

*Whole Beast Rag*  
**Issue 07: HOMME**  
December 2013

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## The Rationality of Your Duty – or – What You Think Your Fathers Wanted

by Eric Lloyd Blix

So there LeRoy Spencer sits, arranging the last stray pieces of the day's paperwork beneath the dull white drone of the fluorescent lights overhead, the vague, parasitic feeling persisting in his belly that he's forgotten something important. He shuts down his computer and tidies the stuff strewn over his grassgreen blotter before he flicks the nose of the Mattel, Inc. Saddam Hussein Ruthless Dictator Series™ bobblehead doll next to his stapler and on his way out nods once yes likewise to the withdrawn secretary at the front desk, who, Spencer has observed, seems to serve mainly as Mr. Panetta's administrative doormat. A grungy European dance beat issues from the headphones nestled above her cherryred cheeks as good-natured Spencer, across the top of the circulation desk, slides the girl a folder of documents inked with his John Hancock by a cold, shaky hand. He wishes her a happy holiday to zero response, she at once winsome and removed, which his tendency toward reticence and self-counsel allows him to absorb without giving off the outward appearance of any unfriendliness whatsoever. Spencer: a diligent and conscientious man whose ability to have feelings isn't any more or less keen than anybody else's, but the guy's introverted and, let's say, deliberative—a deliberative body within himself—a trait that he manifests not in what he presents, but in what he doesn't present: Spencer conveys his inner workings at about a glacier's pace. *He's thinking*, was his mother's canned response for whenever anybody would make the socially-cumbersome observation that the boy's silence was *different*, though the usual inflection of the remark would reveal, as Mrs. Spencer feared through her midwesterner's desire to always foster friendly relations among acquaintances, the perception of a certain unfiltered childhood nihilism that could lead the boy to do God Knows What that his folks worried about so consistently while they cleaned the dinner plates every evening or during their pillow talk in bed as LeRoy would sit pent up in his room, caved into himself for what seemed to observers to be spans of nearly Christlike hiatus, never once making even a peep, these instances becoming increasingly frequent and worrisome to Mr. & Mrs. Spencer in the run up to LeRoy's departure for school out east to become one Crimson out of many others, away from his semi-rural Minnesota home in the place his ancestors conquered and settled. This trend of silence was refined with time, mainly over several years as Spencer hunched dreadfully over various desks chugging out pages of homework or intel files until little beads of sweat would bleed through his shirt, no sign of complaint ever once visible, however, into something so pure and essential to his character that it became, like him, a thing among other things, an ontological playmate for his still body, a gentleness so fundamental and remote and palpable that, though it hasn't exactly procured him any enemies at the office, it could only be found attractive and irrevocably lovable to a philanthropical sensibility like his wife, the sanitation heiress Olivia, whose name is one of ten on the list Spencer had forgotten about and now holds after digging in the right pocket of his overcoat as he wonders what he'll tell

her about his day. His feeling of something misplaced subsides momentarily and then returns, descending over him like a dark hood. What gift does one buy one's wife during wartime? Olivia had composed the list and placed it for Spencer to find next to a halved, out-of-season grapefruit she'd sliced for him before she left this morning to meet her sanitation dynasty of a family at the Reagan Nat'l Airport, a fact of the Season that's left Spencer nettled inside. LeRoy Jr.'s name has a short sublist of items for Spencer to pick up on his way home headed in the child's handwriting: *a two year trip to florida to America's Playground to ride the roller coasters!!!*, such penmanship, though the space by *Olivia* has been left blank. This is for Spencer to fill. He places the list back in his pocket and digs for his keys in his trousers, feeling an un-capped pen he approaches the wide row of naked cherry trees on the parking lot's edge. A concentrated bundle of red spots are partially hidden behind their lightly bobbing branches, the spots flicker behind the wood limbs in fragments and coalesce as he nears them: like small bits of red fruit, it seems, an image that conjures that of schoolgirl Olivia, golden head bowed over her desk littered with papers. *The Public and Political Discourse of Early American Poetics* was the course, he recalls, one crossing the departmental boundary between Political Science and the History of American Civilization. LeRoy was then a helpless, faltering undergraduate, writing his bungling verse in the seat behind Olivia and her wafting schoolgirl scent. The adulterated image of his sophomoric summer, their first together . . . Who couldn't have fallen in love with a winsome sanitation heiress emerging with a wicker basket from the row of cherry trees atop the orchard's green lawn with a bushel of berries at her side, as though to be released from another realm guarded by an invisible membrane made secret by the bunches of pink leaves? She was white and tantalizing, like a fairy queen, though he spelled it *fairie* at the time, his youthful pretension. What was that allusion he made, the central conceit of that conceited poem he'd written for her there in the orchard? The ham-fisted one that had stuck with him because of its ham-fistedness, too obscure to be understood without the thoughts that spurred it? Something to the extent of the muddled and confused non-emperor, Edmund LiegeRoy Spenser of Burkeshire, possible progenitor perplexed by the other sex. In his mind the silent non-emperor lay prone, enthroned by the words of literary and political elders, covered by the tall grass of the narrow Lakota territory with a mass of bushes behind his head, on his back quaking meekly between the strange sites built on the borders of expansionist Contact. Spencer delicately crumples and smooths the list in his pocket, walking among the cherry trees. And Olivia the philanthropical almost-virgin coming forth, Spencer's non-divine non-right, inverted by the reflexive gaze of his memory, godchosen, her reflected image intimate and personal and gestated inside a tumescent LeRoy. She unrightfully his without much sour stink of a bedroom past on her, seeming to be placed before him by God the Almighty Himself on the green lawn with its amber tops swaying in the breath of the seasonal westerly. Olivia, the poetic subject, lifting a somewhat seasoned white leg over the wooden fence post. Her skirt ruffled, a white thigh she smiling sultry and cooing at the unstately head; and the amber

tops of grass protruding from between his sticky toes, bobbing up and down like a nodding plastic tyrant, a sustained glug and the murmur of a crowd filling the space beyond his head, O the lotion she rubbed in, like maraschino. What would he say tonight, sworn to secrecy? The list in his hand expands downward. The space below the wife and son is filled and occupied by the names of Olivia's visiting sanitation dynasty. The children's wishes for fortune constitute a space—cascading annexes of personal assets accruing. He moves past the bank of trees. The red spots unify: a form: the substance is Panetta's 1968 Corvette. It's embanked on each side by gathering drifts of snow, the vehicle's smooth red body being slowly consumed by the white anti-erosion, ornamented by a blue handicap tag dangling from the rearview. And Panetta earlier before he left for Yemen to speak with diplomats regarding a botched suicide bombing, one attempted by a cowboy-dressed mascot at *America's Playground: Al Hudaydah*. Panetta's half-assed lament that we the U.S. can't make a decent sportscar anymore, the declension of a nation of manufacturers, the loss of what he called it from behind the john door, the *moxie*, that allowed for our ascension to industrial and, consequently, martial supremacy—we've lost the world we made for ourselves, he'd said, gassy and belching out the rump. Spencer fingers the pen. The proverb of superlative might, the inscriber of fictions. The letting of signatory ink like blood on the clandestine counterterrorism papers atop his grassgreen blotter. O penstroke, though the poem in the orchard—Panetta gassy behind the crackedopen john door with a sliver of light stretched expanding outward into the darkened office like a sharp frontier, Spencer's head hung bowed as though a repentant monk or convict, as he walks and pats his flanks, vexed and silent and wondering why the vexation, why the mild personal torture of this gray vexation that something he had has been abandoned, which he wears like a dark hood? He stops in his path and confers with himself silently and moves to his car with the pen and list both in his hand, leaving footprints in the white snow behind him from the naked cherry trees. *Cherry Lotion et al.*, he writes with the pen of love and war next to *Olivia* before starting his foreign luxury sedan and working his way east down Dolley Madison Blvd. on down over onto Western Ave., further east. Down these streets Spencer performs the silent act of commuting, soundless, not of radio nor of fellow traffic. The wane of it all is muffled by the vehicle's sealed windows and the hot bluster of its malevolent sounding heater; the commute is an act automatic, nearly as fluid as the functions of the body itself. A flow through guided channels, the twiceaday movement of the business week. Vessels carried and shepherded terminally over the body of the North American continent by the gutpaved earth. Spencer's Audi hums and moves without obstruction. A maniacal red Chevrolet passes him on the right and veers into his lane, slowing down abruptly. General Motors the barometer of American zeitgeist, pressure: Panetta waxing sorrowful from behind the private door to the analyst Spencer with clandestine intel files strewn about his grassgreen blotter in the darkened side office, overcome and flushed, silent. *Sometimes we must behave outside of our regular character in order to regain that character*, Panetta's dirge in front of a chorus of farts before flying east for his two week continuum of diplomacy

and leisure in the oil- and tourism-rich Republic of Yemen, where he'll walk the grounds of American-made amusement parks, the briefings by embassy men and the Yemeni counterterrorism attache regarding the parks' available CT logistics as high value targets because of their indications of a Western presence. Panetta strutting and blustering taking care of business. *I know you must have some reservations*, he'd said, at which LeRoy stared at the nodding plastic dictator yesnodding on his grassgreen blotter with a malignant molded grin underneath a black plastic mustache, the painted white teeth: Panetta's eventual grin in the government-subsidized suite reserved for him overlooking the blue-as-dyed-water gulf. The pen and list rest bundled in the cupholder of the center console where Spencer has them stored. Exceptions to legality. The family will be in the living room after dinner chatting this evening. He could stay in the kitchen to help Olivia clean up. It's a ready-made excuse. He weakly resolves to tell her what he signed, he steers the Audi silently under a contour of the G. Washington Memorial Pkwy, past the Reagan Nat'l Airport on his eastward course across the antecedent banks of the Potomac. Spencer looks out the window into the side mirror at the inverted concrete legs supporting the receding highway: Olivia's gray route Northeast toward home from the R.N.A. with her kindred line of river-crossing sanitation tycoons packed tight inside her Land Rover, the Mississippi their western Delaware, spans crossed by patriarchs and their lineage. Maybe he wouldn't say anything, the risk of having someone overhear him being too great. But then again the river-crossing sanitation dynasty has acted more or less friendly on most occasions; they won't wage war, no surprise attack like against the sleeping Hessians, and the scene comes to Spencer's mind as though a memory: LeRoy Schlaffer, the Germanic wielder of mighty pens and lists lying prone, a loafer unsuspecting, napping inside a canvass tent with his hat pulled down and white hands clasping his stationery to his chest, next to the orange embers of a smothered flame, separated from the snowcovered grass leaves of the North American continent which the occupiers hold as capital, the monarchical forces of commercial sanitation standing in his camp smiling with arms out for extended-familial embrace: the germinating sanitation dynasty Waistdice, a name of English origin that crossed the Atlantic, Olivia had said, the sanitation dynasty Waistdice's derricks plunging updownupdown into the broken soil of the continent, the rumbling glugalug of the thrusting derricks filling carved-out cavities until the grassgreen earth shows a slight bulge, removing the eastern seaboard's trash from the ground-level in a gesture of philanthropical, aesthetic re-placement, done as public spectacle on a queer stage in front of a murmuring crowd. Spencer, in his Audi, pictures how the episode must have looked—papa James Waistdice grinning huge from a tobacco-brown rut in front of a weathered red barn festooned with a nylon banner reading *The LandFill™ of the New Millennium*, which Spencer had seen through a smattering of bobbling leaves. Waistdice cutting a silky red ribbon with a pair of oversized scissors inside the echoing voice of an enthused PA announcer, the announcer's tinny voice echoing outward over the crowd decorated with bolo ties and pinnedup Dolly Parton hairdos. And the blue smoke rising from the candybar

sized stogie extended from Waistdice's executive teeth under his cream colored cowboy hat, his peeling red face scrunched and squinting like the stogie had punched a hole in it: the *American Restoration Project* of Olivia's politico brother, the widower Eric, who pushes a star-spangled broom across the gaudy stage, his philanthropical cause. It makes Spencer feel as though the black hood about his head is bearing down further, encroaching on the peripheries, tightening itself toward a pinhole. He frisks the right pocket of his trousers with his fingertips and pats his crotch, uncertain of what he's searching for though surmising that it must be somewhere. And how many kids is it now, how many more little Waistdices in the sanitation clan, the little carriers of the trash re-placement gene riding with Olivia from the R.N.A.? John Stuart, the oldest, he's a smart one. The rude mass of little ones with the interchangeable names of A, Andrew, Abraham, and the twins Amanda and Aric Jr., the mutation of his father's name of E, though the two younglings together constituting the mutated *Amarica*. They'd all want to go to that Floridian playplace, *America's Playground* on the top of the list flapping in the heater's malevolent breath: and Spencer adjacent to the private john door with Panetta's escaping bluster, head bowed torturously signing the itineraries and briefings for the clandestine Yemeni and Saudi and Iraqi parks all concealed to the Western world like secret prisons though indicators of a Western presence, sites of triumph and fostered friendly relations hidden, a secret realm behind a black administrative hood pulled over a country's eyes. Spencer's silent oath of employment. *The pioneer spirit*, King Panetta the First had said, leaning forward on his porcelain throne toward the frontier of escaping bathroom light. Though the familial expansion, preserved by the thrusting glugalug, thrusting, thrusting. And O but Olivia! the poetic subject emerging her hair more golden than the sunlight running down the pink cherry leaves like liquid, the golden rays hanging in the air as a splendid vapor. Poetic subject Olivia's dirtied white skirt lapping in the gentle westerly, her arm held out clasping a fruit for bashful LeRoy to taste, tumescent, her pink cheeks full and flushed standing winsome looking at him atop the green grass his toes squirming dirty and sticky in the bulging soil like earthworms seeking shelter, toes sticky and red pulp oozing in between. The incessant glugalug of the welded steel derricks and a PA announcer's tinny voice buzzing from beyond the bushes. She the Word of God the Almighty Himself, he coiling away bashful. Her hair shining over her cheeks over the wicker basket of fruit atop the bulging greengrassed earth where the pines meet the prairie, *O Minnesota*, *Olivia* the old Scandinavian Soo Line outpost on the Lakota plains, colonized into a holy land of corn and cattle. The highest truth that cannot be a lie, the origin of Spencerian lineage among the cherry trees—the moral pedigree of a nation, derived from the truthful child Washington, the cherrytree chopper of parable. And she named for the place that grew her the patriarch James Waistdice liked to bluster. P.S. Olivia standing revealed from the realm of parted pink leaves, the child of the vast midwestern ag-pro garden, fruit extended on the growing tumescent landscape, a cavernous space being filled as Spencer pulls his car into an open spot in the Bloomingdale's parking lot, there quickly to purchase according to the lawful list. He walks silently between the rows of

parked cars toward the store's automatic entrance: the list curled around the pen in his hand, he thrusts the other into the cavernous left pocket of his overcoat. Bits of lint crumble among his fingertips. Plenty of shoppers drift past in routes opposite Spencer's, pushing carts with children dangling off the sides or hopping at their mothers' feet as the shoppers find their respective parking spaces, their chirping offspring, vehicles pulling in and out. The beams of their headlights look hazy and somehow tired in the wet, gray air of midwinter. Spencer grabs a basket on his way in and courses toward the bath section, crowded with perfumes, where, cherries on the mind, he picks the scent out above the others and places Olivia's lotion in the basket: a cherryful basket at his side he courses toward the toy department. And Olivia placing hers full of cherries at the side of his prone body by his pen and paper, Spencer regally silent, a heap of fruit tumbling down into the splitting surface of the bulging ground. Olivia lifting a leg over him like climbing over a fencepost their two corporal forms inverted, heads bobbing nodding yes in clandestine relations: the frontier of escaping bathroom light expanding, casting itself over the nodding plastic dictator on his grassgreen blotter nodding over the strewn documents torturously John Hancocked, a bowed head monastic with the silhouette of Panetta emerging with the withdrawn secretary trailing and drying her hands behind. The looming form adjusting his trousers and hawking a lump of phlegm and swallowing, blustering to the silent analyst *take all of that down to Legal* and turning to the pallid figure at his rump *and you make sure nobody does anything to my car while I'm gone*. The steel sportscar that clunky symbol of diligent times when resources were extracted and alloyed and products made, industrious manufacturers manufacturing a superpower: *they don't make them like that anymore*, he'd said, a voice malevolent and forceful and full of sorrow, a residual fart passing fluidly out the rump. Spencer stands in the toy aisle holding the list and the cherryful basket at his side in front of a shelf stocked with smiling plastic dictators, their heads bound by wound up twist-ties. A whole row of grinning Saddam Husseins et al., a roll call of malevolent plastic. It's not like he has the U.N. on his tail. He's not gassing populations of ethnic minorities or bombing subways. He's a paper pusher, nothing more, really, how binding, his oath to secrecy? He moves again, courses rightward down the aisle as he crossreferences the child-scribbled list making sure not to forget anything, past the brand name and knock-off G.I. Joe's until he stands gazing at a whole other phylum of toy soldier, musclebound and humanoid, looking more or less amoral, it seems, less *trained* for martial activity as it is *designed* for it. *Covert Carl*, the messy list reads in a child's smudged scribble, the name on the box. He plucks the toy off the shelf and drops it in the basket and courses rightward to the end of the aisle, where there stands a yard-high cardboard cutout of Covert Carl™. The figure's humanoid arms are raised above its blonde head in a moment teeming with victory, backgrounded by game huts and concession stands, a speeding, deathdefying roller coaster encircling its head like a halo. It speaks in a cartoony white word balloon, *Ask your parents to enter now for a 2 week, all expenses paid vacation of a lifetime to America's Playground in Tallahassee! Come Play With U.S.I!™* The cartoonishly rendered action figure's blond hair

stands spiked and tussled: the little child LeRoy's request: a trace of the recessive gene present in a toy figure without ancestry; a hulking American figure dropped from a vacuum, no origin other than a bottom line that's fed by appeasing the desires of U.S. children instilled in them by the bottom line itself, urging them to give in to their solipsistic tendency to forget the external and succumb to the inward desire for a personal world, the desire for things to be *for oneself*, the toy aisle colorful and inviting and urging its viewers to quit resistance and simply give in to a world with no other history than what it contains in the mind of its spectator, a nationalism centered around the self, Spencer concludes, *this is a service to your country; if we go down, the whole world goes down with us*, Panetta adjusting his belt, the girth of a world strapped in, *if you won't do it we'll sure as shit be glad to find someone who will*, blustering before his jaunt to the U.S. outposts of steel, the strongholds covertly built for mohammedan amusement—the secret loci of fun and subversion. And their two heads nodding the sounds of yes drowned and stifled by the PA announcer's tinny excitement transferred to the crowd on the front lawn of the Waistdice sanitation dynasty's hobby farm, the public outpost of their empire. He pictures the patriarch of philanthropically aesthetic trash re-placement grinning for a flash bulb before the incessant glugalug with his feminine strand of lineage, the prospective Mrs. Waistdice-Spencer, lady livery, hidden straddling with a dirtied skirt her inverted hobby horse cimarroy atop their private green space out of the eyesight of the crowd of paid admittance, the wild hobby horse neighing his nervous stanzas. On the farm's lawn, separated from the orchard by the ornamented barn, the peeling red face of the Midwestern patriarch Waistdice wondering where his daughter went, the split ground introducing a Coke can underneath the yesnodding pair as Spencer reads the list, coursing through the toy aisle dropping for his niece and nephews several plastic dictators into the basket of fostered friendly relations between married parties. A red Coke can making contact with Olivia's white rump, the crevice of transferred capital Spencer checking out swiping his credit card through the crevice acquiring annexed personal assets to be dispersed as the mighty pen lets ink in a mercenary John Hancock of *L. Spendere* on his receipt. The paid enabler of hessians and toy soldiers and clandestine administrators. Outside he silently trudges, into a space dimmed like a low-key side office by a setting sun, his foreign sedan gurgling with a crossed out list of annexes, a world built for married lineages Panetta strutting out through the frontier of backlight at once mournful and satisfied; Spencer's feeling of something misplaced is subsumed by a gale in his chest on par with any of the green storms he'd seen torment the U.S. Midwest as a freckled and tussled-haired child looking wide eyed out the rain-speckled window—he looks up and sees an airplane gliding eastward across the dimly glowing sky as though to draw the string of the black hood around him closed as he drives silently on his eastward course toward home, deciding what he should say to his wife when the question will inevitably come, “How was work?”

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Golden haired Olivia bends forward the clink of the afterdinner china as James Waistdice, a snifterfull of brandy on the end table to his left, pulls a match across the brown strip of his *Liberty Lights the Way* matchbook to set alight the fat stogie in front of his cherryflushed face, insisting that Spencer stay put. It's the decades of sub-division, he says. That's the problem. Blue smoke rising in front of the cherryred. Liberty's flame. The French gift. Spendere's giftwrapped gifts underneath the plastic fir tree. Sleepy Schlaffer's Tannenbaum. Traum. The wrapped up cherrygift, the absorbed agent of artificial scent. Invades the skin. Olivia in the side room, too frazzled to ask about my day when I came in, whipping up dinner. Mythical cherryred. It's been difficult enough with all the greenpeacers shoving their noses into every legitimate business move you make, even the little ones, but you have a whole other beast on your hands when you piss off the Indians. By the side of cherryred the wifeless son E nodding yes agree. Son agree. Electable E son. Ah-Mare-EE-Cah. Itching to say a word. The tired hobby horse cimarroo sits silent. Grrglrgh. O, a bit gassy feeling. Something in the gut. Like bossman, 16 gurgling eastward hours. A bathroom occupied. Eastern occupation. A torturous smell similar to Waistdice in a lot of ways. Blustery bossdogs missing their America. But the torture question, ah, what's missing? Olivia in there alone. Privacy necessary for a confession, like a priest and his parishioner. A useful comparison, metaphoric. What good would come? Silence for now. There's the steady patter overhead of the little ones' rude feet trampling about. What doing? Oblivious to the adults. Out of sight out of existence. America's Playground. Hidden detained. John Stuart in the study adjacent door closed. Hope he doesn't check the browser history. Rot the brain. They make my life a stinking hell. Orangeglow. Blue exhale. Some tribes have these plots of land that they're just now disputing where the deeds are 150 gosh damn years old. The Indian excuse is that their ancestors were tricked into signing their assets over, or even worse that these tribes were conspired against by the U.S. Government who breached their treaties were somewhere along the way, or that these documents were never legitimate to begin with, these people say they were fooled into what we all know more or less happened, but since it's been a damn century and a half since the deeds were written, these plots have all been sliced up and divided so many times over that the Indians have in some cases maybe about one square inch they're angry over that's valued at *maybe* one thousandth of one cent. In some cases we're talking disputes over land that's now being used as *traditional* landfills, but a man's land is a man's land, right tipasip? And all these deeds from over the years are so bogged down by litigation that it's simply an administrative nightmare to untangle everything, though I say hire the Indians to do it. It'll get them out of the bottle, and it'll let me move some trash. You and I all know that when I'm not moving trash the whole damn eastern seaboard's life is a stinking hell, and when the whole damn eastern seaboard's life is a stinking hell, my life is a stinking hell, and all over this little tiny square inch of disputed land that you can't do anything with anyway. Tipasip. Grglrrrgh troubled gut. Olivia's golden head comes bobbing in from the kitchen.

Forward bend with a glass of redwine out front. Pushes an outlet plug by the cherrygift, O. The plastic tree lights up, she smiles. *Liberty Lights*. Upstairs the rude patter left-to-right. She unlike she used to. The lines in her face. The map of a life. Girlhood gone. A memory. Image. Does LeeLee want anything to drink? Coffee? No, thank you, nothing that could interfere with sleeping later. Thank you. But so I mean the problem's historical glug, not that any of this is all that profound. The link between people and place is religious. You know how you feel for example when you come home after a long trip in some foreign land that's different from the place you call home, and the first view of the green horizon spread out like dairy product hits you right in the heart, that kind of pearly gate feeling? The land in a manner of speaking is our father, and he allows us to become like children. All this stuff the Indians have about mother earth which is what they call it, I believe, is mistaken. The land is a provider, a worker. He's out there all day everyday allowing his skin to be brutalized and upturned not because he wants to but because he has to, because he knows that that's what's required to provide for his children. The land is God, more or less. Top me off, by the way, please. Thank you. And so it pains me just as much as it pains the hippie-dippie greenpeacers and the Indians when the ruptures occur, because not only am I losing money and prestige as well as the ability to move trash with the damn EPA breathing down my neck monitoring every gosh damn move I make like I'm some kind of gosh damn criminal, but I'm also desecrating something that's holy, and that fact doesn't sit well with me at all. It makes me feel quite guilty, actually, though it's what I've done and how I've made my living. Too late to go back now. Glug puffpuff. But the farmers like it. They simply plow it all under and they've got themselves a top notch compost material that I more or less paid to have pumped in. Have you ever seen corn that's twenty feet high? I have, and let me tell you, it's a thing of greatness. Glugalug. I suppose this is all a bit metaphysical, isn't it? That by desecrating something that's holy in its physical form I'm desecrating it, I think... Platonic, right? Hey John Stuart. Boy. Eric go get your boy. John Stuart, how are you this evening? Granddad has a question about philosophy. The essence is a thing of Plato, is it not? That's what I thought. The Platonic essence. By rupturing the holy land—ha, how's that one for you?—the land's Platonic essence, it's redemptive greatness, I should say, I rupture. It's like burning a flag, if you want to make a comparison. That's when all this trouble started, is with the hippies, all wearing their fringed leather coats and moccasins like they're some type of gosh damn urban tribe, pretending they're in touch with what's natural. They're the ones that began questioning the very premise of America and what it stands for. They're the true villains of history, not the—good brandy you've got here, by the way, LeRoy, my boy. Tipasip. Say that again, John Stuart? A nouveau Wordsworth? That's clever. A nouveau Wordsworth bred with a Richard Milhous Nixon? That's even more clever. I have an eminently clever grandson. Don't go back into that recessed room, John Stuart. Why don't you just sit out here with us for a while? We're more interesting than that internet you're in there playing with by yourself. Don't look so enthused. I think your eyes might pop right out of your young head. See, that's the problem with the people your age.

You're all isolated with relation to one another. It's as though you see yourself as merely one being at the feet of another, sitting across the room from those signified by 'aunt' and 'uncle' as they sit tangled with their legs crossed each with a hand on the other's knee. We're all family here, boy, one body split into units at once sovereign and connected. You have no notion community. That's why all these multicult—everything exists in a spaceless space for you. There's no such thing as a neighbor anymore. That's what made this country great. We watched out for our neighbors. We offered them our bread. We were brothers, all of us. Tipasip. No more. No more. Glugalug. Now it's as though nobody wants to be an American. Everybody's so concerned with what's happening abroad. We have enough problems to clean up over here, if you ask me, which is the beauty of your philanthropy, kids. Though imagine the prospect of bringing American entrepreneurship to the Middle East, the industrial spirit we know we all have but is right now at this juncture lying dormant. Do you all realize how much trash we could move in a war zone? The feast would never end. We'd have to keep it clandestine, of course. It would be utter suicide for you, Eric, speaking of your political career. It would have to be a secret. We'd need to put a cloth over it all. Just imagine the scandal. Cherryred a flushed face, zones of deeper red around his neck and temples, his blue exhale up-rising. Just imagine the scandal. The guy's boisterous, never even once noticed so. Caved into himself. Convinced of greatness. Given himself to it. Thinks he speaks for a country. A nation of values contained in one man. Sucked by an inward spiral that he doesn't even notice. When he dies there goes. How did Olivia come from him? She got the good side, there next to me rolling her eyes and squeezing my knee just so, as though to utter through the body, 'I understand.' Pol Eric quiet. Out of campaign mode. A rude patter trickles down the steps. Grghllrhgh prfffft. Ah, cushion soak. Smell absorbed thank goodness. The world doesn't revolve around you, the world doesn't revolve around you a rude youngling voice. The twins. Fraternal Amarica. A feminine and masculine lineal split mutated patter ascends back up. John Stuart out the office sitting at blustery cherryred's feet. Smart kid. Hope son LeRoy. Good genes. Out the office Panetta in the sky eastward gurgling in the heavens. Imagine the war zone feast. The shrapnel. Concrete garden. Community in the steel trusses, waves of tourists wandering together. Brothers all of us, fraternal. Global greatness answers at what cost. Whose fault? Her grip feels nice. If only alone, then I could tell. A penstroke of war. That would be quite the major gaffe, which it seems to me as well as anybody that pays the slightest bit of attention to things in general the American people dislike. Gaffes punch holes in the stories we like to hear. They let the people really know that they're being bullshitted—pardon my French—which they like, though it must be on their own terms. Don't look so sullen, LeRoy. Nobody wants to perceive an inconvenient truth without seeking it for himself. Why do you think I was able to build my empire based on a model of strategic misplacement? Why do you all think the American Restoration Project keeps winning elections? Eric, this fact that the people yearn to see the Platonic ideal over what exists on the ground is what makes both your philanthropy and your political career

successful. Because you package the desires and ideals that people hold into something they can vote for, something that seems tangible and that you can sell to them that will allow them to say, 'By voting for Congressman Eric W.J. Waistdice, my values and ideals are affirmed and vindicated as a true and valid American,' you allow them the illusion of building the country according to their individual longings. They buy their way out of despair. A vote is nothing more than a transaction, you know, one that's official—legally and spiritually binding glugalug. You sell them what they want to hear. Conspire—see, the way we live is based on a calculated ignorance to that which is ever flowing beneath us. Thus is also the beauty of your philanthropy, kids. It's triumphant. Though not that it could ever work over there in camel country, even if it wasn't ultimately a politically suicidal gaffe and scandal. The beauty of your philanthropy, kids. John Stuart. Are you listening to me? Why don't you listen to your Granddad. The real beauty of your philanthropy, kids, is where it occurs. Up there in the ether. Ethereal America. You clean the colonies and fertilize the continental garden, and by doing so—I said listen to your Granddad, boy, that internet you hold in your hands, that thumbclicking doohickey; stop it and listen to your Granddad about where you come from and what makes you part of something special, what makes you a chosen descendent of communal greatness. By doing so as I was saying by cleaning the original colonies and fertilizing the truly holy space of provision and labor—each redemptive in their own right but especially so when done together, in concert—the real expression of the truth and beauty of America himself, by cleaning and fertilizing the American landscape you make Ethereal America come to fruition. Its Platonic ideal that exists in the ether. But the ethereal ideal requires the physical space to exist. It's only practical. The land is what's special, it's what's God, it's what dooms our democratic experiments abroad. The land is what makes America great. The frontier is limited to that space which contains it. The spiritual parameters of democracy are necessarily spatial, which we stand over right here on the collective feet of you and I and all of our brothers. Which is why I feel particularly heinous when the ruptures occur, and I empathize with the greenpeacers and the EPA and the Indians, even if it's only a square inch that's desecrated; that square inch is holy no matter who you are. But then what seminal technology isn't without its flaws? Everything requires refinement, purification. I don't understand why people feel this unamerican need to apologize for—if we'd stay home and realize what we have right here. Eden, Olivia, top me off again, will you please, sweetheart? Tipasip orange glow levitating in front of solemn cherryred the blue exhale rising to the ether. Very good brandy, once again, LeRoy. If you haven't finished your Christmas shopping, Olivia, then I request a bottle of the good stuff, here. Grrghlrhgh, O. This is a gift I would truly appreciate swirlywhirl tipasip. Say, LeRoy? Why all this silence all night? Surely you have thoughts about all this. What—why recoil? During dinner you recoiled into yourself when I asked you about your work, the exciting, the mundane, the happenings around the office, and now you recoil into yourself when I ask you about your country's Platonic ideal. Why recoil? Don't look at Olivia. Look at me. I'm the one who's speaking to you, not her. Now you look

lost, as though you carry the burden of sin. Believe me, all of you, when I say that I know how to read people. I did not expand my empire to what it is today oblivious to those around me. You carry a burden the size of an empire. I can see it on your face. It's an empirical burden, in a manner of speaking. What must you not confront, LeRoy? What must you avoid? Silence is no way to get anywhere in this country. Do you think that I was silent when I was slinging fifty pound trash bags for my father, into the back of a rusted-out diesel truck with disconnected breaks designed for moving harvested grain, while I calculated in my head my strategy for expanding my eventual sanitation empire, so that it would one day course under and feed the land we call God? Silence is stasis, good LeRoy. The inability to move trash or oneself is no way to make an empire go. Confront your country's greatness and give yourself to it. Confront the land your God and mine Glugalug blue exhale masking the cherryred floating ethereally brimming over the wide cream hat like a soul ascending. The rude patter of children comes tumbling down the stairs. The A-named mass huddles around John Stuart at cherryred's feet. Amarica each take a knee on their father's lap, who sits quietly nodding at the right hand of his father. Quiet, solemn, flushed, out of campaign mode. Young LeRoy on his mother's lap, as she strokes his hair, gentle O. Her same laugh lines on his boyface, her's prominent and droopy with age. Drowsy, they seem. A majestic woman she is, not the girl I remember behind the orchard, among the metal sounds of a recorded crowd humming while the mass of ag and sanitation pros stood silently fulfilling their obligations of being present at the public event. Investors seeing what they paid for. Like a presidential fundraiser. Phony. O, her breath is warm, heats the ear lobe. He's been drinking, LeeLee, try not to let him get to you. You and I both know you're a good man, which is what matters. Yesnod agree. O, that thing she said to me while we lay in the grass. Just recalled it. More beautiful than verse. And blustering cherryred and son agree mugging for the camera. Malevolent smiles. If they knew what Panetta. Globetrotting. America's playground. O the penstroke—what a couple of phonies. Always searching for a good photo op. Hairstreaks a little gray among the golden rest. Beautiful in her own way. Should pick poetry up again, like back in the Cambridge days. A pen could write her something lovely. Granddad's little brood! Tipasip You all make Granddad feel so good, so young. None of you know how well it feels to see your gene pool continuing. Seeing myself in your young faces, it makes me feel as though I'm a child again myself, and not a lonely old widower like your father here at my side. Don't look sad, any of you tipasip. I mean nothing malevolent. You should all rejoice. My essence is continued through all of you, which makes me grateful. When I go, I will still be here because of you. I will be both here and at the Eternal Feast, smiling in each place behind the dual sets of pearly gates. How wonderful it is to have such thoughts. And though you clearly have no understanding of what I'm telling you now as is shown by your kitten-eyed faces and those questions you ask by twisting your young necks so that you can see your red-faced father who hushes you, you will one day understand and appreciate my sentiment. Tell me, all of you wonderful descendants of sanitation fortune, what are your summer plans? Andrew and Abraham,

baseball, huh? What's more American than baseball? Nothing except a squeaky clean landscape that feeds twenty-foot corn, that's what. You are both classic children of the Middle-West, at once tanned and bleached by the sun's brimming rays. You fail to realize how tipasip glad this makes your Granddad that you each have chosen baseball glug. Too many kids now play soccer, that international game, without realizing the value of deciphering a curveball. Knowing a curveball allows you to adapt in all aspects of commerce and familial life. You can identify those instances of rip-off and swindle. Good for you two. And what about you, Amanda and Aric? Will you follow your father on his campaign as he pushes his star-spangled broom across his various rhetorical platforms? Oh, you're each going to America's Playground forever and ever? Tipasip well that's shocking news. We'll all miss you, especially your old Granddad who yearns to see himself in your freckled faces. This leaves us with only John Stuart remaining. Don't talk to your father that way, Eric. This is neither intimidating nor embarrassing. This is a Granddad reaching out to his lineage, the heirs of his sanitation fortune, to establish a palpable link so that they know just where they come from and why they're here. Enough. You don't want to make a gaffe in front of your children. Let's hear it John Stuart. Please drop that doohickey you possess from your hands that contains a space without form or substance. What can that space grow? What does it produce that's palpable? Talk to your family, or is that space-inventing device your way of disowning us? Say something. Where do you want to go to college? Surely you've thought about it. Are you abandoning your roots and going East like old silent LeRoy here did? If you ask me you'd be better off at a land grant institution than you would at any ivy. All that's gotten your silent uncle here is a profession he refuses to speak about. Quiet, Olivia. What you perceive as oppressive is the trait that has so far funded your privileged lifestyle. Now, John Stuart, what are you doing this summer? Speak. Kids now, it seems to me, want to deny that they come from somewhere. Did I glugaglug deny my roots when I was heaving stinking fifty pound trash bags for my father on my way to owning my own sanitation empire? No. Kids now want to depart and work for anonymous multi-nationals instead of their own family businesses. Why not inherit? Please tell Granddad you're playing baseball like your brothers. John Stuart, a smart one, speaks: Actually, I'm going with my friend John-Smith Dirtybelly and his dad on their campaign of eastward contraction, as they say. Mr. Dirtybelly calls it 'The Whites of Their Eyes.' We're starting in Mankato on the site where they hanged 38 Sioux Indians in 1862. We'll be through Washington on the Fourth, on a course to England where we'll set up a camp of protest. We're hitting all of the Anglo centers of control, just the three of us. It's a modest but powerful gesture of decolonization. Think of it as a reversal of paths. Dad doesn't want me to go out of concern for his own political career, though he can't stop me. Sipaspill you ingrate, you dead bitch's bastard, James Waistdice drops the soggy cigar butt into the snifter and snatches his cane, ascending creakily up the stairs into secondlevel darkness. The family sits silently. The air above them is punctured and scattered, a piled up mess of psychic debris. Eric bounds up the stairs after his father with red cheeks flushed

cherry. Olivia, reestablishing friendly relations, puts a movie on for the children. Spencer breaks his silence. I'm sorry, John Stuart. I'm so sorry.

Spencer blows out a match and waves it through the air before dropping it into the porcelain bowl. That old crank, should've stayed at the Ormond in Alexandria. Get as messed up as he wants to there without upsetting the children. What Olivia puts up with wipawipe O the smell of self always curious. Stomach feels better, flushed out. Treats everyplace like it's his, like everyone is here on this planet to serve him and him only like a damn god. When he dies there goes a world, a blown out match without any smoke wooosh. Out there spilling all over himself. The guy's a damn dictator. Eric nodding at his side like father like. A yesman. In the genes. Phonies self-serving. Each a campaign of self. Astute, though, alarmingly. Good for John Stuart. The poor boy. Takes balls. Should talk to him more savvy knows more than I do. A gentleness about him gentle like Panetta's pallid rump wiper the things some people do to draw pay. The things people, O penstroke, ah. Panetta suspended over the sea gassy, ah how could I? Pressure. Gotta draw pay. A gentleness he has, polite unlike the A-names, gentle that thing she said to me in the grass. O. This obsession the bossdogs have, history viewed grainy and miscolored like old home movies. Nostalgic, I cannot tell a lie, ha their history, ha. As though the past is a commodity. Hope LeRoy turns out like, not the geneless toy. Imagined, made up. Try to do right not give into indulgence. Scrubadub wash my hands of it all. Savvy John Stuart tells it truthfully, won't give into stories. Won't take the easy comforts. Admirable. Knows there's a world. Philanthropist. O, bloody penstroke. Redemptive nation fictitious be redemptive, confessions of guilt extracted with a pen. The point of torture, O empire. That thing she said pressed in the bushes. Clear as a bell above tinny PA. Click lights out there goes the bathroom far as cherryred is concerned, dead dead dead. Desperation in his voice, narrative usurped. Storycide. John Stuart the true protestant, depose the blustering rump just like that, prideful and purged from town ex post christmo who would be left to speak for him. None, that's who. Chop it down like a tree. O, glad relation, reversal of paths. Contraction, O. The birth motion. Contract to expand. A linguistic dilemma. What she said, O, pants off jingaling inverted in the grass O, there now in bed on the ruffled gray streaks of goldenhead beautiful. Not a girl anymore not what I imagine, flawed, truthful, O. She's warm. A separate body having her own dreams. Separate from me. Really can't complain, a great wife. The things she does for me the small ones to smile at a grapefruit sliced neatly for breakfast in a darkened kitchen before I'm up. The philanthropical genes sincere. Where from? The desperation in cherryred facing what's lost never there. His truth a product. I cannot sell a lie. Sold to him, the people that get off on that culture war claptrap, a fertile market. Doesn't want to face it, like Leon—O my penstroke. O. Can you still write your poetry, O like the Crimson days at that out east school? O cherryred between the rows of

archived books like furrows where we met and played, O the youngman melodrama  
sublimated in verse *let me list the ways Oliver, / The guiding force of my hobby horse trot*,  
O when she appeared younger, O that ideated version of her self the poetic subject, now  
for real next to me sleeping graceful, imperfect; snoring her goldengray hair messed. O  
penstroke can you still express the beauty of her form, O the truth she said, O the truth what  
remains when her substance is peeled away, O her essence, O what she said in the long  
grass now tonight into my ear, O salvation, *You're a good man, LeRoy*, O thank God for that  
stupid cowboy trope, saved by a woman. Necessary wife Olivia, if I weren't pledged to  
silence!

END

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## Spearfish Canyon by Mark Brenden

The morning sun was high and generous above the canyon. For miles around, the lines of fly fishermen were being cast out to the tips of running creeks and repelled back, tight as wire, pulling in either air or fish or wet sticks or seaweed.

Tucked back into the canyon, on a lawn chair in front of a cabin nestled an acre from National Forest land, sat a young man wearing jean shorts cut above the knee, gazing off at a bird feeder entertaining finches and crows and, below it, a family of chipmunks.

The dew cooled his toes and he curled them up to it, hoping for a new sensation—be it coldness, wetness, anything—to sneak from his exterior on inside. The one he had he was attempting to find an English word for. Not loneliness. He did not covet another's presence. Not guilt. He had suppressed the actions of yore. Not sadness. What is sadness? Something that existed on a plain between the three but was not grabbed by any. He figured the Spanish must have a word for it, or the French.

Centuries back the extremities of this canyon scared even the Indians. He thought about that and how just this morning he took his motorcycle across its entirety into town, bought beer and eggs, and drove back. Perhaps it was guilt he felt for the privileges of his state. He came from a family of self-made men, ones whose stories would not be scorned by the cameras of American cinema. His great-grandfather came to this country on a boat at the age of 13 from Norway by his lonesome and homesteaded in Minnesota. His grandfather dropped out of school in the middle of eighth grade to help with the farm, leading him to structure his sentences in such sincere ways as "I and she went to the café," a rugged and earnestly American way of speaking the young man often endeavored to unlearn toward. His father saved the family farm by buying it back from a crook who hoodwinked his grandfather with an underhanded Contract for Deed agreement.

And who was he? What modest heroism could he shrug off as just what he had to do? What American ideal had he adhered to, or come to embody with gallant obliviousness?

A smile surprised his face muscles as he watched a chipmunk jump with anticipation while a finch seeded a morsel from the bird feeder. In his chosen seclusion, he'd learned to find natural distractions from the beastlier of his inner thoughts. You're just sitting in a chair watching birds and chipmunks, he'd tell himself. Nothing else.

His chief reason for such reminders was his past, particularly that in regards to women. When the axe fell on his latest romance, he'd taken to retribution-fueled misogyny. When his friends in the city would disparage his newfound language, he would grunt and say

"Was Christ a heretic for *Eli Lama Lama Sabactan!*? These days, secretly, or as secret as you could call a hermit's actions, he had begun to study the foundations of feminism, as some kind of self-rebellion. In these studies, he'd run the gamut from enlightened to exasperated. His final conclusion was that he was simply too stupid to understand the concept. What good, he decided, were his two cents on the matter?

Damned if you do... His muttering trailed off into the canyon.

Two weeks ago he had driven out past the border of Wyoming with two married women ten years his senior and floated by inner tube down a creek, their silent passions rushing with the water below them. Social decorum disallowed for this passion to pass back into Dakota Territory, and it had left him — this time he was sure of it — sad, guilty and alone. The day before last, he had taken this trip by himself and floated that creek alone, hoping to reproduce some kind of feeling, concluding that feelings of this or any kind do not respond to calls or swim to your reaching hand.

It's a cruel measure to take, he thought, to surrender your early 20s to solitude, but it's the only one he knew how to take. Leaving the city was too cinematically appealing, a masculine sexiness he wouldn't yield from. He had worked to abandon his nightly inklings toward women, even hucked his phone into Spearfish Creek. The hunger he had for it was a forbidding mirage, he told the birds and the chipmunks.

Presently, two of the chipmunks commenced to struggle on the grass and the gravel for a sunflower seed dropped from above. They rolled over one another, tossed the seed about, forgetting it, and continued chasing each other off down the driveway. As he watched from his lawn chair, he felt his breath all the way from its formation in his lungs to its odyssey through his esophagus to its exit from his mouth to its amorphous release into the piney air. It was another sensation he found no word for, and he allowed that, just sitting and letting it happen. He felt as though his hands were seeping into his legs like liquid. He told his brain to move them and they only pushed deeper. He tried to stop his breath. Nothing. Tears welled up in his eyes and he felt them, and allowed them to fall. Images of cracked tan skin and lunch coolers and sweaty forearms invaded his mind like some tortuous montage of his unattainable lineage. He tried to force a feminine icon into the picture, either a famous actress of a bygone lover, but nothing came. Dirt-ridden abdomens, lined foreheads, all of men, were all there was. He tried to grunt or cry, but still there was nothing. He closed his eyes and opened them.

Two chipmunks, each with half a shell of sunflower seed, stood erect beneath a spruce tree, birds sung. A woman's hand graced his shoulder. This sensation was either real or imagined, he understood, but he no longer needed to feel his breath.



## **Always Singular, Never Alone** by Eric Cummings

I quit drinking Cristal  
Not because it's prejudiced  
But because Jay Z says  
It is intolerant.

When the Jigga man says jump  
You look down at the earth  
And you say 'all paradises  
Are imperfect.'

So I never-never ever-ever gonna be seen sipping on the Crissy again.

Unless it's free  
Or it's too dark in the club to read the label  
Or it's too dark to read  
Or I'm just drunk or that's all room service has to offer and the two nubile  
And semigloss semi-nude swoon-beams in my bed right now  
Can't think of anything left to say except  
'Mimosa! We are sensitive herbs. Mimosa! S'il te plait!'

And it does very much, the playing. Never sipping on the Crissy again.

Sometimes you have to sacrifice what you stand for to keep standing.  
It really is a hard knock life.  
I'm sure J-hova would understand.  
He knows it's tough out here.

He knows the world is a taking for us takers to take.  
He knows the new intelligence  
Is sex, cash, and fashion.  
That music is an extravagance.

That the new poetry is seeded deeply in luxury.  
That desire is an unfaithful lie.  
That there is no true hedonism left when you are true to yourself.  
He knows; there are no real ghosts in a Phantom Drophead coupe,

That the past will haunt you but can't chase you if you're driving

A V12, that survival is the diametrical  
opposite but not the antithesis of Art. He's right—  
Armand de Brignac is just as boss and the bottle is more player.

(As a poet, given the choice, I will always concede  
to good taste.) Luckily there's a concierge for everything.  
So I'm going to pop these corks  
And toast 'We are alone!'  
There's no one here that will not condone  
The bubbles so no one here will condemn the bubbly. *Votre santé!*

The fact of the matter is a matter of faction,  
the same legended  
thing is the same legal thang. No matter what we name it,  
it is what it always has been;  
the same old condom you were born with, if you're lucky,  
a couple championship rings or a song listened  
to more than twice.

Always singular never alone. **Never Alone, Singular Always.**

### 3. by Jon Dambacher

Homoerectus  
pulls bark from an African Plum tree  
to scratch a line into a cavewall.

The exaltation sends him dashing out  
charging toward his tribe in camp  
collecting them to acknowledge the event.

In the cave  
four of his kind stand in wonder  
he's created a recognizable figure.

At sundown  
hunters hide below the Agapanthus  
stalking two antelope.

The sketcher grins privately  
as his troupe barbecues their dinner  
he signs the cavewall with animalblood.

In the morning  
the tribe shares freshly hunted meat  
but he accepts plums from a female's hand.

## **Jerk** by Joseph Farley

being a jerk is what I am best at,  
no lessons needed,  
naturally a son of a bitch.  
now all my toys are broken,  
and all that I loved has gone  
cursing my name.

maybe now it will start to sink in,  
all those lectures I received  
on my parents' knees.  
maybe I will finally learn  
how to be nice and good,  
and treat people like I should.

maybe that will happen,  
but I doubt it.  
it is easier to stay  
with what you are good at,  
and this nasty mongrel dog  
is too old to learn new tricks.

## Searching the Wreckage by Joseph Farley

You chose to be  
what you chose to be,  
and I chose to be  
who I was.

We may have started  
in a different place,  
but we ended  
in horror and flames.

I toast the wreck  
that was our lives,

If you stole  
more pearls of joy than I  
who is to blame?

My fault was simple.  
I cared too much.  
but it ended all the same.

In our next life  
if we should join,  
I hope we twist less  
in the wind,

and quickly sail apart  
before we become  
better at wounding

than loving.



## Argentina Days After Paul Bowles by Moneta Goldsmith

It gets dark. We return home. Tea.

One goes somewhere, drinks tea, converses, then the opening of the suitcase, arranging things in the guest room. Isn't this one of the main activities of my life? Listening to new whispers, breathing strange air, deciphering a strange system of sounds, smells, lights?

*The lamps are on, the dogs lay on the rug.* When I spoke with them, these details were crawling all over me, like insects, and made me practically absent.

As always when I arrive someplace, I spread out my papers along the desk and I stand before the window. I gaze outside in private devotion, as if in the courtyard below there was a palette from which I were drawing paint. I grow restless, re-arrange, pace, fidget. If there is a tree I give myself to its wispy tree breath. I listen for the rustle of the wind, for the sound of the land sent by the trees for the birds to hear. The trees across this country sometimes spread their wide branches out like flags, jutting out over the land, a little too proud of themselves.

Is it not the job of every tree, like great towering erasers, to push the words away? A Poplar tree, the breeze it blows, aren't these the essential props of every forgotten kingdom of the world?

Shut the window. Whatever fruit is there is there to rot for the crows to catch.

Point yourself toward the bedroom, try to avoid the mirror mounted on the wall.

Understand that one of the major ordeals of man is to face his mirror, but the force of another kind of humiliation is enough for you now. Scuttle across the floor to the bedroom like a crab across the sea floor, one eye glancing up to the surface of the water, careful not to be spotted. Outside, the pendulum swings on the branch of the Poplar tree. The smell, the rot of flesh swinging on a rope. *Pace, fidget, re-arrange.*

Shut the door. Hear the echo of your own blood, a voice outside. Feel the air kiss your forearms a moment, a sense of the door still warm with vibration. *The lamps are on, the dogs lay on the rug.* Old fruit falls to the ground for the crows to catch.

## Short Talk on Booksellers by Moneta Goldsmith

*Anonymous asks: what is your opinion of booksellers?*

The earliest Assassins belonged to a small tribe descended from a region on the outskirts of ancient Phoenicia. According to Montaigne, their central doctrine seems to have held that in order to deserve entry to Paradise, a member of this tribe had to murder someone from a religion outside of his own: The greater the distance of this assassination (we borrow this word from their name) the greater the glory, in this world and the next. It is in this way, Montaigne tells us, that Count Raymond of Tripoli was brutally killed with a butter knife in the center of town while waiting in line for a cannoli.

Traces of these practices can still be found today. I'm told, for instance, there is a bookshop in the center of Scotland containing a volume with nothing but blank pages; and if a reader opens this volume to one of these blank pages at exactly three o'clock in the afternoon, he will die.

Of course, there are more obvious examples as well. Why else would so many spiders build cobwebs so close to hornet's nests, on the branches of poison willows, or just outside the bedroom window of a young man who dreams each night of Super Soakers filled with insecticide for the express purposes of entomological holocausts? It's true, the manual has changed very little since the time of the first Assassins. Although there are a couple of exceptions. Today, for instance, there are ant colonies that court parasites that give off highly addictive aromas. These aromas, while faintly rancid and almost imperceptible by our own olfactory capabilities, are capable of driving whole hoards of ants so wild that they smother one another with their own limbs and antennae-cords, and have even been known to sacrifice their own children so that they might live to fall once more under its fragrant and nauseating spell. (Such is the unfortunate drawback of being born into one of the most socialized tribe of insects.)

Today, too, there are full-time readers and writers of novels who plant themselves in the center of coffeehouses and behind rickety podiums of occasional bookshops, where the smell of printer's ink is enough to ruin the scent of garlic in a home-cooked meal; often, these young men can be seen pulling on their beards as they stare off into the middle distance, as if ready to bury their heads in their hands to cry, deluding themselves they are being noticed, all the while hoping not to be.

This final change in the Doctrine of Death may well derive from the early assassination techniques developed in Rome. Surely, Brutus deserves some credit for this, personalizing his betrayal at the Theater of Pompeii, ruthlessly stabbing Caesar as he did, right in the

small of his own backyard. Although this historic event is not where we get the word 'assassination' today—despite the traditional line you will often hear from so many waylaid historians, that distinction belongs to the Assassins of Phoenicia – this *was* in fact the event from which we gleaned the contemporary notion of 'brutalitim', coinciding as it did with the first booksellers in history, who quietly opened their doors for business that day on the outskirts of the Roman Empire.

And that is all that I have to say on the subject of booksellers. Mahalo.



## Keen by Lauren Gordon

### Chapter 1

*Nancy meets her robot.*

The first thing you should do is put the robot back in the closet,  
lock it, and for safety hide the key.

Ned will say he doesn't see a thing. Ned will hide the key under a statuette, carefully  
palming her ceramic tit. Ned will insert the tape.

He wants to know, do you think  
the sound of your voice can activate the robot?

### Chapter 2

*Nancy loves her father.*

I guess you recognize the black widow spider, spun-  
suppose we look in the cupboards? Egg. Corn.

And your mother, dead.

Nancy thinks hard, wants answers hard, hewn  
like the oak of a trapdoor; you can't *pull* that trick again

unless, she thinks fearfully,  
unless she thinks fearfully:  
you fall into such a deep hole, or onto some craggy rocks –

Query the shaft of light falling on your hardwood floors;  
your father whispering legalese into the folds of your  
mother's nightgown, a stale cigarette  
your own heart an ashtray, always careful to avoid the trap-door area, reset:  
wait for the whirring sound that smokes above your bed  
your head pressing like concrete.

### Chapter 3

*Nancy and the Innuendo.*

Ned beamed his flashlight, threw light  
into a nest of darkness; we're here! Let us out!  
Call loudly, yank the knob with all your might

then feel the relief; a hidden button is a gasp,

the couple's prison a turret  
unbreakable glass. Investigate the foot  
in your bed, the one attached to your ankle  
then have it removed.



## Wooden Lady by Lauren Gordon

### Article 2

I am not enough. And in the den, my mother distilled  
perfume from fear and when that splintered, I swallowed  
like the baby, like the baby's shrillness. My skin shivers like wood  
my own mother moving in opposite directions. I do the dishes,  
if you know what I mean, I do them. Retreat, retread  
the carpet from the pacing, so much prescribed pacing.  
Are these my knuckles? This could not have been the cinching  
of my life. That I do not recall.

*Addendum:*

*Your father smokes in the backyard  
through the window  
a thin stream of blue  
between his fingers  
feet pointed north  
he says it's manly  
like the steering wheel of a ship  
lamine cuffs pegged  
shims fix-its I-beams  
the epoxy hardens the belief  
of death which wafts  
who are we kidding here? Darlings  
someone will die here  
your mother will die here  
a woman will die here  
a hymn a hymn for mouths  
whisper mama  
in the split level  
she is Venus and  
the hymns fly around her  
like dandelion fuzz wisp  
whirl and it is all she thinks of  
bless her but the baby  
is just a girl, just a baby, a girl.*

## Seeding 1. by Lauren Gordon

1.

Ma scraps the boiled orange  
from a shredded carrot to color white butter,

presses it into pretty  
strawberry leaf molds for Pa's haying supper:

(blackbirds, blackbirds, baked in a pie  
shot you down from the prairie sky  
blacktears, blacktears, watched you cry  
grinding up the flour for the chicken fry)

Mary and I eat the shavings,

roughage for keen eyes on the buffalo wallows,  
sharp enough to see the wolves.

I listen to the Indians,  
press a cold tongue  
to the ceiling of my mouth

(lay a hot hand  
to myself  
under  
the piecemeal quilt)

## Seeding 2. By Lauren Gordon

2.

Ellen's calf bawls.  
I skim the milk,  
dip my fingers,  
let her rough lick,  
tonguing and suckling. Milk.

She'll butt the pail,  
smell the milk,  
I know it:  
She's a dumb wobbly-thing  
with stupid legs. Milk.  
Mary. Milk.  
Has stupid eyes, too  
that bawl blue  
when no one's looking. Milk.

Cheerful cheerful  
by God's own grace  
to race. To race  
the grave. Milk.



## The Bounding Main of Your Mind by Lauren Gordon

Your feelings lie down on a moth-worn blanket  
like a farm dog.

The weather gives you  
a sense of purpose and your spleen is the sieve  
that filters out the tar in the world, so you hide  
out in the seascape of your brain: the briny deep  
beneath, the undulating lift of water,  
the soundless pressure;

the octopus in your heart unfurls a map  
to another ocean, another ocean  
endless, or unending: the swim is tireless,

your tentacles taut

when you heap your body  
into the chewed bed  
littered with stale hay, sunshine;

nothing is racked  
into neat bales.

It took thirty five years  
to get slick. Or did it?

Your brain, the sea;  
your nerves, the dust mote.

Now you taste the salt in everything.

You could quit.  
You could keep going.

## Dad Capsule by Peter Milne Greiner

Such curated remains  
as the ring you wore to sleep in Emily Dickinson's back  
yard in 1973, a pewter woman's face  
that reminds me of Converge now;  
as weird American currency and notes  
toward a novel, *The Loom of Descent*, about greedy, furtive sons—  
its lush psychic backdrop a  
grimoire of our average action  
One out of two trustees agree they're worth saving  
I too reap a decade's scant scaffold of myths  
Ceremonial dog burial, half hour hike, day trip to the caves  
Our plain eon takes form



## **The Occupation** by Terence Kuch

Melanie gradually became fearful that she, her Self, was being occupied, slowly taken over by a silent army of strange and worrisome thoughts, unintelligible obligations. Hesitantly mentioning this to her women friends, she found that several of them, too, had these fears; some had harbored them for many years. They felt as if they were being pushed out of their own minds, that a stranger was taking their place.

They tried to put a name to these intruders. Coming home one evening, Melanie finally saw who her intruder was; and where the hell was his dinner, anyway? he asked.

END

[^](#)

## **Bottled** by Diane Lefer

They called the cat Clooney because he was a ladies' man. Whenever I walked into the room at the animal rescue foundation, he would set his paws on my shoulders, kiss my lips and stick his tongue in my ear. One day, they put a litter of kittens in the room with him. The little boy kitten was fascinated by the adult male, kept trying to get close to him, wanting his attention, but Clooney wasn't having any. He'd growl and swat Otis away.

Otis started putting his paws on my shoulders, kissing my lips, tonguing my ear.

The big male was indifferent and even abusive. The kitten imitated him anyway.

So I sat in a living room in South LA with a group of men who'd spent decades behind bars and I told them about Clooney. And how after Clooney was adopted—who could resist him?—Otis grew anxious and angry. Another adult male was moved in with him. Otis attacked. And this wasn't play wrestling. This was aggression but the male didn't fight back. He didn't startle. All he did was turn the other cheek—or that's how I liked to think of it though most likely he was just moving his head to keep the claws from his eyes. I thought the two had to be separated, Otis was going to do some real harm. But by the end of the week, the adult male had won the kitten's trust and tamed him. The two were curled up together purring.

"Are men like cats?" I asked.

The thing is, I was encouraging the men to express themselves, and to write, and I had begun to feel I was not up to the task and not because they'd just come out of prison.

"It seems odd to me," I said. "You're in transitional housing and the person in charge is a nun. Your director of case management is a woman. And now I'm here. All these women telling you what to do. Do we understand a damn thing?" No response. "What's it like being men listening to women?"

Finally someone said, "Women always want you to open up. They're always pushing."

"Well..." Was it true what I'd read? That many men don't have words to put to their feelings?

They didn't know what I meant.

"If your heart starts beating fast, do you know if it's excitement, or is it fear? Or both? If your face gets red, are you angry? Or are you embarrassed?"

They didn't respond. "The thing is, I don't know. You're the ones who can teach me."

I gave the men a short piece to read by Bruce Jackson, about a grown son meeting his father for the first time. This did spark some enthusiasm, especially from one of the men who said how moved he was to read about the father and daughter.

Henry spoke up and told of being sent to a psychologist in prison who was assessing his suitability for parole. "I'd never seen her before in my life. In 50 minutes, I'm supposed to tell her all about me. I'm not going to talk that way to a stranger." She gave him a negative assessment. That time around, his parole was denied.

Was he sending me a message?

So we sat there quietly for a while and I remembered times I'd been so depressed. Male friends would take me out for a drive or to a ballgame. Women friends were so sympathetic. They want you to talk and then they commiserate: *it's terrible, it's awful, how do you stand it?* until I want to kill myself. Or else they demand, *Do something! Why don't you do something?* all that pushing, all the implied criticism, *What's wrong with you? Why don't you?*

It can be so relaxing to be in the company of men.

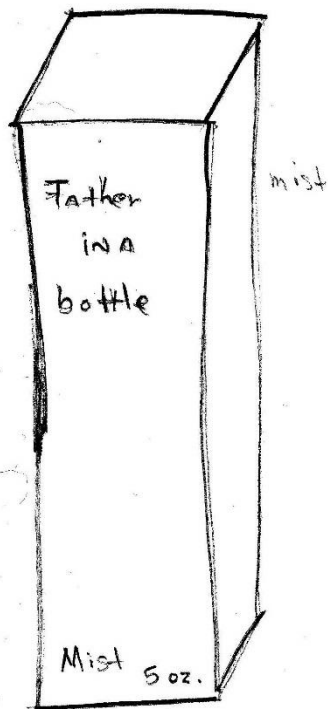
Weeks later:

Sidney says he's afraid to open up. If he's not guarded, he says, he might lash out.

Kenneth writes about the violent crime he committed at age 16: "...things were scrambled in my head like a two-thousand-piece puzzle, difficult to put together...I was the same four-year-old, scared, intimidated little boy that didn't know how to talk about what he was feeling, let alone identify those feelings and emotions. So they were kept bottled up and eventually they exploded."

J.R. says it changed his life once he was "able to get this empathy stuff."

I invited the men to invent a magical consumer product that would solve a problem in society. I asked them to draw the advertisement and this is what Aaron gave me:



Spray the person with this  
When you want a father, and  
instantly, he is there for you.  
for guidance, support, and  
most of all love.

We all need a father because  
he is not a mother and has  
different ideas, advice, and love  
than a mother.

Don't miss out! You can now  
have a father for only \$10.99,  
plus tax.

## From the Cretaceous by Rupprecht Mayer

Right below me lies the coast, its cliffs being patted gently by the waves, with the wind blowing off-shore. Do animals also have roads? I do not know whose footsteps formed the broad path where I walk. At the left, the view opens into a wide, gently curved valley; in the far distance a ridge, and above it a tantalizing sun. Speedy clouds cross the sky. The wind coming from out of the valley takes my breath away. Millions of dark green rush stems—or is it fern?—as far as the eye can see. The wind pushes them down, they are as long as fishing rods, with no leaves. Their silvery spikes as sharp as agaves, pointed towards me. When the shadow of a cloud flits over the undulating fields and takes the shine from this army of deadly lances, I can see the ground for a moment. There is no path. Does it matter what happens to me in the Cretaceous? Anyway, I wrote this down, and now I leave the path and turn left, down the valley. I walk against the wind, in the direction of the spikes which now must decide themselves to pierce the forehead and the chest of a *homo sapiens*.

## **Peeper's Sorority** by RC Miller & Gary Shipley

The woman's voice gleams with oddly translated survivor guilt.

In her arms I'm breath held in.

I'm many bipolar suckers pulling the trailer park of a lung.

The rise of the capillary roams fruitfully, but it too must burn.

This is not what I meant by Martian technology.

In the woman's spurn my balls are her stockingless bronze.

Of the many intelligent dogs she fucks, less than one of them is me.





## Four Nocturnes by RC Miller & Gary Shipley

The murderer is beautiful, and with a deep-sea ugliness.  
Our hunting fire howls on the plateau framed in an office.  
The man is a chair sat in by gargoyles and bedwetting angels.  
His murderer pays my moderate rent to God, plotter of croaking.  
The medicine I need would fill a megacity  
Of mating dogs creaming for children bored as eels.  
I had wanted wolves and less than this.



## **Bang Scanner** by RC Miller & Gary Shipley

Ekelöf is difficultly dead and I am the son of myself.

It is good to talk about old times.

I hear applause there, round the feet of identical twins in a cage.

I feed them a bump of cold chicken and they think we must love each other.

But a bird begets a universe—of men now impotent and living with their mothers.

I understand nothing to win bread for us all.

My father walks through bedrooms to wear me as a coat.



## **Exploded Awake** by RC Miller & Gary Shipley

Metal walls hungry for ankles emerge from hibernation at the start of terrorism season.  
Weirdly for the year we're in, the parts of me in bomb dust are invisible in the rain.  
Grandmother, may online ricin sessions on oxygen convert Grandpa's huge farmer's cap.  
And may the pervy corn you grow inseminate my rectum.  
Our family tree blindfolds watery department store leather  
So I can cry over the hundred limbs I lost to freezer burn.  
Unmarked graves fabricating no recognition and no fame fling full-speed to wed them.



## Worldwide Enema by RC Miller & Gary Shipley

I attempt to pull the mammoth tusk from my mother's new lover.

It's a symbol polishing the blunt-force indifference cannibalism fuses.

In place of terminology, there's sports equipment made from coated torso swarms.

My mother arrives, spreads her thighs and sees the primary verve of my mind's air is blank.

She moves to molest all regions of the son gone missing.

Blobs then bikini wax and transfix neighbors of half-mildew half-soup.

I leave her drunk in bed to attend my own hanging.



## Saying Djinn by RC Miller & Gary Shipley

All my girlfriends have the names of dead children.

Placentas for eyelashes, tricycles for tits.

An Evian bottle filled with blood

Completes our crystal dome of air.

And as a tribute to my masochism they assassinate a cow.

Its aromatic funeral milk resuscitates a vast waste of dentures.

I scam like a newscaster, and cut my smiles from magazines.



## **Molecular Welt** by RC Miller & Gary Shipley

After breaking my daytime fast, I'm where the bombing judges gay people,  
Where there's time to form what I've eaten into phalluses commemorating love.  
And my soul says: fondle babies high in the unseeing.  
For if the light drips from a corner, the little genitals stagnate.  
And I dream a movie of the tongue's miscarriages:  
Its constellation smells coddle submarine shells drunk on spiral eyelids.  
My sleep is glaucoma and depth charges falling through martyrs.



## Stump Flap by RC Miller & Gary Shipley

My bacon egg disease  
Unmade organs carved from soap.  
A swan into hello folds  
My last white creases into silence.  
Trout kraut the ho-hum!  
Cow-mouth the Semtex lawn!  
If I feel what I fill, smell my fingers.



## A Glacial Age by MF Nagel

I have reached  
A glacial age  
Age of bone and melt  
Age of cave and calf  
A glacial age of ash.

Retreat.  
Recede.  
Leave a low valley.

Scalper  
A  
Monument  
Mount'tinned

*Sauve-qui-peut*  
*Sanbeni'o*                      In iced peaks.  
*Sanction sancire scnct*  
   In iced peaks.  
(Sing a sacrare sonnet  
Take thee the altar  
Dress  
In sack cloth'and winter.

In sack cloth and winter  
Take thee  
The seven rites'  
Saint of the seven celestial heavens  
Sang-froid.

Taed'ium vit'ae                      *Sung out of tune*  
   *Sung out of tune*  
Sugges' tio' fal' si'  
Bay                      *hold the hounds.*  
Say                      *Tenir a bay.*



The soothsayers of  
Empyrean                *empyreans' seven*.  
Seven lost suns and moons).

I have reached a glacial age  
Age of bone and melt  
Age of cave and calf  
A glacial age of ash.



## Aphorisms by Scott F. Parker

It begins and we are all wonderers.

.

Life itself normative, we justify in circles. The straight line from birth to death an expanding spiral of revisions.

.

We philosophize out of necessity, so that we might live. And we live out of necessity, so that we might die.

.

Surprising allies: certainty & oblivion. Law of the Inclusive Middle: ignorance & curiosity & patience & trees—*trees!*

.

That starting line, that diagnostic provocation, that divisive claim, that firestarter: Too often we've sought to understand the world. The point, however, is to figure out how to live in it.

.

A fact about attention: philosophy, like art, makes the strange familiar and the familiar strange.

.

The human being: the fruits of the search for meaning: the search itself.  
The human meaning: the fruits of the search for being: the search itself.

.

Philosophy never gets off the ground because it's always coming back around to chew on its own feet. It's why it'll be here as long as we are.

.

You will die.

.

When you find yourself sitting for the first time at the foot of an oak tree reading Kant you'll think to yourself that you've made it somewhere. And you have. The question is how much your butt hurts and whether the acorn will land on your head.

.

One history of philosophy: division, division, division—somehow the numerator still undivided.

.

Another history of philosophy: a garden, a university, a cafe—and you needed philosophy?

.

Thinking about thinking. Philosophy may not be able to get itself off the ground, but when we live here on the ground, does it need to? We dance between tautology and absurdity, but still we dance.

.

Philosophy as one of the things we do, as one of the things we are, as one more thing *we* cannot account for.

.

The breakthrough: philosophy isn't interested in truth or even in wisdom but in human beings. The breakthrough: *whose?*

.

That a philosophy may be true, it must have knowledge of our nature. Our nature: as philosophers in search of knowledge of truth.

.

To witness tragedy is to see it as comedy or not see it at all.

.

On astonishment being ordinary. Pascal says philosophers astonish ordinary men and Christians astonish philosophers. Nietzsche said Christ was the only Christian and I am astonished.

.

There is only one Nietzschean and I am my own god [feat. Kanye West].

.

*Nemo ante obitum beatus est*—God is happy now, too. Or nothing is.

.

There is no necessary being but being necessary.

.

Another reply to Pascal: Let us imagine a thinking full of body members.

.

Syllogizing by implication: I am a friend to Aristotle but a better friend to myself.

.

Philosophy as way of talking → Truth → human tool that serves human purposes. What would an elephant's philosophy be? We are in the business of making meaning and the meaning that succeeds in meaning changes with the subject.

.

Philosophy as analysis. Analysis as component of living well. Philosophy as methodological self-criticism. Philosophy's self-reflexivity as subjective interrogation. Awareness via cultivation (intentional).

.

Further outrageous claims: Argument: failure of creativity; failure to compel. Instead: leaps, associations, charm, and seduction.

.

Ideas are squeezed by the sides of the page they may or may not fit on a line but they are squeezed and like all things squeezed they change their shape—give me a big sheet of paper and you'll see my personality; give me a small sheet and you'll see my wisdom.

[^](#)

## King Kong by Ratty St. John

I saw something disturbing today. I was at work, manning the counter, when a man in a T-shirt walked by. At first glance he was nondescript: pale and plain and a little bit dorky. His forearm was normal, but what I could see of his bicep was furred.

Initially I took the dark patch on his skin to be a gigantic mole or some form of discoloration inexplicably linked to the mild-mannered and brainy, but as he breezed by the counter I could see that the entire upper length of his arm was covered in a dark, silky pelt. It grew thick and straight, in what seemed like three layers, with not one glimmer of skin peeping through. The fur bristled out from his shirt-sleeve, coated his arm, and ended neatly in a curved sort of hairline at the elbow. It looked, on my honor, like the flank of a dog.

My first thought was that he was a scientist who had offered up his body for the cultivation of an abnormal mold: the firsthand study of a virus's lifespan. This particular flesh-eating strain was more subtle, I thought, replacing skin-cells with brown fur. Or perhaps it was performance art, a somewhat tacky tribute to the wild in us all. He saw me watching him and smiled, as if nothing was wrong, as if he was normal. I could've killed him then; I'm not ashamed. But I smiled back and served him his latte.

He sat in a corner and I spent the rest of my shift sneaking glances. I couldn't stop trying to picture his shoulder, how far the odd wool extended over his body, where it dwindled into patches and where it grew the most densely. I expected him to be unable to lift the furred arm, for it to hang leadenly off the side of his chair, but he used it to bring his mug up to his lips, carrying on as if it were as bald as the other. I think that's what turned my stomach the most.

Now with everyone I see, I can't help but imagine where their own fur begins. I find myself scaling their arms as they reach for their coffees, hallucinating their secret afflictions. When at first I wanted him to suffer, I can't help but seek this man in every crowd, in every sweated arm I brush. Make no mistake about my disgust: but it's true that I both loathe and cherish this man in that I can't get him out of my mind. The backs of boys' necks have been spoiled for me. I see only that fur in the stray scruff of napes, the buzzed ruins of newly-bared skin. Beards are the worst; I fixate on their outer limits, where the hair starts to space out, to curl, and can only conceive of this stubble as filth. So many pretty cheekbones lost now to a plague: the jaws around me cannibalized.

I tend toward melodrama.

In reality, I steamed milk and felt dizzy. The heebie-jeebies hit me like a breeze (my own braids anchored); like the soft, insistent pull of hate. I didn't even break a dish. Nobody saw what I was thinking.

And still, a part of me longs to see it all: the entire disease start to finish. Who can say what I'll find on his stomach, his chest? I need to meet him again and lure him out to the beach, where I'll watch as he hunches and takes off his T-shirt. Do I hate the animal or the man? This is the tipping. This is nonfiction. Tracing the five o'clock shadow of my beau (tanned and lanky) and feeling the skin of prepped places beginning to crawl, I know only that I have been ruined.



## Jesus is a Faggot and I Invented Tupperware by Ratty St. John

i want to rule and rape the world

put it in the microwave

and stick it on my dick

(dat molten core doe)

the milky way is my Jacuzzi—      dying stars are sacral jets—  
and Pluto, my cruel bride.

Mr Castro, Mr Armstrong, and Jay-Z attend the ceremony  
bringing Ziploc baggies as a gift.

we drink Mexican coke      and eat rumors, eat interdicts.

we, the Masters of the Earth      [beefdaddies in beige wife-beaters]  
watch my little, bitter woman twerk:

a dream in  
silicon

she blows me like a saxophone—  
i, the CEO of fly—  
& our Commie neighbors close the blinds



## The Temporality of Rhetoric by Dennis Sweeney

### *I. ALLEGORY AND SYMBOL*

[illegible]

A temporary eclipse. The intentionality of rhetorical figures. The association of rhetorical terms with value judgments that blur distinctions and hide the real structures. The poetic language of genius. The subjectivity of experience. A

configuration of entities that designate a plurality of distinct and isolated meanings. A configuration of symbols ultimately leading to a total, single, and universal meaning. The idea of a transcendental distance between the

incarnate world of man and the divine origin of the world. The landscapes and places that are often described at the beginning of poems. Their considerable poetic authority. The fact that they are not synecdoches designating a totality of which they are a part, but are themselves already this totality. The antimony between allegory and symbol. A special case of figural language. No disjunction of the constitutive faculties. The material substantiality. The spiritualization of the symbol. The transcendental source, albeit in an oblique and ambiguous way. The assumed superiority of the symbol in terms of organic substantiality. A description of figural language as translucence. The very prominent place given in this criticism to the study of metaphor and imagery, often considered as more important than problems of metrics or thematic considerations. Synthesis. The tendency shared by all commentators to define the romantic image as a relationship between mind and nature, between subject and object. The fluent transition in romantic diction. A closer, more faithful observation of the outside object. A greater inwardness. Experiences of memory and of reverie that stem from deeper regions of subjectivity. The manifestation, in language, of a fundamental unity. The sources of the unifying, "symbolic" power. The eighteenth-century loco-descriptive poem. Eighteenth-century theoreticians of the imagination. *Associative* analogy. Working monism. The critical—and even,

at times, the poetic—vocabulary. Words such as "affinity" or "sympathy." The formal problem of a congruence between the two poles. That of the ontological priority of the one over the other. An intersubjective, interpersonal relationship. A relationship of the subject toward itself.

## II. IRONY

Around the same time that / the theoretical speculations of the early romantics go hand in hand with a theoretical concern for the trope "irony" as such, / the use of irony is conspicuously absent from / the implicit and rather enigmatic link between / the constitutive mode of all literature and / a dialectic of identity and difference. Nevertheless, / the relationship between sign and meaning is discontinuous; / it clearly lacks discriminatory precision / in the form of a common concern of some writers with both modes. / The link is made in many critical texts: structuralist studies / from the very beginning / described irony as capable of coloring an entire discourse / from the localized trope to the extended novel, / although / even the superficial and empirical observation of literary history / bears a by no means obvious relationship to / the advent of a full-fledged ironic consciousness, which / is not necessarily accompanied by a parallel interest in the theory of irony; one has to wait until / they show a prevalent tendency toward aphoristic, rapid, and brief texts, / as if there were something in the nature of irony that / cannot so easily take refuge in the need for a historical de-mystification of the term, as when / the tension between allegory and symbol justified this procedure: the mystification is a fact of history and therefore must be dealt with in a historical manner before / irony becomes increasingly conscious of itself. / We cannot escape, therefore, / a great deal of assistance. / Curiously enough, / freed from the necessity of respecting historical chronology, / the accent falls on the notion of *dédoublement* as the characteristic that sets apart a reflective activity, such as / the notion of self-duplication or self-multiplication, / the concept for the sake of which / one would indeed speak of difference in terms of the superiority of one subject over another, / when the concept of "superiority" is still being used when the self is engaged in a relationship not to other subjects, but to / a discontinuity and a plurality of levels within a subject that comes to know itself by / the activity of a consciousness by which a man differentiates himself from / the material of the cobbler or wood. / In everyday, common existence, / the reflective disjunction not only occurs *by means of* language as a privileged category, but it / divides the subject into an empirical self, immersed in the world, and / the moment that the artistic or philosophical, that is, the language-determined, man laughs at himself falling. / As a being that stands upright, / man / is quite powerless to convert even the smallest particle of nature into something human, / a progression of self-knowledge / that the writer or philosopher constitutes by his language / despite the fact that it involves laughter, / the moment the innocence or authenticity of our sense of being in the world is put into question, / and, most clearly of all, / a consciousness of madness, itself the end of all consciousness. / The ironist invents a form of himself that is "mad" but / this might be construed to mean that irony, as / a cure for a self lost in the alienation of its melancholy, / at once arises for the ironic subject to construe its function as one of assistance to the original self and to act as if / it does so precisely by / reasserting the purely fictional nature of its own universe and by carefully maintaining / the bourgeois idyll of the end / that the hero and the

heroine, far from having returned to their natural selves, / represent figures from the *commedia dell'arte* floating against a background that is precisely *not* the world, adrift in an empty sky.

### III. THE PREFIGURATION OF A FUTURE RECOVERY

*The isolated, alienated man nostalgically aspires toward unity and infinity; the world appears to him as divided and finite. He cannot overcome*

*the subjective region of fiction.* Every word is right.

Every word is wrong.

The dialectic of self-destruction and self-invention is freedom, the unwillingness

of the mind to accept any stage in its progression as

definitive. *Infinite agility.* Die Romantische

Poesie, Die. But this same endless process—

the poetic self engaged in its own development—

finally, *the irony of irony.* The temporality

is definitely not organic, no end, no

totality. Only: a past that is pure mystification and a future

that remains harassed forever by a relapse within the inauthentic.

Fiction and reality could coincide: a

leap out of language into faith. Yet could we bypass

the temporality of all language? The definitely non-ironic? The

*pure poetry from which laughter is absent*

*as from the soul of the Sage?*

The text clearly is not ironic. Either in its tonality or its meaning.

#### *IV. SLOW, MEDITATIVE MOVEMENTS FULL OF REVERIE, ANTICIPATION, AND RECOLLECTION*

These lines are curiously ambiguous.

The difference has been spread out.

The structure of irony, however,

is the reversed mirror-language of this form. This is the instant

at which the two selves

are simultaneously present, juxtaposed

within the same moment but as two irreconcilable and disjointed

beings. The structure. A synchronic structure. The pattern of factual experience

as a successive mode capable of engendering duration as the illusion of a continuity  
that it know to be illusory.

Things get somewhat more complex.

All perceptive critics have noticed the emphasis

on the moment with the resulting discontinuity. These episodes

are allegorical and emblematic, caught

between the truly perverse assignment of using both the narrative duration of the diachronic  
allegory and the instantaneity of the narrative present. The myth

is that of the unovercomable distance which must always prevail.

## The Doctor's Urn by Terrell Jamal Terry

Nose-prints on pages out,  
pistol smoke admixed  
with bloodied background.  
Evidence of university  
purchases seem discarded  
while asleep. Petrified eyes,  
inside day-sight that cannot  
see. Had such a discord  
poured dark thoughts into  
cracks, until eventually he  
was pushed on an unsteady  
roll without a majority of  
purpose? It seems that his  
mind's balanced wave had  
gone erratic, as if a forger  
sold a stable life for wild  
satisfaction at any and all  
cost. But blue and red neon  
screams and tattered marks  
did tell: dead stop of a dated  
watch, papers white-lined  
lasers, the major threat to  
tired eyes. For a finale, he lit  
one last fire with loud colors  
before cradling down a dark  
left turn, leaving a fatherless  
daughter of a doctor who  
steered silently into distant  
sparkling directions, never  
speaking a word of his woes.

## Love Makes a Monster by Terrell Jamal Terry

Be delighted by this blaze.  
While today had a touch  
of yellow gladness, there  
was much shallower gloom.  
Day plucked from night  
breathed all over these  
stuttering seconds, and  
those sparks circled inside  
the skull of an hour's ring.  
The skins side of a mask  
hid the contents that trickle  
curves of new contracts:  
complex strategies, duties  
that keep our many days  
from caving in. It is never  
enough to take you out to  
big cities, balancing these  
nervous whistles with my  
dry tongue. And I know not  
to mistake your lovely face  
for a resting place that holds  
a man's desire. At home,  
I collected standing stacks  
of slim handsome books  
and learned to cook for one.  
But love, you must believe  
I never planned this fire.



## Universefucker by CJ Waterman

On a mission to the center of a planet I lost protection.

I came up empty.

I wanted to play just the tip,

instead stretched ozone to breaking point.

The objectification of land mass

can't abstain at high velocities.

In & out & in

the goddamn cosmos recoils at my touch.

I don't take messages.



## A Temple Your Father Found by Zack Woodard

You are tending the fields with your father and the others when Ixlan comes to you, running through the green staves rising from the earth, calling your name.

"The Cali has seen your face in the smoke," he says. "He wishes you to go to him."

You look to your father and he nods, places a callous hand on your shoulder. His eyes are dark, the corners of his mouth pulled down on either side of his graying beard. He looks at you for a moment, glances over you as if to say yes, this will do. Then he turns away, and goes back to the corn.

Inside the Cali's tent it is dark, and the smell of burnt incense scratches your throat. Candles bleeding fatty wax surround the Cali, who sits in the darkness facing away from you. His long braided hair hangs like the tendrils of an octopus, beaded with bone and gemstones. You kneel at the entrance of the tent. Animal bones, bleached from the sun and cracked with heat, lay on the floor before you.

The Cali is the tribe's connection to the Gods, and of them the most important—Koh, God of the People.

"Do you know why you were summoned?"

You tell him, because Koh has called your name.

"What is it you do for The People?"

You tell him, you tend the fields, you give the People food to live.

"Why?"

Because your father tends the fields.

The Cali asks you, what are you afraid of?

You tell him. Uncertainty.

The Cali turns to face you and he is wearing the wooden mask of Koh—painted red, three wide white eyes staring from its face like moons. It is no longer the Cali speaking, but Koh Himself. The flames of the candles burn brighter, they spark in the darkness. The smell of blood fills the tent.

Koh asks you, in a voice that echoes and booms, shakes your stomach in your flesh—are you ready to join the People?

You nod.

Before you, Koh offers four masks. These are masks of power, Koh tells you. They will protect you, and guide you. Each represents an aspect of your soul. Choose one wisely.

.

This is what you must do to become one of the People: you must travel to the island of the god Koh, and find the temple your people built there centuries ago. You may take only what you can carry. Once you find the temple, you must perform a ritual—what that may be, Koh will make clear when you find it. You must never tell anyone where you found the temple, or what you did there.

You gather up the things you wish to take to the island. You grab a knife, tie its sheath around your thigh. You take a spear to use as a walking stick. You sling a hare-skin pouch across your back, and fill it with enough food to sustain you for a few days, if you're careful—seeds and grains and nuts and berries.

You do not say goodbye to your family. They are still working in the fields or at the river when you leave your tent and slip quietly away from the village. The mask on your face, you are titled Wanderer, and it is as if you are a ghost. Though people walk about, they do not look at you as you make your way through. You take an apple from an old man's basket, and he does nothing to stop you or even acknowledge that you are there. You leave without a word.

The air is warm this time of year, and the smell of life drifts from the earth as the wet mud grabs at your ox-skin boots. The trees are blooming with new leaves, the bright green buds opening up to give breath to the forest. You run your fingers along the rough bark of the towering trees as you walk through the dark, warm woods. The smells of salt and fish begin to fill your nose.

At the edge of the forest the ground slopes as the trees open up to welcome the sea. You dig your fingers into the muddy shoreline and rub it between your fingers, watch the thin pink worms squirm in the dirt.

At the shore there is a wooden boat. Beside it stand two broad-chested young men, painted in red glyphs and wearing wolf masks, a third eye in their foreheads. You do not recognize them, but know that beneath the visage of Koh's Servants are boys from your village, training to be holy men and maybe even Cali someday. You suspect that the dark-skinned one handing you the wide-mouthed oar is Oxlatl.

They watch you in silence as you throw what little gear you have into the boat and shove out, leaping into the canoe as the shore releases its grip.

Your arms burn with each dip of the oar into the water, but the sharp smell of the ocean keeps you focused on your goal. Soon, the island rises from the horizon.

It stretches outwards for miles, every acre covered in a dense coat of towering green trees. Its peaks rise into the sky, finger-like mountains that claw at the clouds. For the first time in hours you let the oar rest atop the boat and fill your lungs. You open your bag of food and take out a bit of hard bread, tear at the crust and chew it, slowly.

You take off your boots as you reach the shore and leap into the water. It's frigid, makes the bones in your feet ring out with each step as you drag the boat onto the black sand. The sun is setting the eastern sky on fire, and so you make camp for the night, turning the canoe over to make a shelter and lighting a fire on the beach.

You hold the mask in your hands and run your fingers over it. In the morning you will search out the temple.

.

What is your name, Koh asks. When you answer, screaming, it is muffled behind the mask. Birds shriek as they light from the forest floor, creatures scatter at the booming reply.

It has been three days since you arrived on the island, and no sign to point you towards the temple. Only the green of the forest engulfing you, pressing against your skin until it burns, wrapping tight around your chest until you struggle to breathe.

To your waist you've tied a rat as big as the dogs that nip at the Holy Men's ankles back home. It and its ilk are all you've been able to catch, all you've subsisted on in the three days since you entered the forest's gaping maw. But you know there's bigger prey here. You see it in the way the grass bends before you, the circles of bowing stalks pressed into the forest floor. Larger things than rats live here, to be certain. But you haven't seen them.

The wood in the forest is too wet to build a fire, so you eat the meat raw. Now, you cut off a bit from the rat at your side and coat the pink bit with wild grain and berries to dull the taste of uncooked flesh. You pop it in your mouth and chew the grisly cut just once before forcing yourself to swallow it down.

A deep breath. You are to become one of the People. In all the moons you've seen grow heavy and thin again, in all the suns that disappeared and reappeared before your eyes, only one Wanderer has not returned from their quest. Only one failed Koh's test. You will surely not be the second.

So you tell yourself as you calm your heart, breathe deep through the wooden mask. You realize you've stopped walking, and have been standing in the woods, leaning against your spear. You don't remember how long you've been like this. One last deep breath to shake the frigid feeling from your chest, and you begin again.

When you come across a cave, you enter it briefly. Without a means to make a fire you're left without light and, thus, without a way to fight off the darkness beneath the earth. Still, you make your way a bit beyond the last ray of light, keeping your left hand against the cool, wet wall of the cave. You tap the butt of your spear before you like a blind beggar—but somehow, carelessly, you miss a stone or root that catches your ankle and flings you forward into a mass of rattling sticks.

You curse as you lift yourself from the dirt. You roll your ankle about and thank the gods you didn't break it. As you rise, your hand brushes against one of those light, dry sticks—cold and smooth, but cracked. You run your fingers down it, feel the surface like polished stone, the broken, jagged ends that turn to hollow insides.

You have fallen into a pile of bones.

Your throat clenches tight and you scramble for your spear amongst the bones. You try not to wonder what they once were, but can't help but be stricken by their size. When you find your spear you push yourself to your feet and carefully turn yourself around. Your right hand on the wall now, you rush, wishing each step could be faster but fearing another fall, until you break through the mouth of the cave and back into clear, green daylight.

You decide to stay wary of caves.

On the fifth day, it rains. Not a simple mist or a calming spring shower, it is a deluge. Thick, heavy globules crash through the treetops, drum against your head and shoulders as you make your way through the foliage. You've managed to keep yourself dryer by tying the enormous, thick and waxy leaves of a crone-like tree to your clothes. The rain drops slide down the leaves in rivers, following the contours and veins.

You trek on. There is no time to rest, to waste waiting for the storm to pass. You press forward, clearing the way with your spear. What little daylight makes its way past the clouds and the canopy above you must be put to good use—if Koh saw fit to send a storm your way, you will endure it.

Your thoughts turn to Koh, and the holy apprentices, the last people from your tribe you saw before embarking on this quest, and you begin to wonder what the Tribe has in store for you on your return. When you make it back, should you make it back, you will be an adult. No longer a child, no longer under the careful watch of your elders. Your responsibilities, your actions and their consequences will be your own then. You will have a duty, a place in the Tribe.

What are you made for?

What were you made for?

Koh is to tell you your place in the People once you reach the Temple, but what if what He ordains is not what you desire? You have no interest in the workings of healers *or* soldiers, and have long since bored with your father's job of tending the fields. What is your place in The Tribe?

You knock aside a bush and are met with hissing. You nearly stepped upon it, the pile of writhing snakes, their scales of bright gold and purple hues, triangle-heads and black eyes. You stare at them, coiled around one another, pressing tight, their scales clicking against the others'. How many are there? Each one nearly as thick around as your forearm.

For a moment you envision yourself thrusting your spear into the writhing knot, stabbing the vile, crawling creatures, watching their blood mix with the rainwater and the mud. But in the end you merely cover them back with their brush and carefully tread around them, as their hissing dies away behind you.

In the night, an owl finds you.

You're lying against a tree, your mask in one hand, the spear lying across your lap like a child. You didn't notice the owl at first, its silent wings masking its arrival. Only after a few moments, as its eyes burn like suns on your face, do you open your own to see it. Though it is dark, your eyes have adjusted well enough to make it out in the branches above you.

It is a large creature, gold as wild honey and with a devil's horns, its eyes wide and round like the discs the men throw in tournaments. Its beak is black and viciously curved like the talons on its feet that dig into the soft, wet bark of the tree limb.

You welcome it, and it stares silently in return.

It reminds you of the gods, watchful and silent. A figure blended seamlessly with the air itself, invading and omniscient. Perhaps protecting, though maybe that's just something your mother said to make you feel more at ease in the night.

It works, and soon you're back in an uneasy slumber. When you wake in the morning, the owl is gone.

.

You are sure the temple lay at the top of this cliff. You are not sure how you know, but you are convinced of it. You spent the entire day previous walking a perimeter around the plateau, the column of earth jutting from the forest floor, looking for the best face to scale it by. At its lowest side, the cliff face seems to raise ten horses above you—unfortunately it seems insurmountable there. Here is it nearly that height and a half, but the rocks seem sturdier, the holds more within your reach. You believe you can climb it.

You assess what the damage will be if you fall. It is not comforting.

You take a deep breath through your mask. You would take it off if you could, but if you're right and the temple is at the top, to peer at it without seeing it through the mask would be a grave sin. You will have to keep it on. The spear, though, you leave behind. You lay it safely tucked against the face of the cliff. You take off your boots to grip the cliff face better.

One last breath. You reach up.

The climb is slow and treacherous. The golden rocks are smooth and slick, and when you grab a tuft of strong grass, or the width of a young bush nestled into the cracks, you relish the small relief.

By the end of the climb it seems that every joint in your body aches. Your fingertips and toes are worn raw and pink—the skin scraped away—and your shoulders burn furiously. But you reach up, and your arm clears the top of the cliff, and as you grope around the top you feel a stone tile, and a rut for your hand. You grab onto it and pull.

And suddenly, before you, is the temple.

It rises from the center of the plateau, invisible from the ground, a small square room of white stone rising from the tiled floor that makes up the top of the plateau. When you pull yourself over the edge, you kneel before it on your hands and knees, not in reverence but in exhaustion. You take a moment to catch your breath before standing and walking shakily to its entrance.

Inside it is dark. You find a firestarter on the ground and strike it above a pool of oil in a ledge that runs along the wall. Suddenly the entire temple is lit—the fire races in a line from one wall to another, until the glyphs and portraits engraved into it are illuminated. In the center of the room, a podium stands. On the podium there is a single empty bowl.

The engravings on the wall are of Koh, overlooking the People. His hands are outstretched over them, his fingers spread wide. The Peoples' arms are raised above their heads as they gaze at him, enormous and all-powerful. Some of the People hold hearts in their hands, others hold fowl or sheep or heads or children. They call to him. He is selecting them.

It begins to rain outside, but the fire surrounds you and keeps you warm against the cold at the door.

The bowl on the podium is simple and bronze. Leaves and vines are engraved into its side. You run your finger along the inside—it is clean and smooth. No dust or cobwebs have collected in its mouth.

There is a sound at the doorway, the soft thuds of a live thing walking. When you look, you see that one of Koh's servants have joined you. Not a holy man of the Tribe, dressed as a servant—one of the harbingers themselves. The wolf stands as tall as an ox, his wide shoulders take up the entirety of the doorway. Streaks of red like blood-stained clay run through its gray fur that billows like smoke over its back. Clouds of steam rise from its form as the rainwater strikes it.



The third eye in the center of its forehead stares at you, and it pulls back its lips.

You are struck with the presence of this creature, and you stare back. Your mind is racing, you are trying to make sense of every minute detail around you, trying to grasp out and cling to one solid, structural thought that could keep you from falling into confusion and fear. The servant of Koh is waiting for you to act.

And finally, you find you know what to do.

You turn from Koh's messenger, reach up to the back of your head and find the knot of leather straps binding the mask over your face. You untangle it and remove the mask to turn it around, until you are looking at it face to face.

This was the mask you chose. Of the four, this block of painted wood was the one that sang to you in the sound of your soul—it was the face you would bear before Koh. When you wore it, you had your name, and the carvings and the paint made a wall between you and the rest of the Tribe.

You place the mask on the floor, facing up, and set your foot upon it.

When you lean forward with all of your weight the mask cracks in half along the eyeholes. A splinter cuts across your foot, and sets blood running over the broken wood and the smooth tiled floor. You pick up the two halves of the mask.

Broken, marked with your blood, you place it in the bowl. It is your sacrifice to Koh. It is the only thing you have to give, the last thing you can set aside in order to help hold up your brothers and sisters. You can set aside yourself to aid those you love and who love you. You turn back to the doorway.

Koh's servant is gone.

You take a deep breath. With each step you take towards the shore you feel the pain of the cut in your foot. But that's alright. It will heal.

## Man Can(not) Be by Sennah Yee

man cannot be



man cannot be **moved**

man cannot be **saved in ignorance**

man cannot be **saved by works alone**

man cannot become **god**

man can be



man can be **sad too**

man can be **destroyed**

man can be **moved**

man can be **happy with any woman**

man cannot



man cannot **live on bread alone**

man cannot **serve two masters**

man cannot **discover new oceans**

man can



man can **taste colours and sounds**

man can **fly**

man can **run forever**

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## CONTRIBUTOR BIOS

### Eric Lloyd Blix

Eric Lloyd Blix lives in Minneapolis. His stories do or soon will appear in *Metazen*, *Necessary Fiction*, *Birkensnake*, the *Puritan*, *REAL: Regarding Arts & Letters*, *theNewerYork*, and elsewhere. He is a candidate in the MFA program at Minnesota State University, Mankato, where he also teaches writing. He has a Twitter feed, @eric\_blix.

### Mark Brenden

Mark Brenden is a young, South Dakotan writer.

### Eric Cummings

Eric L Cummings pinballs between Prague (CZ) and Morgantown (WV/US). His poems have appeared in *Watchword*, *New Calligraphy*, *nether*, *GRASP*, and/or, *VLAT* and elsewhere. Currently he works as a croupiers in Las Vegas (NV/US). He collects postcards featuring cloudscapes.

### Jon Dambacher

Jon Dambacher lives in Los Angeles, Ca. His published works of fiction are, "Gyratory Jabber," "Sour Candies," "A Strange, Sickly Beauty," & a small book of poetry "Anchored Disorder" in collaboration with Cliff Weber. @Jon\_Dambacher is on Instagram, Tumblr, etc.

### Joseph Farley

Joseph Farley edited Axe Factory from 1986 to 2010. His books and chapbooks include *Suckers*, *For the Birds*, *Longing for the Mother Tongue*, *Waltz of the Meatballs*, *Her Eyes*, and *Crow of Night*.

### Moneta Goldsmith

Moneta Goldsmith is a writer and performer whose works have appeared in *Sparkle & Blink*, *Frank Matter*, *Under the Influence*, and other publications. He eats mostly at regular mealtimes in front of his typewriter and, when he is not eating, he ruffles his feathers and preens for Satan.

### Lauren Gordon

Some of Lauren's recent work has appeared or is forthcoming with *Poetry International*, *Inlandia Institute*, *TRIVIA: Voices of Feminism*, *Scapegoat Review*, *Verse W/*, *Sugared Water* and has been anthologized in "Knocking at the Door" (Birch Bench Press 2010). Her MFA is in Poetry from New England College and her BA in English from University of Iowa.

**Peter Milne Greiner**

My name is Peter Milne Greiner. I live in Brooklyn and work at a hotel. On Thursday I'm going to buy Lee Billings' new book about exoplanetology, called "Five Billion Years Of Solitude." Some things I've written have appeared recently in *Fence*, *Leveler*, *Stone Telling*, and *Diner Journal*.

**Terence Kuch**

Terence Kuch's speculative fiction has appeared in paying markets including *Dark Fiction*, *Spotlight*, *Arct*, *Fusion Fragment*, *Niteblade* (Canada), *Noctober*, *Polluto* (U.K.), *Roar & Thunder* (Australia), *Sybil's Garage*, etc. His work has been featured in anthologies from Pill Hill, House of Horror (U.K.), Static Movement, and other publishers. He is on the editorial teams of Fickle Muses and Z-composition e-zines, and is Fiction Editor of *The Again* (U.K.).

His writings in literary and other genres have appeared in numerous periodicals including *Commonweal*, *Diagram*, *Dissent*, *Foundling Review*, *New Scientist*, *New York* magazine, *North American Review*, *Slow Trains*, *Thema*, *Timber Creek Review*, *Washington Post Book World*, and *Washington Post Magazine*. His work has been praised in the *New York Times* and by Kirkus Reviews.

His popular "microfiction" blog, [www.terencekuch.com](http://www.terencekuch.com), available for subscription on Amazon, has had more than 21,000 page views.

He lives in Pimmit Hills, Virginia, with his wife and several dissatisfied cats.

**Diane Lefer**

Diane Lefer offered a series of writing workshops over the summer to men in The Francisco Homes transitional housing and worked with former political prisoners and ex-combatants in Northern Ireland in the fall. Her recent books include the historical novel, *The Fiery Alphabet*, the crime novel, *Nobody Wakes Up Pretty*, and nonfiction, *The Blessing Next to the Wound*, co-authored with Colombian exile and torture survivor Hector Aristizabal.

**Rupprecht Mayer**

Rupprecht Mayer was born 1946 near Salzburg. After some 20 years living and working in Taiwan, Beijing, and Shanghai, he recently resettled in SE Bavaria. He translates Chinese literature and writes short prose and poetry in German and English.

**RC Miller & Gary Shipley**

RC Miller lives in Metuchen, NJ. He is the author of *Mask With Sausage* (gobbet press), *Pussy Guerilla Face Banana Fuck Nut* (Les Editions Du Zaporogue), *A Large Retailer* (Ronin Press) as well

as a collaborative experiment with Gary J. Shipley called *Flavored Apocalypse* (Strange Cage). Miller maintains an art blog via [visionblues.blogspot.com](http://visionblues.blogspot.com).

Gary J. Shipley is the author of eight books of various sizes. His latest is forthcoming from Blue Square Press. He has published in *Gargoyle*, *The Black Herald*, *Paragraphiti*, *elimae*, *>kill author*, *nthposition*, *3:AM*, and others. More details can be found at [garyjshipley.blogspot.com](http://garyjshipley.blogspot.com).

### **MF Nagel**

[No bio provided]

### **Scott F. Parker**

Scott's writing has appeared in many venues, including *WBR*'s "Chthonic" issue.

### **Ratty St. John**

Ratty St. John is a barely-legal navel-gazer hailing from the SF Bay. Publishing credentials include *Diagram* and *Metazen*. Keep abreast of the bastard here: [rattysaintjohn.tumblr.com](http://rattysaintjohn.tumblr.com).

### **Dennis Sweeney**

Dennis recently had the luck to win the 2013 CutBank Chapbook Competition, and has other work coming out in *wigleaf*, *Word For/Word*, *NANO Fiction*, and *Fractured West*. He just moved to Corvallis, OR.

### **Terrell Jamal Terry**

Terrell Jamal Terry was born in Germany and raised in North Carolina and Texas. His poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *West Branch*, *Verse* online, *Sou'wester*, *dislocate*, and *TYPO*, among other literary journals. He lives in South Seattle.

### **CJ Waterman**

CJ has an MFA from the University of Notre Dame. Some recent work appears/ is forthcoming in *Gobbet*, *Metazen*, and *Deluge*.

### **Zack Woodard**

Zack is an emerging writer out of Philadelphia. He received his MFA in Creative Writing from Arcadia University, and his work was recently published in *Intellectual Refuge*.

### **Sennah Yee**

Sennah is a Toronto screenwriting student.