

# THE CATALYST

CONTEMPORARY LITERARY ARTS MAGAZINE



ISSUE 3 // FALL 2014

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

1-36 // PROSE ▲

37-42 // LITERARY CRITICISM ▲

43-59 // POETRY ▲

## THE TEAM

### EDITORIAL BOARD

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### WRITERS

Adam De Gree, 52  
Alison Van Houten, 41  
Allison Kent, 59  
Anjali Shastri, 12  
Annabelle Warren, 20  
Aubrie Amstutz, 48  
Brandon Pineira, 62  
Charlie Broadway, 57  
Corinna Zanolini, 29  
Devin Beirman, 50  
Ellen Wirth-Foster, 54  
Emily Hunt, 51, 59  
Gianna Stoddard, 48  
Hannah Atkinson, 22  
Helen Irias, 1, 53  
Ian Jones, 34  
Joanne Howard, 17  
Jonathan Moens, 35  
Julia Marsh, 25  
Kathleen Byrne, 48  
Lena Garcia, 47, 56  
Lulu Dewey, 32  
Mathew Javidi, 7  
Paul Malone, 27  
Sam Arrow, 58  
Trevor Crown, 39  
Tristan Denton, 44  
Vijay Masharani, 4



ART // COLETTE MCGARRITY

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**THE CATALYST IS A STUDENT PUBLICATION  
OF THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT  
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,  
SANTA BARBARA**

COVER PHOTO // DOMINIC MORETTO + MARK HOKE: "We originally built three of them and called them the Three Treasures, based on Taoist principles: compassion, humility, and simplicity. These loose themes were translated through constructing spaces where people can get away and recharge. We wanted to create an interactive counter force to balance the craziness of the dance floor; whether it's reading a book, meditating, seeking solitude or company."

*Disorderly Vandal's Art & Design* is a fab-lab dedicated to building weird and funky installations for everyone to enjoy. Founded by Dominic Moretto in 2013.

# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Reader,

Where are you right now? Where are you sitting? How do you sit? Are you a coffee person or do you prefer a steeping cup of tea? Are you outside? In the car? These are questions we ask our writers as they develop new characters. What parts of you will you find folded in the lives in these stories?

Wherever you are, find a space where you can slip away into the fish bowls and swamps and dorm rooms where these authors and artists have invited you. Climb a tree, hop on a raft, lay out in the grass--just settle in for a moment, okay?

Good. Now that you're *ready*, I would like to introduce you to our third quarterly publication with *The Catalyst*. A lot has changed in one year, with endless support from student editors, friends, and mentors along the way.

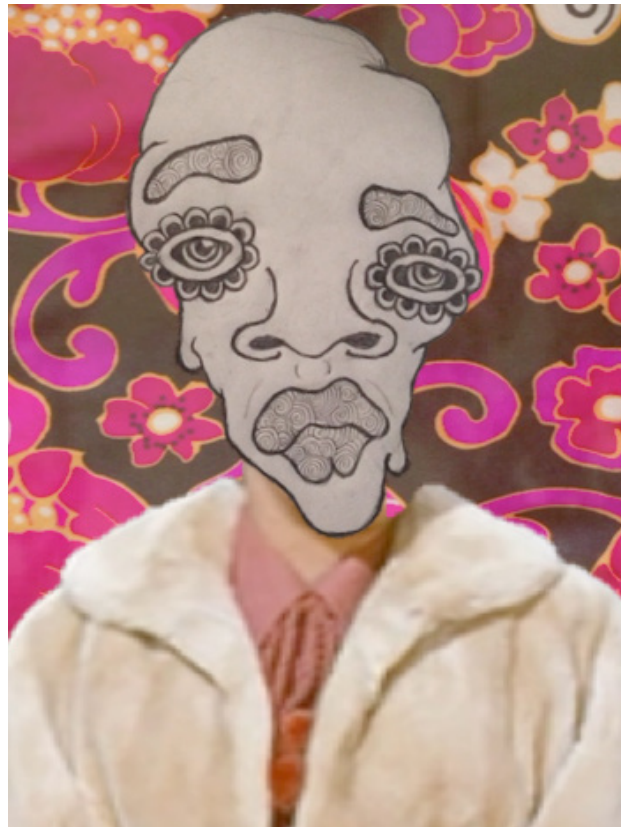
To give you some context, *The Catalyst* was born in April of 2013 in a cramped but cozy South Hall office. Since, the project has evolved to embody its name: Catalyst. Throughout the past year, it has become clear that our crowning accomplishment is not the product, but the process. So many talented, beautiful, brilliant people have carried the arts community in Isla Vista. I want to stress that this project is only one of many.

I met a freshman the other day at Coffee Collab by the name of Sam Arrow. (Yes, Arrow.) We began to talk about his collegiate experience thus far. I couldn't help recalling my first year, and the uncertainty latent in every action to reach out and find the sweet spots: the open mics, collaborative art nights, poetry readings, books, music, and friends. I really just wanted to talk about books. So that's why *The Catalyst* began: to find and amplify bright voices.

What started as a small effort to print a magazine has become a course, online publication, and team, which we hope will continue for many years. Our goal is to provide a source, platform, gallery, and forum for those searching for creative outlet and discussion. Our course aims to teach students all the working parts of the publication: being the producers, the editors, the curators, and the planners. I am so incredibly proud and moved to be working with gifted and growing writers.

So what are you waiting for? Send in your writing and art, get your name out there. Don't be afraid to reach out. This could be the beginning of an adventure, and it's only fall quarter. So thank you writers and artists, for carrying us forward, for expressing yourselves, and for incarnating catalysts everywhere you go.

Until Next Year,  
Natalie O'Brien





# OCTOPUS

BY HELEN IRIAS

## WEEK 1

Tess kept her Bible in her desk drawer; Serena kept condoms in hers. The contents of both drawers had been used every day since move-in--almost five days ago. The Substance-Free Christian Scholars floor had been difficult to fill up. In fact, Tess suspected she had been the only student who had actually requested it. Since she considered her room comparable to a discount brothel, she would find new places every day to hide while she read, free of distractions. Tess had earned a spot at the number one marine biology department in the country, and yet she was beginning to find that her studies were not nearly as challenging as evading her sinful environment. As she looked up to gaze at the waves lapping the shore, a silver Coor's Light can fell from the tree above her, hitting her head and rattling her back into reality.

Ashamed, Tess realized it was past five and she had forgotten to make her daily phone call to her parents. In a few minutes they would no doubt be calling the police for fear she had drunkenly tumbled off a cliff into the wicked waters below.

"No Mom, don't worry, I stayed in last night." Her hall had been dead silent that Friday night, allowing Tess ample time to read her Bible and work on her biology homework.

"Are you making friends?" Her father's voice boomed out of the phone because he was still unclear about how the speaker feature worked.

Tess thought about this. "Yeah, lots! Everyone is so friendly." That was not entirely a lie; her roommate Serena had offered to give her marijuana about forty-five minutes prior.

"And how about your prayers?" Her mother sounded concerned.

"Don't worry, I have plenty of time to pray."

The conversation continued in this routine manner; this daily monitor of her purity did not bother her. Of course her parents would be worried--she was attending the number one party school in the country, according to the Huffington

Post's latest survey. Truthfully, she had a morbid curiosity regarding nightlife. There had to be some reason everyone loved going out, but having never attended anything rowdier than a youth group ice cream social, Tess had no reference point.

When she hung up, she subconsciously opened her Bible again to Matthew to drive those reckless thoughts from her mind.

*Matthew 26:41: Watch and pray, that you enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.*

## WEEK 2

3am. Tess had been tossing and turning all night. Probably too much coffee in the dining commons. She had severely overestimated the time it would take her to finish her homework, and chugged about three steaming cups. Now her heart was racing and her mouth was burning, and she sat up, full of exhaustion and regret.

"Dude, are you okay? You've been wiggling around all night."

The voice from the far side of the room startled Tess, who jumped up, and hit her head hard on the upper bunk. Serena was sitting at her desk, shrouded in a halo of smoke.

"OW! Yeah, I can't sleep."

"Take a hit."

Tess stared at the small glass pipe in Serena's hand and felt her face heat up. She hated herself for even considering it.

"No, thank you."

I promised my parents I wouldn't participate in anything reckless and sinful. I promised--

“It will put you right to sleep. Trust me.”

The pain behind her eyes and soreness in her neck whispered encouragement: Go on. Try it. You aren't doing anything wrong. You'll feel better.

Who was that voice? The Devil? It sounded like Tess's own. Then shouldn't I trust myself?

In general, Tess believed everyone's sinful actions were committed with pure intentions, whether or not the person was aware. Deep down, each person had a good heart at their core, Tess believed. Their corrupt actions were separate from their innate virtue. She had never had to apply this theory to her own actions until now, as she reached for the little turquoise piece of glass. She held it up to her face, examining the swirls of color, slightly stained by dark brown scorch marks.

“How do I do it?”

Three hours later, Tess's headache had been replaced by a stomach ache from laughing. She had curled up on the floor in fetal position, twitching and squealing. A passerby may have thought she was having a seizure. Tess could not remember a time she had laughed so hard, and the strangest part was, she could no longer remember what she was laughing about.

“Baby's first bowl. The whole thing, I'm impressed. You're like my little pot prodigy.” Serena giggled.

By this point, tears were running down Tess's face. She pictured herself as a flowerpot. Her mind had never felt so calm.

“Light of my life! Fire of my loins! Come to me my little one.” Serena spoke in a deep raspy voice, attempting to sound manly, but then fell victim to a coughing attack. She bent her head down and held her hands to her face, racked with laughter and coughs. The underside of her blonde hair was dyed purple and it spilled down her shoulders; *she is a mermaid. She is perfect.* Her nails were painted black and her fingers were mostly wooden rings. As her millions of ratty bracelets slid down, Tess glimpsed white scars streaking down Serena's wrists. Tess shivered.

Just then, Serena sobered up and yawned. “I'm pooped. Going to bed. We should chill more, you're hilarious.” With that, she climbed up her ladder and flopped onto her face, snoring almost immediately.

Tess turned off the light and wandered in the dark to her bed, her head still buzzing with the thick fog of her high. She stared into the nothingness of her room and quickly prayed for forgiveness. As fun as it had been, this would not happen again. *Regret it. Regret it.* She commanded herself sternly.

Before sleeping, she realized in the past three hours she had told Serena more about herself than anyone else in the world knew. And Serena seemed to like her. Coming from a graduating class of ten students, none of whom enjoyed speaking too much, this feeling of closeness was excitingly foreign.

*Maybe this is what it's like having a sister.* The idea gave her chills. Was this excitement or fear bubbling up inside her? She wanted to wake Serena up and talk for another hour or so, but before she could even raise her head, sleep hit her like a stone and she drifted off for the night.

## WEEK 3

The octopus was her favorite marine mammal. It could camouflage into its surroundings to hide from its predators. Everyone in this town is a predator, Tess often thought, picturing bottles of alcohol and small mysterious pills she had heard stories about. It seemed better to remain as removed as possible from it all.

At this moment, Tess hoped that if she tried hard enough, she could blend into the navy blue of her seat and disappear from sight. Serena had cajoled her into smoking before lecture, but now she could not stop worrying that everyone knew. If they knew, God knew. Quickly she prayed for forgiveness, but the knot of guilt in her abdomen did not loosen.

No one but Serena knew her at this school. She had done an impressive job of laying low, retreating to private study cubicles reserved for Honors Program students.

Luckily this class was just a Gen Ed course that would not affect her major; Greek Mythology was not exactly in her career plans. There were only fifteen minutes left of class. Maybe that was enough to take a few solid notes.

“Then Ulysses and his men encountered the sirens,” the professor droned on. He was relatively good looking, Tess had to admit, but his delivery was as deadpan as a sleep-talker. Maybe he was secretly as shy as she was.

“They were beautiful, and legend had it, their voices would drive men mad with desire. Although he knew the dangers of hearing their song, Ulysses was enamored by the idea nonetheless. He had his men tie him to a post of his ship, and upon hearing the Sirens, he struggled with all his might to break free from his bonds and reach them, going temporarily insane.”

How could anyone do that to themselves? Tess was dumbfounded, remembering her consoling Matthew verse. She then drifted off into incoherent thoughts, images of

mermaids singing with beautiful faces and cruel intentions. She tried to picture their faces but for some reason they were all Serena's.

Just then, Tess's phone buzzed with a message from the devil herself.

"How ya doing rockstar" was all Serena texted.

"Fucked up," Tess texted back, a tingle of exhilaration spreading down her spine at the use of with this new word. "It's just a word. It's so multi-dimensional, it can be used in any situation. Why avoid it?" Serena had explained, and this made sense to Tess.

"LOL I love you." Serena's next text read. "I'm going shopping after class, wanna come?"

No one had ever invited Tess shopping. Her mother bought all her clothes or sewed them herself, and it was unfortunately quite obvious.

"Yes I would appreciate that! Thank you for the invite." Is that how people accept offers such as this? Based on Serena's reply--"haha okay weirdo"--Tess assumed not.

"I can't afford a single thing here," Tess lamented, cursing herself for this terrible longing for material items at Urban Outfitters. She stared at a long white lace dress, feeling something like love.

"And you think I can?" Serena smiled and grabbed Tess's hand, sending a buzzing sensation down her entire arm. "Follow me."

"Watch and learn." Serena peeked inside a red floral dress to check the tag. "79.99. Bullshit. But wait." She grabbed the dress off the hanger and waltzed confidently to the clearance rack. The dress she selected here was undeniably hideous. What is she doing? Tess watched in horrified fascination as Serena meticulously peeled off the clearance sticker of \$10.99, then peeled off \$79.99 sticker, and carefully switched the tags.

"The key is to act totally natural. Worst case scenario they tell you it's fake and you act super confused and just don't buy anything."

"But isn't this stealing?" This was too far. It was even in the Ten Commandments:

*4.5.3 Thou shall not steal.*

"No silly, it's just being strategic. We're in college, we can't afford this shit."

Tess slowly approached the white lace dress she had been eyeing. \$89.99. Definitely not within her budget.

"Don't get that white one. Where can you wear it? Church? Go for this one, it's more you."

It's more me? She knows me?

Serena picked a short black lace dress off a nearby rack. The plunging neckline made Tess cringe.

"What? Where would I wear that?"

"To parties, DUH." She said this as if she thought Tess had ever partied.

"Okay but it's still almost \$100.00."

"You saw me just now. If you want something, make it happen. We have control, if we want a discount there are ways to get one," Her voice dropped to an irresistible whisper. "Just try it."

Timidly, Tess peeled off the \$94.99 tag and held it far from her like a toxic rag.

"Don't be so obvious!"

"Sorry."

Tess trudged shamefully to the clearance rack. She did not want to be doing this at all, except to prove to Serena she had it in her.

The two got in line, Serena smiling and joking as Tess stood in silence with a fake smile frozen on her face. Her heart was beating faster than it ever had. God will understand. I pay for all my school and I need to treat myself sometimes. Nonetheless, she said a quick prayer for forgiveness.

Walking to the car, Serena slapped Tess on the butt. "There ya go, hot stuff. I knew you were an undercover badass. And now we have clothes to wear to the party tonight!"

Adrenaline shot through Tess's entire body so powerfully her knees went weak. This was what she had been avoiding this whole time. She pictured crowds and lights and red cups and concentrated sins.

"I...don't party." She could not bring herself to make eye contact with Serena.

Much to her surprise, Serena just burst out laughing. "Honey, you don't party yet." ▲



CALIFORNIA IS A  
**DROUGHT**

BY VIJAY MASHARANI



*During the summer, the heat will get to you. The heat gets inside your brain, making you crazy. All crimes increase in the summer. You're more likely to get robbed or killed or raped when it's hot out. The heat makes you want things you can't have.*

Miles smells like sunscreen and deodorant. I smell like sweat and burnt stuff. Miles used to resemble a short Greco-Roman statue, but he's recently accumulated a pillow of fat that looks disproportionate and tumorous. I've lost weight, my arms are lanky again; my stretch marks still visible by my armpits are an annoying vestige of when I was fitter. I stopped doing my posture routine, so I slump emphatically under the heat. Miles also slumps emphatically under the heat. Miles got his wisdom teeth out six weeks ago and he's still popping Percocet. Miles spends his time at the hospital these days, so our time together is precious and we definitely like to make the most of it.

The heat is paralytic, like a taser or a void. The heat extinguishes action, bemusement, creativity, drive, energy, feeling, gratitude, hope, intention, jubilation, and zeal. The heat makes me lazy. The fan does nothing. Miles' garage doesn't have air conditioning, but it has beer. The beer is not cold.

Gallantly and fearlessly, Miles decides that today the heat will not take away the conversation.

"Where's Kaves?" Miles exhales.

"With Sophie," I reply.

"Where's Izzy?"

"She went to the beach."

"Why didn't you go with her?"

"She asked me not to. She went with her girl friends." I don't want to talk about it.

"Oh, really?" Miles and I both have good days and bad days. If one of us is having a good day and the other is having a bad day, whoever is having a good day will pull the other out of a bad day, so that we can both have a good day. If we are both having bad days, then it's a rough day. Today is a hot day. "Where's Chloe?"

"With Joey." I don't want to talk about it.

"Oh, really? At least you have Izzy now."

"Izzy's gone to the beach."

"Oh, yeah."

"It's so hot." Miles doesn't respond; he's distracted by a bag

of Gummi Bears. He tries to open the bag, but he's going at it from the wrong angle and his hands are clammy and slip on the plastic. As he fucks with the bag, I notice that his garage is filled with blankets. Big plastic bins with blankets instead of lids, full of blankets, and stacked up to the ceiling. "Dude, why do you have so many blankets?"

"I'm out of ash."

"What?" I look over. As I've been contemplating blankets, Miles has been gutting each Gummi Bear with his thumbnail, filling it with ash and seeds, then placing it on the oil-stained floor. I thought he was going to eat the Gummi Bears, but he's been performing taxidermy on them; stuffing them with burnt plant matter. The coloring used in the sticky candy has permeated his skin, dyeing his oily thumb and grimy forefinger red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and pineapple.

"I'm out of ash."

"Dude, why do you have so many blankets?"

"Where's Nate?"

"With Carolyn."

"Do you want to smoke more?"

"Not really, I want to go Outside." I want to go Outside. Outside isn't really outside of the house, or any unenclosed space; it's Hallmark park, two blocks away. Hallmark is big and dry and hilly. Hallmark is dense; Hallmark needs to be set on fire. Me, Miles, Kaves, and Nate have exhausted Hallmark's excitement supply; we know every secret trail, hippie hangout, and animal house. I lost my virginity at Hallmark. I got arrested at Hallmark.

It's too hot to smoke today. My back is already slouching; it'll get worse if I smoke, and then the muscles in my spine will be sore if I wake up tomorrow. I forgot to take my Cetirizine today. Hallmark is full of dry plants and pollen. I feel my eyes start to water as soon as we get close to the park. My throat begins to ache as we hop the fence.

"Where's Hannah?" Miles asks, as I land awkwardly and my knees pop like fingers.

"In the city, with her family." My throat really hurts and my eyes burn. I've got what many rappers refer to as Chinese eyes. I should have taken my Cetirizine. My allergies make me feel feverish. Beads of sweat drip down my back and are soaked into the top of my boxers. My feet are sweaty. Miles and I slosh alongside each other in silence as we aimlessly wander the park, knowing that we won't find anything new. Miles says something about it being so hot, something like,

"It's so hot." I don't want to talk about it. Miles passes me a joint. The joint is so hot. As I smoke, I'm very conscious

that the exterior and interior of my body are part of the same, corroding organism. Miles pulls out his phone, but the sun is so strong overhead that he can't see the screen. "Fuck dude, I can't see my screen." Miles hunches down on one knee to shade his phone, and with his Gummi Bear stained finger, chooses a song. Every time Miles chooses a song, there's a one in three chance that it will be hip-hop, a one in three chance that it will be some old school rock song that I haven't heard, and a one in three chance that it will be some indie-faggot-hipster nonsense like Fleeting Foxes. Miles plays one of our favorites, Ms. Fat Booty. The hook goes, "I know, I can't afford to stop for one moment, that it's too soon to forget." I feel a little insect rise up in my sinuses. I immediately wonder, in a Pavlovian sense, does Mos Def make me sneeze? Have I always sneezed at Mos Def? That's disrespectful to Mos.

The sneeze ricochets violently inside my body. My vocal chords activate involuntarily, and I scream. I find myself doubled over, gasping for air, and moving my face closer to the dust. I sneeze again. With this sneeze, I feel my lower back shatter into painful fragments that embed themselves in various places throughout my abdomen. The sun punishes my bare neck. Somewhere, Miles is talking to me,

"Hey dude do you want to kill this?" I want to kill this. I'm losing vision, kaleidoscopic blackness is infringing on my peripherals. My eyes are leaking. The second sneeze tickles the hairs in my nostrils, irritating them, yielding a third sneeze. With this third sneeze, my ribs explode inside of my chest. The shrapnel pierces my heart. I'm very aware of the fact that my head weighs eleven pounds, and that my face is covered in itchy stubble. My whole body is oily. I forcefully crack my back into place and inhale sharply to repair my ribs and sternum. My stomach is queasy. I want to go home and take a shower.

"I think I want to go home and take a shower soon, man."

"Are you sure? We haven't been to rape spot in a while." Miles hates hanging out by himself. We have not been to rape spot in a while, though. A short half-mile hike with a steep incline leads to a secluded area of the park overlooking the highway. One time Kaves made a joke about it being the perfect place to rape someone. If you're not laughing, it's because I don't have Kaves' timing. I like rape spot because it's enclosed by trees, so we can finally get out of the sun for a little bit. The light is weirdly filtered through the brush; in some corners of rape spot, it feels like night, and others maintain the same golden hue from sunrise to sunset. Rape spot is a dimple in the landscape of Hallmark; it's easy to slip slightly downhill into the center on the piles of dry leaves. "Where's Sasha?"

"She's at Alfredo's house."

"Oh, really?" Alfredo is Sasha's emotionally abusive boyfriend. I don't want to talk about it. Miles and I sit among ugly, wiry, twiggy plants on a skinny path on the edge of a dirty crumbling cliff. The plants look like I feel. As I mangle the dry twiggy plant stalks, my skeleton itches, reminding me how breakable it is. It's too dry; Hallmark needs to be set on fire. The cliff overlooks highway 280. We watch people go places. I'm struck by how shitty the plants are. "Man, these are some shitty plants."

"I kinda like them."

"I guess."

"Where's Rose?"

"She's driving back to LA today. Look, maybe that's her!" I smile as I say this, and point vaguely at the highway. Miles doesn't laugh. I don't blame him; I don't have Kaves' timing. My face feels weird smiling; the muscles aren't really used to it and my nose begins to run again. I taste salty snot and immediately wipe my whole face on my black T-shirt. It's so hot outside. Somewhere, Miles is violently sneezing. I close my eyes and pray that there will be an awful car crash on the highway that I will be able to witness from a prime vantage point. I don't want a simple fender bender, I want a twenty-nine car pileup or a Kindergarten school bus accident. I wonder how Miles' Dad is doing. "Hey man, I was just wondering, how's your Dad doing?"

"I don't want to talk about it," Miles responds curtly.

"I think I want to go home and take a shower, man."

"Yeah, me too." We walk back up the trail to the main area of rape spot, then down the hill, around the exterior of the park, and towards the fence. Miles hops the fence first and I follow him. My pants get snagged on the metal weaving and rip without any hesitation.

"Man, these are some shitty pants."

"I kinda like them."

"I guess." We walk silently back to Miles' garage. I don't go inside, even though I have to pee. "I'll catch you dude," Miles says.

"Yeah dog." We're going to hang out later tonight. Maybe tomorrow morning, at the latest. I call Izzy before getting into my car, but she doesn't answer. She's probably not at the beach anymore, it's been a long time. I wonder what she's up to. I wonder where everyone's been. ▲

# NOTES FROM THE AFTER GRAD

BY MATHEW JAVIDI

I'M NOT GOOD AT ANYTHING. I am mediocre at several things, like playing the piano, troubleshooting a computer, cooking, and, as you can probably tell, writing. That's my own damn fault though. When I was a boy, somebody told me that I could be anything I wanted to be. This person was most likely a teacher, which makes sense, because nobody knows how to overindulge in their lofty but fruitless desire to "make a difference" like a 25-year-old with a masters degree in what is essentially professional babysitting. Still, young and impressionable as I was, I believed this person, and I spent the formative years of my life (a strange thing to call such a period, as if one year your emotional evolution simply stops, and you are doomed to die the person you became sixty years prior) dabbling in the myriad arts of a prepubescent youth. Water polo, Tae Kwon Do, speech and debate, middle and high school orchestra, competitive paintball (...ladies), and many more.

I might have ended up excelling in one of those activities had I not discovered, at the age of 14, another hobby—one that masterfully blends such perennial human ingenuities as agriculture, therapy, self-awareness, and fire. Anybody who claims that marijuana is neither a drug nor an addictive one at that clearly operates under the assumption that human beings are not, in fact, inextricably drawn to happiness. Who can inhale just one puff of the Devil's lettuce and not feel as though everything they are ostensibly working toward in life is already tucked away in an ornate glass bowl between their fingers? Such a person obviously has never woken up at noon, sweating, groaning, photophobic, curled into the fetal position as though still, even as a teenager, they hope they might one of these days wake up back in the womb. That's exactly the sort of feeling that begins to creep into your everyday life when you're a pensive, bookish teen at a Catholic high school. Thanks to marijuana, I became a content slacker for approximately 3 years, only managing to get into UCSB through sheer luck and administrative greed.

I know. What does this have to do with the post-grad lifestyle? Well, there's this program at UCSB called the College of Creative Studies. It was founded in the 1950s by a disgruntled English professor named Marvin Mudrick, who held the unctuous belief that the academic climate of his department was too dry. "Why is the study of literature so bloodless?" he probably asked, definitely out loud, most likely outside of a preschool. All he wanted was a place where he and his students could read books, imitate their authors, pass





ART // LESLIE ZHANG

off the work as their own, and argue vehemently against the merits of said authors when accused of unoriginality. So, he founded the College of Creative Studies, eventually allowing it to expand into a sort of pre-grad school, Vassar-ish place with eight disciplines (Google them yourself, I've got a word limit here). The school operated without grades, prerequisite classes, GEs, deadlines, pass times (CCS students enjoyed priority registration), library due dates, or lack of student-teacher communication. It seemed like heaven, a home for students who knew upon matriculation that they would never apply the knowledge gained from Intro to Cultural Anthropology ever again in their lives, and thus weren't required to take it. Without these restrictions, students had free reign to study and contribute to their field long before becoming grad students. But the privileges came with a caveat; students much like (and including) myself began to abuse the College's laissez-faire approach to teaching. At first, I didn't think there was anything wrong with my laziness. I was allowed to focus on other projects like stage managing and founding a humor magazine, one that has

since reached a plane of comic nirvana previously thought unattainable, bringing tears of joy to its readers and tears of pain to its detractors (but enough about Gaucho Marks Magazine and its website, [www.gauchomarks.com](http://www.gauchomarks.com)). The point is that I used my academic perks to escape academia as much as possible. My assignments rarely commanded more than four cumulative hours of my attention, and I only read what truly captivated me, a difficult task for even the most powerful writers. I could describe in great detail the bacchanalian whirlwind that occupied the rest of my time, the one that resulted in five disastrous relationships, several blackouts, a couple of heart attack scares, and a mild case of Chlamydia, but that's not what this story is about. This story is about the consequences of those details. But let's just say that I didn't, as Mark Twain once suggested, let my schooling get in the way of my education. I let my decisions do that instead.

I graduated with a 3.3 GPA having founded a magazine, taught a class, written two musicals, minored in education, and worked two jobs (one on-campus and one downtown),

so my resume upon graduation was neither particularly impressive nor sparse by any means. I like to think of myself as sort of a control element when observing the average experience of a liberal arts major post-grad, but take my story with a grain of salt; you might be far better or worse off than I was. I came to work at a San Fernando Valley law firm called Graydon and Associates after approximately two weeks of job searching. My other most promising prospects were an assistant manager position at Bevmo and Deputy Communications Director for the Los Angeles Department of Public Health. Being eager to quickly silence my parents on the “when is that \$100,000 piece of paper going to pay off?” issue, I took the Graydon interview--and the position that subsequently came of it--simply because they were the first to call. Two days later, I was hired full time as a case writer for an immigration law firm.



My new boss, Esther Graydon, had to describe the job a few times before I really understood what it was, so for the purpose of this story I'll give you the cliffs notes. The Immigration Act of 1990 established what are known as the 0-1 work visa and the EB-1 green card. These two perfectly legal avenues toward either temporary or permanent residency in the United States are designated for what the Department of Homeland Security calls “aliens of extraordinary ability.” These are foreigners whose financial, commercial, and critical achievements are recognized nationally or internationally by both the public and members of their own industry, particularly the arts. For example, if a Brazilian actress were looking to further her career in the United States by acquiring an 0-1 visa, which would grant her three years of residence, she would need to prove the following to the United States Citizenship and Immigration Service:

- 1) That she has played leading and critical roles
- 2) In productions, organizations or events with distinguished reputations
- 3) That went on to achieve critical acclaim and/or commercial success
- 4) While earning a salary that places her in the top 10% of working actors,
- 5) Garnering national or international recognition via published materials,
- 6) And recognition within her own industry, as evidenced by expert testimonials.

My job, as a case writer, is to take all of the evidence of our clients' fulfillment of the aforementioned criteria and write the application for their visa or green card. This

evidence typically comes from IMDB pages, testimonials, press clippings, payment stubs, and union consultation letters, as well as whatever else I can find on the Internet. Then, I write what's known as a petitioner's letter to summarize the evidence, which involves a lot of fluffy, aggrandizing language, like “Mr. Enrique Valenzuela (fake name, for obvious reasons) is one of Uruguay's most talented and extraordinary young actors, whose illustrious career starring in hit films and television programs has garnered him both the attention and adoration of the South American people.” If you ever want to develop a drinking problem, make sure that your first job after graduation involves talking at length about other people's accomplishments.

This wasn't my first office job, but while I was accustomed to the environment, I've never been comfortable in it. Offices are somehow always cold but never fail to draw out sweat, leaving me with the clammy feeling like newborn still caked in his mother's filth. They aggravate my thoroughly irrational fear of hallways, especially long, dimly lit hallways, for nothing is as terrifying as a motley collection of doors, staggered and still in single file like mercenaries in a firing squad, waiting to be opened, closed, entered, exited, and all with such horrible noises as the thud, the clickitey-click, the slam. Hallways, too, are pathways for people, my second greatest fear. Besides myself, there are approximately nineteen employees at Graydon and Associates, and to this day I refuse to make eye contact with any of them in passing. I've learned to find the space above their shoulders fascinating. I've mastered the “oh look, a text message, better read this right now before somebody realizes I work here” maneuver. I once suppressed a sneeze, a bad one too, which gave me a headache in its struggle to escape, just so that none of my coworkers would say “bless you.” This behavior has helped me cultivate a phantom-like status at work. I have a time-card, assignments, a lunch in the refrigerator, but beyond those markers, there is no discernible evidence to suggest that I even exist.

After my brief introduction to the duties of the job, Esther Graydon introduced me to her secretary, Meredith, who would give me a brief tour. Meredith walked me around the office, showing me the dinky excuse for a break room with its fridge full of rotting leftovers, the bathrooms (which I'll get to later), the copy room, and a room in the back where the rest of the case writers usually worked. “You'll be on the other side of the office, with Yuri and Anna,” she explained, “but let me introduce you to the other writers.”

Not only did it appear that every other case writer in this office, of which there were eight, was a young, twenty-something male, but nearly all of them bore an uncanny resemblance to me, and upon realizing this a feeling crept

over me, the kind presumably felt by frequently typecast actors who all wait to audition for the same part in a film or television series. Dark button-downs, khaki pants, sales rack loafers, five-o'clock shadow from three days before, and low, gravelly voices tuned perpetually to mumble. Only a couple of them looked up when Meredith told them my name, and only one of them shook my hand.

"Good to meet you, Matt," he said. "I'm Tom."

Coincidentally, Tom was the only writer who didn't share any physical features with me. A stocky, bespectacled, Korean-American man, Tom immediately came off as the kind of person who masks a troubled, possibly violent past with a brilliant sheen of optimism and joviality. He was always the first case writer to arrive at the office, which made him by far the first to start working, since most of us fooled around on Reddit or whatever other sites we needed to ease us into the workday. I quickly surmised that he lived with his parents, or at least his father, who drove him to and from work every day in a grey Toyota Yaris. Usually wearing a black cardigan, powder-blue Lands End dress shirt, and blue jeans, Tom was the proverbial "thank God it's Friday" coworker who, quirks aside, was excellent at his job. New writers were taught how to structure petitioner's letters, requests for further evidence, exhibit lists, and other legal documents based on his old cases. I was actually quite glad to meet Tom first out of the rest of my coworkers (some of whom I did not officially meet until many weeks later, if at all). His enthusiasm for legal writing and can-do attitude eased some of my new-kid anxiety about the job.

Meredith took me to my own office, which I shared with, as she said, two women named Yuri and Anna. Anna was a single mother of two whose life is so depressingly mundane that I will speak of it no further. Yuri, who was close to me in age, seemed nice enough. Her desk was next to mine, the two separated only by a small garbage bin, and always tidy, save for a couple of wanton Almond crumbs from her seemingly endless supply of the revolting nut. At first, she rarely spoke to me, doing so only when necessary and always in the timid voice of a cartoon toddler (I have yet to find an explanation for the whispering-epidemic of my office—aren't lawyers supposed to be hot-tempered, bloviating narcissists?), but after a week or so of minimal communication, she opened up to me. Like a fire hydrant, for some reason. We talked about her Japanese parents, her experience at Cal State Northridge, her moribund love life, and much more. She was a Jehovah's Witness, which gave her a perfect excuse to duck out of Graydon's sporadic but unavoidably awkward office birthday celebrations. She also led an incredibly sheltered life; even if I could have figured out that she was a virgin on my own, she told me so five minutes into our first real conversation. I didn't discover

the source of her sudden vulnerability until my third week at Graydon.

"I have to ask you a question," she piped, "but I think I already know the answer."

"Shoot." I wasn't really paying attention. One of our clients failed to mention that his salary was paid in New Zealand currency, not American, despite their mutual use of the "\$" symbol, and I was in the process of converting his tax returns into terms the United States could understand. Yuri continued.

"I just want to make sure, but you're gay right? Or are you just a feminine communicator?"

I stopped browsing the fascinating currency comparison on my desk monitor and turned to look Yuri dead in the eyes. "Feminine communicator?"

"Oh, I'm so sorry!" She clasped her hands to her mouth. "I just...I assumed you were gay."

"I will suck a hundred dicks if you never call me a 'feminine communicator' ever again," I said. "I don't even know what that means." Yuri and I don't talk much anymore.

About thirty feet from the front doors of the Graydon and Associates building was a small, concrete nook with two steps and an old, black handrail, a spot seemingly designed for the sole purpose of providing a place to smoke. Apparently, it had only taken me two days on the job for my procrastinatory schedule to line up with that of two of my fellow case writers, also smokers, whose names I would momentarily learn were Zach and Tyler. Upon seeing them there, I nodded my head upward, and they nodded downward. After those eloquent pleasantries, we smoked in silence for about a minute and a half.

"So," Zach finally said, "are you sick of this job yet?"

"It's only my third day," I replied. "I'm still learning."

Tyler chuckled, puffs of smoke popping from his lips as though he were a hiccupping dragon. "Do you know how to use Google?"

"Seems pretty self-explanatory."

"Then there's nothing else you need to learn," he said. "Once you're used to the forms, all you do is take all of the information the clients give you, Google the rest, and fill in the blanks."

"Like legal mad-libs," Zach quipped, taking another drag. Tyler nodded, speaking volumes.

"Wow, you guys sound jaded as hell," I said. "How long have you been working here?"

“Six weeks,” Tyler replied, followed by Zach. “A month.”

I thought about what Tyler and Zach had said while I prepared my lunch that day. Much of an office worker’s character can be gleaned from the contents of their lunch, as well as the circumstances under which it was obtained. For my first day of work, I prepared lunch the night before; a lovingly crafted roast beef sandwich with cherry tomatoes and avocado, some greek yogurt, carrots and hummus, and an ice-cold Nalgene full of loose leaf Gyokuro tea. I kept up that routine for about three days until it became a nuisance to prepare lunch before every morning. Luckily, my office was surrounded by incredible eateries like Capriotti’s Sandwich Shop, three sushi bars, and a steakhouse that served brunch all day. So, for the next week or so, I left my office at 1 pm for one of these esteemed establishments, making sure to avoid whichever one my coworkers visited on any given day. As delicious as my lunches were, however, I soon was forced to reckon with the compounding costs, the time it took to eat (my lunch break only lasts half an hour), and the depressing sight of a twenty-two-year-old man eating lunch by himself on a Tuesday. Thus, I found a middle ground between the convenience of restaurant dining and the cut costs of packed lunches in Marie Callender’s Chicken Pot Pies. Nothing quite sums up the tragedy of the American white-collar worker like a microwaveable chicken pot pie. At approximately 1200 calories per serving, they do not provide an actual meal, but rather a hollow facsimile of one, and after four hours of mind-numbing desk work, that’s all your brain really needs. And why wouldn’t it? Pot pies contain vegetables, dairy, protein, and carbohydrates, all packed into a deceptively appetizing cocoon. When consumed, they invoke a paradoxical feeling of shameful contentment, like that of a heavily-sedated Labrador post-neutering. The microwaveable pot-pie is a harbinger of self-loathing that wraps itself around its maker’s mind and whispers with a salty, savory timbre, “You may be garbage, but I love you.” Much like the work of the modern desk jockey, it tricks you out of asking for better by providing you with just enough. None of the effort, a shadow of the reward. My kind of meal.

One day, after a pot pie and Red Bull, I spent the remaining minutes of my lunch hour in the Graydon restroom: a dinky, single-serving alcove with walls as thin as bat wings. It was my fourth week at the firm, long after my conversation with Zach and Tyler, and I had noticed that there was a pattern to what they had told me. Besides Tom, the ticking time bomb, no case writer at Graydon had held their position for more than six months. I didn’t understand that trend. This was ostensibly good work with decent pay, a friendly environment, and it carried with it an element of legitimacy that would put any anxious parent

at ease. So why were people dropping out so often? All of this ran through my head while Mrs. Marie Callender made one hell of an exit from my system, and I patiently waited for her to gather her belongings and go by thumbing through Quickmatches on OkCupid. I still don’t know what prompted this—maybe the force of the dump or the apparent lack of compatibility I had with women in my area—but I began to cry. It took a great effort not to make myself heard by my coworkers, so I sat there, pants down, shit flying, one hand over my mouth, the other scrolling through the selfies of college co-eds, sobbing uncontrollably like a toddler who scraped his knee. Ten minutes I sat there, letting the tears slide off my cheeks and onto my exposed crotch. At one point, somebody tried to open the door, but was stopped by the lock before I had a chance to locate a weapon with which to kill them, or myself, in case they caught me in my present state. When I was done, I sniffled, pulled my pants up, and went on to have what is still the best day of work I have ever experienced.

I suppose I’d been blinded by the initial excitement of my hiring. Could you blame me? I was a working writer. I wasn’t mixing lattes, I wasn’t some office assistant, and I certainly wasn’t a teacher. I helped people get into the country. I wrote—I argued—for a living. Then I remembered how much cooler titles and summaries sound on resumes than they actually are. I could type case writer as Case Writer on every document, say the words in conversation with an air of superiority thick enough to capitalize the words in speech, but it wouldn’t change the truth. I couldn’t be promoted even if I wanted to; paralegals and lawyers both carried additional schooling. My pay will never surpass that of an assistant manager at Panda Express. And what of my other writing projects? What time do I have to work on musicals, TV scripts, or poetry while I spend eight hours of every day ruining typing for myself? The truth is I’m stuck. I’m a peon, a drone, a mind perhaps too sharp for the job but unable to definitively prove so.

That moment, the moment when you begin to understand where and what you are post-graduation, that’s when you notice the silence. It follows a sound that you never really listened to before, but fills you with dread when muted, like the breathing of an infant on a bedside monitor. That white noise, that subconscious amalgamation of Internet articles, counselors, high school teachers, parents, aunts, uncles, older siblings, older cousins, Democratic politicians, motivational posters, Aaron Sorkin television series, that indistinct hiss of a stadium crowd cheering you on toward the next, tangible step. It disappears over time, but when its absence sinks in, you don’t know what feels worse: asking the question “what’s next?” or realizing that only you can answer. ▲

# POST-GRAD

BY ANJALI SHASTRY

It was a dark and stormy night.

Actually, no, but that sounds suspenseful. It was a very hot, humid, 90 degrees in the shade sort of night here in the swamp that we call our nation's capital.

My hair puffed out every which way due to the humidity and the flies started to circle the walking corpse that was my body. I'll tell you now, there is nothing quite like an east coast summer. I stopped in front of my apartment door and reached into my pocket for my keys.

There were no keys.

I looked at the area around my feet frantically, then started to panic, like a two year old doing a potty dance. Okay, calm down. Retrace your steps.

I had tied up the trash. I went to the dumpster. I put the trash in the dumpster. I walked down to my apartment, and here I was. I'm just a woman, standing in front of her door, wondering where her keys might be. It was no Harry met Sally sort of moment.

Then it hit me. Obviously, I had thrown my keys out with the trash. This was the only logical explanation.

I ran back at lightning speed to the dumpster and realized that because it was just a trash run, I left my cell phone in my apartment, so I had no light at all. It was pitch black, and somewhere within all the rotting fruit and cardboard boxes lay my beloved keys.

Pacing ensued. I walked back and forth in front of the dumpster, ruminating on every possible way that I could retrieve said keys without physically entering the dumpster. There was a stick on the ground, which I picked up and waved while muttering, "Accio."

It did not work. I felt betrayed.

With all alternative options exhausted, I took a deep breath, pinched my nose, and climbed into the dumpster.

I rummaged in vain for 15 minutes before I heard footsteps approaching.

"Please don't throw trash on me!" I yelled as I popped out of the dumpster. I heard a shriek and the sound of a body colliding with cement.

"Please don't hurt me," a voice whimpered. I looked down to see this guy feeling around for his glasses.

I climbed out of the dumpster and handed him his glasses. He put them on and stared at me in shock.

"What the hell are you doing?"

"I'm digging through the dumpster," I said as nonchalantly as I could, at 9pm on a Friday night.

He hesitated for a second. "Do you want my bottles and cans?"

"No," I huffed. I proceeded to explain myself.

He looked at me, trying to determine if I was a lunatic with rabies who might bite him and turn him into a werewolf, or a small, precious human to whom he should lend a helping hand. He sighed (he swears to this day he did not sigh, but rather "coolly exhaled"), and pulled out his phone.

"Alright Oscar, I can help you with the light, but there's no way I'm climbing into a dumpster."

"That's what I said about 15 minutes ago, Big Bird. Now I'm in a dumpster."

He shined the light into the dumpster, and I moved two bags before I saw my keys sitting right there. This was completely unfair. I had touched some terrifying things for a quarter of an hour in the dark.

I giggled nervously. Do I say something? Do I try to leave the scene with what dignity I have left?

He turned to leave, then turned back and said, "So, did you find anything cool in there?"

I smiled, relieved. "Louis, I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship."

And arm in arm (I had to hold him up because he twisted his ankle when he fell down), we strolled off into the distance.



I know this sounds melodramatic, but I have an arch nemesis.

When I first met Tessa, she seemed so sweet. She had these cute little dimples on both cheeks and plaited ribbons into her pigtails.

It all began on a beautiful summer day, where the sun was high in the sky and the birds were singing. The grass had never been greener, and my skin had never been clearer. Then my neighbor knocked on my door and asked me to babysit his seven-year-old daughter.

Well, I wasn't doing anything, and I had just bought some ice cream, so nothing seemed like a bad decision.

Never have I been more wrong about anything in my whole life. It's gotten to the point where sometimes when I see a group of seven-year-olds approaching me on their walk home from school, I cross the street.

Again with the drama, right? Wrong.

Tessa, sweet Tessa, came over to my apartment with a copy of *Anne of Green Gables* and a wide smile on her face.





PHOTO // ALEX WANG

She was adorable, and promised to be good while her father gave me a list of emergency contacts. I felt as if she was a kindred spirit.

Then the door closed, and the temperature dropped 10 degrees. The horns on her head were revealed and her teeth became sharper.

“There’s dust on this table,” she declared authoritatively.

I looked at her hesitantly. “Yeah. Sometimes dust happens. Are you allergic or something?”

She looked me dead in the eye. “I’m allergic to lazy people who can’t dust.”

I gasped. How dare she! I may be lazy, but I have the capability to dust, should I wish to. I needed to get away from this kid, who seemed to be channeling my parents with terrifying accuracy.

I gritted my teeth. She’s only seven. I’m the adult here. I can do this.

“I can take care of the dust when I

get back from the laundry room in a minute, okay?”

Ten minutes later, I was standing in front of my door holding a laundry basket that weighed more than I did and pleading.

“Tessa, please let me in.”

“No!”

“Tessa, if you let me in, I’ll give you some ice cream.”

I heard a pause, and then a little, “You have ice cream?”

I heard footsteps recede, and then a thud. She yelped, “Your waffles hit me!”

The little menace. She raided the freezer! I had totally shown my cards.

An hour and many calls to management later, a member of the repair staff let me into my apartment. I found papers strewn everywhere, and in the middle of the mess on the floor was a sleeping seven-year-old monster with ice cream on her face.

She looked almost harmless, but now I knew better.

I cleaned everything up as best I could and put a blanket and pillow on the floor with her. When her dad came to pick her up, the place was pristine.

Her father looked appreciative, and asked her, “How was your time with Anjali?”

“Amazing! I hope she’s always my babysitter!” Tessa smiled so sweetly I started rethinking our afternoon together and wondered if I had imagined everything.

As she and her dad walked out hand in hand, she turned around and stuck her tongue out at me. I stuck my tongue back out at her.

Sharp teeth, check. Horns, check. There went the devil, casually strolling out of my home.

You won this round, but I’ll see ya later, little monster. I’ll see ya later.



Sometimes after a long day, there are things that need shaking off. Out in the world, the haters are gonna hate hate hate hate and the fakers are gonna fake fake fake fake fake. I just like to shake shake shake shake shake, shake it off. Shake it off.

Imagine Patrick Stewart reading that as a Shakespearean actor. It is my dream to see that happen.

But really, that Taylor Swift song is my jam. It's repetitive, insipid, and generic. But it is also the best thing in the world to play loudly on repeat while doing dishes and vacuuming. That song gives me life. I won't try to justify it as a "guilty pleasure" or whatever. A catchy song is a good song and I'm always down to have a one woman dance party.

So naturally, it was blasting in my apartment. The soft autumn day was warm enough to leave my back door open, the blinds were pulled back to let the sunlight in, and I had just enough motivation to consider folding the massive pile of laundry that was taking up half my bed. One of the great joys of a double bed is that if you just don't want to fold laundry, you can push it to one side and continue on with your life.

But the day had come to end the madness. The dishes were done. The carpet was clean. I even scrubbed down the bathroom. All that was left for me to earn a cover shoot for Martha Stewart's magazine was that I fold the laundry. I was on my way to becoming what every young girl dreams of being: a domestic goddess. Balancing a book on my head while stirring tonight's dinner. I was fielding off the suitors with one hand and dusting with the other.

Shake it off, shake it off, off, off, shake it off! I was finding my inner awkward monster as I waved my blazers in the air and created a leaning tower of Pisa with my jeans.

Then I heard a young voice yell loudly from the yard, "Mommy, can I go dance with her?"

I stopped dancing. I dropped the blazer. Through the window I saw a family, complete with grandfather and grandmother, watching their little four-year-old daughter dance to Taylor Swift on the sidewalk outside my back door.

She wriggled. She jived. She tap danced her way

into my heart.

I could stop dancing out of embarrassment. Or I could join this four-year-old in the pure, unadulterated happiness that a catchy song on a sunny day brings. So I wriggled. I jived. I tap danced.

Somewhere out there, a single tear rolled down Taylor Swift's cheek.



I'm a journalist. I moved to DC to become a hard hitting political journalist, chasing politicians down and holding them accountable. I want to follow up on the state of their campaign promises, and see what the ten-square mile logic-free zone we call our nation's capital is up to. I aspire to Politico, to the Washington Post, to Time Magazine.

So my editor sent me to the local town's daylong summer festival.

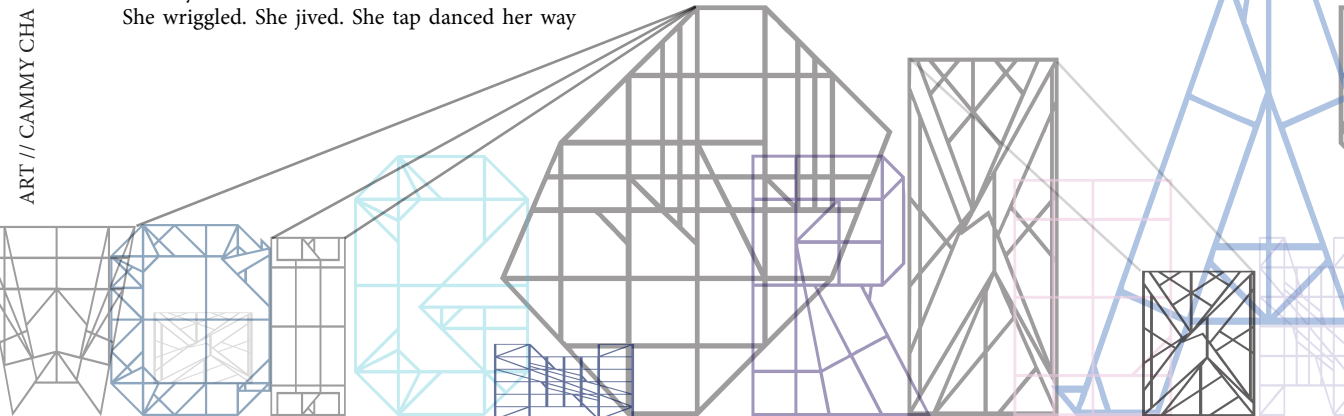
There was a jumpy house, face painting, puppies everywhere, and kids. So many kids. Screaming kids, crying kids, sleeping kids, angry kids, happy kids, talking kids, kids, kids, kids. I do not kid about how many kids there were.

My partner and I stopped at the edge of the fairgrounds. There were so many people, and for a couple of journalists, we really don't like people. I held my tape recorder and notepad at the ready. He steadied his camera. We looked at each other. We nodded. Solidarity, brother.

Talking to kids is a difficult thing. Sometimes they answer your questions, sometimes they tell you what they want to tell you and completely disregard the fact that you have an agenda. I spoke to three brothers, aged between five and eight, who were more interested in talking about their new toy truck and less interested in telling me how they were enjoying the jumpy house and face painting. I steered them to a puppy.

"How do you feel about this puppy?" Hard hitting journalism indeed.

"It's fine, but the truck has flames painted on the



side and we can use a remote to make it move!”

I groaned and tried to find my partner in the crowd. I asked the eight-year-old if he had seen my partner.

“Who, white boy with camera? He went that way.”

Yes, white boy with camera. I looked for white boy with camera and found him eating cotton candy and standing in the shade. Traitor.

We shared a look of complete exasperation when I felt a little tug on my pants. I looked down to see a little girl staring up at me.

“Hi, are you lost?”

“No. You talked to all my brothers but you didn’t talk to me.”

My partner audibly aww’d. He was awwdible. (Sorry, that was there for the taking.) I crouched next to this sweetheart.

“Okay, do you want me to interview you?”

“Yes. I like the puppies, and I don’t like that truck. They don’t let me play with it.”

“We don’t have to talk about the truck. Are you having fun at the festival?”

She told me about the jumpy house, the face painting, and the puppies. She brought up the cotton candy and saw four of her friends from kindergarten. I couldn’t stop smiling when she asked to hold the recorder herself close to her mouth to make sure I could hear her.

*Click. Click. Click.* My partner’s camera shuttered away as he documented this *adorable* interaction.

She stopped midsentence and stared at him. “Can you tell your boyfriend to stop taking pictures?”

I stifled a giggle. “Stop, boyfriend. She doesn’t want you taking pictures.”

She wasn’t a politician. This wasn’t Politico. But this was coverage of the little people of the town who didn’t usually get interviewed for stories. She made the it worth it.

I brought some cotton candy and prepared to leave. My partner reached to take some. I slapped his hand. “Stop, boyfriend.”

And white boy with camera and I walked away.



If you are on public transportation, you should probably put in earphones and avoid eye contact with strangers. This is an unwritten rule of the world.

I was sitting in peace listening to Ariana Grande (who makes perfect commute music) and shutting out the world. Then I felt a thump in the seat next to me and turned to find a disheveled man in a dirty plaid shirt with hair Albert Einstein would be jealous of sitting next to me, gawking.

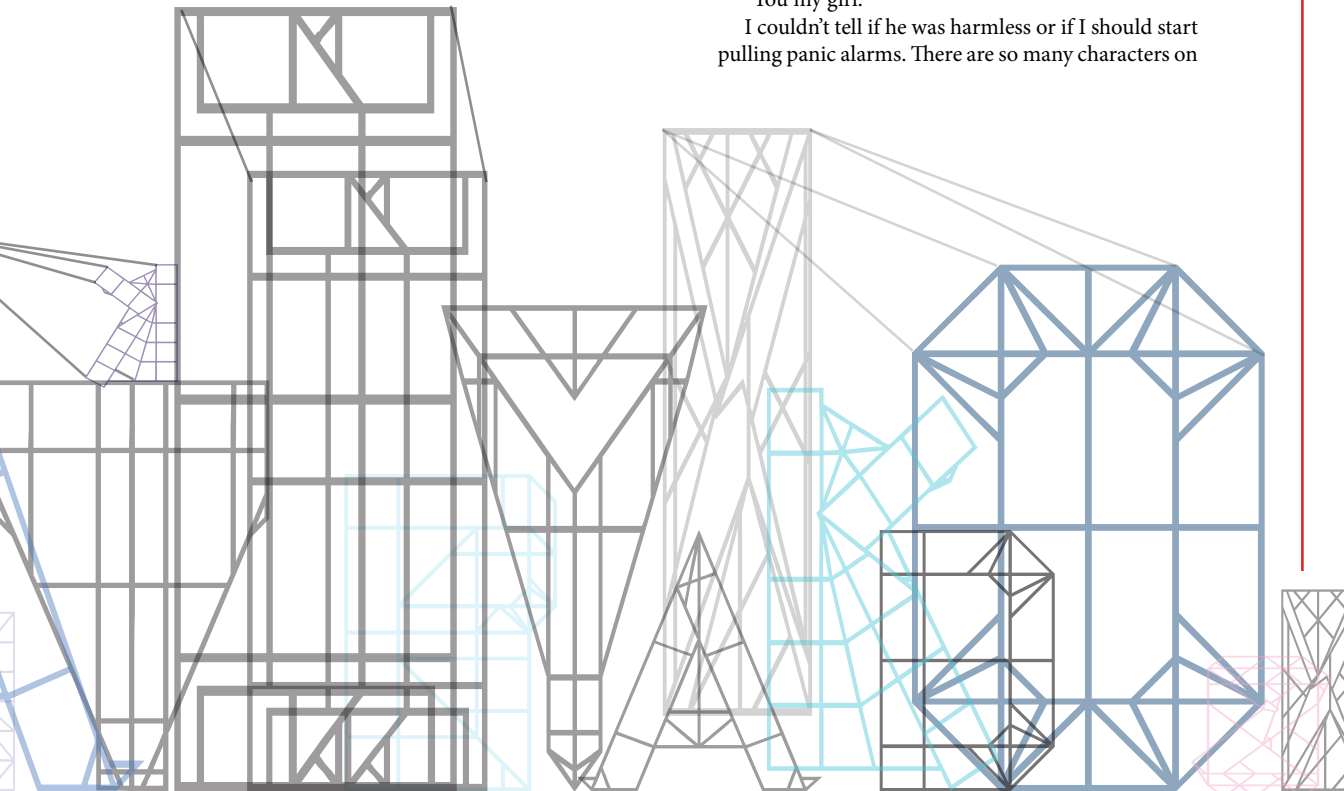
I stared at him blankly and hoped he wouldn’t say anything so I wouldn’t have to say anything. Then he said something.

“You my girl now.”

“Excuse me?”

“You my girl.”

I couldn’t tell if he was harmless or if I should start pulling panic alarms. There are so many characters on



the DC metro that I'm never sure when I should chronicle it for a magazine and when I should blow a rape whistle. The week before, two guys pulled out a boombox on the train and started crumping. Was it *crumping*? I only recently found out what dougie-ing is, and I'm still not even sure I would actually recognize it if I saw it.

The week before, a guy followed a woman around the metro station and kept asking her if she would do unmentionable things to his nether regions. She took a random train to get away from him.

Such is the DC metro. We never know if it's a living contemporary art piece or a sign we should all move to the suburbs.

"You my girl!"

"No. I'm definitely not your girl. I'm nobody's girl. I'm my own girl."

He laughed. "Until you became my girl."

I nodded. My destination was two stops away, so I just had to keep this going for another five minutes. "Sure, sure. Logical."

He kept asking me about where I was going, and what I was doing, and when I'd be home. He told me about his house under a bridge. I couldn't tell if this was an elaborate bit and if Ashton Kutcher was going to pop out. I kept my cool. I was going to look calm and collect when he popped out and stuck a camera in my face.

When I got to my stop, I tried to stand up. The man pushed me down. "But you're my girl!"

I started hyperventilating. Where was Kutcher? Where were the police? Planes have air marshals. The metro should have train marshals.

There was a businessman in a suit sitting across the car reading a newspaper. He looked up at the ruckus and noticed I was getting scared. He promptly stood up and strode over to pull the man away from me.

"Is he giving you trouble?"

"I just need to leave the car, please."

My savior looked at me. "Go quickly. Wouldn't want the doors to close on you."

I smiled gratefully at the angel from heaven, grabbed my



bag and borderline flew off the train.

I told a coworker about this later over lunch. He shook his head disapprovingly. "Those homeless black men are the worst."

I stopped. "I never said he was black."

"He sounds black"

"No. He was a white guy. The guy who was harassing me? He was white."

My coworker paused, as if he was finding a way to justify the blatant racism. I kept going.

"And you know what? The guy who saved me? He was black. So you and your stereotypes can go to hell."

I picked up my bag in a huff for the second time that day and marched out of the restaurant.

Maybe the metro is a living contemporary art piece, like some sort of living exhibition in discomfort. I don't know. I'm trying to make it more profound than it is. Harassment isn't profound. It's just awful.

But the city is a sort of self-perpetuating cycle. Some days go well, some days don't. And there's nothing like the metro to make you feel like getting from point A to point B is some sort of deeper journey. I don't know what I'm supposed to get out of it, but I'll keep looking anyway. I'll keep you posted. ▲



# CHILD OF WEAKNESS

BY JOANNE HOWARD

She loved the children. She loved to watch them crawl around on the Sunday School carpet, reddening their knees and dripping drool and snot on themselves. She loved to see them chew on their toys, their little white teeth just bursting through their pink gums, their chubby arms and legs twisted around their favorite blanket, their lips bright red and wet. She imagined chasing after them as they pedaled the fire truck scooters down the aisles of desks, or wiping their bottoms after snack time, the round, swollen buttocks bouncing as they giggled at the touch of the cool, moist wipe. She imagined kissing their toes and blowing raspberries on their stomachs, bloated like summer fruit ripening on the vine. She loved the children.

She had come to the El Dorado Episcopal Church at 8:00 this Sunday morning with her husband, Wes. They shuffled into the pews with a hymnbook each; it never occurred to them that they could share. Standing side by side they sang along under their breath with the choir. "I hear the Savior say, 'Thy strength indeed is small; Child of weakness, watch and pray, Find in Me thine all in

all.'" They were the Hackburns on their best behavior, for the church was not so much a place of worship but of gossip. This was the place where the women brunched together on Sunday mornings after service, where the only jobs they had were as mothers or wives, or as nothing at all. Holly Hackburn was careful not to give the women reason to circle her like keen-eyed vultures; she and Wes had sat towards the back and to the side, ready to leave as soon as it

was over. This, of course, Holly did on purpose. Wes thought it was because they were always late.

"I have to use the restroom," she had whispered to her husband just before the sermon began. She had escaped at exactly 8:07 as was her habit every Sunday morning. After she had relieved herself of the two cups of coffee that were required in order to wake up at such an ungodly hour, she left the bathroom but did not return to her seat. Instead, she had turned in the opposite direction down the fluorescent-lit corridor toward where the Sunday school classes were held. Like a ticking clock her high heels sounded slow and regular upon the white linoleum tiles as closer and closer she came, slouching towards the children.

Here she stood in the hallway in front of the glass window, peering into the little lives before her. She put her hands on her knees and bent lower, her lips crinkled into a friendly smile, and she raised her fingertips into a flourishing wave "hello". She had done this many times before and knew how to act like a mother checking in on her darlings.

She suspected the Sunday school teacher, Mrs. Spruce, was simple. Simple like the other women in the pews she had left behind. But Mrs. Spruce always smiled hello at her through the observation glass, and Holly never failed to notice how pristine Mrs. Spruce was dressed. Her dress, which covered her knees, was neatly pressed and tailored to her figure. She always wore a bow in her hair. Holly never smiled back.

She looked down at her own clothes, which had a few small paint splatters. She wore dark jeans and a grey t-shirt, both of which slouched on her frame. She never bothered to get dressed up for church like the other women.

Mrs. Spruce stopped smiling at her and turned away, disappearing behind an art supply cabinet. Holly was free to watch the children play again. She loved the children. But they were not hers.

When the service ended, the Hackburns found their 1986 Buick LeSabre in the parking lot and turned towards home. This was the country of the Central Valley, California's heartland. Just one left turn and they were out of town, driving into the farmland, dry in the Indian summer. The sun was nearing its zenith already; the service had run late.

"Holly, gimme a light," Wes said, cigarette wedged between his fingers, held out across the front seat towards her. Taking the lighter from her purse, she ignited the flame and held it to the cigarette.

"You know you'll have to stop that if you want to make a baby," she said.

"You mean I'll have to stop it when you have a baby," he answered, eyes on the road. "What's the hurry to have one anyways? I know I said I want kids eventually, but you're twenty-seven. Don't you want to at least wait until your thirties?"

She felt like she had waited long enough. She had wanted kids ever since she could remember. She had wanted kids even when she herself was a kid.

"Sure, if that's what you want." Silence filled the car again and she watched the fertile farmland blur through the window. She disliked how straight the rows of crops were.

The endless fields of harvested wheat sprawled along the horizon, fallow in the late summer sun. Deep were the fields once, tall and mighty were the stalks of corn, their fibrous leaves large and healthy. Now, the soil lay exposed to the Central Valley heat, where once it had been shielded by the verdant crops. The highway cut a black line perpendicular to the rows. Along the shoulder gathered prickly weeds and dandelions, inching closer to the farmed land as the summer drought wore on, as they seemed to thrive on the dry air and the fumes from the black tar baking under the sun. A golden summer it had been. The sickly sheen of dust that covered all. The crows that understood not to stalk the barren fields anymore. The ghostly whisper of a breeze that disappeared as soon as it began, a tease to the thirsting land. Yes. This was the end of summer.

They arrived at the house, and Wes pulled the Buick into the driveway. Blue hydrangeas grew in the shade beside the house where the garage was. The bushes were outgrowing the height of the house. At the top where the sun struck it, the flowers were lifeless and browning. Holly had tried a hundred

times to capture with paint and brush the exact moment when the blue turned to brown, but she could never get it right. Her shade of blue somehow managed to look stale and unnatural, and it did not blend seamlessly to green, white, then brown the way that the hydrangeas did in real life. Wes had once cut bunches of the flowers and placed them in a vase upon the kitchen table, a rare show of affection. Holly had come home and, upon seeing it, had flown to where Wes laid spread out on the sofa watching the football game.

"What have you done? What is this!" she had said with a fire in her eyes, shaking the vase of flowers in her hand, sapphire petals quaking down to earth. From then on, Wes never touched the hydrangea bush again. The dead growth at the top had never been pruned, and he even left the fallen leaves and petals alone on the lawn just to be safe.

The hydrangea bush stood in front of the dining room window and blocked the view inside from the street. It was the only window in the house where she could see out but they couldn't see in. This was important to Holly. No one could know the countless times she had stood in front of this window, watching them race to the cars with their lunchboxes swinging on their soft arms, watching the older ones fly past on their bicycles, their bottoms raised just off the seat so as to pedal a little faster, watching the newborn across the street learn to point his fragile finger at things he wanted. One day she thought he had pointed at her, but she convinced herself he must have wanted the hydrangea flowers. Yes, they would be something a child might like.

At the same time that Wes and Holly pulled into their driveway, Mrs. Spruce was tidying up the Sunday school classroom after the children had left. Her husband, Mr. Spruce, knocked on the door frame at exactly 9:03, as was his custom.

"How's it going, Penny, how was class?" he said. He always thought it felt strange to ask that of his wife.

"Good," is how she usually answered, as if from a script, her voice high and cheerful. Everything was always good. The paintings that the students made, those were good. Her husband, light of her life, he was good. She watched over the children and saw that they were good.

But today, she said an uncharacteristic word. "Okay," she answered her husband. Immediately she hid her face behind a piece of yellow construction paper, as if she couldn't believe the word she had just said.

"Just okay?" Mr. Spruce said, sidling up to her tenderly. "Penny, what's wrong? Did the children not behave?"

"No, no, it's not that—" she faltered, searching for the words and second guessing her fears. "There's a woman I see every Sunday. She looks in at the children. At first I thought she was one of their mothers, but today I watched every child go away with their parents, and not one went home with the woman. Sometimes I think I am being visited by a ghost. Has God sent someone to punish me? Have I done something wrong?"

Mr. Spruce laughed at how easily her world could be broken. "If she was sent by God," he chuckled, "how do you know she is there to punish you? Why not to protect you?"

“But I don’t need to be protected from anything, or anyone,” Mrs. Spruce thought aloud.

“Well, then, maybe she’s just a woman who likes to take a break from the service every once in a while. And those kids are cute. I don’t blame her for peeking in.” Mr. Spruce was always able to dismiss his wife’s fears easily, for they were always ill-founded. Three months ago she had tearfully confessed to him that a girl in the class had asked, “Why did God create Satan?” to which Mrs. Spruce had given no answer. She could not. Instead she put on the “Clean-Up” song and helped the students put away the toys and supplies. Later that night before bedtime, Mr. Spruce had simply told her, “You can’t have good without evil,” and turned out the light.

“Pretty Penny,” he said now, “you worry too much. Come on, let’s go home.”

The Spruces were childless. They had been trying for a baby going on four years, to no success. Mrs. Spruce was the kind of woman who was meant to be a mother. She had no greater joy in her insignificant life than to be surrounded by a sea of children every Sunday, rolling and twisting and being pulled this way and that through the currents of laughing faces and sticky palms. She disliked going home afterwards to a quiet house, ghosts of the high-pitched giggles and screams echoing in her mind. Mrs. Spruce finally accepted she would never have children, not her own. They had been trying too long and nothing to show for it, but she smiled sweetly and said yes to Mr. Spruce on the nights he asked. If not children, she at least liked to see her husband hopeful.

That night she had kept awake, imagining what kind of person the peculiar woman was. She had noted the paint splatters on her jeans; perhaps she was an artist. And she supposed she had never met a woman who came to church with that sense of indecency and disregard for her own presentation.

The next morning, Penny sat rigidly in the wooden pews of the Church, waiting for Father Jacobs. It was cool indoors, with dim light filtering through the tinted skylights above her.

“Hello, Penny, how is your Monday going?” Father Jacobs said, approaching her from the center aisle.

“Good,” she said automatically. “Except, there is something I...wanted to talk to you about. It has been troubling me for some time now.”

“I’m always available to listen to your troubles. One should never bear them alone.”

“How do you know if someone is a good person?”

“Everyone is a good person, Penny. Everyone is a child of God.”

“But we do bad things sometimes.”

“Yes, God did not make us perfect, but we have a divine part of him in ourselves. We do bad things, but we are not bad people if we feel remorse and make amends.”

She crossed her arms over her chest and ran her fingertips over the skin of her shoulders, goose bumps emerging to guard against the raging air conditioning. “Is a person bad if

they have bad thoughts but do not do bad things?”

“It is not a sin to think about sinning...No. I suppose a sin that is kept between yourself and God only is as if it didn’t exist at all. What made you think of all this? I know children can ask some hard questions sometimes.”

Biting her lip, Penny cast her eyes down to the smoothly polished floor of the Church. “No, it wasn’t one of the children. I ask it for myself. There’s...a woman who comes every Sunday to service, except you wouldn’t know her, because she stays and watches the children when she should be listening to you. And she’s not a mother of any of the children. I’ve looked into it myself,” she confessed sheepishly.

“What has she done to make you think she is a bad person?”

She stared in thought at carpet, and at last said, “Nothing.”

Chuckling lightly the priest answered, “Are you threatened by a woman who admires God’s littlest ones? Honestly, the greater sin is your assumption about her. She is an innocent person who is being unfairly judged.”

“Is she innocent?”

“Has she done anything to make her guilty?”

When Penny did not answer for a long time, the priest continued, “God created us out of goodness. There may be parts of us that are bad, but it is human nature to be always seeking goodness, always working towards it, even if we are led astray at times. Everything is good.”

Mrs. Spruce pushed her thin arms against the double oak doors of the Church and walked down the concrete steps, her numb fingertips grasping the railing for support. The cars in the parking lot sparkled with an intense brightness, the sunlight amplified by the glass. She shaded her eyes against the light. The August late afternoon air felt sour and dusty, the Central Valley striking down any relief of a breeze from the West. She walked down the row of parked cars, the white lines on the pavement so perfectly painted straight. Beads of sweat began to push through the skin on her forehead, her body overheating rapidly. Her dress clung to her thighs and rode up more and more with each step down the row, discomfort inching over her body, sweat beginning to drop. At last she reached her car and placed her hand on the door handle. It burned her hand as she pulled it open. She had forgotten to lock it.

She slid into the driver seat and calmly shut the door. Inside the heat was unbearable, and she was thoroughly dampened by the sweat now, her clothes heavy and her breathing slow and labored. “Everything is good,” she said, and started the car. Through her rearview mirror, she watched the church diminish into the dust as she steered toward the farmland. “Everything is good,” she whispered. ▲





# DAFFODIL

BY ANNABELLE WARREN

When my father married my mother, all of his friends were jealous. Her beauty was exotic in their small town of dirt and fields and K-Mart. Her nickname among the young men was “the Daffodil,” because she stood out like a dash of color among all the dead grass. My poor farmer’s-boy father, a whole year younger than my mother and miles gawker than she, had managed to put a ring on the most exquisite flower he had ever seen. “How did you do it?” his friends would ask. “You must be some kind of wizard!”

“She is the only magic that exists,” my father would reply. “I am just lucky.”

I was 12 when she got sick; I remember being in the backyard of our new home in Mississippi, building a raft out of old plywood, when my father stuck his head out the kitchen window. “Your mother isn’t feeling well, I’m taking her to the doctor. Don’t forget to feed the cat.” He seemed nervous, but there was a hint of excitement in his voice. A week earlier, I had been looking for aspirin in my mother’s medicine cabinet when I found a pregnancy test. I didn’t even know what it was at first—I had to ask Jack from my bus stop, who was an 8th grader. I recall being offended by the fact that they were trying for another child, as if just one gangly son wasn’t good

enough. I hardly knew a thing about pregnancy at the time, but I knew that when our maiden neighbor Ellen was expecting, my mother would go to her house every morning with ginger and honey tea because pregnancy makes women feel sick. My mother said that the ginger settled her stomach, and the honey settled the loneliness.

When my mother finally came home from the doctor that evening, she was pale to the point of greenness. Her hands were white and cold, and her eyelids were an achy blue. My father was shrunken with exhaustion. The doctor had said it was the flu, not a baby. He prescribed her with some special cocktails and sent her home to sleep it off. Meanwhile, I had finished my raft which I was excited to show her. I managed to drag her off of the living room couch to look out the window and see what I built. “You taking that thing out on the swamp?” She asked. I nodded, and she simply said, “You’re gonna get eaten by gators,” and shuffled back to the couch.

The next morning I was awoken by the sound of moaning coming from the bathroom. I ran in, only to be overtaken by the acidic stench of blood and vomit. There on the floor was my mother, spine curled, trying to crawl toward me. My memory begins to blur after that; I remember screaming for my father and calling 911, and eventually seeing people dragging a stretcher up the stairs to the bathroom.

It was 8 days before she came back home from the hospital. My father made me stay with Ellen and her son while he rented a hotel room in the city, right next to the hospital. Nobody would let me see my mother, and nobody would give me a

good reason as to why. All Ellen would tell me was, “She was real sick, but she’s gonna be alright. Don’t you worry.” I begged God to prove her right.

God must not have heard, because the woman who came home was not my mother. This woman slept on the couch because she couldn’t remember who my father was. This woman silently stared out the kitchen window for hours at a time, and when she did speak, she would ask a simple question, such as, “Where are we?” Three minutes later, she would ask it again. The mother who used to read a chapter of Tom Sawyer to me every night before bed was replaced by a woman who flinched and cried when I tried to touch her. My father had to install a lock on the front door from the outside, because she had taken to wandering. My mother, the college graduate, could no longer read a clock. My mother, the Daffodil, was wilting.

In June of that year, she went missing. My father blamed himself for forgetting to lock the kitchen window, but I knew that he had locked it. He was already in bed when I opened it a crack on that humid summer night, and in a sweaty daze, gone to bed without locking it back up.

I never told my father about the mistake I made.

There were search parties, but they were in vain. She was gone without a trace—no sightings, no footprints, no phone calls. It was two months after her disappearance that I finally took my raft out onto the swamp. I spotted two alligators about a hundred yards out from my raft, but they could’ve ripped me limb from limb for all I cared. When I reached a sandy bank on the swamp, I stepped off my raft to sit down. I was running my hands through the sand and staring through the trees when I felt what I thought was a big clump of tangled moss. I looked down, and

immediately felt the scream rise from my stomach, only to catch in the back of my throat. It was hair.

I paddled my raft home with an inhuman strength, and washed my hands until they bled. Since she had gone missing, I fought to imagine her being safe somewhere, in a new home with a fireplace and maybe even the new baby she had wanted. She was reading him Tom Sawyer and singing him Ella Fitzgerald and she had her mind back. But now, I didn’t imagine anything. I didn’t mention the swamp incident to anyone, because my father was still clinging to my same fantasy she had escaped to a better life somewhere.

My father and I eventually decided to move to California, but not before I set my raft on fire and pushed it out onto the swamp, burning for my mother, and maybe burning some alligators on the way. I cried as my father and I wrote her a note with our new phone number, in case she ever wandered back to the house after we left. We never did get a call. ▲



## “WHY REINCARNATION IS A TERRIBLE IDEA,” OR, “THE ASSHOLE AND THE GOLDFISH”

By Hannah Atkinson

Glub.

He moves. Not quickly. Around him is cool and still, touching his face and down his sides. He is hungry so he is looking for food and there is food somewhere so he is going there.

This is because he is a goldfish and goldfish don't have a lot to do.

In the distance, there is color; there is light; it's like a red-blue-yellow sky, but he does not know what a sky is because he is a goldfish. Space moves around him in its usual round wobble.

He doesn't think anything of it. Goldfish usually don't.



Brakes screech.

“The fuck!” yells the guy in the car. He's flabby pink, and it clashes with his hair: ginger, thin on the top. He's got the window rolled down.

Thomas pretends not to hear him over the whizz of traffic, the city clamor. Gray-blue sky, gray-yellow scrap of sidewalk—he feels like the star of a movie, the only one in color. His shirt is red and snappy-bright; he thinks it makes the world look dingier by comparison. It dulls out this guy, whipping by his front door.

His girlfriend told him to be more careful jaywalking. He told her, next guy to nearly grind him into the ground, he'd just kick the bastard's car.

“Easy on the body count, buddy,” says Thomas, plants

a foot on the guy's bumper—he feels a little jolt of victory when the man jerks, bristles. Thomas splays his hands in hey, it's me you nearly killed.

“You're in the road!” The guy's face is going blotchy, red as his shirt. Thomas hikes up his shoulders in a shrug. It's a rusting Subaru, seriously, his shoes cost more.

“Not for long. Chill.” He swings his foot off the bumper and dares a little bow, like it was his honor. Then he turns tail and bounds away.

On the other side of the street, Thomas' girlfriend waits stick-straight, watching the guy roar off. She always looks half ready for an interview: narrow face, sharp eyes, dark neat blouse. He slouches over with his hands in his pockets, tries to look innocent. Her mouth pulls thin at him like she's flustered.

“You'll get us killed,” she hisses, but her arms still go around one of his, and he likes to think she says it with a little bit of wonder.



There are lights dancing in the distance, past the edge of the world.

This is usual, for as much as a goldfish can track the concept of “usual.” The smudges of color are mostly static, but sometimes not; there are figures of different sizes and shapes; the shapes have weight when they move, and they thrum and shiver through his round gentle world. He can wait anywhere and the space around him will change when he needs to know things.

The world does not shiver now, but the blurs of light jar closer and further (danger! chimes something dark and nonverbal somewhere deep in him) and instinct is all he has.

Today's danger is orange, a fluffy smudge of it. The danger presses closer, and now it has eyes, dark-sharp and green and slit-pupiled. It touches the edge of everything. The world shudders.



They met because she likes animals.

It was his roommate's fault: this reedy stick of a guy, still speckly from high school, accumulating hipster photography blogs and sweaters in California. Worked for a software startup, spent it on gourmet food for his  
g i n g e r



disaster of a cat.

The cat hated Thomas. Thomas hated the cat. It shrank and hissed when he tried to touch it, once dug bloody furrows into his leg even through the jeans—so when it shot out the door and didn't turn up again, he didn't have a lot to say. The friend dragged himself around for days, though, and sniffed and touched his eyes a lot, perched on a corner of Thomas' slumping couch. Thomas clapped him on the back and said something consoling, probably, and then Meena called. Said she helped catch his cat when they were kids.

She'd stepped into Thomas' apartment, small straight shoulders and dark eyes, and she'd done it better. Hush, honey, we'll fix it, she'd said, and made posters, and she had better hands for putting on someone's shoulder. She was pretty. Thomas called dibs.

He never sees his old roommate anymore.



Evenings are long.

Meena is chatting about her sister the painter, is separating paper from tape. Straightening canvases. He catches every fifth word; he selects a beer; he thinks about the state of his shoes.

"Look," she says, in the pay-attention voice, so he spins to face her.

It's a shitty painting.

"That's a shitty painting," he says, and lifts the beer to his lips. A man floats above the ocean, gull's wings where his arms should be. His feathers and face are a smudgy jumble of lights and darks, not real detailed, proportions all weird. Meena holds it at her shoulder, fingers careful on the edges of the canvas.

Her mouth goes tight.

The can cracks under his fingers, too loud. He shrugs.

"Who'd want to turn into a seagull? Do you get the power to shit on tourists? Just an opinion."

"It's spiritual," she says. "It's surrealism."

"Just an opinion," he says. Quirks a smile, with teeth. "I was just kidding."

Her lips are still pulled thin.



Goldfish don't have teeth.

The fluffy orange danger does, but he doesn't really understand this. Only that the shuddering swirls of the world are Bad and Dangerous and Panic.

Kind of shitty luck! He doesn't know this. He's a goldfish.

He flits, this way and that and up and down and back, looking for an elsewhere. The world ends on all sides, every time he reaches a boundary he turns back thinking he'll find a different way but oh right he was just here, wasn't he?, hard to tell.

Everything shudders. The danger makes a horrifying shudder-sound which could be translated as mrow. All at once, the world tips, tumbles, the not-a-sky turns haywire blur.

His whole universe sloshes onto the living room floor.



Her sister the painter lives in India.

Her sister the painter is getting married. Meena talked about it, gesturing and happy-sighing, for a solid week. Showed him the paintings which she thought reflected their relationship: things with titles like Metamorphosis of the Soul.

"Is his head supposed to look like that?" said Thomas. She did that tense, disapproving thing with her eyebrows.

He spent the week ducking sister-the-painter conversations, throwing himself around a little more reckless than usual, and counted the dramatic screech of brakes by asshole tourists whipping down his street.



Everything settles, sort of.

There is less of the world. He can hurry back and forth, test that it's stable, but the current pulls him one way—drags over the edge of the world, out onto flat fuzzy blue. Somewhere, the danger hulks and moves and swishes.

His belly brushes the ground. There's a cold slap of nothing just above his head, closer than usual. Something enormous and orange dabs into view, stirs everything in front of his face, makes it all flow wrong.

He's afraid. He doesn't know exactly why, only that it's the right thing to be, and that he should keep being it and keep moving. But there's nowhere to move to. So he doesn't.

New shape happens, too big to understand, and the tilting world feels its footsteps. He's a goldfish. He doesn't know what it is to die.



Meena is crying.

"You just—you never—you never listen to me—"

She's been ranting for ten minutes. She's been ranting forever. Snapping her hands up in the air, pointing sharp-fingered at him, raking her hair into disarray. It makes him awkward—standing, shifting his feet, not able to get a word in. He wants a drink. He wants his laptop and his afternoon, not her ugly crinkly crying-face.

"An animal would listen better—"

"Yeah," he says, and, picking up strength: "yeah, that's already me, I'm a fucking workhorse, I'm—" He scowls. He tries not to let his face crinkle like he's crying. "I try so hard, you just ignore it, like I'm something you have to be embarrassed about—"

"You're embarrassing!" Downward slash of painted nails. "You just brush off— everyone! You don't respect my family. You're insignificant, you think you're big!"

"Yeah—" and look, look, he's giving her an excuse to calm down, he's making it funny, quirks his eyebrows up: "Enormous."

Her middle finger stands straight and precise, too.



The nicest thing about being a goldfish, by someone's metric, is getting taken care of by girls.

Not that he knows. He'd rather the girls stay away, when their hands make everything shake and their shadows chant dangerdanger in him. Simple and bad.

But the world thrums with a voice he can't hear—hush, honey, I'll fix it—and maybe he's a little less afraid than he would be of another voice, but maybe not. Goldfish don't do memory very well.

The world shifts, slops, swirls back into place. Everything shudders back upright. The orange danger is gone, shooed away, and the world fills back in around him. Was anything wrong in the first place? It isn't wrong now.

This is why it's good that he is a goldfish. Not that he remembers being anything else.



"You don't know shit," he tells her.

"We'll talk when you're not all hormonal, or whatever this is," he tells her.

"You aren't leaving, I'm leaving," he tells her.

She stands sharp and unmoved, says nothing, so he swings up his arms and blows out a *fuck it*. He needs a walk. It's too small an apartment on too shitty a street. He covers it in ten strides, and the front door slams behind him.

Brakes screech.

This time, he doesn't get to kick the bumper.

There's a truck, a guy with bright hair: smudges of ginger-orange. When the world wobbles, when everything goes simple-slow, all he gets are blurry splotches of gray and blue and red. He thinks of the shitty-painted man with wings for arms.

The air around him is cool and still, touching his face and down his sides. The sky is a cold slap of nothing above his head. No one tells him hush, honey.

Glub. ▲



# HOWARD JOHNSON

by JULIA MARSH

This is an unabridged, unillustrated, unaudited portion of the biography of Howard Johnson, a boy far too fussy for his own good. He brushes his teeth with a Buzz-Lightyear toothbrush every morning, afternoon, and night. He combs his hair at least four times a day, is always early to his tap dancing lessons, and never eats barbecued chicken (unless specifically asked to on particularly informal formal occasions like Easter brunch and the 4th of July). He never, ever, wears a tie as his mother asks. No way, no how.

His story takes place in Portland, Oregon, where the flowers smile longingly at the sky, waiting for sun, and the sun hides shyly behind the clouds. Portland is home to friendly neighbors and cliché housing units arranged in concentric circles around parks, and painted soft and rather bland shades of beige. Portland, Oregon, is almost the perfect place to lay our scene.

We open our tale in the emergency room at Providence Medical center, where Beatrice Johnson sits in a room with several chairs, a water dispenser, a coffee table and a stack of magazines. Underneath the table, her 6-year old son lies completely naked and covered in claw marks, staring at his stomach as it rises and falls.

Howard turns to look at his mother, unblinkingly. He hears the criticisms she's thinking in her head but says nothing. He turns back to stare at the underside of the table. Howard is going through an identity crisis. At 6 years old.

Beatrice Johnson slept in late that morning as her son Howard was finishing his macaroni creation. It's a 12-segment art piece that stretches from the sofa to the armoire, and took

him several days to complete. Finally finished, Howard went to wipe the glue from his fingers onto the carpet, just as his mother begs him not to do. As he was bending down, a large orange tabby cat came trotting through the open sliding glass door and planted itself directly on segment three of the macaroni masterpiece. Howard shrieked, lept from the floor, ran to the beast and snatched it up. His glue-covered hands meshed with the feline's fur like worms crawling through a shag carpet. The cat stared with its glowing yellow eyes into Howard's watering blue ones, and with a feline chuckle released its claws from its tiny padded paws.

Four and a half minutes later, Howard was lying in his mother's carefully manicured tulip garden, pinstriped with raised pink scratches from head to toe. The growling beast was still tragically glued to Howard's fingertips, but had retracted its claws for now. With a profound and concerted effort, Howard lifted the furry monster above him. He stared at its menacing face, into its glowing yellow eyes, and then glanced just below its whiskers. There was a ratty blue collar with a tag hanging around the cat's neck.

Peeling himself from the trampled tulip patch, petals falling from his trousers, Howard tromped warily through the garden, along the side of the house and across the sidewalk to the next door neighbor's house. He rang the doorbell several times before a young girl, perhaps three or four years of age, answered. She looked smartly at the cat, and smartly at the boy, and proclaimed with indifference, "He-llo and thank you for my kitty." She ripped the beast from the boy's sticky fingers and her face widened with delight. She saw the way Howard cringed as the cat hissed back at him.

"If you don't mind telling me, Susy," said Howard, guessing the girl's name, as it is the habit of young girls in stories to always be named Susy, "Are you sure this is your kitty?"

Unphased by the boy's scratches, she replied in the most strikingly sensible tone, "Of course he's mine. His name is Howard. He is orange. That is why they named him Howard."

Howard the boy gasped inwardly. The cat was named Howard? It couldn't be.

He waved good-bye to Susy and Howard the cat, and limped as quickly as he could back towards his home. He stumbled through the back door, down to the basement, slid through the ventilation opening, climbed up the ladder, through the hole in the wall, and into his secret hideaway. Howard, the boy, plopped down upon his cushion in misery. It is a habit of our young protagonist to sit in his hide-hole whenever something horribly dreadful has occurred (the death of a goldfish, the loss of a game of Monopoly, the mispronunciation of a word, such as "infinity" or "synonym").

You may wonder what caused his current retreat to the hide-y-hole.

Whispering to himself, Howard realized in solemn contemplation that he was not orange. No way, no how. He did not have whiskers, nor white paws, nor a taste for warmed whole milk. He did not have an affinity for rodents, or a love for lying log-like in his mother's tulip garden. He was not orange and he was not Howard. 'Howard' now belonged to a cat, to an orange furry four-pawed thing. He figured that if he would look up 'Howard' in the dictionary, the definition would read; "Howard, noun: an orange feline, known most infamously for clawing

young boys to bits, mid-day napping and catnip snacking.”

So simple, so plain, was this to the young boy that he could not stand to have this inaccurate label any longer. No way, no how. On that spring day, Howard Johnson, the boy, became Howard Johnson no more.

He emerged from the hidey hole, down the ladder, through the basement, and into his backyard as a nothing. No longer did he gaze happily at the wind in the leaves on the sidewalk by the school. He no longer took pride in macaroni art or peeling string cheese one strand at a time. He was no longer unique, he did not meow, and he was not orange. He had not earned ‘Howard’ and ‘Howard’ did not belong to him.

He walked nameless for two and a half hours. Like the pale, expressionless hours of his neighborhood, he walked solemnly, responding to no one. Concerned passersby were baffled with what to call him. They called him sir! They called him boy! They called him friend! They called him Bub!

It was two and a half hours of namelessness and lifelessness until our young protagonist came across what no eight-year old should. You see, on the corner of Fifth and Junipero, there sits a homeless man who holds a sign that reads, “God Bless” on Tuesdays, and on Thursdays, a sign that reads “In desperate need of fine Indian hair weave, please help,” and the rest of the time he merely sleeps, taking rest from his finagling. His head has gone completely bald, and all the hair that might have grown there seems to have been transferred to his arms, which are as hairy as an unshaved gorilla.

In his daze, our scratched up protagonist nearly tripped over the beggar, and upon reading the sign, asked him, “What’s a hair weave?”

Seeing the boy’s apparent desperation and the cat’s claw marks, the beggar realized this was an opportunity to help a young creature in need. With a wide toothless smile, the

man replied in a sour-milk Southern drawl, “Why it’s when you take a bunch o’ hair an’ stick it on yer head! Much better than a warm coat on yer noggin, ya see? More permanent-like. A coat can slip off yer noggin, n’ there ain’t no way it’ll stay on in a Portland hurricane. No way, no how!”

It was clear to our nameless young protagonist that this homeless man was indeed quite wise and knowledgeable as to the workings of the adult world. Unfamiliar with the Southern accent, and being quite naïve to the actual knowledge of older-folk, it was at this point that the boy mistook a joking beggar to be a Buddhist priest, misplaced from his temple by only a few miles. Understanding him to be wise beyond compare, the lifeless boy asked, “Tell me, what would you name an orange cat, given the opportunity?”

“Lemme see...” the man thought aloud, and then, “Howard, of course. Any dingbat could tell ya that. You’d name him Howard ‘cuz he’s orange.”

“And what would you name a young boy, such as myself?”

“Now that there is a more je-oh-par-dizing sit-u-ation. The thing is, all the youngins I ever done met were French ones. They eat lots o’ french fries. I’ve done met a Jacque, a Mi-chelle, an’ a Cousteau - silly lil youngsters. I did done meet lil Rat-a-touille, cute little guy, down by the pharmacy. A young boy oughtta have a French-like name.”

Relieved at having found someone who might properly understand him and adequately name him, our desperate young protagonist asked in a hurry, “Then you should know what sort of French name I ought to have!”

“Why cer-tain-ly.” The man paused for a moment. “A youngin such as yerself should be named none other than Giuseppe. Giuseppe Montague. There’s nothin’ more French than that there naming.”

Though the homeless man was entirely wrong about everything he’d just said, the boy’s pain came to a

screaching halt! This was all perfectly reasonable to him. He thanked the bald man kindly, put a quarter in his hand, and ran off, gleefully, back home.

His search for identity had been solved, his queer need for independence quelled, his young spirit refreshed! He embraced this new name with pride and glee. Young Giuseppe Montague looked at the world with eyes newly opened, took deep, ebullient breaths of air. When he reached his front yard, Beatrice Johnson stood in the doorway, patiently waiting.

“Howard Johnson, you better get your little hiny in here right this instant! Adventure time is over for today mister!” As he came closer, she could better see her young son’s torn clothes and scratched body. Her eyes widened, she ran back into the house, grabbed the car keys from the table and ushered her son into their Subaru. “How many times have we visited the ER just this summer Howard? Seven times so far? I swear child, one more incident and they’ll be sending me to jail.”

As they pulled out of the driveway, he could’ve sworn he saw glowing yellow eyes peering from Susy’s bedroom window. Yes, the road to self-identity would be a long one. But our boy knew one thing – no cat on earth could steal “Giuseppe Montague” from him...

NO WAY. NO HOW.



# A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE

BY PAUL MALONE

The sun was a few minutes away from peeking up over the edge of the valley floor. It always seems the coldest just before dawn. Our rooster never missed an opportunity to greet the day; he frequently called just to remind the hens that he stands vigilant or maybe to make sure I didn't sleep in. The blankets still hugged my waist and covered my legs as I glanced around the room. Little sister Aesha was breathing softly in the baby bed that Baba made for her. I could hear mother lift the lid of the fire pit from the floor of the kitchen. She rose early every day and cooked for the family so we would have strength for the days work.

I went to mother and kissed her hair as she knelt over the lentils she was making. "Good morning, Ami." She said nothing but poured a small glass of chai and handed me some naan with ghee. I squatted down and ate my breakfast quietly and thought about the extra work I had today. Baba had left yesterday to buy supplies at the big bazaar in the city so as the oldest son I was head of the house and his work was my responsibility.

I pulled my skullcap from my pocket and looked at it, I couldn't wait until the day I was allowed to wear the turban that the men do. Ami noticed and smiled, "You will be a man soon enough son, I see the strutting you do when you carry your fathers tools, you look like the old rooster with his chest puffed out." Blushing I stood up and placed the skull cap on my head. My vest was near the door, I grabbed it and put it on to shield me from the crisp air. Ami chuckled as I walked out.

The tools laid outside, I grabbed a spade to dig out the irrigation ditches that were filling with silt. The goat bleated, asking for food, I ignored him and crossed the courtyard to the big metal gate in the wall surrounding our house. I slid the bolt aside and stepped outside closing the door behind me. A deep breath through my nose brought the clean earth smell of the fields; I was happy to spend my days out here, to be a farmer like my father and his father was.

The day was long, my grandfather had dug many lines across our land so that we could water all of

the field and bring water close to the house. They always needed mending as silt built up in them or the sides of the ditch collapsed. It grew hot out as the sun climbed to the middle of the sky. My back ached from the bending and constant pulling against the mud and water; usually Baba did most of the digging, and I would spread seed and tend the animals. I sat down on the edge of the ditch and noticed my trouser legs were filthy. I could already see Ami's frown when I walked back to the house later. The vest was too hot so I pulled it over my head instead of unbuttoning it. A handful of dates fell out of the pocket and onto the ground. Scooping them up, I smiled, dates were my favorite thing. Ami never admitted she had them and they were impossible to find in the house; I had looked everywhere and been smacked several times trying to discover their hiding place.

The rest of the day went quickly and my belly announced it was time to go home for dinner. My back stiffened as I stood up straight, I balanced on each leg trying to brush the dirt off my pants without bending down. My hand stung as I swatted some mud from my clothes, I glanced at it and noticed blisters in my palm. I puffed like the rooster and started my walk home knowing my hands would soon be as rough and strong as Baba's were. In my daydream during the walk; my beard grew thick and black, the other men would respect me and listen to my words. I'd be able to work all day and hold the hot chai without noticing the heat just like father.

Ami made a curry that we ate with naan, pinching the curry in between pieces of the bread, I savored every bite. I hope the wife that my parents find for me is as good a cook as Ami. After dinner I locked the door in our courtyard wall and changed into my night clothes, a long pale blue shirt and loose pants. It seemed that Aesha had never moved, but I knew she had been up and fed, and was carried around on Ami's hip as she went about her chores during the day. Once wrapped up in the blankets that were strewn out on the floor of the family room, sleep came quickly.

Late in the night, my weariness and sound sleep fled when the air suddenly shifted as a concussion shook the house followed by a loud bang. The baby started crying and Ami was quickly there to reassure her that everything was okay. I stood up wincing, as my back remembered the hard work. A few gunshots rang out, it sounded like it came from Ahmad Khan's house. Ahmad Khan was Baba's distant cousin, a member of our tribe and a neighbor so if he was being robbed I was honor bound to help. That is what Baba would do.

So I put on my shoes and skull cap walked out of the house and started across the courtyard, I paused halfway and turned back towards the house. I wondered, "Should I get the old rifle my father used for shooting the rabbits that raid the fields?" I had never fired it, but it might help if was going to rescue cousin Ahmad from the thieves. A few steps back towards the house, "Baba doesn't keep the bullets with the rifle, where are they?" I thought. Nevermind, I walked back towards the gate; if I can see what is happening I'll decide if I need the rifle.

There was a loud chopping sound in the air that I didn't recognize and a distant humming near the mountains. My heart started to beat faster, I needed to be brave. I am the man of the house and need to protect my family and my clan. I swallowed hard as my hand touched the cold metal deadbolt on the gate door. I wished Baba was here with me and we could chase these thieves away together. He wasn't so it was up to me, "Insha' Allah." I slammed the deadbolt to the side and burst out of the door.

Ahead there was a dark figure low in the sky making the chopping sound, it flew past the village. Then the world slowed down. The chopping sound crawled, I could feel each heartbeat in my neck. I heard a foot stomp to my right my eyes followed the sound. There was an American there, he was moving towards me, everything was happening like a terrible, slow, dream. The soldier was raising his rifle, one eye was covered by something that gave off a faint green light the other was staring where the rifle was pointed. The eye and the rifle were rising from my feet, his thumb flicked a switch, to my middle, his finger began pressing the trigger, and finally to my face. The trigger was about to fall, and I was going to die.

Baba had told me about the Russians, and how

they raped women and killed innocent people. He told me that the fierce Mujahideen warriors had exacted revenge for these crimes. In this new war the Americans hurt people too, they were here to kill the Talib; to kill the Arabs that recruited young Afghans for their wars against the west. They had never bothered my family since the war began when I was a few years old. We farmed and raised our livestock in relative peace, only sometimes harassed by American patrols when on the roads. Baba stayed away from politics and did his best to explain to my mother and I what was happening and why. Why are they here for me? Why are they here for cousin Ahmad? God forgive me, for not being a better son.

I could see the Americans eye widen just before the pressure on the trigger ended my life. He yelled, and time sped up, "Stop!..Woodarega! Get on the ground! Get down motherfucker!" Did he say, stop? I stumbled backwards hoping to get back behind the gate with the bolt locked and run back to my blankets. He took one hand off the rifle and grabbed my sleeping shirt. My head snapped back as he yanked me out of the doorway and threw me hard into the wall, I lost my balance and fell to the ground. The gate had closed halfway, he kicked it open aiming his rifle into the courtyard.

Another soldier was there instantly, he pointed an even bigger gun at me. The first one came back to me, pointed the rifle at my chest and touched my sides and legs. They said something to each other and lowered their guns. "Just a kid, fuck, I almost waxed him. Noticed no weapon at the last second" I wondered if they were discussing a more horrible way to kill me. The American kneeled down and took the green light away from his eye so I could see his face. He was a young man, hardly old enough for a beard, with a skinny neck which made the helmet look ridiculous. He looked sad, he half heartedly smiled at me, and said something in a softer voice. "You're alright buddy." Then he went back to the door of my house as the other soldier slipped plastic cuffs over my wrists. I noticed my hands were tightly balled into fists, I slowly opened them. I stared at the back of my hands as they shook; I noticed the dirt from our land still under my fingernails. I wiped tears away on my sleeve. I turned my hands over and saw the blisters had popped in my fists; I let my palms stay wet, those broken blisters would callous. ▲





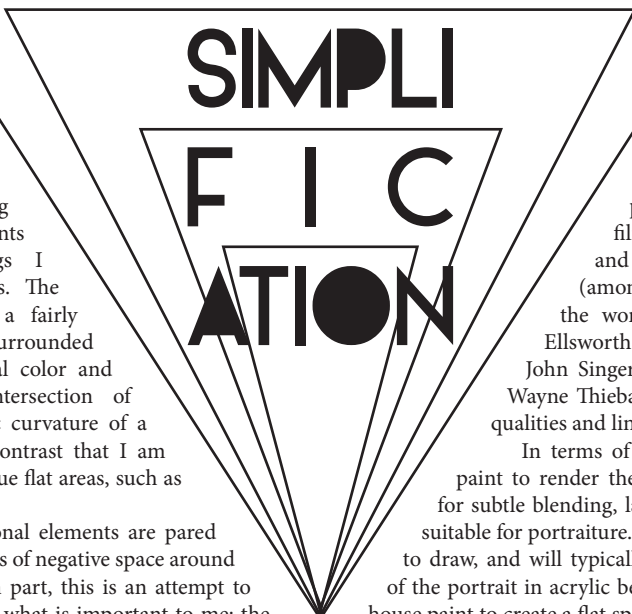
by CORINNA ZANOLINI

# AMPLIFICATION THROUGH

The main focus of my art practice is portraiture. Figures and faces are what I find most compelling. My work fuses the strong opinions I have regarding stylistic and design elements with the strong feelings I have towards my subjects. The resulting combination is a fairly representational portrait surrounded by broad planes of neutral color and often bold line. The intersection of geometry with the organic curvature of a face creates an engaging contrast that I am drawn to. I indulge in opaque flat areas, such as text or simple linear shapes.

In my work, compositional elements are pared down, while significant areas of negative space around the figure are embraced. In part, this is an attempt to strip all excess and amplify what is important to me: the person. I enjoy the notion that I serve as an intermediary for the representation of the people I paint. They pass through me, so to speak, and I imbue them with my own hand and the distortions (major and minor) that inherently follow.

I believe my conception of “style” is something that has been handed down through my culture, age, and surroundings; not developed in isolation. Some influences are clear, while others



are subconscious reflections. My aesthetic sense finds likeness in sources such as: graphic and industrial design, interior spaces, photography, minimalism, film, essential geometric forms, and contemporary illustration (among countless others). I admire the work of artists such as Parra, Ellsworth Kelly, Manet, Gilbert Stuart, John Singer Sargent, Anders Zorn, and Wayne Thiebaud, as well as the expressive qualities and line of Egon Schiele.

In terms of materials, I prefer using oil paint to render the face. The capabilities of oil for subtle blending, layering, and glazing, make it suitable for portraiture. However, I like to use acrylic to draw, and will typically produce an underpainting of the portrait in acrylic before applying oil. I often use house paint to create a flat space in the background. I have several shades of gray and off-white in quart-sized buckets that I use repeatedly in paintings. I like its qualities of opacity, specificity of color, fluidity of application, and its industrial feel. I prefer a matte finish to help bring the figure forward in space.

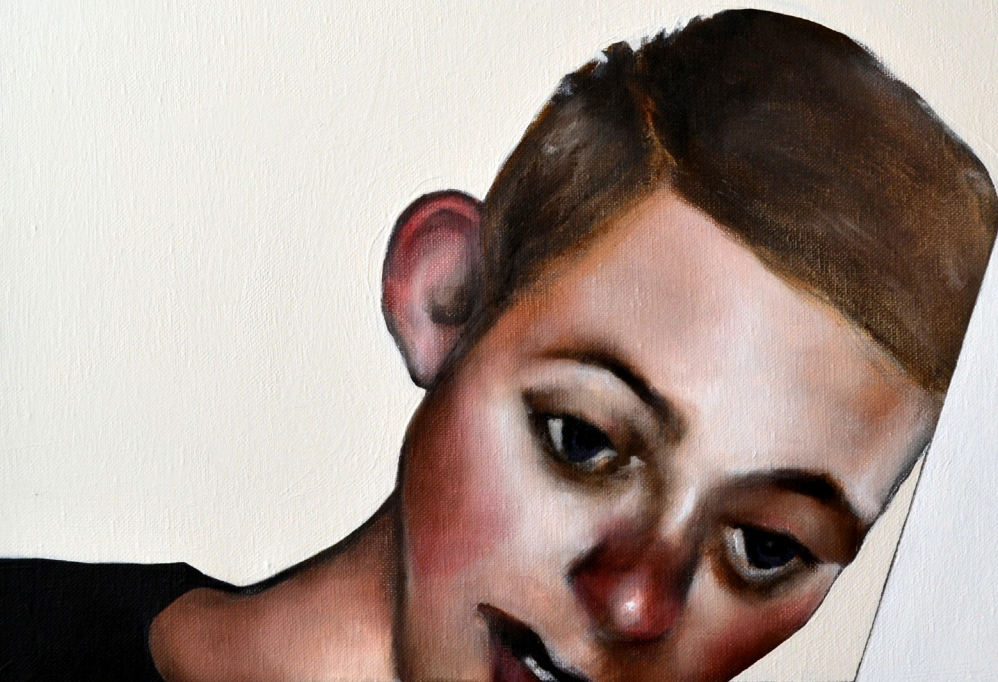
I relate to the words of contemporary artist Ana Kraš in this quote wherein she ponders inspiration:

"I never have a clue of what is it but it must be emotions, that's what moves us. Whether pleasant or bad emotions, but something needs to move you in one way or another to leave a trace in you, and in your work. Music moves me a lot. Friends, family, stories, colours, loves, nothing particular and all that together."

At the core of these separate sources of inspiration I find that the content of my work almost always arises from feelings of love, both positive and negative. From warm compassion to bitter heartbreak. If I am moved emotionally and enduringly, I make a painting. A deep impetus of my art-making comes from wanting to share, express, and simultaneously conceal life as it affects me. I draw from reality and fantasy alike. My hope is that the emotional qualities of my work are palpable to the viewer. I agree with artist Elizabeth Murray when she states: "making art is trying to respond to being alive, to learning about death and how these things mingle."

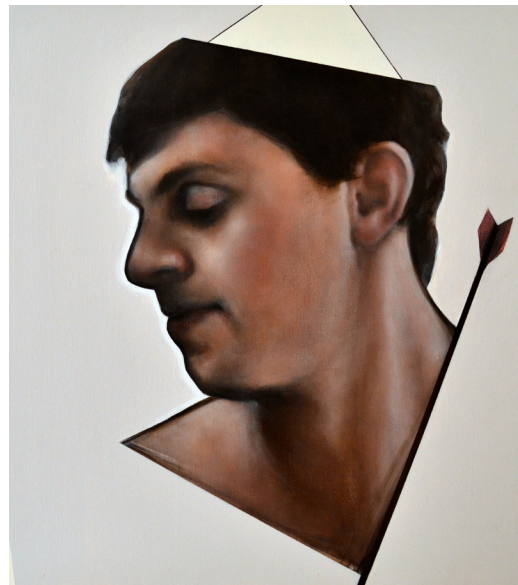
Corinna Zanolini is a third year undergraduate student at the University of California, Santa Barbara majoring in Art through the College of Creative Studies. ▲

For inquiries contact: [corinnazanolini@gmail.com](mailto:corinnazanolini@gmail.com)  
(Subtitle from "Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art"  
by Scott McCloud)





ART // CORINNA ZANOLINI



# Alfalfa:

by Lulu Dewey

## the dominic story

Dominic was a spritely figure with an alarmingly small head and I loved him in a way that only a sixteen year old girl at a Quaker farm school can love a man who milks cows. I loved him with every ounce of my being—a love which didn't falter, even when Dusty had looked up from his work clipping goat toenails and curtly informed me that Dominic used to be a goth. I only swooned harder.

He came to the school after me and wasn't there for long. The dairy operation needed an intern after Alice left to go work with sheep.

So one night, Dominic frolicked into the dining hall. I took one look at his handmade shoes and stained sweater and knew that we were destined for each other. That night I sat with him outside at dinner and told him all of my best stories about peeing my pants in unusual situations. We watched the sun stretch and falter over the trees and my cabin mate told about the time she said "butt sacks and nut cracks" and laughed so hard she peed all over her best skirt right before we went in to Meeting for Worship. Dominic said that he'd never really peed on himself.

After that I made visiting the cow barn a multipurpose event—I'd sit with the sheep and peer at Dominic as he shoveled old hay into a wagon. I'd stare at his hands, mostly. They were oddly delicate, roughened by hard work and looking at them left me paralyzed with embarrassment. Dominic would peek back at me through the dark and clutter. I'd always hope he couldn't see me blush. Weeks later, when the first goat twins were born, I made my first move.

"Dominic, where did you get your van from? Is that your NRA bumper sticker on the back?" He skittered over and I suddenly felt as if I had been terribly impertinent to interrupt his work. But he responded in his little reedy voice, "I got it from a dude who said he'd never been pulled over with that sticker. I dunno, I've never been pulled over either so I figure its good luck."

I really didn't know what to say to him about this but I hoped that he wouldn't walk away. "Can you remember the last time you had the hiccups?" he asked me. And then, "How do you feel about slugs?"

He was weird too. I loved it.

I took to doing chores up at the barn with him after my Peace Studies class and afterwards we'd sit in the goat pen and let the new babies climb all over us. At sunset I would find him at the edges of the cow pasture taking long drags from his cigarettes and he would tell me strange things about his life. We played a game where we hid in the long grass with the baby goats and let them dash away from us, making tiny trails through the field. In the dusk we'd follow the trails back to the barn, our fingers brushing together in the closeness of evening.

He told me he was leaving as we buried one of the first twin goats. I cried at the sight of Yula's tiny dead body curled up and cold, and I cried at the sight of Pearla without her twin. When he told me he was leaving I didn't cry because I didn't believe him. But sure enough, Dominic was gone the next day. He had left in the middle of the night, leaving behind only his handmade shoes and a note addressed to the other interns. It read:

farmers,  
it has been real.  
peace, dom

My cabin mate and I were the first to find it in his absence and we laughed together over the absurd note. I imagined him standing in the darkness of the barn with his rough spidery hands carefully printing out the words-- *it has been real.*

A secret part of me was glad that Dominic was gone. The Sunday after his disappearance I awoke before dawn and stumbled up the road to the barn, my bare feet slipping on the gravel. I hopped over electric fences and made my careful journey through the grass up to the familiar hazy morning silhouettes of the cows, lying down amongst them with their hot breath on my face and twigs in my hair, leaning against the warmth of Mary's side. With each breath of hers I was bounced upwards and I thought about how strange it was that something so big could be so gentle. As the sun rose through the trees I left my cow friends, brushing the alfalfa off my wooly sweater. I found my seat in the Meetinghouse and settled into the silence. I thought of God and the way Dominic used to say alfalfa smells of destiny.

Life went on.



I got Dominic's letter the day that the dogs dug up Yula's body. Her eye sockets were empty; her body was curled and rotting. Pearla had escaped from the barn and was bleating mournfully beside the corpse. I began to scream and didn't stop until Dorothy came down from the Ranch House and sang me Quaker songs in her wavering voice:

*When true simplicity is gained,  
To bow and to bend we will not be ashamed,  
To turn and to turn it will be our delight  
til by turning, turning we come 'round right.*

When I had calmed down I clutched Pearla to my chest and opened Dominic's letter with trembling hands. It said simply, "I love you, I had to leave." I thought of God again and of alfalfa smelling like destiny and as we reburied Yula. I thought to myself quite seriously perhaps God is just *alfalfa*. ▲



# G A M B L E

BY IAN JONES

F I R S T

All hands on deck. The hands say nay. They will go their own way. The captain will yell, tip-top of his lungs, commanding, pleading, questioning. They say nay. The ship will find its way. Each has his method; this will suffice. It is the effort, after all. The ship knows this, hands say. The captain knows otherwise, but he is mutinied against. He wanders the decks observing chaos. One man is cleaning portholes with filth he found in the head; one man is scrubbing the brig's iron with an excellent vintage; the priest is fucking a hole in the hull and calling it scripture.

S E C O N D

The trees turn and face the barren one, asking why she yields no fruit. She explains the fruit she once bore does not win her anything in return for her yielding it, and so she has stopped the growing. Her bark, she says, is more lucrative, and so she has implemented production of more than she requires, and she sells off the excess. The other trees did not perceive their fruit as worthless but they presently adopt the wisdom of their sister. Each is driven to find a part of the self that is valued so that he may commence production and make for himself a happy life. In this way many years go by. The trees, if one can call them trees still, cannot see each other now. They call out, and though they stand but a little ways from one another, their cries reverberate into the forest and stick to nothing. They have become odd, misshapen, and most of them no longer bear fruit.



ART // DENIS VICTOROV

T H I R D

Here, do not fasten it that way, it will not work. Give it to me, I have been hunting a long time. He gives it to her and she shows him the way it is done. She is right. He takes it back; they prepare to hunt. An unsuccessful shot; an escaped creature. Do not draw your arrow that way, let me show you. I have been hunting a long time. Tenderly she corrects his method, and he learns the way to do it. She is right. They continue through the woods. Eventually he sticks a beast. They will dine tonight. Camp is damp, dew on the ground, the wood is wet. Some drier stuff is required. They search around, gathering what they can. Do not pick those, here, pick these instead. I have been in these woods a long while. He corrects his picking and they continue, tinder and logs gathered for the flame. She is right about the logs. He takes his knife, contemplating the steps, forgets one or two. It goes here, see? That's the way to avoid a mess. I have been hunting a long time. He adds the steps he glossed over in hazy forgetfulness, completing a show she is proud of. They wait and turn and stoke and turn and wait. They eat. The light dims, and the time has come to rest.

# THE MIDGET AND THE MISANTHROPE

BY JONATHAN MOENS

Davis glanced over at the seats next to him and read the labels: Vanda Haines and Theo Brown. He scanned his memory for their potential faces. He found a match. Not good. Theo and Vanda were exactly the kinds of people he actively tried to avoid in his life; they were people who imposed themselves with all their self-righteous bourgeois manners—expecting nothing in return. He wondered why he had attended the event in the first place. Of course he knew—it was expected of him, but he failed to see this as a justification for having to endure it all.

Knowing that he had nowhere to escape, he comforted himself with the thought that an open-bar would be available for him all evening. Yes, that's what he would do. He would retreat to the bar like a bear to its cave, and drown himself with whiskey. He had recently taken a liking for the stuff; it had the delightful capacity to muffle all unnecessary noises around him, so that even his own voice was hushed to a mere whisper.

More and more people flooded the room. Some had hats, some had canes, and others wore velvet coats embroidered with expensive jewels. He knew this view too well—and not once did it fail to amuse him. It was so blatantly clear to Davis that the entire situation was nothing more than a theatrical performance; they were all playing a big phony game. Everyone here was boring. Everyone here knew that they themselves were Goddamn boring. And it was in order to deceive each other into believing they are in fact mildly interesting that they wore these superfluous accessories. Davis looked away.

The bartender began preparing drinks; it was the cue Davis had been waiting for. He ordered a double whiskey, no ice. Downed it and ordered another two. Then another. He continued at this pace until his mind went so numb he felt himself slipping out of his body. From then on, the night lost its flow. It no longer followed the physical laws of nature, with one event

following another; rather, it became fragmented, broken, and lacking all measure of time and space. He remembers enjoying—to his great surprise—a profound discussion with Theo about philosophy or politics, only to find himself crouched on the floor swiping his hands over a pool of red wine. He vaguely recalls cornering a waitress with words he himself thought were crude and demeaning. And it was only when his resentment for the people at the party got the better of him—when he brutally slandered a lady for wearing fox-fur, that he was finally dragged out of the building and thrown onto the streets. Not having the energy to fight or think, Davis threw himself onto a curb and let his body melt into the asphalt floor.

A few hours later, Davis found himself woken up by a sudden violent convulsion. His body shook and his eyes trembled like shutters during a rainstorm. It was as though some higher presence had forced him out of his sleep, demanding his attention. He looked around, expecting to see a face, but as he did so, he was reminded of how outrageously drunk he still was: his brain throbbed and the faint taste of vomit lingered at the back of his throat. 'Fuck' he muttered. 'Ah, it's not so bad' he heard himself reply. 'You've been in worse. Much worse. In fact, this is the best I've seen you in a long while.' At this point Davis's mind switched. Even in this drunken state, he knew himself all too well to recognise this positivity as his own; the voice had to be someone else's. He strained his mind and ears and estimated that the voice came from somewhere ahead. He raised his head to find himself looking at a small, red-brown figure.

'What?'

'Look Davis, I'm not the kind of person who talks for talking-sake. I'm here to sort you out. I'll get you right out of this mess.'

Davis was confused. After all, he had never spoken to a midget before. He would never have imagined that such a

piercing voice could have come out of such a small body.

‘Now Davis, all we have to do is to come to some agreement. You and I—an agreement, yes?’

Davis was far too drunk to follow. Besides, he was distracted. Something about the midget’s saffron coloured jacket captivated him intensely.

‘Ok Davis, I’ll get straight to the point. No need to beat around the bush’ The midget straightened his jacket and said ‘Davis, you’re going to have to die.’ ‘The way you lead your life, Davis, it’s not the way one ought to. You might as well be dead.’

Davis’s eyes moved away from his coat and up to the midget’s face. His vision was blurred, but he could tell from the sharpness of his jowls that this was a man.

‘You see, Davis, you’re a burden to us all—to humanity that is. You’re a weight on our shoulders and we no longer have the strength to hold you on for much longer. We need to let you go. Of course, we would prefer that you stay with us. You are, after all, a human being, and all human beings are to be admired. They are the quintessential species. But, you see, it is exactly for this reason that we need to let you go. Don’t you understand?’

Davis was so caught up by the humble tone of the midget’s voice that he instantly nodded.

‘You’re a smart guy Davis. I’m just reiterating what you already know. This is the only way forward! Just listen to what science says, to what evolution is telling us—it’s all pointing in the same direction! You, Davis, a man of science, a man of reason, a virtuous man, you, of all people, should know that this is the moral thing to do. Humanity can only progress by getting rid of the weak and replacing them with the strong.’ He paused for a beat. ‘That is why the old die: to give space for the youth. Can’t you see Davis? There is a grand scheme to all this. There is a purpose. Let yourself be a part of this purpose.’

The midget paused to gasp for air then, abruptly

‘Wait a second. I’ve just realised something. I’ve just realised that you probably don’t even know what your problem actually is. How silly of me to assume you understood. Look Davis, let me put it this way. There are two kinds of misery in this world. There is the kind a human can and will rebel against; and there is the kind a human has no intention of rebelling against. Your misery, Davis, is of the latter sort. You have gone too far; you have folded into yourself to such a great extent that you, Davis, have befriended Misery.’

Davis grew cold and shivered slightly. Something inside him was beginning to stir; some delicate chord within him had been strung. His mind was a blank; and yet, there was something about the individual words the midget had chosen that wedged themselves deep into his mind. The words ‘worthless, misery, rebel’ all swam in a pool of consciousness. He began reciting the words.

The midget looked at Davis attentively and seemed to have picked up on something.

‘You are beginning to make sense of this, Davis. That’s very good.’ The midget now placed his hand on Davis’s shoulder. ‘Now, how about it—what do you say?’

Davis ignored him entirely. He was too engrossed by the recital of the words and too confused as to the reality of the

situation to pay any attention to the midget.

‘Worthless, misery, weak, science, ...’

Observing what now appeared to be a metaphysical ritual, the midget’s eyes brightened. He knew exactly what the situation required; he knew exactly what he had to say next.

‘Davis’ he started ‘what do you want more than anything?’

There was no response.

The midget insisted, ‘Davis. Focus. What is it that you want, that you crave, that you would do anything for, that you would even—’ He stopped himself from finishing off his sentence.

At the sound of this, Davis’s mental recital slowly began to fade. The words that had appeared to him became increasingly less real, until they no longer denoted anything. Soon his mind was emptied of all its content. And just as nothingness had enveloped him, a single, ominous thought entered the room of his mind—unannounced and unperturbed. Davis collected himself and spoke.

“I want to disappear.”

▲▲▲

The following morning, Davis lay on his bedroom floor. He showed no sign of being alive. A cool stream of air filled the room and touched the whites of his eyes; they gradually moistened. The look on his face was a peculiar one. In fact, it seems inaccurate to refer to it as a look at all; for what we saw wasn’t so much the face of a man actively visualising the world around him, but rather a gaze that was so blindly unaware of his own presence and of the objects around him that the only sensible conclusion to be drawn would be that he was dead. But Davis was not dead; he was simply engrossed in a thought.▲





ART//CORINNA ZANOLINI

# FLAG CAKE

BY TREVOR CROWN

Before July 4th of his sixteenth year, the boy had never tasted wine, had only ever sipped stagnant beer from near-empty bottles left out overnight by his uncles at Thanksgiving. But the shine and shape of green glass stopped him in the Martin family laundry room, where his mother had sent him away from the party to retrieve sunscreen for the swimming children. He held up the merlot bottle by its barrel like Christ at the first miracle and locked the door behind him.



“It’s recording? No, that’s fine. Alright. I don’t remember the entire setup of the confession paper ordeal. From its inception, the whole exercise felt a bit Catholic to me, but like I said, I was only an intern during the summer. Jeff was High School Ministry Director and so it was his call, and the paper idea corresponded to a message he had planned for that night. It had to do with bringing all of yourself before God, hiding nothing from Him. It was a strong message and the kids seemed to respond well, a few of them even crying through the final worship set. They had been told to make their way up to the front of the room during that set—only, of course, if they felt convicted to do so—and write on slips of paper the sins that were burdening them, to crumple up the papers and leave them at the foot of the big plankwood cross we had next to the stage. That was another way we could tell that the message had hit home, aside from the crying—just about every kid in the room crumpled up his or her own personal sins and threw them down there, some with real vigor. They seemed to pick up on the symbolism of the whole thing without too much difficulty. Anyway, while

the kids’ parents were coming to take them home or drive them to the after-event (likely at the smoothie place down the street that night), Jeff asked me if I could start tearing down the stage and the props like we did every Sunday after service. But this week, the other intern, Julie, was gone (I think either at a family reunion or a women’s conference), and so I had the room to myself while Jeff dealt with parents out front. I went immediately to the papers. I made a basket with the front of my sweatshirt and put them in one by one. Before dumping them in the back hallway trashcan, I picked out one for myself. One, I thought. Only one. It said, ‘I lied to my sister about scratching her CD,’ or something to that effect. And I guess I wasn’t satisfied with that, so I reached in for another.”



At arm’s length the boy held two lit sparklers spewing neon streams, pink and green. He painted rings on the damp air, branding his blurred vision. Barefoot, barebacked and itching from the dry hill-grass atop which he’d watched the fireworks, he stalled the line for one of two tiki torches in the Martin backyard. Soon everyone in the yard would hold lit sparklers. Magnificent, he thought. Magnificent lights.

“Are you alright?” asked his younger brother.



“The Claire Redding thing had brought a lot of new kids into the group that summer. Likely the tragedy made a lot of parents think twice about where their kids were, spiritually, and it goes without saying that Sunday church has the appeal



ART // LESLIE ZHANG

of something to attend as a family, together. I remember the morning when my mom put down the newspaper and told me what had happened, turning her lower lip down in this sad look she does whenever she feels really bad for somebody. The look itself has always kind of made me squirm, because it just means she really wants me to be sad for that person with her, and most of the time that doesn't help anyone, I think. She kept talking about how unfair it was, the hit-and-run. Anyway I noticed that it was the Times she was reading, and not the Otter, and so I wondered what made it different than other local tragedies. Of course, as it turned out, Claire Redding was this beautiful interesting girl with a lot of potential. She'd been captain of the track team as a junior, a member of a bunch of clubs on campus, and by all accounts a really likeable person. The picture of her they used for the Times story was from her Junior Prom, her and her date standing out in front of a nice house. I wondered what it must have felt like to be that boy and to see that picture now. But the point is that when I opened that second or third crumpled confession paper—I honestly can't remember whether it was two or three that I read, not that it really even matters—but when I opened that last paper, I recognized the name immediately, Claire Redding. Just the name, written out. Nothing else."

▲▲▲

He thrust the sparklers skyward with abandon, bounding the length of the lawn. Mothers laughed from the back porch, unable to see his eyes. But he meant every movement. Mean every movement, he thought. From now on.

He wished only that his younger brother would take to motion as well, instead of standing with his hands on his hips beside the porch.

"Are you drunk?" his brother asked.

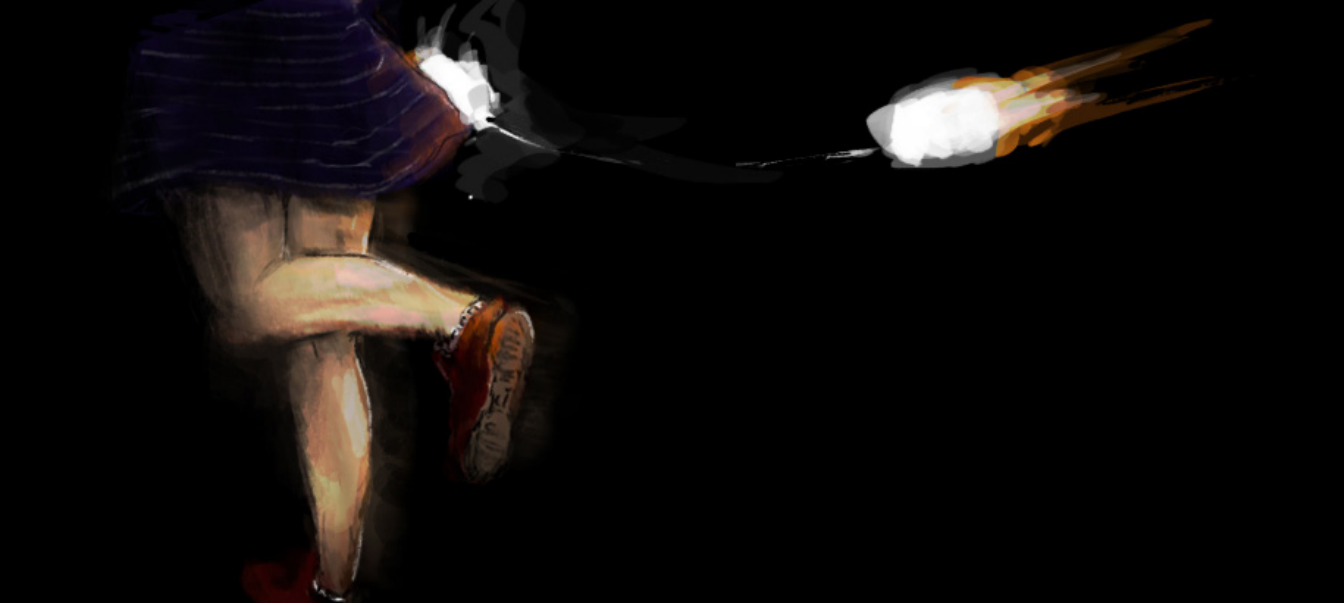
He smiled, shouting, "You ask the wrong questions!"

But the mothers had ceased laughing, and he realized upon slowing that all of the younger children had stopped playing to watch him. It ruined him to see them so concerned, limp hands about their waists still holding lit sparklers. He dropped his in the water bucket at the center of the lawn and slunk up the porch steps.

He interrupted his mother's conversation to tell her that he had left his towel in the car, and she handed him her keys. "Is everything okay?" she asked.

▲▲▲

"And I remember the way it looked on the confession



paper, messy. You could tell by the handwriting that it wasn't a girl's. And again, I don't know if this will help you at all, but there were only maybe ten or twelve boys there at the service that night, and probably four of those weren't even old enough to drive. We have a sign-in sheet from the service. Maybe talk to all of the boys or talk to the girls too just in case, but I honestly don't think it could've been the writing of a girl. Then again I guess if you were going to write something that dangerous on a confession paper, you might try to disguise your handwriting, even if you were pretty sure no one would read it. Again, obviously they were told that no one would read it. And I honestly did feel bad about it. As soon as I read it I felt bad. But the more I thought about it, I knew that I shouldn't feel guilty, because I might be able to do some real good with it, by hopefully helping you out with the information."



The road appeared harshly lit before him in his mother's truck, and he checked more than once to make sure that the hi-beams were off. He eyed mirrors compulsively, turned on blinkers one hundred yards before turns, and stopped truly at the stop sign on Vern and Maynard before proceeding.

The passion had left him, replaced by an urgent shame and the fear that he had spoiled something permanent by drinking himself reckless at an annual party he had once attended in floaties. For the time being, his mother and brothers would not know that he was gone, and when he got home, he would sit in his bedroom with the television on. There he would smile at the temporary nature of guilt when compared the permanence of home. Then, after a show or two, he would return to the Martin house and eat flag cake, because he would have his stomach back.

Her body could have been a pile of bags in the road and so it was not until he made out a visibly human haircut that he wrenched the wheel to the right and smashed onto the curb of Maynard near the elementary school. He had narrowly missed her and the truck thundered and creaked as he braked, right wheels on the sidewalk and left on the pavement. He left it there, parked in a tilt as if for an auto show display.

Her hair was blond and when he shook her she did not move. He turned her over and recognized her, beautiful even in the dark and through the blood and broken teeth. They had never spoken in either of the classes that they shared. She wore a striped sundress.

"Claire," he said, kneeling. "Your name's Claire."

When his bare knee came down in liquid beside her, he knew that she could not hear him. Still he shook her.

"Claire," he said. "Claire, what happened?"

He continued to say her name as he felt for life in her. He closed his eyes and prayed without knowing what for, prayed to her and hoped that God would overhear. And when God finally spoke, He only said, I am sorry too. And the boy nodded, certain for the first time that He meant it.

Feeling for his phone through the outside of his pocket, the boy looked about as the first emergency responders would when they arrived. He saw a car near-wrecked on the curb, a dead girl in the street, and a barefoot drunken boy standing over her, and so he did not dial a number. But they'd be right, he thought. Because I'm no better than whoever left her here. He held both of her hands before rising to go.

Cake had already been served at the Martin house. When the boy's mother said he looked pale, he began to cry. "I'm drunk," he said. She called him honey and hugged him but made him swear to hide it from his younger brothers. He agreed to it, though nothing felt temporary anymore. ▲

# BLAST!

## TRADITIONAL ART

by ALISON VAN HOUTEN

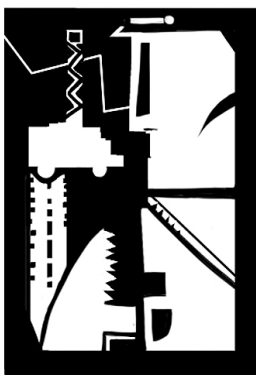
In his influential essay, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” Walter Benjamin argued, “That which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art” (p. 3). Benjamin proposed that facsimiles lack the authority of the original piece of art. However, the introduction of new techniques of mechanical reproduction (printing, for instance) has historically enabled new types of art that were not practical before. New technology allowed art to be disseminated more freely, and gave birth to a modern medium, the magazine, the rising popularity of which gave artists an increasingly accessible avenue for publicizing their work. Art publications such as Wyndham Lewis’s Vorticist magazine *Blast* were intended to be reproduced, and not only for publicity. Each copy of the magazine was another facet of an original piece of art itself, rather than an inauthentic copy. The combination of the visual features and the literary content within *Blast*, including poetry and stories, render each edition a composite work of art. Every physical copy of *Blast* is a multi-media art object that makes an aesthetic statement about Vorticism, an early subset of modernist literature and visual art during the 1910s Famous for defying categorization, Vorticism was characterized by its rejection of traditional forms and its embrace of abstraction.

At first sight, *Blast* is certainly an unconventional magazine, especially for the era in which it was published. The cover of the first issue is perhaps the most blatant instance of the publication’s presentation as a piece of art in its own right, rather than merely a periodical concerning such things. The hot pink cover, “something between magenta and lavender, about the colour of a sick headache” (Morrison), is emblazoned only with a black “BLAST” in bold capital

letters. The colour choice, paired with such an unabashed expletive, was shocking and thought to be perverse by many. Contrary to the concept of a traditional cover, *Blast*’s cover is only vaguely informative, listing a single, ambiguous (and offensive) word as its title. It offers no transparent description of the work it contains or even any indication of what it is. *Blast* does not initiate itself as a logical review of artwork, or an introduction to a relatively obscure branch of modernist art. Instead, the ostentatious design of the cover is a dramatic statement— it is a visual manifesto for the textual manifesto to be found within.

While many of the pieces in *Blast* are undeniably textual, even the text is presented in a visual manner. Much of the text in the magazine is meant to be seen and not just read; the words are laid out in such a way as to make a visual statement as well as a literary one. Their denotations are the same no matter how they are written, but their connotations depend on how they appear on the page. The form of the text informs its meaning by manipulating the way the reader sees the words. For example, text in all capital letters is frequent in *Blast*. This method, echoing the cover of the first issue, is an aesthetic choice. Capital lettering grabs the reader’s attention and reflect one of *Blast*’s major goals— the aggressive introduction of Vorticism to the world. The bold type does this, and it also serves an aesthetic purpose in reflecting the avant-garde Vorticist spirit. Without even reading the text, the audience can see that orthodox rules of grammar and punctuation have little hold on the Vorticists. This disdain for tradition carries over into the unconventionality of their artwork.

“Enemy of the Stars” is an interesting example of form versus function. Wyndham Lewis’s play shows that form will be as great a priority as content in the literature of *Blast*. “My literary contemporaries I looked upon as too bookish and not keeping pace with the visual revolution,” says Lewis. “A kind of play, ‘The Enemy of the Stars’..was my attempt to show them the way. It became evident to me at



once, however, when I started to write a novel, that words and syntax were not susceptible of transformation into abstract terms, to which process the visual arts lent themselves quite readily” (p. 129). The introduction to the play is especially important for its aesthetic qualities—despite being a text, it emphasizes the visual rather than the textual. The words are printed in bold capital letters, in various blocks of text that seem to be positioned only for aesthetic reasons. Thick black lines both underscore phrases and cut vertically between sections of type to emphasize and separate certain sections. The effect of the words is visual rather than literary; the stage directions become a piece of print art rather than a text that relies on the reader to understand the words.

In making a text visual, Lewis rectifies the contradiction of reading a play, an art form that is inherently out of place on the page. A play is naturally a visual art form meant to be performed, not read. Thus, the oddity of reading a performance makes the script a perfect medium for the Vorticist project. Visualizing text, in this case, actually resolves an apparent contradiction. As *Manifesto I* in *Blast 1* states, “We start from opposite statements of a chosen world. Set up violent structure of adolescent clearness between two extremes” (p. 30). The Vorticists sought to find the truth within the contradictory, and that is exactly what Lewis does in this play. Although it is widely regarded as practically incoherent, Lewis succeeds in his own work because he portrays the incomprehensibility of translating the visual nature of a play onto the page. He expresses the absurdity of reading a play by writing one that is unperformable. “*Enemy of the Stars*” uses the aforementioned block capitals, for instance, in its stage directions to emphasize their own impossibility. Stage directions by nature are supposed to be performable, so Lewis draws special attention to his directions, which would of course be impossible to enact on stage. This celebration of contradiction is a tenet of Vorticism.

Pound’s poem “*Fratres Minores*” is another unusual example of how visual choices affect the literature in *Blast*. The first line of the poem (“With minds still hovering above their testicles”) has been blacked out, as well as the penultimate and final lines (“That the twitching of three abdominal nerves /Is incapable of producing a lasting Nirvana.”) (*BLAST 1*, p. 48). This act of censorship on behalf of Lewis’s publisher adds an intriguing visual dimension. If one had never known that lines were deleted from the poem, the reader would be naively content. But when the reader sees the lines blacked out, he or she instinctively wants to know what lies underneath. Publishing the poem with visual evidence of editing transforms it from a solely textual piece of art into a visual statement about censorship in which the line dividing visual and textual art is blurred.

The stylistic choices of the magazine make an aesthetic statement about what the Vorticist movement is. *Blast*, “whose portentous dimensions, and violent tint did more than would a score of exhibitions to make the public feel

that something was happening” (Wyndham p. 125), was meant to focus the public attention on Vorticism, and what better way to do that than to exhibit Vorticism itself? Rather than letting words alone explain the movement, *Blast* also employs the visual tactics of the illustrations, as well as the stylistic features of the texts, to model itself as a legitimate piece of Vorticist artwork. In this way, *Blast* is able to

ingeniously encapsulate a manifesto in an exemplary piece of what that manifesto is meant to promote.

While the aesthetic features of *Blast* were certainly unconventional, it is the magazine’s composite nature that really makes it unique. Each of the pieces within *Blast* is, of course, an individual work of art, but all of the individual pieces are also subsumed in a singular piece of art, the magazine itself. The visual art is arranged in such a way as to enhance the pieces that surround it. Many pictures are illustrations for a particular piece of literature, such as



Lewis’s “*Enemy of the Stars*” (*BLAST 1* p. viiia), an illustration for the eponymous play. Each part is a vital component of the whole that informs the meaning of every other part. Of course, the magazine would still exist without certain pieces, but the meaning could change drastically. Wadsworth’s “*March*” (*BLAST 1* p. 55), for instance, is an abstract drawing. In the context of *Blast*, which is largely concerned with war, the picture can be seen to depict soldiers marching, perhaps an omen of death. But without that context, one might just as easily interpret the shapes as leaves alluding to the month of March. Instead of an image about war, it then becomes a representation of rebirth. In the same way, the various literary contributions within *Blast* might have different meanings in different contexts. Of course, the different pieces can and will be read out of order and with no regard for one another. But in presenting them in a certain light, the producers of *Blast* can offer contextualisation for each piece, and hint at their intentions.

War was a major influence on Vorticism, especially in terms of the concept of destruction. The two issues of *Blast* can almost be viewed as before and after perspectives on the matter. Though the Vorticists had initially been so casual in dishing out advice about destroying that which was deemed bad in the first edition (the infamous “*Blast*” lists), *Blast 2* was faced with the consequences of real-life destruction in wake of the commencement of World War I. *Blast 2* had a more sober attitude as it was forced to re-evaluate its pugnacious tendencies in light of events that hit close to home, such as the untimely death of Gaudier-Brezska in June 1915, just prior to its release.

The war may have also been a large factor in deciding to publicise Vorticism via magazine. The impending war created circumstances of imminent destruction, and not only in terms of physical wreckage but in terms of the looming

threat of cultural devastation as well. This ominous state has a subtext of necessary rebuilding, and subconsciously inspires artistic proliferation as a measure of protection against destruction. Mechanically reproducing art such as Blast would have been a preventative means of protecting art from destruction—had some, or even most, of the issues been destroyed, there would still remain some from initial printing. A mass-produced medium like the magazine decreases the likelihood of its complete obliteration with every issue printed. And so, mass-produced periodicals are a fitting medium with which to discuss war because they themselves are a product of impending ruin. Thus, the presentiment of war gave rise to both the content and the medium of Blast.

Despite the fact that the Vorticists rejected Futurism (“Futurism is the disgoring spray of a vortex with no drive behind it”) (BLAST 1 p. 39), they embraced machinery because it was a medium in which they could embody their ideals more so than in any other. “Machinery is the greatest Earth-medium: incidentally it sweeps away the doctrines of a narrow and pedantic Realism at one stroke” (BLAST 1 p. 39), they proclaimed. In embracing mechanical reproduction as an artistic medium, the Vorticists were able to create and distribute authentic Vorticist art. In fact, the distribution of Blast can even be considered a type of performance art—in disseminating Blast, the Vorticists were acting out the Vorticist ideal of making art for everyone and attempting to actually reach a less elite audience by means of authenticity (I will come to this shortly).

Interestingly, each image in Blast is a reproduction, a fact Benjamin might have found troubling. But the nature of the images lends to their being reproduced in an authentic manner. Many of the images within the pages of Blast are prints, made from woodcuts or other printing methods. Even the paintings that are reproduced in Blast lose little of their effect when reproduced, because they are in styles more reliant on their geometry than paintbrush strokes. This is no coincidence—these mediums are meant to be reproduced. The very nature of printing as an art form is repeated reproduction from a master stamp. But it is the print, not the engraving itself, which is considered to be the work of art. In the same way, the copies of Blast are each a work of print art,

multitudinous but no less authentic for it.

Benjamin posits that an authentic work of art has an “aura,” an element of authenticity that is eliminated in subsequent reproductions of the original. “This [unique existence] includes the changes which it may have suffered in physical condition over the years as well as the various changes in its ownership... The presence of the original is the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity” (p. 3). However, multiplication does not negate the authenticity of a work when it is meant to exist in many different copies. Each copy of Blast retains its aura because it was created specifically as a reproduction. Everything from the text to the illustrations lends the artwork to authentic reproduction. Blast’s format crucially allows each copy to retain its authenticity while simultaneously being widely disseminated. Benjamin’s argument that “technical reproduction can put the copy of the original into situations which would be out of reach for the original itself” (p. 3) assumes that a technical reproduction is necessarily inauthentic. That aside, the basic logic of this idea follows—mechanical reproduction widens a given work’s audience.

This technique allowed the Vorticists to fulfil one of their main goals: reaching everyone with their art. The usefulness of the magazine as a medium made it apparent to the viewer that Blast was being marketed to a wide audience. Without reading a line of the content, a reader could see a demonstration of the Vorticist ideal of widespread propagation. In choosing to circulate Vorticist ideals as a magazine, Lewis was quite literally demonstrating one of the tenets of Vorticism. Blast does not profess to cater to the poor, but rather to the individual, regardless of class. “Blast will be popular, essentially. It will not appeal to any particular class, but to the fundamental and popular instincts in every class and description of people, TO THE INDIVIDUAL. The moment a man feels or realizes himself as an artist, he ceases to belong to any milieu or time. Blast is created for this timeless fundamental Artist that exists in everybody” (BLAST 1 p. 7). In making each issue a work of art in its own right, the creators of Blast were able to bring an authentic piece of artwork to every individual who came across a copy of the magazine. ▲

*(Continued online at [www.thecatalystscb.com](http://www.thecatalystscb.com))*



Winner of the 2014 Frost Memorial Award

# THE PARANOID AND THE SENSITIVE: Navigating Structural Punning in *The Crying of Lot 49*

by TRISTAN DENTON

In as much as his novel can be said to be about any one thing, Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* is about interpreting and navigating the signs, the "hieroglyphic streets," which constitute its world (Pynchon 150). Through the novel's organizing sign, the Tristero, meanings of its world proliferate and expand. By maintaining the focus of the novel's quest narrative on learning "the direct, epileptic Word" through which meanings proliferate, Pynchon's novel can be seen as organized through linguistic means (95). Specifically, the pun, at a narrative level, both engenders the proliferation of meanings and order within the novel's sign systems and drives its narrative. In navigating its punning structure, Pynchon's text establishes contrasting modes with which to interpret pun through the figure of the paranoid, Oedipa Maas, and her counterpoint in Nefastis's sensitive, Mucho Maas, each with its own interpretive shortcoming.

For the purposes of this paper, a pun can be defined as a linguistic construction whereby connections or new meanings are made between words based on their resemblance to one another. That is, there is no inherent, linguistic meaning in a pun. Meaning is not attained from sets of punning words through a similarity in definitions, but a similarity in appearance or sound. For example, the name Wendell "Mucho" Maas is almost certainly a pun derived from the similarity in sound between Maas and más. While there is no explicit connection between the character's name and the Spanish word for more, the resemblance in appearance between the seemingly unrelated words nevertheless gives rise to the full pun, Mucho Maas: much more. In this way, puns indicate a dimension of meaning beyond the obvious, and give words a power of multiplicity, grounded in a system of meaning not governed by words' strict definition, but by their resemblances.

The linguistic connection between disparate entities based on the connections of resemblance, engendered by punning, organizes *The Crying of Lot 49* at a narrative level as well. The elements of narrative punning that drive the novel can be seen from the point at which Oedipa is inaugurated into her quest for the novel's central narrative puns, the Tristero and the W.A.S.T.E. system:

It got seriously underway... with the letter from Mucho... It may have been an intuition that the letter would be newsless inside that made Oedipa look more closely at its outside... At first she didn't see a blurb put on by the government, Report All Obscene Mail To Your Potmaster...

"So they make misprints," Metzger said, "Let them.

As long as they're careful about not pressing the wrong button..." (32-33).

While not necessarily a pun, this passage introduces the punning aspect of the W.A.S.T.E. system, in that the letter, like the word that is punned on, indicates an alternate or unauthorized meaning through its external appearance. Specifically, the word Potmaster, alerts Oedipa to the possibility of alternate meanings. To determine what this corruption of language means, then, depends on whether or not it is intentional. While the anxiety over the intentionality of punning signs plays out in Oedipa's quest throughout the novel, here it is externalized in dialogue. If intentional, this corruption points to a system that works outside of the established system of delivering linguistic information, akin to a pun. If the corruption is accidental, a misprint, then it is only important in that it happens to look like an expected word; an alternate meaning is not existent. This passage, while not necessarily a pun, indicates the linguistic and narrative character of the pun: connections between signs are not inherently meaningful, but by virtue of appearance, specifically resemblance, they point to the possibility of some kind of order beyond the generally accepted. Molly Hite echoes the importance of resemblance in her own writing on Pynchon's language: "emphasis on an overall system of formal relations... calls attention to the importance of resemblance as a structural principle in Pynchon's novels" (40). Resemblance, merely hinted at in the above passage, recurs more explicitly through narrative pun in ways that affirm Hite's assertion as the novel progresses.

The novel's central narrative pun, the Tristero, works to guide the novel by creating a multitude of conflicting ideas of order and meaning. This proliferation of order and meaning through narrative pun can be seen directly preceding Oedipa's night in San Francisco, as the text describes Nefastis's connection of informational and thermodynamic entropy through Maxwell's Demon, "For John Nefastis... happened, say by coincidence, to look alike... he had made mere coincidence respectable, with the help of Maxwell's Demon. Now here was Oedipa, faced with a metaphor of God knew how many parts... With coincidences blossoming these days wherever she looked, she had nothing but a sound, a word, Tristero, to hold them together" (87). While here a metaphor is explicitly invoked, Maureen Quilligan suggests, "Puns... in *Crying of Lot 49*, ground the book's structure in polysemy rather than in a parallel system of metaphors" (98). This argument seems to hold; the Tristero, as described



above, does not function like a metaphor. If Tristero here functions as a metaphor, it is for an analogous system of order, Maxwell's demon. The Tristero, like Maxwell's Demon, is a point at which the disparate elements of the novel's world are yoked together by the repetition of the same sign, rather than any analogous definition. Here specifically, Maxwell's Demon literalizes the resemblance between the equations for thermodynamic and informational entropy. Despite the connection of the novel's world on a broader scale through the narrative pun of the Tristero, though, conflicting ideas of order and meaning arise through what Molly Hite terms "an unavailable referent" (32). That is, despite the given facts of its historical legacy, the Word or object that the Tristero puns on is missing. As a result, this narrative pun indicates an order beyond "linear causality" and uses "the double meanings of word play to imply an unsaid world of significance" (Hinds 25, Palmeri 985). Determining meaning in this unsaid world, however, is left up to interpretation, a task for which Pynchon establishes contrasting and seemingly irreconcilable modes.

Through the character Oedipa Maas, Pynchon's novel establishes the paranoid interpretive mode, which insists on finding a singular and unifying meaning of its puns, either as part of a connected and intentional order, or as entirely unconnected details. From early on, the novel establishes these concerns, as Oedipa's quest is figured as a search for "pulsing, stelliferous Meaning" (64). This need for an all-encompassing, capital-M meaning of the narrative pun of the Tristero further complicates the process of deriving meaning in the lines, "Under the symbol she'd copied off the latrine wall of The Scope...she wrote Shall I project a World? If not project then at least flash some arrow on the dome to skitter among constellations and trace out your Dragon, Whale, Southern Cross" (64-65). This metaphor of deriving meaning from the recurring sign of the Tristero confirms its status as a pun. Meaning in this metaphorical starry sky is pun-like, in that meaning derived from constellations is a matter of resemblance to other recognized signs. In this metaphor, then, the star puns cannot cohere, and so the troubling symbol does not cohere. For the paranoid, then, this incoherence suggests a scenario in which, "relations are imaginary...the quest reveals nothing but a desire to discern connections among a random assembly of wholly unrelated details" (Hite 15). Alternately, the novel asserts the possibility that, for the paranoid, coherence of the Tristero's pun is equally problematic. The novel's metadrama, *The Courier's Tragedy*, contains the couplet that initiates Oedipa's interest in the Tristero. This couplet, "No hallowed skein of stars can ward, I trow, / Who's once been set his tryst with Trysterio," seems to presuppose the all-encompassing nature of the Tristero (58). That is, the couplet suggests the horror of total coherence by setting the order of the universe, "[the] hallowed skein of stars" against the order imposed by Trysterio. If the supposed order of the universe cannot ward (read: guard) against the order imposed by Tristero, then it suggests Tristero imposes its own all-encompassing order. Underscoring the unease of the paranoid at the possibility

of coherence, Edward Mendelson writes, in regard to the linguistic puns of its name, "the Trysterio is not simply a vehicle by which unseen relations are manifested. Its name hides not only the unseen (and, to the secular world, illicit) relationship of the tryst, but also the tristesse that must accompany any sense of coherence or fullness" (37). The dual, but irreconcilable, possibilities of total coherence or incoherence create their own problem for the paranoid mode.

In the paranoid mode of interpreting the puns of Pynchon's novel, the lack of a unifying meaning or order creates a problem for the paranoid. "The true paranoid... [and] the dreamer whose puns probe ancient shafts of truth all act in the same special relevance to the word, or whatever, it is the word is there, buffering, to protect us from," here, in one of the novel's most affecting scenes, the true nature of the paranoid mode is encapsulated. First, this line explicitly codifies the importance of puns to meaning making within the novel. Secondly, it seems to define the paranoid as wholly in pursuit of Molly Hite's "unavailable referent" (32). These conditions pose an inherent problem to the paranoid. Specifically, the problem created for the paranoid mode of interpretation is characterized as Oedipa quests after, "Another mode of meaning behind the obvious, or none. Either Oedipa in the orbiting ecstasy of true paranoia, or a real Tristero. For there either was some Tristero beyond the appearance of the legacy America, or there was just America and if there was just America then it seemed the only way she could continue...was as an alien, unfurrowed, assumed full circle into some paranoia" (151). Here, the problem of the paranoid mode is made manifest: the punning sign requires both the pun and what is punned on, but for the paranoid each meaning is mutually exclusive. As a necessary consequence of the narrative puns, then, the paranoid must vacillate between meaning and non-meaning, trapped in an interpretive loop. Hite informs this reading of interpretive loop, gesturing that it is a natural consequence of Pynchon's language, writing, "The absence of a definitive synthetic unity is finally...an enabling condition for language, and especially for the language of his novels" (21). This argument, that Pynchon's multifaceted and even duplicitous language means that the novel's details cannot be wholly unified, suggests a general interpretive loop whereby style engenders content and vice versa. In this context, then, the symbolic punning language of Tristero allows Oedipa to quest after a unified Tristero, whose lack of unity itself creates the conditions that drive her interpretive quest.

Through the character of Wendell "Mucho" Maas, Pynchon's novel establishes the interpretive mode of John Nefastis' "sensitive," which is driven to assimilate the proliferation of meanings engendered by the novel's puns. Nefastis' "sensitive" is positioned as a counterpoint to Oedipa's mode of interpretation, after Oedipa fails to communicate with Maxwell's Demon: "The true sensitive is the one that can share in the man's hallucinations, that's all" (86). This mode of interpretation, while never

explicitly assigned to Mucho Maas, is explained by John Nefastis as, “The sensitive must receive that staggering set of energies, and feedback something like the same quantity of information. To keep it all cycling” (84-85). Mucho’s condition, after his introduction to LSD, is described in the lines, “the world is so abundant. No end to it, baby. You’re an antenna, sending your pattern out across a million lives a night, and they’re your lives too” (118). In this clear echo of Nefastis’ description of the sensitive, the counterpoint to Oedipa’s paranoid mode of interpretation, Mucho is affirmed as representative of this mode. Validating the pun in his name, much more, the sensitive mode of interpretation is defined by the total assimilation of competing meanings, which in the paranoid mode causes an interpretive loop. While this radical openness to divergent meanings is validated in Mucho’s echo of Nefastis, it is made even clearer by the central pun occupying his nightmares. These nightmares center around “the sign. We were a member of National Automobile Dealers’ Association. N.A.D.A. Just this creaking metal sign that said nada, nada” (118). Here, Mucho is confronted by a pun with the same linguistic origin as his name, but here signifying its antithesis. It is a sign, made to mean nothing, literally an empty signifier. As the antithesis to the sensitive mode of interpretation, then, Mucho consciously, through LSD, or deterministically, if the pun in his name bears out, chooses a mode of interpretation that must require assimilating a harmonic proliferation of meanings, rather attaining a unified meaning.

In Pynchon’s novel the sensitive mode of interpreting the novel’s puns is problematic because it suggests that this mode of interpretation may actually prevent attaining any meaning at all. While free from the interpretive loop of the paranoid, the sensitive mode may fall short as a consequence of its indiscrete assimilation of meaning. This shortcoming can be seen in these lines, “they’re calling him the Brothers N. He’s losing his identity...Day by day, Wendell is less himself and more generic.... He’s a walking assembly of a man” (115). Taken with Mucho Maas’s insistence that, “I can do...Spectrum analysis in my head. I can break down... words...into all the basic frequencies and harmonics...each pure tone,” the novel seems to suggest that the sensitive mode of interpretation entails a dissection of the world to a point beyond meaning. Though he professes to take in all the constituent parts of a word, the sensitive’s apprehension of “pure tone” is without inherent meaning; it is pure sound. Where in the case of the paranoid, sound resemblance engenders a proliferation of meanings, the sensitive mode is so focused on sound that it misses any possibility of obvious or hidden meaning. It suggests that the resemblance of sounds, as in a pun, is no more meaningful than sound itself. Frank Palmeri, arguing that Pynchon’s novel reads as an exploration of paradigmatic crisis argues, “[the author] uses puns, as he uses entropy, to think about paradigms rather than within them, and to signal our position between inaccessible fullness and profane emptiness of meaning” (985). If, to take Palmeri’s argument, and juxtapose the paranoid and

sensitive modes of interpretation as competing paradigms working within the ambiguity allowed by punning, then the sensitive mode can be seen as modeling a paradigm of “profane emptiness”. This comically hyperanalytical mode of interpretation, then, serves as a counterpoint to Oedipa’s paranoid mode, in that it establishes a point where relations of resemblance are entirely obscured by overanalysis to the extent that signs lose the power of even coincidental signification.

As the narrative draws towards an apocalyptic ending that never comes, Pynchon’s language refuses to cede to the demands of conventionally organized linguistic meaning, but neither does it fully affirm either interpretive mode. Oedipa comes as close to finality as she is allowed, enumerating four mutually exclusive options that she can derive from her paranoid worldview: “Either you have stumbled...onto a network by which X number of Americans are truly communicating...a real alternative to the exitlessness...Or you are hallucinating it. Or a plot has been mounted against you...Or you are fantasizing some such plot” (Pynchon 140-141). Mucho, in turn, drops out of the narrative entirely, another of the men Oedipa lost through the course of the novel. A disappearance that to her signifies “they,” presumably Tristero, “got rid of...Mucho” (133). Or, as the true sensitive, the novel seems to suggest, that he is irreparably dissipated into the “spectra” of meaning that dominate this interpretive mode (116). All the same, though the novel ends fatefully poised between absolute meaning and absolute meaninglessness, harmonious spectra of meaning and the divergent frequencies of informational noise, it also suggests that either interpretive approach may miss the mark entirely. Tristero coheres, as much as possible, as a historical community of “The Disinherited,” a community of isolates bound through their subversive communication, a fact that Oedipa eventually learns (132). This interpretation seems incommensurable with the interpretive modes established by the novel, but it comes as close as Pynchon’s work dares to giving a definitive face to those who may or may not be behind Tristero. And yet, this discovery cannot complete the novel’s quest narrative, however much it works within the novel’s structural use of pun. What is uncovered is a community bound by relations of resemblance; the only relation between “the tattooed sailor in San Francisco” and the “Inamorato Anonymous” is a shared isolated status, echoed by the ever-punning Tristero (140,146). Just like a pun holds a word responsible for multiple ideas through sound resemblance, an unintended byproduct of the linguistic system of meaning, so too are the “disinherited” elements of society bound together as unintended by products of a social system; they constitute its W.A.S.T.E. System, bound by a repeating sign. ▲

*(Continued online at [www.thecatalystucsb.com](http://www.thecatalystucsb.com))*

**Literary Criticism Editors:**  
Daniel Podgorski, Ben Moss, Maya Jacobson



ART // MARIAH MIN

# AFTER DARK

by LÉNA GARCIA

Opium sorrow tinsel yellow  
I can't tell whether it's  
dead or starting to go  
I'm used to vital signs  
the heartbeat in my neck  
saliva stains on dark pillow cases  
and mint burning quickly  
when it I let it drop into the fire  
at night

I thought American flowers closed up  
opened in the sun on white windowsills  
above the sink  
every Monday morning  
when the blinds open  
and that the flowers the boys gave me  
would wilt  
unless I dried the roses upside down  
hung on twine from my bed frame

# EPISTLE

by Kathleen Byrne

To Bohemian Highway:

In summer, for memory's sake  
I did the whole chicken thing  
Feathers suck in dew and morning sunlight  
The air came up from the vineyard soil  
Potentially warm, crisp and twig-leaf fresh

Feathers stuck in dew and morning sunlight  
Quiet summer morning's gold catching in cracks  
Potentially warm, crisp and twig leaf fresh  
Sweet with the smell of coffee and bread

Quiet summer morning's gold catching in cracks  
Of fog stained yawning sky, windshield filtered  
Sweet with the smell of coffee and bread  
The car glides of pavement kissed by fields

Fog stained yawning sky, windshield filtered  
Opens up but gets lost in fingertip tree tops  
The car glides over pavement kissed by fields  
That recline in the watery shade of redwoods, the road

Opens up but gets lost in windy canyon turns  
Cabins waking up morning slow, colored moss and riverbed  
That recline in the watery shade of redwoods  
Fade away still in starry night dip-dye darkness

Cabins waking up morning slow, colored moss and riverbed  
Nestle like dark fruit seeds wrapped in summer flesh  
Fade away still in starry night dip-dye darkness  
That river bridge approaches and I take a right

The dips and rises of tree-root cracked road  
Leads me to the grove tucked up the hillside  
That river bridge approaches and I take a right  
Nestled like dark fruit seeds in summer flesh

# EARLY SPRING

March 1st

by Gianna Stoddard

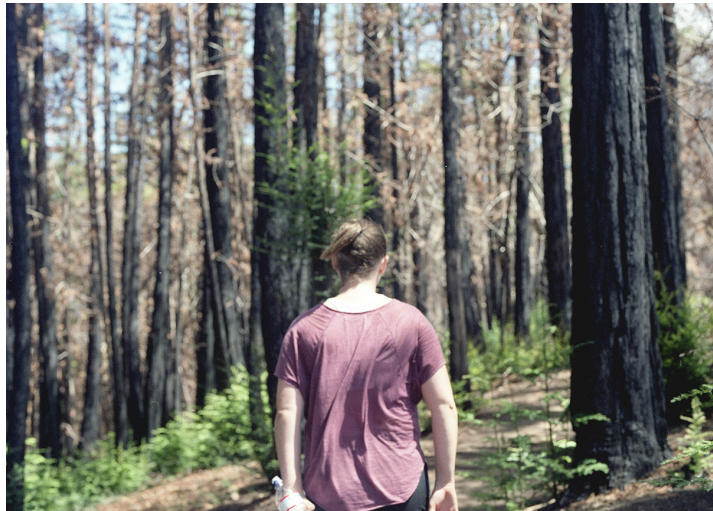
I can finally hear my thoughts here  
amid slanted, stenciled sunlight  
under this massive, tangled fir  
flirting with the edge of spring.

Lost among them, I jump at the thick blurry  
buzz just left of my shoulders, turn sharply  
surprised at the sound, meet the darkly liquid  
eyes of a hovering, ruby-throated hummingbird.

## APRES LE TUBE DU FRANCAIS ET LE VOYAGE A LE'TRANGER

by Aubrie Amstutz

Not sure I believed  
that they really  
spoke them other languages until I saw it  
with mine own eyes.





PHOTOS // MARIAH TIFFANY



The light outside a  
wartime trench:  
handsome dream,  
without blue hands  
and pocked mud-mess.

The highway is all  
shouting:  
a bunker of twitching toes  
and half-empty  
soft drink cups.

As a child I counted  
which cars carried dogs  
and learned to incorrectly  
pronounce Reseda.

Crumbs on my lap were  
unrevealing.

Morning drives were a  
slow mouth, mid-pancake.



## *Valley Traffic*

By Devin Beirman



## A LOVE SONG FOR BRITNEY SPEARS

BY EMILY HUNT

To you, darling:

Oh my muse of mediocrity! My maverick robot  
My pride my joy my languid love my \$5,000,000 pout.  
My favorite medication, to forget what I just thought.

My father says you ruined this country but I know that's just  
rot  
You made us what we are today, you are our final route.  
Oh my muse of mediocrity! My maverick robot.

You first came to me when I was a tiny tot  
Draped in your diamonds, straight blonde hair that bounced  
Just like my favorite medication, to forget what I just thought.

Feverish love or ardent hate you were the face no one forgot.  
The fresh faced Mississippi girl with a world to conquer and  
then mount.  
Oh my muse of mediocrity! My maverick robot.

You hit them once, but they hit you a lot  
Until the tabloids ran your frenzied spiral throughout  
Their pages It was a maddening time. I forgot what I just  
thought.

Oh, yes. It was a while, new baby faces to picture smoking pot  
With boyfriends, damn their purity rings! More money by the  
ounce.  
My muse of mediocrity! My maverick robot.

And what of you? You had your time. You had your final shot.  
We sit and wait and watch you now, in our peripheries you'll  
pounce  
Just like my favorite medication, to forget what I just thought.

And now it's so late, we can't remember what we sought  
To hear from your parted lips, the truth about us about  
What we really ought  
To do. For who? For !! For you! For naught.

# PARALLELISM

BY ADAM DE GREE

'Let go,' whispers the wind  
in dusty moans.  
The sinner and his sins  
sing joy's perfection  
as request meets response  
In an absurd dance.

Beheld in breath,  
this timeless convergence  
eludes my grasp  
As dust motes scatter words  
unequal to the task  
Of chaining presence.

I push towards death.  
or am I pulled?  
Spun by the secrets  
of young and old  
Wheeling like suns  
Above a burning clock that leaves  
No ashes.  
Yet still, the phoenix rises  
from the purple horizon.

Symphony of electricity  
Lucid harmony  
How do I find you?  
Embrace for a moment  
under breathy stars  
As dancing divisions dissipate  
into glassy mirrors.  
I take refuge in eternity  
The awareness behind my own  
through which experience rolls.  
When reality is reduced  
to planetary electron orbits  
even science  
Has resorted  
to poetry.

Do we wonder that  
good, evil  
order, chaos  
enemy, and friend  
only reveal the world within us?

What if synaptic gaps are the  
source of separation?  
Duality just a creation  
of our double-sided minds.

In the midnight moment,  
floating between opposition,  
The unconscious voice cries out for unity

The answer imperceptible only  
because it is everything,  
watching,  
as we awaken.



PHOTO // LORENZO BASILIO





# BLUE MOON

BY HELEN IRIAS

Through half-drawn blinds  
The expected white gold does  
Not drip  
In thin beams across my floor  
Leaving nothing to count as black alertness  
Electrifies my core  
Thoughts like cocaine dilate my brain  
The one to whom I'm promised is gone  
This tunnel ends in charcoal  
Dust from the former Flame  
When the perpetual ceases spinning  
All that remain  
Are vacant hours before  
He who shares himself with all  
Rears his proud glaring head  
She, I decide, must be with him  
Sneaking behind sheets of clouds  
And tonight with no confidante  
The jasmynes will not bloom  
Hearts, petals tumble  
To a dark earth  
Betrayed

# ABSOLVED *of* MEDIOCRITY:

a stream of consciousness experiment

BY ELLEN WIRTH-FOSTER

## CHAPTER ONE

To be absolved of mediocrity

To be taken seriously as a woman

The absurd distinction between girls' books and boys' books... is it not possible for a boy to enjoy a woman's story, or a girl a man's?

## ABLUTIONS

To be cleansed of hesitation, guilt, and fear

To access inner cycles of articulate thought

To bring life to something

Books as children of their authors

The seed-eating birds seen through clear panes...a tiny herd in the grass

A lawn mown by invisible hands, the same hands which...

The secret smell of femina...the salt deep noticeable mark that makes me inhale deeper, examining myself, knowing myself

## DICTIONNAIRE HISTORIQUE DE LE FRANCE

Now that I am older the children will play with me, and I see that it was my fault not theirs that I could never bring myself to play their robot games, their chasing you're-it games

The moment a page becomes live all its faults are underlined, who can concentrate when we are constantly defending our words—I meant to spell it like that, I want to write it that way

After a week of gloom in a sunny season, finally a bright day begins

Guilt, a second-string emotion

Before flowering, or perhaps after, Camellias are subject to apple like swellings of green tinged with brown and red, sealed in a downturned mouthcrease

To write the truth, not spare the rod on this monstrous devouring child

On many clothes the buttons are an afterthought and only endure once pulled and reapplied, like a dream inscribed or a man denied

From the sea of vowels comes a scream

Intermittent bowels disgorge languorous phrases

Intermittent bowels disgorge languorous vowels



**I**n Ashernell no one has time to get depressed. All viable units are assigned to operative detail in their free hours. This is a huge advancement—in ancient times children would rot in their rooms reading and playing and dozing through the days, and never fulfill their potential as productive members of society. What interminable suffering, to be forced through years of boredom ending only in an adulthood of work. Detail which is mostly useless, created to bring profit to its designer alone; these days the system is a great

boon, not a hindrance. The Generals get their fill of engaging activities, and the Classers get to use their unusual C-O-C's (cerebral output capacities) to the greater good of all. Their job is to design the distribution of operation. They have access to the MAPS and watch out for dips in productivity or spikes in unattended resources, calculate the supreme possible output of these locations, and send the newly composed assignments out to the General's best qualified, by proximity, to the site and by the relevance of personal infobank content. ▲

# CEILING

L é n a      G a r c í a

Palm trees and military barracks fade white from the sun, the way it was before they got here and plucked all the butterflies like candles from cake and rust red water poured into rivers mixing red dirt with ocean, forming clay, the kind I painted and sold on the sides of desert freeways. 1964. The kind my mother passed by waving in the teal green Buick, her mother driving and four in the back. My aunt Dolores broke her collarbone on a road like this one, liltling, rolling, and screaming because they were in traffic and Nan couldn't find the breaks. Like she couldn't stop melting plastic bowls of cheese grits at night and 9 AM oatmeal stuck in the corners of the ceiling when she slipped and the pot went flying. The kids cleaning it up, standing barefoot on the linoleum counter, my mother curving a plastic broom into the ceiling.



ART // CINDY CAMBEROS

Strung together  
Strung along,  
Our bodies graze  
Cabinets and countertops  
Turning shoulders and  
Tripping feet.

I push you so you'll push me  
Hard and straight  
Into that decorated  
Veteran fridge.

So the words mix up  
But I don't care  
For arbitrary attempts  
To order messes.

I blink back to April  
Before waking dreams.  
That night you invaded my  
Kitchen hiding place.

Fearing every strand  
Of hair gone astray  
That might sink fishhooks  
In my flesh,  
Not to kill but delay.

Words I wanted for mine,  
You made look like you,  
With what you could find  
Strong but few.

We're skimming letters  
With our backs now,  
To feel the way they speak.

And when the spinning  
Turns to spiral  
We sink and stagger  
Underneath.

Five blanks in one missing line.  
Five beats omitted from time.  
Ending with *anyone, darling*  
To let down my mind.

It's easier to fake  
Than tell,  
Diving in  
Beneath the swell.

If I could only  
Infuse my lungs  
With everything we've done

Then maybe, being harsh  
Would prepare my eyes better  
For a life staring square  
Into the sun.

What munitions do I have,  
That writing won't bring,  
Since walls just make paper  
A more attractive thing.

# FRIGID MAGNETS

by CHARLIE BROADWAY



# YELLING VOICES

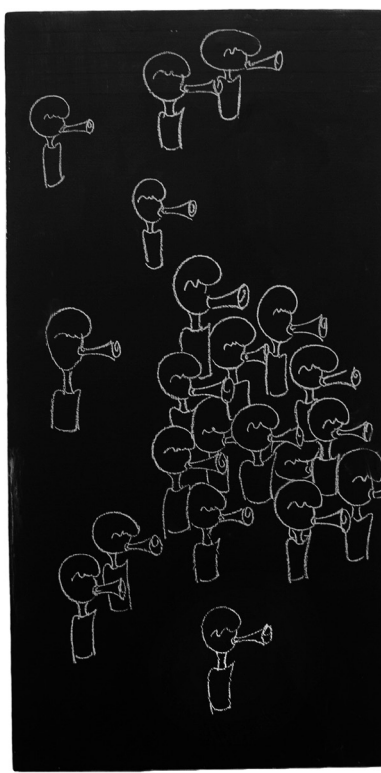
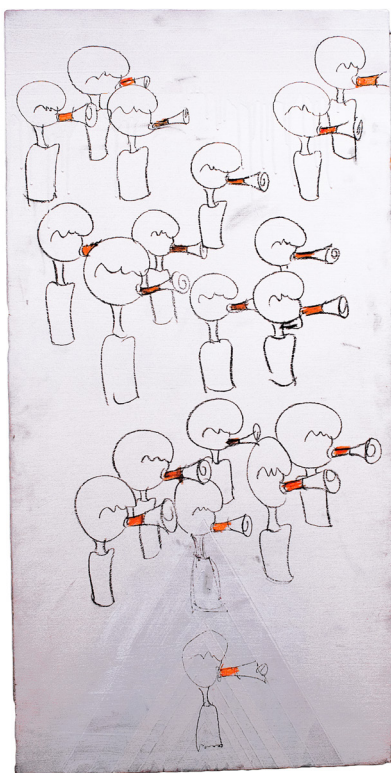
By Sam Arrow

at some point or place in the twilight hour  
when the couches and pillows of the mind  
are torn apart feather by feather until  
the remnant scraps of fabric struggle to  
pull the covers together, the cloth gives way  
and those timid, quiet, anxious voices  
set fire to the sheets.

who i am and what i am and how i came to be  
all put silently to rest, settling somewhere  
past the western horizon, past the  
residential 7-11s and gas stations  
and fast food restaurants.  
and i, like the caged and covered bird,  
forget how to sing.

my brain in a distant jar, reality a foggy dream,  
or perhaps societal ideas the  
product of an egomaniac's new world order, all  
fill the bucket to the brim with carcinogens,  
grease, and doubt.

some men succumb to drink,  
but some choose to sleep,  
some longer than others.



ART//VIJAY MASHARANI

A woman with dark hair and bangs is shown in profile, wearing a white dress. The text 'IN MY MIND I am THERE' is overlaid on the image in a large, bold, black font. The text is arranged in three lines: 'IN MY' on the first line, 'MIND' on the second line, and 'I am THERE' on the third line. The woman's face is partially obscured by the text.

IN MY  
MIND  
I am THERE

ART//CORINNA ZANOLINI

## THE WOMEN IN UNFLATTERING DRESSES

By Emily Hunt

I miss the women in unflattering dresses  
Who spend hours cleaning up. Faces, messes.  
I miss the aspirations of uncorrupted beings  
The sunlight flickering off of honey pink wine glasses  
And laywoman wisdoms that we now know were  
Just ignorance.

Your livelihood is living! he digresses  
Into mumbled talk of libertarian candidates, tomorrow's points, how time passes  
Pats your pretty head and leans back in his chair.  
And I am caught leaning into your being and those sunny pink wine glasses  
Of you. You look so beautiful, he thinks, he pauses:  
You're livelihood is living, he digresses.

I don't see women like you much anymore  
Women made only for me, to lean into, they're  
Kissing me goodbye and preparing me for nothing but kisses.  
I don't much see those beautiful women  
Who spend hours cleaning up. Faces, messes.  
I miss the women in unflattering dresses.





# H A N D

BY ALLISON KENT

» A puzzling piece  
before me gawks at me  
With its alien, peach-colored blanket.  
Why does it comply to my every thought?  
Its porous surface sprouts  
out hairs and contains  
Millions of cracks- but  
these cracks are not torrid;  
They remain curved and moist much like the way  
A pillow wrinkles at its embrace.  
Each curve cups a unique segment that extends  
Into five independent branches.

Familiar, yet perfectly estranged.  
How fantastic that it obey each thought yet is not a part of me.  
It possesses no feeling- a numb tool simply remaining.  
This configuration is merely attached to a body, a costume.

There  
is no  
choice.

T h i s  
costume is  
permanent  
in which  
my thoughts  
are trapped,  
Paralyzed in a  
bounded element  
where they flow freely,  
Incapable of physically  
streaming beyond  
Reality the way the  
do so in this very jail.

An unequivocal yet  
daunting paradox.

And while these thoughts  
are eternal, this suit,  
This carcass that  
imprisons them will one day  
Wither and decay to set these  
reflections and apprehensions  
Freely into the alien infinitude. «

a trilogy  
of poems from  
the perspective  
of a  
young man who is  
nothing like me  
nothing at all

by: brandon  
pineira

this is  
not love

When I was 14, I bought a music box from France  
It was a beautiful tan lacquered box  
with sketches of the eiffel tower  
adorning the front and sides  
and when I wound the lever  
the delicate metal tabs rang so bright and lucid  
the turn of my finger was a wick to candlelight,

I would give it to a girl from home  
and the silver-tongued contraption  
would tell her what I didn't have the voice to say,

and round and round and round  
I would guide the steel edge  
in my hotel room and on the plane  
and in the car ride home  
listening to the promises it sang,  
breathing in the smoky color of its tone,  
but I wound the damn thing round and round so much  
that gradually and tragically,  
a tapestry left outside in the rain,  
the melody fell within its own folds and wasted away.  
The dainty tabs lost their perfect manners  
and the melody was a memory of beauty;  
shallow, tinny, jaded.

It certainly wasn't a gift for a girl any longer  
and so I never gave it to her.  
Over the years I forgot my love for her  
and to this day, 6 years from then,  
I try to forget that the song the box played  
was called "Romance."

# this is not success

Yesterday I skinned my knees sprinting toward my college degree.

It was never a problem  
 accepting thinking about things in place of doing.  
 As a child I never ate my vegetables  
 and I think the arrogance went straight to my stomach,  
 there he sits, an 80-something-year old nobody  
 drinking scotch and watching my worst re-runs.

Yesterday, I woke up a 20-year old somebody,  
 and furrowing my brow so concentratedly upon waking,  
 I forgot to breathe in all of the tension,  
 and left again without my shoes.

It's okay though,  
 I actually prefer the feeling of granite on my skin,  
 I really do,  
 that way I can hear my toes  
 blasting ruthlessly against the pavement  
 with the force of all my weight,

and jackhammering away,  
 I can't help but think,  
 what if someday  
 I traded my PhD  
 for some goddamned peace and quiet?

# this is not me

Growing up I was always told that my voice doesn't carry;  
 I never really knew how to handle that.

A spider's web can hold many times the weight of a spider.  
 The one above my doorway  
 clings to people's faces like the monsters from Alien  
 and treating it much like a stranger's sneeze,  
 they shy uncomfortably from the invasion of their space.

Growing up, I was always told that my voice doesn't carry  
 and I used to take it like a riddle;  
 What is the difference between you and a wagon?  
 I would stare back, and answer:  
 sorry about that, let me repeat myself,

When I was fourteen at my great-grandfather's funeral  
 my father and I sat in a rented car  
 and listened to Al Martino sing "Spanish Eyes,"  
 He cried  
 and the best thing that I could offer  
 was to be so still  
 you could hear the muscles  
 contract in my throat,

and I'm still growing up, but I think what I'm trying to say is  
 nothing is more certain than silence,  
 and I think  
 that it's tragic how some people are asked the same riddle day everyday  
 and never figure out that all you really need to do is quietly declare  
 There is a difference between me and a wagon.  
 There is a difference.  
 There.



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