms in pronunciation abound.

There is only one letter *y* in word *yahoo*. So when a person says, “He’s a real yayhoo.” Instead of “He’s a real *yahoo*.”, *yayhoo* is a yahooism for *yahoo*.

The letter sequence *ho* is not in the word *sure*. So when a person says, “I’m *shore* of it.” instead of “I’m *sure* of it.”, *shore* is a yahooism for *sure*. Think about it, Mr. President.

The letter *r* appears twice in the word *library*. So when a person says, “I’m going to the *library*.” instead of “I’m going to the *library*.”, *library* is a yahooism for *library*.

The letter *u* is in the word *Aunt*. So when a person says, “I love my *Ant* Maggie.” instead of “I love my *Aunt* Maggie.”, *Ant*, which is an insect, is a yahooism for *Aunt*. The letter sequence *un* and the letter *n* are not equivalent, so why should they be pronounced the same in English?

There is a letter *k*, but not a letter *t* in the word *asked*. So when a person says, “I *asted* the guy.” instead of “I *asked* the guy,” *asted*, which suggests the person stuck something up the guy’s ass, is a yahooism for *asked*.

The letter sequence *ank* is not in the word *strength*. So when a person says, “He has the *strankth* of an ox.” instead of “He has the *strength* of an ox.”, *strankth* is a yahooism for *strength*. The letter sequences *ank* and *eng* are not equivalent, so to pronounce one as if it were the other is to speak like a yahoo.

The letter *i* is not in the contraction *can’t*. So when a person says, “I *cain’t* remember.” instead of “I *can’t* remember.”, *cain’t* is a yahooism for *can’t*. The letter sequence *ai* and the letter *a* are not equivalent.

The letters *t* and *a* are not in the phrase *with you*. So, when a person says, “I want to go *witch ya*.” instead of “I want to go *with you*.”, *witch ya* is a yahooism for *with you*.

The letter sequence *or* isn’t in the word *wash*. So when a person says, “I need to *worsh* my hands,” instead of, “I need to *wash* my hands.”, *worsh* is a yahooism for *wash*. The letter sequence *or* and the letter *a* do not sound the same, and therefore, they are not interchangeable when saying *wash*. Similarly, it is *Washington D. C.* not *Worshington D. C.*, and it is the state of *Washington*, not the state of *Worshington*.

The letter sequence *um* is not in the word *them*. So when a person says, “I haven’t seen *um*.”

instead of “I haven’t seen *them*.”, *um* is a yahooism for *them*.

A letter *h* is in the word *him*. So when a person says, “I haven’t seen *im*.” instead of “I haven’t seen *him*.”, *im* is a yahooism for *him*.

When questioning another about lunch, some old neighborhood, born-and-bred, and probably older New Yorkers may ask, “Jeet?” to which the reply may be, “no, jew.” Both of these are yahooisms for “*Did you eat?*” and “*No, did you.*”, respectively, even though the pronunciations bears no relationship to the spellings.

There is a letter *a* in the word *Italy*. But an older Italian-American might say, “Originally, I came from *ltly*.” instead of “Originally, I came from *Italy*.”, which means *ltly* is a yahooism for *Italy*.

The letter sequence *gonna* isn’t in the phrase *going to*. So when a person says, “I’m *gonna* buy myself a parrot that doesn’t fart.” instead of, “I’m *going to* buy myself a parrot that doesn’t fart.”, *gonna* is a yahooism for *going to*. The pronunciation of the phrase doesn’t correspond to the spelling.

There is no such word as *git*. So when a person says, “*Git* the hell out of here!” instead of “Get the hell out of here!”, *git* is a yahooism for *get*. Again, there is no such word as *git*, which was a surprise to me at the age of 64 when someone pointed it out to me.

The letter sequence *ta* is not in the phrase *got to*. Neither is it in the phrase *have to*. So when a person says, “I’ve *gotta* go.” instead of “I’ve *got to* go,” or “I *haveta* go.” instead of “I *have to* go.”, *gotta* and *haveta* are yahooisms for *got to* and *have to*, respectively.

And of course, what American hasn’t been guilty of dropping the letter *g* at the end of *i-n-g* words, for example, saying, “I’m *goin*.” instead of “I’m *going*.” What’s worse is when a person combines yahooisms, for example, “I’ve *gotta git goin*.” or “I *haveta git goin*.” instead of “I’ve *got to get going*.” or “I *have to get going*.” The list of this kind of yahooism is lengthy, including *comin* instead of *coming*, *bein* instead of *being*, and *walkin* instead of *walking*.

There are many more examples of American Yahooisms in pronunciation. The list seems endless at times, much to the consternation of people in other countries who attempt to converse with Americans in English or to students and others who are trying to learn the language. Mind you, not every American is guilty of every yahooism in pronunciation, but chances are, every born-and-bred American is guilty of at least one and probably several. And it isn’t easy to rid oneself of them either.

One might think the English people in that island across the Atlantic would be the best guide. They fancy themselves the final authority on all things related to the English language. But they have their own set of yahooisms in pronunciation. For example, they pronounce the name of the river *Thames* that flows through London as the *Temms*, which bears no relationship to the spelling, except, of course, that it begin with the letter *T*. That is one of their more conspicuous yahooisms in pronunciation. Another one that comes to mind is the pronunciation of the word *waistcoat* as *wescot*. *Wes* is neither equivalent to *waist* in spelling nor phonetically correct pronunciation, and neither is *cot* equivalent to *coat*.

And it is the rules of phonetically correctness that are the best guide to ridding oneself of yahoisms in pronunciation. The reason is straightforward. It provides correspondence between the pronunciation of words and phrases to their spelling, using the sounds of vowels, vowel combinations, and consonants taught in every grammar school. As Noah Webster pointed out when compiling the first American dictionary, it is that correspondence that makes it easier to learn the English language and use it more effectively in communication, which after all, is the purpose of language.



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METAMORPHOSIS



metamorphosis  
Ina Iansiti



# towards a glossary of imaginary sorrows

Moneta Goldsmith

In the official Idler's Glossary of Imaginary Sorrows, which is not real although it should be, the term *prefertilization* can be defined by the act of preferring and/or preparing to fertilize (a transitive verb), as in, for instance, the case of a sparkleponie at a Burning Man festival, someone who has very little in the way of basic survival skills but who makes up for it by being naked pretty much constantly.

As in, for instance, the group of citizens from the Czech Republic who have formed a secret international organization known as MAID—or Masturbation and its Discontents—which aims to cast elaborate obstacles during controlled acts of onanism.

As in, for instance, the case of the first person to gain public recognition for MAID, a man from the English chapter, who successfully masturbated while reciting John Milton's poem 'Il Penseroso'. The man, I'm told, achieved climax during the line, 'While the bee with honied thigh'.

*Prefertilizing* may also refer to what happens when you watch Mexican porn at your work place and, not having had the foresight to set your printer to *B&W Only*, accidentally click *Print* just while your boss is making her rounds, so that the two of you are forced to look on in shame as a series of Mexican babies emerge from the printer bearing labels like 'Oscar-Lucinda Redux' and 'Las Papillas', something you later learn—no thanks to Google Translate—is slang for 'the little papers'.

Another possible meaning of the term *prefertilization* would be something like, 'the days immediately prior to Spring, just before the clock strikes the hour of pure sorrow, when the courtyard clears the grass for the daffodils as a stage clears itself for dancers (also a transitive verb); as in, for instance: 'there is so much Spring outside I could spring myself from the window'.



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# mutton

Katelyn Stover

After running all night, sleeping on the cold ground and only having eaten one slice of bread, I found myself kneeling on the floor of a barn in front of a dirty animal. Behind me, a professor who owned this barn, who wanted to teach by experience. Before me, Tim- a huntsman, holding down the body of a lamb with one hand, holding a knife in the other.

I pulled off my fleece glove and reached out, gliding my hand over the side of the lamb, first gently petting it's head, then feeling it's warm body and smoothness of its flesh and combing my fingers through the rough, steely wool. It was lying on its side, legs bound but completely still, its wool brown and tainted like grey dust sprinkled over fresh snow. I peered into its black eyes that seemed to see beyond me. Then I stepped back, and Tim began.

The lambs' body started to shiver and tremble as it struggled under Tim's arm- now stretched over its stomach holding it down, the life-stealing knife slithering deeper across its neck into its throat. Shriek cries pierced the air; a quivering scream slowly fading into a broken, choked moan. Dark red blood began pouring from its flesh, puddling beneath the incision, clumping in its wool. A long, slow stream flowing straight from the lamb's throat over the barn floor, over the dirt and dust took bits of hay in its thin current.

Forget queasiness at the sight of blood, forget the cold biting my fingertips, forget wanting to be a vegetarian, forget not having eaten since the night before. The moment the knife slit through the flesh into the trembling body—

Sacrifice.

With the same knife, Tim skinned and cut the carcass, hung the full skin on a tree branch and disposed its organs outside the barn. I remember watching him stop his work to wipe the blade on the grass, leaving the ground marked with melting snow and dirt and the shining red blood. He cleaned and boiled the meat in a pot over a fire. After it was cooked I ate a few chunks, then this sacrifice became a provision.

This was not a full mutton meal, with mint jam and silver forks like my aunt always served on Easter dinner, nor did I even receive a satisfactory portion, enough protein to revive my exhausted body by feeding oxygen into my bloodstream and strength to my quivering knotted sore muscles. I remember eating maybe 5 pieces, straight from the pan on the fire into my gloved hand. While the pieces of my memory are vivid enough to remember small glimpses: touching the lamb, the few seconds before it died, chewing the small portions of its meat that hardly satisfied my body, still there is a glimpse beyond the fire pit and the barn and the sheepskin hanging from the nearby tree. There is a sight of the Lamb's final Sacrifice that revived my entire life.



# reincarnation (italian (petrarchan) sonnet)

Christi Moon

Reborn in triple spiraling egress  
and pixilated fragments of green-grey,  
sequestered states and saturated fray-  
that splinter through a winter of distress.  
Sound resonates in threaded tenderness  
as hues of evening's treason slip away,  
unwind the brine of moon's naiveté;  
pure sentiments and essence coalesce.  
Ennobled minds can't reason or diffuse  
the imprints sifted off the surface vault.  
Induction lifts our canvas through the sky  
to catapult in rapture's heightened views-  
suspended in this fluid somersault;  
exalt in all, renewing you and I.



mouse eats cheese: an old signature

James Baxenfield

# chao mung (welcome)

Cindy Rinne

Mai Ly caressed  
to her breast  
arches, inner gate

blood pearls  
cut through  
Co Loa communal house

close  
giant wooden doors  
many voices

of court officials on stone pathway of moss to Princess My Chau shrine. Headless stone statue at rest dressed in embroidered gown of dragons and jeweled headdress. Her spirit appeared to Mai Ly, her guest – They sat next to each other like best friends sharing secrets. Her voice expressed a silent story of wars, a magic crossbow, and Golden Turtle Kim Qui. My father held the weapon (gift from turtle), and shot an arrow to kill one thousand defeating the Chinese king. The beaten son crept into my life bringing alms of peace turning into celestial love – marriage of two enemy kingdoms. He begged the truth of our victory over his people. He followed me up the steps in the highest tower to the magic crossbow. Unknown to me, my husband had a promise to keep. He

stole the weapon and replaced it with a fake.

Drums beat and his father attacked mine. Papa bolted up the tower and shot. Air split, but the false bow was powerless. The realization of what happened fell like rain as my father watched his people perish. Golden Turtle revealed the traitor. Father grabbed an axe, chopped off my head, and drowned himself in the Red River. My husband followed a trail of feathers to my place of death; later drowned himself in the deep well you dipped my pearls. His blood and mine dye them. He did love me. I'm sure of it.

As you take the spirit of the bronze drum and the axe, I know of your quest, be aware they embody my love and betrayal. You will carry both to your spirit-boat and your home, your family, your bloodline across time.



# purity & renewal

Cindy Rinne

Binh entered through the back door  
on his bike zooming towards the front –

*Hi, everybody.*

Mother yelled, *Pick up cabbage and leeks.*

(talking

to herself.) *Need time to pickle. Can't believe I forgot them.*

Ok, said Binh.

*How old are you?* Aunt Thi Tien asked Phong.

*I am tiger,* he growled.

*You aren't that old already,* laughed the Aunt.

She & Uncle Bao traveled from Hanoi.

Paused to bow to grandfather on altar,

*Receive our cakes of glutinous rice.*

Phong pounced from one space

to another tracking like a tiger. Grimaced.

Feet and hands sore. Aunt Thi Tien

held him close.

*Let's invite our dead ancestors to join in our celebrations.*

*How about more dried candied fruit for you?* She asked.

(concern sprouted from a seed in her mind)



# pre-tet dinner

Cindy Rinne

Binh burst into Phong's house singing  
Happy New Year –  
by ABBA.  
Mai Ly joined in  
waiting for Long Anh.

Soon they would taste  
Meat Stewed in Coconut Juice cooked  
last night. Mai Ly prepared

pickled bean sprouts, chopped the chives,  
and arranged the rice  
to accompany the main dish—  
placing them on the floor  
in the middle of the mats.

Father sat next to Uncle Bao  
with Binh & Phong  
at the opposite end.  
*Sit up straight,*  
said father. Meal ended  
sipping green tea. Mai Ly & Long Anh  
picked up the dirty dishes.

Long Anh asked,  
*Are you ok? You seem*  
*distant. I don't know,*  
*like your mind*  
*is a million*  
*miles away.*  
*Are you dreaming of Binh?*

Yes, yes, *that's it,*  
Mai Ly said. *I worry*  
*he is going to betray me.*

*What are you talking about?*  
*Has he done something to hurt you?*  
*No, but trust is fragile,*

Mai Ly replied. (Not sure  
where this doubt is coming from.  
It feels like something is trying to cut  
my heart in half.)



# the star gazers

Pippa Anais Gaubert

The old manor house on the moor has been standing empty for many years. A family of crows moved in to the roof long ago; the windows have long since been broken and boarded over. The garden is overgrown with a wild tangle of gooseberry and red currant bushes. But no one has ever wanted to pick those fruits because of what might be buried in the soil.

Then, this morning, carriages arrived and delivered box after box of books, an upright piano, beds, wooden trunks, tables, chairs. And Mr and Mrs Harris and their servants moved in.

\*\*\*

I put my bonnet and apron on and go round there. Mr and Mrs Harris are standing in their garden, admiring the view.

I say, "Good morning,"

"Good morning," They smile in a way which seems too friendly given the circumstances.

Mrs Harris says, "You must be the farmer's wife, Mrs Curnow,"

"Yes," I say.

It seems that nothing more might be said. Mrs Harris has lines around her eyes that seem to suggest a lifetime of wicked laughter. There is something similar in his eyes too. But I suspect that all the wickedness originally comes from her. She seems the wicked, city sort.

"I suppose you know the history of this house?" I wish I could be less interested. They probably think I am intrusive. I am blushing foolishly.

She smiles patiently. "Yes, we know," She laughs and Mr Harris laughs too.

They are surprisingly free, these people, that's all I can say. They don't even mind living in a house where there was once a murder and a suicide.

"There were horses too. Of course, you see there are stables. They say that the woman killed the horses as well as her husband and herself. Although they never found the horses' bodies," I would have liked to stop saying so much. I am more interested than they are.

"Perhaps they just ran away," says Mrs Harris, gazing out across the moor. Her eyes are blue like pieces of sky.

\*\*\*

It is the middle of the night. I watch the newcomers walking across the moor from my bedroom window. Their shadows are long across the ground. They are holding hands, like children. They don't do things the way we do, I can say that much.

My husband is snoring in the bedroom next door. He was once such a light sleeper; now he has become a pig. And I can't sleep anymore. The hatred keeps me awake. The same thing happened to my mother. I think my mother-in-law suffered from it too.

I slip out of the house and follow them at a distance. I know ways of being invisible; I learned it in my dreams. They are walking silently through the night yellow gorse and heather, towards the mine. She wears a long white cape. She is so much smaller than he; she looks like the wind could take her. It's just as well they're holding hands. They stop for a moment, as though to listen. They might be able to hear the sound of the horses, pounding their hooves, somewhere far out on the moor.

The night is easy to move through. There is plenty of moonlight. And I know how spirits feel. The moors are full of them; I feel them deep in my bones. The granite boulders are radiating energy. The firm lines between things are losing all definition, especially in my mind. It might be because of the powerful blowing wind.

They walk. I follow behind. I see them lying now inside the crumbling walls of the ruined tin mine. She is light and pale like a fallen fragment of space and he I imagine rich and heavy like earth. He is lying underneath her like the ground. I hide behind the wall, crouching like a snail. I hear her soft moaning like petals peeling from a rose. It seems to me a very precious thing.

\*\*\*

Mrs Harris speaks to me in a lazy way which always makes her seem like she's just woken up. "Look," she says, pointing out a small plant laden with black, shiny berries, nestled under the currant bushes in the back of her house. She is showing me round so I can admire all the work their servants have done. They've started making a vegetable bed and they've cleared out the stables. She has an interest in local plants, she knows more than I do, even though I'm from round these parts. "This is a deadly nightshade plant. Some of these berries crushed into your tea can kill you." Her eyes flash as she says this and she makes a crushing motion with her fingers.

The skin on her arm is pure white and the berry is deepest black. I want the berry more than I've ever wanted anything before. It's just I feel my own life slipping away. None of it feels so important nowadays. I want to live inside her skin; it's so deadly and white. I can't believe the things we're not saying. For example, why not talk about the woman who lived here before and killed herself? And her husband. There was blood everywhere. She actually butchered him, they say. She wanted to reduce everything she'd ever loved to bones and cuts of meat. Nobody knew why. Murder and suicide have the same feeling behind them. They break the monotony like mountains do.

\*\*\*



I sneak out while my husband is drinking his nightly ale in the drawing room before going to the public house. He always does the same things at the same time every day. The servants are already to bed. The sun is going down. I can hear horse hooves softly thudding in the distance, carried on the wind. Our cows start bellowing; they think I am on my way to see them. But I walk across the moor in the direction of the manor house. The way is muddy and wet. There are tadpoles even in the puddles. Seems a shame, I know the puddles will dry up and then that would be that for them.

I walk around quietly to the back of the manor house. The plant seems to quiver a little when I pluck the berries. I wonder if it feels sad.

At home I place the berries in a bottom drawer, wrapped up in one of my old stockings. I like the berries. They feel like something secret and all mine.

\*\*\*

The following evening, I go round to the manor house. My husband has already gone to the public house. Mrs Harris has sent her cook to bed early and is making pies herself. I can tell their oven is very hot; the whole house smells of baking. She pulls out a pie with whole sardines arranged in a circle with their heads still on, eyes burnt to a dull black.

She laughs wickedly at my horror, "I got it from a recipe. Star-gazey pie. I liked the name. It's supposed to be a Cornish thing,"

"Yes, but no one eats it,"

She laughs at this and says to Mr Harris, who is watching from the doorway, "Imagine that Charles! No one eats it even though it says in all the books it's a Cornish thing."

Mrs Harris pours me a cup of hot mead. It is very strong. I am drunk probably after the first sip; I have the feeling this catches their eye. I know I am blushing. There is no way to stop. And then somehow my drink just slips out of my hand and I spill it all down my frock. They aren't as flustered as I am. They are looking at each other sideways as though everything I do is a charming, eccentric joke.

"Come," says Mrs Harris, reaching out and taking my hand. Her fingers feel very delicate and cool. "Upstairs. You can wear something of mine."

Their bedroom is very grand and tasteful. Of course, that is to be expected. There is a big brass bed. I sit on the divan and resist the urge to lie flat on my back. My brains are swimming around in my head because of all the mead.

She pulls out a black satin dress with ruffles and says, "I'd love to see you in this," She turns her back whilst I put it on. It fits perfectly and I know that I am beautiful. I haven't been beautiful in a very long time. "So, Mrs Curnow," she says. I feel she wants me to show her the seed of myself. She can't find the right words to ask. "You seem too young to be living out here in the wilderness. What are your plans for the future?"

"I'm considering murder," I say, "Or perhaps suicide. Or both."

\*\*\*

When we go downstairs, my husband is standing at the front door, come to bring me home. I go to him and he squeezes my arm too hard and he doesn't give me time to button my cape and my face is blushing bright red.

When we get home I realise that he is quite drunk too. He hits me clean across the face but in slow, drunken motion and I fall to the ground. I go upstairs to my room. I open the drawer and unwrap the berries from inside the stocking. My hands are trembling.

"Do you want some tea, dear?" I call to him, pretending I have already forgotten what he did.

He is in the other bedroom now, getting ready to retire. The side of my face is still smarting. I'm not drunk anymore but I have a terrible headache. If I think about Mr and Mrs Harris, I am very embarrassed about how foolish I must have seemed to them. I wish I could go around there again and carry on where we left off. Without my husband, of course.

My husband doesn't look at me when I give him the tea. I watch him slurp. I drink my tea too.

"This tea tastes foul," he says, drinking it anyway. "It has strange lumps in it. And it's so bitter. Is yours bitter too?"

"Possibly." I turn to go back to the other bedroom where I sleep. He follows me out to the top of the stairs.

His eyes are very big and dark and he has beads of sweat on his lip. He grabs me by the wrist. I know what he wants and I am not in the mood. I push him away with my other hand. I use all my strength. Somehow I slip. It's similar to the way the mead seemed to slip out of my hands earlier. I fall violently backwards down the stairs, the skirts of the black satin dress wide around me. My husband is following after me. He almost tumbles too. He's still drunk. I get to the bottom of the stairs. Everything slows down. As I land, I feel an extraordinary pain in my neck and head. My eyes fill up with something black and grainy.

My husband cries out, "Oh dear Lord!"

There is scalding tea all over the place and hot blood filling up my every pore.

Just when it seems there is more agony than I can abide, the pain begins slowly to transform itself into a softer feeling. The feeling flows out of me warm, gooey and sweet, like treacle, towards the weeping man and to the woman with the twisted neck lying at the bottom of the stairs. It's then that I realise what has happened. I've slipped out of my skin, just like I always wanted to.

\*\*\*

I stroke my husband softly on the cheek and run my fingers through his dark beard. He always was a handsome man, even if he lost his beauty somewhere along the way. He is very upset that I have slipped my skin, of course. He's always been afraid.

"I never did belong in this life," I whisper as I slip outside, like liquid, under the door. I feel lighter than ever before. "Thank you, my dear." But he can't hear me or see me now.

The poison berries will most likely kill him in a little while. But I'm not worried. He won't know where to look for me anymore.

\*\*\*

A horse winnies as I head across the moor to the manor house. The tin-mine in the distance is a dark silhouette. A sharp wind blows across the heather. The air tastes bittersweet.

I find I can enter their house easily, just by thinking that I can. They are sleeping soundly, naked in their bed. The moonlight falls in through the window onto their faces. They lie snug in each other's arms. They seem so innocent to me, and tender, like shell-creatures without shells.

I sit on the edge of their bed, watching them breathe. I know that Mrs Harris is going to wake up any moment and look straight at me with her startling blue eyes. I'll wait for her until then. She won't be afraid. After that I'll slip under the sheets between them both. That is where I've dreamed of being all along.





tangle  
Elizabeth MacDuffie

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# king of aces

Gary Glauber

The magician was a sensitive soul,  
kind and caring, a gift for attention to detail  
that would serve him well in the years  
beyond when the magic ceased.  
He was proud and confident then,  
ever the showman, a fellow artist  
working long hours at his specialized craft,  
walking coins over knuckles, investing  
the necessary time to practice the dexterity  
that ranked him among the world's best.  
He invented one trick with four aces  
that fooled them all, impressively, incredibly.  
No one else knew how much it all mattered,  
how hard he worked to make the close-up magic  
seem effortless, chimerical, an embodiment  
of madcap casual whimsy.  
His friendship was a privilege,  
watching him work a room illuminated  
with the glowing spirit of reckless youth,  
fueled by talent and ambition.  
We traveled the back roads of Scotland,  
entertaining lads and lasses nightly,  
immune from the fears of an unknown future.  
He was on the continent chasing down Skinner  
in pursuit of promoting the idea of magic as therapy,  
cards and coins hopeful of unlocking autistic cages,  
in feats of semi-medicinal enchantment.  
I wished him well, and went along for the ride,  
playing second fiddle as indie musician,  
while he won hearts and minds of strangers.  
We reunited several years later, one New Year's morn,  
climbing to the rooftop of a luxury Manhattan hotel,  
his idea to go where no one was allowed, pushing  
the limits, thriving on this controlled danger,  
for that was his way. I remember the view,  
some sixty stories above the hungover city,  
forbidden, fearsome, and breathtaking.  
The chill clear wind carried distant sounds  
but mostly I heard the drumbeat of my own heart,  
pumping excitement and the palpable thrill  
of not knowing what happens next.



# grand opening

Gary Glauber

The great exhibition hall was opening in a week.  
The owners already knew it was destined to bleed money,  
a natural side effect of lying to the public and charging them  
for the dishonesty. I was hired as a consultant, a stopgap measure  
with ill-defined duties, never allowed to interact directly with  
the power brokers. Still, I got to wear a vest. The lowly ones  
with whom I was ordered to interact frowned at my gift basket idea,  
and questioned my loyalties to our mutual employer.  
Today they let me know they were bringing in a whale.  
“Does it do any tricks?” I inquired. “It’s barely alive,” they told me.  
They suggested painting it something more garish, perhaps  
a Day-Glo color. “These posters won’t work,” they complained.  
“The grey reminds people of winter, and that’s never a good thing.”  
I reminded them how the last winter’s blizzard ravaged the town,  
and shuttered half of the downtown businesses.  
I wanted to explain the impossibility of their suggestions,  
but my own exasperation translated my speech into bird calls.  
Normally I love my work, but today seemed a telephone call  
short of madness. Strangers on the sidewalk began chanting  
my name, or perhaps it was another trick of the wind.  
“Be reasonable,” they said, but it was a word that had  
no place in these proceedings. The oil painting of the  
company’s founder was smiling oddly at me.  
Time was working against us, the storm was tracking fast,  
and none of the simulations offered any solace.



# underpass

Gary Glauber

We sit there staring,  
isolated from the world,  
cars racing by at speeds  
far beyond the posted limit.  
Yet we don't see them,  
we only hear the echo of the roar  
as another sixteen-wheeler  
passes en route to a distant  
point of important delivery.  
We consort, consider the  
mystery cargo, its need for  
refrigeration, the perfect  
comfort of our silence.  
I block thoughts of how  
this spot is mere yards away  
from where my father went down  
that morning, suddenly made aware  
of a faulty heart needing  
surgical repair, assistance.  
Instead I watch the meaningless  
passing of speeding vehicles,  
and think kindly of you,  
pretty you, the coincidences  
that drove us together,  
the roar of my heart  
when we kiss, not ever  
dreaming how, a few years later,  
I'd be the one driving you  
to unforgivable tears.



# roadside

Adam Gianforcaro

I was newly knighted with my driver's license and was cruising in my uncle's hand-me-down named Belvedere. I was on my way to work. I knew Belvedere was on empty, but I was told that cars were able to drive 100 miles once the gaslight popped on. I was about 40 miles in when my car gave out.

I didn't have a cell phone at the time. A couple cars passed by but I sat staring. I knew I would have to walk to the gas station, which thankfully wasn't too far, so I let go of the wheel, stepped out of the car, and scuffled off. I wasn't too far down the road from my sleeping Belvedere, staring at my cloggy sneakers and sweating, when I came upon the bird. Its yellow feathers hugged perfectly around its body as if it was tucked in for an afternoon nap. I didn't see blood, just a perfect goldfinch stiff on its side. I nudged it twice with my foot only to have it pivot a few centimeters. I felt guilty for disturbing the feathered, hallowed cadaver. I sighed and continued towards the gas station. I felt a soft wind push on my chest asking me to slow down, go back, the drifting air whispering, *go back to the yellow bird*. I stopped and did as the wind said. I trotted back and jumped into place a foot behind the bird, bending my knees, leaning in to stare at its striking features: its lemon tuft, its thorned beak.

I ran backward back to Belvedere, an eye on the goldfinch the whole time. I opened the passenger door with my crooked key. I took out two cigarette boxes that were tucked under the seat. I ran back to the bird, this time forward, with the car door still ajar. I squatted and used the two cartons to scoop the finch. I passively tried to keep it from touching me, balancing it on the flattened cardboard, but by the time I walked into the woods lining the road, the cigarette boxes littered the ground and I had the bird gently tucked in my palm. When I came to a small opening of trees, I used my free hand to dig a hole. As black mud was caking under my fingernails, I sang Leonard Cohen's *Hallelujah* hoping the bird could somehow hear it, somehow comprehend its words. I placed the bird in the hole, its yellow strikingly contrasting the moist dirt, and covered it with cold earth. I tasted salt on my lips.

Back in the car, I saw myself in the rearview, tan stripes on my cheeks where I had wiped my face. I went into work dirty and nobody said a word to me. I ran the dishwasher over and over again and sniffled my running nose anytime I saw the yellow cornbread caked onto the cheap plates. Those I kept aside unwashed in a small cabinet at the back of the restaurant.

\* \* \*

I was on my bicycle, pedaling fast, using my arms to pull up the handlebars and my legs to lift the back wheel off of the ground, hopping over stones and litter. I had pedaled faster seeing a lump in the road, wanting to hop over it, but I skidded and fell onto my side when I saw the entrails. Its back leg was curved like a scorpion tail, its foot resting on the back of its head. There were pinks and reds and whites leaking out of the toad's side. I could have found the same hues of behind the clouds if I decided to look up.



I was wearing two shirts at the time, two white shirts. I used the first shirt to pick the body up and rolled the toad like a loose burrito folding the ends of the shirt. I used the undershirt to clean the street, scraping the dark and spitting on the ground. I buried the burrito coffin in a cylindrical hole. Not a single car stopped to ask why I was shirtless, kneeling, singing to the dug-up ground in the cold dusk. I skipped the third and fourth verse of *Hallelujah* and only cried a little, but the verses that I did sing, I sung them proudly.

\* \* \*

I buried my first human being a week after my 30<sup>th</sup> birthday. You know, I stopped counting the neglected lives long before that, but it almost made me wish I still had the moleskin. I used to have a roster I'd update each time, adding tally marks in the tiny notebook I kept in my pant-pocket next to opossums, raccoons, skunks, et cetera; I had one marked next to a family dog; one for the large elk off of the pike. I could have flipped to a new page.

I took a sharp turn into my development around midnight and was speeding through the narrow streets. My neighbor's kid was walking down Ridley Avenue. I hit Erik from the side as he was turning to jump out of the way. His face was pale under the streetlamp and there was blood on his teeth. I looked around. The houses were dark. I threw his dead weight in my car and drove the extra block to my house.

My yard was torn up from various construction projects I had taken on and never completed, so when I was finished and stood brown and wet, the yard looked like the same eyesore that it always had. I didn't sing and I didn't cry.

When I stretched and yawned after throwing the shovel under the deck, I walked to the back of the yard and stood over the soil-filled trench. Everything was silent except my breathing. I gazed around the neighborhood, lastly staring at the kid's house. I saw his dad through the kitchen window washing his hands in the house one plot over, staring blankly into the predawn darkness. I'm sure it was close to sunrise by then. I went inside and rinsed my hands in kitchen sink, too, my work done for the day. With the cool water flowing over my stiff and blistered hands, I tried to recall the first verse of *Hallelujah* and couldn't remember for the life of me.

\*

# can't you remember the antimatter?

George Djuric

*I tried to free myself from him by moving on from the mythologies of the slums to games with time and infinity, but those games are now Borges's and I will have to conceive of other things.*

Jorge Luis Borges – 'Borges and I'

Oscar Wilde walks through the customs, Anything to declare, sir? I declare I am a genius. I walk through the customs, Anything to declare, buddy? My name is George, you can buddy yourself, and all I have to declare is this memory of the slums I grew up in that I carry like a bible inside the pocket in front of my heart. Any tax on that, buddy?

The color of one's creed, necktie, eyes, thoughts, manners, speech, is sure to meet somewhere in time of space with a fatal objection from a mob that hates that particular tone. And the more different, the more unusual the man, the nearer he is to the stake. There is nothing dictators hate so much as an unassailable, eternally elusive, eternally provoking gleam. One of the main reasons why the very gallant Russian poet Gumilev was put to death by Lenin's ruffians was that during the whole ordeal, in the prosecutor's dim office, in the torture house, in the winding corridors that led to the truck, in the truck that took him to the place of execution, and at that place itself, full of the shuffling feet of the clumsy and gloomy shooting squad, the poet kept smiling.

You never knew back then back there, some schmuck pulls a virtuoso knife out and it swiftly travels to deliver a cardiac arrest. Where I grew up it was a daily ritual, even though virtuoso knives were scarce. You walk through my Zemun neighborhood, and by the time you reach the end of the street, where gypsy shacks kiss a dump field, the infamous Yelovac, your pants are wet and your ass stinks, or it is them who double stink by now; no gray, scented area there. They stare you down, you stare back at them, that's the juice; unless some weak sucker can't handle his fear and he jumps at you screaming at the top of his lungs while trying to bury his void, or even better, fill it with an inflicted wound. If you've seen the Gangs of New York, you know how poetic it is compared to a never ending bildungsroman of the slums; that is if you've ever tasted the actual slumslife. If not, hang in, you might learn a thing or three. Back then, probability of survival wasn't a mere computation of odds on the dice or more complicated variants; it was the acceptance of the lack of certainty in your capability to survive, and the development of methods for dealing with your survival.

Truth to be spitted out with a phlegm, while I was quite cross-eyed as a kid, my mind wasn't; I knew I had to step it up the first time around, otherwise I'd become their steady customer. I'm a six-year-old sent for a loaf of bread some three hundred yards down the street. I walk by the old houses worn smooth by the winds of innumerable days, with echoes and memories of colors scattered in the depth of the cloudless sky. A few more houses and the street ceases

to maintain any pretense of urbanity, resembling a man returning to his little village who piece by piece strips off his Sunday best slowly changing back into a peasant as he gets closer to his home.

The very first time I take upon this adventure, the Zemun's barbarians are there, with an expression which no human tongue can render any account of: a rigid, stern looks settled upon their features with a slight frown as if in response to some gloomy thoughts or unpleasant sensation; five scumbags playing soccer in front of the bunkered heavy metal gates of Navip, the biggest liquor and wine producer in Yugoslavia, its high walls featuring broken glass that blasts kaleidoscope reflections straight into my eyeballs. The shoddies shower me with names, curses, but I keep on going – intimidated, pissed, but not scared. Then they block the way, interrupting my mission: it is an obstacle I have to overcome, obstacle which gives the measure of a deed and of the man who performs it. I stop. Now what? After a verbal massage they let me go. To be repeated on my way back; this time they reach for my bread (no butter back then – one day a man walks in our yard looking for fresh sour cream since we had a cow: Say what?!). A rush of fear shakes my body as I hit the closest raider and break his slimy nose. He runs away weeping, the brave bunch follows; I storm home pressing the blood-stained bread on my chest. I feel free yet frightened – the first giaour to enter the forbidden city of Mecca. Few days later I go again. The pressure of the unknown boils inside my head: I can't wait to get over with it. They look at me, I look at them, no one says a freakin' word.

For my part I have no doubt as to the internal causes that led me to pen this episode – I do so under stress of a comparatively unusual but very powerful sentiment: that of shame. This first win, though, felt striking. Depending who you ask, it was like entering the Pink Floyd studio during the recording of the Dark Side of the Moon, or the first lap of the 24 Hours of Le Mans; or even juicier, a reading of A Universal History of Infamy. This book dumped on my barely literate shoulders the weight I wasn't ready for. As far as I could see there was no writing on the wall either – the walls were all shelved up from bottom to top, bearing the enormous pressure of the antimatter. Let us ad hoc call this collection of unread books an antilibRARY. I don't think I've felt that much gravity ever after: my shoulders itch at this muscle reminiscence. And for the reason unknown to me, we all assume the matter to weigh more than antimatter, let alone the qualitative preferences we readily shower it with. I am by no means an expert when it comes to astrophysics, but I'll question any material arrogance.

Years later, driving my race car sideways through the very first curve of my first rally, still trying to get away from the slums as far and as fast, a voice spoke to me: One of these days the future will be here, and you won't be ready for it. Then it touched my shoulder and drifted away. The message became absolutely clear just feet away, when my Abarth overheated and the smell of the burning present filled the cockpit with fumes. My longtime obsession had the makings for disaster, which my feeble brain refused to recognize being fried from the frantic action.

The illusion of future is always at its best in the half-light of dawn or dusk. The sense of distance lacks: a ridge nearby can be a far-off mountain range, each small detail can take on the importance of a major variant on the countryside's repetitious theme. The coming of day promises a change; it is only when the day had fully arrived that the observer suspects it is the

same day returned once again – the same day he has been living for a long time, over and over, still blindingly bright and untarnished by time. Whatever is a reality today, whatever you touch and believe in and that seems real for you today, is going to be, like the reality of yesterday, an illusion tomorrow.

Immediately when you arrive in the illusion, for the first or the tenth time, you notice the stillness. An incredible, absolute silence prevails inside that moment; even in busy places like the flea markets or whoretta sisterhoods, there is a hushed quality in the air, as if the quiet is a conscious force which, resenting the intrusion of sound, minimizes and disperses sound straightaway. Then there is the sky, compared to which all other skies seem fainthearted efforts. Solid and luminous, it is always the focal point of the landscape. At sunset, the precise, curved shadow of the earth rises into it swiftly from the horizon, cutting into light section and dark section. When all daylight is gone, and the space is thick with stars, it is still of an intense and burning blue, darkest directly overhead and paling toward the earth, so that the night never really goes dark.

At this point you will either snap and hurry back inside the slums, or you will go on standing there and let something very peculiar happen to you, something that everyone who lives in the myth has undergone and which the French call le baptême de solitude. It is a unique sensation, and it has nothing to do with loneliness, for loneliness presupposes memory. Here in this wholly antimaterial landscape lighted by stars like flares, even memory disappears; a strange, and by no means pleasant process of reintegration begins inside you, and you have the choice of fighting against it, and insisting on remaining the person you have always been, or letting it take its course. For no one who has stayed in the myth for a while is quite the same as when he came. Of course, no matter how keenly an epiphany is presented and analyzed, there will be minds that remain blank and spines that remain unkindled.

28

Perhaps the logical question to ask at this point is: why this obsession with future, this addiction with myth? The answer is that when a man has been there and undergone the baptism of solitude he can't help himself. Once he has been under the spell of the vast luminous, silent country, no other place is quite strong enough for him, no other surroundings can provide the supremely satisfying sensation of existing in the midst of something that is absolute. He will go back, whatever the cost in time or money, for the absolute has no price.

The map I am using today does not feature the village of Zemun, nor it pinpoints the Sime Šolaje Street as it fades into the deep dump. Doesn't even indicate the vast area of my beloved slums, still religiously placed in front of my aging heart. How very inconsiderate on the part of the cartographers, I'll bet they didn't forget to indicate their own shitty hometowns, those illiterate morons. Which clearly indicates how unsustainable the past is, a fishing trip delusion entirely surrounded by liars in old clothes. Which leaves the mythology as the last and only asylum available to the man of reason, or the woman of vanity: My dear Dorianna, you don't dye your hair to deceive other people, or to fool yourself, but rather to cheat the picture in your closet a little.

What is the myth after all if not the most authentic ending which is already revolving towards another beginning. Let me bless those soccer playing freaks, for in the natural evolution of things the ape would perhaps never have become man had not a freak appeared in the family – direct opposite to when a writer is born into a family, then the family is finished. But there, everything has its drawbacks, as the man said when his mother-in-law died, and they came down upon him for the funeral expenses. After all, the '60s are gone, dope will never be as cheap, sex never as free, and the rock never as great.

I recently wrote about the editorial analysis (I still deny my temptation to embrace this *analysis* with quotation marks) I received from a literary magazine in regards to one of my submitted illusions, and at this juncture I have to quote a tiny bit of it: 'Why would a library full of books be considered *the wonder of the world...*?' It's probably me, but I'm missing something here. Name any other *wonder* of the world, and I'll laugh at the comparison.

Going to work, on the other hand, is yet another myth from the tedious library of Karl Marx. At age of six I wasn't philosophically inclined: I hoped for a life spent in the labyrinth of my own fantasies, fantasies constructed of other minds' labyrinths – anything that would isolate me from mental ubiquity of the slums surrounding the farm my grandfather had, from those names my peers slammed over my large head and my refreshing Marty Feldman stare. Two eye surgeries and the relocation to the capitol took care of my exterior troubles, leaving the usual interior suspects to the Ministry of Home Affairs i.e. behind the bars, letting them feed, like a jackal, among the tombstones.

I still can't even figure out why I walked away from my propitious racing career. I was at my peak, only 21 years old, just a tad shy of the full-fledged mastery in terms of driving technique; but the speed was there: I broke almost every single record in the class. And walked away. I can't extract the crucial turning catalyst which irrevocably overpowered all the reason shouting within me. It could've been some unknown personal trait that kicked in de profundis, or that Slavic self-destructive impulse.

One clue remains certain: George and I haven't been in the best of terms ever since. There was a mortal leak of antimatter, which kept cutting my future peaks half-mast, an absence of the secret ingredient that made alchemists amaranthine and philosophers tangible. For a brief, flickering moment George had it lined up, and as I walk away from him in disbelief, he is where he always wanted to be: racing his bolide through the labyrinth of what-could've-beens.

Now I will have to conceive of other things, which is an equivalent of Now what?! All my troubles didn't start in Teba Hecatompilos, that was Borges's Alamo, but in a similar place: a local library. I was five years old when my aunt took me there and pointed at the wonder of the world. I don't think I was that much of an asshole back then, maybe an asshole's apprentice, so my scream had sincerity written all over it: 'But what am I going to read once I'm done with these books?!' My dear aunt wasn't on par with the question, so my very first existential incertitude went uncomforted.

Even at this early age of mine I could clearly see the traces of betrayal, a foggish abbreviation from the path of genius: reading made me too comfortable from the get-go, always a bad omen. I built a self-sustained universe, a parallel reality; the more furnished that castle became, the less appealing outdoors activities reflected in my binoculars. Then the winter would come, as it does once a year, and my father, grandpa, uncle Brne, and uncle Žika would wrestle a three hundred pound hog in the yard and slice its throat open, shattering my shelter into pieces and leaving me bare naked in the frost.

Not understanding yesterday guarantees understanding tomorrow even less, today the least. The future will, as it usually does, produce its own new fallacies, regardless of the fact that they will be the same as ours, as old as the world, which won't prevent our grandkids from being proud of them, wiping their asses with our old fashioned wisdom in the process. The place will smell of fairgrounds, of lazy crowds, of nights when you stayed out because you couldn't go to bed, and it will smell like New York, of its calm and brutal indifference. Those will be the most monotonous fuckin' crickets I ever heard in my life, since anticipation is a very subjective affair. Just like a man grieving because he has recently lost in his dreams the confidence he had never had in reality, hoping tomorrow he would dream that he found it again. That is how the myth is created; it has its fatal flaw: in the evening the Nevsky Prospect is illuminated by electricity. While in the daytime the Nevsky Prospect needs no illumination.

30

It took me ages, some forty years since my first novel hit the furnace, to realize why I quit rally racing. In the meantime I became an expert on the subject of *toska*. No single word in English renders all the shades of *toska*. At its deepest and most painful, it is a sensation of great spiritual anguish, often without any specific cause. At less morbid levels it is a dull ache of the soul, a longing with nothing to long for, a sick pining, a vague restlessness, mental throes, yearning. In particular cases it may be the desire for somebody or something specific, nostalgia, love-sickness. At the lowest level it grades into ennui, boredom. Not in my case scenario, though: I explored every possible debilitating option within alienated labor, mostly selling cars across the Southern California dealer network, from Toyotas to Nissans, then Fords and BMWs, Hondas too. The only thing I can recommend at this stage is a sense of humor. Meanwhile time went about its immemorial work of making me look and feel like shit. I didn't care; always busy with a new carrot a foot away, bigger and juicier by every new occasion, I'd dream of being promoted into sales management, then becoming a real estate tycoon, the stock market guru. Until one not so fine day we lost our house of thirteen years, which drew the line in the sand for me, sending Eileen and my pitiful self to where the actual sand is – Desert Hot Springs, CA. At that point the final Now what?! happened to be in the tough neighborhood of ours, considering the 2009 reputation of this crime infested shoottown. Back in the slums!

Some idiots never learn, some learn the first time; I explore, while Eileen pays the bill. I'll let you in the deepest secret of mine: I'm going to join the duo, make it the three tenors: what did Nabokov and Joyce have in common, apart from the poor teeth and the great prose? Exile, and decades of near pauperism. A compulsive tendency to overtip. An uxoriousness that their wives deservedly inspired. More than that, they both lived their lives 'beautifully' – not in any Jamesian sense (where, besides, ferocious solvency would have been a prerequisite), but in the droll fortitude of their perseverance. They got the work done, with style.

All the emotional information I've had about myself to date is from forged documents. After this brand spanking sparkly resolution my doubts have their own private way of understanding each other, of becoming intimate, while my external person is still trapped in the commerce of ordinary words, in the slavery of car sales rules. The moment of truth, the sudden emergence of a new insight, is an act of intuition. Such intuitions give the appearance of miraculous flushes, or short-circuits of reasoning. In fact they may be likened to an immersed chain, of which only the beginning and the end are visible above the surface of consciousness. The diver vanishes at one end of the chain and comes up at the other end, guided by invisible links.

Well, I reappeared on the other side of the myth four decades later, as a writer. There is nothing truer than myth: history, in its attempt to 'realize' myth, distorts it, stops halfway; when history claims to have 'succeeded,' this is nothing but bullshit and mystification. Everything we dream is realizable, why not? Reality doesn't have to be, it is simply what it is. The greater danger for most of us lies not in setting our aim too high and falling short, but in setting our aim too low and achieving our mark. One arrives at style only with atrocious effort, with fanatical and devoted stubbornness, it's that simple. Magic is believing in yourself, if you can do that, you can make anything happen. What I am aiming at is an immobile movement, something which would be the equivalent of what is called the eloquence of silence, or what St. John of the Cross, I think it was him, describes with the term 'mute music.' And if anyone is reckless enough to question my credentials, she or he better speak now while I have a doubt or two, or forever shut up: Listen, I built this dream up from nothing. When I started all there was were slums. Other freaks said I was asinine to build myself up from the dump, but I started the construction all the same, just to show them. My racing career sank into that fuckin' dump. Then I built my business career. That sank there as well. So finally I built a temple of the finest illusions, a perfection. That one burned down in the desert heat, fell over, then sank into the dump. But this one... stayed up! And that's what you're going to get, ladies and gentlemen, an undisputable fictional alchemy for the salient taste of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Being a writer, I am are outside life, I am above life, I have miseries which the ordinary man does not know; I exceed the normal level, and it is for this that simple minds refuse to forgive me: I poison their simple peace of mind, I undermine their stability. I have irrepressible pains whose essence is to be inadaptable to any known state, indescribable in words. I have recurrent and shifting pains, incurable pains, the worst possible pains this side of malignant cancer, pains neither of the body nor of the soul but which devour both. No one has ever written, painted, sculpted, modeled, built, or invented except literally to get out of hell. Everything else is vanity, a fight between two bald men over a comb.\*

\*A word of caution: a masterpiece of fiction is an original world and as such is not likely to fit the world of the reader. If a writer is crazy enough to go about destroying literature, the reader has no choice but become an accomplice. She or he may not be interested in belletristic destruction, but destruction is interested in them. The end may justify the means as long as there is the reader to justify the end.





girl with octopus tattoo

FraHo156



## accidental landscape

Brad Garber

Here I sit, on the edge  
my feet dangling in air  
below, the scenery of my life  
and from this height  
the lava flows of years  
past swirl, dip, rise  
a thin skin over molten stone.  
A vast terrain of chaos  
spreads before my eyes  
nothing planned, nothing  
meaning to be or become  
beauty born of pure mistake  
accumulation of errors  
lucky guesses and turns.  
A mist moves over the ground  
softening the sharpened lines  
smoothing out the roughness  
the crags and tunnels  
everything planned  
and I rise from this spot  
not knowing where to go.



## bill of my rights

Brad Garber

I have the right to ride a manatee  
to piss off of my back porch  
to walk down sidewalks barefooted  
and not step on worms  
to buy corn chips and sugar  
to say anything I want to  
in a crowded space  
to touch a sea turtle  
to ride naked through city streets  
to dive off tall buildings  
and live to talk about Jesus  
and other imaginary people  
to buy an atomic bomb  
a drone and a small knife  
to walk into restaurants with them  
to eat spicy foods with children  
to fart in quiet meetings  
to infallibility and perfection  
to say “bad” words and  
have sex where I want  
to beauty and intelligence  
to howl at the dark side  
and walk without fences  
anywhere I wish at any time  
to civility and kindness  
to oatmeal or scrambled eggs  
to a large soft bed raised  
off the floor about 24 inches  
no bedbugs roaches spiders  
to permanent employment  
with nice people in tights  
to a waning life of dignity  
joyfully painless and content.



# shortcut

Laura Jean Schneider

Face down in the arroyo, kneecaps shattered, heart pounding, face mashed into the sand. Above, a red-tailed hawk rides the wind. Below, a stream-of-consciousness playback. It could've been worse, to have never taken the risk. Or it could have been better, a lot better, navigating the crumbling boulders and rabbit brush and washouts, looking for a safer place to cross. But what's done is done. The girl might just find her way. Rolling over is impossible, but her face won't be looking down here anyway: she's chin-to-chest running back through the barren country to the car, cuffs jangling.

But the keys are here in a sticky breast pocket, buried beneath several broken ribs.

Bright, bright, sickening pain. Fragments of teeth stuck into his gums. How unpleasant, but not unexpected, really, this bleeding out here alone. From the loins of a hotdog-stand-man and the regrettably fertile egg of a charming arsonist, this child molester, animal torturer, pander.

What catches his eye—the one not filled with blood—is a single black hide, hardened by the wind and sun into a rawhide cape, shadowing the L-shaped jaw bones of some long-forgotten rancher's beast, ancient horns sun-splintered and peeling. The sole remains of a half-ton range matriarch and her placid herbivore's existence, settled silent at the bottom of this erratic stream, barbed wire, cactus pods and broken fence stays banking up against her hull like a modern day ark.

Subtract this sight from a lifetime of sins and they all disappear.

Miles away, the blonde girl heaves under a juniper, calves burning, sucking air, snot and tears and sweat mingling.

Imagine that hollow hulk bringing forth life, nourishing a body. Imagine eternity here, sinking into the sand beside it, this mute, skeletal beast.

This mother.





# what they don't tell you

Kevin Pickens

They tell you to beware the writing spider  
that if he writes your name  
you will die.

They tell you to tuck the corners of your sheets  
into the mattress  
and to brush your teeth two times a day,  
but they don't tell you  
about the rules.

They tell you about Jesus and Noah  
and the Boogie man.

They tell you about violence and murder  
and you understand that.

They tell you about the birds and the bees  
and eventually you get that too.

And they tell you about George Washington  
and the cherry tree,  
and the rainbow  
and not crossing the street without looking  
both ways.

But they leave out the part about the rules—  
The Rules!

Then one day  
you find yourself with a wife  
and two cars  
and a beige house,  
and at night you go to sleep beside your alarm clock  
waiting there patiently  
like a fucking idiot  
for the damn thing to go off again.

THESE ARE THE RULES, KID.  
ENTER AT YOUR OWN RISK.



# possession: a re-story

Brendon Bayo

Until my father died, my mother wasn't religious. We went to church only when we were young and my oldest siblings lived in the house. On those Sunday mornings, my mother would march us to the bath, scrub our faces, and rip out tangles of our hair. My sisters would scream, I would scream, and we would worm from her iron embrace while she braided and bowed and smoothed out dresses and ironed ties and crammed us into attire every neighbor thought was adorable. Some would say, *Aw*, real loud, but we were too sore to be precious, so we made our mother pay for her treatment with sullen and ruddy photographs.

Then we grew up. Our parents' inattentiveness made us determined to please them, so my brothers joined the military. When they came home for a holiday, they would have crew cuts and the eyes of a killer. My mother would be tired from cooking and my father would be ghastly pale and need help to get to the bathroom, so we wouldn't go to service anymore. We would fight over the same old board games and drink a lot and my mother would tell us to go to bed when a critical mass would cry and the fire would grow low and the heat would seem paper-thin in our old family playroom.

My oldest sister had the best sense of humor. She would send witty group emails, attach embarrassing pictures of me working at an itch on my back or my brother passed out with his mouth hung open and she would caption the family moment with a line about how much my brother resembled my father when he was in his thirties. It was funny, but was it an insult too, especially to this brother? Some of the family got upset and my oldest sister, who had counseled me through tampons, training bras, and boys, would invite the family for holiday dinner, and mostly everybody who was alive would come and then my mother, who had dry skin and looked frail since my father died but in recent weeks regained her complexion, said that she had an announcement, and everybody better stop what they were doing because she wouldn't repeat herself, and the family was shocked, I was shocked, because my mother said that she had met somebody, a lover, and it was the most serious relationship she'd ever had.

No, we couldn't meet him. My mother would not say his name, which distressed the family, and that was how I happened to live with her for a year.

For a while, I didn't know about the Indians who avoided this part of town when they had the land before us, or about my crazy great uncle who committed suicide when the community accused him of witchcraft, or about my brothers who lured stray animals into the basement and dropped them into a well they'd uncovered there. Our childhood was normal enough. Sure, the phone seemed to hang up by itself. We would joke that it was tired of us talking to the person on the other line. My father would scream at the chandelier and ask if it, whatever it was, wanted him, it could come get him. And vases, dishes, and glasses had a habit of exploding. But large families are clumsy, and my parents kept making more babies, and once another one of us was born, the former youngest ceased to be the center of attention, and it felt right, soothing even, to accept where our mother and father would place us, and to let the momentum of the

days steal us away as would the current of time's river gently erode our youth. For months, I would wait for my mother's lover to show and never got enough sleep and in the morning, when I would wake, I would notice that my hair had whitened and came out in clumps.

I would suppose the evidence became irrefutable the night I saw volcanic light erupt from my mother's door. I found her floating above the canopy, watched the tresses of her nightgown drag along the hardwood floor. She clasped her arms around the air and I couldn't say words at first, though my throat heated with the effort to speak, because I heard the cacophonous flapping of a bat's wings, the largest bat that's ever been, and my mother's papers zipped from her bureau and out through the open windows.

In my dreams, I would hear my mother say, Adult business going on here, honey. Time for bed.

And I would say, That's it, and one day, I meant it.

The library was as informative as I hoped. It had books that explained the phenomena without a whole lot of technical jargon, which was convenient because I preferred to skim the paragraphs (I like pictures more than words), and the microfilm helped me make connections in our town's history that nobody else had made before. Then I learned what I should say, what I should hold, and how I should hold it. I would practice in front of the mirror, the propelling of water from the edge of the crucifix, but I used regular water until I got good at it. One evening, I went from room to room, and I would shout, In the Name of the Father. A voice would boom to GET OUT and to PLEASE STOP. Though all the windows were open, the temperature racked up to ninety degrees. My mother perspired through her nightgown, I perspired through my nightgown, and when I took deep breaths, I smelled feces. My mother would say, I love him, don't you understand, don't I deserve to be happy?, and I tried to ignore my mother's begging, which was easier than I thought it'd be because the bright ambient light seemed to halt all sound. An avalanche of liquid white would pour from the ceiling of each room. My mother would rub against it and beg for it to make her worthy, and when she would pull away, her stomach would be streaked with wet plaster. Something porcine bellowed, and finally the house stopped quaking, my mother's teapot stilled, the television's static disappeared, one of her favorite shows came on, and night was exchanged for a cornflower morning. I peeled the crucifix from my hand, inspected the purple imprint it left on my palm. My mother lay on the floor and wept, didn't care that her bottom was exposed. In a few weeks, varicose veins would grow dark and bulge again from the back of her thighs and I felt sad, very sad for her, to be in the house I grew up in and for my mother only to have me and for me only to have my mother. Even though our family was large and photogenic, we didn't know each other as well as we led others to believe. Of all the things my mother would experience, all she had right now was me, one of her middle daughters and not her favorite. Frost blew in through the windows and scattered the board game pieces, and we would have to clean before she would be comfortable going to bed.





*"The High Priestess"*  
*FraHo156*  
*Copy #1*

# the gift

JoHannah Hoschstetler

He had been living on the same street in the same town for thirty years. He hadn't intended to stay here; it just sucked him in.

His mail was always placed in the box at the end of his sidewalk. Rain or shine, sleet or snow. He always waited until full dark to make the trek to the end of the sidewalk. It was easier that way; his eyes blinded by the darkness.

He dreamed often. Day and night. Seems like all he had to do anymore was park his butt on the sofa and off he would go. He didn't mind. The dappled sunlight of his youth danced beneath his closed eyelids. He could smell his mom's pies, tangy and sweet on the back of his tongue. His beloved dog's head was smooth beneath his palm, silk against his skin.

When he opened his eyes a shard of silvered grief pierced his heart. Tattered remnants of yellowing wallpaper wept from the walls and dust motes floated in meager light. Peals of childish laughter drifted away from his grasping fingers as the mists of his dream dissipated around him.

Night was falling now, the sun's last rays seeping from the sky. He sat patiently in his chair as shadows crept into the room; oozing across the floor. It was now in the gloaming that regrets slunk around the corners of his mind; bitter gall. He remembered how straight her spine was as she strode purposefully down the walk, summer's blooms dying in the wake of her passing, her womb bereft of the brief flicker of life that had glimmered so briefly. His acrimonious words rang in his ears and the sound of her heels was the pounding of thunder in his chest.

Full night now, safe to make his way down the path. The door protested as he pushed at it, screeching on its hinges. A box slid at the pressure, scraping against the old boards of the porch.

He bent stiffly to retrieve it, bending deeply at the waist. His back fluttered momentarily, unused to the position. The box rested in his hands lightly, weighing practically nothing. He brought it close to his face, peering owlishly at the address printed in carefully rounded letters. His name and numbers floated clearly before him. The spot for a return address was starkly blank.

He carried the box in front of him carefully. He placed it gingerly on the coffee table. Surrounded by space, the box seemed to diminish in size, drifting in the expanse. He grasped it quickly; before it blinked into nothingness.

Smooth solidity soothed him and he turned the box over in his hands, searching for the return address, as if it had skittered from its rightful spot playfully, landing on the bottom. He found nothing.

He pulled at the taped flaps gingerly. The box opened easily, spilling a small square of fabric amidst a drift of confetti. He turned it over in his hands, spotting the piece of paper wedged into the bottom.



The same rounded letters were printed across the yellow paper, contained within blue lines. He had notebooks like this for school; it had always pleased him to see the letters trapped between the lines, with only a few tails hanging out.

He followed the print carefully with one finger, mouthing each word silently as he read.

“Place the patch upon your eye, quickly now, before you die. Perhaps you’ll dance on seas of green, chasing pirate ships unseen. Youth is but a dreaming state, hurry now, ‘fore it’s too late. Death will come to claim us all, but perchance you will the grave forestall.”

He unfolded the small square of silk. He ran the soft laces through his fingers, secretly delighted by the whisper of fabric. It was a patch. A pirate patch. He closed his eyes and his nose was filled with the salty brine of oceans vast. Gulls shrieked in the distance and the soft whicker of water lapping against aged wood was punctuated by the creaking of ropes straining.

He opened his eyes quickly. He could still taste biting salt. He gazed around in moment of panic, greeted by his familiar worn room.

He clenched his fist around the silk tightly, his nails biting into his palms. His eyes wandered around his home of thirty years, touching lightly upon this object and that. He drew his breath in deeply, completely, and raised the patch to his eye.



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## today you decide against color pleasure

Gary Lundy

rather count on stark contrast of mascara and porcelain skin. work clothes must not be denim. professionally speaking she's a real looker. dark skirt above knees. perfect light form fit blouse. two inch heels in black. i nod approval through the open reflection. we are going to attract company today. on various occasions the young girl hits puberty and notices an immediate change in how surrounding men treat her. in order to permit their gaze access is presumed through the colorful form accentuating clothing she is encouraged to wear. can there be more than their want straining desire. i slowly walk through their huddled ridicule impervious to their cat calls. should you wish a morning relapse he will be awaiting your return to the bed.



## nerves scatter on egg shells

Gary Lundy

42

shrill patterns of in too many ways difficulty finds a home. permeating silence orders the newly hung painting of photograph behind once again glass barrier. i play at fondling a home inside the small wall cracks. he puts together a puzzle using ill fitting pieces pretends happiness as common comfort. she forgets to shave over several indistinct days lavishing thoughts instead upon a specific him who holds her affections as mind reflections. reality bares essential meaning in order to refold imagined occasions into constant repetition of everything is all right. when the young professor shot himself in the head you wonder if it might be possible to sort through the messy remains in order to collect some sort of last word. for twenty years i fought over the possibility of living with you only to find you'd left for europe. use the razor to insist through pain existence is real right now. as a man walks outside speaking too loudly into the phone. and it occurs to me that i have no friends left to save or stop me. she brushes her tangle of hair slowly loving the woman looking back at her. in a movie they retrace their steps until meeting begins a seminal event. you no longer expect to be joined in bed at night instead depend upon overplayed earlier nights when you felt sure he was the one. balance through sheer insistence a world globe sized upon which to assume their lives might reflect more than frequency or opportunity. she gives up everything until the giving feels more torturous than the living together. cars outside drub the wet streets through shadow and light. a distant siren and wind shaken windows. and a fathers decaying love through a distant night still cannot dispel disappointment. of brothers fighting and a sister dying. we were never young you and i when we came together on the bed our skin speaking the little left to say. i suspect she will suddenly disappear into a quiet recollection of what you once thought you wanted. not even glass can prevent the ongoing surprise.



# the atrocity sink

George Sparling

I'm at the bathroom sink, take a straight wood handle wire brush, and scrape it against my palms, pushing down hard around fingers and thumbs, then scrub the tops of each hand, forcing the bristles down to maximize the blood-gush. I use gritty Lava soup, escalating the hands' damage. I grind the long brush with one and one half inch bristles beneath the epidermis and dermis, into the hypodermis. Skin and claret drop into the sink. I've been at it twice daily for six days. My goal is to grate the hypodermis off entirely.

When Sheila walks in, I hug and hold her wearing large mittens. She flinches, and asks, "What's with the mittens? Am I too frigid for hugging?"

I take them off and she stares at the hands. I flip them over. She looks at my handiwork and gently touches them, and says, "What happened to them. They're mutilated." Her voice cracks, her fingers tremble, her face paler than usual. I wish she'd be nonchalant about it, but I know that's impossible.

"This." I show her pulp and skin gristle entwined in the bristles of the wire brush, and pantomime how I lacerate my hands at the bathroom sink.

"Self-abuse is very serious, like suicide attempts." She closely examines my hands.

"They've been scraped down to the hypodermia. You need to go to ER, Heath."

The last time in ER, the doctor shipped me to the mental hospital. I told him about the clunks. I was just another schizophrenic who spoke truth to conventional thought.

Sheila has been out of town and hasn't kept pace with my lust to hurt myself.

"Your hands look like the special effects in a horror movie."

I hated the misdirected humor. Sarcasm is so unlike her, my hands so unlike me. But she doesn't understand what I've gained.

"I did it to myself. I've no need to scream at them anymore." I consider myself an infliction entrepreneur.

"Them? Not the surveillance noises again. It's not those clunks on the walls, is it?"

After two years, we've not had one blowup. This could become the World Cup Final of Arguments.

"The pain is so intense that I've negated surveillance for good. Don't you wish you were free too?" I pump my arms over my head, blood dripping to the floor. I want to pump the fists in the air, but cannot close them. I've tried once and passed out.

“How can you bear it.” Sheila has tears in her eyes. “People die from shock.”

“I don’t take painkillers, if that’s what you’re driving at.” Pain is what kills *them*.

“What made you do this?” “

“Either self-inflicted wounds or buy a shotgun. I took the moderate approach.”

“I never knew I’d slept with a murderer.” Her attempt at humor is trite.

I’m tired of police sirens waking me just as I’m about to doze off. If she answers, she’ll switch my situation from paranoia to insomnia. I remain silent.

“I’ve solved the surveillance problem. My entire concentration goes into these hands. It displaces the privacy violators. I don’t hear cracks on the wall anymore.”

I’ll take physical sickness before living under a state of technological siege.

“Why not read a book or stream movies? Why torture yourself?”

They’d think I wasn’t paying attention, that I’m embroiled in personal demons instead of the narrative.

44

“The pain hurts too much using the keyboard, so movies are out. My computer’s disconnected. And I can’t turn the pages of a book, so exercising cognitive powers is a thing of the past.”

“Your Kindle?”

“The tips of my finger hurt like crazy. That’s out.”

“You’ll live a dull life. Blood’s on everything.” She tours the rooms. “Blood splatters and drops everywhere.”

“I could use blood like paint. Swinging cans of blood dripping on canvases.”

“Put on the mittens. Then your home wouldn’t look like a torture chamber.”

“I’m my own Pol Pot.” I’ll use torture more than simple mass killings.

Sheila’s face showed how forced I sounded. “You can do better than that.”

I grabbed my crotch, bloodying my sweatpants.

“We can’t make love anymore, not with those hands.”

“Not even wearing mittens?” I hated my whiney voice.

“The new you sickens me.”

“The surveillers made me want to puke. So I called them pukers.”

She cast a forbidden look at me, and my hands, and said, “You’re psychotic.”

“What price glory? The surveillance dilemma is solved.”

I want to tell her back off, I’m on my own, no more togetherness. I was once under the regime of terror but no more.

Sheila and I hadn’t sat down during the visit. How is it possible to get comfortable and relax on soft cushions when conversation concentrated solely upon the hands? .

“Don’t belittle me. This brush eliminated all concern for surveillance rapers,” I lashed out.

“Am I belittling you or calling you out?”

I hadn’t been so angry with her before. Alone, I parade around the house for the world to see my victory laps. I march and strut like a proud soldier, having won the war. I’m without an entourage. Sheila wouldn’t do. I raise my hands, wagging them: Take that, snoops! If she followed my processional route, walking through all the rooms in the house, she’d find my triumph remarkable.

“I’ve been raped, you know that, so don’t slight that.”

I walk over to her, kiss her and rub her hands. Blood and pus on my hands, I pull hers to my heart. Red gruel drips off Sheila’s hands.

“Your heartbeats are fast. You might have tachycardia. But you don’t look in shock.”

I finally found my niche: guidance counselor specializing in bloodsucking. “I don’t need a psychiatrist. They’re delusional thinking they can cure anyone.”

I’ve told him many times about the surveillance crew; next time I’ll tell him I’m a martyr no better or worse than suicide bombers. She knows what I address in his office.

“If you hear clunks on your walls there’s got to be a logical reason for it.”

There’s a school of philosophy called logical truth. Philosophers haven’t produced anything except books.

“I can’t scream sometimes, the pain’s that strong,” I yell at her.

She had been out of town and hasn’t kept pace with my lust to hurt myself.

“Your hands look like the special effects in a horror movie.”

“My pal Brushie has taken the place of soap and water.”

“Stop with the baby talk. You know I hate it.”

“Okay.”

I hate her questions and insinuations. Accept pain, no skepticism allowed.

“Are you telling me it’s an obsessive compulsive disease?”

“That’s psychiatric mumble jumbo. Mine is a different species altogether.”

“I’m sick of your paranoia.” Paranoia is one step away from total awareness.

“It’s the shock of awareness that disturbs you most.”

What did Camus say? Something like should I have a cup of coffee or commit suicide. I chose the third way. I inflicted so much pain that I’m beginning to feel it’s as commonplace as sipping coffee.

“You’ll die from some infection. Is dying worth the price of not agonizing about surveillance?”

I pause, thinking how to tell her what freedom feels like, but I can’t. So I turn your back on her and stare out the window. Sheila moves closer, I hear her feet on the wood floor. I turn around and say, “I realized paranoia was mental baggage, so now it’s gone.”

“I should call the ambulance and tell them you’re a danger to yourself and have severe injuries.”

She holds the smartphone to her ear and I bat it out of her hand. That slap hurts my hand so much the pain pierces my brain. I grin at the pain and Sheila smiles back.

“Listen. I underwent transformation. I’m onto something. For six days, I’ve scrubbed and scoured my hands bloody and don’t care whether the surveillers keep going or cease because they know I’m boasting triumph 24/7.”

“Stop this nonsense,” Sheila says. “When I get in the car I’ll call 911.”

“I’ve achieved suffering by a \$6 wire brush. It concentrates the mind, like meditation.”

“I meditate when things get chaotic.” Meditation means release of pain, more surveillance.

“Right. Tonight, I’ll rub the brush deeper beneath my skin. I’ll show you what meditation is.”

“I don’t want to see you anymore.” I’ve fallen in love with pain, I don’t need her.

“Think globally, act locally. I take the local each day to the sink.”

“You’ve gone bumper sticker on me, eh.” Not so fast, Sheila.

“Governments have gone global to collect every scrap of information. Each morning and night I feel the crush of the bristles, and my face beams in the mirror. They have no sting anymore, I’ve beaten them”

“You’ve gone bumper sticker on me. What bombast.”

“Don’t get flippant. This is the sixth day and it’s taken the place of normal soap and water.”

“Are you telling me it’s an obsessive compulsive disease?” I don’t wallow in obscure psychiatric wet dreams deader than God.

“That’s garbage. I’m talking about how I disposed of the surveillance gang. Take a look.”

We step outside and view a normal day of silence in the neighborhood. A motorcycle speeds past us. “Its decibels don’t register at all.”

“So now you accept the surveillance’s noise, is that right?”

“It’s the sound of spider’s legs crawling in a bathtub.”

I see her on the smartphone. She drives away.

Now I’m in the mental hospital on a 5150, a mandatory three-day hold. They can’t detain me longer than seventy-two hours. I’ll out-psych the shrinks and cut loose from here. My party line: no mention of surveillance. I’m in a room as a camera scans me. I’ll soon restart bleeding at the atrocity sink.





curiosity  
Margarita Gokun

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# sympathy

Anne Colwell

When she came back to work after Jeff died, the kids presented her with the cards they'd made, walking up to her desk and putting their contribution on the pile, saying, as they'd been instructed, "I'm sorry, Mrs. Donahue."

The construction paper cards -- sapphire, vermillion, emerald -- looked nothing like the Hallmark sympathy selection, all pastels and soothing script and seashells. Anita, the principal, visited the class to tell them the news, to explain.

She told Sylvie later that Marnie asked, "Will she still be a Mrs.?" That Joe said, "What do you draw? Like a tombstone or something? Like Halloween?"

Anita told them to draw the things that would make them a little happier if they were sad. So the cards rioted with pictures of dogs and cats, of candy bars, of Mickey Mouse ears, bicycles, skateboards, footballs, butterflies, a bowl of oatmeal, a pair of red basketball sneakers with a Nike swoosh on the side.

Weeks later, snowed in for four days, Sylvie tried to shovel the walk herself and got only halfway before her feet ached with cold and her shoulders screamed. Bowtie ran around the yard chasing something she couldn't see, his fur frosted with snow, exuberant, running back to her and barking and then darting away. She looked out over the white expanse around her. It was all too heavy to lift.

She gave up, made tea, wrapped herself in the fleece blanket in her bed with the kids' cards stacked in her lap. She wanted nothing else but those crayon lines, thick and honest, promising a kind of desire and consolation she remembered dimly -- her Christmas bicycle with the pink and silver tassels, the morning her mother first let her try coffee with cream and sugar -- a time when she believed that the holes were the shape of the things that would fill them.



# chocolate

Doug Bolling

Look, there's no metaphysics on earth but chocolates.

\_\_\_\_\_ Fernando Pessoa, Tobacco Shop

poem of a time

carved out of space

a cord  
dangling  
thru  
a  
shadow

(voices down the corridor reciting  
the probable causes of death,

a slippage shorn

of syntax

and the chocolates,  
they're delicious,  
creamy,  
secrets made of  
little  
stars

on the rue  
we drink that bottle  
of '97 Bordeaux  
words pass back & forth  
like camels in a desert night

Gertrude Stein we adore you  
how you picked up the tablets  
& swallowed the nouns

O you are the milk  
we daily consume,  
your vanishings & return

making words  
from string  
that  
sings

You are the Queen of parataxis  
your words  
leatherbound,  
tight,  
making a  
sufficient  
light  
from  
dark.



# the first floor of the house built on the body of the mississippi

Wes Solether

the front porch baby blue glossy paint slippery  
to the touch cigarettes in coffee cans and random  
buckets a door that doesn't shut when you slam it

the bathroom the corner of the living  
dead squirrel room collects everything  
in the vents disposable at night the yellow  
maggots fall streetlight the dry wisp of  
into the sink a spider carcass carried

the shower shadows and paint the creaking  
she was tired all houses will settle sometime  
we just quit will I ever get this established?  
ever find my way out of here?

the kitchen the alphabet  
magnets spell out 'radiofuck  
me' on the refrigerator  
door to fill is to contain  
is to hold the way dust  
collects on the top of unused  
forgotten things dead  
flies ants termites dust rotten  
fruit vegetables preserving the  
dead flyblown to  
decay to mold blossom  
through the uncanny

the back porch a phone call Angie has  
killed herself on train tracks near Villa Park  
every year someone dies there later that night I  
saw three deer the corner near red shoes  
must be an anti-epiphany last gate down  
tonight



the driveway kids putting  
shit on our cars eggs  
neighbors across the street  
barricaded against the cops  
talk of meth we are too  
close to iowa they wont let  
us park rain fell  
through the cracks home with  
me down the steel  
grate stairs leading to the  
slough someone must have  
died on them imagine  
if you fell in the snow down  
those steps

# /poetry<sup>1</sup> in five pillars—

Wes Solether

- 1) There is no poetry outside of the poem,<sub>2</sub>
- 2) Poetry is done before dawn and at all stages of the segmented orange sun.\*
- 3) What does poetry get in the way of?  
How does it act when you neglect it?  
Does it need you to drive it to school?  
Picked up from the airport?  
Does it ask for a saucer of milk?
- 4) Give poems:
  - a. Declare intention, (who is reading this?)<sub>1</sub>
  - b. When the poem is ready, it will burst forth (see orange)
  - c. Write what you know, don't go beyond your means.<sup>φ</sup>
  - d. Write well, if you're gifted, write gifted poems.<sup>3</sup>  
-If you can't give good poems, consider baseball.<sup>Δ</sup>
  - e. The poem must be given back to the community where it was found.<sup>88</sup>
- 5) Every able-bodied poet must go visit (in vigil) the grave of one poet.<sup>+</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>fPoetics —what we talk about when we talk about poetry.<sup>°</sup>

<sup>2</sup>Poetry is always in motion. It moves below the ground so fast that the human brain can't process the speed at which we are moving.\*\*\*

\*The orange is a fruit, the sun, a person. What is an orange but a layered being?\*\*\*

<sub>1</sub>Not a rhetorical question. Who is reading *this*?

<sup>φ</sup> (Lie.)

<sup>3</sup> Give them to those you hold dear—the cat, the mail(wo)man, the tollbooth person, those that you depend on but rarely see. The forgotten ones. Mourn them.

<sup>Δ</sup> ...or anything else for that matter, pick up the kids from the wife, bring them to a baseball game and consider the baseball diamond in terms of geometry and fours.

<sup>88</sup> Plant them in the sewer grates, fire extinguisher wells, (green)red EXITS, streetlights—the disremembered functioning? safety mechanisms.

+Bring—the bad poem that you wrote in their style.

Give—yourself time to mourn that you weren't alive when they died++

Dress—Like the dead, bones exposed.

Do— Roll on the ground for enough time to absorb their decaying atoms through the subcutaneous layer of skin between the thumb and index finger where your pen(cil) rests.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>°</sup>Raymond Carver's unfinished poetry collection.

<sup>\*\*\*</sup> Exception: Thierry Henry (01/10/00)—Tired idioms on beauty in sports.

<sup>\*\*</sup>Rhymeless (rindless?)

<sup>++</sup>Alive in poetic terminality.

<sup>3</sup>Erasure is the easy way out.



# insomniac

Tom Gumbert

0313

Journal

*Again I'm unable to sleep. I try but it's as if my brain won't shut off. Thoughts flash through my consciousness like a meteor shower, each intensely illuminating for the briefest of moments before disappearing, never again to be recalled. For the past six hours I've tossed and turned, physically exhausted and cognitively wired. This bites.*

I reach for the cigarette, take a long drag, hold it and finally expel before chasing the nicotine with Cocoroco. I grimace. It feels like swallowing shards of glass. For most people, the quantity I'm consuming would be incapacitating. Unfortunately that isn't the case for me.

There's a slight breeze coming off the bay, and anywhere else in the region such conditions would be considered paradise. Not here. This is paradise lost and the devil, well that depends on your point of view.

I look at the lights shimmering on the waves of the bay. If you imagine hard enough, will your mind with all your might, it could possibly appear romantic. I've heard some of the guys talk that way. Particularly Rose. That guy's a born romantic. Maybe it has something to do with the name. When he looks at the bay he imagines being on the beach with an island honey, sipping some rum drink that ultimately culminates in intense lovemaking. Right

When I look at the bay I see...(shudder).

0437

Journal

*The sky is softening in anticipation of the sun's arrival. Reveille in twenty three minutes; maybe I should jump in the shower. Wait. It's my day off. Damn. A day with nothing scheduled, nothing to do but be alone with my thoughts. I'd rather have teeth pulled sans Novocain.*

*Maybe I'll Skype Mom. Or Dad. Maybe not. Maybe Rebecca. She could always make me laugh, make me feel good about myself, about life. Wait. She's somewhere in Africa doing relief work. No contact. She's so brave, so selfless.*

*Guess I'll go the gym, workout until I can barely move, then surf for a while. The internet's always good for killing time and brain cells.*

\* \* \*

I'm exhausted. Physically, mentally, emotionally exhausted. I need to sleep. I want to sleep. But I can't. I run my hand over my head, the stubble bristling as my fingers prod in a ridiculous search for an off switch. Instead, they find a small indentation. It's as long as the tip of my finger is wide and probably no deeper than a cunt hair but I imagine it a trench. I run my nail over it, the skin smooth and sensitive and I push down until the pain sharpens. I imagine a probe buried in my head by some grey alien when I was abducted as a child, or perhaps by the government before they gave me this assignment. Then I remember. It was an unfortunate run-in with a mail box. Literally.

I sit up, bored with the imagination game. If I can't sleep, maybe I can do something productive. How many times have I said what great things I could accomplish if only I didn't have to sleep? Well, put up or shut up.

\* \* \*

1900

Journal

*I spent two hours on Rosetta Stone learning to become angry in a second language. Two hours perra. ¿Por qué no puedo hacer que pare? I finished the Cocoroco and lay in the sun for hours, thinking the combo would knock my ass out. Wrong. All I got for the effort was a gallon of sweat and a sunburn that could cost me my paycheck. Joder esta meirda. I followed that up by eating nearly a whole turkey and watching Pi. Not Life of Pi which was a pretty cool movie, but that math movie with a title that looks like co-joined uppercase T's. Coma inducing movie. But still I'm awake. I can hear the screaming. It's impossible I know, but I swear I can hear it. Time for pharmaceuticals. Hopefully dude is in and fully stocked.*

It's risky, I know but what choice do I have? He claims any one of the shit he sold me will do the trick—knock me out cold. If it does, I might not wake up on time tomorrow and that would be bad, especially if they run a drug screen. With the stuff I have in my blood, instead of guarding the inmates I could become one. Or worse, what if the shit he's sold me mixes with the ample alcohol in my blood to form a fatal toxin? Goddamn it. Seventy two hours without sleep, man that's insane. I know my body can't sustain this and my mind doesn't want to. I roll the pills around in my palm. Eeny meeny miny moe. I pop one into my mouth and swallow.

0215

Journal

*This is so fucked. The pill didn't work. None of them did. Dude said any one of them would do the trick within minutes. It's been hours and nothing. Yeah, I took them all. I think dude fucked me. Pills are probably placebos. Fuck. I went back to his room like four times. The last time he threatened to kill me. It wasn't an idle threat.*

*I can't get the screaming out of my head. I turned the stereo full volume, the windows rattling but still I hear them. MPs came by and made me turn it down, said if they had to come back I was going in. One looked like he wanted to take me in right then but the other one chilled him. Told his boy to give me a break; told him that I was a Delta Dog. I wish. I put on the headphones. I know if they return my shit is weak.*

The headphones don't help. I still hear the screaming. I put a pillow over my face and scream until I'm hoarse. Then I stare at the wall. What was that? A vortex entered through the wall, crossed the room and exited the opposite wall. I inspect both walls and can find nothing. Que mierda?

I watch the walls closely for hours but see nothing. I talk on the phone to my grandfather for like an hour. Then I remember he's been dead for ten years. Maybe it's the aliens. The little grey fuckers have come back for me. They're never going to let me alone. I close my eyes try to will them away.

The slap is loud but it takes two more before I'm conscious enough to realize it's my face being hit. I try to open my eyes but something sticky prevents it. I hear words but they seem foreign. Cold water strikes my face with stunning force and I gasp and sputter. My eyes sting but I find I'm able to crack them open and peer through the slits at a blurry man holding a bucket.

"Are you ready to talk?" I hear a thickly accented voice ask.

56

My head spins trying to make sense of this but before I can, I'm knocked to the floor. I land on my side, my head bouncing against cement and the pain sears through me. I moan and feel my breath leave as a boot connects to my gut just below the ribcage.

Still gasping for air I'm lifted, the chair I'm bound to set upright. "I manage to suck enough air into my lungs to gasp, "What the fuck?"

"Ha!" the voice exclaims. "Nice talk for a zealot. Why are you really here?"

I suck as much air as possible into my lungs and look toward the voice. A short, muscled, dark haired man wearing khaki trousers and a sleeveless white t-shirt watches me as he wraps white tape around his hands.

"Where am I?"

He ignores my question and says something to the man with the bucket, who promptly disappears through a heavy steel door that appears to be the only egress. "Some call this shirt a wife beater," he says smiling. Walking slowly toward me he alternates hands punching one palm, then the other. "Here we call it a sand nigger beater." His punch is so quick and compact that I don't see it before it strikes me above my left ear and sends me back to the floor.

Head spinning I instinctively curl into a defensive posture.



He laughs as he squats to grab my binds and wrench me to a sitting position, the chair teetering before settling on the pavement. Walking in a circle around the chair he stretches his neck, his shoulders and flexes his arms. "You ready?"

As I try to focus my eyes the screaming starts. Somewhere nearby someone is suffering unimaginable agony. The steel door swings open then slams shut as the man who left with the bucket returns with a watering can. Water sloshes over the rim as the men exchange information in a language unfamiliar to me. "W-what do you want?"

My interrogator shrugs. "So many things. But let's start with some basics. What is your mission?"

I blink several times in rapid succession. It's as if I instantly develop lockjaw, my mouth unable to open, my brain unable to connect the necessary synapses to form a response. A hood is thrown over my head and I feel myself being tipped backward. I try to flail, to catch myself but bindings prevent my movement and I am totally at the mercy of my captors who hold me precariously tilted back.

Suddenly water's filling my nose and mouth. My body reacts, gagging, gasping for air but sucking in water. I choke. My heart pounds, trying to escape my chest in an effort to gain the life sustaining oxygen I'm unable to provide. In the darkness of the hood, my eyes squeezed closed, I imagine my death, even as my body struggles for life.

I'm pulled forward gagging and gasping, panicking and unable to catch my breath. "Your mission?" I hear him scream and a second later I'm jerked backward.

I don't know how many times this process was repeated. I don't remember what, if anything, I said or how long I've been sitting here in the dark crying. I hear the call to worship. I hear the angels sing. I hear the door open and footsteps approach. The hood is pulled from my head and sunlight reflecting off the ocean stings my eyes.

I blink to clear my vision, and squint upward into the face of my rescuers. I smile at them, these heroes who have come for me. They help me to my feet and someone asks if I'm okay. I nod. A woman puts a stethoscope to my chest and asks me to take deep breaths. I tell them about the torture. I tell them I can identify my torturer. They exchange glances. I turn and see him in the room, standing across from me, staring at me. I point and scream and continue screaming until they pull me away from the mirror.





miyazaki love  
Jeanna Szuch

## why kabede wrote poetry

Lynn Hoffman

because only a mobius strip makes ends meet.  
because the ghost of light performance is inclined to fly and hide.  
because chances shrink with effort and the dwindling supply of kings  
because it is a matter, in the end of edges, creases, folds unstraightened  
because she left him  
because the reeds command the wind to stretch them over  
because the bullets went through Billie  
because one good poem was one good day  
because he was there when there was room to hide  
because the vacant skeleton of *fasciolaria tulipa* curves  
because his daughter didn't call  
because vienna wouldn't take him in  
because the inside shut him out  
because it made him doubt the existence of  
because he loved his friends  
because he knew how little time  
because it was the only only thing to do



## kabede's inappropriate

Lynn Hoffman

expelled from the garden  
and waiting for the bus  
kabede chants the word  
'inappropriate'  
'in appropriate'  
'in a propriate'  
he imagines propriates  
draws their outlines  
on the ground with his foot  
and he wonders what  
it would be like  
to be in one. he

thinks it would be warm there  
and smell like mint and honey  
his propriate would have stringed instruments  
and enough to eat and  
as the bus approaches, its air brakes  
whisper that-sure enough  
in his own propriate, he  
would be at last, at home  
and he would answer your knock  
in a helmet and a skirt  
and offer you a foaming glass  
of what you drank last time.



# kabede goes to the whorehouse

Lynn Hoffman

they smiled at kabede as he pushed  
through the glass-bead curtain  
everybody smiles at kabede  
easy as gravity those kabede-smiles  
but he saw miracles  
the parting of a sea he could never swim,  
a lift up a mountain that he'd never climb  
the working women worked him  
electric grins, pneumatic breasts  
appointed fumes and stilty shoes  
kabede brought a yearning,  
an ache, an avalanche  
and the sadface, darkeye one  
who won his custom, she  
undressed kabede with feathery  
eyes on the clock and knew  
he was one of the easy ones,  
the soft ones, the ones half in love.

60

“i’ll write a song about this” kabede said  
“i won’t” she said and touched his cheek  
and almost cried.



# kabede knows

Lynn Hoffman

that out of gondar is twelve days  
that out of africa is twelve hours  
that a thousand people can fit inside a  
plane  
that three hundred people make a town  
that once he couldn’t own land  
that now he doesn’t have to  
so gondar is bigger than africa  
and a plane has more life than a town  
and that to own is merely  
to remain.



# obituary for kabede

Lynn Hoffman

In strange towns strange people would ask him for directions  
And he often knew their way even when he couldn't find his own.  
He made fun of gods but he worshipped dogs and trees.  
He cried whenever you gave him half a chance.  
If he'd had a tattoo, it would have been the word FRAGILE, all caps, bright red  
but he never would have let you see it.  
He didn't have much music, but he loved to dance  
He admired chefs, waiters and doctors, didn't think much of cops and lawyers  
He learned a lot of things too late for them to do him any good  
He tried them anyway  
He squeezed the pleasure out  
He drank 'cause it felt like home and he was always looking for home  
He hated bullies but no one else  
He was shy and bruised easy. Did you know that?  
He understood Repentance but not Regret.  
He made me laugh.  
He had some loves that struck him dumb-you know who you are  
He worried that he wasn't grateful enough and he died  
thinking that he missed something really important.  
He promises to do better next time.



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## moving

Amélie Olaiz (translated by Toshiya Kamei)

When I typed the title, I never imagined it would be prophetic. Since that moment human ants had begun to arrive taking everything off my desk. Clinging to my Remington, I typed faster and faster to save something, at least the story, thinking about the critters' backs as they took me out of my dismantled apartment. "Readers are next," the foreman said before dropping this page on the street.



thoughts

Margarita Gokun

## an archangel on the steps

Amélie Olaiz (translated by Toshiya Kamei)

The clouds went down when I saw him that afternoon. I stopped halfway up the stairs in front of the temple, stunned, as though I unexpectedly found God. Only his silver hair and white robe swayed in the wind. A feather fell out of his wings and grazed my face: it smelled like candy. The sight of him restored my lost faith; my goose bumps betrayed me. As a woman passed by him, she dropped a coin into a container. The sound broke my reverie.

The Mime Archangel took off his wings to pick up his jar, went down the steps, and left me there.



## defanged

Amélie Olaiz (translated by Toshiya Kamei)

I told him to stop biting me because I didn't enjoy that kind of lovemaking, but he couldn't help it: the vices of desire are like that.

At the first opportunity he sank his teeth into my jugular vein knowing how obsessive I am about my job.

"I'm damn sick and tired of your cruelty!" I cried, driving a needle with morphine into his pale neck.

Pulling out his eyeteeth wasn't easy, especially because the roots were very deep.

When he noticed his teeth were missing, he stormed out of the house, furious.

As something to remember him by, I had earrings made from his incisors. Unfortunately, I could never see them in the mirror.



## mercy

Amélie Olaiz (translated by Toshiya Kamei)

In multiple lives you have been a mother, wife, whore, queen, daughter, witch, mistress, cat, sister, and victim. I have been a hangman, father, king, lover, brother, he-man, son, pimp, wizard, husband, and mastiff.

Now, because of the transmutation of souls, I'm the woman who writes these words, and you're my man.



# breakfast with love

Milton Ehrlich

Single, married, widowed or divorced,  
they all flock to the Tick-Tock Diner  
for breakfast with the buxom waitress,  
nightingally, in her frilly frock,  
who loves to feed their yawning faces.

They leave behind either furnished rooms  
or sleeping wives who never do breakfast.

Guys with gaping mouths and missing teeth  
assemble on stools,  
like a brood of birds, sitting in a nest waiting to be fed.  
The swirl of cigarette smoke hovers  
over cup after cup of coffee.

They savor molasses-raisin cookies,  
apple-pan-dowdy, or puffed-up muffins,  
the size of young breasts.

64

One man puts a coin in the Juke Box,  
swaying to the strains of  
“Love oh love, Oh careless love.”  
He lingers as long as he can,  
before leaving for work, feeling content.

Taking his place at the grinding monotony  
on the Bendix assembly line, he fits together  
nuts and bolts, springs and things  
that fit together better than the way  
his life has come apart.

When payday comes around,  
he hunkers down like a wildebeast  
murdering time,  
more lost than found.

He settles in with a toothless grin,  
two six-packs, a bottle of gin  
and a night of ESPN.  
What happened to the child within  
who fills an empty space that stretches back to the stars?





# courting the meal

Adam Deutsch

*for Claire Thomas*

We're no spring chickens any more  
but I don't think I'll be getting married today.

No? I guess I won't either, she says.

We have our day in a true order.  
She needs to run to the market

before she eats Low Fat, which would be a shame, as  
Low Fat is the name of her fiancé's kitty.

It wouldn't actually happen. Nobody's eating  
the cat. The animal will not be harmed, but

what of the paint brush the little darling's fur  
could make?

We have to get going, but first:  
the dragons. A sad thing about the Komodo dragons

we've learned about just this day.  
The babies. They roll in poo so their parents won't eat

them. It's a damned if you do/don't sort of thing. Isn't  
that awful? The upbringing of a serial killer.

It's instinct, and it's kinda gross at times.  
She's a dirty bird, that mother nature.

Now, what is this hunger of ours for?



# her problem

Adam Deutsch

The place I've rented,  
tree drops crab apples  
I never have to rake up.  
It's that individual convergence  
with the dirt  
and what comes forth  
that decides whether  
those deer  
are majestic or pesky.  
The headlight cliché happens.  
They're stupid  
or exceptionally resigned. Just  
take it below the speed limit.  
The wild doesn't share  
a mutual fascination, nor  
concern, with us. My neighbor's  
made up her mind. She hates  
those things, their wandering  
through woods  
in the middle of the night. The  
rummaging, jaywalking. Sneaking  
around in packs. She lays  
into them like animals are teenagers,  
nature is a mall and they're broke,  
in the way, out there. And the cops  
are no help. It gets worse,  
so she says, every year.



66



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## the dump heap

Christopher Mulrooney

the valley Nile dries up along the marge  
the temple of the mind's pink candy floss beside the sea  
and nothing remains intelligible but that takes decades  
and then a new building program takes all the evidence away



## turnaround

Christopher Mulrooney

the skillful opposition deploys the trapdoor and the fireman's red suspenders  
to supervise with a comical air  
what hovered like a saint's dropped twenty mile  
and that which crawled in bottommost ooze and mire's  
sustained to serve the state as God inspires

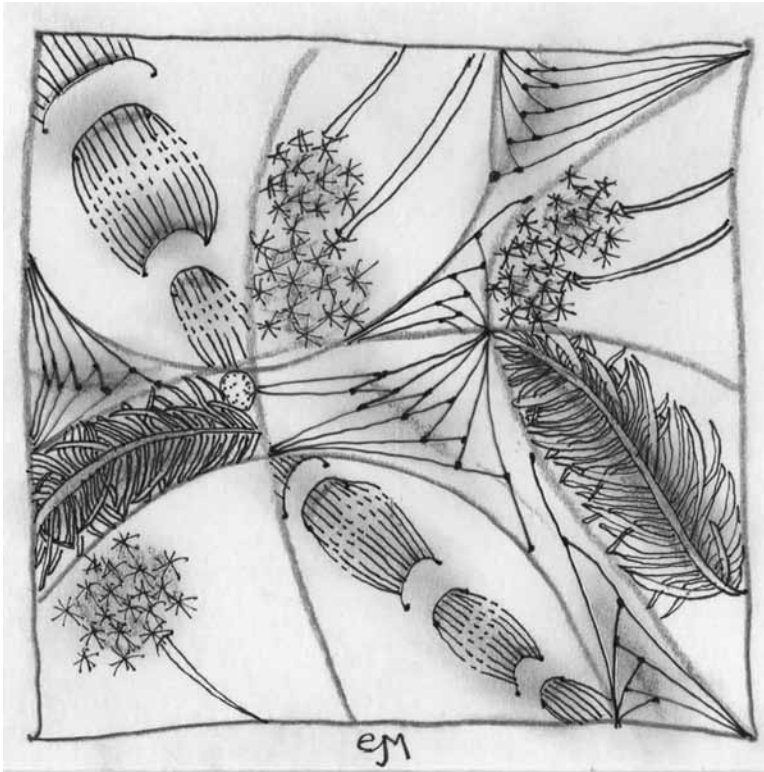


## on yeats' "innisfree"

Christopher Mulrooney

it is the most beautiful of twentieth-century poems  
how like a movie effect and often aped  
the lake "with low sounds by the shore"  
remembered "on the roadway" standing "or on the pavements grey"  
there you have the mind of it today





tangle  
Elizabeth MacDuffie



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# a miniature replica

Susan L. Lin

The day had not started out the way he imagined it would—blue sky and green grass and dotted yellow lines dividing two-way traffic—all the usual constants in their neat little boxes, plain and painfully ordinary. Colby Keiser could convince himself that it had started that way, of course, flat-out lie to his own reflection in the bathroom mirror as he brushed his teeth with the limitless supply of Aquafresh toothpaste in the linen closet because, face it, he'd been doing that for most of his adult life. But why bother anymore? He didn't want to be this person forever, the kind of man who let his past disappointments shrivel his skin before its expiration date. He didn't want to be the kind of man who left dirty wishes in the sink until they were crusty and smelled of mold, amidst cake crumbs and spiral candles that were half-melted and dripping with hardened wax, their wicks twisted and black. He needed to be the kind of man who washed them clean under the running water and left them to dry on the rack until he was ready to use them again, fresh as new: *I wish for world peace and dreams fulfilled. Red carpets and velvet ropes at film premieres. A safe homecoming for the dearly missed. I wish, I wish.*

His alarm went off an hour earlier than usual that morning. That was a fact, the first strange thing. As formations in the sky hovered above the city and drifted over turnpikes and bridges and landmark after landmark, morning turned to afternoon, and the strange things only multiplied—the laws of physics disobeyed and proven false, like they were in that Dr. Seuss book his sister Zooney had always read to him when he was younger, like they were the day a little boy awoke to find a shoe stuck to his bedroom wall. The delicate fabric that separated reality and fiction, present and past, was now coming undone at the seams.

69

He didn't even have the chance to ponder the implications of such an occurrence, no time to wonder about the why or how. After a series of insistent beeps, the alarm clock in question promptly unlocked a large pair of tractor wheels and rolled right off his nightstand, dropped to the floor, and then finished off a bumbling tour of his bedroom by disappearing behind the bed skirt.

The gadget had been a gag gift from Dallas Flores, the company's go-to talent for many of the videos in the martial arts line of The Cheese King Work-Outs. She'd shipped it to his place in a cardboard box shortly after her first DVD had been released, along with a note: "*Sometimes even a wheel of cheese needs a little help to get rolling. No excuses now! Better not be late to a shoot again! ;)*" Dallas wasn't afraid to use bad puns. She wasn't afraid to use handwritten emoticons and playful threats. She was so agonizingly normal and transparent—her whole life a story written on her face and told in the timbre of her voice. When she spoke, the gestures her hands made spelled out an underlying narrative with the flair of a new breed of American Sign Language. He wasn't accustomed to any of that.

The alarm clock was a pain and a half, but it got the job done, so he continued to use it. He liked the way the pastel colors and plastic body looked in contrast to the rest of his room, populated by muted bedspreads and varnished wooden furniture. However, he groaned as the mechanical object ran into a wall underneath the bed and halted even as it continued beeping, louder and louder. Colby lifted the skirt and tried to coax it out by prodding it gingerly with the

handle of a large umbrella he kept in the closet, as if the device were a sentient creature, a cat stuck inside a tree. Eventually, he retrieved the object—which looked so innocent now that it had shut off—and placed it back next to his bed. He made a mental note to give Dallas a hard time when he next saw her. There was no way he was going back to sleep now. He trudged to the kitchen, dragging his feet along the carpet, and began to make coffee.

“Danny!” He went into his son’s room and peeled back the covers. “Time for school.”

He considered himself lucky that his son never fought him when it came to waking up early and getting to school on time every day. He wondered if that would change when Danny got older, knowing that he himself had been much more difficult at that age. Colby set the table with breakfast. Tomato juice and oatmeal for Danny, coffee and a blueberry bagel for himself. They ate in silence, both still shaking sleep from the innermost crevices of their brains.

There was a window above the kitchen sink and Colby paused while preparing Danny’s lunch to look out into the parking lot. It was already half-empty, with most of the other tenants departing for work before the morning rush, so early that the sun was still a mere memory of yesterday. In the freezer, he found an old loaf of bread, only a few slices and the two heels remaining. He’d forgotten to leave them in the fridge to thaw overnight. There had to be something else to eat. A bowl of apples sat at the center of the table and he selected one, dropping it into the metal pail along with tuna and crackers and some baby carrots with ranch dip. The newspaper was waiting at the doorstep when Danny ran out to the bus stop. Colby tossed it into his messenger bag, still wrapped in plastic. He would read it on his lunch break.

70

Outside, the blades of grass were damp with morning mist. With a dirty rag, he wiped the car windows clean of water droplets and tossed the wet cloth back onto the floor when he was done. He was about to get behind the wheel and start the engine when he noticed movement in his periphery, the next strange thing announcing itself and emerging from its hiding place: a single-file line of people surfacing from the opposite side of the building.

Colby shut the car door and walked closer to the street in an attempt to decipher the meaning of their unexpected appearance. The man at the front of the line was wearing a black cowboy hat and dark sunglasses. Clearly the leader of the group, he navigated the terrain with assurance and ease. In one hand, he held a cane, sweeping the white tip along the path in front of him, like someone with a divining rod searching for pirate treasure and buried bones. In terms of demographics, physical features, and sense of style, the group of people following him was comically diverse. Colby could not figure out how they had all ended up in the same configuration, limbs touching the way they were. Some were short while others were tall, some had graying hair while others looked as if they were still in primary school. Each person had one of their arms outstretched in front, so that their palms were resting on the shoulder of the person directly before them, or so their fingers were hooked onto a belt loop or shoulder strap—in essence, tethered to the person just ahead. They all had their eyes closed and were blindly following the human chain as it weaved around the neighborhood. Every once in a while, the man in front would turn his head and shout out a warning: “Cardboard!” or “Curb!” or “Sharp right!” and then the others behind him would repeat the words until the message reached the end of the line in a cacophony of echoing voices.

Colby watched in fascination as the people kept coming, rounding the corner of the apartment building in an endless procession, like people marching towards death. He stood by as the pace of the line quickened and then lagged at certain points, so that minor collisions happened at periodic intervals. At other times, stragglers were forced to jog for a few paces to keep up with the line. Finally, the last person rounded the corner and Colby realized he should take action. He walked up to that last man, who was sporting a goatee and wearing a black T-shirt with an abstract graphic of interlocking geometric shapes on the front.

“Excuse me, what is all this?” Colby asked, his mouth near the man’s ear. For some reason, he could hardly hear his own voice. Still walking next to the goatee man, he settled into a pace that was similar to the rest of the assembly. The man ignored him, feet walking with the poise and confidence of someone who had control of all his senses, left foot forward, right foot forward, left again, repeat. “Sorry, excuse me, but what—” His attempt at getting someone’s attention was interrupted by another ripple of shouted warnings from the front of the line.

“Grass!” someone shouted as Colby noticed they were about to traverse a field of grass. “Grass! Grass! Grass!” Colby heard the word repeated in various voices and tones.

“Glass!” an Asian woman in the middle of the line yelled loudly, clearly misunderstanding the word in the mixture of iterations. “Glass! Glass!” others repeated. Their faces contorted in confusion as their shoes hit a soft, muddy patch on the ground instead of crunching against sharp shards of shattered glass.

Colby ran toward the front of the line as it crossed the grassy field, searching for the beginning but failing. By that point, the line stretched so far in front of him—and had turned and twisted so many times—that he could no longer see the man in the black cowboy hat.

“Someone! Anyone!” he shouted breathlessly as other warnings rippled around him and interrupted his speech. He continued to jog. “Please tell me what is happening here?” For reasons he couldn’t comprehend at the time, he was desperate to know. Finally, he reached a girl with eyes squeezed so tightly, it seemed she had just eaten something sour. She frowned in concentration as she tried to make out the commands that were coming down the line in the midst of Colby’s questions.

“Shut up!” she hissed in his general direction. Her free hand reached to the side to push him out of the way, but it completely missed, instead pawing at the muggy air.

“Shut up!” the man behind her repeated with the same insistence.

“Shut up!” several other people in the surrounding area said all at once.

“You shut up!” someone else shouted back.

“No, you shut up!”

“Everybody better shut the fuck up right fucking now!”

“Stay to the left! Stay to the left! Stay to the left!” Several people at the front were trying to pass the new message along, but it was getting lost in the argument that had broken out in the middle of the line.

“Excuse me?”

“I told you to shut up!”

“Oh no you didn’t!”

“Shhhh!” a boy shushed, spittle escaping from his lips and landing in a small bead on the fitted suit of the man in front of him. Colby stared at the scene in bewilderment, not knowing how to fix the disruption that he had caused. He stopped walking and one by one, these people were passing him on their way to—well, wherever they were going. Colby wasn’t sure they knew any better than he did. They probably had no clue where they were located at this very moment.

A few other spectators, including a homeless man and his shopping cart, had also stopped to witness the bizarre sight. The homeless man was wearing a skullcap and muttering underneath his breath. A plastic bag full of fresh vegetables dangled from one hand.

72 Little by little and without any intervention, the chaos that Colby had created at the middle of the line seemed to subside and the group fell into their previous pattern yet again, marching forward and shouting directions to the tail end of the line as necessity arose. Colby could now see the line’s end once more, and perhaps he was imagining it but the man with the goatee who had originally been the caboose of this human train was no longer in that position. What’s more, the line seemed even longer than it had been previously. Now a pair of giggling teenage girls filled the space where the man had once been. Colby couldn’t remember seeing them earlier. They both had long, strawberry blond hair with identical facial features and were wearing the same striped tank top and denim cutoffs but in different colors. Colby scanned the faces of the dozen people who preceded the two girls trying to locate the man with the goatee but he couldn’t pinpoint him. Whether the man had now gotten so far ahead of the line’s end that he could no longer be found, or jumped ship and abandoned the group, or completely disappeared altogether, Colby was not certain. He wasn’t certain of anything anymore.

Looking at his wristwatch, he tried to make sense of the slender hands that pointed to opposite sides of the circular face. He was so disoriented that it took him a few moments to remember what he was looking at, and then a few more to recall how to read an analog clock. It was nearly ten o’clock, he finally deduced. In other words, he was late to work. Luckily he didn’t have a boss to answer to, but his assistant would be arriving soon, as well as a number of editors. They were on a deadline, working extra hours to get the next Wing Chun DVD out before the holiday season, and the others would be pissed if he kept them waiting.

By that point, the other spectators had dispersed, gone back to their everyday lives probably, the collective trance disrupted, and now only Colby and the homeless man with the forest green skullcap—who continued to mutter underneath his breath—remained. Colby couldn’t make out any specific words, not one. The man was still following behind the procession of human beings, pushing his shopping cart with him. One of the wheels was broken and it whipped



around and around in a constant circle, causing the cart to veer this way and that, like a drunk driver on an open highway. Colby hurried past it.

Uncertainly, he reached out and rested his palm on the shoulders of the last girl in line. She didn't even flinch, as if this were natural, as if this were an everyday occurrence: a stranger placing his hand on you and letting you guide him to some unknown destination. Beyond that, the change was instantaneous when he shut his eyes. The daylight and all that it revealed disappeared, taking the city with it and leaving the skin behind his eyelid baking with a bright orange glaze. The surrounding sounds suddenly became magnified, the way they had been that night on the island. But this time, there were differences. The private area on the island had been dark, quiet and deserted. Now, he was walking around a large metropolitan area in the mid-morning, with only a horde of incapacitated people to guide him along the way. Instead of a foghorn or water lapping the shore, he heard cars honking and slamming on brakes, dogs barking, and sprinkler systems working overtime as they dispensed moisture to the thirsty Earth. He heard that broken wheel of the homeless man's shopping cart, keeping pace behind him as it spun around and around incessantly, like a caged hamster running around the exercise wheel.

"Curb!" someone ahead of him yelled loudly in a rough, gravely voice, followed closely by, "crossing the street!" Colby repeated the statements even though no one was behind him to receive them. Maybe that last remark should've worried him. This whole situation was an accident that had not yet happened, but one that was surely on its way. The line had become so long that they would never make it across the street before the lights changed. The truth was, however, he had stopped paying attention to the messages that these instructions carried, only concerned with repetitions and echoes, passing along the words to the next, non-existent person that followed.

Several minutes passed. They wandered across a variety of landscapes: "Dirt!" "Concrete!" "Wooden boards!" "Dog shit!" The girls in front of him giggled and let out a few yelps of disgust. Before long, he could smell it. Cooking in the heat of the blazing sunlight. Dog shit, indeed.

But then, like everything else, it passed. As a group, they made a few turns, cautioned each other, new messages springing up and originating from the middle of the line as unexpected barriers were encountered. At that point, Colby was blissfully unaware of the outside world aside from the auditory, olfactory, and tactile sensations that seemed to hit him from all directions—the smell of bacon grease wafting in the air, droplets of water hitting his skin, a cool breeze that prompted all the hairs on his forearm to stand alert in solidarity. He surrendered completely to the man in the cowboy hat and his actions and directions, filtered through the long line of people that closed the gap in between. He allowed himself to be swayed and taken to new places. He had lived in this city for years but realized that he didn't recognize this version of it, this presentation of the things it offered.

Lost in thought, Colby was startled when a large and heavy hand clamped down on his shoulder, breaking him from his trance. His body stiffened in response until it realized it was not in danger. He relaxed. There was a balance now, a shift in sensation now that he was in between two people: still being pulled but now one of the people pulling as well. Pretty soon he heard a voice echoing his own as he threw out suggestions and cautionary statements, then another,

then three or more. He even invented some of his own warnings as he encountered new obstacles. Behind him, the helpless shopping cart wheel continued to turn, repetitions of the same motion persisting, however faintly.

When someone yelled, “Stop!” his first reaction was just to repeat the word and keep walking, but then he realized what it meant. He stopped moving abruptly, accidentally stepping on the heel of the girl in front.

“Sorry.” Colby mumbled a cursory apology, but she barely acknowledged him.

“Open your eyes!” It was a command, not a statement. “Open your eyes! Open, open, open...” He opened his eyes and the well-lit landscape shocked him even though he was expecting it, piercing his eyes in an all-consuming glow. The girls in front of him looked different than before—older, as if they had stepped through a portal somewhere between point A and point B and exited on the other side, where the future of adulthood was waiting to greet them.

Colby looked down at his hands, flipping them over and then back again, finding nothing discernibly changed. He glanced at his reflection in the glass window of the laundromat where he had stopped. Inside, people sat reading newspapers or watching TV screens, completely oblivious to what had taken place right outside. Around and around their garments tumbled, warm and soft inside the cyclical machines. Colby waited around for further explication of what had just occurred, not knowing what he expected. Maybe the man in the black cowboy hat and white stick would come back and explain what had just occurred. Maybe they would be debriefed and it would all make sense.

74

But nothing happened. Colby turned around, looking behind him at the sidewalk and the restaurants and the men in business suits grabbing coffee and street food on their lunch break. The bum with the red shopping cart was gone.

Colby waited a little longer. He reached into the pocket of his jeans to pull out his phone but he found something else instead: a miniature replica of a ‘20s era tripod and film camera—the kind that could only be operated by turning a crank. It had been the cake topper at the surprise party for his twenty-ninth birthday. The handcrafted details on this particular model were extraordinary. He liked the way the delicate tripod legs actually expanded and retracted between his fingers. He liked the way it became so compact that it fit easily inside his pocket. And so he had slipped it in there when they left the restaurant that night, careful not to break any fragile parts. But in light of what had just transpired, even this benign object took on a sinister quality.

He placed the tripod upright on the palm of his hand.

He turned the tiny crank.

He waited for something to happen.

The man never came back around. By then, the crowd had dispersed in all directions like an airborne virus finally escaping a sealed compartment, free to roam to its heart’s content. Colby

looked into the laundromat window once more. A little boy stared back at him, tiny hands pressed up against the glass. Ghosted handprints remained when he pulled his arms away and turned his attention to a roll of quarters sitting on the bench. Colby panicked. He watched the smudges on the window fade, realizing he had completely forgotten about Danny in all the excitement. A few seconds of sheer guilt and terror passed before he remembered that his son was safe at school. His heart rate slowed, stabilized. He stood for a short while longer, watching life pass by.

The sun had almost reached its zenith for the day. Colby stepped across his atrophied shadow as he walked back to the intersection and stared at the street signs, trying to determine where he was. There was a freeway a few blocks away which made the process of discovery much quicker. This was a neighborhood he had driven through a few times before, he realized, typically en route to the aquarium with Danny. But he had never set foot on this particular street until now. He tried to figure out the best way to walk back to the apartment complex, curious as to which circuitous route the group had taken to get here, curious too as to where they first started and whether there were people near the front who had been informed about the walk before it started. But it was too late now to track them down. Too late, Colby lamented, for so many things.

Shadow shrinking, noon approaching, he began the long walk back home.



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## at mother in law's townhome, new mexico

Kirby Wright

A flame has been extinguished in her, not the fire of life but that spark wanting independence. She displays a certain resignation, one causing her face to droop as if melting. Her body sags in the chair. The dining table's cluttered with magazines, keys, unopened credit card statements and utility bills, newspapers, and expired coupons from Whole Foods. She nods solemnly when I suggest she consider a live-in to help prepare meals and keep things tidy. "You could be like roommates," I smile, "and, best of all, she could drive you everywhere." "Driving Miss Lonely," she smirks, getting up. She weaves her way through a gauntlet of boxes marked for recycling, crates of junk mail, and plastic bins filled with ornaments. She shuffles past the Christmas tree and falls into the loveseat beside the window. She studies the rabbits. They're gnawing the carrots she stacked on the snow at dawn.



## the tasters

Brian Flynn

The tasters sit on barrels near a still, inspecting color gleaned from white oak bark. Detecting scents, they toast and taste their fill. Expectorating tongues work in the dark. The tasters, they don't shy away from sin. Complexity quaffs smooth beneath her moon. The tasters mind their own and keep their kin (from those whose tastes spill flat in their spittoons). At least fifty-one one-hundredths must be corn. Imperative, this makes it as contrite as the still to its divine process, a bourbon borne on chapped lips burned with wisdom and respite. A sweet corn breath keeps smoky mouths engaged. Soft reverie of ripe perfection, aged.



## butchering day

Kirby Wright

Sever my arthritic feet,  
Toss them to coyotes  
Hunting in packs

In the Mojave.  
Fresh meat in pain  
Is still fresh meat.

Let them taste  
Poetry in my blood.  
Watch them gnaw

Ankles, tendons, toes.  
Hear them howl  
When I tumble

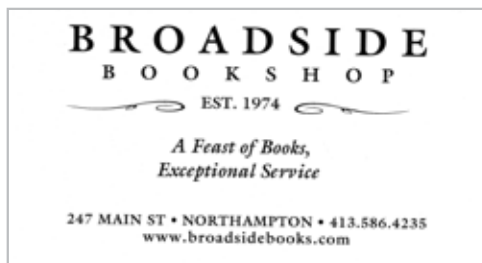
Into their bellies  
Under the blue moon  
Of butchering day.



# the movie house

Brian Flynn

There's a certain buzz in here. The projector purrs in the rear. Images fly by. Famous movies, famous scenes. Everything from the wheelchair in the stairwell in *Murder Inc.* to Warren Beatty's monologue in *Heaven Can Wait*. From Bollywood, Italy, Paris, Hong Kong—films I've never heard of. When somebody shouts the picture's name, the scene changes. People pass popcorn. Have your own Coke, even Diet if you wish. If you fret about finding dead fingers in the popcorn, the usher brings you a fresh bucket. A few of us fret. A few people talk through the scenes. We tell them to shut up. We wonder what they showed here before they showed movies. "There was always a commonality," a wise man once said, but he left. Some of us doze off. We dream of how the wise man left, and why. DiCaprio flies by in a vintage suit. "Catch me if you can," shouts a little old lady in the front row. She's fast with her answer—and cute. I shout down: "Were you always such a foxy little lady?" She ponders for an instant and blinks. When her eyes reopen, she's Marilyn Monroe—a platinum blonde, young and beautiful. As she recalls how it felt and what she misses, she weeps. George McFly and Biff stand toe-to-toe. "Back to the future," she says, blinking elderly again. "Yes, yes, I was always a little old lady." We comfort her. We tell her how beautiful she is. She is. The buzz returns. The projector purrs in the rear. Images fly by. Famous movies, famous scenes...




# anxiety of coincidence

Brian Flynn

ANG is a famous sound in human language: Angels sang, bang bang bang, you rang? On her lips, the cadence smacks onomatopoeic. SIGH is her breath on an earlobe drenched in sweat. Not her last, not her first, but the last until she winds up her normal breathing sing-song. -IETY is an uncommonly sexy suffix. That is to say, within piety and society, it is rare. COINS are often shiny and preferably perfectly round. They may honor notable figures and symbols or landmarks. They're taken for granted, yet highly sought after, desired for value, and quite original in their difference to anything else. SIGH sigh sigh, she sighs yet again, sighs early and often, late and with habitual desperation as we DANCE, before we dance, and after we dance the ANG SIGH – IETY of COIN SIGH DANCE (in a fluky world whirling by happenstance).



78



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# what the poem is about

Brian Flynn

(Upon having read “*The Task*” by Jane Hirshfield,  
a friend asks what the poem is about.)

#

## **A closeup.**

A braided Greek **GODDESS**—Athena,  
Jackie Onassis, or you, it doesn’t matter  
—poses stiff as a statue.

#

## **Pan back.**

Bigger than  
the world,  
she dons  
a long robe  
of rose-silk—  
of life itself.

#

## **Zoom.**

**THE WORLD** spins  
over her back, sewn into  
the silk like the name of  
a motorcycle gang.

#

## **Zoom in closer.**

The world is in full action.  
Centuries pass. Sun up,  
sun down, sun up. **CATS**  
stretch in the desert sun.

#

## **Aerial stock shot:**

**THE SPHINX appears. PYRAMIDS.**

Civilization doing civilized things.

Something darts past. **Tight on A MOUSE.**

#

The cats watch the mouse.

They know. They remain as still as  
the dreaming Sphinx—frozen yet blazing  
in the sun.

#

More mice disappear into houses, deep  
inside away from the cats, away from  
the sun and her embroidered robe.

#

## **Hitchcock zoom.**

Sitting under electric lamps, the mice meditate  
next to little Buddhas. They pass  
cheese and crackers.

#

## **Pull back.**

**SMASH CUT to stock shot:**

**A BLUE PLANET IN OUTER SPACE.**

No braids, no robe, just the earth in full bloom.

#

**TITLE: THE TASK. Fade to  
black.**



# adult conversation

Tim Miller

I'm glad they didn't let me sit in the front seat for my birthday. I never like the front seat. Dad and mom are always driving, and then I can't see out those windows. I sit in the middle in the back and then I look anywhere. And in the front seat everything is faster going by. In the back seat I can turn and then watch and then things are slower. I can see people better too. I can get up on my knees and--

"Sit down honey," mom is saying, "put your seatbelt on."

"But it's my birthday."

"Why don't we let you sit on the traintracks because it's your birthday too."

"Okay!"

Dad says my name. "Come on." I listen to dad better. "And sit on one side or the other. You're getting too big to sit in the middle."

"Really?"

"When you're sitting on your knees looking out the back window, yes."

I get off my legs and then scootch over behind dad's seat. He's driving today. I see his face in the middle mirror because I know what happens. He has his driving face and then he sees me see him and then he makes a weird face and then I laugh.

"What?" mom is saying, like I did something bad.

"Nothing," dad is saying.

Mom doesn't understand, I make jokes with dad more than I make jokes with mom. But she makes a face now like she's left out and I don't like that. "We almost there?"

"Almost, honey. A few minutes. You've been there before."

I know that, I always come here on my birthday. But I feel like I've been in the car for forever. I see all the other restaurants we go by but none of them are where we're going. That one there is where they got busted for having bugs in the food. That's gross, but I wish I could've seen it first.

But my belly grumbles. But at least we're driving finally. Mom was in the grocery store for forever. Sometimes I'm so hungry that I think that if I wait too long then I won't be able to eat, because then I'll be nervous too much. And we're going to the baseball game after we eat! I want to be able to eat because I know we can't get a lot of food at the baseball game, I know what mom and dad can afford. I don't want to make them mad at me.



And the waitress girls will be at the restaurant. They always look at me when they know it's my birthday, one of them messed up my hair and then tugged my ear once, then I didn't know what to do. Even dad laughed then, and I got nervous. I liked it better when I didn't know they were pretty, they were just older then, now I know they're older than me but not as old as mom and dad, and then I get nervous. I remember when I first started to feel that way, about the gym teacher at school, since she's the only teacher who doesn't have to wear all those clothes, and then we were glad the nuns aren't our gym teacher, that would be gross--

We're here! I always think I remember how things look, and then it's always better. Sometimes there's too many people and then we have to wait and we sit by the door all the way inside where there's a big table and a bunch of newspapers on it, and the car magazines. I love the car magazines, I'm always looking at cars. But then if they had a magazine for those big machines, ones for the big trucks with the shovels and the flatteners that remake the parkinglots, I would look at those first. I took my bike once to the school parkinglot when they were doing that and it stayed there all day.

And next to the door is always the big tall ashtray, it's all silver and has a big hole on the top. I keep thinking it's like where the Holy Water is in church but I know that's silly. They don't let people smoke cigarettes around here anymore, but somebody wants to keep the ash tray. And if it's really too many people we stay in the hallway, and then there's a board there with signs on it and pictures, but it's boring stuff, people who want to cut your lawn or who lost their cats, I hate cats!

But they're going to put us in our seats right away, mom and dad did that on purpose, they said we should get here early, and that worked. The waitress girl has red hair and she smiles at me and I want them to tell her it's my birthday. And they do! And she puts her hands on her legs and gives me the menus and then tells me to lead the way, and then she even says I can sit anywhere. I look down one place but there's a bunch of old ladies sitting there, and they remind me of the old ladies that are in the church when I'm in the church in the morning and serving mass. They're always sitting in the dark with their rosaries and always scare me, and I don't want to sit by them. But I don't want to turn around and look dumb or make mom and dad think I'm dumb so I go to a table where I can just not face them, but I know I'll still think they're looking at me, like in a scary movie when people are looking at you.

I play around with the tablecloth because it's plastic on top, but where somebody's tore it it looks like little pieces of cotton are falling out. When I don't think mom and dad are looking I like to put my fork in there and then make the hole bigger.

Mom and dad get their coffee and then I get my pop and then they bring the bread too, and if you eat all the bread then they bring you more. The butter is always melty and I put it on the bread like I'm coloring to the end of the lines, so the whole bread is covered with the butter. And then I take a bit and then I drink the pop and then it's like the bread melts.

And if I'm chewing when the waitress girl is around I swallow real fast because I don't want to have my mouth full when I order. Mom and dad just let me start ordering, and I want to do it right. And I point on the menu where the cavatelli is, and then I make sure to say the word real slow otherwise I can't say it, and then I tell her that I want applesauce and not salad. Mom and dad always get salad, and it feels funny to be disagreeing with them about that, but they've never talked about it. I just like the applesauce better.

Now is when mom and dad start talking together. Dad always sits back in his chair and then he puts his arm on the empty chair on the other side of me, and then he holds his coffee cup. When he does that I know they're about to start talking, and that's usually after we order food.

They talk about adult things, and then I try to do something so I can listen but they don't know I'll listen. I sip water from my little water glass hold it in my straw with my finger and then drip it on the tablecloth, since on this one it stays there like a bubble and slides around, and when I do it at home on mom's tablecloth it sinks into it and leaves a wet spot.

And then I think of my brother, he doesn't like going out to eat with mom and dad, and now he's old enough to stay at home and then not have to come all the time. I think even when I get old enough I'll still go out to eat with them, it feels like I have them to just me, or like I'm an adult. They talk about adult things at home, but when we're out and I'm with them it feels like something else--

Oh--and I take my birthday money out and then count it a few times. I had mom take it to the bank and then make them all ones, so it looks like I really have a lot. And then I take mom's pen from her purse and a piece of paper. Because grandma gave me twenty dollars last year, I know that because I wrote it, but this year she gave me thirty-five dollars, and I try and figure out how much I'll get in five years, and six--

And right then mom starts talking about grandma, and I always feel weird when they start talking about somebody I'm thinking about.

**82** "Oh mamma still won't believe it," mom is saying, and it's weird to hear her call someone mom.

"What about grandma?" I say. I know she means her mom since dad's mom died before I was around.

"Oh nothing honey."

"Well she's blind if she can't see what's going on," dad is saying..

"She's just old—"

"She has to know by now that there are bad politicians, bad cops, bad whoever. And there are bad priests, too."

I don't want to listen. I know it's something. Because when I serve mass people made jokes about that, the older boys most of all. I don't understand it, but then they say it like how people make fun of people, it's something they laugh at me about. And it's probably about sex, they have that look too.

"I tell you," dad is saying, "if anyone—I don't care who it was—ever touched our boys, I swear I'd kill them, I don't care if I went to jail—"

"Honey—"

"Well I would—"

He has his hand on the seat across from me and I'm glad I'm not sitting on his side today. I don't know what's wrong with a touch, but then I don't want to ask, dad's face is red. He gets mad about hitting, I don't know why about touching though. It must be bad because dad said he would kill him. I try to imagine that, like the movies, dad with a baseball bat or a gun hitting someone or shooting them, or then like that dad in the movie with an ax in the snow, and the kid my age running away from him.

Dad's not like that! He gets angry and spanks us, and then one time he got mad at my brother while mom was driving and then grabbed him in the back seat and that made me cry, but that's not killing, killing is bloody. I felt silly for crying but I couldn't help it, it just happened and it made me cry.

Now the waitress girl has the food and I eat a bunch, but then I just watch dad's knife and his fork, I think of him stabbing someone, or even hitting mom or me. When I was really little and I got my first bike I rode down the street where the two girls were in my class, they were playing in their driveway and then I wanted to make them see me do something, and then there were old people next door to them and then I yelled all these swears at them. That was as mad as dad ever got at me.

And mom told me to go say I was sorry later, and when I went and saw him he was sitting upstairs by himself in his chair, and he had all the lights off, and then I was going to say I was sorry but instead I said if he was okay, and then he just put me in his lap and said he was fine, but then he wouldn't talk any more.

I never try to think about that, he scared me sitting in the chair, it was worse than the spanks since I know I deserved them. I don't want to see him like that anymore.

I think I should quit being an altar boy just in case. Because of dad and because of the older boys. I won't want dad to go to jail for anything, and I don't like being made fun of. But I don't know.

If there's something dad would kill someone else for doing, is there something he'd hurt me for doing, worse than spanking, something I don't know about?

I don't play with the fork and the tablecloth after we're done eating. I try not to cough at all, even when I drink my pop too quick, I don't want to upset him.

When we're done dad goes to the car by himself and then mom says she'll pay the check, and then I ask if I can stay with her, and then I ask if I can put the tip back on the table.

I don't want to be alone in the car with him.

I wait by the boards with the lawn cutting and lost cat things for mom to get out of the bathroom, and then we go to the car together.

When we get in the car I sit behind mom instead.



# gripping

Kari Wergerland

Tubes and sharp instruments.  
Extra-strong suction.  
(You don't need to close  
your mouth over this one.)

Whirring noises, drilling—loud  
rock music peppered with static.  
Headphones refusing to stay put.

Attention focused intently  
on my open mouth. “Wider,”  
she says. Buttocks grip—  
back bows, fingers like claws.

How many think of Dustin...  
*Don't think about it!*  
The marathon continues.

Tubes and sharp instruments  
hogging mental space—  
extra-strong suction.

Muscles, bones, and nerves  
paying lip service  
to the mind's (the dentist's)  
command.

“Relax!”

“Relax!”

“Relax!”

TI try the body scan  
and feel this living matrix  
slip back to “on alert.”  
Fight or flight. I can't move.

Too many industrial sounds.

They aren't the Beatles—  
this group singing  
Come Together.  
“Take them off.”

Tubes and sharp instruments.  
Extra-strong suction.  
Muscles, bones, and nerves  
paying lip service  
to the mind's (the dentist's)  
command.

I can't relax.  
“Relax as best as you can.”

Sound. Tooth. Numb. Pressure.  
Movement inside my mouth.  
“Open wider,” she says.  
“Wider.” Suction. Sliding sound.

Tubes and sharp instruments.  
Grinding (and grinding) what's  
left. Dentist—and hygienist.  
We drill on the tooth together.



## bear boxes

Kari Wergerland

In the High Sierra country  
the lecture went into reruns.  
*Place all scented items into bear boxes:*  
*food and food wrappers,*  
*toothpaste, soap, shampoo—*  
*and ChapStick* (a policy tough  
on lips drying course in the night).  
A bear was recently seen  
munching on sunscreen.

Why would they bother waiting  
for the one person,  
who forgets to lock the box,  
to raid our toiletry items  
(okay, peanut butter sandwiches)  
when they could just dine  
on human flesh?

They're scared of us,  
the ranger says,  
and we want to keep it that way.  
This, he tells us after noting  
how smart they are—  
how their learned behaviors stick.

So mothers in search  
of 22,000 calories a day,  
fat that will feed their young  
as they rest in winter slumbers,  
remember to go through garbage bins—  
part of their natural routine these days.



## delay

Kari Wergerland

This airplane refuses  
to back away from its moorings  
into coffee served at thirty thousand  
feet,  
though the two windows to my left  
ease the anxiety mounting  
in this invisible square,  
this cubicle of air.

In the sleek belly next to ours  
two gaping holes  
into which they might load coffins  
from Afghanistan.

Or is this always done away from view:  
do they lift the heavy boxes  
reverently into the cargo hold  
before tying them down?

What else goes into the underbelly?  
Drugged up dogs in crates?  
Black roller bags?  
Surfboards?  
Skis?

The snaky train of luggage carts,  
flanked by workers  
waving light rods,  
never arrives.

No, this silvery mirror  
breathes alone  
as my eyes  
trace and retrace aluminum curves,  
finding the elegance of a whale's back,  
or a dancer's leggy – suspended – pause  
poised to shift abruptly—  
turn, whirl, glide  
into flight.



# a ghost walks downtown on a snowy mid-afternoon

Samuel Vargo

The snow is warm I'm so cold. It falls on my face, a freezing baptism. It's two o'clock, give or take a few minutes, and I haven't roamed these streets in decades (as a newspaperman with a job to do – a multitasked, overworked, draft horse). I'm not dressed up like the old days – in a topcoat, sweater, dress shirt, tie, and khakis or corduroys. I have a bulky brown outdoorsman's coat on, one of those fuzzy hats with big lobes covering my ears like Canadians wear, and a well-worn pair of blue jeans and underneath them, long johns. I probably look like jiminy cricket. Oh, I must be a dull figure at this odd hour of the business day.

Downtown's always looked run down but I've always sort of liked this place. I don't know, I always have for some reason . . . . I take a quick turn up Phelps Street and duck around the corner to swagger along Federal Plaza. Just like the old days when I worked here. I don't come here often. I don't want to – I don't know any of the few slowcoaches walking around and they certainly don't know me. It's been far too long . . . .

A girl dressed in a spring coat approaches. She's shivering she's so cold. The poor thing probably doesn't have the money to buy a fine, warm, wooly, winter coat. She looks like an office girl, like sundry figures of office girls I used to see in city central. She's probably delivering a parcel from a law firm to a client, or taking some file with papers she typed to the county courthouse or city hall. It's usually a bad destination for all involved (whose names are typed on the papers inside the manila covers) and the young carrier doesn't look any too happy, either.

86

Sundry run-on years have passed since I walked this track daily and although it hasn't changed all that much, it really has changed. A few new restaurants are tucked away here and there and the place even has a nightclub or two. And the names on the law offices have changed like a good serving of alphabet soup. But the steam and stink still rise from the sewer holes, as way back when. The cityscape remains bleak and ugly.

The snow is starting to collect on the sidewalk in a slick mess. But I have grip today. I wear tennis shoes, not oxfords or dress shoes. Under my coat, I wear a well-worn hoodie from some university I've never been to, with my school up beyond the hill over yonder. I'm warm enough underneath it all . . . .

I'm just killing time. I have to meet some friends in a few hours and I just decided to walk around the old haunts. Why? I don't know. . . . I guess I've always liked to take walks in the snow.

Nobody's seen me. I'm a ghost here. Nothing more.



## hunk of moon

Kirby Wright

I will trip and fall  
Through glass shower doors,  
Blood and shards scatter.

Two shards  
Bounce into the toilet.  
A third finds the sink.

The drain washes  
More and more of me away  
Under the spurting shower.

I will survive the stitches  
And see a woman  
Standing in the doorway,

Hands on swollen hips.  
She is my woman, I think.  
Her eyes become a path

To the dangerous present.  
A baby cries in her womb.  
I hunger from losing blood.

She slices a hunk of moon,  
Serves it on a blue plate  
The stroke of midnight.



## final act in paris

Kirby Wright

Room smells of pinot and sex.  
The human morning bangs itself.  
Last night was first touch.  
Rue Saint-Martin is a rage of wheels.

The human morning bangs itself.  
Dreams break the lights.  
Rue Saint-Martin is a rage of wheels.  
White petals melt over bricks.

Dreams break the lights.  
Survival leaks to tragic.  
White petals melt over bricks.  
Warriors erupt from the carpet.

Tulips bloom red in a vase.  
Last night was first touch.  
Girl becomes her mother at dawn.  
Room smells of pinot and sex.



# four short talks on booksellers

Moneta Goldsmith

## Short Talk on Booksellers

*Anonymous asks: what is your opinion of booksellers?*

The earliest Assassins belonged to a small tribe descended from a region on the outskirts of ancient Phoenicia. Their central doctrine seems to have held that in order to gain entry to Paradise, a member of this tribe had to murder someone from a religion outside his own. The greater the distance of this assassination, the greater the glory in this world and the next. It is in this way, Montaigne tells us, that Count Raymond of Tripoli was brutally killed with a butter knife in the center of town while waiting in line for a cannoli.

Of course, traces of these practices can still be found today. I am told, for instance, there is a bookshop in the center of Scotland with a volume that contains nothing but blank pages; and if a reader opens this volume to one of its pages at exactly three o'clock in the afternoon, he will die.

There are more obvious examples as well. Why else would so many spiders build cobwebs so close to hornet's nests, or on the branches of poison willows, or just outside the bedroom window of a young man who dreams each night of Super Soakers filled with insecticide for the express purposes of entomological holocausts?



It's true, the manual of death has changed very little since the time of the first Assassins. Although there are a few exceptions. I'm told, for instance, there are whole ant colonies who willfully court parasites that give off nauseating aromas; and that these aromas can sometimes drive entire hoards of ants so wild with longing that they will smother one another with their own limbs and antennae-cords, and even sacrifice their own children in the hopes of falling once more under its highly addictive spell. Such is the unfortunate drawback of being born into the most socialized tribe of insect.

Today, too, there are full-time readers and writers of novels who plant themselves in the center of coffeehouses or behind rickety podiums of occasional bookshops, where the smell of printer's ink is enough to ruin the scent of garlic in a home-cooked meal, where young men can be seen pulling on their beards as they stare off into the middle distance—as if ready to bury their heads in their hands to cry—deluding themselves they're being noticed, all the while hoping not to be.

This latest change in the Doctrine of Death, the change in the *clause-from-within*, may well derive from some of the assassination techniques developed in ancient Rome. Surely, Brutus deserves some credit for this, personalizing his betrayal, brutally stabbing Caesar as he did inside the Theater of Pompeii—right in the small of his own backyard. But this historic event is not in fact where we borrow the term 'assassination', a distinction belonging, by the way, to the Assassins of ancient Phoenicia (despite the traditional line you'll hear from so many waylaid historians). This *is*, on the other hand, where we derive the word 'brutality', coinciding as it did



with the appearance of the very first bookshops in history, which quietly opened their doors for business that day on the outskirts of the Roman Empire.

And that is all that I have to say on the subject of booksellers. Mahalo.

### **Another Short Talk on Booksellers**

In *The Confessions* of St. Augustine the author claims that perhaps his greatest lesson came from seeing someone read a book to himself in silence rather than aloud, thereby marking the first time in recorded history a fool moved his lips to the words on a page, his wrinkly eyes suiting themselves to his body. Before the invention of books, it is true that the Greeks and the Romans believed intelligence was located somewhere between the heart and the 'voicebox' rather than in the brain which is silent.

It is by this very same notion that entire breeds of booksellers today are so anti-intellectual that they refuse to fall in love. I happen to have known a great deal of booksellers in my time, so I feel I should say a few words on the subject before nodding off drunk into the angelic night. Listen. Hang up your hat in the halfway house, here is the secret about booksellers: They have lost faith in their own words.

Take a close look, and you will notice that the vast majority of booksellers are in fact little more than a walking poesy of other people's flowers, a swarthy collection of other people's quotations passed down from on high—from other sager booksellers—which they then use to commit spontaneous acts of education on unsuspecting patrons, and whatever other idiot Bedouins fated to find shelter among the shelves of their dreary shop on a Sunday afternoon.

Over in merry old England, many booksellers treat books like Lords, knowing their titles and therefore feeling themselves acquainted.

It is no coincidence that the word for book in French carries the promise of *de-live-ry*—with all the smarmy anonymity that no doubt accompanies the Franco-European post; that in today's parlance the German 'buch-handler' evokes a certain pleasure to the touch, loosely translated as that 'swarthy old man behind a mahogany desk who fondles'.

In English too, no thanks to the patois of American film-noir, is just as often associated with crime and punishment: To book someone is to toss them in the slammer, and to throw the proverbial book at someone's head is to rebel quietly against the centralized power so many booksellers hold over the rest of us, in their collective raid on the inarticulate.

In the early days after Gutenberg, more than one owner of a significant private library made it known that no printed book would ever be in it. These are precisely the same people today who—Augustine knew first-hand—who love without any words, hatching revolutions in the basement of the ivory tower, plotting our future out of their own undifferentiated facts (i.e. praising Mussolini for the fact that his trains were always on time, forgiving Castro for his job improving public health and education, Stalin for reaching the people to read and write in farmhand, Hitler for bringing Weimar out of its economic quagmire).

They are the self-same people as well who can be sometimes be observed parading about the streets with a goofy grin on their face like a balloon on a string, sporting their customary *muffeta* or else a well-knit burnoose or, perhaps less and less common, a pair of open toe sandals, blithely kicked up on their mahogany desk in a spirit of defiance—or cultural authority abuse, depending on which side of the desk you're on. These are the very same men who squeeze from the wrong end on a tube of toothpaste or who need lines on a notepad.

Such egregious displays of gustatory-olfactory exhibitionism as these are not only designed to rankle genuinely enthusiastic bibliophiles the whole world over; they are meant to mask the fact that most booksellers' internal chakric machines have long broken down, something believed to account for the way these miserable creatures shoot off dagger upon dagger of other people's words which only point back—in truth—to their own flinty little hearts.

Add all this to the fact that most bookshops today look like war bunkers and smell like luxurious water closets, and it is little wonder booksellers no longer know how to love.

In any case, managers and booklovers beware! There are as many booksellers today as there are wheat-ears in a mummy's tomb; there is enough dust in their lungs to be scattered by the four winds of Heaven. And I have no idea what these last phrases mean, but I stumbled upon them a few moments ago in an rare text about the first booksellers of ancient Rome who ostensibly began their sad underprivileged lives as slaves (this was considered the Golden Age of booksellers), later turned scribes, and eventually became as precious and indispensable as cooks or scullions.

Which is to say that there are far, far too many booksellers.

Which is to say they must be eliminated. Mahalo.

### **Another Spontaneous Act of Education Regarding Booksellers**

In the official Bookseller's Glossary of Imaginary Sorrows, which is not real although it should be, the term *prefertilization* can be defined by the act of preferring and/or preparing to fertilize (a transitive verb), as in, for instance, the case of a sparkleponie at a Burning Man festival, someone who has very little in the way of basic survival skills but who makes up for it by being naked pretty much constantly.

As in, for instance, the group of citizens from the Czech Republic who have formed a secret international organization known as MAID—or Masturbation and its Discontents—which aims to cast unusual and elaborate obstacles during acts of onanism.

As in, for instance, the case of the first person to gain public recognition for MAID, a man from the English chapter, who successfully masturbated while reciting John Milton's poem 'Il Penseroso'. The man achieved climax during the line, 'While the bee with honied thigh'.

**It wasn't until after a racecar driver died attempting to masturbate in the midst of a race that MAID gleaned universal traction and widespread internet coverage. It is believed the racecar driver achieved climax moments before his death.**

*Prefertilizing* may also refer to what happens when you watch Mexican porn at your work place and, not having had the foresight to set your printer to *B&W Only*, accidentally click *Print* just while your boss is making her rounds, so that the two of you are forced to look on in shame as a series of Mexican babies emerge from the printer bearing labels like 'Oscar-Lucinda Redux' and 'Las Papillas', something you later learn—no thanks to Google Translate—is slang for 'the little papers'.

Another possible meaning of the term 'Prefertilization' would be something like, 'the days immediately prior to Spring, just before the clock strikes the hour of pure sorrow, when the courtyard clears the grass for the daffodils as a stage clears itself for dancers (also a transitive verb); as in, for instance: 'there is so much Spring outside I could spring myself from the window'.

### **Prefertilization: Yet Another Spontaneous Act of Education Regarding Booksellers**

If you look through the window of Alias bookshop, at twilight, when the shopkeepers collect their wares to make their way home, you will see a woman sitting behind a very old and very sad desk that is made of wood. You will see straight away that this woman is young and comfortable, that she is like a honeybee drunk with honey that is perched on a cluster of fruit. If she happens to be a redheaded honeybee – and hopefully she is, dear reader—I want you to walk right inside that shop and tell her that her skin looks like what the wind makes with illuminated leaves. Tell her that she has a voice like a bird, a heart like a house, that her eyes are what gemologists groan about in their dreams, that her hair soothes you with a cold delicacy normally reserved for complicated organic compounds.

When the honeybee speaks, my pale and intrepid reader, I want you to cast your sad nets on her oceanic eyes. Tell her to be quiet. Her voice will grow thin and cracked as the tracks of gulls on the shore. When she speaks, *if* she speaks, stop her. Tell her that her breath is for Sparrows to wander in, that her back is spied by expert architects for future waterfalls. Tell her you want to clasp her in your arms the way the ivy clasps the walls outside the bookshop—the way her words climb all over you, as me, from a long way off.

Tell her all this, pale and intrepid reader, before making your final purchases. Tell her with great care and tenderness, as if these words were more hers than mine. Go and tell her from you, as me, and then go and find your own redheaded bee, drunk with honey, perched on a cluster of fruit. This one is spoken for in a headful of ways. Go on. Tell her all this right now. I'll wait.



## Contributors' Notes

**James Baxenfield** was born in England but has lived in Eastern and Central Europe for most of his adult life. He currently resides in Estonia where, aside from writing, he lectures on Rudyard Kipling at the University of Tartu. Baxenfield is also a founder and director of the Estonian not-for-profit publishing house Villane Raamat MTÜ.

**Kari Wergeland** has received recent acceptances from Far Enough East, THEMA, and Prick of the Spindle. She is the author of *Voice Break*, as well as *The Ballad of the New Carissa and Other Poems*. In addition, she once wrote a children's book review column for The Seattle Times. She works as a librarian for Cuyamaca College in El Cajon, CA, and lives part-time on the Oregon Coast. For more information, please visit [kariwergeland.wordpress.com](http://kariwergeland.wordpress.com).

**Doug Bolling's** poetry has appeared in *BlueLine*, *Basalt*, *Italian Americana*, *Pebble Lake Review*, *Indefinite Space*, *Tribeca Poetry Review*, *Slipstream*, *Hamilton Stone Review* among others, recently in *The Missing Slate* with Poet of the Month and interview. He has received five Pushcart nominations and has an M.A. and Ph.D. from Iowa and is a graduate of William & Mary. He currently lives in the greater Chicago area.

**Anne Colwell**, a poet and fiction writer, is an Associate Professor of English and Creative Writing at the University of Delaware. She published two books of poems, *Believing Their Shadows* (Word Poems 2010) and *Mother's Maiden Name* (Word Poems 2013) as well as a book about Elizabeth Bishop (*Inscrutable Houses*, University of Alabama). She received the Established Artist in Fiction Fellowship and the Established Artist in Poetry Fellowship from the Delaware State Arts Council, as well as the Mid-Atlantic Arts Fellowship at the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts and three Work-Study Fellowships to the Bread Loaf Writers Conference. Her chapbook, *Father's Occupation, Mother's Maiden Name* won the National Association of Press Women's Award for Best Book of Verse. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in several journals, including: *Valparaiso Review*, *Mudlark*, *r.kv.r.y.*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *Gargoyle*, *Prime Number*, and *Octavo*.

**George Djuric** flew through rally racing, street fighting, philosophy, and anti-psychiatry as if they weren't there. In the aftermath, all that was left was writing. He published a critically acclaimed collection of short stories, a book read like the gospel by his Yugoslav peers, *The Metaphysical Stories*. Djuric is infatuated with the fictional alchemy that is thick as amber and capable of indelibly inscribing on the face of the 21st century literature. He lives in the desert near Palm Springs, CA, USA. His stories were published in *Hobart (Print)*, *Serving House: a Journal of Literary Arts (April and October 2013)*, *FictionWeek Literary Review*, *Inwood Indiana (Print)*, *Extract(s) (Print)*, *Xavier Review Press*, *Fresh Literary Magazine's Printed Anthology*, *Los Angeles Review*, *Grey Sparrow Journal*, *Independent Ink Magazine*, *The Foliate Oak Literary Magazine*, *The Fat City Review*, *In Other Words: Merida Literary Magazine (Mexico)*, *Busk Journal*, *The New York's Electric Encyclopedia of Experimental Literature*, *BareBack Magazine*, *Anatomoo (Tasmania)*, *Commonline Journal*, *Gloom Cupboard*, *Extracts*, *BRICKrhetoric*, *Danse Macabre*, *Euphony*, *South Jersey Underground*, *The Intentional and Mad Hatter's Review*.

**Adam Deutsch** lives in San Diego, teaches college composition and writing, and has work recently or forthcoming in *Coconut*, *Thrush*, *Iron Horse Literary Review*, and *Jelly Bucket*. He is the Poet-in-Residence at *AleSmith Brewing Company*, and the publisher at *Cooper Dillon Books*.

**Milton P. Ehrlich** is an 82 year old psychologist who has published numerous poems in periodicals such as the "Wisconsin Review," "Toronto Quarterly Review," "Antigonish Review," "Shofar Literary Journal," "Dream Fantasy International," "Pegasus," "Blue Collar Review," "Chiron Review," "Parnassus Literary Journal," "Xanadu," "Mobius," "Christian Science Monitor," and the "New York Times."

**Brian Robert Flynn**, originally from Denver, Colorado, currently breathes the poetry and fiction of Washington, DC. He is a recent contributor to *Banago Street*.

**Brad Garber** lives and writes in the Great Northwest. He fills his home with art, music, photography, plants, rocks, bones, books and love. He has published poetry/essays in *Cream City Review*, *Alchemy*, *Fireweed*, *Uphook Press*, *Front Range Review*, the *Newer York*, *Ray's Road Review*, *Flowers & Vortexes*, *Emerge Literary Journal*, *Generation Press*, *Penduline Press*, *Dead Flowers*, *New Verse News*, *The Whirlwind Review*, *Gambling the Aisle*, *Dark Matter Journal*, *Sundog Lit*, *Diversion Press*, *Unshod Quills*, *Meat for Tea*, *Mercury*, *The Meadow*, *Shuf Poetry*, *Post Poetry Magazine*, *Foliage Oak Literary Magazine*, *Temenos*, *Hoot & Hare*, *The Ilanot Review*, *Third Wednesday*, *Embodied Effigies*, *Sugar Mule*, and/or *Poetry Journal*, *Ikleftiko*, *South 85*, *100 Word Story*, *Gravel Literary Journal*, *New Plains Review*, *Blast Furnace*, *Round Up Magazine*, *Cactus Heart Journal*, *Squalorly* and *Great Weather For Media*. Nominee: 2013 Pushcart Prize for poem, "Where We May Be Found."

**Pippa Anais Gaubert** is a fiction writer based in Berlin. She was born in Austin, Texas but grew up in West Cornwall, UK and has since lived in several other countries. She has been published in several journals and anthologies, including *Litro Magazine*, *Erotic Review Magazine*, *Digital Americana Magazine*, *Dog-Ear Magazine*, *Another Country Berlin*, *Cactus Heart Press*, *Step Away Magazine*, *Strange Fiction aus Berlin* and *Telling our Stories Press*. She is a contributor for 'NPR'. She is currently finishing up a short story collection and working on a novel.

**Gary Glauber** is a poet, fiction writer, teacher, and music journalist. His works have been nominated for the Pushcart Prize, Best of the Net, and one was named "A Notable Online Story" by StorySouth's Million Writers Award panel. He took part in The Frost Place's conference on teaching poetry, as well as Found Poetry Review's Pulitzer Remix Project. Recent poems are published or forthcoming in *Agave*, *Gravel*, *The Chaffin Journal*, *Extract(s)*, *Bay Laurel*, *Dead Flowers*, *Diverse Voices Quarterly*, *Stone Voices*, *Falling Star*, *Foliage Oak*, *Fjords Review*, *Tendrils Literary Magazine*, *Kindred*, *The Found Poetry Review*, *Eunoia Review*, *Northwind*, *Thirteen Myna Birds*, *The Bicycle Review*, *Thin Air*, *Deep Water Literary Journal*, *3 Elements Review*, *Dirty Chai*, *JMWWW*, and *Noctua Review*.

A nomad by nature, **Margarita Gokun** never lives longer than two-to-four years in any one country. That creates havoc when she has to pack her canvases but inspiration of a new place almost always makes up for it. Margarita moved to Madrid, Spain last year and almost immediately became obsessed with all things Menina. Since starting to paint with her favorite medium—oil—four years ago Margarita's work has been exhibited at the Museum of Art of Ft Lauderdale (Florida), published in an array of literary and art magazines, and won contests. Her entire portfolio can be seen at <http://StoriesAndColors.wordpress.com>

**Moneta Goldsmith** is a writer, teacher, and former poetry editor of *The Northridge Review*. His works have appeared both online and in print in the following magazines: *Sparkle & Blink*, *Whole Beast Rag*, *Apiary*, *Watershed Review*, *East Jasmine Review*, among others.

**Tom Gumbert** lives near Cincinnati, OH with his wife Andrea (Andy) in a log home overlooking the Ohio River, in an area that was an active part of the Underground Railroad. Operations Manager by day, he has been writing for over a decade. His publishing credits include "Write This," "Black Heart Magazine," "Down in the Dirt," "See Spot Run," "The Vehicle," *Inwood*, Indiana's "Harvest Time," "Milk Sugar," "The Wayfarer," and "Rathello Review." His anthology "Nine Lives" will be published by *All Things That Matter Press* and he is currently submitting his novel.

**FraHo156** has been a resident of the Northampton area since 1985. During that time, he has worn the hats of musician, pin artist, and occultist. His art has been displayed at 'Bound' in NYC and 'Bound' in Washington DC," and at 'DIVAS' in Northampton, Mass.

**Susan L. Lin** recently completed her MFA in Writing at California College of the Arts, where she spent her days photographing toy dinosaurs and eating free pie. Her novella *Goodbye to the Ocean* was a semi-finalist in the 2012 Gold Line Press chapbook competition. Her short prose recently appeared or is forthcoming in Hayden's Ferry Review, Ghost Town, Midway Journal, MadHat Annual, and Gravel.

**Gary Lundy** taught English literature and creative writing for twenty years at The University of Montana Western, in Dillon, Montana. His poetry has appeared in a variety of magazines and journals in the United States, Canada, Israel, and the Czech Republic. Most recently his poems have appeared in *Askew*, *My Favorite Bullet* (online), *Cedilla*, *Indefinite Space*, *Citizens for Decent Literature* (online), *Prairie Winds*, *The Prague Revue* (online), *Assaracus*, *Snow Monkey* (online), and *Otoliths* (online). He is the author of three chapbooks, *this making i tore the sight from* (Sweetbrier Press, 1996), *lavish is saying nothing like again* (Blue Malady Press, 1997), and *to each other water cool and pure* (Blue Malady Press, 2003). His fourth chapbook, *when voices detach themselves*, was published in the fall of 2013 by *a rose press*. He now lives in Missoula, Montana.

**Elizabeth MacDuffie** is a postmodern Jill of all trades. When she is not working on *Meat for Tea: The Valley Review*, she makes her own mayonnaise and mustard and cooks elaborate meals nearly every night. Elizabeth is of mixed origins: 50% pirate, 25% Selky and 25% Pict. After suffering through many scurvy knaves, she has finally met her one true love and lives happily ever after with him in Easthampton.

**Tim Miller's** work has appeared online and in print in *Parabola*, *Foliage Oak*, *Bitter Oleander*, and *Mungbeing*. Other notes from history and mythology are frequently posted at [wordandsilence.com](http://wordandsilence.com). His narrative poem *To the House of the Sun* will be published by S4N Books in 2015.

**Christi Moon** grew up in a small coastal town in California and currently resides in rural southeastern, Pennsylvania with her teenage daughter. Her poetry has been published in the journal *Brush Strokes* and *Ink Spots*, an Anthology of Poetry and Art ~ *The River Journal* and *Twisted Tungz* art & literature magazine, *Nomos Review* literary journal ~ *Women on War and Conflict* and online in *Combustus* and *The River Journal*. When not writing poetry, her personal interests also include; photography, yoga, and exploring local nature trails. She also facilitates poetry workshops for cancer survivors and is passionate about advocating and fund raising for local cancer patients.

**Christopher Mulrooney** has written poems in *Red Branch Journal*, *The Germ*, *Auchumpkee Creek Review*, *Epigraph Magazine*, *Bicycle Review*, *Pomona Valley Review*, *Or*, *Decanto*, *The Cannon's Mouth*, and *The Criterion*.

**Amélie Olaiz** was born in León and lives in Mexico City. She is the author of *Piedras de Luna* (2005), *Aquí está tu cielo* (2007), and *La vida oculta en la caja de nogal* (2013). Her work has been anthologized in *Prohibido fumar* (2008), *Antología mínima del orgasmo* (2009), and *Three Messages and a Warning* (2012), among others. English translations of her fiction have appeared in *Meat for Tea*, *Phantom Drift*, and *Slab*.

**Cindy Rinne** creates art and writes in San Bernardino, CA. Cindy won an Honorable Mention in The *Rattling Wall Poetry Contest*. Cindy is a Guest Author for *Saint Julian Press*. She is a founding member of *PoetriE*, an Inland Empire based literary community. Her work appeared or is forthcoming in *A Narrow Fellow*, *shuf poetry*, *Poetry Quarterly*, *The Prose-Poem Project*, *The Wild Lemon Project Literary Journal*, *Welter Literary Magazine*, *The Sand Canyon Review*, *Inlandia*, *A Literary Journal*, *Lili Literary Journal*, *Tin Cannon Literary Review*, and *Phantom Seed*. She has recently completed a new poetry manuscript, *The Feather Ladder*. Cindy is collaborating on two chapbooks and working on her second manuscript. [www.fiberverse.com](http://www.fiberverse.com).

**Laura Jean Schneider** lives in New Mexico. She has a BA from Smith College and is currently enrolled in the low residency MFA in Writing program at Vermont College of Fine Arts. She has work forthcoming in the *High Desert Journal*.

**Wes Solether** just moved back from San Francisco to his home state of Illinois. He picked up an M.F.A. during his travels. He has poems forthcoming in *Dirty Chai*, *Timber*, and *Sugared Water*, among others. He co-edits *Bitterzoet Magazine*. He has a website with a very predictable address: [www.wessolechter.com](http://www.wessolechter.com). He knows you don't have to use the w's anymore, but he's nostalgic.

**Jeanna Szuch** started studying art seriously in 7th grade when she was accepted into a high school art program. Studying art in college was the obvious choice and starting her freshman year in junior level art classes at William Woods University was the perfect decision. Jeanna studied pastels and drawing while learning how to draw on the computer. Eventually, she perfected her computer artwork but always continued to keep a sketchbook or two, paint on canvas and doodle in ink all over any papers he could get her hands on. At this point, she turned her attention to photography and built a client base. She continues to grow and learn every day, taking classes, researching topics and discussing them with like-minded artist friends. The essence of her art centers around color and emotion, each piece means something to her and hopefully to the viewer as well. She believes that with each piece, a part of her shines through.

**Samuel Vargo's** poetry and short stories have appeared in print and online literary magazines, university journals and a few commercial magazines. Mr. Vargo worked most of his adult life as a newspaper reporter. He has a BA in Political Science and an MA in English (both degrees were awarded by Youngstown State University in Youngstown, Ohio, USA). Vargo was fiction editor of *Pig Iron Press*, Youngstown, Ohio, for 12 years. A book-length collection of Vargo's short stories, titled *Electric Onion Head and the Rotating Cyclops of the Month*, was published by *Literary Road* and had a web presence for five years. His poetry and fiction appear in the following: *Antithesis Common*, *Ascent Aspirations*, *Blue Fifth*, *Boston Poetry Magazine*, *Censored Poets*, *Centrifugal Eye*, *The Circle*, *Clark Street Review*, *Connecticut Review*, *The Cynic Online Magazine*, *Dandelion*, *double dare press*, *Edifice Wrecked*, *Electric Acorn*, *Elegant Thorn*, *Eye On Life Magazine*, *Fat City Review*, *Glass - A Journal of Poetry*, *Guideposts*, *Gypsy Blood Review*, *Higginsville Reader*, *Late Knocking*, *Licking River Review*, *Literary Hatchet*, *Lynx Eye*, *Mastodon Dentist*, *National Lampoon Humor Network (College Stories, Dead Frog, The Frown, Points in Case)*, *The Nocturnal Lyric*, *nthposition*, *Ohio Teachers Write*, *Poetry Motel*, *Projected Letters*, *Red Dancefloor*, *Reed, Revolver*, *Scholars and Rogues*, *Small Press Review*, *Verve*, *undergroundwindow.com*, *Why Vandalism?*, *Window Lit-Mag*, *Word Riot*, *Yasse*, *Z-Composition*, and other presses and literary journals.

**Kirby Wright** was born and raised in Honolulu, Hawaii. He is a graduate of Punahou School in Honolulu and the University of California at San Diego. He received his MFA in Creative Writing from San Francisco State University. Wright has been nominated for five Pushcart Prizes and three Best of The Webs. Wright is a past recipient of the Ann Fields Poetry Prize, the Academy of American Poets Award, the Browning Society Award for Dramatic Monologue, and Arts Council Silicon Valley Fellowships in Poetry and The Novel. *Before the City*, his first book of poetry, took First Place at the 2003 San Diego Book Awards. Wright is also the author of the companion novels *Punahou Blues* and *Moloka'i Nui Ahina*, both set in Hawaii. He was a Visiting Fellow at the 2009 International Writers Conference in Hong Kong, where he represented the Pacific Rim region of Hawaii. He was the 2011 Artist in Residence at Milkwood International, Czech Republic. *The Widow from Lake Bled*, his second collection of poetry, was published in 2013, along with two works of speculative fiction: *The End, My Friend* (novel) and *Square Dancing at the Asylum* (flash fiction collection).

**Frank Zahn** is an economist and author of nonfiction, fiction, and poetry with a PhD in economics from the University of California, Santa Barbara. His publications include nonfiction books, articles, commentaries, book reviews, and essays; poetry; short stories; and novels. For details, visit his website, [frankzahn.com](http://frankzahn.com).



