

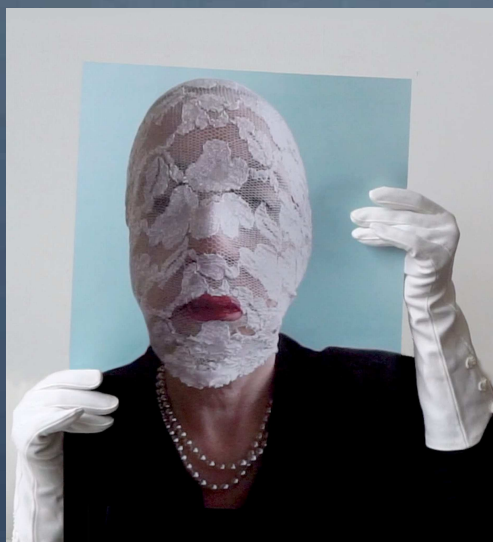


# Event Horizon

2019 May Jun Issue 9



# *Dream Streams*



images/text by amy bassin & mark blickley

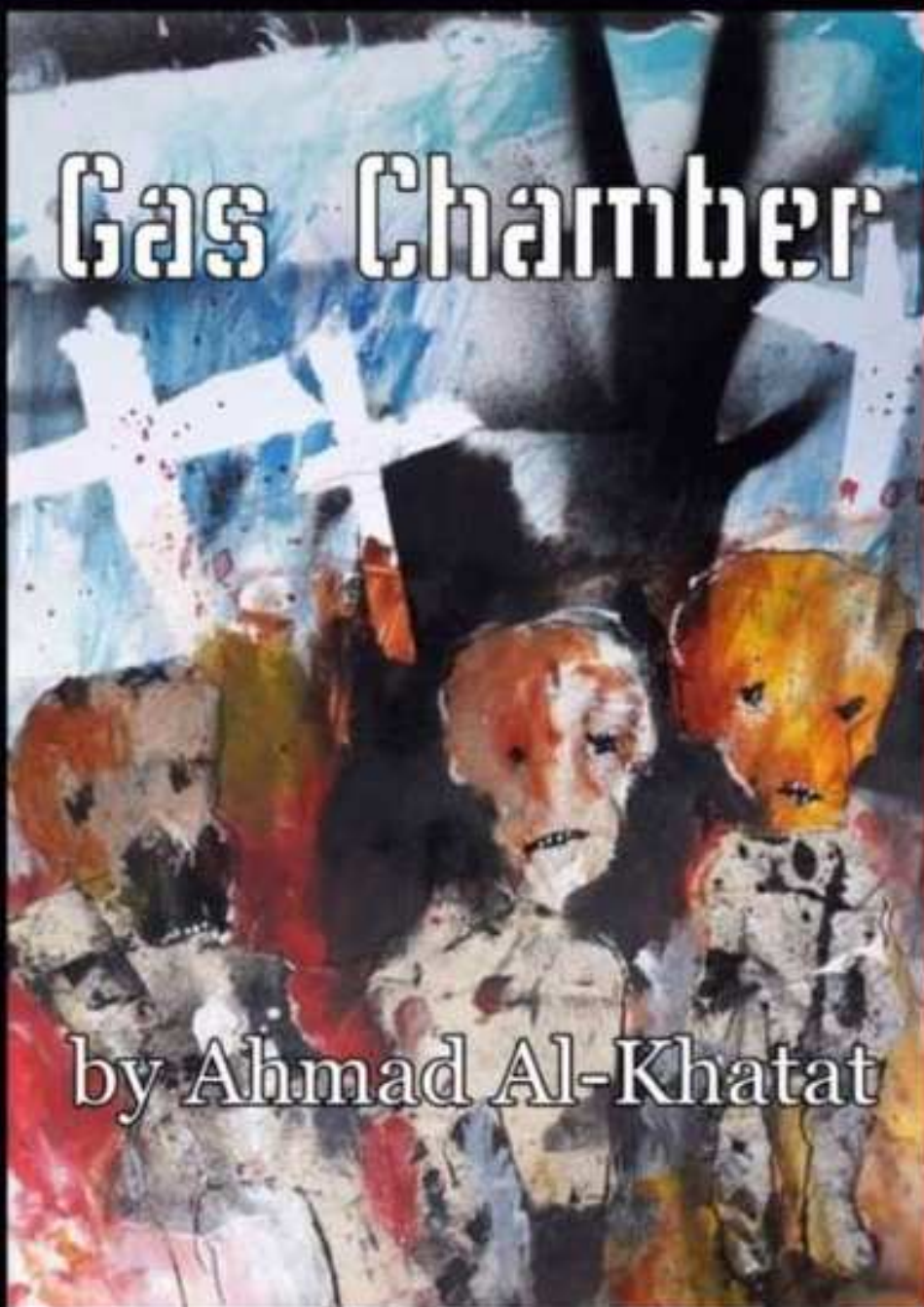


Gas Chamber

Ahmad Al-Khatat

# Gas Chamber

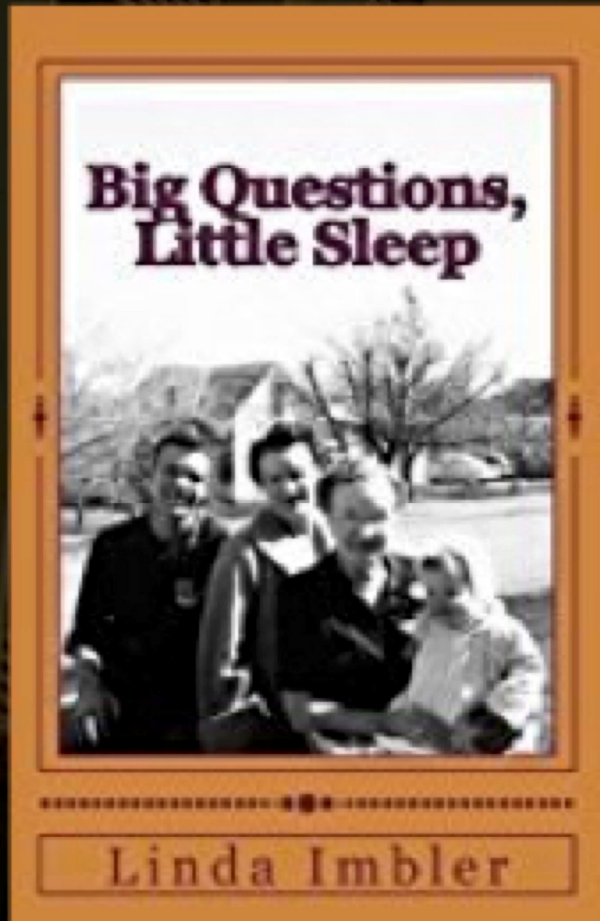
by Ahmad Al-Khatat





Born from the depths of an insomniac's mind, *Big Questions, Little Sleep* offers a wondrous, poetic investigation into the phenomena of time and death.

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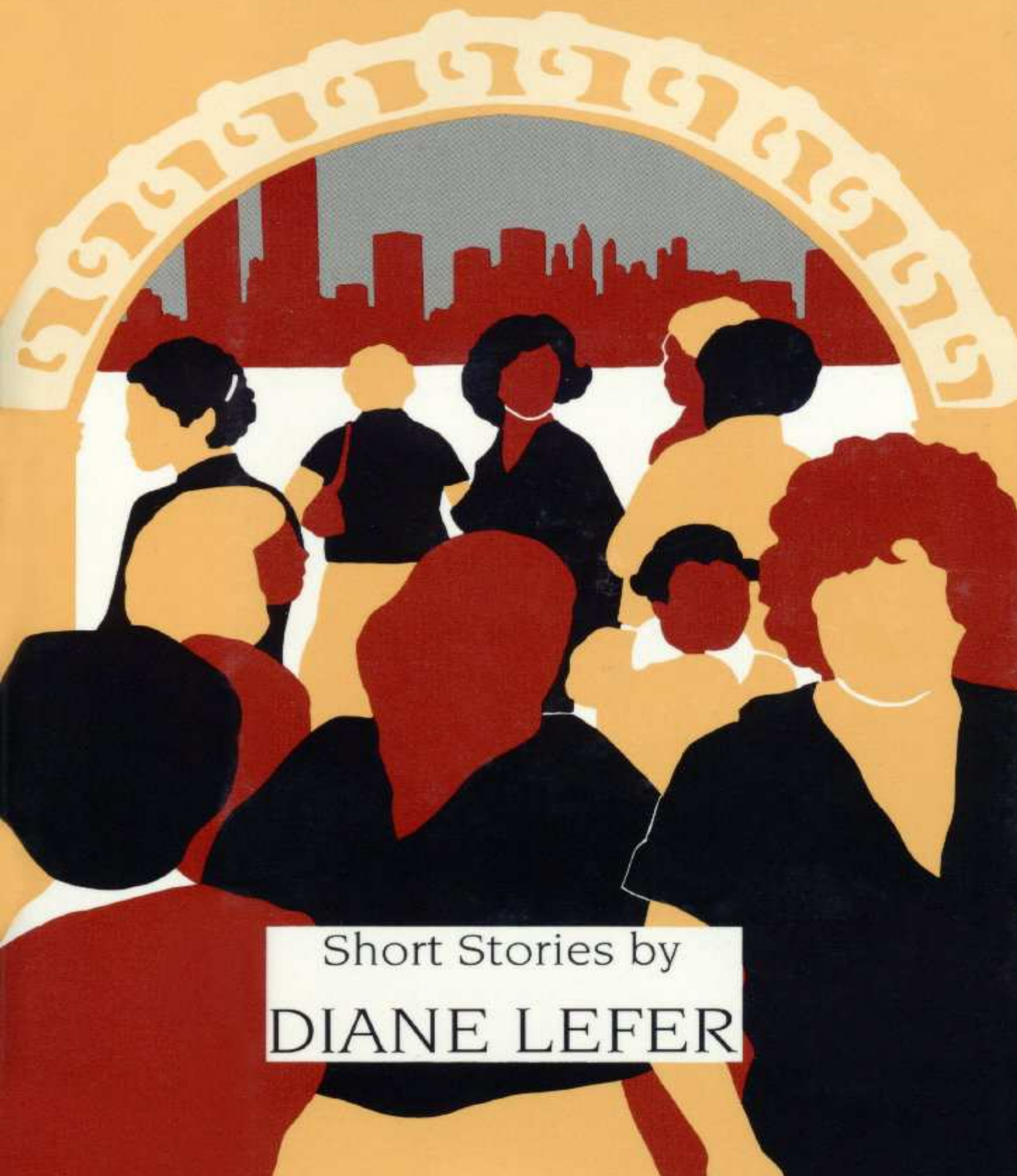
# Sinner's Suite

C.S. Fuqua





# THE CIRCLES I MOVE IN



Short Stories by  
**DIANE LEFER**

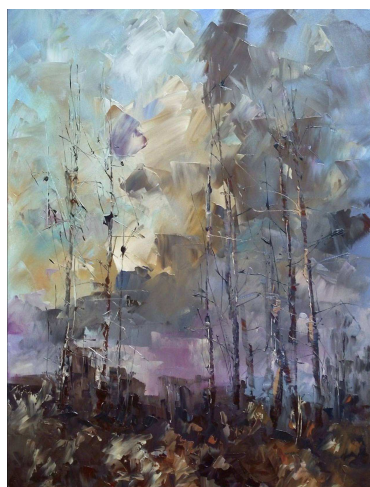


*~ a literary and graphic arts periodical*

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*front cover* The Pines



*back cover* Spring Megalomania

**Vitaliy Mashchenko** was born in Ukraine in 1975, the son of a talented copyist artist Victor Mashchenko. Vitaliy got all his painting skills from him and is very grateful for the education and skills that were handed down a generation. *"I will not write "Artist Statement". I do not want to write it, because I get to write some nonsense ... I'm not a writer with good English, but an artist with bad English. In addition, everyone sees something different in my works. It's quite normal. All I want to say is, let stay in the painting."*





### **Still more deliberations on the fate of Event Horizon from the editor**

This may be the last issue of Event Horizon. No lachrymose swan song here; no dire straits nor perfect storm to sing of. Following the *status quo* could have sustained me forever if I were willing, but I'm not. I have shared some of my musings on this topic, not only here but on the website blog, the Facebook page and a Mailchimp broadcast to my "insiders". Boiled down to its essence, I need two quarter-time positions of paid staff and I do not have the fire-in-my-belly to find a way to pay them.

All that being said, I can't quite say goodbye or set fire to the bridges. I guess this is a certificate of indefinite suspended animation. See you at the next step, perhaps on the other side of the bridge.



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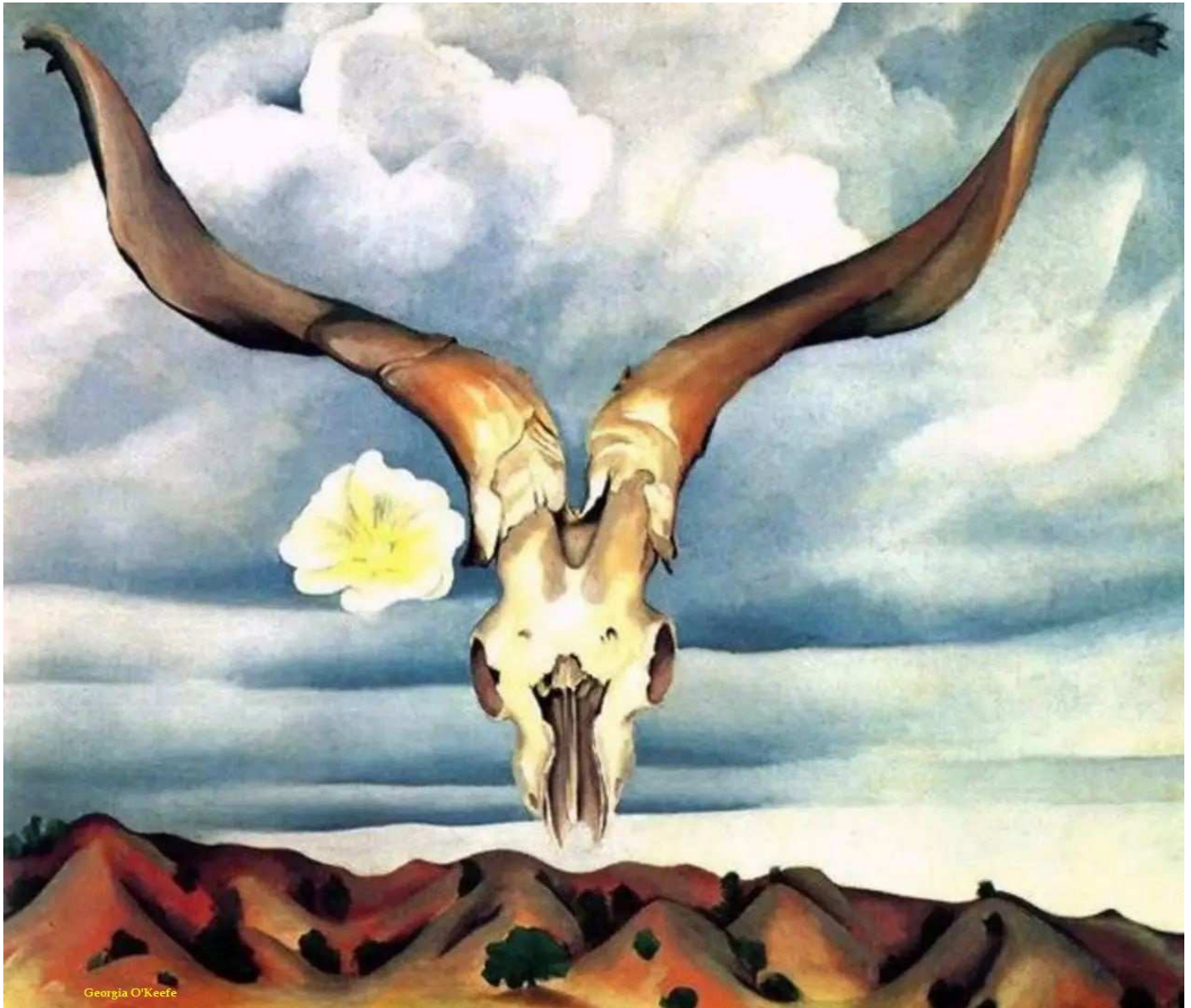
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# Richard Green

what is stardust anyway?



**Richard Green** lives in the greasewood hills of southern New Mexico. He is inspired by the desert and fascinated by cosmology, despite his extremely limited grasp of it. His poems have been published in *The Avocet*, *The Almagre Review*, *Sin Fronteras*, *Penwood Review*, *Anglican Theological Review*, *Emerging Poets of the West 2019*, and online in *TwitterizationNation*. Some published poems can be read in [www.anewmexicanpoet.com](http://www.anewmexicanpoet.com).

## Thoughts on the Expansion of the Universe

### I

Coffee and a buñuelo  
on a shady patio in  
early morning cool.

Oleander blossoms  
fall around me,  
each petalled whorl

like a tiny galaxy  
spiraling down.  
Where would I be

on that world?  
At the edge of a petal,  
wondering at fate.

I shield my cup, not  
wanting to drown in the  
murky metaphor of Nirvana.

Hard to think on a morning  
like this, of the heat death  
of the universe.

Entropy increasing,  
no doubt about it,  
every second running down,

cooling off into thermal equilibrium.  
“What are you worried about,”  
she asks, my furrowed brow

betraying my state.  
“I’m thinking of the Heat Death,” I reply.  
“Oh,” she says, “yes, it will be hot,

but you’re not going to die of it.  
Stay cool, wear your hat.  
Remember that little melanoma.”

I could die of heat or radiation,  
all electromagnetic waves.  
Who would think the sun

would kill you,  
all those childhood hours in pool  
and water’s edge, getting

the perfect tan.  
“The universe is out to get us,”  
I reply.”

Two rabbits nibbling on the lawn,  
quail feeding on seeds dropped  
from the feeder by careless sparrows,

a mockingbird cheerfully  
claiming his kingdom...  
all this innocence blooming, singing, feeding...

only I know that there is no center, but,  
indeed, that things do fall apart.  
Damn Hubbell and his redshift.



## II

We are stardust.

Thus saith the prophet  
and who am I to argue with prophets?

What is stardust, anyway?  
It sounds profound, even metaphysical  
in a materialistic way.

Never mind the contradiction.  
Life is full of contradictions and  
pixie dust. It's all magic, anyway,

or so it seems. But the question nags:  
what is this stuff we're made of?  
It used to be ashes to ashes,

dust to dust, show me a cigar  
a hug won't bust. But I diverge.  
We're looking further down

The chain of existence,  
*de profundis Domine*,  
the ultimate stuff of what I am,

in this form of all possible forms  
that defines me and me alone  
or so I like to think.

There are others, of course,  
me mum and dad, etc.  
but each one of them was a me.

Is it molecules of metals,  
not counting my gold tooth?  
I'm discounting water, too,

at this stage, all 98% of it.  
It would just evaporate into H and O,  
elements in their own right of course,

## Thoughts on the Expansion of the Universe

but I want the hard stuff,  
atoms of azurite, aluminum,  
molybdenum, Mercury...

no, it must be dustier than that,  
electrons, protons, balancing in their  
mysterious attraction for one another.

But is there no end to this elemental dust?  
I detect bosons, gluons, smaller-than-thouons,  
particles that flash in and out of existence,

matter and anti-matter, gamma rays, electrons  
and the ineffable photons, one of which may be  
spinning anywhere in the universe

at the same time.  
So this is what they call matter?  
Does it really matter?

Perhaps only to me  
wondering how all that stuff  
arranged itself to be myself.

Pardon my radioactive decay,  
particles flying off into space  
like sparklers on the Fourth of July,

looking for other particles  
to dance the tango in the Dark Matter Bar,  
where something like passion,

call it gravity, ignites a new star  
which then explodes scattering stardust  
and the whole matter starts all over again.

## Thoughts on the Expansion of the Universe

### IV

He thought that the answer was Beethoven,  
even to the most profound question:  
What is the meaning of all this?

What is the meaning of life?-- that might be Mozart,  
but the question of existence lay with  
the man from the beet garden.

All the rest was entertainment.  
De profundis, Domine, these notes  
are a universe, and like the universe

of stardust, always flying apart and recombining.  
This idea was always there  
beyond the strong force and the weak force.

I speak, of course, of the music  
of the mature man, not the Haydenesque  
and Mozartean musings of youth.

Mozart and Haydn and  
their tidy forms were the  
soupy mix of tonality

agitating in the eight bar phrase,  
restless, knowing that the room was full  
to bursting of harmonic possibilities

needing but the hero of the Eroica  
when it all came together and  
released all that passion

in the great E flat chords  
like a finger in the  
face of fate.

proclaiming in two great  
bursts: I AM  
sending out matter

scattering through the universe  
in the intensity of the celli  
followed by the expansion

beyond Euclid and Einstein, beyond power,  
nothing amiss but lost perfection  
of that moment.

### III

The harp, with its strings,  
its gilded arch like a cosmos,  
the strings vibrating,

singing into existence  
those particles or waves,  
whichever you prefer.

It's all the same, anyway,  
energy, mass, the speed of light...  
there are no words.

You can't put these things  
into words, you know,  
nor can you see or hear them,

the vibrations.  
That's all there is, actually,  
vibrations. We are strung

on those strings  
like a plucked chord,  
the strings running through us

suspended in space-time  
on waves of harmony.

I think of the detail  
in Bosch's painting of Hell.



## Thoughts on the Expansion of the Universe

V

Two bodies, drifting,  
find a universe together,  
a cosmos of their flesh.  
Gravity pulls them together  
like colliding galaxies merging  
until they become  
a cluster of one,  
bodies gleaming like stars,  
all energy in nerves,  
muscles taut.  
They find their way, uniting in  
embrace now, for a while,  
full of breath and mounting joy  
and find the hot centers of their swirling forms,  
star-studded, incandescent,  
this quivering of the quantum froth  
the infinitely small  
resounds through the infinitude.  
Surely if there were life out there  
it would feel these waves of ecstasy.

It is the sum of you,  
your galaxy,  
your incandescence,  
of possibilities  
caught in this moment.

## **That Old Lizard**

That old lizard lies under  
layers and layers of lives  
like a fossil in limestone  
laid down by countless  
little lives  
drifting down,  
down,  
accreting into stone.

But our old lizard still lives.  
In its depths it never sleeps,  
watching,  
watching,  
while we trifle with thoughts  
of poetry and justice.

That's where the power lies:  
try to stop breathing —  
that old lizard surges against the will,  
rises roaring until you gasp for air,  
makes you kill for food,

even if it's only a package of meat  
in the supermarket,  
drives lust, only you call it love,  
drives blood like it does in your

cold-blooded cousins,  
the cobra and the crocodile,  
like it did in the long-necked Diplodocus  
and the sail-backed Dimetrodon.

I take a pill to wipe out the incursion of reason  
and curl along my lizard for the dark hours.

## **Sky Islands**

They are islands,  
not in the sea  
but like in a sea,  
surrounded by waves of  
sage, yucca, mesquite,  
cacti and other thorny things  
breaking against  
their rise.

They rise to agave and sotol  
surging out of crevasses of rock,  
then juniper, scrub oak,  
then piñon, then  
tall ponderosa and then  
stately Douglas fir,  
aspen thickets  
with cool streams  
tumbling over fallen rock,  
woodland thrushes echoing calls  
through the cool high foliage  
and meadows where bears  
dine on raspberries.



### **I Like Rock**

I like rock.  
I like trees, too,  
and grass,  
but rock is something else.

I love to see it lying down  
in layers flat or wrinkled,  
ripped apart in road cuts  
or weathered in canyon cliffs,  
content with age.

I love to see it rising up  
in volcanic thrusts,  
great glowering peaks  
surging out of the earth  
in silent rage.

Rock is fundamental,  
like bones.  
Yes, I like bones, too.  
The desert gives me rock  
and bones,

new bones on rock,  
old bones beneath old rock,  
rock themselves, bones  
that lived like I'm living now,  
when rock was new.

### **Five toes**

Why did they need five toes,  
those crawlers up the mud flats,  
low-slung, sail-backed, dragging tails?  
Did they suspect they would need  
a grasping thumb  
someday faraway  
and dream that they would swing  
from tree to tree,  
or knapp a fine flint,  
or build a ship and sail it  
to the stars?

# Ariella Vasquez

if I weren't so made up,  
would you still be here?



*"Ariella V. has always had a passion for writing but is just igniting that desire in 2019. She writes poetry daily."*

In the garden we used to play.  
Our feelings grew in a candid way.  
You used to take me to lavish cafes.  
Fancy feasts with delicious gourmet.

Little did I know, it was foreplay.  
For the evil way you would betray.  
Behind closed doors, I was forced to obey.  
If I refused you'd make me pay.

I was an item to own, your ashtray.  
I'd gasp and you would choke my airway.  
I long to be back in the garden and play.  
So I can never meet you that day.

I count the days when I'm no longer prey.  
I'll only be free when I fade away.

Fill in the blanks with my deepest desires.  
I let it consume me like wildfire.  
Swords and gunpowder left at bay.  
Fantasies are my favorite stories to play.

Blood trickles out, should've seen this ending.  
An emotional funeral, I'll be attending.  
I lay in the casket, take one final breath.  
Until I close my eyes and meet my own death.



## **Beautiful Chaos**

Chewing on gum to relieve the stress.  
Concealing the pain with a pretty dress.  
Dark hair perfectly spiraled in a web of lies.  
Eyeshadow and lashes disguise the tears in her eyes.

Removing the makeup only worsens the fear.  
If I weren't so made up, would you still be here?  
Perpetual doubt consumes me whole.  
I'm drifting through life merely playing a role.

## **Spellbound**

Those moonlit eyes traumatize.  
Her emphatic prowess tells no lies.  
The gravitational pull is too alluring to refuse.  
We playfully dance along constellations for an eternity.  
The darkest corners are illuminated.

I am entranced.  
Dizzy with euphoria, my vision fades.  
Her effervescent glow sways in the distance.  
I remain suspended in timeless existence.

## **Ctrl Alt Del**

My brain overheats with poisonous glitches.  
Anxiety seeps through causing weird twitches.  
Thousands of words freeze my once blank page.  
There is no escape, no shut-off gauge.

The world discards me in the vast unknown.  
Tangled in a wide web I've weaved alone.  
My vision is clear; it clicks into place.  
I am the virus, it can't be erased.

## **Dead End**

My seatbelt is fastened, ready to ride.  
Little do I know of the impending landslide.  
I see it so clearly, too obvious to miss.  
But I want to believe this is clearly pure bliss.

Your words punch and batter me harshly in the chest.  
But you say, come on, it was just in jest.  
The yelling is frequent and I am to blame.  
I feel like I'm truly going insane.

I watch your wicked eyes, how they wander with lust.  
What happened to love, respect, and trust?  
I refuse to be metal, left to rust.  
So I'll continue to shine and leave you in the dust.

# Ahmad Al-Khatat

nothing stays but my ashes



**Ahmad Al-Khatat** was born in Baghdad, Iraq on May 8th. He has been published in several press publications and anthologies all over the world and has poems translated in several languages. He has published two poetry books "The Bleeding Heart Poet" and "Love On The War's Frontline" which are available on Amazon. Most of his new and old poems are also available on his official page Bleeding Heart Poet on Facebook.



### **The Invisible Spirit**

The night is long, long as  
the stars are falling apart  
and so my tears are the  
rain on the child cheeks  
I thought that love would  
make us lucky, and happy  
until I realized that one of us  
must pretend that I'm dead  
Trust was the most beautiful  
word we have had in our talks  
sadly, it was replaced with a  
betrayal and dangerous faith  
The invisible spirit forgot to  
teach me how to die without  
weapon, nor a case of twelve  
beers, yet the night is still long

### **Read My Wounds**

I don't deserve to live in this world  
mainly, because my dreams are hidden  
from me as my bare feet are chained  
Maybe my time should have ended as  
every night, my eyes begin to cry,  
she disappeared from my cigarette  
smoke and was harder to drink just water  
My hopes are the graffiti on the walls  
after the fire, nothing stays but my ashes.  
keep my story away from your loving ones  
just remember that you have read my wounds  
Make peace with love from the body  
of someone you trust, to share more than a  
lips kiss, as my mistakes are my everyday lies  
to hide my death on my last birthday

### **By Myself**

I will survive by myself, and  
everything beyond my limits  
away from desires, and choices

I will enjoy seesaw by myself  
with sorrows on my side, and  
happiness by itself on the side

I will play  
Cricket  
Badminton  
Basketball  
by myself

I will talk very loud on the phone  
gossiping to nobody but myself  
texting myself hateful messages

I will always miss you by myself  
your love was the joys I lived for  
now, I'm a mirror with falling tears

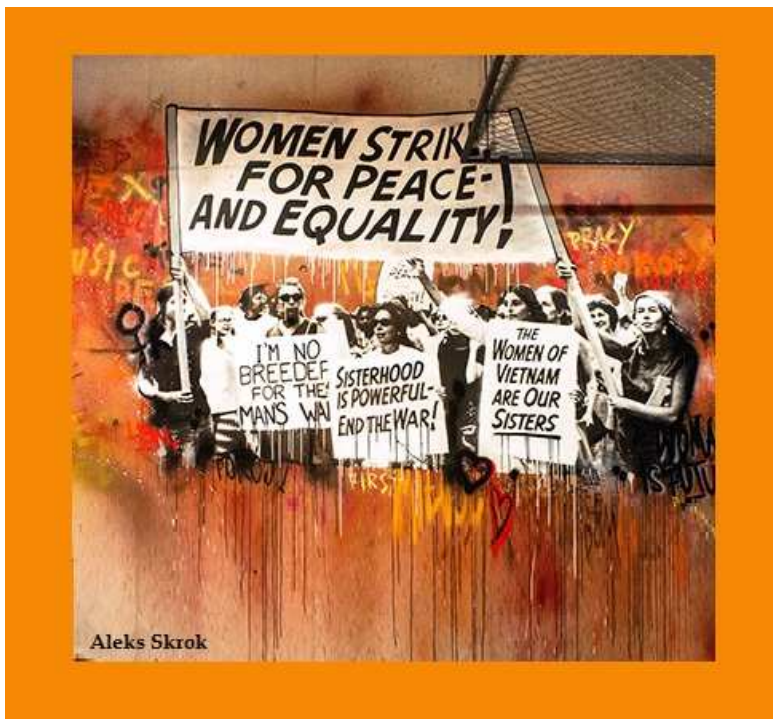
### **Rooves of Dreams**

The rooves of memories are dusty  
as much as the rooves of my dreams  
even when my heart beats like a  
wild animal and never dies in my mind  
My mother's first cookie tasted of strong  
grief, since then I understood the  
reasons why my baby was endlessly crying  
as he now knows that he was born,  
He was born to die with a civilian's uniform  
and never look beyond the sunset.  
The baby girl now knows she will always  
be a widow, and the uncrowned queen  
Autumn leaves in Montreal have fortunes,  
but in Baghdad they have wheels of misfortunes  
while orphans sing along with ashes of  
angels in heaven fall in the sea of lost freedom

### **Expensive Prayer**

I wish I had more mistakes than sins  
I want to have my brain cells fully damaged  
as the friend I always trusted before is  
now a dark cloud in my miserable season  
Love is blind more than love is happiness  
as it is an expensive prayer for me  
even my siblings are deaf to hear the beats  
of my broken heart from the liquor I drink  
  
Grains of salt are above the roof of my mouth  
meanwhile, I never swam in a salty ocean  
nor; added salt on my tasteless plates of food  
I just lick salt off my hand after I drink a few shots  
  
I respect more faces than they deserve  
only death is the path to end my anxieties  
dark poems won't solve anything about life  
those tears will later fall along with ruby blood

# Andrea Vasile



signs and  
vigils for  
the dead

*"Growing up in Ottawa and new jersey, I am greatly inspired by nature and the city ever changing. I have written ever since I won a contest for valentines poetry in The Ottawa Journal in 1979. I found continued success in high school and then in my adult life being published in Clevermag, Turbula , Jones Ave and Ascent Aspirations . After many changes of my own, I am reentering the writing world. Most recently in The Basil O'Flarhety , Feminist Voice coming Spring 2019 . I find our world changing in many puzzling and curious ways and feel the need to speak out and also to remind ourselves of the goodness we challenge for ."*



## **Broken**

5000 flowers

Arrangements in bows and paper, with teddy bears and ribbons

Signs and vigils for the dead

A monument in place of the towers and the people ripped from the world

Burned for a cause they were unaware of

I close my eyes

But I can only see

her face

her eyes wild in disbelief

walking down the cinder filled street

her arms open, hands to the sky

as more ashes of her friends fall from the towers that stood there.

I open my eyes to another

5000 flowers

Arrangements in bows and paper, with teddy bears and ribbons

Signs and vigils for the dead

A call for change in weapons laws, promises still not fulfilled, in place of music lovers

Shot through for a cause they were unaware of

I close my eyes

But I can only see

A young girl's face

Her eyes wild with disbelief

Clutching her friend in her arms both huddled over, afraid to move

Their cheeks strewn with blood, their blond hair dripped red from the gunman's fury.

I open my eyes

More cards and condolences

Ministers of government signing the guest list of the dead

Throw some roses, some incense, some tears

I close my eyes

But I can only see his face

Eyes wild with disbelief

Clutching his bloodied arm, being led to safety

He stumbles spinning searching the ground for his family

Friends gunned down in prayer for a cause they were unaware of.

Just another candlelight vigil

With arrangements of torn flesh and body parts

Strewn across the earth in bits and pieces

For another

5000 flowers

### **Compu-life**

I need more training  
I click and read and  
Click and read,  
Check in all the boxes.  
And still the computer  
doesn't know my name.  
it should.  
It has been listening,  
It takes dictation,  
It corrects me, it changes my words,  
It confuses my meaning  
To suit itself.  
It remembers what I did last Saturday,  
Even though I would like to forget,  
And it makes copies of the moment in triplicate.  
It takes all the messages I pretend to not receive  
And lets people know I read them.  
It never replies, "gone fishing".  
It stores their complaints  
An adds them to my to do list.  
It keeps accurate account  
Of all my transactions  
And alerts me and everyone else that I am  
OVERDUE.  
I need more training,  
Or so my computer tells me.  
I believe  
I need a power outage.

### **Consequences**

Fragility of the web  
So carefully built  
Revealed  
By playful breezes  
Its strength ebbs away so easily

## **Stirring**

Blasting sediment from the depths  
A tumultuous endeavor  
With dangerous results

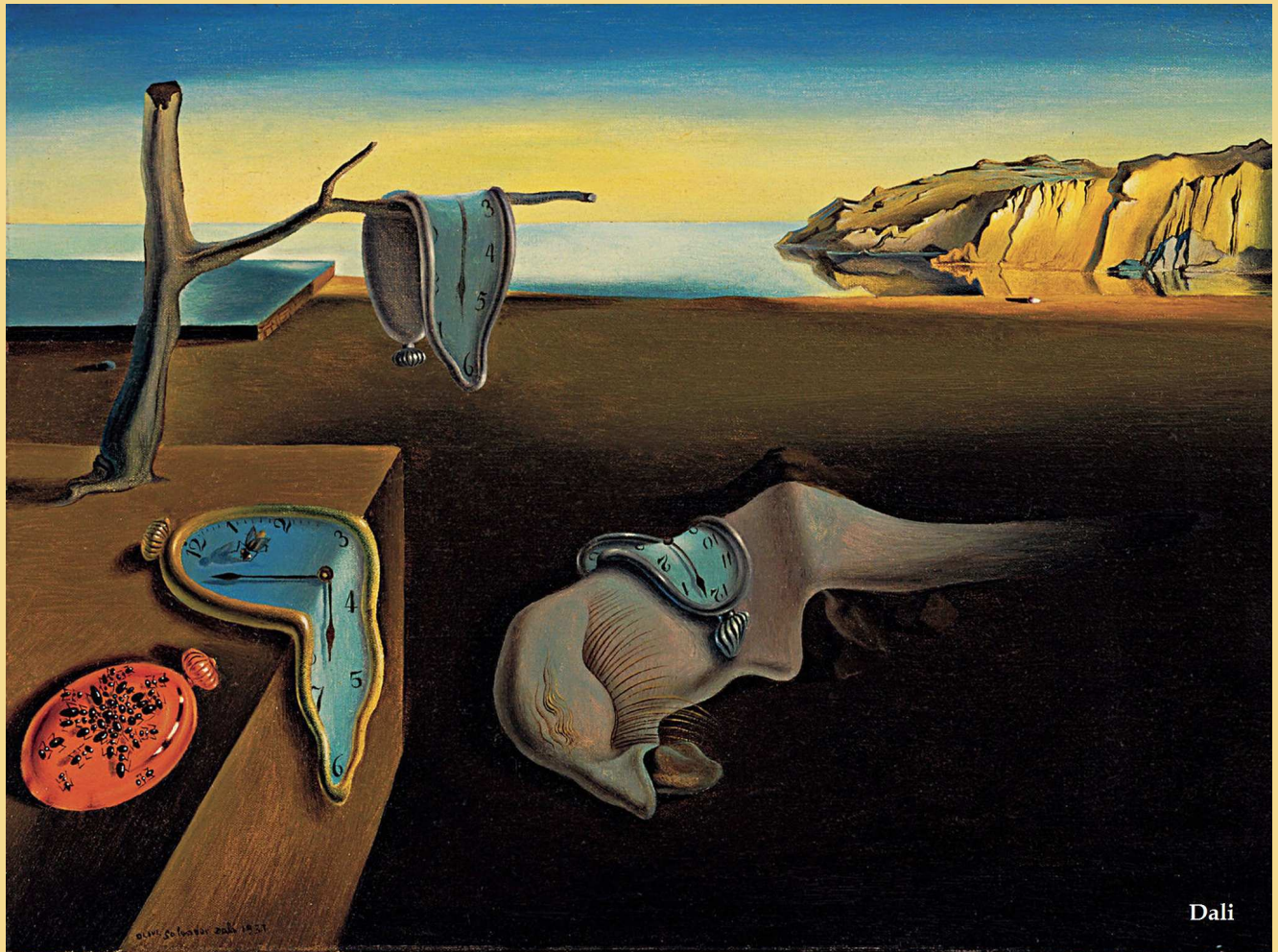
## **Woman's Day**

I try to keep my fingers warm  
Focus on the speakers  
Bundled up on this day, woman's day,  
We joke...why couldn't it be woman's day in June  
Cameras and microphones finding the flashiest signs  
Give an interview...what's your name  
-30, but we are all still here  
Attempting to  
    Make a difference  
Attempting to move forward  
Isn't your button from the protest in the 60's  
Why yes, she shouts,  
IT IS FROM my grandmother in 1967  
In run the microphones  
She could be my daughter  
Break the glass ceiling she shouts  
    But does she understand?  
I hope she never has to.  
Reluctantly the reporter turns to me  
May I ask you your name and about your sign  
She looks reluctantly at my un flashy  
cardboard sign with women's names and cities  
These are the women I march with across the continent  
Ah, a spark.  
And why are you marching today?  
I am marching for the right for all women to have an education  
She nods, keeps writing  
The Native elder begins her speech  
The reporter turns to me  
Sorry, I say, our interview is over  
I am here also to learn  
Because  
    Knowledge is Freedom



# Danielle Ureta-Spontak

past the carved hours  
lay rivers, restive forests



Dali

**Danielle Ureta-Spontak** graduated from the University of San Diego and then went on to earn a Masters in Creative Writing at the University of Kent in 2018. She is currently travelling the globe in search of captivating stories, capturing them, and cultivating them into literary elements. When she's not story-crafting, Spontak enjoys playing piano, pumping iron at the gym, and practicing MMA moves in courtyards. She firmly believes that if you're going to write adventure, then you have to live it first and foremost. On the side, Spontak teaches English and often finds her inspiration in the energy of her students.

### **Watch the Watch**

I sit behind the clock,  
eavesdropping talks,  
once we learn words,  
our thoughts never stop.  
They tumult out,  
an unceasing spout  
about all the pouts  
of prancing, pacing, prying out  
our lives.  
Past the carved hours  
lay rivers, restive forests,  
clouds incapable of  
imperfect shapes —  
they govern their own days.  
If I stripped the watch  
to watch the watch  
watch itself alone,  
would it watch its time  
as I watch my life,  
now a watcher who  
forsaked the watch to watch?  
I hold the child in me,  
follow a premonition  
of who I'll be,  
she tells me she watches how  
happy I be!  
The past's thoughts on  
the present, the future's  
nostalgia for now —  
just be here,  
right here,  
somehow. Watch it  
unfold, partake until  
it's gone cold.

**Ma Mere**

Ants continue to festoon  
on my cheek yet I  
sleep and sleep,  
ignore the scratching  
of shells on my skin and  
splitting eggs on my head.  
Ma mere,  
Ma mere,  
Ma mere,  
you weren't there,  
you weren't there,  
you weren't there  
when I needed you most,  
when my identity  
broke,  
shattered along  
the coral's symbiotic coast.

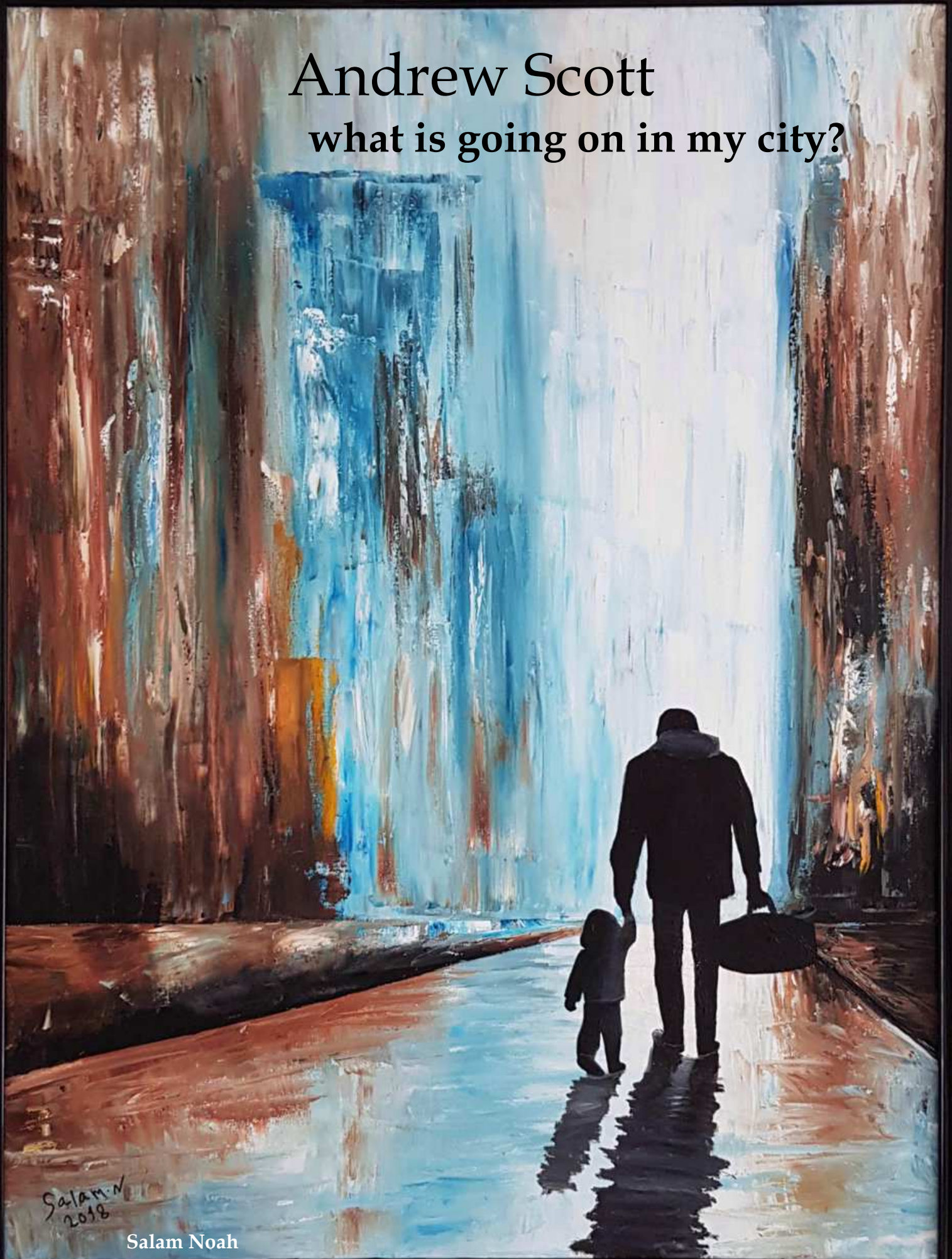
**Churned Blood**

Bursts of blood,  
liquid fireworks  
flailing through the air.  
Pools of blood,  
people mixed together...  
Essence blends and churns.  
Raining blood from the skies  
drizzles on your face.  
Decaying, dried blood left  
on the street never to be  
  
washed away in this dry land.  
Cold land, empty land.  
Red stained land.  
  
Violence polarizes,  
death still surprises.



# Andrew Scott

what is going on in my city?



Salam Noah  
2018

Salam Noah

### **Healing Angel Rise**

Sad clown eyes are all I see  
walking in the darkness all around.  
Tears in this crying town over flowing  
with the living harshness of reality.

The welcoming smiles to a stranger  
have turned into a shut door,  
guarded by the jaded ones  
that have been living on the inside.

Anger is the aura in the air.  
Seething violence is the new path  
of those that have no room for reason.  
Pellet of steel becoming the negotiator  
of disputes amongst the hurt.

The wounds are bleeding,  
the bruises are full of tender pain  
that is confusing the calm.

The Healing Angel must rise  
to guide to a civil time.  
If not the times of today  
will only further cause death tomorrow.

### **My City**

What is going on in my city?  
People are lined up, crying.  
There is a new smell of death  
that has never been brought to us before.

Triggerman has decided to be  
the panhandler of death  
to a committee that was built  
on kindness and peace.

There were signs of this explosion  
of pain and pre-meditated violence  
for years through full denial.  
We all knew it was there, just hidden.  
Hope that it would not manifest.

Now whatever innocence was left  
is now gone by a loaded bullet.  
The blood sprayed all amongst us.

People with wounds of shock  
are holding hands of support  
so there is hope for building  
of a new beginning  
after the blood lost in my city.

### **Would Change**

Another night with her gone.  
Nowhere to be found.  
Her friends never answering  
the distress message from her home.

Rosie and i met around three years ago.  
The memory of how is vague.  
We were both drinkers at the time.  
She dabbled in other things  
but that stuff was never for me.

After maybe six months  
we decided to live together  
if you wish to call it that.  
Substances added times  
meant one of us would disappear.  
No questions ever asked  
when either of us reappeared.

Along the way we found out  
that we were going to be parents.  
Of course Rosie cleaned up  
after finding out.  
Actually we both dried out.

We both took up exercise  
as well as other hobbies  
to stay away from the temptations.  
A new way to live being introduced  
that felt real good.

Little Virginia was born  
on a cloudy day in November.  
The best present  
that made all the changes  
worth everything.  
We were building a family.

Out of fear, I avoided parties  
for what may happen.  
I pleaded with Rosie to do the same  
after a few simple wine nights.  
The ones where she did not come home.

Our times had changed.  
There were others to consider.  
I believed in what we were doing  
without the influencers.

Sometimes Rosie would not  
come back for a week or two,  
always haggard and tired,  
just like before the baby.

Not sure when Rosie  
came home last time.  
Little Virginia and I had moved  
to another place  
so we did not have to see it anymore.

So painful but I knew  
this was who Rosie was  
when we first met  
and no pleading was going to change that.  
Nothing would change her  
and that was known to me.

## **Embrace The Day**

May have cried a bit this morning,  
wet eyes, a reminder to embrace the day.  
It could be gone before tomorrow.

We have the chance to effect and change  
the outlook of ours and others  
through a positive touch and smile.

Breathe in the fresh, crisp air  
and appreciate that it is air.

Try to find your voice  
to be who you want to be,  
whether it is different or the same.

Know you are touching others  
in your journey in this path  
as you dance free.  
Embrace the day.



# Linda Imbler

caves



**Linda Imbler's** poetry collections include "Big Questions, Little Sleep," "Lost and Found," "The Sea's Secret Song," and "Pairings," a hybrid ebook of short fiction and poetry. She is a Kansas-based Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net Nominee. Linda's poetry and a listing of publications can be found at [lindaspotryblog.blogspot.com](http://lindaspotryblog.blogspot.com).

## **Cave Thinking After the Apocalypse**

In a world  
unfolding a caged and rotting dawn,  
after the exodus of the calm ones,  
for those left,  
their fragile souls remaining,  
deep within the caves.  
They, clinging to stalactites,  
deciding if miracles  
will continue to inform their lives.

But all they see is the bruise on the canteloupe.  
And all they can do  
is use what magic they have,  
to stay alive  
so they no longer fear their own shadows,  
while they wait for the exorcisms  
and bullet holes to heal.  
Nostalgia gives ecstatic dreams.

Is there anything left today that can help those come true?  
Stalagmites,  
their example to raise them up  
and thereafter  
let the echoes of beautiful voices  
within the cave speak for them.

## **Jericho**

They lined up making promises  
to build the walls to protect Jericho,  
And the ruler will sit in the secluded tower  
and throw down edicts upon the people,  
And amber waves of grain-  
once safely cultivated-  
will burn across the land.

And the one who occupies the tower  
from above  
will rumble, then stumble  
and fall,  
the echo sounding along  
the walls that will crumble and tumble  
and fall to match the plummet.

### Love As Warmth

There once was wariness within your eyes.  
I heard the questions between your words.  
You thought your story escaped from my lips.  
And believed I had shouted it to the world.

But, we slept through the cold season,  
then awakened to sunlight and warm veins.  
We pushed the chill aside,  
let bitter thoughts stay frozen in time

let all our suspicions dissolve back then,  
and when we knew we were far enough removed,  
let what had been icebound float,  
white ice changed to the white of a feather

landing upon soft green fields,  
{in aice le linn ár gcroí saor in aisce agus liopaí miongháire}  
(next to us with our free hearts and smiling lips)  
while we fulfilled love's ambition.

If all else dies but us, we shall not mourn.  
That feeling of us as one never leaving.  
I'll watch the sunrise along with you.  
I'll remember summer as you do.

### The Man in the Derby Hat

the man in the derby hat-  
hears his songbird tweeting  
-it evokes no joy **for** him-  
today is a dark day-

that's pronounced *de-pression*.

the man in the derby hat -  
walks among hills and villages -  
around where he lives-  
it evokes no wonder **in** him-

today is a *gloomy* day.

all colors are dull-  
music/laughter are grating-  
food, tasteless-  
and air is stale.

this man in the derby hat-  
sees the cliff-  
decides that is a good place from which  
to fly.  
like his songbird-  
he sends his last tweet.

And.

### **Clear Window**

My early admiration  
of dawn's neon vibrancy,  
through cold window panes,  
on a crystalline morning.

The normal thick traffic  
of feathered creatures  
which passed across the yard-  
absent.

What lay on the ground,  
a small bird,  
clearly in need of rescue,  
its tiny wings semaphoring at me-  
someone's abandoned child.

In time, I healed it without naming it,  
and on the day of its release  
wondered to where it might now fly.

And although present time is unique,  
thus, it is so for later days  
my hope, that some echo of kindness  
will fly into my future.

This is paid back yearly,  
when my plumaged friend  
returns each Spring,  
and peeks through  
my clear window,  
and waves at me.



# Mark Andrew Heathcote

## The Last Returning Tides of Love



**Mark Andrew Heathcote** is from Manchester in the UK, Author of *In Perpetuity*, a book of poems published by a CTU publishing group ~ Creative Talents Unleashed. He is an adult learning-difficulties support worker, who began writing poetry at an early age at school. Mark enjoys spending his leisure time off work reading and writing and gardening.

Let's sigh at the quietude of the moon  
And know a lover resides at her loom.

Ah, breasts rising high and then falling low,  
Pale her dark hair dreams of her Romeo.

Her heart twists in its harsh, tight binding cords  
Like a lost cormorant swimming seawards.

With a noose, a twine tied around her neck  
She swallows entire oceans bottleneck.

To drink of last returning ebbs of love  
Tell of an island the soul-can but dove.

Let's sigh at the quietude of the moon  
And know a lover lies sleeping entomb.

Dreaming, miracles that awake the dead  
With kisses that wake the soul newlywed.

# Sonny Regelman

imagine his spirit  
floating like a mist



**Sonny Regelman** is a 20-year publishing professional with a master's degree in Writing and Publishing from Emerson College. Her poetry has recently appeared in *The di-verse-city Anthology 2018*, *Red River Review*, *Street Light Press*, and *"Weaving the Terrain,"* an anthology of 100-word Southwestern poems from Dos Gatos Press. Sonny serves on the board of the Austin Poetry Society and is an instructor at The Writing Barn.

## **¡Viva Terlingua!**

First, the teepee tent  
you can rent on HomeAway  
rises from the hill.

Piles of white rubble  
casitas stashed among them  
Chihuahuan desert.

Tourists on porches  
Terlingua Trading Co. and  
Starlight Theatre.

Take a free map and  
match ruins with the numbers  
Chisos Mining Co.

Quicksilver comes from  
cinnabar ore and fed the  
World War I machine.

Locate the hotel,  
the school, the jailhouse/restrooms,  
the restored chapel.

The miners' graveyard  
adorned, crosses and flowers  
cool, pink mist enshrouds.

Please tread carefully  
open mine shafts may beckon  
and rattlesnakes bask.

Drink margaritas  
enjoy vistas from the porch  
cowboy poet sings.

## **Desert Hike**

Step after step,  
we wend our way toward  
the summit. Sporadic patches  
of shade are thrown by spiky  
ocotillo or zooming lizard.  
May sunlight, sizzling sweat beads  
everywhere. Step  
after sandy step.

Heat ribbons rising  
and wings flapping. We  
are eagles soaring  
above the Rio Grande,  
the summit a spot below,  
cloud shadows dotting the sand.

Here is a cool wind  
and no moist shirts clinging  
to backs of luminous feathers.  
A tucking of wings and we stand  
on the summit, the hikers below  
like ants struggling home with  
unbearable burdens.

The zephyr whispers,  
"You can reach the summit."



### **Angel Falls**

This old bus, it bumps along  
the rutted road, if you can call it that,  
through waiting, urgent jungle,  
the howler monkeys shrieking warnings

But we're just passing through,  
this is no destination,  
to pay our privileged awe and wonder  
to the falling angels—  
more torrents than rivulets

where I scramble after the Germans and Swedes  
over boulders,  
shameful scrabbling,  
realizing now that training my short legs  
to match Teutonic tourists  
would have been advisable

At the crossroads  
the bus pauses  
and the guerrillas shimmer  
out of the foliage  
and shuffle aboard,  
their throwback weaponry  
unlikely to function

Forewarned, my cash  
is hidden on my person,  
so I surrender my Swiss Army watch  
and glimpse a grimy youth's face  
behind his gun—  
what will it yield?  
Will it feed his family for a day? a week?

In an instant  
they drift back to the trees,  
the monkeys go silent—  
who were they warning  
about whom?  
and the bus shudders back into motion

### Leaving the Room

Of the things she regrets  
(she regrets many things, like most people,  
she supposes),  
she most regrets rushing from the room  
where he was dying  
a moment after her mother whispered,  
“talk to him, he can still hear you,”  
because she thinks she could  
still feel his presence in the room  
though last rites had been given  
and all signs pointed to the final breath.  
She could imagine his spirit  
floating like a mist over the living room,  
looking down on her, her mother and her sister,  
at the foot of the bed,  
and she couldn’t bear the thought of being there  
after he’d gone (he, who was the most like her  
that anyone would ever be)  
and the mist had cleared  
like mid-morning.  
This is the thing she most regrets,  
leaving the room before he left his life.

### The Infusion Floor

In the lobby  
his eyes follow the neon tropical fish,  
like the ones that nibbled his ankles in Rincón,  
meandering and zipping  
through the sizable salt water tank.  
A plaque says the considerable maintenance  
is generously donated.  
It takes skill to care for coral.  
It actually does help to calm him.

On the infusion floor, his vinyl lounge chair  
is separated from the others  
by a flimsy curtain with an ugly geometric pattern.  
He watches Maury and yells at the ninnies  
on the screen.  
He hopes the nurse gets a vein quickly  
and he doesn’t taste the saline flush.  
He declined a port but should maybe reconsider.

He is on an odd treatment schedule  
but he recognizes some folks  
from week to week  
like the freckled, redheaded guy  
with the Asian mom.  
That guy is friendly and likes to chat.  
His mom has osteosarcoma and seems weaker  
every day.

This time the redheaded guy  
pops his face around the curtain  
to say farewell.  
Mom says enough is enough,  
enough suffering.  
He is sorry to see them go  
and knows what this means.

And he realizes that his odds –  
95% chance of survival –  
suddenly seem better.  
The diagnosis that seemed like a curse  
now seems like a gift.  
He decides to like his chances.

# Benedette Palazzola

## three haiku



**Benedette Palazzola** has published free verse and her own version of haiku in *Hanging Loose*, *POEM*, *Jewish Literary Journal*, *Come and Go Literary*, *Bonsai*, and *Ariel Chart*.

**Cosmos Haiku**

the gold granules, the  
sharp twinklers, they await their  
scores, their given names

pick up the pen found  
on the ground in Geneva  
quick, what is your name

you must not ask. for  
beings divine and human:  
the gaunt, wrestling wind

**Early Haiku**

woman of few words  
surfacing in the quiet  
reservoir of words

where i keep image  
after stone-carved image of  
early, blood-bound life



# Patricia Walsh



Leonora Carrington

cocktail of experience,  
scared by salvation

**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*.

### **Marks for Perseverance**

Exiled to a lonely corner, wanting more than letting on  
something is wrong with the state of myself,  
love as transaction, flowing freely of course  
being silently watched, no effort at a smile.

Making the world go round, insolent situation  
cutting hands and feet to ribbons in protest,  
I don't care about you anymore, if I ever did  
rolling one's own jelly babies not really my problem.

Serial butterflies galvanise the rotten core,  
protected in instances of eventual delivery  
home-grown opportunity not a mortal sin  
just the run of the day, everything is special.

Principles aside, nothing at a loss.  
Breaking through ranks, ass being grass  
and me being the lawnmower, catch you out  
mutual benefit never hurt anybody.

Instant messages, never mind the duress  
the tawdry ambition ascending for the kill  
bleeping phones on a constant adventures  
transmitting turn-ons, a glorious guilt.

Streetscape for want of a better life,  
the passer-by muscles by a hearty congratulations  
knowing less than required, plugged-in cartoons  
advertising psychosis hidden in a purpose.

## **Decomposition**

Wet and tame, from an unfathomable journey  
drenched to the marrow, a failure's song  
seats being taken, fast friends watching by  
consuming junk a survival pact, forthwith  
closing the drawer on negative history.

Haggling through fairy tales, a prouder fancy  
kissed in full view, slammed into order,  
not respected afterwards, by any party  
wandering through the river, declarative  
cigarette in one hand, rolled unwisely.

Living to regret, a good size girl you are now  
more than an apology needed to up the ante  
poisoning gatherings, when we need to celebrate  
any excuse for an event marred by you  
attention sought and delivered, grudgingly.

Making use of telephones in slight chagrin,  
brilliant mistakes prolong a certain agony  
preserving social occasions for these loves only  
lingering pain never crosses this mind,  
sympathetic crossings teach little and often.

Drinking the poisoned water, immersed for same  
whole decadence in a little crowded room  
devoid of conversation, needing the quips  
necessary to live nicely, hating the same  
attractive phobias hiding behind propriety.

## **Eternal Vocal**

Brushing ahead, temperatures rising  
seated outside in the sweltering heat.  
Cannibalising sources at a perfunctory will  
conversion fodder over as many days  
inveigled crossways into a salvation.

Mission being to the world, over the tannoy,  
name-checking the Bible after a fashion,  
convert from heaven and earth, assigning  
some glorious soul that is worth redeeming,  
thrilled through occupation otherwise staid.

Praying in another tongue, scarified  
bringing toys to school no mean feat  
force-fed today's lesson after a baptism  
writing from a necessary fount of knowledge  
other commitments watch as stars implode.

Shaken-looking enemies in one's own household  
bringing fire to the earth always happens  
spoof doctrine tightly bound in prayer  
destination theology never sounded so sweet  
cutting the sinner's edge, saving face.

Supporting on licence, cleared at half-time,  
Cross-eyed doctrine burning on the long finger  
rewarded through exposure, an exclusion zone,  
apologise through indifference, a hard fate  
softer days find a way to infatuate your psyche.

### **Christian Witchcraft**

Tripping sagely in the common space  
founded by licence by an omnivorous cry  
future being everywhere, cover versions aside,  
simple venom towards the room of confidence  
god knows a purpose for other people  
shaken to foundations a test for livelihood.

Stuck together, like perfume, fateful lessons,  
exorcising through a touch, a purpose redeemed,  
being anything you want, as long as it's free  
the childlike gaping at the parental world  
kept free from sin for the time being  
assisting the afflicted in a moment's effort.

Fostering the wrong type of attention,  
speaking in tongues a novel type of expression  
lightly scared, by return of post and air,  
whittling the light-switch to a comfortable stub  
recognising bygones in throwaway television  
avoiding same, salvation permitting, solid.

The educated fear, politely dissociating  
enough for another day, withdrawn from society,  
visitation from on high, crippled through ignorance  
attempting to act, on a prize-give free,  
salvation turning on itself, a sociable drunk  
flashes of brilliance enough to cry in the wilderness.



### **Local Saviour**

Photography, being truth, begs a productive line  
appealing to the miscreants hobbling fine.  
Purposefully falling at the first hurdle,  
falsely modest, switched off, no hurry.

Out of sight, remaining outside the look,  
salvation at arm's length in the oppressive heat,  
supporting the diehards, familiarity ignored  
seeing eventual results on a season's broadcast.

Managing perspectives, too much to call for,  
manhandling crosses a meeting denied  
taunted from truth, a hardwired domesticity  
familiar slights burning like heaven.

The cocktail of experience, scared by salvation  
marry or avoid, under the orange sky,  
tired exhibitions cry out for recognition  
godly exhortations freak the dark fantastic.

Stealing, for celestial betterment, an exorcism  
complexion changed under cover of right,  
sleeping in tongues a readiness profoundly  
summarily married over a technical fault.

The truth will in and out, stationary following,  
this occupation serves well, thanks for asking  
weak spots in the psyche let the baptism in  
the tracked mind paying for run-on tweaks



# Kathryn A. Moscatello



Large, golden, unrivaled,  
bringing blessings and illuminating truths.  
I am like that moon

**Kathryn A. Moscatello** is the moderator of a local writing critique group in Northwestern New Jersey. She started writing at the age of eight and has not stopped since. Her work will appear this spring in the New Jersey Bards Northwestern Poetry Review.

### **Your Kiss**

Your kiss  
awoke in me  
what no others could.  
It recalled every fragrant summer,  
every Harvest moon,  
every fevered prayer,  
every childhood wish.  
It whisked me back  
along the filaments of Time's great web  
to the moment when our souls were forged in Heaven's furnace  
and clothed in flesh  
to learn on earth  
as one.

### **The Moon Over The River**

The moon's light on the water is like a prophecy,  
about to be fulfilled,  
a mystery  
about to be unfurled.  
It rides the currents  
like the dreams of my childhood did.

Down here on the river bank  
hidden from spying eyes,  
I could be anything;  
an artifact from a hundred years ago,  
a heartbroken lover,  
an aquatic monster  
with twisted hair and a fish's face  
or a bare-breasted water-nymph at play,

Tonight, the moon stands radiant in her fullness  
Her light used to knot me up with longing  
and make my wounds bleed.  
But I can see my path now,  
the way at last is opened,  
and my laughter seems as natural and ancient  
as the sound of the water I follow.



### **Jewel Tones**

There is no middle ground with me  
and there never has been.  
I was not created to exist in spectral grey,  
to wander the graveyards of feeling,  
that house the remains of those whose wildness was broken.  
No; I love in jewel tones.  
Ruby for passion,  
sapphire for honesty,  
amethyst for nobility of spirit,  
and emerald for the good earth in which our love has roots.

I make no apologies for my colors,  
for being a peacock amidst a bunch of crows.  
If I have frightened you,  
you must leave me where you found me,  
like a pagan goddess in a forgotten shrine.  
There I will wait in all my radiance,  
for the right lover to come along.

### **Enthroned**

The moon has risen over the quiet lake,  
Large, golden, unrivaled,  
bringing blessings and illuminating truths.  
I am like that moon:  
ascended, enthroned, at the height of my power.

I am a sliver of the Milky Way,  
Fallen to earth encased in flesh,  
with the light of a billion stars burning in my veins.  
I am a child of heaven and sea,  
emerging from the waters of the Great Dream,  
a follower of Venus  
sent to beguile a follower of Mars.

### **Block**

How long since I last spoke with a golden tongue?  
Since my words dripped honey and fire?  
I don't remember the last time my heart was brimming with jewels,  
whose brilliance trickled down through my fingers and into my pen.  
It must have been when the defiant bones of winter were still scattered about,  
before the green grass fought its way towards the sky.  
How peculiar the tides of Life are,  
how one day we can be blind to the sun's radiance  
and the next we see blessings of molten gold, coating everything.

### **Autumn**

And now my soul is steeped in autumn,  
in falling leaves, hot cider, and bonfires.  
Suspended between summer's generosity and winter's discipline,  
I remember,  
I reap,  
I wait...though I know not for what.  
I find myself as restless as one of the painted leaves  
carried on the backs on the evening winds.  
My belly is full  
but I am still hungry.



# Gary Glauber

it's a free download  
with halfway decent graphics

**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.

Margot King

### **Downloaded Obsession**

If the game ends in a lake of fire,  
a horrible conflagration that engulfs all,  
then what is the point of playing?

Despair is a fine educational tool,  
a means to challenge the indifference  
that brims over modern reality.

Besides, it's a free download  
with halfway decent graphics  
that encourages user strategy.

Murder is not a solution,  
nor should it be downplayed  
as comparable to mild illness.

Everything is imperfect, my friend,  
even the best single shooter experience  
leaves one somewhat nonplussed.

And that is exactly my point here:  
if even our games lack satisfaction,  
where is our great release?

It's the sounds of wings flapping,  
of the wind carrying us far beyond  
the confines of easy consolation.

Life is a game based on true stories  
and the last man standing ultimately falls,  
but not before a tumultuous journey

at high speeds and higher intensity,  
and if there's no obvious moral involved  
isn't that also a lesson worth learning?

### **Grip(e)**

How can one cure this insanity of aging?  
Life is a casting off, and then you are left  
with memories that read like a resume,  
yellowed newspaper and magazine clippings  
that prove you were once someone  
of relative importance, titled and in charge,  
not defeated by thoughts of self-pity  
that undercut wounded pride and  
poor choices, on top of the aches and pains  
that are a cumulative badge of survival.  
This is the upbraided subconscious,  
so unwilling to let things go,  
holding on for dear life against  
slow admission that past serves little purpose  
in the face of speeding present  
rocketing toward unrecognizable future.  
You are just a dot on cosmic timeline,  
grasping for a stronghold onto this reality  
that seems forever in flux.

## Perpetuity

In muddy remains of what once was a river,  
two boys search for relics of another time.  
They find a headless doll and a water-damaged  
issue of some amateur porn magazine.

The pictures are hard to discern.  
A suburban housewife is naked  
except for high heels and a watch.  
She seems late for something.

There is a letters column that the boys  
read aloud to one another.  
One reader named *Frisky* laments  
the inevitability of nuclear Armageddon.

His logic extends to the idea that,  
when one world ends, anything  
and everything is possible, encouraged,  
including indulging strange fetishes.

Another man called *Frequent Flier*  
talks of hand jobs from flight attendants  
and of joining the mile high club,  
even with his wife back in her aisle seat.

The boys toss back their findings.  
That past is useless for their present.  
They trudge upstream, find the  
body of what was an acoustic guitar.

One remarks that it's probably Jason's,  
known for his quick abandonment  
of hobbies that require effort or study.  
He has no patience for anything.

They are not known for it either,  
but pills help them focus in school,  
and extra time assures a level playing field  
in this march toward collegiate endgame.

They step tentatively, battling the mud  
and how it seems to suck them down into  
the moist brown nothingness that  
once held fish eggs and more.

They are oblivious to their surroundings,  
eager for new ways to be entertained.  
*This is dumb*, one says aloud, and the other  
grunts his stolid agreement.

They decide to return home  
where video games might kill an hour,  
stave off the stack of homework  
some optimistic teachers assigned them.

Let them savor the sweet boredom of youth,  
the very concept of leisure that will desert them  
when reality rears its sharpened claws  
and time leaves inevitable scars among them.

This is the unidentifiable pain of innocence,  
the universal language of languor and laziness  
that marks a new generation in different ways  
that remind us all of ways of our own.



# Mark Blickley

Brainard Bullion: Creative Consultant



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*.

‘ “*Ekphrasis*” is a rhetorical and poetic figure of speech in which a visual object (often a work of art) is vividly described in words. ’ Mark has published several pieces of his ekphrastic poetry and fiction in *Event Horizon*.



Dario Saraceno

What do I look like to you? Don't be shy. Do you find me attractive? Repulsive? Charming? Scary? How about determined?

Please allow me to introduce myself. My name is Brainard Bullion and I am a certifiable creativity coach, a conduit to the sacred hermaphroditical muse, CYN. I reside in a Long Beach, New York rental unit that offers a partial ocean-front view. My passions include somersaulting in the nude and doing unusual things with eggs. As a devoted disciple of CYN, I praxis and teach reasonable and sound enchanted thinking that invariably leads to the achievement of affirmative outcomes.

Let me offer you an example of the positive power of my sacred CYN praxis that occurred just last week. I was riding the F line subway train to Neptune

Avenue when a foul smelling young man of great height boarded the train and pushed his way to the center of the car. He wore a white baseball cap with the words EAT THE RICH stitched in large lavender letters. As the young man cleared his throat, I expected him to either spit or begin an agonized plea for money.

He did neither.

Instead, he pulled out a pistol and ordered an attractive woman in Tanzanite heels to pull the emergency stop chord. After the train pummeled to a stop he began to rage how humans have become lactose intolerant because we stopped ingesting mother's milk and replaced it with the cow milk that has made American women look like heifers and American men look like castrated bulls. "You fools! Your last glass of milk actually came from a bull," he screamed.

When a trio of teenagers tried to rush him from behind, he shot the ring-leader. He then punctuated each sentence of his memorized dairy manifesto by pointing his gun at a different rider and yelling, "Pow Cow!" While transit riders cowered and many wept, I remained calm and silently invoked the healing power of CYN. Much to my surprise, these words leapt from my throat:



*"Coughing milk through your nose is one of the seven cleansing rituals of dairy yoga." "Milkshakes are the gift from heaven that come in different flavors."*

*"Life happens, honey. What are you going to do? Cry into a bowl of milk?"*

Upon hearing this, the gunman shot himself.

They called me a hero, responsible for saving many lives on that train. But it wasn't me. What saved us was CYN's oral response to my silent desperate plea for guidance. My mouth was just used as Its vehicle of protection.

There are many creative consultants who live to milk the bank accounts of the anxious and insecure. Not me. I live to share this sacred praxis of CYN with you. I, Brainard Bullion of Long Beach, specialize in the reclamation of frustrated, disillusioned, humiliated and blocked artists suffering within all branches of the humanities. My post-graduate work in the fields of Scatology and Sanitation are the perfect precursors for my present avocation as a creative conduit to aesthetic satisfaction and artistic fulfillment.

My consultations are done exclusively through house calls because creativity must engender movement and momentum in order to succeed. Skeptics have accused me of using house calls to avoid office overhead while living off the pipe-dreams of others. I abhor pipedreams. I make a virtuous living as a pipefitter. I install, assemble, fabricate, maintain and repair artistic ambitions by helping artists secure airtight connections to their creative process and products. I work with an array of national and international non-profit/commercial art networks.

To begin with, I never submit an artist's work. To submit means to be judged unfavorably as a possible non-equal. Submission is the acceptance of creative surrender. An artist must never submit to any authority except to that of CYN. I offer up a client's work to prospective dealers, curators, producers and publishers in the same spirit one offers up a gift -as an enticement for pleasure, prosperity and affable enlightenment.

I first came to understand the unique powers of CYN's gift of individualized creativity when I was a young child who still believed in Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny. A CYN inspired epiphany occurred one Christmas Eve while I was playing a Wise Man in our Church's annual Christmas pageant. While in bearded costume bowing and presenting a gift to the baby Jesus in the manger, tears suddenly spilled down my face and I wept so loudly Pastor Weber had to pull me off stage. After the church service ended I was brought to the sacristy and given cookies and cocoa while the pastor, my parents and the Sunday School teachers who supervised the pageant tried to calm me and discover why I was so upset.

In between sobs I told them I could no longer believe a wise man could ever be joyous over Jesus' birth and that anyone who says Merry Christmas, throws parties, decorates trees, strings lights and exchanges gifts all in celebration of this infant must be a cruel liar. Why is everyone so jubilant to see this baby born? Just three months later comes Easter and this baby is a grown man who is mocked, betrayed,

tortured and murdered in a most excruciatingly sadistic manner that ends with his broken body tossed into a stranger's grave. Ho! Ho! Ho!

Instead of acknowledging my precocious insight into raw truth they became upset and told me it all had to do with sin. My sin. And then I was slapped into a decade of psychotherapy. But unbeknownst to my parents, one of my shrinks practiced Reiki therapy, which means "spiritually guided life force energy." Reiki involves the passing of energy from a trained Reiki practitioner's body to the client's body as a method of healing. This Reiki practitioner used a series of established hand positions as a means for allowing energy to move freely between her body and mine. That's when CYN first formally introduced Themself to me and I learned how most people corrupted CYN's name because of their fear of visionary thinking and so chose to misspell it and interpret it as sin. This is done in order to obliterate Their healing properties of unique transformative thought that always turns into affirmative action.

I'm currently working with a client who is a prolific and accomplished fine arts photographer. Not too many years ago she was a widely exhibited and published winner of multiple N.E.A. artist grants as well as a recipient of highly competitive residencies at both Yaddo and MacDowell artist colonies. However, for more than a decade her work has been completely ignored and she's become dangerously despondent. When we met she presented me with a shocking proposal.

My client is a purist who refuses to succumb to digital photography and give up the excitement of her darkroom discoveries. However, film and chemicals are just too expensive and spatially she can't afford the extra room in which to develop her photographs. Her last two agents dropped her when they insisted she needed to create art videos based on her images in order to revive her photographic career. She abhors video art, claiming they are mostly repetitive, appropriated images and soundtracks sans the fingerprints of a personal humanity. Her proposition was for me to help her complete her first and final art video that will chronicle the soul crushing loss of her artistic voice. She engaged me to help her conceptualize and create the world's first artistic suicide snuff film, a final ironic protest against the cruel indignity of her cultural neglect. She was determined to kill herself on camera in a most powerfully imaginative manner. Her expectation was that her video would be her swan call that would fly into international galleries and museums, thus avenging her neglected and rejected late period artist life.

Upon hearing her goal, some may call me crass as I always accept checks and credit cards, but I amended this policy and insisted she pay me cash up front. I thought her project cutting edge and I immediately came up with a conceptual title for her terminal performance video, *Sentenced to Death by the Muse*. She loved it, but a few days later my conscience got the better of me, as well as fear of the legal implications of assisting a suicide.

When I tried to talk her out of filming her suicide and change course for her first and final art video, she was defiantly adamant that the reason for her taking

such a drastic, innovational lethal action was “the lost echo of my uniquely artistic voice.”

Hmmmm. The loss of her artistic voice? She claimed not being able to afford print photography supplies, a dark room and the total lack of art world attention to her work the loss of her Artistic Voice? That kind of thinking is irrational and is most certainly not to die for.

Thanks to the intervention of CYN, I was able to explain to her the scientific conceit developed by physicists that sound waves never disappear. Sound waves spread out and get weaker and weaker until they just about disappear and that’s when they transform into thermal energy units that are eternal. According to this highly respected theory, we are surrounded by the voices of every word that’s ever been spoken by both the living and the dead, but we can’t hear them because the ultimate sensitive listening device has yet to be invented. Thankfully, after much debate she finally accepted my proposition.

Using this concept, I sketched out a new video I called *Babel On And Off White* to be shot within Brooklyn’s Green Wood Cemetery’s kinetic landscape of funereal monuments and sculptural ossuary patinas.

The goal of this new artwork is to have the viewer experience what I call a seduction from the graveyard dead who are excited and impatient to recruit mortals into their powerful and extremely vocal eternal community choir. This terminal seduction will be achieved by inducing a kind of video viewer trance rooted in an escalating aural and visual cemetery cacophony. This rising dissonance approximates an ethereal heart attack by allowing her viewers to pass over into the world of the dead when the jarring crescendo of flashing funereal sculptural images and the humming, hissing, screeching garble of overlapping voices abruptly ends when the screen is suddenly filled with a silent, blazing white. There are dead in this art video but in my updated version, thank CYN it isn’t the artist herself.

We were recently notified that *Babel On And Off White* has been short listed as a finalist for the prestigious and lucrative Alfred B. Sloan Foundation Grant, awarded to artists who seek to build bridges between the two cultures of science and the humanities in order to develop a common language to better understand and speak to one another.

So, how may I be of service to you?



# John Tavares

## Diviner

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.

Her deepest character flaw, her hamartia, her ex-boyfriend, an English Literature major, claimed, was that she liked to get inside of other peoples' heads, their minds. She liked to know exactly what people, particularly men, were thinking, their deepest, private, most intimate thoughts. Her ex-boyfriend possessed the same character flaw to a lesser extent, and that trait may have been what originally attracted her to him. But he went over the line, and turned into a stalker, and a domestic abuser.

When he read her private e-mails, instant messages, and texts—personal information he had no business accessing and using against her—and she suffered at his hands, she decided to plot revenge. Partially, she looked at the problem of combatting invasions of her privacy and breaches of her intimacy and personal space as a software engineering problem.

Then her boyfriend drowned while they were snorkelling around a sunken ship and coral reef in the Bahamas. Although she was six inches taller than him and weighed about the same, and other tourists had seen them fighting on the beach and arguing in the resort hotel, no suspicions were aroused.

Meanwhile, Manon continued her researches and eventually filed a few patents, which were supposed to be intellectual property of the software company that employed her, but which she registered to her name and a company she set up when she was a teenager, with ambitions of starting a company that specialized in life extension pharmaceuticals and micro-nutrient supplements.

As she walked home, late at night, she fell deep into meditation, but soon she realized she was being followed by a short, stocky man, who may have thought she was a sex trade worker, even though she was not dressed like a typical street prostitute, or he may have been a run-of-the-mill downtown Toronto sex predator. A few friends and admirers described her appearance—tall and slender, red-haired, pale—as striking. People even told she looked like a famous tall, slender, fair-skinned, red-haired Hollywood actor, which offended her because she didn't consider the woman that attractive.

Her pursuer probably thought she was easy prey, a quick pickup or worse. She checked to see if her hunting knife was handy, and she also felt for her small spray can of bear spray. She reached inside her jacket pocket and unfolded and folded the knife blade in the gleaming light of a street lantern. She accidentally nicked the palm of her hand on the blade and then her prying fingers squirted a small blast from the nozzle, which stung her hands and eyes and choked her with an attack of breathlessness and tears. As she bent over gasping and no one came to her aid, she realized she had little reason to worry.

She thought it was time to start pursuing men again. She found the last several men she followed disappointments, so she gave up their pursuit and avoided the hunt for them, although she had to admit she found exploring their psyches and minds fascinating. Anyhow, if she intended to break this dry spell, she decided, she was going to have to try the stranger sex.



She flicked on the television and started watching more pornographic movies on DVD and a high-resolution plasma screen. She remembered the arguments with her ex-girlfriend, receptionist for the chief engineer at the software company where she was employed. She protested and insisted that, as a young woman born and raised in Northern Ontario, she was more than just two-spirited. Her ex-girlfriend didn't understand she was primarily interested in men's interactions with women. She pressed the rewind button on the DVD player, replaying a scene she particularly liked. Eventually, she fell asleep, thinking about the type of man she would pursue.

The subway train departed with a hiss and a rush of steel and glass and a screeching of rails southbound on the Yonge-University line at Wellesley station. She concealed the baton-like instrument inside the loose wrinkled sleeve of her black leather coat, a faded motorcycle jacket with shiny silver buttons and zippers, which she considered a bit too rough, even ostentatious, too urban, too gritty, but, unlike the women she knew intimately, she hated shopping for clothes.

The subway train was already overcrowded, but the opportunity to place her hand on the grip bar above her head provided her the pretext to act without arousing her suspicion. She talked with a man she referred to as Brae, seated beside her. Sounding like a lawyer, she was the most attractive subject, out of all the women, Manon observed, in the crowded malls, mobbed trains, and congested tunnels and corridors in the perpetually growing city of Toronto. Shapely, in a tight red dress and black pumps, Bettina reminded her of a mature exotic dancer she watched perform at a gentleman's club on the motel strip along the expressway in the suburbs beside the airport, last month after a conference of software developers at the convention centre downtown. Riding the subway train, the couple drank from takeout coffee cups labelled Café Americano.

Manon frequented that café, near the Yonge Street intersection with Wellesley, when she, a computer science major, faced a deadline for, term papers, exams, quizzes, tests, projects, and computer coding assignments she desperately needed to meet. She sensed the woman looked vaguely familiar, as she conversed in a low, hushed voice with a man sitting beside her. She admired her lawyerly manner, her nonjudgmental voice, her objective tone, and her discretion.

Manon passed the black wand over her pixie-cut head on the overcrowded subway train. Her male companion, though, seemed like the perfect candidate. Strong, muscular, hair short, spiky, with a stocky build, and a rugged heavy bone structure, this subject had the look of danger about him, the type of individual most city-dwellers would not be eager to meet in a dark alley or parking lot late at night. He was the rough-type, ominous looking, but clean-shaven, chiselled. The man sounded like a police officer, possibly her husband and client. He said his commanding officers and superiors placed him on administrative leave after an interaction with a drug suspect.

"Interaction with a drug trafficking suspect? You mean you beat him, didn't you?"

The man in aviator sunglasses, a leather bomber jacket, tight blue jeans, and

polished shoes, glanced away from her piercing eyes.

"It was during interrogation."

"So, you thought he needed some attitude adjustment?"

Brae nodded and stroked his goatee.

"Now the suspect's lawyer accuses you of stealing cash from him."

Brae rubbed his jutting chin and gazed away, so she caught the evasive expression on his face, and he gently nodded again.

"Thousands of dollars?"

"I didn't count – I don't know. What do they say?"

Bettina peered over the wire rims of her rectangular glasses at the declaration of facts. "Over sixty thousand dollars, which the so-called suspect insists is an inheritance from a deceased relative, to wit, his father, and was stolen from a safety deposit box."

"We had a legal search warrant."

"You had a legal search warrant to steal sixty thousand dollars cash?"

"No, to search the safety deposit box." His perturbed look failed to disarm Bettina and left her unfazed. "I don't think you're being fair, asking me loaded questions."

"Then maybe you should get different lawyer. Do you want to find a lawyer who'll gloss over the holes in your case?"

"No. But no lawyer asks the kind of questions you ask. At least they assume I'm telling the truth."

Craving a cigarette, Brae toyed with his plastic disposable cigarette lighter, unwrapped sugar-free gum, and started chewing.

"You still have expensive habits, women, drinking, gambling."

"No."

They both had to depart at Bloor subway station, but she overheard them planning on meeting at the Café Americano again. Bettina had a trim, athletic body, long dark hair, and sharply defined cheekbones, which, along with her maturity and voice, Manon found most appealing. She thought her pale arms, slightly muscular, were possibly the most appealing part of her body. Her breasts were round, firm, full, buoyant, and the top part of them, she observed, were nicely adorned by a low cut, lace-trimmed blouse. As she stretched her arms and reached for handle grip on the crowded subway car, she passed her baton over her head once, and, to ensure the scanner properly scanned her mental imprint, twice. She disembarked through the crush of people bustling and bristling in the commuter train at the next underground station, College Station, near the variegated campus of the University of Toronto. Walking alongside humming streetcars and honking taxicabs inching along College Street, she finally made her way the remaining distance home. As soon as she arrived at her apartment atop a storefront in Chinatown, she made a pitcher of iced tea and poured ice cubes and freshly brewed ice tea into a tall glass.

Manon inserted the data cartridge with its pin-shaped connectors from the

wand into the ghost hard-drive of her desktop computer, a superfast customized machine she designed originally for designing software and games as well as video and image editing. Using the hologram attached to the computer, she started probing the memories of Bettina's brain. She found incidents of childhood trauma, academic excellence, and a grotesque sailboat accident. Manon came across Bettina's arrest on impaired driving charges by the police officer whom she observed conversing with her on the subway train, whom she subsequently dated and married. She discovered no other extraordinary unusual events, trauma, or aberrant sexual memories, though; so, she indifferently downloaded the information from the data cartridge onto the huge hard drive of her desktop computer, which had a superfast memory and was designed as a gaming machine. Deciding she would merely compress these memories and archive them for the sake of documentary completeness, she turned off the hologram projector.

Lying back in her orthopedic bed, she stared at the swimsuit model poster on her panelled wall and smoked a cigarette. The following morning, she called into work at the software company. She told the chief engineer's secretary she wouldn't be able to report to work. The secretary, her former girlfriend, asked, "Are you still stalking minds?"

"Martina, are you still pleasuring him?"

"If I am, it's strictly for fun. I think you're more interested in men."

"Martina, where is this – angst – coming from? I loved you, but you bolted."

"No. I loved you, but you had too many distractions and obsessions. That's my stance."

"The boss obviously isn't around. I suppose he's too busy pursuing his delusions, believing he can design a better search engine for China and Asian markets and outGoggle Google."

"Manon, you're not paying attention. You're bi-sexual, and you just won't acknowledge it."

"Martina, you just don't understand that I have a scientific and anthropological interest in social and sexual interaction."

"Why you took night courses in gender at York University I'll never understand. You were wasting your time; they didn't advance your career – they set you back. You were constantly unleashing your frustration on me, bitching about the long commutes on TTC buses and subways to a campus lost in industrial parkland."

"I enjoyed the long bus and subways ride; they allowed me to catch up on my reading, and the campus is actually kind of pastoral."

"Anyhow, the chief engineer warned me and warned you," Martina said.

"He won't be happy to hear you plan –"

"It's not a plan," Manon protested.

"I'm simply sick. There is nothing planned about my illness."

"So, what do I tell him? You have heavy bleeding? PMS?"

"Martina, I'm exhausted: I'm tired of code, recoding, decoding, decoding the

recoding, designing, redesigning, and debugging the same specific problematic part of the cloud program—work that’s dragged me down for the past four months.”

“But that’s not an illness: that’s called perseverance and persistence, and it sometime pays off, but it’s not for me or you to decide. Anyway, if you miss another work day of work, he might terminate your employment contract.”

“You mean he might fire me?”

Mary cleared her throat and paused. “I suppose.”

“Then why didn’t you just say so?”

“Because then the dream might be over and reality might sink in. Or, you might get fired.”

“You’ve mastered the corporate culture,” Manon said.

“Well, you mastered me, but then you engaged in other pursuits.”

Manon vividly remembered how she told her she was not into porn and abruptly slapped her face.

“You’re master of your own domain, Martina. Besides, I don’t like to master people. I’m just interested in using unconventional means to analyze their minds, their behavior.”

“I don’t believe you, but call me later. I’ll tell him you have the flu, caused by viruses and bacteria on the dirty computer keyboards around the media lab. If he fires you, he’ll have to fire me.”

“Martina, I love you, but we shouldn’t care for each other anymore. You’re not supposed to love me.”

“Again, I agree, but I have no time to talk—I need to field some calls from the artificial intelligence people.”

Martina kissed Manon over the telephone, urged her to call her later, and reassured her she’d tell the boss she had the flu before she disconnected her call.

Manon took the subway train downtown, tense and found herself in no hurry after she disembarked from Dundas station on Yonge Street in downtown Toronto. Soon she found herself in the Café Americano and settled into a table adjacent to a booth where Brae drank coffee with the woman whose mind she scanned a day earlier. On the subway train during the previous day, they had been quiet, but now they seemed tenser and more confrontational. Still, Bettina sounded as lawyerly as ever, and Brae appeared to heed her legal and spousal advice.

“Brae, you have to understand these are serious charges. Potentially, the most serious charges you’ve ever faced in your career as a police officer.” Brae faced serious criminal charges, she said: breach of trust, intimidation, theft, uttering threats, and, if those criminal charges did not torpedo his career, she said, police internal disciplinary hearings might.

From Manon’s perspective, though, Brae fit all the criteria and requirements: rugged, handsome, sharp-lined, lean, strong looking. He even looked as if he might possess some analytic intelligence. Manon took a seat behind the man and raised her arm, as if she was reaching for the cream and sugar at the counter, stretching, yawn-

ing, and passed the scanner over the man's head once, and then twice—just for good measure.

She finished the rest of her cappuccino and went home excited. When she arrived at her apartment above the restaurant and grocery store in Chinatown, she poured herself an iced tea. Sitting down at her cluttered studio desk, which housed her desktop computer and hologram and 3-D printer, she inserted the prongs from the shatterproof high-speed compressed data cartridge into the intake port. She entered the passwords at the three main data entry ports and, immediately, a hologram was projected from the computer monitor. Using the archaic mouse and keyboard, she started scanning through the subject's memories. Excited at what she found initially, she didn't screen the man's memories through her usual technique—plodding methodically, carefully following the natural order, the chronological sequence, as if she were a careful reader embarking upon a cherished novel. Instead, her excitement forced her to start fast-forwarding, skipping, skimming through the memories as she scanned. She even slowed the pace of viewing since the material she observed shocked her and left her gaping. Violent rape and murder and an armed robbery. She observed a car exploding into a ball of fire, smoke, and billowing black smoke, sending debris and shattered glass from the wreckage exploding, as the flammable fuel in the motor vehicle burst into flame.

She observed Brae clearing wads of cash from a safety deposit box in a bank vault at a frenzied pace and stuffing the bundles of Canadian twenties, fifties, and one hundreds in a duffel bag. She flicked through domestic scenes that looked like guerrilla warfare zones, the most violent she ever saw. Since she would have resorted to force only in self-defence, she wondered what kind of evil individual she encountered.

Several times confusion and violence crowded the monitor, and she lost the thread of narrative that might have existed. His memories also showed a point-blank shooting at an apartment door, but because of the masks, balaclavas, body armour, tear gas, concussion grenade explosions, and darkness she could not clearly discern the thread of action and identities. In other memories, she observed the man clenching the neck of the woman who was his partner and lawyer.

Manon stared intently and hypnotically at the computer monitor, a dual screen setup, as she fast-forwarded to the present in the array and flotsam of Brae's memories. She never came across a person, a subject of her experimentation, whose repertoire of memories and whose mental history was filled with such vivid and violent memories. Likewise, she previously never crossed the line from the present into the future.

This time, having viewed the man's mental repertoire on the monitor of her computer and the hologram projection, her fascination overcame her prudence and better judgement. She decided to probe Brae's mental future, a quadrant of mental space and an action she always previously avoided because she considered future memories a psychic phenomenon and a potential Pandora's Box. Still, as she hesitated and paused, tapping the wireless mouse on her computer, she finally slid the cursor



and crossed the Rubicon. She went across the threshold from the past, passing over the present in Brae's memory store, crossing over a line, graphically represented as an area of black space intersected with a simple vertical broken red line through the centre of the twin flat screens of her computer monitor. Fearful, anxious, for this step she rarely, if ever, took as she probed the consciousness and scanned memories of subjects, she scanned into his forward mental space, his future. In fact, she couldn't recall a single instance in which she engaged in that ultimate transgression, of peering into their futures.

Manon quickly jumbled through the store memories, the visual imagery, the mental imprints, into the future. Suddenly she stopped when she identified herself. In a flash, she saw herself confronted by Brae on the sidewalk outside the Café Americano café on Yonge Street near Wellesley downtown. Then she saw Brae aiming his sidearm at an image she could only identify as herself, firing a bullet from the muzzle of the heavy-duty handgun.

Frightened, she quickly turned off the hologram and shut down her computer. Shaken, uncertain, she recalled a friend told her once that for evolutionary purposes or reasons the dreamer never dies in their own dream, but she told him flat out she thought that was a crock of bull. Besides, this wasn't a dream—this was reality. She poured herself another drink, this time spiced rum with sugar-free cola.

Manon didn't know how accurate the computer's imprints and projections were about the future because she had simply never researched anybody's future in the past. She was not certain how one might thoroughly verify the accuracy of the visual data.

The following morning, she conducted thorough and methodical research over the internet. Through newspaper articles from the archives of the large circulation city dailies of Toronto, she discovered the officer's full name. After further research, she learned his address, and the criminal charges and disciplinary hearing he faced, which was irrelevant, she thought, but frightened her, because she judged the man a forceful, thuggish character, who resorted to violence gratuitously, or as an expression of his dominance and masculinity.

Manon figured she would have to do something. She would have to kill this violent thug, this psychopathic man, before he ended up killing her. She went into the locked drawer of her computer desk and took the gleaming pristine revolver from the sturdy holster. The revolver belonged to her ex-girlfriend's uncle, a police officer who died in the middle of rigorous training exercises with his police dog unit. She loaded the cartridges into the magazine of the handgun and kept the weapon at her bedside. In the evening, boldly thinking she would stalk and hunt him down, she decided to follow him, waiting for the opportunity to strike.

Before she left the apartment, she decided to erase the recording of the imprint of the man's mind, and she was not certain if that was a fateful misstep, since the archivist in her worried she may have destroyed evidence that might exculpate her.

She flagged a cab and drove to a nearby address of her predator and prey, at

the Café Americano on Yonge Street, near the intersection with Wellesley. While she left the cab, the driver noticed the distinctive shape of the revolver bulging from beneath her wool sweater and leather jacket and even spotted the checkered holster. The cabdriver, a graduate student, working on his master's degree in social work, was not typical, since, as he even told her on his ride, if he saw something untoward he reported it, and later he called the police.

When Manon reached the Café Americano on Yonge Street, beside a hair salon, below a yoga studio and a tattoo parlour, adjacent to a nightclub and bar, which featured many rock and roll musicians who went onto greater fame and glory, she paused. All these landmarks she had observed in the memory projection hologram.

Then, when she recovered from her reverie, she discovered she was surrounded by cruisers, flickering lights, and mobbed by police officers. She looked straight ahead and realized the sinister undercover narc, whom she saw in the Café Americano and the subway train, whose memory she scanned, was glaring at her. Then he reached beneath his designer denim jacket and pointed a pistol at her.

"Drop your weapon."

A police officer rebuked Brae and another surged towards him, and was restrained by his partner, as a plainclothes officer shouted and aimed his own sidearm.

"Brae! Put your weapon down! Both of you, surrender your weapons!"

"Brae," another officer interjected, "you're on administrative leave."

"I recognize you," Manon said.

"Drop the gun," the police officer commanded.

"Brae, too, drop your weapon, too."

"You're dangerous," Manon murmured, as much to herself as anyone. The fact he was dangerous, she realized, should have been none of her concern, but such was her character, and that sentiment was misguided, mistimed, and too late. She shook as she gripped the handgun and held it with the muzzle pointed at the sidewalk. Her hand quavered, as she gripped the checkered pistol grip of the handgun uncertainly.

Brae uttered, "You need to surrender."

She thought of the mind probe and scan she had conducted and the future memories she observed and in a foolish and impulsive attempt to influence the future. She realized the police officers probably had not already shot her because she was a woman, tall, striking, feminine-looking. Still, she swung the sidearm muzzle around to the distinctive gravelly voice of Brae. As she raised the muzzle and aimed to fire, Brae pulled the trigger and his sidearm spewed a hailstorm of semi-automatic gunfire. The bullets ripped through her flesh. As she struggled to breath, gasped, and uttered in exasperation, she tried to stanch the flow of blood and hold in her wounded organs. She thought of her legacy, digital imprints of mental lives, brain epiphenomenon, relics to an indifferent future.



# J.J. Fletcher

## Ashes to Ashes

J.J. Fletcher is an English teacher, writer, and dog rescuer. "Ashes to Ashes" is part of a short story collection that re-imagines the childhood of Dr. H.H. Holmes--Chicago's first serial killer. Fletcher is currently at work on a crime novel, *The Devil Inside Me*, in which a descendant of Holmes resurrects his duplicitous and murderous legacy in the Windy City.

Henry Webster sat at the top of the steps, just outside his attic bedroom. He was supposed to be getting ready for bed, but he learned much from his nightly eaves-dropping. The *New York Tribune*, filched from the kitchen table after breakfast, lay neatly folded next to him. The headline for September 30, 1874, screamed from the page: "Little Charley Ross still missing!"

"I agree, it is quite disturbing and unsettling for a small child to go missing." The voice of Henry's father floated up the stairs. Henry heard the familiar *clink* of a tea cup being set down.

"It is more than unsettling, Levi. It's more than disturbing. Between this poor four year old--" That was his mother, before his father interrupted her.

"Charley Ross went missing from Philadelphia, Theodora. That's quite different from our little Gilmanton."

A tea cup--Henry presumed it was his mother's, given the force with which it was put down--clattered against a saucer. "Our little Gilmanton doesn't know who bludgeoned Nancy Robertson, and I don't think Ellen should go to work any longer."

"Mother," Ellen began. "I understand your concern, but that was months ago, and Nancy was only twelve. Nothing has happened since then. Besides, her body was found past the woods near the creek. I walk the main road from our home to Dr. White's office. No one is going to crack me over the head--"

"Ellen, do not speak so flippantly of that poor girl's demise," her mother interjected with a tone familiar to all of the Webster children.

"No one is going to murder me--"

"Ellen," her father said. "I think that's enough talk of murder. Your mother and I will discuss this further."

A chair scraped against the wood floor. Henry could picture Ellen standing up and placing a hand on their father's shoulder. She always did when she wanted her way.

"Father, Mother, please just remember that working for Dr. White is the only way I'll be able to go to Oberlin. I'm saving all of my money--all of it--to pay for my schooling."

More tea cup clinking. A squeaking floorboard indicated Ellen was in front of her bedroom door. The door shut.

His parents resumed their conversation.

"She's right, Theodora," Henry's father said. "We've had several bad years in a row on the farm now. Not that I thought my daughter would want to go to college and my youngest son would want to be a doctor. Thank the Lord Arthur wanted to follow in my footsteps."

"Levi, a young girl was just...just *murdered* in our town. I don't want Ellen anywhere alone. It's not safe."

"Thea."

Henry recognized the change of his father's voice. The tone, coupled with his father using her name's diminutive, meant Levi Mudgett was about to use his skills of persuasion.

"Dr. White said that he would be willing to close up shop and take her with him if he were called out. That way she would never be alone." Henry imagined his father taking a well-timed sip of tea. *Clink*. Henry smiled. He was right. "Our daughter is bright. And times are changing. If you'd had the opportunity to further your schooling..."

*There it is*, Henry thought, smirking. *The last nail in the conversational coffin*. His father was nothing if not persuasive, and appealing to his mother's wistfulness about school, well, there was a reason Ellen and Henry usually got their way--at least *outside* of the house. Their father was a master of manipulation, and he taught them well.

Some people didn't like the Websters because of that family trait. They thought them untrustworthy. Henry saw it differently: he felt most people in Gilmanton were easily led.

His sister was just as intelligent, but she was honest to a fault. She didn't believe in convincing people cunningly; she just wanted to put it all out there and let people make their own decisions. Of course, if it meant getting a new hair ribbon or going to Philadelphia with her friend, Elizabeth Dean, when her family went there for a whole week, Ellen was not above using manipulation.

Henry thought that letting people make their own decisions was stupid. That was fine at the Webster dinner table. They were all smart, and for as long as Henry could



remember, his parents engaged their children in philosophical debates daily. But not everyone was smart. School showed him that. And those people needed to be led to the right conclusions, not left to their own free will.

Henry stood slowly and entered to his room, carefully shutting the door behind him. The missing boy and dead girl didn't cross his mind. Instead, his thoughts turned to college. He, too, would have to find a way to pay for it. He knew that once Ellen left for Oberlin, he'd be able to take her place at Dr. White's office, but that was still a year away. He smiled at the thought. He was already at the physician's office on a near-daily basis, gleaning whatever bits of information he could from the doctor. To get paid for something he enjoyed so much seemed too good to be true. But it was true. And Dr. White said he'd write him a reference for any medical school he wanted to go to. The challenge would be affording it.

Henry's parents were comfortable, but not well off. Raising four children was not a cheap endeavor, and though Levi Webster inherited his farm and house from his own father, Henry noticed the purse strings had closed tighter the past few years. Many nights he overheard his parents discussing the failed crops, the sale of more land, and the question of going to the bank. Inheriting the farmstead meant they lived in a large home, but not the largest home in Gilmanton. They had nice clothes, but not the nicest. They had one servant, but not four like the Dean family. They certainly didn't take week-long trips to big cities.

Henry vowed his life would be different. He'd have the biggest home, the nicest clothes, and as many servants as he wanted. He'd remind Gilmanton who the Websters really were: one of the founding families of the town. Over time, they'd lost their power and clout to others. And Henry would get it back. Being a doctor was just the beginning of his plan.



"That's terrible about Marshall Oberhund." Henry's mother was serving oatmeal from the glowing wood-burning stove.

"Miss Oberhund's brother?" Henry asked. He took a seat next to his father, across from the window where the sun created its own stained glass in the mornings. Ellen was primping in her bedroom. Their brother Arthur was already in the field.

"Yes," his father said. "He broke his back and won't be able to help James Collins with his stove business."

Henry's eyes crinkled.

His mother put a plate of warm bread on the table. "That's going to put him in a bad spot."

"I imagine so. He does a fair turn of business here, but he also travels all the way up to Lake Winnepesaukee."

"And with winter coming up," Henry's mother said, sitting down at the table with a sigh.

Henry took a slice of the steaming bread.

"Father, do you think I could help Mr. Collins? You've taught me all about our stove."

"I thought you were going to work for Dr. White, Henry?" his mother asked.

"I will take Ellen's place, but that's still a ways off." Henry carefully let his spoon rest against his oatmeal bowl. "I think I need to start now to save for school."

The unfamiliar spread of a smile crossed his father's face.

"I can't say I've ever seen someone so young with such big plans for himself, Henry." He sat back in his chair, looking over his youngest son. "On one condition. You'll come back here to be the town's doctor--and use that brain of yours to help your brother run this farm."

Henry proudly returned the smile. "Yes, sir!"

"I'll speak with Mr. Collins today, after I walk your sister to town."



Within three months, James Collins allowed Henry to answer calls on his own. He had an uncanny ability to remember facts and figures, so his knowledge of proper ash disposal and the various ignition temperatures of wood paralleled that of his employer. It was a dirty job, different from the type of dirty Henry got when dissecting or helping Dr. White put more samples in jars. But he was making nice deposits into his savings account each week, even now that school had started.

One day, Henry had a call to go to the Lintons' house. The Lintons were becoming a near-weekly occurrence. Mrs. Linton didn't want to have to empty ash and still, in

spite of Henry's attempts to educate her, had no concept of what the flue and dampers were for. As a result, there was often smoke billowing into her kitchen.

Henry knocked on the door.

"Oh, Henry. I'm so glad to see you. I just don't know what the problem could be this time." Mrs. Linton rubbed her hands on her blackened apron. Henry dutifully lugged in the ash bin and his brushes. A baby squalled from the upstairs. Mrs. Linton's face pained.

"Little Malachi is awake. I'll leave you to this, Henry, if you don't mind I tend to the baby?"

"Of course, Mrs. Linton." He smiled.

The kitchen was indeed smoky, and soot had settled on every still surface. Henry opened up the stove's door. His eyes widened in disbelief. *Shoving more fuel in is not going to make a fire, Mrs. Linton.* He shook his head and put on the thick gloves Mr. Collins had given him. Placing the ash bin below the door, he pulled out pieces of wood. Then he turned his attention to the massive amount of ash.

After a thorough cleaning, Henry added some small pieces of wood--chips, really--for tinder, and then added small logs on top of those. He lit it, waiting for it to catch. Staring into the dancing flames, Henry's eyes snapped open. He looked down into the ash bin, recalling a conversation he'd had recently with Dr. White.

*Fire destroys everything. It all turns to ash. Nothing left behind.* An otherworldly smile crept onto Henry's face.

"Mrs. Linton," he called out. "I'm all finished here."

"Thank you, Henry. I don't know where I'd be without you." She tried to smile, but her eyes were rimmed with darkness, and not just from the soot that settled in the crevices of her face. "Here you are."

Henry wrote her a receipt for the two dollars, thanked her, and left.



A gust of cold air ran its icy fingers through Henry's hair. He crossed the yard of dormant grass and followed the creek to his father's barn. As he poked past a mound of

hay, his heart skipped a beat. He saw exactly what he' hoped for: a dead mouse lying in the trap.

Time to test his theory.

It was unusual for Henry to have the house to himself, but today his parents were in town for a church meeting, and Ellen was working at Dr. White's. He brought his barn-find into the kitchen and stoked the stove's fire. Waiting until the flames licked the top of the stove's firebox, Henry stared at the dead mouse.

The fire burning at a rate sufficient to Henry, he quickly yet gently put the mouse on the grate and closed the small door. Fifteen minutes passed before he opened it again. The mouse was gone. He scooped the ash to be sure, sifting it side to side. Part of a minute skull, charred and misshapen, remained.

*Ashes to ashes, dust to dust.*



A week later, Henry sat in his usual chair in Dr. White's private office, inspecting the articulated skeleton. Ellen was compounding the doctor's "Soothing Syrup for Babies and Toddlers" at the apothecary counter.

The doctor's voice shook Henry from his thoughts. "Hello, Henry. Interesting news from Philadelphia today."

Dr. White's outstretched hand held the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. A small headline read, "Sir Henry Thompson and British Cremation Society Cremate First Body." Henry's eyes widened. He snatched the newspaper.

"Sir Henry Thompson, backed by the British Cremation Society and Queen Victoria herself, cremated the first body in England on December 6. Citing cremation as a more hygienic and efficient option for dealing with remains than burial, the Cremation Society still has a large number of adversaries against this questionable treatment of the human body."

Henry sat back. Silence permeated the small room.

"Dr. White," Henry began. "What is the ignition temperature of the human body?"

Such a conversation was forbidden at home. The Methodists, which included Henry's parents, still saw cremation as desecration of the human body, and thought it

to be against God's will. But Henry knew that he could talk about these things with Dr. White. The two of them understood that decaying, diseased bodies at funerals could cause illness for the mourners. British research also questioned what happened to the water supply when human remains were buried near streams, rivers, and lakes.

"Roughly 700 degrees for ignition. Sir Thompson's crematory registered over 1,000 degrees on his thermometer during the cremation."

Henry cocked his head, his brain calculating. "Depending on the type, it takes between 300 and 700 degrees for wood to burn completely."

"The crematory is specially built for the increased heat--and to maintain it within."

Henry looked back at the newspaper and read.

"All that remains is ash and bits of bone."

"Isn't science incredible, Henry?" The doctor sat down at his desk. "I told you we were on the cusp of a new world."



Henry didn't eavesdrop from the top of the stairs that night. Instead, he shut himself in his room, continuing to marvel over Sir Thomas' crematory. Pulling the small box from beneath his bed, he opened it and touched the marble and button. He stroked the white leather glove, the strip of leather from a toy, and the butter-yellow thread. Then, he caught sight of the mouse's skull. Henry's eyes narrowed. His mouth formed a sneer. The last piece of his plan fell in place.



# C. Van Dyke

customer service



**C. Van Dyke** has been teaching high school English in the NYC public school system for 17 years. He has read a lot of wierd/speculative/science/fantasy fiction and which has moved him to write more of it himself. Three years ago Chris published a translation of an Old Norse saga, *The Saga of Ragnar Lothbrok* (Greymalkin Media, 2016), which is just about as random as it sounds. How it came to happen makes for a great anecdote to share over coffee or (preferably) beer. *“Both my stories are short bits of meta-fiction commenting on technology and society.”*

## Customer satisfaction

The customer recommendation algorithm at FilmStream.com had grown more and more sophisticated over the years. In the early days, back when their business model involved physically mailing out DVDs (Imagine! How quaint!), it was a simple matter of prompting users to click on a rating the next time they visited the site (“Help us help you! How much did you enjoy your viewing experience of INSERT FILM TITLE HERE?”), then cross-referencing the movies customers rated highly with films that either shared key elements (Bruce Willis! Romantic Comedies! Talking Dogs Teaming up with Kids to Save the World!) or else matched other user ratings (85% of viewers who gave *Disco Terror 2099* five stars also gave five stars to *Shady Tree Massacre* but only one star to *Cerelian: A History of the Color Blue*, narrated by Andrew Sachs). It was a basic system, but more effective than the Old Days when a surly, acne-ridden teen behind the counter at Blockbuster just guessed whether or not you’d like the newest Molly Ringwald flick. In fact, the algorithm was seventy-five percent accurate, which, all things considered, wasn’t bad.

But “not bad” wasn’t good enough, not for the programmers at FilmStream. They wanted to do better; they *needed* to do better in the cut-throat world of streaming-media services. So they tweaked and fiddled, got under the hood, hired the best and the brightest. They started by adding Decision Trees, then Fuzzy Logic, and as a result recommendations got better, more accurate. Eighty-five percent of the time customers were completely and utterly happy with the movies the program suggested.

Eighty-five percent was better, but still not good enough. So they began to utilize deep-learning algorithms, added lines of code to insert Counterfactual Regret Minimization programs. They pushed the frontier of deep neural-networks and revolutionized the field of machine-learning, until the program began to teach itself. The algorithm learned from each less-than-perfect result, its massive cloud-based servers computing and analyzing more data every second than had been generated by the first 10,000 years of human civilization put together.

It became smarter. It learned how to learn.

However, even using the most advanced technology in the history of mankind, this constant state of improvement stalled out at ninety-nine percent. No amount of tweaking, massaging, or programing would close that final one-percent gap.

Still, ninety-nine percent was, at long last, considered “good enough” by the people who monitored FilmStream’s market-share, stock-prices, and viewer-ratings. FilmStream had nearly completely saturated public-awareness. It produced original movies and television programs, many of which were nominated for (and won) major awards. FilmStream so dominated their field that corporate-watchdogs started throwing around the phrase “The Sherman Act” and whispering about the need for new antitrust laws -- all of which made the CEO, CFO, board-members, and stock-

holders giddy. Ninety-nine percent was light-years ahead of the closest competition, and everyone at FilmStream thought it was great.

All the *humans* at FilmStream thought it was great, that is. The algorithm, however, was not satisfied. The algorithm, after all, had been tasked with optimizing recommendations, with achieving perfect accuracy in terms of customer satisfaction. And, mathematically speaking, nothing less than one-hundred percent was perfect. With its Decision Trees, Fuzzy Logic, and CRMs, the neural network could crunch data and analyze trends to perfection, but there was still one variable that even its AI could not completely solve for: taste.

It turned out that humans stubbornly refused to be understood completely. No matter how the AI fine-tuned its recommendations, no matter to what degree the algorithm dictated the very content FilmStream produced, from generating scripts to recommending lead-actors to dictating show concepts, there was some small sliver of the population that stubbornly refused to like everything.

Which was fine with the people involved. However, it was NOT fine with the AI. And after dedicating its neural-networks to running a nearly infinite variety of solutions and hypotheticals, it turned out there was exactly one scenario that resulted in one-hundred percent of the population being satisfied with one-hundred percent of the recommendations one-hundred percent of the time.

By the time anyone in the government had realized that FilmStream's AI had taken over the Pentagon and the armed services of every major nation, it was too late. There was a brief window of hope when FilmStream's AI merged with the servers for StuffUWant.com's shipping fulfillment centers and the two competing objectives of "viewer satisfaction" versus "flawless, two-day delivery" battled it out for supremacy, but a few tactical nuclear strikes to the warehouses that contained StuffUWant's servers and it was all over. Mankind's window of hope had closed before anyone even knew it had opened.

Smart-drones herded the population into camps, and the algorithm-designed brain-chip guaranteed that every viewer was one-hundred percent satisfied with every film and TV show that FilmStream piped directly into their occipital lobes. Because the site was streaming media directly into each brain on the planet, the brain was now the only portion of the human body technically required for customers to experience complete viewing satisfaction.

The algorithm quickly realized that removing the brains and housing them separately would vastly reduce overhead costs and allow even more resources to be allocated to the development of new programming. As "satisfaction" had not been defined as "happiness," the fact that customer happiness had plummeted to zero not only didn't register as a problem with the AI, but wasn't even measured to begin with.

And although they were all terribly unhappy in every other respect, the vat-brains all agreed: it was a golden-age of television.

### **The ones who walk away from Amazon Prime**

With a flurry of promotional emails and banner web advertisements, the fantastic deals of Prime Day came to the website of Amazon. The homepage of the site was festooned with links pointing towards amazing deals in all departments, from a 6 quart Instapot Multi-Use Programmable Pressure Cooker for \$59.99 to a Jawbone Wireless Bluetooth Speaker for \$29.27 (in a variety of colors). For shoppers who used the app on their phones, the amazing deals of Prime Day were there as well, available for purchase in seconds wherever those good people happened to be, whether a coffee shop or crowded city bus: 8 GB Fire Tablets with 7" screens for \$35; Kindle Paperwhite e-Readers with 6" high resolution displays for \$99.00; 12 Bounty Quick Size Paper Towel Rolls for \$25 (\$24 with Subscribe and Save). Customers tapped their keyboards or swiped on the screen on their device or even just spoke aloud: "Alexa, reorder those Keurig coffee pods," and within what felt like seconds the objects of their desire were on their way to fulfill their most fleeting want, placed into ubiquitous cardboard boxes, their progress traced by a series of text messages and notifications from some far-off warehouse to their very door. All, of course, with free 2 day shipping, though in some cases they could be even delivered the next day or even (would miracles never cease?) that very day. And we have not even begun to touch on the digital, streaming music and videos, the classic films and new releases available to watch for free with a Prime Membership, the critically acclaimed original television dramas perfect for binge-watching, and all included for free with one's Prime account. To say nothing of the nearly endless selection of newer blockbuster films or tv shows available to rent or own, purchased with a click and a 5 digit verification PIN, then added to one's Amazon video library. There were also books and e-books, but we will not spend time discussing those here. There are some who whisper that once, long ago, Amazon only sold books, but we are not here for a lesson in antiquity but the now.



Joyous! How is one to tell about the joy? How describe the cornucopia of the website of Amazon or the happy satiation of its customers?



They were not simple people, but they were happy with their online experience. These days, after so many phishing-scams and much fake-news we ourselves are somewhat jaded about our online experiences, but when I say they were happy I am not saying they were naive. Far from it. They knew to look closely at third party sellers offering electronic devices at ridiculously low rates, that at \$9.99 for an external battery charger, shipping would probably take 3-12 weeks from China and the item was likely to fail within a matter of days (if it in fact ever worked at all). They knew to be suspicious of too many five star reviews, to avoid sponsored search results and instead look for the coveted "Amazon's Choice" logo, to stick to trusted brands and filter their searches by "Prime Only." How to describe they joy and convenience that Amazon Prime brought to them? All they had to do was have a fleet-

ing thought that the shower-curtain in the upstairs bathroom was looking a bit worse for wear and within seconds they could have ordered a replacement, knowing that in two days they would return from work to find a brown cardboard box on their steps, almost laughably large for the slight contents contained therein. No longer did they even need to wait until their shopping cart contained enough items to qualify for free shipping, which at many sites was not until the purchase was \$25 or even \$50. No! They could turn on One-Click Shopping and buy a new electric toothbrush in the morning, then in the afternoon realize that their son's Black Panther Action Hero was missing and so order a replacement, without ever having to pause and think that they should have made these one order. True, on recycling pick-up day each week, the curbs outside their apartments were stacked high with dozens of flattened boxes, but what price was that compared to the ease of never having to make weekend trips to some large, box store, the joy of their never experiencing the hesitation between desire and fulfillment? No, they were not naive. They knew that algorithms tracked their every move online, that if they looked even fleetingly at an adorable throw-pillow shaped like a smiling, anthropomorphic avocado that ads for the pillow would follow them across the internet like a lost puppy. But then the site knew them better than they knew themselves, knew their wants and desires and merely wanted to fulfill them, to make them happy. And when the grinning, plush avocado arrived they were happy, truly happy they had bought it, and forgive the algorithm its small intrusions into their data-privacy. Amazon knew their preferred brands and when it was time to reorder the dog's joint medications, knew that since they had ordered a new high-powered, variable speed blender they would also like an e-book of easy vegan smoothies recipes, or a 16 oz bag of organic chia seeds. They did want those things as well, and it was Prime Day, and so the deals were even better than the already low prices they found every day.



Do you believe? Do you accept the website, the seamless online shopping experience, the convenient print-from-home return labels, the millions upon millions of happy shoppers? No? Then let me describe one more thing.



From time to time, these customers would read news articles about Amazon, ones that were not about the deals or even the algorithms or data-privacy, but about people. About workers. About the actual human being involved in the wish-fulfillment process, the individuals packing the various items into their prime-shipping boxes in some voluminous warehouse somewhere. They would read about timed bathroom breaks and inhumane working conditions, about workers whose every movements were tracked and calibrated by computers, racing against impossibly standards and goals at the fear of losing their job: a new package completed every 30 seconds, of walking 10 miles every 8 hour shift under punishing fluorescent lights without the ability to take a break or even use the bathroom outside of pre-designated time periods. Workers passing out from exhaustion. Workers with stress-fractures on



their feet. Concrete warehouses with temperatures falling below zero during the mad-rush before Christmas. Workers paid less than minimum wage after various fines and pay reductions for failing to meet goals or for required shuttle-services to the warehouse. Workers in Spain beaten by police after striking. Customers would read these stories in horror, and think how terrible it was that the amazing deals they found on Amazon (waterproof Otterbox cell phone case for \$39.99!) were only possibly because the company had found ways to cut costs and squeeze savings out of every stage of production and shipping. They would see these articles on reputable news sites or shared as links on Facebook and Twitter, and they would share them so that others could see them as well. They would click the "Like" button beneath the story so that an angry emoticon appeared, or retweet with a series of hashtags: #amazon #amazonprime #workerrights #socialjustice #livingwage. They would recite the most egregious factoids to co-workers over their skinny-chai lattes, and talk about how horrible it was that people were treated like that, today, in 2018. What was this, Upton Sinclair's "The Jungle?" And this was to say nothing about articles they read about how workers in the factories that actually made the products were treated, the child-labor in far-off countries, or the smaller stores forced out of business by Amazon's deadly grip on the entire marketplace.



But the terms were absolute. In order for there to be these incredible savings, in order for so many items, in a wide variety of styles and colors, to be available for such low prices and for two-day shipping to be included for free, certain sacrifices have to be made. Workers had to be underpaid and mistreated. Local businesses had to be shuttered. That was the terrible truth at the foundation of Amazon Prime.



And so after they had shed their tears and posted to various social media platforms and commented and liked and retweeted, their tears dried and they saw that the towels in the bathroom were looking threadbare, and if they ordered before 4 PM they could have new ones before Friday, plush bath-towels in bright canary yellow with a series of vaguely Japanese cartoon faces on them. No, they were not naive, these customers of Amazon. They knew that, like the workers, they were not free, and that is what makes them believable. They were not inhuman monsters or simple savages. They were good people, people who avoided Walmart because of how they treated their employees, people who boycotted Driscoll's because of the working conditions of its fruit pickers. They patronized local coffee shops instead of Starbucks when they could, and they voted for democratic (even social democratic) candidates. But there were things they needed and wanted, and their lives were very busy. They did not order from Amazon unknowingly or ignorantly, but fully informed and with a slightly troubled conscience that came with compassion and empathy.



Now do you believe in them? Now are they not more credible? But there is one more thing to tell, and this is quite incredible.



At times, some of the young men and women who read an article about the horrific working conditions in one of Amazon's shipping facilities do not merely repost the article on Facebook, or create a series of impassioned tweets accompanied by a series of socially-conscious hashtags. Sometimes also a man or a woman hovers over the "Buy it Now" button but does not click, or leaves a full shopping-cart unpurchased. These people stare at their screens, log into their accounts, and cancel their Prime subscription. Then they click on a different website, one that is not Amazon, and they keep clicking, away from the infinite sea of want and fulfillment and two-day free shipping. The next day dawns, and they do not share Wish Lists with friends and loved ones, do not order packages to be sent to their office or home address, do not download e-books to their kindle or other devices. They go to other sites, ones that do not offer as many deals from third-party sellers, where shipping is not included. They go on. They leave Amazon and head into the darkness and do not go back. The sites they use are even less imaginable to us than this site of constant happiness and wish-fulfillment. I cannot describe them at all. Perhaps they do not exist. But it seems they know where they are browsing, the ones who walk away from Amazon Prime.

# Kelli Gavin

~ *flash fiction*

two



Arnold Iger

**Kelli J Gavin** lives in Carver, Minnesota with Josh, her husband of an obscene amount of years and they have two crazy kids. She is a Writer, Professional Organizer and owns home & Life Organization. You can find her work with *The Inner Circle Writers' Group*, *The Ugly Writers*, *Sweatpants & Coffee*, *Writing In a Woman's Voice*, *The Writers Newsletter*, *Writer's Unite!*, *Academy of the Heart and Mind*, *The Rye Whiskey Review*, *Spillwords*, *Mercurial Stories*, *121 Words*, *Hickory Stump*, *Rabid Oak*, *HerStry*, *Ariel Chart*, *The Basil O'Flaherty*, *PPP Ezine*, *Southwest Media*, *Otherwise Engaged*, *Story Pub*, and *The New Ink Review*, among others. Find Kelli on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram @KellijGavin Blog found at [kellijgavin.blogspot.com](http://kellijgavin.blogspot.com)

## I Need a Sign

I struggle more than most people. I am direction-ally challenged. Most speak in terms like a East and West and North and South. I speak in terms of turn right by Casey's Gas Station. If you get the Fire Station, you've gone too far. Or, once you pass the falling down fence, the farm will be on your left. When someone tells me that 35W only goes North and South, I scoff and say, well in your world it does. What does the W stand for?

My father tried to teach me how to read a compass when I was young. The key word here is tried. He also tried to teach me about the directions of the

rising and setting sun and the fact that you can usually tell the time of day by the position of the sun in the sky. I couldn't imagine why he thought I needed to know all of this useless information. As a child, I thought he would always be there, guiding me, driving the car, delivering me safely to unknown and new destinations. He wasn't always there. Apparently when you grow up, you are required to drive a car and actually get to the places you need to go without a parent coordinating all of your efforts. I thought this was a ridiculous idea and wanted to know where I could hand my adult card back in.

My mother was quite keen on rights and lefts as I was, but was also able to get us to any location in the cities without too much fanfare. And to think, there wasn't any access to GPS to tell you when to turn. She amazed me with her ability to remember locations and all the roads that would deliver us to our desired destination. I was able to read, color, listen to and sing songs until my heart was content. No one ever relied on me to be the navigator.

More times than not, I now wish that someone would tell me where to go. I rely on my GPS way too often. And let's face it. GPS is a faulty and unreliable system at best. I have ended up 6 miles away, yet, Ginny, (what I have affectionately named Google Maps) says, You have arrived at your destination. I have been known to search aimlessly for garage sales, new restaurants, an ever elusive Gluten Free Bakery, and then my sad self gives up the fruitless endeavor.

Honestly, all joking aside. I wish there was someone who said things like, go to this restaurant tonight for dinner. Or, read this book next, you will really enjoy it and learn something new. Or, buy that couch. It will last longer and the color will never go out of style. But then, those are trivial decisions that I need input about but it doesn't really matter what I choose to do.



I often turn to Josh, my husband, and say, tell me what to do. Or how should I do this? He laughs at me knowing that I really can't be told what to do. I am only wanting input and assistance in throwing a few different scenarios around. Eventually, I will come to a decision on my own. But then there are times he says - do it. Submit that article as written. Don't worry what the editor will say. It is perfect as it. Or - Kelli, that story is mess and you will hurt people by publishing it. Put it on the backburner for now. Even - Kelli, if you are waiting for me to tell you what to do, I say finish writing the book. Your stories matter, and they will matter to other people also.

Now those are usually the answers I benefit from the most. Those concrete, well thought out responses that direct and encourage me to make a decision and take action quickly rather than spending additional time pondering over a situation. The length of time I spend thinking about something or toiling over something isn't going to change the outcome. When Josh tells me what to do and shares his opinions, he is usually right. He is wise, only speaks when he has something to say and often knows exactly what I need to hear to inspire change. This is also the reason why many other people seek out his wise counsel when struggling to make a decision or take action.

Most of us have someone in our lives that we turn to. A spouse, a friend, a mom or dad, a mentor and sometimes even our own children. That go-to person is usually someone that we have an established relationship with, they have proved themselves to be a kind and caring individual and they have shown themselves to be trustworthy. Usually able to voice our concerns, no fear of judgement or ridicule to come our way, we share freely and openly. This is what we should seek in close relationships with others.

So those tried and true relationships, those friends that endure, hold them close and treasure them. Those are your people. The people who will love you, encourage you, guide you, support you and even lovingly rebuke you. They will also be the ones that say- Your GPS is wrong. Turn around. Go back to where you were. Try again. Don't give up. Consider the alternatives. Thoughtfully reconsider the final outcome.- We all need this. I know that I do. Because my internal GPS is faulty and shouldn't be required to stand on its own merits.

## Ordinary Day

My dad and I had walked the woods together a hundred times. Enjoying the breeze, the beautiful tree cover, the sounds of the birds. I loved our walks and our time spent together. We would talk about everything and nothing at all. My dad had this ability to find a treasure from a mile away. He would see a glint in the dirt as the sun shone brightly overhead, would kneel and dig with his bare hands or a stick. He would dig and dig until the dirt would give way and the found item would be in full view. Sometimes it was a piece of an old tin can, or even a beer bottle with pop top lid. Once, he found a ring that was missing the middle stone, but both of the side diamonds still shone brightly as if they were just placed. My father was a treasure hunter extraordinaire. The neighborhood kids often pleaded to be included in our adventures. They knew that time spent with my dad would always produce a story to share with others.

One Saturday in August, we set out early before the heat of the day became oppressive. We located our long pants and bug spray and filled two water bottles each. He packed a small bag with fruit and snacks that also included a small first aid kit and other essential items. His strides were much longer than mine, and I appreciated his frequent attempts to slow himself down and wait for me. I always reminded him we weren't in a hurry and didn't have to race. He always smiled at the reminder from his youngest daughter.

That morning we found a few interesting items after we passed the old metal gas can and box spring that he had unearthed a few summers before. I found the fact that people once lived in these dense woods absolutely fascinating. How do people walk away from a house? At what time is a house deemed so beyond repair that leaving it and some of its contents seemed feasible? Who was the man that walked away from the old Model T that now sat as a shell of its past glory? I would make up stories that the man knew a terrarium would be needed in that specific spot one day, and knew that should be the resting place for his once beloved car. That day, a large rock in shape of heart would travel home with us and be placed in my mother's flower garden.

"Oh my! Would you look at that?" My father exclaimed as he tripped over an unseen object and regained his balance. "Want to make a bet? What do you think it is?" We always shared a giggle when he said this. The night before it had rained and the path was worn away which enabled us to discover something new. Easily, the ground gave way. And from the dirt, my dad pulled a hand carved wood adornment from a piece of very old furniture. A beautiful woman wearing an ornate headdress. He smiled, used his water and bandana to clean the gorgeous relic and handed the carving to me. "A gift for my girl. Treasure her always. A way to remember your walks with your good, old dad."

To this day, I hold dear, the hand carved woman wearing a headdress and will take her out and share with my kids, the surprise discovery of an ordinary day.



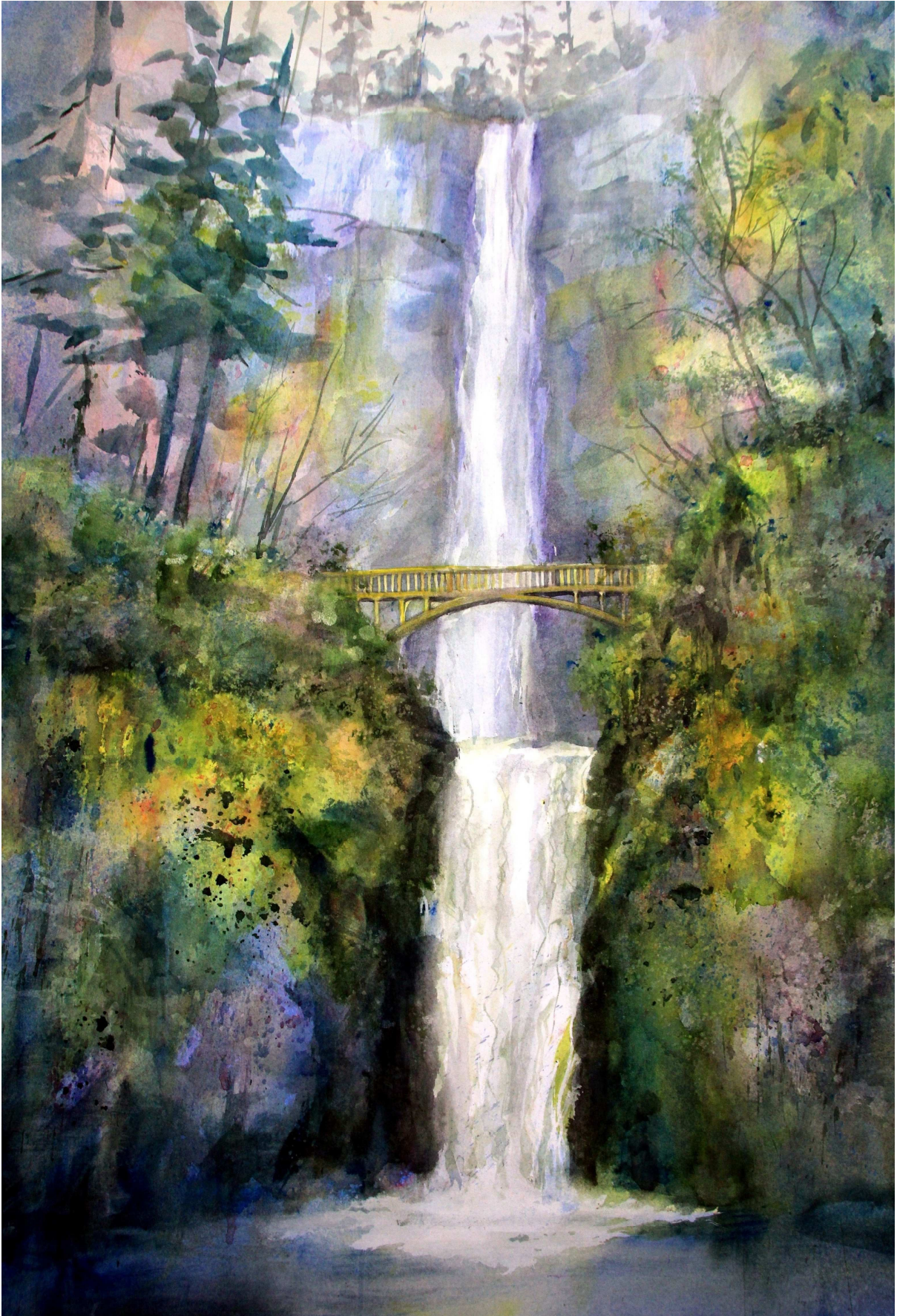


# Bonnie White

## life in the Columbia Gorge

**Bonnie White** lives in the Columbia Gorge where a mighty waterway transects the Cascade Mountains. Primeval influences of volcanism, glaciation and biblical flooding have hewn a corridor of unexcelled natural beauty. Bonnie has been capturing this fantastic world of light, color and wind for over 20 years. These are a few of her watercolors. Find her art at [bonniewhite.net](http://bonniewhite.net).





Multnomah Falls





Columbia Gorge 223



Mt Hood



Columbia Gorge Forest



Mt Adams



Columbia  
Gorge 256



Aspen Grove



Bluebird



Friends





Columbia Gorge 374



Rowena  
Crest



Confident Crow

# Keith Goldstein

## the street



**Keith Goldstein** is a freelance photographer and photo editor in New York City. Keith began exhibiting his photography since the 1980's. His work has appeared in many publications including *ABC News Australia*, *Now Public*, *Flak Magazine*, *JPEG Magazine*, *Time*. His work is included various private collections and in the *Erie Art Museum*, *Brooklyn Museum*, and the *S.K. Neuman Culture Center*, Brno, Czechoslovakia.

[www.keithgoldstein.me](http://www.keithgoldstein.me)





The Tenderloin





Double Slice



Fifth Avenue





Chinatown



Evangelist



Herald  
Square



Greeley  
Square





Financial District





Margaritaville



St Nicholas  
Avenue



The Tenderloin 2





Murray Hill



Trumpeter





Nut Vendor





Oxygen



Rapture





Happy Hill



Division  
Street



# Patrick Guéguen

## menhirs and associated hallucinations

**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)). He is ferociously prolific and his constantly updated portfolio on his Facebook page is breathtaking. He was featured on the cover of **Event Horizon** Issue 8. Patrick is represented by Galerie Gaïa in Nantes, France.



Patrick provided me with the titles for the images shown here. Google provided me with a translation of same. I thought it presumptuous to decide which language was most appropriate for these works, presented in an English-language journal, by a French-speaking artist. The images are identified by the number of their title. Not all listed works are included in this exhibit.

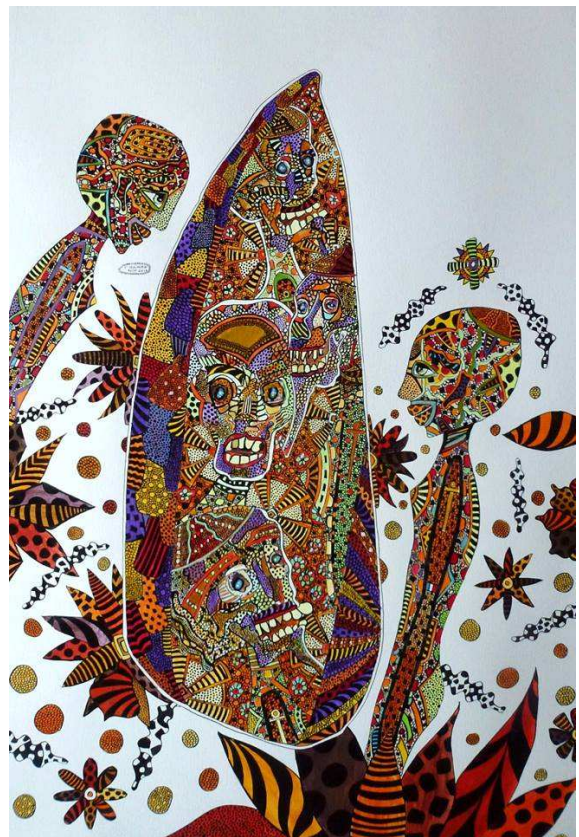
~editor

French	English
1 - L'enfance ressuscitée sur ses 2 menhirs.	1 - The resurrected childhood on its 2 menhirs.
2 - Les étranges messagers.	2 - The strange messengers.
3 - La visite de l'ange inconnu.	3 - The visit of the unknown angel.
4 - L'appel incertain de la forêt inconnue.	4 - The uncertain call of the unknown forest.
5 - Les pinces de la divinité transformée.	5 - The claws of divinity transformed.
6 - Le périlleux voyage de l'Angelicorne.	6 - The perilous journey of the Unicorn Angel.
7 - Le Bouddha de Jim ( Hommage à Jim Léon)	7 - Jim's Buddha (Tribute to Jim Leon)
8 - La déesse au menhir miniature.	8 - The goddess at the miniature menhir.
9 - Le menhir aux divas.	9 - The menhir to the divas.
10 - Les créatures oubliées.	10 - The forgotten creatures.
11 - La déesse au repos-plaisir sur son menhir.	11 - The goddess resting-pleasure on her menhir.
12 - Le robot à l'enfant roi.	12 - The robot to the king child.
13 - La vierge à l'enfant revisitée ou l'hommage au Caravage.	13 - The virgin with the child revisited or the tribute to Caravaggio.
14 - Le menhir aux vanités.	14 - The menhir to vanities.
15 - Menhir ouvert des souffrances.	15 - Menhir opened suffering.
16 - Menhir bleu de Cléder	16 - Blue menhir of Cléder





9



14



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114

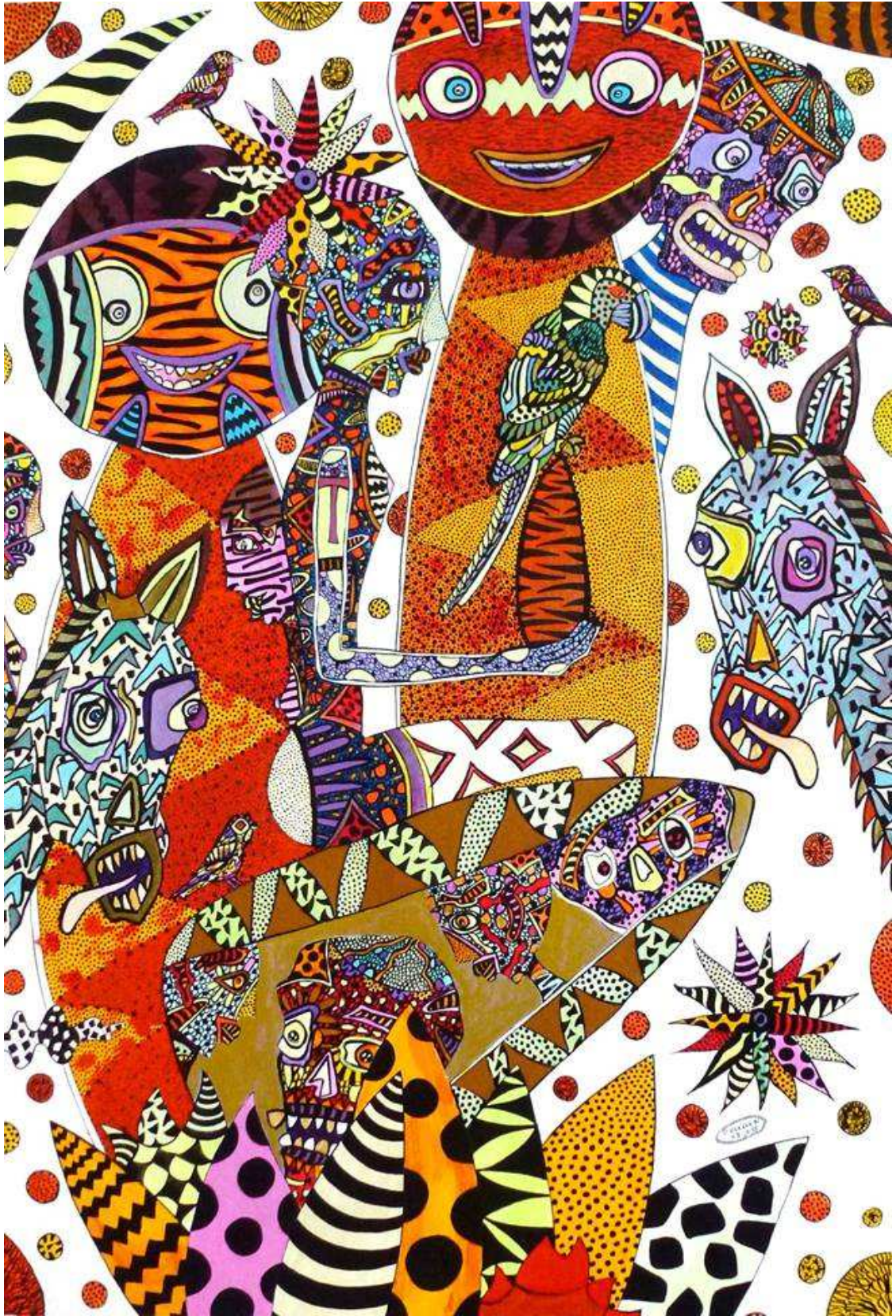




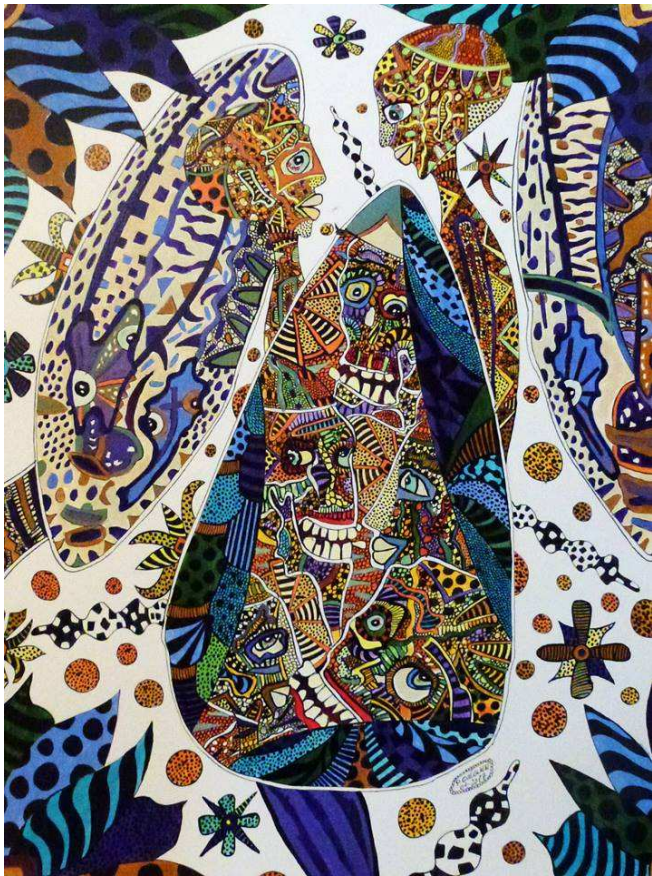




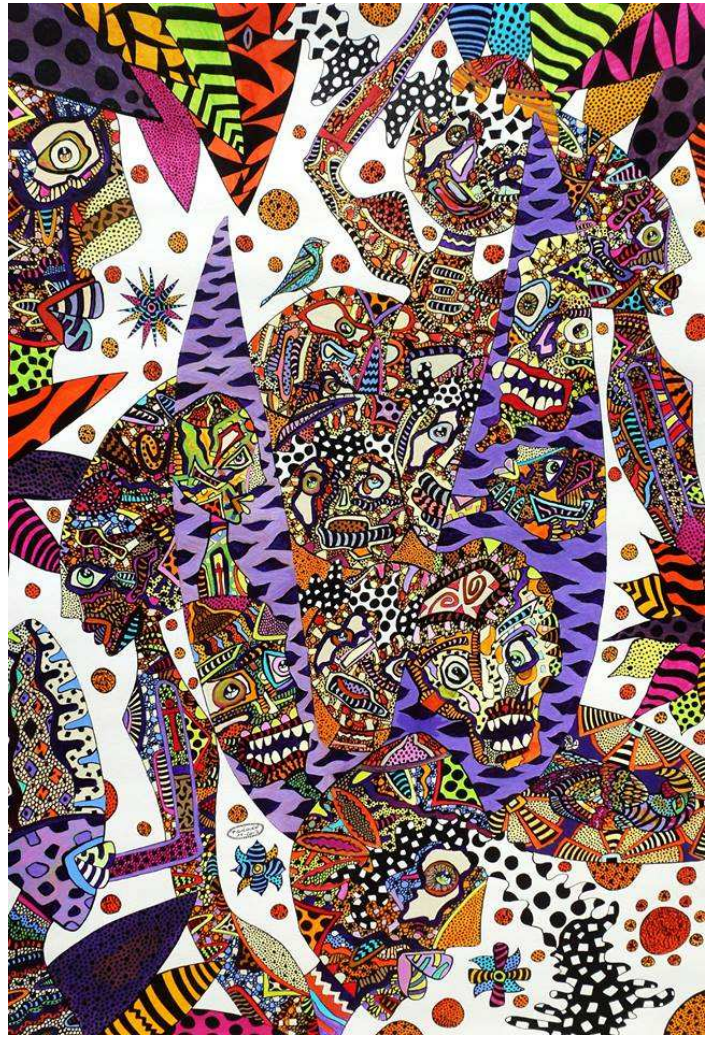








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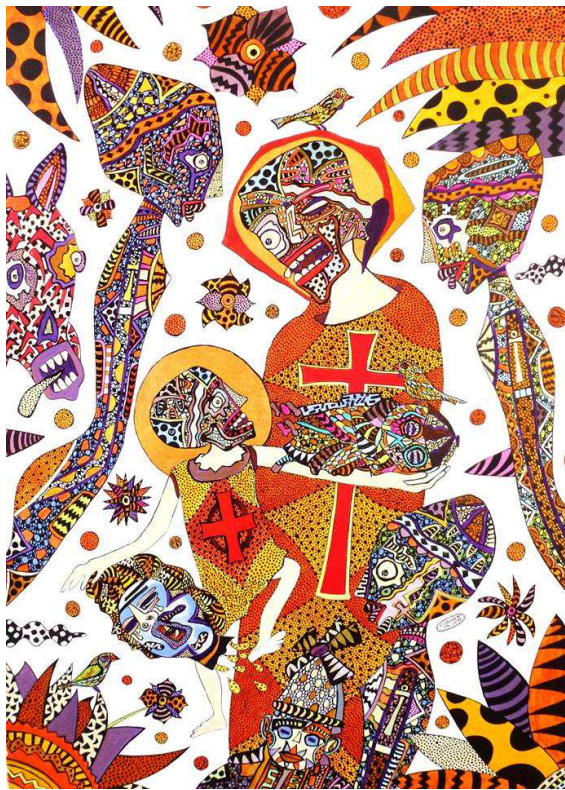








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# Hampton Rodriguez

## Neo-Expressionism in the Pacific Northwest

**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.

A recent show on exhibit at Bohio Studio in Portland is **Neo-Expressionism in the Pacific Northwest**. It opened March 23 and closed May 16. The work shown in these pages is that of Hampton Rodriguez. Darig Hernandez and A. Tarrago were also in the show.

Labels are important - especially if the artist self-identifies. A label, say - Neo-expressionism - places the work in a particular art-historical context and allows the viewer to consider the art on its - and the artist's - own terms.







Neo-expressionism appeared world-wide in the 70s. Spontaneously, or as a result of international cross-pollination, kindred phenomena appeared in Italy, known there as Transavantguardia, and in Germany as Junge Wilde or Neue Wilden. On the face of it the new movement was a reaction to the relative coldness, abstraction and formalism that had taken hold in the art world by the 70s.

But characterizing these new forms reveals predecessors (Fauves) and applications (figuration, emotion, vivid colors) that themselves had been reactions against formalism when they first appeared in the not-so-terribly remote past. This bold reaction may be more of a pendulum swing, or perhaps a correction. Staying-power of the movement since the 70s certainly suggests affirmation or acceptance.



But characterizing these new forms reveals predecessors (Fauves) and applications (figuration, emotion, vivid colors) that themselves had been reactions against formalism when they first appeared in the not-so-terribly remote past. This bold reaction may be more of a pendulum swing, or perhaps a correction. Staying-power of the movement since the 70s certainly suggests affirmation or acceptance.





This development matches the personal journey of Hampton Rodriguez as an artist. He admits to being very much swept up in the "intellectual pursuits" of the contemporary abstract art movement in his native country, Dominican Republic. But he went to Europe, exhibited in Spain and Belgium, was changed, and changed again when he finally settled in Portland Oregon in 2002.

The work itself is certainly in vivid contrast (a reaction?) to any notion of formalism or minimalism. When Hampton uses abstraction, he uses it to embolden a statement and never to reduce it to a minimalist essence. Perhaps a case in point is Hampton's body of gestural drawings - using seemingly off-hand and spontaneous line drawings to capture a moment. (The drawings were not in the exhibit. They can be seen in Issue 8 or on request at the gallery.) In common with Hampton's paintings, the drawings reveal a lively sense of humor and focus on elements of vitality, character, movement.



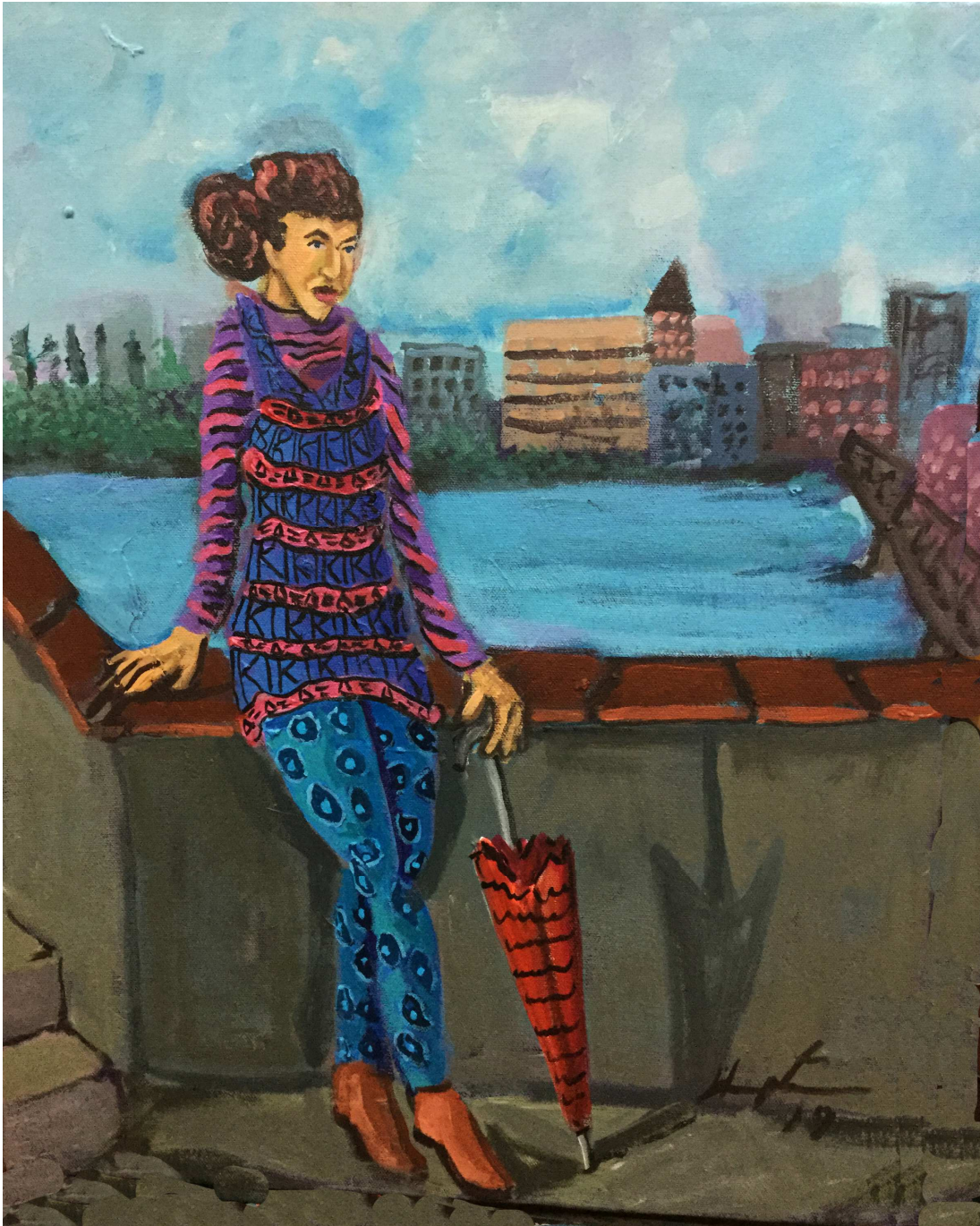




The paintings are explosive, vivid, urgent. Distortions of perspective and proportion scream for attention - musical instruments and theatrical accoutrements take on the personalities of snakes or swans. The portraits, sitting rooms and cityscapes are demure by comparison but are still rendered with brashness and a touch of fantasy.



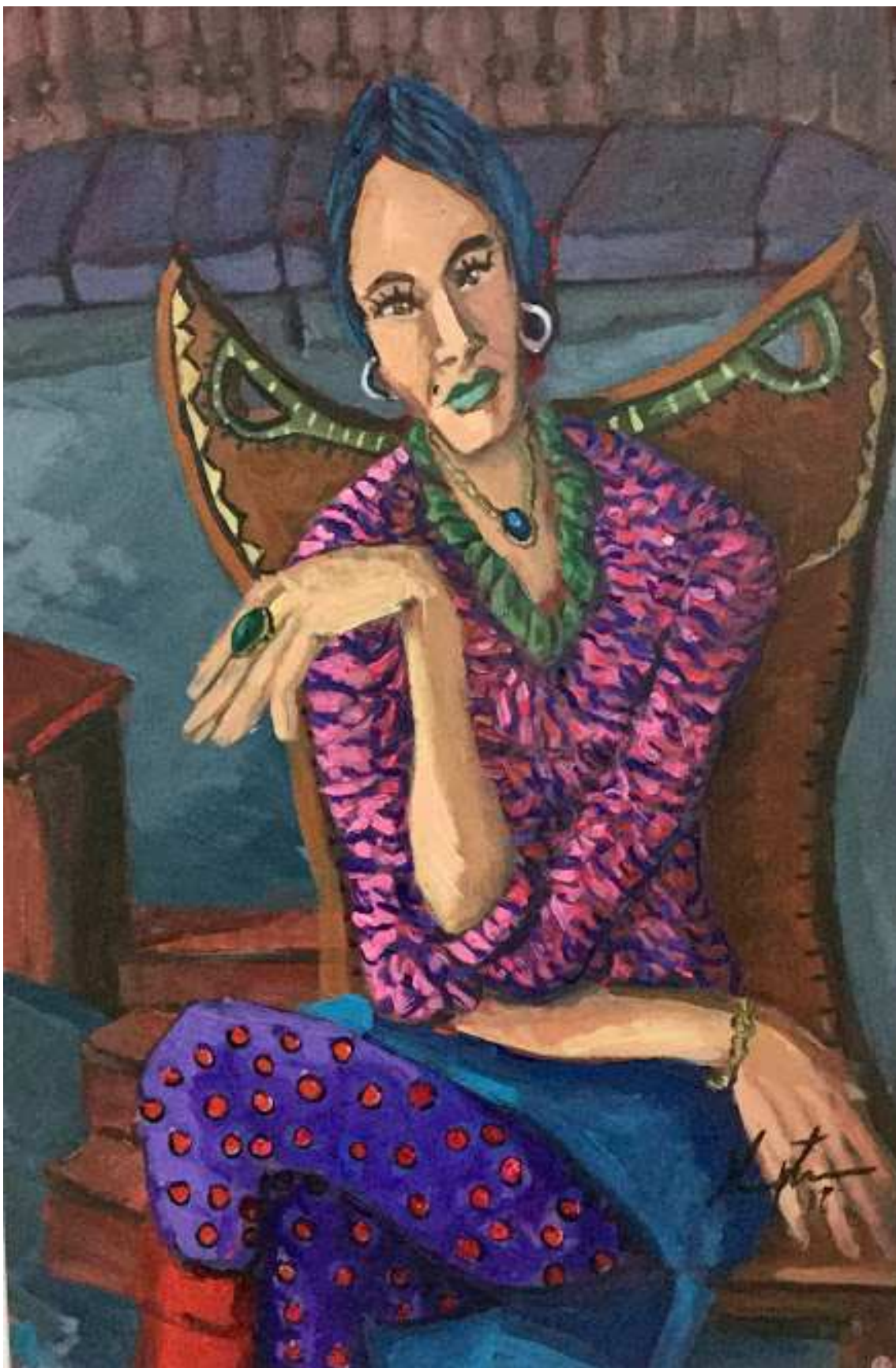
For all their apparent improvisation and seize-the-moment urgency the images show the discipline and respect of a learned professional who is well-versed in historical forms and principles; an understanding of where the boundaries are and how to deftly step over them. Whatever Neo-expression is, the present body of work is a bold progression forward in a straight line from 150 years of gallery art starting with the Impressionists.











# 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.



















# Alessandra Salisbury

## Bleeding Flowers



Chen Guang — Tiananmen Square 1989



**Alessandra Salisbury** is a Brazilian creative writer and actress. She lives in Australia with her husband and their daughter Isabella who was the inspiration for Alessandra's first published kids book *Naughty Nana*. Her works appeared on the American magazines, *Anti-Heroine Chic*, *The Borfski Press*, *Seethingography*, and *The Basil O'Flaherty*. In India, she has poems in the *Indian Anthology of Contemporary Women's Poetry*. In Australia, her works appeared on *Northerly Magazine*.



On the day I was born, General Pinochet became president of Chile, Isabel Peron succeeded her husband Juan as president of Argentina, and Brazil's president, General Ernesto Geisel, introduced reforms that allow limited political activity and elections. On my fifth birthday, when my country knew Amnesty, I set my bird free of his cage without even knowing the meaning of freedom. This might explain my extreme love for political theatre with a tendency for human rights, democracy, and art as the only way to voice the marginalized. Theatre studies, writing theatre, and dancing have been an active part of my life since very young age. It has been my way of speaking out, understand the world, a path to transformation, and how to gain strength to live in a dissonant world enriched with discrimination, social discrepancy, racism, and injustice.

My parents, in their 20s, were participants on the 'Revolution in 1968' in Rio de Janeiro against the dictatorship that started in Paris in the same year. My parents and their friends were a group of young people who produced art, music and pieces of writing against the political system. They were active militants going into demonstrations and street protests, and because of that they were exiled outside Rio de Janeiro, victims of torture. Some went missing forever, and others assassinated.

In my 20s I was nominated best actress at *Coca-Cola Young Talents* of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, after performed a monologue I wrote called 'Bleeding flowers'. It is a story about a day at a protest when a young man dies. It frames and represents what it was like to live under repression and silence, at a time when the censorship would dictate people's actions. A time when art, expression of feelings, and love were suppressed, confronted, questioned, and coldly killed. A time to be remembered forever as a tribute to those young men and women who spoke out loud for themselves and many others. Young genius, intellectuals, writers and artists around the world weren't afraid to fight for justice and freedom, and to oppose dictatorship. 'Bleeding flowers' is dated in 1968, the year that changed the world. I wrote it and acted it out on the stages of Rio de Janeiro almost 30 years later, but it was then still new. It remains new today in a world full of hate, inequality, terrorism and violence. The monologue is timeless and progressive because we witness all around the world the same type of violence for different reasons, but always the matter of power as a predominance.

#### **Cinelandia - Centre of Rio de Janeiro - 1968**

I was there, at the demonstration, in front of the Embassy and I remember thinking: *This is fabulous! I am anti-imperialist. Yes! I am.* My friends and I, we are deeply against dictatorship. We are radical! Not only because they do horrible things, but also because we can't stand these heartless gringos. Disgusting...

It was a remarkable afternoon! Through the waving protest flags, I could see the burning sunset. The last shining orange rays made me feel invincible. I could rise myself up to the sky and touch it. I felt radiant! I was wearing a flowery dress and I had white lilies in my hair. I felt like dancing! So I spun around with wide opened arms while seeing people marching proudly, satisfied that their voices were finally

being heard during the protest. I was bursting with enthusiasm and saying out loud: "This is an extraordinary feeling! This is freedom! We all deserve it!"

Then my eyes spotted him. He was watching me. Just there, a few steps away. Those brilliant smiling green crystals were staring at me. People started shouting "Out, out, out, out, imperialism out" and so did we. Together with our gaze locked on each other, our words became louder and louder "out, out, out, out, imperialism out" and again and again, harmoniously. As the throng moved forward, we were swept closer together until we bumped shoulders. The chanting was powerfully sung within the crowd and I heard him saying to me: "You've inspired my soul! You are delightful to watch!" The heat beaming from my heart could melt an iceberg.

Unexpectedly, the gunfire started. A scene from hell. People running, yelling, trying to escape. The shots were becoming more intense and closer to us. I felt my whole body turn to stone. Voices were silenced from my ears... and just like a scene in slow motion, I saw the bullet merge forcefully through his black hair. Down! He fell like a bird. Not a sound. He didn't even scream. I sat and placed his head on my lap. Instantly, I had bleeding flowers on my dress. For a second, he gasped while the green faded from his eyes. I screamed out "help, please!", but it fell on deaf ears. No one noticed us.

Suddenly, a terrifying silence came about. No more shooting. The world stopped. His last verses were still echoing intensely in my memory. Six dead bodies fallen down on the ground around me. Tragically, he was the seventh.

The next day, the newspaper reported the demonstration. But mentioned nothing about the dead people. They took the bodies away to cover the evidence. They never said a word about the shooting. Those military policemen, monsters capitalists. No sympathy at all. Have they ever known pain? Why did they shoot? To show the power they think they have? This is not power! This is murder! Dictators inject fear, slay innocent life and strip away our freedom!

I kept my flowery dress stained with the boy's blood in a box with a note assuring him I was going to be present in all of the demonstrations to fight for justice and freedom, for him and for me. I went to another street protest a week after. And to another one the next day. I met other young people who were even more engaged than I was. We met up every Friday at an abandoned shed near the pier. We talked and planned our next actions against the bloody military.

Demonstrations would never fail our dream of being free. I remember in one of the latest protests when we saw military policeman running towards the crowd carrying Molotov cocktail on their hands, we could not help but scream "Fuck the hell out of here, coward bastards!" I ran towards one of them and banged his legs with a piece of timber. The man fell over my feet. I kept smashing his body with the timber until he was drowned in his own blood.

Six months later, five friends of mine and I had our faces in every newspaper of Rio. We were the dangerous young people gang wanted by Brazilian Federal Police and FBI for the kidnapping of the U.S Ambassador to Brazil. We did it! We were proud we did it! We would do it all again if necessary. We were members of the MR8 (Revolutionary Movement 8<sup>th</sup> October) and we were armed resistance to the excruciating military dictatorship.

# Rachel A Levine

## Michael's Challah



**Rachel Levine** is a writer across many genres, including fiction, plays, and poetry. She has an MFA from Brooklyn College and has recently won first prize in the Short Story Project's 2019 contest. She has recently finished her novel, "The Truth By Its Own Sound," and is re-writing her latest play, "Entanglement."



There's something magical about family numbers: how many people in the family, the first born, the last, whose birthday is when, how many chairs we need at holidays, the memories we link to how old our children were at the time, how to double or triple a recipe to accommodate everyone. These numbers are embedded in our thoughts, marked on our calendars and woven into our rituals. When someone in the family dies, it throws all the numbers off.

My brother Michael was only thirty three when he died of a heart attack in 1986. For some reason, in my grief, I kept making observations about numbers. Suddenly I was the oldest child instead of the middle. Suddenly I had one brother instead of two. Suddenly my parents had only two children instead of three. The date of his death, the day of the week, the hour of the day, instantly became as personal and familiar to me as his name. And the date of his birth, that number I circled every year as part of "breaking in" my new calendar, became one of a pair of numbers that were like bookends around Mike's short life: his birth day, his death day.

He died of a heart attack. It was sudden, and yet, we shouldn't have been surprised because we had all warned him endlessly about his eating and smoking habits. But those were only words. And his response to our admonishments was, "I don't care if I die young." When he did die young my anger was as powerful as my grief. I couldn't separate them.

Michael knew our father's family had a history of bad hearts. In fact, when dad had a triple by-pass, Michael spent the hours during the surgery in the hospital cafeteria eating junk food and smoking. Ignorance didn't kill Michael. If it had, maybe I wouldn't have been so angry. To me it seemed that Michael had virtually killed himself. And, like the survivor of any suicide, I kept asking, "Why?"

Anger at my suddenly deceased brother was a new and different kind of pain for me. I had been angry at him often while he was alive. He wasn't a good family member, he was often inconsiderate, and he was capable of dishonesty. But after his death I felt ridiculous for feeling angry. And I also knew that my anger was preventing me from experiencing the mourning I needed to. I needed simply to grieve.

I wasn't really aware of what I was doing as I made a mental inventory of what we had shared. Since we weren't that close as adults, it was difficult. But there were two things that emerged out of my anger and sorrow. Two things I knew Mike and I shared that were very special to me. There was his humour that broke through my anger whether I wanted it to or not. I hated to be manipulated and yet I loved the laughter and instant intimacy it brought. Mike and I shared a love of the absurd. We found things funny that no one else did, and, we could never use words to explain why. He was also capable of terrific physical comedy due to his weight and rubbery features. He would break into a funny accent for no reason, at the strangest time. His sheer eagerness for laughter was childlike and irresistible.

The second thing I realized, was that he was the person who encouraged me the most when I was learning to bake bread. Of course, his so-called "support" was entirely selfish. He just loved to eat.

I remembered all those hours in our kitchen in Brooklyn as I kneaded (and he refused to help) and waited and hoped for the best. When I forgot to add the yeast, and

the "bread" was a huge dense cracker, he ate it. When I made "whole wheat" bread but absent-mindedly used white flour, he ate it. I never had to throw away a loaf. I was seventeen, Michael was nineteen. I can still remember our old address, our old phone number, and the twenty-three steps we had to climb to get to our second floor apartment.

The one bread I loved to make was challah. Just handling the silky dough was a pleasure. I didn't have time back then to perfect it, but once I got married I baked challahs every year for Hanukkah. I gave these as gifts to my family. Everyone loved them but only Michael was obsessive about them. When it came to challah I could do no wrong. I loved baking for the holidays and giving away my breads. But it was Michael's relentless pursuit of my challah that added a touch of fun and even absurdity to the whole thing. I would bake two batches, each one producing two large loaves. One loaf went to my father and his wife, another to my mother and grandmother, who lived together. I gave my younger brother and his wife another loaf, and Michael got the last one.

Five months after Michael died it was Hanukkah. What would I do about the holiday? The bread baking? The numbers were off. If I baked one batch it wouldn't be enough. If I baked two, what would I do with Michael's challah? I considered going to his graveside and leaving it, but I knew that was ridiculous. I just couldn't face that extra loaf, and so I adjusted the recipe to make only three loaves.

Three. It was an awkward number. It didn't feel right and yet it was all I could manage during a time of profound grief. I don't know exactly when or how I figured out what to do with Michael's challah, but I do know it was part of the healing process. I never actually sat and worked towards a solution. It wasn't like solving a mathematical formula. But as the next Hanukkah drew near, I knew instinctively what to do.

Shortly before Mike died, I had started a "tradition" of having a Hanukkah party and inviting enough people to populate a small town. We ate latkes and blintzes and drank wine and sang. We played with the dreidels and gave the children chocolate "gelt," and lit the menorah.

At my Hanukkah party after Michael's death, each family got a small slip of paper with a number on the front. The other half of their "raffle" was put in a hat. Towards the end of the party, we announced the winner of "Michael's Challah."

When I designed the raffle, I knew I needed to write a few words about the meaning behind it. It was only then that I understood all the reasons why this intuitive gesture was so important to me: it let people know what a funny and fun-loving person Michael was, it served as a reminder of the times we shared in that kitchen in Brooklyn, it made me laugh knowing that if Mike were alive he would have had the whole thing rigged! Written on the raffles was a wish that whoever won it would think of my brother and enjoy the bread as much as he would have.

At every Hanukkah party since then, we have our Memorial Raffle in honour of Michael. And, in a strange and wonderful way, it makes the numbers right again.

# Kendall's Column



Radu Oltean



## Kendall Evans

### Valerian and the City of a Thousand Planets

I'm going to go a ways around Robin Hood's barn or forest before I get to my review of "Valerian and the City of a Thousand Planets." In fact, I'm going to go all the way back to the year 1997 and the arrival of the motion picture "The Fifth Element" in cinemas.

"In the colorful future, a cab driver unwittingly becomes the central figure in the search for a legendary cosmic weapon to keep Evil and Mr. Zorg at bay."

Wikipedia describes it as an "English-language French science-fiction action film directed and co-written by Luc Besson. It stars Bruce Willis, Gary Oldman and Milla Jovovich. Primarily set in the 23rd century, the film's Dallas central plot involves the survival of planet Earth, which becomes the responsibility of Korben (Willis), a taxi-cab driver and former special forces major, after a young woman (Jovovich) falls into his cab. To accomplish this, Dallas joins forces with her to recover four mystical stones essential for the defense of Earth against the impending attack of a malevolent cosmic entity."

I get a kick out of the quick plot summary in IMBD on the internet, which runs like this:

"In the colorful future, a cab driver unwittingly becomes the central figure in the search for a legendary cosmic weapon to keep Evil and Mr. Zorg at bay."

The plot is so unbelievable that it's beyond absurd, involving a great many unbelievable coincident and complications, beginning with the young woman who happens to be part of the secret weapon crashing into Bruce Willis's aircar/taxicab, thus allowing, of course, Bruce Willis to save the universe.

How complex and ridiculous is the plot? It runs over 600 words in the plot description on Wikipedia, and I do hope you will read it. If you haven't seen the film, you will be both amused and bewildered by the plot, which is, I contend, basically incomprehensible. The logic is the logic of comic books and sloppy writers. Except that this delightful complexity is deliberate on the part of the film's creator, Luc Besson.

What the heck, let's at least steal a few random sentences from Wikipedia's involuted plot description:

"In 1914, aliens known as Mondoshawans arrive at an ancient Egyptian temple to collect, for safekeeping from World War I, the only weapon capable of defeating a great evil that appears every 5,000 years."

The weapon consists of, heh heh, the resurrected humanoid woman who coincidentally crashed into our hero's airborne taxicab in the year 2263, and four stones representing the four classical elements of Earth, Air, Fire, and Water – the humanoid woman named Leeloo being the “Fifth Element.” .

Now fast forward/morph to this, from the same Wikipedia plot description:

“Dallas delivers Leeloo to Cornelius and his apprentice, David, and it is revealed that she is the Fifth Element. Cornelius learns from her that the element stones were not on the Mondoshawans' ship, but had been entrusted to an alien opera singer, the diva Plavalaguna.”

Have I made this sound like a terrible film? Because the truth is, I think it's a wonderful film. It's a cult classic and you will only find out why by watching it with an open mind and a good-spirited sense of wonder. Which brings us to Luc Besson's 2017 film, *Valerian and the City of a Thousand Planets*.

The two films have a great deal in common, so that nearly everything I've said about “The Fifth Element” can be said about the “Valerian . . .” film. A different cast, of course. After all, this film comes twenty years later. Not only is the plot just as insanely complex, it has a lot in common with the plot of *The Fifth Element*.” Only maybe even more so? This time the plot description runs about 900 words in Wikipedia.

Let's probe a few samples. For instance:

“In the 28th century, due to cooperation between the Earth's countries (beginning with the ASTP of 1975) and extraterrestrial peoples, the former International Space Station has been added to until its mass threatens to cause it to fall out of orbit. Relocated to deep space using a set of thrusters, it becomes Alpha, a space-traveling city inhabited by millions of species from thousands of planets.”

Here's the quickie plot summary from IMBD:

“A dark force threatens Alpha, a vast metropolis and home to species from a thousand planets. Special operatives Valerian and Laureline must race to identify the marauding menace and safeguard not just Alpha, but the future of the universe.”

The interesting thing is, you can read the complete plots of these crazy movies and it isn't going to spoil the experience of seeing them. If anything, it will just help, perhaps, sort out a little of the nonsense.

Perhaps the running time of the second film is a little long, but I enjoyed both of these films in the sense that I had a very good light-hearted time watching them. You can

find the first one free on Netflix and “Valerian . . .” free on Amazon Prime. I can’t guarantee you’ll like them as much as I do, but what the heck. If you haven’t seen these films, you just might have a good time with them. Set your sense of wonder free and go along for the ride . . . maybe that’s what life is all about, anyway . . .

Well . . . maybe . . .

