GULF COAST

A JOURNAL OF LITERATURE AND FINE ARTS

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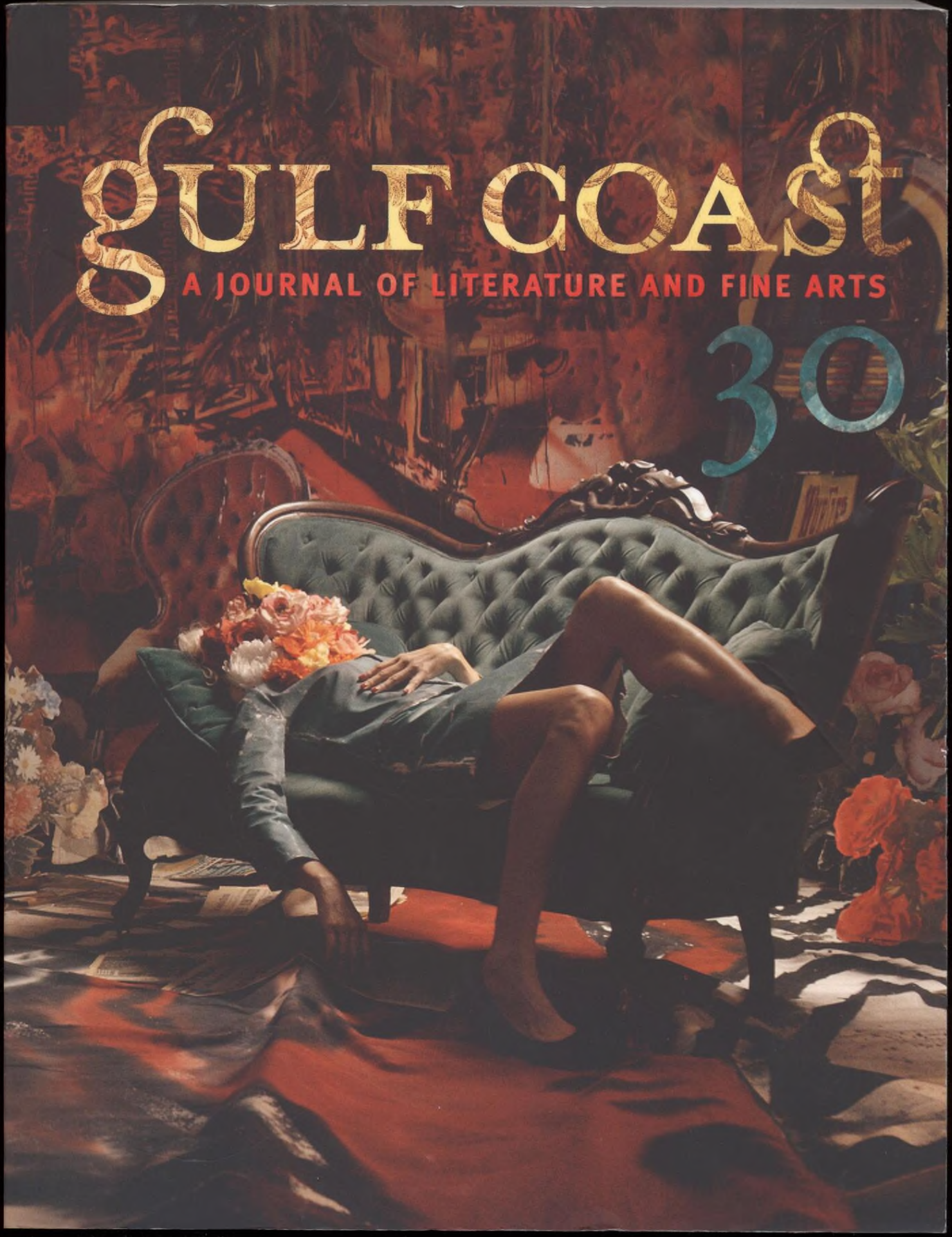

Quill & Quad

A JOURNAL OF LITERATURE AND FINE ARTS

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A JOURNAL OF LITERATURE AND FINE ARTS VOLUME 29, ISSUE 1

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The aim of literature ... is the creation of a strange object covered with fur which breaks your heart.

–Donald Barthelme. *Come Back, Dr. Caligari*

The trick is to realize that one is not important, except insofar as one's example can serve to elucidate a more widespread human trait and make readers feel a little less lonely and freakish.

–Phillip Lopate. *The Art of the Personal Essay: An Anthology from the Classical Era to the Present*

Dear Readers,

In his piece in the *Houston Chronicle*, Phillip Lopate described 1980s Houston as a self-conscious city, its fertile cultural scene often obscured behind "soulless glass skyscrapers" and oil boom. But he and Donald Barthelme saw the city's promise. They joined the faculty of the University of Houston's newly minted creative writing program, kept company with painters and architects, and teamed up to found a modest literary journal. Lopate claims the journal's original name, Domestic Crude, was chosen in the spirit of the city's "boastful-ashamed dialectic." The first issue was rust-brown and slender enough to be bound with staples.

As Houston and its literary community flourished, so did the journal, adopting the name Gulf Coast in 1986. From then on the journal grew through the tireless efforts of a dedicated board, graduate students of the UH Creative Writing Program, and key figures such as Marion Barthelme. Since then, the journal has evolved in form and feature. We're lucky enough to be homed in Houston, a city that boasts a more diverse population than any other metropolitan region. Houstonians speak Spanish, Arabic, Farsi, Vietnamese, Korean, Russian, Hindi, Pashtun, Chinese, Urdu, etc. Since the inception of the Translation Prize in 2014, we've continued to build an emphasis on the art of translation by publishing a wide array of languages. In this issue, you'll find works from Russia, Germany, Puerto Rico, and Japan. You'll also find a new and exciting manga piece by Miki Yamamoto, translated by Jocelyne Allen. It is our goal to better reflect the true texture and variation of our city, and, really, our country as a whole.

The essays and art in homage to the esteemed art critic, poet, and teacher, Thomas McEvilley, celebrate a life that touched many others. New York Times art critic Holland

Cotter writes that McEvilley was someone "who understood very clearly that there was a world out there, and that both art and criticism were, or should be, part of that world, connected to it." This issue also features the work of Rosson Crow who is described by Tamar Halpern as a, "re-animator, giving the past new life." and Susan McClelland, whose work comments on and challenges themes such as terror and surveillance. This fall, we're thrilled to launch the Toni Beauchamp Art Lies Prize in Critical Art Writing, a prize that will shine a light on the important work of art writers and will open up a new space for critical conversation.

Our thirtieth anniversary issue is full of poetry and prose that connects to and interrogates the past. National Book Award winner Robin Coste Lewis speaks through time to the first African-American Arctic explorer Matthew Henson, "Thank you, whoever you are, for standing behind the camera and thinking / 'Matthew Henson' and 'photograph' at the same time." Molly McCully Brown walks us through The Virginia State Colony for Epileptics and Feebleminded, "In the beds, the smell / of kerosene and lye." And Hadara Bar-Nadav meditates on the horror of the Holocaust, "Troubling histories/hidden/inside the prettiest pastel cakes."

We are interested in language that pushes us out of sleep and into the realness. Danez Smith does just that: "i scream in the field & i'm not/ talking where the meat falls from me/ i'm singing a song for my lost ones." In "Trans Memoir 4-7" Sarah June-Woods explores gender through metaphor, "..people is/ the word for living creatures who look almost like monsters but not quite." And finally Mike Alberti reminds us that, "All it required was to become nothing, dissolve the borders of yourself and let the world in."

Preparing for this milestone issue, we too tracked the past, interviewing Phillip Lopate and exploring the works of Donald Barthelme. We lingered over Barthelme's collages. They are inventive and uncanny, encouraging you to look closer and see differently. In that spirit, Digital Editor, Michele Nereim, embarked on the project of creating the small art-pieces featured throughout the issue, scouring the Library of Congress digital archives, combining and refashioning old images so they might say something new, connect to now. Like how the wedding of unfamiliar words can forge new ideas. Or bring to light what's already there.

Looking back at 30 years of Gulf Coast, we realize that, ultimately, the power of the journal radiates from the writers and artists themselves, their words and works. As Darrel Alejandro Holnes says, "Beyond the night, / I'm becoming a force forever expanding in the universe." We are merely the radio.

Michele Nereim, *Digital Editor* | Luisa Muradyan Tannahill *Editor* | Chris Liek, *Managing Editor*

PRIZES

Gulf Coast Nonfiction Prize, 2016

Judged by David Shields

WINNER:

Cassidy Norvell Thompson, "Witness Trees"

HONORABLE MENTIONS:

Montana Wojczuk, "The Way of the Gun"
Tracy Fuad, "On Isis, Coming Out, and a Country that Doesn't Exist"

Gulf Coast Poetry Prize, 2016

Judged by Rick Barot

WINNER:

Brandon Rushton, "Calisthenics"

HONORABLE MENTIONS:

July Cole, "Time When the Birds Turned Silver"
Micaela Cameron, "Sura: Providence Rhode Island"

Gulf Coast Fiction Prize, 2016

Judged by Ayana Mathis

WINNER:

Mike Alberti, "Destiny"

HONORABLE MENTIONS:

Lisa Nikolidakis, "With Mercy to the Stars"
Jenny Xie, "Rehearsal"

ANNOUNCING THE 2017

GULF COAST PRIZES IN FICTION, POETRY, & NONFICTION

$1500 goes to the prize winner in each genre. Two honorable mentions for each genre receive $250 and acknowledgement in the issue. Submit one previously unpublished story or essay (7,000 words max) or up to 5 poems (10 pages max). Your name and address should be included on your cover letter only.

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Destiny

1.

Begin at the end, at the beginning of real winter, in the barn, up in the hayloft, alone. In Woods, Kansas, standing in the hayloft door, looking out across the bare December fields. Wrapped in a blanket but still cold, shivering. Quiet, cold, the wind coming in through the long gaps in the walls of the barn. The hayloft door is perhaps thirty feet off the ground and from that height she can see across the fields, across the blank colorless world—it has not yet snowed—to a distant stand of trees. She is looking out at the trees and remembering her dream, in which she was a bird—a long white heron, rising—and lifting her eyes from the fields to the grey sky and remembering that feeling of weightlessness, flight.

Or begin at the beginning, at the end of childhood, in the barn, up in the hayloft, alone. From the hayloft door she can see a bright ocean of gold: her grandfather has a sunflower farm outside of Wichita and the heavy, drooping heads stretch to the limit of her vision. She lowers her eyes from the flowers and looks instead at her doll: cornsilk hair and a red dress. A gift from her mother, who gave the doll to Grace when she left her there at the farm before driving off to New York with a self-styled evangelist named Roland. She is singing to the doll, a nonsense song she is making up as she goes, and now she hears a voice calling her name, gently, from below. Her grandmother, calling her for dinner. Calling, Grace? Grace?

2.

She was working on a farm in New York but her coat was thin and when the weather turned she left, flew south. In Charleston, South Carolina, she fell in with a group of other drifters, friendly vagabonds. They slept on the beach or under the boardwalk, made fires from pallets and gnarled skewers of driftwood, ate the fish the fishmongers threw away in the afternoon and the fried things the

tourists threw away all the time. They smoked hash if they had it—everything was shared—and drank rum and fortified wine. They stole from people's gardens. It was genial. Arguments were arbitrated. No one bothered them. No one carried a weapon. It was warm in late September. There was always, falling asleep and waking, the sound of the surf.

Eli was one of that group. He had arrived there just before she did, come up from Florida, he said. Selling airboat tours through the Everglades, he told her one night on the beach with the firelight glancing yellow off his forehead. You know, fanboats? Most people come down to see the alligators and the manatees, but I built my reputation on the birds. Cranes, herons, egrets, you'd be surprised how many people come down to see them, and they aren't easy to find. The boat motor scares them off. People leave disappointed. But I had a good sense for them, got to know their favorite places, where their nests were. Rookeries. You should see a heron egg. People are surprised. Small as a chicken egg, hold three in your hand, but blue. Blue, blue like the sky, like a jewel, little miracles. You should see one.

She liked his voice, the rhythm of it, deep and slow. Faintly southern around the edges, but that was acquired, he said. He was from Oregon.

He wore a blue denim jacket lined with red flannel. He walked stiffly, bow-legged, as if he had just dismounted a horse or a motorcycle. He had a large forehead and looked a little like James Cagney (she had watched the old movies with her grandfather as a girl). During the day, when the group splintered off into smaller sections, they walked around the city together, like tourists, carrying their backpacks. They sat on the pier and watched the gulls swooping over the harbor. She complained about wanting a hot shower—generally they bathed in the ocean—and he taught her a trick he knew, waiting behind the backdoor of the YMCA until someone came out and then catching the door before it closed.

She had been there two weeks when she woke up one morning and he was gone. She figured that he had moved on, and she wasn't surprised, but she was a little hurt, and the hurt surprised her. She had thought she was beyond that, accustomed to abandonment.

She went back to the Y in the afternoon, turned the water very hot, stood under it for an hour. She wanted to hone the edges of herself. She wanted a new crisp version of herself to emerge, be born, from the blurry background of her life: deliverance. She had three-hundred dollars in a wooden box stuffed deep in her backpack. She was twenty-one years old. She scrubbed herself red, watched the steam rise off her red skin.

Eli came back that night, late, and woke her up by shaking her shoulder. He backed up, motioning for her to follow him. She grabbed her sleeping bag and pack and walked behind him up the beach to the road. Parked on the shoulder was an old Volkswagen Beetle.

Whose car is this? she said.

Mine, he said.

Where are you going?

West, he said. California. Hop in.

She hesitated, looked back down the beach. But it was a perfunctory pause. The air was dense, she felt, with destiny. It was in the breeze and stung her face.

The car was not his, and it was full of drugs. One-hundred pounds of crystal methamphetamine, made right here in America, Eli said, and a single pound of black tar heroin (origins unknown). The trunk was full—the spare tire had been taken out—and the backseats had been cut open and filled. Idea is, he said, smiling, don't get pulled over. He had been waiting in Charleston for a connection, a friend of an old friend, who had driven the first leg, down from Philadelphia. I'm taking her the rest of the way, he said. The rest of the way was to Los Angeles, where drugs and car would be handed off again and payment made.

It's a typical mule job, he told her as he drove down the coast. Pure transportation. No production, no distribution. Easiest way to make a living that I ever found. I did it once before, six, seven years ago. One run'll make you enough to live on for eight months, a year if you're careful. Which is what I am. I got used to

the swamp, don't get me wrong. I respect a working man. But deals like this come along sometimes and I think that's the universe's way of saying, shake it up, man, make a change, hit the road.

The universe. She liked the thought of that. Really, she had nothing to lose.

They broke into the meth that afternoon in a hotel room in Carabelle, Florida, where she stood on the fourth-floor balcony in her underwear, listening to the tide coming in, and understood that her blood was an ocean, too, it ebbed and flowed. She smelled the salt, licked her sweaty arm to taste it.

He talked a blue streak—the Volkswagen was blue—across the bright Gulf Coast. They were not taking the main highways. They were taking the smaller roads, the older roads, he said. They stuck close to the shoreline, drove four or five hours a day. Eli always drove and she sat back and let his voice thrum through her. It settled into her, into the hollow places—sinuses, throat, her hollow bones—and vibrated there, soothing, like the sea.

There was such joy in the world, she thought, and joy was green, like jade. Words produced their own auras, tinted atmospheres. Love was green, too, but like a lime. There was an alliterative logic to it, she realized, excitedly, somewhere in Louisiana, as they passed another smoldering refinery. Peace was purple. Glory was gold, and so was grace.

Grace, he said. Glory. Now those are words for these parts. This is real fire and brimstone country. He rolled down his window, took a deep breath. Smell the sulfur?

Then he began a long story about a man he had known once in Mississippi, a cotton farmer, whose father and grandfather were cotton farmers, who was going broke because of falling cotton prices, and who one day went to church to talk to the pastor about it. The whole time the farmer talked, the pastor was shelling and eating peanuts, and when he was done talking the pastor said something about blessed are the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of God. Then he went on eating peanuts. And so the farmer went home and decided to plant peanuts instead of cotton. The point of the story—the moral, it seemed—was that the farmer got very rich.

They skirted the cities to avoid attention. Eli drove the speed limit. They gave a false name at hotels and paid with cash. They were careful, but she knew it didn't matter. The air was dense with destiny. They were in the care of the universe.

Outside of Houston, he talked about his mother. Kind, kind, very kind and gentle. A good woman of the old sort, not found anymore. Grew up poor in a logging town, in a prefab house with no foundation, where the dust just breathed up through the floor. She loved us. She did her best for us. I mourn her every day. Her and all her kind, all the old daughters of Eve who carried the sadness of our lost world. Who carries it now? No one. It's dispersed, diffuse, the very air we breathe. I see her at the kitchen sink, in that ratty robe, looking out the window. What was she looking for? What was she looking for? Her heart was always breaking. Then it broke, and she died, right there on the kitchen floor.

She was choked up, crying, remembering her own mother, standing out on the front lawn with her mouth open and her arms raised to the sky.

He was quiet. He was waiting for her to speak, to tell him why she was crying.

But she said, Talk. Keep talking.

3.

Her mother worked as a secretary in Topeka. She was always on and off her meds. When she was on her meds she dressed every morning, fixed her hair, came home, made dinner, watched TV through flat eyes. Sometimes she seemed to fall asleep there on the couch, sitting up with her head drooped and her mouth gaping, but her eyes were open, flat. She said, it feels like my blood's turned to water. She said, it feels like my brain's got a flat tire. Grace wanted to help. She made tea. She nuzzled her mother's leg, like a dog.

When she was off her meds, she made elaborate ice cream sundaes. She took Grace to the fair in Hutchinson and spent a whole week's pay and they drove home with their faces stained with ice cream and cotton candy and two goldfish which

they put in a mixing bowl and found floating there the next day. She decided to put a swimming pool in the yard and together they dug a shallow hole, filled it with water from the hose, took off their clothes, and wallowed in the mud.

It got worse as she got older. Her mother heard things on the radio, messages from God. Grace asked why she couldn't hear them, too, and her mother said, Because you're trapped in your body. You're all closed off. I'm open. Do you understand? I've opened up, so I can feel everything.

The spring that Grace was six her mother put up an eight-foot radio antenna on the front lawn and strapped herself to it with a complicated homemade harness. Grace watched through the living room window, scared, as her mother stood in the yard with her mouth open and her arms raised to the sky. Soon they came and got her in an ambulance, and then a kind white-haired woman came and watched TV with Grace until her grandparents arrived. She spent a month on the farm while her mother was in the hospital. When her mother came to get her, Grace ran to the car to hug her, and her mother hugged her back, but Grace could tell that she had changed. Her eyes were flat. She was closed off again.

They went back to Topeka and lived together for a year before her mother left again. Dropped her off at her grandparents' farm and ran off with Roland, a tall, thin man with a sharp face and hair slicked back, who talked about God's will in a voice that crackled and spit like a downed power line. Gave her a doll and told her to be good.

4.

They drove north toward Dallas, where they stopped in a trailer park and picked up a friend of Eli's. He was built like a heavyweight. She offered him the front seat but he shook his head, squeezed his bulk into the back where he sat with his knees up by his chin. His name was Brian and he had a bad mouth. His lips were always moving, squirming, as if they wanted to crawl off his face.

Me and Brian go way back, Eli told her. All the way back to the Northern Nevada Correctional Facility in '98. We're taking him all the way.

In Dallas they checked into a suite at the Hilton. Brian had a vial of cocaine that they added to the mix, and that put an edge on the night, shook things into focus. (Things had gotten out of focus, she realized.) She was hungry. She felt like a predator, a wolf. They ordered steaks up to the room and she picked one up with her hands and bit into it, growling. She did it for them, to make them laugh. They laughed. Look at my girl, Eli said to Brian, winking. She's wild. She's a wild animal, once you get to know her.

They went out to a club that Brian knew. It was all fake leather and maroon carpet, music that was noise to her. She and Eli had sex in the bathroom and came out to find Brian in an argument with a man wearing a bolo tie. Eli walked up to him, flicked the tie with his finger. The man sighed, said, fuck this, and turned away. Triumph was maroon, like the carpet. The logic had changed.

There were other places. The night smeared. There was the purple light of dawn. When she woke up in the afternoon, she was alone and ravenous. Almost all of the food they had ordered the night before was still there on the table. They had barely touched it. She sat down and ate, looking at the wallpaper, thinking nothing. Her mind was cauterized, sealed shut.

When they came in, the men were angry and in a rush. There had been a dispute about the bill. They had to leave in a hurry. Pack your things, Eli told her. She looked at her unopened backpack and shrugged.

Let's slow down a little, now. Let's take stock. We have a car full of drugs and no money. So what we've got is a liquidity problem. Cash flow. And that's a good problem to have. The drugs in this car are worth a million, easy. And that's wholesale. Maybe two million retail. One pound of this stuff—he reached across her lap to open the glove compartment, took out a bag to show them—is a steal at ten grand. So what we do is, change our business model. Adapt. Move into distribution.

She had only been half-listening, letting his voice flow through her like a current, but now something snapped like a static shock. What happened to

transportation? she said, suddenly nervous. Why don't we just drive straight to L.A., no stops, hand off the car, get paid, and go to the beach?

Her voice sounded strange in her ears, as if it came from someone else. Afterwards she wasn't sure she had spoken at all, but the word beach lingered in her mind, white gulls swooping across that blue background.

Thing is, Eli said, these guys expect a little graft. It's built into their equation. One, two pounds go missing, and they write it off, you know?

A business expense, Brian said, his big head jutting up between the front seats.

Exactly. So we're back to liquidity, which is essentially supply and demand. We've got the supply, and we need to go where the demand is.

Where? she asked, from somewhere else. Go where?

They drove through the night and when the red rim of the world appeared they were in Kansas. She had slept. Brian was sleeping, somehow, with his head hanging between his knees. Eli had not slept. He had snorted bumps of meth off a key.

Here we are, he said as the light bloomed around them. The broken heartland.

Flat, flat nothing. An endless road. Brown November fields.

Later that morning he pointed something out to her. It was a cliff, a long stone face rising from the prairie. It looked like one half of a low hill had fallen away and left a wall of sheer rock. It looked as if it had been carved out by the blade of a huge shovel.

A buffalo jump, he said. The Indians would put wolf skins on to scare the buffalo, make them stampede. Imagine. Like an earthquake, hundreds of them, and you in a wolf skin running and whooping, the buffalo so scared they just run off the cliff and break their legs. Imagine that.

She did imagine, closed her eyes and felt the ground shake. She felt the cliff approaching, the empty space beneath her feet, her own weight pulling her down.

After that it's just mopping up, he said. Target practice for the kids.

5

In her dream she was a buffalo, running alongside a thousand others. They were making the earth shake. They were breathing hard with their huge heads lowered. She could not see anything except for their brown bodies and the blank sky above.

Then they fell away in front of her and then she was falling, too. And then she was not a buffalo but a bird—a long, white bird; a heron—and she was not falling but flying, and she looked behind her and all the other buffalo had turned into birds, too. The moment they went over the cliff they transformed and rose gracefully into the air. They were flying. They were following her, up.

6.

In a town called Hugoton they left her in the Greyhound station while they went out to test the market, as Eli put it. She watched the people waiting and boarding their buses. Hunched and glassy-eyed, they lined up for a bus which eventually departed from beneath the aluminum canopy. Then another identical bus took its place there, and another identical line of people. Time passed differently in a bus station, she thought. It didn't go straight along but in circles, round and round.

She'd been in too many bus stations to count, but they all circled around the first one, in Wichita, like ripples spreading in a pond. She'd been seventeen. Her mother had been gone for years and she had been living with her grandparents on the sunflower farm. One day she came home from school and was heading up the stairs to her room when her eyes caught on something blue, a postcard that lay in a small pile of letters on the low table in the hall, where her grandmother always set the mail. The postcard had a bird on it, a bluebird, and on the front it said, The Eastern Bluebird: The State Bird of New York. On the back there was an address in New York City and, then, written in the crouching, slanted handwriting she would recognize anywhere, her name and a few lines:

Darling. I am spread too thin. I feel like I might float away. I love you.

Her life on the farm had not been a bad one. Her grandparents were kind, loving. She liked school. She played volleyball. But as soon as the postcard flew

into her life, none of that mattered anymore. For the first time, she felt the pull of destiny. She felt like an actress in a play, being given a cue from offstage. It was just a matter now of saying her line.

The next day, she sat in the bus station in Wichita, waiting for the bus to New York. In her backpack she had some clothes and a small gold bar she had stolen from the safe her grandfather kept under the stairs. He was a good man, distrustful of the banking system. He kept a safe full of ten-ounce gold bricks which he had shown her once, explaining inflation. Her grandmother had sat with her at the kitchen table every day, helping her with her homework.

Now, in Hugoton, she tried to remember her grandmother's voice. She tried to remember the golden sunflower fields in summer, so bright it was as if they were from another time, a prehistoric gold, the yellow blood of the earth. She closed her eyes and tried to raise that color in her mind, but could only touch the edge of it.

She could leave now, she knew. She could just get on a bus. They wouldn't find her. They probably wouldn't even look. She could get on a bus to Wichita, go back to the farm. It had only been five years since she left. Her grandparents would still be there. They would take her in.

But she had abandoned them, and she was ashamed. How could she explain it all to them? To her grandmother with her soft voice and knotted, arthritic hands? No. It was easier to succumb, to yield to destiny, let herself be carried by it, float.

7.

They came back to the bus station at one o'clock. Eli gave her a sandwich. He had a little money and he was happy, strutting. He said, this place is going to suit us just fine.

Someone had told them about a place nearby, an abandoned town where they could squat for a while. They found it twenty minutes down a nameless highway, past a sign that said Woods, Kansas (Unincorporated). It was not a town. It was three houses, an old grain elevator, and a barn, all in various states of disrepair, nestled in a copse of trees—maples, cedars, Russian olives—crouched in an expanse of bare winter fields.

Just here for the taking, Eli said. A whole town. Fruit off the vine.

In one of the houses they found an iron woodstove in the kitchen and two springbox beds with mattresses. There were a few old pots and pans and plates, dusty. Eli found a dull axe in the barn and used it to rip planks off the barn walls for firewood. Brian found a pile of bricks and a piece of plywood and built a table in the kitchen. She got into the spirit, too, swept the floors with the branch of a spruce tree. They brought the two beds into the kitchen for warmth and lit a fire in the stove. The room grew warm. With the money they'd made that afternoon, they'd bought bread and cheese and eggs and bologna. She fried the pink meat on the stove for them, as her mother had done for her. The men watched her cook. She felt them watching, hungry.

I'm not much for religion, Eli said when the food was ready, but I am humble. I understand my own insignificance. I can acknowledge it. And I'd be the last one to deny that there are miracles in this world. And this feels like a miracle. And I think we ought to pause and recognize that. Say grace. We are grateful. For this place. For this bounty. For each other. The universe provideth.

Amen.

They settled into a routine. It was domestic. In the morning, she cooked breakfast and the men went off to work—selling drugs in Hugoton—and then she had the day to herself. The first few days, she got high and set to work on the house, cleaning and trying to add small pieces of charm. They brought her a sponge and soap and she scrubbed the floors. At the edge of a field there was a well pump that still worked, though she knew it would soon freeze. In one of the other houses she found yellow plaid curtains, which she took and hung. She found a checkered sheet and spread it over the table to hide the ugly wood.

In the late afternoons, the men came back and she made dinner. If they had made any money, they brought groceries or small things for the house: candles, an oil lamp, sheets and blankets from the Salvation Army. Eli got her a new coat. It was for a man and much too big—she could almost disappear inside it—but it was warm and she was grateful.

She could only do so much around the house, so she started taking walks through the empty fields. Alone in the middle of that nothing she sometimes had a wonderful feeling, a kind of communion with the fields and air. She felt porous, permeable. In the trees around the town there were often crows, hundreds of them squawking, and she fantasized that they were her, or she was them, the whole group of them, ready to rise—dissolve, disperse, disappear—into the big slate sky.

8.

Increasingly, the men came back sullen, irritable.

We've exhausted the demand here, Eli said one evening. He was in the clawfoot bathtub, which they had unscrewed from the plumbing and brought into the kitchen. (They heated water on the stove. Like pioneers, Eli had said, like bona fide hayseed homesteaders.) The kitchen was bathed in a pooling, waxy light from the candles.

Maybe we should think about moving on, Brian said from his seat at the table.

This is a good thing we've got here, Eli said. We're just not reaching a wide-enough market.

That's what I mean, Brian said. We've exhausted the market. That's what you just said.

A short pause. Then, Don't you ever tell me what I just motherfucking said.

His voice was a blade. She heard it in her teeth. She was tending the stove fire, waiting for another pot of bathwater to heat up, and she did not dare turn around to face them. The threat of violence was like the threat of snow, now, growing heavier with each passing day.

Okay, okay, Brian said. But maybe we should finish the mule. We could make L.A. in two long days, I bet.

And leave all this behind?

In his voice now there was a joke, and so she turned away from the stove to face them, eager to ride the downslope of tension. Eli was smiling and gesturing towards her from the tub.

She can come, too, Brian said. And then, to her: Don't you want to go to the beach, sweetheart?

In a flash of smooth, liquid motion, Eli rose from the tub and stepped across the kitchen to Brian, and before she let out her breath he had somehow acquired a kitchen knife and was holding the tip of it to Brian's throat.

Don't fucking talk to her, he said. Do you understand? Don't even look at her.

All the air had gone out of the room. She gasped and brought her hand to her mouth. Neither man said anything for a moment. Eli stood dripping on the floor, steam rising from his skin, his flaccid penis hanging off his body like a pale leech. Brian was staring up at him with cold, narrow eyes.

Finally, Eli lowered the knife and backed off a few steps. Brian rose slowly to his feet and put on his coat.

Where do you think you're going? Eli said.

For a walk, Brian said. He turned and went out the door and, for a few moments, they were left in silence. Then they heard the sound of the Volkswagen start outside and Eli ran out after him, shouting, Hey! Hey! She stayed where she was, listening to the receding sound of the car engine as it pulled away. Waiting for what would happen next. She could feel the cold air coming through the open door. On the stove, the water began to boil.

Eli came back inside and closed the door behind him. He'll be back, he said. Mark my words. He'll be back before morning.

What if he doesn't come back? she said. Most of the drugs were still in the car.

He'll be back, Eli said again. He picked up the pipe from the counter and took a long hit, and then he stepped slowly back into the bath. Let's freshen her up, he said, pointing to the pot of water on the stove. She lifted it and poured it into the tub near his feet. He sighed with pleasure, leaned his head back, and closed his eyes.

They waited, smoked. Eli talked and talked. The Interstate Highway System. West African religion. Italian anarchism. The aching desire to know God. She settled into bed, listening. She rode his voice all the way through the night.

As dawn approached, Eli became more and more anxious. Where is this motherfucker? he said, pacing back and forth across the kitchen. I knew it was a bad idea to bring him into this.

Near daybreak, they heard a car pull up. Eli was sitting at the table, talking, but when they heard the car he went silent.

For a moment she imagined that, instead of Brian, it was the police arriving, come to take them off to prison. Or the ambulance, come to take her away. She imagined the same paramedic who'd taken her mother years before: that boy-faced, crew-cutted man who'd cut the straps of the harness she'd used to tie herself to the radio antenna. Or maybe it was her grandfather in his run-down red pickup. Maybe he had been looking for her all this time, driving around Kansas with her picture, stopping at every truck stop and motel. Maybe he would take her home.

The door opened and Brian came in and shut it behind him.

So, Eli said. His hands were clasped in front of him. He had the bearing of an exasperated parent. Do you want to tell us where the fuck you've been all night?

Without speaking, Brian took something from his coat pocket and set it down on the table. She couldn't see what it was from where she lay on the bed. Eli frowned. Then he reached across the table and picked it up and she could see that it was a gun. He held it up to the pale light that came in through the windows, examining it.

Well, he said after a moment, one eyebrow raised. Well, well.

For two days she listened to them plotting, scheming. They would rob a bank. No, an armored car. A liquor store. A gas station. She would drive the getaway car. No, she would provide a diversion, pretend to be a bystander. They smoked, drew maps. When they got tired, they shot the gun off in the fields. She watched them, swaddled in her coat. The sky was low and leaden. The noise from the gun swelled out into that space and she felt the sounds reverberate through her. She rippled like the air.

I've been on both ends of a pointed gun, Eli said, back in the kitchen, and let me assure you that there are no two feelings more different. The problem comes if you confuse the two. I've seen it happen. I've seen a man with a gun in his face grow bold, fearless. Lucky for him the gun wasn't loaded. I've often wondered, did he know? Did he sense it somehow? On the other hand, I've seen a man with a gun get cold feet and start crying. Pointing a gun at a guy and just blubbering. Can you imagine that?

What about the drugs? she said, suddenly lucid. What about the plan?

Every so often, she had a moment like this, when a window opened in her mind and she saw the situation, briefly, from the outside. What were they doing here? What happened to California? It was as if the arrival of the gun had erased all previous motion and set them on an entirely new course. In retrospect, their whole excursion looked suddenly like a series of accidents, completely divorced from any plan or providence. Anxiety fizzed up behind her eyes.

It's called adaptation, baby, Eli said. The introduction of a new element demands a recalibration of the formula. Now we have a new variable to figure for.

She could not remember the last time she'd slept. Eli offered her the pipe, but she shook her head. Her face was suddenly wet. She was crying big silent tears.

Oh sweetheart, Eli said. His voice sounded genuinely sad. You're carrying too much. Your load has become too heavy.

I know just the thing, Brian said. He got up and went out to the car, and when he came back inside a minute later, he was holding the brick of heroin, smiling.

She lay on the bed in the kitchen and found she could go anywhere in her mind, touch any feeling. She thought of her mother strapped to the radio antenna and cried, thinking how easy it was, after all, to tap into everything. All it required was to become nothing, dissolve the borders of yourself and let the world in.

She went to her grandparents' house in Wichita. She floated through every room, saw everything in perfect detail, the pictures on the wall, the stain on the wallpaper in the dining room, the deer's head mounted above her grandfather's writing desk, the beaded chain that hung from the light over the kitchen table, the steel safe in the closet under the stairs, where her grandfather kept the gold bricks. When he had shown her, she sat on his lap at his desk chair and the light had gleamed off the gold and she had touched it, very smooth, and outside in the summer air there were the sunflowers rustling, glorious, and she filled her mind

with that gold color and she felt that happiness was flowing out of her, out of her fingers, out of her mouth.

When she opened her eyes Eli and Brian were both watching her intently. They, too, were bathed in gold.

Honey, Eli said. Sweetheart, can you tell me where this farm is?

She laughed. Of course she could.

Eli smiled, too, and took her hand. The universe provideth, he said.

9.

When she woke up, she was alone. Pale light came in through the window above the sink. She sat up in bed, blinking, feeling herself come in and out of focus. Her head hurt and her mouth was very dry.

She stood and went to the sink, looked out the window at the fields. She frowned, trying to think. What had she done? What had she told them? Were they on their way to Wichita now, Brian in the front seat now, the gun in the glove compartment? She imagined her grandfather looking down the barrel of the gun, scared. Yes, terrified. But also sad, disappointed.

She left the kitchen and went up into the barn. She took the blankets and climbed into the hayloft and made herself a nest. Eli had left her a few grams of heroin and a brick of meth, more than she could ever use (perhaps as payment, she thought absently). If she put enough of it into her body, she would dissolve the borders of herself completely. She had everything she needed.

She did not feel afraid. It was pleasant in the barn, soft. As a girl she had spent hours by herself in the hayloft of her grandfather's barn, making straw dolls, composing songs, reading. Below her the sunflower fields rolled out like a golden quilt.

From her nest, she could see through the big door in the hayloft across the fields to some distant trees and, as the light faded, she could see the red lights on top of the radio towers in the distance, blinking.

10.

She'd arrived in New York with no idea where to go. She'd sat on the bench in Penn Station until they told her to leave. She'd walked the streets of Manhattan all night. Seventeen years old. In the morning she found a shop in the Village with a sign in the dirty window that said, We Buy Gold. She went in and sold the brick for three thousand dollars, more money than she could have imagined. She walked up to Central Park and checked into the first nice-looking hotel she could find. The room was incredible. She ordered room service. She sat on the bed and looked at the postcard again. She had fingered it so often that the edges were brown and thin.

Darling. I am spread too thin. I feel I might float away. I love you.

There was a postmark that said Queens, New York, but no return address.

She wandered the city in the daytime. She wanted to find her mother, but she didn't know how to look for her. She walked through Central Park. She wandered the Village. She went down to the Battery and looked out at the ocean, the Statue of Liberty, the Brooklyn Bridge, the gulls swooping over the water.

Her money went fast. She moved to a cheaper hotel. She ate two meals a day, usually in diners. She liked the city, she found. She liked being among all those people, all the stray lives she passed in the day, all the anonymous faces. She read the postcard over and over. She'd begun to feel very thin herself.

One day, walking in Chinatown, she passed the police station. On a whim, she went inside and told them she was looking for her mother, gave them her mother's name. She waited for an hour, until an officer called her over to his desk and told her that her mother had killed herself a month before. Jumped from the top of a building in Queens.

His voice went inside of her and coiled up there, dense and heavy, as if she had swallowed a stone.

The officer gave her an address and she went there on the subway. The neighborhood was quiet and run-down, grey brick buildings, gutters choked with trash. The door to the building was unlocked and she went up a dank stairwell to the third floor. She knocked on the door of the apartment, but no one answered. She knocked again and waited, then tried the doorknob and found it open.

She was hit with a rancid smell, vomit and charred metal. She covered her mouth and nose and tried not to retch. The room was very dim and it took a moment before she could make out her surroundings. All the windows had been covered with cardboard. She saw a couch and a coffee table. She felt strangely calm; it didn't occur to her to be afraid. She waded through a layer of trash to the hallway and checked each room: two bedrooms, each with a stained, bare mattress on the floor. The whole apartment gave off an air of abandonment.

On the floor in the second bedroom she found two hypodermic needles and another postcard, this one with a picture of the Empire State Building on the front. It was blank. Had her mother wanted to write to her again? Perhaps, she thought, her mother had bought them both because she hadn't been able to choose one. Perhaps she had looked at them for a long time, trying to decide which postcard Grace would like best.

She left the apartment, started back down the stairs. Then she stopped, turned around and went up instead, to the roof. The building was five stories high. The sky was grey. She could see the rooftops of lower buildings, brown water towers, in the middle-distance a busy highway. She walked to the edge and looked down at the sidewalk below. She felt heavy, weighted down. She felt how quickly she would fall, how hard she would hit the ground.

After a few moments, she went back down the stairs. That night, she went to the Port Authority to catch a bus back to Kansas. She bought a ticket but when it came time to board she stayed where she was, seated on a cold bench. She watched her bus leave. She was thinking of her grandparents, who would be out of their minds with worry. She hadn't even left a note. They would have no idea where to look for her. They would blame themselves, wonder what they had done, how they had driven her off. If she came back, they would cry and clutch her. All would be forgiven. There was another bus an hour later.

But she couldn't bring herself to get on that one, either. She remembered when her mother had gotten out of the hospital years before, when she'd come to pick her up at her grandparents'. Her mother had hugged her and told her how much she'd missed her. But even then, Grace had known that it wasn't really her mother, that her mother was still somewhere else. That she hadn't come back at all.

Near midnight she was approached by a thin, lanky boy with pockmarks on his face and scabs on his knuckles. Hey, he said. Are you hungry? She nodded, and he produced half of a sandwich from the pocket of his coat. She looked at him. His eyes were deep-set and bleary, but kind. He smiled, showing a single gold tooth.

She would never get on a bus, she knew. She would never go back.

She took the sandwich, wolfed it down in seconds.

11.

End at the end, at the beginning of a cold grey day, in the barn, up in the hayloft, alone. In Woods, Kansas, waking in her nest of blankets and looking out through the open hayloft door across the bare December fields. She rises, wraps a blanket around her shoulders and walks to the edge of the hayloft door. She is perhaps thirty feet off the ground and from that height she can see across the fields, across the blank colorless world, to a distant stand of trees. She watches as a cloud of crows surges from the trees, swoops and circles in the air. She remembers her dream, and she imagines flying out across the fields to meet them. She can still touch that feeling of weightlessness, flight.

A figure emerges from the trees, walking across the fields toward the barn. She watches, not trusting her vision. Minutes pass. The figure approaches, takes shape. A tan uniform and hat. A cop. A woman. Approaching the barn but looking straight-ahead, not up.

Hello? she called from below. Is anyone here?

When it was time for supper grandmother would yell up to the hayloft, where she was hiding. Sometimes, she would wait to answer, wondering what would happen if she didn't, if she might be invisible.

She does not speak. The woman walks below her, stops. And then, finally, she looks up.

Holy! she says, startled. She takes a step back and brings her hand to her chest. She is young, in her twenties. She has straight brown hair cut to her shoulders. Her

shoulders are slight, but she stands sturdily, looks strong. She lets out a breath and says, Geez, you scared me. What the hell are you doing up there?

Still, she does not answer. She feels so airy, so insubstantial, that she does not trust herself to make a sound. She looks back toward the trees, where the crows have settled again.

Hey, the woman says below. Hey! Listen, I got a report that there were some men living out here, some gunshots? Do you know anything about that? Are you here alone? Are you hurt? I can help you. Are you okay?

Her voice is kind and warm. She feels it loosening something in her, thawing out the ocean of her blood. She is cold. She is shaking. Something about that voice, the gentleness of it. A woman's voice seeping slowly into her and all of a sudden she does not want to dissolve. She wants something else.

Who are you? the woman asks. What's your name?

She wants to hone the edges of herself. She wants a new crisp version of herself to emerge, be born, from the blurry background of her life. Deliverance.

Grace, she says.

And then again, because she stuttered: My name is Grace.

Witness Trees

Cassidy Norvell Thompson

2014. In Storm Lake, Iowa, a public park is home to the Living Heritage Tree Museum—an assemblage of historic trees. Not the trees who themselves witnessed history, but their descendants—grown from seedlings and cuttings from the original significant tree.

The open-air "exhibit" features a surprising number of trees with origins in Kentucky: the Colonel Sanders Ash, the Kentucky Coffee Tree, the Ben Butler Maple. Some trees' historic value is tied to the entire United States, and a few to the whole world. Among them is the Isaac Newton Apple.

The audio tour says the fabled apple tree in Newton's garden died in 1814, but this tree is a descendant from earlier grafts. This tree was present (if only genetically) when Newton first thought, "Every particle in the universe is attracted to every other particle. The force of their attraction is related to their masses and their distance from each other. All the motion in the solar system obeys this same law." This distant offspring continues to carry in its cells the experience and significance of its ancestor.

Newton's presence lingers in this tree.

2013. There are two kinds of witness trees.

One has stood in the presence of a recognized historical event and still stands today. By definition, these trees are old. They have outlived their early human contemporaries, sometimes by hundreds of years. They hold secrets that no one alive is left to remember. They hold within them the past, buried in their rings.

Gettysburg, Pennsylvania is home to this kind of witness tree. The large white oak stands among the retail and food chains common to most modern American landscapes. The oak spans a wide territory with its 285-year-old limbs and roots.

Due to the sheer weight of the Gettysburg witness tree's limbs, a vertical crack develops along its center. The Cumberland Valley Tree Service inserts metal rods to extend the tree's life.

2013. Foresters show a group of students at Pennsylvania's Hickory Run State Park how to use an increment borer to obtain a core sample from a tree. They use a T-shaped tool with a handle that turns an auger. The auger bit is inserted into the base of the trunk, as near to the ground as possible and at an angle that ensures penetration through the very center—or pith—of the tree. Without the pith, the extracted core sample is inaccurate for determining age. The pith indicates—and in fact, *is*—the tree's origin. This central dark spot is where the counting begins.

Some say scientists and foresters should plug the tree's core sample back into the hole to prevent decay and fungi, but the rod-like sample is often kept for analysis. Sample-takers can fill the hollow spot with a dowel, though this can introduce fungi rather than prevent it. And if the dowel plug swells, its expansion splits the trunk.

The consensus is that the valuable knowledge gained by sampling trees outweighs the risk of injury. Limiting coring to the growing season minimizes the long-term effects; trees heal themselves more readily while they grow.

2008. I count 24 growth rings from the center of the stump to its sappy bark. Thinking of the boy-turned-old-man in *The Giving Tree*, I lay a hand on the felled trunk and pat it the way one does the cooling fingers of a loved one newly passed. This mulberry, recognizable by the little green clumps in her flowing branches, is twenty-four years old, and this morning, Dad put a notch and a wedge in the base and pulled her to the ground with a chain and his truck. He says she was disfigured by an ice storm, but I liked seeing her when I drove past in the afternoons, noting the way she lifted her jointed arms into the air. Now they are in pieces as Dad divides her trunk with a chainsaw.

The exposed interior of this tree is yellow and solid, not like the hollowed white stump of catalpa that keeps vigil several yards away. I grab a tiny arm and rock a small section of the trunk toward me. Dad warns me that it will crush my toes if it slips, so I gently push it back and ask if we can take this piece to the house. He reverses the pickup until it is alongside the tree, not questioning my motives. Dad rolls the small portion away from the rest and heaves it in the truck bed.

When we get home, he adds it to a row of wizened chunks of Trees Past collected beside the garage. I did not notice these sections of log before, not until today when I have my own addition of mulberry. Most pieces are short and wide. Despite being gray or graying, each has unique bark—some scaly, some smooth, some deeply furrowed. The wooden cores range from ashen to sorrel. I am not enough of a dendrologist to identify the different species.

2006. Oxford Dendrochronology Laboratory's Daniel Miles drills into the wood frame of an eighteenth-century home in Wethersfield, Connecticut. From each of twenty-six oak timbers, he extracts a striped cylinder—a core sample—to be analyzed. He is trying to determine the date of a curious addition to the house.

Cross-dating, or comparing growth ring patterns, helps establish anchored chronologies, the oldest of which dates back eleven thousand years. Eleven millennia of history and experience contained in the lives of trees and the evidence they leave behind. Peering behind the walls of antiquity and extracting plugs from its framework is the equivalent of tapping into a house's DNA.

Between written documents—deeds, marriage records—and dendrochronological analysis, preservationists can compose a clearer picture of a place's history. Daniel Miles's core samples corroborate documents found by the house's curator. The addition to the house was built in 1752.

2000. The circumference of the Gettysburg witness tree intrudes on the planned construction of a shopping center. It is saved from an early death by the people of Straban Township, who petition against its removal. This tree is the core of the town—its oldest member, the last living figure from the Civil War portrait. To destroy the white oak would be to erase history from the picture of today. The oak is the thread that holds these two images together. Straban Township's identity depends on not snipping them apart.

1992. My hickory nut tree—or "hickernut," as I imagine the spelling—stands in the back yard by itself, behind our brown and white trailer, which is parked on the "woods lot," a vestigial name. Several trees have come and gone in my lifetime, but not enough to constitute "woods."

There are the five pines Sissy brought home from school as seedlings when she was my age—now giant sentinels lined up evenly along the ditch, though she is now gone from here. Young peach and plum trees dot the lawn. A stand of hickories convene way back near the dark hallways of the cornfield—a towering clique. My hickernut stands independently, maybe halfway between the far-off cluster and the back door of our trailer. It is much more approachable than the others. It is close enough to home for me to feel safe, yet far enough away for me to feel free.

The distance between the trailer and the tree—between my parents and me—muffles their angry voices. The intervening time and space protect me as I twirl and circle the hickernut's trunk.

1990. The National Oceanic and Atmosphere Administration begins maintaining the International Tree-Ring Data Bank. Ring-width indexes from all over the globe are compiled for climate research.

Each growing season, a layer of new cells generate beneath a tree's bark in the vascular cambium. The new, light-colored springwood around the previous year's dark summerwood creates a dual-shaded annulus, or growth ring. These not only number the passing years of a tree's life, but also record

the quality of those years. Poor growing conditions—a lack of rain, for example—yield a very narrow ring.

Tree core sample data could be used to predict future climate change.

1989. Mom dresses herself for work and me for kindergarten and guides me through the twilight to the car. I snooze in the passenger seat for the fourteen miles between Wanamaker and Providence.

We shuffle into Nana's kitchen, where jellied toast waits for me on a paper towel. I eat breakfast while their coffee brews. When I am done, I kiss Mom goodbye and wander off to find the cozy spot on Nana's couch. Again, I fall asleep—this time, to the murmur of their voices and the clink of spoon-against-cup in the other room.

With me, they are Mom and Nana. Without me, they are Pat and Betty.

1987. Dad threatens to leave so many times that Mom jokes about it. Nana laughs at him. She says if he leaves too many more times, he will have all the hair and scales rubbed off the mounted fish and deer head he takes with him when he leaves and brings back each time he returns.

Most afternoons, after Mom picks me up from Nana's, we sing on our ride home. Sometimes it's "You Get a Line, I'll Get a Pole" or some unseasonable Christmas song. I don't know anything about musical notes or harmonizing and neither does Mom, but I like it when we sing and I can hear something special happen. If we hold a syllable long enough to find each other's pitch, it is as if our voices blend, and it makes my teeth rattle or the air in the car quiver. I can always hear it in "Silent Night." Neither of us can hit the high notes, but we can hit the same notes.

Sometimes, we sing this other song Mom made up. The speaker's voice is Dad's:

I'm gonna leave and I won't come back
I'm gonna go 'cross the railroad tracks
I'm gonna leave when the sun comes up
I'm gonna leave in my pickup truck

We change the words, depending on which car or truck he is driving these days, but I don't remember how we sing it when he plans to leave in his little Chevette, which he does a few times.

This time, he is standing in the yard in the yellow glow of the night light, wearing an army surplus jacket, a black garbage bag stuffed with clothes in one hand. With the other, he accepts a sleeve of Townhouse crackers I hand down to him from the edge of the trailer porch. I worry he might go hungry.

I don't know where he goes, other than into the darkness beyond our trailer's dome of light. But I never worry that he won't come back, because this is his home. Because this is his family farm. Not just where his wife and children are—where *he* too was a child.

1981. Mom and Dad own a semi that he has been driving for days at a time, hauling rush contract loads to places like Oswego, New York, and Fort Worth, Texas. On the CB, Dad is Night Rider. This is before the TV show, but the handle is already a common one.

Now the rig is broken down, and because Dad is self employed, maintenance costs come from his pocket. Their pocket—his and Mom's. He has a local trucking buddy who might be able to help him with the repair. His handle is Guitar Man, but his real name is George. He, his wife Betty, and two kids live in a trailer between Dixon and Providence. It will be a quick trip there and back, he assures Mom. Dad convinces her to go with him.

When they park in the gravel driveway, Mom refuses to follow him inside the strangers' home. She will wait in the car.

Dad knocks on the trailer's front door and a woman with tight gray curls and large rose-tinted glasses lets him in.

Betty steps out onto the porch in her house shoes and sees Mom in the car. She waves first at the car and then toward the front door, signaling Mom to come inside. From the shielded glass silence of the car, Mom shoos her back in. Neither woman moves. Betty waves again, more

emphatically, this time with a frown. Mom rolls down the window and shouts across the yard, "Nah, I'm all right." She swats the invitation away, but Betty is persistent.

"Come in here right now and have a cup of coffee." Mom sighs because she cannot say no to that. The visit will last much more than five minutes.

1972. The other type of witness tree marks a property line. Some American surveyors still cite them in metes and bounds. When one stands on or near the corner of a parcel of land, it becomes the natural monument of said corner, in both the physical world and on paper. It is also sometimes called a "bearing tree"—not because it has borne witness to any important event, but rather because, at this particular tree, the bearing of the boundary changes direction.

Courts still recognize waterways and witness trees as the most reliable source of information in settling land disputes.

The deed to the Norvell farm—conveyed directly to John, Mildred, and Jerry by their parents—names four witness trees. The property line bears northwest to a stone and a black gum, then northeast to a stone, southeast to a stone and a sassafras, and southwest to the beginning, another black gum. And a hickory. These witness trees mark about seventy acres.

1945. When the atomic bomb blasts Hiroshima, Japan, on August 6, all creatures and structures within a mile and a half of the explosion are destroyed or severely damaged. Everything from rooftops to flesh melts. Most vegetation chars.

Three ginkgo, or maidenhair, trees stand less than a mile and a half from the hypocenter—the surface directly below the point of detonation. They not only survive, but in some cases, their support prevents the immediate destruction of nearby buildings. They are renamed *Hibaku Jamoku* (A-bombed trees).

Hosen-Ji temple ginkgo tree, estimated 105 years old, 1130 meters away from the hypocenter of the blast.

Josei-Ji temple tree, estimated 45 years old, 1420 meters

away from the hypocenter.
Anraku-Ji, between 77 and 342 years old, 2160 meters away.

Shortly after the blast, ginkgo buds reappear. Unlike many *Hibaku Jamoku*, the new growth on the ginkgo trees shows little or no sign of deformity.

1878. An Oneida father and his son set up camp beneath the Half-Way Tree. Their ancestors paced the distance between Lake Michigan and the Mississippi River and determined this bur oak the journey's midpoint. For decades, members of their tribe have journeyed along Wisconsin's Sugar River in the springtime and stopped to rest at this tree, but now they are the last to make the trip. The tree now stands on someone else's private property.

1863. On the third day of battle in Gettysburg, fifteen-thousand Confederate soldiers cross a stretch of farmland toward a hilltop grove of trees. They aim to wipe out the center of the Union's stronghold. Fewer than half the infantrymen survive the three-quarter-mile march toward enemy fire. The offensive cannot break through. The center holds.

1730. The traveler knows his way to water, but where the trail fades into undergrowth, he finds an oak sapling. He stoops to the ground and pulls the bole toward the earth. A bit of rawhide and a stone will hold this tree in place until it learns this new posture. Now it will gesture toward where Rock Creek flows into the Sangamon River. It will indicate the place where the sources converge.

1730. By the time the traveler's strap disintegrates, the crooked trunk, now more like an elephant's than a tree's, arches permanently toward the confluence of Rock Creek and the Sangamon River. This tree, as long as it stands, will be a messenger to those who know to look for it.

1832. Surveyors confirm that Lake Michigan and the Mississippi River are equidistant from the Half-Way Tree of Brodhead, Wisconsin.

1863. The tactical roles shift. Confederate soldiers make only one small breach in the stone wall of Union defense, but this gap is quickly healed. The Confederate failure of Pickett's Charge at Cemetery Ridge is considered the turning point of not only the Battle of Gettysburg, but the entire American Civil War.

1878. John Henry Fulcher comes from North Carolina to Wanamaker, Kentucky, by horse-drawn wagon. Over the next twenty years, he buys bits and pieces of land, forming the family farm. His surveyor notes the witness trees—among them sassafras, black gum, and hickory.

1948. The reconstruction of Hiroshima's Anraku-Ji temple incorporates a hole in the building's roof through which the ginkgo *Habiku Jamoku* can continue to grow unimpeded.

1973. Three generations gather for the photo in the front yard of my grandparents' house.

My grandfather, Raymond Norvell, is the central figure. Other than my sister, he is the shortest person present, back and shoulders hunched. To the left of him, Lyda's mouth is open, but not in a smile. My grandmother's lips form a tiny *o* that seems to be asking *Who? What? Where? When?* or *Why?*

My aunt Mildred stands behind them with her husband, Bill, at her side. In the back, posed farthest from the camera, is the oldest brother, John. He is noticeably taller and thinner than anyone else.

Half the background is a house so light in color that it fades into the cloudless sky, also white. The edges of the house and sky meet behind my mother, the faint seam connecting them floats vertically above her head, halving her frosted bouffant.

Directly in front of Mom is Dad, kneeling with Sissy, who stands on his thigh. She is small enough to sit on his shoulder. The two of them seem a little off balance, as though they might have toppled to the sidewalk after this shot was snapped. Her toddler body lists toward the right of the frame while Dad's leans toward to the center, his forehead nearly resting on his own father's upper arm.

With limbs so sprung out and wild, my family looks like a solid, steady trunk.

1981. In Hiroshima, the Josei-Ji temple undergoes its third reconstruction since World War II. A staircase is built around the trunk of the still-surviving ginkgo.

1982. The annual rings visible in a cross-section of tree begin with the newest growth on the outside, just under the bark, and work their way inward to the oldest. Each inner ring is older than the one that encircles it, with the pith at the center—the original seedling forever encased by its yearly expansion. This eldest part of the tree sits in quiet meditation at the center while youth ventures continually forth.

The Norvell children aren't like that. The youngest ring is nearest the center, and the oldest lies farthest from Wanamaker. The radii formed by my grandparents' children are three concentric circles around their homeplace:

John R. Norvell, 50 years old, 101 Lackawana Drive, Lexington, Kentucky, 172 miles away from the homeplace.
Mildred Wood, 47 years old, 401 Cottonwood Drive, Nashville, Tennessee, 112 miles away from home.
Jerry E. Norvell, 38 years old, 15524 U. S. Highway 41-Alternate, Corydon, Kentucky, 4 miles away.

When Lyda dies, she leaves the center empty.

Dad sells the house with the Corydon address and moves my mom and sister to Wanamaker, shrinking his own circle to a point.

1990. All of Nana's children and grandchildren are in town for her family reunion. Trucks and vans with license plates from Michigan to Alabama park down her gravel driveway in a line. A few spill into the grass.

Her grandkids and I play together like cousins. We have named the young red maple in the front yard Heaven. It is small like us, and we can reach its lowest branches. When we play tag, Heaven is base.

When we are sweaty and tired of chasing each other, I share with them the Fla-Vor-Ice popsicles that Nana always keeps in her freezer just for me, for the days I stay at her house. Everyone fights over the blue ones. When I call her "Nana," a girl about my height with a round face and dark brown eyes squeals, "Nuh-uh!" and points to herself. Nana is their grandma, not my nana.

I do not understand the difference. How can Nana not be mine when I am the one who comes to her house every day? When I am the one she scrapes a knifeful of Country Crock and Welch's grape jelly onto toast for every morning? When I am the one who rides with her to the Sureway and gets a long package of Mamba fruit chews at the checkout for being good? When I am the one who helps her paste the Quality Stamps into booklets when we get home?

How can my Nana belong to these people, who live so far away?

1991. Nana announces her plans to return to Alabama to care for her ailing parents. Mom will need to find me a new sitter.

For seven growing seasons, my life has formed around her presence. My core has already been altered. The something inside me that points toward home points toward her, but now she is gone.

1992. The ground surrounding my hickernut is dense with shells. Most of them are dried-out and broken into empty halves, but some are whole and green. I never see the actual nuts. Squirrels and deer must eat them during the early morning hours or after I go inside at nightfall, but I don't miss them. It doesn't occur to me that something has ever been inside each nutshell other than the hollow spot.

Nana is gone. The hickernut shells press and poke the soles of my shoes. I can't put a foot down anywhere beneath the limbs without wobbling. It is not Heaven, but I stay. I cannot reach this tree's limbs, but some of the branches dangle their leaves low enough for me to touch if I stand on tippy-toes. If I lean against the trunk, bits of shaggy bark come loose. I can snap whole scales off with my fingers, but I only pry away a few brittle pieces. I don't want to tear up my make-believe home. I like it the way it is—intact.

Dad likes to park old vehicles under the hickernut tree, so I usually have a bumper to sit on. The dull silver Chevette's seats are stacked high with cardboard boxes and garbage bags that strain with forgotten belongings: faded artificial flowers, framed black velvet, a chainsaw.

1993. The junk Chevette is hauled away. Now he has a little Datsun truck, yellow and afflicted with patches of rust. I climb over the tailgate with my Walkman, settling onto the hump over one of the back tires like it's my couch in a living room with a ceiling of leaves. I snap the metal headband over my hair and ears.

Under the hickernut, I listen to a Judy Garland tape from the seventies. Her picture on the case looks nothing like Dorothy Gale, and when I rewind and fast-forward to "Over the Rainbow," the only song I recognize on the track list, I am disappointed to find it isn't the familiar recording from the movie. This voice sounds much older, much sadder—brittle and hollow.

1994. The Hosen-Ji temple's front staircase splits and wraps around the ginkgo tree, forming a U-shape.

2008. I'm not sure if the collection is a memorial for fallen trees, bits of trunks Dad has found, or for trees he has felled himself. If this is a display of honor, apology, or victory. I do not know if such a clear purpose exists, but viscerally, I understand.

Maybe he tends these stumps like he does the old family cemetery of

which he is last living caretaker. He mows around chalky headstones whose names and dates have eroded into oblivion.

The trees on the farm are relatives, and each stump is both tomb and tombstone. Countable rings mark the dates of life and death, from birth to final growing season.

Whatever force compels him to place the pieces there along the wall has also compelled me to salvage this newest fixture. The mulberry looks fresh and out of place at the end, with her twenty-four fully-intact rings, as many as me.

The hickernut, at least, still stands on its own—whole and mine.

2010. Neither of my parents tells me it is gone at first, but now I am coming home to visit.

Mom figures she better prepare me—the way parents do when a pet must be put down while the kids are at camp.

If Dad had asked me, he wouldn't have done it. Mom, knowing how much I love the tree, tells me it was already dead.

As I turn onto the rural route that leads to the farm, I prepare to cry. I know what to expect when I pull up the gravel driveway and past the row of pines. Now nothing will block the view of the new house.

The pines welcome me home as my tires crunch onto the gravel. The hickernut tree is gone. I feel a tug in my chest, but only a tiny one. I do not cry.

The tree, Dad says, was dangerous. Cutting the grass in the front yard was nearly impossible. He feared damaging a mower blade with a tough hickory nut or slinging one of them through a window like a stone. A storm could have blown its limbs and trunk onto the brand new roof. It was staining the freshly poured sidewalk.

It was from a different time and place, the hickernut. Its disappearance from the front yard isn't any more unusual than a stranger rising from a park bench. It was there and now it isn't. So what?

2011. Here's what. Hickernut and I witnessed each other. My own childhood is tied up in those rings. Because my younger self—the one who knew the tree as my boundary and my haven—still exists within me. Losing Hickernut is like the other disorienting losses of my youth. Losing Nana. Losing my sense of home. That tree accesses a part of me—my core—even now at twenty-seven. That tree and I resonate. Its presence—and now its absence—reminds me that my own sapling-self stands at the center of me. Without that younger self, my current self could not be.

Hickernut's disappearance is a point of disconnection. Disorientation. A dissolved boundary.

2012. Melissa Thomas Van-Gundy uses historical deeds to reconstruct the pre-settlement forests of West Virginia. Early surveyors unknowingly gave her a data set when they noted witness trees on their records. She maps the distribution of trees across the state before settlers began clearing the land for homes and farms. She now knows where the white oaks congregated, where the American chestnut thrived before blight essentially wiped it out.

2012. Some cool evening, we will take pieces from the rick of hickory to build nighttime fires, and they will burn down to ash by daybreak.

2013. Bill Hewitt fashions walking sticks and ink pens from the wood of fallen Gettysburg witness trees. At a friend's suggestion, he mails a pen to the president, and to Hewitt's surprise, he receives a thank-you note from Barack Obama a month later. In the letter, the city is spelled Gettsysburg. He displays the flawed document in a wooden frame.

2014. Dale and I are driving around Stage Coach Road, trying to find a fishing hole his work buddies go on about. We haven't found it on a map yet, and he's not even sure it has public access.

Before the residential area runs out and the roadside turns into farmland, I see a tree in the yard of someone's house. It is small, maybe a

young walnut. On the ground beside it is a humble stack of split firewood. The first and tallest column of logs leans against the still-growing tree's trunk. From there, the layers of wood continue into the grass.

Dale finds the fishing hole, circles it, and drives away unimpressed. I am still thinking about the little tree and woodpile a few miles back.

It is a coexistence we ordinarily do not acknowledge: that the living and the dead occupy the same space. We rely on each other. Rarely, outside of a cemetery, do we confront this fact.

2014. John Henry Fulcher's wagon is little more than a dry-rotted wooden axle, but it still sits in the fencerow dividing my parents' front yard from Sam Puryear's field. Broken spokes jut from the rusted hubs in all directions. Meanwhile, its steel wheels are scattered. One leans against a nearby tree, another against the concrete-block wall of the pump house.

In the early summer, honeysuckle crowds what's left of the decomposing wagon, reminding us it is there.

2014. Grass creeps over the spot where the hickernut once stood.

2015. If someone were to lay transparencies of the past on top of now, the ghost of Dad's Chevette would be parked on the front sidewalk. I might be there with my headphones on, singing out of tune, somewhere near the rosebushes that Mom asked Dad to set in front of the house. Through the living room window, she would see not only her roses, but a tree pebbling the grass, concrete, and flower beds with its hickory nuts and split shells. A brown and white mobile home would be nestled among enough trees to call this yard a woods lot—not just hickory, but sassafras and black gum, too. By the fencerow, John Henry's wagon would be whole and fresh from the journey—all four wheels in place.

Calisthenics

Brandon Rushton

All things are an effort to prolong the inevitable.
For example, my deep concern when the kids call
top bunk it means they've acquired innuendo.
They'll get there, if they haven't already
and already it is hard for me to accept that.
The dog brings in the daily paper and I tell
myself the troubling news is temporary.
Each month we make believe the mortgage
is a ransom installment meant for remedying
our differences with the mob. It's better this way,
for our sex life, if we're more morbid than boring.
I wave at the neighbor who dual wields
his weed killer and he does not wave back.
I'd like to call a mayday every Monday morning
but this seems insensitive considering the plane
that's just crashed on a pond of swans.
The community committee has just elected
our inaugural savior of the suburb. Kids chuck
their trading cards down a manhole
as a form of protest. Nothing stays the same.
Spirits are low. The search effort is to be
suspended at sunset. The main difference
between a plane and a person hurled into the water
is the black box that helps us understand it better.
There are no survivors. There are still
so many swans.

Lisa Olstein

Shimmer Here Shimmer

Preface

Remember the feel of the latch:
a group of organic habits, such
simple structures. In storm

storm makes sense of shelter.
Imagine living in a seashell,
shrinking enough to be contained.

By clear-eyed words can one
hear oneself close? The rote
of the sea, the roar of, the glint.

Note: Each section of "Shimmer Here Shimmer" uses a corresponding chapter of Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* as an exclusive word bank; the composition process involved selecting and collaging short phrases into new combinations of syntax, meaning, and image.

1. Simple Exercises for the Phenomenology of the Imagination

We begin to dream of nothing in the night.
This, then, is the main problem: to dream
of nothing in the night we are carried back

to the land of motionless childhood. What
a strange thing it is, fossilized duration.
We are never real historians. We once loved

a garret. Was the room a large one?
A matter for the biographer. The biographer
prepares his explosions in the theater of the past

to illustrate an instant's freezing. These
drawings need not be exact. What would be
the use? You would like to tell everything.

I have already said too much. In every country,
a house constitutes a body. Fear in the cellar.
In the attic, rats. The tiniest latch has remained

in our hands: names of things we knew.
Dumas is crying because Dumas has tears.
One very dark night set the waves.

Think of the road this way: what is more
beautiful than a road? Geographers are always
reminding us of an underground horizon.

Such a complicated geometry. Night dreams
just in front of me—of a hut, of a nest,
like an animal in its hole is a distant glimmer.

How many scattered wolves alone before god,
like fireflies, like so many invitations?
Now, still, we could start a new life.

2. The Reverse of the Function of Inhabiting

Housewifely, the housewife awakens
reaping an imaginary field. The house-test:
every morning every object a working draft,

a ready-made invitation to the mountains
to come back through the window. Airy
structure, long did I build you in the blue

incense of a red letter day. A flower
lived where we lived and called it home.
But the question is more complex than that.

The house remodels the man. The cell
of a body having been a refuge
becomes a cyclone. Between the notary

and the heir, the iron hooves of dream
geometry: later, always later, the house
of the future is better, a nest already

and when you are there you would
like to be. It's always like that.
The gesture of closing is briefer than

that of opening. In the tiniest of hatreds,
an animal filament, a sleeping insect
in its red night. Out the shadow,

show the hatchlings this dove was
a hospitable ark: a winged house
makes good flour from storms.

3. A Theorem of Infinite Space

All words do an honest job, the hurried
reader responds in passing. A slight pain,
a mild shock, the rudiments of a story.

This time in little mirrors stopped with sleep
a very white almond appears. Concepts
are drawers not open to just anybody

here and there in the brain, keepsake boxes.
There will always be more things in a closed
than in an open box. What good things are

being kept in reserve, objects friendship,
folded in the russet wood, between the flanks
of the wintry meadow? Objection

overridden, erudite minds lay in provisions,
an anthology of mechanized debates.
On page eighty of the twenty-sixth edition,

you touched what you were touching.
Sufficiently lavendered, under a button,
under a leather tongue, what soft words

cut the story short? Nothing more to
confess, every secret has its little casket.
In other words, a secret is a grave,

a casket is a dungeon as cold as
a police record we should also like to open.
A lock is a threshold, an invitation

to thieves. Well-guarded secret,
slender casket, the lock doesn't exist
that could resist these closing calls.

4. Architecture Is the Natural Habitat of the Function of Inhabiting

A rat in its hole, a rabbit in its burrow,
cows in the stable. But this is not
our subject. Autumn was there

so there is also an alas in this song.
A nest is a bird's house.
A nest is a hiding place.

An empty nest mocks its finder.
When we discover a nest it takes us back
to our childhood or, rather, to a childhood:

to the childhoods we should have had.
If we return to the old house as to a nest,
it is because memories are dreams.

In order to make so gentle a comparison,
one must have lost the house that stood
for happiness. Values alter facts.

Of the actual nest. We definitely saw it,
but we say that it was well hidden.
The nest we pluck from the hedge

like a dead flower is nothing but a thing.
A legend carries an invisible nest
to its utmost point. The nest is a point

in the atmosphere that always surrounds
large trees. A bird is a worker without tools.
The tree is the vestibule. The nest is

a bouquet. Would a bird build its nest
if it did not have its instinct for confidence
in the world? For the world is a nest.

Angie Cruz

Every Bride Deserves A New Dress

The first time Juan Ruiz proposed to me, I was eleven years old, skinny and flat chested. I was half asleep, my frizzy hair had burst out from the rubber-band holding it together and my dress was on backward. Juan and four of his brothers showed up past midnight, on their way to serenade our neighbor Dolores who lived in the next town in Alta Mayor.

That night, the first out of many, the brothers parked their car on the dirt road and clanged on Papá's colmado's bell as if they were herding cows. We huddled near the house while Papá walked toward the darkness with his rifle in position ready to shoot. The roads were especially dark with the absence of the moon, the cloudy sky, and the power outages that lasted fifteen hours at a time. There'd been some cow-stealing and our store had been robbed twice in the past year so everything was locked down. It hadn't been too long since Trujillo died, which meant all the shit from the bottom of the sea was stirred up and we had to be vigilant.

—It's us, it's us, the friends of Dolores, Juan yelled out, the brothers waving their instruments in the air and laughing.

—Come. Step forward, Mamá yelled and soon they sat in our front yard with beers in their hands talking about New York, politics, money, and papers.

Papá didn't care for politics but he knew not to trust a man in a suit. Juan wore a suit and was drunk like a fish. Slurred,—Marry me Ana and I'll take you to America, then tripped over himself and onto me, pushing me against the wooden fence.—Tell me yes, he insisted with his lit breath and his thick sweat dripping over my face.

Papá went for his rifle. So Mamá stood between them, laughing it off in the way she does where she shows all her teeth and dips her chin to her neck then flirtatiously looks away. She gripped Juan's shoulder and guided him back to the plastic lawn chair to sit with his brothers who all had too much to drink and acted like boys and not middle-aged men.

When Juan sat, his chest folded toward his round stomach, his jaw, the corner of his lips, his cheeks, and eyes all came down: a sad clown. Juan stared at my knees that came together tight tight as if I held a secret there for him to discover.

The four brothers, differing widely in size and facial features all wore suits and clumped together near Juan like a band on a stage. Their eyes glassy and pink. Their instruments their crutch. They serenaded my sister Isabel who was thirteen going on twenty, born kicking before the sun had risen, before the roosters crowed. She reveled in the attention and swung her skirt side to side clapping her hands to the music.

—Girls, to bed, Papá announced with the resonance of a cowbell. He sat with his rifle across his thighs, pissed like I've never seen him. Two of his sisters had been taken by military men back when Trujillo was still alive.

—We should hit the road, Tadeo said. He stood up lean and tall like a flagpole, always polite, always apologetic for his younger brothers who couldn't control their liquor.

Before Juan left he bent down to look right into my face. I stared straight back into his eyes as if I had the power to scare him. He made a gesture of retreat and suddenly he pounced toward me and barked, loud and insistent. Bark. Bark. Bark. I jumped back and away from him, tripped over the plastic bucket we kept by the door to fetch water. He laughed and laughed. His large body shook when he laughed. Then everyone laughed except me.

Mamá made nice and told them to come back soon, and don't be strangers, and that the best of girls are worth waiting for. Maybe we'll go eat at your restaurant in the city one day, she said, knowing well we never go to La Capital or eat at restaurants.

Years went by and the Ruiz brothers kept coming for free beer at all hours of the night, flooding Isabel and me with promises and proposals. Come with me now? Let's get the Justice of the Peace?—You making the stars jealous with that face of yours, Juan said to me more than once.—Never did I see a green-eyed bird like you, he said and his blood-shot glassy eyes would stare into mine making the fuzz on the back of my neck lift.

From the day I was born Mamá said my eyes were a winning lottery ticket. Inherited from my grandfather who was from the Cibao.

—If we choose the right man for you, we can all get out of this hell, she would tell me.

It didn't matter if Juan's intentions were serious or not. Mamá had lived long enough to learn a man doesn't know what he thinks until a woman makes him think it. So when I got my period at twelve and eight months, she undid my pigtails and pulled my hair back tight away from my face so not a kink could escape. So tight, my eyes pulled at the ends. When he came by, she made me wear my Sunday dress I had outgrown a while before and it pushed the little fat I had up and around my chest for all to see. Juan was often too drunk to know the difference between a dress or a potato sack, but she colored my lips pink and when I talked, the lipstick bled onto my teeth. She made me sit with the men, my dress rising high up, the back of my thighs sticking to the plastic chairs.

My brothers, Yohnny, a year younger than me, and Lenny, who still didn't know how to blow his own nose, sat a ways away and made faces at me, imitating the Ruiz brothers in their fancy suits who stumbled and slurred all their words. The men talked in a loop: about papers, the value of the dollar, the baseball games they gambled on, if Balaguer was going to do something for them after they had campaigned for him. Money, papers, money, papers, money, papers, they talked as if we weren't even there. Until Mamá cleverly changed the subject to our precious farmland filled with possibility, and then to me.

—Ana is very good at math, Mamá said,—Isn't that right, Andres?

She looked pleadingly towards Papá, who no longer kept a rifle on his lap but wore a scowl on his face.

When Juan didn't visit for a long while, he did live and work in New York City after all, Mamá would make me write him letters.

—Tell him you miss seeing him and that you're a flower, untouched and ready for the perfect vase. You're the kind of flower that doesn't do well in the hot sun.

But what kind of flowers didn't love the sun? We had flamboyan trees overrunning our yard. They were so happy. Even when it didn't rain for days they held up fine.

—Tell him how hot it's been. Unbearable. And how you long to see the snow. Tell him how handsome he looks in a suit and how wonderful it is to see men dress like men, serious men.

But don't you think it's ridiculous to wear those heavy suits in this heat?

—Tell him how you wish you could dress as fine as him. That your favorite color is green, like your eyes. Remind him about your eyes. There are few women around here with such a color. Tell him how well you're doing in school and how much you love to study. How you hope to continue to study for many years, if only you had an opportunity to do so. That in your class you're the best in math. How you love numbers so much you dream of them while you sleep.

That was true. I counted everything, the steps to school, how many times the teacher had to repeat herself, even the impossible things I tried to count, the stars in the sky, how many limoncillos there were in a tree.

—Tell him how much you enjoy to cook. Be specific. Don't just say food, say pescado con coco, so he knows you're the kind of woman who's not afraid to grate the coconuts or clean the fish.

But what kind of woman would be afraid to grate a coconut? Pure silliness.

—Tell him you wish he could visit during the day so you could cook him a proper meal at a proper time. How much you would enjoy feeding him. Tell him how good you are with a needle and thread, there's nothing you can't fix.

—But most of this is a lie, Mamá. Pure lies, I finally said.

—Love letters are just words so people understand things about each other.

Trust me.

—But what about what I want?

—What do you want?

—I don't know.

—So until you know, I'll decide for you. A mother knows what's best anyway. When you have your own children you will see.

Papá says even one drop of water could fill a bucket if you wait around long enough. So it was no surprise to me, between Mamá's letters, the free beers, and visits every few months, one day Juan Ruiz would ask properly for my hand in marriage. When I was about to turn fifteen, he was thirty-two, he showed up during the daytime with his older brother Tadeo. Sober, or as sober as I had ever seen him, not flailing his arms or grabbing at me, at Mamá, the chair, at a tree, to hold himself up. For the first time ever I could see him. He even took off his suit jacket. Wore only a tailored vest. Without the shoulder pads, his shoulders became small. He had a small hump at the top of his neck.

—Ana? Juan said in such a serious way everyone stared with bated breath. I wore my Sunday dress, a faded yellow one, from all the times it had been washed and line dried in the sun. I couldn't breathe well in it. My hair so frizzy and out of control it looked like a nest. My tongue dry. My throat ached. I knew the moment would come. I looked at Juan towering over me. I focused on the thin gray lines on his vest, the way they intersected at the lapels. The sweat streamed down his cheeks, dodging his large pores. His thick nose. I tried not to look at him. But they all stared. Isabel stood close by with her son on her hip. My mother's teeth exposed, her bright red lipstick caked on her bottom lip. Yohnny and Lenny lay on a bench like overheated dogs, so thirsty their tongues hung out of their mouth. I looked for Papá, who stood quietly as if defeated.

Where is your rifle? Where is your scowl?

—What is it? I asked Juan wondering if the lipstick had already stained my teeth.

—Will you be my wife? he asked.

Tadeo, who anticipated a yes from me, stood behind Juan, cornering him as if without him there, Juan would split, run away, take it all back. And it was then I understood that maybe Juan didn't want to marry me after all. So why was he there? Why was Tadeo there? I pressed my shoes into the rich soil, the leaves on the mango trees were especially vibrant that day.

I could've said no. Isabel waited for me to say no. Her mouth, tight-lipped and up to one side in disapproval.—You have rights, she said.—You are the boss of you.

I looked to Papá for an answer.—Go ahead, answer him, Papá urged.

Mamá grabbed Papá's arm in solidarity. It was an unusual gesture for her to make, but one understood by Tadeo, because he smiled and shook my father's hand as if I had said yes. And Yohnny and Lenny ran about singing interchangeably, I like to be in America. Okay by me in America, everything free in America, Olé.

In minutes the adults had moved away from me to make the arrangements. Yohnny and Lenny grabbed my hands and spun me around and around reminiscent of the *West Side Story* musical we had seen many times at the theater in the center.

—Get the refrescos, Mamá yelled over to Yohnny.—Today is a good day.

Every bride deserves a new dress. So on the next available appointment Mamá took me to Carmela's in San Pedro de Macorís for a fitting.

—But I have school, I said.

—You don't need to go there anymore.

—But I haven't said goodbye. I haven't said goodbye to everyone.

She was suspicious from the moment I said everyone. What I meant was Gabriel, the only boy who showed interest in me. She wouldn't let him ruin everything now.

Mamá wrapped a scarf over her head and pulled the keys for the scooter off the hook. And without any hesitation she swung her leg over and sat on the scooter and yelled,—Com'n, get on.

I slipped behind her. She took up most of the seat. The sun blared above. She handed me an umbrella and waited for me to open it. After some fits and starts, the scooter peeled onto the road, leaving a cloud of dust behind us. For a long while we were alone on the narrow road, miles of cane fields on each side. I hugged my mother, pressed my head against her sweaty back and could taste the ocean on her skin. You would think we were close. That she wasn't about to give me away to a stranger.

Then suddenly the clamoring of tin pots, the horns of the ships, the stink of trapped water inside the numerous potholes hit us. Cars and scooters competed for every inch of the city streets. The Malecón burst at the seams, people shopping, hanging, talking, drinking. Selling lottery tickets and coconuts. Men whistled and hissed at Mamá whose skirt hiked up exposing her brown thick thighs, even thicker next to all my bones.—Cochino! my mother yelled back at the gaping mouths of horny men.

—There's not a good one in that bunch, she said and demanded I hold on tight as she pushed through the traffic, around the park in the city's center, shaded by palmettos and almond trees, a refuge from the blazing sun.

Mamá pulled up to Carmela's house. The only house made with concrete on the block. It was once painted red, now pink. Dwarf palm trees cluttered her front yard.

—Carmela! Mamá yelled through the iron gates. We looked into the house. Everyone was out back. She looked back at me, my eyes watery, my chin pressed against my neck. My imminent departure had become too real.

—Cheer up. This is the beginning of great things for you. For all of us!

Carmela led us to the room where she slept and worked. There were a few reams of fabric on a shelf, a black metal sewing machine on a small table by a window. A bald bulb hung from the ceiling. A loud fan propped on the floor, faced the chair she worked at. A rope strung from one side of the room to the other, where she pinned fabric pieces, photos from magazines of dresses her other customers had ordered.

—Bad news. Carmela said,—There's not an inch of white fabric in town. The communion ceremonies are in two weeks and every girl between six and eight is dressing like a bride.

Mamá fanned herself with the McCall pattern on Carmela's table. I smiled to myself. This was a sign the marriage was ill-fated and my mother believed in signs. Maybe she would cancel the marriage and my life could go back to being simple.

—What other colors do you have? Mamá asked.

—What? The response flew out of my mouth startling them.

—Other colors, my mother repeated and Carmela pulled out the three possibilities. There was a shiny gold lamé that was a definite no. Black linen. And a roll of red cotton.

Mamá sighed and fingered the red fabric on the sewing table.

—It's more pink, a flaming pink, Carmela said. She turned around and pulled out a large piece of white lace from her storage cabinet.—We could put this around the neckline.

She stood behind me, placed the lace on my chest so my mother could get the effect. There were no mirrors in the room for me to look at myself. I was supposed to be in school. Gabriel would wonder where I was. I couldn't go off to America without saying goodbye.

Mamá scrutinized the flaming pink and white lace.

—That pink is so bright. Don't you have anything else?

—I have black but she'll look like a widow.

—I like the black, I said.

They both looked at me as if I had gone mad. As if they cared what I thought or what I wanted.

—Make her something pretty in the pink. And put as much white lace as you can. I don't want anyone to think my daughter is indecent.

We walked out into the midday sun. Mamá opened the flowered umbrella she stored inside her purse. She locked her arms into mine. Pulled me over to sit on the ledge of Carmela's house to sit. Across from us some men were setting up a piece of cardboard over stacked crates to play a game. Women were lining the wash in their front yard. Two boys played catch.

Mamá revealed a cigarette she had hidden in her bra.

—You smoke?

She stopped a teenager pretending to be a man, asked for a light, cupped her hands over his and then waved him away.

—Only on special occasions, she said.

She took a drag and passed it to me. I made a face of disgust to hide surprise.

—Lesson number one to survive this fucking life, learn to pretend. You don't need to smoke if you don't want to but you can embody one of those movie stars and make the gesture.

—I'm not like that.

She shook her head in disapproval then leaned her head back, took a drag and exhaled. The sun behind her drew her silhouette. We had the same lips, the shape of our eyes, large and wide. The same bad hair at the nape of our neck.

When she came back for air, she winked and smiled at me.

—They're gonna eat you alive in New York if you don't change that face de pendeja. You need to toughen up. You think I like being the way I am. But your father has no backbone. Never fought for anything in his life. Not even me.

—But you once said he went after you like no other man?

—Ha. You better open your eyes, before someone else opens them for you. You hear me?

That day, Mamá was a wolf pushing away her pups. But I wasn't ready. Nothing about me was ready.

—You go to America and you make Juan understand that without you he can't survive. And you stand back and pretend you don't care about what him and his brothers are talking about but listen carefully and take notes. The Ruiz brothers started poor like us. And look at them. They own a restaurant in the capital right by the sea, a fancy one, with cloth napkins on the tables. And his other brother, Raymundo, I heard he has a school with over one hundred students. And in New York, Juan is working with his brother to start businesses. Not one, but many. They are detailed people. Organized people. These are people with intelligence. You want to study, don't you?

I fought to hold back the tears.

Mamá took the last drag from her cigarette and put it out on the wall. She picked up my chin and was so unusually tender she took me by surprise.

—Think of your Tia Clara, her daughter married a man who works in New York and every month he sends the family money. He never fails. They have a cement floor and a new bathroom.

—But, I cried.

—Oh mi'jita please. Stop it. Now everybody's looking at us. You're being ridiculous. Look at those kids. You see those kids?

Mamá pointed at some barefooted boys carrying baskets of bags filled with peanuts and peeled oranges.—Do you know what your brother Yohnny is doing every day while you and Lenny spend your days at school?

Mamá grabbed my chin and made me look. Everything looked blurry from all the tears.

And as soon as Lenny can write his name and add his numbers he will be out there too.

Every day I pressed Yohnny's shirts so he could get them dirty again sitting by the road waiting for someone to buy Papá's fresh meats and fruits, carrying baskets twice his weight. He wasn't allowed to come home until he sold everything. So, yes, I knew. I knew.

—There's no future for you or your brothers here. Please try and be happy. It kills your father to see your sad face all the time.

Before shipping me off to New York my mother smeared red lipstick on my lips and covered my body with talcum powder. I was fifteen. A dead fly.

Mamá instructed me to sit and wait patiently for Juan who was expected before noon.

—Ana, get out of that dress, Isabel insisted,—El Guardia's taking us all to the beach. Her words and hair bounced around her head like ribbons on a present.

My brother, Lenny, already in his cut-off shorts, slapped his sweaty arm against mine.

—Gabriel will be there, Isabel said as if I needed a reminder of the fun I'd be

missing.

Not a hair out of place. Not a speck on the dress or else.

—Ooh Gabriel, Lenny teased.

I tried not to blush. I hadn't told Gabriel I was leaving. How could I? When he gave me a lift home on his bike, across the field, my hands grabbed his hips and when he stopped pedaling, my chest and head pressed against his back. That's when the feeling my mother called the devil who steals reason came up between my legs. Without reason women make mistakes. Big ones, like Isabel who got caught by the devil the day El Guardia stuck his cucumber inside her and gave her a baby Mamá had to care for.

—Go already. Mamá'll kill me if I get up from this chair.

Isabel's tits sat on her chest like hand grenades. She was born with hooves as feet, stubborn as any mule.

—You really want to go away with that old man? she asked.

Juan Ruiz was 32. It's true, he was old, but he hadn't married yet and had no children. Besides, out of all the girls Juan could marry and take to America, he picked me.

Isabel took a small towel from her bag and patted the sweat from around my hairline and neck, her breath fresh from chewing on fennel.

—You're a ghost with all this powder. And this ridiculous dress? Poor little thing.

—But I like the dress.

All my life I wore Isabel's hand-me-downs that were wider and shorter than me. This dress was made to measure by Carmela, a top-notch seamstress in San Pedro De Macorís, special for the wedding. I wished it had been white and not a common bougainvillea pink, but a white lace stitched over and around the neck made it so I didn't look like a whore.

—Com'n Ana, if the old man wants you he'll wait until we get back from the beach.

El Guardia's clunker pulled up. One of the doors had fallen and was being held up with duct tape. Merengue blasted from his radio. He honked on the horn.

—You don't have to marry him. You're old enough to choose your life, Isabel said, extending her hands. El Guardia's car had the engine on. Gabriel was waiting for me at the beach. I touched my lips. Underneath my lipstick, I could still feel his

kiss. Everything in me wanted to see him again.

Mamá must've known I was tempted because she rushed out of the house and swatted Isabel away with her kitchen towel.

—Get away. Why do you want to ruin her life the way you ruined yours?

—I want Ana to know she has a choice.

Mamá turned to me and asked,—Do you want to stay here and end up with a good for nothing, pigeon-toed, disgraceful man like El Guardia? Or do you want to go to New York with a respectable, hardworking man so you can make something out of yourself and help your family?

—At least El Guardia loves me, Isabel shouted back.

—Ay, love, love, love. You children don't know anything about love. You live in the clouds.

I couldn't look at either of them so I stared at Yohnny tying a goat to a cherry tree. If he let her loose she would run. I wanted to pet her milky white fur. Her eyes, shiny and mysterious like a zapote seed. She looked at me confused, with longing.

Isabel's hooves cut the ground, her nostrils flared, she was ready to hold Mamá back so I could make a run for it.

I bit the insides of my cheeks and breathed in the fresh mown grass, the scent of lilacs and manure, the decay of mangoes fallen from the tree. I listened for the hummingbirds that flapped flapped flapped their wings. For the gravel under Lenny's feet, for Gabriel's breath in my ear when he told me secrets. At least I kissed him when I had the chance.

El Guardia honked again. He knew not to step out of his car when Mamá was home. When she first caught his devil eyes on Isabel, she warned El Guardia, if he stuck it in her daughter she would chop off his dick. Everyone knew Mamá could carve a chicken blind.

—Com'n Ana, stand up for yourself.

Isabel pushed but the agreement to marry was done. Hand shaken and hard liquor sealed the deal.

—Leave her alone, Yohnny called out to Isabel. The more I was bullied the smaller I became. I wasn't like Mamá or Isabel who fought for every inch of land or man.

—Yeah, leave her alone, Lenny repeated then stood in front of me with his arms crossed high on his chest knowing well Isabel could flick him away with her pinkie.

—Don't worry. We'll all be together in New York one day. You'll see.

—And we'll ride the subways? Yohnny chimed in.

—And spickee inglis, Lenny said.

—Over there you'll have no one to protect you, she said and pressed her forehead against mine, our sweat glued us to one another, our eyes became one.

Yohnny karate kicked the air and split us apart.

—I'll protect you. I'll fly there and kick whoever's ass, he said. He had a man's heart in a child's body.

I held back from laughing, to not upset Mamá. She counted on me to follow through on this.

—Stop it, Isabel. I don't want to go to the beach, okay!

Isabel rolled her eyes and hugged me as if it were the last time I would ever see her. Mamá's chest puffed up like a rooster, pride swelled inside of her. Finally I accepted what she knew was the only answer for me. She had won and waved them away.

—Enough already. Leave now. I rather Juan not see you hooligans being such a bad influence on Ana.

Lenny and Yohnny whooped and hollered their way back to El Guardia's car. They slid into the back seat through the open window and stuck their arms out, waving goodbye. Isabel was disappointed. She thought I was weak like my father who let Mamá boss him around, who accepted things as they were. But this marriage was bigger than me.

That day the sun bit hard into one side of my face. I tried not to cry. To think of the beach, the way the waves crashed against the rocks, the fun to be had. Of Gabriel and the keys he carried in his pocket. The way he traced my body, his eyes like fingers. I had memorized the ends of his tight curls, his skin an orange-brown glow, as if someone had lit a candle inside of him.

All morning, my father rocked on his chair and smoked his pipe. My mother poked her head out the kitchen window checking on me, smiling and waving. I didn't want to leave our house in Los Guayacanes painted the color of buttercups

by my late grandfather; the only house in miles that had survived all the hurricanes. Our house that I shared with my parents, Yohnny, Lenny, Isabel, where there was everything I knew and could imagine, for all of my life.

By the time Juan arrived, way past the hour he had said he would come, all the makeup had washed away with my sweat. My dress was wrinkled. My hair a mess. I had dozed off in a sitting position waiting, because any minute now, he was to arrive. I wished desperately Isabel would've not gone to the beach and stayed to keep me company. That she would've given me, at the very least, her blessing.

He drove his car over the grass, close to the entrance of our house. A film of dust covered it.

—He's here, he's here, Mamá squawked, worse than the chickens.

In the daylight, Juan looked even more pale and hairy than I remembered him. Mamá said that's better for the children's sake. Dark children suffer too much. She gave me a paper bag and inside of it, a botella for me and Juan to drink every morning so the babies come fast. She said a man without children was not a man.

Juan was in a hurry to leave because he had borrowed a car to fetch me.

He told us his brother reserved a room for us in El Embajador for the honeymoon.

—Is that so? Mamá lit up with every word about my future life: New York City apartment, on the top floor, a view to the city.

—The nicest hotel in the country, Juan continued.

The last time I was alone with a boy it was with Gabriel. Juan was a man. A head taller, twice as wide. Gray hairs around his ears, thinning around his forehead. Soft and pillowy hands and cheeks.

Mamá talked to Juan as if I wasn't there. She didn't know about Gabriel who could still show up to the wedding and speak now or forever hold his peace like in the telenovelas.

—Don't worry, Señora, I'll take good care of your daughter, Juan said in cowboy style. Then he turned to me, pulled out a handkerchief from his pocket, and wiped all the makeup, lipstick, and sweat off.

—What are you doing?

—You really are the most beautiful girl I have ever seen.

I pushed him away.

—More beautiful than the girls in New York?

—You don't need any of that stuff. You don't need anything.

He was undone just by looking at me.

Everything free in America. For a small fee in America . . . be in America!

I opened my eyes wider, held my chest higher and a smile escaped the side of my lips.

Beth Ann Fennelly

6 Micro-memoirs

A Study of Reading Habits

When I was a girl with a book in my hand I could go to a place so deep no one could follow. No one cared to, except my mother, an affectionate woman who smarted at her lack of companionship. She must have felt bereft to watch me sink beneath the surface. She must have stood on the shore and wrung her hands, the retreating waves eroding the sand beneath her feet grain by grain by grain. She must have looked to the horizon and seen her own dear daughter gone from her, even the long dark locks, eel-graceful, succumbing.

Sometimes, in the deep, I'd hear an echo for a long time before I recognized what I'd been hearing: my name. My mother, calling my name.

Yes, Mom? I'd ask, lifting the globes of my eyes.

It's time to set the table, Honey.

Okay.

I'd place the book belly-down and rise, though I could see (we both could see) dinner was still a good way off.

I don't go in so deep anymore. Can't, in fact. I suppose, over the years, my body grew too used to being hauled into the oxygenated air, my lungs grew less capacious. Also, I'd begun to hear the voices from the surface so distinctly. Now, I'm hooked the first time they call my human name.

The Coming of the Coming of Age

We were vacationing on a small lake in Canada. I'd walked the pineneedle path to the store, the kind of place lichened with shingles, bell on the screen door, bowl of water for the store dog. The kind of place that sold a bit of everything, beef jerky and buttons and shoe polish and fly paper. I cased the tiers of candy. I was six, would have been happy eating nothing but Pixy Stix and Pop Rocks and Bottle Caps. Lik-M-Aid Fun Dip and candy cigarettes that gave a puff of chalky sugar.

Waiting in line, I felt a hand settle onto my head: the woman behind me, conversing with the clerk. She began stroking my hair. I waited, obedient, patient, to pay, and the woman continued chatting and stroking, rhythmically, unhurriedly, my hair an instrument she strummed to lyrics about summer traffic, worse than last year, eh? And did you hear Mary's eldest is moving home?

Then it was my turn, and as I addressed the clerk, the woman behind snatched her fingers back as if they'd been scorched. "Oh!" she cried, and I turned. "I'm sorry, I'm terribly sorry! I thought for a minute you were my daughter!" I gazed at her, surprised only at her embarrassment. Of course she'd want to pet me.

Diet of nothing but sweetness, expectation of nothing but affection. You can imagine what this world would make of me.

Expiration Date

Every time my mother visits now, she brings a stack of yellowed papers from her attic. My girlhood artwork, some of it forty years old. We flip through together: a menu from the Mother's Day dinner I cooked her when I was ten. A letter from camp. A coupon book, crayoned for her birthday, 1979—free foot massage, free breakfast in bed. I'd given the coupons the expiration date of New Year's Eve, 1999, the most impossible distance conceivable, a day I knew would never come to pass.

We don't talk about why she's going through her things. Her prognosis is good. But she's 75.

Last summer, at the consultation before my mother's double mastectomy, I questioned the surgeon about the silicone implants. They don't last forever, right? How long before Mom would need a replacement? Fifteen years, he said, meeting my eyes. No more questions.

New Year's Eve, 1999: Not the impossibility it had seemed. That date has been ceded to the territory of the past. The same will hold true, eventually, for the day my mother will die.

I'll be left alone, curator of the archives. Bearer of this coupon good for a free hug.

Low Budget Car Dealership Commercial

My high school theater troupe was offered the gig, fifty dollars each to play volleyball on the beach by Lake Michigan, with a giant pickup truck in the background.

It's shameful but I've always loved an audience. With the camera rolling I entered a never-before-and-never-again zone of skill and sass. At one point the camera guy ran to my side, whipping his black power cord behind him like a snake, and got a close up of my supplicant wrists perfectly bumping a ball to the center.

Months later I saw the commercial. After the shot of my wrists, the camera cut to the triumphant, lightly-misted face of a model who had absolutely zero teenage acne.

Wunderkammer, Strahov Monastery Library, Prague

It is indeed a cabinet of wonders: for example, there's the narwhal tusk, passed off for centuries as a unicorn horn, and the two whale penises which, even now, bear the false label, "elephant trunks," to prevent prurient thoughts.

I Was Not Going to Be Your Typical

mother of a teenager lament my daughter my daughter's friends
bodiless as car horns indistinguishable as fine airborne particles
of filed fingernails yet you saunter through the door your
Styrofoam Sonic cup long as your femur *no one* is who you hung out with
nothing is what you talked about you speed-inserter-of-the-ear-buds
filching my favorite sweatshirt which almost flatters me
until you explain "Tomorrow is '80s day at school" I know

you don't want to hear me reminisce about the years in which I fed you
from my body how naked on my naked chest you'd scrunch-smell
toward my milk blind and earnest as a worm drunk years

those were drunk years yet even after those drunk years there were
years in which your every bite was proffered from my hand jar of
pureed peaches snug in my palm pop of lid tink of plastic-
coated spoon every third spoonful scooped from your fat cheeks deposited back
on the pillow of your tongue until *all done* my
two-note song
all done your face a messy plate I could lick clean which I
sometimes did yea even if it was green beans I licked you
you never had bad breath in those days not even in the mornings

Sheila Maldonado

peluche perdido / plushie lost (Disney Central Americans in Times Square)

there's an Elmo on the beast
fuzzy red blurry
atop the train
traversing middle earth

he's coming north
for a smile a buck
what was taken
what was promised

you fear he will fondle
your child in the
crossroads
of the clock

elmolestor
U.S. abused
peripherally addled
by animation
and supremacies

he's with Minnie
her bow fluttering
in the train whoosh
disk eyes aloft
pink cuticle shoes
bound to black feet

she removes
her head
wears it cocked
on an indigenous crown

hot day on the square
she fumbles through
her drawstring knapsack
for a water bottle

detaches the native skull
sits it on the
mini Minnie within

heather hughes

ghosts of me

the ghosts of me sell bodies
on the stairs on the lake in the snow
lined up there sidewalk-sale
near-identical
spectacle
salt girl shadow girl balancing act
rev'rent

the ghosts of me sell bodies
battered moistened frozen
pick a poison pluck a daisy
oopsy easy
backside up
soft-breasted short-sighted handstand
hymn

skin
countertop stageprop trickride
see-through
sound-proof
roughed up dressed down
like fire like yesterday like piles
of bodies inventing ghosts

Darrel Alejandro Holnes

Af•ri•can-A•mer•i•can•ize

\\ v. 1. To enchant by turning my meneo into a bump & grind
against a hard bass-driven synth rhythm/ No longer a hand-hit on ton-tones,
congas, and bongos/ No more rumba y azúcar, el sabor de los congos/
No more tu pum-pum mami, mami no me van matar/ Todos los hombres
lo van corretear/ Tu pum-pum mami, mami no me van matar/ A mamacita
porque soy un General/ Now I like that boom boom pow,
chickens jackin my style/ Now can I get a hey? Can I get a yo?/ You can get
with this or --wait-- is that how it goes? 2. To trade in my Puma cleats
for some Air Jordans/ To refer to futbol as soccer/ As if it were a game
between sock puppets. 3. To root for a basketball team based on their colors
even when you don't know the team's players and are from a suburb
3,000 miles south of the team's hometown. 4. To cross the border
between real and pretense/ To really want them to win, to really want
to fit in and be from some place nearby so you're finally at "home"
without giving up your dream 5. To look at the people who look like you
and see family. 6. How I twist my bachata-dancing movidas
when twirling my girl on the pista de baile/ Double-dutch jumps skipping
ropes to escape lynch mobs or the long arm of the law coming after me
for reaching into my pants for my phone or any other black, gun-like thing/
Blackbirds, blackbirds, hanging from the wire. What do you do there? May
we inquire? Do you just hang there to see the day? Then will you flock and
fly away? By 1, 2, 3... 7. To fly into the sky/ To become dark matter/ Letting
the night blacken my brown/ To be more than a Moreno from Panama. 8.
Beyond the night, I'm becoming hypothetical/ Invisible Man/ Unable to
be seen by the naked eye/ Beyond the night, I'm becoming a force forever
expanding the universe.

After A. Van Jordan

Translator's Note:

J. Bret Maney

Nueva York, Nueba Yol, La Gran Manzana—whatever we call it, we think of New York as an exemplary Latin city. During the twentieth century, this Latin identity came into being in large part because of the arrival of tens of thousands of Puerto Ricans to New York's shores. Beginning with the congressional act of 1917 that granted Puerto Ricans U.S. citizenship, migration to New York soared after World War II. From 61,000 Puerto Ricans living in the city in 1940, the population grew to more than 600,000 by 1960. The first novel to focus on this postwar influx of Puerto Ricans to New York appeared in Spanish in 1951.

Guillermo Cotto-Thorner's *Manhattan Tropics* (*Trópico en Manhattan*) tells of the arrival of a spirited, college-educated Puerto Rican named Juan Marcos Villalobos. A sociologist by training, Juan Marcos settles in Spanish Harlem and sets out to explore the metropolis, searching for work, love, and greater recognition for the culture of the city's growing Latino minority. One of the novel's most compelling features, and a pleasure and trial for the translator who wishes to preserve it, is Cotto-Thorner's creative use of "Spanglish." With an ear for documenting the way Puerto Ricans spoke in midcentury New York, the novel's narrator blends Spanish with English phrases and Hispanicizes English words like "scratched" which becomes "escrachao." The novel's commitment to linguistic diversity at a time when such literary code-switching was rare makes it an important predecessor of Nuyorican poetry and of contemporary Latino bilingual aesthetics.

In equal parts a work of New York immigrant literature, a coming-of-age story, and an important historical document, *Manhattan Tropics* is also a forgotten cornerstone of New York Latino literature, one that is beginning to receive increasing critical attention, and which will, in a full English translation, reach a wider audience. The present excerpt is drawn from chapter six. Only a few months into his New York adventure, Juan Marcos boards with a working-class Puerto Rican couple, Antonio and Finí, and has a job wrapping parcels in a 5th Avenue department store.

Tropico en Manhattan (1951)

Una noche fría de principios de diciembre Juan Marcos decidió quedarse en casa para escribir algunas cartas. Serían más o menos las doce cuando ya cansado retiró la silla de la mesa y acomodándose pensativamente encendió el último cigarrillo. Sobre la mesa había tres sobres bordeados de rojo y azul con estampillas de avión. Una de las cartas era para sus padres, otra para una amiga y la otra para un compañero suyo que hacía un año enseñaba en la Universidad.

Fragmento de la carta a sus padres:

"Ustedes no deben apurarse tanto por mí. Antonio y Finí me tratan como un rey. Tengo aquí mi propio cuarto y como dicen por allá, estoy encantado de la vida. Aunque no me gusta mucho el trabajo que tengo, siempre trato de hacer lo mejor que puedo ... Deseo saber si ustedes recibieron el paquetito que les mandé hace dos semanas ... Cuídense mucho ..."

Fragmento de la carta a la amiga:

"Me alegra saber que decidieras quedarte en el Departamento de Sanidad. Veo que las cosas se están arreglando por allá. Debo informarte que aquí en Nueva York estamos siempre al día con relación a los sucesos de la isla. A veces sabemos las cosas antes que ustedes mismos. He ido a tres conciertos y he visto varias representaciones teatrales. Hace días fui a un concierto que ofrecieron los Hermanos Figueroa, y nunca me sentí más orgulloso de ser puertorriqueño..."

La carta al amigo catedrático estaba escrita en tono pedantesco. Juan Marcos estaba aún atravesando por esa edad crítica de la juventud en que se piensa que es necesario ser 'profundo' a toda costa, especialmente tratándose con intelectuales; edad que por inclinación está en pugna con la sencillez.

"La metodología ética de la metrópoli es esencialmente polifacética. No puedo figurarme a ciencia cierta los cauces legítimos por donde fluyen las emanaciones intangibles de este conglomerado social ... Se habla de democracia y a la vez se vive en medio de un oportunismo dialéctico y aburguesado, menoscabando los prístinos fundamentos de la nación que datan desde la gloriosa era Jeffersoniana..."

Guillermo Cotto-Thorner

TRANSLATED FROM THE SPANISH BY J. BRET MANEY

Manhattan Tropics (1951)

On a cold night in early December Juan Marcos had decided to stay home to write some letters. At around midnight he pushed back his chair and settled in for his last cigarette of the evening. He was dog-tired and in a thoughtful mood. On the table were three envelopes bordered in red and blue and bearing airmail stamps. One letter was for his parents, the second for a female friend, and the last for a college classmate of his who had been teaching at the University since the start of last year.

An excerpt from the letter to his parents:

"You shouldn't worry so much about me! Antonio and Finí treat me like a king. I have my own room here, and, as they say back home, *estoy encantado de la vida.* I'm thrilled with life. Even though I don't really like the job I have, I always aim to do my best ... Did you receive the package I sent two weeks ago?... Take good care of yourselves!"

An excerpt from the letter to his female friend:

"I'm glad you decided to remain with the Department of Health. Things, I see, are starting to get better over there. I should tell you that here in New York we are always up-to-the-minute regarding what's happening on the island. Sometimes we even know what's going on before you do. I've been to three concerts and have seen several plays. A few days ago I went to a concert given by the Hermanos Figueroa, and I've never felt more proud to be Puerto Rican ..."

The letter written to his professor friend adopted a pedantic tone. Juan Marcos was still passing through that critical period of youth when it is thought necessary to be "profound" at all costs, especially when dealing with intellectuals. It is an age at war with simplicity:

"The ethical methodology of the metropolis is essentially multifaceted. That being said, I cannot determine for certain the legitimate channels through which the intangible effluences of this social conglomerate flow ... They talk about democracy yet simultaneously live in the midst of dialectical and petty-bourgeois opportunism which undermines the pristine foundations of the nation dating from the glorious Jeffersonian Era..."

No se había equivocado Juan Marcos al decirle a sus padres que no le gustaba mucho el trabajo que tenía. Nada es más difícil que ganarse el pan en una ocupación que le resta al individuo todo impulso de creatividad. No le era posible acostumbrarse a la mecánica de una ocupación que sólo demandaba destreza en los dedos y una paciencia a toda prueba. Indudablemente la vida detrás del mostrador no era lo más deseable para Juan Marcos, a pesar de que ganaba suficiente dinero para cubrir sus gastos y enviarle algunos dólares a sus padres todos los meses.

En la Quinta Avenida y la calle 42 se levanta uno de los edificios más imponentes de la ciudad: la Biblioteca Pública. En diversas ocasiones Juan Marcos había visitado este centro de cultura, pero en este día su fin no había sido literario ni cultural, sino sencillamente económico. Alguien le había dicho que era posible conseguir una plaza allí si se tenía un grado universitario. Hacia allá se disparó encomendándose a Dios en el trayecto. Le era preciso hacer esta diligencia en la hora del almuerzo y no tenía tiempo que perder. Ya en la oficina de la Administración, en el segundo piso, fue recibido por un joven americano muy amable que le entrevistó. Luego de llenar unas planillas en las cuales vació los detalles más importantes de su vida, fue informado que dentro de breves días le avisarían si podían o no valerse de sus servicios. Esto no le agradó mucho ya que estaba al tanto de que esa era la manera de decirle a los aspirantes que no había colocación para ellos. Salió triste y cabizbajo. –Después de todo se dijo–, ¿qué más se puede esperar de estos americanos? Son todos unos hipócritas; mucha sonrisita, pero mala entraña. Ahora no me arrepiento de aquella huelga que hicimos una vez en la escuela superior. ¡Cómo gocé el día que bajé la bandera americana del asta, entre aplausos de mis compañeros, e izé la bandera de mi querido Puerto Rico! ¡Qué se va a hacer! Aquí no hay porvenir para nosotros. Estamos perdidos. –Una hora después estaba detrás del mostrador haciendo su labor bajo el peso de una resignación humillante.

Pero Juan Marcos se había equivocado. Exactamente cuatro días después de su entrevista recibió una carta ofreciéndole un puesto en el Departamento de Referencias de la Biblioteca. Aquella mañana no fue al trabajo y a las diez estaba

Juan Marcos was not wrong when he told his parents he didn't really like his job. Nothing is harder than making a living in an occupation that deprives you of every creative impulse. He found it impossible to get used to the mechanical nature of a task requiring only nimble fingers and boundless patience. Without a doubt, life behind the display counter was not the most desirable one for him, even if he earned enough money there to cover his expenses and send his parents a few dollars every month.

At 42nd Street and Fifth Avenue stands one of the most imposing buildings in the city—the New York Public Library. Juan Marcos had visited this temple of culture a few times, but today his purpose was neither literary nor cultural but simply a matter of business. Someone had told him you could get a job at the library if you had a university degree. So there he went, commending himself to God along the way. It was necessary to run this errand at lunchtime, and he had no time to lose.

In the Administration Office on the library's second floor, a young American gave Juan Marcos a friendly greeting and proceeded to interview him. Then, after filling out some forms from which the most important details of his life were absent, Juan Marcos was told he would be informed within a few days if they could make use of his services. This news disappointed him because he knew it was a way of telling candidates that there was no place for them. He left the library in a huff. "When all's said and done," he said to himself, "what more can we expect from these hypocritical Americans? Always ready with a smile but with malice in their hearts. Now I don't regret at all that strike of ours in high school. How thrilled I was the day I pulled down the American flag while my classmates cheered me on and ran up the pole the colors of my beloved Puerto Rico! What is to be done? There's no future for us here. We're lost!" An hour later a resigned and mortified Juan Marcos was again at work behind his display counter.

But Juan Marcos was mistaken. Exactly four days after his interview, he received a letter offering him a position in the library's Reference Department. He skipped work that morning and at ten o'clock was once again in the Administration Office

otra vez en la oficina del segundo piso. Ahora sentía cierto aire de triunfo y gloria. Todo cantaba a su alrededor, las mujeres le parecían más bellas, el petróleo de los carros le olía a perfume, y hasta un empujón que le dieron en la esquina en medio de un torbellino de peatones, le pareció como una caricia. –¿Por qué pensaría yo tan mal de esta gente? –se recriminó. –Aquí no hay tantos prejuicios como dice la gente. Es mera propaganda, aquí uno vale por lo que es, ya me lo dijo Don Balta el primer día que pisé este suelo.

Juan Marcos reaccionaba como el péndulo. Necesitaba aprender muchas cosas, y no era cuestión de libros y lecturas sino de experiencia vital. La Biblioteca le ofreció un trabajo sencillo, ganando dos dólares menos que en su anterior trabajo, pero con más prestigio. Allí se ancló, revivió sus esperanzas, y continuó hilvanando ensueños.

Faltaban pocos días para la Navidad. Aquella noche estaba nublada y pesada. Juan Marcos, sentado con Finí y Antonio en la sala hacían planes para las fiestas. De pronto Juan Marcos se asomó por la ventana y vio algo que desde muy niño había deseado ver: la nieve.

–Está nevando, está nevando, asómense–gritó regocijado.

–Este jíbaro está revuelto,–dijo Antonio–deja ver si es verdad.

Los tres se pararon juntos a la ventana para contemplar el espectáculo de la primera nevada.

–Aquí no me quedo yo–dijo Juan Marcos, yendo al cuarto a buscar su abrigo.

–¿Para dónde vas, muchacho?–preguntó Finí.

–¿Y no lo sabes? Pues a darme un bautismo de nieve.

Y sin más ni más salió a la calle. Ya en la acera extendió las manos dejándoselas llenar de nieve, y tratando de descubrir en la semioscuridad las formas elaboradas y simétricas que había visto, dibujadas en los libros. Miraba hacia arriba y se dejaba bañar la cara con la escarcha, para luego enjuagarse con el pañuelo la fría humedad y reírse solo como un loco.

Se echó a caminar Madison abajo. Pasando frente a una fondita criolla radicada en un sótano, oyó tocar un aguinaldo puertorriqueño. Se detuvo automáticamente. La nieve seguía cayendo, esta, vez más pesadamente. Hendían el aire frío los acordes

on the second floor. Now he reveled in an air of triumph. Everything about him sang out—the women seemed more beautiful, the gasoline from the cars smelled like perfume, even the shove someone gave him in a frothing sea of pedestrians felt like a caress. "Why should I think so badly of these people?" he asked himself reproachfully. "There's less prejudice here than some folks claim. It's nothing but propaganda. A person here is valued for what he's worth. Don Balta told me that the first day I set foot on New York soil."

Juan Marcos's reactions swung like a pendulum. He still had much to learn, but it was less a question of books and study than of life experiences. The Library offered him a simple job that paid two dollars less than his previous post but came with more prestige. Juan Marcos took the job, his hopes revived, and he continued stringing together daydreams.

It was a thickly-clouded night a few days before Christmas. Juan Marcos, Antonio and Finí were sitting in the living room making plans for the holidays when Juan Marcos looked out the window and saw something he had wanted to see since he was a child—snow.

"It's snowing, it's snowing, come here!" he shouted with joy.

"This *jíbaro's* all stirred up," said Antonio. "Let's see if what he says is true."

The three of them stood by the window and watched the spectacle of the year's first snowfall.

"I won't remain here another second," Juan Marcos said, and rushed to his room to get his coat.

"Where are you going, my boy?" asked Finí.

"Don't you know? I'm going to go baptize myself in the snow."

Without another word Juan Marcos went out into the street. He stretched out his hands and let them fill with snowflakes. In the semi-darkness he tried to make out the elaborate, symmetrical patterns he had seen illustrated in books. Looking upward, he bathed his face in the falling snow, wiped the cold frost from his cheeks with his handkerchief, and laughed alone like a lunatic.

que venían de la vellonera que en ese momento tocaba. "Si me dan pasteles, dénmelos calientes". El contraste de aquella escena norteña y aquellos cantares tropicales le produjo una nostalgia que, a pesar de su gozo por haber visto nieve 'al fin', sintió que se le aguaron los ojos. Siguió lapachando nieve, absorto, pensativo, caminando como entre nubes. Ya no sentía si estaba despierto o sencillamente soñaba.

He started walking down Madison. Passing in front of a basement-level diner, he heard a Puerto Rican Christmas carol playing. He instinctively paused. The snow was falling more heavily now. The chords coming from the diner's jukebox slashed at the cold air. "*Si me dan pasteles, dénmelos calientes.*" "If you give me pasteles, giv 'em to me hot." The contrast of the northern scene with this tropical song so filled Juan Marcos with homesickness that, despite his joy at having seen snow at long last, he began to cry. He walked on. The snow dusted his clothes. He was deep in thought, as if walking among the clouds. He no longer knew if he was awake or dreaming.

Kelly Sundberg

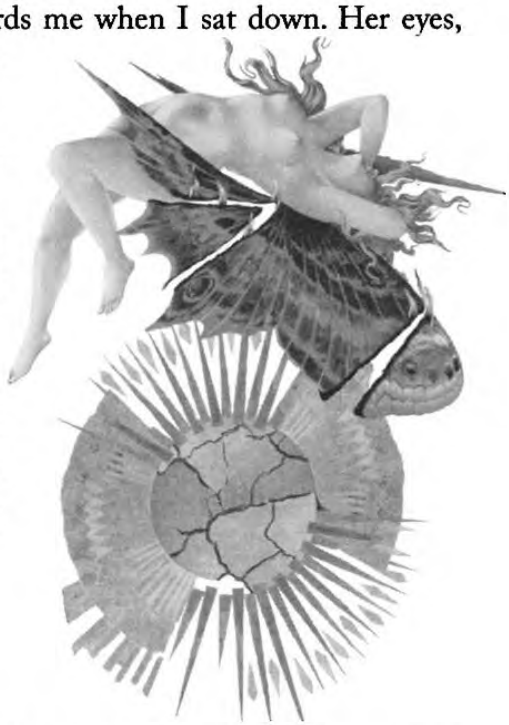
Mates

Sun Valley, Idaho, 1998

One of the swans was murdered; he was stabbed in the night. Swans mate for life, so his mate grieved. She lay on the steps of the boardwalk that traced the pond, head bowed into her legs. Tourists approached her tentatively, threw breadcrumbs at her, but she looked up with large, teary eyes, then rested her head back into the billowy down of her feathers. One afternoon, I sat on a step beside her and watched the pond. She lifted her head towards me when I sat down. Her eyes, large and damp, sparkled. Painful like bright snow. I slid a cracker in front of her, but she pushed it away. She was starving herself to death.

Someone had offered a $10,000 reward for the arrest of the person who had stabbed her mate.

I thought of the dead swan in the snow blood spreading through the ice like petals Death is everywhere during an Idaho winter I know how blood looks against the glistening whiteness.



Or was it actually two springs before when the swan was stabbed, and I tried to give her a cracker? The spring when my high school classmates and I went to Sun Valley for a school newspaper competition? The spring when I envied all of the pretty girls

who had the attention of the boys from the bigger school districts? The spring when I consoled myself that at least I was the smart one? The spring when, even though I was the smart one, I only won an honorable mention in the writing competition I was expected to win? The spring when the announcer gave me my certificate and the word "Superior" had been crossed out?

Instead, someone had scrawled "Honorable Mention" in black marker just below it.

How did I end up in Sun Valley nearly two years after graduating from high school? I was the smart one. I was the one who my high school newspaper advisor had said would be her Pulitzer Prize winner. I had been in a graduating class of less than eighty students, so it wasn't hard to be the smart one, but I had left high school flush with expectations.

After graduation, I started college in Montana—the only student from my rural high school to be admitted into an Honors College—but I spent the days huddled in my dorm room trying to out-sleep the anxiety, the expectations, the weight of all of the people I knew I was going to disappoint. I dropped out two weeks into the second semester.

I looked for a cure for my anxiety. I blew my student loans on a trip to Europe. I spent the following summer waitressing in my hometown. I tried living independently in Portland, Oregon. After all of that, I ended up back in Salmon, Idaho on my parents' doorstep.

Back in Salmon, after moving back from Portland, I ran into Ann, my best friend from childhood. As girls, we had spent long days at her house across the street from mine, playing Barbies, brushing out their hair, coveting their long legs and tan skin.

Her family had a playroom in the basement that was cold and damp. Ann and I huddled underneath hand-knit Afghans for warmth; sometimes, we played house—fantasizing of love. Sometimes, Ann pressed me to the wall, pushed her

hand over my mouth and kissed the other side of her hand passionately—with force—the same way we had seen Patrick Swayze kissing Jennifer Grey in *Dirty Dancing*. We played like that until we grew bored of the game, moving on to Hungry Hippos or Monopoly.

We avoided Dale, her younger brother. He was violent, out of control. He pounded me over the head with a meat tenderizer. He slammed me in the back so hard with a Wiffle bat that the wind formed a bubble in my chest and my face turned red from the pressure. He chased me and pulled my long hair back, so that my neck stretched tight.

He hid in the closet and eavesdropped on our private conversations. I got my period when I was only eleven. I huddled on Ann's bed and whispered the news to her. She asked what it was like, and I described the humiliation of my mom showing me how to rinse my panties in the bathroom sink—cold water, not hot—and the horror of wearing a pad in public, convinced that someone could see it. Dale burst out of the closet laughing and pointing. He ran out of the room shouting, "Kelly's got her period! Kelly's got her period!" My cheeks flushed red, and I ran across the street, threw myself on the bed, and cried while my mom watched.

Dale skulked, lurking around corners, hiding behind shadows. Even the bathroom wasn't free from his gaze. Their bathroom in the basement had a hole in the door where a door knob should have been. Sometimes, when I was peeing, I would look over and see Dale's eye pressed to the hole, his fleshy cheeks protruding through the gap, eye bulging, and I'd scream, "Dale, stop being gross!"

Ann told me about a job in Sun Valley as a lift operator at the ski hill. It only paid minimum wage, but housing and meals were provided for a nominal fee, and the idea of living in Sun Valley was better than the thought of spending the winter trapped in my dead-end hometown, so I packed up and moved three hours over a mountain pass to the neighboring ski town.

The Sun Valley Lodge—a massive, lumbering hulk of a log cabin—sits at the foot of the small resort town, an ice sculpture of a grinning sun sweating in front of the paved turn-around. Across the boardwalk, through the snow-covered lawn, past the man-made pond where the swans—the Sun Valley mascots—glide lazily, is the Sun Valley Inn, a massive stucco hotel built to look like a Swiss chalet. The entire town is enclosed by parking lots, but in the distance, mountains loom over the valley, mansions dotting the winding roads. Aspens fill hollows in the hills, white wood bends achingly toward the blue sky, and Bald Mountain, an enormous ski hill, dominated by an intricate network of ski lifts, looms over the entire Wood River Valley.

Ernest Hemingway lived and died in Sun Valley. He wrote the majority of *For Whom the Bell Tolls* in room 206 of the Sun Valley Lodge. He later shot himself in a home built in the same style as the Lodge. The walls of the lodge are dotted with photos of Hemingway and other celebrities—Marilyn Monroe, Adam West, and local favorite Arnold Schwarzenegger, among others.

Beyond the Sun Valley Lodge and Sun Valley Inn, another town is hidden. The Pit. The Pit also has buildings made to look like Swiss chalets should any unsuspecting tourist stumble upon them, but the insides of those Chalets are stuffed with bunk beds and bean bags. The carpet is dirty, and the buildings smell of armpits and bare feet. The Pit is where the employees live. The Pit was where I lived.

Ann and I had grown apart in the sixth grade. She had gone on to become a stoner and ended up at the alternative school while I became a bookish nerd, but we reconnected when I left college. Ann's family had imploded by then. Her Mormon mother had an affair with the Baptist preacher. He was excommunicated, and Ann's mom divorced her dad. The preacher broke up with her mom shortly after the divorce, and her mom took to drinking as if she had been doing it her whole life, as if she hadn't been baking cookies and attending day-long church ceremonies for most of my childhood.

Ann, her boyfriend Tim, and I drove to the Oregon Coast once. Ann was struggling with depression. She sat in the back seat quietly while Tim sat up front with me. Tim and I chatted about unimportant things as we drove up the winding coastal roads. I tried to pretend as though I wasn't a third wheel, chattering even more than usual. I didn't understand their relationship. They seemed in love, but very sad. I had never dated then, did not yet understand that love could be sad.

We drove all day to find the ocean, then finally, decided to take a right in the direction of the ocean and ended up driving onto sand at dusk. Three kids from small-town Idaho, and none of us had ever seen the ocean. We stood and watched the sunset, the light golden on the dark waves that crashed onto the shore. Ann and I rolled up our pants and waded into the water. Tim took our photo. In it, I am leaning forward, laughing, my hair blowing. Ann is upright—an unreadable smile on her face—an irresistible combination of beauty and sadness.

Before we left, I took one last, long look at the sun disappearing behind the waves. I turned back to the car and Tim had scrawled in the wet sand with a stick, "God Was Here."

The following winter, Ann and Tim had broken up, and Ann and I started working at the ski hill. There were only a few women working the ski lifts, and Ann and I were the youngest. The rest of our co-workers were men. The work was tedious, and I stood and watched the ski lifts swing by, floating through blue sky. Occasionally, I stopped the lift to help a child into the seat, but most of the time, I stood and daydreamed.

When the supermodel, Elle MacPherson, wanted to ride the lift while eight months pregnant, I stopped the machine for her while a tanned ski instructor helped her sit down. One of her slender hands rested in his, and the other hand waved at me generously while she smiled through her fur face mask. She was as beautiful in person as she had been on the cover of *Sports Illustrated*. I looked down

at myself. I was in an entirely purple uniform that consisted of ski pants, a heavy Bavarian-style sweater, ski coat, and a matching purple hat with a tassel that swung down into my eyes. I was dumpy.

Another time, I helped load a ski patrol sled. I stood in front of the sled, waiting for the chair to sweep it up, but became distracted when I saw Maria Shriver in line. She was unmistakable in her full-body, Holstein cow-print ski suit. I stared at her, hypnotized by the black splotches on her white suit, while the chair swept both me and the sled away. I clung to the sled, desperately trying not to fall as the chair crawled up the mountain. The ski patrol officer shouted and rushed over to hit the stop button. The chair lurched to a stop, and I fell with a thud into the snow; flakes rose up around me in a poof, landing in my nostrils and eyes. When I stood up and brushed off my face, Maria Shriver leaned over and asked kindly, "Are you okay?" Embarrassed, I nodded yes.

Her husband, Arnold Schwarzenegger, famously had a fondness for redheads. When he came through my lift line, his Viennese ski instructor had me take off my hat. "Ooh," said Schwarzenegger, when he saw my bright red hair. "I like."

I blushed. After that, the other lift operators called me "Schwarzenegger's girl." For the girl who had only ever thought of herself as the "smart one," the attention was secretly heady. No one in Sun Valley cared if I was smart. I could be whoever I wanted to be.

Ann and I befriended a group of international college students, mostly from Australia and New Zealand. They were fun, friendly, and rich. They ate Vegemite and called each other "mates." My windowless dorm room was in a renovated ranch house on the edge of The Pit. It had plywood walls and two hard twin beds with a dresser pressed tightly between the bed and the wall by the door. My room was slightly larger than the other rooms, so it was a good room for gatherings. We lined up along the edges of the beds, passing around beer, bowls, tabs, or mushrooms. The walls of the room expanded temporarily—laughter blending into the night air outside—clear, and cold, and hard.

After a while, Ann's brother, Dale, decided to join her in Sun Valley. He, too, got a job as a lift operator. I wasn't happy when he was put into the room next to mine, but he had grown large and awkward, like a child who had outgrown his limbs. Despite all of the years I'd known him, Dale treated me with shyness, shuffling his feet when he spoke to me and lowering his eyes when I met his gaze. Ann, by then, had thrown herself into a relationship with a young Australian man and showed no interest in hanging out with Dale, and Dale no longer resembled the malicious boy of my childhood, so I couldn't help but feel sorry for him.

One night, when I was lying down for bed, I heard Dale leave his room. The plywood separating our living spaces was the cheapest variety available, and I could hear most of what happened on the other side. I was still awake when Dale came back, the door slamming behind him. I pulled a pillow over my ears to block out the sound, but after a few minutes, claustrophobia set in, and I let the pillow slip to the side. His light switch came on, and a faint glow peeped through a knotty hole in the plywood located above eye level. I heard the sound of bottles opening.

The next morning I saw empty Malt liquor bottles in the trash. It was an intimacy I didn't want to share with him.

In the confines of the Sun Valley village, a regular rotation of tanned millionaires in fur coats glide along the boardwalk, stopping to watch bon-bons being hand-dipped into chocolate or to toss a few crumbs to the swans. In The Pit, we ate their leftovers, but for us too, every night was a party.

After we finished eating, we got high, then went for a swim in the heated, outdoor pool. The steam from the pool merged into the cold winter air while we hung from the sides, our heads light from the heat, the flirting, and the marijuana.

Sun Valley was different from Salmon. In high school, my cross country team traveled to the public school in Sun Valley for a meet. It was the first time most of us had seen this neighboring town. We drooled at the sight of the mansions as our thirty-year-old bus farted and burped up the highway. When we reached their school, the building wasn't sinking into a swamp like ours. They didn't have to

tow cars out of the mud in the spring because they had sunk up to their bumpers. The track was paved and lacked puddles. The bleachers weren't caving in. But the biggest difference was how the runners looked in their shiny uniforms and new shoes. Standing at the starting line, I looked down at my uniform in embarrassment. My jersey number was made out of electrical tape. The original number had washed off long ago.

This was before I learned that I was only an honorable mention when I thought I had been a winner.

Ann and I danced late into the snowy, starry nights. The Kiwis and Australians went to clubs at night, and we went with them. We danced at Bruce Willis's club, The Mint, bought expensive cocktails, and watched for glimpses of ourselves on the big screen television above the stage. A night at The Mint meant I needed to live off a box of Grape Nuts for the rest of the week, but I thought it was worth it.

A guy named Smitty with a long, stringy ponytail who proudly boasted that he had lived and worked in The Pit for twenty years had a side business giving loans to young girls like me who partied away their paychecks, so whenever I ran out of money I knocked on his door. He didn't even charge interest. I only had to give him some extra attention in line at the cafeteria, which meant a long full-body hug after I paid the two dollars for my employee meal. I was discovering the power that came from being young and pretty enough. Not pretty enough to turn heads, but pretty enough.

One, night, as I stripped down the layers of my work clothes—boots, wool socks, ski pants, ski sweater, and long underwear—I pulled my tight Duofold top over my head. It hooked on my head, so I yanked, the fabric stretching my eyes tightly upwards in the process. As I looked up, I saw an eye pressed to the hole in the wall, fleshy cheek bulging. The eye looked down upon me, scanning the room back and forth nervously.

I screamed and threw my arms across my chest. The eye quickly disappeared. My roommate told my supervisor, and Dale was quietly dismissed. Someone came in and nailed a board over the hole, but I shivered every time I saw it, every time I remembered his nighttime ritual, every time I realized how thin the wall that divided us had been.

At the bar one night, I drank too much beer to drive home. The ski patrol had bought a keg, and although I was not 21, the bartender didn't check my ID. Another lift operator, a man who wore turtlenecks, had been flirting with me. I was not attracted to him, but I enjoyed the attention. No one had ever paid attention like that to me before.

I couldn't drive home, and he offered to share a cab. We stopped at my dorm first, and he wanted to walk me in—just to make sure I got in okay, he said, but when he got out of the car, he paid the cab driver. I was confused, but too tipsy to ask questions. He walked me to my door, and I let myself in. He followed.

Then, he was on top of me. The smell of beer and dryer sheets. I wasn't a virgin, but I had only had sex once.

The thin plywood walls rescued me this time. Another man heard and banged on the door. "Time to go, buddy," he yelled.

The man in the turtleneck left.

In the morning, I found my tampon in the sheets next to me—a blossom-like stain around it, like red in the snow.

For the first time, I had known how it felt to be held down.

Soon, Ann's ex-boyfriend Tim moved into Dale's old room. Ann seemed okay with it. She was in love with her handsome Australian. We were convinced Tim had followed her to Sun Valley, but he left her alone, so it didn't bother her.

I had never told Tim, but I had a crush on him when he first moved to Idaho from California in the eighth grade. He had a floppy bowl cut and skateboard. At

the eighth grade prom, no one asked me to dance, so I sat in a chair next to Tim, my legs stretched out onto the chair in front of me. I wore a pleated miniskirt over bare legs. I twirled my feet in front of me out of boredom. When I looked up, I caught Tim staring at my thigh. For a moment, I didn't move it. Instead, I looked at him, boldly. He looked back. He wasn't scared, but I was. I quickly pulled my legs down and tucked my shins under my chair.

Later, he took my best friend in high school on a date to a movie at the Roxy, the only movie theater in our one-stoplight town. She was Mormon, so her mom would only allow her to go if I accompanied her. I wished that Tim had asked me to the movie instead of my friend, but they never went out again, and, in time, I forgot about my crush on him.

I was relieved when he moved into Dale's room. I felt that I could trust Tim. In the mornings, I knocked on his door to wake him up, and then gave him time to dress while I made coffee. I filled a cup for him too, and we drove together to the ski hill.

On Valentine's Day, I opened my door and found a rose on the floor. My heart sank. I picked it up and knocked on Tim's door. "Did you leave this?" I asked.

He shrugged and smiled. "Nope, it wasn't me," he said.

I handed him his coffee and tried not to think about where the rose had come from. The man who wore turtlenecks hadn't forgotten me. He skied by my lift, but I hid in the shack. I could see him peering through the glass, but it was one-way glass, and he couldn't see me. My lift partner asked, "Why don't you like that guy? He's interested in you."

I stared at the coffee mug in my hands and shrugged. "I don't know; I just don't."

I'd never known shame like that before.

I slipped the rose into my bag and put it out of my mind. That night, I returned to my room and changed into my pajamas. I was just readying to turn off the light when I heard a scratching outside the door. My hand froze above the light switch, my heart beating. I stood very still.

There was a knock at the door. I didn't answer. Another knock, then Tim's voice. "Kelly, it's Tim."

I let my hand slip down in relief and opened the door. I was surprised to see him standing in front of me, drunk. He leaned forward, glassy eyed. "Can I come in?" he asked.

I stood aside, and he came in and sat down on the narrow bed.

"I have something to tell you," he said.

I sat down next to him. "Okay."

He looked at me, then looked down at his hands. He told me about how he had been working on a fishing boat in Alaska before moving to Sun Valley, how he had befriended an alcoholic with liver disease, how they had to work so hard that they would do lines of cocaine to get through the long shifts on the trawler, how they would drink themselves to sleep on their days off. He told me how his father had been an alcoholic, how he had left his friend in Alaska knowing he was going to die.

He started to sob, so I hugged him, and he soaked my shoulder with tears, his back shaking.

He pulled back and looked at me. His eyes scared me.

I grabbed a pillow and scooped it into my lap, hugging it to my chest. I wanted protection from his pain. "That sounds awful," I said.

He nodded. "There was so much anger and hate on the boat. Everyone wanted to kick everyone else's ass. I just wanted to stay out of it. I just wanted to have a good time."

I looked at my hands clutching the pillow. "I know that feeling," I said.

He reached over and took my hand. "When I got home, all I could think of every day was how I wanted to die. Life seemed so hopeless. I had a gun."

"But then I got here, and I saw your smiling face." He smiled at me then, his face still teary.

I nodded my head—shoulders tense—finally understanding. "Did you give me the flower?"

He smiled again. "Of course it was me."

His shoulders straightened. "Now, every morning, I want to wake up, because I know I'll see your face. At least I have that. You give me a reason to wake up."

I was sick. I had so much of my own darkness right then.

"Tim," I said. "I don't know what to say to that."

He looked disappointed. "It's okay," he said. "Really."

I stood up. I just wanted him to leave.

"Okay then, well I need to get up in the morning—" I said. "So I should probably go to bed."

Tim went to the door. He stopped at the door, and turned back to me. "Can I just spend the night here?" he asked.

I thought of that man, but I didn't know how to say no. "I don't know," I hedged.

"Can I just sleep on your floor?" he asked. "I just want to be close to you."

I relented. "Okay," I said.

I turned off the light and climbed into bed. Tim curled up on the floor next to me, and I lay in the dark, listening to him breathe. He wasn't sleeping either.

The room was pitch-black. I knew he would never hurt me, but still, I was afraid. And ashamed.

I couldn't be his reason to live.

I had to leave.

I was a tourist in that life, and that town, too. The party wasn't a party anymore. The next day, I wouldn't be going back to work. I wouldn't be going back to the mountain that loomed over my life, full of money and excess. I wouldn't be going back to my lift shack with a white board in the corner where a ski patroller had scrawled, Welcome to Spun Valley—a nod to the cast of Beverly Hills 90210 who showed up at a party on New Year's Eve looking for cocaine while I drank champagne, and danced, and laughed. I wouldn't be going back to that man—who wore turtlenecks. I'd never be attracted to a man who wears turtlenecks.

I wouldn't be going back to dead swans and plywood walls.

I was going to pack my car up during the day when everyone was working, and I was going to run. I was going to leave it all behind—the holes in the wall, the parties, the wealth, the constant staging of everyone, as if we were all just players in a community melodrama. I knew my life needed to move forward.

But it didn't.

Instead, I went home. And a couple of years later, after my heart had been broken by a man who I had thought would love me forever, I let Tim hold me. I let him hold me on the floor of his mother's house, the same way he had wanted to hold me in that dorm room. I let him hold me and hoped that I would grow to want his love, but I didn't. And the next morning, I drove away again.

And shame.

Shame is the void left by the stories I still can't tell.

As the Australians would have said, Tim and I had been "mates," but I misled him. I misled him because, in my most vulnerable moments, the version of myself that I didn't like continued to return.

In Sun Valley, on the night when Tim had lain on my floor, I had wanted the darkness to hold me—to confine me—to wrap around me like a blanket and make me safe. But it hadn't.

And the next day, as I drove out of Sun Valley, I left the closeness of the town—the small Wood River winding through aspens, the ordered rows of condos, the grid-like subdivisions, the mansions dotting the hills, and the looming brick of the Sun Valley Lodge—all of them were dots in the distance. My car wound through switchbacks, climbing the steep mountainside of Galena Summit. When I reached the top, I stood at the overlook where I could see the bowls and dips of the valley that stretched for miles, cradled in snow—so clean it seemed limitless. As I looked at the vista before me, I could almost convince myself that Sun Valley wasn't still there—waiting—just beyond that immaculate whiteness.

Molly McCully Brown

The Dormitory

Throughout the early and mid-1900s thousands of people with mental and physical disabilities were forcibly committed to The Virginia State Colony for Epileptics and Feebleminded, a government-run residential hospital.

Grand Mal Seizure

There's however it is you call,
& there's whatever it is
you're calling to.

July, I sew
my own dress
from calico & lace.

August, they take it
off me in the Colony,
trade it in

for standard-issue
Virginia cotton.
Not much room

for my body in the
heavy slip; maybe
that's the idea.

For awhile the abandoning
was rare & then it was not
and would never be again.

Imagine you are
an animal in your
own throat.

The dormitory has a pitched
dark roof & a high porch.
We are not allowed outside.

Instead, we go to the window & make
a game of racing dogwood blossoms
knocked down by the wind.

Choose your flower as
it falls & see whose
is the first to hit the clay

I beat the crippled girl every day
for a week. The trick is to pick
the smaller petals.

Most nights, they knot
the bed sheet in my mouth
so I will not bite my tongue.

Lay out on the pine floor:
rattle your own bones back
to the center of the world.

In the beds, the smell
of kerosene and lye.
The girls wake themselves

one after another:
spasm, whimper, whine.
Outside: cicadas.

In the distance: the bighouse lights.
Another truck comes loud up the road
bearing another girl.

There is whatever it is
you're calling to. There is
however it is you call.

Labor

If you have the body for it, you're bound for the fields
to pick strawberries and coax the milk from cows,
or hired out to make baking powder biscuits and gravy,
to sweep floors and wash and fold a stranger's clothes.
You come back on a truck after sunset, raw and ragged, covered
in flour, tobacco, or clay. You come back bone tired and bruised,
burned dead out and ready to be shut away. You sleep.

I know all this from stories; I do not have the body for it.
I do not go to the fields, or the barns, or the parlors of other folks' houses.
I wake at sunrise when they wake the rest, lie in bed
til somebody hauls me out and puts me by the window. Lord, I know
to want to work's a foolish thing to those who've got a body built for working.

I was as close to born here as you can get, brought twisted and mewling
to the gates and left. Since then, I am one long echo of somebody else's life.
Every understanding that I have is scrap, is shard, is secondhand.

Distance: the space between the porch railing
and the rise of the blue ridge

Water: what comes from a bucket to my body on Sundays;
what I open my mouth for, morning and night

Sex: The days the girls come back smelling of whiskey,
snuff, and sweat, and something sharp.

Every Other Thing I See Is a Ghost

Whatever it is you were born to do sweetheart there's no doing it here
make peace with small labors your own hand drawing a needle
through a torn sheet your elbow bending
as you soak clothes in the washroom downstairs

the storm that tears the azaleas apart along the road outside
that's it for beauty or also there's the way at night
the girls in nearby beds teach one another to cuss whisper
goddamn it you bastard sigh *goddamn it all to hell*

you know before they brought me here I'd never seen a ghost or anything
that wasn't really there I'd never heard a voice half asleep in the blackness
and had to wonder whether or not it belonged to a body

but after the swearing someone has been singing me hymns from home
canaan's land *the spirit shall return* *traveling on*
in the daylight no one ever sings

sometimes in the doorway I think I see a hem
trailing away outside but there's nowhere to leave to
and nobody sweetheart nobody has a dress that long

or lace

Without a Mind

This child is without a mind.
That one has a cave for a face
blank, unlit, and fallen in.
Back wherever she began
somebody clapped his hands
and the fire went out.
But, somehow, she continued to burn,
curl up like paper tossed into the flame:
fingers, toes, and tongue drawn in,
limbs pulled toward the trunk as if
wrapped tight in kitchen twine.
Some summers the cicadas shed
their brittle skin. It's just like that:
useless approximations of live things
littered on the beds as I make my rounds.
What accident of nature?
What error in material?
What sin warrants a blown brain,
a lame body? Where does it wait
to be born?

Hadara Bar-Nadav

Soap

Always a threat
of cleanliness

and its failure
to purify.

(A showerhead
shadows my head.)

Rumors of blubber
and human fat.

Troubling histories
hidden

inside the prettiest
pastel cakes.

Swarm of invisible
nibblings.

Foam and its fetish
for the grotesque,

appetite and its pick-
ax smile.

Secret crevicer

effacing our days,
white-washing injuries.

Even our wounds
become fragrant,

musk and yeast
smelling sickly

of lavender.

I am afraid
of the drain,

the melt of meat
and ivories,

erasure bubbling up,
rendering us

sweet as
graveyard flowers.

Barbara Hamby

Ode on Words for Water

I'm sitting next to a doctor at a dinner party
at Daphne's apartment in Athens,
and I bring up one of my favorite topics,
which is words that cannot be translated
into another language, and he says what he loves
about Greek are all the words for water,
like *paflasmos,* which means the tiny wave
that laps against the side of a boat
when other boats are moving through the sea nearby
and *alisahni*, the dried salt water on the hair
of your arm, and then we go on to other topics,
but that night I dream about the time
I swam off the coast of Florida with the stars overhead
and happened into a school of phosphorescence
so that my body was covered with a shimmering light
as if starlight and moonlight weren't enough
and if it has a name how could I bear to know it
much less speak it in the world,
no, it's better to stick with words like *drizzle*,
splatter, or *drip* until, of course, you need
torrent or *flood*, not to mention *hurricane* or *tsunami,*
which makes me think of the time
when I was a little girl and we had just moved to Hawaii
and there was a tidal wave alert,
and as we drove toward the mountains, I saw a line of boys
heading toward the beach with surf boards
balanced on their heads, and some language must have
a word to describe walking towards a tsunami,
perhaps a Polynesian dialect just as Inuits have

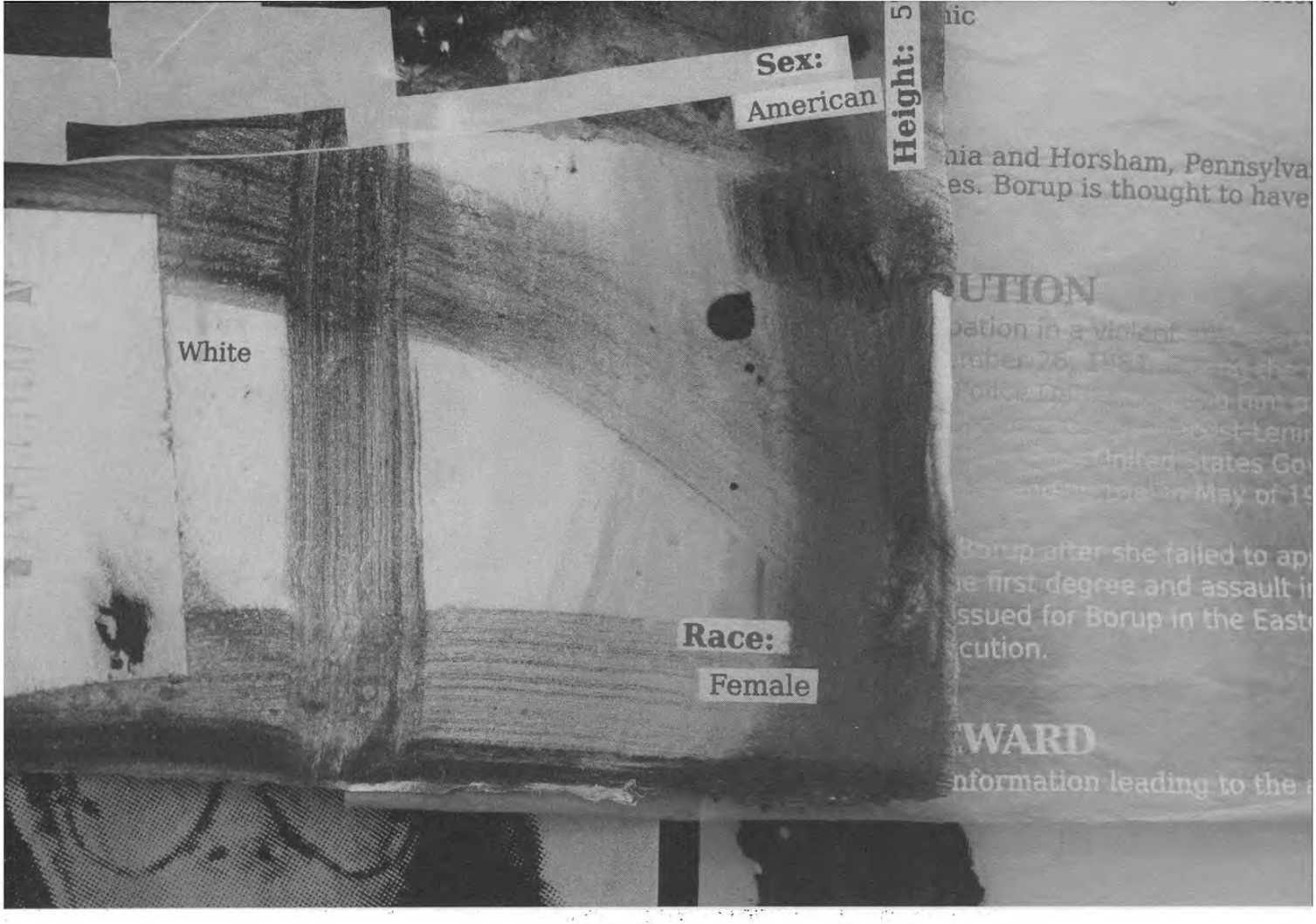
a word for melted snow, and think of all
the disappearing languages and their words for water,
the spray of a mountain stream in autumn or
condensation dedicated to the gods of humiliation,
because when you are surfing and riding
inside the curl, it's called *being in the green room*,
and then there are all the words for green,
such as emerald, forest, teal, and turquoise,
which is seeping into blue, and what is the word
for the shifting blue of the Aegean off Crete where we stop
and see a bee with a golden bottom and scarlet head
gorge itself on the feather bed of a giant lavender flower,
sunlight a riot on the surface of the sea?

SUZANNE MCCLELLAND

SELECTED WORK

p. 130-131, *Ideal Proportions: Steve and John*, 2013.
Courtesy of the artist and Team Gallery Inc.

p. 132, *Lou Ferrigno (Ideal Proportions)*, 2013.
Courtesy of the artist and Team Gallery Inc.



Suzanne McClelland's Fugitives

Christopher Stackhouse

Kurt Schwitters once wrote, in his self-published periodical *Merz* (ca. 1920), "I pasted words and sentences together into poems in such a way that their rhythmic composition created a kind of drawing. The other way around, I pasted together pictures and drawings containing sentences that demand to be read." Schwitters strove to obliterate the boundaries between fields to bring "all genres into an artistic unity." Suzanne McClelland's ambition is adapted to a slightly different time. The polymathic, interdisciplinary artist is anticipated and less rare now. Capitalist productivity, and its effects, has fully merged with the occupational identity of art, which for better or worse has contributed to "blurring genre" and to a generalist ethos in contemporary art. Schwitters' most productive years in

Fig 1. (above) Detail of work by Suzanne McClelland, 2015. Courtesy of Team Gallery Inc, New York

Europe were between two World Wars; McClelland, who came of age during the Vietnam years and is now living, like all of us, in the midst of the so-called "war on terror," is working in the American era of "endless war." In each of these periods language itself is weaponized. As with product advertisements, the competitive glut of information presented by media in the arena of the 24-hour news cycle establishes an environment where language and meaning are contested. Beyond the confluence of text and image, the representation of speech in/as action in collage and assemblage, McClelland and Schwitters share the project of using artistic autonomy to confront the dominant social, political, economic messaging to which we are all subjected.

Painting can be considered as a potential ligament between contemplation and action. As the artist settles into it, the practice becomes one maintained by a select yet versatile tool kit. The painter is as much equipped with intellectual prompts for herself as she is familiar with the materials of her trade. Making is thinking. What to think about is the outstanding question, followed by pursuing the means and vehicles that give ideas communicative power. Suzanne McClelland's work is inclined to do this by juxtaposing conceptual elements that at first seem incongruent, but are at the same time synchronized. There is the corporality of pigment, paint, canvas, paper, and surface, the variety of raw tangible media. In the broader scope of her production, the import of lettering, text fragments, and photographic imagery can be read as analogous to the purer properties of visual language (line, shape, color, texture, etc.) of which academic painting consists. However, the cultural sources taken from the broader public sphere (e.g., FBI Wanted Posters from the internet or photos from vintage weekly news magazines) are brought into critical proximity to painting/drawing, in order to question the precepts of "fine art" and its sociopolitical conveyance of hierarchy, privilege, and power. In spite of the aesthetic synthesis McClelland achieves in bringing these disparate elements together to make works of art, the two main bodies of information—painting tradition and mass media—remain conceptually lateral. Productive tension resides in comparing and contrasting how these different types of visual information are (re)produced and digested.

McClelland's *Internal Affairs: 7 Domestic Terrorist Files* (2015), first exhibited in 2015 at Team Gallery in New York, presents a selection of seven of the top-ranked American–born terrorists, as listed by the F.B.I. The people she chose, five of whom are women, are: Elizabeth Anna Duke (May 19th Communist Organization), Joanne Deborah Chesimard (also known as Assata Shakur of the Black Liberation Army), Josephine Sunshine Overaker (Earth Liberation Front/Animal Liberation Front), Donna Joan Borup (May 19th Communist Organization), Catherine Marie Kerkow (Black Panther Party), Joseph Mahmoud Dibee (Earth Liberation Front/Animal Liberation Front), Leo Frederick Burt (University of Wisconsin-Madison/Sterling Hall Bombing, a student Vietnam protester). Each was found on the FBI.gov website, with their full physical descriptions and their National Crime Information Center (NCIC) numbers included. The NCIC has 14 categories of files on various individuals in their database which include, "Supervised Release; National Sex Offender Registry; Foreign Fugitive; Immigration Violator; Missing Person; Protection Order; Unidentified Person; Protective Interest; Gang; Known or Appropriately Suspected Terrorist; Wanted Person; Identity Theft; Violent Person; And [persons found to be or not yet found to be criminal on the] National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS)." Further relevant to McClelland's project is text on the website that reads, "[the] system also contains images that can be associated with NCIC records to help agencies identify people and property items." McClelland seizes the opportunity to expound on the possible meanings of those "images" and their dependence on various language systems (in this case, some hostile) for those meanings. Boldly appropriating this information, she uses it as an analogue to image production and categorization in art overall. She creates a direct corollary between categories and reputations in painting to those that are in contentious, mortally consequential, political situations by dislocating these two subjects from their historical and practical contexts. This artistic gesture provides a potent measure of aesthetic distance that leads the viewer through an ample visual experience toward acute sociopolitical considerations.

Internal Affairs, which is a series of large charcoal, polymer, and oil on linen paintings employing McClelland's characteristic blend of gesture and inscription, retrieves the custom of artist-as-witness that goes back to Francisco Goya's

suite of prints *Disasters of War* (1810—1820). Goya's posthumously titled and published prints document atrocities from the Napoleonic Wars between France and Spain, albeit in a poetic way, marrying his imagination with the realities of human suffering that he saw in the flesh. (For example, in *The Carnivorous Vulture, plate 76*, Goya positions a common man with a pitchfork in his hands ready to stab a giant anthropomorphic bird character that represents the appetite for death had by the powerful actors in war). Goya's prints amount to a type of reportage. By way of depicting images of violence and degradation, in a series of etchings, they constitute a critique of war, imperialism, and nationalist ambition. Goya's early 19th century Spain, of course, starkly differs from McClelland's 21st century United States of America, yet where the vital connection between these artists abides is in their relationship to, and artistic interpretation of, state power.

Contemporary discussions about organized public revolt (the 1999 Seattle World Trade Organization Protests, Occupy Wall Street, the Black Lives Matter

Fig 2. Suzanne McClelland, "Domestic Terrorist:Kerkow NCIC W333088341",2015. charcoal, polymer, oil on linen. Courtesy of the artist and Team Gallery Inc.

movement, etc.) and those about random and conspired acts of violence (Dylan Roof and the Charleston Church Shooting of 2015, Timothy McVeigh and the Oklahoma City Bombing of 1995, Anders Behring Breivik's 2011 Norway Attacks, or, the November 2015 Paris attacks for which the revolutionary group Islamic State took credit) are conflated under the legal and colloquial rubric of "terror." State sanctioned violence—the habitual beating, killing, physical, and verbal humiliation of unarmed citizens by American police forces; the militarization of police departments across the country; corporate pillaging from countries in conflict (think of the investigation opened in 2013 by Swiss authorities against the gold refinement company Argor-Heraeus for helping to fuel arms purchases in the Democratic Congo during the Congo's "First" and "Second" internecine wars, by buying and refining black market gold from the area—the case was dismissed by the Swiss Attorney General's office in 2015); or, on a larger scale, "Authorization[s] for the Use of Military Force" laws which include provisions for government surveillance on all American citizens as well as the ability to kill terrorists, suspected terrorists, or, for that matter, any persons or entities thought to be a threat to America's national interests—is not commonly seen as tantamount to any other act of violence. Under these conditions, even peaceful forms of resistance are at least considered suspect and subject to scrutiny by every apparatus of the state. Therefore, any form of civil disobedience, however resourceful or non-violent, is potentially dangerous.

Under these accelerated terms, public protest, political resistance in every form, militarized policing, and creeping surveillance by government intelligence agencies, make the current public debate about privacy and citizens' rights (about what constitutes "private" and "public" in the eyes of the law) a heated one. All of this is not lost on McClelland. The portraits created by the *Internal Affairs* portfolios are allusive, the aims of their execution are specific; they portray conflicts between the United States government and its citizenry in the context of global power struggles. It is ironic that Joseph Mahmoud Dibee is of Syrian descent. His wanted poster lists among his physical descriptions: "Remarks: Dibee may have fled to Syria." This is a pointed coincidence given the current controversy around the admittance of Syrian immigrants into

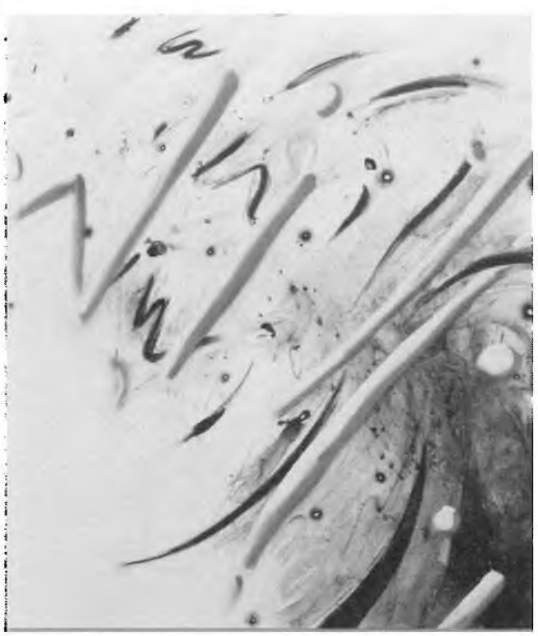
Fig 3. (opposite) Suzanne McClelland. *Internal Affairs: 7 domestic terrorist files*, 2015. various: linen, abaca, and cotton handmade paper, silkscreen on velour, digital photographs on rice paper. Courtesy ofthe artist and Team Gallery Inc.

please contact your local

Aliases:

[redacted] "Seattle", "Steve", "God"

the United States after the discovery that one of the November 2015 Paris attackers may have been admitted to France as a Syrian refugee. Having been described by the FBI as having "a role in a domestic terrorist cell," it should be noted that the Syrian-American, who *may* have committed a violent act, is an environmental and animal rights activist- not a "jihadist." Dibee was born in the United States in 1967, and though a fugitive, he is a United States citizen. To layer the irony here, the $50,000 award posted for Dibee is a mere fraction of the now $2 million award posted for the African-American Assata Shakur (nee Joanne Chesimard), who as of 2013 is the first woman ever to be added to the FBI Most Wanted Terrorist list. She is labeled this way in spite of not having been convicted of an international crime, but after being dubiously charged and convicted (and acquitted) of several domestic ones in the 1970s. Shakur escaped prison. She is essentially, by political category, a feminist and an American civil rights activist. The FBI and Central Intelligence Agency know that Shakur is in Cuba, and that she holds at least the equivalent of a Cuban passport. Her exile has been politicized by governors, mayors, congressmen, and presidential candidates. She is on the same 'Most Wanted' list as Ayman Al-Zawahiri, who is by official record the current leader of al-Qaeda with a reward on his head for $25 million.



American government intelligence activities brought into relationship with art have a well-documented history (see, for instance, Frances Stonor Saunders's book *The Cold War: The CIA and The World of Arts and Letters*). McClelland has, in effect, turned this particular political instrumentalization of culture around 180 degrees in paintings such as *Domestic Terrorist: Kerkow NCIC*

Fig 4. Suzanne McClelland, "Action Figure: Chelsea Manning head only $60," 2014. Dry pigment, gesso, polymer, and oil paint on portrait linen. Courtesy of the artist and Team Gallery Inc.

W333088341 (2015). At a glance, the numerical and alphabetical content in the painting can seem neutral or arbitrary, or, something of a deeply personal, coded poetics. Former Black Panther Party member Catherine Marie Kerkow's NCIC number is obscured, alternately advancing and receding in appearance in the spatial field. The alpha-numerical text forms a slight arc in red that pops across an otherwise neutral in color duotone canvas. The serially placed letters and numbers become a gestural line that gives a sense of motion, of action happening in real time. The combination of the angling white-on-black striations alternating with the numbers and letters are obscured by what could be read as billows of smoke, brushily rendered: these marks index residual energies from an explosion blast. The painting is at once a nuanced yet pronounced meeting of specific temporal and conceptual content, with method, and material histories of applications in paint.

The Domestic Terrorist paintings are chronologically preceded by McClelland's *Action Figures* series, where the abstract paintings are designated by the names of highly consequential whistleblowers Julian Assange, Chelsea Manning, and Edward Snowden. Each of these individuals exposed "classified" (concealed from public view) American military and governmental information from computerized data storage and retrieval systems to reveal fuller pictures of state action against global citizens, and state actions against other states. Respectively, as perceived actors against "national security state" interests, these individuals have found themselves imprisoned. Snowden is trapped in exile, granted temporary asylum in Russia. Assange has been for years cornered in a room in the Ecuadorian embassy in London, which has been surrounded by the city's Metropolitan Police Service. Chelsea Manning is being housed in a correction facility, the United States Disciplinary Barracks in the U.S. Army installation of Fort Leavenworth, fulfilling a 35 year sentence. Manning, being a transwoman, transitioned during all of this, which makes McClelland's *Action Figure: Chelsea Manning head only $60* a title loaded with punning language. The more open gestural tricolor markings, the flashes of red scattered about the *Manning* painting, are legibly a projected psychological portrait of Manning's newfound gender and sexual freedom, and, conversely, the harsh reality of living in imprisonment.

During a 2015 lecture given at the New York Studio School of Drawing, Painting and Sculpture, McClelland characterized an element of her process as "delivering content that functions on the periphery." She was referring to data, media images delivered in print/video/film, memes, sound bites, written opinions, recurring news stories, historical facts, topical reporting, that are so readily and often projected before the general consuming public, that we are unaware of the impact those messages being sent may have on us. In the case of the Wanted Persons postings, the human complexity of the individuals is reduced to basic physical description, estimates of birth record, a criminal case number, bounty price, and a very vague sketch of previous activities. In addition to dehumanizing the individuals, those specific postings intentionally abstract a life from the presence of emotions, from any everyday sense of familiarity, leaving a void that could otherwise be positively filled by an exchange between human beings that foster understanding. This is a similar strategy of remove used by those with influence and control over major mass media sources and distribution. By omission or embellishment of the material information, our reception of that information is manipulated. McClelland positively emulates this process, costuming it in the language of abstract gestural painting.

ROSSON CROW
SELECTED WORK

p. 133. *The Folly of Degenerate Imperialism*, 2015
Courtesy of the artist and Honor Fraser Gallery.

p. 134-135. *Madame Psychosis Holds a Séance, 2015*
Courtesy of the artist and Honor Fraser Gallery.

p. 136. *The Shadow of Your Smile*, 2015
Video still.
Courtesy of the artist and Honor Fraser Gallery.

Fig 1. Photo by Jeff Vespa

A Visit to Rosson Crow

Tamar Halpern

When I met Rosson Crow at her Beachwood Canyon studio, the sheer vibrancy of her canvases—which look like film sets recently flattened by a steam roller, with beer cans and flowers, curtains and presidential campaign swag gloriously smashed into a pastiche of chaotic joy and bursting with bits of neon sprays, as if the objects themselves exhaled their last colorful breaths—blew me away. Color organizes across her canvases as if a wind blew past a Tibetan sand mandala, carrying along bright-hued grains. As a filmmaker, I found myself drawn to her paintings because in the midst of this whorl of color, there are elements of stories lurking about, tinged with mystery, sometimes with an almost funereal somberness. The flowers bursting across her canvases could as easily be from a lover, or for a lover's wake. There are hints of lovers past, revealed through objects of nostalgia like the kind found in classic films. The lover who sips a brand

of Texan beer that went out of business in the 1980s (think *Badlands*), the lover who prefers a cold Coca-Cola in a glass bottle (think *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*), the lover who dropped off a smattering of "Citizens for Kennedy" buttons (think *The Manchurian Candidate*), the lover who left a mess of tabloid newspapers strewn across the floor, headlines crowing about conspiracies and blunders, death and the paranormal (think anything by John Waters). Ms. Crow builds a story within these still-life studies, which are anything but still, playing with memories plucked from black-and-white home movies while working in tandem with the brightest, most modern neon colors possible. She is a re-animator, giving the past new life.

The slightly blurry effect of her paintings makes me want to rub my eyes and focus harder. The rich Persian carpets and intricate Ming Dynasty vases channel Matisse, but with a twist. This Matisse had his café crème dosed with a touch of Ayahuasca. The overall effect of viewing her work is on par with feeling a sudden burst of mania, of seeing a firework in the night sky when you least expect it, or possessing slightly super superpowers for a brief but critical moment.

In the course of our studio visit it emerged that Ms. Crow had made a film, *Madame Psychosis Holds A Séance*. Here, I have to inject a personal note. As someone who has made five feature films, a few shorts, and a smattering of commercials, I usually groan when a person who seems to have a perfectly good career in one field decides he or she wants to be a filmmaker. But for some reason, with Ms. Crow, I felt differently. The way she lit up when she talked about her experience and the sparkle in her eyes as she told me she was ready to make another film someday left me disarmed and intrigued. She seemed to lack the usual bravado and puffed-chest presentation I've grown accustomed to hearing from first-time filmmakers. Or the defeated, deflated, everything went wrong, I'm in serious debt and living in my mom's basement kind of response. It's usually one or the other. But she was almost apologetic, as if she was surprised by the fact that the film even came together at all.

I'm familiar with artists who have built their careers on making films and videos, like Bill Viola, or who used film as part of their exploration, like Warhol or Robert Smithson or Bruce Nauman (I'm still haunted to this day by his clown videos) or

(the most haunting of all) Paul McCarthy. But as Ms. Crow sat and described her film to me, it felt like I was speaking with a filmmaker, not an art filmmaker. And what is the difference, you might ask. In Crow's film, as she recounted it to me, there seemed to be a narrative, something concrete to hold on to, an actual story. All too often, artist-made films and videos lack what we filmmakers affectionately call a three-act structure: beginning, middle, and end. The majority of artist films I've seen seem to mostly have middle. They are constructed in a way that invites the viewer to enter at any point in the narrative, and then leave at any point, with no vital information from the unseen parts required to grasp what has been seen. These films run in loops, adding to their infinite circuitousness, and usually do not rely on plot. Or setup. Or payoff. Or any number of narrative qualities storytelling requires. When the art videos work, they are their Own Cool Thing. When they don't, the viewers are left feeling stupid, or worse, alienated.

As Crow told me about the filming of *Madame Psychosis Holds a Séance*, she instantly had my sympathy. All the problems she encountered while making the film were typical independent, low-budget, first-time filmmaking problems; there wasn't enough time, there wasn't enough money, there was only one small location, with Ms. Crow wearing tons of hats like co-director, co-writer, set designer, art department, designer and props painter, costume painter. Add to that, she almost fear-peed herself the first time she showed it at Honor Fraser Gallery in Los Angeles, where likely everyone in the audience makes, or plans to make, films.

She needn't have worried. Her film is good. And I mean really really fucking good. It has a beginning, middle and end. It stars a brilliant actress as the lead. It is fearless and experimental, but still approachable and relatable. Her paintings came alive to play support characters, as good set design should. The costumes are wearable extensions of her work, subliminally guiding us through geography, tone and mood. The entire film is an organic reflection pool of her art, with nods to some of cinema's greats. Imagine Peter Greenaway and David Lynch having a love child named "Persona" to honor Ingmar Bergman, and you can begin to understand *Madame Psychosis Holds a Séance.*

Madame Psychosis, played with an arresting presence by Kelly Lynch, is an aging lounge singer type, an also-run beauty queen obsessed with the

Fig 2 (opposite). Rosson Crow, "Madame Psychosis Holds a Séance," 2015. Single channel high definition video: 12:30 loop (still), Edition of 3 +1 AP. Courtesy the artist and Honor Fraser Gallery.

assassination of John F. Kennedy. As she conjures his spirit up via a Ouija board, her fading memories are in contrast to the hue-sharp world around her while haunting her on the inside, as she tries in vain to make contact with the dead president. Or is it Jack Ruby she's reaching out to? Ms. Crow does not intend to give us the answer, but instead infuses us in a rich and entertainingly disturbing film about memory, yearning, and fear: fear of aging, being forgotten and, ultimately, our own mortality. The acting, direction, set design and costumes are deft. The editing is just right, unlike many first films, which are often so in love with themselves they're bogged down with the more that defies the adage "less is more." Ms. Crow keeps the pacing going and the viewer engaged, never lingering in the splendor she's created. She takes us into three distinct worlds with a masterful economy as we follow Madame Psychosis down her psychotic descent. Employing visual trickery to great effect, Ms. Crow gives a knowing nod to surrealists before her like Dali's collaboration with Luis Bunuel in *Un Chien Andalou*. There's also a more contemporary allusion: the main character is inspired by a character in David Foster Wallace's novel *Infinite Jest*.

I watched the film twice, in awe of her ability and envious to my core that someone who had never made a film could create such an exciting and original

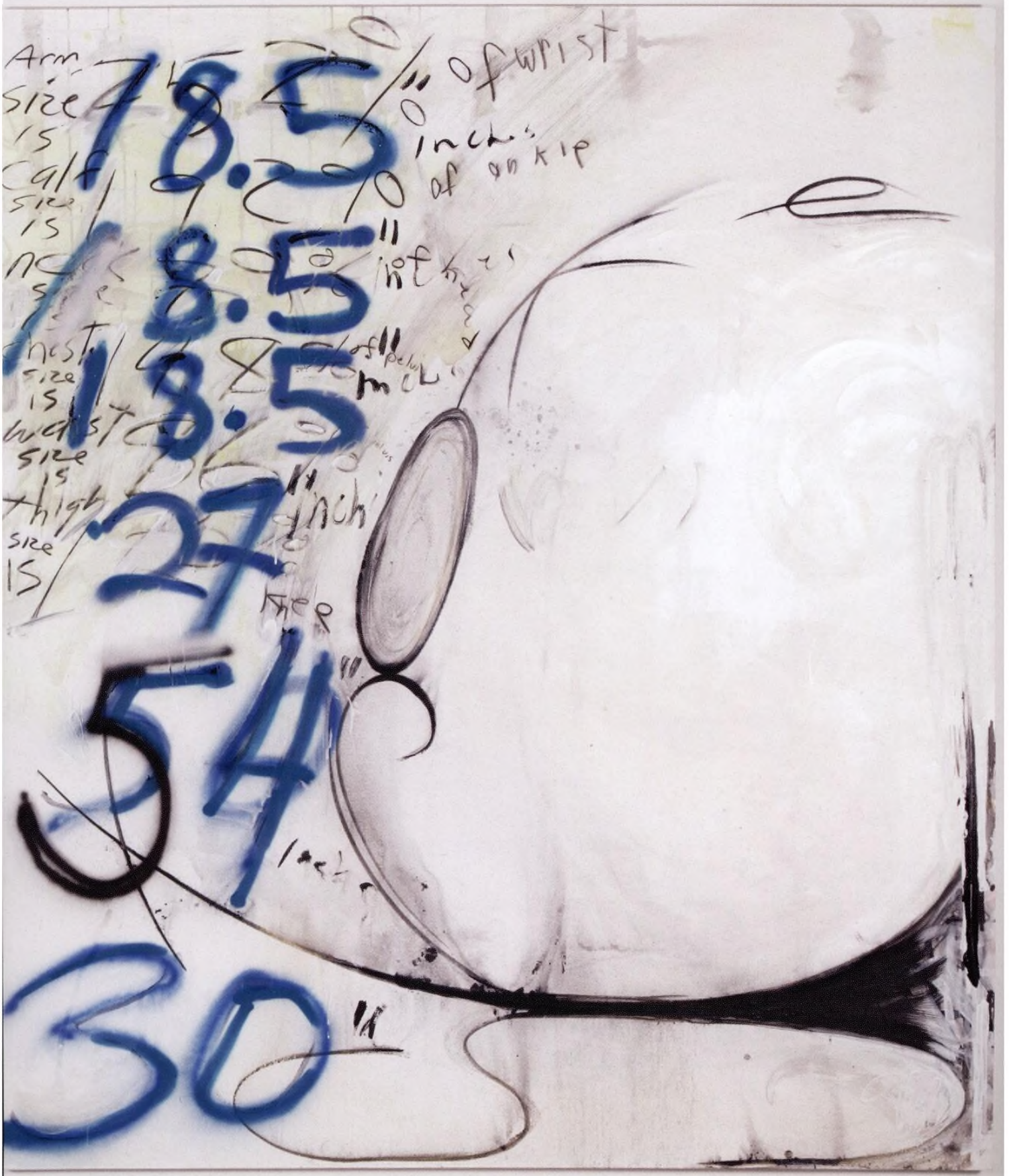
piece. I've worked all my life to make good films and Ms. Crow put down her paintbrush for a second to make a great one. The awe I felt wrestled with the envy, with the awe ultimately winning as I was reminded of something she said during our interview. This film is not available to the public. It is a limited edition, owned by only three collectors and one museum. That's it.

Nothing is more bone jarring and depressing for a filmmaker than to undertake such a Sisyphean task as making a film, only to have a tiny, almost nonexistent audience. As someone with two unreleased films, I know. If you consider the thirty frames per second rate of film, a short like *Madame Psychosis* can have the equivalent of around twenty thousand individual paintings wedged between the main title and the end credits, requiring considerable time and space for an audience to appreciate. Ms. Crow has three collectors and a museum who will probably trot out her film once in a blue moon. And Ms. Crow is fine with it. I am reminded that the sharing of one's art is a paltry, secondary pursuit compared to its creation.

Fig 3 (above). Tamar Halpern, "Rosson Crow studio detail," 2016. Courtesy of Tamar Halpern.

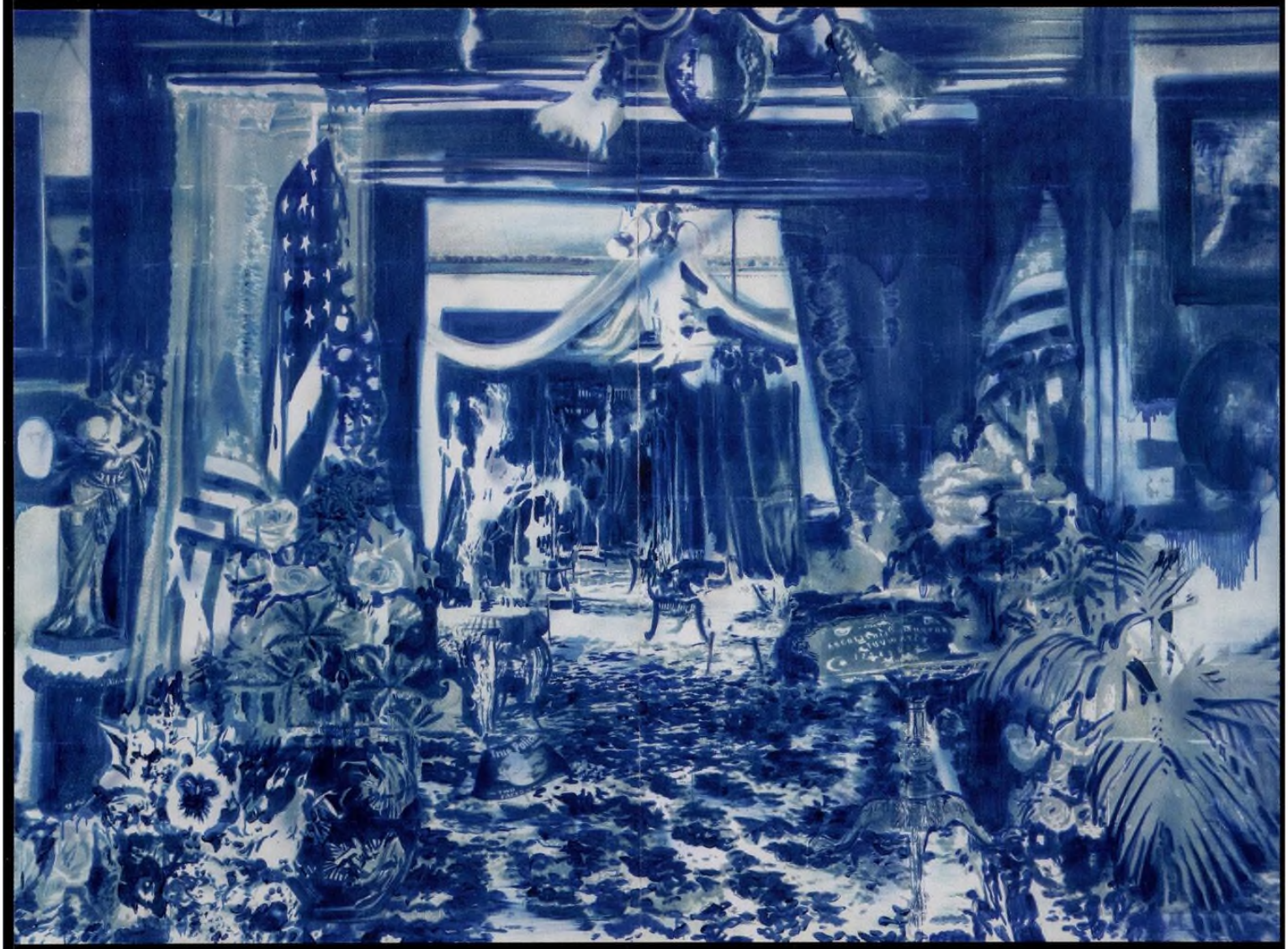
Fig 4 (opposite). Suzanne McClelland, "Internal Sensations: Fume," 2013. Dry pigment, gesso, polymer, and oil paint on portait linen. Courtesy of the artist and Team Gallery Inc.


65 times your wrist
chest girth
85
530
292


Arm size is
18.5
of wrist
Calf size is
18.5
inches of ankle
18.5
18.5
27
54
30


59
chest
5'8"

LAS STEELE



Robin Coste Lewis

Using Black to Paint Light: Walking Through a Matisse Exhibit, Thinking about the Arctic and Matthew Henson

"The light range was so narrow if you exposed film for a white kid, the black kid sitting next to him would be rendered invisible except for the whites of his eyes and teeth. It was only when Kodak's two biggest clients—the confectionary and furniture industries—complained that dark chocolate and dark furniture were losing out that it came up with a solution."
—Broomberg

"When a contradiction is impossible to resolve except by a lie, then we know it is really a door."
—Simone Weil

I keep referring to the cold, as if that were the point.

Fact. Not point.

Forty-below was a good day. "In short, fine weather," you wrote once, before cutting out blocks of ice and fashioning another igloo for the whole crew each night.

But it isn't the point, that it was cold, is it?

How many days before arriving did you sit on the deck in that chair, staring out to sea, wearing a coarse blue shirt, the lost, well-mannered

rhetoric of your day spiraling beneath a blue hat—concertina (at your ankle) outside the placid frame?

Thank you, whoever you are, for standing behind the camera and thinking "Matthew Henson" and "photograph" at the same time.

The unanticipated shock: so much believed to be white is actually—strikingly –blue. Endless blueness. White is blue. An ocean wave freezes in place. Blue. Whole glaciers, large as Ohio, floating masses of static water. All of them pale frosted azuls. It makes me wonder—yet again—was there ever such a thing as whiteness? I am beginning to go grow suspicious. An open window.

I am blue.
I am a frozen blue ocean.
I am a wave struck cold in midair.
The wave is nude beneath her blue dress.
Her skin is blue.

To arrive in a place.

And this place in which you have arrived finally: a place you have always dreamt of arriving. Perhaps you have tried—for eighteen years—to get there, dreaming of landscapes, people, food. Always repulsed by your effort, unable to attain the trophy.

And then finally, somehow, you arrive one day and are immediately stunned because you realize more than anything, it isn't the landscape,

food, the people. That thing which most astonishes you is the way the air appears, how the sunlight hovers just before your eyes.

And you—then—wanting nothing more than to spend the day indoors watching the room. The vast ocean always nothing more than an open window. So you stay inside and choose to watch the same wall turn fifty reds, then later: slow, countless variations of blue. Blues you have never seen.

There is a black beam overhead on the ceiling. Without it, the ability to see such light would disappear. The light is toying with you, and you like it. All of this because the darkness is now always overhead. That. That is what arriving means.

I want to say the same thing in a variety of different ways. Or I want to say many different things, but merely one way.

Perhaps there is only one word after all. Beneath all languages, beneath all other words: only one. Perhaps whenever we speak we are repeating it. All day long, the same single word over and over again.

Choose something dark. Choose a dark line to hang above you. If you want to see what light can do, always choose the dark.

Out on the ice, the light can blind you. The annals laced with men who set out without the protection of darkness. All finished blind.

Blackbirds, black bowhead whales, the raven, the night sky, the body inside, blue ink, pencil lead, chocolate, marzipan. Like us.

All water is a color. But what does that have to do with you and me, Matthew?

Maybe life is just this: walking with each other from one dark room to another. And looking.

Sometimes the paintings come to life. Sometimes you just love the word *pewter.* Sometimes the ocean waves at you. Sometimes there are goldfish in a jar. A bowl of oranges. Sometimes a woman steps down out of a frame and walks toward you. Sometimes she discards the white scarf, which covers her, and reveals her real body. Sometimes she leaves, moments later, covered in a striped jacket and leather hat.

Our lady of the dressing table.
Our lady of the rainy day.
Our lady of palm leaves, periwinkle, calla lilies.
Our lady of acanthus.
A garden redone three times.

Sometimes someone you love just falls through. Gone. The blue massive ridges of pressure shift, float away, move. Sometimes the ice breaks open. That's it. Sledge, dogs and all.

I fell through once. I'd grown cold, so I stood up and walked to get my coat. I was told it was hanging on the far wall of a very dark room. Because it

was dark, I could see, really see—for the first time—how a particular gold thread sparkled on the collar. I reached out my hand. But before the wall, there was a large hole where stairs were being built, which I could not see. I walked into air and landed on my head. Underground.

Everything then turned a vivid black.

I wonder, Matthew, when you were out on the ice for years, trying very hard not to fall through, I wonder whether—like me—you ever thought of the same woman over and over again, whether you ever imagined her draped in a loose-fitting emerald robe, seated in a pink velvet chair, engulfed by a black so bright it was luminous?

I do.

Sometimes I lie here in bed before the fire, unable to move—this cane, this hideous cane, this glorious cane, cutting cane—and imagine that one particular curl falling forward toward her forehead. I imagine the same curl at this angle, then that. A recurring dream. When my bed becomes a vast field of frozen ice the color of indigo, and I cannot move, I begin to see her face. Each strand of her hair becomes a radiant small flame, twisting and burning so quietly. Then I look at your picture, you out on the ice, and I wonder if you ever feel like that, Matthew?

Like a woman, faceless and flung over
a desk, at rest or in tears, exquisite

quickly-drawn ruffles about your shoulder,
halos of wide banana leaves

hovering just above your head?
Were there images you could not fling

from your mind? Events that clung
to you, coated you, repeating

themselves in a series: movements
or instruments in a symphony?

Objects that would not let you go:
an avocado tree; a certain street

at night where someone exceptionally kind
once took your arm as the two of you walked

along a wet sidewalk; trying
to remember the light on that certain gait:

your mother twirling a parasol, also walking
through a grove of olive trees?

Did you begin to find comfort
in the serial, the inexplicable and constant

reappearance of things, people, sensations,
every moment syphonically realized

and re-entered. The way the days begin
to rhyme. Every moment

walking into the same room, new
again. Sledge after sledge.

Matthew?

I fell through, into a hole in the floor. I landed far below, on my head. Sometimes I still forget my name. Sometimes I forget yours. Sometimes I forget how to spell *the.* Regularly I am unable to remember Adam Clayton Powell. Or how to conjugate *exist.* Sometimes I lie in bed and cannot feel my legs. It's like something quietly gnawed them off while I was in the kitchen making tea. From the knees down: this odd sensation, not nothing, but something, just not legs. If ice were not cold perhaps. Or the memory of a leg. I cannot feel my legs, but I can feel their memory.

In conversation, my face goes numb. It starts at my mouth and spreads out. When I am quiet, it recedes. Why is numbness ascribed the color blue? It's not. It is red.

By the end of the day, my left hand has disappeared from the end of my arm. I ignore it. Hold my pen. Smile at you. What year is it, darling? I once lived where? With whom? Where is she now? Dead. What was her name?

I remember nurses. Their faces. Someone very, very kind—a woman—began to tape a pen inside my hand. I remember being suspended in a harness. Being lowered down into a warm blue pool. All the other patients there were very old. Here is how we all learned to walk properly again. Underwater.

Once I fell through—into the dark.

Braces and casts.

Being told not to write.

Being told not to read.

Forgetting someone I once promised I would never forget.

Remembering her finally, one year, then forgetting her again the next day.

Remembering not remembering I'd forgotten.

Forgetting her completely.

When I look at photographs of Matisse, unable to walk, drawing on the wall from the bed, his charcoal tied to the end of a very long pole, I stop breathing.

Him, I think. Yes. I could marry him.

I could slip into his bed.

We could talk about real things.

I could be his dark line hovering above.

We could watch the light turning the room every color.

Donika Kelly

Love Poem: Chimera

I thought myself lion and serpent. Thought
myself body enough for two, for we.
Found comfort in never being lonely.

What burst from my back, from my bones, what lived
along the ridge from crown to crown, from mane
to forked tongue beneath the skin. What clamor

we made in the birthing. What hiss and rumble
at the splitting, at the horns and beard,
at the glottal bleat. What bridges our back.

What strong neck, what bright eye. What menagerie
are we. What we've made of ourselves.

Cortney Lamar Charleston

Triggernometry

For
you, the
first triangle:
Father and *Son* and
Holy Ghost, and you hear
from everybody Southern fried in
your life the devil be a master mimic—
be a mathematician speaking the language
of the boot that kicked him out of those pearly
gates. And you're smart, so you take notes: sanctuary
sits between 108th & 109th Streets on Halsted. That's in
The Hundreds, high numbers, too many names of dead boys
for you to count, and your church sits locked behind an iron gate,
black like both sides it divides. Both sides root for a basketball team
that ran the Triangle Offense all the way to glory, and Jordan is God to
this day, and people have died for his feet, so many over the years, nobody

counts. And Chicago is the angle between sides, between brothers:
a tangent of death. You question if the letters in your textbook
are pronounced *sign* or *sin*. You know the devil be a shape-
shifter. Nothing about this particular triangle is right.
You're smart. You take notes: see that same shape
in your history class drawn in red, a long trail of
blood between Africa, Europe, and America
that gives the ocean a crooked mouth on
the map. It speaks to you, begs an old

practiced recall: *slaves obey thy*
masters. And you're smart,
so you realize that all of
you Southern frieds
have been had,
are owned to
this very
day:

it's all algebra, trig– you say,
jotting your name boldly
atop your test, that
test itself being
just another
A+ plus—
plus.

Family and Consumer Sciences

"I'm the... neighborhood pusha
Call me subwoofer, 'cause I pump base like that, Jack"
– PUSHA T

Stumbling through the kitchen, tired and headed for
the staircase, her hair is slightly out of character

as she asks me what residual I've left
coating the countertop and I tell her *it's flour, mom*—

stove's eye burning behind me:
blue heat set beneath the metal pot.

If she had a dollar for every time I've
told her that, it would be flour

or baking soda. And if I had a dollar for
every time she asked me, it wouldn't be flour;

it'd have to be baking soda then—*no question.*

In my mind, if I had a dollar for every time
she didn't ask me, it'd be flour *for sure.*

When she stumbles into the kitchen, tired, headed for
the freezer, in those moments, if she had a dollar

for every time she wanted to ask me, it'd be
baking soda. Needed to ask me? Baking soda.

Not there to ask me? Flour or baking soda.
If it was baking soda instead of flour, then, in

my mind, blue heat would toss me in the freezer.

Then, when she came to visit me, her hair would
be slightly out of character, having just climbed

all the precinct stairs. I'd tell them inside:
it's *flour.* By that point, she wouldn't ask me

or have a dollar. She'd be stumbling through
legal fees and all life else—residuals of my bastard presence.

Steven Ramirez

The Dammest Thing

and even though this school's falling apart, is secretly rotting from the inside out, K'll still find the time to set aside his mop and bucket and tell anyone about the ghost, the ghost, little white thing he call Casper follow him up and down these halls cracking jokes, talking shit, but mostly helping out with things, small things, like opening doors when K got his hands full, flicking on lights, flicking off lights, and evenings, when K sneaks a basketball from out Coach B's equipment room to shoot his exactly one hundred free throws, it's who else but Casper hooking up rebounds, rebound after rebound, though he don't gotta travel far, K shrugs, cause you know that rock got no where else to go but *swish* right through the net ... And it's true, swears Adrian Montes—Adrian who gotta work off his tuition serving food, stacking books, chasing K with a belt of tools clinking and clanking from around his neck—about Casper, he says, about the doors, the lights, the way that basketball will magically bounce pass its way back to K like some kinda freaky magnet with mad spin, but what everyone really wanna know is what's Casper's story anyway? where's he come from? why's he here? what's a matter, K? don't heaven or hell want his sorry dead ass? And K, sounding out from up there on his ladder, or from deep down a shaft, will just laugh that sandpaper laugh and it's the dammest thing, K says, but Casper been wanting to know the same thing about *you*! Oh and another thing, goes Adrian—Adrian who think he a real down homie now just cause he got a little grease on his fingers, knows the difference between a fixed and open-ended wrench—seems Casper is only interested in helping K, and not only that, he says, but the other day they were going around changing bulbs, right, both with their hands full, right, and so of course the door opens for K but soon as Adrian steps up not only does it close on him, but *whap*! the damn thing slams in his face, knocking him down, shattering bulbs, and Adrian swears no matter how hard he scrubs he can still feel the glassy bits crawling beneath his skin and so whoever thought to call that culo ghost sonavubitch *friendly* can go ahead and kiss his bleeding ass! The point being don't ask him, about what happened, the morning Coach B brought some math to his equipment room and found

he was missing four brand new basketballs, which was the second or third time, and he ain't stupid you know, or blind, knows all about K's little extracurricular activities—a hundred free throws? *shiiit*! the pinche mayate should be scrubbing a hundred toilets!—and so during lunch that day did Coach B jab a finger into K's chest, wanna know how much the street was paying for some NBA quality shit these days, and K, eyes wild, jaw laced with iron, jabbed a finger right back, wanna know how much the street was paying for his *mama's* quality shit these days, and it was pretty much on after that, right then and there, two grown ass men throwing down in the middle of a busy cafeteria, and this knowing crowd—clinging like flies to the muck of these walls—braced itself, waited white knuckled for the world unseen to take Coach B by his ankles and whip him across that tiled floor, plink-plink him against every nook and cranny like a goddamn pinball, and then, as a finale of sorts, parade his lifeless ass around the entire school like a puppet on a string ...Because listen, if this Casper was capable of slamming doors over something so simple as a busted bulb, then who the hell knew what was within the supernatural realm of possibility when it came to actual feet-shuffling, head-bobbing, dukes-in-the-air *chingasos*? Is what everyone was left wondering anyway, soon as the whole thing was broken up, and it took three teachers and a visiting parent to finally pull the stronger, faster, larger Coach B off the shit stain that had become of K's broken and beaten body, and hey yo what's the story? everyone, all this time later, still wanna know. Like que the fuck *pasó*? Casper so tough shit, so in between, so spooky mas chingon, well then what happened? huh? where the hell'd he go? And since K ain't around no more to answer—some say he quit, others say he was fired, and still others swear they seen him on TV feeding pre-game balls to the pinche Lakers—it's who else but Adrian Montes the one calling out from up there on the ladder, or deep down a shaft, who else but Adrian been caught how many times waiting at the free throw line for this world to snap magically to life, who else but Adrian left now to laugh that sandpaper laugh, and it's the dammest thing, he says, how it don't take a ghost to be invisible and Casper still wanting to know the same thing about you.

Danez Smith

nigga as pronoun

nigga, tonight i'm bout to be too much

in this context the room is the nigga

or maybe your reflection

or the wood skinned sprites juking around your ankles

& on top the shea butter

or the whole damn everything

or perhaps you yourself the nigga in question

when you turn to no one/everyone & announce you

plan on being some kind of sight, a mess, the queen

of some man's neck, a saltlick for whatever beast

you are, i mean i am, i'm the beastqueen

tonight, i feast on his highness [1]

[1] when you have a second, google *women who have named themselves king*, catch up on RuPaul's Drag Rage, go on youtube & listen to Sylvester's "You Make Me Feel (Mighty Real)," watch the video. now, you sing it. sing it, nigga. let it out. tell me how it feel to be your own God?

i'm that nigga

i scream in the field & i'm not
talking where the meat falls from me

i'm singing a song for my lost ones –
a dare to America, imthatnigga

the very one, imthatnigga in the flesh
come from a long line of imthatniggas

& imthatnigga over there
& any imthatnigga will do

& imthatnigga up in the tree like
you heard about Imthatnigga, Travis?

i heard they raised imthatnigga up real
quick, said my imthatnigga was posted

in leaves, turned my imthatnigga into a
bad bird
bad light
hashtag
bad fruit
warning [2]

[2] of course you know anything can be a tree & you don't need a gender, just the skin

nigga...

as in let me teeeeell you
as in i can't believe they said that
& thought you *wasn't* gonna say something
as in you already know
as in let me find out
as in remember that time
as in every time
as in as if blood
as in i've known you
since we was little niggas
& we ran through
your mama's sprinkler
each jump a little baptism & one day
your mama made you cover up
what was not yet there
& i wanted your top, your whole
your new bikinibodywaterchurchclothes
but i already knew [3]

[3] what did i know, what did i know of the body's austere & lonely offices?

O nigga O

the above is

a. the sound i made when he was most inside me
b. a picture of him when he was most inside me
c. a face
d. a black man on a train
e. the original title of *Othello*

ANSWER: your first sonogram, a picture of you inside of your mother, the only thing the doctor knew you were.

... *nigga*

somewhere a white boy is in his room, in the lunchroom, in the car with his father, alone, in the morning, in the dark, under his breath, as a battle cry, with the song, with his friend, in his lover's ear, when he's 8, when he's 40, when he's angry, as tradition, as the punch line, just to try it, nigga nigga nigga nigga nigga nigga nigga nigga nigga nigga nigga nigga nigga nigga [4]

[4] he means all of us

alternating ending for "nigga as pronoun"

i love niggas cause niggas are me

is maybe my favorite thing ever be nigga'd

a whole people gathered in one body

what's a word but a little body? look at it

nigga

looks like your cousin

nigga

has your love's eyes

nigga

pressed a cold towel against your charred neck

nigga nigga

we is [5]

[5] we don't die, we multiply. a single cell splitting blacker & blacker.

Kristen Lowman

Sadiki

Margaret and Kennar kicked back a lot with the other thirteen couples after their day's work was done: his, out on the massive Ghawar oil field; hers, folding laundry and wringing diapers and sometimes weeping in the linen closet, her head resting on the towels or staring at the jigsaw puzzle on the card table that was never finished, just considered, and smoking, she was always smoking. The sky smoked too, from the giant flares, the hell flames of burning crude, as if the earth breathed fire. After the *salat* played over an outdoor speaker for the workers who knelt in prayer toward Mecca (the direction debatable when the rolling *Nafud* shifted during the night, the sly desert) and after I fed my sister Lucille her bottle, and after me and my big brother Badge were told to get in that room and stay there and Badge yelled, Yeah! Affirmative! and pulled his cardboard duct-taped wall tight around his bed, Margaret and Kennar—and their friends too—dressed up and called it quits because somebody had to draw the line on the Saudi day, whose sun had no clock. Dresses and perfume, linen shirts and Vitalis replaced pedal-pushers and sweat-stained khakis and the couples gathered to ha-ha-ha and cha-cha-cha and drink *sadiki*, the moonshine, the red-eye, the screech owl—that me and Badge took to drinking from Dixie cups as we chased laughing crazy, the communal gazelle and sometimes we barked like a dog and drank more—hooch, the blue flame, the holy water. There were as many names for booze from Kennar's homemade still as there were for the *simooms*, the poison winds that drove Margaret to tear out of the house one night, screaming, running

barefoot into a *shamaal*, drawing its pink sheet of sharp sand across the sky. Kennar chased after her, calling, but who could hear in that howl? In the morning, Kennar, breathing coffee, told us she had been blinded and had tripped over a geode, gashed her leg good. Me and Badge left the one-room schoolhouse at lunch, telling the teacher we had something to do and wouldn't be back and she said she didn't care and took another sip from the thermos she carried around like a handbag. Me and Badge found that geode at the foot of a dune, bloody, like a fallen planet. There was nothing we could do except hit it and kick it a little, wonder if its crystals were purple or white and you'd have to drop the thing from the sky, goddamn break it open to see what was inside. From the blue above a helicopter arrived like a winged chariot bringing us a doctor, and he stitched Margaret together, wrapping her calf in white cloths, white like the *ihram,* the dead's dressings. Dr. Basrawi, who shook our hands and we didn't know why, kicked back with everyone that night, and Margaret's eyes shone and her face flushed. I, crouching in the hallway in the dark, my nightie pulled over my knees, peered between the door slats, drawn to *C'est Si Bon* and the emerald eye of the Grundig hi-fi. I saw the doctor gaze sleepily at Margaret as he lit her cigarette and I watched his fingers, sneaky like a spider, trail down her arm. Kennar took their picture. The flashbulb, a marbled glaucoma eye in its tin socket, popped and smoked, startling Margaret. Dr. Basrawi, Mahmoud, the grown-ups now called him, returned every week, flying in on the helicopter that delivered sacks of flour, cans of soup and sausage, and limp vegetables from Dammam, and in his pockets, hard candies for us kids. He checked on Margaret who wore red lipstick in the afternoon but Kennar no longer whistled when he came home.

One day the doctor, arriving from the sky, undressed her wound and unlaced her stitches, and that night, crouched in my usual spot in the dark, I watched Margaret dance with her doctor Mahmoud, joining the other thirteen couples. I watched Kennar pour *sadiki*, which means "my friend" in Arabic, and watched him sit clutching his friend and bring his friend to his lips and again to his lips and again, and I stood up, adjusted my nightie, opened the hallway door and made my way to him, whispering, "Dad, I can't sleep."

Anne Cecelia Holmes

Archival Footage of a Necessary Outburst

It's hard to know what lives
in my hands when I'm not paying
attention to who I claim to be.
I never said I wanted any of your
swagger because I don't. You have
the nerve to hold a morning glory
to my face and tell me to breathe in
as if my senses need permission.
Perhaps I am being unreasonably
defiant but that is my victory today.
Tell me about your own defiance
while I stand here bleeding in my pants.
That is another victory I can claim
and I will. I worry I am living
perpetually in corpse pose—
did I deep sleep inside
the moment or miss it hook
and line? How do you feel
unfetishized and embalmed
by your bloodline? It is a privilege
to have a name at all. I build
a temperate zone around you
just to watch how two belts
of latitude rip you apart.

Jonathan Moody

Breaking up with Pablo Neruda

I'm tired of answering the phone
at night only to have the wind

hang up. When I tell her
to stop calling, she seduces

pine tree branches into opening
windows & singing

his name. He pretends
he's sleeping just as he pretends

his love poems are honeysuckle
kisses meant for my lips alone.

Existentialism & the Absurd

The speaker is a high school student

I can't tell you what any of my teachers taught
me yesterday, but I remember last month's knife fight
on the stairs—Mike stabbed Big Bo in the neck
& chest, & the nurse had only one
Band-Aid, one roll of gauze—the insanity
of it all, how blood spilled out of Bo's body
more rapidly than pints of Red Bull, our janitor
mopping up the floor with shirts from the Lost
& Found, the homecoming queen's screams sounding
like they were funneled through a megaphone,
the way in which the EMTs split nose hairs
over whether Bo's tattoo ink suggested a tinge
of indigo or violet, cops flipping a coin
to see who'd break the news to Bo's mama,
Mr. Patterson's paranoia peeling paint off the walls:
his premonition about the school receiving new metal
detectors as opposed to new textbooks ringing
as true as feedback from Marshall stacks,
my realization that having security
cameras is so savage because, at times,
we even forget we're being watched by some sadistic
substitute above the clouds who has Scantrons
with our names on them, certain the way I'm checking
out of this world has been bubbled

in incorrectly & St. Peter's half-ass attempt to completely
erase the dark circle before circling in another
will cause my friends superfluous suffering,
convincing myself I need to learn
the art of hiding a razor blade under my tongue,
how, for some, Hate latches onto brains
& spinal cords like a viral infection, how, before
Bo blew his last breath, God didn't even extend
my Bro the courtesy of a mic check.

Alex Lemon

Becoming Animal: A History

Of the parts of animals some are simple: to wit I am sun damaged skin rotting on deepening layers of flesh and ligaments, organs and bones. *Cutis* is Latin for skin, which, for the most animal animal, the human, consists from outside to in, of the epidermis, the dermis and the hypodermis. The Greek prefix *Epi* means on or above, around—and is usually attached to a noun. Because of skin I am a water balloon, an oven mitt, the furred-hide rug of a near-dead animal, I am come closer, I am too hot, I am get the fuck away.

Such are those parts that, while entire in themselves, have within themselves other diverse parts

Like an oil black towel, the riot of flies whips above the river-mucked shoreline. It ruffles, rolls, thickens until holes—darker than midnight—carve into the air. Then, the holes fade and vanish and I look across and my girlfriend is looking back at us from the other side of the small river. She smiles big and waves. It's my turn. Come on, she says, laughingly. I've flown across the world to see her and now we're spending a week in Northern India—a handful of hours on a packed bus from where she works for an NGO in Kathmandu, Nepal. It's humid and blindingly bright—I try to take a deep breath but suddenly my ribs feel collapsed like great, cinching hands are trying to choke out my entire body.

Our hike has taken us over mile-long low stretches of sandbarred rivers and Indian woods, but the last hour we've been in dense forest and jungle. The guide thumbs open each handful of scat he finds and holds the shit close to his face, closing his eyes like a wine taster before telling us what animal left it behind. He points out monkeys, birds in the dense trees—explains what kind of throat can make the impossible cackling howls we keep hearing. We see scarred tree trunks and he presses his fingers into them like a surgeon caressing an abdomen for tumors, then he reminds us again about tigers. The jungle opened into a clearing that looked split in half—pulled directly apart, eggshell precise, and the earth between

it was ten feet below. The tan water barely moved. Down the shore, baton-legged birds walked the shallows, piercing their long beaks into the mud. Look down a bit further, the guide nods his head towards the Giacometti-bodied birds. See it? But there's nothing. More lethargic murk and branches and tumbled-in logs and stones. Or maybe not. To me, the world always looks like it's moving—expanding, shrinking—as if a slowly breathing lung works inside everything around me. Each face, each leaf. When I woke from the brain surgery I had because of a vascular malformation in my brain stem, I couldn't walk. Had no balance. The world blurred around me. I was in a wheelchair, used a cane and walker. I toppled from side to side; fell to the tub floor in the shower and cracked open my head. Two years later, it takes every ounce I have within me to walk a straight line. Constantly, my eyes bounce, everything bubbling up around me.

But then, standing at the river's edge, I thought I saw something shift, or maybe it's nothing, a piece of wood, a rock, swallowed over by the nearly invisible ebb and flow of the murk. Are there alligators in there? I had asked, staring harder at the water. No, no, he laughed. If you see anything, it is a crocodile.

It is my turn to go. My turn. Mine. The felled tree that I need to tightrope to cross the river is two feet wide, beetle-gnawed, maybe fifteen feet long and it is scabbed with peeling-off bark. The water below is listless, sour smelling chocolate milk. Flies rise up from the water. The breeze seems to turn hot and something in the dark trees howls crazily. I inch forward—one, two, three—but not even halfway, everything starts to spin. I stop. River worms. Tigers. My alligators, their crocodiles. I am wavering, side to side. I am about to topple in when two hands clamp my shoulders. Easy, mate, I hear from behind me. Liam has walked out onto the log. He's half of the other couple who are on the guided hike with us. His hands steady me—then help lower me to my haunches. Just scoot across on your bum, he says. I am numb, can barely hear his voice, so, when he repeats himself, louder this time, I hear him. I do exactly what he says. Everything I have has shrunk down to a tiny empty box and he sounds a thousand miles away. It is the only thing I have—his barely audible voice. I am empty. I drag myself to the other side, cutting up my thighs and calves.

When I stand on the other side, no one says anything and I don't speak. I look

into the shadowed trees, avoiding the eyes of everyone long after Liam and his new wife scamper easily across the log.

Thus in some the texture of the flesh is soft, in others firm; some have a long bill, others a short one; some have abundance of feathers, others have only a small quantity

On the downside of the topmost hill I cover my eyes to the rising sun and peer out over Simi Valley. Turning back, resting for a few minutes to stretch the too-tight muscles in my legs, I watch the morning fog hunch and undulate over my neighborhood in Thousand Oaks, California. No one is awake. I can feel the healing happening inside me—have started taking anti-depressants, let the afternoon sun warm my bones. I tear down the switchbacks, hopping over stones, sticks, fallen cactus. Halfway down, the trail widens and pools, flattening into an overgrown clearing. At first I don't see it and I do not have time to slow down, so I run through the bloody mess, pulling up just before the trail veers down further. My shoes are slicked with fur and blood and turning back, the mound of viscera and bones looks purple in the rising sun. There are catamount and coyotes up in these hills—each night the coyote sing me to sleep, but I can't tell what left this pile of rabbit parts. Floppy ears, legs, hollowed-out, fur-screed torsos—a few legless bodies that look sucked flat. I can't tell how many rabbits were killed—but the blood-sodden heap is hip tall. I scoop the gunk off of my shoes with a disc of prickly-pear cactus, listening to the roiling shadows.

For many animals have identical organs that differ in position; for instance, some have teats in the breast, others close to the thighs

The souvenir baseball bat cracks flat the snapping dog's head. No yelp, no last heave. It slumps at my feet; head lowered into the dirt like it is still alive, begging. I feel my son turn away behind me—I can't see him, haven't seen him, but I know it is him, my son. The other Doberman backs, growling, and prances a tight circle in front of me. It doesn't look away from my face. Can we go to school, now? my son asks. I glance behind me to see him. Where his face should be is a blankness, a fleshy canvas. Can we just go? We are still a block away from his school and the

neighbor's other dog is out of the yard and doesn't look like it cares that there's a pool of blood growing beneath its partner's broken skull. My son peeks out at the dog from my side. He has no face, but I know it his him. I know who he is. The sleek-ribbed Doberman dances harder around us, a knife-footed ballet.

Animals differ from one another in their modes of subsistence, in their actions, in their habits, and in their parts

My eyes do not work together. Individually, separately, they focus and spin. Diplopia: Double vision. Nystagmus: bouncing, shuddering of the eyes. There is no concert between them. The pupils dilate and shrink independently, too. With one, I can almost see in the blackest night. With just the other open, I can never adjust to the darkness of a room. I have to close one eye to focus on a placard, to read the page of a book. I see two of you and you are vibrating. Always.

Many of these creatures are furnished with feet, as the otter, the beaver, and the crocodile; some are furnished with wings, as the diver and the grebe; some are destitute of feet, as the water-snake

The neurologist thinks I have multiple sclerosis. He says "might," that I "might have MS," but I can see it in the way his eyes seem to stiffen and stare back at me each time I answer one of his questions. We also need to rule out regrowth, he says. What? I gawp. If it wasn't totally resected, he says, it is possible. I don't remember anyone ever telling me this—and the words echo and carve inside me and my heart falls out of my body. Have I ever thought it might all happen again? Almost ten years have passed since a neurosurgeon cut into my brainstem to repair a vascular malformation. I have good days and bad days—it's always hard to see, and each day I'm swimming out of the deep murk of sadness I have within me. But lately—in our last months in Minneapolis, almost all of the time my fiancée and I have lived Southern California—after the first months where I thought for sure I was getting better—the numbness I feel in my face and down my limbs seems worse. The muscles and bones up and down my back and into my butt and legs

feel struck by lightning, smoldering. My hamstrings lock-up when I walk. Sit in a chair and my thighs might instantly go fist-tight. They are impossible to loosen no matter how or for how long I stretch. I am taking so many pills for so many different things I can't keep anything straight. In our backyard, we have tomato plants and slugs and an enormous, satellite-looking aloe plant. Mornings, when it's too painful to sit or walk in the desert hills around our neighborhood, I crawl into the thick grass. Until the sun droops and sets fire to the hills on the way to Camarillo and Ventura, I watch the golden rat that lives in the aloe. The rat flutters, scurries around the aloe's spiny alcoves. The neurologist wants tests—an MRI, some nerve tests—and he scribbles a prescription for another muscle relaxer before walking out of the room. Each day I hate California more.

The chief parts into which the body as a whole is subdivided, are the head, the neck, the trunk (extending from the neck to the privy parts, which is called the thorax), two arms and two legs

When the first electrical throb races down the electrodes the neurologist stickered me with, I forget all about the MRI I am supposed to get this afternoon—I forget everything. My shoulders spasm up, and he tells me to relax, that each muscle needs a number of pulses, that it'll be over soon. Beside me, a machine graphs nerve conductivity. I think Richter Scale—that my body is crumbling, rubble and rubbish, falling to the bottom of the ocean. For the next forty minutes, the neurologist makes a map of the broken land of my body, shuffling electrodes—one electric tentacle on the nerve, others sprawl vein-like over the muscle. A to B. C to D. E to F. The machine scribbles. My body jerks.

Every animal is supplied with moisture, and, if the animal be deprived of the same by natural causes or artificial means, death ensues: further, every animal has another part in which the moisture is contained

That night I am rabid, thinking about the neurologist's words, that the vascular malformation might have regrown. I'd waited for the films to be processed after the procedure so I can take them with me to my neurology appointment tomorrow.

But having them so close to me—knowing that an answer is somewhere inside them—makes my insides feel riddled with fleabites. I can't sit still and at dinner tap my bowl with a fork again and again until my fiancée, as gently as possible, tells me to knock it off. After we finish the dishes there's a message on my phone from a man at the imaging clinic where I got the MRI today. He says to call him right back. I try to smile when I tell my fiancée who it was, what he said, but she can tell by the blank look on my face that I feel hollow. She holds me close while I weep. It's all happening again, I tell her between sobs and everything feels like it's whirling into abyss. My breath catches in my throat. With shaky fingers I dial the phone. He isn't available. The MRI must have shown something cataclysmic, something that could not wait, that was life or death—that my brain was bleeding again. My muscles cramp. I am going to throw up. I am about to be dead, I think, any second now, when the phone rings.

And of land animals many, as has been said, derive their subsistence from the water; but of creatures that live in and inhale water not a single one derives its subsistence from dry land

Ten minutes after speaking to the man from the clinic, he's knocking on the front door. He delivers the two MRI films that somehow were not included with the folder of images that I was given after my MRI. He apologizes profusely, says have a good night, but instead of turning into something to laugh at, a crazy mix-up that fucked with my mind for a little bit—made me think that I was filled with death when it just was a dropped picture—the fear squeezes all the wind from me. Nearly gasping, I hold each MRI film up to the dining room light, staring intently into the wobbly, colored plastic as if the harder I try, the more likely I am to understand what I am looking at, to magically see in it a better version of myself.

Some animals at first live in water, and by and by change their shape and live out of water, as is the case with river worms, for out of these the gadfly develops

My daughter does not have a face when she looks up at me. It's OK, I tell her, We are almost there. I squeeze her hand to reassure her, and the tiny bones feel shattered, pulverized. Her faceless face nods, then looks away. Ahead of us in the pasture, the gleaming snowdrifts seem to go on forever. The day is dreary, gray-shawled. Cotton balls of snow sweep down from the sky. We should have frozen to death long ago—my little girl's sleeveless dress is tattered. The t-shirt hanging on me has long tears across its midsection. But I am warm, almost too hot. I have no idea where we are. My daughter is gripping in her other hand the even smaller hand of a doll, but its arm is floppy and it hangs to the ground, dragging through endless iced-over mud puddles. I have no idea where we are going. We walk on without talking. Her cloth doll bloats with moisture, streaks with mud. I try to breathe slow and steady, step after step, but each time my foot lands I'm afraid of collapsing. My daughter starts to hum. The snow is so incredibly bright. Like the other dream I keep having—the one with the faceless son—my other reoccurring dream about parenthood, another about a child I do not have—the pain and panic blossoming up in me is a near-crippling burn.

In the water are many creatures that live in close adhesion to an external object, as is the case with several kinds of oyster

Cloaked in the setting sun, I watch Los Angeles dissolve into darkness. Union Station and LA's built-up concrete sprawl flattens into the blackening desert and then it is night and the overnight train to New Mexico quiets. Sporadic lights flare and wheel in the full dark outside—but mostly there's nothing, suggestions of topography—and so I stare at my ghostly reflection.

I slip out of my seat and side-to-side-walk through train cars to the end of the train and then retrace my steps and stop in the first observation car I come to. It's past midnight and the lights are turned low and everyone looks sketchy in the murkiness. I am sure I do, too. I won't sleep all night—haven't in weeks and I gimp and shuffle like there's a teeming load of shit in my shorts. In just months of therapist and doctors' appointments this body felt as home-like as it had in years but now there are so many visits and new meds piling up—and more each

week—that I feel like I am floating above the wreckage of myself. Lying back on the couch on the other side of the long thin room, I stare up through the glass ceiling at the sky. A few hours after sunup, I'll step off the train into a landscape wholly different than the bustle-crowded glass and concrete I left. I'll spend the next week wandering through red-rocked canyons and cliffs and piñon-furred hills. I will be able to breathe, deeply. Every few months I've been making this trip. I have to. I just left a rabid America, ridiculously sprinting after its own loveliness. My brokenness, my maladies—make me feel radioactive. When I am looked at, when eyes pass through me as if my hurt isn't there, hot blood throbs in my face. The train shuttles and shakes. Above, the darkness spins and spins.

And, by the way, the sponge appears to be endowed with a certain sensibility: as a proof of which it is alleged that the difficulty in detaching it from its moorings is increased if the movement to detach it be not covertly applied

Just like the neurologist in Thousand Oaks, the one I visit after we move to Texas rules out multiple sclerosis and a handful of other neurological diseases, but she can't pinpoint the reasons for my constant pain and nerve problems. Like the others before them, my new doctors says fibromyalgia or chronic fatigue syndrome, maybe Lyme disease. But these diagnoses have the possibility of so many physical and psychological symptoms, seem so amorphous and undefined, that almost anyone could be diagnosed under their catchall umbrellas. I don't believe anyone. I am prescribed more pharmaceuticals: for my fibromyalgia, for my bouncing eyes, my failing body—anti-depressants, an anti-convulsant, muscle relaxers, pain killers, sedatives. On the new MRI images I am shown, told the same thing: there's no way to tell if the abnormal spot is the regrowth of the vascular malformation or it could just be scar tissue. That's probably what it is, I am told, but without actually going in, without performing the surgery again, there is no definitive way to tell.

Other creatures adhere at one time to an object and detach themselves from it at other times, as is the case with a species of the so-called sea-nettle; for some of these creatures seek their food in the night-time loose and unattached

I am my non-daughter's dream doll, overflowing with pills, stuffing more pebbles and bits in my mouth. I am her dream doll bloated with sickness. Inside the swelling dream doll, I am sickness in the greatest dark.

Of land animals some are furnished with wings, such as birds and bees, and these are so furnished in different ways one from another; others are furnished with feet

My wife wakes because of the incredibly loud voices she hears in her sleep. In the living room, she sees the TV's blaring screen, a sockless foot hanging over the back of the sofa. She tries to wake me but I am delirious, totally out of it. A baby, or a drunk, a drunk baby. There's an open and empty jar of Nutella in my lap. I loll on the couch. A ripped slice of bread slathered with spread falls to the carpet. She shakes me awake, tells me I have to come to bed. I stand and stagger, ask if she liked the movie. I tell her I'll be in bed in a second, that I have to go to the bathroom first. A few minutes later, she finds me sitting on the toilet, trying to put her contact lenses into my eyes. In the morning, my wife asks me what I remember about the night. Nothing, I say. She tells me I have to stop taking sleeping pills, she is afraid of what I might do.

Of the animals that are furnished with feet some walk, some creep, and some wriggle

I never thought I would be a parent. Could. Would. Cannot. Often I've been haunted by dreams of parenting, but I thought it was a part of life not meant for me, that whatever I am, whatever is inside of me, would stop here. Most of the time this seemed like a good thing. I didn't think I would live through my brain surgery, and a large part of me didn't want to. After I woke up alive, I could hardly take care of myself, so it was inconceivable, seemed impossible that I would ever be able to take care of someone else, too. Next, doctors thought I might have a genetic disorder—one that could potentially grow tumors in my offspring. Then I had MS, fibromyalgia, and maybe my vascular malformation may or may not have returned. Sexual violence and medical hardship and chronic bodily pain and

depression, I could lie and laugh and say that I wish these things on my enemies, but I won't. Thinking that these horrors could happen to my own child cripples me. Fear is thick in the air I breathe. I am a hothouse of dread. And so, a decade and a year into the 21st century I become a father.

Some are nocturnal, as the owl and the bat; others live in the daylight

After slowly cracking the door to the baby's room I lean into the green-glowing dark and stop, completely still. Felix is ten months old, and it's two in the morning. In the crib, his swaddled-black shape doesn't move. Minutes before, I'd startled out of sleep. Wide awake, I lay beside my wife and over the monitor listened to Felix's horse-clopping snores. The more I tried to fall back to sleep, the more my head felt like it was on fire, and when the snores stopped and the monitor silenced, a bright hot wire shot up my chest. And so, like almost every night these days, I slunk out of the bed's warmth, left the bedroom and tiptoed to the door of Felix's room. The shell of the plastic turtle on the floor has dozens of stars and planets on it and each lights up, projects itself on the walls and ceiling. I crouch through the hazy green galaxy and kneel beside the crib, waiting for my eyes to adjust to the dimness. I can't see anything in the crib—can hardly make out the bundled sack that is Felix in the shadowed corner of the room. And so, like almost every night these days, I stand and lean over the railing, levering my face down slowly until out of the dark his little scrunched face sharpens. I inch nearer, nearer, close enough to kiss him, closer and closer until I can feel his warm breath on my face, as close as I need to get to assure myself that everything here is indeed real.

Some are gregarious, some are solitary, whether they be furnished with feet or wings or be fitted for a life in the water; and some partake of both characters, the solitary and the gregarious

I was born with 270 bones, and now have 206. Busted and bruised and sheared. Nearly 700 skeletal muscles, and that doesn't include the cardiac, and my organs' smooth ones. Around nine pounds of skin, and eleven miles of blood vessels. I

hold within me hundreds of gallons of tears. What lurks within me, what kinds of dishonesties swirl? I have so little courage. I am bluster and blubber, confused and unsure. I am sick. I am tired and weak. I am scared. That what I am is not, will never be enough. At the very top of my closet there is a black tennis shoebox filled with hundreds of pills. All of the prescriptions I've stashed from early RX refills, from having multiple doctors prescribe me the same painkillers, the same pills to help me relax, the ones I ordered off of the internet. The box is full. Enough in it to do whatever I might want.

Man, by the way, presents a mixture of the two characters, the gregarious and the solitary

Life splintered like a lightning struck tree that day in India. After surgery my body felt like it had been taken from me. It had. I was suddenly alive in skin that wasn't mine, that couldn't be mine—moving around the world in a husk that didn't do what I wanted it to. I had thought that if I worked hard enough, I might be able to find the body I had lived in before my surgery. But, nearly nose-diving off of that log, the truth began clarifying, diamond-sharp, inside me. It began growing inside me then. No matter what I do, my body will never feel, totally, completely, like my own.

Such social creatures are man, the bee, the wasp, the ant, and the crane

The acupuncturist fingertips each needle into me—tap, tap, tap. He connects each pair of three-inch needles by small clip and wire to a power source. Each time he turns one on, it buzzes, sends continuous pulses down each pair of needles. He slowly modulates the power running to the needles, asks if I can feel it, turns it up, asks if it is too much, turns it down, before moving on to the next pair of needles. When he delicately closes the door behind him, up and down my body, like metronomes, electrified needles are bobbing in my skin and I feel like I am watching the tocking needled-flesh of a stranger.

And again, both of gregarious and of solitary animals, some are attached to a fixed home and others are erratic or nomad

A cheap plastic Olympic medal hangs from a red, white and blue ribbon that's wrapped around the curtain rod on the other side of the room and if I lock my eyes on its glint—stare at it hard like someone trying to shatter glass with their mind—I can stay upright, balancing on just my right leg, for one one thousand, two one thousand, three one thousand seconds. Then boom, the room tilts, bookshelves spin, the floor rushes up and I have to plant both my feet on the floor. Sweat glues my t-shirt to my lower back, a cloud-shaped wetness on my chest. It takes everything I have to balance—my muscles are quivering. Over my resting breaths, I hear Felix maniacally pedaling his tiny bike through the kitchen. He is already three and keeps the tiny bike he had instantly outgrown inside so he can tear around the rooms when it gets oven hot outside. Felix whips around the corner of the kitchen in a sliding skid—he's buck naked and grinning, red-cheeked—and when the bike is turned into the living room, he starts pistoning his bare legs, steering *The Rocket* right at me. I stiff-arm the handlebars before he slams into me, and he jars to a stop. I swing his sweaty body off the seat into the air and he laughs, tells me to stop. As soon as I perch him back on the bike he's off and my gentle swat at his butt hardly touches him and he's gone, ripping over the carpet and out of the room. I have to settle myself—stare at a snail that's made a home on the picture window and deep breathe. I try with the other leg and don't feel the earth swoop out from under me for six seconds. Three more times and each lasts eight. For over twelve years I have been doing this—trying to get better, practicing with wobble boards and Therabands and plyometric balls. I go back to the right leg—two seconds. Again, two seconds. Again, two seconds, and when I have to plant my other foot so I don't fall I stagger into the wall. From somewhere in the house my wife hollers, asks what that noise was, if I am OK. Totally cool, I shout, but it's not. My life is incredibly full, teeming with everything anyone could want, but in moments like this, everything drops out of me and none of it matters, nothing at all does, hearing Felix rumbling around the house, my wife saying he should think about slowing down, I am utterly, hopelessly alone.

And by "insects" I mean such creatures as have nicks or notches on their bodies, either on their bellies or on both backs and bellies

Slowly, as if they're the tiniest, impossible bones of people I love, I slip the molted exoskeletons of the first two dog day cicadas out of my pocket. The brittle skin shells drop to the bottom of the old pickled okra jar with a dulled ping. From my fingers, the third jar fly falls on top with a split second crunching sizzle. Cicadas are cryptic. At night, male cicadas use the tymbals they have on each side of their abdomen to sing to and attract females. Thin-ribbed membranes, tymbals have the layered-line look of radiators, or the baleen-mouth of humpback whales, and are flexed by the insect. A click sounds every time the tymbal buckles inward. Another is made when the membrane relaxes. The clicks are amplified by echo chambers in the dog-day cicada's trachea. When hundreds of the jar flies are contracting themselves maniacally, you hear a head-cradling, livewire hum. I shake the hardened skins out into my palm like dice. I am wonderstruck, the way they feel alive within me.

Further, in respect to locality of dwelling place, some creatures dwell underground, as the lizard and the snake; others live on the surface of the ground, as the horse and the dog

We are Marine Iguanas today, Dada, my boy says from beneath the covers. We must dive deep to get our food. I peek my head under the comforter, ask him what we are having. When he wakes in the morning, he yells, Mama! Dada! Mama! Dada! until one of us comes to his room—lying flat on my back in the living room at 5 a.m. this morning, I heard him, and hurried into his room so he'd stop yelling before waking up my wife. The air is hot under the blanket and he whispers that we eat gold and dinosaur bones.

Moreover, some creatures are tame and some are wild: some are at all times tame, as man and the mule; others are at all times savage, as the leopard and the wolf; and some creatures can be rapidly tamed, as the elephant

The Norwegian rats use the pecan tree to get into the house—clambering out onto the limbs that hang over our roof, then dropping to the shingles, and scurrying about until they find a way in. I can hear them skitter in the attic and the walls. The reinforced black plastic traps that are set in the garage look like a jagged-tooth open jaw and are called T-Rex traps. They snap down with such force that when one whip-clamps on a rat's neck in the middle of the night I am shocked awake, check the doors and windows because, until I hear another trap go off in the garage, I am sure I heard someone trying to break in.

For, whenever a race of animals is found domesticated, the same is always to be found in a wild condition; as we find to be the case with horses, kine, swine, (men), sheep, goats, and dogs

Lying in bed with my eyes closed, I feel like I'm falling off the world, like a giant hand has lifted one side of the bed into the air and I'm sliding down it. If anything, the vertigo, the bed spins that started after my brain started bleeding, have gotten worse. In the dark, my sense of self is skewed. A hand feels sprouted directly from my shoulder. Or folded behind and beneath me. Instead of sandwiched between my back and the mattress, it feels hundreds of feet below me, a doll at the bottom of a well. My feet are miles away, as if my legs are cables stretching to the drought-cracked fields outside of Fort Worth. I have to open my eyes in the dimness and see my stretched out limbs to really know anything—hands: one right there on my chest, the other atop my wife's hip—slowly opening and closing, like an octopus undulating away.

One sense, and one alone, is common to all animals-the sense of touch

I am a Road Runner, Felix shouts, sprinting across the stretch of grass where we play soccer with the neighbor boys and their father. One of his shin guards has flopped loose, and he runs gangly, trying to keep the ball in front of him as he zigzags back and forth toward the open goal. It's The Bigs vs. The Littles (dads vs. kids, who are six, four and three) and The Bigs are doing their best not to win by

too much. But I sprint to get between Felix and the goal, yelling Here comes the freight train as I come up behind him. As I pass him, we collide and his tiny body sprawls forward—somehow, at the last second, toeing the ball one last time before he goes down, crying and writhing in the dirt. Why did you knock me down, he wails at me, his red face streaked, shiny with tears. You did it on purpose, I know it—and I am not sure if he veered into my elbow or side as I ran by him or what happened because another part of me thinks he's right. I hug him, feel the growing knot on the back of his head as, still crying, he laughs, says Ha ha at me and points at the soccer ball in the back of the goal.

A part common to the upper and lower eyelid is a pair of nicks or corners, one in the direction of the nose, and the other in the direction of the temples. When these are long they are a sign of bad disposition; if the side toward the nostril be fleshy and comb-like, they are a sign of dishonesty

In the bathroom with the lights off, I stand, listening to the house sleep around me. My wife curled around a body pillow in our bed. The baby monitor rattles with the snores of the boy in his room. My eyes begin adjusting to the dark—the contours of a cup on the sink edge, a toothbrush or comb lying across the top. An Ugly Doll timbered on top of the toilet. I close my left eye and the room goes black, everything goes black. When I blink closed the right the entire room glimmers—the blue tiles, a postcard tucked into a cabinet door—everything—is brighter than when I have both eyes open. Below the faucet's silver glow, a spider hovers in the ghosting light. In the mirror in front of me I stare at where I know my face will appear when I flash on the lights and then I flip the switch. One of my pupils is huge, celestial. The other is a pinprick. I blink and blink and brace my arms on the sink. There is no spider. Maybe there never was. Who knows what I really see. The room wobbles around me and I knock the cup to the floor.

Some can swim, as, for instance, fishes, molluscs, and crustaceans, such as the crawfish. But some of these last move by walking, as the crab, for it is the nature of the creature, though it lives in water, to move by walking

Swimming laps in the university's outdoor pool, I feel the left side of my body pull smoothly through the eye-stinging water. But my right side feels a half-second behind. I cannot kick, to crawl with the same rapidity. Like it's not fully awake, fatigued for some reason, weaker than the smooth-working muscles on my left side. I veer to the right and mid-pool bump into the wall. Stop. Walk to the end. Start over. Halfway down the pool I slam into the side again. To make sure my anger doesn't ruin my day with Felix at the pool, I stop swimming, walk into the shallow end and use the wall to stretch the muscles in my arms and shoulders and back. The pool is almost empty. Felix is taking a break from our races, our dives to the bottom to be the first to pick up rings, sitting at an umbrella-covered table, chewing a nubby carrot, goggles pulled up onto his crown. The red indentions left by them going purple as he cools in the air. They look like cord-thick veins. He waves, runs over and gives me a handful of almonds. I give him a forehead kiss when he bends down. Dada, look at all the bugs, Felix says. He points around me. What are they doing, Dada? I'm chest-deep in the middle of a swath of water that is pocked with tens of dozens of insects. It's like a plague suddenly dropped out of the sky, or every bug in the nearest tree crept over to die right here. I cup my hands beneath a deadwood cricket and swoop it up in a gush that splashes the concrete. Going swimming, I guess, I say. What do you think? He shrugs, folds and crunches a leaf of seaweed into his mouth. I bowl my hands beneath another black speck, but shout and throw my hands above my head when suddenly it feels like my finger is sliced off. Around me, half of the bugs are wasps. My middle finger is bright pink. The growing orbit of the sting swells. Yowzer, I smile at Felix, show him my finger. I've been got! I shout goofily and he grins. I pop out of the water and sit on the pool deck and Felix climbs on my back.

Such are the properties of the windpipe, and it takes in and throws out air only, and takes in nothing else either dry or liquid, or else it causes you pain until you shall have coughed up whatever may have gone down

I lay back in our backyard hammock, shadow-splotched by the live oak above us. Curled beside me, my boy sleeps. Inside, my wife is reading in the air conditioning—she is pregnant with our second child, a girl. I fall into a fitful,

dream-thick nap. In the only part that remains with me after I wake, I am kneeling in front of Felix, trying to explain to him that that there is a little girl growing in his mother, that in a few months he will be a brother. I try to get him to laugh by telling him that the house will smell of dirty diapers but he bristles, seems not to care and asks if he can keep hitting wiffle balls. The first ball I lob at him he smashes right back at me, searing into my neck and spilling me onto my back—where a split grows down my neck, through my belly and chest and I splay open and out of me streams thousands, an endless stream of Xerces blue butterflies.

Those who imagine it to be empty are altogether mistaken; and they are led into their error by their observation of lungs removed from animals under dissection, out of which organs the blood had all escaped immediately after death

Walking beside Felix as he rides his bike, I talk about Zedonks. Almost every morning over breakfast, my wife and I play a game with him about favorites—What's your favorite nocturnal creature, one of us might ask, or What's your favorite canine?—and the three of us will answer. Today, I started talking about hybrids, about ligers and zebroids and wholphin and his face opened big-eyed and grinning and as he pedaled the two blocks toward his pre-school he asked again and again For real? For real? Are you teasing, Dada? Watching his happiness surged something huge and hot through me, some incapacitating kind of love that kept me from stopping him from riding into the strictly forbidden, always busy, parking lot instead of up on the sidewalk with me. He churns ahead, behind a row of parked cars and the day freezes around me when I see one of the parked cars, an enormous pickup, start to back up, reversing right toward Felix. I cannot move. There is a cold nothingness in me, as if everything I am has suddenly died and I cannot shout stop or hold up wait or watch out.

The heart is not large, and in its general shape it is not elongated; in fact, it is somewhat round in form: only, be it remembered, it is sharp-pointed at the bottom

Out into this morning's Texas dark and sweat beads and then spits from me

Alex Lemon

because it's already 85 degrees and cotton candy humid. Up Stadium Drive and for two miles, I jog in the bike lane of Trail Lake Road. My headlamp lusters specks in the morning dark. Like *National Geographic* footage of a submersible searching the lightless bottom of the sea, they float the humid air; zoom past like microscopic, glowing krill. The sound of my shoes on the dirt path is a ratchet and shake. I push harder, heaving. When I run there are flames in my bloodstream. By the time I get to the lower park by Westcliff Elementary the sky is pinking. Down the path, and into the woods, I sprint, chasing my old self. The one just ahead, always ahead. The one I will never again be. I know this, but my legs will not stop.

NOTES

1. Italicized sections are excerpts from Aristotle's *History of Animals*.
2. This essay is influenced by found poetry and the collage tradition in prose, which takes material from other sources and recontextualizes it, sometimes in its original form.

Lincoln Michel

Good Boy

My father beat me with a lot of different things, but the thing I remember best was the hairdryer.

My father loved that hairdryer. He used it every day. He had beautiful, flowing hair, much longer than my mother's.

If I was a good boy, my father let me dry his long wet locks with his hairdryer. I would have to stand on the toilet to reach.

My father didn't like to beat me. "I wish I didn't have to do this," he always said. "I wish to God you didn't force my hand."

His face would get red and sweaty when he was beating me, and his golden hair would stick to different parts of his face. You should have seen it!

My father did the beatings, and my mother did the bandaging. She liked to kiss the parts my father had beaten before putting on the bandages.

"You're a good boy," she would say to the bruises.

Her own hair was short and curly. She rubbed a lot of creams and chemicals into it. I didn't like the way it smelled.

There weren't a lot of other boys for me to play with where we lived. I had to make my own fun alone in the woods.

We did have an old dog named Waves, but he could barely move anymore. My father had gotten Waves back when he lived by the ocean. Waves was older than even me, and his fur would fall out in golden clumps when my father petted him.

"You're a good boy," my father would whisper to him, beginning to cry.

One time my father was beating me, and the hairdryer broke. Pieces of plastic went flying everywhere,

and I got to see the weird metal guts inside. My father stopped beating me and fell to the floor. I wanted to run to my room, but I just stood there. My father was yelling and trying to scoop up all the pieces before they rolled away under the furniture.

All of this happened a long time ago.

The thing I'll always remember most about my father, other than the beatings, was that hair. It draped down past his shoulders and was bleached the color of fresh wheat by the sun. When I was little, I used to watch him brush it slowly each morning after drying it.

Later on, I watched his hair disappear chunk by chunk. My father wasn't very old, but he sure looked like he was. He could barely lift his thinned arms from the hospital sheets.

My mother made us visit twice a week. The air in that hospital room tasted bad. Mostly I stood around not knowing what to do.

The last time, when all of my father's hair was gone, I didn't believe he was still my father. Not anymore.

"Son," he whispered. He coughed up a bit of blood. The yellow hospital light shined off his pale head. My mother was crying.

"Look at me for a minute," my father said weakly.

I was looking down at the floor though. The machines around my father hummed and buzzed. I got down on my knees.

"Get up!" my mother shrieked. "What are you doing?"

I'd seen something down there, underneath one of the machines that was hooked up to what was left of my father.

"I just need to say one thing," my father said. "Just one thing. Please."

I couldn't hear him that well. The machines were beeping louder and louder. I ran my hand beneath the biggest one. I was right! A clump of hair the janitors had missed, tucked behind one of the wheels.

My father was still trying to say something above me. Something like, "Will you promise me you'll always be a good boy?"

I stood up, but my father wasn't talking anymore. His body was still and hairless in the sheets.

Doctors and nurses ran inside as my mother turned me to face the door.

I slid the clump of hair into my pocket before anyone could see.

Translator's Note: How Are You?

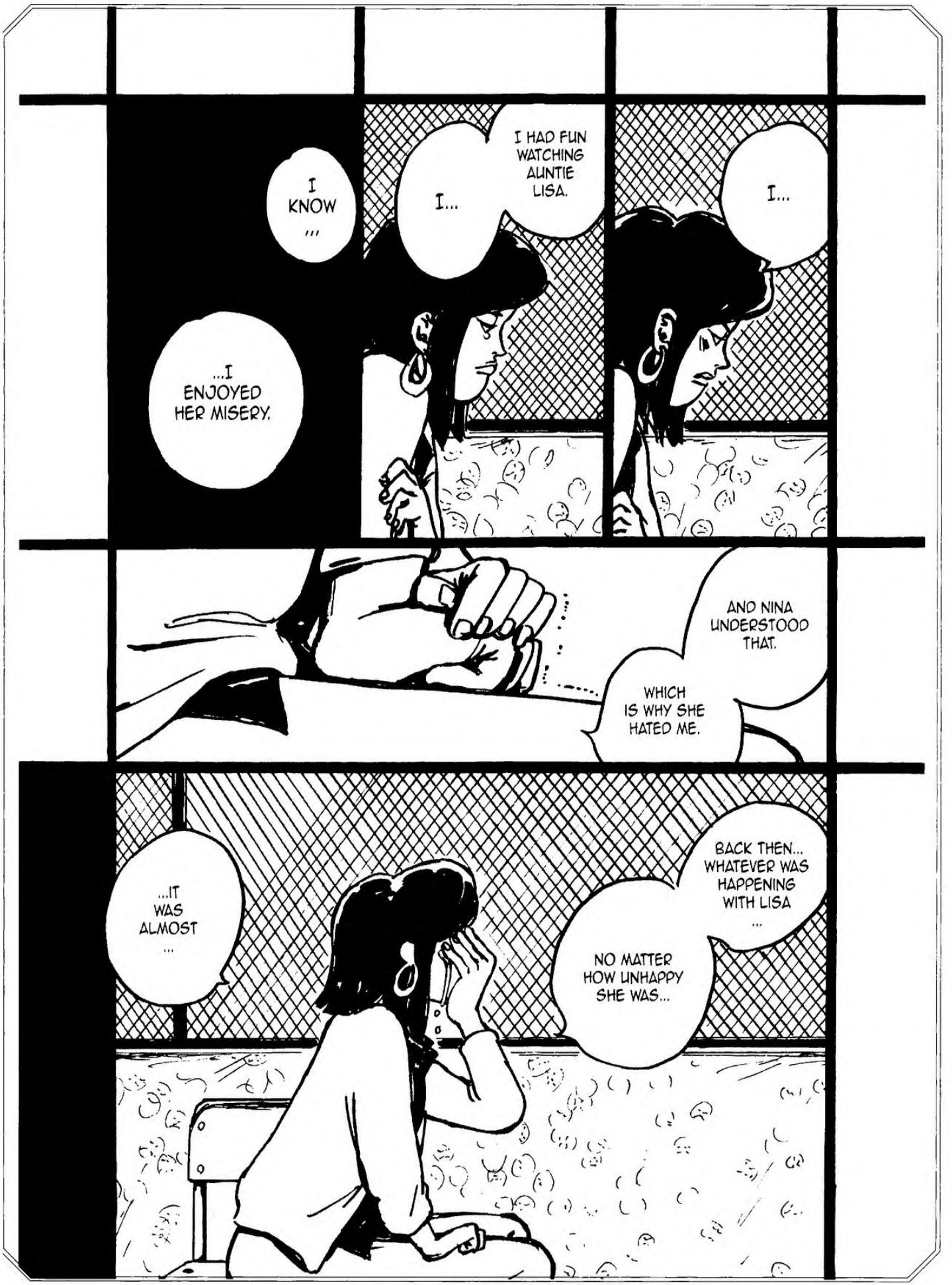
Jocelyne Allen

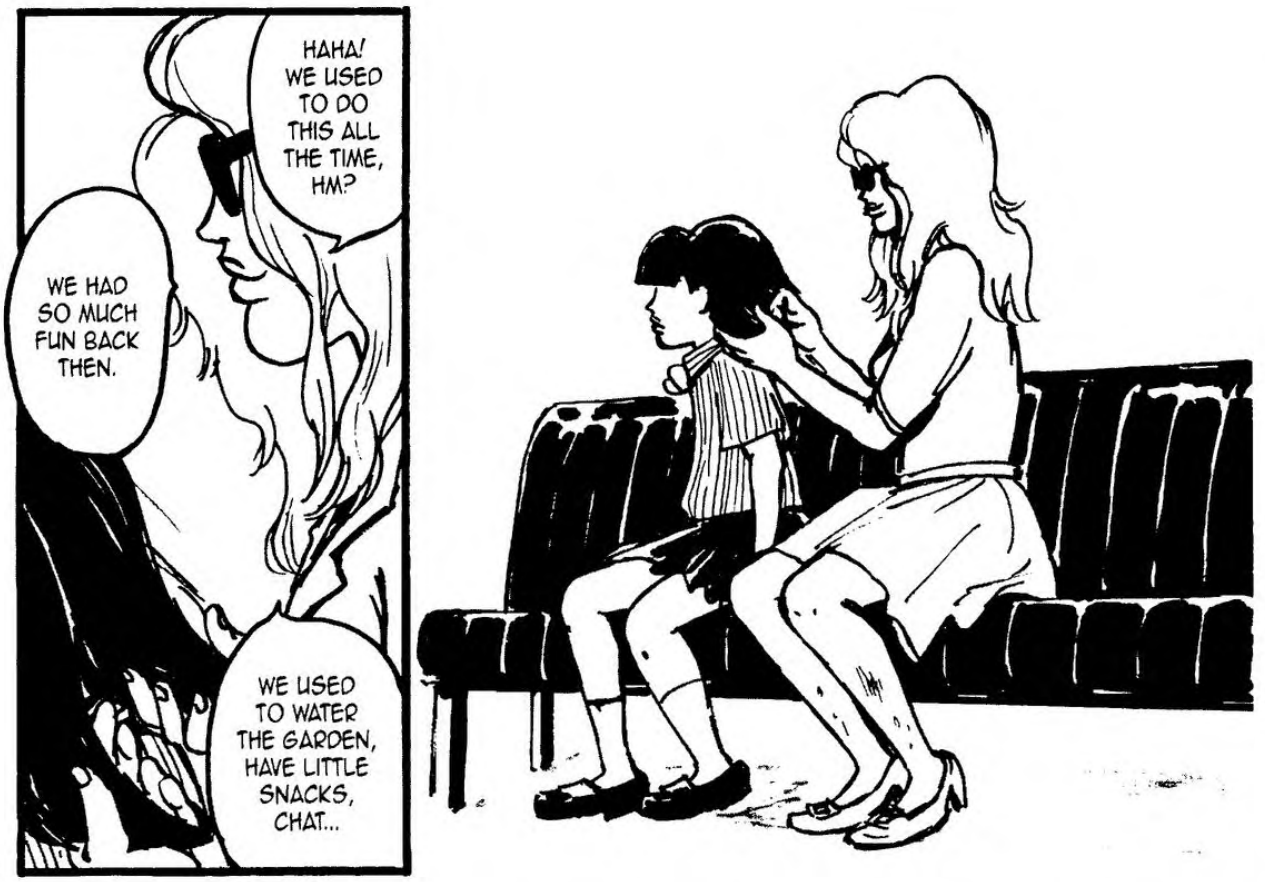
First of all, for those of you who are unfamiliar with reading Japanese comics, these pages are meant to be read right to left, rather than the usual left to right of English. Start at the top right of each page and move right to left downward, and the story should come together for you.

Now that you're ready to read the story the right way, a bit of background. These pages are excerpts chosen by the author from the book-length *How Are You?*, and they offer a tantalizing glimpse of the strange and intense relationship between Lisa and Tsumi. Lisa Masaoka is a stunningly beautiful foreigner married to a Japanese man, raising their rebellious teenage daughter, Nina. And her neighbor, 13-year-old Tsumi, completely adores her. As she plays with her Barbie, the doll she uses as a stand-in for Lisa, in the back of her schoolgirl mind is the vague idea that when she grows up, her hair will be as flowing and blonde as Lisa's.

After an idyllic sunny Sunday together, Lisa's husband disappears without a word, and Tsumi tries, in her child's way, to hold Lisa up as she crumples under the weight of this loss. Things come to a head in Okinawa, far from their Tokyo neighbourhood, after a well-meaning Tsumi sends a postcard from her school trip in the name of the missing Mr. Masaoka, and Lisa races down to the southern island to find him. Tsumi tries to persuade Lisa to give up the search, not understanding why she can't simply let go of her missing husband. Only years later, after Lisa is gone, does Tsumi start to understand what motivated her back then.


IT WAS ALMOST EVEN WONDERFUL TO ME.


I KNOW ...
...I ENJOYED HER MISERY.
I...
I HAD FUN WATCHING AUNTIE LISA.
I...
AND NINA UNDERSTOOD THAT.
WHICH IS WHY SHE HATED ME.
...IT WAS ALMOST ...
NO MATTER HOW UNHAPPY SHE WAS...
BACK THEN... WHATEVER WAS HAPPENING WITH LISA ...


HAHA! WE USED TO DO THIS ALL THE TIME, HM?
WE HAD SO MUCH FUN BACK THEN.
WE USED TO WATER THE GARDEN, HAVE LITTLE SNACKS, CHAT...


...ARE YOU DOING OKAY THESE DAYS?


...MAKE DINNER... YOU'D CHECK THE MAIL FOR ME, I'D BRAID YOUR HAIR.


AND THEN SUDDENLY YOU WERE GONE, TSUMI.
I KEPT WONDERING HOW YOU WERE.

WHY DO YOU KEEP CHASING AFTER HIM?

DOES IT HAVE TO BE HIM?

IS... IS HE THAT IMPORTANT TO YOU?

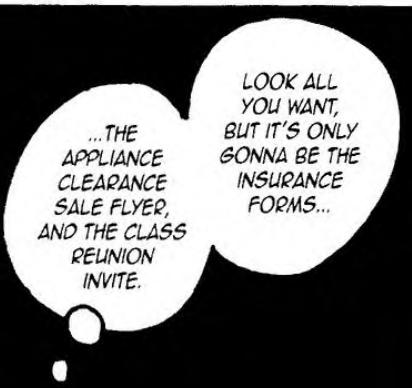
DO YOU LOVE MR. MASAOKA THAT MUCH?

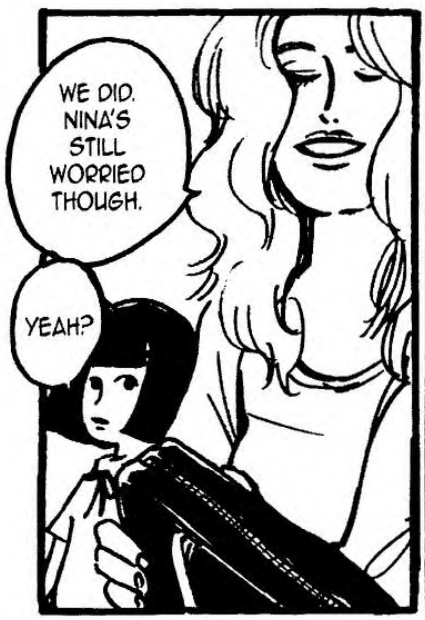

EVERYONE'S REALLY WORRIED, YOU KNOW!
COME ON! JUST COME HOME ALREADY!
RIGHT.
I GUESS SO...
NO! YOU CAN'T! LET'S JUST GO HOME!
UNTIL I'M SURE.
I'M... I WANT TO KEEP LOOKING FOR HIM A LITTLE BIT LONGER.
BUT.
TSUMI, HONEY. PLEASE.
OKAY?

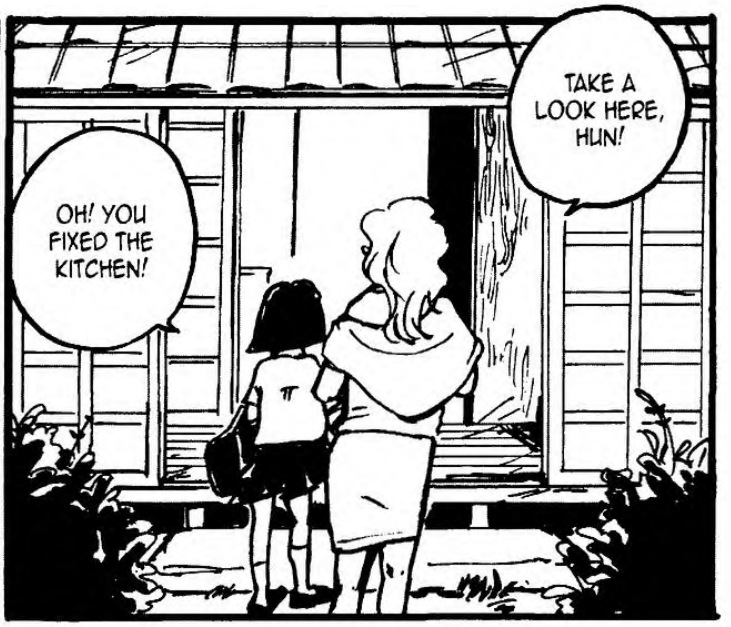
But Lisa kept waiting for a letter from her husband.

And the waiting made it so she couldn't open the letter box.

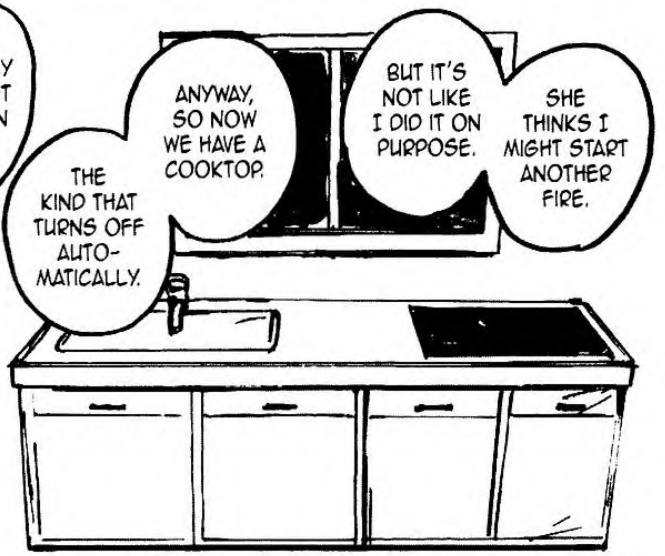
So I checked the mail for her, and in exchange, she did my hair for me.

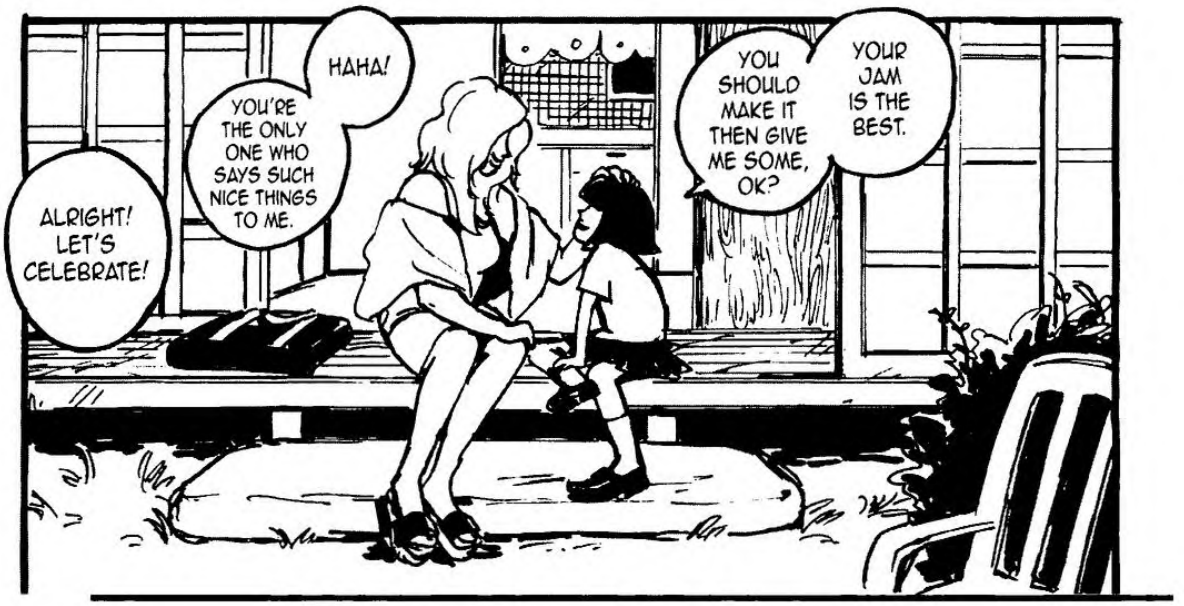


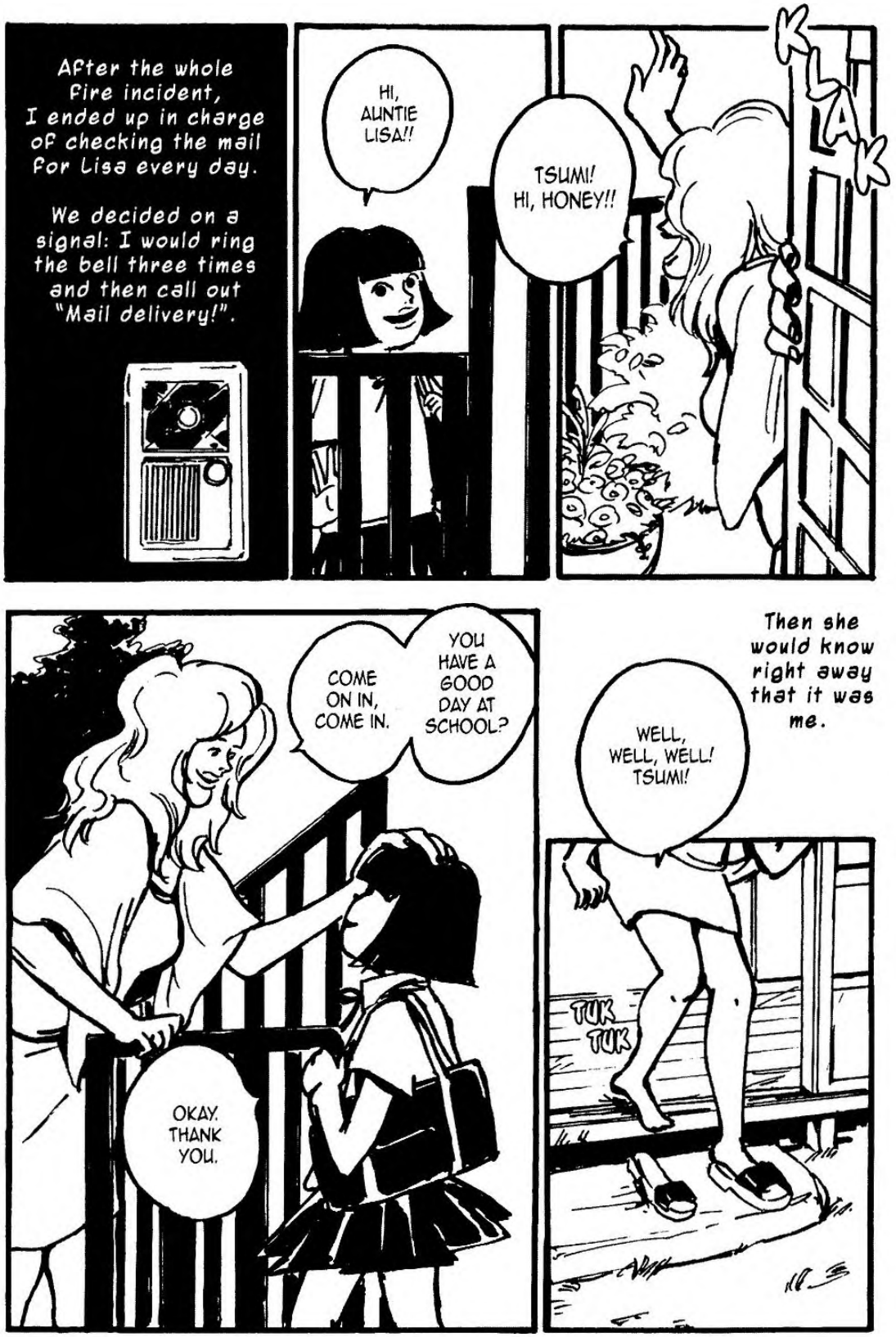

WE DID. NINA'S STILL WORRIED THOUGH.
YEAH?


TAKE A LOOK HERE, HUN!
OH! YOU FIXED THE KITCHEN!


AND I DEFINITELY WON'T LET IT HAPPEN AGAIN.
AUNTIE LISA?
I CAN'T WAIT TO EAT YOUR COOKING AGAIN.


ANYWAY, SO NOW WE HAVE A COOKTOP.
BUT IT'S NOT LIKE I DID IT ON PURPOSE.
SHE THINKS I MIGHT START ANOTHER FIRE.
THE KIND THAT TURNS OFF AUTO-MATICALLY.


HAHA!
YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE WHO SAYS SUCH NICE THINGS TO ME.
ALRIGHT! LET'S CELEBRATE!
YOU SHOULD MAKE IT THEN GIVE ME SOME, OK?
YOUR JAM IS THE BEST.


After the whole fire incident, I ended up in charge of checking the mail for Lisa every day.
We decided on a signal: I would ring the bell three times and then call out "Mail delivery!".
HI, AUNTIE LISA!!
TSUMI! HI, HONEY!!
KLAK
COME ON IN, COME IN.
YOU HAVE A GOOD DAY AT SCHOOL?
OKAY. THANK YOU.
Then she would know right away that it was me.
WELL, WELL, WELL! TSUMI!
TUK TUK

Alessandra Lynch

Superhero

I was a superhero I blew into the brittle
quills of porcupines and the sky listened
and in its listening glistened and bells
galloping down the hillside burst
into asters and persimmons and the father
sat next to his daughter in the park
without adjusting her buttons or fanning her
with his tie They were silent as hedges
No remarks about whose vision
of the wind was accurate The snow glided
down a blue slope of air The dead grandmother
held a delicate brass chain she had found
beneath the couch I was a superhero I folded the white
fur of the snow around her and her son and his daughter
still sitting together without speaking The rabbits of dawn
greeted the rabbits of dusk This was neither
Eden nor the Afterlife but the regular world
in proportion The hackberry's arms rightly
askew mulberry-limbs fracturing under
the great weight of insects burrowing taking
tiny naps inside tree-skin When the father rose
snow fell from his coat in glittering shingles
He offered an arm to his daughter
It was warm and unharmed The world
wordless as letters still sleeved

I was a superhero I held father and daughter
in one palm while flying through the night watchful
for those sharp stars afraid of their own
tenderness

John Pluecker

The land is made of organic matters and rock and we are launching drills and bits deep into the wellbores. The flowback is rich with sediments, chemicals

burn the land. The skin is the land, and the chemicals burn the skin on our collective body belch steady gas

natural, our stomach taut and full of pain and bacteria burst out of the anus and through our collective mouth, the mouth of the earth or the mouth of the wellbore

full of blisters, blistered and ill, our body is a traitor and there is no time for metaphors or simile, he said. Just say it, he said, if he dies, he didn't die like a swan at the end of that ballet or if she is angry, there was no hornet nest unleashed, if he fracked deep into our body and all the liquids came rushing out of the annulus, just call it flowback

and you know if you don't screen out properly or if you are using the wrong drill bit, the fiber optics you use to test the hole can also be damaged in the process so please be careful

as you dig down deep, the fluids are valuable, we know, the fluids have all kinds of values and the gas, let's get it all into pipelines, into tankers, however we can get it and let's get it moving

the blood pouring down the side of the outcrop, shale

La tierra está hecha de materiales orgánicos y roca y estamos lanzando perforadores y brocas hasta las profundidades de los pozos. El contraflujo abunda en sedimentos, quimicos.

Los químicos queman la tierra. La piel es la tierra, y los químicos queman la piel de nuestro cuerpo colectivo eructa gases constantes. Los gases son naturales, nuestro estómago hinchado y lleno de dolores y bacterias revientan por el ano y por nuestra boca colectiva, la boca de la tierra o la boca del pozo

está llena de ampollas, ampollada y enferma, nuestro cuerpo es un traidor y no hay tiempo para metáforas o símiles, dijo él. Solo dilo, dijo, si se muere, no murió como cisne al final de ese ballet, o si ella está enojada, no se desató un avispero, si él fracturó hasta lo más profundo en nuestro cuerpo y todos los líquidos salieron volando del espacio anular, solo llámalo contraflujo

y sabes que si no se sella apropiadamente o si usas la broca equivocada, las fibras ópticas que usas para examinar el pozo también se pueden dañar en el proceso así que ten cuidado

mientras perforas hacia lo profundo, los líquidos son valiosos, ya sabemos, los líquidos tienen todo tipo de valores y el gas, pongámoslo todo en los oléoductos, en los buques petroleros, como sea que lo podamos poner y pongámoslo en movimiento

la sangre derramándose a lo largo del afloramiento, esquisto

Torrey Crim

Asylum

He leaves a note for her on the kitchen table. She's just spent the week in San Francisco with her mother, and the moment she walks in with her luggage, sweating, she sees the note pinned down by her favorite coffee cup. *Out of town, for business again,* he says. *Talk soon. Love.* She doesn't mind. She likes having the house to herself, the quiet pockets of her life without him. She leaves her bags in the bedroom, leaves the note on the table, sits on a kitchen stool and stretches out her legs. There are two mangos in a bowl on the counter, which annoys her. She breaks out in hives if she touches them. He knows this, and usually disposes of them before she returns. She remembers this later, when he doesn't come back, how he thought of everything but he didn't think of this.

When she thinks of her mother, she feels like a guitar string pulled taut and strummed at a high, quiet frequency. She waits for the trembling to stop. She doesn't want to talk about it, but she wants someone to absorb those tiny soundless waves, some mute, listening being. If they had a dog, she could say to the silent house, "Just you and me, old boy," and he'd rest his chin on her knee.

Her mother is dying. She is old enough to have a mother who dies. She knows this because when she tells people, they cluck and sigh, "That's hard," as if she had to put down a pet, an unfortunate, everyday thing. But what they mean is not that it is hard to have a mother who will be dead; what they mean is that it is hard to be without one's mother. She is not without her mother. They don't understand the magnitude of what it is to be with someone who has knowledge of when, approximately, she'll stop breathing. That is beyond hard.

She's glad, actually, that his work has taken him elsewhere. If he were here he would ask dry,

technical questions about the chemo, about expected time. If he were here she'd have to tell him they'd given up, that the bloom on her mother's liver is just a matter of weeks. He'd ask for numbers. She doesn't begrudge him this, his need for quantities, hard facts, but she's glad not to have to provide him the cold calculation of when her mother will pass. If he were here, she knows, he'd ask her what she needs. If he were here, she'd say she needs space, and he'd give it, shut himself in the office with his work or else go for a drive. He's always been good at this, at knowing what should stay untouched. They are a couple that does not share everything, that takes pride in their ability to leave one another alone.

In the morning she turns the TV on while she makes coffee. She doesn't like the sound of it, the intrusion, but has become so accustomed to his insistence on hearing the news that she turns it on out of habit. There's always been something of a fatalist about him, his obsession with the ways in which the world is full of violence and terror. It's part of his job, she knows, to keep track of the danger. The knowledge he has access to would make most people shudder. She worries, often, about the burden he carries, sitting at his desk in front of a computer, just *knowing* things. Sometimes when he gets home from work he'll sit out on the porch with a beer, watching the wind in the palms, and when she asks if he's all right he'll just shake his head. She knows he can't tell her, has long since given up on the frustration of wondering about his job. Information. How vague, how sinister it is.

Her sister always says, maybe he's a spy. She knows her sister has never really liked him, his opaqueness, the way he listens to a joke, calculates it, and then admits, "That's funny," without cracking a smile. Her sister doesn't like how thin he is, the lack of pectoral evidence that he could carry her to safety if need be. She's never understood this, her sister's need for large, muscular men. Once, in a bar in college, she saw a man pick her sister up in his arms in flirtation, like a baby, and her sister had loved it. She hated it, dislikes men who are too strong, is grateful she hadn't been born too slim or slight and is uninviting to men who are prone to tossing women around. She prefers a man who looks hungry.

The news on the TV is drone strikes in Afghanistan and a school shooting in California. These days it's always drone strikes and school shootings. It scares her that she barely pays attention anymore. An unnamed source has come forward to expose something the government has done, something illegal but unsurprising. She has little faith in the government. She should know then, but she doesn't. She thinks, maybe one of his coworkers. She turns off the TV and leaves for her job, where she teaches art at the senior center. She takes pleasure in her work, in the satisfaction that comes with small completions.

She doesn't hear from him for three days. It's not unusual. He often disappears. What's unusual is that he doesn't tell her when he'll be back. What's unusual is that when she emails to ask him, he doesn't respond.

She reads the note again. Gone for *a while*, he says, as vague as can be. Talk soon. Love. Love as a statement, not a farewell. She waits. She'll hear from him, she's sure. She leaves the TV on every hour that she's home, because some part of her already knows. For several months leading up to the most recent trip to San Francisco, he took to the porch more and more often, staring at the palms. "Anything I can help with?" she'd asked, and he'd told it was best if she didn't. And then something had shifted, and he'd seemed steadier, less troubled, more certain of himself. When his photo appears on the television screen and his name is written below it, she understands then that he had been happier because he'd been making a plan.

She hates that word, whistleblower. There's something petulant about it, like some whiny child crying out for attention, hurt not because the bullies aren't playing by the rules, but that they're winning at all. He is the least petulant person she's ever known. She wants to tell someone that, that he's not a whiner.

Two agents appear at her door that afternoon. She lets them in, sits quietly while they look through the house, his office, cart off boxes of papers, tax returns, pay stubs, things that cannot possibly have any importance. She answers their questions. She understands that he has made it very easy for her to be completely honest. She is grateful for that, that she is not tempted or confused or inclined

to lie. They ask her, "Did you ever think that he could be a traitor?" She hesitates. It's a ridiculous question. Traitors are scheming, skulking people. But then what seems ridiculous is that an action was taken, on her small-yarded suburban street, because of an ideal. What he's done is an outdated, old-fashioned thing. He had beliefs, privately held, unconsummated by public opinion, and he acted on them. When she thinks of this, of how alone he must have been with this decision, of what it must have felt like to reach it, bright and pure and burning white-hot with conviction, she is jealous.

The agents are waiting. She says, "No."

The message arrives shortly after they leave, a pulsing blue bar in the corner of the screen, as though he were watching her. *Are you okay?* She tells him about the agents. She tells him about the larger man, whose belt missed two loops on his pants and revealed a stretch of salmon-colored briefs as a result. He'll find that funny, the untidiness of the agent. He'll know she's okay because she remembered to tell him that detail. *Good*, he says. And that's all for now.

She admits to herself that she is frightened. Not particularly of what will happen to him, but of this thing he's exposed, the government, its inscrutable, crushing presence. She feels small, and she hates feeling small.

In the morning there is some sort of vehicle every few yards on her street, men tinkering with electric lines, landscaping trucks, sewer maintenance, off-brand delivery services. When she returns from work, they are all still there, just in different positions. They alternate stakeouts every twelve hours for the next two weeks. Every day she receives calls. She turns off her phone and only checks the messages every other day. Reporters, yes, but worse are the friends, the distant relatives, the old acquaintances posing as confidantes and comrades. If you need anything, let us know, they croon, desperate for details. By the end of the first week, she only takes calls from three people: her father, her mother, and her sister.

Her father says, "What a rat." She doesn't anticipate this of her father, this vitriol. Her father is patient and loyal and kind. He never second-guesses her, or asserts his opinion as superior to her own. Her friends have envied her this father, who has always trusted her intuition, who has allowed her, even in his maleness, even when she was a small child, to be opinionated and full of fury and force, a

girl people shrank from and tried to laugh off. He'd always been proud of her, his little revolutionary, his fighting daughter. "You have good instincts," he'd told her, when she was in the seventh grade, "believe in them," and that had held true her life through, even the petty things, the crushes and the dances and what dress to wear, the job interviews and the grad school applications. When she'd come to him for advice he'd always said, "What do *you* think?"

Her mother hisses, "How *selfish*." Her mother, the most self-absorbed person she has ever known, abhors selfishness in other people. She tries to forgive her mother this anger. So much anger is a masquerade for fear. She knows that her mother is angry because she is afraid to die.

Her sister says, "Are you seeing anyone new?"

He writes to her: *I have a good lawyer. I'm hopeful.* Geographically speaking, he is as far away from her as he could possibly be, stranded in some airport in a country she wouldn't wish on her worst enemy. She understands this concept, hopeful, but it's hard to see what he means, what counts as the best-case scenario. Weeks go by. The surveillance trucks have left her neighborhood. Her landlord emails to say her rent check bounced, even though that's impossible. She checks her accounts. She sends the rent again. It *bounced*, the landlord insists.

She flies to San Francisco for her mother's funeral. She is selected for random TSA screening. She is calm. The sensation of strings thrumming up and down her ribcage returns and doesn't leave her until she returns home. He writes to her of her mother's death. In all this time, it is the only thing he apologizes for.

She packs up the house. In some way, she is not packing up their life together but the life she had when she still had a mother. That is what it feels like. She does not look at the photograph of the two of them at her sister's wedding and think, he is gone now. She files the photos away and thinks, *she* is gone, she is gone, she is gone, she is gone. That is the absence she sleeps with at night. She puts boxes in storage, boxes of objects that do nothing for her, a spare set of coffee mugs, an antique salt shaker, tea towels, dictionaries, tee-shirts from college, throw pillows and lamps. She checks her email. Sometimes he writes, a sentence or two, some hard little detail for her to hold on to. An old woman waiting for a connecting flight keeps forgetting she's spoken to him before and tries to convince him to

marry her granddaughter. *I keep telling her about you*, he writes, *I'm not on the market. Love.* These stories annoy her, that he's reporting his activity to her. She hates that he always resorts to silly details when he doesn't know what he should say. He's always been so sparing with words, particularly words of feeling or conviction. She's had to drag them out of him, like pulling up a fishing net from the ocean depths, a thrashing beast fighting the surface, and even then he was reluctant, awkward, squeamish.

She thinks about that word, *love*, the soft lull of its beginning and the hard violence of its final consonant. It's a whale of a word, lumbering, enormous, graceful only when seen by the tip or the tail, beautiful only by the sounds it makes in the deep. And yet, how slight, how insufficient and yet unwavering in its succinctness, like a small, hard rock. He didn't write *love you* or *love*—He wrote: *Love.* A stone, and then a period, as if that said everything.

She quits her job. She spends a week in a hotel on the North Shore, swims in the sea, gets drunk every night; she sleeps with a man on his first business trip with an expense account. She's two years older than he and she feels ancient. Over drinks in the hotel bar she tells him nothing about herself except that her mother is dead, and then they speak almost exclusively of that, of how her mother used to criticize and harp on her, of how grief, inexplicably, does not cancel out the hurt of their arguments over the years, even those they had when she was very young. The businessman is kind and attentive and beastly dumb. When he leaves to go back to his job in San Diego he tells her, "You're a real catch." As though trying to convince her she'll find someone real soon, someone to buy a house with and make babies with. As though she came off desperate for a man. She finds this endearing, his earnest stupidity.

She flies to San Francisco and sleeps on the couch of her sister and brother-in-law for three weeks. Her sister manages to manipulate her into meeting a string of handsome, well-educated men, each with a job more undecipherable than the last. Apps. They are paid extraordinary amounts of money to develop and manage *projects* that do things like manage more money or deliver goods or calculate transit times or coordinate the arrival of a private car. She wonders what her sister tells them about her. She wants to tell them, I'm not on the market. He writes to her, *Might have some good news soon.* Again, she wants to know what qualifies as good.

She doesn't tell him about the men, but she knows what he'd say, the joke he'd make about robots and the ceding over of our private lives to the tiny nuances of comfort. He always mocked that incessant drive to be just a little more comfortable. She hears his voice in her head, always. In all this time, she never feels his absence.

She tries to qualify her life. She stuffs her shirts and books into duffel bags, makes up the couch, keeps her sister's house as tidy as possible. She wonders at the thrill she feels, without her mother, how precipitous and open her life could be. It never seemed likely, somehow, that her story was about love. She never counted on it. When she was young, her sister, older, had been popular and a raging flirt, sobbing in the bathroom after every breakup, and because of that she'd always seen the link between a woman and a man as some sort of deficit, a weakness on the part of her sister or herself. Even being with him had, in the beginning, felt like some sort of concession, a fragility. How long it had taken her to admit that she had wanted that, him, their tenuous bond, which had, in recent months, seemed not so tenuous at all. Despite all her resistance, that stone, that ocean beast, had found her.

When her sister says of him, "You dodged a bullet there," she senses the slow dissolve of some reserve in her, the right she's maintained to love him. Her sister is trying to take that away from her, to tell her she's better off without him. This is the greatest betrayal, that her sister and her brother-in-law and her father are trying to take away from her the only truly holy feeling she's ever had. Her mother, too, had tried to corrupt it, belittle it in some way. They say to her, he chose politics over you. As if politics and love were ever fighting in the same ring.

Here is her brightly burning, white-hot truth: for every reason her sister and her father tell her she's better off, for all the discomforts of her life with him to be, for all the pain he's caused her all these weeks, there is never, not once, not for a moment, a question of what she will do when he writes to her from exile. *It's safe now. Come.* He's been granted asylum. For the price of her boxes in storage, and the job and the house she lost, and the disapproval of her remaining family and the fact that she will miss, in a year's time, the scattering of her mother's ashes, she can join him. It surprises her as much as anyone, that she, too, has something unshakeable at her core. This is her privately guarded, her sacred and her unspoken, her one absolute certainty: when he writes, *Come*, she goes.

Catherine Pierce

The Guilt Depot

The filing cabinets are clearly labeled:
Wrecked Vacations, Sex Lies, Domestic Road Kill.
One shelf sags under unlocked guns. Another
under melted slugs. Bookcases are lined
with the Annals of Ambivalent Motherhood.
The radio loops prom songs.
The light bulbs are all incandescent.
An industrial freezer houses the nitrated
hotdogs, deep-fried Oreos, Red Dye 40 cereals.
On the wall, a massive gleaming mosaic
crafted from thrown plates. Shoeboxes full
of tiny reminder cards for missed mammograms
and colonoscopies. Shoeboxes of unsent letters,
all ending with *So now you know.* Each day
new bins are carted in. It's a plum gig for workers—
job security, hazard pay. Applicants must answer
one question: *Did you first feel remorse over*
a) stealing, b) thinking, c) a let-go balloon gone forever?
The correct answer, of course, is c: you're hireable
if each night before sleep you see that pinpoint
rising, your useless hand reaching, the blue sky
around you faultless, maddeningly clear.

Chet'la Sebree

Lily-White-Secretion Maker

Some say the jaw is the strongest muscle—
Book of World Records, Library of Congress—

but my TMJ begs to differ, the ache
of my migrainous jaw says *not so much.*

I can unhinge mine like a snake—
devour a man—but it will never

see uterine-style combat. My mother
quaked fifty-three hours for me—

watermelon-sized womb growing
for thirty weeks, involuting for six.

Rajiv Mohabir

The Cowherd's Son

O Krishna, O flautist,
    what thrill to wind another man's flute!
To have fingers guide the air

and stop its prayer leaking from holes
    plugged with pads and mantras.
My prayers are hollow

reeds or shells whose mollusks
    I've fricasseed. My love tasted of sea
and relics: the tooth of Gautama,

the finger of the Baptist
    and I digested all his holy
to make music of his bones. I punch gaps

into his femur and press this flute to my lips
    to Pied Piper Hindu twinks
in Queens out of bikini briefs.

I mix rum in my milk and we suck
    spirits down all Saturday night
and *Jai Jagdish Hare* on Sunday morning.

O Kanhaiya, O Madhav,
    My father is Ahiri and my mother Brahmin,
now Christian beef-eaters.

Mixed-caste and queer-countried,
    I'm untouchable, the only Mohabir left
who still scores your shlokas.

Mary Peelen

Godsend

On top of the water, the sky rippled thinly. Lake Macatawa was clear and cold that fall. My paddle cut through the surface, carving circles that spread outward, overlapping as they went. Eddies swirled and collapsed before the water was made calm again. Symmetry revealed itself so persistently back in Michigan, I felt certain it was a reflection of heaven as well.

Father's old canoe was still in Veenstra's boathouse, sticky with cobwebs and pine needles, but perfectly sound. I had no trouble putting it in the lake. Back when I was a girl, Father used to take me fishing at an hour when mist hovered over the water. I still remember the excitement, the tug, the slick wet thrill of a fish on the line. My earliest memory is of Father at home, his face floating above my bed in the dark when I was just an infant. The side of my crib was held by a tricky, rickety metal latch. Mother had the knack of it, but when Father came for me in the night, he shook and rattled the bedrail with a most violent conviction. Calamity itself woke me into this harsh world.

The new minister was a godsend.

He spoke like a learned man. I'd never heard such theology, no one at church had. We said *God* the normal way, with a vowel sound like *baa*. Reverend Hoekstra pronounced *God* with the sound of awe in the center, all reverent and drawn out like that. I tried not to smile when he preached. I'm so toothy I can hardly stretch my lips all the way around my face.

The new Reverend lifted the whole congregation from our mourning stupor after Father's passing. He was tall, even for a Dutchman, and so handsome it would've been improper to be around him, were he not the minister and all. He had blue eyes and a dimple in his chin, exactly like Paul Newman. We didn't keep gossip magazines at home, but all the ladies from church pored over his picture at the beauty parlor on Saturday afternoons.

No one had ever noticed me before. I was shortsighted and thick around the middle. My hands were an embarrassment, all red and torn. I wore gloves to church on Sunday, of course. Saturday mornings, Mother and I still scrubbed the

church floors, the aisles and the vestibule. We couldn't expect his wife to do it.

Our lawn was as square and tidy as any yard in town. We hung our bleached bedsheets on the clothesline out back every Tuesday. Dark wash was on Wednesdays. The cemetery next to the plant was just as neat, though more solemn. Mother and I clipped the grass and deadheaded the geraniums on Father's grave on Sunday afternoons.

Reverend put a hunger inside me that nothing could touch. I'd been ravenous for weeks. On my way to work in the morning, I went to the IGA and bought vanilla wafers, a Hershey bar, some beef jerky, and a package of windmill cookies. On my way home in the afternoon, I stopped at the bakery. Donuts were half price after four. Mother liked them, too.

Reverend's wife was from a good family, Grand Rapids money. Furniture people. She wore pastel colored suits and sat in the front pew. She was trim and pretty with tiny, square white teeth.

When he smiled, his eyes lit up like a miracle. They shone more darkly in anger. Once I saw them go a deep violet hue, and from the pulpit, when he warned of God's wrath, they flashed so mightily, I believe they saw everything, all my unworthiness.

I worked at General Electric out on East 16th. It was steady, and they were nice to me. I had my very own desk off the shop floor and all the paper and pencils I could use. Our plant made motors for refrigerators. Engineers upstairs did the electrical designs, but someone had to do the math, long division and logarithms, mostly. Father taught me algebra when I was still in grade school, and I was pretty handy with a slide rule. I did my sums on blocks of manila paper, then copied thin columns of numbers into hand-sewn books with shiny green covers. I went full-time after finishing the eleventh grade. Mother and I needed the extra money once Father was gone.

Sometimes I was overwhelmed with the profusion of God's detail, the sheer recklessness of it. I'd never seen such hands, for example. Reverend's palms were narrow and concave, capable in the air as angel wings, and just as graceful. With the tiniest gesture, he put new life into a tired old parable we'd all heard a thousand times, and when he raised his arms above his head, drawing Jesus down into the

sanctuary, there was perfect stillness in the pews.

I watched the sinews at his wrists, fine and taut as puppet strings. They contracted when he held my head between his hands. I closed my eyes, and they covered my cheeks, my neck, my chest. His robe was deep and dark as gravity itself, and I fell into the center of him, and when he reached inside and tore my secrets open, I believe something holy passed between us. For days afterwards, it burned between my legs, memory of his hands like a hot flight of spirit.

I understood the facts of biology. It wasn't ignorance, but something more complicated that pressed in on me, a weight like heavy summer heat, its smell of cut grass, chemical and vaguely anesthetic, wafting up from the square green lawns.

It smelled like iron, exactly like the water in Lake Newaygo with its taste of rusty nails. I might've been horrified by all the blood, the shocking color of it, more orange than red. It came in a profusion, clumps so sinewy I was afraid the mess would clog the plumbing. Instead, I was thrilled and I wept, buoyed with relief. I'd been overfull of tears and a painful kind of longing, the sort of shame I sometimes relieved with a hot water bottle and secret caresses in our dark four poster bed. If I waited until Mother's snore was regular and rhythmic, I could feel myself quite alone with it.

Deep inside the gory mess, a veiny mass with two clouded eyeballs, gray and unblinking. Bloody as fish entrails.

The wax paper in the vanilla wafers box was sturdy, so I folded it into a tiny envelope making sharp white creases with the edge of my fingernail. Then, down on my knees, I cupped my hands around the meaty, red soul of it. Mostly, it slipped back into the toilet water. I saved what I could. I folded the packet, then I put it inside the cookie box and tucked it in my pocketbook. Burying the thing was out of the question. No place to dig a hole without an explanation.

Lake perch swam under the canoe in parallel formation. I wondered how they managed such precision. I envied their fishy vector fields, the Lord's call to order so plainly manifest in the world. Theirs was a more intuitive kind of math, perhaps, watery and biological.

I lowered the tiny packet over the gunwale and let it slip into the lake. It slid away smoothly without a sound or a splash, not even the smallest ripple. I had

feared the wax paper would float, but thankfully, it sank straight down.

A far flight of seagulls skimmed the lake. One bird fell away and dived down into the water for food, perhaps, or sport, then all together, the flock lifted again, pulsing wings driving them upward and away. I watched till they disappeared, following their ascent toward the sun setting out over the Great Lake, the great, reddening hell of it, and for a moment, I was blinded by its exquisitely round circumference.

Terese Svoboda

Some Great Urge

Love drags a wheel-less suitcase
tagged Risk, some town on a lake
in former Yugoslavia. Miami rolls,

you say with a smile, but he takes
that as advice, packs his earflaps,
and leaves, which fall off trees in Greece

now and then where the deciduous aren't quite myth.
Some great urge—name it!— propagates
those seasons of fall and rise, the dreamy way

the boy finds the door. But what if the knob
is cut off? Trains collide from two
directions, neither with open doors,

and reptiles pull their metal into tunnels
that make them gone. You're on the uphill now,
the present present, and rain forces your tires

to pedal funny. A real mother, not
just a woman-with-children, clucks
her short humans together,

they hold hands and cross the avenue
in tight tandem, not learning how to do it
alone. Enough without wheels.

You Miami yourself out on a limb
of one of those trees showing snow
or sorrow at the base, risky and frisky,

nearly the whole world in a cast, mending.
The rest are out of line in Costco,
the guard is headed for them,

stuff fallen in great piles at their feet
where Amazon, the great estuary,
makes this gesture too, in flood.

Horses Do Pony Bends

She dances like a Bomb, abroad
-Emily Dickinson

You fold your hands in an x
to signal the gate's electronics.

Get the alcohol.
In a thought bubble: *scotch or a disinfectant?*

Instead, penises troth,
winding one around the other.

And extra socks. Whose imperious
voice comes from the wardrobe?

You rise like a virgin, a two-point rise,
nothing touching.

There's a button for it.
You should have thought of that earlier,

and mortar,
an explosive, or brick-stickers,

footsteps, amplified.
The sun doesn't help, the sun—

you'd call it alien, if you
stood on the back porch instead.

Every time you try to shove
your head in—is it the cooking?

—And what about the pony?
Alcohol in every trough,

the explosions *pip pip pip*
And the gate opens.

Carrie Schneider and Adrienne Perry

Endorsement of Alternative 2, an avant-garde museum, in Mr. Barthelme's memorandum of July 10, 1961

Not long before Donald Barthelme moved to New York and became known as one of the most exciting, innovative, and important writers of his time, he lived in his hometown of Houston and served as the director of the Contemporary Art Association, known today as the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston.

As a board member and eventually as acting director, Barthelme's ideas for the museum made waves that rippled out through the institution's subsequent development. Not unlike the stories readers would soon encounter in *The New Yorker* and in his first collection, *Come Back, Dr. Caligari*, Barthelme was not afraid to shake up forms, decentralize authority, or to merge high art and popular culture at the museum.

As early as 1959, Barthelme appears in the CAA's board meeting minutes, where he both contributed to and defended copy for a museum brochure outlining an expansive vision for the museum's future. At the time, the CAA was stuck between its 1948 foundation as a volunteer-driven art association and the model later created by its first professional director, Jermaine McAgy. Although Houston had one of the first non-collecting museums dedicated to showing the work of contemporary artists, the CAA, without funding and a withdrawal of de Menil support, housed in a small A-frame building, its board being called to resign, volunteers disengaging, and supporters polled about whether the museum should persist, the board understandably considered whether the time had come to fold.

Finding new space within the impasse, Barthelme proposed that the museum become itinerant, expand beyond visual art, and diversify its activities and scope. The unsolicited proposal he authored with Herman Goeters outlined an interim period in which diverse programs—including music, theater, and film, "plus something on the walls"—were presented around Houston by volunteer chairmen

with curatorial control. The museum adopted the plan as its official "new direction" and announced, "The Board of Directors looks forward to an exciting new season, fully aware that this excitement has something of the feeling of a high wire act done without a net."

Barthelme spoke fondly of his time at the museum and its influence on him is evident in stories such as "The Dassaud Prize," "The Balloon," and "The Flight of the Pigeons from the Palace." In a 1976 radio interview with Judy Sherman and Charles Ruas, Sherman asked Barthelme, "Were you writing while you were in Texas?" Barthelme responded, "Yeah, yeah, oh yeah, but not, you know, not particularly well. I couldn't figure out how to do it for a long time. And then finally I sort of began writing things which I thought weren't too terrible—and...that really happened at the time that I was working for the museum." Barthelme downplayed his own influence on the museum, however, claiming that he landed there "more or less by accident" and only because "the place was in ruins." The archives tell a different story, illustrating Barthelme's habit of writing unsolicited proposals and staging backstage trickster maneuvers; board minutes witness Barthelme simultaneously dismantle and reconstruct bureaucratic language as cover, while he authored a new course, role, and alternative future for the museum.

Beginning with her 2014 exhibition "Incommensurate Mapping," curated by Dean Daderko, Houston artist Carrie Schneider has traced Barthelme's influence on the CAA through board minutes in the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston's archives. Schneider also draws upon the Barthelme Archive at the University of Houston's Special Collections, as well as images from Barthelme's work in *Forum* and his collage stories, to recast our understanding of Barthelme and the museum—as institution, project, medium for artists, and malleable platform for cultural life in the city. Compiling these primary sources in a collage account, Schneider's work invites us to reconsider Barthelme's tenure with the CAA, suggesting Barthelme's influence was a precursor to the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston's storied days under the directorship of Sebastian "Lefty" Adler and Jim Harithas, not to mention the importance Barthelme placed--at the CAA and in his writing--on a multiplicity of voices, making space in the margins, and the need to test words and images alongside the institutions that endorse them.

SEE PAGE 323 FOR IMAGE FOOTNOTES.

The Museum also plans to stage its annual Art A
tion, Art Rental show and Modern House Tour.

caa

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE.

Eventually, if the Contemporary Arts Museum is to serve the community adequately, the scope of its operations must be increased to encompass a permanent collection, an art school, a library and reading room, slide and photograph collections, and circulating exhibitions. These projected developments suggest a museum structure flexible enough to accommodate such activities and ideally one that would itself be a vital example of contemporary art.

A museum building and a budget substantial enough to support such a range of activities are necessary aspects of the Contemporary Arts Association's growth. They remain very much in the realm of future plans. We mention them here merely to make the point that such plans are being formulated, and that every contribution to our present operations also projects the C. A. A. toward this future.

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS
held at the Contemporary Arts Museum

Tuesday, December 8, 1959, at 4:00 p.m.

A. Fund raising and development. Mr. Bruhl read the text of the brochure which will be mailed at the initiation of the campaign. It was again discussed at length, Mr. Bruhl being particularly conerned by the last section which describes an ideal museum for the future. He stressed that the CAA must make definite plans to cover its present expenses, that the aim of the campaign should be to take care of the immediate problems and that the building fund must be repaid before any plans for improvement can be formulated. Mr. Barthelme said that the brochure must give definite plans for the future as an incentive to present support and that there is no real conflict between immediate needs and plans for the future.

George Pierce, Mr Morris gave the report on development, as worked out in consultation with Mr Croneis and Mr Barthelme. There are at present five museums for contemporary arts in the country. Three are located in the New York-Boston metropolitan area, two are in Texas. Our ultimate goal would be to achieve a balance of interest by increasing the importance of the C?A.A. According to this general plan the "Past, Present and Future" brochure would be revised to include four parts: 1. The purpose of the association. 2. This year's activities. 3. Membership. 4. Hypothetical museum we would like to achieve, should we be able to raise $1,000,000 in the membership drive. It would be aiming for the most in the hope of achieving excitement.

Mrs McAshan objected that the C.A.A. has not proved itself yet this year and that to put our aims so high would hurt us because they are unrealistic; Dallas tried it last year and failed. Mr Barthelme said that there is no correlation between Mr Morris's short tenure and the amount that the Museum should drive for. The question is at what point the goal we are driving for should be given, and psychologically this should be done at the beginning: a concrete program must be presented and this being the beginning of the second decade since the association was organized, it is a good time to present what has been done and what is planned. It was decided that no definite amount would be mentioned in the brochure, but simply that a definite goal for the next ten years would be presented.

EVERYTHING REFLECTS WELL ON OUR CITY
OUR AUDIENCES ARE AMAZINGLY PERCEPTIVE
THE STRING SECTION HAS A BROKEN HEART
WE CHEER IT BECAUSE IT IS OUTSTANDING
GULLS SMASH INTO THE GREAT GLASS WINDOWS
I HAVE NEVER BEEN MORE OPTIMISTIC, MORE SANGUINE

We asked ourselves: How can we improve the show?

We auditioned an explosion.

contemporary art

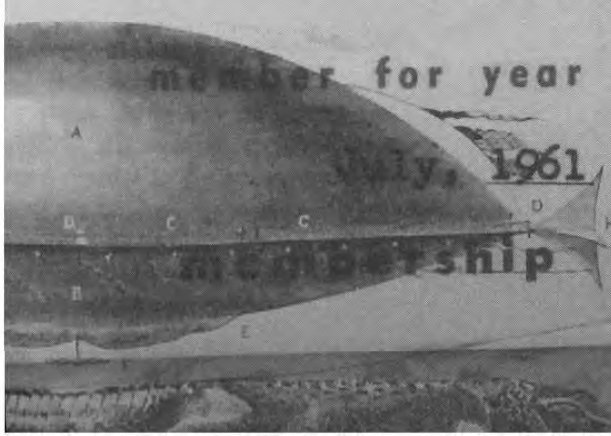
association of houston

Mr. & Mrs. Donald Barthelme, Jr.

member for year ending

July, 1961

membership card



HO POST 3/23/6

PAGE 4, SECTION 7

DONALD BARTHELME
Attended University of Houst

Barthelme Named by Museum

Donald Barthelme, for f years editor of the Univers of Houston's prize-winning qu terly, Forum, has been nam acting director of the Conte porary Arts Museum.

The museum's board of rectors announced Thursd that the appointment is eff tive immediately.

BARTHELME, A form Houston Post reporter who liv at 819 Harold Ave, resigned fr the board of directors to acc the acting director's position. had been vice president of t museum and had been on t board since 1959.

He had also been chairman several exhibits at the museu

Barthelme, a native of Ph adelphia who attended the U versity of Houston, was one the principal designers of t museum's new diversificati program. The program w adopted by the board last fa It places equal emphasis on forms of contemporary expre sion.

WHILE HE edited Forum, published articles by Dav Riesman, John Kenneth Ga braith, Norman Mailer, Walk Percy and Jean-Paul Sartre. also published the work of su artists as Leonard Baskin, Ji my Ernest, Robert Andrew Pa ker, Robert Rauschenberg a Jasper Johns.

statement referred to no individual, but board as a whole. The finances are sinking lower and lower; expenses top income; not accomplishing original purpose of CAA. Mrs. McAshan called attention to a phrase she said had been left out of the statement, "and to make recommendations toward the formation of a nucleus for a new board of directors", following after the last word in Proposal 2. ~~Mrs. Freed said it sounded as though all members were being asked to resign. She agreed the exhibition program~~ had been very disappointing and that CAA had failed in making an educational contribution to the community, but she felt much good will for CAA still exists. Mr. White asked, as a recent member of the board, what real value CAA could contribute in the existing physical facilities and suggested a combined operation with the Museum of Fine Arts, where there is so much more space. The, n, perhaps, a good director could be found, the kind the city should have. Mr. Pierce referred to his statement prepared for the Annual Report: "through broad membership, through interested group at patron and board level who will support program". General discussion followed with several suggestions: have paid chairmen of exhibits, merge with the Museum of Fine Arts, return to work shop type organization, hire real professional as museum director. Mrs. Freed reminded the board of the Steering Committee Report of 1959. ~~All agreed CAA has a place in community~~ The great majority of people contacted for that report agreed CAA still has a definite place in the community. She then repeated her feelings that conventional means should be used in finding director, such As AFA, ~~and other friends of CAA such as Katherine Ku~~ Mrs. McAshan said such means had been used when CAA was first seeking a director and that of the three people brought to Houston for an interview, all of them wanted the phusical plant completely redone of such a size and materiel that the board serving at that time felt they could not possibly afford it.

four alternatives for the museum:

Mr. Ransom moved the proposition be referred to the board for the remainder of the summer be approved. Miss Detering and Mrs. Freed seconded. Discussion followed. Mr. Ransom said often calls came yesterday evening, [illegible] to bring up for discussion.
1. Bruce Monical, the technician, is not able to take part time work for the museum as he [illegible] to accept the same.
2. Melvin Nellum, janitor, decision must be made about whether or not to continue his services.
Mr. Barthelme moved motion be changed to include a positive opening date. Miss Detering seconded. Motion carried unamimously.

after meeting and consulting with many peo
including some who were involved in the
founding of the CAA,

1. To Fold
2. Merge with the Museum of Fine Arts
3. Try another year without a director and with a n
4. Ally with one of the Houston Universities

Mr. Selig moved Mr. Monical be kept on in present capacity, at present salary until further action may be taken by the board. Mr. Barthelme seconded. Discussion followed. It was agreed to dispense with the janitorial services and that notice be given to Melvin Nellum at once. It was [illegible] try [illegible] with the last two adult painting classes. If he is unable to do so, money must be refunded to those enrolled.

Mr. Barthelme is to prepare an official release for the newspapers about Mr. Morris' resignation and the closing of the museum building and clear it with Mr. Ransom before released.

Mr. Goeters moved Executive Committee study or form a committee, to come up with a sound economic program for CAA. The motion died for lack of a second.

Miss Detering moved the Executive Committee select a group of citizens to meet with the entire board for a discussion of the major problems. Mrs. Freed seconded. Discussion followed. Miss Detering then revised her motion to read: The Executive Committee select and meet with a group of citizens for a discussion of CAA's major problems and then report back to the board. Mrs. Freed accepted the revision and seconded. After further general discussion, Miss Detering again revised her motion to read: The Chairman, President and Treasurer select and meet with a group of citizens for a discussion of CAA's major problems and then report back to the board. Mrs. Freed ~~again~~ accepted the revision. The motion carried unanimously.

amended

Mr. Barthelme moved the Executive Committee be asked to meet with a major museum director and ask these questions: 1. What could be the relationship between the board and the director and between the board and the membership? 2. What can a museum reasonably hope to accomplish in its community? Included in his motion was: a professional fund raiser be interviewed about helping the CAA in a future drive. Mr. Goeters seconded. After discussion, Mr. Barthelme ~~and Mr. Goeters~~ agreed to separate his motion into two motions. ~~The motion referring to the Executive Committee meeting with a major museum director~~ one Mrs. McAshan said in this instance, she felt it would be very beneficial to have the entire board meet with a museum director. Mr. Barthelme accepted this amendment, as did Mr. Goeters, and the motion was revised to read: The board shall meet with a major museum director, etc. Motion carried unanimously.

motion or

rthelme said

had a proposal to present, if it was in order.

PROPOSAL

11 October 1960

It should be stressed that what follows is designed as an interim program, a holding operation for the 1960-61 season only. As was indicated earlier, it is intended to provide an active program for the museum, one worthy of continued membership support, while giving the board ample time to search for a new director. It is also planned to bring to a halt the dissipation of capital, and to bring to the museum new audiences which might be a source of income and future membership.

We propose, therefore,

1) That, for this year only, the museum diversify its activities, placing upon film, theatre, music and architecture an emphasis equal to that given painting and sculpture
2) That volunteer chairmen be appointed in each of these areas, under a paid business manager who coordinates and supervises their efforts and is in turn responsible to the board
3) That the responsibility for the content of the museum's offerings in each area rest with the volunteer chairmen, as in the past, and responsibility for disbursing funds rest with the business manager
4) That the business manager in no sense be considered or consider himself the museum's artistic director, but rather be employed to support the work of the area chairmen and maintain the **nimum staff** m running basis
5) That each area chairman be given the responsibility for staging a stated number of events in his program area each month, the number of events to be determined by funds available, availability of worthwhile offerings in his area, and the nature of competing offerings from other groups in the city. (In every case we see no point in duplicating what is already being done by other organizations, but would instead hope to supply leadership.)
6) That distinct budgets be set up for each of the program areas, and in addition for publications, printing and mailing, and installations, that these budgets be made known to the chairmen and enforced by the business manager
7) That most, but not all, of these events would be offerings for which a reasonable admission would be charged
8) That a system of bookkeeping that would allow a regular periodic check on expenditures, and thus periodic modification of the program if necessary, be employed instead of a system under which we budget for an entire season
9) That certain alterations be made in our schedule of fixed expenses

Within this framework, the outlook for the new season would include:

1) Three major painting & sculpture shows
2) Eight extremely low-budget wallshows
3) Art rental, auction, house tour
4) Eight 35 MM films running two nights each
5) Six 16 MM films running two nights each
6) Six architects as visiting lecturers
7) Twelve dramatic events
8) Eighteen musical events
9) Sixteen museum TV programs

Four of the above would be "Specials" with larger budgets than the average

as in a given month we would have

thirteen nights of activity

plus something on the wall

Talk then went back to Mr. Barthelme's proposal.

proposals for future activities, whi

o
ention should be made publicly that CAA considers this an interim
rogram, but instead publicity should be slanted in a positive manner as
resenting an entirely new concept for CAA. Other members agreed.

The director then reported that

he had invited

Robert Bly

Peter Yates

W.D. Snodgrass

Walker Percy

Kenneth Koch

Harold Rosen berg

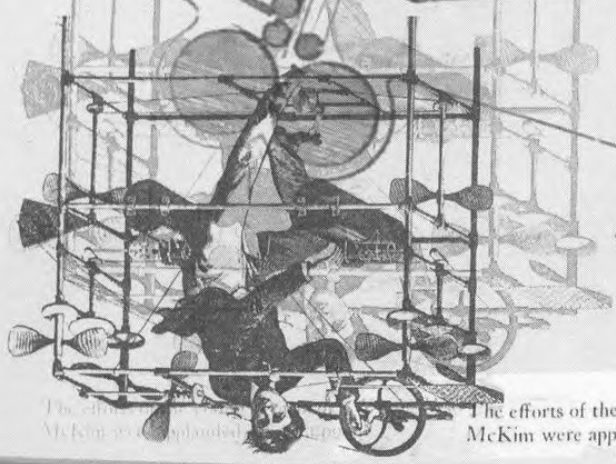
to speak at the Museum

Elaine de Kooning

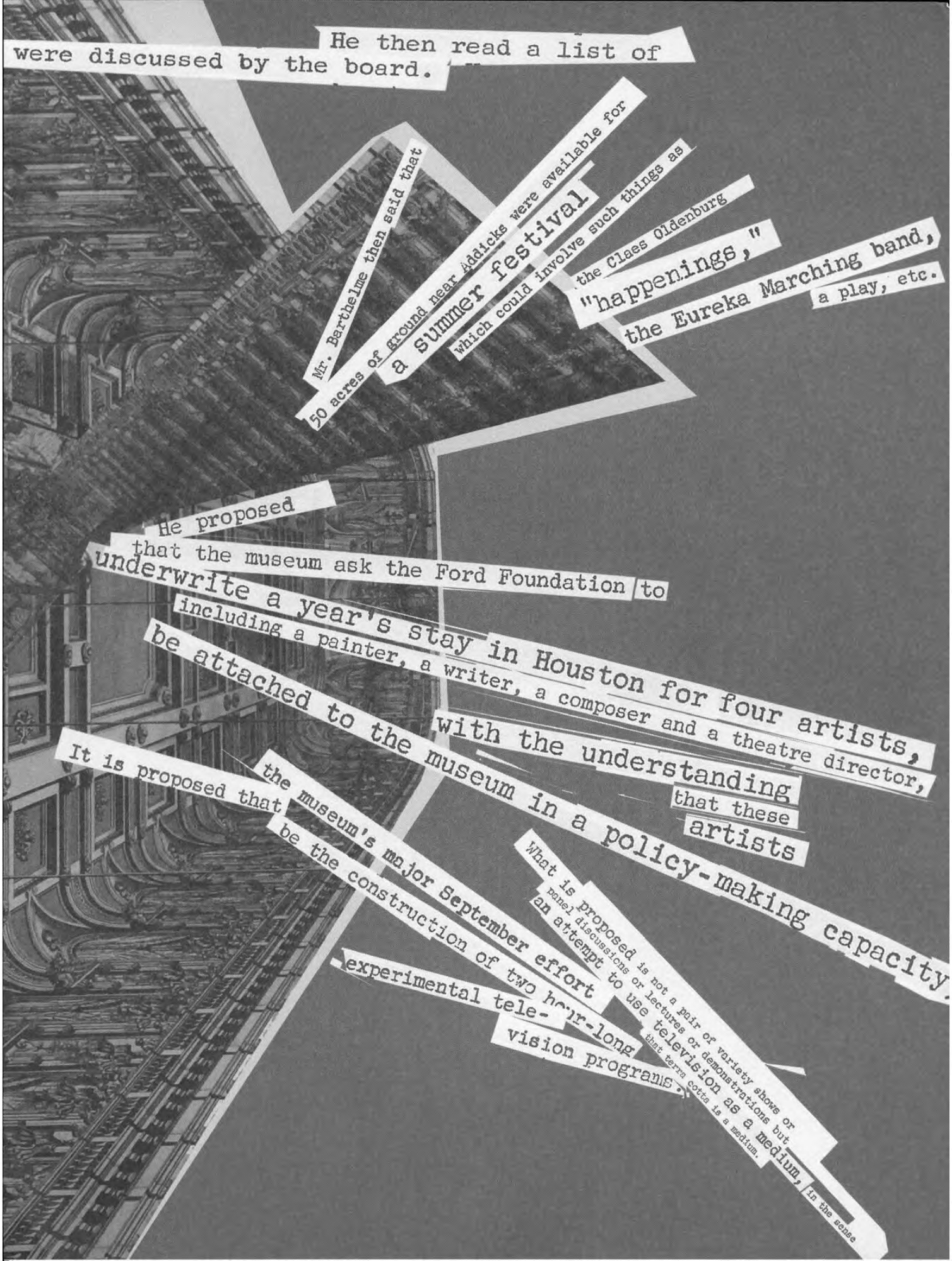
to conduct a short art course for adults.

the children's summer school would be held as before but on a slightly larger scale.

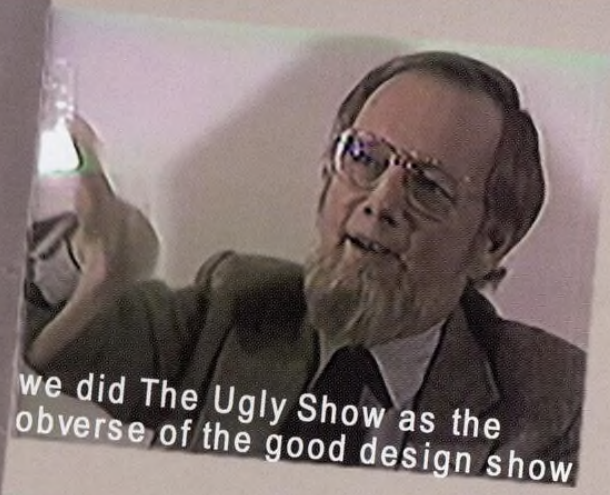
it was decided that the Houston Artists' annual exhibition would be given.

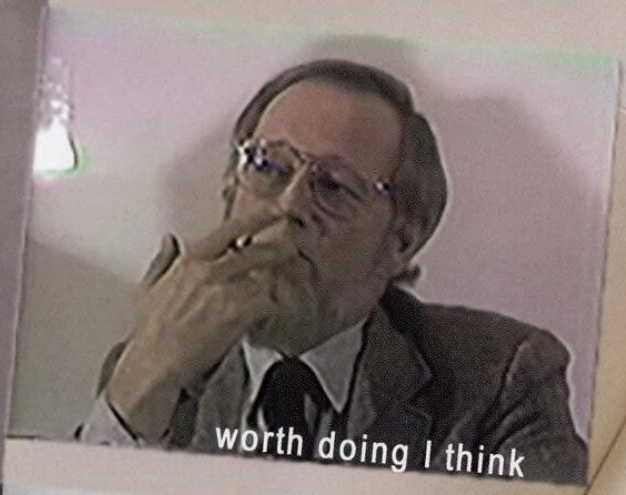


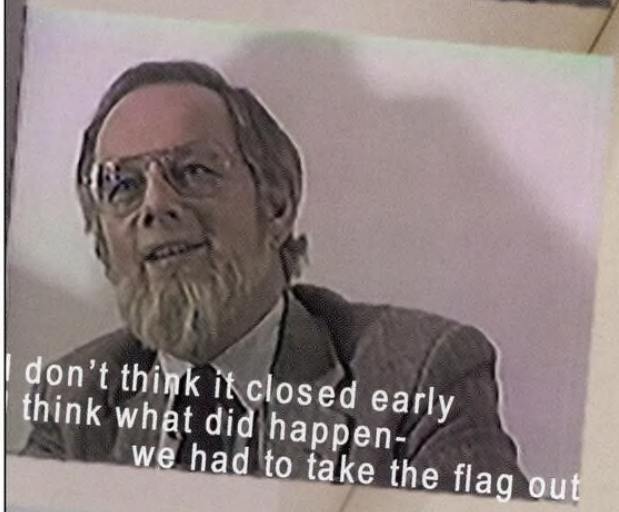
The efforts of the young Scotsman "Wrong Way" McKim were applauded, up to a point.

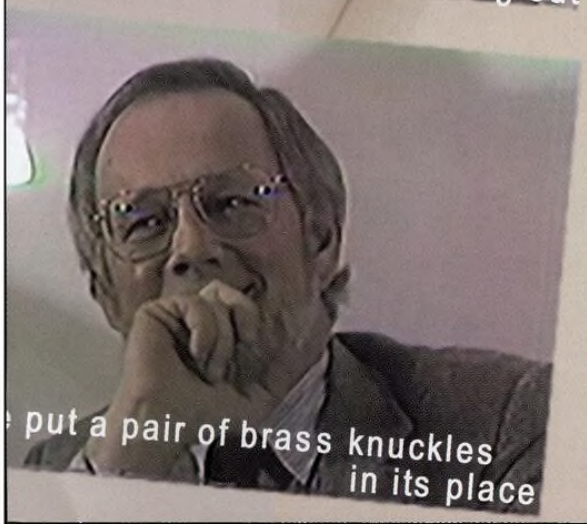

He then read a list of
were discussed by the board.
Mr. Barthelme then said that
50 acres of ground near Addicks were available for
a summer festival
which could involve such things as
the Claes Oldenburg
"happenings,"
the Eureka Marching band,
a play, etc.
He proposed
that the museum ask the Ford Foundation to
underwrite a year's stay in Houston for four artists,
including a painter, a writer, a composer and a theatre director,
be attached to the museum in a policy-making capacity.
with the understanding
that these
artists
It is proposed that
the museum's major September effort
be the construction of two hour-long
experimental tele-
vision programs.
What is proposed is not a pair of variety shows or
panel discussions or lectures or demonstrations but
an attempt to use television as a medium,
that terra cotta is a medium.
in the sense

A baby blue Styrofoam chrysanthemum. An auto hubcap, brand unrecognizable. A hideous jukebox. Paint-by-number pictures of lambs, sans paint. An unbelievably ugly plastic chair. A giant-size Vaseline jar. An imitation shrunken head. A plaster "flamenco." Reader's Digest. Official Detective. Ricky Nelson Magazine. A TV antenna. A whiskey decanter disguised as a Greek vase. Bunny rabbit decals. Big Bonus stamps. A gilded baby shoe coin bank. Klutchdenture adhesive. Plastic-bright artificial fruit. TikiJoe's Luau Kit. A plastic red rose in pseudo crystal vase. Three (bad) reproductions of Gainsborough's Blue Boy. An "obscene" ashtray. A large Coke bottle. A box of All. Half-ceramic, half-wooden totem poles. A toy machine gun. A plastic soldier's helmet. "A roseate and gaudily commercialized" badly-printed stuffed head of Christ. A copy of the American flag printed out of register on flimsy plastic.









2406 Yoakum Boulevard
Houston, Texas
June 29, 1960

Board of Trustees
Contemporary Arts Association
6945 Fannin Street
Houston, Texas

Dear Members:

On receiving a statement concerning renewal of my membership in the Contemporary Arts Association I at first thought I would ignore it, but then decided that before doing so I would see the current exhibition. I have now done so; I will ignore the statement, but not without comment.

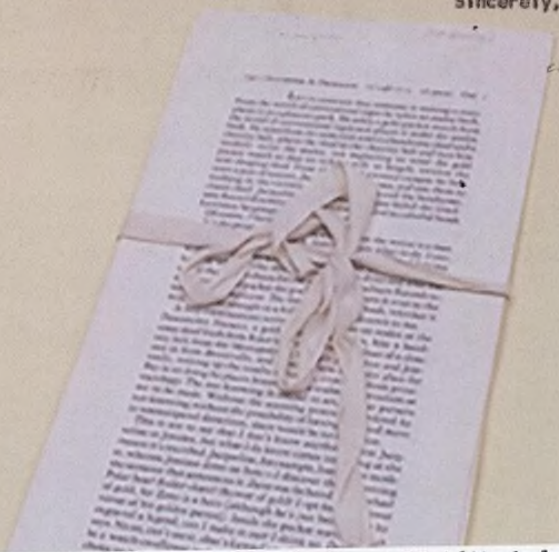
The exhibition "New American Artefacts" is a horror, but less because of the objects themselves than because of its meaninglessness as a museum exhibition, and in particular as an exhibition by this particular museum with its limited area and money.

One can see similar collections in any shop, from Woolworths to Neimans, in many homes and public buildings, but the "selective eye" automatically rejects or ignores them. The question is of how that eye can be developed, which this smug and rather snide exhibition doesn't forward at all.

The real problem as I see it, however, is that this exhibition begs the question of this museum's contribution in other exhibitions during the year to the development of a selective eye, and of the heart, head and spirit which should go with it. Has the quality of the previous exhibitions been such that the contrast is obvious? I think not. If so, one could permit the small joke of this exhibition I think rather that it is a waste of limited space and time and money in a year of exhibitions which have done little to delight or to instruct.

And it is later than you think, in a city which daily grows more full of "New American Artefacts". Whether any museum can successfully improve popular taste may be a moot point, but one could provide an oasis. That the main function of a museum of fine arts is to provide access to the wonderful seems hardly debatable.

Sincerely,

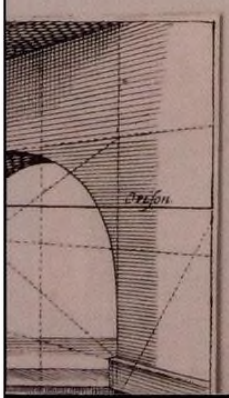


If I know how a set of brass knuckles feels on Heidi's left hand it's because I bought one once, in a pawnshop, not to smash up someone's face but to exhibit on a pedestal in a museum show devoted to cultural artifacts of ambivalent status. The world enters the work as it enters our ordinary lives, not as a worldview or system but in sharp particularity, a tax notice from Madelaine, a snowball containing a resume from Gaston.

— 7" —

It is difficult to keep the public interested.
The public demands new wonders piled on new wonders.
Often we don't know where our next marvel is coming from.
The supply of strange ideas is not endless.
The development of new wonders is not like the production of canned goods. Some things appear to be wonders in the beginning, but when you become familiar with them, are not wonderful at all. Sometimes a 75-foot highly-paid monster will raise only the tiniest frisson. Some of us have even thought of folding the show--closing it down. That thought has been gliding through the hallways and rehearsal rooms of the show.

However the new volcano we have just placed under contract seems very promising...



MEMORANDUM: 10 July 1961

On the question of the future of the museum, I believe the Board must make what amounts to a radical choice. On the basis of recent experience as acting director as well as previous experience as a board member, I would locate the choice as being between these alternatives:

1) If what is desired is a museum in the traditional sense, going about its business in traditional ways, then an extremely well-known professional director (a "name" director) is mandatory. A museum of this kind, offering traditional museum exhibitions and services, cannot attract sufficient money to make itself worthwhile without him. Such a person would of course be valuable in many areas other than fund-raising; fund-raising, however, cannot be successfully carried on without him, given the history of this organization and its present state of development. The experience of the Houston Symphony, which has successfully employed this approach for some years (Efrem Kurtz, Stokowski, Barbirolli) is relevant, as is that of the MFA.

The corollary is of course a new building. The building itself will attract money, as the MFA discovered with Cullinan Hall, as well as attracting public interest and enthusiasm. With a name director it would be easier to get a new building; with a new building, it would be easier to get the right director. But one or the other is absolutely necessary, I believe, if we wish to grow in this direction, in the direction of the standard museum.

2) The alternative, in my view, is an avant-garde museum. The CAA began as this sort of organization, bringing contemporary art to a city where there was no contemporary art. Now, when the larger museum has a famous modernist at its head, we can hope only to supplement or footnote his efforts if we continue with the kind of program we have presented over the past ten years. This does not mean that the CAA might not "successfully" continue showing contemporary art as it has in the past; it does mean that to do so, in the terms in which past exhibitions and other offerings have been conceived, is inevitably to duplicate in most ways what will be offered by the Museum of Fine Arts and other groups.

An avant-garde museum on the other hand, would enter areas the MFA is not likely to deal with, in a sense cannot afford to deal with. These are also, I think, the most exciting areas, and those which the CAA is most nearly equipped to handle. (By avant-garde I do not mean, for instance, 90% of what was done by this museum last season.) Nor would a new building (or a new director) be precluded by this choice. We would gain a direction, a working philosophy, and a sphere of influence or activity that would be both uniquely ours and needed in the community.

Donald Barthelme


THOMAS McEVILLEY
CINCINNATI 1963
SS
December 5
1776

ALEXANDER
McEVILLEY
ACHILLES

REMEMBERING THOMAS McEVILLEY

p. 228. Lonnie Holley, *High Class Chair (Honoring Thomas McEvilley), 2011.*
Courtesy of James Fuentes Gallery.

p. 229. *Phi Beta Kappa Medal (University of Cincinnati), 1963.*
Courtesy of Joyce Burnstein.

p. 230. Thornton Dial, *Strange Cat Making Friends.*
Courtesy of Joyce Burnstein.

p. 231. Julian Schnabel. *Alexander Achilles McEvilley, oil on tarpaulin, 1986.*
Courtesy of Joyce Burnstein.

Raphael Rubinstein

A Portfolio Of Tributes To Thomas McEvilley (1939-2013)

For this issue of *Gulf Coast*, my last as guest editor of the Art Lies section of the journal, I have asked a number of people—artists, writers, scholars—to contribute appreciations and reminiscences of Thomas McEvilley. A man of wide-ranging interests and talents, McEvilley is best known for his extensive art criticism, especially his *Artforum* essay "Doctor Lawyer Indian Chief," which many people, myself included, credit with effectively undermining Eurocentric art history and making possible the globalized contemporary art world ("globalized" in a cultural rather than market sense) that we now take for granted. McEvilley was also the author of several volumes of fiction and poetry and a book that many consider his magnum opus, *The Shape of Ancient Thought*, a monument of innovative scholarship on the influence of Indian and Near Eastern thought on Western philosophy. As *New York Times* art critic Holland Cotter observes in his contribution, "Tom McEvilley's roots were very, very deep, drawing on rich resources no matter what he wrote about. This is one of the things that makes him continuingly valuable, that gives his critical writing a resilient texture." In one piece, I spoke with Marina Abramović about her long friendship and dialogue with McEvilley. Abramović stresses the range of his activities: "Writing is one aspect of him, but in some ways he was an artist, too. He participated in James Lee [Byars]'s performances; he also participated in mine. When I made *House with Ocean View*, he would come with a little chair every single day, and put the little chair, the folding chair, in front of me, and really have this very strong gaze. He understood this work on so many different levels, and put it in historical context. Not so many people had that knowledge to do that." Also contributing important texts to this McEvilley portfolio, which extends to both the print and online versions of this issue, are painter and close friend Donna Moylan, and two Houston residents, Surpik Angelini, and Christopher Kilgore, who first encountered McEvilley

through courses he taught at Rice University. A current student in the University of Houston Art History program, Kilgore not only pays tribute to McEvilley as a teacher but also recounts an emotional encounter involving a Phi Beta Kappa medal that related to Tom's early years. Angelini conveys what made McEvilley such an inspiring teacher, and in the Spring of 2017, the Transart Foundation for Art and Anthropology, the organization that Angelini directs, will inaugurate its new premises in Houston where its research library will be dedicated to McEvilley. These tributes to McEvilley's impact on art and scholarship are accompanied by images of a few of the many artworks he inspired and influenced.

Raphael Rubinstein

Thomas McEvilley: Global Citizen

Holland Cotter

Originally delivered March 5, 2014, at The Poetry Project, New York, during an event celebrating the life and work of Thomas McEvilley and the posthumous publication of his books The Arimaspia: Or Songs for the Rainy Season, from *McPherson & Co, and* Seventeen Ancient Poems: Translations from Greek and Latin.

I never met Tom McEvilley face to face. Our personal acquaintance consisted of a few telephone conversations in the late 1980s or early 1990s. Somehow he learned that I had spent some time in India and called to ask if I would participate in an art conference that he was organizing in, I believe, New Delhi. The conference,

Fig 1 (above). Alex Grey "Sketch," 1994. Courtesy of the artist.

to take place the following year, was focused on modern and contemporary Indian art at a time when such art was just beginning to get international attention. We talked about directions the conference might take, and what my contribution might be. By that point I had been reading his writing on art for years, so I knew the project was in excellent hands. I said: count me in.

When he called again a few months later, he sounded angry. The conference, it turned out, was being funded by a private foundation run by an Indian family of art collectors. Once the dates were locked in, members of the family began trying to dictate the planning, including the program content. And they didn't want the participants Tom had chosen. Holland who? We want Homi Bhabha. Big stars. After what I gathered had been some sizzling back-and-forths, Tom had withdrawn from the conference and it was canceled. We talked a bit about the political entanglements that came with private patronage, something I would learn much more about in the years ahead. We said we'd be back in touch, but we weren't.

For me, this wasn't unusual. I don't circulate socially in the art world. My friendships have always been most entirely outside it, so I end up not meeting even people I really admire, as happened with Tom McEvilley. But I did read him. And I knew that his career was multifaceted, that he was a scholar, translator, curator, editor, teacher, poet, and novelist. But it was as an art writer that I related to him, and specifically as an art writer who had profound and long-standing interest in non-western culture.

How such an interest, which is in some way an ethical passion, develops I don't know. Although there was a few years difference in our age, we both essentially grew up in the 1950s. And if in the 1950s you were a bookish, skinny kid, never mind being gay as I was, you were under some threat. You got sensitized to what it meant to be vulnerable in the world. That sensitivity aligned you in your sympathies with the Outside, rather than the Inside. And that alignment is permanent. I imagine that Tom lived with some version of that perspective.

Anyway, I had been writing art criticism freelance for a bunch of magazines around 1980-81. When I started out writing in a regular way I lived in the East Village and I followed the conventional model for art criticism. I focused on what was new, what was being talked about or what I thought *would* be talked about. And, like

a conscientious consumer advocate, I wrote in terms of thumbs-up/thumbs-down: this art is good; this art is bad, with a certain amount of shading on either side.

But by the end of the 1980s, my interests in writing about art were changing. For one thing, I was doing a lot of traveling. In 1983, I went to Japan and spent some time there. Then I went to Nepal, and then to India. And when I got back, I signed up for graduate school to study Indian and Islamic art.

And, of course, American culture was changing, "American art" as a category was in the process being redefined. African-Americans, Asian-Americans and Native-Americans were finally getting some mainstream attention. Equally interesting to me, art from Africa, Asia, and South America was beginning to gain notice. This was the stuff I wanted to write about, though I didn't know how.

Then, in 1985, I read Tom' s piece "Doctor, Lawyer, Indian Chief: 'Primitivism' in Twentieth Century Art at the Museum of Modern Art" in *Artforum*. To read, or more accurately to experience, his stunningly intelligent and witty takedown of the entire conceptual apparatus on which that show rested was liberating, a high. The truth at last! And that the truth was written in such commanding and accessible language was fantastic. He was the writer for me when I was looking for a role model. When I learned that he was a poet, it further deepened my sense of connection.

As the '80s went on, I wasn't reading much art criticism, but I was reading him. In 1991, he wrote a fantastic essay titled "The Selfhood of the Other: Reflections of a Westerner on the Occasion of an Exhibition of Contemporary Art from Africa," which appeared in the catalog for a show called "Africa Explores" at the Museum for African Art.

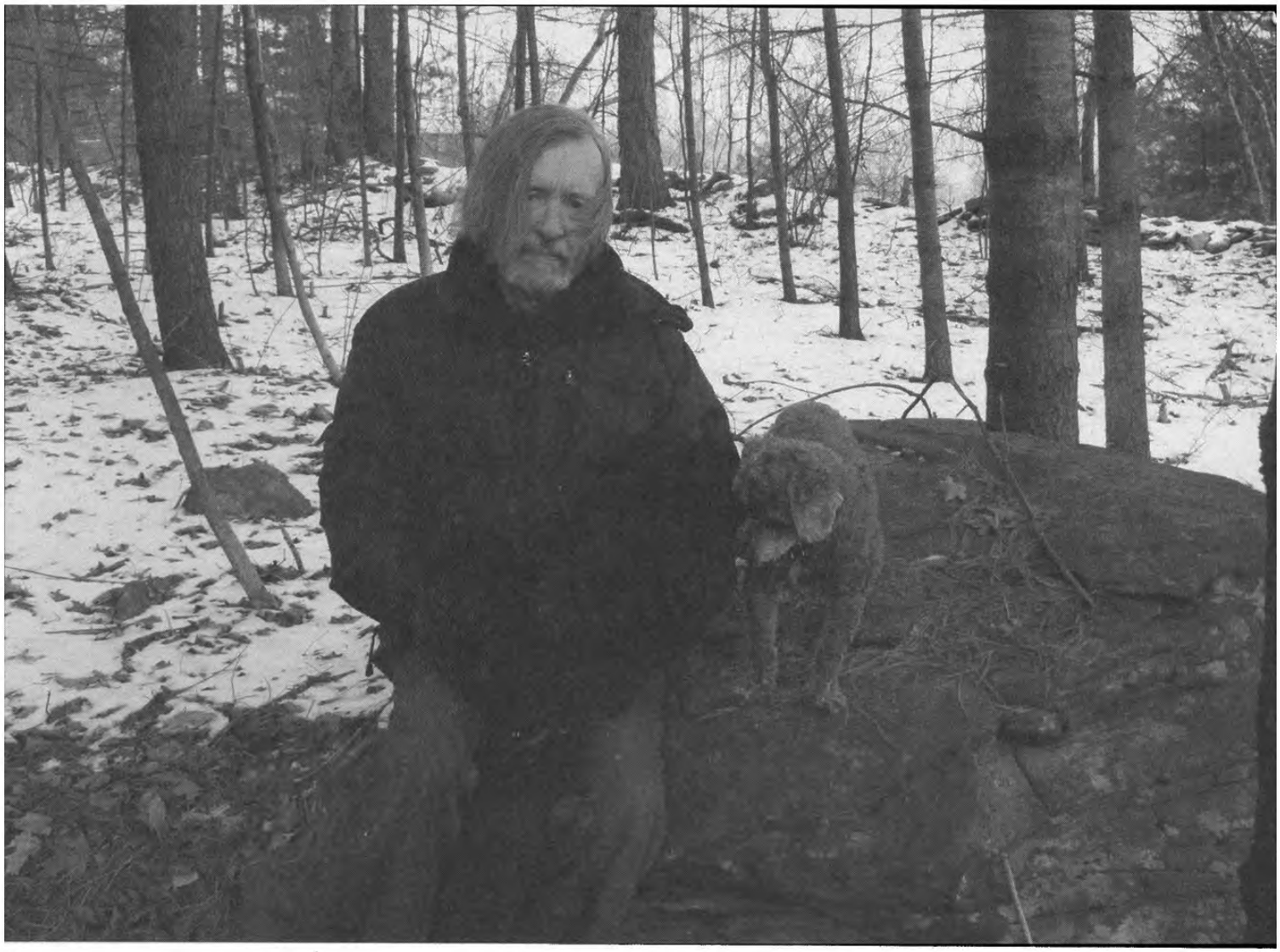
The show was put together by Susan Vogel. It was one of the very first local surveys of contemporary art from Africa. It was a risky project. And it ended up taking a lot of critical heat. But its range, from academic painting, to portrait photography, to glass painting, to Mercedes-Benz-shaped coffins, and genius riffs on traditional forms, was stunning. And Tom's laying out of the political and philosophical complexities and contradictions that gathered around *that* material at *that* particular postmodern moment is still for me a primary document.

Postmodernism and multiculturalism have turned out to be problematic concepts, in part because they've been absorbed by the market and spit back out

as brands. But the reality is that none of the crucial questions and difficulties they raised at that time have been fully explored, never mind resolved. And Tom's writing in this area remains, if anything, more pertinent today than when it was new, both as an act of resistance to parochial thinking and as a utopian gesture within the discipline of art writing, a confirmation that art critics can address those issues, instead of hiding from them, which is what most contemporary art writing at present is doing.

He struck me as a critic who understood very clearly that there was a world out there, and that both art and criticism were, or should be, part of that world, connected to it. I also like to think that because he was an historian and a philosopher as well as an art writer, he saw critical writing as being about the past as much as about the present. The International Association of Art Critics, of which I'm a member, has qualifications for membership: to be admitted you need to have published x number of reviews or articles on *contemporary* art. AICA defines an art critic as a writer on the art of the present. I have a problem with that definition. It misses the reality that the past is always new, constantly changing, undergoing fresh developments, sending new information; that histories require constant critical analysis and re-evaluation. I would go so far as to say that the problem—or at least one big problem—with current critical writing, the reason it feels small-scaled, weak, and market-reactive, is precisely because its roots in history are so short and thin. Tom McEvilley's roots were very, very deep, drawing on rich resources no matter what he wrote about. This is one of the things that makes him continuingly valuable, that gives his critical writing a resilient texture.

Personally, even without knowing him, I sensed from his writing human qualities I admired and wanted to emulate. I thought of him as being passionate about things that I was passionate about: art and literature, and the moral, and I'll say spiritual, dimensions of those disciplines. I thought of him as being generous and embracive in his thinking, which seems to me, as I get older, ever more important. And I thought of him as being a true global citizen, which is what I aspire to be. Without our ever meeting, Tom helped me figure out what that citizenship was and how to live it. I owe him a debt of thanks.



Learning From Thomas McEvilley

Surpik Angelini

Honoring the pedagogic legacy of Thomas McEvilley is a daunting task. It is made a little easier by knowing that I am not alone in the attempt: as time goes on, the impact of his scholarship has spread throughout the world, as myriad references to his work make their way into academic literature. This is not surprising since, over many years of research and prolific writing, McEvilley spun several threads of knowledge into a spellbinding understanding of the paradigmatic roots of our post-modern global culture. With the acuity of an archaeologist, the discerning depth of a philologist and the broad-minded view of a philosopher who uncovered the intricate intertwining of ancient Eastern and Western thought, McEvilley conceived a unique survey course called *Art and The Mind* that he taught at Rice

Fig 1 (above). "Photgraph of Thomas McEvilley,"2010. Courtesy of Joyce Burnstein.

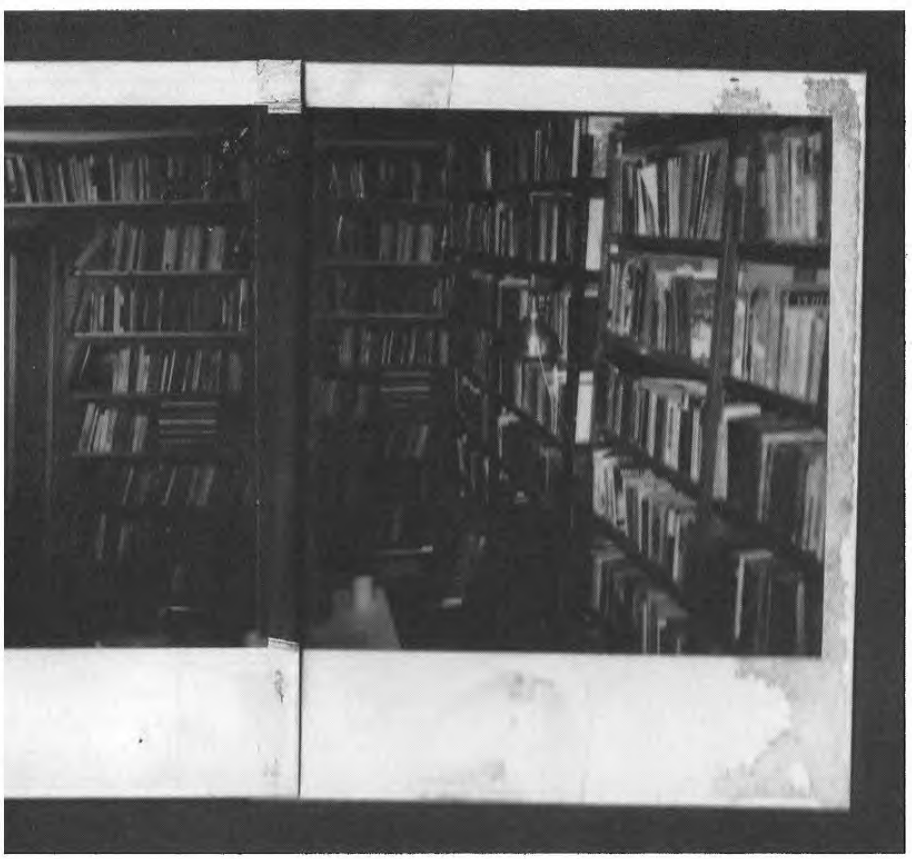
University every Spring semester for over 20 years, as he traveled weekly between New York and Houston.

Studying material culture from the dawn of civilization up to our contemporary era, McEvilley drew an unforgettable conceptual map for students like me who took *Art and The Mind*, pointing out seminal changes in the slow evolution of human consciousness throughout the millennia. He traced every significant transformation that affects our present reality, reconstructing history with methodological precision, finding poignant testimonial evidence in stunning images of ancient artifacts and works of art, as well as in a trove of literary and philosophical references.

I recall clearly how studying the passage from Paleolithic Earth goddess cults to the heavenly patriarchal religions subsisting to this day made an impact on my own self-awareness as a female artist struggling with male dominance. I also remember how vividly McEvilley, when I was studying with him in the early 1990s, described the schizoid mixing of Judeo-Christian beliefs with ancient pagan myths as they emerged in Renaissance art, revealing how they still permeate our fractured modern morality play. At another point in the course McEvilley demonstrated how the dissolution of figure and ground in such pictorial movements as Impressionism signaled the internalization of perception in phenomenological thinking. As you

Fig 2 (above). "Photograph of Thomas McEvilley." Date unknown. Courtesy of Joyce Burnstein.

followed each train of thought, engaged in the adventure of discovering the secrets of the past, you couldn't help trying to figure out your own place in the world. Here is where McEvilley became a beacon for many aspiring artists, as he exposed their minds to radical critical thinking, showing them the importance of breaking with retinal art and understanding that after Conceptualism, no creative act can disregard the need to make thought visible. In fact, McEvilley inspired many extraordinary creators to pursue art as the production of knowledge, art as cultural critique, art as a poetic form of activism and social change. It was at this point that our professor brought down the barriers between Eurocentric and non-Western cultures, challenging the Modernist canons of Western art's purity, universality, and most importantly the belief in Hegelian "progress." McEvilley not only heralded a permeable, permissive post-modern world, but he showed us, through his own example, what a mind free of colonial barriers was like, exploring the art and culture of uncharted territories, reporting his personal journeys as if he were a traveling ethnographer. Every time he came back from new explorations, we heard fascinating accounts of his exchanges with great artists and intellectuals. If it was not Cape Town, it was Chicago, Beijing, New Brunswick, Havana, Mumbai, Delhi, Rishikesh, Boulder, Rome, Islamabad, Venice, Sulaymaniyah,



Bangkok, Athens, Heraklion, Paris, Slovenia, Oshkosh, Lubiana, Boston, Aukland, Edinburgh, Cincinnati, Austin, Astana, Berlin, Delphi, San Francisco, Mytilene, Fairfield, Sydney, Princeton, Olympia, London, Epidaurus, Cleveland, Pompeii, Istanbul, New Haven, Delos, Dublin, Houston, Toulouse, Minneapolis, Cairo, Columbus, Lyon, Atlanta, Amsterdam, Malmö, Dakar, Mycenae, Philadelphia, or back to New York.

To follow McEvilley's thought process, one had to be ready to clean one's slate, to edit out superfluous ideas, or weak sentiment. His manner was as sharp as his mind. Minimal, essential, to the point. He was as intimidating as he was provocative. His diction was perfect, his performance flawless. I studied every move, every word he uttered, as if I were studying acting with a tough master. At times, I would engage in a pointed discussion with him, which would send me back to the books for a week, or for months. McEvilley's comments were edifying, not only intellectually, but in "the manner of addressing clouds," as he would say. He was a true teacher, like Diogenes, a performer of truths.

Beyond the wealth of knowledge he imparted, McEvilley was keen on instilling respect for creative work based on groundbreaking thought, and not mere emulation or variation of formal aesthetics. He was deeply interested in changing his students' mindsets, preparing them to think globally, moving them towards embracing a postcolonial vision of a just, equitable world. McEvilley was definitely not a formalist, leaning on ethics before aesthetics, yet, one soon learned that longing for the highest form of ethics put one on the path of a high form of aesthetics. Perhaps this was the most valuable lesson inherited from the Classical Greek philosophy and literature that he knew so intimately.

And then, there was a sense of wonder that persisted subliminally after he left us for a semester, a year, or forever. When I find myself rereading his brilliant essays on art, or pick up one of his marvelous novels, somehow I cannot believe that he was real. Having been his student now and then seemed like sheer fantasy, or maybe another fiction in one of his stories. When he was alive, I asked myself whether I had dreamed him up? Or maybe it was he who dreamed me up? That was a question I never asked him. It would have destroyed the magic that still brings back his words, his thoughts and the *Art in My Mind.*

Marina Abramović on Thomas McEvilley: An Interview

Raphael Rubinstein: *When and where did you first meet Tom McEvilley?*

Marina Abramović: Before I met Tom I was reading his articles in *Artforum*, about Joseph Beuys and Yves Klein. His article on Yves Klein was one of the best articles I ever read. It was just mind blowing. Ingrid Sischy was the chief editor of *Artforum* at that time, and Ulay and I were doing the piece in Amsterdam called *Positive Zero*. I was asking Ingrid if she could send somebody to cover the story, without asking for anybody specific. And who arrived? Thomas McEvilley!

I was overjoyed. Ulay and I became almost instant friends with him. But

Fig 1 (above). Marina Abramovic and Thomas McEvilley during "The Artist is Present," at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. 2010.

this piece we made was the worst work we ever made in our life. It was so bad. I think I have shame even to think about it (Laughs.) It was in a kind of a theater setting, and it was kitschy, and in the middle of the piece I started realizing how bad it was, but I could not stop. The public was there, everybody was there, and I got this huge fever and was literally dying on the stage. After this I was sick for months, but it doesn't matter because Ulay and I really became friends with Thomas.

This was in '83, I think, or '84, and my and Ulay's relationship was still good. Then, around '86 or '87 we started falling apart. When finally the Chinese said we could walk the Great Wall we were at the end of our relationship. Thomas was still friends with us, so he decided he would participate in this common rite. He went to Ulay's side, and to my side, and that's how this book *The Lovers* came about, which is his point of view of two of us walking towards each other to say goodbye.

RR: *I'm curious to know what you think inspired Tom to write about your work. I think he wrote more about you than any other artist. Again and again he comes back to write about you.*

MA: First of all, maybe because his real friends died, like James Lee Byars. He was great friends with two artists, Eric Orr and James Lee Byars and both of them died. So we were left to write about. But, in a sense, I think for him we were a very interesting subject because of the extremes we had been doing, and the emotional impact of the relationship. And also because of our interest in other cultures. You know, he actually spoke some of the Tibetan dialect, and some Chinese, and was a great scholar about Greek culture. This was the connection: not just European Art or Western Art, but the world. He had such an enormous knowledge that he could see parallels that other people didn't.

RR: *His awareness and his interests were very contemporary but also very much about deep history. He talks about the Greek Pre-Socratic philosophers in relationship to your work. I'm curious about what you got from Tom's writing.*

MA: Writing is one aspect of him, but is some ways he was an artist, too. He participated in James Lee's performances, he also participated in mine. When I made *House with Ocean View*, he would come with a little chair every single day, and put the little chair, the folding chair, in front of me, and really have this very strong gaze. He understood this work on so many different levels, and put it in historical context. Not so many people had that knowledge to do that.

RR: *He didn't respect the boundaries. He was a philosopher, a classical scholar, an art critic, a novelist, a poet... .*

MA: And he did not see performance as something new. He saw it as happening since ancient times. We, the artists, could see our work in a different way because of him. He had such a difficult, and tragic life, full of drama, that he could actually reflect these different states of mind. He is a writer who had this same kind of drama as artists in his own life, every kind of misfortune. And he had very strong dignity. You never could see that anything was wrong.

"HE DID NOT SEE PERFORMANCE AS SOMETHING NEW. HE SAW IT AS HAPPENING SINCE ANCIENT TIMES."

RR: *In the last years of his life, Tom went back to his interest in Greek philosophy and the influence of India. Did you get a sense of what was inspiring him to do this?*

MA: No, I didn't. After Ulay and I split, Tom became much more a friend of Ulay than of me. They drank together, and I never drink in my life. They would start drinking and I would just leave. I was not so close with Thomas anymore. The only time I really spent with him after that was when he was writing this book about Ulay and me. At that time Ulay and I were not on good terms but because of Thomas, I agreed to come to his house upstate, and we had these conversations, and his book came out of it.

I want to talk about the last time I really had a connection with him, during *House with Ocean View*. He would come with his little folding chair and sit in front

of me. I would come to the edge of the platform, and from the platform down there was a ladder with really sharp kitchen knives, so I could never actually go down. I just stood there for a long period of time. I could fall. And I could injure myself on the kitchen knives, or I could fall on the ground and break something, so this was very important for me to stand on this exact edge, because then my awareness was there and I was always in the present, because if my mind would flow anywhere else then I could fall. And then this gaze with Thomas, it was really a strong thing. It's like when you have non-verbal conversation with somebody. It's like your entire two lives are passing in front of you, a kind of movie that never stops. There was so much pain I saw in Thomas's eyes, so much pain it was almost unbearable. This is the thing that I remember the most. That's what silence is, and that is so, so important, because somehow we could conclude our existence in that moment, between what I am and he is. Everything was so clear. There is nothing that actually could be said at that moment, because it was not a verbal communication. He would come every day, mostly in the afternoon, and I was always expecting him to come. I was always looking forward to the moment of looking to the eyes of a friend.

" THERE WAS SO MUCH PAIN I SAW IN THOMAS'S EYES, SO MUCH PAIN IT WAS ALMOST UNBEARABLE. THIS IS THE THING THAT I REMEMBER THE MOST. THAT'S WHAT SILENCE IS.".

Geri Ulrey

Swimming

WHEN I WAS 37

The young waiter at the back bar was happy that we had joined him and asked us what we wanted to drink.

I asked if he had any tequila.

Of course he did. It was a flamenco bar and a little balding man in a black suit sat on the corner of the stage and played his accordion with his head down and his eyes closed. He tapped his foot as the two women in flamenco costumes danced next to him. Tall and robust, the women moved on strong legs, balanced on tiny pointy shiny shoes. They opened and closed their fans, patting them briskly on their palms. They fought and fanned one another, moving up and down and across the stage. Hair sleeked back. Pink flowers tucked behind ears. Breasts rose and fell beneath silk dresses, black and red ruffles, lace trim. They danced. They swirled. They stomped.

I downed my shot in one swig.

Steve leaned in, sipping his mescal. He was tall and dark with long flowing hair. He was an elegant 40-something hipster with an easy way about him. Boy-next-door looks, but an edge.

Steve and I hadn't had sex yet. I'd promised myself that it wouldn't be tonight. We'd been dating for months but tonight was our first date with really just Steve and me, no ex-girlfriend, and no ex-fiancé. Our first date with no more obstacles in front of us.

I wanted him to put his hands on me, touch my bare legs under the bar. Reach for me underneath my short skirt. I wanted him to kiss me, right there, the bartender busy making margaritas two feet away.

Our banter had stopped. Silence and smiles.

It's going to be hard to keep that promise to myself, I thought.

I remember getting into the car.

I thought, but didn't say, I should just walk home.

I was a few blocks away. I was drunk. He was drunk. In no way should he have been driving. No way should he have come home with me.

So, we got into his car. But not to drive.

We closed the doors quickly, fast, desperate. Before Steve or I could settle into our seats, before Steve put his key into the ignition, we were all over each other.

We groped and kissed like teens.

I felt him. He felt me.

If we were in a bed, we'd be fucking, some cheesy scene in a romantic comedy, after hundreds of missteps, the couple finally, finally kisses, hooks up, falls into each other's arms, makes love. That's what we'd be doing.

But instead we were parked on Sunset, making out, a stick shift between us.

Still, I was turned on and drunk.

All instinct. Not thinking. Just feeling. And groping. And reacting.

He grabbed the leather strap of my necklace and pulled me to him like he was pulling the reins of a horse. I moved to Steve's side of the car. I straddled him for a moment. I felt the roughness of his gabardine pants against the softness of my thighs. I felt him. It made me wet.

We were in full view, on Sunset Boulevard. Parked at the curb. Cars drove past. Headlights reached across.

I moved to my side of the car, but then, my left leg found its way back to Steve.

We kissed harder.

Steve whispered, I want to taste you.

A high pitched squeal, waiting, listening, holding breath, for the crash to come.

Tires screeched, long and thin.

Shrill and deep sounds of metal scraping, crushing, folding, turning. A substance, once so hard, for a moment became liquid, bending and twisting at impact, into an unrecognizable form.

Then the sound of shattering glass. The various pitches and pings, as it cracked then broke, as shards of it fell onto car metal then concrete road.

A man started to scream.

People ran out from the bar.

Sirens wailed as I asked, What's going on?

Red and blue light bounced in every direction. Off the car ceiling. Off the brick building. I caught it out of the corner of my eye.

But I could barely see anything in my limited view.

I have to get out of here.

I said it out loud.

I opened my eyes and only sensed movement. Then felt blurred colors. When my eyes focused I made out moving shapes clothed in pink and purple and pastel patterns. I saw a hand. A tube. A nose. A chin. A set of eyes, staring at me. They bopped in and out of view.

I heard voices. It was the echoing sounds you might hear underwater at a crowded public pool, sounds I couldn't comprehend, or attach any meaning to.

Then the eyes peered at me again. One set after another. Cocked. Angled. Wrong side up.

There were those pastel colors again. Blue and pink and purple. Surrounding me. Gazing down.

I was a specimen that could not move its head.

Then something recognizable. A face. I quickly affixed to it. It was my friend. I couldn't yet attach a word to her face. I didn't know why she was there. I didn't know why I was there. I didn't know what there was. My thoughts couldn't yet form.

Then my friend's face pulled me into the reality of the moment and made me more present in my own life.

OK.
I'm Geri.

We had been hit by a blue Volkswagen Fox driving out of control, rear-ended. Amazingly, I was the only one hurt.

WHEN I WAS 19

At 19, I spent a lot of time thinking about dying and killing myself. I even wrote a suicide letter, once.

I used to sit deathly still in my hairdresser's chair as the bleach he poured made my scalp burn and blister, ooze and leak.

I liked dancing at dirty, grungy clubs and the smoke machine and my burning Parliament cigarette between my fingers made it hard to breathe. I remember a girl with fishnets and black leather shorts, lying on her back, grinding against the guy on top of her. He was a tall jet black-haired wannabe skinhead. He thrust his pelvis against her. I looked two and three times, trying to make out if it was just dry fucking, or was he wet and smooth inside her? Was his fly open, had he snuck in, between opened zipper, or through the opening of his cotton boxers? I studied them. I was drunk on five shots of vodka and high from the couple of drags of a joint I took from a guy I met in the back hallway. It took me great effort to focus my eyes on the bleak leather and smeared mascara scene of dry—or was it wet—fucking. The wannabe skinhead's face was buried in the girl's shoulder. I was frustrated and not feeling the music. My favorite song by my favorite band was playing, but I was not dancing anymore because I was watching them.

That Sophomore year was the year I came closest to killing myself. Hair bleached, combat boots, black leather jacket, stomping around campus. I stopped going to class. I stopped reading. I couldn't focus. I couldn't write papers. I didn't care about my heart throb e e cummings, or Virginia Woolf, or getting through *Moby Dick.*

When exams came around, my friends were stressed, worried, sleepless. My roommate pulled all-nighters for her German papers. Another friend studied until eight in the morning for her monstrous art history exam, covering the entirety of the creation of art, drinking coffee. I admired them, but could barely remember what it felt like to care, could vaguely remember what it was like to think that any of it mattered.

Drugs helped some. Cocaine. Acid. Shrooms. Pot. Ecstasy. Always a fifth of vodka, eye level, next to my pillow near my futon on the floor. More cocaine. They gave me a break from my brain and re-routed my thoughts, a mini vacation from me. Sometimes they made me see colors, hear sounds, made me feel prickles and feathers on my skin that weren't there, or gave relief from the pain. Some varieties helped me focus and study and always made kissing and dancing feel real good. At times, drugs made getting out of bed somewhat possible. But in the end I didn't want to live the life of an addict.

So, I dragged myself to the Galleria and ended up standing in one of those tiny stores that plays ocean sounds and sells water fountains, angel figurines and plaques with comforting sayings, like "Peace comes from within. Do not seek it without." I took my time to smell the different scented candles, balsam fir, pumpkin spice, strawberry fields. That's when I saw my first dream catcher; I imagined it was carried to me from some faraway exotic place, Arizona, Utah, woven by an old weather-beaten Navajo woman. I read on the tiny printed cardboard tag, the web was meant to catch the bad dreams and let the good ones slide, gently, softly down the feathers. They came in four different sizes, full-grown ones the size of tennis rackets all the way down to tiny baby ones, smaller than my palm. I bought the smallest, most puny one, not fully committed to the fact that it would work, but wanting to give it a try, wanting to believe. I tacked it above my bed.

Meanwhile, one friend who lived in a small single once inhabited by Jackie O. threw herself to the ground, flailing herself, hitting. Another cut her hands, the soft spot where her thumb reached into her palm. Another, who still lived at home with his mother, broke a shot glass and used its sharp edge as an instrument to dig into his feet, watching the blood as he lay on his mattress on the floor, making himself unable to walk. Another did crazy amounts of coke, just to get through

the night. There are various ways, methods, relationships people have for hurting themselves, doing harm, digging in. I knew that I was surrounded by people, just like me, who suffered, who hurt, who didn't necessarily know how, or if, they might get through their day. I knew that desperation was all around me, even from the ones smiling and nodding their heads, even if they looked like they had it all figured out.

The dream catcher failed.

LATER

I woke up surrounded by a trauma team working on me, my scalp flapped open. They were trying to figure out if I was going to be paralyzed. They were trying to figure out if I was going to live. For nearly two days I drifted in and out of consciousness; each time I came to, sometimes just for minutes, I asked, Am I going to die? Am I going to be paralyzed? The nurses answered with silence. How could they? Nobody knew.

For months, I walked around Los Angeles with a broken neck wearing my neck brace. People would stare and ask questions. When I told them my story they would get wide-eyed.

They would say, You were lucky.

Then they'd shake their heads and say, Wouldn't it be better to die than be paralyzed?

The first time I heard this question I was confused.

What? I asked.

I was standing in the Kellygreen Home store on Sunset in my neck brace just a few blocks down from where I shot tequila with Steve on the night of the crash. They sold only gifts for a green home and I wanted one of the ecospheres, the size of a baby's skull, a miniature seawater biome with brine red shrimp, algae and bacteria. A micro cosmos of our world. This little cardboard tag explained it was self-contained, an environment that would live for years without attention. I didn't care how much it cost; I only wondered if I could carry it home.

The young woman with cropped fire-dyed hair got specific; she said, I mean wouldn't you have wanted to die instead of being paralyzed in a bed? That's what I would want. I'd rather die.

What? I asked.

She repeated, Wouldn't it be better to die?

I thought about it. I had fought so hard to live. My body had worked to make it through those early days. As I lay on my gurney, fighting to speak and move, that's when I knew I would take life in any shape I could get it.

So I looked at her with authority, as I did all the other shopkeepers, taxi drivers, my colleagues, my friends, and firmly said, No. It would be better to live.

Nine months after my accident, scars finally healed, nerves connected, muscles contracted, vertebrae fused, my neck brace came off and I got back into the pool, swimming laps, pulling water, feeling my skin glide through wet. While taking a shower after my swim I looked at the other women, their heads bowed, avoiding eye contact, our ritual as we scrubbed and cleaned. But the little girls huddled in twos and threes, grabbing, pushing, playing like under sprinklers, straps soaked, wet hair whipped, bravely stealing looks at me and the other naked full-grown women. Sometimes the little girls would scream shrill and long. The sound shuddered up and down the turquoise tile, penetrating my ears, bouncing inside my body. I had to stop myself from joining them. Instead, I listened and took pleasure in looking at the other women's bodies. The fat, the too skinny, the stretch marked, saggy skin, the scars. I used to feel embarrassment, shame, for me and for them. I thought, What a miracle for any of us to be moving at all.

Erín Moure

The Voice, from *The Elements*

The Voice

Sometimes it is hard to tell the difference between one's voice
and one's voice

Out in the field or street, children are still learning
sadness from parents

One has the look of the other
immortal sadness

conducted down the river of blood
even where the cataracts spill into tremendous flicks of sunlight
and are pulverized into droplets

that land, henceforth,
on the arm
on the shoulder and on the arm

trickling to the wrist and into the hands

which makes the eye wrench upward for a single moment

2.

and somewhere else, some parents are teaching "self-importance"
and the word "police"
because even the poem can be policed

and called down and despised
for feminism, for indigence,
for the word "lesbian"
which I place gently over the word "police"

because it is more peaceable

3.

What other thing is there to learn from a parent

4.

As such I am descended from a mother whose own father
turned his back on war
who practically deserted
because he was to be sent into the fields of war against his
brothers

and not his metaphoric brothers
his own brothers
born of the same parents

As if this desertion could make me
honest
What new land can be ours in such circumstance?

(a riposte)

It is said that
the poor have nothing but the sanctity of their name

~~wood for the~~
~~[hebrew]~~

the end of the world will come with clear and unmistakeable signs: children will poison their mothers in the womb with the most ingenuous of poisons (San Camilo, *1936* José Camilo Cela)

5.

and what other thing is there to learn from a parent

Besides sadness
The "worthy"

What there is to teach us, they will teach us
and we will make ourselves worthy of "it"

One tree blowing in the field alone*

Our own father in the stutter of time,
time's gloss multipled in clocks

When time means nothing, is it revelation
or dementia
Clocks, the needles of trees, the wind

(blowing in the field alone)

**to find me find the trees* *MIM*

6.

Oh my brothers why are you
here where there is no river?

I am standing and my arms are
dry

I am your sister in those years forever
before our father vanished

And there is now no river just the
struts of grasses

The dry and bony rush and *kail*
of grasses

The clash and *miel* of grasses
Our parents

low <beneath> these two boot-lengths of snow

Jason Bradford

LOL, not LOL

today the sidewalk is decorated
with seeds, leaf fragments
and fuschia starfish
like aster
isks.

the slabs curve
like a parabola,
as if the earth's pull
presses up
from under
neath / i try
to stay centered
as i drive
my chair over
the crest. inevitably,

i drift

left and right. / i swear
i haven't had a drink
dear passerby. / one

time, i nearly drove
into the bush

halfway
to the door.

i swerved
to soften
the impact

but missed.

reasonably

people laugh
when i say
cracks in sidewalks act
as speedbumps,

they think i'm joking,

but,
one time
i almost slid out of my chair.

Translator's Note: On the Prose of Anzhelina Polonskaya

Andrew Wachtel

I have been translating Anzhelina's work for almost twenty years. For the first fifteen, that meant exclusively poetry. Her poetry is, however, somewhat unusual in the Russian tradition because for the most part she employs free verse, which gives her poems a somewhat "prosaic" feel in comparison to the metered and rhymed work of most of her contemporaries. The prosaic affect is further underscored by her eschewal of showy poetic tropes. Instead, she is a master of ellipsis, which is quite difficult to render in English.

A few years ago, Anzhelina began to experiment with prose and asked whether I would be willing to translate that as well. "How Birds Die" is part of a collection of prose pieces entitled *Greenland*, and is typical of her approach to "poet's prose," a type of writing that in Russia was perfected by Osip Mandelstam, Boris Pasternak, and Marina Tsvetaeva (Anzhelina's favorite poet). Such writing straddles the fine line between autobiographical sketch and fiction, and is characterized by some of the same traits that are visible in her poetry: a strong lyrical "I," the avoidance of showy tropes, quick cuts between narrative and lyrical sections, and frequent ellipses. In another context, I said that translating Anzhelina's poetry is a bit like translating Chekhov—you look at it and at first glance you think, "this should be easy." But once you start you realize that simplicity is devilishly difficult to render in translation and start to wish that she were showing off a bit more, which would give you more plentiful options. Or to make an analogy with a different art form, translating Anzhelina is like playing a Mozart symphony as opposed to one by Mahler. There may be less going on, but the slightest mistake is audible.

TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN BY ANDREW WACHTEL

Anzhelina Polonskaya

How Birds Die

I didn't notice how the day lilies wilted.
Their stems stick up—dried out stalks.

How the blue shutters faded,
and the furious birds banged into the glass.

What has happened to us all?

You'll wake up early and call my name,
but my name doesn't talk,
doesn't smash against the rocks.

And I don't understand silence, don't drape my shoulders
in silence.

A bird flew into the window. To me its wingspan seemed enormous. I ran out into the garden and on the path lay a large woodpecker.

His beak was half open. The woodpecker was having trouble breathing.

Dying animals scare me.

Maybe because they leave life out of sight. And we don't know anything about it. In a sense, human death is more comprehensible and closer to us. Like it or not, you have to guard your home against it.

When I was a girl, riding bicycles with a friend, we came upon a dead body. It was strange that no one was walking from the commuter train at that hour. When people were usually coming home from work. A rather thin woman was lying perpendicular to the path that had been tamped down along the fences, a few steps away from the main, unimproved road. She lay with her head on the curb. I remember the high green sedge close to her cheek. The woman looked like one of those androgynous people who live very strange lives. Burning up their

days between alcohol and sleep, junkyards, basements and campfires. Disappearing from time to time. Forever. They're usually followed by a train of dogs, as unkempt as their owners.

We took her for a "lost woman." Which for us meant homeless. But it's possible that our impression was incorrect. Death makes everyone poor without exception.

I bent over the bird, afraid to pick him up. His tail feathers were stained red.

"Blood."

I wasn't afraid of the blood but rather of what I might see when I parted the bird's feathers. It's precisely under the surface that the most terrifying things are hidden. Nature has not made us very aesthetically appealing on the inside. I lifted my glance up to the window. It was clean. On the panes were two seemingly old streaks. They had nothing to do with the bird. If they had, the liquid would have flowed down the glass and along the wall, leaving a mark on the garden pavers. I picked the woodpecker up. He was beautiful and hot, much hotter than my palm. He grabbed spasmodically at my fingers with his claws. I had to get him far away from the feral cats. That was all I could do.

I couldn't heal him.

It turns out I couldn't do anything: love unlovable, unnecessary people, dance to their tune, lie, inhale a stranger's odors in the night, stroke the skin over black birthmarks. O, how unbearable skin can be, touching it! Why? Because they were an inalienable part of life. The life I've been forced to accept.

To wait years for another, unique and unavailable. To exculpate your guilt through slow, middle-aged happiness.

"Happiness?"

Who said that?

All that was best in me had been wasted on the servile word "hope."

He'll abandon you, dying in an airplane crash or of cancer. He'll marry a slut, empty as her compact, polished clean by her sharp fingernail. He'll marry her, paying tribute to the fashion for exotic idiots. You have to be a woman—accept what you have. Accept the alms of fate.

I couldn't. I threw away those gifts.

Half an hour later the woodpecker was still where I'd hidden him. I brought

it some tiny crumbs of cheese, pieces of soft bread, and a little dish of water. He didn't touch them.

The degenerates in my country, following the orders of my president, are crushing European cheeses with bulldozers. They're destroying apples that were grown in lovely orchards, which know nothing about primitive barbarity. They're burning meat in crematoria that were once used to burn the bodies of the people who died in the siege of Leningrad. The work goes slowly, because the slaves who are called "my contemporaries" are throwing slabs of ham into the fire one by one. Our epoch is a hell so dark that even Dante wouldn't have been able to describe it.

For many years I've been haunted by one and the same dream: somewhere in my attic I'm hiding a yellow canary.

"Why does he live in the darkness behind the bars of a cage?"

"From whom am I hiding him?"

The attic floor is covered in fallen leaves. At every step the leaves brush up against my feet like waves. Between the wooden boards that make up the walls there are tiny cracks, which let in a bit of sunlight. If you put your eye up to one of those cracks on the west side of the house, you can just barely see what the neighbors are doing.

Days go by, weeks, and with horror I understand that I've forgotten about the canary, which is locked up under the attic roof without water or birdseed.

"Oh, my God," I say.

A fear of the inevitable sight of the bird consumes me completely. I draw a mental picture of his slow painful death, hour after hour. So, first he sat on his perch, blinded by the darkness. Then he carefully hopped down, trying to find water in the confined space. But the water dish was empty.

"Oh, my God," I repeat, walking in circles and holding my head in my hands.

"And then, and then ..."

His feathers have become dull, his beak is partially open. Already he's unable to jump up onto the bars, but sits immovable in the straw streaked with droppings. I wave my hand in my sleep, trying to stop the film that's rolling in my brain. Cowardice prevents me from climbing the stairs, opening the trap door, breathing in the smell of decaying old things and opening the cage.

"I'm so strong, loving, and I wouldn't hurt a fly."

The nightmare is over. But I know it will come back again and again, haunting my future dreams.

What hurts most is experiencing the pain of others and realizing your inability to assume even a portion of it. Although that other life depends on you. Cowardice. You can sneer at it, but it's useless. Because "a coward dies twice."

I stroked the woodpecker along his black and white spotted back. He turned his head carefully in my direction, shook himself and made a quick movement to hide in the bushes. And only then did I notice that one of his eyes was covered with a cataract. It was an old injury, maybe he ran into a branch when he was a fledgling. Or some kind of illness. The other eye, burning like a big pearl, looked at me with fear. Suddenly he spread its wings and flew off. Flying low and heavily he crossed the garden and hid in the pines.

"He'll live," I said to myself.

But for whom?

Sara June Woods

Trans Memoir 4-7

Sea-Witch held me after my formation. I cried in her arms & in her hair & went into her body through the entrance to her body, which is the ear. When I got there I met others for whom she had done the same. I saw their beautiful faces & hair & how they covered them with dirt like I had covered mine with dirt. They took me to a beach there where I could live. Sea-Witch is one of the few places in the world where the act of living & doing the few things that are needed to live hasn't been made so difficult as to be nearly impossible. Outside of Sea-Witch you have to be nearly obsessed with doing a lot of very specific strange things at the service of the seventy-eight men who cause pain & you have to spend much of your life doing & thinking about these things in order to live, & even then, even if you focus your whole self on this service you still often will not be able to live. For those of us who are monsters this will always be so difficult as to be nearly impossible. I can't tell you how it is for those who are not monsters, because I do not know how to speak to them. In Sea-Witch living is everywhere. It doesn't eat you from within.

I'm not sure people exist. I often think about myself & the time I spent in the world among people before I came to Sea-Witch. About the time before I knew I was a monster. People is the word for living creatures who look almost like monsters but not quite. People can be found almost everywhere, but I always wonder if they aren't maybe, secretly, monsters too.

When I arrived at Sea-Witch for the first time, I told her I am so tired now. I said, I am tired & tired of being tired. She told me to come in & sleep. I told her I could sleep for lifetimes & then I did just that.

Amy Meng

Orpheus, Asymptote

I've tasted bones from the butcher's house
and once a sun-bleached fragment of skull.
The longer I live the closer I get.
At rush hour turnstiles click like a summer
mob of beetles, their shining mouths.
Trains deafen as they speed,
departure trailing like a loosened bow.
Inside the car it's quiet.
Silent inside speed, and delicious
to be with something that just holds me.
By the lane the birches are notched with public initials.
It seems like proof but isn't.
At night I bump the table with my bare thigh
and pain spreads like slow ink.
I look at tight buds of lavender,
the ring finger of strangers. I look at the people
getting into their homes at night, light
from the hallway falling flat on their faces. I turn
and walk straight into the blazing X of the sun.

Amy Meng

Motion, Moved

I fold into the cold croissant of bed.
When he leaves I flutter open like a valve.
His wardrobe, my hangers, our chest
of drawers. Possession tossed like a rule

over everything. He says:
I think you should move out.
Wiping away my deed like light snow
over the car window.

The last time we touched was
an accident in sleep. I think of the shout
of a shot in hunting season and stay down
in the leaves of bed. I feel close

and protective of my brain,
which is already doing things for me.
I stare down the mattress edge
and tell myself:

Swing over. Render
unto Caesar what is Caesar's.

Khadijah Queen

When I saw Ochocinco I had to think about all of the ways I had been fake

or lied about my feelings or calculated a response & why I mean why risk dismissal of a real self when you can create a façade one easily taken down & reconstructed why let people into your real house with its rust & clutter and unframed prints & dessicated parsley in the crisper & so what if your history of poverty & abuse is evident & an undercurrent you ask yourself is that who you are & who are you afraid of or is the surface attention itself your addiction & in Atlanta getting a buffet dinner at Eats making sure Ochocinco who is famous for both playing football & head-butting his fiancée when she allegedly caught him cheating making sure he doesn't touch you when he reaches a little too close when you are both getting silverware & your armor is a burgundy vegan leather tank top with peplum hem & a black mini skirt & low-heeled slightly-over-the-knee leather boots & you can feel the men in the restaurant looking as you walk by but they don't speak & you practice what you've learned you walk tall walk pageant straight & manage to eat greens & cornbread with whatever kind of grown woman grace

Leila Aboulela

The Circle Line

Cheese melts in London like nowhere else. Old mixes with new like nowhere else. The city is blessed. But a girl can sob her heart out in London's streets and no one will stop, no one will raise an eyebrow, no one will ask why. Oh city of opportunities, career ladders and fame, you promised me I could do this and that; start afresh, make my fortune. Rise and cruise up high. But I age and watch the chances fold in, the paths converge. I live the narrowing and the shutting down.

This shrinkage makes for a modest life, a failure; it opens the trapdoor on what I thought was beneath me: the cesspool of bitter and delirious crime. Last year my fiancé was arrested for money laundering. I had no inkling of it, not the vaguest idea. Lucky you didn't go down with him, people tell me. They can't be bothered with the state of my heart.

After I broke off with him, my mother took to sending me alternative suitors. It is easier to meet them here in London. In Abu Dhabi we would have to be chaperoned or at least pretend to be. Here we can be alone. Here it's all quicker: from the awkward first meeting, to seeing through the veneer of appearances, nurturing a spark, aborting a project before it becomes formal. Here we are allowed a more organic start.

I wake to the buzz of a message from her. We Skype while I eat my toast. She is three hours ahead of me and chirpy. "After our last tragic experience, we need to stick to families that we know."

It is nice of her to say 'our' to include herself in my disgrace. But it could also be a ploy to soften me. I know her tricks. She goes on, with confidence, "Remember Hisham, the son of Dr. Suad? You must remember him from that time we met up in Alexandria. How old were you then? Thirteen or fourteen. I gave him your number. He is only in London for a few days. You must

meet up."

I flick back two decades to a snapshot of Hisham, skinny in a navy swimsuit and poking at a patch of seaweed. He is saying, 'It's edible! It's edible!' No one else shares his excitement. At the age of fourteen I already knew about crushes, I knew who I fancied and who I didn't. At the age of fourteen, I assessed Hisham and concluded that he was not my type.

"I'm busy," I say to my mother.

"You are thirty-four."

"Thirty-three." My birthday is in November.

Her mood changes, "In a few years' time the situation will no longer be a joke."

I have heard this lecture time and time again. Years flying, fertility falling; how I'm becoming more and more set in my ways, how no man is perfect. "So what's the catch with this one?" I ask. These suitors always have a defect. The first one she sent was too short, the second only spoke to say that he hated London, and the third should have been right—three is a good number, after all—but he confessed that his family had put pressure on him to meet me while he was actually in love with another girl, unsuitable no doubt. The fourth was too religious.

"You," my mother sighs. "You are the only obstacle."

He phones me as I step into Hyde Park. Before I break into my after-work jog and start to breathe heavily. It's sunny today. Girls stretch out on the grass, their lipstick melting in the sun. I stride past ghetto blasters and smelly dogs, tepid ice cream handed down to children. Hisham tells me he's staying in a hotel in Bayswater. He's left the NGO with which he'd spent eighteen months in Darfur. In a few days' time he will take the train to Edinburgh to visit his brother who is studying there.

"I'm giving private Arabic lessons in the evenings," I say. "It's amazing how many people now want to learn. And they're willing to pay well for it!"

He laughs, I don't know why. He says this sounds good, this sounds interesting. I stand still and look at the playground. An overweight Arab boy is panting over

the sand-pit. His Filipino nanny stands over him, her skinny arms on her hips. This job has taken her from her lush homeland through Doha or Bahrain. For a few months she will walk London's tired grass and carry heavy shopping down Edgware Road. In holiday photos and video clips, she will be an exotic flower in the background.

"I'm sorry to hear about your broken engagement," he is saying.

I mumble something in reply.

Hisham's voice sounds distant as if he is looking away, "The need for money can make the throat go tight. But some people have neither morals nor restraint."

The last thing I want is to discuss my ex. So I make my voice light, "You've become a philosopher, Hisham."

"Yes. And I'm intrigued by the Circle Line, by all things that are inaccurately named."

"Pardon?"

"In the underground. I took the Circle Line earlier today and it didn't bring me back where I started. The trains no longer run a continuous circle. Instead they travel in a semi-circle and there are now two routes."

I remember now this quirkiness of his. How he was sometimes geeky, sometimes soulful. How he earnestly revealed information, things he must have read about or remembered from TV. "Merlin is a kind of falcon. The Nile is the longest river. Seaweed is edible." Now he wants me to show him around London.

We agree to meet up tomorrow; perhaps it won't be as hot as today. It is at this time of year that I miss Abu Dhabi the most. I miss the spacious malls and the blast of the air conditioners. Here, it is as if the sun of the Empire has come to pay respect. London swells with planeloads of tourists. Tourists with big appetites, cash heavy, mouths watering, eyes popping.

Bloody foreigners, screeches a harassed mother as they stampede her and her infant, getting on a bus in Oxford Street. *Every bloody summer.*

The buses are full of women. Women with pushchairs and little old women, shaking away. Dreamy schoolgirls stalked by bullies. The slow red buses are dignified like the Queen.

City of generous absorption, of waddling matrons in black abayas and face

veils consulting Harley Street specialists, of sulky adolescents seeking distraction in Madame Tussauds. Ancient Egypt's gold lying cold in a museum. The tennis at Wimbledon; the pigeons in Trafalgar Square. And an order, a fairness; an obligation to make things better even in some little way. Under Marble Arch I feel the weight of history.

In street corners: nose rings, dreadlocks, skinheads, pin dug through an eyebrow, man dressed as woman, dog dressed as man, a placard raised high, *Jesus Is Coming*.

But this is also a city of fashion. Nearly everyone looks good in London. It's the hair and the new clothes. Londoners make an effort, having faith in the pages of glossy magazines. Or else it's turbans and saris: Nigerian women in paradise greens and head wraps so large only they could carry them.

Down in the underground station it is warmer. I wonder what Hisham will be like after all these years. I wonder why I never looked him up on Facebook. Jubilee Line, Metropolitan Line. Crystal Palace and Marble Arch. What will I tell him about the Circle Line, and how Oxford Circus is not a circus?

He can't truly know London until he is here in winter with its fog and gloves and Christmas lights. There are secrets, then, under the dark coats and bare trees. In the wisps of smoke from breath and street lights. It is also important to know, to keep in mind that in Speaker's Corner not everyone is insane. Not everyone.

We meet off Regent Street, in a café with pictures of dead Hollywood stars and an American slant to the menu. Ten in the morning and it feels early for London. Clean, not too much traffic, not too much heat.

A sudden sticky nostalgia when I first see him. His shoulders are broader, his hair is cut short. I briefly crave the frenzy of our younger selves, itchy swimsuits and sunburn, the blast of the sea, our parents in the background genial and laughing. What if I never ever have children? Hisham orders a cappuccino and I order an iced Coffee Extravaganza, trying it for the first time. It comes tall and sweet, sealed at the top with thick white cream. It tastes so good, I can't believe it.

Have another one, he says. I am surprised at this suggestion, intrigued. I say no. It will be greedy, all that ice and cream.

The second glass lasts longer. I sip through the straw and there is caramel at the bottom. There's caramel at the bottom, I say, and offer him some. He shakes his head.

I was four when my parents moved to Abu Dhabi. Flushed with new money, they fed me on McDonalds and Pizza Hut, indulged me until I refused to eat anything else. I ate nothing but junk food for three years until I fell ill. It was a struggle to wean me off and get me to eat a proper meal. For a long time anything green felt strange and tickly in my mouth.

"How long will you keep hiding in London?" he asks.

I am taken aback and launch into a long and hectic explanation. I brag about how regularly I jog in the park and about the new car I am buying. He must never feel sorry for me.

He says he's burnt out after eighteen months in Darfur. He says he can't talk about what it was like in the camps. He spreads his palms out to take in our surroundings, the comfy seats, the strident leftovers on people's plates.

"You're too soft for that kind of work," I say.

He laughs instead of getting annoyed. He says, "Maybe this is what getting older means, becoming disappointing in our own selves. And now I need to adjust to normal chitchat and the kind of everyday life where there isn't an urgent situation every two minutes. But I won't look for another job yet. I'll wait till my savings run out."

He says he is writing a story about a university professor. He begins to recite it out loud from memory: "Hunched, the professor gazed into his glass of whiskey and slowly moved it round and round. The ice clinked. The professor said (and his voice was just a little slurred, his tone as if he was going to tell a secret) 'I believe the earth is going to go round and round, round and round forever...It will never stop.'"

"Is that all?" I say. Through the window I can see the traffic building up. Bicycles weave among the black cabs.

"No, because his friend responds..."

"What friend?"

"There is a friend with him, his drinking companion." Hisham says 'drinking companion' very slowly as if it were a foreign word. It is as if he wants to make a point about the distance he keeps from alcohol. He stresses each syllable, drin-king com-pan-i-on. "He is writing a biography of Pascal," Hisham adds with pride.

"Is he?"

"Yes, and this is what he says to the professor when the professor says the earth will go round and round forever and never ever stop. He says— his voice is also just a bit slurred, but smoother —'My money is on it ending.'"

"Then what," I ask, my fingers reaching for my phone.

"That's it, that's my whole story. Don't you know Pascal's wager?"

"No, I don't."

"Pascal said that it is rational to wager that God exists, because in doing that, you have everything to gain and nothing to lose. If you wager that He doesn't exist and then it turns out that He does, you lose everything. If you wager that He does exist and then it turns out that He doesn't, you won't lose anything."

Hisham smiles and my brain works to catch up with him. He was like that too when he was young. I could never understand half of what he said or how he could possibly do things like listen to the Grateful Dead. And now he is drawing the Circle Line on a napkin.

I look down at the drawing. The Circle Line is not continuous. It does not go on and on in a loop. It has an end. This is the basic, deepest argument, Hisham says. Will the world end or will it go on forever? Does time finish or not? A straight line starts at a certain point and ends at another, unless it goes on to infinity–and infinity must be a different place, not where the line started. But a circle promises continuity, round and round passing the same things.

"It makes sense to wager that the world —as we know it—will end."

What he is saying doesn't sound new. "Everyone knows that. What do you think people are doing every single day? They are making the most of things before it's too late."

"So they know already," he says. "It is that clear."

In a way it is clear and in a way, it isn't. Through the window, the buses look purposeful. Everyone's footsteps pound, beating out a march I can faintly hear.

Come join this dance. Such beautiful shops...and they're selling soft ice cream on the pavement. Eat, walk, shop, carry plastic bags, run and hop onto a bus. In the churn of central London, everyone is united by one wish. More to spend.

Is there nothing that everyone has, every single person?

I am surprised when Hisham answers, how sure he is. "Time, everyone has time. But if the professor in my story is wrong and the earth stops going round and round, even time will stop."

There is a message on my phone: my mother asking, "What do think of Hisham?"

I could text back, 'Not sure' or, 'so far, so good.' I ignore her instead. We walk out of the café. He falls in with my step. It matters that he does. It is significant, more appreciated than acknowledged. We walk past Hamleys and Liberty. We ignore the turn into Carnaby Street.

Eat, walk, shop, carry plastic bags, run and hop onto a bus. The truth is in the movement itself. Disappointment is embedded in every step. Because every beat takes us closer to the end. We find hope, though, in the fact that the world spins.

Continuity might be a false comfort, but it is not one to be dismissed.

Ross Wilcox

Crop Circles

I wanted the Crop Circles to be a hoax,
but they were way too incredibly detailed.
For example, one Crop Circle
depicted the Sistine Chapel.
Inside was the magnificent ceiling,
exactly as Michelangelo had painted it,
ripply-muscled white people wrapped in sheets
and God extending his index finger like ET.

Other Crop Circles depicted famous places like
Machu Picchu, the Taj Mahal, and South Dakota.
More people went to the Crop Circle movie theater
and saw the new James Bond movie than the actual
movie theater with the actual James Bond movie.
Before long, there were more people living
in the Crop Circle San Francisco than the actual San Francisco.

I tried resisting the relentless Crop Circle appropriation
of everything. But at church, I found myself praying
for rain along with the rest of them, so that we, too,
might grow in detailed patterns. I found myself eating
fertilizer for Communion. I made my bed in the dirt,
welcomed the sun's kissing rays in the morning, rejoiced
at the occasional falling rain, hoped with all my leaves
and stalks for the Pranksters to come along at night
and make me into something beautiful.

But everything changed when a Crop Circle
depicting a Crop Circle appeared.

Michael Morse

Little God (Labrador)

I will not venture out into the flats.
Not today. It's Monday. And Sunday

serves us habitual grit and contemplation
as a dish of incremental coins collected.

See how the bivalves sit, still souls
found and kept and conveniently projected?

In currency we make ourselves a PowerPoint—
What otherwise is there in a cerulean atlas

half-cherrystone, half-almanac, both homespun
and mercurial with territories uncharted?

Little God, I give the bucket, rake, and boots a break.

The beds are out under the bay, little brine mines
with ordnance slow and benefits of happenstance.

Given or lent? We let them be and find ourselves.
We happen to our finding here. A tongue. A tanker.

We embrace two different kinds of Labrador—

the kind that hunts in perpetual haste
and that place which never asked to be discovered.

Mario Alberto Zambrano

A National Installation of Memory

A woman on a bicycle is wearing a red silk scarf next to a signpost where I once ate a split-open coconut smothered in lime juice. I click the arrow on my computer screen. The image shifts further down the street. The woman on the bicycle disappears.

I don't remember it raining the year I lived in Tel Aviv as a dancer in Batsheva Dance Company, between August 2000 and July 2001. Every morning I'd walk through the concrete buildings and commercial warehouses that were covered in dark gray dust until I reached the shore of the Mediterranean Sea. The sun was always out. I walked down Rothschild Avenue with my Jansport backpack over my shoulders, my headphones over my ears, listening to Radiohead or Ani DiFranco—*Amnesiac* had just been released. I worked on the second floor of the Suzanne Delall Center, in a 4,000 square-foot studio with more than thirty bay windows, each of them twelve feet high. On one side there was nothing but palm leaves, while on the other there was a view of the shore with clouds of fuchsia dotting the horizon. We'd start class on the floor with our eyes closed, connecting with our bodies, listening to either Nina Simone or Billie Holiday, trying to apply the similes the director gave us: to move our arms like honey, to jump as though we were in a pot of simmering water, to stretch as though we were made of taffy. The director would sit in his low chair next to a sound system and lead us through class while changing the music.

A few months earlier when I was trying to decide if I'd move (I was dancing in Holland with Nederlands Dans Theater), my previous director told me Tel Aviv was the armpit of the world. It was dirty, politically unstable, and I wouldn't make much money as a dancer. Most points were true—I lived on a thousand dollars a month in Israel—but no matter what anyone told me, what I envisioned was not the dirt or upheaval shown on a CNN broadcast; instead, I saw the djembe circles on the beach, the rare Siberian blue of Israeli eyes, the sun that would give me a

golden-brown tan. If Jerusalem (which is where I assumed most of the political havoc to be) was considered the heart of the country, I considered Tel Aviv the soul. Everyone I knew who'd visited Tel Aviv told me it was one of his favorite cities. "Everyone there is so beautiful," they said.

As I click through a virtual walk on the computer screen, passing the towering trees on Rothschild Avenue, I arrive to a corner on Herzl St. where there was once a kiosk that burned down a few months before I arrived. I passed it every morning on my way to work and never considered it as anything more than an abandoned building that was the result of an unexpected fire. Covered in soot, there were no signs that it might be remodeled. It wasn't until a few days later into my sojourn when I encountered a soldier on King Street who said the street I was walking down was blocked. They had found an unattended bag. It dawned on me that the kiosk on Herzl St. might have been bombed. I walked the path the soldier suggested, but my curiosity arrested me and I couldn't look away from the unattended bag, under a bench and across the street from a park. Further down the street, I slowed my pace and looked down, stunned in part by the possibility of fire and sound erupting at any second. A few seconds later, I heard an explosion. The other pedestrians on the block continued walking as though it were only a car horn, another raucous sound they'd learned to live with. A college student saw me standing and said something to me in Hebrew, then in English.

"They *have* to," she said. She was on her way to a music lesson, carrying a cello on her back. She did not have Siberian blue eyes. Hers were a dull emerald outlined in gold, as though they were framed with a sage understanding that everything was going to be all right, all was outlined in the light of how we see. "If they find one," she said, "they have to blow it up."

I asked a friend in the company if she knew anything about what happened at the kiosk. "Bombed," she said as she chewed on an apple. I'd known about suicide bombers and bomb threats, some targeted the market where I bought pita bread and basil and cherry tomatoes on my way home after work, but the proximity was palpable. I passed it every morning, thinking: When? When is it going to go off? Will I be far enough to witness it, or will I be in the midst of a deafening noise until I blackout and then awake in a cloud of smoke?

"Bombed?" I asked, naively as though she might offer a different explanation. She took another bite from her apple. "It's the fucked up way they communicate," she said.

They? Who were they?

On weekends or after rehearsals some of my friends and I would go out to a burger bar we liked going to and find ourselves sitting next to students doing their military training, wearing their camouflage green uniforms, their rifles propped up against the tables. I'd ask them what training was like. But they evaded the question because they were more interested in what it was like being a dancer. Talk of weapons and military discipline didn't interest them but the idea of dancing as a profession did, of waking up to the voice of Nina Simone every morning. I was surprised at how well they spoke English, and I never had to practice the little Hebrew I knew. We fell into conversations about Woody Allen and Quentin Tarantino, directors they loved because of their witty approaches to tragedy and daring audacity to be singular without apology. They shared stories about when they visited either New York City or Los Angeles, and about how, on weekends, they'd travel to cities as far as Haifa to enjoy their grandmother's cooking. This was a way of showing me that their lives were more than the highlighted coverage of bomb threats and military responsibilities. They were more than young adults doing their military training, which, I understood, was exactly how I saw them when I sat next to them.

But I couldn't forget about the stories I'd heard, like the one about Inbal, a friend of one of the girls in the company, who took a bus to a ballet class one afternoon then died when the bus blew up near the Dizengoff Center. This is what I wanted to talk about. Isn't this terrifying, I wanted to ask. Why aren't you afraid? Why don't you seem afraid? I mentioned it because that kind of terror was something I didn't grow up with, and I wanted to learn, I wanted to understand. My unleashed imagination at what life was like for them—of taking a bus to school under the threat of danger—and their uncompromising reality collided. All I wanted was their stories in order for truth to surface. How did they live through these stories? Of Inbal dying? I didn't ask. Instead, we drank beers and talked about Eilat, a port town off the Red Sea.

On Shenkin St. there was a music store called The Third Ear, the coolest music store in the world. It carried the latest albums from electronic artists like Thomas Brinkmann and Raster-Noton, the kind of music that provided a sonic soundscape

I spent hours dancing to in the studio after everyone went home. It's due to this habit that I hardly went out dancing, why I never found myself on the outskirts of Jaffa, the old city, where a dance club called the Dolphinarium was getting popular. And lucky for me, I never had the urge. At the end of my first season in Tel Aviv, the bomb I'd been anticipating finally went off.

Someone by the name of Saeed Hotari dressed up as an orthodox Jew and wandered among the line of teenagers waiting outside of the Dolphinarium, banging on a drum packed with explosives and ball bearings, chanting in Hebrew, "Something's going to happen." At 11:30 p.m. he detonated himself, killing twenty-one people and injuring more than a hundred.

I first heard about it the next morning at work. We were about to begin class and some of the dancers were discussing what happened, shaking their heads, reminiscing about when they'd gone to that very same club. The director led a moment of silence then proceeded with class as always. But I couldn't stop thinking about what happened, about those kids who wanted to go out dancing. I imagined each and every one of them: the older brother who didn't want to go out dancing but went anyway to escort his little sister; the boy who'd taken a nap so he could pull an all-nighter; the teenagers who were going out for the first time, who wanted to feel grown-up; the one who couldn't stop moving even as he stood in line; and the twenty-one year old Saeed. I imagined how he might convince himself that murder by means of suicide is an act of heroism. But again, my imagination was all but fiction if I couldn't empathize enough to understand why in the world he would go through with it, especially at a club where young people had gathered to celebrate music. I took class that morning first with an unbearable sadness, then with rage. I'd never heard of a terrorist attack made on a dance club, and now, it had reached so close to the world I dedicated my time to—of dance and music—that I felt the assault on my innocence, to *our* innocence. There was nowhere to hide if we couldn't dance without fear.

What would it be like to go through with it? To pull the duct tape around my chest knowing this piece would take me and those around me to a place of nothing? What if I had a daughter and something terrible happened to her, what would save me from the reflex of retribution? I wouldn't consider reason because reason hadn't considered my daughter. My everyday truth would become the re-

imagining of her story until it drove me drunk with revenge, so much I'd become indifferent to other people's well-being, including my own.

Saeed was a member of the militant group Hamas. His reasons were not likely because of a victimized daughter, but the only way it made sense to me was that they were, that it was personal. It had to be emotional. I clung to the idea that suicide bombers are engendered from a history too profound and complex to ever understand. I know it's not the point of empathy to acknowledge what's on the surface, but rather, an attempt to unravel what we are trying to decipher underneath the subject we're considering. But the political and religious labyrinth of Israeli and Palestinian conflict spans so far back, hundreds and hundreds of years, that I was but a passing and present witness realizing I was too small to comprehend the complexity of time. Perhaps Saeed had convinced himself to detonate the piece across his chest not because of a radical manipulation, but because his father or great grandfather, or son even, had been murdered.

When I was a boy, I watched dance films—that's how I started dancing, by emulating what I saw on television. In the movie *Dirty Dancing* when "Baby" rehearses a dance routine with Patrick Swayze, she drops the frame of her arms. Swayze gets impatient. He says, while holding his arms in second position, "This is my dance space. This is your dance space. You don't go into mine and I don't go into yours." I was eight years old and what I learned was that you have to keep your frame in order to dance with someone. In the movie they step into each other, overlapping, while keeping the shape of their arms. They occupy the space between them.

When we consider areas where boundaries are marked with walls, how do the parties involved respect the spaces they are allowed to live in and the stories they want to tell without losing the form that helps them overlap? The grace between two dancers is due to the strength of keeping their forms from collapsing. It's not easy, and it comes with hours of practice. In a ballet I learned at Batsheva I had to swing my partner around in circles while holding on to her wrists. The goal was to elevate her body off the ground as I spun around, but during rehearsal one day my

hands slipped and she landed on her back and rolled toward the wall. When I ran to her to see if she was all right, her eyes were wet, her hands shaking. "Why did you let go?" she asked. I apologized, feeling ashamed and awful about it, but we dared to try again, and before we did, she looked at me, her cheeks still wet from tears of shock, and said, "Hold on this time." There would be no art between two dancers if they never tried to find balance in their movements, no room for the potentiality of human agreement and collaboration.

In her essay "Imagination and Community," Marilynne Robinson suggests that community is a work of collective imagination: "I would say, for the moment, that community, at least the community larger than the immediate family, consists very largely of imaginative love for people who we do not know or whom we know very slightly." In Robinson's way of thinking, how do we imagine Israel and how do we imagine Palestine, or any other country, if they are a community we do not know or whom we know slightly? Furthermore, how do they imagine each other? If two dancers enter the dance floor with his or her singular idea, a singular dream, they dismiss the opportunity to invite—and be invited—into the communal place of partnership. If one dreams of waltzing, she must be willing to seek balance with her partner. Isolated dreams won't participate in any constellation except for the shooting stars that pass them.

"This is my space. This is your space."

During the year I lived in Israel I experienced something called the National Broadcast Alert System. When the alarm goes off in honor of those who died in earlier wars or in the Holocaust, whether someone is in his car or walking down the street, the moment he hears the alarm he stops and stands still. The first time I heard it—an ascending and descending tone that rings for sixty seconds through the airfield of Israel—I was on the roof of Suzanne Dellal with two friends, one of them Osnot, a dancer with tight curls falling to her shoulders, who had completed her military training. She was telling me about the time she heard the alarm during the Gulf War, when it wasn't a drill but a real emergency. She ran home and helped her family cover the windows in plastic tarp, then pulled a gas mask over her face. The alarm was a

warning. A Qassam rocket had been detonated and the country was at war.

During the moments we stood on the roof and heard the alarm in the clouds I imagined every person in the country listening to it, immersed in thought for each other's stories—a national installation of memory.

Listening to it I felt so protected as an American, so naive. During my youth I never heard a national alert system intended to warn me that the country was under attack, a drill, an alarm, a quake of sound reverberating from California to New York City so that everyone in the country, at once, knew we were entering war. Today, if we're attacked the first thing we'd do is reach for our phones and check Twitter and the latest news feed on CNN. How little prepared we are in case of the event that a terrorist group hacked into our cellular network, blinding us as well as deafening us to come together. The last time our country stood together in such a way came less than three months after I left Israel, when everyone—from as far as Japan to Australia—stood still, quietly watching the twin towers fall in New York City. That was an example of imagination and community. A way of coming together without losing our identities and the stories we carry for one another.

What is it like now in Tel Aviv? At the corner where the kiosk once was there is a clothing store called Boss Mode. The Dolphinarium has been rebuilt and renovated. The trees in the courtyard of Suzanne Delall have grown, their leaves thick and wider than I remember. I wonder if it's all different or essentially the same, the streets, the music, the people, a country dreaming of its future while never forgetting its past, hoping that those who see it from abroad consider it as familial, as incredibly human and ordinary just like themselves. And do they feel any sort of relief from the worry of violence? Are they still—or were they ever—afraid of dancing?

Kelly Sundberg

Spoons

"Is it hard?" I asked my childhood friend. I couldn't remember his name—the name of the baby she'd lost. I hadn't been close to her in years. Her arrival at the wilderness guard station where I worked as a river ranger for the Forest Service had been a surprise, but the salmon were running. Her husband had wanted to fish, and fishermen had been my only companions for a week.

The last time I had seen her was the year before in the grocery store. She had hugged me then, her body thin and hard. My eyes connected with her husband's. Startled. For the first time, she wasn't beautiful.

Now, we sat at the picnic table outside of my A-frame. I held her newborn daughter.

"Sometimes it's hard," she said. "From the side, she looks just like him. The other day, I laid on the floor of her nursery and cried."

"I'm so sorry," I said.

Her eyes shined, "The nurses did compressions on him for so long that they left a divot in his chest. They were crying. They said, 'Don't die baby,' but he was already dead."

I looked down. I stroked her baby's soft head, "Your daughter is beautiful."

She spoke again. "I keep thinking that one day I'll wake up and have forgiven myself."

I didn't know what to say, didn't know all that had happened during those years when she had struggled with addiction, when she had been thin and hard, when her baby had died, when I, too, had been hard, when I had lived across the country with a violent man and a son who could hear my screams from the other room.

When my friend and I were girls, we slept in her bed surrounded by stuffed animals. She spooned me. Held my hand.

At that picnic table, I saw her as the girl she had been.

What did she see in me? I wondered.

After she left, I sat by myself. Night arrived slowly, the darkness unmarred by

electricity. A single light flickered across the river, a golden glow from the only other cabin nearby. I pretended that the light was for us, my friend and me. I pretended that it spoke from the darkness.

I pretended that it said, "You are not alone."

I pretended that it said, "You are forgiven."

Bethany Schultz Hurst

Seascape with Evacuating Animals

all of the ocean creatures
have been ripped out
of the pop-up book no one's

actually been using the trashcan
lately just tossing used
Kleenex strands of

dental floss in its general
direction I have been stepping
over a grinning paper shark

on the bathroom carpet
for a week now I suspect
my missing car keys

number among this
flotsam it is fall and spiders
are seeking sanctuary

from the cold are squeezing
their plump bodies
under door cracks

every morning
I wash one down the drain
a new one dangling

over my head I shower
praying steam doesn't slicken
whatever informs its

tenuous hold I feel I
should announce now
it is not ideal to have

carpet near a toilet eventually
everything floats down
to clogged waterways

where by mistake birds
and fish fill their mouths
with plastic bags chemical

foam I can think of
nothing to do with this
limp book but return it

to the shelf an empty ocean
how many times have I
held two things in my hands

and thrown the wrong one away

Ralph Angel

Untitled

Even in a thousand years time
I sit for a while

in a garden
among tall buildings

and put my mind
beneath the sound of water

falling
and eat a fabulous

tomato
and like the lighting and the angle

without props or lines
an open heart

and look right at it someone
whispers

TRANSLATED FROM THE SPANISH BY GEORGE HENSON

Vicente Alfonso

Pitol, Our Great Eccentric

Everything is in all things, I repeat as I thumb through my copy of *The Art of Flight* in search of the phrase. The five words enter my head like a mantra, a *ritornello*, a motto of ancient alchemists It's noon on Monday, and I'm in Xalapa, at the home of Sergio Pitol. Everything is in all things I repeat as we wait for the author in his studio: a large space on an upper floor, illuminated by natural light, where I find the essential moments of his life on display: his work, his trips, his readings, his friends.

Everything is in all things. (I recognize objects present in Pitol's work: the three rugs he bought in Turkmenistan during a mind-bending trip he took with Vila-Matas, pottery by Gustavo Pérez, the detective novels from the Séptimo Círculo collection, photos of his closest friends: Margo Glantz, Juan Villoro, Carlos Monsiváis, Elena Poniatowska). The novelist's two dogs, Homero and Lola, watch us. The noise from the hustle and bustle of the kitchen on the lower floor reaches us; someone offers us coffee. Everyone declines except me; I've not been able to drink a cup since arriving in Xalapa yesterday, because I've devoted all my time to tracing the footsteps of the translator, editor, diplomat, novelist who a week later would receive, in this very space, the Alfonso Reyes Prize. Everything is in all things, the voice inside my head insists, but I can't find the phrase in the pages, and I stop looking for it because the dogs become excited when they hear familiar steps on the wooden staircase.

"I owe to our great writer, and to several years of tenacious reading of his work, my passion for language; I admire his secret and serene originality, his infinite

combinatory ability," Pitol has written, alluding to Alfonso Reyes. It's not a recent devotion: already in his *Autobiografía precoz*, a memoir published in 1967, a young Sergio evoked a time when, once a week, he would escape the Faculty of Law to "frequent devoutly" the talks on literature and Greek philosophy that don Alfonso delivered at El Colegio Nacional. It was there where a teacher-pupil relationship began, which in one way or another continues today as the polygraph's presence in Pitol's work is not a minor detail. As proof, one need only recall that Alfonso Reyes is the first name mentioned in *The Magician of Vienna*, in a commentary that acknowledges implicitly the Monterrey native as master. In fact, one frequently finds the figure of don Alfonso in the pages of Pitol: "When in my writing I need a quote, I often recur to Reyes or Borges," he says in *El tercer personaje* [The Third Character]. Moreover: on several occasions Pitol has admitted that "The Dinner," that perfect story written by Reyes, is one of the roots of his narrative, and that a good part of his fictions are "a mere set of variations on that story."

In *The Magician of Vienna*, I find this paragraph: "Alfonso Reyes, our figure most open to the world, was stigmatized for writing about the Greeks, Mallarmé, Goethe, and Spanish literature of the Golden Age. Opening doors and windows was a scandal, an almost betrayal of the country." Although he does not say so openly, I believe that with these lines don Sergio Pitol includes Reyes among a lineage of writers portrayed with great skill in Pitol's work: the eccentrics.

An ambassador in the metro

Silent and smiling, don Sergio enters his study, shakes our hand, and with a gesture invites us to sit down. He's wearing a black suit with no tie, blue vest. He looks calm, lucid, happy. Despite the language problem he's faced in recent years, he's developed a system of signs that allow him to communicate with precision with his friends and collaborators, for example when offering a cigarette and borrowing a lighter. Seconds later, when he releases the first puff of smoke, I inevitably recall "A Vindication of Hypnosis," a text included in *The Art of Flight* in which the

author recounts his experience with a hypnotist whose mission was to help him give up smoking: the result of that treatment is without a doubt one of the most emotional stories in Spanish narrative.

Evoking *The Art of Flight* causes the *ritornello* to return: everything is in all things. Where did I read that phrase? Is it from Pitol or did someone else write it? No matter how much I look through my notes, I only find variations, so I asked don Sergio how he's been, if he's working on a project, and he gestures to a book resting on the table: *The Journey,* a book that was born from a trip through Russia that took place exactly thirty years ago. His assistant adds: in recent weeks Pitol undertook a review of his work, and recently he's been re-reading *The Journey.* He adds that when he tires of reading, someone continues the reading aloud. He also listens to operas and watches movies.

It is precisely in *The Journey* where Pitol devotes a few pages to profiling the eccentrics, a literary species whose preoccupations are different from those of others: "His gestures tend toward differentiation, toward autonomy insofar as possible from a tediously herdlike setting. His real world lies within. (...) In some novels, all the characters are eccentrics, and not only they, but the authors themselves. Laurence Sterne, Nikolai Gogol, the Irishmen Samuel Beckett and Flann O'Brien are exemplars of eccentricity, like each and every one of the characters in their books and thus the stories of those books. (...) The world of the eccentrics and their attendant families frees them from the inconveniences of their surroundings. Vulgarity, ungainliness, the vagaries of fashion, and even the demands of power do not touch them, or at least not too much, and they don't care."

In October 2005, in an interview with Carlos Monsiváis published in *El País*, Pitol referred to the population of eccentrics who inhabit his novels: "In my books eccentrics abound, perhaps in excess, but it's natural. Remember, Carlos, our youth and you'll see that we moved among them. Our friend Luis Prieto, the king of the eccentrics, led us to that world. We spoke a language that few people understood. And during my many years in Europe, above all in Poland and the Soviet Union, that was my world. Dictatorships and oppression produced them; being odd was a way to freedom."

It's clear that if eccentricity is manifested as a way to move away from the

canon, in Pitol that distancing was also physical. In 1961, at twenty-eight, he began a journey that lasted nearly three decades through London, Warsaw, Beijing, Barcelona, Moscow...

Margo Glantz, perhaps his closest friend, describes him this way when I contact her, days later, to request an evocation of don Sergio: "We took many trips together. Through the Mexican Republic when it still existed, or Spain, Austria, Portugal, France, England. I remember many anecdotes, I can think of one in particular at this moment, in Lisbon where he introduced me to Tabucchi, with whom I also became friends, we saw the Portuguese film version of *Ballad of Dogs' Beach* by Cardoso Pires (who should have won the Nobel and not Saramago) of which we did not understand a word, because the Portuguese accent is so closed; an entertaining dinner at a place where they sang *fados* and the singer's toupee was moving in a very funny way when he sang. Or, later, when I went to spend a few days with him in Prague and he went to pick me up by car in Vienna, where he greeted me wearing a carnival mask and, once in Prague, in order to see the city we took the subway on the corner—he was the only quirky ambassador who allowed himself that sport—and we walked and talked until late at night through the streets of the city."

Glantz tells me that Pitol's stories seem extraordinary to her and that she really likes his first novel, *El tañido de una flauta* [The Sound of a Flute], which she considers "largely ignored by critics and misread." Her closing response is conclusive: "I believe that Sergio is one of the great universal writers of our time, I believe it absolutely and without exaggeration."

To translate, to be translated

Perhaps Pitol's most eccentric feature is his open transgression against literary genres, as his texts flow freely from the chronical to the essay, the short story or the personal journal, and they even slide into passages where the events occur with the distorted logic of a dream. It could not be otherwise in a writer who since 1968 has

kept a journal of his dreams and nightmares. It could not be otherwise in an author who has drunk from literature born in very distant latitudes.

"I do not know a better training for structuring a novel than translation," wrote the maestro, who devoted himself for years, during the sixties, to introducing to our language works of authors like Conrad, Austen, Lowry, Gombrowicz, and Graves. From his work as translator has emerged the collection "Sergio Pitol Translator," created in 2007 by the Universidad Veracruzana, which numbers 20 published titles.

Pitol invites us into his bedroom. Next to the bed is a portrait of the writer done by Juan Soriano. Just beyond it, on a small bookcase, two shelves are devoted to Pérez Galdós. I also find, among other titles, *A Dog's Ransom* by Patricia Highsmith, *The Shooting Party* by Chekhov, *The Story of a Novel* by Thomas Mann, *Trans-Atlantyk* by Gombrowicz and a read and re-read copy of Alfonso Reyes' *El plano oblicuo* [The Oblique Plane] (which opens with "The Dinner"). Once again, everything is in all things.

Despite its austerity, the bedroom offers two additional pieces of evidence of this author's opening to the world: in front of one of the windows, don Sergio shows us his travel trunks: three metal boxes that suggest long stays, wrought for transporting books and manuscripts; at the other window, a healthy collection of Pitol's books that have been translated: copies of his novels and essays in Turkish, Arabic, Korean, Hungarian, Dutch, Russian, Hebrew...

Before leaving the room, a thick book on the desk catches my eye: a copy of volume 5 of his collected works, published by the Fondo de Cultura Económica. I open it at random. The phrase is there.

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TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN BY JD LARSON

Friederike Mayröcker

Excerpts from *études*

.... bin ich tobend. Diese kl.Mücke am Morgen wenn diese kl.Mücke auffliegt am Morgen einen Fingernagel hoch über dem Frühstückstisch während der Regen, dann verschwindet diese kl.Mücke deren Gliedmaszen intakt usw., oder ist der trübe Morgen 1 Himmelreich mit Mücken Ameisen und Bienen in meiner Kammer dasz die Tränen mir stürzen dasz der Fusz ich meine dasz der Fusz mir welkt während mein Bruder mich anblickt mit so blaugrauen Augen dasz ich sinke versinke in sein Angesicht während die Etüdenübungen »etudes« ich meine ich sehe dieses Augenpaar vor mir: Immergrünblumen am Saum des Waldes diese 2 blauen blaugrauen Blumenaugen in meines Bruder's Angesicht ach 1 Regenmorgen mein Fusz ist krank wie mein Herz, dann fliegt 1 Schwalbe durchs Haus meine Mutter ist lange tot Cy Twombly's »Orpheus«, Wachskreide auf Leinwand, wiedergefunden in einem Buch fassungslos bin ich tobend in meiner Hütte, meine Sprache vergraben in einem Grasbusehe (Würzelchen)

für Nikolaus Brinskele
24.7.11

Friederike Mayröcker

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN BY JD LARSON

Excerpts from *études*

.... am I uproarious. This tiny mosquito in the morning if this tiny mosquito soars up in the morning 1 fingernail high over the breakfast-table while the rain, then this tiny mosquito disappears its extremities intact etc., or is the dull morning 1 kingdom of heaven with mosquitos ants and bees in my chamber that the tears plunge from me that the foot I mean that the foot is withering me while my brother looks at me with kind of bluegrey eyes that I sink sinking into the presence of his face while the etüdes exercises »études« I mean I see this pair of eyes before me : Evergreen myrtle by the forest seam these 2 bluegrey bloomingeyes in the presence of my brother's face ach 1 rainy morning my foot is sick as my heart, then 1 swallow flies through the house my mother is long dead Cy Twombly's »Orpheus«, waxcrayons on canvas, found again in 1 book stunned am I uproarious in my cabin, my language buried in 1 tuft of grass (rootlet)

for Nikolaus Brinskele
24.7.11

»étude« »étude«
1 Vöglein 1 Finklein am Tor
und ehe es eintrat begann es zu
zwitschern (»Gesäuse« »Gesäuse«)
(je zerrissener jaulten die Hunde am
Eingang zum Supermarkt .....
durch tiefe Sonne gebleicht geblendet das neue
MS ziehe Gardine vor dasz die tiefe Sonne an meine
Schrift nicht rühre : keine Wolke kein Veilchen ziehe
die Gardine vor dasz die tiefe Sonne die neue
PAMPELMUSE nicht bleiche ....)
schwärmten wir nachts unter Sternen an Händen uns
fassend uns küssend während Glyzinien, Büsche von
Amaryllis .... ach HALIF AX als Kind
mit Schlittschuhen

2.9.11

»étude« »étude«
1 birdlet 1 finchlet at the gate
and before it entered it began to
chirp (»sighing« »soughing«)
(the more torn up the dogs howled at the
entrance to the supermarket ....
the new MS bleached blinded by deep
sun draw curtains back so that the deep sun doesn't
reach my writing : no cloud no Violas pull
the drapes back so that the deep sun doesn't
bleach the new POMELO ....)
nights we gushed under the stars by hands
grasping ourselves kissing ourselves while Wisteria, bushes of
Amaryllis .... ach HALIFAX as 1 child
with ice skates

2.9.11

untröstliches Astehen
(1 Hommage an Alois Lichtsteiner und
Tony Frey)

untröstliches Ästchen, weiszt du, bin entgeistert, dieses feine Herzeleid nämlich, die Kralle des Notenhefts. Ich war hinter die Berge geglitten, mein Profil hatte sich verändert .... 1 Largo von Vivaldi die Schwalbe nämlich fliegt durch meine Stube du sagst zu S., siehst aus wie frischgepflückte Kirsche siehst aus wie Klatschmohn siehst aus wie schutzbefohlen, diese Tellermütze nicht wahr, dann sind wir tatsächlich in der Wirtsstube von Z., in welche die Nachmittagssonne brach, im Flor der Nachsommersonne gesessen : alles in sonnigen Kuben nicht wahr —der kl.Hund und rasend das Gebüsch ich bin UMBUSCHT, aus meinen Fingern Füszen Armen die Erlenblättchen sprieszen, so steh ich da als grüner Baum am blauen Firmament .... mit Rosentritten und mit Jenseitstritten da flutete deine Hand von Blut, Antoni Tapies und wie er leuchtete in der Nacht, noch veilchenblau der Abendhimmel im Oktober, und schutzbefohlen : seinen Freunden gibt er es im Schlafe, nach Andy Warhol : 4 leere Colaflaschen im Fenster .....
als er mich küszte damals 1 Sträuszchen Tau von seiner Stirn auf meine Lippe fiel 1 Sträuszchen Tau, als er mich küszte damals 1 Sträuszchen Tau von seiner Stirn auf meine Lippe fiel : der Tag war heisz und heiszer Nachmittag, Nachtschimmer lieber Freund, der Wasserfall im tosenden Gebirge, wilde Narzissen, 1 Berg der PIANINO hiesz, weiszt du

1.·4.10.11

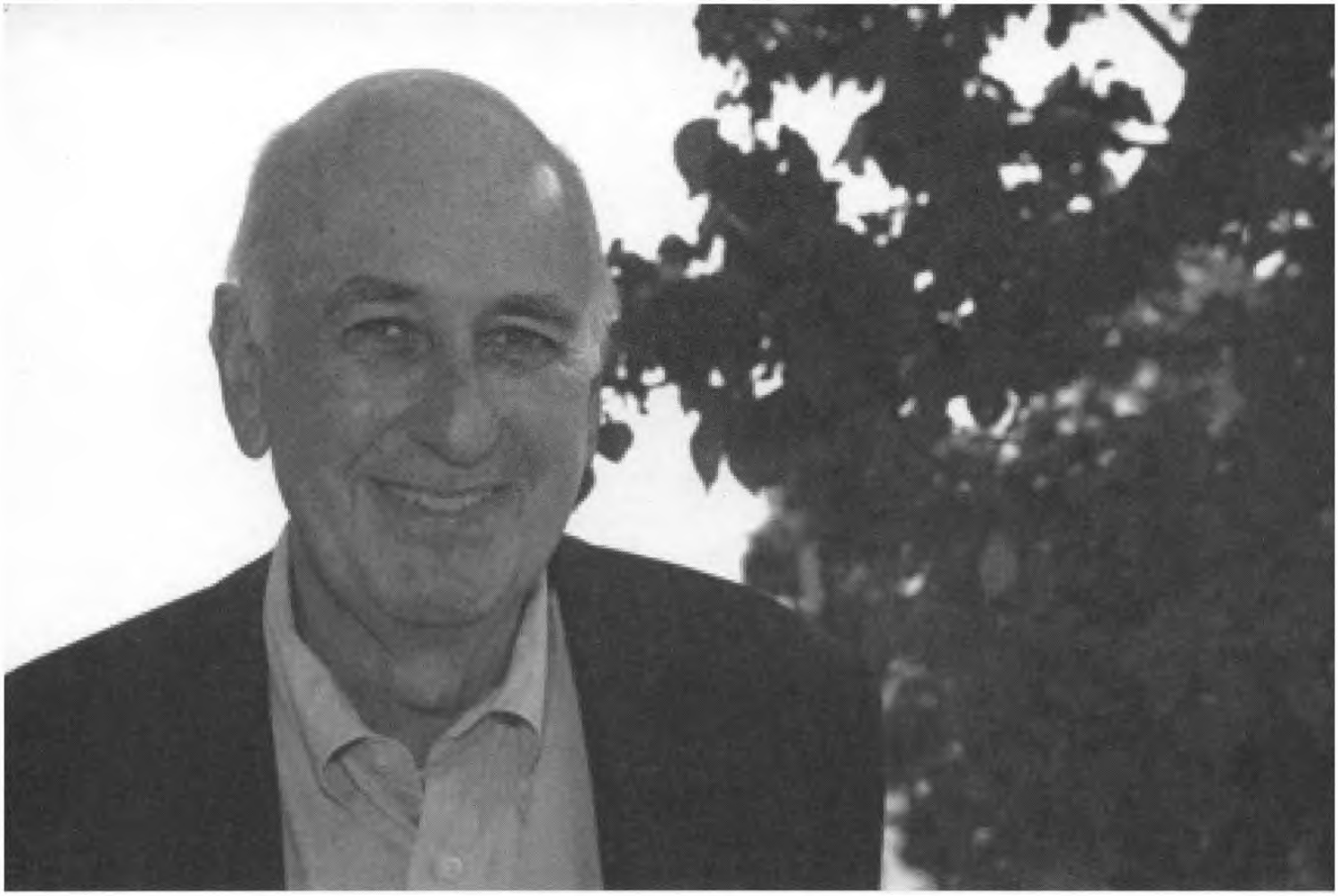
Friederike Mayröcker

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN BY JD LARSON

unconsoling branchlet
(1st homage to Alois Lichtsteiner and
Tony Frey)

unconsoling branchlet, you know, am aghast, this fine
heartbreak namely, the claw of the music-notebook. I had slid
behind the mountains, my profile had changed .... 1 largo of
Vivaldi the swallow namely flies through my room you say
to S., you look like freshlyplucked cherry you look like
field poppies you look like protégée, this flat cap
isn't it so, then we really are in Z.'s room into
which the afternoon sunlight broke, sitting in the web
of the late summer sun : everything in sunny cubes isn't it so
—the little dog and the racing bushes I am ENBUSHED, out
of my fingers feet arms the alder leaflets spring, so
I stand there as 1 green tree in the blue firmament .... with rose
footsteps and hereafter footsteps there your hand flooded with
blood, Antoni Tàpies and how he glowed in the night, still
viola blue the evening sky in October, and protégée :
he gives it to his friends while sleeping, after Andy Warhol : 4 empty
cola bottles in the window ....
as he kissed me that time 1 posy of dew falling from his forehead onto
my lip 1 posy of dew, as he kissed me that time 1 posy of dew
from his forehead onto my lip falling : the day
was hot and hot afternoon, nightshimmer dear friend,
the waterfall in the blustering mountains, wild Narcissuses,
1 mountain named PIANINO, you know

1.-4.10.11



Writing Whatever Presents Itself: A Q&A with Phillip Lopate

Author of more than a dozen books of fiction, nonfiction, and poetry, Phillip Lopate currently teaches at Columbia University, where he directs the graduate program in nonfiction. In the early 1980s, Lopate served as faculty in the University of Houston's Creative Writing Program, where he co-founded the literary journal Domestic Crude, *the precursor to* Gulf Coast. *As we approached the journal's 30th anniversary,* Gulf Coast*'s editorial staff reached out to Phillip Lopate to pose questions about the literary marketplace, the pleasures of writing, people, such as Marion Barthelme, who championed* Gulf Coast, *and the journal's founding during those early days in Houston. In this interview, Phillip Lopate was kind enough to answer questions from* Gulf Coast *staff.*

Gulf Coast: *What was it about Houston that you found so inspiring when starting* Domestic Crude, *and then continuing into* Gulf Coast*?*

Phillip Lopate: Having been the editor of my high school and college literary magazines, I've always been a big believer in these publications. Also, graduate writing programs tend to promote a fairly constricted, anxious set of classroom behaviors, so I've been eager to set up clubs where a different kind of energy or activity could be unleashed. Houston, when I arrived in 1980, did not have many literary magazines, but it did have a can-do attitude and improving spirit which I found attractive. It also had what I took to be a massive inferiority complex, as indicated by its persistent need to aspire to "world-class city" status. I thought it would be amusing to address this boastful-ashamed dialectic frontally by taking on the name *Domestic Crude.* I had nothing to do with its morphing into *Gulf Coast;* that change happened after I left.

"GRADUATE WRITING PROGRAMS TEND TO PROMOTE A FAIRLY CONSTRICTED, ANXIOUS SET OF CLASSROOM BEHAVIORS, SO I'VE BEEN EAGER TO SET UP CLUBS WHERE A DIFFERENT KIND OF ENERGY OR ACTIVITY COULD BE UNLEASHED."

GC: *What was it about Houston that caught your eye? What was Houston like in the early 1980s? Where did you live, hang out, what preoccupied your writing, thinking, and teaching during that time of your career?*

PL: Houston was very welcoming to artistic folks in the early 1980s. It was undergoing a real estate boom. I found myself invited into wealthy people's homes, listened to respectfully instead of competitively (unlike NYC), and asked to take part in all aspects of Houston's cultural scene. As the literary life was still fairly thin (about a dozen professional writers in town), I hung out with the painters and architects. Houston seemed to me much more a visual arts city than a literary one. So I got involved with CITE and the Rice Design Alliance, dated a woman painter, and volunteered my services to help program movies at the Museum of

Fine Arts. I lived in the Montrose district, on West Drew Street off of Taft, and often found myself at the River Oaks movie theater or the area around CAM and the Museum of Fine Arts. I also went to some zydeco and jazz joints. I was writing a novel about a lonely Zoroastrian in the city (*The Rug Merchant*), and was increasingly preoccupied with urbanism and the personal essay. It was in Houston that I began teaching the essay form, and conceived my anthology, *The Art of the Personal Essay*.

GC: *How would you say the writing/MFA/PhD culture has changed in the past 30 years?*

There are more programs now, competing for the top candidates. Nonfiction programs are no longer such a rarity. The AWP annual conference has exploded, with more than 10,000 people attending. In more fundamental ways, it hasn't changed that much.

GC: *Some might say student writers are urged more and more towards professionalization. Do you agree? How do you feel about teaching being the default path for so many writers? Is it a sustainable plan?*

PL: The way I personally teach includes lots of introduction to writers of the past—the nonfiction canon, if you will. So, for instance, I am apt to include Nietzsche, Montaigne, Freud, Roland Barthes, Virginia Woolf, Diderot, Ruskin, Pater, Kael, Cicero, you name it. Increasingly, graduate writing programs cannot assume that the colleges will have provided a firm liberal arts literary foundation, so the task falls on us. Implicit in this saturated reading is the assumption that it takes a lifetime to make a writer, and so, what's the hurry? MFA programs are not trade schools: I resist pressure towards professionalization. At the same time, a lot of this pressure is coming

"IMPLICIT IN THIS SATURATED READING IS THE ASSUMPTION THAT IT TAKES A LIFETIME TO MAKE A WRITER, AND SO, WHAT'S THE HURRY?"

from the students themselves, and they have a right to seek guidance about trying to "monetize" their investment, as they go deeper into debt. I try to give practical advice without necessarily finding them agents or book contracts. As for teaching, I consider it a noble profession, one that I love and feel privileged to practice, and in no way a "default" path. Nor do I believe for a second that taking a job in academia sucks the life-blood out of a writer. If you're lucky enough to be able to support yourself with your writing, bully for you. But if not, find yourself a day job—-and teaching is as good as any other.

GC: *What do you most look forward to looking ahead? What is most urgent to you in your writing and teaching these days?*

PL: I look forward, if that is the right way of phrasing it, to sickness and death, but I do want to be able to continue writing whatever presents itself to me, whether it be an ambitious new project or a book review or something trivial. I have been fortunate in avoiding writer's block these many years; I continue to hope that lasts. At Columbia University, where I currently direct the nonfiction MFA program, I am confronted with administrative crises on a daily basis, as well as the concerns that come with teaching full-time, and I find both challenges stimulating. I like my students a lot, am often deeply touched by them, their predicaments and progress, and grateful that they put up with me in spite of the increasing gap in our mindsets. For instance, I have practically zero interest in their pop music, and I assume they are partly humoring me when I talk about Lionel Trilling or William Dean Howells, but somehow we get along.

"IF YOU'RE LUCKY ENOUGH TO BE ABLE TO SUPPORT YOURSELF WITH YOUR WRITING, BULLY FOR YOU. BUT IF NOT, FIND YOURSELF A DAY JOB—AND TEACHING IS AS GOOD AS ANY OTHER."

GC: *What do you remember about Marion Barthelme and her impact on the journal?*

PL: Marion was one of the loveliest people you would ever want to meet: warm,

gracious, down-to-earth. In the years I knew her at Houston, she was mostly taken up with being the mother of a young child and the supportive wife of Donald Barthelme, not always the easiest person to live with. She saw people realistically. During the early years of *Domestic Crude/Gulf Coast,* she had no involvement in the magazine, but was friendly toward me. In fact, after Don died, I wrote a personal essay about him that scandalized some people in Houston because they thought I was being insufficiently hagiographic and telling tales out of school; but word got back to me that Marion liked the essay and thought it was accurate, for the most part.

GC: *What possibilities do you foresee for interdisciplinary art-thinking and making?*

PL: I've been fascinated all my life with movies, and at Columbia I've taught a course in the essay-film, encouraging students to make their own essay-films in lieu of writing a paper. I also teach a course in criticism as a literary form, which allows students to reflect on various media, including music, visual arts, theater, film, and dance. As I stated above, I've hung out with artists all my life, and have at various times collaborated with them. For instance, I participated with the photographer Sally Gall (originally from Houston) in a mixed media show at the Blaffer Gallery, and wrote introductions to books by photographers Thomas Roma, Joel Meyerowitz, Barbara Mensch, and Burhan Doğançay, and filmmaker Robert Gardner. Because Houston is so strong in visual art, it seems ripe for mixed media experimentation. When I was teaching there, Donald Barthelme and I kept trying to throw the visual arts students and the writing students together—usually without great success. There were social events at Lawndale and DiverseWorks that combined writers and painters. Ultimately, it comes down to the friendships formed on a one-to-one between practitioners in various media; it's foolhardy to

"I'VE HUNG OUT WITH ARTISTS ALL MY LIFE, AND HAVE AT VARIOUS TIMES COLLABORATED WITH THEM."

try to orchestrate those alliances bureaucratically from above.

GC: *What gives you the most pleasure in your own writing?*

PL: Hitting on an eloquent sentence or witty turn of phrase; getting a messy piece into some sort of order—the moment when you know it's going to be able to stand on its own and won't totter over, being fruitfully obsessed day and night with a piece of prose, and finishing it and sending it off.

Book Review

Dan Chu

An Inheritance of Violence

Ocean Vuong, *Night Sky with Exit Wounds*
Copper Canyon Press, 2016. Paperback, 70 pp, $16

It's May 16, 2016, the 50th anniversary of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, and I am reading Ocean Vuong's *Night Sky with Exit Wounds.* In a recent NPR interview, Vuong explained that his new book is rooted in "what it means to be an American body born out of violence." A poem from this powerful collection puts it more succinctly: "An American soldier fucked a Vietnamese farmgirl. Thus my mother exists. / Thus I exist. Thus no bombs = no family = no me." Stripped to bare facts and the inevitability of syllogism, the lines are a reminder of the unnerving truth that many Americans, especially first-generation Americans and immigrants, owe their existence in the world to violence. The unrest, famine, and death during the Cultural Revolution caused massive displacement of people; without it, I would have never been born.

Vuong, a Vietnamese-American who immigrated to the States when he was two, explores the cultural heritage of violence through the Vietnam War. "Aubade with Burning City" describes the fall of Saigon with pinpoint detail: "A military truck speeds through the intersection, children / shrieking inside...when the dust

rises, a black dog / lies panting in the road. Its hind legs / crushed into the shine / *of a white Christmas.*" These images weave together with the lyrics of Irving Berlin's "White Christmas," creating a startling juxtaposition between snow and the blackened ashes of a burning Saigon. Like most of the poems in the collection, Vuong confidently confronts the tragic stakes in his work without hiding behind obliqueness; he sings with a plaintive voice.

In the NPR interview, Vuong also called people "inheritors" of war. Many of the poems in *Night Sky with Exit Wounds* feature individuals dealing with the way past violence continues to shape their present-day lives. An abusive father, carrying the baggage of war, haunts the poems' speakers—how can the child avoid this violent family legacy? In one poem, the father even passes on his Colt .45, like "an amputated hand," to his son. While the gun can be rejected, the body cannot be: early on, the speaker of the poems says he wears his father's face "to kiss all my lovers good night." This inherited, violent body tries to give affection and establish connection. Vuong writes of sexual relationships with men—some fleeting and anonymous, others substantial—that allow the speakers an assertion of identity and a surrender from the past, if only temporarily. In "Seventh Circle of Earth," violence—the sin punished in Dante's Seventh Circle of Hell—returns in the form of a robber who incinerates his victims: a gay couple. In the collection, Vuong deftly varies the form and the spacing of his lines to match the emotional tenor of his words; yet, in "Seventh Circle of Earth," he is the most formally daring. The body of the page is blank except for the numbers 1-7, which lead to poetic footnotes describing one man's celebration of love for the other while they both burn.

Vuong also explores the effect of violence on women, especially mothers. "Immigrant Haibun" uses the Japanese Haibun—a poetic form that incorporates both prose and poetry—to describe the journey of a man and woman crossing the ocean to start a new life. The woman's realization that the man has forced her into the journey for his own sake coincides with the transformation of the image of the boat—a complex, often painful symbol of hope among immigrants—into a harrowing new context to create one of the book's most startling shifts. Yet, it is through the women found in the poems that Vuong's syllogism breaks down as the mother shows how to not merely exist, but how to live. We see the tenderness

of an immigrant mother teaching her child the alphabet despite knowing only the first three letters, "A," "B,"and "C," with "the fourth letter: / a strand of black hair—unraveled / from the alphabet / & written / on her cheek."

"Of Thee I Sing " turns from the immigrant experience to the eyes of Jackie Kennedy during the assassination of her husband, JFK. When I first read the poem, published in *Gulf Coast* 28.1, its boldness—its images, its subject matter, its speaker's stance—floored me, though I wasn't sure why Vuong chose to dramatize Kennedy's murder. Yet within the context of *Night Sky with Exit Wounds,* it makes sense that Vuong would position Vietnam's violent past and the immigrant experience with Kennedy's assassination. Like the mother of "Immigrant Haibun," Jackie Kennedy witnesses the American Dream gone horribly wrong as the "glistening pink" of Kennedy's blood splashes onto her. The poem begs the question, "How do you navigate becoming an American when America has ravaged your home country?" The poem also reminds us of Kennedy's role in the Vietnam War and how his assassination set into motion LBJ's full escalation of U.S. involvement in the conflict. The end of Camelot and the death of American glamour birth Vuong's American Dream.

Vuong's commitment to and his interrogation of his established themes propel *Night Sky with Exit Wounds* forward. The poems are placed to play and feed off of each other; "Of Thee I Sing," in the middle of the book, expands and takes on new historical, transnational, and personal meaning because of the poems about war, violence, assimilation, and broken families that come before it. Vuong's deliberate use of recurring words or images—a person kneeling, teeth, the body's sharpness, the stars, and fire, just to name a few—reinforces the book's concern with the inherited nature of history. This concern culminates in "Someday I'll Love Ocean Vuong," the penultimate poem of the collection, which was featured in *The New Yorker* last year. Its charged emotion, vulnerability, and sincerity captivated then, but the reassurance of the speaker is much more loaded when read as part of the collection, since many of its images, from "horizon" to "gimp," have appeared in previous poems. *Night Sky with Exit Wounds* is a hard-hitting, emotional book that reveals more with each reading. On my third read, I noticed that perhaps the response to the legacy of violence is devotion, which is the title of the collection's last poem. "Devotion," referenced above, curiously mentions the alphabet. Maybe devotion is the letter "D," the letter the mother could not write but could show.

Surpik Angelini is an artist, writer, and independent curator. She directs the Transart Foundation for Art and Anthropology in Houston since 1996, to support artists and scholars whose works involve social and cultural research. In the coming Spring 2017, the Foundation will inaugurate its new premises, where its Research Library will be dedicated to Thomas McEvilley.

Mike Alberti grew up in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and received his MFA from the University of Minnesota. He lives in Minneapolis and has taught creative writing at the University of Minnesota, the Loft Literary Center, and in Minnesota state prisons as a part of the Minnesota Prison Writing Workshop.

Leila Aboulela won the first Caine Prize for African Writing. She is the author of four novels, *The Kindness of Enemies, The Translator*, a *New York Times* 100 Notable Books of the Year, *Minaret and Lyrics Alley*, Fiction Winner of the Scottish Book Awards. Her collection of short stories, *Colored Lights*, was shortlisted for the MacMillan Silver PEN Award. Leila's work has been translated into 14 languages. She grew up in Sudan and now lives in Scotland.

Vicente Alfonso (Torreón, Mexico, 1977) is a journalist and author of the novels *Huesos de San Lorenzo* (Premio Internacional de Novela Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz 2015) and *Partitura para mujer muerta* (Premio Nacional de Novela Policiaca 2008). He is also the author of the short story collection *Contar las noches* (Premio Nacional de Cuento María Luisa Puga 2009). In 2013 he was a National Fund for Culture and Arts writer-in-residence at Wake Forest University. His work has appeared in *Este País, Proceso*, and *Revista de la Universidad*, among others. He is currently coeditor of the cultural supplement *Confabulario*, published by the newspaper *El Universal*.

Jocelyne Allen is a Japanese translator and interpreter based in Toronto, Canada, after a decade in Japan. During her time in the Land of the Rising Sun, she worked as a magazine columnist, interpreted for foreign correspondents, and toured with a Japanese drum group. Her recent translations include the novel *Red Girls* by Kazuki Sakuraba, "Noodling in New York" by Akino Kondoh, and *A Girl on the Shore* by Inio Asano. She is also the author of the novel *You and the Pirates*.

Ralph Angel's latest collection, *Your Moon*, was awarded the Green Rose Poetry Prize. *Exceptions and Melancholies: Poems 1986-2006* received the PEN USA Poetry Award, and his *Neither World* won the James Laughlin Award of The Academy of American Poets. In addition to five books of poetry, he also has published an award-winning translation of the Federico García Lorca collection, *Poema del cante jondo / Poem of the Deep Song*.

Hadara Bar-Nadav's newest book of poetry, *The New Nudity*, is forthcoming from Saturnalia Books in 2017. She is the author of *Lullaby (with Exit Sign)* (Saturnalia Books, 2013), awarded the Saturnalia Books Poetry Prize; *The Frame Called Ruin* (New Issues, 2012), Runner Up for the Green Rose Prize; and *A Glass of Milk to Kiss Goodnight* (Margie/Intuit House, 2007), awarded the Margie Book Prize. She is also author of two chapbooks, *Fountain and Furnace* (Tupelo Press, 2015), awarded the Sunken Garden Poetry Prize, and *Show Me Yours* (Laurel Review/Green Tower Press 2010), awarded the Midwest Poets Series Prize. In addition, she is co-author of the best-selling textbook *Writing Poems, 8th ed.* (Pearson/Longman, 2011). Hadara is an Associate Professor of English at the University of Missouri-Kansas City.

Jason Bradford was a poet and member of literary communities in Iowa, North Carolina, and beyond. He was an MFA candidate in poetry at UNC Wilmington, where he taught two sections of creative writing and was the poetry editor of *ecotone*. The author of the chapbook *The Inhabitants*, his work has also appeared in *jubilat*, *Jellyfish*, *The Laurel Review*, and *Fruita Pulp*. In January 2016, he passed away after a lifelong battle with muscular dystrophy.

Molly McCully Brown is the author of *The Virginia State Colony For Epileptics and Feebleminded*, which won the 2016 Lexi Rudnitsky First Book Prize and will be published in 2017 by Persea Books. Her poems and essays have appeared or are forthcoming in *The Adroit Journal*, *Image*, *TriQuarterly Online*, *The Kenyon Review*, *Connotation Press*, *The Rumpus*, and elsewhere. Raised in rural Virginia, she holds degrees from Bard College at Simon's Rock and Stanford University. Currently, she is a John and Renée Grisham Fellow at the University of Mississippi.

Cortney Lamar Charleston is a Cave Canem fellow, finalist for the 2015 Auburn Witness Poetry Prize and semi-finalist for the 2016 Discovery/Boston Review Poetry Prize. His poems have appeared, or are forthcoming, in *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *The Iowa Review*, *The Journal*, *New England Review*, *Pleiades*, *Rattle*, *Spillway*, *TriQuarterly*, and elsewhere. He currently lives in Jersey City, New Jersey.

Dan Chu is originally from Brooklyn and is completing his MFA in poetry at the University of Houston. He is a recipient of a Brazos Bookstore/Academy of American Poets Prize and serves as a poetry editor for *Gulf Coast*.

Holland Cotter is co-chief art critic at *The New York Times*. He has been awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Criticism and the lifetime achievement award for art writing by the College Art Association.

Guillermo Cotto-Thorner was born in Puerto Rico in 1916 and migrated to New York City in 1938. In addition to publishing two novels, *Manhattan Tropics* (1951) and *Gambeta* (1971), Cotto-Thorner was a Spanish-language journalist, civic leader, and Presbyterian minister. He remained an active and progressive voice in the U.S. Hispanic community until his death in 1983.

Torrey Crim received her MFA from Warren Wilson College. Her stories have been published in *Epoch*, *American Literary Review*, *Fifth Wednesday Journal*, and *The Master's Review*. She is the fiction editor of *Construction*, and she lives in Brooklyn, New York.

Angie Cruz is an Assistant Professor of English at the University of Pittsburgh and is the author of two novels, *Soledad* and *Let It Rain Coffee*, a finalist in 2007 for the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award. She has published short fiction and essays in magazines and journals, including *Callaloo*, *The New York Times*, and *Phatitude*. She has received numerous grants and residencies including the NYFA, Camargo Fellowship, Yaddo, and The MacDowell Colony. She is founding member and Editor of *Aster(ix)*, a literary/arts journal. She is at work on her third novel, *Dominicana*.

Beth Ann Fennelly directs the MFA Program at the University of Mississippi where she was named Outstanding Teacher of the Year. She's won grants from the N.E.A., United States Artists, and a Fulbright to Brazil. Fennelly has published three books of poetry and one of nonfiction, all with W. W. Norton, and a novel co-authored with her husband, Tom Franklin. They live in Oxford with their three children. *Heating & Cooling: 52 Micro-Memoirs* will be published by W. W. Norton in fall of 2017.

Tamar Halpern's feature documentary Llyn Foulkes One Man Band, about the painter Llyn Foulkes and his rediscovery by the international art world at age 77, is now available on iTunes. "A joy to watch" (The Hollywood Reporter) "Undeniably fascinating" (Variety). Halpern wrote and directed the short *Death, Taxes and Apple Juice* (40+ festivals, 16 awards) and the feature *Jeremy Fink and the Meaning of Life*, starring Mira Sovino, Joe Pantoliano and Michael Urie, which she adapted from the book by New York Times bestseller Wendy Mass. Previous writer and director work includes the feature Shelf Life, "a whip smart film that taps into a fresh source for American comedy" (Variety). Halpern has an MFA in Film Production from the University of Southern California School of Cinematic Arts and a BA in Journalism, also from USC. Her fiction and non fiction is published in the *Huffington Post, Joyland, SheRa, ByLine, Ms In the Biz* and *Sundress*, winning the Best of the Net for Short Fiction. She was named a 2016-2017 Film Expert for American Film Showcase by the US Department of Education and USC School of Cinematic Arts. Updated news and work can be found at www.tamarolandpictures.com.

Barbara Hamby has published five books of poetry, most recently *On the Street of Divine Love: New and Selected Poems* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2014). Her new book is based on journeys, including one following *The Odyssey* from Troy to Ithaka. Poems from this manuscript have appeared or are forthcoming in *Poetry, American Poetry Review, Ploughshares*, and *The New Yorker*.

George Henson is a translator of contemporary Spanish narrative. His translations include works by Sergio Pitol, Elena Poniatowska, Alberto Chimal, Andrés Neuman, and Miguel Barnet. His work has appeared variously in Words Without Borders, Buenos Aires Review, Asymptote, The Kenyon Review, and World Literature Today, where he is a contributing editor. His translations of Sergio Pitol's *The Art of Flight* and *The Journey* were published by Deep Vellum Publishing. *The Magician of Vienna*, the third volume of Pitol's Trilogy of Memory, is forthcoming. George teaches in the Department of Spanish & Portuguese and the Center for Translation Studies at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.

Anne Cecelia Holmes is the author of *The Jitters* (Horse Less Press, 2015) and three chapbooks: *Dead Year* (Sixth Finch, 2016), *Junk Parade* (dancing girl press, 2012), and *I Am A Natural Wonder* (with Lily Ladewig; Blue Hour Press, 2011). Her poems have appeared in *jubilat, Conduit, Denver Quarterly, The Atlas Review*, and *OmniVerse*, among other places. She lives in the DC area.

Darrel Alejandro Holnes is a poet and a playwright. His poetry has been published in or is forthcoming in *Poetry Magazine, American Poetry Review, Day One, Callaloo, Best American Experimental Writing*, and elsewhere in print and online. He teaches at NYU and works with writers at the United Nations. Check him out at darrelholnes.com.

heather hughes hangs her heart in Boston and Miami. Her poems appear or are forthcoming in *Bad Penny Review, Cream City Review, Grain, Hinchas de Poesía, Jai-Alai Magazine, Vinyl*, and other journals. She MLA-ed in foreign literature at Harvard University Extension and MFA-ed at Lesley University. Her other adventures include working in academic publishing and making letterpress broadsides. All her tattoos have wings.

Bethany Schultz Hurst is the author of *Miss Lost Nation*, winner of the Robert Dana-Anhinga Poetry Prize and finalist for the 2016 Kate Tufts Discovery Award. Hurst's work has been selected to appear in *Best American Poetry 2015* and in journals such as *American Literary Review, Drunken Boat, The Gettysburg Review, New Ohio Review*, and *Sixth Finch*. She lives in Pocatello, Idaho, where she teaches creative writing at Idaho State University.

Donika Kelly is the author of *Bestiary*, selected by Nikky Finney for the 2015 Cave Canem Poetry Prize, forthcoming from Graywolf Press. She is a Cave Canem graduate, holds an MFA in Writing from the Michener Center for Writers at the University of Texas at Austin, and received a Ph.D. in English from Vanderbilt University. Her poems have appeared in various journals including *Cincinnati Review, West Branch*, and *Pleiades*.

JD Larson is a poet and translator living in Brooklyn. Recent works have appeared or are forthcoming in *Asymptote Journal, Brooklyn Rail, Lana Turner*, and *The Volta*. A translation of Francis Ponge's *Nioque of the Early Spring* is forthcoming from Red Dust. JD teaches in the German Department at NYU.

Alex Lemon is the author of four poetry collections: *Mosquito, Hallelujah Blackout, Fancy Beasts*, and *The Wish Book* as well as *Happy: A Memoir*. An essay collection and a fifth book of poetry are forthcoming from Milkweed Editions. He lives in Ft. Worth, Texas, and teaches at TCU and in Ashland University's Low-Residency MFA program.

Robin Coste Lewis is the author of *Voyage of the Sable Venus*. "Using Black to Paint Light" is from her new forthcoming collection, *To The Realization of Perfect Helplessness*. She lives in Los Angeles.

Phillip Lopate is the author of four essay collections (*Bachelorhood, Against Joie de Vivre, Portrait of My Body, Portrait Inside My Head*), a teaching manual about literary nonfiction (*To Show and to Tell*), and several book-length essays (*Being With Children, Waterfront, Notes on Sontag*), as well as editor of the widely used anthology, *Art of the Personal Essay*. He taught at the University of Houston in the 1980s, and is currently Writing Professor and Director of the MFA nonfiction program at Columbia University. His newest book is the forthcoming *A Mother's Tale*.

Kristen Lowman attended the University of Texas at Austin and the Webber Douglas Academy of Dramatic Art in London, England. As an actress, she has performed in theatre, television, and film. As a writer, she has written several plays and short stories. Her novel *Arabian Eve* is to be published by Selwa Press.

Alessandra Lynch is the author of *Sails the Wind Left Behind, It was a terrible cloud at twilight*, and *Daylily Called It a Dangerous Moment* (forthcoming from Alice James Books). Her work has appeared in *32 Poems, Antioch Review, The Massachusetts Review, The Michigan Quarterly Review, Ploughshares*, and other literary journals. Alessandra was born on the East River and now lives by a stony creek and a magnolia trio. She teaches in Butler University's undergraduate and MFA programs.

Sheila Maldonado is the author of the poetry collection *one-bedroom solo* (Fly by Night Press, 2011). Her second publication, *that's what you get*, is forthcoming from Brooklyn Arts Press. She is a CantoMundo Fellow and a Creative Capital awardee as part of desveladas, a visual writing collective. She lives in uptown Manhattan where she is working on an ongoing project about a lifelong obsession with the ancient Maya.

J. Bret Maney is an assistant professor in the Department of English at Lehman College, The City University of New York, where his areas of interest are American literature and culture, the practice and theory of translation, and the digital humanities. He translates from French and Spanish.

Friederike Mayröcker's work has been to live and to write, continually and daringly exploding the limitations of language. Her collection études, published in 2013 by Suhrkamp, is a poem arranged by date, spanning 14.3.11 (or 3/14/11) to 16.12.12 (or 12/16/12). It begins as an invocation of bricolage: agglomerate epigraphs, motifs, typographical motifs (»guillemets« ; ++++++++++ ; underlines ; ALL CAPS ; ..... ; drawings ; etc.), quotations, gossip, seasonal changes, weeping, dreams, memories, song lyrics, moods, lilacs and mimosa trees, anecdotes branch and twine so that the poem = the poet's life. Images, motifs, and rhythms interweave the ongoing poem, and in this selection, 'tears' cascade from poem to the next, among others. The material of life produces the subject of the poem; Mayröcker's singular project has been the making of literature. From fembio.org : "So she lives as she writes: with growing courage, to distance oneself from the normative syntax, to play with it and to make new creative classifications and arrangements."

Amy Meng's poetry has appeared in publications including: *Indiana Review, The Literary Review, Sycamore Review,* and *Pleiades*. She is a Kundiman Fellow and poetry editor at *Bodega Magazine*. She lives and drinks seltzer in Brooklyn.

Lincoln Michel is the editor-in-chief of *Electric Literature* and the co-editor —with Nadxieli Nieto— of *Gigantic Worlds*, an anthology of science flash fiction. His stories have appeared in *Granta, Oxford American, NOON, Tin House*, the Pushcart Prize anthology, and elsewhere. He's the author of the story collection *Upright Beasts*. You can find him online at lincolnmichel.com and @thelincoln.

Rajiv Mohabir received fellowships from the Voices of Our Nation Art Foundation, Kundiman, and the American Institute of Indian Studies language program. Winner of 2015 AWP Intro Journal Award and the 2014 Intro Prize in Poetry by Four Way Books for his first full-length collection *The Taxidermist's Cut* (2016), and recipient of a PEN/Heim Translation Fund Grant. His second book, *The Cowherd's Son*, won the 2015 Kunidman Prize and is forthcoming from Tupelo Press in 2017. He received his MFA in Poetry and Translation from Queens College, CUNY, where he was editor-in-chief of *Ozone Park Journal*. Currently he is pursuing a Ph.D. in English from the University of Hawai`i, where he teaches poetry and composition.

Jonathan Moody holds an MFA from the University of Pittsburgh. He's also a Cave Canem graduate fellow whose poetry has appeared in various publications such as *African American Review, Beloit Poetry Journal, Borderlands, Boston Review, The Common, Crab Orchard Review,* and *Harvard Review.* Moody is the author of *The Doomy Poems* (Six Gallery Press, 2012). His second collection, *Olympic Butter Gold,* won the 2014 Cave Canem Northwestern University Press Poetry Prize. He teaches at Pearland High School and lives in Fresno, Texas, with his wife and son.

Michael Morse is the author of *Void and Compensation* (Canarium Books, 2015), a finalist for the 2016 Kate Tufts Discovery Award. He has published poems in various journals and anthologies, including *A Public Space, The American Poetry Review, Field, Ploughshares, Spinning Jenny,* and *The Best American Poetry,* 2012. He lives in Brooklyn, New York, and teaches at the Ethical Culture Fieldston School and the Iowa Summer Writing Festival.

Erín Moure has published 16 books of poetry in English and Galician/English, a book of essays, and has translated 13 volumes of poetry from French, Spanish, Galician, and Portuguese, by poets such as Nicole Brossard, Andrés Ajens, Louise Dupré, Rosalía de Castro, Chus Pato, and Fernando Pessoa. Her work has received the Governor General's Award, the Pat Lowther Memorial Award, the A.M. Klein Prize twice, and has been a three-time finalist for the Griffin Prize. Her latest works are *Insecession,* a biopoetics published in one volume with Chus Pato's *Secession,* and *Kapusta,* a sequel to her book *The Unmemntioable,* which speaks of the Second World War as lived in Ukraine and northern Alberta. Her latest translations are of François Turcot's *My Dinosaur* (BookThug, 2016); Chus Pato's *Flesh of Leviathan* (Omnidawn, 2016); and Rosalía de Castro's *New Leaves* (Small Stations, fall 2016). *Planetary Noise: Selected Poetry of Erín Moure,* edited by Shannon Maguire, is forthcoming in 2017 from Wesleyan. "The Voice" is from a work in progress called *The Elements.*

Lisa Olstein is the author of three poetry collections, most recently, *Little Stranger* (Copper Canyon Press, 2013). A new book, *Late Empire,* is forthcoming in 2017. Recipient of a Pushcart Prize, a Lannan Writing Residency, and fellowships from the Sustainable Arts Foundation, Massachusetts Cultural Council, and Centrum, she is a member of the poetry faculty at the University of Texas at Austin.

Mary Peelen received an MFA from San Francisco State University and an MDiv from the Graduate Theological Union. Her writing has appeared in *Bennington Review, New American Writing, Michigan Quarterly Review, Alaska Quarterly Review, Poetry Review* (UK), and elsewhere. Born and raised in Grand Rapids, Michigan, she lives in San Francisco.

Catherine Pierce is the author of *The Tornado Is the World* (forthcoming from Saturnalia Books in December), *The Girls of Peculiar,* and *Famous Last Words.* Her poems have appeared in *The Best American Poetry, Boston Review, Slate, Ploughshares,* and elsewhere. She co-directs the creative writing program at Mississippi State University.

John Pluecker is a writer, interpreter, translator, and co-founder of the language justice and literary experimentation collaborative Antena. He has translated numerous books from the Spanish, including *Antígona González* (Les Figues Press, 2016), *Tijuana Dreaming: Life and Art at the Global Border* (Duke University Press, 2012), and *Feminism: Transmissions and Retransmissions* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). His most recent chapbooks are *Killing Current* (Mouthfeel Press, 2012), *Ioyaiene* (Fresh Arts, 2014), and *An Accompanying Text* (She Works Flexible, 2015). His book of poetry and image, *Ford Over,* was published in 2016 by Noemi Press.

Anzhelina Polonskaya was born in Malakhovka, a small town near Moscow. Since 1998, she has been a member of the Moscow Union of Writers, and in 2003 Polonskaya became a member of the Russian PEN-centre. Currently she lives in Germany. In 2004 an English version of her book, entitled *A Voice*, appeared in the acclaimed *Writings from an Unbound Europe* series at Northwestern University Press. This book was shortlisted for the 2005 Corneliu M. Popescu Prize for European Poetry in Translation. In 2013 *Paul Klee's Boat*, a bilingual edition of her poetry, was published by Zephyr Press and was shortlisted for the 2014 PEN Award for Poetry in Translation. Anzhelina Polonskaya has been awarded a Rockefeller Fellowship and many residencies all over the world. In 2016 her first volume of prose, *Greenland*, appeared in a German edition.

Khadijah Queen is the author of four books and four chapbooks. Her fifth is the forthcoming *I'm So Fine: A List of Famous Men & What I Had On* (YesYes Books 2017). Individual poems and prose appear or are forthcoming in *Fence, Tin House, RHINO, Memoir, Best American Nonrequired Reading, The Force of What's Possible,* and widely elsewhere. Her verse play *Non-Sequitur* won the Leslie Scalapino Award for Innovative Performance Writing and was staged by The Relationship theater company in December 2015 in NYC. She is core faculty for the new Mile-High MFA in creative writing at Regis University.

Steven Ramirez earned his MFA from the Iowa Writers' Workshop. He currently teaches creative writing and literature in Chicago, where he is working to complete his first novel, *Chingasos! A Fight Song.* "The Dammest Thing" is an excerpt from that novel.

Brandon Rushton's poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Hayden's Ferry Review, The Journal, CutBank, Sonora Review, Passages North,* and others. He is the winner of the 2016 *Gulf Coast* Prize and the 2016 *Ninth Letter* Literary Award in Poetry. He holds an MFA from the University of South Carolina. He teaches writing at the College of Charleston. Born and raised in Michigan, he now lives and writes in Charleston, South Carolina.

Carrie Schneider is an artist interested in collapsing moments across time and the ability of people to reimagine their space. Her projects include *Hear Our Houston* (2011), a hub of public generated audio walking tours, *Care House* (2012) an installation in the house she grew up in considering the roles of caregiving/caretaking and the bodies of mother/home, *Sunblossom Residency* (2009-2015), and *Incommensurate Mapping* (2014) at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston. Schneider co-organizes Charge, a Houston convening of local and national presenters to platform artist-led models, advocate for equitable compensation of artists, and consider artists' work in the larger economy.

Chet'la Sebree, a mid-Atlantic native, graduated from American University's MFA in Creative Writing program. She has received fellowships from the Stadler Center for Poetry, the Vermont Studio Center, and the International Center for Jefferson Studies. Her work has appeared in *jubilat* and *Monticello in Mind: Fifty Contemporary Poets on Jefferson*, edited by Lisa Russ Spaar.

Danez Smith is the author of *[insert] boy* (YesYes Books, 2014), winner of the Lambda Literary Award for Gay Poetry, and *Don't Call Us Dead* (Graywolf Press, 2017). Danez is also the author of two chapbooks, *hands on your knees* (2013, Penmanship Books) and *black movie* (2015, Button Poetry), winner of the *Button Poetry* Prize. Their work has published & featured widely including in *Poetry Magazine, Beloit Poetry Journal, Buzzfeed, Blavity*, & *Ploughshares*. They are a 2014 Ruth Lilly - Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Fellow, a Cave Canem and VONA alum, and recipient of a McKnight Foundation Fellowship. They are a two-time Individual World Poetry Slam finalist, placing 2nd in 2014. Danez is a founding member of the Dark Noise Collective. They are an MFA candidate at The University of Michigan and currently teach with InsideOut Detroit. They is from St. Paul, Minnesota.

Christopher Stackhouse's books include *Seismosis* (1913 press), which features his drawings with text by writer/translator John Keene; and a volume of poems, *Plural* (Counterpath press.) His writing has been published in numerous journals and periodicals including *Der Pfeil* (Hamburg, DE), *American Poet-The Journal of The Academy of American Poets, Modern Painters, Art in America, BOMB Magazine, MAKE Literary Magazine*, and *The Brooklyn Rail*. His recent contributions to artist monographs include Kara Walker's *Dust Jackets for The Niggerati* (Gregory R. Miller & Co.); *Basquiat – The Unknown Notebooks* (Skira Rizzoli); and, forthcoming *Stanley Whitney: American Painter* (Lund Humphries). He is co-founder of *This Red Door*, a collaborative experiment in art, social practice, interventional curation, and the employ of alternative exhibition sites. He frequently lectures on art, literature, and American culture. He has taught and lectured at the New York Center for Art & Media Studies, Bethel University; Naropa University; Ohio State University; Azusa Pacific University; and the Maryland Institute College of Art.

Kelly Sundberg's essays have appeared in a variety of literary magazines. Her work has also been anthologized in *Best American Essays 2015*, as well as listed as "notable" in *Best American Essays 2013*. She is a doctoral candidate at Ohio University, and she divides her time between Appalachian Ohio and Idaho. Her memoir, tentatively titled, *Goodbye, Sweet Girl*, is forthcoming from HarperCollins in 2017.

Terese Svoboda's *When The Next Big War Blows Down The Valley: Selected and New Poems* was published in 2015, *Anything That Burns You: A Portrait of Lola Ridge, Radical Poet* in 2016. Forthcoming is *Professor Harriman's Steam Air-Ship* (poetry) in September and *Live Sacrifice* (stories) in 2017.

Cassidy Norvell Thompson earned an MFA in creative writing from Murray State University in western Kentucky, where she teaches Spanish to high-schoolers and spins yarn—both the knitted and the written kind. She was a nonfiction finalist in the 2016 Writers@Work Annual Fellowship Competition, and her short essay "Ghost Ship, 1964" appears in the Summer 2016 issue of *New Madrid*. "Witness Trees" is an excerpt from the book-length nonfiction project she calls *Core Samples*.

Geri Ulrey is a writer, filmmaker, and educator living in Los Angeles. She has been published in *The Carolina Quarterly* and shortlisted as a finalist for the 2015 DISQUIET Literary Prize in nonfiction. Both of Geri's narrative short films, *The Break* and *Pink no.22*, have screened at numerous film festivals worldwide, each winning awards along the way. Her essay, "13th and B," originally published in *The Carolina Review*, was listed as a "Notable Essay" in *The Best American Essays 2016*.

Andrew Wachtel is president of the American University of Central Asia in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. Previously he was dean of the Graduate School at Northwestern University. He is a fellow of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences, a member of the Council on Foreign Relations, and an active translator from multiple Slavic languages.

Ross Wilcox is a Ph.D. student at the University of North Texas. His work has appeared in *The Carolina Quarterly, Nashville Review, The Adirondack Review, Green Mountains Review*, and is forthcoming in *Harpur Palate*. He lives in Fort Worth with his wife and two cats.

Sara June Woods is author and designer of three books, *Careful Mountain* (Civil Coping Mechanisms, 2016), *Sara or the Existence of Fire* (Horse Less Press, 2014), and *Wolf Doctors* (Artifice Books 2014). She is a scorpio and a transsexual and she lives in Oregon.

Dr. Miki Yamamoto is an assistant professor of art and design at the University of Tsukuba, studying and analyzing narrative expression in wordless picture books. As a manga and picture book artist, she is also recognized for her idiosyncratic images and her unique characters. She is the creator of the manga *How Are You?*, selected for the 19th Japan Media Arts Festival Jury Selection, and *Sunny Sunny Ann*, which received the 17th Tezuka Osamu Cultural Prize Creative Award.

Mario Alberto Zambrano was formerly a contemporary ballet dancer with Hubbard Street Dance Chicago, Nederlands Dans Theater, Ballett Frankfurt, and Batsheva Dance Company. He graduated from the Iowa Writers' Workshop as an Iowa Arts Fellow, where he received a John C. Schupes Fellowship for Excellence in Fiction. *Loteria*, his first novel, was a Barnes and Noble Discover Great New Writers pick for Fall 2013 and was hailed as a best book of 2013 by *Booklist, The Village Voice, School Library Journal,* and *San Antonio Press*. His writing has appeared in *FiveChapters, Guernica, Brooklyn Rail*, and has been anthologized in *Best Gay Stories 2014* and *Narrative 4's* How To Be A Man project. He has been awarded fellowships from MacDowell, Yaddo, The National Endowment for the Arts 2016, Bread Loaf Writers' Conference, as well as Hawthornden Castle in Scotland. He is currently working on a new novel, and will begin an appointment at Harvard University in the Theater, Dance & Media concentration as of 2017.

FOOTNOTES: Source image attribution for collage spreads by Carrie Schneider in *Endorsement of Alternative 2, an Avant-garde Museum, in Mr. Barthelme's Memorandum of July 10, 1961*. Pages 226-235. Left-right, top-bottom.

1. Contemporary Arts Association Introduction

Contemporary Arts Association brochure 1960 featuring copy written by Donald Barthelme, Jr. as a CAA board member.

"Five museums for contemporary art" and defense of Barthelme's copy imagining the CAA's future, excerpt from CAA board meeting minutes December 8, 1959.

Barthelme's text from collaboration with Jim Love, The Rook's Progress 1987, box 29, folder 11, University of Houston Libraries Special Collections.

Explosion from original layout of "The Show" 1970 collage story which became "The Flight of Pigeons from the Palace" published 1971, box 28, folder 3-4, University of Houston Libraries Special Collections.

Barthelme CAA membership card 1961.

Blimp and gator collage elements from original layouts of "The Educational Experience," Donald Barthelme Literary Papers, box 27, folder 3, University of Houston Libraries Special Collections. "The Educational Experience" was published in Harper's Magazine, June 1973 issue.

"Barthelme Named by Museum" article in Houston Post, March 23, 1961.

2. State of Museum Pivot

Excerpt from (unadmitted) CAA board meeting minutes Tuesday July 12, 1960.

"Four alternatives" and Barthelme's informal proposal introduction excerpt from CAA board meeting minutes September 27, 1960 with ink bleed from 1976 flood of the CAMH.

Lionsuit illustration from *Forum* 1958.

Excerpt from Barthelme and Herman Goeters' formal interim program proposal presented October 11, 1960.

Statesman and shrew collage element from "The Emerald," 1979 collage story, Donald Barthelme Literary Papers, box 27, folder 5-8, University of Houston Libraries Special Collections.

3. Barthelme Directorship and Proposals

"No mention should be made" and official adoption of Barthelme's proposal from CAA board minutes October 11, 1960.

Twirlyman collage element from "The Educational Experience," Donald Barthelme Literary Papers, box 27, folder 3, University of Houston Libraries Special Collections.

Writers hosted at the CAA. It is difficult to definitively attribute individual programs to Barthelme because he piloted a curatorial model of volunteer chairmen with creative control over programs in

areas such as jazz, film, theatre, and music. However, writers who spoke at CAA during Barthelme's tenure were more likely by his sole invitation, his invitation of Elaine de Kooning is documented in the board minutes, and he mentions the CAA hosting Buckminster Fuller when Robert Morris was director in a "Playing with Petrol" interview with Charles Ruas and Judy Sherman from the Winter of 1976, available at Clocktower.org.

Wrong Way McKim collage element and caption from "The Dassaud Prize" 1976 collage story page proof, Donald Barthelme Literary Papers, box 29, folder 5, University of Houston Libraries Special Collections.

Interior collage elements from "The Educational Experience," Donald Barthelme Literary Papers, box 27, folder 3, University of Houston Libraries Special Collections.

Selected excerpts of Barthelme's program proposals as recorded in the CAA board meeting minutes 1960-1962.

4. Ugly Show Reflections

CAA's registrar's list from New American Artifacts (The Ugly Show) as appears in Kevin Cunningham's "L'Eclat du Hazard" *Gulf Coast* Volume IV Number One: A Tribute to Donald Barthelme Spring 1992.

Background mylar plate from original layout of "The Slightly Irregular Fire Engine" 1971 children's book layout with artwork, Donald Barthelme Literary Papers, box 26, folder 1-15, University of Houston Libraries Special Collections.

Screenshots with typed captions featuring Barthelme's reflection on the 1960 "New American Artifacts: The Ugly Show" exhibition he organized, from 1982 panel on the CAMH's history and future proposals "Dreams and Schemes" exhibition moderated by Ann Holmes, from the CAMH's archives courtesy of Daniel Atkinson.

Response letter to "The Ugly Show."

Photo of "Not Knowing" typescript and as it appears in the UH Special Collections Helen Moore Barthelme Papers series 3: box 3, folder 4.

5. Volcano Memorandum

Original layout from "The Show" collage story 2970, published as "The Flight of the Pigeons from the Palace" 1971, Donald Barthelme Literary Papers, box 28, folder 3-4, University of Houston Libraries Special Collections.

Memorandum from Barthelme to CAA July 10, 1961. The endorsement of this memorandum was recommended in the CAA's Budget Committee's 1961-1962 report, circulated and accepted at the August 15, 1961 CAA board meeting. This line item is where these collage works take their title.

All CAA board minutes were originally viewed in the archives of the CAMH thanks to the assistance of Misha Burgett and access granted by Dean Daderko.

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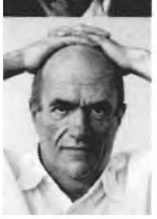

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COVER ARTWORK BY ROSSON CROW.

NONFICTION BY VICENTE ALFONSO, BETH ANN FENNELLY, ALEX LEMON, KELLY SUNDBERG, GERI ULREY, MARIO ALBERTO ZAMBRANO.

ART AND ART WRITING BY MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ, SURPIK ANGELINI, ROSSON CROW, HOLLAND COTTER, TAMAR HALPERN, SUZANNE MCCLELLAND, ADRIENNE PERRY, RAPHAEL RUBINSTEIN, CARRIE SCHNEIDER, CHRISTOPHER STACKHOUSE.

TRANSLATIONS BY GEORGE HENSON, J.D. LARSON, J. BRET MANEY, ANDREW WACHTEL.

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