



# THE MISSING SLATE

SUMMER 2014

Criatura by Danielle Boodoo-Fortune'



*Artwork by Marta Syrko*

*“ These moments of escape are not to  
be despised. They come too seldom. ”*

*~ Virginia Woolf*

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# A Word from the Editor-in-Chief

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Dear Readers,

It's interesting the sort of stuff that gets your creative mind going — a previous incarnation of this letter had me writing it in Calibri (11 pt), but now that I'm using Rockwell (our layout recently underwent a face-lift), everything looks different. Almost as though I'm in an entirely new place. Interesting, isn't it? Perhaps it shouldn't be as interesting as I'm making it out to be, given an editor's preoccupation with words and the aesthetics that bind them.

What is more interesting, perhaps, is the easy association between escapism, fantasy and creation — that artists, regardless of medium, disappear into their own world in an attempt to escape from the one they live in. Indeed, *The Missing Slate's* Maria Amir and Mariam Tareen ponder that very argument: how escapist is writing and why do some writers die young, caught inextricably in their own worlds? Editors Sana Hussain and Ghausia Rashid Salam pick through genre and fan fiction, trying to understand why literary snobs so abhor both genres as not being "authentic" enough. To put our hats in this ring might, we hope, encourage the magazine's scope to expand and include science-fiction, the well-executed thriller and horror story, from more traditional and more mainstream international literary fiction, though perhaps one ought to examine when literary fiction entered the "mainstream". Aren't we constantly told that literary fiction as a genre is a dying one? But then, we've also been informed of the constant death of the print publishing industry. Somehow, someone, somewhere is always claiming the death of something in literature, and yet it persists. Perhaps one should step back and realise the lasting power of the written word and its evolving permutations.

If creating is to be a form of escape, let us agree that it is not reserved solely to the creator, but extends to the viewer / reader / observer who ensures its dissemination. Whether digital or in print, literature and art in their essentials are still portals — though perhaps not the escape we hope they will be — and they tend to provide telling insights into their makers and the individuals who indulge in them.

In this special issue, we invite you to the Caribbean — with a layout to match — with writing from some of the Islands' most talented writers, guest edited by John R. Lee, who also introduces the feature.

It is my sincerest hope that you enjoy the journey.

Warmly,



Maryam Piracha  
Editor-in-Chief

# GATEWAYS:

## A CARIBBEAN SAMPLER

An introduction to the Caribbean writers' feature

By John Robert Lee

*"I accept this archipelago of the Americas."*  
– Derek Walcott (*The Muse of History*)

In their introduction to the comprehensive *'The Oxford Book of Caribbean Verse' (2005)*, editors Stewart Brown and Mark McWatt say that in spite of the atrocities of its colonial history, the Caribbean has produced *"what is arguably the most life-affirming and spiritually uplifting body of poetry of the twentieth century."* And after giving a broad overview of the development of Caribbean Literature across its historical and linguistic borders (English, French, Spanish and Dutch), identifying significant writers whose seminal work has proved to be deeply influential, they conclude, again affirmatively, that the region (including its large diaspora), at the beginning of the twenty-first century, *"has produced what is arguably the most vigorous and exciting body of poetry in our time."*

One could conceivably describe that flowering of Caribbean Literature in English between the late forties through to at least the eighties as a Golden Age, crowned by Nobel recognitions of Walcott (1992) and Naipaul (2001). The work of our writers, now across several generations, and well represented by both men and women, is regularly rewarded with international and

regional prestigious prizes. The authors are frequent guests at literary festivals and conferences all over the world. A number of home-based literary festivals have become familiar names among writers, critics and the world of literary journalism: Calabash International Literary Festival in Jamaica, NGC Bocas Literary Festival in Trinidad and Tobago, Word Alive Literary Festival in St. Lucia, St. Maarten Book Fair, and the BIM Literary Festival in Barbados, among the better known.

The digital world and its plethora of online journals and blogs, alongside a range of publishing possibilities, the wide availability of printed and e-books, make access to Caribbean writers easier than it has ever been before. While many of the "Golden Age" personages are still with us and publishing, the quantity and quality of Caribbean writing, at home and abroad, has become overwhelming. One can hardly keep up. One depends on recommendations from friends or respected critics to guide one towards those whose contribution is a real advance and development on the classics that remain so resonant.

Peepal Tree Press, based in Leeds, UK, has become the premier publishing

house for Caribbean writers. Publishing in the Caribbean is still relatively non-existent as a viable concern. Many aspiring authors increasingly turn to on-demand publishers to produce their work.

This modest "sampler" of Caribbean writing in English presented by *The Missing Slate* is meant to be one gateway among many for those already familiar with the literature, but, even more importantly, should serve as an entry point for those who are becoming aware of writing rooted in the real life of those fabled tropical islands, so-called tourist paradises and the home of "calypso cricket"! It provides a broad introduction, across generations, across countries, to representative poets and prose writers.

To follow the career of any of the writers whose work appears

here is to enter a gateway that leads to many others. To go through the doorways opened by Barbadian Kamau Brathwaite and Jamaican Edward Baugh is to find oneself in the company of some of the greatest names in modern

“The digital world and its plethora of online journals and blogs, alongside a range of publishing possibilities [...] make access to Caribbean writers easier than it has ever been before.”

literature, the very Golden Age generation: Derek Walcott, Martin Carter, Eric Roach, George Lamming, V S Naipaul, Claude McKay, Frank Collymore, Louise Bennet and others. Brathwaite is a poet, historian and critic whose original, groundbreaking publications and critical thinking have set a compass for directions in the

literary developments. Baugh's criticism places him among the first rank of Caribbean critics whose analyses provide for many the introduction to, and understanding of, Caribbean literature and its historical and social groundings. His poetry, now gaining more attention, stands well alongside that of those whose work he has reviewed.

The garden gate, as it were, of Jamaican Lorna Goodison — poet, short

story writer, memoirist and painter — opens on to the spaces of the many women using both the scribal and oral traditions, who began to gain attention in the seventies.

To read Kendel Hippolyte, Jane King and Esther Phillips, Elizabeth Walcott-Hackshaw and Robert Sandiford is to meet



Artwork by Nora Pinell

“ This modest “sampler” of Caribbean writing in English provides a broad introduction, across generations, across countries, to representative poets and prose writers. ”

accomplished representatives of those who have lived in the Caribbean all their lives and were among the first to be described as the post-Independence generation. Following the example of Walcott, Brathwaite, Earl Lovelace and others who chose to work in and travel from the Caribbean home base — writing back to the empire from the provinces, as it were — they have gained wide respect and recognition.

And with Kwame Dawes, Kei Miller, Ishion Hutchinson, Curdella Forbes and Christian Campbell, one is introduced to younger author-scholars and their colleagues, who are equally at home in the metropolis, in the teaching departments of Ivy League universities as well as on their island beaches or in their reggae dance halls. They have become major international voices for the newer publishing

houses like Peepal and Carcanet. Kwame Dawes has built a formidable reputation for his poetry, prose, critical work, editing and is one of the founders of the Calabash Literary festival.

The very newest of the literary talent is pointed by the work of Vladimir Lucien (St. Lucia), Vahni Capildeo (Trinidad) and Danielle Boodoo-Fortuné (Trinidad). Post Independence, post modern, the world the stage on which they stride comfortably, these represent the very newest generation of confident and assured Caribbean authors. Without stridency, without self-consciousness, they occupy and build on the ground they have inherited.

For a special focus, we look at Phyllis Shand Allfrey (1908-1986) who was a writer and political activist well ahead of her time. Born in Dominica, friend

of fellow Dominican Jean Rhys and famous authors like Auden and Edna St. Vincent Millay, she was a novelist and poet. Her biographer Liza Paravisini-Gebert, and the owner of the Papillote Press Polly Pattullo, who now publishes Allfrey's out-of-print work, provide a view of the life and achievement of this Caribbean pioneer whose prose and verse are being rediscovered.

This sampler reinforces the confidence of the editors of *The Oxford Book of Caribbean Verse* — Caribbean poetry and prose continue to be arguably (among) the most vigorous and exciting body of literature accessible today. May our readers find it a portal leading to new adventures in new found lands in a new world, both with the now classic writers and the emerging voices represented here.



*Goddess of Growing Things by Danielle Boodoo-Fortuné*

## Slight and Ornamental



(“A few of the poems are, admittedly, slight and ornamental.”)

Reviewer’s comment on a book of poems)

That admittedly slight and ornamental  
butterfly that flew across the morning  
did not interrupt its flight to reason  
with me, or otherwise consider matters  
topical or theoretical or of consequence.  
How it made light of gravity, displaced  
such weight of air! Space expanded  
to its map of detours and digressions.  
Its sun-dance round the lignum vitae  
done, it darted zig-zag off  
to eavesdrop on the conversations of trees  
and the ruminations of street-dogs filing  
single-mindedly down the sidewalk.  
Last seen, it was a fleck of dazzle  
in the eye-corner of the pelican perched  
and gently rocking on a fisherman’s canoe  
off Hellshire beach. It went, subsumed  
by sky and silence. But the clamour of its wings  
had traced a yellow highlight along  
the day’s ephemeral urgencies.

~ Edward Baugh

# Portrait of the Farmer's Stepdaughter

On evenings, she lies,  
back pressed to the road.

Soft pitch swells beneath her heels,  
the blue sky crowns her.

Somewhere, metal drags  
across the soil's hot heart  
men's voices crackle in the distance  
like burning grass.

There is nowhere to hurry to,  
no circle of lonely earth  
to set down the halved  
seed of her name.

Here is both home  
And nowhere.

The world beyond her fingertips  
stretches sharp and green  
into the sun.

~ Danielle Boodoo-Fortuné



Goddess of Growing Things by Danielle Boodoo-Fortuné



# Meeting Phyllis Shand Allfrey

By Polly Pattullo

Thirty years ago when I went to interview the Dominican writer and politician Phyllis Shand Allfrey, she was more used to being asked about her compatriot Jean Rhys than about her own writing. Now, while Rhys' reputation remains undimmed, the interest in Allfrey's writing has become steadily more visible.

After decades in which Allfrey was better known as a politician than a writer, the mid-1980s perhaps marked the start of her literary revival: the feminist publisher Virago Press had just re-published her one novel, *The Orchid House*. This garnered some interest but it was the publication of a biography, *A Caribbean Life*, by the Vassar College academic

Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert and UK television's four-part film of *The Orchid House* (in 1991) which began to make a difference.

Encouraged by these developments, I worked with Professor Paravisini-Gebert on the publication of Allfrey's short stories, *It Falls into Place* (Papillote Press, 2004). In putting together the collection, we grew to admire Allfrey's ironic insight and gentle radicalism in (usually) a Caribbean setting. It was not difficult to find Caribbean writers willing to endorse her work. Olive Senior, for example, said: "*It Falls into Place* will confirm Allfrey's major contribution to the development of West Indian literature..."

And now, a decade later, come Allfrey's collected poems, *Love for an Island* (Papillote Press, 2014), again edited and introduced by Paravisini-Gebert. The volume will surely reinforce Allfrey's importance.

But, as Paravisini-Gebert says in her introduction to *Love for an Island*, it has been difficult to place Allfrey within the Caribbean literary canon. Born in 1908, she was a daughter of the Caribbean white plantocracy, whose creative life flourished in England in the 1930s and 1940s when she mixed with left-wing intellectuals. Many of her best poems were written at this time. Her life as a writer was cut short when she went back to the Caribbean in the early 1950s

“Politics ruined me for writing”, she told me. Survival meant there was little time for writing; but conversation was rich.”

to commit to politics — her formation of the Dominica Labour Party followed by her election to the West Indies Federation in Trinidad (1959-62), her return to Dominica and final years as editor of *The Star* newspaper.

“Politics ruined me for writing”, she told me. When I met her, two years before her death in 1986, in her tiny stone-built house set amidst citrus trees some miles from the Dominican capital, Roseau, her car no longer worked, water came from the stream and lunch consisted of cold yam and frankfurters with wine and cigarettes for dessert. Survival meant there was little time for writing; but

conversation was rich.

When *It Falls into Place* was published, *The Sun* newspaper in Dominica wrote: “One of the traits of being Dominican is that we recognise greatness among us only after the rest of the world sort of give us permission to do so. And then we do that reluctantly.” Certainly, for Allfrey, for most of her life that was painfully true. Now perhaps things are changing. Dominica's own Nature Island Literary Festival, for example, is unequivocal in trying to honour Allfrey annually. And, in a Festival presentation in 2013, based on Allfrey's unfinished novel *In the Cabinet*, members of

the audience remembered her warmly, remembering how as teenagers she had encouraged their youthful attempts at writing stories and poems — then published them (and paid for them) in *The Star*.

Allfrey had in the midst of her own creative stalemate found a way of nurturing others. The publication of her own poems, in a small way, attempts to redress some of the neglect that Allfrey experienced. “*My poems are the best part of me*”, Allfrey said. And *Love for an Island* shows that perhaps she was her own best judge.

# Writing:

## Escapism or Thoughtful Engagement?

*“Writing is an escape from a world that crowds me. I like being alone in a room. It’s almost a form of meditation — an investigation of my own life.” ~Neil Simon*

By Mariam Tareen

Anyone who has ever read a book and enjoyed it is familiar with the sensation of slipping into the pages of a novel. Reading a good book feels like an escape. It is a release from the daily burden of an ordinary, contained life and an ordinary, contained self. Susan Sontag describes the experience as “disembodied rapture” and this sensation translates into writing too, for many. Comparing reading and writing, Sontag writes: “*Like reading, rapturous reading, writing fiction — inhabiting other selves — feels like losing yourself too.*”<sup>1</sup>

There are as many kinds of writers as there are books, but all writers share the desire or at least the willingness to spend time alone inside their heads. Silence may or may not be a prerequisite. There are writers who write in coffee shops, those who write to music. The process, though, is the same: a writer sits still and imposes order upon a raging imagination. (This is, of course, on a good writing day, not the kind where your mind is blanker than the white sheet of paper in front of you.)

Writing is a solitary act, and

arguably necessitates escape. Seeking solitude with words, a writer will lock herself up in a space away from family and friends. She sits alone and engages with half-formed thoughts in her mind, hoping that some will spill coherently on to the sheet or screen before her. At some point after the inevitable self-doubt and blankness, “the words start to fall in place”. Sentences pour out of her consciousness. Paragraphs come gushing forth. Ideas weave together, folding and unfolding in letters and punctuation. She feels as if she is outside of herself, and for a time, nothing else exists. It is an exhilarating feeling, worth all the agony of the preceding minutes, hours or days — as long as it took for the words to come.

Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi has spent his career studying this experience of complete immersion in a task. He calls it “flow”: “*the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience itself is so enjoyable that people will do it even at a great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it.*” This concept

of “flow” or “being in the zone” offers a compelling scientific explanation of a feeling that all writers are familiar with.

As Csikszentmihalyi says, “*When we are in a state of flow, we lose consciousness of the self; we temporarily forget who we are.*”<sup>2</sup> It is as natural a state as feeling hungry, and completely universal, described in the same way by young and old, by farmers and assembly line workers, whether in India or Japan. Flow is not limited to the act of writing or indulging in any of the arts (such as painting and dancing); it applies to engaging in other activities that require concentration — rock climbing, for instance, or chess. As effortless as the state of flow feels, it is not easy. It requires “*strenuous physical exertion or highly disciplined mental activity*”, and it is precisely the challenge of the activity that forces concentration.

Writing fiction involves double the escape: the act of being alone is an escape from our surroundings, and inhabiting the consciousness of another can help us forget our troubles,

“ Are writers more engaged with the world than those who do not choose to slip away and pen their observations? Could writing be not an escape from life but, in fact, an intense immersion instead? ”

however temporarily. But unlike playing chess or rock climbing, writing leaves us with a more lasting result — scribbles on paper. We try to understand and then explain our world. Perhaps through this very act of making sense of our thoughts by writing them down, we change.

Writing can be an escape from the mundane. It can also be a form of therapy for suffering. Csikszentmihalyi suggests that perhaps writers are people whose consciousness is “*beset by entropy to an unusual degree*” and can only experience flow by “*creating worlds of words in which they can act with abandon, erasing from the mind the existence of a troubling reality.*” But writers beware: there is danger in using writing to escape in this way. Insofar as writing is a way to “control experience”, it can be a way to “infinite subtlety and rich rewards” — but writing can become dangerous if “*it forces the writer to commit himself to a limited range of experience, and forecloses other options for dealing with events.*” In other words, writing to escape can be beneficial and used as a form of therapy but it cannot and should not be relied on exclusively.

Graham Greene’s apparent reliance on writing to escape would have bothered Csikszentmihalyi. Greene said: “*Writing is a form of therapy; sometimes I wonder how all those*

*who do not write, compose or paint can manage to escape the madness, the melancholia, the panic fear which is inherent in the human condition.*”<sup>3</sup>

In writing about the way they see the world, writers are writing about themselves. There are two truths to capture: the truth in the world around us, and the truth in ourselves. It is why first novels are often autobiographical novels, especially the ones that go unpublished, tucked away in a drawer somewhere. We learn to write fiction by fictionalising ourselves, and one of the signs of maturity as a writer is learning to detach one’s own character from the characters being written about. Writers have argued about the extent to which they loan their own characteristics to their characters, but the initial urge to write frequently stems from the need to make sense of our surroundings and to know our own selves better.

In his essay in *The New York Times*, Andre Aciman encompasses this argument in his meditation on the “hidden nerve.” He explains: “*A hidden nerve is what every writer is ultimately about. It’s what all writers wish to uncover when writing about themselves...and yet it’s also the first thing every writer learns to sidestep, to disguise, as though this nerve were a deep and shameful secret that needs to be swathed in many sheaths.*”<sup>4</sup> To

what extent do we try to escape this hidden nerve, and to what extent do we embrace it? It is a complicated balance. As Susan Sontag has suggested, we write to escape ourselves as much as we write to express ourselves.

“*Some can’t tell whether they’re writing to strip or hide that secret nerve,*” writes Aciman. “*I write to reach out to the real world, though I know that I write to stay away from a world that is still all too real... I write to find out who I am; I write to give myself the slip. I write because I am always at one remove from the world but have grown to like saying so.*”

Writers are often considered daydreamers, observing the world from the sidelines, permanently once removed. Or could it be the other way around? Are writers more engaged with the world than those who do not choose to slip away and pen their observations? Could writing be not an escape from life but, in fact, an intense immersion instead? Some writers are sceptical of the idea of writing as an escape. Flannery O’Connor said: “*Writing a novel is a terrible experience, during which the hair often falls out and the teeth decay. I’m always irritated by people who imply that writing fiction is an escape from reality. It is a plunge into reality and it’s very shocking to the system.*”<sup>5</sup> Writing may not be an escape from “real life” — but rather, a way into it. It is both



Roses by Amy Dale

“ In writing about the way they see the world, writers are writing about themselves. There are two truths to capture: the truth in the world around us, and the truth in ourselves. ”

a step away from life and a step in. Perhaps one step away and two steps in, if it is a good writing day.

Writing may very well be more engaging than escaping. It may be painful to dwell on certain experiences. Anyone who has written about an intense experience will recall the emotional and sometimes physical fatigue that such a writing session brings. Even so, in a state of flow, you escape the unpleasant thoughts and feelings that plagued you moments before. “One of the most frequently mentioned dimensions of the flow experience is that, while it lasts, one is able to forget all the unpleasant aspects of life”, writes Csikszentmihalyi. This is because your attention is so focused on the writing that there is no room in the mind to think of anything else.

Which is it, then? Is writing an escape or a form of engagement? The answer may not surprise you: it is both. Perhaps it is only when you take a step back, and sit alone with your thoughts, that you can examine and grasp the world around you. Writing is both engagement and escape; writers must escape the world to write, but only after they have

sufficiently dug in.

American writer Gish Jen wrestled with the utility, or as she saw it, the *futility* of writing. In an essay in *The New York Times*, she explored a problem that all writers face — of writing and living competing with each other, of being caught between two worlds. For a time, she quit writing, which she had begun to see as “a pitiful attempt to give our leafy lives rocklike weight and meaning.”<sup>6</sup> Soon, however, she felt “as though I were at a party, sitting out the dance.” The absence of writing made her feel removed from the world. “I missed discovering what I thought — or rather, watching what I thought dissolve under my pen. I missed looking hard at things.” Without her writing, Jen felt distanced from life.

Possibly, then, writing is both escape and its opposite. Perhaps we do manage to escape ourselves for a while. The hope is that we return with, if not a deeper understanding of reality, then certainly a more complicated one.

*Mariam Tareen is Junior Articles Editor for the magazine.*

(Endnotes)

1 ‘Directions: Write, Read, Rewrite. Repeat Steps 2 and 3 as Needed’, Susan Sontag, *The New York Times*

2 ‘Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience’, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, Harper Perennial

3 ‘Ways of Escape’, Graham Greene, 1981, Simon & Schuster

4 ‘A Literary Pilgrim Progresses To The Past’, Andre Aciman, 2000, *The New York Times*

5 ‘Mystery and Manners: Occasional Prose’, Flannery O’Connor, 1957, Farrar, Straus & Giroux

6 ‘Inventing Life Steals Life; Living Life Begs It Back’, Gish Jen, 2000, *The New York Times*

# From Requiem

By Curdella Forbes



1947

The father is going to America.

'Wi going to Kingston for yuh fada papers,' the mother said. 'Wi goin stay overnight with Aunt Katie in Denham Town. Wi comin back Thursday morning.'

The girl's face screws up into an uglier grimace than usual. She turns abruptly and walks out of the yard towards the grove of naseberry trees. Sybil screws up her own face in imitation, but when the mother adds, 'Uncle goin stay wid yuh', she cries 'Yippee!' instead of bursting into tears. DenDen cries 'Yippee!' and John tosses his catapult in the air, catches it before it

falls and runs outside where he dances a jig. DenDen runs after him, grabs him by the leg so that he falls with DenDen on top of him and they wrestle like a big puppy and a little puppy, the big puppy rough but taking care. Sybil follows them out the door, limping.

\*

Some time during the night the girl stirred, pushing a heavy weight off her. Her dreaming eyes caught the dog's dark shadow; its outline, a moving blur, blotted out all other space around. Her mind groped for the words of enchantment with which the mother cursed her neighbour. 'Get thee behind me, Satan!' She muttered in guttural sounds. The

weight hung still, shifted, eased. The girl murmured again and was still. The weight settled. A beast with two backs is on the bed. The girl thrashed in her sleep, her hands, fluttering like trapped birds, pushed at the dog's shaggy sides. She moaned a little. The weight grew heavier. The girl's body jerked in resistance. Her eyes flew open; from the bottom of sleep-laden pools she saw the thin gleam of the dog's gaze reflected. The girl's hands, cleaving the pool, cut a long swathe in the wave and she is suddenly sitting up in the bed and crying, 'Come offa mi, come offa mi!' The girl's voice has two sounds, one frantic and sharp, the other underneath and distant, like the echo of sound in a cave. Her hands beat with two rhythms, one frantic and tattered, the other in slow motion, like a swimmer's hands breaking dreaming pools. The occult thing pressing down on her fully understands the ambiguity of sound and motion and presses itself into the space between sound and motion, towards the unequivocal flowers of blood.

The girl was truly awake

“No longer loping, but carrying herself with a careful containment as if there is a breakable vessel inside, the breakable vessel of her essential self, she moves with the tightness and freedom of a woman a hundred years old.”



now, screaming in earnest. Her strong, tensile feet, seeking to protect her navel, remembered their ability to contort and jackknifed into something soft and solid. The impact drew a short, sharp grunt. Beside her in the bed DenDen cried out. Sybil sighed and twined herself more securely into his side. The weight lifts abruptly. A rustle, a shuffle of feet on bare floor, a door creaks open, creaks closed, the girl's breath wheezes in the silence.

The little boy stirs. 'What do yuh, Girlzel?'

'Nothing. Go back to sleep.'

'Yuh was a-dream?'

'Yes, mi was a-dream. Go back to sleep.' She pulls the ragged sheet over him, tucking it into his neck with a convulsive, kneading motion. The boy sighs, puts his thumb into his mouth, with his other hand searches under his nightshirt for his navel, falls immediately asleep, curled around his thumb and his navel.

The girl lies awake, watchful through the night. At first she holds her breath, releasing it slowly only when she cannot hold it any longer for the pain in her chest. Her eyes fixed on the jealousies where the ghosts climb out to colloquy at cockcrow, she waits for the morning.

\*

In the morning the uncle's face is pale, pale, pale, like someone whose blood has been drunk in the night. The girl's mouth has a resolute, cruel look, like someone who is not innocent. No longer loping, but carrying herself with a careful containment as if there is a breakable vessel inside, the breakable vessel of her essential self, she moves with the tightness and freedom of a woman a hundred years old.

The parents have returned. They have brought gifts for everyone, a special gift for the uncle for taking care of the household while they were away. Over the clamour of joy and welcome, the heads of the



*Alex by Amy Dale*

swarming children, the uncle's eyes are beseeching. 'Please.' The girl watches the way his throat works up and down, and she hears him as clearly as if he has spoken, begging her silence. Stiff with dignity, age and scorn, she turns away.

\*

The girl does not know what has happened, or if anything has happened. She searches and searches herself but does not know what she is looking for. No one has told her anything.

She washes and washes herself until there comes a burning and when she walks past the mother, the mother looks at her with suspicious eyes. In the night before climbing into the bed she bends down to make a cross on the floor and plants



a knife in the middle where the four parts meet. She makes the cross exactly over where there is a crack between the boards (there are many cracks in the boards; she chooses one) so that the knife can go easily through. Sybil sits up in bed looking at her with big open eyes, sucking her finger like a dainty lady sucking her pipe. 'What you doin, Girlzel?'

'Nothin. Go sleep.'

Sybil's eyes grow rounder with a dawning thought. 'Yuh plantin somebody, Girlzel?'

'Come, go a yuh bed.' The girl pushes the little one down in her place in the bed and covers her up with the sheet. Sybil is wriggling with excitement. She wants to say her say before she obeys the injunction to fall asleep. 'If you plant him wid di cross an di knife him can't move, yuh know, Girlzel. Yuh know? Yuh know?'

'Shhh. Come mek mi tell you a story.' Sybil shushes quickly at the joyous prospect and wriggles up under the girl's armpit where she is sitting on the bed. The girl starts a soft, gentle

story without contortions and the child, disappointed, begins to fall asleep with her arms clasped around the neck of the girl. The girl sings her tuneless lullaby, in her new voice full of smoke:

*Clap han clap han till mama come home*

*Mama bring cake fi baby at home*

*Baby eat cake nuh gi mama none*

*Clap han clap han till mama come home!*

She feels the warm breath grow sticky, the little arms slackening around her neck. She lays the child softly down and draws the covers up around her once more. She sits on the edge of the bed watching the three children sleep while, thinking, she moves her hands in that washing motion that she has developed since she started getting older.

The mother takes the girl aside and speaks to her in a cold, controlled voice, scrubbed of all emotion. She talks from a distance about something dreadful

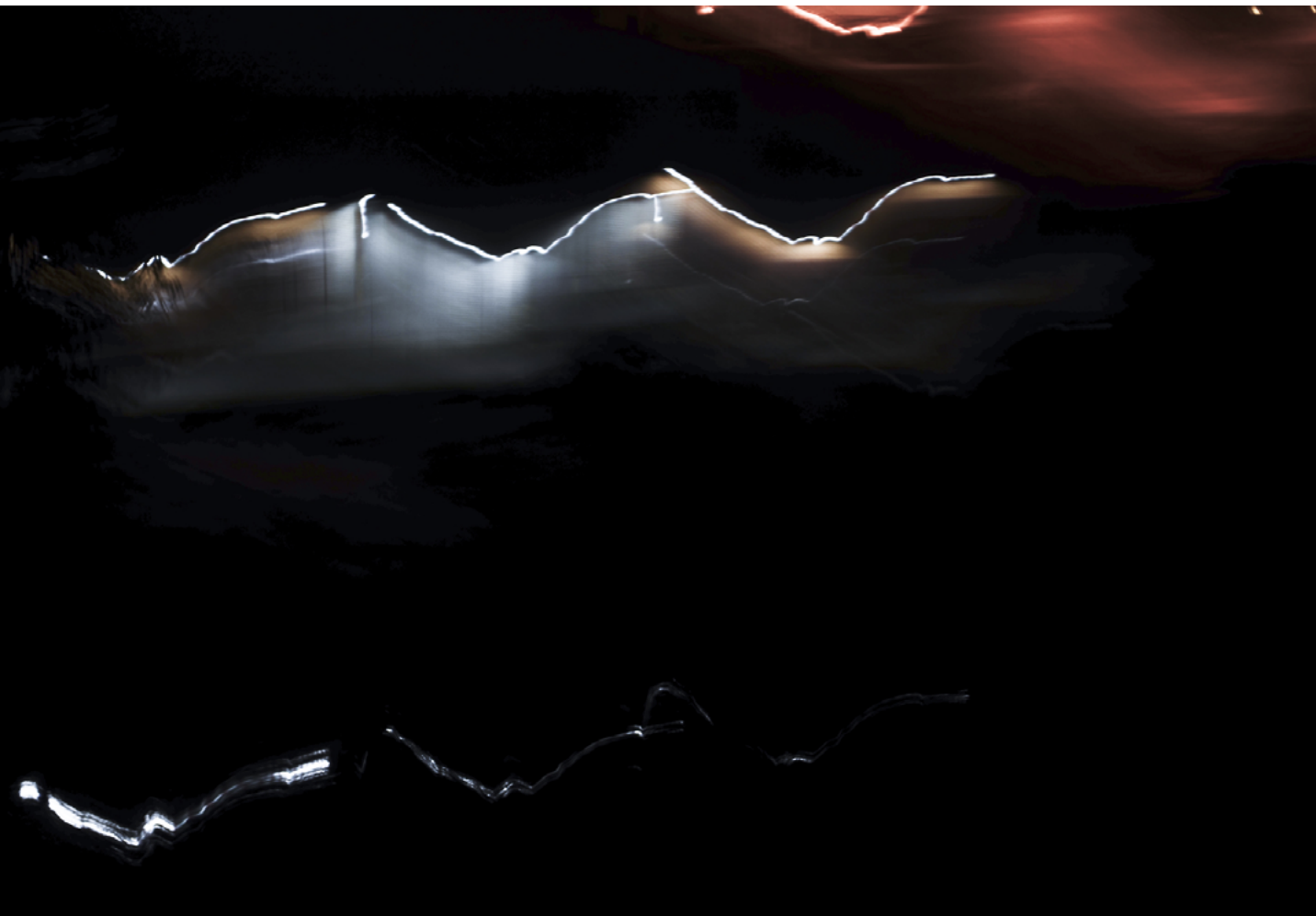
called becoming a woman that makes blood sprout between your knees, every month by the phases of the moon. You must not speak to boys or touch them with your hands. If you do, babies will come. Throughout, her eyes are averted.

When she leaves the room she has left on the white, pristine bed a pile of neatly folded calico cloths, like babies' nappies, which the girl had always hated washing. The mother's voice reverberates in her head. 'You will have to learn to wash them, when the time comes.'

The girl takes up the cloths, goes outside to the privy and throws them down its dark well, her mouth pursed and cruel with resentment. She makes sure her mother sees her passing with the cloths in her hand, and passing back without them. She knows that shame, the shame of being forced to bridge the gap between them, child and woman, mother and daughter, ruler and subordinate, will keep her mother silent.

In the morning the father goes to the wharf, where a ship rides at anchor.

# The Blue of One's Weird



*Artwork by Nicholas Walton-Healy*

Friday night on Jeremie St, a pale blue deepening to midnight as i hurry for what could be the last bus, hunched in a sullen wait, kerbside, among the peanut shells, scrunched wrappings, cigarette ends, a stray dog ...

A man flicks the dead end of a dry sandwich — to an instantaneous flurry of rats that quiver and squeal, that spurt in grey blotches, that swift-slide back to the creviced dark behind car tyres, or scud down a slimed gutter.

i try to zigzag quickly through the night-people but — an infra-blue thin fog is hazing everything; their movements drawl, smoke-slow, their voices mutter; Jeremie St, unstiffening from the day, seeps past like something leaking.

A dreamflow, that was glared out in the day's dazzle, now swirls to clog the usual cross-currents frothing between our selves; the blue drift, an othering flutter, blurs the flat lines and slick day-glo colours of our week-squinted sight.

Slo-mo, the night ones lean away from, then sidle toward me, seeking what their days lack, what our daily trafficking in the hot blaring light drives from our public ways into the dark dwindling bush of our dreaming.

They're talking as they drift — but of what and to whom they're speaking finally they do not know. And though what they're looking for is there with insight, their eyes, blank dials, are registering nothing, staring through a glaze.

The housing blocks around are shut dark — except for one lit window, like a silent screaming.

And that is the sound. The one that we loudly unlisten as we buzz through our bright daze. It is the dreamdeep unheard howling for eternity that ghosts our every action, every word.

It is that sound, though they have never heard it, which draws the night ones, streaming along emptying streets, talking and gesturing past each other through a blue haze. Until they flow beyond me and the fog clears. But now my whole life seems blurred.

i reach the bus. All — bleared. I wonder if even one of these late travellers has ever heard ... It's possible — but not likely, i think, as we move off. It's not everyone's weird.

# Alfred Hitchcock and the Strange Aesthetic of Fetish

*Dissecting the feminine mystique in Hitchcockian cinema.*

By Jess McHugh

'*Sexual Aberrations of the Criminal Female*', reads the title of the text on Mark Rutland's nightstand in Alfred Hitchcock's *Marnie*, and thus may as well read the title of the film. Though somewhat dramatic, and particularly outdated for a modern audience, this book title reflects the discourses of sociology, psychology, and of course sex in this Hitchcock masterpiece. In what can be considered as one of Hitchcock's stranger films, which move away from the simple whodunit structure to something more complex, the representation of sexual fantasy is incarnated in two femme fatales who defy the usual confines of the archetype. Alfred Hitchcock was certainly known for his "Ice Queens", those unattainable beauties with pale skin, almost white blonde hair, and a manner which projected the warning: "tread lightly". These women, especially Judy in *Vertigo*, and the titular character in *Marnie*, also bring elements of social class and fetish into the mix: they are not simply objects of desire — they inspire entire landscapes of fantasy.

The 1964 film *Marnie* met with little commercial success, due in no small part to the central romance which Hitchcock describes as "*degradation by love*" and which French director

Francois Truffaut calls "*a fetishistic love*". A man is attracted to a woman *because* of her faults, not in spite of them; while such a sentiment could seem romantic at first, there is something very disturbing about how Marnie's dark psychological past excites her suitor just as it makes her suffer. In the film, the man is the wealthy Philadelphia business executive, Mark Rutland (Sean Connery), while his secretary Marnie (Tippi Hedren), serves as the "Criminal Female". He hires her, fully aware that she has stolen large amounts of money from her previous employers, but as a former zoologist, he decides to trap this criminal female, study her, cure her, and release her back into the wild. His interest is based on several external behaviors, none of which are standard indicators of attractiveness: she steals, she lies, she's frigid. She rarely shows her interiority, which gives Rutland ample room to project his theories onto her.

Early in the film, Marnie comes to the office to work over-time on a stormy Saturday afternoon. As she walks in, she notices the Colombian artifacts and picture of the "Jaguarina", a fierce jungle cat that Rutland has domesticated. The office décor shows him to be a collector of rare and exotic artifacts. Even

the piece she's typing for him has nothing to do with his current business (it is never made clear what Rutland & Co produces or does), but is, in fact, an essay on predators in the wild: what he calls "*the criminal class of the animal world*". The dialogue is meant to be referential to Marnie and her own criminal instinct, though it's often so heavy-handed that it's almost campy. But then, lightning strikes outside of the tall bay windows behind Rutland's desk, as the stringed instruments of Bernard Herrmann's terrifying score begin an ominous dervish. Marnie is like a trapped bird (in continuation with the animal metaphors employed throughout the scene) as she runs for the door and then the couch, blinded by lightning which starts to flash blue and red in her mind.

As a spectator, between the frenzied music and the chaotic shots of Marnie darting around the room, you expect violence to ensue — were *Psycho's* Norman Bates to storm in with his kitchen knife at this point, it would almost be a relief from the taut atmosphere which persists throughout the scene. Instead, after observing Marnie from afar with a calm but curious look on his face, Rutland goes to her and kisses her passionately on the lips. Her fear and symptoms of trauma seem to turn him on.



*Together by Faizaan Ahab*

## Outside the Courthouse

At dawn, the courthouse, grumpy  
as looming shadows, scowls over

the town—the men move as a  
body of thick coats, cotton, shirts,

worn thin pants smelling of old food,  
smoke and cigarettes; stand waiting

for the truck, for the planter,  
for the landowner, for the money-

bags, for the constable, for  
the loiter police, for the colonel

with his special bloody unit,  
for the preacher preaching of gifts

waiting on the other side  
of these shadows, of bodies

broken by the deals we make  
to calm the hunger in our

multitude of churning stomachs.

The truck rumbles over  
cobblestones, the sinister

music of squeaking shocks and  
pulleys over the moan of the engine.

The truck stops with a sigh.  
The motor grumbles then stalls.

A single light cuts through  
the gloom, coming from the court

house. No one moves,  
the crowd heaves like breath.

~ Kwame Dawes

“ There is a tense relationship between suspense, sex, and narrative — both in life and in cinema — based on the idea that nothing is as pleasurable as when we are made to work for it, be it a woman or the solution to a mystery. ”

It's a strange kiss: surprising at best, violating at worst. “*The love scenes were filmed like murder scenes, and the murder scenes like love scenes*”, Francois Truffaut once said of Hitchcock's films, and until seeing this scene, I had a difficult time understanding what that meant. There is something violent in this moment, in the contrast between the cinematic aesthetic of romance and suspense, and that of the woman herself, who wears a white sweater buttoned up to her chin and an unshakably distant expression.

More ghost story than murder scene, however, the first encounter of Scottie (James Stewart) and Madeleine/Judy (Kim Novak) in *Vertigo* lays the foundation of a romance that, like Rutland and Marnie's, is based on the love for a type of woman rather than the woman herself. The walls of the restaurant are a plush, bright red, but the characters wear muted shades of grey or blue. Judy disguised as Madeleine, on the other hand, is wrapped in a long, black dress with a green shawl around her shoulders. As the camera slowly scans the room, following Scottie's eye, the music swells with romantic violins and rests on Madeleine's back, who is facing away. One's attention is immediately drawn to her light hair in its trademark vertigo-inducing spiral, and the lack of

a shot with her face immediately creates an aura of mystery. The eye is always drawn to the face when a human figure is present, and if an image of a person shows only a beautiful back and hair, we long to see her even more.

This sense of fantasy and unreality is heightened when Scottie gets his first glimpse as the couple gets up to leave. Instead of letting the viewer down by revealing her face in a frank way, Hitchcock continues with his game of delayed gratification. As she begins to walk to the door, the shot pauses when she's in profile, and the camera flickers between her face and Scottie's more haggard, nervous looking image, bringing her mystique up to the level of a goddess. The background goes out of focus, and she looks no longer like just a woman, but a painting or even a ghost. This amalgam of beauty and strangeness is heightened through two well-placed mirrors — one above the bar and one next to the door. Without the mirror above the bar, Scottie would not be able to see Madeleine in any subtle way, but as the couple exits, Scottie sees her reflection once more in the mirror next to the door. These two mirror effects suggest the contrast between what a mirror is supposed to do (reflect reality) and what Madeleine's reflection does to Scottie (spark an obsession which will have

little basis in any reality).

Though the sociological element of sexual fantasy is less apparent in *Vertigo* than in *Marnie*, it is Scottie's view of Madeleine as so unattainable that fuels his desire for her. Where Rutland enjoys being the society man who slums with his criminal girlfriend, Scottie longs to be the lowly detective who makes it with a great lady. At the base of both of these fetishes, however, is a similar striving for some form of impossibility. There is a tense relationship between suspense, sex, and narrative — both in life and in cinema — based on this idea that nothing is as pleasurable as when we are made to work for it, be it a woman or the solution to a mystery. Hitchcock, however, pushes this idea of delayed gratification to the extreme where the woman is impossible to “get”, and there sometimes is no solution to a mystery invoked throughout the story. The excitement is in the chase (or hunt, for Rutland the zoologist), and the aesthetics of these sexual fantasies are often more beautiful and complex than any situation in which the fantasy could be successfully achieved.

*Jess McHugh is a Contributing Editor for the magazine.*



# For Margarita Mahfood Murdered by her Lover Don Drummond



i

Margarita Mahfood gorgeous as a movie queen  
would have dazzled up on the silver screen  
sharing billing with Dorothy Dandridge.

Or with local luck she could have starred as lead  
dancer with the NDTC; instead she rolled with  
rhumba dancers east side at club Havana.

O Beauty if you'd only made it ninety miles  
across the water you might have caught Fidel  
at the Tropicana; but this picture shows you

hovering en pointe between earth and sky.

*Iyata Jah Daughter from Venturian Border,*  
kings would cast down crowns for, is gone.

There are lovers who love to death  
by the giving up of themselves; she was one.

ii

Woman a come with strong love.  
enough to take her self turn  
punching bag.

All because she was lover  
who required strength of warrior  
to equal her own.

Love enough to believe all-heal  
surged through her body in waves

enough to reinstate a fallen angel  
to his place as head of the seraphs  
horn section.

And what of her children?

She loved them.

She left them!

She loved them.

~ Lorna Goodison

(Top Left) *Let Me Come* by Faizaan Ahab

# Shattered Screens

When two worlds become one

By Tom Nixon

In Bernardo Bertolucci's *The Dreamers*, a trio of hormonal cinephiles shack up together during the 1968 Paris Student Riots and indulge their cinematic

when suddenly a brick comes flying through the window, puncturing her deathly fantasies and forcing her to turn towards the changing world. Bertolucci

is something of a film buff himself, and he empathises with his characters' habit of processing their lives through cinematic reference points, but

he understands too that one cannot live inside the cinema forever.

Traditionally, the movie theatre is a place where audiences go to escape into more exciting lives or minds, but ever since Buster Keaton's "*moving picture operator*" dreamed

himself a part of the movie he was projecting in *Sherlock Jr.*, the relationship has slowly become more complicated. Keaton's masterpiece — in which, among other things, he is launched out of the silver screen into the audience, and later mimics behaviour he views on-screen to woo a girl — was a catalyst for movies becoming introspective and aware of their own movie-ness, refusing to function merely as immersive fictions. That evolution is still ongoing, and "escapism" has even, rightly or wrongly, become something of a dirty word in certain critical circles, implying a passive audience concerned solely with narrative at the expense of ideas or self-reflection.

A notable way of tackling these subjects has been the visual motif of breached or broken screens, repeated again and again throughout movie history. Generally, this

is intended to dissolve the barrier between fiction and reality, preventing us from disappearing into the fabric of a separate onscreen universe. We are shocked into remembering that we're sat in a movie theatre, forced to consider the film in relation to ourselves and our world, rather than slipping away into the headspace of a fictional character.

One cannot begin a discussion of screens without referring to *Rear Window*. Alfred Hitchcock's iconic 1954 thriller — about an incapacitated photographer called Jefferies who through a combination of boredom, insecurity and voyeuristic urges starts snooping through the rear window into his neighbours' business, happening across the suspected murder of a jewellery-salesman's wife — doesn't contain any broken

screens, but during its course open windows are invaded, penetrated and clearly delineated as projections of Jefferies' psyche. By drawing attention to the anxieties and repressed desires underlying an experience openly analogous to moviegoing, Hitchcock prevents the audience from forgetting who they are and why they're here, even once the answers prove quite disconcerting.

Three years earlier, a notorious example of a different kind occurred in Elia Kazan's adaptation of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, a film characterised by the conflict between Blanche Dubois' bygone romanticism and Stanley Kowalski's carnal machismo. Blanche's melodramatic persona is a conceit built to stave off her encroaching decay, a sense of fading away; everything

she does is a throwback to the days when she was beautiful. Of course, it's all just performance. She doesn't want realism, she wants "magic", but just like her character Vivian Leigh's theatrical acting style was dying out in the cynical '50s, replaced by the kind of method acting Marlon Brando exhibits here, his Stanley swaggering around like some bastard child of Achilles and King Kong, forcefully asserting that he is more real, more American than Blanche or Leigh will ever be.

Stanley completes his usurpation by raping Blanche, and while this may confirm her earlier accusations that Stanley is a common, vulgar "ape", there is also truth in his insistence that Blanche is hardly a queen herself — after all, she rode the "*streetcar named*

“No longer can the movies provide an innocent, romantic escape from the cruellest truths of our existence; they've started to loom just a little too large.”

and erotic fantasies, until reality "*finally bursts through the screen*". Eva Green's Isabelle is in the process of gassing herself and her blissfully unaware companions as they are cocooned within an Eden of their own making, imagining herself as Bresson's Mouchette rolling down the bank to her death,

desire” to get here. Rather than showing the rape, Kazan cuts to a mirror above the bed just before it’s smashed in the struggle, a screen in which we see Blanche’s limp posture and distorted face. Her illusions have been shattered, she can no longer cast a veil over her mortality, and as actresses and characters like hers slip away into history, it’s clear that from now on neither can we. No longer can the movies provide an innocent, romantic escape from the cruellest truths of our existence; they’ve started to loom just a little too large.

Hollywood’s descent into cynicism arguably peaked in the seventies, and Sam Peckinpah’s *Straw Dogs* proved a cornerstone. The stuffy, near-asexual David Summer (Dustin Hoffman) is civilised to the point of fascism, thinking himself superior to the boorish townspeople with whom his oppressed wife flirts, but when those same people besiege his new home, he proves crueller than any of them. Peckinpah presents Summer’s house as an idyllic escape from the distractions of urban life, where

Summer can disconnect from his animal instincts and immerse himself in laughably obscure academic interests, but this is a fantasy in which he can’t stay sealed forever, and soon every window in the house will be smashed to pieces by outside threats. Peckinpah films most of siege from inside the house,

One of Hitchcock’s greatest successors is David Lynch, whose films *Blue Velvet* and *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me* expose the seedy underbelly beneath the white picket fences and neatly-trimmed gardens of small-town American communities, dragging ostensibly innocent or vulnerable protagonists into

the murk and by extension the audience. *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me* begins with a TV exploding, and the image repeats again later just as Laura Palmer, our surrogate of sorts, is violated. The most horrific scene in *Blue Velvet*, when Jeffrey walks into his masochistic lover’s apartment to find two freshly killed corpses,

contains a broken TV sitting ominously in the corner. Werner Herzog once said that “civilization is a thin layer of ice upon a deep ocean of chaos and darkness”, but Lynch figures it may just as well be a thin layer of glass. With these images he not only allows that foulness to bleed through the screen into our minds, but indicates that it was inside us all along, dormant until the darkness of a movie

## Bedward Chapel

The cyandles flicker  
out inside the ruined chapel  
as the **moon** rises  
Bedward’s few ancient  
followers. themselves ancestors  
. depart from the cold stone .  
their foot-  
steps . dressed in white .  
echo down the architrave  
and the slow silence

<1 march 2014 . 12.35am>

~ Kamau Brathwaite

placing the audience within a safe haven so that each breach feels like it’s coming directly through the screen and into our consciousness, crumbling the illusions of moral superiority we construct for ourselves and revealing the beast within. It’s clear that we can no longer secretly indulge our most uncivilised impulses in the movie theatre without being forced to confront those impulses.

theatre allowed it to run rampant across the screen. It’s difficult to watch movies the same way again.

David Cronenberg’s *Videodrome* goes a step further, suggesting that when we continually expose ourselves to audiovisual media we are in fact escaping ourselves in a quite literal way, becoming something inhuman, something monstrous. Cronenberg’s film is full of screens — many of them warped, penetrated or exploded — and with that comes the warning that we are starting to merge with the technology and media we so worship, losing our identity and our humanity in the process. Cronenberg makes the very process of moviegoing uncomfortable, demonstrating how fluid the relationship between film and audience, perception and reality, really is. What once was harmless fantasy is now something like disease.

Three recent arthouse films, rather different in their methods and goals, have each used the motif of a broken screen to complicate the notion of cinematic escapism. Abbas Kiarostami’s *Like Someone in Love* evokes a claustrophobic Tokyo metropolis, full of cramped interiors and reflective surfaces. His protagonist Akiko is juggling identities as she tries to please her family, a volatile boyfriend, and her clients as she moonlights as a prostitute. The film’s title alludes to

Akiko’s roleplaying, her need to be “like someone” other than herself in this oppressive environment. When Akiko’s boyfriend finally sees through her lies, he approaches the house in which she is hiding and we see a missile come through a screen-like window, framed by curtains. This is a film which dreams of a world that no longer requires cinema, a world where we’re no longer pressured by external forces to escape into the theatre’s array of delusions and facades. What is moviegoing if not the desire to fleetingly become someone who can experience the world without it being filtered through a prism of defence mechanisms? Of course, once the window shatters the movie ends; the viewer’s identity is, in a moment both frightening and liberating, unified once again.

In Giorgios Lanthimos’ *Alps*, a company of actors impersonate the deceased in order to help mourning family members through the grieving process. Aggeliki Papoulia’s character in Lanthimos’ acclaimed previous film *Dogtooth* escaped out of her dysfunctional family at the tragicomic conclusion, but in this film she tries to escape into a family, adopting the identity of a family’s deceased to the point where reality and roleplay start to blur. At one point she quite literally breaks into the family’s house, and as in *Like Someone in Love* the camera is placed inside the window looking out. The interiors are dark like a theatre, stressing the analogy. She is doing what each of us,

in a sense, longs to do when we watch our favourite movies; breaking into a different world and becoming a different person. But in the film it comes across as the ultimate symptom of the character’s madness, different worlds crumbling together in her mind, identities and perceptions in flux. The viewer is disturbed into considering the abnormality of the impulses fueling their own escapism.

In *A Touch of Sin*, an angry film about a modern China suffering through a difficult transition from communism to capitalism, Jia Zhangke presents a series of oppressed, alienated characters who scramble desperately to escape their circumstances, only to be swallowed up by violence. Jia frames these events as though acts in a contemporised *Wuxia*, not only utilising near-cartoonish genre tropes but also images of shattered doors and guns poking through screen-shaped holes — there is even a moment when a woman is abused as spectators stand around eating what may as well be popcorn. This consciously cinematic presentation juxtaposes reality against traditional Chinese cinema, emphasising how insufficient the latter’s notions of heroism and glorified vengeance have become for a broken society falling further and further into pointless, destructive cycles of violence. The screen must be shattered, lest a generation of moviegoers sit idly by as their country devours itself whole.

Tom Nixon is Senior Film Critic for the magazine.

# SOLITARY CONSIGNMENT

*The silent battles between art and soul*  
By Maria Amir

*“Te Occidere Possunt Sed Te Edere Non Possunt Nefas Est”*  
(They can kill you, but the legalities of eating you are quite a bit dicier) ~ David Foster Wallace, *‘Infinite Jest’*

Question: Who wants to be a happy, well-adjusted artist? One would presume that every individual who has at some stage assumed an inclination or gift for a particular form, has hopes for being effective at executing their chosen art. That said, “effective” and “well-adjusted” are not often synonymous states when it comes to artists. Follow-up: Who wants art *made* by happy, well-adjusted artists?

Here the terrain gets trickier; whether or not we admit it we often need our artists to have as much of a backstory as their art. There is an odd romance with misery in both the creation and appreciation of most art forms, perhaps especially, the written word. Shiny, happy people are somehow so... off-putting in this demographic. After all, where is their story? What is their story? Do they even have one? If they do, why aren't they wearing it? It's almost a betrayal to the form itself. Like discovering your favourite poem was actually meant to be a grocery list.

This is a dangerous distinction, for both artists and their audience. It places the onus on misery and struggle to serve as some sort of cosmic X-factor in the production of great work. I am currently reading Woolf's *‘A Room of One's Own’* for the third time, Wallace's *‘Infinite Jest’* for the first and Plath's *‘Bell Jar’* recently served as my bag-book for the second time in as many decades. It's an overdose of ennui, strings of sentences drenched in nuance, meaning and melancholy that no person should ever have been forced to contain. And then it hit me, they couldn't, they didn't, they all killed themselves... *young*.

The reading requires me to take constant tea breaks



*The Little Mermaid* by Amy Dale

to absorb sentences like *"We're all lonely for something we don't know we're lonely for. How else to explain the curious feeling that goes around feeling like missing somebody we've never even met?"*<sup>1</sup> and *"I thought how unpleasant it is to be locked out; and I thought how it is worse, perhaps, to be locked in."*<sup>2</sup> I need walking-around-the-room-breaks for when *"The silence depressed me. It wasn't the silence of silence. It was my own silence."*<sup>3</sup> I even bought a pack of cigarettes because some sentences just deserve a cigarette. Sentences like *"There's good self-consciousness, and then there's toxic, paralyzing, raped-by-psychic-Bedouins self-consciousness."*<sup>4</sup>

Other sentences merit a glass of wine *"Everything I've ever let go of has claw marks on it."*<sup>5</sup> There are some crafted specifically for chocolate *"The trouble was, I had been inadequate all along, I simply hadn't thought about it."*<sup>6</sup> and *"You have decided being scared is caused mostly by thinking."*<sup>7</sup>

And then there are sentences for tears: *"The parts of me that used to think I was different or smarter or whatever, almost made me die"*<sup>8</sup>; *"And when at last you find someone to whom you feel you can pour out your soul, you stop in shock at the words you utter — they are so rusty, so ugly, so meaningless and feeble from being kept in the small cramped dark inside you so long"*<sup>9</sup> and *"I meant to write about death, only life came breaking in as usual."*<sup>10</sup>

It occurs to me that I am invariably attracted to broken artists and conversely, broken art. My favourite writers include the likes of Leonard Cohen, whose cracks in everything exclusively cultivate art out of wreckage and its varying

remnants. Then there is Borges whose mammoth intellect still cannot help but swim in the depths of his dark despair. Some of them survived their art, others didn't, but overwhelmingly I am attracted to artists whose art cripples their person. These are the books I come back to — *'Labyrinths'*, *'Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man'*, *'Notes from the Underground'*, *'Beautiful Losers'* — broken books by broken people, followed by broken songs and broken paintings. All of them dangerously maladjusted beings that thrive in their broken-ness, while being broken. Almost as if the process that shatters their person simultaneously feeds their art. Rosamond Lehmann in her essay *'For Virginia Woolf'* puts it perfectly when she sums the latter up by saying *"Everything one can say about her at this moment seems too soon or too late; and to try to tell the truth about a person so unusual and of such integrity is so important one scarcely dares to make the attempt. One fears to plant lilies: she would have disliked that. Even to write poems about her — in a sense the most suitable kind of elegy for her — seems too much like wrapping her in a lullaby and singing her to rest."*

The ideology behind what makes a "true artist" is a contaminated one. It is inherently polluted by the emotions of consumers and audiences. Truth in art has little value in production and is given far too much value post-production. Or is it the other way around? Does the purpose of art trump the pedestals it is placed on later in its shelf life? Besides, even the term "art" is conceptually different for its creator and audience. This is where sub-textual swamps crop up. The term "genius" in art is almost synonymous with the term "tortured" but no one

“ Truth in art has little value in production and is given far too much value post-production. Or is it the other way around? Does the purpose of art trump the pedestals it is placed on later in its shelf life? ”

“ This is the narrow realm where escapism is either condemned or justified. Where it is either worth the horrible tragedy suffered by one person during their life to later be cemented in history's consciousness and conscience and the sad, silent, suppressed that dwell and drown in what the former create. ”

can quite classify the degrees of either. Is an overtly tortured artist like Kurt Cobain a genius, because he was tortured or was he tortured by that very genius? The same pathology can be applied to the legions who couldn't separate themselves from their creations: Woolf, Wallace, Plath, Van Gogh, Elvis, Hendrix... *et al.* The list is long.

Google reveals 964,000 results for entries under "artists who committed suicide" and these listings are further annotated according to musicians, painters, writers and actors. There are lists that distinguish between suicide and death due to substance abuse, although, for many an artist the latter often constitutes life-by-substance abuse. This is not to say that all artists are over-sensitive, pedantic, cry babies who kill themselves because someone didn't like their painting as in the case of French water colourist Le'on Bonvin, who hung himself from a tree in a Meudon forest after a dealer rejected his work. Also, it doesn't do to assume that artistic genius is always synonymous with depression; there are plenty of statistics to lend weight to that troupe. In a sample of 4,564 eminent artists who died in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, an independent Garzanti's Encyclopedia research team determined that 2,259 were primarily involved with linguistic pursuits, i.e. poets and writers; 834 were visual artists and 1,471 were musicians. There were 63 suicides and an initial logistic regression analysis of data found that artists have 270% higher risk of suicide than non-artists. Factoring in gender controls and other socio-demographic variables brought this figure down to a still-staggering

125%. There is plenty of science out there to support the relationship between suicide and creativity. Some scientists have suggested that the same changes in the Serotonergic system that are associated with depression in general and with impulsive suicides and homicides in the extreme, may also be responsible for risk-taking and sensitivity that characterizes creativity and innovation among most artists. In literary terms everyone from Bob Dylan's *"Behind every beautiful thing there's been some kind of pain"*<sup>11</sup> to Dostoyevsky's *"The pleasure of despair. But then, it is in despair that we find the most acute pleasure, especially when we are aware of the hopelessness of the situation... everything is a mess in which it is impossible to tell what's what, but that despite this impossibility and deception it still hurts you, and the less you can understand, the more it hurts"*<sup>12</sup>, have expressed this sentiment.

I suppose the real issue does not lie in the links between creativity and despair, but rather in the genius that justifies it. It's not that I can't relate to certain sorts of art better or even that I can. It's that I am painfully aware of the silent, all-encompassing distinction between consuming art and producing it. This is the narrow realm where escapism is either condemned or justified. Where it is either worth the horrible tragedy suffered by one person during their life to later be cemented in history's consciousness and conscience and the sad, silent, suppressed that dwell and drown in what the former create. The importance of the parameters on pathos that divides the geniuses and the gentiles, the maestros from the mishaps cannot be overstated.

The fact is, the word “success” whether in life or post-life often ends up justifying a life itself. An ordinary person’s suicide is a tragic loss but an artist’s suicide is part of some cosmic genealogy that connects them to all the others who were “so misunderstood” in life but none of it really matters because “look what they left us with?” The only successful suicides belong to those that mattered somewhat before in life only to matter too much after. After all, genius can be excused anything.

How we, the consumers of their art feel, is quite different. Our maladjustment still requires the salve of success to qualify it from “just being dramatic”. I’m not sure if it can simply be chalked up to a sense of kinship as that requires an equal kinship of genius, of poetry and overwhelming, bubbling art-enough to excuse your *you*-ness.

the difference painfully well. In my quotient of damage vs. artistic damages, I end up weighing far too heavily in the former column and far too lightly in the latter. I have often thought that these words might be the death of me, that not expressing them would kill me. But then I think, what if I did express them and they couldn’t stand up to the ones I need them to. It’s the worst form of purgatory, to be killed by words that aren’t even your own. It is impossible to determine what makes art great but suicide certainly makes one search for greatness in art. It’s almost as if we need to find some beauty to mitigate the tragedy or justify it or worse... encourage it.

What then, is the fate of the rest of us morbid, escapist, lonely, fuck-ups, who lack the genius to justify ourselves? Do we produce art, regardless of consequences... or do we tailor it

“There is some sad, solitary sort of honesty in the act of admitting defeat in the face of life. There are times after all, where one thinks, there has to be something fundamentally wrong with us to be able to live with ourselves and what we do to each other.”

Most of us don’t have that. And without it, we are just borderline nihilists perpetually playing around with the ideals of romance.

I have always been haunted by the overwhelming realisation that I can’t write because I am all too aware of what great writing is. The pathological phobia of entering a pool so deep, so ephemerally immersed in immortal words and ideas always keeps one at the periphery looking in. The ability to recognise great art, is perhaps the most crippling barrier to being an artist oneself. Words flow from me sometimes... occasionally they are even good ones. I am not utterly oblivious to that fact, but they are never great and sadly, I know

for consequences?

And yet, this pathos is not synonymous with fantasy in any way. Most writers who delve into the dark tend not to steep themselves too deep in metaphor. They don’t summon dragons and ride unicorns as often as choosing to wage a much more dangerous battle. They wear their heart and their words on their sleeve, both literal and literary. These are artists who do not try to make sense out of nonsense or light out of their darkness, they wrap their darkness like a shroud. They live it and breathe it. French sociologist Émile Durkheim, in his 1897 book ‘*Suicide*’ termed the condition “anomie”. He described it as a state of “*derangement and insatiable will. Of*

*seeking solace in soul-destruction*”. For Durkheim, Anomie generally arose due to a mismatch between personal and societal standards of ethics, morality, passion and aspiration. The irony was almost always that the despairing artist was in that state because their standards were invariably, unalterably higher. Camus’s ‘*L’Étranger*’ exemplifies this beautifully: “*There is not love of life without despair about life.*”

It is perhaps for these characters and for the ones that they in turn create that solitary confinement would never be the worst possible form of punishment. Certainly not worse than society. This is because their carrot-stick method is much stricter. So much of it is about acceptance and not just of oneself but of one’s surroundings. Given the elevated standards of most of these tortured beings, those surroundings just always seemed to fail them.

“So he was deserted. The whole world was clamouring: Kill yourself, kill yourself, for our sakes. But why should he kill himself for their sakes? Food was pleasant; the sun hot; and this killing oneself, how does one set about it, with a table knife, uglily, with floods of blood, - by sucking a gas pipe? He was too weak; he could scarcely raise his hand. Besides, now that he was quite alone, condemned, deserted, as those who are about to die are alone, there was a luxury in it, an isolation full of sublimity; a freedom which the attached can never know.”<sup>13</sup>

I suppose some of suicide in art is about ownership and acceptance, as much as one might hate to acknowledge it. There is some sad, solitary sort of honesty in the act of admitting defeat in the face of life. There are times after all, where one thinks, there has to be something fundamentally wrong with us to be able to live with ourselves and what we do to each other. I definitely know that I personally continue to struggle with these themes and I do so without the burden of both talent and genius. It is not hard to recognise that many an artist is defined by maladjustment; everything that follows merely romanticizes the enterprise. Sure, you can say that they “didn’t try hard enough to battle their demons” but then it’s an impossible task, isn’t it: to make art out of carnage, beauty out of

blasphemy, to define your world against theirs, give birth to your own people to avoid people and still shine brighter for it.

(Endnotes)

- 1 ‘*Infinite Jest*’, David Foster Wallace, 2006, Back Bay Books; 10 Anv edition
- 2 ‘*A Room of One’s Own*’, Virginia Woolf, 2012 (reprint of 1929 edition), Martino Fine Books
- 3 ‘*The Bell Jar*’, Sylvia Plath, Harper Perennial Modern Classics (October 17, 2006)
- 4 David Foster Wallace Interview Series with David Lipsky.
- 5 Wallace, pp. 606
- 6 Plath, pp.77
- 7 ‘*Brief Interviews with Hideous Men*’, David Foster Wallace, 2000, Back Bay Books
- 8 ‘*Although Of Course You End Up Becoming Yourself: A Road Trip with David Foster Wallace*’, David Lipsky, Broadway
- 9 Plath, pp.81
- 10 ‘*The Diary of Virginia Woolf*’, 17 February 1922
- 11 *Not Dark Yet*, Bob Dylan (Time Out of Mind Album, 1997)
- 12 ‘*Notes from the Underground*’, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, 1992 (new edition) Dover Publications;
- 13 ‘*Mrs Dalloway*’, Virginia Woolf, 2012 (1947 reprint) Martino Fine Books

*Maria Amir is Features Editor for the magazine.*

# Overseer: Ranks

The school went up in arms and chaos  
and uproar like a protest in one of them  
Middle-East countries you does see on TV,  
up in arms when Ranks gave the Boss a *gòjet*,  
caught him with a hook-handed jab to the throat,  
pointing our finger-guns to the sky.  
Nobody went to class that day. The day  
was one six-hour long period of lessons  
in mayhem and revolt. Boys breathed  
fire on the whole upright plantation  
of postures where the teachers  
stood, outside the staffroom, in shock  
and indignation; burning. It must've started the day  
when his mother came in second form  
to beat Ranks in front of the Boss and  
his school, to show—like parents used to do  
to please priests in the old days—  
their total intolerance of upsetting the way  
things were and forever should be.  
From then he revolted, cursed teachers,  
wagged his tongue at the Boss, waved  
his middle finger at the Virgin Mary Statue  
on her Saint's day. But after that massa-day-done  
when he became our Patron Saint of Resistance,



Artwork by Nora Pinell

Ranks rolled and rolled and gathered no moss  
in the society that Boss and his minions seemed  
to have mastered. He dropped out, smoked himself  
into madness, dressed in rags. The teachers invoked him,  
reduced him to his Christian name 'Ethelbert',  
called upon him like a Saint to show us  
what lesson exactly? Ranks was a good boy  
when he first came. Neat, school shoes polished,  
the seam in his pants slicing wind  
as he walked. He said nothing in class,  
talked when he was spoken to. Nobody  
tells that part of his story now, the whole  
tale broken and bent over, like a boy  
being caned, to fit into the allegory,  
their Poetic idea of Justice. Now when we  
happen to oversee him in the street, you could tell  
he is no longer himself, no longer with us,  
grown *meg*, skeletal, living among us, a kind of afterlife.  
He was their lesson, a flint-rock enclosing one fiery memory  
of that glory day, that attempted coup-d'etat when our school  
became the Middle East, nearly Biblical, when Ethelbert  
aka Ranks almost, almost slayed the Beast.

~Vladimir Lucien

# SPOTLIGHT ARTIST FAIZAAN AHAB

*In an intimate interview with Creative Director Moeed Tariq, Spotlight Artist Faizaan Ahab reveals the process behind his intricate visuals, why he chooses to work in the medium he does, discovering other genres and layers in his work. As Mr. Ahab says, “there is more than meets the eye” in his work.*





**Q** Tell us a little bit about yourself: What got you interested in art? Have you taken any art classes?

**A** I've always shown keen interest in artistic pursuits. I remember I started to pay attention to details consciously when I was really young and I've been drawing ever since. Even in school, art was my favorite subject and I eventually ended up graduating from the National College of Arts, practicing architecture and interior design along with other mediums of creative expression passionately: painting, dance and acting. I feel expression in any form is not only imperative but also invigorating, and hence, with the dream to one day travel around the world, I wish to affiliate with people's expressions more personally and creatively.

**Q** What is your preferred medium and why?

**A** It's been different mediums throughout for me. My work has evolved over time and I've been very moody about it. It happened in phases and each phase had me experimenting with different mediums. And that's still how it is, though I like quick drying mediums: acrylic or pen and ink as opposed to watercolors or oil-based paint because when I start working on a piece I not only want it to finish quickly, but [for it] also becomes permanent!

**Q** Do you have an online portfolio or a blog where we can view your work?

**A** Some of my recent work is on [Behance](#).

**Q** Do you have a favorite artist? If yes, what draws you to that person's work?

**A** It definitely has to be (Salvadore) Dalí... I take a lot of inspiration from him, not just in the kind of work I produce but also in personal life dynamics, [in terms of] how he treated his own life like a work of art. I like how he had an extremely flamboyant and egotistical personality. His erratic behavior, passion for life and experiments with pushing the limits of the mind and body all contribute to the impressive and important works of art he left as his legacy.

**Q** Can you remember one of the first things you drew, sculpted, painted, or photographed? What makes it memorable?

Yes, I painted a still life in

**A** poster paints back in the first grade for an art competition and won. I remember it distinctly because, well, I got a prize, and also because everyone at the time told me they really liked it. I really liked it too, especially the color palette I used, which consisted of black with tones of yellow.

**Q** Have you ever stepped out of your comfort zone and discovered a whole new genre of art? How did it turn out?

**A** Yes and no. I have more than a few times ventured into things that were new for me but at the back of my mind I knew I'd eventually be comfortable, if not entirely good, at doing them, whether it was new mediums of expression, fusion of techniques or seasoning of a prior approach, whatever. I remember when I had my

first exhibition or when I first started acting, when I took up dance and even when I started mixing art and architecture and performance arts together, each time I was very reluctant and had a suspicious amount of confidence. But then again, I ended up doing all of it!

**Q** Do you have any other interesting hobbies or maybe a fun story about an experience involving your artwork?

**A** I wouldn't say I have a lot of hobbies, but I like being involved in things. I do pretty much everything with pretty much everyone I can. I remember spending some time [with] a bunch of people, some of them I personally knew and others I didn't. And we all decided to start drawing on a piece of paper in rotation adding some detail each time the paper came to us. And it was a huge sheet, so everyone waited for their

turn till there was no space left. And then the next day we all decided to cut the sheet into the number of people in the room the previous night and we all got to keep a piece each, signed by everyone. I still have mine!

**Q** Where can you be reached in case our readers are interested in commissioning you for their own projects?

**A** I'm very much directly accessible via email (faizaan.ahab@gmail.com), Facebook (Faizaan Ahab) and phone calls (+92 321 5290030).

**Q** What, in your opinion, is the hardest step in creating a masterpiece?

**A** Sitting down and starting it.

# CANVAS



Wonder by Danielle Boodoc Fortuné

We bent to enter the dark doorway. Unlike Alice, we knew where everything was: an old ottoman under the window, the crooked table with an oil lamp set to one side, the bureau leaning in a corner bearing a few enamel plates, cups made from empty margarine tins; two metal spoons. We could find with our eyes shut the one-burner Primus stove and the “smut-tot” she used when kerosene oil grew scarce.

It was none of these that kept drawing us back. It was the piece of canvas she had hung to separate her living space from where she slept in her one-room house.

When time and the damp bit chunks out of her canvas, Miss Lewis filled the spaces with pictures she had clipped from magazines and old newspapers: Greta Garbo and Marilyn Monroe capsized us with their brilliant smiles, bright blue eyes

and shiny red lipstick. How we wanted to be like them, blond hair and all!

John Wayne sported his cowboy hat; Humphrey Bogart, cigar between his teeth, starred in a film called Casablanca; all from a place named Hollywood, where only the beautiful lived, and stars shone night and day.

Sir Winston Churchill, hero of World War II lived in London, just like the Queen. London was bombed and its bridge was broken. We hated the horrible Hitler with his strange mustache. He tortured Jews in something called the concentration camps.

\*\*\*\*\*

What passing stranger could have guessed that in this tiny tumble-down dwelling, small village children stood, not on a bare dirt-floor, but tiptoe at the rim of the world.

~ Esther Phillips

# Deconstructing the Dream Factory

The star narratives of silent-era fan magazines

By Chuck Williamson

Throughout the early-to-mid 1920s, a string of high-profile “star scandals” threatened to dismantle Hollywood’s self-created image as the modern-day dream factory. National debate intensified as Hollywood soon became synonymous with moral laxity and sexual indiscretion. Three scandals, in particular, galvanised public opinion and exacerbated a particularly vitriolic strand of anti-Hollywood sentiment: the salacious 1921 murder trial of comedian Roscoe “Fatty” Arbuckle (he was acquitted after the third trial), the 1922 murder of director William Desmond Taylor (still unsolved), and the widely circulated stories of “screen lover” Wallace Reid’s debilitating addiction to morphine and eventual drug-related death in 1923. For the public, Hollywood transformed overnight from innocuous factory town to a veritable hotbed of crime, licentiousness, and moral transgression. These scandals (and many others) threatened to expose the repressed underside of Hollywood stardom, where success hinged less on individual initiative than on sexual submissiveness, and fame always came at the cost of moral ruination.

As scandal-mongering became a national pastime, a bur-

geoning but short-lived cottage industry of anti-Hollywood publications tried to capitalise on this newly provoked fervor. These works were libelous, largely disposable, and filled with spurious claims and wild speculations that delivered on the promise of their often salacious titles. Perhaps no work better seized upon this virulent strand of anti-Hollywood sentiment than Theodore Dreiser’s *Hollywood: Its Morals and Manners*, a multi-chapter expose published in *Shadowland* from November 1921 to February 1922. In this series of articles, Dreiser channeled his deep-seated (and long-lingering) enmity for the movie capital in a froth-mouthed harangue. Perhaps one of the period’s most denunciatory and vitriolic attacks on the movie industry, Dreiser’s article emerged from his disastrous (and, by all accounts, impulsive) 1919 relocation from New York to Southern California, after the financially strapped author accepted Jesse L. Lasky’s invitation to submit screenplays to Famous Players. Dreiser’s decision was also motivated by his ongoing sexual dalliance with his cousin, Helen Richardson, who had long aspired to become a famous film actress. Indeed, Dreiser’s scorched earth campaign

against Tinsel Town stemmed less from empirical research than from anecdotal evidence piped in from Richardson.

At times evoking the plot of *Sister Carrie* (1900), where “kept women” manoeuvre their way from the bedroom and into the limelight with shocking regularity, Dreiser paints the “hundreds and even thousands of girls” flooding Hollywood film studios as passive victims, or “sexual prey,” exploited and degraded by hordes of unscrupulous producers, directors, male performers, and casting directors.<sup>1</sup> The aspiring actress faces impossible odds, locked in a war of attrition with other would-be performers. To succeed, she must rigorously maintain and amplify her physical beauty, “*decorat[ing] herself so that she might attain some degree of bodily perfection in order to better differentiate herself from the perpetually expanding mob of aspirants.*”<sup>2</sup> But Dreiser cautions that this circuitous quest for fame and fortune inexorably ends in either abject failure or sexual submission. They become prey to a horde of high-salaried employers who “*can, by any hook or crook, contrive any possible claim upon the time or attention or services of those of the feminine persua-*

*sion — the younger and prettier and less experienced, of course — who are seeking to make an ill-page way of life in this, in the main, gruelling realm.*”<sup>3</sup> The self-imposed beautification regimes — of diet, costuming, and cosmetics — through which the aspirant tries to re-fashion herself into “star material” also marks her as sexual prey. All avenues to screen success lead directly to the casting couch.

These tropes — reductive even at the time of their inception — coloured much of the discourse on stardom throughout the decade, becoming indelible parts of Hollywood’s self-regulated mythology. Stories of star aspirants working their way to the top of the Hollywood food chain transformed into subtle cautionary tales; the gold-flecked fantasies of stardom were perverted into something far more dangerous. But for film fans, the allure of stardom could not be shaken so easily. These narratives still contained strong elements of fantasy and escapism, resulting in stories that indulged in vicarious pleasures while also acknowledging the dangers and moral compromises implicit in pursuing stardom. In the shadow of scandal, popular magazines lined their pages with fictionalised stories of film

stardom that, ironically, purported to tell the “truth” about Hollywood and its odd denizens.

This is particularly noticeable in the serialised fiction found in fan magazines. Throughout the 1920s, fan magazines emerged as the prime source of extracinematic discourse on Hollywood and film stardom, feeding their “movie mad” consumers (predominantly female) a steady diet of gossip, film reviews, and vapid celebrity profiles. Exemplary amongst the myriad fan magazines of the 1910s and 1920s was *Photoplay*, which gradually rose to prominence under the editorial control of James R. Quirk. Amongst James Quirk’s most significant editorial policies was his decision to gradually phase out the multi-page motion picture plot summaries — a weak substitute for “fiction” — in order to better accommodate an ongoing series of short stories and serialised novels that gave readers fictionalised accounts of those who lived and worked within Hollywood’s “dream factory.”

These stories, far removed from the one-sided invectives of Theodore Dreiser, targeted consumers of film product and gave them the “insider’s account” they so desperately de-

sired. They tethered to their fantasies a lurid “realism,” engaging in popular fantasies while also illustrating with surprising candor the pitfalls of film stardom: casting couches, in-studio backbiting, the exorbitant time and labour demanded from stars both on- and off-set. In direct address to *Photoplay*’s female readership, these fictionalised narratives catered to the familiar wish-fulfillment fantasies that take on a formulaic fairy-tale structure: underprivileged girls are plucked from obscurity, rescued from extreme penury, and refashioned into marquee idols. Film stardom becomes the final reward for their chastity and humility, the end goal for a Cinderella dogged by svengalis and sexual predators. The heroines are inconspicuous “everywomen,” convenient avatars through which the reader might vicariously navigate Hollywood’s hidden corridors. Without fail, they are always relatable, unassuming, and come from humble origins: the semi-literate ticket vendors, small-town beauty queens, anonymous “extras,” and failed stage actresses. Through pluck and ingenuity, they work their way into the the upper-echelons of film stardom — and, consequently, come face-to-face with total self-annihilation.



Artwork by Marta Syrko

Samuel Merwin's *Hattie of Hollywood*, a serial novel published in Photoplay from July to December 1922, apotheosises the sort of star narratives that emerged from this period. Attracting a significant amount of fanfare and advance praise, Merwin's novel was the first of major significance serialised in Photoplay since the 1916-17 run of Francis William Sullivan's *The Glory Road*. It tells the story of Hattie Johnson, a sheltered mailing clerk "transition[ing] out of inconspicuous youth into budding womanhood."<sup>4</sup> At first blush, Merwin's novel unfolds as a stock fantasy scenario. A Cinderella stand-in whose blandness makes her the ideal reader surrogate, Hattie captures the attention of Earthwide Film auteur Armond de Brissac and rockets to supreme film stardom. But Hattie's journey is not an easy one. Merwin pits the novel's chaste, preternaturally pure star-aspirant against a cabal of sinister film magnates who exploit her for financial gain and sexual gratification.

Chief amongst her tormentors is Armond de Brissac, a studio director with the autocratic zeal of Erich von Stroheim, the lavish extravagance of Cecil B. DeMille, and about a fraction of their combined charm. According to Merwin, he "*is at one moment a slave driver, a tireless dynamo, and the next a suave man of the world.*"<sup>5</sup> He is a libertine who lines his walls with intimate photographs of his sexual conquests, hounds Hattie with invasive questions about her sexual experience, and continually makes unwanted sexual advances on his actresses. In some respects, he resembles the straw man of nativist rhetoric: a Pan-

European "other" whose sexual perversions are a concomitant feature of his "ethnic" origins. Or, as one of his assistant directors gravely intones, "*You see, de Brissac's a big man — he's a wonderful man — but he's got foreign ideas.*"<sup>6</sup> In Merwin's universe of dualistic extremes, de Brissac's sexual perversions threaten to sully our virginal aspirant-heroine and compromise her racial-moral purity. The narrative's dramatic tension hinges on Hattie's unwavering resistance to his sexual demands, which only falters momentarily when she realises that submission might constitute the most accessible stepping-stone to stardom.

But Merwin's novel periodically punctures this tension in order to indulge in escapism and frivolity, trumpeting the transformative possibilities of stardom even as it portrays the aspirant's path as a perilous one. Hattie begins the novel as "a simple-minded, plain little girl,"<sup>7</sup> an insignificant child with low self-esteem who gains fame, fortune, self-confidence, and some degree of autonomy through her experiences in Hollywood. Merwin does not shirk away from the extravagance and sense of elation that comes with stardom, nor does he mince words when describing Hattie's physical transformation from anonymous nobody to hyper-glamorous movie star. During her screen test, Hattie experiences a newfound sense of pleasure in witnessing her own appearance and begins to see "*her slim body in a new light, [sic] as an instrument of expression.*"<sup>8</sup> Appropriately, Hattie's first screen test presents her as an ethereal figure: wan, in-

nocent, and luminescent in the white glow of de Brissac's light machines. She is rendered into a symbol of purity, a fair and unsullied figure plucked right out of a fairy tale. But in Merwin's novel (and other stories of its ilk), Hollywood exists as a dangerous space where fairy tales might be contaminated or perverted, where Cinderella's enchanted gown comes at a ruinous cost.

*Chuck Williamson is Film Critic for the magazine.*

#### Endnotes

1. Theodore Dreiser, "Hollywood: Its Morals and Manners," in *The Best of Shadowland*, ed. Anthony Slide. (Mutuchen, NJ: Scarecrow P, 1987), 86.
2. Dreiser, *Hollywood: Its Morals and Manners*, 78.
3. Dreiser, "Hollywood: Its Morals and Manners," 85-6.
4. Samuel Merwin, "Hattie of Hollywood (first installment)," in *Photoplay* 22 (July 1922), 29.
5. Samuel Merwin, "Hattie of Hollywood (third installment)," in *Photoplay* 22 (September 1922), 29.
6. Merwin, "Hattie of Hollywood (third installment)," 32.
7. Merwin, "Hattie of Hollywood (first installment)," 29.
8. Merwin, "Hattie of Hollywood (first installment)," 85.

# From The Book of Dreams

By Vahni Capildeo

Someone had developed the bay since our last visit. The drive north was the same as for the more famous bathing-place; only a little further. We parked and began the uncertain walk (what should the feet expect? blown sand over paved path, or deep sand? mud or quicksand? broken bottle or quartz?), to arrive at the tight little curve. The lines in the sea threw up walls of light, drawing an imaginary stadium around the bay – an under-resourced stadium whose building contractor had run off with the cash: the walls of light, lined like sea, were like corrugated metal, grey and splashed with rust or the red of rained-on national slogans.

It wasn't a question of us arriving late: the grey and rust, scrub and dust, in a place indubitably holiday destination-ish for the people who lived on the island even more than for the thin-on-the-ground tourists.

Up till the previous bend in the road, the day had retained its colour.

The match had not started.

We walked down the steep slope to what was not defined enough to be a beach – more the area belonging to the sea. The ground was damp-packed, indicating that sometimes but not always it was below water. We turned left, or south-west, and

up a smaller slope. The pleasant, ramshackle new hotel, two and a half storeys high, overlooking the bay, had an old-fashioned gallery running the length of each floor. Perhaps not belonging to the hotel, there was a not-imaginary slice of stadium, or rather seats in tiered stands and something like a barbecue area, covering the western part of the angle of the small bay. That was new. It looked worn.

The match was starting. We sat on metal folding chairs in the first floor gallery, to watch the boys play football in the sea.

“Eh-eh! But what are you doing here!” It was the drum majorette from the Form II March Past parade – how many years ago? Grown up now, pretty in red, with a frosty can of something in her hand. Retired headmistresses. Half-remembered prefects. Everybody's aunt in a flowered hat and coral lipstick, the weight of a picnic cooler testing the strength of her talcum-thick wrist. Somebody's father (but hadn't he died?) trying harder to be friendly since he had betrayed his wife. The boys from the College of the Immaculate Conception, out of uniform and in red or white cotton T-shirts that burned and cowed over the forbidden meagreness that, shyly and muskily, was – not their bodies --- was also-them. Other boys from their college were in the sea, all at sea, playing

football in the sea. We were gathered there together to watch the match.

How were they managing it? Their knees were lifting above the waves. Despite the absence of goalposts, and the shifting depth of water, the boys seemed to know where to go. They were playing side-on to the waves; side-on to us. The waves came in faster, following one another like one ridged iguana moving from branch to branch. The boys were thin and whippy like coconut trees, heads ferocious clusters of concentration.

“The match going well!”

But a dark cloud was blowing up, between the open sea and the edge of mountain. And the boys would not stop playing. And the wind was blowing up too, chill and bitter and salt, what the Atlantic brings to the tropics and is not 'tropical'. The drops of rain then, heavy like one cent coins, hitting us like spiteful alms. And the boys seemed unable to stop playing. And they were kicking the ball up somehow from under greater and greater depth of water, and we remarked their sportsmanship from their elbows, the tops of their torsos, the struggling coconut-heads above the waves, in between the waves. They were in deeper. The sea was nearer. Nearer to us.



*Earth Aflame by Danielle Boodoo-Fortuné*

We were not enjoying watching the boys playing football in the sea. They were playing the match of their lives.

Under the rimlet of every

wave gasping further up on to the damp-packed ground, the sea brought more darkness.

Then the approximate stadium of the bay began, most

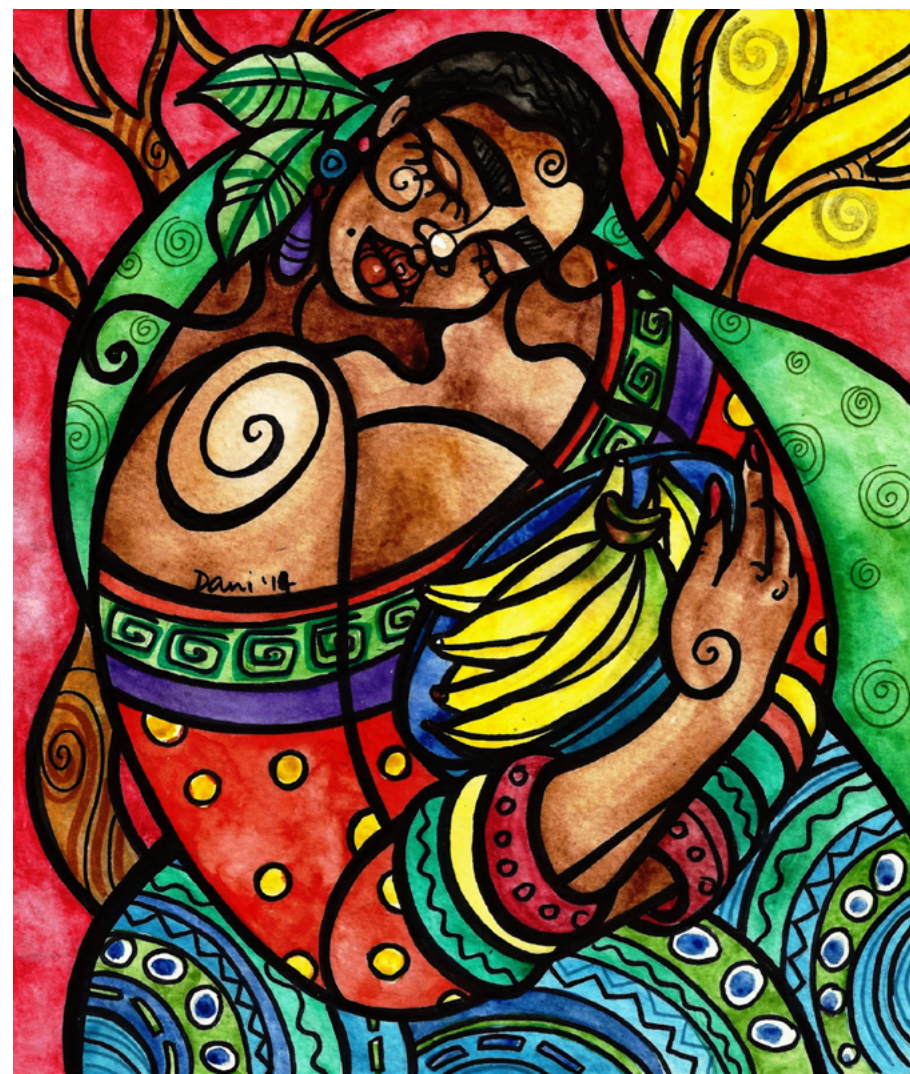
impressively, to acquire a fourth wall.

The Atlantic was going to join the match, and come in to the hotel afterwards.

# Cher Ami

By Elizabeth Walcott-Hackshaw

They were on a hike, going down the steep terrain; the path was treacherous; thank God Zeus was there to help them. He was in front in his tall black rubber boots, bare backed, loose surfer shorts and a machete. Monica was next; she was dressed for an aerobics class; then Carolyn, same outfit as Monica, different colours and finally Baba, torn white tee-shirt, washed out shorts, old sneakers and the widest smile of all. Sometimes they had to crawl on their bottoms to avoid slipping and sliding over the edge, sometimes they had to swing on vines like monkeys, but Zeus was always steady, he walked as though it were a paved road, flat land, he walked as though he could lead them down the hill with his eyes closed.



*Blue Bowl of Plantains by Danielle Boodoo-Fortunée*

“When people look at them, I don’t really know what they see, but I see my whole life, right there with them. My father had them, his father had them, family tradition, family business, you know what I mean.”

Baba was talking about his pigeons; apart from his son, Baba’s life was devoted to his pigeons.

“They saved a lot of lives you know; look in World War 1, one of them, a pigeon called Cher Ami, was awarded a big time prize, the “Croix de Guerre,” imagine she was wounded and still managed to deliver a message that saved two hundred American soldiers.”

“That’s amazing,” Monica said. She was the only one who

was really interested; new to the group, she had never heard Baba talk about his birds before. Zeus and Carolyn, or Caro, as they called her, had heard the story many times.

“This is the hardest part and then it gets easy.” Zeus didn’t turn around when he said this, and the other three just laughed and moaned; every part had been hard from the moment they started.

“Zeus boy, if I knew how hard this thing was going to be not sure I would have brought these ladies.”

“I’m no lady,” Caro said, “I can assure you of that.”

“Speak for yourself, I am.” But the moment Monica replied, as if on cue, she slipped and landed, very unladylike, with her legs spread eagle. They all laughed, including Monica.

“You see, the man up there don’t like it when you tell untruths.” Baba chuckled at his own gibe and managed to help Monica up even though it meant grabbing onto the thorny trunk of a tree.

“Watch out for pricklers.” Zeus hadn’t even turned around. “Don’t worry, the rest of the way is not so bad and just now you’ll see the first waterfall. It’s a small one now, a little trickle, but in the rainy season you get real water, pouring down like mad.”

“How many waterfalls are there?”

“Three; you’ll see.”

\*

In the car on the way to the hike, Carolyn had given Monica the run down on Zeus.

“Zeus is a twin you know, his brother is, was, called Pollo.”

“Short for chicken? In Spanish, you know, *pollo*.” Monica put on her best Spanish accent.

“Such a comedian; no, fool, short for Apollo.”

“These are real names?” Monica laughed but Carolyn said yes with a serious face. She had not given it a second thought when she was growing up with them.

“You don’t understand, Zeus and Pollo were identical twins, you could barely tell them apart, the one difference was that Pollo had smaller eyes, or different shaped eyes, but listen, they were like Gods, brown all over and sprinkled with some kind of gold dust.”

“It gets better, Gods and gold dust?” Monica was having fun now.

“Their mother is Dutch or Danish or something like that and the father is local. Really golden, athletic, on the football team, and not stupid, not brilliant but certainly not stupid, like some of the others. When you saw Zeus you saw Pollo; it was like that, as though they were somehow still attached.”

By now they were driving along the ridge and Monica asked Carolyn to stop so she could take some photographs. On the ridge you could see the sea on one side and the valley on the other. It was early morning and the breeze brought with it a freshness that captured the smells of chive and dill farmed on the steep hillsides. Monica

“ On the ridge you could see the sea on one side and the valley on the other. It was early morning and the breeze brought with it a freshness that captured the smells of chive and dill farmed on the steep hillsides. ”

had last been here when she was still living at home, before she moved away to Florida with her parents. She was eighteen then.

It was only when she was back in the car and nearly at the spot further up the hill where they were going to meet Zeus and Baba that Monica realized that Carolyn had used the past tense.

“You said he was called?”

“What? Who was called?”

“Pollo, Pollo was called?”

“Just caught that, did you? You’ll see Zeus has a scar on his chin, that’s from the accident. Pollo died in a car crash, they were coming back from a party down South, early morning, Zeus, Pollo and two other guys. The one driving, I only remember his last name now, something Laguerre,

anyway, he fell asleep at the wheel and that was it, they crashed into another car after hitting something, ended up on the other side of the highway, heading back down South instead of facing North. Pollo and the other guy died; damn it, I can’t remember his name now. Zeus and Laguerre survived.”

“How old was he?”

“Who, Zeus or Laguerre?”

“Yes, Zeus or Pollo, how old are they, were they, was Pollo?”

“I think he must have been in his early twenties, twenty-two or twenty-three.”

“Long time ago.”

“Not for Zeus, twenty years for us, two minutes for him.”

“So I shouldn’t say anything about a brother.”

“No, Zeus actually likes to talk about Pollo, at least now. There was a time there when he was just lost, left home, disappeared for weeks, months, the parents thought they had lost two sons.”

\*

The last waterfall was the least disappointing of the three that Zeus had promised. It actually had water flowing down into a small pond.

“If we had more time we

could have taken a little dip, the water is really nice, fresh and cool.”

“If we had enough time we could skinny dip, but sorry not today Baba.”

Carolyn loved to tease and flirt with Baba; she knew he had had a crush on her since their high school days. At the time, she had always been flattered but never really gave him much hope and then, much to her surprise, he married her best friend. Still life had taken a strange turn, she and Baba were both divorcés now and it was she not Baba who was doing the chasing, but Carolyn would never admit this.

They could smell the sea on the last part of the hike.

“This is a little tricky,” Zeus said and stopped to make sure they were right behind him. It was the first time he looked a little concerned. They had to hold onto the edge of the jagged rocks, where there were spaces they gripped tightly. Zeus had given them a choice, they could either jump in or swim across the small pool that led to the beach or climb across the narrow pathway gripping the rocks. Baba jumped in and swam across, but Monica and Carolyn followed Zeus. Baba avoided the dark rocks hidden at the bottom of the pool. With the

cutlass now secured in his leather belt Zeus managed to help Carolyn and Monica manoeuvre the tricky path. For the first time Monica was truly afraid that they would not make it; she imagined falling into the pool and hitting her head on a rock, she stopped for a moment, but Zeus held her hand and told her where to put her feet. Carolyn was so athletic she had managed to get to the other side almost in time to meet Baba.

They were all standing on the beach now. The water was a dark green; the sun was almost a surprise having been hiking for so long under the canopy of the giant trees. It was only when they walked closer to the sea that Monica saw the statue for the first time. The broken figure of a Saint seemed to rise up from the sand and tower above them.

“Which Saint is that?” Monica asked

“I think it’s Saint Nicholas, to protect sailors, but to be honest I’m not sure.” Zeus replied.

“How did it get here? And when?” Monica was truly fascinated by the statue in the middle of the beach, they had boasted about the beautiful secret beach but Carolyn had never mentioned the statue. Zeus told her as much as he had learnt from one of the villagers who lived

on the hill close to him. He told her how much he too had been mesmerized by the statue the first time he saw it. Monica was happy, even charmed that Zeus had shared this with her; Zeus, the God who loved the statue of saint. Carolyn was now in the water already telling her to come in. Baba had walked away from them and sat on a log further down the beach. His socks were soaking and filled with sand and pebbles from the river. With socks and shoes in either hand he walked to the edge of the water and washed them. Carolyn’s head was bobbing up and down; she had swum out quite far now. The water was calm and mostly flat, but every once in a while there would be a gentle wave and then, like a silk sheet, the calm would come back. Zeus sat on the sand, his boots and cutlass at his side; he was just staring at something towards the horizon. Zeus eventually walked over to Baba.

“They’ve been friends forever.” Carolyn was sitting on the sand with Monica; she wanted to dry off in the midday sun before putting back on her gym clothes. Carolyn was in such fit shape it made Monica feel a little self-conscious.

“I bet Baba is talking about his pigeons and Zeus about the land he wants to sell.”

“Does Zeus really live in that hut we saw?”

“Since about a year and a half ago, he’s really into being on the land now, growing stuff, selling the property he got from his grandfather. They own a lot of land around here but never really had the money to do anything with it.”

“Does he have any children?”

“Who, Baba?” Carolyn turned towards her.

“No, Zeus I mean.” Monica looked straight ahead.

“Aren’t we very interested now?”

Carolyn had made her feel self-conscious again, only this time it was intentional.

“No kids, but his wife left him years ago, you might remember

her, she was in a class below us, Michelle, her maiden name was Chan.”

“Maybe, the name rings a bell.”

“Why did she leave?” Monica had no idea who Michelle Chan was but she just wanted to know more about Zeus.

“Not sure, maybe because Zeus got married too soon after Pollo died, he was still a mess, so the marriage was a mess. I don’t

come in.

“I swam already.” Carolyn shouted.

“So what, you only allowed one swim?”

But then Carolyn got up and walked into the water with her beautiful toned body and Monica stayed sitting on the sand. She wished she could have summoned enough courage to strip down to the bikini she had on under her gym pants and top.

packed a few snacks of granola bars, cashew nuts, cranberries, things they had managed to stuff into Baba’s knapsack for the hike. Zeus had found two mangoes on the trail down so they had those as well. The four of them sat on the beach and chatted about nothing and everything: Baba’s Cher Ami and his desire to visit the Smithsonian one day where the one-legged body of the famous bird was on display; Carolyn spoke about her bucket list; Monica didn’t say how much

“She wished she could have a morsel of Carolyn’s confidence or was it just the fact that she was simply too shy to undress in front of Zeus?”

think he ever recovered, I’m not sure he ever will.”

“It’s hard, I can’t even imagine losing my sister.”

“How is your sister?”

Carolyn and Monica didn’t notice when Baba and Zeus climbed up and jumped off a rock. They just caught the splash. Baba and Zeus swam over to where the girls were sitting; Baba was encouraging them to

She wished she could have a morsel of Carolyn’s confidence or was it just the fact that she was simply too shy to undress in front of Zeus?

The three of them swam. Monica stayed on the beach and looked at them. She went around the statue and tried to read what was written at the base but what was left of the faded lettering was written in Latin.

Carolyn and Monica had

she hated the expression “bucket list” or the way Americans could make every idea even approaching death sound so banal; Zeus spoke about how difficult it was to sell land now, especially to foreigners who were getting more nervous about the crime and what once had seemed exotic was now simply dangerous. They didn’t stay on the beach for a long time but it was enough to make Monica feel as though she was back in her

home for the first time even though she had arrived six months ago.

“We’ll need to head up soon.” Zeus was the first to stand and hold out his hand to pull up Monica and then Carolyn. They dusted off as much sand as they could; Baba put on his socks and shoes that had been spread out on a rock to dry them out in the sun; Carolyn was already dressed and ready to go. She asked them to pose for a picture, the first with the sea in the background, the second in front of the statue; Monica traded places so Carolyn could get into the photo.

When they first started the climb up they chatted about the old days, high school, parties, drinking, they laughed as Baba reminded Caro ( he always called her Caro) about the night she fell asleep on a bench around the savannah: “In those days that could happen and you could wake up still alive and in one piece,” Carolyn said. Monica had little to say, having left for university a month after she finished her A’ levels. Zeus was silent as well, but he laughed at all of Baba’s jokes. When Baba started to talk about his birds Zeus’ thoughts moved to his land, he had gotten many inquiries, especially about the spot near to the waterfalls but there had been no down payments, nothing firm and he needed the money badly. Pollo would have told him what to do, that was how it used to be between them, sometimes the honesty that they had with each other could be painful, but at least he knew that whatever Pollo told him was the truth. His missed his brother most of all for this. Pollo was his best friend and his other side. Monica wanted to turn around as she took step after step up the winding hill, she wanted to look at Zeus. When Baba suggested they stop to collect some mangoes on the path, Monica

let Baba go ahead of her with Carolyn so she could be closer to Zeus. But Zeus would not let her walk behind him, he wanted to be last to make sure they were okay. He didn’t say much to her and once as they got closer to the top and the brush cleared so that they could see the light again he held her waist to prevent her from slipping. His hand on her body sent a shiver, like a current through her spine, something she had not felt in a long time. She thanked him for the help but he didn’t reply; he may have nodded but she couldn’t tell.

When they got to the top of the hill, they met other hikers about to make their way down to the beach. They greeted each other and told them about the calm water and the mangoes they might find. Zeus told them about the other route, that it was a little more difficult, a little steeper but at least they would see the waterfalls. The hikers were not interested in an alternative; they politely declined.

Carolyn invited Zeus to join them for lunch, they were going to drive down the hill to Maracas beach for shark and bake. Zeus said he wanted to get back; he had work to do on the land. Baba pat Zeus’ back, Carolyn gave Zeus a quick peck on the cheek and Monica said thanks and shook his hand. Almost six months would pass before she would see Zeus again. It was in a coffee house in a Mall, she was going over something for work and he walked in. She stared at him, recognizing the beautiful face but not the clothes. Zeus was in a suit and tie, they did not fit well but he still looked remarkable. He hadn’t noticed her so she called out to him.

“Hey, Zeus.” She said and when he turned and saw her his smile was wide.



# To Hold a Meditation



Artwork by Nora Pinell

And then I dive, serene as a turtle,  
goggles strapped tight; I am the bronze-haired  
men at Arawak Cay who dive for conch  
all day. I am looking for shells  
and pebbles, bits of coral, to turn over

and over in my hands, but half-hidden  
by the blue-brown reef is a body tombed  
in amber and seaweed. It is  
my grandfather, brought back now by dayclean  
tide (having set his body to sea since time).

Laid out on the shore, he is a shell of the sea's  
patience. Still in his blind-white  
catechist's gown, now all laced with seaweed,  
coral has cocooned his legs, caked  
his graying hair. Eyes closed with two stones.

All on shore rejoice my find— the brethren,  
the braiders, the cigar sellers, the lovers.  
We smoke spliffs from pages of the Bible:  
first Peter, then Matthew, then all of Psalms.  
We crouch under casuarinas (praise

these trees older than anything  
we know). We hold a meditation.

~ Christian Campbell

# Literary or Not —

## The Reality of Escapist Fiction

Denied respect for much of literary history, what is the true value of escapist fiction?

By Sana Hussain

“Pitted against its supposedly superior counterpart, realism, escapism is considered inconsequential and superfluous.”

Escapist fiction by definition is writing that permits the reader to escape the ennui of the real world and indulge vicariously in an alternate reality. It is fiction that allows the reader to doff the burden of their problems and inhabit a world concocted by the author; a world that makes up for the arbitrariness and unpredictability of the real world by offering structure, rationality and resolution.

Given this definition, it may be argued that most fiction and the act of reading itself are escapist pursuits. I know for me they are. As a shy teenager, I found great comfort in reading; in being the eighth member of the Secret Seven club, in accompanying George and her cousins to mysterious moors and dark caves, and in being the partner in crime to the girls of Malory Towers. And even

though I am not a teenager anymore, there is something to be said about the simple pleasure of immersing oneself in the predictable comfort of an old book, forgetting the real world that exists outside its musky, dog-eared pages.

But now, the words “escapism” and “escapist fiction” come laden with negative connotations. I am told that I must feel ashamed about my reading habits if I have a proclivity for the genre; call it a guilty pleasure? Critics and academicians classify escapist fiction and the genres of science-fiction, thriller, mystery, romance and fantasy, commonly classified under it, as sub-literary, deeming them unworthy of being regarded as true literature. Charges of shallowness and superficiality are brought up against escapist genre fiction, with its worth denigrated to entertainment alone. Not to disregard any motivation to read for purely aesthetic purposes, but the assertion that escapist fiction offers nothing more than the mere pleasure of escape is both false and unfounded.

The social and emotional value of escapism in fiction cannot be ignored just because it af-

fords the readers an escape into an alternate world. In fact, by allowing its readers to become absorbed into the world of fictional characters, escapist fiction enables them to be more compassionate, something researchers believe stems from “*the direct immersion in another person’s mind and body — that stimulates our empathic muscles.*”

Norwegian psychologist Frode Stenseng categorizes escapism into two categories based on their respective outcomes: self-suppression and self-expansion. He acknowledges that there can indeed be a healthy motivation to seek escape, resulting in a more informed view of self. Fiction, I believe, offers more insight into human behavior than many psychological theories; in fact, seminal psychoanalytic theories (like that of the Oedipus complex) are drawn from literature.

Growing up with an old-school English teacher as a parent, the distinction was always made clear in my home. After a certain age, reading classics or literary fiction became an activity that was rewarded and encouraged, whereas reading a piece of escapist novel by Sidney Sheldon or Danielle Steele



Come To Me by Faizan Ahab

was severely looked down upon. And while I was never barred from reading any of this “trash”, there was significant shaming involved. So much so that I never actually owned a book by either of these authors for more than a month — I would read them and quickly trade them in for more “respectable” books at old book shops. This hierarchical division of books deemed worthy of being read against those that weren’t was neither right nor beneficial, in my opinion. Classification of literature should only be on the merits of good and bad writing. And reading, whether escapist or otherwise, should be free from expectation and judgment.

Neil Gaiman has also commented on the sully of escapist fiction, “*I hear the term banded about as if it’s a bad thing. As if ‘escapist’ fiction is a cheap opiate used by the muddled and the foolish and the deluded, and the only fiction that is worthy, for adults or for children, is mimetic fiction, mirroring the worst of the world the reader finds herself in.*”

Pitted against its supposedly superior counterpart, realism, escapism is considered inconsequential and superfluous. Unless the work overtly exposes the bitter realities of life or presents the readers with some profound philosophy, it is thought of less as “serious writing” and more as “light reading”. But what is perhaps not understood by critics is that escape does not mean a denial or evasion of real life issues; rather, it presents a more layered and complex way of looking at the world. Lloyd Alexander, popular fantasy writer, defends his genre against such an allegation, saying that “*fan-*

*tasy is hardly an escape from reality. It is a way to understand it.*”

Ask any reader of escapist fiction and they will tell you that these works are, at times, more representative of reality than works of literary fiction. While literary fiction’s way of dealing with reality is undisguised and unambiguous, escapist fiction takes more of a circuitous route to achieve the same. In many cases, writers opt for a more subliminal and indirect method of representing the realities of life. But this in no way means that escapist fiction cannot be as poignant and resonate with a reader as much as any work of literary fiction. Who can say that works like ‘*The Chronicles of Narnia*’ or ‘*The Little Prince*’ are “mere escape”, when they communicate fundamental truths about morality and human behavior? What these simple lines — “*One sees clearly only with the heart. Anything essential is invisible to the eyes... It’s the time that you spent on your rose that makes your rose so important... You become responsible for what you’ve tamed. You’re responsible for your rose.*” — spoken by the fox in Antoine de Saint-Exupery’s superb novella say about human relationships may be more profound than any found in realist fiction. And yet, I remember from my college days that when this story was taught to a bunch of literature students, it was pejoratively dismissed as infantile and escapist by most.

But if you ask me, escapism and realism are not mutually exclusive; based on the premise that all reading is eventually escapist, realist writing can contain the potential to provide escape. Likewise, escapist writing can confront the readers with

the grave realities of life. Fairytales perhaps explain this dichotomy best; despite being the quintessential form of escapist writing, they are layered with universal and timeless life lessons. Bradley J. Birzer recounts an interesting assessment in ‘*J.R.R. Tolkien’s Sanctifying Myth: Understanding Middle-Earth*’. He says that Tolkien believed that fairytales provide humans with a “*means to escape the drabness, conformity, and mechanization of modernity*”. Tolkien appended this sentence with a warning that this escape from the weariness brought on by modernity is not the same as an escaping from reality. He believed that life and its harsh realities are still there, but these tales merely reduce “*all complex reality to a mere shadow of creation’s true wonders*”.

Seen within a historical context, this bias towards escapist fiction seems even more erroneous; some of the writings that are now hailed as literary classics were the escapist writings of another century. ‘*Beowulf*’ and ‘*The Odyssey*’, considered to be among the greatest works of literature ever produced, have provided inspiration for later works of fantasy. But despite the fact that they are inspired by these classics and contain the same stock characters, adventures across oceans and the archetypal fight between good and evil, these later works are classified negatively as escapist fiction and not literature. George Orwell’s ‘*Animal Farm*’ and ‘*1984*’ and Aldous Huxley’s ‘*Brave New World*’ could be classified as escapist fiction by current standards, but cannot be called sub-literary in any way. Jane Austen’s novels have all

“ Classification of literature should only be on the merits of good and bad writing. And reading, whether escapist or otherwise, should be free from expectation and judgment. ”

the prerequisites of escapist fiction; yet today, the works modeled after hers are dismissed as intellectual drivel. Of course, in this case, there is an overt gender bias; one that congratulates men writing about life experiences, but denigrates women for doing the same. This is why these works are grouped under the reductive label of “chick-lit” or the newly (and disturbingly) coined “bodice ripper”. However, the fact that these classics contain elements of escapist fiction and influenced future writers is in itself a negation of the notion that escapist fiction is not enduring.

Despite the popularity of escapist fiction, its reign over the publishing world, and massive appeal for readers, highbrow readers and critics still deem it undeserving of any true merit, placing it a notch below literary fiction. This kind of arrogant rejection, whether it stems from a misguided notion of superiority or asceticism, is fallacious. Escapist fiction needs to be reclaimed to mean more than “mere escape”. The distinction needs to be made on good and bad writing, not on the assumption that certain genre fiction is worthless because it provides an escape to the readers; an escape that may in many cases liberates the reader and reintroduces him/her to a different

reality. Sort of like what Dumbledore says in ‘*Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*’:

“*Tell me one last thing,*” said Harry. “*Is this real? Or has this been happening inside my head?*”

“*...Of course it is happening inside your head, Harry, but why on earth should that mean that it is not real?*”

#### Endnotes

1. <http://lifelifehacker.com/5796031/how-reading-fiction-can-improve-your-social-skills>
2. <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/oct/15/neil-gaiman-future-libraries-reading-daydreaming>
3. <http://blog.writeathome.com/index.php/2012/11/writers-on-the-value-of-fantasy/>
4. <http://thecomilmuse.com/tag/chronicles-of-narnia/>

Sana Hussain is Features Editor for the magazine.



Artwork by Amy Dale

# Montale's Lemons

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My first snow, I open the pages  
of Montale, the scent of iron  
and light coming out of heads

of lemon trees in the middle  
of an orchard where raucous boys  
play, not hearing the eel-quiet laureate

who roams under a sky dappled with rust.  
He comes through the gate, plucks  
acanthus, unburdening himself of the city

and the classics left in his study.  
Standing still, his shadow moves  
to branches brushing earth,

freckling it with flame. Montale stoops  
in flecked leaves, to a flickering secret,  
and what could be translated

as winter fixes a spire in my chest  
and my eyes go low down  
with that crouching tower,

I cling to, a still, revolving truth:  
the world is a golden calyx,  
but home is a burst lemon,

a child weeping at the cane root.

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~ *Ishion Hutchinson*

# Skulking Around the Dark Side of Fandom

Exploring the more problematic facets of the ever expanding online fanfiction world

By Ghausia Rashid Salam

When I was about eleven years old, I discovered Harry Potter. A cousin bought it for me from Riyadh, telling me it was a very famous book, though I had never heard of it before. I was in love immediately, having not yet discovered literary fantasy writers like Tolkien, and still being young and naïve. But it was the Harry Potter series, and by proxy the pursuant fandom, that changed my life by introducing me to fanfiction.

I still look back with fondness at my memories of early fandom and fanfiction; I read Eliza Diawna Snape on her original website; I read Cassandra Clare's early work and thought it was actually good, but I also fell into the dark side of fandom: the one with the inevitable erotica

and twisted storylines. And then I started writing my own fanfiction, and that's all I remember until the point I reached college, which caused me to slowly stop writing it altogether. I was obsessed with fanfiction; school bored me, my classes bored me, my teachers were dull and wanted me to rote-learn instead of motivating me. I never realized how much I loved to learn, because I never had the chance to experience the enthusiasm of learning until I was in college. Fanfiction — or, as it's more commonly referred to, "fanfic" — was my friend. I wrote it in class when the teacher was explaining math problems on the board, or making history so dull I wanted to sleep. I wrote it instead of doing my homework or studying for exams or

getting enough sleep. I wrote it surrounded by family, taking no part in the conversation or even noticing anyone talking to me, in restaurants while eating absent-mindedly. I wrote on sheets of paper torn out of school notebooks, in notebooks, journals, on scrap pieces of paper.

One of my major fanfics had an original character referring to Draco of Harry Potter as "Dragon" (12-year-old me thought it was very clever), and every time someone annoyed me, I'd threaten to "sic Dragon on them" if they didn't stop bothering me. One day, my sister sat me down to talk about who this Dragon was, thinking it was some online boy I had fallen in love with, only to realize it was a make-believe character. I was the one who

“Fanfiction characters normally tend to be weak, helpless, and unable to fight for themselves, and the need for indulging the writer's savior complex through the characters that mirror their own personality, often result in a classic portrayal of rape culture.”

had forgotten he didn't exist. I read a teenage help section in a magazine, about problems with self-harm, and I obsessively pondered for a week about why the young teens who indulged in cutting and other methods of self-harm, didn't just magic the scars away like Harry Potter did in most fanfiction; it took me a week to realize that magic wasn't real, and in real life, you lived with the consequences of your own depression, self-loathing and generally poor mental health. In recess or free periods, I wouldn't talk to friends or do homework, I'd put my head on my desk, block out external stimuli completely, and "take a dip into fantasy-land" as I called it — i.e. writing fanfiction in my head. My fiction-writing process is something I call "moving pictures in the brain" because I can see actual people acting out my story, as if I were watching a movie. I often couldn't sleep at night because my brain was feverishly playing out the moving pictures, and when I finally did sleep, it was to dream up new sequences and plots.

Then one day, I looked up, and over a year of my life had passed by, and I remembered nothing but what I had written. (And, in retrospect, all of it was crap.) My penchant for melodrama aside, it was easy to rebuild my friendships, and

not-so-easy but still possible to graduate high school with decent enough grades to get into a good college. I did pick it up again later, but I still never realized what I was seeing in fandom, nor understood the sub-culture on whose fringes I lurked, until I was older.

It may have been Trekkies who invented fanfiction, but when it comes to the Internet, it's a field dominated by women. Due to the trend of bringing books to life on screen, fandoms rise and fall with movie series. Case in point: *Harry Potter*, *Lord of the Rings*, *Twilight* (the bane of all actual vampires), and now *Fifty Shades of Grey* (Sign here, here, and here before we can tie you up). But when it comes to television, the most popular fandom for fanfiction will always be the one with the most attractive men in it. These fandoms include television shows from the CW Television Network, which is geared towards the 18-34 demographic. Even television shows like *Supernatural*, initially intended for male audiences, wound up catering to a largely female audience. The result is that fanfiction, which is essentially wish fulfilment, winds up being a conglomeration of sexual fantasies so far-fetched and unrealistic, they could have only been written by young girls or virgins. One can argue that

there's nothing bad about that, and it would be a sound argument as well. But the problem occurs when certain disturbing elements start to pop up in fanfiction, trends so warped and disturbing that you're inclined to wonder about the writer's mental health, and fervently hope they get help.

The most common and disturbing trend is incest. Some people defend incest that does not result in children, and takes place amongst consenting adults. I'm not one of them, and I'm incredibly disturbed by *Flowers in the Attic*, but my problem with incest in fanfiction is that it mostly applies to rape fanfiction and child sexual abuse. A common case of modern-day incest is from the *Supernatural* fandom. The term "Wincest" was coined for incest between the two lead characters, the Winchester brothers, and occasionally their father. Considering that the show depicts two sons with a dead mother and a negligent, almost abusive father, if creating incest out of this storyline isn't horrific enough; creating incest between a father and his teenage son is worse. In Harry Potter fanfiction, Voldemort/Harry pairings with Harry Potter becoming Voldemort's sex slave will have one of two outcomes: either Potter is subjected to



Watcher of the Seals by Amy Dale

rape and sexual assault and kills himself if he isn't rescued, or he develops a severe case of Stockholm Syndrome, and Voldemort may not need to fall in love with him for that to happen. The plot is poor, yes, but look beyond that, to the disturbing portrayal of sex.

In the Harry Potter fandom, considering that the main characters are eleven years old when the books start, and that the corresponding actors were also ten or eleven when they started acting, it actually does constitute as contributing to child pornography and is a breeding ground for paedophilia. If there's consensual sex between two adult characters, I definitely have no problem; I'm a big Harry/Draco fan myself,

about power and control. Defenders of fanfiction protest that the objections to fandom come from people with unhealthy attitudes about sex, or who are uncomfortable with the idea of sex being interesting and innovative, but I've read a fanfic about Harry Potter having sex with his dead father's corpse, so accusations of being a prude cannot be applied if one protests at the nature of such fanfiction.

Often, the nature of fanfiction is quite violent, with dubious consent or even rape, and this translates into another disturbing trend of fanfiction, referred to as "hurt/comfort," which indicates putting your characters through terrible situations, most commonly rape and torture, before

sea of them. Fanfiction characters normally tend to be weak, helpless, and unable to fight for themselves, and the need for indulging the writer's savior complex through the characters that mirror their own personality, often result in a classic portrayal of rape culture in fanfiction. This includes, but is not limited to aspects such as victim-blaming, social ostracizing, victims committing suicide or becoming mentally ill. We can agree that a fanfic in which Captain Harkness rescues Gwen from a rapist and Gwen recovers from her traumatic experience and moves on with life might be dull for some, but why does Gwen have to be subjected to unimaginable horrors in the first place? And why are those

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“ I pondered why young teens who indulged in cutting and other methods of self-harm didn't just magic the scars away like Harry Potter did in most fanfiction; it took me a week to realize that magic wasn't real, and in real life, you lived with the consequences of your own depression, self-loathing and generally poor mental health. ”

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though truth be told, my "ships" are many. And yes, about two or three times a year, I'll read fanfiction out of utter boredom, but there is a huge difference between reading graphic consensual sex in the middle of a story, and reading a story about rape, considering that the only link between the two is the act of penetration itself. Even that is less of a link and more of a common factor; sex is sexual gratification, rape is always, always

they are "rescued" and healed by another character. This is just downright disturbing. I've put my own characters in awful situations as well: my beloved original character, Aurora Black, was horrifically raped and tortured by Lucius Malfoy, and she was scarred for it, but you know what? As terrified as she was every time she saw Malfoy, she stood her ground, and was strong. Of course, that's just my character, in an endless

horrors always physical? What about Captain Harkness helping Gwen through the death of a child? Why isn't it an interesting story until the physical violation of a character's body, and completely breaking mind, body, and spirit is achieved?

Moving beyond the murky waters of fanfiction, there lies an entire sub-culture of fandom. We could agree, perhaps, that it's an interesting way of meeting people online, engaging

with people around the world, and even possibly learning more about other cultures by befriending people from different countries in a way that you wouldn't have without fandom. But there's a very dark side of fandom too, which extends well beyond the realm of fanfiction. This transcends the boundaries of a sub-culture and crosses over into alarming levels of obsession. If you immerse yourself in fandom, keeping to yourself and just watching the Big Name Fans (BNFs) conduct their fandom business, you'll see that this obsession even includes uploading personal photos and videos of celebrities from beloved franchises while claiming to have obtained them through

ally sell fanfiction, by offering to write fanfiction on request, or to draw fan-art for money, money which they then use to attend various fan conventions and take their 56th photo with the celebrity they obsess over. We all want to meet our favorite actors and singers, but this kind of obsession crosses definite limits that are put in place for a good reason.

We return now, to the question of why. Why is fandom the way it is? Why does fanfiction become as warped as it does? Fandom demographics have a female majority, and for many young girls, it can seem no different than drawing hearts around the name of their crush

allows women to experience a fantasy of authentic love which can only exist between equals, people who are strong and share adventures as well as emotions." It is basic wish fulfilment, but the downside is it veers off into the dark corners of the Internet where there's eleven-year-old Harry Potter having sex with Severus Snape, or Nathan Fillion raping Gina Torres, while in the real world, actress Emma Watson makes the news for being too scared of paedophilic stalkers to leave her home.

Perhaps this wish-fulfillment is why fans are generally possessive to a dangerous point about their favourite

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“Many people who dwell on the outskirts of fandom for any time period will wind up writing epic fan-fiction that will be completely self-indulgent, never expected to finish, constantly changing, and a complete labour of love.”

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legal means. One such example is a photo of the actor Jensen Ackles sitting at the dinner table with his family. Other photos of him with his family members were never made public outside of fandom, perhaps because celebrities know that to draw the ire of fans is to commit career suicide. Anne Rice has a bad reputation amongst many for sending cease and desist notices to anyone writing fanfiction, and even George R.R. Martin has disappointed fans by making his disapproval of fanfiction public.

Such is the obsession of these fans that they will actu-

during study hall. In an essay titled "Spellbound," published in *Fan CULTure: Essays on Participatory Fandom in the 21st Century*, Don Tresca writes about how sub-genres of fanfiction like 'slash' (fanfiction involving characters in often sexually explicit relationships) are less about homosexuality and more about 'acting out' male-female relationships on male bodies. While his opinion on how slash fanfiction allows women to reconstruct gender identity by challenging stereotypes of men and women through homosexual relationships may be debatable, he isn't completely off-base when he writes, "slash

characters. With the emergence of social media, fans have more power than ever, and characters come and go on television based on fan responses. That may be a part of television, but fandom takes it to a different level. The best example to draw from is the show *Supernatural*. First, the obsession began with fan criticism of co-star Jensen Ackles' real-life girlfriend, because a beautiful, sexual woman is a clear threat to a fan's fantasies about the characters. While the show was clearly popular from the first season, hatred for anyone with a romantic history with either of the two male leads was not uncommon. In the

second season, a female character named Jo was introduced as a possible love interest for the male protagonist, Dean. She was quickly written out when fans reacted viciously, because she was perceived as a threat to their fantasy boyfriend, and was subsequently killed off during the show. In the third season, two more female characters were introduced amidst much outrage from fandom, and while one was killed off specifically for being disliked by fans, another was replaced by the actress who would go on to marry the co-star of the show, Jared Padalecki. But would she have lasted as long as she did if she hadn't married Padalecki? While her character was killed off at the end of the season, it was for plot purposes for once, instead of fandom's outrage. Not that either of the co-stars have any privacy when it comes to their wives, as evidenced by the vicious hate that resulted from the announcement that co-star Jensen Ackles is expecting a baby with his wife. As one can imagine, this leaves any fanfiction writers with a bit of a kink in any fantasies they hoped to realize through fanfiction.

But we can't be too quick to dismiss fanfiction altogether. It still remains the singular common ground upon which fandoms unite, and thus can make or break writers, celebrities, television producers, and so on.

It isn't completely mainstream, but it isn't a shameful secret either, considering that even the likes of Neil Gaiman have written fanfiction on the character Susan Pevensie of *The Chronicles of Narnia* (with subtle changes to avoid legal issues), and writers such as Cory Doctorow have defended fanfiction – not to mention other contemporaries such as Diana Gabaldon who wrote books on characters inspired by *Doctor Who* characters. Let us not forget author authors, such as my favourite cult writer, Mercedes Lackey, who got her start writing fanfiction, or even Cassandra Clare, who may be writing books now, but before that, was well-known in *Harry Potter* fandom for the infamous *Draco Trilogy*. There have even been cases where writers have wanted to borrow ideas from fanfiction writers, such as Marion Zimmer Bradley, couldn't write his book due to legal issues.

And while the George R.R. Martins and Anne Rices of the world may still do their best to quash fanfiction completely, it isn't happening. Fandom is no longer a new phenomenon, and books, television shows, and movies depend on fandom popularity for their sales. Moreover, fanfiction is truly a labour of love; it isn't correcting your favorite TV show or writer with "This is how you could have done it better"; it's exploring new avenues

with pre-existing characters, playing in someone else's sandbox so to speak. If writers get too immersed in their world of fanfiction, can we really blame them? I'm not trying to make excuses for rape culture and paedophilia, but take a writer of the more mundane sort of fanfiction, and think of one good reason why they shouldn't write fanfiction. The answer is the same one that I give when people ask why I need or identify with feminism: there are many reasons to do so, but no reasons to not do so. Many people who dwell on the outskirts of fandom for any time period will wind up writing epic fanfiction that will be completely self-indulgent, never expected to finish, constantly changing, and a complete labour of love. Why would anyone want to stop playing out their wildest fantasies? Fanfiction certainly got me through the hardest times of my life. Why would I have to acknowledge the multiple F's on my report card, or face the fear of possibly repeating a class, or confront my own insecurities, when I could be Aurora Black, Level One Warrior-Mage and the feared Warrior Queen? Why would any sane fanfiction writer or reader want to exchange fandom for reality?

*Ghausia Rashid Salam is Articles Editor for the magazine.*

# FUNK

FUNK

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FUNK

By Robert Edison Sandiford

We ran wet from the freezing rain into the sweaty heat of the portico. Cold and snow were forecast for later that night, but The Whacks was roasting. Orville put down his bass as soon as he saw Donna and me.

“Mr. Sobers, what’s up?” I said. We locked fists, crossed arms, knocked shoulders.

His hug was all muscle and grip.

“Mr. Cumberbatch,” he said, completing our usual greeting. “Oh, you know. M’boys been playing like their asses on fire. So I’m good.”

I laughed. “I hear you.” The tables were half full, and it was a Friday night, after eleven. “We early?”

“Nah. The place don’t start to pack it out these days until around this time. We were just getting ready to go on.” He turned to Donna, who was peeling off her parka. “My cousin seems to have forgotten his manners. You must be his lady friend.”

Donna nodded. She shook his hand.

“I’ve heard a lot about you.” He leaned in: “Don’t worry, all good, and most of it we beat out of him.” Then the man I also knew as The Big O laughed with a demonic crescendo. He stopped to stumble back into a bow: “Welcome to The Whacks, my dear. Glad you both could make it.”

The Big O had lost some weight since last I saw him. He had come over to the house to ask my brother Wil for advice on whether or not he should sell his guitars. Mum was in the kitchen making dumplings for soup and

I was marking papers in the living room.

Orville was a shipwreck then. He and Yvette had just split. Before that was the heart attack, and before that the baby’s death. He was barely forty.

“You two kids find a table. What’re you drinking? You know your money can’t buy anything here. And I don’t care who paid last time.”

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It was The Big O’s farewell show at The Whacks. He and his band, The Silver Seven, had a new gig at a new club opening up off St-Laurent. Steady work, more money, a health plan. But The Whacks was where it all started: where The Big O first played, where he met Yvette, and why he couldn’t stand her now, maybe also the place.

Donna pointed to a table left of the stage, not too far from the bar. A waitress took our order.

Orville and his band didn’t waste any energy. “Uh-one, two, three—” They sank into it. Orville’s bass provided the beat. Up a short section of scale then down again, chasing, over and over. Then the guitar added a piece, startled, then the keyboard put in another, as if kicking at the bass. The horns blared into the beat. The drums came in a little late for me, snagging, challenging, doing his own thing.

The Big O was serious, no smiles. He looked stern as a headmaster giving a flogging.

He held his bass like a weapon, firing into the nightclub lights, lips buckled. The band hung on his beat, built on his rhythm, till the funk came

crashing down around them, mashing up the place.

My shoulders twitched and bopped at the sonic pileup.

I looked over at Donna sipping her white wine, watching the crowd, shifting in her seat. When she caught me staring, she raised her drink and pushed a smile at me. I tried to smile back instead of steupse my teeth. Donna was still annoyed. She would have preferred a quiet dinner in Old Montreal at some French restaurant, but I held out for The Whacks. We could do Old Montreal again another time. Not The Big O’s last show in the place where it all started.

After laying down their groove, Orville and the band took a break.

“So. Whatcha think?” He placed his bottle of water on our table. He mopped his head and face and neck with an open blue hand towel. “Do I still got it?”

“I don’t think you could ever get rid of it,” I said. “What is it you always tell me? That’s the nature of funk.”

Orville looked over at Donna, sceptical. “What about you, my dear? Did you like it? Tell me something good.”

Donna smiled at him faintly, nodding. She hadn’t heard what The Big O said and wasn’t about asking him to repeat it.

“Well,” he said, turning to me, “at least some people still think I’m good for something.”

“More than some,” I said.

“Hah.” He shrugged and drank his water.

Donna excused herself to go

to the ladies’. After a respectful pause, I said: “Sorry to hear, about you and Yvette.”

“Ain’t nothing to be sorry for,” he said, sitting back and sniffing. “It didn’t work out”—his face froze—“we didn’t work out.”

It was Orville who asked Yvette to leave. When Mum heard the story the day he came over, she said to me after Orville and Wil went out for a drink, “Good. That’s a good thing, too, he did it first.” But he didn’t seem any better for it.

“Hey,” he said. “Did Wil show you the emails?”

“Yeah,” I said.

“So. What d’you think?”

“About?” I was careful. Wil had shown me the emails Orville and Yvette had sent to each other the last four months, only I didn’t know if I was supposed to see all of them: the ones where he cursed her as the whore of LaSalle and the ones where she called him a wutless nigger-man; the ones where he called her his sexy-ass hardcore queen and she said he was her fuckin’ last stand. The messages were confusing, because all I knew—or had heard—of the story was that she stepped out on him, with some musician from the club, white guy, too. And The Big O found out.

“...Anything. Everything,” he was now saying. “This shit wasn’t always so fucked up.”

One minute, you’re chasing each other around your backyard with a hose, bare-ass naked under the moon, pissing off the neighbours ’cause it’s after their bedtime, laughing your fuckin’ soaked ass off. The next? You

can barely stand to take a call from the other person, hear her voice. Eleven years in all we were together, but the change between both moments felt that fast, that close.”

Orville was ten years older than me and Wil’s best friend, not really our cousin. He and I had never spoken like this before. It took me a while to say: “What happened?”

He looked a little stunned. “We stopped doing it.” It almost sounded like a question, and at first I wasn’t sure that it wasn’t.

“Why?”

“I don’t know. Wish I could tell you it was because the neighbours called the cops on our ass or the baby died. Yvette looked sexier than ever when she was bare-ass pregnant—”

We glanced up to see Donna making her way back to the table. Orville sat straight and watched her walk over as if she was negotiating a field of dog shit. His eyes drifted back to me.

“So. What’s the story with you two? Any plans to jump the broom?”

“Oh, you know,” I said, staring at her, not looking at him.

“No, I don’t. That’s why I’m asking. If I told you what Yvette said to me after my heart attack, you wouldn’t believe it.”

Before I could ask, Donna was back at our table and Orville was on his feet.

\*

The day Orville and Yvette got married, the man was, as he himself put it, no good.

“Will you, Orville Samuelson,



take Yvette Marie Antoinette," so on and so forth the pastor said. The Big O had to be steadied. He looked up, hands shaking, legs quaking. Kind of like when he played. He was sweating terrible, and when he looked up into the steeple and back down at the pastor, the congregation thought he was about to cry.

The pastor lay his hands on Orville's shoulders. He nodded at Wil, Orville's best man, and Mario, his first real manager and the only other groomsman, to step up. They closed ranks, clamping Orville's elbows when the pastor removed his hands. Wil and Mario looked reluctantly grim. They were big men, broad-shouldered and thick-legged, with hugely sympathetic hearts.

"Son," the pastor said to Orville, "you all right?"

Orville's hands and legs kept going, but he said, "Yeah—I mean, yes," trying hard to control his voice.

The pastor squinted then nodded at the groomsmen. "OK," he said, head to book.

"Let's do this. Just repeat after me."

I never understood what happened that June afternoon. Since the divorce, it was easy to guess. But they had been living good together for two years before they got married, and anyone seeing them together could tell they were in love, they didn't need to be holding hands. There was the baby that died but then talk about trying for another one. And Orville didn't say, "No," to the pastor, or Yvette.

I never wondered what Yvette was thinking. I couldn't even remember her reaction.

Was her face veiled? Was she surprised or scared? My man got nerves. Every man got nerves when he about to get marry. Right?

I looked over at Donna, just sitting there staring at the stage. I tapped my rum and coke three times before emptying it.

"You wanna dance?"

She shook her head. I waited for her to look at me, but when it was clear she wouldn't I said, "So you're just going to sit there all night?"

She shrugged. Still not looking at me.

I got up. "Going to get another drink," I said.

I stepped to the men's first, feeling the tension build in my belly.

Mum heard Donna and me arguing over the phone one night. After I rang off, she came into the kitchen.

"I don't know why you keep doing this to yourself."

I looked up startled. The cordless was still in my hand. "Mum—" I was going to say something about this being none of her business and that I had things under control.

"Listen to me." She pointed a finger. "I know not everybody is me or your father; not everybody makes a good match. But nobody comes whole."

I knew that. There was a time, at the end of primary school, when I thought Mum and Dads would divorce. Every evening when I came home, they were fighting. Everything, from what Mum cooked for dinner to Dads' driving, was an irresolvable

issue. Their turbulence stirred Wil, Bert and Lyn to intervene with resentment of their own; I felt I would have been dragged under and drowned by it all. But, twenty years later, Mum and Dads were still together, and that seemed like all that mattered to any of us.

I tried to explain to Mum what my fight with Donna was about—it was really nothing serious, a misunderstanding about a guy she used to date—and we'd be fine. Mum didn't care about that; there was something else she had picked up on about Donna, and about me.

"Ed. You don't have to take to heart every broken vessel that floats your way. Sometimes, let the flotsam pass. You don't think you'll sink one day, too?"

She stood staring at me. I had no reply to this. After about five, seven seconds, she left the room. I had been dating Donna for four years, we knew each other from high school, and I always thought Mum liked her.

\*

The Big O sat back looking at the stage. The band had stopped playing in the middle of their second set.

"Technical difficulties. Story of my life." He took a sip from his water bottle.

Donna was over at the bar talking to a friend—some guy named Fairfield from a place where she used to work in Old Montreal. I recognized the eagle tattoo on his neck and the long, blond rocker's locks. The hair and tattoo stood out less with him not in a suit, but I recognized him. I watched them talk. She was smiling, laughing. Accepted an open-arm invitation to sit with

him and his buddies.

"...Hey. You OK?"

"Yeah."

"You sure?" Orville had been watching Donna and her friend, too.

I turned my head. "You don't think I should be?"

"If you're not, you don't have to be...."

I tried not to turn around again. Donna and I started to date after running into each other at the movies. I was with my friends, she was with hers, we exchanged numbers...that was how it started. I had been seeing a few girls. Mum knew they would all be wrong for me long before I did. What was it she was seeing in them? What was I missing? I didn't think I attracted strays, as she called them, but maybe I did: girls who made up their own rules about how relationships should work.

"You were telling me, Mr. Sobers?" I said to Orville. I wanted him to take his eyes off Donna and her friend.

It didn't work. "Yeah, I was saying." He drank from his bottle of water slowly, his eyes still on them. There was something in his look but before I could read it he'd flipped the page. "I was saying: three weeks after my heart attack."

"Right."

"We were lying in bed, and I hear this sniffing beside me. It's Yvette, crying like a baby, curled on her side, y'know."

"OK. What—?"

He put up his hands, waving me to hold on. "That's what I

wanted to know. We didn't fight the night before, my last check-up I was doing fine. So I say, 'Hey, baby, what's wrong?' And she starts to bawl. It takes me like twenty minutes to calm her down."

My eyes narrowed, trying to see where this was heading.

"You know what she then tells me? You wanna know what that woman tells me?"

"What?" I said.

"I can't believe I almost lost you." Orville repeated it again, mimicking Yvette's voice. It came out more harsh whine than love-me tender.

"What'd you do?"

The Big O sat back. Shrugged. "Sometimes, it's hard to know what to say in the moment. I held her, I made love to her.... What the fuck else could I do?" Orville knocked back his water, and when he did, his eyes rolled to Donna and her friend, sitting side-by-side at the friend's table, the two of them leaning into each other close to talk and laugh. "People think her hooking up with Richie was the worst thing she could do to me. Well, boy, lemme tell yuh." Orville's eyes were half-closed and his jaw worked as if on a tough nut. "You sure you don't want to go over there and do something?"

I glanced to my left. I thought about it. But the way Orville was staring at Donna and her friend, I wasn't sure what he meant.

"Nah," I said. "She would gotta know who brung her."

\*

The Big O and The Silver

Seven were back on. The lights were bright, the sound was sharp. They started to play.

With vocals, this time, but I liked it best when there were no words, just the musicians doing their thing. Sometimes straight up, sometimes outrageous. Sometimes rude, and sometimes faithful. Heavy or hammy, they would bust out, no longer jamming, making it look easy except for the sweat pouring off their faces. It was crazy. "I know this music," I said to myself, bopping. I didn't know how much I knew, either, until I heard it: the greatest hits, the obscure stuff, the stuff the band improvised, lyrics or no lyrics, and a Big O original I heard as a demo, "Jook & Blaze," that was real raunchy. I knew them all by hearing them; then, closing my eyes, shutting my ears, by feeling them.

The band's mood seemed to change depending on how The Big O lay his hands on his bass. He shared the vocals with one skinny white guy who sounded like four black guys whose voices were warm with rum, more easy than bluesy. How could Donna not get this? She had returned to our table after the final set. She wasn't talking or smiling anymore. She wanted a drink before we left. I didn't argue. I went to the bar for refills.

Coming off stage, Orville intercepted me.

"What's wrong?" he said.

"What do you mean?"

"If you could see the look on your face—and Donna's. You both look vex."

"It's time to get her home."

"You sure about that?"

I followed Orville's eyes. Donna's friend had come over to our table. He was with his buddies. Donna was smiling and laughing again.

"Looks like they're saying goodbye," I said, anticipating The Big O.

"Maybe. Maybe not. How serious are you about this girl?"

"I don't know."

"You better—"

"I said I don't know."

Orville wasn't cooling out. "I saw her talking to that guy. For a moment there, when you introduced us, I thought she couldn't smile or had braces or some shit—until I saw them together."

"He's just a guy she used to work with..."

"Uh-huh. OK. But I'm telling you. Don't do what I did."

I was trying to look him in the eye but got as far as his chest.

"I know what you're thinking. You're thinking: you're not me. You're not even like me, right? That's right. I thought I was the guy shit like this didn't happen to. Then I found out in our backyard that any guy could be that guy."

I wasn't following him. My eyes were back on Donna and her friend at our table.

"You found out what?"

"About Richie. In our backyard. Four days after she tells me she can't live without me."

I looked Orville full in the face.

"We were having a



barbecue, and I decide to do the hose thing. We hadn't done that running around naked shit in a while. I thought it would do us both some good. At first, she's into it. We're having a good time, soaked and laughing. Then when I pull off my shirt and pull at her top, she starts to freak. 'What are you doing? What are you doing?' The woman-starts-to-freak! I get mad, too. 'What we always do,' I say, 'or don't you remember?' Then she falls into a patio chair and starts to cry. That's when she told me about Richie. Everything. My pressure must've gone high or low, I still don't know. Either way, she wasn't worried about losing me any—"

Orville stopped talking. He stopped moving and looked like he stopped breathing, too.

His face dropped as if the air had been let out of him. I put a hand on his shoulder.

"...Hey, man, you OK? Orville? O, what's...?"

He tapped my hand, but I realized he wasn't looking at me. When I turned around, behind me in the entrance was Yvette, shaking snow from her coat and boots.

\*

Orville removed my hand from his shoulder.

"I gotta go," he said. "I gotta go do something."

He slipped past me and headed for the stage before I could say, "Like what?"

The band looked worried. They were whispering and nodding in Yvette's direction, at a darkened area of the bar. It seemed everyone had seen her come in. Orville said something

to the guys onstage, motioning with his hands for them to stay.

I never knew why Mum and Dads stopped quarrelling. One evening, there was no more noise in our house. I was a kid: kids almost never know for certain what causes the disturbances in a house to go away; Lyn, me, Wil and Bert, we were just happy when they did. Watching Orville's face, it occurred to me my parents may simply have been together long enough at the time to regret some of their choices. Teenaged sweethearts on the beaches of Barbados, they were husband-and-wife immigrants to Canada who settled a generation ago along the rocky shores of the St Lawrence. They had always said La Belle Province looked hopeful to them both then, less scarred by history.

Someone handed Orville his bass. He took over the mike.

"Hello? Everybody? I know you expected us to be out of here." The room kept buzzing. "And I really do mean outta here." There was some laughter. "This is the finale for me and The Silver Seven at The Whacks. This is where it started. And, well...."

Some clapping and whistling. "Thanks. Really, thank you. A lot of friends and family in the house tonight, despite the crazy weather. My little cousin Edson. My mom's good friend Aunt Pam. Mr. Harding—the seventh grade Math teacher who flunked my ass—is that you?" More laughter. "Well, even if it is, I love you. I love you all. Thanks for making it." Clapping.

## A Ghazal for the Tethered Goats

Sometimes in Jamaica, the roads constrict like throats  
and around each green corner — the tethered goats.

They are provision from a god that craves  
the sacrifice of sons. If not, the tethered goats.

They bleat all night who did not know the size  
of abbe seeds and their own beings — these tethered goats.

They do not go to war but send their skins.  
How sweet, the repercussion of tethered goats.

Kids tremble at the sound of gumbeh drums  
and of their futures. How meek the tethered goats.

Their bellies run for sweetness, and their mouths  
are full of awful doom — these tethered goats.

But how they stipple this island, from Trelawny  
to Saint Ann to Saint Andrew, the tethered goats.

~ Kei Miller

When the crowd died down:  
"So. I'd like to do just one more  
song for you, because, well, I  
must say life does take funny  
turns. I thought it would be over  
for me some months ago. Just  
turned forty, no kids to take care  
of me in my old age, don't have  
what people call a 'real' job, and  
overweight—OK, fat. But it wasn't.  
It isn't. The best thing about all of

this is that I know better, now. Yes,  
take it up a notch, you always  
find that you want more. It's not  
a bad thing, wanting more; there  
are lots of things that we all want  
more of. I always heard my mom  
and dad say, 'If you suck salt, then  
I suck salt.'

"But there are some places  
you go it alone. You all know what

“He held his bass like a weapon, firing into the nightclub lights, lips buckled. The band hung on his beat, built on his rhythm, till the funk came crashing down around them, mashing up the place.”

I mean. I wanted to live. I still do. That's not much to ask for, right? Then this stillness comes over you around three in the morning, when it's just you and the clock, maybe a little background music, and you know—you accept it: you'll be all right. Either way it turns out. Whether the sentence is forty more years or for eternity, you'll be all right. We'll all be all right."

The Whacks was quieter than I had ever heard it, even

empty. Orville bowed his head and started to play. The band came in gradually, taking their time, making their way.

They found him hunched over stage left, cradling his bass, feeling the funk.

When I looked from The Big O to Yvette and back again, he was smiling, she was crying. Or maybe it was the other way around, and nobody noticed.

# GEOGRAPHY FOR ROBERT

We return  
because we must  
to sparkling harbour, Castries' dust,  
the market bright with makambou, pumpkin, lime  
seasoning peppers, various mangoes, thyme,  
the reek of garbage  
piled up coconut shells  
little dark shops  
saltfish and other smells;

to quiet La Toc, which as children we'd comb  
discovering tunnels, old guard houses, secret homes  
watching the lightning crash on the black sea  
as thunder storms raced on to Martinique.

We will return to where we were before  
the moulding hands finalised our shapes  
before they fixed us in this potter's field  
patterned by our landscapes.

We will return because adult despair  
may lighten with a glimpse of what we saw  
before we even knew how solitary we were.

In this dark time  
as drought devours our land,  
La Toc, Vigie, the market  
help us understand.

In blinding snapshot flashes/  
when the harbour's suddenly cleaner/  
buses wood and brighter/  
the cruise ship's a Bequia schooner/  
heavy bare-breasted women squat/  
squelching piles of clothes to bleach  
on river rocks/  
below the bridges by the bends  
in Canaries and Anse la Raye/

and we are innocent as clay ....



Harvest Dreaming by Danielle Dooboo-Fortuné

# CONTRIBUTORS

## Guest Editor for the Caribbean Literature Feature

**John Robert Lee** (St. Lucia) is a published writer of prose, poetry, journalism; a librarian; and a former radio and television broadcaster. His latest publications are 'Elemental: New and Selected Poems, 1975-2007' (Peepal Tree Press, 2008), 'Sighting and Other Poems of Faith' (Mahanaim, 2013) and 'Bibliography of St. Lucian Creative Writing: 1948-2013' (Mahanaim, 2013).

## Poetry

**Edward Baugh** (Jamaica) is one of the Caribbean's major poets and a literary critic whose distinguished career has been devoted to West Indian literature – in particular the work of Derek Walcott. He edited the 'Selected Poems of Derek Walcott' (FSG) in 2007. His latest poetry collection is 'Black Sand' (Peepal Tree, 2013).

**Kamau Brathwaite** (Barbados) is one of the Caribbean's prominent and distinctive poets. He has written history, literary criticism and poetry. He recently won the 2013 Frank Collymore Literary Endowment (FCLE) awards in Barbados. Brathwaite has won several international awards, including the Neustadt International Prize for Literature in 1994 and the Griffin Poetry Prize in 2006. 'The Lazarus Poems' won the Collymore award. Other recent collections include 'Born to Slow Horses' (2006) and 'Elegguas' (2010).

**Christian Campbell** (The Bahamas/Trinidad & Tobago) is the author of 'Running the Dusk' (Peepal Tree Press, 2010).

**Vahni Capildeo** is a Trinidadian writer of poetry and prose. She has worked in academia, at the Oxford English Dictionary, and with Commonwealth Writers, the cultural initiative of the Commonwealth Foundation. Her books include 'Utter' (Peepal Tree, 2013) and 'Measures of Expatriation' (Carcanet, forthcoming 2016). Current projects include a collaboration with Jeremy Noel-Tod for Steven Fowler's 'Camarades' reading series, and Dante reworkings for Peter Hughes's Oystercatcher Press.

**Kwame Dawes** (Jamaica) is the author of over thirty books of poetry, prose, drama and criticism and is one of the Caribbean's leading contemporary writers. He is Glenna Luschei Editor of Prairie Schooner and a Chancellor's

Professor of English at the University of Nebraska. He is Associate Poetry Editor for Peepal Tree Press in the UK. Among his recent publications are 'Wheels' (Peepal, 2011) and 'Duppy Conqueror: New and Selected Poems' (Copper Canyon Press, 2013).

**Lorna Goodison** is a Jamaican poet and prose writer and painter, whose work places her among today's foremost literary voices. She is an internationally renowned, award-winning poet and the author of ten books of poetry, two books of short stories and a highly acclaimed memoir. Born in Jamaica, she teaches at the University of Michigan. Her latest collection, 'Oracabessa' (Carcanet, 2013), won the 2014 Bocas Literary Prize for Poetry.

**Kendel Hippolyte** (St. Lucia) is one of the Caribbean's foremost poets and playwrights. His latest publication is 'Fault Lines' (Peepal Tree Press, 2012) which won the prestigious Bocas Literary Festival Poetry Prize in 2013.

**Ishion Hutchinson** was born in Port Antonio, Jamaica. His poetry collection, 'Far District: Poems' (Peepal Tree, 2010), won the PEN/Joyce Osterweil Award. Other honours include a Whiting Writers' Award and the Academy of American Poets' Larry Levis Prize. He is an Assistant Professor of English at Cornell University.

**Jane King** is an accomplished Saint Lucian poet, whose work is widely recognized as part of the growing tradition of Caribbean women's poetry. Her work intertwines social, inter-personal and spiritual themes in language at once layered and accessible. Her latest publication is 'Performance Anxiety' (Peepal Tree, 2013).

**Vladimir Lucien** (St. Lucia) represents the new wave of Caribbean poets. His first collection, 'Sounding Ground' is published by Peepal Tree Press, UK (2014).

**Kei Miller** was born in Jamaica. His first collection of short fiction, 'The Fear of Stones', was shortlisted for the Commonwealth Writers First Book Prize in 2007. His first poetry collection, 'Kingdom of Empty Bellies', was published in March 2006 by Heaventree Press; his second, 'There Is an Anger That Moves', was published by Carcanet in October 2007. He is also the editor of Carcanet's 'New Caribbean Poetry: An Anthology'. He currently teaches Creative Writing

at the University of Glasgow. His latest publications are the Forward Prize-shortlisted 'The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Zion' (Carcanet 2014), and 'Writing Down the Vision: Essays and Visions' (Peepal Tree Press 2013), which won the Bocas Literary Prize for non-fiction in 2014.

**Esther Phillips** (Barbados) publications include 'When Ground Doves Fly' (Ian Randle Publishers, 2003) and 'The Stone Gatherer' (Peepal Tree Press, 2009). Her poems appear in several anthologies, and her work has recently been recorded for the Poetry Archive, UK. She is a Sunday columnist for the Nation Newspaper and editor of 'Bim: Arts for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century'. She is the founder of Writers Ink Inc. as well as the Bim Literary Festival & Book Fair. In 2014, her poem 'Word' was selected by BBC Scotland to represent Barbados at the Commonwealth Games.

## Fiction

**Curdella Forbes** is Jamaican. Her published fiction includes 'Songs of Silence' (Heinemann 2002; 2nd ed. 2010); 'Flying with Icarus and Other Stories' (Walker Books 2003); 'A Permanent Freedom' (Peepal Tree 2008); and 'Ghosts' (Peepal Tree 2012). A scholar and critic of Caribbean literature, she is also the author of 'From Nation to Diaspora: Samuel Selvon, George Lamming and the Cultural Performance of Gender' (UWI Press 2005). She is Professor of Caribbean Literature at Howard University.

**Robert Edison Sandiford** (Barbados) is the author of eight books, including the award-winning novel 'And Sometimes They Fly' and the graphic novel 'Great Moves'. He is the editor with Linda M. Deane of 'Shouts from the Outfield: The ArtsEtc Cricket Anthology' and 'Green Readings: Barbados, The First Five Years (2008-2012)'. A recipient of Barbados' Governor General's Award for his fiction and the Harold Hoyte Award for his editing, he has worked as a journalist, publisher, video producer with Warm Water Productions, and teacher.

**Elizabeth Walcott-Hackshaw** (Trinidad and Tobago) is a Senior Lecturer in French and Francophone Literatures in the Department of Modern Languages and Linguistics, The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine. 'Four Taxis Facing North', her first collection of short stories, was published in 2007 and translated into Italian in 2010. Her first novel, 'Mrs.

B', will be published by Peepal Tree Press in April 2014.

## Essays

**Polly Pattullo** is a former UK journalist and now publisher of [Papillote Press](#), which specialises in books about Dominica — and beyond. She is the author of 'Last Resorts: the Cost of Tourism in the Caribbean' and 'Fire from the Mountain', a book about the Montserrat volcano crisis.

## Artists

**Amy Dale** is an advanced doctoral student studying environmental engineering and public policy. Whenever she can, she escapes into fantasy worlds. With watercolours, she pins her dreams to paper.

**Danielle Boodoo-Fortuné** is a poet and artist from Trinidad & Tobago. Her writing and art have appeared in several local and international journals such as 'Bim: Arts for the 21st Century', the 'Caribbean Writer', 'Small Axe Literary Salon', 'Poui: Cave Hill Journal of Creative Writing', 'Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal', 'Dirtcakes Journal', 'Blackberry: A Magazine', 'Room Magazine' and others.

**Marta Syrko** gives a magical essence to her photographs which goes from portraits and landscape scenes to nudes. In all of them we can see how the light plays an important role. The light is the key in all of them, giving the photographs a special touch.

**Nicholas Walton-Healey** is an Australian photographer and writer whose work appears in the 2010 Next Wave Text Camp Reader 'No Risk Too Great', Visible Ink 23 'The Screen Door Snaps', Rabbit # 1 & 2. Nicholas also has work forthcoming in '21D', 'Conclave: A journal of character' and Cersie Press.

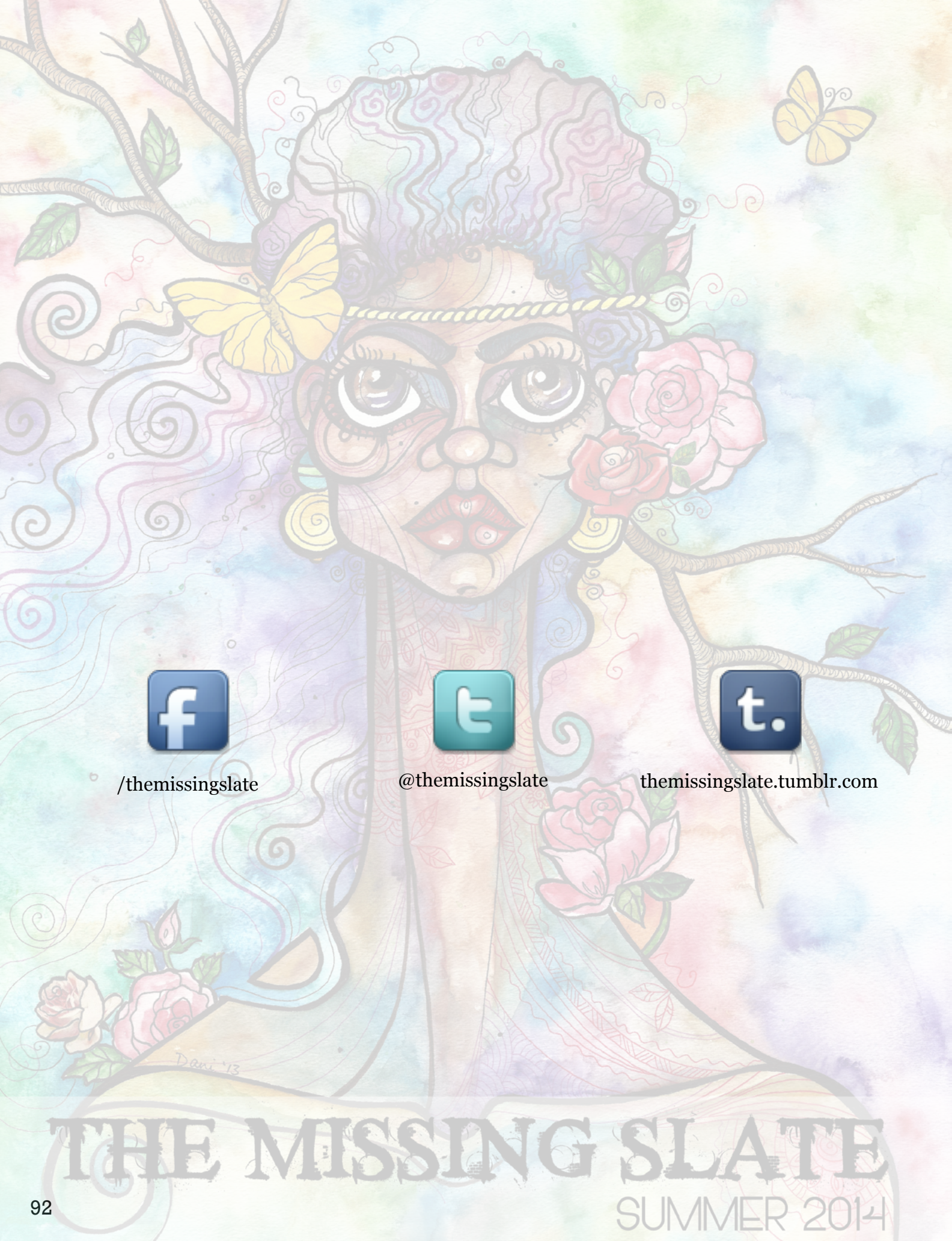
**Nora America Pinell-Hernandez:** The scenes of my paintings emerge from sketches and photographs of my travels to Nicaragua and Cuba. The iconography used is influenced by my studies at John Hopkins University where I became acquainted with the art of various Andean and Meso-American cultures. Their textiles, ceramics, lapidary, murals and metallurgy are inseparable of their axioms and serve as visual communications with-in their society. The parallelism of relaying mythical accounts between my artwork and these societies assures me that these narratives of animalistic transformation and regeneration are not atypical.



*Artwork by Marta Syrko*

*“ Fantasy is escapist, and that is its glory. If a soldier is imprisoned by the enemy, don't we consider it his duty to escape? [...] If we value the freedom of mind and soul, if we're partisans of liberty, then it's our plain duty to escape, and to take as many people with you as we can! ”*

*~ J.R.R. Tolkien*



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