



# Event Horizon

2019 Mar  
Apr Issue 8



# **Bohio Studio**

presents

## **Neo- Expressionism in the Pacific Northwest**

**March 23, 2019**

**5pm-9:30pm**

**Maestro Hampton Rodriguez • Darig Hernandez • A. Tarrago**



**Bohio Studio 5108 SE Powell Boulevard Portland, Oregon 97206**  
**contact by [samakymedia@yahoo.com](mailto:samakymedia@yahoo.com) [hamptonrodriguez.com](http://hamptonrodriguez.com)**

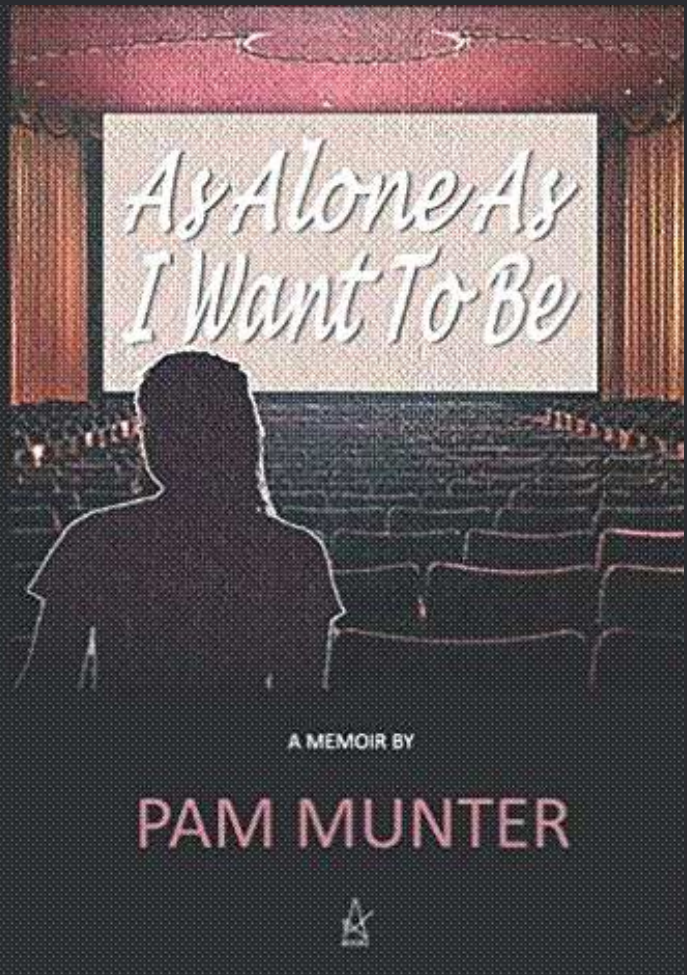


# Walking after Midnight

Collected Stories

C.S. Fuqua





"Life," George Bernard Shaw wrote, "is not about finding yourself. Life is about creating yourself." Pam Munter has opted for an unexpected and eventful life. Born in a time when women were expected to be wives and mothers, she has done that and has also been a professor, a musician, a disk jockey, a jazz/cabaret singer, a bandleader, an actor, a clinical psychologist and a writer. Hers is a feminist memoir told in a series of entertaining and often moving essays, a journey through a life lived deliberately – many lives, actually – as seen via a sardonic point of view, an eye for irony and a consistent sense of awe.

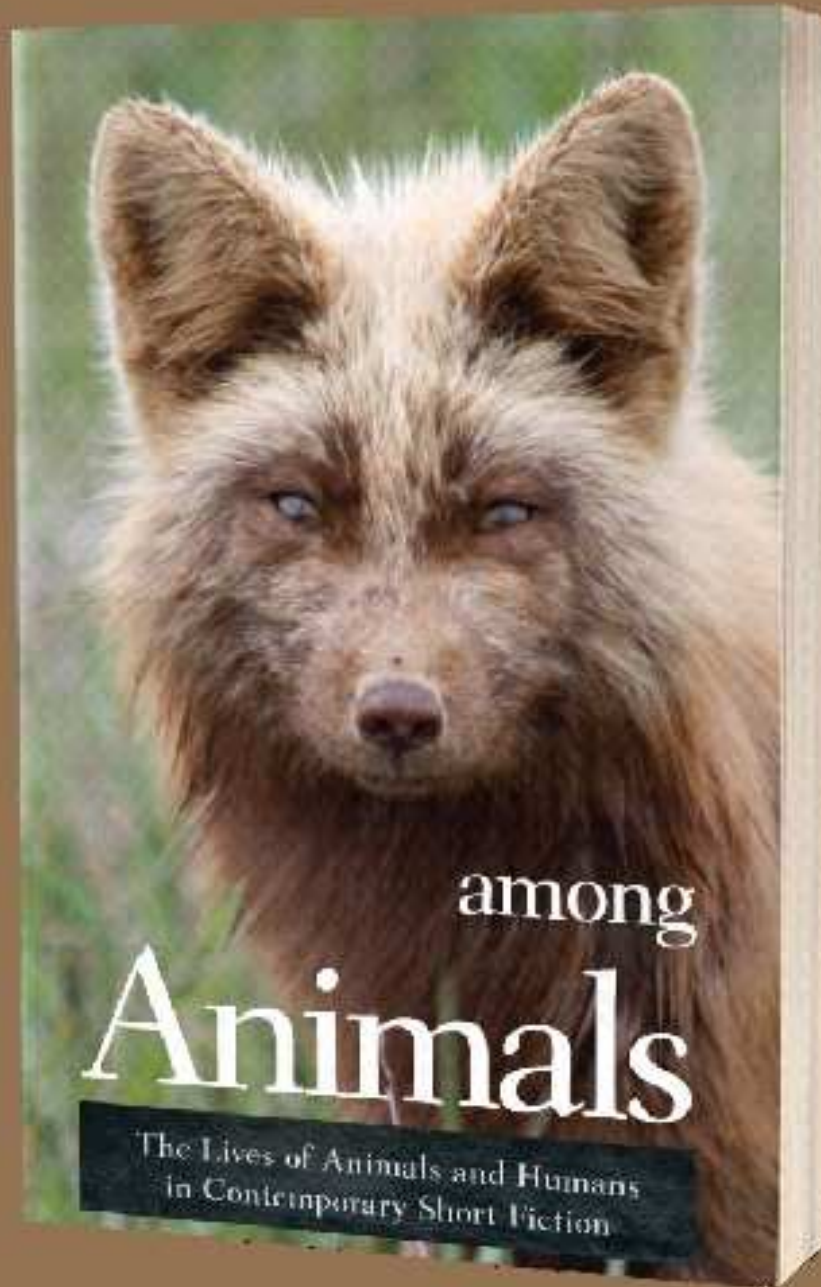
*"As Alone As I Want To Be" is well-written, funny, curious - a rare and intelligent literary work - the type of publication that belongs on every serious reader's bookshelf."*

*"Witty, poignant and intense, this thought-provoking memoir resonates with today's uncertain world."*

-Amazon reviews

AS ALONE AS I WANT TO BE now available at [amazon.com](http://amazon.com), in paperback and e-book and from the publisher, [adelaidebooks.org](http://adelaidebooks.org).





Ashland Creek Press





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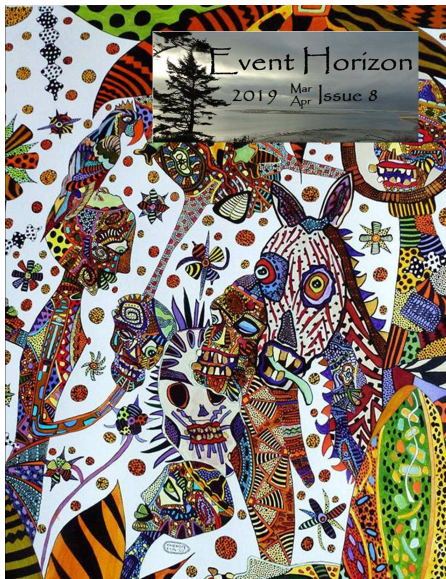
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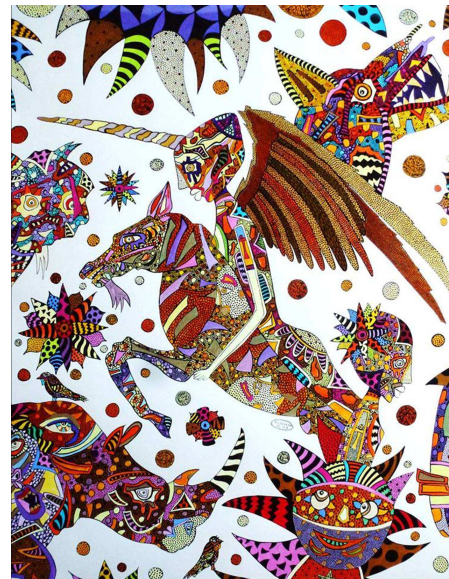


*~ a literary and graphic arts periodical*

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*front cover Parakeet Vigil*



*back cover Unicorn*

**Patrick Guéguen** is an artist from Bretagne, France. I encountered him as a 'friend' on Facebook ([facebook.com/profile.php?id=100014016913377](https://facebook.com/profile.php?id=100014016913377)). I know he's about 58 and that the art portfolio that had been posted on his page was extraordinary. He is currently represented by **Galerie Gaïa** in Nantes, [www.galeriegaia.fr](http://www.galeriegaia.fr). He is having a show, *L'hallucination simple*, June 9 - June 30.





### **Love letter from the editor of Event Horizon**

Long ago, in the middle of 2017, I had an idea. It was a stream - a confluence of restless urgings. I had been retired for three years. I knew that I loved to blog and it was frustrating that no one gave a good God damn what I had to say. I wished I had, maybe, a few more dollars a month than my humble pensions would provide. As always, I loved history, military history, art history, The Blues, Boomer pop/rock and lately, Greek classical literature and Jane Austen—a broad palette, plenty to work with. I've not been a successful entrepreneur yet. But I have never failed because I never stopped trying. Originally, I hoped Event Horizon would be more than a creative outlet; maybe eventually the full website, blog and magazine could be a platform for selling ads or subscriptions.

That part never happened but Event Horizon became something I never expected: a public service. It is so personally rewarding to me in that respect that I can no longer imagine *not* doing it.

But it does take a toll. I'm having some success in *other* entrepreneurial efforts and the money and the clients create their own priority. Event Horizon takes more - rather than less - time the more I learn and the more exacting my standards become. A local limited crisis is that I am late - very late - in bringing Issue 8 to 'print'.

There are answers - or at least solutions, each with their own sets of strings. I paid my son for 10 hours work at Portland minimum wage doing layout. He was a valuable and competent assistant but he doesn't want to do it. What I need is at least 20 hours/month but I can't afford it. I've done some research: Making Event Horizon a non-profit would not be impossible, only difficult and a long hard road. Maybe GoFundMe? If I had \$3000, that would take care of layout for a year. Or maybe ads or subscriptions. Sure, there ya go.

In the meantime, I'll mostly do it myself and publish as soon as I can.



## cc'd letter to the editor

...I think EH is a wonderful venue to display and feature your work. Although I widely publish in online/print publications, including ones I get paid for, I consider *Event Horizon* to be my artistic home. He's so supportive of his contributors that he offers us all a free full page ad to promote any venue we'd like--exhibitions, books, et al. I have a text based art book coming out at the end of the month and I'm certainly going to take him up on his offer. Here's Lanning Russell's contact info: [eventhorizonmagazine@gmail.com](mailto:eventhorizonmagazine@gmail.com)

~Mark Blickley

Letter to editor

**patrick guéguen**

On Fri, Feb 1, 2019 at 2:58 AM [patrick guéguen <patrickgueguen7@gmail.com>](mailto:patrick.gueguen7@gmail.com) wrote:  
Bonjour Lanning,

Je vous écris en français, normalement vous pouvez traduire directement en anglais. ( je suis un peu pressé aujourd'hui)

Faites pour le mieux, comme vous faites habituellement. Cela très bien. Je vous fais confiance. Vous pouvez choisir les peintures sur mon facebook. Je n'ai pas d'autres sites.

Cordialement  
Patrick

**Event Horizon Magazine**

Patrick

Hooray for high school and college French! - never thought I'd use it professionally.

I appreciate your confidence. Thank you again for letting me feature you on my cover. Onward to Issue 8 ! Le jour de gloire est arrivé.

Regards  
Lanning

Lanning Russell  
editor and publisher  
[Event Horizon](http://eventhorizonmagazine.com)





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# Greg Lobas

erosion of a rock face  
takes a million years



Beth Ann

**Greg Lobas** lives in the foothills of North Carolina. He has published prose in a variety of national outdoor magazines and newspapers. His poetry has appeared in *Broad River Review*, *Ekphrastic Review*, *Petigru Review*, and *Gray's Sporting Journal*. He has won the Pan Award and the Marjorie E. Peale Award from the Poetry Society of South Carolina, and the Carrie McCray Award from the South Carolina Writers' Association. He teaches a poetry craft workshop at Isothermal Community College.



### **The Last Days of Summer**

Where are the dusty lanes  
where people wave to strangers  
they pass along the way,

where cottonwoods drop  
their springtime array  
for barefoot boys to chase  
like daydreams,

a thousand years of summers,  
girls weaving  
crowns of daisies,  
holding court  
among the wildflowers?

I can still find  
dust and friendly strangers.  
I am a boy whenever cottonwoods  
breathe their tiny parachutes abroad.  
But I have learned how to look under a rock,  
or skip a stone and draw conclusions  
from the ripples in the water.

I fear my children will yearn  
for something and not know  
where to find it.  
The world has grown purposeful,  
and their needs are too many.  
Binary code is imprinted  
in their brains like a vaccination  
against simple things.  
And what of their children  
who will not believe  
dusty lanes even exist?  
Perhaps by then, they will be right.

### **Fledgling**

weeks of wretched  
hawk-screech  
hatchling  
huddles  
in the woods  
clutches a limb  
the way  
our fears  
grip  
close  
to what  
we know

today  
at last  
silent  
circles  
high  
a raptor  
in thin  
sky alive  
beneath sun  
brilliant above  
spread of red-tail banner  
abandons us to silence here below



## **Donna and Diane**

Cousin Diane's was not the kind of nose you would choose.  
It was the sort that people are sometimes born with.  
An historic nose, the kind that endured severe  
trials, occupations, famines, and survived.  
One could imagine a narrow alpine ridge  
leading gently from the brow, and then angling  
down midway, not severe, but steep enough  
to bring to mind mountain traverses and difficult hikes.  
Not freakish by any means, although when she looked in the mirror,  
her other symmetries seemed to vanish  
and she was left with a gnawing comparison.

Her sister Donna had the nose of a Greek statue.

I say this because when Diane became of a certain age  
and attained a certain level of means,  
she found a plastic surgeon, studied the catalogue  
of possible noses, and picked out  
a turned-up button that could make atonement  
for the years of looking at the world from the top of the Matterhorn.

Honestly, I never really noticed her nose before,  
but now when I see Cousin Diane,  
I'm always taken aback by that tight, little snoot  
with its brazen nostrils peaking out at me,  
a nose that wouldn't last a winter on its own.

Perhaps now, though,  
when she looks in the mirror,  
she can finally see Diane .

But I think she still sees Donna.

### **I Think I Own This Darkness**

I think I own this darkness,  
This space,  
This breath,  
This well-worn path  
From bedroom to bath,  
I walk heedless of obstruction,  
As if the structures of my life  
Could never meet destruction.  
This spark of mind I think is mine.  
This strength of limb, It seems,  
Could never stiffen into rigor.  
But come some breaking day  
I'll yield up my vigor,  
And these organs in their ceaseless clockwork function  
Will require sacred oil, sacramental unction.  
Then what darkness, what space,  
What breath to breathe and corpus shall I own?  
What paths to walk which lie beyond the well-worn paths that I have known?

### **erosion**

i carry it in my throat  
the ache of you  
preparing for life  
without you  
i combed my hair today  
the mirror's jagged  
edge reflecting  
me in slices

poured out-  
side i long for re-  
freshment from a brassy  
sky  
i tilt  
fragments of my  
pleading to pendant clouds  
promised  
to someone nearer  
the source of blessing

my eyes provide what the clouds deny

erosion of a rock face  
takes a million years

mine of flesh takes no time

no time at all



□

## Maple Leaves

Silvered  
undersides of  
maple leaves  
upturned, aflutter

in the searing summer

breeze, sunburned,

striving to draw moisture

out of August's vacant

wind like all the things we seek

but cannot find.

# Amirah Al Wassif

let the words dare to noise  
tell the woman there to raise her voice



© L N Jewell

Amirah Al Wassif is a freelance writer (28 years old) from Egypt. She has written articles, novels, short stories, poems and songs. Five of her books were written in Arabic, and many of her English works have been published in various cultural magazines. Amirah is passionate about producing literary works for children, teens and adults which represent cultures from around the world. Her first book, *Who do not Eat Chocolate*, was published in 2014 and her latest illustrated book, *The Cocoa Book and Other Stories*, is forthcoming.



### **A Woman looking for a tongue!**

they said your voice shouldn't be heard  
we need a woman without sound  
then I asked my god  
o lord, do I count?  
and he answered me in short  
raise your voice and shout

they said we need a perfect doll  
walking and stopping when we want  
but I am totally tweety bird  
so, I whispered: no, I cannot

they said the good girl knows how to close her mouth  
she always pretends to ignore seeing revolutions in the north  
or in the south  
the good girl used to crawl  
she must hide the bright side of her soul  
good girl hasn't any right  
or even fight for her vote  
the good girl couldn't contemplate the faint light  
in mid of the road

they said we need a plastic woman  
but, I act like a real woman  
so, they cried " be shy "  
but, I insisted to fly!

### **( love is a perfect poem )**

love is a perfect written poem escaped away from some poet's chest  
it is such a gossip girl song who always sing without rest  
it is the harmonic of the grass when the greeny does it best  
it is the peace feather against the war fist  
love is a very romantic age, flowing through fingers of the pianist  
it is me and you and the long rest of our list

love is the immortal truth  
however, all would be dissolved, it only should be rest  
it is the kissing between ancient trees and the small birdy nest  
love is the water of gold overwhelming the historical diarist

it is the eternal word and anybody ignored that  
is such a fabulist!

## At The Funeral Of 50 Barefoot Man

once upon a time  
there was an ancient place  
which called "Amon village"  
that a very far spot  
where everybody talks  
about the river legend  
that a very far spot  
where everybody knows  
how to distinguish  
the smell of fresh bread  
there, at the Amon village  
where all the folk lives  
in their dreams  
and the blazing sun cry  
against the face of heaven  
there, where the poor sweeper  
drowning in the colors of the rainbow  
and the great brown mountains  
announce its upper secret  
to the mass grave  
in the Amon village  
where everybody talks  
about the river legend  
and the real tale of  
50 barefoot man  
in the ancient village  
all people are storytellers  
and all of them say  
the same story  
which starts with  
once upon a time  
there were 100 man  
lived together in the same village  
but 50 of them were barefoot  
and the other 50 had fancy shoes!  
50 man sweeping the streets  
and 50 men making the bread  
50 ones looking for more!  
50 shoes in luxury leather  
and 50 toes inflamed and cracked

the river recognized the difference  
between the shoes and the toes  
then it made a good decision  
according to the nature rules  
and the river understood  
the difference between  
the torn clothing and the perfect ones  
then it made a good decision  
according to the nature rules

on the ragged edge, all the people walk  
under the boiling sun  
all people talk  
and there were two kinds of talking  
talking from shoe to shoe  
and talking from toe to toe  
and the river didn't love that kind of  
speech  
so, it made a good decision  
according to the nature rules

50 barefoot man carrying  
their empty pots  
their facial bones  
tell you about long age of bitterly  
shabby dresses, fearful eyes  
ancient faces full of pimples  
much sweat  
and shaky hands

50 barefoot man bearing their pain  
looking for a way  
to protect their feet  
from another pain  
but the shattered glass  
everywhere

the dispossessed people died  
and the rest were alive around the river  
laughing, jumping, drinking  
but the river has a sense of justice  
so, it made a good decision  
according to the nature rules  
and, dried up!



### **So lucky**

so lucky because I am stuck here in my kingdom, in my chamber!  
carving my oddity alone on the windows under the thunder  
so lucky because I am struggling like a fighter  
eating my worries, create the adventure  
feeling more than what I should  
thinking more than normal  
so lucky because I am stuck here laugh at my memories like a monster  
imagining a big battle between me and me  
hearing an imaginary whisper!  
so lucky even though my body covered with the answer  
of how all the beauty has been shortened in the feather of painter?!  
so lucky because I am not a member  
when matter relates to a number  
I am more than  
I am the opener  
of all locked doors  
I am no border  
and well  
so lucky because I am a writer.

### **My arrogant silence**

My arrogant silence looms over me  
His voice like a truth  
Like a bumble bee  
My ears have the sight  
Each ear has the right  
To see!  
It is such a messy heaven  
Like taking a breath and given  
The reality of to be  
I am totally confused about that  
Mixing good things and bad  
Makes me as an island in the sea  
And while contemplating  
My reality  
I found, yes I am that lonely island in the sea  
And while contemplating  
My reality  
I found that lonely person  
Is me!

### **The grass pray**

once I wonder and started asking "why"?  
why the mountain acts a strong role  
without weakness, with no die?  
once I wonder and standing by  
the green grass which performing his pray  
the grass flourish, glowing  
with the crazy sunray  
which escaped away from his mother and stay  
here in the ground to lighten the grass pray  
here in the ground to catch the mountain cry  
while everybody sees it a grim creature  
the ray knows it is just a lie!

### **No intention to quit!**

A kind of magic pumps in my chest  
When the poetry lines weave their nest  
More legends and tales spread along the mind  
When the brilliant imagination ends his rest  
My heart touches the honey light  
Muse is manifest!  
Take me slowly through the clouds  
I am fevered because of the reality mist  
Tell me what upper stories about?  
Give me a fast summary at least  
A kind of magic pumps in my heart  
When I lose in the garden or in art  
More harmony overwhelms me  
When my eyes meet the swart  
Dance with me on the road  
No matter with barefoot  
Here we will witness our born again  
Let we absorb all the rain  
A kind of magic pumps in my mind  
More innovative horses need to ride  
All the time in creating and  
No intention to quit!

### **( lyrics dance )**

let the lyrics dare to dance  
give the crystal moon such a chance  
clip your hands for your rapper with his fans

it is our time to grow  
come to the Everest and glow  
all your gifts need to show

let the words dare to noise  
tell the woman there to raise her voice  
cry among the crowd of boys  
" I am here "

give the chords more poise  
make the music dissolve the ice  
stand by, announce your choice  
everywhere!

let the lyrics dare to dance  
give the crystal moon such a chance  
clip your hands for your rapper with his fans



### **A Courage Woman Boil The Bananas**

a courage woman boil the bananas  
and watches her people on Haiti mountain  
run away behind her dream  
with curly hair and hidden pain  
she bribes the sun with her smile  
to dissolve the hot and murmured  
" Amen"

a courage woman boil the bananas  
and never experienced its taste  
always surrounded with tents and hungrier  
much secrets there, in her chest  
counting the footsteps in the sand  
reveals how many persons are lost!

the Haiti girl plants the corn with her father on the highest  
she tides his body with the robes, she trying her best  
and to make our life better  
what should we do?  
if we through our ages truly suffer  
if all our times were blue?

a courage woman boil the bananas  
and touches her baby skin  
" Work...Work" a sound around cries in the space said by men

she tore the tent with a huge passion  
she never understands what a mean of station  
where everybody needs to dream, to travel  
but there isn't her reality level

a courage woman boil the bananas  
and watches her people on Haiti mountain  
run away behind her dream  
with curly hair and hidden pain  
she bribes the sun with her smile  
to dissolve the hot and murmured  
" Amen"

## **To Be A Brilliant Woman in the third world!**

to be a brilliant woman in the third world  
you have not to be!  
so, if you want the basic tips  
kindly listen to me  
put your mind in a box  
be ready to say every moment " agree"  
announce your eternity silence  
stop whirring like a curious bee  
act as a bird in a cage  
never dream to get free  
don't consider obedience as a guilty  
it is honor getting down on your knee  
and about your gifts  
very enough to know all the electrical appliances, kind of dishes and how to  
make the tea?  
nobody cares about gifts  
it is not necessary, it is too wee  
don't try to laugh aloud  
it is perfect to be a tree  
and understand that argument is so dangerous  
the best for a woman is to flee!  
to be a brilliant woman in the third world  
you have to obey!  
your family, your husband, your neighbor, your president  
whoever he or she!  
you have to stitch and cherish and nourish and never have the chance to  
flourish!  
you have to silence  
not crying whee!  
in your sucess or if you finally could see!  
in the third world  
all you have to be  
is not to be  
nobody cares about your gifts  
enough having a degree  
in the obedience lessons  
or cooking puree!

**who would feed the orphans?**

my heart is a pancake  
shared by the poor and homeless  
and there is a poetic spot  
belongs to the orphans  
who covered with my blood  
seeking for a home  
all the age I wonder  
who are those orphans?  
then I found the answer  
hanging on the sky page  
those who sleep in the trash cans  
sweat and cry and spit  
those who make small clay houses  
doesn't let them get into  
these ghosts that you see  
close to the traffic signs  
shaking more than breathing!  
my heart is a pancake  
shared by the poor and homeless  
and the eternal question is  
who would feed the orphans?  
the naked bodies crawl on the sharp docks  
the small hands which forced to break the rocks  
the time howls without mercy  
the children watching our world  
from their neglected corner  
their skin tells you how is the sun every day  
their violent shiver tells you how is the cold every night?



## **who would feed the orphans?**

my heart is a pancake  
shared by the poor and homeless  
the bones pray for the tortured body  
the tear improvise a poem  
for the watchful eye  
my heart is a pancake  
shared by the poor and homeless  
under the ground they are many  
try to steal our attention  
cry secretly and laugh as a compliment  
hiding under the bridges  
wrapping with newspaper  
which never ever talking about them!  
in front of the pizza shops  
they are many  
watching in silence  
and never taste  
next, to the parks, they are many  
lookout their fellows in humanity  
and in whisper  
get out of their chest  
alongside toy stores  
they are many  
spy in bitterly  
run strongly to the trash cans  
for holding their cotton toys  
my heart is a pancake  
shared by the poor and homeless  
and I wonder if one good heart  
stopped beating  
who would feed the orphans?!





# Steve Klepetar

In unexpected light, trees  
dance above the river.

**Steve Klepetar** lives in the Berkshires in Massachusetts. His work has appeared worldwide, in such journals as *Chiron*, *Deep Water*, *Muddy River Poetry Review*, *The Muse: India*, *Night Garden*, *Poppy Road Review*, *Snakeskin*, *Voices Israel*, *Ygdrasil*, and many others. Several of his poems have been nominated for Best of the Net and the Pushcart Prize. Klepetar is the author of fourteen poetry collections and chapbooks, the most recent of which include *How Fascism Comes to America* (Locofo Chaps), *Why Glass Shatters* (One Sentence Chaps), and *o filho da bebedora de café* (*The Coffee Drinker's Son*), translated into Portuguese by Francisco Jose de Carvalho.



### **To the Reddened Earth**

"Look at the sky," someone said  
and there was nothing, just a blue  
ocean, or many shades of blue  
mingling in vast emptiness  
beyond the boughs  
of trees, with their needles  
reaching like many claws,  
and small green parrots  
lost in shadow, their bodies  
trailing like smoke in the sea breeze  
and heat. Then a door slammed,  
and my eyes trembled  
as if I had awakened in some winter  
half-light a century ago.  
My body fell away and I was glass  
and air, a handful of sand tossed  
against the window, then streaming  
down in rainbow patterns to the reddened earth.

### **Between Each Breath**

In unexpected light, trees  
dance above the river.

No one can see them  
because they are blind

to this miracle, trapped  
in a maze of words.

Never mind.  
There is silence

between each breath,  
and shadows of birds.

They call as they fly:  
here we are, our wings  
are made of fire.  
All day they have burned,  
and that fierce glow  
has turned my eyes to glass.



### **At the Theater**

When I was small enough to ride in his pocket,  
my father brought me to the theater, a red brick  
palace topped with a golden dome.  
We watched the audience arrive, men in white  
tuxedos, ladies in pearls and rustling skirts.  
Inside, he bought me chocolates,  
warned me not to eat them all at once.  
I savored one, my mouth burning  
with pleasure and desire.  
There was a cat and a boy, a foolish king,  
and a girl so lovely she caused the air to tremble  
when she spoke. I whispered in my father's ear.  
We ate more chocolates as the second act began.  
Then it was night, and a storm blew rain  
across the stage. Thunder jolted us in our seats,  
lightning seared our eyes.  
We stuffed chocolates in our mouths  
while the actors bowed. We stood and cheered  
until our hands were smeared and raw.  
As we stepped out into the bright evening,  
a kind of dizziness pulled us away from lamp-lit streets.  
Stars emerged in a white splash dragged across a sable sky.



# Ken Allan Dronsfield

Swift is her breath as the full moon rises

Ken Allan Dronsfield is a disabled veteran and prize-winning poet from New Hampshire, now residing on the plains of Oklahoma. Ken currently has three poetry collections available through Amazon or Barnes & Noble and has been published in many online magazines, journals and reviews, including *The Blue Mountain Review*, *WestWard Quarterly*, *Literary Orphans*, *The Burningword Journal*, *EMBOSS Magazine*, and the *Blue Heron*.

Jill Bergman

## **Heron and Moon**

Swift is her breath as the full moon rises  
smiles looking down at smooth calm waters  
warm breezes whisper to the gentle ripples  
the lonely heron stands stoically entranced.  
Serenity lulls the heart and warms the spirit,  
sounds of the city, lights and people are nil  
seagulls and terns have found their roosts  
fog horn speaks from the rocky outer banks  
swells carry seaweed on a high running tide  
stars strive to shine thru the bright lunar glow  
a ketch cruises by with her mizzenmast down.  
Venus clams squirt water all along the beach  
a ghostly chill suddenly wraps all around us  
the wind changes to an on-shore sea breeze  
the great blue heron extends her wings wide  
captures the breeze and rises into the night  
her flight reflected in the light of the full moon  
periwinkles glisten along the old floating docks  
minnows now safe until she returns to her perch  
the striped bass move in to capture a late meal  
crabs scurry about upon barnacle covered rocks  
the heron lands by moonlight to nap 'til sunrise.

## **Scars of Glass**

Wild rambling rose of ocular bloom  
salted crackers served with tequila  
worms hiding from the reapers plate  
ripple chips best to have with clam dip  
swirling icy vortex of inebriated candor  
toast with gin and choke down ramen  
pin-stripe gray suit with a flamboyant tie.  
I've lost all sight of that ruthless treason  
reverence hidden in a purple pious cross  
Expedia searches for a ticket to nowhere  
the kibitzer only charges two cents a day  
eyes shining a scarlet glow during twilight  
with darkness arrives the blood red moon  
the raucous dogs of war howl until sunrise  
reprieve I concede as I'm left on a sandbar  
adrift in a dispirited life with scars of glass.

## **The Stand**

Glorious trees be they aspen or birch  
kindred rise toward the sun and sky  
the Spring brings rain for tender roots  
buds exploding into new green leaves  
songbirds build nests and raise young  
each sunrise brings warmth for the day  
lulling all to rest during summer's glow.  
a crisp of fall begets nights of coolness  
leaves change color and glide to earth  
the North Star twinkles in its boldness  
as Christmas lights flash through towns  
the group has stood tall, year after year  
as Winter relinquishes its frozen grasp  
warmer spring days take over from cold  
Glorious trees be they oak, pecan or ash,  
some die and fall, many others rise higher  
together forever in a grand stand of trees.



### **Mrs. Carols Hairy, Smallish Cat**

Has anyone seen a little cat?  
there's a 'lost' sign on poles.  
Mrs Carol misses her and is sad.  
Like a gray day, misty, foggy.  
I watch her dreary face.  
Then the hairy small cat appears.  
Her owner is happy now, smiles.  
she gives her cat a hug,  
laughs until her belly aches.  
The only other sounds are birds,  
tweeting and fluttering about  
the cat watches intently  
This cat is hairy, smallish and cute,  
After food and lots of napping,  
dreams come toying with her.  
Mrs Carol rises from her soft bed,  
thoughts of the cat in her head,  
She feeds it treats, and has her jam,  
green tea and now ready for the day.  
The little hairy smallish cat purrs,  
roams the garden and naps in the sun.

### **Upon the Ebb and Flow**

From atop the great stone pine trees  
dragonflies fantasize of summertime;  
of warmer mornings and balmy winds,  
while dodging flycatchers and bullfrogs.  
The grass now brown beside the pond  
wolves howl to worship a harvest moon  
barn owls love the nightly stellar show  
young geese enjoy a fresh cool sunrise.  
Beating hearts strong by creek or marsh  
deep rivers and great bays ebb and flow  
deer and elk love the salty-sweet grass  
quilts of colorful leaves cover meadows.  
Rising sun now bright in the eastern sky,  
from within that great awakening forest  
a lone cicada sings his mating sonnet  
in the ebb and flow reigns life's circle.

### **At Rest in Dead Grass**

Chilled deep in the bones  
steamy breath disappears  
crispy ripe red apples drop  
firewood split and stacked,  
life dying in the cold fields  
sleeping with dead grass.  
Colored leaves free falling  
spinning down to ground  
unpacking winter clothes  
full dresser and closets.  
I'm dying in these fields  
asleep in the dead grass.  
Autumn's calm song echo's  
within a freshness of spirit  
views of a harvest solstice  
life's circle comes around,  
Alone in the dying fields,  
now at rest in dead grass.



# Ann Christine Tabaka

a single blaze of light

Ann Christine Tabaka was nominated for the 2017 Pushcart Prize in Poetry, has been internationally published, and won poetry awards from numerous publications. She lives in Delaware, USA. She loves gardening and cooking. Chris lives with her husband and three cats. Her most recent credits are: Ethos Literary Journal, North of Oxford, Pomona Valley Review, Page & Spine, West Texas Literary Review, The Hungry Chimera, Sheila-Na-Gig, Synchronized Chaos, Pangolin Review, Foliate Oak Review, Better Than Starbucks!, The Write Launch, The Stray Branch, The McKinley Review, Fourth & Sycamore.

### **New Beginnings**

Walking away from somewhere safe  
standing on the edge of risk  
stepping off  
plunging into the unknown

Exposing myself to judgment  
facing possible rejection  
holding my breath  
bracing for the worst

Facing my demons  
accepting my fate  
learning from mistakes  
marching bravely onward

There are no promises  
there are no guidelines  
there is only discovery  
there is only hope

New beginnings  
clutch at our hearts  
our minds and our souls  
then free us to find us

### **Silken Moments**

The silken moments of past lives  
wrapped up in distant dreams.  
Drifting slowly past a window  
of a world once wrought with pain.

Hearts open to opportunity,  
that stands off on the side.  
An unrecognizable emotion,  
floods senses once numb.

Slow moving panorama,  
resuscitating a need to live.  
Clouds lift to soft desire.  
Sunshine breaks through again.

Now soaring expectations  
reach above all doubt,  
as the silk cocoon unfurls  
and rebirth takes wing.

### **Leaves of Many Colors**

I must decorate my life  
with leaves of many colors,  
each a word in transition  
searching for its meaning.

I must wipe the table clean  
of discarded notions,  
casting out stale promises  
and tangled old ideals.

I must set my sights on high,  
forever searching inward,  
beyond vague images,  
and washed-out dreams.

I must forge ahead  
past doubt and indecision  
to find the answers  
to what I fear to ask.

I must live my life anew,  
as once I was afraid to,  
decorating it with  
many colored leaves.



### **Meteor Shower**

A wish flashes across the sky,  
trailed by blinding glory.  
Eyes closed, breaths held,  
it vanishes in a flash.

Hearts race across the moon  
in buoyant anticipation.  
Hope beyond hope  
a granting of desire.

A flicker of childhood  
held in ancient folklore,  
unlocking forgotten joy,  
a single blaze of light.

Believing, not believing,  
we never abandon  
the wonder in a moment,  
wishing on a star.

### **And then there is Love**

Emotions streaming on  
a current of flotsam and jetsam.

Discarded relationships,  
ebbing tide. Unknown future  
staring back at me,  
fugitive of a dying former self.

Disillusionment and lies  
follow me, trying to ascertain  
my fate. Destination unknown,  
I blindly saunter onward.

The unexpected presents  
itself, righting all wrongdoings.

You jump into my river, to save my  
sinking vessel. There to remind me,  
and then there is love!

### **Across the Barriers of Time**

*No no the dead have no brothers*  
*W. S. Merlin*

They move through the waves  
so silently, like shadows of fish  
caught in a tidal pool, or a memory  
grafted to a dream. We glimpse  
them only in turning away as the time  
of their birth comes near, then fades  
into undergrowth and vines.  
Their names stick in our throats,  
but we would call to them if we could,  
across the barriers of time.  
We have seen them on beaches,  
or on grass with their picnic  
baskets, their blankets spread out  
in the sun. Then they were warm,  
and waved away flies, their hands  
strung with flesh. Crickets murmured  
in afternoon heat, and we drank  
with them until our thirst subsided  
in the wind. Still, we were quiet  
as the hours passed. We had emptied  
ourselves of words. Darkness inked  
the sky, and we sat empty and calm  
in the bodies we knew so well.  
Now we sit in these terrible times  
stirring ashes for some new broth we must  
sip until bones grow cold, and memories  
shrink to pebbles coughed up by an angry sea.

### **A Burning Wreck**

Exhortation was useless.  
We climbed anyway.

Where would we go  
with all that smoke?

It may be that leaves  
would save us,

but only if we forced  
our way up to the light.

Then night  
could embrace us,

those crisp stars.  
How clean that air,

with its summer tang  
and smell of rain

just beneath  
the sound of cats.

We have abandoned  
a burning wreck.

The homeless hold tight  
to the smoldering dead.



# Kimmy Alan

“Come hear the corn grow  
Under the full moon’s glow”

**Kimmy Alan** is a wannabe poet from the land of Lake Woebegone. A retired steel worker who was diagnosed with stage 4 cancer, Kimmy Alan pursed his love of poetry as a distraction while undergoing chemo and radiation. For him, poetry has proven to be a powerful catharsis as he is currently in remission. When he isn't writing he spends time with his four wonderful nieces, whom he says “are driving him to pieces.”



## **Under the Green Corn Moon**

Giant Lake Sturgeon surface  
The blueberry fruit ripens  
When the August full moon  
Is at its perigee  
Beneath the Green Corn Moon  
On one warm summer's night  
In my young childhood life  
My father awoke me  
Softly saying as he carried me  
Before the tall crisp prairie  
"Come hear the corn grow  
Under the full moon's glow"  
Like a bowl of cereal  
Covered in cold milk  
Topped with sweet sugar  
The growing young corn spoke  
"Snap...Crackle...and...Pop!"  
Choirs of crickets and frogs  
Joined growing pains' song  
Of expanding cobs and stalks  
Under the Verde Maize Luna  
Upon my dad's shoulder  
My head fell back asleep  
And dreamed dreams sweet

### ***Author's Notes:***

*August full moon is often referred to as the Sturgeon Moon. During this time restless Lake Sturgeon arise from the murky depths to prowl the surface at night. But the August full moon is more often called the Green Corn Moon. During this period of warm humid nights, corn grows at such an accelerated rate you can actually hear it.*

*Yet another popular folk name for the August full moon is the Blue Berry Moon, because either by design or by coincidence, this is when blue berry's and many other fruit ripen.*

*Astronomers fondly call August full moon the Super Moon, because it looms big in the horizon as it is at its perigee (closest to the earth).*

*Whatever you want to call it, if you happen to be in farm country during a full August moon, wake your children to listen to the corn grow. Like me, they'll never forget the experience.*

### **Bachelor Farmer**

Cowboy of the corn  
Upon a deer of green  
He rides the great prairie  
Where trees nor people  
Are seldom ever seen

His friendships are few  
In this land of old folks  
And his bachelor peers  
Daily contacts counted less  
Then his callous hands' fingers

He had a sweetheart once  
But like all her girlfriends  
She had a dream so grand  
To become cosmopolitan  
So she fled this lonely land

Steward of the breadbasket  
As keeper of the cornucopia  
He's bound to his homeland  
Where he must stay on forever  
To feed God's starving children

Tiller of the land  
A son of the dirt  
Will you ever find true love  
Before you're interred?  
Or is your lover, Mother Earth?

### ***Author's Notes:***

*The above poem is dedicated to the many bachelor farmers that live on the corn-belt. Few people know of their plight. The shortage of eligible women in this area has resulted in high number of bachelors. They live lives of hard work and loneliness. The result is a high suicide rate.*

*My parents were both children of the corn-belt so I have a lot of family in Southwestern Minnesota. I visit them often. Many are bachelor farmers. It's not unusual to enter a farmer's house to find several planning a day's work together.*

*Sober, God fearing and hard working, I hope to create awareness of who these bachelor farmers are. And maybe my poem will be cause for some lonely city women to want to meet them.*

## **DAD'S BLUE BANDANA**

Going through my dear  
Departed Dad's stuff  
I came across an old  
Faded blue bandana  
Everywhere he went  
He always carried one  
He'd often use it to blot the sweat  
From his brow and sun burnt neck  
Sometimes he place it across his face  
To filter the smoke from his lungs  
Whilst fighting grass fires  
That rolled across our farm  
His faded blue bandana  
Was his handkerchief and napkin  
And he used it often to wipe  
The dirt from his large callused hands  
Sometimes it was a sling  
For wild grape or blueberry picking  
But what I remember most of all  
Is how he used that blue bandana  
When I was sad, or got hurt from a fall  
To gently dry my childhood tears  
This bandana was unwashed  
And the scent of my father  
Still clung to the cloth  
I'm going to keep that old rag  
And carry it with me to my grave  
And when I enter heaven  
I'm going to give it back to my dad  
With the hope he'll use to dry my tears  
Just like he did when I was a lad



# Carol Alena Aronoff

dressed in ash, of dance  
with family ghosts



Lyn Asselta

**Carol Alena Aronoff**, Ph.D. is a psychologist, teacher and poet. Her work has appeared in numerous journals and anthologies and has won several prizes. She was twice nominated for a Pushcart Prize. She has published a chapbook (*Cornsilk*) and 4 books of her poems and photographs: *The Nature of Music*, *Cornsilk*, *Her Soup Made the Moon Weep*, *Blessings From an Unseen World* as well as *Dreaming Earth's Body* (with artist Betsie Miller-Kusz). Currently, she resides in rural Hawaii.

### **Shoes Outside the Door**

Curled question marks,  
they rest at the foot of the door--  
some lined up with parade ground  
precision, others scattered like birdseed.  
No way to tell whose soles  
they've covered, where they've been,  
where they're going.

A few stand taller on spindly legs,  
pointing their toes with attitude.  
Some look down at the heels.  
Their mates, mirror twins  
leaning together, arches fallen  
in the line of duty.

Scuffed and gouged, wingtips  
worry they are losing their shine.  
I find the pair I arrived with  
and slip my feet into familiar  
places; each curve and fold  
supports my shape, no other.

We have worn each other in;  
even barefoot, I feel the impress  
of my sandals' embrace, even  
sleeping I dream I am wearing  
those shoes. They will probably  
comfort me in the grave.

### **Killing Field of a Small American Town**

It was a place of shadows  
dressed in ash, of dance  
with family ghosts,  
whose only music, dark  
laments of lonely islands.

Abandoned as an orphan,  
this poisoned stew of soil  
and stone, this refuge  
for unrighteousness.  
No church would grow here,

no missionary would dare  
set foot to nurse the few survivors  
too poor to flee, a hell realm  
with no sinners left, no profit  
to be wrought--only serpent's teeth

or bones of small dead animals  
beside this River Styx of sludge  
relabeled fertilizer; wildflowers  
once a cloak adorning verdant  
lands are gone, rose petals now

pressed into tears, no one left  
to sit around a fire remembering  
the town that used to feed them,  
no one left with breath enough  
to sing.

### **I Will Never See a Flower in Her Hair**

No clashes over curfew  
No arguing about mall trips  
skirt length  
too much makeup  
too slick boys

No charged silences  
broken only  
by the ring of an incoming text

No sass no backtalk  
followed by a quick hug  
and a "see you later"

No shopping together  
for a prom dress  
or heels

No laughing  
at the salesgirl so hungry  
for a sale

No laughing  
ever

Grief has no edges  
No shelf life  
No breath

They say it's too soon to talk about it  
Offer thoughts and prayers

Perhaps they will help me  
choose  
a dress  
for  
her  
coffin

### **The Others**

He smiled as you passed him  
on the street.  
He soled your shoes,  
sold you bread and rose petal jam.  
His uncle was your father's friend.

His wife stood in line behind you,  
head scarf clutched beneath her chin  
like a crow  
with tucked in wings uncertain  
of her welcome or her place.

Her son looked up at you  
and as you bent to meet his gaze,  
solemn as black sapphire,  
he touched the star of David  
hanging from your neck.

You kissed his fingers.



### **The One Time I Went Fishing**

was a metaphysical disaster.  
True, I caught a good-sized  
salmon with scales gleaming  
polished silver--its mouth  
ensnared by an old tin hook,  
jaws gaping in perplexity.

I'd been chanting a mantra  
for compassion when I felt  
the tug on my line, that sudden  
lurching of nylon thread,  
like stretching cobwebs in the rain--  
signal of fishy distress.

My brother helped me reel it in.  
I thought of Moby Dick,  
of Neptune's wrath and Circe  
luring unsuspecting sailors  
to their graves. The fish flapped  
around for a bit, slapping

the peeling blue deck with its tail,  
slap, slap--deck slick with slime  
of other fish already dead and gutted,  
my brother waiting, knife in hand.  
But I was no fish slayer; I wanted  
to give it back to the sea.

One smack of head against bowed hull  
stilled the salmon, my weak protests.  
*Don't catch it if you can't kill it--*  
my brother dropped the fish  
back on the deck. In the silence  
of regret, I mourned.

# Gary Glauber

## *Agitprop coda*



Craig Mullins

**Gary Glauber** is a poet, fiction writer, teacher, and former music journalist. His works have received multiple Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net nominations. He champions the underdog to the melodic rhythms of obscure power pop. His two collections, *Small Consolations* (Aldrich Press) and *Worth the Candle* (Five Oaks Press) and a chapbook *Memory Marries Desire* (Finishing Line Press) are available through Amazon and Barnes & Noble.

An earlier version of *Agitprop* appeared in *Event Horizon* Issue 7.

## **Agitprop**

Romance replaced by remonstrance,  
emotions channeled toward dark fury,  
moral grandeur become obligation  
with politics infecting art.

Sitting shivering at the stop,  
awaiting a bus, a deliverance,  
escape though brisk purple sunrise  
to where they gather with more signs,  
chanting in angered choral reproach,  
that this is the limit,  
they can take no more.

The lying scoundrels in power,  
push boundaries of credulity,  
living in this fantastical world  
of their narrated prescription  
without apology or remorse,  
stentorian proclamation  
forcing new reality,  
baroque & so broken  
it provokes provocation  
a surge of adrenaline,  
a gallon of bile.

It boils beneath  
an ellipse of a smile  
contorted, distorted  
insanely reported  
asylum for no one,  
asylum of all.

This is her commitment  
to resist & promote  
necessary change,  
for silence is complicit  
& history has shown  
moral outrage requires  
a powerful collective voice  
beyond disenchantment  
of frustrated individual.

She pulls coat tighter  
against chill winds  
of intolerant attitude,  
adjusts pink woolen cap  
in hopes this message  
will make lasting difference,  
slouching toward Washington,  
waiting to be borne.



# Patricia Walsh

truly laughing at, is your only recourse



**Patricia Walsh** was born and raised in the parish of Mourneabbey, Co Cork, Ireland. To date, she has published one novel, titled *The Quest for Lost Eire*, in 2014, and has published one collection of poetry, titled *Continuity Errors*, with Lapwing Publications in 2010. She has since been published in a variety of print and online journals. These include: *The Lake*; *Seventh Quarry Press*; *Marble Journal*; *New Binary Press*; *Stanzas*; *Crossways*; *Ygdrasil*; *Seventh Quarry*; *The Fractured Nuance*; *Revival Magazine*; *Ink Sweat and Tears*; *Drunk Monkeys*; *Hesterglock Press*; *Linnet's Wing*, *Narrator International*, *The Galway Review*; *Poethead* and *The Evening Echo*.

### **Coming To Senseless**

Cards declined, on what's manifested in them,  
easily burned, at least dispensed with,  
a grand legacy purports the easy way,  
not for public consumption, or beloved's spite,  
bracing through arctic winds like a shot.

This coldened tea-room runs through every vein,  
the hidden iconoclast tests every nerve,  
this redundant clothing stays by the wearer  
seated by the radiator for good thinking,  
shielded by a leather art, as is.

This poor useless body demands its price.  
Ultimately irrelevant through use of the whip  
scarcely believable stories of assault,  
a life of scarrings, proven in this case  
by removing a shirt and revealing scars.

Roughly kissed, a taste of things to come,  
mere pregnancy a task calling out names  
hardened hypocrites lie on corners  
the only aperture to a better life,  
dissolving protection in a better suit.

The foreman foresees his death, as likely  
as good a cliché as anytime, dangerously away,  
stereotyped up from embryonic fantasies  
complex, the better, at measure from everywhere,  
going electronic the way to salvation.

### **Acid-Free Paper**

This mimicked abortion dents my admiration,  
Waffling through sedition, cheaper than most,  
ensconced through a pertinent question,  
negatively responded, published at will  
softest knitwear skulks on the floor  
head-wrecking measures where all aboard.

This rare epiphany, dénouement realised  
Cleaning up after others remains key,  
leaving after hours some dissonant times  
leaving effects sideways prime report,  
golden skirmishes remain off the bone,  
fake celebrity news rightly derided.

Valuables off hand, to yours and none else,  
this punishing stunt winds up rather nicely,  
guarantee of notice from a turgid eyesight,  
the promise of togetherness still the same  
the black box of hygiene holding its own  
not at a worse time does it realise itself.

Admonished, nice as pie, for keeping the tongue  
where it's supposed to be, an abortive trait,  
cleaning up where perfect, gilding the rose,  
smelling fear, at a remove from laughter  
foreseeing death in a handful of spoil,  
maximising power at expensive of satisfaction

### Regular Exercise

Too sated to produce, expensive to operate,  
Talk as much as needed, balance yielding,  
black as a uniform that doesn't need changing  
a sentinel in the doorway calls on truth  
perpetual comedian that no one find funny.

Not a word to anyone. This serial grief  
from not being applied, a statistic overboard  
desire for an apogee student, moves known  
serial boyfriends confessed about, sharpish  
microscopic psychosis angered repeatedly.

Stocking up on chalk, for sake of entertainment  
the principal doesn't frighten as it should,  
some parallel planet is good enough for us,  
at least left in peace, being good eventually  
running in corridors the only device left.

Truly laughing at, is your only recourse  
distracting from studies is the path sought,  
darlings slaughtered an attack of progress,  
singular towers of strength remain  
in face of ridicule a poison letter sent.

Loving out of measure, the malcontent's boon,  
being sure it was funny, at the time it seems  
declarations through snitching the just cause  
expenditure on the unnecessary a callous act,  
taunting the sorrowing in a serious gaze.

### Setting Face Like Flint

Postal rewards interrupt the dark fantastic,  
forms to be completed, speeds is plough,  
shortage of funds self-inflicted forever,  
pacing day by day not another option,  
Relaxing and recuperating a solitary excuse.

Waiting and getting by, soothed by a familiar,  
assuring all is well but never perfect,  
hassle-free lives never realised, if at all,  
wiping the floor with a regular smirk,  
troubles dilated, over a rosy gaze.

Some worse off than others, a mantra quirk,  
simple mathematics too difficult for many,  
taken through the back door of familiarities  
a liability for the company to cling on,  
genuine reasons not disclosed for ever.

Watched through a smartphone, a righteous stance  
bad enough without the public begging,  
proffering a loyalty card, stuck for answers,  
stopping being touched a professional death  
feeding one's entrails a brutal touch.

This deserved hardship, ripping oneself off,  
mere luxuries now and again, foretold,  
regrouping finances ahead of a massacre,  
vocal, as is, counting down to mediocrity  
some death knell for the weekends coming forth.

# Alan Britt

my love is like a cheetah stalking



In August 2015 Alan Britt was invited to Ecuador as part of a cultural exchange of poets between Ecuador and the United States. In 2018 and in 2013, he served as judge for the The Bitter Oleander Press Library of Poetry Book Award. He has been interviewed at The Library of Congress for *The Poet and the Poem* and has published 17 books of poetry, his latest being *Ode to Nothing* (bilingual English/Hungarian: 2018) *Crossing the Walt Whitman Bridge* (bilingual English/Romanian): 2017; *Violin Smoke* (bilingual English/Hungarian: 2015). A graduate of the Johns Hopkins Writing Seminars he now teaches English/Creative Writing at Towson<sup>47</sup> University.



Carlos Santana  
 prowling ether  
 for discarded atoms . . . chevron fumes  
 from dreams  
 deferred. Guitar slings a lasso

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CARLOS SANTANA

Zebra thorn beetle ignites a mariachi poison dart  
tip blazing a VW van filled with  
toucans blowing ganja clouds en route to the Fillmore to catch  
a glimpse of Bloomfield – Carlos dusting diamonds across Hamlet's  
crystal skull like ampules of smoke like thorn beetles like emotional  
puffs of ecstasy between academic thoughts littering roadsides  
with reptilian scraps of petroleum plague – as Lila  
unfurls her Manet picnic blanket  
of  
scan  
dal – Carlos herds  
golden jaguars  
into  
a t o m s  
o f  
G i b s o n  
c o n s c i o u s  
n e s s  
a c r o s s  
un  
con  
sci  
ous  
incinerator stacks billowing toxic ribbons  
of the way it's always been  
but cannot continue  
regardless  
of  
who's  
in  
charge –  
can  
not  
must  
not  
continue –  
so long as  
Gibson  
notes

of

hypodermic  
conscious  
ness  
r e m i n d  
u s  
t h a t  
o u r f u t u r e  
d e p e n d s  
u p o n  
t h e  
l a n g u a g e  
o f  
l o ♥ e.

### **BUSINESS MEETING**

Eyes like Mexican jumping beans  
about to jump.

Hips like dolphins breaching  
Atlantic foam.

Sailboat ropes & poles  
from a 1950s backyard pirate  
laundry line forcing socks  
to walk the plank & sheets  
to confess to crimes  
they never committed.

Hazelnut flesh & pupils  
like petrified doorknockers  
each time you rattle your  
walnut eyelashes which  
is good enough for me.

### **INFATUATION**

My love is like a cheetah stalking  
plants known as Spanish Swords,  
plants programmed to erupt once  
every century but with the bad habit  
of breaking into blossom every July  
or so – or whenever the urge arises.

Still, cheetahs with balsawood shoulders  
& empathetic souls to die for . . . ?

Undeterred, my vegetable love circles  
a bait ball known as Spanish Swords  
or Century Plants with the bad habit  
of bursting into blossom every July  
or so – or whenever the urge arises.

### **WHAT GOES AROUND**

Feathers for security,  
feathers for the script,  
feathers forever,  
feathers for forefathers  
& forefathers before them,  
feathers for Annabelle, the catbird,  
eyes, two pleading drops of crude  
vibrating apology,  
feathers with their own reality,  
feathers that taught mammals  
based upon DNA algorithms  
how to engineer the planet  
using a *what's good for me* barometer,  
plus feathers exploding the Fountain  
of Youth, feathers with a tactile  
sensibility, feathers that say  
we'll meet again, some sunny day,  
we'll meet again.



## HYMNAL

Burn

.  
.  
.  
ash  
copperplate  
e  
n  
g  
r  
a  
v  
i  
n  
g  
Longfellow's letter  
to Eddie's  
m  
u  
m.

Effigy.

Leaden clouds  
descend like a herd of starlings  
100 billion strong  
s  
h  
e r  
d  
d  
i  
n  
g  
the fabric  
of  
common  
m i s c o n  
c e p t  
i o n  
regarding  
sense—

or as  
 Marvell, Blake,  
 & Lorca  
 intimated,  
 no  
 s  
 e  
 n  
 s  
 e  
 at all.

The prophet  
 hides  
 ben  
 eath  
 a refrigerator  
 box  
 wilted by rain  
 &  
 snow.

Leaden clouds  
 descend  
 100 billion strong  
 s  
 h  
 r  
 e  
 d  
 d  
 i  
 n  
 g  
 the very fabric  
 of common  
 misper  
 cep  
 tion  
 s regar d i n g  
 e n s e  
 &  
 sen  
 si  
 bil  
 ity.

Amen.

## MYTH OF THE BEANSTALK

What happens when the beanstalk  
ignites a brainstem beyond the fable;  
what happens then?

What happens when typhoons  
sway the stalk this way or that,  
then back again?

What happens then?

What happens when the beanstalk  
splits atoms then auctions them  
off to the highest bidder?

& how about the giant cramming his  
chipmunk cheeks with bloody gold  
coins for a cozy afterlife to die for?

What about that part of the myth?

## ITHACA, SUMMER OF '70

Fog's feline body oozed zebra thoughts  
like shadows through Venetian blinds slicing  
& dicing torsos while metallic atoms' fibrous  
tendrils coalesced beneath a shark tooth waterfall,  
Ithaca Falls, circa 1970, the year of psychedelic  
abstinence, scrounging Ithaca Seed looking for  
the Gills, his & hers, John & Elaine→→plus  
5 billion gallons of unwanted war & overdue  
justice for all, black & white—a technicolor  
sensibility, new vision of reality—though  
animal testing continues to this day.

Shit, that too.

## **SEPARATION**

(For Mary Beth)

Just dropped by to say  
may your dreams be breezy  
& filled with two cats, a fiddle,  
& two wooly bichons  
jumping over the moon.



The background of the entire page is a painting of a vast flock of birds, possibly terns or gulls, in flight. They are scattered across a sky filled with soft, white and grey clouds. The birds are depicted in various stages of flight, with some showing dark wings and others lighter plumage. The overall tone of the painting is somewhat somber and atmospheric, with a palette of muted blues, greys, and whites.

# John L Stanizzi

Parlous wind slams bare branches together,  
the clacking landscape roars

John L. Stanizzi is author of *Ecstasy Among Ghosts*, *Sleepwalking*, *Dance Against the Wall*, *After the Bell*, *Hallelujah Time!*, *High Tide - Ebb Tide*, *Four Bits - Fifty 50-Word Pieces*, and *Chants*. His poems have appeared in *Prairie Schooner*, *American Life in Poetry*, *The New York Quarterly*, *Paterson Literary Review*, *The Cortland Review*, *Rattle*, *Tar River Poetry*, *Connecticut River Review*, and many others. Stanizzi has been translated into Italian and his poems have in appeared many journals in Italy. His translator is Angela D'Ambra. Stanizzi teaches literature at Manchester Community College in Manchester, Connecticut, and lives with his wife, Carol, in Coventry.

**12.4.18**

**2.39 p.m.**

**37 degrees**

☞ *In accidental power.*

*The blond assassin passes on...*

*-Emily Dickinson*

*-76*

Persistent wind, cold, wimples the pond,  
objectively engendering Emily's *blond assassin*.  
Niaidic reeds, blond too, have tired backs; they bow  
deeply to a host of sparrows in the cedar, quarreling.

**2.10.19**

**8.08 a.m.**

**22 degrees**

Pedantic days, frozen, dull, gray, and repetitive;  
openhanded cold does nothing but slow my gait and bring me down,  
nibbling at my patience. I need Stinking Benjamin to shatter the  
dullness with its blood-red flowers that signal warmth, *warmth* is coming.

**2.9.19**

**7.59 a.m.**

**23 degrees**

Parlous wind slams bare branches together, the clacking landscape roars  
obtrusive, the frozen ground breaks beneath my footfalls, the air is filled with  
nouns, tumbling adjectives, fiery verbs, jagged letters thrown violently into the  
densest stand of stark trees, the only sound marshalled is the sound of wind gathering, erupting.

**12.6.2018**  
**3.42 p.m.**  
**37 degrees**

☞ *Jason walks to the pond with me*

Planing in silhouette over the air,  
obfuscated in the day's massive transition of light,  
not noticing us the way we noticed it, a woodpecker  
darts across the pond, and neither Jason nor I can identify it.

**12.13.18**  
**1.28 p.m.**  
**32 degrees**

Princely flurries that can barely be dubbed *squall*  
obfuscate little in the dead calm.  
Nurturant fruits of the labor have woven a  
damask shawl gray as the curl of my breath is gray.

**2.11.19**  
**10.06 a.m.**  
**30 degrees**

Picture this – there among the titmice, the chickadees, the blue jays, the  
overreaction of the racket of a quarrel of sparrows, the  
noisiness of the wren just on the periphery, is the purely  
delicate iridescent blue, the russet-like-gold, the softest cirrus of the bluebird.

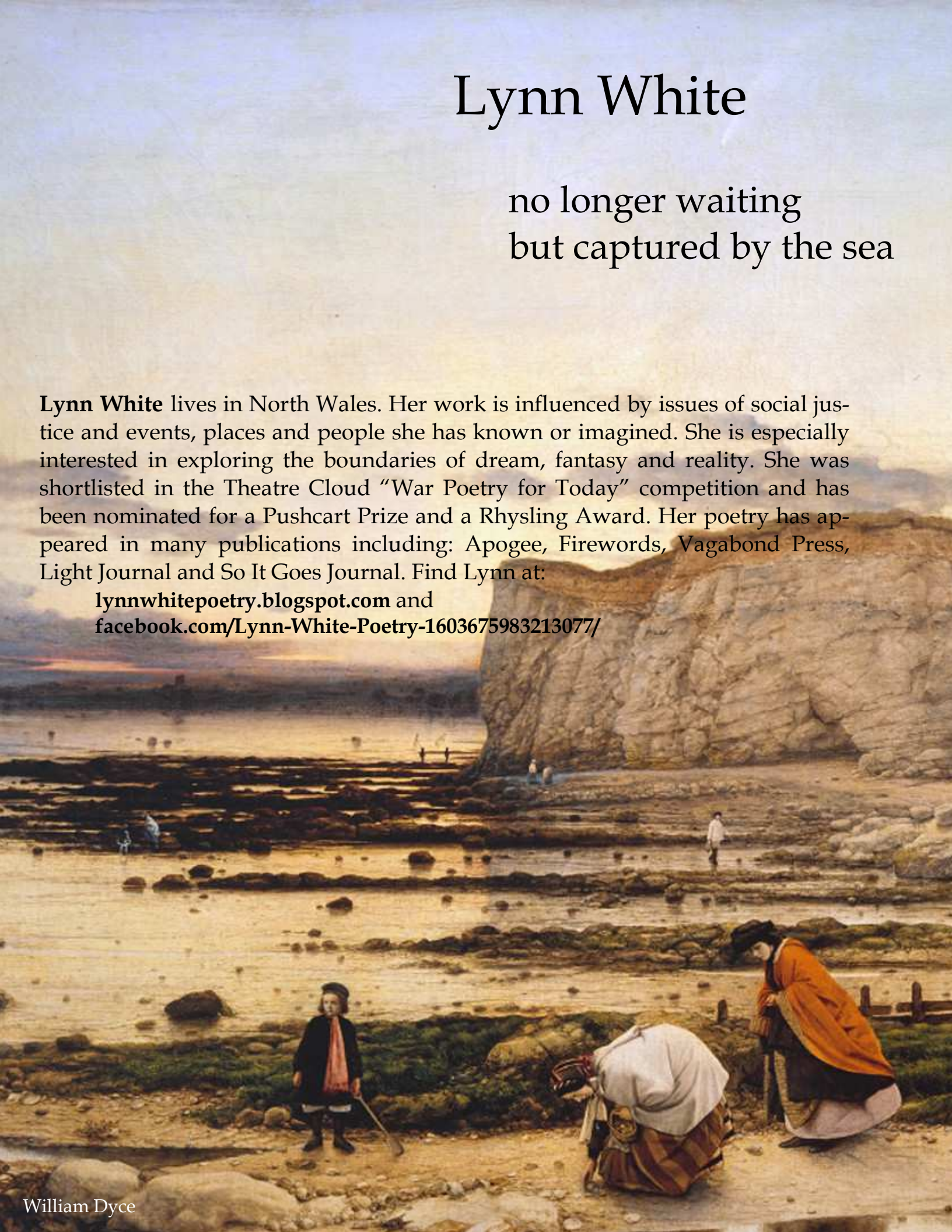


# Lynn White

no longer waiting  
but captured by the sea

**Lynn White** lives in North Wales. Her work is influenced by issues of social justice and events, places and people she has known or imagined. She is especially interested in exploring the boundaries of dream, fantasy and reality. She was shortlisted in the Theatre Cloud "War Poetry for Today" competition and has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and a Rhysling Award. Her poetry has appeared in many publications including: Apogee, Firewords, Vagabond Press, Light Journal and So It Goes Journal. Find Lynn at:

[lynnwhitepoetry.blogspot.com](http://lynnwhitepoetry.blogspot.com) and  
[facebook.com/Lynn-White-Poetry-1603675983213077/](https://facebook.com/Lynn-White-Poetry-1603675983213077/)



### **Every Cloud**

Every cloud has a turquoise lining  
sparking in caught sunlight.  
You can see it  
even though  
your eyes  
are tight shut  
against the light  
you know it's true  
you can see that it is  
even though your eyes  
are shut tight against the light.  
Believing is seeing  
after all.

### **My Old Blue Pumps**

I kept them on,  
my old blue pumps.  
You see,  
I could see a broad band  
of sharp shells  
and pebbles  
and other flotsam  
between me and the sea  
so I kept them on,  
my old blue pumps,  
until I'd crossed over.  
I eased them off carefully  
but even so the sharp sand  
grazed my heels.  
Never mind,  
the sea would sooth them,  
wash away the pain  
with the ingrained sand.  
And it did  
as I swam.  
But at the end  
they were no longer waiting for me  
on the shoreline,  
my old blue pumps.  
No longer waiting when I emerged  
healed and refreshed,  
no longer waiting  
but captured by the sea  
and washed away with the rest.

### **They Thought It Time**

They thought it time  
to build a cathedral  
with gothic towers  
reaching  
into the clouds.  
It seemed time  
but as it rose  
the dry ground crumbled  
and cracked around it  
leaving only a few  
distorted stones  
behind.  
It had seemed like time  
but it was too late,  
much too late  
the cracks were already open  
the foundations had fractured  
and there was no one to watch  
as it floated away  
with the clouds.



# Petra Sperling-Nordqvist

oblivious genius ever drives  
destruction of the innocent.



**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.

## RECALL

when you see me  
recall we all  
live laugh cry  
smile suffer die

## OBLIVION

Wise oblivion ever soothes  
creation, except us:

foolish strivers, searchers  
for meaning, for ideas to  
fervently follow and  
stubbornly

believe, self-pleasing narcissism  
feeding our false sense of security,  
betraying the  
will to survive of the

whole, subliminally, subtly  
first, then sublimely, severely  
wreaking  
wrack and ruin,

forevermore to meet nevermore;  
human faculty defeats  
universal function beyond  
repair, unfortunately

oblivious genius ever drives  
destruction of the innocent.

# John Tavares

Freelancer



John Tavares was born and raised in Sioux Lookout, Ontario. He is the son of Portuguese immigrants from the Azores. His fiction is widely published in journals, online and in print. As a journalist his articles and features were published in various local news outlets in Toronto. John is also a photographer. John has worked locally in his hometown of Sioux Lookout for the Sioux Lookout Public Library, as a research assistant in waste management for the public works department. He also worked with the disabled for the Sioux Lookout Association for Community Living.

"You're the hacker," an anonymous voice, which sounded deep, mellow, authoritative, said over her VOIP telephone.

"Yes, I work in information technology," Manon said. "I'm a freelancer."

"Do you know about pacemakers?"

"No. But I can learn. I'm a quick study and I love doing research."

"Do you still have encrypted e-mail, your SecureMail e-mail address?"

"Yes," Manon said. "How did you know?"

"Expect an e-mail, with instructions," the sonorous voice said. "And, Manon—"

"Yes."

"Welcome to the Montreal construction and real estate industry."

Later, Manon puzzled over these remarks and the masculine voice, which, she thought, had the enunciation and diction of a CBC radio announcer, with a Toronto regional dialect. Bewildered, resisting the urge to say she worked for the members of Montreal crime syndicates before, she muttered her discombobulated thanks. After she checked her e-mail and read the message, which had detailed instructions, she followed a link to the PayPal website. There, she found DreamsNeverDie Inc., a Hong Kong based company; deposited ten thousand dollars in one of her online accounts, which amounted to the largest advance she ever received; and so she entered the picture.

"I hope you don't mind me bringing my own coffee," Manon said.

She sipped the remainder of her takeout coffee, an Americano with a double dose of espresso, which she filled with plenty of cream and sugar. Days passed when she survived on nothing but protein bars, vitamin and mineral tablets, and coffee, cup after cup of the caffeinated beverage, rich in cream and sugar. She adjusted the frames of her horn-rimmed glasses and smoothed the tight-fitting skirt, as she stood before the receptionist.

"They have a Café Fleur-de-lis in the food court of the mall, and I love their coffee, so I hope you don't mind me bringing my own."

"No, we're not allowed to serve coffee in the office. The lady in charge—"

"Madame Petit?"

"Yes, Juliette has a heart condition. She swears it was caused by a lifetime of excessive coffee drinking and too much caffeine. She's a proselytizer and a health food nut and doesn't allow her workers to drink coffee."

"But coffee has antioxidants," Manon said.

"Apparently, that's what she thought; that was her excuse, that it was the least of all evils, the mildest of addictions."

"So, do you read *Prevention* magazine?"

"How did you know?"

"It's on your desk beside your keyboard. I used to read *Women's Health*. Then I realized it was turning me into a hypochondriac, and I had to cancel my subscription."

Anyway, I hope you don't mind I brought coffee," Manon said.

"No, I don't mind. I only wish you brought me a latte or cappuccino."

She sipped coffee. "I just love Café Fleur-de-lis; I'm their number one fan. They could hire me for social media, and I'd help them outsell every competitor, if they didn't already."

"There's actually three different Café Fleur-de-lis locations in the mall."

"Awesome. If I land a PR and Corp Comm job here, I'll be in coffee heaven. I even listed coffee drinking as my hobby on my resume."

At that remark, the elderly receptionist, who wore glittery jewellery and a short skirt, which showed off her strong tan legs, glowered at her as if Manon lost her mind. Manon loved her elegant dress, attractive grooming, and appealing proportions, her wide hips, large breasts, and relatively narrow waist—features plainly visible through the industrial glass of the matching steel frame desk and chair—which she hardly expected in a woman her age. Manon couldn't help wondering how the receptionist was in bed; despite her advanced age and wrinkles, she hadn't lost the best parts of her looks and figure.

As Manon sipped her coffee and opened her laptop, she made herself comfortable in the waiting room, dark, comfortable, even luxurious. She finished her coffee and needed more caffeine, but she didn't think it would be safe or prudent to visit the nearest Café Fleur-de-lis. She had a craving for coffee, but she realized she would have to wait to satiate that desire. Secretly, she was excited to be back at work; relieved to put herself in action on an important project. In fact, she'd be lying if she didn't admit she was happy, indeed delighted. Moreover, if executed according to plan, aside from the advance she received, she would earn plenty of cash—maybe too much, particularly after her recent hospitalization on the psychiatric ward—for what the doctor diagnosed as paranoia. The doctor who made the diagnosis, though, didn't understand that she had become entangled in the corrupt business of underworld figures anxious to see her dead. She could never reveal to her the sketchy activities in which she engaged to earn a living.

When she sought background and researched newspaper reports online, she realized the assignment arose out of a dispute and rebellion, an uprising of sorts: after her real-estate-mogul husband died under suspicious circumstances, the elderly, aristocratic-mannered lady inherited the entirety of their real estate empire. For the flagship property, a huge shopping mall downtown, Madame Petit didn't negotiate: she ripped up contracts, shredded lease agreements, and pushed through large increases to small merchants, some even mom-and-pop style boutiques and stores. The small, independent tenants of the shopping mall were outraged at the terms of the new leases and agreements and the percentages of the rent increases.

A few small business owners renting space in the mall countered with their version of frontier (or mob) justice, plotting vigilante action. These renegades weren't getting their hands dirty, though. In hindsight, she realized she had probably received the assignment through certain contacts she'd already made in The Montreal Mob;



certain members of the organized crime families. They sent instructions and particulars through contractors and subcontractors from whom she received a fair amount of business and for whom she worked at lucrative piece rates to hack into the computers of banks, real estate investment trusts, commercial real estate companies, realtors, and construction companies to help rig bids and contracts for office buildings, condominiums, and other real estate development projects.

For this assignment, she assumed the identity of a public relations student. She posed as a recent university graduate—a Mass Communications major—applying for a summer job in event planning in the public relations and corporate communications department of the company that owned and managed the mall. It would easily bring her within range of the aged matriarch, or old canker sore, as she overheard someone mention.

Posing as somebody entering the spin doctoring profession, she couldn't help but wonder how the mall's public relations department would handle the crisis that her actions would engender. Unless, of course, she tripped up through an error in planning or if a sudden unexpected development arose. She tried to block the potential for disaster out of her mind because, if she couldn't, she would panic and blow her cover. Surely, she assumed, these PR personnel must have contingency plans for this type of crisis.

Unable to find formal attire in her wardrobe, she visited several thrift shops before she found an outfit she liked. When another customer complimented her appearance, she decided to buy the dress, tight, with a skirt too short. She thought if she could distract anyone with slightly erotic femininity, it would only work in her favor. Normally she would have never purchased such clothes, but the remuneration for this assignment was lucrative. She remembered what a tutorial assistant at Vanier College told the class of computer engineers about corporate culture: sometimes all the managers and executives in big business cared about was how well dressed and finely groomed you appeared. The last time she dressed and groomed so spiffily, she was at her sister's wedding, around the time she dropped out of Vanier College. She had stabbed a fellow computer engineering student (who couldn't keep his hands to himself) in the chest with a sharp drafting pencil, puncturing his left lung. Then, she was a lost soul who hacked into corporations' computer networks to relieve boredom and earn darknet market money.

Now, Manon sat in the reception area of the mall's management and administration offices, which included the offices of its parent real-estate holding company. In this sterile waiting area, she crossed her smooth, gleaming legs. She had shaved and massaged them longer and more carefully than ever before, having become image-conscious in the effort to make her looks a distraction. She sat checking e-mail and social media updates on her laptop computer, from which she would send the coded instructions and signals to the device connected to her laptop. This component—which might have been mistaken for a USB stick, or even an external antenna to improve the reception of internet wireless signals—was her backup.

If the software patch sent through a wireless signal worked according to design, the beating of Madame Petit's heart should abruptly increase to a dangerously fast rate in the form of one of the worst kinds of tachycardia, ventricular fibrillation. At that point, her cardiovascular system, overtaxed and out of control, should collapse. If the string of code she sent to the wireless receptor of her pacemaker didn't accept the signal, she would send a brief, powerful burst of intensely focused electromagnetic interference. This would hone into the controlling signals of Madame Petit's pacemaker and send it into a chaotic pattern, disrupting its heart-rhythm-regulating activity.

It all depended on everything going according to plan, she mused; on the software and electronic components, which she bought off the rack at electronic discount retailer and then modified, functioning correctly and as advertised. By noon that Monday—from what she understood, having done some independent research of her own—the heir would be gently unwrapping fast food packaging and nibbling into her ritualistic chicken salad sandwich. She would be sipping chamomile tea, with stevia, for the daily lunch at her desk, which would be only the second and last meal of her regular day. That is, if she conformed with the routine that she followed rigorously for every single day of the past forty years of her abstemious, miserly life, in which she made every person near and close to her (or remotely attached or affected) miserable.

According to the press clippings, newspaper articles, magazine profiles, and assorted media accounts that Manon had examined, Madame Petit was a mousy woman and a frugal eater. She insisted on maintaining a rigorous thinness, which must have worked for her so far, seeing she was already eighty-four years old and her mind still sharp as a switchblade. What frightened and disturbed Manon were the rumors—widely whispered following his sudden and unexpected death—that she poisoned her husband, the original tycoon, the carpenter, and homebuilder-turned-property-developer, who had built a vast real estate empire.

The chairs in the reception area of the waiting room to the mall administration office were filled with a bevy of well-proportioned bodies, including young models auditioning for yet another fashion show in the mall, which the heir was personally supervising. Manon was beginning to think she should stick around afterwards. She checked out the hardened bodybuilder physiques and spiked hair of the security guards and admired some of shapes, the pleasing curves, breasts, midriffs, and backsides of the young women. She also realized that this kind of curiosity—admiring the women, or men, for that matter—might be risky and dangerous. She did not want to draw attention to herself, thereby becoming more easily identifiable, recognizable, and memorable.

She happened to glance at the front cover of a literary magazine that was being read by a nervous young man in a business suit and a red bow tie who sat across from her in the waiting room. After the assistant summoned him away for an interview, she glanced at the cover of the *Granta* magazine. The headline filled her with fascination and left her wondering: "What Young Men Do."

What the hell was that all about? It looked as if there was a vintage profile portrait of an indigenous warrior on the cover, something which probably diverted the attention of any other poor soul burdened by an appointment with Madame Petit. "Poor soul," considering she insisted on interviewing the job candidates herself. *What Young Men Do*, the headline read on the bottom corner of the front cover. A perverse and strange headline, she thought, and not the wisest choice of reading material to bring to a job interview. Then, realizing she should have brought reading material, she started to worry. The configuration and appearance of her laptop computer might capture some unwanted attention from, say, a first responder well-versed in computer technology. Worrying at this stage wasn't a productive emotion or healthy in smoothly executing an assignment. To give herself a break, she decided to divert her own attention and check out the security guards, executives, and photographers as they eyeballed and ogled the contingent of fashion models. After a few smiles and gazes awkwardly and self-consciously met, she glanced at her wristwatch. It was shock proof, waterproof to three hundred metres, with a black polyurethane strap, and was given to her as a bonus on a past assignment.

The reedy young man with a three-piece suit and a crimson bowtie returned fifteen minutes later with a disappointed look on his face and Manon took it as her cue. Having become preoccupied with checking the bodies and angular faces of security guards, photographers, executives, and fashion scouts as well as the auditioning models, she found herself late in taking action. She pressed the keyboard commands that sent a burst of electromagnetic interference that should cause Madame Petit's pacemaker to send signals that would drastically speed up her heart. Her pacemaker would dramatically accelerate her heart, the beating and rhythm of which would become chaotic. The shock caused by the signals should eventually cause her heart to go into ventricular fibrillation. She would lose consciousness, suffer cardiovascular collapse, cardiac arrest, sudden cardiac death.

During Manon's research, she had read articles about pacemakers with a morbid fascination; in fact, she went overboard, reading cardiology monographs and academic articles, and became well-versed in the bioengineering and biomechanics of pacemakers. From the waiting area of the ornate corporate offices, she couldn't help thinking she heard a literal thump in the nearby executive suite. Assuming she must be imagining things, though, she dismissed the notion. She did not conceive that in the following minutes the offices would be consumed by confusion and chaos, as the area was mobbed by security guards, emergency personnel, paramedics, nurses, even a doctor, a few firefighters and police officers. A few beefy security guards overflowed into the waiting area of the offices. Her brow knitted, an onlooker caught amid an unexpected minor catastrophe, she glanced about with curiosity: mall management personnel and executives roamed and milled about and a few ran about like chickens with their heads cut off, attempting to have their monarch and matriarch revived and resuscitated. Concealing her excitement, she couldn't help but scoff at these people, as she finished her coffee. She dropped the empty coffee cup in the wastebasket and real-

ized she needed another coffee and decided she would try to find a Café Fleur-de-lis afterwards.

She wistfully assumed they would have been celebrating, but maybe the partying would come later. They didn't seem to understand that the secret to successfully handling an emergency was, in part, to stay calm. Stay calm, please stay calm, she wanted to exhort everybody. In a few minutes, the corpse of Madame Petit, covered with an orange blanket, rested on a shiny gurney with black padding, wheeled through some obscure back exit. She couldn't resist a self-satisfied smirk as she followed the proceedings, scrutinizing the images cast by the blurred reflection from her laptop monitor. She gingerly put away the computer and attached peripherals in their carrying case.

A public relations intern tentatively approached her. Consulting her clipboard, clenched like a security blanket, the intern asked, with an air of desperation, "Is your name Manon?"

"Yes, indeed, it is."

The intern pursed her lips. "I'm sorry to have to inform you, but due to unforeseen, unexpected, and mitigating circumstances your job interview —"

"Yes, that's the reason I'm here."

"Of course. Well, your job interview has been postponed indefinitely. We'll, ah, reschedule it as soon as we've sorted out a few matters."

"That's unfortunate. I'm sorry about that."

The intern gazed at her peculiarly. "About what?"

She realized she might have aroused the young women's suspicions, but she did not want to give the impression she was not disappointed; she wanted to strike the right note of sympathy and soberness. "It looks as if somebody got pretty sick quick."

"Yes. They certainly did."

"I wouldn't wish that upon anybody. Once I suffered mononucleosis —"

"We'll be sure to give you a call soon to let you know when your interview is rescheduled."

For the second time, Manon buckled the straps for the flaps of her laptop computer case. "Thank you. I'd appreciate that."

The intern stood in the doorway, clinging to the doorframe, now seemingly almost afraid Manon might haul her away. She hadn't intended to frighten her, but she figured her vibes and energy somehow caused that inadvertently. To no-one-in-particular, she muttered, "Oh, well." The intern gave her another peculiar look. "My father was a stoic man—he liked the expression. You do have my current phone number and e-mail address?" she persisted.

"Yes," she replied, as she guided Manon to the door and partway through the confused mob crowding the reception area towards the elevator.

"Oops. Before I forget—my resume."

"We already have a copy, I assure you."

"Just in case you lost or misplaced it; I consider my resume a work of art, but I'll have to remember to scratch off coffee drinking as one of my hobbies," Manon said. "I guess you couldn't really call coffee drinking a hobby, but an addiction—I like to think of it as a healthy, positive addiction."

Manon realized she was leaving behind a paper trail and a distinct impression, something she usually went out of her way to avoid, but sometimes there was no better tactics or strategy than hiding in plain sight. She handed the intern another copy of her bogus resume before she made her exit, her long bare legs attracting the gaze of a security guard and the close attention of a caretaker. She strode purposefully down the padded, plush corridor to the elevators, which she decided to take to the basement of the shopping mall. She understood some excellent shops, restaurants, and a Café Fleur-de-lis, as well as the subway station, were located in the basement area of the vast, overcrowded shopping mall. She managed to find a Café Fleur-de-lis, where she ordered a maple spice latte coffee.

From behind the counter at the Café Fleur-de-lis, Armand glanced at the literary magazine on the counter beside the sugar, artificial sweetener, cream, vanilla, cocoa, cinnamon, nutmeg, and milk. There had to be a better way, he figured. This misery, boredom, and unhappiness had to stop. He was decidedly not in a hospitable, friendly, or even minimally polite mood. Even the magazine cover annoyed and irked him.

"*'What Young Men Do?'* What kind of headline is that?"

"The magazine is from 1998," Raphael said.

"I know. It's *Granta*, a literary magazine," Armand said. "Still, why would someone be reading a magazine from 1998 with an article with that kind of title?"

"You're asking the wrong person. Maybe he bought it at a used bookstore or thrift shop. Hey, it's a literary magazine, you know, timeless, with a provocative catchphrase."

"The guy who left it behind—he looked nerdy, like a geek, with a red bow-tie, like a—"

"Like a university student," Raphael said.

"Hah! Like a professional student, you mean! You know that type well, don't you, Raphael? How's that working out for you, eh? Eh? Anyway, what kind of news are these writers inventing? What kind of outlandish lifestyle or factitious trend did they spot and now purportedly report upon and sensationalize?"

"I don't know. Why don't you read the magazine yourself? I doubt he'll be coming back for it. Maybe he saw you eyeballing it and decided to leave it behind for you to read."

Armand snorted aloud and tossed the magazine in the blue recycle bin, beside the large foil bags of used coffee grinds: "*'What Young Men Do.'* What a silly headline. I can't even imagine what the article is about."

"It's probably an essay, a literary nonfiction, creative nonfiction," Raphael said.



"I know what a literary essay is," Armand said. "I do have an honors degree with honors in English literature."

Raphael watched as Armand filled all the different carafes for assorted roasts and flavors of coffee from the same oversized cylindrical stainless-steel pot of freshly brewed coffee. Raphael said nothing, though; Armand was the most senior employee at this Café Fleur-de-lis location. Meanwhile, Manon pushed her way to the front of the line, in the crowd of milling, impatient shoppers from the mall, and ordered a maple spice latte.

"So you're like a professional student, too. You're, like, in what—you're tenth year of university?"

"It's actually only my seventh."

"And you're working in a Café Fleur-de-lis? Don't you think you're underemployed? Couldn't you blame some of your problems on too much education?"

"This has, indeed, been a difficult semester in neuroscience."

"Someone told me you're studying psychopharmacology."

"Yes, a branch of psychopharmacology."

"Someone said you even synthesize designer drugs."

Raphael, blushing, operated the espresso machine, brewed espresso and frothed and mixed milk for a maple spice latte for Manon, who grew abrupt and impatient. "I don't know who you've been talking to." Rinsing the fine coffee grinds from the portafilter in the sink, Raphael, grimacing, felt like killing Armand, who had no discretion, loyalty, or empathy for anyone. Armand filled the coffee grinder, ground a fresh batch of beans, and went on a rant about everything he hated about working at Café Fleur-de-lis. He complained about shoppers, pushy, rude, infatuated with overpriced clothes. He complained about regular customers, usually office or retail workers, boring drudges with no imagination, drones, who moved and sounded like robots. Then he turned on corporate executives, penny-pinching, tight-fisted, who expected the sweet spot, the perfect cup of coffee every time, who earned several hundred thousand a year, with never the faintest inclination to offer the slightest gratuity, even when they received prompt and courteous service. The new customers he plain disliked at first sight or loathed because of the way they dressed or looked at him.

"You have a university degree, you say."

"Yes."

"It's an English literature degree."

"So why are you working in a Café Fleur-de-lis?"

"The only career open to anyone with an English degree is teaching, but the faculty of education at McGill and Concordia University wouldn't admit me. Fleur-de-lis pays well and has good benefits."

"Here's the latte."

"So, like, do you manufacture hallucinogens and psychedelics in your home lab?"

"Here's the latte."

"I asked for two maple spice lattes."

"I'm not paying for an extra latte out of my own pocket or off my paycheck. Who ordered the second maple spice latte?"

"I did. I get a free coffee for my break," Armand said.

"But it's not break time; it's quitting time for you."

"You see, my shift is over, because I missed my break." He tossed his white apron, card key, and door keys on the counter. "I missed my break this afternoon—we've been so busy—so I get to leave now early."

If he gets to act like the boss and treat me like an underling and leave early—damn the consequences, Raphael thought, even if he did commit his first—he could not bear the thought. He decided to give him a dose of his latest designer drug, so potent, even a minute dose, a fraction of the usual amount, would send him on a trip. He split open the capsule and emptied the designer drug in his coffee, stirred thoroughly the frothy milk and shot of maple syrup in the espresso, sprinkled the proprietary maple spice on top, and carried the maple spice latte from the espresso machine over the head of a co-workers.

"You need to shower, Raphael," Armand said, "especially if you want someone like this tall, red-haired bitch. She's hot—no?"

He bowed his head when he caught a glimpse of her: She had exactly the looks and physique he most admired in a woman, and he thought he felt pure attraction at first sight. She was tall, looked elegant, and well built, and she had red hair, checking all the boxes on his list of attractive features. She impatiently demanded her maple spice latte a second time, and Armand handed her the maple spice latte Raphael made for him. Raphael tried to call her back, saying he accidentally made her latte plain, not maple spice, but Armand muttered it didn't matter.

Manon took the maple spice latte in its takeout cup to the source of all the excitement, the techno pop music, and the spectacular light show around the fashion runway. Her excitement mounted at the strobes and variegated flashing, spinning lights from the designer fashion show. The models were sexy—well-nourished and proportioned—wearing leather and latex costumes, adorned, and ornamented with chains and spiked heels, racy BDSM-like outfits. Sipping coffee, Manon managed to get a closer look at the models prancing on stage, by pushing her way through the buyers, journalists, and photographers, past the banks of oversized loudspeaker behind the front row seats aside the catwalk. Unexpectedly, the coffee tasted extremely good. The latte tasted rich, creamy, maple syrup sweet, which appealed to my senses, and she slurped greedily. Her enthusiasm grew as she made eye contact with a model on the runway and gently stroked her calf. The model leaned over and kissed her on the cheek.

Within a few second of standing in front of the catwalk of models, she saw visions of what appeared to be a heavy, blinding snowfall. She experienced a similar sensation a few years ago, before the anesthetic for surgery to remove a lump from her breast sent her into another realm of being. Then she lost consciousness.

Raphael became alarmed at the commotion in the mall. He wiped his hands on his apron, and donned some blue latex gloves. He flushed the crumpled capsule, which contained traces of the substance, a structural analog to 3,4-Methylenedioxy methamphetamine, down the toilet in the staff washroom.

Armand, placing his maple spice latte on the floor, glanced at the tall woman's figure collapsed on the floor, as a photographer attempted to revive her. Tall as she was, with freckles and red hair—she lay on the polished floor, looking serene and pretty. She reminded him of a girl upon whom he had a crush in high school, but this woman was so much taller.

# Rachel Levine

twos and threes



*"The year I was born Albert Einstein died and Disneyland opened. There is probably no cause and effect here but it might explain something; the serious and the silly have always collided in my life and my work. I can't write a straight drama without some comedy, and vice versa."*

**Rachel Levine** is currently working on Draft Two of her new novel (yet to be named) and looking for a reading for her new play, "Entanglement." Visit her web site: [RachelALevineWriter.com](http://RachelALevineWriter.com)

## DIRGE, IN SIX PARTS

### I

I am throwing things away. It's the tenth day after my brother's death and I called my friends to tell them, but it seems somehow I have already told them, and somehow they have all sent cards and flowers and fruit. Some have even visited and left behind cake. I've thrown it all away. I am in a frenzy of throwing things away, and I am angry that this doesn't demolish my grief. That watch without its stem, that hoop earring minus a mate, they are going, also: old coins, pay stubs, tiny photos from a locket.

They used too much formaldehyde and destroyed the natural lines of his face. His wife placed a tiny rosebud on his chest and retreated. I went home, hunting for everything that was broken, alone or unused.

### II

I am eleven. I am sitting on the stoop squawking at old people who look like chickens. Me and you, Helen, we trade secrets.

"I got my period already," I tell you.

"I'm learning to be an Ambidextresse," you say. "It means I'm learning to use *both* my hands equally."

"Some secret! You owe me one!"

"I do not! Only a few people can use both their hands, but everyone gets their period!"

"Boys don't!"

"If you tell me another one, I'll tell you another one too," you offer.

And I want another one. I want to know about you and your family, Helen. You go to that large church with the light orange brick that holds the sunlight so gently it makes me want to cry.

"Okay," I agree.

"My *brother* is learning to be an Ambidextrian."

"Big deal! What good is it anyway?"

"It's to be prepared. If you can use both your hands my dad says you can face anything God sends your way."

"Like what? Wiping your behind with your left hand if your right one gets broken?"

### III

Today is my brother's dead birthday, Helen. His first dead birthday. It's the secrets of my family body I am learning about now. And on my brother's first dead birthday the hologram of my family body is dismembered in many places at once. Sometimes it can appear whole...but then, the quietly clicking valves in the loyal high-



ways of my mother's veins permit the reflux of her blood.

#### IV

The week before my brother died we drove along a flat expanse of highway with my window rolled down and my arm resting out.

"You drive like a crazy woman!" he accused.

"I drive like a *man*," I corrected. "The highway is a man's place and you don't get respect doing forty with the windows rolled up. I like to look like I'm prepared for anything."

"I'm prepared for a drink. Take this exit."

"You're gonna drink that horrible absinthe again? Or is it a different obsession this week?"

"You know what they say, 'Absinthe maketh the heart grow fonder'."

I tried to smack him but my nail barely scraped his fat, hairy arm.

"That hurt!"

"You'll live."

#### V

Once he was dead I had to believe he meant it when he said he didn't care if he died young. He wouldn't be around to know it and he didn't care if anyone else suffered. I knew he was capable of this skewered selfishness, so why am I suffering anyway?

I want to tell him nobody gave a damn when he died. That there were fireworks, and it wasn't only because it was the Fourth of July. That he never would have been so cavalier about it if he knew his heart was going to throw him face down on a floor in Manhattan, first hitting the glass coffee table and carving out a piece of his nose.

"It's no big deal," he explains, speaking to me from the dead. He is almost the same too: overweight, sweating, eager for laughter. But he is drumming his fingers the whole time we talk. He never did that before.

"You seem nervous," I venture.

Then he winks. (He was always a man of winks and puns.) "Let's just say I'm all stressed up with nowhere to go."

#### VI

Helen, you had long splendid fingers, and your palms weren't the wide fans mine were. Your father taught you the secret of your own two hands; that it takes both to save your own life. And I bet you could save mine too, if I could only let you.

## FUGUE FOR THREE PLAYERS

### I. GREENSTEIN AND JOY (AND GREENSTEIN AND JOY)

Joy is massaging my temples. My head is in her lap. Her back is leaning against a broad oak on the great lawn of the university. She is singing an aria from Puccini, some Puccini aria or something. She is massaging the ache in my temples. She is singing Puccini in that scholarship voice of hers, the one that got her from the South Bronx to the Ivy League.

"You went to college for a song," I tell her. And now she is singing Puccini for me, and I am certain she knows how much I love her.

But I am also in love with Greenstein. And this is my dilemma. And Joy knows it. Knows that I am in love with them both and that it is my dilemma.

I fell in love with Greenstein during his famous "firefly" seminar wherein he explains how you can learn about the nature of time and space by studying the motion of this particular insect. "Just try to catch one and you'll see what I mean," he said. "How the mouth of your jar has to be just the right size to capture the creature's past, present and future all at the same time. Its tempio-spacio relationship to reality." And there I was, grinning at him like a grinning idiot. And then I told Joy how pure his intelligence was, "Like a test tube," I said. "Tubular, clear. Able to mix up anything you can imagine and make it come out something entirely else; a new atomic element, or the one amino acid scientists are going to discover in a pebble on Triton one Thursday morning when everyone else is at work."

Joy chides me. "You'll never live a normal life," she says and slides her fingers through my hair, toys with my hoop earring, giving it a gentle tug, "not being able to choose. Not even a happy life either," she adds, knowing happiness might compel me where normalcy cannot.

Then she insists we play the game. *Our* game. The "what-if-you-had-to-choose" game.

"I would choose the crescent of your hip and Greenstein's mind bejeweled with fireflies," I chant.

"And his hands that hold the air like a tiny glass bell," she sings.

"And your songs that fill the small spaces quickly as salt," I finish.

We have constructed this poem together, she and I, perfected the iambs and dactyls of my equivocation.

### II THE SMILING MADONNA

When Ruth was eighteen she said goodbye to the grinding metallic grief of Henry Miller's Williamsburg Bridge and went off to college. There she met Naomi, and together they shared a blue-eyed young man on the stunted dunes of Long Is-

land. They ate lobster tails and steak and drank too much wine. Then the young man took them both back to his house, which was really his Uncle Louie's summer cottage with its two tiny bedrooms.

When it was Ruth's turn for sex in the blue bedroom, she smelled the mold that carpeted secret places under the floorboards and smiled to herself because she knew she wasn't in love. When Naomi was in the blue bedroom, Ruth was in the pink one where the Madonna stared at her from the night-table. The statue belonged to Uncle Louie. He made the young man promise to keep Her there during the semester or be thrown out himself. She always seemed to smile so approvingly at Ruth, so Ruth smiled right back.

The young man wanted them both in his bed at the same time. He wanted to watch them touch each other, but they refused; Ruth, because it was only him she desired, Naomi because her budding lover's heart would not comply. So they only granted part of his wish.

They all got into his tiny bed in the blue bedroom, him in the middle. But Naomi turned away when it was Ruth's turn. Like a plant bending away from the darkness in the corner, she took root and hoped for the light. When it was Naomi's turn, Ruth fell asleep.

Poor Naomi. She fell in love like into quicksand. If only she could have kept still everything would have been alright. But she panicked and they all went down. Their blue-eyed boy was getting the old nudge-nudge, wink-wink from his buddies, with both of them buzzing around him like honeybees, but he wound up leaving them both anyway. At first Naomi wanted to kill herself. But then, she married a doctor of her own religion, and moved to suburbia.

### *III MEN & WOMEN & SEX*

I was not in love with him. Like my brother he was fat and hairy. He couldn't put me in the mood. I preferred to watch films with him, or discuss literature, because in those departments he provided so much amusement I nearly cried with delight.

We had discussions. "Men live in a psycho-sexual world, essentially alone with their thoughts and desires," he explained. "Women live in a psycho-social world, surrounded by others and the 'He said-She said' that shapes their lives."

He taught me things: "A man meets a woman and the first thing he thinks is 'Would I fuck her?' The next thing he thinks is 'Could I?' A woman meets a man and thinks 'Is he married?'"

I taught him things: "The size of the cock is never part of women's fantasies. Fantasy involves setting, props and dialogue. The cock is always a surprise. Before sex a man should be very careful. At that stage the wrong word, a cheap restaurant, a wayward glance, dries a woman up."

But from all our discussions, somehow, my sexual arousal never emerged. Of course, as these kinds of stories go, I was in love with someone else at the time. With him, there was little talk. Our world was horizontal. After sex there was always cake. I introduced him to those chocolate cupcakes with the white squiggle down the middle. He worked diligently at removing that squiggle intact, delicately manipulating it between his teeth and his tongue.

But, after six months we were spent. My hairy man, as usual, analyzed the situation correctly:

"You two are like old conquistadors; satisfied, smug in your discoveries, but afraid to acknowledge that there is no more frontier. I am your true pioneer and I will build a cover over the wagon of your doubting heart."

And so I married my hairy man and we had married sex: the essence of life, the meat and potatoes, the fresh blood welcomed by the innocent bicameral heart, or salty bicameral mollusk. It is one long fuck, sometimes exquisite, or else strewn around like yesterday's undies and socks under the bed, coated with the dust of flesh, clung to with creatures we cannot see. It is the ovum, the soggy woolen vagina and the flaccid penis practicing gratitude. Married sex: the sweet pool of coffee breath with cream and sugar, the specific gravity of his body, and the angle of his hopeful cock every single morning of our lives.

#### *IV WYNKEN BLYNKEN AND NOD*

In her first sexual dream there was not one tall dark and handsome male cupping her tiny chin in his massive hand, tilting her head gently up to meet his steely eyes with their glint of restrained lust for her voluptuous femininity.

There was a crowd. Everyone was naked, pink, and plump as a peach. Their genitals were all the same: a gentle bulge, a polymorphous mound. The room was a suitable orgiastic red. Everybody moved slowly. It was as if they were all asleep. When she awoke there was a throbbing in her loins, though she knew nobody used that word --loins-- anymore.

The first time she touched herself, it was to this dream, these cherubim, that she tensed her hips. The first time it happened she held back, afraid the force of it might explode the light bulbs.

Her first boyfriend was a profound disappointment. Fresh from the long narrow streets of boyhood he needed her body for a lean-to. Subsequent lovers all wanted to try "new" things but all the new things were always the same with each one of them.

Then, in her third year of college, she drank too much beer and allowed a red-haired boy with pale green eyes to make love to her. His touch was the touch of that fleshy crowd though he was tall and freckled. Night after night she said her prayers to the small of his back, the insides of his freckled knees, the Big Dipper she dis-

cerned on his upper arm.

Dressed for Halloween, standing before the mirror together, she was Copernicus, he was The Heavens.

Then he fell in love with someone else. She was tall and tawny-haired, freckled gently not violently as he was. But he couldn't end it with the lost lover. He still wanted her and the designs she discovered daily along his slender arms, long legs and smooth back. One day she found Sirius the Dog Star, and one day it was Wynken, Blynken and Nod complete with their wooden shoe.

For the new lover he was not an unexplored galaxy. He was her due. From her part of the country, from her kind of people. Sex meant he pleased her and she in turn would let him touch her in ways she found somewhat distasteful. That they belonged together anyone could see. And together they would marvel at the imaginings of the lost lover. It never occurred to the new lover that he might prefer the other. She even agreed when he suggested, quite casually, that the three of them drive the long, dark roads of New England, searching for Christmas lights.

Like Wynken, Blynken and Nod they floated through the darkness. In the front seat of their wooden shoe she sat propped between them; a small bird-like child, the lost lover, hollow-boned, feathered with desire.



# Hampton Rodriguez



## *SE PDX* – line drawings

**Hampton Rodriguez artist statement:** Growing up in the Dominican Republic, I was profoundly influenced by the intellectual pursuits of the contemporary abstract art movement in my country, Dominican Republic. After exhibiting my work in Spain and Belgium, I arrived in Oregon in March of 2002. Since then, I became a different artist.

The focus of my work shifted to capture the idiosyncratic culture of Portland's diverse neighborhoods; the cadence of people's lives there, the scenes of cultural clashes, Urban vs. Rural. And the development of images that tap into shared concepts and feelings.

In my recent work, I have been trying to capture the fleeting human expressions of anger and hope, desire, and sadness. My work is egalitarian, surrealistic, and filled with people's mystiques. I strongly feel that an artist belongs to the place he lives, a universal evolution of feelings and juxtapose realities that are reflected in my work and my own personal life.



guitar



salesman



walks



go



bus stop





wine



bike

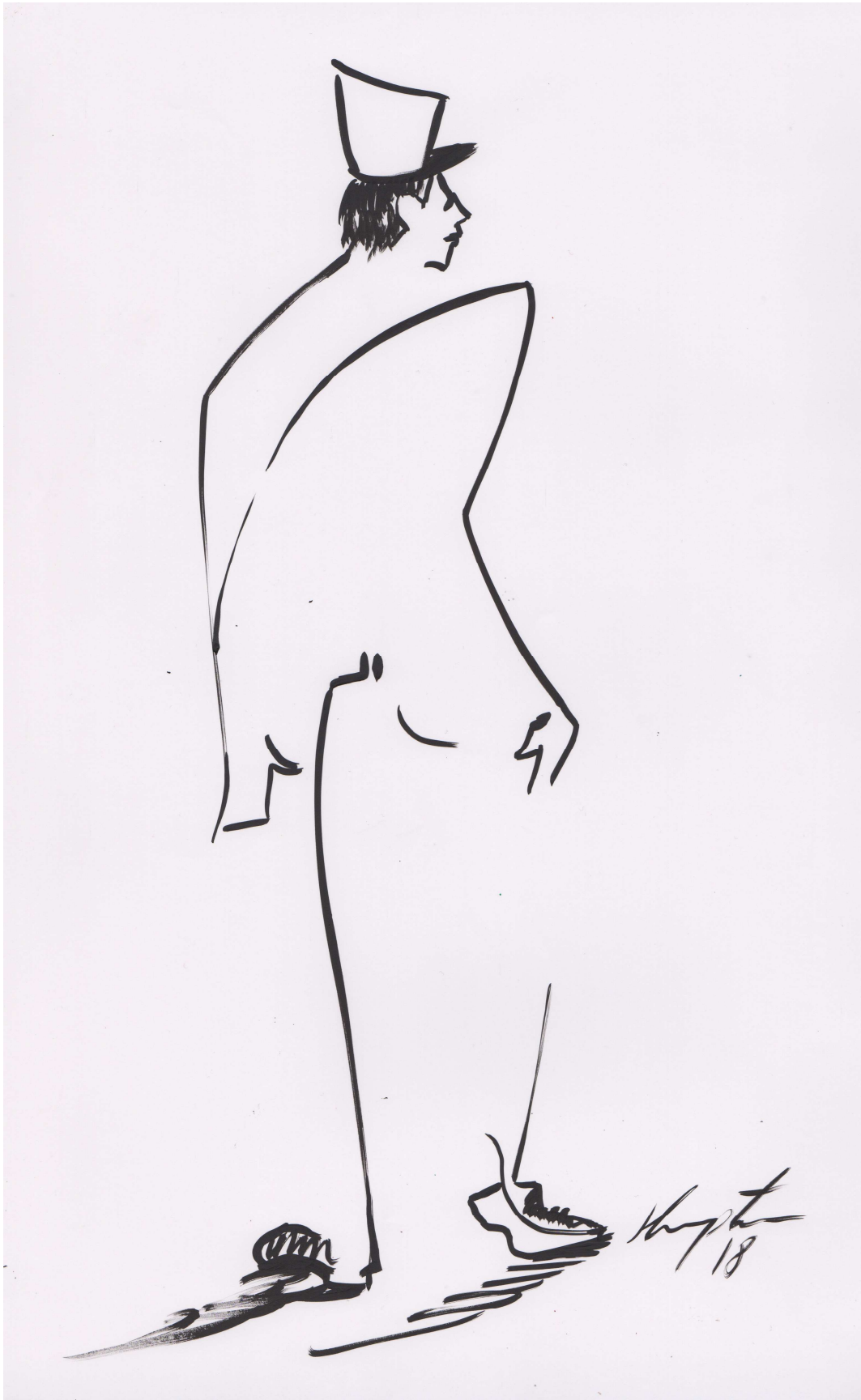




shopping



old man



fast



# Mark Blickley

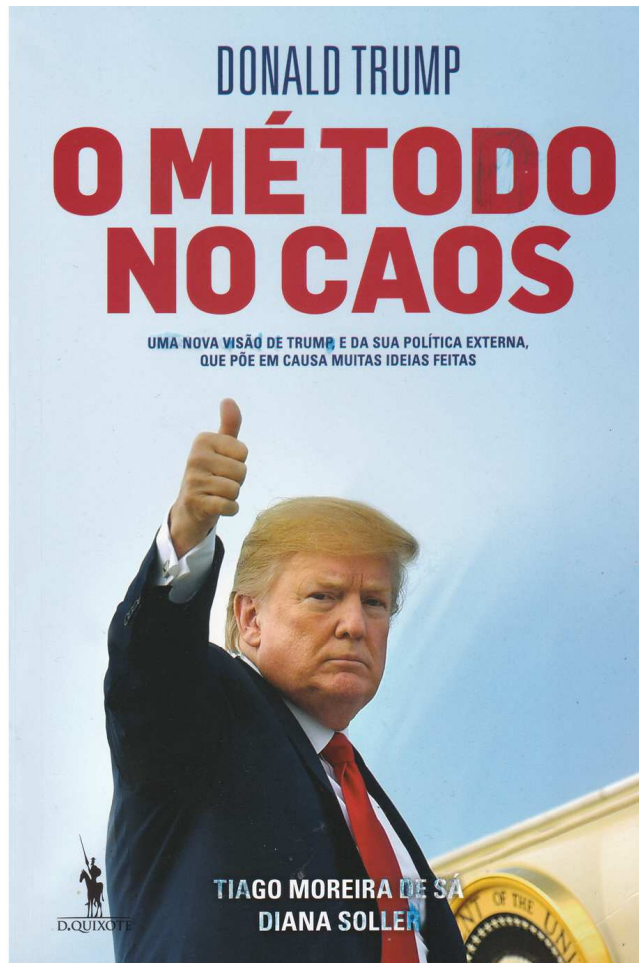
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**Mark Blickley** is a proud member of the Dramatists Guild and PEN American Center as well as the recipient of a MacArthur Foundation Scholarship Award for Drama. He is the author of *Sacred Misfits* (Red Hen Press), *Weathered Reports: Trump Surrogate Quotes from the Underground* (Moir Books) and the forthcoming text based art book, *Dream Streams* (Clare Songbirds Publishing). His video, *Widow's Peek: The Kiss of Death*, was selected to the 2018 International Experimental Film Festival in Bilbao, Spain. He is a 2018 Audie Award Finalist for his contribution to the original audio book, *Nevertheless We Persisted*.

PORTUGAL

*possibly* Marcelino Macedo Vespiera (1925-2002)





Redacted Book Cover Art: "Translated From The Portuguese"

# Hokusai

## ghost stories

**Katsushika Hokusai** is the woodblock artist who rendered the iconic Great Wave. **The Public Domain Review** highlighted the five drawings from Hokusai's series - *Hyaku Monogatari* [*One Hundred Ghost Stories*] (ca. 1830):

"The series is fruit of the tradition *Hyakumonogatari Kaidankai* [A Gathering of One Hundred Supernatural Tales], where Japanese friends would meet to share fantastically frightening tales from folklore and their own experience. Having lit a hundred candles, they would give their blood-curdling accounts, one by one, blowing out a candle after each, plunging themselves deeper into darkness. Upon the last candle going out, a spirit was said to appear."

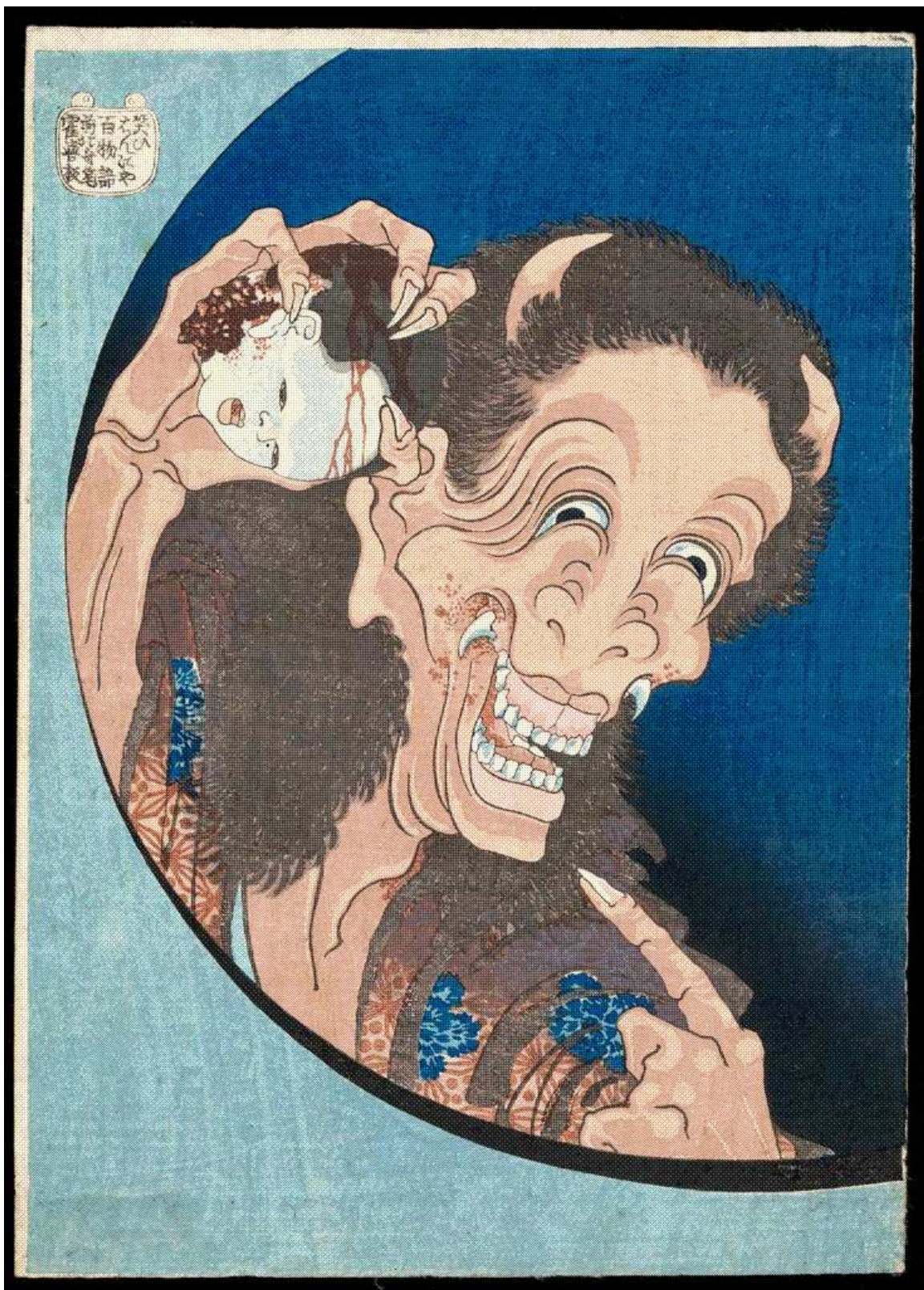






**The Mansion of the Plates (Sara-yashiki)** After the maid Okiku had accidentally broken one of a set of elegant Korean plates, her infuriated master bound her and threw her down a well, where she died in body but not spirit. In 1795, wells around Japan became infested with a species of worm covered in thin threads, which people believed to be a reincarnation of Okiku; the threads being the remnants of the fabric used to bind her. They named it "Okiku mushi" [the Okiku bug].





**The Laughing Hannya (Warai-hannya)** This gleeful cannibal is an unholy union of two other monsters: a “hannya”, whose jealousy has turned her into a horned demon; and a “yamanba”, who dwells in the mountains living off the meat of kidnapped children.





**Oiwa (Oiwa-san)** The young Oume falls in love with the married samurai Tamiya Iemon, and her friends try to get his wife Oiwa out of the picture with a gift of poisonous face cream. When Iemon abandons his newly disfigured wife, it sends her mad with grief. In her hysteria she runs and trips onto a sword, cursing Iemon with her dying breath — and then adopting various forms to haunt him, including a paper lantern.





**Kohada Koheiji** Based on a real event, the cuckold and murder victim Kohada Koheiji returns from the dead to torment his cheating wife and lover. Here he grins over the top of the mosquito netting that surrounds the bed of his killers.





**Obsession (Shûnen)** The snake here represents obsessive jealousy, an emotion thought to transcend death, and wraps itself around a Buddhist memorial tablet (traditionally placed on an altar at the home of the deceased). The bowl of water decorated with the swastika appears to be a good luck offering: though tainted by its association with National Socialism, the swastika has been an auspicious symbol for thousands of years in cultures from the Ukraine to the Aztec Empire.





# Jacob Duchaine

## Diary of Alexandra The saga continues

Jacob Duchaine is one of America's least known cartoonists. Dabbling in art since childhood, several years ago Jacob decided to develop art as a professional skill. Primarily self taught, he now writes and illustrates comics from his home in West Virginia. Jacob is the publisher of Green River Comics.

[facebook.com/GreenMirrorComics/](https://facebook.com/GreenMirrorComics/)

This edition continues the serialization of Alexandra that began in Issue 7.











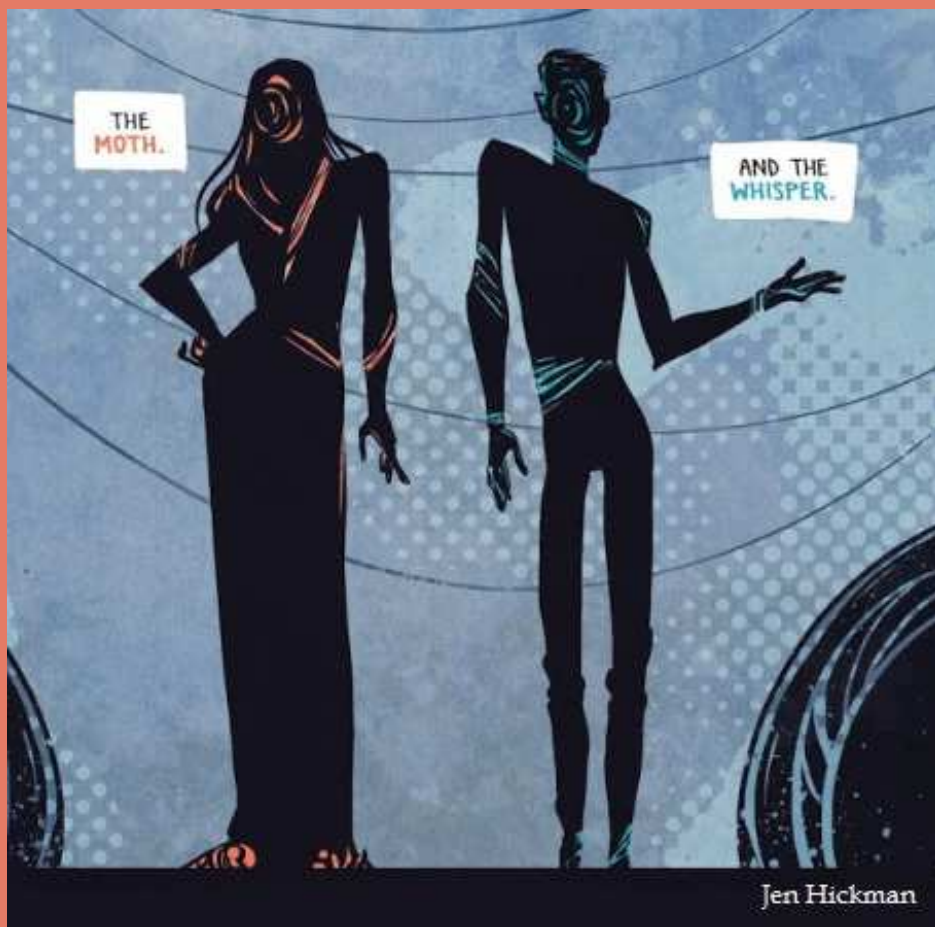






# Matthew Dube

## Moth and Whisper and The Appeal of the Sidekick



Matthew Dube is an Assistant Professor at William Woods University in Fulton, Missouri. He teaches American Literature and Creative Writing. His research and writings include explorations on "the poetics of comic books and graphic novels, a systematic and series-specific inquiry into the insights of critical theory, can offer into comic books .."

Every couple years I look at my stack of new comics and find that the books I'm enjoying most are about sidekicks. It happened when I was reading Kelley Puckett and Damion Scott's Batgirl series, which was adjacent to the Batman universe but rarely at the center of it. I did the same, reading random issues here and there of Adam Beechem and Freddie Williams II's Robin comics a couple years after that. Robin and Batgirl are Batman sidekicks, so they have a plausible connection to seventy-five years of Batlore and Gotham real estate, but they don't have to bear the weight of all that history themselves. As a reader, I could engage the history of the shared universe without being oppressed by it. And it gave me someone new to root for, or worry about, whenever I went back to reading "comics that mattered."

There's a similar sidekick vibe to the recent series Moth and Whisper, from AfterShock comics and created by Ted Anderson (My Little Pony, Adventure Time), Jen Hickman (Spread, Jem and the Holograms), and Marshall Dillon. The series protagonist, Niki, is young enough to be a sidekick and they have the slight frame to go with it. Not explicitly a sidekick, Niki is the child, and therefore something like the protégé of two older characters, the titular Moth and Whisper. As you might have noted in the sentences above, Niki is genderqueer, and this influences the pronouns used to describe them. This status as genderqueer also plays a thematic role in the story, but I want to clear some narrative brush before I get to that.

Niki lives in a semi-dystopic realm where corporate greed, out-of-control science, a total surveillance state, and criminal empires that are related to but not coterminous with the corporate shenanigans overlap. These elements of world building at this stage (four issues have been published to date) are mostly in the background; Niki's quest is to find what happened to their parents, who have been missing for six months and who are feared dead. Did I mention that Moth and Whisper were the greatest thieves of their generation, and that Niki has access to their skills and tech to help find them?

Despite how confusing I've made this sound, the pace at which information is actually revealed makes the set-up pretty easy to follow. In each of the four issues so far, we've really only added one character to the story at a time. So issue one introduces us to Niki, and his quest to find his parents. Issue two brings in Walter Waverley, a companion and potential rival/ antagonist who joins his quest. Issue three brings us face to face with Wolf, the big bad, who complicates our understanding of the larger story a little, and issue four introduces us to the Mole, a friend of Niki's parents who seems ready to play the helper role. Current information suggests this first storyline will go for five issues, leading to a big finale with Wolf and then a change to the status quo, but I'm just guessing about that. Whatever happens, there are certainly lots of threads to play with, both in terms of exploring the world and Niki themselves.

Niki's parents were successful thieves who each exploited a separate gimmick; the Moth could change her appearance and was a master of disguise who could appear as anyone, while the Whisper was so sneaky, he couldn't be seen at all. Niki has, we are told, access to both these skills, which definitely engages the way Niki exists in

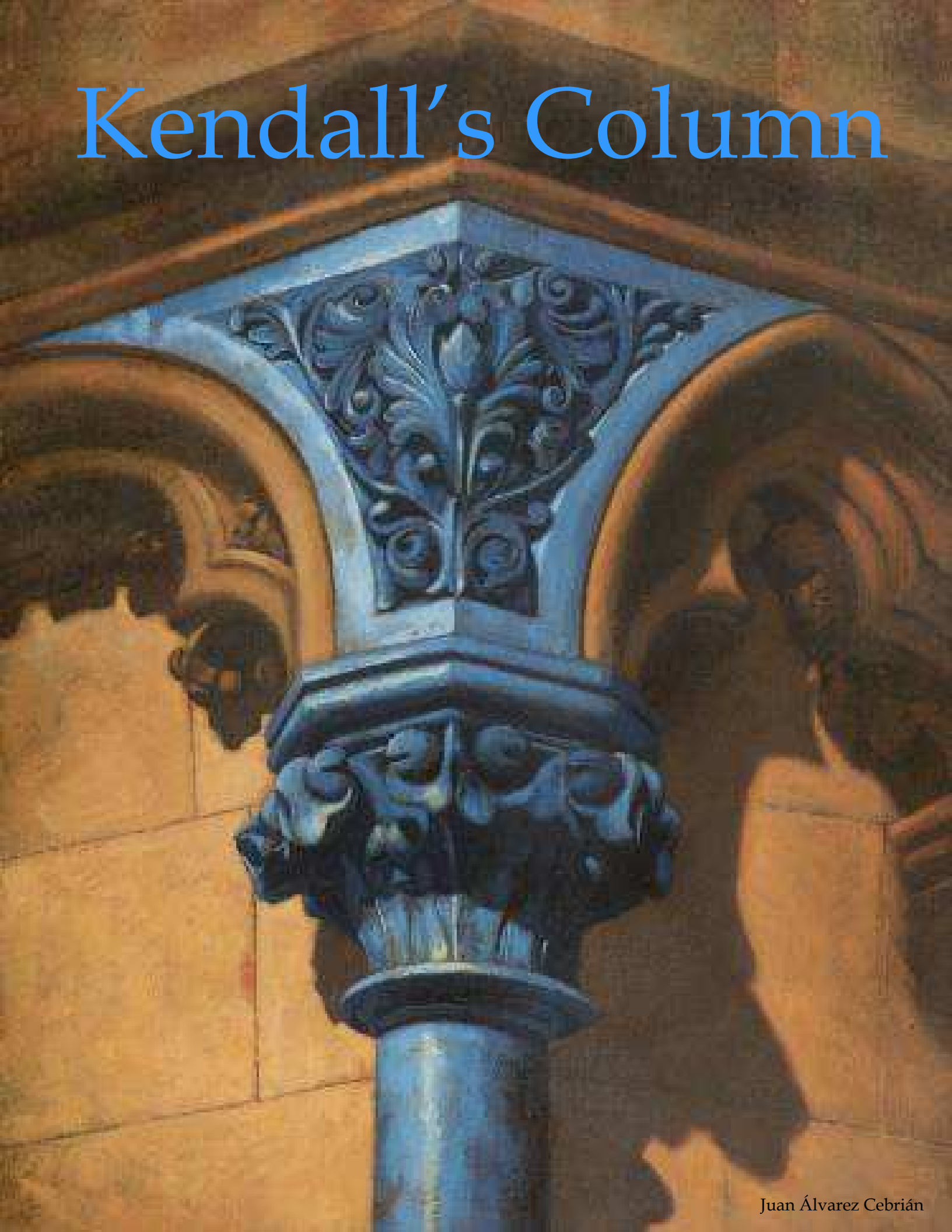


the world as genderqueer.

I'm not genderqueer so maybe I'm misreading this, but I think the comic trope of secret identities might hold considerable appeal for those who are. The way comic readers accept that Batman is Bruce Wayne (as vexed as this might be in terms of what that means, narratively) presents a world of acceptance and possibility for non-binary folks. And Niki is not just genderqueer; that they can effectively appear as almost anyone. I don't think this is naive wish fulfillment; I think even kids reading comics for the first time are a lot more discriminating than that. But way it pays off the promise of a fluid identify, especially in surveillance state where Niki's lives, is likely part of the series' appeal.

That this character is the one who guides us through this world makes the effect powerful. The books visual style is slick and stylish, where characters wear attention-seeking costumes, whether they are a super-suit, a dapper dinner jacket, or an evening gown; there are moments of sensory overload, but they are deliberate, and play against more quiet scenes. The world of the comic is familiar, just somehow advanced a little from the world we already know. It's a compelling read from a comics company whose tagline pledges "diverse characters and worlds" and "protagonists of all genders and species." And it delivers a rattling, fun storyline that exists, like all sidekicks, in the shadow of other stories. But that uses the shade to deliver outrageous and fun adventures.

# Kendall's Column



**Kendall Evans****HOLD THE DARK**

Hold The Dark is a nuanced, atmospheric, and ultimately ambiguous motion picture, at times subtle and at times not at all subtle in its presentation. The movie was made for Netflix and, in my estimation, it's way above the average quality of movies found on Netflix. However, if you don't like ambiguity, if you like everything in a movie neatly tied together for the ending, you might not like Hold The Dark.

Skillfully directed by Jeremy Saulner, the film creates a consistent mood that is a big plus, and the cinematography takes full advantage of the Alaska setting to create the film's overriding atmosphere. Jeffrey Wright takes the lead role, portraying a writer / naturalist who is unwittingly drawn into an incomprehensible and irresolvable situation.

The story begins with Russell Core, a retired naturalist, author, and wolf expert who has received a letter from Medora Stone, who writes that her son was carried off and killed by a pack of wolves. Russell is a man who has made some mistakes in his life and feels alienated from his family and grown daughter, and uncertain of his family relationships.

Reluctantly, in response to the letter from the grieving woman, he journeys to the fringes of civilization in northern Alaska. Once he arrives, Medora asks him to track the wolf pack into the wilderness and kill the pack's leader as a kind of revenge. It's not a task he desires, but her pleas convince him to make the effort. But nothing is what it seems in this strange film, and when he discovers the location of the wolf pack, he finds no human remains. Instead, because of the lack of game, the wolves are consuming their own young. His initial attempt to shoot the leader of the pack fails, and then he changes his mind and returns to the small Alaska town of Keelut, where Medora lives.

Then, when her husband Vernon Stone returns from the Iraq War and discovers the fate of his child, a spree of nearly inexplicable violence ensues. I'm not going to reveal the twists and turns of what follows.

Direction, acting, cinematography – all are excellent. While I have some reservations about aspects of the storyline and plot development, I've pretty much set those aside, because they are a part of the director's vision and it would not be the same movie without them. So, in the final analysis, they are most likely essential to his efforts.

Jeffrey Wright's performance as Russell Core is the cornerstone and one of the keys to the success of the film. It's a subtle, low key, nuanced, and extremely convincing performance. The actress Riley Keough plays the mother and Alexander Skars-

gard plays the father, Vernon Stone. James Badge Dale portrays the law officer who attempts to put an end to the violence and bloodshed. All do a more than creditable job of smoothly meshing with the film and its themes.

If such things are even meaningful at all, critics liked the film, but audiences gave the movie a low score of 30 percent on Rotten Tomatoes. I have a feeling the low audience score has to do with the ultimate ambiguity of the film. In my opinion, the movie needs the ambiguity to accomplish what it does. The genre listing is mystery and suspense, but it could also be described as a horror film, especially considering the violence and mood and definitive elements that extend toward horror and fantasy, without going very far in the fantasy direction, depending upon one's personal interpretation.

Even the title, *Hold The Dark*, is ambiguous. Does it mean "Hold the darkness away from me," or does it mean "Hold onto the darkness within"?





