



Event Horizon

Fall 2017 Issue 1



40 ACRES
1 MILE



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Crane Union High School in Oregon is home to one of the few remaining public boarding schools in the Nation. It serves students from over 10,000 square miles of Harney County and some from neighboring Malheur County as well. Some travel as far as 150 miles one-way to attend. Students living over 20 miles away can live in the dorms and about 30 typically choose to do so. The area may be huge but enrollment is not: fewer than a hundred and lately closer to 50. The graduating class is very small, usually with a 100% graduation rate.

A full slate of sports is available including football, volley ball, basketball, wrestling and track and field. Computer tech is offered in grades 10 - 12. Ag Science is offered all four years. The high school is lovingly supported by its tight knit community.



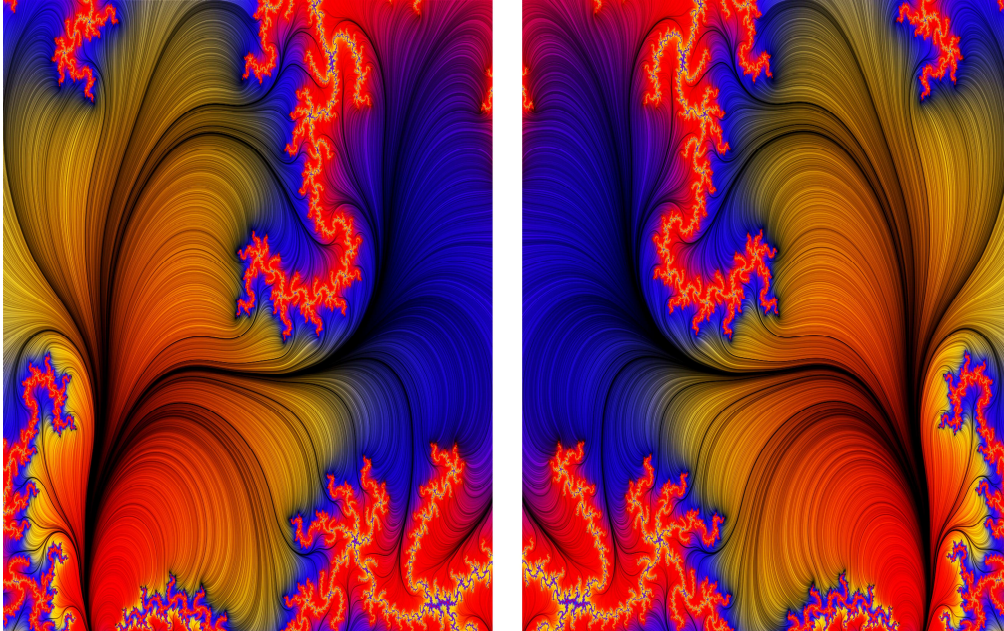
www.cranehighschool.org



~ a literary and graphic arts periodical

Event Horizon is published quarterly as a free pdf download. Every issue is also available as a publish-on-demand book. All access is through the website, eventhorizonmagazine.com. Submissions are always welcome and should be emailed to eventhorizonmagazine@gmail.com. Event Horizon is seeking fiction, poetry, illustration, photography or photographic displays of arts and crafts, manga, graphic novels, comics, cartoons, various non-fiction including letters, essays, criticism and reports on the arts. Cover art is also invited and specs can be found on the website. Event Horizon is edited and published by Lanning Russell.

On the cover:



Junior McClean

Junior McLean of Junior's Digital Designs is a Bronx native. He's been a freelance digital artist and graphic designer since '96, creating digital cover "2D/3D" art work for Gaming, Fantasy, and Sci-Fi. His fractal artworks have been used for public exhibitions and more.

www.facebook.com/juniorsdigitaldesigns <http://instagram.com/juniorsdigitaldesigns>

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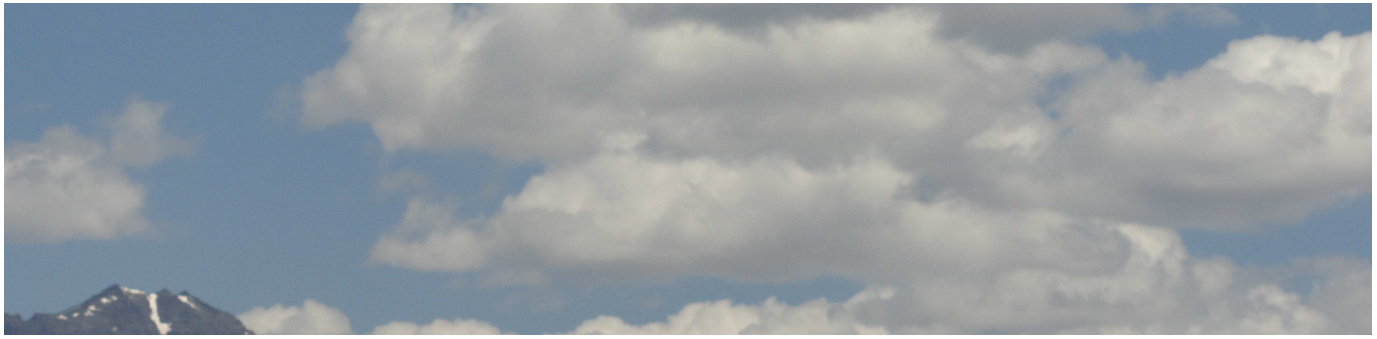
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Letter from the Editor

It is my honor and pleasure to publish this first issue of Event Horizon - a literary and graphic arts magazine. The mission is stated on the website: "Event Horizon features the work of artists who seek a friendly and versatile forum and an accessible venue for publication. The aesthetic of Event Horizon is curated by a single editor who is interested in quality – variously defined – and leeway for the artist." An artist-centric vision would *not* - I expect - be at odds with presenting an exciting and edgy magazine from voices struggling to be heard among the cacophony of the internet and its spinoff media. This issue is dedicated with deep respect to my contributors.

Letters to the Editor

I hope to have a lively 'Letters to the Editor' page in subsequent issues of Event Horizon. Just to get the ball rolling I have provided letters from famous American letter writers of the 19th century. The first is from Edward Everett to Abraham Lincoln. Everett was the featured orator at the dedication of the National Cemetery at Gettysburg. The second letter is from *both* Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B Anthony to fellow suffragist, Isabella Beecher Hooker.

From Edward Everett to Abraham Lincoln
November 20, 1863
225 H Street 1863
My dear Sir,

Not wishing to intrude upon your privacy, when you must be much engaged, I beg leave, in this way, to thank you very sincerely for your great thoughtfulness for my daughter's accommodation on the Platform yesterday, & much kindness otherwise to me & mine at Gettysburg.

Permit me also to express my great admiration of the thoughts expressed by you, with such eloquent simplicity & appropriateness, at the consecration of the Cemetery. I should be glad, if I could flatter myself that I came as near to the central idea of the occasion, in two hours, as you did in two minutes. My son who parted from me at Baltimore & my daughter, concur in this sentiment.

I remain, dear Sir, most respectfully, Yours,
Edward Everett.

I hope your anxiety for your child was relieved on your arrival..

Monday eve'g Oct 11. 1869

Dear Mrs. Hooker

Just in from the St. Louis Convention – a splendid success – Mrs Stanton in too. We've read your note just here. Both say yes to Mrs Wilbour – Pres. of the Brooklyn (Connecticut) W.S. association – she is a beautiful writer & good reader – & her presence is very very good – superior.

Mrs. Livermore will probably say yes to you – she is coming to Boston soon – told me they – the Boston people had organized a Stock Company for a newspaper – of \$10,000 – & were going to buy her Agitator – she coming on to make bargain – may come east to live, lecture & edit the paper.

Mrs. L. has evidently given in her fullest allegiance to the Boston movement for a new association.

Mrs. Stanton says be sure & invite Mr. Tilton he & his precious little wife would not only be ornamental but very useful.

(Susan B. Anthony, unsigned)

[Note: The letter changes here from Anthony's handwriting to that of Elizabeth Cady Stanton]

I would rather leave all resolutions and arrangements to you and only take on myself the responsibility of a speech. It is so pleasant to think that younger heads will do all that is necessary. Can you possibly put your convention one day later as my neice (sic) is to be married and she will put the wedding one day earlier so that I can reach Hartford.

in haste

E.C.S.

P.S. Whoever you invite will be agreeable to me. I can speak and work with all the children of men

a wind that no one felt

Zane Foley

***Zane Foley** is a writer and journalist living in Los Angeles. He is passionate about civil rights, social justice, human potential and skateboarding. He is also a poet.*

Box 11516

Box 11516, from the Todd Memorial Chapel is all that remains of Jonathan Steven. Normally a box this size would contain something of a much lighter nature, but I had never carried human remains before, so I was not to know how much heavier they are than one might expect. After all, we are mostly water. It's with little understanding and much grief the death of my childhood friend John continues to surmount its toll. The guilt of our failed friendship weights in, tormenting me since I conducted his vigil. It drove others to anger, to curse my name and whisper the very same doubts I was repeating to myself. Being back inside his home on Harding Street was living inside the dreams I've had for years, the blue tiled porch, the glass door and blue carpet, the narrow hallway and faint sounds of daytime television. The house looked exactly the same as it had been six years ago. The photos had not been moved, the furniture all identical, the pill bottles, the treehouse wallpaper, the air-conditioning still on, the game room messy and all the things that made the house both homie and unique. There was an empty sadness in the house. There was a wind that no one felt, there was a whisper no one could hear, it was a light no one could see. There was more air in the home than usual, because someone was not there to breathe it in. This time everything was smaller, I was grown and saw the true heights of the home's ceilings, the size of his room diminished, the carvings in the walls deeper, the writings of other poets, nothing of his was left in the room other than material things. We listened and each of us heard the memories spoken to us but to John everything was a part of his life. Now, everything sat with only the stories we could give them. They shrunk with the home, his books to be left unread, his clothes unworn, the writings on the walls never explained. The doors stayed closed, the windows open, the blinds shut and the soundless music muted to the partial heartbeat of a broken down mother. The blue cauldron of a sofa sucked her in, with each tilt of her head her red hair was lit ablaze in a droop reer of pills. *Take them, take them now, they are yours, they are your life, they make you feel better, they are the healing mantra against your ripping muscles.* Scarred by a disease. She took them down, without any water. She was on over 40 pills a day. I say 'she was' when 'she is'. She is left in the house now. Sitting without any water, only her rambling mind and the extra air. Her mind repeats the horrors of her life, of his life now gone. Her life now fleeting outside her glossy eyes.

Sundays

The sun was sadly doomed today
as his first day and his last.
See the sun has no orbit,
so it has no days.
The sun never grows old,
it never has a birthday.
You see,
The sun has no memory,
no passage of time,
The sun will not have a bad day but never a good one either.
No,
the sun never has de-ja-vu,
nostalgia,
or failure of forgetting anything.
Planning nothing,
the sun is the youngest and oldest it will ever be,
from when it was here until it is gone,
taking us with it,
from its burning unimaginable fire,
erupting from its veins in the longest,
shortest,
and everlasting outpour,
giving days to all it touches
but its own.

Goodbye

you made mistakes,
but
you never cared
much.
you split your
lip,
and lied to sound
brave,
but I understood,
and laughed,
the stitches left a
scar,
the story left
more.

black gloves and loading
docks,
tall-wall
voices,
and bricks and curbs,
parking lots,
and still,
relative silence,

freedom.

How the past feels

real,

a painted canvas,

oil paints in melting

wind.

I was

afraid,

she would be

old,

frail,

demented in slurs,

angry.

but she was there,

you were gone,

I had not been,

everything as it was,

only smaller,

and more alien,

the pale blues,

of the past.

the old nights where our hearts

raced,

yellow and clear

moonlight.

We were alive
once.
as we were
young,
chasing tales,
now just memory
lane.
Where smoke lifted,
ants caught wind
near
the bricks and trees.

I believed only
I
held onto these
memories,
until I held your ashes,
and said goodbye,
and noticed all around me
was as it was,
you still saw us,
when I couldn't find you,
get through to you,
and I am sorry for that,
forever.
If I had known,

if I had not listened to others,
if I had not been
ashamed,
proud,
angry,
and selfish.

I am sorry
brother,
I miss you
brother,
I wish you were
here
brother,
so I may
say
how sorry,
I am.
So we might
laugh
at the past,
as brothers do
who have shared
as much
as we have
shared.

I am still trying to say
goodbye.
Perhaps,
forever
I will.
Or maybe,
just maybe,
this is my chance.
To say,
Goodbye.

Goodbye.

an event horizon

Christine Tabaka

Ann Christine Tabaka was born and lives in Delaware. She is a published poet, an artist, a chemist, and a personal trainer. She loves gardening, cooking, and the ocean. Chris lives with her husband and two cats. Her poems have been published in numerous national and international poetry journals, reviews, and anthologies.

THE FINAL FRONTIER

Teetering on the edge
of an alternate universe
an event horizon
that we cannot see beyond

The universe opens itself to us
stepping stones across the sky
where are we going
and where have we been

The ultimate questions
unanswered since the beginning
we continue to search
beyond our own understanding

A race born of pioneers
exploration is ingrained in us
as we push forever outward
wandering into the unknown

THE POET'S MIND

A bizarre world
Filled with colliding images
Sleepless black nights
That crash into daylight
Ghosts from the past
That linger on
Thoughts become reality
That the mind deciphers into words
Open spaces
Crowded with strange illusions
The Looking Glass world exists
Joy and sorrow
In an ultimate battle
To overpower the mind
Creativity, the eternal struggle

TRIBAL DRUMS

The steady beat pulls me in
My senses heighten
I am seized
My blood begins to boil
Tiny explosions fill my head
I do not know which way to turn
The rolling rhythm becomes my heartbeat
I am afire
I want to run wild and free
Escape from all the bromidic
Some former life inhabits my body
A time from beyond time reaches out to me
And at once I am gone

WHERE TO NEXT

Dreariness overcomes me
My body aches, it is weary
I am tired
Maybe I have been here too long
Maybe it is time to move on
What did I think I would accomplish
by staying here
It is time to turn the page
And leave all of this behind me
I do not even remember why I came here
Was it to find myself
If so, I am lost
The void engulfed me
And then spit me out
I stand here facing the maze of life
Trying to decide which path to take
Choosing a journey that is uniquely my own
Will it finally reveal itself to me
Will I ever find my way
Until then I wonder through the cobwebs of my mind
And ask myself
Where to next

SUNFLOWERS

Sunflowers
Thick stalks bend under heavy weight
Black smiling faces
Laden with seed
Lift their heads to greet the day
Inviting avian guests to feast
Upon their oil rich treasures
Waiting to be plucked and devoured
Bright yellow petals
A welcoming beacon

THE GARDEN

I tire of the cold and rain
The garden calls to me
Lonely and forlorn, it awaits my arrival
Lovingly inviting me in

Pots of tender seedlings
Excited to be planted in perfect rows
Some demanding to be placed randomly
In an array of beautiful chaos

Kneeling, the soft earth gives in
And hugs my tired old legs
Lovingly cushioning my way
As I move from plant to plant

I place my fingers deep into welcoming earth
The soil remembers me
Giving way to my hands
Opening up to receive the soft roots

The sun warms my back
Bees greet me along the way
Alighting on each newly planted treat
Birds serenade from the branches above

Time passes too fast
As my labor of love continues on
The garden smiles back at me
It is good to be with my old friend again

SIREN'S SONG

The Siren's call
Since time began
Has lured sailors
And bewitched man

A haunting song
Sounding so sweet
Draws helpless victims
To ultimate defeat

Winged maidens
Half woman, half bird
Whenever they sang
Hearts of men stirred

Daughters of Achelous
Cursed by Demeter
For failing their duties
To guard her daughter

In ancient mythologies
Both Roman and Greek
Their stories are told
Surrounded in mystique

FORGOTTEN

She stands on the corner,
Cold lonely, lost, forgotten;
As her youth slowly slips away.
She hides behind the makeup,
And clothing of her former years.

She evokes a look of pity from all who pass by.
Behind her mask,
Her features show the beauty of her age.
But she refuses to accept this,
And so continues to disguise her true worth.
Trading it in for a few more years of fantasy.

Why does she cling on so desperately,
To the worn pages of past times?
She has much more to offer now.
Many of us are obsessed with holding on,
To what we cannot have.
And in doing so neglect to see the satisfaction,
That each new age holds out to us.

She mistakes the glances of sympathy,
For admiration.
So for the moment she is content.
Then once again, all too soon ...
She stands on the corner,
Cold, lonely, lost, forgotten ...

hot ash or cool waters

Andrew Scott

Andrew Scott is a native of Fredericton, NB. During his time as an active poet, Andrew Scott has taken the time to speak in front of a classrooms, judge poetry competitions as well as published worldwide in such publications as The Art of Being Human, Battered Shadows and The Broken Ones. His books, Snake With A Flower, The Phoenix Has Risen, The Path and The Storm Is Coming are available now.

Dancing In The Thin Line

The sunshine pulls down on me each day
giving energy for a new adventure
that an endless day may bring.

There is a small skip in my step
for the feeling of the curtained unknown
and which way it may take me
once a glimmer of the path has been revealed.

Up to me on which way to go
and to know if the intention
is on the dark or light side.
Knowing I will feel it all
with a smile.

The thrill will keep me energized
and balanced on life's tightrope
while uncovering either hot ash
or cool waters.

Accepted that I can be
drawn by cruel destruction
or the pure giving of the people
and feel the pathways of both.
As each new day gives freedom
to get up and dance
on that little, thin line.

He Cries

The sun is starting to shine
over the night's clouds.
He has been on his deck for hours,
drinking countless coffee
and smoking nervous cigarettes.

He is not sure how many hours
he has been sitting there, just waiting
for his lost child to come home
from a night of escape
in the world of alternating substances.

He has tried to talk to her
and fight when it has been called for
but it never works.
So defenceless he feels.

there is no help anymore.
Her mom killed by a
misdirected, drunk car
so many years before.

When he does try to date
the ladies learn
that they cannot
compete with a memory
that has been perfected
throughout the years
as he sits alone.

He cries because
he does not know what to do.
The fighting and threats
are not helping the disappearances.

Deep down he knows the outcome.
One day she will not come home
or ever be found.

Helpless, waiting, he cries.

Whispering Will - O - Wisp

Hearing the whispers in the air.
They sound like they surround me
as I step into the darkness.
Thick waters impede my steps
and the darkness has me confused.
My mind is playing night time tricks.

There are little lights floating all around,
however I do not know where they lead.
Hearing little, ruffled whispers.
Seeing imaginary, peering eyes.

The mud under my feet could take me in.
Each step deeper than before,
made slippery by a cold, heavy rain.

Fear trickles through my body.
Every step forward is heavier than the one before.
The weight may cause misdirection.

Trying to be cautious in this land's swamp.
The whispers and faint lights are distracting
but the dark and its path
do not worry this body or mind
as much as the lore
of the whispers of a Will - O - Wisp.

Invisible Line

I am sure there is a line
that I will not cross.
Cannot see it right now.
My vision is a little blurred
as it is with every needle
that crosses into my skin.

I do not even know
who owns this injector
or what is in it.
It just feels so good.

Started young when I had
the youthful freedom.
Little cheap pills
were so easy to get.
I did not start
to be part of the crowd,
enjoyed my private high.

I never did it to escape.
There was nothing to hide from.
Curiosity, I guess.

Wondering how far I could go.
Had to stop wearing sandals
in my early twenties
so the holes would heal.

Somehow none of it
has taken away from home or work.
unlike others I have seen
that crash out so fast.
It gives a person a feeling
that it will never truly
effect me like the others.

The more and more I take
the better the feel is.
It has to be more now,
my system needs more.

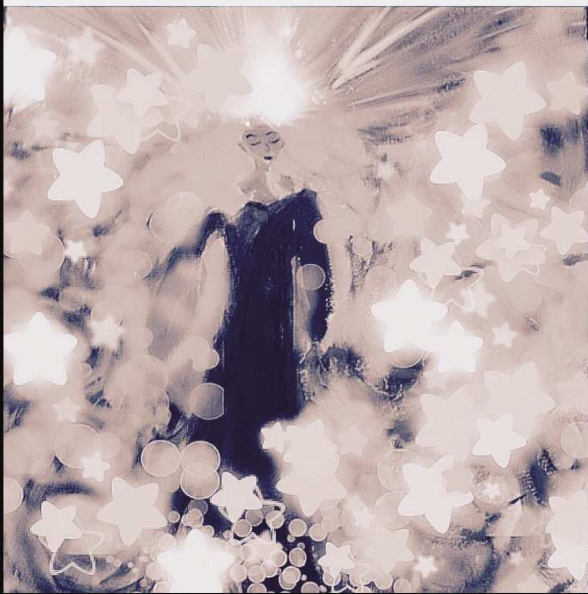
There maybe a time that
it hits me hard
in every way, body and soul.

If there is an invisible line
that you are not supposed to cross
I do not think I will ever see it.

Esmeralda Caneso



Esmeralda Caneso lives in Temecula Valley and has a degree in literature from UC Berkely. She is drawn to Mother Earth's mystical elements and their physical manifestations - scents, oils, herbs, botanicals and minerals.



Oil is love
As water is life.
Oil is woman,
and water, his wife.

Tearful November,
You are sad.
Like a scorpion
Full of poison.

Thirst be quenched by revelation,
The bride of love is here for you.
Her story is ancient and true.

When all was night
And separated from right,
Chaos made a flower;
A sweet pale rose.

A scent of pure perfume
As it bloomed, as it bloomed.
Love was born in her,
And love knew it was right.
She was the lady life's light.

She has come to rescue you
From the death and venom
poured across the land.
And in heaven Angels will sing,
And you will have your diamond ring.

scars on laugh lines

Hayley Beck

***Hayley Beck** reports: "Hayley Beck here. 28 year old female who lives for writing poetry, experiencing live music, singing, learning about people, self improvement, semi-inappropriate humor and doing this thing we call life. I'm a recovering Bulimic and Alcoholic and writing and poetry has definitely served as one of many positive coping skills in my journey thus far. Being read is an honor, being understood is a rarity, and I'm cool with that!"*

Shadow People

Shadow people
Twisted scenes
Chasing the darkness
Lose everything
Invisible feelings
Intangible dreams
Relentless preening
All truths unseen

Shadow people
With cultured scents
And porcelain skin
And covered rent
Laugh lines galore
And time well spent
Giving up on caring
Devoid of tears and sparing

What in the fuck
I can't even write
Devoured by heart loss
And swallowed by plight
Devoid of heart food
And losing my sight
The damage is endless
And I'm down for the fight

What in the fuck
I can't even breathe
Thinking of food, sex and drugs
All while snorting my dreams
Speed-less and slowed down
It hurts to be me
It hurts to be clean
It hurts to have dreams

What in the fuck
I can't even chuckle
There are scars on laugh lines
And bruises on my knuckles

Offensives I spew
Laced within my IQ
And right when I spill truth
It's like hell breaks loose too

What in the fuck
I can't even concentrate
All the numbers are dancing
Among my dwindling fat
And mansions are heavy
From the emptiness they possess
And these riches make me more poor
Than how my childhood was spent
His arms are so gone now
Disappeared like thin air
The hospital bed was so comfortable
Even lined with such dread
I miss you my blood
I miss you my youth
I know you're still alive
Even though I tried to kill you

What in the fuck
I can't even dream
All the lines are out of order
And the sincerity is colored green
All the manipulation and lying
Of all these defects we find ourselves free
But you will always be you
And I will always be me
The dream team
Sickened, floating down
The river's stream
An eye for an eye
A seam for a seam
They wound us up so tight
To suffocate in the steam

What in the fuck
I can't even be quiet
All this attention and chaos
And my brain stages a riot
The chorus runs empty
Just like my veins on days off
The lyrics are simple
When the noise is played soft
I'm on the spectrum for sure
Straddling lines with no cure
And all of this lightness is making me pure
Something I thought I could never be
Not since the moment he took me
And my veins are all tangled
But I will fall asleep happily

What in the fuck
I can't even quit
I can't even give up
Cause I'm so full of it
I can't even shake
All these aspirations and ideas
All the chatter when I'm awake
And it takes conscious thought to raise the stakes
But I know I'll raise them anyway
Cause contentment is boring
And inspiration comes in waves
I've been sober for over 6 months
And I'm still not afraid
I really wish that I was
Cause maybe then I'd be saved

What in the fuck
I can't even sing
My vocal chords are drying out
And I'm living on flings
Give me the sex and the torture
All of these harlequin things

Red lips and romance
Just to clip already shortened wings
Weighed down without flight
Shouting from the inside
Flying blind- without sight
Making promises kept
Only at night
Cause when morning comes
And the multiple suns rise
All of the heat we feel
Will annihilate our eyes
Nothing dreadful is ever a surprise
Only the disturbance of an awakened coma
Can ever really take that prize
Anything else
Any other claim
Yeah, that's a fucking lie
Goodbye

What in the fuck
I can't even stop
My hands just keeping going
My fingers ready to mock
The voices in my head
Yeah there's never just one
They all squabble and coordinate
Until all of my hard work comes undone
All this beauty and grace
That I never had
I store it in trinkets
And look for shelter
From my dad
"are you out there?"
I say
Just like a non-believing saint
I fuck up in private
But I still preach anyway

If This Fails Us- Jet Lag

I'm gonna fly this plane
Straight down this path
Towards the fucking heart
With the least resistance
And we don't even know we're in it
This bubble that we built
When we were feeling dissonant
And formidably reminiscent
Recalling my fuck ups
And drawing stars around your name
Building the barings for your pedestal
While you watched me go insane

hidden safely in your heart

Isaac Melchizadek

Isaac Melchizadek is a philosophy student at the University of Lagos in Nigeria. He is founder and editor of The Electronic Pamphlet - an e-magazine; "a lit pamphlet for the 21st century."

FOR SOLEMN DAYS

1.

Colossal waste :: you cannot look Caesar
in the eye :: days are peeling:: the skins
of time heaped in circadian chunk :: I melted
I and I to 'we' in defense :: there
is no going back.

2.

:: silence.

3.

Before words unwrap
the silence we've long preserved
let us tread in that unbridled path
of dust and desires :: hand in
hand :: unraveling as buds
under the orange gaze of a 6PM Sun.

4.

A playlist for solemn days
heavy with soulful tones :: do
you think the universe is talking
to us :: about us :: whisper emotions to our
ears :: perhaps bursting our brains
time and time again crawling under
the thin flesh that made us humans
until we become songs for solemn days.

BOYS AT WAR

Boys--
with scanty beards boiling blood
ugly smiles bad english fatal
scars inner noise bloody eyes
drunkard's breathe devil's dare with
shattered voices are just boys non men

At--
the centre of it
beneath it within
its bendy confusions are remnant
of broken laughs and
 broken names sipping

--Wars
and drinking deaths

THE WHITE OAK TREE --

pecks the season in minion
leaves & zero fruits. Days rustle behind.
Calm rivers entertain singing women on
bamboo rafts. Baby waves run before their
company giggling as girls. The white oak
lives on, wealthy in remembrance.

FRAGMENTS

Chiffon-clad. Her dress
dances to astral beats of carefree
winds. Bloody vibrations, breathe
after taking breathe.
Hot blooded Lagosians upon two
dangling hills. Bedlam in the air!
Unripe emotions falling like mangoes,
sinking, swaying – in the air, barking –
doing stuffs dogs wouldn't do.

IN MAIDUGURI

Caterpillar moments crawl beneath
the red EXIT of a heavy terminal
unnoticed in the scheme of things. This is where
feeble men buy hearts. Upheaval's harp
in the street ceremonies censor and filter
affections – affections lay hopelessly
in the cozy night – a stranger
in this place. He breathes

fresh longing to your face. This is
paradise. Your veil will not expose the
rivers waxing in your veins.

Is he hidden safely in your heart?
Is the angel of death carrying him
away on its iron wings? In Maiduguri,
you are chewing casualties' thoughts.

Songs from Four Seasons

Joan McNerney

Joan McNerney is retired from the advertising business in NYC and now lives in a small town near Albany. She volunteers, studies and takes classes - including fairy tales and folklore this fall. Her poetry is widely published and soon-to-be published. Joan has four Best of the Net nominations. Her latest title is Having Lunch with the Sky.

Spring Equinox

This is when we search for
color to transform cold grey.
Rainfall begins its magic
high lighting sky blue.

We see stacks of luminous clouds
as plants pop out emerald buds
and forsythia busts open with
sparkling yellow stalks.

Aromatic lilac bushes cluster
in soft bunches. Just today a
breath of warmth brought alive
pink crepe myrtle branches.

Just watch as five trees
dressed up in chic green
boogie through noon breezes.

Summer Solstice

Trees outline the
horizon in green lace.
Beneath boughs float
galaxies of blue bugs.

Listen to swish of
branches as cicada
swell and swarm.
Hiding under shadow
beating their wings,
hissing their mating calls.

Evening is coming...
the dawn of darkness.
We are suspended now
between bright and shade.

Clouds rushing over heaven.
Sun drops from sky.
The air is fragrant with
sweet blooming jasmine
as star after star
sets nighttime on fire.

Fall Equinox

Morning light reveals
silhouettes of branches
against a dove grey sky.

Wearing layers of red, orange,
yellow...trees begin dancing,
sashaying in the wind.

Now it's time to pick gardens of
bright vegetables. Let's cook
pots of soup, yeasty breads.

Children come from school
jumping in piles of foliage
shouting with delight.

Countless shades of leaves,
shapes of leaves spreading
over a lingering sunset.

Flying carpets of sugar maple
foliage unfurl across our roads
as frost draws closer.

Amazing how many stars
fit inside my windowpane
when the moon is new.

Winter Solstice

Hurry, short days are here,
too much to do to.
Get ready, find gloves,
hats, scarves, sweaters.

Stopping to see the
shape of a snowflake.

Hurry home to luxuriate
in dim light listening
to heat hissing finding
warmth from hot teas.

Bundled in bed comforted by
mounds of blankets, books.

Finally succumbing to
our northern goddess,
whose black nights are long
and silent as evergreens.

our names are on it

Joe Russo

Joe Russo is "from" such places as Orlando Florida, Katy Texas and New York City. His writing spans these cities and the people in them. He has been widely published. Find him at joerusso8writer.wix.com/creativewriter as well as Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook.

A Mother Who Tries to Find Herself

Trying to find myself
In between bouts
Of sadness should be a
Full time job -

When they said motherhood
Is a full time job but that's a lie -

(a laugh really but who
Am I?)
((Are you?))

Lie around in the house all day
9-5, Monday through Friday,
Because what kind of excitement do I have
Here?

The supermarket -

Big whoop

Four plus hours a week

(shoppING, cleanING, cookING,
SlavING ((throw a meal together,
present it to family like an
offerING)) waitING

For a husband to come home
Drink go to bed

And a son who hates his father
And hates his mother
And hates this town and this
City and god JUST LEAVE ME ALONE!

Trying to find myself
In between bouts
Of anger

Because I blame myself for things

(if I stayed in school, if I didn't get
Pregnant at eighteen, if I didn't
Rush to marry the first man
Who fucked me?)

Because why did we have to
Move out of the city
And down the street

And across the bridge
And past the blocks
Where our screams blend into the night,
Nobody bats an eye at the man hitting his wife,
Oh no, not this time.
And into the
The
 The
 The
 The

3 bedroom house that I can't

STAND

But our names are on it

Even though you didn't want

Mine on it but we were in love

IN LOVE WE WERE

(Till death do us part,
Forever and always,
I thee wed
In sickness and
BULLSHIT)

Trying to find myself
In between bouts of

Whatwhatwhatwhatwhatwhatwhatwha
Whatwhatwhatwhatwhatwhatwhatwha? (Happened?
Have we done?
To us?)

I hate you
I love you
I hate you

I hate -

I'm trying -

This is Why Mom Drinks

Sisterhood or
The bond of blood and
Vaginas and husbands
And periods and kids and

They're drinking
It's a Saturday night
And they are drinking
Lime margaritas but one
Of theirs has a little bit more
Alcohol in it than the others and

They're sitting outside on the porch
Of one recently married at a circle table
A gift from her mother in law that she fucking hates and
One of them the one with more vodka
In her drink she bows her head down
Lays her head down on her arms

And she starts crying
A weeping sort of cry not a cry cry
But a heave shoulder tear headache
Type of cry and the other girls
They just sit and sip
And sip and sit and they are drunk

And the one crying suddenly
Pops up and sips her drink
And tells the others that her life is shit
And that her kids don't love her
For what she is ((their mother))

And that her twins girls
How one of them wants to be a boy
And a wolf or some other shit animal
And she bought a tail and it
Was delivered this morning
And her boy name is Ryan and she or he or
Whatever *fucking demon took over* her body
Told all her teachers about her name change

And that her husband of twenty three years
Blames her the mother and the wife for changing their daughter into a boy
Because what daughter doesn't want to be a daughter
Anymore and it just confuses her so and so she sips
And that's why her drink has more alcohol in it.

On That Day

You wore white
Because *on that day* you
Wanted
To be pure of mind
Because on that day
You were past pure for your own body
(Age?)
“A woman’s prime is past but
A man's will never-”
Because on that day
You had given up,
Relinquished all of your doubts,
((All 8 months, 2 weeks of it))
Thrown, left behind,
((“Check every hole and nook and
*((Have you checked the trash can behind
The supermarket?
Is it dead? Is it breathing?
It has to be-")))*)
Because on that day
You wanted to die -
Because *on that day*
You had nothing to live for
Anymore
*(((((And what's scarier than death
Than facing a life alone??)))))))*
And so on that day
You wore white
Because you wanted to be a
Bird
*((((A dove or seagull or another
White bird))))))*
Because you wanted to be free
*(ASHAMED AS YOU WERE)
((((((((((((((((((((Could you love it?
Could you sit there and hold it,*
Kiss it, comfort it, and wrap it in a blanket.

Could you bake it cookies and attend meetings with it

Could you could you could you could you -))))))))))))))))))))))))))))))

Because on that day

Pavlovo I, II, III

Isaac Stackhouse Wheeler

Isaac Stackhouse Wheeler is a poet and translator best known for his English renderings of books by great contemporary Ukrainian author Serhiy Zhadan with co-translator Reilly Costigan-Humes. Their first book, Voroshilovgrad, was well-received. Wheeler's work has appeared - or is forthcoming - in Coldnoon, Post(blank), The Missing Slate, Trafika Europe, and Two Lines. He lives in Bennington, Vermont.

Pavlovo

I

She wasn't supposed to be living there.

Legally speaking, it was just one apartment,
with one heavy door to shut out the hallway;
but then there were two more doors, one was ours,

leading to a stack of classics,
jammed under the lip of our sofa bed,
so it could take our weight, and one
to the kitchen, with her things

stacked neatly on the chair by the window
to keep her always notionally in a state
of arrival or departure. The other opened onto
the remotest outpost of our landlord's empire,

the room full of antiques, suitable only
for signing the lease, but not for us
and our often smelly and always noisy cohabitation.
The room full of antiques shared a wall with us,

and some night, with her knees pressed against
the plaster, huddling naked in the hollow
of my chest, she spooled out her fear
for me to touch and look at, and stretch thin.

"What does the landlord do when he comes to water the flowers?"

"He just fills a bucket in the shower and goes in there."

"Does he carry out any opaque bags? Does he carry in food?"

"What're you talking about?" "I think somebody lives in there."

"You're crazy. We'd hear them." I didn't knock
on the interior wall. "Not there. Two rooms away,
I think it's probably some kind of *karlik*" [dwarf,
mutant, abortion (archaic.)] For her this was very real

with her soft, pale belly tucked in the crook of my arm,
who had shared a warren of rooms and one kitchen
and every other convenience, with several families,
who had to clean wet deliberate immigrant shit off the sofa,

who mocked my Vietnam and my ten rubles
proffered to a convincing mockup Afghanistan veteran
on the corner of Nevsky and Bolshaya Morskaya.

"It's the gypsies that cut their legs off,

then chain them to a radiator somewhere at night."

Just as for the debtor veteran, the tiles and the grout
and pedestrians on the corner, by the radiator, can become
a whole cosmos, when viewed from close enough.

II

So I couldn't make the dwarf unreal,
 without unlocking the room full of antiques,
 and there he sits, or might as well, since we don't know.
 People who study perception professionally
have contempt for any notion of a "little man"
 situated inside the skull, watching our senses on a screen.
 As an argument for consciousness, he can't explain a thing,
 just pull the issue back a step; and yet there must,
theoretically, be an observer somewhere. We insist on him,
 though even vivisection always fails to reveal one;
 the moment the good doctor's scalpel discloses the theater
 everything inside it bursts into ordinary electrons
like the occupants of an Egyptian crypt, exposed to light
 for the first time in eons. We got out of bed.
 We killed our hangovers. We made inexperienced eggs,
 then boarded the suburban train for Pavlovo,
as it's called, since that's where Pavlov had his labs.
 There was supposedly a beach there. It was
 a little swath of gray sand, not unpleasant to the feet,
 across the lake from the war dead memorial,
terminating in a prominent "no swimming" sign,
 so the bikini I'd bought her in the planning stage
 was useless until we were grappling in the shadow of the monument
 to the bearded little genius, where it was most convenient.
There was a crossroads in the birch woods;
 one way featured a notice informing us that dogs must be leashed,
 the other had a bar across it with a faded "Restricted Area" sign,
 which she vaulted, laughing at me.

III

The lab was smaller than I imagined.

A little two-story affair, complex of cages to the side,
prominent tire swing, doors heavy and peeling,
closely covered with graffiti. The thing looked abandoned

except for some office plants waving in the upper story window,
like a grainy photo sent back from a probe,
or some earnest groping polyp on a slide.
There must be someone inside, to water them.

We were alone, and there was a little figure,
a blonde lady rolling a baby carriage
loudly back and forth over the asphalt, to sooth
its unseen occupant. She was gazing upward

at the words on the concrete façade, beneath the vents
(every Soviet building was a vehicle for words;
in Lenin's day, they projected movies on the faces
of new apartment blocks, but after Lenin

the words were unmoving). They were clearly meant to be a motto,
by their style and arrangement, something like: Liberty
Equality.
Fraternity.

But this one was simpler still:
Observation
and
Observation.

Afterwards I would try to explain. "It's more like
'the quality of being observant.'" But at the time,
I could explain nothing, and everywhere that should have blood
was pale. Of course, she noticed this,

and was content to take my picture
by a bust of, of course, it stands to reason,
Descartes, and pick our way back down the hill,
to feed the ducks perhaps, and then go home.

Dream Streams

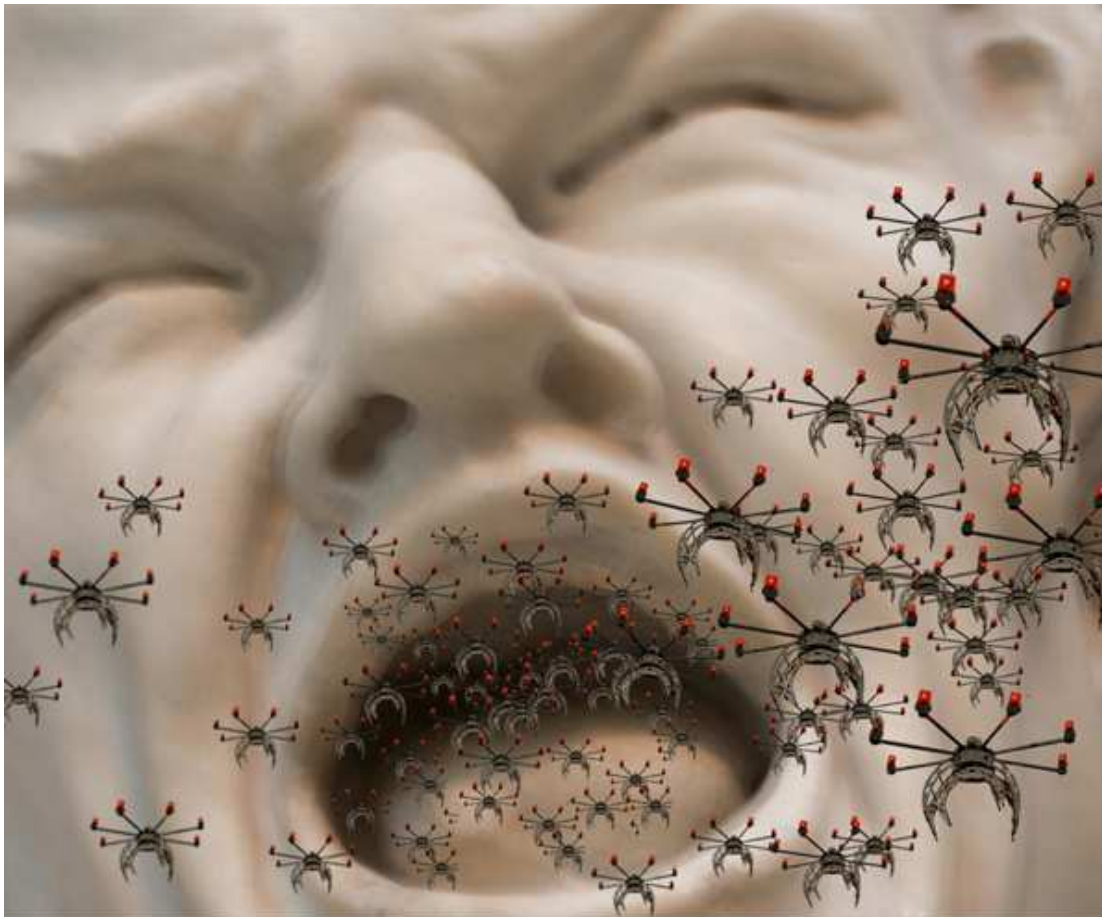
Mark Blickley

Amy Bassin



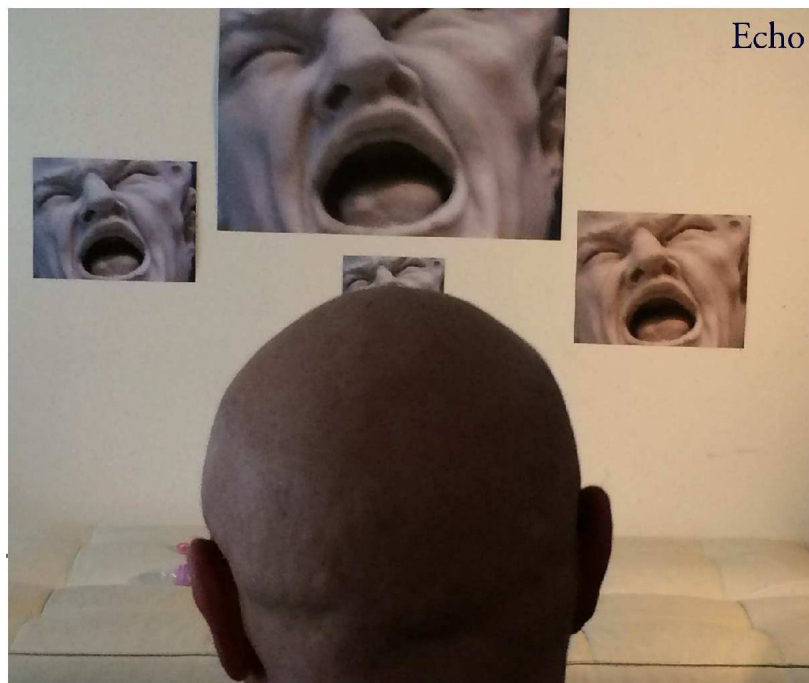
New York fine arts photographer **Amy Bassin** and writer **Mark Blickley** work together on text based art collaborations and videos. Their text based art collaboration, *Dream Streams*, was featured as an art installation at the 5th Annual NYC Poetry Festival and excerpts were published in the *Columbia Journal of Literature and Art*. Their video, *Speaking In Bootongue*, was recently selected for the London Experimental Film Festival. They just published a text based art book, *Weathered Reports: Trump Surrogate Quotes From the Underground* (Moria Books, Chicago). The publisher has sent their resistance book to the White House and members of Congress. Bassin is co-founder of the international artists cooperative, *Urban Dialogues*. Blickley is the author of *Sacred Misfits* (Red Hen Press) and proud member of the Dramatists Guild and PEN American Center.

The Language of Love Parts 1 and 2, Echo, Terminal Blue and In the Shadow of Shame have been reformatted to preserve readability of text panels.



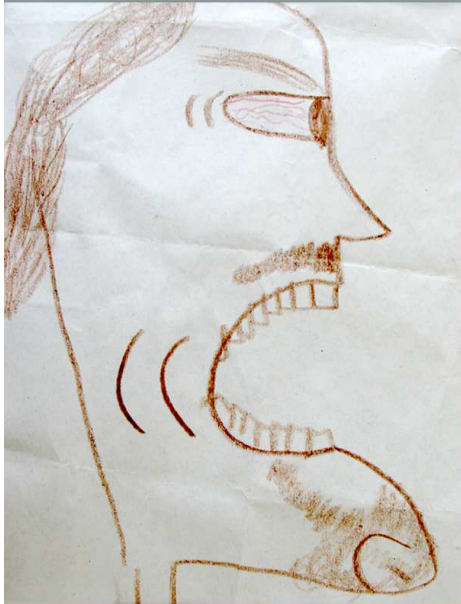
The Language of Love Parts 1 & 2

No no Baby I love you adore you love you worship you not as a jealous obsessive but as a romantic who misses you so much that when you sleep and your velvet voice is silent except for light snores and occasional pseudo-sexual groans from dreams that I know are about me I feel compelled with passion to go through your phone and read your texts not because I fear you are cheating on me or interested in other men but simply because I ache for the beautiful words that flow from your mouth words of love desire and heartfelt denials of infidelity that cause me to enter a cyber lust to see and feel the sweet language your electromagnetic waves echo out into that mysterious void to recipients other than myself in soft disembodied language that so easily light up a cellphone or tablet in imitation of how they light up my aching soul no no Baby I'm not spying on you or stalking you like some suspicious cyber creep I love you truly love you and am not an insecure untrusting possessive overweight wanna be alpha male droning on about how grateful you should be that someone like me has allowed you to reside not only within his deepest purest feelings but also rent free within the loveliest duplex apartment on this Upper East Side of Paradise because I genuinely and honestly love and trust you Baby...



The Captain's dead but hard to forget.
He has to be dead.
Nobody's liver could survive all those years of poisoning.
That's the word he used. Poison.
Never drinking or booze or alcoholism.
It was poison that ruined his life.
The Captain was a romantic. So was I.
Years ago I tended bar in a flea-bag dump
called The Second Hand Rose.
I wanted to experience life and not read about it
so I dropped out of Rutgers for three semesters
and poured the vinegar that my boss called wine into small
cups for customers like the Captain and his mates. Mates.
That's the word he used for the sour smelling people he drank with.
The Captain was different, though.
He had enough pride not to make excuses unless
he thought they'd be believed.
When the Captain spoke he nearly always made sense.

Testosterone Poisoning



My Daddy taught me that when a man expends his precious bodily fluid, it upsets his internal chemistry and drains him of a large portion of his intellectual and creative energies.



A women's sole purpose on this earth is to zap up a man's vitality by having him transfer it into her. It's artistic destruction by injection, if you know what I mean.



Looking down from high places don't bother me at all but when I have to look up at things like buildings it makes me nervous cause it feels like some kind of force like a magnet or something is going to pull me up and lift me off the ground which is a lot worse than falling 'cause if you're falling down you know you're falling and that's that but if you get pulled off the ground and lifted into the air you're not falling but you could fall at any moment and there's no end because if you fall you have to land but if you're lifted up it could go on forever and I hate that.



A Clean Hard Edge

Without Luke's consent or knowledge, Erin Louise entered a competition for a six-week painting and drawing workshop to be held in Tangier, Morocco, sponsored by their alma mater. Her congratulatory acceptance letter arrived in the morning mail, signed by the workshop leader. It included a P.S. that urged her to call him immediately at the enclosed extension number. She obeyed.

"These carbon drawings incorporate an ephemeral, yet taut and liberating line."

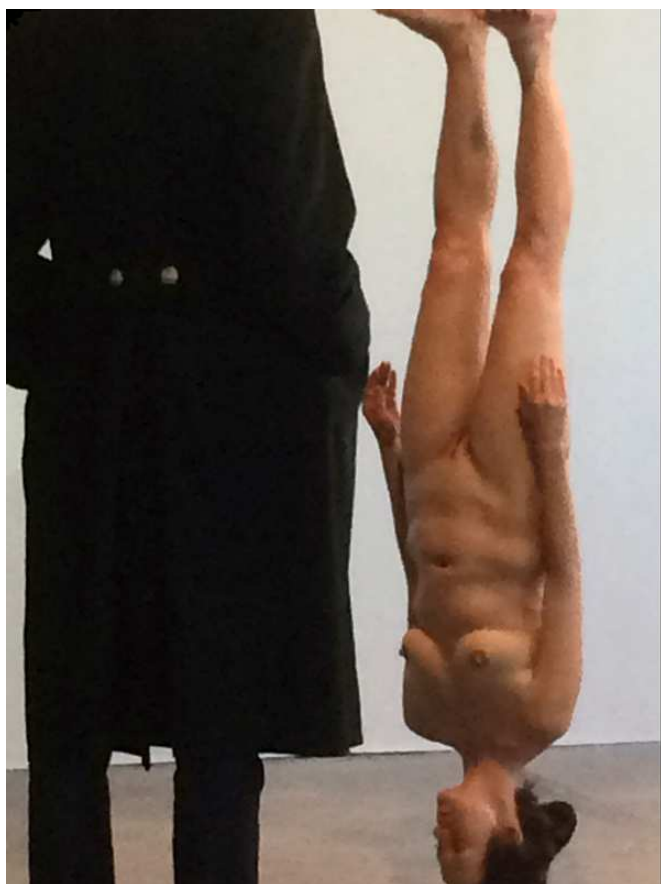
"Thank you," said Erin Louise.

"But more importantly," he continued, "they all seem to possess a clean, hard edge."

Erin Alice continued to press the phone receiver against her cheek long after the professor had hung up the phone. When she finally placed the landline phone back into its cradle, it immediately rang.

"Who the hell were you talking to for nearly twenty minutes and why did you ignore call waiting?" her husband screamed.

As Luke babbled on about her self-indulgent ignoring of his call, she wrote a nine-hundred dollar deposit check to the School of Visual Arts and circled June 9th in red ink on the tiny calendar insider her purse.



Lady Bug

I dream about you Miss.

I dream I see you with nothing on.

Your beautiful woman Miss.

I ain't dreamed about you in two weeks.

I need that dream Miss. I need to dream about me rubbing my nose against your belly and you laughing and smiling.

I never seen you smile, Miss. Listen Miss.

I don't want to make you nervous or anything.

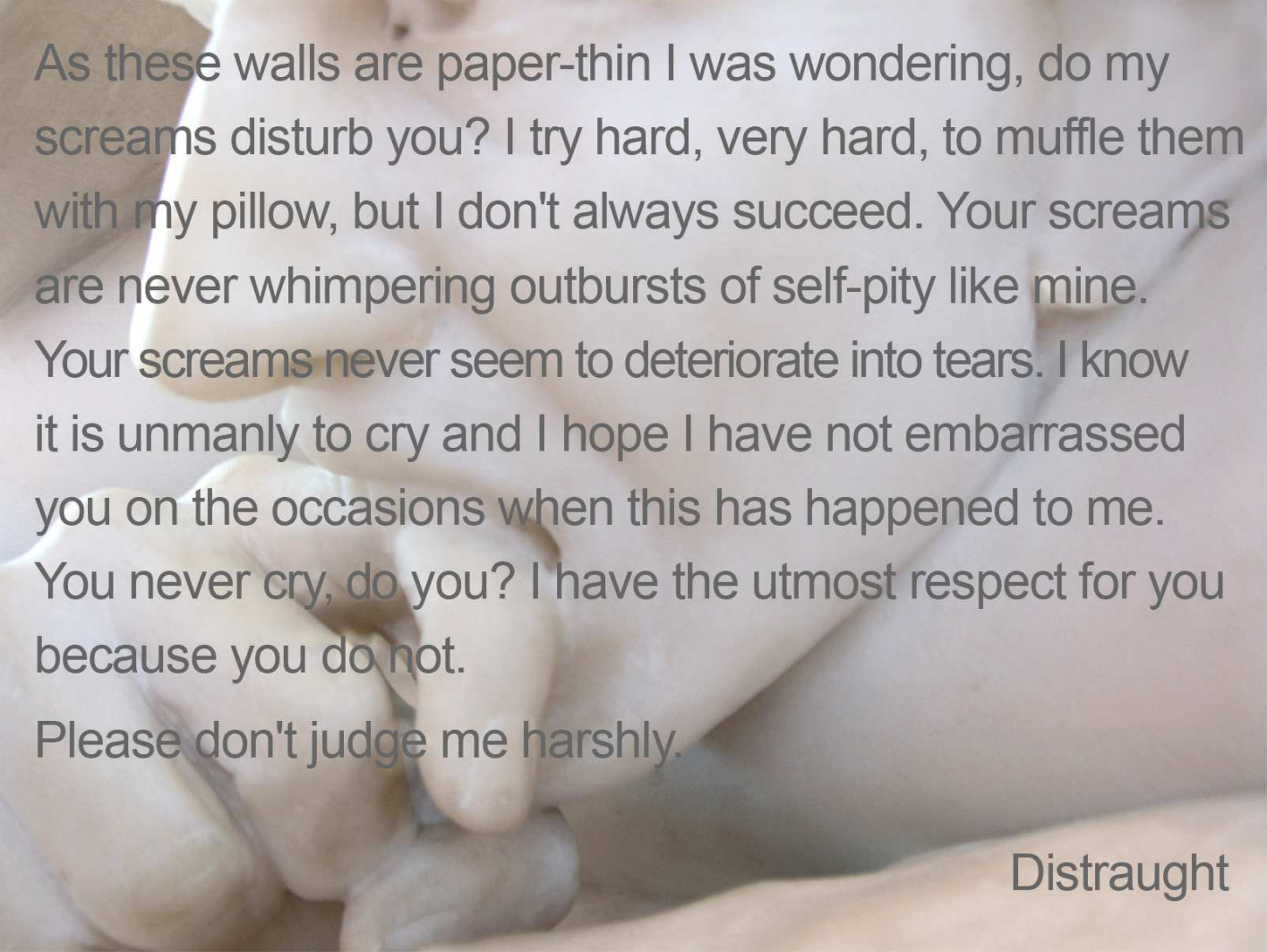
You don't got to see me if you don't want.

Not right away anyway. Things take time sometimes.

But forgive me Miss but your real important to me.

You make me feel like a man again know what I mean?

Last year before you started showing up I sorta let myself go. You know relaxed myself.



As these walls are paper-thin I was wondering, do my screams disturb you? I try hard, very hard, to muffle them with my pillow, but I don't always succeed. Your screams are never whimpering outbursts of self-pity like mine. Your screams never seem to deteriorate into tears. I know it is unmanly to cry and I hope I have not embarrassed you on the occasions when this has happened to me. You never cry, do you? I have the utmost respect for you because you do not. Please don't judge me harshly.

Distraught

DEA# 32462

DR. JOHN B. BURTON
Podiatrist-Foot Specialist
2018 Belmont Avenue, Suite 5E
Bronx, NY 10460
(718) 364-3391

Symptoms: Feeling suffocated, wrapped in despair, impaired vision, compulsive concealment.

Diagnosis: Extreme Millennial Anxiety Disorder (eMAD)

Rx: TERMINAL BLUE therapy. Direct feet towards nearest airline terminal with blue colored waiting lounge/reservation counter. Purchase ticket to destination you always dream of visiting.

DO NOT buy ticket online or from airport kiosk.

YOU MUST interact with another human to complete transaction.

Blue terminal setting is elemental color of water and sky that inspires tranquility, cools down blood pressure and creates open space feeling for communication with oneself and others.

Dr. J. Burton

D.P.M.

THIS PRESCRIPTION WILL BE FILLED GENERICALLY
UNLESS PRESCRIBER WRITES 'D A W' IN THE BOX BELOW

☐ LABEL
REFILL 2 TIMES
☐ PRN ☐ NR

DWA

DISPENSE AS WRITTEN

1601-K00P1631



Terminal Blue



In the Shadow of Shame 1 of 3

In the Shadow of Shame Part 1

Before the Dawn of Agriculture men like ME were slapped into the shadow of sexual shame but now who needs muscles or chiseled chins, great size or strength, a lover's passion or a manly countenance because for ten thousand years now I can persecute any female for infidelity towards ME and hold paternity privilege over MY biological children because we exceptional farmers invented marriage to destroy human sexuality by enslaving women with MY property for sex so I no longer need to share or compete or settle for alpha males' sloppy seconds within foraging groups that are forced to share what they carry with them instead of our enforced legal couplings that takes the innocent, primal pleasure and mystery out of sex by connecting shtoothing to birth thanks to dirt MY dirt MY very own thousand acres of seeded soil littered with pens full of MY trapped sheep, cattle, goats and pigs which means I can pork any female I fancy and destroy any man who thwarts MY desire as simply as the bulls I castrate into submission to easily herd into MY slaughterhouses that feed all the inferior people no longer dependent on their hunting and gathering skills but on ME to stay alive so not only am I not considered a sociopath by hoarding food but am praised at harvest time like a goddamned hero because I have legally claimed and legally raped those precious few life giving inches of topsoil with rotating crops and extended grasslands that exhausts and shrinks the earth, MY earth MY reign of forcing agricultural workers to bend over in the fields, stupidly exposing hairless backs to sun poisoning instead of their protective hunters' heads of hair harvesting MY food that shrinks the testicles of everyone who is forced to feed on the cheap calories of MY industrialized plants and animals that lowers fertility, but who needs big balls anymore when you don't have to kill larger animals in order to survive or attract females with your superior physical attributes proving I am the social parasite Sultan of Swat who grows fat on the food I've seized by stealing Paleo land in the name of government protected ownership!

In the Shadow of Shame Part 2

I refuse to be slapped into a shadow of sexual shame by the Dawn of Agriculture! They raped our topsoil's life-giving and venerated throbbing inches of dirt by pulling up erect trees by their thick stumps that sprout expanding and exploring roots whom firmly holds our moist fertility secure and safe while filling us with excited expectations of a daily mystery that is not supposed to include being plowed and carved into, seeded from just one lousy crop until our sacred dirt becomes dry and dusty for I am juicy dessert not an arid desert smelling of charcoal smoke and the dried dung of domesticated animals, where the stinking glow of kerosene lanterns show off local vendors' rotting fruit in brown one story buildings down the dried mud thoroughfare where small piles of wilted oranges are arranged like pyramids of precious gems and lanterns put out thin beams of shaky light so walking down the street into darkness you hear a clip-clopping echo and see a flickering pin prick of light and jump out of the way of a donkey cart carrying carcasses of barnyard chickens headed right at you with the driver sitting on top unable to see you in the pitch black air though you might smell donkey and driver if the dung laced breeze attacks your nose while you quiver with a new found knowledge of time by squatting to pour the dusty dirt of the defiled domesticated earth from one hand to the other and breathe in the remnants of the old ways through worn slats of the oldest door in the world hanging in entrance of a mud compound where bakers hook their disgusting flat dough pieces the size of small pillows with a black rod onto the roof of a beehive shaped oven with a flick of their fat bakers' wrists as a parade of property owners sniffing money and not the wind with hollow cheeks, throwing out pieces of conversation that hawk their wares into the air, stepping past dried creek beds with cratered walls of spent topsoil on either side of you the D.O.A. chaos of crusty earth, as if some mad god of Babe Ruthian proportions troweled along their rims in ecstatic abandon, surrounding you in a protective snake shaped womb of sandy soil as you listen to the high wailing voices of a Paleo song of despair from the tendrils of a wind that slithers among dunes carved from alleys of depleted soil turned clay as melody and lyric complete with a woman's mating ritual of belly jiggling, pelvic thrusts vibrating and stretching in filthy angelic writhing under a mud thatched farm roof unleashing a gale of unrequited erotic energy as ancient drums carry her through different symphonies of movement as each sway of her hips laments her forced monogamy to a non-alpha male property owner who causes her skin to split like a serpent's egg to reveal the tinkle of a goat's bell ringing inside of her demanding she create more farm hands to till his perverse, flabby soil, that turns all women into breeding beasts of burden!

Love's Labour

Petra Sperling-Nordquist

Petra Sperling-Nordqvist hails from Europe where she received an education in languages, literature, and philosophy (in Germany and Oxford). She has spent the last twenty years with her husband, horses, dogs, and cats in California, dabbling in teaching, writing, acting, dancing, swimming, singing, and playing music.

Love's Labour

Love's fervor's never lost nor life's labor as long as we
abide, sit tight in their abode; it

provides shelter within myth and romance against
impossibilities temporal, losses insurmountable; thus

innocence and purity are preserved through our
identification with the imagined; meanwhile

setting, events, topics, characters common catalysts for us to
take shelter from reality in fantasy.

Survive the lack and need that form the
obscure blank spaces of the

fragmented

yet

sparkling mosaic

infinitely incomplete and unintelligible,
endlessly enchanting and enticing.

Prepare to reside as a solitary
hermit amidst the temple of contemplation; a

rescue from the illegitimate violation and usurpation
perpetrated by any occupier, conqueror, explorer; do

protect your mind and the moment from destruction's void and
turn towards the remnants' sparkle; never

mind road conditions or the weather forecast:
the goal is not the path but the present; if

you gail and shackle yourself within it:
the game's up, immediate defeat awaits.

Move on you

must

remain

presently

living and loving.

between now and then

Rajnish Mishra



thanks to Rajnish Mishra

Rajnish Mishra is a poet, writer, translator and blogger born and brought up in Varanasi, India. He is the editor of PPP Ezine, a poetry ezine. He has a blog on poetry, poetics and aesthetic pleasure: poetrypoeticspleasure.wordpress.com.

My Lines

Life-long have I envied others many a line,
Will someone ever envy me mine,
My verse born now, fresh, dead until read?
Someone, anyone, yes, you -
If only you read it!
Would you call it just fine?
Would it not be dead, not dead if read?
Not when, but if, nor good or bad just read?

I thought of writing lines for you,
Of beauty, of strength, of truth,
A song, just one, of hope, of inspiration.
Lines on those themes come rarely now,
To write that way in these times is a sin,
These vacuous, vacant, little, listless times.
What use of such pursuits?
In a world like ours, what's false, what's true?
Hate, anger, frustration themes right for you.

My poems shallow, from heart's depths rise.
They lack in the mass of meaning, vision's breadth, not volume,
Not style but sense, not craft but art.
Who wants to say just what they want to say, and stop,
When it's just begun, not half the distance run?
When how it's said, for how long heard, is half the fun?

They call me passionless, in my head, half-alive half-dead.
I lack sorely, they say, inspiration:
Those drops of blood that the heart brings on page.
My poems are hard as stone, artificial.
I bring no flowers of hell with me,
No, that's not all, no fires of heaven bring I.
The visionary glance is not mine.
Love, longing, thorns of life, not mine,
Nor envy's green flush, shame's blush scarlet, fear's pallor:
They have almost been done to death.
Nor can I take a prophetic stance on Self or Man,
Doubt or Faith, all inventoried subjects, Nature or Nation?
Crawling in mud, or flights sublime and steep?

No, I may not Return

No, I may not return. Can't? Won't? Ever? Yes, that's destiny, self-scripted/inflicted. Had I known or written the script, contemplated the end of the road less travelled? Had I, ever? Past is not a place to revisit in bodily form. Past is not a phase to re-live and change. Past is not a page to rewrite: rich and strange. Past is past; the slippery sand that slips dryly from between the fingers, is lost, is gone irretrievably. Has happened irreversibly. It does make you first, and then un-make. What time gives first, it has its ways to take. So, years of careless days were baits to be happily swallowed, fast, greedily, unmindful of the cost.

Betrayal

A walk in house new, new rented, steps sure, eyes closed.
A walk in the past, old rooms, old stairs, corridors,
Old house that home I call.
This walk assured and closure efface, betray that walk,
Old house, its stairs and rooms.
Betray, in a way, my city, my heart.

I know now the pot holes and gaps on streets new,
Like once I knew them on streets and lanes of old.
Long years there stood they,
Like friends they waited, and I returned.
Betray them I did, was beaten by change.
Betrayed, in a way, my native, my home.

I turn left or right, go forth or reverse, from mazes emerge yet I,
As once I emerged, from lanes-labyrinths, of my city, my home.

Uncounted, known roughly but surely, these steps,
Like once were known those steps unending
Along a river bending, its *ghats* in crescent complete.
New dreams come to meet new me at new nights,
Bring cities, not home, that newly are known.
Grow rarer my *ghats*, my lanes and old haunts,
Each night grow they rarer in dreams.
Left me and has gone, my native, my city.

Live I split in two, between now and then,
Constancy and change, take turns, they play me.
Pangs surely I feel for what I forgot, erased:
My places old, home and lanes.
Can't bring them to life, eyes closed.
My city, my native, a memory, a phantom,
Yet I can't resent the city, today's,
My past betrayed by present, mine own,
Or nature of man or time, or change.

Time and Life to Death

Filth, they call it ubiquitous; obnoxious,
on the streets, in heaps, in lanes, scattered.

Life goes daily, usually on,
oblivious of filth, or death, goes on
with ease. Unfettered feet, undaunted –
of pilgrims, of people, with purpose,
or strollers, the timeless lanes, narrow,
space ample for all who come,
who live and die there. Disgusting,
the filth, reflected sometimes, on faces.

Cow dung, house waste, refuse and grime,
scattered, removed, then scattered again,
repeat performance, seen and felt on skin,
in nose, on feet through eyes.

Yet feet go on, undaunted, eternally,
as time and life run to death,
from flesh to fire to ashes.

Demands Unchanged

You miss old times and people; open eyes and see change
Envelope you and them. I miss my little brother calling me
To play cricket with him on the terrace. I, the elder one,
Reluctant at times, with things more important to do
Saying no sometimes, and the day we drafted a penciled contract,
Mutually agreed upon; then signed. Its clauses:
I would not slobber him in public,
I would play terrace-cricket with him every afternoon.
I would not snatch his chocolate away, or samosas.
I did keep to my part of it for some time, I remember,
Then, I left. When we met again, he had grown up.
Didn't need any more his playmate of terrace,
Didn't play cricket there anymore. I know how it feels.
I know the shock, the pain, the novelty of being wanted no longer.

Then came my little daughter demanding, not drafting agreements, that:
I play with her every evening, after I return from work.
I take her to the park at weekend mornings
I don't force her to learn her tables,
I don't side with her mother when she's scolded.

I sense my grandchildren in future, demands unchanged,
Eyes bright and happy after success.

sonnet and haiku

Judy Katz-Levine

Judy Katz-Levine is a poet who is internationally published and locally celebrated. Her books include "Ocarina", "When The Arms Of Our Dreams Embrace", and "When Performers Swim, The Dice Are Cast." A new book, "The Everything Saint" will be published in August 2018. Blending with the world of poetry, Judy is a jazz flutist. She writes jazz tunes and spiritual melodies and performs occasionally in the Boston area.

Sonnet Of The Lost Smile

There is a smile lost in summer grass
Because I was wondering about an empty avenue
Someone came to explain that you had been here
And had returned to a house of young cherry trees
And I was very quiet, very quiet, moving slowly
Towards that house, where a praying mantis stilled
On the threshold, and a bowl of water held a reflection
Of not your face, but a stranger's so I bent down
In the summer grass, remembering first snow
The samba that accompanied the flakes falling in obsidian
And I was not able to smile, hearing a choir amplified
By one snowdrift, no microphone anywhere, only
The oldest song I could count on, a ballad of honey
And wind, and I was able to take that and kneel in rye

Heron Glides Over The Lake

Plunge in and 10 laps breaststroke
My friend the poet/swimmer has breast cancer
We grip each other's hands, she will rise

Five Poems

Tom Montag

Tom Montag is the author of In This Place: Selected Poems 1982-2013, This Wrecked World, and The Miles No One Wants. He has been a featured poet at Atticus Review, Contemporary American Voices, Houseboat, and Basil O'Flaherty Review, and received Pushcart Prize nominations from Provo Canyon Review, Blue Heron Review, and The Lake. With David Graham, he is editing an anthology of poetry about small town America.

THE OUTSIDERS

How quiet they are,
these whisperers from
the other world.

I see them in low
light, on grey, hardened
landscapes, far off

from earth, from our lives,
at their beginning,
where it will lead.

JOURNEY

Wind in
tall grasses,

sun and
sky making

promises.
A passing

cloud shades
all meaning

from here to
not here to

going home.

HAWK

Hawk, not
hawk, the

shadow
of death

this morning,
taking

what she wants.

BETWEEN

leaving and arriving,
the journey.

He lives
nowhere else.

This is the path
the monk has chosen.

DARKNESS

Light is wave
and particle,

yes. Does it
matter to

the poet?
No. You flip

the switch and
light goes off

or doesn't.
Do we make

too much of
it -- image

or symbol
or mystery?

Yes, perhaps.
When you let

the darkness
in, you make

too much of
everything.

Annika Lindok is an English teacher in Estonia. Her works have been published in The Wayward Sword, Degenerate Literature, Peacock Journal, Scryptic Magazine, Zoetic Press and others.



Dinner at Mr Jarvis

Characters:

Mr Jarvis- the host

Guests:

Mr Roger Merrygo

Mrs Elderflower

Madam Hoppington

Mr Nuevo

Mr Mole

Mr Jarvis is sitting at a table, full of all kinds of delicious dishes- there is fruit, cold chicken, potatoes, bottles of wine. He is looking anxious, staring at the big cuckoo clock in the corner of the dining room. There rings a door bell and Mr Jarvis jumps.

Voices from the corridor- the footman lets in guests.

Enters Mr Roger Merrygo.

MR JARVIS: There you are! My first guest! Do come in my kind man, have a seat! We should have been starting already with the eating but it seems as anyone else is being late.

MR ROGER MERRYGO: That's alright, Jarvis. I have suppered lightly already.

MR JARVIS: That is a pity! Did you really have such little belief in my culinary choices?

MR ROGER MERRYGO: It's not that at all! God forbid you to think I don't appreciate your taste which happens to be excellent. I merely had to sit down with a friend who more than insisted. I hope you forgive me. You must!

MR JARVIS: I am not a stingy man. My forgiveness you may have but what says your stomach?

MR ROGER MERRYGO: Oh, worry about it not! But do I hear more noises or you shelter ghosts?

(Enters Madam Hoppington with Mr Mole.)

MR MOLE: No ghosts here my dear fellow! Just us!

MR JARVIS: Just you! You are too modest! But wait a minute, you two know each other already?

MR MOLE: Don't bother with introductions. First they are too formal, secondly, if we did not know each other already it might happen we did by the end of the evening.

MR JARVIS: But do sit down, find yourself something on your plates, Thomas, serve them some meat for starters.

(Footman bows and serves the dish.)

MADAM HOPPINGTON: For starters? It frightens me to think what may be the next course.

MR JARVIS: Fear not! It may not be food for the body at all. It may be food for the mind.

MADAM HOPPINGTON: For the mind? I am intrigued!

MR MOLE: That I should think so.

(Thomas disappears for a while and brings in another guest- Mrs Elderflower and Mr Neuve.)

MR JARVIS: What do you say! You two come in together as well! Don't mention it! Are you two acquaintances too? And there goes my plans for the matchmaking.

MR NEUVE: Oh you old man with your jokes! One may think you are a lonely old cat lady with nothing better to do.

MR JARVIS: But that you are right. I am old and lonely. Oh me! But I am not anymore! You my friends still find time to amuse your old and forgotten comrade.

MRS ELDERFLOWER: Oh we do! We haven't seen you in ages, you look much more... solid.

MR MOLE: That was subtle.

MRS ELDERFLOWER: I don't mean anything bad. Just your voice, it is very different as well. But I dare say it is dim and my eyes have never seen too sharp. What say others?

MADAM HOPPINGTON: I say we drop the subject before you start counting the wrinkles on my face.

MRS ELDERFLOWER: I am sorry! I didn't mean to be rude. Child's mouth. But we really like here, uncle Jarvis.

MR JARVIS: And so you shall like even more! Wait for what the night may bring to you.

MR MOLE: That I should hope so.

MR JARVIS: But let's start with the feast! Let's celebrate all my old friends together here at the table, although you may not know each other that well. Thomas, let the plates run!

MRS ELDERFLOWER: That is like a miracle, we just happened to meet with Mr Neuve on the way. He was going in the same direction and it just so happened that...

MR NEUVE: I dropped my handkerchief.

MR MOLE: Very classy of you. Damsel in distress.

MRS ELDERFLOWER: What distress may he have?

MR MOLE: I didn't think you would understand anyway.

MR NEUVE: Well, and so Mrs Elderflower was so kind to return my handkerchief and we started talking.

MR MOLE: Wonderful. That was not how we met, was it, darling?

MADAM HOPPINGTON: No, it was not indeed.

MR JARVIS: Before we start, however, I shall like to...

MR MOLE: say a toast?

MR JARVIS: A toast? No.

MRS ELDERFLOWER: A prayer?

MR JARVIS: God, no! We shall play a little game. For fun! All for good fun! We don't want to be bored, now do we?

ALL: no, no, no.

MR JARVIS: NO! So we shall play a little game. But I do need only one participant. And he or she will have a little prize!

MRS ELDERFLOWER: A prize? How exciting!

MR MOLE: Aren't we too old to be playing games?

MR ROGER MERRYGO: I am not hungry. Let's say I shall participate. What should I do?

MR JARVIS: It wouldn't be fare if I told you, would it? Say if you shall participate or not. If you complete the task you can all start to eat. You must not fail. If you do, you shall try again until you succeed.

MADAM HOPPINGTON: It sounds all so sinister. Do we really have to?

MR ROGER MERRYGO: I shall do it. But what is the prize?

MR JARVIS: Something good.

MR MOLE: This is ridiculous! I am leaving.

MADAM HOPPINGTON: Sit down Roger! Don't even think about spoiling all the fun tonight.

MR JARVIS: Good, we have a volunteer! It is nothing too difficult, I promise. You only have to tell us a secret of someone you know at the table.

MR NEUVE: Whom do you know?

MR ROGER MERRYGO: A secret? I don't know any of their secrets? Can I tell my own secrets instead?

MR JARVIS: No, no. That would be too easy. And how do we know they are a secret?

MADAM HOPPINGTON: How do we know the others are?

MR JARVIS: Oh, you'll know. Go on, Roger, tell us her secret.

MR MOLE: Her secret?

MADAM HOPPINGTON: Oh alright, yes. We are acquainted.

MR JARVIS: Acquainted? Haha, can you tell us something about her that we don't know Roger?

MR ROGER MERRYGO: Oh, I don't know. That would be inappropriate.

MR MOLE: Inappropriate? I am getting curiouser and curiouser!

MR ROGER MERRYGO: Oh, alright. It had to come about either way. Sooner or later. And it's quite funny as well.

MRS ELDERFLOWER: What is?

MR ROGER MERRYGO: Madam Hoppington has a huge birthmark on her left buttocks!

ALL: (laugh)

MADAM HOPPINGTON: This is outrageous!

MR MOLE: Scandalous!

MR JARVIS: Haha, thank you, Roger, for entertaining us on behalf of your secret mistress. This evening is starting rather fun.

MR MOLE: I am going to kill that man!

MR JARVIS: I wish you wouldn't.

MADAM HOPPINGTON: I wish he would!

MR ROGER MERRYGO: Jarvis! You have tricked me! This was a wicked thing to say! Forgive me!

MR JARVIS: Come come. There is your award. (opens his wallet, takes out fifty dollars and offers to Roger Merrygo over the table)

MR ROGER MERRYGO: You don't think I accept your money you old fool, now do you?

MR JARVIS: Don't be shy. Take it, you earned it.

MR ROGER MERRYGO: This is preposterous. I am going. (leaves)

MR JARVIS: That is quite alright. I send him his prize via post. No one can escape my flatter!

FOOTMAN: Do I serve the chicken and wine now?

MR JARVIS: Good Thomas! Always so considerate. Please do.

MADAM HOPPINGTON: My evening has been ruined. I need someone to answer for it.

MR MOLE: And so do I. Answer for me, woman. Were you really his mistress? Oh, but how else could he have known about your left...

MADAM HOPPINGTON: Shut it! Keep your lips sealed you fool!

MR MOLE: You know nothing about humiliation! You have humiliated me by this devious act more than you know.

MADAM HOPPINGTON: Mr Jarvis! Look what you have done.

MR MOLE: Keep him out of that. I am grateful I know what a fool I was taken for behind my back. This will end here!

MADAM HOPPINGTON: What? No! I need my revenge.

MR JARVIS: And so you shall have it. But let us dine first. Tell me Mrs Elderflower, what say you about this business? Do you like my games?

MRS ELDERFLOWER: They would be more enjoyable if they would not hurt people's feelings, Mr Jarvis.

MR JARVIS: Haha, good girl. Good person. Darling Mrs Elderflower. Always so kind. So incorruptible.

MR NEUVE: Me, if I may say so... must, I must... I agree with Mrs Elderflower.

MR JARVIS: Of course you do. I would not think otherwise. Good man. But now comes the second task. And before you refuse me, hear my prize.

MR MOLE: You are impertinent!

MR JARVIS: Yes! Yes, I am. Gold earrings! Ladies? This task would be suitable for either of you.

MADAM HOPPINGTON: See! Hear! You, my husband, have not given me a golden anything!

MR MOLE: And there goes your last chance!

MR JARVIS: Oh! We have a volunteer! Do I understand correctly? You want to claim the prize Madam Hoppington?

MADAM HOPPINGTON: I do. What is the task?

MR JARVIS: Oh, haha. This is getting rather fun. You shall have to show your anger towards the one person at this table, that you are most angry with.

MADAM HOPPINGTON: What? How do I do that?

MR JARVIS: Oh, this is simple. You shall hit them.'

MR NEUVE: This is very... I don't want to be a part of this.

MR JARVIS: My dear man, calm yourself. You are not a part of anything. You may close your eyes if you want to.

MR NEUVE: And so I shall.

MADAM HOPPINGTON: Hit them? Funny, I had the strongest urge to hit Mr Merrygo earlier. As he is not here at the present moment, the next candidate would be you, Mr Jarvis. But...

MR JARVIS: Here is my face, madam. Bless me!

MADAM HOPPINGTON: But you are a rich man. You give me a present. My hand does not rise to slap Your Impertinence.

MR MOLE: Then it leaves me.

MADAM HOPPINGTON: That you are right! (slaps him across the face)

MR MOLE: I hate you, darling.

MADAM HOPPINGTON: I know you do.

(The footman brings her gold earrings on a plate)

MR JARVIS: (claps hands) Wonderful! That was one good slap!

MR MOLE: Thank you, darling. But we were even before. Now I need my revenge to even things out between us.

MADAM HOPPINGTON: Haha, don't make me laugh. (puts on earrings)

MR JARVIS: Of course. I hear you, Mr Mole. And so you shall have it. But let us have dessert first.

(Footman serves them pudding)

MRS ELDERFLOWER: Oh, it's like Christmas! Wonderful. This will wipe out all tonight's horrors from my mind.

MR NEUVE: I hope it works as well for me. I am distressed.

MR JARVIS: A little excitement never harmed anyone. Except it did for Mr Mole. How do you feel?

MR MOLE: Slapped. You have a firm hand, my darling.

MADAM HOPPINGTON: You have a firm heart, dear.

MR JARVIS: And all is well right? But now comes the third task. This one is for you Mr Mole, as I know you are dying to get one.

MR MOLE: Indeed.

MR JARVIS: Yes, yes. I know a thing or two about you. You are a horse breeder, am I right?

MR MOLE: Quite right.

MR JARVIS: And there is this one horse breed that you grave but don't have yet. Buying it is too much for you. Even if the prize would satisfy, no one near has a horse like the one you desire.

MR MOLE: I am stunned!

MR JARVIS: What do you say if I give you one?

MR MOLE: (laughs)

MR JARVIS: You think I lie? C'mon. Rise up! Stand, everyone! Let us go to the stables. I can show you I am many things but a liar.

FOOTMAN: Sir, I can fetch the horse.

MR JARVIS: Please do. Let me show you that good beast!

(Footman exits)

MR MOLE: I am thrilled.

MR JARVIS: I think you are. But it is not a gift.

MR MOLE: It is a prize. I figured it out, thank you.

MR JARVIS: Not quite. It is an exchange.

MR MOLE: In exchange for what?

MR JARVIS: Or whom?

MADAM HOPPINGTON: You must be kidding!

MR MOLE: Oh no he is not. Nor am I.

MRS ELDERFLOWER: Could someone explain what is going on?

MR JARVIS: I demand your wife Mr Mole. But be warned, you know not what I may do to her next.

MR MOLE: And so you shall have her.

MADAM HOPPINGTON: Wait a minute! I am not yours to give away!

MR MOLE: No, you never were mine, darling. No, not truly.

MR JARVIS: Don't be so shocked. You liked my earrings. I have more.

FOOTMAN (enters): I have brought the horse, sir.

MR JARVIS: Oh, wonderful! Go, take a look at it, and if you like it, you can ride away!

MR MOLE exits.

MR JARVIS: Oh, but this has been one distressing evening. I should think you all need a little refreshment. Thomas, dear boy, cigarettes for the gentleman and wine for ladies!

MRS ELDERFLOWER: Thank you, Mr Jarvis.

MR JARVIS: Oh yes! Mrs Elderflower! You too want a prize right? You nod. Of course, you do. Why her and not me, you think. You nod. Course you do. There comes the final task. And the great prize. But I'm afraid, whether you will be able to complete the task. This has been a great evening! We have watched people hurt and sell each other away. Haha, but the last prize! Who could refuse it?

MR NEUVE: What is the prize of the prize I claim to know first.

MR JARVIS: This is a tricky one. It is a divided task. You shall have to share the task with Mrs Elderflower.

MRS ELDERFLOWER: And share the prize too? I shall not hear of it!

MR NEUVE: Nor shall I!

MR JARVIS: Calm yourselves! You will have only one prize and one winner.

MADAM HOPPINGTON: I do not understand.

MR JARVIS: Thomas, will you tell them?

FOOTMAN: Certainly, sir. The last task is for them to kill each other. The one who lives gets the grand prize- a real diamond, the size of my fist.

MR JARVIS: Hear? A real diamond!

MRS ELDERFLOWER: I don't understand. What can you mean?

MR NEUVE: Surely this is metaphorical?

MR JARVIS: No, no. You shall duel and the one who lives gets the jewel. On my honour.

MRS ELDERFLOWER: How horrid! You can't mean that!

MR NEUVE: I shall not duel with a lady! Have you gone mad?

MR JARVIS: Haha, let me show you the diamond! Thomas!

(Footman exits and comes back with a real jewel- just the like the one as described.)

MRS ELDERFLOWER: Oh my lord! I am speechless.

MR NEUVE: I would kill to get one like that!

MR JARVIS: I thought so.

MADAM HOPPINGTON: You are a wealthy man Mr Jarvis. I am glad my husband gave me away.

MR JARVIS: See how easy it is to corrupt anyone? There are your guns. Go ahead. Pow, pow!

(Thomas hands them the guns.)

MRS ELDERFLOWER: How does one duel?

MR NEUVE: We shall step away from each other, while Mr Jarvis counts to ten. On ten, we turn around and shoot.

MR JARVIS: You each need a friend to witness and support you. Madam, could you go with Mrs Elderflower. Thomas, you with Mr Neuve.

MR NEUVE: I am very sad about this. Mrs Elderflower, I truly liked you.

MRS ELDEFLOWER: And I you. We bonded the first we met.

MR NEUVE: True. I would have married you.

MRS ELDERFLOWER: Oh my! And I swear I would have accepted. Oh, cruel fate!

MADAM HOPPINGTON: But I would like to know, Mr Jarvis, why do you crave for one of them dead?

MR JARVIS: Oh, old resentments. Mrs Elderflower has refused my proposals many a time and Mr Neuve has bankrupted one of my businesses. I don't care which one of them shall die.

MRS ELDERFLOWER: You are a cruel man!

MR NEUVE: But it does not have to be like this! Let us not do this. I have another proposal for you miss.

MRS ELDERFLOWER: I am listening.

MR NEUVE: Let's kill Mr Jarvis instead. Then we can share the diamond. What do you say?

MRS ELDERFLOWER: Oh, I like this plan! I have never shot anyone before, I would surely have missed.

MR JARVIS: What? You cannot be serious. Thomas, do something!

MR NEUVE: Wonderful, so we shall do. (shoots Mr Jarvis. Madam Hoppington screams and faints.)

MRS ELDERFLOWER: Now we take the jewel. Hand it over Thomas!

FOOTMAN: Hahahaahhahahahah! You fools.

MRS ELDERFLOWER: Has he gone mad too? Hand over the jewel or I shoot you.

(Footman keeps laughing. Mrs Elderflower shoots him but there is only a click. Mr Neuve tries the same but nothing happens.)

MR NEUVE: There was only one bullet and it was in my gun!

FOOTMAN: I have always hated my footman. I am glad you got rid of him for me.

MRS ELDERFLOWER: What?

FOOTMAN: I promised him the same jewel as for you in return for him representing me tonight. Couldn't you see the heavy make-up and false moustache? I am Mr Jarvis!

(Curtain drops)

Gary Adams is a retired high school social studies teacher and a veteran. He and his wife, Joyce, are seasoned world travelers. Over the years Gary has shared with his friends and students an incredible depth of knowledge of art, movies, history, military technology, travel and geography. Gary reads anything and everything and thinks the internet is cool.

This short story is a period piece. The setting is the destruction of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the Soviet Union.



The Wings of Night

The wind woke him.

It roared out of the oven of the earth, gathering speed and dust. As it came, it whispered its name.

“Sirocco - Sirocco.”

The man smelled the dust and heat. As he struggled through levels of consciousness to near awareness, he smelled the tang of the mother of the sun and the canvas of his tent. As he finally became aware, the rational levels of his mind identified the smells of the morning in the desert and canvas preservative, respectively.

He awoke to pain - and then rage. The anger was always with him now, his only constant companion. He heaved himself upright and gasped, gasping for the pills. As he spread the pills across his hand, he wondered:

“Is this the end of Rico?”

The camp mirror threw his reflection across his eyes. He looked away - and then forced himself to look back.

“Hah! Malignant melanoma - wanted to death any day now.”

He had developed the habit of talking to himself lately. And why not? The diggers were simple people, immersed in their religion, their creature comforts and their stench. The translator - Achmed - well, he was something else again - but not for talking - not for sharing - no, no one left for that now. Once again the rage and pain welled up. He looked at his hand. Three of the pills were gone.

He should have had only one.

He groaned.

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Achmed stood, uncertainly, outside of the professor's tent. He heard the stirring and the coughing and he knew that he should enter. As he considered, he wiped a sweating palm on his shirt and then probed a painful tooth. The professor - Rico - was mad. He knew that. He was also a fearful sight. Black lumps on dead white skin. But he paid well. As he considered and struggled with his fear, the tent flapped open.

Allah - the smell.

"Well, what now?" growled Rico.

Achmed considered the professor's eyes before answering. Mad - quite mad.

"The men are nervous professor. Perhaps if you would speak to them - and pay them, they would work better."

"Hah. They hate me - just pay them - here." he said, tossing a small sack to Achmed.

"Don't bother me again until the door is completely uncovered."

Achmed turned and moved away. The dig was all wrong. There should be ten perhaps twelve Ferhengi - They should be sane - The digging should be slower - but never, never had he been paid like this. As he shuffled toward the diggers, grouped together like sheep before a hyena, he knew the professor was wrong. The diggers didn't hate him - they feared him.

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Rico dreamed. He dreamed of his youth - of his love of life in his 14th summer. God, the sweet smells of the wheat fields of Austria. His joy at running, running, always running in the sun. The wheat was golden - his family was golden - his skin was golden - even the sky was golden. Life was golden. Then, as it always did, the darkness came from the north. And with the darkness came the evil ones, and they took, took them all to...

He awoke sweating. Sitting up screaming, sweating, swearing in the heat of mid-day.

"More pills - yes, more, that's what I need. Just a few more."

The tepid water tasted dusty and flat. He spiraled down and met the pills as they expanded within him.

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He lay awake and half dreaming - but this time, he dreamt of his PURPOSE. Yes, if it was time to die, it was good to have a PURPOSE. His had come to him in the hospital, over that great leveler, the cyclopean god of the masses. The two Germanys were to unite. Once again, Berlin was to be a pivot of power. It was as if someone had thrust a cold, cold knife in his lungs. He had arched from the bed, sweating and shivering - setting off his personal alarms. He could hear the big nurse - the one they called the elephant - lumbering toward him at high speed. Hah! Even in his delirium he smiled at the thought of how the floor had shaken.

At first he thought it was the medication. Then he knew that America would stop this abomination. But no - they bowed before the power of the mark. Mammonites. Then surely the Soviets - they had lost 20 million to the Germans. But the Soviets were still an enigma wrapped in a mystery, and now, like Ouroboros, they were devouring themselves. They had no time, no heart to stop a new Germany.

At the base of his desolation, he had grasped for an Answer and it eluded him for a night, a day and a night. And then it had come to him with Eos, the dawn. At the time when most sick men slipped away, he became more attached to life. Yes, he had the Answer, and he had laughed and laughed until he had set off his alarms again.

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In the slanting, glaring afternoon sun, Achmed knelt before the door. Small harsh chunks of rock bit into his knees, he sweated, his breath was shallow.

"Oh Allah - Intact!"

He glanced over his shoulder and saw the last of the diggers disappearing across the ridge. Superstitious peasants. And yet as he placed his hand on the door, he could almost feel ancient evil.

"Bah! A man who wants to be a fool can talk himself into it."

It was time to bring the professor.

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Rico dreamed of dragging bodies from the showers. It was his last day at Mathausen. He was clutching a dead man's feet, while two Capos had his torso. The Zyklon B had been sucked away, but its sweet odor lingered and mixed with the smell of 40 people who had voided their bowels in their last moments of life. Rico concentrated on the dead man's feet, which were hairy, and on staying as far away from the SS overseer as was humanly possible. The SS sergeant looked like a blond haired, blue-eyed devil, much like the shining silver death's heads on his collars. Rico continued to remove the bodies, seemingly forever, until the Americans came and removed the SS guard.

After the freedom, after the war, the guilt of a nation provided for him, had sent him to school, had chosen a career for him. A career the family would have never understood. But the family was gone forever. Almost all of the gypsies were gone and now, all that was left was a call to, a desire for, safety.

His career selection had been easy. Apathy made things easy. Archeology was the first course offering on the list he was given. So he had become an Archeologist, and since it was free, he became a Doctor. A respected member of society. Hah. His life became . . . Egypt. Never a woman - just - Egypt. Because something had died inside him at the camp.

"Perhaps that's why they called it a death camp." he muttered and then awoke.

A life of learning, a life of work, then the cancer - then the PURPOSE. Now, only the PURPOSE kept him alive.

It was so simple, really. The Germans were an abomination. Berlin was the nerve center, the brain of the new Germany, this new pustulence on the face of Europe. Berlin had to, must, would die. But how? Rico chuckled, because he

had had the key to the box of fate all along. The key was in his mind - and in Egypt.

When Lord Carnarvon had opened the tomb of Tutankhamen in 1911, he had provided part of the answer. His men began to die within three days. Within three months all but two were dead. Lord Carnarvon survived to wake screaming every night for the rest of his shortened life. The tabloids had labeled it the "Curse of the Pharaohs." No one in that age of rationality had really believed.

But in the 1970's, an acquaintance at the university, a professor of biochemistry, had postulated an answer. The answer was ancient spores, molds, disease, growing and mutating from the food entombed with the Pharaohs, perhaps from the common things of three thousand years ago. Waiting, waiting to bring biological death to the unwary, the defilers of the tombs of the living gods. Dormant until exposed to living bodies, and then plague, madness, sure death. The older the undisturbed tomb, the more sure the death.

The sand entered the tent with the evening sun and wind, making stinging sounds on the canvas and bringing Rico up, up off the cot, to stare at Achmed.

"It is time, Professor."

* * *

The hiss of the Coleman lantern was in his ears as Rico knelt and ran his fingers over the rough hieroglyphics at the tomb's mouth. Even with the lantern held high by Achmed, he couldn't really see the inscriptions, but he could read them with his fingers and his mind's caress.

"Ye who would defile the resting place of Queen Hashpet, know THIS:

**Death will come to you on the Wings of Night and those wings
will brush your soul and carry you beyond the light of men."**

He heard Achmed breathing heavily and shifting noisily behind him.

"The inscription means nothing, Achmed. Break in the door." he said, breathlessly.

* * *

He was first into the tomb, Achmed stumbling over him in his haste to enter.

"The Gold!" breathed Achmed.

Then Rico sucked in his breath. What he wanted was on top of the gold dishes.

* * *

The plane was a 747. It belonged to Lufthansa and as it lumbered down the Cairo runway like a dinosaur of flight, Rico wondered how this much metal, this much weight, could possibly become airborne. The rumbling, the vibration became intense, then dropped away to be replaced by muted hydraulic whirrs. One more success for the engineers, Rico thought sleepily. Five pills this time.

The pain was in only a small closed area of his brain now, gnawing frantically, but unsuccessfully at the cage of non-feeling created by the pills. The anger was almost gone. Some had been left in the desert. More had been left in Cairo. At Berlin, he was sure it would be gone altogether.

He slid forward and touched his one small bag. It carried his toiletries and a one liter plastic bottle that boldly stated "Pepsi" in English and Arabic on the outside, but throbbed with ancient evil on the inside. Ancient evil for modern evil. It seemed fair to him.

Rico adjusted his headphones and smiled.

Support our local art and cultural centers



The Lemp Neighborhood Arts Center is a non-profit space, art gallery, and center in the historic Benton Park neighborhood of St Louis, Missouri. Its primary audience is the St. Louis community's youth, particularly anyone involved in artistic endeavors. The walls are lined with exhibits of art work, often with themes of encouraging a social consciousness. Musical genres include but are not limited to: free improvisation, folk, punk, post-punk, rock, and no wave. Lemp also hosts a three-day festival "to link mid-west experimental performers whose work could be associated with noise" called NoisefeSTL.

Edward Russell



Deirdre's Sun

Edward Russell is a photographer and craft woodworker. He is a Vietnam veteran. Edward has been a sculptor for over 50 years and has followed his craft from Martha's Vineyard to Florida.



as he crawled thru the marsh... a face



Secret



**Photographer,
ode to Diana**

**Hungry for more
than a day**

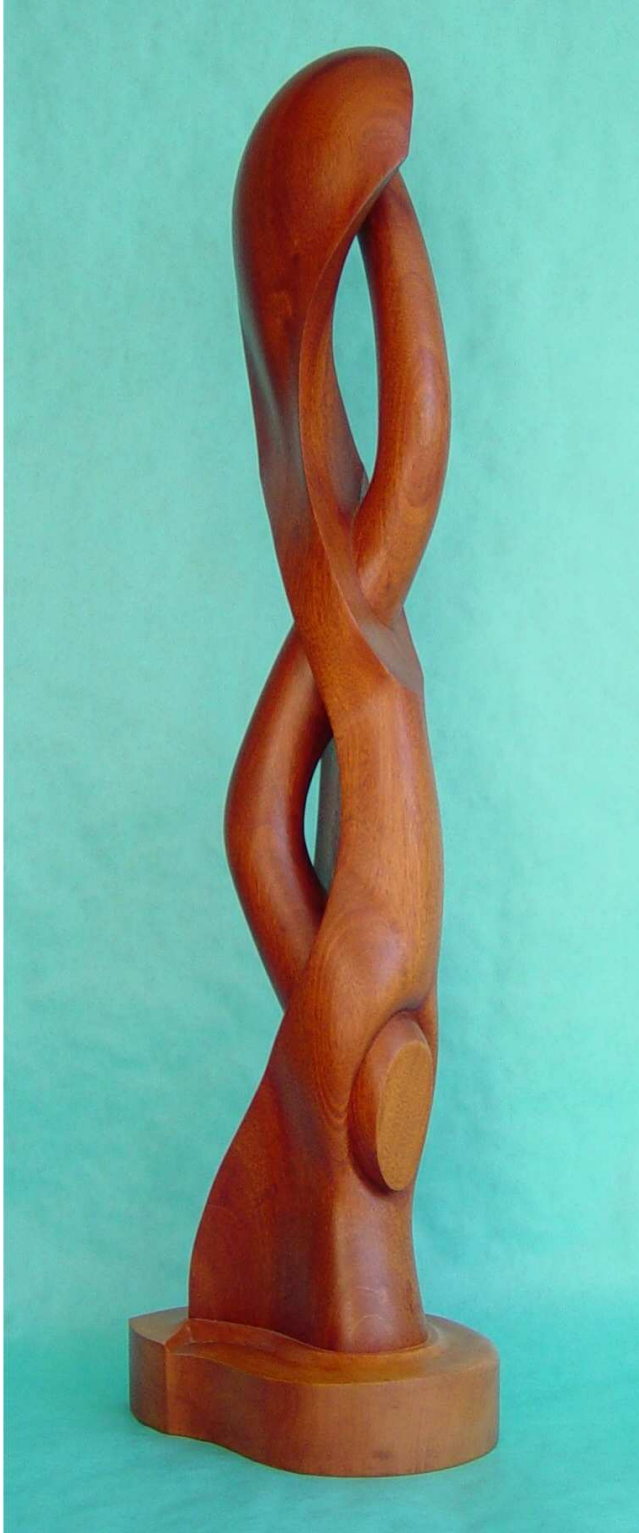


**Confusion... between
sight and sound**

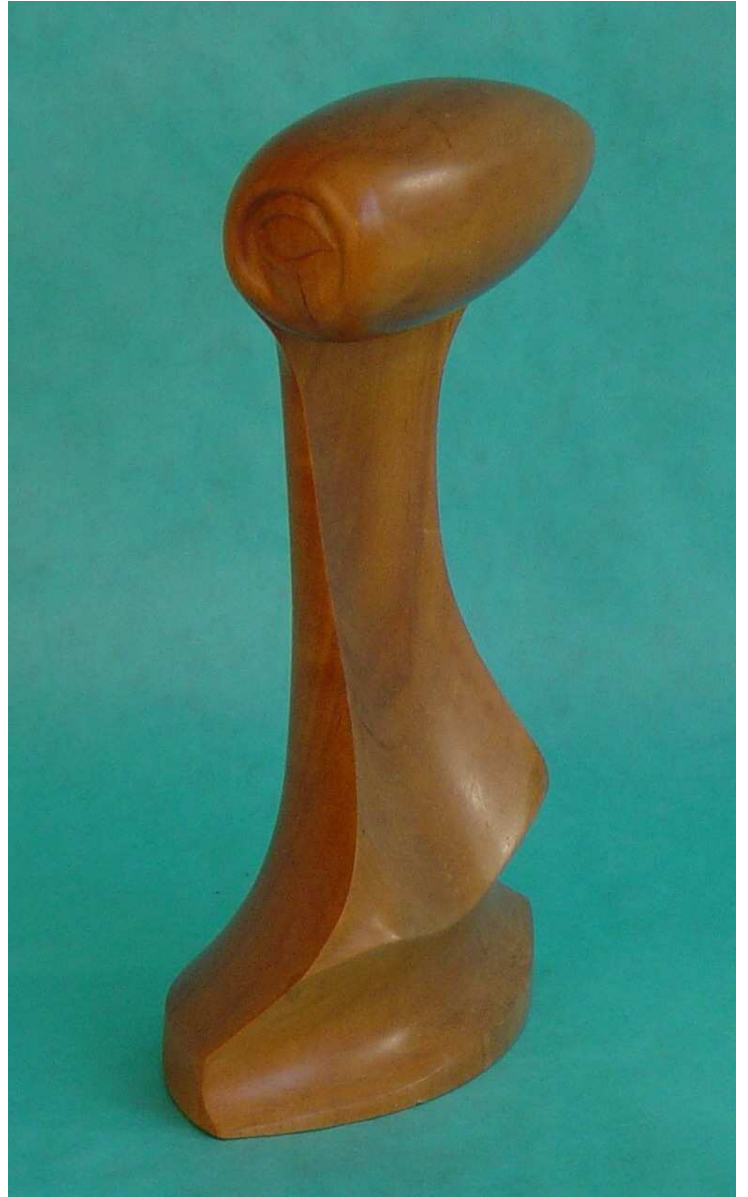




Divorce; He could not see, She would not say



Marriage too



One Eyed Lady



...but when she turned...
(sides one and two)



Napalm's Teardrops

Nick Romero



shells

Nick Romeo is a multidisciplinary artist, musician and writer. Nick lives in Pittsburgh Pennsylvania with his wife and cat named Megatron.



Zero Attachment



Future Proof



Mainline Literature



Media Spindles

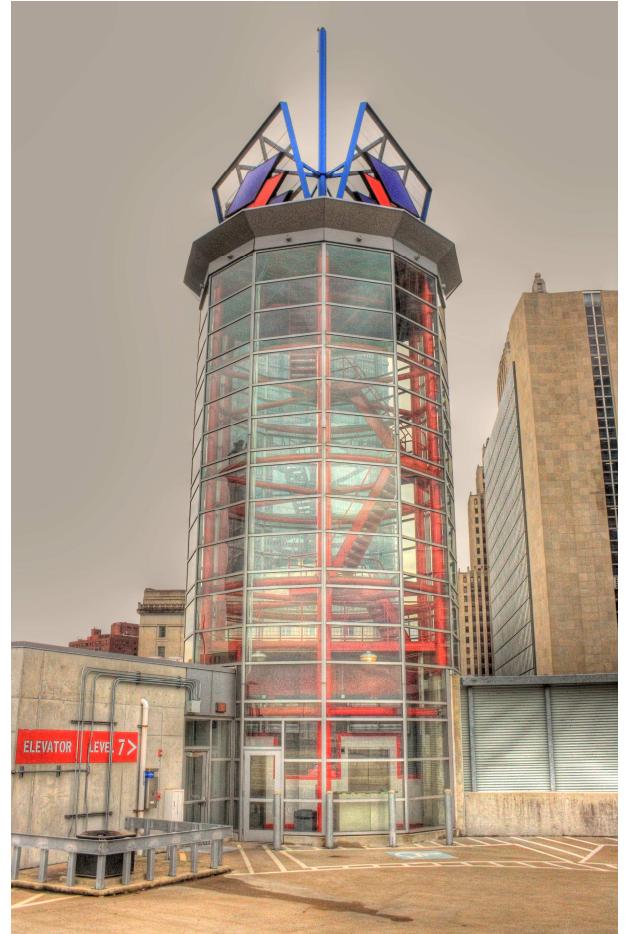


Watermark



The Known Compound

Merciful Cobwebs



Launch Cycle

Alternated Nations





Character Meandering

Janette Schaffer



West End Bridge

cityscapes

Janette Schafer is a freelance writer, photographer, and opera singer living in Pittsburgh, PA. She is a 2017 winner of the Maenad Fellowship in poetry through Chatham University. Upcoming and recent publications include: The Woman, Inc., Eyedrum Periodically, Nasty Women & Bad Hombres anthology.



Highland Park at Twilight



Pittsburgh
Skyline

Star Lake
at Dawn





Pier along the Allegheny River

Lisa Valle



Portraits

Lisa Valle is a self-taught artist. She is inspired by faces and traces mood through her use of color and texture. Another artist - her other muse - is her nephew, Daniel, whom she lost in 2006. Lisa lives and works in Portland, Oregon and is the mother of two teen age daughters.



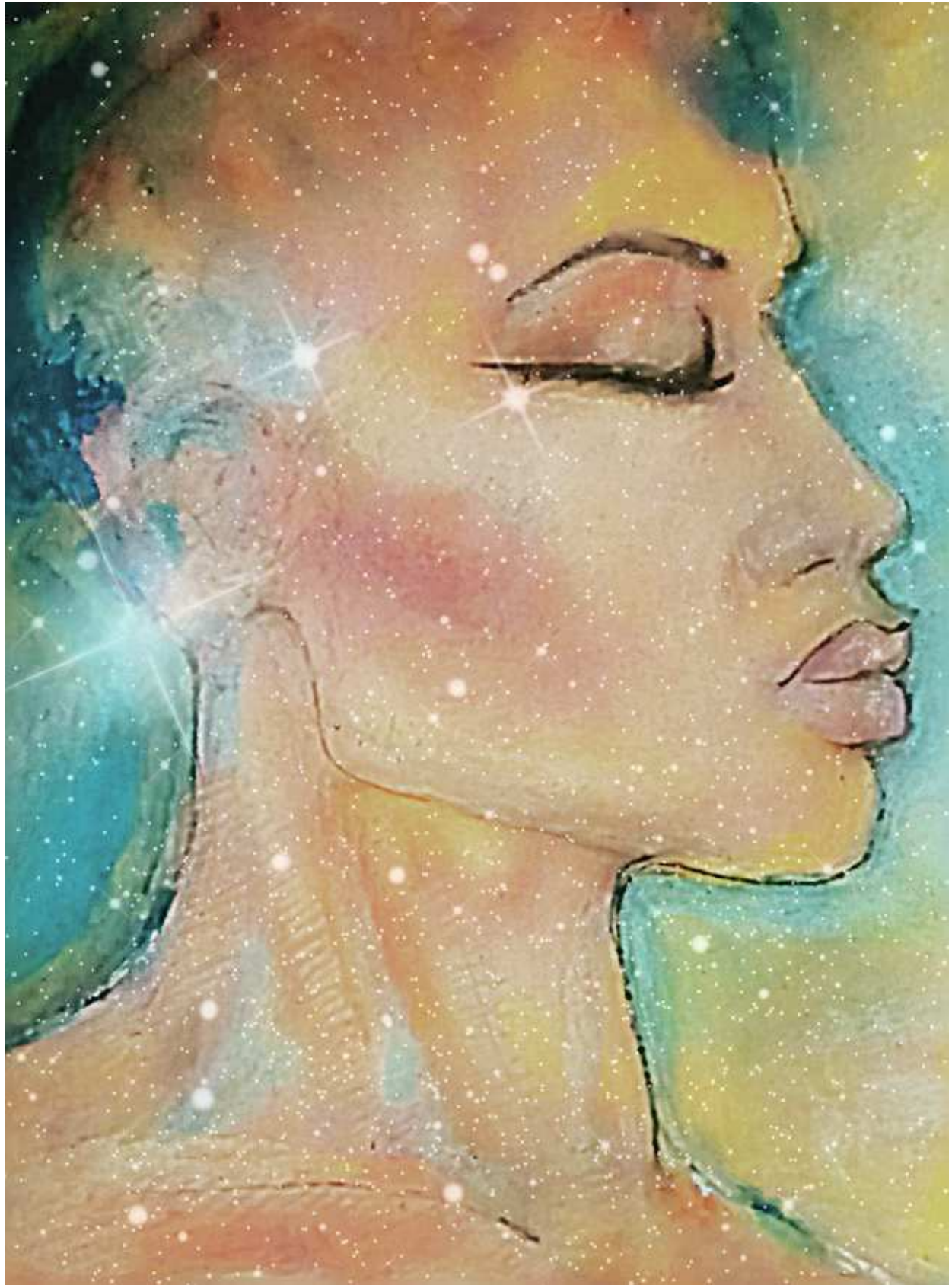
DaVinci Girl



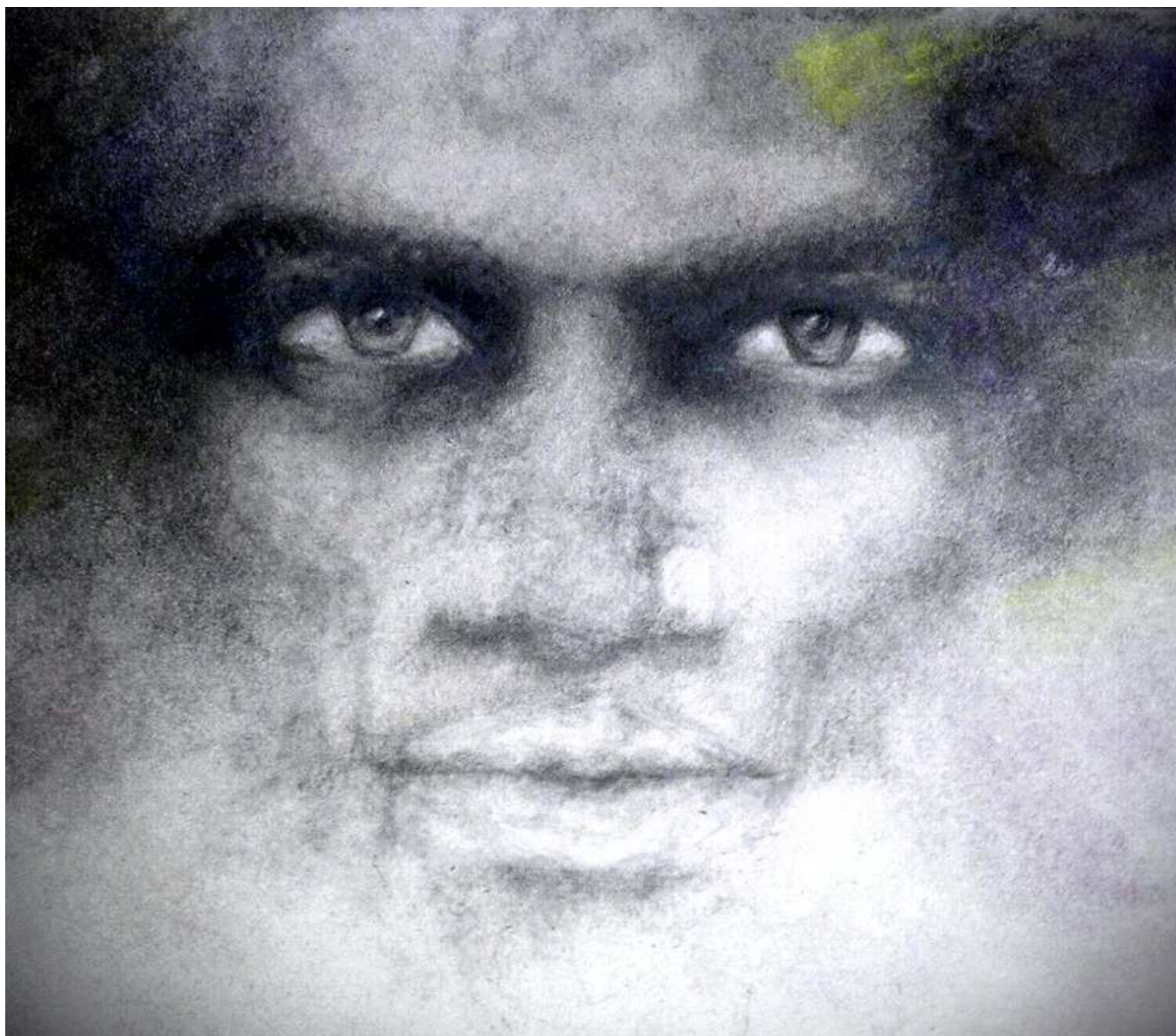
Iscariot



Esmeralda



Nefertiti



RGV



Jesus



Ragtime



Chicago



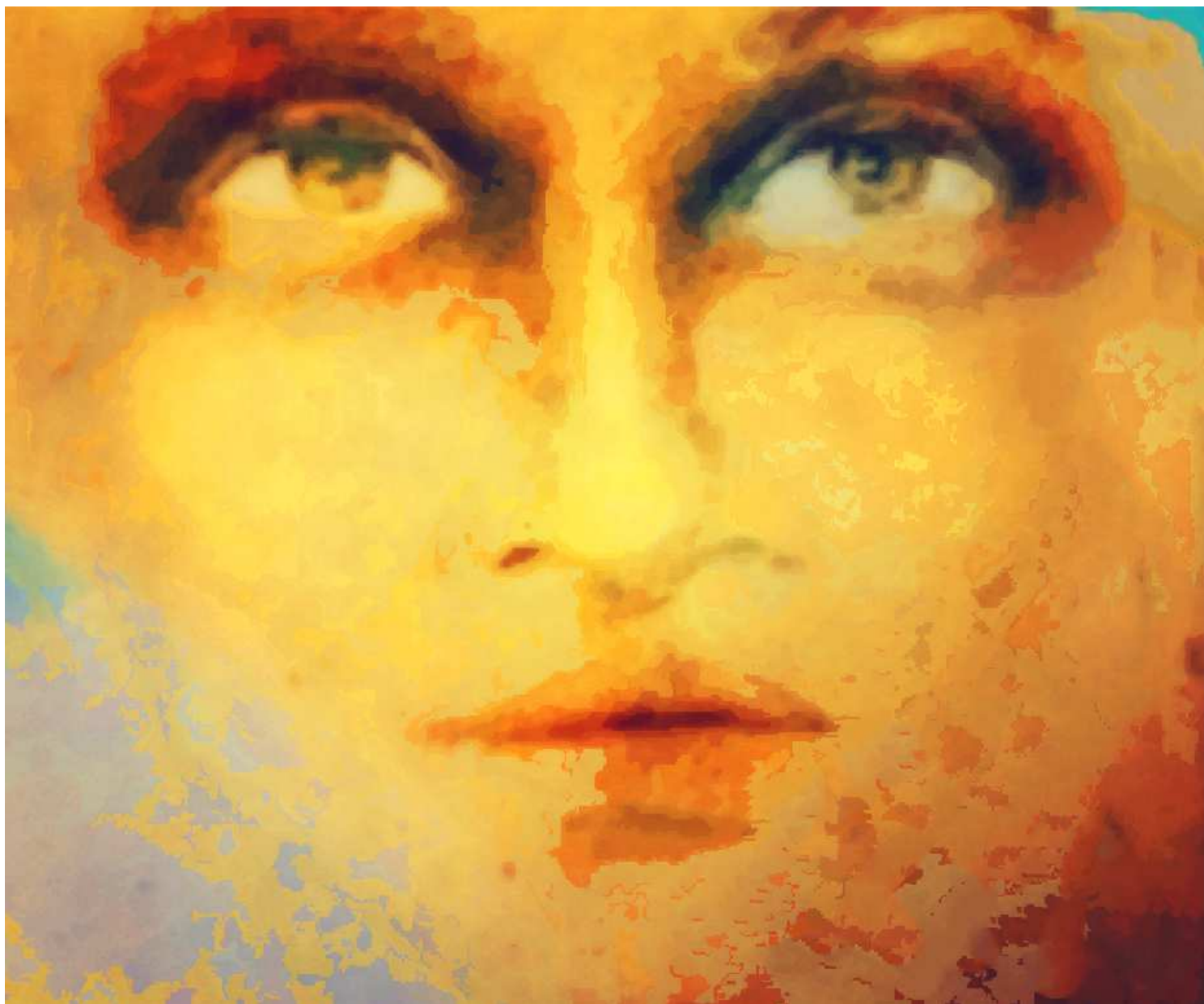
Lady Liberty



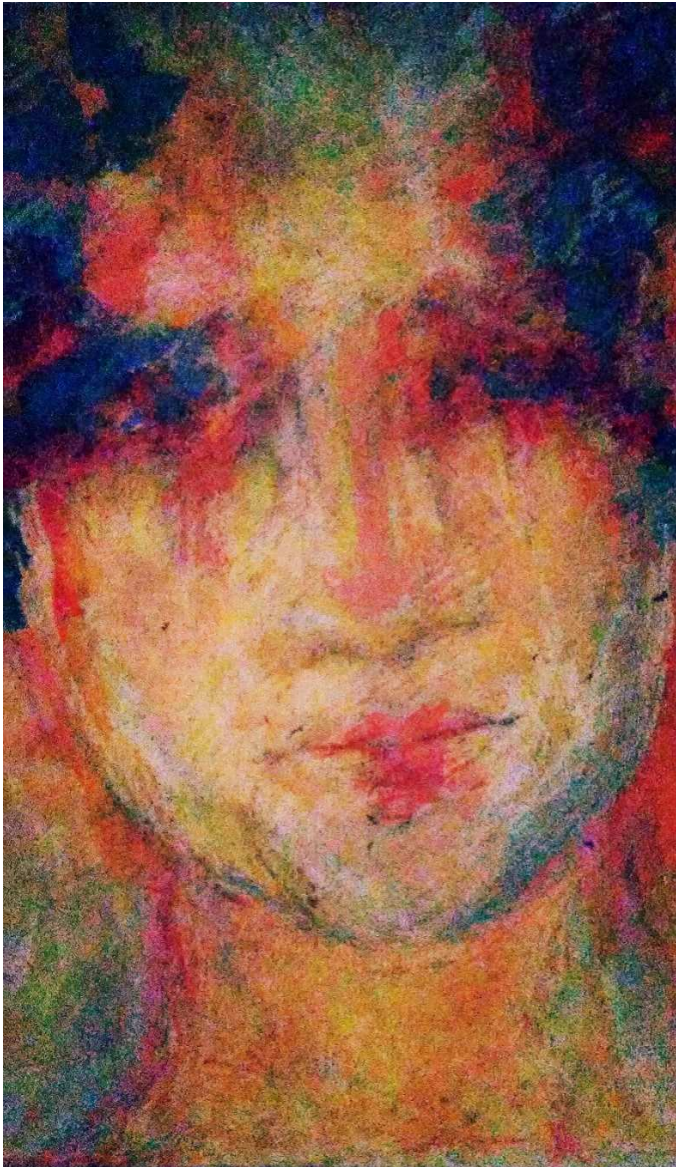
King Tut



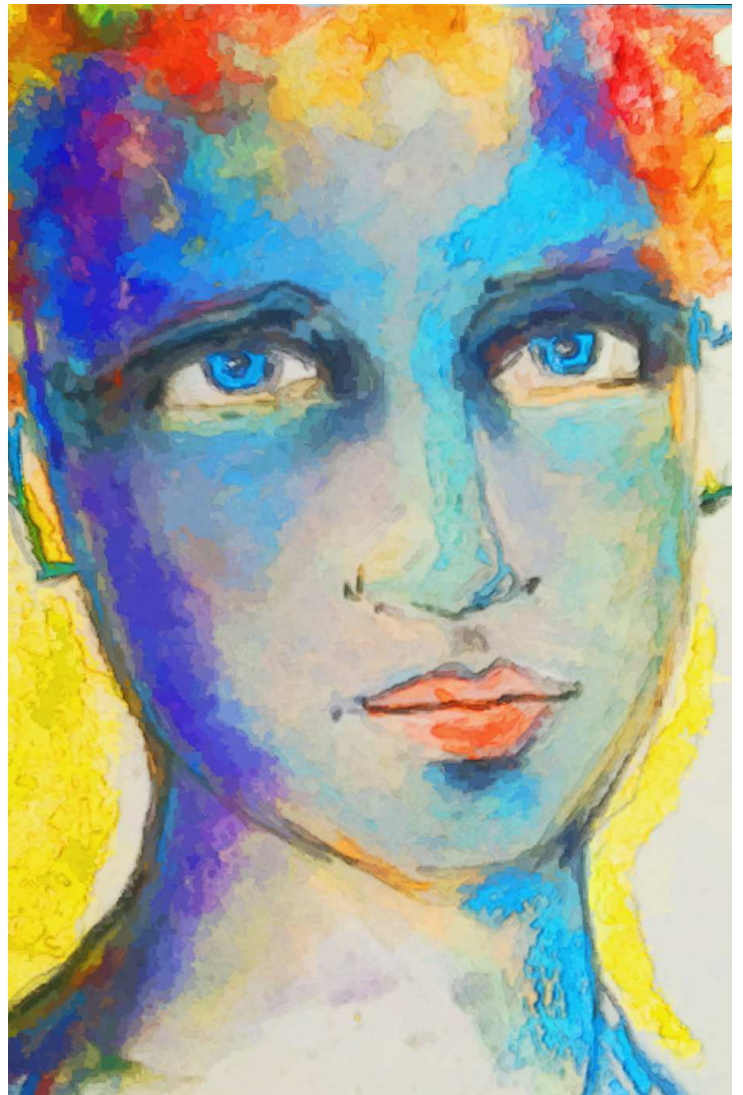
Loss



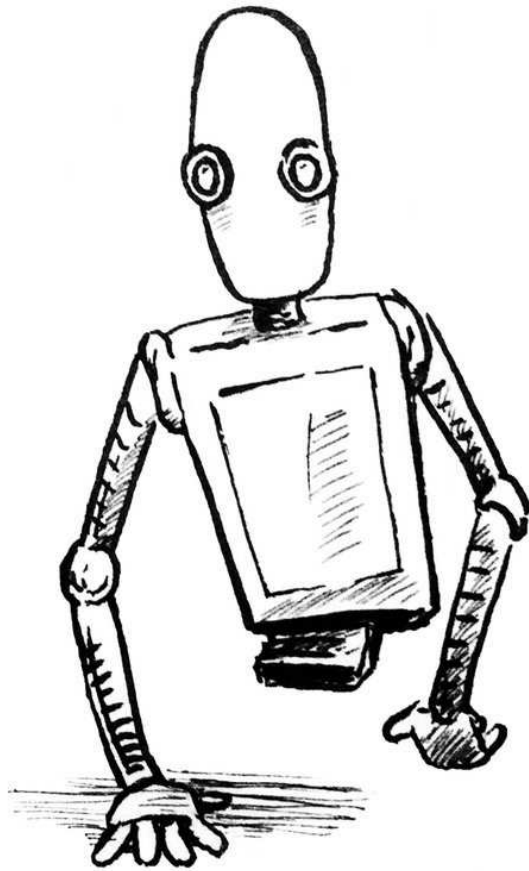
Mary Magdalene



Working Girl

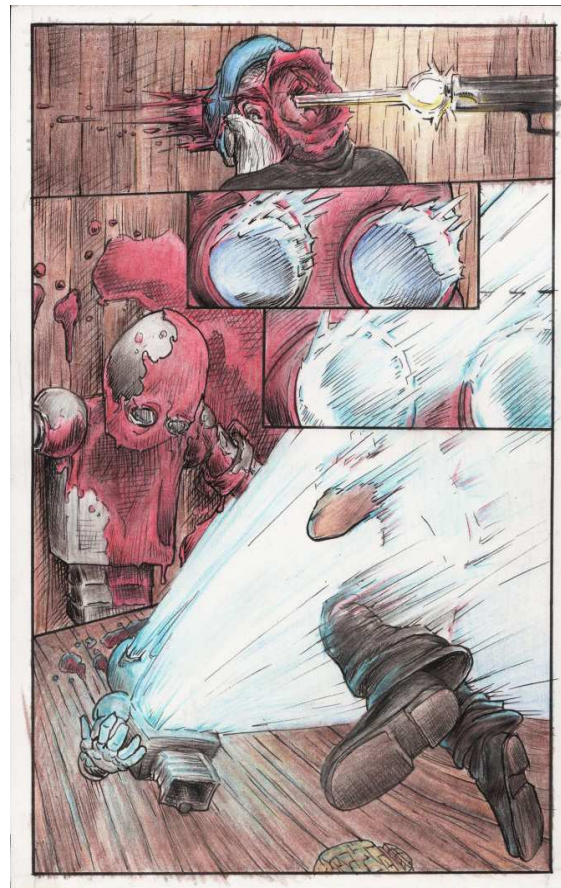
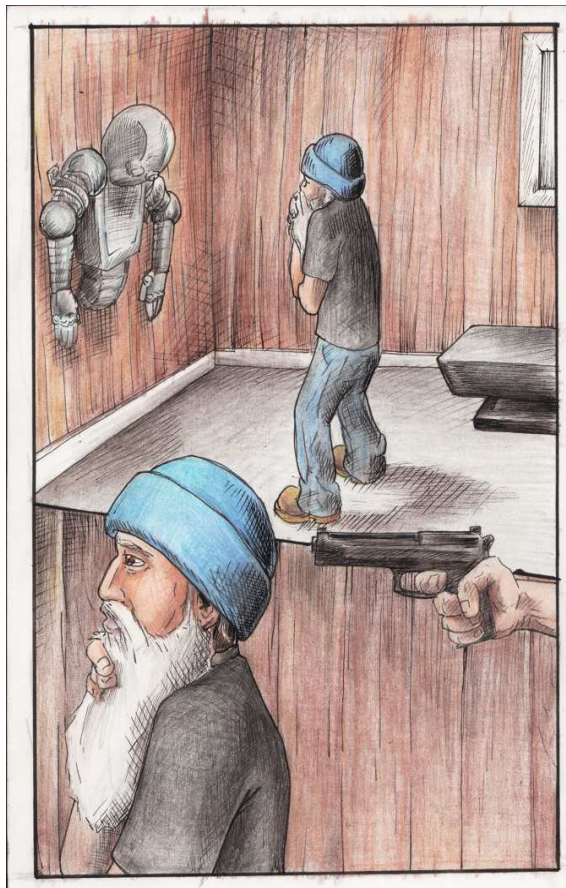


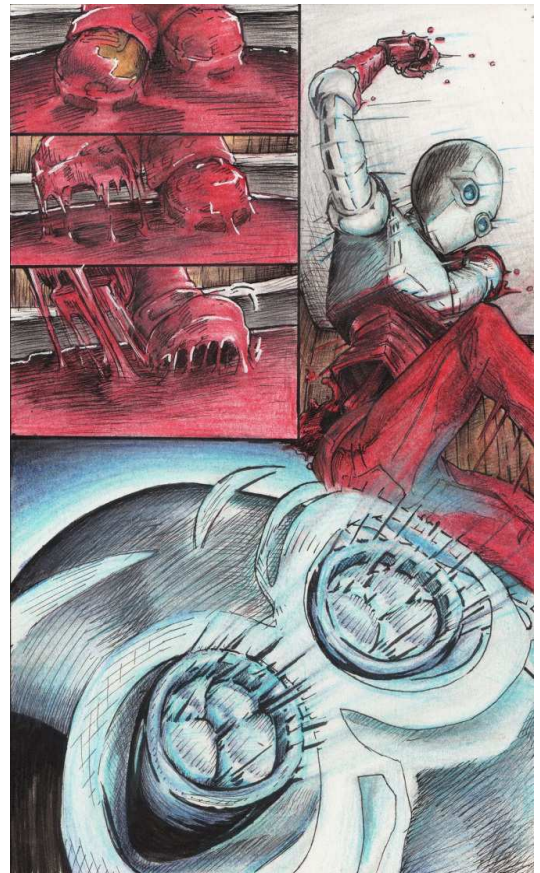
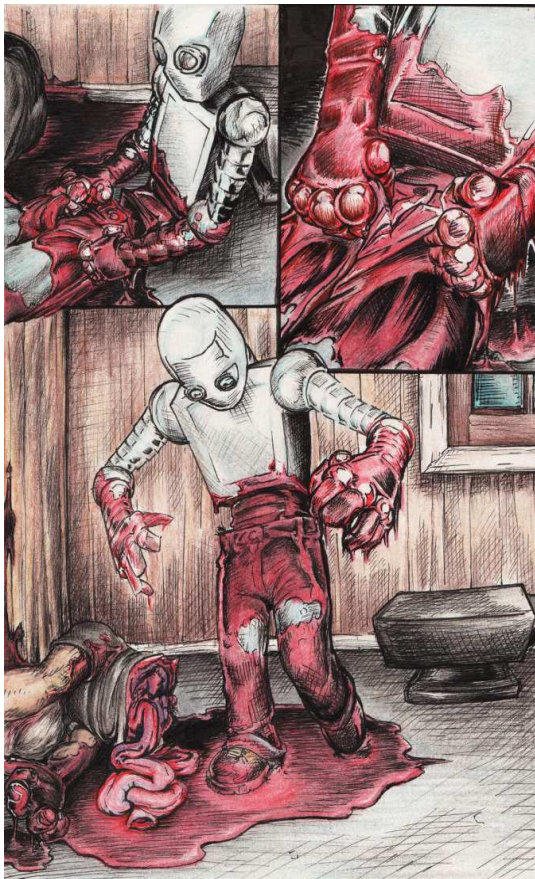
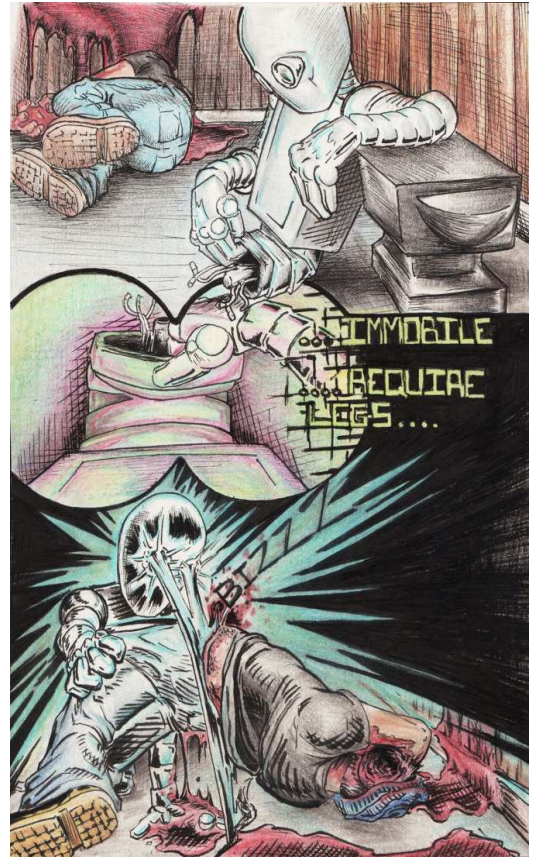
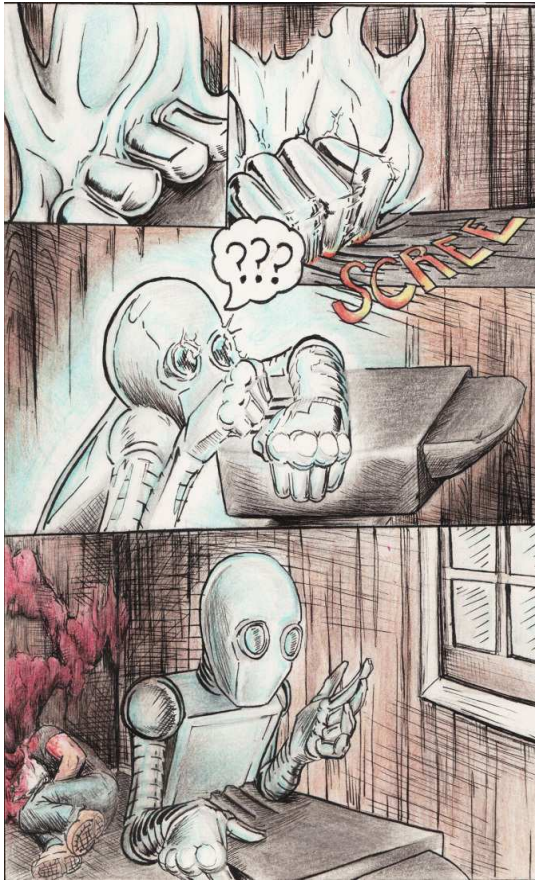
Blue

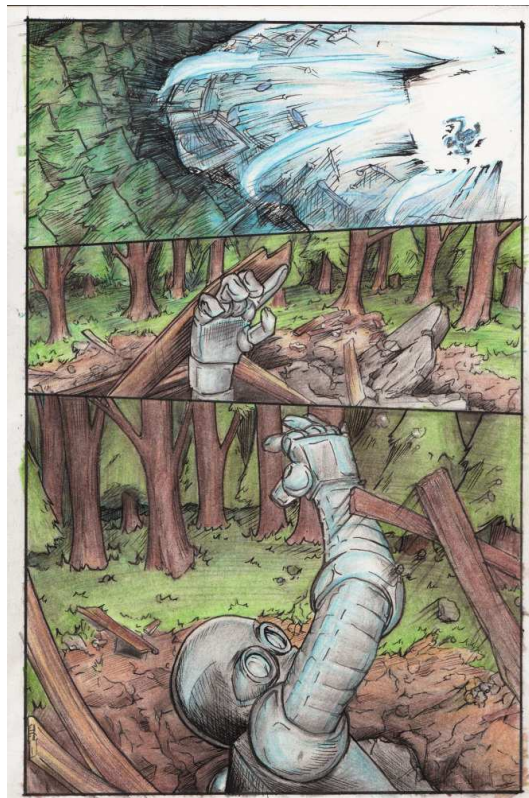


Metalman

Jon Strode is a Saint Louis artist - now of Portland Oregon - who specializes in surrealism. He most enjoys taking different entities and combining them to make something imaginative and strange. His interest varies from pen and ink to acrylic paints. The series featured here is in graphic novel style.

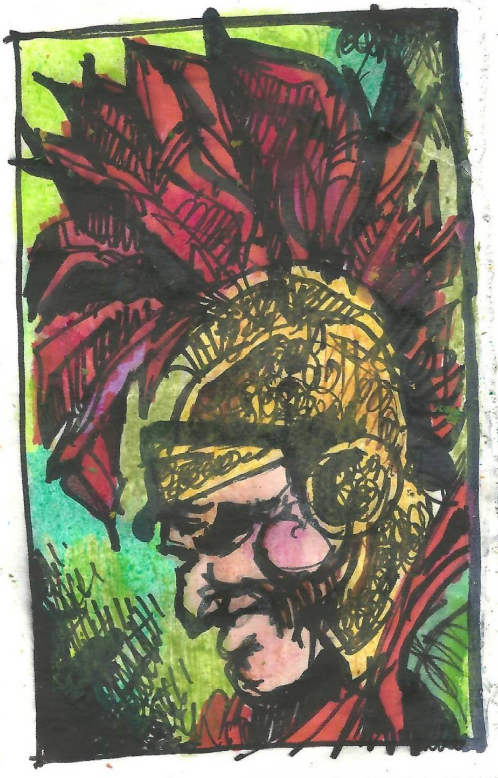






Anthony Acri

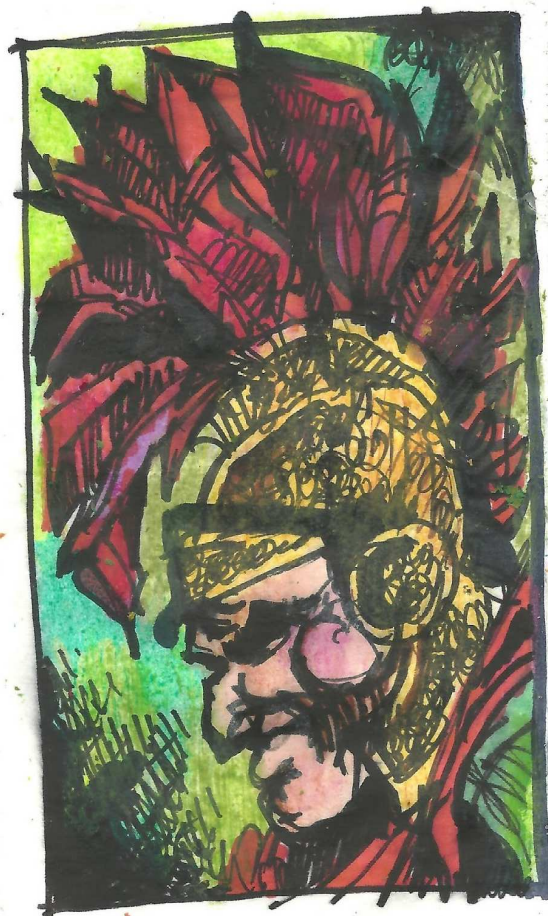
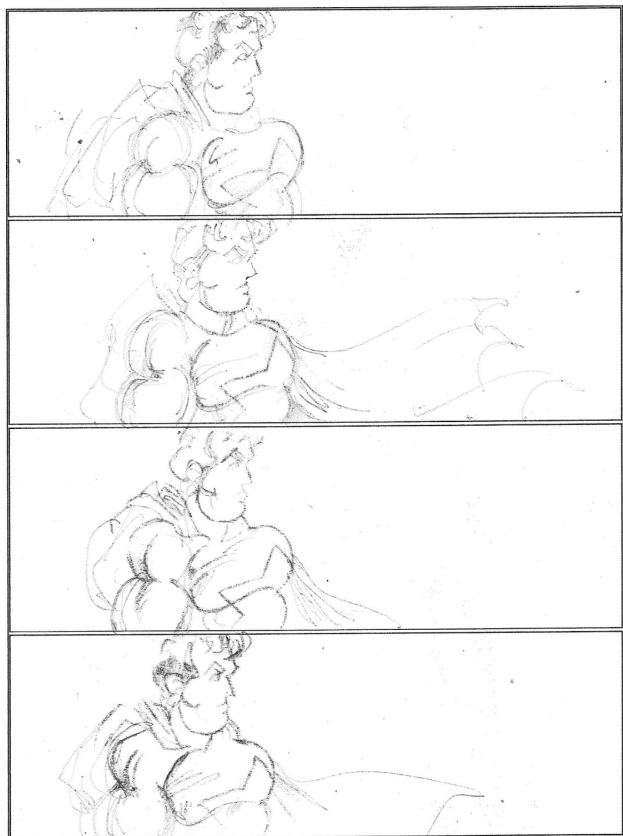
- Gods and superheroes: comic strip studies
- Act IV: a blog post

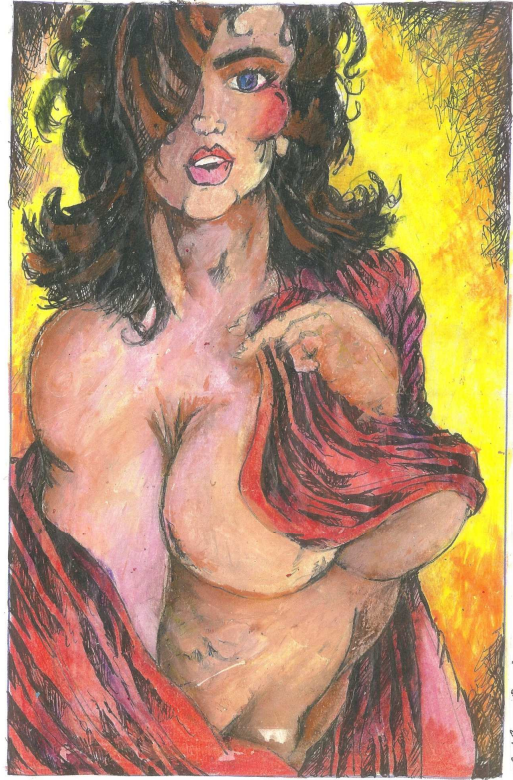


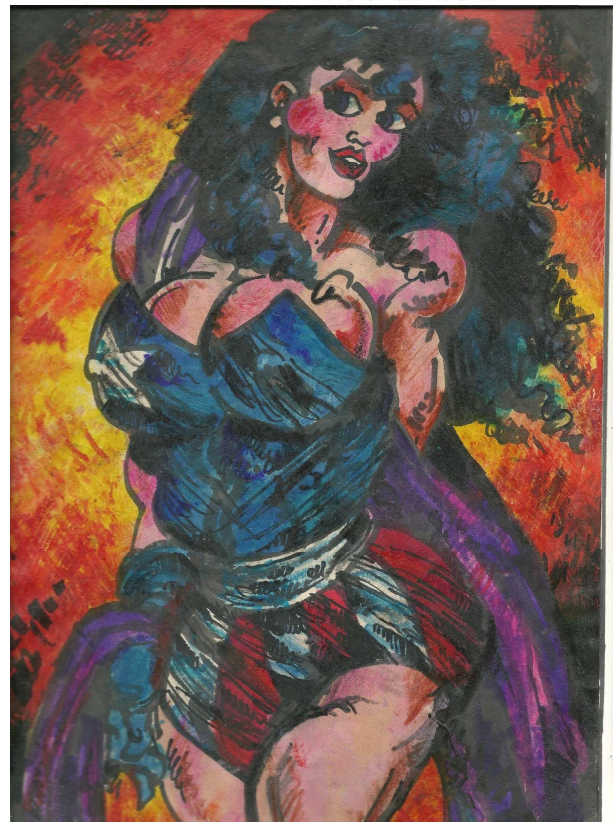
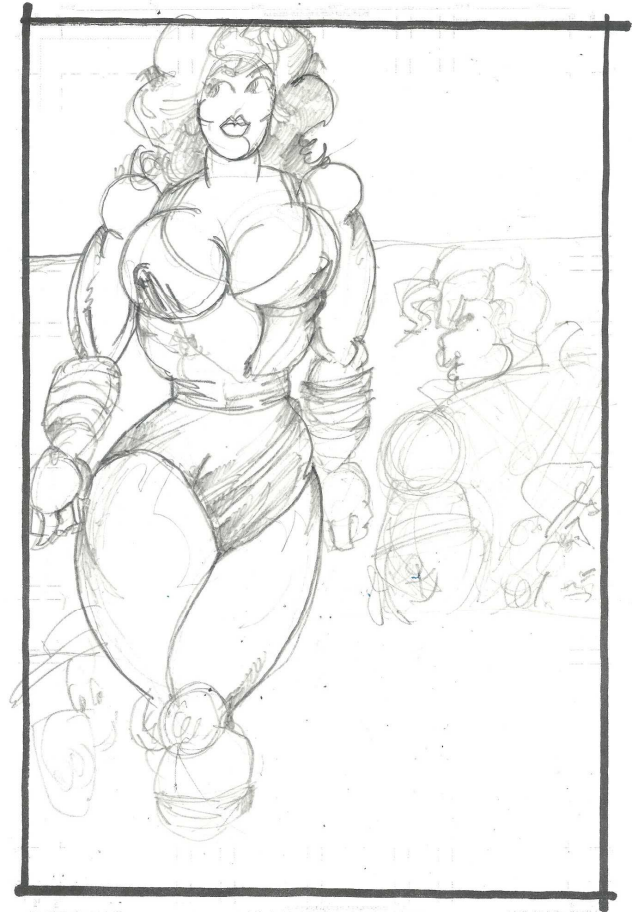
Anthony Acri is a cartoonist and blogger from the suburbs of Pittsburgh. He reports that he was "taught sexuality, decline and fall, and speech and drama by the brethren of the end of the Golden Age" and that he's "devoted to the Republic as Roman boys ought."

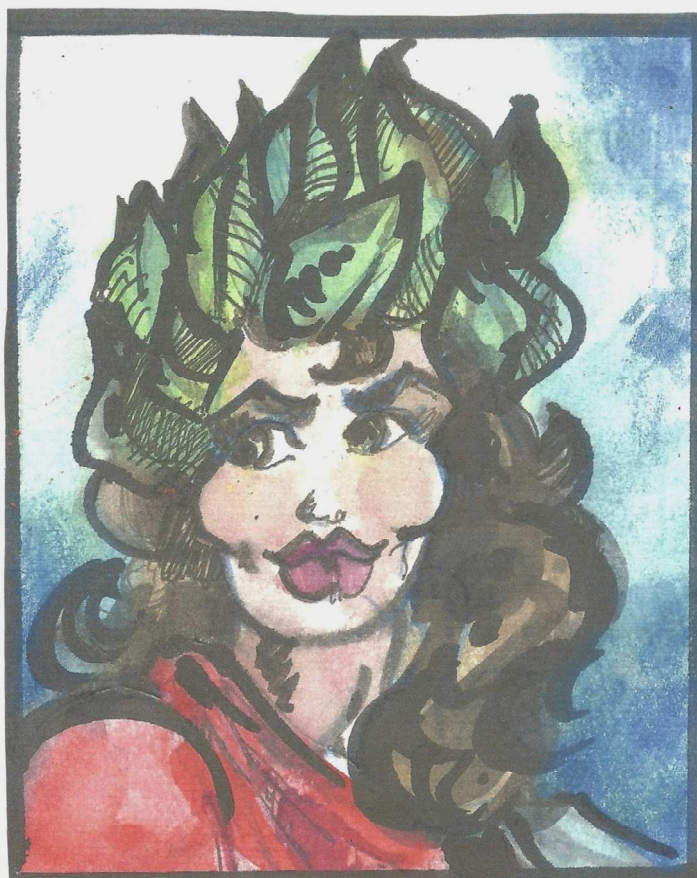


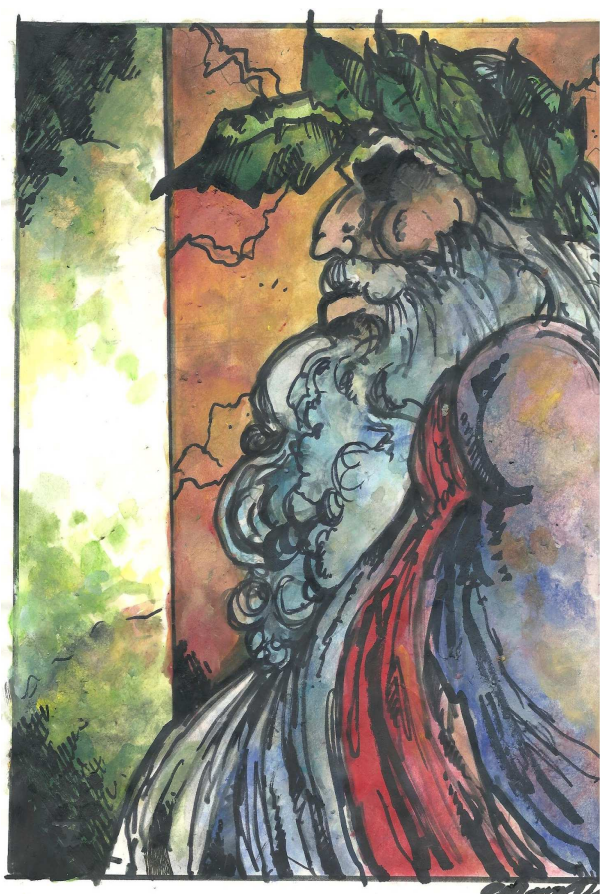
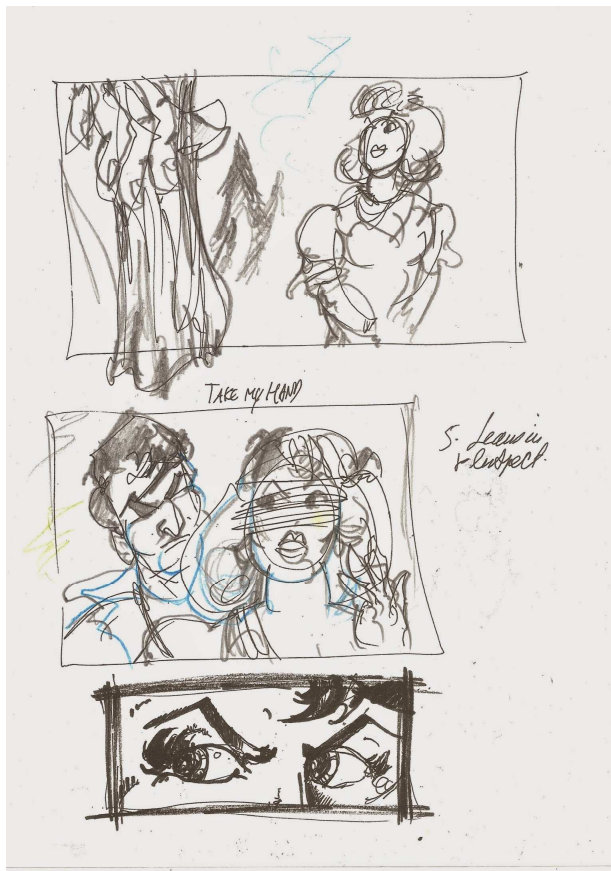
Gods and superheroes: comic strip studies



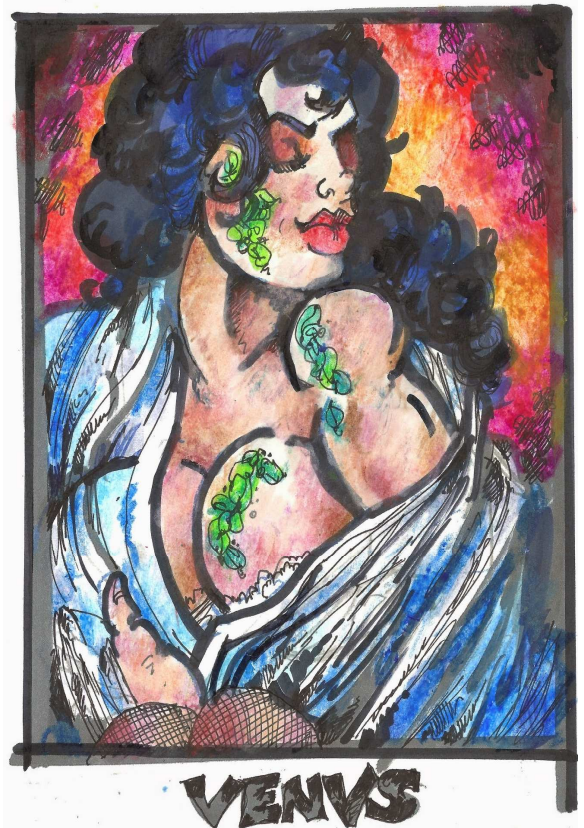
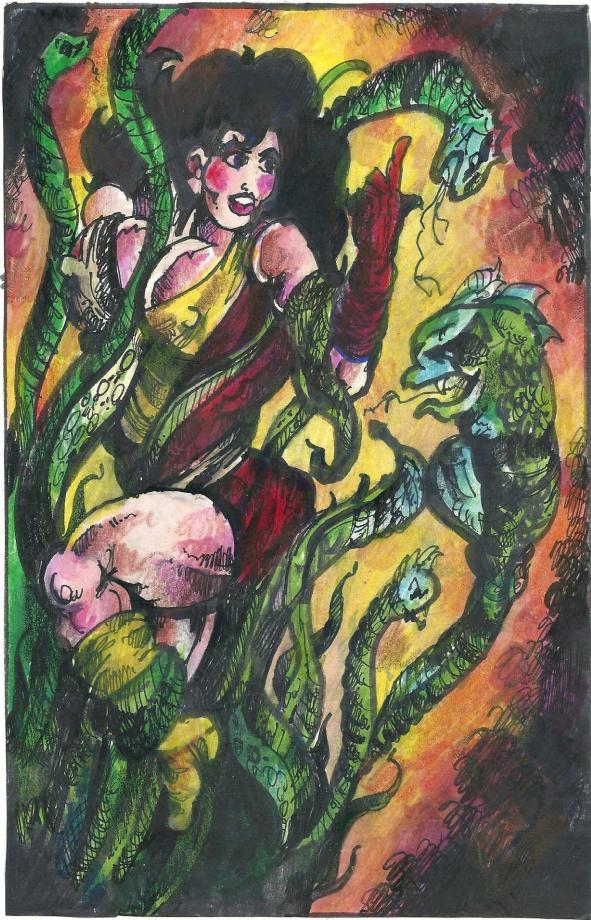












ACRI RADIO COMIX

ROMAN ARTWORKS IN THE FALL OF AMERICA. BUSTY HEROINES, BIG SHOULDERED HEROES, ALL AS AN
ANTEDOTE TO DARK BROODING COVERTLY MEAN, GOTHIC COLD CLOSET HOMO COMICS OF VENDTTAS. I
AM DEVOTED TO THE REPUBLIC.....-AA.

ACT IV





A SWORD...

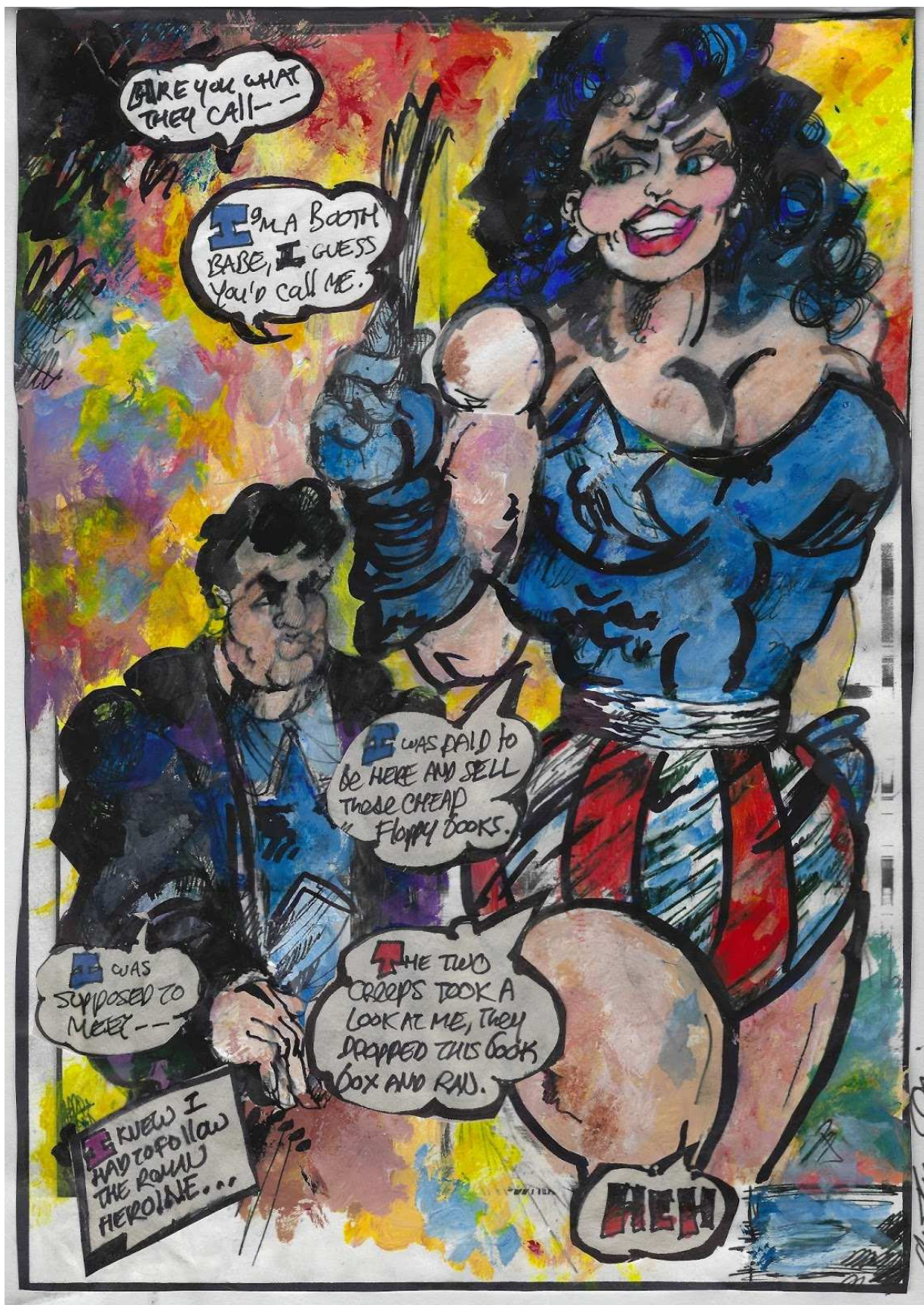
IN SNOW.

IN THE ICE NEAR
GLACIA, THE MAN
NAMED JOE, AS THE
SMITTEN VIOLET NOW
CALLS HIM, STANDS AS
A SILENT SENTRY -
A NOBLE MAN.

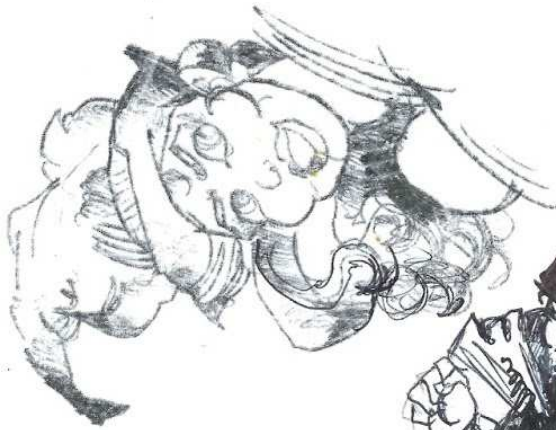
HE WAS
SUMMONED HERE,
HE WAS CALLED BY
THE WIND ITSELF.
HE RECALLS THIS
VALLEY...

BUT FAR OFF, HE
HEARS THE
WHINE OF ACQUA
WOLVES...









THIS STUFF
WAS POISON TO ME!
Now it's JUST ROCK!
I'm NOT JUST A
SUPERMAN...











I LOVE YOUR
WORK, TONY.
MAY I CALL YOU
TONY?

SURE.

I TAKE IT ALL
YOUR HEROES
ARE LATINO.

Well,
LATINO,
AT LEAST.
NO OFFENSE,
JOE.

NAME
TAKEN.
I WAS
HOPING
YOU WERE
HISPANIC.

NO, ITALIAN.

AHHH,
CLOSE ENOUGH
FOR GOMMIT
OYAH. NEH.

Mr.
Scherendous,
eh? That's cute.

SCHER
ENDOUS

AS I HAVE
COME TO KNOW
THINGS, I AM
HERE... NEW
AMSTERDAM.

2 JAN. 70. I USE
THE ROMAN TIME
OF COMMENTARIES
AS I WAS TAUGHT
BY THE MUNS, BACK

WHEN I WAS
A BOY AT ST.
DON'S. THAT
WASNT SO LONG
AGO...

MY NAME IS
CURCLS. LIKE
THE ROMAN
KNIGHT...

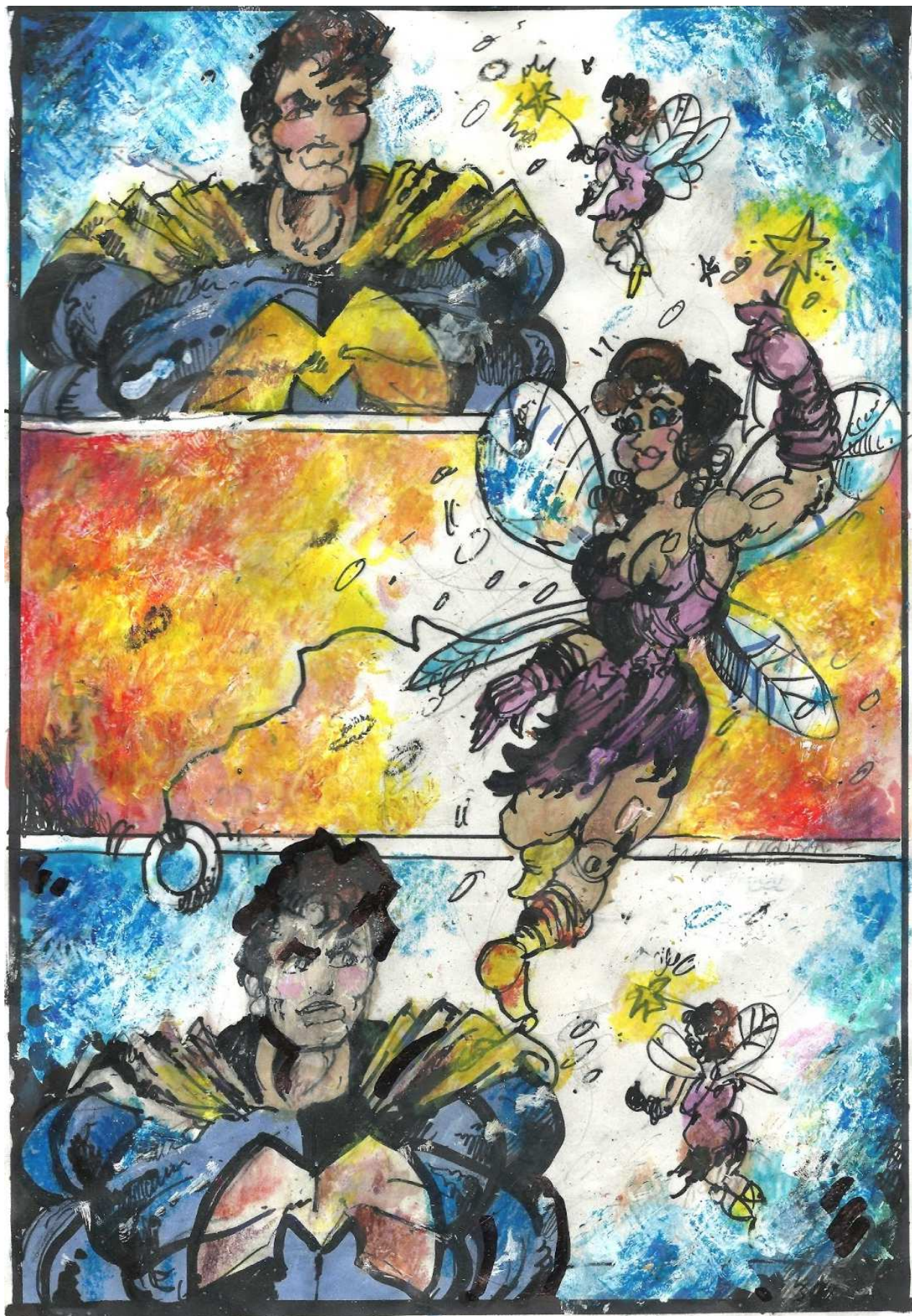
AS A KID, I
USED TO BUY 100
ROMAN KNIGHTS
OUT OF COMICS
FOR A BUCK...



A
RAG
COMIC.

I AM AN ANCIENT
POWER FANTASY, ONE
AINT BEEN SEEN SINCE
THEY PUT BLACK JACK
COMICS OUTTA
CIRCLES

I AM A RETURN
TO THE GOLDEN
AGE... NOT DOC
SAUSAGE AS MUCH
AS VIRGIL, OLD...





PAPERPLAYSET



I take it I missed a modern dress Caesar on decades tv, which is sad and strange in that I only have about ten stations anymore, which suits me fine as if I'm going to watch Gilligan's Island I rather watch Beatnik Maynard and aging pirate movie star Alan Hale as the almost Ollie like skipper than watch that bloated bullshit version on crn. ALL these images were accepted, as long as I ignored the story that surrounded them, more illustration than anything, and gratefully placated each instillation, each and every opportunity as unlike some, I take what I can get.

I missed it, but to be honest haven't really taken much of a view of any of it, Studio One, as in this awful time in which of all things, a Goldwater girl can try to foment ww3 with Russians, and somehow meathead is fine with looking under the bed for all those who fucked up her Imperial delusions of being queen of the Tiber. Ah, speaking of ...for...?, Caesar before any of you white chicks or Jewish in laws, I SUGGEST YOU REREAD IT OR AT LEAST READS ITS CYCLE EPICS, AND FIND OUT WHO OCTAVIAN WAS. Oh, that IS Bill in more than just my version. But as wrote in TCOJC, felt a tremor in the land out there, as I know you don't go Roman without an implied insult worthy of Oxbridge sissies and ninnies like George Pill, and so I want to see this end, I kind of dare you to destroy Trump, as don't think destroying a plutocrat is something that GE theater wants to make a precedent, like again Cato's being beaten by CAESARS MEN IN THAT STREET, AND I DO REMEMBER BILL NO LESS BRINGING THAT UP, AS HE KNEW Virgilio's as good as mute to the avenging Hillary cunts and thus his asides as dues and mean slated vicious turns of a screw were something you often smiled through, and the boys who took my lady liberty took it as they told me, Tony it was a lovely respite from the 'swill' out there, their words, didn't as Harry Shearer would say, get the punch line. As missed Caesar as much as anything, but again, the correct roman roads go my way, as it seems I am getting befriended by wayward lesbians and Arabs and even transvestites, who I guess liked my line about who would anyone be against the Word transvestite, as too roman perhaps for the prefects who didn't fall far from the hanging tree, as again America I mean, is nothing to me.

But I must say I am sorry to see ancient third Rome Russia be demeaned and dratted for some Goldwater daisy flower girl. No, I'll never forget and I will be the mad man at the roman triumph that day she is squeezed into power as if a girdle, that my own father a fascist from Italy thought both Goldwater and Reagan mere clowns, and won't forget or fail to mention she voted for a graven-faced Cicero. Yet that line about extremism is his, and if one can get a house payment for gratis, what the hell...?, the last person your Epicurus nigger saint MLK voted against, so there. As I can't watch these kinescopes were William Shatner looks like the ghost of Virgil, even though I knew that Leslie Nielsen is in father Gore's play, still can't miss my beloved Della and Perry, God knows. As somehow mistakenly looking at this CBS petition sheepishly stolen from Orson without credit as they wanted the rights to war of the worlds, as Payly, I guess, was doing the wash. But reading some of this sewage, I was shocked that something and some cretin was writing about a Caesar death with only that 'playwrights' jumbled translations as some kind of erudition, as he tactfully said in some Google library book, that Antony was the villain of Caesar, as my money was always on Caesar, hence the Bush daughter stinking of rye media tarring Trump with it lest you recall he was antiwar here in the cages less Sparta. The creep, he said something amusing, in that Caesar's men, like Antony, were all shown as fascists, duh, but that Virtuous Brutus, where the hell

did that ever come from...?, and Cassias were shown as bankers and politicians. you know more decent people than soldiers, did you want to expand on that, sir, no I just meant ...I believe they were there as aide de camps, when Caesar detained Pompeii's troops by him believing scared Caesar, who steamed do over and uncle, hehe, when you quite people who limp dear Hilary, you start to limp... and asking for a truce, and look that word up, and when German reinforcements came to aid Caesar, I'm no fan of games or thrones, he was cut to ribbons when came to accept a plea agreement, as the priests warned me of the vipers of power. So, never save Caesar from drowning, a tip to than national biscuit company that wishes to make Hillary if not the new Caesar, A NEXT Herod. The most noble and decent roman laughed at this turn, glad that his placed as at the dog at the table was secured, [gay joke there,]as Antony a gloomy burning soldier worthy of being played by a Welsh drunkard in love with miss tits, merely had enough of that king vitamin fagot, and said when Caesar said we won today because ire enemy was a coward, he had it, and shouted back, we 'won' today because the enemy, was a Roman and took you are your word. Jews and Greeks win with Trojan Horseshoes , Romans rather die.

Ah, having read Caesar in the final I think the epitome of whatever story was here that allowed Willie to use the buffo stuff he came up without of Plutarch for his life of Pompeii that was given the kibosh by his banishing angel Lizzie, I think the whole meat of the story is that Brutus was as loved by Caesar, as anyone, thus the line, mistakenly put there for posterity, which when what was really said was, you also my son have joined the mob, which these men being Italians always can be a joke worthy of Al Franken. But never get that Antony as the villain of this, as this Kreton said, been reading everything on Revolvly lately, made it a point in that way GV tells us all to avoid in that standing on assaulted principal shit that comes from women and always agreed with by Jewish husbands if they know what's good for them. I got my play back from the upper state new York guys who would have liked to sue it but it's hard for Indy filmmakers to execrate 1970 as mad men did, so I guess my Etruscans are fucked. And I think about remaking it again as a house of blue leaves thing about Joey Bishop, who actually fired everyone in his show ala Ted Baxter, including aunt Harriet, Guy Marx, the guy who played Kelsey on All in the family, Bill Bixby, and Marlo Thomas, in a cast too good for him. And as was told after having to redo the pages in publishing fixedly ways that the two places I sent MS flied again, too both seemed to rethink things, as the white chicks and the imperialists, it's what you are at the Bush stables, sorry, seemed to find this Blog. Too bad, did bring MS back to life, and still got 1466 views in ten days, which is more than your smarmy comic rags will ever get.

Antony as villain, not to my mother, and not to Willie, as he used him in the better sequel, and he dies and burns in a hell even Ertiwan came to defend. This creep called him an opportunist, and it was too late, and alongside for the Perry done by Erle, always the best, and had to stop before got to Marlon as Antony, another tome he saved his career by passing as a wop. As he showed a ROMAN DEVOTION, I read life of Antony kids, I read them all, all the books that Bill pretends to love and Barry preens to hate, all of them, and they mean something to me, as that is why I get Romans centurions in Arab newspapers now, as after tell them what the bell Arabs are, as you've been as they say upstaged by men In Pretorian Black, who turned out despite the vowels on their names to be at

the prosecutors table after all. Aren't you all...? I was asked f I'd like to redo my Caesar as a comic book with Trump, but can't add to that's Swill, even as Roman as Id be as now rabbis and lesbians and even transvestites are seeing me as heroic, and I'm bored of this, wake me when Trump is derailed, something tells me it will end bad, though hell just go back to the life Billy the kid dreamed of having for thirty years, as when he quoted Sallust, or mentioned Cathy Loving, I knew acutely what he was talking about. As I saw Rachel dear actually tell who was out there shopping crap stories at the beg men, and she told is all, I have an unkling who it is, The fault dear Brutssssssshhhhhh, and in Coriolanus, the play I'd dare them to out on in the weeds, lets the roman filth figure things out, there are parts for him too in that , as what's his name, the guy who falls at Actium I guess, as after all I was everything that Bill and Barry and legacies, all had to tippie toe to preen that they were.

Next; Breakfast in America brunch with Zbigneu

Support our local art and cultural centers



Photo - Creative Commons

Maude Kerns Art Center Eugene, Oregon

Maude Kerns Art Center is a non-profit community center for the visual arts located in Eugene, Oregon. The center was founded in 1950 by a group of local artists including Maude Kerns. The center currently hosts art installations, classes in the creative arts, and public and private events. The center is housed in a historical church building built in 1895.

Elizabeth R. Pollak is a retired physician. She lives and writes in Salt Lake City, Utah. Her work has appeared in publications for the Utah Shakespeare Festival.



What are the Odds?

A book I read recently, *Half a Life** by Darin Strauss, rattled my personal core in a way it likely wouldn't have at most other times. On Friday July 24, 2015, my twenty-five year-old great-nephew Tommy died of Ewing's sarcoma. *Half a Life* is Strauss' memoir about an auto-bicycle accident in which a teenaged girl struck on a bicycle died and Strauss, the driver of the car, survived. I was in the middle of *Half a Life* when Tommy died.

For days I was deeply affected by Tommy's death, partially incapacitated, and for a couple of days semi-crippled as my grief somaticized as severe low back pain. I walked around in a daze, reached out almost blindly to find others sitting in the same place I found myself, but even within my family, who knew and loved Tommy, who know and love his mother, no one was quite in my place. It seemed nearly incomprehensible that they, that the world, that I, could just keep on going, get up and eat breakfast, walk the dogs, chat with a neighbor in the hall, rifle in the freezer for something to thaw for dinner, sit down at my desk and write.

This passage from *Half a Life* says what I already knew to be true, but needed to be reminded:

I didn't understand that everyone's tepid emotions were reasonable. The panicky little drum that kept me going required that this event, this death, be epochal. Of course, it was that: this was an incomprehensibly sad occurrence for our school, our town. But I didn't yet know that there are some truths — that even young people die occasionally; that there's only so much gnashing of teeth and weeping over another person's tragedy — there are some truths that only come to us softened by beautiful stratagems of self-deception. Nobody wants to be reminded. Nobody wants to hear the sad song again. (47-48)

The reason for me that Tommy's death needed to be epochal was that it was supposed to be my death. In May 2012 when Tommy's cancer, first diagnosed in June 2010, recurred, I was diagnosed with ovarian cancer. For months, he and I underwent treatment simultaneously. We joked together about how "hair is over rated." His Mom, my niece, encouraged me when I was down, gave me gastronomic survival advice, and soothed my discouragement over infection setbacks. There was still great optimism that Tommy was going to beat his cancer, to be cured, to go on to survive, begin his adult life, go to college, get a girlfriend, move out of his parents' home. I had a sliver of survival hope for myself, but mostly acceptance that my outcome would go the other way. We both had odds, but with opposite polarity. Tommy's odds were 60-40 Life-Death. Mine were 80-20 Death-Life. And it seemed right. I had no desire to trade. I would have liked to see us both survive, but if one had a choice, there was no contest. Tommy. I was 63. He was 22.

Tommy and I both went into remission at the end of 2012, I for the first time, he for the second. By the time the family gathered in Massachusetts over Labor Day 2013, my strength was returning and I was beginning to wonder, *might I survive after all?* Tommy

was there, thin and frail as a cornstalk after a storm. He required a cane to walk, and was obviously still far from recovered from his brutal anti-cancer treatment regimen (much harsher than mine had been), but he cracked jokes with all of us, and teased his grandmother. He and his cousin, my son Ben, planned a visit for Tommy in Portland, Oregon the following spring. Travel! Tommy's young, fragile life was revving its engines.

January 2014: Tommy's routine follow-up scans showed the cancer had not only returned but had further metastasized. Over the next 18 months, as I celebrated two years cancer free, then two and a half, Tommy endured more radiation, more chemotherapy, new cocktails, clinical trials and finally, in April 2015 came the message of surrender. Treatment options had been exhausted. Cancer prevailed. Tommy was relegated to palliative care. "*It's not fair,*" I railed to the implacable universe. There I was, back to 20 and 30 mile bike rides, and about to take a ten day cruise on the Elbe river in Germany.

My despair, when I heard that day in July from my niece that "Tommy is at peace now," took on a new quality, and the essence of *Half a Life* engulfed me. Years after the accident that so altered his life, as Strauss stood in the kitchen with his wife: " 'Well,' she was saying, 'it's like what's the name of that term? . . . Survivor's guilt. That's the term,' Susanna said." (154)

Survivor's guilt. That's what I was feeling. Distraught as I had been over Tommy's terminal course, I had not been prepared for *this* reaction to his death.

I shouldn't have been, but was at first, paralyzed by self-reproach. *What right do I have to be alive?* The urge to reach out and the shame of my silence finally overcame my impotence, and I wrote to Tommy's parents:

It is not the natural order of life. Grief will forever be your bedfellow, the stone on your shoulders, the pebble in your shoe. But so too will be those joyous memories of your golden boy, that prancing towhead poking on the beach for hermit crabs. It may come to pass that you will find a way of existing alongside the unfulfilled longings and expectations of a life. You are in a place that none of us who haven't been there can know.

But in a way, so was I.

After a silent interval during which I began to wonder if they had decided to grieve alone, to my relief, his parents issued an invitation to the *celebration* of Tommy's life. To my poignant amusement it stated: "*Casual attire is required with the suggestion of wearing a politically or socially incorrect T-Shirt. Also a time of sharing will be held to tell your favorite story about Tom or the opportunity to share a story, poem or joke with a humorous or perhaps slightly inappropriate theme. Tom loved to make us groan and chuckle while reading such things to us as we sat in our living room enjoying downtime with him.*" It was going to be about the *real* Tommy. But I wondered, when I go to the memorial service, will I feel like I'm wearing a Scarlet Letter? How many there will know that Tommy was supposed to be the one to survive, that this should have been a final celebration of my life, not his?

On a rainy coastal weekend, eighty relatives and friends gathered at the Willing Worker's Hall, home of the local Lions Club, in New Harbor, Maine. As instructed and without the slightest hesitation, I wore a "socially inappropriate" T-shirt. It pictured the Ass Family: cartoon stick figures named Wise, Smart, Lazy, Kiss, and Dumb. Ten tables with paper tablecloths and metal folding chairs – and an outdoor truck-serviced lobster buffet.

Tommy's Dad, Jay, with a courage I doubt many could muster, read the tribute. As I listened, I reflected on how little I knew Tommy. My relationship was with his mother, and I had striven to ease her pain, but, *Had I reached out often enough?* Jay told of his son's passion for Tolkien's books, how he had memorized the Periodic Table in junior high school, and that though during his illness Tom was often confined to the house, he had friends all over the world through international internet gaming. *Why hadn't I sent postcards from Germany? It would have been so easy, and might have brightened his day.*

"We watched him mature into a man," Jay said. Then added, "there was one thing more Tom wanted us to do," and projected this onto the screen: "Life is not about waiting for the storm to pass. It's about learning to dance in the rain." Soft music began and his parents danced, their faces burrowed into each other's shoulder. We all wept. The monsoon of the group weep concealed the depth of remorse behind my sobs.

Grandparents, uncles, cousins and friends related anecdotes that made us groan and chuckle. I told a favorite off-color joke with the punchline "Keep your *fucking* jack," and thanked Tommy for giving me the opportunity to tell my joke in public for the first time, then sat down and felt guilty for making everyone laugh so heartily. *Shouldn't I have told a story about Tommy instead?* But, like a tangle of seaweed tossed ashore by a storm, it was a complex moment in the lives of a large and loving gathering. Family members announced the births of two new babies. Huzzah! And tragedy loomed again: present with us in the room was another young cousin with a recently diagnosed brain tumor--that had manifested itself the evening before with a grand mal seizure.

My shirt, as were many, was a hit. Sometimes I said "Smart" and sometimes I said "Wise" when asked which of the Ass Family was me. No one knew how hard it was not to say, *But I should have been Dead Ass.*

Strauss lived around his guilt—survivor's guilt—for half his life, tried to keep it hidden, examined it alone from time to time, and even tried to share it with others. He concluded his memoir saying:

What I hated in myself, for more than half a life now, was feeling lucky for being alive. For not being blamed. Merely for being allowed to continue, when Celine wasn't. How could anyone be unhappy about that? But how could a person with my story agree to feel relieved and blessed? The accident has formed me. I can no more discard it than I can discard having grown into adulthood. But I am grown now. And because I am, I can say no. I can say no to the hectoring, blistering hurt. I can say to myself: it's all right to take in the winter beach and grass smells, and crackle back across the sand of the road, and smile at the faces you love. (187)

I wonder how long it will take me to, or if I ever will, stop hectoring myself? My daughter said to me, "Well, Momma, not everyone wishes you had been the one who died. I don't." Perhaps someday I too will reconcile the cosmic injustice of my survival.

We don't get to choose. If the details of the accident related in *Half a Life* are anything like accurate, and there is no reason to imagine otherwise, Darin Strauss in no way *caused* Celine Zilke's death and yet it haunted him for half his life. He had no control—he was driving, she was on the bicycle. He hadn't *chosen* to be the one to survive.

That evening, sitting near the rocky Maine shore, at dusk, getting to know people I had never met, catching up with others I hadn't seen in years, and sharing memories of Tommy, I watched a seagull hunting at the water's edge. She waddled up onto the beach, dropped a crab from her mouth, and looked up, as though puzzled to see us there. The crab, unscathed, scurried off at full clip. The seagull paused a second or two, took two steps toward the crab and scooped it back up in her beak, crunched it twice, and gulped it down, shell and all. Moments later, she was back in the water, cruising near shore, head bobbing in and out, but now with a youngster, a grey gosling swimming at her side, echoing the motions of her hungry pursuit.

*Strauss, Darin. *Half a Life: A Memoir*. New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2010.

Dear Robert,

I am so disappointed that your email and weblink went dead before I could find out a little bit more about you. Thank you for your contribution and the revision. I hope you discover the publication of your work in this inaugural edition of Event Horizon.

~editor



Lost In the Jianghu A thousand-year-old Chinese literary genre lives on

By Robert Mendel

Ancient China -- an epoch of incessant warring between the feudal states, invasions from the north by tribes seeking control of the central plain, and rule by emperors and their courts rife with corruption and intrigue. In the countryside the people are taxed, exploited and threatened by famine and flood. The rule of law favors the rich and the court system is dysfunctional.

Outside mainstream society of family and clan there is an environment both real and metaphorical known as the jianghu. The word is derived from jiang (rivers) and hu (lakes). The jianghu can be traced to the novel *The Water Margin*, in which a band of noble outlaws who mounted regular forays in an attempt to right the wrongs of corrupt officials, retreated to their hideout in the countryside. These bandits were called the chivalrous men of the green forests.

One of four Chinese classic novels, *The Water Margin*, also known as *Outlaws of the Marsh*, is attributed to author Shi Nai'an, Ming Dynasty (14th century). This launched the literary genre known as wuxia, literally "martial arts chivalry" or "martial arts heroes." Many works in this genre were lost during the Ming and Qing dynasties due to prohibition by the government. The ethos of personal freedom and settling scores by conflict embraced by these novels was seen as seditious, even in times of peace and stability. But the genre remained extremely popular nevertheless..

The word jianghu originally referred to places where hermits lived but came to designate a world of wanderers. The fictional jianghu includes the wulin, translated as "martial forest," referring to the community of martial arts wanderers of slender means with no fixed abode. Jianghu denizens include these warriors, adventurers, monks, priests, rebels, cultists, beggars and other outcasts of society. To these people, the jianghu provided a substitute social order and lineage, which offers them the aid and protection they cannot obtain from mainstream society.

Most of the jianghu denizens are members of sects, the equivalent of a clan, which run the gamut from beggars to orthodox monasteries like Shaolin, Wudang and Emei. Men and women alike are highly skilled in martial arts and respect is based on one's level of skill and a reputation for righteousness. The original wuxia tales and the current derivative films often feature women as heroines or arch-villains and blend romance, fantasy and supernatural skills with martial arts action. The jianghu has a code of chivalry (xia) based on honoring relationships to family, one's sect and one's martial arts master. These relationships are based on loyalty and mutual protection. Harm to one sect member brings retribution from another or from the

entire sect. Foremost qualities in the xia's code of conduct are righteousness and honor, which emphasize the importance of a good deed, or its opposite and revenge, over all other values. This code is grave enough for its adherents to kill and die for, and their vendettas can pass from one generation to the next.

The jianghu tales are peopled by children, the elderly, naive youths and cunning masters of deceit. Their ambitions and schemes weave complex plots featuring conflicts of loyalty and love. The characters' motivations are the classic greed, lust and desire for fame and power. On the ethical side, decisions are made based on honor, compassion for the people and love of country. The result is an action-based tapestry of feudal life laced with martial arts combat. A strong element in the structure of the jianghu is that the line between good and evil, right and wrong, is crystal clear. But complications often result from a conflict between loyalties to one's family and to a friend, or between duty and love. With some exceptions, protagonists in wuxia novels and film represent the moral side of ethics and integrity, and their antagonists the opposite.

The characters in these stories are concerned with appropriate action, not motivation or psychology. Revenge is the only justice available to them and an obligation to be honored at all costs. They are well aware that revenge creates a cycle of violence but to avoid their obligation will bring unbearable shame on oneself and one's family.

A common theme is the tacit assumption that the courts of law are dysfunctional, corrupt or powerless to maintain control over the jianghu world. In the jianghu, law and order is maintained by the elected leader of each sect. They in turn elect a leader for the alliance of the various sects. This alliance leader is an arbiter who presides and adjudicates over disputes, serving as a chief justice for the affairs of the jianghu. The scheming and conflicts among jianghu sects is often caused by a particular leader's ambition to advance the prestige and power of his sect and rule the jianghu world.

The jianghu is a milieu where there are no illusions about life without struggle and suffering. The proverb, "It's better to be lost in the jianghu than caught up in the world," is explained by Jet Li's character in the popular film *Flying Swords of Dragon Gate*. He says, "Partings are hard, in life and in death." In another wuxia film, a character observes cogently, "Wherever there are men, there will be injustice."

The social context in which these tales unfold is that of old China and its continuing influence in Chinese society today. The core social values are allegiance to the family and respect for parents, grandparents and kin. Honesty and reputation are vital and explain why individuals are judged by their family reputation; a good person will come from a good family, while a person from a disreputable family will not be trusted.

This perspective undoubtedly arises from centuries of pragmatism, supported by the Confucian ideals of behavior, which define the nature of the relationship of each family member. China is one of two cultures surviving intact over the last three thousand years and a principal reason might well be the emphasis on the family as a social unit.

One of the most common themes in wuxia narratives is the pursuit of a fabled book or manual revealing a secret and powerful martial arts routine which will enable whoever learns it to be a peerless fighter or swordsman. Alternatively, the goal may be obtaining a legendary sword that confers dominance in the jianghu, or an internal energy cultivation system which builds a superior level of qi, and therefore power, in the practitioner.

Wuxia tales vary in their “realism” from outright fantasy and magic to depicting a genuine high level of internal energy cultivation. A common form is the “light technique,” which allows the character to leap up to and over rooftops. This extends in fantasy to the ability to fly, which Chinese audiences accept. In many cases, what would appear to a Western audience as fantasy is a genuine, if rare skill, such as healing or immobilizing a person by using internal energy and pressure point manipulation.

In the 21st century, wuxia novels have emerged as a highly popular genre in mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore. Those by noted authors like Jin Yong and Gu Long, have a devoted following. Many of the most popular works have been repeatedly converted into films and television series, some running from 40 to 80 or more episodes. International audiences are being exposed to wuxia through Asian television and Internet fan sites, which feature engrossing, well-made wuxia series with complex storylines, lavish sets and costumes and veteran actors. Notable among many English-subbed television series are *The Book and the Sword* and *Strange Hero Yi Zhi Mei*. Youtube videos have helped spawn an international following as well and the genre has experienced a strong surge in audience growth.

Actors, actresses, choreographers and directors involved in wuxia films have become famous and directors noted for their achievements in other films have tried their hand at wuxia stories as well. Jet Li was a star of wuxia films before coming to Hollywood, and he has returned to Hong Kong to continue his career there. Yuen Woo Ping is a well-known fight choreographer, and more recently, director, who achieved fame by crafting stunning action sequences.

Co-produced by Asian and Hollywood studios in 2000, Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, introduced veteran martial arts actress Michelle Yeoh, Zhang Ziyi and Hong Kong action star Chow Yun Fat to an international audience. Mainland Chinese director Zhang Yimou directed *Hero*, targeted for the international market in 2003 and *House of Flying Daggers* in 2004. Other notable films include *Flying Swords of Dragon Gate*, with Jet Li, from veteran wuxia director Tsui Hark; *Dragon* with Donnie Yen and *Painted Skin*, also featuring Donnie Yen.

To complicate matters, there is a popular novel genre called xianxia, a type of Chinese martial arts novel stemming from wuxia and influenced by Taoism and Buddhism. The Chinese written characters forming xianxia are xian and xia, which literally mean “immortal hero.” First introduced in China, it became popular worldwide in this century. Protagonists (usually) attempt to cultivate their qi and moral character to attain immortality and personal power. Xianxia novels often have strong elements of fantasy, complete with magic, demons, ghosts and immortals moreso than the typical wuxia tale, but the distinction is somewhat arbitrary.

As might be expected, feature films in anime format have made their appearance in recent years as well. Wuxia anime film is a genre which is still growing and likely continue to do so, considering the popularity of fantasy. There are also a number of wuxia-based games online. Massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs) are a combination of role-playing video games and multiplayer online games, where a large number of players interact with one another within a virtual world. Typical of the game genre is *Swordsman*, based on the popular Chinese novel, *The Smiling, Proud Wanderer*, by author Louis Cha, aka Jin Yong.

Considering their origin dates back a thousand years, what explains the enduring popularity of these stories? Obviously there is an inexhaustible appetite for fantasy world wide. But genuine wuxia and jianghu stories don't exploit this factor. Instead they project a tangible sense of fate, destiny and the vicissitudes of living in an uncertain and violent world.

Unlike many contemporary action films and stories, wuxia characters experience sorrow, shame, doubt, love and joy during the unfolding of events, rather than functioning as flat, emotionless and efficient killers. They are heroes because they make difficult human choices. While the surface content appears to depend on action, plot twists and surprise, the deeper flow of the narrative is driven by relationships. The jianghu mystique continues to be a classic expression of human values, life's dilemmas and moral imperatives, as timely today as it was in the days of the emperors.

Sara Cleto is a PhD candidate at The Ohio State University concentrating in folklore and eighteenth-century British literature. She is especially intrigued by the intersections between literature and folklore, including fairy tale, myth inspired and balladic retellings. Her work can be found in venues such as Cabinet des Fees, Goblin Fruit, Ideomancer and others.

Erin Kathleen Bahl is a PhD candidate at The Ohio State University studying digital media, composition and folklore. Her research investigates the possibilities that new media and digital technologies offer for creating knowledge and telling stories. Her work has been published in Composition Studies, Humanities Journal, Harlot of the Arts, Signs and Media, Computers and Composition (print and online) and Showcasing the Best of CI-WIC/DMAC.



Becoming the Labyrinth: Negotiating Magical Space and Identity in Puella Magi Madoka Magica

Abstract: In the magical girl anime series Puella Magi Madoka Magica, middle-school girls receive the power and responsibility to fight witches in exchange for making a wish. The series has connections to many different genres and narrative traditions within the realm of folkloristics. However, the folkloric genre most relevant to the ethos and aesthetics of Madoka is that of the fairy tale. Drawing on Bill Ellis's concept of "fairy-telling" and scholarship on new media composition, in this paper we seek to investigate labyrinths as acts of embodied composing—not lairs of evil or destruction but rather creative material memory work that negotiates grief and despair. Many of the series' action sequences unfold in "labyrinths," the magical spaces controlled by witches. By composing a labyrinth, witches can simultaneously reshape their environment and create a powerful statement about identity through personalized performance in narrative spaces that they control. In particular, we argue that both the frameworks of "fairy tale" and "new media" give us useful analytical resources for beginning to make sense of the intricately complex phenomenon of Madoka's labyrinths.

Keywords: fairy tale; new media; anime; magical girl; labyrinth; Madoka

1. Introduction

In the anime series Puella Magi Madoka Magica [1] (hereafter Madoka), a granted wish marks not a happily-ever-after ending but rather a complicated beginning. In the first episode, middle-school girl Madoka Kaname meets a cat-like creature named Kyubey¹ who offers to grant her and her friend Sayaka Miki any wish. In exchange, they must make contracts with him and become magical girls in order to fight witches, dangerous supernatural beings who spread curses and discord by mobilizing disruptive magical spaces called "labyrinths." As the storyline progresses, the girls discover that Kyubey was not transparent with them about the terms of their contracts. Although their wishes are indeed granted and they are given magical powers, magical girls eventually grow disillusioned with their task and succumb to despair, triggering their transformation into witches—meaning that in fighting the witches, they have really been fighting their own destinies all along.

Madoka has connections to many different genres and narrative traditions within the realm of folkloristics. The aesthetics of the labyrinth spaces draw upon the carnivalesque atmosphere of the festival, as do the performances that unfold within them. Figures drawn from historical legends, such as Joan of Arc and Cleopatra, appear in the final episodes of the series and are positioned on a continuum of magical girls, including the series' protagonists, throughout a reimagined history. Even myth is invoked as creation stories are explicitly unraveled and re-written at the series' conclusion.

However, the folkloric genre most relevant to the ethos and aesthetics of Madoka is that of the fairy

¹ Romanization of Japanese names is never entirely consistent across fan communities; sometimes multiple variations occur and are intensely debated. In this article, we use the versions as they are spelled in the officially released English subtitles.

tale. Drawing on Bill Ellis's [2] concept of "fairy-telling" and scholarship on new media composition, we seek to investigate labyrinths as acts of embodied composing—not lairs of evil or destruction, but rather creative material memory work that negotiates grief and despair.

2. The Anime

The official Puella Magi Madoka Magica storyworld [3] is spread across several kinds of new media genres, including anime, manga, movies, and merchandise, along with numerous unofficial media formats such as fanfiction, fanart, and discussion forums. Our analysis will focus on the Madoka anime series, consisting of 12 episodes which originally aired in Japan in 2011 and were released in the U.S. via both online streaming and DVD in 2012 [4,5]. Over the course of the series, Madoka, who is reluctant to make a wish and become a magical girl, and Sayaka meet three girls who have already made contracts: Homura Akemi, Mami Tomoe, and Kyoko Sakura. Though they frequently clash with one another, they form uneasy alliances and battle witches together, but casualties are high. By the last two episodes, only Homura and Madoka remain, prompting Madoka to finally contract with Kyubey and become a magical girl with unique, unprecedented power.

Madoka not only features magical girls but is also an example of the "magical girl" genre of anime, which includes other series such as Sailor Moon, Cardcaptor Sakura, Prétear, and Princess Tutu. This series draws from many common elements of the genre, such as: middle-school-aged girls; an apparently average, somewhat inept heroine who reveals or receives magical powers; extended transformation scenes; and color-coded magical state costumes. However, Madoka also works within and against the magical girl genre, deliberately interrupting and subverting its conventions [6–8]. For example, Mami, the friendliest and most reliable of the magical girl characters, dies an unexpected and gruesome death during an early witch-battle, marking a distinct tonal shift in the series and shocking early audiences [9–11]. Additionally, the arrival of a small white catlike animal who possesses knowledge of magical powers and frequently appears in the main character's bedroom evokes the guardian-cats Luna and Artemis in the iconic magical girl anime Sailor Moon [12]. For the sailor scouts, these animal-like guardians serve as benevolent guides in helping the heroine discover and use her powers. However, Madoka and her friends eventually discover that Kyubey is part of an alien species that harvests the energy from magical girls' degeneration into witches in order to counteract the effects of cosmic entropy. These departures from genre convention draw attention to the question of narrative power: who can determine their own role within the narrative, and who can make their story stick? In a storyworld populated by bodies in flux and multiple timelines, the battle for narrative control and self-determination is paramount.

3. The Labyrinth

Many of the series' action sequences unfold in "labyrinths," magical spaces controlled by witches. Each witch possesses her own labyrinth, a disorienting maze both defensive and offensive—the labyrinth protects a witch's body from unexpected attacks, as a magical girl must survive and navigate the labyrinth before reaching the witch that resides at its center. It is a space in which the witch's will is externalized and made manifest, a personal, performative arena where combat between witch and magical girl takes place. The labyrinths themselves are highlighted by a marked shift in animation style—bold colors, collage-like layers, unusual textures, and erratic movements differentiate labyrinth sequences from the rest of the series, emphasizing their status as magical, otherworldly spaces with their own conventions and realities.

Despite the labyrinths' intensely personal nature, they are also public and confrontational. Although only magical girls can see witches, anyone can wander into a labyrinth, leaving them perpetually open to invasion and infiltration. Each labyrinth is composed of assorted objects and symbols, which vary depending on the personality of the witch that constructs it. In addition to the objects that fill the shifting paths of the labyrinths, each has at its center some kind of arena modeled after a public space. There are concert halls, formal gardens, and makeshift theatres—spaces in which communities traditionally come together for entertainment or celebrations. Labyrinths are personal and public, individual and yet

reflective of community needs, echoing the material spectacle of festival² in their composition and function.

While Madoka's labyrinths seem uniquely disruptive, they have precedence in other contemporary fairy-tale and new media narratives. Jim Henson's *Labyrinth* (1986) [13] and Guillermo del Toro's *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006) [14] both feature adolescent female heroines who encounter magical, morally questionable male figures as they pursue their labyrinthine quests. Although neither heroine is responsible for the physical construction of the labyrinth in her respective film, in both cases the young girls' wishes and imaginations play key roles in each labyrinth's creation, a connection that is strengthened in Madoka's witches' labyrinths.

In Madoka, the possession and construction of labyrinths is a highly gendered phenomenon. Magical girls and witches are exclusively female. Kyubey explains that his race has specifically targeted adolescent girls because they believe that this population experiences emotions more powerfully than any other demographic that they have encountered. Kyubey and his race exploit the magical girl's emotions and their descent into despair, harvesting the girls' expelled energy for the greater good.

This sharp, gendered demarcation is at odds with other aspects of the series, which seem to self-consciously counter rigid gender binaries. This is perhaps most explicit through the depictions of Madoka's parents. Her mother, Junko, is a high-powered business woman who expertly applies makeup, works late hours, and occasionally comes home drunk. Tomohisa, Madoka's father, appears to be a stay-at-home parent; he cooks, tends to the house and the garden, and fondly takes care of his wife when she is inebriated. Junko and Tomohisa appear to have a very happy marriage; Tomohisa even has an extended conversation with Madoka about how greatly he respects his wife and her choices, even when they appear to be eccentric or unconventional. These roles within the family are foregrounded in the first episode of the series, suggesting the desirability of more flexible gender roles even as the magical girls are forced into rigid identity narratives with predetermined destinies—and thus drawing those destinies into question.

Labyrinths, though still associated with a rigid gender binary (as only girls can create them), can offer another, more individualized form of meaning-making and self-determination. They are nonlinear and often highly disorienting because they are explicitly drawn from disjointed fragments and redeployed as a kind of personality assemblage. However disorienting these labyrinths may be, a complex cohesion underlies their chaotic appearances. In English, a "labyrinth"³ is distinct from a "maze" insofar as the latter is a space of puzzlement offering multiple pathways, while the former, no matter how circuitous the route, ultimately leads to one destination ([17], p. 23; [18], p. 8). Additionally, in recent times, the practice of "walking the labyrinth" has gained popularity as a method of spiritual healing and self-integration in both secular and religious contexts [17,19–21]. Both perspectives shed light on how a labyrinth may be viewed as a powerful tool for creating internal cohesion amidst external confusion and disarray. By composing a labyrinth, witches can simultaneously reshape their environment and create a powerful statement about a complex, yet integrated identity through personalized performance in narrative spaces that they control. In particular, we argue that both the frameworks of "fairy tale" and "new media" give us useful analytical resources for beginning to make sense of the intricately complex phenomenon of Madoka's labyrinths.

4. Fairy Tales

"Fairy tale" is a contested term, and within fairy-tale studies definitions are frequently revised or redevise. Stith Thompson characterizes these stories as tales "involving a succession of motifs or

2 For further discussion of folklore and festival, see Noyes's *Fire in the Plaza* [15] and Foster's *Pandemonium and Parade* [16].

3 Our choice here to focus on the English word "labyrinth" as a translation for the original Japanese 結界, *kekkaï*, is based on both the official English subtitled and dubbed anime episodes.

episodes. [They move] in an unreal world without definite locality or definite creatures and [are] filled with the marvelous. In this never-never land, humble heroes kill adversaries, succeed to kingdoms and marry princesses” ([22], p. 8). More recently, scholars have emphasized the affordances of the fairy tale as a genre over its distinctive contents. Jennifer Schacker and Christine Jones suggest “that the idea of the fairy tale might be better understood as an open-ended, playful way of engaging social and political issues in a form that defies the constraints of realist fiction rather than as a fixed discursive form that corresponds to a set of narrative rules” ([23], p. 488). For the purposes of our exploration of fairy-tale space, the classic assessment from J.R.R. Tolkien is particularly apropos, as Tolkien grounds his definition in “the nature of Faërie: the Perilous Realm itself,” a magical space in which the marvelous can unfold. For Tolkien, a fairy tale “touches on or uses Faerie, whatever its own main purpose may be: satire, adventure, morality, fantasy. Faerie itself may perhaps most nearly be translated by Magic—but it is magic of a peculiar mood and power” and “the magic itself...must...be taken seriously, neither laughed at nor explained away” ([24], p. 10). In *Madoka* “Faerie” finds a corollary within labyrinths, otherworldly spaces created and deployed by witches. In these magical realms, witches and girls battle for dominance, and magical identities are constructed and performed in ways that would be impossible in realistic or everyday space.

The influence of the Western fairy tale is pervasive within the genre of anime, as well as the related genre of manga. Fairy-tale characters and tropes are taken up and entextualized within new narratives, often with uncanny results as the familiar motifs become strange in their redeployment and ambiguity. Both the fairy tale and the narrative tradition of manga and anime “are ways of opening the participants’ minds to the unknown, to asking questions about the way things are, and to tolerating the absence of conclusive answers” ([2], p. 21). The defamiliarization of these stories can result in innovative retellings and reconstructions. As Bill Ellis observes, “Western fairy tales often play an explicit part in these narratives in a form that is less influenced by Western cultural norms. For this reason, elements that are intrinsic to the genre of the fairy tale become more visible when we see how Japanese authors read and reinterpret these narratives, not as all-too-familiar stories but as exotic and novel ways of reimagining universal human dilemmas” ([2], pp. 21–22). Decoupled from the conventions that frequently govern them, these Western fairy-tale tropes can be redeployed to create revisions and new tales informed by the fairy-tale genre but distanced from generic expectations. Furthermore, the genres of the fairy tale and anime complement each other thematically.

Fantasy-based anime frequently emphasizes “the ubiquity of chaos and discord” in “labyrinthine” worlds populated by characters “beset by apparently insurmountable obstacles” ([25], p. 161). Yet, the fairy-tale dimension present in such series “serves to imbue the quest with a tenacious sense of hope. Through the contrast and conflation of a dystopian world and fairy-tale aesthetics, and even fairy-tale optimism, the anime accomplishes a synthesis of reality and fantasy of eerie and, at times, truly disquieting intensity” ([25], p. 161). While not all fairy tales feature happily-ever-after endings, their association with optimism and success persists, and this atmosphere of possibility, even positivity, can contribute much needed levity to those anime (such as *Madoka*) that feature apocalyptic landscapes.

5. New Media

Like “fairy tale,” “new media” is a contested term with many possible definitions; in digital media studies, for example, “new media” composing blends into discussions of “multimodal,” “multimedia,” and “digital” composing [26–28]. In this study, we rely on Wysocki’s definition of new media in order to focus on creative expressions that draw attention to (rather than efface) their materiality: for our purposes, “‘new media texts’ [are] those that have been made by composers who are aware of the range of materialities of texts and who then highlight the materiality...Under this definition, new media texts do not have to be digital; instead, any text that has been designed so that its materiality is not effaced can count as new media” ([29], p. 15). Expanding the concept of “new media” to emphasize materiality over digitality allows us to consider *Madoka* not only in terms of extradiegetic “new media,” but also “new media” on the level of diegesis—that is, how the characters within the story use the

material resources around them to make meaning in a way that foregrounds the expressive media they use.

From the perspective of the magical girls in *Madoka*, the labyrinths are disorienting, confusing, non-linear, unintelligible, and perilous places—and therefore considered as unproductive and even evil. However, looking at these spaces through the lens of new media rhetoric and composing, we can see how those same ambiguous qualities also offer possibilities for interpretation as creative spaces of learning, discovery, and agential identity composing. For example, these labyrinths in many ways bear resemblances to a Wunderkammer (plural Wunderkammern), which Delagrange treats at length in her work on visual rhetoric, new media, and embodied composing [30,31]. Delagrange defines Wunderkammern as “cabinets or entire rooms in which naturally occurring and man-made artifacts were collected, collated and catalogued” ([31], “Revision”). As stages for arranging, displaying, and engaging curiosities of all kinds, a Wunderkammer serves as a space of both material and intellectual engagement; it is “an object-to-think-with that constructs an uncanny bridge between the mental and physical; it engenders wonder, a productive aporia between not-knowing and knowing” ([30], “Mental/Physical”). Likewise, a witch’s labyrinth is a collection of objects meaningful to her life and identity in some way, carefully yet confusingly arranged and organized; it is an “uncanny” aporia, a space of puzzlement, both strange and familiar all at once ([32], p. 8) that challenges the ordinary sense-making strategies of those who try to navigate it.

As an “object-to-think-with,” a labyrinth might additionally be viewed as rhetorical memory-making work enacted via new media objects. Turkle’s collection *Evocative Objects* engages objects as “active life presences” with the power to “catalyze self-creation” ([32], p. 9), simultaneously “uncanny” and “rich with creative possibility” ([32], p. 8) in their ability to serve as identity-fashioning resources at key moments in an individual’s development. Whittemore notes how the classical rhetorical technique of *ars memoria* employed imagined spaces as memory aids, whether walking through familiar spaces to remember talking points (“walking mnemonic”) or observing scenery while sitting in the center of a theater (“memory theater”) ([33], p. 6). It is interesting to note, as we will see in our case studies, that the witches’ labyrinths foster both kinds of memory-making activities and spaces; the magical girls walk through half-familiar corridors in seeking out the witch, while the witch herself typically sits in the middle of a theater-like space at the center of the labyrinth. Like a Wunderkammer, Whittemore observes that these memory-spaces served as “both tools for learning and tools for finding,” and comments that the most effective memory organization systems might not be file cabinets but rather “streetscapes and theaters” ([33], p. 6). These perspectives—uncanny spaces, evocative objects, memory-work, and learning through exploration—help us to reframe the witches’ labyrinths not as evil spaces of absolute destruction, but as ambiguously, richly creative spaces for crafting identities and working through memories with the help of meaningful objects.

6. New Media Fairy-Telling

In analyzing *Madoka*’s labyrinths as creative acts of new media composing, we borrow a term generated by Bill Ellis in his analysis of another magical girl anime (*Princess Tutu*). “Stretching our usual language,” Ellis notes, “we could say that *Princess Tutu* is not about fairy tales at all but about fairy-telling, the ongoing tradition of generating new versions of old tales and inventing entirely new tales out of bits and pieces of existing ones” ([2], p. 231). Fairy-telling is both a critical and a creative act; one that involves “understanding the cultural grammar that governs fairy-telling and the gender conventions it makes visible, and gaining the skills to create new myths, ones that we can genuinely call our own” ([2], p. 236). In the witches’ performances of memory-work—arranging “bits and pieces” of their lives, fairy tales, and the surrounding environment—their labyrinths become new tales, new interpretations of the world, the tellings of which are foregrounded in the hyper-materiality of their expression. In other words, the labyrinths can be viewed as acts of new media fairy-telling.

We apply these frameworks—fairy tale and new media together—to our close readings and analyses of three particularly significant witches’ labyrinths that appear in *Madoka*: those of the witches Gertrud, Oktavia von Seckendorff, and Walpurgisnacht. Drawing from Ellis’s definition

of “fairy-telling” as the ongoing tradition of generating new versions of old tales and inventing entirely new tales out of bits and pieces of existing ones ([2], p. 231) and Wysocki’s definition of new media composing as foregrounding a communicative act’s materiality [29], we can look at the witches, in making their labyrinths, as powerful composers drawing on material objects from a fairy-tale repertoire and the stories of their lives in an act of creative embodied expression and identity-fashioning memory work.

7. Case Study 1: Gertrud

The first labyrinth to appear in the main timeline⁴ belongs to a witch named Gertrud.⁵ After an intimidating confrontation with their new classmate Homura, Madoka and Sayaka run from her and stumble into the labyrinth. They are disoriented and do not understand where they are or why their environment is changing so dramatically and rapidly. “Where did the exit go? Where are we?” Sayaka cries as gates and chains erupt into the concrete hallway through which they are running. The hallway quickly disappears behind an overlay of giant butterflies and windows floating unanchored in the air. In alignment with Sayaka’s panicked question about the disappearance of the exit, this is a landscape that offers no avenue of escape—the chains and gates suggest entrapment and claustrophobia, and the windows are not only too high to reach but they are empty, revealing the landscape behind them instead of offering an exit into another space. As they try to make sense of their surroundings, with still more disconnected images flashing by, Madoka exclaims, “There’s something wrong—the path keeps changing!” The name “labyrinth” is apt—like Wunderkammern, these are not spaces with clear trajectories, but rather dynamic, circuitous spaces that actively direct the traveler’s movements rather than being passively moved through themselves.

In addition to more recognizable images and motifs including briars and roses—symbols intrinsic to many classic European fairy tales including Sleeping Beauty and Beauty and the Beast—there is a profusion of images that resist recognition or interpretation. Chief among these are animate cotton balls with thick black mustaches that laugh and dance over a garden bed, behind the roses and briars, and then dart unmoored across the screen before gathering around Madoka and Sayaka and chanting at them. The words of their chant are in untranslated German, unintended to render legible meaning for Japanese or English audiences. Even if the production company deliberately chose not to subtitle or dub the chanted words, in the midst of a capably, clearly dubbed series, the effect is of opaqueness and unintelligibility. As the chanting grows louder, the cotton-ball faces suddenly bare their teeth, and slashing scissors appear among the convulsing chains, heightening the threat of danger, and even dismemberment.

In the midst of this crescendo of sound and visual threat, the chains begin to break and fall to the ground, and a bright light surrounds the girls. From a newly made, clearly marked path, another magical girl, Mami, appears, holding her soul gem⁶, which emanates a bright, clear light, slicing through the chaos of the labyrinth and exerting creative control over its materials. As the girls greet each other, Gertrud’s labyrinth, which has been subdued by Mami’s appearance, begins to revive and thrash around the girls with renewed energy, reestablishing narrative dominance over her space. Mami promptly steps away from the other girls and engages her transformation sequence, in which her school uniform is replaced by her customized magical girl costume. At the end of her transformation,

4 Homura’s magical girl powers include the capacity for time-travel, which she uses again and again in an attempt to save Madoka from death. Her actions create a succession of related timelines in the series. In this article, we have confined our discussion to the main timeline for the sake of clarity.

5 The name Gertrud does not appear in the 12-episode television series, but in the extended media associated with the Madoka world more broadly, she has been identified through the rune-like characters that appear in her labyrinth. We will refer to this witch as Gertrud for clarity.

6 A soul gem is the source of a magical girl’s power. When it darkens from power loss or its owner’s grief, a magical girl transforms into a witch.

Mami stands on top of a large pile of Gertrud's accumulated objects, physically dominating the space. From this vantage point, she materializes a massive array of guns and fires them towards the heart of the labyrinth, forcing Gertrud to retreat, along with her labyrinth. The other-world of the labyrinth wavers and disappears, leaving the girls once more in the bare hallway in which the encounter began.

The next day, the girls encounter the same labyrinth—and this time, the witch herself as well. The witch has a head like a drooping rosebush, with a gelatinous body, butterfly wings, and roses scattered below her. As she and Mami battle, the witch ensnares her in a thick cord and dangles her high above her head. However, hyper-conscious of her role as a performer and her audience, Mami assures Madoka and Sayaka that she is fine, and laughs that “I can't let myself look uncool in front of my magical girl trainees.” As the witch rushes at her, brandishing thorns and snapping scissors, golden ribbons rise from Mami's bulletholes and ensnare the witch in a tangle of yellow threads. While the witch struggles to free herself, Mami turns a swirling ribbon into an enormous gun and shoots her; the witch disappears in a swirl of golden light. Butterflies rise into the air as Mami drops to the ground with a bow, and the labyrinth evaporates around them. As Gertrud collapses, Mami punctuates her performance by materializing a cup of tea and calmly sipping from it. In defeating the witch, Mami literally takes her place at the center of the stage; her power to shape the story has prevailed, and the world crafted by the witch dissolves into nothingness.

The composition of Gertrud's labyrinth, despite its seeming chaos, draws heavily upon fairy-tale motifs from *Beauty and the Beast* (ATU 425), *Rapunzel* (ATU 310), and most particularly *Sleeping Beauty*⁷ (ATU 410) [35]. Roses and gardening paraphernalia abound; the flowers and their briars appear again and again, in addition to the sinister cotton-plant faces, abundant butterflies, flowers, and tilled garden rows, and Gertrud's appearance as a vaguely humanoid rose bush with butterfly wings in her garden-arena heightens this impression. The cotton balls heighten a connection to *Sleeping Beauty* tales, as they are materials associated with spinning and spinning wheels. Furthermore, imagery of restraint and enclosure echo the iconic briars that surround *Sleeping Beauty*'s castle in many famous versions of the tale [36,37]; the flowers and other garden objects are frequently crossed or intermingled with actual briars, along with chains, gates, and other obstructions. Gertrud decontextualizes and recombines these elements to mobilize her attacks on the magical girls that enter her domain, wielding roses and butterflies against Mami's guns in an act of creative fairy-telling.

Despite these gestures at meaning-making, Gertrud and her chosen objects are fundamentally opaque to her audiences—both the magical girls and the viewers of the anime. Gertrud's labyrinth is particularly resistant to interpretation because no information is provided about the witch that constructed it, the magical girl that she once was, or how these objects relate to her own narrative. While the other two case studies we examine in this article are discussed explicitly among characters within the diegetic world, Gertrud's space is an enigma that surfaces without warning, explanation, or backstory. The magical girls' reactions—their disgust with Gertrud's reimagined body and their confusion in the face of her labyrinth—are foregrounded, and so the anime's audience experiences disorientation with them. However, as the series progresses, context and backstory provide clues to reading a labyrinth, as well as insight into the personalities and the creativity that construct them.

8. Case Study 2: Oktavia

Because Sayaka's storyline gradually unfolds over the course of the series, the audience is able to interpret her labyrinth as a witch in the context of her memories and the symbols meaningful to her. The labyrinths are too complex to afford a one-to-one correlation between symbol and interpretation; their objects' richness lies in their ambiguity and ability to evoke rather than signify absolutely. Instead,

7 For further discussion of *Sleeping Beauty* in Japan, see Jorgensen and Warman's “Molding Messages: Analyzing the Re-working of ‘Sleeping Beauty’ in Grimm's Fairy Tale Classics and Dollhouse” [34].

we suggest that awareness of her personality and backstory allow a degree of transparency that was not accessible for Gertrud or the other witches that precede Sayaka's transformation.

When Kyoko finds her, Sayaka sits alone on a bench in a darkened train station. After an accelerating disenchantment with her magical girlhood and increasing dissatisfaction with her personal life, Sayaka is overcome by despair and transforms from a magical girl to a witch. As Kyoko looks on in horror, Sayaka's physical body falls into the emergent labyrinth, and the train station transforms into an ocean scene, crossed with trains, tracks, and flying wheels, and punctuated with staves and music notes. At the center of this chaos is a witch, identified by flashing rune-like letters as Oktavia von Seckendorff. The looming figure wears a dark blue cloak reminiscent of Sayaka's blue magical girl cape, with a pink bow, ornate ruff, and loudspeaker-like helmet; she has a brightly colored mermaid tail and is seated upon an array of knightly pennants. The remaining magical girls take Sayaka's vacant human body and flee the labyrinth, unwilling to harm their friend in her witch form.

In an attempt to save Sayaka, Kyoko and Madoka reenter her labyrinth, which first appears as a quiet brick hallway lined with rune-scripted concert posters. Deeper in, the next hallway is more ornate, with red-carpeted floors, gold-adorned pillars, and round glass screens playing hazy images from Sayaka's memories. Suddenly, the doors snap shut behind them; the screens go black, and Kyoko warns, "She knows we're here! She's coming!" As with Gertrud's labyrinth, the witch's approach is signaled not by any motion on the part of the magical girls, but rather by the entire labyrinth rushing toward them as a series of doors opening up into a spacious concert hall, emphasizing the collapse of distinction between witch and labyrinth, narrative and performance. The hall is lined from floor to ceiling with red seats; off to one side, the silhouette of a conductor directs an orchestra—completely comprised of violinists—with inexorable regularity. At the center of the hall is Oktavia, swaying from side to side in time with the orchestra, sword raised like a baton. The train imagery returns when the girls approach her; as the witch raises her sword, spinning train wheels (both metallic and musical) appear and loom threateningly above Kyoko and Madoka. Madoka is protected by Kyoko's barrier, but the witch circles around the hall, hurling wheels at the magical girl. Although the witch carries a sword, she uses it to direct the wheels rather than to fight with the blade; her will is equally materialized through her body and her assembled labyrinth.

In viewing the labyrinth as an act of creative expression, as a material network through which the witch's identity is distributed, Oktavia composes her labyrinth from elements clearly related to her own memories. The train imagery, for example, evokes a key location from her transition to despair; it was a conversation she overheard on a train that made her question and ultimately reject her fight to protect humanity. In particular, music plays a key role in relation to Kyosuke, the boy she loves.

Sayaka

becomes a magical girl to help him; her wish is for his hand to be healed after an injury so that he could play violin again. However, as in life, she remains on the edge of the music; in her labyrinth, she places herself in an ambiguous role between conductor and audience. Although she clearly orchestrates the entire scene, at the same time she is removed from the orchestra and even the conductor figurehead, a listener rather than a musician herself. The labyrinth expresses an active power over music that she never possessed in life; even without a violin in hand, the performance is still very much her own.

Because two separate incarnations of Oktavia's labyrinth are depicted in the series, they can be understood as two iterations of the same narrative act. The same elements, particularly train tracks, wheels, and music notes, are drawn from the witch's memory and recast across different landscapes within the labyrinth. In this sense, the witch's creation/performance of each labyrinth echoes the tension between continuity and change that govern the (re)telling of a fairy tale, during which some elements remain consistent while others adapt based on changing factors like audience, context, and locale ([2], p. 233). The elements that Oktavia uses to construct her labyrinth are drawn from her memories as well as from fairy-tale tropes, and she remixes these pieces to create multiple versions of her own memory-narrative.

Between the oceanic theme that resurfaces across different incarnations of the labyrinth, Oktavia's mermaid tail, bodies in flux, unrequited love, and an emphasis on music, the fairy tale of "The Little Mermaid" serves as a useful intertext for decoding this labyrinth. Written by Hans Christian Andersen [38], and further popularized by Disney with their cinematic retelling [39], the fairy tale has been recently revitalized in Japan with Hayao Miyazaki's film adaptation *Ponyo* [40]. The motifs from the fairy tale resurface disjointedly, echoing across Oktavia's body and the labyrinthine landscape. Her memories of the boy are given shape by figures within the labyrinth as well as the orchestra comprised only of his chosen instrument. Within her labyrinth, Oktavia uses the affordances of new media fairy-telling to reimagine the boy she loves and to recast their relationship through the material fragments of a familiar tale. In this way, remembrance and creative storytelling intersect to frame a space in which Oktavia can grieve and reestablish narrative control over her story.

9. Case Study 3: Walpurgisnacht

The final labyrinth we wish to examine is that of the witch Walpurgisnacht⁸, the crucial point around which the entire series has circled. The series actually begins with an encounter with Walpurgisnacht, although only her silhouette and the pieces of her labyrinth are pictured without any explanation. It is not until episode ten, when the multiple timelines are revealed and the same images are repeated, that the audience recognizes Walpurgisnacht and realizes the extent to which her presence has shaped the narrative and the vast scope of her compositional power. Unlike the other labyrinths encountered thus far, the witch Walpurgisnacht does not simply incorporate pieces of the "real world" into the creation of her magical labyrinth space. Rather, she is so powerful as to project her labyrinth over the entire city, blurring the lines between real and magical worlds beyond distinction.

Because Walpurgisnacht's labyrinth interrupts the structural integrity of the real world, the city's inhabitants perceive her appearance as a series of natural disasters and retreat to evacuation shelters. Homura, the last surviving magical girl, stands alone looking out over the empty streets. Following a festival procession of fantastic creatures, lacy curtains part and ornate numbers count down from five to one, heightening the anticipation of a spectacle just about to begin. In many ways, though, the spectacle has long been underway; the same lacy curtains, which resemble Walpurgisnacht's skirt, opens the *Madoka* series at the beginning of the very first episode, implying that the direction of the narrative has been under Walpurgisnacht's control all along.

Like Gertrud, Oktavia, and the other witches, Walpurgisnacht's body is composite. She has the most humanoid body—rather than mobilizing rosebushes or animal bodies to mimic a human form, Walpurgisnacht has the appearance of a woman. She wears an elaborate, blue gown with exaggerated bell sleeves and a cascading, tiered skirt. On her head sits a formal headdress reminiscent of medieval European nobility; it tapers to two sharp points, suggesting horns or a crown. Her face possesses prominent red lips and teeth but no other discernible features. Her back and limbs are long and straight, suggesting a regal bearing. She resembles nothing so much as an evil queen, a figure popularized most by *Snow White* tales (ATU 709) [35], particularly the Grimms' version [30]. Appropriately, *Snow White* focuses on intergenerational conflicts between women, which might be mapped onto the struggle between the youthful magical girls and the more experienced witches. Walpurgisnacht's headdress and queenly, but monstrous, appearance also suggests a connection to the villain of another iconic sleeping maiden fairy tale, *Sleeping Beauty*—particularly her incarnations in Disney's films *Sleeping Beauty* (1959) [41] and *Maleficent* (2014) [42] (though the latter was released several years after *Madoka* aired). In these versions, the witch-like fairy wears a headdress with two sharp, prominent points shaped to resemble horns—and in *Maleficent*, she is revealed to actually possess horns, which the headdress later envelops. Walpurgisnacht's resemblance to magically powerful, morally questionable fairy-tale queens establishes the scope of her ability, and imbues the stakes of the magical girls' fight against the witch with fairy-tale wonder and weight.

⁸ In Germanic folklore, "Walpurgisnacht" is a night for a witches' gathering.

Despite her resemblance to these familiar fairy-tale figures, Walpurgisnacht's appearance is uniquely uncanny. Her torso rests not on legs but on a giant stack of gears that fits beneath her skirts. She hovers above the cityscape, her humanoid body inverted, her head tilted towards the ground. She occasionally emits eerie, high-pitched laughter, particularly when Homura attacks her with an incredible barrage of explosives. Half humanoid, half machine, Walpurgisnacht utilizes fairy-telling fragmentation to assemble a body and labyrinth that speak to multiple discourses of material and narrative power. Walpurgisnacht is by far the most powerful witch yet encountered in the series: instead of hiding within a labyrinth, she projects her will and personality onto the world around her, dovetailing with the fairy-tale motifs of feminine power that she has reappropriated. While the preceding witches in the series challenged the demarcations between body and labyrinthine materials, reality and labyrinth-space, Walpurgisnacht shatters the boundaries as she imposes her physical body and her mental desires into and onto everyday reality. Her resemblance to recognizable fairy-tale witches/fairies heightens the perception of her ability to interrupt orderly hierarchies and to threaten established discourses of meaning-making through her power to re-compose the world into her own labyrinth.

10. Discussion: Composing and Telling

The power to compose the world ultimately does not belong to Walpurgisnacht, however, but to Madoka. In order to save Homura from an endless cycle of irresolvable conflict, and all magical girls from becoming witches, she makes a wish to literally rewrite the laws of the universe: to erase all witches before they are born by taking all magical girls' despair upon herself—and thus erasing herself from the normal plane of existence altogether as she is undone by her own wish. We see the effect of her wish in undoing Walpurgisnacht; as the laughing witch floats through the city, debris still strewn across the skies and Madoka's pink arrows raining down around her, she starts to disintegrate piece by piece until only her gear half remains. By the time Homura returns to the "present" timeline, the witch's presence has been entirely erased.

From the angles of fairy-telling and new media composing, we can start to see the witches and their labyrinths in a new light. The witches are clearly dangerous, with the potential for considerable destruction—yet at their core they are not evil monsters, but rather grieving young women. Instead of insidious lairs, we might look at the labyrinths as creative attempts at healing, sense-making, and identity-fashioning in the midst of despair. This is not a passive despair, a helpless grief. It has a life, power, and vitality of its own, taking pieces of memory and rearranging them in combination with fairy tales and everyday objects—a grief that has given up so thoroughly on the old world that it creates a new one instead out of the shards and sparks of mourning. For the witches, their role in Kyubey's plans are complete; once they have completed the transformation, Kyubey has no further need for them, apart from serving as enemies for future magical girls, and they are narratively free to compose their own stories via their labyrinths without any apparent need of any further sustenance apart from their own powers.

Herein lies the paradox. Madoka wants to save magical girls from despair and hatred; however, following her universe-shattering wish, when magical girls exhaust their power or fall into despair there is still no hope of healing. They are simply erased, body and soul, as Mami explains: "Before the hope we wished for summons an equivalent amount of misfortune, we have no choice but to vanish from this world." As witches, the girls had power, creativity, individual expression, and embodiment in the midst of their despair, the power to shape the world around them with their assembled story-worlds; with Madoka's new system, however, even that ambiguous power and creativity is denied them, and they are literally wiped out of existence. In taking the magical girls' despair upon herself, Madoka has not saved them; she has trapped them further by ensuring their complete erasure the moment hope or magic fails, and sapping all creative embodied power from their grief. The cycle continues, there is no redemption, and the curses have merely taken a different form—what has been lost, though, are the power, material bodies, and individual creativity of the witches who were once magical girls.

We do not suggest that the witches are unambiguously good—after all, their labyrinths are extremely destructive intrusions into the real-world cityscape, and the curses that they spread result in contagious despair and even death for those who encounter them. But we do wish to foreground the creative potential of their labyrinths, as well as the narrative possibilities that they can present.

Madoka's vision of a better world takes away the witches' feelings of despair, but erases the magical girls entirely in the process. Rather than saving them, she leaves them with even less agency; their ability to feel and exist is taken away altogether. We might use Cornell's three minimum qualifications of individuation, as applied by Fleckenstein ([43], pp. 243–44) to new media composing, in order to critique this ending. A legal ethicist, Cornell posits that laws working towards greatest agency for all individuals involved (especially women) must meet at least three criteria: bodily integrity; access to symbol systems; and protection of the imaginary domain, which she defines as "the space of the 'as if' in which we imagine who we might be if we made ourselves our own end and claimed ourselves as our own person" ([43], quoted p. 244). Madoka's new universe fails these three criteria through the complete erasure of magical girl subjects. Conversely, even in their despair, the witches maintain bodily integrity through continued physical existence (and even an expanded existence, in considering the labyrinths as extensions of themselves); they have rich symbolic access to "develop and explore a robust matrix of personae" in the act of "renarrating and resymbolizing" themselves ([43], p. 244); and they are able to inhabit a space of self-reimagining and refashioning within their labyrinths as protected imaginary domains. For all their other complicated resonances, from this perspective the labyrinths can be seen as—uncanny, disorienting, sinister, but also liberatory—spaces of fairy-telling and new media composing.

11. Conclusions

Just as Madoka deliberately subverts the magical girl genre, so might it also deliberately encourage us to read against the grain of its own ending—to be a magical girl, without the ability to experience the full range of human emotions, good and bad, may be temporarily empowering but ultimately leads to the total erasure of the self, both body and soul. Ellis notes that in Japanese fairy tales, powerful women were frequently portrayed as monsters such as mountain ogres—kin, in a sense, to the witches and evil queens of Western fairy tales ([2], p. 222). In this light, perhaps the ultimate evil is not to become a witch—grieving and beyond the bounds of normal human society, but still embodied and powerful—but rather to be a magical girl—destined for complete erasure once her magic runs out. Donna Haraway claims that it is better to be a cyborg than a goddess ([44], p. 46); in the end, perhaps it is better to become a labyrinth rather than disappear as a magical girl.

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Department of English, The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH 43210, USA; bahl.24@osu.edu

* Correspondence: cleto.2@osu.edu;

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***Pam Munter** has authored several books including *When Teens Were Keen: Freddie Stewart and The Teen Agers of Monogram and Almost Famous*. She's a retired clinical psychologist, former performer and film historian. Her essays, short stories, and a play have been widely published. She was recently awarded an MFA in creative writing and writing for the performing arts, her sixth college degree.*



Being A Shrink

It's probably politically incorrect to admit this, but I loved being a shrink. Much of the time, it was stimulating, challenging and, well, fun. For nearly 25 years, I was a clinical psychologist in private practice in a suburb of Portland, Oregon, seeing as many as 38 clients a week in 45-minute sessions. I haven't done that in more than 20 years now, but hardly a day goes by that I don't think about those years and all the people who invited me into their lives.

In the final decades of the last century, there were few restrictions placed on who could use mental health services and how long the sessions could continue. Equal access to mental health services was mandated by law, making it easily accessible to anyone with insurance. That has all changed with the advent of managed care and the giant industrial complex that has transformed the insurance industry. More about that later.

How does one morph into a shrink? As an adolescent, I was sometimes perceived by peers as "too intense." While they wanted to chat about the latest pop music hits or teen idols, I wanted to hear about what they thought and felt, not just the events. Even then, it seemed to me that what happened within the self was far more absorbing than the activity outside it. That this predilection might be a forerunner to becoming a clinical psychologist didn't occur to me until I was in my early 20s.

In fact, I was heading in an entirely different direction. I had just been awarded a Master's degree in political science and had volunteered to teach it at the University of Panama in the Peace Corps. Once selected, we met with a Field Assessment Officer for vetting by a clinical psychologist. Almost immediately, I was fascinated by her approach to screening, the assessment techniques and how she arrived at her conclusions. But close to the end of the four-month training, I was told I was informed I was being sent to another country due to political instability in the region. This wasn't what I had signed on for, so I planned to resign. But in order to leave, I had a final appointment with the officer for an exit interview. The meeting was supposed to last an hour but it went on much longer than that. I had lots of questions about how she did her work and asked how I could learn more. Once I began reading, I knew this was it for me, an epiphany if there ever was one.

The academic road to the Ph.D. was not an easy one since I had taken only one Mickey Mouse undergraduate course in psychology. So while I was teaching political science in one department of the university, I was filling in an undergraduate major by taking classes across the campus in another. Soon, I applied and was accepted into a Master's degree program in a second university across town. And after receiving the M.A., I was accepted at a doctoral program in another state. The training is intense and comprehensive, including experimental design, statistics, neurology, social psychology, personality theory and abnormal psychology. And, of course, psychotherapy, theory and practice. Part of the clinical training was to "see" a client while the session was recorded for discussion later on with a faculty advisor. Whether or not he (and it was always a "he") thought I was doing a good job depended on whether our psychotherapeutic orientations were compatible. This could be problematic. There was an extensive array from which to choose, including the

classical Freudian approach, the more detached Skinnerian behavior modification techniques, and Albert Ellis' Rational-Emotive therapy, among many others. From the get-go, I knew I'd be most compatible with the seldom-taught existential-humanist school, since I had found an instant camaraderie after discovering the works of James F. T. Bugental and Carl Rogers.

The basic premise in this way of doing therapy was that the client and I were in a relationship between equals. She was not a "patient" upon whom I would apply all the techniques I had learned, nor would I presume to tell her what to do. This approach started in the waiting room when I introduced myself as Pam Munter, not Dr. Munter. Something that small established the tone, producing an almost immediate reduction in stress in a setting where comfort typically evolves over time. We had a fridge full of water and soft drinks, routinely offered before the session began.

When the client entered my office, he could see the setting was more like a well-appointed living room with a choice of comfortable seating. There was no massive, imposing desk, no remnants of a medical habitat and no white coats in evidence. I had leased a space that was configured to my specifications, so I made sure the entrance, exit and hallways were all accessible, as well as the bathrooms down the hall. The ADA had not yet been enacted but I was convinced that accessibility was a minimum expectation if clients were to feel welcomed. I wanted the struggles to be internal, not external.

"What brings you here today?" I would ask, knowing that the response would be only part of the story. I wanted to hear and discuss the client's history but we'd soon move to the task at hand, the exploration of the inner world while using the presenting issue as a fulcrum. What mattered to her? What was important? What did she want from herself and others? So many people could neither identify nor express themselves accurately on an emotional level. They lacked internal access and the vocabulary to fully participate in their own lives. As a result they were living inauthentically.

I knew my limits, both personally and professionally. Thus, I would not see people who were psychotic or afflicted with intransigent personality disorders, both categories quickly recognizable. I had a list of people to whom I could refer them and, of course, would not charge for our initial session. I was best with people who were willing to risk fully "being there," who would engage in internal excavations, would think about our conversation between sessions and had even a small hope that their lives could be better if they worked at it. The most common diagnoses pertained to anxiety or depression but they were effects, not causes. If someone was suicidal, addicted to a chemical substance or if they just wanted to stop smoking, I was not their shrink.

Most days the first session began at 8 a.m. to accommodate working peoples' schedules; some days I didn't get home until 9 at night. As narcissistic as it may sound, I decided early on to see only people with whom I could sense a personal as well as a professional connection. It turned out that most of the time, they were also people I liked. It made the sometimes stressful job so much easier.

The upside? Every day I was bringing all of myself to every session—my intellect, my emotions, my relationship-building skills, my energy. There was no place to hide. I would arrive home exhausted but usually satisfied I had done a good job that day. The downside was the obvious toll on the rest of my life. Intensive work like that could easily empty my tank. Some days with difficult clients felt like an emotional marathon, requiring that I pace myself, take frequent breaks during the day. Though I had a young son and partner at home and enjoyed a social life with several good friends, it was not ethical to discuss my client's issues outside the

therapy room. I had to work out my thoughts and feelings relating to clients on my own. It was essential for me to take care of myself physically, by eating well and exercising most days. Short vacations several times a year were a must.

In the early days of my career, I spent a day a week with an “habilitation center,” where adults with physical and developmental disabilities could acquire job and basic living skills. For the few years I was there, I set up an in-service training program so that the staff could learn to work with this population more effectively. In time, I brought in graduate students from the local university where I was also teaching so that each of the center’s clients who wanted could be seen on a one-to-one basis every week. As my practice schedule filled up and the waiting list grew longer, however, I began to devote all my time to the office.

Over the years, I had the opportunity to work with people of all abilities, life situations and orientations. Some of them were professional people, others were stay-at-home wealthy women (handicapped in their own way, I mused). I was on the “approved” list for LGBT organizations and for two of the local Catholic orders (even though I am an atheist, which I had made clear at the start). There were individuals, couples, families, groups, kids and teenagers. Some of the clients were famous, too, presenting a unique set of issues for us to work out. The variety made it more interesting and even compelling.

In addition to the many therapy hours, I kept myself sharp by making media appearances, acting as an expert witness in many criminal cases, engaging in frequent public speaking opportunities and even starting a groundbreaking quarterly newsletter for clients. All this was just plain fun for me, tapping even more of my resources. We had dedicated a large room in the office suite as a library and I found myself in there enjoying my solitude when there were cancellations.

While I empathized with their daily struggles, the most challenging clients were not necessarily those with disabilities, not even the people who were struggling with incapacitating illness or terminal diseases. No, the toughest were the angry ones, those who were dragged there by a spouse or a parent against their will. I had to remind myself to be patient, to avoid reacting on a personal level. I knew it had nothing to do with me but more with the many issues outside the room that were making their lives a living hell. Sometimes we worked through it; sometimes we didn’t.

In fact, one of the most productive coping skills I developed as a shrink was consistently setting a firm boundary between me and the client. While I was living inside their life in a way, I had to remember that it was—in fact—their life, not mine. The decisions they would make would be theirs alone. I was responsible for fulfilling my role as a clinical psychologist, a guide. The outcome was their department. It was a matter of respect.

At times, I’ve been asked to write about my years as a shrink, to lay out some of the more bizarre or poignant tales exposed in that room. While the issue of client confidentiality is likely no longer legally relevant, it would represent a major violation from my perspective. Rather than reveal details about my clients, I’d much rather talk about the nights my sleep was interrupted by an emergency call from the answering service from someone who had was facing a middle-of-the-night disaster. Or how I managed my own life crises in the middle of theirs without the two ever meeting. Or the times I came home feeling disappointed by my own ineffectiveness in a given situation.

I closed the office long before I wanted or expected, a direct result of the insidious and frustrating encroachment of HMOs. When a referral came from an insurance company that used

managed care, I would be granted a handful of sessions to “fix” whatever problems came in the door, no matter how chronic or acute. More time might be allocated, but only after reams of paperwork, justifying the extension by describing the client’s problems in detail. This started to feel unethical and was antithetical to the way I knew I was most effective. Of course, I recognized the economic realities but the application of quick psychological band-aids is not how major life changes occur, at least not long-term. Sadly, what used to be in-depth psychotherapy is now more like counseling—limited, structured and directive. For those who can afford it, existential therapy is prohibitively expensive for those without access to insurance. And so, with great ambivalence, I left the profession that was the most perfect match to my personality, abilities and sensibilities.

Being a shrink was simultaneously humbling and ennobling. People willingly put their very lives in my hands. It sometimes took a long time for significant changes to occur, for them to feel a sense of wholeness and to live life more honestly. But what a worthwhile journey it was for all of us. It was an honor to be an often catalytic part of so many people’s lives.

This article is reprinted with permission. It first appeared on June 2, 2017 in Racontesse by Sarah Gray - a literary blog.

FORTUNE AND FELICITY: BECOMING MRS MOSS-WORTH

by Josephine Rydberg

Join our guest writer, Josephine Rydberg, as she LARPs about with Jane Austen.



I larp, beg your pardon, LARP, Live Action Role Playing. Like cowboys and indians but with adults. Just recently I took part in the LARP of my life; *Fortune and Felicity*. Being an Austen fan it was a given I would sign up for this particular LARP. I had also been involved in the very early stages of planning the LARP. While the organisers were deciding about design and production of the whole affair, I had been very outspoken about my support about the idea in general.

However, when it actually came to doing any actual work, I was otherwise engaged. When the tickets were released I didn't even sign up. I can be like that sometimes, you know... stupid.

Fortunately there was a lottery of the last available tickets for female characters and I decided to let fate decide. Fate obliged and I bought my ticket to become Mrs Esther Mossworth.

By this time the website was up and running - photos and general buzz around the LARP was enough to convince me to make the effort to find time and money to prepare for a dive into Regency romance.



When the first batch of characters was released I found myself being cast as Mrs Mossworth, a widow of some £1,000 a year. The daughter of Lady Mossworth (£10,000) the Mater Familias, mother of three children and also blessed with three nephews. All unmarried. Actually all of us were unmarried but Austen focuses usually on young romance (the possibility of older inheritable relations marrying is used more as a plot device-threat than as a real possibility) so only the young ones are expected to get engaged. Especially those with good family connections and lots of money.

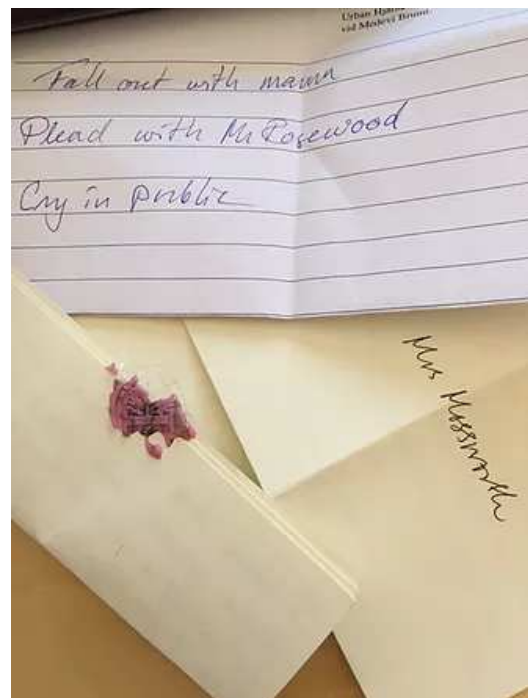
Mrs Mossworth had loved and lost. As a young woman she had been in love with Mr Rosewood but her mother had intervened. Exploiting another young woman's affection for Mr Rosewood and paying her to seduce him. He then had to do the honourable thing (by her, not

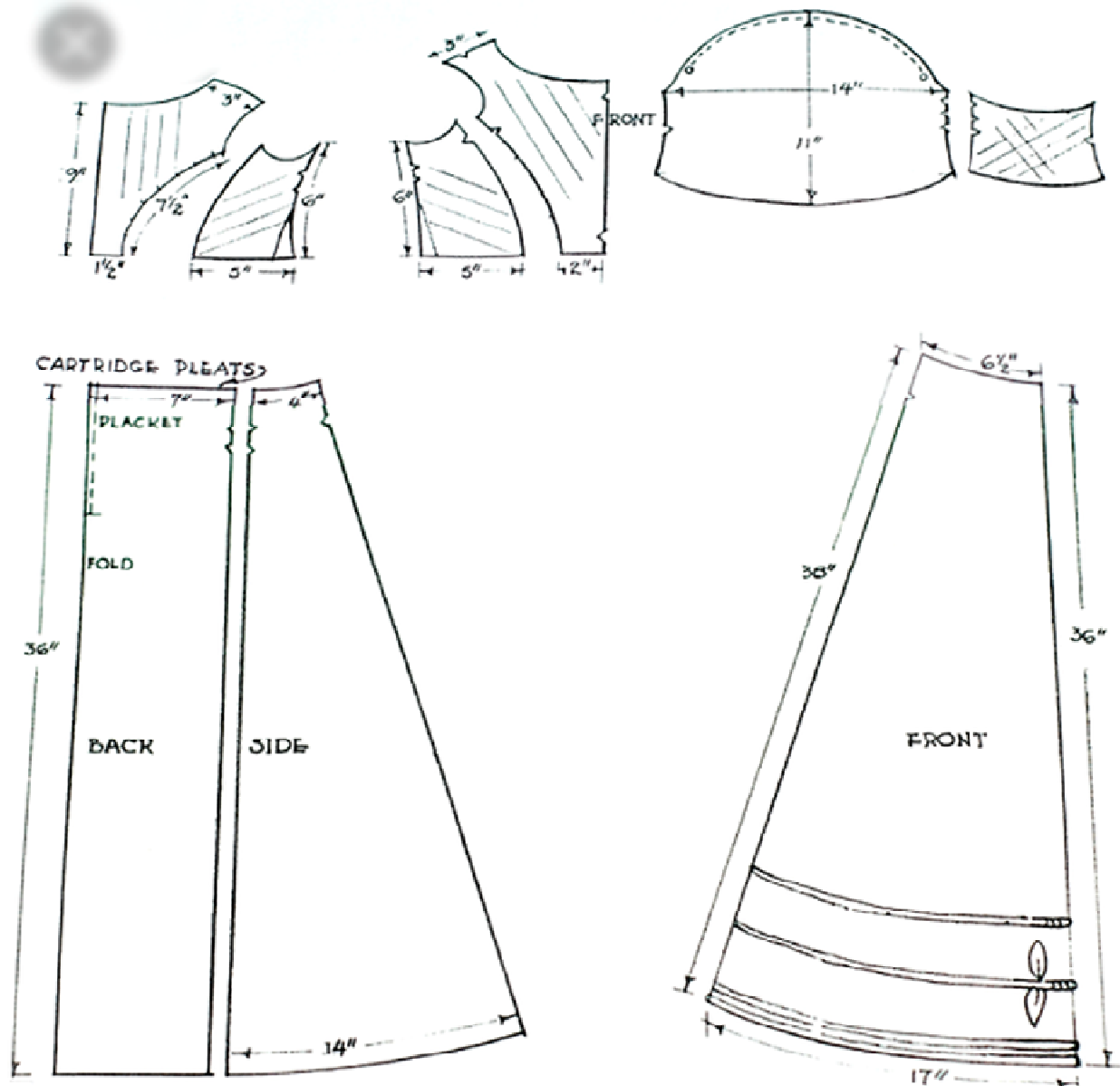
Esther) and marry her. Esther married a cousin on the rebound and lived unhappily ever after. Until now.

Now she is back at Primrose surrounded by a new generation of hopeful lovers. Mr and Mrs Rosewood will be there too. And Mother. The scene is set.

Before we got there however, I had to sew. I have a closet full of costumes but they were all wrong. Regency fashions are like no other. I hate sewing, so naturally I put it off until the last minute. Old tablecloths and curtains were dug out, patterns found online and all else was put on hold. My (real) children would have to cook their own meals, the house would go without cleaning and the washing would pile up. Only the cat was amused by my efforts; as it included spreading fabrics on the floor. Fabric on floors are like Tivoli for cats. Fun! Fun! Fun!

Of course I was not completed when it was time to leave. No buttons, hems un-sewn and I still hadn't actually tried anything on with the corset. However, I sort of managed 3 outfits; 2 for day wear and 1 ballgown. Oh and I was rescued by my cousin who lent me a bonnet. It was green. I love my cousin.

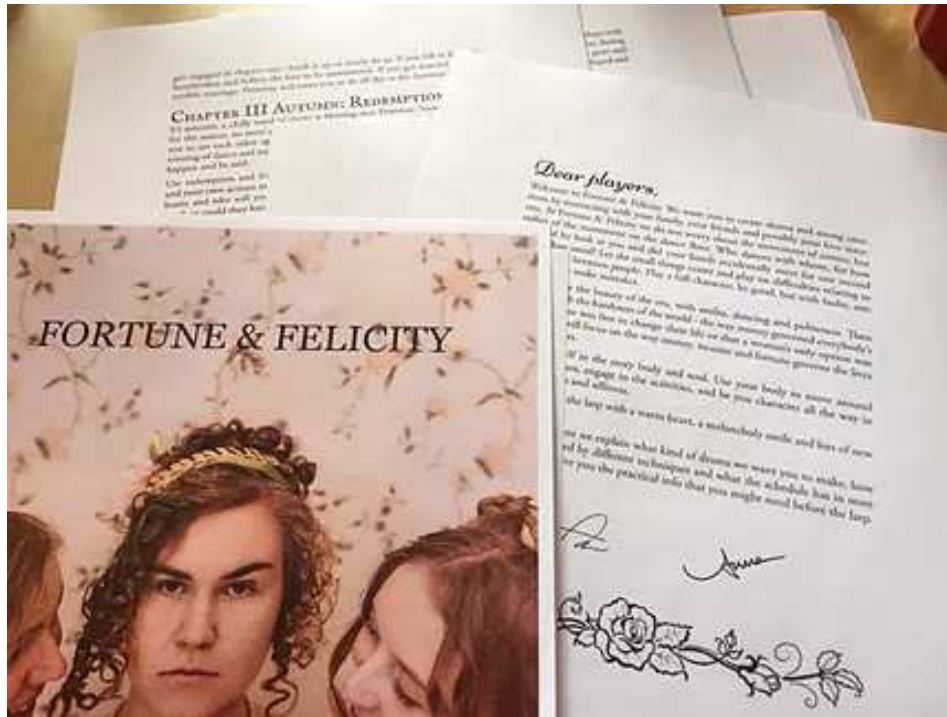




Green is the colour of the Mossworths so it was good to wear, made us easy to identify as a family. Another grouping is the romance set, this consist of of players from different families whose intrigues are entangled in different ways and stories that tend to play off one another. Every romance group has a motto. Esther Mossworth belongs to a group whose motto is "All is fair in love and business".

Before the LARP begins both family groups and romance groups meet in workshops. This is to get to know each other and help each others' play along. These workshops are repeated between the three acts that make up the LARP as a whole. This makes *Fortune and Felicity* a transparent LARP, there are other kinds. This transparency means all the

players in my family and romance group knows each other's full backstories e.g. that my mother bribed a young woman to seduce my fiancé all those years ago. This means they can all support me (and others involved) in reacting to this and creating drama around it. The players know but their characters don't of course. Until they do, shock, shock, horror, horror.



At *Fortune and Felicity* an international set of some 150 players danced together in the ballroom (live music of course), got engaged, got jilted, dueled, had tea, picnicked, wrote each other letters, went to church and, of course, drank the waters to improve their health. All with different character goals and intrigues to pursue. It goes without saying that the game design was pretty complicated. It all worked beautifully. And it did feel and look very Austen. The location was the lovely little village Medevi Brunn, built in the 16th & 17th hundreds around a famous well. For the LARP this was transformed into Primrose, a smaller version of Bath.

There were three acts to *Fortune and Felicity* each with a different season and a different theme.

Spring: Romance.

Summer: Reality (all falls apart more like).

Autumn: Redemption.

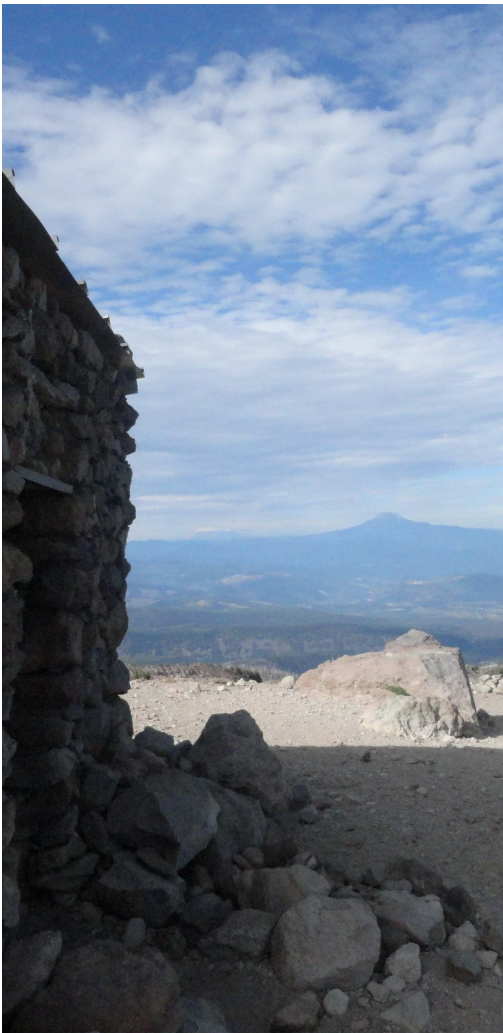
The LARP had other design features as well. A black box disguised as a Fortune Teller for instance, where characters could explore the "what ifs" with the aid of two game masters. Mr Rosewood and Esther explored scenes from their life as a happily married couple. Very happy indeed as it turned out. Oh well...



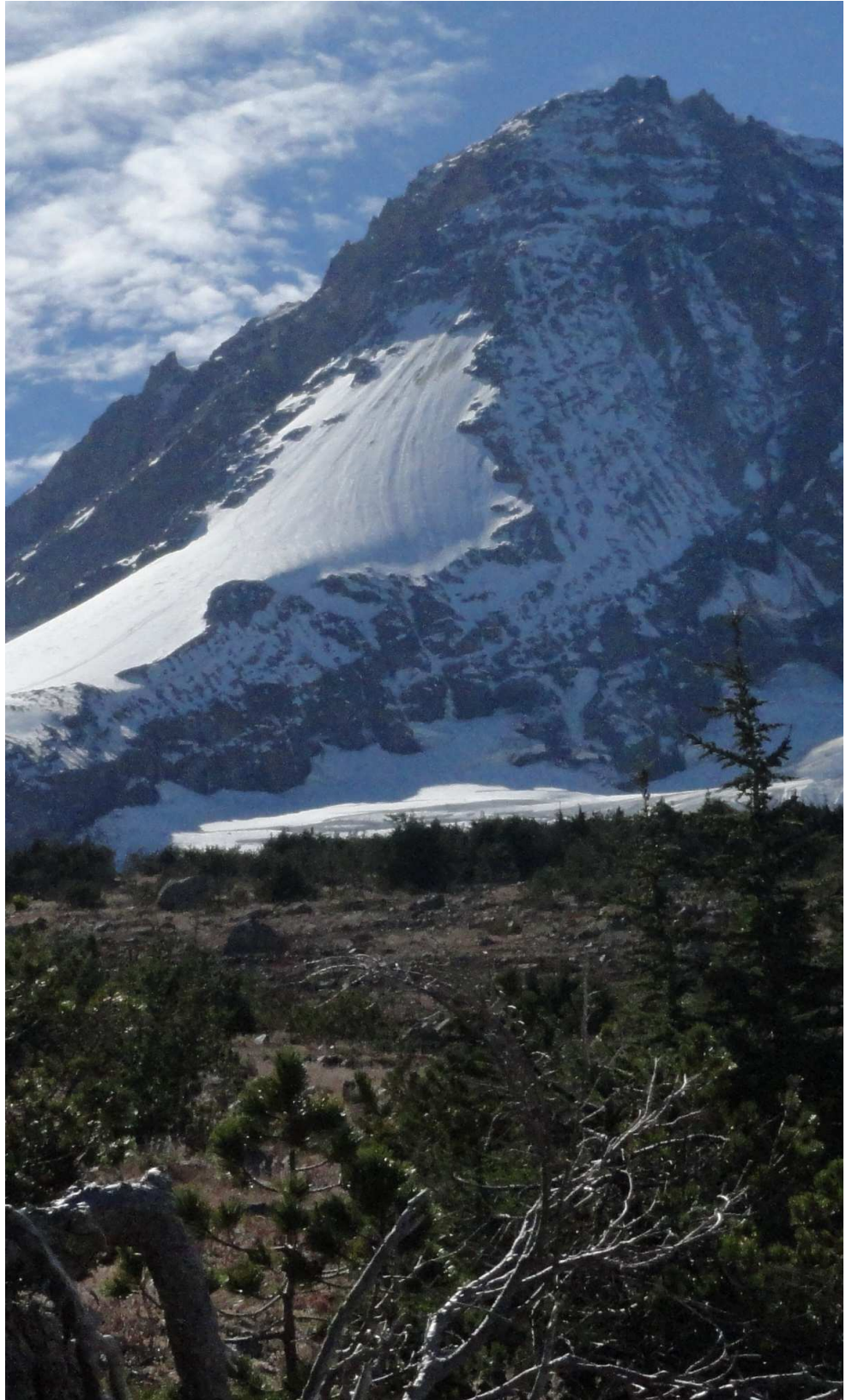
I loved being Mrs Mossworth, it was sometimes exhausting and emotionally draining but the drama worked, the design worked and that was extremely satisfying. Walking along the little gravel road between the Mossworth rooms and the church was such an immersive experience. Meeting other characters in uniform and high waisted dresses and silly bonnets, nodding and talking nonsense felt like stepping into a film.

There are many scenes I will carry with me, my nephew boring some young ladies to tears with his collection of dried flowers, meeting Mr Rosewoods eyes across a crowded dance floor, my “mother” rushing off at midnight to stop a duel, sitting in our parlour alone writing a letter in the light from the window. *Fortune and Felicity* reminded me why I LARP, even though it means having to sew. When location, story, design and all else works, it’s magic, with me in the middle.

Protect our public lands



View north from 6500'



Mt Hood north face

Mt Hood Wilderness - Oregon



