

Ai

m a g a z i n e

issue 10. spring 2019.

IN THIS ISSUE

FEATURED ARTIST
Norma Alonzo

+ AN INTERVIEW WITH
Leigh Rourks

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Artists & Authors

in this issue

Alonzo, Norma

Norma Alonzo has always taken her painting life seriously, albeit privately. An extraordinarily accomplished artist, she has been painting for over 25 years. Beginning as a landscape painter, she quickly transitioned to an immersion in all genres to experiment and learn. Initially, Alonzo was torn between professions – the arts or a career in architecture. She chose the arts, graduating from San Jose State University in San Jose, California with a degree in Interior Design. After working in this field and ultimately heading her own design firm, her focus turned to the creation of fine art. Under the mentorship of Richard Lees (artist and art historian of Pasadena, California), Alonzo was encouraged toward honesty in her painting without judgment, without expectation, and without the confines of outside demanding interests.



Bergamini, Guilherme

Guilherme Bergamini is 40 years old and was born in Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, Brazil. Graduated in journalism, he has been working with photography for 23 years. Awarded in national and international competitions and festivals, he has taken part in group and solo exhibitions in 21 countries. Also, his work has been published in several Brazilian and foreign press vehicles. He has published part of his photographic journey on his website (www.guilhermebergamini.com).



Berry, Stephen Eric

Stephen Eric Berry is a film-maker, composer, and a recipient of a Jule and Avery Hopwood Award at the University of Michigan. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Puerto del Sol*, *California Quarterly*, *Sukoon*, *The Ilanot Review*, *Foliate Oak*, and elsewhere. He lives in Chelsea, Michigan.



Brand, Gabriella

Gabriella Brand's short stories, poems and essays have appeared in over fifty magazines, including *Room Magazine*, *Cordite*, *Stone Bridge Café*, *The First Line*, *Switched on Gutenberg*, and *Three Element Review*. She is a Pushcart Prize nominee. Gabriella divides her time between Connecticut, where she teaches foreign languages, and the Eastern Townships of Quebec, where she writes. She travels widely, mostly on foot.



Artists & Authors

in this issue

Brosnan, Michael

Michael Brosnan is the author of *The Sovereignty of the Accidental*, a collection of poems published in 2017 by Harbor Mountain Press. His poetry has appeared in numerous literary journals, including *Confrontation*, *Borderlands*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Barrow Street*, *New Letters*, and *Rattle*. He is also the author of *Against the Current*, a book on inner-city education. More at www.michaelabrosnan.com.



Cahill, Zachary

Zachary Cahill is a poet and student currently attending Alma College in Michigan, with plans to further study poetry and critical theory upon graduation. He is physically unable to turn down a good bratwurst. His work has appeared in *Gravel*, *West Texas Literary Review*, and *Hashtag Queer*.



Campiglio, Stephen

Stephen Campiglio's poems and translations have appeared in many journals. He won the 2013 Willis Barnstone Translation Prize for his translation of a poem by Italian writer Giuseppe Bonaviri (1924-2009), and has now completed a book-length manuscript of translations, *The Ringing Bones: Selected Poems of Giuseppe Bonaviri*. Nominated for two Pushcart Prizes, Campiglio has published two chapbooks, *Cross-Fluence* (2012) and *Verbal Clouds through Various Magritte Skies* (2014).



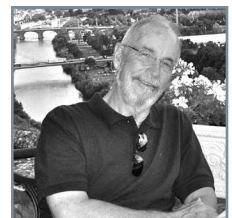
Clarkson, Martha

Martha Clarkson manages corporate workplace design in Seattle. Her poetry, photography, and fiction can be found in *monkeybicycle6*, *Clackamas Literary Review*, *Seattle Review*, *F-Stop Magazine*, *LensCulture*, *Portland Review*, *elimae*, and *Nimrod*. She is a recipient of a Washington State Poets William Stafford prize 2005, a Pushcart Nomination, and is listed under "Notable Stories," Best American Non-Required Reading for 2007 and 2009. www.marthaclarkson.com



Dalmas, Paul C.

Paul C. Dalmas is a freelance writer who has made his living as a boilermaker's helper, a fry cook, and a high school English teacher. His work has been broadcast on KQED radio and published by *Newsweek*, *The San Francisco Chronicle*, *The Berkeley Daily Planet*, and *California Magazine*.



Artists & Authors

in this issue

Daniels, Barbara

Barbara Daniels' book *Rose Fever* was published by WordTech Press and her chapbooks *Black Sails*, *Quinn & Marie*, and *Moon Kitchen* by Casa de Cinco Hermanas Press. Her poetry has appeared in *Prairie Schooner*, *Mid-American Review*, and many other journals. She received three Individual Artist Fellowships from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts.



Denzler, Lucas

Lucas Denzler is graduate of the BFA program in Creative Writing at Bowling Green University. His work has appeared in *Prairie Margins*, where he received the Grandma Goda award, as well as Sheila-Na-Gig online's 'Under 30' issue. His work is forthcoming from *The Hunger*.



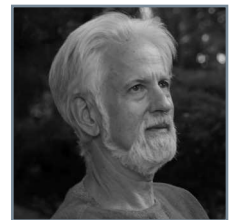
DuMar, Kelly

Kelly DuMar is a poet, playwright and workshop facilitator from Boston. She's author of two poetry chapbooks, *All These Cures* (Lit House Press), and *Tree of the Apple* (Two of Cups Press). Her poems, prose and photos are published in many literary journals including *Bellevue Literary Review*, *Tupelo Quarterly*, *Crab Fat*, *Storm Cellar*, *Corium & Tiferet*. Kelly serves on the Board of the International Women's Writing Guild (IWWG). She blogs her daily nature photos & creative writing at kellydumar.com/blog



Eisenberg, Ted

Ted Eisenberg is married with four children, six grandchildren and two Tibetan terriers. He retired from the practice of labor law in 2014 to write every day. He had been managing partner for almost ten years, which gave him the opportunity to learn something of how the world works out its practicalities. His poetry concerns anything other than those daily work-outs.



Fowler, James

James Fowler teaches literature at the University of Central Arkansas. His short stories have appeared in such journals as *The Labletter*, *Anterior Review*, *Little Patuxent Review*, *Best Indie Lit New England*, *Line Zero*, *The Chariton Review*, *The Southern Review*, *Riding Light Review*, and *Elder Mountain*.



Artists & Authors

in this issue

George, Patricia

Patricia is a retired teacher who keeps busy writing, creating art and playing piano for church. Blossom is the kitty love of her life on this earth. Neither eats grains. Patricia is the creator of phonetic poetry. She writes with the belief that pure vowels have beauty and healing properties when read aloud or sung. See some of her published work on her website. www.patriciageorge.biz



Gibb, Robert

Robert Gibb's books include *After*, which won the 2016 Marsh Hawk Press Poetry Prize and *Among Ruins*, which won Notre Dame's Sandeen Prize in Poetry for 2017. Other awards include a National Poetry Series title (*The Origins of Evening*), two NEA Fellowships, and a Best American Poetry and a Pushcart Prize.



Gooley, Ruth

Ruth Gooley (Ph.D. in French literature from UCLA) has published a chapbook called *Living in Nature* (July 2018). She has also published a variety of poems in publications such as *The Corner Club Press*, *Hamilton Stone Review*, *Ibbetson Street Review*, *Peeking Cat Anthology*, *vox poetica* and *BlazeVox*, among others. She resides in a cabin in the Santa Monica mountains, where she lives in harmony with the abundance of nature.



Grey, John

John Grey is an Australian poet and US resident. He is recently published in the *Homestead Review*, *Harpur Palate* and *Columbia Review* with work upcoming in the *Roanoke Review*, the *Hawaii Review* and *North Dakota Quarterly*.



Hostovsky, Paul

Paul Hostovsky is the author of ten books of poetry, most recently, *Late for the Gratitude Meeting* (Kelsay Books). His poems have won a Pushcart Prize, two Best of the Net awards, the Muriel Craft Bailey Award from *The Comstock Review*, and numerous poetry chapbook contests. He has been featured on *Poetry Daily*, *Verse Daily*, *The Writer's Almanac*, and was a Featured Poet on the Georgia Poetry Circuit. Website: paulhostovsky.com



Artists & Authors

in this issue

Judge, Jury S.

Jury S. Judge is an internationally published artist, writer, poet, photographer, and political cartoonist. Her 'Astronomy Comedy' cartoons are also published in Lowell Observatory's publication, *The Lowell Observer*. Her artwork has been published in literary magazines such as *Northwestern Indiana Literary Review*, *Permafrost*, *Amsterdam Quarterly*, and *Typehouse Literary Magazine*. She has been interviewed on the television news program *NAZ Today* for her work as a political cartoonist. She graduated Magna Cum Laude with a BFA from the University of Houston-Clear Lake in 2014. If you are interested in her artwork, email her at jurysjudge@gmail.com.



Kern, D. E.

D. E. Kern is an author and educator from Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. His poems and stories have appeared in *Reed Magazine*, *Hypothetical: A Review of Everything Imaginable*, *Nude Bruce Review*, *CRATE*, *Limestone*, *Mission at Tenth*, *Negative Capability*, and *Ink in Thirds*. He teaches English and Creative Writing at Arizona Western College.



LaDew, Kate

Kate LaDew is a graduate from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro with a BA in Studio Art. She resides in Graham, North Carolina with her cats Charlie Chaplin and Janis Joplin.



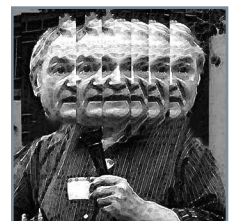
Marshall, Andrew

Andrew Marshall is a writer and visual artist living and working in the eastern Sierra Nevada mountains. www.andrewmarshallimages.com



Nodopaka, Alex

Alex Nodopaka originated in 1940, Kyiv, Ukraine. He speaks San Franciscan, Parisian, Kievan & Muscovite, mumbles in English & sings in tongues after vodka. He propounds having studied at the Ecole des Beaux Arts, Casablanca, Morocco. Presently a full-time author, he is a visual artist in the USA but considers his past irrelevant as he seeks new reincarnations.



Artists & Authors

in this issue

Oram, Andrew

Andrew Oram is an editor at O'Reilly Media, a highly respected book publisher and technology information provider. Andy also writes often on policy issues related to the Internet and on trends affecting technical innovation and its effects on society. His work has appeared in *The Economist*, *Communications of the ACM*, *Copyright World*, *The Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, *Vanguardia Dossier*, and *Internet Law and Business*.



Pearce, Jared

Aubade Press released Jared Pearce's collection, *The Annotated Murder of One* (www.aubadepublishing.com/annotated-murder-of-one). His poems have recently been or will soon be shared in *Picaroon*, *Southword*, *Wilderness House*, *Triggerfish*, and *Young Ravens*.



Riecki, Ron

Ron Riecki's books include *And Here: 100 Years of Upper Peninsula Writing, 1917-2017* (Michigan State University Press), *Here: Women Writing on Michigan's Upper Peninsula* (2016 Independent Publisher Book Award Gold Medal Great Lakes Best Regional Fiction), *The Way North: Collected Upper Peninsula New Works* (2014 Michigan Notable Book awarded by the Library of Michigan), and *U.P.*, a novel (Ghost Road Press).



Rourks, Leigh

Cuban-American author Leigh Camacho Rourks lives and teaches in Central Florida. She is an Assistant Professor of English at Beacon College. Her short story "Moon Trees" was awarded the Glenna Luschei Prairie Schooner Award. Her story "Pinched Magnolias" received the Robert Watson Literary Review Prize in Fiction. Her work has appeared in a number of journals including *Kenyon Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Triquarterly*, and *Greensboro Review*. Her debut collection of short stories, *Moon Trees and Other Orphans*, won the St. Lawrence Book Award and will be published by Black Lawrence Press in October of 2019.



Artists & Authors

in this issue

Sassi, Fabio

Fabio Sassi makes acrylics and photos. He uses tiny objects and discarded stuff. He often puts a quirky twist to his subjects or employs an unusual perspective that gives a new angle of view. He really enjoys taking the everyday and ordinary and framing it in a different way. Fabio lives in Bologna, Italy. His work can be viewed at www.fabiosassi.foliohd.com



Saturley, Brandy

Known as the painter of 'Canadianisms', the symbolic paintings of Canadian artist Brandy Saturley bear more affinity to magic realism than to photo realism. Saturley's work has toured Canada-wide, and garnered the Canadian artist notoriety as the voice of Canadian Pop Art. Inspirations include Georgia O'Keeffe and Lawren Harris. These paintings are inspired by O'Keeffe's time in Hawaii.



Scopa, Domenic

Domenic Scopa is a four-time Pushcart Prize nominee and the 2014 recipient of the Robert K. Johnson Poetry Prize and Garvin Tate Merit Scholarship. He holds an MFA from Vermont College of Fine Arts. His poetry and translations have been featured in *The Adirondack Review*, *Reed Magazine*, *Borderlands: Texas Poetry Review*, *Reunion: The Dallas Review*, *Prime Number*, and many others. He is currently a Lecturer of English & General Studies at NHTI, Concord's Community College.



Serafimova, Margarita

Margarita Serafimova was shortlisted for the Montreal International Poetry Prize 2017 and Summer Literary Seminars 2018 Contest, and long-listed for the Erbacce Press Poetry Prize 2018 and the Red Wheelbarrow 2018 Prize. She has three collections in Bulgarian. Her work appears in *Agenda Poetry*, *London Grip New Poetry*, *Trafika Europe*, *The Journal*, *A-Minor*, *Waxwing*, *Orbis*, *Nixes Mate*, *StepAway*, *HeadStuff*, etc.



Severino, Carol

Carol Severino's work has appeared in *Best Travel Essays 2012*, *Voices in Italian Americana*, *Hinchas de Poesia*, and *Writing on the Edge*. She teaches writing and directs the Writing Center at the University of Iowa.



Artists & Authors

in this issue

Sheldon, Evan James

Evan James Sheldon's work has appeared in *CHEAP POP*, *Ghost City Review*, *Pithead Chapel*, and *Roanoke Review*, among others. He is an Assistant Editor for *F(r)iction* and an Outreach Assistant for Brink Literary Project. You can find him on twitter @EvanJamesSheld1.



Shepherd, Lucas

Lucas Shepherd is an Air Force veteran and English professor living in Texas. His poetry has received two Pushcart Prize nominations.



Sites, Teresa

Teresa Sites currently works in the Washington, DC area. She earned her MFA from George Washington University in Painting and Drawing and studied Studio Art and English and Georgetown University, where she received her BA. Her artwork has been published in several venues, most recently in *The Art of the Tractor Coloring Book* published by Octane Press. Her artwork has been reviewed in publications, including the Howard County section of *The Baltimore Sun*, and has also been featured on ARTSLANT's "Under the Radar."



St. John, Andrew

Andrew St. John is a recent graduate of DePauw University. A lover of the macabre, his interests include nonfiction, fiction, and dramatic writing that touch on the human spirit and the inner most workings of our brains. When he's not drinking vats of coffee while scheduling students for tutoring sessions, he's on the couch with his dog, Scout, reading and writing or binge watching a Netflix Original series (followed by writing in-depth critiques of the series).



Smith, Robin

Robin Smith has been published worldwide and has won the Academy of American Poet's Prize. She is currently pursuing her PhD in Creative Writing at the University of North Dakota.



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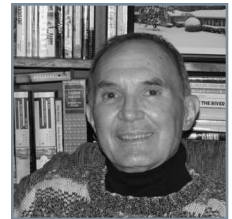
Thomson, Taunja

Three of T.M. Thomson's poems have been nominated for Pushcart Awards. She has co-authored a chapbook of ekphrastic poetry, *Frame and Mount the Sky* (2017); her chapbook *Strum and Lull* placed in Golden Walkman's chapbook competition (2017) and is due out soon; and her chapbook *The Profusion* will be published in 2019.



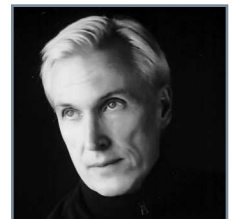
Vannatta, Dennis

Dennis Vannatta is a Pushcart and Porter Prize winner, with stories published in many magazines and anthologies, including *River Styx*, *Chariton Review*, *Boulevard*, and *Antioch Review*. His sixth collection of stories, *The Only World You Get*, was recently published by Et Alia Press.



Vyse, Richard

Internationally collected artist Richard Vyse has shown in galleries in Manhattan and Honolulu. He has studied at the School of Visual Arts in Manhattan and has taught at Pratt in Brooklyn. His art has been featured in many international art magazines. His art is in the Leslie Lohman Museum Collection. For bio and published art –<http://manartbyvyse.blogspot.com>



Whitehorse, Marilyn

In the topside world, I teach academic writing at Kapiolani Community College in Honolulu, Hawaii. In the river that flows beneath, I am a writer, photographer and collage artist.



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in this issue

Wolak, Bill

Bill Wolak has just published his fifteenth book of poetry entitled *The Nakedness Defense* with Ekstasis Editions. His collages have appeared recently in *Naked in New Hope 2017*, *The 2017 Seattle Erotic Art Festival*, *Poetic Illusion*, The Riverside Gallery, Hackensack, New Jersey, the *2018 Dirty Show* in Detroit, *2018 The Rochester Erotic Arts Festival*, and *The 2018 Montreal Erotic Art Festival*.



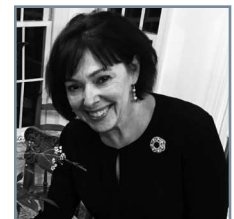
Yatchman, Cynthia

Cynthia Yatchman is a Seattle-based artist and art instructor. A former ceramicist, she received her B.F.A. in painting from the University of Washington. Her paintings are housed in numerous public and private collections and have been shown nationally in California, Connecticut, New York, Indiana, Michigan, Oregon and Wyoming. She has exhibited extensively in the Northwest, including shows at Seattle University, Seattle Pacific University, Shoreline Community College, the Tacoma and Seattle Convention Centers and the Pacific Science Center.



Zurenda, Susan Beckham

Susan Beckham Zurenda worked as a features reporter for a daily newspaper, then taught English for 33 years. Retired from full-time teaching, she works part-time as a book publicist for Magic Time Literary Publicity. Susan has won a number of regional fiction awards and published stories and nonfiction pieces in various journals. Mercer University Press will publish her debut novel, *Bells for Eli*, in spring 2020.



Editor's Welcome

"They'll sell you thousands of greens. Veronese green and emerald green and cadmium green and any sort of green you like; but that particular green, never."

-Pablo Picasso

When we settled on this issue's theme, our reviewers wondered: will we get sick of green? Will an emerald issue exclude too much, will we get enough high quality material to fill the issue? It wasn't long before we put those questions to rest. We were too busy wading through lush jungles, slapping the mosquitoes, eyeing the green blinking lights late at night in a hospital ward. This issue is packed with as many hues of the elusive color as I found on Wetcanvas.com, where one painter from Maryland made this claim: "Greens have been used for centuries, viridian being one of the most popular, emerald one of the most deadly. With it your paint can double as an insecticide and rat killer." Another painter agreed, explaining, "True Emerald Green is essentially unavailable today. It's considered to be extremely toxic and since the same basic colour is easily simulated from safer ingredients there's no real reason to use the real thing in modern painting."

Although certainly harmless, this issue does not presume to be "True Emerald Green." Instead, thanks to our contributors, we offer shades unique, as yet unnamed, some innocent and arboreal, others more sinister, born of nightmare. Some are opaque and lie flat on the walls while others glimmer and glow like gems. Some are silent, some speak; others whisper in hushed tones.



Brian Taylor, a colleague and a wonderful painter and teacher, told me that the quotation above is associated with Picasso's "The Death of Casagemas," a tribute to a young painter whose unreturned love inspired suicide. That piece is a deliberate and close parallel to some of Van Gogh's work, and in the middle of my ordinary day, the endless flow of my email, the bossy list of deadlines, I wonder. What shade of green, exactly, proved right in such a painting?

Picasso's "Nude, Green Leaves, and Bust" sold for over \$106 billion in 2010, proving that while a perfect, particular green may never appear on the canvas, whatever color the artist finds, the result can be worth more than anything in the humdrum world of fact and classification, where everything has a label or a number, and nothing of mystery remains. Thanks to *Aji's* dedicated, careful reviewers, our talented graphic designer, and our generous contributors, we present our emerald issue. Although we may fail the test for *true* emerald hidden among these pages, we hope you'll agree—sometimes, the faux is exquisite!

Erin O'Neill Armendarez
Editor in Chief



Jury S. Judge
Jellyfish



LINE & LANDSCAPE

an interview with Norma Alonzo

Norma Alonzo has always taken her painting life seriously, albeit privately. An extraordinarily accomplished artist, she has been painting for over 25 years. Beginning as a landscape painter, she quickly transitioned to an immersion in all genres to experiment and learn. Initially, Alonzo was torn between professions – the arts or a career in architecture. She chose the arts, graduating from San Jose State University in San Jose, California with a degree in Interior Design. After working in this field and ultimately heading her own design firm, her focus turned to the creation of fine art. Under the mentorship of Richard Lees (artist and art historian of Pasadena, California), Alonzo was encouraged toward honesty in her painting without judgment, without expectation, and without the confines of outside demanding interests.

Katie Redfield: When did you know you wanted to be an artist?

Norma Alonzo: I started rather late. I was working as an interior designer, and would often purchase art for a client. I always felt I could paint what was needed only better. I started painting and fell in love with the power of paint, canvas and brush to materialize into something magical that only I could create.

Can you describe your journey from that point to your present work?

I continued to study art history and in particular the abstract artists of the 1950's. I took painting classes and in the process found my mentor Mr. Richard Lees with whom I studied for sometime.

What inspires you to create?

After a long day of painting, I am always amazed at what materializes on the canvas. Each and every time the work takes me on an inner journey of play, perhaps frustration, perhaps joy, and ultimately an exploration of emotion and feeling.

How do you find new inspiration to keep your work moving forward?

My inspiration comes from my own path in this life. I am a thinking, feeling human being that absorbs and processes what is happening around me. It could be the news of the day, it could be a morning walk after a snowfall, it could be new music or a conversation with someone, it could be a memory or a combination of all of the above. In short it could be everything, or anything that emerges.



Norma Alonzo



Landscape in Green



Sedona



Chamisa

What challenges have you encountered and how have you overcome them?

The challenge might be feeling inspired but falling short of what my ideas for the painting are. Often I will sit with the painting, and just look when it is not working. Something will emerge if I see a line is needed, or a space of color is required, and many times that will lead to attacking the painting. It sounds ruthless but sometimes a fearlessness must be present to make the painting come together, and the only way is to just get into it and not be afraid to make big changes.

You have a beautiful use of line. Can you tell us about your background with architecture and how that informs your current creative work?

I have a degree in interior design. At one time I couldn't decide if I wanted to be an architect. I love the formality and the structure of that field, but I also love the use of pattern, and color from the design trade. The one constant was the use of line or a draftsman's approach in the design world. I love the notion of freedom and containment of line.

What is your workflow like? Can you describe a day in your studio for us?

I start the day deciding on whether to work on canvas or paper. I love the feel of brush on paper. I also love the way the paint moves or flows on a canvas. It is just what I feel I want to experience in determining the selection. If I have an idea in mind I will work from that in regard to color. Often I start with a series of marks. Once I start to paint I will follow through with the idea, and if something else presents itself I will abandon my preconceived idea for the shapes and feelings that call me within the painting. I will always trust my inner voice or my gut.

Do you work from photograph, life, or memory when creating a landscape image?

I started as a traditional landscape painter. My mentor Richard Lees would often say the landscape is the ultimate abstract. How do you make a mass of trees, a wall of mountains, or field read? I now combine known elements of a landscape with my need to explore current feelings, or a memory. My life experience is enough for me to paint from. So many times I feel I have just begun to explore the depths of painting feelings, experiences, and memory.

How do you share your work with others?

I use Instagram (normaalonzomyart). Instagram offers a support for me to share my paintings. I can share, and receive an immediate response. I will know quickly if my work in progress is well received or not, and additionally if the painting is a success. I don't always agree with my followers because many times I love a painting that the numbers of likes and comments does not support. Conversely they may love a painting that I feel is incomplete and needs more time.



Park 2

What is one of your favorite pieces you've ever created and why?

One of my favorite pieces is titled "Jumping Board". It is an abstract landscape I painted in 2018. It has all the elements I love, gorgeous color, great line work, space and depth of feeling. It is my take on the land I see here in New Mexico, high plateaus, wondrous skies, and a variety of terrain. I hope to continue my investigation of the land, my inner world and the emotions that emerge from my gut about what it means to live today.

Who are some of your mentors?

Matisse is the master of color and that beautiful arabesque, or line that only he could draw. He will always inspire me whenever I feel lost or unsure. The abstract painter Richard Diebenkorn is another that never ceases to amaze me. His investigation into structure, line, color and the abstract landscape is a constant inspiration.



City in Between



Park 1

What is the best advice you've ever been given?

My mentor Richard Lees told me to paint from my gut. He said that I must trust what will emerge from that place of honesty and truth.

What other artists inspire you?

I enjoy the work of Danny McCaw and his contemporary figures placed in abstract shapes, Taylor Anton White and his playful use of color, materials and line. Also the Brooklyn based abstract painter Robert Szot and his gorgeous abstract monotypes.

What feelings do you hope your work evokes in a viewer?

I want the viewer to recognize the beauty and the hardship that living entails. We are always trying to juggle living our lives in the midst of struggle and joy. We are a constant balancing act of opposing elements. It is okay that we live in beauty and chaos. There is a place for it all.

What is the most rewarding thing about being a fine artist?

After a painting I often sit back and see that it was a journey getting to the finish line, often revealing truths about me and my world, and if I do it right it will be a universal truth that can be shared.

What can you tell our readers about living a creative life?

A creative life is not for the faint of heart. It is a commitment to share yourself that may or may not be well received. It can come with criticism both positive and negative about the work. It can come from your own internal dialogue, or from outside. It is up to you to decide what matters, and what is of value. It is a calling that cannot be ignored and must be pursued.



Storm

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An Interview with Leigh Camacho Rourks

interview by William Nesbitt

William Nesbitt: How do you introduce or explain your work to someone who is unfamiliar with it?

Leigh Camacho Rourks: That is one of the things that I am probably least good at. When I first started realizing that I was a “real” writer and started publishing a little, people would ask me and I would say Southern Gothic. I was in Louisiana and people would be like, “Oh, like Anne Rice?” I have a lot of respect for Anne Rice. I read all the vampire books when I was a teenager, but my writing is not like Anne Rice. That word *gothic* has a lot of baggage attached to it these days.

I’ve gotten to the point where I tend to feel like a disclaimer is often in order for my work. There’s a lot of violence. I think that when people meet me they’re not expecting that. I’ve gotten to the point of saying my work is often about bad people doing bad things, which is a response people seem to like.

I think if I could answer it the way I want to answer it, I’d say I write a lot about love.

Normally, violence and love are the not first things we connect together, yet sometimes they are unfortunately intertwined. I see a lot of that in your work.

I’m really interested in that intersection between tenderness and violence and the unfortunate ways that they come together.

I’m also really interested in the human condition and why people do what they do, the pressure that makes a perfectly normal person behave inappropriately and do bizarre things. We want to believe that people who do things that appall us are all loners, but I don’t think that’s true.

I think it all started for me when I was younger and I just read poetry. I wrote so many things about people dying. My husband was like “Can you please stop writing about death?” *[laughs]* Even that was more about love, different ways we love. To the outside world I was writing obsessively about death, but internally I was trying to figure out how we survive people’s deaths.

What is the best writing advice you've gotten and/or given?

It's hard to say what the best advice has been, because, thanks to the educational opportunities I've been given, I am lucky that my adult life has been a glut of amazing writing advice. I've had astonishingly good teachers and mentors. But maybe it was a piece of advice my mother gave me. She isn't a writer, but she is a really smart lady. I was struggling to write. I was exhausted. I was juggling, teaching a 5/5 at a public university with ever-rising classroom caps, and not living up to the writing promises I'd made myself after my MFA. She told me, "Maybe it doesn't matter how many words you get done in a day, or even if you write every day. Maybe you need to zoom out. Think about a goal for the week or the month instead." Sharon Harrigan, an amazing writer and wonderful friend who has acted as a daily writing touchstone for me for years, gives me similar advice regularly. For example, when I was juggling writing a novel with grading 150 essays a pop and my own battles with lethargy, she emailed me this: "I know, given your history, that you *will* get the novel done, in your own time, even if you don't work on it every day. You have your own pace and your own way of doing it that works for you." Not every one of us can write every day, for a variety of reasons. That doesn't mean we are failures. The key is to do the work. The work is inescapable, but there is more than one schedule, more than one pace that will get it done.

How do you find or make time to read, write, and revise?

I don't [*laughs*].

So this will be the final interview because there's no more work coming out.

There's no more work coming out. No. I just found out a piece got accepted that I wrote very recently. Finding time is a constant struggle, and it's partially because I have a very strong belief in the necessity of leisure time. The easy answer is "I don't do anything else. I go to work. I eat. I write."

That's what you're supposed to say.

That's what I'm supposed to say. "Write every day. I wake up at five in the morning."

"I write twenty-eight hours a day, ten days a week."

I don't do any of that. I can't. I love sleep and I believe in leisure. I don't write every day. Even when I'm on a schedule and I write every work day, I still take days off because I think it's not just healthy for me as a person and for my relationships, but I think it's healthy for my writing to live. Even if living is just resting.

It doesn't always have to be "productive."

Exactly. I don't believe that every second of my life needs to be productive. I just don't buy into that, especially because I'm a ruminator. My stories wouldn't come about if I didn't spend a lot of time being curious about things that I learn about the world. I have to have time to think.

And the thinking is doing. It leads to something measurable and productive.

Exactly. And enjoying myself in life is doing. All of these are things I pick and choose. These little

pieces of memories and these little images—the way sun looks on leaves—that’s all filed away, and one day I can use that if I need it.

I work best and I’m most productive when I’m on a schedule. I try to write Monday through Friday even if it’s just a little. That’s not always feasible. Right now I’m really struggling to make time. I begin to treat it a little like a love affair. Catch-as-catch-can. Focusing on it when I’m supposed to be doing other stuff.

Like sneaking around as a teenager?

Yes. It does give a little passion to the writing when I’m doing it when I’m not supposed to be. Oh, I should be grading now, but I’m going to just write a little bit. I’m waiting for a student to come to my office, and I’m going to open the file for just a second and peek at the work. I try to fool myself that way, and it works. That doesn’t mean I’m super-productive right then, but at least I don’t lose the work. I may not be working every day at the moment, but I am working a little every week. That to me is good. That’s where I am right now.

I think a lot of people are going to be relieved to hear that answer. I’m relieved to hear that answer. You write short stories, novels, creative nonfiction, flash fiction, and poetry. What do you like most about each of those genres?

I began in poetry, and I was a narrative poet. I started by telling stories, and then I decided I wanted to study out of genre. I moved to writing short stories. Then, I decided I wanted to stay in fiction because I love stories. I love to tell stories. I love to hear stories. I love poetry. I love both lyric and narrative poetry, but I am a storyteller and having more room to tell stories started to be really appealing to me.

I went from short stories and started working on a novel, which blew things up. I love that big form. Hilma Wolitzer told me that a novel is not a longer short story; it’s wider. So there’s all this room to get to know a lot of people, which is what short stories do versus a narrative poem. It give me a lot of room to meet the people. In a narrative poem, the characters are almost secondary for me.

Recently, I’ve been playing with flash, which I’m in love with. I’m mad for flash. The thing that’s appealing about flash is a lot of the things I love about poetry, which is this idea that there’s a conservation and condensing of language. You condense milk and it gets thicker and sweeter and weirder and more awesome. That’s what narrative poetry is, but flash fiction is a little more blown out. The other thing about flash fiction, though, is that for some reason my childhood love of fantasy and science fiction and weirdness feels really comfortable in flash fiction. For me, right now, flash fiction is a playground. I feel like I can do anything

“What I like about creative nonfiction is that it lets me tell my stories my way. I’m so vulnerable in it, which is terrifying, but I think I liked to be scared.”

-Leigh Comache Rourks

in it strangely enough because of the constraints. I would argue that the formalist poets would say the same thing.

In class today we were discussing Wordsworth's sonnet "Nuns Fret Not at Their Convent's Narrow Room," which talks about that idea of being able to do more with less.

I swore for years that I would never, ever, ever write creative nonfiction. I decided to do it because I was scared of it. I really dared myself to do it. What I like about creative nonfiction is that it lets me tell my stories my way. I'm so vulnerable in it, which is terrifying, but I think I liked to be scared. I like to do things that are hard. It's the hardest one for me, so I don't do it a lot.

This question comes from a blog entry on your webpage. Why are comic books so great and why are they good for us to read?

I love comic books. Anyone who knows me or follows me on Twitter knows that. I've been reading them since I was real little. I love them because comic books are storytelling with two signals—the language and the images. So we're dual-processing. They're good for your brain. You learn that not all reading is left to right, which is just awesome. It's also incredibly enriching to live inside a story when you're reading a comic book. When I read anything, I like to think of it as living inside a narrative. When you're reading a comic book, and you're living inside that narrative, the movement of images, the way artists create space and movement on the flat page, it makes my internal life more colorful and more interesting.

Also, I love superheroes. I love the mythology of superheroes. I was kind of an awkward, weird kid, so falling into stories was my thing. The idea that you could make a difference in the world was a magical idea. Or the idea that you could be just a normal kid and grow up to be *awesome* was really cool. Or even the idea of autonomy. Superheroes have this sort of body autonomy. They're not just in control of their lives like grownups are; they're strong. They can go where they want. Nobody can put their hands on them. They're in control.

I have friends that look at the women in those comic books that I read growing up and go, "Oh, they're sex objects." To me, they weren't. To me, they were body autonomy. They were power. They were exciting. They were beautiful no matter how they looked. They men were just as objectified. I had major crushes—and still maybe do—on comic book characters. Superhero comic books made me believe in a world where I could do anything, which is a pretty good world for a clumsy, chubby, awkward kid to live in.

It's a good message for anybody at any point in their life.

I still read them. I stopped for some years; it just got expensive. We started back up while I was getting my Ph.D. I was under so much stress, and I was freaked out a lot. My husband one day said, "You know what we should do? We should go to the comic book store." We went, and it was like falling in love all over again. I go almost every weekend and pick up comic books in multiple genres, not just superhero. I love art. They're beautiful. I love the way a story happens and unfolds over multiple book but also very quickly, so they function almost as short stories and novels.

Details operate like a kind of spice in *Moon Trees and Other Orphans*—just the right amounts in just the right places. How do you decide where to add detail, how much detail to add, and what kind of detail to add? Give us the details on details.

I love this question. I think it's the best compliment anyone's given me in a long time because I love details. I think that partially because I started in poetry and partially because I have an unrefined love of art, I have a strong and nearly religious belief in the importance and power of the resonant image. This concept of the resonant image is an image that resonates and bounces off of other images, both similar and different. That's a core value to me.

I wasn't very good at setting until I learned about the concept of place. Erica Carter, James Donald, and Judith Squires wrote that "place is space to which meaning has been ascribed." For me as a writer that meant that setting wasn't time and place. Setting was all about the meaning of a place. What are the details that resonate and create meaning and that bounce back that meaning that we've ascribed to places or fight against the meaning we've ascribed to places? How can we juxtapose those?

Finding a way to make details reverberate is important to me. In "Clown" there's this reverberating image of birds. Those had to be placed in, and the game was figuring out how to make this bird imagery reverberate and not create cacophony.

Three stories in a row from *Moon Trees and Other Orphans*—"Pinched Magnolias," "El Feo," and "Everything Shining"—have dead bodies as either a predicament or a central feature. What's with all the dead bodies?

Death, death, death. As a kid in Miami, as a teen in Miami when I'd walk home from the bus stop, I'd look into the canals and think, "Wouldn't it be weird if there was a dead body in there?" [*laughs*]. I've never really been curious about what happens after death, but I've been incredibly curious my whole life including now about the concept of death, how we die, and why we die. I'm really interested in science, and I read a lot of articles around death. *Stiff: The Curious Lives of Human Cadavers* by Mary Roach is awesome. It's all about dead bodies, cadavers, what happens physically when we die, and then what happens emotionally to the people around us when we die. Why we kill each other is confusing to me. I understand it sort of on a gut level, but I don't on an intellectual level, so sometimes I think I'm working that out in my writing. I can't imagine being in a situation where killing someone is the last resort.

I think death is really interesting on so many levels. I've been to an autopsy for a class in forensic pathology. I've been to the *Bodies* exhibit. I was moved to tears by how strong and beautiful we are inside. It was the closest to a religious experience as I've ever had. I'm not obsessed with death. Well, I do go to graveyards because I lived in Louisiana and they were gorgeous, really beautiful places. I'm not obsessed with death. I don't think about it constantly, but I do think about it a lot. I think it's part of being mortal.

People are super-scared of death. People are afraid to talk about it. People whisper it. That's really interesting to me. We experience the loss of other humans constantly. How can something that happens to every single one of us, that we all are going to experience for ourselves, how can we not all be talking about it all the time? I think our fear of talking about it, of exploring our own

feelings about it, of confronting death stops us from talking about death. I think a lot of it is me confronting that fear and exploring my curiosity because we as a society are so secretive about it.

I grew up reading and watching violent things. It's part of our culture. There is an aesthetic to violence and to death that I am curious and interested about. I think about other people's deaths more than I think about mine. In fact, I realized not that long ago that I hadn't really engaged with the thought of my own death other than just as a matter-of-fact-yes-I-am-going-to-die. Recently I've been thinking about that more just because I'm curious what I think about that. What am I worried about? Am I worried?

Thinking about death and being aware of impermanence helps me get things done and make meaningful distinctions about what does and does not matter, but there's not much point in worrying about it, even though I do.

Exactly. Everyone I know is going to die. That's a weird truth.

How applicable is the term Southern Gothic to *Moon Trees and Other Orphans*?

It's super-applicable, especially to "Pinched Magnolias." It's the most Southern Gothic piece that I have ever written. It's part of my heritage. It's definitely there. It's definitely a field I work in, but the term now for its current form in American literature is Grit Lit, which doesn't have to be Southern. I like the term Grit Lit better for that reason. It's predominantly—but not always—about a socioeconomic class that engages in the environment in sort of desperate ways.

I like it better because even if they've never heard of it, people immediately have a clear understanding of what I do. "It's gritty. I write gritty stuff." That should have been my answer to the first question. Not every single piece I write is that. I would say every single piece is Southern, and every single piece has its own weirdness, which is the Gothic. So Southern Gothic is totally accurate, but I think Grit Lit is what we're calling it these days.

I have heard a distinction made based on, as you mention, class status. The world of Grit Lit is the world of the Rough South or maybe the Poor South. So something as quintessentially Southern Gothic—and wonderful—as "A Rose for Family" is not Grit Lit because it's a world mostly of faded upper echelons, calligraphy lessons, servants as minor characters, and decaying mansions. Does that seem right?

That is right, but I should add that Grit Lit is not necessarily Southern, though it tends toward regionalism, often set in the parts of rural and poor-suburban America either left out of the canon or exoticized by it. A lot of Midwest authors, Southern authors, and Western frontier authors, a lot of us are doing very similar work under the heading of Grit Lit. And I think Grit Lit is becoming more diverse, too, which is wonderful.



Cover Art, *Moon Trees and Other Orphans*

What's next for Leigh Rourks? What are you working on now?

I have a novel in reserve. I'm working on another Southern Gothic-y, Grit Lit-y novel. I'm also working on a post-apocalyptic, post-alien invasion novel in flash. *Jellyfish Review* is going to be publishing the first piece of that in the spring. I'm hoping to write enough of those to have a small novel.

I would like to do some comic book work. I would like to write a script for a silly little indie comic book that I have in the back of my head.

More flash is in my future because that love affair is hardcore right now. I'm going to try some flash creative nonfiction soon, I think.

Anything else you want to mention?

I want people to stop asking me if I've killed somebody [*laughs*].

Cuban-American author Leigh Camacho Rourks lives and teaches in Central Florida. She is an Assistant Professor of English at Beacon College. Her short story "Moon Trees" was awarded the Glenna Luschei Prairie Schooner Award. Her story "Pinched Magnolias" received the Robert Watson Literary Review Prize in Fiction. Her work has appeared in a number of journals including *Kenyon Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Triquarterly*, and *Greensboro Review*. Her debut collection of short stories, *Moon Trees and Other Orphans*, won the St. Lawrence Book Award and will be published by Black Lawrence Press in October of 2019.



Follow Leigh Rourks Online:

Website:
<http://lcrouks.com>

Twitter:
[@atDrScaredWriter](https://twitter.com/atDrScaredWriter)



Brandy Saturley IAO



Brandy Saturley *Morning Glory*



Editor's Poetry Review

The Apathy of Clouds ***by Domenic Scopa***

by Erin O'Neill Armendarez

The Apathy of Clouds attempts to exorcise the memory of sexual assault at age seven, the memory of the worst sort of betrayal. Sequenced into three sections, the poems move from Section I, where narratives of childhood collapse into sudden, unexpected violence and silent despair, to Section II, where the remnants of Nazi brutality give way to the hopelessness of Central Europe's prostitutes, addicts, and homeless men. Finally, Section III most directly attempts to release the consciousness of the narrator/s from the wounds and trauma of a childhood rape. Unfortunately, there is no hint of lasting peace.

The narrative lens focuses on human-caused suffering, vacillating between the very private and the openly public. Scopa's poems mean to force readers to reflect upon the silent heartbreak, terror, and vulnerability of those moving among us in deep emotional pain, the kind of pain that permanently damages a person's ability to love and to trust freely. In "The Apathy of Clouds," the narrator does his best to control his self-destructive impulses, characterizing himself as desperate and trapped:

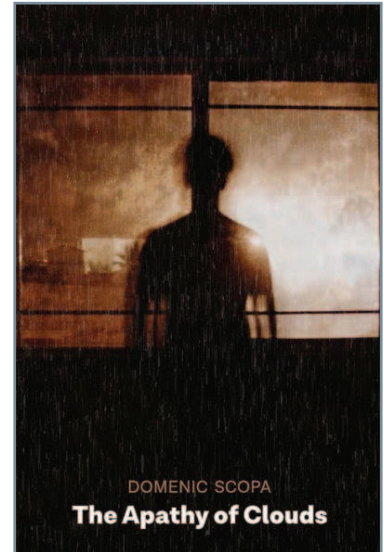
I carry trauma,
and the world consoles
with its radiating stench.

The first poem, "Apple-Picking," is one of my favorites; inevitably, I recall Robert Frost's "After Apple Picking," which offers dreamlike images of apples that are symbols for all of the things the aging narrator will never have time to achieve in life. In contrast, Scopa's apples are "bruised as beaten flesh." The poem describes a silent home with much distance between two estranged parents, contrasting fairy tale images of apple orchards with strewn fruit "spoiled beneath his [father's] boots." The poem ends with the narrator, a young child, sitting in his father's lap. They're sharing alternate bites, "Fruit flies orbited the apple—marked with our mouths--." It seems that the epic pall of original sin is transferred from father to son, foretelling that every desire will be perverted or denied by the fallen nature of the ensuing world.

The poems repeat images of men burning, falling, drowning, men having heart attacks, committing suicide. "Post-traumatic" describes a fiery ambulance crash that haunts the narrator's father, abandoning

his son to the “calligraphy of scars” left by an abusive surrogate. After this, the reader might be hoping for some release, some pendulum swing toward stability, but no—Scopa doesn’t mean to allow any comfort. Instead, in “Cousin’s Body,” he offers the ghost of a teen cousin suddenly killed in a crash:

How hard it must be for poor Frankie,
lost in mania
wherever he wanders,
the smell of gasoline still on him,
his wonderful eyes rigid and relentless
in debate over the thrills of speeding
and the risk of arrest.



Cover Art for *Apathy of Clouds*

Among these pages, any hope of pleasure eventually leads to suffering of some kind. Youth doesn’t leave anyone innocent for long.

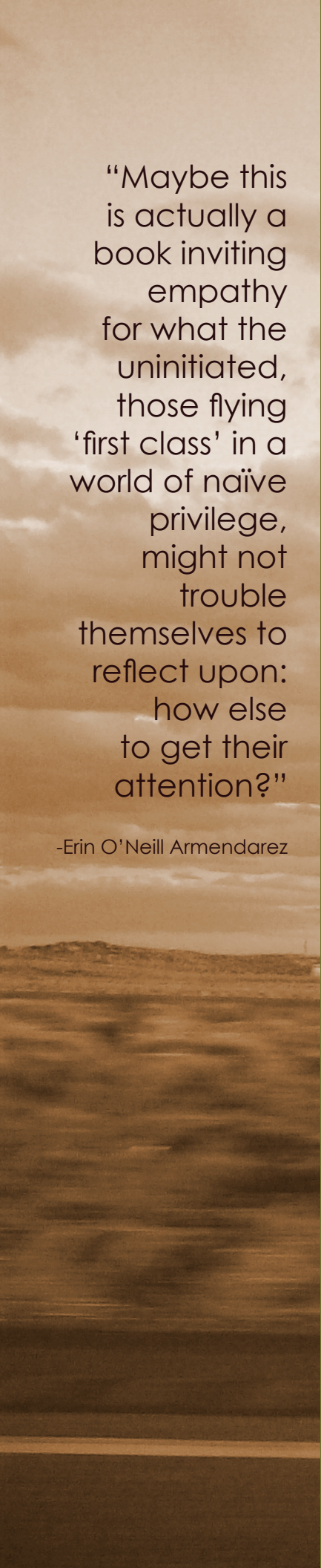
In the initial poem of Section II, “First-Time Flyer,” rape is first mentioned by the victim to his grandmother on her deathbed, “knowing her mind would wipe out the fact, the way his teacher’s hand erased the chalkboard after class. . . .” Other poems in this section offer readers dystopian scenes left by the “budovy bastardu,” the wealthy owners of the skyscrapers protested in “Occupy Prague,” or the nightmarish stories of Nazis amusing themselves by forcing Jewish fathers and sons to fight to the death in “the commandant’s” pool at Terezín. Subsequent poems take up the dog-eat-dog nature of the relationships between prostitutes and their clients, and in “Town Square, Krakow,” the narrator resists empathy toward a homeless man dead on the street from a drug overdose. “Rapsodia” is a blunt echo of Auden’s “Musée des Beaux Arts” as a tourist wolfs down a hot dog not far from the gas chambers of Auschwitz, where others “chatting and snapping pictures” appear unmoved by the cruelty of Nazi oppression or the photos of the exterminated.

Section III begins with “Walk-in-Closet,” a poem that juxtaposes the memory of childhood rape with the narrator’s first sexual encounter with his girlfriend:

Her first time, she pleads, *Don’t make me scream.*
I press her;
Don’t make it hurt so much!

Hurt as much
As I remember.

“Seventh Birthday” begins with a blue question mark left by a workman’s spilled paint followed with the emblem of childhood innocence, a birthday cake, suggesting a horrific initiation instead of a joyful celebration. The assaults happen in a closet, a hellish world from which the narrator struggles to escape. The narrator hopes, “At a certain time, that closet,/that room, that house,/will turn completely into light.” Yet the book’s epigraph, a quotation from Alexander Pope, hints it won’t be that easy: “To err is human, to forgive, divine.”



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-Erin O'Neill Armendarez

The poem “Stain” describes the narrator at ten as he watches a man dropping from the South Tower of the World Trade Center on 9/11. The child experiences terror but also is attracted to the image:

... I thought I could forget that man
cascading through the chaos—determined, free—
and whether or not his fall was soothing.
Bathed in the television’s tide of light, I sat,
a moth fixed to the flame of what it wanted. . . .

Here, the child’s fascination with death suggests an intuition that death will be the only release from the deep emotional wounds he carries.

One of the most compelling lines in the book appears in the prose poem “Sanctuary,” which describes Argus, a captive wolf defeated by his brother Grendel, who recognizes Argus’ weakness after the sudden loss of his mate. The narrator, as he visits the wolves and sees Argus’ apparent exile, recalls previous visits where the wolf and his mate were together: “I would watch him nuzzle his nose into her neck, the two of them running side by side, as if to race away from our world.” The temporary paradise experienced by Argus and his mate is soon destroyed, once again underscoring the futility of attempting to escape from a world filled with violence, betrayal, and cruelty. Grendel is appropriately named, and his drive to dominate echoes that of the “budovy bastardu,” the rapist babysitter, the Nazis, and even that of the various narrators who commodify women as they take solace in their services, knowing that to some degree they are preying on the vulnerable, as is seen in the eyes of the prostitute in the final poem, “The Land of Fields.” Scopa leaves readers with a grim conclusion:

I must say
there are two things about darkness
and what it does to us:
Her bright hooker eyes
when I switched the light off,
how the pupils constricted
as if in blind faith,

and my babysitter closing
the closet door,
shadowed and speechless.

Clearly, no light is coming from that closet, and the faith of the blind is bound to be exploited, manipulated, and ultimately crushed.

One might be tempted to conclude that Scopa is a hopeless pessimist, but I don't think such a conclusion would be apt. Rather, I believe that *The Apathy of Clouds* is meant to convey the lasting consequences of trauma on an individual psyche; the author wants readers to know that pain is everywhere, all around us, that it is often hidden, easy to miss, and probably responsible for much of what we don't understand in the choices and behavior of others. Maybe this is actually a book inviting empathy for what the uninitiated, those flying "first class" in a world of naïve privilege, might not trouble themselves to reflect upon: how else to get their attention? The terrors of Scopa's pages will never make polite dinner conversation.

In "In the Land of Fields," the final poem, the babysitter attempts to further burden his victim with the responsibility of forgiveness. Scopa seems to be telling us, in spite of all those inspirational survival stories we love so much, closure is something many victims will never get. Just when we think we're safe with a bit of offhand description or conjecture, we're forced to face what a victim can't deny:

That night, to spite a missing person,
I refused to listen
to the sound of cathedral bells.
To be honest, I was still attached.
My babysitter died and I was still attached.
It seems so strange to say it
quite like that—
but how else can I say it?

In *Apathy of Clouds*, there is no escape from the mental agonies of those who suffer in silence. Scopa just wants us to wake up to that truth, but also to see that our common humanity, our hope for something better, our desire for honest connection, is the best thing about us, even when it causes us inestimable grief.

"In *Apathy of Clouds*, there is no escape from the mental agonies of those who suffer in silence."

-Erin O'Neill Armendarez

In an interview with *Crack the Spine* (2017), Scopa attributed his editorial process to Robert Lowell's method, and there is much of Lowell to recognize in Scopa's poetry in terms of sound, structure, and theme. According to his partner poet Alexis Groulx, in a dual interview with *The Missing Slate* (2016), Scopa has a "man-crush on Robert Lowell." Scopa's response? "True." Lowell was a literary chameleon, so it remains to be seen what sort of poetry his disciple will publish in the future. Readers can easily find several of Scopa's poems in print in literary magazines and online. This first book promises lasting success for a poet who is serious about his craft, a poet who has things on his mind and in his heart. Give him a read, I say. Enter a world of searing pain, nightmarish memory, and desperate addiction. Examine the "baggage" of the tormented. What sort of territory might this be? You will have to decide for yourself.

Domenic Scopa is a four-time Pushcart Prize nominee and the 2014 recipient of the Robert K. Johnson Poetry Prize and Garvin Tate Merit Scholarship. He holds an MFA from Vermont College of Fine Arts. His poetry and translations have been featured in *The Adirondack Review*, *Reed Magazine*, *Borderlands: Texas Poetry Review*, *Reunion: The Dallas Review*, *Prime Number*, and many others. He is currently a Lecturer of English & General Studies at NHTI, Concord's Community College.



The Apathy of Clouds is available for purchase at [Barnes & Noble](#) and through [Amazon](#).



Marilyn Whitehorse
Casting Spells

Pigment

We painted the room blood red. The small, crumpled paint chip read *hothouse tomato*. Even *cranberry* would have accomplished the goal. *Carmines*, *ruby*, *scarlet* all would have passed muster. We'd have warmed to *maroon*, or even good old *crimson* – *stop sign* red could have worked too. But not blood. Not the exact color of blood. It was too much.

But as the third coat finally set it was blood red. Not dried blood – the top of an elbow scab or the crust around a nose – but live blood, realistic enough to look like the walls could drip.

The room was supposed to be the den but we slept in it then because we were painting our bedroom too. We'd gotten bored painting the *forest green* and still had a wall to go, so our bed remained in the red room, pulled to the center, away from the fresh red paint. It was like waking up in a transfusion.

"This must be what life in your womb looks like," Hugh said one morning, still curled on his side, knees almost up to his chin.

I turned sharp, pinning the sheet around my waist, reminded of what we'd lost. I wanted to eat him alive for saying that, but then he was facing me with that sideways smile and I knew he meant it in a kind way, that he was just imagining being our baby.

The one window in the room did all it could to bring in yellow daylight. We opened the bottom half as though quantities of air equaled light. From the basement we hauled up a can of *ivory dust* to paint the oak trim, sure this would help turn the red to some benevolent fruit color.

We brought in lamps from all over the house.

"Maybe it's about wattage," Hugh said, setting up a floor lamp, briefly singing into it like a microphone. The thought of painting over the red, three coats bold, brought on a nausea even the paint fumes couldn't touch.

We bought white furniture from Ikea – cheap stuff – and the chairs and tables we carried in from another room had silver trim. Transparent curtains draped long at the floor; we bought a yellow and orange rug to throw onto the oak boards. It certainly felt warm in the room and I'd only wear a T-shirt when I worked at the white desk.

Finally we moved the bed back to our forest green room. Some mornings a woodpecker tapped on the roof, then we opened our eyes to all that green, and thought we were in the woods. A skinny branch could crack underfoot at any moment. Through the open window came a tree smell, because of the Douglas Fir next to the house, the one Hugh worried about in windstorms. In the back corner of our lot were holly trees, no doubt sprouting red berries, but then, right then, we were nothing but green.

Success Story

The Trimax Group, with \$3.1 billion in revenue this past year, had its humble beginnings in Creal Springs, Illinois, sometimes misread as Cereal Springs and wrongly identified with the development of breakfast food. It was here in 1878 that Cyrus Balfour first started selling Brother Hezekiah's Eucalyptus Lozenges in colorful tins blazoned with the now famous slogan *Good for What Ills You*. Though a sketch of the namesake backwoods healer graced each package, family tradition has it that Cyrus's wife Hattie stumbled on the recipe while trying to concoct a homemade tarnish remover. As with other medicinal products of the period, it likely contained some ingredients that have since been banned for consumption or strictly regulated.

By 1901 the lozenges were in wide enough use that William McKinley was sucking on one when assassinated. The force of the shot caused him to expel the barrel-shaped anodyne onto the exposition floor, from which eight-year-old Bix Boone retrieved it in a handkerchief and quickly pocketed it. This memento later became the basis for the country's smallest Presidential museum, a one-showcase affair in Dunwoodie's Drugs off Highway 7 in Fredville, Kentucky. Other highlights of the collection include a set of dentures belonging to George Washington made out of harpsichord keys, and a truss of John Kennedy's certified to have been worn by him while he and Bobby smirked at LBJ. Curiously, there are no artifacts associated with Kentucky's favorite son.

When McKinley's political enemies, playing on the Brother Hezekiah's slogan, rebranded the lozenges as *Patently Not Good for Bullets*, Balfour, in high dudgeon, shifted production to canisters instead, given the collectible status of his original tins, favored even today by marijuana users with a taste for Americana. Housewives particularly liked his animal-shaped containers: the flour rooster, sugar pig, coffee dog, and tea sheep.

During the Great War, the company, now Balfour & Son, expanded into canteens and waterproof items. In standing with their class, Balfour *père et fils* countered all Wobbly action, judging it an infection in the public throat.

It was Douglas Balfour who pushed the business into near-beer production during Prohibition. Drinkers of the brew detected nostalgic notes of eucalyptus and sassafras. While tough to get tipsy on it, imbibers did enjoy the sensation of opened passageways. There is a photo of Al Smith hoisting a bottle of Balfour's Best surrounded by would-be roisterers. After the amendment's repeal, Balfour & Son started making whiskey barrels in addition to kegs.

In the next generation, Tommy Balfour mainly left trusted assistants to run things while he lived a playboy's life in Florida. Deep-seated Balfour enterprise asserted itself, though, as he drifted into land development, building up the coastline and establishing the tourist attraction Emerald Springs, known for its skiing alligators. Ad posters showed grinning gators balanced on their tails as they scooted behind powerboats. In reality, the big lizards rode toboggans at a slow clip. Spectators suspected that the things were drugged, perhaps with Brother Hezekiah's unlisted ingredients.

Tommy's inescapable business drive led him to cinch slicker and tent contracts during the Second War. And his Florida experience gave Balfour Industries an edge in all pontoon supply for the Army. As icing on the cake, he married Trudy Lamar, the insecticide heiress, and merged their holdings.

Their second son, Marshall, hardly needed grooming to ascend the throne (his older brother Trip having perished in a cardboard jet-pack accident). A precociously sober infant, Marshall was featured in *Executive Privilege* at five years of age as "The Tyke in the Grey Flannel Rompers." By his early twenties he was directing the Balfour Industries invasion of Europe and Asia. Whether harbor dredging, distributing treated mosquito nets, or placing plastic barrels everywhere, Balfour made its presence felt. One need only glance at movies from the time—*A Hard Day's Night*, for instance—to be convinced of the pervasive Balfour imprint. The lads from Liverpool frolic and cavort before a Balfourian-suffused background as solid as bricks.

Further mergings and acquisitions in the late 1900s gave rise in turn to BLF International, the last avatar to be headed by a Balfour scion. Marshall's son Clay spun off divisions and entered new sectors and territories so fast that even the company's top officers had trouble saying month to month exactly what their business was. *Forbes* reported it had something to do with satellites, nuclear-waste storage, electronics recycling, battery technology, and French microwave meals. The scuttlebutt is that the BLF board ultimately jettisoned, or spun off, Clay Balfour himself and agreed to a white-knight takeover by a smaller German conglomerate, producing The Trimax Group.

A portrait of Cyrus Balfour from the 1890s hangs in the Duluth Museum of Decorative Arts. Not surprisingly, he looks on the whole pleased with himself. If the shadows around his jawline appear to resemble tarnish, that need not suggest any slyness on the painter's part. Even so, there are agents found in and out of nature that handily remove it.

You Will Remember the Slugs

This is what you will and will not remember. You will not remember the coarseness of your father's hands, or the feel of his breath laced with smoke on your neck. You will not remember the stains on his t-shirt, the grey one from Fruit of the Loom with holes and brown patches on it that he likes to work and sleep in. You will not remember the Dodge Ram hat, turned at an angle that fit his head better than when it was on backwards or flat against the crest of his brow. No, you will not remember these things first.

You will remember the slugs.

You will remember the slugs because they ate the plants at night and crawled on the concrete in voracious search of those captivating weeds and dandelions that closed on themselves when the moon was high. You will remember the slugs because of the nightmare of the Boogeyman who was covered in soot and brown trousers and a brown tunic and kinky black hair, a mane of an age that did not exist anymore. He climbed through the window of your bedroom while you were asleep on the couch with your mother holding you. She didn't wake, but you felt the scratch and itch of the threadbare couch as he entered the house, marking the floor with dirt in his wake. You watched him and you would remember him even now, almost like a bad dream. But he must've been real, right? He had those bandages from wounds that never had a chance to heal. And the eyes the color of the dirt with which he carried. Beside each clump of dirt was a trail, a mark, that an ochre slug had passed through. You will remember this as you tell your father and your mother of the man who had taken your childhood away while one was at work and the other was off in their own dream world.

And so your father will grimace at the thought, but the grimace will turn into a laugh, because he always knew something you didn't, even when you knew something he didn't. You will think that is confusing. Perhaps it is. But that is apparently just how life was made. Either way, you will always end up in the same place: on the back porch with your father as sirens echo in the distance. He is standing there in his work boots, the same ones he will kick your mother with when she calls him out for being a liar and a cheat and yell out "Get out of my face, your breath smells like pussy!" You are standing there in cartoon pajamas, small and chunky and a little too round about the face. You look like your mother when she was young, except they have cut your hair so short and so often that the curls would never form, except at the crest of a cowlick, that strange blessing your grandmother likes to finger when she checks your head for lice. Just in case. Your father will hold Morton's Salt with the little girl and the umbrella on the side and you will wait on the steps for the sun to pass down on the other side of the world, or the world to pass down on the other side of the sun, and you will wait and wait and wait. Because that is all you ever did. Waited. And finally, the slugs will crawl up from their hiding spaces and slither about the porch in search of a new meal and you will watch them with a quiet fascination, a delicate and horrible stare and realization of what was about to happen before it could happen.

Years later you will cling to what happens next and it will become a part of a chain of memories that you hope will never fade, like the memory of you and your best friend on the green couch as you played with the stuffed green alien. But how could you ever forget that one? After the Big Terrible Accident of the Slugs, the next memory is of you sitting on the carpet. Your father and mother are in the kitchen and there are cabinets slamming and hushed voices followed by full voices followed by screams and yelps and arguments.

You hear them, but do not see them. All you can see is the watered down spaghetti in front of you and the television and a clump of hair on the floor. Your favorite underdog hero is saved by a strike of deus ex machina, but you are stuck here as they yell and scream and fight and have an argument.

“Who do you want to live with?” he asks.

“You’re making a mistake,” she says.

“Who do you want to live with?” he asks.

“Don’t,” she says.

You stare at them from the floor and you can feel the mess curl around your mouth. You feel the red sauce on your collarbone, as warm as your own skin. They are staring at you with wild eyes, like if you don’t answer them right now that the world itself will end. You turn to your mother and then your father and then back again. You chose then and there. Years later when you recall this memory and hand it to your father like a gift saying “here! I remember! I know what you both did!” he will look at you in the same way as when they asked you to decide between two completely different lives. His lip will curl around a Pall Mall, the blue kind that are supposed to be menthol and smell like there is a hint of gasoline in it. He will stand outside of his truck as you sit inside with your own cigarette. You will think that smoking is a sort of twisted inheritance you have earned from your parents for all their feuds and all their ways of betrayals. It is too cold to be standing outside, you will think, as he shivers out there in a coat that is too close to his chest. You will think a lot of things as he stands out there in the cold, like how he called you while you were in a dorm room with a boy you hardly knew. How when you picked up the phone you felt the most amazing mouth kissing the spot between thigh and hip as he sobbed. How you felt that mouth and the teeth and the eyes of the blonde haired blue eyed lover looking up at you with your hand in his hair and your most sensitive member disappear inside of him and he told you the news and you stifled a laugh and a gasp in a singular breath. Your great grandmother was dead and gone and had gone and your father was weeping and you were sucking in breath and you go soft and feel empty and panicked and you push the lover from your loins and you tell him “Leave! Leave! I need you to leave!” and he will look at you, confused, hurt, estranged and he will pick up his clothes and change in the corner as you change and put your father on hold and you will tell him “Hold on, I was studying with a friend,” and he will cry and wait and cry and wait. You will be dressed and you will go out into the hallway and usher your lover out of the door and run down the stairs and sit on the bench and smoke a cigarette and listen to nothing but tears and silence and it is freezing out. It was February after all. It’s always cold in February.

You will write poetry about the experience. About the funeral. About your stepmother. Your classmates will read it and sigh and ask how you knew which words to choose and could you choose another in the stead of this one. And was this real? How could you do that? Wow, I didn’t realize you were so . . . *active*. And you will sit and listen because your professor told you that is what you should do and then you will remember another time with your parents. You will remember the questions and looks and then the night of slugs, because who could ever forget the slugs? Who could forget your father’s steel toe boots? The sick? The crashes and raging, fuming, screams. You don’t get over something like that, at least not yet. Because you remember why you did it. You remember that there was a reason to it all.

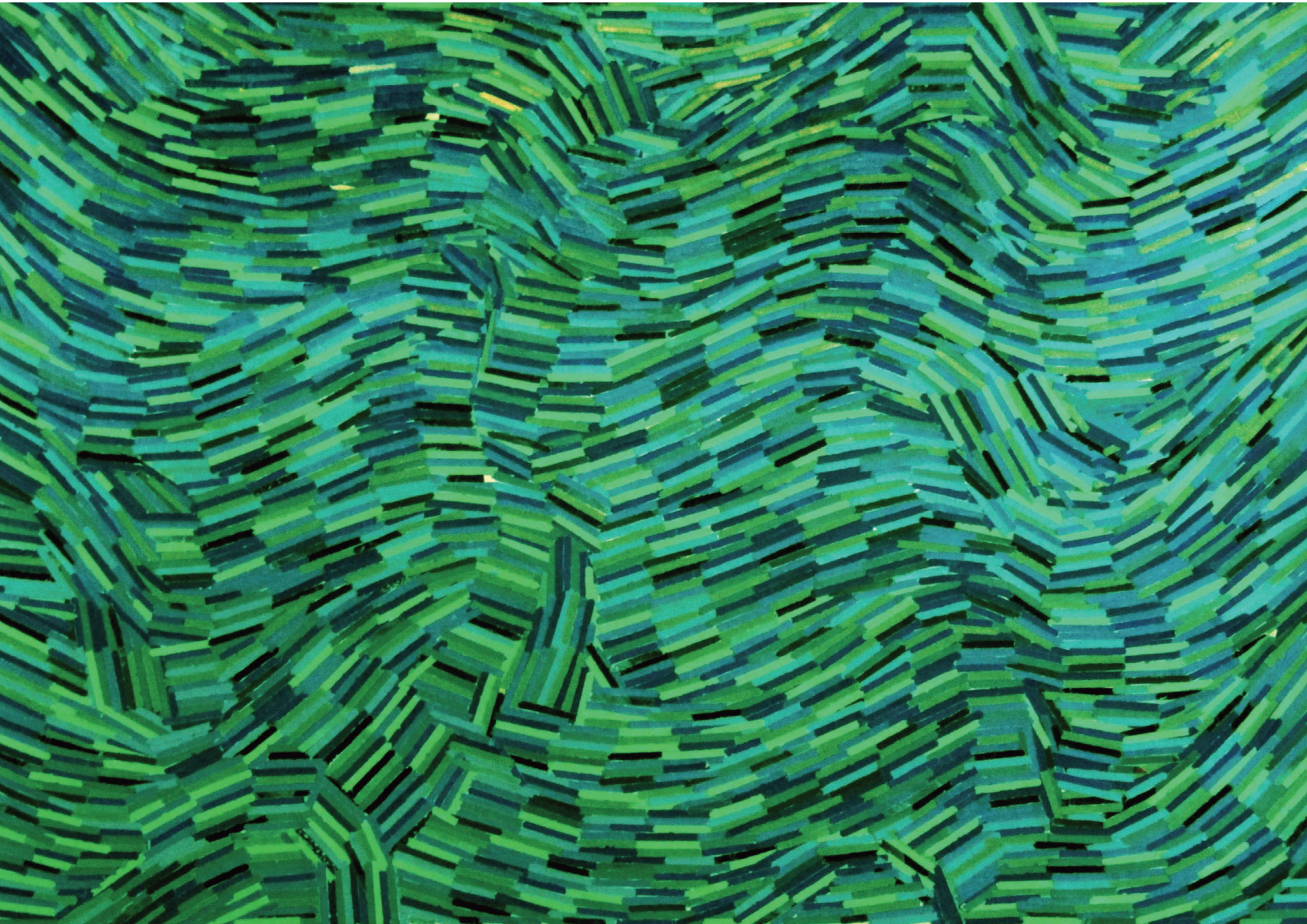
Your father was going to kill the Boogeyman for you so you would stop writing those cartoons about the fisherman you saw in a dream. The one killed by Death in the basement with a scythe and gurgle and red red red blood on the concrete basement floor. That one disturbed your mother. She refused to hang it on the fridge and you vaguely remember taking a magnet from your elementary Parent/Teacher Night and hanging your masterpiece on the very front of the fridge, the part where you could just reach on your tiptoes. Everyone needed to see it.

It was your art.

Plus didn't they know that it actually happened? That was always happening to you. Your dreams were realities that no one else could see but you. Your secret burden. And perhaps you're too afraid to tell them you knew your grandmother was dead before anyone asked. And perhaps you're too afraid to tell yourself. And then you are back on that porch behind your first house, the only house your parents owned together before they left one another for more reasons than you could count. The concrete is cracked and sunken in places. Your house must've been very old or very poor to have sunk that much in such a short amount of time. It must have been. Nonetheless you are there and the sky has turned blue, but not the morning blue or the robin's egg blue or the navy blue or the cobalt blue, this is a black blue. A blue that has electricity in it that is so blue the stars will hide themselves from it until much later when it all turns black and it is so dark you can't help but look up at the night sky. But not yet. You and your father have a task to do now. You remember this as the slugs start to form on the steps and your father stands behind you. You watch them slither across the cement together, they have feelers reaching out for something new and exciting. That's when your father pulls the salt out and pours the grains into his hand. He bends down next to you and holds his hand aloft, just above a single yellow slug with little black spots. He drops the salt over it and within seconds it boils. He takes more salt and pours it out on another slug. There are four in total and he makes quick work of it.

And just like that the slugs are fuming, their bodies writhing and bubbling up. It is as if they are on fire and you and him were the ones to do it. You did it. You killed them. This is what you will remember because of many things. You will remember it because you will think *will this happen to me? Will I burn up? Will I bubble and die? Will this happen to him? To her? To them? To everyone?* You will remember this moment and it will be glued to you in a way no one could have expected. Yes. This is what you will remember.

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Teresa Sites
Green Wave

And a Bird Trap

In cooler seasons, when I think of summer, in my mind summer light is yellow. Perhaps it's some residue of childhood, crayon gripped in little fist drawing a yellow sun beaming yellow rays over a crooked house, beside it three stick figures, parents and child. Alas, although I do have a passion for art, I never could draw; hence, now, me, Paul Seipel, Associate Professor of English in the midst of a six-week summer session, two ninety-minute Intro to Lit classes back to back. A real killer.

Sunlight in an Arkansas summer is not yellow. The brutal heat bleaches the perpetually cloudless sky to an insipid blue like a nurse's faded scrubs. It's the *winter* sky that Brueghel paints a radiant yellow, yellow the frozen river upon which the skaters cavort, yellow-tinged the snow, the houses, the bare trees, one black crow grotesquely huge on the spindly branch disappearing off the right edge of the canvas. *Winter Landscape with Skaters and a Bird Trap*, 1565. The original is in a private collection in Giraudon. I have it before me in Robert L. Bonn's *Painting Life: The Art of Pieter Brueghel, the Elder*, Chaucer Press Books, 2006, in a reproduction just about the size of the 3x5 notecards upon which I record the facts, anecdotes, and themes that I'll bludgeon my students with this afternoon.

I've spent a pleasant couple of hours this morning sitting in McDonald's sipping Diet Coke and shivering under Brueghel's winter sky, but now the lunch crowd has invaded, and I'm assailed by the reek of frying hamburger grease, so it's time for me to return home to Cindy, and maybe Jay. I hope Jay's been there. I hope he hasn't. It's a hell of a thing to not even know what to hope for. Oh well. I close the book.



The garage as usual this time a year is hot as an oven, and when I open the door leading into the house at first it feels cool by comparison. But two steps in and I realize, no, it's hot, the air stale from lack of even a fan moving it. Yes, the air conditioning is still off.

I go into the dining room and pull back the sheers over the window onto the back yard, crane around until I can see the AC unit up against the rear of the house. No Jay.

"Damn it, Cindy, where is he? Where's Jay?" I call out. No answer.

In our bedroom I find the bed unmade. I'd watched Cindy making it this morning as I rode the exercise bike. That was when, sweat running in a rivulet down my spine, I realized something was wrong. "Cindy, I think the goddamn AC is out again," I said, and she tossed the throw pillow on the bed, walked over to the vent in the ceiling and held her hand up to it. "Yes. Out." I told her she'd better phone Jay and tell him to come fix it right this time, and she said, "Why can't you call him? You can at least use a phone, can't you?" So I looked up the Chalmers Heating and Cooling number and called Jay and told him whatever he did on Monday didn't take and he needed to come back and give it another try. He said he could be here in an hour or two if there'd be someone home. We'll be here, I said. I showered and dressed and told Cindy I'd called, that was my part, so I was outta there and she could wait for Jay. "Give you two some alone time," I said. She rolled her eyes. She's good at rolling her eyes.

That was two hours ago. Now, the bed's unmade and Cindy's in the shower again, the radio tuned

to the oldies station, volume way up. The Eurhythmics “Would I Lie to You?” is playing. I kid you not, “Would I Lie to You?” Priceless! I lean against the bathroom doorjamb a moment, laughing silently, and then I ask her what happened to Jay. She says she can’t hear me. I ask her again, and she sings out, “I can’t he-e-e-e-ear you! Wait until I get out of the sho-o-o-ower!”

I go back through the bedroom, and as I pass the bed, I glance down and notice that the bottom sheet looks damp. I lay my palm against it. Yes. Damp.

My first thought is that Cindy and Jay have been “hitting the sheets” heh heh, but even a suspicious husband has to admit that’s unlikely. They’d have to be idiots to so brazenly risk getting caught, knowing I could return any moment. Jay may have dirt under his fingernails and tattoos here there and everywhere, but I don’t think he’s an idiot.

I go into the kitchen to make some lunch, humming “Would I Lie to You?” Catchy.



The only thing in the frig that appeals to me are the Heinekens, but one or two of those and I’d be joining my students in a snooze during class. Instead of beer, I pour myself a tall glass of ice water, take it into the den and sit under the overhead fan, open my *Introduction to Literature* text to Faulkner’s “Dry September.”

I’m thirty-nine. I’ve been teaching at No Raise U here in Little Rock ever since I finished my PhD twelve years ago, but there are still old-timers on the faculty who think of me as one of the “new guys.” Ha. Feels like I’ve been here forever. Feels like I’ve used *Introduction to Literature* forever and taught “Dry September” every semester forever. I used to say I’d never teach a work without rereading it, but the hell with that. I know the story better than those knuckle-heads, that’s for sure, and anything I say will be news to them. I use the story primarily to illustrate setting, and I can burn off an hour talking about the weather (setting as atmosphere and theme), the town (I’ll compare Faulkner’s Jefferson to Searcy, just up the road from Little Rock; students get off on local references), the historical setting. By then they’ll be ready to go home. By then? Ha. They’ll be ready to go home the second they walk through the classroom door. They’ll have to run to beat me out.

I drop *Introduction to Literature* to the floor and open Bonn’s *Painting Life* to plate 1, my beloved *Winter Landscape with Skaters and a Bird Trap*. The temperature in the room drops twenty degrees.

How does he do it, Brueghel? Other winter landscapists would employ dingy whites, slate grays, icy blues, maybe a hint of cadaver green in their dead worlds, but Brueghel’s Flemish village glows with a yellow that cools and soothes at the same time that it pulses with life. I count three dozen figures, every one alive with movement, even the two non-skaters. True, the mother and child move more slowly, but we can tell by the child’s outthrust arm that move they do. (Cindy and I have no children. I seem to recall discussing the pros and cons with her years ago. The cons won, apparently.)

There’s another couple far down the river in the distance, probably another parent and child since the figure on the left is much taller than the one on the right. It’s quite possible, though, that the figure on the right is a woman down on her knees before the man. You get what I mean. Must be uncomfortable on

her knees on the frigid ice, but hell they'll do it in the heat, won't they, the AC on the fritz?

Cindy must be out of the shower by now. I go to ask her about the damp sheets.



"It was so hot I couldn't even think, so I just went back to bed."

"You went back to bed in the middle of the day?"

"It was morning."

"In the middle of the morning, after you'd already showered?"

"I knew I was going to have to shower again, anyway. What's the big deal? Don't worry, I'll make the bed. You won't be called upon to do anything as taxing as make a bed."

"The sheets are damp."

"So? It's hot, Paul. Jesus, what's the matter with you? What's it to you if I want to hit the sheets in the middle of the morning?"

She's standing in front of the box fan. She must have brought it in from the garage. She's gotten no further in dressing than putting on a pair of denim shorts and a black bra. Her shoulders and neck are white from talcum powder, which she douses herself with, especially in the summer. I stare at her as she stands there one hand on her hip and fanning herself with the other.

Wait. What was that she said? if I want to hit the sheets . . . Lie down for a while, she could have said. Try to take a nap, she could have said. Hit the sheets—I know what that means. Everybody knows what that means.

"So. What about Jay?" I ask her.

"What do you mean, what about Jay?"

"When's he going to come and look at the goddamn AC?"

"He was already here."

"Jay was already here? This morning?"

"Yes. He checked it out and said he needed to get another part. A whatchamacallit. He said he had to go to some special electronics store to get it. Said he'll be back this afternoon."

"I'll bet."

"What do you mean by that? You better hope he's back this afternoon. It's not getting any cooler in here."

"That's what he said the last time, Monday. That he had to go get another part."

“And that’s what he did. It worked too, didn’t it?—at least for a while. Now it doesn’t work and he has to go get a different part.”

“I’m surprised you didn’t go with him. But then I guess you’ll see him again when he comes back after I’ve gone in to school.”

“Don’t start that shit again, Paul, just don’t you start.”

She stops fanning herself with her right hand and puts it on her hip. With both hands on her hips, she’s standing “arms akimbo.” Yes, that’s the phrase for it. I like the phrase. I’ll try to work it into a lecture sometime soon.

When Jay made his first service call Monday, I went out into the back yard with him and we chatted as he checked out this and that. It’s a man thing, I guess, feeling an obligation to keep a worker company even though you don’t know damn-all about plumbing, carpentry, whatever. After a few minutes, though, I bailed out—the heat. Cindy asked me if the guy had diagnosed the problem yet, and I told her he said that he thought it might be the switch to the unit, on the side of the house. “I didn’t even know there was a switch on the side of the house until he pointed it out,” I said, laughing. Cindy didn’t laugh but turned away, at the same time muttering something. “Ineffectual,” I’m pretty sure the word was. “I don’t have to know how to fix things,” I called after her. “I can afford to pay to have things fixed.” This time she did laugh. Me, Associate Professor at No Raise U. She took my place outside, watching Jay work. Then she came back in and said Jay was going to have to go get a part. A few minutes later as I was getting ready to go teach, Cindy was heading out the door. She said she had to run some errands. Out the front window, I watched her drive off in the direction Jay had gone in his pickup. When I got back from teaching four hours later, the AC seemed to be fixed and Cindy seemed very very happy. I asked her for details, and somehow things degenerated from there, climaxing with her telling me to fuck off. Those were her exact words: “Fuck off, Paul.” A real lady.

That was less than forty-eight hours ago, but I have a hard time remembering what our lives were like before that. Did she ever tower over me, arms akimbo? Was it ever this hot?



Teachers are old hands at humiliation. Sometimes we inflict it upon our students, sometimes on ourselves. This afternoon, me.

It was my first class. I’d spent a half-hour expatiating on setting in “Dry September” and then desperate to get the damn thing over with jumped to the end of the story, the scene between the murderous bigot, McClendon, and his wife.

“I have a theory,” I began. “I wonder if any of you have the same feeling that I do? That big bad McClendon is so full of rage not just because Will Mays is black—although certainly that adds fuel to the fire—but because Will Mays truly had been sleeping with McClendon’s wife. Do any of you suspect that? Am I the only one? Now look, I’m not saying that would justify the murder, of course not, but wouldn’t it make McClendon, you know, slightly more sympathetic? What do you say? Anyone think Will Mays is guilty? In that sense, I mean—guilty of sleeping with McClendon’s wife?”

There was a, let's call it a stirring, among at least a few of the students. Sort of a tensing. A cant of the head here, a raised eyebrow there. Two or three sat up straighter in their chairs. Pert Maddy Cosby frowned and raised a tentative hand.

"But Dr. Seipel, the story isn't about Will Mays and McClendon's wife. I mean, that's just not the issue, you know? The story is about Will Mays and that spinster lady, that Minnie Cooper."

I should have reread that story, hey? I attempted to turn it into a joke, said I'd tried to trick them just to see who was paying attention. They sat back in their chairs and crossed their arms over their chests like jurymen who'd heard enough evidence and were ready to hand down the verdict. Oh yes, and smirked, too. Don't forget the smirks.

Somehow I made it through my second class with my dignity mostly intact. So what?



At home again, the air conditioner is on, and the house is cool, and Cindy is gone.

Where is she? Is she with Jay? Was she ever with Jay? Have I driven her away with my suspicions, my paranoia? Include these in the "Questions for Discussion" at the end of "The Story of Paul and Cindy" in my new course on Marriage in a Hot Climate. Follow "Has Paul driven Cindy away?" with "Why would Paul's suspicions take this particular direction: betrayal, adultery? Do we sense something about Cindy that makes his suspicions believable to us as they are tormenting to Paul?" Add this: "Where there's smoke there's fire" may be a cliché, but does that mean it's not true?" Discuss. Three bonus points: Who said, "Not paranoia. Just the way it is"? (Answer: Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow*.) Perhaps I'd go all epistemological on them and ask, "If Paul never heard anything fall in the forest, does that mean Jay never banged Cindy up against a rotten tree?" Or reword for students metaphor-challenged: "If Paul never actually saw Cindy and Jay rutting rutting rutting until you could wring the sweat out of the sheets, does that make his torment less or more? Discuss once you've stopped laughing."

Enough. The only thing I know with absolute certainty in this life is that each step we take leads us to the present moment, and whether we understand the steps or even remember them is irrelevant. If only we could choose our moment . . .

Mine would be Brueghel's *Winter Landscape*. So radiant, so cool, so still. Caught in poses of whirl and glide and leap, the happy people are at play forever. They will never return to their verminous houses smelling of pisspots and offal, lives of disease and starvation and suspicion and betrayal. And as long as I look, I can be right there with them, carefree beneath a yellow sky. Why would I ever look away?

But I do. Some "imp of the perverse" (identify the author, three bonus points) causes my eyes to stray to the right of the river, and there, occupying almost half of the painting, are the birds. I count them as some art history doctoral candidate has no doubt counted them and built an entire plodding dissertation out of the fact that there are precisely as many birds on the

snow, in the bushes and trees and sky, as there are skaters on the ice. What can it mean?

In the midst of them is the bird trap. Unless you look closely, you don't see the string running from the trap to the tiny window in the house on the right edge of the canvas. Of the three dozen birds, only one is in danger of being caught in the trap, three conjoined wooden planks looming over him so that when the string is pulled the weight of the falling trap will not simply catch him but will crush the life out of him.

I stare at the trap, the bird, the string, the black window in the wall, a face behind it we cannot see. I stare until I am no longer skater on ice but the bird in the trap. I stare until I'm no longer the bird but the face behind the window, mine the hand on the string. Or am I both?

Yes, stare at a Brueghel long enough, and the Brueghel will begin to stare back. (Identify the allusion. Three bonus points.)



Guilherme Bergamini
A Tree Remains (03)

Prologue to the Amazon

The Florida Everglades is an expanse of green swaying above two or three feet of marshy water that in summer teems with alligators and every imaginable flying, swimming, crawling, skimming, and biting insect. Now I know that no one ever goes to the Everglades in July. The heat is scorching, the humidity smothering. Hot rain falls on a primeval no-man's land thoroughly unfit for human habitation.

But at the time I thought a few summer days in Florida would be an useful introduction for my wife, Marsha, and me to the adventures that would follow. We were on a Miami layover for our twenty-fifth anniversary trip to the Peruvian Amazon. We had packed our mosquito repellent; we had taken our malaria medicine; we were inoculated for yellow fever, cholera and typhoid. We were prepared for anything, and so we set out at sundown across the Everglades in a rented Hyundai, convinced that its state-of-the-art Korean air conditioning would provide all the protection we needed in what was, after all, nothing more exotic than an American national park.

As the Flamingo Lodge faded behind us, we drove along the main highway then up a narrow road toward an overlook with a comforting name: Mahogany Hammock. The day's heat radiated from the murky swamp and swarms of insects surrounded our car, filling the air in dark clouds. They scrambled across the car's hood and collided with the windshield blanketing it with their colorful innards. Our wipers and washer only smeared the carnage, making the road ahead a streaky blur.

Marsha stared through the glass and grimaced. "Look at them. Those mosquitos are going to chew us up."

"Come on, if we're ready for the jungle in Peru, we can handle this." Then I paused for a moment and adopted an authoritative male tone. "I know what to do. I think they're attracted to the heat of the motor, not to us. We can get away from the car and fool them. They won't be much interested in us when we walk to the overlook."

Marsha glanced at me out of the corner of her eye. The ends of her mouth curled upward and she raised an eyebrow. She was humoring me, a ploy she had acquired from years of dealing with me when she saw that I was absolutely sure and also absolutely wrong.

"If you say so. But I'm getting hungry and I think I want to go back to the lodge."

"That's silly. It'll be beautiful. Look at what the sun is doing to those clouds. The light is changing every second. God, this is great!" The first raindrops fell on the windshield. We pulled into the empty parking lot three miles from the main road and ranger kiosk.

We hadn't seen a single vehicle, and flying things continued to mass and buzz around the car.

They dived and swooped like a furious air force training for an all-out assault against human encroachment.

I hatched my scheme. "They're attracted to warmth--the engine's warmth--not our bodies," I said. "If we get away from the car fast enough, they'll stay near the hood and won't even know we're here. We can handle a few bugs at the overlook and watch the sunset."

"But the rain," Marsha said.

"Just a few warm drops," I insisted. "Don't think of it as rain, think of it as ambiance."

Her silence encouraged me.

"But we've got to get away from the car quickly," I insisted. "We don't want them following us, and we sure don't want them coming into the car when we get out."

Her mouth twisted up at the corners again.

"When I say 'Go' jump out of the car and move away as fast as you can. I'll do the same. The bugs will stay here and we'll be fine. It'll be a walk in the park. Don't forget to lock your side." I took her steady gaze as an indication of trust.

"Go!" I swung open my door, hopped out, slammed it shut, and ran from the car.

Marsha followed my lead and we stood together a few yards away.

Then I saw that the wipers were still moving and the engine was still humming. I moved closer to the car, pulled the handle, and saw the keys inside hanging from the ignition.

I pulled the handle again and tried to understand what had happened. Our car-rental cocoon still delivered security from the tropical wilderness, but we were hopelessly locked out.

Marsha made a sound that was between a shriek and a moan. The insect swarms had suddenly lost interest in the car and discovered us. Something large landed in my hair. I tried to remain dignified as I swatted it away. I needed to analyze our predicament, to sound in control despite my growing panic. I paced several paces away then returned.

"We have two choices," I said slowly. "We can smash a window or we can walk."

Marsha's tone was no longer trusting. "If we smash a window, we'll drive around without air conditioning for the next three days. And it'll probably cost us hundreds of dollars when we return the car."

"It's raining. You want to walk?" I said.

"No, I want to be inside that car. But you just locked us out."

"But we can't walk. It's three miles." As I spoke, something flew into my mouth and squirmed in my saliva. I spat. "And it's getting dark."

She turned and started marching up the road.

"But we can't just leave the car here," I pleaded.

"Why not?" she shouted without turning. "It's locked."

As the rain soaked into my clothing, I saw the long strip of asphalt beyond her. On each side,

the road fell away into darkening swamp. Strange birds made eerie as they settled for the night. Flying creatures struck my face. Some crawled down the collar of my polo shirt. A mosquito sucked on my forearm. I brushed it away, took a final look at our Hyundai, and started after Marsha.

I had heard that insects were the most successful life form on the planet. Now I knew why. We were in the midst of a force of nature. In the air around us millions of insects acted out their biological destinies, massing, mating, procreating. To them, Marsha and I were a romantic evening meal before a night of torrid copulation in the tropical heat.

I walked--almost ran--through the hungry clouds. I developed a defensive strategy that created its own rhythm: Slap my arms, slap my hair, slap my face, slap my neck; slap my arms, slap my hair, slap my face, slap my neck. I repeated the pattern again and again, varying it only to wipe insects from my mouth and to use my fingers to clear my nostrils and ears. The road stretched ahead. I wondered what was lurking in the dark swamp a few feet away. I thought of alligators and tried to remember if the guidebook had mentioned leopards.

Marsha strode silently ahead of me, setting the pace.

Finally through the twilight I saw a pair of headlights that grew to become a Toyota sedan. We waved our arms insanely. The car slowed and stopped, but the young couple inside only peered suspiciously through the windshield examining the wild people emerging from the swamp. Finally they motioned us to get into the back. We slammed the doors to seal ourselves in and fell back into the seats. Our saviors, locals out for an evening look at the swamp, turned and smiled. He was swarthy, she was thin, pale and freckled. They listened passively as we babbled about our car, the bugs, the heat, the rain.

"God, we're so lucky you came along," Marsha said. "It's so far to the main road. What were you doing here?"

"What're you doing here?" the young man responded. "Folks never walk outside in the evening here." He shook his head, "I'm glad you didn't let any mosquitos into the car. My wife is allergic to them."

I could see one tiny bloodsucker circling my nose. Another buzzed at my ear. But I remained silent as our rescuer U-turned his car and headed back to the main road.

At the park kiosk the ranger took our names, made a call and said we should wait for a second ranger to drive us back to our car and unlock it for us. We stood under an eave out of the rain. The swarms seemed less aggressive, and I was confident that our ordeal was nearly over. Marsha stood next to me in a posture that was familiar after decades of marriage.

She is five-two and I am six-feet, but she managed somehow to look down at me in silent scorn.

Finally an immense green Ford cruiser glided up and out stepped a smiling young African-American ranger in regulation Smokey-Bear hat and olive uniform.

He explained the obvious. "You picked a bad time of year to see the Everglades. Bugs, heat, humidity, rain. Florida at its worst."

I nodded stupidly.

“Your car’ll be easy,” he continued in a lilting drawl. “This Slim Jim will get the door open in no time. Nothing to it.” With a confident smile he held up a thin metal tool. We were in the care of a National Park ranger, a delegate of the Government of the United States, a guardian of the wilds who knew the ways of the swamp. This was America at its greatest.

“Get in the cruiser,” he instructed us.

Ten minutes later we arrived at our car, its motor still purring, its air conditioner still humming, its headlights still drawing insects, and its wipers still smearing bugs back and forth across the windshield.

Marsha stayed in the cruiser, and, in a manly show of support, I accompanied the ranger as he approached the car with his Slim Jim. He deftly slipped the device down the driver’s window, gave it a twist of his wrist and pulled to release the lock. Nothing. He reinserted the tool, pulled again, and again nothing happened. His brow furrowed. “Funny,” he said. “Hold my flashlight for me, will ya?” I was eager to be useful, but the third and fourth attempts also failed. Moreover, the swarms had surrounded us and I felt rain again on my scalp. The ranger slapped a mosquito on his forehead and turned to me.

“No sense us both getting wet. Why don’t ya get on back in the cruiser?”

An instant later I was watching him from the air-conditioned vehicle.

“You should help him,” Marsha commanded me from the back seat.

“Just following orders,” I muttered and slouched in my seat.

The rain pounded on the roof and the ranger continued his struggle with the lock. He had pulled his hat down further on his head and adjusted the sleeves of his light jacket so they protected his hands from the bugs as he worked. He worked the Slim Jim with one hand and with the other wiped insects, perspiration and rain from his face and neck. While we waited, I had time to ponder the inequities of the situation. I was inside and he was outside. I was dry and he was wet. I was cool and he was sweating. I was safe from the swarming hordes and he was being eaten alive. I was middle-aged, white and vacationing; he was young, black and saving my ass.

I continued to watch him. The clock on the dashboard crept ahead. Ten minutes passed. He moved around to the passenger door, worked there for a while. Twenty minutes.

He returned to the driver’s side and continued his struggle. Thirty minutes. The shower lessened then increased in a cloudburst. His clothes clung damply to his body. Forty minutes.

Rain pounded on the roof.

Marsha stared grimly out her window at neither me nor the ranger. She had not spoken a word in almost an hour. Then I heard a click from the door of our Hyundai, and the ranger straightened, raising both arms in victory. Then he swung the door open to grab the keys then noticed something

else on the seat. He picked it up and dodged back to the cruiser. With a sigh, he took the driver's seat and slammed the door.

I looked at his face. Welts swelled across his forehead, one eye was puffed halfclosed, and his lower lip ballooned. A cheek was distended and insect bites covered the backs of both hands. He breathed heavily from his exertion. "Got your keys," he gasped. He gave them to me then held out what he had retrieved from the car.

"You're gonna need this, too," he said and handed me the guidebook I'd been reading, *Walking the Jungle: An Adventurer's Guide to the Amazon*.



Kelly DuMar
Ball of Fern

Family Waterfall

My daughter-in-law's extended family owns a waterfall they have turned into a major tourist attraction and resort in Ecuador's Amazonia region. Its powerful cascades serve as a natural waterslide for the young and the brave, and its Edenic pools or *balnearios* offer bathers a respite from the intense jungle heat. Floating on your back, you gaze at the bright red and yellow heliconia contrasting with emerald- and jade-green foliage on the banks, as electric blue morpho butterflies dart through the moist air. It is a paradise on earth although these days your idyllic experience may be interrupted by boisterous American students drinking and sunning themselves like marine iguanas on the huge rocks called *peñas* jutting out of the pools.

Where the largest pool at the foot of the strongest cascade precipitously drops into the Rio Jatunyacu ("River Big Water"), the family has attached a rope to the *peñas* on both sides with signs that warn of "Peligro" (Danger). But a number of foolish, inebriated gringos and mestizos from Quito who slid down the waterfall were then carried by the current over or under the rope, dashed against the rocks, and drowned in the raging river. In response to these tragedies, my daughter-in-law's uncles, who serve as tour guides at the resort, were encouraged by local government authorities to train as lifeguards. Now proudly taking turns wearing an orange *Salvavidas* life jacket, they accompany groups of tourists on hikes to the different *balnearios* and the butterfly garden, always listening for desperate cries for help.

The family waterfall used to be the best-kept secret of Amazonia. But now the resort has become a much-needed source of income for the extended family — members of the indigenous Quichua minority in a mestizo-majority nation plagued with un- and underemployment as well as discrimination against minority groups, including the Quichua. To earn money selling food and beer, my daughter-in-law's dad and uncles built a makeshift restaurant and bar overlooking the main waterfall in a two-story wooden shack where family members also slept and cooked. The women of the family have always prepared and sold delicious dinners of tilapia wrapped in banana leaves (*maito de tilapia*) with rice, garnished with a salad of tomatoes, onions, and lime. Through a window in the shack, you could also buy for only a dollar a 22-ounce bottle of Pilsner, Ecuador's national beer, which means empty bottles scattered all over the *peñas*. In order to accommodate increasing crowds of weekend tourists, the family then tore down the wooden eyesore, replacing it with a cement-framed kitchen and installing an enormous cooler full of beer and soda.

But after a couple of those huge Pilsners, a greater number of the hundreds of visitors each weekend are taking risks when they slide down the waterfall, trying to stop at the "Peligro" rope. What if a lifeguard uncle can't rescue them in time? Beer sales contribute to the much-needed family income, as few family members have been able to find full-time jobs, but they don't reduce the possibility of accidents. Recently, the men of the family placed a large fishing net to try to catch those who slide beyond the rope. But staggeringly drunk tourists can still fall off the high *peñas* beyond the net.

Besides beer and soda sales, the women and girls of the family operate their own concession stands selling watermelon and roasted plantains, but also chips, cookies, and candy, thus adding melon rinds, spilled cheese doodles, and snack wrappers to the empty beer bottles littering the rocks. Of course, the family picks up the litter in the evening at closing time; the trash is a necessary evil they put up with in order to earn money to feed their families.

I have been going to the waterfall almost every other summer for years. Because of advancing arthritis, it is harder for me to climb up and down the *peñas* to get in and out of the stunning *balnearios*, but I haven't given up yet. I wear sneakers, my *tenis ecuatorianos*, for more traction and less pain on the rocks. And needless to say, I never drink beer at the resort. I don't need to make navigating the *peñas* more difficult for myself, nor do I want to become another casualty. With each biennial trip to the waterfall though, more crowds of loud tourists and unsightly litter interrupt my aesthetic gringa-privileged experience, communing with the beauties of the jungle.

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Alukus, photo courtesy of the author

Watch a video of the waterfall on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=275385916419288>.

The Lovers Found the Lighthouse in a Field of Chokeberry Bushes

It seemed to sprout like the largest tree in the forest, and it was green—covered in moss and weeds and bird shit. Shattered in spots, the glass casing that surrounded the turning bulb meant to shine the way appeared ghostly—filmed and cobwebbed. The tower was capped with copper, but what had once been shiny and new had aged green and milky.

The lovers lounged about in gentle afternoon sun, one eating a handful of chokeberries and offering it to the other. The berries were nearly ripe, and the lovers liked the feel of them in their mouths like little black bulbs exploding into a cascade of acidity.

One of the lovers suggested that they climb into the lighthouse, despite its decrepit condition. The other agreed—it would be an adventure of sorts, a marker in their budding relationship. When, years later, over a bottle of New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc, they could look back and say *Do you remember when we ate all those sour chokeberries and climbed that old lighthouse?* This would be a memory to build upon. They both felt expectant.

They pushed through the chokeberry bushes, eating one or two here and there, not in a hurry, happy to touch and be touched, happy to move slow and laugh, happy to breathe deep the aroma of the surrounding woods and each other. As they neared the lighthouse, one of the lovers noticed that it wasn't as green as it had appeared from the edge of the field of chokeberry bushes, but there were all sorts of colors, dead browns and dry yellows and dirty reds. The lighthouse itself, now that they were up close, didn't resemble some beautiful romantic relic, but instead a moldering bone, like the world itself had broken and the lighthouse had pushed up through ragged skin, and was now exposed.

The other lover smiled a crooked smile and ran around the base of it, fingers trailing along the cracking facade lightly like a caress. *Look I found a way in. There's a small red door over here.* The lovers rejoined at the door. *Let's not go up there quite yet,* said one, the one who had seen the colors. Linger down here might be fun. That one traced a finger down the other's shoulder, much as the other had along the lighthouse's exterior.

But the lover pressed, and cajoled, and pleaded, not in a simpering way, but laughingly like this was all a big farce. The reticent lover was torn. Why not go in? What harm could come to a bit of exploration? And then, in a miniature black bulb explosion of sour anxiety, the reticent lover saw all the reasons not to go into the lighthouse—some rational, some definitely not, some far flung and as wild as finding an abandoned lighthouse in the middle of a forest. But that was proof enough wasn't it? The very proof they needed to support the wild thoughts was right before them, a wildness incarnate.

The reticent lover begged off and sat down cross-legged among the brambles and chokeberry bushes. In a sulky pout, the other went to explore the lighthouse. Both were alone and quiet with their thoughts for several minutes.

The sun began to dip beneath the trees, and a chill set in. The reticent lover wondered what was taking the other so long and assumed the delay was a punishment of sorts. Just as the reticent lover was about to call out, the other lover returned, who looked scared now and moved with hitching gate, like a

person who was trying very hard not to run. Grabbing the hand of the reticent lover, the other pulled them both briskly away from the lighthouse. The chokeberry bushes scratched at their naked shins as it neared full dark.

What did you see? What did you see?

The other lover wouldn't reply at first, but when finally the tale was recounted, the reticent lover did not believe. Years later, living far apart, the lovers had their own individual bottles of New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc, and they drank them swiftly, silently, and very much alone. The memory of the lighthouse caused them both to stifle a shiver.



Richard Vyse
Man Imagines



Richard Vyse
Man Mood

Vyse.

Survivor

Her husband, recently turned 64, said he had no energy because he was getting old. “It’s what happens,” he told Gwen from his recliner where he sat for hours every day now reading every inch of the newspaper. It was driving her crazy.

Earlier in the week one of Winslow’s friends had invited him to play golf. But her husband hemmed and hawed because he said he didn’t feel like playing but nine holes at most and knew Ed would insist on 18. He’d retired a few months ago, for goodness sake, shouldn’t he be enjoying himself, Gwen said and pressed him to go.

And so he’d gone for the golf excursion, offering to pick up Ed, but passed by the turn off to his friend’s house and ended up 10 miles away at Lake Monroe before he realized. When he finally made his way back to Ed’s, they’d missed their tee time. The pro allowed them onto the course anyway, but said it would have to be nine holes. Winslow seemed to think it a blessing he’d gotten distracted when he relayed the story to Gwen.

On Friday, she asked Winslow to walk their Boston terriers with her, something he’d mostly done willingly, until recently. She feared walking them by herself because once a German shepherd ran from a yard and lunged at them, and if Winslow hadn’t been with her to kick the beast away, she didn’t know what she would have done.

“I don’t feel like walking,” Winslow said. He slunk down so that the top of his balding head fell even with the top of the chair.

“What is going on?” she exclaimed. “You’re going to atrophy sitting in that chair all day.”

“I don’t sit all day. I went to the grocery store this morning.”

“And what else?” she asked.

“I’ve got my list of things,” he said. Gwen gave up and threw the Frisbee for the dogs in their fenced backyard.

The next day, when Winslow parked himself in the chair again, Gwen insisted he call his internist for a checkup. Surprisingly, he complied, and got in on a cancellation that day. She accompanied him. Everything checked out normal except for her husband’s low testosterone level.

“Whoo, 400 points,” Dr. Allen exclaimed.

“Getting old,” Winslow remarked.

“You’re not old,” Gwen interjected. She was the same age as her husband and walked four miles on the days she didn’t go to the gym.

She had written a list of Winslow’s odd behaviors—like getting lost and sitting all day—for Dr. Allen. He glanced at her items, and dismissed them. He prescribed testosterone gel. “It’ll beef up your

vitality,” he said, slapping Winslow on the shoulder and winking at Gwen.

She wasn’t convinced, even if Winslow had never been a super power of energy, and she’d spent the ten years of their marriage encouraging him to exercise more. The next day, with only a little prodding, her husband yanked the spade from the pegboard in the garage and headed to the side yard to divide the irises.

She glanced out the living room window every so often to check his progress. He seemed to be mostly sitting on his “tool stool.” She shook her head in exasperation. Sometime later, her gloved hands scrubbing the rim of the powder room toilet, the doorbell rang. Her young neighbor announced he had loaded Winslow onto the back of his pickup truck and brought him up the drive when he passed their house and saw her husband in trouble.

“What?” she cried out.

“He looked like he was about to fall,” Tim said. Gwen rushed out to find Winslow sitting on the tailgate.

“My legs started shaking,” he said. “I looked like a bad Elvis impersonation.”

“Might need to get him checked out,” Tim said.

“We’re going to the emergency room,” Gwen told Winslow after Tim left.

“Not late on a Saturday afternoon, we’re not,” Winslow said. “We’d be there forever.”

Gwen fumed, but he would not relent. “We’re definitely going in the morning, or else,” she commanded.

“We’ll see,” he said, ignoring her tone.

On Sunday morning, when he nearly tripped down the three steps into the garage, she prevailed. The ER physician ordered a cat scan and minutes afterward the diagnosis came: a brain tumor.

“Can’t be,” Winslow told the physician. “Nothing hurts. No headache. I feel fine. Just getting older.”

Gwen had begun to shake. “Winnie, oh God,” she whispered to no one but herself.

The doctor pulled her outside the door and said he was calling in a neurosurgeon immediately. Instinctively, she threw up her hand, the gesture for questions.

“There’s no time,” he continued. “I’m sorry. He’s critical.” They took Winslow away. She sat on a hard chair in a waiting room and pulled her knees into her chest, shocked, terrified, and feeling guilty for wrong assumptions all at once.

Finally an attendant took her to Winslow, reclined partway on a gurney. A tube ran from a shaved patch on the side of his head into a bag. “It’s true what I’ve read,” he said. “Your brain doesn’t have any feeling. I didn’t feel a thing.”

The neurosurgeon explained he drilled a hole into her husband’s skull to drain excess spinal fluid.

There was so much pressure from the fluid, he said, that Winslow's brain had shifted from the midline.

Gwen didn't know what that meant. She looked at the doctor, imploring. "He has a pituitary tumor. Not cancerous. That's the good news. But it's the biggest one I've ever seen, four times typical, been growing for years before reaching this crisis, and there's a lot of damage. He's unstable. Can't think about removing the tumor until we get the fluid off his brain. He's had no vision problems?" Gwen shook her head. The surgeon shook his head too, his manner terse, like he didn't believe her. "He's going to general Intensive Care Unit. Neuro ICU is under renovation." She felt tears slide from the outer corners of her eyes.

For five days, Gwen sat in the corner on the lidless toilet in Winslow's room. To discourage visitors from staying too long, the ICU didn't allow chairs. But Gwen couldn't leave him alone because twice Winslow had almost lifted his head too high—a situation that could be dire—with the tube in his brain. The first time a nurse was in the room, but she didn't notice. So Gwen got the idea to bring a piece of plywood from home to cover the toilet's hole to keep herself from sagging. She watched the pale greenish fluid from Winslow's head drip into a bag. Her stiff back hurt continually while he slept much of the time. Their rector came to say a prayer each day; friends dropped by. Winslow would rouse, but he never remembered.

On the third day she asked when surgery might be scheduled. The nurse attending—too tired in the last hour of her 12-hour shift to offer much communication—sighed and offered dismissively it was tricky to coordinate two surgeons' schedules. Along with the neurosurgeon, an ENT would be present to pull the tumor through Winslow's nose—if it could be done with such a large tumor. Also, the nurse warned, the spinal fluid was still a problem. No matter how much drained, more collected because Winslow's ventricle for releasing the fluid still wasn't operating.

Gwen's daughter, Justine, across the continent from South Carolina, said she wanted to come home and help. (Winslow had no biological children and his only sibling—his brother—died in a car crash long ago.) But Justine was overloaded working two hourly-wage jobs to pay graduate school loans. She'd been searching for months for a professional position. Gwen couldn't allow it. There's nothing you can do, she told her daughter on the cell phone.

"I can at least sit with Winnie and give you some relief," Justine insisted. The connection was scratchy.

"No, baby. You stay put. We'll talk over the phone, and that'll help me." Only she hadn't been able to talk to Justine much at all because cell phones weren't allowed in the ICU. And when she finally got home at night exhausted, Justine was still at her restaurant job on West Coast time.

On the fourth day, sitting on her plywood throne, watching the rise and fall of Winslow's chest, she sensed a commotion in the hall. She looked through the glass wall of Winslow's tiny room to see an orderly pushing an alert young woman—maybe in her 30's—in a wheelchair into the room directly across from them. Two older people followed, the parents, Gwen assumed. She tried to imagine what malady would bring a beautiful—no bandages anywhere on her body—woman the age of Justine into the ICU.

No one drew the curtains in the new occupant's room—Gwen knew the staff preferred them open to make quick checks—so, in spite of herself, she watched. Workers draped head-to-toe in protective garb scurried in and out, toting bags of fluid. The young woman picked up a paperback with a colorful cover and

began to read. Gwen saw her smile toward one of the nurses.

When Winslow woke, he noticed the young woman. Together, they pondered her condition. Gwen said it was surely an infection with all the precautions taking place. Winslow agreed. They didn't speak of her again in those days before the surgery, but Gwen considered how Winslow watched the young woman—best he could with his head at half-mast.

After a week, though it seemed like 100 days in their tiny prison where the lights stayed on and machines never stopped beeping, Winslow went into surgery. Gwen sat in a waiting room on a stained sofa, holding her hands. She tried to be personable to the friends who insisted on keeping her company, but mostly failed. Fear overtook her comportment.

After many hours, an attendant alerted her the neurosurgeon was on the phone for her in the waiting room. "We got some of the tumor. Not all because it's wrapped around nerves. It could grow back, but maybe not. He's doing okay." Gwen had questions—what it meant if part of the tumor was still in Winslow's head—but the doctor was in a hurry to get to another surgery, sorry he couldn't come out in person and speak. She desperately wanted to see the doctor's face. She could understand better if she saw his face.

No one prepared Gwen for the sight of Winslow after surgery. So many crisscrossing tubes, inserted into veins or emanating from nearly every orifice of her husband's body, shrunk now by more than 15 pounds.

A male nurse attended, checking machines, inspecting bags, lifting and lowering Winslow's swollen legs, strapping on compression sleeves. Unlike most of the other nurses—and who could blame their edgy behavior with the traumas they experienced—Eric was attentive to her. He said it was all normal procedure after a surgery like this, but she saw the worry pleating his forehead. Terrified as she was, she willed herself to sit quietly on her makeshift seat. But within the first hour, an emergency came in, so she had to leave. Always, the emergencies required visitors out of the unit.

Gwen retreated to the empty waiting room. It might be only minutes, or it might be hours before the green light over the door came on to signal readmission. She curled up and folded her hands beneath her head on the hard cushion of the settee. She was so tired.

Two voices, male and female, interrupted her dozing. She didn't sit up, but she opened her eyes and saw sitting a few feet away, stiff and upright, the mother from across the hall. A man dressed in street clothes held both her hands in his, and she knew instantly he was the young woman's doctor.

He sat close to the woman, but Gwen could still hear. "We've been here before, Matilda," he said.

"How can she?" came the response.

"Don't," he said. "She's fighting." The mother looked bravely at the physician who let go of her hands to put an arm around her shoulder. He hugged her in a familiar way. Then he rose and left.

Gwen sat up. She looked at the woman. "Hello, I'm Gwen," she said.

“Hello,” she responded, her expression blank. “I’m Matilda.”

“My husband is across the hall from your daughter. She is a beautiful young woman. I’m sorry for what brings her here.”

“Thank you,” Matilda said. The expression on her face fell open, yet she said nothing else.

“She is in our prayers,” Gwen said.

“Thank you,” the woman repeated. “I’m sorry for your husband.”

“This is a tough place,” Gwen said. And then the green light appeared. Together, without words, they rose and walked toward the entrance. Gwen pushed the button and the double doors opened. Side by side they walked down the long hall, their eyes straight ahead, neither glancing into rooms they passed. At their respective doors, each looked toward the other and nodded. Like old friends who understand one another’s thoughts.



As the days passed, Winslow became more alert; he could think more clearly and remember, but the bag from the catheter gathered too much urine when the opposite was expected. A nephrologist was consulted, and in spite of his insatiable thirst, Winslow was restricted to a quart of fluid a day. He pleaded for the blue Gatorade that Gwen had brought in daily. He beseeched the nurses for water and anyone else who came in view. It broke Gwen’s heart to see how he suffered.

The restriction did not help. Urine poured into the bag. His numbers were all wrong. He couldn’t stand on his own. He’d lost another ten pounds.

When he tried to read, the words muddled. When he tried to watch television, the images blurred. The physician’s assistant said the tumor had been pressing on the optic nerve and the surgery likely touched the nerve. Winslow’s vision might improve with time.

The young woman across the hall—they still didn’t know her name—seemed to worsen each day. She no longer read or turned on her television. She stayed on her side, often staring at the wall.

Gwen watched Matilda try to feed her daughter, the spoon aloft in her hand, but her daughter turned away.

New faces—more doctors— went in and out of the young woman’s room. The parents came and went in short shifts. “It’s breaking my heart,” Winslow said one morning. “Here I am with my life, a survivor, and she seems to be slipping away. Why can’t they fix what’s wrong?” Gwen shook her head. Why indeed couldn’t the doctors fix what was wrong? For the young woman. For Winslow.

She encircled her arm around Winslow’s, limp, the muscles deteriorated.

In the afternoon, a nurse closed the curtains to the young woman’s room, and Gwen and Winslow

could no longer see. Her husband made a sound like an animal groan.

“Winnie, there’s nothing you or I can do but pray. Try to rest,” she said.

When Gwen arrived the following morning, the room across the hall was vacant. She entered her husband’s room and found him crying. “She died,” he said. “I’ll be getting out of here any day, and she’s young and she’s gone.”

“I know,” Gwen said. She caressed her husband’s arm and looked at his tired, parched body. She hadn’t yet told him of the upcoming surgery to insert a shunt in his brain that would wind around and empty spinal fluid into his lower abdomen—like a garden hose into a drain field—a permanent substitute for his ruined ventricle. A surgery that might or might not work.

Suddenly, the tubes, the lights, the whirring, beeping sounds overcame her. Gwen couldn’t catch her breath. “A cup of coffee,” she muttered. “Coffee. I’m going for a cup of coffee.” Winslow looked at her quizzically. Of course he knew she drank her only cup first thing when she awoke. He shook his head. She fled from the room.

In the cafeteria, she bought a bottle of water from the machine and sat in a booth. She pulled her cell phone from her purse and dialed Justine. She forgot it was still dark on the West Coast until her daughter answered on the fourth ring in a voice full of sleep.

“Mama? What?” Justine said.

“I needed to hear you, know you’re there,” Gwen said.

“What?” Justine said again. And then her daughter’s voice, suddenly awake, “Mama, you okay?”

“What you said about coming home for a little while,” Gwen answered.

“I’ll make arrangements today,” Justine said.

Winnie was staring straight ahead, watching for her, when she returned and pushed open the heavy glass door into the room.

“I’m getting out any day,” he said. He rubbed at his eyes. Gwen approached the bed. She laid her head on her husband’s arm. She noted the depth of his sigh, as tenderly, he reached down and stroked her hair.

Lockpicker

I was a little too drunk on tequila
and the party was a little too warm
so I dove into the outdoor pool
all lit up and shimmering.

The boy I kissed in the water
was a little too beautiful
and he knew it
his skin tone looked like yours
his dark eyes felt like yours
but his hands would not leave mine.

I left the backyard, that beautiful boy
and the stars gleaming inside the pool
and hid away in the bathroom
tucked myself in the bathtub
like I did when I was little
to escape
from you.

I turned the tap on
and instead of water
diamond backs dropped from the faucet
and slithered up from the drain
wrapping their emerald and tawny
bodies around my ankles and legs
they made their way up my arms
and into my hair
the tub became thick and full of their slide
until I could not move or breathe.

At least until Willow picked the bathroom lock
like she did when we were little
my guardian angel
in her silver cocktail dress

the diamondbacks disappeared
the water smelled of nectarine and sunlight
she curled up in the tub with me
pulled the bath curtain closed
lit candles
tugged a towel the color of tangerines
over our heads
*let's pretend we are in the middle of the sea
in a sailboat taking on too much water*
the last two people in the world
who can understand each other.



Guilherme Bergamini
Untitled (02)

Love Dinosaurs

Let us take a break from darkness reader,
let's slip into accidental happiness
let's run around the San Diego Zoo
get buzzy on champagne in paper cups
feed the giraffes, their neon pink tongues
wet on our palms, let's pet kangaroos
and feel love boom from the Elephants'
bodies.

Let's not decide between orange popsicles
or strawberry ice cream cones, let's just have both.
The flamingoes preen
their feathers
and they bloom peony petals
the lone duck shivers emerald.
Let's soak in the speckled light
and violet sunshine, my dawn thief.

Let's twine our fingers together,
let me hold your hand. Let me turn your heart
into kaleidoscope, into prism, let me remind you
of the first person you loved,
really truly loved.

Know my dark secrets, pull them from me
make them rainbows, I do not know yours,
I hope someday I will,
but for now let us glitter
the clouds. Let me lie here with you
until we become moon bloom
until we fossilize.

Bookmarked

In public spaces, I'll hold a book
like the hand of a loved one.
Instead of the hand of a loved one.

No amulet, no talisman, no scapular,
no veronica, no faux rabbit's foot glued
to a cheap looped chain from China.

Just this careful collision of words.
In the bookstore into which I've wandered
tonight, lost

after another day of forgetting to forgive,
I crack the spine of the early works
of Philip Levine,

think this alone can save me.
But from what?
The calm gloating of death?

I tuck Levine under my arm,
Heinrich on ravens and the urge to run,
another novel by John B. Keane.

I love the heft, the palpable
hum of revision, the had-to-be truth,
so like gravity and mud.

Quick

See
these words float away?

The story of us —
too swift.

A gust of wind,
the water shimmers,

another year
gone.

The diagnosis,
then death.

In June,
we buried you, brother.

Snow tears
down the tiring hills.

The Mourning Dove

In the mid-growth forest,
the wood thrush softens the evening

with its muted, trilling flute.
Lovely.

But I bow more to the mourning dove
singing the soulful who-*are*-you song

of some paunched musician
heading home so late

the sun is gaining on a new day.
He saunters the misty roadside,

scuffing his shoes in the dirt,
whistling low and lonely

for all who delight in what the night
gives to the brightening sky.

Houseplant

At my friend's funeral, his brother gave
me this houseplant that now stretches
above the piano. On that day it sat,
its fine limbs spreading up and tapering

into life, aside the urn caching ashes.
We paid it no attention, and it was later,
holding the wicker pot, that I saw
it had been there at all, that its fine

exchange of oxygen, the tender music
of its regular leaves, the hard mess
of its stems in the center that refines
and clarifies as they grow toward their ends

had accompanied me for many years.
Since then, six months ago, not much
has changed, except a few dried leaves:
it's holding still, it seems to be growing.

Revelations

I'm not so certain the world will end.
judging by the wisteria, life has no limit;
despite the late frost and wayward
pruning, the new leaves are out, lapping
the wind with their ruffled giggles.

And the rabbits, digging their loves
so not one square foot of grass is even,
don't care to consider their young
will die pointless deaths, not even old
enough to curse their mute ears and parched eyes.

Six times my strawberry leaves have hit
the earth; Nine times I've worked
to release flood-gates; the fates of trees,
the shapes of stones, I've all decided.
I did my best to not let it end.

Something Is Happening out the Window

You can't call that grass anymore.
The dinosaur on the lawn
is stomping out
all the pigment,
once-green blades glancing
uselessly off
armored paws.
Spooking the nag.
It looks like
some kind of challenge
or greeting
or something—you know
I can't be sure.
Emerald and scaled,
tufts of feather in awkward places
no recognition in those eyes
no quarter either,
but prehistoric restraint seems to be
keeping him content to
stomp it out on the grass.
And I'm just laying upward
feasting on oxymoron
open and stupid and awake
acting like
I still have things
left to lose
besides this pile of wet dust
sitting by this hole
I dug in the kitchen, acting like
I found a panacea
down there
under the floorboards
and I'm not about
to get killed.



Martha Clarkson
Today's Outlook

Brushed: Emily Carr

No one asked her to come. She just came. To Cumshewa,
To Haida Gwaii. To The Islands of the People.

A leather satchel, wrinkled like an old woman's nose,
stuffed with tubes of pthalo blue, camel hair brushes, old rags.

A dented frying pan, blackened by beans, hung
onto the slope of her horse's back like a metal tail.

She was there to paint the hidden woods and waters,
to sweep the mines of aqua and marine.

Her arrival stirred the native sons, who narrowed their eyes
and hid behind the virgin firs at her first approach.

But the elders knew sacred when they saw it,
and praised the transparent quiet of the stranger's step.

At night she bedded down alone on the forest floor
letting wolves speak to her, fauve to fauve.

By day, with hurried strokes, she copied the beryl pond,
the turquoise lakes, the blue-green domes.

Before the loggers slashed, before soapsuds curdled streams,
She stashed emeralds onto canvas, none too soon.

* Emily Carr 1871-1945. Canadian painter of the Pacific North West



A Shroud the Color of Grass

In 1814, the textile company discovered
a green brilliance—so splendid
they splashed it on the wallpaper
of Buckingham Palace, in between
the fleur-de-lis of corsets, on bedsheets
and doll clothes.

Emerald Green expressed the luminosity
of sun, the depth of moon, invoked
the sweet incense of grass cuttings
and the anise and fennel
of absinthe, the smooth feel
of pothos leaves, the cool burning
of a woman's eyes.

The color outlined every dance,
brightened rooms, elicited
comments.

No one knows the first woman
to faint from its arsenic
base, the first child
found draped over crib,
doll in hand.

But the company knew
as person after person fell
in parlors, hospitals, nurseries,
the power of the poison.
Its heads also knew the power
of the dollar
until years later
when the demand for change
grew too strong.

In the meantime, the most prolific
serial killer cooled its heels
in manor houses and apartments,
on breast bones, around waists,
on the bedsheets
of the dying,
a shroud the color
of Bermuda grass.

The Child Who Shot Himself in the Head in Rota

There was a gypsy
holding a baby—
this was in Barcelona—
so I looked in her arms
and saw the baby
was dead, its bones
the color of chandeliers
and she wanted money.
I gave her nothing.
When the Marine,
later,
put the gun in his mouth,
he stopped circling the building
on patrol,
and from
deep inside the building
I heard nothing.

In the Psych Ward of the Prison, the Glass Ate Blacks

And whites. And Jews. Hispanics. Us. The night. The day.
The gates ate everything. There were teeth barbed-wire.
The teeth of nurses. The smell of shit, a huge shit, storms
of Charon, how the inmates who wanted to commit suicide
would have a friend stab himself in another cell, diversion,
and I'd go out to the gazebo to watch the medics smoke,
the basketball court nearby with nets like old pirate ships.



Fabio Sassi *Cracks*



Fabio Sassi *Drops*



Fabio Sassi *Happiness*

Rebirth

My favorite trail, that quick loop
up Sycamore Canyon and around
through the valley, thick with trees
and shade, chaparral, the quick flit of bees
and birds, now heavy with the charred
skins of oaks and mustard, lupine,
my fingers sticky with ash,
the persistent taste of smoke.

Above me, following the dried stumble
of the stream, two hikers
finger ancient leaves, fossils
that tumble along the waterfall
unscarred. I climb beyond them,
find green shooting from brittlebush,
vines birthing, manzanitas sprouting,
lilacs and tidytips, dandelion fuzz.

Toes and throat aching,
I sink onto a rock, down water,
slip into the warmth of the noontime moon,
listen to the chattering of wrens,
the scattering of pollen, cracking of seeds,
inhale the growth after the burn,
forget the firing of my home,
the crackle of my burning hearth.

From A Cicatrix Behind a Redwood Desk

Our maple sentinel,
now amputee -- by ice
shrapnel -- by tree
medic
 by chainsaw; pride
of the Kenwood 4th, feted
Sundays with Pinot Noir
in sterling goblets;
trunk unbowed
 and daisy
chained; one stunted limb
regaled with passiflora incarnata,
salutes the risen sun with
thousands of green starts,
then soldiers on.

A Monarch

in the milkweed flashes
its heraldry, adjusts its grip of black
fore-threads.

Four wings – each *Venus*
Paradise – conflate, two form each side.
They whisper shut -- thin's limit.
Paper's cut selves

color being neither here
nor there. Wings swish in halves to reunite
in talc. A mute clap wags orange, yellow,
white and black-felt-tip
bravura. The regal
thrill pauses to enter the petals' blush
haunt, the carpel's netherworld. Entered
in turn by viscous nectar's

reciprocity.
Life brushes and adheres to life, until
a tremor and the deed is done. Design
spreads in pop-eyed flits throughout
the garden,
inhabits each green extenuation.
Each milked bud utters a sigh among us stirs;
each striation bends a singular refraction.

Lesson

They kill the intellectuals first.
It goes back to the old hatred
for the smartest kid in the class,
the one whose hand was always up,
practically levitating in his seat--
“Oh, I know, I know.” But he didn’t
know they kill the intellectuals first;
didn’t know the stolid, bored,
backrow kids who were slow in school
would be swift and decisive
in violence. Where did they learn it?
he asks himself now, blood
gushing from his nose and mouth,
the articulate fingers reaching out
from the sleeves of the well-ironed uniforms
to remove daintily, almost lovingly,
the eyeglasses from the blinking eyes
of the intellectuals first, then dropping them
to the ground, then crushing them
with the boots. So much to learn, dear heart,
say the ironical uniform evil smiles,
which, stitched together, form a kind of
horizon at the end of the world.

First Anniversary

Before the tree fell on Frank, Frank
was falling, falling.
The pipe was calling him and he picked up
up in Lynn. *Lynn, Lynn, city of sin*,
sang the dope man's kids jumping rope
on the broken sidewalk outside
where Frank went up and bought an 8-ball
and stayed all weekend in the same gray chair.

Frank the arborist getting high with the oboist,
the ex-con and the congressman's aide
and a host of fungible guest drug addicts.
From Yale or jail, they say in NA,
said Frank to himself
as the deft fingers of the oboist
passed him the pipe and he took a hit, deep, deep,
sinking deeper into the same gray chair.

He came to
in the ICU
in hell, the halo brace
screwed to his forehead,
no feeling in his arms or legs, feeling
like a fly caught in the spider web of tubes
running from every orifice, the face
of the doctor hovering over Frank's broken body:

*Frank, Frank, do you remember
what happened?* What happens
when you head to work Monday morning
to cut down a tree, your head still full of smoke
from burning the weekend at both ends? Accidents
happen. For the first time in Frank's life, Frank
got to fly in a helicopter,
got a morphine drip,

and didn't get out of bed all day
every day for a year. At the end of that year
Frank celebrated a year clean and sober.
They had a little NA meeting for him in his room.
And everyone clapped for Frank except for Frank,
who couldn't clap. And the PCA
pushed a button on the expensive hospital bed
to elevate Frank's head.

New Song of the Open Road

Go forth, Traveler, out onto the wide American road.

Chances are you are neither afoot nor lighthearted.
You carry your worries in the back pocket of your blue jeans
but there are sights to see. And every roadside diner
has a special you could kill for and
a freshly frozen pie defrosting in the microwave.

My god, each westward facing bridge draws you forward
into the manifest destiny of mountains
burning merrily on the horizon.

You carry the seed of a pistol in your swollen belly.
Each bullet landing in your fertile womb takes root.

And so go forth, blue eyed and straight-backed,
deserving of your riches
because of your belief that you deserve them.

This is your birthright,
distant hills made purple
by the neon of the Shell station.
Amber waves of mono-cultured grain
waving lazily beneath a star spangled sky.

I can't tell you why this land is beautiful.
It seems to be so
despite itself.

Blue Bottle Glass

Walk with me from the desert floor

and rise

four thousand feet through stone and sand
and step into the shadow of the douglas firs.

How else will you know
that here the resin hangs suspended in the air
so thickly that on breathing
you can taste the heartwood on your tongue?

How else will you know
that here the shade is cold and clean as
blue bottle glass?

In the Thirsty Country-

In the thirsty country
in the dust lands-
I push my pale pink skin
out onto the scalded quartz.

Born soft and mewling-
my body calls to mountains
in the spirit cradle
in the God place

where the sun draws salt from flesh
and a black gecko lifts his body
from the surface of a charcoal log.

in the arroyo-
in the stone scattered wash-
he is a holy thing.

How to Ward Off Evil

Bare your breasts, and waves will calm
themselves. Put on the swan's head cap.

When little souls flitter from branch
to branch like crazed bats, your gaze

will quiet them. Lift your skirt.
Face the dogs with taunts and cries.

A coin stills the wind as you take it and
turn it toward first light. You're a needle

pulling through emerald cloth, a fragrant
bay leaf placed on a grave. Smooth

your mussed hair. Put on the wolf-skin cap.
It helps to laugh at yourself, your weeks

in the hospital, nurses at night telling
their stories—blood, ambition, lost boys.

Summon your winged attendants. Wheels
spin in the distant heavens. Dragons roar.

Airfish

I chose a pot of basil
but it won't root right.
A fig tree that died.

A mobile, dangling emerald
airfish, long thin bodies,
ping-pong-ball eyes.

Red sweater I wear
against a beige couch
through coal-dark days.

Books because houses need
books, even small houses
in down-market developments.

A jar of honey tempts me
to plunder. The heat pump
kicks like a startled animal.

Sometimes books float me
or come like a tide
to drown a small sadness.

What if there were no
sorrow, nothing paid for
with despair? It's not really

hoarding—buying more
tables with shining surfaces,
a pile of books like a sacred fire.

And Through the Bardo

Grandmother
you only ever smelled of tea.

This coat
that I put in a box
this coat that covered you
three of four seasons, this coat
the color not of trees
but a single tree bending
off Tibet, this coat

smells of pain. The birds
have eaten their fill.
I am flush with the feminine
seedpods of your wisdom

like the mountainside
sweetly smelling of juniper.

A Grip on the World

My father died on a slate-grey Tuesday. I checked the temperature when I heard because I wanted a fuller picture, precisely as he would. It was a question used for cover to prove he still had a grip on the world. I saw it was not quite twenty,

and my thoughts turned to the ripping wind, his preference for cardigan sweaters wrapped like a bandage hiding his mottled skin. The elements eroded his person, but nothing scored his heart. He died on a slate-grey Tuesday, and it was cold.

It was one of his stock questions, along with a query about my wife, carefully dodging names so as not to offend. Then he would ask me about the panfish, recall a shark pulled from Barnegat Bay—an assurance he still had a grip on the world.

He latched onto the notion of one last trip, contending every obstacle to his plans—the wires and wheelchairs and pills—were about me and not him. And the truth pricked me liked a barbed bit of treble. On a slate-grey Tuesday may blood ran cold.

More than most, I believe, I loved the way his heart worked in concert with his mind. He was given to improv, made you Dizzy, and dared you to go along for the ride. We drank coffee over riffs on Trump and Watergate, proof he still had a grip on the world.

He knew the heart was a muscle, and love is a choice. There is not disconnect at all—no space for spilt mercury to fall in a fissure or a nightcrawler to find a void in the soil. It's a clear, cool Wednesday, and I want him to call just to check on the weather. I want to listen patiently and give him shots to show me he still has a grip on the world.

Social Graces

The sleepwalking homeowner
emerges from his tool shed
and pushes a lawn mower up and down

the grass bottom of the cage
before returning to bed.
The noise he created

hangs in the air, in my head.
Across the street, an artist
angles her pad beneath the sharp sun

that unlocks the shade around her.
Our eyes meet briefly,
not wanting to disturb the other.

She lifts her hand, marks out
the extremities of the cage,
and begins to fill us in.

Previously appeared in *Verbal Clouds through Various Magritte Skies*, Cy Gist Press, New Haven, CT (2014)

“What We Study When We Study ‘What We Talk About When We Talk About Love’”

We were naming types of love
the Greeks hadn't already dished.
Puppy love, bar-
ked one student,
her paws on the desk.
Sure, I said,
and wrote it on the board.
Self-love, mused
another kid with his
emerald eyes turned inward.
Narcissism, I wrote,
feeling smug.
Love of money, they said.
Food love, they told me.
Love-love, dreamed
this student who
genie-lamped out
of thin air.
I wrote them all
down, each more
ridiculous than the last.

Genealogical

i.

The world turning on the word until they clicked.
As with the affinities, or that day in late adolescence
When *The Ginger Man* (a Dell paperback, Kelly-green)
Stopped me cold in an aisle of Jay's Book Stall—

“Today a rare sun of spring.” The fragment's freshet
Of perception a kind of ideogram, it would seem
To me years later, but even then it was pure presence,
Cleft of its verb, like Adam's given-named animals.

ii.

In the middle of the Ellis Island century—prefix, suffix—
Gibb got shucked from Fitzgibbon, misnaming
The generations of that émigré Adam, Roberts-in-a-row,
Down to me. A knowledge I came to belatedly,
Like sex, or how Pittsburgh is a part of the Midwest.

iii.

“Count yourself lucky,” she told me. “If your mother
Were still alive, you'd be going to parochial school.”

iv.

Shanty the slur I heard most often in that house.

Spiritus

Paddy's Day, in which spirit
I'll call it poteen, the fume-wisped moonshine
That lit us up—one sip at a time
Taken from a jam jar filled at a still.
Not burning, really, though you could feel
The afterburners kick right in.

It hinted of the rubbing alcohol
She whisked me with, that tropic run of days—
Cotton balls trailing astringent wakes
That wisped away on contact,
And the fumes that seemed like spirits
Being kindled from the skin.

Sweet apposition—whisked by evanescence
Yet minded by the flesh.

Our Life's Carnival

Of course a drawing-room door will warp over time
Especially one that children hung onto and let giggling swing,
Or pressed against on rainy days when we played hide-and-seek.
But why can't a door be repaired?
They hardly make them out of mahogany any more,
At least not with parrot carvings.
And why shouldn't we care about the preservation of the neighborhood,
Even if all the neighbors have moved out years ago?

You throw in unrelated arguments, said Marsha
Just like Mother used to do—
As if a good observation has to wait politely for its moment to take the platform,
As if an observation were not true until it proved itself useful.

Because you need to switch points of view like the piled-on beats of a pounding rhythm,
If you want to march with feather-crested revelers behind the trombones in the samba.

After assuring us that the only goal was to have fun,
And that anything we do is fine,
And that we should throw ourselves about as free as palm trees under an open sun,
The instructor said the right way to do it
Is to rotate our hips about our core
While letting them sway side to side at the same time,
All the while moving forward.

And if you take away all the rainy days in my life,
It would be like taking away Father's unclamped final years,
Or expunging the argument Mother had with me over not pursuing math in college.
Her head for figures was good enough
To keep the store out of the chains for thirty years.
So why can't we preserve the mahogany parrots?

Don't tell me which arguments are relevant to my case.
You need to balance many thoughts at once
To dance the samba through our life's carnival.

Fake Emeralds Are Flawless

real emeralds hold tiny fractures,
natural breaks deep inside conducting heat
a breath will fog them for a moment, one two,
before the fog evaporates
fake emeralds stay clouded, one two three four five,
too green to be genuine
so when you are inches away from me
I hold your face between my hands
bring you down to my lips
breathe in, out, and wait



Cynthia Yatchman
Four Trees

Miss Crable Introduces Herself to the Seventh Graders at Scarlett Junior High School

Look down and see a hundred raging cocks:
Curved, stout, spangled, strung out, jockey-muzzled. . .
A hundred manic blooms weeping crystal meads
From a single heartsick taproot that burrows
Down to a dark humidior of ancient leaves,
Where serpentine blue veins are the rivers
Of a summer's forever roarbeating the trees.
A hundred weeping willows, a hundred breathing trees,
And all the sway and strum and sap of this moment
A tincture's distillation of wordlessness
Captured and corked in a hundred frost-hot vials:
A hundred winters, a hundred springs, a hundred falls
Where palmary hands will spend their native heat
As she turns and chinks her name across the sky.

Untitled 1

I thought someone was following me –
perhaps a behemoth?
I turned around –
wheat ears were moving in my wake,
a ship of the green's own.

Untitled 2

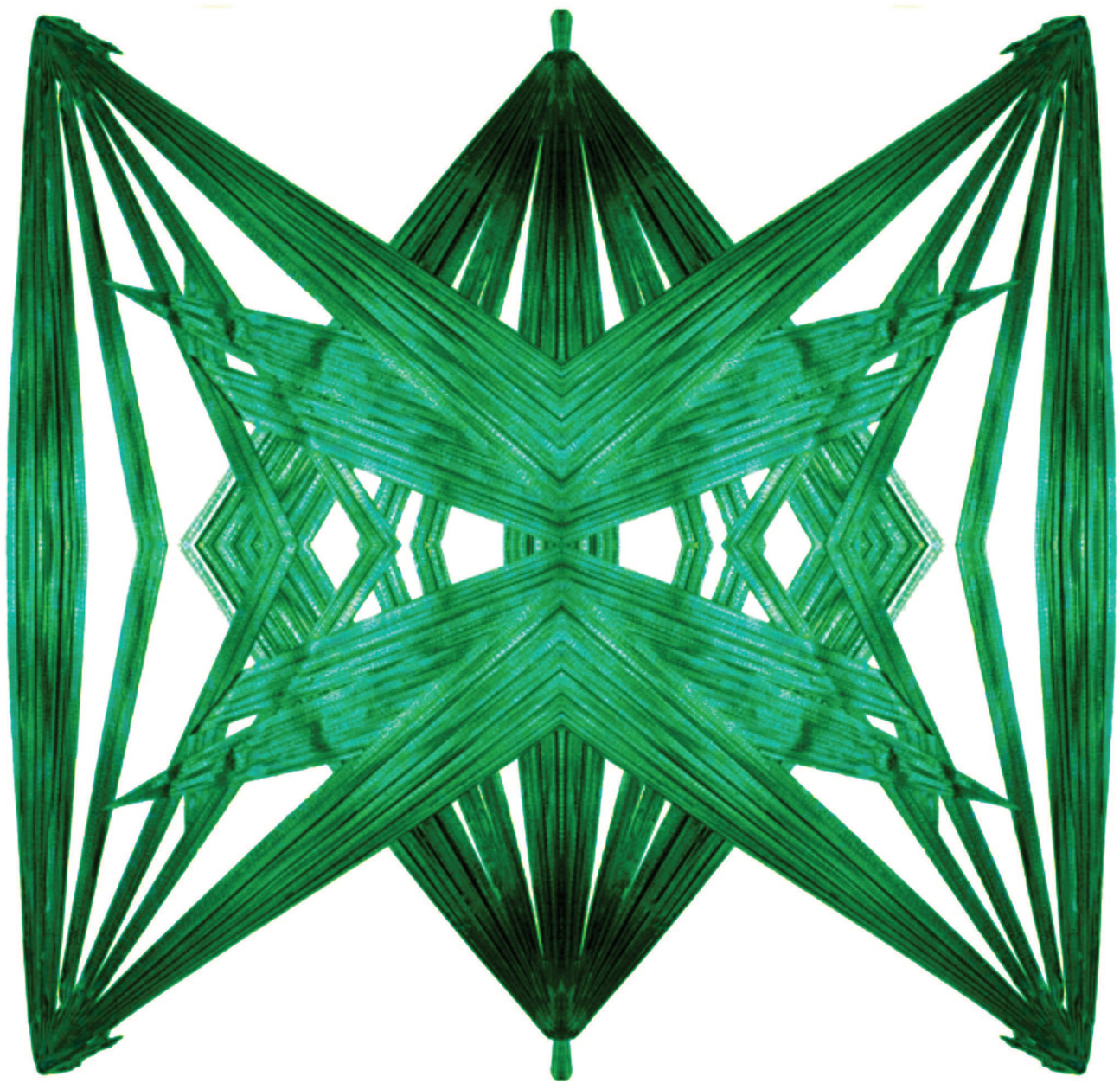
Beautiful as a gray, light-dappled falcon reflected in green waters
that are not sea, not river, not lake,
is this stone.
The sultan attire of the present moment.

Keep Up the Good Work

So poets have taken over the word “love.”
Does that surprise you?
They’re the ones who most often speak out
on the feelings they value.
Were you expecting the answer
to be lawyers or firemen?
And if it takes on a patina of literary
then so what.
Who inspires more?
Romeo and Juliet
or your next door neighbors,
Dick and Robin?
But this has nothing to do
with classrooms and books.
It’s a direct line between the poet
and what occupies his heart.
No great claim to the “aesthetic.”
No effete nod to academia.
Just sublimation to emotion’s
pantheism and abstractions.
its acceptances and rejections,
its needs and passions
at a particular place and time.
Why shouldn’t we respond to modern life
by rejecting all but
the sensitive, the unconventional,
the rebellious, the romantic.
The world needs the word “love”
to be more frequent in human parlance.
So poets have taken it upon themselves.
Cops and truckers weren’t getting it done.

RAHPHAHEEL

Rahphaheel, Rahphaheel
spahkleen green
waysr hees gown oove
eemeerould green
eemeerould green
seent by God to heal
by God toعال

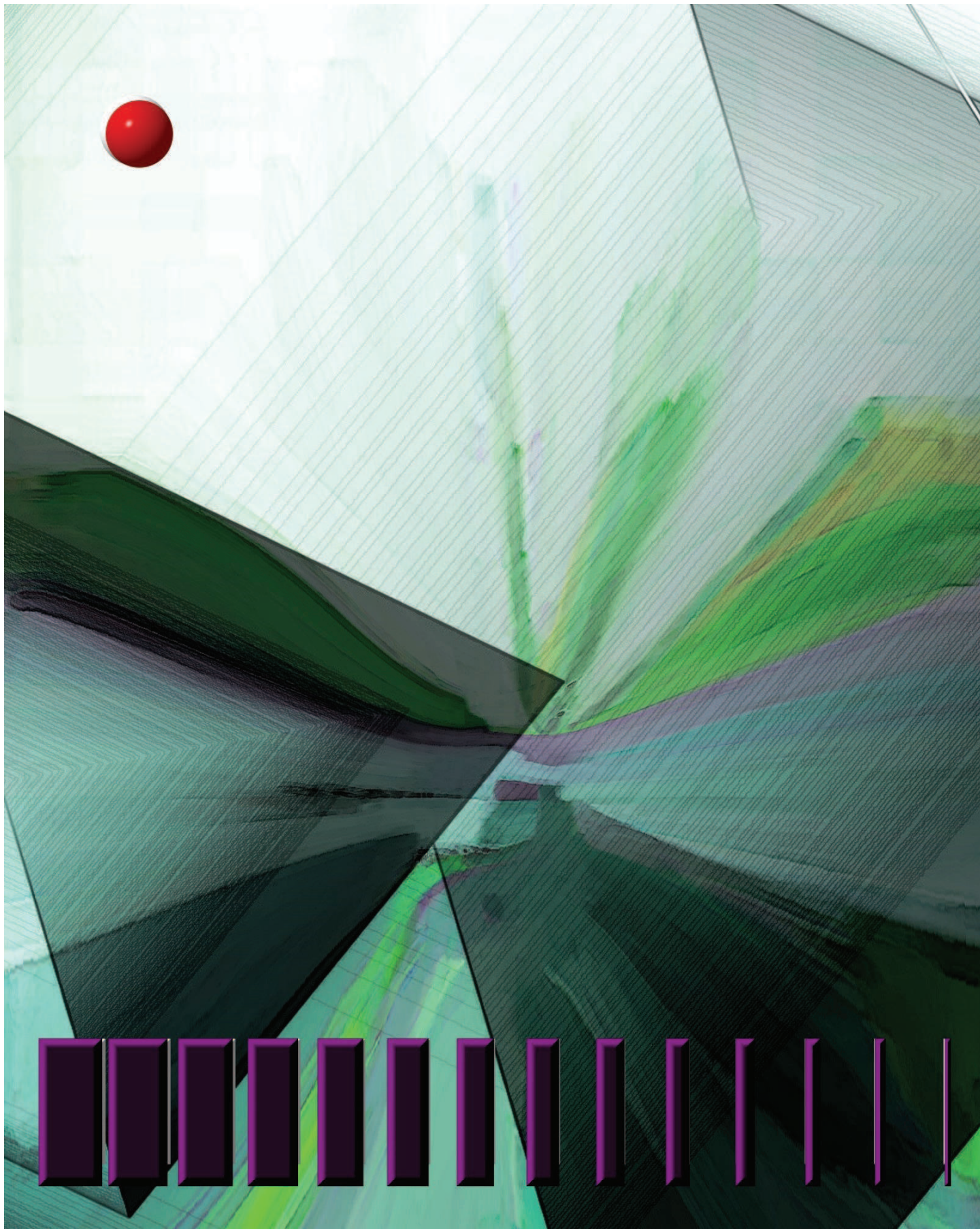


Bill Wolak

Neon Whim



Alex Nodopaka *Abstract Cubism 3*



Alex Nodopaka *Abstract Cubism 51*

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