



Spring 2000

The Lantern Vol. 67, No. 2, Spring 2000

Padcha Tuntha-Obas
Ursinus College

Caleb Prescott
Ursinus College


Christine Spera
Ursinus College

Oana Nechita
Ursinus College

Daniel Gallagher
Ursinus College

See next page for additional authors

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.ursinus.edu/lantern>

 Part of the [Fiction Commons](#), [Illustration Commons](#), [Nonfiction Commons](#), and the [Poetry Commons](#)

[Click here to let us know how access to this document benefits you.](#)

Recommended Citation

Tuntha-Obas, Padcha; Prescott, Caleb; Spera, Christine; Nechita, Oana; Gallagher, Daniel; Church, Jeffrey; Robinson, James Clark; Afshari, Lilly; Diaz, Rosabelle; Gerchak, Andrew; Jackendoff, Ben; Patton, Susan; Michel, Harry; Romeo, Genevieve; Taylor, Corey; Claus, Ashley; Edwards, Michael; Frame, Amber; Lipschultz, Tom; Jones, Aly; Malachowski, Philip; Ciarllo, Anthony; Kruk, Lori; Howard, Tom; and Keeper, Mike, "The Lantern Vol. 67, No. 2, Spring 2000" (2000). *The Lantern Literary Magazines*. 155.
<https://digitalcommons.ursinus.edu/lantern/155>

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Ursinusiana Collection at Digital Commons @ Ursinus College. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Lantern Literary Magazines by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Ursinus College. For more information, please contact aprock@ursinus.edu.

Authors

Padcha Tuntha-Obas, Caleb Prescott, Christine Spera, Oana Nechita, Daniel Gallagher, Jeffrey Church, James Clark Robinson, Lilly Afshari, Rosabelle Diaz, Andrew Gerchak, Ben Jackendoff, Susan Patton, Harry Michel, Genevieve Romeo, Corey Taylor, Ashley Claus, Michael Edwards, Amber Frame, Tom Lipschultz, Aly Jones, Philip Malachowski, Anthony Ciarllo, Lori Kruk, Tom Howard, and Mike Keeper



The Lantern

The Lantern

URSINUS COLLEGE

Volume 67, Number 2

Spring/Summer 2000

<http://webpages.ursinus.edu/lantern/>

Editor: oana nechita

Layout Editors: Corey Taylor, Jeffrey Church

Visual Arts Editor: Allison Newkirk

Online Production: Jeff Algayer

Advisor: Jon Volkmer

Poetry Judge: Kathrin Phillips-Ellis

Prose Judge: Rebecca Jaroff

Cover Art: *Early Morning Blues* James Clark Robinson

Staff:	Bridget Baines	Lori Kruk
	Brian Berg	Philip Malachowski
	Chris Bowers	Laura McCann
	Chris Calderelli	Leah Miller
	Ashley Claus	Raquel Pidal
	Rosabelle Diaz	Michael Pomante
	Susan Fialkowski	Genevieve Romeo
	Khary Flamer	Nathan Rosen
	Dan Gallagher	Adam Shepherd
	Heather Gurk	Christine Spera
	Aly Jones	Monica Stahl
	Mike Keeper	Padcha Tuntha-obas
	Samantha Kravitz	

Editor's Note:

The Lantern is what it is because of the entire staff, all of the writers and artists featured in this issue, and all of those who have submitted their works to be considered for publication. Many thanks to all of you! Jon, thank you for your calmness and confidence!

James, Padcha, and Corey – CONGRATULATIONS! We are proud to feature the beautiful creations of your talent.

To all readers: enjoy this issue of *The Lantern*, pass a copy along to a friend, hug a writer or an artist, support and encourage in any way the creative energies!

oana nechita

Table of Contents

Poetry

Dearest Yarn-Spinner	<i>Padcha Tuntha-obas</i>	6
My Poem, This Tongue In Your Eye		
	<i>Caleb Prescott</i>	14
15th & Rodman	<i>Christine Spera</i>	19
Vision	<i>oana nechita</i>	21
Linguistics	<i>Daniel Gallagher</i>	23
casting cartesian shadows	<i>Jeffrey Church</i>	35
On the Defensive	<i>James Clark Robinson</i>	38
Sea Sick but Still Docked	<i>Lilly Afshari</i>	40
Urban Dreams	<i>Rosabelle Diaz</i>	48
Wolf of the Steppes	<i>Andrew Gerchak</i>	50
josephine	<i>ben jackendoff</i>	61
Happy Birthday to Me	<i>Susan Patton</i>	64
I Have Never Been to Africa	<i>Harry Michel</i>	72
pa·pou	<i>Genevieve Romeo</i>	74
Onion[s]	<i>Corey Taylor</i>	75
Intimacy	<i>Ashley Claus</i>	75
three trick pony	<i>Michael Edwards</i>	80
Blazer	<i>Amber Frame</i>	89
In My Tea	<i>Tom Lipschultz</i>	92

Creative Non-Fiction

Emmaless	<i>Aly Jones</i>	15
Dreamcatcher	<i>Ashley Claus</i>	24

Table of Contents (continued)

Fiction

Repetition	<i>Corey Taylor</i>	7
With the Turn of the Reel	<i>Philip Malachowski</i>	42
Fault Lines	<i>Genevieve Romeo</i>	52
The Shrink Is In	<i>Anthony Ciarllo</i>	65
The dancE	<i>Lori Kruk</i>	77
Exam	<i>Tom Howard</i>	82
Another Post-Apocalyptic Christmas	<i>Daniel Gallagher</i>	94
The Circumstances of My Prolonged Depression	<i>Mike Keeper</i>	100

Visual Arts

Empty Hope	<i>Kristin Geist</i>	18
I-Ching	<i>Matthew Terenna</i>	22
No More Apples	<i>Bridget Baines</i>	34
Seaside	<i>Laura Siciliano</i>	39
Dawn	<i>Matthew Terenna</i>	51
Trespassing	<i>Joe Laskas</i>	63
Footprints	<i>Laura Siciliano</i>	71
Still Hungry	<i>Bridget Baines</i>	76
Finals Week	<i>Jonathan Miller</i>	88
Steelworks	<i>Mark Peacock</i>	93
Obituary	<i>Lori Kruk</i>	99

JUDGES' NOTES

"Dearest Yarn-Spinner" examines the construction of a woman's identity. The narrator of this poem weaves her sense of self through the hands of another, the yarn spinner. The narrator becomes "simply the yarn, the daughter . . . woven with your song." The author leaves open the identity of the yarn-spinner, offering the reader opportunity to identify the yarn-spinner as lover, parent, or friend. "Dearest Yarn-Spinner" invites the reader to witness the construction of self, an inner view to a woman's attempts to explain her identity. The reader cannot help but to feel privy to a confidential moment in life—realization of what shapes a personality.

"Dearest Yarn-Spinner" was not alone in quality. Other poems that I feel worth mentioning include "I Have Never Been to Africa," "In My Tea," and "Happy Birthday to Me." Congratulations to all the contributors!

-Kathrin Phillips-Ellis

Writing dialogue that actually resembles how two people might talk to one another is challenging enough. When dialogue also works to reveal character, propel plot, and create conflict, the author has managed to master one of the more elusive techniques of storytelling. "Repetition" does just that. The characters come alive by both what they say and, more importantly, what remains unspoken. Without giving into sentimentality or self-pity, "Repetition" explores how an intimate moment beneath the summer moon can be so easily lost in almost the same instant it is most desired.

While all of the other prose selections in this volume deserve high praise, three of them merit honorable mention: "Fault Lines," for its moving tribute to love and loss, the tragicomic "The Shrink Is In," for its depiction of male alienation masked as group activity, and the daring "Exam," for an experimental form that puts readers to the test.

-Rebecca Jaroff

Dearest Yarn-Spinner

Padcha Tuntha-obas

Dearest yarn-spinner,

I hear your song of wheel spinning smooth and patient. It sings. It does. I hear but not listen. It is like wind strokes that touch slim tall grass and pass by.

Your song is so simple. The rhythm steady like drops of dew. The lyric relaxing like stream.

Your song shapes my texture smooth and patient. Secure and non-forcing. It is not a spotless cotton dress for ballroom. Nor is it a wrinkle miniskirt running wild.

I am simply the yarn, the daughter, blessed with your song of wheel. My texture is spun with your hand and woven with your song.

I hear your song, dear yarn spinner. I am its smiling dancer.

your girl

Repetition

Corey Taylor

Among the porcelain, among some talk of you and me,
Would it have been worth while,
To have bitten off the matter with a smile,
To have squeezed the universe into a ball
To roll it towards some overwhelming question

-from "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"
by T.S. Eliot

The night sky was scattered with clouds as Allison and I walked up 123rd Street to the beach. A humid mist hung upon the air and the moon emitted a hazy glow through the early August gloom. We had just come from The Chicken or The Egg, a usual summertime haunt of ours: a ridiculously popular 24-hour restaurant with walls of knickknacks and oddities that serves all sorts of wonderfully unhealthy food. A chicken cheesesteak with hot sauce in my stomach and an Eggwich with a side of homefries in hers, our toes sunk into the cool sand as we came over the dune.

"Want a piece of gum?" Allison asked.

"Why, does my breath stink like hot sauce?" I said.

"Yup. Here," she said, handing me a piece of cinnamon Trident and smiling her big, beaming smile.

"I think we spend way too much money at The Egg whenever we go."

"Yeah, you're probably right."

"What's the matter? You sound more downbeat than usual."

"Screw you" she said as she jabbed me in the ribs.

"Anytime, baby."

I jabbed her back and began to tickle her. I could feel her ribs, even through the thick, oversized navy blue Billabong hooded sweatshirt. She tried to squirm away from me, laughing,

but to no avail. Our arms encircled one another and we began to kiss. Her lips were soft and gentle.

So did you bang her or what? are you kidding me? she's my friend. So what? You should have at least gotten head. nah. What do you mean 'nah'? You're telling me that for the whole summer the two of you kissed and did nothing else? yup. You didn't even cop a feel? nope. Man, what the fuck's wrong with you? nothing. Dude, whatever. You're trying to be modest and it's not working. you think i'm lying? I hope you're lying! You're a regular dirty whore when you're up here at school. Do your studly abilities suddenly disappear when you go home? no, it's just that . . . Did you leave it in your dresser last semester? leave what? Your game, man! Your skills! oh jeez. You banged her and you know it. okay, you're right. i admit it. i banged her. several times, as a matter of fact, in a shitload of ways. i was only joking. Awesome! Are you gonna hit that shit whenever you go home? probably. Oh man, I knew it! You fuckin' rule, bro'! Let's go drink some beers.

We stopped kissing as I heard voices down along the waterline. I looked towards the ocean and perceived what appeared to be an older couple, walking arm in arm. Allison put her head on my shoulder and put her hand on mine.

"August already," she said quietly.

"I know. Just a few weeks and I'll be back at school," I said, kicking off my sandals.

"Not me. I told Don that I would work until Labor Day and even then I have a week until I go back."

"That sucks, man."

"Tell me about it. I can't wait to get the hell out of here. I hate being stuck at home." Allison began to run her fingers up and down my thigh, delicately brushing the surface of my khaki shorts.

"Me too. I am getting too old to stay in New Jersey for an extended period of time. I'm bored to death." I put my arm around her waist and lifted up the side of her sweatshirt a little, rubbing the flesh of her smooth hip.

“Well Pennsylvania is no treat either. It’s boring as shit.”

“Hey!” I replied.

“What are you talking about? I went to school there for a year, remember? Allegheny isn’t exactly a happenin’ college town.”

“I like Pennsylvania. It’s . . . poetic. Sort of.”

“It’s a far cry from Colorado. Denver is a better school than your diminutive piece of shit college, too.”

“I know. I’m jealous. But at least P.A. isn’t New-fucking-Jersey.”

“Yeah, I guess. I also don’t have to deal with any of this New Jersey bullshit when I’m out there.”

“Like what? The same old shit that always happens when you come home? The job and the mom and the boredom and the depression and . . .”

“Yeah, all that shit.”

There was silence for a few seconds. I took a deep breath and let out a sigh. The ocean gave me a lonely look. Allison stopped rubbing my thigh and took her head off my shoulder. She shifted her weight and faced me.

“Oh, I’ve gotta tell you this.”

“What’s that?” I asked, grabbing both of her hands.

“Guess what happened the other day?”

“I give up. Tell me.”

“I caught my mom looking through my credit card receipts when I got out of the shower that afternoon before work.”

“Really?” I let go of Allison’s hands.

“So we got into this huge fight that lasted like fifteen minutes. I told her that I was going to put a lock on my bedroom door so that she couldn’t go through my stuff anymore.”

“Hasn’t she done that before?”

“Yeah! It’s a good thing that she didn’t find the one from MasterCard. It’s like \$3,000 and I’ve only paid like \$500.”

“Holy shit.”

“I’ve kinda stopped paying it for awhile, too.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know. Just because I don’t feel like it.”

“What the hell do you spend so much money on?”

“Skiing.”

“Damn. I guess skiing is expensive out in Colorado.”

“Yeah it is.”

“Then why do you go so often if you know you’re gonna be in debt?”

“Have you ever been skiing, dumbass?”

“Nope.”

“Well there you go, then. It’s a riot. I don’t care about how much it costs.”

“Oh, okay Miss I-Don’t-Give-A-Shit-About-My-Credit!”

“Oh, okay Mister I-Always-Defend-Allison’s-Mom-When-She’s-Mean-To-Her!”

“Ouch. Sorry I got you started.”

“It’s not your fault. My mom just pisses me off. It’s like I’m ten years old or something. It’s ridiculous.”

“I think all moms are like that.”

“Maybe, but my mom’s a psycho bitch. My dad doesn’t pull that crap with me.”

“I’m sure she just wants you to be responsible with your money. But that was a shitty thing to do.”

“Yeah, whatever.” Allison turned towards the water and crossed her arms.

So how was your date with Allison? it was fun. we always have a great time together. What’d you guys do? the usual: went to a movie, grabbed some grub, and kissed. Damn. That’s like the fourth time this summer that you two have hooked up. fifth, actually. but it was nothing big. Hey, that’s still cool, man. Seems like you two are getting along nicely. i suppose. What’s wrong? nothing really, i . . . C’mon, you can’t lie worth a shit. Spit it out. i dunno,

man. i have no clue how to handle this whole situation. *Just enjoy it. You and Allison have known each other for how long?* just about as long as i've known you: since ninth grade. seven years almost. we dated for like a month and then broke up and then . . . *Yeah yeah yeah. You've told me the whole sad backstory at least a dozen times this summer. So how do you feel about her?* i like her a lot, but it'll never work. long distance and all. *True. So just enjoy it while it lasts.* but we've been inseparable all summer, man. movies and dinner and drinking and shopping and the beach and everything we did was together. *I know, I know. So you should just tell her how you feel. You're friends and all, so she should be cool with it. Know what I mean?* uh-huh. but i can't get a read on how she feels. she's definitely weird like that. *Just use your best judgment. You're a smart kid.*

"Anyway, then at work that night, Don was like, a total dick."

"Why's that?"

"Well, first of all, we were shorthanded and then we got slammed with all these asshole customers for about an hour and a half at dinnertime. Then, this new girl named Kelly that just started the other night took more than her share of the tip money out of the cup."

"Wow. That bites."

"Yeah, and it happened while Jamie, Kate, and I were cleaning up the rest of the restaurant. I was out on the porch putting away the chairs and umbrellas while Jamie and Kate were sweeping and mopping the floor. Kelly thought that I went home early, so I got dicked out of some money."

"Uh-oh. How dare some upstart of a counter girl deprive the assistant manager of her rightful tip money."

"Exactly. So then I told Don the next day, and he didn't seem to care too much. I hate it when I know something to be true and no one else believes me or gives a shit."

"I know precisely what you mean."

"I want to fire her, but Don thinks she's cute."

"Well, is she?"

"No. She's a bitch."

"Jeez."

"I think she's a dumbass, too."

"Sounds like it."

"I mean, how could she not know that I was there? I told that idiot what to do to close the place!"

The clouds began to increase in the sky, dulling the light of the moon. I slid my hand into Allison's and squeezed. "So are you excited to go back to school?"

"Not really."

"No?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"I don't know. I'm just not."

"I thought you liked Denver."

"I do. I just don't want to go back to school."

"Oh. Hey, Allison, I . . ."

"Hmm?"

"Ah, it was nothing."

Let me cradle your slender body in my arms and kiss you forever, Allison. Please listen to me and please let me in. I can't bear to lose you again. We owe ourselves this. Let's go down to AC and I'll get us the finest honeymoon suite in the Taj, the most expensive bottle of Dom Perignon, and two glasses with our names engraved in gold. We'll drink the wine and laugh and kiss and fall into each other all night. Ah the hell with that, let's up and leave tomorrow for the Bahamas and we'll open up our own bar and restaurant and in a few years we'll be filthy rich. Then we can eventually retire to our own private island where we never have to worry about anything beside how many times a day we have sex. Hell, we don't even have to be rich or in the Bahamas. I just want to be with you tonight. Will you let me get you out of here and be the man you deserve?

We sat on the bench for a while, my arm around her. I looked at her fragile face, infinitely deep brown eyes cast

somewhere across the rolling sea. Her raven hair was almost indistinguishable from the surrounding night, save for her blond highlights. It was getting late and the wind was getting chilly. We both had long days tomorrow.

"I guess I should go," I said.

"Yeah, I'm getting tired," said Allison.

"You working until midnight tomorrow?"

"Of course."

"Okay. I guess I'll give you a call when I get home then."

"Whatever." She got up off the bench and adjusted her red O'Neill board shorts.

"We'll hang out again before I go back to school, right?" I picked up my sandals.

"I guess."

"We can go out to dinner wherever you like."

"Sounds good to me," she said. She looked at me and smiled again, sadly.

We embraced for a minute or two after we walked back to her house. I unlocked the door of my slowly deteriorating royal blue Oldsmobile Delta 88.

"Hey," Allison said.

"Yeah?"

"I was just thinking that we might . . . or you might like to . . ."

"Yeah?"

this is it this is it this is it this is it this is it this is it this is

"Oh, never mind. It's a stupid idea anyway. Give me a call tomorrow."

"Um, okay. Sure. You know I will."

"Cool. See ya later."

"Goodnight."

Allison smiled at me, beaming once more through the darkness.

My Poem, This Tongue In Your Eye

Caleb Prescott

Your door is shut against my space,
And my blood making waves on your flag
My blood making waves in these unclaimed streets and
Drying like abandoned piss under staircase number 2 apartment
B1.

You asked me to wait like we waded in the murky water
You saying the sunset bringing things...

Time bringing things

Al Gore bringing things

Bill Bradley bringing things

Governor Bush bringing things

Senator McCain bringing

war experience...

Oh the weight in biding subtlety!

When they speak of the millennium and beyond with paper
clips in their mouths

Their speed heading with eyes, faster, Pentium IV speed.

Oh lord help us they have cancelled the skies and it megahurts

They scrape their knees in front of their speedy reflections.

And bring Tonka trucks to meetings where women fight for
breast cancer and flesh in one.

I lash out with reverb and they blink,

Do you see that we are...?

Do they see what I am...?

I am two things because of them

And live in this place where no one should live.

Emmaless

Aly Jones

December 19, 1993

Fifteen minutes ago I slid my chubby shell-white legs along the smooth mahogany pew, waxed and worn by parishioner's holy backsides for 80 years, and gracelessly lowered my dimpled knees to the leather upholstered prayer bench folded and creased around the corners like a mother-tucked child-filled bed. *Praise God from whom all blessings flow.* My eyes traced the hemline of my mother's sandy pink skirt, as her legs (mine minus the pinchable pink skin) clad in suntan stockings, lightly lowered her bowed curls to prayer. *Praise Him all creatures here below.* I glanced up, catching my pastor's eye. His comfort reached out to the congregation, singling out my mother, father, brother, and self. I thought, maybe prayer is the answer. *Praise Him above the Heavenly Hosts.* Maybe this gracious God, trusting, loving, understanding, whom Lou brings to our ears every Sunday in family anecdotes and familiar narrations would listen to a desperately seeking fourteen year old. *Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.* I looked down at my short palmy hands, studying the curvature of the soft almond-shaped nail beds that my grandmother had passed on to me – artist's hands, she reminded me all the time. *Amen.*

I squeezed my family eyes shut and watched orange and red dance along a black screen, eclipsed by a blue flash. Dear God, I thought, please help my Granny. Her raisin like frame sunken into my grandfather's plush leather chair, filled my eyes. She turned her permed head to engulf the serenity of the backyard's commanding orange trees and concreted man made lake. I knew her artist's hands, entwined like twins in the womb cuddled on her lapless lap, cool and smelling of baby powder and Dove soap. *Praise the Lord. Go in peace.*

Now, fifteen minutes later the answering machine's piercing beep sends my Sunday shod feet through the warm

hug of the kitchen and into the cool low lit living room. I lean my little girl stomach against the burgundy corduroy of the sofa, the window on the phone blinks red 1-1-1-1, 1 message. I smile, maybe *he* called. The dance is less than a week away and I remain a dateless wonder. My sweaty first finger jumps out and jabs the expecting button, the soft black disk sinks and clicks under the pressure. Wurr Wurr Wurr...smack. The commonly confident voice of my mother's younger sister breathes slowly through the house. "Al. It's Ruthy. It's Mom." Pause, deep breath, soft air sucked hard through tear restraining clenched teeth. "This morning. Please call." My mother is through the kitchen and slamming the black disk before I can even turn to see her walk through the door.

December 22, 1993

Fifteen minutes ago the one-member-short Nelson family pushed their full stomachs back from my grandmother's hand-crafted Japanese dining room table, the one she had insisted on bringing back to the states after my grandfather's tour of duty. The clawed feet strained under the weight of the dishes scattered with scrapes of my grandmother's favorite foods. Moth-like stories the diners set forth cover the table in an array of wings and antennae. The straining table knew it would be removed from the crevices in the plush oriental rug and then transplanted to another Nelson household, Emmaless.

Ashen pieces of evening fell around the little rancher. Emmaless the clan followed my grandfather and the jar of ashes past the intoxicating scent of pregnant orange trees and down the toe itching spiky grass to the concrete lagoon embedded behind the Emmaless house. The wind, like my grandmother's soft wrinkled fingers, sucked the tears back into my eyes. I followed my uncle and grandfather along the water's edge watching the crumbly gray dust rapidly slip out of the plastic container, hungry to join the warm lapping liquid. I crawled on my knees, enjoying the pain of the needling grass, brushing

pieces of my grandmother that crept back up towards us back into the water. Pieces of Emma swirled, painting milky pictures that quickly fell away as my artist's fingers danced amongst her ashes.

Now, fifteen minutes later, I sit in at my grandmother's dressing table Emmaless. Her tiny rose bud robe fits me like her hands as I stare at her bobby pins left haphazardly strewn across her jewelry box, anticipating their owner's return. "Chin up," my Aunt Ruth presses her fingers against the underside of my jaw her, the motion stirring up the fresh aroma of Granny's perfume. She brushes my dark damp hair, sprinkling Dove scented droplets against my cheeks, and slowly begins to wrap small sections around her fingers, twisting them to my skull and fastening them neatly with the expectant pins.

In the mirror, Ruth's neck and collarbone look older. The wrinkles seemed more defined and soft like rising bread dough. I want to hug her and tell her I might have gotten Granny's hands, but she got Granny's neck and necks are far more comfortable than hands. Instead, I sit and stare at the black lacquer jewelry box, wishing the inlaid mother of pearl swans would climb into my cupped hands and sing me to sleep. "This trick always works," I feel my aunt's almost confident voice push into my wet head. "Granny taught me," she breathed. "Leave these in until an hour before you're ready to walk out the door. Okay?" she secured the last pin from the jewelry box at the nape of my neck. I wanted to answer her but all of the words that floated into my mouth were the wrong ones, they bobbed up and down on my tongue like oranges on water. "You're going to have a great time at this dance tonight. Didn't I tell you he would call? Boys are just dumb, all of them."

Ruth smiled at me in the mirror. The makeup lamp surrounded us in a two-foot puddle of light. I gathered a soft smile and she hugged the rose bud robe and me.

Empty Hope

Kristin Geist



15th & Rodman

Christine Spera

How I stand
in the dusk,
in the soft rust light
in the room,

naked and arranging
coins on your wardrobe.

You will not look at me.

Hardwood cold under my feet;
moist on the backsides of my knees
and inside of my elbows;
arranging leftovers from
bought toothpaste and train tickets.

Stacks and lines.

You stare at the vines crawling
in the window,
at the makeshift screen that failed
to stop the robbers.

Look how I curve
peaceful as waves.
 how I stand here,
 untouched.

Your fingers think
across the hairs below your belly button...

You imagine the masked men.
How they climbed into your space,
graceful as ivy,

how they left quiet as snow,

taking things and
leaving.

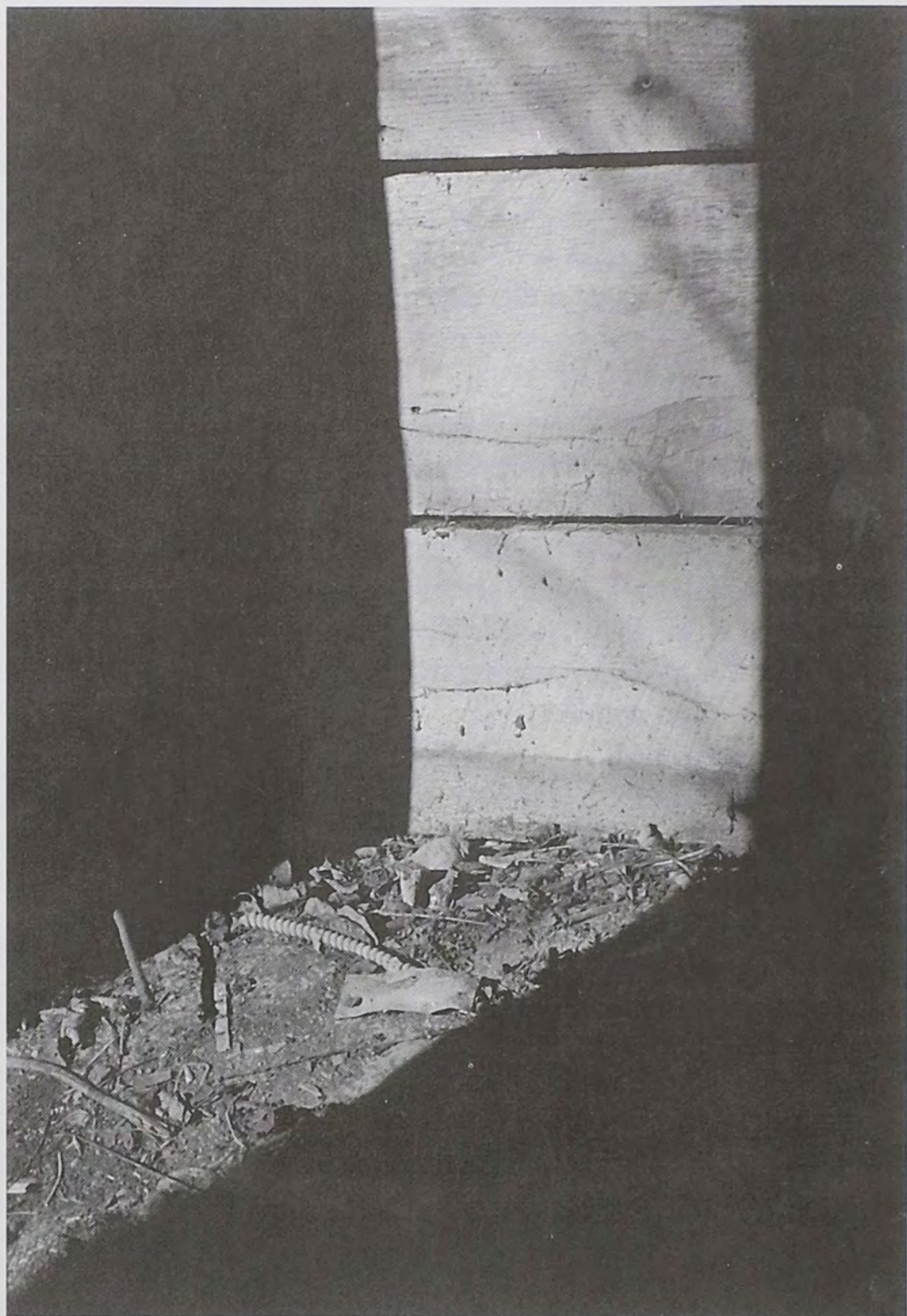
Vision

oana nechita

When I first met you
the child of my womb
awoke and turned – a planet forming,
mixing and shaping elements of the Universe.
My eyes opened in its blind eyes
seeing through placenta as if through a church window.
My palms bathed in infantile eagerness
to melt in the mist of your aura;
they started towards you
as arrows shot from a bow – sure, unreturnable –
they sipped into your bloodstream,
my heart pounding as before birth,
my breasts magnified as wombs
birthing boiling milk, hot as semen,
my visceral scream dispersed in the atoms of my flesh.
Blessed power of organs willing our bodies
together like iron and iron,
engorged, magnified,
metals meant to mix as gravity is meant to pull,
squeezing toes, undulating spines,
mouths gasping to receive the new spirit.
The waters of my womb broke,
You and I streaming from within
as clay, wet, unsure,
unshaped to this world,
children ourselves,
holding on to one another,
holding on.

I-Ching

Matthew Terenna



Linguistics

Daniel Gallagher

Should you see me
someday walking d

o
w
n

the street

cats in my pockets, canary on a leash

don't be ALARMED dear.

For though in senseless MEANING

intention be lost

(drowned, as it were),

definitions yet lurk, trench coats and wide-brimmed hats,

a r o u n d
e c
v o
e r
r n
y e

reality keeps us

dangerously sheltered.

These cats roar your name,

canaries scream at each utterance

deafened inside your pillowcase.

Tornadoes of yellow feathers blind me as my color scheme is turned
off by your remote

control

**Fall back, fall a w a y, fall down the stairs from your
apartment.**

The icicles protruding from your eyes frighten me

but I suppose that's understandable.

Dreamcatcher

Ashley Claus

“Would you have a look at this! There’s no denying who this little one belongs to, now is there?” Every other stranger on the street, at the grocery store, at the bank said I looked just like her. The same red hair, the same baby blues. My mother laughed politely, quietly; a proud, satisfied chuckle - “Oh thank you, I feel about twenty years younger” - until she’d turn to see me rolling my eyes at Miss Busybody’s astute observation. Now she would try to suppress her elation, but her smile lingered, unconsciously seduced by a remark she understood to compliment one of her most prized achievements, her children.

Catching a glimpse of my disgust, her lips shrugged in sympathy for my too striking resemblance. “She gets that a lot . . . it’s terrible.” My mom’s smile rebounding involuntarily, “I remember when I used to have bright red, shiny hair. Poor child hates hearing she’s gonna grow up to look like this old hag. Lord knows I never wanted to look like my mother.”

She was right, that was the frightful destiny I had imagined from the beginning. I would grow to be frazzled, uncoordinated, and out of touch like her. Strangers, relatives, whomever, they all conspired to prepare me for what they probably never saw coming in their own lives but nevertheless felt was their duty to pass on and warn future generations. Doesn’t every daughter say she doesn’t want to grow up to be like her mother but then somehow, somewhere along the way, she unexpectedly becomes who she fought never to be? Yeah, I may look like my mother, but I have my Dad’s personality . . . or so I convinced myself.

I guess I didn’t notice then, but she was beautiful. She was indeed beautiful and smart and charming, but I rejected the similarities between us . . . as did she for my sake. I was too young to see it luster beneath her skin. That glow that only a

mother has. Reddish, never yellowed or burnt, just blushing modestly as it warms their insides, waiting impatiently to break through tight, strong pores and boast.

I imagine she used to play cowboys and Indians for hours in the basement with Tom and Jim, the boys next door. But I don't suppose she played either part very well. My mother was better at House. She pushed her doll carriage tip toeing gently over the sidewalk cracks, lovingly combed the knots out of her baby's straggled curls, and took care of the plants in her pretend apartment. Perhaps instead she served the tired cowboys lunch after their pioneering adventures. In her pretty Auntie Oakley costume, she was feminine, not competitive, and probably had more fun getting ready to play, than actually playing. Twirling like a toy top across the grass in her new patent leather shoes and black and white checked dress, or standing at the kitchen counter intently watching Mom-Mom cook dinner, she was without a doubt, a woman at six going on twenty-nine. A twenty-nine year old newlywed intoxicated with dreams of the perfect marriage, the perfect house, two kids, and a dog. A little girl wishing to be a regular Betty Crocker-Stay-at-Home-Mom.

"I should have known that night what I was in for." We were nestled on the couch watching TV together and flipping through a Martha Stewart wedding magazine when she started to tell me about her first date with my Dad. The realities of day to day living seem to have cramped her fantasies of what life and love are supposed to be. Sometimes I think she has spent her whole life wishing fate had ripened differently. Wishing fate had aged like the pictures flickering between the polished pages. Wishing fate had listened to her youthful imagination.

Mom's first date with Dad wasn't exactly the perfect first date. Neither was their engagement for that matter. On their first date they went to a coffeehouse at a church, only to find they had the wrong night and drove miles for nothing. Then Christmas day three years later, Dad was his punctual self,

fashionably late, . . . extra fashionably late.

“Where’ve you been? We have to go Karl!”

“Dinner’s not ‘til four. We have plenty of time.”

“We were supposed to be there an hour ago!”

“So . . . Here”

I’m sure he said *here* matter-of-factly, like “Please pass the salt,” . . . “Here,” and then tossed her the ring box. A kind of Dick Tracy proposal. She pranced around the house admiring the promise wrapped around her finger, “Oh, it . . . it’s beautiful, it’s beautiful honey, I love you. I thought this day would never come.” Meanwhile, in a sickly shade of green, Dad spent the next half-hour on the couch reflecting on the commitment he had just initiated. She should have known then. It would never be perfect, nothing would ever be perfect.

I don’t think she would ever really want life to be perfect anyway. Mom used to fight with Suzi Feldman. Spoiled Suzi had everything and was good at everything. She knew it too. Surely her flawlessness irritated my mom like an itch that one day is just an itch and the next day is a full-blown case of chicken pox. That’s when mom stood her ground. Pulling hair, pushing the little piano playing priss into the grass and staining her white daisy dukes. She roughed Suzi up on the front lawn pretty good, I bet. One time the fight was so brutal, a pedestrian had to stop to pull them apart. Even though she probably spent the rest of the afternoon crying in her room to herself, nauseated with guilt, my mom wasn’t afraid to get her fingernails dirty when she needed to.

She smoked a cigarette once. It wasn’t her idea though. Aunt Karen was the rebel my mom wanted to be. “Here hold it like this, just like in the movies. Don’t swallow, breathe in . . . breathe out, nice and slow.”

“Your parents are away, right?”

“Stop your worrying and just try it” Aunt Karen said coolly standing across the room, finger ready with a potpourri aerosol can. My mom probably spent the next day in bed

recovering, comforted by bag of lemon-honey cough drops, but she tried it nonetheless. No, she wouldn't want things to always be perfect. Where would the adventure be if things were always perfect?

She is a packrat. She keeps things so she can go back to a time when her options were still open and simple. "When I was young, you could be a nurse, a secretary, or a teacher. I was going to be a nurse, marry a tall, rich, debonair man, and have warm homemade cookies waiting on the counter for my kids when they came home from school." If the choices were that really that simple, who knows . . . she would have matched her apron to her high heels and gotten a manicure once a week. She would have turned into one of those fake moms who organize the school bake sales, never leave the house without lipstick, and eventually become closet alcoholics. Deep down she knows better, but she goes on thinking life would be improved if everything had gone according to plan.

Once I told her I threw out some old birthday cards and she cried. They weren't even her cards.

"When you get to be my age you're gonna wish you had those to look back on!"

"When I get to be your age, I won't even remember who these people are. Besides, I'll be making *new* memories, I won't have time to look back!" She glorifies youth a lot now that she has more years stacked up against it. A card she sent me at school begins "Keep up those spirits, when you're fifty you'll think this part of your life was the easiest and the best!" *What's the point of life after twenty-one if it is never going to be better than this? Keep up my spirits? For what? According to her it's only going down hill from here.*

On a card table in my mother's bedroom, boxes of Polaroids, newspaper clippings, old grocery receipts, and diet books wade pruning for four years in the sea of "I'll get to that tomorrow." Amidst the wrinkled but nonetheless treasured survivors of her nostalgic shrine to good times and special

people, a newspaper guide to Tuesday TV 1971 beams "Love, American Style," "Gentle Ben," and "The Lone Ranger." On the flip side, cartoon artist Frank Baginski lashes the all too true anxieties of Plain Jane. . . "Sigh! . . . If I don't meet somebody soon . . . And get married . . . And raise a family . . . I'm gonna become an endangered species!" My mother worried she would never get married. She would live and die an old maid alone, knitting dish scrubbies for her married friends. She was afraid of being alone then and she is afraid of being alone now. Mostly though, she is afraid of being dispensable.

"Promise me you'll cook homemade dinners for your family."

I was trying to practice, couldn't she see that. "Leave me alone." She's afraid I don't know how to cook or iron. . . or mind any of her prized, domestic talents for that matter.

"Don't use that knife! Use the one with the ridges for bread."

"I know! Go Away!"

"I didn't spend enough time with you when you were little. When I was a little girl, I used to love. . ."

"Shut up, would you, I'm twenty years old. I think I can follow a recipe."

"You're so mean to me sometimes . . . I just wish I could have spent more time with you kids. Now my babies are all grown up and I didn't teach you enough." Her face cramps up like it does before she's going to cry. She doesn't cry though, I do. She sighs as she bulldozes a trail of crumbs into the cup of her hand. "I've had to work too hard. I hate it. It's pathetic."

Pathetic is her word for everything. I never know what to say when she starts talking down about herself. Annoyance saturates my good intentions to make her feel better, so instead I internalize the thundering self pity barreling in my direction . . . *I'm never going to get married. I'm not going to get a good job. My friends are all going to be rich and I'll be poor and hungry eating Easy Mac out of the box because I don't know how to cook anything else . . .*

percolates inside of me, breaks down walls of assertion, and melts into one big glob of pasty tissues.

“I hate that goddamn word, *pathetic!* Can’t you find any other word. There’s got be another word.” I sob. I’m analyzing my negative feelings and I’m sobbing as each thought spirals into another more meaningless anxiety. . . *I’m fat. I need a haircut. I need new clothes. I have so much to do.* Then one of those self help quotes I’m always reading pops into my head. “When you analyze your negative feelings you’ll usually have more to contend with.” *Just stop Ashley. Stop and be nice to her. She’s your mother for God’s sake.*

“I’m sorry honey, I can’t help it. I just want you to have good memories, that’s all.”

She worries I won’t remember her as a good mother. Tied up in dirty socks, years of working full time, rushed dinners, and babysitters, she is afraid of being lost in greasy sink bubbles and prime time TV. Somewhere, sometime she lost a part of herself and she can’t afford to lose me too. On the telephone when I’m at school, she ends every call with, “I love you sweetie.” Somehow she always beats me to that part of the conversation. Before I even realize it’s coming, there it is exposed. Hanging connected between us, waiting for me to push it back to her. I love you too. She worries that I’ll leave her someday, that I won’t need her anymore, that I already don’t need her anymore. Most of the time I say I love you back, but sometimes I soak up her voice, all of it, and keep it for myself. Sometimes it’s better to be clueless in the kitchen. This way she has to hang around, help out, *mother me . . .* and I don’t have to ask.

I know I need her. She is like one of those big yellow sponges that soaks up the messes everyone else makes. Just a few weeks ago I got my first speeding ticket. Pulled over and waiting for the officer to get out of her car, I turned off the radio and coached myself. *Don’t cry, whatever you do don’t cry. Be strong Ash. Be strong.* Soon, however, my anticipatory efforts

would be fruitless. The tears harvested and wouldn't stop—didn't stop until I made it some and called my mom. "It's ok, it happens to everyone." There, all better. In one sentence she sucks up my guilt and I am a good kid once more.

The problem is, I, like her, am twenty-one going on twenty-nine. I too have always been going on twenty-nine. When I was three I was going on twenty-nine. The photos in my baby-book are proof. Naked and sunburnt, I mopping up the bathroom floor. In another I'm standing inside the washing machine. Yet another: sticking a Betty Crocker cake box in the oven. My youthful days spent playing house or serving the tired cowboys lunch, I envisioned the perfect career, the perfect house, the perfect husband. Just as she did, I foster fantasies of what life and love are supposed to be.

Stored boiling together in a big wooden box I call *Someday*, my disillusioned ideals are similar to hers, but different from hers. Within the walls of this sacred chest lies hope and incentive that someday *Someday* will arrive and I will be happier than I am now at this moment. A three by five card listing the songs I intend to play at my wedding floats among multi-colored paint chips, magazine redheads modeling a haircut I want to try, and more and more lists. Lists of places where I want to travel, qualities I want my husband to have, business ventures I plan to embark and so on. Inside the box, a pleated Hagar the Horrible cartoon reminds me of how I want to be. Two dopey looking Vikings stare dumbfounded at a beautiful woman gripping a shield and a spiked mallet. "Why are you so afraid to talk to Honi? She's just a girl." "I know . . . but she has a certain air about her." She has beauty and power and strength and someday so will I. When I drive home from my corporate job, in my German-made car, to my urban apartment, I want to slip off my shoes, light a candle, and relax in the bubble bath my husband draws for me just ten minutes before I walk through

the door.

Today, there are more choices than when my mother was my age. Women are biomedical engineers, aviation technicians, CEOs, *and* they are teachers, secretaries, and nurses. Individualism is on the rise and there is not as much pressure to get married and raise a family as there has been in this country's past. But despite these differences, the ideals that consume my expectations for the future are the same as hers, exaggerated and unearthly.

Of course I realize life will never turn out as I imagine. I'm sure I wouldn't want it to turn out *exactly* as I imagine. Life would be boring if everything happened according to plan. No one would ever learn anything. Besides, I like to think of myself as strong and persevering. Like an American Gladiator, I flex, make mean faces in the mirror, and call myself "Ice." I always wanted to be Ice. I don't take medicine when I'm sick either. Brave and adventurous, that's the way to be, surprising people with my relentless courage and determination. Water skiing, rock climbing, I'll try it all with enough coaxing. *But* who needs to be strong if fate works everything out just right? Sometime in the course of life one needs to learn how to fight. A good punch can be exhilarating.

Even though I am aware life is not this cookie cutter world we all buy into in the movies and the American sitcom, I am not yet ready to give up on the idea. I think to myself wouldn't it be nice if one day I came home gave my mother a great big hug, held her in my arms until she made the first squirm to escape my grip, told her dinner was great, I love her, and I'll always need her. But no matter how much she needs to hear it, or how much I want to say it, smoke bubbles out of my mouth to choke the words. Maybe it would hurt too much. Maybe I'm not a sponge like her; I don't want to absorb everyone else's problems. Because I know if I tell her she will make a big fuss. First she'll tear up, then she'll hug me, then she'll tell me I mean the world to her, and then she'll thank me.

“I needed to hear that, sweetie. I’ve had such a rough day. I just can’t keep up with anything. The house is a mess. I have so much to do. . .” and on and on. An avalanche cheapening the meaning of my confession and squashing my own fantasies.

I still have hoped that someday my life will miss a turn and I will accidentally come upon the yellow-brick road leading me to the fairytale life I fancy. I’m too young to look back. I just want to be and keep thinking things will always get better. The lead guitarist of a small cover band will someday look up at me sitting at a small window table quietly swaying to the muffled harmony. Before he looks away again our eyes will meet and my life will be forever changed. Until the smoke clears and the sun rises over the little dive bar, we will stay up talking, engaged in each other’s unique intellectual outlooks and contented by the warmth of our sincerity. Eventually we’ll backpack in places like Greece and Italy, we’ll swing dance, we’ll drink fine wines and toast to the blessing that brought us together.

I fear that someday my idealistic illusions will haunt me as they often haunt my mother. I’ll be so wrapped up in waiting for something extraordinary to come along and sweep me from the mundane that I will be blind to small marvels that inhabit my daily life. I’ll be so busy looking for something great to happen, I won’t see it when it actually does. Or worse, I’ll settle. I’ll say, “I’ve waited long enough. I guess life doesn’t get any better than this.” I’ll think to myself *yes, he has a nice family, he’ll never hurt me, he’ll be a good father, he’s intelligent, he’s handsome*, and I’ll sacrifice passion for practicality. I might be fooled too. I’ll think someone is so wonderful, I’ll forget to investigate. I’ll look past the bad in order to create the appearance of my dreams coming true. I’ll make him something he’s not and never could be.

Maybe though, without looking, without noticing, fate will just work itself out in the end. By now I should know how foolish it is to trust my own primitive human perceptions. I

may not meet the man of my dreams in a little dive bar. I may never meet the man of my dreams at all. I may never own a Volkswagen either, but maybe I won't for another reason. Compelled by an uncontrollable force to forsake being in the moment in the right way, at the right time, to come upon something even better in the long run.

The way you set up your life, the expectations you cling to, enslave you in limitations. How you react to your expectations as they play out is the key that either tightens the cuffs or frees you. "When you let go of your expectations, when you accept life as it is, you're free." You see everything, you dance with everything. Doors, invisible before, fling wide open and unhinge.

Within the billowed flames, it hovers just long enough to catch her breath and prepare her for the next moment. At the end of the day, she massages the dog's silky ears, snuggles up to him by the fire, and peace, for an instant, unconsciously infiltrates.

No More Apples

Bridget Baines



casting cartesian shadows

Jeffrey Church

examine me closely:

words and mathematics fork my mind—
through the left lobe, over the brain stem, somewhere
my C- fibers fire in the thalamus core, punishing a
rational assessment, and so . . . i move my hand, strike a
match, hit a tennis ball, eat a biscuit, rage, cry, limp, hoist
a knapsack, read a poem—all explanatorily immolated
under Zeno's puzzle about movement—

i can prove to you that movement is an illusion through
mathematics—imagine that i am walking from point A
to point B along a straight line. in traversing that
distance, i have to eventually reach the midpoint of
AB—let's call it C. but to reach C, i have to get to the
midpoint between A, where i started, and C—let's call
this midpoint D. but to get to D, i have to get to the
midpoint between A and D—let's call this midpoint E.
but to get to E . . . and you see my point—a line can be
infinitely divided into points, thus, in reality, we can't
move . . .

movement, sloshing, rainy days, cats, dogs, beef steaks, fires,
neurons, brain, me, you—illusory—Zeno, Descartes
QUESTION MARK EXCLAMATION POINT (is
anyone REALLY out there?)

examine me closely:

i have exactly six trillion parts . . .
approximately . . . well . . . until i can devise a way to
look even closer at me. all the parts that you have, i have
as well; we are wavering masses of parts strung together
arbitrarily, beautifully; when i look at me all i can see is

examine me closely:

at least i have words to keep me company
down the short clanking road of short clanking parts—
words that accompany me like a chore when i'm dog-
tired—words that baffle me,
inspire me,
construct me,
rend me,
bludgeon me,
words that constitute who i am (in
some bizarre Nietzschean sense)

(musing)

... i am my only reality ...

... i am etherized on the cartesian coordinate system ...

... i am as much truth as my society can muster ...

... i am 26 letters bound by a set of grammatical rules ...

(...)

On The Defensive

James Clark Robinson

I wonder, sometimes,
if I talked to you,
would you walk away;
would you stay – sit awhile and
Listen
to what I had to say –
would you feel the verse that flows –
would you adhere
to the verb of my
vocal or,
To you, am I
just another cat;
unreliable, irresponsible
with somewhat uncontrollable
urges of lust directed your way.

Seaside

Laura Siciliano



Sea Sick but Still Docked

Lilly Afshari

I wake up
One sea sick morning
Swaying from wake to dream,
wake to dream,
And I could feel my eyes
Cut through my pink
Morning haze, with fog-lights
Casting down the difference
Between the murky dock,
And the sturdy water.

I wake up
One sea sick morning
Swaying from wake to dream,
wake to dream,
Waiting for the drift to take me –
For the tide to
Touch my shoulder,
For the waves to
Pull away and return,
Pull away,
And return.
Wake to dream,
Wake to dream.

I wake up
To writhe like
Oysters without pearls,
Swaying from wake
To dream,
For souvenirs of ocean salt tears,
And seaweed left scattered

By the shore's passions
Left bare.
Peaking through the sand,
Their fingers and toes –
Little blush gleaming bodies,
Of homes
To so many creatures,
With hardened surfaces,
Hiding in smooth shells...
... They whisper the
Ocean's memories
From wake to dream –
The sounds of waves
Crashing Down!
Pull away and return,
Pull away,
And return.
Unable to dam
What flows freely.
The stream of consciousness
Swells from high to low,
High to low,
Tides leaving behind
The Sea's sweet castaways –
Wake to dream,
Wake to dream.

With The Turn of the Reel

Philip Malachowski

Heaven. “Popularly, the abode of God, his angels, and the blessed . . . The state or place of perfect union with God and so of eternal life and extreme happiness.” A guy named Webster said that. Sounds nice. Sort of like . . . well, I’m not exactly sure what it’s like. When I was a child, my mom would tell me that heaven was the place where my dead pets—my hermit crabs, salamanders, worms, frogs, snakes, fish, turtles, chickens, robin eggs, hamsters, mice, moles, a dog, and a cat—awaited me. Now, let me tell you that this had frightened me. While I hadn’t been a remarkably bright child, I had possessed enough sense as to not wish my soul to dwell in the eternal company of those creatures to which I had subjected my childhood forgetfulness and negligence. Jesus. I remember a pair of frogs that my brother and I had kept in a covered fishbowl. The frogs themselves—while their scientific names elude me—had been tiny creatures with pale-green skin that would stick like ice cubes to moist fingers. Like ice cubes to moist fingers. As I noted earlier, this particular heaven had frightened me.

Heaven. Abode of God or of vindictive frogs?

Last month I saw the movie *The Green Mile*. It had suggested to me that I think of heaven not as the popular conceptualization as a glorious white palace or even as a giant fishbowl, but rather as the event or occasion of my life that I would choose to relive over and over again for the duration of eternity. All in all, I thought that *The Green Mile* was a very good film. The kind that makes for little discussion during the hour or two afterwards, not because of any lack of comment, but because of the depths to which it permeates your soul—or whatever string of nerves it is that connects us to our spiritual halves. The kind that makes for a quiet drive home. The kind that makes your ears a little more sensitive to the squeaking of your windshield wipers; the kind that softens your touch to

your lover's lips. In other words, the kind that makes you conscious of being alive. Yes, I'd have to say I believe that epiphany comes in strange doses. A movie here. A song there. You simply don't know until it decides to tell you.

Indeed, later that night, as I watched a candle light flicker on my tired dormitory walls, I listened to my memories crackle in the flames of sober meditation and self-reflection: Which hour of my life would I choose to relive a million times, and a million times again? Tough question: lots of distance to cover between here and eternity. There's a song by the Counting Crows in which lead singer Adam Duritz sings, "I can't remember all the times I tried to tell myself to hold on to these moments as they pass." As a general rule, I try my damndest to hold on to those fleeting moments of eternal happiness. But, as it often occurs, happiness is found only after the fact—after the grade, after the kiss—and not in the moment itself. For if I were to recollect that day—that afternoon beneath the sun whose life would stretch from here to eternity—for what it actually was, then I wouldn't believe in heaven at all.

January something

Journal—

Remembered the lake today. Made me miss her.

Immersing my fingertips and hands, I caught my breath as the lake's cool, liquid tongue licked my skin. Careful to not cloud the water, I tilted up a half-submerged rock: mechanical antennae twitched, searching for the shelter that was just there. Attached by thin strands of vessels, two eyes floated eerily in the water. My fingers hovered above the crayfish. A rusted claw

opened, setting the spring. *On three, Phil. One*—the stained, copper armor glided past my fingertips, a little wary of the ragged claws posed to battle me. *Bastard!*

My knees cracked as I stood up. “Catherine!” I yelled.

Having not heard me, Catherine continued along the lakeshore. A strip of pebbles ran along the water’s edge and contrasted with the green turf that suddenly met it on the opposite side. Summer’s breath stirred the over-hanging tree boughs, and shafts of sunlight pierced the leafy foliage. Beyond the wavering shade cast by the trees, the lake glistened in the afternoon light.

“Cath!” I called again. *Yes. I am twenty years old going on eight. I crave attention. Look at me.* Catherine stopped and, without turning around, she laughed lightly, more to herself it seemed than to anybody in particular—particularly me.

“Catherine?”

Standing in the lake with water dripping from my hands and short bottoms, I watched Catherine walk away. The soft shade beneath the canopy of foliage attached itself to Catherine with a touch that accentuated the muscles working beneath the skin of her tanned legs. The white straps of her shirt pressed into the flesh of her shoulders, and a weathered olive bag hung at her waist. In her left hand, Catherine held a fishing rod, its line hooked tautly along the shaft.

“Catherine!” I leapt out of the water and ran to catch up to her. “Catherine! Cath—” I stopped running and stood, with my hands dangling by my sides, listening to my feet sinking in the spongy turf.

Hey, Catherine. I’m here behind you, I thought. Several moments passed, and Catherine continued walking away. *So much for telepathy.*

“Catherine! Hey, hold up a second.” I caught up to Catherine and grabbed her hand, moist with perspiration. “Cath, I haven’t caught one so far. Not one.” Breathing perhaps a bit too heavily for the short distance I had run, I

managed a smile. *Please, just smile, Cath. Just a smile*—I searched her eyes, emerald lakes housing creatures that I knew I'd never hold or feel.

Catherine's upturned face looked stonily into my eyes.

"Not one," I smiled with feeble success.

"Stop whining," Catherine said. "Come here."

Squeezing my hand, Catherine led me into the lake. I gasped as the water swelled past the tops of my boots and soaked my feet and toes. Catherine knelt down and immersed her hands into the water. With strings of golden hair falling into her face, she ran her fingers over the slippery lakebed. The lake surface reflected wavering sunlight onto Catherine's face, with soft mouth and flushed cheeks. Suddenly breaking through the surface of the lake, Catherine's hand raised the crayfish, its legs and claws wriggling in space. The sun glistened on the creature's rusted copper armor, the wet surface burning heroically in defeat.

The cold hook bit the worm's insides. Coughing, spitting, breathing, tasting metallic dust, the creature suffered the sensation of pain. Robbed of the yielding embrace of the earth, the worm dangled in the nothingness of space. Its guts tore and ripped, detesting the flight through the air and into the water. Liquid arms smothered the worm, as fish watched its wriggling descent with unblinking eyes. The water swirled, striking and throwing the worm with an omnipresent hand. Chafing its delicate skin, sharp teeth tasted the worm: its flesh was stripped and torn. Inside the bloody entrails of death—her eyes staring and mouth working—the worm was the writhing, twisting bait threaded onto God's hook.

I watched as Catherine meticulously worked another worm onto the hook. Unmoved by the inky excretion that stained the creases of her fingertips, Catherine softly hummed. When she had finished baiting the hook, Catherine pressed the line against the rod shaft, opened the reel, and raised the rod over her shoulder. The fishing line hissed as Catherine cast it far into the lake.

“Nice cast,” I said without smiling.

Seated on a fallen log entrenched in the shore, Catherine and I looked out across the shimmering lake. About a hundred yards separated us from the opposite shore, where heavy tree limbs dipped solemnly into the water. Ignited by the reddening sun, the lake burned as if it were afire. There, in the vicissitudinous surface, I envisioned Catherine’s glowing countenance at my fingertips. Her hair lifted almost imperceptibly in the breeze, and I suddenly longed to tangle my fingers in the sun-warmed strands. Moisture on her lip glistened, and I yearned to taste it, to bathe in the scent of its ecstasy—Catherine was my Calypso, and I didn’t ever want to leave her chamber in the sea.

I leaned over and picked out a stone from the shoreline. I stood, my figure silhouetted by the crimson clouds that rolled and twisted over themselves in an avalanche of mist.

“If there is a God, then he’s up there,” I said, lifting my face to the sky’s expanse. “Sitting atop a tuft of clouds with his naked feet dangling over the edge and his toes kneading the creamy air, casting his line down into the earth, where the silver scales of his fish flicker mortally beneath the water’s surface.” I wound back my arm and launched the stone far out into the lake.

My peripheral vision caught the sudden jerk of the fishing rod, and the lake surface shattered as Catherine set the hook into the fish, momentarily suspended in mid-air. With the turn of the reel, Catherine brought in her prey. Loath to surrender the life preserved beneath the scales of the fish, the

lake surface rippled and spat. The fight was short, however, and the passing of several moments brought the fish near the shore, where it splashed in the shallow water.

Catherine stepped into the lake and retrieved her catch. Starting from the domed, slippery head and continuing down the spine, Catherine's palm flattened the bony fins that spiked the air. Rheumy eyes bulged as Catherine squeezed, pressing her fingers into the soft, white belly of the fish. Vainly flapping gills spurted out blood, washing over the wet scales and onto Catherine's hand.

"Catherine!" I snapped. "Jesus Christ. Loosen up on it." My cheeks immediately began to burn.

Setting her thorny gaze upon my brow, Catherine explained to me that the hook was lodged too deeply in him. "Give me the clippers."

Bound by her spell, I handed Catherine the clippers with which she cut the line and released the fish, still possessing the metallic chill in its bowels. At that moment, a breeze drifted across the lake. Directed by this fleeting breath, my eyes shifted from the fishes' pitiful effort to crawl into deeper, safer waters, to the diluted blood that stained Catherine's hands.

same January something

Journal—

P.S. Fell in love with heartache today.

Urban Dreams

Rosabelle Diaz

I

Angel Dust

The 5th Street Seraphims
exorcise passers-by
with their emetic eyes.

A pagan bullet
disintegrates one of the
Heavenly bodies.

The white powder blows into the celestial smog.

I wait for my bus on their waterfront property:

A tall smoke building next to the crystal sea
with a graffiti-gold lamppost door
and black bubblegum tiles

I spit another pattern on the floor.

II

Holy War

The chemical freedom fighters protest
behind bars in the cement schoolyard
on the edge of military territory.

I jump over land mines and gold mines,
cross at the red light, after all the tanks pass.

I pull up my hood to prevent nuclear sunburn.

It's starting to rain shrapnel (from an exploding cloud).

It drops on my head sharp and clear as
glass smashed in heaven
and purified in hell.

III

Urban Dream

My brain waves dance
with an auditory hallucination-
the soundtrack to a blurry vision
of a girl with a blue backpack on her lap-
she overlaps herself as she sways through
mirrors and orange seats.
My incomplete set of bones is
squeezed between headphones
and subway cars.
Circular dents decorate
the plexiglas like fallen stars.
I trace constellations with my fingers.

Wolf of the Steppes

Andrew Gerchak

I want to make you immortal.
I want to imprint you into the Earth.
I want to carve your myth in pages
with serpents and seraphim.

I want them all to sing you,
breathe your magic with each turn.
Your brand-name madness breeds legends.
Kerouac's Cassady
Hunter's Samoan
Why not you?

Visit of pure Death
Visions of clean God
Victim and Victor of the mind.
Blossoming strength of the thumb
pushed you halfway Home
waiting in generic towns for last call.
I arrive in adventures of an angel.
Light unfolds and empty pages beg for you
Why can't I teach them?

Your cancelled voice scrapes.
"You can't because you didn't.
You didn't because you can't."

And so it goes
that I cannot write
the greatest character I have ever...

But I dig it.
You don't need my help
to live forever.

Dawn

Matthew Terenna



Fault Lines

Genevieve Romeo

Her food dish was gone. Where there should have been a blue-trimmed saucer filled with dried-out chunks of 9-Lives was now a big empty space. I left before my parents could ask me where I was going.

It was insufferably sunny for an early May afternoon. The sun blared; heat rose from the asphalt in waves. My cat was dead.

My parents had been telling me since I'd left for college that Taffy was getting old and no one could put up with her anymore. She had arthritis, was partially blind, and shed all over the new furniture. Not to mention she meowed like a dinosaur. It didn't matter to me. She used to lie on my feet when I was sick. Her claws dug little nests in my hair in the morning. I would put Vaseline on my fingertips and giggle as she licked it off. I felt more guilty leaving her than anyone else. Every night saw me pray for God to take her in her sleep so that they wouldn't kill her while I was away. Apparently, He had other plans.

I tried to push her out of my mind as I walked in the spring heat. Under the overpass, past the town dump, up a dizzying hill. I hadn't left my house with a direction in mind, but somehow I knew my feet wouldn't take me anywhere else. Same rows of white alyssia in flowerboxes. Same black mastiff barking and snarling at me. I turned the corner to Glen's block. The houses were packed together like mice huddling for warmth. I wiped my forehead and rang his doorbell.

His face gave away nothing when he saw me. I don't know what I expected – shock, anger, elation – but *something*, to be sure.

“Hello, Olivia.”

“Hi, Glen.”

I followed him inside, my eyes adjusting slowly to the

dimness of his house. Why had I come here? Out of instinct, perhaps. I hadn't called him in two or three weeks. He didn't even know I was home.

"You mind if I sit?" I asked him.

He said nothing and sat on the couch. I sat next to him. It was hard to believe that we had been on this very same couch last Christmas, playing Tetris and giggling like 4-year olds. Everything was different now. We hadn't broken up, but the relationship had deteriorated. Three years eaten away by time and distance.

"What are you doing here?" he asked.

When I had told him over the phone in February that my parents would probably be putting Taffy to sleep, he had responded with a soft, "I'm sorry," and nothing else. Neither one of us had brought up the subject since then. If I grieved for her, then she would be dead. In not saying anything, somehow, she remained alive. A sick paradox, but it kept me together. Maybe now was the time to tell someone. I opened my mouth to finally talk about her, but different words sprang to my lips.

"I cheated on you." I stared at his face. A muscle worked his jaw.

"I know."

My mouth fell open.

"You ... you do?"

"Yes."

"Oh."

I waited for the anger, the outrage, the cavalcade of tears. I got nothing but a long stretch of silence.

"You scared me the last time I came home," I said.

He shrugged.

"I didn't know what to do," I continued. "You freaked me out. I thought you were going to ... I don't know what I thought you were going to do, but you scared the hell out of me."

"It was too much at once," he muttered, "I just shut

down.”

That was a nice way of saying it, I guess. I don't know what to call what had happened. He had spent the night on my couch curled in the fetal position, crying and shaking uncontrollably. Nothing I tried got him out of that catatonic state, not comforting words, nor tears – not even my palm across his face. That was the only time in my life I had ever struck anyone. I had slapped him good and hard over and over again, trying to get the blank, dead stare out of his eyes, trying to get him to stop repeating, “I feel like I'm dying,” until I thought I would scream. I left strawberry marks on his coffee-colored skin. The sound of my hand cracking his cheek echoes through my head a lot. Especially at night.

And that was only after I had told him I was a little confused and possibly attracted to someone else. I don't even want to think about his mental state after he found out I had cheated on him.

“I can't deal with something like that again,” I told him.

“Don't worry. I'm past that.”

“Past me?”

I stared at him intently, waiting for my way out. He turned back to the television. The imitation leather couch was sticking to my legs.

“Are you?” I nearly shouted. “Should I go home now? Get up out of this couch and walk through that door and never ever look back? Is that what you want?”

“I don't know.”

Why not? Why didn't he hate me? Why didn't he want me out of his life, out of his house, off of his living room couch? Why was he making this so hard? I had cheated on him. I was lonely, I was insecure, I was sick of listening to my mother tell me I was in an unhealthy, semi-obsessive, co-dependant relationship. I was sick of feeling responsible for his well-being. I looked with longing at his front door. The same green construction paper caterpillar his brother had made last

December hung over the peephole. The edges had faded to a grayish-brown. I readied myself to get up off of his couch, open up that door, and never look back. But somehow, I just couldn't walk away from him. Somehow, I didn't want him to stop needing me. That was what had led me to him on this sultry spring afternoon. Part of me wanted him to do the walking for me--to curse me and shake me and spit on me. Maybe he would.

He met my eyes for the first time. "What do *you* want?" he asked.

Maybe not.

"I don't know either." I looked away.

He turned his eyes back to the TV, where Bob Barker was giving away some fabulous prizes. I kept my face as emotionless as his. We had both sobbed like babies at *Edward Scissorhands*. Now there were no tears from either of us. Maybe neither of us saw a point. I had only come home yesterday. We had the whole summer to agonize over this.

"I love you," I said, "I know that. I just ... I'm so confused. I don't know what to tell you."

"Well, isn't that just the theme of the day," he sneered.

"This isn't the time to be sarcastic."

"It's called a coping device."

"Well, I definitely prefer *this* coping device to you having a nervous breakdown in my living room."

"That's not fair."

"It wasn't fair to me when it happened," I told him. "How was I supposed to deal with that? What the hell would you do if I suddenly went comatose on *your* couch, Glen?"

"I don't know."

"Yeah! You don't! But you know what? That's something I'd never do, so you don't even have to think about it!"

"I hope I never do," he said quietly.

I stared at him, slightly furious, slightly saddened.

“You know what Caitlin told me?” he suddenly said.
Caitlin? My stomach flipped over. Was that jealousy squirming inside me?

Could I possibly feel affronted that he had done so much as talk to that skank Caitlin after I had cheated on him? After I had wished to God that he would cheat on me so that he could understand what it was like to feel something for another person?

“What?”

“In life, there are those people who are what they feel and those that feel who they are. I’m done being in that first group of people.”

I looked over at him – really gave him a good look for the first time since I’d been here. I hadn’t seen him in two and a half months.

His hair fell black and straight and silky around his face – had he blow-dried it? He hadn’t done that since my prom. Face meticulously clean-shaven. He was wearing a brand new pair of carpenter pants and an equally new ribbed tank top. My eyebrows arched as I noticed how well-defined his upper body had become since March. He’d mentioned he’d been working out, but ... hot damn.

“Getting more than some good advice from Caitlin, are you?”

“What’s *that* supposed to mean?”

“Does she ‘feel what you are’?”

“You should talk, Olivia. How did you *feel* when you decided to shack up with whatever rich white preppie happened to live next door to you?”

“It wasn’t like that” I said quietly.

“Then how was it? I don’t see you rushing to explain anything to me. It’s bad enough I had to hear it from Caitlin instead of you ...”

I knew it. That bitch.

“Look, I’m sorry. I’ve said I’m sorry. I will continue to

say I'm sorry until the day that I die, but it won't change anything."

"You've got that right."

"This is giving me such a headache," I muttered.

"Well it's not giving me an erection."

I rubbed at my eyes. They itched from the spring pollen, but there were still no sign of tears. An eyelash fell on my finger. I stared at it for a long time before offering it up to him, for old time's sake if nothing else. He looked down at me, almost contemptuously, then let his face soften for a fraction of a second. He placed his index finger over mine. We stayed like that for a moment, eyes closed in wishing, then pulled away from each other. The lash was now on his finger.

"You always win," I whispered.

"Not always."

"I wish for the same thing every time anyway."

"Me too."

We sat in silence for what seemed like an eternity. Frustrated, I rose from my seat and walked into his room, hoping he would follow me so that somehow, we'd end up on his bed and become lost in a tangle of limbs and tongues. Maybe that would solve everything. But he remained on the couch. The wall by his bed was still papered in posters of Tori Amos, Nine Inch Nails, and The Sandman. I knew each one of them to the tiniest detail, having spent long hours staring up at them in daydreams as I lay next to him, listening to his breath and feeling his muscles twitch. And then I saw something new. Breath left my body in a short gasp. There, above his dresser, was the same photograph of me that I had given him last summer, only now he had digitally altered it so that I blended into the trees behind me. My skin was leaves, my hair was branches. White light shone through, illuminating my eyes and skin. It was beautiful beyond words. I rose a hand to my mouth and whirled around, only to find him standing behind me.

"When did you make this?"

“Month or so ago.”

“It’s amazing.”

He shrugged.

“What else have you made?”

He pulled his black portfolio from behind his bed and removed several pictures from it. The first two were lithographs of flowers, done in exquisite, painstaking detail. The third was a charcoal sketch of two people, sitting with their backs to each other, faces hidden in their hands. But the fourth was the one that got me.

I immediately recognized it as a photograph of my cat he had taken sitting in my backyard last summer. He had altered it, removing the grass and trees in the background and instead adding a soft blue skyscape. Row after row of purple, orange, pink, and yellow clouds trailed off lazily into the distance. My cat was sitting on a lavender cloud in the foreground, looking endearingly aloof as only she could. A hazy, rosy halo hung above her calico head. The title below read, *Spirit of Taffy*.

The paper started to tremble. I could feel my face contort and my throat tighten.

“Why did they have to do it without me?” I whispered hoarsely, barely even aware that I was speaking. “They couldn’t wait two more months until I came home? She was *my* cat. They had to do it without me?”

Tears began to course down my face. A loud, racking sob escaped from my chest. I stood there, in the middle of his room, holding that picture, and began to cry my heart out.

He stood motionless, watched me for a few minutes, then took the picture from my hands and placed it on the bed. His arms wrapped around me, his hands smoothed my hair, his lips kissed my head.

“I loved her so much,” I choked out through violent sobs. “She didn’t deserve to die with *them*. She was probably shaking the whole time. If I had been there, she wouldn’t have

shook because she wouldn't have been scared."

"She loved you more than anyone," he said softly.

"They didn't love her." Tears and snot flowed in twin rivers down my face. "She annoyed them just because she meowed all the time. That's what a cat does. What did they expect her to do?"

"Shhhh."

"We got her when I was four, you know? She was all curled up in a box in the hardware store with a sign on her that said, 'Free Cat.' Do you know how proud my dad was because I could read that?"

"I know."

"She wasn't scared the day we got her. I think she knew that she was going to a good place. But she shook like a leaf two years ago when we took her to the vet to get ear medicine. My dad tried to shove her in this cardboard box, but she wouldn't go. But when I picked her up, I could feel her stop trembling in my arms. She rode the whole way in the car curled up in my arms and she didn't shake at all."

"I know," he repeated, stroking my hair and kissing my tears.

"I bet they just tried to stuff her in another box this time, only this time they made sure it had a real tight lid."

"I'm sure it wasn't that bad."

"I know they had to get rid of her because I wasn't there to love her or take care of her, but all I wanted ... all I wanted them to do was wait for me go with them, so that she wouldn't have to shake. Is that so wrong?"

"Not at all."

"They didn't even tell me what day they did it on. I didn't even know until I came home and saw her food dish was gone."

"I shouldn't have left her with them."

"You had no choice. She knows that."

He held me and soothed me, whispering soft words and

pulling away the pieces of hair that had been plastered to my face. My sobs dissolved into silent tears.

“Don’t let go of me. Please, Glen. Please don’t.”

I clung to him, quivering and sniffing, smelling his cologne and feeling the pulse in his neck. The heat hung silently around us.

josephine

benjamin jackendoff

handled box
projecting
eclectic footage
received by patients
crowing
for old time's sake
blending into
lollipop backdrop
walls
licking grapes
covered in
aspartame
she cowers
bloodshot orbs
rimmed in
horns
awake, awakened
confectioner's sugar
covers the bloated
cracked lips
smacking helplessly
hoping for
a revelation
concerning
reality
in her mind
ancient natives
are holding
a medicinal pow-wow
provocatively dancing
before
a raging blaze

dressed in
flowing robes and feathers
beating drums for the dead
calling her name
“josephine, josephine,
we’re here,
where are you?”

Trespassing

Joe Laskas



Happy Birthday to Me

Susan Patton

Couldn't quite get the words to tell you why my nose
 Wrinkled like an old shirt after all we've been through.
Brushing the shoulders off and feeling so alone
 Among the hundreds of people that walk the curbs
along New York City.
Flexing my tongue to talk, but choked on the crumbled news-
papers
 That carpeted 5th Avenue like spinach that grew on my
plate
 At Aunt Trisha's
But somehow, I managed to listen to that song before the oven
bells even scorched
 The cake and there I was without another year that fell
from my
 Fingertips.

The Shrink Is In

Anthony Ciarello

“Hey Tony, I see you’re using Quaker State Gold.”

Frank and Jim laughed when I mentioned the motor oil. Frank wasn’t much for emotion, but Jim started to shake Tony’s bucket seat. He grabbed and pulled at Tony’s arm. “You really take care of this beauty of a car.”

“Do you want to get out and walk?” Tony asked as he pulled the car to the side of the road. “And you, asshole,” Tony turned around and grabbed Jim. “Don’t you ever fucking touch me. I will break your fingers. Don’t ever touch me!”

“Look, I don’t want to get out. I’m sorry, I won’t say anything about the car again.” Tony stopped, turned around and started to drive again. Tony was an angry person. He was the kid that poured salt on a slug just to see what happens each time. “It’s just that your car is a piece of shit.” That was when Tony pulled the car over to the side of the road again. It was twenty-seven degrees outside and a light mist of snow had been coming down. He stood under a streetlight and in front of the one headlight that worked and waited for the second participant, me, to enter his snowy ring. And after a couple of minutes of warming up and floating like a butterfly he stepped out of the ring victorious. He didn’t say much when he climbed back into the driver’s seat. He called me a bitch and lit a cigarette.

Jim and I sat in the backseat and Frank sat shotgun in Tony’s navy blue Buick Skylark. There were cigarette burns on the backs of the bucket seats and the headrests. Names of people I didn’t know were scratched into the plastic under the window next to me. There was always a smell in the car; a mothball peppermint flavored hard candy old smell. No matter how many cigarettes were smoked or how many bottles of dip spit were filled, the car still smelled like a grandma.

“Do you know what would be nice?” Jim asked as he

looked up at the ceiling. "If you had enough staples to put the rest of this felt up." Tony had stapled the felt back to the roof, but only had enough staples for the front half of the car.

"Shut up! Asshole!" Tony slammed the steering wheel with his hand. "Are we going to that fat chick's house or what?"

"She's not fat." Jim and Tony laughed and Frank kind of turned to show his disgust too. "What, she's cute." I said.

I was using an empty bottle of Quaker State as a footrest. Frank didn't move much and at times, it was easy to forget he was around. At parties he liked to sit in the background and drink his beer. Tony complained about not being able to see out of the windshield. I sat behind Frank and watched. I pulled an Ultra Light out of my pocket and added to the burn marks to the seat in front of me. Jim was fumbling around in his pocket and pulled out his beaten up faded brown wallet. He took out a piece of folded tin foil that was stuck in between two twenties.

"So, where does she live?" Frank shrugged his shoulders and took a sip of a beer that he had with him.

"Do you want some acid?" Jim asked me as if he was offering me a peace of gum.

"No, I'm straight." I didn't know how to turn the offer down. "How did they get a picture of Bart Simpson on such a small piece of paper?" I assumed it was paper. I had never seen acid before.

"Darin, Jim, do either of you two know... what the hell are you doing?"

We were stopped at a red light and Tony turned around just in time to watch Jim place the little square of paper on his tongue. There was a red outline of Bart Simpson's head on a green piece of paper. "You waste of life. What the shit are we going to do with you now?"

"Settle down, I'll be fine."

"No you won't." Frank said as he sipped from his beer. "Luggage man, goddamn luggage."

I sat and watched. I watched Tony yell at Jim. I watched Frank sip from his beer. I watched Jim stare at his hand. I knew Jim wouldn't be okay, but what could I do? I just wanted to get over to Lisa's. "I think she lives on Woodbine, across the street from the golf course." I didn't think that she lived on Woodbine; I knew she did live there. I knew that the house was right after GolfView road, that she lived in a white house with blue shutters, that her middle name was Beth. I knew all of this but I didn't want my friends to know how much I knew about her. Lisa was a little on the heavy side, but I didn't notice. She was short and had black wavy hair.

"At least she has big tits." Tony said.

She did have a rather large chest, but it was more than that. Lisa was just a very cool chick with a great personality. Lisa had a party every Saturday night. Her parents were divorced and she lived with her mom. Saturday was the night that her mom would go out. At parties in the past I would avoid her on purpose so I wouldn't make an idiot of myself in front of her or the guys. I didn't want them to know how I felt.

"It's like she's hiding a couple of midgets in her shirt." Tony made comments about Lisa's breast the whole way to her house. Frank sat quietly and just drank the beers he had brought with him. Jim sat still and stared at his hand. He waved it back and forth and up and down. After a while I watched his hand too. I watched and became hypnotized by the rhythmic pattern of the hand.

We pulled into Lisa's driveway and got out of the car. Well Tony, Frank and I got out but Jim stayed in the backseat. "There's no way that I'm going into that house." Jim said and waved his hand in front of his face.

"I knew this shit would happen, goddamn luggage." Tony yelled at Jim for a couple minutes. "There's no way I'm leaving you out here by yourself. Damn luggage."

"I'll stay out here and watch him. I've got nothing better to do," I said as I lit up another smoke. "Just come out

and check up on me.”

Tony and Frank jumped on the chance to not have to deal with Jim. I think one of them told me to have fun as they walked into the house. I didn't care that Jim couldn't tell the difference between reality and that world he happened to be in. I figured that if I was outside I didn't have to worry about looking stupid in front of her. “So, is that stuff any good?”

“Oh yeah. I'm out of my head.” He was lying down on the backseat and was playing with his hand still. “Are your hands melting too?”

“What?”

“Just like the stars that float in this car, and the sky that falls.”

“What the hell are you talking about? That's not the sky. It's just the felt coming down from the roof of this shitty car.”

“The chicken was right. The sky is falling, but you wouldn't listen.”

“Get out of the car and stop being crazy. Just try and settle.” I pulled Jim from the back seat. He sat on the hood of Tony's car. The light mist of snow had stopped coming down. “It's just that I like her. I know she's not a super model, but she, she...”

“She dances like a leaf. You can see what no one else can.” Jim had climbed up on the hood of Tony's car. He looked like he was giving a speech, or a lecture. He waved his arms in the air and made eye contact with everyone in the audience. He demanded everyone's attention and everyone was listening.

“Why are my fingers so fat?”

“I want to tell her how I feel, but I'm afraid of what Tony or Frank might say. You saw the way they reacted to me calling her cute.”

“Tony and Frank are lonely people. They find happiness in others misery.” Jim stepped away from his pulpit and climbed off the hood of the car. “Do you see those garbage cans bouncing too?”

I sat down behind the steering wheel with the door opened and reclined the seat. Why was Jim making sense? He had no idea what was going on, but his words stuck to me. "Ever stop to think how much water there is in the world?" Jim asked sitting next to me. "This song is really good."

"The car's not on, Jim."

"Isn't it great?"

I sat outside with Jim for an hour before Tony or Frank came out to check on us. I sat there and opened my heart to Jim. I told him how I felt about Lisa. I talked about her like we had spent a lifetime together. Jim played with knobs on the radio and told me how there were people out there watching him.

"Darin. Do you want a beer?" Tony said as he walked towards me with bottle of Red Stripe. I wasn't in the mood to drink.

"Why are you guys standing outside?" Lisa walked towards the car. She was wearing a pair green corduroys, a yellow fleece, and a blue wool hat. "It freezing out here. You guys can smoke in the basement if you want."

"We've got some luggage with us." Tony said as he sipped from his beer. "Jim dropped some acid about an hour and a half ago and can't handle all the people inside."

"So you guys just left him out here, in the cold." Lisa started to yell at us. I wanted to tell her that I was watching him, that I was keeping an eye on him. But I could only just stand there and feel like I had done something wrong. She walked over to Jim's side of the car and asked him how he was doing. Jim just sat there and watched her. She told him that it would be okay if he came inside. She told him that he could go upstairs to her room where it was warm, there was no one up there. I had spent an hour telling Jim how much I liked this girl and he was heading upstairs to her room.

I watched as Lisa walked inside with Jim. I imagined what it would be like to walk up the red shag carpeted stairs

that lead to her room. I wondered why it was Jim climbing those stairs and not me. I sat outside and waited for Lisa to come and take me from the cold.

Footprints

Laura Siciliano



I Have Never Been to Africa

Harry Michel

Let's sit on the pyramid.
Or lay on the crown of the sphinx
And watch the vast horizon,
That is the sands of Egypt.
Let's watch the heat of the sun
Push and pull the ancestral presence
Buried within the yellow grains.
Centuries of history,
In the grains that are caught,
In the twist and turning of the winds of time.
I have never been to Africa,
But I go there sometimes.
I lay in the bosom of the Nile
Stay caressed and slumber within her.
In her arms
I dream dreams that have been dreamt many times.
Ten thousand years have I slept
With unopened eyes
I've lived the lives that were given birth here,
And died.
Caught in the current
Lost in the tide.
I have never been to Africa,
But I go there sometimes.
I let my eyes fall asleep in the sunsets
And sunrises
Trace my destiny in the unfolding and unraveling
Of the clouds within her sky;
I am enchanted by the aroma that she gives off
In the coolness of the night.
I loose my spirit in the trampling of the earth,
Underneath the feet of the moving herds.

I have never been to Africa,
But I go there sometimes.
I am astounded by her rapture.
Haunted by the sweet sound of laughter.
I dance on her spine, drink the fruit of her vines.
I have never been to Africa.

But I go there sometimes.

pa·pou

Genevieve Romeo

pa·pou (pä'poo) *n.* [*<Gr. papou, grandfather*]

1. Hugga Bugga Teddy Bear,
<stomach big and round and warm beneath the ever-present white T-shirt, sitting on the red vinyl easy chair in the porch with the>
2. TV blaring
<like the bug zapper, hanging over the Red picnic table in the backyard, summer heat blistering the paint, yes, I know me and Kenny aren't supposed to be peeling the big red bubbles, but maybe if we set the bin of>
3. Poker chips
<over the barest spot, no one will know. He slowly descends the concrete stairs, wobbling metal railing in one hand, deck of cards in the other, we learn In the Boat and Queen of Spades-jacks or better to open. Deals each glossy card with soft>
4. Paper bag hands,
<dirt welded into the creases from loving his garden, styrofoam tray of>
5. Hot peppers
<drying next to him split and spilling their seeds.>
6. Slice of sesame bread with scordalya,
<waves of garlic blanket the world as he tells us another story about>
7. The Navy.
<That time he was getting off the ship, "half-crocked, you know? And I wanted to sneak this pint of booze off with me, so I put it down here (in his sock)

So I was leaving the ship when all of a sudden
pshoom!

falls outta my sock and the commanding officer sees it, says
'what's in the bottle?'

So I tell him it's booze and he takes it. Wonder where he drank
it, the sonofagun."

Sunlit summer breeze lifts>

8. Wisps of charcoal hair.

<"probably heard that a million times, eh?">

9. Yes. At least.

<But tell us again.>

Onion[s]

Corey Taylor

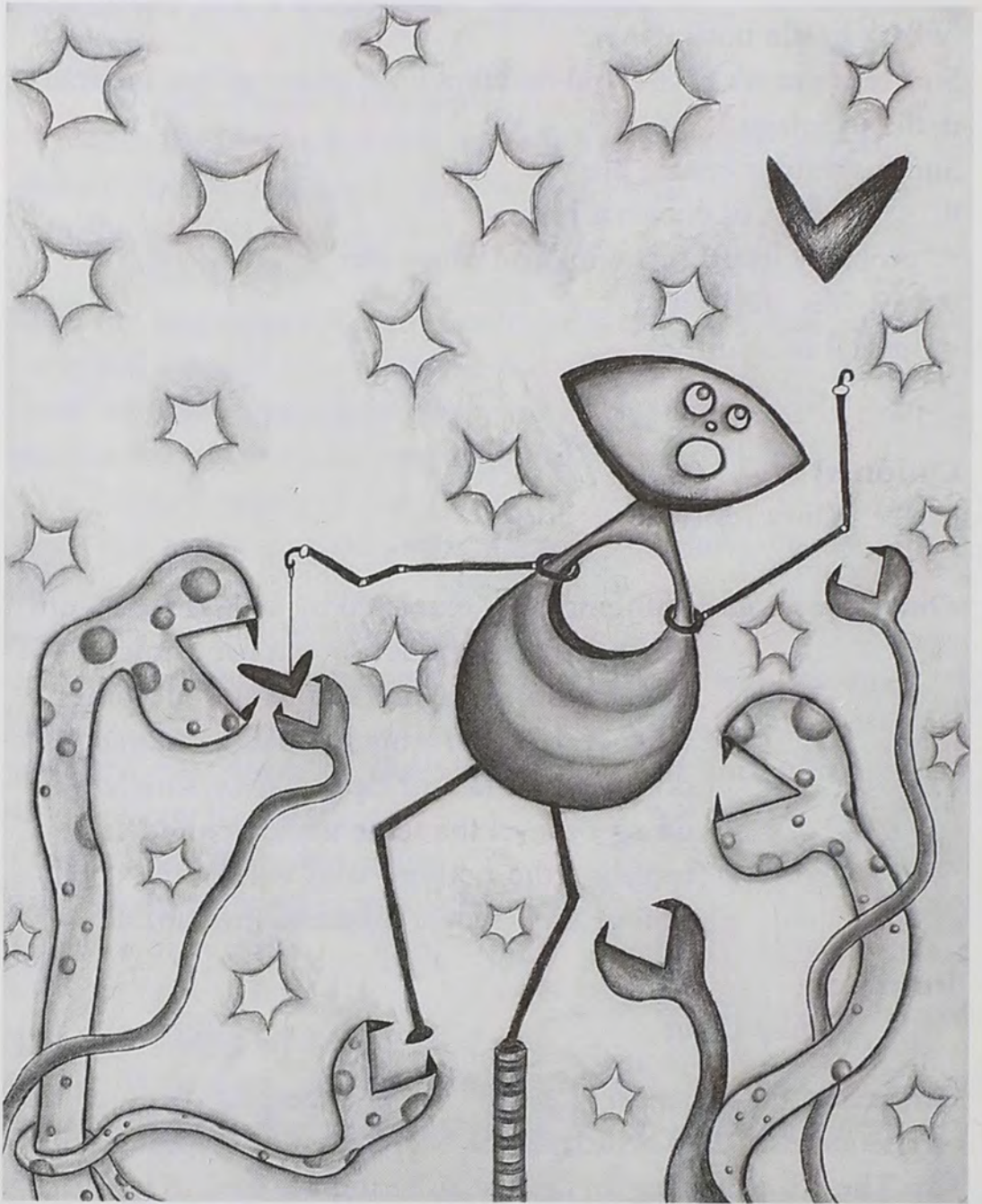
Onion[s]: see also: stinging tears extracted by an acrid, pungent
smell; speaking gibberish; rampant miscom-
munication; saying one thing and meaning
another; layers of language like membranous
skin peeled and / or ripped away; simulation;
on every level the same manufactured cells;
revealing the nothing void within; the condi-
tion of *homo sapien*; inherent, inescapable

Intimacy

Ashley Claus

intimacy (in' ti-ma-se) n., pl. *cies* **1.** A fingerprint tattooed on
someone else. **2.** The activity or occupation of shedding skins.
3. The act of peeling an orange, suffering the rind to lay dead
on the sidewalk. **4.** An unclothed freckle. **5.** A drink of
alcohol taken to inflame bone marrow. **6.** Oxidized copper. **7.**
Faded Blue Jeans. **8.** Disarmed infrastructure blooming with
out its crushed exoskeleton. **9.** A place of no return.

Still Hungry
Bridget Baines



The dance

Lori Kruk

Hay-colored ringlets did not jingle around her porcelain face like those of a six-year-old Victorian girl. Instead, each ringlet ballets in the lullaby of the warm daisy breeze. Spring's breath the conductor of this performance. She was graceful, not clumsy or ordinary. Two sections of her golden threads were pinned to her crown with two thin hairpins, the color a darker shade of tan. In the front of her head, the only two flat sections amongst her ripples of ringlets, the new sun had reflected its vibrant shine off her sleek parted hair. Her eyes held the color of Ireland, and her thin shell lips looked delicate enough to be painted on with the swift stroke of an artist's brush.

Her small slender shoes were made of ivory cloth, and the bending of the green velvet grass did not bother the soles of her feet. The dark gray pebbles that bathed in the ground were flat and the dirt was soft and comforting beneath her toes. Her eggshell cotton dress was trimmed with pink lace. Small opal buttons secured her dress, running up and down her body. Not very tall, the dress fell below her knees, exposing white tights the fit her petite limbs and hugged her kneecaps.

When she danced, her dress blew kisses against the back of her calves.

Midnight's cloak against the blue of sky, his hair was panther fur. Glistening with perfect luster, thick and heavy it fell on his oval shaped head. His short fur was brushed neatly, tucked behind his medium sized ears and exposed his young forehead. Distinct cheekbones were pale and tender. The six-year-old had gray eyes, a light shade of ice blue mixed with slicing metal. Intriguing, they pierced the object of their attention.

Coal-laced boots covered his feet and were made of cowhide. When they performed movements, the lush grass surrendered to their power. Straight, loose fitting cotton pants hung a half-inch from the ground's touch and fell from his bony hips. The white gothic shirt underneath his jet-black colored jacket had large ruffles at the cuffs and collar. Silver-coated metal latches kept the strong body covered by the white silk. His sturdy wrists rejected the shelter offered by the ruffled cuffs. Half his exposed flesh soaked up the sun and produced bronze sunrises and shadows on his collarbone. He was mysterious and elegant.

When he danced his ruffles grew long fingers and strangled the air from his neck.

He moved rhythmically in the field outside the large mansion that stood behind him. She, in front of him, identical movements. The violin symphony leaked into the tempting air, mesmerizing the two pair of feet. The music spilled from inside the grand white mansion. Not once had one stolen a glance at the other. No eye contact and no head raise. The boy pulled his chin up, succumbed to his curiosity. He searched the girl's angelic face. Never had he seen such beauty, such purity. His cobwebbed brows tumbled on his face. He knew this strange girl in front of him was absolute love in every way capable. He had found his soul mate. He could not let her go.

The girl felt his enticing stare, powerful and curious. She felt empathetic for the lost boy. She knew even without words that he had never felt kindness, love or any of the simple things. She wondered if his untouched cheeks had ever laughed until they were blissful with pain. She felt he was beautiful and unique, nothing she had ever known. The violin was growing louder now and their feet were moving faster and unkind. The grass was not as gentle to her now, and began poking through her cloth shoes. Each blade felt like a sharp sword in her skin.

Finally she raised her green eyes to his. The metal and ice pierced through her immediately. She could not break their wrath. The girl yearned for this unfamiliar feeling. She could not leave him. Dancing quicker and quicker, both strangers could not stop dancing. They were entranced.

When they danced their worlds would collide.

The music beat hard and shrill now. The violin was angry and unforgiving, its strings overworked. The welcoming sun hid behind death clouds, afraid to watch the next scene. The boy was transformed, driven by his passion and his need. He was possessed, an innocent monster. He needed the girl, her smile, her beauty, her life, and her love. He needed his angel by him forever, even if it meant he would ruin her. He could not let her escape, he wanted to but it was not in his power any longer. Her eyes held terror, and his, regret behind the yearning. He drew her in closer, sadly pulling her arms into him and her satin neck near his lips. The smell of orange arose from under her ears and made him weep.

His mouth opened, his white teeth razor points, sharp and haunting. The girl saw them and surrendered. She was his angel. She knew this was her destiny. She knew this was her love. She lifted her understanding eyes to heaven, and pulled the two ringlets away from her neck. The boy began eating her flesh, gnawing under her left ear. The first clamp of razors and the girl began to sob. His forgiving mouth continued to feast. Her tears slid from her blush cheeks, and fell onto the boy's body, sliding his complete surface one by one. Their feet still painting the ground with footsteps became soaked. The dance never stopped, even when the boy had swallowed the girl entirely: her eyelashes, her cream fingernails and her tiny belly. His leather boots continued moving, and his panther fur once again shined in the sun.

three trick pony

Michael Edwards

ACT I

River of mist hangs over fluid stream
Eyes on the road
Hands on the wheel
The brain escapes through window cracks
Like smoke from a brown cigarette
Exits and dissipates into a million invisible atoms
Carried by the wind's ruminations
To Maine, to Paris, to dark library corners
Committing every unspeakable act
By proxy

ACT II

i am a volume of
vegetable knowledge
turn these pages with care!
the chapters cannot help but
bear constant element exposure
crumbling, scattering, and reforming
under the terrible burden of your finger(print)
not a present pain so much as
a specter of emotion
these lines, not confined to paper
stretch and relish their new limbs
each paragraph taken by force
burned by the torch of inspiration
weighty parchment bears the scars
of noble and valiant battles
so much ink - spilled like blood

on the virgin fields of January
every impression, imprint
renders the whole less sterile and perfect

a measure of stealth is what's required
and guile above all else
don't believe the punctuation
it lies with its very nature

this searching fragile wholeness
this uncanny unison of touch
this soft demand for intimacy
no devotion to form will save us

time runs out of sand
space runs out of sound
feelings run out of makers
poets run out of words
thoughts run out of letters
I run out of you

ACT III

fear is the reflection off a plane wing
it is impossible to write poetry in Disneyland

Exam

Tom Howard

SHORT EXAM ALPHA

A man is at a bar downtown. Before him are five empty shot glasses, one full shot glass, and a half-finished beer. He is alone. His cigarette has burned down to his fingers, burning a hand he can no longer feel. Yesterday, his wife of seven years filed for divorce, taking their young child with her as she left. After five years, they no longer had sex. He began to frequent strip clubs and secretly masturbate. She began to spend more hours at the office and take sudden business-related weekend vacations away from him. He began to drink. She got careless and left the phone number written on hotel stationary in their bedroom. He thought of calling it, he wanted to call it, he wanted to face the man on the other end of the phone but found he could not. He is at a bar downtown. He gets up, pays his tab, and stumbles to his car.

A man is at a bar uptown. Before him are five empty shot glasses, one full shot glass, and a half-finished beer. He is with several friends. His cigar rests between his fingers after a celebratory toast. Yesterday, he proposed to his longtime girlfriend and she accepted. Last night, he and his girlfriend spent an unforgettable night in an expensive hotel compliments of his boss, who also informed him of a possible promotion. He speaks on his cell phone to his brother across country, telling him of the good news. Others buy him drinks, and the night slowly winds down. He is at a bar uptown. He gets up, leaves an extra tip, and begins the drive to his apartment.

If the first man drives an average of sixty miles an hour, the second man an average of thirty-five miles an hour, and if the men are exactly five miles apart when they begin, it will take slightly more than three minutes for the two men to meet in a head-on collision.

That night, which man died?

SHORT EXAM BRAVO

A young woman, working part-time and taking classes at a local community college, discovers with fear and anxiety that she is pregnant. Her boyfriend of almost two months, employed by his father as a roofer, does not believe her at first, but, when after several tests it becomes obvious, they suffer a collective emotional breakdown. Both live at home. Both earn minimum wage.

She is a former drug addict. He is a high school dropout. She was raped on the night of her senior prom at the age of seventeen. She underwent an abortion because of this and had nightmares for two years subsequent. He urges her to have an abortion, which he cannot pay for. Her parents find out and urge her to dump the boyfriend, whom they believe has ruined her life. She has an abortion, which her parents pay for. On the day, she and her boyfriend argue because he wants to go out and she never wants to go anywhere he says why are some people so selfish he says. He eventually proposes to her and she accepts. She eventually breaks up with him and he threatens to kill himself. She continues to struggle with her past drug abuse. The little girl in two years of nightmares had blonde hair and said her name was Skye.

Was this her choice? Define this, define her, define choice.

Then answer, yes or no.

SHORT EXAM CHARLIE

Okay, so you own the Chocolate Factory.
Get the fat kid out of my chocolate milk.

SHORT EXAM DELTA

You are a writer with a headache sitting at your keyboard at three in the morning trying to make a point.

You do not sleep out of fear that you will suffer a recurring dream involving a corpse that is lying in your bed and

strangely warm, which makes a vague attempt at struggle when you try to remove it from your bed, and from said dream you wake up utterly disturbed in the middle of the night, walk downstairs and out of the house to have a cigarette, the desiccated body of the young woman with coarse black hair and sunken facial features a phantom image burned into your retina whom you feel, at least in part, responsible for.

Of the numerous dreams experienced involving abrupt rousing trauma, most contained elements and symbolism associated with witchcraft or the occult. Whether causal or coincidental, you cannot sleep, and so you write, attempting to make a point without sounding cliché.

SHORT EXAM

You are a writer attempting to make a point.
Why?

SHORT EXAM ECHO

Patrick, an Irishman with the unlikely last name O'Furniture, wishes to build a spice rack out of morning wood as a surprise for his wife. In order to build a rack that is twelve inches long, eight inches high, and with enough room for spice bottles with a diameter of one and a half inches on two separate shelves, Patty needs at least 64 inches² of morning wood to work with. Unfortunately, Patty only has one unit of morning wood that measures 6" x 1.5". His neighbor, an adult film star, offers Patty the use of his 10" x 2" unit of morning wood to build the rack. Assuming the average North American male only has from between 5 inches² to 10.5 inches² of morning wood to spare, Patty O'Furniture will need a total of three units of at least 10 inches² and one unit of at least 5 inches² from four men to complete the spice rack.

What can you infer about adult North American society from the images evoked in your head due to this short exam?

SHORT EXAM FOXTROT

For any integer $N \geq 3$, there are no integer solutions to

$$x^N + y^N = z^N, \text{ with } xyz \neq 0.$$

For any interrogative statement $N = \text{why?}$, the declarative solution

because + why not = why?

is the most thoughtless and insipidly trite response to an honest and deeply challenging question ever contemplated.

This statement is false or I am Long Duc Dong.

Who am I?

SHORT EXAM GOLF

A young Zen monk took a walk in the fields surrounding his monastery one afternoon during lunchtime. In the first field, he saw a few monks playing golf. One called out, "Ah! Un ga warui ne, Suzuki-san!" as another hit the ball into a sand bunker.

As he walked towards the second field, the Zen initiate noticed some monks playing baseball. He heard one cry out, "Okesho wa doshitano, geisha-san!" as another struck out.

At the last field, he spotted two monks savagely beating each other. Shocked at this display of violence, he ran over to them. He dropped the bag with his lunch on the ground, pulled them apart, and chastised them. "Haji o shiri nasai!" He said. The two monks fell to the ground laughing. One pointed at the bag with the young initiate's lunch several feet away, and in between fits of hysteria said, "Doshite watashi ga Makudonarudo ga wakarimashita ka?"

The young monk thought, "Sozo ijo no mono deshita."

What do *you* think?

SHORT EXAM ANSWER FORM

SHORT EXAM ALPHA

- A. The first man.
- B. The second man.
- C. I don't know.
- D. (...)

SHORT EXAM BRAVO

- A. Yes.
- B. No.

SHORT EXAM CHARLIE

[~insert diagram here ~]

SHORT EXAM DELTA

- A. Because.
- B. Why not.
- C. All of the above.
- D. I don't know.
- E. (...)

SHORT EXAM ECHO

- A. Dick.
- B. Squat.
- C. I'm shooting blanks here.
- D. A big O.
- E. (...)

SHORT EXAM FOXTROT

- A. Talk to my lawyer, Mr. Duh.
- B. Long Duc Dong.
- C. Pierre de Fermat.
- D. Mel Gibson.
- E. (...)

SHORT EXAM GOLF

- A. I don't get it.
 - B. I am fluent in Japanese, and I still don't get it.
 - C. My parents don't pay \$30,000 a year for me to actually think.
 - D. Acting like a freak is less effort than eliminating my own map, on the spot.
 - E. [insert typical Gen-X inspired witty rebuttal here, 7-letter max.]
- — — — —

Finals Week

Jonathan Miller



Blazer

Amber Frame

So why did you call me on your wedding day?
I imagine you at the altar in your
black tux with shiny black lapel and silver vest;
then I open my eyes.
There's not much I could've done.

The Anthony I know has chosen a prison,
although I have the bail . . .
Whether or not he wants me to use it
is another story.

I can't help feeling we began too late,
I think of you when I'm with the alleged boyfriend,
A revoking of happiness,
it's all the same.
What was- remains sacred,
what can-never-be remains desired.
Two untouchable nights.

Your ability to magnetize me as we speak,
yearning lips only inches apart,
through the window of the Blazer,
each word embarks on a journey
to where the world becomes silenced,
by the meeting of mouths.
I become swallowed by the kiss,
my eyes open in confused excitement
I'm dreaming- I'm awake.
"Can you tell by the way I kiss you that I care about you?"

Back to our spot on Lippincott and Bank,
you looked so good in your cop pants and

Adidas tee (with the sleeves rolled exposing your guns).
You were not afraid of what they would say or see.
“Got something to hide?”

I wanted to die there at the river with you.
I saw the only shooting star of the summer,
I made the wrong wish.
You hoisted me up, pulling me to your chest,
 We walked across the pavement
-shiny with grease and oil-
 to the Blazer.
Thoughts alike, the outcome of the night had been determined.
“You’re good at the art of seduction.”

The friction between my fingertips,
and your chest,
 peel the Adidas shirt off of your triangular torso.
Your cut body moist with sweat.

The collision between your physical splendor and my
unsuspecting body,
 up against your Blazer with force,
releases the adrenaline which takes over the moment.
The kiss becomes addicting,
 harder and faster
-forget to breathe-
the hands wander aimlessly
 yearning for satisfaction.
“I haven’t kissed anyone with that much passion in a long time.”

I saw Shakespeare in Love;
An immediate connection was indicated
by a gentle touch to her soft and inviting face with his desiring
hands.
Their perfect love was bathed in tenderness and passionate

secrecy,
later to be ripped from their fastened hands.
You were right about our little
“Shakespearean Tragedy”-sweet talker!
“Our relationship’s ending where most begin.”

The final day came,
when you approached the altar,
tearful eyes soaked with joy upon you.
When you repeated the vows of truth in love,
did I cross your doubtful mind?
The length of the day invited the contemplation of the sinful
actions,
but there were no regrets.
Praying to a medallion because it has a saint with your name on
it,
I found it hard to pry my fingers open
from their clenched fist.
“I do.”

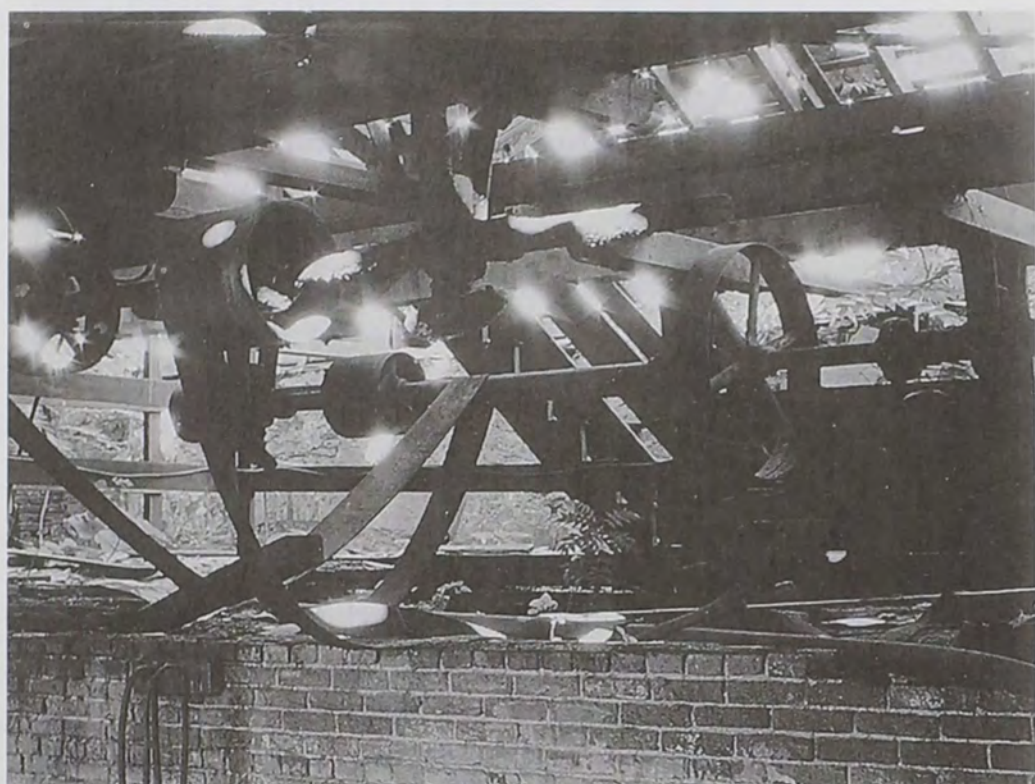
In My Tea

Tom Lipschultz

I saw reflected
a red-hued light
outside my window
in my tea
and traced it back
to the setting sun
which to me portends
the end of something
which got me thinking
my toast was done
or maybe I
had traced it wrong
and in reality
my toast was burning,
creating red light
I saw reflected
in my tea.

Steelworks

Mark Peacock



Another Post-Apocalyptic Christmas

Daniel Gallagher

We laughed straight through from the day after Thanksgiving till Christmas Eve. Corporate America licked its chops and drooled acidic saliva on the unsuspecting consumer, but we dodged the capitalist death from above. And we laughed at them like we laughed at everybody, content with their labels and their toys and their false sense of identity, while we drank Piels and smoked Basics and were so obviously superior. We knew who we were and we didn't need a brand name to reassure us.

Chester and I spent Black Friday smoking fat joints and analyzing the beast known as American consumerism. The six o'clock news showed footage of the carnage at local mall scenes, and we were completely confounded. Black Friday was much more sinister for us than long lines and no parking. It signified America's willingness to succumb to the commercial decrees of the corporations and to lose itself in price tags and merchandise.

"Man," Chester said between hits, "I really wonder if any of them know. I mean, do they even *know*, man? Their altar has a cash register on it. Shit." He hung his head between his legs and started picking something out of his barely formed dread locks. I ran a hand across my shaved head and thought of an answer for him.

"I dunno. I guess some of 'em know. Some of 'em have to know. And they just, like, delude themselves, ya know, to get by, cause it's harder to deal with the truth than with the fiction. Yeah. That's what I think." Chester raised his head with a quizzical look on his face. He picked up the roach clip and finished his joint. He always had an amazing talent for that, for smoking the motherfucker down to nothing. I think he must have killed the nerve endings in his lips at some point. As the last thin trail of smoke flew from his mouth he trained his eyes on me. I was already preparing my backup statements, because I

knew I was about to get grilled. No statement from my mouth would ever be accepted until it had survived rigorous examination according to Chester's standards.

Chester's philosophies ran far and wide, from corporate evil to ancient spirituality to physics and the nature of the universe. The bookshelf on the wall behind him was stacked with ratty paperbacks by Burroughs and Salinger, Hawking and Descartes, the Bible and the Bhagavad Gita. Notebooks were strewn about the floor, filled with poetry and ramblings and philosophy, all owing to others but distinctly Chester. Every once in a while I'd get a real Kurtz vibe from him and it would freak the hell out of me. Most of his writings dealt with the fact that the world had ended several years ago, and that all the millennium hype at the end of 1999 was laughable. He theorized that Armageddon took place somewhere in the early to mid eighties (he was still trying to pin down an exact date) but nobody was paying attention. Since then, we'd been living in a forsaken world where humankind had stepped into God's shoes and fell far from filling them. Somehow I'd been sucked into his mystique, and even helped him to develop some of his ideology. We'd been friends since middle school, but I was the only one who stuck with him when he burnt his first flag.

"And you don't think you're deluding yourself?" The blue-green of his eyes was cold suddenly, and his lips were approaching a smile, a sadistic little curvature. I focused somewhere in his shaggy beard, below his chin. I knew what was coming, but I was never prepared for it. He could always run argument in circles around me while I stood there getting dizzier and dizzier. I motioned for the roach clip before I responded.

"I'm sure I am," I started, with a halt in my voice. I could feel my heel start to tap the hard wood floor and looked to the burlap curtains for guidance. They stared back with an accusing malaise that only burlap can pull off. Everything in the crappy two-room apartment was on his side. I could feel it,

even in the couch I was sitting on, the couch that we pulled out of someone's trash at four in the morning one whiskey-drunk Tuesday, the couch that was my bed. My mind was running in four feet of water, off-balance and slow, searching for the best way to handle this. I could change the subject, but he probably wouldn't let me. The bastard knew me too well, probably knew what I was thinking, probably before I did. I put out the remains of the joint and sat back, exhaling with frustration. I hate having to be aggressive and stoned at the same time. I'd rather take a nap.

"All right," I rejoined, "Fuck it. I know where this is going, and so do you, so why do we bother, man." I looked over at him, in the eyes, I looked right at the sick bastard. My best friend. His grin came to full fruition, and I knew I wouldn't get off that easily. Chester's a preacher, and he loves it. Once he's seen the path, he's barreling down it full speed, with no regard for anything in his way. He's a pacifist, a vegetarian, and a Druid too, but he sometimes forgets.

He stood up and paced over to the window, pulling back the curtain and ducking in a sort of paranoid, witness protection maneuver. He turned around and pulled back his dreads with a piece of string, and let out a heavy sigh. "I know what we're trying to do here, and you know what we're trying to do here. I don't know if you still have the faith, man. That shit out there, it's sick. Fuckin' sick, man. It ain't real. None of it. You only see what they want you to see, man, the joy of buying, the comfort of living the lie. Fuckin' Huxley, man. You know that shit's fucked up. Fuckin' Ginsberg. They could see it, man, and they almost shit their pants, and we can't let this shit happen. Don't close your eyes again, not after they've been open. We're destined for Valhalla, man. We're on the path, but I can't hold your hand, you gotta walk like you want it. And you better not hold me back." He lit a cigarette and looked away from me.

"Fuck Valhalla," I quietly exploded.

"Fuck Valhalla? Fuck Valhalla?!?" He turned back to me

with clenched fists and an incredulous look in his eyes. "Fuck you!" He took a step toward me and I stood up. I knew he was close to the edge, but the fact that I was four inches taller than him and had at least twenty pounds on him that would dissuade him. For a little while.

"Uh-uh, Chester. Not me. Fuck you. Your world is bullshit, just as much bullshit as the world out there, man."

"You're fuckin' dead, man. You're losin' it, you don't know what you're—"

"It's bullshit!" My voice out-manned his for once, and he fell silent. "It's bullshit, all of it, and you know it too," I said through clenched teeth. "Maybe you need to practice what you preach, you sick bastard. I'm tired of it, tired of shadowboxing with the corporate machine, blowing kisses to Cuba, drinking cheap beer and smoking good cigarettes, or vice versa because we can't afford to have both. I'm sick of being your disciple. Sick of the bullshit. Sick of it." I spat into the enormous glass ashtray.

"I swear to God, you ungrateful bastard, if you say bullshit one more time you're a fucking dead man. I've been trying to open up reality for you, open up your eyes. Goddamn. I don't fuckin' believe this..."

I had been tensing myself, waiting for the attack. I had squared my eyes with his. I let the venom flow freely. "Bullshit," I said, almost under my breath. He looked at me for a fraction of a second with disbelief, then his fist connected with my jaw. I forgot how quick the little bastard was. When he came at me with the left, I was ready though. Grabbing his wrist in mid-swing and wrapping his torso with my other arm, I tossed him over the couch behind me and felt, rather than heard, him hit the ground. I spat at the nicotine-yellowed stucco wall, then felt my knees being taken out from behind. My head slammed into the hardwood floor as Chester started throwing punches into my kidneys.

"Son of a —"

“Shut the fuck up, bitch. You wanna,” punch, “turn your,” punch, “back on me,” punch, “now?” My inner organs were beginning to feel like pudding, and that crappy weed had completely worn off. I managed to roll myself over and catch him one under the chin, sending him in a backwards somersault off me. I backed against the wall.

“Chill. Now.” I was in intense pain with my arms cradling my rib cage and I needed the wall to support myself. He was breathing hard and holding the back of his hand to his lip, then licking the blood from it. He still looked hungry. Just as I braced myself for another assault, though, he pulled up his legs and closed his eyes, his meditative position.

“What the fuck are you doing now?” I asked with an incredulous tone in my voice.

“Praying for you. I think that’s obvious.”

I had no response for that. I kinda wanted to kick his ass some more out of principle, the bipolar bastard. I decided I had to go, to pull some semblance of sanity back into this scene, and I turned away from him. The conglomeration of blood, mucus, and saliva that I had launched from my mouth earlier was rolling down the wall with the steady pace of a slinky. I watched it slide till it hit the dusty floorboards. It’s fun to play rebel. That’s all Chester was doing, really, was playing, pretending. That’s what made me kinda sad for him. There was no way to tell him that; he was too wrapped up in his own world, his construct that was maybe even more dangerous than the one corporate America wanted us to embrace. Chester’s world was fun, and it was stimulating, but it was so fragile. It was a plastic bag, and the more shit he poured into it, the more likely it was to break wide open. I didn’t want to be the one to slash his plastic world open. Spinning on my heels, I fell over the arm of the couch and curled up in a ball.

“Wake me up around ten, man.”

“Yeah, no problem.”

Obituary

Lori Kruk



The Circumstances of My Prolonged Depression

Mike Keeper

The circumstance of my prolonged depression is really rather ordinary and not just a little typical. It involves a girl and love and the mixing of the two, which I now know is the recipe for an extremely incapacitating ego embolism. As I relate to you the events of last summer I ask that you not judge too harshly my actions and also that you rather heavily empathize with me, the victim of emotional torture at the hands of a rather cold-blooded succubus. Of course you're free to criticize (and I'm sure you thank me for allowing you the privilege) but because I give a clear-eyed account of the crushing of a human heart I trust you'll swing support to the side of right.

I wasn't always cynical. I once pranced (or swaggered rather) through the tulip fields of sublime innocence. I would often splash my feet in the cool waters of Mellow Creek (a tributary of the Contented River). I did all this, until she came into my valley. She won my confidence and support and used them to build a textile mill that, as I recall, produced not textiles but lemon juice exclusively.

The first time I saw her... couldn't have been that spectacular because I don't remember it. This was not love at first sight but rather love at acquired taste. She, oh jeez I haven't told you her name yet. Christina !Fu*Sh; (sorry, involuntary hand twitch), she was by all accounts exceedingly beautiful yet also heartless and elusive. But you see that's me projecting future events back on the past and for that I apologize. Her heartlessness didn't manifest itself until months later when she'd freeze like an eskimo's icebox. But for now, in those early days, she was merely magnificent. Hair: blonde down to the small of her back. Body: tall, slender, tan.

Our employment aspirations must have overlapped because we both took jobs at a pizza shop on the boardwalk of a tiny island town. Now the boardwalks of tiny island towns

aren't exactly hurting for pizza shops and I used to call it "swell luck" that we happened to converge at the same one. The location's important because it says something of my infatuation with her. In the summertime a young man is treated to a myriad of ocular pleasures in the rather shapely shape of the female form which, in hot weather, is usually barely contained within two strips of cloth most scientists call a "bathing suit." I'm not one to ogle indiscriminately at women, unlike many of my fellow primates I consider this habit to be rather degrading, not to the woman mind you but rather to the pitiful masturbation-prone man that does the staring. But last time I slit my wrists it was warm blood that came coursing from my veins and so yes, I've eyeballed a few ladies in my time. But that summer it was as if a thick fog lay on the beach and she was the beacon shining so bright in my eyes as to swallow my vision.

Here's some back-story on our heroine. She, being nineteen, had an older boyfriend (three years older to be exact). The boyfriend, Brandon, lived in Christina's parents' house. They took him in when his mother died and his father committed suicide.

Her predisposition towards boyfriendability made things easier on your author who finds he works best when allowed to operate within a three month grace period, during which time his quiet, boyishly disarming personality may emerge enchantingly in a stress free environment, like a butterfly from its cocoon. In layman's terms (and a redneck drawl), "I done get nervous round the girl I like." But once again I jump ahead of myself. At this point in our relationship she saw me as the friend and I was therefore able to hold lengthy, stumble free conversations with a girl I might otherwise have acquired a savage case of lockjaw in the mere presence of. You want witty repartee? Check this:

Me: I wish I could dance the waltz at Disneyland.

Christina: Why?

Me: Cause then I'd be Waltz Disney.

Christina: Confucious say, “those who fart in church sit in own pew.”

Me: Hmm, interesting.

Christina: It’s an ancient Chinese proverb.

Me: Oh yeah?

Christina: No.

Me: Okay.

But what of the all-important personality you say. Alright, alright I’m getting to it. Christina was off-hand cool, calm and yes, even collected. The original super spy, all black dress and side arm. She was also brilliantly, exactingly goofy. The only girl who’s ever given me an atomic wedgie so atomic it ripped the elastic band nearly clean off my tightie-whities. She caused laughter but also generously reciprocated it too as when she sprinted for the bathroom in tears for fear of wetting herself as I lay on the pizza shop floor clutching my Hiroshima’d groin asking “Why?... Why?”

I had my own phone at the time and dear God did I dial the hell out of it. Christina and I were not ones to hold your “typical” conversation. An atypical excerpt is as follows:

Christina: Hello?

Me: Ms. Christina Tilewski?

Christina: [*slight pause, possible smile*] Yes?

Me: Congratulations Ms. Tilewski you’ve just won a year’s supply of pea soup.

Christina: I have? WOW, that’s wonderful!

Me: You’re damn right it is Ms. Tilewski. Thank you for entering our 1st Annual “Give Pea Soup a chance” Sweepstakes Giveaway.

Christina: Oh, anytime. So when can I expect my first shipment?

Me: We’ll be sending a crate round by noontime next week.

Christina: Well then I better call all my elderly soup spoon owning friends right away.

Me: Smashing idea, Ms. Tilewski, smashing!

The quick drying cementation of our friendship is a

lovely little tale full of humorous characters, anecdotes and asides but I fear the telling of such stories might garner sympathy for the antagonist so I herewith summarily censor any such mention of them. What I will say is that it was a wonderful, absolutely magical self-contained shell of a summer that has never and will never be smudged by the dirty hands of those involved in any and all unfortunate future transgressions.

If you've ever lived in a seasonal shore town then you know what happens come June time, but for our friends in the Mid-West I'll explain here briefly. The tourists swarm in hordes of flocks of droves, tracking the salt air like some kind of sand snuffling blood (or sand) hound. Reservations are honored as they pour into the Seashell Motel's and the Ocean Inn's packing beach chairs and paperback novels. But I'm partial to these transgressors because they bring life and noise and very often breasts and boogie boards and pocket change. I would roll down my window as I drove down the causeway towards the island, the bay dark on both sides, the moon just risen over the Ferris wheel and I'd flick on the radio and I'd smile cause I knew Her, and we were friends and I'd let the wind hit my hair and my teeth.

But it is with winter that we now concern ourselves, so quickly, shroud the sun in gray clouds and evict all life from the empty, (repetition for effect) desolate streets (leave some windswept litter on the sidewalks for atmosphere) because it was winter that brought the beginning of the end I always knew was coming. I knew it was coming because nothing perfect ever lasts. Just ask Shangri-La... oh wait, you can't (not only because it's an inanimate object but also because we can't FIND IT! It's lost and most likely destroyed!). Albert Camus once wrote, "In the depth of winter I found within me an invincible summer." Well Albert my dear, please be so kind as to royally shut up and stop rubbing the attainment of your inner strength in my FACE!

RELATIONSHIP UPDATE: Christina and Brandon were

arguing nonstop, like an elderly, pigeonly couple locked in a broom closet. I'll relay the details through dialogue in a desperate attempt to "show, not tell" for all you literary types out there and also to break up the monotony of my inane banter. Don't mind the change in tense, just go with it...

I'll set the scene: It's dead cold out, my car is parked on the dirt shoulder of a road that cuts through marsh land and dead ends in a ten-house-community in the middle of the bay. In the summer she calls it the firefly place but now the sun's gone and the wind's blowing. Also, the fireflies are probably dead (there's just a lot of deadness).

"Can you feel your body deteriorate?" I ask. "That's what they say happens you know? Wear and tear they call it. Tendons lose their elasticity, bones grind and crack, skin shrivels in the sun. Get old enough and you fall apart."

She stares across the bay at the red lights of the cooling tower. "I hate cold," she says. "I like cold, I just don't like being it."

I turn the key a click in the transmission. The heat kicks on.

She turns her face to the window and smiles.

The ticking of the car's digital clock punctuates the silence at second intervals (yeah I know, it's for effect, just keep reading) (Oh alright, please keep reading).

"They can't kick him out." So low it's nearly a whisper.

"He's hardly your boyfriend and he's definitely not your child. Let him hang with the grownups since he's old enough to be one." I've said this before and it hurts her. I must have the hiccups.

"He can't make it. He can't make it without me and I hate him for it. I'm nineteen and ulcer prone 'cause I got his problems on top of mine and I can't... I've told him, 'pick-up an application' and he tells me he keeps forgetting. I've got..." She starts to cry.

Silence. I exhale three times, my vision blurs and my

automated pilot remembers to inhale. Here goes, I've practiced this speech before, bits and pieces of it here and there, in the mirror that is my brain. "Christina, I'm all for keeping quiet. I can shut up and agree with you, tell you he needs your help because of what's happened to him, he's had a tough life and all that but look at you, you can't, you can't, you... you can't go on being strong for two people forever. Too much responsibility, you've got too much, we'll uh... too much for anybody, responsibility wise you know? I mean, as long as I'm your friend I'll keep telling you that, what I've been sayin'. Sure, our relationshi- our friendship might last longer if I never spoke my mind and I never disagreed with you about anything but it'd be hollow, our friendship would be hollow and meaningless and okay, I'd still have an extreeeeemely beautiful blond girl by my side at the beach and I could say 'Hey, look at me fellas, scrawny guys do finish first so fuck off!', sorry about the language, but it wouldn't be worth nothing cause you'd still be sad and I'd still feel bad. And Christina it's, well right now it's Christmas morning every damn day of the week I see you and I'd hate to see that end, hate to have this feeling end but... Well I'm saying I'm willing to risk it, risk me, risk us... for you... Ya know?"

"It's getting' late. I should get home," she says.

I start the car, pull a K-turn and accelerate back up the narrow causeway.

Rejoin me in the present for a second will ya? "What an utter asshole," probably what you're thinkin' right? What an unbelievable asshole for blowin' what had the makings of a powerful, heartfelt speech. Maybe you think I was being insensitive is that it? "His parents are dead for cripes sakes and she's only tryin' to help him." Well forget that, jack. A guy's gotta look out for a friend, and in case you question my motives that is still how I saw her, as a friend, until we got about five minutes up the road and she opened her mouth and everything changed.

"I'm attracted to you."

"What?" That's me, Mr. QuickWit.

“If I wasn’t going out with Brandon, I’d go out with you in a second.”

“Really. Well I guess I’m kinda attracted to you too.”

“But maybe it’s just cause we’ve been spending so much time together ya know? Friends, close friends, start confusing some things for other things.”

“Yeah, or uh, yeah maybe it’s that.”

I shoulda yanked the wheel hard right, crashed into a tree right then. It might have saved me a lot of pain. The seed was planted in the harsh tundra that is my brain and no hoe was scraping it out.

In the months that followed:

Christina and Brandon broke up and Brandon moved out (voluntarily not forcibly). Christina hit the dating scene about a week and a half later. Brian Greiman was his name, nice kid, fifth year college student, my boss’s right-hand pizza-making man. The guy always had yellow sweat circles under the armpits of his work shirt but anyway.

A new summer was upon us and hell’s bells was I confused. Brandon was gone and here I thought I was successor to the throne of Boyfriendia. She didn’t say anything either, no explanation or nothin’ and that’s what was gnawing at my heart of hearts. I couldn’t take the not knowing any longer. We took break at the same time. We weaved through the boardwalk night crowd, sat on the beach steps. I spoke first.

“What’s going on?”

“What’s going on with what?”

“With you.”

“With me what?”

“I thought... well you said... well I thought you said.”

She looked at me with those eyes, those beautiful, sparkling green eyes and oh screw this, her eyes nothin’ man! They were regular human being eyes, a little beady maybe but beautiful? Bullocks to that! Still, they told me she knew what I was getting at. “I don’t know Sam. I don’t know what’s going

on... I don't know what I'm doing."

"I don't know either."

(We didn't know)

"I'm sorry...You're angry."

"I'm not ang-don't be sorr-well I'm a little angry. I don't get it. I don't get IT. Why not ME? What's wrong with me?"

"Nothings wr... I'm sorry. I don't know what I'm--"

"I can't live without you."

"Sure you can Sam."

"What?"

"I'm quite sure you can live without me."

"That's easy for you to say.You're you, you live with you all the time."

I left work early, my guts impacted in a flat sheet against the rear wall of my body cavity. I couldn't breathe. Tunnel vision of life ahead had narrowed and closed to claustrophobic funnel vision, dark and stifling. I waited for her at her car. I was crying-sobbing-choking hysterical. We join the action in medias res:

"My life is going, ending. My heart hurts. I can't--"

"Stop it Sam." She pincerred my chin between the thumb and four fingers of her right hand. "Why are you doing this to yourself?"

"I can't live with--"

"With what?"

"The PAIN. Should I rent a fucking billboard? Paid for by the Committee to Eradicate the Miserable Existence of Samuel A. Cleary? I AM GOING TO KILL MYSELF." This last sentiment I punctuated with aggressive finger gestures. "My heart hurts. My HEART hurts."

Time out. Flag down. "Oh lord, not another tragic tale of love and loss featuring a couple of middle class teenage white kids from Privilege Town USA." That's what you're thinking and I absolutely agree. These words, and I squirm as I write them, make the needle on my world-guilt cognosometer librate with the vague consciousness of universal human suffering. Because

right now a totalitarian regime is ripping the fingernails of freedom from its citizen's hands. And right now a dehydrated child in the Sudan cannot produce the tears to cry for his dead mother. The point is I know the inanity of it all, but try telling me this then and I might have gone "schizo on your ass." Time in.

"I know about pain," she said. "You helped me get rid of it. But now what? What am I supposed to do? Am I supposed to take yours?" She waved her arms in wild expostulation and the bra strap, of which I'd had but a glimpse the entire night, now slid, in slow motion, down the curve of her tanned shoulder. Needless to say my groin registered a 5.3 on the Richter Scale, circumstances be damned.

"So you're rid of it?"

"Nobody ever gets rid of it. That's just something I said."

"Don't you see? I feel good when you have pain because I can help you. I can make you laugh. But when you feel good and I have pain and you don't help ME by sharing in MY pain I can't be good for you which is what I want to be... Don't you see? Don't you understand? It's a vicious cycle. It's--"

"What is that Sam? Is that fair? No. No I don't SEE."

"That didn't come out right. Don't get mad. That didn't sound--"

"What's that? That's not you Sam. That's not--"

"I know. I can't explain myself... I LOVE YOU." If spastic head jerks are an unconscious indication of extreme shock you'd have thought I slugged her. "I love you, loved, love... you."

She didn't say a word for a very long time. Finally... "You made me happy when nothing else could. I don't know what more I can say."

"Well maybe I only love you 'cause you're pretty."

The moon was high. I drove home.

Time passes... We no longer speak though I think of her

still. A ghost in my dreams, she sits ringed in fog upon the unbroken yellow traffic line of an empty street. I awake with a smile that dissipates at the brutal intrusion of reality. I urinate in the toilet and spit in the sink and remember and curse her presence in my brain. I stare back at myself in the bathroom mirror unsettled by the knowledge of who we are. For she is Heartless Bitch and I am Suffering Fool.

Contributors

Lilly Afshari...likes to go clubbing.

Bridget Baines...wears a lavender bathrobe and eats pizza without cheese.

Jeffrey Church...is a metaphysical incoherence. He bubbles with "the overman. Man is something to be overcome"-Nietzsche.

Anthony Ciarllo...is a very silly man who likes to fall down and roll down hills.

Ashley Claus...Nurturing a plant offers us an excellent opportunity to practice unconditional love.

Rosabelle Diaz... ..

Michael Edwards..."If curves are more graceful than broken lines, the reason is that while a curved line changes its direction at every moment, every new direction is indicated in the preceding one"-Henri Benson.

Amber Frame...is a freshman from Riverton, NJ. She attributes most of her inspiration to personal experience, and the support of her parents and grandmother.

Tom Howard...has learned to cultivate a network of highly placed friends and influential allies because in this day and this day-and-age, one never knows now does one now does one now does one now does one?

Daniel Gallagher...smokes. A lot.

Kristin Geist...is a saucy red-haired dynamo.

Andrew Gerchak...Lies.

benjamin jackendoff...My life is a crockpot of caffeine and nicotine. These are the things that I exist on. End transmission.

Aly Jones... "See now. There all the time without you:and ever shall be, world without end"-James Joyce, *Ulysses*.

Mike "Chip" Keeper...is a junior astronomy major who has "worked for the British Secret Service since 1938 and now holds the secret number 007." He also agrees with Christina Aguilera when she says, "Abuse is not cool."

Lori Kruk...is the vodka burning on your tongue.

Contributors (continued)

Joe Laskas...comes from the land of Pabst and honey.

Tom Lipschultz...was a good man and died in China, but he's back to congratulate everyone for taking such good care of the world.

Philip Malachowski...Why do we say that we "catch a cold?" We don't actually catch a cold-why would anyone want to catch a virus? Phil proposes that it would be more accurate to say that the "cold catches you."

Harry Michel...The basis of my writings is passion and knowing that everything develops "in the fullness of time."

Jonathan Miller...consumption and regurgitation of information. "momomomohline."

Susan Patton...is an aspiring journalist who plays lacrosse and field hockey.

Mark Peacock...Unfindable. Unreachable.

Caleb Prescott...My dreadlocks dangle in the wind; they remind me in which direction west life.

James Clark Robinson...a senior writer and photographer inspired by Coltrain, D'Angelo, and Giovanni, aspiring to create his own art.

Genevieve Romeo...likes pudding. Do you?

Laura Siciliano...commutes from here to there and back.

Christine Spera...has gone home for the weekend. Please leave a message.

Corey Taylor...swims in a perpetual stream of consciousness. He wants everyone to realize that there is beauty in chaos.

Matthew J. Terenna...he sold out long before you ever even heard his name.

Padcha Tuntha-obas...My name means peace in Romanian and is the name of a song in Thai. In Celtic astrology, I descend from a poplar tree.

oana "the goddess" nechita...flirts with women and has an unexplainable bias against capital letters.

PATRONS

Libby and Bill Akin
Alumni Office
Juan Ramon de Arana
Beth Bailey
Berman Museum of Art
Douglas Cameron
Center for Continuous Learning
Marsha and Robin Clouser
Lori and Paul Cramer
Jeanine Czubaroff
Pam Dancu
Louis DeCatur
Richard G. DiFelicianantonio
Mrs. Geoffrey Dolman
Lynne Edwards
Mary Fields
Judith Fryer
Holly Gaede
Kathryn Goddard-Doms
Sue and Ray Gualtieri
Melissa Hardin
Hobson Community Service House
margot kelley
Jan Lange
Judith Levy
Annette Lucas
Jim Maynard
Jane McLaughlin
Jay Miller
Laura Moliken
oana nechita
Kathy and Gary Newkirk
Lauren Newkirk
Debbie Nolan
Eileen and Eric Ordway
Peter Perreten
Janel Reppert
Pam Potter-Hennessey
Andrew Price
Kelley Reilly
Hudson Scattergood
Ken Schaefer
Patricia Schroeder
Ray Schultz
James Stewart
John Strassburger
Corey Taylor
Sue and Brian Thomas
Victor Tortorelli
Collette Trout
Jon Volkmer
Eric Willamsen

Ursinus College Literary Magazine

<http://webpages.ursinus.edu/lantern/>