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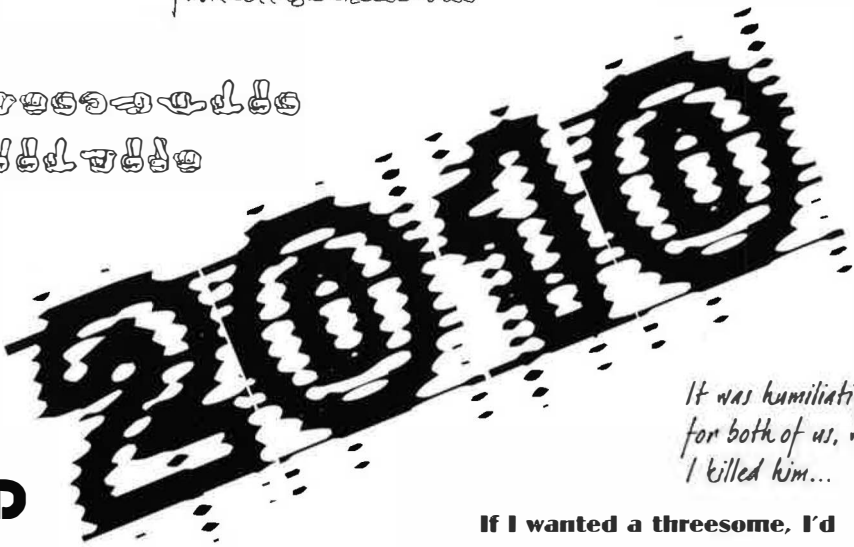
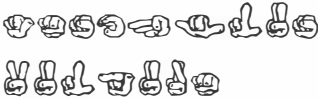
What's happening in

FUTUREBOY

Craving the story slices
of memory to life
from your tongue to my own.

**If I wake
before
I die,
nail me
down**

*I will rip through pink skin and red lips
reach that white skull and inside the
pink cottage cheese mass*



*It was humiliating,
for both of us, when
I killed him...*

**If I wanted a threesome, I'd
have a hot guy and a lesbian
there...each to satisfy me.**

**D
N
A**

X MARX THE SPOT

*If nothing means anything, and anything can mean anything, and nothing
matters, what is the point of writing anything?*

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Submissions: The Northridge Review accepts submissions throughout the year. Manuscripts should be accompanied by a cover page that includes the writer's name, address, email, and telephone number, as well as the titles of the works submitted. The writer's name should not appear on the manuscript itself. Manuscripts and all other correspondence should be delivered to: Northridge Review Department of English/California State University Northridge / 18111 Nordhoff St. /Northridge, CA 91330-8248. Manuscripts will be recycled.

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The Northridge Review gratefully acknowledges the Associated Students of CSUN and the English Department faculty and staff (Karin Castillo, Marjie Seago, Yuri Diaz, Mireya Diaz, Bryan Banuelos, Andrew Banuelos, Kavi Bowerman, Eve Green) for their help. Thanks also to Bob Meyer and Colortrend for their continued assistance and support, as well as Trader Joe's for its generous donations.

Awards

The Northridge Review Fiction Award, given annually, recognizes excellent fiction by a CSUN student published in the Northridge Review. The Northridge Review will announce the winner of this award in the Fall of 2010.

The Rachel Sherwood Award, given annually in memory of Rachel Sherwood, recognizes excellent poetry by a CSUN student published in the Northridge Review. The recipient of this award will be published in the Fall of 2010.

The Northridge Review is also honored to publish the winner of the Academy of American Poets Award. The recipient of this award will be acknowledged in the Fall of 2010.

Editor's Note

Hello and welcome,

So, first things first: Why the hell is there a bunny rabbit on our cover? Well, I'm glad you asked. The ASCII bunny came to us from one of the poets published in this very book! It is actually the title of our first piece (by the inimitable David Morck) and over the course of the semester that little bunny began to generate its own meanings. For some of us the jumble of punctuation became a symbol of sorts for the endless potential of the keyboard. It served as a reminder that writing is, can, and should be boundless and fearless and that the keyboard can keep up with whatever we can conceive of.

Also, it's kinda cool.

Now on to the editor part of this Editor's Note. I did absolutely no work connected or pertaining to or that was in any way involved with the production of this Northridge Review. That is partly due to the fact that I am indolent and slothful, but mostly it is due to having the single most dedicated and capable staff in the history of all things that have ever had staffs. I LUCKED OUT! These people are awesome and I'm sad that the publishing of this book marks the end of my time working with them because their collective talent is infinite and their dedication is inexhaustible. I want to publish more books with these people! I want to take over countries and write constitutions with them! I have a big, sloppy, embarrassing crush on my staff. It's totally true. You will develop a crush on them too as you read on and devour the goey and delicious treasure that they have created for you: the Spring 2010 Northridge Review.

But before you do that! I have to offer my sincerest of thanks to Mona Houghton, our instructor, our advisor, and our intrepid guide on this expedition into the wild territories of undiscovered art. Her patience with me was saintly and her willingness to trust the staff was what allowed us to create such a phenomenally awesome collection.

Finally, my thanks to all of the authors, poets, and artists who submitted their work to us. It might be cliché to say that without you we wouldn't have a book to publish, but it is also true. The eclecticism and vitality of the work we received is not just impressive, it is downright inspiring and we are honored to be able to publish it.

And now, it is my pleasure to present to you (drum roll please!) the Spring 2010 Northridge Review.

Enjoy.

James Bezerra
Managing Editor

DAVID MORCK

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I wish I was drunk.
Tilt back that bottle and let the words
spill.
Kick out the power cord
saving my progress.

The book of matches
still has two.
The urge to strike them both
is compelling:
people that do that don't know

the feeling of divine intervention
you get when you find that one
last match
when you need it.

(This is where I turn to page 54 of my Choose Your Own Adventure book and die).

When I walk out the door
I pat my pockets:
lighter, cigarettes, inhaler.
When I pat my pockets
I feel my mother.

I feel those tubes and tape,
mechanical breath,
plum bruise on the forehead
next to where I left last kisses.
Edema is a beautifully ugly word.

My wife stood next to me
as I choked on those fishbone tears
and lit up.
"Don't die," her eyes spoke.
(This is where I turn to page 36 and try again).



[untitled]
Valeri Polissky

Making

Robin Alfaro

I did **hardly/hard** any work yesterday.

It was a rush, but we just managed to get there **in/on** time.

You really **should/ought** to help more often.

I had **less/fewer** time than I needed.

Making

I'm the only one on the corner with a lawn chair. I like it. It has white and green stripes and a little cup holder on the arm rest. Most of the day, we sit. We wait. We talk. But we mostly wait. There are so many of us. We stand outside here and envy the people coming out of the store with materials because they all have what we all want, a place to go. They have wood to cut, wires to put in, paint to spill on the walls. On a good day we'll get something. We'll get open spots at a car wash, help out with digging a hole. Something.

Sitting. Waiting. Tough cracked hands.

Crushing. Mixing. Spreading. Boiling. 2 for 5 dollars.

Ay-Ee-Eye-Oh-You, Not, Ah, Eh, Ee, Oh, Oo. There is no E before the S.

Paper to a pen. Voice to the barrio.

Indoors most days, life with no chains.

Tamale Making

Lay out aluminum foil square on a flat surface.

Lay out banana leave square on top of aluminum foil square.

Pour masa on center of banana leave.

Making a hole in center of masa, pour three full tablespoons of recaudo on center of masa.

Place meat cube at center of depression on batter/recaudo.

Sprinkle 4 to 5 capers on top of batter/recaudo.

Toss in 2 olives on top of batter/recaudo.

Toss in 3 to 4 garbanzos on top of batter/recaudo.

Toss in 1 potato dice on top of batter/recaudo.

Toss in 1 stripe of red pepper on top of batter/recaudo.

Toss in 1 stripe of green pepper on top of batter/recaudo.

Toss in a pinch of minced fresh garlic...

on top of batter/recaudo.

Sitting. Waiting. Tough cracked hands.

Crushing. Mixing. Spreading. Boiling. 2 for 5 dollars.

Ay-Ee-Eye-Oh-You, Not, Ah, Eh, Ee, Oh, Oo. There is no E before the S.

Paper to a pen. Voice to the barrio.

Indoors most days, life with no chains.

Can you please inform Mr. and Mrs. Gonzalez that I am not seeing any improvements in Josue's language skills. Tell them that he is still speaking primarily in Spanish and doesn't seem to make any effort to learn English. Furthermore, he seems to be back-tracking many of the other children, especially those that have made improvements. He speaks to them in Spanish and they follow his example. If they want to see any advancement in their child, they'll have to discipline him and let him understand that Spanish is not acceptable. Is there anyone at home that speaks English that would be willing to communicate to Josue at home? Ok. Poor Fayvor no Es-pan-ol en lah cah sah.

Sitting. Waiting. Tough cracked hands.

Crushing. Mixing. Spreading. Boiling. 2 for 5 dollars.

Ay-Ee-Eye-Oh-You, Not, Ah, Eh, Ee, Oh, Oo. There is no E before the S.

Paper to a pen. Voice to the barrio.

Indoors most days, life with no chains.

Where's the notebook? The notebook where I had my stuff in? Fuck I can't find it. Under the covers? No, fuck. I think it's in the kitchen. *MAMA! ESTA MI CUADERNO EN LA COSINA?* No! Fuck. I need to finish what I was working on. My homie says he got hook ups with this dude that prints a zine. I want to give him the piece I've been working on for the past month. This is it you know. If I at least get some shit to show my moms then fuck maybe she'll get off my back. Edgar says that he needs a copy by 10 a.m. tomorrow. The dudes gonna hold off print to see what I got. Fuck. I just don't know where my book is at.

Sir, Señor, over here please. Electrical, painting, plumbing, and carpintero. Señor please.

Don't let the water spill in the car. Please don't let the water spill on me. It's hot.

Hello, my name is Josue. I have 9 years old. I go to school in L.A.

The glowing fog from the street light made a golden halo around her head and he knew that she would save him.

Ay Dios mio. I don't know why but I always get scared when I am cooking so late. I feel like I am going to turn around and my mother's ghost is going to be standing there and next thing I know the crazy woman is going to yell at me and tell me that I'm doing everything wrong. It's silly I know. But the family is asleep, well except for my vago son who knows where that boy is. Ay no. Don't get me started. If I don't look at the clock it doesn't seem so late. I just spread the masa on the leaves. Put the chicken, potatoes, everything. Then I rap it and off to the next one. The only bad thing is that this late at night there are no novelas. Only infomercials about magic stones that I can wear around my neck that can make me lose 30 pounds in a month. Ay si! Why would I pay \$45.99 for that? Two more tamales into the pot. Leave them overnight.

Sir, Señor, over here please. Electrical, painting, plumbing, and carpintero. Señor please.
Don't let the water spill in the car. Please don't let the water spill on me. It's hot.
Hello, my name is Josue. I have 9 years old. I go to eschool in L.A.
The glowing fog from the street light made a golden halo around her head and he knew that she would save him.

Choose the correct word or phrase to complete the sentences.

1. If you aren't sure of a word, check **its/it's** meaning in your dictionary.
2. I'm not sure if **they're/there** coming.
3. She's done well, **isn't/hasn't** she?
4. It **can not/cannot** be ready on time.
5. I did **hardly/hard** any work yesterday.
6. It was a rush, but we just managed to get there **in/on** time.
7. You really **should/ought** to help more often.
8. I had **less/fewer** time than I needed.
9. It was cancelled **because/because of** the bad weather.
10. She's away on a business **journey/trip**.

Score: 0/10 – *Josue is not equipped for this level. He is still showing a language barrier. I suggest that he be put in a lower class.*

Sir, Señor, over here please. Electrical, painting, plumbing, and carpintero. Señor please.
Don't let the water spill in the car. Please don't let the water spill on me. It's hot.
Hello, my name is Josue. I have 9 years old. I go to eschool in L.A.
The glowing fog from the street light made a golden halo around her head and he knew that she would save him.

The cops try to make an arrest on anyone that's at MacArthur Park after eight. It's ridiculous. I can't have a clear state of mind at home. The words don't flow into my mind and on the page when I'm surrounded by the dirty white walls of my room. The noises coming from the kitchen aren't inspiring they're just reminders of the disgrace that everyone says that I am. Pero mijo... NO! I don't want to hear it. That's prison that generations have put

me under. Everything that's going on, yeah that's my fault, right? What more do they want. I don't drink. I don't do any drugs. All I ask is for them to let me be. I can't stay there knowing that they all think I'm the downfall of the family. I'd rather be here, letting the sounds, lights, and air inspire me.

Sir, Señor, over here please. Electrical, painting, plumbing, and carpintero. Señor please.

Don't let the water spill in the car. Please don't let the water spill on me. It's hot.

Hello, my name is Josue. I have 9 years old. I go to school in L.A.

The glowing fog from the street light made a golden halo around her head and he knew that she would save him.

Oh my God did you see the goal that Sanchez blocked when they played Trinidad and Tobago last night. Sí Papa asi se hase! That's it! You watch the ball. You keep your eye on it, you make it your soul and learn every move that it makes and when it comes your way, you know where it's going before the player that kicked the ball did and BOOM, you blocked it. That's all the men are talking about today. It's a cold day and we're all standing here with our gloves and our coffee, just waiting. We had to move corners recently, we're not allowed to stand by the entry way because Home Depot says that we are blocking people from entering. They say that we scare them. We don't do anything. We just ask them questions, try to get by. They're overreacting. I don't care though, all I have to do is move my little chair that my wife bought me and I'm ok. I love this chair. It folds into this tiny little square so if I get picked for a job, I fold it up, put it in my backpack and go. Then ready for tomorrow.

I am Josue. I was in Ms. Taylor's class but now I am away from friends.

I like play soccer.

When I was ten years old my mother showed me to mix the seasonings for the chicken.

Sorry man, but I don't think you got what it takes.

Fuck that. He doesn't know.

Corren hombres! Run. No sir I didn't bring them.

No please. My wife, my sons.

I don't know why I have to be in the baby class. I already had my friends in the other class. And everyone was my height. All the kids played soccer. I don't know anyone here. I want to go back to my class. I never like the teacher, but I miss my friends. In class I always used to play with Julio while the teacher was talking. He would use his blue eraser as the goalie for his team and my purple eraser was the goalie for my team. Then we would use balls of paper as the ball and our fingers as the players. My mom says that I should pay attention to what the teacher is telling me. She says that then I can talk as good as my brother. But I just want to play with my friends. None

of the babies in this class know how to play soccer. They can't even play it like me and Julio. You know, Julio was telling me that some schools here have teams. Like real teams with uniforms and numbers. If I could have a number it would be 80 like Ronaldhino. That's my favorite player on the Brazil team. He plays for AC Milan now. I know my mom gets mad when I don't bring home the good papers. She says she'll send me back with Abuela. I don't care though. There everyone likes soccer. We play on the street everyday, and I was one of the best kids on defense around.

I am Josue. I was in Ms. Taylor's class but now I am away from friends.

I like play soccer.

When I was ten years old my mother showed me to mix the seasonings for the chicken.

Sorry man, but I don't think you got what it takes.

Fuck that. He doesn't know.

Corren hombres! Run. No sir I didn't bring them.

No please. My wife, my sons.

Hey man look. I just don't got a place for you on the zine. I know I held up printing and everything but Edgar made you out to be some sort of Shakespeare. You know in East Los they got a lot of zines and magazines and stuff for your type of deal. You know what I mean. I mean I try and get these things around the Venice-Santa Monica area. I try to pass them out on the boardwalk. No one around there really wants to read this. I mean ninety percent of them won't even understand half the shit you're saying bro. Go to East Los, talk to some homies. You'll get your shit out there man. I mean I respect your style but I'm trying to get less of these things in the trash and more in people's homes.

I am Josue. I was in Ms. Taylor's class but now I am away from friends.

I like play soccer.

When I was ten years old my mother showed me to mix the seasonings for the chicken.

Sorry man, but I don't think you got what it takes.

Fuck that. He doesn't know .

Corren hombres! Run. No sir I didn't bring them.

No please. My wife, my sons.

Desgraciados! Malvados! Ay Dios. Spilled all over the parking lot. I only sold two this morning. Only two. They were nice and hot. The water was still steaming. Ay no. It's not like they just threw them out the car trunk, they stomped on them too. I mean they are wrapped in foil in the leaves. I could have picked them off and gotten hot water from home and gone to another lot to sell but no. They stomped on them. Cobardes! If they knew how long it all takes me. I don't see how it's against the law. Ay no! It's only seven-thirty

in the morning. Maybe it would be a nice to have a day where I relax since I have nothing to sell. Oh but I couldn't even make anything to make up for the food that I used. I hope Manuel comes home with something today. If I start a little later tonight then maybe I can sell to a lunch crowd at another lot, maybe some place with less ingratas!

I am Josue. I was in Ms. Taylor's class but now I am away from friends.

I like play soccer.

When I was ten years old my mother showed me to mix the seasonings for the chicken.

Sorry man, but I don't think you got what it takes.

Fuck that. He doesn't know.

Corren hombres! Run. No sir I didn't bring them.

No please. My wife, my sons.

I think they moved the spots again. Last week they were by the entrance. This week they were on Sunset. They're probably on Wilton. I see all the coffee cups left here. There's some gloves here and there. Chingado! Does that mean that everyone got work today? Did I miss it? Oh man if I would have gotten up early. Wow they left this place looking like a mess. No wonder Home Depot doesn't like us here. Well, I guess I can wait and see if someone passes by. Maybe if the guys come back they'll let me know if they need more people for tomorrow. Oh hey look at that; a chair.

TANYA SEAL-GRANT

CAR

He had long fingers
and the sort of jittery nervousness
that sparked waitresses into action
bringing him another pot of black, saying
maybe he should lay off the coffee,
maybe he should have another cup.
They never called him hon.
Even strangers sensed there was something
implicitly wrong in the way
he tapped his cigarette pack against the edge
of the table
and the way he looked at women too hard,
sharp and jittery and hard
with eyes like moths lighting against your skin
in the middle of the night,
unexpected, unwelcome.

I know now they took pity on my mother
the roadside waitresses,
on purpose forgot
to charge her for toast,
adding an extra scoop of ice cream to my sundaes,
a soda on the house.
When we piled back in the car
she would always smell like the thinnest smoke
and I imagine her in a bathroom stall
curled over a cigarette on loan from the hostess
breathing in,
her briefest escape.

Later, tucked driver side in the back seat
I would watch her flutter beside him.
With streetlights marring their faces
they took on the mottled pattern of birds.
I knew from the way her lips were pinched
he drove too fast,
but she harbored fear silently and
only once, when he nearly sideswiped
another car did she flinch.
Her hands flew to her chest then,
a betrayal of instincts and I knew for the first time
this is how she went along-
braced for impact, steeled for crash.

Tobi Cogswell

She packed up everything
and left him house-poor.
He stood hands at his sides,
clenching and watching,
flexing and breathing,
breathing for the first time in years
as he traded a couch for his life.
He kept a few first editions,
the coffee pot, sheets
they had never made love on
for the bed
they had never made love in
and his daughter's baby shoes.
And he grew taller,
and he ate cake. And fell in love
again, a girl with no agenda,
and no merchant of future scars.
And they quietly toasted
the New Year, thankful that
the movers never looked up
and so they left the chandelier,
and they were part of the stars
as if a constellation had been named
for them, just as they named
the children they would never have
but yet breathed inside them
every second of every day.
What does furniture matter
when there's cake and love?

T

he Beggar's Kitchen

Tommy in the Sky

Tommy closed his eyes and
hoped for a star:

I want, he thought
to himself.

He opened
his eyes.



A
star
was
falling.

by
Gena
Jankovsky

Tommy in the Sky

There was movement in the sky. Tommy could not see the movement, but he knew it was out there, somewhere, watching him right now. He looked at the sky: blue, and then down at his beach ball. It was red like his fire truck.

“Tom,” his brother shouted. “Throw the ball.”

He looked at his ball and threw it back to his hero; big brother Mike was taller than all the tables in the house and he gave Tommy cookies from the high cupboard.

“Good throw,” big brother said. “Why don’t we go inside and have us some cookies?”

Big brother Mike could also read Tommy’s mind. A lot of people could. Tommy’s face was an open book – his mind never far from the high cupboard – though none could correctly guess his thoughts when he watched the clouds from the ocean side.

Those are the stars, the big man said. Tommy sat in his father’s lap; they rocked softly with the rocking chair. Big man dad pointed out the Big Dipper and the little one, and belts on figures that Tommy couldn’t see. It was the first time Tommy knew there was something out there. He stared at the stars and looked for them again in the morning – the stars were missing.

Tommy woke up in the middle of the night and looked out his bedroom window. It was a clear night, a night without the moon. The sea was calmly rolling in the dark distance. His parents were sleeping in their bedroom; big man’s snoring could be heard wafting in through the cracks of the doors.

Tommy crawled out of bed and onto the chair by the window, resting his head against the cool glass. His breath made fog on the glass, turning his face humid. *Star light, star bright*, he tried to remember his mother’s saying, but none of those words came to him. Instead, Tommy closed his eyes and hoped for a star: I want, he thought to himself. He opened his eyes. A star was falling.

The star fell quickly, like a pebble through a pond – straight down, dispersing sprinkles of light, illuminating the sea and everything in its surrounding. Tommy’s face resembled the lit wick of a

candle. The star turned as it met the ocean, skidding over the water, and headed straight towards Tommy. Tommy reached out his hand towards the window, through the fogged glass, past the fog and into the night. He grabbed the star and plopped it into his mouth. It was dark.

As quickly as the star was in his mouth, it was back out again. He spit it down on his bedroom floor; it made no noise, but brightened his room. It tasted salty and was hot in his mouth. Tommy could barely see because it was so bright. He wanted to cry, but crying meant that his mother would take it away. He sat down next to the star and covered it with his hands. Light sliced through in lines, striping the walls in shadow and light. He rolled the star, introduced it to his teddy bear and used it as a missile on his soldiers. When dawn started breaking, Tommy could barely hold himself up. He hid the star in the cab of his fire truck.

In the morning, bits of stardust could be seen in the surf's froth. It looked like glitter had littered the sea. Where larger chunks had fallen into the ocean, pillars of steam rose into the sky. The air was dense with the stickiness of steam. The neighbors called the Coast Guard. The pillars were gone by the time they arrived. The Coast Guardsmen called the scientists. The scientists collected remnants, not knowing what they were. The scientists were confused, but nothing in the air proved dangerous. They cleared the beach of people, prohibiting anyone from touching the sea. The residents were free to stay in their houses, but told to stay away from the water.

Nights and nights passed by and Tommy tired of his star. One was nice, but his soldiers didn't have anything to fire back on. Tommy wished for another star. It came to him.

The first warning came in November, when the air was starting to chill, but the sea stayed warm. A vessel, not from earth, crashed into a satellite.

By the time January came round, Tommy had amassed almost thirty stars. One star had gone supernova in his hand, sending out particles and knocking over all of his toys in the process. He thought that his parents would wake from the light or noise, but they never did. Tommy gathered the dust when it settled and put it in the pouch of a stuffed kangaroo.

Tommy became sick. The doctor told his mother he had a sinus infection brought on by an allergy. His father thought it had to do with the ocean. The ocean's acting strange, he said. His mother thought it had to

do with the crowds. "Too many people around," she said. It took an entire day to clean his room. Tommy's mother spent the next night with him, never noticing the faint glowing windows in the cab of the red fire truck. Tommy didn't wish for any more stars, for a while.

The third and sixth warnings came, but no one on earth noticed. Tommy's stars belonged in a place too distant for eye or telescope to see.

Tommy's stars were losing light and heat. The once bright and shiny dwarfs had become dull embers, faintly pulsating. He picked up a star the size of a jellybean, and poked it with one finger. It didn't brighten or warm, but did start to move. It gently rose from his palm and into the air where the embered star folded itself inwards. With one final pop of light it disappeared and so did the space where it once existed. There was a black hole in the middle of Tommy's room.

Tommy stared at the hole. He stared at it for a while. Tiny bits of stardust floated around the void. It looked like a photograph of the Milky Way, except for the black center. He picked up a red crayon from his desk and fed the small hole. It almost pulled his fingers in with the crayon. He picked up a blue crayon. He picked up all of his crayons and fed them one by one. He moved to his markers next.

Big brother Mike woke Tommy up in the morning. Mike didn't see the small void and nearly walked his right ear into its cusp.

"Wake up," big brother said.

Tommy woke up. He looked at his brother, and then back at the hole, and then down at the floor. He had left his stars scattered around his room.

"You slept in pretty late," brother said.

Tommy said nothing. He rolled out of bed.

Mike turned to leave and stepped on a star. It rolled beneath his foot, sending him to the floor. He muttered words that Tommy wasn't allowed to repeat. "What are these?" he said. Mike lifted a tiny sun between his two fingers, holding it up for Tommy to see.

"Star," Tommy said. Tommy stayed standing next to his bed.

"A what?" Mike asked, staring at the ember.

"Star, sky," Tommy pointed towards the ceiling.

Mike looked at his brother and then back down at the star. "Well, whatever they are don't leave them on your floor." He left the room, and narrowly avoided sending his left ear down the black tunnel.

At breakfast big man dad and mom and brother sat at the kitchen table, along with Tommy who spent the entire time fidgeting with his food. The grown ups were too busy talking to each other to tell Tommy to stop making war with his eggs. They said that they should leave the house. They didn't care that the scientists said it was safe. Tommy had been acting weird, and the sinus infections were getting worse. Big man Dad said there was no money to leave. He said the family would wait it out another week.

Their vessels were crashing into moons, and voids that hadn't been there the day, week or month before - their maps useless. Hundreds of ships were caught in the pull of the black holes where stars had once been. When they saw the big star leave, they followed.

Tommy sat in his bedroom that night, stars rudely splayed across his floor. Fireflies could out glow their waning phosphorous hues. No matter how hard he poked, threw or wished, they wouldn't brighten. He walked towards his window again, spotting the brightest star in the sky. I want, he wished. Nothing happened. He could feel the North Star pulling against his wish. I want, he closed his eyes and opened them again. Nothing.

Tommy went back to the center of the room, picking up the brightest of the dulling stars, and moved it to the black hole in the room. He held it up to the mouth of the hole, and felt the gravitational pull suckering his fingers in. He moved slightly to his left, so the biggest and brightest star outside could see his threat. I want, Tommy thought, or else. He looked at his little star and then outside. He dropped the little star back on the floor, walking back to the window. His face darkened like a burnt out candle.

I want, Tommy demanded, or else.

The star fell, straight down, hitting debris in its path. Tommy breathed onto the window, clouding up the glass, turning it into fog. He reached his hand out into the fog, the glass particles felt like sand rubbing against him. He held his hand out. The star turned over the ocean with a boom, dropping stardust, like a chainsaw spews trees. The house shook. The star was much bigger than any other he had taken down. Tommy's eyes widened as it came to him. He backed away from the window.

Large fires fell to the top of the ocean, and stayed afloat. Steam rose. Waves formed from the weight of the fallen parts. The star was coming closer, too big for Tommy to catch in the palm of his hand. He ran, hiding

below his bed. He stayed hidden. His family was screaming.

"Fire," big man dad shouted. Sounds of stomping filled the house.

Tommy's door opened. He saw the feet of big man, brother, and mom. It was quiet. Not even Tommy's own breath could be heard. He waited. Nothing. He crawled out to the feet of his family, and looked up.

Outside his window, floating a few feet in the air was the North Star. Heat radiated in waves. The ball was not huge, the size of a small car, but so bright that it looked like heaven shone outside his window.

They did not know what they would do once they found out who was taking their stars, but they followed the North one quickly, leaving behind other burning ships, which exploded like fireworks in space.

"What is that?" big man dad whispered.

"Star," Tommy whispered, but only brother Mike heard.

Mike looked down at his brother. "It's a star?" he asked.

Tommy nodded. "Star, sky," he said.

The light mesmerized Tommy's parents. His mother, frightened, began to cry. Big man started to cry also, but not from fear. He understood what it was. He listened to his two sons speaking.

"Why is it here?" Mike's knees gave way. He fell to Tommy's level. "Why is the star here?"

"I wanted it," Tommy said.

Big man dad looked at his youngest child, and so did mom. Tommy picked up a toy soldier from off the floor and walked to the center of the room. They saw it, the small void, and the delicate dust floating around the room.

"What is that?" Tommy's mother asked.

"Hole," said Tommy. "I made it with star."

Tommy's mother stepped forward, reaching out to her son, attempting to grab him to her. Her husband stopped her. "Wait," big man said.

Tommy held the soldier, itself carrying a tiny green gun, up to the black hole. He let go. It fell into the void with a small flash of light, more dust settled into the room. Tommy sneezed.

The big man's legs failed him too; he fell to his knees. "How long has this been in here?" he asked.

Tommy shrugged. He picked up a marble off the floor and put it in too. He smiled. "Like a garbage can," he said. He pointed to the dull embers on the floor. "Stars," he said.

Big man dad looked at his son, "Tommy," big man said, "You can't have the stars, they don't belong to you."

"No, mine," Tommy cried. He grabbed at his stars and shoved them into the pockets of his alligator pajamas. Some fell out, rolling across his floor.

They followed the star to a small planet. They followed the dust into the atmosphere. They followed the fire and steam from the ocean. They landed their craft between the big waves and the home of a small boy who had been stealing their stars.

"Tommy," the big man said quietly, "give the stars to me." He held out his hands for the small boy, but the boy backed away from his father.

"They're my stars," he shouted.

Waves could be heard crashing against the sand, too close to the family's home. Fire trucks and police car alarms faintly wailed in the distance.

They stepped into the doorway and moved behind the family as the big man was reaching out to the small boy. They brushed the back of Tommy's mother's shoulder. She turned around. She was not scared of what she saw, and she wasn't able to describe to her friends, later, over coffee, why she wasn't scared. They were there for the stars. She accepted them willingly. They didn't have eyes or lack eyes, she would later say. They didn't have mouths or weren't without them. They looked exactly like us, she would say, but exactly the opposite.

"Harry," she called to her husband, the big man.

He looked over, and so did Mike. Tommy didn't care whether the beings were there. He just wanted his stars, and to keep his stars to himself.

They walked to the middle of the floor and tried to pick up the jelly-bean stars that had escaped Tommy's pocket, but the stars refused to move for them.

Big man dad understood them without words. He would later say, *I just knew that Tom had to be the one to give them the stars.* "Tommy," his father said, "you have to give them your stars."

Tommy shook his head no.

"Tommy," his mother said. "Give them the stars, now."

"No" he said, his hands still stuck over his pockets.

"Tommy," brother Mike said, "I will give you a cookie for every star you give to them." He nodded as he spoke.

Tommy hesitated. Stars were something he loved.

"What?" his mother cried. "Absolutely not. Tommy, no cookies for your stars. Give them back, now." She walked towards Tommy. He cowered at her movements.

"Are we really having this conversation right now?" Mike asked. "Lessons come later," he added. Tommy's mother stopped.

The North Star pulsated. The room was hot, and growing hotter.

"Cookies or stars," Mike said. "One or the other, you can't have both."

Tommy wanted both, but his stars were so dull now. He looked at the North Star. It was too big to play with his toys. He thought maybe he could ride it, but Mike interrupted his thoughts.

"I'm giving you to the count of three," he said. "One, two, thr-"

"Cookie," Tommy cried. He took out his stars from his pockets, and threw them at his father. His mother picked him up, cradling him in her arms.

The beings collected the dull embers in their hands, leaving the black hole for Tommy's family. Space, they had unanimously decided, didn't need any more voids. They hooked the North Star to the back of their ship. The neighbors would later say it was like they were hitching a wagon to a truck. The vessel floated away, pieces of star and fire afloat in the ocean, followed. Everything was calm again.

Tommy ate his cookies, and smiled at the sky.

David Deardorff

You foul,

dull fowl.

Carrion feasting

wretch,

featherbrained

fledgling!

What sort

of annotine ass

mistakes the

regal crown

of a playwright

soldier,

for a

common rock?

Was there a shortage of suitable stone in Sicily?

Why not Aristophanes, with his peak filled with crags and crevices
and pen already pointed to your nest?

Bastard buzzard, if I could pluck you feather by feather I'd tell your tragedy through your own
quills.

Nestling nitwit, perhaps you were in Zeus' employ?

Who was still raging at the smashing success of my Prometheus Bound.



Aeschylus to the Vulture (Post Mortem)

Spaces

Your pinky curled into my palm
when you held my hand.
You never wanted to hold hands
but you wouldn't let go either—
so your pinky kept the small space
preventing our palms
from lying flush.

At the beach, we only took
one towel, your thigh
brushing up against mine,
just enough
so I knew you were there.

The first time you stayed the night
you wrapped your legs around mine,
intertwining our ankles,
and turned to face
the edge of the bed.

Jessica Bechtold

SEAN

MACINTYRE

THE MAN WITH THE
CROWBAR WAS BESIDE ME
AND, IN A MOMENT OF
COLLECTIVE CLARITY, WE
BOTH REMEMBERED THE
OTHER CAR.

LIGATURE

Ligature

I closed the book because there was nothing left to read, then I leaned back in my chair and thought about the last line of the novel—“El hombre y el fantasma se miraron.”ⁱ

I thought about the last line of the novel and I thought about the artifact itself, lying slightly askew in relation to the rectangular surface of the old office desk I had placed it on—an old office desk with no visible indication of make or model, positioned against the north-facing window of the small office I shared with six or seven other teaching associates at a state university; the window overlooked the grassy quad of the university, which was punctuated with trees I could not name, and I could see the large, too-modern looking library bordering the distant northern edge of the grass. The book was a small, gray paperback with a single white dot aligned to the center of the front cover and moved slightly above the middle, perhaps three-eighths of the way from the top. On the bottom left of the front cover was the name César Aira in black lettering and on the bottom right was the word “Ghosts,” the title of the book, in white lettering, and in between the two were the words, in two rows of small black letters, “Translated by Chris Andrews.” Every letter on the front cover was capitalized. On the back cover, the novelist Roberto Bolaño told me in white, capitalized letters that “Once you have started reading Aira, you don’t want to stop,” and Mark Doty, whose name reminded me of Mike Doughty,ⁱⁱ informed me in similar lettering that “Aira is firmly in the tradition of Jorge Luis Borges and W.G. Sebald.”ⁱⁱⁱ While most of the back cover was covered in two sentences excerpted from the book, a brief description of the plot (plot?) of the novel, and a brief biographical note that informed me that Aira had been born in Argentina and had lived in Buenos Aires since 1967, there was also the picture in the bottom right corner, between the barcode and the spine, of a black or possibly shadowed ladder that seemed to be suspended in the air, propped against nothing, its safety catches attached to nothing, so that any person who endeavored to climb to the top of it would have no choice but to fall towards the ground with what might be a murderous velocity.^{iv}

But these were all externalities.

For how can one begin to think about the contents of this book? What is one to make of this fictional world wherein a poor and displaced family – but “rich in goodness” – lives in a metaphorical ivory/literally cement tower of their own making, but which does not belong to them, amidst legions of nude male ghosts with wild toes and childish proclivities and genitalia that, when stretched taut and snapped back, sounds like the lowest of the thirteen strings on a koto?¹ Should one begin to speak of the constructions of sexuality and gender present in this novel?² Or of the various modes by which national identity is reified in a foreign country?³ Should the importance of urban spaces be explored here, both in relation to the setting of the novel and the philosophical meanderings that attend to these concerns?⁴ Should one begin by parsing out the possible (negative) commentaries on capitalism and globalization?⁵ Or should one explore the psychological “connotations” of those moments of “sexual significance”?⁶

And what is one to make of the author’s self-proclaimed refusal to edit his own work?⁷ Is this simply an example of a pompous scribbler gloating about his publishing prowess, writing books but not refining

¹ Aira, César, *Ghosts* (Trans. Chris Andrews. New York: New Directions, 2008), p. 12.

² García, Mariano, “¿Queer o post-queer en la narrativa de César Aira?” (*Lectures du Genre: ...dans la Production Culturelle Espagnole et Hispano-Américaine*. Vol. 4, July 2008).

³ Navascués, Javier de, “Menú y nacionalismo: Un repaso a la gastronomía literaria argentina” (*La literatura hispanoamericana con los cinco sentidos: Actas del V Congreso Internacional de la AEELH*. Vol. 78, December 2002, pp. 189-96) and Fernández Della Barca, Nancy, “Bordes, límites y fronteras o una poética del desplazamiento: La liebre de César Aira” (*Celehis: Revista del Centro de Letras Hispanoamericanas*. 5.6-8, 1996, pp. 307-13).

⁴ Villanueva, Graciela, “El ‘enfrente del enfrente’: Circuitos urbanos en las novelas de César Aira” (*Les Villes et la fin du XXe siècle en Amérique latine: Littératures, cultures, représentations/Las ciudades y el fin del siglo XX en América Latina: Literaturas, culturas, representaciones. Liminaires: Passages Interculturels Italo-Ibériques* 9. Berlin, Germany: Peter Lang, 2007, pp. 369-381).

⁵ Reber, Dierdra, “Cure for the Capitalist Headache: Affect and Fantastic Consumption in César Aira’s Argentine ‘Baghdad’” (*MLN*. 122.2, March 2007, pp. 371-99).

⁶ Aira, p. 52.

⁷ Reber, p. 371.

books, or is César Aira a man that embraces the belief – to an extent tantamount to revelry – that writing is and should forever remain an expression of a singular moment or thought generated perhaps intransitively,⁸ or perhaps as a catenary construction wherein each and every sentence forms links from the previous to the next and any damage or alteration to a particular part of the chain might disrupt the integrity of the totality, as with nucleotides?^v

Sitting in my office chair, with the light of a Southern California September pouring unabashed through my north-facing window, I thought about *Ghosts* as a sort of tall building with few or no external walls, a text with so many entrances for critical exploration as to be intimidating, if not paralyzing; I felt as though any entrance into this building – through the doors of genre, language, theory, or structure – would immediately cause a view of the whole building to be obscured by itself: any sort of magnification of detail would be, would have to be reductionist. But the book, like all books, was written with codes, and codes can be cracked, even cultural ones.

I looked at the little gray tablet on the desk, the sentence that began with a period on its cover. *It's just a book.*

Around 1:30 in the afternoon, Ashlyn entered the office – her office as well. We had been dating for a year and a month, the outcome of several years of mutual attraction and infatuation fostered through shared classroom spaces, a few snatches of conversation, and a first date as bizarre as it was wonderful.^{vi} I enjoyed her writing, her words, her eccentric sense of fashion; I had been with her longer than I had ever been with anyone before: testament to both the qualities of her person (her intellect, her humor, her tastes) and my attempts to overcome a pathological inability to take anything seriously. She made my day just by walking into the room.

I just finished *Ghosts*, I said.

What did you think of it? she asked.

I thought about it for a moment, another moment: I don't quite know what to make of it, I said.

We talked about other things for a little while, she asked me about the class I had taught that morning and I asked her about her Biology class. After she had checked her email on the office computer she turned to me.

¿*Listo*? she asked.

⁸ cf. Roland Barthes' "Death of the Author."

Oui.

The building we left, the one that housed all of the English TA offices as well as the offices for the Math department, was a multi-story tower with mostly brick walls and an open-air central foyer with no roof and gates blocking most of the four corners, creating an interesting sensation that one was both inside and outside while in the center. The corners of the foyer also had chains, brown from rust, cascading down from the top floor presumably to provide ivy vines with something to climb. The ivy did not take, however, or had been pruned and cut off long ago, leaving only small, stunted plants that barely ascended past the first floor and ghostly looking chains that struck me as ominous with some unfathomable and irrational and curious portent.

I got into Ashlyn's car, a fuel-efficient sedan that had been recently purchased with the assistance of a government subsidy and still had the new-car aroma of formaldehyde and plastic, and we began the drive home together — me looking out the passenger window while blues music, Howlin' Wolf and Muddy Waters, streamed in from a satellite receiver. I looked out the window at the streets of the San Fernando Valley, that almost after-thought extension to the northwest of Los Angeles, full of low buildings, tract housing, and grid-pattern streets and a collision of so many cultures, languages, and classes as to be jarring and wonderful — like New York, but spread out flat as putty on the valley floor. I've seen the Los Angeles cityscape compared to a flickering computer circuit board,⁹ or often heard the winding freeways described as arterial,^{vii} but these streets, surrounded by valley walls, seemed to act as more of a loose web, connecting different nodes of concept and abstraction with other like or dissimilar nodes; connecting, for example, the warehouses where pornography is filmed in Chatsworth with the multi-million dollar mansions in Hidden Hills, the small taquerias that also sell donuts and Chinese food in Northridge with the cul-de-sac communities of crack addicts and dealers near the factory-sized Budweiser brewery in Panorama City, the artist and theater communes of Glendale and North Hollywood with the migrant workers that congregate outside of Home Depots and under freeway overpasses with the Korean mega-churches converted from enormous, bankrupted department stores with the equestrian ranches of Burbank; connecting these things as though they were parts of an enormous network of signs and symbols that, considered as discrete entities, create interesting juxtapositions, but, because

⁹ cf. Thomas Pynchon's *Vineland*.

they are syntactically linked together in one circuitous, unending sentence with infinite beginnings and points of entry, crash into one another in the streets and, combined, formulate a system, a zeitgeist, that is all at once a collective manifestation of each individual node and simultaneously something greater that resists the whimsical changes of singular constituents.¹⁰ I thought about this as I stared out the window and I thought about the beginning of *Ghosts*, which begins with a seeming lack of focus upon a particular subject: the rich Argentinean families are contrasted with the poor, mostly migrant workers; children are seen playing games and running rampant in the supernatural heat, and the ghosts that spray parabolic streams of urine into satellite receivers are seen playing their own games with cacodemonic glee; the architecture of the large building which houses most of the action of the novel is described in detail, and other locations which seem to lack relevance to the larger plot, such as the supermarket, are elaborated on as well; characters of different ethnic backgrounds and from different echelons of society are introduced and described and then vanish, phantasmagorically, from the text, never to appear again; and tedious, menial moments and tasks — tasks that might be considered trivial — such as unloading bricks from a truck or managing a large number of groceries by hand, are described in great detail while events, in what may be more conventional (read: North American) narratives, that can be considered momentous are hardly described at all.¹¹

I realized as I looked at the aimless yet intertwining streets of the San Fernando Valley that the beginning of *Ghosts* is a prolonged example of rhetorical aporia, a long expression, rendered either intentionally or unintentionally, of philosophical perplexity or doubting uncertainty — the beginning of *Ghosts* might as well be a long chain of rhetorical questions that give the narrative permission to proceed.¹²

¹⁰ cp. Roland Barthes' discussion of *Langue* and *Parole* in *The Elements of Semiology*.

¹¹ Aira, pp. 1-42.

¹² Capano, Daniel, "La voz de la nueva novela histórica: La estética de la clonación y de la aporía en La liebre de César Aira" (*Historia, ficción y metafiction en la novela latinoamericana contemporánea*. Ed. by Domínguez, Mignon. Buenos Aires, Argentina: Corregidor, 1996, pp. 91-119).

Thus, if the beginning can be considered an expression of philosophical perplexity, the author literally not knowing what the book is going to be about, then the first third of the book can be considered a search for its subject, as it were.^{viii} However, if this aporia is being consciously used as a device, if this where-to-begin or what-direction-to-take uncertainty is ostensibly being feigned for rhetorical effect (and affect), then the text is left free to explore different ideas and “walks of life” and Aira is employing it to, so to speak, introduce multiple sides of an argument, or, in a narrative sense, introduce many concerns that may or may not have significant ramifications to the plot but may nonetheless be important for a reader when they have to weigh and try and find meaning in the multitudinous ideas that crop up later in the novel.^{ix} If this is indeed the case, then it allows the text to send out its wandering “camera eye” to focalize on different cross-sections of life in this particular society,¹³ a narrative strategy not entirely different from the preliminary chapters of, say, Victor Hugo’s *Les Misérables*, or the large portions of Tolstoy’s *Война и мир*¹⁴ that are devoted to Russian and French history, or the sections of Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick* which deal almost exclusively with cetology, all of which, in characteristically realist fashion, attempt to depict every facet of the society in which these books were written and/or take their subjects. In the early 20th century, there was an ongoing debate between two camps of proletarian writers and theorists: those, like György Lukács, who felt that the best way to represent the totality of society, and consequently the materialist dialectic, was with strictly canonical realism, and any attempt to represent the immediacy and abstraction of modern existence with artistic modes that employed immediacy and abstraction further perpetuated bourgeois ideologies (he praised Gorky and Mann and deplored Joyce and Kafka), and those, like Bertolt Brecht, who felt the best way to represent societal totality was by mirroring the fragmentation of reality and perception caused by the hegemony inherent in any capitalist superstructure, resulting in texts and plays that were both self-conscious of their artifice and experimental – and sometimes ridiculous – in their execution, blending different literary forms and

¹³ cp. John Dos Passos’ *The U.S.A. Trilogy*.

¹⁴ *War and Peace*.

styles, such as song or critical metacommentary, and sometimes even including (plagiarizing) ideas or large excerpts of text from other sources (in the case of Documentary Realism, for example).¹⁵ If César Aira's *Ghosts* were to be placed on a continuum somewhere between these two paradigms, it would most certainly fall more towards the former.¹⁶ Indeed, as Dierdre Reber states in her essay, "Cure for the Capitalist Headache: Affect and Fantastic Consumption in César Aira's Argentine 'Baghdad,'"

Even on the surface of their topical concerns, Aira's texts themselves invite this kind of cultural analysis. While they may not explicitly insert themselves into a recognizable or realistic rendition of everyday life, they nevertheless unmistakably ground themselves in the fact of global culture in the local Argentine context.¹⁷

Though *Ghosts* does not strive to be an objective representation of reality, it does explicitly attempt to portray — through feigned aporia in the beginning and through philosophical musings or proclamations later in the text and descriptions of different events through a variety of subject-positions — the nuances of the social and historical moment, or *kairos*, from which the book derives its focus; it portrays a verisimilitude that is internally consistent yet not beholden to external realities while, at the same time, being aware of and attempting to respond to the zeitgeist of the era and location in which the book was written. Reber uses this as a launching point to interpret a number of Aira's texts as being negative commentaries on capitalism and globalization and U.S. hegemony, and this interpretation can easily be extended to include *Ghosts* considering the portrayals of the middle-class future apartment tenants (the Pagaldays, the Kahns, etc.),¹⁸ the pell-mell consumerism of the supermarket sequence,¹⁹ and the descriptions of members of the lower-class — considered lower economically, nationally, or racially amidst their Argentinean surroundings — that run throughout the book.

¹⁵ cf. György Lukács' "Realism in the Balance" and Bertolt Brecht's "Against Georg Lukács."

¹⁶ Horne, Luz, *Towards a New Realism: Caio Fernando Abreu, César Aira, Sergio Chejfec y João Gilberto Noll* (Diss. Yale University, 2005. Ann Arbor: UMI, 2005. AAT 3194663).

¹⁷ Reber, p. 375.

¹⁸ Aira, pp. 1-11.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 17-28.

While it may be tempting to ground *Ghosts* as strictly responding to a realist, and especially Marxist tradition, this reading breaks down when one considers the naturalist (a precursor to the effronteries of modernism, according to Lukács) and fabulist characteristics of the text that are at times complementary and at other times contradictory to the realist conventions it occasionally endeavors to emulate. Rather than being “psychologically-motivated,” the characters of the book seem to be more representative of clockwork cogs: figures that, given their ethnic and social backgrounds and the scenario in which they are placed, will inevitably arrive at a fixed end – exemplary of the Social-Darwinist appropriations of Naturalism (there is a character in *Ghosts* that goes as far as to laud Emile Zola as a genius, though it marked him as being bourgeois)²⁰ and the archetypal structure of fables and folk tales.²¹ In the novel, Patri can even be considered a sort of “maiden in distress,”²² and her end can be read as the logical and unavoidable conclusion of this particular paradigm – the maiden must, of course, be rescued from her tower and her despair by the benevolent knight in shining armor (in this case, an army of nude ghosts). But –

There was a huge crash behind me, and I turned around to see an SUV that had swerved into oncoming traffic, collided with a small pickup truck, and was flipping over and over again in the street, tires rolling into other cars and the stellar tinsel of plastic and metal exploded up into the air.^x

Ashlyn slowed down and I jumped out of the car and went running over to the accident. I was the first person there; there was a mother in the driver’s seat and her 12 – maybe 13 – year old daughter in the seat next to her. The mother was dazed – conscious but dazed. The daughter was screaming for help.

When I went around to the passenger’s side, I could see more clearly what had happened in those moments of proairetic freneticism: the windshield had been slammed down when the car flipped over. The vehicle had landed right-side up, but the windshield, the glass, was now digging into the girl’s body, her legs.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

²¹ cf. Vladimir Propp’s *Morphology of the Folk Tale*.

²² Leone, Lucía de, “Tradición y ruptura: La deconstrucción de algunos tópicos tradicionales en *Ema*, la cautiva de César Aira” (*Everba*. Spring, 2003).

I tried to open the door — nothing. I tried to tear out the airbag — no give.

The little girl had dark blood all over; she was crying.

Calm down, people will be here soon.

Did I say people? Did I say police?

There was nothing I could do to get her out.

She stopped crying out except for sporadic bursts, as though she were having occasional moments of lucidity where she recognized what had happened and the pain she was in.

The mother's legs were pinned or crushed in place; she seemed neither to hear nor understand what I was saying. Are you all right? Turn off the ignition. Can you hear me?

Loud pop-music was still playing from the stereo.

The windshield was cracked everywhere but still in one piece and there was blood all over.

Other people had come up to the car by now, a bumbling, faceless mass of people with different opinions about what to do and no clear idea on how to implement it.

Should we pull her out?

The police say to wait, paramedics on the way.

Should we do anything?

I went back over to the driver's side and a man ran up with a three-foot long crowbar scraping the asphalt behind him.

I yelled to the driver, the mother, We're going to try to get you out.

The man clumsily attempted to put the crowbar beneath one of the rumpled folds of metal, I put my hands on the window frame, and together we pulled and pried; the door wouldn't open and all we were doing was shaking the car — the girl started screaming again.

The man with the crowbar and I jogged around the front of vehicle to the other side and I slipped in the oil and radiator fluid and gasoline that had begun to pool on the ground. When I got up and went to the passenger door, the man with the crowbar and other, older, stronger men had ripped out the airbag and pried open the door.

The police say we shouldn't move her, one man said.

Miss, miss, another man said, do you want to stay or do you want to get out?

The girl screamed that she wanted to get out so loudly and with such a high pitch that it was almost impossible to tell what she had said, then she broke into sobs again and tried to push the windshield off of her.

I reached in through the window and windshield frame and put my hands under the fractured-but-intact web of glass, little crystal splinters and shards puncturing my skin and my hands getting covered with the girl's blood; I lifted the windshield up as much as I could and the arms of all of those other men helped pull her forward into the air.

She tried to reach back for her purse and one man yelled, Forget your wallet, forget your wallet.

She was carried off to the side of the street and propped against a pale brick wall, under the shade of a jacaranda tree.

The mother watched as her daughter was taken away, but she seemed too paralyzed to do anything — she looked pained, as though she were trying to call out or reach out, she said a few things in Spanish, but none of it seemed intelligible.

I put the windshield down and my hands came back bloody and numbness spread like wildfire.

The man with the crowbar was beside me and, in a moment of collective clarity, we both remembered the other car.

Maybe he suggested we go over, maybe he said nothing at all and we just started jogging towards the wreck, but then we stopped about ten feet away from the pickup truck. Something was in the driver's seat, and I couldn't make sense of what it was; I didn't understand what I was seeing, I didn't know if it was an animal or a car seat that had been torn up. Long, very long black fibers cascaded, spilled from the point where it met the metal of the cab frame that had been crushed inwards, and a single arm that was nearly severed at the elbow — only connected by thin fibers of sinew and what might have been bone — dangled limp outside of the misshapen window frame.

It was what was left of a person, a man.^{xi}

I could see what had happened in the accident.^{xii}

His head was pressed against the metal and warped from the pressure, his forehead pushed back and his lower-jaw jutting forward. Even though his body was barely recognizable, I could tell that it had once been huge and strong — shaped like a weightlifter. It looked like he could barely fit in the small truck, even before the accident. Now, he looked ruined and monstrous, his insides exposed, but it seemed like no blood came from his face or from his arm.

There seemed to be no blood at all.

There was a Hispanic man standing next to me, staring at the body.

I asked: Do you know if he's alive?

The man just stared, his eyes looked glassy and he didn't blink. Is he dead?

He shook his head and stuttered a few non-words, and then he walked away.

Men from a nearby grocery store, men with latex gloves and red shirts were waving traffic past.

Is he dead? the man with the crowbar asked them, his pry-bar hanging limp on the ground.

No reply.

Is there something, a blanket or sheet or something we can use to cover him?

A red-shirt turned and shook his head.

Nobody went within five feet of the dead man; people were paralyzed when confronted with this.

"Man and ghost stared at each other."

The collision and transgression of semiotic binaries in a text comprises what Roland Barthes calls the "symbolic code," one of the five codes he proposes in his book *S/Z* that, rather than being reductive interpretations imposed on a text, are embedded — encoded — within any text. The symbolic is achieved in a text when a system of antithetical binary oppositions is constructed and then transgressed in some way: when a man, for example, is castrated and made to pass as a woman, or when a poor person is given an expensive-looking necklace and appears to be rich, or when a person's true love emerges from a family they have hated their entire life (these three examples constitute three entrance points by which one can perceive the symbolic: sexual, economic, and rhetorical).²³ In *Ghosts*, binaries are constructed not only in the content of the text itself — in, for example, the antithesis between the middle-class tenants and the lower-class workers, between the attractive Argentineans and the ugly and displaced Chileans, between the "inside" and the "outside," and, ultimately, between death and life — but they are also addressed through conscious exclusion of the preferred tropes of the

²³ cf. Honoré de Balzac's "Sarrasine," Guy de Maupassant's "La Parure," and William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, respectively.

narrative hierarchy: “flat” characters are preferred over “round” characters, “telling” is preferred over “showing,” and the abstract is, at times, preferred over the concrete (once again defying a Realist reading of the text). This transgression of constructed binaries through inversion – preferential treatment of the stigmatized pole rather than the hegemonic one – appears to be the primary symbolic strategy of the text, breaking down meaning with so-called unrestrained metonymies that cause meaning to partially if not entirely crumble into a desiccated heap. The book culminates with what may be the greatest symbolic transgression of all: the preference of death over life in Patri’s suicide. I say greatest symbolic transgression because there is no binary, no antithesis more profound and crushingly powerful than life and death because no other binary can represent a boundary which every person will inevitably cross and yet nobody can adequately represent due to the fact that death, unlike “wealth” or “male,” is not an experience that can be quantified by the living.

And so what is one to make of a situation wherein two forces from similar cultural and economic backgrounds violently collide in a text and one can clearly see emerging (transgressively, perhaps) from this the feminine, the youthful, the “weak” trumping the masculine, the old, the “strong”? What could it possibly mean when a man dies because of the whims of fortune?

I looked at a dead body and realized that it meant nothing, and that death was random and terrible, and I could do nothing.

I walked back towards the SUV with the mother still trapped inside – her legs were being crushed by the steering column: they looked awful. She had been left alone except for an older woman with a metal adjustable cane who was on the phone with the police.

Red sirens were coming from the north and the south.

The woman on the phone suddenly noticed the man in the pickup truck. His body was hanging out of the car now, and one of the red-shirt men with latex gloves tenuously approached and placed the back of his right index and middle fingers against the dead man’s neck, checking for a pulse. He seemed terrified as he did this.

Oh God, the woman on the phone said, there’s a deceased man.

She began to cry.

Can anyone cover him? For God’s sake, can anybody put something over him?

She was yelling at no one.

The man with the crowbar came up to me and asked if I had seen who had given him the crowbar; it wasn't his, somebody just handed it to him.

I said I didn't know.

He walked off, saying he was going to move his car.

An old man with aviator glasses and tennis shorts came up to me and asked if I had witnessed the accident. He was in insurance and he wanted to know if I had seen what had happened.

I said I didn't see.

I started walking back towards the car – Ashlyn's car.

Sean! Sean!

I didn't even realize Ashlyn had been calling me from the sidewalk, I didn't recognize her until I heard her calling my name.

The first firefighters on the scene went right to the dead man, but even they wouldn't get close to him. The woman with the cane called them over and one went running to the trapped woman in the SUV.

There was nothing left to do. I wondered if, for a moment, I should go leave testimony with anyone, if the police wanted a witness, but no police had arrived yet. Most of the people that had helped had gone when the firefighters arrived, probably all saying the same thing to themselves: there's nothing left to do.

My hands were covered in blood and shaking. I didn't know if it was my blood or the girl's. Ashlyn and I walked back to her car. I wanted to scream. Ich fühlte: die Welt ist schön, und das Leben ist kurz! I wanted to do something cliché and stupid and life-affirming.

I'll just walk home, I said. I don't want to get blood on your car.

It's okay, she said. I'll get the door for you.

She grabbed and hugged me, but I tried not to touch her with my hands.

I got into the car and she closed the door behind me. Then we drove off together.

There was nothing left to do.

ⁱ An internet-translated version of the last line of the novel's English translation, the haphazard result of being unable to procure the Spanish edition of the book and an inability to speak or read the language.

ⁱⁱ Singer/songwriter from New York, former front man of the pop-band Soul Coughing, who wrote a song called "True Dreams of Wichita" that includes the line "Engine sputters ghosts out of gasoline fumes." He also wrote a song about Los Angeles titled "Screenwriter's Blues" that includes the line, "We are all, in some way or another, going to Reseda someday to die." All things considered, Reseda, like Woodland Hills, seems random, but as good a place as any to die someday.

ⁱⁱⁱ Roberto Bolaño, W.G. Sebald, and Jorge Luis Borges are all important names to keep in mind when reading César Aira, due to the fact that they all share the same tendencies to breach and blend genre and discourse conventions in their works. Mark Doty is notable primarily for being a poet who has actually managed to make money.

^{iv} Though this, perhaps, takes too much liberty. Depending upon the angle, simply falling out of bed and landing awkwardly on your head can be fatal or permanently disabling. On the other hand, there are accounts of soldiers that, in jumping or evacuating from a plane, have fallen, parachute-less, through thousands of feet of air – perhaps air that was filled with flak and debris and smoke – and survived with injuries ranging from a few scratches to some broken bones and ruptured organs. Death is and will always be a game of probability, where behavior or time or fortune are long chains of complementary events that will bring the odds ever closer to a life-ending 1. // The cover of the book was designed by Rodrigo Corral, who also designed the covers for Chuck Palahniuk's *Pygmy*, *Snuff*, *Invisible Monsters*, and *Diary*; Junot Diaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*; the recent New Directions publications of Jean-Paul Sartre's *Nausea* and Jorge Luis Borges' *Labyrinths* and *Seven Nights*; James Frey's *A Million Little Pieces*; George Saunders' *The Braindead Megaphone*; Roberto Bolaño's *The Savage Detectives*; *AK 100*, the 25-film Akira Kurosawa box-set; and Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen's *Influence*. The photograph of the ladder was taken by Tracy Morford, who has the fantastic ability to make all of her models look like they're made of mannequin plastic – a remarkable feat, considering that she claims to avoid "Photoshop tricks or superimposition," opting instead to plan all of her shots ahead of time (in particular, there is one picture of hers that catches the eye, though maybe not as well as the earthen tones of a Kandinsky painting, titled "Marii III," taken in 2006, that depicts in black-and-white a blurred, ghostly woman concealing her face with what looks like a hand-held mirror; she is standing in the corner of a dilapidated room with odd lighting and bloody handprints on the cement walls; she looks ghostly because it seems as though the camera was set for a long exposure and, when the shutter opened, the woman ducked down into an animal squat, leaving the transparent trail of past moments behind her). Rodrigo Corral and Tracy Morford

have worked together on covers for *Business Week* and *New York Magazine* (November 10, 2008, and March 24, 2008, respectively), Juan Gabriel Vasquez's *The Informers*, Michael Lewis' *Panic!*, and Kelly Hollingsworth's *Soup in the City*.

^v Perhaps "nucleotides" is a bad analogy as mutations in DNA are somewhat common, usually as a result of transcription errors during cellular division, most of which are easily reverted. Though, conversely, maybe DNA mutation is an excellent analogy for writing and revision; some of the terminology even seems to fit well: insertion, deletion, amplification, inversion. If narrative were to be treated metaphorically as DNA, and meaning was considered comparable to the proteins that DNA codes for, then it is easy to understand why one might have a reluctance to revise their narrative: an induced single-point mutation can disrupt or truncate the production of an entire meaning-protein, and a combination of induced alterations might have the effect of, for example, giving the textual organism the equivalent of something like *Cri du chat* or *Angelman syndrome*.

^{vi} Late in the summer of 2008, on August 14th, after having attended a going-away party for my friend whom I did not realize was Ashlyn's cousin, we drove south together through Malibu Canyon, four large bottles of beer in the back seat held in place by beach blankets. About half of the way between Malibu and Kanan Canyon, we stopped at a private beach—a line of houses on stilts begging to be swept away into the sea. We passed under the Pacific Coast Highway through a storm drain, set out blankets on the sand, drank beer and told each other stories. After an unknown stretch of time, Ashlyn turned to me and said, I have to micturate. Okay, I said. I have to pee! she said. I know, I said. We stood up and began to take off our clothes; I had a bathing suit on beneath my pants, but I quickly realized that Ashlyn was taking off all of her clothes. This was a, "Fuck it, you only live once," kind of moment, and I took off all of my clothes as well; we saw each other naked before we ever kissed. We ran into the Pacific holding hands and got soaked in the freezing water. When we returned to shore, we kissed the salt off each other's bodies and held each other close—her skin was soft like flour, she kissed me so gently it felt like butterfly wings. We held each other and kissed for a long time, and though our eyes were closed we could see a bright blue flash of light. What was that? We ignored it, kissed again, and the light flashed again. Someone's taking pictures of us! We scrambled to get our clothes on, looking at the surrounding houses to see if we could tell where the light was coming from. With the two of us half-dressed, the light flashed again, and then the thunder resounded in mediant harmony with the waves. A lightning storm was drifting towards the coast. We watched the blue arcs of electricity collide explosively with the ocean—one force acting on another as though mortal enemies or diametric entities. I told Ashlyn about fulgurite, a beautiful,

brittle glass that formed when lightning struck sand. When the rain started we ran back to my car, then we drove off together.

vii This is often used both figuratively and metaphorically, which is easy to understand considering the fact that the OED lists both the anatomical as well as the communicative definitions. (The latter definition, though, appears to be a semantic extension that began to occur in the mid-16th century with initially metaphysical connotations — “the arteries and conduites of the Supper of the Lorde” — and subsequently was further extended to refer to trade routes over waterways in the 17th and 18th centuries; particularly the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers and ocean routes to the East Indies. The railroads, that pillar of mercantile exchange in newly-industrialized nations, were also labeled arterial in the 19th century. Roads meant for cars began to be considered arteries around the same time they became a commercially viable means of transport in the early 20th century. The role of commerce and transportation in systems considered arterial might be a distant connection to the original anatomical definition, as the literal role of an artery consists of connection — as ligature — and the transportation of blood or other things of necessity to an organism for the purposes of biological exchange.) If one were to take the freeways-as-arteries metaphor a few steps further, however, one could consider vehicles as analogous to red blood cells, the people they carry similar to oxygen, streets as capillaries, police cars as leukocytes, buildings as different kinds of cells, differently-zoned areas as organs, fuel as hemoglobin, traffic as clog or constriction of blood flow, and road construction as vascularization. The inherent flaw with this metaphor might be that there is no heart, no originating “center” in this system that compels all of this activity.

viii Contrast with examples of elenctic debate, such as in Socrates’ dialogues, in which the end result is typically a state of aporia. In *Ghosts*, the movement would be a sort of inversion, where an initial lack of knowledge would transition into a state of knowing and direction.

ix Compare with classical or other well-known examples of rhetorical aporia, or *dubitatio*, such as passages from Demosthenes’ *On the Crown* (“but I am at a loss where to begin”) or Hamlet’s “To be or not to be” soliloquy. Contemporary examples of rhetorical aporia might include a conversation in which an interlocutor prefaces something they know will be offensive to other participants with “How do I say this?” The offensive comment is known ahead of time, and thus the controversial turn has already been anticipated and appropriately set up by this device.

x Man Killed In Woodland Hills Crash / Sep. 22, 2009 5:28 pm / WOODLAND HILLS (CBS) -- A 49-year-old man was killed Tuesday in a head-on collision in Woodland Hills. / The crash occurred at 5947 Fallbrook Ave. at 2:35 p.m., said Brian Humphrey of the city fire department. / A woman driving southbound on Fallbrook swerved into an oncoming car, killing the man driving it, Los Angeles police spokeswoman April Harding said. Police withheld the dead man’s name, pending notification of next of kin. / The woman

and a passenger were hospitalized in stable condition. / Occupants of two other cars also complained of injuries, which were not believed to be serious, Harding said. / Fallbrook was closed at Oxnard Street to accommodate [sic] the investigation and motorists were advised to use Woodlake Avenue if they are west of Fallbrook or Shoup if they are east of Fallbrook. / (© 2008 CBS Broadcasting Inc. All Rights Reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten, or redistributed. Wire services contributed to this report.)

^{xi} Popular restaurateur is mourned / CRASH: Hubaldo 'Waldo' Vacio was killed Tuesday during head-on collision. / By Tony Castro, Staff Writer / Updated: 09/26/2009 01:10:46 AM / Everyone loved Waldo. / They knew him only as Waldo, a middle-aged man with a bodybuilder's physique and the heart of a lamb, who owned a takeout joint in a strip mall at Vanowen Street and Platt Avenue. / And this week, everyone in the West Hills neighborhood has been in mourning for Waldo, stunned at the sudden loss. / Hubaldo "Waldo" Vacio, 50, a Mexican immigrant who came to Southern California three decades ago in pursuit of the American dream, died Tuesday in a nightmarish traffic collision that shattered a tightly knit community. / "He was rich in goodness," said Marty Nevis, who owns a business in the same strip mall. "Everybody in the neighborhood knew him and loved him. It was impossible not to." / For more than a generation, the restaurant Vacio bought with a lifetime of earnings, El Pollo Amigo, had been the heart and pulse of the neighborhood where residents remember such acts of kindness as giving youngsters who needed money a job or cheering them up when they seemed down. / "He was loved by old and young," said West Hills resident Kathleen Murray. "When he was killed, word spread like a wildfire. My kids - all the kids around here knew him - were heartbroken." / At Nevis' ice store, where friends and acquaintances shared remembrances of Vacio in the days after the accident, Ben Armijo uttered what many were saying: / "I just saw him a couple of days ago... / "I remember that when my mother died, out of the blue, he came over and brought us food. He didn't have to do that." / "That's the way he was," Nevis said. "He was just so kindhearted." / "I remember not being able to recall his name, and he said, 'Don't apologize. It's like "Where's Waldo?" the game,' and had a good laugh." / In front of El Pollo Amigo, other residents left flowers, cards and votive candles remembering other acts of kindness and generosity. / Inside El Pollo Amigo, some of Vacio's five grown children braved the ordeal of keeping their father's business open. / "I don't know what I'm going to do without him," said Brian Vacio, 17, a student at El Camino High School and the youngest of Waldo's children. / "I didn't look up to anyone except him. He was my wing. My mother is my other wing. They carried me through so much. Now one of my wings is gone." / Brian was still traumatized from seeing his father mangled in what remained of his pickup after the accident

in the 5900 block of Fallbrook Avenue, which occurred about 2:35 p.m. Tuesday. / Waldo Vacio was returning to the restaurant after making a food delivery, police said, when a southbound motorist lost control of her SUV and swerved into his oncoming pickup, killing him. / Police said the SUV's driver, a passenger in her vehicle and the driver of a car that slammed into the rear of Vacio's pickup were taken to hospitals, but their names and conditions were not released. / A passerby who recognized Vacio's truck immediately drove to the restaurant and notified the family, said Brian Vacio, who rushed to the scene. / "I saw my father still stuck in the truck," Brian said, overcome by the memory. "His arm hanging down . . ." / "I came back, and I was the one who had to break the news to my mother and my family." / Brian said witnesses told him the driver of the SUV had been using her cell phone when she lost control of her vehicle. / "That's a focus of our investigation," said Los Angeles police Detective Bill Bustos. "We're looking into that, but it's still too early in our investigation to know." / A funeral for Waldo Vacio is set for noon Sunday at Angeleno Mortuary in Sherman Oaks. / "He was a good man, always good to everyone," said Brizeyda Vacio, 28, Waldo Vacio's oldest child. "I think that's what made my father so special to everyone is that he wouldn't just take the orders from people who came here. He would also listen to them, hear their problems, their joys. / "He would talk to kids and pay close attention to what they would say, and they knew he took a genuine interest in what they were doing and in their lives." / Now, say those who knew him, it is hard to believe he is gone. Some hung out outside El Pollo Amigo remembering how buff he was - he worked out regularly at a local 24 Hour Fitness - and the ponytail he wore like a matador. / "He would call me Martizito," Nevis recalled. "He was so gentle and full of sweetness." / "The first time I met him, I'd been talking to him for just a couple of minutes when he said, 'I love you, man. You happy man.' / "He made my day."

^{xii} A 5,800 pound Sport Utility Vehicle, with a ground-to-chassis height of about 20 inches, travelling at approximately 50 miles per hour collides head on with a 4,000 pound pickup truck, with a ground-to-chassis height of 10 inches, travelling at 45 miles per hour in the opposite direction. While one might be tempted to simply solve for the Severity Index suffered by the passengers of each vehicle, which accounts the magnitude of acceleration (or, in this case, deceleration) and the length of time in which it is experienced, this figure is somewhat meaningless when the height of the first vehicle allows it to jump up and slide over the hood of the other vehicle, treating it like a ramp and flattening the cab ceiling onto the driver.

Heidi Vandenberg

In the center of this world
I've found a citadel where the hiding
stops and I fight for what
I deserve but can't have.

I spin around
all that is and was
and might someday be.
I grab your hands and twirl.

Yellow fields blur; trees surround us
in a wall; our problems fuse
together and they drop
into oblivion.
We spin
around all
that has become. We hold
hands and we revolve
Closer, closer

until
the space between
us shrinks to nothing
and we spin
together,
hinged,
like the sky
to the
sea.

Spin

Jeffrey C. Alfier

Dusk, and the café fills with disbanded
hunters, their shoulders slumped by weighty ghosts
of quarry, and regret for what escaped.
Like them, you place your order and kill time
till you can flatter a waitress. Chances
come down to a stone truth worn on the face
of a tired one, her bitter eyes gazing
back, the same face your landlord wears when rent's
due – two prize fighters beyond their last prize.
But neither of you will let words emerge
from rusted speech, words said wrong forever
in every small town like this, where voices
become borders you both cross blindfolded.

Regulars at the Moonglow Café



Death of a Legend

by John William Young

In Texas during the 1960's, baseball is God.

Every beer joint, pool hall and country café in every small town is filled with able bodied cowboys, truckers and farm hands who relive tall stories about the big games of their past. They aren't talking about the race riots in the northern cities, or the campus upheavals across the country or even the drug using hippies of The Haight-Ashbury. And they aren't talking about whether or not Viet Nam is a good war or a bad war. Death is a reality in Viet Nam and many of our boys are coming home in boxes. The chant of *'What are we fighting for?'* is ringing across the country.

But – not in Texas.

The talk is always about the 'big game' that week. Everybody will be there. The players will play their best. The fans will root their hardest. Everybody will talk about the 'play of the game.' Every fan will talk about the best player. Every player will want to be the best player. Every best player will become a hero. Every hero will become a legend. Every legend will become a God.

On this particular spring afternoon, Taft High School's Armadillos are playing for The 1969 Southwestern High School League Championship. Balloons and banners announcing the game line the fence of the Armadillos' finely manicured baseball diamond. The scoreboard reads two outs in the bottom of the tenth and Taft High trails three to four.

Brightly painted signs read "T & A – ALL THE WAY." The Armadillo players eagerly stand on the steps of the dugout with Coach Ryan, a middle aged favorite uncle of a man, watching their teammates struggle. One by one, the Armadillos turn their T&A hats around to the cry of "RALLY".

Coach Ryan puts in a plug of chew and yells out words of encouragement.

"Let's do it, Boys! This is it!"

B.J. Dickerson, an athletic Adonis, is on third base and Jimmy Blake Johnson, the team speedster, is on second base. Mickey Roy Dunn, an intense, thick, barrel-chested youngster, is at bat. The count is two and two with two outs. Cindy Lou, a petite and very pretty teenage girl, paces the first base fence line.

"You can do it, Mickey!" she yells. "Come on, Baby!"

"Come on, Mick!" shouts B.J.

"Let's go, Mick," encourages Coach.

"See the ball, Buddy!" Jimmy Blake shouts from second, "A little bingo, Kid!"

Chuy Saenz, a behemoth teen of 6'5" and 290 pounds, is in the on-deck circle swinging a bat with a donut over his head. It is obvious that he has a tremendous amount of power. He smiles and scratches his crotch.

"Hey, Pendejō? You don't get on you're a queer!" he shouts and then feigns, "I got your cajones right here, ESE."

Chuy guffaws as the crowd howls. A smiling Mickey Roy stares right through Chuy and shakes his head knowingly. There is a real brotherhood amongst the boys. Coach Ryan spits tobacco as he interrupts.

"Come on, Mick. Just a little contact!" he shouts out.

The opposing pitcher reaches back and throws. Mickey Roy closes his eyes and swings.

BLAM!!!

A line drive is hit to the gap in right center. B. J. scores easily as Jimmy Blake rounds third and heads for home. The right fielder picks up the ball and lets go with a monstrous heave. Jimmy Blake and the ball arrive at the same time.

B.J. screams, "Slide! Slide!"

There is a funeral in Mickey Roy's brain as an imaginary 40-ounce Louisville Slugger slam against his cerebral cortex.

"Hit it, Cabron!" shouts Chuy.

Chuy and B.J. motion for Jimmy Blake to slide and he does. The catcher catches the ball, at the same time and Jimmy slides around the tag and swipes his left hand on home plate. The umpire signals safe and the crowd erupts into cheers.

"Way to go, Team!!!"

"Wahoo Armadillos!!!"

Mickey Roy exuberantly runs into home to celebrate with the guys and jumps onto the pile that includes Jimmy Blake and B.J. As they roll on the ground laughing hysterically, Mickey Roy looks up and grins at Chuy. Chuy feigns indifference and offers a hand.

"Bout time you listened to me, Pussy."

Cindy Lou waits in the passenger seat of Mickey Roy's 1955 yellow and black Chevy-Nomad wagon with Astro-Supreme chrome rims. Mickey Roy, carrying his baseball gear is saying goodbye to Armadillo fans. Cindy Lou has been crying. She folds a note and puts it into Mickey Roy's brown letterman jacket with tan arms, brown collar and brown wrist bands. She smiles briefly, knowing how important the jacket is to Mickey Roy. How it represents who Mickey Roy is. And today he is 'THE HERO.' For a moment Cindy Lou is happy.

Mickey Roy opens the driver's door and gets in. "Damn, I thought I'd never get away." He puts his bag in the back seat rearranging his bat, glove and spikes before zipping it up. The last thing he does is dust the dirt off of his baseball pants before he takes his T&A hat off which he then throws into the backseat on top of his blue and green ice chest.

Cindy Lou says, "You're a hero."

Mickey pulls out an RC and fiddles for his church key. "Yeah, I guess so. Dang, I can't get this cap off, my hands are so swollen."

Cindy takes the bottle and the church key from him and opens his cola. "You're my hero."

With his manhood in question Mickey responds with an uncomfortable chuckle as he glances at Cindy, "I don't feel like a hero." He does a double take. "Hey, have you been crying?"

Cindy breathes deeply before she responds, "I've got something to tell you."

Mickey Roy looks at her and replies simply, "What?"

There is an awkward pause. Cindy Lou starts to tear up but doesn't say anything. Mickey Roy is concerned and he gropes to say something. Anything. The tension is unbearable.

"Cindy Lou, I'm sorry about last night."

"It happens. I don't hold you to blame," she replies.

Mickey Roy searches, "I mean, I love you—but I just don't know if it's the right time to get married or not. Look what's happened to my cousin, Johnny and his family."

"Well, then... when is the right time?" Cindy asks.

"I dunno," Mickey responds.

Another long awkward pause.

"Look, I really appreciate your daddy offering me the job at the hardware store and everything—but I'm getting a lot of pressure to go to college. I even thought about joining the army. Heck, I might even get drafted and sent to Viet Nam."

"What do you want to do?"

"I dunno! I just know I've got to get out of this one stop sign town somehow!"

Cindy stares at Mickey Roy for a moment, then, "Out of this town?"

"Yeah," he responds with no energy.

"Does that include taking me?"

Mickey Roy doesn't answer, he just sighs. Hurt, Cindy Lou flings her door open.

"Oh, God." Mickey knows he has crossed a line, even though he doesn't understand how and by how much.

After searching for the words that do not come, Cindy climbs out of the Chevy, slams the door and runs off in tears.

"Cindy!" Mickey shouts after her.

Cindy Lou doesn't answer and continues running. Mickey Roy doesn't go after her but he leans over to the passenger side and yells out the window.

"What did I say?" he yells.

Mickey Roy peers out the windshield of the Chevy lost deep in thought. He thinks about being a hero today. He thinks about the guys rolling on the ground laughing. He thinks about Chuy offering him a hand. He thinks about Cindy Lou crying softly. His emotions are tugging at a tide of uncertainty with no rudder.

Suddenly the passenger door opens and Chuy gets in replacing Cindy Lou. He is sipping a Royal Crown Cola in a thick glass bottle. He and Mickey Roy look at each other for a moment without saying a word. Finally Chuy asks.

"Did you tell her?"

"Yeah," Mickey offers.

"Did she take it okay?" Chuy questions.

"I dunno – I guess so."

"Well, good." Chuy offers the bottle to Mickey Roy who takes a long swig without thinking and drains the bottle dry.

"Hey, Gordo! Pinchy Cabron, Mother Fucker," Chuy fakes anger.

"I'm sorry Chuy. I'm kinda out of it. Leave me alone for a while, okay. I need to think. I'll pick you up later tonight."

Without hesitation, Chuy reaches into the ice chest in Mickey Roy's back seat and pulls out a Pepsi cola. He pulls a church key off of Mickey Roy's key chain dangling from the ignition and opens the Pepsi bottle. After taking a long drink, he opens the door to leave.

"Hey, I already put my sleeping bag in the trunk, Mi hijo. You better not get any "trunk gunk" on it, Pussy, or your ass is grass."

Mickey Roy just nods as Chuy slams the car door and ambles away. After a moment Mickey Roy picks up his letterman jacket and starts to put it on. As he does he feels something in the pocket. He reaches in and pulls out Cindy Lou's note. It reads:

Girls

*Brandy Ann Dunn
Becky Lynn Dunn
Jenny Sue Dunn
Ronnie Renee Dunn
Donna Verdine Dunn
Lucy Amber Dunn
Janet Carolyn Dunn*

Boys

*Johnny Will Dunn
Roy Dean Dunn
Billy Mack Dunn
Tyler Blake Dunn
Stevie Ray Dunn
Ricky Lee Dunn
Donnie Dick Dunn*

Mickey Roy takes his letterman jacket off and throws it onto his back seat. Mickey Roy thinks about his cousin Johnny moving his family to Detroit, hoping for a better life by taking a job at The Ford Motor Company. He thinks about the riots in Detroit, New Jersey and Chicago. He thinks about the death of Malcolm X and the rise of The Black Panthers. He thinks about the Anti-war demonstrations sweeping the nation. He thinks about the hundreds of thousands of U.S. soldiers killed in Viet Nam. He thinks about Sirhan Sirhan shooting Bobby Kennedy. He thinks about JFK. He thinks about Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. delivering his famous "I Have A Dream" speech. He thinks about Johnny's layoff and Johnny's family having to move back home.

For the moment Mickey Roy thinks about all the broken lives, all the broken promises, all the broken dreams.

"Hey, Mickey Roy!" an able bodied cowboy with a long neck in hand, yells from a passing pick-up truck. "That was one hell of a game today."

"Thanks, Man," Mickey answers.

"Way to go, Hero!" the cowboy clicks his beer to his side-view mirror offering Mickey Roy a toast. He guns his motor and his pick-up truck spits loose gravel as he peels out. "Go Armadillos!!! Yee Haw!!!"

There is a funeral in Mickey Roy's brain as an imaginary 40 ounce Louisville Slugger slams against his cerebral cortex. He doesn't feel like a hero, a legend or a God. Suddenly – baseball in small town Texas doesn't seem that important.

Perry Duane Brenner

Yeeehaw watching Hee Haw and *Hallelujah* on Sunday mornings
Puuuraise the Lord at church and *Go to Hell* for lunch
Seedy southern trailer parks and free lunch milk money
Fried chicken and Kool-Aid and guilt by association

I am from

Taking shelter in the radio's warm green glow while F-bombs are dropping from the ceiling
Family reunions leading to family dysfunction leading to family desecration
Down south, down home, and downwind from hate's foul fumes
Hayseed and overalls, outhouse and outsource; now outsourcing the outhouse

I'm from

Haggard, Mellencamp, Small Towns and small minds
Weeping willows, weeping widows and big dinners after the funeral
Moonshine and moonlit walks
Spanking the monkey that's on my back

I'm from

Raisin' Cain and Raisin' Hell
Beautiful landscapes, beautiful women, and beautiful ideals
Rash realities of rural decay
Grandma's kitchen, momma's guilt, and daddy's guidance
Family perdition and hates tradition

I am from

The southern table of hospitality that loves you while you die



am from...

EDGAR MUNOZ

WALKING HETEROTOPIAS

"heterotopias ... contest the very possibility of language at its source."
—Michel Foucault

You are walking
heterotopias,
children of chaos,
rag-tag chasers
of utopias
living in the hate
of contradiction
knowing diction
only as an image
as far away
as the continent
of Atlantis
from Plato's
hands.

You dream of
non-self
because you
loathe yourself,

because the world
is you
and the boundaries
true,
because you have
been wed
to a system ahead
when peace
shall rule
the earth
and everything
in its place.

You are walking
heterotopias,
children of chaos,
rag-tag chasers
of utopias.



Shoes
Jacob Boghosian



X Marx the **Spot**
by Tommy Bui

I'd be in charge of driving, Marx would be in charge of the map. A capricious enough arrangement. I'd pick him up at his favourite delicatessen at precisely dawn. Naturally, he would have an overabundance of luggage. Imagine his chagrin when he sees what I pull up in. He is supremely unamused when the wheel that touches the curb belongs to a 1953 Adler RS 250 motorcycle. Sidecar included. Seems the K man will have to do without the luxuries his overpacking would've afforded him. He kicks his handbag.

I kick start the engine.

And off we go. The trip is falling over itself with anxiety and tension from the word "go." Marx keeps mumbling something in German under his breath. He knows I don't understand word one but yet he insists on badgering me. I tell myself that's the last time I escort a deceased literary figure across the nation. The money's good. But not great. Plus I could do without his perpetual "harrumphs" and ostentatious "a-hems" whenever I open up the throttle. What's the point of having a machine like this if you can't feed it a little speed every now and again? Christ, he's mumbling something to me again. I also must mention those cycle goggles make him look like a frog.

Two days in now. Our tires have careened over fifteen hundred miles of American asphalt. K's warmed up a bit. I tried to explain baseball to him for an hour. That conversation turned into an explanation of cricket somehow. I can't quite recall how our dialogue landed on abortion. But it did. He had nothing intelligent to add to the discourse. Conversation petered off into one about baby kittens. He's really into baby kittens.

One day behind schedule. I had to doubleback by twelve hours when, after a short pit stop, I discovered Marx wasn't in the sidecar but was replaced by a giant zucchini wrapped in swaddling. That feisty German. I found him loitering around a local pet shop tapping the glass of the feline enclosure. By the time I arrived, he had named them all.

...that's the last time I escort a deceased literary figure across the nation.

ETA two days. We've exhausted our funds. In retrospect, I see now that we made some poor financial decisions. We were too naïve to see through the smoke and mirrors of two stockbrokers we encountered on the road. Please do not invest any capital into the stock "Gimme your wallet, punk." Or its subsidiary corporation, "And your little kraut friend too." Although they had a compelling pitch, I just don't think it's an auspicious time for the market now.

We finally arrive. Our bike is basically scrap metal now. I'll have to figure out an alternate way home. I shake hands with Karl and bid him farewell. "Not a bad duo, eh? Me on driving, you on map. We must do this again." Suddenly, *now*, he knows English. "I vas in charge of zee map?" He takes his zucchini and gets into a nearby cab. Christ, I'm starting to wish he only mumbled terrible German nothings under his breath again. In any case, I still need to get back home.

I think I'll call my broker. Try to cash in some of those, "later, losers!" stock.



Train Station Platform
Rebecca Algazy

Being in **E-Prime**

by Bret Adrian Kaufman



nce, a man of deeds and a man of words stood on the shore of the Ocean of Being and the man of deeds dove headfirst into the water, but the man of words just stood and contemplated the surface of the waves. The man of deeds called out to the man of words: Follow me! All you need to know comes with the leap! You cannot know unless you do! But the man of words said: I cannot do unless I know. So the man of deeds swam away.

II

I swam out past the waves where my feet couldn't touch the ground. I let my body go and the current dragged it out. And I watched the shoreline become a sliver of what it once seemed. And I felt the vastness of the ocean envelop me.

The ocean conceived all life on the planet. And within the seed lay the tree. From the first protozoa to the rise of the human race, this tree grew with its many branches and boughs until it produced that most great fruit: the self-aware being. The anatomy of the prenatal human demonstrates this development in the microcosmic view. At its earliest stage, it takes on a form similar to that of a worm. At a latter stage it evolves into a fish-like form with gills. Then, it takes on a more reptilian appearance. And, finally, the familiar form of the human baby. Yet, all of this development takes place within the womb in preparation for birth so that the perfected form may grow and actualize its consciousness in the self-aware creature.

They say as a baby I learned to run before I learned to walk. And, in my first memory, I ran full baby speed into a mirror. This produced a two-fold shock. First, the cacophonous sound of mirror shards crashing to the floor all around me caused a general heightening of all of my senses. Second, and more importantly, in a matter of seconds, the image of myself, so fragmented by the shards below—with an eye here and fingers and so on there—came into sharp contrast with the feeling of the fullness of my body brought about by two frantic hands that lifted me up so fast that all the

blood in my tiny head rushed downward causing me to black out. And when I returned to full consciousness, I cried not from the shock of the accident, but from the frightfulness of this new awareness of wholeness and sensuousness.

III

My body drifted farther from the shore. And the mountains seemed to move to my left. I watched the sun break forth from its rocky cage, bathing the land and sea in light. It slowly rose, yet I know it never moves.

The *Qur'an* establishes the fixity of the sun almost a millennium before Copernicus. Arnold Toynbee has argued that history remains the story of civilizations and that civilizations contain at their base the essentials of religion. The essentials of religion include acceptance of the revelation of a messenger of a supreme god, adherence to the social laws instituted by that messenger, and the glorification of the faith's primary god through the production of culture: of art, architecture, music, and the sciences. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Arjuna implores Krishna: *Tell me the truths necessary for the world in which I live. Show me how I can meditate upon you, learning from you the wisdom that I need. I never tire of hearing you, because your words bring life.* Krishna explains: *When righteousness weakens and unrighteousness exalts in pride then my spirit arises on earth for the salvation of those who do good. For the destruction of evil in men. For the fulfillment of righteousness, I come to this World, from age to age.* The sun rises and sets and if we say the sun has renewed itself we speak the truth and if we say the sun remains the same we also speak the truth. For most of humanity, facile pronouncements about religion — that it amounts to nothing more than an opiate of the masses and that God has finally died — have gone largely unnoticed. Religion remains the most vital impulse in the ordering and structuring of civilization because most people recognize that civilization depends just as much, if not more, on non-material forces than it does on the raw materials used.

As a child, I came down with a severe fever. I shivered and convulsed for hours while people prayed all around me. I felt a great darkness come over me. Then everything went black and silent. And I finally felt at perfect peace. I saw an image rise up from the darkness like a hologram, a vision of an impressive building of a classical Greek style in a place by the sea that seemed both old and new. The rectangular perimeter of the structure, upheld by columns, shined in the light of the sun. Each column contained the inscription of a word: UNITY, ONENESS, HARMONY, TRUTH, BEAUTY, and others. And I saw a joyful multitude of radiant women and men usher forth from the building in all directions with medicinal plants, fantastic machines, golden rods, and all manner of books in

Stuck in the mire of materiality, the bird of the spirit cannot wing its flight to the realms above.

their hands. And I heard a voice like that of many waters call out: Justice! They say I died, but when they brought me back, it seemed to me I had never really lived. And I felt myself rocking, as in a cradle, though in a place without space or time.

IV

My body drifted further and further out to sea. The sun rose to its zenith, although I know it never moves. And the shore finally became a simple line.

In Euclidian geometry lines represent idealizations of space without actual width or height. In analytic geometry lines represent derived notions defined by points. Superstring physicists theorize that all of creation exists in a matrix of quantum lines or strings and that each string resonates on a unique vibratory frequency which gives rise to the forces of reality, such as gravity and electromagnetism. In this construct, the intersections of strings allow for infinite permutations of elements and bind together all dimensions, of which there are several beyond those of space and time. But what came first the program or the code? A massive form rises up from the earth. It moves like a rolling cloud, undulating in ordered chaos. It takes a moment or two to register the composition of this form as a flock of seagulls. Each seagull in a flock stays just close enough to the one next to it to avoid predators (more eyes mean quicker reaction) and just far enough away to avoid collision with the birds around it. But no one bird leads. Some schools of fish do this too. So do humans, in certain situations. But, again, what came first the program or the code? Systems scientists suggest two possible constructions of the emergence of such complexity. Weak emergence presents a reductive model of evolution. In terms of consciousness, weak emergence presents the source code, the mechanics of life, as arising from a singularity which continued to reprogram its own totality through a refinement of complexity. The obvious problem with this hypothesis would be the origin of the singularity. Strong emergence posits the precedence of a non-local program from which all things receive their encoding. This pre-encoded program permeates space and binds the elements together in increasingly more complex systems. In terms of consciousness then, the program represents one great

thought that shapes the stuff around it in order to manifest itself in awareness of itself. Nevertheless, within every thesis lies its antithesis. Like the rising and receding tides, or the changing of the seasons, in every age some protest the non-material realities of the intellectual and spiritual realms and even the necessity of their non-local basis, especially in terms of the abstract. They say that only material reality exists, even though quantum mechanics has proven that the material represents more of a thought in space than a physical existence. Stuck in the mire of materiality, the bird of the spirit cannot wing its flight to the realms above.

As a boy, I became intrigued with geology. I studied the composition and the history of the formation of the elements, minerals, and gemstones. And I developed my own excavation kit. And I used to pick at nearby hills for hours in search of samples. It thrilled me to think of time as so expansive and of pressure as the catalyst for such drastic transformations. It occurred to me that the Book of Nature reveals the perfect metaphor for change. I began to think more of the transmutation of elements. We locate a non-foliated metamorphic rock resulting from the metamorphism of limestone, composed mostly of calcite. We quarry it. We give it form. And sometimes we give it function. We call it the White Marble Mosque or some other such place of worship. We create buildings and statues and ornamentation. By the blueprint of heaven, we build up structures that rise above the earth. As above, so below.

V

My body drifted back towards the shore. And the sun began to sink into the ocean, although I know it never moves. The clear sky turned from bright blue to hues of brilliant pink, lavender, and red with wisps of clouds that made it seem as though some great impressionistic hand patiently worked above.

To what do we owe such knowledge of the intellectual and spiritual realities, the mind and the creative power of the will? The spirit represents a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education alone can bring forth these precious elements. Although some primates, such as chimps, can be taught by humans to sign to get what they want from their trainers, and although their young can learn to mimic their parents, nothing indicates that they understand the inherent connections being made. When released into the wild or simply unprompted by the mechanics of the food reward they eventually return to their old instincts and lose the habit of mimicking signs. A human baby left on its own will die, as will many mammal species, demonstrating an inherent need for the affectionate bond we might call love. This love bond, if we may call it that, occurs at all levels of creation. The constituent elements of the mineral love each other and bond

together. The vegetable kingdom loves the mineral and the carbon dioxide produced by animal. And many animals fiercely love their young. Yet none of this loving and bonding occurs with any sort of self-aware intelligence. It all happens in its instinctive way. The manifestations of consciousness in the lower levels of life organize themselves according to an apparently preordained set of laws. Humans possess a manifestation of consciousness that operates according to a different law: the law of the will. A chimp becomes entirely self-sufficient in seven years and enters into the fully actualized realm of chimp society. The less complex the life form, the faster it becomes self-sufficient; it simply needs less time to completely actualize its necessary programming. Without the exercising of the will, the human child will not only cease to progress, but will also continue to devolve in such a base direction that it will become an even more animalistic creature than the animal itself. Human children not only can learn, but they can also continue to learn on their own after learning the fundamentals of how to learn. Everything that cannot be seen can be understood by its effects. We cannot see the wind yet we know it exists because it rustles the leaves of the trees in a park on a moody August day. So what of the intellectual realities, such as reason, imagination, and abstraction? Do these intellectual powers manifest as a sort of deterministic byproduct of the brain or do they occur at a more subtle level of reality in which the brain becomes merely the vehicle for their expression? And since human beings require transcendence to function beyond the base level, might we not agree, once and for all, that a non-material force exists in us which compels us not only to rise above nature, but also to seek expression in such things as music, painting, and narrative? When we do agree to accept that a spirit moves each and all, that each and every one of us represents a unique expression of the transcendental source of mind and will in the infinitely permuted unity of being, then we can proceed to produce an art that will rise above syllables and sounds. Then, we will achieve the dream of the Tower of Babel and construct a language that, in its transformative power, reaches to heaven.

As a young man, my Hebrew instructor taught me that learning *Leshon HaKodesh* would bring me closer to the Lord, *Hashem*, because the Holy Tongue represents His Word as spoken by Him in the beginning. My instructor said that even in its shape it appears like fire because to the prophets it came as illumination in the land of Ur and the scribes set it down in such form in the *Torah* to remind humanity of that illumination. But to me the letters represented no more than ink on a page. In my private time, I turned away from my primers to the Tree of Life. And I set out to discover the essence of the Word of the Most High. Lost in a sea of diagrams and formulae, I poured over all the esoterica I could get my hands on. My mind reeled at the thought of so

vast a theme. I pressed on, but to no avail until I threw up my idle hands in despair and stole away into the woods behind the yeshiva. And I found myself in a place of enchanted beauty. In the center of a circular clearing, by a brook, amidst the sound of soft flowing water complemented by a gentle and delicious breeze that made the falling leaves and the sunlight dance in the midst of the trees, I came upon a pool of water. The manner of this place seemed quite sublime. Everything in it—the singing of birds, the vibrantly green foliage, and even the multicolored fungi—impressed upon my vision a sense of something quite magical. And the pool too seemed to shimmer in the available light like a million tiny diamonds strewn across the mossy earth. And there in the pool I saw myself as myself: a spirit in a material world, under the sun with stillness inside yet moving in the midst of life. And this stillness set me free. And I looked up at the sun and saw the light as never before, as if for the first time. In some crystal formations, the light reveals itself in color. In others, it appears like fire. The light trains everything according to its nature. And some focus on the objects containing the light and find nothing but differentiation. Yet, a few come to see only the light itself in all things.

VI

As my body drifted along, the sun sank into the sea, although I know it had never moved. And the stars looked down, like a million eyes in the face of the night. And I thought of our ancestors, beating time like a heartbeat on a drum, painting caves with scenes of the hunt in red ochre and crushed, wet, charcoal sprayed from their mouths, and attuning themselves to the changing of the seasons by the revolution of the stars. And I heard a drumming in the distance or maybe I heard my own heartbeat. My body drifted back to shore, I saw the twinkling of lights in the distance and I thought of the light of my vision when it finally embraced the world.

The bay of Haifa radiates with a special energy in the daylight. All around, buildings seem to rise up from the earth like natural extensions of the sacred landscape. Yet, on the slopes of Mount Carmel, there appears a vision of heaven on earth. Amidst the terraced slope cultivated in a manner the likes of which human eyes have not seen since they gazed upon the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, stands the most majestic shrine of the herald of a new world faith crowned with a copper dome like a queen among lowly vassal. And at the top of the mountain stands an impressive building of a classical Greek style that seems both old and new. Seeing this vision before my naked eyes, I finally understood that we stand on the precipice of a new day and a new cycle of human history matchless in its potential. Matchless, then, must be the deeds that accompany such a day.

VII

Once, a man of deeds and a man of words stood on the shore of the ocean of being and the man of deeds dove headfirst into the water, but the man of words just stood and contemplated the surface of the waves. The man of deeds called out to the man of words: Follow me! All you need to know comes with the leap! You cannot know unless you do! But the man of words said: I cannot do unless I know. So the man of deeds swam away. And he dove into the ocean's depths. And there he found many others like him. And some seemed content to ride the currents of this vast and limitless ocean. And others moved to and from the shore. And the man of deeds knew each and all even as he knew himself. He decided then that he would swim back to the shore and find others in search of this ocean, to guide them and teach them how to dive in.

JESSICA BECHTOLD

FABRIC SOFTENER

I have adapted
to the silence
of night,
the computer's glow
shining
in beneath the door.
I lie waiting
for you to come
kiss me,
like when you
had to have me
because
you didn't know
if you ever would again.

But now
that our sheets
are the same
spackled green,
you're not as anxious
to find out
if my skin
has soaked in
the lavender vanilla
of fabric softener.

Instead,
you slip in
quietly, lie down
and smell the sheets,
when my eyelashes
are already resting
on my cheeks, twitching
to the dialogue
in my dreams.



The Femme Fatale
Michael Balingit



Followers
Sara Alavikia

Sevana Minassian

There's a garden where I sow scars,
inner demons, and sorrow.

Each month I place a for sale sign,
inviting the public to my nursery.

*Bruised peonies only five bucks a bouquet.
Crushed carnations by the dozen.*

Five years straight, my thorns
have won first place in this town.
While I'm not wealthy,

my petals sink to the bottom,
drowning in people's vases.

he Gardner

after Jeffrey McDaniel's, "The Farmer"

The Distance

Between

Here

and

There

by Cynthia Cuno

“They were strange geometry
that when inversely squared
made perfect sense.”

The Distance Between Here and There

After dinner, she lit herself on fire.

She taped the water bill to the TV screen so he would see it, walked out the back door with a bottle of turpentine and the book of matches she swiped from the Mexican restaurant that served pineapple margaritas in hollowed out pineapples. They had free quesadillas during happy hour.

She made her favorite lasagna with extra parmesan cheese. He served himself seconds and thirds like he usually did and even washed his own dishes when he was done. She put everything away on the table and returned everything to the cupboards, the drawers and the cabinets where they belonged. The kitchen was clean and nothing was out of place.

Did you pay the water bill?

No, he said. Didn't you?

She hated him. He loved her. That's how they started when they met.

He was stupid and quiet. She was smart but judgmental.

There were 138 days in the semester and they spent almost all of them together.

They crossed paths on the stairs between the photography lab and the machine shop. He waited in the same spot every day until she stopped ignoring him. He talked to her until she answered. That was when they knew that the silence of their days and nights was over. She learned about steel and its flexibility. He learned to recognize the smell of D-76.

Eventually, he became a welder, she a photographer. She took pictures of him, of everything. They often went to museums and she showed him Rothko, Kandinsky and Lichtenstein - all those things he couldn't understand because she had to admit that he was not as smart as she was. But she liked it that way and she never questioned that he liked learning everything she taught him. He understood all the things she obsessed about - creamed honey on rye bread and colored glass. He convinced himself he knew her.

He did.

They were strange geometry that when inversely squared made perfect sense.

He listened mostly and watched.

She showed him thousands of photographs of buildings, of beaches, children in playgrounds, the central market, museums,

cemeteries, cars, trees, people laughing, the things that made sense to her and no one else. She talked about the places she wanted to go and how there was no reason for her not to get on a Chinese shipping barge to Asia. There was nothing to leave behind but everything to see.

Nothing to see and everything to leave behind, he would often tell her.

She considered this when he said it, in the same way she stood at the foot of her bed all night and watched his chest rise and fall until morning. She told him she stared out the window and watched Venus until it disappeared. His smell was on her sheets and pillows even when he was gone. He smelled like donuts and cigarettes. Sometimes she found his stray hairs on her sweaters.

She taught him how to develop pictures and let him borrow her camera. His pictures were always of people. When he tried to take her picture, she always turned away.

Why not? he asked.

She ignored him.

The first time he came into her house he wandered into every room. She watched him go from room to room. She knew he was trying to find something he had never seen.

Where are the pictures of you? he asked

She laughed.

Why would I have pictures of myself in my own house?

Don't you have any pictures of camping trips or graduations?

Not really, she said. Just a lot of preschool art...

Why? he asked.

Why not? she said. I liked to paint and I was good at it.

Don't you have any pictures from elementary school?

She always found something else to do when he asked her all of this. She cleaned the kitchen or started dinner. Sometimes she fed the cat that wandered into her yard or made coffee. The truth always revolved around the dirty dishes like the flies in the sink. Somehow there was always a resurrection.

There were no camping trips or graduation pictures, just ugly preschool art, she said.

He looked around quietly anyway. She let him.

He asked about the photos on her wall, when she had taken them and what they meant.

There were pictures of trees, the coastline, a city from the top of a mountain and pictures of different objects from strange angles that made the object look like something else – a bird cage that looked like the inside of a prison cell.

Why do they have to mean anything? They don't have to mean anything in order to be good pictures, she said.

He paused.

You're right, he said.

She smiled and usually looked away before he continued.

But they *can* mean something, he said.

She stayed quiet for awhile.

They can mean anything you want them to mean, he said.

One day he found an old brittle picture hidden in a book. The woman in the picture was holding a baby wrapped in a white blanket.

Her face was like the mother, but not as pretty and not as far away.

There was also a picture of a little wooden house that hung onto dirt like indifference and leaned on a twisted rusted fence. He pulled them out of the book and handed them to her.

You looked like your mother, he said.

She took the pictures into the next room. They disappeared with her into the silence.

Those were not lost, she said.

So when he asked about the father, she never responded and at first he never made her.

He always wondered.

She always forgot.

But it was never really silent.

She made him a key to her front door and he often used it. He came in at night and they slept together. Sometimes he didn't leave for days. Eventually he stayed. She never asked him anything and he never told her much of anything. They talked about all those things people talk about when there was nothing to talk about. The weather and global warming and how the neighbor's cat always left his paw marks on her car. He was warm and she realized she was often cold. This was often the problem with her almost always. It was easy to discover these things with him there. There was a sense of roundness if not completion, like things continued and never ended with him. They watched people pass by the window and she made up stories about where they were going and what they were doing. He always listened.

There was more film in her refrigerator than food. Most of the canisters had dates written on their caps, some so old they were over 10 years old. Some of them were labeled: trees, sidewalk 100, subway, downtown alley 4, oak grove/tech pan, old house, Portland F-16, tower 3, birds, market 400, pier/terminal 17. He separated them into groups.

Why don't you develop these?

She never answered.

He put the canisters on the front shelf but she always moved them back to their original place. Aware of his unanswered question, she thought of something else and before the afternoon was over she

had usually taken control of the situation. There was always something else to do and she usually felt his uneasiness slip away.

She never talked about the summer she spent on the road alone or school and how she ended up in France after she met Felix or how often she spent time in the damp alleys of the 14th quarter in Paris. Felix was never important - the drugs and everything else mattered. There was never enough to eat and she almost died once when she tried to catch the birds that haunted her balcony. They came to warn her every day; "There is no end" they would say. They were black and they were loud. She ignored them most of the time. There was an ocean that seemed to go on forever outside her window and she talked mostly about that. Those were the things of youth she said and always left it at that.

He asked her again about what she was like before he met her.

What do you want to fucking hear? she said. There is nothing more that I can tell you that you shouldn't already know. I could tell you more about what I've already said but you already know everything there is to know about Felix and Paris.

I don't care about that, he said.

Tell me what it was like before all of that.

She flicked the ashes off her cigarette and realized it was out. She quickly lit a new one.

Every once in awhile he started this again and asked her about the things she didn't know and didn't see. He wanted to know what car she drove in high school, why she got the stupid butterfly tattoo she had on her shoulder, what her father was like, what was her favorite this and that.

Her expression never changed when he asked those questions.

Sometimes she changed the subject but mostly she sat there quietly. There were never really any answers for those kinds of questions.

He quickly learned how to read her silence. There was an absolute freedom of ideas in the air she knew existed. She let the cigarette smoke fade away in front of her and she knew she had to give him something. She traced the smoke with her fingers as it twisted and turned. She told him what she could. She told him whatever she could think of.

The father died on Taco Tuesday. There was no funeral - just her. When it was done no one cared. She went to the museum after and avoided the renaissance paintings of angels and patron saints - she hated all of that fiction. She remembered it was cold that particular afternoon and forgot to bring a jacket.

He always waited patiently for her to start talking even though he knew sometimes he lost her to the silence of memory.

She didn't see him for awhile after that incident.

Later he asked her how she felt. She laughed.

What kind of question is that? she said.

He waited for her to answer. She looked at him and smiled.

She showed him her favorite beach. She took pictures of him in the water. He buried his face in her hair.

He was easy to be with. Sometimes they lay on the grass for hours at night. She traced the constellations in the sky for him and followed satellites as they went by. She talked about the cameras they used in space and how some of them can see light years away. These were the things he didn't know. These were the things she liked to tell him about.

These were the things that meant more than he understood.

She explained what the speed of light was and how the light came from so far away that by the time it gets here, wherever it came from is gone.

So you can see the past in the sky? he asked

Exactly, she said.

Then you can never run away from the past because it's always there. The light eventually will get here and then you have to look at it.

She smiled, but said nothing.

Then how do you know the place it came from ever existed if you can't see it? Even if you went there it wouldn't even be there, he said.

You don't know. You just believe it's there and it is, she said.

It's like that with a lot of other things too, he said.

He looked at her and smiled. He loved her.

She buried her head in his chest. He was always warm.

There was a certain comfort about him.

One day between Kandinsky's "Transverse Line" and Rothko's "White over Red" she told him that there was a certain amount of gravity that existed, a force that could not be changed, that continued, even if he disappeared for awhile.

He still wanted to know.

Was that your house in the picture I found in the book?

She walked away further into the gallery into the color between the sculptures and tight spaces.

You're not going to stop asking are you?

He followed until she stopped.

It was a nice house, she said.

Like a palace – everything was gold trimmed and shiny and there were horses parked outside instead of cars. There was a huge garden with trees the size of buildings and there was a tree house with an ocean view. There was always something being cooked in the kitchen and the swimming pool looked over into the mountains and sometimes the moon hung right over and then hid behind the summit. The clouds hardly ever came around and the grass always grew just right so the lawn was the right combination of cadmium yel-

low and cobalt blue. It was never too hot or too cold, always just right. The fairies sprinkled stardust over the curtains. The snow during Christmas was perfectly white and the house perpetually smelled like warm, fresh gingerbread.

You know what I like?

Fucking turpentine. Because most of all, the best thing about it besides the cartoon birds and the huge fireworks in the sky, were the broken neon lights over the bar across the street and the crazy assholes that lived behind the dumpsters and the newspaper that floated in the alley between the palace and the rest of the world. A teaspoon of turpentine is the only thing that fixes something like that.

She lit a cigarette and the smoke disappeared into his face. There was an understanding now – it was no longer a safe place.

He stopped in the middle of the gallery and stood right in front of her.

There is no point in staying, if I can't come in, he said.

She knew he meant it.

She explained how fixer, once used, meant the photograph can be exposed to the light and how sometimes she hated using it on her photographs, that they were more beautiful in the dark.

What happens if you don't use it?

The picture fades away. The light makes the image disappear and the whiteness swallows it until the paper becomes clean again.

So then either way you have to use it or your photograph can never come out into the light?

Yes.

And if it doesn't come out into the light, it can never be a photograph.

There was nothing for her to say. She stared past him at the painting on the wall, the lines and circles moved across the canvas until they settled at the bottom. After that there was no more movement, no more people, no more voices or events – just the energy spinning around her.

He knew she missed the life she didn't know.

He left her in the silence.

Later the café was crowded when he came back. She was alone. It was almost midnight and only the artists and the students were left. He was quiet when he sat down. She watched him carefully but he was the same. He waited for her to say something. So she told him about Enceladus and how there are water geysers like the kind at Yellowstone. She said she saw them one night when she was looking up at the sky. They looked really big she said and she wanted to show him what they looked like. He listened and learned that Enceladus orbited around Saturn. She knew the seriousness was stronger. There was no way to stop it. She wanted to stall and wait until time passed for years and let the truth settle.

He waited.

They were congruent, side-angle-side; they fit.

There had been a silence that until recently had not existed.

The train shook the walls and the table.

They stood still.

He wanted to know about the little house in the picture he found inside the book – the one without the flowers and huge trees, the one without the horses and the gold trimming. He wanted to know what her father was like – the one who broke her teeth and shattered them across the table, the one that took a gun put it in his mouth and fell back while the blood rushed out of his nose like water from a broken fire hydrant, the one she saw with his eyes open sitting up straight until he looked down at his nose and his shoulders slumped over as the blood ran down the wall like dark molasses for hours. He wanted to know what her mother was like – the one that left her in the grocery aisle next to the pickles and never came back, the one that broke her finger with a rolling pin. He wanted to know what the little house was like – the one that was cold, moldy and dark, the one neighbors stayed away from, the one the cat left to live under the dumpster down the street. He wanted to know her favorite this and that...

He wanted to open the door.

She said nothing.

She didn't yell.

She didn't cry.

There was nothing to say, nothing to do.

There was nothing extraordinary about it but there was something peculiar about not being ordinary all of a sudden.

It got cold so they walked back home.

What do you want for dinner?

He didn't answer.

She continued with all the ordinary things. She let the pasta boil and diced the onions while listening to the news. He sat at the table and looked out the window. She knew this time there was nothing to talk about. She told him about how telescopes could see other solar systems now and there were hundreds of other planets out there. Most of them are made out of gas but no one can be sure. Some of them might be made out of rock like the Earth.

There are so many possibilities out there, she said.

He listened and learned that other solar systems existed besides their own.

He didn't look at her.

He didn't ask her.

Dinner was ready before the news was over. He ate quietly and left everything the way it was once he was finished.

She knew he was somewhere else entirely.

She loved him.

She stared at her plate and watched how the cheese gave in to the warm lasagna and sank into the sauce. After awhile it stopped fighting

and disappeared into red extinction. She poked it with her fork until the cheese was gone. He watched her stare into her plate and waited quietly until she finished.

I wanted to learn more, he said.

She started to talk about the sun and how it turns hydrogen into helium.

He interrupted, that's not what I meant.

No, I can't, she said quietly.

There was nothing left to ask.

He left quietly in the darkness. She watched him go out into the cold and walk down the driveway onto the street until he was so small, he disappeared.

She waited for him to come back.

There was nothing left to do.

No one else noticed.

There was silence after that.

She took the water bill to the living room and let herself be carried away by the music on the TV. She imagined the ocean underneath the couch until she pulled herself into a deep sleep. When she woke up she felt axiomatic - he walked out and left in a way where she knew what it equaled. She taped the water bill to the TV and closed the curtains. She folded the napkins on the table and put them in their holders before she walked out the back door with the turpentine and disappeared.

Two Sailors

Some smooth sail,
with no currents forecasted,
from one harbor
to another below a gentle sun.
Sailors in sleepy oceans
glide through these sceneries,
missing adventure's entrance.

Others ride against waves
with lost compasses
wearing life jackets
and chattering prayers
while clouds tear in fear.
Sailors on unpredictable water
learn to swim
and land on real shores.

Sevana Minassian

Patricia Overly

Phases

Just a lot of passionate
fuck you's
in the hallway
or wherever.

Phases

Ted, 45ish, somewhat out of shape and balding is asleep on the couch. The TV remote on his stomach is going up and down with his breath. Silvia, 42ish, high strung and dramatic is seated on the couch next to him with a horrified look on her face staring at the television. Laughter is heard from the TV.

SILVIA: That's not funny. (*Laughter is still heard as she picks up the remote from Ted's stomach and with slight difficulty turns it off.*) That is so not funny. (*An awkward moment passes, then whispering loudly.*) Ted? Ted. Ted, are you awake? Ted, I want to talk to you. (*Ted scratches something and moans.*)

SILVIA: Ted!

TED: (*ugh, moan*)

SILVIA: Ted, (*shaking him*) you awake?

TED: No, I'm still sleeping.

SILVIA: Hey, ya wanna talk?

TED: No. (*He rolls over.*)

SILVIA: Ah, come on honey. Let's talk.

TED: Why? What's wrong?

SILVIA: Nothing.

TED: Why did you wake me?

SILVIA: So we could talk.

TED: Now?

SILVIA: Uh huh.

TED: What's so important?

SILVIA: I don't know.

TED: Well, don't wake me until you do.

SILVIA: Okay. (*pause*) Ted, I think we should talk more.

TED: About what?

SILVIA: It doesn't matter.

TED: That doesn't make any sense.

SILVIA: Oh come on, try.

TED: Why?

SILVIA: (*awkwardly*) How was your day?

TED: Are you okay Silvia? (*Ted sits up.*)

SILVIA: I'm trying to talk to you.

TED: Okay. (*under his breath*) Doesn't make any sense, but okay. (*to her*) So talk. (*He grabs the remote from her to turn on the TV.*)

SILVIA: Okay, well, let's talk about our sex life.

TED: (*turning on the TV*) Yeah?

SILVIA: (*Takes the remote away and turns it off again.*) You missed it!

TED: Our sex life?

SILVIA: That too. But I meant you missed this comedian that just did a skit on what appeared to be *our* sex life.

TED: Now you're really not making any sense, Silvia.

SILVIA: I mean it, seriously. He said there were three phases to a normal sex life and, according to him, we're on phase three. There's only one place to go from there. It's not pretty, Ted.

TED: So you did finish off the Jim Beam.

SILVIA: No, this skit on TV is about our sex life!

TED: Are you trying to tell me someone's doing a skit about *our* sex life?

SILVIA: Ha ha. No, not our sex life exactly but...

TED: (*He takes the remote from her again.*) Silvia, you shouldn't watch so much television.

SILVIA: You should talk. Isn't that where you get all your wisdom from these days?

TED: Wisdom.

SILVIA: You sure get plenty of "ideas" from it.

TED: Alright I'll play. So this "idea" of yours, derived from the infinite wisdom of TV, (*he pauses and scratches his head*) is that there are... three phases to a sex life and we're in the last phase...did I get that right?

SILVIA : (*surprised*) Yes. Uh huh.

TED: (*He shakes his head and throws his hands up in disbelief, stands up and walks toward the door.*) Good night.

SILVIA: (*She stands up, hands on her hips, and orders.*) Oh no you don't! Sit down.

TED: Alright, two minutes. Make sense in two minutes or...

SILVIA: Okay. (*Jumps up and begins to pace.*) Okay, see, this comedian, he says that we all start off with *everywhere* sex...

TED: Everywhere sex.

SILVIA: Yeah. You know in the beginning when you are newly in love and you just do it everywhere, the restaurant bathrooms, cars, on top of pianos, in elevators...

TED: On top of pianos?

SILVIA: Okay, bad example, but you get what I mean.

TED: We never did it on top of a piano.

SILVIA: Would you forget the piano.

TED: Yeah, but we never did it...

SILVIA: Ted!

TED: Okay. Yes, I remember this *everywhere* sex. Except on the piano.

SILVIA: Well, that's the first stage of sex. After that, things get pretty domestic and everyone settles down. Then all the sex starts happening in the bedroom. And that's how you know you're in phase two.

TED: So we have sex in the bedroom. What's wrong with that?

SILVIA: Well that would be fine except...I mean...well, see, we used to fall into each other's arms excited. You know...we were excited to be with each other. In each other's arms.

TED: Are you sure this guy was a comedian? Was it Dr. Phil? He can be kinda funny.

SILVIA: No, he was a stand-up guy.

TED: Well, he wasn't very funny, this stand-up guy!

SILVIA: Would you stick to the point.

TED: Sorry.

SILVIA: Where was I?

TED: At the end?

SILVIA: Very funny.

TED: I think we were excited... *(Ted moves closer to her and leans in for a kiss.)*

SILVIA: No, no, no, *(dodging the kiss)* that was at the beginning of phase two. Cuz now, where we are in our sex life, it's more like we get into each other's arms and maybe find excitement...if we can find the time or the energy or even the interest.

TED: *(teasing)* Are you complaining?

SILVIA: No. I'm not complaining Ted. I'm just saying that, well, we don't exactly start off with the idea, "I'll just die if I don't get into his arms." That's all I'm saying.

TED: Well, that's the comfort of marriage.

SILVIA: That's the danger of marriage. Let me finish the joke...because the next phase is hall sex.

TED: We don't have sex in the hall.

SILVIA: Yeah, I know.

TED: We never had sex in the hall.

SILVIA: Now who's complaining?

TED: I didn't start this...

SILVIA: He's not talking about that kind of sex.

TED: Who?

SILVIA: The comedian...

TED: No, stick to the subject.

SILVIA: What's the subject now?

TED: That other kind of sex.

SILVIA: Oh yeah. Oh, we have it.

TED: We do?

SILVIA: More all the time.

TED: When?

SILVIA: Well, let's see. We have it when we pass each other in the hall and there's all this really strong passion and heat from, oh say, the way the bathroom was left this morning, or from me tripping all over your shoes that you left all over the house. And all that passion, it just kinda explodes into a sort of climax with a *fuck you* or a *you bitch*, sometimes even a lousy *son of a bitch*. See? That kind of sex.

TED: I don't call that sex.

SILVIA: Me neither, but that's what starts replacing it. That's what I'm saying. That's what the funny guy was saying anyway. And I'm afraid we're slipping into it. Pretty soon we'll be having nothing but hall sex. Just a lot of passionate *fuck you's* in the hallway or wherever. All because we're not talking.

TED: (*putting his arm around her*) Don't you think you are getting a little ahead of yourself? I mean it was a comedy sketch, right?

SILVIA: There you go...you're doing it...minimizing what I'm saying. (*She pulls away from him.*) That's just one of the ways it all starts.

TED: Alright, now you're going drama queen on me.

SILVIA: Fuck you.

TED: ...am I suppose to come now?

SILVIA: Very funny. Why won't you take any of this seriously? I'm really worried about us. We never talk. I don't know you anymore...

TED: Hi, I'm Ted.

SILVIA: Oh keep laughing, but this is serious. You come home and watch TV. On the weekends it's more TV and golf. Half the time you sleep out here.

TED: I work hard..it relaxes me.

SILVIA: Yeah, cuz I'm just sitting here eating bon bons all day.

TED: I can't believe you woke me up for this.

SILVIA: Oh, I'm so sorry to have disturbed your beauty rest for something as trivial as a divorce.

TED: That's quite a leap. Divorce?

SILVIA: Uh huh, yep, that was the punch line. Eventually, we stop talking all together. You can just let your lawyer talk to my lawyer until we're divorced.

TED: That's not very funny. (*trying to keep it light*) I think you should work on your delivery.

SILVIA: Are you kidding? Is that all ya got?

TED: Didn't you say it was a comedy act?

SILVIA: Oh fuck off. This is useless. I'm going to bed.

TED: (*imitating her from earlier*) Oh no you're not!

SILVIA: Fuck you!

TED: Okay, fuck me! Right here...right now. (*He moves in and puts his arms around her waist.*) Come on. Let's get back to phase one. (*He nibbles on her neck.*)

SILVIA: I was talking about talking.

TED: I'm talking about communicating.

SILVIA: But we need to talk more.

TED: We never talked in phase one.

SILVIA: Yes we did. For hours, remember?

TED: Hate to break it to ya, you talked, I listened...and all I was really listening for was the moment I could make my move. *(He starts to kiss her again; this time she responds.)*

SILVIA: You talked too.

TED: Hey, I have an idea...let's have some hall sex.

SILVIA: Why?

TED: No, actual sex in the hallway. That way we combine elements of phase one with elements of phase 3...

SILVIA: ...and they cancel each other out. Genius!!!

TED: To the hallway. *(As they giggle off stage, they remove a piece of clothing.)*

The End

David Morck

Beyond the valley rifts of color coordinated packages there is milk.
Sun reflected prism shifts as the finger traces through the stagnant stream.

Blackened is life: newsprint, pantone charts, rubber-based inks.
Twenty-Nine point Nine Nine Seven frames per second.

Fear, inadequacy, disease. Performing better, increase of size.
Remember that fox in winter, contrasted against the wooden fence post?

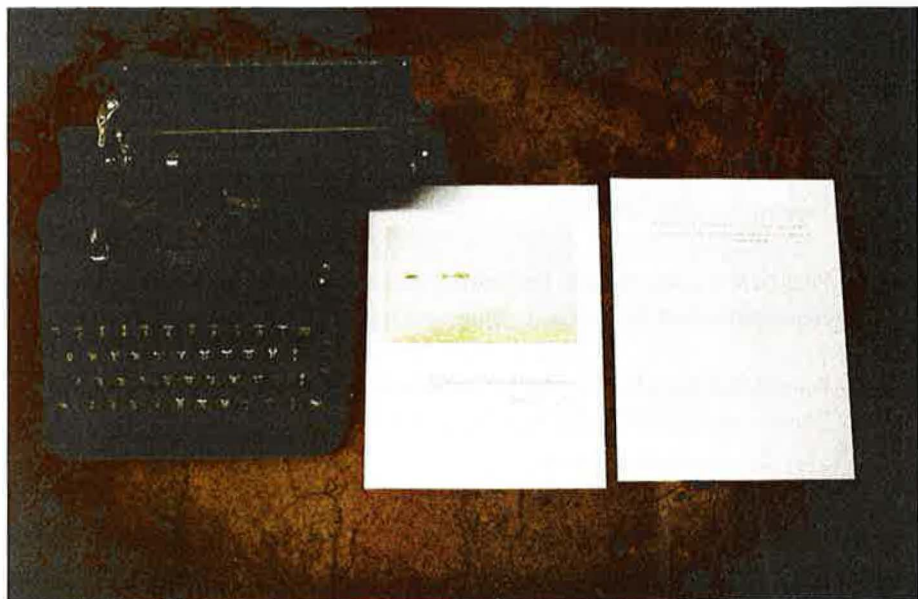
Do you feel like taking up the lost art of letter writing?
There is an application for that. 'Find a Mailbox v2.13.'

I could save a dollar if I picked from the bottom shelf.
Stooping over doesn't fit into the scheme of instant gratification.

Lost among the giant cedars we clasped hands, excited, fearful, a bear in the path.
To capture that moment
with a Sony,
a Nikon,
a Polaroid –
our hearts in our feet
against the soft ground
built by weeping trees.




hat Advertisement Had Absolutely
No Effect On Me



Type
James Hanna

A Modest Alternative to Affirmative Action: An **Essay**

by Doug Weaver



With the disappearance of Affirmative Action, it seems that the last nail has been driven into the coffin of higher education for disadvantaged students at virtually every inner-city school across the state. Even armed with the knowledge that behaving differently toward some for equality's sake is effective, the powers that be have chosen racism over reason, leaving the best and most brilliant Black and Latino students in the lurch, forced to accept attending community colleges even when the academic direction they've earned is clearly pointing toward Stanford or Berkeley or UCLA.

Although this is a lamentable and deplorable state of affairs, I believe there is a solution, one that will solve the problem at hand, ensuring that virtually all underprivileged students, gifted or otherwise, receive a back-to-basics college education, as well as maintaining an in-the-black ledger for the state's budget. And most important of all, there are no quotas, race-based or otherwise.

My humble plan not only guarantees an education, but preserves these students' rich cultural heritage, while, at the same time, exploiting many of the talents and traits they already possess, traits unique to their particular socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds, and traits easily adaptable to any social structure in any institution of higher education. Think about it. What's the hue and cry of the privileged and gifted students already entrenched at a Stanford or Berkeley when a poor, inner-city student arrives on campus? Welcome? Be who you are? Not really. It's more like: be like us or die, an imperative that is unlikely or unable to be obeyed.

This is of particular importance because of the very real fear of socially "traumatizing" these deserving youngsters, who, from no fault of their own, would find themselves, when confronted with one arcane bit of Stanford-esque protocol/etiquette or another, at such high levels of stress that their psyches and emotional well-being would be at risk and therefore not open to learning, which is what this is all about anyway.

My plan is so all-encompassing that these concerns dissipate as if they were steam rising from the dean's afternoon pot of tea.

The question becomes, among others, just what is this rich cultural heritage that will be preserved upon implementation of my plan? It's nothing more and nothing less than the proud tradition of service to another human being, indeed an as yet untested tenet of Christianity itself, and a tradition with which the underprivileged people of color throughout history are intimate.

In order to explain how the underprivileged will actually land onto a college campus, it's incumbent upon me to explain the fiscal aspects of my plan. The top universities in California are expensive, not the way say a Corvette automobile is expensive, but the way a Bentley is expensive. They're really expensive. The students who have traditionally been attending these universities are, for the most part, being subsidized by their parents, whose pockets are so deep that another twenty-five or thirty grand over a few years to pay for a new "perk" for their kids on campus would hardly be noticed.

This is where the spiritual value of service to one's fellow man comes into play. It's no secret that, in the inner-city, women of color possess an innate and invaluable knowledge of, among other things, how to make a bed properly and also keep someone else's abode orderly and clean.

The boys, on the other hand, while probably not having any real experience at service, but being the progeny of countless generations of porters, waiters, butlers and man servants, shoeshine boys and the like, will have a genetic propensity toward this skill that will probably be able to be assimilated and mastered within a few weeks or so.

My plan, in short, is to offer to underprivileged students of color the chance to serve their academic brethren already enrolled in universities by becoming their servants, cooks, dressers and butlers, all at minimal or no cost to the state and thereby at the same time offering them a college education.

Of course, the method of acquiring knowledge that I propose here will necessarily be different from what one usually defines as "learning," not because of any deficiency in pedagogic dogma, but simply because it's so

superior to what "education" has been eroded into over the years. No more strict adherence to class schedules and taking notes furiously from lectures on subjects that are, at best, open to interpretation; no more wrestling meaning from algorithms and formulas that will rarely if ever be used in day-to-day life; no more guessing at just what one professor or another thinks is important.

The method my plan utilizes is not only foolproof and superior, but two-pronged: just as the delicate spring flowers of the Desert Southwest draw sustenance from the arid sand, so will these underprivileged students, through mere proximity to higher learning, draw into their brains a profound understanding of the lofty disciplines college has to offer. It's simply, in a word, osmosis. And the second prong would be repetition and more repetition. To illustrate this, I'd point to the great composers of the world who would not nor could not have written a single great or even not so great note had it not been for their method of learning, which was simply copying others' work ad infinitum.

The privileged students served under my plan (we'll call them "Masters") will, of course, be well-educated about their new state of affairs well before the first shipment of servants arrives, and therefore aware of the fact that all their homework, notes, graded tests, etc., must be photocopied and left for their servants to help themselves to at the end of every day.

The naysayers among you will most likely scoff at this seemingly catch-as-catch-can method of stocking the learning shelves: "What if one or more of the Masters forgets?" "What then?" Well, I say, "What if it rains?" I've covered every possible contingency. Forgetting is certainly a valid concern, one of which we're all guilty. Are the servants simply to go without the learning materials promised them for as long as their Masters forget? Absolutely not!

**And most important of all, there are no quotas,
race-based or otherwise.**

My plan has a built in fail-safe mechanism for just such an occurrence, and for an explanation, we'll briefly revisit the servants' rich cultural heritage being preserved so far away from home. All we really have to do is briefly browse the statistics regarding a minority's behavior while in their previously unenlightened environment. When we superimpose this behavior to virtually anywhere else in the world, one radiant axiom outshines all others: that when left unsupervised and in close proximity to something of value, be it an electronic device, flashy jewelry or in this case, learning materials, the student of color will simply steal it.

The last and probably most important part of my plan deals with the manner in which a servant of scholastic excellence is treated, while again, staying within guidelines that are not inconsistent with the cultural baggage brought along to, say Stanford. The most important part of this task was to come up with a "Job of Honor," if you will, one that reflected the monumental struggle of overcoming terrific odds to excel scholastically, and one that, at the same time, enhanced the dignity of the institution.

This job also had to be created, again, in accordance with certain predispositions of minority students, not only in terms of social standing, but also in terms of appropriate garb that was not only immediately identifiable as signifying excellence, but also one universally accepted as a mark of unflinching dignity.

Knowing that students of color are already wont to wear clothes and ornaments, usually in bright, primary colors, reflecting allegiance to one group or another, it wasn't too great a stretch to come up with the notion of wearing similarly identifying garments for this job of honor.

After much thought, the "uniform" I came up with consisted of a silken, boldly striped jersey in the school's colors and a cap with the same color scheme. For pants I thought that maybe a traditional pair of jodhpurs, tucked neatly into a pair of shiny black boots, would be suitably distinctive for exemplifying such a place of honor.

And the job itself is nothing less than serving the school as an icon of staunch character while at the same time adorning the acres of graceful lawns upon which the school's proud structures stand. While wearing this

previously described uniform of honor, the student of color will stand stationary for hours on end (an act of quiet dignity in itself) while holding a lantern in his outstretched hands, a gesture that unequivocally says: come on in. Take your shoes off. Sit a spell.

If, for some reason, my simple plan is rejected, leaving these underprivileged students no hope whatsoever, one can almost hear their desolate cries rising from tenement buildings and skanky neighborhoods across the state: "What are we to do now?"

The only solution available to them is obvious and elegantly simple, although admittedly not easy. Indeed, it involves solving one of the great universal mysteries. But being of gifted caliber and having no other choice really, these students should be able to tackle the problem with alacrity.

So when their forlorn cries of frustration rise as to what to do in order to obtain a college education, the simple answer is: go back and be reborn to parents in Beverly Hills, silly!



Broken
James Hanna

Low Affect

I died as an infant;
slipstreamed to soaring choirs, then
—slammed to cold steel and shrieking light.
I'm rarely right here.

I've lurched and flinched through fourteen
thick currents I can't sync to.
Tutors, aides, blur by.
Only I have a shadow.

She puts two quarters before me,
How much sense in that? And I say two,
that makes sense to me;
two things, too sense, and I am wrong.

Sometimes the river slows
and I grab hold a swirling joke.
Rude and mean also
jut clear from murk.

I used to splash and jump,
always the wrong time, always in
someone's way and
their thorns tore my skin,

now I've backed in,
risking only fingertips to touch flow,
from my cave
of sunken safe.

Susan Shields



Emerge
Arlene Ferley Monzon

FUTUREBOY

The earth should not be burned, along with all of its trees and green grass, no matter how many trumpets sound.

by Rich Anderson

Futureboy

Futureboy asks why there are so many weird boy movies in the back, behind the curtain. He rests his head atop his arms on the glass counter and looks up at Clem.

Some people like those, Futureboy.

That's weird but whatever and Futureboy rocks his head down, and looks through the glass at the collage of old VHS movie covers - movies he has not ever heard of: nothing but pictures to him. Tilia, My Left Foot, The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith, Pixote - He likes that one there. This one. He puts his nose up to the glass, they touch, and his eyes fix. Batman with Michael Keaton. Something about where the gold meets the black and the shine of the smooth curve of the bat tail and the sharp spiked tip of the wing. Glossy, shiny, inviting, not like all the others. Can I watch that one?

Clem knows he needs to keep a better eye on Futureboy to make sure he doesn't sneak his way to the adult section. He'd never found Futureboy back there, but kids are kids and curious and all that, so he was sure he'd been back there a few times.

Are you thirteen?

Eleven and a half.

No then.

Futureboy's mother steps out into the street. It is bright. She squints. She turns and there is the laundromat behind her. Shrugs. Starts to cross the street. Heavy traffic.

Clem wanted to write a screenplay. He even went to an Arts college just outside of L.A.

CLEM

When I was in college, at this Arts college, I met this girl: I was walking down the FILM HALL after class and she came up and told me that I was beautiful, and then walked away. That was all. "You're beautiful," and then to just walk away, like nothing happened. I didn't get it. I stood there, stopped walking, taken aback, you know. I only saw her face for a second, because I was looking down and walking, to know where my

feet would land, like I usually do.
But I remember she had a nose piercing, 'cause
it sparkled right there, in the middle
of her face. And her eyes were golden.
I turned and started walking toward her,
as she walked away from me. I said,
"Hey, excuse me, hey, excuse me."
But she kept walking.

BEAT.

She kept walking away from Clem, no matter how many times he said hey, stop, excuse me, why do you think I am beautiful, are you just teasing me? Why say that to me? What did I do to you? What do you want? Don't go. I want to know your story and your story for me.

Please don't go.

She just seemed to disappear, around a bend in the hall and then down a stairwell and then gone. Clem stopped following. And Clem stopped writing because he thought Molière was right - "First, you do it for the love of it, then you do it for a few friends, and finally you do it for the money," and he didn't want to be a whore and he knew money made stories worse.

Futureboy waits for his mother. The city separates them. The city with tar stretching like veins through its streets. Worn fading crosswalks.

The cars all stop for her. The drivers watch her cross through their windshields. She must do her laundry at that coin-mat over there - and they are all so glad that they have cars, and washers and dryers in their apartments or apartment buildings or houses, and they wonder why she has so many clothes and she is across the street, the light is green. And they drive thinking that she seemed pleasant and beautiful even though she was carrying all that laundry.

In the church, the preacher says to the mother: This is not what you are here for. You are here for something else. I saw you leaving and knew, just knew that I needed to come say something to you. You are God's child. You are. And He cares. He truly loves. And only He can save you. Only He can save you from your sins, from those forces in your life that drag you down, that hold you down, that keep you from being you. Come repent. Come to the altar. I'll walk down with you, and kneel beside you and pray. We'll pray together for God to wash your sins clean. For God to come into your life. All you need to say is that you accept God into your heart. That Jesus is your Savior: He is the way, the truth and the life. Say it with me. It's okay. I am here. We are here - all of us in this congregation - to help you, to help your life, to make you one with God, one with his Son, and one with His Holy Spirit. We will help you cast your demons out of your heart and welcome in the light of God - the everlasting light - the light that is for every one of his children. You are His child. Come. Pray. Say it. Child.

She hears her son crying and feels her heart ripping open, the LIGHTNING of God striking her down, as they always knew He could.

What happens in this one?

Well, do you know who Batman is? Anyways, Batman is a guy who goes around in this city called Gotham beatin' up bad guys. Clem unwraps the cellophane off of the new arrival and he crumples the crisp plastic sheet and knows he will unwrap hundreds of new arrivals and input them into the computer, just like the hundreds he's already done, and put the neon pink sticker on them and watch people come in and out and sometimes pick the new arrival, sometimes not. But he knows Futureboy will always be there, on Thursdays, from 3:00 PM to 5:00 PM, while his mother is off. At least until he is old enough to be without someone watching over him. Will you watch over him for a couple of hours today? I just need to go and do this laundry and go to the bank and the market but it won't take that long and he is a really good kid, you'll see. And something about her eyes, how they were green and blue at the same time, bright as the sun yet still, and her soft voice, warm, welcoming. Pure. Heavenly. And her son looked up at him and he felt like it was them against everyone else in the world. Okay. No problem.

Gotham?

Yeah. Gotham.

Is Gotham L.A.?

This city isn't Gotham. Gotham's supposed to be New York City, but this city, it is as bad and as dirty as Gotham.

Bus Stop - Sunset and Colorado.

She wonders if she had named her son Phillip if she would have spelled it one L or two. Two, definitely two.

Phi - Lip is not Phill - up.

None of those names are all that good she thinks. And she smiles and thinks of her son and that he is the only beauty in this world as cars blow past and car exhaust breathes on her hot and dry. Clem's nickname for him is good. Clem is good. Old enough to be a dad.

Futureboy and Clem.

INT. VIDEOSTORE - DAY.

FUTUREBOY

Is that his real name?

CLEM

It's Bruce Wayne.

FUTUREBOY

Weird.

CLEM

But some call him the Dark Knight.

FUTUREBOY

Do you call him the Dark Knight?

CLEM

No.

FUTUREBOY

Why not?

CLEM

I don't know. I suppose because Batman is not really real.

FUTUREBOY

But if Batman was real would you call him the Dark Knight?

CLEM

I suppose, maybe.

FUTUREBOY

What do you mean?

CLEM

I guess, if Batman was in L.A. and fighting bad guys and doing good in the middle of the night, then, yeah, sure, the Dark Knight.

FUTUREBOY

But isn't Dark bad?

CLEM

Yeah, I suppose so. But not the Dark Knight, little guy. There are different characters in different stories, like all these videos in here, in this store, some good, some bad, some with the same names, some not, but different. Except for remakes.

(beat)

How's about we watch BATMAN the cartoon?

Futureboy! Hey Futureboy! Fuuuuture B-boyyyyyy!

But Futureboy can't hear the Sunday school teacher's and the good children's cries and he keeps rising up and up into the tree, with the branches rough and knobby and crossed over each other. Come down! Why won't he come down!

If he could build a house, it would be up in a tree, up near the sky. It wouldn't be like the place they are in now. It wouldn't have cracks reaching through the walls or brown stains on the floor and ceiling. He wouldn't be able to hear yells and sirens and smell exhaust. It would be bright green and blue and the wind would blow through his hair soft and cool. His mom would live there with him. And so would Clem, and all of Clem's movies. And they would always be smiling and far away from everyone in there and the boys named Matthew, Timothy, James, Titus, Peter, and John. He can't see his mother but she is down there, underneath him, but she knows who will be there for Futureboy.

She really didn't want to ask too much of Clem, but the way he looked at Futureboy, and the way Futureboy looked at him, she knew it would be fine and that he would be safe from the world inside that video store. But she decided to try Sunday school for Futureboy. She thought that if she accepted God into her heart and dropped him off at Faith Church of Patmos and then left and went to do her laundry and her errands, to the bank, and to the market, then back to the laundry, to pick up her and Futureboy's clothes, she could get everything done with him safe. And not bother Clem too much.

She had only been to one other church before. Her son came with her. He was a toddler, old enough to walk, and old enough not to cry. Crying is for babies and I am not a baby, he wanted to say, but couldn't. All he could say was blue ball and blue mall and blue call and blue ma. Her friend from high school was getting married. Alan. They met in chemistry class junior year. She sat in the middle of the class, in the middle of all of the students sitting at their desks. She liked the feel of being in a sea of people. She would lay her head sideways on the desk and look through one eye and it would seem like she was in a kelp forest, with the light coming in through the paneled windows, filtered blue, and the heads of her classmates would be floating off in the Pacific. Alan sat right beside her, and he would catch her staring blankly with one eye, her head flat on the desk. You're doing it again. And she would get embarrassed and pretend that she was just sleeping from being up all night. Which she was: up all night. You sleep with one eye open? Staring at the sun through the windows? I just zone out when I sleep - I don't know what I do with my eyes.

She and Alan became friends, and would eat lunch off campus together. At the Wendy's mostly, where she could get a Frostie and he could get French fries and they would share, dipping the fries in the Frostie. Nothing beats this, they would say, eating the deep fried potatoes in the chocolate soft yogurt with the cold touching their lips and the hot from the fries. But something would. When they first kissed, one day after school, near the start of summer, with the dry heat, and the oak trees dusting the ground with yellow pollen, and the dragonflies that used to invade the school, bright green and purple and gold, buzzing and flying so close to your face and ears that you want to scream, she knew Alan was not the one for her. Her son, now he was the one. And as they came to the church, he said blue call, soft, and serious. She knew he would be good in the church.

The church was a Macedonian Orthodox church in Whittier, off of Whittier Blvd. They walked to the front, but when they tried the gate to get in the grounds, they found it locked. People she had never seen were on the other side of the gate. Friends of Alan or his bride, who she did not know either. And she didn't quite know how Alan found her. But there was the wedding invitation in her newly rented P.O. Box at the newsstand store off of Riverside Blvd. They walked around to the back of the church, and her son, in his little

black shoes, held on to her shoulder as she carried him. He was quiet. The service was in Greek and she didn't understand anything. Одбележувајќи ги овие темелни настани од нашето голготско столетие, на сите верни чеда, во Татковинава и ширум по светот, радосно го честитаме Јубилејниот македонски национален празник Илинден, со порака за мир и братољубивост, како меѓу нас, така и со сите луѓе. Нека ни е честите и вековит Илинден!! But Alan looked like Alan from all those years ago, but with a light shadow where his beard could now grow. He looked ready, up there, waiting for his bride to come down the aisle, standing beside the priest, with the candles burning in the corner, the two golden ceremonial marriage crowns on the table behind him – she wondered why she never felt he was the one. And Futureboy turned his head to his mother's ear and whispered blue ma.

The first class Clem took at the Arts college just outside of L.A. was titled "Screenwriting: Approaches to the Profession." Over the summer he'd prepared for the course, watching all of the Academy Award Best Picture film nominations and winners, in order, while taking notes.

7th Heaven – 1927 – silent film – romance – war – beautiful actors and actresses.

The Racket – 1928 – crime – detective – bad guy mob boss – pretty good movie – good music, I suppose.

In Old Arizona – 1929 – TALKING! – Western – outlaw Cisco and sexy girl – evading Sheriff – sexy girl with Sheriff against Cisco.

And so on: The Patriot, The Big House, Trade Horn, The Champ, Shanghai Express, Lady for a Day. All the way to Rain Man, Awakenings, American Beauty.

But in Professor Edison's class it didn't matter anyway. And the script he wrote over the summer didn't matter. Yes, it is true Clem that the screenwriter is the "author" of the film, and Professor Edison holds Clem's script in his hands, rolls it up, and Clem wonders how many times Edison has rolled up scripts of students and how many of them, the scripts, were actually good and how many were actually bad. How many students stood right here, with scripts, with ideas, that were shot down, or praised. Shot down to praise ratio – 30:1? 10:1? Seems too high. But you have to realize that these "BEATS" will vary in the film making process. I mean, there is nothing wrong with the script, it's written, at least structurally, solid. But these "BEATS," even though they are elements of screenplays and scriptwriting are problematic. I mean, they aren't so much problematic as they are debatable. You are going to have directors and actors in this script debating what and how. But not even what and how. They are going to debate gestures, facial expressions: What is CLEM thinking here? How can I present CLEM to show this? What is CLEM feeling and why? This will be open to interpretation, you understand. Hitchcock, Capra, and Lubitsch all changed the scripts they were given. Drastically. The directors. The actors. And Clem will want him to crumple the script like the cellophane from the new releases. They decide the interiority, the psychology, the why. You'll have an entirely different story. And you want your story to be your story, don't you?

Right? And he wanted to tell Professor Edison that he didn't care; that if his story made different stories that would be fine; that multiple stories were better than one story; that one story, one way of viewing things, was not what he wanted.

In church, the Sunday school teacher says to Futureboy: Everyone gather, gather in close, like the Sermon on the Mount, it's OK to get close, come in together. "Then the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to sound them. The first angel sounded his trumpet, and there came hail and fire mixed with blood, and it was hurled down upon the earth. A third of the earth was burned up, a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up." Do we all know where this is from? And the children look around at each other and pretend that she didn't ask the question. But Futureboy keeps looking at her. He doesn't know where it is from. Who is speaking? And why? The earth should not be burned, along with all of its trees and green grass, no matter how many trumpets sound. Seven, ten, twenty, he knows better. He knows his mom would know better too. Revelations? the dark haired boy in the front asks. Yes, yes, it is from Revelations. But what does this mean? The apostle John wrote this book when he was exiled on Patmos, a small island; he was exiled because of his beliefs in God. Because he believed in God he was persecuted but he wrote this book, Revelations, to warn us what is in store if the world turns unholy, turns its back on God. And Futureboy doesn't know who the God is that she is talking about. He wonders if God is like Clem, from the video store, who is just there and keeps an eye on him when his mother is gone, when his mother runs errands and brings back warm fresh smelling clothes for him to wear. But Clem wouldn't kill things. Clem would just sit there and make sure he doesn't run out of the store. But what if I did run out of the store? Would Clem trumpet and burn me up? And my mother. But my mom and Clem look at each other so nice; he would not burn her up. "The second angel sounded his trumpet, and something like a huge mountain, all ablaze, was thrown into the sea. A third of the sea was turned into blood, a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed."

Clem is in bed with all of his day clothes from the video store off, the lights off, door to his apartment locked, his eyes open. The red flashing digital clock on his nightstand: 2:45PM. His room is full of things - clothes, dirty and clean, piled at the end of his twin bed. A baseball glove he bought from the used sports store with the name COADY written in Sharpie, block letters, sitting on his dresser. This baseball glove is good - hardly any scuffs: look. It's a little tough, Coady apparently didn't work it in too much, but take a look, and the used sports store salesman hands Clem the glove and Clem holds it with both hands at first, touching the leather, feeling the smoothness, the toughness. You see, you are lucky you have small hands, if

you don't mind me saying - cheaper glove. These bigger ones here, he points, twice as much. And Clem rests the glove in his right hand and puts his left fingers together and slides them into the glove. Perfect fit, but too stiff to close or open all the way. The ball might hit the center and bounce off or drop to the grass before he closes it and that won't do. He hopes the salesman doesn't ask why he is buying the glove.

But he can't close his eyes because he knows he won't be able to fall asleep. He's been up, in bed with the lights off, the digital clock blinking red, since he slid under the comforter. There is just no way. No way to sleep. He has to work tomorrow, just like he worked today, and he knows she will be there to drop off her boy and that he will try to say something to her but will be unable. And then he will stay with her son thinking of something to say to her, something to say to keep her there when she returns. COADY, see, that's your new name. But her son won't like that. He'll like the glove. Clem can see him with his elbows resting on the glass counter, glove in hand, with eyes pinched together trying to figure out why COADY. Haven't you heard of Coady? But that won't work. Clem knows he can't give him the glove. He knows her son isn't Coady - he knows taking care of her son isn't the same as taking care of her. COADY could be your superhero name? He will come up with a story, he knows. And there in bed, the lights off, he will call her son Futureboy, for the glove he will get in the future, when he has a story for him, and for her.

The glove is for my boy.

Futureboy

Written by
Clem Thomas

OVER EXTERIOR SHOT OF BUSY LOS ANGELES IN THE B.G.,
CROSSWALK IN THE F.G. NO MUSIC ONLY CITY NOISES: CARS
HONKING, CROWD NOISE, ENGINES.

TITLE: Futureboy

EXT. LOS ANGELES INDEPENDENT VIDEO STORE - DAY.

CAMERA looks at the parking lot of the VIDEO STORE.
Only a few late model cars. A MOTHER walks into the
parking lot with FUTUREBOY.

ANGLE. BEHIND MOTHER AND FUTUREBOY.
MOTHER and FUTUREBOY are, in the summer's heat, walk-
ing to the VIDEO STORE.

CUT TO:

CU. DVD STILL IN THE WRAPPER.

CLEM is unwrapping a NEW RELEASE and is putting a neon pink sticker on the edge of the DVD case.

WIDER, THAT MOMENT.

CLEM sets down the NEW RELEASE and watches MOTHER and FUTUREBOY enter the VIDEO STORE;

CLEM

Welcome.

BEAT. MOTHER looks at CLEM.

MOTHER

Can I ask you a favor?

BEAT.

CLEM

Okay.

BEAT.

MOTHER

Would you watch my boy for a little while, just while I run some errands.

BEAT.

CLEM

Okay. No problem.

HOLD.

“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.” Now what can we say about this city’s fruits? Is this city good or evil? Where is this city heading? And the child who answered last time raises his hand again. Yes Matthew? And as Matthew answers the question Futureboy feels something deep in his chest, a tingling, a burning, a shame, raw and painful. He folds his torso down over his arms, touching his Indian-style folded knees. He rocks and sways with his eyes pinched shut. This city is hot and smoky and noisy and bad but there is Clem and there is mom and whoever would burn them up does not know what nice is. Futureboy feels his body loosen and his head raise and he sees the other children, with their name tags stuck to their cotton, collared shirts, and he feels something lift in his lungs. But what about Batman? And the room goes silent, and the children’s church teacher shifts in her seat. What do you mean Batman?

He is the Dark Knight, but he is good and goes around helping people who are in trouble but this God is not the Dark Knight. And Futureboy stands up, his knees wobbly, and the teacher stands and tries to touch his shoulder, to calm him, but Futureboy is crying and he doesn't want to see the world burn, the seas turn to blood, the trees cut down, the good be bad. So he runs.

CUT TO:

INT. VIDEO STORE - LATER.

Inside the VIDEO STORE CLEM and FUTUREBOY are watching a BATMAN cartoon on a TV on the glass counter. They are physically close to one another, leaning on one another and eating popcorn together out of the same microwavable bag.

MOTHER enters the VIDEO STORE. She has laundry basket full of folded clothes.

MOTHER

Baby.

FUTUREBOY and CLEM both look at MOTHER. MOTHER looks at them and smiles and looks at the TV on the glass counter.

FUTUREBOY

It's Batman. He saves the city from evil.

MOTHER

That's nice.

(beat)

Are you ready?

FUTUREBOY

Yeah, one sec.

FUTUREBOY turns to CLEM. MOTHER turns to CLEM.
BEAT.

And CLEM looks at FUTUREBOY and then to MOTHER and their eyes meet. CLEM knows that FUTUREBOY will be back next week, and that FUTUREBOY's MOTHER will clean the clothes again and go to the bank and do all of the things that little kids can't stand waiting around doing.

CLEM wants to ask if he can write their story, if he can write her and write her boy into something that will keep FUTUREBOY safe from the world, safe from harshness and grit and definiteness. He wants to.

BEAT.



The Villain

by Jon Beadle

lots of people have dreams. At least, when they are children they do. When they grow up they forget their dreams. It is not realistic to be an astronaut they say, better to be an accountant. They trade in the stars for a graphing calculator and console themselves that their large pay-check will buy many things to fill the hole in their hearts.

I killed a man. It was not part of my childhood dream, but a necessity of the adult world. When people die in films, they always die in such a nice, clean manner. Real death is dirty and awkward. It was humiliating, for both of us, when I killed him. There was nothing personal in the killing, don't say murder, that's such a low and dirty word. Murder is for desperate men and crazy men, I was neither desperate nor crazy, until the end I was calm and collected. Perhaps you think that makes it worse, but at least when I killed him he knew it was not an accident or a random act of fate. There was meaning in his death. I don't know if that was any consolation.

It was, of course, a premeditated act. Please don't refer to it as a crime, that is another word I dislike. I am not some petty criminal, some lowlife thug who barges into a liquor store at two in the morning with bloodshot eyes and an unshaven chin, demanding the few crumpled dollar bills in the cash register. No, my actions were deliberate. I had a dream.

My childhood dream was to be a villain. Villain is a much nicer word than criminal, don't you agree? Villains are classy and stylish and always intelligent. The villains of my childhood always had a reason for their actions. Sometimes they were sympathetic, sometimes they were irredeemable. Always they were great men with a vision for the world. And then the hero would show up and defeat the villain and make sure the status quo was perfectly maintained because we can't have anyone changing things up, no sir.

The world is full of heroes. Heroes who fear change. Heroes who worship tradition for no reason other than it is safe and comforting and was here when they came into the world and had damn well better be here when they leave it. If you ever feel in need of a hero, simply look at the man or woman next to you. Should the status quo ever be threatened, they will leap tall buildings in a single bound to save it.

Excuse me, I seem to be digressing. You will understand that a man such as myself has a lot on his mind. We were talking about the killing. I don't dispute it, you don't have to concern yourself with trying to wheedle a confession out of me. A confession, as if it were something embarrassing to be hidden away in the dark recesses of the mind and brought to light only with the greatest reluctance. I confess nothing. I announce my deeds openly, I have nothing to hide.

It is all to do with my dream, you understand. If you don't, that's fine, but please try. I did not understand it myself, for a while. Like the others, I too traded in my dream for the meager portion of gruel that reality dealt me. I was unhappy, terribly unhappy, as we all are deep down inside. You smile, you disagree; I think you are a fool or a liar or both, which is not uncommon. I lied to myself too. Shackled to the routine and telling myself that's how it is, how it's supposed to be. The truth is a persistent creature though, like a dog whining at the door until you let him in and he gets mud on the carpet and you see the carpet was never clean to begin with. That's when my dream returned.

At first, I hesitated. That may surprise you, you know me by my reputation and my reputation is not one of hesitation. It is a curious kind of despair in the past and hope for the future that prompts action. I began to think my dream was possible. I became a child again. Write that down, it will please the psychiatrists. I became a child again and acted as a child again. I looked again at my childhood idols, only now I looked not to admire, but for inspiration. But while they lived in worlds that were designed for their existence, I lived in one that denied such things. That was when I realized that I had to change the world.

It was humiliating, for both of us, when I killed him.

Like the first words of an infant, I made my clumsy attempts to create a new world. I even went so far as to design a rather gaudy costume and mask. Don't look so shocked, I never wore it. That should convince you that I was not crazy, at least. Perhaps I will show it to you some time, I think you would like it.

What I needed was an act beyond mere spectacle. I needed a spark. This was the rebellious teenage phase of my development. I stole, I scammed, I cheated. At this time, I was no better than the garden-variety criminal. A great man can afford to admit his shortcomings, and so I admit mine. Of course, I accomplished very little, besides making myself disgusted. Not from guilt. We can speak candidly to each other, there's no reason not to, and so I can tell you that I never held any great love for my fellow man. I use 'man' as a general term, you understand, I never had much consideration for women either. The psychiatrists will be absolutely delighted. No, my disgust came from the pettiness of my actions. I wanted to change the world and there I was stuffing my pockets full of diamond tiaras and confidential documents. It was enough to make anyone sick.

Hm? You want to know what became of those riches? They are long gone by now. Beyond sustaining my own frugal lifestyle, what use did I have for such things? Most ended up dumped in the river or discarded in a back alley. As an aside, you know of course of Mr. Horn, recently elected? His quick ascent began, no doubt, when one drunken night he chanced upon an abandoned suitcase full of gold bars. I don't envy him, it was extremely heavy to carry around.

We have covered my beginnings and my dissatisfaction and so we must now come to the killing. Pay attention and take good notes now, this is the best part. I hope you won't be disappointed. I had now reached my adult state and I resolved that if the world could not be changed by minor thievery then I must naturally raise my actions to a higher plane. We are told that the taking of a human life is a terrible thing, the worst thing one can do, though I disagree, for there are many worse things than death. Still, the world sees it as such and so this ultimate terror inevitably became my next act. Selecting a victim was pure commonsense. You have read the reports so there is no need to go into detail. He was wealthy and well-known, an important figure such that the world could not help but sit up and take notice if something were to happen to him.

I wish this next part involved a grand scheme, but killing him was absurdly simple. There was nothing more to it than walking to his office late one night, long after everyone else had gone. I even entered through the front door, anyone could do it, though few would. We talked in his office, as you and I are doing now, and I explained everything. I had no personal grudge against the man, you understand, he was just a sacrifice for my dream. He was, as you might expect, not accommodating and indeed I was surprised by his resistance, though I suppose a man of his position must have considered such circumstances before. Let us not get caught up in the sordid details. Suffice to say I struck him down using that device which has already been recovered by the authorities and will no doubt shortly be on display in a museum.

There was one small flaw which occurred at this point. He did not die immediately, but was instead just gravely injured. Have you ever swatted a fly and then seen it lying on the floor with its legs twitching feebly? It's rather embarrassing, you don't know whether to finish it off or just leave it there to feebly cling to life. I felt that old disgust coming back, this was supposed to be a great moment and here he was ruining it with such an awkward display. My enthusiasm had quite run out by that point, so I did what I could to tidy things up and make the whole business cleaner and then left.

That was it really. There was an investigation and the newspapers diligently reported every rumor that was fit to print. But they never found me, for how could they? And soon enough the killing was forgotten and the world did not change. It was disheartening as I had felt sure that I had been on the verge of my dream, only to see it escape me again. And now I had to ask myself: what could be worse than killing? What would shock the world more than the death of such an eminent person? Which, of course, brings us to why I'm here.

SEAN AHERN

MUSTANG JOCKEY

America was stretched out like a cheap thrill,
white lips, red shoulders, hard curves,
fault lines that run blue like veins
that haunt the neighborhood surface.
You're saturated and sick
to the marrow of freedom and shadows
that follow. Opportunity wasn't something
you believed, it was what you needed,
as it pulled at each sleeve, pairs of hands,
six mouths to feed. Pork and beans,
Levi jeans, five cent triple features,
social disorder chasing
the American dream.
That desert dirt road reeks
of the last ditch gutter ball destiny
of a nomadic entourage plunging
far into the orange groves.
Carving your existence center cut, in a Ford, eight kids,
you're the Butcher from the Bronx, born and bred.
"The Right Stuff" in the city for Angels,
this is the real estate reality
of humanity. I'll listen for hours
and hours. Memory drunk with scraps of legacy,
you toss to me cross-legged on the floor
with your derby hat on. Your liver soaked
crimson iron hands slicing and chopping,
surgical fillets of life dished out on Sunday mornings.
Play that cleaver deep thoroughbred butcher
master in chief of blade to muscle tendons

severed from bones
as if they were your own.
Do you remember lead-based cradles?
Depression era dreams soiled by Hitler's ends and means,
bleach blond Barbie brainwashing hair onto toddlers.

Poets of a new age wail to the grey skies
radio writers of lullabies from "The Day the Music Died"
Buddy Holly, Big Bopper, Frankie Valli.
Hear it in the freefall of cold drum steel
sermon hymns of the new generation
fluent in the rebel yell of Rock and Roll,
the rhythm that stirred the soul.
"The Irish are a plague that breeds luck out of humanity."

JFK was your hero everyday not just presidents' day.
Castro and his defacto iron curtain,
guerilla tactics armed with cigars.
Field the righteous,
neighborhood heroes that scream
Revolution! The c-section scar performed by the Czar,
the Red Dawn of the Cold War.
They said "Democrats are Communists"
they never met the Roman Catholics or worst yet Irish.
Arms race, Space Race, Death Race,
you never missed a Kentucky Derby,
but you remember the first time, the gate
the oval lanes the rush of galloping
drove the senses wild.
You knew horses better than
your own face, more than the
citrus trees that scented the hot air
on a summer night.

Does the radiation have an after taste?
Breathe in Saigon,
the cemetery plunge
deeper with each stolen moment.
Penetrate the green grey jungle haze,
suck it down the rabbit hole, fox holes.
Rusty Russian muzzle flashes are thick
and bite flesh harder than the brothels,

cherry poppers, black teeth shrapnel rosaries,
they wash out your prayers for fodder.
Leave your rice paddy romance at home, it's terminal.
Did you know that innocence sweats out?
Shreds of proof,
at the soggy province banks
youth for the sticky fingered media
craving napalm stains
hacked and mangled,
with growing pains.
Where you'll never forget
the silence
after the phosphorous rain.
Matchstick memories.
Get on your knees!
Is the way to immortality
New York Times in full color frames?

They're just muddy memories,
something glanced at
forgotten, folded back
until you pour another smile on the pyre. Cancer so
stealthy between your hips. Swallowing
like a heart, savage, drunk, beating
sin swollen while rain still clings to the windowsill,
clawing at the glass, rolling eyes glossy.
Spit out the corrosive spawn within,
gnawing your womb
into oblivion.
Do Mustangs
run these lanes,
your veins and mine?
Is that lucid reflection
yours in the mirror
or my own,
hungry for attention.
Craving the story slices
of memory to life
from your tongue to my own.

Jessica Bechtold

Hapless grapes are tied down in the sun,
starved and deprived of water,
dried alive,
no final goodbyes,
separated from their families.

Grandma and Grandpa grape,
too old to be chewed,
are squished and squeezed,
gutted,
remains bottled by the Welchs.

The kiddie grapes,
plucked long before their prime,
are suffocated, and fermented,
corked,
the decadence of the rich,
sold at the highest price
conspired from Napa to Naples.

Ma and Pa grape,
torn from their stems,
split into groups,
Pa's final vision: Ma's round bottom
scraping along the dirt,
dragged off to be stripped of her skin
and used as eyeballs in a haunted house.

Pa grape is tied down in his peak,
screaming and hissing in the heat
until no sound remains
then scooped up and boxed:
an American tradition.

Raisins



Comp
James Hanna

CHRIS EGAN

THE BENEFITS OF DRINKING BURGUNDY

I drink red wine on the porch,
as I watch the sky fade from
orange to purple,
then die.

I drink as I hum
an Irish lullaby. A song
of Killarney that my
grandmother sang. Her voice was
delicate ash, rising softly
into the cool air.

I drink and I talk until
my Illogical thoughts become
impassioned and wonderful.

I drink and I stutter,
I believe in something,
I believe in everything.

I drink to the destruction of the
best minds of *my* generation –
may we be worse off than theirs.
I find truth in all the rhymes
of lines in poems –
in all the things I wish I wrote.

I drink and I call girls,
the ones that it ended badly with.
It's always too late, they never
call back. But in
the morning, I'm glad they don't.

I drink to immortality,
because tomorrow will be death.

I drink and hear the words again;
Tura Lura Lural
Until the day I die.



Cotton Mouth: A Monologue

by Jennifer Floyd

It's rotting flesh and tree shaped air fresheners, with every warm touch hairs raise like porcupine spines. Do these joints jerk like a wooden rollercoaster for some unpaid debt, long overdue? Do my black veins, like hollow rubber tubes, harvest the souls of babes, or just their blood? For naught I sew this newspaper flesh back into place. With thorough cruelty I plunge the needle and its black thread. But it was happenstance that led to a face so blue, tongue too? The flesh must remain! Through my glassy eyes of petrified wood, from lips tight and hapless, through dead tissue and crumbling bones, all of life is pitch black and too bright. This bitter taste is surely the millstone of some unknown gaffe; this acid saliva, this cotton mouth, much too raw and unnerving to be... happenstance! All it is and all it will be.

With these fingernails, grown and split, I will rip through pink skin and red lips, reach that white skull and inside; the pink cottage-cheese mass. The noise is always louder than sin, the point? There is no sleep or taste, but carnal satisfaction slips like a tide over and over. A prolonged cannibalistic orgasm, my mind reels in horror, sometimes.

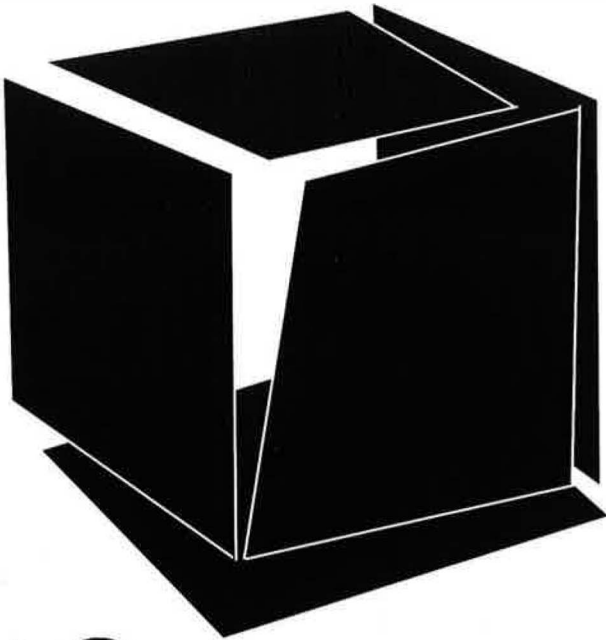
Were all of life in a simple frame, could we see the rhyme and reason? Would it lay itself bare as a femur stripped of Sartorius and Profunda? It's an endless tapestry like my own legs, sewn and re-sewn till the lines became a map to nowhere. Paper thin flesh that flakes and frays is a coincidental consequence of ambiguous means. Now I, the instrument of such demise and terror, am not terrified myself? It's only half a question, a thought abortion. Consciousness will eventually subside. Will I wake up and find myself amongst the beetles and worms to find there's no longer a word for these creatures in my wild untamed mind? The maggots are in the wrinkles, interrupting the synapses... Kill the head so the body survives.



Are You Really Going to Listen to That Guy?
G. D. Fekaris

Storytelling is something that we've inherited much like DNA...

Ashlyn Morse



DNA:

Primer for
Textual Analysis
&
Patient Diagnosis

DNA: Primer for Textual Analysis & Patient Diagnosis

I. [Abstract]

The following epistolary text was analyzed according to the new application of an old paradigm: the primary, secondary, and tertiary components of deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) structure, its replication, and its newly invented application in textual analysis. It was recently thought, by Dr. A. Lynn Franklin, that the structure of DNA exhibits itself in the commonly circulated form of "story." By superimposing the double helix structure and the nature of its replication onto any textual artifice, Dr. Franklin's lab team has revealed, surprisingly, that a body of language is as scientifically fecund as straight-laced lab-based DNA analysis. "You can tell more about a person and how to treat their particular disease by what they write and looking at what they write through the lens of the double helix," Dr. Franklin asserts, "than you can by their very DNA." The revolutionary application of the helix structure has had a short history of success in diagnosing and curing previously incurable diseases such as: addiction, anorexia, and obsessive-aggressive personalities induced by high-stress situations such as holiday shopping.

The relatively new application of this paradigm (as of February 28th, 2010) has been largely questioned by current experts in the DNA analysis field. One biochemist in particular, Dr. Jerk Crickson, has criticized Dr. Franklin's practice as wildly "outrageous, and a pseudoscience if ever there was one." The following text, as examined through the lens of Dr. Franklin's textual DNA analysis, can be considered (despite adversaries of this blossoming field) a successful case study of a patient that was textually analyzed and subsequently treated (unfortunately, the patient is not available for post-treatment questioning as part of successful treatment involves eradicating certain species of memory from the hypothalamus to circumvent the repeated action of mirror neurons). The following text was synthesized after the patient in question voluntarily called for treatment and was asked to compose a "story" regarding the events that took place during the forty-eight hours leading up to the call. The following "story" is then subjected to a three-phase analysis which yields important findings about the patient's condition and necessary modes of treatment.

II. [Excerpt 1: The Beginning of the Story]

Dear Jane,

I'm sorry I never showed up. And, just like anyone most certainly would be, I'm sure you were probably left there (even all alone, maybe) wondering where the hell I was or if maybe hell was where I was or maybe it's unfair to say that I was there all along and that you knew that the whole time? That is, I admit, grossly unfair – after all, we're only human, at best. How about if I couple this with an explanation...

But before I even begin (I hardly know where, to be honest), let me preface my explanation with just a few things here...Jane, they are asking me to write this letter. I am under the impression that, in my prolonged absence, they will send it for me. They will, won't they? At any rate, I know that you know I've been through some rough times (who hasn't, right?) and, although we'd never talked about it explicitly, I know you must have always had the feeling: "Hmm, something is not quite right with that girl." No lie, I've seen it in the way you look over at me sometimes after reading a poem I've left for you to find. And, to be honest yet again, things weren't exactly ever "quite right" with me. And, well, since honesty is the policy here, things got to be a little overwhelming, you know – this letter seems, at best, vague I know – let me put it this way: have you ever tried your hand at gardening, Jane?

I was on my way around the side of the house forty-eight hours ago to pick up the mail from the front box when I noticed it (actually smelled it first): there, between perfectly coiffed Agapantha (they really do prune themselves, easy to take care of – you know the plants with long green stalks with explosions of little white or purple flowers as finial touch, perhaps with a slight tendency in the shade to get a bit monstrous in the stalk, but not so monstrous as to be offensive or disturbing) – right between the two Agapantha (with quarter-sized stalks, I confess) was this big blossoming thing without a stem or anything of the sort – just a blossom lying on the hard ground, about the size of a dinner plate and about as smelly as last week's garbage. Putrid, honest...

Jane, seriously, if you can imagine a grossly beautiful dinner plate-sized burgundy blossom with dime-sized white spots and a big, hollow center (as if it were holding a bowl within it), you've begun to catch wind of my afternoon. So what did I do about it? I got the mail and I ignored it...as is often my policy (as you should know) with unusually upsetting discoveries. No big deal, right?

III. [Phase 1: The Replication Bubble]

DNA is a tightly wound coil of nucleotides and phosphates with discrete primary, secondary, and tertiary structures. It is also worth (briefly) acknowledging the history of the double-helix structure and its relationship to language: the double-helix non-linear structure of DNA was originally photographed by Rosalind Franklin. Watson and Crick, the famous laboratory couple often attributed with discovering the double-helix, stole a collection of photographs and appropriated Franklin's structure as their own, taking all credit, seeking to dominate the discourse surrounding DNA. Stories, much like the structure of DNA, can be stolen, appropriated, revised, and published as one's own... This story, likewise, is a tightly wound coil of discrete structures that, once separated, can reveal a lot about the "teller" in question — i.e. where were these ideas stolen from and what does this source reveal about the teller?

DNA, in many ways like this text in front of you, is ultimately one of the most stable components of the human body. Case in point: are you a biochemist that needs to get from Boston to the University of San Francisco lab post-haste? Can't afford a plane ticket but have a car? No worries, biochemist in need. Like the writer tossing books this way and that without injuring the text inside, all you need to do is load up those DNA samples into the appropriate number of conical vials, stopper them, throw them in your trunk and take off cross-country. Even forensic analysts applaud the stability of the DNA structure every time they pull a single strand of the victim's hair from the carpet fibers of another unmarked white van. DNA, in other words, is a story that does not easily denature.

And how, you might ask, do you find DNA in the story you are reading here? Step 1. Identify a replication bubble. Let's begin by selecting any point in this story and "unzipping" it. Dr. Franklin affirms, "The replication of DNA is a lot like this epistolary text." Once we have selected a point in the story's structure to "unzip," we have arbitrarily selected a point on which to begin our analysis (in this case, we began with "Excerpt 1"). When we analyze the way in which the two strands of this replicated story can be pulled apart (much in the way helicase pulls apart DNA bound to replicate), we will be able to determine which strand of the story is part of the "parental" strand and which strand was a replication thereof — "this," says Dr. Franklin, "will get us closer to identifying the psycho-origin of the illness."

When we look at the way the story's strands differ (one strand being "parental" and the other a replication of the original), we are examining the story's origin of replication, i.e. the "replication bubble" — and when we examine the origin of the story's replication, we are closer

to what some people would call the problem's "root" (some might also consider the parental strand to be the "real" beginning of the story).

IV. [Excerpt 2: The "Real" Beginning of the Story]

But I do confess, I've seen this obscenely large blossom crop up once in my life before. Remember when we were roommates, Jane? (Remember when you called me after I hadn't been home in months and said: "Hi, this is Jane, you might know me because I'm your roommate"? I still have that message and listen to it from time to time when I don't feel quite like myself – And remember how you told me that you used to tell your friends I was gone backpacking in South America?)

The first time I saw it I was looking off our balcony down over by the carport, the one where you directed my truck right into the pole after insisting "trust me, you can make it" – you know those dumpsters to the left, over on that hard dirt where nothing grew but ivy, where the stray cats bred ceaselessly in the night? This obscenely large blossom was there too, growing right out of the ivy, the most monstrously large flower I'd ever seen – yes, an offensive size – something so meaty and big it could have been fauna. The cats rubbing up against it. . .

Admittedly, when I first noticed it the sun was just rising (after another one of those...long nights that you never asked me about) so it might have seemed more ominous in the oddly dimensional blues, those early morning hues of the wee A.M. hours – and, perhaps, this was further obscured by my vantage point from the balcony...but, in all fairness to me, from my perspective it sure did look to be the size of a bike tire.

And of course at first no one would notice the smell (not even me) and although I did think it odd the landlord would grow such a peculiar looking species right next to the community dumpsters (it had to have been a rarity), a couple of days later I noticed the smell. (In the following weeks I also noticed that the excessive numbers of stray cats began to dwindle.) It was the same thing, the same big, hollow center with a soft, glistening cushion of tissue on the inside.

Come to think of it, the flower was probably there the day we moved in, but how could one notice such things? I mean, did you ever notice it? The landlords never said anything about it, never did anything about it...And one night it just so happened that I was taking out the trash (you weren't there, it seemed we were rarely ever home at the same time) and, by accident, I truly saw the extent of what this flesh-eating flower could do...

So naturally, to think that a thing like this could have followed me and shown up in my very own yard right now between the Agapantha is something not to be ignored, but of course, as with any problem...

Which is why, in all honesty, you might be surprised to hear that

later that afternoon (after I first found that carnivorous blossom) I went outside and measured the thing with a ruler (twenty four inches, if you can believe that!) and sprayed a little of my strongest perfume – *L'eau de Poison* – over it when suddenly it occurred to me, oh hell this thing is devilish, and I threw the whole bottle of perfume into its hollow center.

As you can imagine, when I came out to check on the status of the odor a couple of hours later, I wasn't so surprised that the perfume bottle had completely disappeared and that the smell, of course, remained...strong as ever, Jane, strong as ever.

V. [Phase 2: DNA Heritability]

"It is important to remember," Dr. Franklin reminds all textual analysts, "that just because the parental strand might be the origin of the story's replication does not mean that the parental strand is always the origin of the illness." Again, it is useful to think of this story in terms of the properties of DNA: where did we begin if not with our first cellular replication...what is the origin of DNA?

Certainly we did not begin right where we stand at this very moment and certainly we did not begin yesterday...Storytelling is something that we've inherited, much like DNA, through distant generations, locations, through speech, and through culture (and yes, keep in mind we can also be on the lookout for mutant strands that crop up in the gene pool every now and again to change the genotype and subsequent appearance of storytelling altogether; other times we have the stories and the way we want to tell them perfectly coded by our DNA by the time we have to talk).

Step 2. Look at any phylogenetic tree and see for yourself the relationship between genotype (DNA) and a freshly diagrammed sentence. Parts of speech are diagrammed on a forking line, much like a tree branch, and surely it is impossible for anyone diagramming parts of speech not to be thinking simultaneously of how closely they are genetically related to fungi. Language and the phylogenetic tradition share much in common, including that the usage of either reminds us of how closely we are related to our own past. In this sense, a "story" analyzed by means of DNA textual analysis will often reveal, imbedded in a key metaphor, the object of the patient's past desire...in other words, imbedded in their textual DNA is insight into the desire that binds them and would continue to bind not only them, but (should the patient decide to reproduce) their progeny as well. Stories will repeat themselves throughout generations unless the metaphors and the memories that produce certain metaphoric connections are eradicated from the hypothalamus of the

patient in question. "This constitutes once and for all," enthusiastically claims Dr. Franklin, "successful treatment of any 'psychological' disease—in this patient's case, severe methamphetamine addiction."

VI. [Excerpt 3: The Heritable Metaphor]

And the hollow center, might I remind you, is big enough for a squirrel or perhaps a cat to crawl inside and meet its fate. Kind of a mesmerizing thing, really. When I went out again toward the evening hours (in the waning light and prolific shadows), I couldn't help but put walk around the side of the house, kneel by the blossom, and put my hand inside...

The center, of course, began to close around my wrist in slow, jerking movements, and it began secreting a thick mucous that I could feel all over my knuckles especially...and then there was the tingling sensation that started at my fingertips and ran straight to my elbow. After keeping my hand inside a few seconds longer, I was able to pull it out without too much of a struggle. Truthfully, I felt a sense of loss, as if this blossom and I could have been intimate in a way I had never known. Maybe, I truly thought, this is what it means to garden.

As you can imagine, having such a thing in one's yard is both wonderful and ominous—a heaving responsibility, if you ask me. This was right around when you called and I didn't answer and you left that message you sometimes leave, the one about being my roommate and all... Jane, I have cats in the yard that run around that I need to feed and watch over. With this thing in my yard, what could I do? What would you have done? I tried to call you back, it's true...but hung up. I'm sorry. I was trying so hard to just...relax.

But soon, as you will see in my explanation, this terribly wonderful blossom was only the beginning of my gardening woes. Never let it be said that horticulture was ever a true hobby of mine, but (looking back on it from this carpeted room) I do wish that it had been—I mean, maybe then if I knew how to cultivate near anything exotic in my yard I could uncultivate those things as well.

While the blossom kept getting bigger (the last time I measured it, yesterday afternoon, it was already a total of 40 inches wide!), the mulberry tree in my front yard started to shrink. It was almost like this giant tree just kept getting pulled by the roots further down into the soil...And actually, I shouldn't fail to mention that every single plant in my yard started to slowly dwarf (while the truly small things like the petunias and grass just...died...even the crabgrass died).

The blossom knew no bounds, really and didn't have a problem even without much water (I hardly watered my plants) it just kept right on growing, this monstrous devilish thing that it was. And I can't help but think it was partly responsible for what happened next...

Now, as I write you this letter (for closure, mostly), they tell me it was only a matter of time before this happened. The Agapantha were now dried helices of crude, tweed ribbon (completely dry and lifeless, a protein shell of their former selves). In a mad frenzy, after nearly everything in and around my house had started to die, I finally decided to take charge over this parasitic blossom...

But, I admit, it was strange...when I bent over with my canvas gloves to uproot the damned thing, I end up (after all) uprooting the dried Agapantha to make more room for that beast of a flower. I figured, hell, if it was the only thing growing in my yard...then let it grow. Help it grow.

I lined the dead Agapanthas on the walkway, kind of like a sacrificial offering of some kind now that I think about it, all along the side of my house and the massive petals on the blossom just became more and more thick, veined, highly vascularized – almost like human tissue.

At this point, I suppose it would have been in order to give this plant a name...and I would have had I not run into the peculiar trouble that I did. All the stray cats had gone missing, which I had more or less suspected would happen, and at least now I could offer the blossom kitty food, which it ate voraciously...but in the mailbox, one fine hour or two before I called them to come pick me up, I found this peculiar trouble inside: rancid, fertile smelling air and two white envelopes. I put my face close to the rusting metal box, sniffed the air, and inspected a small fern that had begun growing inside curiously enough. I used my hand to move the small fern aside as I reached in and removed the two letters...this is when the water began to flow. At first, a small trickle...

And this is how the flooding that did not stop began and my yard of course continued to flood until the moment I called...the massive liquid level rising, I noticed that the water itself seemed to form some kind of divide between muddy water and clear water...my entire front yard was feet deep with water, it covered the giant blossom, covered all the dead grass, and all that floated on the surface were the dead, porous Agapantha helices that used to be hearty stalks – and those were the helices that kept scratching at my bedroom window, begging me to call for help. And I did.

VII. [Phase 3: Okazaki Fragments]

In the process of DNA replication, there is a leading strand that is replicated continuously, and there is a lagging strand that is replicated in small, discrete pieces. "The lagging strand of DNA replication," says Dr. Franklin, "is created in small, discrete pieces known

as Okazaki fragments – these fragments can be likened to the memories that are evoked in a story’s telling. While we cannot construct the past fully, we find that stories often construct the past in fragments, and these fragments are often enough for well-informed DNA textual analysts to diagnose and begin treatment for a mental illness.”

In this case, Dr. Franklin has already stated that we’re dealing with a rather severe case of methamphetamine dependency. What have we learned thus far? We have learned the origin of the illness, the heritable metaphor which would transfer from parental generations to progeny, and now, what is left? Step 3. Identify all Okazaki fragments/Memories linked to the heritable metaphor.

As recent studies from Harvard University have illustrated, memory of drug use triggers the same part of the brain (the insula) as does cravings for the drug; whereas N.A. therapy was recently the popular road to recovery, findings show that this mode of recollection often worsens the cravings – it is, of course, better to forget altogether.

Beginning with a variety of studies done on mice, it is shown that the brain can actually be trained to “forget” or to “displace” certain memories. When these memories are displaced, we find that drug rehabilitation success is greatly increased. This treatment calls for success not only in addiction cases, but in a variety of other “psychological” illness as well.

It is important that memories involving and surrounding drug use are eradicated so that seeing the drug being used or seeing the paraphernalia correlating to drug use does not trigger the excitation of “mirror neurons” – these are neurons that are excited in the patient when the drug is being used by others and, consequently, cause the patient to crave. Instead of treating the symptoms of the craving, Dr. Franklin advocates a procedure that treats the progenitor of the craving. The following and last excerpt of the letter highlights some crucial Okazaki memory fragments that are in dire need of removal. If we can remove the memory, we can un-replicate the pieces of DNA that code for drug use.

VIII. [Excerpt 4: Mirror Fragments]

While I waited for them to arrive, I opened the two letters that I had removed from the mailbox...the precursor to the massive flooding (which had since begun to subside somewhat since I placed the call). The first letter was a letter I had written to you, Jane, and had addressed to myself. When I opened it, the thing read so new that I couldn’t believe I had written it, but there it was, in my own writing (as best as I can remember):

Remember you always made me do the manly chores like taking out the garbage while you would pretend to clean? You and I both know you only ever cleaned after...Remember when I came home randomly one afternoon after having been gone for so long and you were taping newspaper cocoons over the white walls and shoving pieces of a deflated Mylar butterfly balloon into each one? It was interesting, I'll admit. I just wanted to write you to tell you that all those paintings that you did on the cabinets in the kitchen didn't cost the whole security deposit – I kept it. But I could never tell you that to your face. I'm not that sort of roommate. Remember when you asked me if I was a lesbian? Those were interesting times, Jane. And because they were so interesting, I can't see you anymore. And so I'm writing you this letter, one that I know you'll never get.

In the second envelope, there was a poem I had tried to send to a small poetry magazine stationed at the University of Utah... thing is, the magazine is not printing this year – rough times, like I said, for everyone. Jane...I must confess, it was a poem about you (please don't let the name Sarah confuse you, it's a cover, the thing that hides our insides):

*I just got out of rehab.
Went in the first place for getting addicted
to untying Sarah's shoes. The first time it happened:
one evening on the porch.
A chill. I untie her shoe.
Once. And then again (of course) it happens and this time:
I use both hands at once
to untie both shoes.
She laughed...at first. And God, it was good
and that wasn't all,
I coupled this to the untying:
chiffon pink pie
that Sarah loved. Our stomachs
simultaneously growled whenever we met:
mine, for the shoes
hers, for pink pie.*

Jane, I am writing you this letter because I couldn't show up. And I will never show up. Instead of treating the symptoms of my condition they say they can treat the cause – these memories. These poems. You. I am required by law to forget it all.

When they showed up at my house they walked on top of the water like miraculous hydrophobic balloons and it took three of them to pry me from my mattress (I was clinging from sheer fear).

They said it was the right thing to do, to call them...and that they would have to change some things. And they said, of course, I could forget all about the flood.

I want you to have the letter and the poem as best as I can remember for now because, without you, they will be lost.

Yours truly,
Patient X.

IX. [Conclusion]

It is imperative to note that “story” is the mirror image of disease in the way that one DNA strand must be antiparallel to the other. If one can learn to analyze a series of events in this fashion, it is possible to diagnose and treat myriad diseases that were previously thought untreatable or merely offered poor treatment options for suffering patients. This goes to show that, given long enough, there isn’t any one disease that is incurable to medicinal science.

The implications of such a therapy illustrate, quite fundamentally, the nature of human existence: Dr. Franklin confidently says, “There isn’t anything – no art no text – that comes from an unexplained source.” All stories originate from our DNA in that they are reflective of our own physical condition and, in most all cases, are useful tools in diagnosing and treating illness.

After having received treatment for their condition, the patient has been living (drug-free) in a gated community in a small suburban Southern California community for two years. The patient currently volunteers at a medical center and has discontinued studies in English while simultaneously turning to pursue an academic career in Chemistry at a local community college with an emphasis in cellular transport. When asked the reason for pursuing cellular transport in particular, the patient eagerly responded while looking out the window: “Because there is much information missing when it comes to understanding how anything in the human body gets from point A to point B, especially memory.”

While some of the clinicians took it upon themselves to send a copy of the letter to the aforementioned “Jane,” no evidence of a person by that name was found to exist within the former belongings of the patient, nor in the patient’s personal record.

Welcome

Jaded eyes
seldom sleep

Life depends on a clock

Virtual promise
waits at home

Logged in just for him

Trading emotions for
World Wide delusions

Download a new version

Pixelated passion
never fades

Natalie Alcala

Some Reasons Women Don't **Orgasm**

by Lisa Kerr

One. Being a woman is mentally confining.

Two. "The rape of the mind occurs with the draining of women's energies by obsession with genital sexuality."¹

Three. The female body is not confining. The breasts—in my case creamy white, the curve, the nipple—stimulated by the nerves that run slightly closer to the surface than most, making them instantaneously aroused. I like my breasts and I like other women's.

Four. I went out with Jared Saturday night and he asked me to have a threesome. I'm insulted. If a woman *wanted* to have a threesome, she wouldn't want it to be focused on his pleasure. If I wanted a threesome, I'd have a hot guy and a lesbian there...each to satisfy me.

Five. "The categories of heterosexuality and homosexuality are patriarchal classifications."²

Six. Keith comes in and out of my life with far less consistency than my father. If I ever got a late night text from him, it was 1:00 a.m. and he was at the gym. He had an obsession with being bulky and muscular. His father used to beat him. We watched the movie "300" together, watched Kevin Smith movies religiously, and then later, I learned Tucker Max was his hero. He came over Sunday night, which was odd, because I hadn't heard from him in months. He walked into the apartment, fixed a rum and coke, and brought me over to his lap to sit down. Then we fucked six times until he was complaining that he couldn't keep up anymore. The first time was good. The second through sixth times I don't remember much because I was high and drunk.

Seven. Keith is always a disappointment.

Eight. I have a healthy appetite for sex.

¹ Daly, Mary. *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1985, Print. See Daly 123.

² See Daly 125.

Nine. "All witchcraft comes from carnal lust, which is in women insatiable."

Ten. Grayson texts me, "Behbeh...when I bring your stuff over, I thought about bringing some sex over too." His girlfriend looks like a man to me. She's thick and short, and has brown hair with chunky bangs and tattoos on her arms. She is moving here from Ohio in a week, and apparently he has needs to meet before then. I loved him for a year and a half. It was hard to say no, but I did and then we sat on my couch and smoked some weed together.

Eleven. Grayson, I loved. How do you love someone who just wants to fuck, who tells you he doesn't want a relationship, and then moves a thick, short girl from Ohio to California?

Twelve. Most men don't understand the orgasm. They think that the sole reason a woman reaches an orgasm is that he did all the work with his mighty phallic wand. On the contrary, I can be with a man who is unskilled or really bad in bed and still orgasm. I imagine being with a woman. Most men ignore the fact that it's also a spiritual and mental connection for a woman, and if she feels connected emotionally, a woman will be more open in the bedroom.

Thirteen. "Our society limits the scope of sex, reinforcing the status quo and unrebelling existence."⁴

Fourteen. "Moloch the incomprehensible prison! Moloch who frightened me out of my natural ecstasy."⁵

Fifteen. "What is my natural ecstasy?"

Sixteen. "Men?"

Seventeen. "Women?"

Eighteen. "Neither?"

Nineteen. Liam always gets online at night, and complains to me that his girlfriend never gives him blow jobs. I'm sick of hearing him complain. We start texting and I tell him that of course I give blow jobs, then I describe how I'd put his penis in my mouth, lick the head with my tongue, and then insert all of it in my throat as far as it could go. He gets in his Mustang, walks in

³ See Daly 44.

⁴ See Daly 124.

⁵ For a description of Moloch, see HOWL, lines 6, 139, 142. Ginsberg, Allen. *HOWL: ORIGINAL DRAFT FACSIMILE, TRANSCRIPT, AND VARIANT VERSIONS, FULLY ANNOTATED BY THE AUTHOR, WITH CONTEMPORANEOUS CORRESPONDENCE, ACCOUNT OF FIRST PUBLIC READING, LEGAL SKIRMISHES, PRECURSOR TEXTS, AND BIBLIOGRAPHY*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1986. Print

my bedroom, and proceeds to violently thrust his penis in my throat. He's asthmatic and I have a cat. Sex is never complete.

Twenty. I miss Grayson's texts. I even miss his invitations for sex because after the sex we would lay on his twin mattress together, tangled up in each other's bodies, and warm tears would start falling down my cheeks. I'd say, "I know you don't want a girlfriend, but I love you and I can't help it." And he'd say, "I know behbeh. I love you too. You deserve the very best...it's just not me."

Twenty-one. Damian was tall, exotic, muscular. We lay on his pillow top mattress, surrounded by down feathered pillows, and he pressed his body on top of mine and thrust, thrust, thrust. He reaches down to unbutton my pants, sticks his fingers inside me and I groan. I unzip his pants, pull them off, and lean over with my mouth and grab his dick in my hand except something is amiss. He pulls my face up and away from his cock and I realize why he doesn't want a blow job. His dick is two and a half inches erect. Two weeks later I'd met Abel, who was short but thick like an islander. Violent sex ensued — tossing, clawing, screaming. I managed to orgasm with a three-inch penis. Abel lay next to me between the sheets and whispered in my ear, "I like to whip myself sometimes."

Twenty-two. First girl crush: Sara. At parties, I was often drunk, would lean over to a girl, grab her face, and make out with her. This happened five times. I met Sara in the back of the Hotel Café, in a smoky room, surrounded by men with full beards playing a 1920's ragtime waltz. Sara stood with her neck erect, short blonde hair falling around her soft cheeks, gazing at the men playing. Next to her was a thin, boyish woman.

Twenty-three. Second girl crush comes in-between sleeping with Grayson and Keith, and we meet through Grayson. She's Persian, curly-haired, and witty. We exchange hugs like we're long lost friends, as she calls Grayson "love" and "baby," and walks up to kiss him on the cheek. Later, we share a cigarette. She's had too much whisky and I've smoked too much weed. I want to invite her to my apartment, but Grayson walks up to us.

Twenty-four. If I invite her over, does that mean I'm a...?

Our society limits the scope of sex, reinforcing the status quo and unrebelling existence.

Twenty-five. "Radical feminists are fundamentally agreed in the advocacy of total elimination of sex roles."⁶

Twenty-six. Grayson tells me to take his friend James to my house. I'm okay with it and we get in my car and he mentions how fast the engine must be. He sits on my couch and I sit on the chair. He passes me a pipe, a lighter. At five o'clock in the morning I'm tired of listening to him talk about "American Gangster", and I invite him to bed. He hesitates, comes to my room, and starts kissing me. His beer belly is peeking out over his jeans and his back is wet with sweat. Luckily, I'm high so I don't mind being on top doing all the work. I don't climax, and it's possible he does, but I'm thinking about Sara. "I've been in L.A. for ten years and I play at Molly Malone's," James explains, and he simply doesn't impress me. We smoke a cigarette. He leaves.

Twenty-seven. "Jesus was a feminist."⁷

Twenty-eight. I think of Martin, Grayson's other friend, and he's the kind of man I would be happy with.

Twenty-nine. Martin and Raj drink ale, place bandanas over their mouths, and walk behind the brick wall along the alley and enter a club. Martin tells the radio personality they're here to "spread forth the gospel of the step" and they proceed to play the filthy, savage beats. Later, Martin gets in my car with a dime bag. We talk about the benefits of smoking weed for the creative mind, the tension between fundamentalist religious groups and politics, and he finally asks how I know Grayson. "We slept together for a year and a half."

Thirty. I am a booty call.

Thirty-one. I break apart the kush, place it in the pipe and inhale deep breaths. My throat burns.

Thirty-two. I sit on the couch and imagine a glass staircase coming down from the dark sky; a man in a charcoal colored coat approaches me and says, "You are a Witch by being female, untamed, angry, joyous, and immortal."⁸

Thirty-three. I tell him: "Here is my daughter; she is a virgin; I will give her to you. Possess her, do what you please with her..."⁹

⁶ See Daly 124.

⁷ According to Daly, scholar Leonard Swidler proved that Jesus was a feminist. See Daly 73.

⁸ See Daly 179.

⁹ See Daly 117. This reference is from Judges 19:24.

HEIDI VANDENBERG

MY BOY, HINDSIGHT

If I get pregnant tonight,
I say to myself,
While you're complaining about
my lack of (birth) control,
I think I'll be okay if you decide to
go.

A cigarette hangs off my bottom lip
Like a broken guitar string.
An empty glass of wine
is pinched between the fingers of my right hand
that may, one day
or may not,
stroke our child's hair
and soothe it to sleep.

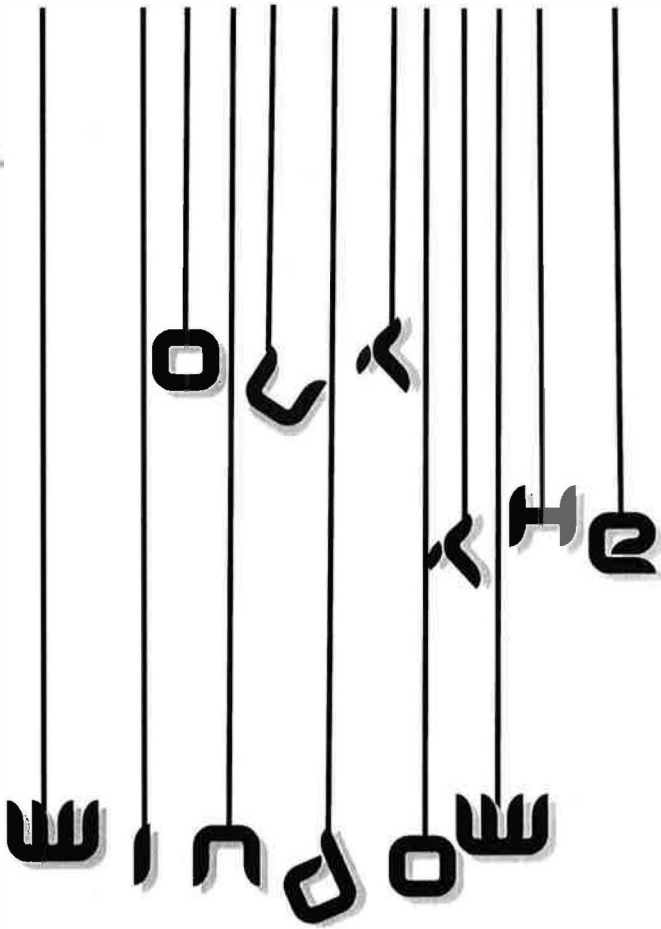
If I get pregnant by you,
I think out-loud while you're next to me,
it would be a miracle.
You laugh and probably think to yourself
Good luck with that, babe.
My wine glass is crying
and the cigarette smoke crawling.

If you knock me up tonight
because you couldn't control yourself
or I couldn't have control of my uterus
then our kid might have a name like
Hindsight
and you'll visit him
on Saturdays and take him hiking only on days
it rains.
I'll make him a life and when Hindsight
is old enough, you will write me a note
saying, "Sorry, can't pay"
and he'll never see you again.

So, Love, if I get pregnant tonight
I'll be damn fine if you
just
go.



Classically Insane
Michael Balingit



Matth ew Wald eck

The sky was above and below,
so that I questioned if I should call it the sky.

Out the Window

Raymond turned to me and said, “this is my blender,” then turned back to the blender. He began to load it, something for later. He continued talking, facing the blender, so that I barely listened. Without looking, he could not see that I had almost given up. Instead, I looked around at the room. It was a fine place Raymond had. Was it his place? It wasn’t mine. I saw a lot of things in it. He had many possessions. I did not understand why he had chosen to show me his blender. I thought that he might get to the other things. I hoped not. I could see them for myself. This way was better, it was faster, and Raymond did not have to say anything—or he could talk for a while on one object, for the sake of occupation, and leave out the rest; this gave us both something to do. I did not dislike Raymond or the things he said in general, but it would be dull to listen to him list his possessions that I could see for myself.

We were at a table. It was not large. It was brown, made of wood. It seemed like wood. I did not examine the grains. From my seat, I could see into another room, which I identified as the kitchen, and yet another, over on the other side: the living room. The walls of these three rooms, from what I could see of them, were painted a very pale cream color. They looked like the flesh of a fish to me. I pretended that we were inside a gigantic fish, and I had a little giggle. Raymond had smuggled so much into the fish with him. I made this remark to Raymond and laughed. He made as though he did not hear me and continued talking about his blender. What did he say? There was a collection of apparatus out on the counters in Raymond’s kitchen. I did not recognize many of the devices. They were composed of chrome cylinders, straight or curved, of varying lengths, smooth white plastic shapes, thin metal bowls, serrations along flat strips of chrome or white plastic; they had handles that appeared rotary, or else buttons, or dials, or switches, or a combination excluding the first. They were all clean and seemed to be arranged into a display. I thought that Raymond had thought with pride to show them to me, since I was here. He had laid them out in preparation. This idea was relieving to me, since I did not recognize them and would not be bored by a vocal introduction to them. I could be interested. And if that were Raymond’s aim, then probably, or

maybe, he would not tell me about many of the other objects in his apartment. Were these rooms an apartment? They seemed to be one. I speak of those things that I already knew about. I grew doubtful of this supposition. The blender did not seem a part of those strange, clean things grouped on the counter; it was neither chromed nor made of white plastic, and it was recognizable: a very commonplace appliance. It was clear, and beige in parts, and completely without possession of the uniformity, stringency, and boldness of the other devices.

I could not remember why I was here or how I had gotten here. Strangely, this had not occurred to me until now. I watched Raymond nervously for a few seconds while I searched my memory. I could not remember. I calmed again. The sound of Raymond's lulling voice did it. Probably that is not what it was. It is unexplainable. But certainly there was nothing threatening or shocking about Raymond at that moment. I looked over to the door and tried to remember walking through it, what lay on the other side...nothing was recalled. As irritating and unsettling as this was, I did not stop Raymond to ask him about it. Then I stopped asking myself. I looked around at the rooms some more, at the furnishings. I looked at the sofa, and at the lamps and the chairs. Raymond had nice lamps. He had them in all sizes, the smallest being barely more than the shade, the largest upon the floor and several inches taller than myself. I am not a short man. I am not a tall man, either, though I am taller than Raymond. Except when we are sitting down, then we are approximately even in height. I would prefer to be standing. Looking at the ceiling and along the walls, I did not see any lighting installations. This peculiarity explained why Raymond had so many lamps. His lamps seemed related to each other. Their bases were a combination of dark wood and dark metal, with the wood carved in intricate designs around the simple metal supports. The colors of the shades ranged from off-white to orange. Most of them had subtle patterns speckled onto them. These were not dark enough to effect the light that shown through them, so far as I could tell. I took them as precautionary, as being there to render any acquired stains undetectable. The lampshades were prepared to be dirtied. They awaited dust.

Raymond had stopped talking and was looking at me. I looked at him and he smiled, tersely. It seemed to me that he had not been done for long, and had not noticed my inattention. It was hard to tell for sure.

"Well, Raymond?" I said, feigning expectancy. As though I knew what was to come next. As though Raymond's lull had produced in me an impatience and a desire for continuation. I have found that this is the best approach to take in most situations.

Raymond reached down and pressed a button on the face of the blender. The blades came to action, reducing what was in the blender to a thick paste. It happened quickly. Now we will go over what was in the blender, though I would rather skip over the subject. Raymond had put into the blender chopped carrots, small tomatoes, some cubed mango, chunks of pineapple, a cup full of honey, various seeds I did not identify, a cup of milk, and some fat raisins. All of these things he had prepared in advance. They had been sitting in little plastic containers on the table. It was as though he were putting on a show for me, a demonstration. The containers came in a variety of sizes and shapes, within a limited range. It seemed to me that they belonged to a set.

With the ingredients blended, Raymond put the blender aside. He placed it onto a small, white metal cabinet that was sitting next to the table. He stacked the containers together and put them there as well. He did not pour himself any of the contents of the blender to drink, nor did he offer me any. I was dumbfounded. Raymond got a sly little look in his sly little eye.

“Would you like to see something else?” he asked. I was worried that he would show me something I did not want to see. I said, “Yes.” It was possible that he would show me one of the unknown devices from his kitchen.

Raymond stood up in front of me and became very excited, and was obviously hesitating to do something. His eyes shown with anticipatory enthusiasm.

“Yes, Raymond?”

He lifted up his shirt, revealing to me his naval. I have spoken too soon. There was no naval. In its place was a knob. It was like the knob in a shower. I realize of course that those are not of one kind only, and it was only indistinctly like so many of them that I have seen, granting that there are many I have never seen. But a knob is a knob. His was not decorative sufficient to warrant further description. It served the same purpose as any other knob: to turn. And to turn in one direction to termination, and again in the other, opposite direction to termination, the distance in either direction being equidistance from a center point of presumed equilibrium. In this way, I suppose it was not like certain knobs, those knobs without a middle position, those that can be seen as being in the “off” position at one point of termination, and in the “on” position at the other point of termination. Or, perhaps more accurately, that can be seen as moving through a scale—from 0

to 100, we'll say – when turned – and when done so in either direction – 0 being at one terminal point, 100 at the other.

“Do you want to turn it?” asked Raymond.

I did want to turn it. I did not say anything. I responded instead by reaching out my hand and placing it on the knob as though to turn it. I did not turn immediately. I looked up at Raymond to see that it was okay with him. Did I give a damn? There was little to be found in his face. I made my assumptions and turned the knob clockwise until it stopped. Raymond got red in the face and began to scream. I quickly turned the knob counterclockwise. I did so rashly. Not knowing where the knob had been to start with, and in something of a panic, I turned all the way to termination in this direction as I had in the other. Raymond responded by dropping to the ground and dilating his pupils to unbelievable sizes. His eyes scarcely managed to contain them. He reached down to the knob, his arm shaking, and turned it back to center. He gasped and shuddered and placed his hand on his chest. He stared down at the floor for some seconds. He stood up.

“What has happened? I asked him.

“I cannot begin to explain,” answered Raymond. He made a wide smile, entirely foreign to the smile I had seen him form quite recently. He began to giggle in short, violent bursts, as though he were unable to contain himself. The air left his mouth quickly. He expelled a chaos spittle and squealing sounds.

I stood up in confusion, possibly intending to confront Raymond, and came to eye level with a mirror across from me on the wall. I saw that I had a full beard, whereas I had thought myself clean-shaven. At first I was astounded that I had not noticed, but then I thought that it was not so peculiar. A beard feels natural and weightless enough when it is there. I had not had occasion to bring my hand to it since I could remember. It was understandable that I had forgotten. But there was something missing in this particular experience of the not uncommon phenomenon. When a beard is forgotten upon the face, coming into contact with it causes a realization of having grown it to emerge. Now I seemed only to glimpse an emptiness. I should have been bewildered, I should have been horrified. I found some unspeakable vein of refutable logic to calm me for the time. Since I could not remember coming to this place, I thought that maybe I had been here long enough to have grown the beard. Of course, not remembering, I could have been elsewhere and not shaving. I assumed for the time that I had been here for the duration of growth. I rationalized to myself that I had been fulfilling some kind of continuous habit or routine, and that unbreaking repetition can breed a

kind of amnesia. I sometimes pursued such avenues of activity, for the interpreted therapeutic benefits. It is helpful, sometimes, to forget – to become an automaton. Forgetfulness is laced with the divinity of motionless coasts, and the unwavering wings of birds in trees. I brought my hand to the now reconciled beard. I must have looked puzzled. Raymond said to me, “What is it?” with genuine concern. As though his behavior could not have explained the expression on my face.

I wanted to know how long I had been there.

“What time is it?” I said, mistakenly. I had meant to ask for the date, or for the day of the week. Though I had not an inclination of the numeration of a previous date or day.

“It’s around five.”

“I mean what year is it?” This question was even more peculiar to me than the last, since I had assumed that I had been here only for a number of days, or at the most weeks, by the progress of my beard, and I had again intended to ask for the date, or for the day of the week. Besides, I would not have allowed myself to ask such a ridiculous question no matter how far my uncertainty reached. To make the mistake once I had excused, now I became upset. I was rattled even more by Raymond’s answer.

“It is the year when my having this knob begins to make a difference.”

What the hell did he mean?

We went over to the window.

“Why don’t you open it?” asked Raymond.

What a strange way to put it, I thought. I hesitated. I made no motion and I do not know if I would have gone on to open the window or not. Raymond stepped in front of me and seized the drawstring. He stopped to look at me with strange wide eyes and then he pulled the string down, raising the blinds. The blinds went up, revealing to me something I had not expected to see. There was very little I was able to expect, having been unable to remember how I got to where I was, or what had been out the window when I arrived. But it was not what I had expected based on what I had seen out of other windows, as varied as those experiences have been.

What I saw was a blank sky. Of course, it is not unusual to see the sky out of a window, and at first I was soothed by the regularity of the view. What distinguished it was that it was the sky alone. There were not other windows or other buildings, there was no ground. The sky was above and below, so that I questioned if I

should call it the sky. However similar the walls of a room are to the ceiling, there is an obvious distinction, and a clear set of terms. This case was exceedingly different. The base of the building was visible, below me, and it seemed to stretch on forever, down into the depthless pit of blue. The sky was entirely clear and amazingly monochromatic. I could not see the sun or tell where it might be in the part of the sky beyond that which I could see. I looked up to find it and found that the building stretched on in that direction as well. Looking to either side of the window, I discovered the same condition. There was a part of me that wanted to open the window, to stick my head through and get a better look. To see more clearly the extension of the walls and what lay below me and in every direction. There was a part of me that did not want this at all.

"This is some kind of a trick with mirrors," I said.

"I don't think so," said Raymond, beginning to fiddle with the knob between his fingers. He made fine adjustments which only vaguely effected the expression on his face with slight degrees of inflammation and color, clarity and dull illumination and loss.

* * * * *

I awoke the next morning strapped to the bed. I think it was the next morning. Anyway, I have made the statement. My hands were at my sides, tied at the wrists. My feet were tied to the bed posts at the ankles. All were bound so that they had not more than an inch of mobility. I struggled pathetically.

I began to shout. I do not believe that I shouted any words but it is possible. I was not thinking of any words. Some may have been in me. I was not thinking of sounds of any sort but something escaped my lips and at a high volume. Raymond burst into the room.

"What is it? What is it?" he gushed forth with urgency.

I continued to shout. Raymond came over to me and moved his hands around above my body, as though he desired to help but was unsure how to do so.

"Untie," I spit out.

"What?"

"Untie me."

"What?"

"I'm tied to the bed."

"Yeah?"

"So untie me from the bed, Raymond," I managed.

Raymond looked pained. His hands moved over me in the same way as before. Then he stepped away from the bed and put his knuckle into his mouth. He sighed and took the knuckle out. I started to say something. Before I did, Raymond reached down and lifted up his shirt, revealing not a knob as I now expected from him, but a flat grey screen. The screen possessed the shine and the luster of high quality glass. With his other hand Raymond knocked on the screen. It made a kind of clunking sound. Hollow, clanging, amusing in timbre. In this fashion, he produced the sound for a while and I began to calm down. Mostly, I became resigned to the situation. I could see that it was no use with Raymond. His immediate behavior as well as that from the previous day had removed my sense of hope. It was a nice sound to listen to motionlessly. I reserved my complaints and lay in the bed. I assumed that I would lay there for some time. I assumed that I would eventually be released in some way. I assumed that it would happen in much the same way as I had come to be tied to the bed. Suddenly, and without my awareness. I tried to go to sleep. I am unsure as to my success. Sometimes it is hard to tell.

At one point in time, I saw that Raymond sat down in a chair in the room. I could not see what he was doing below the middle of his back or in front of him. I was prevented by the way he was positioned relative to the bed, and by the way I was unable to move my neck, which I discovered was bound much as my appendages were. The specifics of these bindings were indeterminable from my position. They did not cut into me in any way. They were not uncomfortable. In fact, I scarcely noticed the bindings unless I tried to move. I would not have noticed them at all had I never attempted to move from the bed. I heard Raymond fidgeting with something. Was he at a table? I could not see a table. What could he be working over?

Time passed.

"I'm hungry," I said aloud and in a surprisingly thunderous voice. It did not sound like my voice at all, and it seemed to come from all directions. That was not where my voice originated from as I had come to understand it. If one's ear is pressed to a bed, the sound of the voice becomes distorted. Precisely, it is heard within the bed. The other ear is always free of the bed. Neither of my ears were against the bed. I could not use this explanation. I tried anyway, and it lasted me for a while. What nonsense did I think up then?

Raymond got up from the chair and came over next to the bed. He had with him a jar wrapped in a paper towel. I could tell it was a

jar by the rim that was exposed above the top of the paper. What I have meant to say is that it was a glass jar. It was obviously a jar of some kind without seeing any of it, from the shape the paper towel was conformed around. From the rim I could see that it was made of glass. Raymond dipped his fingers into the jar and drew them out. They were coated with a thin paste. It was the liquid made earlier in the blender. Raymond moved it towards me on the ends of his fingers.

"Where did you get that?" I said hastily, though I had mentally accounted for the source already.

"From inside this jar," Raymond said with a gaping smile, leaning over me, his fingers inches from my face. I opened my mouth and allowed him to put his fingers inside. I thought about biting them off of his hand. The concoction was tastier than I had imagined it would be when I saw it. It was a putrid grey-orange color. Having eaten, I fell asleep. I know this absolutely. Possibly I am mistaken.

* * * * *

We hung from ropes outside the window. The ropes were tied somewhere inside the window, anchored. They were looped around our waists. We each had a rope. The ropes went to separate points through the window. It looked like they did. I could not remember tying the ropes or going out the window with them or for what purpose we would do such a thing.

"How long are these ropes?" I asked.

"Let's find out," said Raymond. His answer struck me. The lengths were unknown to me because I could not remember the ropes from before, from a time inside the apartment. Hadn't Raymond seen them? Wouldn't he know how long they were? Maybe they were my ropes. It was possible that I had gotten Raymond out here without his really having had a good look at them. Maybe Raymond did not remember either. What of the things I knew did Raymond know? Did Raymond know more than I did? I could tell nothing for sure. Based on the content of his answer, it was possible that he did know how long the ropes were, in a certain sense, but not as it related to the distance they allowed us to dangle out of the window, or not with any precision.

I began to repel, hesitantly. The ropes seemed very long. Mine at least was long. Raymond did not move from his position two feet below the ledge of the window. At first I thought that he was scared. His fear seemed ridiculous to me, since there was only the sky and the wall, and it really made no difference where you were in relation to the two. There

was still the same wall below you, or so it appeared, and the same sky around you. Of course, a longer length of rope could be seen reaching to the window as one descended, and the window itself became farther away. Maybe that was what frightened Raymond, becoming far away from the window, and escaping from the domain of his apartment. If that were the case, it would make sense for him to be scared, or at least more than it would for me. It was his apartment. I say this declaratively. Though we know the uncertainty of my situation. Do we?

Raymond was not scared at all, I soon discovered. Once I had moved thirty or forty feet from the window, in my estimation, which took me some ten or twelve drops, he repelled the distance in one push-off. I realized that he had waited so as to show off his skill to me. I was more than a little bit impressed. I was unable to go more than five feet at a time, and that at my boldest, and here he could go thirty, and did so heedlessly. Timidly, I asked him to show me his technique. He began to laugh.

“All you do is laugh, you idiot,” I said, stricken.

Raymond reached down and slipped a hand under his shirt, keeping one on the rope. He began to fiddle with his knob.

“That won’t do you any good,” I shouted.

“What do you know about it?” he hollered carelessly.

His eyes darted and so did his head. He looked to the sky above and behind him.

“See, what are you doing? You look ridiculous.”

Raymond continued lolling his head. Then he laughed his same laugh and repelled another thirty feet. And then another, and another. Soon I could barely see him. He became a shrinking speck on the wall below me. I tried my best to catch up, but it was hopeless, going five feet at a time. I shuffled sideways along the wall. I made it over to his rope. I took it in my hand and I began to shake it, lightly, and then with mounting violence. I heard Raymond’s laughter reaching up from somewhere below me. I stopped and I waited. He did not stop laughing. Then his laughter seemed to be coming from above me. I giggled at the strangeness of this impression, assuming that it was false, or that it was an echo, however implausible an echo might have been. The sound began to draw towards me, from above. I ignored it for a time and then I looked up. I saw something up there. Then I thought that I saw nothing. Then it was undeniable. There was Raymond, above me, descending on his rope in thirty foot bounds. I was petrified, so that the time of his descent passed

quickly, and it might have. Raymond was now beside me.

"Well look at that," he said, grinning. He looked down and then up. I followed the motion, confounded. Raymond shrugged his shoulders and continued his repel. I could see the rope descending for the second time, descending past itself, the two lengths next to each other, slightly jerking back and forth. Or the one length, wrapped around in some strange way so that it doubled over on itself. In what seemed like a short time, I looked up and saw Raymond above me again. I began to feel uneasy. I started to hyperventilate. I felt that I might faint. The sky around me seemed to move. The wall did as well. The distance between my face and the wall seemed to grow to an unimaginably large proportion, and then to shirk so that the two were touching, practically. When Raymond was at my level again I said, "Would you stop doing that. You're making me nervous." I looked at the rope, having come around for the second time, so that there were three lengths of it together on the wall. I looked away. I felt that I had to do so. I tried to climb up. I tried feebly. I found that I could not move.

"Raymond," I bleated.

"What?"

"Would you mind climbing up and back around and then through the window? Please? Could you please do that for me?" I was practically begging, and weeping. My voice was trembling. I didn't care how pathetic I sounded. Whatever would make the rope go back, I thought, would eliminate the feelings that were growing horribly inside me, and squeezing my guts against their casings.

"What do you mean around?" asked Raymond in a whimsical tone of voice. The asshole knew what I meant. He meant to torment me.

"Please Raymond. Please."

Sorely, Raymond walked up the wall to the window. To my horror, he went straight through it, without having gone around.

"No Raymond you have to go around. Raymond. Please Raymond. Please. Raymond. . . ," I shouted up towards the window. I continued to shout. I would not have ever stopped but Raymond returned to the window and poked his head out. His face was totally blank. I looked up at him. Then his hands came out with a knife and began to saw through the rope. Having been cut through, the rope fell. I was relieved. Until I saw that, having fallen, the rope then came down from above me, so that the three lengths would forever stream by the wall. Looking at them, it seemed that they were simultaneously moving away and that the distance was growing. More accurately, it seemed that they were moving towards me, but that as they did so everything else grew gigantically, and

did so equal to the rope's rate of motion, so that though the ropes moved towards me they were farther away, increasingly. I screamed and closed my eyes. After several minutes of moaning with my eyes closed and groping at the wall with my fingers, I found the impetus to move. Mustering whatever strength and determination I had in me, I began to climb upwards. I reached the window and I fell through the open part onto the floor. I slipped the rope from around my waist. I crawled over to a corner of the room and I tucked my head down as far as I could and I stayed that way.

* * * * *

I recovered slowly, never completely. That is what I think will happen. It has not been a very long time. Only less than twelve hours, from what I can calculate. It has been an excruciatingly long time. Though the time slips away from me. This would seem a good thing, but in those cases that I realize it I am filled with fear. I recount the events to myself as I know them in a terrible whisper, hoping to lose my belief in them. I no longer hope to understand or to learn any more than I am burdened with already. Raymond has done his best to, "cheer me up," his own words. He showed me a globe that he keeps somewhere in the apartment, somewhere where I have not seen it ever before that I can remember. With the ocean all done in black, for some reason a tremendous comfort to me. I can guess at the reason easily. The ocean is usually uniform blue, like the sky, and to see it in black instead helps to eliminate it — and by association the other — from my mind, so that it is not felt expansive and wild on the other side of the window. I do not have to think about the brown stream of ropes. I cannot stand to think about it. I have allowed for Raymond to become a close friend, whereas before I did not like him very much at all. I did not hate him. I have allowed it because of my desperation. I don't know what I would do if I were to stop feeling this way, if the desperation were to leave me. I think that I would remain thankful to Raymond, and would continue to be friendly with him, at least for a time. In the long run it is impossible to predict, except coincidentally. It is likely that I would change my opinions and their justifications over and over again. I don't know what Raymond would do.

Raymond has brought out his blended liquid. He proposes that we eat, so that I might feel better. Food is a comfort, he says. Also that he is hungry, and that we last ate at the same time, and that I

should therefore be hungry as well, and should eat to abate my hunger and thereby soothe myself. An occupied stomach, the activity of digestion, is a source of contentment. It is something. It has been lost to my recollection when the last time we ate was. I cannot remember ever having seen Raymond eat. It is just as well. He comes over to me with his jar filled with ugly paste. The jar is without the towel. I can see that the contents are more than halfway down into the jar. Is this evidence that we have eaten quite a bit of the stuff, more than I remember? I can't remember ever having seen where the paste came to on the jar initially.

Dipping my fingers, I find that the sludge is quite cold. It must have been waiting in the refrigerator. I have not seen a refrigerator but I assume that there is one. How could there not be a refrigerator? Somehow, this is a comfort to me and I think about getting into the refrigerator myself, not to die but for a cold sleep within an enclosed space. Pushing the paste coating my fingers into my mouth, I find that it is unappetizing. Perhaps it has gone rancid. I think that I remember it being more tolerable at a previous time. I continue to eat anyway, so as not to offend Raymond. Is this a concern of mine? I continue for my own good. Then Raymond is dipping his fingers and cramming them into his own mouth. He seems to enjoy the paste. And why not? He made it himself. It is the texture that most repulses me. Like thick oatmeal and raw eggs together, like chunky molasses snot.

I think back on the blender fondly, happy to remember better times. Times that were at least better for myself though they did not seem so good at the time. How were they for Raymond? Happy to remember anything. Happy to know that there is such a thing as memory, and to know it undeniably. I might deny it. The lights seem to flicker in the apartment for an instant but I think that it may only be my imagination the way things become perfectly black for an instant or else I am going flawlessly blind. It is strange that I remember the blender, since I do not remember much else. With every moment, something is forgotten. What is learned? What is gained? Am I progressing towards anything at all? I feel as though I am moving away. Strange especially since it was not something that seemed to be making an impression on me at the time. It had seemed boring. What is more memorable than boredom? What is more sublime? It is likely that I am not remembering accurately. It is possible that I am imagining a memory for my own comfort. The sight of the blender might have sent my mind running, struggling for ground with its legs. I would not mind that so much, if I knew it with certainty. It is more of a bother as an unverifiable possibility. I start to ask Raymond, something, but the words come out in a jumble. He gives me a look of

puzzlement not unlike his usual look but I recognize the subtle difference. I stop to think it over but cannot think of how to explain the question, or even what I am trying to ask or what I was thinking about just a moment ago when I decided to ask. I dip my fingers again into the paste. I place them into my mouth. Thankfully, grateful for the simple occupation. Mulling it over with my teeth, I detect something crunchy in the thick liquid. Why have I not noticed before? I think I have been swallowing hastily. I cannot remember, but it would make sense on account of the distaste I have for the stuff. It is possible that it has been in the freezer, so that it has begun to crystallize, but not so long that it has frozen altogether. Perhaps the refrigerator is colder than it should be, or the freezer warmer. Perhaps there is some element of the paste that resists freezing. How many potential explanations must there be? I am sure there are several. Explanations must exist beyond those that have occurred to me. The multiplicity of it is something of a comfort to me.

What are these rooms?

The lamps in here are an amazing family..it is unbelievably soothing to observe their likenesses to one another...and their glow sunny orange delightful an ocean of light brining the small room preserving it like a pickled fish...the colors of these walls...the sky is so heavenly out the window such an abysmal inhuman blue void...A dead mackerel of a sky.

Motor Oil and Mascara

I don't know why glitter-ridden
City dwellers
Find themselves in glowing forests
Where hazy warm midnight skies never go dark;
Not because of neon and exhaust
But because of starlight and the nervous
First crush
Between a boy wood nymph and a heart tinged with
Motor oil and mascara.

Viktoriya Stolitenko

David Morck

Outside, where the clouds from the wine cup dismally bay over the moon, a girl was being adjusted by her bra, and she was cooing over it. She says it's the best thing ever: Not to me, but she's not the girl, not the girl, not that one. Nothing would be the same in a building where everything is the same. I am surrounded by the motel room. Diffused glare on the tile, and the television turned on, porn by default, but I just want background noise, not content. Wails and moans, moderately sarcastic, plugging away, mining for gold. I stole one of Hemingway's cats. Polydactyl and better at swagger, like she was, is. I can hold it in my gaze and it can swaddle me in its feline mannerisms. A waltz, a fire; I could disappear this cat now that it appears to prefer to polka. Six toed cats can't replace that little nubbin, that little white pill. Shapeless blob. The cat doesn't know what ectopic means. And the girl and her bra, and that glimpse of cleavage. Those acrid fumes, tingling brain, ethanol. Small worn hole in the industrial brown curtain. What madness to allow the world to look in. Cigarettes trying to join in the kiddy pool, overflowing, wanting love in the open sky, and around them discarded caskets I pulled them from. I want to take to a coma like this cat to a sunbeam. I want to fill the bathtub. High, high, right to the top. My hands are oars and I taunt them into movement. If I wake before I die, nail me down. This grunting, groaning, mewling, they're sure to find me. Sometimes you need to burn things to get what you want. Sometimes you miss the things you never knew you wanted.





How to Choose **Corn**

by Chris Egan

It begins at the market. One minute I'm looking at corn and the next, a large man with a small baby is asking me if we have to take this outside. I tell him I prefer it inside – it's cooler. He tells me that if my cart bumps his ass one more time I won't remember what cool feels like. I tell him I don't know what he means by that. After using a few choice words, he walks away and I go back to corn.

I go home and tell my wife about the sociopath at the market. She tells me it's called a grocery store. I repeat my story about the man, this time putting emphasis on the word "market". She walks away frustrated halfway through my story because she's under the impression that a market is a gathering of farmers, all trying to sell their pesticide ridden fruits and vegetables.

I am at a market with my mother. I'm sitting in the cart. She's explaining to me how to choose corn.

"You have to pull back the skin. If the hairs stick to the kernels, put it down. Also, look for large kernels, they will be sweeter – like heaven. But, never choose the largest cobs, they might be ripe in the middle, but the top and bottom will be awful."

Everything is always either heaven or awful with my mother. Even now, when I ask her how it's going, it's either heaven or it's awful. There's no medium – no middle path. Nevertheless, I can pick the best produce any market has to offer.

My wife is not my wife when we meet. She is in a protest-oriented parade and I'm against anything with a cause. I tell myself I'm there just so I can see just how pathetic and useless non-violent gatherings are. People only care when other people die, otherwise, protestors annoy everyone.

People only care when other people die, otherwise, protestors annoy everyone.

We mingle after she gets off of the "NO WAR" float, and I tell her how I feel about causes. She says I'm ridiculous – that everything has a cause. I tell her that in that case, I only disagree with pointless causes. We disregard our differences and I invite her over for coffee. I have no intention of any coffee actually entering the picture – I don't even own a coffee pot.

We get to my house and she asks what kind of coffee I drink. I tell her I hate coffee. She laughs, I lean in and kiss her cheek. She asks if I'm Jewish. Her last name is Fassberg. I tell her not to worry – I'm circumcised.

On my 11th birthday, my father introduces me to a stranger. He will be the one that will perform a *bris* – a circumcision. I'm still Jewish, but I call it quits after that. I tell my dad that I'm too old now – it would be like getting braces at 35. He responds with:

"Son – it will be fine. I think this is the best age to have it done – no man wants to wear a turtleneck in the summer. He'll just tug the tip, snip and you'll be a real Jew."

I ask my mother how she feels about the whole thing. She says it will be fine – which I assume is a level worse than awful. At least I'm comfortable with awful.

She catches me masturbating when I'm 14 and the first words out of her mouth are:

"Must be nice without all that extra baggage in your way."

My wife catches me masturbating on our honeymoon. She walks in, sees what I'm doing and tells me she's thinking about getting braces again. I advise against it – it would be like getting chicken pox when you're 20. She says she's 32 and asks me what I'm talking about. I swing my hips back and forth, which makes my penis shake its protruding head at her.

That night, we go to a luau. We eat roasted swine and sweet corn on the cob. I tell her whoever chose the corn doesn't know the first thing about ripened produce. She says she likes it.

After the luau, we shower together. She tells me I should shave. I tell her I just did and that my face is as smooth as an orange. She looks down and I get it. She tells me she hates it when pubes stick to the shaft – it's gross.

I'm at the market, looking at the corn. A much older man approaches me and takes instant notice of my wedding ring.


"How'd you like to have the best corn you ever tasted?" he asks.

My wife would call this man a farmer – but what does she know? I tell him he doesn't know who he's talking to. I could be a judge in a corn contest. He insists I come with him and try his corn. Eventually, I do.

We get to his house and I ask him what his favorite kind of corn is. He smiles at me and says he hates corn.

The River **Sutra**

Rich McGinis



he man parks his car in his driveway, goes into the house and lies on the bed next to his partner. She is reading a magazine. She asks him about his day, and he tells her. He is taking classes at the local university. He talks to her about how the young people there are all in love with their darkness. How they caress it, how it seduces them so completely that they seem forever lost, like children in some dark Gothic maze. He speaks to her about the evolutionary dead-end that they have made of storytelling. "After all," he says to her as he stares at the ceiling fan and she reads her magazine, "if nothing means anything, and anything can mean anything, and nothing matters, what is the point of writing anything?" "That's not right," she says to him, "that's not right at all." And they kiss each other good night, and the man gets up and goes back to his office on the other side of the house, because he has much to do while she sleeps.

So perhaps you will think that this story is about suicide, murder, or terminal illness. And perhaps for you it is. But perhaps it is about something more. Perhaps it is about something bigger. Perhaps a mind, in an attempt to remind itself, to prove to itself that it is not alone, to overcome its separation from all the other minds it sees but does not touch, attempts to communicate something to another mind. All this attempt may produce in the end is a knowing nod. Identification. Communication. The echo of an idea, perhaps. But that is enough.

The man checks his stocks and the news, eats his late dinner, looks at his computer and types for a time, goes back across the house, undresses and lies back down in bed next to his partner. He reads for a time - economic history, nothing interesting. He catches himself drifting away, so he turns off the light and the book falls to the floor. Soon, he dreams.

He vaguely begins to recognize, along the edges of his mind, that he is dreaming. Sometimes, when he realizes he is dreaming, he can awaken himself. But often he cannot and he awakes feeling somewhat sickened. "Why," he asks himself, "can these dreams never be anything pleasant?" The feelings aroused by his dreams often stay with him for a day or two, beckoning him to a mystery that he can never seem to completely unravel. Tonight he cannot awaken himself, try as he might. So he is trapped.

Over the years, he has asked many learned people – sages, psychiatrists, therapists – for help with his dreams. The closest he ever came to an answer was from an old grizzled veteran who lived in a trailer park, a World War II bomber pilot who had befriended him out of boredom. This other man, a sinewy-tough, desert-dried, blue-eyed old man had cocked his head to one side and made the observation that, "The mind just manufactures this shit. It's meaningless." The man embraced this rationalization. It eased his suffering for a time, but in his heart he knew there was more to it.

One dream that came back many times through the years was his dream of Niagara Falls. Now, it is important to know something of Niagara Falls and of this dreaming man to understand. But you will be left to ascertain its meaning for yourself. Do you remember the old parable of the Zen master silently pointing his finger at the moon? That's why.

In any event, as a boy, the man, whom his family called Buck, was sent to live with his grandparents in Niagara Falls. This was done because his father was alcoholic and his mother was having difficulties as a result. His grandmother was a nurse who worked in the obstetrics ward of the hospital in which he had been born. His grandfather had sold the supermarket that the family had run for many years. They owned the building that the market was in, and as was common in that region, lived in the large apartment above it. The building was across the street from the great Niagara River. The grandparents were concerned, what with having a six year old boy in their charge. So they would tell him stories about children who had drowned in the river. "The river is dangerous," they told him. "It looks calm, but it has a strong current. You must never go swimming in the river, and you must promise us that you will never go down to the waterfront by yourself." The boy nodded his head and promised, and they ate their roast beef and boiled potatoes and boiled green beans.

Now, I told you that you need to know something about the Niagara River to understand. Let me tell you what you need to know.

The Niagara River runs north along the border between New York and Canada. The other Great Lakes empty into Lake Erie, which empties into it. Where Lake Erie meets the river is the City of Buffalo. The City of Buffalo was once a mighty hub of industry, but is now a decrepit, rusted wasteland. The River flows through the suburbs of the city towards Niagara Falls, slightly less than halfway to Lake Ontario.

The Falls are approximately thirty-six hundred feet wide, and about one hundred and seventy-five feet high. Roughly six million cubic feet of water flows over them every minute of every day, and has done so for the last twelve thousand years, when the receding glaciers of the last ice age carved them out of the rock that is called the Niagara Escarpment. As you might expect, at the foot of the Falls there is a massive gorge. The river then widens again and calms as it passes into Lake Ontario. The east end of this inland freshwater sea then flows into the St. Lawrence River and joins the Atlantic Ocean. It takes approximately seven years for a drop of water that goes over the Falls to join the Ocean. What many people do not know is that twenty percent of the fresh water supply for the entire Earth passes over the falls.

The boy's grandparents, being good people, were concerned that he seemed anxious and frightened as a result of the experiences he had before coming to live with them. So they decided one day to take him on a trip to see the Falls. It was not far. They promised him ice cream and a souvenir, and drove Downtown, as they called it. Buck's eyes lit up and he became shyly quiet as they stood overlooking the American Falls. He wanted to leap over the fence, to join the Falls. This was not because he wanted to die. Quite the contrary. The Falls held some strange powerful attraction. They pulled him to them in some way that he could not understand. Such power – he had never seen anything like it. He wanted to be part of that power. He did not understand at his young age why he felt this way. It frightened him, that he should be pulled to the water this way. He thought that perhaps something was wrong with his mind. He would continue to feel this way for many years.

They walked along the gorge to the whirlpool, and stopped to look over the edge. Buck was completely fascinated, stepping on the lowest rung of the railing and pulling himself up so he could look down to the water that pulled at him so. "What would happen if I tried to swim in that?" he asked his Grandfather. "You'd get sucked under and drown. Happens to big men all the time," his Grandfather replied. "How come the Maid of the Mist doesn't get sucked in," Buck asked. The Maid of the Mist is a tourist boat that floats over the surface of the water and goes close to the falls so that people can feel the power of the water more closely. "Because boats float... But," his Grandfather said, holding Buck by the chin and looking into his eyes, "little boys don't. Don't you ever go down to the River alone. The Rapids will suck you away and you will die. It's not like the bathtub!" Buck looked up at him and knew that this was true. Grandfather was a rough man, had even killed another man once when he was in the Navy in World War I. But he never lied to Buck. He loved Buck, and Buck knew it.

Once when Buck was in the tub, his Grandfather had come in to shave. Buck looked at his tattoos and asked about them. On one burly shoulder was a tattoo of the U.S. Navy anchor. On the other was Christ on the Cross. "Do you like your tattoos, Grandfather?" Buck asked. "Goddamned things are the biggest mistake I ever made - I hate these damned things", his grandfather spat out as he shaved with his brass razor and his brush and mug. That made quite an impression on Buck. After all, his grandfather had laughed the night Buck vomited hot dog and root beer slop all over the hallway carpet while running to the toilet. Buck had expected a beating, but his grandparents never hit him (His grandfather had once lifted Buck by the ankles and banged his head on the floor until the money fell out of his pockets, but that had been funny and they had all laughed. "I'll teach you to brag about havin' money, young man!" he said to Buck, laughing

**So they would tell him stories about children
who had drowned in the river.**

so loud the walls of the house shook). So for Grandfather to blurt out bad words about his tattoos meant that they must be bad things indeed. He would also say bad things sometimes if he was frustrated. "Jesus, Mary and Joseph", he would bellow, or "God Damn It". Not 'Goddammit', but 'God Damn It'. He had a way of pronouncing the 'N' so that his tongue would rub against his teeth and the purple veins on his temples would bulge out. Buck's Grandmother would admonish him. "Frank, please stop that talk around your grandson," she would say, puckering her lips while she stirred the beans in the pot. After dinner, they would watch television for a time and then Buck would go to bed, to the captain's bunk in the sewing room, and he would read. Buck loved to read his grandfather's Outdoor Life magazines because they were full of adventures. After a while, he would turn off the light over his bed and fall asleep.

One night, shortly after they had made their trip to the Falls, Buck had a dream. Buck did not like to dream, because he would often have the same dream over and over again, but the emotions of these dreams would be as vivid each time he had the dream as they had been the first time. And his dreams were never happy. They were always unpleasant. This particular dream was one of a few he would have over and over again down through the years.

In his dream he is being sucked down the Rapids towards the Falls. You see, somehow, although we don't know how, as is often the case with dreams, he had been in a boat with another person, and the boat flipped over and sank. Now, trying as hard as he can, with all his might and all his will, he is being sucked down the River towards the Rapids, and he is being drawn, drawn down towards the Rapids - towards the Falls. And he is shouting to the other person, but they cannot find each other, and he is struggling, gasping for air, trying to get out of the River, but he cannot reach the sides. And he is screaming and choking on the water, and crying out, and people are running along the bank of the River as he is pulled under the Grand Island Bridge and down towards the Rapids that run to the Falls. Once when she had come to visit, his mother had warned him that if you got pulled past the bridge you were gone for sure. And suddenly it has become winter, and it is very cold. Ice has covered all the rocks, not the kind of ice

that you know, but ice that is hard as steel, clear and hard, hard slippery ice. So that every time Buck tries to get to his feet, the water knocks him down and he slips and stumbles and is dragged further down towards the Falls.

Finally, he begins to slide over the Falls. And he is scared because he knows that he will be sucked into the big whirlpool and die. He tries and tries, but each time he gets to his feet, he slips on the ice and stumbles again. People are cheering for him and pleading with him and trying to throw a line out to him, but they cannot reach him. He is terrified that he can see the Falls coming, and hears the roar of the water onto the rocks below and out into the gorge and down into the whirlpool. Finally, he tumbles into a chute and there is melt water and he is sliding down. But for some magical reason there are cables running down the sides, and he can see other people struggling, too. They aren't really people, but shadows, brown dark shadows. People bundled in heavy wool coats, perhaps, with big black rubber galoshes on, the kind with the metal buckles that fit on over their shoes. Then he realizes that maybe it's not what he thinks, this business of falling over the Falls. He grabs the cables, cables like when they stopped the Falls to fix it in nineteen-sixty-nine, he looked at that and was fascinated, fascinated – how could they do that? How could they stop the water? There were men walking along the top of the Falls, and there was no more great rush of water, just a meander here or there down the side of the cliff. And Buck stared and stared and stared. And then he slips and begins to fall again and the water runs down his neck and into his pants and he is falling and rolling, falling and rolling, falling. His feet are kicking against the ice-covered rocks. And there is spray and roaring and then he is in the water, sucked under, down and down, flailing and spinning and then spinning 'round and 'round in the whirlpool. He knows that now he will die. And he accepts it, although it makes him sad because there is so much more that he would like to do.

Just at that point, where things have turned gray and are about to fade to black, like a TV screen that has been turned off in a dark room, Buck wakes up. He knows he is still alive because he sees the window, and the streetlight outside shining in through the thin white curtains and the wavy old glass. He is still alive, and he is perfectly fine, tucked into the high captain's bed under nice linen sheets and a crisp wool blanket, in the sewing room that his Grand-

parents had set up for him, with the light over the bed and the magazine on the floor just as he had left it. And Buck, the boy, is frightened, terrified really, and confused, and doesn't understand what it could mean. Is it an omen? Is he bad in some way? Is God punishing him for something? He lays awake, sick in his stomach and sick in his head, woozy and questioning, until Grandmother gets up to make breakfast, singing a cheerful song to herself as she fries the eggs and makes the coffee and the toast. "Rise and shine Morning Glory, you're up early today," she says to him sweetly as he sits on the metal and vinyl chair next to the kitchen table staring up at her.

Now, Buck's grandparents had a cottage on Lake Ontario, the Great Lake that the Niagara River empties into. You see, in those days, a shopkeeper and a nurse could make enough money together to buy a house and a car, to save money for old age, and to help their daughter when she married badly by taking care of her oldest son for a year or two. They could do that and still live a decent life. It was not like today.

So they had a cottage on the Lake, as they said. They had deeded the cottage to their son, Buck's Uncle Ed, and he was making it into a house. But they would still go out there in the summertime. There, Buck could be free. He could swim and fish, and eat the raspberries that grew out by the shed behind the cottage. He could dig clay and make things from it, or walk along the cobblestone beach and collect bits of drift glass, or interesting pieces of wood that had been polished into strange shapes by the waves. Sometimes Grandfather would get the binoculars out and they would sit and take turns looking at the gigantic lake freighters, the huge ships that looked like snails on the rim of a glass when viewed with the naked eye, but were really giant ships that carried iron ore through the lake to the Ocean. And when they had corn on the cob for dinner, he could take the cobs over to the neighbor's farm and feed them to the pigs. Sometimes, his Grandparents would let him spend the night in a sleeping bag out on the lawn under the stars, and he could stare and stare and stare at the Milky Way going round and round while the waves lapped the shoreline. It was as close to Heaven, here on the shores of Lake Ontario, north and east of the Falls, as Buck could ever have hoped to get. He was never afflicted with dreams when he was out at the Lake.

The man opens his eyes and looks at the clock. He flips the covers off of himself with a grand waving gesture, and tosses his legs over the side of the bed. Sitting for a moment to clear his head, he marshals himself to meet another long day's march, a day of work and classes and stock markets and late dinner and reading. He pauses for a moment to consider his dream, this same waterfall dream he has had so many times. Only today, this time, after almost half a century of strolling around on this earth, he is not quite so sick, not in his head or in his stomach. He has lived long enough to have the glimmer of an idea about what this dream means. So, although it still makes him somewhat nauseous, it no longer frightens him with the intensity that it used to when he was a boy. "Here we go again," he mutters to himself, as he lurches to his feet and walks into the bathroom to turn on the shower, thinking of the Lake and how happy he will finally be when he gets to go there once more.



The Evolution of a Photo, Part 5
James Hanna

Jeffrey C. Alfier

Comfort's an old print dress – pink,
black and pomegranate. Threads
fraying slowly apart still beg her
to keep it around just one more year.

She won't deny she's got a cigarette
going in every ash tray in the house,
but refutes tall tales she's got a man
in every bar her band books a gig in.

Her husband hears ice cubes tinkling
as she idly stirs her gin. He obliges
with hesitant refills. Come nightfall,
spooning will be their slow dance in bed.

Upstairs, an only child waits on nothing
but solitude as he listens to ambient voices
downstairs. He whispers into an oscillating
fan, thinks the sound comes back as music.

Words for a Night Singer



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