



The Alembic

Providence College 2019

Providence College

The Alembic

alembic

noun | **alem·bic** | / əˈlembik/

an obsolete distilling apparatus. for our purposes, a figurative “distillation” of the collective talents of a literary community. just as an **alembic** distilled each season’s yield of grapes to produce fine wine, we also gather and distill the year’s yield of creativity, in hopes of producing a palatable artistic vinatge.

2019

The Alembic is published each spring by Providence College in Providence, Rhode Island. The two-year subscription rate in the United States is \$15.

Address all correspondence to: The Editors, *The Alembic*, Department of English, Providence College, Providence, RI 02918. Our reading period is from August 1 to January 15. Works can also be submitted online at our website www.alembic.providence.edu. Please include a brief biographical note with all submissions, as well as an e-mail address for contact purposes. Manuscripts cannot be returned.

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THE ALEMBIC Spring 2019

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What is memory, and what does it mean to remember?

This question seems like a pressing one. Memory and experience work in such strange ways. Once an event is experienced, do we copy it and store it away for remembering later, almost like taking a picture and putting it into an album or gently tucking a book into its right place on a shelf? If memory is like this then it would dictate how we lived, for then we would try to save our memories and store them to keep them safe.

In Medieval Romance they would write about how the first impression of the beloved left an imprint at the bottom of the very heart of the lover so that the beloved was not simply stored away but rather became a very part of the lover's innermost being. I like to think of memories in this way, even if it seems like a fanciful notion. Our memories then lodge in our hearts and our souls and impress themselves upon us so that they become a part of us. Consequently, our souls must look like dappled tapestries, pieced and woven together by different impressions, some conjuring rich joy, others deep sorrow, and still others burning anger.

This is also how I would have you read the collection of poems, stories, translations, and photographs contained within this issue. They form a rich tapestry of woven memories that detail experiences of family tensions, lover's squabbles, reflective moments in nature, and the pure joy of artistic creation. I hope that you can find at least one piece in this collection that touches your own memories and plucks a string that makes your own heart hum like so many of these works did for me.

Nicholas Ogrinc
Editor-in-Chief

Shawls of the Color Wheel

Cathryn Shea

Himalayan goats shed their winter coats,
three to eight ounces of fleece
teased from underbellies every spring,
fine down combed out.

Mulberry trees sprout tender leaves
where silkworms spin,
metamorphose into pupae
then emerge as moths
from soft cocoons.

Workers sort and simmer,
fluff and unwind
unbroken threads
a mile long.

In the mountains
of India and Nepal
weavers knead, dye,
entwine the goat hairs,

weave on a warp of silk
for strength and luster.

Two hundred hours
for one shawl, not counting

twisting and knotting fringe.

Department stores yawn
their doors open.

Shawls laze on shelves,
price tags red-inked Past Season.
New orders on hold,

prices drop.
Traders stop visiting
steep mountaintop villages.

Shawls of the color wheel,
plain and ornamented, persist
in tin-trimmed trunks.
Dowries ripen.

Thought Safe

Cathryn Shea

Keep bookmarks handy with maps of the world,
pieces of continents printed on them, places
you've studied and think you know
but are never sure of.

It's not what's printed on the bookmark that matters,
it's your ideas about the words the bookmark is keeping,
as if it were the world's thinnest safe
holding your thoughts

dry like powder, sprinkled into the card stock,
locked tightly until you return to where you were
before you checked your mail
or turned off the stove.

It's nice to be able to go back, where you left off
patiently waiting for you to continue
your journey through the pages
even if you are not reading

old fashioned print on paper. What would it mean
to really lose your place?

Remnants of Star Death

Cathryn Shea

Common element of betrothals and marriage
until death does its part, infernal diamonds
spewed from earth's innards,
borne in magma through kimberlite pipes,
dispersed in diasporas
over deltas and plains.

True or False:

Carbon atoms come from dead stars.

(Atoms in a diamond or a tree or me?)

Older than our solar system.

Here's great aunt's legendary
three carat, cushion-cut rock
set in Art Deco platinum, said to be
from her heavenly suitor.
Removed from her ossified finger,
the jewel eludes heirs.

So much carbon among us, a fine line between
graphite in pencils and big ice at pawn shop.
How many believe they're forever?

Visa Balaji Temple

Cathryn Shea

On the damp banks of Osman Sagar Lake, the visa temple. Devotees walk dizzying circles around the inner shrine, complete eleven pradakshina,

clockwise circumambulations, while they chant the name of the Vishnu incarnation,

Lord Balaji, entreat him to grant their wish: an overseas guest worker visa.

Advanced degree holders supplicate for an H-1B visa, a temporary work permit

and delivery to a job in the United States. Their hope to beat long odds against want.

Those who find in a few weeks their visa has been granted must show gratitude

by returning to the temple to walk one hundred and eight more laps around the shrine.

The workers arrive in waves, pleading voices hum as they walk in the midday sweat.

Some carry devotional puja items like cashews and ginger in hand-loomed bags, some wear hand-loomed clothes of indigo and ikat. Lord Balaji smiles on weavers.

For the lucky ones, years away from home await their answered prayers when they reach the distant country where they'll live and work, walk a new auspicious path, which will alter their family's future.

Will they go back from whence they came?

Will they attempt to stay?

To Kepler Spacecraft, Not a Man

Cathryn Shea

Stargazing robotic tetrapod, you limp through deep space
and through your gelid lens planets in the habitable zone
hint at Earth-like promise, prod our imaginations.

Sequestered in the void with your unintended cargo of earthly spore,
an infinitesimal galaxy hidden from our bare eye, your focus is flawed now.
Gyroscopic wheels of your telescope wobbly beyond repair.

What havoc might you unleash on the innocent amoebas and chaste crustaceans
of a not-too-cold, not-too-hot Goldilocks planet?

Or are we to think no piece of you would break off and fall to a virgin veld
while you remain looping intact forever,
eons after the last war has pocked our world?

(You keep sending us reports of what could be
the patter of little extra-terrestrial feet.)

You might have found an alter earth for us, a fresh nature
like a church tabernacle lit from within by magma,

where volcanoes erupt with diamonds
and fish are just learning to walk.

Perhaps you would have discovered another sentient hominid,
authors of an innocent mythology, architects of a lover's argot.

O Kepler, even with your wounds
do not disappoint us.

With Her

Megan Monte

I tiredly looked at Jennie’s “you’re gorgeous!!” and Matt’s “damnn girl.” Jennie’s adjectives never changed and Matt always wrote something stupidly objectifying like that. But I sat up a little straighter when I came to Emily’s “Ok Kendall Jenner.” That was unexpected. Genuine, creative comments were rare, and I found a warmth spreading through my chest.

My thumb politely tapped the heart beside each comment before scrolling up to the number of likes. 532. The warm feeling soured into a disappointed cool as the small-point Proxima Nova font stared back at me, a judge with a harsh verdict of my likeability.

“Sweetie. Eliza, dear, are you even listening to the conversation?”

Mom stated the question with her you’re-in-trouble voice, but its threat had dwindled from overuse. Annoyance pricked my stomach, and fighting an eye roll, I smirked into my front-facing camera and snapped the photo. “Bored. Someone hmu.” I typed the invitation in petite black letters, placing the text over the volcanic catastrophe that had invaded my chin.

“Eliza. Listen when your mother is talking to you.” The words boomed across the table in Dad’s deep bass, echoing with attempted authority. Anyone could appreciate the guise of patriarchal control. I set my phone on my lap, clasped my hands on the table, and smiled at my parents. More concerned with the medium-rare filet in front of him than my antics, Dad decided my response was sufficient and went back to shoveling meat in his mouth. Mom was another story. She always had been.

“Can’t you put your phone down for two seconds? This is family dinner.”

Experience had taught me defense was futile, but I was a poor excuse for a teenager if I didn’t try. “I was just responding to my followers.”

“And sending out a Snapchat story!” Luca announced with a grin, his pubescent eighth-grade status obvious with his cracking voice and desire to ruin my life. My gaze whipped to my pain-in-the-ass brother and promised death. When it returned to Mom, her eyebrows were raised. Her turquoise eyes were wide. And she’d dropped her steak-holding fork. Fantastic. I leaned back in my chair, bracing myself for the Category-Five storm of scorn.

“I’m sick of this. Your phone isn’t your life. Your commenters, your Snap-pic friends—”

“Snapchat, Mom,” Luca blurted on a hormone-driven squawk, but she didn’t miss a beat.

“They mean nothing. What matters right now is us, talking, being a family. Don’t let me see that phone again or I’m confiscating it.”

In rudely ironic timing, my phone buzzed against my thigh, and my fingers involuntarily twitched toward the screen.

“Don’t.” That one word, punctuated by the red of her cheeks and straight line of her mouth, held the promise of eternal technological banishment. My fingers froze on my case.

You see, Mom always had that way about her. One minute, she could smother you in love—the kind that felt like a warm blanket and smelled like fresh cotton laundry detergent—and the next, she’d demolish your attitude with a few words and a stone-cold face.

My last memory of her belongs to the latter category in front of a plate of medium-rare steak.

The girl, twenty and fresh out of an eight-hour shift at Macy’s, was texting when she turned down Dwyers Ave. and hit her. She was going so fast Mom didn’t feel anything.

Painless. Her death was painless. Dad’s words—the ones that sounded like Luca’s squeaking voice but because of tears, not puberty—ran on repeat in my head. There, in the suspended amber-stained wood, was a body that hadn’t felt pain. A body that’d smelled like fresh cotton laundry detergent. A body that’d reamed me out at the dinner table a few days ago. A body that was being dropped down, down, down until it hit the bottom of the ditch, because it was broken and was just a damn

body.

Painless, her death was painless.

A whining cry, high and choked, came from next to me, and I looked at Luca burying his face into Dad's black suit jacket. I twisted a little to see Aunt Mary's arms around Uncle Jackson, and behind them, family friends standing arm-to-arm like the feeling of a living person might chase away the chill of death-suffused cold. I didn't think it worked like that.

I slipped my hand into my purse and pulled out my phone, aiming the camera at the grey tombstone with the pretty black cursive and taking the picture. "I don't know what I will do without you."

Sent.

I looked back at Dad and Luca to find the roles had reversed. Dad, the banker with a head of cropped graying hair, the one who liked sixteen-ounce steaks still mooing, was leaning on Luca like his legs had broken, like if Luca moved he'd sink right down into the ditch with Mom.

Painless. Her death was painless.

My phone buzzed. It took a second to slide the response open: a black background, a yellow crying emoji, and text that said: "I'm so sorry for your loss. I'm here for you!"

I waited for the rush of...of something. Something different than the empty stomach and the empty chest and the her-death-was-painless and the thought of the body in the amber-colored wood at the bottom of the ditch.

But all I thought was how novel it was for Jennie to type something other than "you're gorgeous!!"

Blue eyes stared back at me. Navy with a few flecks of cerulean and a spattering of gold. They looked almost neon with the black eye-lashes around them—more neon than they usually did. Or maybe I just thought that because it'd been a week since I'd looked in the mirror. Everyone used to say I looked like Mom. But standing here, watching my reflection, I didn't see Mom like I thought I would. Her hair was dark

and her eyes were blue, but they didn't have cerulean and gold specks.

Maybe they did have cerulean and gold specks, and you never bothered to look. The thought cramped my stomach into tight knots, and I knew I wouldn't be eating breakfast. I got ready quickly after that, putting on a white T-shirt and ripped jeans, because that's what I'd always worn and there was no reason to wear my feelings. Only nuns could pull off black robes on a sunny day.

The familiar scent of dark roast coffee welcomed me to the kitchen where Dad was gripping a mug like a lifeline. He was still in his grey pajama pants and white sleeping shirt, looking like a rumpled, wrinkly chemo patient trying to stave off death for another year. He hadn't left the house in the past week, instead opening the door like a restaurant host to visitors every hour. Uncles, aunts, cousins, family friends we hadn't seen in years, bosses who felt guilty for overworking and underpaying my parents—everyone came. I never spoke with them, only watching them come and go from my window, but I knew they weren't the magic vitality pills they thought they'd be because Dad looked terrible. But he'd packed me lunch.

"Thanks." I grabbed the paper bag and threw it in my shoulder bag, just like I had every other morning of junior year. Except my lunch was usually in a flowered lunchbox. When I swallowed, it felt like I was stuffing a tennis ball down my throat.

"You're welcome," Dad said, resting the mug on the countertop. Tired grey eyes settled on me, silently asking me to wait. "Are you sure you're ready to go to school? We haven't really talked about how you're doing."

"There's nothing to talk about Dad. I'm fine. I'm going to school now. Thanks for lunch."

The human body is a contradictory traitor. It convinces you its aim is survival, telling your instincts when to fight or take flight, storing glucose for starvation scenarios, patching itself back together with an army of cells—but it's all a bunch of crap, because if its sole purpose was survival, it wouldn't have let precious water leak out of my eyes as I drove to school because I had a paper bag from Dad instead of a lunchbox from Mom.

I hadn't planned on it, but I pulled the car into the back corner of the parking lot. Something about student bodies chatting and laughing around their cars left a sour taste in my mouth. The clock told me I was early, so I shut the engine off, unbuckled my seatbelt, and pulled my phone off the aux cord.

Five notifications were displayed on the screen. Three from Facebook, two from Instagram. I opened Instagram and was met with the grainy image of a black-haired blue-eyed woman, lying on a white bed in a light green hospital gown, smiling at the human bundle in her arms like she'd found gold. Dad had taken the picture sixteen years ago. And now it got 800 likes and 173 comments. The most I'd ever received.

I scrolled through the commenters, hitting the obligatory heart beside each message. About half of them expressed the compulsory apology for "my loss," and the remainder assured me they were "here to support me." Nearly all were names I recognized from class rosters and hallways, but they were just names. Names attached to accounts. And all those names—all those apologists and supporters—were waiting for me around their cars so they could just say the same thing to me I was reading. That thought had my thumb pausing over a heart. And then my thumb was shaking, quivering above the touchscreen. The shaking travelled to my other fingers and then my whole hand, and before I could stop it the shaking consumed my entire body, until I was seizing in the front seat of my car knowing I couldn't click anymore goddamn hearts and couldn't walk in the building and see all those sympathetic commenters because my stomach was rolling and I would vomit if I did.

It took me four tries for my trembling fingers to get the key back into the ignition and hear the sputtering growl of the engine.

Small purple flowers timidly poked through the gravel, and I carefully dodged them as I stepped out of the car. The groomed dirt path was just by my parking space, framed by rows of baby's breath and vibrant green sprouts. I stared at it for a moment, not really sure what to do. Then my legs were carrying me toward it like they belonged to some other brain.

Honeybees flew lazy paths between the delicate sprouts as I walked down the path, their buzzing wings the only noise disrupting

the unsettling quiet of silenced bodies. One of them landed on my hand, its translucent wings stilling as its fuzzy yellow stomach tickled my skin. Careful to avoid sudden movement, I slipped my phone from my pocket with my free hand, and zoomed in the camera until the bee's thick stripes and pollen-dusted body were magnified on the screen. I snapped the photo, and my breath caught. Displayed on my screen in twelve-megapixel glory was the ironic living beauty of the graveyard. "And what should your caption be?" I asked the honeybee, still resting on my hand.

The bee never got to answer because my next step brought my foot down farther than it'd anticipated, and momentum sent my body forward. Instinct shoved my hands in front of me, and my palms hit the dirt hard, the impact sending sharp pricks of pain up to my shoulders. I breathed in deep, choking on a cloud of dry dirt and the feeling of rock buried in my left palm. My right hand didn't hurt, but adrenaline shot through my veins when I realized it'd been saved by my phone. I pulled my foot out of the hole that'd captured it and stood, peeling my hands from the ground with lead heavy in my stomach. Angry red scratches and splotches of dirt marred my left palm, but my other hand brought pathetic tears to my eyes. The face of the phone was mutilated. Shattered. Unsalvageable. Gone.

Anger—a dark, boiling wave of emotion—rose inside me like a tsunami and I wanted to scream. I wanted to scream so loudly that every damn corpse rolled over three times so that maybe, just maybe, they'd tell their maker to give me a break. But I didn't scream, because I saw the grey tombstone with pretty black cursive words out of the corner of my eye, and I knew the body beneath it would raise its eyebrows and stare up at me with wide turquoise eyes if I yelled in a graveyard. Taking a deep, unsteady breath, I veered from the dirt path and walked over soft grass to reach the tombstone.

It was easy to see where the hole had been dug, the new grass marked by stubby, yellowish lengths that looked pathetically sad against the soft lawn around it. Still, I choose the new earth over the old, sinking down before the tombstone until my legs were tucked beneath me. Away from the bees, a haunting silence consumed the graves, an oppressive reminder that I was completely, utterly alone. The only thing alive in a sea of dead.

I stared at the name carved into the grey limestone—Eliana Marie Jackson—and felt this itch inside me. An overwhelming urge to reach out and touch the cursive. Slowly, my phone slipped from grasp, and like it was pulled by a magnet, my finger came up to the letters and began to trace the sloping swirls of my mother's name. When I finished, something made me do it again, and with each gentle the stroke the itch faded, and I felt the ache in my shoulders as they slowly fell, and the sweet release of my eyebrows relaxing, and the silence around me seeping into my head. I closed my eyes so I could bask in that calm, that blessed peace, and it didn't make sense but I thought I smelled cotton laundry detergent.

There is no feeling like this.

I was sitting ten feet above Mom, but I felt like I was touching her, like we were as close as when she hugged me. For the first time in a long time, I wasn't holding tears down in my throat because there weren't any, and my insides weren't empty but full of something. Something warm and cozy and...and beautiful.

I opened my mouth, but no sound came out, because I was with Mom and I guess nothing needed to be said. So I closed it, and I kept tracing those letters again and again like an addict until I remembered that Dad might wonder where I am.*

* Fiction Runner-up of Poetry and Fiction Contest

St. Martin-in-the-Fields

Rebecca Ethridge

Have you ever heard a cricket sing, like really sing? I have once: after evensong during a concert about the sea and memory. It sat there

next to me on the pew, an insect rubbing its legs together in warm-up ritual. The instrumentalists twanged at their notes,

plucked awkward strings, but the cricket held key. I wished it silent. I shushed it with a wave of my hand.

The cricket paused, rolled big eyes up at me—the whole circle of fifths in a look—and flicked its back legs to slide closer.

Barred by the side and the wandering eyes of the audience, I could not move away. The music began.

The cricket chirruped—a chorus of one overcoming the order of the symphony, a green clef belting out. It became the chirps.

When I focused on the violin solo,
the cricket's volume rose.

When I focused on the piano,
the cricket's pitch rose.

That cricket bellowed, echoed through the rests
and intermission, through the sneezing, crying,
leaving of the audience.

After its finale, the cricket bowed
into itself, tucked legs back in, and blinked
once in approval of the sounds it made.

I heard the cricket sing
and I envied its voice.

Tender Headed

Kincaid McLaren

Connection between a mother and a daughter. A sister and a sister. A girl friend and a girl friend. A connection that grows from the root up with unforeseen naps and tangles, breakage and split ends. A connection that stimulates my growth just like the Jamaican black castor oil I caressed through your scalp last night. I grew up not knowing that the worst pain I'd bear is the pain of my mother running that thin comb through my nappy hair. From the coils to the shrinkage my tender head rendered baby Afros, two strand twist, silk press, and occasionally braids. When your fingers lathered through my scalp to get every bit of dandruff on wash day. When your fingers lathered through my hair to moisturize and maintain the possibility of my tender head hair growing past my shoulders. I think of my hair as my mother's foundation. My hair consist of the pain, joy, happiness, & confusion my mom bared. You never know the mood you caught her in when it was time to do my hair. You never knew if she was going to tend to my hair with love and care or a hard heart and sadness. When the process was delicate and careful I knew I'd end up with moisturized hair and an oiled scalp with a touch of hair spray to complete the look. When the process was irritable and rushed I knew I'd end up with an unsettling style. The foundation of my mother was built into my hair because her child was in her image. Her child's hair reflected the natural being of a black child. Her child's hair displayed how she was feeling and how she wanted her daughter to be seen. The connection between a mother and daughter fixed into wash day determined the knit or the divide implemented in the future. Wash day between a mother and daughter could easily mean therapy, church, school, or gossip. As years progress I'm wondering why wash days ended between my mom and I. I'm wondering when I stop being tender headed and capable of taking on the emotions of everyone who placed their fingers in my hair. When did my mother decide wash days were going to end between us. Connection between a mother and a daughter. A sister and a sister. A girl friend and a girl friend. A connection that grows from the root up with unforeseen naps and tangles, breakage and split ends. A connection that intertwines like my box braids. A connection that weaves like my sew in. A connection that relaxes like my silk press.

A voluminous connection that sprouts like my Afro. That connection we made when you washed my hair and styled it is the connection I wish to continue and never think we are too old to stop. I want to be able to openly discuss why I chose to sit in my room than go out. I want to be able to openly discuss why church wasn't going to work this Sunday. I want to openly discuss why the man in my bed makes me feel whole. I want to be able to openly discuss topics once our wash days are over.*

* 2nd Place Prose Poetry Winner of Poetry and Fiction Contest

Paper Trail

Paul Ilechko

There are pages piles of paper dusty and
fluttering that curl and yellow with age that
disintegrate like a life like a set of lives

each life described in transactional measure day
by day and dollar by dollar

white light shines through a south facing window
picking out the motes of paper dust from the
disintegration of these documents from the
disintegration of these lives

how many pages does it take to define a life?

two lives once bound as one now separated

pages collected pages discarded paper turned
to dust the debris of life the detritus of living
the paper trail of dereliction stained and
yellowing

the acid rain of tears the acid tongue of words
remembered from across forgetful years

white light dims and fades
the sun drops lower in a winter sky the paper
turns from white to gray as color voids itself in
darkness

the book once written is now destroyed

The Club

David Press

When I was twelve, my brother Mike got it into his head to break into the Snowden Club Hotel. What can I say? He liked Alice in Chains, skateboarding, and some light B and E.

The abandoned hotel looked like some giant force-fed it a two-day-old burrito, and developed a wretched case of heartburn. It was an arsonist who torched the place after the Deveraux family bought the abandoned grounds in 1992. The rumor about the arsonist was it was a pissed former-Club board member who wanted to make some cash on the insurance before the sale was complete.

I was an inside kid. In July 1993, I was obsessed with the movie *Under Siege*. I watched this movie two-hundred and three times in three months, averaging 2.2 viewings a day.

In Mike's room, down the hall, Eddie Vedder's voice went dead with a scrape of Mike's record player. Mike would ruin twelve records that summer, because of his poor maintenance skills.

He's in my room a split second later. "Whatcha doin'?" He nudges me. He flips down his sunglasses. Even at thirteen, Mike's lack of enunciation is an attempt at trying to be cool—it was always annoying.

"Watching *Under Siege*..." I roll my eyes up at him.

My brother, as he often loves doing, smacks the back of my head. "Shocking. What are you actually planning to do with your day?"

He lifts me up by my armpits. I'm too small to do anything other than elbow him in the gut, which he laughs off like a buffoon. He smiles his huge, dimpled grin at me. "Again: What are you actually doing with your day?"

The movie's knife fight between Seagal and Tommy Lee Jones wipes my brain clean and I forget that my brother is talking to me. When is my golf lesson? Today? Tomorrow? Mom will notify me. I squint my eyes and shrug my shoulders, smiling out of the left corner of my mouth in Little Brother Code for: Not doing a whole lot of anything.

“That’s what I thought.”

He walks out.

I follow him downstairs to the garage where our parents have parked Speedy, the barely-usable red Volvo. I lift my bike off the car. Mom is always screaming at me about this, but there is no other place to put it in our cluttered one-car garage so she can get over it.

My brother pulls his long-board from behind the nook next to the door that opens to the front yard and the driveway. Somehow our father can sense—like the whiskers on his bushy eyebrows twitch—when we place one foot on his flawless yard that he nurtures like a two-month-old baby. Mike doesn’t care and frequently walks all over it with little punishment.

“Where are we going, Mike?”

“Wait and find out.”

He sets off at a run, jumps on his board. Our driveway connects us to a highway that leads us either up the hill towards the town or down to the ski mountain. There is nowhere else to go except for the golf course across and up the road, but the only people who go there are over seventy-years-old. Or have a dog. Every kind of dumbass driver sees this road as an opportunity to fly down the hill at fifty-five miles per hour and see how their car handles mountain roads. It’s like they’re practicing for their run on a mountain. Mom doesn’t want us on this road for that reason, instead she’d rather we go through the neighbor’s backyard. It’s a more direct route to go out from our driveway and walk the gutter that ends at the top of the hill that connects to Beaver Creek Road. There’s a motel at the top of the hill that always has vacancies, but somehow still manages to stay in business. The worst of this road is our house resides on the crest of a hill and it’s quite a walk to get up to the top.

Snowden is a mountain town—if you’re not into hiking hills just to get into town then you should move to Ohio.

At the top of the hill, Mike gets on his board and turns onto Beaver Creek. I try to coax my legs into getting my ten-speed’s gears to start moving, but it just clicks and clacks with rust and effort.

We ride down Beaver Creek for a little bit, turn left onto Algon-

quin—a private road. This is my favorite road: it's so decrepit from being secluded and off the town's paths that the Snowden Department of Transportation doesn't even bother to fix the pot holes. We dart around the pot holes and bumps using them as jumps or pretending they're land mines.

Mike knows this road so well he sails. He carves through the road's obstacles as if gravity is his fishing rod, tugging on it to let him clear the natural moguls, cutting asphalt.

It's a typical summer afternoon: a gentle breeze sends a fresh pine smell which oxidizes our skin, bones. We make the clearing at the end of Algonquin, the Club's grounds emerge from the trees as if they're a natural part of the forest. Abandoned condos and ranches that used to be a part of the property lay like scattered dominoes. Bulldozers and lifts and hacksaws lay deserted in the parking lot of the big hotel which features five stories of graffiti with broken and overgrown infrastructure. Three figures kick and throw rocks at the abandoned building, linger by the fence that surrounds the parking lot.

"You brought your brother?" Mike's friend Jackass looks at me like I'm a nuisance, his tongue ring dangling out. I'm not sure why he's called Jackass, his real name is Lee Soldier, but he's been Mike's friend for as long as I can remember. Last year, Lee got his saliva wrangler run through with his cousin Stefan in Canada. He removes the bar every time he goes home so his dad doesn't beat him.

"Not cool, Mike." Lilith Soldier shakes her head and pulls a cancer-causer out of her brother's shirt pocket. She impersonates the X-Man Rogue's hairstyle, but instead of the white skunk streak, Lilith has a bottle red streak to contrast with her natural jet black color.

Our neighbor Frankie leans on Lilith's shoulder and takes the cigarette out of her hand, smiles at me: "What's going on, John-boy?"

I kick gravel. "Oh nothing."

Frankie likes me. She comes over to play chess with me and drink Mike's supply of Jolt.

"You want to see something cool?" she asks.

"Sure."

Frankie points at the south corner of the fence. "You see

that fence?” There’s chipped asphalt, a hole dug underneath it. “Do you think you can slide under it and hold it up for us bigger kids to fit through?”

Her mother is a teacher so she speaks in a non-patronizing voice. Still, I’m not sure whether I should do it.

She knows this. “Do you want to learn to dance, John?”

I like that she doesn’t use slang— “want to” instead of “wanna.”

“What do you mean?”

“We’re going for a dance lesson, but we need your help.”

Mike crouches and looks me in the eye. “Remember those rocks we used to play Hide and Go Seek at the beach?”

He points down the street towards Lake Clair and the sidewalk that circles it. About a half mile from where we’re standing is the Club’s Beach, where we are all members. It’s the last operation of the Club, and is partially-owned by the town. There’s a rocky outcropping behind the bathrooms that we played behind. It’s our Batcave. One time, a rock fell on Jackass’s pinky toe and took a chunk off it. Every time I see him I still hear his screams and his father leaning over him, back-shaking, finger pointing, cursing him out in hushed tones.

“Yeah.”

“Well, it’s like that in there—it’s an abandoned hotel left for us to play in.”

He doesn’t have to do a lot of convincing—never has—he knows how to hit my Indiana Jones bone. I’m over to the hole in the fence, belly to the earth. The loose spokes of the fence tug at my shirt and the back ends of my jeans, but I’m through without too much hassle.

“Here.” My brother feeds me his belt through the fence’s link. This loosens his baggy jeans. I grip the belt holes hard to hold them up. I wrap the belt through two links and pull the buckle ends towards my chest, lifting the links up enough for people to slither under the fence.

Frankie, the tallest and skinniest of the group—close to five feet ten inches and thirteen-years-old—gets through easy. Lilith, a bull-

dog of a girl, has a harder time so I pull up the fence more.

When it's his turn, Lee Soldier sneaks up behind my brother and pulls down at the bottoms of Mike's jeans forcing them to drop so fast it exposes Mike's Fruit-of-the-Looms. Everybody but me laughs.

"Jackass!" my brother cries out, pushing him. Now I get why he calls him that. Lee laughs as he scrambles under the fence. The girls make a rusty carburetor sound good with their laughter. They smoke too much.

"He still wears Tightie Whities!" Lilith laughs, points.

My exhausted arms force me to let go of the fence.

"I got it." Jackass steps over and relieves me.

My brother drops to the floor, his wide shoulders make it difficult to shimmy under the gap. The embarrassment of Jackass's prank sits on Mike's back as he writhes under the fence like a bloated snake—keeping his pants up with one hand and digging his way through the hole to the other side. His friends still laugh at him.

Trees grow in the closed-off parking lot, leaves float in the empty outdoor pool. The pool's shell has been flayed by the six-month winters, leaving bronzed enamel and chipped tile scattered like skin flakes. The entrance to the hotel leans to the left, blocked off and held up by tree roots with untrimmed pine making natural scaffolding. Before the arsonist, the property had been abandoned for ten years, probably making the land a bargain for the Deveraux family.

My brother loops his belt back into his pants. He scales the branches over the entrance up to the second-floor terrace. Across from ramshackle balcony is a broken window. Lee follows my brother. Mike leans over the edge of the balcony to the window, Lee holds him so he doesn't fall into the tangled and tiled mess of the old pool twenty-feet below. From this stretched out position, Mike pulls out a plank of dry wall through the broken window for people to crawl across from the terrace. He has a gift for climbing trees, rocks, and whatever else—but you couldn't pay him to go on a roller coaster.

The girls giggle and climb up while making sounds that make us boys shake our heads at the lack of seriousness. Why can't they just do it and not make remarks? The structure holds itself together for me to go last.

Inside debris is everywhere. Broken glass, dangling insulation, charred weather-beaten wallpaper and not a single window left whole. None of the rooms have doors. It still smells like ash. I'm sure we're ingesting all sorts of things that we shouldn't be. Like Hepatitis or whooping cough. Do people still get these illnesses? Where is the adventure in these concerns?

Mike looks down at the chipped brown and white tile beneath his sneakers. "My first memory was in this place," he says, looking at me. "Dad was renting condos to tourists and Mom would put me in the stroller and take me through the shops in the mall that, I think, is right beneath us. She would always get me a cookie the size of a football...or a cookie that appeared to be the size of a football."

Lee leads us through the falling hallway. "I remember the fire," he whispers to no one directly, looking at the molding fleur-de-lis wallpaper. "We were living on the property. The servants' house was the first thing that went up, about a half mile down the street from us."

Lilith nods. "Mom panicked," she says, waving her arms over her head. "She reacted like a wacky-waving-inflatable-arm-flailing tube-person. She packed up the car that night and we moved back in with Dad."

"We could see the fire from our house," my brother pipes up, but he's full of it. "It looked like hundreds of people each lit a book of matches while sitting on top of the trees that line Algonquin."

We're at the end of the hall and Mike leans up against the exit door, tries to push it open with his shoulder. It doesn't budge even in a little bit. Lee steps over to help him with it.

"I don't know how you remember that," Lee grunts. "You guys've usually left town by September and the fire was in November, just after the Halloween snow."

"Shut up, Lee," Mike throws back. My brother likes to imagine what he would like a memory to look like then he treats it as truth. Lee and Mike grunt as they force the door open.

"Yeah, I don't know how you could have remembered it." Frankie catches up and starts pushing, forcing the door open even more.

Mike looks at his shoes. "We were here for Thanksgiving...I

just remember the light in the sky.”

“Like a UFO? Suuurrrre.”

Mike’s shoulders slump with disappointment.

They get the door open enough for our frames to slide through. Worn and bundled carpet and dry-wall fragments lean up against the steel door. The carpet creates a squishy, sloshy sound that feels like we’re stepping on a tongue. Mildew and ash aromas continue here, cracked and tagged walls show that we’re not the first people in here. Mike wonders out loud asking if there are squatters. This gets a laugh. The idea of homeless people living this far north and in such a cold climate is ridiculous. Who would want to live here other than us crazy mountain people?

Frankie pulls out a disposable camera and takes a photo of us descending the stairs. The cheap flash clicks like a turn signal.

The stairs let out at the lobby, whose ceilings are taller than the building’s dimensions should allow. The main hallway still has its staircase complete. Burned and mildew-covered photo frames featuring Club hotel members line the staircase.

“It’s through here,” Lilith says. She’s walking towards the sliding door next to the staircase.

This room is, I guess, a drawing room? Though rooms called “drawing rooms” never appear to have any kind of art supplies or other art-related apparatus. There are abandoned moldy couches everywhere. People a hundred years ago might have sat in here sipping brandy and smoking cigars.

We walk through this drawing room, or study, and up to a doorway at the farthest end of the room.

Through this door is a dark hallway with small picture windows that look in to pitch black rooms. I’m waiting for some animal to burst out, slam against the window snarling at me.

The door at the end of the hallway opens to a massive auditorium.

“Jeez Louise,” my brother exhales, blown over by the sight before him. “I never get tired of seeing this.”

The space is destructive beauty. The dance floor is a camel, humped in places. Decrepit charm explodes in the ceiling, which is open to the July sky, exposing pigeons and crows in the rafters. Mirrors and windows circle the perimeter of the dance hall offering funhouse reflections of us—we're elongated torsos and bobble heads. Though nobody is paying attention to any of this, our eyes lock on to what sits on center stage:

A gold-rimmed, chrome-plated, good-as-new 1950s juke box.

“How the—?” I ask the air. The jukebox looks like it should belong in the diner down by the pizza place slash bowling alley. Instead it's here, in a burned-out husk that was a Prohibition-era hotel.

“Who can say?” Lilith answers me, bounding up to the stage, looking at the thing. Frankie snaps a couple of photos from the theatre's entrance.

Lilith reaches around the back of the jukebox and finds a set of cables. “It was back here wasn't it?” she asks Lee. She follows the cords behind a curtain. “Got it!”

Lee follows his sister. There's a rusted metal sound, and Lee appears from behind the curtain pulling a small lawnmower engine. He grabs the choke and yanks. Nothing. He does it again, and gets nothing but bup-kiss. He throws his arm all the way back and the damn thing spits and spats with life.

The engine does a tottering dance on the stage. The lights in the jukebox turn on.

“Who would put this here and how do they keep it undamaged?” Frankie asks, taking a close-up photo of the box.

“Clearly, they want people to use it,” Mike is staring at it like it's about to shoot fireworks.

Lee pushes the buttons on the front case, and peers into the glass dome.

“Any Alice in Chains?” my brother asks.

“Give it a rest,” Frankie groans. My brother's face goes from excited to dejected, disappointed that his crush isn't into the same music.

Lee pushes three buttons. A red and green record slides into the

player.

Paul McCartney's voice cries out of the speakers that is so loud it shakes the birds off their perches in the rafters: "PAPER-BACK WRRIIITERRRR!"

The girls can't contain themselves and start dancing. The boys, being in that weird space between eighth and ninth grade, aren't sure what to do. Unlike them, I'm not one to care if I look like an idiot. I get up and start dancing.

Lee and my brother sit on the stage looking at us prance. Lee starts rolling something in his hands and lights it. An acrid, spring-like smell makes its way over to us.

They join us on the dance floor.

Long Lost Waltz No. 9

Jane Stuart

ever rising
like the sun—
each dream, each surrender—
playful meadows, rainy trees
the lost unicorn

the mythic moment
not remembered
or forgotten fills
with a cone of peaceful hours,
sunlit moments, golden hills

we are part
of a lost Eden
floating on through memory—
distant shadows, soft graffiti—
days of love and mystery

The Things We Carry

Micol Striuli

There is this image I have of my mother
as a young girl in springtime
walking through throes of soldiers
towards what she thought was
freedom.

Eleven-years-old, she left home
in April and she did not know
that the mere three months
of the New England summer's heat
would be the only time she felt reminded of Saigon.

In freedom land she searched for home
but in the months that passed,
she realized it was gone
as all she found was snow
and in the surrounding whiteness and cold,
she entered the first winter of her life.

She had arrived in America, unwelcomed
by the people that stripped her of home.

Eventually, I was born in wintertime,
years later when she was no longer
an orchid of a girl,

but a chôm chôm of a woman
and the war was waged anew.

As I grew older,
I thought I had become her enemy
when I was told to clean the dishes,
to practice piano,
to not talk back.

That's when I heard war in the anger of her voice,
and although I have not known war —
never smelt burning napalm in the sky
or walked through throes of soldiers —

I am my mother's daughter.

Mother —
this war has forsaken you,
this country that brought you
also stripped you of your home.

I forgive and grieve with you:
this war will wage no longer
and we will find peace in our home.*

* 1st Place Poetry Winner of Poetry and Fiction Contest

Motherland

Tyara Dabrio

The first memory I have of visiting my father's side of the family was in fourth grade.

He said we were going to his home.

I wore a bright pink dress with white flowers.

With each location he sung his childhood tunes.

He told my brother and I that when he was younger his job was to round up all the goats and bring them back home.

“Don't you dare chase that baby goat!”

my father screamed behind
swift tiny legs of curiosity.

Within seconds my brother darted back up the hill
followed by the heavy hoofs of fierce mama goat.

We laughed.

He cried.

In the second grade I cracked my mom's favorite vase.

Tears ran down my cheeks as I begged for forgiveness
and asked her why she didn't call the police on me.

She laughed.

She said Blood was thicker than water.

The first time I heard my father's voice crack
was when he called me on his Mother's birthday.
He called to thank her for life.
She didn't answer.

I wonder if the baby goat called his mom
or if she sensed his demise.
What if he didn't have a momma to
pacify his fears.
To protect his home.

The second memory I have of visiting my father's side of the family
was my sophomore year of high school.

My father said we were going to Nevis.
We wore all black.*

* Poetry Runner-up of Poetry and Fiction Contest

In which Dad Does the Voices of Jay Jameson, Glib Gilbey, and the Referee, Mimics the Sound of the Bell, and Plays the Role of The Crusher—and I Do a Turn as The Monkey

David Thoreen

Good evening, Ladies and Gentlemen, and welcome to the Exceptionally Grand Auditorium. We're minutes away from real excitement. You rarely see a mismatch like this anymore, what the scribblers call a classic, a battle of barnacles. Some of us have waited years for this.

If you're just tuning in, you've found yourself On the Ropes. I'm Jay Jameson, and with me in the booth is Glib Gilbey. We're here as your eyes and ears, so if you couldn't scrounge the scratch for tonight's ticket, tie yourself to a chair at home and stay tuned. We're broadcasting live from WTKO.

*You know, Jay, this truly is a fight of Biblical contortions,
a battle between Sprite and Might, Underdog and Overlord.*

It's the Prince of the Prance vs. the Sludge of the Bilge.

Who do you like, folks, the Scholar or the Brawler?

The mat's a 6' by 9' Serapi, gold and green. Here's the referee:

“In this corner, wearing white trunks and winter boots, with the frame of a breadstick and the flexibility of a rubber band, weighing in at 33 pounds and 16 ounces, subsisting on a diet of nothing but Cheerios and Cheetos, it's . . . the Monkey!”

Just listen to those cheers and whistles, folks! This fight might seem as one-sided as William Tell and the apple, but don't be deceived. Behind that cherubic smile is pure sinew. He's all giggles and guile. Listen to him play to the crowd! There's nothing like a champ in Pampers.

“And in this corner, wrapped in postprandial contentment and khakis, his head as hard as a cast-iron skillet, bristling like a half-starved Rhodesian Ridgeback, standing ten feet two inches tall and weighing in at 847 pounds, with a large soft spot for cookies, it's . . . the Crusher!”

Have you ever heard such animosity, Jay? This might be the loudest crowd on record. The Crusher lifts his fist—the jeers multiply, intensify. The Monkey looks electrified, fully charged and glowing. Well, Glib, we hear that before he hits the crib his trainer gives him a rub-a-dub-dub to the ears.

DING-DING.

And there's the bell. Round one is under way. The Monkey dashes from his corner of the rug into the medallion and slides—whoa!—between the Corinthian legs of the Crusher. Now the Monkey plants his feet behind the Crusher's knees. Wrestling is pressure points and fulcrums, folks, and the Monkey knows his physics. We're just under way and already the Crusher's teetering. The Monkey's squeezing the life out of his shin.

Can the Crusher break his hold? Listen to that crowd.

This is history, folks. It's early and too close to call.
We're here in Round One, as the Mombasan Assassin
takes on the Ex-Con from San Juan. The Monkey's squealing
in delight. His fans love him. He's the Kid from Madrid,
the Binky from Helsinki, the Cutie from Djibouti.

And look at him dull the skull of the Crusher. But what's
this? The Crusher gets a reversal! He lifts the Monkey
right off the carpet. He's got him in the Tilt-a-Whirl.
The Monkey loses a boot, the other boot. The Crusher
lays him out flat. The Monkey's pinned, but is there time?

DING-DING.

The Monkey's saved by the bell. The wrestlers repair
to their corners. The Monkey's trainer has him seated
on the bottom step, where he drinks from a sippy cup.
The fans are stamping their feet, chanting in the stands.
The Crusher's panting for breath, hands on his knees, and—

DING-DING.

Round Two. It's like Custer and Geronimo, toe to toe,
Circling, circling clockwise, now counter-so. The Crusher goes

to his knees and the Monkey dances in. He grips
a bicep, flips the Crusher on his nose, then leaps:
Giddyap!—on his back. The Crusher's a bronco,

the Monkey in a rodeo, and he'd better hold on tight.

Riding in style, Jay. Look, he's waving to his fans.

No wonder they call him the Caballero of Sarajevo.

The man from Cheyenne. He scissors the Crusher
as if he were nothing but paper—this is wrestling!

But wait. The Crusher fights back, with a low blow
from Idaho. The Glute from Beirut puts the Monkey in
the Dishwasher. He's using the Rinse Hold. Now
he's got him in the Lower Rack. The Monkey's arms
are flapping like spatulas. The Monkey is pinned, and—

DING-DING.

Saved by the bell. Saved by Glib and Jay. Saved by Dad.
By memory. Nostalgia, maybe. That bell? It tolls for me.
My turn. The Monkey cartwheels cornerwise and winks
at a girl in a black beret. The Crusher's hair's gone gray.
These last few rounds have—he's aged unmercifully.

*Time's a funny substance, Jay. One day you're carrying
your kid in from the car, the next you're giving him the keys.*

Too true, Glib. It happens as fast as trees lose their leaves.
One minute you're zipping a kid's jacket, the next he's drinking
coffee, putting on your overcoat. And then he's gone.

DING-DING

Round Three, and you're On the Ropes with Jay and Glib,
as the Hammer from the Slammer, a.k.a., the Groin from Des Moines,
Cole from Newcastle, goes toe to toe with the Sheik from Battle Creek.
The Monkey springs into the ring
and hits the Crusher with a Non-Linear Equation.

But that's just appetizer. Next, he rattles the Crusher's brainpan
with a snare drum, followed by a total loss collision.
The Crusher doubles over—never saw it coming.
He's cross-eyed, stumbling, can't defend himself.
And then the coup de grâce: this too-thin girl with ashen skin.

The Crusher swerves . . . and falls. For the second time tonight,
the Monkey's laid him flat. Repeat: the Crusher's out,
flattened by love and worry. The crowd goes wild. What a tale!
The referee drops to a knee. He's slapping the wool
and counting. "Eight. Nine. Ten!" The Monkey prevails.

The Crusher's still down, Jay, drifting, receding, slipping away.

The Monkey bows to the four corners of the compass, climbs
between the ropes and threads his way through the crowd.
It's been a long day. He'll stop at a diner for something to eat.
Tonight, he'll think of his father, his face covered up with a sheet.

Tomorrow, the subway to Midtown, riding the tide of commuters.
He'll come above ground and buy coffee, then disappear in the street.

Harmless Arsonist

Dawyn Henriquez

Of those already called back to the air I am the one that can't burn. When I was six, I set things aflame in the kitchen sink when mom wasn't home. The skins of napkins crinkled, as the soft scent of burnt cotton slithered into my nose. Packs of boxed matches came and went. I would waft the smell of matchheads like a chef their masterpieces. My G.I. Joes were in the fieriest wars, their faces oozing with black and blue puss, still smiling because they survived. When mom would get home, she'd wrinkle her forehead in disgust like she found curly black hairs on her toothbrush. Her hands were wooden paddles on my ass. Pinpricks of pain pulverized my dreams of pyrotechnic displays pulsing the pupils of concert goers around the world.

One day, after a spanking, I locked my room door and threw a lit candle across the room. The tapioca tinted curtains shined and sizzled like a firework on the 4th of July. Flames waved their arms at me in triumph, thanking me for their newfound freedom. The warmth waddled over towards me for a hug as sparks jumped from curtains to dressers and dressers to carpet. Mom knocked my door down and yanked my arm for years before she could force me away from the giggling gurgle of the rolling flames. But of those called back to the air that day, I lived because I cannot burn. *

* Prose Poetry Runner-up of Poetry and Fiction Contest

El Primer Beso

By Amado Nervo

Yo ya me despedía... y palpitante
cerca mi labio de tus labios rojos,
«H asta mañana» , susurraste;
yo te miré a los ojos un instante
y tú cerraste sin pensar los ojos
y te di el primer beso: alcé la frente
iluminado por mi dicha cierta.

Salí a la calle alborozadamente
mientras tu te asomabas a la puerta
mirándome encendida y sonriente.
Volví la cara en dulce arrobamiento,
y sin dejarte de mirar siquiera,
salté a un tranvía en raudo movimiento;
y me quedé mirándote un momento
y sonriendo con el alma entera,
y aún más te sonreí... Y en el tranvía
a un ansioso, sarcástico y curioso,
que nos miró a los dos con ironía,
le dije poniéndome dichoso:
«Perdóneme, Señor esta alegría.»

The First Kiss

Translated by Clara Howard

I'd already said goodbye, but my racing heart
brought my mouth near your red lips.

“Good night,” you murmured.

I met your eyes for an instant,
and you closed yours instinctively,
and we kissed.

(I lifted your face, brightened with my own joy.)

Elated, I went out
while you leaned against the door—
burning, beaming, watching.

I turned back to you in tender fascination,
and, keeping my gaze entirely, eternally, on you,
I jumped on a trolley moving quickly past.
My eyes lingered on you a moment longer
and my soul smiled, complete.

One last smile to you... And on the trolley
a restless, sarcastic, and inquisitive man
watched us with derision.

But I smiled wider, and begged of him:
“Forgive me sir, this joy.”

Unidad

By Amado Nervo

No, madre, no te olvido;
más apenas ayer ella se ha ido,
y es natural que mi dolor presente
cubra tu dulce imagen en mi mente,
con la imagen del otro bien perdido.

Ya juntas viviréis en mi memoria
como oriente y ocaso de mi historia
como principio y fin de mi sendero,
como nido y sepulcro de mi gloria;
¡pues contigo, nací: con ella, muero!

Ya viviréis las dos en mis amores
sin jamás separaros;
pues, como en un matiz hay dos colores
y en un tallo dos flores,
¡en una misma pena he de juntaros!

United

Translated by Clara Howard

No, I'm not forgetting you, Mother.
But it was only yesterday that I lost her,
so it's natural that my current pain
is burying your saintly image in my mind
with hers, which I've lost forever.

But now, you'll both live in my memory—
as the sunrise and set of my history,
as the start and finish of my path,
as the cradle and tomb of my glory.
With you, birth, but with her, death!

Now you'll both live, my two loves,
never divided.
Like how in one shade are two colors,
or on one stem two flowers:
so two heartaches are once united.

Este Libro

By Amado Nervo

Un rimador obscuro
que no proyecta sombra,
un poeta maduro
a quien ya nadie nombra,
hizo este libro, amada,
para vaciar en él
como turbia oleada
el ánfora colmada
de lágrimas y de hiel.

Humilde florilegio,
pobre ramo de rimas,
su solo privilegio
es que acaso lo animas
tú con tu santo soplo
de amor y de ternura
desde el astro en que estás.

¡Un dolor infinito
labró en él con su escoplo
tu divina escultura,
como en recio granito
para siempre jamás!

This Book

Translated by Clara Howard

An unknown poet
who casts no shadows,
a weathered poet
whom no one remembers,
wrote this book, darling,
to pour into it
an urn full of
crushing, murky waves
of tears and bitterness.

A modest anthology,
a pathetic pile of verses.
Its only credit lies
in the chance you might enliven
it with your cherished breaths
of love and tenderness
from the heavens where you rest.

An infinite sorrow
carved into this book,
as if in enduring marble,
with its own chisel
your divine memorial,
for forever and ever!

En Paz

By Amado Nervo

Artifex vitae, artifex sui.

Muy cerca de mi ocaso, yo te bendigo, Vida,
porque nunca me diste ni esperanza fallida
ni trabajos injustos ni pena inmerecida.

Porque veo al final de mi rudo camino
que yo fui el arquitecto de mi propio destino;
que si extraje las mieles o la hiel de las cosas
fue porque en ellas puse hiel o mieles sabrosas:
cuando planté rosales coseché siempre rosas.

...Cierto, a mis lozanías va a seguir el invierno;
¡más tú no me dijiste que mayo fuese eterno!
Hallé sin duda largas las noches de mis penas;
más no me prometiste tú sólo noches buenas,
y en cambio tuve algunas santamente serenas...

Amé, fui amado, el sol acarició mi faz.

¡Vida, nada me debes! ¡Vida, estamos en paz!

At Peace

Translated by Clara Howard

An artist's life is the artist's self.

So close to my sunset, I am grateful to you, Life,
because you never once sent me false hope,
nor work beyond my strength,
nor shame I never deserved.

Because I can see now, at the end of my rough path,
that I was the architect of my own destiny.

That should I draw honey or bile from my memories,
it's because I infused honey and bile in them initially.
(After all, whenever I planted rose bushes,
I always received roses.)

True, winters will follow my summers...
but you never said May would last forever!
And sure, my sufferings made the nights run long,
but you never promised me only clear skies,
so some nights I had were blessedly calm...

I loved. I was loved! The sun caressed my face.
Life, there's no debt to pay. Life, we are at peace!

Amable y Silencioso

By Amado Nervo

Amable y silencioso, ve por la vida, hijo.
Amable y silencioso como rayo de luna...
En tu faz, como flores inmateriales, deben
florecer las sonrisas.

Haz caridad a todos de esas sonrisas, hijo.
Un rostro siempre adusto, es un día nublado,
es un paisaje lleno de hosquedad, es un libro
en un idioma extranjero.

Amable y silencioso, ve por la vida, hijo.
Escucha cuanto quieran decirte, y tu sonrisa
sea elogio, respuesta, objeción, comentario,
advertencia y misterio...

Kindly and Silently

Translated by Clara Howard

Go through life kindly and silently, son.
Kindly and silently like the moon...
On your face, smiles should bloom
like celestial flowers.

Be generous with those smiles, son.
An ever-sullen face is a cloudy day,
a journey full of discourtesy,
a book in a language unknown.

Go through life kindly and silently, son.
Listen to all they want to say, and your smile
will be praise, answer, challenge, opinion,
warning, and mystery...

The Music Box

Brianna Brickner

A music box is opened by a pair of small, timid hands. The hands belong to that of a young girl. They carefully wind up the gilded box and a tiny ballerina starts to twirl in place, while the twinkling of music softly sings out. It's London, 1941, but, now, a new world is opened to her, detached from time itself.

As the music swells in her ears, her imagination runs wild. An image starts to unfold on the blank canvas of darkness where there should be shapes, colors, and movement.

And it begins.

A theatre. The lights start to dim. Movement among the thick, velvet curtains. It rises as the low hum of voices peters out. And a sole ballerina stands in a pool of white light, unmoored. A sheath of adorned taffeta is draped over her slender figure, the crest of her head crowned in a floral wreath with flecks of gold peppered in it. Titania.

From her place onstage, she leaps into the glade, and time suspends as she floats upwards into thin air, no strings attach her. The audience gapes and whispers roll through the crowd. She twirls three times, pendulous, then drifts down until her slippers hit the stage without making a sound. Her fairies emerge by twos, fluid and supple. They surround her as the music darkens, and Oberon and his fairies cascade from the wings of the stage.

In the girl's imagination, this particular ballet is extraordinary. The dancers can soar, fly, disappear, and reappear. They aren't grounded by gravity or defined by time.

The notes performed by the symphony intensify, and as the energy heightens, Oberon and Titania begin quarreling with the sharp movements of their bodies. It's a whirlwind of fouettés, pirouettes, and grand jetés. The fairies weave back and forth, in and out of Oberon and Titania. Then, suddenly, the little Indian prince appears, dressed in white cloth with golden trimmings. Oberon and Titania fight over him, and he is gently tossed from one side of the stage to the other.

The symphony picks up speed. It is raw, untouchable, enchanting, and it encircles the audience like a veil of thick smoke. The girl pictures herself sitting in the front row. She's fully entranced inside her daydream.

It's one she's had many times before, but now it's a rendition of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Sometimes it's a tragedy, *King Lear* or *Hamlet*. Other times it's the *Nutcracker* or *Swan Lake*. She's never seen a ballet performance. It's only a myth to her eyes, but she's heard enough stories from her mother to dream up these images. These particular ones belong to Lenore.

Lenore is blind.

She wasn't always enamored by this ailment, but it struck her so at age five. Her mother, despite her eccentric nature, had little explanation to why this occurred, besides the fact that Lenore had been born with poor sight to begin with. It happened slowly over the course of that year, then, one day she woke up, and saw reams of light and shadows, but nothing more.

Despite this, Lenore quickly began coping with her blindness. She learned Braille, how to walk from her bedroom to the kitchen without catching her bony hips on the corners. She learned to lace up her shoes, to brush her hair, and to fix her own toast with the sweet marmalade her mother homemade. She doesn't remember much from before, not even her own mother's face; overtime everyone's faces became lines, curves, and contours.

But there is a one night that Lenore vividly remembers. It occurred the winter before she went blind.

That night was dark and terribly blustery, sometime in mid-January. Lenore and her mother had just finished picking up fresh eggs and milk from the market around the corner from their apartment when the lithe body of a dancer caught her attention from across the byway. She was exiting the theatre, her white tutu poking out from under her wool coat. Her auburn hair pulled into a tight bun at the nape of her head with creamy feathers encircling it.

The dancer was beautiful.

Lenore watched intently as the ballerina quickly pattered along

the snow-covered lane on her tiptoes in the opposite direction. She had a bag slung over her shoulder and a round object slipped out, slowly, and then rolled behind her as she moved away. Lenore called out to the girl, which was rather unlike her. Lenore was quiet and tended to maintain a soft-spoken demeanor even among the worst of situations.

“Miss! Y-y-you dropped something.” Lenore’s thin arms hung limply by her side, the dancer didn’t hear her. She had rounded the corner and was long gone.

Lenore didn’t think twice about her next move. She swiftly made her way across the street (without looking both ways like her mother taught her) and ran to the foreign object. Her mother yelled after her, startled by the sudden action from her daughter, and then followed.

“Lenore, don’t you ever do that to me again. You scared me half to death.”

“I’m sorry, mama, but look.” Lenore held out a small, round music box in the palm of her hand, her eyes widening. The music box was encrusted with colors of gold, emerald, and ruby, and it sparkled even in the lack of light.

Her mother let her keep it, despite her panicked state, and she shuffled her home to the cramped apartment as the coldness crowded in around them. Six years later Lenore couldn’t see that same music box, but the image of it was permanently etched in her memory.

Times were changing, though, and real darkness had begun to spread over London. The Blitz. It came during the night and destroyed relentlessly.

Lenore and her mother didn’t have a cellar in the basement of their apartment, so when the sirens began, they took shelter in the underground stations: praying, hoping, wishing, it wasn’t their neighborhood this time around.

It’s been a while since an air-raid has occurred, and everyone is on edge.

Lenore is situated with her back pressed up against the cold metal of her bedframe, a scratchy wool blanket covers her feet. Her imagination still running rampant.

It's the beginning of Act III, and Puck has just turned Bottom's head into that of an ass. Titania has woken up and has fallen deeply in love with him. Bottom and Titania are on stage now, prancing, bending, and rising above it.

She starts to drift off, while still clutching the music box.

And, slowly her dream starts turning dark. Panic rings. Shrieks and cries are distilled from the audience. Or is that coming from her window outside? The orchestra has stopped playing, Bottom and Titania stand stagnate, alarm spreading across both faces. The theatre is engulfed in complete chaos. The curtains bridge together, darkness overruns the crowd despite a small parting where they didn't fully close. The sirens start to blare, getting louder, then fading, then gradually coming back around screaming, and fading once more. Over and over again. The city of London is under attack. She's restless. Is it this reality or the one she has created in her head?

She doesn't know.

The ballet, usually composed and unflappable, is now in complete disarray behind the curtains. The fairies are crying, and the dancer playing Hippolyta is trying to calm them with her soothing voice, while the director is trying to organize his dancers as the pandemonium ensues.

It isn't working.

Beyond the stage, the crowd is scrounging and clawing their way towards the exits. Most unsuccessfully, until eventually, light seeps into the theatre as one exit opens, and people fly down the staircases towards the lobby.

The conjured-up version of Lenore is left in the front row of the theatre, weeping. Tears spill over onto her pillow: reality. But a fairy notices her between the parted curtains, picks her up, and flies her onstage with the rest of the ballet. The huddle together; someone is whispering. Lenore's hands start to disappear. At first, it's her fingernails, then her fingers, her palms follow, and then it's her arms. She's being transported away from the mess of the world unfolding before her blind eyes.

Her mother (a widow now, although she doesn't know it at the

time) shakes to wake her: reality.

“Lenore. Lenore!” Her mother cries as Lenore bolts straight up in her bed. She must have fallen asleep while daydreaming about her Shakespeare ballet.

“It’s happening. Get up. We need to move.”

Her mother bustles her into a thick jacket and hurries her out the door of her bedroom. Lenore stumbles on the way out, tripping over her collection of dusted-over toys, wooden blocks, and dolls that her mother can’t bring herself to discard. She’s still grasping the music box tightly in her hand as they bump off walls in the hallway making their way to the kitchen. Her mother grabs, what Lenore can only assume, is her handbag and a couple of heavy blankets. The station’s cement walls are frosty at night and they never know how long they will be down there for.

As they make their way out the door and towards the warped staircase leading out of their apartment, Lenore starts to lose her grip on her music box. They take the stairs by two, as the sirens wail from high above them, and she is losing her balance all together now.

Time slows down around her. Her memories expand before her, suspended in the air. The first time she saw the theatre across the street with its bulbs lighting up the sign advertising *Sleeping Beauty: The Ballet*. The time she saw the mysterious ballerina coming out of the theatre and accidentally dropping the music box in the snow. Opening the box when she returned home and hearing the sweet music pour forth from the tiny machine. When she fully lost her sight and everything became foreign to her, expect that music box. It was the only thing that stayed stagnate during that difficult transition. It kept that same, soothing melody, and it still had the same miniature ballerina that spun around and around in the center.

Her mother’s demeanor even changed after she lost her sight. Her once offbeat nature and whimsical approach to parenting became strict and tart. She no longer told intricate stories from far away places. Her body, agile and graceful before, became rigid and her embraces felt stiff.

Time speeds up and the music box slips from Lenore’s fingertips, one finger at a time. It echoes down the staircase, as it thuds down-

wards from each floorboard to the next until she can no longer hear it, just a piercing ring is left sitting in her ears.

She screams for it to come back, but nobody listens. Her voice is then swallowed up by the dark chaos before her.

In the morning light, Lenore and her mother return to their neighborhood to find that their apartment, along with the rest of the area, had been turned to rubble and ash. And for the rest of the week, they, alongside their neighbors, pick through the pieces to find anything they can salvage.

Lenore's music box is not found among the remains, not then, and not ever. Despite this, Lenore did not cry or bathe in self-pity, but, instead, she focused on what her mother told her that morning, "We were the fortunate ones."*

* 2nd Place Fiction Winner of Poetry and Fiction Contest

Corporate Vision

Ed Ahern

I was corporate not once but twice,
pledging loyalty and dedication
as I should.

But more was required.

With the handshake swearing in

I became beholden to

intransigent practices

and firmly skewed outlooks.

My words self-filtered,

my principles in refuge,

the required lie unspoken

but ponderous.

Kairos^{*}

Ed Ahern

Life is most enjoyed outside of time,
in an acutely conscious present
that ignores looming goblins,
immersed in the immediate,
viewing without history,
idiots savant of just now,
experiencing with wonder
the satiated joy in events
like the formless, ever-recurring waters
of surf and rain and cloud,
disrobing preconceptions
for the pleasure of the moment.

* The ancient Greeks had two words for time: Khronos, the time of schedules and hours, and Kairos, the most apt or perfect time for an occurrence.

A Keening

David Sapp

Now a keening, piercing at every turn,
how did I arrive at this anguish?
My cry, now a predictable, animal shriek,
a poacher's snare in the forest, seeping
into every pore, a pungent, exotic oil,
my mouth a chasm, teeth gaping,
gulping at insufficient air,
my shoulders rattling, knees buckling
of their own accord, my wail
is not so tangible as for a death
(You lost your sister to heroin.
You lost your son to prison.
You lost your breasts to cancer.)
but a loss nonetheless, merely
a pervasive apprehension, a paralysis,
run-away obsession, so staggering
is the absurd, the random, irrational
decrees, disparaging bureaucracy.
Where is the solace, a little levity—
in my monkish cell, my hermit's retreat?
I've been apprised, this dread is now
routine and to be expected.

Dead Raccoon

David Sapp

Yesterday, along the ditch,
Indifferent to gawkers,
I was obviously a raccoon
Of leisure, languorously
Reclining on one side,
Napping and reflecting
On my dissipation,
My peculiar situation,
No need to catch or gather
Crawfish or berries just yet.
Yesterday, everything in place,
Eyes, stomach, liver,
I tried to recall the blur,
The color of the car with
The shiny chrome grill.
Today, I'm splayed
On my back, paws wide,
Too long in the sun,
Bloated, ready to pop,
But with so many new,
Crawling acquaintances,
Dear worms, dear bugs,
And the vultures are here
To play, tickling my belly.
They're much too much.

A Good Death

David Sapp

Samurai pursued, and I am convinced there must be
beauty in a good death, aesthetics not sentiment.
My beloved, I love you, but when it is time, when
all is dim and brittle—too obvious, bring that young
woman to me, that nurse pushing my beeping machines,
that perky waitress from our usual spot in Oberlin,
her fresh, blithe complexion so smooth, her eyes wide,
eager for what's next, the length and width of the world.
She'll be my recollection. (Of course, her smile, though
dazzling, shall fall short of yours, that first moment
in the church basement, or sitting in my wicker chair.)
She's a fragrance of fresh laundry, her hair of strawberries,
her flying wrists and fingers little, white moths flitting
over me, her bright, unburdened voice, a honeyed pulse
(and a little patronizing, assuming I'm deaf—I don't mind)
confident in her carriage, her movements not so jaded,
her girlish curves turning, breasts, belly, waist, hips
coming and going about the room like music. Actually,
I think you realize, I'd simply rather spare you
the bother of my departure.

Scar

David Sapp

Red, the plucky color, unequivocal,
another gash on my thumb, rash gymnosophist,
cut across the hinge, an uneven furrow.
Did I plan to sow radishes? Leaking
again, it never fails to stun. Blood eddies,
fluid memory of what swirls beneath skin, my
crimson lubrication. This slice crosses an older
version that never healed quite right—a jagged
locker split me after one-on-one basketball
with Rocky Canterbury. My capillaries,
molested, my pith running unabated,
Coach ignored my plea for a bandage. Quick!
Anubis, anoint me with iodine, a piece
of gauze, fashion a little mummy wrap, staunch
my fears of metal, rust, tetanus. Consequently,
after forty years, the scar summons Rocky—
I didn't like the kid, his oppressive charity.
If I possessed a scar for my mother's rage,
it would astonish, a disfigurement drawing
side-show gawkers. Step right up. See the boy with
the freakish childhood trauma. If I possessed a scar
(a tattoo instead?) for every moment, slight,
love, death, I could recall anything, point to it
on my hide. This recent scratch, won't leave a scar.
Already, amnesia sets in.

The Limb

David Sapp

I suppose the locust tree
garners some sympathy;
its limb, a mangled arm,
twisted and broken by a storm,
a brutish husband,
now two years past, leans
heavily upon, overwhelms
its neighbor, the wild cherry.
Such an imposition!

Is the limb gradually crushing
the cherry on one side,
an inadvertent torture,
or did the cherry always tilt
at that angle? I don't recall.
Shall I climb precariously,
with my ladder and saw,
risk a broken bone,
to set matters right?

The wild cherry remains green,
pliant, sap coursing its length.
Tiny cherries, more seed
than fruit, still arrive on time,
every summer its blue-black

violet just as tart, eliciting
wincings and puckers—bitter
feasts for birds, unfit for pies.

I suppose, a callous outlook,
eventually, the dead limb,
increasingly brittle and splintered,
will snap and crash on its own.
In time, I shall attend to that
inevitable aftermath. For now,
we'll witness the locust's plight.
The wild cherry and I are patient.

Assateague's Life

Cecelia Little

Human buildings embedded in my sands
are acne in my skin, invasive, and embarrassing.
I know I have the strength to get rid of them—
to destroy them—
but that would only scar my skin
and the acne would soon reappear.
The structures are unnatural, produced by architectural filth,
raising like pores hard to clean except with wind, rain, fire, and water.

The grasses are my long, full, delicate hair
pulled by rubber tires of heavy off-road vehicles.
Roads, like veins, are only visible under stress or strain.
If only I could relax and be still..
Without those wheels, the veins would disappear.
Even smaller tires and smaller vehicles bother, even pain me,
crawling over me like fleas,
biting, pinching, digging into my skin.

Calm, cool waters lap at my miles of shore
guiding the sands, protecting my inhabitants.
Whitetails, ospreys, and herons are all indigenous.
Spanish ponies arrived in 1750,
and Asian sikas, in 1923.
Both are foreign, but all who live with me now
are welcome, loved, and protected as children,
free to rest in my dun sands and swaying grasses.

My sands, my shore, my grasses and trees
all create a living museum of Mother Nature's glory.
I have adopted these herds: Mother Nature's children
are now mine as well.
I bear no shame from my grandiose display-
Mother Nature fashioned my life from water and rock,
raising and grooming me with Her elements.
So I vow to show infinite reverence for Her power.

I wish solitude, with my Mother and children, was my existence.
Yet these nasty human things keep appearing, crawling,
scratching, itching, pulling.
What have I done to be brutalized by these parasites?
Mother thought I would be protected by the guardian seas.
In anger I wield my gifts of wind, rain, fire, and water at my aggressors,
destroying the buildings, washing away the tires' tight grip:
but the violence hurts my children, and me as well.

The Father and my Mother blessed me with primordial power
that, like any child, I must learn to use.
The humans are invasive, yes,
they are known to invade, build up, suppress, and destroy.
My parents are unsure my aggressors will ever change.
But I know I must control my anger, as I have power to affect others:
my children- they are my prize, my world, and my life.
They cannot withstand my elements enraged, they are fragile—

So I must be gentle.*

* Poetry Runner-up of Poetry and Fiction Contest

An Interview with Jennifer Malone

Conducted by Elena Bibilos, Micol Striuli, and Samantha Oakley



Jennifer Malone is an author of middle grade and young adult fiction and has worked with publishers such as Simon & Schuster, HarperCollins, and Random House Dreamworks Animation. She has published ten books thus far and is in the process of publishing *The Art of the Swap* which was written as a collaboration with Kris Asselin. Some of her individual works include *At Your Service*

(2014), *Changes in Latitudes* (2017), and *Wanderlost* (2016). Prior to becoming an author, she had a wide variety of experience in the professional realm, including working as a freelance editor, working as a professor at Boston University, starting her own accessory company called Linaloos Designs, and serving as both Senior Publicist and Account Executive for Allied Advertising, a public relations firm.

Interviewers: In looking over your LinkedIn, I see that you have worked as a professor, early instructor, owner of Linaloos designs, Senior Publicist for Allied Advertising—what made you want to change career paths and become an author?

Jennifer Malone: I have to admit I somewhat “fell into” being an author. I never set out to write a book; rather, I had some free time one afternoon and my youngest had just started kindergarten and was learning to read. I thought it would be fun if I wrote her a short story we could take turns reading at bedtime. I looked up several hours later and realized it had gotten dark outside without my ever noticing. I have ADHD and something capturing my attention so completely for so long is a rare occurrence—that was the moment I was hooked! That being said, I have always loved to write and studied journalism before switching to advertising copywriting,

which is how I landed at an ad firm after graduation. I just never seriously considered writing fiction until that short story grew and grew into something novel-shaped. Honestly, “accidentally” writing a book was such a gift because I think I would have been put off by how daunting the task is had I set out to write a full novel from day one. But once I’d done it, it was far easier to convince myself I could do it again and again and again (I still need the pep talk with each new manuscript!).

I: How does working as an editor inform your work as an author?

JM: Working as an editor has been hugely helpful in my own writing because evaluating someone else’s work to figure out why my interest waned or grew in certain spots or what could be attributing to a vague dissatisfaction I’m feeling as a reader is something that most authors (myself included) find difficult to do with our own work. It’s hard to tell if I’m bored within a section of my manuscript because it’s lacking tension or if it’s because I’ve read over it so many darn times in tweaking it, or if it’s because I already know the answer to the mystery I’m incorporating. But when I’m evaluating someone else’s work and I identify an issue, so many times I will realize, “Oh hey, I did the same thing in my manuscript! I need to go in and fix that.” I think it’s also helpful in that I know my attitude when editing someone else’s work is always, “How can I help this author make this better?” which allows me to accept that my own editors are doing the same with their edits on my manuscripts, not being critical of me because my work is so very terrible! (So much of authoring involves constantly beating back the internal critic and the self-doubt.)

I: What inspires you to write novels? What is the general writing process for you as you come to craft a new story?

JM: Curiosity. My ideas generally come from news articles or stories I encounter out in the world that tickle at me until I stop and evaluate what it is I find so interesting about them. Sometimes it’s a subject I want to delve into deeper, sometimes it’s a concept that works well in an adult story that I think would be fun to attempt to manipulate for a younger audience. Sometimes the ideas come fully-formed and other times it’s just a scrap of something that I write on a slip of paper and maybe won’t look at again for months. Once I have the idea, I do a ton of research and “pre-writing”—I’m working on my 15th manuscript now and with each subsequent book the pre-writing stages get longer

and the drafting gets shorter, whereas it used to be that I dove headfirst into the writing part and winged it on plot and character development (which made for a very long revision process). Pre-writing can include basic research, but generally also involves journaling about my character's motivations and filing out extensive "interviews" with them to learn who they are and what makes them tick. It also can include creating an aesthetic board on Pinterest, compiling a playlist or choosing a particular scent of candle that I'll use when I sit down for a writing session to "trick" my brain into instantly re-entering the world of the story, and/or doing a chapter by chapter outline of the story. I use a program called Scrivener to organize all of this info in one place (I also use it to draft and revise the manuscript).

I: How different is your writing process when writing middle grade (defined as stories for 7-12 year olds) versus young adult (defined as intended for audiences 12 and up)? Would you say you enjoy writing either one more than the other?

JM: When writing for younger kids, the themes tend to center on learning to fit in, often with a group of friends or in a school environment; whereas the themes of young adult novels tend to focus more on learning to stand out. Middle grade is a time when kids' world expand from a sheltered home environment to include a school community and learning to navigate social groups. YA years are when teens dip their toes more into the world at large, and are navigating a bigger arena that might include even more independence from parents and thoughts of a future beyond their current circumstances. I find both equally fascinating to explore, to be honest. When I write middle grade, it's with more tenderness and I find I'm writing with a younger version of me in mind as the reader; when I write YA, the themes tend to align more closely with sophisticated issues I'm still trying to figure out as an adult: how do I define my individually? What does it all mean? What is the measure of a life well lived? Where do I fit in on this planet?

I: How much would you say your writing style changes when you write books for middle grade versus books for young adults? Do you like either style better?

JM: With middle grade, I have to pay particular attention to language and topics, to make sure they are PG enough for the marketplace and to make sure my characters act and sound authentically "tween." Of course I still am concerned about this authenticity with regards to teens, but there is a bit more leeway with language, adult themes, etc. in teen fic-

tion. Statistically, 85% of YA readers are actually adults over the age of 35 and teen fiction, as a result, has gotten increasingly mature, both in terms of theme and subject matter. I don't always agree with this trend, because I think it leaves actual teens out of the equation too much, but it's the reality of the current market.

I: Do you have a favorite book that you have written or published?

JM: This is a bit like asking a parent to name a favorite child :) That being said, I do have a soft spot in my heart for *Wanderlost*. It tracks so closely to what I experienced as a solo traveler out in the world on my own for the first time and the wide range of emotional states that travel entailed, and it also seems to be the one that resonates most with readers. I love that the reviews and notes I get refer to it being a "comfort read" or a "happy, fluffy read" for them. If I can add a little happiness to the world (even of the short-lived variety), I consider that a fairly decent accomplishment.

*I: I see that you wrote the book *Follow Your Art* (2016) to serve as a written companion to the Dreamworks movie *Trolls*. How did this come about? Did you approach Dreamworks or vice versa? How hard is it to write a companion piece as opposed to an original work of fiction?*

JM: In this instance, it was an editor at Random House who had read one of my earlier books and thought of me for the project. She was working with Dreamworks and had been charged with finding an author for it, so she reached out through my literary agent. How do you say no to an offer like that? In terms of how hard it was, I won't lie... it was a challenge. Not so much because I didn't feel ownership over the idea (I actually love the collaborative process of brainstorming story ideas with others) but more so because the script for the movie itself kept changing, right up until the end, so I was constantly tweaking (and even rewriting from scratch at points) to make sure my story stayed consistent with the canon of the *Trolls* world.

*I: Your newest book *The Art of the Swap* (Simon & Schuster, 2018) is a collaboration with Kris Asselin. What brought about the collaboration? What are your favorite parts of collaborating with other authors? Would you be willing to collaborate on a future novel?*

JM: Kris and I have been friends for a while and happened to be driving to a conference in New Jersey together, discussing our individual lists

of potential story ideas to pass time while we sat in traffic. When she mentioned she'd clipped out a magazine article about a museum caretaker who raised his daughter in the converted servant quarters of a Gilded Age mansion in Newport that was now a museum, I drooled over the concept and said, "If you ever need an eager cowriter on that book idea..." Instead of laughing, she immediately said, "Let's do it!" At that point I had already written two books with a co-author (*You're Invited* and *You're Invited Too*) and was writing and editing another book that was co-authored with SIX other authors, called *Best. Night. Ever.*) so I had a good idea of what the process entailed and what the pros and cons of the adventure would be. But, as I say above, I really do love the collaborative process- I liken it to what I imagine it would be like to work in a writer's room of a TV show—and I'd definitely be willing to do another co-authored project. (It's also great for accountability. I rarely mind disappointing myself when I miss a word count goal but I'm much more conscientious when I know someone else would be affected by my procrastinating!)

I: I see that your future book, The Arrival of Someday, is coming out in 2019. What can you tell readers about this upcoming book?

JM: This one is a departure for me in that my previous books have been very plot-driven, whereas this one is character-driven. It's also much darker subject matter—my main character learns she needs a liver transplant to survive the year and has to wrestle with how to evaluate whether her life has been a meaningful one, even if it might not be a long and happy one—although I hope it includes enough lightness and hope to feel like it still belongs in the same family as my previous YA novels. It's very introspective and deals with grand-scale concepts, which made for a lot of soul-searching of my own, but I really appreciate having had the experience of writing it and the places it made me go in my own head. Now here's hoping readers like it as well!

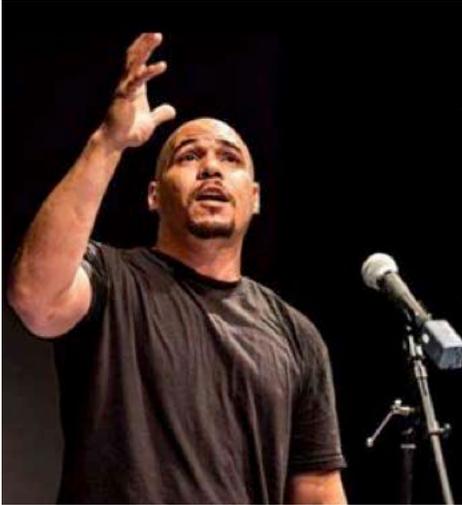
I: Any advice for students looking into the publishing industry, either as editors or authors?

JM: Read, read and read some more. I know that sounds trite but it's the best way to absorb writing craft by osmosis for authors and the best way to see what does and doesn't fly in the current publishing marketplace for prospective editors. When I contemplate writing something in a new genre or a new category, I try to read at least 100 books in that market

space to get a strong sense for the things that make that genre/category work and to learn the tropes or themes that would be met with resistance. Of course we all want to write to our passions versus to a commercial marketplace, but ultimately the project still has to sell, so it always helps to know what those unspoken rules are before we can nudge up against them! There are also some GREAT podcasts that delve into writing and publishing and would be great places for students to learn about the industry. Two that stand out, in my opinion, are “Literaticast” (hosted by literary agent Jennifer Laughran) and “88 Cups of Tea.”

An Interview with Thomas Tre G. Gilbert

Conducted by Eliana Lopez, Abbey McClellan, and Ian Axford



Originally from Camden, New Jersey, Thomas Tre G. Gilbert is a husband, father, poet, and military veteran. He currently has two published works, with the most recent one published on March 29, 2012 by Lulu Publishing, titled *For the Sake of Gods*. Gilbert identified his passion for words at a very young age and since then has used his experiences of loss, love, hope, and hate to build his legacy as a poet. The scope of his performances ranges from universities, grade

schools, and halfway houses across the nation. His success speaks for itself as he is the 2010 Loser Slam Grand Slam Champion, 2013 Nuyorican Grand Slam Champion, and has appeared on seasons 3 and 5 of *TV One's Verses & Flow* and *Russell Simmons All Def Poetry* on Youtube. The following interview was conducted over Skype and is transcribed here.

Interviewers: What started your journey as a writer? What inspires you to write?

Thomas Tre G. Gilbert: Long story short, in roughly about the sixth grade I had an uncle who was shot 5 times. During the time he was shot, I was living with my grandmother, and she was really depressed. I wrote this acrostic poem in the form of grandma: G is for your greatness, R is for, and all this stuff. It didn't change her entire mood but she smiled and kissed me. I saw the effect it had on her in that moment and out of that, I started writing things just from my past and writing funny stuff for people in school. I would write poems—you guys are college kids right—poems about smoking weed, poems for friends who had girlfriends and they did not know what to say. I would write love poems, and all different kinds of stuff. That's where it all kind of began for me.

I: The title of your book is For the Sake of Gods. Why did you pick that title and should readers assume it indicates polytheism?

T*FGG: I work at a car dealership and one day, writing for me has evolved into this process: if you don't feel it, if it's not in you or there is sometimes, I don't know if you guys write, but you get this inspiration that kind of pulls on you and it's like I have to write this, I have to write it down and there is no way to get past it if you don't write it then it keeps nagging you. I had this feeling and it was more so directed at police brutality and what was going on. There is a section of the book that takes up a major section called "Grand Jury." It started out to just be that, but as I began writing all these things out and looking over everything I had written leading up to that, I started to notice that it was more than the grand jury, that there were different parts. I do not know if you guys know but I was involved heavily in slam poetry. The reason why I got out of slam was that I felt like we were just doing it for the self-gratification for people liking and giving a score and assigning a point value to our emotional truth and that bothered me. So when the book starts out, it tells you how I got into writing. It's a poet's advice that I basically give myself and it basically says that if you are not doing this to help somebody, or in some way to have a sense of activism about you then you are doing it wrong, so that's why it goes to that. For the actual "Sake of Gods" is a play on words, it's for God's sake, but to understand that we too have the ability to, within the sections of book, be gods. Our families shape our views, our opinions, they give us life and they can kill us, more specifically the poet and the artist within ourselves, sometimes by ostracizing us. There is a line in the book that says "We are responsible for doing what the teacher cannot, for showing us the blemish of our humanity but the potential of our divinity." All of these things, juries, they sentence you, they are supposed to be the final line of justice in terms of judging right and wrong. These sections of the book are basically saying "Hey look for god's sake wake up."

I: You have a lot to say on police brutality and the Black Lives Matter movement in your poems and your daily life. Can you comment on how any of your personal experiences with that kind of injustice motivated you to write your book?

T*FGG: When I was in high school, me, my brother and two of our friends we were known to hang out with on occasion would ride around in Philadelphia, and there it was fine, the cops did not pull you over too

much, but four black kids in the car at night in Somerdale, New Jersey where my brother lived was a different story. They would pull us over and they would do things—like it was almost like we knew if all four of us got into the car we were getting pulled over. We were taking that risk because we were young, looking to have fun, or hungry and wanted Taco Bell. On this one occasion, we pulled up to a light where the Taco Bell was and we were waiting to take the turn. The cop had the green light and he shined his light—the light they have in their car—into our vehicle and then they sat there at the green light. We had the red light, and they were sitting at the green light and shining the light into our vehicle. We pulled into the Taco Bell through the light into the drive-thru and he pulled behind us and started flashing his lights. Now his excuse was that we had a tail light out but we saw them sit there. We saw them profile us. Another incident is from when I was in the military in Georgia and we were walking down the street. These guys were in a car and they called out, they called us the n-word. And then they pulled into the Post Exchange that was right there. Why would you do something like that and not expect us to turn around and address you? I don't know. When we turned around to address them, it erupted into a big brawl at the Post Exchange. Then the MPs got there. Mind you, in the military, we were told that the only color that would be seen would be green. I'm in the army. Most of us were black except one friend “Koch,” really cool dude from Las Vegas. We are all out there, scraping, we are brawling with these dudes who called us the n-word and when the MPs came they basically grabbed anybody who had some melanin and let the other guys went. These guys got back into their car and just go. We were all sitting on the curb and even Koch was standing there like “So why aren't you grabbing them?” They ended up letting us go too, but the fact that we were the ones who got held and detained to break up the fight! You see and experience these things where it's like “oh we are all equal” or “we're all equal until it comes down to...” or “well maybe, we're not really equal.”

I: In your book, there is a poem titled “Jazmine,” what inspired you to write this poem?

TTGG: Jazmine is my little cousin. She is actually my cousin's daughter. This cousin, the cousin that I speak of is more like a big brother to me and he asked, “Could you talk to Jasmine?”—because he doesn't really

have a way with words. He is a real hood dude. For him, it's like I'm going to beat this dude up!" because this is somebody who is breaking his daughter's heart. He just wants to beat the dude up and he was like "could you go speak to Jazmine." I go and talk to my little cousin and she is telling me he said all these things and she is wondering why he isn't following through on what he said. These guys are telling you things that they do not know themselves on top of this, a guy named Conceited had posted this thing on facebook where it said something in regard to "men can cheat and still love you just like we sin and still love God." When she re-posted that, that prompted the poem: why are you still dealing with this, this is what you really need. So that is how that poem came about.

I: There is a loose-leaf paper version of your poem "A Running List of Why Black Lives Matter" listeners received at your performance at the Nuyorican Poetry Cafe on July 7th, 2017. Are you planning or have you already officially published it anyway?

TTGG: That is something I have submitted to be published but no one will publish it as of right now. It's just these pressing feelings. In that poem, there is a list of names, and it's done for two reasons. The first is very obvious: when I get through the list of names and I say "because there are too many names to add to this list without making this poem sound like a marble wall war memorial." So the first reason is to remember the names. Secondly, to put this out there when, for instance, wherever Black Lives Matter shows up people always take their protests or marches as some sort of terrorist attack. That's not what they are there for. You're switching the narrative. It is supposed to bring awareness to the fact that black lives matter! I had this pressing feeling that this keeps happening. I believe that, like I said at the beginning of the book, if you are going to do this you can't be afraid to have a bullseye on your back. And so you have been given a voice, you've been given the ability to see these things and convey them with the emotion that will draw other people in, and with the passion that other people can feel for a purpose, use it. Whenever I get that press, whenever I feel that push to write and to write with that type of conviction that's what I am going to do and like I said I have tried to have it published, it just hasn't happened yet. I have recorded it and I did put it out on an album called *#Ambush* which is due to show up any day now on all streaming services.

I: You have been posting on SoundCloud for years now; how has that helped you connect to listeners?

TTGG: Originally, SoundCloud and Youtube, I did those just because somebody said, “You are so lowkey, you show up to the venue, do the poem and you pass out a CD or you sell your CD.” My very first book was *Thesis Statement* and I sold that for a while and so they said there is no other place where we can see you or hear from you and the world is changing and you need to change with it. As a result I started doing that as a way to just put the work out there. To be able to connect. And I don’t get a lot of comments. So I don’t know how it affects people. I did see this one video of this young man who actually did a cover of my poem “Seraphim,” and I was showing my wife and I was so hyped. I was like “look at this! He is doing my poem!!” The way it makes you feel to know that this isn’t all being done in vain is good. I’m not someone who is looking to always be paid for this. This is what I do: I would like to be paid, but if I can’t, then just put the work out there and if it helps somebody through SoundCloud, through Youtube, then I am fine with that. And that’s always been my thing. It’s an added bonus to get paid for it, and it’s an added bonus when people do comment and say “hey man this is like huge to me.” Like, y’all don’t even understand what life y’all are giving me right now. It’s always good to have people reaching back and saying “hey we feel you.”

I: We have to ask, are you planning on publishing another book, poetry or otherwise, in the near or distant future?

TTGG: As of right now, I’ve had another book on the back burner forever. It’s on my google drive and it’s called *Nobody’s Child*. It’s kind of like a memoir but not a memoir. All the names have been changed including mine, but it’s basically my childhood and how I grew up going from house to house and being around all these personalities. The stories are about my mom and my dad and grandparents. If I publish anything then it would be that. I think that is something that so many kids, who are growing up in single-parent homes could relate to. The mom is always out working trying to put food on the table, so you grow up with your imagination. The people whom you meet in the streets and your friends become your family. I think that would really connect to the audience I want to reach, and let them know that they are not alone. That is something I want to try to accomplish: I want whatever I write always to be relatable and to let people know that they are not in this thing by themselves.



Bioluminescence

Claire Rigaud



Fiordland
Claire Rigaud



Land of the Long White Cloud

Claire Rigaud



Emerald Forest

Claire Rigaud

Untitled IX
Nikki Silva



Untitled VI
Nikki Silva



Untitled XI

Nikki Silva



Sydney Harbour Bridge

Olivia D'Elia



Downtown Sydney

Olivia D'Elia



Watson's Bay, Sydney, Australia

Olivia D'Elia

An Interview with Jennifer Militello

Conducted by Corrie Traverse, Jessica Looney, and Madison Stevens



Jennifer Militello was born in New York City and raised in Rhode Island. She has previously taught at Brown University, the Rhode Island School of Design, and the University of Massachusetts Lowell. As of this year, she teaches in the MFA Program at New England College and lives in Goffstown, New Hampshire. She has written four books, and her poetry has been featured in a number of literary journals around the country, such as

American Poetry Review, *The Kenyon Review*, *The Paris Review*, *Ploughshares*, and *The New Republic*. She has also collected an impressive amount of awards, like the Barbara Bradley Award, the Ruskin Art Club Poetry Reward, the Betty Gabehart Prize, and a number of other grants and fellowships as well. Her most recent book, *A Camouflage of Specimens and Garments*, was a finalist for the Eric Hoffer Book award and the Sheila Margaret Motton Prize.

Interviewers: Where do you get your influence/inspiration to write? Are there other authors that you consider to be influential to your style of writing?

Jennifer Militello: I am influenced and inspired by so many things. Things I see. Things I read. Snippets of sound. Fears. The past and my own emotional life. I am influenced constantly, by poets writing today and by poets who wrote long ago. Emily Dickinson and Federico Garcia Lorca were two of the first substantial influences on me, and they helped me to decide what kind of poem I wanted to write. I am influenced by what I read and I am influenced by the world, by the reaction that what I encounter creates in me.

I: Is there any place specific that your inspiration for your poetry comes from? Do you draw off personal experiences or do you typically like to write from another perspective?

JM: I write more and more from my own perspective these days. My poems are laced through and rooted with my own romantic involvements, my troubled family life, my psychological states. Even my latest book, which was full of persona poems and thus written in many voices that were not my own, was driven by my own obsessions surrounding identity and death, feminism and inner struggle. I am baffled by being a person. By being finite and strange and awkward, the physical reality of existing within a limited body, and the emotional reality of being a person who has to deal with the gap between the physical self and the other, inner, self. The human condition is mainly a dilemma. This is what drives me to write.

I: Is any of your work influenced by your personal life? If so, which parts?

JM: Yes, though I often need some degree of distance to write something, I've only just started writing poems about my problematic relationship with my mother, and that's something that had a more powerful hold on me when I was young. I've written a lot about love and romantic catastrophes, so that's also an area where my actual life plays a role. I'm bad at love. It shows in my poems.

I: Did you always want to be a writer? What made you want to be a writer?

JM: When I was ten years old, I found a book by Emily Dickinson in the back room at my grandmother's apartment in Brooklyn while we were there for a family visit. I read that book aloud to myself from then on whenever I could sneak away during a trip to that apartment. I felt I could see myself in those poems; I felt recognized there. So that means I've been an odd person in some ways for a long, long time. From day one, no one, including myself, understood what I was doing or why. I had a deep drive, a need to write, that was based in a sense that the world was an intense experience for me, that being alive was a little overwhelming. Every aspect of our culture challenges my writing every day. Why would I do something that is meant to explore discomfort? Why do I feel things so deeply? That which I live for, my writing, my very life philosophy, is always going against the grain, and that grain is always there, pushing back, telling me I should have a normal job and a normal

life, telling me I am doing the wrong thing. So began my love of poetry. I started writing soon after, and so, yes, I suppose I've been a poet for most of my life.

I: When you write, what type of audience are you targeting? Or are you targeting anyone in particular at all?

JM: I am targeting a reader who is willing to abandon her need for a logical, literal grip on the narrative reality of the world. I want someone who can read with the instinct rather than the intellect. My poems are challenging. There's a certain need to let go of control and follow the leaps created by challenging, ambitious writing. My reader has to be willing to reimagine, to see slant. This is how I read when I read poems. I want the world to be reinvented, so that I can see it anew and have the excitement of a twist that I didn't expect. I like my poems full of surprises and images and passion, so it is my goal to also write poems that speak to the imagination in this way.

I: Do you feel your poetry appeals more to males or females? Why?

JM: I hope my poetry is free of gender, as I never read or wrote from a place of gender early on. I truly believed in the equality of the reader when I was young, and I believed in what Elizabeth Bishop said about keeping the writer's gender out of a poem. Now I understand that some pieces I write may capture the female perspective more than the male perspective, and I do sometimes write about female experience or oppression. That doesn't mean these pieces should appeal more to women if our world is truly about discovering perspective. I hope my work is universal enough at heart that it appeals to everyone. Because the issues of women are the issues of all of us, once we get past false cultural divisions.

I: How do you find balance between writing for your personal enjoyment and teaching at New England College? Do you find one overshadows the other?

JM: Writing is my profession. My passion for writing began when I was very young and it has shaped my entire life. Teaching is my way of sharing this gift. I love talking about poems that have moved me, and sharing my trade secrets with younger writers dedicated to pushing their own writing further. Being a writer takes commitment, maybe above all else. I've given my life to it, and teaching is just another angle of that. New England College is an incredible community, and that community allows

me to be a writer among writers. It feeds my writing in that way, and that is a blessing. To some extent, a writer does have to protect her space and time from her job or outside life, but this is one job that enriches the writing, and that expects and allows for that needed time and space.

I: Do you have a personal favorite literary piece that you have written? If yes, which one and what makes it special to you?

JM: I always love best what is most new. I also always feel most sure about those pieces that come out most whole. So I am partial to the pieces that seem like they were working themselves into existence in secret someplace and came out ready for the world. But also because my writing is always evolving, the newest work seems the most accomplished to me at any given time. This is of course my own bias. I also have favorites, poems that I would put in a volume of selected poems at some point in the future, but I do outgrow my work and my sense of accomplishment fairly quickly. I think it was Agnes Martin who pointed out that an artist has to both love and hate herself and her work, and I most certainly have obtained that complex balance.

I: What is your favorite emotional standpoint to write from? A place of romance, hurt, pain, friendship, forgiveness?

JM: My favorite place to write from is pain. If you feel enough, everything is pain. Life is pain, fear is pain. Poems make me feel less alone because they are one of the few cultural forces remaining that admit this and struggle with it openly. We live in a culture that shuns discomfort and enforces a superficial version of happiness that everyone can supposedly obtain. And yet we can't have a meaningful life without struggle. Life is struggle. So it is those conflicts that dominate my life that also drive my need for poetry. I am always seeking answers. I am always wondering at what we are, and why. This is the place that ignites poems in me.

I: Is there a specific genre/topic that you find to be easiest to write about?

JM: I tend to think of my main obsession as fear of death, though when I look at the ruling subject of my work, I am forced to realize that I also struggle with identity. As a woman, as a person who feels pulled in many different directions, as someone who has not fit into the world that easily. I am not sure who I am or who I am supposed to be, or where those two planes meet. That seems to lie under much of what I do on the page.

I: We saw that the other day you had a reading at Bucknell University. What are

some poems that you typically enjoy reading out loud and sharing with a college level audience?

JM: My favorite poems on the page and favorite poems to read to audiences often differ dramatically for me. I like to read not only poems that have an audible music to them when I read them aloud, but also ones that have some interesting details or an interesting story behind them. Poems that have used details such as the fact that spies used to carry cyanide pills in the arms of their eyeglasses. Poems based on torture devices or statues with iron nails hammered into their shoulders. Retellings of fairy tales. Reshapings of myths. I think it's important for the talking between a poem to provide context but also to be interesting, so I often choose poems that allow for that aspect of a reading to be developed. I know how hard it is to sit and listen attentively, and my poems tend to be fairly dense, so it's important to me to feel that the reading is broken up by these between moments.

I: Your poem "Oxymoronic love" is very captivating. Is there a story behind this poem? Or was this poem crafted off the desire to use oxymorons?

JM: "Oxymoronic Love" started with the idea that love is a cousin to hate or can lead to a kind of passion or intensity that acts like hatred. Then I just looked at the many oxymoronic aspects of passionate love and the poem grew from there. It's a concept I may have borrowed from British poet Tim Liardet, and it's part of a series about the complexities of romantic love and its extremes.

I: One of your more recent poems is "Job's comfort," you seem to be writing from the point of view of an idea / something besides yourself. What was your inspiration for writing this poem? Where did it come from?

JM: "Job's Comfort" is about the impact of a mother on a household, how rage can shape a landscape, how siblings who love one another can still use each other as scapegoats in an emotionally difficult scenario. It's about how love for others can take a back seat to preservation of the self. It's about a mother who came home angry every day because of the failure of her own love, and how that shaped the dynamic of an entire family.

I: Can you share any themes of your poetry that you are currently working on?

JM: I just completed a manuscript titled *The Pact* about the complexities and extremities of familial and romantic love. How we sometimes love

people with such extremity that it resembles other, less positive emotions. How all extreme emotion on some level takes the same shape. Now I am writing about the oppressions of women and the coming age of the machine. These themes overlap as well, as people are dehumanized and machines are humanized and, in the face of these evolutions and their increasing speed, the lines we rely on blur.

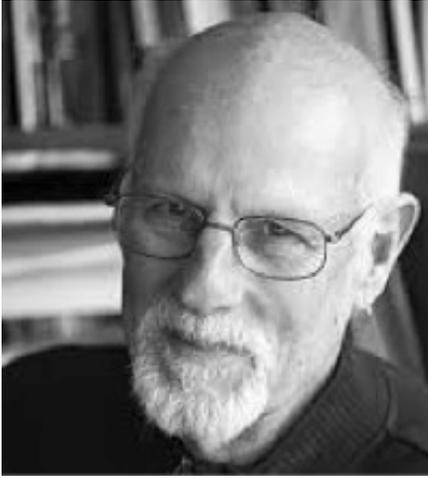
I: What advice would you give to an aspiring poet?

JM: Read. Experiment. Follow your heart. Practice complete commitment. Be true to the art and don't let the practical aspects of the life of a poet get in the way. Wait to publish.

Push yourself further. Study the old masters. Write. Suffer. Believe your writing and your feelings about writing will be cyclical. Trust the cycles even when they bring you to a place where you think you'll never write again. Read. Read more. Write. Revise. Feel gratitude that you are fortunate enough to have a love for this. Celebrate the impact of language on all you think and feel. Write as often as you can. Take joy in this work.

An Interview with Doug Anderson

Conducted by John Sullivan, Jack O'Connor, and Haley Georgen



Doug Anderson grew up in Memphis, Tennessee, before serving in the Vietnam War as a combat medic. After returning back to the United States, he went on to attend the University of Arizona where he studied acting. His poetry writing began after moving to Northampton, Massachusetts where he collaborated with fellow poet Jack Gilbert. His poetry collections include *The Moon Reflected Fire* (1994) and *Blues for Unemployed*

Secret Police (2000). In addition to poetry, he has published a memoir titled *Keep Your Head Down: Vietnam, The Sixties, and a Journey of Self-Discovery* (2009). His most recent book is *Horse Medicine* (Barrow Street Press, 2015). Anderson has been awarded with a grant from the Eric Mathieu King Fund of the Academy of American Poets, a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship, the Kate Tufts Discovery Award, and a Pushcart Prize.

Interviewers: Did studying acting at the University of Arizona influence your writing or skills?

Doug Anderson: Yes. The lines I memorized, particularly those of Shakespeare, became cellular. I carry their internal landscapes. If you memorize the role of Prospero, your brain chemistry will never be the same again.

I: What was your main inspiration to start writing plays and poetry and what are the differences and similarities between writing the two styles?

DA: My imagination troubles me if I don't speak to it. I think initially my writing was a spontaneous expression of an imagination that demanded attention. When I made friends with it, a more complex relationship developed. I think all people who work with their creativity find that something

in them is very demanding, must be acknowledged. This is not always the case. There are dry spells.

I: Does your inspiration for writing mostly come from your personal experiences or are you influenced by other things as well?

DA: I think it comes from multiple sources. It can rain, and I'll respond. or I can imagine something/ someone that is out there wanting to be discovered.

I: Are there certain writers that when starting your career you admired, and had hoped to utilize some of their tactics and/or writings styles within your own works?

DA: Too many really to name. I'll mention Greek poets, dramatic and other – Sophocles to Archilochus. I loved the classics and read deeply in them and not just because I was taking a course. One of my favorite books is Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy, because it is a prodigious classical education synthesized by one man into three volumes and delicious quotations. I could go on but it would fill up too many pages. My living influences include Dorianne Laux, Jack Gilbert, Chase Twichell, Amy Gerstler, Louise Gluck, Ocean Vuong, and others. Again, too many to mention.

I: We truly admired your memoir Keep Your Head Down. Are there any instances in your time over in Vietnam that you strayed away from writing, and how did serving as combat medical corpsman impact the individual you were?

DA: I tried to keep a journal in Vietnam but the part of the mind that has the contemplative space for that sort of thing was quickly overridden by a need to survive. I think the war is what made it impossible for me to NOT become a writer, impelled me to be a witness, to try to put into words the unsayable. I think anyone who has been at the sharp end of the fighting in a war, who has experienced the moral ambiguities, is pushed so far beyond one's self that it takes a whole life to find the way back to what some people call "normal." I don't think there is any such thing as normal, but one craves it, or something like it.

I: Can you expand more on your transition from Vietnam, back into the United States in the 1960s? More so, did you recognize any noticeable changes in the country you left?

DA: Nothing was ever the same after. I wrote about this in the memoir. I fell into the sixties with my contemporaries and was transformed by

it. Permanently. The country had changed deeply. There was an overwhelming hatred of the war and the country has not been the same since. Many of the divisions and polarizations we have now had their seeds in the sixties.

I: We enjoyed reading your poem “Sixty-One.” As we noted, the title and publishing date related to your age at the time. Was there a specific instance during that year that influenced you to write that poem, and was there a target audience or individual that it was directed towards?

DA: When people get old—and I am fourteen years older now than when I wrote that poem—the body changes. We become aware of our age because of it. But the heart and mind remain hungry. We love, we lust, we imagine, we create as if we were younger. Young people tend to edit out older people from their lives—perhaps because they want to be young forever and push away things that remind them of mortality. But they don’t understand that the passion remains. And that longing can become a powerful horse one rides into not-knowing. That leaving one’s self open to love is absolutely necessary.

I: After reading your poem “Letter to Martín Espada,” we were wondering if you could expand on the connection you have with the acclaimed Latino poet, and why you decided to write the poem incorporating both the English and Spanish language?

DA: I’ve known Martin for a very long time. He’s a good friend and has helped me a great deal to find myself as a poet. We initially met because he admired my war poems. We did a reading together and have been close ever since—have witnessed each other’s difficulties and joys. Martin teaches me that a political poem can be a great poem and not just a rant.

I: Finally, here at Providence College, we maintain a literary journal known as The Alembic. It is small, but contains great material ranging from fiction, poetry, and even a photography section. If you were to give any advice for the journal to gain more recognition, what would it be?

DA: I love the word “alembic” and what it describes. Making poems is an alchemical process. Poetry is a language inside language that speaks to a world inside the world—that is, the world that demands to be seen in depth. The technique of poetry involves compression, just at the alchemical transformation require heat. We are both turning lead into gold. I think all journals should honor the new and growing as well

as the established. I think your instinct to blend the two is a good one. Keep it up. May you always be well funded and read.

Homeless in New Mexico

Sheryl L. Nelms

today
it is

a leather chair

in the Las Cruces
City Library

and a public
restroom

with running water
and toilet paper

to
use

for as
long

as they
will

let me
stay

Hot Is

Sheryl L. Nelms

sweat

oozing

up

through

your scalp

like

crystalloid

beads of

cooling

meringue

Grey Wolf

Sheryl L. Nelms

a slim howl
through

the snowy night

sends ripples
down my
skull

raises the hair
on my head

as ghosted feet

pad
around

ponderosa pines

Lorsque l'enfant paraît

By Victor Hugo

Lorsque l'enfant paraît, le cercle de famille
Applaudit à grands cris; son doux regard qui brille
Fait briller tous les yeux,
Et les plus tristes fronts, les plus souillés peut-être,
Se dérident soudain à voir l'enfant paraître,
Innocent et joyeux.

Soit que juin ait verdi mon seuil, ou que novembre
Fasse autour d'un grand feu vacillant dans la chambre
Les chaises se toucher,
Quand l'enfant vient, la joie arrive et nous éclaire.
On rit, on se récrie, on l'appelle, et sa mère
Tremble à le voir marcher.

Quelquefois nous parlons, en remuant la flamme,
De patrie et de Dieu, des poètes, de l'âme
Qui s'élève en priant;
L'enfant paraît, adieu le ciel et la patrie
Et les poètes saints! la grave causerie
S'arrête en souriant.

La nuit, quand l'homme dort, quand l'esprit rêve, à l'heure
Où l'on entend gémir, comme une voix qui pleure,
L'onde entre les roseaux,
Si l'aube tout à coup là-bas luit comme un phare,

When a Child Comes

Translated by Bailey Zimmitti

When a child comes, the whole family
Applauds with loud cheers; the child's sweet shining look
Makes their eyes shine too,
And the gravest brows, the most soiled even,
Loosen when a child comes,
Innocent and joyful.

Whether June turned my doorstep green, or November
Made, around a dancing fire,
Chairs come closer together.
When a child comes, joy arrives and brings us light.
We laugh, we squeal, we name the child, whose mother
Trembles to see them walk.

Sometimes we talk, kindling the flame of love,
Of country and of God, of poets, of the soul
That rises in prayer;
But a child comes, and farewell heaven and country
And holy poets! Grave talk
Stops, and smiles.

At night, when men sleep, when the spirit dreams, at the hour
When women hear little snuffles, a voice that cries,
Like a wave between the reeds,
If the dawn suddenly shines down like a beacon,

Sa clarté dans les champs éveille une fanfare
De cloches et d'oiseaux!

Enfant, vous êtes l'aube et mon âme est la plaine
Qui des plus douces fleurs embaume son haleine
Quand vous la respirez;

Mon âme est la forêt dont les sombres ramures
S'emplissent pour vous seul de suaves murmures
Et de rayons dorés!

Car vos beaux yeux sont pleins de douceurs infinies,
Car vos petites mains, joyeuses et bénies
N'ont point mal fait encore;
Jamais vos jeunes pas n'ont touché notre fange;
Tête sacrée! enfant aux cheveux blonds! bel ange
À l'auréole d'or!

Vous êtes parmi nous la colombe de l'arche.
Vos pieds tendres et purs n'ont point l'âge où l'on marche;
Vos ailes sont d'azur.
Sans le comprendre encor, vous regardez le monde.
Double virginité! corps où rien n'est immonde,
Âme où rien n'est impur!

Il est si beau, l'enfant, avec son doux sourire,
Sa douce bonne foi, sa voix qui veut tout dire,
Ses pleurs vite apaisés,
Laisant errer sa vue étonnée et ravie,

Its clarity in the field awakens a fanfare
Of bells and birds!

Child, you are the dawn and my soul is the prairie
Who perfumes its breath with sweetest flowers
For you to breathe;
My soul is the forest of which the somber branches
Fill for you with soft murmurs
And golden rays!

Because your beautiful eyes are full of sweet infinities,
Because your little hands, joyful and blessed,
Have yet to do any wrong,
Never have your tiny feet touched our muck;
Sacred head! Blonde child! Beautiful angel
With golden halo!

You are the dove of our ark.
Your pure, tender feet cannot yet walk;
Your wings are azure.
Without understanding, you watch the world.
Double virginity! Body where nothing is filthy,
Soul where nothing is impure!

So beautiful, the child with sweet smile,
With sweet, good faith, with a voice that wants to say everything,
Whose tears are quickly calmed,
Leaving sight to wander, amazed and delighted,

Offrant de toutes parts sa jeune âme à la vie
Et sa bouche aux baisers!

Seigneur ! préservez-moi, préservez ceux que j'aime,
Frères, parents, amis, et mes ennemis même
Dans le mal triomphants,
De jamais voir, Seigneur! l'été sans fleurs vermeilles,
La cage sans oiseaux, la ruche sans abeilles,
La maison sans enfants!

A complete offering of this little soul to life
And this little mouth to kisses!

Lord! Protect me, protect those that I love,
Brothers, parents, friends, and my enemies the same
Even in their evil triumph,
From ever seeing, Lord! the summer without vermillion flowers,
The cage without birds, the hive without bees,
The home without children!

À ma fille Adèle

By Victor Hugo

Tout enfant, tu dormais près de moi, rose et fraîche,
Comme un petit Jésus assoupi dans sa crèche;
Ton pur sommeil était si calme et si charmant
Que tu n'entendais pas l'oiseau chanter dans l'ombre;
Moi, pensif, j'aspirais toute la douceur sombre
Du mystérieux firmament.

Et j'écoutais voler sur ta tête les anges;
Et je te regardais dormir; et sur tes langes
J'effeuillais des jasmins et des oeillets sans bruit;
Et je priais, veillant sur tes paupières closes;
Et mes yeux se mouillaient de pleurs, songeant aux choses
Qui nous attendent dans la nuit.

Un jour mon tour viendra de dormir; et ma couche,
Faité d'ombre, sera si morne et si farouche
Que je n'entendrai pas non plus chanter l'oiseau;
Et la nuit sera noire; alors, ô ma colombe,
Larmes, prière et fleurs, tu rendras à ma tombe
Ce que j'ai fait pour ton berceau.

To My Daughter, Adèle

Translated by Bailey Zimmitti

My baby, you slept close to me, pink and fresh,
Like a little Jesus half-asleep in his crèche;
Your pure sleep was so calm and so sweet
That you can't hear the shadow bird sing discreetly;
Pensive, I breathed in the moment and I could see,
Could imagine the mysterious heavens to meet.
And I listened to angels fly over your head;
And I watched you sleep; and off your diapers you let me
Pluck jasmin and carnations by moonlight
And I prayed, sleepily standing over your closed eyelids;
And my eyes became wet, considering the things I did,
And the things awaiting us a night.
One day my turn to sleep will come; and my bed,
Made of shadow, will be so gloomy and unfed
That I won't hear birds sing—who knew life was so fatal!
And the night will be black; so, my sweet dove,
You'll return to my grave tears, prayers, flowers, love--
That which I gave over your cradle.

Elle est gaie et pensive

By Victor Hugo

Elle est gaie et pensive; elle nous fait songer
À tout ce qui reluit malgré de sombres voiles,
Aux bois pleins de rayons, aux nuits pleines d'étoiles.
L'esprit en la voyant s'en va je ne sais où.
Elle a tout ce qui peut rendre un pauvre homme fou.
Tantôt c'est un enfant, tantôt c'est une reine.
Hélas! quelle beauté radieuse et sereine!
Elle a de fiers dédains, de charmantes faveurs,
Un regard doux et bleu sous de longs cils rêveurs,
L'innocence, et l'amour qui sans tristesse encore
Flotte empreint sur son front comme une vague aurore,
Et puis je ne sais quoi de calme et de vainqueur!
Et le ciel dans ses yeux met l'enfer dans mon coeur!

She is gay and pensive

Translated by Bailey Zimmitti

She is gay and pensive; she makes us dream
Of all that gleams despite somber veils,
Of woods full of beams, of nights full of stars.
Seeing her, my spirit fled...I don't know where.
She has all that makes a poor man crazy.
She's sometimes a child, sometimes a queen.
Alas! Radiant, serene beauty!
She has proud scorn, and charming favor,
A sweet blue look below long, dreamy eyelashes,
She has innocence, and love that without sadness once more
Rains, imprinted on her forehead like a vague dawn,
And then I know no calm, no victory!
The sky in her eyes puts hell in my heart!

À la mère de l'enfant mort

By Victor Hugo

Oh ! vous aurez trop dit au pauvre petit ange
Qu'il est d'autres anges là-haut,
Que rien ne souffre au ciel, que jamais rien n'y change,
Qu'il est doux d'y rentrer bientôt;

Que le ciel est un dôme aux merveilleux pilastres,
Une tente aux riches couleurs,
Un jardin bleu rempli de lis qui sont des astres,
Et d'étoiles qui sont des fleurs;

Que c'est un lieu joyeux plus qu'on ne saurait dire,
Où toujours, se laissant charmer,
On a les chérubins pour jouer et pour rire,
Et le bon Dieu pour nous aimer;

Qu'il est doux d'être un coeur qui brûle comme un cierge,
Et de vivre, en toute saison,
Près de l'enfant Jésus et de la sainte Vierge
Dans une si belle maison!

Et puis vous n'aurez pas assez dit, pauvre mère,
A ce fils si frêle et si doux,
Que vous étiez à lui dans cette vie amère,
Mais aussi qu'il était à vous;

To the Mother Who Has Lost a Child

Translated by Bailey Zimmitti

Oh! You will have said too much to the poor little angel,
That he is like other angels up there,
That nothing suffers in the sky, that nothing ever changes there,
That it is sweet to return there quickly;

Whether the sky is a dome to the marvelous pillars,
A tent to the rich colors,
A blue garden filled with lilies that are stars,
And of stars that are flowers;

Or whether it is a more joyous place than one could ever describe,
Where always, letting ourselves be charmed,
We have cherubim to laugh and play,
And our good God to love us;

How sweet it is to be a heart that burns like an altar candle,
And to live, in every season,
Close to the infant Jesus and the blessed Virgin
In such a beautiful house!

And so you will not have said enough, poor mother,
To your son, so fragile and so sweet,
How bitter you were to him in this,
Yet bitter he was to you too.

Que, tant qu'on est petit, la mère sur nous veille,
Mais que plus tard on la défend;
Et qu'elle aura besoin, quand elle sera vieille,
D'un homme qui soit son enfant;

Vous n'aurez point assez dit à cette jeune âme
Que Dieu veut qu'on reste ici-bas,
La femme guidant l'homme et l'homme aidant la femme,
Pour les douleurs et les combats;

Si bien qu'un jour, ô deuil! irréparable perte!
Le doux être s'en est allé!... -
Hélas! vous avez donc laissé la cage ouverte,
Que votre oiseau s'est envolé!

Avril 1843.

Oh, how as long as we are little, our mother stays awake over us,
But how later we must defend her;
And how she will need, when she is old,
A man—her son.

You will not have said enough to this young soul,
How God wants us to stay here below,
Woman guiding man and man helping woman,
For the pains and the fighting;

So much that one day, o grief! Irreparable loss!
The sweet creature has left you...
Alas! Then you have left open the cage,
And so your bird has flown away!

April 1843.

À un poète aveugle

By Victor Hugo

Merci, poète!—au seuil de mes lares pieux,
Comme un hôte divin, tu viens et te dévoiles;
Et l'auréole d'or de tes vers radieux
Brille autour de mon nom comme un cercle d'étoiles.

Chante! Milton chantait; chante! Homère a chanté.
Le poète des sens perce la triste brume;
L'aveugle voit dans l'ombre un monde de clarté.
Quand l'œil du corps s'éteint, l'œil de l'esprit s'allume.

Paris, mai 1842.

To the Blind Poet

Translated by Bailey Zimmitti

Glorious poet! At the doorstep of my faithful ancestors,
Like a divine host, you come and reveal yourself;
And the golden halo of your radiant verses
Shines all around me like a circle of stars.

Sing! Milton sang, and Homer once, too. Sing!
The feeling poet pierces the sad haze;
The blind man sees in the shadows a world of clarity.
When the eyes of the body fail, the eyes of the heart ignite.

Paris, May 1842.

Adonis

Dawyn Henriquez

The day we stopped calling Don by his nickname was like any other Thursday that I skipped school to work the corner with him. Row Street was littered with fiends looking for a score that day and every corner had their trio, quartet, or quintet, all for the sake of efficiency. Don and I worked alone, though. He was fast and I was faster, so we did the work of a couple of people and in turn got more money for it. He was the corner boy and collected money from the fiends because he was the face of the operation and the point of contact with the supply. And across the street from him, by the neighborhood garden that ran amok years back, was me sitting on the curb. I was the hopper so I hid the supply nearby where it could be safe and where I could get it, away from the eyes of our junkie clientele. Like an umpire, Don would make hand signals after he got the money, indicating how much I needed to get for each respective customer, and I would hop up and get what was needed. It was simple and the pigs couldn't get us because we never had the money or crack on us at one time, so intent to distribute was out of the question.

The fiends piled up on us in droves that day, so by noon I was playing with plates of grass and reading the scribbled chalk on the pavement from the neighborhood kids. With supply empty and a wad of neatly folded bills in his pocket Don had gone off to chat with Chino, one of the other corner boys. Simba was getting out of school soon, we had had a half day so there wouldn't have been much for him to fill me in on, but I knew he'd have something to bring up and I definitely wasn't going to mind. I hated missing school, but there was no other real way to make the money I was making, and we needed it. School was almost out, but we were going to need new uniforms for the upcoming semester, the ones we had at that point had sweat stains that industrial washing machines couldn't get out. Not to mention we'd need new school supplies, coats that actually kept us warm during the winter, all the bare necessities for another year. So, missing one Thursday a week of school was worth it if it meant we'd be good for a time.

"I'm type hungry, you tryna get some food?" Don asked as he

walked over.

“Hell yeah, I’m starving,” I said as I got up and rubbed my stomach for emphasis.

“Bet, we can get some Cubanos from Ramon’s or some shit,” he said as he dug into his pocket and took out the day’s profits, a little happier than usual. “Before we go though, hold this. I’m finna go play cee-lo with these niggas for like five minutes,” he smiled.

Don really was a kid at heart. He almost never played cee-lo to gamble, mostly for the thrill of the game and the bragging rights. Of course, he would have gladly taken anyone’s money too. As I put our funds in my pocket he bent down to untie and then retie his Air Force Ones out of habit. His white wife-beater was a bit sweaty from the noontime sun, the ‘John 3:16’ tattoo on his chest over the round of the shirt’s neck was visibly wet. He was a rare type in the streets—a holy hood nigga, doing hoodrat shit but still fearful of God. Kind of a contradiction, but our world is filled with them, right?

“You hear back about your moms yet?” I asked as he finished tying his left shoe.

“Bro! I legit just talked to her on Chino’s cell,” he said as he tossed a calling card out of his pocket excitedly. “She got it bro! She got the visa! I just have to buy her flight, but she’s set!”

“Let’s fucking go! That’s what I’m talking about!” I said as we dapped up and hugged for a half a second. “When you gonna send her the bread for the plane ticket?” I asked before something in his attitude changed. He was staring at a car driving up slowly.

“Yo, stay here bro,” he said seriously. “And if I yell run you fucking book it my nigga.”

“Adonis was devout, believe it or not,” I told Leo. Whenever I spoke to him in private I never code-switched. With him I spoke how I always thought. Leo didn’t need hood paraphrasing and didn’t make me feel out of place when I spoke freely. Besides, he never did code-switch himself, he talked like a Harvard alum and all. Didn’t give a damn who caught him speaking that way either, he knew he didn’t fit in and never tried to.

“That I knew, we have thin walls here kid. I heard that boy praying to high heaven every other night,” he said. His voice was steady, unexcited, and withdrawn. A sober mind painted his eyes with blood-shot withdrawal. He almost looked as though he had been crying and maybe he had been. I always knew Leo and Don’s relationship went deeper than Simba and I had ever known. They lived right across from each other for over two years, shared a bathroom, and a love for being high. Combine that with Don’s unwilling desire for a father figure and Leo fit right in.

“Don’s...Adonis’ tattoo. Did you know about it?” I asked. At that he smiled as though I asked a question, I should have known the answer to.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16,” he recited flawlessly.

Don walked over to the black hoopty as if he already knew who was inside. They had to be Elm Street niggas. Don told me they wanted trouble ever since I scared off some of their guys with his gun. I didn’t really have any other choice; the fight was getting out of hand. I didn’t hurt anyone. All I did was shoot a gun at the sky. I should’ve known though, you bring a gun into any situation and your likely to cause more trouble than you were hoping to avoid. I’ve always known that. And yet, there I was a couple of weeks back, gun in hand, thinking nothing could come of it so long as I didn’t point it at anyone. Yet, there I was, weeks later with my blood wanted for that very reason.

Don seemed to have been arguing with the voices inside. Whoever they were. I wasn’t so much scared as ready. If a fight was about to pop off, I had enough adrenaline to jump in and do some damage. It was only a matter of time before whoever they were jumped out of the car and started shit; I could tell Don was getting riled up and was riling up the voices inside too.

“He ain’t hurt any of y’all niggas! Y’all are alive because he wasn’t finna do y’all like that!” Don yelled. At that point all of Row Street was quiet. Watching the exchange. Just as ready to run or fight.

“Yo Brain!” I heard Chino yell from across the street. “what’s

going on?”

I shrugged. “I don’t know bro!”

“Nah! Fuck that! Fight him, stop being pussies!” Don yelled. At that something silver came out of the window. Everything went silent.

“Run!” Don yelled again before a single gunshot rocked Row Street’s eardrums.

“His grandmother used to yell that verse at us whenever we walked out of the house,” I chuckled. “I didn’t even know where it was from exactly. I didn’t even think he was ever listening.”

“It’s obvious that he always was, though.” Leo paused for a minute, seemingly not knowing what to say until he quietly spoke again, “It’s true, you know. Eternity is within all of our grasps if we feel so inclined to just reach out and grab it. Adonis did, I can tell you that.”

“How could you possibly know?” I asked.

“I’m sober, there’s nothing I don’t know right now,” he said with another playful smile. I couldn’t ever pretend to know what Leo was thinking or whether to believe what he was spouting. His words were always mysterious, yet somehow laced with some sort of forewarning. Wisdom? Divine knowledge? I could never tell. The rooftop was quiet for a bit longer. I didn’t know what to say.

“No, but seriously. Adonis did things his own way, albeit the wrong way a lot of the time, but he always had that prayer in mind. He tried to keep onto God as much as possible, even if most times he couldn’t.” Leo said, breaking the uncomfortable silence.

“I don’t know if I can see that side of him in my mind,” I responded.

“You don’t have to, it was there all the same,” he said. “Why’d you ask if I knew about his tattoo?”

At the sound of the bullet everyone took to their own and ran off. Chino was more of an acquaintance, so he hesitated for a second. He made eye contact with me and telepathically communicated that he was getting the hell out of there and that I should too. But I stood

there, watching, as Don hit the pavement like a falling tree. I couldn't leave him. I couldn't just leave. Not like this, I thought. The car went in reverse for a second to leave Row Street behind as the other side of the street was where the pigs usually drove up from. But then they stopped, as though remembering who they had come for in the first place, and the bullets started to fly. I counted two before the right side of my head felt like it ripped open with the third bang. I'd find out later at the hospital that an inch to the left and part of my brain would have gone out as well. All they got was a good chunk of skin, though. But in that moment, I thought myself dead as I fell to the ground. I kept my eyes shut. Mom always told Simba and I that if anything were to ever go down to just lay low and play dead. That's what life was in East Park. So, there I laid, counting two more bangs before I opened my eyes to see Moe drawing himself back into his seat, silver and black desert eagle in his hand. Moe, a person Don considered a close friend. An Elm Street nigga himself. They thought me dead as the car reversed out at the sound of the sirens coming from the other end of the street.

They were all gone when I got up, blood dripping from my head onto my white tee. Crimson dripped from my necklace as I took my shirt off and put pressure on Don's chest. The blood was pouring out fast, a puddle was already under him. My white tee was burgundy in seconds.

"M...Moe," he gasped.

"I know," I said as my head grew faint.

"Tell that lil nigga S-Simba I love him," he whispered. "Tell my moms and Mama Lola I said I'm sorry."

"Nah bro," I said, tears clouding my vision. "You're not going like this. You're gonna be fine. You can tell Sim and them yourself."

He shook his head slowly and smiled. "Nah brodie," he took a deep breath. "Listen to me, you gotta remember this shit. All of it. And remember, real niggas don't..."

"Die," I finished as his mouth stayed open and the breath of life left him with open eyes.

"That's where he was shot." My jaw tensed at recalling Adonis'

death. “The bullet hit the 6; turned that shit into a 0. You know that verse? John 3:10?”

At that Leo’s expression changed from playful to serious again. His eyes shifted between the city skyline and the roof. He looked at me uncomfortably and recited:

“This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not God’s child, nor is anyone who does not love their brother and sister.”

Don’s gun slipped a little deeper into the back of my jeans where I had it tucked. Leo looked into my eyes with a pained glint, as though knowing exactly what I wanted to do. What I had set out to do when I picked up the gun earlier that morning. His almost black irises gleamed brown in the sun and pleaded with me silently.

“That one is also true,” he said as though from experience. He put his rough dried out hand on my shoulder and with one last look at the sky squeezed his eyes shut. He stayed there, as though in prayer for a while, before walking back downstairs through the fire escape. I stood there alone a bit longer, staring off at wherever he had looked. I couldn’t find anything that spoke to me the way it had spoken to him. Something about the city resonated with his flavor of crazy. But I couldn’t see anything but smoking chimney pipes and the New York skyline far off in the distance. I couldn’t hear anything but lunch time traffic and the clanking metal of the T. Silence. I looked up at the clouds the way he did, trying to divine some sort of epiphany from water vapor and getting nothing but mute wind. Silence. In that moment I wondered whether or not I had shot God too when I pulled the trigger at the sky that past summer. Maybe that’s why he wouldn’t speak to me. I walked onto the fire escape and the quiet followed as I made my way to Elm Street.*

* 1st Place Fiction Winner of Poetry and Fiction Contest

Forward

Maggie Burke

Cracks are how our light shines through, said someone important. But that word—crack—always makes me think of my mother’s rib when she fought to fit fresh sheets on my brother’s twin sized bed. Who knew Tuesday noons had the shortest wait time for a date with the radiologist?

It’s what’s broken that makes us beautiful, said someone famous. Tell that to Kenny Stanley who got popped in the eye socket with a fly ball during practice—practice!—fracturing his cheek bone. I guess he did make a sexy pirate with that eyepatch he wore to junior prom.

Make a mosaic when someone shatters your glass, said someone clever. I look at the fragments still scattered beneath the bedroom window that faces sunset from when you were my alarm clock, waking me up with pebbles tossed. Five years later and I still haven’t picked up the miniscule shards, afraid to cut myself on the memory of moonlight. And whispers. And turning off the headlights while pushing your car in neutral down the block until we were too far to be caught by the purr of an engine. Drafty air successfully sends me the same shivers from when we went swimming in birthday suits during September midnights. I am reluctant to bust out the sealant, mimicking the youthful temptation of running my tongue over a wiggly tooth, if only to test my tolerance. But I don’t smell the memory of our cinnamon vomit when passing the swing sets at Veteran Park anymore, when I once swore I would never be able to eat my grandmother’s snickerdoodles again. I don’t hear you panting a precautionary last will and testament of love into my ear when passing the haunted house on Grove Street we were dared to explore, when I once swore I would press your words onto vinyl, looping it on my cranial record player. Outside of this private pocket of the world, the rest keep turning and I no longer wish to be time capsuled.

Bring me a broom, said someone ready.*

* 1st Place Prose Poetry Winner of Poetry and Fiction Contest

Washington Square

John Grey

I stroll through the cement park,
city above, glistening torsos below,
where skirts and shirts are flapping in modest breeze
and some guy is trying to sell me a wristwatch.

A fountain pours lightly,
smiles and rubs its chin,
while everyone in its vicinity
takes great pleasure in themselves.

My eye is an Italian director,
Fellini, most likely,
seeking setting, plot. characters
for my next film:

the Puerto Rican dancers,
a sidewalk painter,
posters for a hip-hop concert,
young girls dancing to a blaster's beat.

I buy a hotdog from a vendor,
for the thrill of mustard
dripping down my fingers,
as I loiter by the chess players,

and two yapping pooches.
An old bearded guy preaches communism
to a small crowd.
Another mutters poetry to himself.

Then the most beautiful woman
in the world
walks briefly into view
and is gone forever.

Well maybe she does
and maybe she doesn't.
But there's always a place for her
in my picture.

*

Simon Perchik

Pulled from under the others, this city
was built with ashes, fertility dolls
—its gates were carved then locked

made smooth on a mountain side
and the sound a shovel carries away
as the heaviness that is now dirt

helps you dead find a place and stay
overlooking the wall where you can watch
hold on to a stone that no longer opens

giving it time to catch fire, fit into the air
the way flames, over and over, wave goodbye
one on top another, still trying to fly.

*

Simon Perchik

Except for the captain's hat
you're homeless, gathering bottles
where a sea should be, half

in this washed up grocery cart, half
still wobbling as the sound
sails make when emptied from inside

would spot you slipping into the water
for safe keeping the way years ago
can be found still beating in your hands

as shoreline, finished and complete
asking for directions, something back, point
where rescue was no longer there.

My Name is Hardy

Zara Raab

Emma Hardy, wife and mate
in the old house at Max Gate.
We met in Lyonnaise; there
he wooed and courted me, my air
blue dress original, indeed!
We loved each other, early
and late, but especially at first,
walking along Beeny Crest,
St. Juliot's, the sea beneath us.
No children came to our nest,
but his poems kept me busy,
fair-copying each one out:
Foster work with pleasure in it.
I gardened, too, in hyacinth,
rose, and marigolds in summer.
Just being near him—a writer!
I kept a diary, tried my hand,
but something held me down.
Was there no way I might learn?
Was there no school for wife-men
in 1912? Not then.
I loved my garden, my cat,
turned so feral now that
he's wived another woman,
and penned the Emma poems.

It's taken me all this year
to say, "I did not please him."
He was cold that afternoon,
scolding, mercilessly scolding
while I—I soon was dying.
Well, how could he know?
He'd gone from me, too.
If I am alive at all, I live
in those poems of 1912.
I read them out again,
and the tenderness returns,
I see the places we knew.
Farewell, dearest, farewell.

The Art of Self-Reflection—A Message to the Opinionated

Meghan Mello

Mom and Dad nod in agreement and tell me, “You should definitely go to a psychiatrist to talk about him, that boy sounds very off.”

Dad adds, “I’ll submit a newspaper article about what you’ve told us about him, too, because I feel badly for him.” And Mom says that is a noble thing to do.

So, I hurry over to the local psychiatrist’s office and she lets me in. What’s wrong, she asks. Nothing, I say, it’s about a boy I know.

“Nothing’s wrong with you?”

“No.”

“Why are you here, then?”

I say, “Well every morning this boy wakes up and—”

“I’m sorry to interrupt but I ate so much today, I just have to unzip my pants right now,” the woman tells me.

When her belly hangs out I continue, “Every morning when this boy’s alarm goes off he screams. Then, he’ll grab his phone and with a hammer he will smash the phone’s screen.”

The woman yawns. “So... he has to buy a new phone every day, then?”

I nod.

“He sure seems like he has a lot of money, maybe he is greedy.”

“Thank you,” I say.

I tell Mom and Dad that the boy is greedy, and they tell me to ask the local priest what he thinks, because they believe that’s not the right answer.

So, I run over to the local church, and see our new priest practicing prayers at the altar. “Father,” I say, “I have a problem that I need your assistance with.”

He says, “Sure, my child, I’m listening,” as he dumps the Holy

Water on his head.

I tell him the same story I told Mom, Dad, and the Psychiatrist.

“Well, child, I think he is just a very disturbed and angry individual. Ask one of his teachers if he has always been this angry.”

“Thank you, Father.”

I then sprint over to the local high school, and throw open the door. “Are there any teachers here?” I scream.

Ms. L comes running out of the classroom. “I’m here! Come on in!”

I walk to Ms. L’s classroom and see shredded papers scattered over the tile floors.

“Sorry about the mess,” she says, “I am shredding student’s test grades, so kids won’t have to feel stressed tomorrow.”

That’s okay I say and ask her if the boy has ever shown signs of being angry in class.

“Well... that’s hard to say but you know what? He was always squinting! Ask the school nurse if he has the boy’s eye exam results. That must be why he did so poorly in school.”

“Thank you,” I say.

I drag my feet to the nurse’s office because I’m a little tired at this point.

“Hi Mr. K, I was wondering if (the boy’s name) has gotten his eyes checked lately.”

Mr. K drinks the remainder of a bottle containing a student’s blood and says, “I’ll go check his file for you, kid. Be right back.”

Mr. K walks back into the room and says, “Sorry kid, but that boy graduated three years ago, we don’t keep his files here at the high school anymore, I would check his real doctor’s office if you care that much.”

I don’t say thank you this time and start walking home, extremely annoyed with my lack of answers. I pass the boy on my walk home and he smiles at me.

I say hi and we talk for a few minutes about college classes and

how messy our dorm room is getting. He says he's actually on his way to volunteer at a charity event for kids who can't afford glasses.

I say okay, and walk away, but as I'm walking I realize I wasn't wearing any shoes this whole time, so I run home instead, because my feet are cold.*

* Fiction Runner-up of Poetry and Fiction Contest

Unfragmented Fact

Marilyn Johnston

Being an unfragmented fact—actually your own category

.— Krishnamurti

Land-grant college dorm-box
with belongings spread on the floor
all my incubated courage mustered
for this place, meaningless to my mother,
striving to be meaningful to my mother,
because it was mine alone.
Saying goodbye to parents
arm around Dad in the pictures,
Mom taking the pictures, busy organizer,
unpictured in the farewell moments
as it was only Dad who could be present
and master sadness

On the edge of baggage heaps,
my own space, window frame, book-case.
desk.

By nightfall, put off by the maternal
orientation teams' clamor in the hallways
falsifying everything with cupcakes, punch,
patronizing party games in the lounge.
Balloons? Bags of rhymed nick names?
I retreated, inwardly cold to it all.

Heart to Heart

Marilyn Johnston

This day could write itself before-
hand. The heart will enter clutching
its one riotous bouquet, zinnias
in hot colors. Mother's shyness

will step forward awkwardly:
to be kissed. Eyes on the flowers.
They will need a vase then. There
will be the dance around the vase.

There will be the manifest turn
to a common objects in the room.
Then, the garden will have more hard reality
than the heart will feel for itself.

Talk will begin and last all day
and it will, again, stave off
all there is to say. They will
eat lunch, they will share tea

and comment on everything visible.
This is to avoid entering depth—
hopes of lost ones who opened vacancies
in the beginning of a new century.

At fifty-nine, the heart feels hollow
as though stepping onto an empty stage.
Like memory in a February garden
things becoming entirely potential:

Mother's roses by the split-rail fence
brimming full erect standing
clear in 1961. Heart to heart we haunt each other
with the persistency of life
wanting to be dream.

Being One Year Older than the Age Emily Dickinson Died

Marilyn Johnston

Something's happened to the lightness
in the sway of leaves. Skeleton's
bones shiver like trees. Even trunks
align, dated, tagged to disappear

It's clear—never was an elation
wore such a leaded hat
rose up—on giddy feet—to crash, crazily
then bless—putting joy far from one—

“Fifty-seven”—pins the sinkers
on every silver line, staples
hooks to keep life sanely down
with fish in zigzag mania, flown—

Eyes keep their knowledge—
see Youth's gladness and are glad
yet blink, ware of an ache in the reeling—
faith perches lightly on—even sings

as she taught us, hoping
for hope to abide—
Stoop to that little bird that fell,
finding not the float—it had

Ocean

Hope Tiboni

There was ocean in her hair.

With each curl came a riptide and a long lost surge.

Like driftwood, she swept away the hearts of lost sailors.

She had a salty soul strong enough to spill secrets of the sea—oh so easily.

She had fair weather feelings about those who stayed too long and about
those who left too quickly.

Her mind was forever a message in a lost ship sailor's bottle.

She was a little bit pacific

for she only truly listened to the waning and crescents—

Light caught her attention against the moon's reflections.

Her body was poise,

especially for a girl who at times was quite a mess.

She let her heart get tumbled and sometimes swept away
for shiny shells and glass that broke too easily.

But at the end of each day,

the girl with ocean in her hair

would surrender to the sea

and let go of herself within each roll of a wave—

water baptizing every sin and bone—

for she knew tomorrow's sun would cast a whole new set of currents;

ones much more difficult than today's subtle undertows.*

* 2nd Place Poetry Winner of Poetry and Fiction Contest

About Facing Freedom With a Little Fear

Jimmy J. Pack Jr.

Warren was sitting in the house he'd come to know so well the previous summer. Matt's parents were hoarders. Junk mail for Sam, Matt's older brother, sat piling up on a dinner table with cereal boxes, computer monitors, and the cores of empty paper towel rolls. Shopping bags from the local Giant supermarket formed a taupe plastic mountain in front of a sliding glass door to the outside that no one could possibly ever open again. Warren shifted his eyes between the table and Mount Plastic as he sat on the couch that was torn, tufts of white polyester stuffing bled out of the back cushions. Warren was waiting for Sam to come down from upstairs.

"Hey, Warren—can you tie this for me?"

Warren stood up and waited for Sam to stand in front of him—his navy blue suit a size too big. Sam stopped lifting a year ago after Matt, his younger brother, slipped two discs in his upper back, and another one lower. Warren grabbed the tie and stared at the forming knot, avoided looking into Sam's eyes, which were staring out the window behind Warren, and the two young men, Sam twenty-five, Warren twenty-two, said nothing.

Warren looked into Sam's eyes—focused on the lawn across the street—and thought, he looks just like his brother.

Sam didn't know much about Warren, but he knew his brother cared about him—knew his brother trusted him, which was enough for Sam to trust Warren, too.

Sam shifted his gaze from the lawn, white and stiff with October frost, into Warren's eyes.

"I know my brother loved you."

There was no way Warren could stop himself from crying, but he could suppress the heft of sobs, the moans, the obvious sorrow—preserve his emotions. He tied the Windsor and looked back into Sam's eyes.

“I always knew your brother’s timeline was very short. I tried...”

Warren sat back on the couch and stared at Mount Recycle-thisshit remembering the previous summer of Fleetwood Mac, chicken nuggets, and chocolate martinis—remembering he was a shadow on the one who used to cry. Sam sat down next to Warren, put his left arm around him, pulled him close, and said his name.

Matt was on the phone with Warren. It was three-thirty in the morning and the sky was open—a harvest moon lording over Happy Valley. Warren was over a hundred miles away in Philadelphia sitting on the back porch of his parents’ house, staring up at the same dark sky with the moon draining all the light from the sun.

“I finished writing my letters. I would’ve written one to you, too, but I’d rather just tell you.”

“Tell me what,” Warren asked.

“Tell you...I wouldn’t have lasted this long without you. Tell you that I always kind of knew how I felt about you. Tell you that I can’t be here anymore.”

“Don’t go anywhere, Matt. Stay where you are. I—”

“I don’t have to go anywhere. I took all the Percs.”

Warren heard Matt drink, finishing his prescription with a bottle of Stoli.

“I can’t do this anymore, Warren. I can’t feel this pain.”

“Which pain?”

Matt paused. He was searching YouTube for something.

“Remember this song? Remember painting my room that navy blue color? My dad hated it. Said it made the room look like a tomb.”

Matt laughed, only because he was high, and climbing higher with each elapsing second.

“Matt, I’m going to call...Where are you right now?”

“I’m at a bar. The bar where we had the Moscow mules?”

“Stay there. I’m going to call you an ambulance.”

“I never had the guts to say it before, Warren, but I love you ... I know that means nothing to both of us now.”

“Matt... I’m getting you help. I...”

“What do we do with this love? What can we do? But I wanted you to know. I wanted you to know because I wanted all this to be so much more.”

Warren was about to speak, but the battery in Matt’s iPhone died—white noise cut off—and even though Warren called the ambulance, and the cops by default, Matt was nowhere even close to Hudson’s Bar. His body, twisted like a rogue rubber band, was at the bottom of the stairwell in an apartment complex a mile away from his dorm. The local news couldn’t even find the respect to make sure Matt’s parents knew about his death before his body was positively identified.

They were standing in the parking lot of Senior Salsa’s. Matt had come down from State College to say good-bye to Warren who was commuting to Temple University. They had finished shared plates of nachos and chicken enchiladas, and each drained two pints of Corona. The semester was about to start and Warren wanted to head up to school with Matt.

“My roommate’s a good guy,” Matt said. “But I know you and I’d have more fun living together.”

Warren looked at the pavement, kicked a Dos Equis bottle cap underneath the squatting tire of a maroon Dodge Caravan, and couldn’t look Matt in the eyes.

“If I had the money, we’d both be up there right now. I hate seeing you leave. We—”

“We had a good summer together,” Matt interrupted. “But I’ll be back. I’m not leaving for good.”

“I want to be with you everywhere.”

Matt leaned in to give Warren a hug. Warren’s arms opened wide, trying to throw his arms around the world. Matt held Warren—Warren didn’t want him to let go—and both young men, for what seemed everlasting, but was not, felt they belonged together in some way.

Matt and Warren were sitting in the driveway of Matt's parents' house. The start of the new semester was a week away and they'd just come back from Chick-Fil-A; the conversation stopped. They were listening to the music stream from Warren's iPhone.

"And a memory is all that's left for you now..."

"I don't want to go back up there, Warren. I want to stay here with you."

The silence singed something in the air. Warren looked at Matt and he lip-synched with the song—"Lightning strikes, maybe once, maybe twice"—and to Matt, Warren's words were glowing green neon.

"Can I kiss you?"

Warren felt the blush in his cheeks, felt his blood rush in hyper propulsion, felt that something was going to happen, going to move. He closed his eyes and leaned in towards Matt whose eyes were also closed, Matt's right hand reaching to pull Warren's head closer.

This was a fireworks display ignited. It was the creation of a planet—calderas blowing earth into the atmosphere, earthquakes reshaping continents, and monster waves erasing dry lands from the globe. Lindsay Buckingham's fretwork haloed over the young men who didn't want the moment to move on. Warren reached over and ran his left hand down Matt's back—felt his discs bulging at the bottom and wished he could push them back in to stop the pain. His hand hovered there hoping his emotions would heal Matt. He wanted this moment to last for always. But it didn't, and when Matt jumped out of the car he said

"See you tomorrow?"

"Yes. Six again. The earlier the better."

There was so much that Warren wished he could experience—over and over—now. He drove back to his house with the song on repeat.

There was a tango in the night. The two young men were wearing white t-shirts and black athletic shorts, both speckled with fine dots of navy blue eggshell paint. The slim Ikea single bed was pushed against

the closet waiting for the body of a mattress to rest inside it. Matt's jaw was tight and his eyes stared out the window to the back yard, his right arm stretched across his back, wrist pushing into his lower spine. The lights were off and Warren was wrapping a paintbrush with a damp paper towel, folding the edges so that they interlocked, even though they weren't strong.

"Not feeling so good now?"

"Think I overdid it on the painting," Matt said.

"Sit on your bed. I'll finish cleaning up."

Warren got to work rolling up the drop cloth, tamping the lids on the paint cans while Matt flicked through the music feed on his iPhone. He turned up the volume. Matt dropped the iPhone in a cup and started swaying, his silhouette in front of the dusk window a dark ballet.

Warren laughed and asked, "What are you doing?"

"Getting some exercise. Feeling the music... Come here. Stay with me a while."

Warren walked over to Matt, who was reaching for Warren's hands. Matt pulled Warren against his body, threw Warren's arms over his shoulders, and wrapped his own arms around Warren's mid-back. The energy exchanged between them a warming, a comfort. The young men swayed to the song but slowed steadily. Warren rested his head on Matt's shoulder, moved his mouth next to his ear and sang to him:

"You said you'd give me light, but you never told me about the fire."

They both stopped moving and stood there, embracing—bracing for something else to come that didn't.

Checking into The Hotel Hershey was choppy, only because Matt and Warren had never done a thing like this, not without being with their respective families on vacation. Warren handed his \$2,000-limit credit card to the clerk who welcomed them with two extra Hershey bars during check-in.

Warren pulled the suitcase packed for two. They were staying for two nights—one to enjoy themselves, the next because they had to

be up at 4:30 a.m. for Matt's spinal surgery. When they opened the door to the room they were glad to find they were given a king sized bed. The room was awash in gold wallpaper, the slight scent of chocolate beyond the dull cocoa smell of their complimentary bars in hand hung in the room.

"I'm hungry," Matt said, diving into the bed.

"Want to eat al fresco?"

"What the hell does that mean," Matt asked, bridging his back into jigsaw shapes.

"Outside."

"You English majors and your big words. Yeah, let's eat outside."

The patio of Trevi overlooked the front of the hotel, overlooked the entire Hershey area—the amusement park active in the distance with blinking lights visible even in the noon sun. Further back, two smokestacks blurred in the humidity. Warren relaxed in his chair with a chocolate kiss martini in his hand. Matt mirrored his image and was laughing.

"I'm freaking twenty-one and I have the back of an eighty-five year old."

He rested his drink on the table next to the caprese salad they were sharing and leaned back in his chair. Warren admired the black stubble on Matt's face, his longish black hair curling at the ends blown about by the breeze, and as he stared into Matt's eyes he realized that this was it. This was the real thing—the real fucking thing—and there was no going back now. He didn't expect this to happen, he was just trying to help an old friend not feel so much pain, and in his empathy, in his ability to breathe the sorrow and pain in from Matt, Warren found himself in love.

"Might be eighty-five, but you look pretty darn good."

Matt smiled, ran his hand through his hair and flipped it back.

"You want to go to the pool," Matt asked, popping mozzarella into his mouth.

"As long as you follow, bud."

At the pool the two young men dropped their towels onto lounge chairs. Instead of diving into the pool filled with toddlers and nuclear families, Matt wanted to hit the outdoor hot tub—ninety-seven degree water in hundred-and-five degree heat.

Matt took off his shirt—Warren scanned the hair on Warren’s chest and stomach.

They had the hot tub to themselves. Warren sat against the side, arms stretched out, head thrown back. Matt was doing stretches. The sound of the boiling and trickling water eased Warren who was trying to figure out what the hell to do—to tell Matt, or just keep doing what they were doing? Warren felt a foot rub against his belly. He opened his eyes and brought up his head.

“Hey, grab my foot and help me stretch.”

Warren took hold. Matt bent and buckled, twisted, turned, writhed in every way while Warren anchored Matt’s foot and lower leg. He wasn’t going to let go, especially if it was making Matt feel better.

“You can let go now,” Matt said.

“Do I have to?”

Matt shifted his eyes quickly to the left, then back again into Warren’s eyes. Warren turned around. He saw an elderly man staring at the boys as if they had tainted the pool, spoiled the water, dechristened its purity. They stood up, draped their shoulders with towels, and headed back to their room where housekeeping turned down the sheets, left Kisses on the pillows.

“Fancy,” Matt said.

“Let’s change and get drinks at The Iberian Lounge,” Warren said, dropping his pool towel and heading to the bathroom.

After both had showered, both had buttoned up their short-sleeved shirts, both had their shoes tied by Warren, they grabbed the leather couch—both men on opposite sides—and ordered a beer and a long island iced tea. They went through three rounds, and when the fourth was delivered they were inches apart in the middle of the couch.

“Warren, can you grab the back of my neck and hold it tight for a few minutes? Feels tense.”

Warren looked at Matt, smelled his Wolfthorn Old Spice deodorant, and blurted out, “Can it be this feeling follows you wherever you go, Matt?”

Warren reached over and grabbed Matt’s neck. Matt dropped his head back, his hair brushed against Warren’s hand.

“I love you, Matt. I’m in love with you.”

Matt lifted his head and said, “We’re friends. Don’t break the spell. It would be different.”

Matt bent his head backwards and shook it, continued to rub his hair and head on Warren’s hand. He smiled and said, “Let’s go back to the room. Get some sleep. We can wake up super early and eat a huge freaking breakfast.”

After two more drinks they went back to the room. Matt stripped down to his red Hanes boxer-briefs, Warren in a pair of shorts. Matt lay in the center of the bed and Warren lay on his side on the edge of the bed. Warren heard Matt crying; it was the familiar sound of muffled air slowly eking out of a tightened throat. Warren turned, rolled over so he was up against Matt’s body. He threw out his left arm and wrapped it around Matt’s chest, pulled him close.

“My dad caught me. When I was fifteen. Looked at my Internet history. He knew. He always knew.”

Warren reached up to wipe tears off of the sides of Matt’s face. He leaned in and kissed his cheek, saying nothing, doing nothing else.

The man behind the counter at the paint store tried more than three times to convince Matt that the paint wasn’t going to look good on the walls of such a small bedroom, and that the choice of black trim was even worse.

“I want my room to look like, feel like a cave,” he said.

Warren knew the colors didn’t marry up, but this was Matt’s room and he made the decision. Warren handed his credit card to the clerk and then gathered the cans and the bag of rollers and paint pans to carry to the car.

They stopped at Chick-fil-A on the way back to Matt’s house.

Warren stirred the paint while Matt looked out the window of his room, stretching his back to the left and right. He then looked over at Warren. He started to cry.

“I can’t do this anymore, Warren. I can’t hurt this much. I don’t wanna know what this pain feels like anymore.”

Warren stood up and walked behind Matt, placing his hands on his shoulders. He started massaging his neck and worked his way down his back. Matt continued to cry, stifling his sobs into a white noise stream of air leaking out of his throat.

“I don’t know what I can do for you, Matt. Hell, I’d switch spines with you, if I could.”

Matt turned around and hugged Warren.

“I just know this can’t keep up. Seriously, I can’t live with a pain like this.”

Warren had taken a Greyhound up to University Park from Philadelphia to help Matt clean his apartment and to give him some company while his roommate was away on an internship. He rented a room at The Nittany Lion Inn—might as well make a mini vacation out of it. Disembarking the bus, he looked around State College—a mass of brick buildings with small signage and a street that seemed too dangerous to ever cross. He watched as Matt risked his life crossing Atherton Street in the distance. As he came closer, Warren’s heart beat into his throat.

“I’m over my head, here, Matt,” he said, throwing his arms open.

Matt walked into his arms and they embraced, for a while.

Matt pulled away and said, “Don’t worry about it, Warren. I can help you navigate the place. The campus is kind of confusing, but downtown is just a straight strip of bars and places to buy sweatshirts.”

They walked to The Inn and had lunch at Whiskers, sharing chickpea and kale stew and chicken quesadillas. They checked into the room with two queen beds and a whirlpool in the bathroom, but they didn’t stay long. Matt wanted to show Warren what he was missing when

he transferred from the satellite school of Penn State to Temple University. They started drinking at The Corner Room, moved to Local Whiskey, Saffell's Saloon, and then ended at Whiskers. They shared beers, martinis, Jack Roses, four glasses of Riesling wine, and Long Island iced teas.

They walked back to the room. Warren vomited a soup of acid and alcohol into the toilet. He heard Matt crying in the bedroom. He was lying on one of the beds and clutching a half-empty plastic bottle of water. He threw the bottle at the wall and stood up.

"I can't do this anymore, man! The pain is ridiculous. You know what its like being twenty-one with a bad back? Did you know back pain brings on depression? I'm going fucking crazy. I'm seriously going crazy!"

Warren pulled himself off the floor from the toilet, grabbed a tissue, and stepped out to talk to Matt who was leaning against a wall next to an armoire with an embedded flat-screen television and a mini-bar. Warren held a tissue to Matt's nose and wiped away the clear snot. He balled up the tissue and dabbed away Matt's tears.

"This will pass, Matt, I promise. I promise you that if it doesn't I'll take you to see the seven wonders—that's how sure I am that it will be fixed."

Matt hugged Warren and said, "Let's go back to my dorm. I can't sleep here tonight."

They crossed the campus; both young men basked in the orange glow of sodium lights illuminating the library, the classrooms, and manicured greens with grazing rabbits. They passed all the bars, passed a closed Chipotle, and walked into Matt's dorm. As Matt unlocked the door, Warren entered a living room glowing a dim blue.

"Who the hell put these up," Warren said, pointing to the blue Christmas lights bordering the entire room.

"My roommate Charlie put them up. I hate them. The whole place looks like—"

"A fuckin' horror movie has been filmed here. What was he thinking?"

"I know," Matt said, looking down at his shoes.

“You shouldn’t live like this,” Warren said, and then he jumped, ripping the lights off the walls. Each tug and pull had the energy of anger, of violence.

When Warren was done with the living room he moved to the kitchen area, then the shared bedroom. Matt found the destruction hysterical. His laugh was guttural and he fell to the floor. He pulled his shirt off, then his pants, and never once stopped laughing. Warren fell on the couch and stared up at the ceiling—spinning and all—and passed out to the baritone of Matt’s laugh.

The sun came up the next morning too damned fast. The lack of curtains in the living room revealed an angry sun to a hung-over Warren. He walked into the bedroom and saw Matt in his bed sleeping on his back, mouth open, snoring. He wanted to wake him up to get breakfast but knew more sleep was better for Matt.

At nine o’clock Matt nudged Warren awake.

“What the hell happened last night,” Matt asked.

“I think we changed your life for the better.”

Matt pulled on a pair of tan jeans and a blue and gray hoodie and they walked to back to the hotel.

While Warren showered, Matt crawled into bed and fell back asleep. Warren took the other bed and in less than two minutes passed out. An hour later, Matt was sitting next to Warren on the bed. He was shaking Warren’s back to wake him.

“I don’t think I’m going to stay in my dorm this summer. After my back surgery I’m going to come home to heal.”

Warren smiled, happy to have Matt closer to home.

The boys went to Whiskers for lunch and a few drinks, which ended at four o’clock. They walked off campus to Hudson’s Bar and sat outside with Moscow Mules until they closed the bar.

The next morning, Warren checked out and Matt walked him to the bus station.

“I’m going to miss you, but it won’t be for long. I’ll take the bus home on Wednesday. We gotta get my bedroom together. Make it my own space.”

They hugged each other, a little too long, Warren thought, because the bus driver had given them both a sneer, and a too skinny man with sunken-in cheeks and a grey hoodie that looked as if it had been pulled out of a dumpster asked him, when he got on the bus, “You two queer?”

The phone went off at three-thirteen in the morning. Warren was in his bedroom at his parents’ house and had just come home after working a double shift at Outback Steakhouse. His hair smelled of bloomin’ onion and his back was sore.

“Hey,” Matt said.

“Hey, what’s going on?”

“My back. It’s killing me. Thought I’d take you up on the offer to call you whenever I couldn’t sleep. Is this O.K.?”

“Yeah! Yeah, it’s fine,” Warren replied, not even trying to open his eyes.

“I’ve been awake for three days straight. Gets to you, you know what I’m saying? And the pain? It’s worse now than it’s ever been. I think my roommate wants to kill me. He’s tired of me complaining about my back. Says I need to deal.”

“I don’t think any of us can understand what’s going on inside you, Matt.”

“I wish you were here. If I had you here...”

“I gotta get my ass up there,” Warren said.

“I get like this; I just want to throw myself in front of a bus, or, if I had a gun...”

“Don’t, Matt. This distance between us, it’s small.”

“Hold me.”

“What,” Warren replied, and then heard the sound of Matt’s iPhone go silent from a dead battery.

Warren had to go to University Park with fellow students for an event the first weekend in February—a mandatory English conference

needed to complete his degree for next year. He didn't know any of the other English majors and thought it'd be a good way to finally make friends. But once they got up there, they all dispersed like focused travelers. Warren found himself in Hudson's Bar drinking a vodka martini. He felt a hand fall on his back and gently squeeze his neck.

"Warren!"

Matt opened his arms and leaned in for a hug.

"I haven't seen you since last April during our sociology final. I didn't know you came up to the main campus."

"I didn't. Here for a conference. I actually transferred to Temple."

Matt sat in the stool next to Warren and told him about his lifting accident, his classes that he had to withdraw from, his worry about his identity. Warren listened patiently, remembered what a good guy Matt was when they had talked in class, and he wondered why Matt was so open with him.

"It's hard to make friends up here. My roommate is kind of a fuckwad, too. And this pain in my back is kind of making me crazy."

Warren listened to Matt continue to talk, continue to tell him everything about himself—his popped discs, the isolation he felt, the abuse from his father, and Warren realized that Matt might've been one of the bravest people he ever met. Might've been one of the kindest people he ever met. Might've been flirting with him, too.

"Damn, man! You'd be better off coming back to Philly. Sounds like this place drives you mad."

The boys continued talking until the bar closed. They exchanged cell phone numbers and Warren told Matt if he ever needed anything, no matter what time of day it was, to call him any time.

Three of the discs in Matt O'Connell's lower back protruded through his skin like an overstuffed laundry bag—nothing about it looked right. The physical therapist recommended stretches and yoga—neither of which worked. Matt received two cortisone injections—neither of which worked. He couldn't focus on his homework, his classes,

couldn't even get an erection, especially when he was with Cathy who wasn't even sure Matt liked women, and also knew Matt hated being alone, feeling alone. She knew the only connection he had made his first semester up there was her, and that all she had to do was avoid him for a little while and he would do whatever she wanted.

She put Dave Matthews on her iPod and told Matt she needed someone to crash into her. Matt wanted the closeness she was asking for—but not the sex. To him it was a trade off. She did everything she could to make it work. He wanted it to work, but instead they fell asleep, Matt's body warmed in Cathy's arms, even though in his dreams he was being held by a guy he knew back at his satellite campus that sat next to him in sociology—a guy he had thought of sometimes when he was alone.

The next night, Cathy asked Matt to come back. She got him drunk on peach rum, had him smoke a little, and pulled him into bed with her. Matt told her he didn't want to do it; he didn't want to be with her. That he was sure, at some point, he'd be with a woman, but not now, and when she threw him out of her bed, out of her apartment, wearing only his boxer briefs and a t-shirt, he passed out on the floor of her hallway.

Three guys walked by—mind-blown-drunk fratboys with blue balls—and they took photos of Matt with their privates in his mouth, fingers inside of him. The photos made the snapchat rounds, the email rounds, tumblr blogs—they even made it to Matt who thought of killing himself after he saw the linked images that Cathy had emailed him.

But while on the Internet, his Facebook friend list popped up. And there he was—Warren Williams—a guy who'd always been nice to him. A cute guy who once asked him to grab a coffee. A nice guy that was all Matt ever wanted.

Sand and Sugar

Julia Zygiel

She kisses her apples before biting into them. And she squeezes my hand before letting go. Every action, even the smallest twitch of a finger, must follow her arbitrary code of morals. The apple doesn't have a soul or feelings, I argue, smiling because my girlfriend is soft and sweet. "It's curious. No. Courteous." The whiskey makes the words like slush in her mouth as she lets a handful of sand slip slowly through her fingers, letting it down as gently as she can. She worries for the sand, but not whoever owns the private beach we're trespassing on. "The apple deserves one last act of kindness before it has to go through the circle of life again." She rubs her hands together to rid them of any stray granules. "Or whatever," she finishes with a dismissive giggle.

Or whatever. Always after a confession or after sounding off a thought that's been rattling around for a while. A sign-off, a signal. An insurance policy, to lessen the blow if I tell her that's stupid. To save herself the embarrassment. I lock my hand with hers, look out at the sea and then at the ocean within her. I want to tell her that she should never be embarrassed with me. That all of her thoughts are beautiful. Like her. But I know I'd never be able to say it right. I'd never be able to capture it like John Keats, or any of those other pretentious English writers. So instead I squeeze her hand, take her in my arms, and envelop my senses in the ocean. Or whatever.*

*Prose Poetry Runner-up of Poetry and Fiction Contest

April Caller

Bruce Parker

A tree comes to the door today,
a visitor
bearing flowers and buds in its hands

Please, tree, leave nothing behind till
Fall leaves cover everything—
now they are too young and shy.

The tree next door leans over the fence,
extends handfuls of white petals,
hides the squirrel as crows collect twigs.

The visitor knocks:
“Here, I have something to show you.”

The Hunters in the Snow

Bruce Parker

Four cold crows
stand on nearly black limbs
crusted with snow,
four poets' souls
stare into the distance,
silhouettes, silent statues that
in staring at everything,
see nothing.

Sky a strange shade of jade,
every fold of bark on trunks and limbs
on which the crows stand picked out—how close
the artist came to the wood to
which his delicacy has touched oil,
how clear his eye, the balance of his brain
of which the hunters take no notice.
They have taken little game.

Spring is Madness

Bruce Parker

Spring is madness, stubborn
to begin again
all that was ended with the
Fall. Daffodils fight a
sadness in the air, chilly,
still,
that caresses bare branches
set afire,
exhausting every effort of Spring to be here.

Yet the blooms know no other course,
no
other
source than water, light,
they struggle from the same earth
that bears
outraging oil.

Toil on, daffodils, meet the sun, dance
as though
you know
no one sees you bare your faces,
madness
in your eyes.

The Cloud

Erin Venuti

When the Cloud finds me, I'm minding my own business. That grey mass of loose brainwaves strung together in a knot. It says it used to belong to someone else who didn't ask for its company. Who finally managed to yell GO AWAY and get it to listen. Part of me thinks it's telling the truth, but part of me thinks it's lying, that it's been watching me for a while. Waiting for the right moment to coalesce, to wrap its foggy arms around my neck.

He lives under my bed. Just out of sight. I found him there last week, playing in the pile of everything else I want to forget. In the morning he grabs my ankles before my feet hit the floor and tries to pull me back to sleep. Usually I can shake him off long enough to throw myself out the door. If I can't, he'll climb into bed with me, curl up next to me, and wrap his icy arms around my chest. He follows me, sits next to me in class and at meals. He is there. Always. Everywhere. Gasses take the size and shape of their container, he whispers, they possess every last inch. At night we return to bed. His fists take shape and he pounds at my mattress.

It left a long time ago. I don't know how. Or why. Just that. Sometimes I think I see its colorless shadow coming from around the corner, its dark arm reaching from behind my shoulder in the mirror. I jump out of bed in the morning just in case it's still under there, waiting to catch me. After all, it knows my name. Worse, it knows my friends' names. It was my Cloud, but it watched them too.*

* Prose Poetry Runner-up of Poetry and Fiction Contest

Are You Going?

Rebecca Monroe

Bill closed the gate behind him without looking, his attention caught by the small run-down house before him. It had been pretty once; an idealistic cottage with flowers and fresh paint. Then May had died. He shut his eyes for a moment as a wave of loneliness washed over him. It's been twenty years. Twenty. See the dead flowers now weeds? The paint wasn't just peeling; it was worn away by the weather of years. He took a deep breath and let it out. There was no sense in fooling himself. If he hadn't done anything with it by now, he wasn't likely to. May was gone and she'd been the driving force behind Saturday's touching up this and fixing that. He released the gate he'd been using to steady himself and went up the steps.

The house felt over-warm. When he'd left for his walk, it had seemed chilly. His body would readjust from the cold outside and then he would want the heat so he left the thermostat alone. He'd heard people say Oregon winters were colder at forty degrees than ten degrees elsewhere because of the moisture. Perhaps. All he knew was the damp was hard to shake sometimes.

Going to the kitchen, he turned the burner on under the teakettle and began stripping off his layers of clothing. The clock over the stove had numbers nearly the size of his palm; a gift from a friend. It was almost ten-thirty. Arnie would be arriving soon with the paper.

He warmed his hands in the heat from the burner. Arnie was a strange friend for him to have. They were opposites—he thin to the point of skeletal, Arnie heavy...okay, well, fat. He read, Arnie watched television. His head had long since bid hair goodbye—Arnie always looked shaggy. Arnie's face was round where his, with its high forehead and long chin, was narrow and nervous looking. The years had made the differences between them something they had in common. Arnie, too, was a widower who had never re-married though Arnie didn't mind. More than once he'd said, 'Let her tell God what to do for a while!'

The doorbell rang and Bill went to let Arnie in.

"Did you have a nice walk?" Arnie entered with a blast of cold air.

“Yep. Just got back. The kettle’s on. Did you bring the paper?”

Arnie pulled off his coat, struggling between its bulk and his own. “No, fool, after all these years I finally forgot it. Never mind I walked all the way over here. Of course I brought the paper.”

Bill grinned. Arnie gave the same response every time.

They went to the kitchen where Bill fixed two cups of tea while Arnie centered the paper on the small table by the windows, before he sat down. Bill carried the cups to the table thinking, as he did every morning, he needed to switch kitchen chairs. Arnie’s was starting to squeak alarmingly and its legs had a weary look.

“Headlines first?” Arnie took the cup Bill handed him.

“As always.”

“Someday you ought to get your TV fixed.”

“Someday I may win the lottery. Right now I can’t afford it.” Bill sat across from Arnie. He could win ten lotteries and not a penny would go into the television. He’d missed it terribly when it had first quit but after a week, he found his pile of large print books more absorbing as he re-learned how to think about what he’d read. Two weeks and he was sleeping better, waking more rested.

“Your radio then.”

“Can’t afford that either.”

“You can. You’re too cheap.”

It usually took most of the day to get through the paper. At first, it had been Arnie’s way of cheering Bill up when Bill had found out his vision was failing. It turned into a pleasant way to pass the day for two old men with too much time on their hands. They met on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays to argue politics, crime, and the state of the world, which always triggered memories of how things had once been. Bill suspected Arnie didn’t watch the news in between. There was real surprise (or horror or outrage) when he read articles; so much so Bill had to sometimes prod him to read out loud.

“Listen to this.” It was four o’clock and they were on the personal ads. “MB. Seen. Can’t meet.’ I wonder if MB is male or female.”

Bill grinned. “MB is male. The ad sounds like it’s from a female.”

“Now how could you possibly determine that from four words?”

Bill tapped the paper. “If the person seen had been male, he would never have written the ad. He’d have assumed ‘MB’ would figure it out. Females don’t give males that much credit. They know they have to explain things,”

“Huh,” Arnie’s standard response when he didn’t completely agree and couldn’t think of a better argument. “What else have we got...William...” Arnie scowled.

“What?”

“William Kern. Born February 1, 1924 in Dallas. You have a brother.”

Bill froze in the act of dipping his tea bag. His name. His birthday. His birthplace. There was a mistake. Even as he rejected the idea, he acknowledged it was possible. “Are you sure you have the name right?” Was all he could think to say.

“Yep. William Kern. Your birthday’s on the first, isn’t it? Where you were born?”

Bill resumed bouncing the teabag, seeing the darker spots where it pressed against the paper as he nodded. It was possible there was another William Kern, wasn’t it? No. Not likely. Dallas, Oregon had been small in those days. Small enough the same last name meant a relative.

“You gonna talk to me or do I have to wait until that bag falls apart?”

What a joke it would be, after all these years. One of the topics on his first date with May had been his own lack of family. “My mother left my father. It’s possible.”

Arnie’s bushy brows went up. “Did she remarry?”

“I don’t know.” His voice came out flat. “When I say left, I mean left. She never wrote, never came around...” the quiet tick of the clock in his kitchen reminded him of the afternoon he’d sat for hours in silence with his father at a different kitchen table. He hadn’t really

understood why they were there – only something bad had happened while he'd been in school. He could still feel the darkness as late winter afternoon turned to night.

Arnie cleared his throat. "There's a Portland address here, a post office box. You could write to it."

Bill shook off the teabag and set it on the table. "I can't see to write. Besides, what's the point?"

"We won't know unless we ask, now will we? I'll write for you."

It was a hoax. Someone had gotten his name and birth date and were thinking of conning him. From what little his father had insinuated, the last thing Mother would have done was have another child. "It's a con, Arnie."

"Con you? Why? It's not like you've got a lot tucked away to steal."

"Thanks."

"It's true and you know it. It's winter and we're a couple of old men with nothing better to do. You've got to be wondering"

Foolish but, yes, he was. He realized something else at the same time. "You're going to write anyway, aren't you?"

Arnie went as red as his old skin would allow. Two bright dots on each cheek beneath his eyes.

Bill sighed. "There should be writing stuff in the desk,"

Arnie got the stationary and envelopes and put them on the table. The paper was pink rimmed with bright flowers. Arnie grinned. "Pretty."

"Compliments of Mable Howell before she went to Florida. I believe it was a hint,"

Arnie put the items on the table and sat down. Carefully he extracted a sheet of the stationary from the box and clicked open the ink pen. He slanted the stationary a bit and began to write, head tilted back so he could see through his bifocals. "I'm writing in response to your ad. I was born on February 1, 1924, in Dallas, Oregon and my name is William Kern," Arnie paused, looking an inquiry at Bill.

“Sounds fine.”

“Don’t you want to add anything?”

“You might put I am an only child.”

Arnie wrote it down. “You want your telephone number on it?”

“Absolutely not!” Bill sat back in his chair as if to get away from the idea. “I don’t even want my address on it!”

“There’s not much point in writing if they have no way to answer.”

“The last thing I want or need is some crazy calling here looking for money I don’t have. And I sure as heck don’t want them to know where I live.”

Arnie put the pen down. “You could take out a post office box.”

“What a waste of good money.”

Arnie scowled at him, jowls quivering slightly. “I’ll use my address then. They won’t know the difference.”

Bill felt silly though he wasn’t about to let Arnie know it. “I hope you don’t regret it.”

“You got a stamp?”

“Left hand drawer of the desk.”

After Arnie left, letter in hand, Bill stayed at the kitchen table.

What if it wasn’t a hoax and his mother had had another child? What did they want after all these years? Television had glorified family reunions of long lost loved ones with tears of joy, the awe at similarities. He’d lived too long to buy it. Television never bothered to check in later. Warm fuzzies had a way of shedding under the harshness of reality. Last, and most important, those families had been separated by hardships. Not because the mother was a...

He remembered his mother quite well, even though he’d only been eight when she’d left. He’d lived it so many times, it was burned into his soul. He’d set the whole thing aside at the age of twenty-five, when May had stood by the bed, open suitcase before her, unable to stand his suspicious jealousy any longer. Mother had almost ruined his

marriage even after seventeen years of absence. The realization, and corresponding rage at her, had helped him lock her away in his mind.

It was easy to say someone had a wild spirit when you didn't have to live with it; easy to admire independence and a carefree attitude when you weren't the one picking up the pieces, filling in the gaps, living in a house full to the eaves with hurt.

His father, typically, had been the opposite of his mother; quiet, pretending to understand when in fact he didn't. Unfortunately, his father denied being angry, right up until she left for good. Oh, he'd get mad about a door left open, a scar in the linoleum, a shirt not washed but he never got mad about the new dresses, the 'I'm going out' as the front door closed on a merry voice that wouldn't be heard again until after midnight.

How had his father stood it? Everyone in town knew what she was, how she was. It all seemed so, made for TV, now. At the time, she'd been labeled unusual, crazy, or untamable by the nice townspeople. Others had other words for her. Over the years, he'd heard conversations and opinions and formed his own vision. She hadn't even been pretty. She'd been too thin, with light strawberry red hair rather than the auburn models worked so hard to color to. If she wasn't laughing, she looked angry and anorexic. Her figure, he was sure, had been padded though he hadn't realized it at the time. Pictures revealed arms and legs too thin to support the bust she supposedly had.

Why they'd married became obvious when he'd gotten old enough to do the math.

Quit! Bill pushed himself up from the table. Put the woman back where she belonged; dead, gone, a nonentity in his life. He cleared the table of the coffee cups. He was in the middle of a good novel—by far more creative than his own history.

The next morning he lay in bed, staring at the ceiling, remembering the ad; all the feelings awake before he was. Mostly it was anger though there was also the old sense of worthlessness...she'd just walked away from him.

He rolled out of bed. Once he could sit up and swing his feet off however those days were long gone.

She was there while he dressed and made his coffee. Now she'd escaped the place he'd locked her all those years ago she refused to go back. Memories he'd forgotten he knew were pushing at each other for their say; her at the kitchen table in robe and slippers—hair smashed on one side, wild on the other, smoking a cigarette and looking into her coffee with an unseeing glare. His father, pottering about making breakfast. Silent, yet content too, because she wasn't always at the breakfast table in the morning.

The time she'd bought the new dress and come out to model it; beige with big blue flowers. His father had taken one look at her and started laughing—the uncontrollable type, starting as an explosion of air and then bending him over. The dress had three big flowers in the front and even Bill had been able to see their placing; two on top, one midway down, were inappropriate. She'd been furious for a moment but, in the end, joined them. One of the rare times the three of them had laughed together.

Grandma Budge, his mother's mother, visited regularly, holding things together where her daughter couldn't or wouldn't. She talked as she worked and the audience didn't seem to matter.

“She's a handful, my girl...I swear...I taught her, don't think I didn't, though none of it stuck. Oh, if I was looking, she could remember it all fine and do a wonderful job too but if I turned my back off she'd go—a wild spirit.” Grandma would beam at him. He always had to help her clean, and in the same room as if he, too, were a wild spirit to be watched.

“I told her to wait to get married but did she listen? Not her! Like she was trying to live her life all at once and before she was twenty. You missed the cracks there. Go back and do it over.”

He never could go back and do the parts he'd skipped. He had to go back and start it all over.

He felt a flare of anger. His childhood was like one dark horror and it had directed his life from its sullen corner. Baseball, hotdogs, and sunny afternoons had not been part of it. The darkness had been there throughout his marriage, mostly hidden once he realized it was ripping him and May apart. There was never an instance when May was late he didn't question why; what was she doing? Who was she with? It had

burrowed down into him with his father's silent grief.

He put the coffee cup in the sink so hard he double-checked it to make sure he hadn't broken it. The house needed cleaning. Enough of this maudlin crap.

One week later, to the day, Arnie was on Bill's doorstep at the usual time; paper under his arm, letter in his hand. "Your answer," he waved the envelope.

Bill snatched it from him. "I bet it's a mistake. I'll bet they spelled the name wrong, or got the wrong date."

"Get some coffee and let's read it," Arnie plucked the envelope back.

"All right. Take off your shoes. You're tracking in mud."

They sat at the table, coffee before them as Arnie opened the letter and began reading it aloud.

Dear Mr. Kern,

I'm sure this will come as a shock to you. You are not an only child. Our mother was pregnant with me when she left our father," Arnie raised his eyebrows, continuing at Bill's impatient gesture. "My name is Max. I'm sixty-two years old. My wife died ten years ago and I took up genealogy to pass the time. To say I was surprised when I discovered you is a mild understatement. I've since put off contacting you because I wanted to do more research and needed to come to terms with the facts. Your letter struck me as less than enthusiastic and so I have enclosed copies of my birth certificate along with our parent's marriage license. I'm not a sentimental sort and was not going to write since we've gone a lifetime without knowing each other. However, my children insisted. They have always been fascinated with Grandma's wild ways. If I am disturbing you, I understand and won't pursue the matter further. I will take silence as a sign you want to be left alone."

Bill used his magnifying glass to examine the documents. They looked authentic. He had nieces and nephews?

"You must be rattled," Arnie said. "You never use that monster."

Bill tucked the glass back into his sweater. "Some things you have to see for yourself. Of course I'm rattled. I guess I thought my mother's life stopped when she walked out. It never occurred to me to wonder what she did, after,"

"You put her out of your head, you mean,"

Didn't he wish! "Something like that."

"Why did she leave?"

Bill suddenly realized Arnie was probably imagining all sorts of things. "She was selfish, bored and I could probably toss spoiled in there too. My father did the best he could by her. It was never enough."

"So she just packed up one day and walked out?"

"Yes. As far as I know, my father never said a harsh word to her."

Arnie raised an eyebrow. "All her fault, eh. That would be a rarity, wouldn't it?"

The thought was a new one to Bill and it made him uncomfortable.

"You gonna write this guy back?"

"There's no phone number, is there?" He asked more to stall for time than knowledge. He would never call.

Could his father have been responsible for her leaving, her wildness? Had he been too strict, too stern, too dull? Or could she have left because of him, not Dad? He'd believed her behavior, the local gossip. It had never occurred to him to consider her leaving from a different angle. He shook his head slightly.

"No, there's no phone number. Apparently, he's as cautious as you are." Arnie shifted, causing the chair to protest.

Why? Why write back? What could be gained? He wanted the memories put away again.

"Write him," said Arnie, poking at the letter. "What harm?"

"Why?"

"Why not?"

Bill opened his mouth and shut it again. How could he explain?

“What happened the day she left?”

Arnie had found something more interesting than the daily news, Bill realized with a twinge of irritation. He rose to get them coffee. Was this Max better off financially than he was? What did it matter? Competition at his age was pathetic. “I came home from school and found Dad sitting at the kitchen table...”

He'd walked in, mind full of the dog he had crept past without disturbing — pretending he was an Indian creeping through fall air, the road a path in an imagined forest. He'd kicked the door shut, jumping when he realized his father was at the table, watching him.

“Where's Mother?” He wasn't sure why he asked except when something out of the ordinary happened it usually involved his mother.

His father sat, arms crossed in front of him, hair a little long and curling at the collar of his plaid shirt. His black-rimmed glasses caught the kitchen light and hid his eyes. “Gone.”

Gone? Gone from the house? Gone from town?

His father rose. “I'll start supper in a bit. Get your homework done.”

He didn't have any homework; it was too early in the school year. He went upstairs, put his books in his bedroom, and then went to theirs. The closet doors stood open and the gap was a blow of reality where his father's words hadn't penetrated. Like a facial disfiguration, the hole where her dresses had been crammed made him look away. All the dresser drawers were shut. There was no disruption or anger about the room—only the gaping hole.

He almost spilled the coffee when he realized he'd never believed her gone for good. Never thought of it that way. Every single day until he moved out at eighteen he expected to come home and find her there. “She left. She never should have gotten married to begin with. She wasn't the type to be content.” Even after all these years he couldn't give her the label she deserved.

Arnie nodded toward the table. "He might be able to fill in the blanks."

"Why would I care?"

"Because you're still mad!" Arnie chortled. "Seventy-three-years old and you're still mad. Isn't it time you put it to rest? Besides, we haven't had this much drama in our lives since Sandar's cat was poisoned."

"You're a sick man, Arnie." He was right though and the curiosity felt good. Where had she gone? What had she done? Had she remarried or had Max out of wedlock?

"I'll get the stationary."

"Sit still. I'll get it. It'll be short." Bill retrieved the pink box. "Give him my address and tell him if he wants to meet, I'm always here."

"You're going to tell him where you live?" Arnie's smile vanished.

"There's no point in dragging this out. I could keel over tomorrow. If he wants to come, let him come. He's already got your address. He could show up anyway."

"Responding to a letter is different than an actual invitation." Arnie took the pen and paper, hands dwarfing them. "We could write the questions you want to ask..."

Odd how their roles had reversed. "What's the point? Either he comes or he doesn't. Write." Now he'd decided, Bill was eager to get on with it.

A week passed. Then two. Bill was disappointed. Once the curiosity had awakened it would not go back to sleep and questions replaced memories. He had been ready to settle down for his afternoon nap when he heard a car in the driveway. He stepped out onto his porch, seeing Arnie do the same across the street. The car was white, a newer model though what it was, Bill didn't know. They all looked the same to him these days. An elderly man got out of the passenger's side and the driver, a woman of about forty got out too but stayed by the car. Arnie was already on his way across the street; struggling to pull on a coat.

Bill studied the man who was approaching him. The facial features were unmistakable; nose slightly hooked and flatter on the end than was attractive, high forehead, chin too long. He was shorter than Bill imagined but not thin like Mother. He was heavy, built more like Grandpa Budge. Bill went down the steps, wind cutting through him. "You must be Max."

"I am." Max extended a hand.

Bill took it and shook it. Max was scrutinizing him the way he was scrutinizing Max. "It's strange to see my face somewhere other than in a mirror." Then he introduced Arnie, who had appeared at their side.

Max called to the woman, waving her forward. "This is your niece, Betty."

Where Max resembled himself and their father, Betty had enough similarities to his mother, it was hard for Bill to look at her.

Bill waved toward the house. "Come inside. It's too cold for us to be standing around here." He included Arnie in the invitation.

He made coffee, happy to have something to do while everyone got settled. When he joined them, there was an awkward silence.

"What made you put the ad in the paper?" Arnie asked, loading his coffee with sugar.

"Betty. She wanted to find the other half of the family. I'm not getting any younger, which meant my older brother would be, well, older. She has never been happy she didn't know who her grandfather was and Mom would never give a straight story about that." Max stopped, shrugging one shoulder. It was a gesture Bill had not seen since he was eight.

"I've been hounding him for years," said Betty. "I don't know why he waited this long. I have kids who want to know all the family. And it was a mystery. Whatever happened to Uncle Bill..." She smiled and wiggled her eyebrows.

'Uncle.' Bill felt himself lurch inside. He was talking to his brother...his mother had lived on...had cared for another son but never returned to him. His throat closed up and he had to look away, struggled to breathe.

Betty reached over and put her hand over his and he met her gaze. One tear escaped and wound its way through the wrinkles in his cheeks.

“What was Dad like?” Max asked, stirring his coffee.

Bill regained control and felt a stab of sympathy. At least he had known Mother. Max hadn’t even had that much. “Before his business went belly-up, before Mother left, he was doing pretty well. He worked hard, tried to balance it out with family time. He’d take Mother and me to the show every Friday night. In the summers, we’d go to the fair or on picnics. In the winter, we’d go to Ainsworth to shop and have dinner, maybe see a movie. I think he enjoyed being a family man,”

“Sounds ideal. Look, I waited a long time because Mom was so, sensitive, about the whole thing I’m pretty sure she got hurt. I didn’t want to meet people who were responsible for that. The least you could do is be honest with me.” Max said, shrugging again.

“Dad, be fair.” Betty rapped him lightly on the arm. “He’s being careful of your feelings,”

“Honestly? When they got along, it was ideal. It was also very rare,” said Bill. “When they didn’t, which was normal, it was cold silence. They were terrible at the day-to-day stuff. Mother liked drama too much to enjoy a mundane dinner with quiet visiting and simple pleasures. She liked parties, she liked night life and she liked being with, others.” He let it hang.

Max nodded. “I know she liked to have fun. She was also bipolar. Later she was on meds for it. When I was young we had a great time together, carnivals, beach trips, road trips.” He lifted the shoulder. “She was not mother material. I was mostly raised by Grandma and Grandpa Budge. The only thing Mom would say about Dad was he was an angel for tolerating her and a fool for marrying her.”

“Did she ever tell Dad about you? Why she left him when she was pregnant?” The honest assessment of herself surprised Bill.

Max shrugged. “She never said. Some days Grandma Budge would talk about how Dad had been too stifling. Mom couldn’t bear to see her child turn out like that. Other days, Grandma would rail against Mom for being too selfish to share her life with a man, spend time with

her child. It depended on the day. The one thing neither of them would do is tell me about Dad, aside from him being dull. I don't know if she ever told Dad I existed."

Bill wished he could reassure Max. The best he could say was, "After Mother left, he wasn't much there for any one, myself included. I have pictures."

"I would like to see them," responded Max.

As he got the pictures, Bill wondered which was worse: knowing your parent had left, or never having known them at all?

The photo album on the table helped give a focal point and slowly stories emerged to blend with them, clarify what had happened after she'd left. Bill felt the gaps filling in as he and Max shared their own parts of their history. Mother hadn't changed until Max had been nearly forty and her energy began to diminish. She had stayed single, but never alone. She'd never stopped chasing life. Dad had never started again. Max had loved her very much. It was in the way his eyes shone and got moist when he spoke of her so however shallow she might have been, she'd done something to deserve that.

It was dark outside before Betty began gathering her purse and coat, forcing Max to acknowledge it was time to leave.

"We would like you to come see us, maybe you could spend a weekend," Max said as they all stood at the door. He held out his hand.

Bill took it, clasping it hard. This was his brother! It really was his brother. Family. "They won't let me drive anymore." It was the first time Bill had ever regretted the lack.

"I can come get you," said Betty.

"I could run him down," Arnie put in quickly.

Bill felt like baggage. "Let me think about it. I have your number. I'll call you." He ushered them out, suddenly eager to be alone, to think, and absorb all he'd learned.

As he prepared for bed, he thought of Max's invitation. Spend a weekend with his brother. How long had it been since he'd been away from his home for even a day? Years! The thought frightened and excited him. What would they talk about? Once they used up the memories?

There was no way he could go. And knew he would.

He paused as he was putting toothpaste on the toothbrush. The dark cycle of his thoughts about Mother was gone. Max had helped him see her as a human rather than a plastic silhouette of self-centeredness. Like a stone skipping over water, she'd dipped in and out, unable to stop her course while being aware of it. Also, he had a different view of his father. Had Dad known there was a second child? Had his father been more indifferent than he'd imagined? Why had he never at least tried to find her? Or had he and been turned away?

At seventy-three-years old, he should know there were no absolute villains and no perfect good guys in any drama. The knowing wasn't so easy to apply when it was your emotions involved.

The next morning he went for his walk, as usual and Arnie showed up with the paper, as usual.

"Are you going to go?" Arnie lumbered in, paper under one arm, face red from the exertion of walking across the street.

"I haven't decided."

"I can drive you. Then you wouldn't be stuck down there for a whole weekend with no way home."

The paper and coffee lay between them. It struck Bill how all the props were the same however, the movie had changed.

"You all got along real good." Arnie began spooning sugar into his coffee.

"I was surprised. I thought it would be more awkward," Bill said. "I thought there would be more evasions, less truth."

"They seem like nice enough folks."

"Company manners can hide a lot. Anything good in the paper?"

Arnie began to read but they'd both been jolted out of the focus they'd given it. The articles and issues were the same as they'd been for the days stretching out behind them, as were their own opinions. Arnie's gaze kept flicking up at him, noticing his inattention.

Finally, Arnie pushed the paper aside. "You two look and sound a lot alike. It's kind of spooky."

Bill frowned. Was he more like his mother than he thought? Or maybe it was the Grandparents Budge influence. He'd forgotten to ask Max if he'd ever cleaned with Grandma Budge. "I would like to go," he said it aloud as the realization hit him.

"I can drive you," Arnie repeated.

He wasn't sure Max could put two of them up for the night. Of course, if Arnie drove, they wouldn't have to spend the night. He wanted to spend the night though; have time to get to know Max, the family. Betty probably would come get him if he asked.

Arnie was fidgeting with the corner of the newspaper they'd only half read...his other hand tight about the coffee cup.

Dip and skip in and out of relationships, just like his mother. He'd never, until this moment, realized how easy it was or that he might do it too. He'd almost missed it. Almost. "Sounds good. If Max can't put both of us up, we'll split a motel room—a cheap motel room."

The hand relaxed. "I'll bet you snore. Where's his number? I can dial for you."

Bill smiled. Mother truly was laid to rest.

Cain and Abel

Jane Lunin Perel

The bane of pain drains the brain's main frame like fame
slain. A deranged plane flamed down into sugar cane.
So maiming names us. The rain shames us, lame as
Cain waiting for his truth claim. We would slay Abel
for Cain? Cain for Abel? If we could strain
beyond this bitter, bitter taming.

Cash for Scrap

Jane Lunin Perel

9 trucks lined up to unload Heaps of Metal. Yesterday 11 beyond the sign "Cash for Scrap." Metal Mountains reflecting yellowblueorange-black dismemberedcarspigironfencestrashcans. A moment to Worship Combustion/ Destruction. An abstract painting of a Planet Imploding settling into a Pyramid of Cipherable Cash. We always Slow Down and Great Excitement Seizes us. That the Enormous Unshaping Cone at the top has Grown. A monster of fall Shattered Matter. Children Stripped from their Mothers by those who Bury them at the Bottom. Disembodied Junk Suffocating in Nightmares. Only Shards for Nerves. Battered into Wrecks. Each one Shrinking,

Destroyed. I was outside their Dismantling before I saw the ScrapHeap Tearing Apart the Sky. Only to Assert Dominion.

The Perseids

Alexandra Rose

This velvet universe
called upon by users,
takers, prayer-sayers,
aces of clandestine,
horses of night,
overflowing
with chrysanthemum spirits.

Tightly bound,
tumbling down
through avenues
marked by stars.

momma's fudge brownies

Alexandra Rose

momma's kitchen is bare footsteps
take her cautious tread to the fridge
the pantry and out the grout
once-laden with sugar
cayenne and all smudged
under those size sixes the mix
sits store-bought unnecessary

momma's kitchen is bare faces
of her june-sky sweetie pies
reminders of before the war
once fought with flour and firepower
goodbyes laced with cinnamon
hearts laced with bullets
momma's kitchen is bare

Of Gains and Guiles

Alexandra Rose

Sometimes I go over to that little pond
beside our house and look down into it,
disappointed that it isn't as deep as it used to be.

I stick a toe in and swish it around
to taunt whatever creatures lurk there.
Then you come over to me and pull me back,

and we sit and stare into the sky hoping
for a break in the silence.

Each time, you look over first,

give me your catastrophic smile,
and say something celestial into my ear.
Out of this I receive no satisfaction.

Yet my eyes would show you mirth
and my mouth would show you zeal,
or I'd bow my head in mock modesty.

Would you like to pluck the pearls
from around my neck?
Or would uttered symphonies please you more?

Sometimes I sink into the cracked

leather of your recliner, certain
that you have fallen asleep beside our children.

These bedtime tales of Dickinson, Stein, Toklas
wouldn't put me to sleep on this star-fire night
where words traded concealed truths.

Then I place the books on the shelf
next to the recipes and anthologies,
where your eye never wanders, and wake you.

In our too-big too-small bed, I lie in the terminal quiet
and wait for you to put your hand on my arm.
You always do.

In summers, it festered.
In winters, it froze.
The illimitable loop of my hopeless Eden.

Knock Knocking

Eliana Lopez

knock knock

They didn't even have the decency to knock a third time
Like they knew what they were taking I'd never get back

Hand on knob

Hand on heart

Hand on gun

Hands behind your back

From the door frame "Where's your daddy, girl" From the hall

"Oh my god"

From the bedroom

"Que quieren Eliana"

You then.

Him now.

Me soon?

Hands clasped

Knees on the wooden church floor

Please let my papi come home

Please let my papi come home

He came home

And that was the birth of a series of false hope

Cause they came knock knocking again and again

Too many hands in too many cuffs

Too many sentences

Too many lives

Behind too many bars Too many lies

Causing too many scars

Now I have this recurring dream where they tell me I can live you,

daddy If I reach you

I can never reach you, daddy

Can you make it to me please?

Come Home

Eliana Lopez

25 year to life

25 years of your life

For the end of his life

The swift click of a double ended trigger

That ended him and you and all the bodies in between

I don't know if you knew where the intentions of the night laid

I might be naive to think your innocence survived in a world this cruel

Regardless of the truth

Your life will be indefinitely tied

To that one definite choice

I'm disappointed

In the father that didn't raise you

In the system that failed you

In the god I prayed to

Because it's more than just you two

It's about all the colored boys and girls

Whose worlds didn't treat them gently

So they rough each other up

Not knowing they are one in the same

Using one another as shields
Not knowing the blood of a brother isn't death repellent
It's a bloody shame

A white man's game
Of how to pin the gun shot on the black boy
Of pushing a colored kid far enough into a corner
Until his option to shred blood seems probable

We can't blame the white man for everything
If we did, we be just as bad
Incapable of facing blame
We can't point a finger and a trigger expecting the fault to be less our own

That's why I'm disappointed in you too
You made a choice
I'm still not sure which one it was
My heart has been pleading with me to believe the best in you

But, still
Now you have to pay 25 years of your life
He has to pay 25 years of his life
And
He has no more life to give

And I'm spending mine in Lynn district court
Hoping, wishing
That the white man on the pedestal so high

Might see past the allegations against a young black prince

Begging for my silent sobs to rust your handcuffs

To bring you home

I wish you would've just come home

I wish you all would've just come home

Cause your little sister's birthday is around the corner

My mom's birthday is in a few days

And your slice of cake will go uneaten, untouched

Because Thanksgiving's around the corner

And your dad doesn't feel thankful for anything these days

Because New Year is around the corner

And when the ball drops at 12

It'll all just mean the first, the second, the thirty-fourth year

None of you came home

I Suppose

Eliana Lopez

Sometimes when I'm cradled by my four bedroom walls

I feel like I'm in this pit

I feel like I'm being forced to lay face down at the bottom of an inground pool

Full to the brim with loss and hate and anger and all the things most familiar to
me

Suffocating on the decaying debris of those who've drowned before me

Sometimes I feel like I'm winning

Like I've found a way to grow gills and thrive in a place I don't belong

And with each inhale my body is floating to a place a little less dense

A little more light

But, no

Tough luck, because the light feels like a place for those lighter than me

And I know I'm wrong because I've suffocated on vanilla flavored debris too

I'm just trying to put a face to a name because,

Depression doesn't seem to be enough for you

Enough to convince you that the water I'm still choking up from my last trip to
that pit isn't metaphorical

Enough to prove the marks on me weren't premeditated attacks

on your conscience

Just survival tactics

Because maybe if the pool turned red enough you might drain it

And I, could breathe again

People talk about lending a hand
Me, reaching up to the unexpected hero
But they don't talk about when you can't
When the most available hand is reaching out
From its facedown position on the other side of that same damn pool.

What am I supposed to do when the last gulp of water I suffocated on
tasted like the remnants of my mother's
broken heart?

What then?

Am I supposed to be the heroine or the helpless bystander in that story?

Am I supposed to lift my body, the one that begs to be limp?

And inhale every piece of ruin left behind

Until the pool is empty?

Am I supposed to breathe life into the trail of bodies depression has left
behind?

Am I supposed to then drag the unwilling to a place where their hearts
can pump purpose into them once more?

Am I?

I don't know

But I guess

I'll try

Darkness

Eliana Lopez

I want to sit in the dark with you
With the remnants of God's shattered promises shining through the window
Highlighting my every mistake
Backs on a bed
Heads toward a ceiling
Breathing slow
Thinking nothing about me and everything about us

I want the darkness in our four walls to swallow me
Mask my pain
Engulf me in you

I want all my open eyes to see is the pitch darkness
So the vibrato of your voice is all I sense
So the depth of your midnight memories can muffle my uncertainty

I'm not scared of the dark with you.
Being as blind with my eyes open as they would be closed doesn't phase me
Because I know all the direction I need is mapped in the echo of your voice
Cascading from your mouth, coating the walls of our darkness, gliding in my
mind
For that moment
Not a moment that will be or that has been
Can overpower me and you
Or our ability to lay clothed in nakedness

Or the darkness that drowns
But never suffocates us

I want to sit in the darkness longer with you
But now,
With my head in your lap and your head tilted towards the man neither of us
know
The tango of our voices has muted my insomnia
And I'm drifting

Drifting into something a little less dark
A little less us
A little less like home

Amateur Imagination

Eliana Lopez

I never had an active imagination
As a child, my room was my room
Not the locale of any amateur attempt at establishing a home
Only the shell casing falling from my restless body
As the capsule of my existence pierced the world
A place to lay my head, only partly my own, temporary

My living room wasn't the setting of any adventure
The space between the two couches was only a pocket for forgotten socks
Not a perfect alleyway to fitted sheet forts
Where nightmare met the hero brewing in every child

Everything was real
There was no funny bone to advert the pain, to conjure laughter
Only the brutal collision of loss and need
No filter to mask the ugly
Only illumination of its every angle
A strictly factual existence

Now
My imagination limps loose
Free to flounder in the pockets of my mind
Those pleading to be turned inside-out
Released of their content

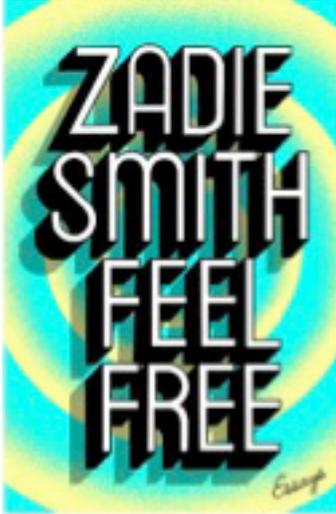
My imagination is a suction
Siphoning the worms of pain that fester in my mind
Hissing them into the clear void pickling my brain

Really, it is drowning
Engulfed in its own filth
Meant to cradle, cushion
Really, suffocates, strangles
My brain

Now
My hilarity layers my humanity making it
Supernaturally invulnerable to truth
The doubt that dances down my face is glazed
With a potent foundation of fiction
Nothing is real.

On Zadie Smith and Exploration as Freedom

Micol Striuli



Being a college student, the word “essay” invokes some unpleasant thoughts. The realm of academia reduces the essay to a piece of pedantic and repetitive writing, but Zadie Smith shows us that it certainly does not have to be that way. Shrewd, witty, and insightful—her essays capture the sense of liberation that her title *Feel Free* suggests. This freedom is translated in the spontaneous and unique topics that she expresses in this collection of essays. Known for her brilliant novels,

such as *White Teeth*, *Swing Time*, and *NW*, which also explore the human experience, much of Smith’s writing is propelled by an introspection of her multiracial identity. Born the daughter of a black Jamaican mother and a white British father, she is able to navigate avenues between black and white, the Americas and Europe. Smith lends a continual voice to her racial identity that echoes in her commentaries on art, music, film, politics, and literature. Therefore, the most important element of freedom that she presents is found in the exploration of the self.

Comprised of five distinct sections—“In the World,” “In the Audience,” “In the Gallery,” “On the Bookshelf,” and “Feel Free”—she explores a wide range of political, philosophical, and racial issues in our contemporary age. Each section contains essays published over the past ten years and distinctly promotes this notion of freedom. The first section focuses on observations of politics, namely in the post-Trump, post-Brexit era. Her transnational experience of living between New York and London allows her to contribute a nuanced view on neoliberal politics that affect citizens on both sides of the Atlantic. Her universalist perspective culminates in her exhortation that in order to understand freedom, an interdisciplinary exploration of the arts and the self is necessary. She writes on

our current political reality: “Millions of more or less amorphous selves will now necessarily find themselves solidifying into protesters, activists, marchers, voters, firebrands, impeachers, lobbyists, soldiers, champions, defenders, historians, experts, critics. You can’t fight fire with air.” Her political awareness also extends to the realm of literature and art especially when she expresses her support for public libraries in the piece “Northwest London Blues” (an homage to her neighborhood and 2012 novel *NW*). By expressing discontent in the economic and governmental neglect of libraries, she reinforces the importance of literature to be accessible in community spaces.

Smith often mentions that her young children contribute to her understanding of the world around her and that the issues of contemporary society will shape their future. In what I thought was her most interesting piece, “Getting In and Out,” relates the multiracial experience to the 2016 film *Get Out*. She explores the polarization between black and white America and the presents a challenge to the pervasive notion of racial purity. By discussing Dana Schultz’s controversial painting of Emmett Till entitled “Open Casket,” Smith wonders if her own “quadroon” (quarter-black) children “are too white to engage in black suffering.” This piece speaks to the importance of her writing and its engagement with a black, white, and multiracial audience. Her work is not only relevant in today’s globalized world, especially amidst calls for a greater acceptance of diversity and multiculturalism, but necessary in order to fully address the nuances of race and create a better understanding of what comprises a multicultural identity. Smith seeks not to further divide, but like her essay “On Optimism and Despair,” she hopes for a greater sense of unity in our current times of polarization and bigotry.

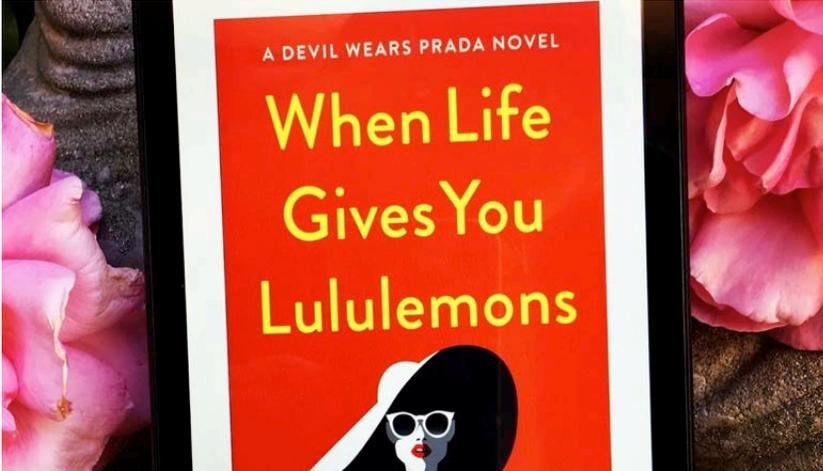
Perhaps most striking are her analyses of pop culture. What makes her observations on pop culture, like the hype surrounding Justin Bieber (“Meet Justin Bieber!”) and Jay-Z’s contribution to hip-hop (“The House that H.O.V.A Built”), so interesting is her ability to turn superficial facets of pop music into philosophical meditation. In her essay on Justin Bieber, she relates the idea of celebrity persona to Martin’s theory of the I and Thou. By analyzing the concept of the “fan girl,” she is able to express in great detail the meaning of interpersonal relationships and the superficiality of personality.

The beauty of Smith’s writing comes from this prolific ability to

take quotidian aspects of life, especially aspects of contemporary society that may be regarded as trivial, and reflect on them with such attentiveness. Her essays are filled with such careful contemplation that she is able to go beyond the surface of mainstream phenomena and relate these broad topics to the individual self. Smith succeeds in demonstrating that observation leads to liberation, namely that if we continue to explore the world around us we can better understand ourselves.

When Life Gives You Lululemons Champions Housewives Across the United States

Elena Bibilos



Lauren Weisberger's *When Life Gives You Lululemons* is a light-hearted depiction of three wives teaming up to cause one of their cruelly conniving husbands, Senator Graham, to crumble like a s'more. With a sprinkle of Gatsby-esque parties in the seemingly drab suburbia of Greenwich, a dash of pop culture references, and guest appearances by the devil herself, the one and only Miranda Priestley, Weisberger's next installation in *The Devil Wears Prada* series champions housewives across the United States. This novel completely eradicates the common fear that turning thirty is the end of the wild, Dionysian phase of life—au contraire, this novel shows thirty is just the beginning of the rollercoaster.

Structurally, the novel alternates perspectives between three female characters, Emily, Miriam, and Karolina, and the characterization of these women is what makes the novel so dynamic. Readers enter into the Devil's world and meet thirty-five-year-old career woman Emily, the ex-assistant to Miranda Priestley of *Runway Magazine*, on New Year's Eve in Los Angeles, which Emily decided was "God Himself[s] least favorite city on earth." She is at a party with her husband, who is flirting

with a younger woman. Quickly, the readers learn that Emily's heart is in her career, as she accepts a job offer to clean up yet another celebrity's mess—this time, Swastikas are involved—as she jets off to New York to deal with public relations, where a spiked coffee and entitled celebrities await.

Miriam, in contrast, is a housewife of Greenwich who retired from her eighty-hour work week as a lawyer to raise her three children, and whose days consist of her Fitbit, various get-togethers with the other moms in town, Lululemons, and Soul Cycle. Our third wife of the trio is the catalyst to our plot; Miriam, ex-model from Poland turned wife of Senator Graham and loving step-mother to Harry. She spends a night in jail due to an unjust DUI, framed by her husband who wanted a divorce so he could strategically marry political golden girl, Regan, to enhance his president aspirations.

This unlikely trio is an electric bunch—Emily is as sharp as the Pradas for which the series is named, Miriam's legal finesse is empowering, as is watching her grow to become surer of herself throughout the novel, and Karolina's triumphant quest to rejuvenate her reputation after a DUI charge, win her son back, and get revenge on Graham is as satisfying as Karolina popping the three-thousand-dollar bottle of wine they were supposed to drink on their tenth wedding anniversary.

While at the surface level, this novel may seem to just be humorous romantic fiction, Weisberger simultaneously weaves in a nuanced social commentary regarding public perception of celebrity culture in the United States. Protagonist Emily built her career after leaving Runway on creating believable personas for various celebrities that will be well-received in the public eye. Throughout the novel, Emily works to do damage control and attempt to save Karolina's reputation, which has sunk, "From Save the Children to drunk driving with children" in just one night. Emily, always clear-minded, noted that the people respond better to, "Feeling over fact! No one cares what actually happened. No one cares if you're guilty or innocent...The only thing that matters is how they feel about you." With this advice as her guide, Karolina tries to win over the hearts of Americans everywhere via fake stints in rehab, public tears, and shaking hands with the right people. Emotion trumps logic in the Devil's world, but Weisberger's novel does pose some questions—what does this say about our society today? Is it a positive or

negative that our society is so easily swayed?

Weisberger's novel hinges on this idea that society's opinions can be shaped by the media playing on their emotions. She executes this juxtaposition between events that really happen versus the public perception of those events flawlessly, bringing the reader along for the ride, and allowing us to see both sides of the story. This discrepancy between what is real and what is perceived by others garners the reader's sympathy for the characters, in plotlines as extreme as being falsely held for a DUI to wrongly assuming a husband's infidelity. The larger misconceptions of reality such as the DUI drive the plot forward, but the smaller misconceptions, like miscommunications between husband and wife or friend to friend make this novel relatable and a joy to read.

This novel is merit-worthy in that at three hundred and forty pages, it is a compelling read, with dynamic characters and a well-constructed plot. The ending is satisfying and even has a few twists thrown in along the way. Weisberger's book should be on Christmas lists for all those who loved *The Devil Wears Prada*, and even those who haven't. It can be read as a stand-alone novel, because it has a completely different plot. There are two large scenes in which the devil herself, Miranda Priestley, appears, but Weisberger gave enough detail that if readers are starting on this book, they will not need background knowledge. This book should be read by women everywhere—it appeals to those looking to find their place in the world, and in learning how to navigate juggling the workplace, family, friends, and romantic endeavors.

Contributors' Notes

Brianna Brickner is senior at Providence College, majoring in English. She is from Eau Claire, Wisconsin and will be returning to the Midwest where she will attend graduate school for counseling psychology with hopes of becoming a therapist. She's a voracious reader and loves writing in her free time.

Maggie Burke is a senior at Providence College majoring in Creative Writing and Sociology, with minors in Women's Studies and Black Studies. When not in Rhode Island, she makes a living selling seashells by the seashore down on Cape Cod. At the age of 16, a prophetic nun in Guayaquil, Ecuador told her she was going to change the world for the better with her words. She is trying to do so every day.

Tyara Dabrio was born in New York, and raised in Hartford, Connecticut alongside her three older brothers. She is a senior at Providence College with a major in psychology and is also in pursuit of a business studies certificate. She hopes to become a psychologist focusing on both research and counseling. Her goal is to help people grow from their experiences and learn the power in honesty and acceptance.

Rebecca Ethridge is originally from Central Florida, but upon craving mountains and the change of seasons, she moved to Asheville, North Carolina. She has the privilege of tutoring and teaching students at Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College about all aspects of the writing process. She is currently interested in poetry that interweaves a strong sense of time, memory, and place.

John Grey is an Australian poet, Rhode Island resident. Recently published in *Midwest Quarterly*, *Poetry East* and *Columbia Review* with work upcoming in *South Florida Poetry Journal*, *Hawaii Review* and *Roanoke Review*.

Dawyn Henriquez has wanted to tell stories for as long as he can remember. When he was a kid he created the most elaborate scenarios for his action figures, making dining room tables into tree-worlds in which each plastic figurine was a hero, a villain, and everything else in-between. At the time he had no idea he was trying to escape realities that

went over his head: eviction notices, alcoholic families, jailed mothers, abandonment. In retrospect, those are the things that made him so capable of escaping into the stories he made up. Obviously, he still writes to this day, but not because reality has failed him like it did then, not because he wants to escape and leave everything behind, but because the worlds he creates now are fragments of the one he lives in, they are his truth in one way or another. And so, writing is the only truth he has left.

Clara Howard is a fourth-year Creative Writing student at Providence College. Her writing career started in the third grade, when she co-wrote her first short story, “The Buggy Adventures of Buzzie, Lovie, Zip-Zap, and Petal.” From there, she went on to scribble poetry on napkins, fill agendas with fiction, and even dabble in the world of fanfiction. You can find pieces of her more recent writing in publications such as Providence College’s own student-run newspaper *The Conl*, where she has served as both staff writer and co-editor of the Portfolio section.

Victor Hugo was a French writer who lived from 1802-1885. He is well known as a prose writer outside of France, and some of his most famous works are *Les Misérables* and *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*. In France he is also known for his poetry collections *Les Contemplations* and *La Légende des siècles*.

Paul Iechko is the author of the chapbooks *Bartok in Winter* (Flutter Press, 2018) and *Graph of Life* (Finishing Line Press, 2018). His work has appeared in a variety of journals, including *Manhattanville Review*, *formercactus*, *Sheila-Na-Gig*, *Marsh Hawk Review* and *Rockvale Review*. He lives in Lambertville, NJ.

Marilyn E. Johnston is the author of two full collections of poetry, *Silk Fist Songs* and *Weight of the Angel* published by Antrim House Books. Her chapbook, *Against Disappearance*, was published by Redgreene Press, Pittsburgh. Her work has garnered six Pushcart Prize nominations and has appeared in numerous journals, including *South Carolina Review*, *Worcester Review* and *Poet Lore*. Marilyn is co-founder of the Wintonbury Poetry Reading Series in the Bloomfield (CT) Libraries, a series she directed for twenty years and which is still ongoing. Marilyn retired from the library in 2017.

Eliana Lopez is a freshmen English major with a concentration in Creative Writing, originally from Lynn, Massachusetts. She is a poet with a passion for performance and over the tops theatrics. Having no clue where her passion for creative writing will lead her, she is hoping to find the answer in the lines of an unread poem. With that in mind she is looking forward to the upcoming years working on the editorial staff of *The Alembic*—perhaps she will find herself in a submission. Lastly and completely unrelated but equally important, she strongly believes if she had the opportunity to be a Disney character she would be Nala from *The Lion King*.

Kincaid McLaren is from Brockton, Massachusetts—30 minutes outside of Boston. She is currently in her third year at Providence College, but studying abroad in Florence, Italy this semester. During her sophomore and junior years at Providence College, she acted as a Public Relations Officer for the poetry club on campus, Believers of Words. This club with the help of alumna Phionna Claude was the reason why her poetry excelled over the years. “Tender Headed” is a prose poem written in the depths of the relationship she maintained as a child with her mother. Recognizing that her wash days or days they spent together in the hair salon were some of the most intimate moments during her younger years. This poem highlights what it is to grow up as a black woman who appreciates the relationship between her mother and herself.

Meghan Mello is a sophomore Finance major from Syracuse, N.Y. She loves to write in her free time which is why she chose to submit this piece as well as undertake a writing minor. After college, she plans on starting a fashion company and brand as well as continuing to write about her experiences and observations in life. She has a great group of friends at school as well as a loving family back home. She is very blessed.

Megan Monte is a junior English and Secondary Education major at Providence College. She attributes her love for reading and writing to growing up in a small Massachusetts town with parents who promised her unlimited books—a promise their wallets probably regret. In her free time, you’ll find her cooking, playing violin, training for races, or dreaming of her next scuba diving trip.

Sheryl L. Nelms is from the Flint Hills of Kansas. She graduated from South Dakota State University. She's had over 5,000 articles, stories and poems published, including twenty collections of her poems*. She's the fiction/nonfiction editor of *The Pen Woman Magazine*, the *National League of American Pen Women* publication, was a contributing editor for *Time Of Singing, A Magazine of Christian Poetry* and four time Pushcart Prize nominee. *For longer credits listing see Sheryl L. Nelms at www.pw.org/directory/featured.

Amado Nervo was a Mexican poet, journalist, and teacher who lived from 1870-1919. He was involved in Latin and South American politics during his stint as the Mexican Ambassador to Argentina and Uruguay. He is considered to be one of the most influential Mexican poets of the 20th century. He has 20 published books of poetry and 6 published prose books that include several novels and collections of essays.

Bruce Parker was born in Providence, Rhode Island, and holds a BA in history from the University of Maryland Far East Division, Okinawa, Japan, and an MA in Secondary Education from the University of New Mexico. He has worked as a technical editor, teacher of English as a Second Language, and a translator. His work has most recently appeared in *Zelizabeths*, *The Inflectionist Review*, *Common Ground Review*, *Perfume River Review* and *CIRQUE*. He lives in Portland, Oregon, where he and his spouse, poet and artist Diane Corson, host the Portland Ars Poetica workshop.

Simon Perchik is an attorney whose poems have appeared in *Partisan Review*, *Forge*, *Poetry*, *Osiris*, *The New Yorker* and elsewhere. His most recent collection is *The Osiris Poems* published by boxofchalk, 2017. For more information including free e-books and his essay "Magic, Illusion and Other Realities" please visit his website at www.simonperchik.com.

Jane Lunin Perel is the author of five books: *Red Radio Heart: Prose Poems*, *The Lone Ranger and The Neo American Church*, *The Fishes: A Graphic Poetics Essay* (with Artist James Baker), *Blowing Kisses to the Sharks*, and *The Sea is Not Full*. A professor emerita of Providence College, Perel arrived to teach English and creative writing at the college in 1971, and led the initiative to establish the College's Women's Studies Program in 1994, serving as its first director, and was devoted to it and the Department

of English until her retirement in 2014. Perel had also served for many years as the faculty advisor of *The Alembic*.

David Press taught composition, comics, creative writing, and film at Paul Smith's College in New York's Adirondack Park. The National Science Foundation published his graphic novel co-written with Curt Stager with art by Emilyann Cummings, called *Walden: The Graphic Novel* about how climate change has affected Walden Pond after Henry David Thoreau made the location a literary landmark. He is working on a collection of stories and a young adult novel. He lives with his family in Bloomington, Indiana. You can find out more about him at davidpress.net.

David Rogers' poems, stories, and articles have appeared in various print and electronic publications, including *The Comstock Review*, *Atlanta Review*, *Sky and Telescope*, and *Astronomy* magazine. He is the author of two novels, *D.B. Cooper is Dead: A Solomon Starr Adventure* and *Thor's Hammer*, and a fantasy novella, *Return of the Exile*, each available from Amazon.

David Sapp is a writer, artist and professor and lives along the southern shore of Lake Erie in North America. A Pushcart nominee, he was awarded an Ohio Arts Council Individual Excellence grant and an Akron Soul Train fellowship for poetry. His poems appear widely in the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom. His publications include articles in the *Journal of Creative Behavior*, chapbooks, *Close to Home* and *Two Buddha*, and a novel, *Flying Over Erie*.

Cathryn Shea is the author most recently of the chapbooks *It's Raining Lullabies* and *The Secrets Hidden in a Pear Tree* (dancing girl press, 2017 and 2019), and *Backpack Full of Leaves* (Cyberwit.net, 2019). Her poetry has been nominated for Best of the Net and recently appears in *Tar River Poetry*, *Typehouse*, *New Orleans Review* (web feature), *Rust + Moth*, *Tinderbox*, and elsewhere. See www.cathrynshea.com and @cathy_shea on Twitter.

Micol Striuli is a third year political science major at PC. The daughter of a Vietnamese refugee and an Italian immigrant, she hopes her focus on the themes of home and displacement can help her find comfort in the nuances of her multiracial identity. Although she is not a writing major, her passion for poetry stems from her desire to express the pain,

anguish, and joy she encounters while exploring her multiracial identity. For her, politics encompass much more than just theory and its general association with politicians and government. The politics of race and of the family are of great interest to her and she draws her inspiration from poets like Mahmoud Darwish, who used his prolific voice to advocate for Palestinian justice and anti-colonial struggle—issues she cares deeply about and finds solidarity with her own parents’ experiences with war in these struggles.

Jane Stuart very much enjoys nature—autumn colored trees, redbud and dogwood in spring, all the summer shades of green and snow! Now there are owls, a hawk, deer and there is a shy heron (crane) that stands in the middle of the road on its way to the creek. This bird can fly—not as graceful as a turkey—but fun to watch. She is working on Haiku, Tanka, sonnets and trying her best with sci-fi forms. She latch-hook loves sports (soccer and football) and, as the saying goes, “listen to one wind.” She lives in a ten-room house that was once a log cabin in the middle of a nature preserve—really so beautiful (and she lives alone).

David Thoreen’s poems and stories have appeared or are forthcoming in *The South Dakota Review*, *Minnesota Monthly*, *Natural Bridge*, *The Journal*, *Great River Review*, *Slate*, *Seneca Review*, *New Letters*, and elsewhere. A recipient of Minnesota Monthly’s Tamarack Award for Fiction and a Tennessee Williams Scholarship from the Sewanee Writers’ Conference, Thoreen teaches writing and literature at Assumption College.

Hope Tiboni is from Mendham, New Jersey. She is a freshman at Providence College with a double major in psychology and political science. Some of her favorite activities at Providence College are Adult Literacy and Providence College Debate Society. A fun fact about her is that she have been to 48 of the 50 states of America.

Meet the Editors

Nicholas Ogrinc is a senior English and philosophy double major at Providence College. He has greatly enjoyed his time serving as the editor-in-chief of *The Alembic*, and is constantly amazed and humbled by the talents of all of the contributors and the other editors. He is as of yet unsure what he will do next year, but is certain that he will continue to spend his days reading and writing and will plant an elaborate vegetable garden this summer.

Alexsia Patton is a proud editor of *The Alembic* and a creative writing major with a film minor at Providence College. She is from Equality, Illinois and loves the art of language and its ability to tell stories. She is a performer with 15 years of experience in theater and film. Alessia has been in numerous theater productions in her hometown and film projects including two independent films: *Dig Two Graves* directed by Hunter Adams and *Walter* directed by Anna Mastro. Alessia aspires to work in the film industry as a screenwriter.

Michael Verdichizzi is a junior English major at Providence College with minors in Computer Science and Philosophy. He runs the projectors for his local drive-in theatre back home in Glenmont, NY. Hoping that money will qualify him for a few more loans, he plans to attend law school after completing his undergraduate degree. In the meantime, he feels content enough reading Dostoevsky and playing chess.

Carly Martino is a senior at Providence College. She is studying English and Spanish with a minor in Latin American Studies. She hopes to teach English abroad in Spain after graduation and eventually go to graduate school to study literature upon her return to the United States. This is her second year as an editor for *The Alembic*.

Elena Bibilos is a sophomore Marketing Major and English Writing Minor. She grew up always writing short stories and poems. These literary passions have continued into college, where she loves working on *The Alembic* staff. On campus, she can usually be found in the Dunkin line in Slavin. She is from Melrose, Massachusetts, and is the oldest of four siblings.

My Nguyen is a Sophomore majoring in Psychology at Providence College. She is originally from Vietnam and studies at Providence College as an international student. This was her first year as an editor of *The Alembic*.

Elizabeth Dumais, more commonly known as Betsy, is currently a senior at Providence College, studying English and Secondary Education and suffering through a Business Certificate. Home for Betsy is Burrillville, Rhode Island, a town in the middle of the woods where nothing much happens.

Eliana Lopez is a freshmen English major with a concentration in Creative Writing, originally from Lynn, Massachusetts. She is a poet with a passion for performance and over the tops theatrics. Having no clue where her passion for creative writing will lead her, she is hoping to find the answer in the lines of an unread poem. With that in mind she is looking forward to the upcoming years working on the editorial staff of *The Alembic*—perhaps she will find herself in a submission. Lastly and completely unrelated but equally important, she strongly believes if she had the opportunity to be a Disney character she would be Nala from *The Lion King*.

