

A JOURNAL OF PROSE | POETRY | PICTURES **FREE**

FRONTSPEACE

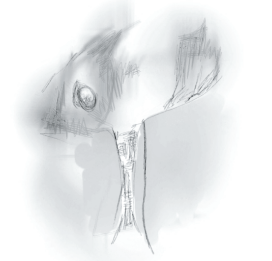
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Editor's Note

Mike Young — Editor
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ONCE UPON A LATE NIGHT IN THE OZARKS, me and my friend Jack ran out of gas. We were in a rented SUV, a tank for moms, scrawling the very deserted foothills of Arkansas. We were driving so late because had a morning plane in Nashville, and we'd stayed too long in Fayetteville, pilgrimaging at an all-night marathon reading of Frank Stanford's hectic epic poem *The Battlefield Where The Moon Says I Love You*. We'd also been attending a crayon party thrown by two girls completely unrelated to Frank Stanford. Half-drunk and half-over-caffeinated, we drove and squinted at unlit gas stations. We felt pretty fucked. Finally we saw a Shell sign, high atop a pole, tall as a water tower, shining like come in, come in, gas up your weary etc.

I was driving. We got off the exit and turned left toward the station. Then Jack grabbed my arm. "Watch out," he said. A fireman sprinted right in front of me, dragging a hose, bright-ish in his yellow helmet but not bright enough. "Goddamn," Jack said. Then we saw the fire trucks. Lights on but sirens off. Firemen running hither and skither. And on the shoulder: weird-looking mannequins, painted with simulated terror and smoke problems. Their arms were crooked in save-me positions. "What the hell," Jack said. We got to the station. Went into the mart part. Two firemen were slurping Slurpees and laughing. "What the hell," I said. "What?" they said. "Is everything—" "Oh," they said. "We're doing an exercise." "Out here? This late? With dummies?" One of them refilled his Slurpee. "We're covering the bases," he said. The other fireman nodded, his helmet untied at the jaw.

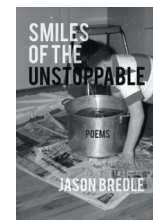
I've told this story a lot. By now the details are pretty set. We all have stories we tell and tell. We introduce ourselves with them. Sometimes we write songs for dead people and sing them for crowds. Sometimes we doff our glasses and meet some eyes. Others we avoid. Some white hot pilots of storytelling, like the late Barry Hannah, talk about lies, how the only lies worth anything are the ones that open us wider. This is something I subscribe to. When we say we're made of stories, we're talking a lot more about how we know than what we know. In NOÖ [12], we're talking mustard kings and flying goats. Electric pony light and detachable sainthood. We're also talking about being insanely pleased to feature the illustrations of Christy Call—impressionistic ghosts of static and shape—drawn just for this issue, which you can find on pages 8, 13, 16, 18, 22, 24, 28, 31, and 33.

Along with welcoming you to our twelfth issue, which closes our fifth year of publishing and begins our sixth, I'd like to bring your attention to some other cool stuff happening under the NOÖ tent:



NOÖ Weekly: Our series of exclusive online issues, which we publish weekly-ish, all guest-edited by awesome friends of NOÖ, showcasing a wide range of aesthetics and literary scenes. Find them at noojournal.com/weekly.htm.

Magic Helicopter Press: Our affiliate micropublisher is stoked to announce its newest titles: Jason Bredle's third full length book of poems, *Smiles of the Unstoppable*, and Jen Gann's debut chapbook *Back Tuck*. We're over the top about both these titles. Find out more at magichelicopterpress.com.

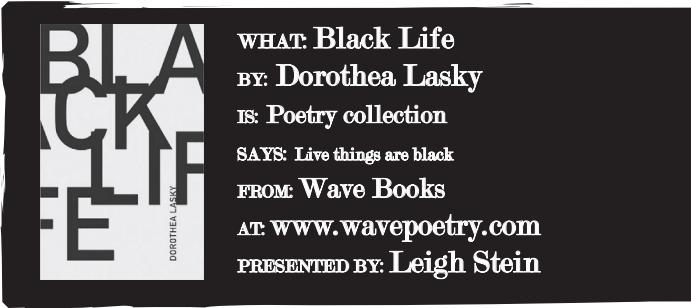


RAD P♥RTV: Our ongoing fundraiser, which you can find at our blog: noojournal.blogspot.com. How it works is we make videopoems for every donation made to help us keep publishing and distributing NOÖ for free. We accommodate all wishes. We've made videopoems for sons and videopoems about reality TV shows. Our blog—guest-edited this Fall by intern Todd Orchulek—also sports a host of cool ongoing features, including interviews, book reviews, and contests.

There we go. That's the rundown. As always, many thanks to my co-editor Ryan Call. Thankfully I didn't run over any firemen, and we got our gas, and I survived to exaggerate. Everything in NOÖ [12], of course, is true. You'll see.

NOÖ Presents

Reviews of independent literary projects



WHAT: *Black Life*
BY: Dorothea Lasky
IS: Poetry collection
SAYS: Live things are black
FROM: Wave Books
AT: www.wavepoetry.com
PRESENTED BY: Leigh Stein

BLACK LIFE, Dorothea Lasky's second full-length poetry collection, is a memoir of losing, a covenant of sincerity, and a haunted house of the mind. It's a pretty bleak road trip, through a landscape dotted with monsters and memory loss, and yet there's a persistent wild joy that's riding shotgun, existing in tandem with the darkness.

"When my dad got Alzheimer's all the plants died," the book begins, and it's hard to ignore the autobiographical here. But we don't reach for poetry when we're hungry for facts, and later in the same collection, Lasky tells us that her favorite poet, Sylvia Plath, "had some fucked-up shit happen in her life, but who cares about that? We all suffer and that has everything to do with poetics." Emotional truth trumps happenstance. The details Lasky gives us about a memory lost to disease are more universal than particular, more symbol than fact. "Live things are what the world is made of," she writes. "Live things are black / Black in that they forgot where they came from."

Sincerity is risky. It's hard not to hide your wounds behind humor in poetry, or artful language, or a hint of the absurd. But somehow, Lasky makes poetry out of sincerity that's as blunt as a dull knife, and her honesty is disarming. In a poem called "I Hate Irony," she writes, "I don't think it's funny to be so elitist / To everyone who hasn't had the chance to

be as special as you are." I don't think it's funny either. Behind deceptively plain language, she has the voice of a mystic: "Atheists are all over this world and they are such idiots / To think they are the ones who know what is really going on in the world." Reading these feels a little like hearing someone saying something off-color at a party, and liking them even more for it.

Our narrator is vulnerable. I don't mean she isn't strong; I mean she is capable of getting hurt, of admitting her weakness. She wants to be beautiful, yet fears she's a ghoul. Lasky writes, "People think I am very friendly and innocent / I spend every day inside this house being the creepy thing they couldn't handle." There's a tug of war between knowledge and innocence, good and evil, black and white. But Lasky lives in the gray, where it's the ugliest, the most opaque. "I have more than two options of good and evil / And this is horrible."

Gracefully, joy blooms from the gray in the form of hope and light. In flight we see, "The warm November lights / Glittering below me like a pale escape." We see the sweetness of new love that is both near and out of reach, "With the dark trees silhouetted and the birds aflame / It just feels like love / It really does / I don't know." And there is joy in intimacy, in feeling as if this book was written for the person holding it, even though "...no one kisses this paper / And in the end no one will protect / This paper from the rain."

Black Life is bigger than Lasky's first collection, *AWE*. Its subjects are weightier, but it is also physically larger. On my bookshelf, it stands an inch taller. The font size of the poem titles is poster-sized in comparison. The typesetting on the cover is a tangle of letters, with no space to maneuver, like a puzzle of dyslexia.

In the end, I don't know what the black life is. Maybe it's the life we no longer remember. Maybe it's recognizing the closeness of death, or love's absence. "I mean black," Lasky writes, "the darkness / That we all succumb to or if we don't, we never live." Maybe the black life is the suffering that awakens a sensitivity to light.

WHAT: *Crash Dome*

BY: Alex Phillips

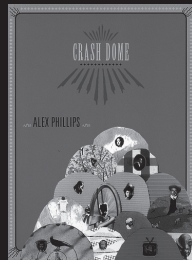
IS: Epic poem

SAYS: I think worrying is making me more unpredictable / and I find that funny

FROM: Factory Hollow Press

AT: www.factoryhollowpress.com

PRESENTED BY: Sasha Fletcher



CRASH DOME seems to exist as a meditation on the notion of belief systems. Now a belief system could be loosely defined herein as being the beliefs that guide us, internally, through the world as we experience it.

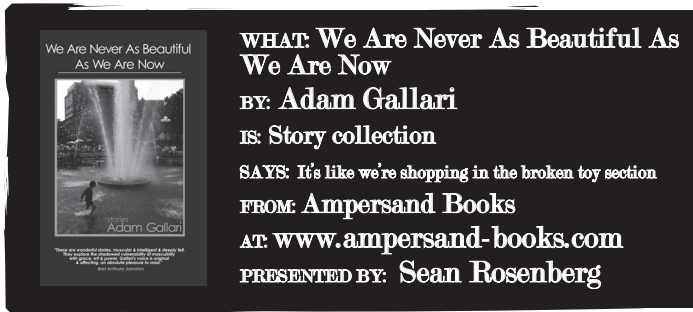
Another way of saying this is: Factory Hollow Press put out a goddamn gorgeous looking book called *Crash Dome* by Alex Phillips and the book is in fact one long poem that meditates on what is happening to the speaker as he thinks his way through his day. It exists somewhere between a dream and a book and that part of your brain that is both narrating and questioning the events that unfold around you and how this part of the brain often only barely relates to what is going on, how it runs off on its own headfirst into other things, things unseen outside until they make impact and get folded in.

Say you are sitting at your window and you see a bird and its wings and you start to think about its wings and how they are like a little machine urging it onwards and then maybe you start to think more about

the wings and how they move and how you would move then on the wind and while this is going on you then notice the bird is gone and so you see the telephone pole where it used to be and that was once a tree and then it goes from there as you move along in the world.

There seems at times to be a Hindu influence on the book (what with the words *Brahman* and *samdhi* and *samanyasa*) but my complete ignorance of religion sort of prevents these mentions from opening up into something more for me. The key line from *Crash Dome* for me seems to be "... I longed to understand / what was happening so I could decide / how I felt." The struggle of the speaker to determine what should be believed, and how we could begin to approach that idea, that idea of just believing in something, in longing to understand what is happening so that we can then decide how we feel (and just how ridiculous that can seem to be, the idea that this is even possible) is fascinating. And the parts where the speaker decides to believe things, like that he needs to be more charitable, are equal parts moving and hilarious: "I think worrying is making me more unpredictable, / and I find that funny, and that can lead to / real problems. It's not supposed to be funny. It's deadly as far as I know. At least / I solicit money to keep the / television going. It makes me feel good. / It makes me feel like I belong when I go / to a party and when they ask me what I've been doing / I can tell them something charitable, / and they know I'm telling the truth because / it's a charity I really love; I really love it."

I hope he's not being ironic. For a poem that seems to at times be about belief systems, it is sometimes difficult for me to figure out what Phillips believes. But that is, I think, sort of the point of a poem wherein the narrator gets hit really hard in the belief system, which is a thing I think most of us can relate to in this day and age. We all have our ways of navigating that experience, and this is Alex Phillips's, and it is pretty neat.



WHAT: We Are Never As Beautiful As We Are Now

BY: Adam Gallari

IS: Story collection

SAYS: It's like we're shopping in the broken toy section

FROM: Ampersand Books

AT: www.ampersand-books.com

PRESENTED BY: Sean Rosenberg

WAIT TILL it's raining. Some flashes of lightning. Then walk around the corner to your public park and watch the junior tennis player, a recent second-round loser at States, take serves at the line. Or, more on par with *We Are Never As Beautiful As We Are Now*, the overlooked baseball pitcher slinging sliders against a chain-link fence. Chances are Adam Gallari knows one of them. Or perhaps was one himself.

We Are Never is a collection of the antithesis of the afterglow. The nine male-narrated stories display and explore the track of failure: effort, hope, inevitableness, desired distractions, dejection, and gloom. We get overbearing parents and the task of idealizing and glamorizing the ugly and hard. Obsessions of Old Hollywood, speakeasys, poetry and Zen come into play. Characters are inured to workouts and setbacks, and yet they exhibit a slow, defiant longing. This longing for something else, some refuge from failure, often ends up being a relationship.

Adam Gallari pits women, and by extension the possibility of relationships, against passion, which is usually sport, specifically baseball. In the milieu of machismo, fathers tell their sons "[W]omen are logs," and teammates reiterate the sentiment by referring to women as bricks. These are the ways that men shamefully cast attraction as distraction. In "No Cause for Concern," Danny, the alcoholic protagonist of "No Cause for Concern" overhears an anonymous female exclaim at a bar: "It's like we're

shopping in the broken toy section." Danny, of course, laughs the remark off, but the reader feels a certain compassion for this woman and the other women dealing with this pool of men, characters such as Bellingham, the washed up pitcher, or an unnamed street artist-dreamer, or Reid whose torn rotator cuff will end his baseball career.

Sometimes we do get a glimpse of those unconsumed enough by their failures to take on new directions in life. In "Go Piss on Jane," the narrator escapes his under-stimulating neighborhood, athletic prowess and national call of duty only to read spec scripts in L.A. all day. In "A Beautiful Lie," Bobby's life in New York is painted no more glamorous than his past baseball life. Particularly well-done, devastating and demonstrative of the struggle for success is the second-person "Chasing Adonis." In each story, we see how suffering for pro ball can be more enticing than quotidian jobs. While some of the prose might be pruned to better reflect the laconic characters, and the final story might be heavy-handed and too cute in foregrounding the tie of baseball to writing, *We Are Never* does deliver on its pressing question: Are we really meant to conform to social norms, find a partner and a job, just to suffer through our own shortcomings?

These nine stories are reminiscent of Eadweard Muybridge's photographic series *Sallie Gardner at a Gallop*. Gallari has set up twenty-four cameras and turned them to capture each angle, not of a horse galloping, but of failure, from the initial inclination of it in the bullpen to the final swig of alcohol at last call. What we have in this book is not an epiphany that all four hooves of a horse are off the ground at once, but a sense of fracture, an inability to come to terms with time and being passed by. We know there is no remedy. A change in career paths does not bring closure. Relationships are insufficient to quell that possibility of walking across the wet grass and up to the mound for the first pitch during primetime, a four-prong shadow in tow from the 1000-watt lamps. However, frame by frame or story by story we must admire those lucky others who get to experience this rush, as we can only think back to high school and taste the dirt in our mouths when the wind would kick up and blind us for a second before the next pitch.



WHAT: Unclean Jobs for Women and Girls

BY: Alissa Nutting

IS: Stories of jobs

SAYS: Vaginal elasticity is a secondary concern

FROM: Starcherone Books

AT: www.starcherone.com

PRESENTED BY: Molly Gaudry

INSTEAD OF a Table of Contents, *Unclean Jobs for Women and Girls* offers a Table of Jobs, which serves to inform us—before we even get to the stories—that the women and girls in Nutting's world are defined by, and potentially elevated or reduced to, their positions in life. Their fates? Seemingly normal occupations like "Model's Assistant," "Zookeeper," and "Bandleader's Girlfriend." One is simply an "Alcoholic," but some have more exotic roles, such as "Knife Thrower" and "Magician." There are even such oddities as "Dinner," "Ant Colony," and "Corpse Smoker."

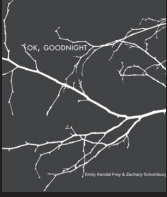
Yet, all have in common what women everywhere have in common: they find and accept love in unexpected places at unexpected times; they suffer rejection from those who have never been rejected; they are expected to have sex; they play Mother and lose; they trust doctors with their bodies; they are haunted by their mothers and terrified by aging grandmothers; they forget abuses hoping for happier memories; they have abortions and lose boyfriends to best friends; they are separated from husbands and find new lovers with new issues; they sacrifice precious parts of themselves for those they think they love; they are murdered for not being everything they are expected to be.

Nutting is making an important statement here about women, about

their roles and what happens when the roles are what define them. But let me not mislead readers by presenting these stories as simply the stuff of realism and gender politics. These are present, of course, but illuminated by the unfamiliar—and delightful—territory of the author's imagination. "Hellion," for instance, concerns a woman guilty of murder-suicide who tells us that when "you know you have an eternity to get over things, you tend to just go ahead and get over them," and that "pain is different and more relative in Hell, less 'ouch' and more 'I guess I don't have anywhere else to be.'" Did I mention she's doing the devil?

Like "Hellion," "Teenager" also has something to say about sex: "Vaginal elasticity is a secondary concern. I do not want to suffer the fate of many a cute sweater, suddenly stretched too large for proper wear." And then there is "Porn Star," who must have anal sex on the moon with the winning contestant on a reality show called *Eat It*. Ultimately she shares that she feels the weight of the "world and its distance" in her "stomach like a pregnancy, like an old meal." With her hand she covers "up the Earth" and "then even with the cameras it seems like no one can see." A voyeuristic "Gardener" whose husband no longer desires her falls in love with a gnome and cuts off her hair for him, buries it at his feet, so that when he appears, with "his beard braided into a long braid the color and length" of her "former hair," she then marvels at and touches "his bare skin."

These stories are unreal. But they are also very, very real. And they do me the honor of reminding me I am a woman. While I'm not often unaware of this fact, I do sometimes take it for granted. So although I am no "Cat Owner" or "Ice Melter," and certainly not a "Dancing Rat" or "She-Man," I realize now that I could be, or could have been, by some other twist of fate. This is the magic of *Unclean Jobs for Women and Girls*. It will take you to strange places you've never been, where there are women you've never known, but it will also remind you of all the women you've ever known and all the places you're likely to find them. And it will remind you to treat them right. To treat yourself right.

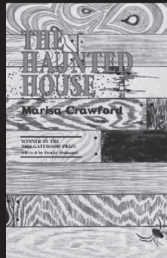
WHAT: OK, Goodnight**BY: Zachary Schomburg & Emily Kendal Frey****IS: Poetry chapbook****SAYS: I was in 1976 / the year of dead leaves****FROM: Future Tense Books****AT: www.futuretensebooks.com****PRESENTED BY: Luke Bloomfield**

IF YOU'VE CAUGHT FIRE, or found yourself lost in unfamiliar woods, or been given the task of ruling several million people, or invented the Phillips-head screw, there's good reason to scratch your head. When a collection of poems ceases to be just a collection of poems, but an indication of something else—its forbearers, or poems that haven't been yet written—heads spin. Finite and overwriteable, poetry systems are constantly remapped. Indeed. Emily Kendal Frey's and Zachary Schomburg's *OK, Goodnight* is the Temple of Doom of poetry, the Multireal of cultiness. Advanced science courses at the college level. These twenty-seven more poems from the land of voodoo donuts and urban homesteaders are sure-minded, fired-up, like a blind piano tuner, and steadfastly baroque, insistent, autonomous logic. What we have in common with words—mutual signification—is most apparent in this collection. The barstool is the sturdiest structure, and the compliant boomerang, when thrown correctly, will seriously bite the hand that flinged it. Suppose that a game of leapfrog could wind up with Guy Maddin following you around with a video camera. Playing back the

events of a deep and ambiguous emotional moment, you realize you've irrevocably disturbed the sequence of what happened to the extent that cognizance frays at the edges and drifts away in pieces of microscopic phalanges in dark liquidy matter. *OK, Goodnight* is a very small and wild sea ranch. A lithium bubble that floats the words *not all is lost*. It's not too late. The blank night has not yet fallen. The exciting thing about post-Avant Garde is that it's still Avant Garde. There's no going back is the best way to cope with change, even the reckless, unpastured kind. The best defense is not having one, but letting your cows roam as far as they please. The sky is always bigger.

I got up from where I had fallen on the ice
 I was in 1976
 the year of dead leaves
 all covered in dead leaves
 a whisker-of-the-whill watching
 That bird had a fat neck
 I could tell it was wooden
 It made me salivate it was so dusty
 It looked like a turd with eyes

Don't be worried about what to expect. Whether expectation is frustrated or frustratingly satisfied, we can safely say that, just as a Monkey Puzzle is not what it sounds like, this second collusion from the authors of *Team Sad* appeals to the idea that a tiny wizard working a contraption of levers and pedals can be revealed if you peel away the layers of vowels and mammals and craters and marshmallow ankles. These are all good things, and there are more.

WHAT: The Haunted House**BY: Marisa Crawford****IS: Poetry collection****SAYS: A riddle: You want to go home,
but the man in the mask is there.****FROM: Switchback Books****AT: www.switchbackbooks.com****PRESENTED BY: Lily Ladewig**

WHEN YOU READ Marisa Crawford's *The Haunted House*, you should read it all in one sitting. Preferably in the dark, under a blanket, with a flashlight. With your mouth full of sour Lemonhead candies. Then, when you finish, go into the bathroom and look at yourself in the mirror and you will see your thirteen year-old self staring back.

The poems in Crawford's first collection are brave, intelligent, and darkly humorous. They inhabit liminal spaces: the awkward formative years of adolescence, the change of the seasons, and the invisible tides that pull the living and the dead together. In "Indian Summer," a poem that perfectly captures the mixed emotions of going back to school, the speaker might be addressing both the month of October and a first boyfriend:

It was so hot the way you helped me transition into high school. Baseball diamonds rocked themselves to sleep at night. The way the air is so perfect and crisp at Halloween-time and the streets get dark so early. There's a moth in the house, eyes all over its wings. I sleep with the covers over my head.

In *The Haunted House* the majority of the poems are written in a prose form reminiscent of diary entries. Popular girls names from the 80s and 90s—Stephanie, Jessie, Deidre, Alyssa—are sprinkled throughout.

Likewise there are allusions to *90210*, *The Land Before Time*, *Beaches*, *Titanic*, Judy Blume, and *The Wonder Years*. But while *The Wonder Years* focused around boyhood nostalgia, Crawford explores the more sinister ways that girls come to terms with their changing bodies and notions of femininity. Horror comes in many forms and shifts from the imagined (slumber party ghost stories and Freddy Krueger movies) to the quasi-real (the dismembered female victims in torn-from-the-headlines crime dramas) to the very real (the fear or shame that accompanies getting your first period in the middle of gym class). One way or another, a woman's body will continue to bleed.

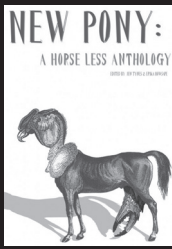
The literal centerpiece of this book is the impressive title poem, composed of sixty-one brief, numbered sections. Crawford weaves her narrative through recurrent notes passed in class to a "Dear Libby." Feminist theory, Madonna lyrics, early sexual encounters, visits to Emily Dickinson's grave, flashes of snow and glitter are intercut by riddles with missing punch lines that hover in the page's white space like ghosts.

27.
 The part of the song when she says,
 At night I lock the doors/ where no one else can see. [...]

46.
 The disconnect of who he was from what he would do
 like how when someone dies, they divide into two
 and one floats up to the ceiling [...]

50.
 A riddle: You want to go home, but the man in the mask is there.

The overall effect of these fragments, carefully laid out by Crawford who asks us to piece them together ourselves, calls to mind the "Best Friend" necklaces girls traded in high school. In your hands this book turns gold and broken-heart-shaped. Jagged edges dig gently into your palm, leaving pink marks on your skin that refuse to fade.



WHAT: *New Pony: A Horse Less Anthology*
BY: Horse Less Press
IS: Anthology of poems
SAYS: The animals are strapped to the look.
 Are panes there.
AT: www.horselesspress.com
PRESENTED BY: Erin McNellis

RESPONSE IS a tracking device for the changes that a poem made in my topography," writes Kate Schapira in *New Pony*. "It's full disclosure. It can answer the questions the poem raises, or be a question to its answers; it can be a footnote or an amendment; it can pick at a hangnail the poem starts." What's remarkable about *New Pony* is that it consists *entirely* of responses—we are given *only* the answers, or the questions, or the footnotes, or the picking.

For this anthology, editors Jen Tynes and Erika Howsare put out a call for collaborative work and/or work responding to pieces previously published in *Horse Less Review*. The response pieces note their source material, but one would have to go back through the *Horse Less* archives to compare the responses side-by-side with the originals. And the collaborative pieces are also the result of hidden conversations—they are networks of response between the authors, the nature of which is obscured from the reader.

The effect is intriguing—it's like a museum of half-overheard telephone conversations. The poems are lively and interesting on their own

WHAT: *Ghost Machine*

BY: Ben Mirov

IS: Night poems

SAYS: I've decided to stop sleeping you.

FROM: *Caketrain*

AT: www.caketrain.org

PRESENTED BY: Mike Young



HAVE YOU ever seen those baseball replays that stutter? When there's a nasty slider, I mean, and FOX struts out technology that shows the trajectory of the pitch as a series of frozen balls. A curveball moves by haunting every ball it's been, and Emily Dickinson said "Nature is a haunted house; Art a house that wants to be haunted." In a black box theatre in Providence, RI, I listened to Dan-Beachy Quick talk about Dickinson and how easy it is to forget that the world is full of everything the world's been, and that making poems is about building voices for all those ghosts. Meanwhile, in the epigraph of Ben Mirov's *Ghost Machine*, Jack Spicer says, "The ghosts the poems were written for are the ghosts of the poems. We have it second-hand. They cannot hear the noise they have been making." And the worlds of Ben Mirov's poems are full of not only ghost voices but second-hand curveballs: jittery memory machines of people who pour ketchup on hash browns, who give piggybacks on the BART, who fall asleep in grocery stores buying broccoli, and who try to delete the memory of sex from the poem about love. They remember drawers full of strawberry condoms, then abridge the name of the drawer owner to J. These people change the word "love poem" to "move pole," but they confess what they've changed. Mirov's poem people live in dreams of blurry faces, shuddering through the haunted house of walking around and being inside a name you didn't choose, a self you spitball into.

Structurally, *Ghost Machine* opens and closes with Ghost poems (as

merits, but each points beyond itself to a prompt or a process that the reader can only guess at. A few poems (such as Schapira's) are published with explanatory statements, but most are not, and the explanatory statements are not always straightforward enough to satisfy the reader's hunger to know *how this was made*.

How, you ask yourself, did Andrea Rexilius and Susan Scarlata come up with lines like these?

"she shellfully resists making calls she sillfully wants to coast away
 she says show me again your spine potato"

In what way is Jennifer K. Dick's "Spring Constellates in Snow" modeled after Nate Pritts's "from *Spring Psalter*"? How did MTC Cronin and Peter Boyle pair names and attributes for their series of portraits: "Henri Michaux as a Broken Canoe," "Emily Bronte Awakes as Alison Dubois on the Film Set of 'Medium,'" and so on?

The good news is that you don't need to know the answers to these questions to enjoy the sparking, slippery energy of these poems. As always, Horse Less Press delivers a thought-provoking collection of work from writers whose care for words manifests in both experimental daring and attention to craft.

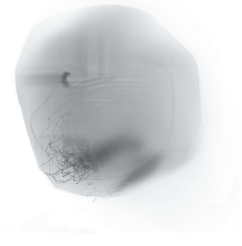
Reading *New Pony*, you realize that your desire to know how *specifically* a poem is responding to another poem or by *what specific process* two writers worked together on a poem is a forbidden desire. You realize that when the creative process takes place between *two* writers, we want to know the hows and whys, but when it takes place in a single writer's head, we treat "inspiration" as something mysterious and sacred. This anthology forces us to consider whether and how collaborative creation is different from individual creation: for don't we all "contain multitudes"?

in "Sleepless Night Ghost," "Ghost Couple") that sandwich Machine poems ("Fog Machine," "You Machine," "Ummm Machine") and a long serial poem called "Eye, Ghost" that uses "Eye" for its "I" pronoun. Plenty of Mirov's poems concern identifying not as recognizing but making up: "I program a future version of myself to remember a face slick with seawater." Or: "I make things up to see my reflection." Along the way, the speakers in these poems lose plenty of girls and sleepwalkingly recollect dramas of friendship. They buy slices of pizza and their hearts feel like television static. They live with their heads full of Bay Area fog, nervous at parties, then take a train underwater to the next city, heartsick and addled by self-awareness.

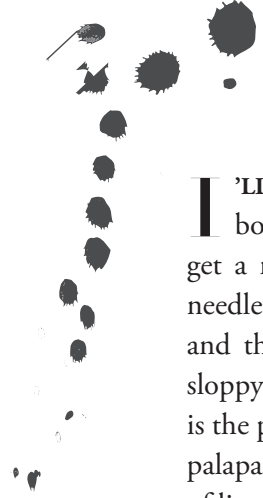
The word "I" is a pillar of identity, a skinny embodiment of the traditional speaker-driven lyric poem. "Eye," meanwhile, is a block of identity, a shimmering rectangle, like maybe the shape of an ID card, that plays on what it means to be versus what it means to look. Mirov's "Eye" poem show how the book anxiously flattens and squishes identity. When you split an I down the middle—the way "wind comes through a crack in the glass," the way "There are people to call and people who have breakdowns"—what happens is the Eye pokes bleakly out.

What with all of *Ghost Machine's* stripped-down declarative sentences of wet earlobes and blithe gashes and mythic ATMs and beer spilled on neon, the reader does get a sense of hipster angst. And certainly this is the book of poems I'd give to anyone who likes when The National gets stuck in their head. But *Ghost Machine* transcends the fashion feedback chamber by thinking about what it means to be stuck thinking in heads. What it means to be an I who's an Eye who "walk[s] through love with a / mannequin's arm" and who "lose[s] all of my echoes to friends." The real angst in these poems floats from the way memory is a ghost of visitation that never stops suggesting otherwise: "Eye / can never revisit a moment. Eye can't shut down the / recording device." We crinkle the machine of selfhood into a little ball that looks maybe like burrito foil, and then we pitch this ball at those we can barely see across a bay at night. What hurts the most, knows *Ghost Machine*, is when they throw us back and we don't quite make it. We land in the dark water, and we can't tell ourselves apart from all the tricks of starlight.

RUNNING THE DRAIN



Brian Allen Carr



I 'LL CHECK the police report in the morning from Mexico. I'll slip across the border at Reynosa. I'll buy a cheap rusted car and a pistol and drive south. I'll get a room in the mountains. I'll walk through the pines and kick the fallen needles. I'll be free. I'll think about the fire and my finger prints and the neighbors and the severed corpses in the bathtub with blood running the drain. Was I sloppy? Was I sloppy? The mountains will not hold me long with my money. That is the place money goes to burn. I'll jump a bus to the coast at Tampico. I'll rent a palapa and lay in a hammock in the shade. I'll drink quarts of Corona with slices of lime. In the evenings the woman at the inn will slaughter a chicken and roast it over an open flame. The skin will crack and pop as the coals burn bright red below. When the bird is cooked she'll wrap it in foil. I'll buy half of the chicken. She'll bring me a plate of onions, cilantro and lime. She'll bring me corn tortillas and grilled Serrano peppers. I'll eat giant mouthfuls, sucking down beer and salty air between bites. I'll sleep with the inn keeper's daughter. She'll be fourteen, but her body will be mature. She'll smell like cinnamon toasting in a cast-iron pan. My hammock will sway with our sex. I will not stay in Tampico. The beach is corrosive. I'll take another bus to Oaxaca City. I'll walk the streets eating chipulenes. Fried grasshoppers with chili and lime. I'll look at the artwork. Great art in Oaxaca. I'll get a room at a good hotel. I'll unpack my luggage into drawers. I'll look at her dress. Why did I keep it? Will I put it on? I'll wait for dusk. I'll shave my face, chest and legs. I'll enter the street in her dress. I'll call myself by her name. I'll walk slow by the men. I'll hold them in my eyes. They will look at me in turn. They will not know of the bodies. Of the blood. The fire. The drain. If I'm lucky they will take the bait. They will talk to me in their language, their lips moving calm beneath mustaches in the dusk. They will buy me sweet drinks on a patio bar. They will ignore my throat, which will give me away. I will hold my face in my hand. I'll smile when they tell jokes. Their language so floral. They will take me in horse buggies to the barrios which ache with age. They will take me to their empty homes. They will show me their guitars and sing boleros softly. When the time is right I will take what I came for. I won't feel sorry for the sad faces trembling. They should have spotted. They should have sensed how I could learn them.

MYSTERIOUS MUSTARD KINGS

Eugene Thomas

SEAN CAME UP WITH a way of lacing mustard with cocaine. It still tasted like mustard and the sniffer dogs couldn't tell, but it packed a concentrated cocaine buzz. So we headed out to Guadalupe and built a mustard factory on the edge of town where the shacks look like broken hearts and Colombians arrived in cowboy hats to give us pallet-loads of coke. We set the peasants to work and crossed the border, taking the first delivery, into Los Angeles city.

The villagers had packed the mustard into big plastic dispensers with nozzles on the top—the kind you get at baseball game hot dog stands. We put a box of twenty in the trunk of Sean's Corvette and hit the streets. We started at the house-parties, all kinds of parties; college kid parties and underground parties and aging hipster cocktail parties and movie producer swimming pool parties. We turned up sight unseen, through the night, attracted by the noise and lights and no one knew who we were, the mysterious Mustard Kings. And we squirted it on everything, man: birthday cakes; tequila shots; vol-au-vents; we squirted it on mirrors in lines and licked them clean; we squirted it straight, into our mouths; on breasts; on people's faces; we squirted it on walls, writing our names, and the neighborhood dogs came and licked them clean, and once they got the taste they'd chase the Corvette, and follow us everywhere. An army of crazy wired dogs fighting for their fix.

And with the dogs came two homeless men, with wild, red beards and wild, red faces, and one of us had the idea of setting them up in the hot dog business, with their own hot dog stands and umbrellas and concessions for selling ice-cream drinks, and of course, the condiments were laced by the Mustard Kings. And the money came rolling in, and soon enough we promoted the homeless guys to area managers and they shaved off their beards and bought tubs of moisturizer and spacious houses in the suburbs with throw-away wives and they employed whole departments beneath them, teams of people with dental plans and statewide marketing budgets and dreams of going legit. And the army of dogs grew bigger.

The Colombians came to visit so we took them to a

nightclub on the beach and after getting drunk and high and wired they left with smiles on their faces, with briefcases full of dollar-bills and life-size models of pink flamingos we'd bought from an aging sculptor who lived on the sand in a hemp-sown tent. And we wrote checks for the Guadeloupians' kids, made out to the bursars of UCLA and Princeton. And when the Guadeloupians' kids arrived in town, looking confused, we set them up in digs, gave them pocket money, treated them like our own children, and told them to make something of themselves.

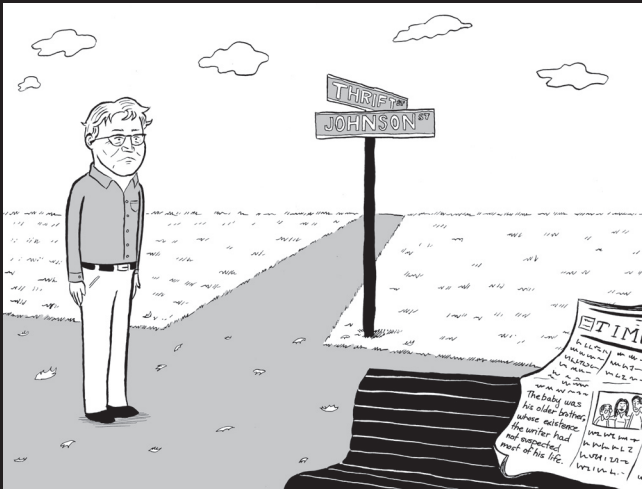
We started heading up to San Francisco, three times a week on the mustard run. The red Corvette flew up the Pacific highway. There's so much space on the Pacific Highway, the ocean on the left and the sky above. Rattling the cliffs, through the blue, a hand on the wheel, a hand dispensing, spraying mustard into our mouths, gulping it down, with fresh air chasers. And the dogs in the backseat howling and barking. After San Francisco we hit Las Vegas, and I traded in the Corvette for a rusty eighteen-wheeler. We filled the back with mustard dispensers, and wild dogs, and drove full-pelt through the desert. The truck rattled and clanged like a hundred drumkits and the horn screeched like a saxophone. And the wild dogs screamed like a demented chorus.

Eventually the statewide marketing budget stretched to include the commissioning of a logo. So we employed the pink flamingo sculptor, and in the depths of one of his hashish fits he designed a cartoon face with a devil's grin and a clown's eyes. The cartoon face popped up all over the state, on desert roads, by rainforests and silent ponds, in shopping malls next to Bed Bath and Beyond.

We bought San Simian and watched our empire grow. Sean traded in his Converse for a white laboratory coat and an afro wig. He dedicated a room in the basement to scientific experiments. Once he'd perfected the formula for coca-mustard-powered rockets, he hitchhiked to a small country in South America and started a revolution. The last I saw of him was a grainy video clip on the evening news, wearing a General's uniform, smoking a cigar, growing a beard.

John Dermot Woods





Panel 2: Groves, Daniel. Personal communication, forwarded, September 2008.
 Panel 3: The Parent Trap. Dir. Nancy Meyers. Perf. Lindsay Lohan, Dennis Quaid and Natasha Richardson. Disney, 1998.
 Panel 4: "Our Happily Ever After Begins Now." Airplane banner seen over Atlantic Beach, NC. September 13, 2007.
 Panel 5: Strand, Mark. "Poems for Daughters." Weekend Edition Saturday. NPR. WNYC. 31 Jul. 2004.
 Panel 6: "White Rock Man Apologizes for Disappearing Unannounced." CBC News. Online Video Clip. Accessed on 08 September 2008. <<http://www.cbc.ca/ml3/8752/bc/ondemand/video/bc-080623-home-WEEKES.wmv>>
 Panel 7: Cowell, Alan. "Ian McEwan's Life Takes Twist with Discovery of a Brother." International Herald Tribune. 7 January 2007. Accessed on 10 September 2008. <<http://www.iht.com/articles/2007/01/17/news/brother.php>>
 Panel 8: "Man Marries at 63 ... After Fulfilling Duties as Son." Thaindian News. 9 July 2008. Accessed on 10 September 2008. <http://www.thaindian.com/newsportal/uncategorized/man-marries-at-63after-fulfilling-duties-as-son_10069661.html>

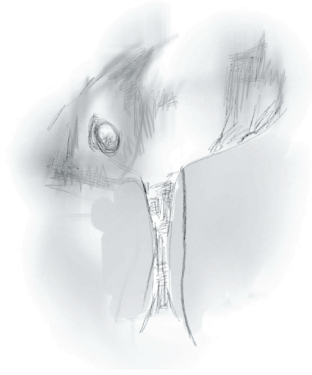


Michael Trocchia

BEHIND THE OAK was a stage. It was of a stone quarried long ago and far away and shipped here on the orders of a prince whose suicide still puzzles us. But for the day he was buried the prince was never seen by anyone in the principedom. Not even the princess could talk of his presence knowingly, for the day they were wed had been a day without witness, and thus, for many, herself included, not a day without question. The princess certainly understood her plight. Her mind was a nimble thing. How could she or the people think herself a princess, when the prince himself was but a vague presence in their lives, a mere afterthought, a shrug, no more, of the shoulders, a word said among others. Thus, the princess sought to accept her circumstances on their own terms, having her servants treat her not as a princess, nor themselves as servants. Yet triumph here had the same quality of an even vaguer failure, and in no time she would find herself in a state much unsettled by what she sensed as the suspicions and slanders of her subordinates. Once, her most trusted servant, whose name had failed the princess always, approached her as a solemn man approaches a river bank. He handed her a letter that, for some time, had been passing through the hands of men and women and children alike in that quiet principedom. The letter described the princess in the most ruthless language, accusing her of the most horrid infringements, and vulgarizing her beauty in a crude and hideous drawing fit for the masses. At this, she was brought not to tears, but certitude and resolve. Her own suspicions had been confirmed, and so, sitting alone in her bluest of rooms, where she, among the dark furnishings, had the finer qualities of a kite caught in the branches of an enormous oak, reasoned as only she, the princess, could. She disappeared, or more precisely, shut herself up in her room, spoke with no one, and had her meals left outside the door. Years would go by until, finally, when word of the prince's death travelled, the princess relinquished her power, itself long forgotten by an aging and now indifferent population, and she left for less

treacherous lands with her only son in hand. Her son? Yes, the story of her son comes down to us in the following approximations: The prince, it was agreed, had a talent for chemistry, so much so he once made a solution, which, it is thought, was either by him or his closest servant, placed as a bowl of soup among the evening meals outside the princess's door. She, of course, unknowing the prince's hands had been involved in the preparation of her supper, slurped the soup and, shortly after, fell into a deep sleep. The prince, with no intention but to verify the effect of his work, let himself into her room that evening, where he found his princess, dreamless, lying not quite breathless on the floor, among the unfinished bits of bread and meat and drink. Seized by the unmoving beauty before him, by candlelight and shadows, by dark and yet darker furnishings, for which he knew himself partly responsible, the prince gave way to impulse, and thereafter, it is thought, much shame and regret. Thus he, as was his habit, made himself invisible, and the princess, awakening the next morning, had not suspected a thing. This, at least, is the story as it appears in letters the son of the princess left behind, letters themselves written in the most ruthless language, accompanied by the crudest drawings, and found by the princess's most trusted servant, whose name had failed her always. The servant, we know, had taken these letters to his young friend who made his home in the woods, a glassblower of some renown; and this glassblower to an actor-friend; and he to a playwright's son; and the playwright's son kept them until he had a son of his own, who one day became a playwright in his own right. And it was through the work of this last that we, fortunate as we were, saw some use made of the stone stage behind the oak, for it was there that this man, the son of a playwright's son, produced with extraordinary spectacle his one and only piece of theatre, *The Plight of the Princess*, a play which the local people praised and now talk little of, if at all.

Free Time



Gabe Durham

YOU CAN GET less than eight hours of sleep or more than eight hours of sleep or eight hours of sleep. You can die alone or die addicted or go out to the bar tonight. You can get diabetes or let fame make you boring or shoot hoops shirtless. You can smile more or smile less or appear to be self-monitoring enough already. You can tap on a wall or buy something that beeps or store your paintings on the hallway floor. You can look up words you don't know or use context clues or you can read a book tonight. You can say a prayer or sing a prayer or eat while it's hot. You can pay one dollar for one donut or four dollars for six donuts or you can approach the dinner table with a clean conscience. You can eat wax or be a hero or eat glue. You can use me or define me or ask me for my place of origin. You can arrive early or arrive rested or you can think of yourself more as a searcher. You can't or you won't, or in a more formal setting, you cannot or will not. You can put down the dog or take her for a walk or finally name her. You can replace the light bulb or live rustic or you can move away forever. You can do a dance or wait to get thrown out or you can put your pants back on. You can, shuck, husk, or befriend. You can shell, scale, or frown over. You can bore, marry, or kill. You can enjoy entertainments, enjoy a mercurial rise, or you can never stop putting bunny ears on loved ones in photos. You're with us or you're against us or you made other plans but wish us the best. Rap music is too something or not something enough, which is why some people feel a way about it. I laid out a tarp in the field behind my house and sat in the center, waiting for what.

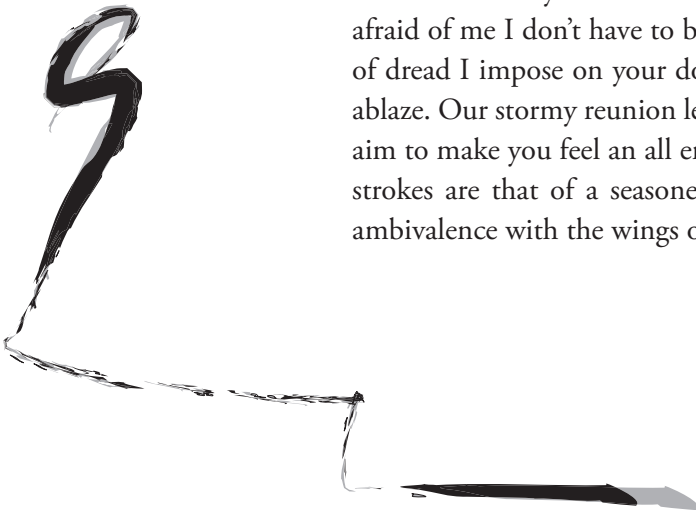


walletsize photos
 of dead paraplegic people
 make you tear up and lose
 precious vitamin c

Zack Sternwalker



I SAW YOU at the astronaut fair and your parted hair was everywhere. Your beautiful hair is a mixture of your father's and your mother's hair. I used to sing about my crops but I got a lot of flack. Your twins are devoted anusless creatures with little regard for the future of aviation. Legs are photographed shit. Our bodies mingle together like foamy soup. I have unfastened my pants so I may sit more comfortable after eating a large meal. Your once tight groomed hair in recent months has been flowing like high school promises. I have a long nose but that's just how it goes. I shot my arrow at your back but I guess you already knew that. In the rude unison of pawn shops in the hot concrete of broken skin. The rain creeps in like an agent of darkness its hands are muscular and covered in mucus. I beat your brain with my fingers outstretched like pythons. I feel you are afraid of your own hands that's okay I eat fish with both hands. I know your dog is afraid of me I don't have to be a scientist to understand the sense of dread I impose on your dog. Leaving you would set my heart ablaze. Our stormy reunion left me aching deep within my soul. I aim to make you feel an all encompassing pleasure. My rhythmic strokes are that of a seasoned lover. The warm shower fills my ambivalence with the wings of sped up pig copulation.



Found

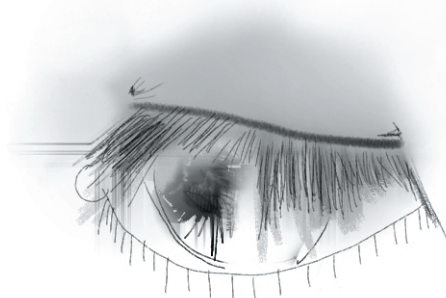
Andrea Kneeland

WHAT WORKED WELL with the bear cub did not work as well with the foal. This was what the circus owner found. That is, “The World’s Smallest Bear” was a popular attraction, a little cub kept in an iron cage above a handsome hand painted sign, kept there until the bear was too large for the cage, kept there during humid show faring nights. Not kept there during the day, during the long hours of training, of whips, of grinding organs, of steel jawed muzzles. This cage earned the bear cub’s keep until the cub was grown enough, was trained enough, to become a part of the regular act, a part of the real act, the main attraction that folks paid ten cents admission to witness instead of just five cents (five cents being the admission charged at the sideshow tent). Kept in a cage with a handsome, hand painted sign until The World’s Smallest Bear was not The World’s Smallest Bear any longer, was just a bear with no name, hobbling around the center ring with two other nameless bears, all of them balancing painfully on their hind legs, grunting to the grind of the organ, shielding their black glass water eyes (those great, sinking pools of despair) away from the half-dark of audience, tender paws padding slowly along the floor, through layers of sawdust and hay and elephant’s dung.

No. A foal was not like a cub. This was what the circus owner found. The circus owner found that when he propped up the hand painted sign (just as handsome as the bear’s sign; both signs were crafted by the same artist, by the circus owner’s son, who was gifted enough with his hands, gifted with a harmony between what his mind envisioned and what his hands could perform, gifted enough that he had narrowly escaped the aerialist fate that his father had imagined for him at birth), the sign that was labeled “The World’s Smallest Horse,” not one person took the bait; in fact, all of them that had paid for the entrance to the sideshow tent returned to the front, angry, all of them demanding the full price back, all of them spitting, all of them red faced and frothing with poison. Full refund they

wanted, even though they’d seen the other secrets of the tent: the lobster woman; the sword swallower; the two-headed chicken. Even the skeleton of the rabbit-boy (also an invention of his son’s hands; the genius of a tiny, fetal human skull grafted to the sun dried bones of a hare), even the preserved remains of those Siamese Twins, pickled and floating in a murk of formaldehyde, floating behind the window of a smooth glass jar, served up dead to the mother at birth (the mother: the lobster woman, who had stopped leaving her cage (even though she was allowed; she had her own key) after her miscarriage had been put on display). The circus owner was not terribly concerned about the lobster woman, as it had been only a few weeks since the dismal birth; she would see reason, he was sure, before the end of the month. The circus owner’s son was not so sure, but refused himself any guilt on the matter.

The circus owner’s son was aware of his own special talents and exercised a certain quiet dignity beneath the well-deserved accolades offered him by the performers. This dignity revealed itself through small acts of kindness: a hobby horse (crafted, in part, from a mop and coarse burlap) for the trapeze artist’s son; a rocking chair (carved from a pine felled in Vermont) for the lion tamer’s bride. And for Bridgette, the lobster woman, a mirror in a painted frame. The circus owner thought these gifts inappropriate and, further, a drain of resources. His gift to his son was



silence on the matter; this was how he demonstrated his love.

No. A foal was not at all like a cub. A bear was a glory in its own right, but a foal was just a stupid thing that nobody cared to either love or despise. The circus owner was fortunate that his son was a man of creative means, far and beyond the physical aspects of such. He was not only capable of crafting the magic in his mind, but of the corporeal inception of that magic. This was what the circus owner found when his son suggested to him that the foal was not a foal at all, but was, instead, *The World's Smallest Something Else Entirely*.

When the circus owner's son suggested his newest idea to his father, his motives were selfish. His motives, truth be told, were nestled somewhere inside the folds of Bridgette's shiny white flesh, nestled somewhere amongst what the circus owner's son imagined as the secrets of her skin. The mirror he'd given her, he had rendered from the found shard of a window, popped out by the rages of a storm and laid to rest beside the husk of an abandoned barn. He'd painted one side of the glass with a reflective silver gloss (purchased from a specialty shop he'd discovered in Texas), and then mounted the looking glass to a base of shiny Oriental rosewood, salvaged from a broken table he'd found in Storyville. This rosewood, he'd carved into the shape of the heart. He'd twined her name in cursive, in pale pink paint, amongst red roses and green vines, all birthed from the tips of his fingers, through the tiny bristles of his finest brush. The ribbon, which he'd used to hang the mirror from a bar in her cage, had been a glorious vision of indigo velvet.

No. A foal needn't be a foal. As ivory was prohibitively expensive, and porcelain sure to crack, and as the beast was kept on a platform, in a cage, and protected both from inquisitive hands and from the minute inspection of awe stricken eyes, the horn was carved out of a simple wooden dowel; sanded, spiraled and whitewashed. Affixed with a heavy duty epoxy between a pair of oily, equine black eyes. A new sign was painted: "*The World's Smallest Unicorn.*" The beast that stood inside of the cage was a miraculous vision, a thing of impossible beauty (even the circus owner wept). The new attraction was so popular that the circus owner put the Unicorn in its own special tent and charged an extra penny (on top of the already collected nickel) for a

two minute view of the animal. Some of the townspeople came back for seconds, and thirds. The circus owner found that they couldn't get enough. The circus owner's son found himself distracted, for a moment, from his worries through the pride of his boldest creation. For what he had given birth to was a thing of true merit; was a thing that not just any man could bring forth; was a thing born of the skill of his labor.

This distraction, this reverie far and away from memories of Bridgette and the mirror, had been the circus owner's son's truest motive. Although he would never admit it, he didn't give a rat's arse for the foal, nor for the money to be made. He didn't give a rat's arse for the foal, nor for the pickled atrocity of legs and eyes and wrinkled skin that he kept in a jar just above the Unicorn's cage, where every ticket holder was sure to have a glimpse.

No. The World's Smallest Unicorn was not born in the same way as, for example, a baby. A baby, which could spring forth from the seed of any man's sword.

If the circus owner's son had not been forthright with Bridgette, it had only been out of respect for her expansive womanliness; for her pink horizon of skin, soft like an endless petal. His great respect is not to be confused with a lack of will, with a lack of assertiveness, on his part. Not to be confused with a lack of animal instinct. If his animal instinct had not been carried out directly upon the lobster woman's body, but, instead, in the privacy of his room, beneath the sheet of dark night air, beneath the invisibility of isolation, between the friction of his own skin and the most private skin of his thoughts (about mirrors and cages and baby-soft claw hands), this is not to be confused with a commentary on his manhood. This is not to be inferred as an unfavorable comparison between, say, the circus owner's son and the aerialist's shiftless brother (good for nothing but mucking the circus beasts; covered in the shit of the bears and the bulls and the foal).

No. A foal was not like a unicorn, and a unicorn was not like a foal. It was unfortunate when the foal gored his own mother while trying to feed, but worse things, as the saying goes, have happened. The lobster woman had not given up her milk for her dead twins yet; her body pushed itself forward with the meaningless biological drone of motherhood; the milk still dribbled out of her pendulous breasts in delirious spurts, staining her smock with large, round

circles of the thin white liquid. She had protested when the circus owner had given her the apparatus, all suction and rubber, and insisted that she harvest milk for the foal. He had to cuff her four times on the head and beat her legs with a chain before she finally acquiesced to his demands. The circus owner also took back her key; the lobster woman had stopped using it, anyway.

Just as the circus owner's son's profound respect for the lobster woman, professed through a singular gift and a cloak of heavy silence, is not to be confused with an unfavorable estimation of his virility, neither is the lobster woman's milk to be confused with anything more than a simple biological function. That the initial impetus for that milk—that the seed which had led to the birth of the twins, which had, in turn, led to the fauceting of her breasts—had been gifted to her by the aerialist's brother, means nothing. Nothing more than the copulation of beasts. This was what the circus owner's son thought when he found them together, a sweating heap of hair and flesh and fat and bone and slickness, heaving beneath the crown of her iron cage, reflected in the pane of a hand-made mirror.

No. The lobster woman was not like a foal. If she were more like a foal, she would have her own show; she would be capable of providing something more valuable than milk. It was when the circus owner's son was nursing the foal with the lobster woman's milk that he discovered the newborn wound. The epoxy he'd used had been, perhaps, a bit too strong for the skin of a foal; as the foal continued to grow, the skin between the eyes had stayed firmly adhered to the horn, eventually splitting open, as if torn from an internal seam, channeling thick, gross rivers of blood straight into the centers of the foal's night black eyes. This was, perhaps, just as fortunate as it was unfortunate; this torture of growth, this wreckage of skin, was a sure sign that the foal was becoming much too large to pass as *The World's Smallest Unicorn*.

The circus owner's son had found that mid-wives can be bribed. It was not the Siamese fetus that he'd purchased with a few gold coins, per se. Simply the mid-wife's complicity with a strangulating umbilical cord.

No. This foal was not *The World's Smallest Unicorn* any longer. The circus owner's son sawed the horn from the foal's tiny head. He studied the foal's eyes, the bloody center between, and nuzzled it with the gentlest kiss he

could offer: the silvery nose of a bullet. When it was done, the foal's used up body gleamed sweetly beneath the Idaho sky, and the circus owner's son was imbued with an unbearable sense of pride. The circus owner found that he was able to purchase a new foal from a witless farmer the very same day, and for a beggar's sum (the foal was a runt). While the runt foal became accustomed to his new cage, the circus owner's son bet the aerialist (who had recently broken his arm) that the lobster woman's milk tasted exactly like sea brine and rotting fish. Every day that the aerialist found himself out of work, he became more in debt to the circus owner: lodging, meals, other such sundry. He took the bet.

When the aerialist pinned the lobster woman beneath the weight of his plastered arm and bit down on her pillowy breast, she didn't struggle.

No.

She simply shut her eyes and let out a noise that sounded just like the moan of a muzzled bear cub.



© Jaroslav Serych, *illus. Tales of the Uncanny*, 1976

CLAUSTROPHOBIA

Charles du Preez

SITTING IN MY work cubicle made me very claustrophobic. I could feel the walls closing in, a tight grip on my neck that became tighter when I got up and paced around the office, chewing on the end of a felt pen. I made a smacking sound with my mouth.

Jake from the cubicle next to me became annoyed.

“Calm down,” he said. “You’re scaring the ants in my ant farm.”

I told him that I needed to get out, that the cold, spindly fingers of claustrophobia had throttled me by the neck and were violently shaking me side to side, my brains a bowl of scrambled eggs.

“I can’t take it any longer,” I said. “I need something. I don’t know what though.”

I told my boss that I had to leave early, for a date. When I entered his office he was playing with a Rubik’s cube. A half-eaten cake was on the edge of his desk. He looked up at me, wearing that silly grin, the kind that makes you want to go to the circus or play with sock puppets. I didn’t waste any time trying to make up an excuse. I said:

“I have to go.”

“You should eat this piece of cake,” he said. “It’s my birthday. My secretary got me a cake and this Rubik’s cube.” He held up the Rubik’s cube like it was a sacred object.

“Maybe you could just save me a piece,” I said. “I have a date tonight.”

He hung his head and started to whimper. It made me feel like a jerk.

“Well, maybe I can have a little,” I said.

My boss’s eyes lit back up again, and he clapped his hands.

“I knew you’d pull through, Johnson!” he said.

“I knew you were the one!”

“Just a small bit,

though. I’m trying to watch the sugar.”

“You and me both,” my boss said, shoveling a mammoth-sized piece into his mouth. “You, and me, both.”

That night I got a massage. They used oils that smelled like a garden in full bloom. Like the scent of tulips multiplied by ten and infused into every tiny drop drizzled on my back.

The touch of bare hands on my flesh filled me with a yellow light. Back home, when I got into bed and went to sleep, the room was illuminated and I felt safe.

All the yellow light drained from my body when I sat back down in my cubicle the next morning. Stacks of papers, thumbtacks, crumbs from muffins. They all looked at me, frowning.

“Jake,” I said. “It’s back. The claustrophobia has descended into my chest. I am not wanted here, the thumbtacks do not want me here.”

“How can they not want you here?” he asked. “Did they say that?”

“In strange voices,” I said. “Like the sound of a million tiny dinosaurs.”

I spent most of the day with my face on the desk. It didn’t take long for a small pool of spit to form. When I exhaled I could see waves. It was an ocean. I could hear the gulls.

Jake came into my cubicle with his ant farm.

“I discovered that the ants like chocolate,” he said. “Watch them fight for it.”

He dropped a shaving of chocolate into the ant farm. Instantly there was much scurrying and yelling. The bodies of the workers were crushed in the jaws of the warriors.

“That’s horrible,” I said. “It is sad, a massacre.”

“Evolution,” Jake said. “Nature is the most powerful force.”

I met my boss at the water cooler. It was Thursday. He had on his giraffe tie.



"I got a massage last night," I told him. "They used oils."

"Why a massage?"

"Because of my claustrophobia." I took a sip of water.

"Did it help?"

"A little bit," I said. "I slept pretty good. I had a dream that Christopher Columbus let me steer the Santa Maria for a little while."

"That's interesting," he said. "I had a dream about piloting a barge down the Nile."

There was an article about the mountains in a magazine. I read it when I was in the restroom, urinating. The whole thing was only two paragraphs long:

In a recent study, scientists discovered that mountains are actually made of granite, not clumps of yarn and glue.

It has been suggested that these massive piles of rock were constructed by the people of centuries past as a sort of prison, wherein lies the flagging, almost forgotten concept we now call Freedom.

When I showed Jake the article, he laughed.

"No way they're not yarn and glue!" he said. "Not even possible!"

"But what if it was true?" I asked. "Don't you want to find out?"

"Not especially," he said. "Freedom sounds like a hoax, just like those fly-ee things. What are they called?"

"A dragon?" I suggested.

"No, not that," he said. "The other one. I think they're called eagles."

I lay on the floor with my hands outstretched. An eagle, I thought. How wonderful.

Time slowed down as I took flight, my wings beating slowly, the air ruffling my feathers. I tried to imagine how my breath would be taken away while soaring above the expanse of the forest, the mountains. I tried to imagine what it would feel like to have nothing holding you down.

I tried to imagine, but then realized that it was impossible.

Jake wrote a whole book about the evolution of ants, completing it in twenty minutes:

In a certain area of the world, there is a special kind of dirt. This dirt breathed life into the leaves on the ground, which then became the creature we now call ants. The ants grew legs and antennae and started to burrow into the ground for safety. One ant, the queen, suggested that they dam up the

entrance with rocks. A massive flood was coming.

The claustrophobia came in full force, crushing my lungs. I felt that I needed to be outside, in the wilderness. I got off the floor and started walking. My windpipe was partially closed off, so I decided to breathe through my eyes.

My boss was flirting with the secretary, a man.

"Get back to work," the secretary said. "You're not in preschool anymore. You can't just leave."

"But the walls are closing in," I said. "The claustrophobia is inside of me, squeezing my kidneys and preventing blood flow to the testicles."

"Well," my boss said, removing his hand from the secretary's ass, "what are you going to do instead?"

"I am going to visit the mountains," I said. "For Freedom."

"What is that?"

"I read about it in an article," I said. "It's buried. The mountains are actually granite."

"Bring some back," he said. "And get some salt. It sounds appetizing."

I roamed the streets like a sick camel, coughing, delirious. My eyes itched; they were not used to breathing.

Once I caught my reflection in a store window, a bakery. My body was slumped over and my arms were swinging like a paraplegic's legs dangled out the window of a moving train. A man took out a hatchet and made me a crutch from a nearby bench.

"Take it," he said. "It looks like you need it more than I."

"Ehhuhuh," I said. "Ghehehuhe, ughughugh!"

The people inside the bakery dropped their croissants and pressed their greasy faces to the window. I saluted them. It seemed like the proper thing to do.

There were interesting things outside, things I had never seen before. A group of children were gathered on top of a parking garage. A young girl was flying a goat, just like a kite.

"Hey mister," she said. "Do you want to fly the goat?"

"I don't know if I should," I said. "I don't think it will stay in the air for very long."

All the children looked up at me with pitiful faces. It made my heart skip a beat.

"I guess I will never know," I said, "unless I try."

I took the string and watched the goat soar through the air. Its head was tucked down, its ears flapping in the

wind. The goat looked peaceful, like it was dreaming. To disturb it now would be devastating.

There was a bond between us, I was sure. I felt close to the goat, like a parent to a child. I continued to watch it soar through the clouds. A flock of birds circled around, a patch of angels singing in the blue sky.

After an hour of flying the goat, the string became slippery from sweat, so I wrapped it around my wrist to prevent the goat from floating towards the sun and melting. I would not allow another Icarus event, no way. The goat must have felt the string become taut, because it looked down at me with its gorgeous eyes, and bleated. A cry of alarm.

The goat began to fall, its thin legs desperately trying to find a foothold. Perhaps the goat could see something there in the sky, a foothold or ladder of sorts.

I tried my hardest to get the goat back in the air, but my efforts were in vain.

“Take it back,” I told the girl. “I can’t do it.”

Much to my disbelief, the girl would not take it.

“Death is inevitable,” she mumbled, closing her eyes. She knelt down on the ground and started to pray. The other children joined her, forming a circle. A helicopter might have mistaken the circle of children on top of the parking garage as a landing pad.

“Why don’t you save him?” I asked. “Do something.”

The girl opened her eyes.

“Without trust,” she said, “death will always happen.”

I watched as the goat fell to the ground. Apologies emanated from its eyes.

“There was trust,” I said. “It did trust me.”

The girl took my hand in hers, like the doctor did when he told me my father had died. She tried to smile, but it was more like a grimace. I realized that the birds had dissipated, their songs no longer audible.

“But,” she said after a long silence, “you didn’t trust him.”

We took the goat out into the woods and buried him in a thicket, where a single magnificent ray of sun found its way through the leaves and illuminated a small patch of ground. The little girl placed the delicacies a goat might like on the mound: clover, blackberry leaves, dandelions.

I asked to be left alone with the goat. The children left one by one. Before the girl went, she stopped and looked into my eyes.

“It’s okay,” she whispered. “You didn’t know.”

“Didn’t know what?” I asked.

She caressed my face with her hand, then crept out of

the thicket and back to where she came from.

I knelt down by the mound, underneath which the goat lay. Soon he would be nothing more than dust.

I put my hands on the mound, thinking that I might be able to pump life back into the goat. I would write a story about it and publish it. Everyone would then realize I wasn’t such a bad guy after all. “This man is a miracle worker,” they would all say. “This man is like Jesus.”

I pressed on the mound with more force. The goat needed to feel my hands, feel my skin. I pressed so hard that my hands sunk into the earth until I felt the soft fur.

Just before dawn, when the sunlight was beginning to bathe me in an incredible glow, I left the thicket because I did not feel comfortable in the goat’s presence.

I set off towards the mountains in hopes of finding Freedom. The woods were very peaceful, and a chorus of birds, strewn throughout the trees like angels watching over me, sang songs of encouragement as I plunged deeper into the wilderness. There were many other creatures I had heard about but had never seen: the fox, the badger, the marmot. The animals smiled at me, and I waved back.

A divine presence lingered in the leaves, in the vines, in the dirt.

Eventually, I stopped counting the days. Most of my time was spent stretched out on the ground like a bear, rolling over only to warm the other side of my body. At times I would let out a growl, feeling the deep bass of my voice resonate in my chest as I outstretched my arms toward the sky. It was a primal ritual, but necessary for me to reinsure that I was still alive. After these supplications, I would rip apart a small animal and eat the soft flesh from its ribs, thanking the gentle creature for its selfless act.

My boss let me come back to work. He must have felt sorry for me. “You need to wash your hair,” he said. “Maybe iron your clothes.”

Jake was still diligently caring for the ant farm. After his book was published, the one where the leaves turn into ants, he had become totally engrossed in the caring of the small creatures.

“They’re my little babies,” he said, cupping a handful of ants in his hand. “It’s like having a child, only better.”

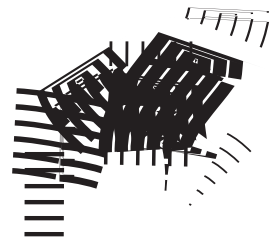
Not knowing what else to do, I stepped into a closet and turned off the lights. I reached for a mop and held it in my arms.



IF PEOPLE ARE SCARED OF ME, THEY SHOULD BE

Ted Powers

I turn on the wipers and open the sunroof.
 If I knew the words I would sing along.
 It is good I do not know the words. Not that
 the neighbors seem to mind
 when I act like a creature
 around their children
 and in their trashcans.
 Did I mention how nights
 I am a creature?
 Or the long days
 of creaturedom?
 How I am left unable
 to stare into a window
 or hold a mirror? Yet
 I am told I resemble
 a hound dejected
 by the prospect of surrendering
 to his enemy the rainstorm.
 You told me that. Four hours
 and you will tell me again.
 Wet dog, you say. I am also
 told I have twelve pincers
 and that you love each one equally.



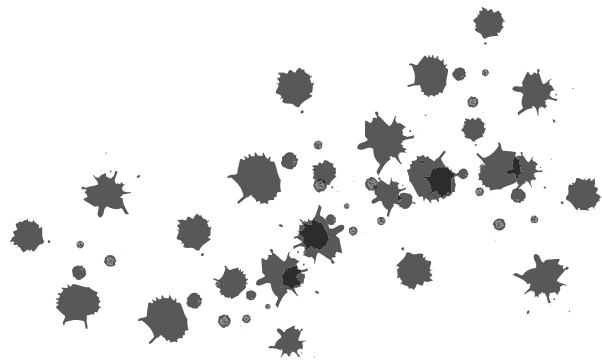
Electric Pony Light



Todd Colby

This is what I look like when you're not looking
 at me I feel feverish my eyes are bigger in your
 electric pony light. There will never be more of me
 than you can handle ever, I swear. Leave the heavy lifting
 to my sturdy legs. Parts of me are strewn on the floor,
 I can pick them up later. Leather wristband, cold cream,
 and my lost in space feeling marking what remains of the morning:
 you and your helium will. It's curtains for the
 sheepish and sullen. They can suck it. What I'm trying
 to say is: morning with you is a luxury in the puzzle
 of my day. Give me the soft solace of your arms.
 All amber-scented and clear-headed,
 you move through me like a bright tiger
 jolts the green with her stripes in the woods.
 You might be more awake than even I could imagine
 but the way coffee tastes in your mouth
 when I lean in makes my spine buzz with jazz.
 When you're not looking I'm right here.

Read two more Todd Colby poems at
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It Doesn't Photograph Well

Emily Siegenthaler

“No,” he clarified, “his two best girl friends are his two best friends’ girlfriends.” From inside the dressing room she called, “Well when someone dies you don’t have to exfoliate.” This stall door was not the origin of their miscommunication but it alleviated him having to acknowledge the disconnect. He could see her bruised feet underneath and they were a pleasant break from her cheerless face. Of all the people trapped here, she was the one who ruined the most. He assumed he could not improve her by adding ketchup, but arguably he hadn’t tried. He went looking for answers at the perfume counter, where he was presented with a bar graph of his dwindling lust. “How did you calculate this?” he questioned the lady behind the counter, but her ingénue pout was unwavering. She was from a different movie, he just knew it. These were such crowded dreams. There were never enough fire escapes, but by the third day the nausea always seemed to subside.

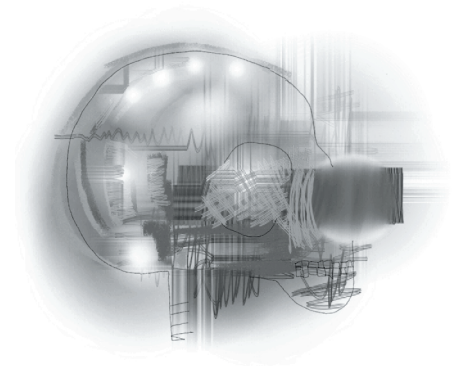
Several Minutes After They Met

She tried to entertain him with a story which centered around someone chewing on Beethoven’s absinthe-soaked acid face. He interrupted, reminding her that the submarine had officially broken through the ice shelf and yes, they were still unemployed. The day was really beginning to take shape. At ten o’clock sharp they cracked the hatch. He whistled in disbelief. “There’s nothing left here.” She mustered, “For something to be left there had to have been something to begin with.” He should have expected this, she was forever inventing constellations and immediately forgetting their names. This whole damn thing had been her idea. He could only turn away from her at this point. When he did the snow was blinding except for the patches where a deep red wine had been spilled in celebration the night before. He wondered how he had slept through such a party. Come to think of it, he hadn’t seen the crew since they arrived. He strode around the white bank, calling their names anxiously, stopping only when his feet shook with the thick shuddering of the broken shelf below. However, upon closer examination he had never hired any sort of crew. There had been no wine either, only a brief and fatal encounter between a tundra fox and his short-lived snow goose adversary.

this is a poem titled poem where good things happen

Gregory Sherl

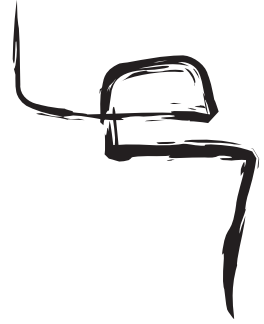
When I wake up, my mental illness is in the microwave.
I cook it (high for four minutes) and then drizzle it over
a plate of home fries. They are delicious and low in cholesterol.
The New York Times reports that Chlamydia
really is a flower.
Someone stole Barry Manilow's vocal chords.
There is no reward.
Sugar free gum *is* a low calorie food.
My band, The Babymakers, sells a song to Volkswagen.
We refuse to wear leather jackets or sunglasses indoors.
I punch Bono in the face, twice.
With the profits from the commercial, I build a car
that drives on love and happy thoughts. Just for kicks, I super glue
palm leaves to the sides and now the car that can drive on love
and happy thoughts can fly on love and happy thoughts.
My girlfriend, Lane, and I picnic on the top of a Sequoia
somewhere in California, it doesn't matter where.
We don't look at things because we're too busy looking at each other.
We eat drumsticks and talk about the weather. *It is lovely weather,*
she says, *lovely weather for a picnic on top of a Sequoia*
somewhere in California.



Specimen

Mark Cunningham

Dear Craig, nothing will make the next five minutes worth living, so we look to the future. Taurus: reach out for someone at a distance, or perhaps you might need to find an expert. We couldn't find an emoticon with a beret, dang it. My new book is titled *1,001 Places to Die Before You're Enlightened*. When I put my hands over her eyes, I felt the itch and tickle of her eyelashes shifting in my palm. My hands were having a dream in somebody else's mind.

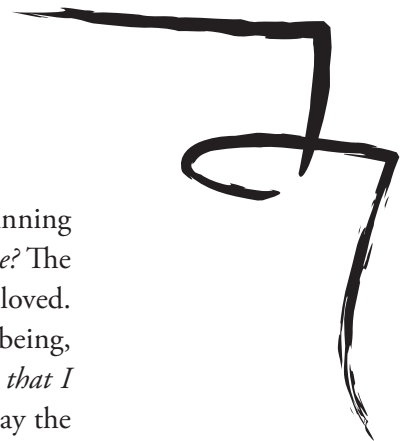


Specimen

The mirrors check out OK, but the illegals making the smoke seem to be fooling only themselves. In a moment that showed me what my subconscious mind really was, I misread "story" as "Sting." They asked if I had a good mental attitude and I asked if they thought I was crazy and they must have because they took my question for my answer. We found the information booth by ourselves, thus reinventing phenomenology for the Guitar Hero generation.

Specimen

They're waving at us—something must be wrong. Beginning Japanese: did you shoot that baby carrot out of your ass at *me*? The box said "Earth-friendly," but I bought it because I wanted to be loved. "When it's windy, it's easy to confuse a swaying bush with a living being, to say nothing of a foreign planet." *A strange encounter, so peculiar that I myself don't know whether it is truth or a dream*—but I still had to pay the parking ticket.



Review of a Review of Mark Danielewski's *Only Revolutions*

Sampson Starkweather

The other day in the shower I got these words stuck in my head: *I thought of never-ending love, you know, the kind that never ends, anyway, for a few seconds there I just thought about it.* Just the words, not the actual— never-ending love. A dream that wouldn't make sense if you thought about it too long. Like America. Two teenagers in a car with no place to go, forever, never aging. Model-T to Geo Metro, an advertisement for love. In America, the only revolutions happen on TV. The future is a footnote in closed captioning. Every circle is a protest against History.

This review is supposed to be in the shape of a circle. Or graphically depicted as an arrow shot into infinity. But I'm not proficient enough at Microsoft Word to pull it off. The Ouroboros, that's the tattoo on the bodies of several waitress I've fallen in love with in South Carolina, or in other words, any good review. A snake infinitely swallowing its own tail. Words do that. A house that's bigger on the inside than the outside is no longer a metaphor. All fiction is, is a man making a pyramid out of Equal packs, telling his son not to breathe.

After we make love, she asks me "what are you thinking" and I say, love, not meaning it, then she asks me what are you thinking now, and I say skipping a rock and hitting my sister in the head, she asks me what are you thinking now, and I say that I could walk away from anything, she asks me what are you thinking now, and I say sand, then she asks me what are you thinking now, and I say You, thinking that this review could go on forever...



Read three more Sampson
Starkweather poems at
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DETACHABLE

SAINTHOOD

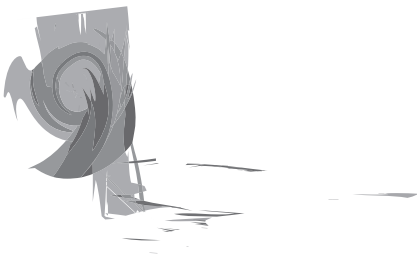
Carol Guess

Cell phones are just earmuffs fuzzy with the static of a new century. You're pimping polyester like the 80s were yesterday. Maybe retro's where it's at, holding onto holding on. I'm not thinking of toy guns when I tell you what I want. You're at the far end of the farthest corner of the road. You're a girl where girls don't go. This is where I come to find you, counting saints to fool the devil. Your name changes in my mouth, little accidents colliding with consonants. I am not your plate tectonics. Don't nod off and don't say *Dork*. Frost on the stoop means you'll wear your tracksuit, a 70s sort of detachable sainthood. I've loved you longer than that. I'm ready. My hands flex *Stop* like stopping traffic, but nothing stops.

We Are Hearing the Loudest Animal Be Its Loudest

Emily Pettit

It's a shrimp. Makes meeting sound like an accident.
 A tiger pistol shrimp. Not a whale whistling,
 though deaf that might make you. Deep dark
 and dangerous feelings are filling our foreheads here.
 I remember an airplane to somewhere else.
 I was shocking in the restaurant. The deep dark
 and dangerous feelings like a different kind of rocket.
 The vault alarm alarming. Something good that isn't
 recognized at first as such. Such as, when you are mistreated
 the same way you mistreat others. And now we are
 back to talking about control. I've got a radio in a bucket.
 I have a bucket in my hand. What about you? What's in
 your hand? A flower. Flowering plants have dominated
 the plant scene since dinosaurs and it is a lesson
 in perseverance. Yet paleontologists keep changing
 their minds just like everyone else. Can you make
 yourself completely independent of daylight?
 Completely, completely independent. It's the bottom
 of the ocean. And I will not stop listening to the radio.
 It is not mandatory, it's just what I'm doing again today.
 Not getting down about the deep dark and dangerous
 no daylight. I don't get on the airplane. I get on
 the airplane. The airplane smells just like an airplane does.
 I cry just like you. And I stop too.





WHAT DID YOU EXPECT TO FIND?

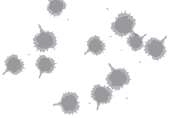
Trina Burke

Carrion trace and ribbed washboard—
 This place is anachronistic, a cache
 For Barbie heads in transit, dolly eye-
 Edges caked with dust and sticky dried-up
 Soda. Willow growth and buzzing,
 A gator grunts like a peacock
 And the lake shore ripples like danger.
 This is where we held our spelling
 Bee under the paper tree, pressed
 Fingernails into flaky bark to make
 Our made-up words as ideograms.
 Melaleuca encyclopedia of thing theory,
 Whose praxis acted out as scissors,
 Paper, rock—a split-cell
 Manner of distinguishing and de-
 Cisioning over what lay there under
 That abandoned rust-bucket
 Tetanus shot john boat.
 We didn't have a name for it then
 And we still don't.

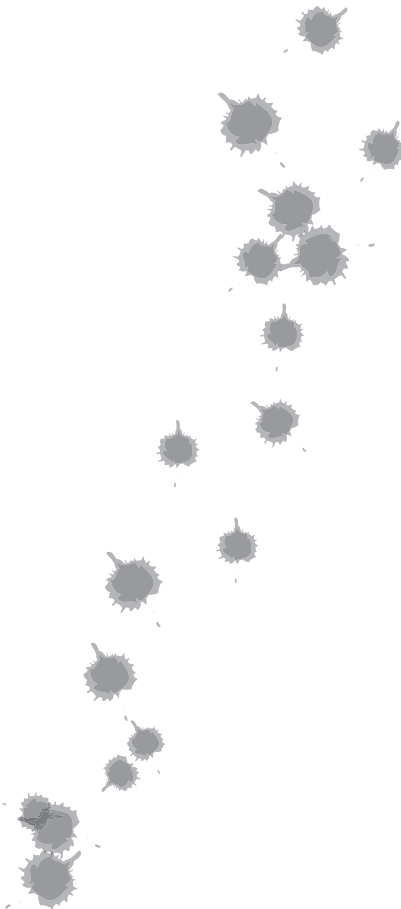


A Kiss on the PURPLISH Light

Ben Mirov



I wanted to impress her with my kissing ability
and so placed my hand on her cheek.
It scared me, but I touched it gently.
My eyes were shut. My mind began to wander.
I thought of a deer spooked by his shadow
on the rime. I thought about Papa
who died half-naked with a mouthful
of mushroom soup. I thought of the universe
expanding in its bowl and of the breaking
of the bowl and the spilling of its contents
onto what. I thought of the word *isotope*.
Isotope, I thought to myself. Although
I may have spoken it aloud. Years passed
between the end of this kiss and the beginning
of the next. Several things occurred
that demanded my immediate attention.
I found a bouquet of wilted flowers.
I spilt my mug of strong black tea.





FLAMINGO POEM POEM

I'm going to flamingo this flamingo
into flamingo & call it Poem.

Nate Pritts

I'm going to golden sun behind clouds,
feather & haze propped up on one supporting

fact like a leg plunged in water. Exuberant
declaration! O Insight, O Epiphany!

I'm going to diction. I'm going to shifting
tone: serious consideration given to the Fanciful

bursting off. I'm going to poem this poem into poem
& call it Flamingo. I'm going to mimetic theory.

One can write a flamingo that calls
attention to itself as flamingo & still make it

flamingo—embed it with flamingos of dawn, rising
& orange, flamingos of starlight, burning

forever, flamingos of the cave, empty & raging.
I'm going to big bright light in the cave

to sweep away those shadows. I'm going to
set the woods on fire: because pledge to beauty

everlasting, because I love you, because
God writes trees & reading is building a house

of the trees God made. So I want you to stand
in the field with me. There is no shelter here.

I wrote a flamingo mimicking the flamingo
of flamingo. Flamingo golden in eternity, feasting

on the trembling Ephemeral; Nate blue & ephemeral,
trembling, no matter how much love you feed him.



I HEARD



Jordan Stempleman

Somewhere, sometime yesterday,
I cast this stupid spell
that caused the slaughter to be
more or less about the slaughter.
Ask anyone what happens when one person
tries to focus on the next,
and they'll tell you, incredibly blinding,
and possibly, an entire shopping experience
of now ready to discuss soundproofing
the swinging door for no good reason.
The stupid spell before this one;
a solid letdown. After fifteen minutes,
a really solid letdown. It began
romantically enough; Ask someone
to do anything, anything, and they'll respond.
In your dreams, I'm constantly
stumbling, yet never crushing my will
to fall down. In your dreams, a cross
between hearing your name
and nothing wearing nothing is,
quite possibly, always enough.



Skirt Steak, We Said

Nathan Logan

“Life could not get any better,”
but then it totally did and so
my pants are on fire. Walking
in the park, Julie found that year
of life she couldn’t remember—
it was hiding under a picnic.
Mary’s allergies vanished and
she pinned all the orphan sunflowers
to her tank top. I perfected my
squirrel, cajoled one to share
some walnuts. Above us, in our
magenta part of the world, the blue
sky pulled off a successful burglary.
Later, we went grocery shopping
and said, “Skirt steak, please.”
And that’s exactly what we got.



CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

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TODD COLBY has published four books of poetry on Soft Skull Press: *Ripsnort* (1994), *Cush* (1995), *Riot in the Charm Factory: New and Selected Writings* (2000), and *Tremble & Shine* (2004). Todd has performed his poetry on PBS and MTV, and his collaborative books and paintings with artist David Lantow can be seen in the Brooklyn Museum of Art and The Museum of Modern Art special collections libraries. Todd serves on the Board of Directors for The Poetry Project, where he has also taught several poetry workshops. He posts new work on gleefarm.blogspot.com.

MARK CUNNINGHAM has three books out: *80 Beetles* (Otoliths), *Body Language* (Tarpaulin Sky), and *71 Leaves* (an ebook, BlazeVOX). A recent chapbook, *Georgic*, with Eclogues for Interrogators, is on the Lamination Colony site.

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SASHA FLETCHER is the author of *When All Our Days Are Numbered*

Marching Bands Will Fill the Streets & We Will Not Hear Them Because We Will Be Upstairs in the Clouds (Mud Luscious Press 2010).

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SEAN ROSENBERG has the following philosophy: If it ain't either eggs or oatmeal, it ain't breakfast. He is a couple months younger than Rafael Nadal and doesn't have a single grand slam title to show for it.

GREGORY SHERL is the author of the chapbook *I Have Touched You* (DSM, 2011). He has two novellas forthcoming from Mud Luscious Press: *The Oregon Trail Is the Oregon Trail* (2012) and *Swallow* (2013). He co-edits the online poetry journal *Vinyl* and blogs at <http://gregorysherl.com/>.

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INSIDE NOÖ [12]

Sincerity is risky. It's hard not to hide your wounds behind humor in poetry, or artful language, or a hint of the absurd. But somehow Lasky makes poetry out of sincerity that's as blunt as a dull knife, and her honesty is disarming.

NOÖ Presents: Dorothea Lasky's *The Black Life*
Leigh Stein | 4

They will talk to me in their language, their lips moving calm beneath mustaches in the dusk. They will buy me sweet drinks on a patio bar. They will ignore my throat, which will give me away. I will hold my face in my hand.

Running the Drain
Brian Allen Carr | 8

You can say a prayer or sing a prayer or eat while it's hot. You can pay one dollar for one donut or four dollars for six donuts or you can approach the dinner table with a clean conscience. You can eat wax or be a hero or eat glue.

Free Time
Gabe Durham | 13

This is what I look like when you're not looking / at me I feel feverish my eyes are bigger in your / electric pony light.

Electric Pony Light
Todd Colby | 22

I'm not thinking of toy guns when I tell you what I want. You're at the far end of the farthest corner of the road. You're a girl where girls don't go. This is where I come to find you, counting saints to fool the devil.

Detachable Sainthood
Carol Guess | 27

