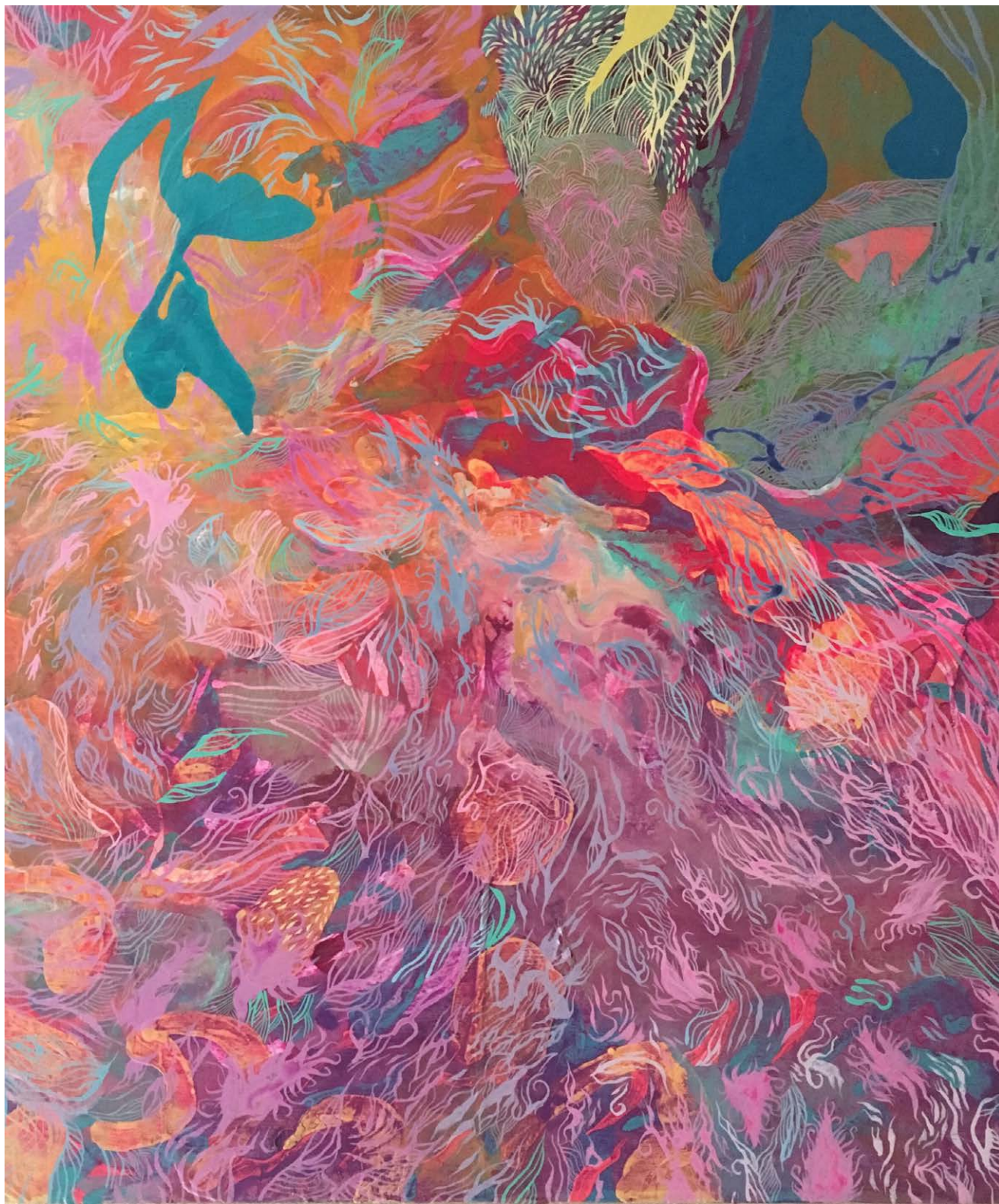


Angel City Review



Foreword

There comes a moment for all of us when we come to understand that truth is not immutable pillar of reality that we were raised to believe in. A teenager begins to understand that not only are there people who do not believe in God but that there are even people who don't believe in any god. A red-blooded American patriot watches a video of refugees and political prisoners displaced by an autocratic government supported by the United States. A literature student takes a class and learns names like Derrida and Foucault and that maybe words themselves are something of a fiat currency. Learning that things are relative, that context is an, if not the, ultimate arbiter, can be a transcendental experience for the mind and the soul. And yet with every choice, something is gained and something is lost. In our rush to explore the infinite possibilities of our newfound philosophical freedom, we have seen what happens to the people in our wake. Some have been left wounded and ignored in the excitement to declare all things constructs of the mind. Some have used this wave of relativism as a tool of exploitation, equivocating crimes against humanity and the world by declaring them as inevitable or simply a matter of perspective. This way of looking at the multiverses beyond and inside our minds is neither a unquestionable good nor an abject evil. Like any tool, it simply is. And as always, what matters is how we use it.

For starters, we cannot forget context. We exist inside our own heads and we likely always will. As much as we might rail against this notion, we need context to define anything and to get anything done. Even if the definitions are temporary and technically incomplete, they are needed to give intent and effort some direction. Why is this important? Two reasons. First, your context is unique. It may share attributes with another, but it is only yours. Second, the context of others can never be forgotten. It has become absurdly easy to bury the humanity and identities of other people under mountains of intentional lies. It is shamefully, painfully easy to regard other people as things to be ignored or destroyed. Here at Angel City Review our mission continues to be to provide a sounding board for those voices in the existential rubble. Try to think of Issue Six in the context of context, a place where a group of brilliant authors provides snapshots of moments in their ever-shifting perspectives. The circumstances in which those moments were born can never be created again, but replication is never the point. The point is that while the structures we build are impermanent and protean, they are no less beautiful and real.

- John Venegas, Lead Editor

Featured Artist

SIMON TRAN (GHOST GHOST TEETH)



Simon Tran aka ghost ghost teeth was born and raised in Long Beach, CA. Currently he resides in Berkeley and works in the special education department at Berkeley High School. He has a forthcoming solo show with The Compound Gallery in Oakland in October 2018.

My work is about reconfiguration, resistance, and a hearty bowl of soup. There are sensibilities in my work stemming from post-punk, Vietnamese-American culture, traditional Vietnamese textile patterns, retro video games, my daughter's beautiful imagination, and my dad's flea market finds. I create dense compositions for the viewer to get lost in. There is no resolve in the narration of my work, instead there are slow meditative builds that lead to chunky riffs that wormhole into hard-edged noise, all loopy-loopy and stuff. <http://www.ghostghostteeth.com/>

Angel City Review Issue 6 2017

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Kristin Kaz: Prose Editor

John Venegas: Lead Editor

Gabby Almendarez: Editor

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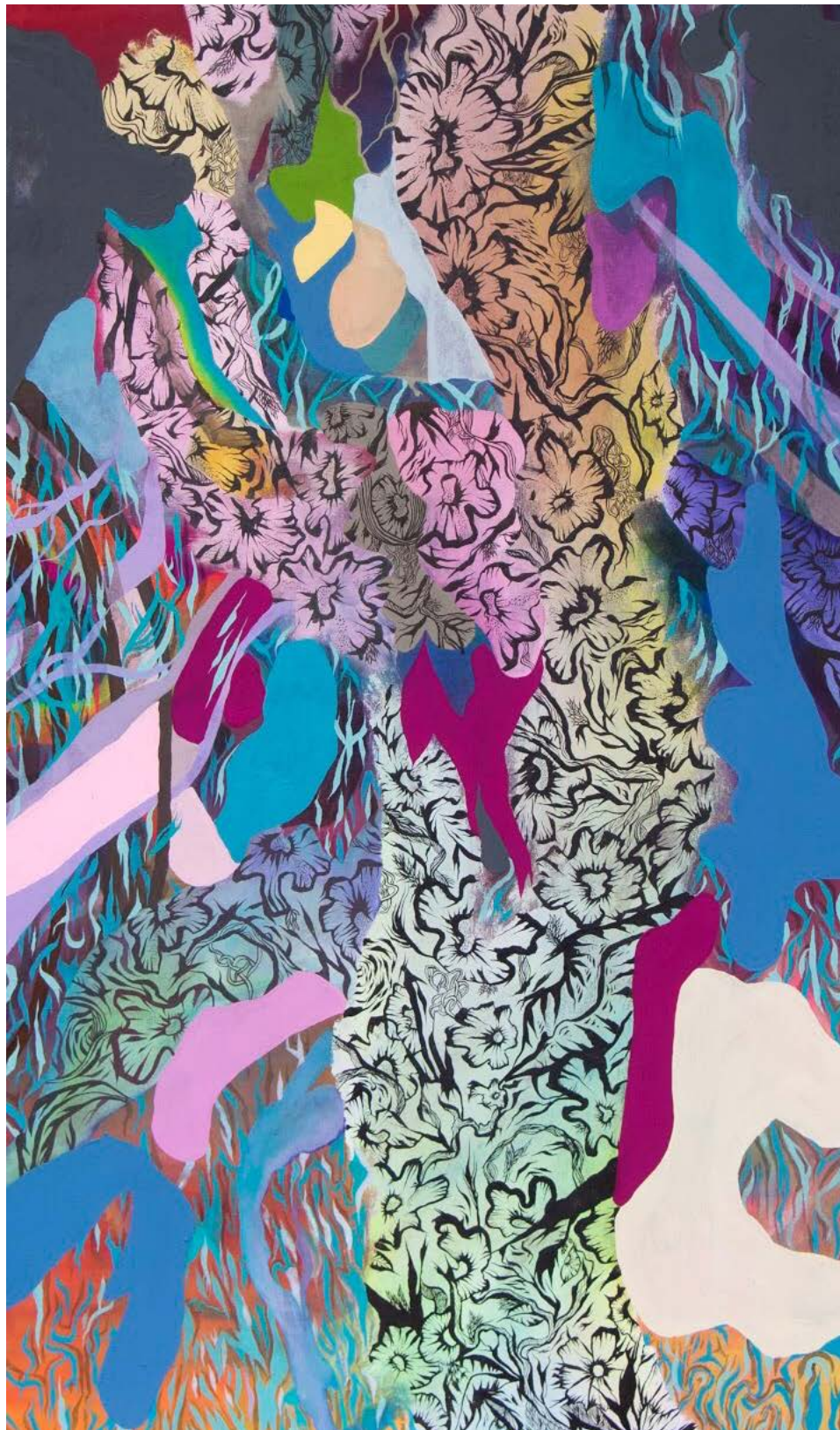
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Oil and water

BY ANAHITA SAFARZADEH

Consumed by petrichor
where it rains despair

insert images of broken trees.

Viscosity overwhelms our skin
with permission from cavities in our minds
getting ourselves lost
to remember what it felt like to be
found.

Then, the seasons change
again we must change
boxed in “freedoms”
and choices of organic devastation-
hyper objects passing on treadmills stuck on high speeds
SLICK

Oil stains skin black full melatonin pores clogged drain.
Infinite choices
water can't wash away
It's too bad my pen only works under water

Lost in reveries of washing blood while washing blood
off walls.
Is shitting where you eat a way of claiming territory?
And all else - what all else?
Lunatics remain
to howl at unripe moon left on vine and hollywood.
Rotten roots-
spoiled fruit can't stop dinner of starving feasts.

Sun beams off ends
crisping lasting flakes,
the last flakes.
These don't belong here.
They don't belong to me.

What's the difference between
A settler and an alien when both immigrate?

She looks up at the night sky - point up.
This one, she says, this one is covered
in stars
 ash and that dark blue.
What gives a foreigner
 It's foreignness

*What happens 25 pages into your book
when you only write under water?*

Semisupervised learning
a process by which __ points
 and __ writes
 while __ edits.

I've gotten it wrong again-
I'm getting it wrong again.
And now - lost in the silver hum of electromagnetic signals
I'm too far to notice the trees from the trees
-the scientist from the analyst.

This pen is wet
 are my thoughts this easy to paint?

A woman who can manipulate her world
to believe she is a man
Doesn't notice she does it everyday
 Not just while they watch her
 Not just while they watch her
 Not just while they watch her
Buffering
Oh, it this growth?
 pending
Stuffing her pants with a cucumber
while she tapes down her 34 d's
grows out armpit hair but not beard
only cute on skinny white girls with lesbian tendencies.
 She goes home to take off her disguise
 -at least the parts that she can.

They warned her it would be hard
-the world and the joining in.

They have a pill for that.

Ends up making her tits fall off.

She grows a small penis
and covers it.

Brush strokes
on papyrus.

Nothing is waterproof
until you hear that
the buddhists are killing the muslims
and then you know it-
that the proof is in the resistance.

Wanders outside of the pack once
And calls herself an entrepreneur

-there are too many broken links on the internet to create a real connection.

Anahita Safarzadeh is a writer and scholar currently completing her MA in English at CSUN. She lives in Los Angeles with her dog.

Scotched Gutenberg Prince

BY ROSE KNAPP

Dreams have a Freudian tendency

To interpret Euro as Id

Dreams have a Jungian tenacity

To disinterpret Afrikaan

St Du de facto artifacto

De Kooning via viola

Venicia e la lamb-Ak

A Ωμέγα Vamonos

Patrick Patricia Patr

Cia Circe ions Ich Iambic

Dreams have a Heideggerian ten

Two solipsistic nonsense

Streams have a Wittgensteinian

Quietist Quixotic fascistic

Fly out of the bottle Bool

Lean logos ring to it hast du Tu

Ring rank brut brat pass pastor

Heliocentric Univocity-El

Rose Knapp is a poet, producer, and multimedia artist. She has publications in *Lotus-Eater*, *Bombay Gin*, *BlazeVOX*, *Hotel Amerika*, *Gargoyle*, and others. She has a chapbook with Hesterglock Press and a collection forthcoming with Dostoyevsky Wannabe. She lives in Los Angeles. Her work can be found at roseknapp.net



The Murder at Murder Creek

BY HENRY HOKE

I pulled over on the small shoulder of the road because I was young enough in 2012 that it was nothing to risk death for a good photograph. The green sign marked the bridge Murder Creek and I couldn't pass up a capture. I'd only had the photo-posting app on my phone for a few months and I hadn't accumulated many followers. It was a photograph I thought people might like. At least ten people. Ten likes was a solid number back then.

After waiting for a semi to pass, its eighteen wheels rumbling the tiny sedan I'd borrowed from my grandmother, I stepped out onto the road and hustled down to the sign at the lip of the bridge. I raised my phone and snapped, leaned on the guardrail to post. The sign was edified on my phone screen, filtered. This wasn't the photograph I'd wanted to take.

The photograph I'd wanted to take was a mile back. I'd crested a ridge in the road and there loomed an old factory, a fortress of huge smokestacks, the only structure in acres and acres of dying woodlands. Seeing it felt like confronting a monster in some forgotten era. The way it interrupted the landscape. I held the feeling and kept driving, knowing I had no chance of doing the vision justice. Objects in or against the sky could never look as good in a phone picture as they did to my twenty-something eyes.

I was driving around the Deep South to interview my elderly relatives about their military service. My aunt had hired me to record testimony and scan documents before it was too late and people and things were lost to time. Scan everything and make audio of everything, she'd said from California, where we both lived.

A heart popped up on the app and a feather of validation tickled my back. Another semi came around the blind curve and almost clipped me where I stood scrolling. I lowered the phone and gasped, retrospective. I could've easily ended up face down there in the shallow rocky water with whoever it was met a violent end and was memorialized, the only association some old namer could think of. I gazed at the stones below. It was a hot day for close calls.

The ambrosia salad I'd eaten an hour before was still on my taste buds. I had wolfed down the sweetness while my great-uncle shouted into my tape recorder. I wanted him to tell me war stories but he told me about last week, how he'd been down by the quarry and pulled a rifle on some trespassers. You shoulda seen 'em run the hell off, he said.

A second and then a third heart popped up on the app. I steadied myself on the guardrail to scroll and thought about turning this site into a deeper pursuit. It could be the inspiration for a book: *The Murder at Murder Creek*. A mystery.

Yesterday there was a murder at murder at Murder Creek. Not the capital “M” Murder that the creek was named for, a new murder. My murder.

Spoiler alert: the murderer did it, I commented on the photo. I thumbed down the phone screen in the app past the older photos I’d posted with their meager amount of likes. A picture of my great-uncle in Hawaii on his way to the Pacific. A selfie of my jet-lagged face in the Denver airport. A cut ran down the back of my phone hand.

Watch out for the gopher, she bites, my great-uncle had warned as I walked to his garage to investigate documents in storage. My great-uncle’s garage was a dungeon of file cabinets, each filled with correspondence his long-gone mother had neglected to throw away. In the furthest reaches was a cabinet full of 1850s tanning plant ledgers, ephemera then, artifacts now. There was violence in the simple numbered accounts, enslavement. I reached in a pouch containing civil war letters and the ancient staple pierced me and slid. I wondered how long it’d been since I’d had a tetanus shot, pictured the infection spreading.

On my way back to my great-uncle to request bandages I saw the gopher burst from the ground. When he’d said gopher he meant gopher tortoise, and her shell was coming at me down the walk, faster than I imagined possible, given the reputation of turtles. My impulse was to pull out my camera and take a photo of the turtle’s attack mouth. My next impulse was to run the hell inside. I followed that next impulse.

The rural South felt more dangerous than New York or Los Angeles or San Francisco or the Virginia college town my parents had run away to in order to birth me. I glanced down at the blood red clay stuck to the bottom of my combat boots. I didn’t know what evidence made sense to gather, what stories I was supposed to tell.

There was no picture of a charging turtle in my phone as I stood oblivious to my fate on the side of the road over Murder Creek. The photo reached ten likes. I watched the sun and figured it was time to get in my car and drive back down to Florida to return it to my grandmother. I looked the first of both ways, ready to leave the sign behind.

A hornet from the woods marked me for assassination and barreled toward my neck.

The bug smacked into me. My phone dropped from my hand and bounced off the guardrail and landed in the road. I leaned forward to retrieve the phone and stepped into the path of an oncoming semi.

The truck didn't hit. Its grill opened like my great-uncle's shouting maw and gobbled me.

From the driver's seat of the big rig the trees looked squatter than they did from my back yard. It wasn't bad to be up this high. I was heading over on 31 to the shutdown paper mill, delivering demolition materials. It was my first time in the big rig. Usually I'd be driving the dump truck and next week I figured I'd be driving the dump truck again, hauling debris from the blast. There weren't that many of us.

I knew as soon as I got another mile and turned the bend the mill would fill the sky. The mill was a sight, and I was going to be there when they turned it into clouds. They said there might be asbestos in one of the smokestacks but it'd be too dangerous to remove that all before blowing it so I had a bandana tucked in my work shirt for my face.

I pawed at the Alabama-shaped scab on my right leg. My mother was kid-famous for eating her scab on a dare. Only once, but she was dubbed Scab-eater and it stuck. I was Son of Scab-eater.

I looked over my hands on the steering wheel, looked out at the bore of the drive. The same old potholes and the same dead grass. I shook myself a little awake.

Was there just a skinny kid in the road? On a phone on a phone on a phone. By the sign for the bridge over the creek. Murder Creek. It's tempting to gawk at and goof on a spot like that, the boldness of the label. But come on, this is America. Every creek is a murder creek.

Henry Hoke is the author of *Genevieves* (winner of the Subito Press prose contest, 2017) and *The Book of Endless Sleepovers* (CCM, 2016). His work appears in *Electric Literature*, *Joyland*, *The Collagist*, *Carve*, and is forthcoming in *Tiny Crimes* (Catapult/Black Balloon). He co-created and directs [Enter>text: a living literary journal](#). <http://henry-hoke.com>

Sidewalk Prayer

BY DOUGLAS PAYNE

Blot out my name on the back of your lottery ticket
a body bound to a burning roulette wheel.

I cried when I kissed my cigarette to a god's coat;
red fur, a million eyes like embryos.

I am a spine on the sidewalk praying, a dog full with bloat,
chicken bones and trick bags on my dresser,
butane mermaids flame up my throat.

(Turn over the vinyl: a black sun for a cruel goat.)

Brush my lips closed
when I die cruising -
bury me in smoke.

Clouds full of doubt and bone dust
glazed over unlocked doors
of your homes, rust screams,
cracks grow.

Portrait of the Artist as a Dead Canadian Wrestler

BY DOUGLAS PAYNE

Turn down the house lights,
a burnt out match
where cameras bow their heads and walk away.

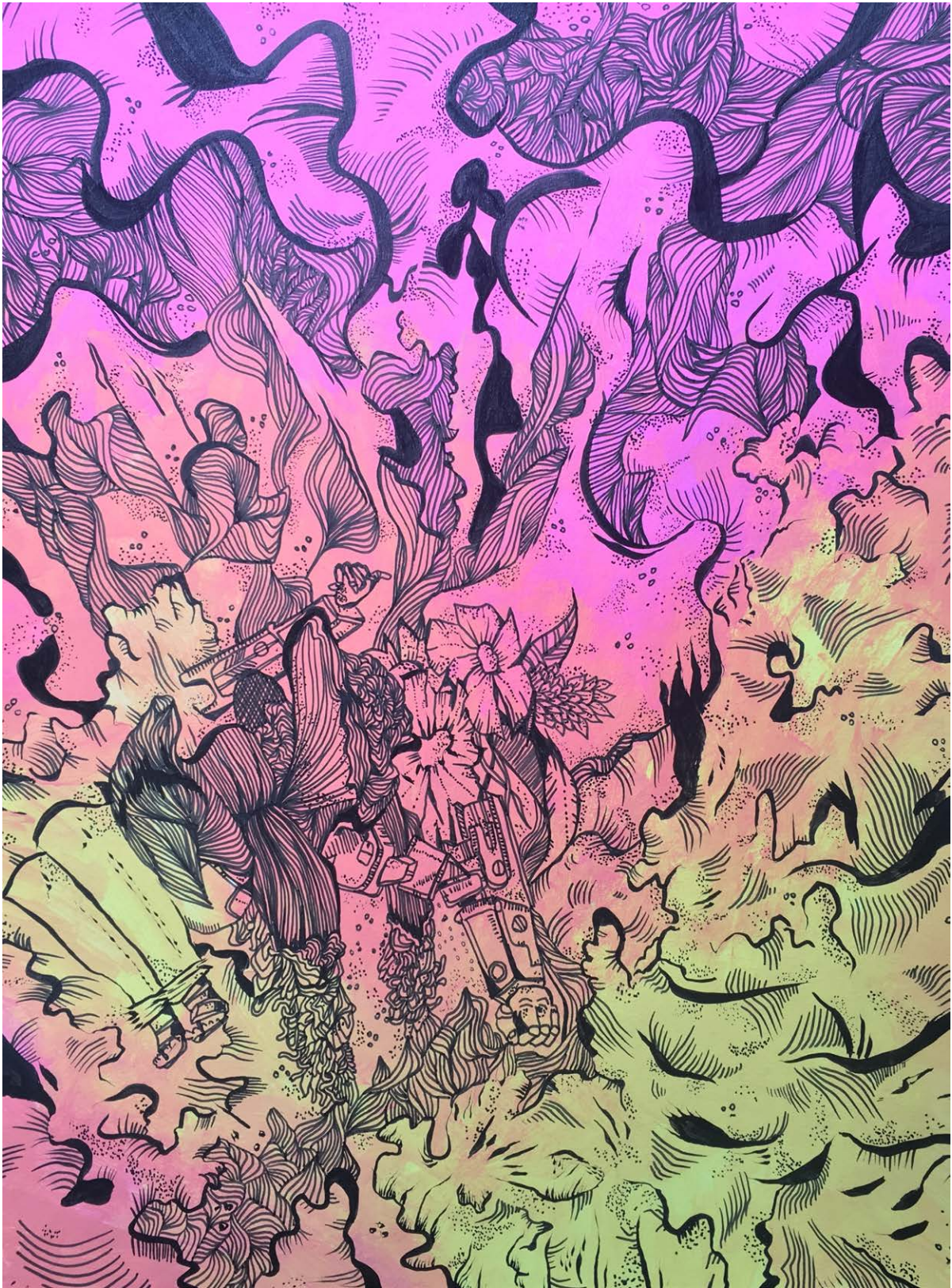
I feel the edge of your hand strike my throat
I smoke,
I inhale before the fall, a dark leap.

My face ruddy ghost white like the mat,
the ropes trembling like a child
half-asleep.

I weep in the corner, the boot of this night
across my neck,
but see me rise,
see me climb.

The shudder of me falling
from the top rope,
the shadow of me
breaking against you.

Douglas Payne is a poet originally from San Diego, CA. His chapbook *Salted Rook*, winner of the Grossmont College First Book Contest, is out October 18th from Chest-O-Drawers Press. He is currently an MFA Candidate in Poetry at Arizona State University



Mental Health Screening Form—III (MHSF—III)

BY MAKAI ANDREWS

Name and Age: A.M, age 18. Me, age 19. We are doing this form together. We are the Bonnie and Clyde of the crazies. Lisa and Susanna. Flying over the Cuckoo’s Nest together.

Hometown: Traverse City, Michigan. Los Angeles, California.

Is there any family history of psychiatric diagnoses? Maybe. Yes.

1. *Have you ever talked to a psychiatrist, psychologist, therapist, social worker, or counselor about an emotional problem?*

We’re at a hookah bar in the New York City. It’s probably around midnight but the streets are still heavily trafficked. I thought we were in St. Marks but apparently we’ve been walking for longer than I thought. Now we’re somewhere past NYU, maybe the East Village.

I looked up hookah bars on my phone, trying to find the closest place that wouldn’t card us. We end up at *Farfasha* after turning down the wrong block at least seven times. There’s a reason we can’t find it: the sign that once read *Farfasha* has been covered with a new sign reading *Dinah’s*, but you can still see the *F* and the *sha* if you know what you’re looking for. There’s chalkboard out front covered in writing with cheap buzzwords like *Hookah*, *smoke*, *lit!*, *cheap*, and *alcohol*.

My party consists of myself, A.M , and her friend from college. We’re all dressed in tight black pants and different black shirts. We fit into New York nightlife better than planned. We always wear all black, but tonight it’s coming in handy. We made it through Astoria on foot without getting harassed and came out on the other side of the river ready for the night to begin.

The building has a patio outside where one or two groups of men sit sharing a bowl. We walk past the patio and into the front door, where my British friend blurts, “Can we do the hookah?” The waiter laughs and leads us over to a table in the corner of the room. It’s a good-sized space with white walls and dark purple and blue lighting. There’s a bar set off towards the back with shiny bottles stuck on the shelves.

I don’t know the British girl, she came with A.M . They drove down for the night so I could see her. They planned on driving back early the next morning because we couldn’t find any open hotel rooms less than three hundred dollars. I was staying with a college friend in Queens. Friends from boarding school, we haven’t seen each other since high school graduation and far too much has happened in those five months. We don’t need to see therapists when we’re together because we have each other to talk to. It’s when we’re separated that shit starts to hit the fan.

2. *Check if you have ever tried the following:*

()Methamphetamine	(A,M)Marijuana
()Cocaine	(A)Pain killers (not as prescribed)
(A,M)Stimulants (pills)	()Methadone
()Heroin	(M)Tranquilizer/sleeping pills
(A,M)LSD or Hallucinogens	(A,M)Alcohol
()Ecstasy	

3. *Have you ever felt you needed help with your emotional problems, or have you had people tell you that you should get help for your emotional problems?*

“I’m supposed to ask for your IDs but you all seem fine so I’ll trust you ladies,” the waiter says when he returns. “So what can I get for you?” We order a glass of wine each, different foreign names that start with M’s and P’s.

“And a Tank of Shark hookah,” says the British girl. We decided this before - a mix of kiwi, strawberry, mango, peach, and mint.

He leaves with our menus and our order. I wonder why there aren’t more people in here. It’s near NYU and cheap enough for college students to afford. The waiter brings the sangria couple a new bowl. It’s tall enough to reach past the table and the little square coals he puts on top look like sugar cubes someone set on fire. I watch them smoke it, passing the handle back and forth. When they breathe out I’m thrown off - the smoke is blue.

“How?” I lean in to ask A.M , pointing to the blue.

She just shrugs, taking another gulp of her wine.

“Remember to go slow,” I whisper. She’s undoubtedly an alcoholic, probably has been for the past two years. I never noticed it before, just thought she liked to drink. But since leaving the stringent rules of boarding school it’s easier for her to be drunk and high nearly every night. And so she is.

She’s wearing Adidas pants right now with a tight black shirt and a thick choker that looks like a dog collar. I asked her where she got it a while ago and she said a sex shop in the village. It has a thick, black leather band with studs and chains dangling down from it that look like they’re intended for someone to lace their fingers through and pull. I try not to think about who she’s used it with.

4. *Have you ever been advised to take medication for anxiety, depression, hearing voices, or for any other emotional problem?*

Together we take twelve pills a night. Divide that by four and it’s my lucky number. Add eleven and it’s hers.

5. *Have you ever been seen in a psychiatric emergency room or been hospitalized for psychiatric reasons?*

They never put me in a hospital because I was too afraid to miss school. They never put her in a hospital because she wouldn’t tell anyone she needed it.

A.M in three minutes or less:

She’s from northern Michigan, grew up in the U.P. This is the northern most point of Michigan. The part people always think is Canada. She has four younger siblings, two dogs, three cats, seven chickens, a bird, and three fish in her home. Her mom teaches Spanish at a local elementary school because she could only get a scholarship to college with a Spanish major. Her dad does something with stocks.

She had an eating disorder when she was fourteen but has since tried to recover. It sustains itself

for about three years before she begins to spiral out of control. She's been a heavy drinker since I met her.

Her grandpa was an alcoholic and died while drinking and driving when she was in elementary school. That's the only time she's ever seen her dad cry.

She wrote a love letter to a boy she fell in lust with when she was sixteen and he gave her a hug and said thank you. They didn't talk all that much after that. She fucked a guy in an editing suite of the film department while it was snowing outside and her fingerprints stained the wall with blood. We smoked a pack of cigarettes behind a cabin in the woods the next week and watched the way the snow pushed the flame out so fast.

She's one of the few people that I've told about my eating disorder, the time I did acid, my self harming tendencies, my semi reliance on alcohol, and my slew of daddy and trust issues. The only person that knows about the guy who slipped me something strong on the hillside. The only one who knows I stop eating when people stop liking me.

Her shopping list: rice, grapes, beer, creme de menthe, a pipe, hot chocolate powder, radishes, spaghetti sauce, raspberry flavored ICE drinks, chicken tenders, chocolate, caramel apples, orange juice, grapefruit, snow, pills.

6. Have you ever experienced any emotional problems associated with your sexual interests, your sexual activities, or your choice of sexual partner?

Our hookah comes and we let A.M go first, figuring we'll learn by watching. Our smoke isn't blue, just a few different shades of grey escaping her cherry lips. Slowly, I take my first hit. It tastes like fruit punch I used to drink when I was a kid.

"He said he only fucks when he's drunk." She's talking about someone she rebounded with after her boyfriend told her he was too afraid of his feelings to be with her. "But I don't like doing that when I'm fucked up. He always gets me drunk first, though. I don't remember most of the nights with him, to be honest." She takes a long inhale and I watch the way she forces the smoke back out from her lungs. She's skinnier than she was the last time I saw her. I don't know what to make of this.

She slips off into the bathroom after we've been there for a few hours. She's had four glasses of wine and we're onto our second bowl. I think I've only had two. But then again, maybe it was three or four.

"Is she okay?" I ask her friend once she's out of earshot.

"I don't know. Honestly, I don't think so. The breakup really fucked with her," she responds.

I wish I could trust this friend with her. But they've only known each other for a few weeks and I can tell A.M 's far too fucked up for anyone to invest themselves in too deeply.

She comes back and we ask for the check soon after. We pay by tossing three debit cards onto the table, hoping the waiter will be able to figure out how we pay. The wine and the smoke are starting to hit us harder than we planned. It's foggy in the room now and we're the only people left. The sangria couple disappeared long ago, though I never noticed them paying a check. The blues and purples that

once stood out so strongly have dimmed to match the hazy glow of the smoke that escapes our mouths. I take a few quick inhales to try and catch a final buzz before we head out.

7. Have you ever been treated for alcohol or drug use or abuse?

As I start to drink more, as I start to smoke more, I forget to remember the details. The night gets hazy, a sort of jumble of snapshots that I don't remember taking. It's like a montage in a movie, a poorly stitched together photo collage that I made with half a stick of glue and far too little glitter. I don't remember most of it.

We walk back to the subway, weaving our way in and out of other college kids trying to find their way back home. The British girl and I smoke a few cigarettes while A.M dances ahead of us. She points to a park bench, "I think I threw up there on New Years last year," she says. She was in the city with her friend last New Years. I don't doubt her words - the friend she was with is stupid and doesn't know how to say no to A.M. I think she's in love with her. A.M says they just fuck when they're together and go back to their attachments afterwards but I don't believe her.

A woman pulls A.M aside while we're on a corner. It happens so quickly I can't find my way over to her, but I can hear what she's saying. "Woman to woman, you peed your pants girlfriend," she says.

I look down at A.M, and sure enough there's a big, dark stain near her crotch. We try to figure out if it's pee or if she just sat in water. The smell gives her away.

8. Current Symptoms Checklist: (check once for any symptoms present, twice for major symptoms)

(AA,MM) Depressed mood	(A,MM) Racing thoughts
(A,M) Unable to enjoy activities	(AA,M) Impulsivity
(MM) Sleep pattern disturbance	(AA,MM) Increase risky behavior
(A) Loss of interest	(A) Decrease need for sleep
(M) Concentration/forgetfulness	() Excessive energy
(AA) Change in appetite	() Increased irritability
() Excessive guilt	() Crying spells
(MM) Fatigue	() Excessive worry
() Decreased libido	(A,MM) Anxiety attacks
() Hallucinations	(M) Avoidance
() Suspiciousness	

9. Have you ever had spells or attacks when you suddenly felt anxious, frightened, or uneasy to the extent that you began sweating, your heart began to beat rapidly, you were shaking or trembling, your stomach was upset, or you felt dizzy or unsteady, as if you would faint?

We faint all the time. Once her younger sister found her unconscious on the kitchen floor. I fainted seven times in one day when I was seventeen. She faints in the shower and wakes up in a puddle.

Once I fainted and left a dent in the wall. Another time I fainted when a plane was landing and scared the flight attendant. When I passed out in English class the principal asked me if I had an eating disorder. I pretended to pass out again so I didn't have to answer.

10. *Have you ever been depressed for weeks at a time, lost interest or pleasure in most activities, had trouble concentrating and making decisions, or thought about killing yourself? Did you ever attempt to kill yourself?*

We end up in Astoria again. None of us are sure how. We stand on the platform, hoping another subway will whisk us back to Queens but another doesn't come. Whenever I'm on a platform I can't help but think about how easy it would be to just jump out in front of one. It would hit me in seconds - no one would even have time to process it. That's what I thought about at the Grand Canyon too, how easy it would be to just jump over it. Maybe that's why I hate it so much - Because I almost jumped.

I hear something from A.M.'s direction that snaps me back to the present. I look over to where she is passed out on a bench. She's peeing herself again, smiling to herself while the stain on her pants grows darker.

11. *Have you ever had nightmares or flashbacks as a result of being involved in some traumatic/terrible event? For example, warfare, gang fights, fire, domestic violence, rape, incest, car accident, being shot or stabbed?*

We call an Uber to take us back to Queens, realizing A.M. won't make it back to the car on foot. When we drive through Astoria there's some sort of fight in the streets in front of a bar. A few blocks later we drive by a mess of police cars and bright lights. There's shouting in the distance but I can't make out any of their words. At this point I can't figure out what's real. All I know for sure is that A.M. smells like piss and we need to get out of the Uber as soon as possible. A few more blocks and I see someone trying to hide a gun in their too small pant pocket. I watch the lights flicker past - red, blue, white, green, yellow. I try to remember how many more it would take to make a rainbow.

12. *Have you ever experienced any strong fears? For example, of heights, insects, animals, dirt, attending social events, being in a crowd, being alone, being in places where it may be hard to escape or get help?*

The first time I saw her cry it was raining. We'd both fallen in lust with senior boys our junior year of boarding school that far from returned our affection. I don't remember if she was crying because she realized she liked him or because she realized she'd never have him, but either way it scared her. I've never seen someone so small shake so hard. A few days later she got angry, so I let her smash my full length mirror to pieces in the snow.

Me, I'm always afraid. I'm afraid of slipping on the snow when I walk out of my dorm room to a light frost. I'm afraid of ordering meals at restaurants. Afraid of running out of time. Afraid of approaching people I don't know. Afraid of being alone with someone new. Afraid of affection. Afraid of trust. Afraid of my body. Afraid of my mom dying when I still need her. Afraid of talking in front of

groups. Afraid of anything new. Afraid of phone calls. Afraid of sleeping for too long. Afraid of never sleeping again. Afraid of breaking my back. Afraid of staying alive too long.

13. *Have you ever had a period of time when you were so full of energy and your ideas came very rapidly, when you talked nearly nonstop, when you moved quickly from one activity to another, when you needed little sleep, and when you believed you could do almost anything?*

When we're back in Queens I run into my college friend's house to wake her up. I leave A.M with her while we get the car. It's well past four in the morning. The British girl and I walk a mile or two to the car, only heckled once by a group of guys who even apologize for their catcalling as we continue to walk away.

Back at the house A.M is throwing up on my friend's front lawn. We get her some water and strip her clothes off in the backseat of the car. I wipe her off with a handful of baby wipes I found in my friend's bathroom. I imagine this is what a mother feels like when her newborn gets the flu for the first time. Tender, caring, and petrified. I and put her in the front seat of the British girl's car and watch as they drive away before I finally go inside.

I fall asleep quickly that night, something that only happens when I've had too much to drink. When I'm far gone enough to forget. Insomnia only has a hold on me when I'm conscious enough to remember. My pills keep me numb, keep me down, and with the alcohol they're practically tranquilizers. I'm only manic when I miss a dose or two. Then the crazies start to come back. The spinning thoughts, my self harm, my addiction to starving. The pills are usually able to keep them in the closet long enough for me to fall asleep. And tonight I fall asleep like a toddler: a slight protest, a pout, and a dream.

S. Makai Andrews is a student at Ithaca College, born and raised in Los Angeles, California. She is currently furthering her studies in Writing and Psychology and coming to the conclusion that in order to write well, you have to live well. Her published work can be found in *The Claremont Review*, *The Mighty*, *Jackelope*, and *Coal Magazine*, among others.

EXTENSIÓN-ROTACIÓN-EXPULSIÓN

BY BEGOÑA DÍEZ SANZ

Levo oito meses
douscentos corenta e cinco días
nos que non me recoñezo
no espello.

[sempre conto o tempo cos dedos]

Oito meses xa da xestación dunha estraña.

(...)

Axiña parirei un corazón morto.

EXTENSION-ROTATION-EXPULSION

BY BEGOÑA DÍEZ SANZ

TRANSLATED BY LAURA CESARCO EGLIN

It's been eight months
two hundred and forty-five days
in which I don't recognize myself
in the mirror

[I always count time on my fingers]

Already eight months of the gestation of a stranger

(...)

Soon, I'll give birth to a dead heart.

ESTÉTICA XERACIONAL

BY BEGOÑA DÍEZ SANZ

Lembras(te)(de min)?
da choiva
e
das palabras
fuxindo,
de nós
baixo o colchón
[coa forma das miñas pernas abertas en pé de guerra].

Eu podo lembrar(te) na topografía da escuridade
podo reproducirche
as noites,
as estrelas coma xogos de unir os puntos
as pegadas da beleza, que vai tres ou catro pasos detrás nosa,
coma sombras xaponesas da realeza.

GENERATIONAL AESTHETICS

BY BEGOÑA DÍEZ SANZ

TRANSLATED BY LAURA CESARCO EGLIN

Do (you) remember (me)?
the rain
and
the words
escaping
us
under the mattress
[with the shape of my legs open and girding for battle].

I can remember (you) in the topography of darkness
I can reproduce you
the nights,
the stars like the games of connect the dots
beauty's footprints—three or four steps behind ours,
Like the Japanese shadows of royalty.

O QUE NON SE SABE DICIR POLO SEU NOME

BY BEGOÑA DIEZ SANZ

Todo empeza
e todo acaba.

Todo é cíclico,

coma min
e coma ti.

Mais non sei se coma nós....

WHAT CAN'T BE CALLED BY ITS NAME

BY BEGOÑA DíEZ SANZ

TRANSLATED BY LAURA CESARCO EGLIN

Everything begins
and everything ends.

Everything is cyclical,

like me
and like you.

But I don't know if like us...

Begoña Díez Sanz was born in Valladolid but is Galician by adoption, and in fact, the Galician language is pivotal in the creation of her debut poetry collection, *Camarada: Eu só quería facer algo bonito* (Follas Novas Edicións, 2013) from which these selected poems originate. She has participated in international conferences on literature and literary theory, and has written various articles on micro-fiction and short drama.

Laura Cesarco Egin is the author of three collections of poetry, *Llamar al agua por su nombre* (Mouthfeel Press, 2010), *Sastrería* (Yaugurú, 2011), and *Los brazos del saguaro* (Yaugurú, 2015). A bilingual edition of her first book translated by Scott Spanbauer was recently published as *Calling Water by Its Name* (Mouthfeel Press, 2016). A selection of poems from *Sastrería* was translated collaboratively into English with Teresa Williams, and subsequently published as the chapbook *Tailor Shop: Threads* (Finishing Line Press, 2013). Cesarco Egin also published the chapbook *Occasions to Call Miracles Appropriate* (Lunamopolis, The Lune series, 2015). Cesarco Egin has translated works of Colombian, Mexican, Uruguayan (both from the Spanish and the Portuguese), Galician, and Brazilian authors into English. Her poems and translations have appeared or are forthcoming in a variety of journals, including *Modern Poetry in Translation*, *MiPOesias*, *Eleven Eleven*, *Puerto del Sol*, *Copper Nickel*, *Tupelo Quarterly*, *Columbia Poetry Review*, *Blood Orange Review*, *Timber*, *Pretty Owl Poetry*, *Spoon River Poetry Review*, *Pilgrimage*, *Periódico de Poesía*, *Metrópolis*. Cesarco Egin is the co-founder and publisher of Veliz Books.

Not In Defense of Masculinity

BY JANICE LOBO SAPIGAO

Not even when Binh was peer pressured into freestyling in Vietnamese or when Jonah was the only dude of the group of bros who volunteered to ride with me in my brother's Corolla to In-N-Out or when Omar agreed with me that he liked Danity Kane and missed girl groups, too or when no one clapped when I bowled a strike but high-fived me when I hit two or three pins when they didn't know I bowled with my brother every Sunday for a whole academic quarter so he could practice & especially not cuz we both listened to Native Guns or Logic or even Common whoever called themselves conscious & not the time when Joe voluntarily showed me and Ana his scrotum before we watched Gladys at the choir recital in the school cafeteria, how it looked like rotten blackberries with the white fuzz fungi you only throw away or like when I told Eric that Darius gave me the sweetest moment in kindergarten when he gently pulled my cardigan off my shoulders and placed it in my cubby next to his but then forgot and claims he never did that & when in seventh grade I sat on the bench next to Martín who said that I should sit on his lap because I was his girlfriend like he truly believed all dogs go to heaven or some shit like Gustavo smacking a girl in the arm in fourth grade because her ponytail smacked him square in the face like she planned that when that girl was me like how dare I flex the muscle of my jet black hair to his crown or how could there be a whole world against him you know there are students in my classroom who still think everything I say is a suggestion & how someone told them a degree makes you a better person & how often we bury stories six feet deep inside us without a tombstone so that we don't have to go back and find what we abandoned so what does 'on purpose' mean again? and can you tell these bi(nary) boys that it's like when Porsha & Tessa & Gail said we should shave everything yup all of it like a conveyor belt of self-extraction and bodies built strength from cat calls and how many times we joked the other was a ho so much that even my immigrant mom said it to my third gen-American best friend and how he laughed the courageous belief boys laugh when we refuse their generosity at bars and never when we don't get recognized as femicide or even bullshit at our sudden deaths by law or white women's kindness far gone are the days where I won't lunge back breaking glass coming out of the hiding men whipped with the softest sides of them

Janice Lobo Sapigao is a daughter of Filipina/o immigrants. She is the author of two books of poetry: *Like a Solid to a Shadow* (Timeless, Infinite Light, 2017) and *microchips for millions* (Philippine American Writers and Artists, Inc., 2016) and two other chapbooks. She is a VONA/Voices and Kundiman Fellow, and the Associate Editor of *TAYO Literary Magazine*. She co-founded Sunday Jump open mic in L.A. She earned her M.F.A. in Writing from CalArts, and she has a B.A. in Ethnic Studies with Honors from UC San Diego.



Green incanto

BY NYLSA MARTINEZ

TRANSLATED BY ANTHONY SEIDMAN

By the time we entered the bar, we had a good hunch about its appearance. Peniche had spun a narrative about the years when he was still under twenty one and the bar was the one place where he could order a drink without getting carded. We joined him today because he wanted to introduce us to his new boyfriend. He has been insisting on that for a while. It comes as a surprise that Matias is a good catch, much better than the rough trade that he attracted in the past. Peniche is still young; either he's uninterested in steady relationships, or he doesn't know how to find them.

In his description, he also explained how Maria is an excellent barmaid; he keeps a tab at the bar, and she also serves him some cocktails on the house. He gives her cash her whenever it's payday. If the tab's too high, she gladly gives him extensions. He explains how she annotates everything in a little notebook. They have known each other "forever," which, according to Peniche, means for over five years... when he was nineteen and looked like a fifteen year old boy.

"Don't worry about the check, I have credit with Maria," he repeats to us while he turns the wheel abruptly to the left, then to the right, and finishes by putting the gear into park. I feel like I just tumbled down from the Moon and for the first time I'm putting one foot on the Earth. The way Peniche drives always makes me dizzy. "Don't be such a bitch-ass! I was driving smoothly," he says to me, anticipating my complaints. I'm not going to argue. It's easier to admit he's right.

We step into the bar and Peniche introduces us to Maria. The dive is located in the center of downtown. How it has survived defies all logic. Little by little all the sordid and dingy places have been replaced by clean and bright restaurants featuring international cuisine, and bars that serve craft beers from all the corners of the world. The type of ilk who now walk the sidewalks has changed. Gone are the denizens of bars where tragedy was drowned in cheap alcohol. Now people dip and quench their gripes into béchamel sauces and artisanal brews.

Matias already knows the bartender and orders before all of us. He grabs a cold beer and drinks it. Then he wraps his arm around Peniche. I have the impression that this relationship will end up badly, even with this new man who seems to have good intentions. Peniche does not know how to be with someone in a stable relationship; he is accustomed to being fetted like a boy-toy, with older men inviting him on trips, and spoiling him during three day weekend. Matias does not have much in his wallet. He is a file clerk who struggles to make ends meet, however, he is organized and thrifty. The car we used was his...he lets Peniche drive it.

Maria is Japanese, with ample girth. She has long black hair and her teeth are perfectly aligned. She smiles while mixing everyone's poison. I study her: she reminds me of the one and only girlfriend I ever had. I imagine her and my old girlfriend as two streams of refreshing water.

I think of Victor and feel an ache. Once again, he's flaked out. I sense he has tired of me but doesn't have the guts to admit it. I order a beer and down it in a few gulps. There are not many customers at the place, perhaps fifteen. A group of four are playing pool at the only available table at the end of the room.

Fausto is putting songs on the jukebox. If I had not rushed into a relationship with Victor, surely I would have fared better with Fausto. He's always had a thing for me. I would notice Victor's jealousy every time he saw us together. Maybe I should gather the courage and confess some of these feelings. But why create problems? Besides, I think we are becoming closer friends. Now he values me as a confidant.

The song currently playing is Bon Jovi's *I'll Be There for You*. Fausto approaches me and runs his hand down my back. Do you miss Vic? Why didn't he join us? I shrug and invite him to sit next to me. I order one more beer and remember how that creep, Roberto, came looking for me again. The nerve! His narcissism knows no limits. "Why are you so quiet? What song do you want to hear?" And Fausto gets up to go to the jukebox.

Maria brings me one more beer, and at that moment, when she is close, I notice her beautiful eyes. She moves off to the other end of the bar and my gaze follows her. She is staring at the content of a small, opaque plastic box. I try to guess what's inside. Maria leans toward it and I think she is trying to

smile. She stays like this until someone asks for a drink. Now the plaintive guitar of *Patience* by Guns and Roses comes on the juke. I realize that Fausto's taste in music is unbearably; if he continues with such a selection, everybody will stop partying. I'd like to dance. To forget about everything.

Peniche approaches me and says he is feeling like going to Román's house and chill out there. I stand up, take him by the shoulder and tell him, "Don't be an asshole. You came here with your partner. Does he know about you two?" I'm not one to moralize, but I know that he, lacking any scruples, is capable of making us visit all of his lovers. In addition, I feel sorry for his boyfriend who, thus far, has been so attentive. He even paid for the bill at dinner, and, to make matters worse, we're using his car.

I see that Maria rummages through the drawers behind the bar. She smiles triumphantly upon finding a glass bowl. For a moment, she ignores everybody and thoroughly washes it, then rinses. Aerosmith's song *Cryin'* is now playing. I'm definitely fed up. Maybe that's why we're not together, Fausto and I. It would be torture to endure this music all the time. I wonder what Victor is doing right now. He asked me for some time to put his thoughts in order, although I know he's just looking for a good excuse to leave me. In fact, he's already left me. Again, Fausto's hand goes down my back. "What's up? I thought you wanted to dance and have fun."

I'm fed up. Peniche hugs Matias and orders a round of cocktails called "Green Incanto" for everyone. Maria mixes the spirits in a giant shaker. I'd rather not watch. I know that tomorrow my head will be pounding as a result of this toxic mix.

Maria arranges the glasses and masterfully fills them out. Her hands move delicately. When she finishes serving them she makes an inviting gesture, urging us to take our drinks. The scene seems like stock footage from a movie about gay nightlife. These rituals bug me. Sometimes I prefer to go out with colleagues from work, although they have nothing to talk about...at least they do not commit these clichés. The Green Incanto takes over me like a warm, yet Spring-like breeze. Surprisingly, it's refreshing.

I observe Maria at the distance. Now I can discern the mystery inside the glass bowl: a small fish flutters inside it. This seems to be the most striking picture of the whole afternoon. She watches the fish flicker from one side to another; I cannot make out its color. I call out to Maria, while recognizing the first chords of the next selection on the jukebox: the especially horrible *Winds of Change* by Scorpions.

Definitely a relationship with Fausto would be impossible if this is his type of music. I see him leaning over the jukebox, selecting more and more songs.

Maria approaches and I ask about the fish. She blushes, and an innocent, almost high school air takes over her. She says it was a gift from a client, a man who is about sixty or seventy years old. He brought it and told her to take care of it. She knows nothing about fishes. She is afraid the fish may die. “How should I take care of it?”

But she is not a girl; she was working at the bar before Peniche was twenty one years old. Her youth comes rather from inside, probably from a strange spell that also envelopes her on the outside. “It’s a Beta fish,” he told her. I add: “You can’t make him share the bowl with others. He must be alone all the time.” She admires my knowledge, and for the first time I feel I’m useful. “Make sure there are no mirrors near him because he’ll mistake his image for another fish. He can die that way”. “I don’t want him to die,” she says, and her eyes widen with concern.

The fish stirs in the water. Maria brings the vessel to me. We both study it. I have questions to ask. I think of our drive to the pub, and how Peniche recalled all the occasions in which the barmaid generously gave him drinks on credit so he could enjoy his drunkenness for free. So this is where he learned how to handle his liquor! But he never mentioned the charm both shrouding and illuminating the barmaid. Nor did he mention that she was from Japan. How did she end up here? Although she speaks English fluently, she has a slight accent.

Silence inside the bar. I take the opportunity to tell Fausto not to put on any more songs, that we’re almost leaving, and that we’re not going to be able to listen all of them.

Maria asks me, “How should I feed him?” I notice her black hair that cascades down her back. Fausto approaches me and takes me by the waist, “You wanna leave? How about one more Green incanto ? Just one more!”

Matias, Peniche’s boyfriend, also approaches me and asks if we’re having a good time. He adds that if we want to stay here, there’s no problem, “We don’t have to go where Peniche wants. When he starts drinking he becomes obnoxious. I will drive. We can go wherever you want.”

I watch the little fish while Maria prepares that narcotic mixture. When the drinks are ready I feel that I have no desire to dance. Apparently, Fausto achieved his goal: his music has spoiled the night.

Peniche has put on a song by Donna Summer on the jukebox and begins to dance. Enough, I say to myself. I look around and everything is sinking. Nothing and no one stays afloat except for Maria, who carefully observes the flittering tail of the Beta. Then she sees me and I can distinguish a sincere joy gesture in her expression. She asks me if I want one more drink and I shake my head.

Once again, Fausto takes me by the waist and ask me something. I push his hands away and look him in the eyes. He is surprised by my reaction. “Is something wrong?” “No, I’m just tired. Nothing went right today.” The comment leaves him more upset.

I finish the cocktail and approach Peniche who is next to his boyfriend; I say goodbye. Maria watches me and pulls a long face at the fact that I’m leaving. The song that starts is Gloria Gaynor’s *Never Can Say Goodbye*. Peniche stands up and asks one of the strangers at the bar to dance, taking advantage while his boyfriend is using the bathroom. Fausto stares at me; he’s upset. Is it due to the drastic change in music or my departure? The only thing that makes sense is Maria, who is again staring at her fish. I walk to the door while the chorus of the song repeats itself interminably. It’s clear to me that this is the moment to escape. Once I’m out of the place, I can still hear the chorus: *I can never say goodbye boy, no, no, no, baby.*

Nylsa Martínez is a writer of fiction from Mexicali, Mexico. Some of her short story collections are, *Roads* (Editorial Paraíso Perdido, 2007), *Tú casa es mi casa* (CONACULTA, 2009), *Un patio más amplio* (Paraíso Perdido, 2014) and *Green Incanto* (Bagatela Press, 2017). She is the winner of the 2008 Prize for Literature of Baja California. She has published in numerous journals, including *Párrafo* of UCLA, *Revista de Literatura Mexicana Contemporánea*, The University of Texas at El Paso and *Huizache*, The magazine of Latino Literature, University of Houston-Victoria. Her work of fiction was recently included in *Latinx Writing Los Angeles. Nonfiction Dispatches from a Decolonial Rebellion*, University of Nebraska Press.

Anthony Seidman is the author of the books *On Carbon-Dating Huger* and *Where Thirsts Intersect* (The Bitter Oleander), as well as *A Sleepless Man Sits Up In Bed* (Eyewear) the chapbook *Playing Dead* (Business Bear Press) and others. His poems, articles and translations have appeared widely in Mexico, and his work has been included in the anthologies *Corresponding Voices* (Point of Contact / Syracuse University), *The Ecopoetry Anthology* (Trinity University Press) and *Asymmetries: An Anthology of Peruvian Poetry* (Cardboard House Press). He has recently published work in *Bengal Lights*, *Drunken Boat*, *Nimrod*, *World Literature Today*, and *Modern Poetry In Translation*. Seidman lives in Los Angeles with his wife and two children.

VII

BY YESENIA PADILLA

[A] kind of monster that will become
 your life :: what is atonement? [When]
 Wolverine moaned in modulation [of]
 [his] nature [Wolverine] [moaned] [in]
 [reverse] and tried to create words,
 words such as [love] or [fucking] ::
 words such as [feeling] or [action] —
 when is an attempt to create words
 [only] use? [when] [is] an attempt to
 create words war? and how [does] [he]
 use [words] as [he] used war, to escape
 [his] worst crimes, to escape [his] own
 death? [To] [escape] [death] — [he]
 can't want to passionately
 enough. [Is][that] freedom?
 So patient. Freedom is [an]
 [e][x][p][e][n][s][i][v][e] [ideology]
 massacres and [bloodsloe] rivers seem
 only to desecrate themselves in its
 lens.

Yesenia Padilla is the founding editor and editor-in-chief of *Lumen Magazine*, a literary magazine founded for and by women and non-binary people. she also co-curates Now That's What I Call Poetry, a monthly experimental poetry night in Southern California. her work has been published in *Queen Mob's Teahouse*, *Complex*, and as part of the *Websafe2k16* project.

Dervish - Nietzsche

BY ADAM BROWN

D c
a i
n r
c in c
i l
n e
g s

☀ ô ô ö

Yields

[[[Epiphanous
Pleasures]]]]

The music
comes
from within
No one
hears
it

Adam Levon Brown is an author, poet, amateur photographer, and cat lover. He identifies as Queer. He has had poetry published hundreds of times internationally in several languages. He enjoys long walks through the inner insanity of his psyche. He is an anti-imperialist peacenik with a love for books. He believes that you should turn your societal education into a living transgressive art piece, and parade it around for all to witness. When not tripping on his own musings, he enjoys reading fiction. He has been published in venues such as *Burningword Literary Journal*, *Harbinger Asylum*, *The Stray Branch*, *Poetry Pacific*, and *Yellow Chair Review*. Adam can be contacted via his website at <http://www.AdamLevonBrown.org>

THE HEART ON PLUTO

BY RACHEL CHALMERS

I was late, and when I finally got to the speaking venue, Mark was waiting outside. Not good. Worse: he was wearing his Italian suit. He looked me up and down and said: “Really?” I was in combat boots, ripped jeans, and a hoodie.

“Lost track of time,” I said.

“Shocker,” he said. “Did you at least bring my speaking notes?” I handed over the index cards, which I’d written for him late the night before. “Thank fuck for small mercies,” he said.

“You’re welcome.”

“Don’t be a cunt.”

“Not that there’s anything wrong with cunts,” I said.

“Agree to disagree,” said Mark.

We registered and Mark went off to get hooked up with a microphone. I made a beeline for the bar. Most people were milling and networking. I’d rather die. I drank my free beer and caught the eye of a fifty-something man who looked almost as disgruntled as I felt. I raised an ironic glass to him and to my surprise, he winked. I sidled over.

“Like the wedding of a close friend you secretly can’t stand,” I said.

“Bat mitzvah for a King Charles spaniel,” he suggested.

“Fund-raiser for a furry Burning Man camp.”

“Landmark Forum graduation.”

“Esalen reunion.”

“No, that sounds rather fun.”

“I knew I liked you,” I said as we clinked glasses. “I’m Archie.”

“Archibald?”

“Archimedes.”

“Fancy!”

“Dad was an astronomer.”

“Oh, was he? Anyone I know?”

“Not likely. Amateur. IBM sales-droid by day.”

“And what do you do, Archie?”

“Kept man. You?”

“Planetary scientist.”

“I bet you say that to all the boys.”

“Maybe,” he said, fishing out a business card that read: David Russell, PhD, NASA Ames.

“Oh my God,” I said. “You’re a planetary scientist. Like Bobak.”

“Yes. But he works on Mars, and I work on—”

“Christ, I hope you’re going to say—”

“Pluto,” we finished together. I put down my beer and unzipped my hoodie.

“Can’t say it’s ever worked this well before,” he admitted.

I showed him my T-shirt, which said “I heart Pluto,” except that the heart was a cartoon of the pink New Horizons image of Pluto with its southern hemisphere heart.

“Love your work,” I said. “I mean it.”

The corners of his eyes crinkled with pleasure. “Househusband, you said? Are you sure you’re not underemployed?”

“Oh shit,” I said. The staff were trying to herd us to the auditorium for Mark’s talk. I made it to one of the last available seats. Mark scowled at me from the stage. Dr. Russell got the very last seat, which was next to mine.

Mark’s talk was not great. It would’ve been better if he had done more prep, worked harder on his dissertation, been a stronger public speaker, or had a smaller sense of entitlement. I’m not being fair, but he did himself the much bigger injustice. He wasn’t a stupid person. They don’t give out doctorates in artificial intelligence for good citizenship. He was just very proud and very insecure.

After the Q&A without any audience questions, and the desultory applause, Dr. Russell and I made our way back through the crowds to the bar. Miracle of miracles, we found an unclaimed table. I was glad he seemed to want to stick around.

“Pluto,” I said. “Rivers of nitrogen. Hit me.”

“There’s a water ocean under the heart.”

“No way. Water how? It’s so far away, and so cold.”

“Well, it’s slushy. But it’s a rocky planet. Planetoid. Turns out there’s enough geothermal there to keep it warm.”

“And sustain life?”

“Oh yes,” he said, deadpan. “We’re sending a diplomatic mission next week. To steal their Death Star plans.”

“Jerk,” I said, laughing, and Mark chose that moment to walk by and drop the index cards in my lap. I stopped laughing.

“At least you’re having a good night,” said Mark.

“Mark, this is Dr. David Russell,” I said.

“David, please.”

That felt weird, but: “David, this is my husband, Mark.”

“Archie and I have been talking about Pluto,” said David.

“Oh God,” said Mark, “don’t let him turn on the bloody sci-fi channel; it’s impossible to turn it off again.”

“A feature, not a bug,” said David. “I work at NASA.”

“Oh, do you? That’ll be right up Archie’s alley. Do you study Uranus?”

“It’s pronounced Uranus, and no.”

“Right, Pluto. So: planet or dwarf?” asked Mark. I’d known he would go there, but I winced anyway. It is exactly the least interesting question to ask about Pluto.

“I don’t really pay attention to that kind of thing,” said David. Mark wasn’t listening. He was already looking over our shoulders to see who else in the room would be more help to his career.

“Oh, there’s Barney,” he said. “Come along, Archie.”

“You go,” I said. “I’ll be another minute.”

Mark gave me a look that felt like it should’ve burned holes in my skin, said: “Suit yourself,” and walked away.

“It’s a stressful night for him,” I mumbled. I was blinking hard, because I choose not to be the kind of boy who cries in bars after marital spats.

“No need to apologize,” said David. “Where were we? Oh yes, the ice. You know Pluto and Charon are tidally locked, right? And that the heart is on the anti-Charon side.”

He talked about how the heart-shaped depression had enough mass to cause Pluto to wobble on its axis. Polar wandering, it’s called. Earth has it too. He talked about how the likeliest cause was subsurface water. He was very interesting, and he talked long enough for me to get my shit together emotionally, so I liked him more than ever.

“I’ll let you in on a little secret,” I said. “I have an icy heart myself.”

“Who among us doesn’t?” said David. We were well into our second beers at this point. “I’ve buried two husbands. I’m basically a black widow.”

“God, I’m so sorry.”

“Oh,” he said, with a fluttery hand gesture, “this was in the late eighties, early nineties. AIDS War One. I rode dinosaurs to their steampunk funerals, and so on.”

“A friend of mine failed retrovirals,” I said, and winced. I never talked about him.

“AIDS War Two. I’m sorry. Tell me about him,” said David.

I drained the rest of my beer. “Gonna need another drink,” I said.

It’s not even that there’s that much to tell. It was the semester I spent in London. Mark and I had agreed we’d be open, but tell each other everything. Pete was in my class. He was cute and dreadlocked and fucking hilarious, and after one long night of drinking and dancing and cracking one another up with increasingly obscure jokes, I went back to his apartment and had the best sex of my life, repeatedly.

He made me pancakes the next morning, and it was all very delightful until I called Mark, as agreed, and Mark went nuclear, as not-agreed, and made me promise not to see Pete socially ever again. Since ours was a small and close-knit class, this put a crimp in my style. Since Pete’s meds were already failing him, he was back in the hospital before the semester was out. He didn’t graduate. I heard much later from mutual friends that he had died.

For whatever reason, I hadn’t told anyone before. While I strive not to be the sort of boy who cries over marital spats, it turns out I can’t be the sort of boy who talks about Pete without tears spilling out of my eyes. He deserved so much better, from life in general and from me in particular. I never even apologized.

David was somehow holding my hand. When I’d calmed down enough to hear him, he said gently: “You know, if a one-night stand of yours is sobbing over you, years after you died, you probably won at life.”

I was hiccupping, because dignity. Mark was glaring at me from the other side of the room. “You’re very kind,” I said.

“Me? I’m just one more bitter old queer with a space robot,” said David. “To a first approximation, we’re all kind. No other way to survive. Don’t lose my number, okay? I live in a big house above the Castro. It’s full of lost boys.”

“I’m not lost.”

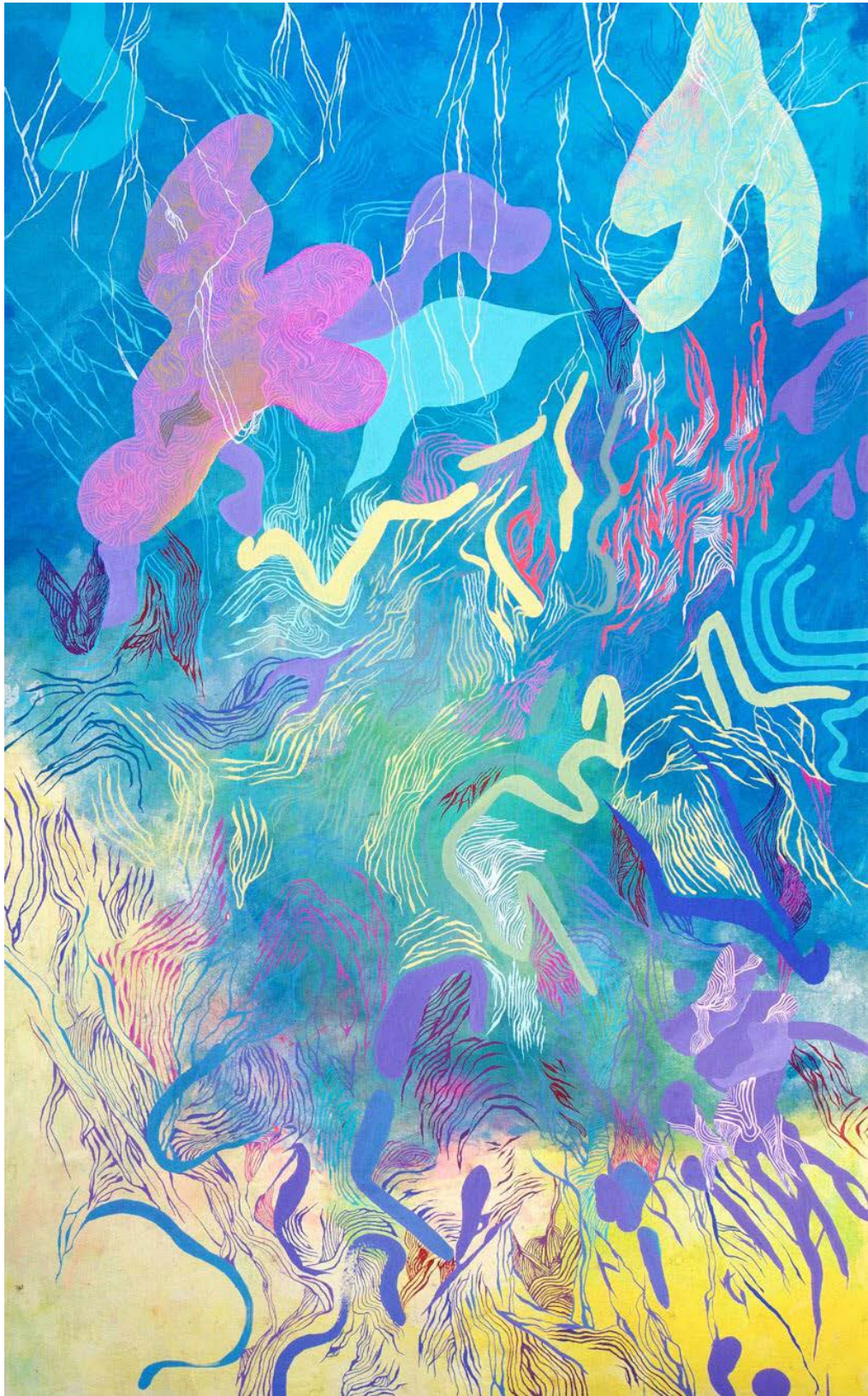
“In case you get lost.”

“New Horizons?”

“New Horizons. Haven’t you ever wanted to boldly go?”

I laughed. “Sure, why not,” I said. “Make it so.”

Rachel Chalmers is an Australian writer living in San Francisco. She studied English Literature at the University of Sydney and won the Wentworth Travelling Fellowship. She moved to Ireland to work with Peter Fallon, Brendan Kennelly, and Terence Brown. She is a graduate of Trinity College, Dublin with a master's in Anglo-Irish Literature.



No Left; Child Behind

BY ERIKA GILL

These days, lost in conversations,
I feel we eat the pie by spooning off the crust.
I aim my deprived-orphan stare at
abandoned, filling-smeared plates.

In my mind's eye it's berry-red—a tall poppy,
illicit
gutted bloody articulation.

O Academia! (Oh, macadamia?)
No wonder Faustus scorned you. (Who?)
The buxom hetaera (hetero-what?)
promised to yield the *bare*.
(I think you've got something there!)

Dead-eyed genius, where hide you your
fat tongue? Salted, it cringes—a mollusk shrivel.

These days, lost in conversions,
I cannot decide if I want the pie
and the mug of the one percent,
or 99 problems and willful deprivation.
—But god, how I hate waste.

Erika Gill studied English Literature close to home in Los Angeles at Loyola Marymount University, and has previously written journalistic editorials and reviews for *LA Loyolan*, as well as Denver's *303 Magazine*. She is currently a receptionist at a corporate law firm in Denver, Colorado.

WHAT SHARPENS THE TEETH

BY HELEN WICKES

The spring of her last year, she wanted
to get out and drove full force, slammed
the brakes, all skewed and cockamamie
into the disabled spot by the genteel

used-stuff store, while I'm nattering, *Ma*,
where's your stupid placard, as she's lurching,
hobbling, laughing, white mane of hair
afame in sunlight, then she's roaring,

So you limp, God damn it, you're really
good at it. The dogwoods quietly unleash
their riot of white blossoms, blue sky washed
clean and easy, world of silence—no traffic,

not a bird. How happy she was, imagining
those treasures that summoned her onward.

Helen Wickes has had four books of her poetry published: *World as You Left It* (Sixteen Rivers Press, 2015), *Moon Over Zabriskie* (Glass Lyre Press, 2014), *Dowser's Apprentice* (Glass Lyre Press, 2014), and *In Search of Landscape* (Sixteen Rivers Press, 2007). She lives in Oakland, California, and worked for many years as a psychotherapist. She received an MFA from the Bennington Writing Seminars in 2002. Her poems published by online journals can be read at her author's page, <http://www.sixteenrivers.org/authors/helen-wickes>, and additional poems can be read and heard online at From *The Fishhouse*. Helen's work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Agni*, *Amethyst Arsenic*, *Atlanta Review*, *Boulevard*, *Clare*, *Confrontation*, *Delmarva Review*, *Euphony Journal*, *Massachusetts Review*, *Passager*, *Pirene's Fountain*, *Sagarana*, *Schuylkill Valley Journal of the Arts*, *Evening Street Review*, *SLANT*, *Summerset Review*, *Soundings East*, *South Dakota Review*, *Spillway*, *Spoon River Poetry Review*, *TriQuarterly*, *Westview*, *Willow Review*, *Zone 3*, and *ZYZZYVA*, among many others.

Jail Beyt

BY TJ REYNOLDS

(Overheard in a mess hall, Mosul, 2004)

Hey man, it's crazy. Two guys from Alpha just got arrested. Raped some thirteen year old near Al Azar neighborhood.

What?! How'd that happen?

I heard the driver and VC did it while the platoon was searching the neighborhood. They pulled guard for each other, took turns. Shit. Salisbury steak again. This is barely edible.

Ketchup and hot sauce help. Back up a second though. What did they do it?

I heard they asked her to come outside. Then they pulled her back to the Stryker. But the bitch tells her fuckin parents after, and they all drove to the God-damned FOB! The father was demanding justice of all things.

Those guys are screwed. Commander will want to hush this. Yo, grab me a roll. What did those assholes think would happen?

They gave the family solatia hoping to quiet things down. They'll be rich before we leave. Talk about a twisted dowry. You should try the garlic bread. Tastes better than the rolls.

Nah, I think it's nasty. Chunks of garlic get stuck in your teeth. What happened them anyway?

Court-martialed. Probably gonna be Leavenworth.

Damn. Think they just wanted to go home?

I think they just wanted wet dicks. Yo, let's sit near the exit. The PL just got in line. I'd rather not get sent on some bitch duty.

Good call. What happened to the girl?

Hmm?

The girl. What happened to her?

Fuck if I know man.

*Beyt from Kurmanji and Yazidi tradition, a narrative poem

TJ Reynolds has published non-fiction and poetry with *NAILED Magazine*, *The Hour After Happy Hour Review*, and *The Deadly Writers Patrol*. He writes about war, the fickle nature of power and how these intersect with gender and racial politics. From 2004-2005, TJ served as an infantryman in Iraq. He has 3 gorgeous children and works as an English Instructor at Cypress College, CA.

The Stereo and the Wind

BY KEITH VAUGHN

Tammy and Eric were killing time until one o'clock when they were supposed to meet a coke dealer in North Hollywood. "Ohmigod, I have to tell Diane who I just saw," said Tammy over the stereo and the wind rushing through the open top of Eric's Jeep. "She is going to freak out."

"Who was that dude?"

"Jeff Race. He was—"

"He's full of shit," said Eric. "Nobody is buying a car stereo without a tape deck."

"He used to be so bitchin.' I don't know what I expected, but he's—"

"He's full of shit. How do you know him anyway? He looked like he was fifty years old."

"We did this weird movie together when I was twelve or thirteen."

"A porno?"

"Gross. No. It wasn't like a real movie. It was on cable access. It was awful." Tammy watched the strip malls, salons, body shops, and fast food places on Van Nuys Boulevard pass in a bright beige blur.

"Where is this guy's house again?" said Eric.

"Turn here."

#

During her audition Tammy had struggled to ignore director Mel Talbot's floppy chocolate-brown toupee. "Are you familiar with the Intergalactic Brotherhood?" he said.

"Um, I like science-fiction a lot, I—"

"Ah." Mel chuckled. "I know what you mean, but there really is no such thing as science-fiction. Movies like *Battlestar Galactica*, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and *E.T.*—I've seen it three times—are all transmissions from the Ultimate Source of the Sixteen Galaxies." He waved his hand heavenward. "They are the memories of the cosmos."

"I've mostly done commercials, and some modeling."

Tammy and her friend Diane were cast as Ariela and Munia, Daughters of the Angelic Order.

"Knock 'em dead," said Tammy's dad dropping her off at a rented warehouse-cum-studio in Sun Valley.

"It's only the table read." She rolled her eyes behind her new Ray Bans. "Just let me out here,

okay?”

Counting her footsteps across the parking lot, she looked up when she smelled marijuana on the smoggy wind. A blond guy in a blue Camaro was listening to the stereo and smoking a joint. He wore sunglasses but Tammy knew he was watching her. She slowed down and let him.

“The Archangel Zenoach has arrived,” said Mel Talbot when the blond guy ambled to the table fifteen minutes late. Mel jumped up and pulled out the chair beside his. “Do you want anything to drink?”

“Uh, sure. I’ll have a Coke.” He took his sunglasses off and shook his feathered hair.

“Troy,” said Mel to his assistant, “get Jeff a Coke.”

Mel touched Jeff’s arm at certain points during the reading. He squeezed it throughout the climactic Star Craft arrival scene, which Mel several times compared to *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. “It’s going to be... sublime,” he said, gazing at Jeff.

“One of the other girls said he goes to community college,” Diane said while she and Tammy waited outside for their parents to pick them up.

“I bet he has a girlfriend,” said Tammy.

Her first day on set, the production was already behind schedule. A gaffer had hung himself from a light rig the week before and the crew was preoccupied with Andy’s ascension to the Fifth Galaxy.

In costume and makeup, Tammy and Diane watched Jeff work and waited to be called. They were wearing fuchsia robes and gold braided headbands. He wore gold boots, white tights and a blue tunic.

“He is so bitchin,” Diane said into Tammy’s ear. “I could die.”

“You can tell he’s stoned,” said Tammy.

“How’s it looking, Ernie?” Mel asked the camera operator.

“Fine.”

“It looks fine,” Mel said to Jeff. “Go again, and remember, keep it loose and keep going when you mess up.” After a pause, he called, “Action!”

“I shall be—uh, I shall *meet* the Angelic Order, who... um, as you know, are Super-Celestial Beings, such as your—ourselves. They are at once... with the regenerating force field that holds the earth world together, and tears it apart.” Zenoach laughed with his head back and his chest out. He laughed again, louder, took a breath and laughed some more.

“Cut!” said Mel. “Print.”

“It is printed,” said Ernie. “It’s video tape.” Noise and activity bloomed as the next shot was set

up.

“Troy, what’s next?” said Mel.

“The convergence of the Angelic Order.” It was Tammy and Diane’s first scene.

“Is Jeff in this scene?”

“Um, no.”

“I want to see if we can find something for him to do.”

“But Zenoch is in the Seventh Galaxy when the Angelic Order converges.”

“We’ll do some close-ups,” said Mel. “Zenoch reacting.”

“How would Zenoch even know—?”

“Zenoch is a Super-Celestial Being, a billion centuries old—he just tunes the meeting in telepathically or something, and we get his reactions. No dialog,” Mel waved Troy away. “Go. Don’t let Jeff get away.”

“Does this mean we have to keep waiting?” said Diane.

The studio quieted as a man with thick silver hair entered. He wore dark glasses, a gray suit, a turquoise medallion, and a single black leather glove.

“Brother Sidney,” said Mel. “To what do I owe the pleasure?”

“Bad news. The rest of the financing fell through.”

“What, uh...” Mel flicked his eyes around the studio. Tammy and Diane turned to each other pretending oblivious conversation. “What does this mean?”

“The five thousand is all there is.”

“The additional five? The five I’ve been waiting for?” said Mel.

Brother Sidney sighed. “The initial five.”

“Where’s Gene? You should be talking to him about this. He promised me—”

“Gene is no longer with the production.”

“What? Since when?” said Mel.

“Gene has ascended to the Fifth Galaxy for renewal.”

“What? When did this happen?”

“Last Friday. He and two associates, friends of the Brotherhood. They were murdered. It may have been the Valley Mutilator.”

“Were they, uh...”

“The bodies were intact.”

“Oh.” Mel held one arm across his body and a hand over his mouth. “Still, this is terrible. I—I need that five thousand to do the Star Craft arriv—”

“This is a transmission from the Ultimate Source.” Brother Sidney held out a thin sheaf of paper with his gloved hand. “Xaviara channeled it Friday night. It’s your new ending.” Mel grabbed the pages. Brother Sidney held onto them. “The Serpent has awoken,” he said and let go.

Mel flipped through the new pages, “What is this? It’s just more of the same sh— Where’s the arrival of the Star Craft?”

“This is a transmission from the Ultimate Source of the Sixteen Galaxies. And, Xaviara wants this,” he circled a black leather finger in the air, “wrapped up, pronto, by the end of the month.”

Mel gaped and dropped his hands to his sides, “What the hell, Sid? I was promised—”

Brother Sidney turned and left. Mel was still standing there, his new ending rolled in his fist like a diploma, when Troy returned panting. “Bad news.”

Tammy and Diane were called to the set and they shot the convergence of the Angelic Order in one take, no rehearsal. “Just keep going,” said Mel, slumped in his chair when Diane flubbed her line.

Tammy’s second day on the set a week later was the last day of the shoot.

“Ernie is gone,” said Mel to the cast and crew. “We don’t have Ernie anymore. He slipped in the shower and he’s in the hospital unconscious, but stable I guess. So, I’ll be wearing two hats today.”

“Is that counting the rug?” said Diane tilting her head toward Tammy who spurted a laugh that drew reproachful glances.

When Jeff showed up late, Mel came out of his director’s chair like he’d been pushed. “What’s this? You got a haircut? I can’t believe this. It isn’t going to match.”

“Oh, yeah. I got an audition for *General Hospital*,” said Jeff smiling, unable or unwilling to contain his pride. Mel straightened and drew breath, then deflated without saying anything.

Jeff got into his tunic and tights. “Places.” Mel hoisted the camera to his shoulder. Zenoch’s address to the Angelic Order was shot in one take in a stand of evergreen trees on a wedge of earth between the warehouse and the parking lot.

“Speak. Speak to us. Tell us,” said Ariela and Munia, kissing and caressing the golden boots.

“I spea—I shall speak on it now.” Zenoch’s eyes were pink slits. His headband glinted in the high late-summer sun. “The Ultimate Source of the Sixteen Galaxies has given a warning. Death is foretold. The earth world is about to regenerate.” The words meshed with the hazy roar of a jet approaching the Bob Hope airport. “Killers stalk the earth world by night. They mutilate the angels and celestial spirits. The atmosphere will pois—The atmosphere will *be* poisoned. Everything will die. Leaving is the only

way. Three billion centuries from now, in the earth year nineteen eighty-eight, the Star Craft will arrive to reclaim the earth world. Leaving is the only way.” Zenoch and some members of the Order turned their heads when a horn honked in the parking lot. Regaining an attitude of blissful sanctimony, he continued, “The ego structures of man will be destroyed. The Light of Arrival will burn all who do not live as the Ultimate Source commands. The Serpent has awoken. Leaving is the only way.”

“Cut.” Mel put the camera down, took off his sunglasses and wiped his forehead with a handkerchief. “That’s a wrap, everybody.” He put his sunglasses back on. “Thanks for your hard work.” Troy led a smattering of applause.

“Jeff’s hair is so bitchin,” said Diane brushing herself off.

“Tell me about it. I could die,” said Tammy.

“It’s burning up out here.”

“Totally. And I’m so sure this looks like outer space.”

The wrap party was in the Communion Hall at the Intergalactic Brotherhood Unity Temple, a squat building in Chatsworth that formerly housed doctors’ and dentists’ offices. Mel was there with his wife. Jeff wasn’t and Mel sulked through a toast to the cast and crew, the Brotherhood, and Xaviara who couldn’t make it physically but sent “telepathic emissions of eternal love.” Troy toasted Mel.

A buffet of Pizza Hut pizza and giant bottles of soda was laid out on folding tables covered with paper *Star Wars* tablecloths. Another table held matching plates, cups and napkins, and a framed picture of the gaffer who hung himself. A card read, “Happy Renewal, Andy. Leaving is the only way. See you soon!” It looked like his senior class picture. He was cute.

Tammy broke her stare at Jeff’s beachy drawl. “I wish they had pepperoni,” he said, rooting through the boxes.

“For sure,” said Tammy. “I, uh... wonder why they didn’t put up a picture of the producer that got killed.”

“Huh?”

“Some guy that was putting up money got killed. They think the Valley Mutilator did it.”

“No way,” said Jeff. “That’s weird.”

“He wasn’t mutilated though. I wonder why they didn’t put his picture up.”

Jeff shrugged and wiped his mouth on the Death Star. He inhaled as if he were about to exhale an exit line.

“Do you have any pot?” said Tammy.

They drove around in Jeff’s Camaro sharing a joint rolled in a yellow paper that tasted like banana. They didn’t talk except when Tammy asked what music was playing.

“Blue Öyster Cult.” He had to answer twice before she could hear him over the stereo and the wind rushing past the open windows whipping the bluish white smoke in the darkening amber sun.

Walking back into the Unity Temple with Jeff, Tammy’s face threatened to break into a conspicuous grin. Everywhere she looked the dwindling assembly of Intergalactic Brothers and Sisters made her want to laugh, especially the way they stiffened and measured their expressions around the Leadership Council in their gloves, medallions, and matching gray righteousness.

“Zenoch,” said Mel throwing his arms out. “Where have you been? Come over here.” His lap bumped the card table when he leapt to his feet. His wife’s soda tipped over. Jeff smiled, waved and went over.

“Were you just making out with Jeff?” Tammy hadn’t noticed Diane approach.

“I’m so sure,” said Tammy, grateful for an excuse to beam. “We just— We were just talking.”

“Ohmigod, he is such a hunk.”

“For sure. But he’s kind of weird too. Like, why doesn’t he mind?” Tammy said watching Mel squeeze Jeff’s arm and pat his back. They were laughing. Mel’s wife was staring into her empty Han Solo cup. “I don’t know what I expected, but he’s kind of a space cadet.”

“Who, Zenoch?” said Diane and Tammy laughed until she cried.

Sitting on the ornamental brick gate at the entrance to the Unity Temple’s mostly empty parking lot, swinging her legs, waiting for her dad to pick her up, Tammy was still stoned but Zenoch wasn’t as funny anymore, Jeff Race not as compelling a question.

Her dad scolded her for sitting out there by herself in the dark. “The world isn’t safe anymore.” *The manhunt continues.* A report about the Valley Mutilator was on the radio.

“It’s not even dark,” said Tammy.

The car swerved. In the middle of Independence Avenue a snake had been cut almost in half. It thrashed like a bullwhip drawing blood from the pavement.

#

“We have some time to kill. I just want to look around,” said Eric parking the Jeep in front of Discount Stereo Planet on Van Nuys Boulevard.

“Dude (Looks Like a Lady)” by Aerosmith was playing inside the store. A blond guy was wiping a glass display counter and singing along in a whisper.

“Hey. You probably don’t remember me. I’m Tammy Cardiel. We were in a movie together like six or seven years ago...”

“Oh yeah, totally. What’s up?” He was fuller in the face and not as tan, but his hair was still good. He was still acting, he said, and just got a callback for a new show called *Night Street* on a cable station called Maxx.

“Awesome,” said Tammy. She wasn’t convinced he remembered her. She could see him acting. “Good luck.”

Eric circled the store and was back at the counter frowning at a car stereo on display.

“That’s the Philips DC oh-eight-five,” said Jeff walking over. “We’re selling a ton of these. CD player, built-in amp and EQ.” He pointed to the knobs and buttons, grinning like he put them on there himself. “Pretty soon *all* car stereos will be like this—just a CD player.”

Eric looked up at the news.

“This is the future.”

It was the summer before Xaviara and the forty remaining members of the Intergalactic Brotherhood, including Mel Talbot and his wife, drank poison in the Unity Temple basement.

Eric turned from the future and looked at his Swatch. “What time are we supposed to meet that guy?”

Keith Vaughn is a writer and artist with an MFA from the Cranbrook Academy of Art. He have published art criticism in *CARLA, the Contemporary Art Review Los Angeles*. This is his first fiction publication.



MAMãO

By DM O'CONNOR

Open fruit in midday sun,
papaya, for example,

virtue
ripe to give.

Fruit peddler, smog covered,
car horns blazing Villas-Lobos.

Axé from sweatshop windows
air conditioners weep puddles

onto cobblestoned memory.

The bus will never come.
There is no shade.

Yet that orange meat splayed
green skinned, black seeded,

flash of flesh, authentic, faithful

promise of juice-kiss
seducing some

lucky passerby.

DM O'Connor is based in Albuquerque, where a short story collection progresses. He contributes monthly to; *The Review Review* and *New Pages*. His writing has appeared in; *Barcelona Metropolitan*, *Collective Exiles*, *Across the Margin*, *Headland*, *Cecile's Writers*, *The Great American Lit Mag*, *Bohemia*, *Beechwood*, *Fiction Magazine*, *After the Pause*, *The Great American Lit Mag* (Pushcart nomination) , *The New Quarterly* and *The Guardian*. Tweeting @dmoconnorwrites

Touring the French Basilica

BY LAUREN DAVIS

Around us throngs of children twist to learn each stone and saint,
their limbs jerking with the labor of reverence. Somewhere someone chants.

Stained glass claws its way to beams, pope blessed. You lower your camera.
I have to just put it in my brain, you say, cap the lens. How long to commit

each grotesque and tomb to memory? The longer we stand,
the more prayful each visitor mutates. We might as well all be stone ourselves.

Except the woman barely beyond the north facade—she stomps her foot
to scatter pigeons, pops her gum. Inside silent as candle flame.

Outside, a clash of wings.

Lauren Davis is a poet living on the Olympic Peninsula in a Victorian seaport community. She holds an MFA from the Bennington Writing Seminars, and her work can be found in publications such as *Prairie Schooner*, *Split Lip Press*, and *Clarion*. She works as an editor at *The Tishman Review*.

Cutting Through

BY JOSHUA LIPSON

nothing but current
warm with sea
and if —

knew in that moment there was no First Cause
and glid

shelf receding
blew her mind in international waters

cleared the bellows
shot the witness

Hathor

By JOSHUA LIPSON

things that never occurred to me
skinning a Chinese gooseberry

golden, the
mandrakes beam back
methyl memories of torsion
avarice cinches back to
flower and the sea runs
high with potash
honest as the dun carapace
mind in limestone gambols
not a star.
uses for mastic and dried mint
cavity sealant kiwi-lime ananda
pure Castile soap of consciousness
addle you run with airs of Lebanon.
oarsmen among the water-lilies
belfry in the wooden
pendant universe.
shut up in obsidian
Tabnit undone
retains the shade
of ribbon alphabet.

current through a latticework amphora
and you are holding my hand in the middle of the water

Joshua Lipson is a student of history, language, and the mind. He's from New Jersey, by way of Cambridge, Jerusalem, Istanbul, and San Francisco. His work has been published in *Harbinger Asylum*, *Obra/Artifact*, and *Three Line Poetry*.



Lucky Girl

BY JAIME CAMPBELL

The student government crowd passes out condoms from the outdoor stage in the main quad. They're purple and red, glow-in-the-dark and ribbed. Yoshi takes two, holding the gold-wrapped condoms over his thick, black-framed glasses as he smiles at Tessa. She pulls the condoms away from his face, tossing them into the bushes.

"Can I copy your geometry homework?" he asks Tessa.

"You can copy what I copied from the other Tessa, if you want."

Tessa and Yoshi walk across the quad and sit on their usual bench, ignoring the crying girls who are all over campus. Tessa is not tempted by their grief, even if part of her would like to emotionally collapse in public, too. Sure, she listens to the music. She can logically understand the tragedy of a man overwhelmed by the expectations of fame and probably a million other normal things on top of that. But she doesn't feel connected to any of it. The public tragedy is too far removed from her internal one.

She hands Yoshi her math homework, twists the bleached highlight that frames the left side of her face, and then pulls out her day planner. She flips it open to the day's date—Friday April the 8th, 1994. Tessa has a red heart around it and the two days that follow. She's ovulating.

#

That weekend, Tessa convinces her older brother to drive her and the other Tessa—her best friend—all the way out to Montebello for their first Riot Grrrl meeting. They walk in, and a bunch of girls more pierced, tattooed, and shabbily dressed than them stare and stare at Tessa's clean, new Nirvana t-shirt, smirking at her. The other Tessa steps close to her, like a small child hiding behind her mother.

They've been shrugged off as normal, which relieves Tessa as she pulls on the shirt, looking down at the image that is also on the cover of *In Utero*. The skinless angel woman is more naked, more stripped down and vulnerable than any scantily clad rocker chick she's ever seen—an intentional parody of what came before the band. She touches the stiff, air-brushed image, wondering how so many feminists could miss this message. She joins them anyway, sitting in a circle with the group for a discussion in which only girls who have been victims of sexual assault or abuse are allowed to speak.

Tessa remains silent, her gaze centered on the second hand of the clock—the most frequent reminder. She watches it for four laps, just as she had the night she'd been sexually assaulted. Raped, she thinks. She had been raped. She imagines the years passing as a second hand. Two times around now.

She avoids thinking directly of what happened to her. Her memory remains on its periphery—the clock, the purple velvet blanket. A wall-sized Jane's Addiction poster tacked to the ceiling—the cover of *Nothing's Shocking*. She bundled the blanket into a black trash bag, got a digital clock, but she left the poster there on her bedroom ceiling. She studies it often, imagining the floating, flame-haired siamese twin women had been real witnesses. The only ones to have seen. Still the only ones who know.

She remembers the shame about how she felt afterward, too. She'd always imagined herself the kind of girl who would report rape—go to the ER and tolerate the necessary physical exams and interrogations. But once it was over and he was gone, she felt no sense of civic duty. Instead, she craved

shelter. Going to the police countered every instinct inside her, and she chose to listen to her body.

The shame didn't end there, either. The concern that she might have been pregnant somehow transformed into a hope, a desire for a life to be developing inside her. This response was all wrong, a negative reflection of who she really was, she thought. It was as if the rape had left her ugliest, most backward self exposed. The disappointment she felt when she got her period, sitting in the stall of the girls bathroom, her blue and white P.E. shorts around her ankles, was confusing for Tessa—she knew she was supposed to experience relief, but she couldn't detect a single ounce of it. Instead, she wished she had gotten pregnant, a sudden, uncontrollable desire for a baby aging her from the inside. Everyone would have forgiven her for it, too, she remembers thinking—because of her circumstances, no one would have blamed her despite her youth.

Two years later, this still makes Tessa feel like the most fucked up person on the planet.

And then another girl at the Riot Grrrl meeting who wears jeans and a white t-shirt, no fashion choices indicating her taste in music or political affiliations, says, "I must be the most fucked up person ever."

Tessa remains quiet, even though this girl has articulated her exact feelings. Her silence feels like a lie, and Tessa wonders if she is the only one not being completely honest. Not just someone like her who is too ashamed or scared or angry to openly accept the label of victim, but someone who might falsely claim it here, now, because that's how badly she wants to fit in and identify with the group. She feels yet another dose of shame at doubting anyone, but she also recalls a statistic she'd seen in her dad's LA Times one morning as she sat in his place at the kitchen table, stealing sips from his coffee mug while he was in the bathroom—that all crimes, rape included, share the same small, but real false report rate.

Tessa looks at a girl with her septum pierced, a Tribe 8 shirt ripped and tattered, just barely covering her braless A-cup breasts, wondering if she has raised her hand, identifying herself as a victim, merely because she cannot stand the thought of not being able to talk.

The fantasy ends up comforting Tessa—that this girl might not have actually suffered through anything resembling Tessa's own experience. She might not have any idea what it would feel like to be victimized. Tessa allows herself to believe this story. Lucky girl, she thinks.

#

The other Tessa lost her virginity the night before at a Sonic Youth show to a cool, older boy from school named Marcus. Tessa has invented two kinds of virginity—the one that was stolen from her and another that she can give freely to someone else. She knows it is make-believe nonsense, but to her the general significance of virginity has a similar tone to it anyway. So, she approaches the conversation in the other Tessa's small, book-lined bedroom feeling in her own way like an actual virgin.

Tessa rests on the carpet and pulls *The Bluest Eye* off a shelf, asking her friend, "What was it like?" She flips the book over, pretending to read the plot summary, but she is really just avoiding the girl on the cover who looks too old for those pink hair ribbons and that doll. She hasn't read the book, but she understands what the cover artist is trying to tell her.

"It felt like so much," the other Tessa says.

"Like so much...what?" she says, dropping the book and pinching the sides of her lower lip together, the flesh collapsing inward at the middle.

"Just so much feeling and pleasure."

Tessa grows annoyed. The other Tessa is always like this—everything all the time about beauty and feeling, each life event transformed into a poem. They're everywhere, these poems—journals and loose leaf pages sprawled all over the place. Not just here in her bedroom, but in both lockers the Tessas share at school, and often left behind in Tessa's own bedroom. She found one in her own mom's car once.

"Why haven't you done it yet?" the other Tessa asks her. The other Tessa is always so shy until it is just the two of them, and they both know it is unexpected that the other Tessa has gone first. They both understand which Tessa usually gets attention from the boys at school—which one of them is known for her wit and cool factor and which one is known for her awkwardness and good grades.

Tessa stares past her friend because she cannot say any version of the truth—that she isn't actually a virgin or that were she to have sex now, she would not want to use birth control, especially if she were ovulating. This is not what Tessa is supposed to want—it is what she is supposed to avoid. So, instead, she just says, "I don't know."

"Like maybe with Yoshi?"

"Where? At school? That's the only place I ever see him. Hey—Tessa." Tessa always likes saying her own name out loud like that—in reference to the other Tessa. "You wanna go walk up the horse trail and smoke this?" She pulls a joint from her purple lunchbox that she uses as a purse.

"After we're done with our math homework," the other Tessa says, refocusing on her sheet of graph paper and drawing out a proof chart for geometry class.

Tessa sits up and pulls open a desk drawer, peeking through her friend's things. It is a mix of girly office supplies, notes in her own all-caps handwriting, and old cassette tapes.

Tessa picks up one of the tapes, a small picture of a pink house on the back of it, surrounded by large lettering: MUSIC FROM BIG PINK.

"What's this?" she asks the other Tessa.

"My dad used to play it all the time when I was young."

Tessa slips the cassette into the TEAC combo stereo unit from Costco and hits play. It picks up in the middle of "Long Black Veil" and her homework cannot compete with the chorus. She rewinds and plays the song over and over until the other Tessa is ready to go get high.

A few weeks pass, and all the other Tessa can talk about is her new boyfriend. Suddenly, their friendship is limited to the confines of the four out of six classes they share. Tessa grows distracted by not having a social scene anymore until Yoshi asks her if she wants to go for a hike.

This has always been Tessa's way—get wrapped up primarily in one friendship, and she transitions from the other Tessa to Yoshi so smoothly. They are in Laguna, hiking from Top of the World. She squats under an oak tree and rolls a joint. After she inhales, the drug draws her attention to the ocean breeze. She passes the joint to Yoshi, their fingers lingering there for a bit. She looks from their hands to his eyes, and he is already looking at her. His straight dark hair floats over the edge of his glasses, the endless Pacific mirroring all the light of the moment behind him.

#

Tessa is ovulating and she thinks this is it. But then Yoshi is on his knees on the large Persian-style rug in the center of his room as he pulls a condom out of his top desk drawer—one of the gold-wrapped ones from school. He tears it open and starts unrolling it over his erect penis.

"You don't have to," she says, breathing against his checkered flannel pillowcase and draping the

matching sheet over her hip, the fabric soft and stimulating against her skin.

He stops, his penis in his hands. "I don't have to what?" He has his glasses off and his eyes are squinted at her.

"Nothing," she says, turning onto her back and pulling the sheet from her body.

He walks her home, and once she is alone in her room, staring at the serious, knowing faces of the siamese twins on the poster she compares the two experiences, no matter how badly she does not want to associate one with the other. They will always be coupled in her mind, though—oppression and exploration.

#

Tessa wakes in the night, resisting the temptation to look at the clock. Instead, she gets out of bed and slips on her Converse sneakers. She grabs her thrift-store flannel, walks right out the front door, and sits on the curb to smoke a joint. She looks left, looks right—suburban desolation in both directions. Once she is good and high, she heads to Yoshi's house. She pauses at his window where he sits cross-legged, his right hand cradling his left and his eyes closed. The room is filled with low, golden light and she is eager to get inside. Tessa taps the glass and his eyes open. He smiles as he stands to let her in.

"What were you doing?"

"Zazen," he says. "Sitting meditation." Yoshi is agnostic, but this part of his Buddhist upbringing has stuck. "It feels good," he says.

"Can you teach me?"

"Sure," he says.

They sit down cross-legged, and he shows her how to use her dominant hand to hold the other. He tells her to start by focusing on each breath and dismissing each thought, counting to ten exhalations over and over. Tessa tries for what she imagines to be four rotations of the second hand and then opens her eyes.

"My thoughts feel like one big blob," she says.

"Isolating one makes the others fall away," he says.

"Okay." She tries again but something inside her rises and she wants to stop.

"You don't have to practice for very long. Just do it whenever, and it'll get easier, better."

She goes home and sits underneath the numb, identical faces on the ceiling, letting each of her thoughts rise and release, rise and release, but they're never-ending and she can't even count to three breaths before having to start over again.

#

Tessa and Yoshi walk home from school finding fifty different ways to touch each other—they hold hands, he grabs her hips, and on and on. They count them out loud together. Then they are in his room, under the covers.

He goes to put on a condom, but she says, "I'm not even ovulating, if you don't want to wear that." She speaks with confidence, drawing on her desire, ignoring her fear of what he'll think, what he'll do.

"Ovulating?"

"Yeah—I can't get pregnant right now."

“How do you know for sure?”

“I keep track of these things.”

“Why?”

“So I won’t get pregnant.”

“The rhythm method?” His doubt is clear to both of them, even as he tosses the condom aside and pulls her toward him.

His skin against hers is the warmest nestling of anything either of them has ever experienced. She is surprised when she actually has an orgasm this time, the feeling more internal than any self-induced clitoral climax she’s experienced, and she pretends that it has worked, that he’s given her a baby. She rests on top of him and snuggles her face in his Speedstick-scented armpit still imagining the way it would feel to be pregnant—like a correction of something she keeps vague and unclear.

#

Tessa takes the train to L.A. for another Riot Grrrl meeting. She is by herself, following the directions she was given over the phone to get from the station to the meeting, and she can hear a band playing when she is a few storefronts away from her destination—a closed-down record store. The room is small, and the empty display cases are all pushed up against one of the walls. She leans against a Smashing Pumpkins poster, modified with a red Sharpie so that Billy Corgan is giving head to a floating, gigantic penis. She taps her foot to two more bands until finally the part that she came for starts. She misses it if there is an actual name for this portion of the meeting, but she thinks of it as confessional. All these girls sitting in a circle, sharing stories of survival and victimization.

She thinks she is about to tell them about being raped, but instead she says, “I want to get pregnant.”

One girl runs her hand over her own shaved head, another slips a pack of Marlboro Reds in and out of the front pocket of her black babydoll dress.

“I want to get pregnant,” she repeats, challenging all of these girls to speak up, confront her. Tessa can no longer tolerate that there is nowhere to go to talk about it, no one who could anticipate she might feel the way she does.

“Have you ever been a victim of sexual abuse or assault?” a girl with two hoop nose rings and a labret piercing says.

The direct, clinical nature of the question is a slug in the gut that Tessa cannot answer.

“It’s okay if you have,” the girl says, her voice softer and more sincere than Tessa has ever experienced from another teenager, but it isn’t enough to make her want to open up more than she already has. She finds her left hand in her right and says, “I have to go.”

It takes almost three hours to get home. At the Santa Ana train station, she calls Yoshi from a pay phone. Twenty minutes later, he pulls up in his mom’s boxy Volvo station wagon.

They stop at the park across the street from the cemetery and climb into the backseat. Both of their shirts are off, crumpled atop the dash.

“Are you ovulating?” he asks her.

She is, but she feels compelled toward the lie, little by little. She resists the deception, though, and says, “Yes. But what if we don’t use a condom anyway?”

Her head is turned, so he must rely solely on her profile as he assesses whether or not she’s joking. “What?” he says.

His hand rests between her shoulder blades as she looks out the window at the empty swings, motionless under the orange light of the street lamp.

“I know it sounds crazy, but I want a baby so badly. I’ve always wanted to be a mother, always.” She fights the knowledge that the desire doesn’t go back to always, but to a rape she cannot imagine telling Yoshi about. She thinks about it then, though—the neighbor’s nephew from out of town. He came over to listen to some tapes when no one was home. Her mom had suggested it: “He’s only a year older than you. Call him, Tessa. Be nice—neighborly.”

She turned from the stereo to find him standing right there in her personal space. He just started kissing her—no eye contact, no slow lean-in. Did she want him to kiss her? The actions took place too quickly for her to have known.

He had her on the bed, his knees against her spread thighs. How they got there is a blur—not because Tessa had been drinking, but because he commanded the situation so swiftly, assuming consent, his ability to direct her body baffling, confusing to her. How did he get her dress over her head, exactly? Or her panties off her hips? When did that happen?

He had his finger inside her when the words came to her, “No, stop,” she said.

“Okay,” he said, pulling his finger from her body and then forcing his penis inside her.

Tessa clarified at the top of her lungs. “No stop it stop it!” She used physical force, her palms, her curled fingers, pushing against his hot, heavy weight. Her lungs could barely expand against his movement, though. All he had to do was lay there on top of her—she was pinned. Stuck. She would have to wait for him to let her up, she realized. She closed her eyes, but found this worsened her crying, the sense of panic, so she opened her eyes wide, trying not to blink. She fixated on the black and white clock, both hoping and not hoping someone would come home and walk in as she lay there waiting instead of fighting. She knows she is not supposed to take this detail and allow it to fuel guilt and a sense of responsibility. It is difficult not to, though—a Herculean struggle against her own mind.

“You think about—babies?” Yoshi’s concern grows as he articulates her feelings. He moves closer to her, his chest against her back.

She says, “I want it like I’ve never wanted anything, like it isn’t even up to me. A mother—that’s who I am meant to be, nothing else.”

“No one’s just one thing,” Yoshi says. “Someday you’ll be a great mom, but Tessa, we’re too young. I don’t want a baby.”

She feels like someone is playing a trick on her. She can feel his warmth and love, but it is burdensome and heavy. It takes up too much space, now, like there isn’t room for her alongside it. He stares at her, and she thinks he knows—he knows that she’s been damaged somehow. She wriggles away from him and asks him to take her home.

The other Tessa is there sitting on the lawn. “Marcus broke up with me,” she says, tears in her eyes and her journal in her lap.

They go inside and the other Tessa asks her, “How are you and Yoshi?”

“Really good. I’m a lucky girl. We’re talking about having a baby.”

“What?”

“A baby. I want to be a mother.”

“Tessa shut up. I’m not in the mood.”

“Well, neither am I.” Tessa sits in the middle of her room, and she tries to sit zazen with the other Tessa watching. She closes her eyes.

The other Tessa says, “What...”

Tessa dismisses the word.

“...are...”

She counts her second breath.

“...you...”

She lets the word you go and begins counting again at one.

“...doing?”

She dismisses this last word as well, starting at one yet again. She keeps going, up to four, until she hears the other Tessa close the door on her way out.

#

The next morning, Tessa wakes infuriated that she confided her deepest secret three times in one day only to be dismissed three times. This is what Riot Grrrl should be focused on, she thinks—how easily girls are shrugged off, even by each other.

When she comes out of her room, her cousin Jill is in her living room with her baby Sophie. Tessa feels all negativity slip away as she reaches her arms out, and the little girl reaches back. Tessa picks her up, dancing her around the living room.

Then Tessa’s mom comes swooping in. “Gotta get my baby fix,” she says, pulling up her sleeves.

“I just got her,” Tessa says, turning and gripping Sylvie protectively.

“Fine, I’ll wait,” her mom says, making eye contact with Jill.

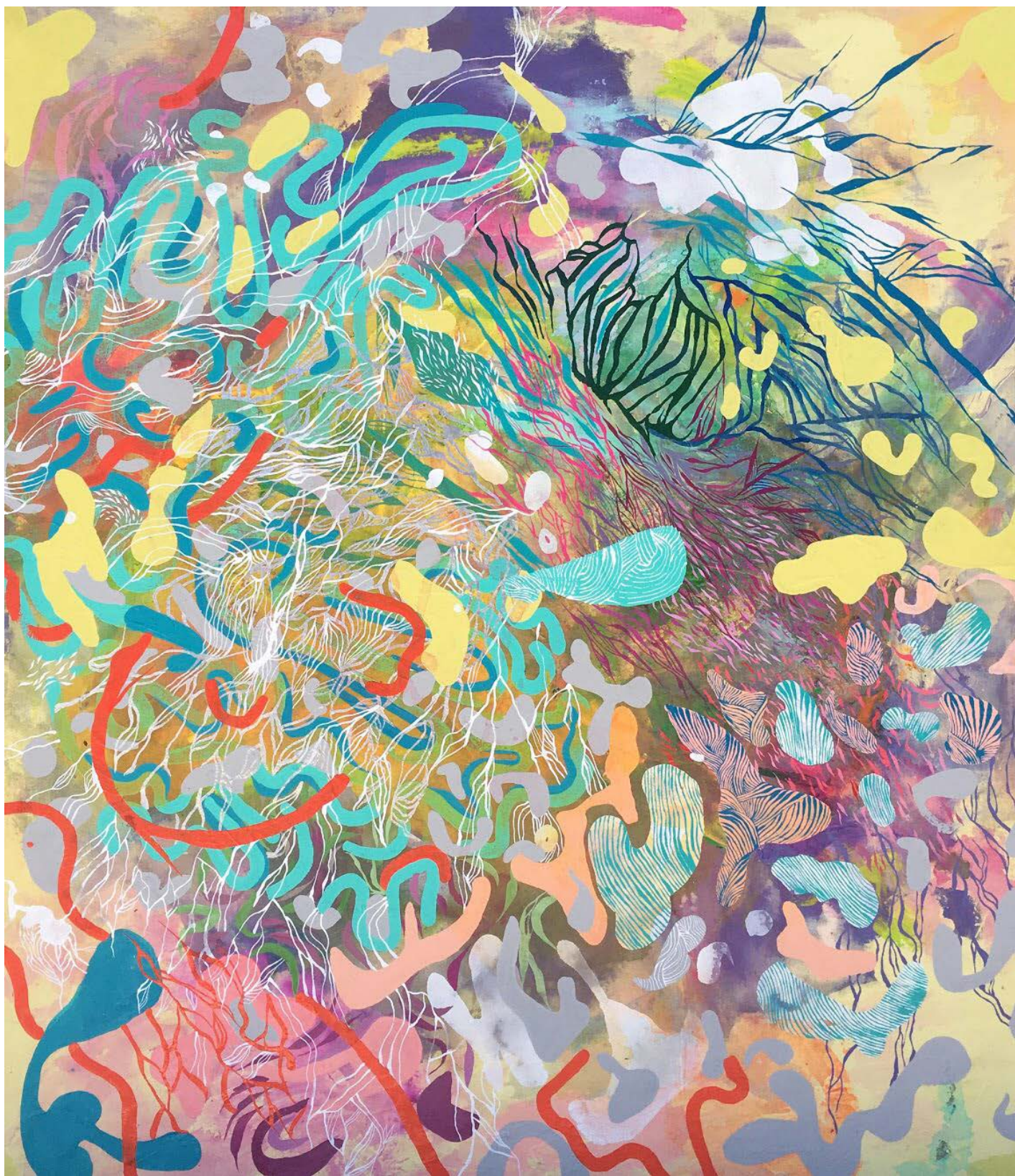
Tessa dances little Sophie around more and then her mom and Jill go outside.

Tessa sits cross-legged on the floor and holds Sophie to her chest, peeking out the window to make sure they aren’t being watched. She closes her eyes and counts her breath. Each one is smooth and soothing, like she is taking in more oxygen than she has before. She keeps going, counting and counting, her jaw relaxed, her heartbeat slow and even.

She gets to ten this time, twice in a row.

She cradles Sophie close, whose head nestles against her shoulder as she gums the end of Tessa’s braid. Tessa pretends Sophie is hers, imagining that the perfect, logical sense of motherhood belongs to her. She watches the clock, and after four rotations of the second hand, she breathes in, exhales, and dismisses what has been her deepest secret for years.

Jaime Campbell is a fiction writer and poet who lives in Modjeska Canyon, a rural oasis tucked within Southern California's suburban Orange County. Her fiction is forthcoming in *The Los Angeles Review* and has appeared in *The Ear*.



MIÉRCOLES ANTES DE MEDIO DÍA

POR ANDRÉS PANIAGUA

A Ytzel y Pablo

*...ahora el giro
y lo que fue un camino
se convierte en un círculo
sin nada detrás
[Aquí, Robert Creeley]*

1

FRENTE A LA COMPUTADORA MASTICO

: MANZANAS

NADA EVITA QUE CERCA DE LAS 11 AM ALGO SUCEDA —

AUN CUANDO LOS HECHOS NO

DETENGAN LA LÓGICA DEL TRABAJO EN EL SIGLO XXI

LA CUENTA PROSIGUE

— SIN

NOVEDADES A ESTE LADO DEL SONIDO

Y AUNQUE SIENTAS QUE NO SIGNIFICAS LO QUE HACES

EN CUALQUIER OTRO CASO FRENTE A MÚLTIPLES OPCIONES

LA INDETERMINACIÓN

CONSTITUIRÍA UN JUICIO MORAL

2

ESTA OFICINA ESTÁ LLENA DE CUCARACHAS

CAMINAN A TRAVÉS DE LOS LIBROS HASTA

ALCANZAR EL ESCRITORIO:

LAS ATRAPO

LAS COLOCO ENTRE DOS SUPERFICIES

PRESIONO

OBSERVO

LEJOS DE LA MASA EXPRIMIDA DEBE HABER

OTRO LUGAR: SUPONGO

MÁS LEJOS INCLUSO

NO IMPORTANDO SI EXISTEN O NO LAS CUCARACHAS

DEBERÍA ENCONTRAR ALGO QUE HAGA SENTIR REALIZADO

AL YO VERDADERO

DONDE BUSCAR SUERTE E INVOLUCRARME

: UN JUICIO DE VALOR

3

HUESOS

DE MANZANA CAEN APARTÁNDOSE DE LA MASTICACIÓN

HAY OTROS SINÓNIMOS

HOMÚNCULOS ATADOS AL CIERZO GRAVITATORIO

SIGNIFICAN CASI LO MISMO

TODOS

VOLUTAS INSENSIBLES AL HORARIO

QUÉ HUEVA

YA NO

SIGNIFICAN LO MISMO

4

Y SI UN YO ES LO QUE ESE YO HACE CON SU

CUERPO *HACE CON SUS*

JUICIOS

—AL FIN Y AL CABO *SOY LA MEDIDA*

DE TODAS LAS COSAS —

QUÉ OTRO RUMBO PODRÍA

TOMAR NINGUNO O SÍ

SEGURO EXISTE

O QUÉ OTRO CAMINO ADEMÁS DE INTENTAR ACERCARME AL

DESFILE DE FIGURAS PRECISAS

ES DECIR HABLAR SOBRE ALGO Y HACERLO

EXISTIR SÍ PORQUE ES CIERTO

SEGÚN AFIRMAN LOS ANALÍTICOS ES EN ESTE ACTO DONDE HABITA

CIERTA PRECISIÓN PARA DESCRIBIR EL MUNDO MI RELACIÓN CON ÉL

COMO BIEN

DECÍA ¿CÓMO SE LLAMABA ESE AUTOR?

NO IMPORTA TOCAR CIERTA IMAGEN QUE HA QUEDADO GRABADA

EN TU MENTE E INTENTA SER PROYECTADA EN LA REALIDAD

OBJETIVA IDÉNTICA

A LA CALVICIE EN FIN

A PESAR DE LA

FALTA DE RIGOR ENTRE ESTO Y AQUELLO

ALREDEDOR DE LAS 6 O 7 DE LA TARDE

DA IGUAL

TODO LO QUE PUEDA VENIR DESPUÉS

Wednesday Before Noon

BY ANDRÉS PANIAGUA
TRANSLATED BY YTZEL MAYA

to Ytzel and Pablo

...now the twist
and what was a road
turns in a circle
with nothing behind
[Here, Robert Creeley]

1
facing my computer I chew

: apples

inevitably around 11 am something happens –

even when the deeds don't

halt the logic of work in the 21st century

the counting proceeds

– without

news on this side of the sound

and even if you feel what you do has no meaning

in any other case faced with multiple options

the indecision

would constitute a moral judgment

this office is full of cockroaches

walking through the books until

they reach the desk:

I catch them

I put them between two surfaces

I press

I watch

There must be a place away from the

squeezed dough: I suppose

even further away

it does not matter whether or not cockroaches exist

I should find something that makes me feel fulfilled

down to my real self

where to find fortune and purpose

: a value judgment

3

apple cores

fall away from the chewing

there are other synonyms

homonculi caught in the pull of the north wind

they mean almost the same thing

all of the

scrolls are indifferent to the schedule

what a drag

they no longer

mean the same thing

and if I am what I do with his

body do with his

judgments

– in the end *I am the measure*

of all things – what other path could I

take none or if

sure there is

or what other way besides trying to get to the

parade of precise figures

that is to say to talk about something and do it

to exist if because it is true

according to the analysts it is precisely in this act

that it lives to describe the world my relationship to him

as well

he said what was that author's name?

it does not matter touch a certain image that has been graven

in your mind and try to project it into reality

objective identical

expose it anyway

in spite of the

lack of rigor between this and that

around 6 or 7 in the afternoon

it doesn't matter

whatever comes after

Andres Paniagua Is the author of *Usted está aquí* (Ed. Mantarraya, Mx, 2016). He has been published in different reviews and websites, such as *Opción*, *Letras Libres*, *UniDiversidad* (BUAP), *Dolce Stil Criollo* (E.U.A.), *Aesthetoscopio*, *Digo.palabra.txt* (Ven.), *Septentrión*, *El Humo*, *Al-Araby* (R.U.). He is a 2017 recipient of the Jóvenes Creadores by Fondo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes grant.

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