

Clarion16

I imagine myself back in Columbus,
Georgia, imagine, indeed, a paddle-steamer careen
and clarion up the East River

Paul Muldoon



About the magazine. In 1998, the undergraduate members of the Boston University Literary Society published the first issue of the magazine which would become *Clarion*. In 2008, the editors opened submissions to all writers. In 2012, the magazine re-launched as an independent publication of the Pen & Anvil Press, with a staff of undergraduate and alumni editors working alongside contributing editors with no campus affiliation.

Submissions of poetry, fiction, essay and journalism, and interviews of a literary nature are welcome any time with the exception of August and December, when our readers are on break. Notification may be delayed during the summer months; queries will be answered promptly. Submissions may be sent as attachments to clarion@penandanvil.com or by post to *Clarion* c/o Boston Poetry Union, 30 Newbury Street, Boston MA 02216. We encourage the use of our online submission manager at clarion.submishmash.com.

EDITORS

Frances Gossen

Jonathan Maniscalco

FOUNDING EDITOR

Jennifer Herron

MANAGING EDITOR

Zachary Bos

PRODUCTION INTERN

Elaina Kim

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From the editors

In our work over the past few months, we at *Clarion* have attempted to gather together stories and poems that will have a lasting quality to our readers.

Highlights include: Rayyan Al-Shawaf's story "The Order of the Forsaken Empire" portrays political and cultural disruption in mid-century Egypt with delicate formalism. A view on the subject we hope will be relevant to the world's current issues.

Our long interview with Tom Simmons, a BU alumnus like his interviewer Sandy SooHoo, makes for a useful frame to consider his provocative stories (for example, "The Great American Hangover" in *Clarion* 15). Plots and style that might seem the work of an underachieving misanthropist can be seen more clearly as deeply subtle and committed satire when you hear from the author himself.

This issue is the first in which we are working as collaborative co-editors, and the first to have been born on screens residing in the Pen and Anvil workspace on Newbury Street instead of on laptops balanced precariously on the knees of editors working in improvised squats (e.g. Trident Cafe, the third floor of Mugar, the sunny but heavily-trafficked front steps of the College of Arts & Sciences). We hope that will help improve the quality of the work we are presenting you with.

Jonathan Maniscalco and Frances Gossen

August 2013

THOMAS JOHN NUDI

Fiona

You, you, you, you,
Fiona, are the type of girl
I could get used to falling
asleep next to and waking up
too. Coffee fresh off the brew,
sitting next to you, reading
the news—

I don't read the news, but maybe
you do. You might set your glasses
over your round blue apple eyes—honey,
you're beautiful always, I'll say,
and you could smile but it wouldn't matter
if you did, or if you ever grew tired
hearing me tell you.

But from what you tell everyone, Fiona,
it sounds like this is it; everything you want.
Anything you want, Fiona.
I could make you croon—

take your blues and turn their hue;
warm up your heavy empty mug
full and to be drunk by you.

Teeth

Looking at your teeth

I can tell your age

like rings of
a tree stump.

What you've been through;

all your chips, cavities,
faults,

patch-jobs—

I can see what remains

when I can look

no longer

The Order of the Forsaken Empire

Dear Edward,

It is with the greatest joy that I write you this belated, though no less appreciative, acceptance of your kind invitation. Chelsea and I should be absolutely delighted to spend the weekend with you and Audrey at your country cottage. You will I trust forgive the lengthy delay in my response; I have of late been besieged by all manner of disagreeable obligations. In fact, it was an instance of the latter that bade me make the journey down to London this week past, a trip the object of which re-kindled a host of faded memories of my early teaching days. Though not immune to the detail-effacing influence of Father Time, yet certain of these recollections might in some meagre way prove useful to you, particularly in light of your recent request that I provide you with information and advice on what shall hopefully be a long and illustrious career in the field of overseas pedagogy.

* * *

THE PURPOSE IMPELLING this reclusive dinosaur to emerge from his hibernation and embark upon an expedition into the heart of chaos and anarchy was the occurrence of a funeral. The unfortunate focus of the ceremony was a man I knew many years ago, and one with whom I shall doubtless soon have occasion to become re-acquainted. Zahed Ayoub (or 'Zed', as his

wife and friends apparently called him), a sixty-something resident of East London, once was a pupil of mine at Stuart Grammar School in Alexandria, Egypt. Zahed and fellow pupils Ammar and Sadeq were upon my counsel expelled from Stuart for conduct unbecoming gentlemen in the winter of the academic year 1956-'57, my last in Alexandria.

It was a strange and difficult time. Even the retina-perforating Egyptian sunlight could not blind us to the fact that the sun finally was setting on us. Yet even in the midst of all the tumult, and as we bore witness to the soaring popularity of a new and ferocious xenophobia in the country, the faculty of Stuart soldiered on determinedly. This was no mean task, as our duties were hardly restricted to correcting peculiarly Egyptian solecisms and confronting rampant and deeply entrenched accidie. Indeed, the situation amongst the pupils was one of turmoil and mass confusion—even as that of the country itself—with misbehaviour ever on the increase. Though all native applicants to Stuart were as a matter of course carefully vetted, this is not to say that our system did not admit of the occasional error or misjudgement. Compounding matters was the fact that the heady days during and after the 1956 debacle served to educe the worst in many of our lads; in brawls amongst themselves and in acts of collective insubordination, a number of otherwise promising types gave activity to the most primitive of instincts. Indeed, at times they were no better than the canaille outside, hardly a testament to our tireless civilising efforts.

In respect of Zahed's lot, I cannot say for certain whether they were all of them fully cognisant of the seriousness of that which they were to undertake. What we did discover was evidence of premeditation and careful planning. Whilst it is not my custom to be overly harsh, neither have I ever subscribed

to that foolishness which holds that lenience is the better part of discipline. As one who had suffered all three of them many a puerile indiscretion (the week previous, for example, I had come upon them smoking in the lavatories, yet chose to mete out a relatively light punishment), I nevertheless considered this transgression to be of a far more pernicious nature, born of the usual Arabic penchant for enfantillage though it may have been.

I had obtained an exemption from the assembly to be held at the end of the day, the last before Christmas holidays. The headmaster had granted me the exemption over a week earlier, as I had already made arrangements to leave the school and make for the port immediately following my last class. I intended to sail for England where I would spend the bulk of the holidays (and celebrate my thirty-first birthday) before heading back to Egypt. My pupils I had duly informed of my plans as soon as they had been confirmed, explaining that I should not be able to accompany them to the assembly.

On the appointed day, after I had completed my lecture, I dismissed the class, instructing them to head without delay to the assembly hall. I remained to pack my books and papers. Fewer than five minutes later, having left the classroom with my possessions carefully arranged in my briefcase, I was startled by the sight of three boys scurrying towards me along one wall of an otherwise empty corridor.

“Mr. Jarvis, sir, sorry, but we’d like to be allowed to speak with you... please,” panted Ammar.

“What are you doing here? Do you know the punishment for such disobedience?” I replied testily.

“Yes sir, it’s just that we’d like to give you something before the holidays. This is our only chance.”

From the start I was reluctant to humour them (*Timeo Aegyptios et dona ferentes!*), but I suppressed my misgivings in favour of a more forbearing attitude.

“Very well, lads, but I grant you only two minutes, after which you shall return to the assembly in progress. Also, I shall be obliged to report this infraction after the holidays.”

We re-entered the classroom and they closed the door. I sat in my chair, facing them. Ammar and Sadeq then ambled over very casually and before I knew it had pinned my arms behind the back of my chair, murmuring apologies all the while. A plainly nervous Zahed hastily produced a roll of masking tape from a pocket and sealed my mouth shut, muffling thereby a mixture of indignant cries and stern warnings. From another pocket he extracted a length of rope, with which he proceeded to tie my wrists together behind the back of the chair.

Zahed shuffled his feet nervously. I sensed that it had been determined that he should speak, but he was not yet ready. Sadeq and Ammar, standing on either side of me, compensated for their friend’s silence. It was Ammar, if my memory serves me correctly, who began. This Ammar had always been consumed with contemporary politics. More avid than his peers in devouring all the reports of daily political events to be found in newspapers and on the radio, he also imagined himself a keen political observer, presumptuously offering ‘better alternatives’ to ‘unwise decisions’ made by Her Majesty’s Government. Now he launched into a diatribe about the prevailing political situation in the Middle East since the messy termination of the Suez Crisis, and what he assumed to be British plans for Egypt.

“We know what this assembly is about... yes we do! We know what’s going to be said, and just how it’s going to be said, and we’re here to tell you that we’re against this gradual surrender,

this slow death! And we seek your assistance—sir—because we know that you share our view,” he added quickly.

I should in this context explain that the aforementioned assembly had been convened with the express purpose of discussing the ongoing ‘crisis in the Middle East’. The repercussions of our clumsy and ill-fated attempt at revanchisme were everywhere manifest, and it was widely believed that the British presence, including institutions and schools, was on its last legs, the nationalisation of Suez having consecrated the rabidly xenophobic Gamal Abdul Nasser as sole and absolute sovereign of this barren desert land. Under immense US and UN pressure, our government (together with that of France) had some time earlier ceased all military activity and consented to withdraw our forces by Christmas Eve. Ammar, with his family’s long-standing ties to the United Kingdom, was understandably terrified of the consequences of this reversal and, impertinent as he was, never missed an opportunity to upbraid Her Majesty’s Government for their (admittedly ill-advised) war alliance with the nascent state of Israel, mortal enemy of the Arabs.

“Eden made a mistake, a major tactical mistake, and now we’re all paying the price! There were other, better ways to confront the nationalisation of the Canal. I kept on saying that he should be careful... And then, after he decided to go in militarily, he shouldn’t have included Israel. Why Israel? The United Kingdom has ruined its reputation for nothing!”

He continued for a time in this vein as I sat watching him impassively, having by now grown accustomed to the surprisingly difficult task of breathing exclusively through my nose.

“Trust me, believe me, giving in to these so-called nationalists is a bad idea. It’ll only whet their appetite for more. You mustn’t crumble. Yeah, there’ve been mistakes. Like I said, the

thing with Israel will be difficult to justify, yeah, very difficult to justify. You see, it'll be used by the other side as proof of British deceitfulness, supposed British deceitfulness, but Britain—Great Britain—has withstood far greater challenges than this!”

Sadeq then interjected, “And you must stand with us, sir, in the face of attempts to abandon us. Together we can fight these defeatist policies. We won't just accept being left behind. We will not be shut out of history!”

Sadeq was similar to Ammar in certain important respects, though different in others. Of a like robustness both in build and attitude, he also—more than Ammar—seemed constantly to harbour a certain frustration wont to express itself in violent outbursts directed at other pupils. Like his good friend, Sadeq closely followed developments on the international political scene, but his main interest lay in history, both Western and Islamic, and especially the role of religion in society (and if all three lads were quite Laodicean in such matters, it was Sadeq who always was the most uncompromising in his secularism). He continued his harangue.

“Mr. Jarvis, you aren't old and weary like the others. We're convinced that you have what it takes to confront—and overcome—the dangers that threaten us all. There, in that assembly, they're paving the way for retreat. Yes, we know! They've been influenced by the socialists and communists and nationalists! They're saying in fancy words that things have possibly become too difficult to bear, and that Great Britain might be forced to give up her historical possessions. And what does this mean? It means abandoning all of us who have worked with her to promote her values. Don't give in to this! Resist!”

By now I was as you might imagine quite enraged, and would fain have administered the appropriate corporal punishment

myself without delay! Yet the histrionic display of which I was the unwilling audience had not yet finished; Zahed, who had at first been reluctant to speak, now stood ready. Ammar and Sadeq took note and eyed him expectantly.

Slight in stature, of a nervous disposition, and in general rather frail-looking, the bespectacled Zahed did not boast the physical attributes of strength and fitness so obvious in his partners-in-crime. Yet he was quite dogged in his opinions and rarely relented when under pressure by his peers. Perhaps this was because he knew himself to be more widely read and studied than they (I should not venture to call him erudite, but his knowledge was both deep and far-reaching). Indeed, he was my most intelligent and able pupil, being particularly well-versed in our classics, and capable of producing thorough exegesis of Shakespeare. He had from the start clearly been accorded center-stage by Sadeq and Ammar, though he had chosen to defer his turn until later. Now, expecting the peroration, I fixed my gaze upon him. Zahed had overcome his unease and, as Ammar and Sadeq straightened up beside me, met my gaze and launched into an evidently rehearsed declamation.

“Sir, we are honoured to be able to recognise your distinguished service. Indeed, in commending you for your noble work we should like to take this opportunity to express our hope that you continue your efforts in support of our great empire. Even if, as we have come to suspect, our other mentors are tempted to turn their backs on us, we have confidence that you personally will not renege on your commitment to what you have created and nurtured. We may not be recognised as such, but we are an empire, Mr. Jarvis. We may be nameless, but we’re certainly not delusional. We’re all over the globe, right, and we’re English, French, German, Dutch and more. And we

shall remain, for we can't simply be wished out of existence. We shall continue to cherish the great wealth of knowledge we have attained, even if those who gave it to us now question its truth. And we pledge to guard this knowledge for the benefit of future generations."

Sadeq no longer was able to contain his enthusiasm. "Yeah, we'll be like Ireland!!" he defiantly proclaimed, one arm extended in the air demonstratively with the other akimbo. When I looked at him quizzically, he explained, somewhat defensively:

"Why not? Just as Ireland during the Dark Ages guarded the knowledge of Europe, which, you know, created continuity and... made possible the waking up... I mean the re-awakening... of the continent... later... our empire will do the same for the West today. Yeah, you know, the West might betray itself and go against its own knowledge, and the East might fight it, but we'll keep that knowledge safe for the future!"

Here I should add that this amusing exaltation of Ireland and its exaggerated role in preserving the Western heritage almost certainly was due to the rantings of a colleague who taught in the history department. A Londoner of indeterminate origin (he steadfastly claimed to be of Scottish parentage), this man's influence upon Sadeq was considerable, the latter having been quite taken with him.

Sadeq quieted down and my attention was re-focused on Zahed, standing erect with inflated chest. This was to be the coda.

"And so, in recognition of... in recognition of your achievements, and as a token of our gratitude and friendship, and an indication of our continuing confidence in... your continued loyalty... we wish to present you with something."

Again nervously reaching into one of his cavernous pockets, the ever-resourceful Zahed fished out what appeared to be a

very crudely fashioned badge of some kind, with a purple ribbon affixed to it. As Sadeq and Ammar each placed a hand on my shoulder, Zahed held this thing aloft, looking exaggeratedly—indeed ridiculously—solemn. I marveled at their predilection for ceremony.

“Mr. Aldrich Jarvis, we hereby award you the order of our great empire!” Zahed pompously declaimed, as he awkwardly tried to pin the hideous thing on the lapel of my jacket.

In summary expulsion from Stuart Grammar School was their reward for such wanton delinquency. The headmaster sought my opinion in the matter of their punishment, to ascertain whether or not I felt as strongly as he did about the incident. I unhesitatingly recommended expulsion, and he immediately concurred. The level of their contrition was hardly commensurate with the gravity of their trespass, and the headmaster and I in any case considered their sin to be of the inexcusable variety. That they should take leave to behave in such a vile manner with a member of the faculty reflected an impudence that cannot under any circumstance be tolerated.

In one respect at least the infuriating ordeal turned out to be a *felix culpa*. The expulsion of Zahed, Sadeq and Ammar served to jolt the remainder of the pupils, including the most unruly (who had been encouraged in their various designs by the general chaos following the war), into an almost complete submission. Chary of offending any teacher lest they suffer the same fate as their former colleagues (the headmaster made clear his intention to further expel all problematic elements), the pupils began to exercise much more caution in everything they did. I was most content. Accuse me of *Schadenfreude* if you wish, but take note of the power of example. Seeing their schoolmates (senior classmen all) hang their heads in shame and be forever

barred from school premises left an indelible impression on all pupils at Stuart. This is not to say, of course, that I did not take pity on the three boys. To the contrary, I sensed most acutely their confusion and helplessness. Like fatherless children, they were without any true sense of direction or purpose. Yet callowness must never be allowed to justify unlawful and immoral activity.

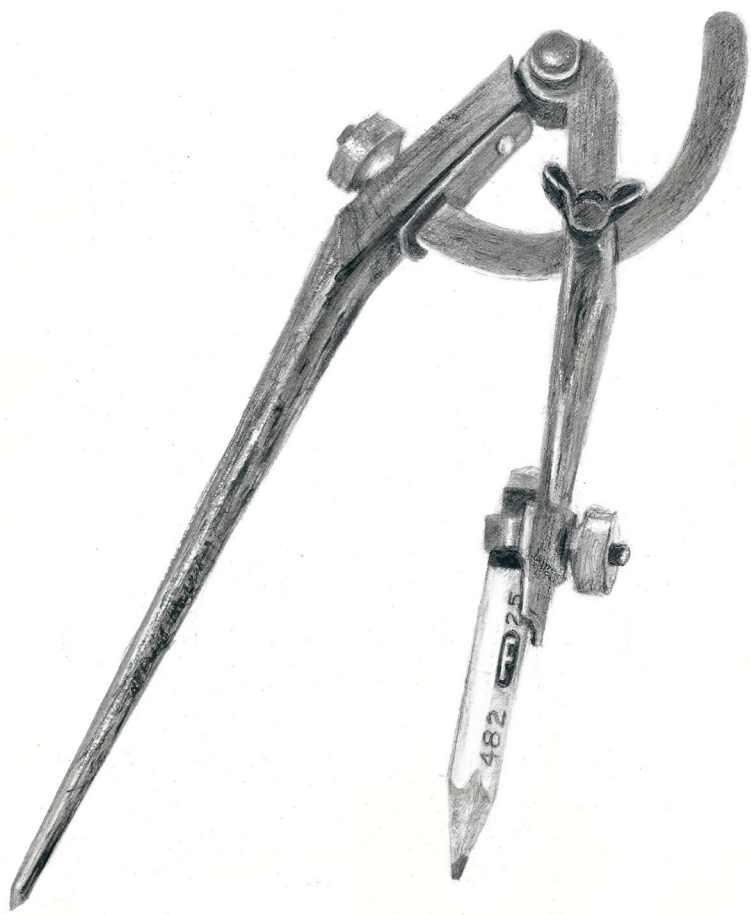
That year was by previous agreement to be my last in Alexandria; I had been in Egypt for over a decade, having arrived as a teacher shortly after the Second World War. As it turned out, Stuart itself was not to exist for much longer; the rising tide of Arabic *sacro egoismo* soon ensured that everything in Egypt, not just Suez, would be nationalised. Most of the faculty began leaving of their own volition, aware that the end was nigh. A few remained a year or two longer until the state relieved them of their posts. Stuart was transformed into just another Egyptian school. A mere two years after my departure there occurred Egypt's Anschluss with Syria, out of which was born the short-lived (it broke up in 1961) United Arab Republic, of which Nasser became undisputed Fuehrer.

Over the years an extensive alumni network has kept me apprised of the activities of former pupils. This is how I am today able to relate to you information concerning the very different trajectories of Zahed, Ammar and Sadeq after their expulsion.

Ammar very craftily re-invented himself as a nationalist, becoming an ardent proponent of that farrago of half-baked ideas and crackpot theories known as 'Arab socialism'. For all its dangerous leftist intimations, this turned out to be pure nationalist zealotry (despite his alliance with the Soviet Union and his peasant's hatred for the landed nobility, Nasser did not flinch from persecuting home-grown communists by the thousands

and herding them into concentration camps). Relying on his first-hand knowledge of the 'Imperialist-Zionist educational system' implanted in Egypt by nasty foreigners such as ourselves, and represented by the likes of Stuart, which he had the extreme misfortune of attending, Ammar was able to catapult himself into the government's ministry of education. Rising steadily in its ranks, he came to play an integral role in overseeing the nationalisation of all foreign schools, consistent with the requirements of that exceedingly chauvinistic nationalism enshrined by Nasser as state policy. From the late fifties to the late sixties he led a very comfortable life as an establishment writer and government official, entrusted with the task of purging Egypt of any and all traces of the evil foreigner and turning the country into one big gulag presided over by Nasser. In his writings on Western—and especially British—influence in Egypt, my sources tell me that he was obsessed with the lingering effect of foreign education, arguing that the Egyptians and Arabs should remain forever vigilant, guarding against attempts to contaminate their noble culture and make them more amenable to peace with Israel and domination by the West. Of especial importance to him was the idea of Western cultural—as distinct from outright political—domination; he claimed that the former, being insidious, was more difficult to combat, but that it posed the greater danger, geared as it was towards making Arabs ashamed of Arabic culture and history. With others, he helped identify a good number of intellectuals in Egypt as 'anti-revolutionary' and as lackeys of the imperialist West, thus sealing their unhappy fate.

Now Nasser's pharaonic reign, though popular with the frenzied masses of rural fellahin and plebeian city-dwellers, nevertheless was characterised throughout by a bitter struggle



between the ostensibly secular Arab nationalists in power and their Islamic fundamentalist adversaries. Barring the common denominator of virulent anti-Westernism, these two groups constantly were at loggerheads, never more so when it came to the issue of governance and law. The nationalists, though not wholly dismissive of religion, firmly subordinated its role to their new creed, whereas the fundamentalists insisted that the only legitimate rule is that which derives from Islam. Perhaps the latter's most compelling theorist was a man by the name of Sayyed Qutb, mentor to an entire generation of Islamic revolutionaries. A commanding orator and prolific writer, Qutb preached that nationalism, a Western import foreign to the lands of Islam—where the Islamic religious bond had always held sway and united people of different ethnic backgrounds—should forthwith be rejected as a heresy by the Egyptian people. If Egypt were to be true to herself, she would have to return to Islam, her only authentic identity, and fight the divisive Western notion of nationalism. Qutb and his supporters entered into open warfare against what they considered a Westernised, infidel state (Qutb even compared it and its rulers to the much derided pagans of pre-Islamic times), along the way murdering a not insignificant number of Copts for good measure. They were met with a campaign of internment in concentration camps, torture and often execution. Qutb himself was hanged in 1966 for treason. During the peak years of this conflict, Islamic fanatics assassinated many a government official as part of their jihad against the state. Though this trailed off after their insurgency was crushed in the mid-sixties, certain isolated attacks continued for some time, and even intensified in the immediate aftermath of the disastrous Six-Day War in 1967, which served to re-embolden the Islamic current. Viewing Egypt's defeat as

proof positive of Arab socialism's bankruptcy, and seeking to avenge the 'martyrdom' of prominent leaders, the Islamic assassins escalated their attacks. In 1967 or '68 Ammar was killed in one such incident. In his capacity as arguably the most prominent government hack, who in his front page newspaper column had repeatedly branded Qutb a traitor and called for his death, Ammar had earned the enmity of all literate Islamic fundamentalists. After Qutb was indeed executed, Ammar's own violent demise became virtually assured.

Sadeq's trail leads somewhere else entirely. He eventually surfaced in Australia, to which his family apparently immigrated shortly after his expulsion from Stuart, but before the latter was seized by the state (decidedly fortuitous, as this means that they would have left before the circumstances obtaining in Egypt became positively untenable for the Westernised elite). In the seventies Sadeq achieved notoriety as an agitator for an extreme right-wing political party active in the anti-immigration cause and staunchly opposed to the 'Asianisation of Australia'. Either in Sydney or in Melbourne (I do not recall which) he apparently distinguished himself as a spokesman and ideologue-of-sorts for this outfit, writing a regular column in its weekly or monthly organ. Representing the 'intellectual' wing of a party whose members generally spent their time parading about in silly pseudo-military uniforms, Sadeq took great care to emphasise that they were not opposed to immigration per se, only the uncontrolled influx of people who adamantly refused to assimilate into Australia's culturally Western society. The party, he maintained, was not racist, as its values were cultural and not inherent in any specific race. Though first formulated by Westerners, these values were capable of being adopted by all. Touting himself (naturally) as the exemplary assimilated immi-

grant, he lamented successive Australian governments' failure to compel hordes of immigrants (and Aborigines) to discard their backward ways and fully assimilate, pointing specifically to the incompatibility of Western cultural values with those of many of the new entrants. He reserved his harshest criticism, however, for many of the immigrants themselves, especially Moslems from countries such as Indonesia, Pakistan and India, whom he accused of threatening Australia's cultural integrity and trying to subvert its values.

In a striking example of irony the Bard doubtless would have appreciated, Sadeq was set upon one night by a gang of bald-headed youths who were affiliated to his party but neither knew who he was nor cared for nuanced distinctions between race and culture. The severe beating to which he was subjected left him a cripple. Thereafter (the attack occurred in the mid-eighties) he faded into obscurity. A few days after the incident, when the details had become known, one of the major newspapers in Melbourne or Sydney published a lengthy profile of Sadeq and his activities thitherto. Included in the profile was an article—or segment thereof—he had originally published in his party's newsletter. In it he claimed that those colonials, like him (naturally), who had attended Western schools in the colonies, were the true inheritors of Western civilisation, as they had drunk from a pristine fount even as Westerners themselves were being poisoned by socialism, communism and now something called 'postmodernism'. On no account, he warned, should sanction be given to the assault—by everyone from leftists to Moslems—on the classic literary canon, the very basis of Western civilisation. Equally dangerous was the indiscriminate glorification in contemporary Western societies of all things Oriental and 'ethnic'. He then proceeded to affirm that during these tumultuous

times, when Western civilisation was besieged on all fronts—not least in the heart of the West itself—those men and women who had studied at Western schools in former colonies and protectorates were a veritable Ireland in a new dark age.

It remains only to relate to you what became of the recently deceased, who had for the past few decades been living in London. After completing his secondary school studies at another institution in Alexandria, Zahed, whose family was part of the sizeable Levantine community in Egypt, enrolled in the American University of Beirut (formerly the Syrian Protestant College founded by American missionaries), where he read English literature, graduating with a Master's degree in the mid-sixties. He remained in Beirut, to which his parents also repaired when Nasser's economic policies began to take their toll on the community, until 1970, when he immigrated to Britain and settled in London. Albion was kind to Zahed; despite an obdurate conviction that he was somehow entitled to yet more, he did find time to benefit from our munificence. Indeed, but for him, the conclusion to the story of the three stooges who presumed to award their English instructor an 'order' (the ridiculous symbol of which I promptly shredded and discarded) might have been somewhat dour. After a whimsical period during which he rather ludicrously sought to become instructor of English literature at a university, Zahed deigned to accept a job he initially was too supercilious to even consider: teaching elementary Arabic as an elective at a state secondary school. This was in the early seventies, when the first stirrings of multiculturalism induced certain schools to inaugurate courses in Eastern languages. Save for a baffling (and abortive) attempt to return to Beirut with his English wife in 1975 (the outbreak of civil war that year sent them scampering back), he stayed with this job

until the end.

In the early seventies, shortly after arriving in the UK, Zahed made contact with me through a third party—an alumnus of Stuart—asking if I would accept his apologies and be willing to become ‘friends,’ but I refused in no uncertain terms, hardly wishing to have anything to do with the perpetrator of a crime of which I was the victim. Every few years, he would through the good offices of our mutual acquaintance reiterate this request, and on each occasion my response remained unchanged. When, after receiving a telephone call from his wife informing me of his death (cancer, I believe) and his wish that I attend the funeral, I met her, a rather dowdy lower-class woman with an atrocious Cockney accent, she told me that he had always spoken highly of me and of his deep regret for what he had done. She also relayed to me his dying wish that I address the mourners, telling them of what it was like at Stuart in the old days (you will find that they are very sentimental and nostalgic people—the Arabs). This I did, to his widow’s eternal gratitude, thus closing the book on one of my life’s more interesting stories.

Do thank Audrey on our behalf for your wonderful invitation. I should tell you that your wife makes the most exquisite blueberry pies ever tasted by this notorious enthusiast of all things blueberry (I have been trying for aeons to get Chelsea to bake such things, but alas, to no avail!).

I must now attend to a few decidedly mundane matters, so that everything is in order when it comes time for the trip (we must find a house-sitter who meets with the approval of our awfully finicky cat, and this requires advance preparation). We are very much looking forward to seeing you!

Yours, Aldrich Jarvis

Three Poems

A Protest

At LaGuardia
Airport, Homeland
Security confiscated
my lunch: a plastic
container of curried
lentils, sautéed
broccoli and brown
rice. “You idiots!” I
shouted. “Lunch is
not a bomb! Lentils
are not explosive!
Your insane paranoia
is forcing me to starve!”

Backstory

At 12
I was
a mime,
pulling
grapes
out of
the air.

Modern Love

Thanks to
Internet
dating,
I met
17
weirdos.

KEITH MOUL

After a High Pulse

When you left
it was obvious we
hadn't said enough;
or we both had said
too many things wrong.
I turn to the high flyers,
eagles and hawks
circling nearby, pestered
by smaller birds,
not to understand,
but in awe to practice contrition.
Had you stayed, you
would have taken it out
on the soil; and you'll be back,
all right, nearer to dusk,
wanting energy.

Often this happens
after a high pulse,
even in rain.

Experience

So much time is gone.
Like air above hot runways
his spirit memories sizzle;
as with oranges he squeezes
for sweet juice, sweet juice.

Talk is gone; so he explains
the hollow pockets in air;
absent time explains
echoed voices in his mind.

Hollow opportunity echoes
in his speculative cave. She
cannot redeem an instant
that popular wisdom disdains.

A hill crests.
Beyond waits a precipice.
Carrying himself erect

he runs up the hill
with baggage he knows is regret.

He plunges from living
into history.

Jerzy the Composer

HE EVEN COMMANDS HIS SHOES, thought Jerzy, looking out through the centuries-old oozing panes at the twisted and curled up footwear of the hooded man in the parking lot, taping a shattered windscreen.

Behind that new idea three different ideas cycled constantly in Jerzy's mind: the unusual wall upholstery that was skins of red Anjou pear, avocado and pomegranate; the notion that his mother's schizophrenia might have become resolved—both characters finally separated—in her two offspring which would explain, simply, why they could never get along; and that Jerzy had reprised his own body and its capacity for living at a time when most would consider it already well in decline, too late.

The last, of course, was the most fallible of ideas since its ultimate veracity resided wholly within one person: Jerzy, and, even more delimiting, within the short part of his life dating from when he had begun to compose. For who could say when his peak would have been, or when the upward or downward points of inflexion would have occurred had he begun composing earlier? (To do so would mean roaming outside of Jerzy's and among the lives of others, including composers, quite different from Jerzy who was unique). The fact was that Jerzy acknowledged his talent—the disease the talentless are envious of; this umbilical cord that reconnected him to the world, though there was really no 're' about it, it was the first time—at 45, an age when regrets are usually more life-sustaining than conquests because they have begun to fuel what few may still lay up ahead.

But regret was not in Jerzy's repertoire, nor anything so self-assured. In its place was wonder. And when he saw the figure outside in the sleet, stocky and despotically deft in the economy and rapidity of his movements about the car, he wanted to allow him too some talent—a talent for fixing windscreens even, a talent for ignoring the cold, for repetition: all things that he, Jerzy, felt incapable of at that very moment. He wanted to because the figure presumed it at all times, even now, in the present circumstances. It was just a question of Jerzy guessing what that talent might be for, that this man assumed was obvious, and then granting what was deemed due.

The apparent divergence could be nonsense, Jerzy thought, as a heavy-set and bearded Jew plodded past in huge cushioned shoes, interceding and breaking up his former idea; his trousers were rolled up to reveal short thick rabbi's shins. It was one of those ideas that could be supported or crushed in accordance with one's present outlook. Hadn't Vera's mother (Jerzy's grandmother) been a bimetal strip? And hadn't it appeared to resolve into the characters of Vera and her steelhard brother, Jerzy's uncle Robart, who told Jerzy once he would kill him if he heard mention of Vera's name again? Then what had happened? What was still happening? Was it a neverending anastomosis from generation to generation that looked resolved, and neat, up until a certain point when the forking started to show anew?

For years Jerzy had been going the other way, as he called it; and now, seeing the segmental, choppy movements of the man outside he was somehow reminded of that fact so strongly that he weakened, physically, at the notion of trying to turn even a fraction towards the old way again, as he had had to do during the brief visit. The old way was the denial of his imagination—a systematic, minute-by-minute purging that he might better

soothe his mother's sensitivity, now the paradoxical fragility (that only Jerzy knew of) of the man in the parking lot. Tamp, tamp, tamp went the heel of the car-mender's hands in staccato. The sound barely reached Jerzy's ears but became amplified in his brain by his eyes and his helplessly vengeful imagination. The compression of time that brought the constraining past—the deadening suffocation with it—right up to the present, or to its brink, was incomprehensible. It was the greatest of all mysteries about himself. It was the perspective from inside the psychiatric ward, the one thing that he—Jerzy—and only he seemed to command. And only because he had dared to see it.

Outside, after he had finished taping up the shattered windscreen of his car, Jerzy's brother lit a cigarette and drove off. The loud rattle outside, echoing off the windows, merged with the rattle of the serving trolley behind in the corridor, telling Jerzy that it was time for the main meal of the day. ■

Wexo, John Bonnett.

Gorillas / created and written by John Bonnett Wexo. --
Mankato, Minn. : Creative Education, c1991.

24 p. : col. ill. ; 29 cm.

grades

(Minn.)

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CHAD HANSON

Grip

A crowded sidewalk. Chicago. Ronnie walks along. He thinks, “I’ve got a pair of big boy pants. No one has anything on me.” The pants don’t fit. Guess jeans made them for women in the 1990s. He pulls at them and remembers the day that he lost his grip. The desk in his office opened up to become the windshield on the Starship Enterprise. Warp drive. He drank to make it stop. Then came the lawyers and the “peace” officers. In a city park, he holds onto the base of an oak tree. It’s better than clinging to furniture. Tree roots burrow into the soil. They know how to sink.

Shine

When she turned seventeen she bought a pair of boots covered with sequins. She wore them to church. Then she wore them to her grandmother's cabin. She wanted to shine. No one could fault her. Everybody needs to shine. But her grandma thought about water when she looked at the boots. Bodies of water shine sometimes. Lakes ripple whenever it's windy. At times a lake will beam sunlight. Other times they lose their luster. They let people look through them. After dinner, her grandma paddled to the cove at the end of the lake. She let the canoe glide over a spot where she could see the bottom.

Calculations

His company won the contract. They would build the new hydroelectric dam. The engineers gathered in Tulsa: laptops, calculators, and drafting pencils. As a team, they drew up plans. They spent the first day, “operationalizing.” Afterward he met his wife at Applebee’s. During their second glass of wine she asked him about the river. Is it home to fish? Salamanders? Does it nourish any farms along its route? Is it pretty? He didn’t know. The university taught him to calculate. He couldn’t make any judgments.

Past the Backyard

I REMEMBER IT RAINED THE Sunday before grmpa died. Our parents drank Cabernet in the kitchen and talked about Ben Shahn drawings they needed to hang over the fireplace. They all stood around the stove, laughter sizzling like the roast in the oven. But grmpa leaned rigid on his cane to watch us kids through the kitchen window.

In the backyard we jumped from puddle to puddle. Alice and Emily chased each other around the terra cotta sundial, which looked glad to be getting some kind of use in the rain—standing alone in the middle of the lawn. Me and Noah played tag between the oak trees.

Ramona and James used the wide flat stones leading to the screen door for hopscotch pretending they couldn't touch the space in between. The back of the house looked like gram's china teapot, the one she kept on the slanted shelf in the dining room. The house was a little slanted too.

At the table grmpa sighed uneasily over his roast, but he groaned and leaned back in his chair and said, "By god that's delicious." He patted his belly and looked at us kids, wanting to be imitated. We joined him making faces at each other. Eye rolling, tongues hanging out. Our parents leaned on each others shoulders pleased to see their family together in one place. Even the silver knives had a cheerful smile.

After dinner we all sat in the den, rain still sliding down the windows, but we were safe and connected and felt loved. A *New York Times* was passed around. Wine dark coffee instead of Cabernet. And the Steinway plunked out "Send in the Clowns"

thanks to Uncle Eli.

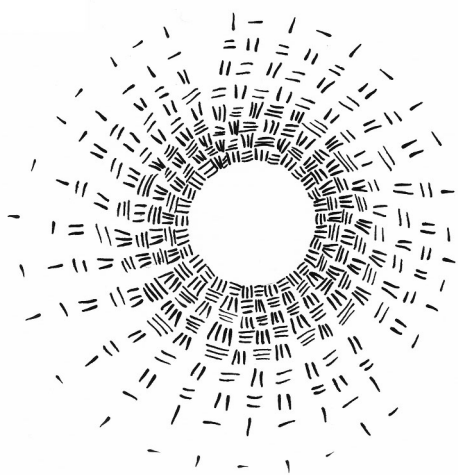
From his chair, grmpa wheezed on his pipe, nodding to the terra cotta sundial in the back yard, as if some specter of the reaper was already waiting outside. He said it reminded him of a story. One he had to tell, one that us kids needed to hear. One that I think my cousins forgot. But a story that I remember well. So we lay on our stomachs at grmpa's feet and listened to his voice roll like thunder over granite mountains.

"In one of the world's deserts—far away—is a village that is a symbol of impatient humanity. A place where people have built their lives on top of rocky spires. They piled boulders, one on top of the other, and smoothed out the sides so no one could reach them. And they climbed a top these spires to sit five hundred feet above the ground for the rest of their lives.

"Now their world ends at the abrupt edge of their little island. Step too far and they plummet to their deaths. And all around are people who had the same idea, to build perch themselves atop these spires, to strand themselves on a rocky island.

"But the most cruel and anguishing thing about this village is that once they have stranded themselves all they want to do is leave. They sit and sit and watch an watch. The sun goes up, the sun goes down, and all they want to do is see the world around them from another point in space. They cry out to the other people around them, 'I wish we could switch places, I wish I could come over their for a little while and you could be over here.' All they want is a little change of scenery, a little change of perspective.

"Some of course have tried to leave their island, have tried to jump across the empty space that separates them from the rest of the world. They fling their bodies out on nothing hoping to land solidly. But all who have tried fall to their deaths unable to



bridge the gap.

“And still, with decaying corpses around the bases of the spires, with buzzards picking at the bones of human remains, new people arrive everyday. To build new spires they can sit on top of. The people on top of their islands shout at them, try to warn them, ‘Stop don’t do it, don’t become like us, keep your feet on the ground,’ and the newcomers say, ‘why, why bother keeping my feet on the ground, they aren’t taking me anywhere. I don’t want to go much farther than a few feet anyway.’ So they continue to build.

“My dear, dear children, do not build your lives on top of stone pillars, keep your feet on the ground. Do not build islands that keep you from leaving that make you their prisoner. You may feel like your life has limits, you may feel like there is not enough time to do everything you want. But you, are limitless, you are infinite so live that way. Do not fear getting old, do not fear dying. Fear never getting out your front door. Fear being stranded by the things and the people around you. Fear waking up every morning with a only a familiar view out your window for company.

“And promise me that you will look after one another. Make sure to look after each other.”

His voice rumbled around the living room for a moment then faded down the hall and up the stairs. He nodded once more at the terra cotta sundial, as if to say goodbye. And on Wednesday he was gone.

With passing years, Gram lived for herself. Lived in her teapot house balanced on its slanted shelf. The cousins grew older and built lives that kept them from visiting home, kept them from seeing their family more than once a year. They studied political science and were given research grants in South

America, had kids of their own. But not me, I never got past the backyard.

Gram died on a Sunday. I came over to have dinner that night, but when I walked in, there was no Cabernet on the table, or roast in the oven. Gram was still in bed, still in her nightgown. And all that was left was a paper saying, “this island I give to you, do with it what you may.”

So I picked out her casket. The cousins cooked the lunches and kept me from doing anything in my own house. “Stay off your feet. You’ve done enough.” Ramona wept silently over dry dishes and smoked salmon. Nieces and nephews ran around the terra cotta sundial in the backyard. We watched them play through the kitchen window. For the first time the house felt whole again, like a cycle had come back around. I looked for a bottle of Cabernet to show them how nice it would be if we could get together every week like this. Talk about Ben Shahn drawings and watch the kids jump from puddle to puddle. They would stay, move in to the community, they wouldn’t abandon me here to sit on top of their own islands.

But they left me with stacks of boxes piled on one another, creating cardboard columns I had to look upon. Reminders of a lesson unlearned and doomed to be repeated. I saw myself, with great grandnieces and nephews gathered around my feet, retelling a story that rolled through the halls of this house like thunder through a granite valley. “People have built their lives on stone columns,” all the time the terra cotta sun dial nodding at me from its place in the middle of the lawn and the whole house slanted like a china teapot perched on the very edge of a shelf. Perhaps they will learn what we could not. ■

Museum Piece

Boy: *(in a sniveling tone)* I don't get why people ever played old video games. They're boring! No story, no ambience.

Father: *(incredulous, with a tone of alarm)* Have you ever heard of Pacman?

Boy: *(taken aback by the vehemence of his father's response)* Y-yeah...

Father: Think about it. It's like Kafka wrote a Lovecraft story... *Pacman* is the story of a man who wakes up one day to find he is nothing but a mouth.

[Scene: Pacman in the maze. He says: "No."]

All his dreams, hopes, desires, sensations... all atavized into a primal consumptive urge. He's trapped in a maze with no exit, but his focus on consumption is so overwhelming, so sensual, that he doesn't even notice.

But in the maze there are ghosts. Departed spirits.

(turning to his son, as if remembering he wasn't alone)
Do you know why they chase him?

Boy: (*beginning to grow uncomfortable*) N-no?

Father: Ghosts can't eat...

They envy eaters because food is the domain of the quick, and they've been dead so long they find eating not only depressing, but repulsive.

Then a being appears who is only mouth. Only there to eat. Only there to remind them, with the crunch and gush of its mastications, that they will never again know the warmth of a beating heart or the contentedness of a lover's bed.

So they pursue the mouth, loathing each food pellet as they pass it, hating the fruit that haunts even ghosts—the tantalizing product of whatever mad creator built this labyrinth.

When the mouth eats them, they find an almost erotic solace. Impotent voyeurs, they live vicariously as they twist through the tangled viscera of the mouth-man.

But with each psychic excursion, the ghosts recall their purgatorial state with renewed horror and grow faster, and faster, and faster.

Until the mouth can run no more, and the dead fall upon it. Unable to digest, they destroy. And the mouth, whose curious nerves existed only for sensuous taste

and tactile stimulation, finds those very nerves to be his final torturer as he is ripped into oblivion.

And then... the game begins again.

Boy: (*blanching*) Old games are horrifying.

Father: (*gazing into the offing*) Oh, don't get me started on *Centipede*. ■

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Plamínek naděje, 1918

The light is failing over the sea : an opaque
Glow in the water and in the sand. The wind
Carries with it a low moan from the figures
Gathered on the shore. Their voices founder

On the air, seeming to join with the passing
Of the tide, the soft movement of the earth.
It may be a litany and it may be a song.
A follower stands, arms open, head inclined,

As if in supplication. He watches the sands
Dance as the wind works through them, and
The meaningless motion of a woman who sobs
At his feet. He is still. He sees his inheritance.

Someone has placed a glass lamp in a recess
Of the sand, and the flame moves gently as if
Submerged, casting slow shapes before it.
At a distance, more figures, more dim lights.

They have gathered to watch Komenský die.
Hours since they took him up from his bed,
At the bidding of his frail voice. Hours since
They sat his shrouded body at the summit of
A small prospect, in his death's chair of cane.

He wished to look upon the darkling sea.
His figure is black against it and as crooked
As the blade of a scythe, his face obscure

Where he nods upon oblivion. The followers
Train upon the idea of his thought. His body
Shudders insignificantly : it seems to them
That a lesser light falls from his bent form.

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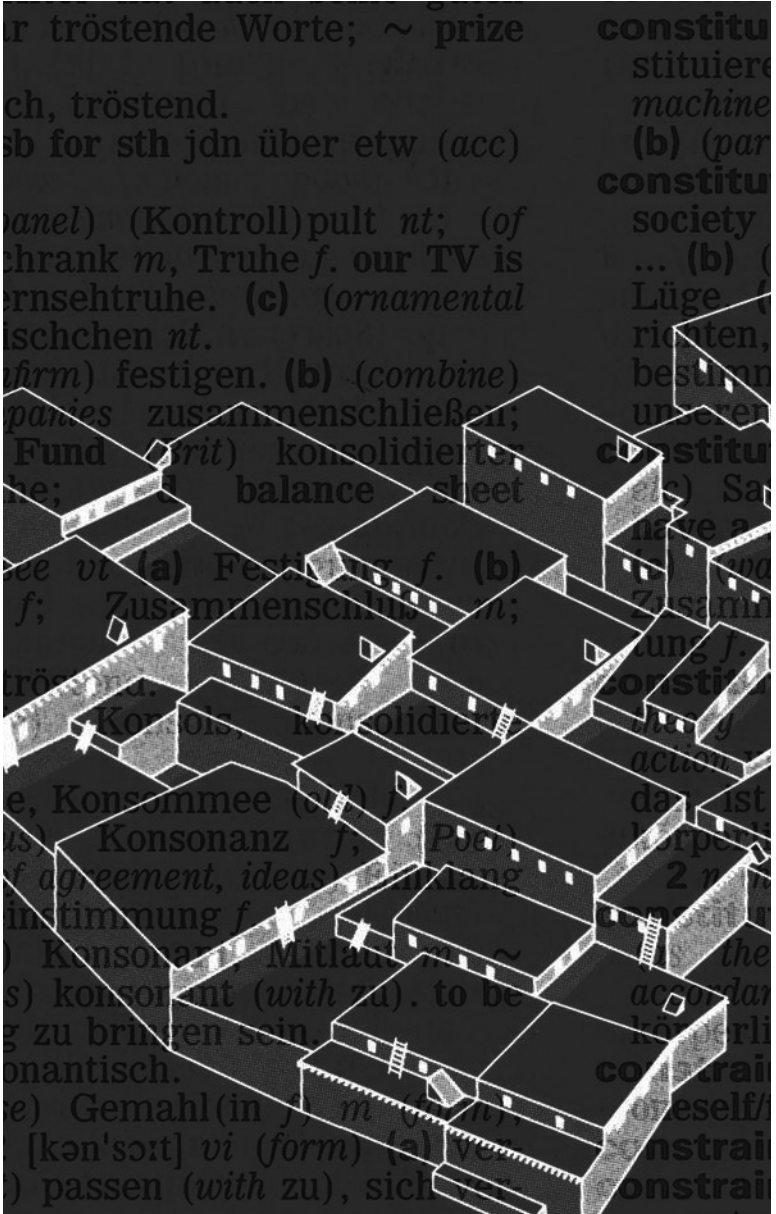
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LAURIN BECKER MACIOS

Backbone of Existence

You're the backbone of a constant battle
pressing the keys of daily depression
rigorously deep down hard and boiling—
crunching numbers, crunching abs, crunching
spines. You're the maker met with a puppied eye
and a dog-eared bible. You're the one to run from.
You're the cold breath streaming from a barreling
steam engine, and the proud earth's thrust to get ahead
on time.

LAUREN DAVIS

Planted Beds

My friend says, I'm sorry you hurt, a breast in his lips.
I'm sorry he broke your heart. He lifts my dress.
The flowerbeds are overrun with clover and crabgrass.
Only one blueberry bush survived winter.
I'm considering coffee grounds to acidize the soil,
my teeth in his shoulder. What are you thinking of?
Stay present, he says, sucking on my hipbone. I once loved
a man so much I cut off all my hair. Loved a man so much
I came to in the ER aisle strapped down, yelling
about the chill. I'm not good with restraint. I killed a cactus
because I insisted it daily drink. How does this feel,
my friend wants to know, his face buried below. Good, I say.
Very good. I arch my neck for display. I saw
from the beginning there wasn't enough dirt in the plots
for the blueberry bushes to survive. I gardened anyways.
Last summer I even bought a watering can to match
my gloves. Now I rely on rain. The sky's been dry
for twenty days. His mouth drums up water
between my thighs. Red roots wash past the bed's
boundary, memory of a man choked by wild growth.

The Time Garden

WHEN WE FIRST MOVED TO Berlin, we rented an apartment in a turn of the century Jugendstil Altbau building with six floors. The ceilings were very high, and the stairs were very steep. Our apartment was on the top floor, and we would both be out of breath by the time we climbed up. Climbing those stairs never got any easier it seemed, even after time.

Our apartment had views onto a back courtyard garden, shared by three other buildings. Throughout the first winter the trees, bushes, and grass were coated in deep snow. There was never anyone there as no one was permitted to enter the garden. Sometimes, as I stood gazing down from our living room window, I saw other people staring down also from their apartments in the opposite and adjacent buildings. I imagined they too felt a longing to be in the garden and they also felt the absence of children, of dogs, of music, of old people sitting on benches. A single, solitary stone statue of a female figure crouched in the corner in the bushes. Only the large Berlin fog crows, the *Nebelkrähen*, felt free to be in that isolated white space.

The garden came to symbolize the restraint and containment of our new neighbors and my loneliness as a foreigner in a new city. If we were lucky, our neighbors nodded to us as we passed them on the stairs; few words were ever spoken out loud. No one in the building ever asked where we were from, why we were there, if we needed anything. All through that first, isolated Berlin winter, I looked down at the garden on a daily basis. Often, the melancholy sound of someone practicing cello would drift out from one of the other apartments and travel up

to me across the lifeless, snow covered lawn.

We had moved to the city, in part, so I could continue my research on the lives of ordinary German Jews before the Second World War. It was for this reason that I wanted us to live in this old, once Jewish neighborhood. I spent my days scouring through local antique shops and markets looking for old memorabilia, old photographs, record books, wedding keepsakes, diaries, and letters. I used the names, the dates, and any other information I could glean for my work, making detailed notes from which I hoped to see patterns and understand information about genealogy, culture, and facts.

Sometimes, at the market, I found old Jewish wedding keepsakes inside heavy, ugly frames called Hochzeitsbilder. I would have to ask for help from my husband to get these home. Once we got them in, he would help me open them with a stanley knife to loosen the frame from the backing. Inside, there would be all kinds of memorabilia. Often, I found little black and white photos with a bride and a groom, never appearing fully happy, both with a terrified expression on their impossibly young faces. The grooms never seemed as handsome as the brides were pretty. Sometimes there were bridal garlands, tiny wax flowers strung artfully on arched wire, or minute fabric myrtle leaves and flowers. Often, there were small satin hearts encased along with the garlands which bore the name and wedding or anniversary dates of the original bride and groom; these I carefully added to my records.

The marriages seemed to me to be entities in their own right, two souls, monstrously entwined, encased and festering behind glass for decades. I came to think of it as my duty to release these poor, trapped pockets of energy.

One day we carried home a particularly heavy Hochzeitsbild

in the snow. In the same antique shop, I had also found an enormous old lace bridal veil which I carried home draped around my shoulders.

“Surely, you don’t need that thing for your work?” said my husband. “It smells musty and old. There is something creepy about it.”

I pulled the delicate fabric tighter around myself and breathed in the smell.

On the long climb up to our apartment, we passed the silent old man who lived on the same floor. We often passed him, and it seemed we were always bringing home antiques or heavy shopping. Like many of our neighbors, he never looked at us, he never spoke. But his face was rich in pain and feeling.

My husband muttered, “What a miserable old asshole!”

I wanted to say, *But he has so many stories to tell. He belongs to the spaces between the being of things.* But instead I just helped my husband carry up the heavy antique.

“Are you sure you need so much of this stuff?” he said as we finally got it inside. It had been exhausting carrying it home in the snow. I draped the old lace veil across the back of a chair. I saw a tightness in my husband’s face as he gazed around at our apartment now cluttered with dusty, old things.

We pulled the Hochzeitsbild into the living room and found the knife to loosen the frame. As the glass was lifted away, I imagined the spirits inside fluttering out, shimmering, barely visible.

As the snow cleared in late winter, I was able to see the Stolpersteine outside our building and in the surrounding streets, the little brass plaques set amongst the cobbles of the pavements, inscribed with the names of the Jewish people who once lived in the buildings. They showed the dates of birth and the

dates of death. And the name of the camp that they had been taken to. Of course, all of this data was perfect for my records. I spent many hours wandering the neighborhood, carefully photographing each plaque, then transcribing the information when I got home.

In quiet moments, sitting at my desk, cataloging the photographs of the plaques, I found myself bracing as though against a sudden, angry banging on the door. I heard screams, not with my ordinary senses, but in a distant, inner place.

That year, I often had trouble sleeping at night. I would wake in the early hours of the morning and my husband would be breathing heavily next to me.

Standing at the living room window, looking down onto the courtyard garden, the loneliness of that green space seemed to exert a magnetic pull on me. And then one night, as though the edges of my consciousness had slipped into dreams, I saw shapes begin to glide across the lawn, shadowy beings, flickering like figures from an old black and white silent movie.

Night after night, I watched them, transfixed, standing there until my husband got up too. He never looked down to the garden, he never saw the shapes. He just put his hand on my shoulder and said, "Are you coming back to bed?"

It was after I started seeing the beings in the garden that I began to understand that there was another world, lingering under the surface of the living one. It was always there, just out of reach. Like a double negative, superimposed, one world layered on the other. I began to long for that other world. I looked for it in the antiques I gathered, in the facts I found, in the faces of the old people, in the Jugendstil facades, in the plaques on the street, in the courtyard garden as I stood night after night at my window, gazing out at those strange shapes moving across the lawn.

As the weather warmed up, we walked the cobbled streets together, taking in the soft murmur of people sitting outside the cafes, the smell of cigarettes and perfume in the air.

We stopped to look at the Jugendstil buildings, to gaze up at the fairy tale like facades, the little cherubs and faces of maidens, scrolls and flowers and ornate details.

My husband said, "I really don't like these buildings, they are too fussy and too close together. And there just aren't enough English speakers in this area of the city. Just as soon as we can, we must move to a different neighborhood. I can't stand living here. Either that, or we go back to New York."

I looked up, to the blue space above the buildings, to the endless clear sky.

After that, the dreams began. The dreams where I entered The Other World. I came to understand that The Other World was rich and deep and textural in a way that those left behind would never know. They would not hear the groan of the wooden stairs as I travelled down them by night, my hands trailing the cool polished banisters, my being casting no shadow on the high white walls. They did not hear me pause outside each of their locked doors, and listen to the gentle murmur of their sleeping minds. As I glided effortlessly down the stairs I knew that I would never be heard or seen. As I passed each locked apartment door, I was aware of the soft drift of light behind my neighbors' eyelids as they lay sleeping in their winter beds and I knew what they were seeing in the twilight shadow universes we call dreams. In The Other World, I could hear the most intimate sounds, the subtlest of nuanced realities, even the sleeping sensations of the dark city mice huddled in their nests inside the antique walls. I knew about the past soaked deep into the stone of our building, so many layers of it, the experience of all

those that lived there before integral to the structure as surely as the plaster and the planks of wood beneath my bare feet.

In the spring, the trees in the courtyard garden exploded with white blossoms and many small, pretty birds arrived. People began to sit on their balconies. I watched a woman with red hair plant flowers in little pots and drink wine every evening with a young man wearing glasses. Another couple came out to smoke and drink coffee.

Later, when summer was finally upon us, the air above the courtyard garden was always filled with white fluffy seedpods. The smell of myrtle flowers reached my nose. The dignified loneliness of the garden began to feel comforting to me. From my window, I watched the small birds settle on the stone woman's head.

Summer came and went and merged into fall. Soon winter was upon us again. One night, when we hadn't seen the sun for weeks and snow had been falling for days, I woke up again in the small hours. I left the warm bed with my husband snoring next to me and I walked to the window in the living room and looked out at the garden, just as I had come to do every night. Dark clouds were drifting across the full moon and casting moving shadows across the tall white walls. As I stood there and relaxed my mind, once more I could see the flickering, shadowy shapes moving across the white lawn.

I shivered; I was only wearing a nightgown and no shoes. I imagined my husband was about to come and get me to bring me back to bed, but he didn't. I walked back to the bedroom and as I was about to get back into bed I saw with a shock that my side of the bed was not empty. There was a sleeping woman already there. I stared for some time at the woman's face in the moonlight; her fading hair curled around her old-young fea-

tures, sleeping next to the man who I knew was her husband.

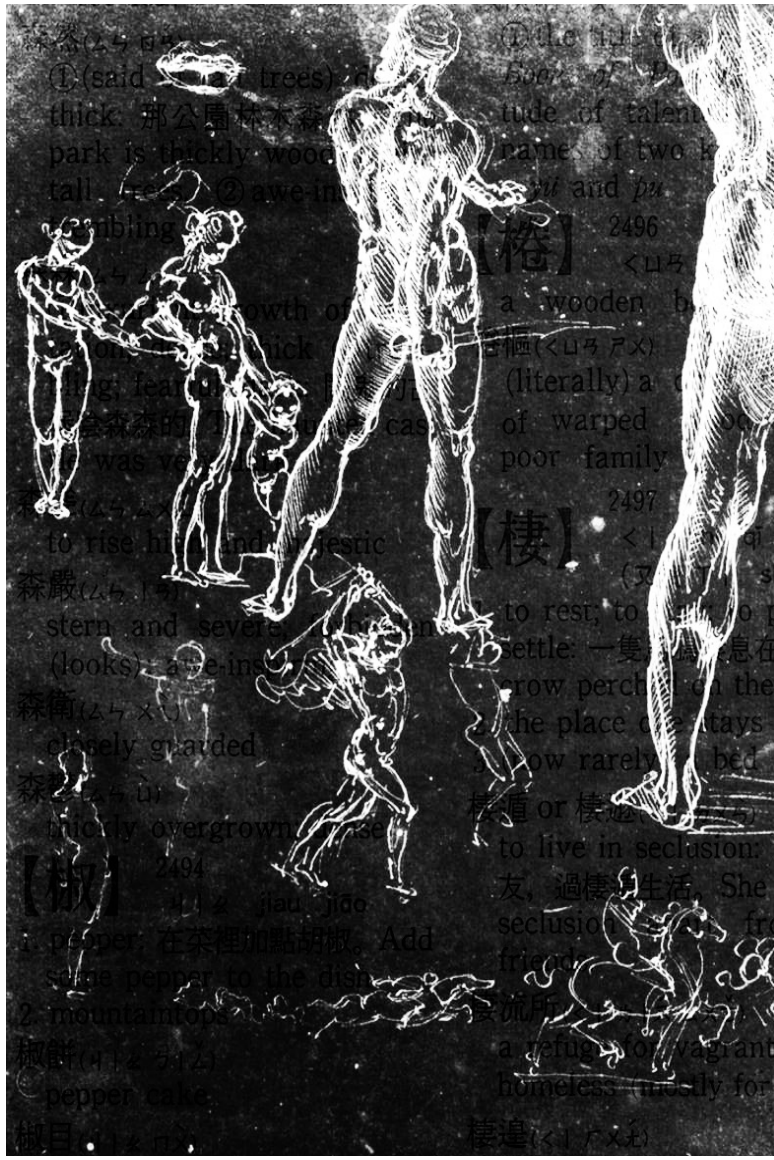
With a rush of understanding, I knew that I was looking at my own self, still sleeping there, back in the living world. And however much I might try, I knew I could never again fit myself back into the stifling case that was that body, that was that marriage, that life. Out of the corner of my eye, I seemed to perceive a slight fluttering in the air.

Effortlessly, I took the lace veil and tied its abundant, musty folds around myself. I opened the living room window and climbed up on the sill.

I heard the calling clearly now. The others were waiting for me, down on the lawn.

It all happened in one instant, and yet a world of sensations surged through me as I fell. The veil like a dying bird, undulated violently around my flailing body. The biting Northern cold. In those few moments, I experienced all the grief and joy of the building that had ever been, the condensed human history, the weeping and the laughter, every smile and every loss; births, deaths, marriages, celebrations and ceremonies.

I landed as softly as the falling snow. ■



森然(シヨウゼン) 森然(シヨウゼン)

①(said of trees) thick. 那公園林木森然 park is thickly wooded tall. ②awe-inspiring

③(said of a person) with a stern and severe (looks) 森嚴(シヨウゼン)

森密(シヨウミツ) 森密(シヨウミツ) closely guarded

森嶺(シヨウリョウ) 森嶺(シヨウリョウ) thickly overgrown

【榎】 榎(エノキ) 榎(エノキ) cedar

榎(エノキ) 榎(エノキ) cedar

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DAVID LEWITZKY

Poem Beginning with a Line by Christopher Smart

“Rejoice with Pegasus The Flying Horse – there be millions of them in the air”

Rejoice with Icarus The Foolish Falling Child – there be a million pulsing sunbeams of him, bathing us, anointing us – that we be filled with derring-do and dreams

Rejoice with Magic Carpet, Tour Guide, Barker, Tout and Train – there be millions waiting in the alleyways, hanging out at bus stops, right outside our door – that we may learn to locate joy

Rejoice with Pineapple Orange Grapefruit Lemon Lime – there be citrus magnifications of millions on all the tables of the sky – that we may lick and sip them as we please – that we may gorge ourselves with beauty

Rejoice with Pastry Shop and Soda Shop and Chop House – there be a million cities filled with them eternal everywhere right here – that we may dine on good red meat and all the ice cream we can eat

Rejoice with all the Slapstick Comic Angels Vulva Penis Boobs and Butt – there be a million of them, troupers all and free of charge, in vaudeville burlesque music hall temples churches tabernacles – that we may live and die in sexual joy and laughter, top banana, open zipper, pie in the face

Rejoice with Charlatan, Snake Oil Scamp, and Yellow Brick – there be millions of adventurers in skyfield, townfield, worldfield Edens – that we may walk down golden roads

and dream

Rejoice with Roughhouse Gibraltar Ape our pal and body-guard – there be a million poses of him, playing and wrestling, tickling us in our back yards – that we may live our lives with trust

Rejoice with Spider Web and Silver Dew for artistry and longevity – there be a million galleries filled with them in the galleries and attics of the sky – that we overflow with beauty, ceremony, creativity

Rejoice with Quasimodo and his telescope – he be multitudes, looking after us from a million cloudy steeples – that we become companion to invisibility

Rejoice with Bach the organist and family man – there be a million choirs and combos of him, a million minyans of him in the morning air – that we may wake up blissfully

Rejoice with crazy old Kit Smart – he be a million children singing love and joy to us in wacky and naïve, prophetic voices; calling out to us from a phone booth in a loony bin in Paradise – that we may walk courageously through life

Rejoice with Roget, Webster, Samuel Johnson – they be an endless stream of drowsing lexicographers in a million heavenly lecture halls and classrooms, dreaming into our dreams a stereopticon of words and histories and visions – that we may speak together ceaselessly with fondness

Rejoice with Gandhi, Isaiah, Mary the Madonna, Martin Luther King and Rodney King, rejoice with all the Peacemakers – for they be our friends and family, and they climb stairways, mountains, ladders, and return multiplied in millions like the rain, and bring us into light – that we be blessed and we endure

TED RICHER

Screaming:

I was—

walking along the road.

Munch was *with two friends—*

and saw *the sun set—*

felt a tinge of melancholy.

To Munch—

Suddenly—

the sky became bloody red.

Munch *stopped—*

leaned against the railing—

dead tired—

and looked at the flaming clouds—

that hung like blood—

and a sword—

over the blue-black fjord of the city.

The friends walked on.

Munch stood there—

trembling with fright—

and felt a loud, unending scream—

piercing nature—

there—

I was—

looking at the painting...

felt the original despair—

like Munch.

And felt a loud, unending scream—

piercing me.

Salvation

She was singing on street corners:

jesus loves me

I heard her—in the early morning.

I heard her—in the early evening.

jesus loves me

. . .

This morning I passed her by.

She was singing and handing out leaflets:

JESUS SAVES!

I passed on by.

“God’s message!” she called.

I passed by.

“Save yourself!” she called.

I passed on.

Behind me, I could hear her loud singing:

jesus loves me/this I know

. . .

This evening I passed her by.

She was singing and handing out leaflets:

JESUS SAVES!

I passed on by.

“God’s message!” she called.

I passed by.

“Save yourself!” she called.

I passed on.

Behind me, I could hear her soft singing:

jesus hates me/this I know

I stopped—

And waited.

We passed on—to my room in Yahv’s house.

ANDREW CHENEVERT

Haiku from Behind the Ice Cream Counter

i

the hours empty
minds or freezers depending
on the day's weather

ii

no one comes in so
I can't build to a rhythm
of caring for them

iii

the register sticks
and I explain awkwardly
that change will take time

iv

my job requires
me to be subservient
to the rude children

v

packing pints is hard
I make dramatic faces
garner sympathy

vi

what I want the most
is an opportunity
to prove I'm human



TOM SIMMONS INTERVIEWED BY SANDY SOOHOO

The Way He's Living

*Earlier this year, Sandy Soohoo, a former editor of this journal, spoke with Tom Simmons (himself a former Clarion head, and author of the short story collection *Ways I Could Be Living* forthcoming from Pen & Anvil) about his influences and aspirations as an up-and-coming writer.*

SS: Maybe you could tell me a little bit about your experience at Boston University and how it did or didn't shape your voice as a writer?

TS: My official stance on my experiences at college and how they helped me become a better writer is that the school taught me how I did not want to write. It's true that BU did a wonderful job in strengthening my grammar-chops, there's no doubt about that, but after that I didn't derive much, if any inspiration from the classroom. Whenever I took a class on writing it seemed that my professors wanted to me to learn how to write mediocly instead of write to my potential. So I'd sit in classes and watch what the professors were doing and think to myself, "Okay. This is exactly what I *don't* want to do."

It was outside of the classroom during my time at BU that most helped my writing. The Writers' Workshop was an invaluable tool for all three of my years attending college. Discipline and how to listen were the two *very* big les-

“TEACHERS WERE HAPPY
TO SEE YOU SUCCEED
SO LONG AS YOU WENT
DOWN AN UNINVENTIVE
PATH RATHER THAN SEE
YOU FAIL AND TRY SOME-
THING DIFFERENT.”

sons I got out of attending meetings, by taking on the burden of having something written for almost every meeting, and eventually running the meetings myself.

And just in general college exposes you to so many different types of people from so many different backgrounds at so many different points of understanding and maturity in their lives... it's like being dropped into the middle of some sort of primordial soup, getting to learn how everyone becomes the way they will. Not to mention it was the house I lived in my last year that led me to write my first novel.

Are you from near Boston or far away? And also, what are you doing now in Chicago?

I grew up on Long Island. I'm in Chicago because I needed better work than what I was doing in New York City, which was barely keeping my head above water, money-wise, and the Chi was the first place to offer me a good job. I don't feel comfort-

able talking about my actual work. Let's just say it's a paralegal position that pays very well for a liberal arts graduate.

Do you prefer one city to the other?

It's really tough to say which city I prefer. I'm actually not in the heart of Chicago yet, I'm in this town a little north of it called Evanston which is a pretty bland place ("A Manhattan for old people" is how I described it once, and I think that might still work), but I think once I'm moved into Chicago I am going to prefer it to Boston. Don't get me wrong, I liked Boston while in college, it served its purpose, but I think it might be a little too small and young for me now. An example is I found a bar in Chicago a few weeks back where I had a conversation with a 40-year-old woman about every old thing, from drug use to Salinger. I don't get the impression that that would be as easy to do in Boston. Not in Allston, at least.

What do you mean when you say professors wanted you to write mediocrely? Do you mean to a certain kind of standard that wasn't your own?

Your second sentence, yes. It always felt as if teachers were happy to see you succeed so long as you went down an uninventive path rather than see you fail and try something different. This was especially alarming when I took a creative writing class. I don't know if you read my story "Prank," but it was workshopped, and it was one of these situations where a lot of the students enjoyed it, but the teacher had objections because it didn't fit the conventional mold of a story: "No tension" was her complaint, even after one of my classmates explained how

there was tension in a an unconventional way. Not to mention my creative writing teacher didn't know what flash fiction was. The whole thing was just a little shocking.

Do you think that the environment you're in has a direct effect on the kinds of things you're writing? This is something I think I'm always struggling with as a writer. I'm always like: if I just GO to this *certain* place everything will come out of me, exactly the way it should. But it's not really like that. So I guess what I'm asking is how have you found all your changes of urban scenery to affect your work? Do you think your characters are risen from the landscape somehow?

Oh, that's a great question about environment! And a tricky one, too! On one hand environment has never been much of an area of inspiration for my writing. I don't have much interest in specific locations because I never want to alienate a reader with a place that they're unfamiliar with. That's why I like to write stories where the most description given to a town is "the town" so that they can conjure up whatever town they most relate to. So no, I don't think my characters rise from the landscape too often. Maybe once or twice. I find more material in conversations with people or going out and doing things with the people I care about.

Could you explain to me a little bit about the thought process behind *Ways I Could Be Living*? Where did it come from in your mind?

Ways I Could Be Living came from a lot of places over a very long period of time. I don't think it's a very thematically con-

sistent collection of short stories, and that's sort of why I like it—there's a lot of range in what's collected, it sort of hops all over the place, so to say it came from one place would be incorrect. Some of it came from my infatuation with putting normal people in situations where it is unclear how they should or are expected to react (I've always been interested in the places society has forgotten about or has turned a blind eye too); some of it came from asking myself big questions and trying to answer them in my work; some of it came from images that popped in my head when listening to a certain song or after having seen a certain movie.

What authors are/were most influential to you? Do you think these influences have changed over the years?

There are a lot of influential authors for many different reasons, too. When it comes to craft, I'm all about the modernist writers—Hemingway, Stein, Dos Passos all left pretty big imprints in my brain about how to write. When it comes to content, a lot of the Russians—Olesha, Kharmis, Gorky, Gogol, Bulgakov—helped me realize that I didn't have to write about myself, my family, or anything like that. It sounds weird to say (or type), but realizing as a fiction writer that you can actually make up a story, in light of so much writing that hinges on “realism,” was very important for me. I think these influences have changed over the years in that I no longer pay much attention to them. Those writers were like training wheels—I've done enough on my own that I don't think I really need them anymore. Not from a writing perspective, at least. Or maybe the influences are just more scattered and varied. Like there have been stories I've written where I've thought to myself “I want

to write this and have Dan Clowes make it into a comic,” and that’s the most Dan Clowes has been involved in anything I’ve ever done.

Do you have a favorite book?

I definitely don’t have *one*, but some favorites are *USA* (Dos Passos), *Tree of Smoke* (Johnson), *Dead Souls* (Gogol), *Crime and Punishment* (Dostoevsky), *McTeague* (Norris), among a bunch of others. I’m very critical as a reader, so it’s tough for me to say there’s a “best book” out there, but I do love all the ones I listed, along with many others.

Let’s talk some more about *Ways I Could Be Living*. Are these really ways you could be living? I suppose anything is a “way” you “could” be living. Is the title meant to be somewhat of a pun given the content of this collection and the somewhat disturbing scenarios that take shape throughout different stories?

I named the collection *Ways I Could Be Living* after I realized that almost every short story contains a portion of myself that, had I handed over complete control to in these developmental, early-twenties years of my life, could have completely changed the way I am living now. The title is not supposed to focus on the scenarios taking place so much as the characters who are involved. Like I said, I like to write about normal people in weird situations, and I generally like to think that all the hypothetical me’s in these stories are normal, except that they chose to associate themselves with certain idiosyncrasies of my own personality stronger than others. There’s the asshole me, there’s the neurotic me, the clever/charming me, the push-over me,

the violent me, the self-loathing me... were one of these me's to overtake the others, then that becomes a potential character I want to experiment with, and that character pops up in my fiction. That's how it's an exploration of ways I could be living.

What is your stance on plot structure?

I never got too mixed-up with structure. I found that the more self-conscious I become about issues like that, the more self-conscious my writing becomes. I tend to write my fiction as if I were visualizing it as a movie. As such, any structure I do is very visual, I never try to dissect it too much verbally.

I'm interested in the way these stories draw their tension from the disparity between the characters and their given situations, with an unnerving incongruity between actions and tone. Is this your intention? What are you trying to evoke in your readers?

There is certainly supposed to be a tension between characters and the situations they encounter, just as much as I try to find a tension between the characters and how they finally decided to handle these situations. What I am trying to evoke out of readers is dialogue about these tensions. Because so much of what happens in my stories is unusual and tends to blur the lines of right and wrong, I don't expect readers to have one universal agreement on whether what happened was good, bad, stupid, beautiful, or disgusting, which in turn I hope will get people talking about what to make of these situations and hopefully build up an empathy with what might normally be an unsavory character. I'm trying to remind people that lots of times the only reason the person on the nightly news isn't you is because you

were never forced to make such big decisions.

My tone is probably a reflection of how easily people allow themselves into histrionics. By maintaining a calm and unbiased tone, I think I'm hoping to keep people from flipping out.

How do you know what kinds of decisions anyone has ever been forced to make?

I don't know what decisions people have been forced to make. What I do know is that people would be forced to make decisions in the situations I create around them in my writing. I also like to think that the situations I create are magnifications of similar situations that are more common in real life, like having to kill a captured mouse, or getting into a bar fight, or internalized feelings of inappropriate lust. So I sort of take inspiration from those.

How would you describe the content of these stories to a stranger, as an examination of chaos theory?

I think if I needed to explain this book to a stranger I'd simply tell them it's a bunch of people having to deal with weird or shitty situations. I don't think it's an examination of chaos theory so much an examination of how people handle themselves when they have no points of reference to fall back on. When I say points of reference, I mean things like movies or television. I'm interested in how people react to things when the hypothetical has never been acted out for them in the past.

Would you say these characters and stories have a theme they are trying to convey?

The big theme I think the stories are trying to convey is; Nobody really knows what the fuck they are doing, which is okay, we just need to admit it and keep trying our best.

How much of these stories are drawn from real situations? Do you have a connection to any of the characters in particular? If yes, why?

I am racking my brain and I don't think any of these stories are directly related to any real-life situations. I mean, they're certainly related to real-life experiences, and some of the characters are based on real-life people, but to be honest none of the stories, the way things happened, or the interesting things that happened to my knowledge ever really happened in real life. Like, I wouldn't be surprised if someone was living in Montana on 9/11 and got a call from someone and thought it was a sick joke, but I don't know if that's the case. I often write about real-life situations for my own personal pleasure, so I think it's difficult for me to try and mesh them into my fiction. Real-life situations serve their purpose elsewhere, I guess.

I did get an overwhelming sense of nihilism from these stories: do you view your characters and their situations as ways of exposing some kind of truth about "meaninglessness" or are they trying to uphold a sort of validity to ideas of existential uncertainty?

Between meaningless and uncertainty, I'd be lying if I didn't pick the former as my normal way of thinking. One thing from which I still draw inspiration is a line by William S. Burroughs, which I just searched online to avoid misquoting:

I had the feeling that all over America such stupid arguments were taking place on street corners and in bars and restaurants. All over America, people were pulling credentials out of their pockets and sticking them under someone else's nose to prove they had been somewhere and done something. And I thought someday everyone in America will suddenly jump up and say 'I don't take any shit!' and start pushing and cursing and clawing at the man next to him.

I think the drive to remind people that showing off is really useless and childish because one day if you don't kill yourself you're going to get old and shit your pants despite all the money you made is a pretty big one. Humans are by nature hypocrites. How can you try to prove you matter when you are preordained not to stick steadfastly to your own principles?

Would you say you're a cynical person or an optimist?

Cynic or optimist? I know it might sound weird, but I think I'm an optimist. I think you sort of have to be an optimist when you are constantly hung-up on people and their problems, because you have to hope there's going to be a way to fix those problems and make things better for everyone.

What's your idea of a normal person? Someone without idiosyncrasies that have been disproportionately developed?

I don't think there are lots of people out there I wouldn't consider normal. Everyone sort of has the same big-name desires but approaches them differently, which makes people different, but I think they're all still normal. So I guess being nor-



mal means having any number of those big-name desires. Love, power, contentment would be the first three that come to mind, but it's not something I've thought about a lot, and I get the feeling there's a whole essay over what I'm talking about here.

What kinds of responsibilities do you think we have as writers? Maybe not just writers, but artists in general. From your perspective, is there a place in art for social/political commentary?

The biggest responsibility we have as writers is to tell the truth. I think any other responsibilities that could be listed come directly as a result of writing as honestly as possible. In a sense I think that by being honest and objective in writing we consequently make social/political commentary. The way a person thinks, the way a person acts—the *reasons* for the way a person thinks, the way a person acts—are the bases of all social and political issues.

What would you say your political outlook is?

I guess I'm probably left-leaning. I think being fiscally conservative is the same as being the kid in pre-school who doesn't share, I think there is still a great deal of racism, sexism, homophobia, and irrational hate out there, and I am not an exception to that fact, and I think of nationalism as a pretty great hustle. I would never describe myself as left-leaning, though, because I might feel pressured to agree with things I normally wouldn't agree with if I stood on my own. I just try and practice common sense while avoiding selfishness.

How does one empathize with characters who seem alienated from any sense of personal responsibility? The tense, atypical situations rise in a way that removes agency from the characters as if to render them free of blame. Would you rather have readers chew on the relative absurdity of the situations than relate to a cast of characters who are disaffected, as in “Prank” and “The Great American Hangover”?

Alienation is a big word when it comes to my fiction. To me, empathy is too easy, and I don't think the consuming public is running short of writing/TV/movies that they can empathize with. So it's sort of, Why do the same? I'm hoping that a lack of empathy forces readers to think about what they are reading, ask themselves questions a more reader-friendly text would never bring up. As for lack of personal responsibility, I try and write about the moments that precede any concerns about personal responsibility. I think, with “Prank” for example, if a person wants to go through with such an absurd situation (just like any other more realistic but still terrifying situation), a person cannot get hung up on personal responsibility. Just like there are times to grieve and there are times to fight. My fiction is more interested in those moments of fight, when people forget about consequences because they have dived into something with no turning back.

Do you think setting aside a sense of personal responsibility falls into the same categories of times of grief and times “to fight”?

I think personal responsibility is directly related to actions like fighting or grieving. We experience grief when we are surrounded by a static environment. In a static environment we're

able to think about the damage our potentially negative actions might have caused because there are no pressing matters to distract us. We do things in the heat of a moment without thinking about personal responsibility because we don't have the time to, and then, when we are finished doing these things, and the dust has settled, and we are allowed to once again preoccupy ourselves with our thoughts, we can recognize our personal responsibility, the consequences of our negative actions, and because we are no longer distracted by immediate action, these consequences eat at us, make us sad, make us miserable, and make us, in one way or another, grieve.

A simpler example of this can be those nights we go out and drink too much and do terrible things but only realize what we've done and feel miserable about it until the next morning, when we've sobered up. I hope this answers the question, it certainly is enough words!

What kinds of characters justify a side stepping of traditional notions of morality without slipping into a kind of gun-slinging caricature of an outlaw cowboy?

I'm not sure about the word "justify". Anything a person does is justifi-*able*. People do things for a reason no matter how base that reason might be, so I don't think one action can be considered more justifiable than another. As for side-stepping notions of morality without turning into a cowboy, one thing I try to focus on with my characters in these situations is that even though they might be forced to go "above the law" or something, they're not "cool" about it like a cowboy might be, there's still a great deal of discomfort and awkwardness in the way they choose to handle things. "Prank" might be an exception,

though that story is the most anomalous one in this collection.

Do you think your stories rely on the idea that there is one sort of agreed-upon notion of reality that they are trying to step outside of?

The one agreed-upon notion I think my writing is trying to step out of is that people know what they are doing, or are in control, or have a handle on things. This is only the case until, you know, a meteor falls out of the sky, or you get mugged in a nice part of town, or your own kid tries to kill you. Until we somehow get a leash around the neck of the universe we are pretty helpless to a lot of things.

Do you think writers can actually achieve neutrality? Or is this something you're only trying to convey through tone?

I think writers can and should always *try*. It goes back to a writer's largest responsibility. If you allow yourself to believe that neutrality is a false idol I think your writing is going to stink of lies and irrationalities and laziness.

they choose
though that story is the most anomalous one in this collection.
Do you think your stories rely on the idea that there is one sort
of agreed-upon notion of reality that they are trying to step
outside of?
**“WE EXPERIENCE GRIEF
WHEN WE ARE
SURROUNDED BY A
STATIC ENVIRONMENT.”**

What kind of audience are you writing for?

I guess I am writing for an audience of myself, and I guess that in turn means I am writing for an audience who wants to be entertained and at the same time challenged by content. Probably I am writing for the same people who like the movie *Oldboy* and that Edward Albee play, *The Goat*.

Do you think religion (or a lack of one?) plays a role in how you write and the direction you're coming from?

I was raised in a secular household, so it's very difficult for me to determine how much of an impact religion has on my writing since I never really had to live with it before.

What films would you say had the biggest influence on the stories you've written?

I've never been much of a film nut. If a friend asks me to sit down one night and watch a movie with them I'll do it, but I never go out to the movies, and I very rarely watch a movie on my own. That said, it might sound kind of cheesy, but the more I write and the more I think the more I can't help but notice a lot of my writing relates to the *Fight Club* movie, and in that same vein, *Taxi Driver*, which I love. *No Country for Old Men* might have only come out recently but that's a movie I sometimes like to watch before I write to get myself in the right frame of mind. Comedies probably also have a really big influence in my writing, notably the subtle humor, the idiocy and silliness of normal but weird situations, but I could list a million comedies. And, finally, because my friends would call me out if I didn't mention



it: the last ten or twenty minutes of *8 Mile*. I never saw that entire movie, but I go onto YouTube like once every two months to watch those final rap battles, because they are such a good example of how to never be ashamed of yourself.

Are there any philosophers you're particularly interested in?

I've never really read philosophy. Stuff like that I much prefer to discuss in person than to spend time reading on my own.

Since your stories seem to be more dialogue-heavy than anything else, do you think the message of meaninglessness ever conflicts with the idea of a writer's objectivity?

That's a great question about meaningless and objectivity. I hope they never clash, I've never been in the middle of writing and felt like they weren't getting together well, and if that issue ever arose anyway it'd probably never reach another reader's eyes because I'd fix it on revision. I am pretty good at getting a feel for when something comes off as contrived or conflated or whatever, and I've written enough that I have no issues with knocking something off rather than hoping no one catches me. At least I hope that that's true!

What personal experiences (if any) have contributed to your sense of a lack of control on a universal level?

The feeling of lack of control started as soon as the first day I was bullied in school or the first time an adult punished me for something I didn't do. I was always very sensitive about issues like this from a very young age, and as the years progressed I

sort of learned to take it in stride because trying to do something about it would've been too much for too little in return. It's sad to say but people are very often self-absorbed and selfish, and to expect them to act any other way is just setting one's self up for disappointment, so it's best to live as well as you can without having to rely on those around you unless you really need to. Also studying astronomy probably played a big role in feeling a lack of control. We're so tiny! There are so many bigger and more amazing things out there that could crush us, and our whole existence would sum up to a millisecond in the grand scheme of things!

How do we separate the world into things we can help and things we are helpless to? How did you try to do this in your writing?

I don't think we should ever resign ourselves to feeling helpless to certain things. Or anything, for that matter. It's more important for us to realize that certain things that we wish we could change by ourselves with minimal effort actually require a lot of work, resolve, and time. So it's not that we are helpless to certain things, it's that we don't want to invest the time into overcoming certain things. I think that's a very important difference from feeling helpless, as you put it. The same is applicable for trying to know things.

I think I try and show this through the ineffectuality of dialogue. Though my stories are very dialogue heavy, what's being said never really functions as a driving force. I see dialogue more as an opportunity for therapy than as an effective means to cause change. What invariably causes things to move in my fiction is what characters actually do. ■

The Thing Itself

SHE CAME HOME ONE EVENING to find wrapped in green florist's paper and taped to her door, a single rose. Red, long-stemmed, it sat in its sheath at an angle, petals pointing at the peephole, lush and precise. There was no note. She stood admiring it for some time, then peeled back the tape and tucked the flower under one arm as she opened the door.

Inside, she laid the flower on a table and teased apart the cone of paper, unrolling it and staring at it till it became an abstraction, a flag of bright color against the blond wood. She slipped out of her coat, hung it on its hook, changed from heels and skirt into slippers and jeans. When she was done, she poured herself a glass of vodka and ice and sat on the sofa, sipping, thinking:

Who? There was no one who could have left the rose on her door, and yet someone left the rose on her door.

Why? Red stood for Eros, for passion, and that was such a distant memory that this possibility felt like a mockery. Could someone have done that—mocked her—on purpose? an ex-lover wanting to send a what-if message across the years? an adversary wanting to underline that it had been years? No, she had no adversaries (she worked in a watch repair shop for heaven's sake), and as for her exes, did she even register with them anymore? It was probably a mistake. That, or something random: the pawning off of an unwanted gift; a piece of student performance art; maybe just a drunk's random generosity.

When? The flower looked fresh despite being out of water. It had to have been left recently—near the end of the workday, one of the hardest times to be stealthy. But maybe the idea wasn't to

be stealthy at all; maybe the idea was to be bold, to leave one's mark if not one's name.

How? The rose was still there, describing its diagonal across the table, a portrait of arrested motion. Like water, or fire, something fluid. She thought of what it must have taken to leave it there—a bold gesture even if it was a random one, because the bearer might have been caught and made to explain... what, exactly? No one was going to confront a stranger with a rose; it would be like obstructing love itself. But there was the problem: everything was like something, but that didn't mean you knew what it really was. She didn't know what any of this was, beyond the thing itself, a rose laid on her table, red on green on blond.

And now? She had no idea what to do with the rose, and was surprised at how much it bothered her just thinking about what to do with it. As if she were the one who'd placed it on her door herself, the one bearing whatever risk, real or imaginary, came along with the act.

She raised the glass to take a drink and realized it was empty, couldn't remember having finished it, then couldn't remember whether it was her first. A strange disorientation took hold—more than the alcohol, if it was the alcohol; more like she couldn't be sure if she was dreaming or if everything else up to that point had been the dream. To feel this way was maddening. She had to do something about it, and there was no way to opt out: if she decided to do nothing, which was doing something too.

Get rid of it, she thought. Throw it out. She returned to the table, slammed down the glass, snatched the flower and began rolling it back up, but she was only a half-revolution into the task when a thorn caught her. "Damn it," she muttered. A single drop of blood began welling on her fingertip. She rubbed it

away but a second drop came, then another, and finally she gave up and went to clean the wound.

The light in the bathroom was brighter and harsher; as she worked she saw, in lurid color, the crimson spatter of a blood droplet on white porcelain, the pinkish smear of blood and peroxide on gauze, the blanching of her finger squeezed beneath a bandage. She looked into the mirror and saw her face as it looked at the end of the day: a little tired, a little pale, the lines around her eyes a little more firmly etched. She stood there, examining herself, till she wasn't sure what she was looking for anymore. It was too much to bear; she bolted out and paced the apartment, feeling something boiling inside her. There was a reason, there must be a reason, why she regarded that apartment more as a sanctuary than a place to live, why she was content to let things happen to her, waiting for the one gesture that would redeem everything. And of course the flower wasn't that, but that was the point: you wait and wait and something finally happens and you don't even know what it is or what it means, only what it's not, what it doesn't mean, a slash of beauty across a dull barren landscape, her landscape, but not for her.

She picked up the rose again, this time more carefully, and rolled it back up, restoring the graceful geometry of flower and wrapper. She filled a bowl with water then, with her fingertips, flicked a few drops on the flower, just enough to make it glisten in spots. There, she thought: just so. A minute later she was dressed to go out again, the wrapped flower cradled in one arm like a baby, a roll of tape in her pocket. She knew nothing about where she was going and why, only that, for reasons she also didn't understand, it was the only choice worth making. She drew a breath, listened for the click of the door behind her, and stepped forward. ■

PEGGY AYLSWORTH

The Impossible Possible

At the present moment
there is no hippopotamus in the room,
said the philosophy professor.
When challenged, it was hard for him to prove.
Especially in the light of Heraclitus:
“We are and we are not.” Try the trick
of turn the tables. Let them thrash it out.
After all, his wife was pregnant
with their seventh child and Heaven
had not sent him fortune. It wasn’t like
McCourt in bed with Angela’s ashes, and the fleas.
One man’s misery could not provide an antidote.
Now, this other problem, too far beyond
the realm of logic. It began as only a bit on the side.
How should he plead? Innocent, with time off
for bad behavior? It’s true, the summer
sang in him a little while, but then a cup became a cup...
though nothing could be certain. It well may be
that a hippopotamus has taken residence
in this lecture room.

City at the Edge of the Poem

Behind the iron fence, a purple rose.
I bend to it and inhale, city mammal
adrift among the billboards.
A tomcat, black stripe along his spine
is mewling, padded feet too long accustomed
to the cracked cement. He gave up the wild
for palaces and cushions. I stroke
his back. He strikes with open claws...
“The hot of him is purest in the heart.”

How the city goes untamed. Towers
rise and crumble. The jar has fallen
from the hill in Tennessee.

A Falling Empire

Reviewed: *Hector and Achilles* at the Kresge Little Theater

ECHOES OF SCREAMING AND CLASHING of shields set an eerie tone at the beginning of the world premiere of *Hector and Achilles* at MIT this August. Based on an episode from Homer's *Iliad* and written in a surprisingly unstilted haiku verse, Edward Eaton's script dials in on the fatal contest between the two great heroes of the siege at Troy.

Eaton—who besides writing the play directed and choreographed the fights—seems to wish to identify the battle between the hero of the Trojans and the chief of the Myrmidons with the larger conflict between civilization and barbarism. Odysseus and Ajax are depicted as fools, self-centered and uninterested with matters of honor that motivate (and consume) Priam and Hector. The cowardly Greeks cooking up their plots against the Trojans were so silly at times as to seem like slapstick players à la the Three Stooges or Marx Brothers. As characterization this comedy gave the Greeks a villainous cast. And that seems to be Eaton's aim: Troy is the great empire when the lights go up, the retainer of art and intellect and sympathy. "Who are these villains? / Base and vile they are. How can / They be beating us?" asks Priam of his enemies. That the Greeks *do* beat the Trojans, we know from the start, meaning that the drama of this kind of history play comes from allegory and character rather than plot. In making Troy the sympathetic side, the playwright seems to be asking that we identify our modern empires with Trojan greatness and Trojan defeat.



Hector, defender, is of course surrounded by his loved ones instead of far from home. We think it a smart decision to write Astyanax (Katheryn Milligan) as nine years old rather than as an infant. Some of the sweetest sentiment of the play is shown during discussions between the father and son about what it means to be a hero. When his father says, “You used to cry when / I prepared for battle,” Astyanax replies: “That / Was when I was young.” It is a precocious statement, crushing in its deft portrayal of a generation raised in war. Hector, horrified despite his own standing as a hero of war rather than peace, tells his son that it is better to be a rabbit in a warren with family than a lonely, scavenging hawk. The image is Eaton’s, and quietly poetic.

Other departures from the source material were smaller in scale but crucial to effect. Eaton makes Hector less certain that he will fall to Achilles’ sword. If he does die, Hector says, in order for Troy to continue on, “All that needs to survive is / The smallest ember.” This hopefulness struck a sentimental note not only not present in the original, but at odds with the political symbolism seemingly at work between the lines elsewhere in the play. The Hector of the *Iliad* minces no words when he tells his wife Andromache there will come a day when sacred Ilium will fall, and Priam and the sons of Priam will fall by an ashen spear. That tragic force is diminished rather than deepened by the superfluous (and thoroughly modern) hope Hector bears with him into battle.

Briseis, Achilles’ spear-captured bride, was a fascinating part of this production, and an excellent contrast to the unwavering, loyal Andromache so idealized in the *Iliad*. Homer never gives her a voice, but Briseis as written by Eaton and played by Nicole Dalton is strident and progressive, jaded, tough, and witty.



She recognizes that Trojans and Greeks alike see her as inferior due to her gender, but uses her allure to her advantage and the advantage of her city. Here, her capture by the Greeks is shown to be an intentional ploy meant to place her before Achilles as a distraction. Is her apparent affection for Achilles a cunning performance meant to win his confidence and keep his attention away from the fighting? Or would Eaton have us believe a prisoner might fall so quickly for her captor? It is right that we are ever unsure. Denied control over her own fate, Briseis walks a dangerous line with her loyalties divided between her cousin Hector and her lover Achilles. Eaton's writing conveys this nuance well.

Christopher Smith's Achilles was brilliant. Silent except for roars of grief for most of the play, his eyes burn constantly with the famous *menis* or divine wrath. This is not the weeping, existential Achilles of the *Iliad* but an animal of passions starkly contrasting the intellectualism and human-heartedness of Hector (played with matching skill by Timothy Kopacz).

Achilles' final speech was especially striking. He is surrounded by ghosts, speaking wisdom that only a man who lives for the battle can comprehend. He is alone with his memories and bidding farewell to those he has sent down to the House of Death. The doomed hero speaks at last to the shade of departed Patroclus, and then stands alone on stage, staring out at a silent audience. His final words: "I will spend my last / Days on fire. Women will cry / In lamentation."

If the core of the *Iliad* is the wrath of Achilles, the last lingering note of Eaton's play is Achilles' grief, a grief that by the transitive property of drama speaks against nationalism and war of all ages, and mourns the losses on every side as equally lamentable. ■

STEPHEN S. POWER

East of Paris

September 1944

He finds the girl outside a church more ash
than stone. Three blasted walls about to fall
embrace a nave whose flock is roof and glass.

It still fares better than the rest of town.

She fares the worst. Bald as a new-born soldier,
she rocks before the remnants of a fire.

From pew and prayer books he rebuilds the fire.

Her eyes flare with it, charcoal hoared by ash,
then fade as she unholds the blaze some soldier
laid in her belly. He can see her fall:

favors for food, her German flees, a town's
stark penalty, her head shorn raw as glass.

She frees a slab of grit and bits of glass.

He nods and sits beside her by the fire.

"Some years ago," she says, "this was my town.

It's no one's now. Or anyone's." An ash
drifts from the fire, floats for awhile and falls.

She catches it. "When I arrived, a soldier
was here, although he looked less like a soldier
than a professor, with his notes and glasses.

I startled him and saw his pencil fall
into the rubble. 'Please,' he said, 'the fire
can only light the windows, not the ash.'

Of course, there's not a window left in town,
but I said nothing and obliged. The town

has no more people either. I told the soldier,
'You could collect the shards sown through the ash.'
and gave him several with his pencil, glass
that used to turn the sunlight back to fire.
He nodded, satisfied, then let them fall
and left. So strange." She lets the ash flake fall,
gets up and gazes west beyond the town.
"I should go too," she says. "Thanks for the fire."

So strange indeed. Had she just seen her soldier?
And why believe the windows had no glass?
He takes his notebook out, swipes off some ash
and sketches one, the fall of Joan, God's soldier.
It shows her drawn through town like forming glass:
fire animates her, but she leaves no ash.

ROBERT S. KING

Asking God to Change

I. Honk If You're Guilty

On the raucous road to hell or heaven,
everyone stands trial. A black sheep,
I pled not sure, and the judge hammered
my life as contempt because uncertainty
is not piety. So I drew my own map
of the world, removed all the borders,
erased the points of power.
But there were too many holy roads to repave
and too many signs I could not argue
with along the way. I got no answer
when I asked a Yield sign why?
Signs save lives they say. I say they
herd the flock toward a final shearing.
Ahead is a toll gate run by hawks without change.
Ahead is the chicken of my last meal
and the vulture with its ear to my heart.

II. Saying Grace

I am too curious a man.
I no longer see myself in the mirror
because I have asked all the questions
I can answer. So I pray to the wind
and stars, hoping they know
why life and death belong to the same

vivivicious circle, why they are just different
sides of the same coin and have the same
value—the sums of nothing more
than profit and loss—why everything
has a price, why the fuel of every creature
is the daily killing and eating of other life.
Star scholars say everything of matter
is made of stardust
Then we are all cannibals, I say.
My own hunger shames me.
To profit from life, I must eat before I am eaten
and say grace to God for this nourishing death.
This is truth, but pray for truth to change.
Pray we are God as God is us. We are in this
together, and it matters not if truth is God or Science,
nor which one Nature weds.

III. *Allowing Food in the Courtroom*

My development was arrested,
my path to knowledge brought before the judge.
Crossroads are illusions. The path
is a straight line or a circle, both leading
to an end or another circle.
Only curiosity can fly in any direction,
but there is a price to pay for even one question.
I hurl a prayer, a shot into the dark of space.
I hear its Doppler shift of wheels and hooves
stampeding around a black hole
that swallows it whole.
Can a simple question reshape the mind of God,

give Nature food for thought?
I pray that knowledge be our food,
I pray we hunger for light to a better way.
I pray we never get comfortable in our skins,
that our God will consider shedding his own.
We who never change make God old and set in his ways.
We auction our lives who never question God.
Too late, now my long silence hears the gavel
sentencing me to life without control.

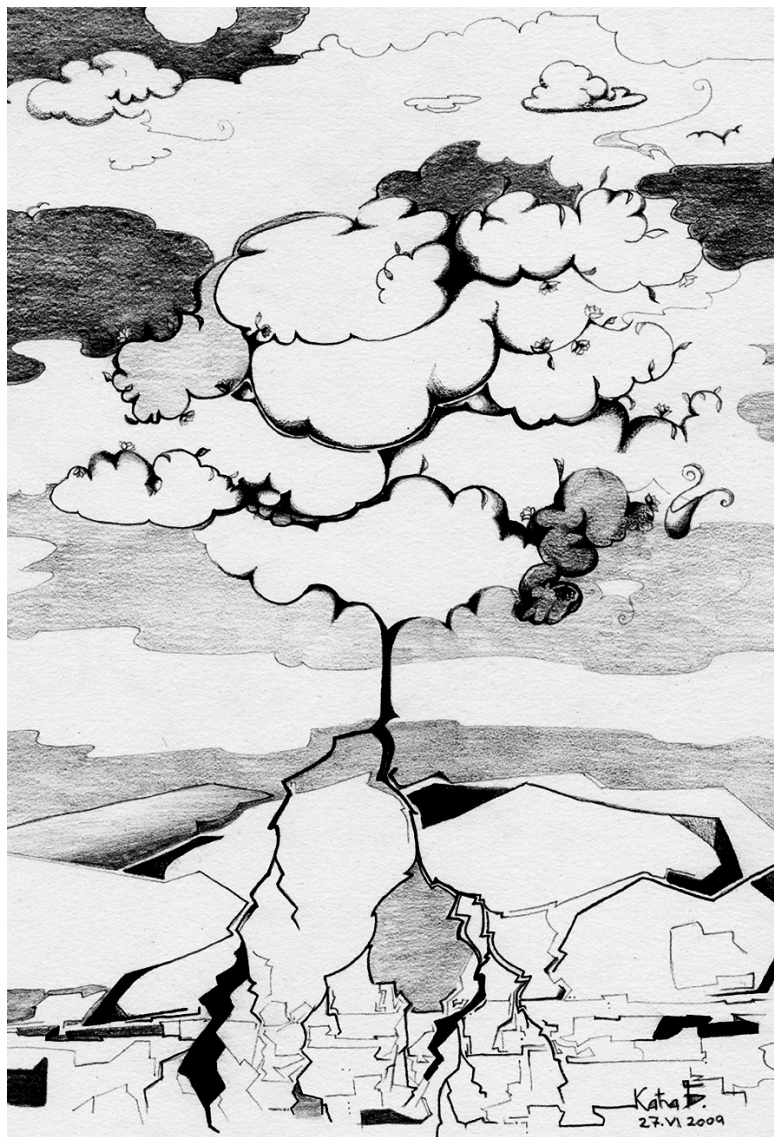
ROBERT MORRIS

The Bergamot Orchard

WE WALKED DOWN TO THE orchard from a series of identical grassy hills. The verdant valley had been cut by the stream that intersected the orchard at a point, but it was rocky and shallow and few trees grew on its limited banks. I wondered aloud to Michael whether he thought it flooded, as it was wide, what that meant for the trees. He didn't answer, but he had other things to think about. I had only asked to break the silence.

The path leading down through the hills was scattered with stones and dusty. Though the day wasn't very hot, I think it was hotter than Michael is really used to and the dust we stirred stuck to the wet places above our socks. I thought it seemed fitting that we were making these clouds of dust in the cloudless day. This time I kept it to myself, but looked back up the path, maybe trying to attract attention to what I thought was comically affected interest I was giving to dust. He didn't notice anyway, and I became distracted from that as I looked back up the hill. It appeared much steeper than I had thought it was as we had been descending it; instead of the gradual slope I had imagined, I saw a winding trail that seemed to propel itself straight up. The hills were covered with the lightly golden grass of late summer; on some of the more distant hills were a few solitary Cyprus and, before I stumbled and had to return my attention to the path in front of me, I saw scattered groups of goats with no shepherds as I could see.

The summer was not so advanced as to be no remains of the blossoms—now dried and scattered—sprinkling the edge of the



leveling basin as we entered the orchard. But I could see clearly that the fruit was already nearly ripe, so the petals we saw, or at least the petals I saw, were very few and dry. We stood at the periphery of the orchard briefly and I tested a petal with the tip of my shoe. It crumbled into the dust with a faint crackle. Before that, I had an inclination to retrieve a petal or two. We had been told that there would only be one person in the orchard and I spotted him quickly, seemingly very involved with the inspection of the fruit and trees. Once again, I almost mentioned this to Michael, but he was intent on scanning the orchard so I returned my focus to the stream I had seen from the hill. The hike had not been very long, I thought, and certainly not very hard yet when I first saw from the orchard the trickling water I wanted immediately to cool my hands in it, touch the coolness to my face. Without a word to one another, I went forward to the stream and Michael went off through the trees to the right. I stopped to watch as he went. It seemed his determined scrutiny had no real purpose; it seemed briefly that his concentration was devoted only to the trees as mine was to the stream, though I knew full well this wasn't true.

As I approached it, I saw the trees that were somewhat close to its waters grew different fruit from the rest of the orchard. The grass, which among the trees was well-kept and green, succumbed in patches to the clay and dust of the bank and water-worn stone. On the other side of the stream, almost all of the fruit green, lime trees grew and between and around many of the trees sage brush and what looked like rosemary flourished. Between the orchard and the stream there was hardly any difference in elevation at all, reigniting my curiosity of whether the basin must often flood, given enough rain. It did occur to me that it may well never rain that much, but it might just as well

have been that I was so caught up in the itchy dryness of the day. In fact, the stream was so calm and placid that I was able to sit directly next to it without getting at all wet and was so silent I practically forgot about it entirely if my attention wasn't squarely focused. It simply faded into the background humming of the orchard and would gently startle me when I paid attention.

I don't know how much time had passed when the man in the orchard approached me still sitting on the bank. I stood and at first he looked at me like it seems all men in this country do, but afterwards stopped and casually only looked at my face—I couldn't tell if he ever looked right in my eyes as I never really did his. When I happened to catch those eyes in a passing glance, I thought how unusual that they be so sterling and blue in a dark face likely made darker for a lifetime in the Mediterranean sun.

"You just get here," he half-asked, not surprised and not especially curious. Forgetting immediately that I had been day-dreaming for some time at the side of the stream, I told him we had. He nodded and appraised the far side of the orchard, where Michael now was, in a way that seemed he had been expecting us. Though this apparent expectation seemed strange to me, I didn't ask if he had. It didn't require much thought, though, to realize I had no idea how long the walk that brought us from the villa to the orchard had taken, as I had no idea how long I'd been sitting by the stream. He asked me where my "friend" was, emphasizing that word just so, as shy but proud people sometimes do, and I vaguely motioned to the direction I thought Michael had gone. This satisfied him, nodding, and he squinted—when I did look at his face, never his eyes, he was always squinting—at the lime trees across the river. I made an attempt at small talk, though I don't know if he was in any way

obliged to attend to me nor did I know if I was keeping him. I asked him about the weather, remarked how hot it had been recently, what kind of climate was good for the trees, why lime on one side and bergamot on the other, mentioned football, but in that he seemed uninterested, and I regretted asking. It had become a habit of mine over the months to rely on leading questions about football as it often elicited a lot of conversation that required very little interaction, and that would ease my awkwardness while I was passing time with the men I was often left alone with while Michael was about his duties. But this man in the orchard seemed unconcerned with football and I didn't press.

I returned to my questions about the orchard and the fruit as that topic seemed not terribly boring to him. When I asked when the fruit would be ripe, he shrugged and said they were already ripe enough to use, that he had been pressing oil this morning. He told me of the scent that filled the room as they were pressed and how he set a dish of it with a slow wick in his study so that the scent would be there too, in his books and his paper. He told me how his wife would use it in her compittu which she always made this time of year. He told me of when the bergamot were ripe he and his sons, when they were still young, would pick at least a dozen to add their flavor to bottles of grappa from his uncle's vineyard. I finally asked him about the stream and if it flooded and he said no, that it never flooded, even as far back as the days of his own father, whom I already knew had planted the orchard in his youth. But he did tell me a story: when, after it had rained for some days in a row and he and his sons came down to prune the trees and enjoy the blossoms and check the various traps for vermin, that the stream was flowing very fast and high, much higher than they had ever seen. What more, it

was filled with snakes. His sons came running to tell him about the snakes, and at first he thought that it had been some trick of light from the abundant and swiftly-moving clouds that his sons came screaming for him to see, but the snakes were easily spotted, moving slower than the extremely clear water they moved with. While the year hadn't been particularly bad for vermin, his eldest still suggested they try to capture some and keep them in the garden on the far side of the lime orchard, which he pointed out to me. I couldn't see through the trees, and didn't recall seeing the garden from the hillside, but nodded with understanding anyway, pretending to see the garden there behind the trees. He told his sons that they didn't know what kind of snakes they were so it would not be wise to try and pick them out of the stream. The youngest said that that suited him fine, as he thought the snakes looked particularly happy where they were amongst the rushing waters, and that if they tried to remove them the snakes might become angry which, the young boy had said, he knew would make the rain stop. The man laughed and told me that he looked at his son with such astonishment, unaware that their mother had been telling the youngest stories about friendly snakes and their beloved rain only that morning. He told me that when he returned to the villa that day, he had repeated his tale with such enthusiasm to his wife, speaking amazedly about what the child had said, and he had laughed and laughed much the same, he said, as he was laughing now. The crop that year had been good, but there was a significant vermin problem the next year and they had to give up the garden and move it out of the orchard entirely. "That," he said, "is why the garden is no longer where I pointed it out."

I was embarrassed at how I had nodded understandingly before and I felt my face redden, trying to hide it. I don't think the

man noticed, however, as immediately after finishing he shouted happily to Michael who had apparently been approaching from behind me. He must have seen Michael coming as he was talking and I hadn't noticed, having never looked directly at his eyes, and had even mostly been looking away entirely towards the bergamot trees, though I knew he had been looking directly at me for much of the story. He never looked at me, but I saw Michael was frowning deeply as he does when he's trying to prevent tears. The man and Michael solemnly exchanged some words that I paid no attention to and looked instead at where the stream bent around the edge of the orchard a good distance away. I thought I would like to better see where the stream eventually led when we walked back up the hill, telling myself to remember it; but when we did, I had forgotten. Michael and the man finished talking and Michael said we could go now if I wanted. I thanked the man for his company and he waved at me without turning around as he had started to go back to his business in the orchard as soon as he and Michael had finished speaking. In my mind, he smiled as he had been when he and I finished talking. The hardness of the dust and rocks of the path was so unfamiliar to me when we started back up the hill. I asked Michael if he had found what he had wanted and he shrugged, not wanting to talk about it. When I looked back at the orchard, I was surprised to see that it was much further away and much flatter than I had remembered it being when we walked down. ■

ABIGAIL WARREN

Conversation After Her Death

“Margaret, a hat no more belongs
in your hands than
gloves on the top of your head.”
So the good Sister
made her sit through Mass
with the gloves
on top of her head.

The only story she told me

that leads me into
her silence, and mine
where we meet to talk.

CHARLES BYRNE

An Argument From Theology

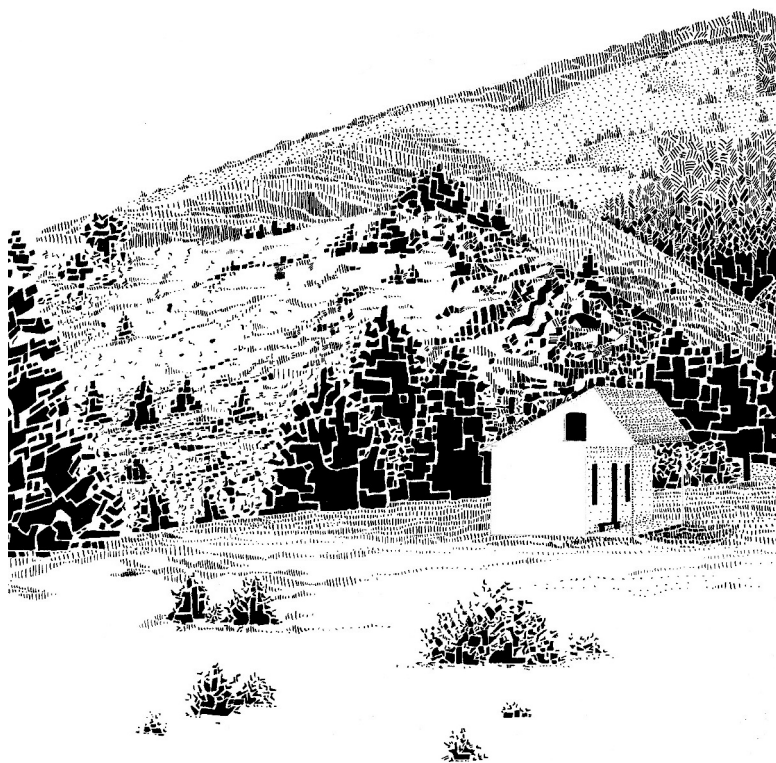
Were woman from man,
oughtn't she be an *an*?
Instead, she conjoins
an *o*, a *w*,
and so is supervened
by him. In fact, to use
the language of God,
she is the breath in
his nostrils, though in truth
she breathes instead
into his navel,
hand on his breast, hand
on his rib, as she
shapes him from the mud
of her womb. In the end,
though, one wonders why

it should matter who
came from whom, since we're
here, and that is not
in dispute, and what's
more, would it not be
preferable to know
how one thought follows
another, or the genesis

of thought at all, or
to explain how *won't*
can derive from *will*,
or for that matter,
will from *wish*? Since *word*
has been wooed from *world*,

the tongue has been
the duplicitous
utensil of ruination
and woe, able, in
its newfound capacity,
after consumation,
after love, to construe
all and everything
in every possible
manner – yet who knew?
The bill and coo of two
tongues, knotted in linguistic
ardor so that they forge
the first letter and
the first word, *I*. Who
take the lay of the land:
river leg and foot
of hill, head of mountain
and arm of tree, kidneyed
stone and décolletaged
skein of geese, while swallows
gauge the flood-wombed field
from the darkening sky,

and somewhere in
a wooded mountain
stream a long-shadowed
woodsman stands plumb,
were his wont, waiting for
the sound to materialize
from his naked hands
of the riving of gill
from caudal fin
and the showering
of roe upon the face
of the water.



ALFRED NICOL

Mid-November House Guest

Because he never seems to move, I wonder
how he got to where he's standing still.
The slow, painstaking insect barely flinches
when I touch his eyelash-like antenna.
He started toward stopping hours ago:
his life's a drawn-out pilgrimage of inches.
No fretful vacillation of the will,
no panic, no unthinking flight, no blunder
out of the frying pan into Gehenna.
He's acting on an instinct to be slow.

This afternoon he idles on *The Globe*,
mingling with the newsprint. The headlines treat him
like the frivolous calligraphy
he seems. Two columns forge the long decline
he's clawed to, elbowing his spindly serif,
as if they mean to spell calamity.
One day soon, his end will come to meet him.
No exoskeletal thanatophobe,
he stands his ground and calmly holds the line,
as though supporting "Sullivan for Sheriff?"

But I presume to know my guest too well:
anthropomorphism is impolite.
He's not *The Fly*, or Gregor Samsa's cousin.
He's not himself (though who am I to say?).
He doesn't want to do annoying things

I would expect of him, like swarmin', buzzin',
(dropping g's!). He stays inside at night,
retreating ever deeper in his shell.
He's shot. He's too far gone to fly away.
He's got the winter weighing on his wings.

This poem is the winner of the 2013 Robert Frost Award and appears in *Clarion* by agreement with the Frost Foundation.

Bios

notes on contributors to this issue

Rayyan Al-Shawaf, a writer and book critic in Beirut, can be reached at calaboose@gmail.com

Peggy Aylsworth is a retired psychotherapist living in Santa Monica, CA. Her poetry has appeared in numerous journals including *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *The MacGuffin*, and *Poetry Salzburg Review*. Her work was nominated for a 2012 Pushcart Prize.

Laurin Becker Macios has an MFA in poetry from the University of New Hampshire and is the Program Director for Mass Poetry. Her poems have recently appeared or are forthcoming in *Theodate*, *RHINO*, and *Five 2 One*. She was a finalist for Paper Nautilus' 2013 Vella Chapbook Prize. She lives in Boston with six plants and one wicked awesome husband.

Kaća Bradonjić received her PhD in theoretical physics from Boston University. She teaches physics at Wellesley College.

Charles Byrne is a poet and philosopher living in San Francisco, with recent or forthcoming publications in *Treehouse*, *Emrys*, *Blue Lake Review*, and *Poetry Quarterly*.

Andrew Chenevert is studying creative writing at Lesley University. His poems have appeared in *Commonthought* magazine. In March 2013, he began serving as a workshop moderator for the Boston Poetry Union.

Robert Dall is a writer in Cambridge, MA. His fiction has appeared in *Hunger Mountain*, *Evansville Review*, *Acorn Whistle*, and *Beacon Street Review*. He received his MFA from Emerson College, has completed two residencies at the Vermont Studio Center, and has been a member of the Writers' Room of Boston since 2001 (and a board member since 2009). He's currently at work on a novel, *In the Box*.

Lauren Davis is a Bennington Writing Seminars graduate student working and living in Vermont. She has published in journals including

Tipton Poetry Review and *Spillway*.

Pippa Anais Gaubert is a writer and artist based in Berlin. She was born in Texas, but grew up in southwest England and has since lived in several different countries. Her writing has been published in venues including *Litro Magazine*, *94 Creations Journal*, *Step-Away Magazine*, and *The Erotic Review*. She is also a contributor for NPR. Online at <http://pippaanaisgaubert.com>.

Frances Gossen, co-editor of *Clarion*, hails from Louisville, KY.

Chad Hanson teaches sociology at Casper College. His poems and essays have appeared in *REED*, *Matter*, *Flyway*, *Third Coast*, *The Chariton Review*, and *North Dakota Quarterly*, among others. His collection *Trout Streams of the Heart* is forthcoming from Truman State University Press this year.

Meghan Kelly is studying classics and English classical at Boston University. She is a Trojan War enthusiast and a budding Yeats scholar.

Robert S. King, a native Georgian, now lives in the mountains near Hayesville, NC. His poems have appeared in magazines including *Chariton Review*, *Kenyon Review*, and *Midwest Quarterly*. He has published three chapbooks. His full-length collections are *The Hunted River* and *The Gravedigger's Roots* (FutureCycle Press) and *One Man's Profit* (Sweatshoppe Publications).

David Lewitzky is a retired social worker in Buffalo, NY. He's had recent work in *Nimrod*, *Red Wheelbarrow*, *Rabbit Catastrophe Review* and *Third Wednesday* among others and forthcoming work in *Passages North*, *Puckerbrush Review*, *Roanoke Review*, and *Crosstimbers*.

Owen Lucas is a British poet living in Connecticut. He grew up in rural Cambridgeshire, and began writing as a student at the University of London. His work has appeared in journals including *The MacGuffin*, *Lines & Stars*, *James Dickey Review*, and *Clinic*. Online at <http://owenlucaspoems.com>.

Sandor Mark is a graduate of Boston University and managing editor with CambridgeEditors. He lives in Allston, MA.

Robert Morris is a writer based in Boston. This is his second appearance

in *Clarion*.

Joel Moskowitz lives in Sudbury, MA. An Associate Member of Fountain Street Fine Art, his work has been included in juried shows at the Cambridge Art Association, the Danforth Museum, Gallery 1581, and the South Shore Art Center.

Keith Moul has been publishing poetry and photography for almost 45 years. Two recent chapbooks are *The Grammar of Mind* (Blue & Yellow Dog Press) and *Beautiful Agitation* (Red Ochre Press). In 2010, a poem written to accompany one of his photos was a Pushcart nominee. His full-length collection of paired poems and photos, *Reconsidered Light*, was released in 2012 by Broken Publications.

Alfred Nicol's 2009 collection *Elegy for Everyone* was chosen for the first Anita Dorn Memorial Prize. He received the 2004 Richard Wilbur Award for an earlier volume, *Winter Light*. His poems have appeared in *Poetry*, *The New England Review*, *Dark Horse*, *First Things*, *Atlanta Review*, *Commonweal*, *The Formalist*, and other journals, as well as in *Contemporary Poetry of New England* and other anthologies.

Thomas John Nudi II is a film director, writer, poet, and illustrator. In 2011, he served as editor of *The Yeti*, a Tallahassee journal. He studied creative writing at Florida State University and the graduate program at the University of South Florida. He lives in Orange, California and is working on an MFA in screenwriting at Chapman University. He is a founding editor of *Blacktop Passages*.

Veronica Priest is studying biology at Boston University. Her hobbies include chilling with her dogs, rappelling, reading comic books, photography and drawing. Her favorite book is *The Name of the Rose*.

Stephen S. Power has been published by *The Innisfree Poetry Journal*, *The New Formalist*, *String Poet*, *Blue Unicorn*, *The Lyric*, *Measure*, *The Raintown Review*, and the VQR Instapoetry Series. He lives in Maplewood, NJ. He tweets as @stephenspower.

Ted Richer is author of *The Writer in the Story and Other Figurations*, published in the UK by Apocalypse Press in 2003. His poetry appears in the anthology *Joining Music with Reason* (Waywiser Press) along with the work of thirty-three other poets, British and American, chosen by

Christopher Ricks.

George Saitoh is a poet, fiction writer and active dramatist for stage and screen. In 2012 his play *Coward's Soup* was produced for film in Ebisu, Tokyo. George was born in Dublin and holds a PhD in biology from the University of York. He teaches at Waseda University and Temple University. He can be contacted at saitohgeorge@gmail.com.

Sandy SooHoo is a photographer and writer living in New York City. Her work has recently been published in *The New York Times* and *theNewerYork*. She is at work on a collection of essays.

Sparrow lives in a doublewide trailer in Phoenicia, NY. He studies with the Jehovah's Witnesses simply because he's lonely.

Abigail Warren lives in Northampton, MA and teaches writing, literature, and poetry at Cambridge College. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Monarch Review*, *Duct*, *Forge*, *Brink Magazine*, *Emerson Review*, *Dos Passos Review*, and *Hawaii Pacific Review*.

Zach Weinersmith is the creator of *Saturday Morning Breakfast Cereal*. His piece in this issue is adapted from a strip published at <http://smbc-comics.com> in September 2012.

AfterClarion

recent news of past contributors

Ellen Glassie's debut collection, *Curtain Speech*, will be published this year by Pen & Anvil.

Sara Balsom has had poetry published in *Turn* literary review at Lewis & Clark College.

Joseph Dorazio has published a collection titled *As Is*.

William Doreski has published a collection titled *The Suburbs of Atlantis* with AA Press.

Joseph Goosey has written a book called *STUPID ACHE*, published by Greybook Press.

Graham Hillard was named a finalist for the 2012 Livingston Award for Young Journalists for his investigative feature, “A Killing in Cordova: The Trial and Tribulations of Harry Ray Coleman” (*Memphis Magazine*). His essay “The Complainers: Online with *The Chronicle of Higher Education*” is forthcoming in *Los Angeles Review of Books*.

Roger Hunt has published a book, *Freud: A Mosaic*. His article “Saving Your Skin: How Not To Be Eaten” is forthcoming in the volume *Jurassic Park and Philosophy*.

Matthew Kelsey has been named managing editor of *Poetry Northwest*, and has had new poetry published by *Monarch Review*.

Ben Mazer saw the third issue of *The Battersea Review* through to publication this spring.

Sam Lovett has published an e-chapbook titled *The Journey Back*.

Ayshia Stephenson recently won the Imaginary Friends Press Full-Length Book Award. Her collection *Black Hands of a Morning Calm* will be published this fall.

Adam Tavel has published a chapbook, *Red Flag Up*, with Kattywompus Press of Cleveland, OH.

The Last Straw

Jacket copy endorsements—blurbs, in marketer-speak—can make or break a trade title, but it is less common to see them on the covers of little magazines. Thinking perhaps this is an unrecognized opportunity for much-needed underwriter support, the Editors offer the following plugs as candidates for our next cover:

1. *This journal gives you wings* (Red Bull™)
2. *iRead therefore iEnjoy* (Apple™)
3. *This book, delivered* (AT&T™)
4. *Clarion is all in the mix* (Twix™)
5. *Keep reading* (Johnnie Walker™)
6. *I'm lovin' it* (McDonald's™)

Select your favorite, and send us your votes by 9/15/13; the blurb receiving the most votes will not only emblazon the cover of Number 17, but also be printed onto a limited-edition slap bracelet (for subscribers only). In the case of a tie, *Clarion* will be published without *any* endorsements, to sell or not sell according to the tastes of the reading public that knows better than to judge the taste of a fruit by the fuzz on its rind.

Humbly submitted,

THE EDITORS

About the editors:

7. Jonathan Mansicalco is a BU student born and raised in Massachusetts (Frances Gossen™)
8. Frances Gossen smells
(Jonathan Maniscalco™)

