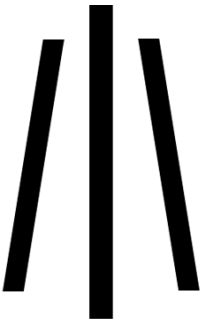

Glass Mountain is a literary journal edited by undergraduate students at the University of Houston. Dedicated to showcasing the work from undergraduate and emerging artists around the world, *Glass Mountain* publishes volumes each fall and spring.

Cover Art

"Evidence II (Love Letters)"
Felipe Campos

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www.glassmountainmag.com/submit

Evidence II (Love Letters)
Felipe Campos
Acrylic and blood on canvas

glass mountain

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Dedicated to the little victories.

"To climb the glass mountain, one first requires a good reason."
— Donald Barthelme
1931–1989

Letter from the Editor

Dear Friend,

Once, during a classic two AM phone call with my best friend, he asked me, "Do you know about the ship of Theseus?" and I, an intellectual, replied, "Is that not some dude's boat?" It turns out the ship of Theseus is a thought experiment imagining this ship that steadily sees its parts removed and replaced—a mast here, a sail there—until eventually every board, rope, screw, flag, whatever of the original ship has been substituted. This begs the question: with every piece replaced, is that the same ship?

I climbed aboard the HMS *Glass Mountain* two years ago as an associate prose editor and in those two years have watched its various parts change drastically. Almost none of the people who were staff then are staff now, and with my editorship coming to an end, few will remain. This, of course, begs a similar kind of question—when we're all gone, will this be the same *Glass Mountain*? Forty-five minutes spent discussing the original question and a year after its asking, I still don't have an answer to it. But I do know immediately the answer to the latter.

Generations of Glass Mountaineers have puzzled what truly defines the *Glass Mountain* aesthetic, and I believe it's that debate, specifically, that adds up to what this magazine is—newly-minted writers join our ranks and are given the question as though it is shiny and unconsidered, and then they get to have it out over their conceptions of the answer until the next generation of writers comes in to take their place. A final conclusion is never reached, and no one is ever wrong; their ideas are simply harnessed and refined. Forever. And this ever-changing revolution of people and ideas is precisely what makes *Glass Mountain* itself.

As I move on, letting go of a magazine that I will certainly not be the same without, I know *Glass Mountain* will go on the same as it ever was, championing the ideas of emerging writers and supporting those brave enough to pursue creation and connection. Volume 22 is the culmination of those voices, brought to life by dedicated artists and writers who through their passion have created a unique home of our publication. And though *Glass Mountain* will go on the same as ever, we will never look quite like this again.

Yours,

Katherine Hill
Editor, *Glass Mountain*

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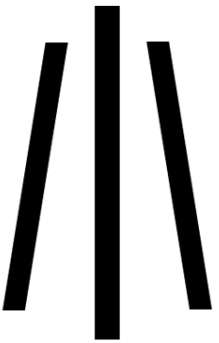


Poetry and Prose Winners

Jackson Neal
Poetry Winner

Jackson Neal is a freshman at the University of Houston and a three-time member of Houston's premier youth poetry slam team, Meta-Four Houston. He is the 2017 and 2018 Space City Grand Slam Champion, a 2018 National YoungArts Foundation Winner in Writing, a US Presidential Scholar in the Arts nominee, and the 2019 Southwest Regional Youth Poet Laureate. His writing and videos have been featured in the *Claremont Review*, *Houston Chronicle*, *Houston Public Media*, and elsewhere. A proud member of Clutch City, Jackson reps H-Town wherever he goes.

Death Drop from Grace

Selected by Michael Snediker

Gingerly, I seduce the skies of science: coaxing
sun into a crimson yolk.

The wavelengths at my lavish
wings slow to the black speed

of sex. Ink licked slippage. Wet
homage on the tongue

of dark kissed creatures. Dissolving
the light of God to eyeshadow,

even the rings around my fingers
darken into petrol halos. I lizard

dip & become canonical need.
Duck walk on mirrored floors

& each inch of air
is tainted by my feathers.

Creature of rhinestone & clavicle.
Creature of leather & gems.

One heel buckled in the soft of me,
the other raised like an axe.

I fell kingdoms, nations,
quaint suburban families of 2.5 children & blonde
labradoodles. Dead.

The Boy they carved me into. Dead.

The Boy I will not be. Dead.

Every boy. All of them. Dead.

All life chopped down in one
dazzling slaughter.

All except the slur of
like-thighed Queens, cackling

“I’m dead! I’m dead!”
Our faces stretched so wide they split.

Our backs arched like horizon.
A dead black veil

cloaking Earth
the instant we

drop.

Madeleine Belden
Fiction Winner

Madeleine Belden is a Chicago-based actress and writer. She was a member of the famed Second City, and simultaneously a copywriter for some of Chicago's most prestigious advertising agencies. She wrote this short story while vacationing in Wisconsin.

A Critical Grade

Selected by Robert Boswell

Donna usually hated parent-teacher night because no one ever wanted her to be honest about their daughters. For some reason, parents always seemed to understand a child failing math. She never heard shouting coming from the math lab on these nights. But American history was different. Parents always got upset about American history.

Failing implied a choice. That the child was not studying for some reason or another. Some parents immediately thought of drugs. One mother popped a Prozac as they were speaking, right after Donna said the f-word (flunk). As the parents walked away, Donna was sure they were blaming it on her. They were probably thinking that she was a lousy, spacy, unfocused teacher. Donna put her pen down and considered her own supply of Prozac. She glanced at the doorway and then leaned over, opening her right-hand desk drawer and unzipping her purse. She found the pills, and rattled the cloudy prescription bottle. Two or three left, it sounded like. Donna looked at the label. Blue type on white, stained paper. One of the corners was starting to curl. REFILL AS NEEDED, it read.

Her mother had died four months ago after a long illness, and her doctor had suggested that Prozac might help even out her mood swings. The sadness and anxiety. One more refill, then she would see how things were going. Donna put her purse back and closed the drawer. A friend had suggested that Donna might need to redefine her self-image, search for an alternative well of strength. That wasn't the problem, though. Hours before she'd died, her mother had forced a promise out of Donna.

"Mrs. Binotti?" Donna called out.

The small dark woman got up from her chair in the hallway and walked into the classroom, a cloth winter coat draped over her left arm. In her hand she was clutching a large, circular key ring

with a plastic daisy hanging from it. One of the petals was missing, Donna noticed. Her hair was wavy and swept up, and parts of it fell casually over her face and forehead. Sitting on her left wrist was a bracelet made from uncooked pasta noodles. "Henry is struggling," she said, taking a seat. "But in the end, I think he'll be fine."

Donna picked up her student's last three tests. They were all C-minuses. One D. "His prognosis is uncertain," she said.

"Prognosis?"

Donna stared at the woman for a moment. "Sorry. I meant to say, his final grade is up in the air. I'm just a little tired." *And spacey and unfocused*. "He needs to learn to prioritize the information in order of importance," Donna said. "The final exam in six weeks will be a critical grade. Anything below a B, and he will fail." Mrs. Binotti looked startled and Donna explained that someone had to be the bad guy. Someone had to be honest. It was her job as a teacher to hold a mirror up so the child could really see themself. Donna stood up and stuck her hand out.

"So I should push him," Mrs. Binotti said.

"You're his mother. If you don't push, no one else will," Donna said. Binotti. She was only at the B's. It was going to be a long night.

"Donna?"

She looked up from her cluttered desk and saw Paul Sales standing there. His hair was still jet black and gelled, comb marks glistening under the fluorescent lights. Eyes on the beady side, celery green. He bared his teeth in pretense of a smile.

"I just wanted to say hello," he said.

"Hello," she said.

"Did Amy tell you that my wife and I separated?"

"No."

"Now will you go out with me?" he said.

"Mr Sales—"

"Paul. Or Pauly."

"I'm working. This isn't a bar. I'm not interested in going anywhere

with you."

He was the father of a former student. Last year, in the middle of informing him of his daughter's B-minus average, he'd asked her to go to the movies with him. Donna suddenly recalled every inappropriate word that had come from him at last year's conference.

"You're married," Donna had replied in response to his invitation.

"I'll tell you a little secret," he had said. "My daughter doesn't know it yet, but her mother and I are about to separate. Any day now. If you hurry. . . ." He'd capped his insider information off with a wink, adjusted his right cufflink and smoothed out his tie, re-securing the clip in the middle.

Donna couldn't remember a time that she had ever been that sick to her stomach without actually having some kind of flu-bug. "Nice to have met you," she had said at the time, still seated, eyes down.

She could still recall how he'd reached his hand out and his knuckle had just about touched her lips, his fingers reeking of garlic and butter. In her mind she'd seen him seated in a dark restaurant, breaking bread, sharing food of the earth with some duped, stacked woman, assuring her that he was going to leave his wife soon, but that she shouldn't call his house anymore on weekends. At the time—his hand still planted next to her cheek—she had considered biting it but worried she'd break a tooth on one of his gold rings.

"Donna?"

The cloying sound of him clearing his throat brought her back to the present. "You're in the wrong room, Mr. Sales," she said, managing, finally, to look at him. "Amy's a junior this year. You should be upstairs." He wore the same tie clip—gold, with the letters PS engraved on the front—but he looked a tad older. His suit a little worn.

He stood there, eyeing her. "You don't like men," he said now. "No problem." He shrugged, turned, and left the classroom, his heels clicking loudly. She heard his hand with all its gold bands ringing

against the steel handrail, heard his feet slam hard against each step as he traveled upward to see his daughter's homeroom teacher.

That night, Paul Sales's words stayed with her. Hovered over heads as she spoke to the rest of the parents. Glared behind streetlights as she drove home. Four days later she still felt the breath of this aural specter in Walmart as she approached the pharmacy window. The pharmacist leaned over the counter, glanced at her legs, and told her it would be a few minutes as they were backed up with requests for Prozac.

"That's okay," Donna said. "I'll just catch up on my reading."

"Sure," Hal, the pharmacist, said. "I think there's a new *Us* magazine since you were last here."

She collected an armful of periodicals from the rack and brought them to the waiting area. It comforted her to sit there, reading. She liked to hear people coming and going as she leafed through the glossy monthlies. Her cramped, bleak apartment seemed a million miles away. She had let most of her subscriptions lapse since everything in the magazines had more or less begun appearing on her home page when she turned on her computer.

"Sorry about the wait," he said over the glass partition. "Shouldn't be too much longer." He nodded at her, taking a long sip from a ceramic mug. "Did you get a chance to read that cover story? It's funny. I was kind of down last night and it made my night."

She crossed her legs and a couple of magazines slid from her lap. "I haven't gotten to it yet," she said, a little surprised that he was making conversation. A few minutes later she noticed him chuckle with a male coworker. As he giggled his broad shoulders moved up and down underneath the crisp white lab coat. His laugh was quick and strong, the catchy kind, the kind that could infect you.

A few minutes later, Hal stapled the small white bag and handed it to her. "Listen," he paused and cleared his throat, looking uncomfortable. She wondered if he was going to caution her about the Prozac. "If this is too forward, I apologize. I was just—would

you like to maybe go out for coffee sometime?"

She peered at his black eyeglasses. Lenses so thick that they must invite a fleeting moment of pity from the average person seeking a prescription. The hair on his head was sparse. Yet when he smiled, it was, in a way, non-threatening. Blushing, she looked down at the pharmacy bag. "I'd like that," she said.

On the drive home she started to worry about having accepted the date. What had she been thinking? She was definitely taking a risk. If it didn't work out with Hal she couldn't use that Walmart Pharmacy anymore. There were other places, of course. CVS, but their magazine selection was nowhere near as extensive. Walgreens was not only out of her way, but they were way more expensive. Not an option on a teacher's salary.

The upside, of course, was big. The way she saw it, she had to take this risk. If things worked out, a certain very large weight would be removed from her shoulders for good. No more guilty feelings regarding a certain unfulfilled pledge.

In preparation for her date, she returned to Walmart, avoiding the pharmacy by circling through the domestic goods section into health and beauty, and purchased a new shampoo that promised to make her hair smell like a rain forest. A new pale pink lipstick, too. She vacillated between feeling hopeful about the date and feeling anxious. To make things worse, when she was nervous, she had a terrible habit of blurting things out without thinking.

"I've never been in love," Donna said, a few days later, as she buckled her seatbelt, gave the shoulder strap an upward tug and sat back.

Hal paused a moment, started the car, and pulled out into the street. After a few minutes he said, "Kind of a strange thing to say, isn't it?"

Oh my god, she thought, replaying her own words. *Did* I *say that? Out loud?* She tried to explain but she didn't know how.

"On a first date?" he said, stopping for a yellow light. Hal turned

and looked at her. He seemed to have decided something. “Maybe that’s the reason you’ve never been in love. Maybe no one’s ever asked you out a second time.”

“Oh my god,” she said. “That was so mean.”

His face reddened. “I’m sorry,” he said quickly.

The light changed. The person behind them honked. Hal had no choice but to drive. As he drove he kept apologizing and explaining. “I was just trying to. . . can I be really honest with you?”

“No!”

“Fair enough,” he said, and then he was quiet for a while. He put his blinker on and made a left-hand turn and they drove in silence for a bit, but then the words bubbled up again. “I thought that what you said, you know, earlier? I thought you said it on purpose. That you made a joke. You know? To lighten the moment? Because first dates can be so awkward?” He sighed. “I thought it was gutsy and so I thought I’d be gutsy too. Make a joke too. Obviously I made a mistake. Forgive me?” His voice collapsed into a bewildered sigh.

She put her head in her hands. She mumbled something about it being fine. To forget it. Her fingers felt cold against her forehead. She had forgotten her gloves. And hat. She was trying not to cry. Her head still down, she could hear Hal quickly pointing out his old high school as they passed it. It sounded like he was babbling out of nervousness. He acknowledged an empty lot where he had his first job, selling Christmas trees during college with his cousin Norm, now also a pharmacist, but he slowed the car in recognition of something else.

“Well, look at that!” he said. “Do you remember this place by any chance?”

Between her fingers, Donna saw a chain-link fence with a large hole cut out of it, surrounding a brick building with a *condemned* sign taped across the door.

“It used to be a community center,” Hal said, chuckling. “I was in a band when I was a teenager.” He looked over at Donna. “You don’t

remember going to any of those dances, do you?"

She shook her head.

"I'll tell you what," he said, his eyes on the brick structure, "we could really rock that place. We even came up with a few original songs. My cousin Norm wrote one called *Prescription Love*."

He pulled into a parking lot. Donna couldn't move. Why would she announce that she'd never been in love? Hal was looking at her, studying her face, making sure she was okay. "Look," he said, "I'm really sorry about earlier. I admit that I am much too direct. It's a hazard that comes with my job. If I'm not direct with people, someone could die. It sounds dramatic but it's true, you know? Could we just agree that we got our signals crossed earlier?"

Donna faced the windshield. "Sure," she said.

They were sitting in a parking lot across the street from an abandoned Dairy Queen. There were two wooden benchless picnic tables on a cement patio in front. Donna stared at the wrecked, leaning Dairy Queen sign.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I have no idea why I blurted out something so personal. It's just that my mother died. Oh! I did it again. Sorry!"

Hal watched her a moment. "Are you sure you're in the mood to see a comedy?"

Donna wiped her nose across her coat sleeve. She reached behind her head and tightened her ponytail. She blotted her eyes with the palms of her hands and then blinked. "I can't wait," she said.

"I—we can. . . would you like to go read some free magazines at Walmart?"

Donna smiled. "No. I'm okay," she said. She could smell something nice coming from his direction. She didn't know what it was: aftershave, shampoo, possibly a hearty skin lotion for men. It was so thoughtful of him to provide a pleasant fragrance just for her benefit.

She let out a big sigh. "Look, I'm not blaming my mother. Maybe a little bit. It is kind of her fault," Donna said. "It's totally her

fault. . . but I mean. . . ."

He began drumming his fingers on the steering wheel, bringing his hand down and crossing his arms in a quick huff. "Shall we go inside?" he said.

Donna stared at him. "Do I seem like I'm in any condition to see a movie?"

"You just said . . . ."

"My mother died. My grief is complicated. Now you want me to sit through a Judd Apatow film and act like nothing happened? Seriously?" Donna blew on her hands and tucked each one under the opposite arm. "Could you turn the car on? I'm cold."

A streetlight a couple of yards away illuminated Hal's profile. His ears were bright red, his thick lips were compressed into an oversized, padded button. "You'd rather sit in a cold car and cry than walk thirty feet and see a comedy? I pre-paid for the tickets. Not that that matters. . . people who feel sorry for themselves. . . I don't like to examine things," he mumbled, starting the engine and speeding out of the lot. He stopped at a red light and turned to her. "It gets you nowhere. Believe me. This is my own fault anyway. This is what I get for asking out someone who needs a sedative."

Donna leaned her head against the frosty window. The same scenery—yellow-brick community center, the enormous high school with all the green hedges surrounding it—so eagerly pointed out to her on the way now passed before her in a blur, and, much to her surprise, she found herself almost wishing for a memory or two from Hal. Or maybe she just wanted a do-over. She sometimes offered her students a do-over if they failed tests. She definitely wanted one. How could she have behaved so immaturely?

He pulled in front of her building and stopped the car. He reached across her and the sleeve of his vinyl overcoat brushed against the underside of her chin as he opened the door.

"I'd like to do this again sometime," Donna heard herself say.

Hal revved the engine in response.

"You don't have to be rude," she said.

He suddenly faced her. "I don't care if your mother. . . it's not that I don't care, I don't mean to come off as unsympathetic. I've lost both my. . . I just don't think it's fair of you to—" He suddenly removed his gloves and eyeglasses, and pressed his fingers over his eyelids, rubbing them gently. He had that look. The look that she often had after a horrible day of teaching. Or being with her mother in the hospital.

"Hey," she said, her voice different this time, and she could tell that he could tell something had shifted inside her. "I'd like to explain why I'm acting like this, but the reason is so. . . I don't even know the word for it. . . embarrassing?"

"Just say it. How bad can it be?"

Fuck it, she thought, so Donna told him about the promise she'd made to her mother, that she'd marry within a year of her mother's passing. In the car, hearing herself say the words out loud at that moment, Donna thought it sounded like something out of a Victorian novel. She hadn't told anyone. No one knew about the tears that poured out of her mom's eyes when Donna assured her that she was telling the truth about keeping the promise to stop being so nitpicky about men and to get rid of her impossible standards. Her mother had said, "We love *in spite of*."

Donna told Hal that in the past three months she had been coping with guilt and anxiety. There was no relief except when she was sleeping. The pills helped, but only a little. "I honestly didn't think that stupid promise would bother me. And it didn't for about a week. A few days later, after work, when I was at the Apple store, getting my phone fixed, my guilt started. Then it changed to anxiety, just like that. It's been getting worse."

Hal turned and faced forward and pulled the zipper on his coat down a few inches. Stretched his neck. His gaze fell to the top of the steering wheel as if studying it, but it was obvious to her that he was trying to digest her words. She liked that. That he really took

it in and didn't have a ready-made response. "You're looking at this the wrong way. You said something to make your mother happy before she died. Any of us would."

She hadn't realized it but she'd been holding her breath. Hoping he'd say something like that. "Think so?"

"There was nothing else you could do. Yes. Be glad you agreed. Keep it in perspective. It was just a deathbed promise. Made under duress. That's all it is. Nobody keeps those things."

"Really?" she said.

He shrugged and shook his head. Nonchalantly. Like he was saying no to fresh ground pepper on his salad. "Listen to me: you did exactly what anyone would do in the same circumstance."

He laughed and then she laughed a little, too. The relief she felt was indescribable.

"Do you like omelets?" she said.

"What?"

"I was thinking, if you want, I could make us omelets and we could watch something on Netflix. What do you think?"

He stared at the key in the ignition. Tightened his seatbelt. Stared out the windshield. He was obviously considering her invitation. The more time that went by, though, the more annoyed she got. What was the big deal? She hadn't asked him to invest in a timeshare! It was a goddamn movie. She was about to tell him to go fuck himself when he answered.

"Yeah," he said, gently, "I'd like that."

It was raining as they walked the block to Donna's apartment building. The air smelled of worms, flushed out from their homes under the sidewalk and they heard nothing but the water hitting the pavement. They walked together, hands in pockets, heads down, feet unintentionally in sync. Hal held the door to the foyer open for her, lightly guiding her elbow. Two chatty couples dressed for a formal evening tramped by. She informed him that she lived on the sixth floor, but the elevator was broken. She thought she saw

a look of concern brush across his face but then he simply said, "After you."

When they reached the top, Donna pretended not to notice his huffing and puffing as she turned the key in the lock. Opening the door, she turned on the light and hurried to the bathroom to get some towels. He gently took one. It was white and extra fluffy. One of a set of six. Her final birthday present from her mother.

"Thank you," he said. "I appreciate it." He dried himself off, folded the towel, and handed it back to her.

She was starting to feel anxious. She had a tendency to nitpick at random things when overcome with nerves. In the past her mom had called her a ball-buster. She hadn't used that word but she'd implied it. "Please make yourself. . . ."

As she was speaking he removed his coat and she stepped back, never having seen the bottom half of his body before—he'd always been partially hidden behind the pharmaceutical counter, not to mention the lab coat he always wore. He was overweight. Overweight! In this day and age! There was practically a gym on every corner of the city.

Ball-buster.

"Do you have the time?" she asked. She explained that she had to get up early the next morning.

He pulled his sweater sleeves up and she saw that his forearms were full of hair. Wiry dark strands nearly covered his wristwatch. He looked down, parted some hair and glanced at the watch. "Seven-twenty," he said.

"Oh, well, we're in good shape then," she told him. She went and got him a beer and reluctantly handed it to him, wanting desperately to point out how many calories it contained. They clinked glasses and each had a couple of sips. Hal had a seat on the sofa. She sat in the arm chair across from him.

He fidgeted with the label on his beer. Said her apartment was nice.

She told him that the elevated train was too loud, and it had taken her a long time to get used to it.

"So, do you like being a teacher?" he said, turning his phone off. He set it on the coffee table and glanced up.

"Yes," she said. She kept her phone on.

"What do you like about it?"

The fact that he saw that she was caught off guard by his question annoyed her. "No one's ever asked that before," she said. "I guess I like the ability to shape a person's future."

"By shape you mean tell them what to do and they have to do it. The power dynamics are clear cut."

She had no idea how to respond. There was a tiny rustling of something uncomfortable inside her.

"I just meant that guiding a life is a lot of responsibility," he said gently. "I'm not sure I could handle it. Did you ever want to be anything else?"

She blinked. "I wanted to be a clothing designer."

"So why didn't you?"

"Do you want another beer?" she said.

"I'm still working on this one."

"That's good," Donna blurted.

"Why is that good?" he said, just as he caught her staring at his stomach.

She glanced back up at his face. In his eyes she could see that he'd connected the dots, suddenly understood that she thought he shouldn't have another because of the calories. "It's not good," she stammered, her cheeks heating up. "Or bad. I don't know why I said that. What was your question again?"

"Don't bother. I think I have the answer."

"To why I didn't become a dress designer?"

"Yes." He took a big long sip of beer. He set the bottle down on the coffee table. He glanced up at her.

"So what's the answer?" she said. She picked up her phone and

pretended to look for something.

"Being a designer requires taking risks. Inviting others to evaluate your work. You don't strike me as someone who would survive being criticized."

She put her phone down.

He studied her face. Then he started to backtrack, obviously unwilling to apologize again.

"All I'm saying is that if a person goes out of their comfort zone they will—at some point—be vulnerable to criticism," he said. "You have to risk looking foolish. You can't expect to grow as a person without letting yourself be vulnerable."

She felt soft flutters of anger in her chest. "I told you about the promise," she said.

"You did. And I admire you for that. Please don't get upset. I thought we were having a mature discussion. Forget I said anything. Weren't we going to watch a movie?"

They watched a movie, which Hal picked out. She mistakenly thought that viewing a film would distract her from her nerves. Pull her out of her head which would have been exactly what she needed. But the movie Hal picked out had the opposite effect. The lead character—a woman of 28—seemed to mirror her own inadequacies. How she didn't have very many friends. How she was more comfortable teaching the same history lesson for the millionth time than socializing with people her own age. How, when she listened to people talk about being in love, she felt like she was from a different planet. Or that they were lying about how amazing love was. If not lying, then they were certainly exaggerating. Yes. It was a truly depressing film. At the end the woman went on an Internet date and got murdered. While the EMT guys carried the woman's dead body out on a gurney, Donna stood up and cleared away the four beer bottles they'd consumed, choking back tears. The film had left her shaken. Her head was spinning.

She brought the bottles into the kitchen and came back and told

Hal she had to get up early. He stood up. Thanked her for a lovely—albeit *interesting*—evening, and she nodded vaguely, afraid that if she said anything at all a waterfall of tears would stream from her. He was not going to see her cry. That was for sure. She just had to hold on a few more minutes.

On the way out, Hal stopped in front of a small wooden table by the front door. He picked up a framed photo of her and her mother. "Wow," he said, studying it. "You look just like her."

"Really?" she said. The picture had been taken when she was a college senior. Around the holidays. Her aunt Martha had insisted that she and her mother get in front of the tree and link arms and smile. Her mother was tall with a short blonde bob while Donna herself was on the curvy side, with shoulder-length dark brown hair. "I never thought I looked anything like her."

He looked up. "How is your dad doing with all this?"

She took the photo and put it back on the table. Donna told him that he'd left when she was twelve. "I see him once or twice a year. Maybe."

Hal found her gaze. Held it. "I'm sorry you had such a jerk for a father. Some people are just messed up. And they never get better."

Donna turned and got his coat from the closet. Her chest tightened and she clenched her jaw. The end of that movie flashed in her mind. "It wasn't his fault," she said. "At least, I never thought so."

"Thanks again," he said slowly.

"My dad couldn't do anything right."

Hal paused before zipping the zipper. He clearly didn't know what to say.

"My mom always needed to have everything her way."

Hal just stood there, speechless.

"She'd just hammer away at him until he did what she wanted. "

"Isn't that kind of. . . ." His voice now had a gentle quality to it that she'd not heard before. "Isn't that really what the deathbed

promise is about?"

"What?"

"Control?" he said.

He was searching her face, nodding, as though trying hard to extract some kind of mind-altering insight from her. Though she hated to admit it, his question may have brought something important to the surface. She felt a kind of relief that she hadn't felt in months. Similar to the relief she'd felt earlier. In Hal's car. Just before she invited him up to watch a movie.

When he leaned toward her, she felt the bulk of his flabby middle section, yes—but she could also smell the lovely rain in his hair and traces of that nice cologne. "I should go," he said, but then he kissed her.

"Don't," she said a few seconds later.

"Don't what?" he said. "Go? Or kiss you?"

The elevated train roared by.

"I don't know."

He kissed her again and it felt good. Better than good. Slow. Confident. Sexy. He stood back and said that he was going to leave. To her great shock she felt disappointed. Outside her apartment he paused at the landing of the steps and said, "Have you ever thought that maybe you're not dating because of your mother?"

She looked at him. His features were earnest. As though he was handing her a coupon that would entitle her to a huge savings on her next purchase.

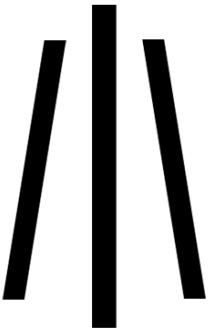
"That maybe you're putting yourself out there—date-wise—for *you*?" He started down the stairs.

There was that rustling again, some kind of anger itching to get out from inside her chest. She felt an overwhelming impulse to criticize his weight. His bulky coral sweater of the type grown men hadn't worn in years. His arm hair.

She had an urge to yell down the stairwell, but then, in the very next second, something flashed in her mind: that the impulse to

criticize was one that her mother would have had. That saying—the apple doesn't fall far from the tree—invaded her mind and she found herself connecting the dots. The ones between her mother's behavior and her own. She steadied herself on the wooden railing, put her head down and took a couple of deep breaths.

She went back into her orderly apartment, closed the door, and went into the kitchen. She filled her coffee maker with water. Three cups exactly. As she measured four level scoops of dark roast coffee into the filter, she wondered whether or not Hal was going to call for a second date. But getting another date might not be the important part. Maybe her *wanting* a second date—for the first time in her life—maybe that was the important part.



Art, Fiction, Nonfiction,
and Poetry

Flow
Suzanne Zeller
Digital photograph

The Burning

Beth Williams

Fire breaks out on the plane
and the priest explains how
to contain it, to take the mask
and place it over my own mouth first.
He points out the exits, lit,
in case I need air, or need to spit
out the blood of Christ.
I push the button and complain
I never received the cracker.

Passion spent, we land
for refueling, and under orders
I straighten the back
of my chair, knees sore
from praying we don't crash.
Smoke has cleared,
yet the sacrifice of bones
remains. And coffins
fall from overhead bins.

I trip on untied laces,
grace escaping, as I exit
this beast that brought me here,
unable to copy candles
in their careful procession
down the aisle, too weak
to open the hymnal
or shape my tongue around
words of praise.

What's left of fire blinks,
like eyelids closing
against ash, re-wetting burnt
ends. Water gathers in the back
of the throat, without swallowing,
without drowning the last
communicant in line
as we shuffle one behind
the other through the gate.

Travelers pile like kindling
in a pit, waiting for luggage
to pass by, painted horses
on a carousel. One believer
reaches out her hand and grabs
the reins, takes her baggage home.
I continue to smolder
from the dry flight, unaware
of what a match might do.

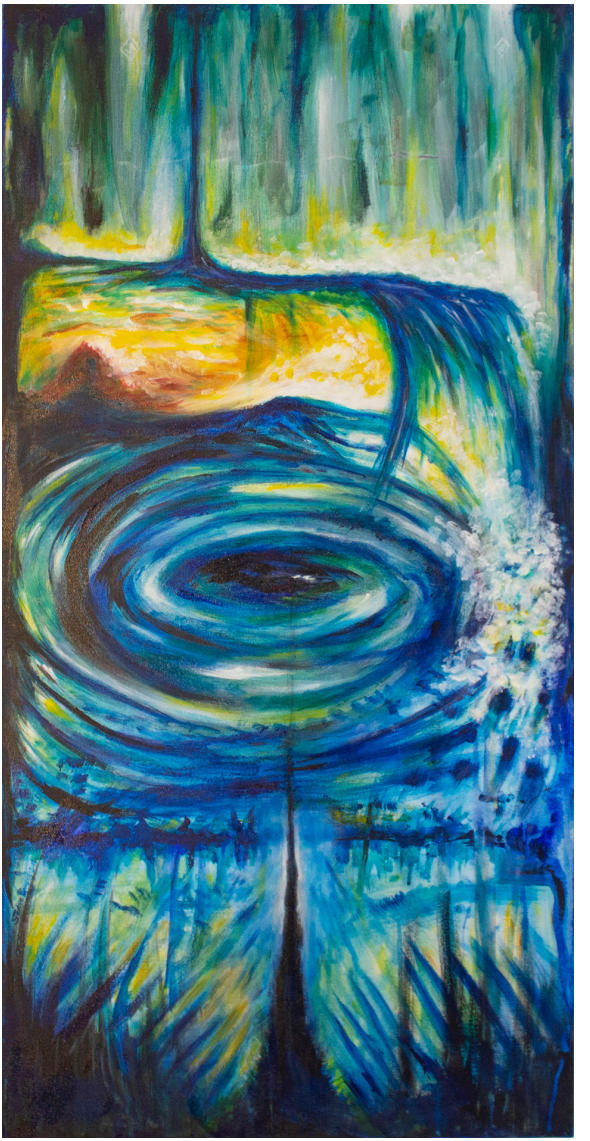
Blackjack Agitato

Kendra Leonard

Blackjacks dead line the sides of the road
and keep on going back to the yellow
color of the grass where nothing's alive
in the Texas hills in the north of the state
is abandoned come over strange and chill.

Like witchy apple trees from Oz they reach
for your car and your windows and what looks like once
a fruit-brimming soft sweet orchard is nothing alive
just a field and a field at that of lines and lines of
blackjack oaks dead short and warped.

The birds aren't here no fruit to pick just eyes and tongues
for carrion dark wings hunched over deer on the lines
of the road they're the only things alive all the blackjacks
barren oaks slapped down misshapen all dead on the sides
of the road a plantation for breeding wild Texas nightmares.



Rise of the Abyss
Felipe Campos
Acrylic on canvas

How to Cry in Public

Kelsie Shaw

You have to do it right. There's a whole process to follow.

Should you find yourself in the dreadful situation of crying in public—and if you do, you've already failed—the first step is to stop. Just cut it out. But it looks like you can't do that, and I'm kind enough to acknowledge that sometimes tears are unavoidable, so I'll let you in on the secret of how to deal with this predicament.

Your first task is to find a secluded area, preferably with four walls and a door that locks, and sequester yourself inside. Bathrooms are perfect for this, and they're typically within reach. You know the clichéd made-for-TV teen movie scene when the broken-hearted prom queen sobs in a bathroom stall? That will be you. If you cannot find such a stall nearby—emphasis on "nearby," as now is not the time for travel—you'll have to get creative. Find an excuse to turn off the lights, if you're in a position to do so. Don your sunglasses and call it a fashion statement. Blame allergies.

Once you're adequately hidden, you can take one of two paths: calm yourself down, or embrace the situation. I recommend the former if you have other things to do that day, especially if those things involve people. Wipe your nose, fix your makeup, look presentable. Pretend what happened didn't happen. Learn the art of repression.

The second option is, in some ways, the more desirable, but, in all ways, the messier. Wail, sniffle, choke a little on your own breathing; let the snot drip down your nose and sweat down your forehead. Like a bleeding wound, the flow will ebb eventually. Luckily for us, one can shed only so many tears.

Remember, all of this assumes you have found some place to settle down. The worst case is that you're out in the open when all of this is happening, and there are people around to see it—this fact will make you cry harder. It's ironic: much like when knowing

it is inappropriate to laugh makes everything funnier, being surrounded by dry eyes makes the whole situation sadder. That is the hardest part: feeling so alone.

I have a lot of experience crying in public. I've done it enough, in so many places and for so many reasons, that I've uncovered this routine. I have cried in classrooms, in cafes, in subway cars, and concert halls; I've locked myself in bathroom stalls, hidden between library stacks, rested my throbbing head on my parked car's steering wheel (left visible but not audible).

One of my earliest life lessons was how to cry, or rather, how not to. When I was in kindergarten, my mother told me that to stop myself from crying I could point my eyes toward the ceiling and blink. I came home from school one day in tears—why, I'm no longer sure—so my mother plopped me down before her on my bed and shrouded me in my favorite pink quilt. Brushing her blonde hair from her brow, she demonstrated her technique, which I practiced with my own wet brown eyes. Somehow, between the upward gaze and fluttering lids, this would dry up the tears, or keep them from falling long enough to dissipate (I did not, and do not, understand the theory behind the practice). I cried often then, because a five-year-old has little control over her emotions, but also because my first inklings of anxiety struck me early, typically during school hours—*are those kids laughing at me? What did I do? Do I look okay? They all must hate me, I'm sure they hate me, I don't know why, but I know they do*. So, upon the first quiver of my lip (my trademark signal of oncoming tears), I'd raise my eyes heavenward and blink, picturing in my mind a clear cerulean sky, as if an image of peace could still the shaking in my limbs. Years later I still point and blink, point and blink, prepared to tell anyone who questions me that there's just something in my eye.

This trick works if your reason for crying is small enough. (It has an almost perfect success rate for tears of joy, those better-adjusted

siblings to tears of sorrow.) I employ it often during concerts—vocal arias and orchestral works always seem to pluck my more sensitive heartstrings, especially when played adagio and in a flat major key (think the second movement of Beethoven's fifth piano concerto or "Un bel di vedremo" from *Madame Butterfly*—my tears swell as fast as the opening motives). But for the real traumas, those that leave the heart battered and untrusting, that even now I dread to remember long enough to write, there is no remedy, no little trick; there is nothing I can do but hide. And I've gotten good at it.

Except when I've been unable to. Experienced though I may be, I've failed to hide nearly as many times as I've succeeded, and those failures are some of the most painful memories I have:

September 19, 2014, five in the evening: I was sitting in The Spot Cafe, small chai latte cooling on the wobbly table before me, the warm evening glow from the window casting an insulting loveliness over the scene. Across from me was Rhiannon, my closest friend and the only person I have ever loved, who informed me that she did not want to talk to me anymore. I was too needy. I drained her. I wouldn't understand her choices; I couldn't. As I placed my hand over my lips that were gathering tears, I was aware of the man sitting a few tables behind me typing on his laptop. I imagined him peeking over the screen to look at the girl shaking and gasping for air a couple of feet away. There was no way he didn't hear me. I feared what he thought.

One Wednesday in February, 2015: It had been about five months since I last saw Rhiannon, at the cafe where I cried. Driving to that evening's chorus rehearsal, I wondered if Rhiannon would be there, as we had sung in the chorus together twice before; after September's breakdown, I had left the group, but now felt ready to join again. My fears were realized—she was. Spotting her wavy chestnut hair and signature red scarf from across the concert hall, I fell into a tempestuous panic attack, eyes like geysers, tears bubbling over my preventive waterproof mascara and settling on

my chin. *What if she sees me, what will I say, do I apologize for being here, for being my needy and draining self?* Plunging face-first into a nearby garbage bin and vomiting, I knew Rhiannon had not even noticed my presence, but I sensed the soprano section behind me glancing at the girl half-immersed in trash and her own tears. I resurfaced and stumbled back to my car, somehow arriving home with no memory of the drive. I didn't go back for two years.

January 30, 2016, almost midnight: Two weeks into my semester abroad in Vienna, Austria, my professors arranged for the students to attend the annual Technische Universität Ball, a main event of the city's iconic waltzing season. I arrived at the Hofburg Palace in floor-length navy chiffon, dizzy with the knowledge that I was living out a childhood fantasy, save that my horse-drawn carriage was the *U-Bahn* and there was no dashing prince on my arm. I spotted a dozen pairs of my classmates whirling around the ballroom floor, and thought, *How have they made friends already? They know I'm here. Will someone ask me to dance?* An hour of lingering in the doorway. No one did. I retrieved my coat from the coat check when the attendant asked, "*Gehen Sie? Es ist früh.*" Yes, I was leaving; I knew it was early. I walked back to my apartment, one hand holding my heels and the other hiding the bubbles dripping from my nose and splashing onto my palm. I'm sure I passed many people; I don't remember any of them. I remember only the cool cobblestones cutting my bare feet and the pulsing around my eyes; I wondered how I had become a cliché. Having trouble breathing, I was consoled only by the thought that someday I would write about this.

I wish I could accept these most vulnerable moments as a kind of poetic honesty, an uninhibited openness about the reality, the complexity, of human emotion, human experience. But no. Each time, I was witnessed—mortified. I was caught being weak, and in such spaces of anonymity, no one could have known that sometimes I was strong. So I swore I would be better next time, each time; it would never happen again.

Shakespeare said that all the world's a stage, and 400 years later Erving Goffman proved him right. According to *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, all social interaction is a performance: The moment we step outside our homes the world becomes a set, the public an audience, and we an actor with a role to play. Whether we know it or not, we have been given a script. We strive to play our parts perfectly, memorize our lines, rehearse until we become method actors who make our characters indistinguishable from our selves. Goffman argues that these roles are not fake versions of ourselves, but rather the selves we long to become. They fit in, and we want to belong.

When your role is "cafe patron," you are not supposed to sob and beg your friend to keep loving you. The script says "chat quietly, sip coffee at regular intervals." When you play "chorus member," you take your seat and warm up your vocal cords, maybe make small talk with your section mates. You do not vomit into a trashcan and exit stage left, a stumbling drunk. And when your audience is Viennese, a people characterized by their refusal to smile in public (so much so that there are guerrilla ads around the city reading "*lächeln bitte*"—please smile), weeping on the metro means you have gone so far off script it's a wonder you're still allowed on stage.

Perhaps I have given the impression that it is never okay to cry in public, but in our stage-world, some plays sanction the act. Take November of 2012, a few weeks before my grandmother died: At the hospice in Albany where my grandmother was staying, my entire extended family—the locals upstate, the aunts and uncles from Long Island, even the cousins from Georgia—surprised her with an early Thanksgiving feast. Though her dementia had intensified over the previous month, on this night she was lucid; gathered around three long, rickety fold-out tables, all eighteen of us shared stories for hours and laughed until our cheeks stung. But after my grandmother fell asleep, we sobbed. I knew that this was likely the

last time any of us would ever see our mother and grandmother as the wise and vibrant woman she was. I knew we would lose her oft-administered advice (Grandma Janet's Life Tip #1: Never drive with a dirty windshield) and her impish sense of humor (she had a habit of drawing silly faces on any piece of paper she came across). Though there were other patients with their own families scattered around the wing, we gathered in the common area and wept. But how could we not? Our role was "grieving family." The anticipation of death hovered in the air, a swirling smog choking all it touched. Hiding our grief would also hide our love.

In all of these scenarios I have tried to be the actor donning her costume and reciting her lines. But we are never only actors, says Goffman; we are everyone's audience, too. I must admit I have also been the unkind critic judging a stranger's suffering. On November 10, 2016, I was at an indie rock concert; the presidential election results of two nights prior cast a murky dread over what I had hoped would be a pleasant diversion from schoolwork and politics. About ninety minutes into the show, a girl sitting a few seats to my right started sobbing. My first thought: *oh my god please stop*. This girl was probably my age, early twenties, and in seeing her cry, I felt my own eyes glaze, my lips tremble. So why did I want her to be quiet? I didn't. What I wanted was to get out of my seat and hug her, to let her cry on my shoulder, to tell her that she would be okay, to say it like I knew it was true. But I couldn't. We were both playing "concert-goer," and nowhere in the script does it say "burst into tears" or "walk down the aisle and hug a stranger." For once, I was the good actress, and I intended to keep it that way. But not without guilt. I succeeded as a performer, but I failed as a person—one who was kind, and compassionate, and loving, someone who said she cared. I couldn't handle that sense of failure. So I wanted that girl to stop.

Annie Dillard met a weasel and the earth shattered. Their locked

gaze "felled the forest, moved the fields, and drained the pond; the world dismantled and tumbled into that black hole of eyes." If you and I looked at each other like that, says Dillard, "our skulls would split and drop to our shoulders. But we don't. We keep our skulls." "Living like Weasels" is not, I think, really about weasels but about living, or not living. We are terrified of finding out what we would see if we looked at each other, really looked with minds willing to perceive and hearts committed to witnessing. Or, perhaps more accurately, we are scared of being seen, of being known. And in what position is one more vulnerable to being seen than while crying? To see is scandalous; to be seen is unsafe. We don't, to use Dillard's words, go for the throat.

What would the world look like if we bore our emotions unashamed? If we pulled off our masks, broke the stage, set fire to the script? What would happen if we took our viscera in our palms, blood oozing between our fingers and entrails dragging behind us, and held them aloft for all to see? Would we lose our skulls? Perhaps. But I could live skull-free if it meant we would look at each other. I could live with my skin rubbed raw and flapping in the wind if I saw that we all wore our bruises and burns and broken limbs proudly. We could compare wounds, recommend remedies, stroke and hold each other until we hurt less. We would be alone no longer.

If you find yourself crying in public, breathe. Four second inhale, hold for two, four second exhale, pause. Repeat. Sit down—no matter where you are—and keep breathing. Close your eyes, keep breathing. Focus on relaxing each of your muscles, working from your forehead down; feel each breath fill your lungs. If people stare at you, let them. Keep crying if you need to; feel your tears flowing down your cheeks and dropping onto your lap. Keep breathing. Your lungs will stabilize; your heart will steady.

Maybe, if you're lucky, someone will come up behind you and

place their hand on your shoulder.

Let them.

Cocoon
Emily Gonzalez
Hand-built ceramic vessel, papier-mâché, and gold foil

underneath the showerhead

A. Shaikh

a nose ring will not make you a better person my father likes to remind me that I am still his child

by pressing prayer into my name when he says it and talking about *jin*.

It is only my third day in Texas and the house smells like
kajoor, holy water,
and eggshells.
I am hiding a rage
wider than a dining table. Brushing with an electric toothbrush. But sometimes,
I feel so far away the feeling rolls inside me like
a monsoon.
But really, there is no rain here. Just a shower
with my bird body
flailing hot.

Jin meaning demons in my nose because
the more holes you put in your body the more places they will live

This is for my father the prophet who
spends his life incandescent
searching for things he can't seem to find
&
looks right over me wearing his old t-shirts.

Which is to say he doesn't know
how the cavity
appeared in between my legs and
how empty a body gets after
something like that.

How I am lurching

against the white tile, writing this.

Home

Soli Shin

The years without you, I did not burn.
No, instead—all around me dead salt,
brine fed corpses that still
sung choruses on Falls Lake.

Sung together, the bodies live on,
with thin oxygenated laughs
with flat eyes, humming—
what is ahead is what we will eat.

Without you, there is no bitter root
not one thing that will catch fire
no flesh to prove in sunlight.
I remember nothing before us.

So now, I ask you for your flame;
Let my vessel be useful for once.
The frog-bodies chant one betrayal after another
their carnival colors and aroma of truffles

a bastion of mockery,
echoing pleasure.
Even at my best, I return
to my vomit like an old dog.

Desert
Sheida Pebdani
Gouache on canvas

Antoine's Universe

Charles O'Donnell

Antoine had auspicious beginnings. He did not spring fully-formed from the head of his father, nor did he strangle serpents in his cradle, but there were other indicators.

Baby Antoine created a universe.

For a first effort, it was laudable. The mature, experienced gods might have called it "quaint" had it come from a journeyman god, or even an apprentice. But Antoine was only a century old, not long from his mother's womb. A *baby*-made universe was buzzworthy.

Antoine was the son of Cleome and Gaspar, two lesser gods about whom no one thought much. They never put on airs, nor were they jealous gods—jealousy being a trait they had always found petty, though surprisingly common among gods. And they had no presumptions as to where they stood in the hierarchy. Cleome and Gaspar simply kept house and went about their business keeping the water tables at their proper levels, according to the needs and the prayers of the locals.

They depended upon the rain gods (there were more than a hundred) for water. In fact, that dependence was the main reason they were so unassuming: When you're dealing with gods, social skills are make-or-break. After a few thousand irrigation-related debacles, Cleome and Gaspar had honed their inter-deity skills—they knew how to get along. This accomplishment was not widely appreciated among the gods of the earth, sea, and sky, but for a god, being diplomatic is a stretch. Having gotten the hang of it, Cleome and Gaspar had settled into a comfortable routine.

Then along came Antoine.

Gaspar had agreed to progeny after an eon and an age—without enthusiasm, it must be said, but not unwillingly—if only to keep peace in the domicile and to end the frequent moping that Cleome was prone to without having a little one to cherish and to care for.

Yet Gaspar was unprepared for the impact that Antoine had had on the household, and on him personally. That gods should be moved by such things as love and parental bonds was not unheard of, but most gods admitted that you really didn't *know* until it happened to *you*. So it was with Gaspar. When Antoine made his universe, Gaspar could not have been more proud.

"Where shall we put it?" Cleome asked.

Gaspar stood by the cradle, the baby cooing night music and grinning rays of the rising sun. Gaspar clutched the nascent cosmos, still expanding, until it exceeded Gaspar's reach and he dropped it, sending it bouncing across the floor, bumping into the dresser, coming to rest in a corner, its protogalactic disks condensing, stars igniting, novae exploding, their glowing remnant nebulae recapitulating the cycle of birth, life, death, and rebirth.

"I'll find a place. Maybe in that display case I've been meaning to build," Gaspar promised, knowing that his box of dry, inhospitable worlds would have to stay in the attic for now.

Good as his word, Gaspar set the universe in its own spot in the family room. The thing was no longer swelling, having reached stasis. They admired it often, showing it to houseguests. Gaspar loved calling attention to the gravitational lensing, noting that this was a detail missed even by experienced gods; yet, as Gaspar stated proudly, Antoine "just knew." It was the center of attention for a millennium.

The next millennium, not so much. The glowing orb no longer the conversation piece it once was, Gaspar stored it in the attic, replacing it in the family room with his collection of desert planets. He decided to make the switch not only because Antoine's universe had lost its novelty, but mostly because it was the last thing Antoine had done of any consequence. Gaspar couldn't help but wonder why Antoine hadn't lived up to expectations, given his early promise. Oh, he *had* the divine nature—immortality, and power to manipulate

time and space—but a baby who made a *universe* shouldn't have stopped at that. Antoine hadn't even kicked up a decent storm in centuries.

When he'd matured to adolescence, Antoine had avoided the usual moodiness, irritability, and irrational outbursts: the growing pains in most gods' lives responsible for the natural disasters mortals found so difficult to explain. Instead, Antoine was a sweet kid—always quiet, always accommodating, never vengeful or cruel. Gaspar and Cleome were grateful for having been spared that troublesome phase, only occasionally irritated when friends asked, "How's your boy—Antoine, right? Didn't he make a *universe*? What's he done lately?" Occupied with their own responsibilities, Cleome and Gaspar appreciated the times when Antoine disappeared—who knew where?—reappearing decades later, still gentle, still benevolent, still smiling sweetly.

"Have you seen my golf clubs?" Gaspar asked Cleome one day.

"You haven't played golf in forever," Cleome replied. "I didn't think you liked the game anymore."

"I need rain in Africa," Gaspar explained, "and the god likes golf. Have you seen my clubs?"

"Have you looked in the attic?"

Gaspar climbed the attic ladder, surprised to find the door already open. He poked his head through the hatch.

The space was suffused in soft, silver light, as if from a moon behind thin clouds. Gaspar searched for the source, squinting to see Antoine's glowing universe by the wall, and, sitting cross-legged beside it, Antoine.

Gaspar pulled himself up, then went to Antoine and sat next to him, not saying a word. Antoine looked at Gaspar and smiled.

"Hi, Dad."

"Hello, Son."

Antoine turned back to the universe, unmoving except for slight

turns of his head, as if he were listening for some infinitesimal sound.

Gaspar looked and listened, too. A few years passed before Gaspar heard it, then saw it, then felt it: the creatures of the universe, a billion souls on each of a trillion planets, their spiritual emanations radiating in perfect synchrony. Gaspar had never felt such a thing: a whole universe without discord—no supplications to the gods for victory, no prayers for revenge, no pleas for mercy, no cries of despair. Gaspar heard no petitions of *any* kind—silence instead of the non-stop babble that most gods learn to ignore, pushing the irritation into the background, like a hissing radiator.

"Antoine…"

Antoine stayed still, bathed in silver light, eyes closed, face raised to the cosmos. "Hmm?" he murmured.

"Nothing," Gaspar answered. He studied the people of Antoine's universe. They worked, but they did not toil; they laughed, but they did not deride; they cried, but they did not mourn.

A century passed, waves of coherent life energy washing over Gaspar and Antoine, filling them with sublime calm, before Cleome popped through the hatch.

"Did you find your clubs?"

Neither Gaspar nor Antoine responded. Cleome sat down beside them. Another century passed.

"What *is* this?" Cleome asked.

"Antoine's universe," Gaspar whispered. "Isn't it wonderful?"

Cleome stared at her men, then at the cosmos, then back at her men.

"I know it's Antoine's universe. What I'm asking is, what's going on?"

"I'm not sure what you're getting at," Gaspar said, eyes closed, resonating with waves of benevolence.

"Those people—they're not *doing* anything!"

Gaspar's eyes popped open. "They what?"

"Look at 'em. They're just the same as they were when I sat down."

"It's pure," Gaspar said. "It's holy."

"They're not building, they're not inventing, they're not creating… It's like… They're just *living*. What's the point of that?"

Gaspar paused for a year.

"They're happy?" he offered.

Cleome stood up. "They can't be *that* happy, if they don't know what misery is." She pointed. "There."

"What?"

"Your clubs. There they are." Cleome disappeared through the hatch.

Gaspar watched her go, eyes lingering on the open hatch for a decade. He turned back to the universe. He studied one family for a millennium, fifty generations of mating, birthing, growing, living, and dying. Generation fifty was indistinguishable from generation zero: the same tools, the same language, the same teachings—that all creatures are Antoine's children, free of fear, wanting for nothing. Their history was a flat line, trending neither up nor down.

Antoine sat motionless, breathing regularly, as if in meditation, a beatific smile on his face.

A glinting feature caught Gaspar's eye. He leaned closer, squinting. Light from a distant galaxy passed near an immense supercluster, stretched into exquisite arcs: a gravitational lens. It was beautiful.

Antoine had made a fine universe, stable and long-lived, the hallmark of a well-crafted cosmos. But it suffered one fatal flaw, the oversight of an infant god, a mistake a master creator would never have made: Antoine left out the conflict.

Gaspar lingered another century and a half, basking in the emanations of a blissful people. He left Antoine meditating by the orb, uncertain how many millennia would pass before he would see him again. He picked up his clubs and climbed down the ladder, out of the attic and two thousand years into the past.

He had work to do. People were hungry, and crops were dying in Africa.

And the god liked golf.

Mujer Con Rondador
Felipe Campos
Acrylic on canvas

Mother's Day

S.M. Pruis

for Breton

Windows whistling,
we lurch along a backwoods
road, its shoulder grown over
in blackberry brambles.
Along telephone wires,
brass-breasted robins
are strung, & laundry
flops in the backseat.
We friends enter Spring
& Lynden simultaneously.

—There,
the two drooling cats
witness from a gray porch
as we climb moss-limbed
cherry trees & geese
patrol fallow fields.
Your mom's lilacs lean heavy
against the hayloft ladder.

You twirl me on
the barn swing, woven
by your great uncles & gleaming
like buttercups in a mote-
spiraled shaft of evening light.

Snap.

Coffee percolates
on iron stovetop, & I
watch on as you tell father, tell sister,
what happened to the rope.
This bloom, there is no one else
to receive apology.

African Women of Brick City

Mickey Mahan

brick upon brick for two city blocks
built without boast or belief
a compound of squat apartments
shaped by dead end streets
and short narrow sidewalks
small patches of snowy grass
countless numbered doors

the dull weathered bricks anchor daily slumber
as this maze of
edges and angles
slowly awakens

the African women stand on the sidewalk
keeping watch over their brood
of loud bouncing children
statuesque
in long flowing robes of fabric
that wrap their bodies in wrinkled rainbows

visceral red and bursting yellow
morning glory blue and crepuscular purple
green squeezed from a tube of oil paint
orange stripped from an amorous horizon
striped checked and swirling
heads hidden in clouds of bright cloth
where dark faces
shine onto the street

Ring Ring
Sophie Barner
Oil paint

For Better or for Worse

Paul Negri

"I tell you, Lucille, I almost did it. God as my witness. I was this close." Doris demonstrated a minuscule distance between the crimson-polished nails of her thumb and index finger. "No, *this* close." She brought her nails even closer together until they just about touched.

"Don't be ridiculous," said Lucille. "Women like us don't kill people. Not even our husbands."

"What do you mean 'women like us'?"

"Middle-aged women. Middle-class women. Normal middle-aged middle-class women," said Lucille, making a great sweeping gesture that seemed to encompass everyone in the restaurant, man, woman, and child. She forked a caramelized scallop. "So how were you going to do it?"

"Do what?" said Doris, distracted by the waiter, Anthony ("My name is Anthony, I'll be serving you today") who was engaged in an animated chat with a very fat man a few tables away.

"Kill Midas."

"With the hair dryer."

"You were going to blow dry him to death?" asked Lucille.

Anthony the waiter was performing some kind of demonstration for the fat man. He leaned forward, puffed out his cheeks, and stuck out his black-slacked rump in Doris's general direction. At the table behind Doris was a young couple with a child on a leash. The man was trying to get Anthony the waiter's attention.

"He was sitting in the bathtub. In the *bathtub*, Lucille. How many men do you know sit in the bathtub and read the paper?" Doris was almost in tears.

"*The New York Times*?"

"Of course, *The New York Times*. What do you think?"

"Mickey reads *USA Today* now," said Lucille in a whisper. "He says it's more succinct than the *Times*. He's come to value succinctness, he says. But even though it's succinct he speed reads it."

"In the bathtub?" said Doris pointedly.

"I see your point," said Lucille.

A few tables away the fat man bellowed, "The Heimlich maneuver?" loud enough to turn heads, and laughed so hard he began to choke.

"I kid you not," said Anthony, slapping the fat man on the back as if he was burping an enormous baby.

A baby at the big round table in the middle of the room began to cry shrilly. Around the big round table sat a large African American family of various ages, from very young to very old, and various shades, from very light to very dark. At one end of the table was an ancient mottled man in a baroquely complex wheelchair. It was festooned with so many tubes, valves, tanks, and gadgets it looked like he could be wheeled out onto the moon in it. It had a small American flag taped to one handle. The old man sat slumped in his chair, his chin on his chest, before an untouched plate of clear soup. The rest of the family was eating earnestly while listening to a tall, striking, middle-aged man who wore a black suit with a clerical collar.

"Was that in '65 or '66, Arthur?" asked a petite caramel-colored woman, cradling the baby who had stopped crying but was whimpering wetly into her breasts.

"'66, right, Daddy?" said Arthur. He did not wait for a reply but went on stentoriously. "It made my hair stand on end," he said. "But not Daddy. Daddy just stood there and didn't say a word."

"I was standing there drying my hair," said Doris, "quite *au naturel* and thinking I still have what men want, even if they're too stupid

to know it."

"Amen."

"Midas had his nose buried in the newspaper. He was making that awful sound that only he can make. Something he does with his nose or throat or I don't know what. All I could see was his pink-tinged fingers curled around the edge of the paper. Pink and pruned from being in the tub so long. Like some nasty embryo."

Lucille shuddered.

"I looked at him," said Doris, dropping her fork in her sweet potato gnocchi, "and I thought, what if I just toss the hair dryer into the tub?"

"It has to be plugged in, Doris," said Lucille reproachfully.

"I *know* that. It *was* plugged in. It has an extra-extra long cord. I could plug it in the bathroom and dry my hair in bed, if I wanted to."

"I think that's illegal."

"This is a free country. You can dry your hair anywhere you please," said Doris. "For God's sake, what did our boys die in all those wars for?"

"I mean a hairdryer with a cord that long," said Lucille. "There must be some regulation or other. It's a danger to children."

The child on the leash, a long-haired androgynously-dressed two-year-old boy, hopped off his chair and took a menacing step toward the old man in the wheelchair. His mother gave the leash a subtle tug.

"Muriel," said the man at the table.

"Do you want to take him, John?" said the woman with quiet intensity.

John reached across the table and stabbed a crinkly french fry on his son's kiddie meal plate and put it on his Cajun blackened catfish. "Muriel," he said again.

Muriel reeled the boy in and pointed to the chair. "Muffin," she said. The boy looked at the chair and stood his ground in silent

protest. Muriel gave the leash another little tug. The boy mounted the chair sullenly and sat with his little legs crossed. “Muffin!” she whispered.

“Muriel,” said John. He rubbed the french fry across the blackened catfish until it too was blackened.

“Butch? Shall I call him Butch, John? Or Butchie? Would Butchie suffice?”

John sighed, shaking his head, and again waved at the waiter who turned his back and whispered in the fat man’s ear.

“I can’t do it,” said Doris. “I just can’t. I can’t eat my gnocchi.”

“Call the waiter. Antonio or whatever he is. Have him take it back.” Lucille scooted her scallop around her plate like a fat puckered little ice skater, picking up maximum sauce.

“There’s nothing wrong with the gnocchi. There’s something wrong with me. I have no appetite. I’m like a poor little murderer who hasn’t murdered anyone yet.”

“You’re just not used to having him home. Why did you allow him to retire in the first place?”

“I thought I wanted to spend more time with him. I thought I wanted to do things with him,” moaned Doris. “I thought I wanted to get to know him better after all these years. But what did I know?”

“You never really know,” commiserated Lucille. “What you don’t know can save a marriage.”

“The green on the pistachio bread pudding is not pistachio, if you catch my drift,” said Anthony to the fat man. “But the crème brûlée—” He lifted his eyes to heaven.

“I really shouldn’t,” said the fat man. “My blood sugar, you know.” He sighed from the depths of his soul.

“What is life without crème brûlée?” whispered Anthony.

“Well, as Oscar Wilde put it, I can resist anything except temptation.”

"And he knew his crème brûlée," sang Anthony in falsetto.

"Muriel," said John.

Muriel had tied the little boy's leash to the back of the chair. She looked despairingly at her avocado and watercress salad, from which she had picked out and devoured all the avocado and was now faced with a bramble of watercress and onion. It made her think of her wedding night three years ago that very day and she put down her fork, which was glistening with rice vinegar. Her appetite had deserted her.

"It's a period of adjustment," said Lucille, mopping up the last bits of sauce with the final crust of bread from the basket. She even used the bread to wipe the sauce from the fork. Her lips were glistening with sauce.

"How did you get through Mickey's first year of retirement?" asked Doris.

"Well, it's easier with a deaf man."

"Deaf or not, he's still there. All the time. Isn't he?"

"He has his deaf friends," said Lucille, again making a sweeping gesture as if recruiting everyone in the restaurant into her husband's circle of un-hearing compatriots. "He spends a lot of time with them. They bowl."

"Deaf bowling?"

"Apparently."

"And he doesn't expect you to go too?" said Doris, playing with her gnocchi.

"No. I'm not particularly welcome, as I don't sign."

"You never learned to sign?"

"I did," said Lucille. "I just never let Mickey know I did." She made a quick series of intricate hand and finger movements that seemed vaguely obscene to Doris.

"What did you just say?"

Lucille smiled slyly. "I can't repeat it in polite company. Just something I over-saw Mickey tell his friends. The deaf have their dirty little secrets, you know. Sometimes I watch Mickey gesticulating like mad with his friends, with a smile and a nod to me, all sweet and innocent, but I know exactly what he's saying."

"Ah," said Doris and popped gnocchi in her mouth. It was cold and gummy. She held it on the tip of her tongue for a moment not sure if she should spit it out or swallow it. She thought of Midas sitting in the murky bathtub, the bottom edge of the *Times* skirting the water. She gulped the gnocchi down whole.

"Muriel," said John.

Muriel got up from the table and walked over to Anthony the waiter. "Excuse me," she said. "Could we have a little service here?"

Anthony and the fat man looked at her as if she was a fly in their soup. The fat man spoke first. "I was just ordering a dessert," he said.

"My husband," said Muriel to Anthony, with a backwards glance at John, who had now taken his son's kiddie meal plate and placed it on top of his own empty one, "has been trying to get your attention for ten minutes."

"He couldn't have been trying very hard," said the fat man. "Anthony is very attentive, I can assure you."

"May I have your attention, please." It was Arthur, standing to his full impressive 6'3" height and intoning basso profundo at the center table. "I hope you will forgive me for the intrusion, ladies and gentlemen, but I wanted to share a very special moment with you all. Today is my father's birthday." He rolled the wheelchair out and turned it away from the table, positioning it more centrally for better viewing. The mottled old man in the wheelchair seemed asleep, his chin still on his chest. "Today Daddy is 105 years old." A few mild expletives and scattered polite applause straggled through the

room. Arthur put up his hands as if quelling a thunderous ovation and continued, "When Daddy was born, Theodore Roosevelt, the Rough Rider himself, was president of these United States." Now the room filled with applause and several men stood up, one old man leaning heavily on his cane. A procession of three waiters, one carrying a large chocolate cake topped with an inferno of candles, marched through the room, stood before Arthur and sang "Happy Birthday," many of the diners joining in off key, the old man with the cane standing as straight as he could manage and saluting. Everyone at the table, except the ancient man in the wheelchair, who was facing the wrong way, joined in blowing out the candles.

"105?" said Doris. "Don't most men die at around 75? I'm sure I read that somewhere."

"That's the *average* age. Many men live a lot longer. Some almost forever."

"Oh, merciful god," groaned Doris.

"Muriel," said John.

Muriel had retreated back to her chair when Arthur called for attention. She was about to resume her assault on the waiter when Anthony appeared suddenly with a blazing smile at the table.

"Now, what can I do you for?" he said mischievously.

"Another glass of milk," said Muriel through clenched teeth, "with a straw."

"Another milk for the little girl," said Anthony, "with a straw."

The little boy smiled. John looked up at the waiter and said nothing.

"A man can do worse things than sit in the bathtub and read the paper," said Lucille, glancing around for the waiter.

"It's not just the bathtub," said Doris. "Do you want my gnocchi?"

Lucille shook her head. "What else?"

"The broccoli rabe, too. I'd forgotten how bitter it is."

"I mean what else about Midas," said Lucille, wondering if Doris was being disingenuous.

"We eat breakfast together now. Have you ever seen Midas eat breakfast?"

"What are you inferring?" said Lucille. "I know you're upset, Doris. But really." The waiter passed and Lucille reached for him, brushing the seat of his pants as he went by. The fat man, who had been closely watching Anthony move about the room, laughed and said, "Touché."

"Can we see the dessert menu?" said Lucille.

Anthony gazed down at her as if he had stepped into something he would have trouble getting off his shoe. "We have just two today," he said coolly. "Pistachio bread pudding and crème brûlée." He gave the fat man a quick sidelong glance and a wink. "I recommend the pistachio bread pudding. It's a lovely shade of green." The fat man chortled into his cupped hands.

"I'll just have coffee then," said Lucille. "Very black."

"Is there something wrong with your gnocchi, madame?" Anthony said to Doris.

"It's not the gnocchi. It's me. You can take me away. I mean *it*. You can take it away."

"And will you be sampling our divine pistachio bread pudding? We have only two portions left, I believe. Like all good things, it won't last."

"Yes, yes, why not," said Doris. "Although I have no appetite." Anthony bowed and moved slowly toward the kitchen. "He used to eat breakfast in the office on weekdays and on Saturdays and Sundays he'd get up late and go to the International House of Pancakes. He still does that and it takes him hours, thank god. But the rest of the time he eats with me."

"Eating is so primordial," said Lucille, "the way men do it. Better not to look."

"When he butters his bagel, he gets the butter all over his hands. His *hands*. They glisten with it. And in his beard. His beard is like a greasy old rag full of God knows what."

"So, make him shave it off."

"He won't," said Doris. "He claims it's part of his face."

The little boy, who had slipped his leash when Muriel went to the ladies' room, was standing in front of the ancient black man in the wheelchair. The boy came closer, trying to get a better look at his face. Arthur looked at the boy and smiled a big friendly smile. His petite wife gave the baby she'd been holding to a woman seated next to her, got up, and stood behind the wheelchair. She was not smiling. The little boy's long dark curly hair fell in ringlets over the shoulders of his white tunic-like outfit.

"Well, aren't you a cute little putto," said Arthur.

The boy bent down suddenly and planted a big wet kiss on the old black man's withered hand. The old man lifted his head and opened his eyes. He looked at the boy with wonder. Muriel came up behind the boy and clipped the leash back on to his shoulder harness. "I'm so sorry," she said, tugging him back to their table. The old man in the wheelchair moved his lips silently. The woman bent down and put her ear close and listened.

"What, Daddy?" said Arthur.

"He says," said the woman, scowling, "he's been kissed by the Christ child."

"He's like a child," said Doris, staring down at the small green spotted square of pistachio bread pudding. "I'm just waiting for him to start wetting the bed. What are these green specks?"

"Pistachio, I presume," said Lucille.

Anthony the waiter was back at the fat man's table. They were watching Doris poke at the bread pudding. The fat man looked like he was about to burst.

"Is his family prone to that sort of thing?" said Lucille. "Bed wetting and the like? Is it something—urological?" She seemed authentically concerned.

Doris put a fork tip of the bread pudding in her mouth. "His father had Alzheimer's. His mother didn't notice it for years. The pistachio tastes funny."

"Muriel!" said John. He came around the table, dipped his napkin in the water glass, and wiped his son's mouth hard. The boy began to cry.

"Is Midas his real name?" Lucille sipped her coffee and made a face. "This coffee is too black."

"Of course. Who would give anyone a nickname like Midas?"

"Well, he certainly had the Midas touch, didn't he?"

"That had nothing to do with it. The gold part, I mean," said Doris. "His mother named him Midas. She's Greek. It's something to do with big ears. Don't get me started on his ears."

"At least his ears work," said Lucille and Doris thought of Mickey and the awful sounds he made when he absentmindedly began to talk in mixed company and how Lucille would manually turn his head toward her and silently mouth something that turned his tongue to stone.

"Daddy?" said Arthur. "Daddy?" The old man didn't answer, not even silently. Arthur gently lifted the old man's head up off his chest. Little green bubbles were forming on his ashen lips. He was smiling. "Oh god Jesus," said Arthur. He pulled an oxygen mask from a metal hook on the side of the wheelchair, slipped it over his father's head, and opened a valve on one of the tanks attached to the back of the chair. Arthur's wife shot an accusing glance at John and Muriel who were hurriedly gathering their things. They wound their way through the tables, Muriel being pulled along by her son's

taut leash, John trailing right on her tail.

"Is there a doctor in the house?" called Arthur operatically and his voice filled the restaurant like a mighty blast on the tuba.

The fat man sprung up with surprising alacrity and was hovering over the old man in an instant. Anthony stood right behind him with a pitcher of ice water.

"Are you a doctor?" said Arthur.

"I'm a chiropractor," said the fat man. "Give me some room."

A wide circle of people, some still chewing, formed around the stricken man in the wheelchair.

Doris and Lucille kept a discreet distance.

"Who is it?" said Doris.

"The birthday boy," said Lucille.

At the fat man's direction, Arthur and Anthony gently lifted the old man out of the wheelchair and laid him flat on the floor. Arthur fell on his knees and began to pray loudly and incomprehensibly. Anthony helped the fat man kneel on the floor. The fat man wiped the green bubbles from the old man's mouth, pinched his nose, bent down with a grunt and clamped his mouth on him. Anthony held the fat man around the waist and seemed to be squeezing him like a great bellows. A dozen people were on their cell phones calling 911. A lovely young girl was using her phone to take a picture over the fat man's shoulder.

Doris took out her phone and before she could punch in 911 it began vibrating in her hand. She said, "Hello? You're where?" She mouthed *Midas* to Lucille. "It's three o'clock in the afternoon. What are you doing in the bathtub?"

The fat man was thumping mercilessly on the old man's fragile chest. Anthony was crying. Arthur covered his face with his hands.

"A pain where? Which arm? Well, soak it if you think that'll help. Wait a minute, talk to Lucille, she's right here. She was a nurse, Midas. I *know* you know." Doris forced the phone on Lucille who had been vigorously shaking her head and waving her hands like a coach aborting a bad play.

"Midas," said Lucille brightly while looking darkly at Doris. "How are you?" She paused. "Your left arm. And your neck." She paused. "That's a little too much information, Midas. But believe me, your neck and—that—are not connected." Long pause. "Well, I don't think that would be very wise. No. No. No—"

"What?" said Doris.

Lucille waved her off. "You're upsetting Doris. Now we don't want to upset Doris, do we? I didn't think so." Pause. "Don't try to get out of the tub if you feel the least bit—awkward. Doris will come right home. Yes, I'll come too. You just sit and soak. You're going to be fine, I'm sure. No. No. Yes, Midas. Bye-bye." Lucille ended the call and handed the phone to Doris.

"What's going on?" said Doris.

"Not a thing," said Lucille, and took a deep breath.

"Is he alright?"

Lucille sipped her coffee. "I really couldn't say."

"I should go right home. Do you think we should call 911?"

"I think," said Lucille, leaning over the table and lowering her voice to a whisper, "we should have another cup of coffee. And I'm getting a sudden craving for dessert."

People were mobbing the cloakroom in a rush to leave before the police and ambulance arrived, no one wanting to get even tangentially involved or suffer the slightest delay. The old man with the cane was menacing the cloakroom girl and cursing loudly in Polish. Someone knocked over the wheelchair and a heavy metal oxygen tank rolled under the table and struck Arthur's wife hard

on the shin. She was crying and clutching the wailing baby to her breasts. Arthur and Anthony pulled desperately on the fat man who, exhausted by his futile exertions, had collapsed on top of the old man. Somewhere outside a siren was wailing, getting closer and closer and louder and louder.

"Lucille," said Doris, giving her a long, hard look.

Lucille put her hand to her ear and cocked her head.

"*Lucille*," said Doris, raising her voice over the din and commotion.

"Yes, Doris?"

"Get the crème brûlée."

Pink Lemonade
Hannah Westbrook
Paper collage

For PK

B.T. O'Dwyer

I found a photograph
that you left behind
of you and a horse
mid-flight over a fence,
like two orders of force
that had left the earth.

I hung it on the wall
because it makes me think
of a depthless power,
a less manageable reality.
I believe you never came down
but are still up there
free of orbit or trajectory
and grown planetary huge.

River Thinking

Iain Twiddy

On the bridge over the thaw
I can't stop thinking that the river,
opal in April, nearly fully running
once more, thinks purely
river river river river river—

given it says nothing else,
loud-mouthed, or mumbling humbly
through its deeps and shallows,
its hard rapids and slows—
only river forever,

just as the trees must think *tree*,
the wind think *wind*,
the rock *rock*,
hawk *hawk*,
and a man must think

is that how it is for a man.

A Man and His Guitar
Griffin Miller
Ink on paper

Cinnamon

Megan Davies

This time of year is invariably cinnamon. As the leaves turn impassioned hues of orange and red, so do printed signs, flashing advertisements about seasonal latte flavors and puffy, frosted coffee shop confections. You might argue that autumn is more pumpkin than cinnamon. However, pumpkin almost always comes as pumpkin spice, and while "spice" alone is terribly noninformative, experience suggests that the lone word "spice" is used synonymously with cinnamon. Gingerbread, apple cider, scones, eggnog? All laced with cinnamon. And the cinnamon flavor stays with me longer than any other. Its spiciness endures after other tastes have lost their kick, and cinnamon would definitely champion a flavor-memory contest.

From shortly after I was born to the time I was around four years old, I lived with my grandmother. While her kitchen exploits filled our home with sweet smells of homemade bread and almond-infused chocolate chip cookies, she herself was distinctly cinnamon. Trident cinnamon to be exact. I don't remember a single day where she didn't sneak back to her bedroom and pull a stick of Trident cinnamon gum from the top drawer of her dresser. After unwrapping a gum stick, the sizzling scent burst from paper packaging and proceeded to dance around my nose and slightly-parted lips. I tasted the fiery smell. I savored it. Upon first contact with extended tongue, the reddish-pink gum blended perfectly with the fleshy parts of the mouth, and they became one in a world of tingly sensation. Admittedly, I probably wouldn't remember days without Trident gum even if they had occurred. I certainly wasn't the type of four-year-old who thoroughly recorded observations about times when her grandmother's behavior strayed from the ordinary. But I did notice general patterns and record them in my memory compartment, where they're filed under the keyword

"cinnamon."

The English word "cinnamon" has been in use since the fifteenth century. Before then, Old English texts refer to cinnamon by several different names. Cassia, for example, names the most common form of cinnamon tree, and its name derives from the Hebrew verb *qātsaʿ*, which means "to strip off bark." Other names such as canel and canella seemingly derive from the Latin word *canna*, which means "tube" and most likely refers to the way in which the bark dries, curls up, and rolls back into itself.

You see, cinnamon comes from the bark of evergreen trees. Large, oval-shaped leaves cover the branches of cinnamon trees. The trees yield small white flowers that eventually give way to cinnamon tree berries. These berries measure approximately one centimeter in length and adopt a brownish-black color. Apparently, they taste somewhat like a milder form of cinnamon bark. The bark itself must be scraped from the branches and stems while still alive. After being pounded with hammers, the wet inner bark peels off in long strips. When left to dry, the bark slowly somersaults over itself, resulting in the layered, tubular structure of cinnamon sticks. The overall aesthetic effect is that large sheets of bark become small little sticks, tiny enough to stick in glass bottles and leave on a very disorganized shelf with fellow jumbled spices.

Being allowed to participate in my grandma's cinnamon chewing ceremony was a sacred privilege. If I followed my grandmother back to her room and peeped around the door as she opened the dresser, she'd always pull out two pieces instead of one. Then she'd hand one to me with a smile but not even a question of, would you like some? Just the gum. Have you ever chewed cinnamon gum? It's surprisingly potent. More than tasting, you're inhaling, inhaling fiery darts of cinnamon air into throat and nasal passages. Rather than being spicy itself, cinnamon turns the air spicy; it's gaseous. Cinnamon is the wasabi-like spicy that you experience in your nose and in your lungs more than on your tongue. But I didn't chew for

taste, I chewed to somehow participate in ethereal, autumn-colored moments. A few months ago, I bought a pack of Trident cinnamon gum. It sat on my dresser where I saw it every day. I thought of my grandmother, but I never chewed a piece. Eventually the gum sticks hardened, so I threw them away.

You can thank cinnamaldehyde for the spiciness of cinnamon. Cinnamaldehyde is an oil found in cinnamon bark, and when it contacts oxygen, it reacts and yields a skin irritant. When placed directly on the tongue, the skin irritant confuses taste buds, making them perceive the tingling irritation as spiciness. Artificial cinnamon flavors contain a higher cinnamaldehyde concentration than normal cinnamon bark, so artificial cinnamon flavoring assumes an even more skin-irritatingly hot flavor. This serves as a possible explanation for why, even though real cinnamon sticks are brown, we dye artificial cinnamon red.

It seems appropriate that I should introduce my grandmother by name: Lorna Jo Brown. The young Ms. Brown hated her maiden name because it reminded her of cold days on muddy farmlands where chilled fingers dug through the earth to root up ugly, grimy, brown potatoes. I heard that Ms. Brown's father, Mr. Brown, passed away when she was still a small girl. For Ms. Brown, brown became a cold, lifeless color. The former Mrs. Brown's remarrying a much meaner man further amplified her feeling that brown is decidedly cool. However, color theory purports that only hues from blue-green to blue-violet (and most grays) qualify as cool colors. Brown, on the other hand, falls among the warm colors, which range from red to yellow (and tans). Thus, brown is warm. Brown is like red. Brown is cinnamon, real cinnamon, and my grandmother is Brown. I don't think this because of anything my grandmother told me but rather because of my own increased sentimentality. My grandmother never told me about her personality as a young girl, but I could tell you about Ms. Brown in great detail. I just hope you would forgive me if I focused on detail at the expense of factuality.

If I believed in auras, I'd say my grandmother's aura was red. Perhaps you think this conflicts with her brown nature, but remember that cinnamon is naturally brown, and yet we dye it red to match artificially heightened flavor. Because my grandmother only endures in my memory, perhaps I sometimes exaggerate her characteristics for the sake of good storytelling. But really, what responsible writer wouldn't? That said, it is genuinely true that my grandmother gave off a warm, cozy feeling. You felt comfortable popping out insecurities and complaints like Jet-Puffed marshmallows and roasting them over the fire of her wisdom, wisdom arbitrarily ascribed to her because of great age. In retrospect, I'm sure my grandmother was wise, but I think she was mainly just kind. She felt soft like a blanket straight out of the dryer or warm air slowly streaming from a nearby space heater. I guess there's a possibility that her gentle, smiling nods genuinely hid the great depths of spiritually divined knowledge that my four-year-old self imagined. But maybe they were just nods. The reason I can't decide for sure is because I remember the feeling more than the actual details. Although my conjured memories feel wise, and warm, and red, I don't remember any actual words of advice. I simply assume they existed and made some sort of impact since I savor the long-lasting, generic memory.

Cinnamon has a long history with royalty. Ancient peoples regarded cinnamon as a gift befitting even the greatest monarchs. In some cases, they offered cinnamon as a gift to the gods. Temple records at the Temple of Apollo in Miletus substantiate this fact. When cinnamon arrived in Rome, merchants sold it for 1,500 denarii per pound. It took the average Roman 50 months to earn 1,500 denarii, before costs of living. When Emperor Nero's wife Poppaea died, he collected every last bit of cinnamon in Rome and burned Poppaea atop a cinnamon pyre. Similarly, the ancient Egyptians used cinnamon when embalming the mummies of royal family members. It was stuffed into their disemboweled abdomens

in order to produce a more pleasant, lifelike smell. Perhaps we subconsciously maintain this ancient association today as we infuse seasonal treats with cinnamon, a tribute to the babe in a manger.

Regardless, people probably obsess over cinnamon because it's nostalgic. The autumn months from September to December are filled with holidays. People go home for the holidays, they visit family, and they escape from the monotony of every non-holiday day. They eat and drink all the spice-infused holiday foodstuffs that they give and have gifted in return. They stuff themselves so sufficiently full of it that everyone remarks on the general phenomenon of gaining "the holiday pounds." Time lulls gently over the autumnal season, and people stuff themselves with every moment of it.

My grandmother passed away during the season of cinnamon, just one day after Thanksgiving. At least that's what I heard, anyway. I was out of the country. The last time I saw my grandmother, we sat down together at her kitchen table. She laid a spread of food before me. I don't remember what the food was, though I could probably guess, but I remember cinnamon rolls for dessert. She hadn't made fresh cinnamon rolls in quite a while, which is why I remember it so clearly. They were delicious, melt-in-your-mouth, cinnamon spirals. I could taste them when my family called the Tuesday of that Thanksgiving week. They wanted me to talk with my grandma one last time. I struggled to find the words because it was a one-way conversation; they said she couldn't speak by that point. But I wondered if they were wrong and that she simply forgot to angle her mouth toward the phone. Perhaps she angled her head toward where I was, 8,549 miles away. In that case, her voice, traveling at the speed of sound, would have taken approximately 11.13 hours to reach me. Unfortunately, the distance fatally muffled her voice. Though I couldn't hear her voice or any last loving words, I could taste the cinnamon.

When cinnamon reached the western world through trade, its origins remained a secret. The Greek writer Herodotus theorized that it grew alongside incense and myrrh and that winged serpents guarded and tended the plants. Alternatively, he theorized that giant cinnamon birds plucked cinnamon sticks from a distant, magical land and attempted to use them to construct their nests, but people stole them by playing fanciful tricks on the birds. When Jean de Joinville traveled to Egypt, he rejected these theories. He declared that cinnamon was hoisted from the sea in fishing nets somewhere near the source of the Nile River. Actually, cinnamon comes from trees, quite naturally planted and normally tended in countries such as India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand, and Laos.

When clutching my phone during that one-way conversation, I sat on the floor of my little apartment in Bangkok, Thailand. Several months earlier, I had lived in Chiang Mai, where I once visited a national park with—you guessed it—cinnamon trees. I stumbled across them quite accidentally, but I took my time in observing them. Rather ordinary-looking trees, they disappointed me most cruelly by failing to infuse the entire mountainside with a pleasant cinnamon smell. Even when I wrapped my arms around their trunks and pressed my nose into the bark, the fragrance was a mere figment of imagination. A guide explained that only the inner bark produces a fragrant smell. Cinnamon has to be fragmented, pounded, broken in order to produce its characteristic scent. Sitting in the heart of Bangkok with its population of 8.28 million people, those cinnamon trees felt far away. My grandmother felt farther still. After returning home, she was gone. Since I was so disconnected from her passing, her absence still feels surreal, like a drawn-out joke that somebody somewhere will explain someday. But, now and again, I meet her in fragmented, pounded, broken memories, which smell quite decidedly of cinnamon.

With My Hands Buried

Cheryl Sutton

When my father tended the garden,
there was always a happy yield.
One with smiling red tomatoes
who gleamed with their bumpy red faces.
It was the only time a face like that
could be considered beautiful.
I would wash the cucumbers and peppers
and listen to them sing. They sang of
the sunrise and its colors, of the thick dew, the plush grass.

I used to dance across the living room floor,
the gray-brown carpet, dingy and dusty,
relishing in the feel of the yarn-like strings
poking up between my toes.
Here, I told my father
that someday I would be able to sing
just like the vegetables. (It turns out
grating a brick sounds more pleasant than my voice.)

In the corner of the garden, we planted
carrots and potatoes. My fingers would sink
into the sweet silk and feel the soil
cake under my nails.
For years, my nail polish was
the sticky brown of earth.
I always thought that with my hands buried
in the garden I could hide the scars,

but I only saw them more, traced
with each little particle of dirt
and mud and weeds.
As if the earth was reaching out to
touch my broken skin and heal it. Still,
what with my father gone, I had to tend to it,
even after the tomatoes' gleam faded
and the vegetables stopped their melody.

My fingers were roots deep within
the ground and their tendrils moved up
my arm before I was immobile.
Leaves grew from ears and down
my spine and my hair, in a ponytail,
became a stem. Sometimes, I think
how easy plants have it. They form
in darkness and live rested on the soft ground.

Historic District.
Goldfield, Navada.
William C. Crawford
Digital photograph

On All the Ways They Say My Name

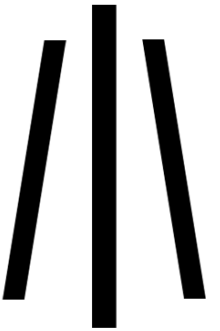
Sohair Elmowafy

"Your parents didn't immigrate halfway across the world
for you to mispronounce your own name
so it fits better in someone else's mouth," I read
in the Gospel of Twitter, scrolling incessantly
five hours past a human bedtime.

Among every thousand voices, I find myself
again, stuck in the minority, even behind a screen. I say my name
and taste it, the way my father fed it to me the first time: old
and cultivated by his sister, who has a different taste than me
in most things that matter, or so I think anyways. I say my name again,
in all the ways I know it morphs onto other people's tongues,
each sound tasting like a tinge of the same American coffee I drink
every morning. Sometimes bitter, sometimes sharp, always

handed with just enough sweetener and heat that I must admit,
it doesn't actually bother me
when my name is mistaken for Sahara, right after I mention

I came from North Africa. Father, I'm sorry you've come all the way
only to have me become myself in the fake name
of my Starbucks order, instead of clinging to a namesake
whose syllables are served like decades' old Egyptian tea
brewed to the melody of your sister's voice, sweet
and exquisite only to you.



Essays, Interviews, and Reviews

Campeóna de Justicia Social:

An Interview with Dr. Gabriela Baeza-Ventura
Editor in Chief, Arte Público Press

Miranda Ramirez

Gabriela Baeza-Ventura, PhD is an associate professor of Spanish with a specialization on US Latinx literature in the Department of Hispanic Studies at the University of Houston (UH). She holds an MA from the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque and a PhD from UH. Dr. Baeza-Ventura is executive editor at Arte Público Press, the premier Latino publishing house in the United States where she is responsible for the editing and production of up to 30 books a year.

Her academic research focuses on various aspects of US Latino literature, including women, immigration, recovery works, language, YA and children's literary production, and Digital Humanities. Her publications include *The Monograph: La imagen de la mujer en las crónicas del "México de afuera"* and two anthologies: *Cuentos hispanos de los Estados Unidos* and *US Latino Literature Today: Anthology of Contemporary Latino Literature*. She has edited and introduced a number of scholarly works.

She is currently co-editing a volume for the Debates in the Digital Humanities Series titled "Built on Biases: Injustice in the Information Age" with University of Minnesota Press. Most recently, along with Dr. Carolina Villarroel, Dr. Baeza-Ventura has received a Mellon Foundation Grant to establish a center on US Latina/o Digital Humanities Research at the University of Houston.

Miranda Ramirez (MR): How did you come to be at Arte Público Press (APP)?

Gabriela Baeza-Ventura (GBV): I came to the University of Houston in 1997 to start the PhD program in Spanish, thinking that I would pursue a PhD in Latin American literature. The university offered me a fellowship to work as a research assistant in recovering the US Hispanic literary heritage. That project is part of APP. I was disappointed I didn't get a teaching assistantship—that was part of the draw to coming to the University of Houston—because I didn't really understand what being a research assistant would entail, but I came.

At that moment, I had read two books published by recovery, *The Squatter and the Don* (María Ruiz de Burton) and *Las Aventuras de Don chipote; O, cuando los loros amamantan* also known as *The Adventures of Don Chipote*; *Or, When Parrots Breast-Feed* (Daniel Venegas). That book, I loved it. I really enjoyed it. It is considered the first novel of immigration, and it is like a precursor to the Chicano Movement. I read it because at the University of New Mexico there is a focus—you can master in Latin American literature, peninsular literature, or Chicano literature. And while some of the faculty there did include US Latino works, I had never read anything related to US Latinos—it was all about England or Latin America.

So when I came here, I thought it was interesting that there was a program dedicated to this. I was still hesitant, because I thought I would be here until a teaching position opened up and then I would move on, but I learned of the draws to working this recovery from Dr. Nicolás Kanellos who said, "We house APP, one of the most established and important publishing houses for Latinos. You'll have access to all of our publications, for free." For a PhD student with a very limited budget, that was a huge draw. I went through

the catalog and highlighted everything I'd read, and of the 400 or so titles they had at the time, I had only read like four of the books. I felt like it would be like a little challenge for me, to start reading all the things they had published.

I went to the warehouse and got all these books, and while I was working as a research assistant, began reading them in-between research papers. Sometimes I would find little mistakes so I started marking the books with little Post-it notes to give to the editors. But I didn't know how to go about getting delivering them, so I kept them at my desk. Then one day Dr. Kanellos walked by the area I was working and asked, "What are all those books doing there? Are you working on a paper for a class?" and I said, "No, I've been reading them and I've found a few mistakes. I was going to give them to the editor," and he said, "Well, do you like to edit?" and I said, "No, not necessarily." He looked through some of the notes and then asked, "Do you mind if I take them?" and I replied, "Of course not, please do."

A few weeks later, he came in and said, "Are you interested in working as a managing editor for us?" I said, "No, I am not." I wanted to be a professor, a researcher, and I felt like I needed to finish my degree and get out in the job market. He then said, "Well, if you are interested, there is a position for you here, and I would be happy to train you. I can show you the ins and outs of a publishing house. I see that you have an eye for these details." I still didn't want to do it, but the next day he said, "You really need to think about it. This is a good career path. You can be an editor and a professor. Many people do that."

In the fifth semester of my PhD, I was working on my dissertation and I became a production manager, and it was not long before Dr. Kanellos said, "I think you are going to be an editor very soon."

MR: Did you face difficulties reaching these heights? As a woman? As a Latina?

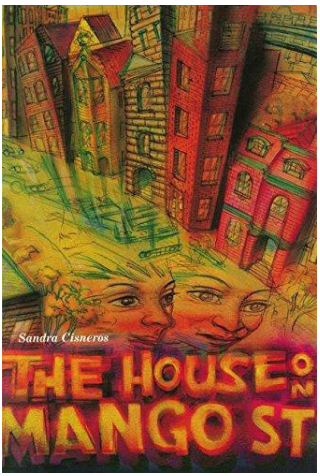
GBV: Within this press, of course not. Dr. Kanellos is a wonderful person to work with. I've never felt I couldn't tell him no or "I don't agree with this." His response is always, "Well, tell me why. Let's discuss it," and eight out of ten times I can convince him. He is willing to hear the other side, and the only times I can't convince him are over the covers or things he's learned in his extensive experience. So here, that hasn't been an issue.

But outside of APP, yes. Mostly it's apparent at events and conferences. Even though I am the editor, I am not invited to speak because they value the work of a male, and we are often seated next to a larger, or what they consider more established, publishing house, and they prefer to hear from them over the small press. Those houses often send out male representatives, and then there's a lot of "man-splaining" where they speak extensively without giving the smaller houses a chance to speak. I always feel like I end up being the angry Chicana at those events. I don't have any problems playing that role anymore, but at first I was a little insecure because I was young and Dr. Kanellos would just send me to those events and I'd never been. At this point, I don't care—I need to speak up. I need to give another voice.

At this point, I don't care—I need to speak up. I need to give another voice.

MR: Do you consider APP a unique publishing house?

GBV: It is definitely unique. We publish authors who write exclusively as Latinos. We don't check papers or verify identities or anything like that—if a person identifies as Latino, we do not question their Latinidad. That is why we exist. We are fully non-



for US Latinos to publish.

We are also unique in that we like to publish writers who have little to no experience. We have published quite a few emerging writers who have gone on to become very successful—Sandra Cisneros, Tato Laviera, Miguel Piñero, Ana Castillo. I feel that we are unique in that sense, and the fact that we are not afraid of language. We will publish in English, Spanish, or Spanglish—with regionalisms—and we receive a lot of flack for that. Especially from the Spanish-speaking community, whenever we don't select the word that is specific to their Spanish-speaking tradition. Our goal is to represent the work as authentically as possible, for the community the book is being written for. We consider the author's intention and intended audience first.

MR: What criteria do you consider when reviewing a submission?

GBV: We are definitely looking for Latinidad, then interesting topics, anything that is well-written. There are issues we feel are important to address, but we like to do things that have a bit of a twist.

MR: Do you feel that APP has a responsibility to represent the Latin community?

GBV: Yes. We have a responsibility to produce books that are for and represent the Latino community, for all of the various needs and identities it contains.

In terms of characters, especially in our picture books, children's literature our press produces, we try to represent a large community. When we contract illustrators, we try to remind them to consider things like complexion and hair—not all the girls wear their hair long or in braids, there are Afro-Latinos and blonde kids as well—and various weights. We try to address stereotypes and be mindful.

MR: Do you feel that APP and its published works have impacted the immigration debate?

GBV: Dr. Kanellos proposed a theory that our literature can be categorized into three sociological stages: you're a native to the US, an immigrant, or an exile. Each one of these categories has a different message. In the immigration category, a lot of the message is, "Stay in your home country because by coming to the US, you lose a lot of your identity. You become accultured—you suffer metaphorical or spiritual death." We have books that deal with that treatment, but we also publish books that talk about belonging and being a part of the United States.

I'm not sure if it has influenced immigration or the debate, but it does allow people to see the different processes immigrants go through, and Latinos at different stages in their lives. I think a lot of the literature demonstrates that Latinos are inherent to this land,

that they've been here. We are producing things for the academic world, but also for the community, so that the people can see themselves reflected in the things they read.

I think a lot of the literature demonstrates that Latinos are inherent to this land, that they've been here.

We also maintain an archive on every writer we publish—when have Latinos ever been a major part of a historical archive in the US? We have an entire space reserved for APP's authors, a space for Latino writers to occupy, here at the University of Houston.

MR: How do you personally cope with the weight of that responsibility?

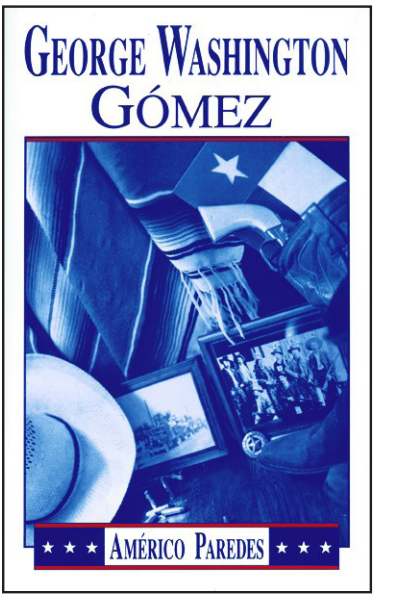
GBV: I look at it from a perspective of social-justice. I feel the work that APP is doing—if we don't do this work, nobody else is going to. We publish 25 to 30 books per year, and this is literature that needs to be made available. If these books are not present, the voices will not be heard. These characters will not live in the minds of American literature leaders.

MR: Have you ever had to defend the narratives published by APP?

GBV: A lot of times, primarily in regard to language. We've been accused of using the "wrong" language for translations, especially for picture books, and especially Spanish-speakers have complained about our use of regionalisms. We have to defend the way we choose to represent the communities we talk about, and we do this so that kids can really see themselves reflected in the literature they read.

I've also had to defend one of our Latina writers who was accused

of using stereotypes. She defended herself really well, but I had to as well. We are evolving and it's hard for us to accept these stereotypes do exist, but they are part of our lives and it is not a problem that they are in literature.



MR: Do you feel that you bring your personal beliefs as a borderlands citizen to the editor's desk?

GBV: Yes, absolutely. That's part of my identity. I am from the border. I was born in Ciudad Juárez, lived in El Paso for twelve years and then moved to New Mexico. It is part of my makeup.

I see the world from two sides. I don't necessarily believe that we live in a binary world, but I do feel like we are always in between, that you're always forced to choose and understand the whole environment. When I edit a book I try to keep that knowledge in mind—the field, the audience, and the author's intention.

MR: What can you tell me about the recovery project? How has it impacted your own academic research?

GBV: I came here as a Latin Americanist who thought the most valuable work that needed to be done was as a scholar of Latin American literature. Because it was beautiful, and as a person from the border, I always identified as a Mexican. When I first came to APP and I began looking at all this literature, I became very angry—

with the educational system that never provided those materials and with myself—that I never had the knowledge or even the curiosity to look for it. I assumed it didn't exist, it didn't matter, it wasn't vital for me to know it.

Maybe it wasn't anyone's fault. Maybe it was my upbringing—my parents are not university educated. We were avid readers at home—not many books, we didn't have a lot of money—but we read the newspaper. I never questioned my identity, did I or did I not belong to the US, I just assumed that I didn't. When I started in with recovery, I discovered that these materials were talking about things I had experienced and things that were talked about in Juárez, but never in El Paso. I never felt like I belonged in El Paso, because nothing that I read reflected me. I think if I had read these things when I was in high school, I would have felt really validated.

So I was angry, and this became my mission. This is what I need to work on. It's important to have those materials available to you early on so that you can start building your identity. Helping you to know who you really are. Once you know who you are, you can put up with a lot of things. If you know you're a Latina, you're not going to put up with anyone disregarding Latinas as just sex symbols.

Working in recovery taught me what was important to the people. It showed me what literary artifacts were available for my community.

MR: How has it impacted you as an editor and writer?

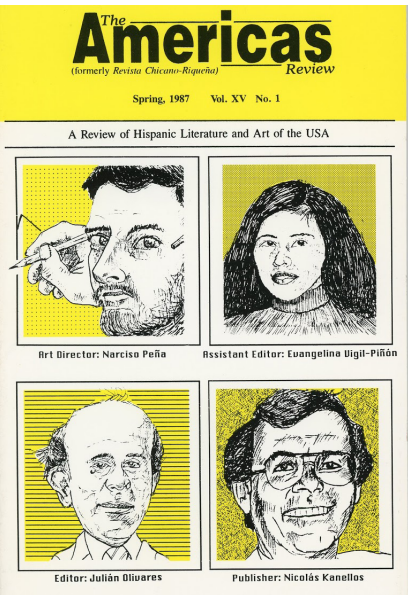
GBV: Recovery taught me the importance of the editor. They are the person who gets to decide what is seen. They select what will be read by the entire community. Establishing role models—the power these individuals had to determine how others are

educated, how they form their identities, their concepts of gender and gender dynamics, how they can dissuade or foster prejudices. I just thought it was extremely valuable—this is where I want to be.

MR: What is your expectation or hope for the field of literature in regard to Latinos?

GBV: My hope is that APP is not the only publishing house seeking to do the work we do. I hope there are 50, 60 publishing houses all over the United States that our books will reach. That they reach Latin and Central America, Spain, Germany—that they are read by people in other countries. Especially the people who come from our writers' countries of origin—they need to have access to this literature.

I also hope that Latino writers will write unapologetically in and about whatever language they want. We live in the United States and we speak many different languages, and Spanish is an extremely important language to our national community. We need to see the discriminatory laws against the language abolished. That has been an act of violence against the community. Also, I hope that we see more Latinos being considered for literary prizes.



MR: Do you think that there are benefits to publishing

with a smaller press like APP rather than a larger house?

GBV: Absolutely. You get to work with people who really care about your work. You also have an opportunity to keep your book available long-term. I think of the 600 or so books we have published, only ten percent are out of print, and even when they do go out of print, we offer print-by-demand. We take very good care of our writers. You may not get a large advance, but you get this long-term care and your royalties will increase over time.

If you're considering publishing with a smaller press, take a look at how many books have gone out of print and if their books are being acquired as textbooks. Look at who is distributing and buying those books.

MR: What advice would you give to young writers in the field?

GBV: If you have a story to tell, keep writing. Think about your heritage. Where do you come from? What makes you who you are? Start with that. Write your own story. Analyze why you are here, your name, your family. You'll see that you have a lot to share.

My biggest pet peeve is to receive work that has never been workshopped. Have someone else read it. Somebody who is not your mom or your sister, someone who can give you a good critique. And proofread. Edit before you send to us. If somebody says no, don't get disappointed. Send it somewhere else. Do your research; look at what they have been publishing. Learn who your target audience is.

MR: Can you tell me about APP receiving the Lifetime Achievement Award?

GBV: We are very excited about that. That award consolidates the activism and the commitment that Dr. Kanellos made to the press more than 40 years ago. This press started as a magazine—*Revista Chicano-Riqueña*—in 1973, when he was a professor at Indiana University Bloomington. It combined the work of Chicanos and Riqueños. They were very productive during the student movements. He wanted to provide a venue for these writers to publish. When Dr. Kanellos was offered a position here at UH, he agreed to come only if he could bring his magazine. That magazine evolved into *The Americas Review*. This prize, for us, demonstrates that we are here to stay. That our work is extremely valuable. It's a recognition—we are not going away. We are a part of this global platform.

APP will soon be celebrating its 40th Anniversary and we plan on hosting a big event. We hope the community will come out and see APP, see who we are and what we do. We don't want to be Houston's best kept secret anymore. We are creating the first digital humanities research center with recovery materials. We want people to see that. It will be fully accessible to the public. Anybody who's interested will be able to see the digital exhibits—scholars, community members—anyone.

"The Story of an Hour:" Yesterday and Today

Haley Rebecca Harrison

Kate Chopin was a modern feminist before those two words really had a meaning. "The Story of an Hour" is one of Chopin's most well-known short stories, but when it was written in 1894, feminism hadn't even made it to the United States. In the 1800s, society was beginning to feel the tension boiling below the surface, even if there were fewer manifestations of such tension. Kate Chopin was one of many women who understood and despised the pressure placed upon them to fall in line with the man's world. All of Chopin's works had the same message: the feminine experience in America, and its impacts on women, is a harrowing one.

"The Story of an Hour" is about a woman receiving news from her sister and her husband's friend about her husband's demise in a train wreck. She reacts in a fit of tears and sobs for a few minutes before retreating to her room to let everything sink in. She looks at the world outside her window, seeing the weather of spring midday and hearing the sounds of the life she has been missing for a long time. She sees a storm approaching, and she can smell and hear the whispers of the rain to fall. Among the whispers of the wind, she can hear her own soul whispering to her, through her. She is free, finally, to live for herself.

As the short story develops, the identity of our main character, Louise, develops into more than a newly widowed young woman. Her name changes from "Mrs. Mallard" to "Louise" as though she lost that title the minute her husband lost his life. She is no longer tied physically or figuratively to her husband. For instance, at the beginning of the story, the biggest issue with telling Mrs. Mallard about Mr. Mallard's death is the fact that she has a weak heart. Josephine, Louise's sister, is brought in to break the news. As the story continues, however, Louise's heart seems to grow stronger with the recognition of her sense of self. Her blood fills her body,

warming her extremities, making her every action more deliberate and self-asserting. The only line she says to someone other than herself involves defending herself and reassuring her sister that she is doing just fine. Even though she loved her husband at least some of the time they were married, she is revitalized by the idea that her days ahead will be for her and only her.

At the end of the story, her husband comes home from work, revealing that he had been nowhere near the site of the catastrophic event. As he greets the people in his home, he hears a screech from Josephine, and sees his friend, Richards, dive in front of Josephine and her sister. Louise dies from what the doctors call heart failure due to a "joy that kills." This not only reinforces the idea of hysteria in women, but also isolates Louise and her sister as the only women in the story. This story is a portrait of living and dying in a man's world, and Chopin's feminist ideology influenced many women to realize their own sense of self-assertion.

The play-by-play analysis of the woman's identity as the story unfolds proves that this piece is about feminism on the cusp of modernity. The modern woman will never go through what Mrs. Mallard experienced, simply because the traditional concept of a woman's identity has been called into question by Chopin and the many feminist writers who have followed her. This story covers only an hour, literally, and yet a whole woman's life can be witnessed at its beginning and end. This is precisely why this piece ushered in modern feminism, or at least took part in its introduction to the forefront of American history.

Land of Lost Poets: Roberto Bolaño's Legacy and Influence in *The Spirit of Science Fiction*

Christopher Miguel Flakus

"Do you want Mexico to be saved? Do you want Christ to be our king? No."

— Roberto Bolaño, *The Savage Detectives*

When I first discovered Roberto Bolaño, I was struck by the parallels between his life and my own growing up in Mexico City. Like Bolaño, I spent my adolescence in Mexico and was part of a group of friends that devoured poetry while loitering around the various cafes and bars of the city's bohemian neighborhoods. Also like Bolaño and his group of self-proclaimed "Infrarealists," we naively dreamed of becoming a new avant-garde and often pilfered novels from the big Gandhi bookstores, perhaps even the same locations from which a young Bolaño and his poet friend Ulises Lima once "repatriated" literature by stuffing books down their pants and walking past security. In other words: I was young, stupid, and full of dreams in the same city, surrounded by a similar cast of delinquents and would-be poets, in much the same way as a young Bolaño must have been.

Roberto Bolaño was born in Santiago, Chile. He lived in Mexico City as a young man and travelled across Europe before finally settling in Spain. However, it was his time in Mexico that seemed to have inspired his greatest work. His two most well-known novels, *The Savage Detectives* (which describes a fictional version of his youth in Mexico and the group of poets he befriended there), and the massive *2666*, are both set in a Mexico that is drenched in nostalgia, promise, failure, heartbreak, poetry, and danger. His is a Mexico so familiar to me I can almost smell its car-exhaust through the pages. Both novels are among my favorite works ever written. My dog-eared and worn-out copies have been read and re-read enough times that their covers barely hang on to their spines.

Three years ago I was back in Mexico visiting my family, this time in Cuernavaca, a town just outside of Mexico City. While there I made my usual pilgrimage to what once was the home of the English writer Malcolm Lowry. It has been converted into a hotel bearing the name of his most famous novel, *Under the Volcano*, which was set in Cuernavaca and was one of Roberto Bolaño's favorite books. I carried with me a knapsack in which I had carefully packed a bottle of water, an extra pack of cigarettes, and my copy of Bolaño's Quixotic master-work, *The Savage Detectives*. The concierge at the hotel was kind enough to admit me to the back of the building despite the fact that I was not a guest. I explained to her that I was a student, and a great fan of Lowry's. She guided me past the lobby, through the small restaurant with its identical pinewood tables and brightly colored tile floor, into the garden that contained the original structure of Lowry's house. I sat for a moment on a metal bench, surrounded by massive bougainvillea bushes exploding with bright purple flowers. I tried to imagine Lowry stumbling drunkenly through the garden, or sitting on the veranda of the white stucco house, sweating out the previous nights' drink at his typewriter. I wondered if in his time a young Bolaño had made his own pilgrimage to this spot. I believe he must have, though I have no proof. To the guests, the hotel's previous life as the abode of a tortured novelist was a curiosity at best. The concierge explained that most guests were entirely unaware of the hotel's history. To me it is a sacred place, nothing less than hallowed ground.

After a couple smokes and few choice paragraphs of *The Savage Detectives*, I left the hotel, hailed a taxi, and popped over to the nearby Gandhi bookstore. My eyes immediately fell on a display announcing the "new" (after reading the back of the book I learned it was written in the 80s and published posthumously) novel by none other than Roberto Bolaño. It was called *The Spirit of Science Fiction*. I bought it immediately. I had the strangest feeling the book had been laid upon the display just for me and had been waiting

patiently for my arrival.

It turned out to be a short novel, closer to one of his novellas in length, but in content more akin to his epic, *The Savage Detectives*. Its story follows two young Chilean writers: Jan and Remo, who, after fleeing from the political troubles of their home country, have arrived in Mexico City. Jan spends his days writing letters to famous science fiction authors like James Tiptree Jr. (pen name of the great Alice B. Sheldon), and Ursula K. Le Guin. Jan begs them to intercede with the government of their country to end US intervention in Latin America. The shadows of The Cold War flit constantly throughout the novel, though they are barely noticeable behind the somewhat disjointed plot: the infatuations, sexual escapades, literary aspirations, and economic troubles of its two starving-writer protagonists.

Even when the book falls victim to its own aesthetic and a penchant for rambling takes hold, it is still highly inventive and lucid prose. Bolaño's rambling is still Bolaño, and therefore worthwhile despite, and even because of, its obvious flaws. Reading this early novel by my favorite author was a valuable experience. It served as a reminder that even a great genius like Bolaño had to work hard at his craft. He was not born good. No one is. In fact, he was really quite a late-bloomer, enjoying only a decade of recognition in Latin America and Spain before dying tragically in 2003, just before his real international success was solidified with the publication of his last novel, *2666*.

Despite feeling personally encouraged by my first reading of *The Spirit of Science Fiction*, I couldn't help worry that its posthumous publication might in some way detract from the great man's legacy. It read more like practice for *The Savage Detectives*, which in my opinion is a superior book about poets lost in Mexico (or, one could argue, a Mexico lost to poets). It is not clear whether Bolaño ever intended this manuscript to be published. I think that is important to keep in mind. I believe an author's wishes should be honored,

especially after their death. Even if the demand for their work becomes enormous.

Since Bolaño's death much of his work has been translated into English. I believe the best of these translations are by Natasha Wimmer. Her English translation of *The Spirit of Science Fiction* was published February 5th of this year. I eagerly ordered a copy. Even though I had felt slightly underwhelmed with my first reading in Spanish, I was curious to read her translation and experience the story again.

Upon re-reading the novel in English I found the same flaws present, but somehow enjoyed the story more. I don't think this had anything to do with the language it was in, but more to do with my own growth over the past three years. I have changed. Mexico has changed. The world itself has changed to the point that some days it seems unrecognizable. My own connection to Mexico is more than ever steeped in nostalgia, and perhaps it is from this happier place, the realm of my own memories, that I approached my second reading of the novel in its English translation.

I am reminded of a conversation I recently had with my friend Jose Barrera, a photographer from Mexico City. We were discussing Bolaño's work. Jose pointed out that he and I had been lucky enough to be part of that very special time and place, Mexico in the late 90s, and early 2000s. We had lived in that almost mythic Mexico in which Bolaño set his greatest work, however briefly, and certainly at the tail-end of an era so recent and obscure it has yet to be named. We may have been the last generation to do so, but through his books I can still glimpse that lost world, and others can discover it for the first time. As long as Roberto Bolaño's books remain in print that Mexico will still exist. And the discoveries of his "new" works, pulled from old notebooks and computer hard drives, will continue to offer us fresh perspectives from that masterful, familiar voice. And that gives me comfort.

Modernist Alienation in Tommy Orange's *There There*

Elsa Pair

Tommy Orange's debut novel *There There* is one of the few novels to gain major literary traction that centers on a cast of Native American characters and is written by a Native American author. The *New York Times* listed it as one of the ten best books of 2018, and it won the Center for Fiction First Novel prize. Writing a book of such acclaim is impressive for any debut author, but especially for Indigenous authors—like Orange—who are so under-published and underrepresented in literature and media. Although Orange wrote and published *There There* almost a century after the American Modernist movement, one of the main themes it seeks to explore is alienation, and it does so in a way that is reminiscent of Modernist texts. This trend of alienation in Modernist pieces occurred due to the movement taking place at the same time as a huge immigration shift in America, and literature being created and influenced by immigrant writers who experienced alienation. Although all of Orange's characters are Native Americans and therefore are not immigrants, they experience alienation in a way that closely resembles the alienation described in Modernist literature.

The fact that *There There* has a cast of Native American characters means that discussing alienation is unavoidable. One of the very first things the novel talks about, in the prologue, is how white Americans tried to force alienation upon Indigenous peoples: ". . . the Indian Termination Policy, which was and is exactly what it sounds like. Make them look and act like us. Become us. And so disappear" (Orange 9). This idea of forced alienation is quite different from the alienation that came with the immigration wave of the time, but it rings true nonetheless. Furthermore, Orange goes on to add that "plenty of us came by choice, to start over, to

make money, or for a new experience. Some of us came to cities to escape the reservation" (9). This is more in line with the alienation we can find in Modernist texts—people knew they were going to be alienated, but they went forth and emigrated (or, in *There There*'s case, left their reservations) anyway, simply for the chance at a new life or experience.

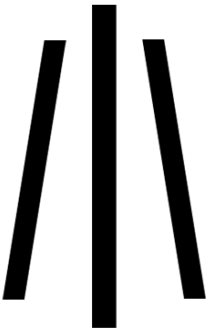
One of the interesting aspects to *There There* is the way that some of the characters choose to alienate themselves. Although Opal tells her grandsons to not "ever let anyone tell you what being Indian means" and seems, in general, unashamed of her family's heritage, she also prohibits anything traditionally "Indian" in her home (119). When we are first introduced to Opal's grandson Orvil, he's secretly trying on his regalia in the privacy of his room, and his first thought is what Opal would do if she caught him wearing it. According to Orvil, "Opal had been openly against any of them doing anything Indian" (118). Although Opal's heart is in the right place—she says openly partaking in activities that are easily identifiable as "Indian" is risky for the boys—it makes Orvil feel isolated and alienated nonetheless, to the point where he goes behind her back just to wear regalia and learn powwow dances. Opal, perhaps unknowingly, encourages him to alienate himself from his own culture in the hopes of protecting him.

There There culminates in a powwow, which is arguably the polar opposite of alienation. All of the twelve main characters are present, all of their stories converging in this one single event, if they haven't already. Native Americans rely on powwows to provide unity, even today, after so much has been done to forcefully alienate them: "We made powwows because we needed a place to be together. Something intertribal, something old. . . We keep powwowing because there aren't very many places where we get to all be together, where we get to see and hear each other" (135). Even though this book does have a horrifying and traumatic event right at the end, it does still end with characters coming

together—Jacquie unites with Opal and her grandsons to bring Orvil to the hospital, and Blue, who has discovered she is Jacquie's daughter, ends up sitting right beside her while they wait. The only reason these characters were able to find one another or were able to gather the courage to unite with one another is because the powwow brought them all together, and the only reason the powwow was possible is because of their culture and heritage. The powwow is, ultimately, what saves Orange's characters from their alienation.

Although *There There* is not a Modernist text, the theme of alienation is so prominent because it also centers on a group of marginalized people that has a long history of alienation, forced or otherwise. It also discusses how even though marginalized people often face alienation, there are ways to overcome it, often ways that they make themselves. In this way, it keeps with the Modernist trend of telling the marginalized experience in a true and honest way.

Orange, Tommy. *There There*. Alfred A. Knopf, 2018.



Contributors

Sophie Barner is currently enrolled as a sophomore at Chatham University in Pittsburgh, PA. She is majoring in visual arts with a concentration in art history and is minoring in studio arts and art museum studies. She has had one work published in Chatham University's literary magazine. Her work has also been featured in a handful of exhibitions including a show at the Albright Knox art museum in Buffalo, NY.

Felipe Campos is an artist from Ecuador and a longtime resident of Houston,Texas. This artist firmly believes in working with different mediums as a tool for self-discovery. While visiting Ecuador, he discovered a passion for the art and music of his birthplace. Felipe's artwork has been showcased at the Nook Café, The G. Lee Gallery, East End Studio gallery, MD Anderson Library, St. Luke's United Methodist Church, *Red Fez*, and other published books. His future goals as an artist are to create interactive installations which combine audio and visuals as well as continue his explorations in film.

William C. Crawford is a writer & photographer based in Winston-Salem, NC. He was a combat photojournalist in Vietnam. He has published extensively in various formats including fiction, creative nonfiction, memoirs, book reviews, and essays. He had a parallel career as a social worker and community organizer. There, he wrote biting editorials on behalf of the powerless, such as abused children, the frail elderly, and victims of enforced state sterilizations. He is known as Crawdaddy to his Yellow Lab, Scout.

Megan Davies is a senior majoring in English at Brigham Young University. Her areas of study include literature, creative writing, and foreign languages. As an archivist, she spends most of her time surrounded by dusty old books, but she also enjoys writing for new ones. She is an author of both nonfiction and fiction. The essay "Cinnamon" is her first publication.

Sohair Elmowafy is a nocturnal creature whose work has recently been published in The Rice Review. She holds a BA in Creative Writing, and can be found somewhere in Houston probably avoiding humans and drinking copious amounts of Coca Cola.

Christopher Miguel Flakus is a poet and writer living in Houston, Texas. He has published work in *The Huffington Post, Akashic Books: Mondays are Murder Noir Series, Indietronica, Outlaw Poetry, In Recovery Magazine, Glass Poetry, Black Heart Magazine*, and elsewhere. In 2017 he was awarded the Fabian Worsham Prize for fiction. In addition, he was one of the editors responsible for The University of Houston-Downtown's literary magazine, *The Bayou Review*, during their special prison issue which focused on the writings of authors serving sentences in Texas prisons. He is the author of the chapbooks *Bear Down Into Hell With Me (As Only a True Friend Would)*, and *Thirst, and Other Poems* through *Iron Lung Press*, and the chapbook *Christiana*, from *Analog Submission Press.* He grew up in Mexico City and writes in both English and Spanish. He is currently working on his first novel.

Emily Gonzalez was born in Houston, Texas and is currently attending Lone Star College. With a major in art education, she intends on teaching art to elementary school-age children and also hopes to pursue a career in art therapy for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. She is currently trying to dabble in various art mediums and aspires to be grow old with her abundance of plant babies.

Haley Harrison is a senior at the University of Houston, studying writing and production. They hope to one day do something with their creativity, and they hope to write as long as they live.

Kendra Preston Leonard is a poet, lyricist, and librettist based in Texas. Her work centers around events, figures, and places local, mythopoeic, and historical.

Mickey "The Flying Busman" Mahan: After nearly three decades behind the wheel of a transit bus, writing WHILE he drives on a pocket-size memo pad (he calls his writing practice "Writing On The Edge Of My Seat"), the poems, the songs, the plays, the journals, the essays have raised an itch in his arse the driver's seat can't scratch. So, he's creased their paper wings for publication. A pogo stick master and hula hoop enthusiast, he waxes his mustache in concentric curlicues and romps the floorboards of his boathouse with two gorgeous redheads: wife, Deb "Red Lily" Thorna and Pomahuahua princess Phoebe du Soleil. It's all licks, kicks, and tricks! His sobriquet, "The Flying Busman," he's inherited from his great, great, great, really great uncle "The Flying Dutchman."

Griffin Miller is an artist currently attending University of Houston for a degree in graphic design. Whenever he is not working on art for classes, he is making art for fun. He adores creating pieces through ink and the tedious, yet pleasing process of stippling. When he is not creating works with tiny dots, he is developing new designs involving mandalas, doodles, and patterns. With these designs he covers objects in them. A few examples of items he has decorated include hats, shoes, light bulbs, baseballs, a construction helmet and many more items!

Paul Negri has twice won the gold medal for fiction in the William Faulkner-William Wisdom Writing Competition. His stories have appeared in *The Penn Review, Concho River Review, Vestal Review, Pif Magazine, Jellyfish Review, Gemini Magazine*, and more than twenty other publications. He lives and writes in Clifton, New Jersey.

Charles O'Donnell writes thrillers with high-tech themes in international and futuristic settings. His works include the espionage thriller "The Girlfriend Experience," the political thriller "Moment of Conception," and the dystopian novels *Shredded* and *Shade*. He recently retired from a career in engineering to write full-time, drawing on his experience leading teams in many countries to create compelling settings in faraway lands. Charles lives with Helen, his wife and life partner, in Westerville, Ohio.

B.T. O'Dwyer was born premature '83, lucky to be alive. He has managed very little since.

Elsa Pair is studying creative writing at the University of Houston. Aside from being an associate poetry editor for *Glass Mountain* magazine, she is also a member of the Student Feminist Organization. In her free time, she likes to nap and watch videos of her dog, who is home in Dallas. This is her first publication.

Sheida Pebdani is currently studying painting at the University of Houston. She plans to graduate with a Bachelor of Fine Arts and Italian Studies. She finds inspiration for her art from stories, poems, and countries she likes. This painting is inspired by *The Little Prince of Antoine de Saint Exupery*.

S.M. Pruis is a student and poet under rainy Seattle skies. Their writing has appeared in *OUT/CAST, ArtWay*, and *The Ocotillo Review*, among others. Pruis is the editor and designer of the 2018 *Keeping the Faith*—the Prison Project Anthology. www.pruispoetry.art

Miranda Ramirez is a writer of poetry, fiction, and creative nonfiction, who seeks to marry her passions for social activism and literature. She hopes to give a voice to the voiceless and offer an alternative perspective of the Latin community here in Houston. You may find previous publications by this author in *Ripples In Space: Science Fiction Short Stories for Fall 2018, Glass Mountain,* Volumes 20 and 21, and *Shards*, Issue 3.

A. Shaikh is an Indian-immigrant who currently lives in a white house at Kenyon College, where she fixates on poetry, good rice, and her increasingly near adult life. This is her first publication. When she isn't writing, she is helping run Kenyon's first student-run publishing press (@sunsetpress) and working for the *Kenyon Review* as an associate.

Kelsie Shaw is a writer currently pursuing an M.A. in English at the University at Albany, SUNY. Her scholarly interests include literary modernism, queer and feminist theory, and critical disability studies. Kelsie's writing has appeared in *The Writing Cooperative, bioStories, Trolley*, and *Gravel*. When not writing or studying, Kelsie can be found playing Chopin nocturnes at her piano, obsessing over Virginia Woolf, or somewhere deep within a used book store.

Soli Shin is a Korean-American Manhattanite. Formerly, she was a reader for Conjunctions and is currently a co-Editor for *Nat. Brut.*'s Poetry section. She has been published in *Apricity* and *Glass Mountain*. She is now based in Los Angeles, CA working on renewable energy. She has a Bachelor's from Bard College and a Master's from Duke University.

Cheryl Sutton is a sophomore at Purdue University studying creative writing and sociology with a minor in women's studies. She works as a fiction editor for her undergraduate literary journal, *The Bell Tower*, and was the 2018 recipient of the Helen Bass Williams Award. She lives in West Lafayette with her girlfriend and their two pets.

Iain Twiddy studied literature at university and lived for several years in northern Japan. His poems have been published in *The Poetry Review, Poetry Ireland Review, The London Magazine, Flyway* and elsewhere.

Hannah Westbrook is a Dallas-based filmmaker and visual artist. Her work can vary from inspiring to sarcastic, or even mysterious and moody to ironic and goofy. The result is a stunning, punchy commentary on life itself.

Beth Oast Williams is a student with the Muse Writers Center in Norfolk, Virginia. Her poetry has appeared in *Lou Lit* and *West Texas Literary Review*, among others, and is upcoming in *Wisconsin Review*, *The Bookends Review* and *Willard and Maple*. She was nominated for the 2019 Pushcart Prize in poetry. A former librarian, Beth spends most of her time still trying to make order out of chaos.

shards

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