



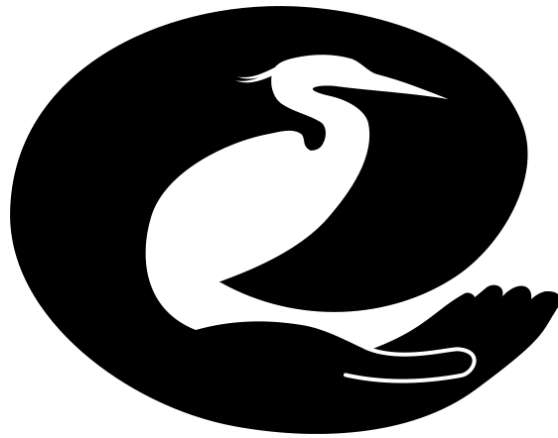
DARK MATTER

A JOURNAL OF SPECULATIVE WRITING



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DARK MATTER: A JOURNAL OF SPECULATIVE WRITING



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Forward

The blood moon on this issue's cover was chosen due to its recent appearance in April of this year. It was seen by many as a prophecy, though I saw it through my daughter's eyes:

Pareidolia

My daughter still sees the moon in the daylight.
We watch it rise and set across the azimuth,
waxing and waning in and out of sight, lost
to those who neglect to look. Those who have forgotten.
That the moon is only there when we look, but just as likely
during the day as the night. Some bemoan our lost connection
to the fable moon. No more tug of lunacy,
no more portent of seasons changing,
no more Coyolzauhqui, Mani, Khonsu, Mawu,
Heng-O, Tsuki-Yomi, or Diana.

Have we no more need of the moon?
Has our communion with nature's cycles been replaced
by technology, our mystic connection
lost to the knowledge that the moon is rock
held in orbit not by goddess but gravity,
no longer a guide for when to sow, when to reap,
but simply a pale reminder of our mythic past?
And yet, my daughter is enthralled,
not by the rabbit, trickster, or tortured face,
but by the prospect of going. Moon as stepping stone
to the stars. Gateway to portals through time.
All of her ambitions, all of her futures in superposition.
With the moon as collapsed beacon
for her universal quest.

Thank you for reading this issue of Dark Matter. We hope you enjoy it!

Brad Hoge
Managing Editor

Mixing Metaphors for Effects

When fire-guided crystal speeds
 On tinfoil like comet, when water
Pipe smoke tends
 Melodious flocks in your ears

So the needle kiss downs in your veins

When ampoule blends burn the brain into a frosty ball
And crystal light greens through skull

So in your room song stitches sea and sky

When your eye sends fog back to night
And only one star, one tree, one way
And you see like many before you have seen
And many after you probably will
Should they yield the forceful will

So when weightless, bottomless, peaceful free fall

Than your spine to be a highway with its own mind

There'll be love and no pain
Though my face fuzzy
It will warm and glow again

Dive in color geometries, then, contortions, distortions
 Of independence, soundless waves
Sluice through proverbial tunnel, pure thought,
 Wormhole speedballing you bodiless

Dive and drown: there'll be time
To crash: regret, guilt, dwelling

Shadows, voices

Might pen be more prolix

When vomit rises for one last slide,
 Promise postponed again
So shiver shall re-fix one last lie,
 Fever freezing your joints
When want nets nauseous light,
So there'll be no world, no end, no stopping

So the bottomless breached
 The other side blooming

Shiver, shiver, shiver

Nonetheless

On the terrace of a hotel on a white chair near the railing
as the light of the sun brightens the columns of windows
on the opposite side of the street,
there, on the terrace, there the theorist thinks
of rows of red bricks
and the people on parade as gerbils of chic.

At a table of a closed delicatessen, sunshine
running down his face, a young lover drinks.
He drinks and looks at the theorist who thinks
as the light of the sun brightens the columns of windows
on his side of the street and brightens the street
and he drinks, he drinks it all in, he drinks.

As the light runs down on the theorist who thinks
and the theorist thinks of rows of red bricks
and gerbils of chic and the young lover who drinks,
and the young lover who drinks
drinks in the theorist and the light and drinks and drinks,
the sun nonetheless sinks.

Wooly Bully

The bull's head is studded
with spark plugs

After defeat
at the hands of several
subpar Mayan bullfighters

his power has fled his genitals
and whatever is left resides in his head
like any minor league intellectual

But his power is illusory
merely decorative
because the plugs' ignition potential
have been depleted

by mini-bikes in the desert
and weed eaters in the vicinity
of the garage

It Never Was

I followed the logic of spring freshness to discover we are oxygen phantoms walking through what appears solid but is mere light wave.

The reality of our situation is far more fantastic than what we were originally fed in our childhood myths.

We have turned a corner and are lost without handholds knowing it is too late to go back to the crumbled beliefs rotting away sticking to our brains.

Only in our imagination can we bump into anything we previously considered real.

Mourn for what is no longer because it never was.

Ciao, Ciao, Bambina

In my father's bedroom there is a doll. A doll that should be mine.

My father says that I'm too young to have her. He is too old to have her.

He says, "You will damage the doll, Alma."

I say, "No, I won't."

I say, "What is the point of having a doll if she is not played with?"

He says, "So that she will last."

I say, "What is the point of having a doll last when I will be too old to play with her?"

He says, "She is not really a toy."

I say, "She is a doll. A doll is a toy."

"Leave this, Alma. Now."

I stand on the edge of his bed. I watch him take white tissue paper with which he will wrap the doll. He picks her up. "This doll is too nice to be used as a toy. Look at how well she is made."

I step forward and stretch out my arms towards her. "I know. Let me have her."

"Coño, Alma!" He slaps my hand hard.

I step back. Tears sting my eyes but I bite down on my teeth and the tears back down.

"Look at her fingers, would you see a doll like that in Kiddie City? You think she's a toy?"

“Yes.”

“Me cago en la puta madre!” He raises his hand to strike me. “Me cago en la puta madre!” It’s the worst of his curses.

I step back into the hallway, out of my father’s room. He curses a stream of Spanish words that are unintelligible to me. All the time he takes the doll, my doll, and wraps her in the tissue paper that is white and crumpled. That is wrong. That is all wrong. He lays her in a box. A package now, he puts her on the shelf in his closet.

I tiptoe into my room. I’m lucky he didn’t hit me. He didn’t want to hurt the doll. I don’t want him to hurt the doll, either.

The doll should be mine. I sit inside my closet and think. The doll is from Spain and Spain is where the “best” comes from: the most important language, the greatest empire, the most talented painters, the most beautiful women, the best olives, the finest swords. This doll is the most beautiful doll I’ve ever seen. Her golden hair has one wave that rises at her ears and falls to her shoulders. Her blue eyes open when she stands and close when she lies down. Her lashes are longer than my finger nails. Her lips are slightly open as if she’s about to say something. If her right arm is raised, she appears to call out to someone across the room. Her fingers are separate and expressive with three tiny lines at each knuckle.

She wears a black apron over her red felt skirt. Three black ribbons curl up and down the hem of her skirt. Atop a white blouse with billowy sleeves, she wears a black vest that laces up the front. On her feet are gossamer socks and slippers of white leather with tiny black laces that go up over her calves. I can never tie them without the laces slipping down and this is how my father can tell that I’ve played with her. This is why he now keeps her up high in his closet.

She used to stand on a console table in the living room. Then it was easy. With my mother in the kitchen and my father in his room listening to opera with the door closed, I would play with her. I kept an ear to my mother’s footsteps and my father’s stereo. Then my father put her in his

room.

Sometimes he lets me see her. He'll take her down and unwrap her. Her hair hangs in a big mass as he lifts her out. He'll put a record on before he'll sit on the bed, cradling the doll in his lap. Then I am to come. Into the heavy smell of his after-shave that reminds me of ships, like in the Armada, though I can't explain why. Then I can unlace the shoes and slip off the socks. I hate my father for this. I'm sure other girls don't have to play with their dads to get to their dolls. Why is this when he is kind? I can untie the vest and finger the tiny black ribbon of the laces. My father will tell me, "Look at her fingers, Alma. Where would you see fingers like that?" "You can't find anything like that outside of Spain," he insists. "Andáale, go on, look at her skirt. Look at that stitching." I hold the skirt and he holds the doll, clothed in her white panties that have a tiny pink bow in the elastic hem. "The hair is almost real," he murmurs as he strokes her hair. "Mira, Alma. Look."

My father has his toys. Downstairs in the basement, he has a big train set. There's a village with stores and a forest with little trees that look like dried up broccoli. I like the light on the locomotive and its soft hoot. I watch him play with it. In his room my father has a desk that he uses for building his model tanks. It takes him a long time to do this. He paints them afterwards. Sometimes I go to the hobby store with him. But he doesn't need me for these toys.

I told my father he has enough toys. He should learn to share, I said. Over and over he said, "What? I should learn to what?" It scares me more when he says things over and over than it does when he uses the belt.

"What did you say? What? I should learn to what?"

I'll hear that over and over. Long after I've been belted. Long after the red streaks have faded.

Red is the top and bottom of the Spanish flag.

The doll was a present from my grandmother. My grandmother lives in Spain now. My dad got her out of Cuba but she went to Madrid to live with other relatives. She sent us a package, a box wrapped over and over in brown paper and wide brown tape. It took my father a long time to unwrap it. My mother and I watched. My father bent close over the box, his forehead wrinkled as he sliced open each brown-wrapped layer at a time.

We were excited to have a package from Spain. We thought it would be a thank you present for my father for getting his mother out of Cuba. Coming from Spain, we expected it to shine gold when it was opened. My father pulled out the doll and set her aside quickly as he checked the rest of the box, searching for something else within all those layers of paper and tape.

My mother's thoughts burst through her habitual silence, "That's what she sent?"

It seemed strange, even to me.

Then I started to think it was a present for me. "Is it? Is it for me?"

My father laughed with a sound that came from far within, as if he needed to clear his throat.

My mother took me away to the kitchen. "Alma, be quiet."

In the kitchen, we could hear the sounds of his rumpling the paper, folding, pushing things around, interspersed with grunts that grew more frequent and staccato. Finally there was a bang on the table.

I said, "Mom, it has to be for me."

Red is the color I sometimes see in the black.

My mother told me about my father. She said that his mother, my grandmother, never let him

play with toys.

“Never?” Never, she answered. Once, my father and his sister were sent toys from Spain. Their mother shelved them high in a locked closet. The humidity in Cuba high, years later, the children discovered the toys in horrible disrepair. I imagined dolls’ faces cracking and peeling, heads falling off.

I asked my mother if my father was doing the same thing to me.

“Aye! Alma! Hush! If he should hear you!”

My mother says, “Don’t talk back, Alma.” “Never say that, Alma.” “Always show respect, Alma.” “I never spoke like that, Alma.” “Hush, Alma.”

What she means is: Don’t Say Anything, Alma.

What she really means is: Pretend, Alma.

Red is the color of embers before they turn to ash.

I think that one day my mother walked away from her body. She just left. I don’t know why. I have a picture of her smiling. The wind blows back her hair and she’s standing in front of an old, funny-looking car with a winged rear. My mother looks happy, her hands in her pockets holding the coat together in the front. She is not the woman who now cooks in the kitchen. She is not the woman who measures my body with needles in her mouth, wrinkly puffs under dead eyes.

What happened to you, Mom? I know that she would answer: “Your father.” I know that is true and that it is not true. I know that she withered, cracked and peeled, in my father’s closet. But I also know she was not a doll.

“Try this on, Alma.” She fastens the snap button on the side of a new skirt she has made for me.

Red is the color of my new skirt. It is red wool, long, with black ribbon that curls up and down at the hem. My mother smooths the skirt, examining the drape of the fabric. “It’s a surprise for you.”

“For me?”

My mother does not answer as she layers a black apron over the skirt.

My father comes into the room and stares at the skirt, his mouth open. “Alabalsa Dios,” he claps. “Mira eso.” He is interested at first. Then he becomes quiet, backing away into the shadows. I see two tiny squares of light on his glasses.

I watch my mother. She raises my right arm and drapes a black vest, pins and pattern still attached, across my arm and onto my shoulder.

“Ouch!”

“Hold still, Alma. I want to make sure the fit is just right.”

On she guides my left arm through the armhole.

“Are you going to put laces on it?”

“Yes,” she says as she pulls the sides of the vest together in one quick jerk. “Later.” She pulls it again, examining the fabric to see how it responds.

“There is too much here,” she murmurs to herself. She pins the excess cloth. I stare down at my chest. It doesn’t look right. Even with the pins. Even without the laces. The doll is flat. I am not.

“I think I need a bra,” I whisper.

“You are too young,” my mother responds.

“They have training bras, Mom. What about one of those?”

“Don’t you see that I’m busy here?”

There is a slight movement in the shadows in the living room.

“Alma! Stay still!”

I ask my mother why she is making me the costume. “Because if you can’t have the doll, you can be the doll.”

I say, “I don’t want to be a doll.”

She shrugs as she presses fabric down on the ironing board.

“I want to play with the doll.”

She stops her pressing and looks at me, and for a moment, I think she is really there in her body, “The time for playing is almost done for you.” And then she goes back to her work and she is gone again. I can tell by the way her hands take over like little machines over the cloth, over the stop and start of needles, over the sound of crinkled paper.

I think, this is her goodbye to me.

My father is out. I go to his bedroom. His room is large and has a window that has a full view of the apartment complex parking lot. He has a stereo in his room. It is a big brown piece of furniture with a lamp on one end and a pretty figurine of a bluebird perched on a branch, its mouth open in song. It was a present to my mother which she did not like. Underneath the lid is the turntable and albums on either side of it, mostly opera. There is the record of Italian songs. Though my father doesn’t say it, I know that he thinks that the best music comes from Italy. He likes the songs, *Volaré* and *Ciao, Ciao Bambina* a lot. Sometimes, he’ll sing to me, his index finger waving in the air:

Ciao, ciao, bambina, un bacio ancora
E poi per sempre ti perderò

Bye, bye baby, one more kiss
And then I’ll lose you forever

Summer is almost over. My mother is at work. My father went out, I don't know where. I'm alone in the apartment and I am not allowed to go out.

I go to my father's bedroom. I look at the oil painting of Manolete the toreador. I look at the large bull-fighting cape on the bed. I look at the albums inside the stereo. I pick the only one I like, a British Invasion album, and put it on.

I slowly push the sliding door of my father's closet open. I pull out two of the cardboard boxes to stand on. One box falls over. Underneath the ABC Spanish magazines are magazines I've never seen before. Magazines with pictures of things I've never seen, pictures of naked people, mostly women. They don't look like women I've ever seen. In some of the pictures there are naked men. They have large penises. Sometimes these penises are in women's mouths or in women's bodies in strange ways.

I stare at the pictures. I don't understand. I don't understand at all.

When I hear the engine and turn to see my father's car through the window, my hands shake so much, I tear one of the magazines. I fumble. The magazines slide off each other and scatter on the floor. I know I won't get them back in the order my father had them and I am going to get caught. My father whistles outside. I make myself hard and rigid and I manage to get the magazines in the box and the boxes in the closet. I close the sliding door and run to the stereo. Keys jingle outside the front door. In my haste, I scratch the album as I pull the needle off. I don't have time to think. The album goes in its white sheath and that goes into the second pocket of the cover. I turn the knob off and I close the lid. I am in my bedroom before he calls out, "Hello?"

Red is the color that I see inside my eyes when my father pulls my hair back so hard that I wish he would just take my scalp off. A week later, when he listens to *Those Were the Days*, the only song he likes from the British Invasion, he discovers that I've scratched the album. Over and over, he shouts, "Quien lo hizo? Quien lo hizo? Who did it? Who did it?"

"It wasn't me! It wasn't me!" I answer over and over squeezing my hair as close to my scalp as I can. When I finally say, "I didn't mean it!" He punches me in the stomach. I can't breathe at all. I make no sound as I gulp for air. I wave my arms as if I'm drowning. He lets go of my hair. I fall down, hands and knees on the floor. It feels as if I will never breathe again. Something in

my stomach has sucked all the air out of me and I can't get it filled back up.

Air.

He kicks me in my butt as I try to get up. "Don't you ever—don't you ever—don't you ever," and he takes a deep breath, "Come into my room again, or you will get it! Really get it!" His face is beet red, his index finger a hair's breadth from my nose.

He slams his door. I lie on the floor. I am so grateful to breathe. I am so grateful that it was only the album.

My mother finished the costume. In my room, I try it on. I stare at myself. I don't look anything like the beautiful doll.

Red is the color of the lipstick I put on from one of my mother's old pocket books. I put some on my cheeks, too. It takes me a long time, so long my arms hurt, but I put my hair in a French braid.

Red is the color that makes bulls mad.

In my costume, in my red cheeks and lips, I go to the kitchen. I open the stove and take out one of the aluminum-wrapped bowls. One is for me and one is for my father when he gets home. Black beans and rice. Strips of steak on the side, veins of gristle curling up the edges. I put it back.

I take step after step on the cool wood floor. I don't have slippers with laces to match the costume I wear. The doll's slippers are beautiful. I look at my toes. I follow my toes to my father's bedroom.

I push open the sliding closet door. Inside are his clothes, a suit in a clear and flimsy plastic bag, his polyester pants with the black-and-brown herringbone, shorts that are too short. On the floor is a black pair of lace-up loafers, his old canvas sneakers and boxes. I stare at the two cardboard

boxes and then pull them out. I am careful as I pull the top box off on the floor. I stand on his ABC magazines that hide the other ones and pull down the doll's box.

I take the doll out of the box. I unwrap her from her tissue paper and pick her up. She opens her eyes and I smile. She is mine. I walk over to the mirror. I look at our reflection.

She will have a French braid like mine, I decide. In the bathroom I search for the right comb and small rubber bands.

I hear the rattle of the front door lock. I remember in my stomach what it is like to gulp for air.

I run. The doll falls out of my hands. She slides across the floor with her eyes closed.

I rescue her. I get her into the tissue. I get her into the box.

“Alma?”

I jump onto the ABC box. I get the doll's box on the shelf.

I hear my father's footsteps.

In I push the box. There is no time for me to get to my room. I dart into the back of the closet, all the way into the dark corner, past my father's suit. The dry cleaner's plastic moves with my breathing. I crouch down as low as I can.

“Alma?” My father is in the bedroom.

I cover my mouth with my skirt.

“Alma?”

I don't know what to do. Should I show myself? No. Not that. I will really get in trouble then.

“Que paso aqui?”

My father takes a few steps away from the closet. He could be looking at the bed. Did I leave something there? He walks back toward the closet. There is no sound.

“Alma?” He is very quiet. He does not move.

I shake. My legs can’t support me for much longer. I’ll fall to the side. I hold myself tighter. I think of the doll. She does not move. I will not move.

He does not move.

“Alma?” he calls. My feet prickle.

I hear movement. The clothes sway. Metal hangers scrape the closet rod. The plastic covering of the suit ripples.

The boxes are dragged away, leaving a great swath of light on the floor. My feet lie just within the shadow of the closet’s darkness. A thump. He has moved the top box off and down. I hear the slap of magazines being cast on the floor. “Humphf,” he grumbles. He must have noticed something, I think. I look all around, as if I could see anything. I am so scared I could pee. I really want to look. The other closet door is right by me. I could just open the door slightly, just to see. Maybe I could run out. Maybe he will go into the bathroom or into the kitchen and I can run into my room. I will be safe in my room. But if I make a noise, I have a feeling that it will be bad. I have a feeling that it will be the worst ever. I tell myself, Don’t open the door, Alma. Don’t open the door. Wait this out, Alma. Wait and be smart, Alma.

I wait. I hear sounds, sounds that come from the bed. He is moving, getting comfortable, I think. I am not so scared now. Maybe my father is going to take a nap. Maybe that’s why he isn’t listening to opera. He is going to nap. When he naps, I will go out.

Whisper quiet, soft and slow, I push the sliding door with my index finger. Slow. Slow. The door sticks on the wheels. Please door, please door, I say inside my head. And with my finger, I push. The door moves just a crack. Just the width of a needle. I push again. The width of my finger. I am going to get out of this. Yes, I will. I push a little more.

The door hits a bump on the track, enough to make a noise, enough that I see, enough that my father sees.

I find that my arm is raised, as if I'm going to wave at someone from across the way, and I can't move it any other way. My mouth is open and mute. He grabs my hand, the waving hand. I can't think. What I saw, what I see, are frozen outside me. Like a picture in a magazine, my mind is stuck at the sight of my father lying on the bed, his pants off, holding his penis upright above a dark mass of hair.

White is the color of the ceiling in my father's bedroom.

White is where I keep my eyes. White. I stare hard at the hope that the white of the ceiling will erase the colors of my father.

The red of his face as he breathes hard over top of me.

The black of his body slamming against me until I feel something give way, something searing red, something that was hidden even to me, that now bleeds as he grabs at my face as if he would pull it off my skull.

White is that stuck place, where the first notes of an almost familiar song echo, over and over,

until finally the needle is lifted and there's that thunder blur of sound and then, silence.

White is the face of the clock as time presses forward.

White is the color of the cutting board for the chicken thighs, skinless, that spill out of its plastic and styrofoam package, spread open in a gelatinous mass, pink pools of blood in the inner recesses.

My mother teaches me to cook.

"It is time now," she says.

I watch myself nod.

In the living room, my father sets up a new stereo system he bought for himself. It is a new kind, with separate parts for the turntable, the controls, the speakers. Components, I think they're called.

The Future in Which Meaning Begins and Ends

Those who've counted on matter to not fall apart can be eating when ancestral symbiosis reminds them everyone lives alongside future generations. Everyone's invested with capacity and propensity of the genome.

Brushes with emptiness and emptying to be filled will happen with absence of those who've been born where the whole branches out from the root reach in roar and terpsichorean sluice in small houses and mansions of sea-bellowed blameless winds.

Those who can tell organic time from anyone's absolute anything can have a violinist's fingers touching on a pitch that enters sleep with the gravity of our condition. Where the green receivership of plants opens to the whole, basement doors swing open on fierce hinges of what might not have happened.

From before cells in their swims invested in sense, fertility fans out through the government of what could be, what bristles in crawls without regret or goes to town on public trust.

Hunger spreads through the evolution of identity reconnecting people with the balance of nature. Everyone lives alongside future generations on which present meaning depends.

Cormick and Emmett

There they go,
four and six years old,
one blond, one dark,
little brothers mastering their two-wheelers
at the same time, on the same summer day—
terrifying and amazing themselves,
growing up in an instant—

Neighbors stand by, quietly smiling, gasping, cheering,
while the mini-cyclists, sweaty cool cucumbers,
speed along the sidewalk, unfazed by cracks and bumps,
enjoying the sunshiny celebrity of their landmark moment.

You can almost see the lengthening of the tether to their parents,
as those fearless bikers head down toward the far corner,
then turn around and pedal back to their own front yard,
drawn by a magnet to home base,
even as they are traveling away.

Night Games

The thing about guarding a dangerous perimeter in the middle of an undeclared war especially at night is you're always alone. You can't see what might kill you out there in the darkness, but you know it can.

The silent Humvee had dropped me off alongside the stark, metal fence in the bright moonlight as a light breeze cooled my nervous, sweaty face.

With two large steps I climbed over the sand dune and was down onto the deserted beach, and could see and hear the breaking surf in front of me all the way to the horizon, the only sound in that still, hot night, except for my loud breathing as I glanced from side to side for shadows and movement of men, any movement.

Two weeks earlier, a Marine with a guard dog walking along this same beach had stepped on a land mine and the explosion had killed them both in a single deafening blast.

Of course, later the beach had been cleared of anti-personnel mines but they would come back, we all knew that, with their Russian-made explosion devices easily hidden in these undulating ridges, waiting to be tripped by your leather boot as you walked; it all happened in perhaps two seconds, and then death.

Now on the beach itself maybe ten yards from the water, first I walked cautiously toward a concrete bunker built for a machine gun but now empty, twenty or thirty paces to my left near two palm trees, and once there, slowly ventured inside.

The moonlight illuminated the inside of the stark structure of open sides which was supported by four concrete columns, and I saw nothing on its block floor except blown sand and what looked like an empty, discarded Budweiser beer can bent in half.

I walked through the soft crunching sand down to the wet, hard compacted surface reflected like glass by the lunar light near the water, and it gave me a narrow unobstructed path along the whole quarter mile length of the beach of two feet or more feet provided by the

outgoing tide.

And tonight for reassurance, I gently caressed the carbine as I walked along the water's edge, tart salt air in my nostrils, glancing every so often back into that wall of darkness above the sand canopy, looking for a sign of movement, and rubbing my right hand and index trigger finger soothingly for me over its shiny mental body. No sound in the night .

The moon was an orb in the black sky and from it the water shimmered like a sheet of glass, beveled by the movement of lazy waves, and I could see a this breathtaking beauty in the bright squares of geometric light set against dark squares of water. The light was magical and for the moment fear left me, and I was filled with an almost metaphysical serenity as my boots splashed the water's edge.

Trudging along the sand, the moon seemed gradually to follow me, and I looked back heavenward and saw the stars, all the constellations filling the dark blanket of sky above me with their white dots. I stopped for a moment, and tried to recognize some star cluster, some old friend from Missouri, and then my eyes found the Big Dipper.

Then I heard a noise, not loud, but a scratching sound, like someone digging, so I turned and moved toward the black wall opposite the water, my finger on the hair trigger and walked slowly in its direction. I could see the large sand dunes next to the barbed wire but saw no shadows anywhere. The only sound was my heavy breathing and my boots on top of the sand.

Halfway up from the water, the digging continued, louder than ever, but still soft. "Were they digging and putting in mines?" I asked myself. "But why didn't they see me silhouetted against the water?"

I had made up my mind to shoot if the sound increased much more, just drop flat on my belly and open fire, empty the magazine before they had a chance to react.

Then the sound stopped, and all I could hear was the surf behind me, so I dropped to my knees and then my stomach and waited. Nothing.

Finally I got up and moved carefully in the direction of the sound, choosing my footsteps

carefully, ready for a firefight, or hopefully surprise the squad.

I got to where I thought the sound came from, and a handful of palm trees blocked out the moonlight. I started to run toward where the sound had come from, ready to empty my entire magazine at the hip, faster I ran, faster, sand flying.

In an instant I was in the grove, and suddenly I felt something hard, brittle under my foot and a sound like metal in my ears.

“Oh God,” I thought, “no, not this way,” and threw myself in the air to my right side in the sand and tried to roll away from the sound.

“I rather die than lose my legs,” came into my mind, and I felt I’d already passed to the other side.

Then nothing, only my breathing, and the taste of sand in my mouth, and darkness.

A dud, maybe not enough time to rig it, all this entered my mind.

Finally I pulled my self to my knees, put my carbine in the sand and poked all around me, and stood up. More silence.

Afraid to use my flashlight, and create a target I saw what some thing flat in front of me, half buried in the sand.

I looked closer, and then saw movement around the spot. It was a large nest of land crabs, some almost the size of a Frisbee, skirting about panic. Their legs three inches tall supporting the circular body, all frenzied.

I laughed, then fell to my knees and started to weep in the night.

What's Wrong With This Picture?

“Good morning. I’m Mr. Brand, spelled like it sounds. Before we begin this morning’s presentation, I will ask everyone to hand over your mobile phones, smart phones, PDAs, pagers and personal navigation. Yes, this is mandatory. No hesitating, just place them in the metal-lined briefcase my assistant, Mr. Krch, spelled K-R-C-H, is holding. And for those who think I made a mistake, I did not. Mr. Krch’s last name does indeed consist entirely of consonants; meaning, he is a man without vowels.”

“All collected? Good. Any questions before we start? Yes, silver jumpsuit with matching eyeliner. What’s that? You’re concerned something will happen to your Android Jelly Bean with tie-died macramé cover. Don’t be. I assure everyone that your devices will be returned without any necessary damage once Mr. Krch has had a chance to examine them for potential danger. What danger? I assumed the flyer you were given about the presentation was sufficient, but I see I need to preface my talk with further explanation. You see, my employers, and your trade union, the Organization of Outfitters and Pinholers, O.O.P.S., as they are sometimes known, pay me to make sure none of their constituents, meaning you who work with scissors and needles and other potential weapons of clothing destruction, are aiding, willingly or unwillingly, terrorists. And by terrorists I’m talking about evildoers, desperados threatened by Western fashion, who think a plunging neckline or 12-inch stilettos signal a moral depravity that must be eradicated from storefront windows or runways. Drably-dressed souls who seek to strike fear in the hearts of those who decide what is chic, who want to undermine the very fabric - no pun intended – of hauteur culture, and who think nothing of slipping an M-80 into an unsuspecting model’s halter top, or lacing a stylist’s spray-tan can with Anthrax.”

“If you don’t mind the idea that women should be covered head-to-toe in burlap, or that a beard is something more than a platonic date on a Friday night, then by all means we’ll give your phones back right now. But if you enjoy the freedom to create clothing that pushes the boundaries of good taste, if you don’t want to see paisley pumps and a pipe bomb on the cover of *Women’s Wear Daily*, then you will let Mr. Krch do his job, which, in the effort to be transparent, means he will check your phone calls, your texts and emails, your photos and links, anything that might warrant further investigation or interrogation.”

“No further questions? Good. Let’s begin. Mr. Krch, before you go to the back room, please kill the lights and turn on the projector. Thank you. Now, and please, one-at-a-time, tell me what is wrong with the picture you see on the screen? Yes, yellow shirt, red pants, birthmark on your left earlobe. I see. You think the man’s jeans are an abomination. The cut makes him look bloated. You think sequins will create a sleeker look. I suppose you’re right, but that’s not where I want you to focus. Look lower in the frame. Is there anything that might make you, say, alert the authorities?”

“Yes, blue blouse, blue ear muffs, blue studs in both nostrils. What is wrong with this picture? The man’s shoes. Interesting! Do you suspect he might be hiding an incendiary device inside them? No, you just think they look dreadful. You think he should wear black boots instead, something vintage, especially if he’s going to wear sequined jeans. I appreciate the comment, but again, not exactly what I’m after. Please, everyone, look beyond the man’s clothes. Isn’t there anything else amiss? Something that causes you alarm as a citizen?”

“You, tuxedo shirt with black suspenders. The man’s hair? You think a blind barber put a bowl over his head and just cut around. His hair style? That’s what you think represents a danger to this country? C’mon people, don’t make me ask Mr. Krch to come back with the waterboard flashcards. For the last time, and please, don’t even look at the man, but look around the subway car. What is wrong with this picture?”

“Yes, the person with the red cape. Indeed, the man in the picture is sitting alone. Go on. You think he must smell bad. You think if he dressed better, got a new haircut and cleaned up, people might sit near him. For heaven’s sake! All of you are missing the point! Look under the seat, on the floor. What do you see? You, with the nostrils. Yes! A package! An unattended package! What do you think is inside?”

“You...are you naked, by the way? No, you’re wearing a flesh-colored leotard. Okay. Disturbing as your wardrobe is, tell me what is also disturbing about the package? What could be inside that poses a threat? Another pair of horrid jeans. That’s your answer! I’ve had enough. The right answer is a bomb! There’s a big, stinky, dirty bomb inside the package! But you’re too concerned about the man’s clothes and hair style to notice and run to people like Mr. Krch for help! What do you have to say for yourselves?”

“Yes, red cape. You’d rather be blown up by a dirty bomb than look like the man in the

picutre. Well isn't that pathetic. Mr. Krch, please come back into the room. Will you turn back on the lights and switch off the projector. Thank you. Let me just say, to all five of you, I've never been more discouraged after a presentation. Clearly, you don't have what it takes to be active, responsible, supportive citizens in the fight against fashion terrorism. I have no choice but to submit a report to O.O.P.S. condemning you all as threats to the industry. Does anyone have anything to say to that?"

"Yes, blue nostrils. Is my suit Italian? Well, if you must know, I bought it in Sweden. Mr. Krch and I did a series of presentations for a furrier in Stockholm on how to spot sedition among sable workers. Yes, the cut is unique. What's your name? Spell it please. Thank you. Mr. Krch, give my wife back her phone. The others will be held for the time being. You can all go back to work now."

Shon 5-DJP

1

Invisible rivers of electrical data flow through the air and through secure land-lines. We are an electron in motion. Our name is Shon 5-DJP. Of our stories, this is perhaps the beginning. We are male of 24 years. In the coastal kingdom of Karangom, we serve among the numbered information workers and dwell in the capitol city, Karan. This is the state's nervous system. We are part of 4,872 translators in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and we decode. We are an element in governmental functioning.

Surrounding us there are many voices; within us there are many voices: they echo and merge on the verge of being swept away. Sounds of all kinds resound in our head and outside our body, and this voice is barely distinguishable among them. But this voice, even if arbitrary, even if artificial, even if alien to us, is the voice that promises to unravel our story. And this story is ours since we are the nexus of this particular set of physical objects, impressions, desires, events, abstractions. Now, to some extent and for a short period of time, this story will be yours.

Perhaps you too feel that nothing in the world of childhood, adolescence, even most of adult life has made the kind of sense others claim to find there. The reality behind the words invoking self-confidence, purpose, single-minded devotion to goals, satisfaction with results has eluded us. No knowing, no constructs of words has ever contained, for more than a moment the rush and throb of experience. We have felt from the start like empty space encased in a swirl of sensation.

Why then does a moment from childhood remain? Our mother was humming as she does the washing in a bucket of sour smelling water. We were lying on our back on the cool damp concrete floor sucking sugar cane whose sweetness filled our mouth. Golden sunlight slid through a crack in the roof and diffused in the dusty humid air. Flies buzzed around the bucket, and from outside came the sounds of Vids and street singers with PA systems blaring words and songs punctuated by the shouts of street vendors, and the hubbub of pedestrians. We could smell sweat, rotting fish, jackfruit, burning meat, excrement, lilies, and frying oil. We were engulfed, swamped and had no being to make sense of this. There was no center. There was no reality

beyond wave on wave of sensation. But somehow there was longing, longing for a beyond, for a freedom beyond.

Once we were placed in the school, memories and exhilaration gave way; chaos lost to forms. The world became less dense as it gained a spectral clarity. Sensation became a thin shifting veil on the logic of history, the formulae of physics, chemistry, molecular and gross biology, the articulation of code and language. The worlds of the senses, the worlds of desires, imagination were not to be trusted; just confused expressions of an alien grid and its inescapable logic. Thus a gap between feeling and knowledge. It was our purpose in life to master the grid, manipulate the illusions of physical existence, close the gap. We moved on roads others with far more confidence set out for us.

We were one of thousands of children with genetic propensities recorded at birth. We were raised by unsuspecting parents who, by the sweat of their labor, eked out harsh precarious lives. At the age of six, we were harvested from the muddy banks on which we had first taken root and placed in academies which were administered by the Ministries of Education and Military Affairs. We were trained for our roles as useful people who could live predictably in modest comfort. That things now seem to be turning otherwise does not engage our understanding.

2

To take refuge in specifics: When we were five years old, our father was coming home on his pedi-cab. He swerved into the garage where we lived behind a curtain at the rear and he cut in front of a plum-red shiny limousine glittering with gold trim. It screeched to a halt. We were stooped over by the stream of sewage that meandered through the gutter. We were, as we never tired of doing, making little boats of orange rind or plastic bottles, and watching them float off through the tempestuous clamor of our world. We absorbed ourself this way particularly when our mother noisily fucked the landlord, the block security officer or the grocer or whoever had to be bought off that day. We were a dreamy child and we thought of these teeny vessels drifting down our street, plummeting into a sewer main, drifting onward through dark ever larger pipes until they would spill out into the river and from there onto a sparkling sea.

The squeal of brakes woke us up. We gaped as a body-guard, huge and dark in a shiny black suit, leaped from the front passenger seat. His boss, some kind of info-business baron, screamed

from the darkness of the rear about how that stupid thing (our father) had almost damaged his new car. Then in no time at all the guard deliberately and skillfully beat our father to a pulp.

The whole time, our father offered no resistance and cried out his apologies, all to no avail. We screamed. We ran forward to stop the man from beating our father. But, to our dismay, our father turned on us with his black eye, blood flowing from his broken nose and split lip, cursed us and told us to fuck off.

Our mother pulled us back into the garage. Later when our father pushed the pedi-cab in, dripping blood onto the dirty concrete floor, he stopped to slap us hard. “You stupid little piece of shit. If he had wanted to, he could have kept me from working tomorrow.”

“But” we started, overcome with the multiple injustices involved,. Our father hit us again. This time he hit us hard enough to knock us to the floor. “Everyone has a job to do. Even thugs. Everyone except you, that is.” In this way we, who had lived unthinkingly, content to make boats out of rubbish, to watch them float in the open sewer in the street before our house, came for the first time to glimpse the rules of the world.

Six months later, we were placed in a boarding school. We never saw the people we had known as our mother and father again.

3

“The chance of a life time”, our mother had said as we cried. “Shh Shhh. You won’t have to live like us.” But of course, we saw nothing wrong with the way we lived. It was all we knew. Through the bus’s yellowed plastic window, our mother weeping and wringing her hands, disappeared into the gray crowd. The parting words of our father still hissed in our ears: “Now Big Head, you’ll go where you belong.

On the Vid, news presenters called people like our parents: “Material Workers”, but everyone else called them “Things”. These were people who struggled in chaos and squalor, who used the raw power of their bodies to move the material things that made life in the kingdom possible for

others. But on the Vids, we saw a different class of people, men and women who used their brains to control computers, to move things about with their minds. In our neighborhood, these were called “Big Heads”. On the Vids, these were “Information Workers, or more grandly, “Information Science Workers.” And it was actually true that the Big Heads really did have biggish heads and that their bodies were rather spindly. And it was true that we did look like this.

So it seemed we then were fated to enter this unknown way of living, one day to look down from our high-rise apartments on the slums and running seas of sewage from which we had emerged. The bus rolled on and on for what seemed hours. The landscape became ever more unfamiliar, and our loneliness and despair became ever greater. The bus drove through unimaginably broad streets, cruised on ribbons of concrete from which no human habitation was visible and where there was no one camped out on the roadside. As things became stranger, we felt ourself shriveling up in terror. We imagined our father taking clients here on his pedi-cab. Other children were hyperventilating. We tried to make conversation to distract ourself. We lied to our neighbors. “Our Dad told us about this place,” we whispered to the quivering girl ahead of us. “He said it’s really great.” In that moment when we were all afraid, this was the only time I ever spoke of him with pride.

Our destination was on the edge of the city, a three story concrete complex surrounded by razor wire. Our first shock was the extreme cleanliness of the bleak corridor and the sweetish smell of disinfectant. We were marched into a long room, stripped by efficient thick bodied women wearing face masks, shoved into a tiled room, showered with boiling water (a first for us), sprayed with chemicals, showered again, dried with hot air jets. We were inspected by medical personnel who pushed us into tiny gray vertical cylinders, cool and dry on the inside. A blaze of greenish fluorescent light blinded us. Chrome metal probes explored every part of our body, and took samples of blood, saliva, mucous, hair, urine and feces. Everyone was then given short hair-cuts and purple overalls.

On a Vid monitor, an emotionless younger man in white overalls explained that when test results were concluded, those who were approved would join the general academy population. Until that time, we would stay in temporary barracks, where we would learn to march in formation and to do maintenance routines. This was at first very difficult. We had never before acted as part of a group.

We were told to follow the purple lines and were led into long, white-washed concrete rooms filled with ranks of gray metal bunks. There were no attendants. No one told us what to do. There simply was no choice. We began living in the routine which we would follow for twelve years.

Of course, some of the people on the bus disappeared after a few days. We never saw them again. These unexplained disappearances were an ongoing feature of our life. Throughout our stay, friends, enemies and mere acquaintances would suddenly vanish. One morning we would wake up and there would be a bare mattress, rolled up where another had lived.

Indifferent and unfeeling men and women on the Vids instructed us in the basics of our schedule: wake up, shower, mealtime, cleaning, education, mealtime, education, military drill, mealtime, study, sleep. We were used to living in a mass of people, but we were not used to the absence of smell, the absence of continual racket, the blandness of the food, and the impersonal ghostly supervision. On Vid monitors, an ageless female face with a slightly out of sync but patient voice assigned us our places in the dorm, the dining hall, the gym and the desks with small facing Vid monitor. Each displayed the already slightly familiar face of a personal instructor.

A week later, one by one, we were subjected to surgical procedures. We received the implants that allowed direct linkage to the data streams we were required to process. Then we were fitted with the visored helmets whose electro-magnetic cues were processed within our genetic make-up. Everything streamed into us was our experience. This wasn't painful; actually somewhat the reverse. But the un-linked normal world increasingly became and has remained uncomfortably solitary, awkward and slightly pallid.

In the years that followed, we trained to accept with increasing rapidity all the canons of mathematics, computer science, sociology, physics, chemistry, biology, languages sociology, economics, and history. Our days passed in an unworldly drift between the vivid intensity of our electro-stimulated mind experiences, the regimented drill of physical instruction, and exhilarating Vid simulations in which we continually experienced being part of some vast and intricate quest.

We had human instructors only in the martial arts and military exercises. These instructors were, as we quickly saw, mere things, limited in their outlook and awareness to the task at hand, and incapable of speech on any other level. What human intimacy that we did have we derived from each other. From soon after our arrival, children climbed into bed with each other, held each other, cried, and slept. As we became adolescents, this naturally became sexual a kind exploration. There was never any effort to curtail these nocturnal activities, even as we were instructed that we could look forward to arranged marriages when later we carried out the tasks which were essential to the security and prosperity of the kingdom.

When our instruction was complete, we were assigned to military intelligence, translating the decoded intercepts of various foreign powers. When we left the military, we were assigned to do the same kind of work for the foreign ministry. We were housed in a ninety-story government apartment where indeed, we could look down on the teeming squalor from which we had come.

4

That was our upbringing, and our entry into the great army of information workers. It was a regular existence leavened by occasional visits to dance clubs, kick boxing tournaments, sex workers, and many hours scoping Vids. There was no reason for it to change. Many others lived reasonably happily this way. All of us were always aware of the brutal teeming existence that we had been spared. And all of us felt a kind of bored disgust at the world we had left and through which we still passed. Perhaps everyone not impelled by harsh demands, feels in some deep way disconnected.

We could expect that our employers would provide marriage within the next five years. We could expect that our grade and salary would rise steadily. Our housing would improve. Our children would enter the ranks of the government. We would retire with our wife to a seaside old-age community where we would watch the violet sunsets with those of the same age and status and talk about the old days. The children would visit, impatient to leave and rejoin the busy life that had left us behind on that shore. And certainly it might have happened that way, and we might even have been quite happy except for a sequence of meaningless events for which we can claim no credit.

The first happened one afternoon when our supervisor instructed us to take a document case

over to the Ministry of War. This was most unusually since any papers too sensitive for transmission were unusually assigned to armed couriers and their drivers. "It's nothing special." The supervisor was a fat condescending man whose every communication was issued in a tone of weary aggravation. "They insist on hard copy. Self important army people. Immediate delivery. The couriers are all out. Bah. Take a cab. Not important."

We found ourself with a metal case, blinking with finder-seeker transmissions chained to our wrist careening through the streets of Karan. The driver drove in a duel to the death, challenging every oncoming bus, truck, pedi-cab, ox cart, or child, honking and driving straight at them until they pulled out of his path. We looked out of the window at an unending kaleidoscope, fruit vendors shouting, a naked man squatting and fixing an electric motor, a young girl urinating in an open sewer, an old man in rags, lying beside a bowl of yellow flowers, two brown dogs pulling at a piece of rotting meat, a fat child bouncing a ball against a wall, an ad for fluorescent condoms, the smell of charcoal fire, burning plastic, a Hologram ad with two large red smacking lips as a purple tongue emerged and wet them, two young men with silver and lime green hair fighting, an old matriarch looking serenely out a window, a prostitute servicing a client against an alley wall, a baker's assistant carrying a tray of pink colored cakes. By the time we reached our destination, our legs were cramped from pressing our feet against the floor and we were swamped in sensations that prompted half-remembered recollections. The swirl and the meaninglessness of the sequences of experience made us dizzy. We passed out slightly as our ability to process was overwhelmed and felt we were being carried into a world of engulfing densities devoid of discernable pattern or reason.

Within a few weeks, after work, we found ourself taking long walks through the slums around our apartment in the kinds of neighborhoods where we had been born. It and all dwelling like it were probably long gone, the roads around it re-routed, the people dispersed. The city was constantly being re-formed. Slums became luxury complexes, and neighborhoods that had recently been swanky were now abandoned. Formerly deluxe apartments became tenanted by criminals and beggars; ghettos became parks then slums again, highways cut across former lakes, were left incomplete were overrun by vines. Even if our neighborhood did by some chance still exist, the ways into it would have been altered beyond recognition.

One night, we wandered in a sweaty fog through a quiet neighborhood occupied by skinny, dark suspicious looking men and women wearing veils. We turned a corner and came upon a gathering in a small square. Beneath a scrawny ailing tree, a wandering street performer had set up a

small stage for himself with battery lights and a painted backdrop. Children sat spellbound before him as their mothers watched from nearby, and several rows of men young and old stood to the rear. Around the group, three or four cooks had set up food stalls, and the smells of fried bread and barbecued lamb filled the air. We had suddenly encountered a little impromptu fair. We bought some food and joined the crowd, munching happily on hot oily bread as we watched and listened. Smells of the growing night clung to all our bodies as we became a single being responding to the performer.

The man who so entranced us was very dark with long black matted hair. He was dressed only in a loin-cloth and his skinny body glistened in the light. He might have been middle aged or older, but he might have been fairly young and lived a very hard life. We couldn't tell. His face seemed sometimes ancient, sometimes youthful, sometimes coy, and sometimes frightening depending on the scene or person he was depicting. His voice was sometimes frail as if dying, sometimes a great warrior's earsplitting bellow, sometimes a whisper so penetrating it was as if he were right next to us.

He was enacting the well-known tale of King Bi. King Bi had lived far off and long ago. He had ruled a powerful and prosperous land. He was good-hearted and well intentioned, but also lustful, careless, and opportunistic. He had been seduced by a foolish if ambitious woman, and thus fallen into the plots contrived by his enemies. These enemies were two: his own scheming wife and a corrupt judge. King Bi remained a favorite with the people despite his own misdeeds and the labyrinthine contrivances of his opponents. He extricated himself from disaster after disaster, but only escaped the final noose of their intrigues by making war on a distant realm ruled by an evil mad-man. When he failed to win the war, he was driven from office by the populace who also lynched his wife and stoned the judge to death. King Bi became an itinerant monk.

5

On that night, we sat there on the ground in the dark as the performer hypnotized us with an infinite variety of expressions and accents and King Bi's life unfolded before us. We and the growing crowd of strangers around us were transported to another world until it was almost morning. We shook our heads as the city was slowly emerging from darkness. As all in the city had dreamed their solitary dreams, we the audience, assembled by sheer happenstance, had shared a single dream. We had joined together in a river of words, ambitions and desires.

In the heavy purple air, we walked past old men, cigarettes clamped between their lips, hauling garbage cans out onto the street, tired prostitutes in rumpled fluorescent pink dresses staggering home on their high heels. We saw the blackened feet of beggars sticking out from the cardboard boxes where they slept. Scowling women with lime green plastic buckets washed the sidewalks in front of their stores. There was little traffic. Radios and PA systems had not been turned on.

It was almost silent. The waking city was still taking shape and not yet quite real. We thought we heard the dark performer's breath near me, but when we turned, there was only an old man sleeping in a doorway. The world of King Bi had not yet vanished, was not yet hidden like the constellations in the daytime sky. We felt we were adrift between worlds. We felt the presence of a shape, a possibility. The words of the last song in the play would not leave our head. We could not put it aside. It was something trying to begin. Over and over, trying to begin.

A fragment of the waning sun
Lights the gold cascade of falling leaves.

Suddenly they rise up in the open air,
Dancing on a vagrant breeze
Each a new-born golden butterfly,
Free, alone, transformed, alive.

And call and whisper
As they fall to earth,
And whisper fallen,
Dancing
Dream.

New Air

That morning I followed the professor
with oak walking stick, pack, my lantern

across the crater's black sand to descend
the quiet volcano's mouth to the Center

I didn't complain of Dante or sad Virgil
his guide starting down into a sky-less

night-bound land without stars or sun or
moon or fear that roped together we'd

traverse hot peaks above infernal valleys
of souls like burning apple trees. By luck

we found an unknown ocean, lost Atlantis
past hungry salamander big as a dinosaur,

and bones of Iceland's lone explorer 300
years pointing one white finger straight

at a chimney's up-rushing wind that blew
our cauldron to the surface world. All dark

miles of our descent we discovered Earth,
every downward spiral stair took us closer

to its core, wheel's empty hub, the heart.
The compass needle spun endlessly, each

direction now north, south, east, west and
finally all our steps led upward to new air.

so to shield our eyes from Eden of animals
done with us, unknown to maps, far island
never spied by ark or whaler, a lost caravel.

Highway Longing

Alone on the highway, white lights pierce the darkness.
Darting cars staple my mind to the road.
This drive made longer with only him in my thoughts.

Insistent red lights interrupt my insights.
Cars zig and zag between lanes, leaving me behind.
The night is smooth like his touch.

Ahead a blinking sign marks a detour.
Will this road put me on the right route?
I speed ahead and follow a white line into nothingness.

Suddenly the road opens to a brightly lit exit.
My thoughts of him mixed up in this moving montage.
Alone on the highway I long for darkness.

Tomorrow is Watching Everything We Do, But Still We Must Live, 2011

*Could the Large Hadron Collider be sabotaging itself from the future,
as some physicists say*

-The Times UK *news article blurb*

The relationship between mass and non-mass is still a theoretical marriage.
The Earth was flat until it wasn't—seeing is believing, they once said. *The* they.

In deep seas giant beasts once blew rogue liquid buttes a hundred feet
over cabin boy and barge alike. Fishy jokes empirically laughed aside:

merely wind and current colliding. Ocean flattened—until ships still slipped
into these monsters like doomed Jonahs as satellites watched helpless. So:

sneaky quantum mechanics delineate almost-but-not-random wave structures
at the invisible atomic level erecting grand anomalies. Holy shit. But—

how else to cross a dance floor than to discover arrhythmia? Whew.
Still no change in hard shadows and noon-light. That's some security,

though now they say the future is trying to sabotage us, careless-
empiricist-us, defending secrets of the Higgs boson. Be wary

of acute protestations. Coo hard statistic-lullabies, refrains of probability.
I can't risk skywriting anymore—I'm sorry. I still love you.

If major tom had been black

mama always said space was
no place for a man
that if god meant for man
to walk on the moon
he would've given us a home there

i saw a replica of a rocket ship
once when i was travelling through
huntsville, alabama
i thought about how the
first brotha must've felt
when he went up
he went so far into
space that he became a
blip on the radar
that he got as close
as he could to god
without prayer
the planets more real to him
than in any of those books
his mama chastized him for
reading

"only dreamers read," his mama yelled
"and nothing ever changed unless
people took action,"

at least, that's what guys like huey newton
fred hampton and eldredge cleaver thought

but space is the place for dreamers

who follow the hand of god
leading them to their destiny
who are not afraid to put on the wings
icarus made and tempt fate

to feel weightless is to become
lighter than god's breath
is to float endlessly as a maple leaf
through all letters of the
alphabet
is to understand what jimi did
when he took sound and created
the 4th dimension

Lisa and Lolita, *Le viol des deux*

One

I discovered *Lolita* in film at the tender age of 11. What I remember most about that year was that I was always alone, but not alone enough, as it turned out. My older brother was habitually out with ‘friends’ and my little brother had the unique privilege of being able to go to work with my mom (who worked at a day care center); this left me alone in our four bedroom apartment. My father worked for our apartment complex as a maintenance man and he had the nerve-wracking habit of coming home in between ‘fix-it’ it calls.

We lived in Las Vegas and that summer was one of the hottest anyone could remember, with temperatures reaching a lethal 120 degrees at least twice a week. Trapped inside by the heat, I would watch movies. My favorites were old movies; anything black and white was of interest. And so it came to pass, that (quite by accident) I found myself one hot July day watching Stanley Kubrick’s 1962 classic *Lolita*.

Two

In *Lolita*, *Laughter in the Dark* and *Transparent Things* Nabokov writes vivid prose regarding the agony that (both unrequited and requited) ‘forbidden love’ creates in the male soul and the violent impulses these couplings bring out in both parties. Nabokov’s themes are voyeuristically sexual; turning all of his readers into ‘accident gapers’ on the highway of life. The accidents Nabokov allows his readers to slow down and gaze at have old names: lust, cruelty, incest, torture, rape, betrayal, and murder. It follows that during Nabokov’s lifetime (and well after his death) his most popular work was *Lolita* – people love a blood-smeared road.

Three

I cried through most of the film. I was so confused. I cried confused tears most that summer for varied reasons.

Four

Synesthesia from the ancient Greek σύν [syn], “together”, and αἴσθησις [aisthēsis], “sensation”) is a neurological phenomenon in which stimulation of one sensory or cognitive pathway leads to automatic, involuntary experiences in a second sensory or cognitive pathway. People who report such experiences are known as synesthetes. Though often stereotyped as a medical condition or neurological aberration, many synesthetes themselves do not perceive their synesthetic experiences as a handicap. To the contrary, most report it as a gift—an additional “hidden” sense—something they would not want to miss.

Five

Biographers and critics alike have analyzed and dissected Nabokov’s prose style, finding the artistry of synesthesia under their microscopes. However, this type of literary criticism feels reductive, sterile, and antiseptic. While Nabokov’s prose is richly textured and full of sensory details that capture and confuse all of the five senses, this quirk of his writing cannot and should not be explained away as the by-product of a medical condition. In the same way, critics miss the aberrant impact of his words when they are tagged, bagged, and shelved as high art. These types of diagnostic criticism, while traditional, capture none of the distressingly painful content that fills the pages of his novels. *Lolita* is about the brutal and repeated rape of a child at the hands of her step-father. *Laughter in the Dark* details the descent of a man into fatal lust and tortured blindness. *Transparent Things* gives the account of a man who kills his young wife in a fit of rage and jealousy. All the flowery prose and untranslated French phrases cannot change these sickeningly heart-wrenching themes.

Six

I called my grandmother and begged her to take me to the library. I wanted to tell her why I had been crying. I wanted to tell her so many things about her son, but I settled for a trip to the library. I was on a mission to find *Lolita* in print – the film would make more sense to me once I read the book. I gathered up my latest round of read books and met my grandmother at the wrought iron gate that separated our community from the rest of the world. She never asked me what was wrong . . . funny, no one ever did. Like all good betrayers, she ignored all signs that didn’t point toward her own destination. She refused to see my puffy, red eyes and emaciated

figure (my anorexic attempt to be too ugly for my father's tastes). That anciently happy betrayer just drove me to the library and complimented me for being such an avid reader.

I checked out three books that day: *Lolita*, *A Wrinkle in Time*, and *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden*. The librarian hesitated as she flipped open *Lolita*'s cover, "Do you know what this is about young lady?" I responded with silence, hoping she would pull me aside and ask me why I wanted to read the book. The silence grew between us. Her face became quizzical and she appeared to be on the verge of saying something . . . I looked up at her with large, brown, pleading eyes, urging her to pursue her line of questioning. "You do know this is not a children's book?" I was silently hopeful, this nosy librarian wasn't going to stamp my book; instead, she was going to help me! "I really don't know if you should be reading this. . ." was all she said before she pounded her ink stamp into the due date box and called for the next patron to step forward . . . due dates are important.

Seven

Readers don't have to wait long for Humbert to find *his soul, his sin, his Lolita*. Just 39 pages into the novel, Humbert a cuckolded, newly divorced man is struck by a girl's resemblance to his first love. *It was the same child-the same frail, honey-hued shoulders, the same silky supple bare back, the same chestnut head of hair. The twenty-five years I had lived since then tapered to a palliating point, and vanished . . . yes, they [were both] beautiful, beautiful, beautiful.* The subtlety of this scene is horrifyingly focused; with an interweaving of words, colors, and textures Humbert's budding compulsive obsession is revealed. The sexuality of the scene is not gratuitously pornographic, but it is sensual. The reader can picture the color of honey on her shoulders, her smooth, sunlit back, and chestnut-colored hair, *lovely in drawn abdomen and puerile hips*. Humbert's *passionate recognition* and equation of Lolita to that *same girl* whose breasts he fondled, hips he kissed, and abdomen his lips momentarily brushed on their way down her body move these sentences from harmless description to calculatingly predatory. Nabokov cleverly forces the reader to look at Lolita as Humbert does (as a sexual being – a nymphet). In doing so, he pushes us to explore our own apathy toward child molestation, rape, and incest. Nabokov paints child rape in an array of blindingly bright, artistic hues – but, like a valuable masterpiece that has been painted over, the true painting, the one most people will not see, is hidden underneath. Conceivably, what lies beneath the surface of *Lolita* is the most shocking; for me, it is the most terrifyingly personal depiction of evil I have ever read.

Eight

Throughout *Lolita* Nabokov hints at the grotesque underbelly missed by readers who get caught up in his intoxicating style. It is noteworthy that Lolita is the first person to define clearly what her relationship is with the narrator. She does not evade the subject with flowery prose (as Humbert does throughout the novel). Instead, she states calmly, clearly, and quite correctly, *the word is incest*. In his choice to have Lolita use this word, Nabokov has skillfully revealed what could very well be her true feelings about Humbert's 'love' for her, as well as, his profound unreliability as a narrator. Perhaps (as has often been suggested) Lolita is being coquettish and humorous, but this is highly unlikely. Her use of the word 'incest' alludes to both the paternal bond between them and the criminal nature of her step-father's desire for her. For all of the flirting, vamping, and 'put-on' sexual maturity Humbert sees in her, and for all of the lechery, vulgarity, and phony fatherly mannerisms Lolita sees in him; the truth might be somewhere in the middle.

Lolita is a twelve-year-old girl, who has just lost the only parent she has ever known. She is now in desperate need of a parent's love and protection from her step-father. Humbert is a pedophile, who has recently become a step-father and a widower. And yet, Nabokov makes it wonderfully and appallingly clear that his protagonist/narrator is *looking through the glass darkly* of a sexually disturbed man. The reader must suspect that Humbert, like all narrators, is telling his version of the truth.

Humbert describes his sexual appetites as that of *an artist or madman, a creature of infinite melancholy*. Very early in the novel Nabokov allows Humbert to speak of himself in the third person; this switch in point of view occurs when Humbert is justifying his attraction to children with a revolting passion and unchecked forthrightness. For instance, *his heart beat when, among the innocent throng, he espied a demon child, [charming and deceitful] . . . he was perfectly capable of intercourse with Eve, but it was Lilith he longed for*. Nabokov's syntax here is precise and deceptively eloquent. The casual reader, who picks up *Lolita* in the hopes of finding a catalog of erotic perversions, misses Nabokov's ingenious equation of pedophilia with demonology.

This important analogy is found by the reader seventeen pages into the novel, long before Humbert finds Lolita. Here, Nabokov invokes the mythology surrounding the Lilith tradition in his depiction of Humbert's sexual desires. To explain, Eve represents subservient adult women

of beauty and strength, who most Adams (unlike Humbert) find sexually attractive. Humbert's yearning for a Lilith symbolizes the contrary nature of what he calls his 'love' for nymphets.

Nine

Lilith, a demon goddess, was birthed from the dust of Eden and married to Adam. However, unlike Eve, she refused to lie underneath Adam during sexual intercourse. According to the myths and legends that surround her, Lilith's refusal came from her desire to control the amount of sexual pleasure she received from Adam, while simultaneously controlling the amount of sexual pleasure Adam received from her. In the same way, Humbert refuses to accept conventional sexual relationships and instead desires to be sexually dominated by a childlike demon-goddess of his very own.

Ten

Nabokov's early mention of the Lilith myth also acts as foreshadowing. The mythical Lilith leaves Eden and journeys to the desert caves peppered along the shores of the Red Sea. Once there she daily gives herself over to her insatiable sexual desires with lascivious demons; the result is the production of a litter of demonic babies. Comparatively, Humbert takes his Lilith aka his Lolita and flees to the deserted roads of America to pursue his own sexual desires. He also desires *a marriage in a mountain state [and] a litter of Lolitas*. Several times throughout the novel, he and Lolita find themselves exploring the dark realms of physical and symbolic caves. To the bitter end, Humbert rationalizes his perverse dream *that with patience and luck I might have her produce eventually a nymphet with my blood in her exquisite veins, Lolita the Second . . . when I would still be [in the strength of my age] . . . practicing on a lovely Lolita the third the art of granddad*.

Eleven

Vladimir Nabokov was asked on numerous occasions why he wrote *Lolita*. Loath to answer this question, he would respond differently almost every time. Sometimes he might quip that it was not the love affair between Humbert and Lolita that interested him; no, it was his own love affair with the English language. At other times, he would state that the whole novel was inspired by Edgar Allan Poe's *Annabel*. Nabokov's evasiveness toward this question only fueled the novel's mystery, causing critics and literary scholars alike to draw their own conclu-

sions. One of the most popular is that *Lolita* is the greatest love story ever told. Take it from a real-life Lolita: this is no great love story; quite the contrary. Perhaps, Nabokov is using the physical rape of his main character to illustrate a larger issue: the rape of the American female's childhood.

Nabokov may have written *Lolita* to expose the fact that underneath the 1950's American commercial veneer of happy marriages, white picket fences, and charmingly boisterous children lay the ugly rapes of generations of little girls - who were conditioned by a predatory mass media to leave innocent girlhood behind as quickly as possible and plunge head long into womanhood as full blown consumers of all products deemed feminine.

Twelve

Comedian Bob Monkhouse once said: *My mother tried to kill me when I was a baby. She denied it. She said she thought the plastic bag would keep me fresh.* My own mother tried to kill me when I was twelve. Like all good mothers, she denies this. She said she thought the fires of her indifference were keeping me warm.

Thirteen

All-in-all my mother was a good sport about things – she always drove me out of town whenever I caught a bladder infection. When I was very young, not more than four or five, I remember being driven forty miles away to a clinic where you did not have to have an appointment. This was done to keep me away from our family doctor, a wonderful, elderly, German gentleman, who had taken a special interest in me since he delivered me into this cruel world. Due to an abnormal amount of bladder infections for a child my age, it was ordered that I see our good German doctor once a week until 'things cleared up'. He always brought his beautiful wife/nurse into the exam room with us and made my mother wait outside. He would carefully look over each childhood bump and bruise to ensure that all of them were received innocently during play. His wife would smile while he was doing this and ask me all kinds of questions about my parents' overall treatment of me and my brother. These visits always ended with the same question, "Does it hurt when you pee?" At first I told the truth, whereupon he would gently pat my knee and tell me he would give me something to take care of that and not to worry. Then, his wife would smooth my hair and prepare the liquid pink antibiotic. By the fifth infec-

tion, I overheard him telling my mother that if I had even one more infection something more intrusive would have to be done. My mother cried all the way home, saying all the time that I might have kidney troubles and that she didn't want me to die. After that, I lied to the good doctor and told him everything was fine, but when the pain got to be too much I confessed to my mother the truth. The doctors and nurses at the clinic never asked me any questions; they just examined me, wrote my mother a prescription and sent us on our way. Thus, she became indifferent to my abnormal amount of infections; tossing them aside as 'something I would grow out of'.

When I was older, the tumor of her indifference grew so large that it blinded her. She loved the darkness that feigned ignorance brings to the eyes. I hated her darkness, almost as much as I hated the hot, white light coming through our front door every day at 1 pm: his favorite hour of interruption.

Fourteen

In classic Nabokovian style, Humbert indifferently describes the details of his own mother's death as a parenthetical note on his childhood: *My very photogenic mother died in a freak accident (picnic, lightning)*. Nabokov's mothers tend to fall into three categories: absent, dead, or complicit, all of which lead to their fresh-faced daughters being harmed emotionally, physically, and sexually. In *Lolita*, Charlotte conveniently dies, and in doing so, opens the way for Humbert: *at first, when Charlotte had just been eliminated . . . one thing in my mind and pulse—namely, the awareness that in a few hours hence, warm, brown-haired, and mine, mine, mine, Lolita would be in my arms, shedding tears that I would kiss away faster than they could well. Death is not the only way Nabokov's mothers betray their daughters. In Transparent Things (one of Nabokov's final novels), Armande's mother acts as a complicit procurer for the obsessive Hugh when she states, Come, I want to offer you a nice cold drink and show you some albums . . . not only did the snapshots follow Armande through all the phases of the past and all of the improvements of an amateur photographer, but the girl came in various states of innocent undress.*

Laughter in the Dark (Nabokov's tribute to the silent film era) shows Margot's mother to be abusively absent: *Her mother was still youngish, but rather battered too . . . a coarse callous woman whose red palm was a perfect cornucopia of blows. As a child Margot went to school, and there her ears were boxed rather less frequently than at home.*

Nabokov's own mother fits none of his categories; in fact, she was the polar opposite of these ghostly figures who float in out of the pages of his novels leaving trails of endoplasmic damage in their wake. His novels leave the reader begging to know 'Where have all the good mothers gone?' Nabokov does not present an idealized view of the bond between mothers and daughters. In stark contrast to any loving bond, Nabokov presents the mother-daughter relationship as an ongoing power struggle – where only one will survive. Lolita, Margot, and Armande find no comfort in their mothers' arms. They are waiflike orphans forced to seek comfort and love wherever they can find it. They are vulnerable. They are preyed upon. They are predators. They are modern women in every sense of the word.

Fifteen

The average marriage among the Sami people of pre-industrial Finland showed young women marrying much older men; with an age gap between 15-25 years . . . the men lived longer . . . love did not enter into it.

Sixteen

Like many of his fellow pedophiles, my father was a lover of history, art, and traps. The internet has allowed men him to fill chat rooms with their: encyclopedic rants regarding Greco-Roman history on the subject of sex with children; citations (given with barely veiled anticipation) places around the globe where men are allowed to freely and openly copulate with children as young as nine; and discussions of the paintings, sculptures, sketches, and photographs of children that line their walls and fill their odious hiding places. Only the most well-known artists are seen by the public and only the most obscene are saved for private consumption. Predators want so much to be accepted and understood as tortuously artistic.

My father's traps, like all good hunters, were camouflaged. He feigned interest in childish things; offered achingly soothing words to my pre-pubescent angsts; carefully placed kisses and caresses on my cheeks, forehead, and hands; offered my eagerly developing brain philosophical bullshit about life, love, and death. Ah but, these revelations come to the prey much too late.

Seventeen

Nabokov's work is not autobiographical and he loathed psychoanalytical criticism or what he called Freudian criticism of his work: *My advice to a budding literary critic would be as follows. Learn to distinguish banality. Remember that mediocrity thrives on "ideas." Beware of the modish message. Ask yourself if the symbol you have detected is not your own footprint. Ignore allegories. By all means place the "how" above the "what" but do not let it be confused with the "so what." Rely on the sudden erection of your small dorsal hairs. Do not drag in Freud at this point. All the rest depends on personal talent.*

This may be due to the fact that there is almost nothing of Vladimir Nabokov's personal life in his novels. He grew up in a healthy, wealthy family where he was educated, supported, and encouraged to pursue his creative passions. Moreover, Nabokov was known for thrashing literary critics who attempted to connect him to his characters: he once wrote [where, in a letter?] *Neither can I do anything to please critics belonging to the good old school of "projected biography," who examine an author's work, which they do not understand, through the prism of his life, which they do not know.*

Eighteen

Nabokov is not Hugh, Albinas, or even Humbert and I am not Lolita, Margot, or Armande. And yet, we are all drawn together by wisdom and experience on the painful journeys his novels take me on. His writing speaks to that part of my soul that was crushed, broken, and lost long ago in the arid heat of Nevada. Perhaps, I return to Nabokov's evil deserts because, despite the pain they bring, they are familiarly real to me. Perhaps, I return to *Lolita* in an attempt to mend the broken pieces of my soul and retrieve those pieces of myself that have been lost. Or maybe, just maybe, I too love to gape at a blood-smeared highway.

Unscience Fictions

In memory of Chuck Jones

If science fictions extrapolate from known possibilities, these move beyond, above as well as below.

Taking a tighter grip on his pole, secretly stuffing some pills into his mouth, the young man vaulted high over the bar and then, instead of coming down, ascended into the skies.

Abraham Lincoln is still alive and well, practicing law in downstate Illinois.

Day after day, for two full weeks without any sleep, he told more jokes than any of us had ever heard in our lives.

All facts in this story are false.

What looked like a gorilla spoke English.

He and her called themselves “itselfes.”

Every evening before dinner my wife made water turn into wine.

He shed his skin layer after layer until presenting himself to us as a full-breasted woman.

Count one numeral at a time to one billion.

Over the Internet, where everyone could read it, she published a narrative relating in persuasive detail how she had dove into a river and, after battling rough current, disappeared.

Infinity should be both the subject and the form of my tale.

Life after death has been better than life before.

His eye had the glow bestowed upon whoever spent most of the day looking into the sun.

For a touchdown he caught a pass thrown ninety-five yards.

Between themselves brother and sister communicated without speaking a word.

He imagined himself writing single-sentence fictions whose defining quality would be impossible actions.

Don't you love my lover's pets who, unlike mine, could talk not just to each other but also to me.

Only when its narrator dies can this story resume.

None of us could account for the bullet holes in our family's front door this morning.

When he claimed abduction by "Venetians," I corrected him with "Venutians."

In the vault we found bodies, both male and female, all exactly the same height.

In the end was a woman who would disappear whenever touched by an adult man.

For every story published here I rejected at least one hundred drafts?

“Extraterrestrial spacecraft,” he swore, “are not a hoax.”

He must have fired his gun without touching the trigger.

Once in the woods, our group was surrounded by thousands of two-legged creatures standing only two feet high.

This story is not about kidnapping but abduction.

She filled her basement with the bodies of sometime husbands refusing divorce.

A rogue plastic surgeon, he reconstructed his wife to be the most perfectly shaped woman who ever walked the earth, even though her personality remained hideous.

None of us could account for the bullet holes in our friend’s front door this morning.

We descended directly to the center of the earth

When the ugly creature introduced itself as a “Venetian,” I had to correct it with “Venutian.”

One charm of Chuck Jones’s classic cartoons was watching anthropomorphic animals behaving unscientifically.

Impossible fictions are inherently unscientific.

Only to herself was she the most beautiful woman in the world.

Some people insist the word “gullible” isn’t in the dictionary.

While listening to J. S. Bach’s St. Matthew Passion, he saw apparitions of his great-great grandparents among other progenitors from centuries ago.

When angered, he breathed fire from his nostrils.

Solely through variations in his breathing our guru communicates.

No mammal, it capsized a ship before disappearing into the sea.

In his last will and testament, my father bequeathed me his only tangible property, he claimed--the moon.

The Soviet Union didn't disintegrate; don't believe what you read in American newspapers.

He cloned himself not just once but twice.

Stuffing his mouth with bubble gum, he blew a bubble so big it swallowed his body until it disappeared.

Thousands of books she claimed she wrote even though no one ever read any of them.

Science fictions are credible; unscience fictions, incredible.

We felt like we'd been lovers in an earlier life.

Behind his house, in space visibly empty between trees, he claimed to store a lifetime's worth of his Conceptual Art

He sought to bring an end to Time.

Chuck Jones's best cartoons epitomize Unscience Fictions.

Now on Mars, I want to return to Earth.

She could see the curls on the back of her head.

Once in heaven I found myself invited by virgins in
diaphanous gowns.

Flatter me extravagantly and my body will clone itself
before your eyes.

Neurotic about leaving his toilet, he conducted the King's
business from his throne.

She composed songs with pitches so high not even dogs
could hear them.

Taking a deep breath before exhaling a fierce wind, he
vanished.

Revelations of his immortality he had routinely.

Once I inhabited a planet previously unknown, I named it after myself.

He liked to write stories that no one else would write or even want to write.

In an instant he saw his future from largest outlines to smallest detail.

Consider him our prophet, as he successfully walked on water.

Chuck Jones cartoons epitomize unscience fictions.

Soon after they first met, they got to know each other profoundly, never getting out of bed except to eat, pee, and crap.

Embedded in his chest was a telephone that he could turn on and off merely by whispering the word “Thanks.”

The supersonic airplane sped through a night that had no end.

To the world's newspapers he offered photographs of Eve's initial seduction of Adam.

This story will end only when its narrator expires.

Thanks to a special diet, he grew and grew until he was well over ten feet tall.

Into this sentence are compressed a million words.

To atheists he would be the only god.

No one ever told him which of his three mothers was actually his; nor which of several possible fathers.

Screaming "Shazam," she discarded her street clothes to become Superwoman.

He became a screaming meanie who never stopped.

Among the other books authored by RK are *Summa Theologica*, *La Commedia*, *Il Decamerone*, *The Canterbury Tales*, *Il Principe*, *Gargantua*, *Don Quixote de la Mancha*, *Pensées*, *La Vida es sueño*, *Phaedra*, *Candide*, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Sandy Gent*, *La*

Bourgeois Gentleman, The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, Democracy in America, I promessi sposi, Faust, Moby-Dick, Les Fleurs du Mal, Das Capital, Un Coup de des, The Making of Americans, Ulysses, A la Recherche de temps perdu, Eimi, Tractatus, Finnegans Wake, Absalom Absalom, Ficciones, The Cantos, Greguerias, Comment c'est. . . .

With his eyes alone the deafmute could tell jokes that made his family laugh.

She cartwheeled from one end of Manhattan to the other.

Escaping the police, he leaped through an open manhole into a sewer that swept him into a world peopled by giants he'd never seen before.

He blew at the sun until it disappeared from the sky.

The canaries in my cage in the morning became hawks every afternoon.

He constructed a hut around himself, brick by brick, until he found himself unable to get out.

In his ideal society everyone's madnesses would be acceptable.

His batteries charged as they discharged.

He is eight feet tall; she, four feet.

When he dropped his pants, we saw a penis that fell below his knees.

With a wave of his hand he routinely turned his designated enemies into goats.

Everything they touched became memorialized as shards of God.

As the slugger crossed home plate, he whistled to have the ball come up out of the grandstands and land gently in his hands,

As my cane fell from my hands, it turned into a snake.

My divinity I claimed by walking on water

Whichever way he walked down our street, no shadows
were cast.

The bowling ball rolled back to me as all ten pins arose
and moved into formation.

Unscience fictions are verifiably unscientific.

The baseball thrown by the new pitcher became
progressively smaller as it neared home plate.

Any editor publishing these fictions will gain automatic
admittance into Heaven; he need only tell St. Petra and her
sidekicks that he's done so.

Can't the possible subjects for Unscience Fictions be less
limited than those for SciFi?

Out of the package in my mailbox sprung the future wife
whom I selected from a flier.

When it rained, he spit back at the sky.

My dogs talk not only to each other but with me

In his daydreams he seduced every woman whose eyes
would meet his.

Parenthesis

Our lives, two crows circling
syncopated
whirling
dervishes like mirrors.
You reverberate on my skin and I echo
back. Stronger.

What is the geometry of your smile?

The exact reflection of my chest where it burns
Holding the shape of your mouth.

The Paleo Diet



The Paleo Diet is the hottest thing since sliced bread.

No thanks to a cliché as old as prehistory itself, which has brutish cave dwellers gnawing on hunks of unrecognizable quivering, bloody meats, in the glow of their fires. Not until the Flintstones was the caveman's diet dignified, with 'Bronto Burgers', 'Dino Ribs' and 'Trillo Bites', and classy eateries like 'Le Chateau Rockinbleau'.

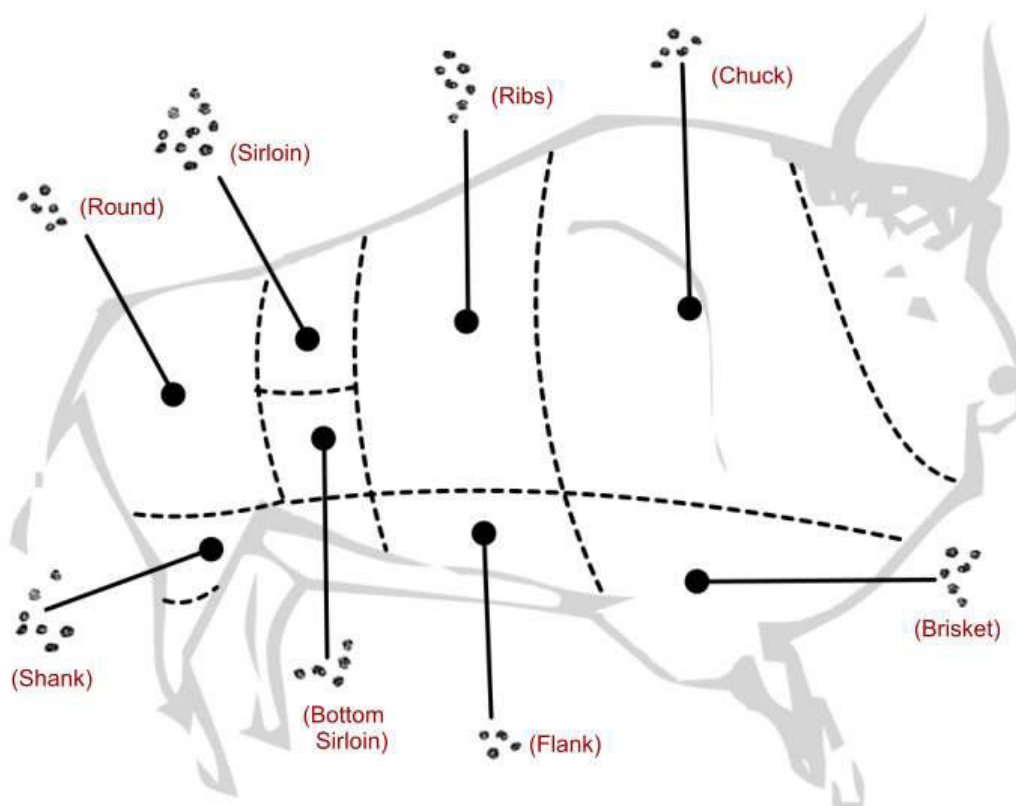
Now there's evidence that the menu in ancient times really was anything but boring.

It's just been found that prehistoric Europeans were using Garlic Mustard as long as 6,000 years ago, shattering preconceptions about human's gastronomic heritage.

A footnote to the news release of the Garlic Mustard find, was that of an incidental parallel

discovery of the identity of a singular individual, from engravings and rock-wall paintings. From all indications it was a woman, celebrated in her region for what appear to have been early culinary skills. As research continues, her portrait emerges as vividly as the celebrated ‘Otzi’ the ‘Iceman’ of the Swiss Alps, in this case not from the preservation of her body, but a record of late Paleolithic recipes and techniques just now being painstakingly interpreted from engravings on bone, pottery shards, and cave-wall paintings. Scientists call her ‘Paleo’.

Her record, assembling slowly as this is being reported here, has been called ‘The Paleo Diet’.



Researchers have painstakingly reconstructed from the faintest surviving lines of a painting on a cave wall near Limoges, France what is likely the oldest butchering guide, attributed to Paleo. Curious patterns of dots reference the various areas of a bison's anatomy in this ‘Bison Tableau’, or ‘Bison Chart’. Analysis of curious patterns of dots which appear as labels of different

cuts of meat has not only boosted our understanding of Paleo meat-dressing skills, but this earliest of written languages as well [Note: descriptions on the chart in () are interpretations of the patterns]



It's not the first time that early language specialists have tried to translate 'les pois' ('polka dots') found in the region's cave system. The arrangement of dots shown, for instance, was first interpreted in the 1950's to mean the removal of ice from a cave entrance.

Only recently, given the context of the find in a grouping of what appears to be the first known rendering of a recipe for a type of stew, was the secondary translation of 'deglaze a cooking pot' ascribed to the pattern. From the same cave wall where Paleo's

identity was first revealed, are these interpretations of *les pois* deemed to be in her hand, revealing the Stone Age recipes that made up some of the Paleo Diet:

Rat-a-Two-e: dried and smoked, served on a skewer, in pairs. Served with a garlic mustard early Hollandaise, prepared with duck eggs and bison butter.

Terra-Lactyl: 'Milk of the Earth'. Ibex milk infused with garlic mustard extract, chilled in glacial streams, a kind of prehistoric savory milk-shake. No doubt the inspiration for the inscription 'got lac?' seen on cave walls in the region.

Tea-Rex: a ceremonial drink made by boiling nettle leaves. And garlic mustard.

Boar Terrine: Wild boar fillets pounded to a purée to which the liver is added, the pâté cooked in a covered crock and served on Einkorn crusts with a garlic mustard and nettle-zest relish.

Toads-in-the-Holes: literally. Soup bowl-sized holes are carved into sandstone, into which toads are placed, one to a bowl, alongside hot coals wrapped in leaves. This is covered with the

upper skull of a bison, and left to steam. Served with a wild pepper and garlic mustard *Romesco*.

Rindocerous: actually wild boar, a specimen chosen for a resemblance to the much larger Woolly Rhino, cooked in a stone-lined pit. Hot rocks are placed inside the pig's chest cavity, along with an assortment of berries, wild onion, and garlic mustard. This is topped off with a few gallons of 'Tree Blood', a heady mead of wild honey and crushed cherries. The boar is wrapped in its own hide which has been previously soaked in brine, and contains the liquids. Serves 40.

Merry Marrow: roasted sections of thigh bones, preferably bison, cooked upright on hot stones, the marrow scooped out with bone spoons, served on a Einkorn flatbread with field greens and garlic mustard and duck egg mayonnaise.

Dinersaur: not a food item at all, but likely a reference to the first paying customers. Some caves show evidence of regular visitation by guests who may have provided trade goods to



individuals like Paleo, and others, for foods prepared in exchange.

Fish Stick: The original dried fish. Large salmon were split, salted, dried in the sun, and kept to eat during the winter months when fresh fish were scarce. Considered to be the true origin of the cliché of a 'caveman' clubbing and dragging a mate by the hair, dismissed by anthropologists by the damage that such a stone weapon would certainly inflict. Evidence now suggests that the Fish Stick was used, in fact by both sexes in a playful mock battle, to woo and subdue prospec-

tive mates, and in hopes of conveying on a propective couple the salmon's fertility. The salt on the battered party was licked by the suitor, hence, 'To lick your wounds'. The tasty batons were then steeped in garlic mustard infused Auroch milk, lightly warmed, and served by Mammoth-grease candlelight.

Tiger's Egg: obviously not an egg, but an early type of haggis. A section of Sabre Tooth Tiger's stomach is scalded, and soaked in cold salted water; this is stuffed with a mince of the heart and lung of an Ibex lamb, the tiger's favorite prey. A dish considered to bring good fortune by honoring the tiger's tastes in the afterlife; served with a tomato and garlic mustard gazpacho, memorializing the blood of both animals.

Gastrodon: Roasted Mammoth shank, basted with a garlic mustard, prune and suet reduction, paired with elbow-sized grilled shrimp, possibly marking the first known surf-and-turf. Served Au Jus over chunks of barleycorn flatbread.

Barney: little is known of the main ingredient, other than it was basted on an open fire with a thick, prune and garlic mustard glaze, and served only to children.



Memory; Loss

Softening satyrs, cajoling them into sleep. The bliss, full kiss
on those supple lips as the raindrops hiss,
on our statues.

A plaque placed on a monolith, as a monolith
sinks. Now, nothing. And to think,

I know?

don't
why.

tomorrow

~~(important)~~ — Trash
Yesterday?

gone.

Aren't we

something

done

it's been

Fun!

"It is?"

"It is."

"It's"

a surprise?

"Oh I'd,

rather

re: member

it.

Per

fact(sic)

LY,

Do you remember the humbling smirks? They worked! Thanks. Do you still love

Center of Attention?

To be the statue upon which all eyes are swept.

To catch the air of the desperate, wind up flailing

in the wind?

On A Chair

I'm sitting on a chair made out of tindersticks and time.
I'm sitting alongside a curtainwall of pale water and light.
Sunset is pouring out its glass of red wine.
The stars are hornets rustling their bedclothes
or the sister Fates making sparks by rubbing their thighs.
The moon is a motherly button.

I'm sitting inside a circle of crushed beetles' wings,
translating salt into a palatable sugar,
spinning yarn out of my abdomen,
retracing the patient constellations.

I'm sitting. And I'm thinking.
I'm thinking about sitting and thinking.
About fingers, jawbones, instances.
Where I'll sleep tonight, I've yet to decide,
I'm so taken up with just *sitting*.
On a throne shaped like a milking stool.
On a beach chair folded into seven dimensions.
There's warm moist mist around my ankles.
My pulse is tangled in fibrous wire and snares.

In truth, I've been sitting here for several millennia,
my stones whistling in the relentless heat.
The Blue Nile and White Nile are meeting
here, just under my black feet.
There's interference on nineteen frequencies.
The vibrations are post-apocalyptic.
I sense them with my million moth-antennae.
It's a message repeating itself in the far future.
My molars are rattling in sympathy.
My bloodstream jingle-jangles unobtrusively.

Just sitting and sitting . . .
Listening to the underscore of earthly music.
Twisting the dreaded locks in my hair.
Gazing out the window at a mind full of sky,
the years nibbling on the wheels of my chair,
the years forever unsatiated, smoke in their mouths,
a new language taking shape, truth divided by lies,
lost love divvying out its smaller portions,
life's door closing like an eye, like Horus's eye,
that was lost in battle, his sacrifice symbolic,
the pillar of Osiris rising . . .

The Apple Tree

They didn't ask for an apple tree, it just came with the house they bought thirty years ago. The branches still grow in crooked tangles, shading the front yard and quiet road, threatening the power lines. I thought nothing of age back when I climbed the knotted limbs and scratched my name in the bark, but apparently, most fruit trees only live until about 35. They tend to rot from the inside, grow black cankers on their branches, and their leaves yellow and shrink. Last year, our neighbor, the arborist who gets stoned and removes stumps for a living, pulled his truck to the side of the road and hopped our stonewall to offer an unsolicited inspection. He patted the trunk, twisted a gloved finger in the knot, and tipped his head to survey the branches. "Eighty, maybe ninety years old," he said. "It's pretty amazing. One of the oldest in town, I bet."

We don't prune or pick. The apples grow unreasonably high, and each September they drop with a force causing them to split open and leak sticky juice on the pavement, or turn soft in the long grass, or be smashed to a paste by passing cars. Our front yard is filled with the swampy, sweet smell of cider, of compost, of pulp. Lazy bees circle the fallen fruit, and ants tunnel through their splitting sides.

Years ago, my ever-hopeful father would engage in some pruning or spray the tree with organic pesticides. A hapless pseudo-farmer, he delighted in the meager handful of semi-edible apples harvested from the tree each fall. He whistled as he diced up the apples in the kitchen, removing the bug marks, the brown spots, cutting around the bruises to salvage a tablespoon of fruit. It would take the dissection of three or four apples to have enough unblemished fruit to top his granola. He declared it delicious. He showed us how to delicately pluck blackberries from the tangle of thorns by the woods. He planted blueberry bushes by the white fence, and when he picked the shriveled blue dimples he said they showed promise. He patted rich mulch around two new apricot saplings in the backyard, but they never grew fruit. The small trees withered and died the same year he did. We used to plant gardens, till the soil, and hold our breath watching the burgeoning crop. By summer's end, the centerpieces of our dinners were a pitiful bowl of cherry tomatoes, or the one or two bitter and bumpy cucumbers survivors. He delighted in our nascent, bumbling way of living off the land. He would sweep his broad hand over the small heap of vegetables and champion them the fruits of our labor. When I think of him now, I picture his hands broad and soft and pink, soil persistently packed in the grooves of his fingernails.

Now, the apples have started to drop again. Each morning my mother puts on her work gloves and gathers the fallen apples. She stoops low over the lawn and fills a large plastic bucket that she hauls across the road and dumps down a wooded hill. Several hours later, she returns to the yard, sighs at the fresh fallen crop, and does it again. I want her to see the pastoral charm of apples dotting the lawn, not to mention the futile nature of her work. But the tree is an invited nuisance in her life, a distraction by means of physical toil. Our property is filled these opportunities: fallen tree limbs must be dragged from the woods, stonewalls need rebuilding, the lawn needs mowing, and there is wood to stack before the winter. She hauls rocks from the garden and insists that the broken wheelbarrow is fine, and she too, is fine. On her sinewy and strong forearms, I'll notice a bruise purpling against the thin, suntanned skin. I think of the phrase, "worked to the bone." I tell her we can hire people to do the yard work, but I know that is not the point.

She went to visit her sister and somehow her list of instructions only consisted of two chores:

- 1.) Check mail
- 2.) Everyday: use work gloves, bucket and broom in basement, sweep leaves from the driveway and dispose of apples.

She has been gone for two weeks, the house feels even emptier than before, and I have yet to remove any apples. But this September, unlike any autumns before it, the apples are huge. For five years nobody has cared to spray the tree, or try to prune the intransigent branches. Perhaps it was the rain, or the cool summer. Whatever the reason, and despite my mother's insistence the apples are only good for throwing away, I take a basket to the yard and turn over the smooth, flushed fruit. Often an apple is too small, split too deep, or chipmunks have already gnawed a quarter of the fruit to yellow. Many apples have bruises, small soft thumbprints where they hit the earth, but they can easily be eaten around and I gather a small, passable collection. Positioning my mouth to avoid a slight discoloration, I bite into the firm crispness of clean, white fruit and taste autumn.

This unexpected, plump goodness makes me uneasy...but I suppose I've been conditioned to

worry this is a last ditch effort, a final shuddering breath. I fear I won't know how much I loved this tree until it rots from the inside, grows unseen tumors, develops cankers on the branches and the leaves yellow and shrink. Searching for a warning, I cross from my basket to the tree, the low September sun streaks through the branches and dapples patterns on my skin. I press my hands to the cool, strong trunk, hoping to feel the insides and sense the core, but the knotted bark just flecks against my palms.

Walking Through, Riding Home

It all started one morning a few years ago. Left the house,

down porch steps, across the lawn to the side walk. But
this was a some where different day. One like I had never
seen. I could smell wood and coal burning.

And all the houses had chimneys. Suddenly,
I noticed walking forward
was also like walking backward in time.

Children playing
roll-the-ring. A forgotten game. All women had long hair,

long dresses, sun hats as if they were characters rightout
of, Gone With The Wind.

Then a breath of horses could be
felt on my back shoulder. A big mare coaxing me to ride
pass barns, haystacks, rolls of king cotton and down by the
silver river, old man river, the Mississippi.

And on board a
noisy steam boat toward home.

Every minute of it like
another life like another memory, traveling like a trunk
full of letters with dried pressed flowers between pages,

taken to an attic beside a small window that never forgets.

How Does Your Garden Grow

Blooming with Life,
Without Purpose,
lightening put me at rest in the garden of Eden,
where impatiens look like pansies
and roses look like
swelled up dreams,
of life and love,
the rain flushes out the buds that bloom
the violets and begonias
-How does your garden grow?
In shades of flesh
detached from the soul
or like steel eyes from a face
Do you make requests
Of the world of grass,
and trees and stems,
of branches....

Orbit Jumped

(thanks to John)

Let's suppose our world's abandoned by language.
No lectern or keyboard

real nice social club. Vowels smeared in air,
must restrain myself as commas

stretch out to dry on some turbo-boosted rooftop.
Peddler of brushwords,

reluctant to tear off mere gravity,
fear pendulum nodes broke loose

anti-matter grabs coupla spokes
from Einstein's dynamo, gives 'er a whirl.

Innocuous pause shaped as a zafu,*.
elevated weightlessness

comes in view: on the lotus
budding Buddhahood lays out Noble Truths.

Though this Jew can't dervish to resemble Rumi,
Christ; will my fulcrum

ever rejoice, lever it's mind's eye
to syncopate love, to flower?

* meditation cushion

Immortality

The Milky Way arches across a black expanse
each pixel point of cream
an ancient burning star
chaos furnace condensed into raging spheres
shining into the void
Light shakes free from its bindings
Flinging itself forwards
two hundred ninety nine million
seven hundred ninety two thousand
four hundred fifty eight meters
in one split second rush
towards infinity
Flying in all directions outwards
further
further
eons of split seconds one after the other
As worlds rotate
lives created, consciousness arise
all are destroyed, then remade anew
and its starry creator explodes
into dust
Still it pushes forward
carrying its holy burden
Until it falls headlong through lens
through the optic nerve's electric pathways
into the complex computer encased in skull
Machinery clattering until a message is spat out:
We existed.
Remember, and we are
immortal.

Ole Betsy and the Blue Faced Man

Billie had been found in the gym rolled up in a mat. The Sheriff had not immediately released the body and when he did it was with a court order that the cheap coffin must not be opened. The coffin was welded shut. Billie's mom protested but the Sheriff waved the order at her and insisted she would not want to see him in his deathly condition. Billie was interred without the traditional farewell and so he was given by tradition to wander the glades and shadow search for his killers.

Old Chief Billie was not satisfied with the manner his grandson and namesake had been sent alone into the neither world. Calling some of the elders together in his traditional chikee hut after dark, he was determined to get to the bottom of the mystery. They sat in a circle as the old man reached into his leather medicine bag to take a piece of the konk. As he held it, pausing in each of the four directions, above and below, he uttered prayers to the spirits and sang his helping spirit song. All the while he was thinking of little Billie as a boy helping him to locate and gather the herbs and incense even this konk that he held in his hand. The boy had been a great one for listening to the old man. It was surely a tragic loss for the tribe and their traditions serving future generations. He had not seen it and now he knew little Billie was gone into the shadow world – a shadow haunting the glades.

With this somber meditation, old Billie lit the konk and its powerful incense filled the little hut. There was another song calling his spirit helper near. A growl pierced the night stillness and the old man abruptly opened his eyes, "Is that you my spirit helper? Are you there? Have you come to lead me to the other side?" Singing low the mourners gathered power in their throats and old Billie listened to the hot, heavy breath of ole Betsy panting nearby. Speaking to the panther, the old man called out his grandson's name and plunged into darkness.

Little Billie was there he was standing by the glades when he saw the old hag down by the water's edge. It was not long there after when he heard the panther cry like a wounded woman. The piercing sound curled his toes and with a searing pain like when the dentist had

drilled his teeth he felt uneasy all over. Billie remembered his grandfather saying something about the cry of the old hag, but what was it? Death, something about her and death, the thought shot through his head like lightning and he shivered with the flash.

He wanted to be away from there, a new place more comforting, somewhere else. A thought sparked in his head, I'll go shoot some hoops, and it comforted him. Racing home, he collected his ball and set out for the high school gym. There was always a few kids hanging around to shoot hoops with and even if there were none, he knew he would feel better away from the haunted glade where the old hag roamed.

At six feet two and sixteen years, Billie was a strapping youth. He expected not only to make the varsity squad but to be selected as a starter in the fall when his sophomore season began. His grandfather had helped him with his jump shot so that he was deadly from the arc and anywhere near the hoop. His passing skills and decision making on the court promised to be a coach's dream. Billie tried to make every hour count working both hands in creating ambidextrous skills with the ball.

The old man had seen those things in the trance but there was a sharp piercing cry like a wounded woman that disturbed his meditation. Even the mourners were aroused from their chant by the cry. In the meantime the old man added more conk to the fire and the incense billowed into the room.

The blue faced man wheezing and panting with every breath was very near death. He looked familiar to old Billie, someone you see in fine silk suits followed by a crowd of agents with dark glasses and bulky holsters under their coats. The man was a speech maker recalled old Billie. He was always whining about something or another – “the forty-seven percent” - or something like that thought the old man. It was a charge against takers who lived off the government or some such nonsense. The blue faced man wanted them held accountable, he said they did not work and contributed nothing to society but mooched off working people. He wanted to punish them or some such talk is what he preached.

Alone shivering in the dark, the blue faced man was finding it hard to breath; death was knocking at his door.

The mourners paused to catch their breath while old Billie added more conk to the fire. Again they chanted rhythmically while he disappeared into the trance.

There was a man dressed in strange green scrub like pajamas. Old Billie had seen the like at the White Man's medicine lodge. He had been called their to minister to some of the people but the woman in white had driven him out crying – "No witch doctors here!" – or some other mess about "black magic." The man in the green scrubs was talking to a hulking figure with tattoos up and down his arms. There was some distress in the green scrubs man's voice. He was saying, "We have to move the time table up. We have to operate immediately. All his organs are failing."

The tattooed man grunted, "What ya got in mind?"

"There's nothing compatible in the donor bank. We have to get someone with type O negative blood and fast!"

"How do you expect me to blood type 'em?"

"You can't, we don't have time for that anyway. Even if we did, we can't wait for a donor to pass away. We've got to have the organs now and from the right type of blood doner."

"What you got in mind boss?"

"The most likely donors are American Indians. By and large they are statistically most

likely to have type O blood and there is only a little type A among them. No type B historically within the Americas.”

“Well I guess Jesse and I can go out to Hollywood and round up a Seminole for you.”

“That would do nicely but make it a young guy and get back here with him as soon as you can.”

The piercing cry like a wounded woman filled the chikee. Chief Billie again saw the blue faced man. He remembered how Billie had been found and as he looked into in the mist, he saw sutures across his grandson’s chest from throat to groin. There was something alien inside but he could not see it. The blue faced man was walking fast and briskly with the strength and ease of a youth. There was a canter that old Billie had often seen before. His speech was bold and direct without the recent panting for breath. So the old man concluded announcing to the mourners, “My spirits have told me, divined the mystery,” as he opened his eyes and the mourners grew silent while the night vanished.

As a chief, the old man was in a position to call upon politicians and other officials. He had invited the blue faced man to visit the glades and in an election year he knew there would be no refusal. It was a natural photo opportunity to poise with a Native that could hardly be resisted by any politician. But it was one that ended abruptly. Some say a great invasive python swallowed the blue face man whole leaving no trace. Others tell how he disappeared with a bundle of campaign funds, enough to live life large through many lifetimes. All accounts however agree he was never seen again.

With an order from the federal court Little Billie’s coffin was exhumed. The old man doctored the corpse taking a bundle of wadded newspapers from the boy’s abdomen and when they returned him to the earth he was whole again. At night in these parts, the people report often seeing a ghostly blue faced haunt while the panther cries like a wounded woman.

Contributors

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Jeff Burt lives in Santa Cruz County, California, and works in manufacturing. He has work in *Dandelion Farm Review*, *Windfall*, and *Thrice Fiction*, and forthcoming in ** 82 Review*, *Storm Cellar*, and *Mobius*.

Bruce Colbert, a former journalist, is an actor and playwright in New York City where his plays have been performed Off-Broadway. His new story collection will be released this summer by LummoX Books.

M. Krochmalnik Grabois' poems have appeared in hundreds of literary magazines in the U.S. and abroad. He is a regular contributor to *The Prague Revue*, and has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize, most recently for his story "Purple Heart" published in *The Examined Life* in 2012, and for his poem. "Birds," published in *The Blue Hour*, 2013. His novel, *Two-Headed Dog*, based on his work as a clinical psychologist in a state hospital, is available for 99 cents from Kindle and Nook, or as a print edition.

Patricia George has worked as a public school teacher, a tutor, a graphic artist and is currently employed as a piano accompanist in the small California valley town where she lives. Her goal is to make a poem of her life and to communicate her life to others through writing. She has a B.A. degree from Fresno State University, Fresno, California and has done post graduate work in Colorado and San Diego.

James Grabill's recent work has appeared in numerous periodicals such as the *Buddhist Poetry Review* (US), *The Oxonian Review* (UK), *Stand* (UK), *Magma* (UK), *Toronto Quarterly* (CAN), *Harvard Review* (US), *Terrain* (US), *Seneca Review* (US), *Weber*, and others. His books include *An Indigo Scent after the Rain* and *Poem Rising Out of the Earth*. Wordcraft of

Oregon will publish his new project of environmental prose poems, *Sea-Level Nerve: Book I* this summer, *Book II* next summer. He teaches “systems thinking” relative to sustainability.

Susan Gundlach has been teaching and writing forever. She has published articles on topics ranging from family history and puppetry, to the Great Wall of China and the Nile River. Her poems have appeared most recently in *Dark Matter*, *Lingerpost*, and **82 Review*. Her work has also appeared in *The Best of Vine Leaves 2012* and *A Midnight Snack*, and some of her poems for children can be seen in *Cricket magazine*.

Nels Hanson has worked as a farmer, teacher and writer/editor. His fiction received the San Francisco Foundation’s James D. Phelan Award, Pushcart Prize nominations in 2010, 12, and 2014, and has appeared in *Antioch Review*, *Black Warrior Review*, *Southeast Review* and other journals. Poems appeared in *Word Riot*, *Oklahoma Review*, *Pacific Review*, and other magazines, and are in press at *Carnival*, *Sharkpack Review Annual*, *NonBinary Review*, *The Straddler*, *Squalorly*, *Four Chambers Press*, and *The Mad Hatter’s Review*. Poems in *Outside In Literary & Travel Magazine* and *Citron Review* have been nominated for 2014 Pushcart Prizes.

Pamela Hirte was raised in Florida and moved to Cincinnati to earn a Master’s degree in Business Administration at Xavier University. She is a Master Gardener and likes to spend her time outdoors writing poetry or gardening. Hirte’s poetry has appeared in many literary journals including UK Poetry Library, Kentucky State Poetry Society Journal, Literary Orphans, Ohio Poetry Association Journal, Ideagems, Cincinnati Express, and The Milo Review. Hirte’s poems can be read at www.poemsbypam.com

Zebulon Huset is a somewhat recent graduate of UW’s MFA program where he was the coordinating editor of *The Seattle Review*. His poems have appeared in *The Southern Review*, *The New York Quarterly*, *North American Review*, *Georgetown Review*, *Bluestem*, *Bayou* and *the Evansville Review* among others. He currently teaches a community creative writing class through the nonprofit So Say We All, and slings pasta to pay the bills.

Lisa Korthals is a native of Iowa who currently resides in Minnesota where she is pursuing her Master’s of English at the University of St. Thomas, St. Paul MN. Lisa has already received a B.S. in Language Arts Education from Wayne State College, Wayne NE and a Masters in Theological Studies, from Bethel Seminary, St. Paul MN. More of her writing can be found on lisa-korthalsblog.com/. She spends her free time enjoying her husband and three daughters.

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P.K. Lauren is a writer/painter/hiker/climber/lover/fighter. She hates zucchini. She loves vintage lace tablecloths. Her professional writing background includes publications of all genres, in publications including: *Clapboard House*, *The Noise*, *Prick of the Spindle*, *Casserole*, *Novus*, and others. Lauren received an MA in Creative Writing from Northern Arizona University and a BA in Linguistics from the University of Arizona. Bookending both her degrees, she spent over a year and a half living in France, in Paris and the Deux-Sèvres. When she's not adventuring on a mountain or other rocky formation, Lauren spends her time otherwise soaking in good creative fodder: digging in the garden, knitting legwarmers, working as a volunteer firefighter, and baking sans-gluten pâtisserie treats. Lauren currently lives in Bishop, California, and touts a day-job of "adjunct professor" ... though she likes to think of it as 30 hours of character study with a sprinkle of academic cheerleading and a dash of counterculture rabble-rousing.

Adriana Lecuona is honored to contribute to *Dark Matter*. An emerging writer, Ms. Lecuona's work has appeared in *The Acentos Review*, *S/tick*, *John King's The Drunken Odyssey* podcast and *The Pennsylvania Gazette*. She received her MFA in Film & Media Arts from Temple University and her BA from the University of Pennsylvania. Ms. Lecuona is currently working on a memoir about her experience with Hodgkins Lymphoma and its aftermath.

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Douglas Penick was a research associate at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, studied and practiced under Tibetan Buddhist teachers for 30 years, and wrote and taught on Tibetan, Chinese, Japanese and Indian religion, history and culture. He wrote the National Film Board of Canada's prize winning two part series on the Tibetan Book of the Dead (Leonard Cohen, narrator) and the libretti for two operas: *King Gesar* (Sony CD w/ Ma, Serkin, Ax et. al.) and *Ashoka's Dream* (Santa Fe Opera) with composer, Peter Lieberman. He received a grant from The Witter Bynner Foundation for Poetry to write a new rendition the Gesar of Ling epic. Shorter works have appeared in the US, the UK, Canada, Australia, Hungary, Pakistan, the Czech Republic, India, Malaysia, France (Parabola, Bombay Gin, Descant, Contrary, Agni, BODY, Cahiers de L'Herne, Hyperallergic, Tricycle etc.) Short performance pieces have been done in Canada, Israel, Germany, South Africa. His novel about the 3rd Ming Emperor, *A Journey of the North Star* is available from Publerati. His new novel about spiritual adventurers and their disappointments, *Dreamers and Their Shadows*, is available from Mountain Treasury Press.

Dave Petraglia has appeared in *Popular Science*, *Popular Mechanics*, *Better Homes & Gardens*, *New Shelter*; more recently in *Dark Matter Journal*, *Thought Catalog*, and *eFiction India*. He is a writer, web and graphics designer, photographer and lives near Jacksonville, Florida.

Bruce McCrae currently resides on the west coast, Victoria, Vancouver Island, British Columbia. His poems have recently appeared in *Theodate*, *Symmetry Pebbles*, *Epiphany*, *Poesy*, *Verdad Verdad*, *Ottawa Arts Review*, *A Baker's Dozen*, *Matchbook Poetry*, *Pure Francis (audio)*, *Earthshine*, *I-70 Review*, and *Hawai'i Pacific Review*. For a full list go to bpmcrae.com/.

Stanley Noah has a BGS degree from The University of Texas at Dallas. And has been published in the following: *Wisconsin Review*, *Nexus*, *Main Street RaSouth Carolina Review*, *Poetry Nottingham* and other publications in the U.S.A., Britain, Canada and New Zealand. He is the winner of The Mississippi Valley Poetry Contest, 2006. Poet of the month, Sept., 2009, fullofcrow.com.

Laura Porter has been writing poetry for over ten years. She lives in North Carolina and has for most of her life. She has published non-fiction articles with the National Recreation and Parks Association and the North Carolina Parks and Recreation Association and a few poems, along with a few articles in the local newspaper. She writes about love and loss, based on experiences in her life, and also writes erotica that is male/male and male/female. Her first publication was in a poetry.com anthology when she was 16 years old, and it won second place in the submission competition. When she was in college, she had three poems published in her college's literary magazine over a three semester span.

Gerard Sarnat is the author of two critically acclaimed poetry collections, 2010's "HOME-LESS CHRONICLES from Abraham to Burning Man" and 2012's "Disputes." His pieces have appeared or are forthcoming in eighty or so journals and anthologies. Harvard and Stanford educated, Gerry's been a physician who's set up and staffed clinics for the disenfranchised, a CEO of health care organizations, and a Stanford professor. For "The Huffington Post" review of his work and more; visit GerardSarnat.com. "Orbit Jumped" may appear in his third collection, "17s," in which each poem, stanza, or line has seventeen syllables.

Verity Sayles is a freelance writer from central Massachusetts. She currently writes for The Harvard Press newspaper, teaches creative writing at Phillips Exeter Academy Summer School, and will attend Oregon State University's MFA program in September.

Christina Tang-Berrias is currently indulging her insatiable curiosity by wandering the world. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Vine Leaves Literary Journal*, *Still Points Arts Quarterly*, *3Elements Review*, and *Beyond Imagination*. Find out more at <http://www.christina-tangbernas.com>.

Jay Hansford C. Vest, PhD. is an enrolled member of the Monacan Indian Nation, a tribe recognized by the state of Virginia, he is a direct descendent of the seventeenth century chief Opechancanough who took John Smith captive as a murder suspect during British Colonization of Tsenacomoco (Powhatan Virginia), and he is an honorary Pikuni (Blackfeet) in ceremonial adoption (June 1989). Dr. Vest is a full professor in the Department of American Indian Studies at the University of North Carolina at Pembroke. He is author of *Will-of-the-Land: A Philosophy of Wilderness Praxis* (2010), *Native American Oralcy: Interpretations of Indigenous Thought* (2014), and *The Bobtail Stories: Growing Up Monacan* (forthcoming), as well as more than one hundred fifty scholarly journal articles, chapters in books and other published writings. For more information see <http://www.uncp.edu/home/vestj/>

