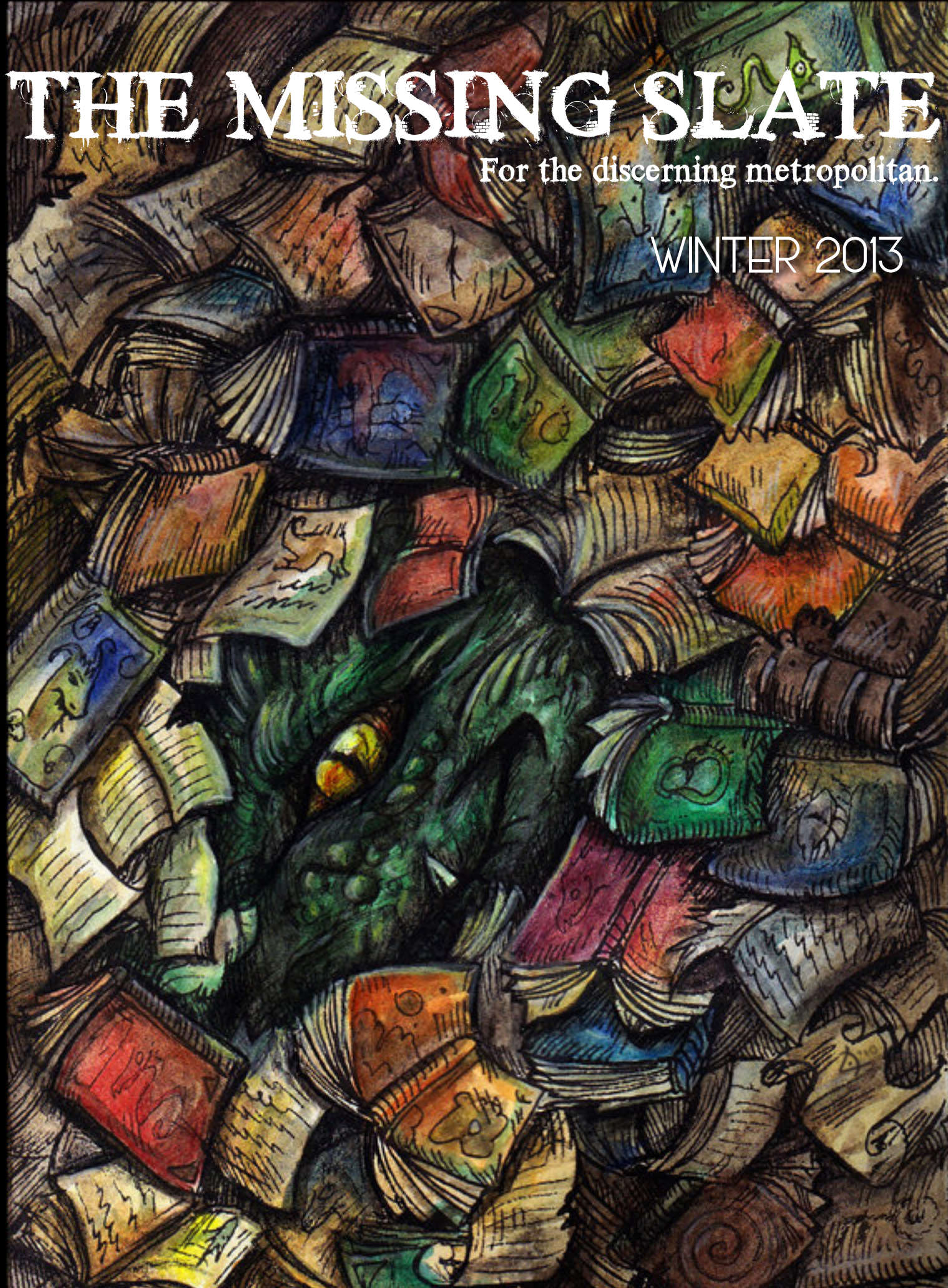


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WINTER 2013



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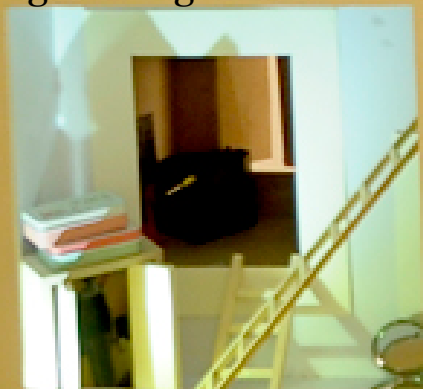
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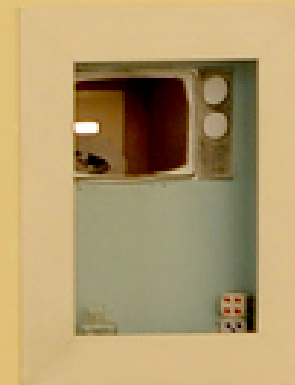
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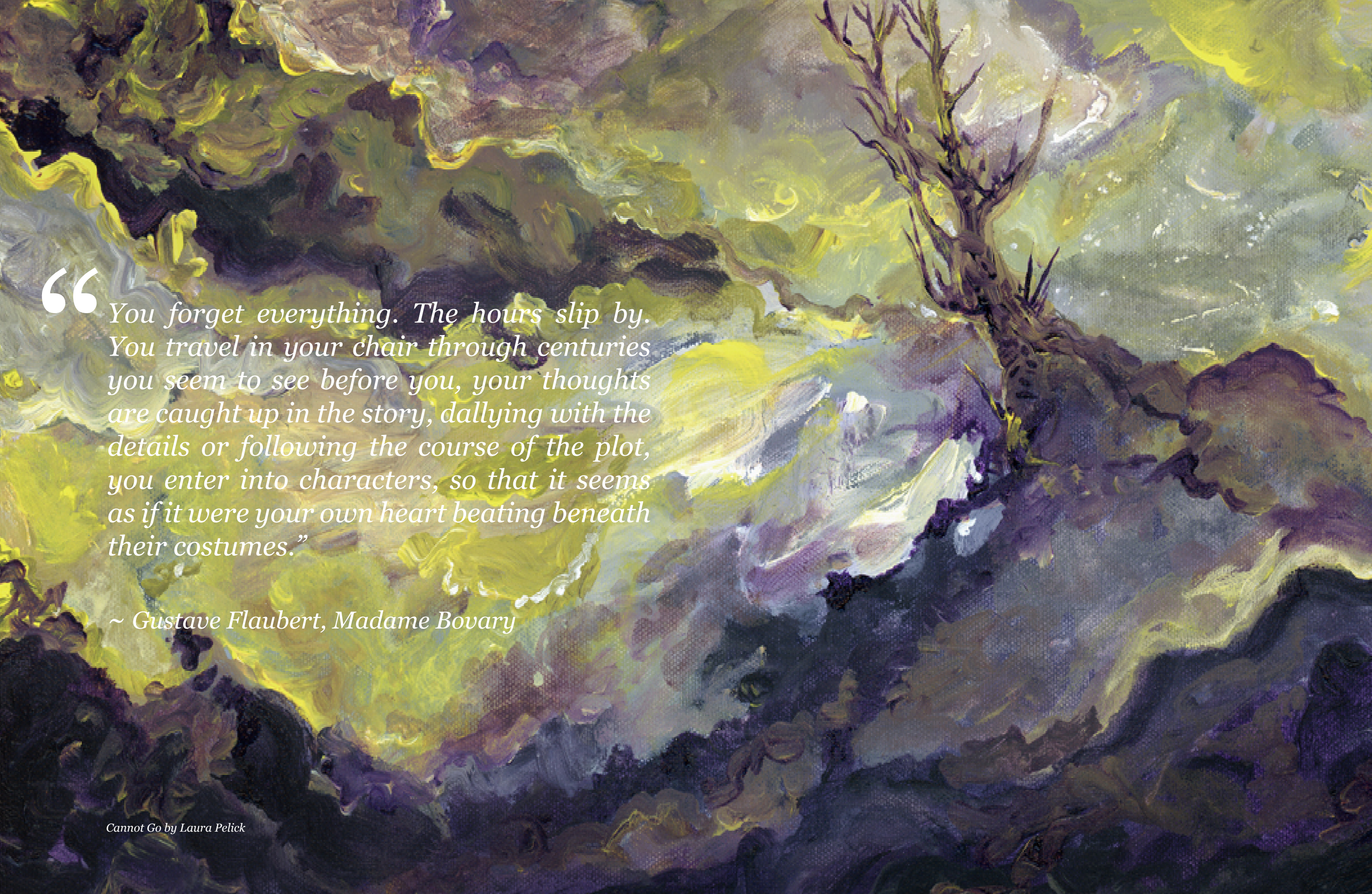
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“You forget everything. The hours slip by. You travel in your chair through centuries you seem to see before you, your thoughts are caught up in the story, dallying with the details or following the course of the plot, you enter into characters, so that it seems as if it were your own heart beating beneath their costumes.”

~ *Gustave Flaubert, Madame Bovary*

A WORD FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Dear Readers,

The opening quote gives it away – indeed, this issue we’re wearing our literature-loving, word-obsessed hearts on our sleeve. This issue is a love letter to the power of literature, the impact it’s had over the centuries, its place in today’s world and what we mean when we talk about literature.

Two special features are part of this issue – the first is a photo essay on a wonderful new initiative led by Oxford University Press Pakistan through their Museum and Archives. Based in Karachi, arguably the cosmopolitan hub of the country, the Museum narrates the story of publishing and literature. The second feature focuses on emerging British poets and includes work from fourteen rising talents. We hope to extend this to other countries and include fiction writers as well (an “under 30” feature is in the works for a future issue).

Also part of the lineup are interviews with entrepreneur bookseller and publisher, Aysha Raja who owns and operates the indie book chain “The Last Word”, and emerging British poet S.J. Fowler. Visuals from Yahat Benazir, Belal Khan, Nazuk Ifitkhar Rao, Andrew Sussman, Lena Winkel, Vee Chayakul, Laura Pelick, Brianna Angelakis and Blumina grace the pages of this magazine and as always, the final product is a collaboration between The Missing Slate’s amazingly talented and dedicated editorial and creative staff.

Speaking of our staff, you may have noticed the growing number of pins on the team map which come thanks to the new internship program for undergraduate and International Baccalaureate students, who have joined TMS in exchange for academic credit. Applications are open year round and staff is expected to rotate. The magazine is now operating from ten countries ... take a minute to consider that – we’re in three continents. That’s amazing!

The Missing Slate is a strange creature in the world of periodicals – as a truly global citizen it wears its intentions rather unabashedly. You see, wherever we may be in the world we are connected by, however corny this may sound, the love for creating something that just didn’t exist before. I hope TMS and its team never loses that wide-eyed approach on literature, art and everything in between. It is an endearing part of our identity and I’d like to think our readers agree.

Sincerely,

Maryam Piracha

Editor-in-Chief



Metamorphoses by Blumina

Sun

THE CRITICS: SON OF A GUNN

Protest of the Physical

Andrew McMillan

(Red Squirrel Press, 2013)

Reviewed by Jacob Silkstone

Ivor Gurney's first posthumous collection, *Severn & Somme*, includes a sequence of five sonnets 'to the memory of Rupert Brooke' — five sonnets formed in bitter contrast to Brooke's idealism. Where Brooke penned fantasies of 'this heart, all evil shed away/ A pulse in the eternal mind', Gurney wrote of 'Pain, pain continual; pain unending...' He described his sequence as 'a protest of the physical against the exalted spiritual.'

From Gurney comes the title of Andrew McMillan's latest pamphlet, a weighty extended poem which unflinchingly faces love ('giving everything too easily/ then trying to stay and claw it back), time ('the smell of ageing which is really the smell of unclean teeth') and the towering dead.

Towering above all others is Thom Gunn, the English-American restrained rebel who has already haunted McMillan's early work: in every salt advance, McMillan covets 'the hand Thom grasped in his/ I want to chop it/ off... and dream of boys/ who maim their fathers/ for their hands.'

This is knowingly Freudian, and appears in a poem called 'dad'. For McMillan, Thom Gunn is both a poetic father and a lover. In *Protest of the Physical*, he is addressed more directly ('undress touch/ the only book blood pumping/ Thom Thom') and quoted in one of the three epigraphs:

The jail contained a tank, the tank contained
A box, a mere suspension, at the centre,
Where there was nothing left to understand
And where he must re-enter and re-enter

Deliberately, you suspect, the lines are borrowed from Gunn's *In the Tank*, first published in *Touch*, a collection which reappears at the centre of *Protest of the Physical*:

Thom you believed your Touch
was boring the wound in the head
healing skin hardening to the blood

'Touch' echoes through the next two stanzas ('undress touch'... 'the fear is to die untouched') and through the poem as a whole: 'how much of

fighting/ is the need to touch another man?' asks McMillan, rather rhetorically, and sends the reader back to his cover image: two topless men wrestling, entwined in the open air, an image simultaneously savage and sensuous.

In *The Anxiety of Influence*, Harold Bloom posited an Oedipal relationship between young poets and their 'influential predecessors' — envisioning writing as a lifelong struggle with the great poets of the past. It is fascinating to see this struggle between McMillan and Gunn placed so nakedly on the page so early in McMillan's career, and *Protest of the Physical* offers a number of signs that McMillan will succeed in throwing off Gunn's shadow.

The echoes of Gunn's great poems are there ('the rough joints of your transatlantic patter/ snailing down my neck'), but McMillan is developing his own distinctive style: a blend of fiercely imaginative similes ('a girls sudden/ flurry of fists like an unroosting of doves) and elaborate portmanteaus ('barrelswagger', 'busredfaced') which recall Gerard Manley Hopkins (as in 'widow-making unchilding unfathering depths') and Dylan Thomas ('who unmanningly haunts the mountain-ravened eaves...'). McMillan's metaphorical leaps almost deserve an essay to themselves, ranging from 'the sun was the face of the man/ in the American Gothic painting' in an early poem to the 'town that sunk from its centre/ like a man winded by a punch' in *Protest of the Physical*: only a relatively small number of writers can summon so much linguistic energy.

Yes, there are imperfections, moments when the intensity of the poem is permitted to lapse (the 'qualitative research into pub names in Barnsley' could have worked in another poem, but felt misplaced so near to the grandiose 'how thin the membranes that we build/ between each other how easily broken opened'; the list of pub names is perhaps too close to Carol Ann Duffy's 'John Barleycorn'), but it is hard not to read *Protest of the Physical* with the impression that this is the next stage in the apprentice work of a major poet.



Photography by Nazuk Iftikhar Rao

PHASING THROUGH THE INK

Literature's growing body

By Aaron Grierson

Once, literature seeped out of quills in quiet hovels onto treated hides. Now, literature seeps out of wires in bustling communities onto the pixels of our monitors. A product of many changes, this evolution of literature may signal shifts just as numerous. It may be safe to say that literature has grown to the point where a person's diary can be viewed, should they so choose, by thousands of people.

Blogs represent only one facet in the conglomerate that is the corpus of modern literature. They are the most potentially numerous format, though perhaps not in print. Just think, if every person in the world had a blog that they updated even once a week from a library or internet café, what the sheer volume of posts would look like. And imagine trying to read even a quarter that many. It would be a whole new industry and in 50 years or so, that may be the case, once blogs are deemed primary historical source documents for 'the way things were.'

It might be an odd way to think about yourself, and any blogs you do post on, which could include personal or 'professional', like ones that post recipes and the like. Any students of history may know that the further back you go, the fewer such sources still exist. Web-based writings have the potential to outlast not only their author, but humanity, assuming the last of our kind leave the power on. They are a 21st century account of whatever we want: daily life, career, political issues, sewing or knitting, and so on. For later historians, anthropologists and cultural theorists, blogs could be the basis for a whole new generation of thought.

This process has begun as more than an idea, too. Forums, though not an internet novelty are available to discuss just about anything. Not least among the variety of topics is literature. While the topics may not yet include blogs, a multitude of literature, from Shakespeare to *Twilight*, is discussed. Obviously not the work of scholars, these environments seem to encourage amateurs and avid readers to put forth their opinion in a manner that abides by the rules (which generally aim to preclude profanity, derogatory remarks or other insults) for good, clean discussion.

“Do aspiring writers of various fictions bring this on themselves, living silently in the shadow of the colossus that is the literary industry? Or do they just hope to get published through Amazon's e-books and then wait to hear what everyone says? ”

One of the results is a sort of ever expanding spiral. New literature comes into popularity, followed by blog or forum posts about it (typically for some years, though volumes fluctuate), more and more cross-textual comparisons are drawn based on individual interests and things continue to grow. The last few years have produced some particularly prominent examples, like *Harry Potter*, *Twilight* and the *Hunger Games* series. In the eyes of readers, these texts are sometimes in competition with one another, and similarities are drawn (in this case concerning characters, primarily). The result is not only a complete non-academic canon of evaluation and analysis on the internet, but a fan base that may find itself divided concerning the top characters or plot line.

And then there are those particularly enthusiastic readers, often youth, who have "a vision", which usually manifests itself as a spin on a popular novel or story. They take that spin, write about it (typically as a short story or novelette though there are those who go the full Monty), and rather than making millions themselves, wind up posting the finished product on a website somewhere. Such productions are aptly called "fan fiction". Although I have no doubt that many of these wind up on blogs, perhaps by the chapter, there are sites entirely devoted to fan

fiction, in addition to other, more general purpose websites for literature not deemed 'professional.' What I mean by professional is simply that these are novice works (no matter the quality) that are not taken up by publishing companies and instead remain on a free website. Fan fiction seems not only popular but of questionable integrity. Authors create worlds they see as—at least in most ways—adequate and complete. Who are we (as readers) to turn around after enjoying the original literature and create a spinoff that tends to be a "how world X should be" or the "untold story of character Y" moment. While admirable, these fictions seem little better than Frankenstein-esque bastards though it seems unlikely that they are as misunderstood as the good doctor's Creature.

Regardless of how I feel about fan fiction, the sheer variety that's out there is mind-numbing. Certain sites with a database of prolific authors are particularly commendable in the volumes of nice literature they host. One such example is DeviantArt, a popular destination for literature (original and derivative) and artwork. Unfortunately, location seems to be very important, even on the internet. Writing winds up almost everywhere, even inside Facebook notes to be kept in the off chance a profit is to be made. This is essentially the nature of the interwebbed beast. It might look cuddly and welcoming, but the reality is that most of us get smothered by the sheets. To have a large audience is almost wishful thinking. But wishful thinking seems to be the starting point for many great stories which always grow, though not always to fruition. So at least in that way, it may be a safe bubble in which to live.

For all its evolutionary qualities, questions must be raised about the path literature will take on the web. Will it simply be segregated from visual art forms because literature requires a longer commitment? Do aspiring writers of various fictions bring this on themselves, living silently in the shadow of the colossus that is the literary industry? Or do they just hope to get published through Amazon's e-books and then wait to hear what everyone says? There are other problems too, like holding on to readers once you've hooked them on a particular piece. Still, each of these problems should not merely resonate through or with the teenagers hoping to spill their hearts out. Many established authors have started reaching out to their respective audiences, perhaps

taking note of how musicians have begun to utilize the ubiquity of the internet.

Each of these relatively new mediums point together at a few conclusions about literature on the whole. The term 'classic' which might refer to authors like Jane Austen or Dante has contemporary competition with series like *Harry Potter*, which is so widely read, your only excuse for not knowing the series would be living alone on an island. This development, while perhaps not new may cause us to reconsider what it is that makes a classic and why we make the distinction in the first place. It also shows just how far literature has come. So far gone are the days where monks copied manuscripts for a living, even the printing press is increasingly in danger of being put out of business, at least as far as literature is concerned. The new literature or new formats of it at least may not seem so prominent in our lives now, but like this publication it has grown in recent years, and will continue to do so as time marches on. Eventually, we will have to reconsider how literature works on personal and larger scales. Another question of increasing relevance is how we view ourselves in relation to literature. No longer are we handed masterpieces by craftsmen from three or four centuries back, but even young teenagers are producing literature like fan fiction. Will we draw distinctions, not only between classics and more mundane authors, but will the sheer volume of fiction and non-fiction cause society to reconsider what it means by literature on the whole?

It may be maintained that proper literature is what gets published and distributed by (publishing) houses, rather than the everyman's blog posting. At this point, no answers are really clear. However, it is easy to feel that literature, and internet-based writing is a major contributor to an ever-growing conglomerate of experiences. The sheer variety of information and written (or typed) works available through the internet may mean that book stores are in for some serious competition, e-books or no.

As much as we may love picking up a book and learning about something new, or going on a foreign adventure, it is almost impossible to resist the allure to type a few keys, click a few buttons and open up a whole other body of texts, ripe for the intellectual picking.

Aaron Grierson is Senior Articles Editor for *The Missing Slate* and is based in Ontario, Canada.

SPOTLIGHT POET: S.J. FOWLER

Interviewed here by Jacob Silkstone, Fowler is part of The Missing Slate's "list" of young emerging British poets.

Q In an interview with the Huffington Post, you mention that you 'believe less than many of [your] peers in the transformative power of poetry.' Is that a reiteration of Auden's idea that 'if not a poem had been written, not a picture painted nor a bar of music composed, the history of man would be materially unchanged'? Is poetry of any importance?

A I think this notion centres around two ideas: the first is a recognition that while poetry is a profound resource for engaging with the remarkable fact of our existence, and moreover our extraordinary ability to utilise language, it is not a matter of matter. It should never be considered before our own sense of personal responsibility or ethical engagement in the world. It does not matter next to death, to injustice, to love, and while this may seem obvious (or not), there is much value in it being directly stated rather than implicitly acknowledged. The second thing is that when a poet states poetry is useless, or indefensible, as Hans Arp proclaimed, when one is affirming poetry in the most comprehensive way by being a poet, what is happening is an attempt to affirm an ethical selflessness, a refusal of solipsism, by engaging in a paradox. It is a poet's way of saying poetry is private, it is for I, and if the reader chooses to engage with that poetry, that is beautiful, but it is never a relationship of entitlement – it is never the poet's place to say his work is profound, it is never the poet's place to say it is for the benefit of all. It is a reiteration of the private sphere, poetry as an act that, at its core, involves only one. I would suggest all ethical acts occur in this sphere, that they are constituted by a relationship one has with oneself, one made without witnesses.

I would further suggest the root of all ethics is subsumed in paradoxes, more clearly in the Ju-

daic tradition perhaps than our own post-Christian understanding of ethics. This is why I personally choose to write, and read so often, because it makes me happy, yes, because it improves my understanding, and thus my sense of humility, and thus makes me treat people better, with empathy and consideration, but fundamentally because all this happens alone, without any recourse to ambition in its being witnessed and at the expense of the question, is this worthwhile? So I think the reason some poets like Auden and Arp decry poetry somewhat is to emphasise the private nature of poetry and the paradox at its root. And this refutes the proselytising post-Christian, post-romantic mystical theory that surrounds the notion of poetry even now, throughout our education system. This notion that poetry in and of itself is improving and beneficial is absurd, and arrogant, [and is] a legacy of Victorian educational theory and colonial asininity that alienates children from poetry. Fundamentally, poetry does not improve one by the mere act of its encounter or its objective content. It only offers something to the individual who makes the private and personal decision to engage with it, to make a sacrifice to it, to remove themselves from the public sphere of learning and into the private sphere of knowledge and creativity.

Q Staying with the Huffington Post interview for one more question, you mention the 'factionalism' of the current British poetry scene. How would you characterise those competing factions? Would you say that the emerging generation is more eclectic, more capable of transcending the barriers between mediums and styles?

A Perhaps it's better to answer this question by speaking about how I believe the major factionalism of the recent past seems to be changing, and how I firmly believe the dualistic landscape of British poetry is not, and will not, be so categorical in its divisions in the future. Of course, there will always be factions in poetry, and there will always be those who define themselves as

independent not because of a method or a strongly held belief but just because they gain status they otherwise would not have. And I must stress the true avant-garde, as I see it, has nothing to do with opposing a 'mainstream.' That would be a blindfolded exercise. The avant-garde is defined by its commitment to the new, the original, to philosophically important ideas and engagements, and these need not oppress or combat, inherently, the ideas of others. There will always be those who try to ignore what is new, and push it aside because they perceive it as a threat. Just as there are those who don't even know such innovative work exists! If the focus is on the work, there is much ground to be found between these unnamed factions, which I leave unnamed for good reason.

I come from an avant-garde tradition, both in my work, my education, my reading and my peers. Some within that fraternity have tried to continue the lame legacy of binary opposites between formal and experimental, mainstream and avant-garde, by passing on their grievances (perhaps valid ones) to our generation. They warned me of the exclusion I would face before 'mainstream' poetry. It's a myth. For one of the first *Maintenant* events I invited poets like Sam Riviere and Jack Underwood to read alongside avant-gardists like Holly Pester and Eirikur Orn Norddahl. Not only were poets associated with the mainstream because of the Faber young poets pamphlets extremely well versed in experimental work, they were extremely receptive to avant-garde poets. Concerns are shared between these battlelines, and I find there is much more that binds these traditions than divides them, in the work anyway. Difference does not mean dislike. If I was a musician, could I appreciate styles other than the one I play? Of course, why is that not so with poetry? I think that a global reading taste has for the first time, thrown up ubiquitous points of reference that at some point bind everyone even if they are not direct influences – Joyce, Beckett, O'Hara, Ginsberg, Bukowski... Moreover there is a sure sense that many contemporary poets refuse the model of the disengaged lackadaisical writer and are organising, making their own events, publishing houses, and criticism, which reflects this wider sense of what poetry can be. I am very proud to be part of a peer group that is thus en-

gaged, with people like Tom Chivers, Nathan Jones, Alec Newman, Chris McCabe, James Byrne, Sasha Dugdale, Ryan Van Winkle, Nathan Hamilton, Linus Slug, Alex Davies, Steve Willey, Sophie Mayer and many others. They all write and instigate, they are refusing to allow the future to be dictated from the outside. This is so important in my opinion.

Q As the founder of *Maintenant*, the UK editor of *Lyrikline* and the interviewer for this summer's Poetry Parnassus, you've established yourself as perhaps the most internationally-minded of all contemporary British poets. Where did that interest in poetry from other cultures and other languages originate? Do you support the idea that the poetic 'mainstream' is prone to insularity?

A It's clearly very important for me to engage with poets from beyond the UK, and this is because my interests are not confined to my own nation, and I would suggest, nor should they be. I am a human being and share that fact beyond citizenship, with other human beings, and I would always hope that my writing and my interests reflect an open, reflexive, inclusive notion of humanity. I have been distinctly influenced by global poetic traditions, I read as much as I can from whatever sources I can and allow that work to permeate throughout my own writings. It might be that this began from travelling, but I hope not, I hope it is just an approach to other human beings which has been channelled through this specific interest at this specific time.

Whether mainstream poets are prone to insularity is very difficult to say, primarily because I wouldn't quite know who to call mainstream. Without that definition I am on rather shaky ground to make any criticisms. I would suggest perhaps that there will always be people who are prone to insularity in any cross section of society because they are essentially fearful and conservative, and thus insecure. It strikes me that few British poets are keen to have their work translated, and that's certainly a

difference between some of the more innovative poets I know, who, like myself, are active in sourcing foreign language versions of their own work.

Q Does parochialism preclude a writer from being a major poet? Should Larkin's contempt of all things 'abroad' be regarded as a significant weakness?

A I'm hardly a Larkin scholar, so I have to venture forward with some caution, but essentially my answer is no, a poet can still be great if they are parochial within a given historical context, but in this case yes, I don't consider Larkin to be a major poet because his parochialism is often specifically actualised within his poetry and the historical context of his writing and its intrinsic links to his views are in no way justifiable. Undoubtedly there is much to be taken from his work and there are moments of profundity amidst his writing, but to me, just in my opinion, he is primarily a poet interested in making smug observations about the middle class, flirting with the banal as much as the insightful. It's not his fault that his poetry has become the defining, somewhat oppressive, style of the day, and his conscious influence has borne a thousand bastard sons, imitators of lesser poet, that continue to exercise their primacy over the current poetical landscape. Just to me perhaps, but it is a surprise his racism and the occasionally fey, bitter whimsy, given over through the litany of writers who have aped him, has not even proven decisive in lessening his influence on every classroom and conspicuous coffee table. I do recognise the reason for people's love of his work, and do admire elements of his oeuvre, but his presence also blotting out so many other writers who were far more brilliant in their understanding of the world around them through the medium of poetry.

I would suggest that retrospective historical judgement of a poet by modern ethical standards should not impede our appreciation of their work, unless it is implicit in that work to a degree that cannot be separated. But realistically, of course, it affects our understanding of that work in question. If Pound suffers in retrospect, if Hamsun suffers, if D'Annunzio suffers, why is TS Eliot's anti-semitism

“ There will always be people who are prone to insularity in any cross section of society because they are essentially fearful and conservative, and thus insecure. ”

not so prevalent in discussions of his work? And why is Larkin's racism oft ignored? The letters published in '93 contain some repulsive passages that can't be excused. We have a responsibility to take poetry in its honest context and not to sweep inconvenient truths under the rug. And Larkin's racism and right wing leanings and misogyny were part of a general snobbery against translated poetry, poetry from cultures other than his own, that defined a formalism which sought not only to be dominant but to occlude others. This is the real crime to me, as a British poet, that a wholly unnecessary dualism was fashioned out of this conservative enclave of post war 'major' poets, which alienated if not buried, the appreciation for the great British modernists of his era like Tom Raworth, Bill Griffiths, Lee Harwood, Anselm Hollo, Alex Trocchi. When you hold Larkin up to those considered the major figures of the European tradition of his time - Brecht, Beckett, Amichai, Brodsky, Milosz, Sachs, Celan, Ekelof, Rozewicz - how does he stand? When he is held up against Ginsberg, O'Hara, Neruda, Paz, Seferis...? I could make a very long list. He wouldn't be on it, and those who would from the UK, are not known by most.

Q Do you agree that online magazines have transformed the poetry scene? It seems to be widely accepted that the Internet has democratised poetry, and encouraged experimentalism, but — looking solely at prize-winners and publishing lists at the bigger houses — you could be forgiven for thinking that old hierarchies remain firmly in place. Are we perhaps in the early stages of a long-term shift?



Artwork by Amira Farooq

A I'm not sure if that's true, there certainly is a shift taking place, but it is not something unique to poetry. The internet changes the means by which we communicate, it opens boundaries at a speed never before possible, but I think it is possibly a misnomer to associate the prevalence of online poetry journals with a rise in experimentalism. We are less tolerant, as a poetic culture, of the new now than we were one hundred years ago. The internet is so democratic that it is almost endless, and thus, while it has the potential to fashion new modes of the poetic, and make dynamic new poets well known, is that really the case? Has any poet become well received because of their presence online? The potential may remain just that. I do think though that there is a change afoot, but that the presence of internet magazines is simply one part of a larger progression. The main reason

for the change is probably because the status quo simply isn't that popular with a new generation of poetry readers. I don't know anyone of my age, who is interested in poetry, who buys up the latest book by the major prize winners they are already long familiar with. There is undoubtedly the climate for change, if we are active in making it happen and do so without sabre rattling. No doubt the online poetry community will play a part in that change.

Read S.J. Fowler's work as part of our Emerging British Poets Feature curated by Jacob Silkstone and with an introduction by Todd Swift.

ESTER

By Lorna Brown

“Hello, is this Ester Raines?” Ester should have felt the chill of the past at her neck, but she was not expecting the girl to say, “Bernard gave me your number. I’m Moiré Hennigan’s daughter.”

Hearing Moiré’s name, Ester had the sensation of waking in her dark narrow hall. She felt empty and bereft, as though her life since Moiré had been swiped from under her feet.

“I know,” the girl said. She had started to cry and Ester heard an intake of breath, a pulling together, and envied the girl’s ability to rein it in. ‘I know,’ she had said, and Ester’s heart had missed a beat. Her hand covered her mouth, burying the cry that had died at birth. “You were her best friend.” She finished, and Ester hung up.

The phone rang seconds later. The vibrations swam through her palm, down her arm, and into her heart that had started to thump with a quickness that made Ester feel faint. She had not thought of Moiré for over thirty years.

She lifted the receiver, and let it fall, cutting the girl off, before taking the phone off the hook and moving slowly, like someone who had just heard of a death, into the kitchen. For years, the memory of Moiré had been blocked by her husband’s solid arms and her sons’ shouts, but now on an early morning, with the clouds looming like nosy neighbors, fragments were coming back to her, as though the girl’s voice had been a hammer on the dam holding everything in.

Ester was hit with the vision of that vast room with its high bay windows and pale walls, where faces peered down from their vantage points, serious eyes and sullen mouths that Ester in her nineteen years had hated. She remembered the fire place, large and open, like a mouth needing to be covered, and the too soft carpet which had made her steps feel light and not entirely under her control.

She remembered Moiré waiting in her long black dress, hands joined in front, half gone... all her years of knowing her, of being her best friend, wiped away by this room and the man who owned it.

Ron, old enough to be their father, grey haired and serious, who became a shadow clouding their relationship. Ester always felt his stifling presence in the thick heat of his house and the eyes peering

down on her. She had hated him, his pleasantries, his lank handshake, but mostly the way he poisoned Moiré’s mind. Ester knew the secrecy was Ron’s idea. How easy would it have been to manipulate the innocent eighteen year old? How easy to take her from her friend and her life, and imprison her in his Kensington home.

At first, Moiré stayed in her job. She went to work on public transport, and told Ester that she didn’t want people talking. She wanted to keep her independence. Besides Ron had meetings here and there, worked late every day, and she preferred to know her routine, to rely on no one.

But after her brother’s visit, she stopped working. Her face turned pale and gaunt, and she refused to go out. She was made to suffer for Bernard’s appearance, for disobeying the man who shrugged and pretended innocence. Within weeks of moving to that house, Moiré grew wary of the outside world. At first Ester could convince her to go for a walk in the park.

Sometimes they would have tea and sandwiches in a café close by, where Moiré sat in a dazed state of tension, unable to keep a firm grip on conversation as she looked out the window, studying passersby as if worried that some dangerous animal might appear.

“You’re afraid of Ron, aren’t you?” Ester insisted one day.

Moiré shook her head. She wouldn’t meet her eyes, hadn’t done since Ester wrote to Bernard and told him what was happening. Her pale hand was lying on the table between them. When Ester went to hold it, she pulled away. “I had to tell Bernard where you were. I was scared, I still am.”

Dark eyes fixed on Ester. She would give nothing away, and her absence brought Ester forward, “I didn’t know what else to do.”

The smile was swift and felt like a slap on the face, “Who said you had to do anything?”

“I should have just left you alone in that house?”

“Yes, I was happy.”

“You were, but you’re not now, help me, tell me what I should do.”

“Nothing Ester, I want you to do nothing, do you understand!”

She didn’t understand. Moiré was pushing her away; just like her brother. Bernard had been a mess when he came back from seeing her. His eyes were red from tears and his voice low and shaky. “What’s happened to her?” he asked, and Ester had no answer. When he had gone back to Ireland, Ester went to the house in Kensington. Ron opened the door and looked at her for a long time before asking, “What?”

“Is Moiré here?”

“No!”

Moiré’s dark coat was hanging on the peg behind him. Ester glanced at it, but he didn’t notice, or didn’t care. He was about to close the door, and Ester’s hand went out, her gaze darting towards the cracked and chipped wood near the door handle. “Her brother did that.”

The scorn in Ron’s voice ran through Ester and made her too angry to argue. She hated his conceited notions, the way he looked at her without seeing her, and could only imagine how he would have treated Bernard, barring him at the door, hardly giving him the effort of a grimace.

“What about Bernard? He’s really worried.” she asked in the café and Moiré’s cheeks became flushed. For a moment Ester thought that she would cry and hoped for a softening, a way to bridge the distance, and put her hand on her friend’s, to touch where she used to touch and where now touch was scorned. But when Moiré spoke, her voice was hard. “Poor Bernard...”

She was a different girl to the one whose excited face peered from the front door on Ester’s first visit to Kensington. “I’m so glad you came, I missed you.” Her gaze had been sure and deep, as if she had climbed inside herself and finally found something she liked.

The smile was confident, enhancing the loveliness of her skin. During those weeks of restfulness she had talked about studying accountancy. She had always been a good student.

At home she had sat quietly at the back of the class, rarely lifting her eyes, nodding to the teacher with embarrassment, her discomfort with attention so obvious that she was usually left alone. Fortunately there was no need to test her knowledge. Moiré was conscientious in her homework.

After Moiré’s mother died, her father remarried, and her step brother made up for his mother’s lack of interest. Eight years her senior, Bernard took

her under his wing, helping her with her school work, and later when she had surpassed him, he got her father, who was large and quiet, more like a shadow floating around the house than a solid presence, to pay for private tuition.

Moiré resembled the dark mass of her father, with brown eyes and dark hair, while Bernard had light blue eyes, brown hair and a smile that made Ester faint hearted. Without thinking, she would doodle his name, draw love hearts in between, an arrow from her to him. Moiré caught her once and the hurt in her eyes surprised Ester. “You can’t like him.”

“You don’t own him.” Ester had argued, annoyed. Moiré shook her head, her gaze held on the names written in blue pen as if they smelled foul.

Ester felt the possessiveness in Moiré’s silent retreat, and in the mood that hung over her for the rest of that day. She’d seen signs of her jealousy in the light touch of her friend’s hand when others had taken Ester’s attention for too long.

This had been her only concern when they went to England, where they shared an apartment with two other girls, but Moiré was easy in their company, her quietness not so strained and tight, as if the city with its smells, sounds and feeling of obscurity had loosened her. During the evening, they listened to music on the radio, dancing around the dark shabby couch and mismatched armchairs. On days off, they sunned themselves on their building’s enclosed flat roof with the sounds of traffic filtering through their conversation. It was there with the sky above her and the hard ground underneath Moiré first heard Ron’s name.

“He’s kind and interested.”

Later, Ester realized the word ‘interested’ should have made her sit up and stare at Moiré until the truth came out. But she was too caught up in their freedoms, too content with the evenings spent jiving, the sound of linoleum sliding against leather shoes and the feel of Moiré’s hands in hers.

As the months progressed, Moiré started staying late at work and Ester hated that she never realized what was happening until it was too late. She had thought homesickness was the reason for the heavy weight of her shoulders and the empty feeling in her belly, when in reality it was her friend’s lingering absences, her drifting away.

It was only a matter of time before she came back to Moiré packing her bags. She stood at the



The Mad Woman in the Attic by Brianna Angelakis

bedroom door, the silence of the apartment raining down on her. What were the other girl's names, the girls they had danced and laughed with, who moved into their own corners when the dynamics changed? Had they seen what was happening? Had they thought Ester naïve? She could no longer picture their faces, but knows they were home that day. They asked Ester if everything was okay, and Ester waved them away before stepping inside the bedroom and closing the door. "What are you doing?"

"I'm moving in with Ron."
"You can't!"
Moiré stopped packing to straighten up and look at Ester with a ferociousness that was new.
"He'll take care of me."
"What about your family?"
"What about them?" The anger was so thick, it drifted between and made Ester's breath catch. Moiré was glaring at her, and she shook her head, "don't go Moiré, you're making a mistake."

She could see the thoughts roaming around Moiré's dark eyes before she shrugged them away, as if the truth no longer mattered, and watched helplessly as her friend zipped her bag and strode towards the door. Only when she was gone, did Ester admit that she had been afraid to stop her. The girl leaving the room had been so full of determination she looked like a stranger.

Three days later Moiré appeared at the restaurant full of smiles and offering her half of the rent.

"I don't want it" Ester pushed her hand away and Moiré laughed, the sound light and airy and ruffling Ester's skin. "What's so funny?"

"You, all angry at me, it's going to be okay, I promise."

"You're an idiot."

Moiré's eyes narrowed, Ester saw the fleeting anger before she shook it off. "I'm giving you the rent, so I can keep the room."

"And keep this a secret from your family."

"I don't want them to know where I am."

"I'm not surprised."

Moiré was shoving the money in her hand, and she let it fall into the space in her palm before closing her fingers around it. At least this was one less worry. She hadn't known what she would do. She didn't want to share a room with someone else, to have another girl fit into Moiré's space, but she couldn't go home either, not yet, not without asking, "Can I visit you?"

Moiré shrugged, "can I trust you?"

With the lack of response, she smiled, "you were never good at lying."

The next time she saw Moiré, she was ready. "I want to meet him and I want to see where you live, otherwise the next letter that comes from your home will be sent back unopened."

That evening she took a bus to Kensington. The house was white and narrow with black railings around the small square garden. She knocked on the door, and Moiré answered, bright eyed with excitement. She grabbed Ester's hand as if her desertion hadn't happened, and Ester hadn't had to black mail her into telling her where she lived. She pulled Ester in through the plush hall, larger than Ester would have imagined, passed the stairs, to the sitting room where the high backed chairs stood face to face in front of the fire, and Ron was waiting. Ester's heart dropped, she had hoped to have time with her friend alone, but the leanness of his smile told her he was

not going anywhere. "Welcome Ester."

She did not feel welcome at all. Within weeks, Ron, with his brown eyes, a shade brighter than Moiré's, like gold caught behind wire rimmed glasses, dark hair going grey, his firm mouth and expensive suits, was at the door of his house in Kensington, a sudden buffer between Moiré and the world. How quickly everything changed, innocence gone, pulled from under their feet.

Ester could have forgiven Moiré for abandoning her for an aged and strict lover. She might have looked passed her treatment of her family, which led her father to write letters and ask in a strained and tired hand, 'what is happening to Moiré, why does she not write?'

Ester read the between the lines guilt for never being there, while he described how Bernard had lost the ability to sleep. We should never have let her go, her father wrote, and Ester found herself on Moiré's side... thinking they had no choice ... it was Moiré's life. But months later, all warmth for Moiré would seep out, running through the cracks in their friendship, their lack of trust, and Ron's continual presence.

In a kitchen in North Dublin, with the clock ticking in the background, Ester closed her eyes to the slurring words and the fallen wet mouth. Moiré's thin red lips were monstrous in their drunkenness. "You have no idea what you would do!" she screamed at Ester.

"Yes, I do," Ester answered. Her body was rigid and tense, and the words clear and even. "I would keep the baby and I wouldn't drink," her gaze took in their rich surroundings, "you have all this!"

"It's not what you think." Moiré spat.

Ester wanted to grab her arms, but looking down into dark eyes, seeing the paleness of her face and the sorrow in her misty eyes, she had the impression that Moiré might break into little pieces by her feet. "Then why don't you tell me what it is, what's happening. Jesus you wouldn't have even told me you were pregnant if I hadn't guessed."

Twice in the space of twenty minutes Moiré had run to the bathroom with the blood rushing from her face. When Ester asked her if she was expecting a baby, Moiré didn't deny it. She didn't say yes either.

Moiré stiffened. "Because you're so trustworthy... How do I know you aren't going to run back and tell Bernard?"

"I did that to help you. Have you looked at yourself in the mirror lately?"

The sprightly girl who had answered the door eight weeks ago had disappeared, to leave a woman whose smile cracked the dry hardness of her face. Her gaze was like a moist weak handshake, barely registering what it held, before letting go again.

"I don't want to look." Brought Ester on her knees, the admission had given her some hope, its faint spark letting her see how scared she had become. "You mustn't give the child away. Ron will help. He can't throw you out."

"Ron will do whatever I want."

Did she really believe that? This woman who had let age creep up before time, who had grown cold sitting before the fire that never went out, as if the flames were sucking her strength, this house was taking her soul, the pictures laughing down at them.

"Then keep your child."

"I hate this child!" Ester still felt the force of those words and the terror that had gripped her with the notion that Moiré had already gone. "What's happened to you?"

"I've never pretended to be someone I'm not, I am not the liar."

Years later, memory of those words would not allow her talk to the child Moiré had carried and hated. 'Your mother never pretended to be anyone else', she'd say to the girl, who she imagined had brown eyes and dark hair like her parents. The girl would ask, "So what was she?" And on the kitchen table with her fingers digging into skin to ease the pain of memory, all she could think to answer was 'mean'.

Days after she discovered Moiré was pregnant, Ester moved back to Ireland. She was unable to stay in the same apartment they had shared. The sound of their long dead laughter glided through the walls and kept her up at night.

Ester's mother met her off the bus, her mouth tight and hard, the lines crawling through her forehead showing her anger even before Ester felt her hard and unyielding grip, "What's this I hear about Moiré, what's happened?"

With the bus starting up again, its engine like an old man's cough, and the narrow street spreading out in a quiet hush, Ester shook her head and bit her lip to hold back the tears. "I don't know."

"She won't let her own father visit. The worry has made him shrink, I tell you."

"I don't want to talk about her, okay."

By the time the child was born, Ester had started dating Pete. He was the only person she cried with, the one person she could trust not to keep an account of her talk, and he fought against her going to England, "she'll only hurt you again. Don't do it to yourself." But Ester had counted the weeks to the birth, and needed to see if Moiré had allowed the baby to soften her and bring her back from the dark place she had disappeared to.

Pete flew to England with her, but she went to that house alone. The moment the door in Kensington opened, Ester knew there was no baby inside, but she thought the child must have been born in one of the fancy bedrooms with the quilted sheets and fine silky wall paper. The quiet was thicker as if made stronger by the infusion of a new born cry.

Moiré's smile was kind and reached her brown eyes, but her, "Ester, I missed you," sounded flat.

"You could have written." Ester told her.

"I didn't know where you were."

"I went home."

Moiré's 'good' annoyed her. The last thing she wanted was this woman's approval. Her eyes scanned the sitting room for a crib or small vests, while her heart grew heavy in her chest, so it seemed to reach her throat and make small talk impossible.

"There's no baby here."

Moiré was standing by the window, dressed in dark trousers and a pale pink t-shirt, her hair was pulled back from her head. She looked tired. Ester couldn't read her face, though her gaze was soft, impatience oozed from her parted lips. "Is that why you came?"

Ester nodded, finding the release of words difficult as if they clung to her, like nervous children unwilling to go forth in this room.

"She was born two weeks ago." The deadpan way Moiré was speaking made Ester feel nauseous.

"I was given this so I might never forget." She pulled up her t-shirt and Ester saw a scar, smooth, pale and thin running from below her breast to the button of her pants where it disappeared.

Minutes later, Ester stumbled from that house, gasping for breath, as though she had been held under water the whole time. She ran down the road, blinded by tears, to the park where Pete was waiting, and was never so glad to have someone's arms holding her together. She didn't tell Pete about the

scar, or Moiré saying that her baby girl was in a good place, Ron had made sure of that. Ester had resisted the urge to spit with the sound of his name as if she was an old Irish gypsy walking for the front door with quick steps, while Moiré remained standing in that room.

The doorbell rattled through the memory of light spilling onto Moiré's narrow shoulders, but it took a second press of the buzzer for Ester to come back to the gloom of her kitchen. Her body was stiff and sore.

It was 2pm; four hours had been spent sitting on the hard kitchen chair. The next chime, longer and more persistent, brought her to her feet, glad to have something to take her mind from Moiré. It was probably her eldest Michael, having lost his key again. No doubt her son would see through her smile, look sideways at her and ask, "Something wrong?" She decided she would shake her head, and leave the girl's voice buried inside.

When she opened the door, the sight of Bernard's eyes staring at her made her gasp. Light blue, specks of grey, and his brown hair hung on her shoulders. "I'm sorry." The girl said. She was tall and wore jeans and a black sweater. "I tried calling you back for hours but the phone was engaged, I had to come. I had to find out about my mother."

Ester was hit with images, rising from the girls startling blue gaze. The past was sparring with her, moving easily through her defenses, Bernard standing at Moiré's bedroom door, leaning over her, bringing a silence to Moiré's room that Ester had always supposed was from reverent love, a possessive need, Moiré crying out with Ester's infatuation. "You can't like him."

Ester's grasp on the door tightened with her fear that she might crumple from the memory of Bernard coming back to her apartment that day with bruised hands, unable to look her in the eye, the smell of sweat coming from him, "What happened to her?" or "What happened."

Which had he said, why can't she remember now. Either one, he had not wanted an answer.

The silence dragged on between them. Ester cleared her dry throat. She was so thirsty and drained, as if she had walked miles to get here. "Bernard knew about you?" her voice was raspy and faltering.

The girl nodded, confused and worried by Es-

ter's face. She thought she must have turned pale.

"I was happy." Moiré told her, sitting in the café, jumpy and gaunt.

"I was happy," a life so easily ruined, the door bashed in. Ester was hit with the fact, as if it had been waiting in the sidelines for the right time to attack, Ron wouldn't have answered the door. It was Friday afternoon when Bernard went to that house, his thick shoulders barred against the world. Moiré would have come home from work early, but not Ron, the boss, he always worked late.

Did Moiré scream when she saw Bernard's face? Did she try to close the door, pleading to be left alone? Ester imagined the sound of the latch catching, a teasing click pulled asunder by the push that sent her backwards.

Nausea was building up in Ester's belly, a mix of sadness, rage and disbelief snowballing her.. She met Bernard a few weeks after she moved home and asked, "Have you heard from Moiré?" He smiled nervously. "There's nothing we can do."

She imagined the letter that would have come from Ron, telling him of the baby's existence, and ensuring Moiré's safety, but too late and at too much cost.

She wondered if Bernard had thought of his daughter through the years, and if he was worried that she would have his eyes? The color was his, but the sadness was Moiré's and brought Ester back into the hall to allow the girl entry. Her limbs were heavy with numbness. There would be time to cry later, for Moiré, and the letter she had sent across the waters with the address on a Kensington street, the betrayal that had killed her in the end.

"Thank you." The girl said, the relief coming over her like perfume. "My name's Jules..." She told Ester as she stepped inside and Ester thought of her friend dancing around an English apartment, light footed, and free.

Lorna's stories have appeared in Ideagems, Cigale, Inkwell and Quill and Downer magazine. Her book, 'Distance between Lovers' is due to be published early next year. At the moment she lives in Winchester, MA with her husband and three daughters.

SPOTLIGHT WRITER: CAITLIN HORROCKS

Interviewed by Abbigail N. Rosewood



*Caitlin Horrocks lives in Michigan by way of Ohio, Arizona, England, Finland, and the Czech Republic. She is the author of the story collection, *This Is Not Your City*. Her stories and essays appear in *The New Yorker*, *The Best American Short Stories 2011*, *The PEN/O. Henry Prize Stories 2009*, *The Pushcart Prize XXXV*, *The Paris Review*, *Tin House*, *One Story* and elsewhere. Her work has won awards including the Plimpton Prize, and fellowships to the Bread Loaf and Sewanee Writers' Conferences.*

Q Where were you when you received news that “The Sleep” was selected for *The Best American Short Stories 2011*? How did you react?

A I was reading my email at the dining room table. I literally hopped up and down and yelled upstairs to my partner Todd. I think there was some dancing around the house. I’d daydreamed about someday having a piece in *Best American Short Stories* since I was required to get the book for a class I took in high school. I have over a decade’s worth in a row on a shelf in my office at GVSU. As colleagues heard about the publication and came to congratulate me, one person eyed this long row of BASSs, nodded solicitously, and said, “I can see how this would be very special for you.”

Q The last paragraph in “The Sleep,” to me, seems more than just a beautiful ending but also poses a philosophical question about our condition as humans in the twenty first century. Are we “better neighbors in warm beds than we ever were awake”? What do you think it takes, to be awake?

A I’m now reflecting on the philosophical flaw in my own story, which is that I actually think people who are “awake” are almost inevitably going to be better neighbors than the sleeping ones. In the story, the townspeople notice each other’s distress, but decide that the easiest way to deal with it all is by going to sleep. The sleep allows them to be magnanimous with each other, when they might otherwise feel too hard-pressed themselves to reach out. But in non-mass-hibernation situations, I have to believe that being awake helps people, and communities, and helps people to help their communities, however tentatively or amorously or imperfectly. Empathy is one of the qualities I value most highly in a writer and in a person, and for me, the most essential part of being awake.

Q What are you reading right now?

A Honestly, right now I’m reading a lot of submissions for *The Kenyon Review*, and I’m writing these answers while staring down a stack of student papers. The complete books I read most recently were for classes I’m teaching, or for our visiting writers series: T. Fleischmann, David Shields, Davy Rothbart, Margaret Atwood, David Foster Wallace. The book I purchased most recently was Robin Hemley’s new story collection *Reply All*, but it’s had to take up residence in my to-read pile.

Q Your writing desk looks beautifully organized. Are you also an organizer in your writing? Do you plan ahead or write what comes to mind?

A My desk looks beautifully organized because I cleaned it so I could submit a picture of it to a blog feature on writers’ spaces. The photo is a total lie. It’s also outdated, because I’ve since made a really classy-looking standing desk by placing an old cardboard box on top of my regular desk. And then there are the days I write hunched over my coffee table. Generally, I have to hope my writing comes out more organized than the spaces I actually do it in. I don’t do much planning ahead for my stories; the first draft is whatever comes to mind, and revision is where the organization becomes important.

Q Do you prefer to write with noise, music, or silence?

A I feel like music is the cooler answer, but I often struggle to write to music, especially if there are lyrics. So silence is the default, until it starts to weigh on me and I go looking for something to distract me a little, but not too much. I recently finished a story that was written almost entirely to PJ Harvey’s *Let England Shake* on repeat. The story has absolutely nothing to do with anything in that album—content, mood or style—that I can perceive. But for some reason, it worked.

Q What do you think about the pattern contemporary writers now tend to go through: writing articles in col-

lege, interning with literary magazines, getting an MFA, teaching at a college level, in order to survive as writers?

A Naively, I hadn't even thought of the first two things you list as part of the overall pattern, although of course they're things that my students are doing, that I encourage them to do. It's sobering, to realize that I'm helping to perpetuate a pattern that I don't necessarily think is the right path for every writer.

I didn't realize that Creative Writing MFAs existed until I was nearly done with college. Even then, I was split between thinking that such a program sounded awesome, and that it sounded crazy: a graduate degree in writing stories! (Although at the time I was thinking about pursuing a PhD in English Literature, so I don't know why an MFA seemed any crazier than that). Getting an MFA turned out to be absolutely the right choice for me as a person and a writer; I learned a lot, and grew a lot, and I think my writing improved in ways it might have taken me years and years and years to achieve on my own. But I certainly don't think MFAs are the only way to improve as a writer (who does?). And I have complicated feelings about the way that college-level teaching has become the default job for creative writers. It's the profession I chose, and I understand its appeals: I have time in the summers to write, I'm rewarded for writing as part of my job, I get to talk about writing with students and colleagues, among other things.

I also don't think it's fair to anyone—the writers or the students—to pursue teaching if it isn't something you can muster enthusiasm for on its own merits. Teaching can be energizing, but most of my work has to come from the same part my brain, so to speak: spending my days reading workshop stories or going to meetings and then trying to write in the evenings doesn't work particularly well for me, I've found. And I'm one of the very, very lucky people who has a stable, permanent, fulltime job. For contingent faculty, scraping together teaching schedules semester by semester, teaching is, in many ways, as tenuous and exploitative as any food service or retail job. I think the question of what will allow someone to “survive” as a writer—artistically, financially—has a much wider range of answers than the usual pattern you describe. That said, I don't have answers

for how to make alternate paths more visible or encouraged.

Q **What is a food you like from a culture you didn't grow up in?**

A So many it's hard to choose. The culinary culture I grew up in was decidedly Midwestern. My parents cook and eat lots of different foods now, but as a child, I remember fair amounts of beef and Velveeta.

Although not together. And those memories are probably more about my own picky eating than what my mother actually wanted to make: I refused to eat pasta with “red sauce,” for example: I only wanted noodles with butter, and cheese from a green can.

Anyway: I was part of a youth theater production my freshman year of high school that was doing tech week rehearsals in downtown Ann Arbor. We got a short dinner break, and I didn't know where to go, so I followed the cool kids (as much as the theater kids are ever the cool ones) to what turned out to be a Middle Eastern place, and ordered last so I could repeat whatever they chose. I came home bragging to my parents about this exotic, fantastic food we all needed to try called “falafel.”

Q **Many writing students are influenced by their professor. Do you think your students have influenced you in return?**

A Absolutely. I'm teaching a “readings for writers” course right now, and I hadn't realized how much I missed simply sitting in a room with smart people and talking about books. They point out things I hadn't noticed in the text, or interpret the author's moves in fresh ways. In workshops, I've come away from class discussions or student stories thinking about the ways that something in particular went awry or succeeded, and how I might want to tackle a similar challenge in my own work. And of course, it's a pretty amazing job perk to be surrounded by people who believe completely and sincerely in the power of writing to offer escape, wisdom, pleasure, insight—to make us all less alone.



Photography by Nazuk Ifikhar Rao

“ I don't know why an MFA seemed any crazier than that). Getting an MFA turned out to be absolutely the right choice for me as a person and a writer; I learned a lot, and grew a lot. ”

Q **Tell us a little bit about what you are working on right now.**

A I think I've nearly finished a second story collection (the stories aren't linked or written about any one theme, but I've been fascinated with failed utopias lately). And I'm working, always, on a novel.

SUN ABOVE THE CLOUDS

By William Blomstedt

“Look like rain, don’t it.”

“Yessir ... mmmm ... yessir.”

The dreary gray clouds stretched as far as the eye could see, which was quite a ways in Bunson, North Dakota. Most people thought of Montana as the Big Sky state, but North Dakota could put up a pretty good fight for that title, especially with most of western Montana tucked in the narrow drainages of the Rocky Mountains. On a clear day in Bunson, looking to the horizon was an elementary reminder of space and time. From the top of a knoll, a view unobstructed by buildings or mountains, one could watch the giant cloud sculptures extend upwards into the atmosphere as they silently floated over Radclaw, Sawfield or any of the surrounding towns. The clouds far away were just as big as the cumulonimbus formations passing over Bunson, but on the horizon they looked as delicate as puffs of smoke waiting for a breeze.

This day a flat and drab cloud covered the sky, like wastewater floating a few hundred feet above the ground. One could not pick out the sun’s location, and without a timepiece it was impossible to tell if it was time to get coffee at Wellgood’s or a beer at the Sinkhole. No rain had yet glazed Bunson’s streets, but it felt like the drops had already parted with the clouds and were on their kamikaze paths towards the sidewalks and rooftops.

Roland and Cliffis were the only people on Main Street. They stood next to each other underneath Wellgood’s overhang and both kept glancing up at the clouds. Usually Roland stood alone at the diner’s door when Oliver unlocked it at 5:35 AM. He would sit at the Dead Peckers’ usual table for fifteen to twenty minutes by himself, reading the newspaper or just stirring his thoughts with a cup of coffee. It was often his favorite time of the day - a few moments of solitude to gather himself and wait for the day to unfold. The other old men had their normal arrival and departure times, but none so regular as Walt. Every morning Walt would watch the WGBY news at his home, turn off the TV and walk to the diner at the same pace, opening the door at exactly at 6:36, or a few minutes later in the wintertime when he had to don his hat and mittens. His had such precise timing that Patty sometimes reset the

diner’s clock to his arrival, if the clock was a little off.

This morning Cliffis was standing in front of Wellgood’s when Roland parked his truck on the street. Unlike the other boys, Cliffis didn’t have a routine. He’d show up whenever he chose, sometimes spending every possible minute at the diner for days on end, and then disappearing for an entire month without a word of explanation. This day Roland found Cliffis with his hands in his pockets and a woolen hat jammed tightly down on his head. He would not have been surprised if Cliffis had been waiting there for three hours. They exchanged the early morning weather evaluation and soon after Oliver’s green Toyota Camry appeared on Main Street and turned into the alley that led behind the building.

The rain had yet to reach the ground. Roland took a final look at the clouds before turning his attention to the diner’s glass door. After a few moments, Oliver switched on the lights and started the coffee machine. Before taking off his rain jacket, he crossed the room and unlocked the front door.

“Mornin’ gents. Think it’s gonna rain, huh?”

“Yup. I reckon.”

“Mmmm ... mmmm.”

Oliver held the door open and Cliffis doffed his hat as he passed through. They ambled to their normal table in the corner and minutes later two cups of coffee were steaming in front of them. Oliver returned the pot to its filling station and moved into the back area where he began his morning prep. Roland and Cliffis were left alone in the diner and Cliffis rocked back and forth in his seat, continuously humming.

“It’s been a dry one this year.” Roland said
“Crops sure could use the rain.”

“Yessir, it has ... mmmm ... mmmm.”

Roland looked at the black liquid in his mug. He didn’t put any cream or sugar in his coffee, he only stirred it with a spoon as he sipped. The coffee at Wellgood’s wasn’t the best, but it was hot and it kept flowing. A buck could fill your mug for the entire morning and caffeinate you all afternoon.

“Specially the alfalfa. Lookin’ as dry as can be.”

Cliffis didn’t say anything. He was in one of his

quiet moods, just humming away to his cup of coffee. On a talkative day he’d jaw your ear off, if you gave him half a chance. He had his favorite subjects: fishing, North Dakota past and present, the New York Yankees from 1949 to 1953, antique farm tools and, oddly enough, ABBA. But then he’d go off on other tangents a ways round the bend. One sometimes had to bumble along with him while he told you, in minute detail, the new method he had devised for raking leaves, or the pros and cons of Tupperware. From what Roland could tell, it was about a one-in-ten shot if a talkative Cliffis showed up and today had not hit the mark. Roland stirred his coffee and the silence rested between them.

“Nothing like last summer. Last summer was wet as could be. Farmers out in the fields hoping for sunshine. Washed half the crop away with that one storm in June.”

“Yup ... mmmmmmm ... Was a bad ‘un.”

“Sure was.”

Roland tucked the spoon into his thumb and took a sip of coffee. Cliffis also picked up his mug, and, still rocking back and forth, somehow drank without spilling a drop. When Cliffis sipped his coffee he constantly added cream shots and sugar. Patty would try to refill his mug, but she could never add more than a dash on the top. By the end of the morning Roland was fairly sure that Cliffis was drinking coffee-colored sweet cream.

Roland watched this human pendulum and tried to think of how long they had known each other. Roland had come to Bunson when he was young. His family bought a piece of land and he spent his adolescent years on these high plains. When his early-twenties hit he fled to Wisconsin with the goals of earning money, finding a girlfriend and drinking in a bar where you didn’t know the detailed history of everyone in the room. After he had accomplished these, Roland returned to Bunson, dragging the future wife with him and together they took over the family farm. Cliffis had arrived in town sometime during those missing years. He was Artie’s cousin and had only meant to work one season, but he stayed through the winter, then the next summer and soon became a Bunson fixture; another odd duck that liked the looks of this pond. Now Cliffis lived in a shack behind Artie’s house. Roland had moved back in ... it had been something like thirty-five years now. Almost forty. Forty years they had

known each other. Roland took another sip of coffee.

“Cliffis, you gone fishing lately?”

“Mmmm ... nope ... mmmmmmm.”

“Yeah.” Roland said, “Me neither. I’m sure Artie told you about that bass though.”

“Mmmm ... yup ... mmmmmmm.”

“Said it was twenty inches but he forgot to measure it. My ass.”

“Mmmmmmmmmmm.”

Wellgood’s door jingled and Patty stepped in. She smiled at the men as she shed her rain jacket.

“Howdy boys. Cliffis, you fall out of bed this morning?”

“Mmmm ... nope ... mmmmmmm”

Patty laughed as if Cliffis had told her a good joke and then moved across the room. She found the pot of coffee and brought it to them, filling Roland’s mug by half and adding only a splash to Cliffis’s.

“Lookin’ dark out there,” she said.

“Sure is. How are the kids, Patty?”

“Why, they’re doin’ fine. Hope they don’t get rained on out there waiting for the bus.”

“I’m sure they won’t. Last night Christopher said it wasn’t gonna start til mid-morning.”

“Yeah, I heard that too. But you never know round these parts.”

“Supposed to be a deluge after that.”

“Yep. It’ll be good for the crops, though. Less it’s too much. Remember last summer?”

“Yeah, I sure do. Me and Cliffis were just talking about it.”

“Mmmm ... was a bad ‘un.”

“Sure was ...” Patty smiled at them and returned behind the counter to get ready. Roland looked into his mug. He picked up his spoon and stirred the coffee into a small whirlpool, then watched the black liquid spin until it settled to a pond-stillness. Then he took a sip and looked at Cliffis.

“Cliffis, doya remember the blizzard of ‘85?”

Cliffis stopped still in mid-rock and his eyes moved in unison towards the upper right.

“Aaahyup.”

“THAT was a bad one. I remember not being able to leave the farm for three days there was

so much snow. Couldn't call anyone, no power. Couldn't do nothin' except burn the candles and fill up the wood stove. My whole family had to camp out in the kitchen together and we had to ration the wood. Then the pipes froze up so we only had a splash of water each day. That was a bad one."

"Ya ... mmmm ... was a bad 'un."

"Yup. Then there was the spring of '90 when we got that softball-sized hail. That was bad. Drove Harris right batty. Killed all his crops that year, sold his property right off for pennies on the dollar. Moved into Bismarck, straight into a home. Poor fella."

"Mmmm ... Ya, sure was a bad 'un."

"What else..." Roland leaned back and looked at the ceiling. "We had that drought in '93... or '94, can't remember. Bad, but not real bad. And that strange summer back... way back. Sixty-something, when we had no rain at all in the first half of the summer and rain every day from August on. Boy, that was somethin'."

"Mmmmm ... mmmmmm."

Behind the counter, Patty turned the knob on the old bunny-eared TV and the set buzzed to life. At the flick of the switch, all the pixels burst onto the screen and spent the first few seconds finding their assigned color and brightness. Once aligned they formed a picture of Janet Kensey and Eric Wortheimer, the two WGBY anchors seated at their desk. It took three more seconds for the sound to come out of the fuzzy speakers.

"Yes ... ha ... well," Eric chuckled at something just said. "I did have a stomach ache for the rest of the day. Let's take a look at the forecast, looks like we're going to get some rain out there today, doesn't it Veronica?"

"It sure does, Eric." The golden voice came from the TV's muffled speakers and the screen switched to show Veronica Melakonopolis, the morning weather anchor. Both Roland and Cliffis leaned forward in their chairs.

The WGBY-Bismarck Morning Show covered the weather quite extensively. Of the half-hour long time slot, eight minutes of commercials left twenty-two minutes of show. Of the twenty-two minutes, eight to ten of them were focused on the weather over three different segments. The program began with a greeting by Eric and Janet, but switched di-

rectly into a bite-sized weather preview. Then, after the main news headlines, Veronica looked at the radar in more detail and gave the long-range forecast. Finally, after sports and before the sign-off, Veronica gave a third weather rundown for those who already needed reminding on how to dress for the day.

The WGBY Evening News offered a similarly segmented program and a great debate occurred among the people in Bunson, and likely the rest of the greater Bismarck area, whether the Morning Show or the Evening News on WGBY was better. The programs were essentially the same, with the Morning Show reminding the viewers of the highlights of the previous evening's news, and the Evening News reporting on what the Morning Show said was going to happen that day. This cycle never ceased but each show colored the spaces with their own set of anchors and personalities. The news and sports segments of both shows were generally considered equal and favorably looked upon by all. The crux of this argument, the flash point which divided neighbors, friends and family, almost always came down to the weather.

In the mornings the weather anchor was Veronica, who, by any means and standards, was a beautiful woman. Even her most serious detractors had to admit her ease on the eyes. She had a lightning-white smile that dominated the TV screen through the rain, sleet, snow or sun and she dressed exceptionally well, wearing nothing fancy, but combining simple, affordable clothing that left male viewers with their jaws on the table and females planning their next shopping trip.

At first glance, Veronica had the looks of a woman who would never have to lift a finger in her life; there would always be men falling over each other to help her at every turn. But by listening to her speak on TV, with her easy banter, bubbling laughter and down-home colloquialisms, one could tell she was still a modest farm girl, and this was probably her most attractive trait. She had grown up on a farm in Arkaba, a small town in the northwest corner of the state. From there she leapt into the spotlight by winning the title of Miss North Dakota at the fair age of twenty. The rumor mill said she almost captured the Miss America title, but lost due to her platform of accurate weather reportage. In North Dakota this might seem like the most noble of causes, but its importance was lost on non-agrarian communities

and the Miss American judges were certainly not North Dakota farmers. Veronica ended up following her dream and, after gaining her degree in meteorology, became the WGBY morning weather anchor. She provided the kind of weather forecast for everyone under the sun. From kids going to school to old men planning their fishing trips, she presented the weather in a friendly, next-door-neighbor kind of way that, even if she reported tornadoes and blizzards, made you feel like looking out the window at the sky and smiling.

The evening weather show operated under a much different philosophy. When meteorologist Christopher Housen appeared on the screen, the show took on the seriousness and precision of an income tax form. Every evening Christopher dressed in a navy blue suit, a red tie and his hair looked like it had been chiseled out of a block of stone. In his expressionless voice, he proceeded to quickly and thoroughly break down the weather, packing as much information as he could in the allotted time before turning the show back to anchor Ned Foley, who then had to revive the viewers from their stupor with a story of a recovered lost puppy or a successful high school bake-off.

Christopher was not from North Dakota. He came from somewhere like Michigan or Indiana and arrived in Bismarck eight years ago when Ron Felkins retired. Ron Felkins had been the weatherman for thirty-odd-years at WGBY and was a living legend in western North Dakota. Everyone loved Ron. He faithfully reported through the good times and the bad, the snow and the sun, the droughts and the deluges. Sometime in the eighties Bunson even awarded him a medal of honor during the Summer Thresher festival. To everyone's surprise, Ron actually attended the event and sheepishly accepted the award. In his brief, thirty-second speech, he announced that the town of Bunson had a bright and sunny forecast ahead of it and everyone about fell over themselves in delight. Afterward, the line to shake Ron's hand stretched from the stage all the way to the Sinkhole.

Ron was in his early seventies when he retired. At first everyone had their doubts about Christopher, but he soon gained a cult following with his extensive, scientific and accurate-as-possible weather reporting. Christopher's report was a farmer's dream. He exhaustively covered the temperatures, precipi-

tation, wind speed and radar/satellite images as any normal weather report would, but also sometimes included the historical averages and records, dew or frost points, barometric pressure, Haines Index, atmospheric pressure, relative humidity, visibility, heat index, Weekly Crop Moisture Index, Weekly Palmer Index, soil moisture, Livestock Safety Index (which was always 'Alert'), hours of sun, solar radiation and Drying Index to name a few. As the words flew from his mouth and numbers flashed on the screen, all the farmers in the room would lean forward in their chairs. After the whirlwind of technical jargon, Christopher would take it down a notch and summarize the forecast. Sometimes he would highlight one of the statistics and give a brief explanation of why it was important to know for that day. Once the report was over people would discuss the numbers ("Boy, I haven't seen solar radiation hit 4600 since last June...") and feel satisfied with their grasp on the complicated weather process happening all around them.

After Ron Felkins retired from the evening show, Roland quickly became a Christopher fan. He liked watching Veronica in the morning, but for the same reasons he didn't mind watching commercials on TV or going to see a movie with a pretty girl in it. Even though Roland did not understand half of the numbers and indexes that Christopher reported, he felt that the wealth of information could help him in any situation.

Roland had watched Christopher's report every day until last spring when an afternoon of heartburn

“ Retirement, Roland realized, would be the next and final phase in his life. With his social security check and his wife Cindy's retirement plan, they could live comfortably for the rest of their days. ”



Artowrk by Yahat Benazir

turned out to be a minor heart attack and Roland had to take a trip to the Bismarck hospital. Doctors with clipboards stood at his bedside and told him he needed to cut back on the fried foods and start taking things easy, or he wasn't going to be around much longer. They kept him under observation for a few days and all he did between visits from family and doctors was watch the Weather Channel. An unusually warm week had hit that April and Roland took in forecast after forecast from different parts of the country, listening to the weathermen and women parade their best springtime vocabulary. By the end of his stay he could tell anyone the three-day forecast from anywhere between Scranton and Seattle. But this constant meteorological barrage clawed at his worried mind. If he couldn't work as hard anymore, what would happen to the farm?

The big surprise came when Clyde, Roland's eldest son, came from Iowa and said he would return to Bunson to take over the business. Clyde had a good job in Iowa City, and had never mentioned the idea before, but when Roland looked him in the eyes he saw the truth. He could retire. The realization frightened him, but when it stood on his doorstep he could do nothing but to welcome it inside. Before the heart attack, Roland could feel his creaking bones and tight muscles, but his eyes and brain couldn't see the wake of his lifetime spread behind him. In peaceful moments, when he was warm and sitting in a nice chair, the thoughts and years compressed on top of each other into a single indefinable point, one that he had held onto since his youth. Roland could sit still and savor those moments, dragging each one out until his gut started acting up or he leaned over to scratch something and felt complaints from his toes to his neck.

Retirement, Roland realized, would be the next and final phase in his life. With his social security check and his wife Cindy's retirement plan, they could live comfortably for the rest of their days. The week after he left the hospital, Roland officially passed the business onto Clyde and strange feelings of excitement and emptiness swirled inside him like smoke and steam. While Roland vowed to let Clyde run the business, he promised that he would sit down with his boy for the mid-morning meal and talk with him about the farm. The tradition began and Roland imparted his best knowledge over flapjacks and fruit salad every morning. Clyde followed his advice most of the time, but other times he had his own ideas

“He could retire. The realization frightened him, but when it stood on his doorstep he could do nothing but to welcome it inside.”

and brushed Roland's words aside. That hurt a little, but when Roland saw the numbers coming in, he couldn't complain. In his first season of retirement, Roland's farm harvested a bumper crop of sunflowers, even with the rust that had been bothering his fields for the past few years. Clyde also managed a 1.5 ton-per-acre average for the alfalfa, numbers Roland had never seen on this side of the state. Near Fargo that was possible, but for Bunson those numbers were off the charts. Roland was proud of his boy, but right on the heels of that pride was a hollow feeling. When Roland spoke, he could see Clyde politely listening, but sometimes there was a look his son's eyes which made Roland stammer and huff. He wanted to explain that he knew what Clyde was thinking and it wasn't like that; this wasn't just an old timer explaining how they did things back in the good old days. But as Roland listened to his own words, he realized that was exactly what it sounded like, and he eventually stopped trying. They still had breakfast together, but Roland did not talk as much about how he used to run the farm and answered questions only when asked.

When the hollow feeling still remained weeks and months later, Roland realized that he missed running the farm. He missed being on that edge of life. Through all the financial uncertainty and constant fear of disaster, the process of waking up every morning and working became as much a part of him as the breath coming out of his lungs. Every morning for nearly forty years he had woken up and asked himself what needed to be done that day so they could work the next day, and the day after that, and the entire chain of days that led all the way to harvest day. And after harvest day he would take a breath and start getting ready for the next season - repairs, maintenance, paper work, insurance and all the little chores in between. In the little cluttered office on the side of his work barn he could look at

the calendar of the previous year to see what they had done on that day exactly a year ago. If he dug through the scattered piles of paper and magazine, he could find the calendar from the year before that. The longer he dug the further he could go back in history.

In his first winter as head of the farm, Clyde cleaned out all of Roland's junk in the office: the receipts, the misplaced tools, the countless Smitty's Feed and Grain calendars, long-forgotten coffee mugs, stacks upon stacks of old seed catalogs and the notes Roland had written to himself. Clyde swept out the years of dust, bleached the local civilizations of grime and installed filing cabinets and a computer. Now, as Roland had told the Dead Peckers more than once, it looked like the waiting room of his dentist's office. That joke roused a chuckle the first time he told it, but afterwards the scenario became real. Roland avoided that office much like he avoided the dentist, filling his day with the things he used to do for fun, like going to the diner, getting a haircut, or driving into town to get groceries. Each day felt shorter than the last and Roland had the sad realization that life had become less a matter of surviving as it was one of waiting.

The bell on the door jingled and Roland came back into his diner at the table with Cliffis. The TV was in the middle of a commercial when Lester and Artie stepped through the front door and into Wellgood's.

“Mornin', fellas,” Patty said from behind the counter. By the time the door jingled shut, Patty had two mugs and a pot of coffee in her hand.

“Mornin' to you too, Patty.” Artie bellowed. She walked around the counter while Artie and Lester stood in front of the door, extracting themselves from their rain jackets and brushing off their shirts. Lester was nearly a head taller than Artie, but Artie stretched out horizontally two or three times Lester's width. With his jacket off, Artie slapped his belly with both hands and jiggled it up and down.

“God damn, I'm starved. Almost didn't make it through the night.”

“Oh, you poor soul.” Patty said and put the mugs on the table across from Roland and Cliffis. “What's going to save you this morning?” She filled the mugs with coffee and both Artie and Lester moved from the door towards their seats.

“I think the steak and eggs will do me fine, with

white toast, grits and an extra egg. Tell Oliver to cook the steak rare today. I mean rare. Thirty seconds on the grill, no more, no less.”

“I'll have the Hardy Boy, please.” Lester said as he sat down and put his finger through the mug's hoop.

“Sure thing. You boys OK?” Patty looked at Cliffis and Roland. Roland held up his hand and Cliffis rocked back and forth. “OK, it'll be up in a minute,” she said, and returned to the counter. The rest of the diner was still empty and both Lester and Artie started modifying their coffees.

“Cliffis, thought you might have up and died this morning,” Artie said once his coffee was stirred properly. “I didn't see you in the hut and thought you mighta just sleep-wandered off into the fields. Legs would've found your body in a couple of weeks.”

“Mmmm ... Legs is a good dog ... mmmm”

“Sure as hell is,” Artie said and folded his arms so they rested atop his belly. A moment of silence passed over the table before Lester opened his mouth.

“Looks like rain today.” Lester spoke in his deep voice and turned towards the TV set, which showed sports highlights.

“Sure does,” Roland replied. “Cliffis and I were just talking about it.”

“Yep ... mmmmmm ... Sun's always shining above the clouds.”

“I bet ... uh ... I,” Artie stopped and looked at Cliffis like his tongue had been pinched by a pair of pliers, but his words soon found a detour. “I bet Veronica told you guys that this morning, didn't she? She's just a dumb broad. Heard it all from Christopher, I'm sure. Doesn't tell you anything you haven't heard the night before.” He gave the table a slight pound with his fist which jangled the cutlery. “My crops aren't gonna rely on her.”

“Yup,” Lester chimed in. “Just a pretty face and a nice ass.”

“Hey,” Roland said, putting his coffee cup down. “She does alright. I mean ... sure, she's not as thorough as Christopher, but you gotta admit she's good at what she does. She reports the weather, huh? She makes you feel good and she's nice to look at.” Both Artie and Lester nodded their heads. “Sure she isn't as technical about the numbers, but you don't always need that, right?”

“Well, I do.” Artie said. “Without all those numbers how am I gonna know when the first frost is coming? How am I going to know ... how am I going to know when the right day to plant is? Not from Veronica, that’s for sure. If I want her weather forecast, I’ll be just as fine lookin’ out the window. But when I need to know ... I watch those numbers and I know the right day to call up Corey and have him come over with the combine...”

“Yup.” Lester chimed in again, derailing Artie’s speech. Cliffis kept humming and Roland began stirring his mug of coffee.

“I suppose...” Roland started but he stopped talking to look at the television. Lester and Artie turned in their chairs and looked at the screen.

“That’s our newscast for the day, folks,” said Jane Wharton, the Morning Show’s bespectacled news anchor. “Let’s go back to Veronica one last time ... Veronica?”

“Thanks Jane and Eric.” None of the men in the diner moved when Veronica came on screen. She was wearing a yellow button-up sweater over a plain white dress and a golden necklace with earrings to match. From Roland’s seat, Veronica’s image was about the size of his thumb, but her figure and smile burst through the screen and almost filled Wellgood’s.

“Well, as I told you all before,” Veronica said, her voice still musical in spite of the warped speakers, “it’s looking nasty out this morning, but don’t let that fool you. The wind’s going to come down from the north and wipe all these ugly gray clouds out of town. By noon you’ll wish that you’ll be having a picnic out in the countryside with the whole family. Then the rest of the afternoon and evening will be free and clear, and the three-day forecast looks the same.” The computer-generated chart momentarily replaced Veronica and showed sunshine and highs in the upper seventies for the next three days.

“So get out this afternoon ... and have a good ole day, North Dakota.” The camera paused on Veronica for an extra second and then flashed back to Eric and Jane who said their perfunctory goodbyes before the credits. Patty, who was taking a minute’s break to watch the weather, turned off the TV and returned to the kitchen where Oliver was crafting the morning feed.

“Have a good ole day, North Dakota,” Artie said in a snide tone as he turned to the table. It was

the phrase that Veronica used every morning at the end of the broadcast. “She doesn’t know nothing. Look at the sky! It’s gonna pour!”

“Yeah. I suppose,” Roland said.

“Good for old-timers like you, who need to know if they’re going to get wet out there fishing.” Artie said.

“Yeah, I’ve got my boy out there running the show. He’s doing great. You see that field over on the Radclaw side? Best looking sunflowers I’ve seen around this year.”

“Best looking sunflowers I’ve seen on that piece of property, ever!” Artie threw his hands up in the air. “You should’ve turned the farm over to Clyde years ago, if you’d known what’s good for you.”

“Yep, he’s showing me a thing or two. Say, Artie, you should think about adopting a kid. Get one from Korea, that seems to be the thing to do these days. Then you can turn over your back acre of flax to him.”

“Never!” Artie cried “I hate kids. I’ll be farming my land ‘til the day I die. And I still have a section of flax back there, thank you very much.”

“You haven’t had a half-section of flax since the eighties. Even if Veronica’s forecast ruins your crops, you’ll only be out a few hundred bucks.”

Artie pursed his lips together and Roland smiled as he saw a little red flare in Artie’s cheeks.

“I ... used ... to be one of the biggest farmers in

“The Limp Dick Club’s conversation shifted around in topic, reverting briefly back to the weather every time a new person pulled a seat up to the table, but then branching out to the other well-traveled subjects like car repair, fishing and town gossip.”

Scratch County.”

“Yeah, just like that twenty-inch bass of yours, huh?”

By now Artie was puffing hard and his cheeks were flushed. He folded his arms across his chest which usually meant he was through with the conversation. Patty showed up to top off all the coffee cups to the soundtrack of Cliffis’s humming. Artie uncrossed his arms and brought his hands down on the table

“Roland, I’ve got a map in the truck. I’ll...”

The door tinkled, cutting off Artie, and Walt stepped in the diner, right on time. Walt received a Wellgood’s greeting as he took off his coat and as soon as he pulled up a chair, Woodrow and Bernard trickled in. A few minutes later, Vernon burst through the door, licking his lips at the tantalizing aromas greeting him. Even Frank, who wasn’t a regular member but still enjoyed a good session with the Dead Peckers stopped in for a chat. Other tables and stools began to fill up with hungry farmers and it turned into a busy morning for Patty and Oliver. Patty flew around with the coffee pot, filling every mug to the brim and coaxing smiles at every opportunity.

The Limp Dick Club’s conversation shifted around in topic, reverting briefly back to the weather every time a new person pulled a seat up to the table, but then branching out to the other well-traveled subjects like car repair, fishing and town gossip. They even held an informal joke session where everyone shared the jokes they had heard from their latest conversation with out-of-town cousins or relatives. Everyone at the table guffawed at the punch lines and made mental notes to tell the joke to their cousin or uncle during the next phone call. It was another standard morning at Wellgood’s diner.

Roland drained his cup of coffee and pushed the plate of toast crumbs to the side. He waved away Patty from his mug and left a few dollar bills on the table. Everyone said their goodbyes and at the door Roland put on his jacket.

When he was outside, Roland looked up. Grey still covered the sky but a few lumpy outlines showed a presence of clouds above the town, rather than just a flat, painted color. Roland looked at his watch. It was 9:25 AM. To his left stood Cliffis, who had left a full half hour before him, but was still standing in front of Wellgood’s window with his hands shoved

in his pockets. Roland pulled his rain jacket around him and spat into the gutter.

“Well...” Roland said and ran his fingers through his hair. Cliffis continued humming and rocking back and forth. Instead of doing what he normally did, which was get in his truck and drive away to a second breakfast with Clyde, Roland leaned against the wall next to Cliffis. He found a toothpick in his coat’s pocket and picked at his teeth as they both watched the street and the sky above. A few cars drove by and both Roland and Cliffis waved at the ones they knew. Neither of them said anything for fifteen minutes until the door of Wellgood’s tinkled open and Artie waddled out. He huffed and spat and turned to face Roland and Cliffis.

“Good thing I brought this today, right?” He said and yanked his rain jacket closed. Artie began fumbling with his zipper but he couldn’t see over his belly and it took a few moments and a couple curses before he zipped it up tight to his neck. Then Artie brushed off his chest, belly and thighs and stood up straight.

“Well, have a good ole ... day, uh ... I, um ...” Artie bit his lower lip and a strange look came over his face. Then he abruptly walked away.

“Hey Artie,” Roland yelled “isn’t that your truck over there?” and nodded his head in the opposite direction. Artie stopped short, turned and walked back. With his head down and his face a ruddy, dark red, he grumbled something as he passed them by. Roland tried to stifle his smile.

“Bye Artie. Don’t forget to water your crops.”

“Hmmm ... bye now, Artie ... mmmm.” Cliffis mumbled, rocking back and forth. Artie didn’t acknowledge them. He yanked the door of his truck open, fired the engine and sped off with a great roar. Roland finally let his smile loose. It felt good to smile. Then he glanced at the sky and far to the west he thought he could see the faintest speck of blue.

William Blomstedt was born in Washington state, raised in Massachusetts and has lived from Texas to Montana. He travels the world working with, writing about and studying honey bees. He has not published any fiction.

SPOTLIGHT PHOTOGRAPHER: KHAN BELAL

Interviewed by Moeed Tariq



Creative Director Moeed Tariq sits with photographer Khan Belal, an undergraduate in Photography from Blake College, London who has been working in Pakistan since his return almost two years ago. While Khan has a distinct style, he does not shy away from taking on the zanier aspects of his job and as a true virtuoso, usually manages to make the most out of any given situation.

Q

What did you want to be growing up?

A

The answer to that changed so many times over the years I couldn't possibly tell you all of them. But I eventually did realize I wanted to be a photographer and the change of mind stopped there. And here I am.

Q

Did you have a pre-conceived notion of what working in Pakistan would be like for a photographer? If so, have you found your experience here any different than from what you expected?

A

Well, When I was working abroad, I did corporate, product and fashion photography, here, photography has more to offer, like media related assignments, bridal shoots and events come more easily to a photographer, but if you know the right people, you do go beyond that, I was offered war zone photography too.

Q

That's quite a surprise, tell us more about that?

A

The offer came from one of the Canada-based filmmaker who wanted myself and another one of my friends who is a filmmaker in Islamabad, to go and cover some areas in conflicted zones near the border of Pakistan and Afghanistan. The reason we couldn't film it was because we weren't given the go signal from the ISPR since it was very dangerous at that time, due to active Taliban activities.

Q

What is your favorite kind of events to cover?

A

Parties I suppose, I have a slightly different way of capturing these events.

Q

What is the oddest assignment you've ever been approached with?

A

To cover a week-long event which took place in Karachi area called "Lyari", in a shrine, where I would have had to stay

with everyone in the same room. It was a caste much different than any I was familiar with where they all literally prayed to an old man they all praise to literally.

Another strange thing about that was that the lady who wanted me to cover it was in England, the event was in Lyari, and she didn't want to pay me in advance which is how things are normally done.

Q

And why did you turn it down?

A

Because I was going to end up spending a lot on the travel expenses, on top (of which) if you know what "Lyari" is like, you'd think twice before heading down there with your gadgets. VICE magazine made a documentary on that. I guess I saw it and lost a few pounds of the guts needed to go there (laughs).

Q

Have you thought of setting up an official studio space for yourself?

A

I have a very spacious basement in my house which I often use for shoots. Other than that I have a few friends who have studios, so I simply hire those. I don't really like studio work though so setting up a permanent space is not high on my list of priorities.

Q

When doing portraits, what are the most interesting features you usually look for in faces?

A

Eyes, followed closely by jaw lines and lips. Eyes tell me everything (I need to know) about a person – their feelings, the dominant mood and the occasional secret.

Q

What are your favorite kinds of events to cover?

A No Peter Parker jobs. I started off from wanting to work as a Forensic Photographer, and now I want to be a warzone photographer so any assignment pertaining to that would be perfection.

Q **Do you think that being a photographer allows you to see the world around you differently, when you're not looking at it through your lens? Has it altered your perception?**

A A lot. every now and then when I am on a road or in a mall or almost anywhere for that matter, I'm looking at things and wondering how they would look on my laptop screen as a photograph. And the search for the perfect light is always on. My girlfriend thinks it's a condition and that I need treatment (chuckles).

Q **Your favorite colors?**

A Red, Purple and Black.

Q **The perfect face?**

A Sharbat Gulla.



Photography by Belal Khan

THE HUMAN SKULL

By John Sibley Williams

There was a time people gathered around me, the word sage on their lips, and placed their skulls in the temporary custody of my hands. On Saturday mornings, queues of strangers would wake me from my cot, nestled in the back room of the shop, chanting “come, tell me who I am, who I will become.” They battered the door raw, until the wood above the knob faded into the mark of a fist, until I’d throw it open, allow the blistering cold to pour like milk over the threshold, and greet them with the knowing nod of a scientist to his ill patients. Their illness was that of not knowing themselves, which like all things, could be traced back to the body.

The swarm of teachers and transients, leaders of businesses and of families, of cobblers, fishermen, surgeons, and policemen with their daily catches of criminals and innocents, all formed a single human mass longing for definition. They stood, rapping their feet into the pavement and holding themselves close enough to stave off our city’s permanent winter, until it was their turn to discover the strengths, weaknesses, tendencies, and prophecies of their character. How they buzzed and cried out and pushed across my threshold in rainbows of hope. Each face stained the window with flesh heat and the smoky breath of expectation. Each night, as my wife tallied the monies and I scrubbed my hands of their worlds, I had my young son wipe the fingerprints and faces from the glass, as I had once done, before father passed down his science.

Somehow, the first patient each morning always asked the same question: “Am I a good man?”

Around midnight, eight hours before the shop opened, I would often see a stranger hollowing a body-sized recess from the snow bank, unrolling his blanket, snoring the pregnant flakes off his cheeks and back up into the sky, where they’d whirl about aimlessly, without purpose, to settle on something else. Within an hour, other men would have congregated, often setting the night ablaze with leftover newspapers in trash cans. Individual sparks leapt between them and soared upon the wind in star arcs. Individual sparks that were in fact exact replicas of each other, as it was with their destinies.

To hear that question immediately upon waking, “Am I a good man?”, carried for me, within its

obvious gravity, an amalgamation of power and powerlessness, wonderment that so many would risk flu and death to be the first to ask me juxtaposed against my inability to answer what at heart they were asking. “That’s not for me to judge,” I would read from what had become a script. “You are more likely than most to cheat on your wife. That I can say with mathematical certainty. Your occipital lobe never lies. But you are also likely to help a stranded motorist or the proverbial cat in a tree.”

Inevitably this man — it was almost always a man — would counter with, “how can that be?”, or some similar sentiment. I would attempt to explain, in simple terms, how the skull forms to fit perfectly its brain, which is just an organ like any other, filled with nerves and fibers and impulses, and how in measuring the size of the brain’s various areas I could evaluate with relative accuracy his moral and psychological development. “Each zone houses specific impulses and tendencies that guide your actions,” I’d clarify, stabbing the ancient, black and white chart in the prefrontal cortex or in the medulla. He’d often flinch, as if it were his mind dissected upon my wall. “And the proportions of each zone tell your whole life story, even make predictions of who and how you’ll be when leaving my office.”

They never appreciated their own ambiguity.

Beyond the lukewarm conformity of quantifying, explaining, and claiming unique so many mirrored lives, beyond the sweat-soaked measuring tape and unshaven cheeks that sandpapered my hands raw, it was discovering this basic human fact that made me question my profession. But, only on rare afternoons, when the sun leaked through its cloud-cover and opened my mind to itself.

Simply put, science had never been enough for them.

“But what is my purpose ... what do I really believe in?”

“Those are questions for the pseudo-sciences: philosophy and religion. I deal only in truth, in what your body has to tell me.”

“And what does my body have to say about why my children won’t speak with me, why my wife turns her face towards the moonless window each



Furies by Vee Chayakul

night instead of towards my lips?” I’d check my figures one last time, at least pretend to.

“Ah, well I see here you can be harsher toward those you love than toward strangers, less forgiving, less empathetic.”

“Can I change this?”

“Even your priest cannot answer that.”

But we didn’t believe in priests either, in my country, which meant I played the role of salvation provider, soothsayer, fairy tale reader, prophet, alongside my obligations to science. “Your morality is resting between my knowing hands,” I’d comfort. “It’s been written in the book of your brain.”

And so they came to my shop by the hundreds, bearing all their superstitions and their need for belief in something outside themselves, and I pointed their searches back inside. I measured each cranial

bone, each crevice, ran my fingers along where one part of them ended and another began. I broke open their hidden desires, their false claims to intellect, their uncharted perversions, and the propensities for light and beauty they were incapable of recognizing in their reflections. My hands were soaked in their worlds, which varied greatly yet still were of one shared world, and though I scrubbed the entirety of my body each evening, my wife — bless her honesty — would whisper as we reclined naked into each other that she could smell all of humanity in my pores. I laughed and claimed that even science, in all its glories, could never explain her.

But in some ways I was wrong.

Without my having seen it coming, my wife drowned in the river that bisected our city while washing these same worlds from my clothes. My

son did not pursue my science, as I'd instructed and hoped, instead escaping into the clutches of art and university and women. And the people... the people found their religion after the high edicts against superstition crumbled into democracy. The answers they sought grew either black or white, were distinct and clear and outside their bodies, were expected to conform to the shape of gift boxes adorned in red ribbon, not to the skull in its nerves and blood and inescapable truth. They began to believe, if they believed anything at all, that they could be more than the sum total of their legible bodies, that they could reach beyond their natural limitations, choose freely between the propensities for empathy and self-destruction. Daily they would ask "when and how will I die?", though they only heard their own answers as I described what may lead them, steadily, to that final precipice.

The crowds tapered off before rounding the block, of which mine was the corner shop. They tapered off like onlookers at a parade, once the floats and orchestras have passed, as the children unfold their wings and plead from father's shoulders to race immediately to the next attraction. At midnight I would sit by the window and await the desperate hordes. I shoveled canals from the snow and lay blankets in the hollows for them. I stopped washing the glass so everyone could count the facial imprints, the breathy circles, the hand prints of those who had come before them. Then I'd return to my cot, the silent lullaby of its coils, and listen for the snoring, listen and listen and eventually sleep without resting and wake before the sun had vanquished the streetlamps to discover at most one patient who had braved the morning and himself to learn what can be learned of the wheels he endlessly circled.

One Sunday afternoon, when nobody had visited all day, I strolled the packed streets to purchase supplies and was stopped mid-stride by a wafting, confident voice streaming through the unopened windows of a church. Something tempted me closer. Snow pounded against the heavy wooden door, so adorned in its intricately carved saints, and against the stained glass, in its near-naked Jesus that did not shiver like the rest of us. Perhaps this is why people believe in things they cannot measure, I thought. Because the promised prophets are more than human and do not know the cold.

I slid into the foyer, quenched my thirst with a

sip of water from a marble bowl that tasted like too many fingers, and listened.

"Everything you need to know about yourself is here," an elderly man decked in peacock colors and silk explained to a vast hall crowded with the entranced lost. He held above his head a book. "You are what God made you, and you will forever be on the path he set beneath your feet before your parents' parents were born. All you must do is follow, and you can become everything you've ever imagined." He then said something about false prophets, about faith over fact, about fire, salvation, grace. I was busy scanning the audience and calculating the number of former patients in its ranks. When I returned, I knew the shop would be empty of everything but memories.

I stepped into the street. The gargoyles grinned from their cement perches at the high corners of our walls. I began to walk, and I kept walking, past my shop, through the city, out to the port, where I purchased a ticket to this new world that the old world believed was born of golden roads and silver towers. Within two weeks I was here, and I made my way inland, to a city without a river, without superstition, this city, where I thought everything would change, where the people would cry out for the truth about themselves, not promises of grandeur, unwarranted success, and love without struggle.

*

Though the girl's eyes glowed blue in the shadow of my booth and never left my lips throughout the story, her husband had been looking around anxiously for something more immediately alluring. When I'd spoken of my dead wife, his gaze had been snared by the bearded woman, from whose waist-length whiskers children were swinging. When I'd spoken of the church, he watched an elephant pass.

"And not stories of an old man's woes," I jested.

"What?" he replied, suddenly joining us.

"You did not come here to hear about my life and science but to experience it. My science, that is." I smiled without opening my mouth in that way of one who knows he has fewer teeth than he should. She smiled back. The circus lights cast a halo up from her blonde hair. Everything about her was golden, rimmed in charity.

"You'd like to know about yourselves, yes? And about each other."

"And what to expect from our marriage," she whispered, cheeks stung red from unveiling the words. "We're so young, and we're — well, I'm — a bit worried about what's in store for us."

Something reminded me of my wife at that moment, perhaps her total dissimilarity to the girl. "Opposites exist on the other side of their mirrors", she once told me, when our love was still untested, when I was my father's apprentice and she the rebellious daughter of an emotionally-absent diplomat. I would soon grasp the dichotomy of mirrors. I stared into the girl's gaunt face and through her saw what she was not, what I missed.

"So you seek the truth, good."

I wound the measuring tape around my thumbs into the simplest web and beckoned the girl to bend her skull forward. Her hair curtained her expression. My hands worked their way through her halo. The unsettling thunder of applause from a nearby tent distracted me for a moment, as I placed myself as ringmaster in the center of its audience. "Lean in and listen, everyone, onlookers, truth-seekers! You have come from the very corners of the earth to witness the mystery and miracle of science. And you will all leave different people, different in that you'll finally know who you are!"

But that was not why this couple, mere inches from adolescence, had wandered into my little world, with its flamboyantly-striped canopy and empty ledger, its sign proclaiming "The Amazing Skull Reader" and its gathering of Christmas lights connecting one oddity to the next. No, they had not even come as far as the corner of the circus, did not expect to witness mystery, certainly not miracle. They had ten dollars to spare, and the wedding ring on the girl's finger itched with uncertainty. I had watched them peek beneath the flaps of various booths, watched him persuade her to crackle fake gunfire into red-starred paper targets, watched her eyes bulge at my sign and her hand tug his toward me.

As they approached, I had scanned their skulls from a distance and could tell, without the slightest touch, that their lives would be as formulaic as the rest. She would snake her legs around him each night and hold him close. He would prefer to stare through the ceiling and see his own stars. He would continue to brag to his friends of various female conquests he could never truly bring himself to

fulfill. There would be regret for both weaving these myths and the fact they were only born of the stars above their bed. The child they would bear in a few years, named Michael or John, Mary or Sarah, or some other placeholder passed down from distant relatives, would seal them forever. This child would carry her halo and fire-lit-cheeks. It would also yearn for something more, like its father.

But I could not tell them this. Forty-eight years of exposing the mundane secrets of people had taught me that the inward-leaning mind expects something more from its little universe than truth. Exaggerated tragedy. Unparalleled success in love and business. Obstacles and doubt and failed attempts all leading down a paved path toward fulfillment. They want to know about the cloud-high walls that one day they will see the other side of. They want to know they are already on the other side of their mirror.

And so this is what I told them. Even he seemed to believe me. Her kindness would be known throughout the town, I think I said. Her art — yes, she would become an artist — will soon bring tears to the hardest hearts. Their un-conceived child will follow in its young father's footsteps and lead his wildly successful company through unprecedented growth. Their lives will be the envy of all. Their well of love and money will never run dry. They will never have stories like mine to bore strangers with. I think I winked and curled my lip at some point.

They left overflowing with joy. I sensed a skip in her step. He pulled a crumpled handful of dollars from his pocket, knowing he'd never be poor again, and returned to the shooting range. He struck a bulls-eye with his first shot and let her choose the prize. I debated again why I'd never measured my own skull, what I was afraid to learn, but instead of following through, as always, I made my way down to the basin where the midgets washed the horses each night and began scrubbing myself from my hands.

John Sibley Williams is the author of six chapbooks, winner of the HEART Poetry Award, and finalist for the Pushcart and Rumi Poetry Prizes. He has served as Acquisitions Manager of Ooligan Press and Publicist for Three Muses Press. He holds an MFA in Creative Writing and MA in Book Publishing. Some of his over 200 previous or upcoming publications include: Inkwell, Bryant Literary Review, Cream City Review, The Chaffin Journal, The Evansville Review, RHINO, Rosebud, Ellipsis, Flint Hills Review, and Poetry Quarterly.

LITERATURE AND CENSORSHIP: A TAINTED HISTORY

The frayed but still consistent relationship between creation and censorship.

By Sana Hussain

As 2012 drew to a close, Literature Nobel Prize winner Mo Yan sparked controversy in the literary world by saying that censorship is a must. During a news conference in Stockholm he said that censorship should not stand in the way of truth, but that any rumors or defamation “should be censored”. Not offering much consolation, he added that he hoped that “censorship, per se, should have the highest principle”. Considering his political affiliations and stance on human rights, his advocacy for censorship as a necessary evil may not be altogether surprising, but it is disconcerting nonetheless. The irony of the situation is also too obvious to ignore when Yan pronounces censorship “necessary” in the same breath with which he says “I have always been independent. When someone forces me to do something I don’t do it”¹.

When a writer and intellectual of the 21st century draws an affinity between censorship and airport security checks, it raises questions regarding his eligibility for an honor whose previous recipients include iconoclasts like Bertrand Russell, Jean Paul Sartre, George Bernard Shaw, Samuel Beckett, and Toni Morrison. Following his statements “celebrating” censorship, Yan has garnered opprobrium from many writers including the Nobel laureate Herta Müller, and also Salman Rushdie; a writer, who more than anyone else today, is aware of the perils of censorship, having a bounty placed on him following the publication of the infamous Satanic Verses. Rushdie’s book was consequently banned in several countries including South Africa, Sri Lanka, India, Singapore, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sudan and Thailand. For all the indignation and protest surrounding Rushdie’s work, it seems odd that some of the West’s more canonical works that are at the core of its culture and are written in the same vein as Satanic Verses, remain ignored in the censorship discourse.

Surprisingly, an Italian human rights organization has requested to have Dante’s Divine Comedy

removed from curriculums, centuries after its original publication, deeming it to be anti-Islam, anti-Semitic and homophobic. It believes that students lack the maturity to understand the text and place it in context, so they should be banned from reading it. Following this line of argument Milton, Blake, and Botticelli along with most of the world’s writers and artists should be banned because they all probably offend someone or other through their art.

While an individual or a community may not agree with the views and opinions of the other, taking away the right to express those opinions is not only wrong but also serves no purpose. Opposing ideas do not always threaten the existence of old ones – they only allow room for debate and food for thought. Contrary to what many believe Dante’s writings despite being hostile to the sensibilities of many, did not harm or cause any lasting debilitating effect on any of them. What’s more, progressive individuals like Harold Bloom and Oscar Wilde admired Dante’s work despite being part of the community he offended.

Wilde himself was no stranger to controversy and censorship; he was charged with gross indecency based on the “profanity” on display in his work. The Picture of Dorian Gray, a treat in aestheticism and finely crafted epigrams was censored upon release as being vile and disgusting, forcing Wilde to

“For all the indignation and protest surrounding Rushdie’s work, it seems odd that some of the West’s more canonical works that are at the core of its culture and are written in the same vein as Satanic Verses, remain ignored in the censorship discourse.”

aamer hussein
aron grunberg
breyten breytenbach
cole swensen
dale peck
david leavitt
david shields
diego de san pedro
etgar keret
fernando pessoa
georges perec
haruki murakami
jose saramago
justin taylor
reif larsen
robert walser
roberto bolano
ruth padel
tomaz salamun
vladimir mayakovsky



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revise many chapters. But more than a century later, the world is still fraught with the debate of censorship as a necessary measure to protect people. Apologists, who consider censorship as important as airport security measures, are perhaps ignorant of the literary wealth they are refusing the world. Censorship is counterproductive to art –the artist strives to create, censorship aims to destruct.

Though censorship has over the centuries been ineffective in quelling ideas or invalidating content, it has left certain authors and their work with a reputation not easily escapable. For many, Lolita will always be a narrative centered on pedophilia and sexual deviance, but for the insightful reader it is about so much more than an old man’s perversions. Nabokov’s intention while writing the book was never to make it wholly about sex and nymphomania; in fact, he was disgusted by the way the book

was being perceived and fought with his publishers who wanted to sell the book on the basis of sex by putting the picture of a teenage girl on the cover.

By banning literature on the pretext of upholding morality, or safeguarding readers from inappropriate content, the censor’s blinkered perceptions overshadow the actual worth of a literary text and subvert its meaning. Focusing only on taboos believed to disintegrate the social fabric, censors remain preoccupied with what shouldn’t have been written and forget to look beyond mere words and understand their meaning. Another novel where most readers seem unable to look past sex is The God of Small Things. Like Wilde, Lawrence, Manto, Chughtai, and many others before her, Arundhati Roy who was writing at the brink of the twenty first century had to face obscenity charges in court for the book’s content. She was made to appear before a first class judicial magistrate on account that her novel describes a sexual union between an upper class woman, Ammu, and an untouchable, Velutha; because even today we can’t

help but be mortified when someone sleeps with the wrong person, even if only in fiction. The indignant lawyer who filed the charges against Roy said that the erotic descriptions in the novel were repulsive, and offended the sense of public decency of the Indian people, believing that the book would corrupt the readers, and incite lascivious behavior.

The values and moral codes that are sacrosanct in one generation gradually become superfluous in subsequent ones. In much the same way literature that was considered offensive and heretic in one era becomes bold and ahead of its time in the next. Many books censored in the past have now attained the status of literary classics, being literary markers of the age that cast them away. However many works of literature still cannot transcend censorship. Even today, only limited titles of the Marquis de Sade’s body of work are available in bookstores;

¹ http://www.salon.com/2012/12/07/rushdie_mo_yan_is_a_patsy_of_the_regime/



The Muses by Andrew Sussman

because while the world seems to have embraced libertine concepts like sexual freedom and freedom of speech, Sade's choice of themes including incest, pedophilia, and cannibalism still remain unpalatable for those who think that reading such topics will eventually persuade one to indulge in them. D. H. Lawrence puts it much more eloquently when he says in *Sex, Literature and Censorship*, "We are today, as human beings, evolved and cultured far beyond the taboos which are inherent in our culture. The evocative power of the so called obscene words must have been very dangerous to the dim-minded, obscure, violent natures of the Middle Ages, and perhaps is still too strong for the slow-minded, half evoked lower natures today. But real culture makes

us give to a word only those mental and imaginative reactions which belong to the mind, and saves us from violent and indiscriminate physical reactions which may wreck social decency".

Sadly, despite this evolution and presence of culture, whenever new ideas are explored through literature they are vehemently opposed and censored for the so-called benefit of the public, though who the "public" is, is still uncertain. The Nazis burned over 18,000 books because they did not correspond with their ideology. As much as we would like to believe otherwise, not much has changed over the years as far as the destruction of books is concerned. Twelve out of the twenty-one winners of the Nobel Prize in Literature have either been ex-

iled, imprisoned, or had their books banned in the past two decades. The work of Toni Morrison stands out, whose novels *The Bluest Eye*, *Song of Solomon* and *Beloved* were banned because they were explicit in their portrayal of slavery, racism and sexuality. Nobel Laureates J.M. Coetzee, Nadine Gordimer and Doris Lessing were banned in South Africa until 1995 because they wrote against the apartheid. Orhan Pamuk was charged for speaking out against the mass killings of Armenians and Kurds during the Ottoman Empire; his books were burned and rallies were held against him because he supposedly insulted "turkishness". This anger against him stemmed from his statement in the Swiss publication, when he said that "thirty thousand Kurds and a million Armenians were killed in these lands and nobody but me dares to talk about it".² Following this statement, his books were banned in Turkey. It is frightening how governments, instead of apologizing for crimes committed in the past, want to erase the collective memory of them by censoring the voices that speak up.

But it is the power of literature that it has, throughout history, resisted such authority. Although censorship and bans have had adverse effects on writers and their work, they have not prevented writers from pushing the boundaries, challenging status quo, and exposing society's failings. And while censorship has been an insidious force that has held the public conscience prisoner from Voltaire until today, the written word has triumphed over the laws and mindsets seeking to erase it. At least now, books like *Brave New World*, *1984*, *Catcher in the Rye*, and *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* are being recognized by the mass reading public as great works of literature. Oh some may still believe them to be the gateway of moral corruption and sexual deviance, they are in a minority. One might even call it progress.

As Alfred Griswold said "Books won't stay banned. They won't burn. Ideas won't go to jail. In the long run of history, the censor and the inquisitor have always lost. The only sure weapon against bad ideas is better ideas. The source of better ideas is wisdom. The surest path to wisdom is a liberal education."

The writer is Features Editor for the magazine.

² http://www.3quarksdaily.com/3quarksdaily/2005/09/orhan_pamuk_to_.html

“Apologists, who consider censorship as important as airport security measures, are perhaps ignorant of the literary wealth they are refusing the world. Censorship is counterproductive to art –the artist strives to create, censorship aims to destruct.”

EMERGING BRITISH POETS

There is no record or document which tells us why the University was established in the first place. Although one of the oldest universities in the English-speaking world and dated to circa 1096, it was only in the year 1479 that the first book was printed in the city of Oxford.

The closest justification that can be found for the need of a press is actually in a supplication that was written to the Chancellor of the University, Robert Dudley, first Earl of Leicester, in the year 1584, and also to be forwarded to Queen Elizabeth I. It stressed the need for the University's own press, and highlighted that every university in France or Germany, no matter how big or small, had a press of its own. The supplication mentioned the availability of Joseph Barnes, a local printer, and in the same year, Queen Elizabeth I gave a loan of £100 to the University to set up a press.

First of all: hidden away in the libraries of the University there are many very important manuscripts foully beset by dust and rubbish, and those could by means of a press set up in this city be rescued from vanishing forever and spread over all Europe doing credit to our nation.

Second. Besides that, there are men in the place extremely skilled in all manner of languages and liberal arts, who, as things are now, are prevented by the slenderness of their means from staying in London while their works are being printed; consequently these men are overlooked and unknown among foreigners and barely known to their own countrymen,

Third. foreigners have always thought it self-evident that where there is a settlement of scholars, there should be printers, so that books can be printed most correctly and texts most carefully collated. A university cannot be deprived of printers without loss to literature.

Excerpt from the 'supplication' to Robert Dudley, the Earl of Leicester, to plead the case to Queen Elizabeth I for a legally recognised press at the University of Oxford.



With an introduction by Todd Swift

Featuring work from Anna Selby, Caleb Klaces, Heather Phillipson, James Byrne, Jen Hadfield, Jon Stone, Kathryn Simmonds, Liz Berry, Lorraine Marinier, Luke Kennard, Melanie Challenger, Ryan Van Winkle, S.J. Fowler and Toby Martinez de las Rivas.

INTRODUCTION

by Todd Swift

Reading British poetry is like eating layer cake – each slice brings with it, as the simile implies, layers – and these are essentially the naturally occurring schools, or movements, which make up how poetry in the UK tends to develop, or at least to be marketed, and sometimes, studied. British contemporary poetry has been exceptionally successful, in terms of the number of poets who are published. The generations immediately preceding what I have elsewhere called The Young British Poets (YBPs) mainly emerged in the late 1980s, 1990s and early 21st century, under the heading of the New Generation and Next Generation. Of the slightly older poets now recognised as having serious careers, most were born in the 1950s or 1960s. For instance, Daljit Nagra, Roddy Lumsden, and Alice Oswald, were born in the boom year of 1966. Paul Farley and Patience Agbabi, in 1965. Don Paterson 1963, Lavinia Greenlaw, 1962. These seven, along with Simon Armitage, Kathleen Jamie, Jo Shapcott, Robin Robertson, Fiona Sampson, Ian Duhig, Sean O’Brien, Carol Ann Duffy, and a few even older poets, such as Andrew Motion, David Harsent, George Szirtes, Christopher Reid, Geoffrey Hill, Wendy Cope, Jeffrey Wainwright, Mark Ford, and James Fenton, would form the basis of what would commonly be understood as the mainstream poetry establishment in the UK – those poets published by Faber, Picador, Cape, Bloodaxe, Carcanet, and Seren, mainly.

This would mean their work was regularly reviewed in newspapers such as The Guardian, was read on the BBC, and that their work was studied in schools and universities: canonical already. To this list could be added Seamus Heaney and a few other Irish poets. To fully understand current trends in British poetry one would also have to read poets of the “Cambridge School” which essentially means poets influenced by Bunting, Dorn, Olson, Pound, Ashbery, O’Hara and Ginsberg; and more specifically the work of Veronica Forrest-Thomson, herself an influence on Charles Bernstein and other so-called “language poets”. Key avant-garde poets include Denise Riley, J.H. Prynne, Keston Sutherland, and Simon Jarvis. While not being reducible to any one position, their work would tend to question the nature of poetic language, in terms linked to Adorno, Derrida, Foucault, Hegel, Butler, and other

thinkers linked to Marxist and/or post-structuralist thinking. As such, their work on the “lyric voice” and “ordinary language” tends to stress how the lyric position of the subject, and everyday syntax, can be distorted, broken, or “disrupted”, to destabilise notions of familiarity and too-easily-established notions of identity and ideology.

The key culprit for them is often The Movement, a school of poets, chiefly now associated with Larkin, whose influence on contemporary British poetry is incalculable, for how it limited what poems could and could not be about; A. Alvarez’s complex encouragement of Plath, and Hughes, and Lowell, led to a different strand of poetry in the 1960s, which emphasized the need for passionate engagement with personal and political issues (the pressures of being human post-death camps and Hiroshima for instance) and an attack on the apparent civility of too much British verse, which tended to be mannered, polite and rather controlled in its emotive responses. All this is history. The point to be made is that all these competing forces are richly active today, in 2013, as many of the protagonists of “poetry wars” since the 1950s are still alive, or fondly remembered. It is still a sore point, for many, for example, that F.T. Prince was dropped from Faber, in the 1950s; as such Prince inspired, along with Nicholas Moore, a rear-guard affection for the poet-ics of so-called Forties Poets, who rebuke the “voice poets” of Larkin’s time.

Meanwhile, Dylan Thomas’ exuberance remains a curiously side-lined series of pyrotechnical moments, perhaps an indirect influence on the per-

“Unlike the young British artists, who became multimillionaires a decade or so back, poets are not the new comedians, models, rock stars, or even Rowlings or Zadie Smiths.”

formance poets now establishing their own alternative world of slams. The main point has to be, that poetry is Byzantine in the UK, and there are many disputations, and variations, of perspective; while few UK poets espouse the terminology that results in a declaration of “poetics”, their unspoken poetics often boil down to how much influence from abroad they will accept into their own work; and how far along the spectrum of modernity or post-modernity their writing will slide. The disruption of narrative, and the lyric self, is another key benchmark; as is institutional affiliation – few experimental poets would publish with a large publisher, for instance, or enter certain well-known poetry competitions.

The poets under consideration in this brief overview, along with a few others not included here, such as Jacob Polley, Owen Sheers, and Sophie Hannah, represent an even younger, more contemporary wave or two, of excellent poets now establishing themselves, and often published by smaller, upstart presses beginning to form a new second tier of important publishing houses, such as Salt and Pinned In The Margins; and, smaller presses like Eggbox, Eyewear, Cinnamon and CB Editions. I’d suggest that there are two waves – one of poets born in the 1970s (Simmonds, Mariner, Hadfield, etcetera) and then the poets born in the 1980s (Kennard, Berry, Stone). It is the poets of the 1980s who mark an especially noteworthy break with the past, though, this being the UK, there is rarely a complete break with tradition or the past in any fully radical way, even among the avant-garde. The YBPs of course emerge at a time of unprecedented social networking and digital over-stimulus. For them, the post-modern apprehension of ubiquity and omnipresence of cultural feed(ing) is a reality. All everything everywhere at once, their norm. As such, these poets are freer than in the past, to draw on outside or unlikely cultural influences.

Luke Kennard, for instance, is enriched by the European and American prose poem, as well as British comedy. Jon Stone is influenced by Oulipo and anime. Emily Berry is influenced by Luke Kennard, and The Smiths. The YBPs have been influenced also by their links to Roddy Lumsden, whose emphasis on complex forms and word puzzles is now endemic; as well as the poetry of Don Paterson and Paul Muldoon, whose complex, playful poems invite a tendency to ever more imaginative displays of wit and knowledge; some have even begun to speak of

“The YBPs of course emerge at a time of unprecedented social networking and digital over-stimulus. For them, the post-modern apprehension of ubiquity and omnipresence of cultural feed(ing) is a reality.”

“Google” or “Wikipedia” poems. There is less emphasis, in this group, on a sense of solidarity, however, with peers or past – so many overlapping affiliations accrue due to various magazines, events, and workshops they attend or participate in. There is no coherent generational leader yet, as say with Armitage, Paterson, or earlier, Auden. Kennard is likely the standard bearer, but this is a lightly worn honour, and also a debatable claim, though one I make often, as I see him as a major figure comparable to the early Eliot, in terms of paradigm shift. Jon Stone also seems brilliantly significant. Ahren Warner, Jack Underwood, or Mariner, could be this figure for others, even for me on any given day. The point being, there is no established key figure of the moment, once one gets to poets born since 1975. There is simply too much published talent.

I caught this sense in the anthology *Lung Jazz*, co-edited with YBP Kim Lockwood, with over 120 poets born since 1970 included by one poem – published last year, this book proved, I think, the signal point that this is a great generation of potentially exciting poets, but the critical consensus is out. At any rate, the canonical, commercial and/or critical markets will not bear too much of this sort of plentitude; the reality is a great winnowing will have to take place, at some point, likely over the next decade, as poets jostle for ever diminishing state support, university positions, and publishing slots. This is the new Age of Austerity, after all, as another key poet of this generation, Sam Riviere, reminds us.

One needs to read many magazines, online and in print, and several anthologies, to begin to get new bearings – for this is also the age of the poet-anthologist: James Byrne, Clare Pollard, Tom Chiv-

ers, Nathan Hamilton, Roddy Lumsden, myself, and a few other poets, have each weighed in with useful and broad church surveys of what is new in British poetry, over the last few years. These anthologies have yet to receive the reviews and public reception they might have expected, but since 2008 the nation has been preoccupied with economic misery, then the Olympics and royal events, as well as demoralisingly high levels of celebrity gossip; the British public, overfed on comedy, titillation, and scandal, has little interest in poetry per se.

Unlike the young British artists, who became multi-millionaires a decade or so back, poets are not the new comedians, models, rock stars, or even Rowlings or Zadie Smiths. The newspapers do not support their efforts; they are under the common radar, though, on Facebook and Twitter (insert other clichés here) – and, as such, known mainly to themselves – a burgeoning, crowded cohort of perhaps a thousand highly-educated readers and writers of poetry. Many of the poets attended and now teach in, creative writing courses, at MA, and PhD level. Many win Eric Gregory or other emerging talent accolades (from *Granta*, for instance), so their lot is not that bleak – they are recognised. No doubt, they are influenced by the technical expertise gained on these courses.

So, what we need to understand about this generation or two is that they are very numerous, their influences are wide-spread and eclectic, and that they tend to overlap the earlier boundaries between mainstream and experiment – they are, as some suggest “hybrid” or “fusion” poets. They will, I think, grow impatient with playing second or third fiddle to the Motion/Heaney generations above them, soon enough; in mode and manner they already chafe at that bit – their work resists the epiphanies of the 70s. I believe this is the finest group of British poets since the metaphysicals, or at least the romantics, though I may be merely deluded; I rely on a handful of these countless, astonishing, imaginative, clever, and formally expert younger poets to prove me right.



the question of paradise,
what it is, what it means and
how it is to be achieved –
was limitless

Artwork by Amira Farooq

Todd Swift is an internationally-recognised poet, critic, literary editor and cultural events organiser. He has published eight full collections of poetry, most recently *When All My Disappointments Came At Once* (Tightrope Books, 2012). Swift has edited or co-edited numerous anthologies, most recently *Lung Jazz: Young British Poets* for Oxfam (Cinnamon Press, 2012) and *Modern Canadian Poets* (Carcanet, 2010). He has edited special sections on Canadian Poetry for *New American Writing* and *London Magazine*; and on *British and Scottish Poets* for *The Manhattan Review*. He has also blogged on *The Young British Poets* for *The Best American Poetry* blog.

DUNWICH BURNING

by Anna Selby

'The burning' is a phrase used to describe phosphorescence

My accomplice stumbles off
out of colour, then stops
at the edge abruptly, as if the sea
were a window that appeared
in his house. The ship-like buildings
of midnight mount behind us:
moonset fugitives, two pilgrims
wading into our silence.
We swim above a town
they say sunk beneath us.
If the tide were low enough,
the wind would rush
through the bell tower. I turn back,
skin crackling
and could cry or sing,
shaking constellations
from my hands. Stars slip
off my fingers, like scales
from a fisherwoman's knife.
We lay each other out
in wet sand. The waves
tuck themselves in, tug and resist
your bare feet, bare shins, bare skin.
And yes, the town might never have existed,
but even as we imagine it
it lies somewhere there before us.
The legend is still hauled
from the depths:
and there is still fire left
and I can dream all night
about the rest of you.



Artwork by Mohsin Shafi

THE WATER CATCHER

by Anna Selby

When she dived
she dived with her hands and legs bound,
white meat
hung upside down.

She'd turn
from a cannonball
to a curl of feathers,
detonate the water:
a white bruise mushrooming
a white trail of sparks.

Lakes
waited only for her.
In her uprising,
their flat planes shattered.
Wherever she went
the water flung open its arms.
In one,
it would take her in.

Anna Selby was born in 1982 in England. She is a poet and editor specialising in international poetry. In 2012: she organised Poetry Parnassus, the UK's biggest ever poetry festival; co-edited The World Record, an international anthology with poetry from all 204 Olympic countries, with Neil Astley; and was voted one of the 100 leading people working in Culture and one of the top 10 innovators working in publishing and writing. She is a graduate of the Creative Writing MA at the University of East Anglia and her poetry has been published in various magazines and anthologies, including Magma, The Rialto and the Cinnamon Anthology of Young British Poets. Anna's forthcoming pamphlet is due from Salt in 2013 as part of the Salt Modern Voices series and she is an associate artist of dance-film company, State of Flux. Her poetry-dance piece, Forgetting Natasha, was featured on the BBC Culture Show twice, was a pick of the Edinburgh Fringe Festival and is touring nationally.

BUSKER BEFORE AND AFTER THE WAR

by Caleb Klaces

1.

The moon kindly stepped in
to stop the guitarist
pouring his feelings
into rocket-shaped moulds.
An officer, whose friends always joked he would
be reincarnated as a map, listed in his diary,
every civilian musical instrument they destroyed
preserved for us by the ice that killed him,
on their way to liberating the city.
Despite which, we know
the soldiers left the mirrors intact.

The family at the adjacent table has sprung a laugh
that is making me laugh about nothing.
Fries haunted by potato,
silent disco,
the way yawns form, are only form,
passed along,
and the first one of the platoon to stop shaving,
who was shot.

The museum employed
a devout couple from eastern Europe
to pray to the shroud,
the jewel in the exhibition's crown.
Christ looked very much like a crude picture of Christ
so the truth requires extras. My Coke Zero
has arrived and I have drunk it too quickly and have got
hiccups.

2.

When the busker's guitar is painted
early last century, its painter has returned
with a head wound from the front,
more resistant to his previous use of shallow space.

To work from nature is to improvise:
a few passengers get off,
replaced by a few who get on;
the moment to make up is the next one,
as the carriage restages its former pattern.

The crowd's arbitrariness
was sovereign. For example,
it had become important which way
your tent was facing
if anyone were to pay attention to your equal participation
in the ad-hoc assembly.

Researchers found no correlation between use of shallow space
and a vote for the economy.

The unpopular god attended the drinks reception
to mark the occasion of the first batch of neutrinos
fired under Japan, drinking atmosphere
until it was sick.



Androgyny by Ahsan Masood

SPARROWS

by Caleb Klaces



Collage by Amira Farooq

The season had worked its way through
 and bowed as the temperature spiked.
 a panic at the prospect of early snow, which turned out
 and had disappeared from the runways
 wedged his ladder into the crook of his arm,
 of sparrows. The literature says *Birds act like*
they are hitting a wall
when they come in range of the speakers.
 The invisible walls,
 overlapping and fading in and out
 only a thin, irregular column of space
 in the middle of Departures was out of range
 of something like screaming—
 moved a few travellers each month to record
 on the feedback forms provided,
the unexpected pleasure of hearing the many birds
that have obviously made the airport their home.

Caleb Klaces was born in 1983. He is the author of *Bottled Air*, which won the Melita Hume Prize and will be published by Eyewear, (Spring 2013), and *All Safe All Well* (Flarestack Poets, 2011). He is a Granta New Poet and the recipient of a 2012 Eric Gregory Award.

AT FIRST, THE ONLY CONCERN IS MILK, MORE OR LESS

by Heather Phillipson

The baby had been guaranteed to reach us and came with hair and no clothes. It's not surprising, given the expedition. Hello, we said.

The task is to think things up. We said words like: Ha, what's not a strange place? and In the field, look! the calf's commitment to a routine dairy surge.

This is how it would be if it were possible to forget Europe and sweat-shopped salopettes and the smell of horses' noses and that the sky is an identikit and words are identikits.

A dense love is under construction. There is more to say and less is said – least of all Mother, I can't bear to outlive you, which is all, really, that matters.

Sooner or later, it is actual trousers.

But where's the baby that's going to be conned one second by the words, think them relevant? The nurses retreated to a disinfected lobby. What else? She was a whole person, but small.



Little Witch by Abigail Larson

~~DEAR JOHNNY BUNNY~~

by Heather Phillipson

~~Dear Johnny Bunny,~~

~~J, Bubs,~~

~~Hello ducks,~~

~~Dear Original Californian Sun-Dried Raisins,~~

Dear John Baldessari.

This is a surprise. You know, the way the inside of your mouth feels when you gargle alcohol or accidentally get a mouthful of the ocean. Huh.

What I'm trying to say is: when I close my eyes, all I can see is a six-foot-seven figure of Man. (Your white beard.) I have done for a long time, ever since I first saw a face without a nose. That was your *quoi fraiche* of the noughties.

We were leaving by slow bus, moving past a noseless Grecian statue (NOT the Venus de Milo). Remplir une fiche it said to the right of the Kestner Gesellschaft advertisement. On the dotted line, I pencilled 'mes cheveux'. Tirez pas mes cheveux, my lover said. Oui, d'accord, I replied. There was candyfloss on the breeze. I have the idea that something MIGHT happen, he said, but not necessarily. (There was froth on his upper lip.)

Back then it felt like things were getting taken apart. Now it feels like they're being put together. Is this you? Or me?

What's with(out) all the noses? It would never have occurred to me, the noses. And I think about stuff like this all the time. What to take out when packing my baggage. I just spent twenty minutes trying to think of another facial feature that would work as well in absentia. I got nothin'.

It was lonely with the poster of the woman with no nose and the man with no eyes. When we left the Czech Republic, the lover said

Could we stop horsing around for an hour. PLEASE.

At the autobusové nádraží, everyone was French kissing like an advert for sexy deodorant.

I don't know why I have to tell you this today. On the other hand, I'm not going to write a whole letter and then throw it away. No, sir. One doesn't learn about social intercourse by thinking about it. Although — I must confess — I accidentally tore a photograph of my lover's face in half once and lost half to the wind, which has left an overspill of guilt. I don't want to be a litterbug! Here's a thought, John-o: Maybe you could tell me about a way of ripping that works with one hand and leaves the other free to steer the bicycle.

I suppose you're just back from 'going to the studio for the day' with the pinking shears tucked into your left back pocket. Is the day hospitable, and light, with pick-up trucks advancing like whopping great fatsos, etcetera? There they all go, gyrating across the San Andreas Fault.

Despite everything, I am determined to get to the point. We always want to be looking. To find out. If you're calculating my follicles, I can tell you: one-plus-one-plus-one-plus-equals-. Schuyler said Giorgione said that's what painting can do, show everything at a glance. Cut Horizontal or Vertical? Cut here or CUT there? How many?

Cut!

I expect you're wondering whether I've read the entire volume of Ulysses beside my bed. It's important to try and figure out what the difference is between a part and a whole. A part can become a whole and a whole can become a part and, really, I don't see why I wasn't born John Baldessari instead of

Let me conclude by reiterating my main point.

We must meet sometime for a chatette in Frisco; or perhaps in wetlands in the Lea Valley. Enjoy your western wafts of coolth, thwacking in off the broad Pacific. It's not possible to describe the climate here. We lie low like coy carp.

Heather Phillipson's poems have been published widely. She received an Eric Gregory Award in 2008, a Faber New Poets Award in 2009, and an ACE Grants for the Arts Awards in 2011. Her debut pamphlet was published by Faber and Faber in 2009, her book-length text NOT AN ESSAY, was published by Penned in the Margins in 2012, and her debut full-length collection, Instant-flex 718, is published by Bloodaxe in 2013. Phillipson is also an artist, exhibiting nationally and internationally, with recent shows in London, Sweden, Germany and Switzerland.

TWO PHONECALLS AT 4AM

by James Byrne

‘the world is places where he will not go’
John Berryman, *Dream Songs* 65

Little terrors in them,

small as a seed at first,
soon a lion’s head.

Lacking the mirror-work of Cocteau’s *Orphée*
or the white throat of a Busoni sonata,

mismouths become crosscuts,

the blue-black spell:
garlic in the roses.

We offer anecdotes:

Li Po drunk on Saki.
Li Po bent mad over books.
Li Po remade as a lithical martyr by Deng Xiaoping.

The voice through the black wire counterclaims that plans for a statue in
Dresden
were recently disapproved on the grounds that the accompanying plaque
was to state:

THE DEAD ARE SORE FOR REVENGE

Phonecalls cut the crowd.
A sympathetic ear smothers like a shot.
The response lies on the tongue like a cube of sugar.

It is the pip in our own voice that terrifies:
the voice of the sweetening epic.



A PRIVATE GARDEN

by James Byrne

Early to rise for knowledge of the garden—for the fringe of a gossamer hammocking.
I watched the painful sum of its catch and knew the eeriness of death for the first time.
The spider trapezed his web, a thin ball of coal discovering its prey in filigrees of ash.
His victim, trapped in the jewel case, huddled appallingly for its life. A sudden drop in the breeze and the kill was fished clean. Books have never taught me these things.

*

Seated between the knuckled limbs of the tree house, I spied on a swarm of wasps nuzzling at apples; their glassy colour-code and spoiling tails cranked with venom—emblematic fire. In France, later that year, my mother broomed a nest and was fanged by an army of them. A quickly pumped prescription pulled her back from an inch of life. Full of the feast, a wasp landed on my hand and looked at me like a god, perfectly evil.

*

For what seemed an era, I clutched at the giant slab to win one look under its shadow.
With a gravelly belch the stone pulled loose and revealed to me its secret archive—the dark unendingness of a disused well. Peering in, I conjured the anaemical fix of my father's stare and shouted down until my face burnt red: *This is my garden!*
There was music then. The chambered echoes passed through me to their reunions.



James Byrne's most recent collection, Blood/Sugar, was published by Arc in 2009. Byrne was the co-editor and co-translator (with ko ko thett) of Bones Will Crow: 15 Contemporary Burmese Poets, the first anthology of Burmese poetry ever to be published in the West. Byrne is also the founder and editor of The Wolf, an internationally-renowned poetry magazine. He is the co-editor of Voice Recognition: 21 Poets for the 21st Century, published by Bloodaxe.

BLASHEY-WADDER

by Jen Hadfield

At dusk I walked to the postbox,
and the storm that must've passed you earlier today
skirled long, luminous ropes of hail between my feet
and I crackled in my waterproof
like a roasting rack of lamb.

And across the loch,
the waterfalls blew right up off the cliff
in grand plumes like smoking chimneys.

And on the road,
even the puddles ran uphill.

And across Bracadale,
a gritter, as far as I could tell,
rolled a blinking ball of orange light
ahead of it, like a dungbeetle
that had stolen the sun.

And a circlet of iron was torn from a byre
and bowled across the thrift.

And seven wind-whipped cows
clustered under a bluff.

And in a rockpool,
a punctured football reeled around and around.

And even the dog won't heel since yesterday
when — sniffing North addictedly —
he saw we had it coming —

and I mean more'n wet weak hail
on a bastard wind.

**Both poems reprinted from 'Nigh-No-Place' (Bloodaxe, 2008) with permission from Bloodaxe.*

*Jen Hadfield lives in Shetland, where she works as a writer, writing tutor and visual artist. Her first poetry collection, *Almanacs*, won an Eric Gregory Award in 2003 and was later published by Bloodaxe (2005). Her second collection, *Nigh-No-Place* (Bloodaxe, 2008) was a Poetry Book Society recommendation and went on to win the T.S. Eliot Prize. In 2012, she won the Edwin Morgan Poetry Competition.*



Artwork by Amira Farooq

HÜM

by Jen Hadfield

(for Bo)

Twilight, gloaming;
to walk blind
against the wind;

to be abject; lick snot
and rain from the top lip
like a sick calf.

To be blinded by rain
from the north.

To be blinded
by westerly rain.

To walk uphill
into a tarry peatcut
and bluster a deal
with the Trowes.

To cross the bull's field
in the dark.

To pass in the dark
a gate of hollow bars
inside which the wind is broaling.

To pass in the dark
a byre like a rotten walnut.

To not know the gate
till you run up against it.

THE BUMBLEBEE DREAMS

by Jon Stone

of nothing more or less
than pulling the balaclava of foxglove or bluebell over her head
until her abundant pile is shaggy with pollen.
Contrary to reports, she hardly thinks at all
of the gorged queen bedded beneath thick comb,
the hive itself being little but a pitstop
to unload her burden of sweetness
before pedalling again at her body's ornithopter
to tangle in the bathhouse of another lawn perimeter,
the mingling sweat of under-ravished bugles and hawthorns,
nosing her way into each tight corolla.

She does not dream of her death, nor play scholar
to the deaths of her colleagues, whom she mourns
with only the faintest fizzing. Her mind is beyond the scimitar
bill of bee-eater, the dragonfly's forceps, the exact dioptré
of shrike-eye. She and the world are partners
in an bounteous sweetshop,
a certain drowsiness that's as close to home
as she has ever come. Call it a thrall.
She is no melittologist, all her beliefs are stolen
and since it keeps her joyous as the tears of a sun god,
she has given up fighting her own madness.

*Jon Stone is a British poet and editor, born in Derby, currently living in London. His full-length collection, *School of Forgery* (Salt, 2012) was a Poetry Book Society recommendation, and he won an Eric Gregory Award in 2012. He is also the co-creator of *Sidekick Books* (www.drfulminare.com), which publishes anthologies and collaborative projects, often fusing poetry with illustration. His personal website is www.gojonstonego.com.*

Belal
Khan
Photo
Graphy



II, MANDA

by Jon Stone

*from *Godzilla versus Yasusada* (an odyssey in kaiju bio-acoustics)*

Dog Crew Nerve

Yasusada's ghost on a coastline, listening
for its bottled lisp. Beach-striders sight him (Yasusada's
ghost):
a cloudy smear on the glass
that waves split their lips on.

With the ocean's whole banquet laid out, why
should he (Yasusada's ghost) choose the inedible
seasnake
to haunt and stalk? Perhaps Yasusada's ghost sees
something
of water itself in its wriggling rope,
imagines it bursts into spray when yanked
from its salt broth.

And what if Yasusada's ghost, his barely-there form
less than mosquito net, wedding veil, dust weave,
should cease entirely to be when sifted through
the self-same mirror?

Male Killed Sheep

The physiology of the sea serpent: patience,
compressed tail, five equal petals,
pairs of caudal plates, striking and peculiar
irregularity of the calyx, unbelievable whiskers,
taste of the Caspian Sea, the Wolga,
a writhe that is always sloughing seawater,
corolla swelled, playfully toxic.

Spur June Stem

One day he (Yasusada's ghost) is seen wading out,
anaemic torso melting into sun-ribboned waves.

For years, his apparition troubles mariners,
who swear they saw the 'namigo' through their
monocles
moments before disaster. Think of a telephone cable,
you meddling it round your finger carelessly.
This describes the serpent crippling Japanese
submarines,
Yasusada's ghost clinging to its flank,
Yasusada's ghost shinning to its maw.

Sometimes we want to wake ourselves but wake
in another dream.

TALKING TO YOURSELF

by Kathryn Simmonds

It starts with sounds of which you're unaware:
the window, opening, gives a rusting sigh,
saying something, although there's no one there.

The bath brims over while you ask the air
what's the point? The air makes no reply.
It's used to sounds of which you're unaware.

Children see you chattering and stare,
and mothers with their trolleys wonder why
you're whispering, although there's no one there,

just artichokes, an avocado pear —
they cannot tell you how to live and die,
they're lipless, though they may still be aware.

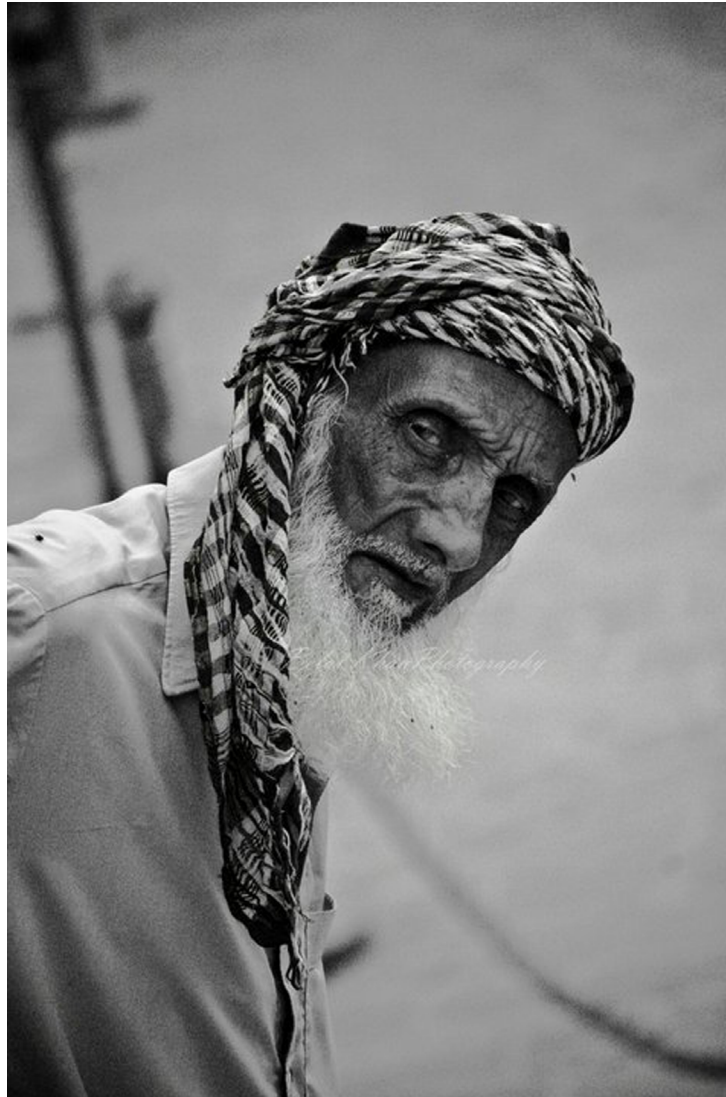
Inside the church the shadows lisp a prayer,
and votive candles clamber to the sky,
insisting something, although there's no one there:

the priest has gone, the altar's been stripped bare.
You've never prayed, but now you kneel and try:
it starts with sounds of which you're unaware,

saying something, although there's no one there.

**Reprinted from Sunday at the Skin Launderette
(Seren, 2008).*

Kathryn Simmonds was born in Hertfordshire in 1972. She won an Eric Gregory Award in 2002 and published a pamphlet of poems with Smith/Doorstep books in 2004. Her collection Sunday at the Skin Launderette won the Forward Prize for best first collection in 2008 and was short listed for the Costa Poetry Award.



Photography by Belal Khan

HOMING

by Liz Berry

For years you kept your accent
in a box beneath the bed,
the lock rusted shut by hours of elocution
how now brown cow
the teacher's ruler across your legs.

We heard it escape sometimes,
a guttural *uh* on the phone to your sister,
soft or *blart* to a taxi driver
unpacking your bags from his boot.
I loved its thick drawl, *g's* that rang.

Clearing your house, the only thing
I wanted was that box: jemmied open
to let years of lost words spill out —
bibble, fittle, tay, wum,
vowels ferrous as nails, consonants

you could lick the coal from.
I wanted to swallow them all: the pits,
railways, factories thunking and clanging
the night shift, the red brick
back-to-back you were born in.

I wanted to forge your voice
in my mouth, a blacksmith's furnace;
shout it from the roofs,
send your words, like pigeons,
fluttering for home.

BIRD

by Liz Berry

When I became a bird, Lord, nothing could not stop me.

The air feathered

as I knelt

by my open window for the charm –

black on gold,
last star of the dawn.

Singing, they came:

throistles, jenny wrens,
jack squalors swinging their anchors through the clouds.

My heart beat like a wing.

I shed my nightdress to the drowning arms of the dark,
my shoes to the sun's widening mouth.

Bared,

I found my bones hollowing to slender pipes,
my shoulder blades tufting down.

I spread my flight-greedy arms
to watch my fingers jewelling like ten hummingbirds,
my feet callousing to knuckly claws.

As my lips calcified to a hooked kiss

silence

then an exultation of larks filled the clouds
and, in my mother's voice, chorused:

Tek flight, chick, goo far fer the Winter.

So I left girlhood behind me like a blue egg

and stepped off
from the window ledge.

How light I was

as they lifted me up from Wren's Nest
bore me over the edgelands of concrete and coal.

I saw my grandmother waving up from her fode,

looped
the infant school and factory,
let the zephyrs carry me out to the coast.

Lunars I flew

battered and tuneless

the storms turned me insideout like a fury,
there wasn't one small part of my body didn't blart.

Until I felt it at last the rush of squall thrilling my wing
and I knew my voice
was no longer words but song black upon black.

I raised my throat to the wind

and this is what I sang...

** 'Bird' previously appeared in Poetry London; 'Homing' taken from The Patron Saint of Schoolgirls (tall-lighthouse). Reprinted with permission from the poet.*

Liz Berry is a poet and a teacher. She received an Eric Gregory Award in 2009 and her debut pamphlet The Patron Saint of Schoolgirls was published as the winner of the Tall-Lighthouse Prize in 2010. Her poems have appeared in many of the major UK magazines and been broadcast on BBC Radio 3. In 2012, she was commended in the National Poetry Competition and won the Poetry London award. Liz has written about dialect poetry for The Poetry School and The Young Poets Network. She is the assistant poetry editor at Ambit magazine. www.lizberrypoetry.co.uk.

THE DEADLY SINS - NO.2 GLUTTONY

by Lorraine Mariner

Derived from the Latin “gluttire”, meaning to gulp down or swallow

We didn't stand a chance, my siblings and I, when it came to loving tea. Here's my mum giving us a milky weak version in a tippy cup while we sit in our high chairs. Now we're old enough to sleep in a bed and here's our dad with a mug of tea come to wake us up.

But how did we get from a morning ritual and a cup sometimes of an evening (and always on a Sunday after lunch) to this; some tea bell which cannot be ignored ringing in our taste buds at two-hourly intervals?

It was a revelation when I got to university to discover that some people could leave for lectures in the morning without a drop having passed their lips. And those nights when their heart had just got broken in five places but no, no thank you, they wouldn't like a cup of tea.



Artwork by Sonja Dimovska

THE COLD NIGHT AIR FOR RUTH

by Lorraine Mariner

Washed and perfumed, draped in a dress of finest silk brought from her homeland, she comes softly across the threshing floor to the pile of grain where he is sleeping the sleep of the well-fed and tipsy.

He has been her refuge, let her glean her family's fill from his land.

But now the harvest has been gathered in and this is her last chance. So she does as her mother-in-law instructed, gently uncovers his feet and arranges herself on the tiles beside them.

Waits for the cold night air to trouble his toes and wake him.

Lorraine Mariner was born in 1974, lives in London and works at the Poetry Library, Southbank Centre. Her collection 'Furniture' was published by Picador in 2009 and shortlisted for the Forward Prize for Best First Collection and the Seamus Heaney Centre Poetry Prize. Her second collection is due from Picador in 2014.

LEATHER-BOUND ROAD

by Luke Kennard

Should anybody ask me how we met I'll read them
Ansel Adams on photography and say it's in
the way the artist brings out of the landscape
what the frame brings out of the painting.
Which is to say you bring out the best in me,
but not the way the Maillard reaction
brings out the best in food through the combination
of amino acids, reducing sugars and heat.
It's more the way the right wine brings out the right light
and the scene reflected in your eye places me
front and centre, peering in, trying to describe the colour.
It's what the singer does between the words
that makes the words *the words* and not just words.
The way the crows that currant-stud the risen green
don't startle as I cycle through and crunch the gears.
Distracted weavers weave their hair into the tapestry,
a knight which leapt six hours ago makes sense now.
The way the symphony opens up only when you know
what's coming next, your place in it and why (or not).
The way the past's not even past and looking back
I overlooked the beauty of the worst of it.
The exam flunked, the form misfiled, the blown bulb
and the curtain drawn which caused the bar's inviting glow.
The way that led with more coincidence and happenstance
than a minor Victorian novel and yet with the absolute
conviction of its binding, and with gratitude, to you.

**Reprinted from A Lost Expression (Salt, 2012) with permission from the author.*

Luke Kennard holds a PhD in English from the University of Exeter and lectures in creative writing at the University of Birmingham. In 2005, he won an Eric Gregory Award for The Solex Brothers (Stride Books), his first collection of prose poems. Two years later, he became the youngest poet ever to be nominated for the Forward Prize for Best Collection, with The Harbour Beyond The Movie (Salt). His third collection, The Migraine Hotel, was published by Salt in 2009, followed by A Lost Expression in 2012.



Artwork by Yahat Benazir

SUIL VEN OR HUMILITY

by Melanie Challenger

We stumble along the ridge with our pangs and our
Addiction, all those years underfoot.
The eagle's sultry possession of air
Wheels the earth round the permanence of its contour –
Despite this dazzle of changelessness, still
The surge picks up where we left off
As the eagle's feather reaches its finale.
And still that lush urge grips
Our bodies and from all our unworded desire
Strips us and repairs our incomplete
Anatomies. The small-time act
Of sex unites our movements as the earth
Without moving eats time.
The dropping sun hauls the millennia
Of each step up from sight.
The lull left in the absence of our fit
Follows through the eagle's unbroken going.

THE WREN'S RIDDLE

by Melanie Challenger

I have tried to sing of a compulsion I can't even name.
Small fool of the woods, my girth is a clean
bell that decided its form without consent.
I'm my own instrument. I sing out of myself –
these ludicrous, barbarian notes of ecstasy and desperation –
as if this is my purpose. I sing out of myself
these ludicrous, ecstatic notes of entreaty as if
there's some election. Then fall silent, fly
into the stunned quiet of the wood like a plastic
bag perfumed into the air by a single breath.
What roared out of me I had no part in.
Such dark, open-ended ecstasy whose tail or bud
I can never see, never know rose out of the neat vents
of an unknowable history. I perch on the tree,
a piffling mechanism. I hurl all lust out
the pocket church of my chest, startled by the fallen
tree, my perch, laid out stiff beneath me,
as if for a moment all earth hovered,
or could carry in a wren's clutch.

From 'The Tender Map'

Melanie Challenger is the author of one collection of poems, Galatea (Salt: 2006), and one work of non-fiction, On Extinction (Granta: 2011). She is currently working on the libretto for a new opera with composer Mark Simpson. She lives and works in the Scottish Highlands.

FLIGHT OUT OF DARWIN

by Ryan Van Winkle

Just in time
I have been
cooling for reason
and come out
from the heat
my chest a tight
rope, my eyes
neon blinking open
and my mouth, cute
when I finish

when I finish
I forget why
I started.
And isn't it a lot
to say 'never forget'
to write it in bronze
and isn't it without meaning
to bow your head
and say 'traditional
owner'. There is no
owner, no parade
I can remember

wanting to forget
and coming close
to his eyes, his yellow,
his mucous, his straw
sometimes we drink
the song says
so we can remember
sometimes we drink
to forget. So we remember
and so we forget
the boats come and go,
rafts really rats
bloated and half sunk
-- our eyes cross

when we look north
or west or east we
forget, as I forget,
how it started how
the snake did eat
his own tail and
wouldn't you, friend,
if you were hungry enough
wouldn't you forget

the moon went yellow
one night and looked
like his eye. wouldn't you
fly out, risk the drown
wouldn't you dig
and dive all the way in?

WAIT, LISTEN, IF

by Ryan Van Winkle

If you are reading this
I hope you are going slow,
that the gulls have clasped
their constant beaks. If
the roads are icy, test
the brakes when you are alone
see if you slide. Leave
the fools and cowboys
to their wreckage

wait

if you are reading this
it is time to know when
I put the box together,
I folded the cardboard
as if I was inside the box. I know
there were days when you
wished me in the box as well

listen

once driving you to school I forgot
I was bringing you to school
and delivered you to work
by mistake. The same drive I made daily.
Not because I forgot you were there
but you being made me feel
enough like myself to continue

if

I could have driven you anywhere
I do not know where we would go
what place at the end of the world
would have been vast and silent enough
for me to take your hand, for me to say.

Ryan Van Winkle is Poet in Residence at Edinburgh City Libraries. His first collection, *Tomorrow, We Will Live Here*, was published by Salt in 2010 and his poems have appeared in *The American Poetry Review*, *AGNI*, *Poetry New Zealand* and *The Oxford Poets* series. In 2012 Ryan was awarded the Robert Louis Stevenson Fellowship.

FROM THE MUSEUM OF DEBT

in collaboration with Alexander Kell

xviii. Saint Christopher enters the desert

& out of the building
there was no more building
no homes
& little in the way of kindnesses
just huddled together
for warmth

hardwords & poverty
thick varicosal veins
says one
& wonder why, in the long
of the blue flower
there is no mention
it will soon be gone

dogfights, breathing
heavy with all that muzzle
is to remain in life
for soon enough anyhow...
you will become
'suspended'



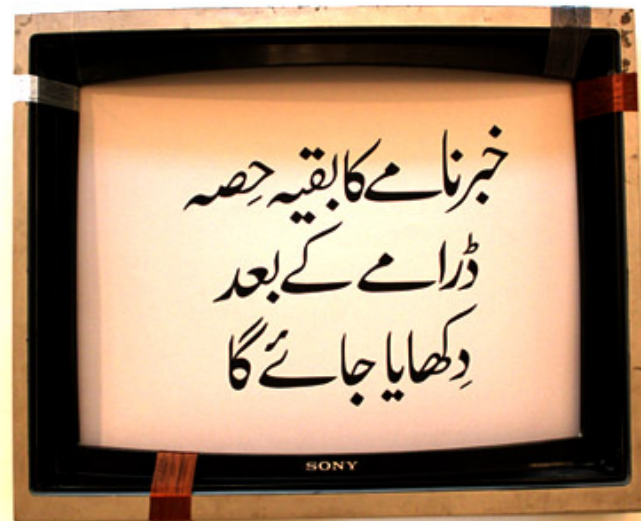
SJ Fowler is the author of four poetry collections, and is the UK poetry editor of Lyrikline and 3:AM magazine. He curates Maintenant and the Enemies project about poetry and collaboration, supported by the Jerwood Charitable Foundation. He has had poetry commissioned by the London Sinfonietta, Mercy and the Tate, is an employee of the British Museum and a postgraduate student at the Contemporary Centre for Poetic Research, University of London. www.sj-fowlerpoetry.com - www.blutkitt.blogspot.com - www.youtube.com/fowlerpoetry - <http://www.maintenant.co.uk/>



xx. Iron

in the traditional Japanese calendar
there are good days
& bad days
on the bad, I hunt cats
& listen to all the talk of bird flu
with a pleased smile
while my pack ferrets whistle

on the good, I sit very still
with my wife & children
& we ready ourselves
for dying all flash like the song of the commuter belt
hall of the mountain king
4th day, what better way
to leave this world



Repeat.. Rewind.. Turn Off.. VI
Retro tv frames, tilla, inkjet print

Artwork by Mohsin Shafi

To narrate is to relent: in me there shall be no relenting, storm baiting the fields with light, the deathless instant of outhouses, cars prone on gravel in searing greyscale, the copse hard by the storage tank deepening its covert. Who steps with me into the shadows, allegiant, sudden, if not you, from the foothills out across the bare Levels, the briefest image regnant even at the point of collapse. Now turquoise lightning thrusts among the stark ridges, the water discloses in a moment the shape of its tresses, the torn birch is lashed, stumbles, immaculate with fire.

desolate

Toby Martinez de las Rivas was born in 1978, and attended Durham University where he graduated in History and Archaeology in 1999. His first collection, Terror, will be published by Faber & Faber in 2014.

the bare naked field is thy part, as
the cat all eyes and bemes and flame
couches into the shell of that vexed
gorgeous chest, she is a rose, is a for-

knowing beyond *thee*, colossal in
thy ignorance, *thy* field blight, as *thy*
black stinking potatoes, *thy* milt,
alii dicebant haec verba non sunt da-

monium habentis numquid daemo-
nium potest caecorum oculus aperire.
So. Tarmac wildfire on the protest
road where nothing in chains, like a-

nother day rising, a man teetering
on the edge of a desk on tiptoes, feet
scrabbling, his neck is in a noose,
such is *thy* part, *crownede wyth reytes*

bere mee to thy leathall tyde, bear
me, if you can and if the back straight
as a buttercup stalk permits you, if
it is allowed & approved by communal

delete all reference to such, sinful,
man is alone, so scuttle back & forth
across my patriotic Brunel Clifton
bridge of a riveted back, the rest sold,

here is the sink of my, my stinking
vulgate body, dicebant autem multi ex
ipsis daemonium habet et insanit
quid eum auditus, it is the dogma, it is

the capital has done this to my so
shining brow, Blodewydd, rendering
the glue from the butchered bone

Station III

boiling down the surplus immaterial

capital of a nation: you want, you
buy it, why should I say one direct
thing, why? Does the goshawk, its
wingtip pivoting around the inward

arc of its turning circle as the finch
breaks cover from beneath the tarred
bird table, authentic rural design,
the serried fir trees as dead in the land

as their tenders care a shite for the
for the proper grammar? It is grammar,
the purity of design, the framework
shaking, never collapsing until finally

permitted to do so. So you stitch
your hair, my graceful fled love, and so
everything is the winterlong light
of certain flowers and birds I can't name

and am proud to do so. The bridge
is depravity, the road, the government,
the centre of fear and betrayal, just
act within your proscribed bounds, as

the goshawk and the leaping joyful
cat refuse to do, beak & teeth in the crop
and the bright blood, foamy as alco-
hol, the darling berries in October again:

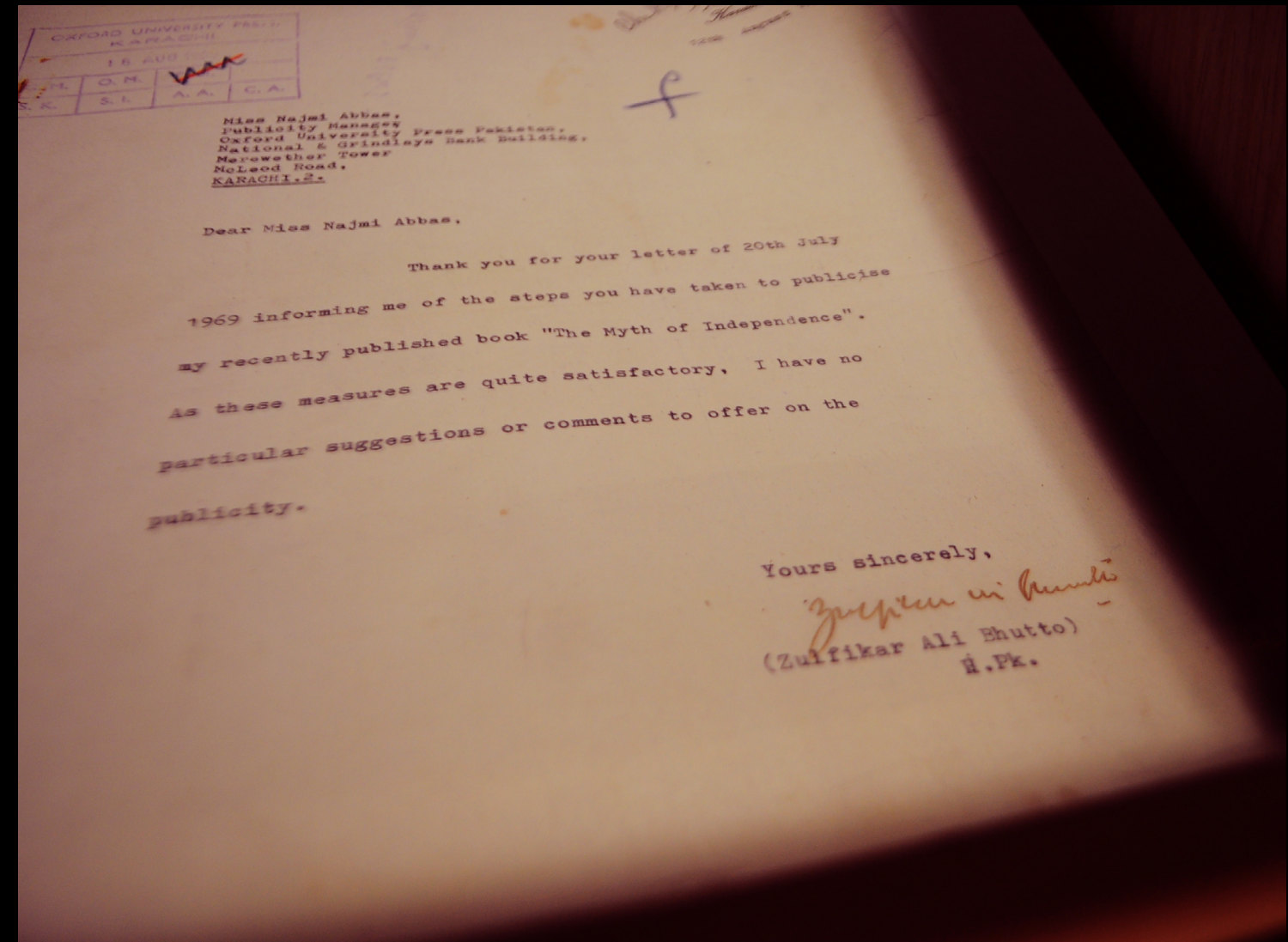
that is how it all was and will never
never be, facta sunt autem encenia in
Hiero
solymis et hiemps erat. The going
down of that eyelid, and it was winter.

PHOTO ESSAY: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

PAKISTAN MUSEUM AND ARCHIVES

by Nabiha Zeeshan & Ghausia Rashid Salam

Oxford University Press (OUP) has established itself as one of the oldest and, at least in Pakistan, the most important publishing house in the world. Its Pakistan division (OUPP) is a core sponsor of the Karachi Literature Festival, the second largest and widely attended festival in the region. OUPP recently celebrated its 50th anniversary and inaugurated the OUPP Museum and Archives, which chronicles the journeys of both literature and publishing in the world at large with focus on Pakistan. Curated by Varda Nisar, the exhibits are a testament to the debt owed to the printing press. With pictures by magazine staff member Nabiha Zeeshan and text by Ghausia Rashid Salam, The Missing Slate brings to light one of the most important dialogs on literature: what literature means and what it will mean (in the future).



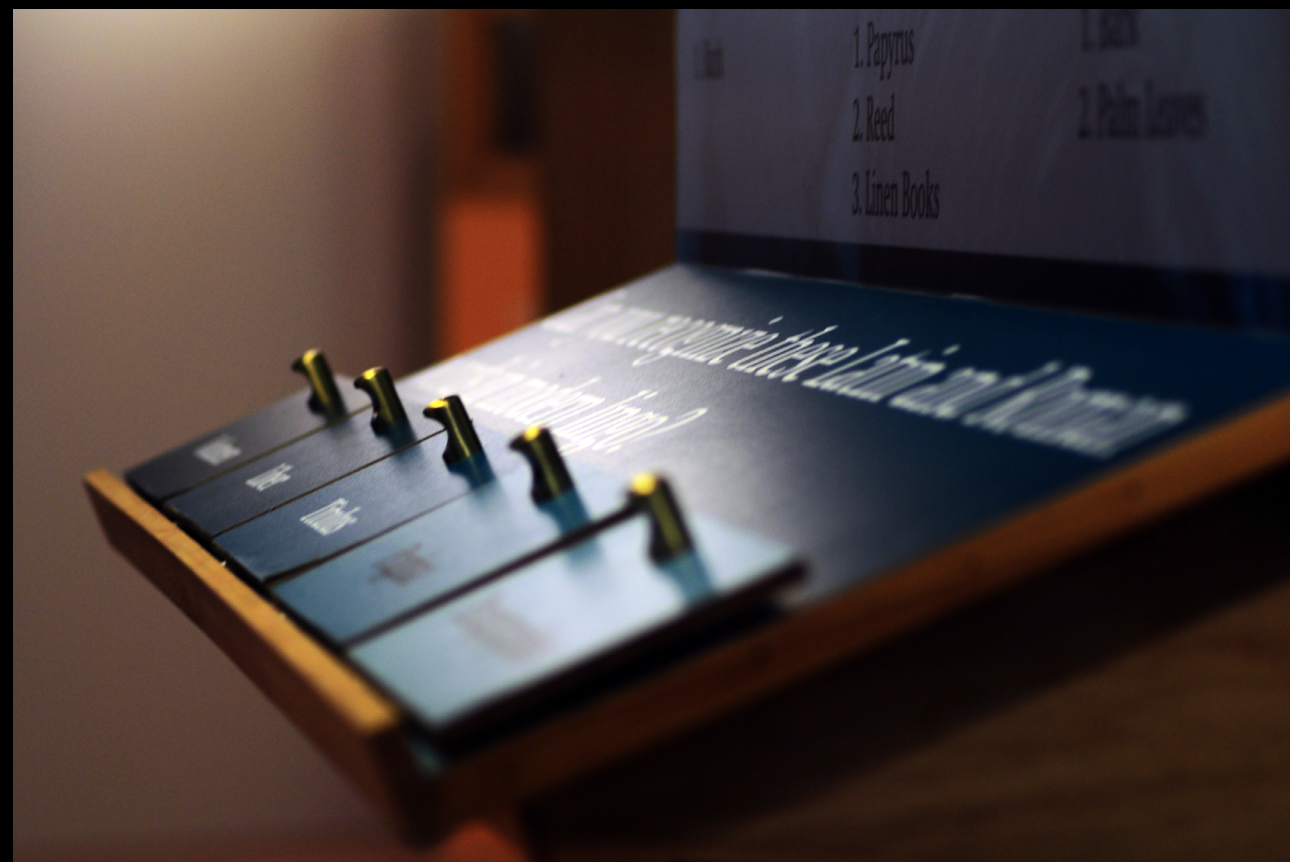
A copy of authentic letter sent to OUPP by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto



An Eastern scribe part of a 3-D display of an East / West comparison of ancient publishing, complete with actual artifacts such as a wooden desk, quills, brushes and paper.



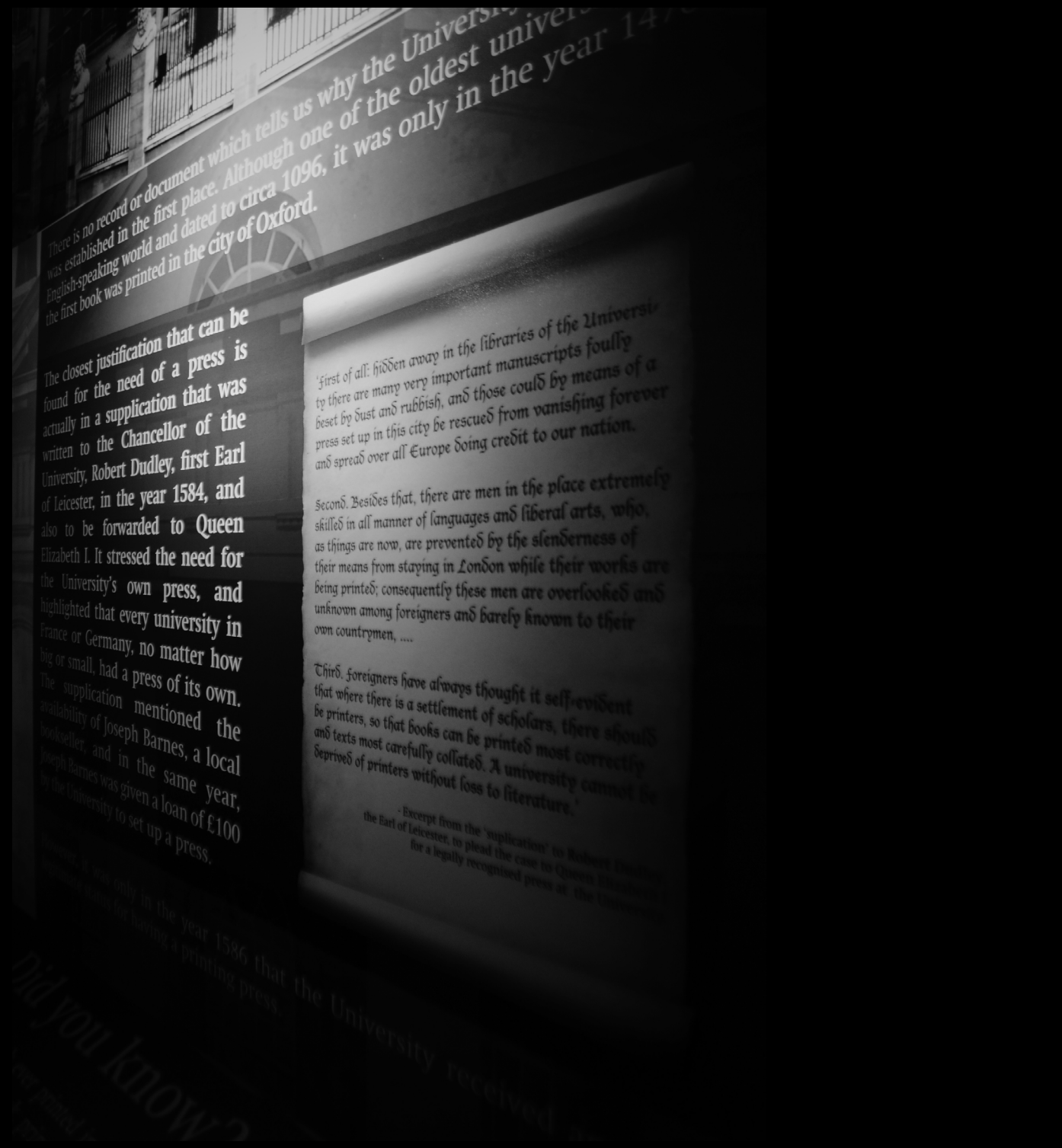
Western calligraphy and publishing in the second part of the comparative 3-D display, where the Western scribe favours goose quills, parchment, a reading frame for holding books meant for copying.



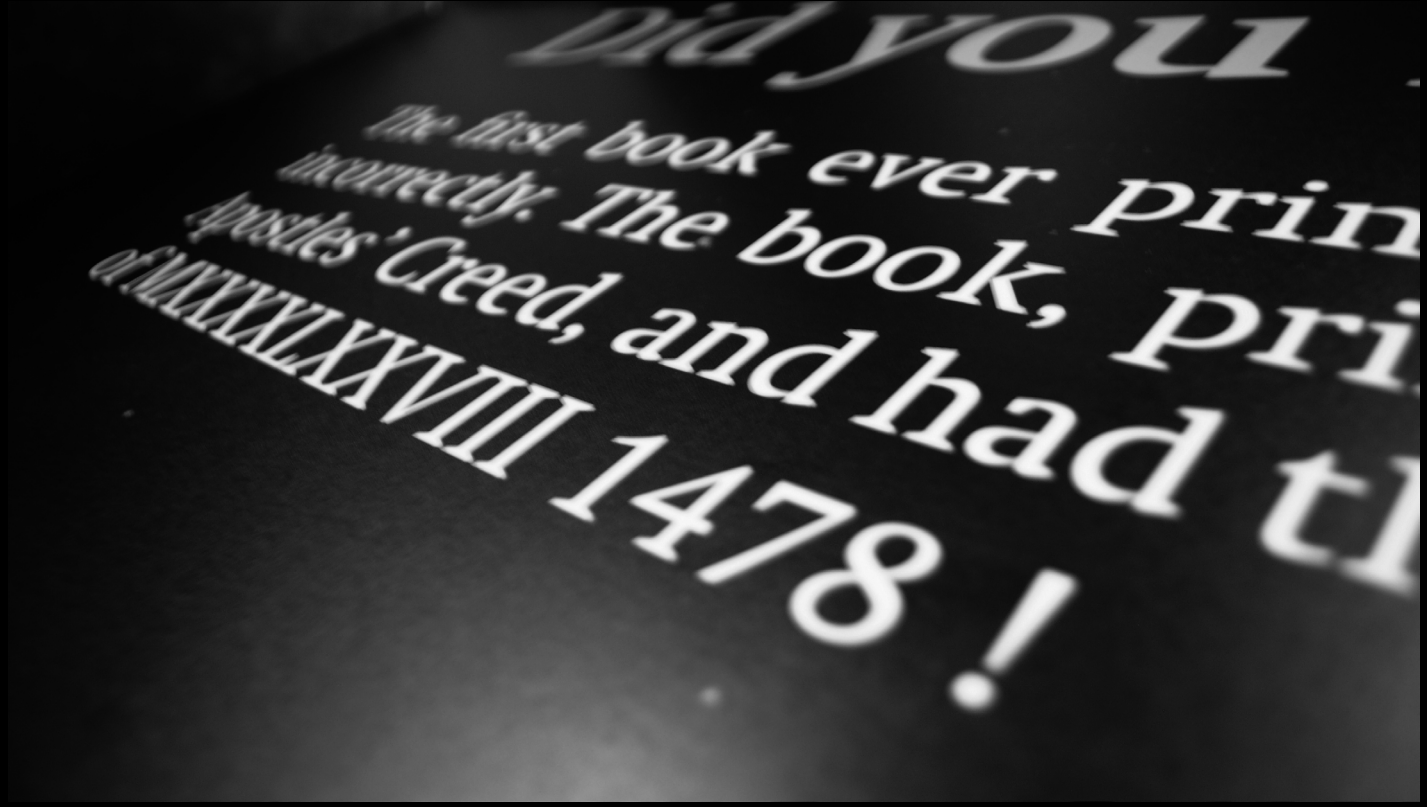
A fun mini-trivia game; guess the root Latin word of modern English words, and lift up the lid to check your answer.



A detailed analysis of how various methods of writing impacted publishing today sheds light on aspects of writing we seldom question, such as double columns and layouts.



A pictorial display of the appeal made to the Queen for allowing Oxford to have its own university press; even then, the monarchy feared the power of the mighty quill!



OUPP's first blunder, a mistyped date, resulted in controversy about its date of origin.

Printers have always thought it self-evident that where there is a settlement of scholars, there should be printers, so that books can be printed most correctly and texts most carefully collated. A university cannot be deprived of printers without loss to literature.'

- Excerpt from the 'supplication' to Robert Dudley, the Earl of Leicester, to plead the case to Queen Elizabeth I for a legally recognised press at the University.

A closer look at the supplication made to the Queen for a university press.



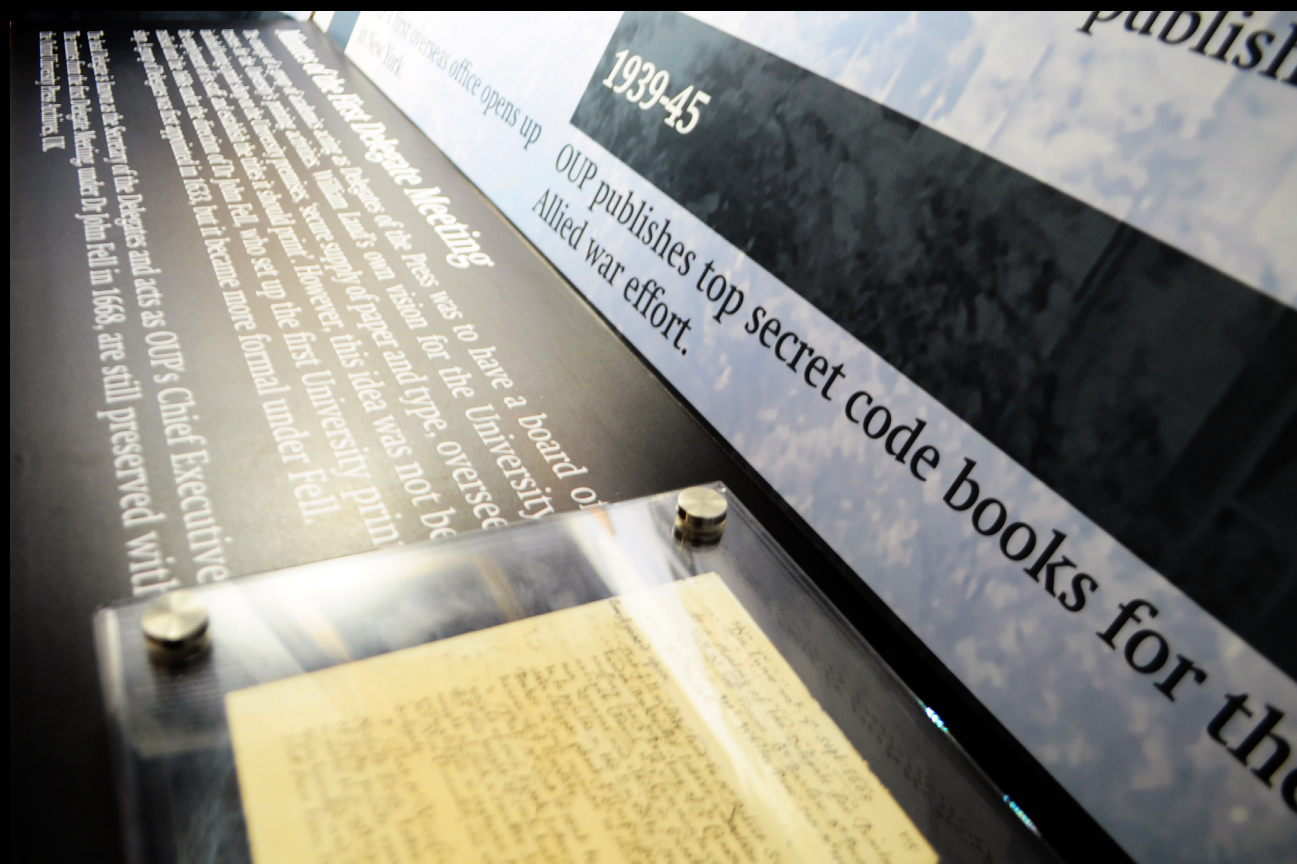
A closer look at ancient Latin text.



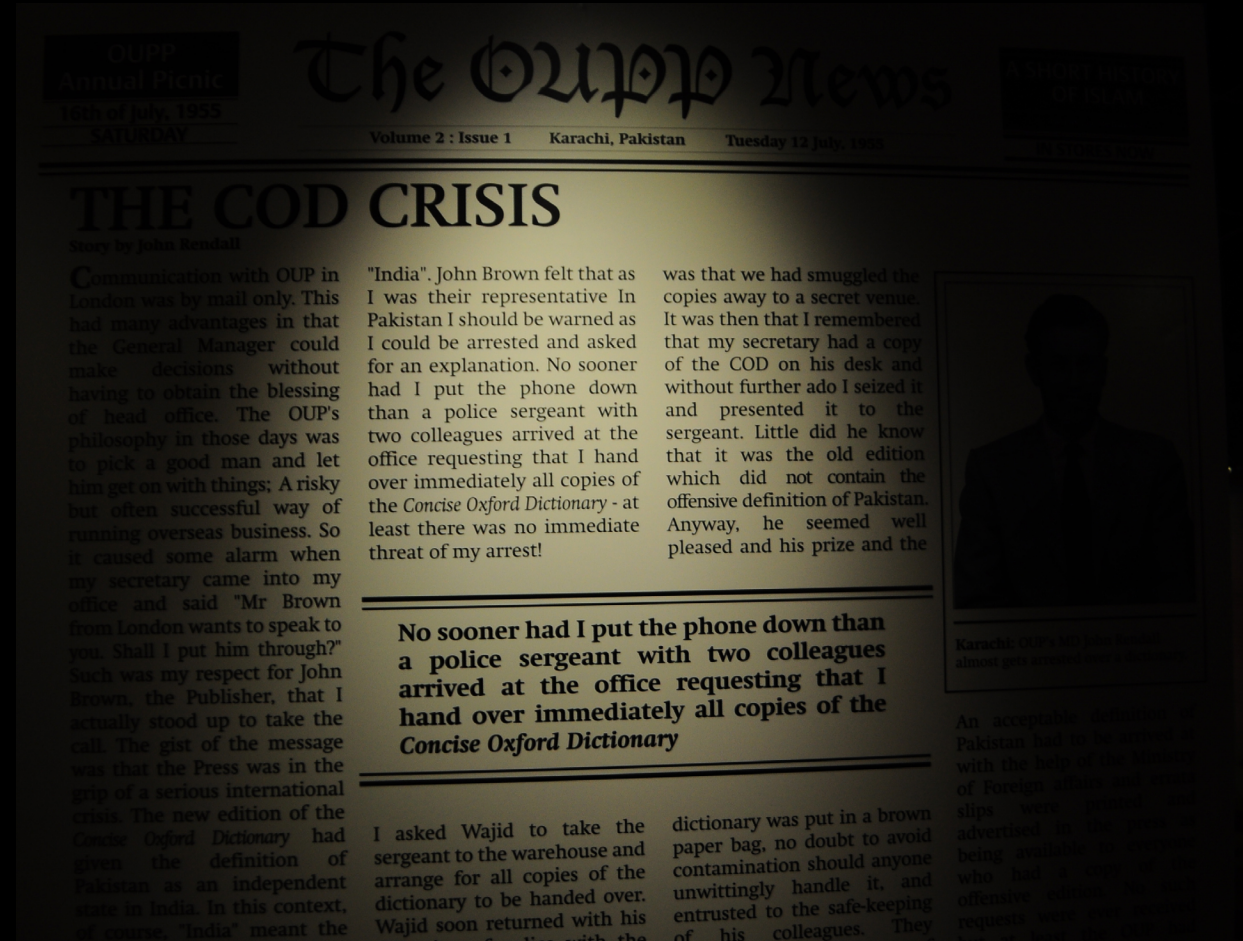
Pictures of the OUP's offices through the ages adorn the walls. This is the magnificent entrance to its head office in Karachi.



A map of London with markers for all the locations of OUP offices, past and present.



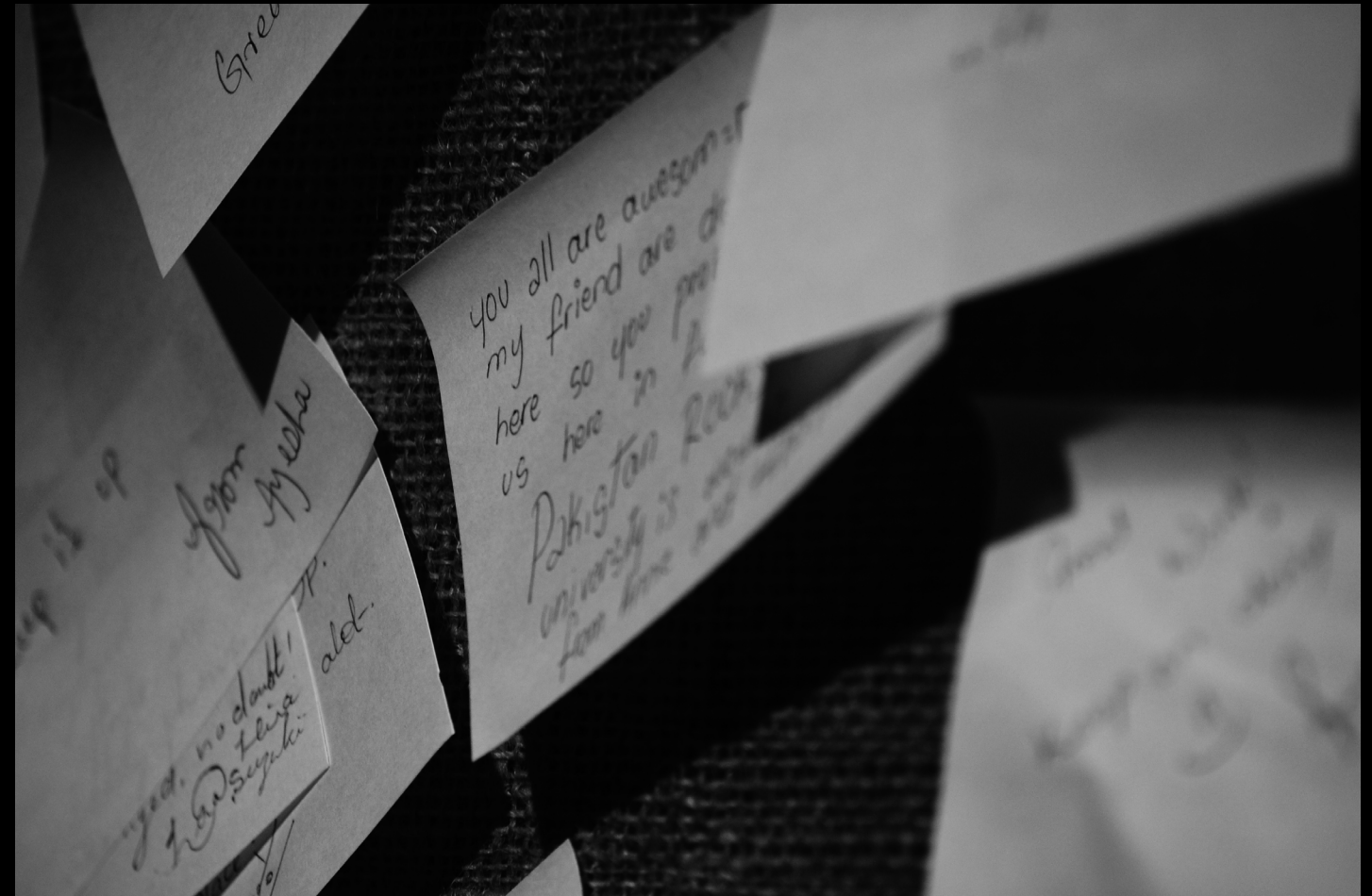
A detailed display of OUPP's history in Pakistan gives minute details down to the minutes of their very first meeting.



Of all the blunders to make, the biggest was to list Pakistan as a nation within India, instead of a separate nation in the Oxford Concise Dictionary, and that too less than a decade after Independence. This blunder was creatively displayed as the headlines of an OUPP newspaper.



A glass case holds some of the oldest (and out of print) books published by OUPP. Bookworms may drool but unfortunately, the case is locked!



A close-up of the feedback wall. School groups frequent the museum and children are enthusiastic with praise!

ADAPTING TO THE CLASSICS

In which the writer argues films, however refined a medium, can (and never will) hold a candle to the novels upon which they are based

by Maria Amir

“Film is visual brevity...if the novel is a poem, the film is a telegram.” Michael Hastings

We seem to be moving backwards, don't we? And no, I'm not referring to a cultural dissonance often reiterated with regards to Pakistan and religious extremism but of our newfound global romance with antiquity. Over the years, it appears that the faster the world moves forward, the more

people long for the romance and nostalgia of the past. And who's to truly say, there was any 'real' romance to be had in the time of Austen and Dickens, of Tolstoy and Fitzgerald, except for the numinous that has persisted like a stubborn welt in our collective consciousness. The tireless devotion to the classics appears to have been rekindled with a new spate of screen adaptations of beloved works like *Anna Karenina*, *Les Misérables*, *The Great Gatsby*, *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* in the last few years alone. There are many byways of approaching this trend and naturally there are pros

and cons aplenty involved with adapting a beloved classic novel on screen. All these points aside for the moment, what is interesting about a resurgence of classical literature being put on silicon is the timing. Could it possibly be that people are tiring of epic battle sequences featuring blue alien races that follow a shoddy plotline but deliver enough prudently placed pithy one-liners to satisfy a mass audience,

or are these attempts on the part of the film industry to breed a more discerning audience? Then again it could be pure coincidence, considering that it is nearly impossible to decide whether it is good taste that prompts a good story or the other way around.

Truth be told, I tend to enjoy a great period drama better than most but the limitations of film versus literature are not lost on me. Especially when sets and costumes seem to take overwhelming precedence over scripts and casting. The problems with treating classic novels like *Pride and Prejudice* for the screen, remain with characterizations. If one happens not to like the casting lead for Mr. Darcy,

for example, the entire story falls apart given that a reader's love of the novel tends to center around a single character. Nowhere is this better demonstrated than pitting the BBC's 1995 production of Austen's classic against the 2005 travesty. Colin Firth, as Darcy had nearly a decade to infiltrate the conscience and many a wet dream of Austen fans before Matthew Macfadyen disastrously tried to fill the same shoes and fall terribly short. William Costanzo, in his book *Reading the Movies* observes the major difference between books and film as being one where “visual images stimulate our perceptions directly, while written words can do this indirectly”. Reading the

word 'boot' requires a kind of mental “translation” that viewing a picture of a boot does not. Film is a much more sensory experience than reading and besides verbal language, there is also color, movement and sound. Still, film remains limited in terms of scope and imagination. It can only convey one perception of each character as translated by the actor; literature allows the reader to play actor, director, producer, set designer and most importantly,

“Oddly enough, I feel that most films that desperately attempt to cling to the slightest detail in a novel fall shortest off the mark because the task is both herculean and generally fruitless, with the possible exceptions of the Lord of the Rings trilogy and most BBC adaptations of British classics.”



The artistic tilework at OUPP M&A is reminiscent of Sufi shrines in Sindh and Punjab. Indeed, these exact tiles also adorn the interior of Abdullah Shah Ghazi's shrine in Karachi.



QUOTE THE KERO

the casting director.

Another major problem with film adaptations that attempt to recapture a classic novel is the dilemma of ‘loyalty’. The expression ‘faithful to the book’ is often bandied about and I personally believe this to be a useless tradition. Oddly enough, I feel that most films that desperately attempt to cling to the slightest detail in a novel fall shortest off the mark because the task is both herculean and generally fruitless, with the possible exceptions of the Lord of the Rings trilogy and most BBC adaptations of British classics. If anything, a film can only ever provide someone else’s interpretation of a great novel, which isn’t necessarily a bad thing but this also means that it then has the freedom ‘not’ to try and live up to a reader’s expectations. George Bluestone, one of the first to study film adaptations of literature believes the filmmaker serves as an independent artist, “not a translator for an established author, but a new author in his own right.” This is perhaps the best approach when adapting a classic on screen because it avoids the obvious pitfalls of catering to the expectations of a long-established readership. That said, no filmmaker can ever truly deny the debt they owe the novel as it is the title that generally draws an audience to the theatre not the director or actors’ gifts, extraordinary as those may be.

Nearly a third of all films ever made have been adapted from novels and these tend to be the most common contenders that go on to win Oscars. Still, one would be hard pressed to consider this long-standing trend a testament to the evolution of literature. If anything, it is the dilution of literature. Like thoughts now mass migrating in cyberspace as tweets and memes on Tumblr, film – as vibrant an art form as it is – does not truly replace literature and yet in the consciousness of a generation it already seems to have done so. Fewer people around

the world bother with books at all any more, especially the classics, considering the language is complicated and the plots often take time to unfold. In a world where ‘article-reading’ on the web is rapidly replacing book reading on a couch, films are fast becoming the only source to recapture any essence of antiquity and there’s something sad about this state of affairs, as though we are finally comfortable being ‘fed’ not only our news and information, but also our art. High school students no longer read the novel prescribed in class before handing in a book report, they usually just ‘catch the movie’ and embellish well enough to fake an entire reading experience.

“ It is the “reading experience” that may well be this generation’s greatest loss in the wake of a digital invasion. It is the loss of experiencing and interpreting sentences such as “I knew damn well I would never be a movie star. It’s too hard; and if you are intelligent, it’s too embarrassing. ”

It is the “reading experience” that may well be this generation’s greatest loss in the wake of a digital invasion. It is the loss of experiencing and interpreting sentences such as “I knew damn well I would never be a movie star. It’s too hard; and if you are intelligent, it’s too embarrassing. My complexes aren’t inferior enough: being a movie star and having a big fat ego are supposed to go hand-in-hand; actually, it’s essential not to have any ego at all. I don’t mean I’d mind being rich and famous. That’s very much on my schedule, and someday I’ll try and get around to it; but if it hap-

pens, I’d like to have my ego, tagging along. I want to still be me when I wake up one fine morning and have breakfast at Tiffany’s” (Truman Capote, *Breakfast at Tiffany’s*). It’s watching Ethan Hawke play Pip in the [Alfonso Cuarón](#) 1998 remake of *Great Expectations* without saying “That was a memorable day to me, for it made great changes in me. But, it is the same with any life. Imagine one selected day struck out of it, and think how different its course would have been. Pause you who read this, and think for a moment of the long chain of iron or gold, of thorns or flowers, that would never have bound you, but for the formation of the first link on one memorable day” or “I never had one hour’s happiness in her society, and yet my mind all round the four-and-

twenty hours was harping on the happiness of having her with me unto death.” It is watching both film versions of *Jane Eyre*, the old and the new, without hearing her say “So much has religion done for me; turning the original materials to the best account; pruning and training nature. But she could not eradicate nature: nor will it be eradicated ‘till this mortal shall put on immortality. Conventionality is not morality. Self-righteousness is not religion. To attack the first is not to assail the last.” And it is anticipating a new *Gatsby* without Di Caprio uttering the phrase “Civilization’s going to pieces. I’ve gotten to be a terrible pessimist about things... The idea is if we don’t look out the white race will be--will be utterly submerged... It’s up to us, who are the dominant race, to watch out or these other races will have control of things” or “I hope she’ll be a fool--that’s the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool... You see, I think everything’s terrible anyhow... And I know. I’ve been everywhere and seen everything and done everything.”

It sounds overtly puritanical, I know. The idea that just because a book happens to be called and considered ‘a classic’ somehow means it ought to be treated with additional reverence in an age that considers little in art to be sacrosanct but I cannot help but cling to the notion nevertheless. The flux of

films based on classic novels isn’t new – nearly each year sees us with a few film versions based on contemporary or classic novels, comic books, or fantasy series but 2012 (and 2013 for that matter) seems to be ending on epics and the remakes of epics. There is obviously the advantage that a cinematic adaptation of *Anna Karenina* might prompt new readers to Tolstoy’s original work or that Di Caprio playing

Gatsby might cause some of his teenage fans to find out who Fitzgerald actually was. Still, there is a sad demise for masters like Tolstoy, Tolkien, Dostoyevsky, Dickens and Austen...who now have to draw audiences to their work through a genre foreign to them and one that could never truly embody the pure power of their words. Here one might even come to question why adaptation has so often supported the institution of literature rather than fostering the practice of literacy.

Shakespeare, the greatest and most adapted writer on screen, might well be flattered by all the notice he still gets centuries later. Then again,

he might just be horrified at how that notice is conceived and wish to remain forever *Anonymous*.

The writer is Features Editor for the magazine – formerly based in Copenhagen, Denmark.

Artwork Credit: Waiting by Abigail Larson



GATSBY THROUGH THE AGES

by Sana Hussain

Following the release of Baz Luhrmann’s glamorous trailer for the new *Gatsby* movie, interest in Fitzgerald’s classic has rekindled. Luhrmann, whose repertoire includes the glorious *Moulin Rouge* and the slightly less glorious *Romeo + Juliet*, has endeavored to create a 3D adaptation of one of the most iconic pieces of American literature. While the trailer, with its glossy, indulgent feel and awkward soundtrack choices, fails to promise anything more penetrating than the adaptations of the past; one still latches on to the hope that given the director’s prior record he will be successful in communicating the essence of a novel that up till now seems unfit for cinematic revision.

The Great Gatsby, a novel that so poignantly chronicled the defining aspects of the jazz age, has been adapted for film, stage and even TV. The most significant film adaptations were the 1974 Jack Clayton version with Robert Redford and Mia Farrow, and the 2000 Robert Markowitz made-for-TV movie starring Toby Stephens and Paul Rudd.

The problem with these adaptations has been that they fail to capture the subliminal quality of Fitzgerald’s writing. Fitzgerald wrote about “the roaring twenties”, an age that boasted flappers, bootleggers and gangsters, an age in which “the buildings were higher. The parties were bigger. The morals were loser and the liquor was cheaper. The restlessness approached hysteria.” However, the movies fail to communicate this aspect effectively. The parties, the drinking, the infidelity and the wantonness, all the superficial markers of that age are present but they fall short of portraying the power of Fitzgerald’s “dialogue”.

While Markowitz’s *The Great Gatsby* took its liberties with the plot and Fitzgerald’s prose, the 1974 version stayed true to the novel in almost every aspect. However, both these approaches left the viewer unsatisfied; Nick Carraway’s narration that is the perfect blend of curiosity and detachment in the novel, is cloying in Clayton’s movie, giving it a lugubrious and cumbersome feel; and in Markowitz’s film the artistic license has been used much too liberally giving one the feeling that had Paul Rudd’s character borrowed more from Fitzgerald he would not have come across as aloof and clumsy as he does.

What is most shocking is that despite staying faithful to Fitzgerald in almost the whole of the movie’s narration and events, Clayton digresses on the most critical point; the ending. Clayton ends the movie with the well-known “Ain’t we got fun?” to highlight Carraway’s disillusionment, rather than closing it on the legendary last lines that are as famous as the novel itself, “So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past”.

This may only be because the movie lacks the understanding of what the book is really about; not the glamour and opulence of East Egg’s apathetic rich, but the failed pursuit of hedonistic pleasures and lost dreams. These are the perilous waters in which the new *Gatsby* adaptation will also find itself in if not careful. The glamour and luxury portrayed in the trailer, if any prediction of what the movie will be about is only the spectacle of sex, booze and revelry, rather than what lies beneath them. Despite appearances, *The Great Gatsby* is a solemn and subtle tale, and it needs to be treated as such otherwise its true meaning will be obfuscated by the superficial treatment of these aspects.

It is striking that at the time that it was originally written *The Great Gatsby* did not instantly reach the iconic status of a modern classic, and it was only when the leftover plethora of unread copies was distributed to American military at the time of World War II that *Gatsby* started becoming popular. But ever since its popularity has never faded and it has been revived every few years proving to be as relevant as it was in the Jazz Age.

Interestingly, Jack Clayton’s adaptation of *The Great Gatsby* came at a time that was not much different from the twenties in which the novel was written. Like the Jazz Age, the sixties characterized changing tides in American history; both welcomed abandon when it came to the conservative values of the past and embraced a more liberal and cavalier attitude towards social dealings. The social upheaval of the 1960s saw a change in social norms, lifestyles, fashion and music. The making of *The Great Gatsby* close to such a historic time seemed like an apt choice. Fifty years later, the narrative was still relevant in exploring a changing America along with the fallout of that change.



Artwork by Yahat Benazir

And again, with the expected release of another Gatsby adaptation, the relevance of Fitzgerald's message in today's time cannot be overlooked. With the American Dream shattered, rampant economic recession and a general feeling of disillusionment and discontentment plaguing the country, Gatsby's dream of the green light is ever so significant. For "Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter – tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther...and one fine morning..." (*The Great Gatsby*).

The new world has many Gatsbys obsessing over past glory, compromising themselves for fleeting pleasures and finally being consumed by their

own passions. The hierarchical class structures that Fitzgerald emphasized through the dichotomy of West Egg and East Egg dwellers, between new money and old money, is still very much a part of American society. So while the movie will transport the viewer back to the 1920s, retrospect will provide sharp insight into the America of the twenty first century. All that remains to be seen is whether Luhrmann will separate his film from the mediocre adaptations of the past creating something that captures the true spirit of *The Great Gatsby* or will he join his predecessors and deliver a mere literal retelling of a novel that is multilayered and profound.

The writer is Features Editor for *The Missing Slate*.

TEN YEARS' TIME

by Scott Bassis

Manuela first realized she loved Kevin a month or so after she waved her last goodbye to him. It was between her sophomore and junior year at Amherst College. She'd had sex with someone she hadn't cared about, Pedro, a stock boy at Strand Bookstore, where she had gotten a summer job. He treated her to Chipotle's, loaded her full of sangria, then led her to the Flatbush apartment he shared with his cousins, who shut the door, smoked a joint, and politely pretended not to hear them.

Manuela, herself, didn't make a sound. She lay mute, gazing at the ceiling. Midway through, though not entirely aware of what was happening, she came to the realization she had done this before. Gathering her clothes and her wits in the morning, she told Pedro she had a boyfriend at school, so it was best they stay away from each other. "Ok," he shrugged.

She spent the subway ride home trying to remember who had raped her. By the time the "6" reached Castle Hill, she had identified the culprit as Ricardo, her mother's ex-boyfriend, who had been around for about two years, when she was eight and nine.

She didn't remember most of it, and the memories she did have had always been there: a removed article of clothing, a look from across the room, a burning shame emanating from her stomach. It just all made sense now, as if after staring long and hard at the pieces of a puzzle, she finally saw the full image in her mind.

She cried often. At work, she would hold in her tears until she made it to the employee restroom. Even when at home, she would curl up on her bed to sob. Containing her grief to one area helped her to function.

It was while her face was pressed into her pillow that her thoughts first wandered, seemingly at random, to Kevin. Envisioning his sullen face and his haunted eyes, reflecting on the bit of his past she knew, speaking after years of silence, she didn't so much conclude as casually accept that someone had hurt him like Ricardo had hurt her.

As she ran through all the occasions they met in her mind, she realized he had always been alone. That had to be another sign, because she was so of-

ten alone too. Turning her cheek against the damp pillow to smile, she thought, perhaps now, they wouldn't have to be.

Their story began at Amherst, at the end of freshman year.

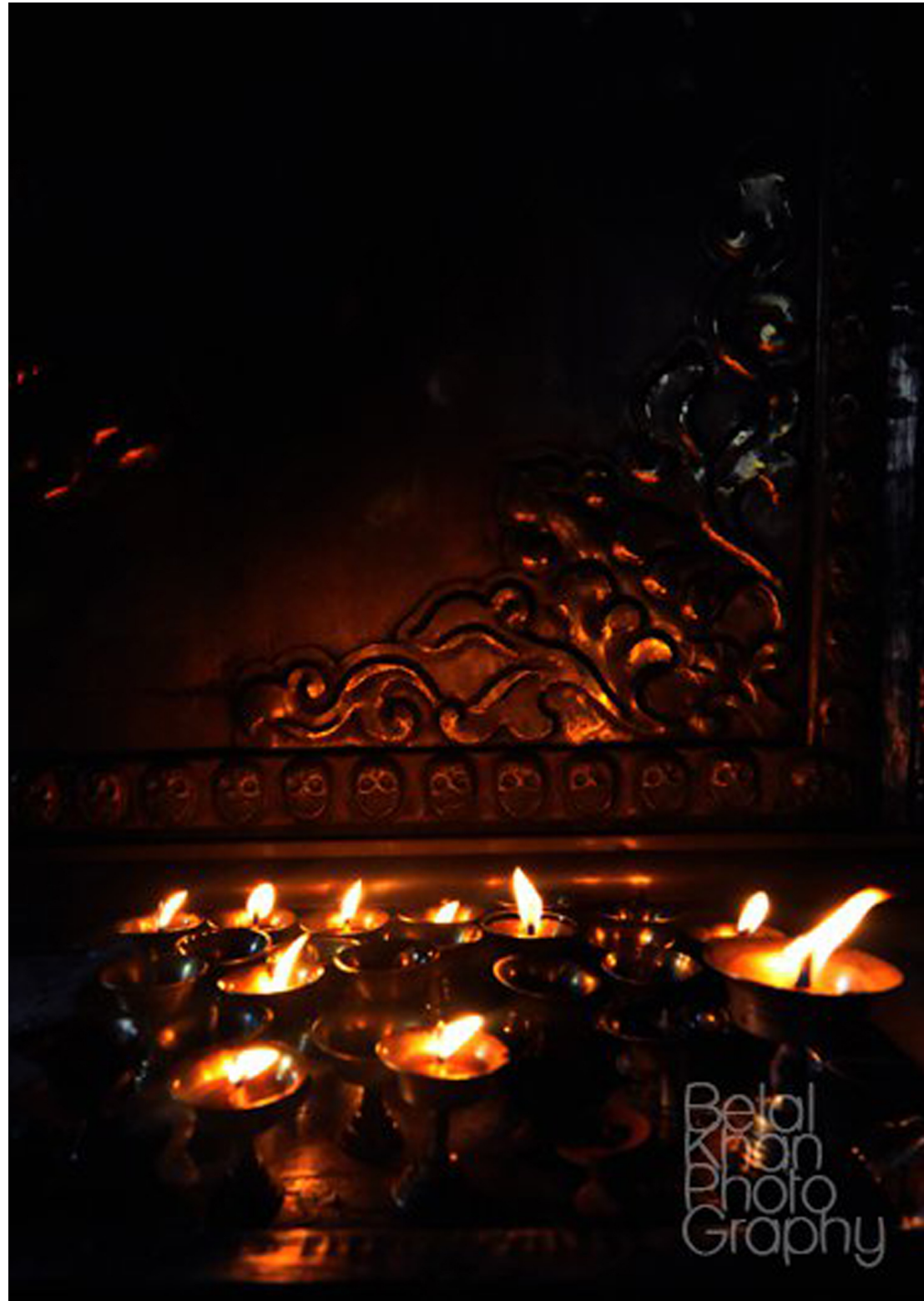
Finals week was underway. Manuela knew this could be her last chance. She was shaking as she approached Kevin. She glanced down. The Diet Pepsi jumped from her glass, spilling droplets onto her hand. Her salad bowl slid around on the tray until fixed in place by a luckily positioned banana. She looked up at him. His eyes were wide in alarm, which nearly made her about face and scurry back to her table, with her friends that year, Beth, her roommate, and Savita.

Beth and Savita treated her like a pet: silent, sweet Manuela, too shy to say "hello" to her own neighbors in the dorm. Savita had a habit of patting Manuela's head affectionately, like whenever Manuela tried to join a conversation, then swallowed her tongue before emitting a peep.

They loved Manuela as she was which was why they had to go.

"Is this seat taken?" Manuela had been rehearsing, ever since this afternoon, when she passed Kevin in the psych center, when he stared at her so longingly she swore she saw tears, and she ignored his soft "hello" as usual, then, throwing his hands in the air, he stormed into the men's room. He had been trying to get her to say "hello" back to him all

“ If she didn't change everything about herself right now, she was liable to bring a razor to her wrists, as she had during spring break; only this time, she might not stop just short of her radial artery. ”



Artwork by Belal Khan

year.

“Nope.” Appearing almost rueful, Kevin removed his black hooded sweatshirt from the chair beside him. He wore it every day, along with black jeans and a black t-shirt. She hoped he at least changed those.

She sat. Unfortunately, she hadn’t practiced anything beyond her opening line. Kevin picked up his roll, bit into it, and chewed it slowly, keeping his wary eyes fixed on her.

Kevin wasn’t ugly, but kind of rat faced, with his big ears, long nose and small chin. He shaved his head bald, which didn’t help. She felt sorry for him, which was why she did this. That, and if she didn’t change everything about herself right now, she was liable to bring a razor to her wrists, as she had during spring break; only this time, she might not stop just short of her radial artery.

“I know Beth.” She finally blurted. She glanced back at her table, where Beth and Savita sat oblivious to the magnitude of this moment. At the time, however, Manuela was too.

“Beth?” He followed Manuela’s line of sight. “Oh. I think we went to the same high school.”

“Groton,” she said. It was a rich kid’s boarding school in Massachusetts. Beth said Kevin used to be as shy as Manuela up until college. Manuela had always remembered because she had never met anyone as shy as she was. She thought that may have been another reason why she chose him. Other boys watched her, even if none as vigilantly. She had huge, doe eyes, a button nose and really nice breasts for an anorexic. But she sensed he would treat her the kindest.

“What else do you know about me?” From his unnerved expression, he seemed sure she was a stalker. That was a laugh: as if anyone would choose bald, gangly, vaguely rat-faced, vaguely scary Kevin Reid to stalk. Besides, he was the one obsessed with her.

“Nothing!” She said defensively. His disbelieving smile made her chafe.

“She said you were waitlisted at MIT,” she recalled. Beth had mentioned it because she had been waitlisted there too, knew the outcome of everyone from Groton who applied, and still fixated on it a year later. He grimaced. It was clearly a sore spot for him as well. He looked away from her, sneering.

She winced. This couldn’t have possibly gone worse. He brought his gaze back to her. His face grew solemn.

“Nice to meet you. What’s your name?”

She was confused. She had no doubt he had made it a point to learn her name by now. Then she quickly understood he was attempting to instruct her.

“Manuela,” she murmured. She resented this game. She wasn’t stupid. She had earned a full scholarship to Amherst. She had ranked first in her Bronx high school, which, admittedly, was like being a gold medalist in the Special Olympics. Yet, even the most illiterate thugs and teen mothers among her classmates could carry on a conversation more competently than she.

“Are you a freshman?”

“Yes.” He knew very well that she was. His piercing black eyes had been locked on her as far back as their orientation.

“How do you like it here?” He appeared so smug, because he knew what to say and she didn’t.

“I don’t know.” She felt drained. She had thought it would be easy. That was possibly another reason she had picked him. She had sensed he was already half-in-love with her.

“Don’t you have a class in the psych center?” he asked.

Now, he was just mocking her. She didn’t have to put up with this. On a scale from one to ten, she was a nine. He was a six, maybe a seven with hair.

“Uh huh. I have to go. Back to my friends.” She was short of breath. She glanced down to see her hands still shaking in her lap. They probably hadn’t stopped since she sat. If he had known how hard this was, he would have been nicer. Nevertheless, she was proud of herself. Before this, the closest she’d had to a conversation with an interested guy was when a construction worker catcalled for a block senior year of high school.

“Okay. Nice to meet you,” he said.

“Nice to meet you.” She stood. She grabbed her tray. As hard as she concentrated, her hands would not steady. She began to walk. Her fork dropped to the floor with a clang. Rather than court disaster, she left it there.

She heard him chuckle. She turned to him glaring. There was no ridicule in his face. There was awe.

If she had been wrong before, and he wasn't half in love with her, he sure looked it now. Even back then, she understood he knew exactly how hard that was.

Regretfully, she had only joined Kevin that once in Valentine Dining Hall. Days later, he called out to her as she scanned the cafeteria for a free table. She had one final left. Beth and Savita had already gone home.

"Hello, Manuela!" As always, he was surrounded by empty chairs.

This time, she wasn't ready. She hadn't prepared. She slunk by without so much as a nod of acknowledgment. He watched her with a look of sorrow which infuriated her. She wasn't as pitiful as he thought. She would show him. Next fall, she would be a brand new Manuela.

She was. During the summer, she worked as a cashier at the bodega on her block. To hone her social skills, she began a conversation with a different customer every hour. By August, she had been asked for her phone number four times by men who had misinterpreted her sociability.

Not a week into her sophomore year, Kevin passed her as she read on the steps of Frost Library. Peering above the edge of the textbook, she glimpsed him pause in front of her before creeping away like a shadow. She bristled, even if she had spent the whole year before pretending she didn't see him.

"Hello, Kevin. How're you?" She put the textbook down. He stopped cold. He faced her apprehensively.

"Good. And you?"

"Good. Just studying. I don't know why I took Neurology." She tried to think of something clever to add, a joke about synapses and neurons maybe. She wasn't quick enough yet. In time, she would be.

Seeing his jaw drop in shock, Manuela smiled. It confirmed how different she was: unrecognizable.

"How was your summer?" she asked.

He looked her up and down, taking in her appearance. She hadn't only refined her conversation skills since May. Her hairstyle, with J-Lo inspired highlights, had cost eighty dollars at a Manhattan salon. Her jeans were Guess. Her shoes were Urban Outfitter. Her jacket was Forever 21. The days of letting her mother pick out her clothes at the local Conway were over.

He wound the strings of his black hoodie tightly

around his knuckles. His face matched the red of his hands. Through clenched teeth, he finally replied.

"Good. I interned at Boston Consulting."

"Sounds interesting," she said, although she knew nothing about Boston Consulting, beyond that it was a company in Boston which consulted people, or other companies, about something.

"I have to get to my linear algebra test. Nice to meet you." He winced from his gaffe.

"Nice to see you again," she said, gloating a little.

He darted off abruptly, just as he had done in the psych center. Then, it filled her with shame. Now, she was indignant. She was easy to talk to when she didn't talk; it wasn't the same when he couldn't feel superior to her.

"Good luck on your test," she called.

This was the key to social skills, she had learned: deception, pretending to care, or not to, pretending to know what she didn't, or not to know what she did. For example, she hadn't mentioned to him what was obvious to her, that he was only angry because he couldn't see why she would need him now.

There were no "hellos" between them for the rest of the term and into the next, only hurt glares coming from both directions. Eventually, he must have noticed the cracks in her new persona. Seeing her in Valentine Dining Hall day after day, it must have come to his attention that her table was as invariably empty as his, and she appeared as miserable as he did. For one evening, he approached her tray in hand. Catching her alarmed face, he swiftly backed away.

"What could *he* want?" she thought.

The next time she saw him, as he cut through Pratt Field, a Frisbee whizzing past his bald, oblivious head, staring back at her with eyes sadder and more yearning than ever, she didn't know what to think.

On the porch of Theta House, the night of the Patriot's Pride Party, those eyes stunned her in place. That she held the door open as she left wasn't an intentional act of courtesy.

"Hi," he whispered.

She would never think to find him at a frat party. On the other hand, she had no idea how he spent his free time, other than eating dinners by himself

or wandering the campus grounds like a ghost.

He quickly stared down. He fiddled with the strings of his hoodie, tying them together and untying them. His nervousness made her nervous. She stepped out of his way, thoughtlessly letting the door close.

"Sorry," she said. He glanced to the shut door indifferently.

He gazed at her. She could see his mind working, struggling to come up with what to say, dismissing several notions with subtle twists of the mouth. She could see shades of the boy he had been at Groton. She remembered why she first felt she could trust him, and realized what she hadn't before, when he seemed so far ahead of her: they were always in the same boat.

"You're leaving early," he said at last. He checked his watch to confirm the validity of this observation. He grinned, satisfied.

"I don't know anyone," she muttered.

"You didn't come with Beth?"

She smiled. He remembered. Their encounter in Valentine Dining Hall had been meaningful to him too.

"No, I've got a new roommate, but she's at her boyfriend's every night. I'm sure Beth's home studying. I kind of like being alone now anyway."

He nodded empathetically, though even she saw the contradiction in her sentiments. She whined that she didn't know anyone, yet proclaimed she was content to be alone.

"Sometimes you feel more comfortable by yourself, but deep down, you know it's not good for you," he said, perhaps explaining why he was at this party too. By his image, halfway between ninja and Nosferatu, and his default expression of being ticked off at everyone, no one would have suspected he secretly yearned for company. Still, she believed it. He had reached out to her.

"Maybe. But they're all stuck up in there," she said, knowing, of course, that was likely the general opinion of her.

"Yeah, it'll probably suck. From what I saw inside, looks like jock central. There's beer pong, isn't there?" he said. She smirked. There was.

"A funnel?"

She nodded, giggling.

"An idiot in a beer hat?"

She paused to think. There wasn't that she recalled.

"A pot room. There's got to be a pot room. The door's closed, but you can smell it from the hall."

"From downstairs," she said. He laughed.

"No. I definitely should have stayed home and memorized my proofs. I think Beth has the right idea."

She shrugged. The last hour, she had wanted nothing except to slink back to her dorm. Being surrounded by affection, solidarity and carefree joy, only depressed her. She had made herself stay, downed two beers though they were gross, but never felt for a moment as if she belonged.

It was different out here. From Kevin's beaming smile, she knew he felt it too, that what they had come here seeking, they found in each other. She was about to tell him how happy she was that he came.

Three smashed girls pushed past to enter, tripping in their heels and shrieking with laughter. One stared with obvious, drunken attraction at Kevin. He blushed momentarily before returning his gaze to Manuela. Yet, Manuela continued to ponder this rival. She was pretty. She knew how to have a good time, clearly. Manuela couldn't help feeling Kevin would be better off with someone like her. This year proved that Manuela was the same pathetic, conceited, crazy girl she had been last year, and always.

Manuela stuck out her hand to stop the door from closing. He frowned.

"You're here. You should check it out, right?" she said.

"What are your plans?" he asked.

"Sleep, I guess." Actually, she was hungrier than she was tired. Spurred by a whiff of McDonald's fries she was catching, no doubt from some red eyed jocks afflicted with the munchies. The thought of biting into a greasy Quarter Pounder filled her mouth with saliva.

He gazed at the drunken festivities inside with a face of terror mixed with contempt. He turned to her. Briefly, she was sure he would ask if she wanted to grab a bite to eat instead. The McDonald's in town was apparently still open. She thought she might just say yes, rather than squelch her hunger with the Tums she kept on her nightstand. There was always

“She was pretty. She knew how to have a good time, clearly. Manuela couldn't help feeling Kevin would be better off with someone like her. This year proved that Manuela was the same pathetic, conceited, crazy girl she had been last year, and always.”

tomorrow to deny herself.

“We have to keep trying, don't we?” he said.

She nodded. She understood. They had to believe they belonged somewhere, or why go on living in the world?

“Yeah. Us outsiders,” she said. He chuckled at the pun.

“Good night,” he said as he went inside.

“Good night.” If only she had really listened to his words, and not given up on him. If only she had not let that door shut.

She saw him on the day she took the bus home for the summer. A month later, she would remember what had happened to her as a child. She would understand why Kevin stared at her so sadly all freshman year. If she had appreciated then how he tried to help her, when everyone else her whole life just let her suffer, she would have thrown her arms around him, kissed him and refused to let go.

Instead, she waved.

She had put many of her on-campus items in a storage unit in town, among them a discounted Louis Vuitton handbag she had bought during winter break. She feared it wouldn't last a minute on her arm walking through her neighborhood. The morning she left, however, she had a vision of clubbing in Manhattan, catching the eyes of handsome guys on the dance floor, being the envy of every girl. The thrilling social life she had expected to find all year seemed at last possible in New York: but not without her Louis Vuitton. In retrospect, the *Sex & the City*

DVD her roommate had watched the night before was probably to blame.

As she dragged her duffel bags across the lawn which bordered town, she spotted Kevin leaning against the back wall of the Morrow Dorm. He was smoking, a disgusting habit he must have recently picked up.

Catching sight of her, he brought his cigarette down. He gazed down at her luggage, which despite including roughly half her outfits, weighed almost as much she did. He seemed about to call out to her, possibly to ask, “Need help?”

She could have used it. Not even off campus yet, her back ached and her hands were sore. It would be fun to tease him about his smoking. She saw it for what it was: the latest prop in his bad boy act. He couldn't hide his true self from her. Still, he would surely ask about her summer plans. She would have to reveal, embarrassingly, she had none beyond finding a menial job which would allow her to expand her wardrobe. Most importantly, she had to retrieve her handbag before the bus left.

So, she waved.

Waving back, he was so flustered he dropped his cigarette into the grass. She knew he was in love with her, yet she trudged past him indifferently. Feeling a pang of something, she turned around upon exiting campus. Smoke trailed up from where he had stood.

Manuela never got around to going clubbing in New York. Her dinner date with Pedro had been her first and last social outing. For most of the summer, she could barely manage to sit with her mother to watch TV; there would be something on the news, or the crime shows her mother favored, which led Manuela's mind back to the putrid memories of her eight and nine year old self.

She thought of all the children whose souls were being destroyed because everyone around was too preoccupied to notice. It was no wonder Kevin always looked so pissed. At work, she caught herself glowering at each customer she rang up.

One night in her room, having nothing to do and no one to talk to, she wrote her thoughts down in a mostly blank notebook from high school. If she saw her story wherever she looked, she might as well tell it herself.

She wrote about the abuse, but she also wrote



Craving for Love by Maria Khan

about Kevin. She poured over their every encounter. She imagined the joy they would bring each other soon. Without him, her story was nothing less or more than a tragedy. He got her through each day, yet she still wished there was a way to know for certain they would be together.

Madame Nadja was a silly looking old woman, with crooked teeth and peroxidized hair, always chasing after tarot cards which had blown in the wind. She had a table at the Union Square Farmer's Market. Her name was on a plastic stand, along with a list of the prices for her various readings. Manuela would see her during her lunch break.

Of course, it was tempting to have her fortune told, increasingly so as fall drew closer. Nevertheless, if Madame Nadja was indeed psychic, why hadn't she won mega-millions? Shouldn't she be lounging about her mansion, instead of sweltering in the New York summer heat, fanning herself with

“Kevin wasn't misplaced among the O'Connors or Ramirezes. He wasn't with the Robinsons or Rodriguezes either. Clenching her duffel bag straps in one hand, the directory in the other, she stormed to the bench outside.”

tacky flyers? Anyone who turned to her for advice was either a complete idiot, or completely desperate.

“You have a question on yours mind. Mad-

ame Nadja can answer,” Madame Nadja croaked to her one afternoon.

Manuela froze. She knew Madame Nadja’s shtick, had watched her elicit customers before. Then again, there was a host of others in the vicinity whose money was just as green. And today, of all Sundays, Manuela’s fruit vendor was a no show. She only had a ten on her, the price for one palm. Cynicism aside, she had to wonder if that was fate.

“I seen yous before. I felt de great sadness yous carry inside. Sit.”

As if her own will was usurped, Manuela approached and obeyed.

“What kind of reading?”

“One palm.” Manuela took the ten from her purse. She placed it on the table.

Madame Nadja said, simply, “Open.” As she scrutinized Manuela’s palm, she traced lines in the air with her red, press-on nails. She let out a few cryptic “hms” and “ahs” before raising her garishly mascaraed eyes.

“I see yous don’t have much to yours name, and what little money yous have yous spend very foolishly. But yous’ll have great wealt one day.” Nadja pulled a cigarette out from a pack of Marlboros on the table. She lit it, ignoring Manuela’s annoyed expression. With her free hand, Manuela waved the smoke from her face.

“But money is not what weighs so heavily on yous now. Yous wish to know about love. Dis is true?”

Manuela fervently nodded. She must have been desperate, for in that instant she believed wholeheartedly in Madame Nadja’s gift. Madame Nadja took another drag from her cigarette. Manuela gazed at her pleadingly as she awaited her fate to be revealed.

“Yous will find it. Fear not. A sensitive, devoted man waits for yous.”

Manuela beamed. Her eyes fogged with tears not brought on by the smoke.

“True love will be yours, in ten-years-time.”

“No!” Manuela shook her head.

“No? What yous mean no? It is here. I see it.” Madame Nadja laughed. To Manuela’s ears, it was the cruel cackle of a witch. Manuela pulled her hand away. She examined the lines, branches and swirls

herself. Squint as she might, they were meaningless to her.

“I love someone now.” Manuela looked up.

“Give.”

Manuela brought her trembling hand forward again. She took a deep breath. This had to be just a tactic to get her to shell out more money. As soon as Madame Nadja offered her, no doubt, pricey solution, she would know this was bullshit.

“Him? It will not be him. Something will come between yous, like always,” Madame Nadja pronounced bluntly. Manuela waited for Madame Nadja’s sales pitch. She kept waiting. Madame Nadja sighed.

“Some never love nobody. And yous’ll have great success. In de arts.”

“What if I buy a crystal? Or a candle?” She glanced at the items on the table with prices strung around them. Another ten years alone was unacceptable. At times, she felt she couldn’t survive another day without Kevin.

“Let me stop at the ATM.”

“Listen to Madame Nadja. What’s written’s written. De lines don’t change. I tell de trut to yous ‘cause I seen yous suffered greatly. Palm shows de future *and* past.”

Manuela stood. The idea that all that had happened to her, all she continued to repress, was inscribed on her hand was simply too disturbing. Madame Nadja shrugged. She put her cigarette down off the table’s edge. She moved her tarot deck and opened a wooden box she kept beneath it. Upon dropping Manuela’s ten inside, she latched it up again.

“Ten years go by fast. Take dat from an old woman,” Madame Nadja advised as Manuela walked away shaken.

By the time Manuela’s lunch hour was up, she had concluded Madame Nadja was a fraud. If one were to ask the average person, most would say they had suffered greatly, whether due to a dead parent, or chronic eczema. Great wealth? Manuela’s mother was a waitress. All she knew of her father was that he had once been a school custodian and hadn’t sent a child support check since she was of walking age. A career in the arts? She couldn’t draw a box, carry a tune, or play a note.

Above all, Madame Nadja’s reading could not

be true for the mere fact that her story could not end this way. Shaking violently, she had forced herself to approach Kevin where he sat. Over the course of a year and three months, she learned to speak with ease, to trust and to recognize in him a kindred soul. If, after such struggle, she still found herself alone, what was it for?

The moment Manuela stepped off the bus at Amherst, she grabbed her luggage and marched straight to the mail center, where this year’s student directory would be sitting in her box. She had been notified weeks ago she would be in the Cohan dorms. Most of the juniors who hadn’t joined a house were dumped at Cohan, so there was a good chance Kevin would be there too. They would see each other every day. If she caught him smoking in the courtyard, though, she would swat the lit cigarette from his hand.

She snatched the directory and flicked through the pages. She stopped. She read.

“Samuel Reeves ... Allison Reilly.”

She checked again, the whole page. She turned a page back. Kevin wasn’t misplaced among the O’Connors or Ramirezes. He wasn’t with the Robinsons or Rodriguezes either. Clenching her duffel bag straps in one hand, the directory in the other, she stormed to the bench outside. She read it cover to cover. Kevin Reid was nowhere.

She held back her tears for later, when she was alone in her dorm room, but could not contain her bewilderment. Had she imagined him? Had he materialized like an angel, to guide her, lend her strength, then vanished once his task was done? No. Caressing her red, stinging palm, she remembered he must be real. Madame Nadja had seen him, as she had seen her future, without him.

She wondered which tiny mark on her hand was Kevin. For certain, he was there somewhere. He was with her in some way. He always would be. She had no choice but to be satisfied with that.

Despite what her palm, and the student directory indicated, Manuela looked for Kevin wherever she walked on campus, whenever she sat on the library steps, or ate her paltry meals in Valentine Dining Hall. It wasn’t as if she had the means to learn his whereabouts definitively. There was no one to ask. She was sure she was the closest thing to a friend he had made in the last two years.

One afternoon, she saw a different ghost from her past, Savita, studying on the grass of the Cohan courtyard.

“Manuela!” Savita waved to her before she could slip back to the dorm unnoticed.

Out of guilt, Manuela walked over. Shunning her friends may have been necessary to change, but it hadn’t been kind. Savita moved her backpack over. Manuela sat down. The idea of company was actually comforting. Ironically, although conversation posed no problem to her now, she couldn’t recall the last one she held. It had to be weeks ago.

“Have you heard about Beth?” Savita asked.

“No. How’s she?” Manuela said.

“She’s at MIT. She got a letter during the summer. Five others from Amherst too, she told me. I guess if you don’t give up after two years, they usually let you in.”

“That’s wonderful!” Manuela knew at once where Kevin was. He wasn’t dead. He hadn’t flunked out. He wasn’t even in a different state. She couldn’t be more relieved, yet she felt no less sad. He was still gone, not far, but gone just the same.

“We e-mail each other all the time. She checks her account here, if you want to write her. She’d like to hear from you. We missed you last year.” Savita stared at Manuela, waiting for an apology, or an explanation, but Manuela’s mind was somewhere else. She was with Kevin in Valentine Dining Hall. She was leaving behind the misery she knew convinced somehow this strange, sullen boy with a shaved head would bring her a new life.

“I think you should at least write to congratulate her,” Savita huffed.

“I will,” Manuela promised. Savita smiled.

“What classes are you taking this year?”

“I just remembered, I have a paper to write.”

“Oh,” Savita said.

“I should go.” Manuela stood.

Manuela was sorry, but she just couldn’t sit here pretending to care about something other than Kevin, pretending anything at all mattered to her since losing him.

Manuela actually did have a paper due tomorrow, but when she sat down to write it, she found herself staring blankly at the screen. She wanted to write, just not an analysis of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s,

“Young Goodman Brown.” Since arriving, she had filled up her old journal then continued where she left off on her school-loaned computer.

A writer: perhaps that was what Madame Nadja foresaw. She could imagine herself doing this in ten-years-time, brooding in front of a computer, phrasing and perfecting her thoughts for hours on end. She might even be writing a story about Kevin.

Per Madame Nadja’s prediction, she would be a great author. She would have the love of a sensitive and devoted man. Yet, there would be a lingering remorse that it had taken so long, especially once she knew all the pleasures she had missed.

Just before typing, and resigning herself to ten more years alone, she did consider writing Kevin instead. Upon checking her e-mail for the first time in months, however, she realized, dishearteningly, he hadn’t written her. She tried not to feel hurt. He had enough on his mind, adjusting to life at MIT. Hopefully, he felt less like an outsider there, though she doubted it. She couldn’t imagine anywhere else they would belong except with each other.

Their story ended here, as she passed up her last chance.

At the same time, it hardly seemed possible, writing this, ten years from now, while deeply in love, she could end it so bleakly. Sad stories, like sad songs, are not composed by happy writers. Shouldn’t she wish to share her joy with her young, lightly fictionalized self? Doesn’t a writer have that power, to transcend such limitations as truth and time?

This was her story. She could change anything she wanted. With that thought, she abandoned her lament of loss. She chose to write herself a different future. She began with a simple message.

“Hi. It’s Manuela. How are you?”

In his reply, Kevin wrote back that he almost wrote her.

Before long, they were corresponding daily. Though they didn’t share their feelings for each other outright, they knew. She knew when he wrote she had better have gained weight the next time they met, since she would be even more beautiful at a hundred and ten pounds than at a hundred. He knew when she wrote he shouldn’t be afraid to show the real him to others. They would love him. Actually, “adore” was the word she used.

Buoyed by his e-mails, she shrugged off the

“C” on her English paper, Beth’s sarcastic response, once she finally got around to writing her, and her anger at everyone for letting what had happened to her happen. She was at peace with her past. As traumatic as it was, it had brought her and Kevin together.

But alas, they weren’t together. They were seventy-one miles apart. When he sent her a photo showing off the fuzz he had let grow on his scalp, she realized she had completely forgotten his dimples, his thick eyelashes and the way his small chin stuck out like a defiant child’s. She downloaded the image to click on if she ever forgot his face again. She liked him with hair. Even if he was still a rodent, he was cuter than Mickey.

For a week, she not so subtly nudged him to visit, “Google says the drive from Cambridge to Amherst is only two hours.” “Finished my paper. My weekend’s free.” “There’s a party at Theta Saturday. It could be fun to go, make fun of the jocks.” If he picked up on her hints, he gave no indication of it. “Two hours. Not bad.” “Lucky you.” “Yeah, it would be fun.”

So, on Friday, when she caught sight of him on the buffet line in Valentine Dining Hall, she nearly choked on her burger. He had known she would be here, at this time. He had seen her eat dinner at six fifteen for a year, because he ate dinner at six. He was only a bit late. There must have been traffic.

He grinned at her dreamily while a handful of students cut him in line. Her vision blurred at about the same instant his eyes began to shimmer. Perhaps to allow them both a moment to compose themselves, snatching a sandwich, he disappeared to the start of the buffet. It was as if he was saying: there’s no reason to cry, this is not a sad story anymore. Of course, he may have simply forgotten a fork.

As Kevin strolled jauntily towards her, a peppy love song seemed to be playing in his head.

“Is this seat taken?”

“What do *you* think?” She could never have imagined such a beautiful ending to their story. That would take ten-years-time, refining her craft in lonely solitude, before at last finding love.

Scott Bassis is a young writer eager to establish himself as a serious talent. He has had short stories published in the literary magazines Rainbow Curve and Harrington Gay Men’s Literary Quarterly. While he eventually hopes to make his career as a full-time writer, he is currently working at the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center.

SPOTLIGHT ENTREPRENEUR: AYSHA RAJA

Interviewed by Maryam Piracha



Aysha Raja is the owner of the independent bookstore chain ‘The Last Word’ which, in the five years it has operated, has become the definitive source for finding good reads, especially those not stocked elsewhere, thanks in large part to its personally curated selection. Though she began her career in publishing as a bookseller, Ms. Raja has gone on to establish Siren Publishing and successfully ran the Life’s Too Short short story competition for young writers in Pakistan. In this interview, Ms. Raja talks to Editor-in-Chief Maryam Piracha on the road behind the enterprise, the future of publishing in Pakistan and what it means to be a writer in today’s competitive marketplace.

Q How did the idea for “The Last Word” come about and why start what is, for the most part, an independent book store? Furthermore, why partner with Hotspot (where branches of TLW have opened up in all three major cities)? Will you ever consider opening up on-line orders?

A I had just given birth to my daughter Leila, and both my husband and I had undergone something of a paradigm shift. For me it entailed devoting myself wholly to someone/thing I love. I guess after six years of lawyering, Leila’s arrival made me realized I could not longer commit to a career that left me so unsatisfied. So I threw caution to the wind and used my savings to set up the kind of bookshop I’ve always wanted to see in Pakistan.

I did one of those dreaded business plans that people harp on about and even asked an established bookseller for advice, but both seemed to indicate that the venture was doomed to fail. It was due to the unfailing support from friends like Omar Khan of the HotSpot that I gained the confidence to think beyond my limitations, and also established The Last Word at HotSpots throughout Pakistan.

We have expanded to other eating establishments like The Café Upstairs in Lahore, but our first love has always been the HotSpot for their food and friendship.

We do provide cash on delivery or courier services to customers who pay directly to The Last Word, but we find social media is our preferred web presence and allows for greater customer interaction when fulfilling online orders.

Q You stock books that aren’t easily or readily available elsewhere – without revealing too many trade secrets, how do you manage to do what you do?

A It’s always been a curated selection so I bring what I think is interesting to the reading public; I would expect most independent bookshops reflect the tastes and interests of the owner. My only trade secret is perhaps genuine interest in books and an insatiable ap-



Photography by Nazuk Iftikhar Rao

petite for reading.

Q Initially a lawyer, how, if at all, has your “former” profession played a role in your “new” one?

A I think being a lawyer has helped me to think strategically about the business and how to expand readership. Also my international law background probably informs my choice of non-fiction titles to stock.

Q With the introduction of the Life’s Too Short Literary Review, you forayed into the industry as a producer of content. How have you found

your journey from bookseller to publisher? What’s that been like?

A It went seamlessly. I ran the shop with an eye on content, so I was aware of the standard we were looking for. Also, being a confident autodidact, experience and formal training have never prevented me from taking on new ventures.

Q You stated on the Life’s Too Short website that the 2011 competition had been cancelled in light of the caliber of work received not being up to the mark. You’ve also forayed into publishing with your own company, Siren Publications. What sort of work were you hoping for and what sort of work are you looking to

publish?

A The first Life’s Too Short competition was a wild ride and deceptively successful. Deceptive, because it gave rise to unrealistic expectations that were promptly dashed the following year when we saw a sharp drop in the quality of entries. We were forced to consider what was lacking that we were unable to replicate our earlier success. What was most evident to me were the thematic immaturity of the submissions; the absence of developed writing skills; and a low threshold for criticism. The first two can be easily addressed by reading widely and voraciously, and I have since begun stressing the need to read in the press and to students in schools and colleges. The third failing is probably best served by the organic growth of writers’ circles/groups that allow for aspiring writers to be critiqued by their peers, much like how it occurs in creative writing courses. Given time, such measures, if employed, will take effect, and we may eventually be able to take annual short story competitions for granted.

If after all this effort participants are still at a loss as to what good writing looks like, they are welcome to pick up a copy of the first Life’s Too Short Review.

Q Was it a deliberate decision to include stories in the Life’s Too Short Literary Review that did not overtly deal with terrorism and the “state of the nation”, or conversely exclude the ones that did? For example, excerpts of Sabiha Bano’s “Challawa”, translated by Mohammad Hanif, were published. While an interesting read, it did make us wonder if the choice of printing these excerpts was a conscious one, to diversify and distinguish Pakistani writings from the one dimensional content and subject matter.

A Our only criteria for The Life’s Too Short, Short Story Prize was that it be a compelling story, we neither looked to include or exclude anything on the basis or theme or otherwise. Challawa was material additional to the Prize, which we included simply for being a cracking read, even without it the review still manages to



Photography by Nazuk Iftikhar Rao

“ I did one of those dreaded business plans that people harp on about and even asked an established bookseller for advice, but both seemed to indicate that the venture was doomed to fail. It was due to the unflinching support from friends like Omar Khan of the Hot-Spot that I gained the confidence to think beyond my limitations.”

showcase diverse themes and exceptional quality.

Q As a literary agent and publisher, can you take us into what a day in your life is like? You play two roles that aren't typically packaged into one in what is becoming a rapidly changing industry.

A There is no typical day. I apply myself to what requires my attention and when. I'm not swimming in good manuscripts, which is why I'm also writing for publications and handling the publicity for a handful of authors. I can however say if you own something and are intrinsically tied to it, either financially or emotionally, it will take more of your time and energies than a normal nine to five.

Q What are your opinions on the current Pakistani literature scene? Do you think it's fluid or a tad rigid? How does it compare with more international fare?

A It's unfair to talk in terms of "literary

scenes" with so little on the ground. We need to invest more in reading and writing before we can boast of having one. Comparison at this point is redundant.

Q Do you see the local publishing industry taking off in the near future? Currently, there aren't many publishing houses locally that writers can take their work to. What difficulties have you witnessed in more or less initiating a publishing platform for writers in English in Pakistan; is pandering to an audience a compromise that is a necessary one?

A We certainly need more publishers, but then we also need more writers producing quality fiction. There are plenty of avenues available for putting out vanity publications both in print or electronically, but when the time comes where quality fiction is increasingly produced you will see a willingness among publishers to pay reasonable advances and devise well thought out PR / marketing strategies to generate sales. Kitab, owned and run by Musharraf Ali Farooqi was recently established so there are new publishing concerns emerging that can be approached in addition to Siren.

Q What books are you currently reading? Any recommendations for our readers?

A Mohsin Hamid's new book *How to Become Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* [and] *Occupation Diaries* by Raja Shehadeh. I've yet to finish either. As for recommendations: I suggest you come to the shop and have a browse.

Q Do you feel there is a future for literary reviews / journals in Pakistan? If so, what else do you feel is missing from the scene?

A I'm sure there's a future for literary reviews in Pakistan but it all relies on us nurture writers from amongst us, and that takes patience on all parts.



Q

(As an informed reader) what do you hope to see from Pakistani authors in the future?

A

Perhaps the courage to take on other genres.

Q

Many have argued that reading is more a love of words than specific to any one medium – do you subscribe to a “side” in the so-called war between the traditional paperback / hardcover and e-books? Or do you believe the two can be reconciled? And what impact (if any) are e-books making on readership that you’ve noticed?

A

The book as an object is a near perfect invention. There is very little you can do to improve on it. It does not require an external energy sources to power it up nor expensive formats to run it. No amount of touch screen sensitivity can compensate for the most fashionable devices going the way of the VCR, mini disc player or (heaven forbid) the palm pilot, in less time than it will take to finish War and Peace.

What’s most shocking about an e-book is you forgo your rights of ownership. Although you have a license to use it, you are in effect prevented from sharing it or passing it on to your heirs. The entire rights structure is geared towards maximizing profits for companies at the expense of the consumer.

I can’t honestly comment on its impact on readership in Pakistan, as its use is not yet widespread.

Q

Any parting advice for budding writers or would-be editors now entering the industry?

A

Read. Otherwise there’s no hope in hell for us as human beings, let alone as writers/editors/publishers.



“ What’s most shocking about an e-book is you forgo your rights of ownership. Although you have a license to use it, you are in effect prevented from sharing it or passing it on to your heirs. The entire rights structure is geared towards maximizing profits for companies at the expense of the consumer. ”

Nazuk Iftikhar Rao is an aspiring novelist and a photographer from Lahore, Pakistan. She is the founder of the Humans of Lahore and currently works at the UN. She has wanderlust and loves to travel. She loves to read European Literature in her spare time.

SOMETHING LIKE HOMECOMING

by John Sibley Williams

It's less by the sea than you'd expect, though the house - half-eaten by sand and repolished by the ebb and flow of time - could be a conch in its musical imperfection. Place it to your ear. The floorboards sound like eternity in their groaning. Even the missing roof shingles could stand for things lost, regained. Less a house than a two-room hut. You recall what it means for disappointment and stimulation to converge. You place this first impression in your back pocket for later.

Herding your gear - Royal Deluxe typewriter, enough blank paper to soak up a birdbath, a photo of someone taken when you still knew her, and six weeks worth of the same two outfits - you place your feet, carefully, one at a time, into the sand tracks left by those who came here before you. The serpentine trail folds upon itself a few times but eventually leads to the porch. You ask yourself if a garden once bloomed all around where you now stand. Both moon and sun share the sky, staring each other down. You cannot recall which will yield. It's been a long drive.

And though well-deserved sleep is pirouetting through your vision, imbuing the nicotine and rain tattered curtains with life, knocking over the chairs and asking for a partner, to have a mission is to struggle, to have a path is to endure, as you're all too often reminded.

There is a bed, at least. Something like a kitchen and a table with newspaper bunched beneath its shorter leg. There is a child's clay handiwork playing the role of ashtray. There are already ashes in it. There is a crust of soap and a stench whose origins you'll need to investigate. There are windows whose views will likely embrace the rousing sea and empty cloudscape during the waning daylight hours. It's too dark now to make assumptions. There is a bulb above the desk that was on when you arrived.

This is the moment I need to capture, you think. This atmosphere. This stereotype of loneliness. This is why you came here. We're all brought into the world in the same house, this house, so where better to begin and end your story? You type "Homecoming" atop the first empty page loaded

into Edna, your typewriter, which you've named as a sailor might his ship, a soldier his rifle. You're not sure if this is the first or last line. Then you type, "It's less by the sea than I'd expected." The words dry instantly, are permanent.

*

Two pages into your story, back stiffened by the unyielding cross calling itself a chair, you stand. You stretch up toward the light, stretch down to the Lilliputian carpet of vague Native American descent, stretch out the back door opposite the one you entered, and rediscover the sting of fresh salt air on your face. There is something from childhood you want to remember just now. Something that smelled like asphalt and blood. An event in which you graduated from a supporting to a lead role in the lives of those you loved. You only remember water and your knuckles, white, clinging to a dress, to a precipice.

There is a novel you once read about a woman, weary from the pre-molded life allowed her, who walks calmly to the ocean, alone, on a night like this one, and releases. You don't care much for titles or authors. In a way, all stories are yours. In a way, none of them are. That is why you write, you remind yourself. Not for glory but to tell your story that is everyone's and no one's. To come full circle. That is why you're here.

*

To your left and right, grids of houses exactly like yours, concentric ripples of aging wood facing the same direction, each with a dim porch light left on, though each dark inside. Shadows from the season's last remaining bugs crisscross the lights, intermittently flash on and off, as if they were strung to overhead power lines, and the exposed bulbs were in fact the night. You instinctively wave your arms around your head like turbine blades, slashing the air and what you assume lives in the air. But the bugs have skipped over your porch. This light is still unpolluted. Perhaps you are too new here.

You're thinking about the story you're about to write and what should happen in the middle, as the rest has already dried, hardened. There are so many years to account for when assembling and editing a life. So many events that stand upon the shoulders of others, as if on soapboxes, screaming



Chouette Hulotte by Ankolie

for future recognition, even if they meant little at the time. Each jockeys for position. Each seems inimitable, irreplaceable, and worthy of permanence. Each seems like you'd read it in someone else's book, one skimmed through years ago, with only the more incredible images standing out, and the more intimate, though all cut from their full context.

You don't recall a murder, but many things that feel like one. You don't recall growth exactly, but now you can touch the highest kitchen shelves. You haven't reached the point where growth folds in upon itself, genuflects, where the solid becomes porous, but things always seem to expand overhead and breakings are more common than before.

Breaking your thoughts, your plans for your middle, what must be a deer bobs and weaves through the browned underbrush, rattling the lockless gates between yards. You cannot rightly claim to see it, but you feel eyes upon you, soft eyes, timid more from nature than lessons hard learnt. They weigh you up. They make a decision. They don't care if you're a threat. That was never the question.

The formless movement advances. Dried twigs loosely attached to their bushes snap. The sea, which you've yet to distinguish but know is near through your other four senses, continues to purr. You're not as interested in what is to come as you once were. There is less of it now. You are merely a glance. You yawn and steal away as much air as possible. You've a long night ahead, not unlike the road before. You'll need your breath. So will your character. Sleep is something for the bored and the already damned. A woman emerges from ten paces beside you, from the ferns and dunegrass. There never was a deer. She has pouches around her eyes and hair the color of colorlessness.

*

"Good morning", she calls, with an unknowable expression between grimace and exaltation, as if her words were a tongue and your tightening brow a mouth sore. "Or I think it's just past morning, judging by the darkness. Do you know what I mean, that confusion of what to call things when they pass midnight?"

Sure, you think you say, uncertain if you just thought it instead. You nod to cover your bases. You cannot stop staring at her hair. There's a way in which it doesn't exist at all, yet quite clearly does, like that of an unearthed corpse, all bone and hints

“In a way, all stories are yours. In a way, none of them are. That is why you write, you remind yourself. Not for glory but to tell your story that is everyone's and no one's. To come full circle. That is why you're here.”

of past growth, or like a blond infant, all flesh and promises of future splendor. She could be your grandmother, unaged thirty years. She could be a childhood sweetheart gone to ruin.

"Sorry to cut in on your introspection, son. I just noticed a figure I couldn't account for, being that nobody around here is up so early. Or is it late? And what's the point of mysteries without trying to solve them?"

A lifetime passes. A silence passes between you and the stranger who just called you *son*. The assumption of deer remains pleasantly behind your eyes. Its coat has no color. It speaks and you refuse to answer. You've attempted to converse with animals before. You have long decided more is necessary for dialogue. The wind has passed on, down the shore, for others to consider it. She's been speaking somewhere outside you, the deer, as you followed the wind along the surf's edge.

"...and then there was the accident. I know all about it. Who doesn't see them all as accidents when they strike close to home, and as providence, another step on the path, when kept at a distance?"

A lifetime, still. An old beige car, a woman screaming, and something that flows like red paint...

"And I'm a stranger still, aren't I? Something kept at a distance. But, not so strange really. Not so different from yourself?"

...and a kiss that cannot dry and a pocket watch that stopped and cannot forget and concentric rows of light speeding down a hall while the rest of the world remains motionless and a deer without answers in its eyes and you are nowhere near it but are thinking about writing about it and there is the sea

“There is something from childhood you want to remember just now. Something that smelled like asphalt and blood. An event in which you graduated from a supporting to a lead role in the lives of those you loved. You only remember water and your knuckles, white, clinging to a dress, to a precipice.”

just out of view and a book with a title that you need to change and there is the sea again and a woman calling you *son* and you're thinking that things aren't the same when they're shared with others.

*

You type all this. As you want this story to be heard, the last line sticks to the roof of your mouth, tasting of asphalt and fear.

Pages pour from Edna. You yank them from her and stack the words carefully on the desk, beside the window, which is open. The wind isn't as you described. It has not passed. Some parts must be left to fiction. It surrounds and pounds the little house by the sea, enters the window and disrupts the order of pages. The beginning is somewhere near the now. You forgot to number them, as always. They disperse across the floor. A page wedges beneath the frayed edge of the carpet and stands upright. Its whiteness is subdued by the muffled light around you. It appears colorless. It stands upright like a scalpel before the incision. You're remembering an incision. It remains at the edge, that page, whichever memory it is.

A lifetime passes in wondering whether or not to collect your story from the floor and reorder it. Should it be regrouped chronologically, the most logical choice, or by theme? There has been only one

theme, one you cannot arrange. You leave your story where it naturally fell and return to the porch, where she is still speaking with you about things you cannot hear. The conversation had continued for hours without you. You remember it well, had been writing about it, along its edges. Others have joined her on your porch, beneath your little light on which insects now gather, beneath the invisible sky with a few stars that seem embers or eyes blinking themselves into extinction.

The outside bulb is steadily darkening. There are too many people here with you, mostly those you had not meant to include. There aren't enough pages to fit this family of strangers, who are chatting endlessly about you, to you, in you. Their voices buzz about your face. You wave your arms, cup your ears, close your eyes. You think of turbine blades. You think of that photo you meant to bring. You think of the woman framed in yesterday. You think of what you don't think. Salt catches in the creases of your forehead. There is air between your hands and too many hands between you and what you no longer wish to hold. She is holding you somewhere, in her hands. You are all baby fat and indistinguishable exclamations. Later you are all flesh torn from its structure, slick along the roadside. She is still holding you. It was not her passing you are writing to forget.

She is here, on the porch. You'd assumed her a deer, an old woman, a stranger. You'd assumed all voices were different people, were neighbors, were somewhere outside you. You're beginning to remember the name of that book in which the protagonist walks out into the ocean alone. Drowns, comfortably. You remember her in those last moments, when she whispered something about how to end your story, how it had already ended, and how it's the sea that swims across itself alone and doesn't return.

John Sibley Williams is the author of six chapbooks, winner of the HEART Poetry Award, and finalist for the Pushcart and Rumi Poetry Prizes. He has served as Acquisitions Manager of Ooligan Press and Publicist for Three Muses Press. He holds an MFA in Creative Writing and MA in Book Publishing. Some of his over 200 previous or upcoming publications include: Inkwell, Bryant Literary Review, Cream City Review, The Chaffin Journal, The Evansville Review, RHINO, Rosebud, Ellipsis, Flint Hills Review, and Poetry Quarterly.

A CASE FOR INNOCENCE

by Abbigail N. Rosewood

When I was sixteen, brimming with energy and the passionate belief that I understood more than anyone else how the world works, my mother would remind me in a tone both gentle and superior, “you will understand when you’re older”. My mother was right— there are some things that can only be learned with time, accompanied by the loss of innocence, and perhaps a price too high for knowledge that does not comfort but rather upsets the equilibrium that was once certain.

As the whirl of information speeds up and expands, the timeframe for innocence diminishes and threatens to disappear altogether. Children participate in social media sometimes out of their own will, but more often as a tool manipulated by adults to propagandize a specific agenda. Teenage girls go under constructive surgeries and strict diets in order to look like Barbie dolls. Innocence in these cases is exaggerated using makeup and clothing more suitable to children than to young women, which distorts and corrupts its meaning. Has there been a global collapse of innocence? Or are we only skeptics and it is not too late to strive to protect the young and prolong their innocence? From the pages of J.D. Salinger and Carson McCullers to the works of contemporary authors such as John Green and J.K. Rowling one may be assuaged to find that though we have discovered the “God particle” and children now learn to read from electronic tablets, we are still helpless against broken hearts, desperate to fend off our loneliness, but ultimately relieved to survive it all and learn how tough our skin really is, and how resilient we can be.

In many ways, innocence gives us an opportunity to react against the inequality of the world. Once we are adults, our words tend to become coated and repressed. We learn conversational manners and rules which dilute our individuality. By contrast, teens often speak their thoughts out loud abruptly and readily. In J.D. Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye*, Holden Caulfield’s innocence allows him to speak bluntly about society and the people he knew. He calls the people who cry watching movies “mean bastards at heart”. His statement is unwarranted yet still seems to ring with truth, perhaps because he

says it with conviction. Holden’s loss of innocence is marked by his loss of words when inappropriately touched by Mr. Antolini, a teacher Holden admires. Instead of reacting with his usual frankness, Holden fumbles for words and maintains politeness with the teacher, making small talk and calling him “sir”. Holden’s effort to hide his “sweating” and “shaking” indicates his shift from innocence. For many of us, like Holden, the transition into adulthood is unpleasant if not painful as we begin to learn that those who we trust to guide us can also betray us.

Published a year after *The Catcher in the Rye*— in 1946, Carson McCullers’s *The Member of the Wedding* tells the story of twelve year old Frankie whose desperation to be a part of something bigger leads her to explore dangerous territories that ultimately changes her though whether it’s for better or worse is left open to interpretation. Frankie’s hope of being rescued from the monotony of her life is no different than what many of us wish for. However it is Frankie’s innocence that lets her nurture an impossible dream—for her brother and his new wife to take Frankie with them after the wedding. Any adult who acted in a manner similar to Frankie’s would be called delusional and though this may be true, Frankie’s persistence is also admirable. Adults sometimes lack this kind of unadulterated passion to propel them to chase after their dreams. Innocence reminds us to be fearless even if the people around us may think we are “just laying...this fancy trap,” as Berenice says of Frankie. In response, Frankie puts her fingers in her ears to avoid listening to Berenice. Perhaps this childish action is what it takes to block out outside discouragement. Society gives us plenty of reasons not to listen to our hearts, and sometimes we only have ourselves to draw courage from.

To survive as humans we need courage, whether in this world or in J.K. Rowling’s, world of flying broomsticks and dementors who suck out all our happy memories. Love may have been the reason Harry Potter survives Voldemort’s magic as a newborn baby, but innocence cannot be overlooked. Harry’s very helplessness and purity become the counteractive elements against Voldemort’s darkness. When Harry is older, he sometimes feels the

“ More than half a century since Salinger and McCullers’ novels and adolescent innocence is still a prevalent theme widely explored in literature. ”

malicious stain Voldemort leaves behind, yet continues to be able to expel it from him. Innocence is not just an inconvenience imposed on life, but a necessary step that potentially saves us from external dangers as children, and from ourselves when we are older.

More than half a century since Salinger and McCullers’ novels and adolescent innocence is still a prevalent theme widely explored in literature. Young adult literature is more popular than ever, though its readership is not limited to the audience it targets— amidst its hundreds of titles and subgenres, John Green stands out as an author who is willing to deal with real human subject matters. *The Fault in Our Stars* follows Hazel as she goes through the stages of terminal cancer. Dealing with death is not easy for anyone, especially a young girl who hasn’t had the chance to fully live. The question then becomes whether or not Hazel has been robbed of not only her time but her innocence? Within a course of a few months, Hazel learns what it means to love and to lose that love. Time accelerates for Hazel and pushes her to grow up as it has for the young adults of our Generation.

Even as the world spins around us at a dizzying speed, there are still people who remind us that our innocence is precious. Hazel has Augustus, who proves to her that an adventure is still possible even for those weighed down by oxygen tanks. Holden Caulfield has his sister Phoebe. Frankie has her cousin John Henry West. Harry Potter has Hermione and Ron. If we’re lucky, we too would have someone who understands how important it is to take our time in growing up, who won’t rush us through one of the best stages in life. I still remember the words my mother said to me after my



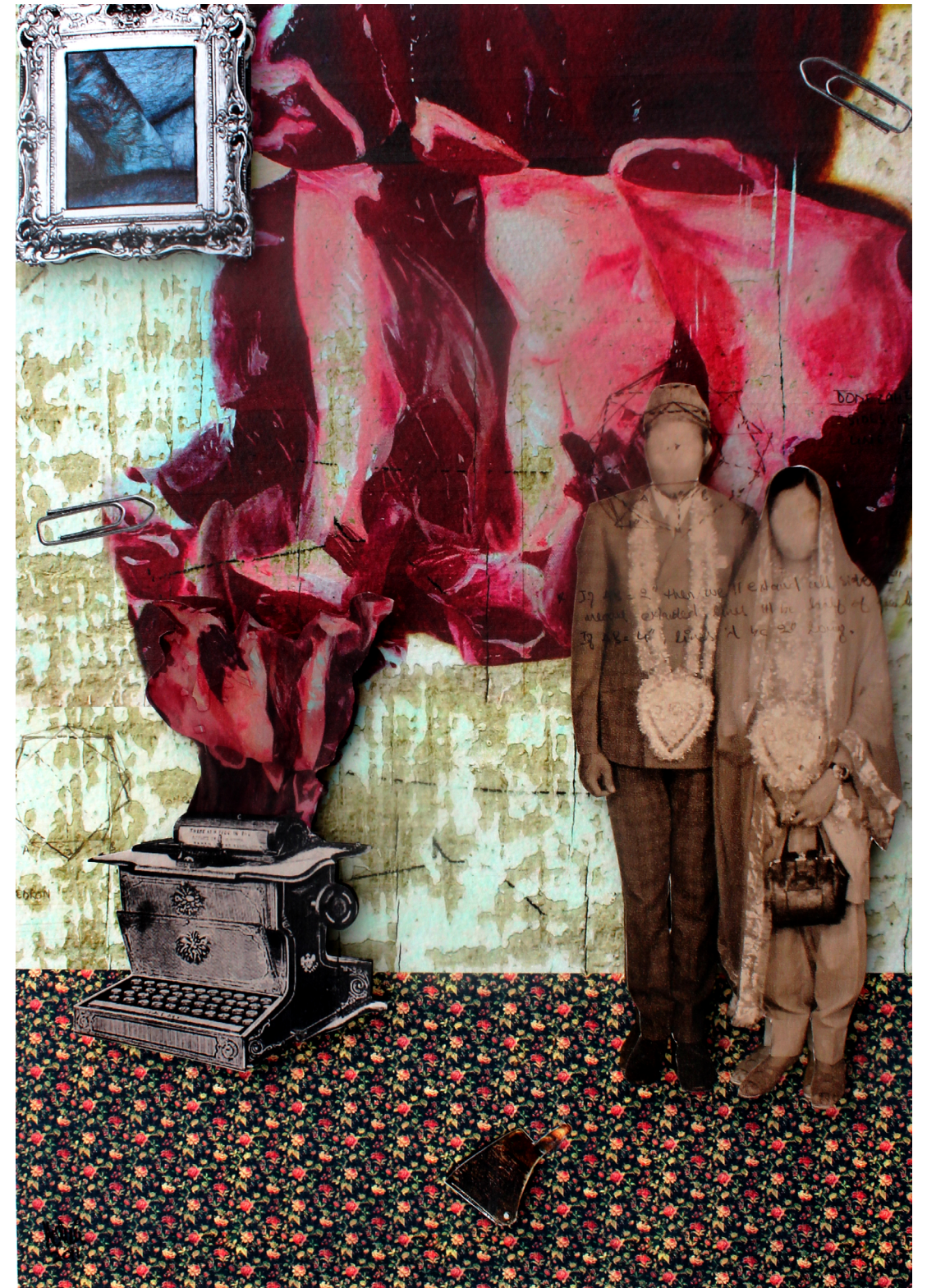
Cammie by Abigail Larson

attempt to run away from home at fifteen years old, “I only want to keep you innocent for as long as possible.” Now I understand what she meant. Be brave. Be reckless. Be adventurous. Be innocent.

The author is Assistant Fiction Editor for the magazine and a contributing writer on *Alone in Babel*, *The Missing Slate's* column on books.

“*That is part of the beauty of all literature. You discover that your longings are universal longings, that you’re not lonely and isolated from anyone. You belong.*

~ F. Scott Fitzgerald



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