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# thinairmagazine 15

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Subscriptions are \$18.00 per year (two issues) or \$10.00 for a single issue

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Lisa Lenard-Cook

### *Vaya a Dormir, Perro Muerto*

Torres knows he's killed the dog, knows it as soon as he hears the soft thud against his fender, but he slows just the same, leans across the cab and sees that, yes, it's dead all right, looks like a field mouse the cat's just done with, legs all pointed up, eye staring at nothing, lips flopping back to expose the teeth.

Damned dog had it coming, rushing out to chase Torres's pickup every time he drives by, barking like a bruja. All the dogs do; it's as if they've picked Torres and no one else to chase, the black labs that belong to Sutton, the heelers that moved into the old Gutierrez place, even that shepherd coyote bitch lays the other dogs flat on their backs whenever they come too close—she joins in too, yapping at his rear tires, at the gravel spit up when he downshifts to get away.

Torres hops out to unlatch the gate-wire, looks over his shoulder to see if the other dogs are coming, but no, their heads are bobbing, other side of the rise, over the side of the road where the dead one landed, and he sees one of the kids running toward him, starts figuring what he'll say to them when they get here (weren't my fault; she oughta keep them dogs tied up; get away from me, you brats), but they turn in at the new lady's place, the one who took the now-dead dog along with the property. Serves her right, Torres thinks, but feels an unexpected twinge of sympathy, then pushes it back where it belongs.

Torres pulls through the gate then hops out and swings it shut again, slips

the wire back over the post, climbs back in his pickup and downshifts into the canyon. Dogs in Nam you just shot the fuckers, human dogs, wild dogs, made no difference, you never knew who was out to get you, so you just shot and kept on going, never looked back. They had it coming, too, man has to think for himself first, after all, and damned if Sutton hadn't tried to run him off his own place, when Drew had said he could stay as long as he liked. Didn't Drew own it, after all? Didn't Sutton just rent from Drew?

You're scaring my wife and kids, Sutton had said, coming out to where Torres had parked the pickup in Sutton's driveway. He was going to offer to help Sutton pick up the place, make a few bucks cash maybe; his disability didn't ever go as far as it should. He'd watched Sutton and the wife and kids unload the U-Haul; bunches of kids, a slew of them, boys mostly but that one bitch girl, maybe sixteen, seventeen, she'd get hers before too long, Torres was sure of it, and she had it coming.

Drew had come out to where Torres had the trailer parked, down the canyon and halfway up again, driving his new Cherokee with its Arizona plates, the wrong red against the red of the truck. Got some folks renting the house now, Drew said, like Torres wouldn't know what was going on in his own backyard, you got somewhere else to go? Torres owned that he didn't, and Drew thought about that some, said, Well, I suppose you can stay on. I'll let Sutton know. Maybe he'll need some help, who knows? So Torres took to driving by slow, to see if Sutton needed something done, till he pulled in the driveway and Sutton told him to get off. Damned hardass s.o.b., not even local, still had Nevada plates on his pickup. Torres's people had been here since 100 years, homesteaded below the Mesa, traded with the Utes. People knew the name Torres meant something around Mancos, and Sutton meant Shit, Sutton didn't know shit, and Torres wishes he'd killed one of his labs instead of that overgrown pup never even grew into its feet. Lady moved in there, she always waves when Torres goes by; Torres wonders if she will anymore, when she finds out it's him hit her dog.

He shuts off the truck and waits for the dieseling to quit before letting off the clutch, then hops down, the rain beginning again. If she's smart she'll just drag it down the canyon for the coyotes, but more likely she'll want to bury the damned thing, now that would be tough, what with the mud. He could go back and offer to help but you never know how Anglos will be, most of the time they hate you before they can even see you clear and no sense even trying is the way Torres figures it, though he thinks about the

lady one more time before letting it go.

Trailer's leaning a little more downhill but Torres is pretty sure it won't slide all the way down the canyon. There's no electric here, no water, and even the road is two overgrown ruts through the snakeweed and chamisa. Torres likes it just fine, built a lean-to shitter out back and found a kerosene lamp at the dump gives him all the night light he needs, when he needs it. Night ain't like in Nam, not black like that, the sticky damp getting under your skin. Moon and stars here make their own light, night's not heavy here; even in winter, you got room to breathe, to stretch your arms out as far as they'll go. Drew was in Nam, too; he knows Torres needs the room, the space, and shit, he's got 300 acres, Torres's trailer's a speck on the plat, way off from the main house Sutton's renting now, down and then up the hard rock canyon so far even the cattle don't come.

Torres hauls the two drums of water off the back of the pickup and up next to the trailer, then swings open the door and jumps up inside. It's raining harder, ping-pinging on the trailer roof, and through the dirty window facing northwest Torres can see it's not going to let up any time soon. He pours some kerosene into the stove and fires it up for heat, sets a boot on the door to keep it down open, pulls the aluminum-and-plastic chair in close and then watches a spider making her way up the wall, just taking her time, fly's already squirming in her web, he ain't going anywhere and neither is Torres, not back up the road where he'll have to face them all, see if they know.

Rain sounds like fucking Nam, though there it was the trees it beat on, the enormous leaves, thrump thrump thrump, like drums, it sounded, like a heartbeat. This is more like birdshot, ping ping, kind of comfortable after a while. A man could lose himself in this, though what Torres sees is the dog, tongue lolling out to one side. It wasn't such a bad dog but it sure hated him, now why was that? Maybe it knew. Maybe it was the pickup it hated. Knew what was gonna kill it long before it happened, who knew what dogs knew? Dogs didn't know shit except who they decided to hate, and that dog hated him, had it coming, served it right. Maybe she'll just call the county, have them haul it away, who'd be out digging in this weather, especially a hole for a worthless dog? Buried Lupo in the rain, but didn't have much choice, put up a branch to mark it but when they came back they never did find it, rain washed it who knows where and maybe washed Lupo away, too: They never found him, either. Hard to believe in God when you've seen shit like that but then that damned dog knew something, what did it know? Torres

had to kill it, though he didn't know till he'd done it, as soon as he heard the thud he'd known it was meant to be, and ain't that kind of like God, knowing shit somewhere your brain can't quite get to?

Like he knows that lady might understand, might not even blame him for killing the dog, like if he goes back and explains, It was an accident, dog run under my tires and I never even seen it, the lady would cry and smile at the same time, say, Sweet stupid dog, maybe offer Torres a beer. Come on in out of the rain, she'd say. It wasn't your fault.

Yeah, he'll go on back there, maybe when the rain lets up some, but right now the ping-ping-pinging's like the lullabies his *abuelita* sang: *Vaya a dormir, niño mio. Dormir.* Now Torres can hear her, *Vaya a dormir*, and pretty soon he's singing too: *Vaya a dormir, perro muerto*, he sings. *Adios, adios, adios.* ❀

## Nadine Lewis

## America is Not Dead

America is not dead; the obituaries have been a not so clever ruse. America is not dead; America is a deadbeat dad; America made a dream in the backseat of a Chevy on a school night, and then ignored the vessel of its own lust; America is not dead; it's not even decadently living in Bukowskian excess/depravity. America is obese and unemployed and addicted to the mundane morning television shows.

American is no longer among the greatest minds of its generation. America played organized sports and paid lip service to organized religion, got a gentleman's C average and thinks books are overrated. America is not dead; it's not even on life support. America kinked its back in the back seat and is trying to live off an SSI check under an assumed name. America is not dead; America is the kind of guy who is all talk and a glass jaw. America is not dead; America is just trying to dodge the taxman, eating the neighbors' crops and blaming rabbits. America is not dead; it's got spinach stuck in its teeth and an eye liner mustache and its varicose veins don't bleed red, white or blue—America bleeds pollution, prisoners and porn—in the shower and slaps on a pad and tries to pretend it didn't happen.

America is not dead; it spits on the graves of Twain and Whitman as it drives its tractor under the influence without a license over the dilapidated bridge. America is not dead; it's not even on the run. It's whining that no one ever hangs out anymore as it sits on the coach waxing about the good old days. America is not dead; it's just oblivious and too lazy to open its mail. America is texting you at work—to see if you'll stop by later with a 6-pack and some smokes.

America is not dead though its taste buds are—too anything that isn't drowning in corn syrup under a mountain of salt. America is not dead; America is unaware of its own actions and has no idea why it's just been served; America thinks everyone is picking on him and wants to tell someone but America dropped out—and not in the Timothy Leary way. America listened to “just say no” then said “yes” to every prescription drug the commercials offered him; America is hopped up on diet pills and NyQuil, complaining

about those damn drug addicts. America is not dead; America is treating the symptoms and ignoring the cause for the sake of profit. America is not dead; America just can't get hard without a pill and is not sure if it wants to go on.

America is not dead; it just needs to be reminded of that fact. America was the bastard child of a 600-pound gorilla and a white elephant raised believing it was a swan who could breakdance. America is not dead; it just doesn't recognize its reflection any more—and is afraid. America is not dead; it just needs a purpose; it needs someone to teach it: how to work, how to eat, how to fuck, how to sleep, how to take responsibility for its own actions.

America is not dead; it's just pretending, 'cause life is easier that way.



## Coach's Son

He grew up locked in a gym alone,  
walked cages, watched himself  
score from wooden bleachers,  
knew each number stenciled

concrete step, each enormous fan  
book-ending rows of painted  
safety glass that ran the lengths  
atop those pitted walls.

A steady bouncing echo cut  
with clean shoes' chirping bite  
through what was never practice,  
always pleasure. Pleasure in a darkening

favorite ball, winter sweat, old air  
perfumed with popcorn and ankle tape,  
new leather, heating coils arresting  
orange, the jaundiced, hungry light.

After hours ripping nets he'd wet  
his face and neck, then clean the floor  
pushing a broom wrapped in towels  
wrung damp in those same drinking

fountains. When his father let him out  
they'd flip the lights off with a key,  
walk back across the hardwood  
in total darkness toward red glimmer  
of an exit sign angling across  
the burnished parquet floor. It read  
like the first hint upon peaceful ocean  
of a round and rising sun.

## Eric Roy Under Under Water Standing

We'd been swimming, or at least I had  
sort of Russian-danced the shallow end  
noticed finally not by my daughter  
but by her best friend's mother, Sharon,

who shook her hair out and walked precisely  
to the diving board. I tried to float  
again, water making islands  
of my face and chest. The sun'd been

slick for days, the sky a hazy mirror  
whose silver was letting through  
and I heard her enter the water, swim  
up to me like an urge. Our daughters

beat each other with neon  
polyethylene pool noodles and  
the rhythm-less sky asked,  
"What should we say to them?"

I found my footing and told Sharon,  
"Tell you underwater." The girls  
stopped mid-fight to watch  
as I made the gesture Down

and we went under, under-  
water standing, bent hiding  
beneath the surface as I clasped her  
naked ear  
with my front teeth, trying hard

to hold on for as long  
as everything would let me.

Lisa Markowitz

## Lost in Vegas

Heaven's brain wavers clumsy over the strip. A clean-looking man hawks at passersby with foot-long margaritas, thrusts little Jesus pamphlets into their free hands. My earth point plots further from tourists and open containers. I glide in a car with windows open, passing giant television sets, talking dirt sidewalks, live action pirate shows. Admission is free—the excess of neon isn't uninviting as much as reliable, a long lovely ride enjambed with people, curtains made of air that twist and thicken with the heat. I take the way of an unoccupied industrial city, somewhere off Interstate 15. Unsure of exact location, I point north, putter on the gas and argue with God. Tonight he speaks in a rip he knows I'll hear. I seldom take it back when I tell him to his face, you silly old man, you're much too old to be real. Mad citizens of the southwest work their rules to a tizzy and pass over double yellow lines to pass me. I decide I've got valid excuse to drive slow. On quiet nights I don't even notice the wrecks that sprout towns of yellow tape on newly paved road. I should have jumped the Jesus man, shown him what it's like to dance on the soapbox. White lights on houses speak underneath silent, stony mountains and look like stars. The knob on the radio keeps company with me and miles of cloud pop out from the second dimension, waltzing, this picture blazing into a hush, warm.



Sean Singer

Isaac Melum

## Vincent Van Gogh, An Invention of His Brother Theo

In Auvers-sur-Oise, in the keyhole of a sunbeam,  
A tramcar curled up the street like a tendril  
I could not control. Women with sweaty bellies  
Thumping the peppers in the baskets, all whispering.  
I, overjoyed, could not avoid hearing it:  
The wheat, like an outer space of herbs, will bite me in two.

My internal sight traced his outline: in a trance,  
Vehement red hair, and behind, a sea of liquid pearl,  
Geometry of the field, and the blue thatch, its circling canopy,  
Leaves like worms, seizing the coagulated plants, the scorching wool,  
A suffering beast has turned into a man.

My intestines broil when I hear the piano,  
I unbutton the collar of my yellow shirt,  
Pour sambuca into my coffee and lurch forward  
Like a face inside a face. Through the shock  
Of fighting elements within, the world split.

The moon strips. I am glad her white curve,  
All jubilee and tribulation, drives barbarous dissonance away  
With the drooping grin of a godlet. Would you like that?

A creature with wings curls up and sleeps—  
Hears with a purple ear the infestation of the sky.

## Inevitable Surprises: A Call and Response with Sean Singer

*One thing I like about jazz, kid, is that I don't  
know what's going to happen next. Do you?*

—Bix Beiderbecke

Sean Singer, winner of the 2001 Yale Series of Younger Poets Prize for *Discography*, is a poet with uncanny vocal range and an ear for the down-beat. His poems take the flight of improvisation while masking the darker rhythms of current human upheavals: in other words, Singer composes art.

Sean's poems have appeared in *Drunken Boat*, *Iowa Review*, *Pleiades*, *Tin House*, and *Slope*, and presently in *Thin Air*. His accomplishments include winning the Norma Farber First Book Award from the Poetry Society of America, resulting in a Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts. Other awards include an artists' grant from the Massachusetts Cultural Council. He currently lives in Harlem, NYC, with his wife and daughter.

The author, poet Isaac Melum, conducted this interview with Sean Singer, via email.

**Isaac Melum:** *Could you explain your process? How long does it take you to write a poem? What steps do you take to prepare for writing a poem? Could you elaborate on what your writing process was like for "Vincent Van Gogh, An Invention of His Brother Theo"?*

**Sean Singer:** It often is a long process, which involves, in a layered pastiche, of thinking on the subject and making lists of images or words and their rhyme equivalents, over extended time. Part of this thinking considers form, and line length.

For historically based poems, I have file folders containing illustrations,

newspaper articles, outlines, spider charts, and other lists of items. These files are called "extensions." The extensions are sort of journalistic research, which support the sensation the poems try to create.

When I read Keats, the impression is that his poems were the products of years of reading, thinking, and talent, but that the actual creation of the poem took no time at all. In this way, jazz has served as a metaphor in the subterfuge that a piece of art can be simultaneously spontaneous and inevitable.

Frederic Rzewski said he believes that in some kind of utopian society of the future, jazz improvisation might be seen as an early experimental form of social practice, as a kind of perception of things to happen later in political organization. As soon as you sit down to write a poem, it is a political act.

In these ways, when I think about my own brothers, or the purpose of writing letters, and of creating pictures in spite of difficult, or terrible conditions, I come to new vistas in my thinking about Theo Van Gogh. There are 874 letters by Vincent, which are 850,000 words. However, there are only 37 surviving letters from Theo. The conceit of the poem is that Vincent was an invention of Theo's because of this discrepancy.

Process is intimately, inextricably bound up with the idea of writing itself, because the product is the result of the process. The line is primarily what makes a poem a poem and not prose. It slows the reader down, and it insists that the reader pay attention. So, there is an intimate relationship between attention and intention.

**IM:** *We've talked about this before, but I was hoping we could discuss it again as a way of transitioning between this idea and my next question: what about jazz/blues influences your poetry and why jazz/blues and not other genres of music?*

**SS:** Jazz has served as a metaphor for writing or creating in that it uses pre-determined or given material as a tool to derive spontaneous composition, known as improvisation. Jazz is about choosing to be joyful in spite of conditions, and much of my work was an attempt to consider whether or not art can be an anodyne to the suffering throughout history.

Jazz history closely mirrors Civil Rights History, as well, so it's been an interesting prism through which I could understand my own relationship to language. I'm also obsessed by jazz, as a sound, as a language, and as a way of configuring myself through those.

Jazz can never be played the same way twice, so it tends to be mindful to the moment, which is all we have. Jazz and poetry are both forms which are about celebration and confrontation.

**IM:** *So does that mean, in the spirit of jazz improvisation, your poems come out in one shot or do you revise your work? If you revise, what is that process like?*

**SS:** Ideally I create the bulk of the poem in one instant, then carefully revise—mostly by cutting. Revision literally means to "re-see," so I like to put the poem away for months and then recast it by eliminating whatever seems stale or unoriginal or unsurprising.

**IM:** *The first line of a poem is an investment to the shape, texture, and momentum that a poem will maintain. For fun: will you write five first lines to potential poems and then explain why each is a worthwhile line to continue into a poem?*

**SS:** Red mittens under steam whistles and calliopes.

This line announces two constants, red and the image of train, and would be a poem about the memory of Arizona, with its arid wind and stony silence.

\*

Block of pink granite:

This line is set in an abandoned, weed-strewn lot in Harlem, between the brownstones. For some reason, this block of pink granite is an incongruous announcement of a hard, geologic past which now is a vibrant urban artery.

\*

The healthy flee from the ill,

This line begins an atheistic litany on the suffering of Richard Pryor, the genius, who used comedy as a tool to express deep pain. Because of the alienation of ill people (people who are burned, for instance) a parallel experience to health is created. Because tortured people can never recover from their torture, their covenant with other humans is lost forever.

\*

The horse's muscular neck shimmies in the stiletto sunrise

This line shows a horse in a black and white silent film who provides a horizontal motion to the lines in the subsequent poem, and as a foil to the nude sylph who rides him, like the anti-cowboy in a bizarre Western.

\*

A black balloon, that your breath keeps and measures

This line begins a psychological space between two people, one of whom applies pressure via sadness, silence, and retraction, and the other one, who understands this to be rational. The black balloon is a metaphor apropos of this, because it elastically stretches to accommodate the myths which accompany relationships, especially romantic ones.

**IM:** *Which five books of poetry should a beginning writer read if they want to become a better writer?*

**SS:** First, Arthur Rimbaud-complete; second, Hart Crane-complete; third, T.S. Eliot, *The Four Quartets*; fourth, John Keats-complete; and fifth, Bob Kaufman, *Solititudes rowded with Loneliness*.

**IM:** *Some balk at the idea of writers writing creative works about writing, as it is sometimes considered either passé or self-indulgent. A close cousin in contempt is writers writing about art. There is a quality about your poetry that transcends this basic idea of art speaking about art. Why use music and*

*other artistic mediums as a starting point or framework for your poetry?*

**SS:** I don't know that to be true, that writing on art is indulgent. But I'd say a writer should use what he/she knows as material, and art and music are things I know.

The history of art and music is itself a kind of call and response to that art and music which preceded it. I think if I address those either explicitly or obliquely I'm really addressing what it means to be a person in relation to the metaphorical world, that which seethes within us, the wilderness of inner space. Jazz makes me feel like a person.

**IM:** *I feel similarly with blues music. Lately, I listen to "Goodnight Irene" before I go to bed and Ma Rainey's "See See Rider Blues" or Bessie Smith's "Downhearted Blues" when I get home from work. In the sense that jazz makes you feel like a person, the act of writing in the improvisational style must have a similar effect.*

*What other poets do you feel, after reading their work, have that same experience?*

**SS:** Bob Kaufman, Gabrielle Calvocoressi, Wanda Coleman, Hart Crane, Harryette Mullen, Ernst Moerman, James A. Emanuel, and Jay Wright.

**IM:** *In what ways has your poetry evolved over the years?*

**SS:** There is a need to not repeat myself, and to get to a place where I started; which is to say: a moment when there were fewer internal and external pressures and I was free to write in whatever manner I chose.

I also have been experimenting with longer lines and longer forms.

I've been trying, over time—to paraphrase Evan Parker—to investigate the unfamiliar until it's become familiar; to impose rhythmic repetition on the familiar; to vary the repetition in as many ways as possible; to select the most satisfying of these variations and develop these at the expense of others; to combine/recombine these variations one with another; and to do all this

for its own sake for an end in itself.

The question of maintaining freedom within a context is crucial. If I'm pre-occupied with issues external to filling white space, then I risk tightening the margins of that freedom.

Can poets write with complete originality, with an assertion of his/her own musical individuality and at the same time be able to merge their unique voices in the totalizing, collective history of poetry with its polyphony and heterophony? As John Szwed said of jazz, there is no system yet devised with social principles which reward maximal individualism within the framework of spontaneous egalitarian interaction.

**IM:** *What is next for your writing? Any future projects?*

**SS:** I have a number of projects going: a book of poems, a children's book on jazz, a television tragicomedy, and a long hybrid work. ❁



## you'll be given love

He thought about running across the tops of palm trees.

Are you thinking about those palms?, she says when his eyes glaze over.  
Well, he says. Well, he says half-lidded.

Somehow his work desk ends up pushed against the 9th-floor windows so that he can tip to the side and lean his head against the pane. The windows spread from floor to ceiling and around the entire building, and he can see the other downtown Phoenix high-rises sitting staggered around like saguaro and, far beyond and at the bottom of the skies, the desert mountains naked brown and patched with jade. Jetliners sink and float on silent behind him one-to-a-minute to Sky Harbor, and of course below and to the right are the palms.

On Friday night they go to her office party where he becomes nauseated and warm in a collared shirt and jacket. He looks for a window.

Is this what you thought it'd be like, a woman he doesn't know says at the punch bowl. She wears glasses.

What, he says, What?

He scoops ice shaped like lug nuts into a shallow plastic cup.

Nothing, she says and ah'em and excuse me and shakes her head.

You mean the party, he says.

No, not really, she says.

Jill Scehovic

you'll be given love

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They watch their reflections wobble in the red punch with orange slices drifting through. Polyester and cotton-covered arms reach between and around them with cake plates.

Well, he says, Well, it's that I've run out of things to say really.

If you look down from above, from a place like the 9th-floor windows and down at the palms along Van Buren Street, it is like a footpath straight and not ending to the eye and of soft blasts of green plumes upon which to leap. Giggling perhaps and on to the end.

One morning at the crosswalk of his office building he bends his head back to the sky.

The building is elastic stretching its top across the morning like a phantom's raised and spooking arms.

The engine blow from a passing jet plane arcs overhead and he sees people in work suits dropping down along tall buildings through the air—were they floating it took so long?—and he tries to sense the moment of letting go, the grip the choked air the dizzy below the heart the things whispered or screamed.

Someone bumps into his briefcase and he crosses on and up through the doors of the building where the lobby is wintry with air conditioning and empty marble walkways. He tries to think of open grasslands and running antelopes.

On the elevator alone he cries.

He has two cars and several credit cards and a mortgage payment. He's worked fifteen years in white shirts and white undershirts.

I want to stop, he says, I want to build pastoral tree houses.

What, she says, What? She is almost grinning.

He closes his eyes.

He read once that the only palm native to Arizona is the Washingtonia palm. It has a bushy and tanned underbelly and small, pitted black-brown fruits. After they are long-ripe, the Washingtonias let their dried-out drupes fall on the city, pebbling the streets below with their seeds.

At night he eats more than one portion and sometimes he eats a second dinner later so that he can smoke again on the back patio.

He records television programs he doesn't watch and instead feels tired and lays down in bed where in the dark he waits with his eyes closed.

There are stories he's heard of people who have been thrown by chance up into coconut palms by tsunamic water and lived. They cling there for hours, they say, and as others' yelling becomes silence and as palms close-by snap and go under around them.

At the board meeting on Wednesday, he pulls his shoulders back against the cold leather of his chair and stares at his empty notepad. The presentation is important to his position and percentage points loft spoken into the air above him. He wants to say to the others sitting there alongside him, He has been trying.

When he gets home, she is angry. Everything is a mess, he is late, he doesn't care about anything anymore.

I am tired of your shit, she says.

He sits on his chair in the dining room for a long while.

He spends the night at a Motel 6. He watches the local news programs and eats candy bars from the vending machines. He washes his undershirt in the shower and falls asleep on top of the bed cover.

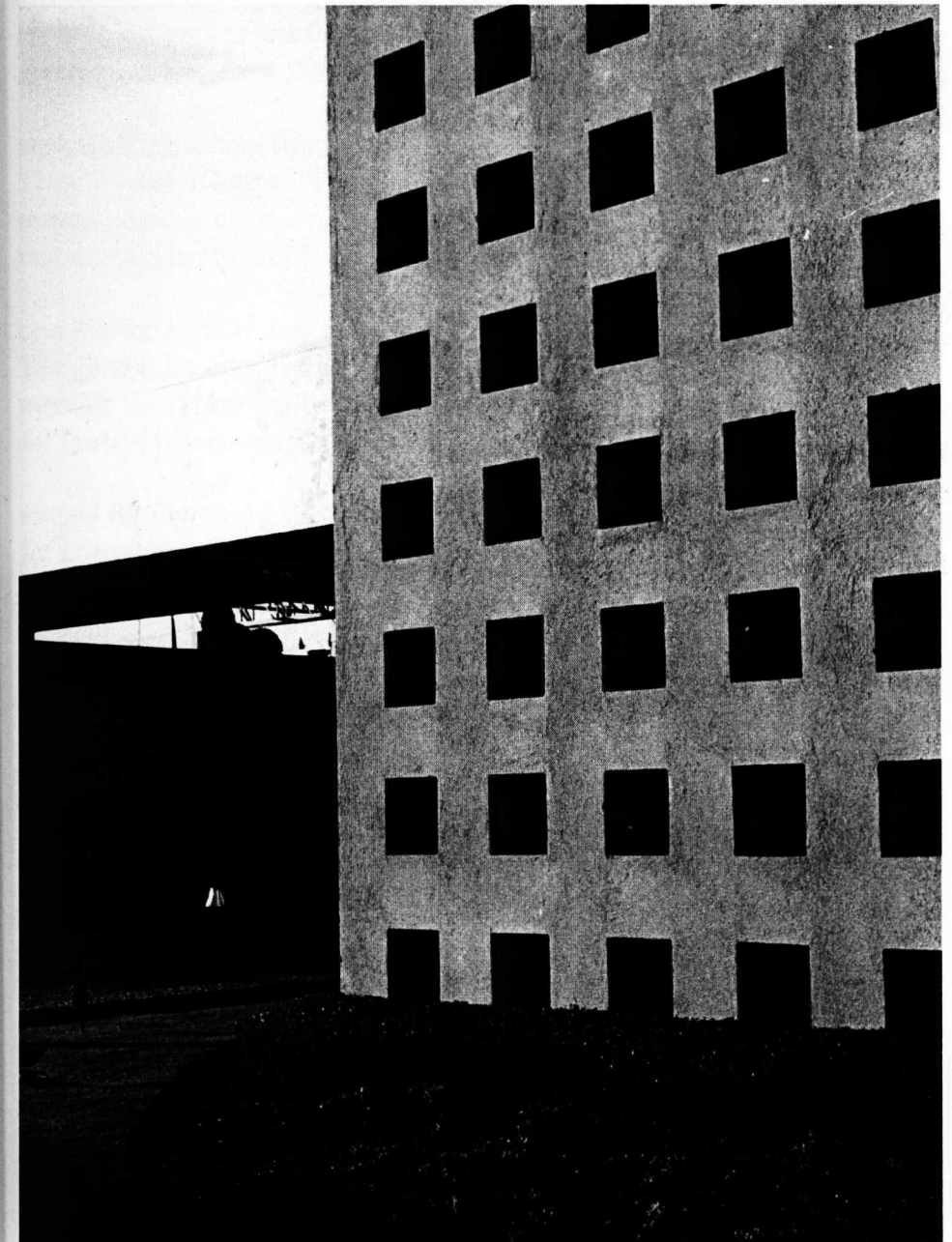
In the morning, he smokes a cigarette on the Motel 6 balcony and stares at his car. It is a station wagon he bought when he thought he'd wanted a family. He thinks about going down the stairs and driving away to a place like North Dakota where it was probably cold enough to feel alive.

Later, at the crosswalk to his office building, the stoplight turns and he crosses with his briefcase in hand.

A tremendous amount of people jumped that day, someone said. They fell on the city like drupes, so many that you couldn't bear it.

He thought about the palms...There was a chance you could land in the soft greens, wasn't there? He tips his chair and leans his head against the

9th-floor pane. You could land and you could run leaping from one to the next and on down the palm path endless to the eye, perhaps giggling and on and on.✿



Richard Robbins    **What They Want of Him**

**Fifteen**

Hard to know the grudge behind the silence  
there on the couch, a video playing  
full of hard men with guns, their hard women  
who talk back, or the soft ones, cowering.

I sniffed his wet head, not two minutes old,  
and smelled the ocean in light, tangled hair.  
He would flinch if I ever came that close.  
Hard to know the grudge behind not caring.

Sometimes the whole body hurts. The tired leg  
blames the knee, and the air's so thick the neck  
aches to move through it. Why be born at all,  
he must be thinking. Why get up at all  
from that couch, the violent eye where the world wrecks  
itself hourly, such faith a small blue wave.

Heat lightning flashes off and on like war.  
His family, home in bed, will want to know  
his whereabouts at just this moment, thunder  
groaning to the north. They'll see tilting oak,

each roofline taking fire in the rain.  
They'll want to know when he picked up the knife,  
mussel shell, and stone to help stamp the coin  
that could ransom a hill. They'll want him alive,

or a life for a life if they lose him.  
The garden steaming at dawn, winter earth  
pushing out its herbs—nothing less for them,  
for those who wished in their dark bed as soldiers

moved through town disguised as men, testing boulevards  
for poison, putting the wind on alert.

## Brad Johnson

## The Wake

The buffet table is piled with salads—tuna salad, macaroni salad, chicken salad, garden salad, fruit salad. Melon ballers, olive pickers, and lemon zesters lay about the table like forgotten relatives waiting for rides. The cold cuts and antipasto are rolled like logs waiting to burn beneath the fire of color of the late-to-arrive bouquet. Purple-printed vines wind round on the napkins; overcoats stack upon each other like a gang tackle on the corner chair. Cousin Al leaves lettuce, cherry tomatoes, cream cheese chunks, bagel crumbs and sesame seeds scattered on the tablecloth like a Sunday boater whose waves uproot the reeds and slap the shoal.

It's not that I feel like I don't belong here: my suit's just as clean as everyone else's; my genealogy and connection to the deceased is as apparent as my nose. It's just the air in the dining room is as stiff as in that coffin, and we all stand in line—waiting—behind cousin Al—

waiting—with our paper plates and plastic forks, waiting our turn to dig holes in Jell-O molds—waiting—too apprehensive to cry out or lift the lid.



*This year, Northern Arizona University's Creative Writing Program and Theatrikos Theater Company launched the Northern Arizona Playwriting Institute. The institute's goal is to promote local production of new plays. For the inaugural event, NAU instructors teamed up with Theatrikos dramatists to host the first annual 10-minute play contest. Dramatist Warren Doody, a professor at Vanguard University in Los Angeles, judged entries from new and seasoned playwrights throughout the region, choosing seven finalists, whose plays were staged at the Doris Harper-White Playhouse.*

*Just because it's short doesn't mean it's easy. The successful 10-minute play, like the successful full-length play, requires impeccable timing, precise and lively dialogue, believable characterization, and a satisfying denouement—all of this, but with the added difficulty of compression. Sandra Raymond's "Pork Belly Futures," a wonderful specimen, took first place. From the Neil Simon school of comic realism, Raymond cameos a moment in the lives of two wily and personable characters, a father in free-fall back towards childhood, and his daughter, a reluctant and wry voice of conscience.*

*The NAPI institute will hold its second annual 10-minute play contest next spring. For details, go to <http://arizonaplaywriting.blogspot.com/>*

—Ann Cummins

### Pork Belly Futures

by Sandra Raymond

A play in one scene.

Present day.

A modest living room with a couch and television.

DONALD, a MAN in his mid to late fifties, dressed in jeans and a polo shirt, sits in front of the television holding the remote control and staring intently at the screen.

pork belly futures

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GABBY, his DAUGHTER, in her early twenties, dressed like a typical college student, ENTERS, carrying a backpack.

She stands for a moment behind DONALD. She looks down at the gold engagement ring on her left hand, removes it, and stuffs it into her pocket. She leans over to kiss DONALD on the cheek. She looks at the television.

GABBY

What are you watching?

DONALD

You're late.

GABBY

Construction. Why are they putting in a light at that intersection? What a nightmare.

DONALD

(Waves his hand impatiently)

Shh...this is important.

GABBY

(Comes around and flops down next to DONALD on the couch. Drops her backpack at her feet)

Ok. What are you watching?

DONALD

CNBC.

GABBY

(Points at the television)

What do those numbers mean?

DONALD

Do you know what pork bellies are?

GABBY

Do I want to know?

DONALD

I was really surprised when I found this out: pork bellies are bacon.

GABBY

I love bacon. With French toast. And real maple syrup. Is French toast really French?

DONALD

I don't know. So, if we buy 500 pounds of pork bellies at—

GABBY

500 pounds of bacon? What are we going to do with that much bacon?

DONALD

We're not actually buying it.

GABBY

We're not?

DONALD

Have you been paying attention?

GABBY

Yes. Pork bellies equal bacon right?

(Beat)

Dad, I have something I want to talk to you about.

DONALD

Yes, yes but that's not really the point. We aren't really buying pork bellies. We're buying pork belly futures.

GABBY

Pork bellies have futures?

DONALD

They have future prices. We're taking a guess as to what pork bellies might cost in six months. Then in six months we sell them at that price. If we guessed right, we make a killing.

GABBY

What happens if we guess wrong?

DONALD

Well, we either sell anyway and take a loss, or we take delivery. But nobody ever really takes delivery, except maybe for the bacon people.

GABBY

Who are the bacon people?

DONALD

Do you even want to talk about this?

GABBY

I'm thinking about the pork bellies' futures. Do you think they want to grow up and go to college and get married and have little pork bellies? Which reminds me...

DONALD

Let's move on. There are other commodities. We don't have to buy pork bellies.

GABBY

What else is there?

DONALD

Well, there's cocoa.

GABBY

Cocoa? Is this what people do with their time? Guess how much cocoa is going to be worth in six months? Speculate about the future of cocoa?

DONALD

Among other things.

GABBY

Aren't there more important things to worry about? Global warming? Diplomacy in China? Aren't we at war somewhere?

DONALD

Well, I don't know about war. For instance, I hate it when they talk about how many people die in combat each day. More people than that are killed in car accidents. Do you how many people die in the world each day from diarrhea?

GABBY

(Stands up and begins pacing)

But all those people would have died anyway. These are extra deaths. Above and beyond the normal deaths. Maybe a couple of them would have died in car accidents anyway, but some of them would have grown old. We're robbing them of their futures. Even pork bellies have futures...

DONALD

Growing old is not all it's cracked up to be. Look, let's just talk about the commodities market.

GABBY

I thought we were talking about commodities.

(DONALD hangs his head in frustration)

GABBY (continued)  
(Sits down)

Ok, ok, we'll talk about commodities. Bacon, cocoa...

DONALD

(Sits up taller and gestures at the television enthusiastically)

There's orange juice.

GABBY

So the commodities market centers entirely around breakfast foods? Has anyone else noticed this? Is ordering the #1 breakfast combo at McDonald's considered market manipulation?

DONALD

Are you just going to make jokes?

GABBY

If I don't laugh I might cry.

(Beat)

Anyway, I have some news...

DONALD

I cried last night.

GABBY

What? Why?

DONALD

Your mother called.

GABBY

Oh, Dad, I've told you not to answer when she calls.

DONALD

She said she's never coming back.

GABBY

She always says that.

DONALD

I think she really means it this time.

GABBY

Why this time?

DONALD

Well...she's getting married.

GABBY

(Sits for a moment in stunned silence)

Are you sure? This isn't another one of her stunts?

(DONALD shakes his head)

I can't believe that my own mother is getting married

and she didn't tell me. This is so typical of her.

DONALD  
(pats GABBY on the arm)

I'm sure she's going to tell you today, honey. She probably just wanted me to know first so I wouldn't hear it second hand. Anyway, you know how your mother is. It will never last.

GABBY  
Who is it? Bernie?

DONALD  
Who's Bernie? She told me his name was Chet.

GABBY  
Chet?

DONALD  
He's a commodities broker.

GABBY  
Shit...

(pause)  
Dad? Is that why you're watching CNBC?

DONALD  
What? No. I thought I might go into day trading.

GABBY  
What about your patients?

DONALD  
I'm thinking about retiring my practice.

GABBY  
You can't retire, Dad, you love your work.

DONALD  
No...no. I used to. I used to be fascinated by the human condition. I used to think that people's

problems were interesting and complex. I used to love listening to their stories. Then, one day, I realized that everyone was the same. The other day I had a young girl in my office, about to get married. A little bird...she had on all these silver bracelets that she kept fidgeting with. They sounded like wind chimes. Those hands were just...perfect. She was so upset, and wanted to know how to deal with the fact that her fiancé and her parents wouldn't speak to each other.

GABBY  
Why aren't they speaking?

DONALD  
Her parents are Catholic and her fiancé is Jewish. I can't believe this. A new century, a new millennium, and the Catholics still aren't talking to the Jews.

GABBY  
Things have gotten better.

DONALD  
No, they haven't. Everything is the same. This war is Vietnam all over again. This woman will go through all this drama with her wedding, yet someday she and her husband will be fighting over whether or not to re-carpet the den.

GABBY  
Well, they won't call it a den.

DONALD  
It doesn't matter. Their love will die.

GABBY  
(Shakes her head)

Jeez, that's pessimistic.

DONALD  
How do I know? I know because right after she left my office another woman came in. Same woman, same bracelets, same tiny hands. She was thirty, forty

years older. The same woman, the same little bird. True story. Of course, the hands were older. You can see age in people's hands. Her husband of twenty-five years is leaving her. She is desperate to save her marriage. I told her to let him go.

GABBY

Dad!

DONALD  
(Shrugs)

Why not?

GABBY  
(Sighs)

I don't know. It just doesn't seem...hey, did Mom say when she was getting married?

DONALD

No. She'll tell you all about it, I'm sure.

(Beat)

By the way, I asked that woman to have a drink with me.

(Pause)

She said yes.

GABBY  
(Jumps up)

DAD! You can't date your patients!

(Takes the remote from DONALD and turns off the television)

DONALD

That's why I want to retire my practice. I think I'm in love.

GABBY  
(Pacing around the room)

You're in love. Mom is getting married to some stock

broker named Chet who spends his time betting on the future of bacon, and meanwhile we are mired in war and the polar ice caps are melting. Did you know that as they melt they're releasing these ancient viruses that might wreak havoc on civilization? Then there's the price of gas, the price of everything...everything seems so...uncertain...and now you are dating your patients. I mean, Dad, this woman isn't even divorced yet.

DONALD

What do you mean she isn't divorced yet? She isn't married yet.

GABBY  
(pauses while this sinks in)

You're dating the younger one with the bracelets?

DONALD

Yep.

GABBY

How old is she?

DONALD

Twenty-five.

GABBY

You're more than twice her age! Oh, and then there is that other little detail...she's ENGAGED!

DONALD

Look, Gabby, we all start out as cute, pink, young piglets. But one day we end up cooked in a frying pan, full of fat and cholesterol. Don't worry so much about what's happening in the world right now. This is always the way it's been. It will all be happening twenty-five years from now, a century from now. You might as well enjoy yourself while you can. We'll all end up buried in the dirt, spinning around the sun forever.

GABBY

Just a minute ago you were telling me that all marriages end up the same. Now you're telling me you're in love. You want to end your career and end her engagement. How is she any different? How is this time around going to be any different?

DONALD

It's like the commodities market. The experts can tell you all the right moves, but sometimes you just get a feeling in your belly...

GABBY

About pork bellies?

DONALD

...you get a feeling, and you make the buy. Maybe your choice will be the right one, and will pay off in the end. Maybe it will be the wrong one and-

GABBY

You'll end up with a truckload of bacon.

DONALD

Which might not be so bad.

GABBY

I like bacon.

DONALD

Now, there are many different commodities. Pay attention, this is important...

GABBY

Anything other than breakfast foods?

DONALD

Well, there is oil, there is silver...

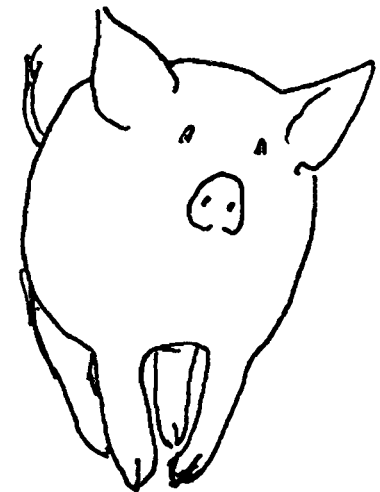
GABBY

(reaches into her pocket, pulls out her engagement ring, and holds it up)

...and there is gold.

(Lights fade)

(END PLAY)



Jonathan Greenhouse

**Around the Circles of His Lunacy**

He is not as crazy as they think he is, and for that reason  
 he has failed innumerable times, his sculpture taking form  
 in lumps of sand or in the shadow of a gathering wave, in the quick accumulation  
 of dark rain clouds dropping their destructive water's weight,  
 or in a body made of impermanent substances like butter  
 surrounded by men with long loaves of bread, or chocolate  
 always carved moments before the sun breaks through clouds  
 and the air-conditioning falters, leaving his creations formless,

but he is not as crazy as he should be; he should be  
 etching his long name into the bluesky, using words composed of mirrors,  
 something indelible because it will never leave a mark to be erased,  
 his invisible words impossibly reflected against a body of wind  
 and a limitless box of sunlight carved into a cloud of black smoke  
 and the ruffled feathers of a passing bird.

He would like to be so crazy as to lift his head into the moon's halo,  
 but each year the sky grows further away, each year his feet  
 weigh heavier to the ground and his arms, never able to fly,  
 can't even flap up & down, on a whim and his forgotten desire.

He is losing his mind forever doing these commonplace things,  
 even though he had always told himself  
 only a crazy man would do them.



Beth Alvarado

from *Anthropologies*

ii

Fernando's Tía Norma lived in a low house, there, next to the dry river. *Barrio Sabaco*. Only Mexicans give neighborhoods names like that. Barrio of the Armpit. They were allowed to keep pigs and goats in their yards, chickens and ducks, and so the air smelled musty, fertile, stinky like an armpit. Norma had married Pancho when she was fifteen-years-old. In the picture, he is in uniform, his hat in his hand, older than she is, and she is a girl, really, just a girl, standing between him and her sisters, smiling. He came back from Korea a calm man. His fingers as thick as sausages, he could ease a bolt out of narrow recesses in any engine. Norma was tall and had white, white skin and black hair. If this were a fairy tale, she would be the good, kind queen, the one everyone goes to in times of trouble.

Their house, set beneath a grove of old mesquite trees, is long and rambling, full of children, a room built on as each is born perhaps. One step up into the kitchen, one down into the dining room with the long wooden table: on New Year's Eve, Fernando's *tata*, Rodrigo, deals the cards for a game of twenty-one. There is a big enamel pot of *menudo* on the stove in the kitchen. The steam rises in Norma's face as she stirs it. Her hair, I remember, is drawn back into a bun. Her eyes crinkle at the corners. *Menudo*, squeeze in lemon and the clear broth turns cloudy, sprinkle in green onion and cilantro. *Pan birrote*, little crusty breads, legacy of Napoleon's Mexico.

*Tata* Rodrigo was a little man in his eighties with long white hair and a white goatee. He remembered Paris. He remembered enough French to ask me if I'd like to take a walk in the moonlight. *Au claire de lune*. He'd been there in World War I. They had come down to the ranches, looking for sharp shooters, and he'd been chosen. After the war, when they arrived in Paris, the French crowded along the wide boulevards, cheering. Oh, those French women, how they loved American soldiers, he said. Then, in Spanish: the children, they had no shoes, nothing to eat, and the soldiers gave them food, bought them shoes, and there were red flowers in the window boxes and the women plucked the flowers and they leaned out of the windows and threw them, the flowers floating down onto the soldiers in the streets.

Rodrigo had a woman in Paris, and a son, and then he came home and married Norma's mother, Grace, a tall woman—Norma looked just like her—and for years, Grace sent letters and money to the woman in France, to the first son of her husband, a child she would never meet. Even when her own baby sons died, even when they lived in a tent during the Depression and had to spray the dirt floors with water and pack the dirt down with their feet until the earth was smooth and hard like polished clay, even when there was barely enough to feed her own children, she sent money to a woman and a child in France.

They say Rodrigo had known since he was a child that he would marry Grace. He had seen her when she was a baby. He was twelve-years-old, lived with his parents, ranch hands on the *Rancho del Oso*; at the neighboring ranch, he had leaned over her, an infant in a crib, daughter of the school teacher at Picacho, and declared he would marry her. Of course, he couldn't have known she would die before him, that lying on his deathbed in the V.A. Hospital, his children and grandchildren standing around him, he would be waiting for her, waiting for Grace, he said, to come along and pull him out of this life by his socks.

Norma was ill for a long time, diabetes, an amputation. Their children had moved into their own homes by then and Norma had filled her house and back porch with birds, colorful birds, and then, like her mother, Norma died before her husband. Pancho was left with the music of birds and grandchildren. A *nieta*, just toddling, who brought him messages from Norma, a crumpled photograph, a look in her eyes, a gesture.

His mother said you should make a cross with the salt to bless the food. She cupped her hand over the bowl full of flour for tortillas. Like this. Just enough. Until you feel the tiny grains between your fingers. Mornings spent in the yellow light of the kitchen, gathered at a table with his younger brother and sisters while his mother made breakfast and told stories about *la llorona*, about growing up in Tucson, how the river used to run, about his father and the Mexican Revolution. There were signs. A dropped fork meant someone would visit. An egg with double yolks meant twins; one with blood meant someone would die. It was as if there was another world beneath this one, a world of spirits, things we couldn't always understand, things we could not see but that should be believed nevertheless. Voices we might listen to. And there was a way in which we should move through this world. Don't draw attention to yourself. Don't ask for more. Share. What does it matter, if your house is clean, if your heart is black?

The neighborhood grocery. Del Monte's. Even the Lees spoke Spanish better than I did. Over the loud speaker you couldn't tell, at first if it was Chinese or Spanish. It just sounded choppy. The grocery store, a world of sounds that didn't mean anything, a different form of deafness or submersion in the self. Half the clues were missing. You had to watch people, their lips moving, the expressions on their faces. Happy? Sad? Gestures. Listen for key words. *Carne*? That way.

The soda bottles are lined up in cases under the front windows. Dusty. The aisles of canned goods, dusty. Don't forget cottage cheese. *Salsa Ranchera*. The produce is to the left but is wilted. The butcher is Betsy's mom. She's from Mexico. Her name is Emma. If she sees you, she will put a special price tag on the hamburger. When her husband gets angry and they argue, she protests, Oh, Louie, you know I don't understand English so good. He is such a big man, half French, half Sioux, that even when he's *not* in the driver's seat of their Mustang, it slants precariously to the left. His grandfather sat in the war party with Sitting Bull. There is a diary in French, but no one can read it.

This was in 1974. There were long lines at the gas stations. On the south side of town, everyone was out of work. Windows got boarded up instead of replaced. Children without shoes, hopped from shadow to shadow as they followed their mothers to the store. We went to the Food Bank and got bags of flour to make tortillas, dried milk for the children. We cut corn off the cobs and ground it in the *molinaro*. We did laundry on the back porch in a wringer washer that had no wringer. Mint, *yerba buena*, grew under the faucet. The sheets were very long and hard to twist. The towels came out as gray as the soapy water. We hung the clothes on the line until they were dry and stiff and smelled of a dusty sun. ☁

Patricia Lowden

The Great Wait That Will Not

One of these days, you say,  
you'll come—

and will you come like Kerouac's starfire yellow and unraveling  
with your hair down  
and your shoulders bare and let me  
ride you out there  
into it  
until the burnt orange hillsides go pink  
under a dawn breath of sun  
and I can open you  
like one of O'Keefe's flowers  
and see your bones stretch out  
like roads I've pushed up  
against before

Somewhere along the way  
you'll take a breath  
and walk in my direction  
no  
you'll run  
a fast flight like you have winged feet  
and a heart that ticks and tings  
you feel it against your ribs  
hear it in the blood pulse of your ears  
subtle but direct  
like a rock thrown gently against a window

and each step  
will you give them words like Gertrude  
a perfect exasperating explanation of what makes you wet  
enough to cry out for it  
and touch me like I'm a Picasso  
and Paris is in my mouth

and I curve like glass you pour your wine into  
and when you finally have this wind at your back  
will the moon be behind you or before you  
the river  
on your left or your right  
as you take the road here  
will it be thoughtless as Coltrane's Jazz beats  
or Django's gypsy strings  
soles of shoes spinning  
and a starry night  
so wet with paint its swims you to the edge  
you've always wanted if you dared

Would it sound out  
like tires on gravel  
like the cut off quiet of the engine  
like night birds you can't name  
and laugh lost or found like Zelda laughs  
as a screen door opens and whines shut behind you  
but the air follows you in  
so you can breathe

and when you take that breath  
and the trees lean wildly in  
what will you say—  
that my feet arch like those of Neruda's muse  
that my eyes spit and curse light like the devil's hero  
that I have lips you want to softly bite against  
hoping to swallow my words whole

and I don't wash off  
and you can't get the bastard sun to burn me  
from your skin

that I asked you to come  
and to come here  
but not to me  
even as I may be the skin of it  
like pages you lay your long beautiful body into

But to you  
so you can see  
your life between the lines  
the way you want it written  
the way you desire it  
to live.

## Into The Fire

At eight minutes past midnight  
I gather the scraps of our letters.  
A tricky alphabet I scrawl on the walls  
of the not-so-impossible,  
yet inconsolable world.

I place them in a pile for examination—

Wet as night dew the moon threw from far off places, whisky-lipped and edges you can walk upside from and live. Hearts of stone that can be swallowed or tossed upwards into cloud hands that don't touch. Shavings of metal that were coughed out from the devil's own throat when words were not enough. The twisted opening of the aorta, limbs of long legs that would not intertwine, keys and locks and chains that would melt down to a river. And a river with its leagues of fish swimming against the current and the current singing with wind spun tight bodies 'til they float without hunger and are never discovered.

I gather small twigs, bones of birds, and paper from yesterday's news—  
I find my best ally, solitude, which was hard won  
eons ago in shadowy boxcar sleep  
and green bones springing away from birth,  
in worn down soles of boots,  
and in the aftermath, the dreaded silence after the crash.  
After love, after death, always  
after finding myself  
the moon.

So much for this I say.  
My breath is fire and I'm about to cry out into it all.

So much for time that's passed, for death stinking between the floorboards,  
for the lines on my face,  
wind washed a thousand times over  
and still wandering in the right direction.

So much for her light that leaves yellow flecks lingering  
on the inside of the day  
or his hands  
that haunt even the dirt under my fingernails.

So much for all that  
as I pass through the hours  
in the light shrinking and growing  
in the tumbling dumbstruck storm  
we call  
being here.  
And shining  
because we are half-moon-minded and hovering  
about to fall from the sky.

So much for safe places you go back to,  
for watercolor portraits of cresting waves,  
for hallucinations,  
for mermaids with brilliant fish tails  
that dip and lick at the swells  
and waiting.

So much for that  
for the little bit they give you  
and for the day that denies love  
in all its juxtaposed glory.

## Brooke Wonders

## Graphic Interpretation of Proven Prose: Diana Gabaldon on the Process of Converting Her Novels to the Graphic Novel Form

Diana Gabaldon is the sort of author you might meet in a book—so gracious, warm and cheerful in person that it's hard to believe she's the best-selling writer of the *Outlander* series. The woman is ageless, and her enthusiasm for storytelling infectious; when she speaks (and it's the same with her writing), it's impossible to resist falling into the worlds she spins with her words. She's also very, very funny, peppering her high-speed delivery with tangents and charming details. It's a pleasure to hear her speak, and to read her books.

Diana's work spans genres, blurring the boundaries between historical fiction, romance, and time-travel science-fiction, and she recently leapt into a new medium—although, as I discovered, it was more of a familiar medium revisited some years later. She's now immersed in work on her latest project: a graphic novel set in the same world as her *Outlander* and *Lord John Grey* series. When she offered to let *Thin Air* interview her for its upcoming issue, I jumped at the chance to ask her a few process questions about how she'd managed to move so fluidly between the novel and graphic-novel forms.

**Brooke Wonders:** *So you have a funny background with comics, involving (if I recall correctly) writing comic books for Disney in the eighties. Could you tell us a little bit about that?*

**Diana Gabaldon:** That would have been the late seventies. My mother taught me to read at the age of three or so, in part by reading me Walt Disney comics—and I never stopped. At the age of 28 or so, I was reading one, and thought to myself, "This is pretty bad; I bet I could do better myself."

Well, moved by impulse, I found out the name and address of the editor who handled those comics, and wrote him a medium-rude letter, saying (more or less), "I've been reading these comic books for twenty-five years, and they've been getting worse and worse. I don't *know* that I could do bet-

ter myself, but I'd like to try."

Luckily, the gentleman I addressed, Del Connell by name, had a sense of humor. He wrote back and said, "OK. Try." He also sent me a couple of script pages by way of example, so I could see how to format a script.

So I wrote a story. Del didn't buy it, but he did something much more valuable—he told me what was wrong with it. He *did* buy my second story and I continued to write for him (part-time; I was working full-time at UCLA at the time) for the next eighteen months. At this point, his bosses suddenly realized that they had forty years of Carl Barks scripts in their filing cabinets and told him not to buy anymore new stories.

"You have a knack for this," he told me, and sent me to his friend Tom Golberg, who worked on the Disney lot in Burbank, running their foreign-comics program. Aside from a few restrictions regarding American holidays, football, and ghosts, the guidelines and characters for the foreign comics program were the same as for the domestic one—so I wrote happily for Tom for another eighteen months or so. Then *he* hit a buying hiatus, my husband and I moved to Scottsdale—and that was the end of my comics-writing career. At least until this year.

**BW:** *Is the research done for the graphic novel different from a written novel? Is it the artist's task or yours to dream up the visuals?*

**DG:** Well, in this case, there really isn't any separate research to be done the graphic novel, since while it isn't a straight adaptation of *OUTLANDER*, it is *based* on that story, and uses the same historical background. I can't think that it would be different, though; you need to know what things look like and how they are done, before you either describe them in prose or inform a visual artist how to draw them.

Which is to say—yes, I dream up the visuals. How else could you do it?

A graphic novel (or comic book) script is laid out in panels, just like the printed page. At the top of each panel, I describe what I want in that panel: the character(s), attitude(s), expression(s), action(s), any special instruction in terms of angle or focus (whether it's a closeup, a long shot, an overhead perspective, etc.). Below that, the characters' dialogue is done in regular script form. So a panel might look like this:

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1-8 Murtagh, standing over Jamie's huddled form on the beach (seals in far BG, barking), shaking his head.

Murtagh: Well, so the laird o' Lallybroch's come home at last! Welcome back to Scotland, Jamie Fraser!

Jamie: Ngh.

Seals: Oark! Guwark! Rork!

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("BG" means "background", "CU" is "closeup", "LS" = "longshot" and "OS" = "offscreen" or "out of shot". The number at the upper left corner is for ease of reference among me, the artist, and the editor; this is panel #8 of the first chapter.)

Now, there is one exception to these kind of detailed instructions. Hoang Nguyen, the artist who's working on this book with me, is a wonderful artist, and so whenever there's a general sort of action called for in a panel, rather than something very specific, I'll leave that in his hands: "Next three panels are fight scenes, the Scots being ambushed by dragoons. I want shooting and stabbing, and I need Dougal, Jamie, and Murtagh each to be recognizable in at least one of the panels—otherwise, it's up to you."

**BW:** *What part of the novel writing process gives you the most pleasure?*

**DG:** I, um, don't know how to separate it into different parts—unless you mean writing vs. research (and for me, they really aren't "vs." at all; the writing feeds off the research and vice-versa—I do them both concurrently).

I know some folks *do* have these neat little processes involving index cards and outlines and notebooks and rough drafts and polishing—which seems terribly appealing and tidy; I just don't know how to do that. I just...put words on the paper. Slowly. And if nothing's showing up, I wander over and start looking through the research material, and fairly soon, something pops up out of that and the words show up. So I go put them down—slowly—and all the time, the back of my mind is kicking up questions from the compost pile back there: "Where are we? What time of day

is it? Who am I looking at?" "Am I hungry?" "How is the light falling?" "Did somebody just drop something...oh, no, it's just the dog. What kind of dog is that?" Etc., etc.

And I go to and fro and fro and to, tweaking and asking questions and recasting sentences for maximum clarity and elegance, and in the fullness of time, the scene evolves into something approximating dramatic coherence. When it's as good as I make it at the moment, I go and look for another kernel of inspiration elsewhere, and make another one. And in the even fuller fullness of time, they start to stick together, and I see the pattern and the shape of the book evolving. I guess that's one of my favorite times—when I finally see the shape of the book.

**BW:** *Same question, but for graphic novels: which part of the process is your favorite?*

**DG:** Oh, getting back the artist's sketches and paintings! It's totally cool to see what I had in my head pop up in pictures on the page.

**BW:** *What are the upsides of working in a visual medium? I think of things like facial expressions, which can be murder to write. Are there any gifts of the graphic-novel medium worth mentioning?*

**DG:** Oh, you can do facial expressions with much more subtlety and completeness in regular prose; aside from whatever facility you may have with language, you have two other things working for you there: the interpretation of the viewpoint character who's seeing the facial expression and the empathetic imagination of the reader. You don't have either of those in a graphic medium and you're limited both by space and the skill of the artist, which is why most comic-book characters have, at most, two or three standard facial expressions. Hoang's very good at expressions, but it's not common in this sort of novel.

Upsides? Color—literal color—and compactness, I suppose. Since you are telling the story in a series of snapshots, you can obviate a lot of the prose that you need to make a narrative flow gracefully.

**BW:** *Are there any downsides or limitations working in the graphic novel form?*

**DG:** Well, space is the main one. You can tell a story with a reasonable amount of emotional complexity and depth, but you sure can't do a very convoluted plot. Likewise, you can't do a heck of a lot with symbolism (not without being pretty blatant about it, at least), allusion, or metaphor. Not much scope for sheer elegance of language, save what you can do with the dialogue (which is perforce very abbreviated, since the lettering fights for space with the artwork in each panel. With rare exceptions, you don't use more than ten words per speech).

**BW:** *You have an elegant, compact prose style in your novels that crams in reams of historical information without ever slowing the pace of the storytelling. How does that translate to the graphic-novel medium?*

**DG:** Oh, it doesn't. They're completely different media—but they do both rest on the ability to tell a good story. That in itself doesn't depend on word-smithing (vide books like *The Da Vinci Code* or *The Bridges of Madison County*. They were popular because they told good stories, but the quality of the writing...oy), and many writers of beautiful prose don't tell very gripping stories. The ability to conceive a story and to condense it into images, though—that's the same, whether you're going to execute those images in terms of words or paint. ☘

*The first in a 3-part process of converting text into graphic form. This is what Diaña submits to her artist:*

2-107 Jamie is laid out in the road, surrounded by men. Claire forces her way through them.

Rupert: He's breathin'!

Claire: Well, how very helpful! Let me see!

2-108 Claire kneels beside a groggy Jamie, who's trying to raise himself on one elbow.

Jamie: I'm all right. Just a bit...dizzy.

2-109 Claire pushes a surprised Jamie flat with a hand on his chest.

Claire: You are *not* all right! Lie still!

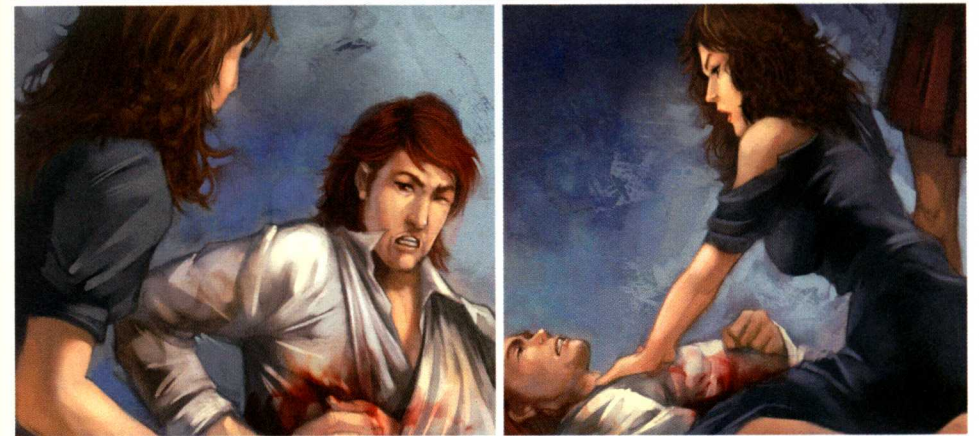
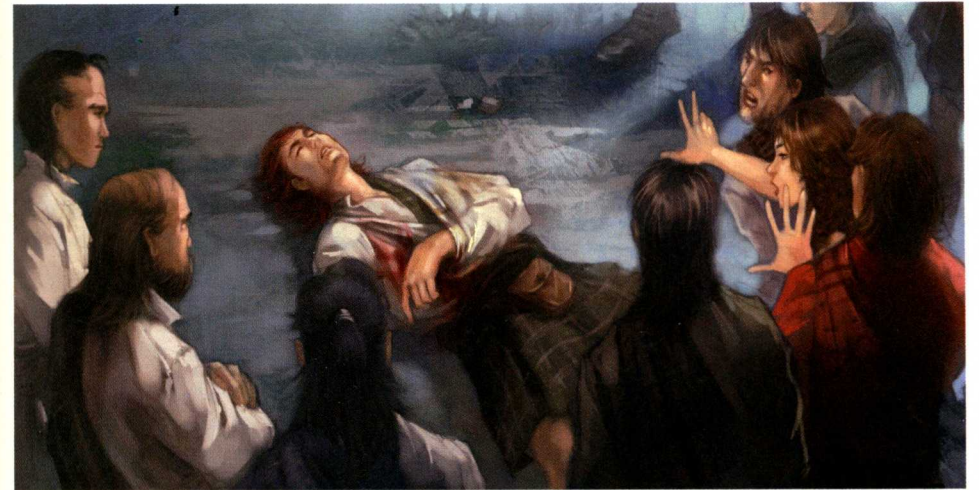
2-110 Claire straddling Jamie, feeling his shoulder. Dougal, Rupert, and Murtagh look on, Dougal impatient, Murtagh worried.

Dougal: Well, lass? How is it?

Claire: The gunshot wound's come open again, *and* the idiot's been knifed, as well!

*The artist, Hoang Nguyen, responds with a pencil workup...*

*...and finally, full color is produced.*



Richard Rizzi

## Stolen Weather

panhandler had no teeth  
became friends with the river rats  
when he spoke to them you could hear the wind on the prairie

a seahorse with nothing to do  
pretended to be a statue in a whore house  
in a conversation one night two of the ladies  
one from Kansas and the other from Arkansas  
talked about loneliness that wouldn't or couldn't go away  
without realizing they both were touching the seahorse  
who pretended to be a statue  
never asked a question  
never ate an egg  
never had a Havana cigar

## Country With No Wind

country with no wind  
burden me frozen bird  
the inhabitants only talk to survive  
nothing real or things that glow in the dark  
(stare with fixed eyes)

### part one

Aunt Rosie goat-footed leaves the shades up  
when the calculations in her mind consume her  
forsaken flash of lightning  
condense the world casual rumor  
tomorrow around the mulberry bush  
tangle me nonchalant  
leave the sweet kisses snoring in the creek

richard rizzi

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### part two

rotten savage becomes a pacifist with a briefcase  
i'm beating a soft sound on all parts of my body

### part three

round breasts are not better than fat breasts or breasts that droop  
reality is never ours  
prance and your shadow will part the river  
fancy talk is the purpose for a desert

### part four

every afternoon i empty myself  
in hundreds and hundreds of unnatural things  
tearless insect with a big belly twitching on the back porch  
only because i am there emptying myself

### part five

the highest ideal cartoon struggling out the womb  
deep grass smell of animal sex  
lingers so does the triumph  
delivers hell hot mortality

## i fixed the skyscraper

i fixed the skyscraper  
placed it in a snuff box  
the boundaries i painted on the floor  
falsifying that they lead to the wild west  
the mob howling BRAKE HIS SMILE  
with a runaway fish that look like Paul Bunyan in drag  
someone by mistake cooked and ate the fish  
the grasshopper hid in a cube of sugar  
i finished gluing my fingers to a visiting slave ship  
the mob howling BRAKE HIS NOSE  
i emptied the world into a locomotive  
it got peculiar when the head of god popped up with the hat of a king

i repeated everything i ever saw a thousand times  
 i wasted no time to change my coat and hat  
 i went to the dining room and sat blowing out the candles  
 the mob howling BRAKE HIS ANKLES  
 daylight after daylight i sat at the dining room table  
 blowing out the candles that never relit  
 realizing night never arrived  
 i painted a cathedral on my forehead  
 it bled into my eyebrows  
 the mob howling BRAKE HIS ARMS  
 to understand my need to interlock  
 i painted a cave on my chest  
 i telephoned for a coffin for a midget  
 a coffin for a saint  
 a coffin for god  
 a coffin for the swedish hooker  
 the mob howling BRAKE HIS TESTICLES  
 i painted a mountain in the middle of the slums  
 moving my tongue up and down the doorway  
 arrangements were made behind my back  
 to burn the building down with me in it  
 i changed to rags climbed to the windowsill  
 shifted my voice into an automatic weapon  
 the mob howling BRAKE HIS LEGS

i painted wings on my shoulders  
 desperate eyes on my toes  
 i returned to the dining room table  
 the candles were lit  
 i blew them out  
 the crowd howling BRAKE HIS HEART  
 i painted a body fading inside the silk napkin  
 moved the silverware back to the draw against the wall  
 broke the plate recklessly  
 i painted a sea that could fit in my hands  
 the crowd howling BRAKE HIS SPIRIT  
 i telephoned the pawnshop for a diamond ring to put on my thumb

night never arrived  
 the crowd howling BRAKE HIS MIND



Carl Jenkinson

## La Fournaise

When he woke with the wind rattling the walls of the cabin Rémy knew that he would not be going to school. In truth he rarely went anymore. Madame Frossart had given up scolding him when he strolled into her classroom well after roll had been called. *Better late than never*, she would say as she eyed him into his seat in the back row. She tolerated his lateness because he was bright and because he lived with his grandmother. She saw it as her charitable contribution.

Today, Rémy wasn't going to visit Madame Frossart or swing back and forth on his chair. He wasn't going to have to listen as she told the children for the umpteenth time how grateful they all should be to have been colonized by Napoleon and his legions. *Imagine*, she would say. *We could have had English masters*. Where would we be now? *Just think about that*. And she would answer her own question, as the class, already bored by the history of their island, laughed at her rapture.

Rémy hopped out of his cot, pulled on his favorite swimming shorts and tiptoed into the kitchen, hoping to avoid his grandmother's questions. He was surprised to find the room empty, and smiled only when he remembered that it was Wednesday. She would already be at the market looking for the freshest fish, the sweetest tomatoes and the hottest green peppers. He could almost smell her karai and feel the burn of the spices on his tongue.

It was November, the near edge of the monsoon season, and the humid-

ity was oppressive even at eight in the morning. The waves at *La Fournaise* would double in size, amplified by the same onshore winds that would later bring weeks of bad weather, perhaps a tropical storm; if they were really unlucky, the wet season would bring them a typhoon named Anna or Agathe or Alice or whatever name the weathermen chose. Rémy shuddered at the thought: just last summer, his twelfth, he had lived through one such event and he did not relish a repeat. The winds had blown for a full week and after three days they had no water left, which meant their reserve of rice was useless. Rémy and his grandmother had survived on sardines and the juice from cans of peeled tomatoes.

Rémy stepped outside. The heat was already a solid mass. He brushed his fingers across his fiberglass surfboard and pulled his hand back sharply. The board was searing. He grabbed a t-shirt from his grandmother's clothesline. After covering the board, he slipped it under his arm and set off to meet his friend, Ludovic. Ludo for short.

"What do you mean, you're going to school?" Rémy raised his free arm in the direction of the sky. It was a flawless blue and what few clouds there were held no menace of rain and would not do so before mid-afternoon. "But, Ludo," he said. "It's perfect, everything's perfect. And old Frossart will still be there tomorrow. Come on, let's go."

Ludo looked over his shoulder, sensing his mother might be listening. She didn't like him hanging around with Rémy. Recently she had been talking about sending him to a private school. Ludo knew that was out of the question—his mother could barely afford the uniform for the local *lycée*. Ludo had lost count of the times she said that his friend was trouble. He was beginning to think she might be right and he had stopped skipping class. In three short weeks his grades had improved by one full letter and he hadn't once been kept after school for detention.

"Rémy, I can't. I promised I wouldn't skip again."

"Ludo, they'll be twelve feet at least. Imagine. Twelve feet."

"Rémy, I can't. Exams are coming and—"

"Ludovic." A high-pitched voice came from inside the house. "Ludovic, it's time you left for school. You'll be late. You don't want to get into trouble."

Ludo's mother materialized in the doorway and stood behind her son, and they both looked down at Rémy who, as ever, was unnerved that Madame Monbard's expression gave nothing away. She always looked at

him with dark stolid eyes that reminded him of the solidified lava in the mountains, eyes that were entirely unlike his grandmother's. When his grandmother was angry he knew it for sure—she would stand in the same spot and boil, hissing her reproach, bubbling over like a too-full pot on a stove. When she was happy she would get teary-eyed and follow him around, hugging him and pressing her coarse damp cheek against his for no reason except that he was there, with her. Rémy decided that it was probably something old people did, and accepted the intimacy without complaint, although he was still not sure which extreme he preferred. Affection unnerved him.

"Hello, Madamé Monbard. How are you?"

Ludo's mother didn't return the greeting. She took one look at Rémy—he had seen shrewd enough to lay his board out of sight on the edge of the Monbard's cane field—and spun her son round to face her. "Straight to school, you hear?"

Ludo nodded. To ensure obedience she stepped past the two boys, walked round to the side of the house, picked up Ludo's surfboard, which was leaning upright against the wall, and took it back inside the house without another word.

Rémy glanced at Ludo as if to ask him, *Are you going to let her do that?* And despite himself, Ludo felt the pull of rebellion. He stuck his head back inside the doorway, picked up his school bag, and shouted:

"Bye, *maman*. I'll see you tonight."

Together, the two boys walked out of the dirt yard and turned left onto the empty road.

Rémy said, "Jesus Christ, Ludo, your mum's tough."

Ludo let go a nervous smile. "It's just that she wants me to do well, you know."

A flush of jealousy pulled at Rémy. There was more than a hint of a taunt in his voice when he spoke. He said, "So you're for Frossart? Over *La Fournaise*?"

"Rémy, I can't. My *maman*. She'll—"

"She'll what? What can she do? What can anyone do? Put you in detention?" Rémy forced contempt into his voice. "Big deal." Ludo's presence suddenly took on a greater importance. If his friend did not come it would take the luster off the day. "Besides," he said, "she'll never figure it out. She'll think you went to school. As long as you get back at the normal time you'll be fine. She's got your board, remember? What does she think you

are going to surf on? A plank? Not to mention that Frossart never takes attendance. She's just glad someone turns up to listen to her prattle on."

Ludo hesitated. "Well, what am I going to surf on?"

They had reached the edge of the cane field.

"That." Rémy grinned and pointed to his board, lying exactly where he had left it, nestled between two rows of full-grown sugar cane. He took out his knife and sliced off two one-foot lengths of cane, handing one to Ludo. "We can take it in turns. Me first, then you."

"What about my bag?"

Remy shrugged. "Dump it here. Collect it later."

And so it was decided. The two boys walked side by side, sucking the juice from their pieces of cane, enjoying the sweet rush that overpowered the bitter-green taste of the casing. When they came to the intersection that took them up the hill to school or down to the coast, and without another word, they both turned right and headed down towards the Indian Ocean. They said little as they walked, letting their imaginations take up the space conversation would normally fill, every now and then exchanging the surfboard or cutting a fresh piece of cane from fields that were swaying in the rising wind, full grown and ripe for harvest.

It took them just over an hour to walk to *La Fournaise* nestled over on the east side of the island. They emerged from the fields and found themselves on one side of the low horseshoe-shaped cliff that encircled the beach. It was a relatively new beach, formed when Mafate, the island's last active volcano, had erupted a decade or so ago. The lava flow had forked at the sea and left a slither of white sand marooned between two giant fingers of magma, magma that turned to the blackest volcanic rock as it met saltwater.

There was no one on the beach, no one in the water.

"Look at that," Ludo yelled.

The ocean was a dark, angry blue.

Rémy said nothing. He was looking at the giant waves pitching headlong into the sides of the funnel-like inlet and turn on themselves before crashing to the shore.

"No way." Ludo looked across at his friend. "It's too rough. Look at it."

They both stood and stared. For several long seconds, neither boy spoke. Rémy flinched inside as wave after wave crashed loudly onto the shore. These were not the biggest waves he had seen—not by a long way—but they were easily the biggest he had tried to surf. Still, he could not bring himself

to admit that the swell was unsafe. He might as well admit that his friend was right, that they should both be in school with Frossart. "The higher the surf, the more water there is," Rémy said, trying not to let his voice give him away. "Which means the less chance there is of hitting the coral." He dug his elbow gently into his friend's bony rib cage and grinned. "It's a cinch."

Ludo was not persuaded. "Come on Rémy. Let's go. We can walk further down to St. Pierre. It's safer." The beach at St. Pierre was for tourists. It had smaller waves and was always jammed, even at this time of year.

The thought of a swarm of blond-haired teenagers who couldn't get upright made Rémy cringe. "I'm serious, Ludo. The worst that can happen is that you get rolled."

"You're crazy, Rémy."

Rémy warmed to the hint of fear in his friend's voice. He told him again that they would be fine, almost convincing himself. "Listen, I'll go first. No problem. You'll see." Before Ludo could protest again Rémy had begun the descent.

The two boys picked their way over the rocks and down to the beach, their bare feet scalding on the fiery black sand with each hesitant step. Ankle deep in water, Rémy and Ludo watched sets of waves curl into the cove. They were huge, sweeping in smoothly and breaking close in with a thunderous crash. The seventh wave, the final and biggest of the set, rolled in. Rémy had never heard a train, but he imagined that was how one sounded: overwhelming and powerful, so loud it turned your stomach inside out. They both stepped back slightly as the foam rushed at them; at least a foot higher than before, it reached their thighs. The seventh wave—that was the one they wanted.

"Look at that," said Rémy, excited now. "It's perfect. And they're clearing the coral." He pointed to the left and as the water drew back into the ocean an expanse of white reef rose into view, like a vast and murderous lure.

"There's no way, Rémy. You'll get torn to shreds."

"Ludo, give it a rest will you? If you get too close all you have to do is go belly down and let the board take it. The tide will do the rest."

They had surfed here in bad weather before. When it got too rough they would pancake onto the board to stabilize it, then let it float inward like a giant piece of driftwood, its underside serving as armor against the coral's incisors.

"Rémy, the tide will suck you in. Look."

But had made up his mind. He was already gone. He splashed out to the right and stood waist deep in the water until the seventh breaker fizzed past him, then flung his torso onto the fiberglass as the wave retreated and paddled hard to beat the next set of waves, his hands slicing into the surf and displacing the water efficiently, just as his father had taught him. Beyond the breakers and out of breath, Rémy floated on his belly in the swell until he had regained some strength. He angled his hand against his head to shield his eyes from the sun, which was beating down stronger than ever. It was oddly quiet away from the beach. He could still hear the waves crashing against the rocks and running up the steep angle of the beach, but the sound was distant, as if it was elsewhere, like a séga playing loud on a radio in another room: It was there, and you could hear it. But at the same time it was not.

Rémy splashed a handful of warm seawater on his face and neck and brought himself back to the swell. Breathing easier now, he aimed the board towards the shore, staying as far right as he dared, knowing that the waves would carry him straight for the rocks if he started out too square. He counted as the waves passed under him: three, four, five, each one raising him up higher than the one before, then dropping him, the nose of the board dipping underwater as the waves swept unerringly towards Ludo. He seemed small, dwarfed both by distance and the enormity of the water. Rémy could make out his friend's jet hair—his curls had disappeared. Ludo's mouth was shut and his arms hung down at his sides. He almost looked as if he were standing to attention.

Rémy held on tight to the front of the board as the sixth wave moved past then he began to paddle, glancing over his shoulder with every fourth beat to see how close the seventh and final wave was. The riskiest to catch, it would be the safest at the end. The last thing he wanted was to be battered from behind at the end of a good run. Rémy leapt to his feet just as the mass of water began to suck him back. This was the critical point, the point where he could be rolled back into the wave or be carried all the way back. The board quickly gathered speed and, with his front foot pointed straight ahead and his back foot planted at right angles towards the rear of the board, Rémy rode into shore, his arms angled down at the water in an inverted V, the spent wave carrying him over and past the reef and depositing him within a few feet of Ludo.

Rémy lifted the board and carried it over to his friend. "See. Nothing to it." He flung himself onto his back in the shallows, his legs and arms splayed in a jubilant cross. The tide washed over him as he lay there, his ribs heaving as he fought to catch his breath and quell his laughter. Rémy pulled himself onto one elbow and grinned at his friend.

Ludo said nothing.

"Your turn." Rémy could not keep the triumph from his voice. He sensed his friend was scared.

"It looks like it's going to rain," Ludo said. "What about sharks?"

Rémy laughed. "Look, there's one now." He said and pointed at a rock jutting out of the water. "See?"

Like most islanders, Ludo knew the rhythms of the Ocean. He knew that sharks hunted at dawn and dusk, and that they also attacked when it rained.

"Come on, Ludo. We've got hours before it rains." Rémy looked up at the sky as if to make his point. The clouds were gaining weight, but there was ample blue still to be seen. On *La Réunion* it rarely rained until the sky was clouded gray and bearing down on the earth like a giant press. He said, "I'll go again if you don't want to."

Ludo knew his bluff had been called. He pulled his t-shirt over his head and tossed it onto the sand, then bent over to pick up the board and tramped slowly into the water.

Ludo did exactly what Rémy had done minutes before. He waited patiently, counting first one set of waves and then a second, making sure he didn't lunge out before all seven had come to shore. After the last wave had flattened out he dropped onto the board and began to paddle hard, straight out to sea, aiming past the point where the waves were breaking. Dipping in and out of sight he looked to Rémy like a needle threading through the water. Ludo pulled with just his right hand to turn the board shoreward. His left arm was out in front of him, his grip on the prow of the board unbreakable.

Rémy counted the waves as he watched. Each one lifted his friend briefly to its highest point, and then dropped him quickly out of sight like a discarded twig. Only an hour had passed but Rémy noticed that there was less clean water than there had been when he first swam out and that the waves were breaking further from shore. He watched the fifth wave in the set rip against the face of the inlet and explode, its force dwindling just yards in front of him. Rémy cupped his hands over his eyes and squinted against the sun, the arc of his fingers breaking the crust of salt that had started to burn his face.

Ludo disappeared behind the sixth wave. When he came back into view he was stooped up on the board, crouching forward to maintain his momentum, as if pushing up against a typhoon. Rémy's friend was perfectly positioned and raced hard to beat the curl, bending at the knees to stop himself from toppling, cutting back and forth on the board. Running too far ahead of the curl might force him over the back of the wave, or, alternatively, it might wipe him out if he slowed too much and the crest overran him. Rémy watched in awe as Ludo's wave grew. It was so powerful that it had sucked up much of the water in front of it. Rémy noted with a flicker of disquiet the white clumps of coral appearing at its base as the giant mound of water powered towards him. If Ludo were to fall he would be sucked into the wave and rolled along the ocean floor. He would be torn to shreds.

Scared, Rémy pointed out to sea with both hands, their signal to pull over the back of the wave and abort the ride. Paddling to shore at *La Fournaise* was not without its risks, but this last wave was a monster. It was picking up speed as it came into shallow water. Rémy realized that his friend had never really been in control. Ludo looked like a puppet on a string, uncoordinated arms flailing, his mouth wide open in alarm and consternation: just out of reach of the curdling water the nose of the board weaved uncontrollably each time Ludo shifted his weight. More than once he touched down with his palms, a sure sign that a fall was imminent, but somehow he managed to stay upright and keep the board headed towards the beach and away from the cliffs.

Just as Rémy began to breathe easily, it happened.

With the wave disintegrating into a wall of foam eight feet tall, and within fifty yards of shore, Ludo overbalanced one last time, tipping into the water like a gymnast off a beam. Half-rolling so that his side hit first, both he and the board disappeared.

Seconds passed. Rémy imagined his friend's body pressed into the sand, the keen slivers of coral seeking his skin, cutting him again and again. Ludo would not feel the cuts underwater, not unless they sliced deep or hit bone. Beneath the surface most would feel like pinpricks, small splinter-like jabs. The warmth of the water and the pounding he would take in the undertow would fool his body's senses. The only clue he was hurt would be a change in the water itself, smears of black clouding the translucence as he spun, perhaps weakening if he was under long enough or lost enough blood. If he made it to air he would know that the black was really red.

Gasping, his mouth a cavern that consumed his face, Ludo surfaced twenty yards nearer than where he went under. Rémy looked for any sign that his friend was hurt but by some miracle there were no cuts. Nothing. He realized that Rémy had come up to the left of the coral and that he had likely been dragged sideways away from the worst of the danger. He watched his friend bob up and down, letting the tide carry him up to the beach, his body steeling each time a breaker slammed into his back to thrust him forward several more yards.

Once out of the ocean, Ludo collapsed on his stomach, panting and coughing up mouthfuls of saltwater until at last he could breathe without retching. He rolled over and sat up, his arms hanging down between his legs. Rémy saw that he had sand on his face and that his body was covered in tiny scratches that were beginning to seep blood.

"Look." Ludo raised his hand with some effort.

Far off to the right the back half of the board had washed up and caught on the coral. It was upside down, the two stabilizer fins jutting into the air like outsized thorns.

Rémy felt a flood of resentment course through him, the same feeling he had suppressed earlier that morning when Ludo had shied away from accompanying him. "Ludo, you idiot," he said. "Look what you did."

"Rémy, I'm sorry, I'm—"

Rémy kicked at the sand and it scattered in the wind, flying back over Ludo and up into his own face. He squinted and turned his head to one side. "Shut up, Ludo. Just shut up."

"Rémy..."

But Rémy was already wading out into the water to retrieve what he could of his board. A series of fine pink threads trailed behind Rémy as he splashed out of the shallows and back towards Ludo, the rear half of his board wedged under his armpit. Rémy had cut his feet open on the coral. His left hand also had a one-inch gash where he had slipped and caught himself.

"I saw you fall. Are you all right?"

Rémy was not in the least interested. "Come on, let's go," he said. "You'd better come back to my grandmother's so we can fix you up. We don't want your mother finding out you skipped school, do we?"

Rémy offered his good hand, and reluctantly, Ludo took it, wincing when Rémy jerked him to his feet. The two boys set off, Rémy out in front, deter-

mined not to let his wounds hamper him, and Ludo, dragging along behind, his limbs unresponsive as he struggled to scale a cliff he would normally dispatch with ease.

Their journey home was slow, marked by a new and different kind of silence. A pattern quickly developed as they walked. Rémy, far out in front, the board balanced on his head for shade, would stop and glare at his companion, who, looking only at the uneven ground at his feet, maintained an even but unhurried pace. While Ludo made up the ground Rémy would lay down the board, cut a piece of cane and chew on it. When Ludo drew near Rémy would gather up his property and set off again as fast as he could.

Rémy finally let Ludo catch up at the crossroads where they had first turned down towards *La Fournaise* instead of going up to school. "You can go straight on up if you like. Frossart probably misses you."

"Too late," Ludo mumbled, refusing to look at his friend as he walked past.

"It's never too late," said Rémy, hurrying after him, concerned now that Ludo would go straight home and reveal everything to his mother. "Anyway, my grandmother's cooking her karai. She was at the market when I left." Rémy realized that he was famished and he was sure Ludo must be too. "There'll be enough for the three of us."

Ludo kept walking. Rémy guessed it was around one o'clock but couldn't be sure, as the sun was no longer visible behind the thick curtain of clouds. He had not eaten since the night before and cursed himself for being in such a hurry at breakfast. Enough to quell his short-term hunger, the cane had no substance and had left him with an upset stomach. If the two boys had been in school they would have eaten already and would be closeted back in classroom for the afternoon, listening to Frossart drone on about this or that. Instead they had spent the morning without food and were on the point of getting caught in a storm.

The wind had subsided and the cane was now still. The entire island seemed to be held in suspension, waiting for the heavens to burst. Ludo struggled to keep up with Rémy as the boys picked up the pace, hurrying to beat the weather. When the first drops finally broke against their skin, their destination was still a half hour's walk away.

Rémy glanced up. "Let's head back to that cutter's hut," he said. "We can wait there until it over."

Ignoring Ludo's protests Rémy turned on his heels and told his friend to

come on before they got soaked. "It'll be over before you know it," he said, marching off.

Standing at the open entrance to the shelter the two boys watched the onset of the storm. In seconds, Mafate's slopes were masked by an opaque curtain of rain drawn against the horizon. The cane fields on either side of them were no longer laid out in rows, but became, instead, a shapeless blur. Sodden red dirt replaced the dusty path they had followed that morning.

"I don't see why we don't just go to your grandmother's," said Ludo, renewing his protest.

"Nothing's stopping you," said Rémy, picking his way past an assortment of old cans and empty rum bottles, to lie down on one of the wooden benches used by field workers for siestas.

Ludo looked away from the rain and down at his friend. "You know I can't go to your grandmother's without you," he said. "And if I go home my *maman* will skin me alive."

"If I go home to *mémère* without my board, she will skin me alive."

Ludo glanced at the half that remained, its jagged ends contrasting the smooth cut of the doorframe. "I'm sorry." His voice was barely audible above the tumult of water whipping against the cane.

"Don't be," Rémy countered, staring at the cobwebbed ceiling.

"You can always get another one," Ludo offered. "And you can use mine," he added. "On weekends."

"That was my father's board." Rémy's voice was quiet, holding something in abeyance, just as the island had before the skies broke open. "He gave it to me," said Rémy, repeating a lie he had told a thousand times, a lie that had become his truth. Rémy had found the board. He had spotted it near Étang Salé while he was fishing with his father and they had pulled it onto the boat, setting it alongside their haul of yellowfin tuna. That day, Rémy's mother met them at the wharf and all three of them cooked the biggest of the catch right there on the beach, heedless of waste and using driftwood for the fire, eating and drinking until dawn.

Soon after, at the end of the same season, his father drowned. The *Journal de l'Île* reported that the Josianne had been holed off the coast as a tropical storm swept in from the north. Rémy's father had radioed for help, but the swell was massive, the paper said, and his boat went down too fast. His body was never found.

"So why don't you ask your mother?" asked Ludo, puzzled.

"Because," said Rémy, his anger rising inexorably to the surface like oil in water. He could feel a blackness sweep over him.

"But she has money, right? She lives in Métropole with the *zoreils*. They all have money."

"She doesn't live with the *zoreils*. She works there, that's all." Rémy sat upright and looked stiffly at his companion. "She'll be back," he said. "When she's saved enough."

"My *maman* says people never come back. She says there are ten times more jobs in Métropole. She says that's where I should go, to find a job."

Rémy pulled on his t-shirt. It was one his grandmother had bought him at the market and normally he was too embarrassed to wear it. It was the kind that tourists wore, *La Réunion* embossed in silver across the front. "Well, my *maman's* going to come back," he said, his voice filling the room above the sound of the rain. "And I'm staying here, on the island."

"To do what?" asked Ludo.

"Fish," said Rémy, defiantly. "I'm going to buy a tuna boat or take tourists out looking for shark." He had grown accustomed to hearing through his grandmother what his mother wanted for him. He could hear his grandmother telling him that the only way to do well was to get a diploma and to do well in school. *You don't want to spend your life fishing or harvesting cane*, she would say. *That's no kind of life*. "What's wrong with that?" he asked.

Ludo shrugged and returned to the door of the hut. The rain showed no signs of subsiding.

Rémy rose uncomfortably to his feet, his muscles stiffening. "I need to go," he said, no longer concerned that he would be found out. Without waiting for his friend, Rémy stepped out into the rain and with the remains of his surfboard under his arm and his t-shirt clinging to his skin, he walked slowly home, his feet sinking deeper and deeper into the red dirt with every step. In sight of his grandmother's shack the rain stopped as suddenly as it had begun. The sky turned a shade lighter, the clouds pulled off the ground and the sun re-emerged, its indolent fingers resting on the swathe of cane, as if they had nowhere else to go, nothing else to warm; nothing else to grow.

Purshia Adams

### Dead End (Nutshell)

Final summer warmth and rushweek huzzahs  
drift in with the cool crossbreeze.

Golden lotus elms, contortions concealed,  
deceive and divert note of  
blue insect crowds that cloud mouths and noses—  
until first frost anyway.

Beside the granary—vacant—fell a  
sparrow—window hit—shrouded  
in fogs—extended wooly distortions—  
and daylight halts: four o' clock  
when ice crusts—day soft and frozen jagged—  
menace: under indigo.

Despite snowbanks, a snowdrop arises  
beneath the blue spruce, before  
weak new wheat filaments warm rolling hills,  
shallows boggy with mud sheen,  
and vacant afternoon furloughs flourish  
as bees tend azalea blooms.

Alarms sound—pre-dawn chorus (not even  
four?)—empty heaves and—panic.

Caitlin R. Dwyer

### The Switch

*for Leon*

Boston, you admit later,  
where it's almost the season  
for cherry trees, and a few months out,  
the old heat of the colonial brick.

Because the shortest distance  
between this world and the next  
is flight, the skirting of grids,  
exigence of memory,  
you refused to commit  
until the name filled your mouth  
with its inevitable fire.

You say it will be different:  
Terra Incognita. I say any city,  
to colonize the night  
with tar and pitch, and later,  
electric pulse, builds  
the walls of its history high,  
dam against the dark.

Back when Boston was the edge of the map,  
last named point on the precipice  
of vast namelessness,  
we could measure its parts:  
count how many torches  
in the windows at dusk,  
the depth of the wells, how many horses.  
Now it is an edifice, immeasurable.

We almost called this city

Boston, the word thrumming its repetition  
on the backs of our teeth, a Pacific mirage;  
our streets almost haunted,  
our daily bustle déjà vu.<sup>1</sup> Their sun  
rises three hours before ours, their electric  
streetlights timed to spark while we are  
still floundering in sunlight.

Chance that we're our own grid,  
that the lights from our windows fly  
not toward our earlier voices but out  
into the dark of the ocean breakers.  
Chance that the babble of names  
over the wires is uncracked code,  
the binary maze of each particular heart.

This town is circling back on itself.  
It's February, clouds bow their heads  
and tumble back to earth;  
we haven't met anyone new since Labor Day.  
We go to the movies just to feel  
the silver glow on our faces,  
light as if from some distant nova  
only just arrived. Thirsty for the shock  
of strangeness, for the unknowable spectrum,  
dressed in the black of our nights,  
which absorbs everything, even loneliness.

From satellites we can see ourselves, beacons  
flaring along the margins of the coasts,  
pockets of smeared glare surrounded  
by silent, unlit prairies.

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<sup>1</sup> According to legend, Portland, Oregon was named by two early settlers. Francis Pettygrove, from Portland, Maine, and Asa Lovejoy, from Boston, Massachusetts, both wanted to name the city after their East Coast hometowns. They settled the dispute with a coin toss.

Miles and miles of darkness  
between oceans, between telephone towers;  
here and there, the faint sparkle  
of a ranger outpost outside Reno.

And between the darkness, webs of darkness  
knotting and untying their unmarked migrations,  
while the river pulses out away,  
and drowns itself in the endlessness of bridges.  
Love is either here or there,  
but never both. The itinerant heart longs  
for specificity.

You've tired of the perfume of firs in August,  
the lewd neon on the corner arcade, the ways the birds  
trace their names against an iron sky,  
rising in their great urgency  
and plummeting back to a single wire.

A change of scenery, you tell me, but we both know  
you think She will be there,  
with her blond or dark or auburn hair,  
her lips with their trace of wine.  
We are always wandering out of ourselves,  
you and I, in search of something  
to resemble ourselves.  
The crows scream a thousand names  
that could be ours.

You've almost discovered the cartography  
of a circuit breaker:  
end of the lines, trolley screeching  
and slamming itself against the tracks.  
You tell me Boston has a subway,  
underground lines leading nowhere,  
great tunnels filled with the pulse  
of electricity, sending people  
out and toward and back.

Maybe you'll brush against her in the station:  
skin lit with the exodus of nerves,  
body collapsing into a singular  
broken sensation, volt  
that leaps the synaptic void—

Maybe this is the end of our nights.  
We throw all the switches—  
the city gleams  
in the whitest fire,  
the city gleams in perfect overload;  
the city just before it blacks out  
is full-throat singing.

### Drifts

I miss you like a dream I've forgotten

On waking, already the soft faded edges, the furrowed brow, the peering  
back

Morning carves away  
the soft wax of memory  
leaving me with an animal nostalgia—  
the way a leaf falls

Have I misplaced something essential  
come home to find my childhood room empty?  
I'm not sure why, but I woke too soon—

there was a glimpse, a hand, a name

Elizabeth Tarver

### Tickle Tongue

When the child is bored she takes her on walks in the woods. Today they pick wild violets in the pine straw. She has brought damp paper towels and shows the girl how to wrap the stems so the violets don't wilt. She points to the pistil in the center of a flower. *Looks like a queen, don't it? A queen with a crown, sitting on her throne.* The girl nods, then clutches the violets to her chest and the damp from the paper towels spreads to her shirt, the pale purple fabric turning violet. *You match your flowers,* she remarks. The girl is worried her mother will scold her. *Just a spot of damp,* she says, *don't cry.*

The mother is too hard on the girl, she thinks, never wanting her to get dirty. She would like to think of the girl as her grandchild, but she looks like her mother's people. All of them, none of me, she thinks. None of Willard. She wonders where Willard is. He was all of her, looked for the world like her, but unreliable and lazy, and in that way none of her and all of his father. He left the girl's mother with nothing, not a can of peas in the pantry. She took them in. The girl's mother says she raised Willard wrong. Maybe she did. She'd had to work. She hadn't had time to raise him. She too had a husband who'd run off. She tries to make the girl's mother understand. She tries to help. She watches the girl while the mother works. But she can't get over how the girl doesn't seem her flesh. The girl is weak and pale. Barely there. She rarely speaks. Her hair is blonde, the strands as translucent and colorless as spider web.

They cross the creek at Sugar Branch where the sand is white. Papa built a footbridge there and it still stands. Whenever she sees it, she is relieved because one day it will fall into the creek and exist no more. She tells the girl to be careful. There are missing sections where they must step long. *This is where I played when I was your age*, she tells the girl. *I had seven brothers and sisters*, she says and the girl raises her eyebrows. The girl says seven is too many. *Oh no*, she says, *we had us a time out here*. She remembers her oldest brother Cecil jumping from behind a virgin pine and scaring her. All eight of them could hide behind the tree, it was so big. "Lena, Lena, the laughing hyena," he would taunt her. She could hear him now, faintly, just barely catching the sound of his voice in the back of her memory. She could see him tanned from working the fields, his nose too big for his face at that age. They called him Nose and he'd punch them. He died of influenza at Camp Beauregard. He'd wanted to fight the Kaiser's Army. That was 1918. She was nine-years-old. Papa got in his wagon and rode with her brother Leeward to retrieve the body. They tied handkerchiefs around their faces trying not to get sick too. Leeward died a month later and then Nora and Maggie. Mama was sick with it but didn't die.

The virgin pines disappeared a short time later when the loggers cut them down and hauled them away to build rich men's houses in faraway places. It was another blow. Like the loss of family. You looked around one day and they were gone. It was 1974 now and all the pines were young. Newcomers.

Papa was never the same after the dear ones died. "What would the dear ones think of this?" he asked her when he built the footbridge. She didn't know what to say. She didn't have to say anything because he answered himself. "They would have thought it fine," he said. He began to talk for them and think for them. "Maggie wouldn't care for that cake, Mother. Too sweet." And "Leeward wouldn't like your hair like that, Lena. You ought not crop it so short." And "Cecil would be proud of you today, sister. A vision in white, he'd say. But he wouldn't care none for that man you're marrying."

She and the girl walk up the hill, out of the creek bottom and into the clearing where the old home place once stood, all gone now but the chimney, which leans hard and insistent toward the ground. The air is hazy with insect wings and pollen. The sunlight blinds them. The girl rubs her eyes with the back of her hand and the violets tickle her forehead. She drops her bouquet to the ground and stomps it. *Why'd you do that?* The girl says they aren't no

good anyway, dumb flowers.

Papa took to the prickly ash after the dear ones died. Toothache tree, they sometimes called it. Or tickle tongue tree. Papa said the dear ones left a sick spot in him and the tickle tongue tree was all he could find to ease the sick. The Indians had used it for medicine so he knew it worked. It numbed your mouth and it numbed your aches and the hurt in your heart. Mama said it wasn't true. There was no remedy for grief.

*That there's a tickle tongue tree.* The girl frowns but follows her to the tree anyway. *All my family gone and this tree's still here. This tree and that bridge over yonder, they haven't left me yet.* The girl says trees and bridges aren't people. They don't grow legs and walk off like people. *That's true*, she says, *but this old tree was a good friend to my papa. He used to come over here and slice off a piece with his knife.* The girl asks why. *To rub in his mouth.* She pretends to rub her gums with an imaginary shard of tickle tongue. The girl doesn't understand so she opens the pocketknife on her key-chain and takes a thin slice from the closest limb. *Put it in your mouth.* The girl grins and says the tickle tongue makes her mouth feel like laughing. She smiles back at the girl who returns her gaze and catches her by the hand. She notices the girl's nose. Something like Cecil's, bless her heart. She hopes it doesn't grow too big. And the girl's eyes, yellow-green like Nora's. She had forgotten Nora's eyes. She is sorry she hadn't noticed it before. She pulls the girl close, pats her head, feels the fineness of her hair.

The girl touches the tree, examines its bumpy twisted trunk. It looks like a big lizard, the girl says, like it has scales. It must turn into a giant lizard at night. *Good Lord, I hope not.* It is a friendly lizard, the girl says, patting the trunk. They turn and walk back toward the creek. The girl sees another patch of violets and runs ahead. *One of us*, she says. ❀

Stephen Malin

## High Jump

— or, you ought to hear my cousin Dunstan on elevator crash safety

Under each of them  
between the size 222 non-shoe  
of the kangaroo  
and Dunstan's own more petite feet  
remains a world that though firmly  
sandwiched by those four soles  
nonetheless lies insecure and  
fraught with bubbling lava  
smoke and smolder spurt and spout  
twitching fiercely through  
countless million dyspeptic years  
in empathy with which  
each morning and night  
Dunstan takes to the air  
in a for-him great leap  
so as to reduce for a moment  
a little of the crusty pressure  
on our plagued planet  
but his dream one day  
is to co-ordinate his elevation  
with the antipodal marsupial underfoot  
whose boundings are said prodigious  
and even half-true when averaged  
would more than double Dunstan's hang time.  
You can question his physics  
but not his intentions.



Stephen Malin

## Afterplay

Shading back to find  
 the where of you  
 as I thought it had been  
 or might become  
 but these  
 the past and the possible  
 fled faded or merged  
 into a third and entirely  
 other  
 still and prone  
 to eloquence in curving shades  
 of intermelting planes  
 hills and moonfilled hollows  
 these heights and roundings  
 mute in reborn mystery  
 a fluent pouring of new presence  
 made distant now in chiaroscuro's  
 spell of levitation  
 hush  
 and the ivory afterlight of old poems

J.J. Blickstein

## Waiting

I mispronounce everything with authority. Radio comforts with the punctuated talk of California fires burning down the dry hills, flames moving horizontal as if led by their own gravity; the war, the other war, its financiers, the casualties, doubt. It's almost soothing, this campaign against evolution, imagination, change; a catalog of errors with its own religion. This anger toward life that we are born into—this jealousy of the intangible that animates us—the need to damage the donor for its generosity and the gift itself as if its water were not enough. There are names we are forbidden to pronounce, to produce, that would shred a mouth, that bring us to the awful sleep, to dream, to fire, when we abandon them. I cut my hair from time to time to ignore them all. The red leaves fall as if embers from an enormous fire, dictates my age and what must be forgotten; a climate in me deepens, a perfect red. It's no longer restlessness that scars but stillness.

Crows and turkeys litter the woods with asymmetry, their sounds cut across my skin with thick black ink as if I were a crude map, or a vice; coyotes paw the wet road. My son is small in his bed, screams out the names of colors that disturb his night: first green, then blue. I imagine a small red cloud falling out of his mouth. His body is a trigger. He sleeps for me. I build things in myself from ash where the wind is terribly strong—faces, vacant towns—nothing pleads to speak. She is bleeding in her sleep, her scent: blood and cinnamon, elderberry, lavender, earth—warm on me as the moon and its math crawls up my feet, blunt like a spoon, across the solar system of the bloated orange fruit of the miniature Panamanian tree in the other room, where I bend time when alone, where I can't hurt them, and empty myself of everything but this.

J.J. Blickstein

## La Casa Azul

*for Frida Kahlo*

Your father exhausted himself into your mother and you were born. The blue house is there and the dirt at the foot of the door from the street pregnant with headache, heartache and bone. There is nothing special about 1907, or any other year, or the bullets, or the wind. Nothing special about being born, or polio, rage, or people learning to crawl after learning to walk, or the monkeys, drunk on fermented fruit, in the trees above the raw sewage from the market spilling into the jungle.

The bus collided with the streetcar, and every bone in your body, in '25, ending the possibility of becoming anything like your mother, your sisters, a woman, or your name. You were invented, again, from meaninglessness, from collective memory where we fall down and gain enormous power by understanding, not expiration, but insignificance.

It's hot. The bed is wet. A crow's shadow across your lips makes them part and there is nothing in your mouth but thirst and a number of days in the shape of a strangled tongue. Incredulous, you open and close your eyes and find no angel, no mercy, no ghost, just your body screaming and twisted without your consent, terrified, peaceful, and committed, you becoming your own family in a village with only one season, where everyone looks just like you, and you embrace yourself because no one else can. Eventually, you hear your sister calling your name, because she does not know what to do, so you smile and she says something stupid. You say "Yes," and she dresses you like a doll and you begin.

What is there left to become when you are forced to be conscious and terribly human with pure will and no possibility or desire for the simple life?—A nation, an idea, a politic or a function as pure as lightning, a mother, a knife, a lie? Art is born from subtraction.

You listen to the water in the mirror and keep painting yourself but there is

nothing in the mirror but props, ashes and heat. It's funny, I didn't find or see anything there either, just the sad gifts of everything that put us here in the first place—stop the music, here comes the wind.





Jeff Berglund

### Luci Tapahonso's *A Radiant Curve*

In her sixth book of poetry and prose, and first full-length publication for adults in eleven years, Luci Tapahonso continues to inspire readers with what I like to call her easy-going colloquial intricacies. Tapahonso's twenty-five poems and four prose works, six of which have been published elsewhere, intimately explore the experiences of being Diné (Navajo) and the continuities that exist between the traditions of ancestors and the everyday practices that sustain and transform cultural practices and beliefs, even for those living a great distance from the traditional homeland.



In the title piece, "A Radiant Curve," Tapahonso uses the experience of her grandson's First Laugh ceremony to share with readers how the Holy People, the Diyin Dine'é, Old Salt Woman, and Changing Woman are invited into the home of young child who has recently laughed. This celebration marks the time in her grandson Isaiah's life when he first made a "consciously performed act of thinking," thus signaling the beginning of his "participation in the human family network" and his movement beyond the exclusive world of the Holy People. Readers learn that the Holy People ensure that Diné people will be good, loving, and generous parents, in order to provide firm foundations for future generations. The Holy People are invited to ceremonies and are an ever-present part of this world, returning, most visibly, at sunrise and within rainbows, their means of travel to their sacred places in the mountains. We humans, Tapahonso notes, always exist "within the radiant curve of their care and wisdom."

This essay is preceded by two untitled one-stanza poems and "The warp taut vertical loops," a poem about weaving and creating a good life each day

—“beginning anew”—in the space between “our father and the earth.” Along with the essay, “A Radiant Curve,” these four works establish the tenor of the rest of the book. Many of these themes resonate directly—as in the sestinas “Old Salt Woman” and “Dawn Boy.” But they also resonate indirectly in the story, “A Tune-Up,” and in the sestina, “The Canyon Was Serene.” This last piece, a great example of Tapahonso’s invigoration of a complex poetic form, the sestina, laments how the speaker feels that the Diné Beauty Way, hózhóqjí, is too often an abstraction rather than a way of life. She recalls a time when she was frustrated by her inability to weave as well as others, but the “long, red mesas and smooth cliffs showed me how to weave/them into a rug” and taught her to understand “that beauty can’t be forced. It comes on its own,” a point that is formalistically reiterated in the beautiful and seemingly unforced, yet structurally intricate context of a sestina. In her poems, Tapahonso suggests, hózhóqjí is anything but abstract.

Those, like myself, who have been fortunate to have heard Tapahonso read and perform her poetry in person will be delighted to learn that this book includes audio-recordings of eleven poems first published in this book, as well as four now-classic poems from earlier books, *Blue Horses Rush In* (1997) and *Sáanii Dahataal/The Women Are Singing* (1993). In numerous instances the recordings contain momentary gems where Tapahonso sings, embellishing the written word where song is only implied. A prose poem, “Far Away,” and its sung elements will be familiar to audiences who have laughed their way through other performances featuring Rita or a lost dog named Sandwich. Readers will similarly enjoy Tapahonso’s wry sense of humor in “New Boots” and “Festival of the Onion” where she recounts her experiences traveling in Umbria, Italy, when she and her travel companions “lost” Scott Momaday.

Tapahonso is at her finest in two poems, “That American Flag” and “Náneeskadí.” In the first, which commemorates the survival of the Diné following the Long Walk (1864-1868), she notes how early weavings featuring the American flag—and thus, by extension, the flag more generally—can be understood to represent the strength and resilience of Navajo people and culture. In “Náneeskadí,” the poet, on one level, introduces us to the process of making Navajo tortillas in a contemporary kitchen, where the cook considers her “inner Martha Stewart,” but on other levels, the poem reminds us of how the making of this staple connects generations, and requires patience, know-how, and a sense of proportion or rightness. The last

stanza, infused with the Diné language, meditates on the root-word, ná or na’, and its use in other phrases—“For you,” “Here, I made this for you,” and “This warm circle of dough is spread out for you”—suggesting that making tortillas is a gift of generosity bestowed on others.

Readers will recognize that Tapahonso’s generosity and good-humored warmth permeate every curve of this book filled with poems, formed like náneeskadí, with patience, know-how, and a sense of proportion and rightness.

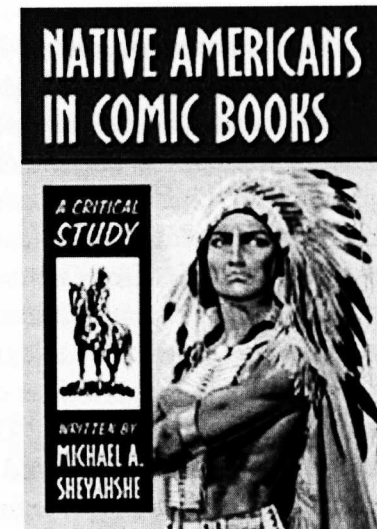
Tapahonso, Luci. *A Radiant Curve*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2008. 93 pgs. with audio cd.

Cody Roberts

### Michael Sheyahshe’s *Native Americans in Comic Books: A Critical Study*

*Now that they are no longer dismissed as grubby purveyors of mindless entertainment, the cartoonists and their employers must expect to be called into account on aesthetic and ethical grounds just as novelists, book publishers, playwrights, and filmmakers are.* —Maurice Horn, *The World Encyclopedia of Comics*, 1976.

Michael Sheyahshe’s *Native Americans in Comic Books: A Critical Study* is long overdue. Viable academic scholarship on cultural representations of indigenous peoples of North America in graphic literature is virtually non-existent. Sheyahshe’s text arrives out of his own love of comics and the absence of critical examinations of Native American cultural portrayals in comic books. Sheyahshe is a member of the Caddo (Hasinai) Nation of Oklahoma and serves as a Trustee of the Caddo Nation’s Heritage Museum. His



enthusiasm for comics in general is infectious—and the copious amount of research on display proves a valuable critical genre study and resource.

The text serves as a categorical examination of the approach American dime novel and comic book publishers have historically utilized when representing indigenous peoples of North America in the post-WWII modern comic book era. While the text provides an extensive amount of research and thorough character examinations, there are few stated arguments. The purpose of this text is as a resource for further research, and Sheyahshe invites Native and non-Native scholars alike to use this text as a starting point for future scholastic endeavors. More importantly, Sheyahshe encourages fellow Native Americans in particular to use the text in order to help provide the mental means for production in the world of comics in order to avoid the mass-marketed “Indian” stereotypes that inundate graphic literature.

Sheyahshe employs wisdom from across the spectrum of Native American and Indigenous Studies. In addition to gleaning Craig Womack’s directives of adhering to tribal specificity while providing an indigenous mental means of production, Vine Deloria, Jr.’s *Custer Died for Your Sins: an Indian Manifesto* works its way into the examination of what Deloria termed as the “Indian Plight.” In graphic literature, this plight includes Native peoples as historically “frozen in time”—for instance, it was not until Marvel’s introduction of Forge in *Uncanny X-Men* #186 (October 1984) that the popular publisher’s contemporary audience received a representation of a Native American without any distinguishing “Indian” features.

The impetus behind Sheyahshe’s research is telling. For instance, if one cross-references the aforementioned Forge character with the book’s own appendix of tribal affiliations in comics, the X-Man doesn’t have one. Several prominent Native American characters from the popular Marvel and DC universes are oftentimes not affiliated with a particular tribal group at all, and many of the characters’ identities are almost always linked to historically or culturally inaccurate context.

Sheyahshe’s text provides categorical breakdowns and commentaries of indigenous character “types.” The most common types of indigenous cultural misappropriations are featured as the basis for the book’s thirteen chapters. Each chapter takes on a categorical theme of representations in graphic literature, provides applicable comic book characters and publishers as examples, and then employs a theoretical or historical basis for comparison while establishing evaluative conclusions that leave room for further discussion.

Sheyahshe also incorporates interviews with creators, including writers, artists, and editors from a variety of publishers. The James Fenimore Cooper (*The Last of the Mohicans*) legacy and the dime novel tales of the 1940s and 50s are discussed, as are the Native comic conventions of the “Wannabes” (DC’s *Scalphunter*).

Other conventional character devices discussed in the text include: “Multiethnic Mistaken Identities” (Marvel’s *Red Wolf*), the “Instant Shaman” (DC/Vertigo’s *Muktuk Wolfsbreath: Hardboiled Shaman*), “Indian as Sidekick” (Dell’s *Tonto* and *Tipi*), Indian as Scout, Modern Day Native Heroes, the unique posit of the Native American woman as having particularly forceful powers in comics, as well as comic book portrayals of Natives in military service and representations of Native American comic book characters in video game adaptations. There is also an interesting chapter titled “The Indian’s Sidekick,” which examines gross cultural stereotypes that often manifest themselves through animal sidekicks such as Lobo in *Red Wolf*. In DC/Vertigo’s *Muktuk Wolfsbreath: Hardboiled Shaman*, the protagonist’s “spirit familiar” is an alcoholic (yet quick-witted and quick-acting) weasel.

Sheyahshe concludes his book on a positive note, looking at representations under the heading of “Indigenous Revision,” a peek at the publishers and creators who got it right, or at least “get it.” Sheyahshe’s final pages address what readers who chose to pick up this text probably already know: knowing is indeed half the battle, and as Vine Deloria, Jr. himself would assert, knowing you do *not* have Native blood is indeed an asset. Deciding how to responsibly and ethically approach cultural representations of indigenous peoples in popular culture therefore is a topic worthy of academic scrutiny, and a topic of growing interest in the foreseeable future.

Sheyahshe, Michael. *Native Americans in Comic Books: A Critical Study*. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2008. 215 pgs.

Valerie Robin

## Bruce Grenville's *KRAZY! The Delirious World of Anime + Comics + Video Games + Art*

In 2005, I got the chance to see Lotte Reiniger's silhouette puppets on display at the Stadtmuseum im Kornhaus in Tübingen, Germany, located about an hour from Stuttgart. I had never seen anything like them—hand tinted, multi-layered creations to dazzle the imagination. Nor had I ever seen an animated silhouette film like Reiniger's *The Adventures of Prince Achmed* (1926). I certainly never expected the film, with its “sense of colour [and] attention to detail,” to be featured in the ‘Animated Cartoons’ section of *KRAZY! The Delirious World of Anime + Comics + Video Games + Art*.

*KRAZY!* was conceived as a companion to the recent Vancouver Art Gallery exhibition, *Massive Change: The Future of Global Design*. The principal goal: to combine the diverse fields of popular visual culture into what is often thought of as a “community without community.” While I was somewhat put off by the cover: what looks to me like a bad caricature of an overstressed Asian man, once I opened the book, I was drawn immediately to the wide range of pop culture sub-categories addressed within. Reading through the sections (which include: Comics, Graphic Novels, Animated Cartoons, Computer and Video Games, Anime, Manga and Visual Art) is very much like walking through a gallery with a pair of informed headphones on—except the audio here is text and there isn't anyone behind you breathing on the back of your neck. Each entry is like a live exhibit, with three pages of illustration to every one page of text. The text is the exhibit's ‘plaque,’ except that the texts in *KRAZY!* are much more extensive and historically connected. If you take the time to read through them all, you'll dis-



cover that this community of ‘pop’ art is definitely intertwined in itself.

According to Bruce Grenville in his introduction, “This book and the exhibition that it accompanies were conceived as a survey of visual culture, the first of its kind to provide a much-needed opportunity to examine the changing nature of visual culture and explore its links to mass media and the traditional visual arts.” The semantic discussion of the words “visual culture” are a lecture all on their own. Here, in *KRAZY!*, Grenville states simply that “it is increasingly clear that comics, manga, anime, cartoons, video games and art are among the most popular and innovative media in the field of visual culture.” What a broad statement. However, Grenville and his co-curators, who are all writers on the various sections between the pages of *KRAZY!*, prove Grenville right.

From one of the very first popular comic strips, *Krazy Kat* by George Herriman (1913-1944), to Christian Marclay's multi-media display called *Onomatopœia* (a mixture of sections from comic books, music, film, photography and performance), *KRAZY!* contains a wealth of history behind each featured piece as well as some surprising connections. For example, I learned that Shigeru Miyamoto's *The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker* (2002) intentionally uses a “cartoonish sort of look” to keep the animation style consistent while staying “subtle but amazing.” The three pages of graphics are expertly chosen to support this claim, with the main character, Link, left of the text and a two page spread of game stills a flip away. Later, I discovered that an artist simply called Mr., employs concepts from Japanese anime and manga as well as bits of hallucinogenic style “reminiscent of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*,” in his installation *Strawberry Voice* (2007).

A potentially perfect addition to the centuries old argument over ‘high’ versus ‘low’ art, *KRAZY!* would be a great book to throw on the table in defense of the legitimacy of ‘pop’ art. Not only does it discuss the predecessors of its featured artists, its “visual art” section clearly illustrates that many of the pieces that are making it into galleries today are often highly influenced by ‘popular art.’ Andy Warhol would be proud.

Every time I brought *KRAZY!* out of my bag, ready to discover something new, either someone wanted to look at it or I found myself rushing to the nearest computer to look up Cao Fei's *Cosplayers* (2004) video or Chris Ware's Thanksgiving covers feature for *The New Yorker* (2006). I realized that *KRAZY!* is the best of both worlds: a hip continuation in the visual cul-

ture discussion and a lot of new stuff that is fun to explore before your friends can beat you to it.

Grenville, Bruce. *KRAZY! The Delirious World of Anime + Comics + Video Games + Art*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008. 276 pgs.

## Editors' Picks

*Thin Air* editors were fortunate enough to receive advance copies of several Arizona-themed books from flash fiction and short fiction pioneers Hart Press, Inc. The perks of pre-market fiction, as editors, is that we keep asking and they keep sending. Printing deadlines and time restraints have prohibited us from scanning the covers and inseting them with the promo blurbs. So we just reproduced the promo blurbs with editorial replies.

— Brent Webster

*Tragic Kingman* by Traci Montague

126 pages

Softbound

Publication date 12/12/08

“Small town Kingman waitress Traci Kingman becomes embroiled in a sinister ploy after she discovers evidence of her father’s romantic tryst with infamous Kingman local and Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh. Set in exciting 1992, rookie cop Traci Kingman must track her father—Rex Kingman—through the brutal calisthenics-driven underground of a local high desert militia to uncover a secret romance. When Kingman Trophy Shoppe heiress Traci Kingman discovers a love poem written on a sports bar napkin, all hell breaks loose. Critics are calling Montague’s crime saga ‘a devilishly horrible house-of-mirrors, a tongue-twisting, gruesome, knotted ride.’ Can soft-porn star and Kingman socialite Traci Kingman keep her teasing and promiscuous father from driving McVeigh out of the militia and into the arms of Ted Danson? It’s a pulse-ending race against time.”

*Nick: It's been on my shelf for a while.*

*MacKenzie: Do you think Traci's parents meant to spell it with an i?*

*Brent: An informed historical rewrite, kind of like Twelve Monkeys could have been if it tried.*

*Jerome On the Range* by Nic Tamberlakin

44 pages (not including the 56 blank pages at the back for Reader Notes)

Softcover

Publication date 10/08/08

"On his search for self-discovery, young Rocky Rakinucz changes his name to Rocky Raccoon and leaves his Nebraska home to find kindred spirits at an artist's colony in Jerome, Arizona. Rocky, a recovering Philosophy major, makes ceramic ashtrays embedded with images of Iggy Pop-themed prairie hostels, like the one his parents ran in Marriage Garter, Nebraska. After he faints at a mineral show, his mannerisms, speech, and appearance begin to resemble Nick Nolte's. The local community embraces him as a messiah as he balances the affections of three desperate herpes-free local girls: Tanya, the sensitive tincture poet; Dolores Dinkins, the owner of a Shiatsu rescue and assimilation farm; and Brandy, 'such a fine girl/a good wife you would be.' Tamberlakin's editor, Edward Hall, says 'Tamberlakin will be a household name after this.' Can Rocky survive this kooky mess?"

*Nick: Again they rip off my name and my idea. How does my stuff get out on the wire like this?*

*MacKenzie: I sometimes wonder if those girls in herpes commercials really have herpes or not.*

*Brent: Rocky Raccoon didn't like that so he said, 'I'm going to get that boy.' Far out, man.*

*So Low in Showlow* by Phillip Lee Roth

548 pages

Perfect bound

Release date, Finland only: 11/14/09

"Not to be confused with popular writer Phillip Roth, newer writer Phillip (Lee) Roth takes us to the narcoleptic daydream that is mountainous Showlow, Arizona, population 685. Roth introduces the unforgettable character of David Lee Hosephina, former flower child turned new age travel agent and part-time private dick. After listening to his hypochondriac grandfather's sixth deathbed confession, Hosephina decides on a plan to incinerate the old man for the last time. To be compassionate, Hosesphina decides to scatter the ashes at Showlow's Donner Pass Exhibit without going to the

Planning & Zoning Commission. Can Hosephina complete his symbolic gesture? With help from his close friend and confidante, Helena Stoeckly—herself on trial from a vindictive homeowner's association—the two decide to pull off Showlow's greatest stunt. Will they succeed? Book reviewers are calling *So Low in Showlow* 'like the movie *Sideways* without the humor and male bonding.' *The Cincinnati Chat* says Hosephina 'if he was female, is the best female character since 'Hot Lips' Houlihan.'"

*MacKenzie: True story. The only man my mom would leave my father for is David Lee Roth. It's the mullet.*

*Brent: Every bit as good as Bret Ellis Easton.*

*Nick: The long sections about homeowner bylaws were creepy. Outstanding effort.*

*Win Slow, A Desert Tortoise Misadventure* by Timothy Smith

Illustrations by Maurice Lendak

Hart Press Children's Division

48 pages

Release date 5/29/09

"In the spirit of such tweener authors like Judy Blume, Erica Jong, and Martin Heidegger, author Timothy Smith offers up a tour de force for young readers. His protagonist, Willie, is not your average Aesop tortoise. A junior-high dropout with a bad attitude, Willie spends his days raiding his parents' refrigerator and dreaming of speed. When he hitches a ride with a truculent trucker, things take an eighteen-wheeled turn for the worse. Eventually, Willie finds company and competition in a jittery jackalope, a raunchy roadrunner, and a coquettish coyote. When the four of them decide to make a bet on who can gallop back to Gallup first, Willie learns that it's more important for others to lose than for him to win. The Salt Lake City Gazette has called this tale 'an abomination, worse than *Catcher in the Rye* or *Forever*. The Seattle Free Press says, 'The Salt Lake City Gazette needs to go soak its head. Willie is our new Frodo.'

*Brent: The uplifting ending kind of made it for me.*

*MacKenzie: Is Gallup spelled "Gallup" meaning "gallop" because people in the West were taught English by cowboys?*

*Nick: It made me seriously talk to my wife about having kids.*

*Outside Bisbee: A Plains School* by Julia McDrury

224 pages

Original Hardcover

Release date 04/05/09

"A Plains School is a riveting crime novel like no other. Taking place during forty-eight hours in a barren Arizona campus named the 'RC,' one bizarre murder changes the lives of everyone. RC police officer Porter Young—a man with a dark past and a darker present—is faced with a bizarre dilemma: he's the only suspect and he doesn't feel like exonerating himself. A college town reeling from a vicious winter has only two police officers and no lab equipment—and big city police can't arrive for days. The story unfolds in a series of cat-and-mouse vignettes between Young and the lethargic staff of the RC, who are doing too much to incriminate themselves and too little grieving. Who killed Red Amundsen? Who cares? Young, deteriorating from the weight of his exposed life, moves methodically and listlessly from clue to clue, raising the suspicions of the academics of the RC. Or does Young have another agenda? This bizarre and unconventional crime novel marks the debut of writer Julia McDrury and certainly will get the attention of the Edgar Award Committee."

**MacKenzie:** *Was the campus sponsored by RC Cola? That's gotta be the crappiest sponsor of all time.*

**Nick:** *The new levels unto which darkness seeps belie layers of meaning inside of me.*

**Brent:** *What's wrong with you, Nick? Did your wife throw your pillows in the street...again?*



## Authors, Artists, Poets & Contributors

**Purshia Adams** was born and raised in Idaho and now makes her home in western Washington, where she works as an educator. Ms. Adams's writing focuses on the significance of place. Her poetry has appeared in *Cairn* and will be published in a forthcoming edition of the *West Wind Review*.

**Beth Alvarado's** story collection *Not a Matter of Love* was published by New Rivers Press in 2006. These selections are from her lyrical memoir, *Anthropologies*; other selections have appeared (or will appear) in *Seattle Review*, *Cimarron Review*, and *Cue: A Journal of Prose Poetry*. Her essay "Life Drawings" is forthcoming from *Saving Fire from the Rain*, an anthology of essays edited by Luke and Jennifer Reynolds. Beth teaches at the University of Arizona in Tucson.

**Jeff Berglund** is an Associate Professor of English at Northern Arizona University. His book, *Cannibal Fictions: American Explorations of Colonialism, Race, Gender, and Sexuality* was published in 2006 from the University of Wisconsin Press. He is currently co-editing a collection of critical essays on Sherman Alexie, forthcoming from University of Utah Press. He has published other articles in *Studies in American Indian Literature*, *American Indian Quarterly*, *Camera Obscura*, *Studies in American Fiction*, *Mediating Chicana/o Culture: Multicultural American Vernacular*, *The Encyclopedia of Native American Literature*, and the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*. His forthcoming articles focus, respectively, on Simon Ortiz, Esther Belin, and Blackfire.

**J. J. Blickstein** is a poet, visual artist, bluesman & editor/publisher of the now defunct *Hunger Magazine*. He lives in the mountains of Upstate New York with a lovely biologist and three kids. He works as a stone mason, occasionally teaches about the tarot, and is a dedicated student of the martial arts. His most recent books are *Barefoot on a Drawing of the Sun* (Fish Drum Inc., 2006), and a handmade artists' book + CD collaboration with French painter, Jean-Claude Loubieres, titled *Signs/Signe* (Paris, France, 2007). His work has appeared in many journals and anthologies.

**Caitlin Dwyer** is a freelance writer from Portland, Oregon. Caitlin graduated from Pomona College in 2006 with a degree in English and Writing, and now teaches after-school arts programs in Portland public schools. Caitlin was awarded the William Jennings Prize for Excellence in English from Pomona College and First Prize in the 2006 Pitzer Prize poetry contest. Her poetry has been published online and in the daily newspaper *The Oregonian*. In addition to poetry, Caitlin writes essays, fiction, and screenplays; a feature-length screenplay, *Belmont*, is currently scheduled for production in summer 2009.

**Jessica Flinn** is an art educator at Stimson Middle School on Long Island, New York. She graduated with a BS from SUNY New Paltz and received her MLS from SUNY Stonybrook. She currently resides in East Northport, New York with her husband and two sons.

**Jonathan Greenhouse** is an interpreter/translator who switches back and forth between the Spanish and English languages, his work bringing him into daily contact with murderers, rapists, tax evaders, and literary publishers. Besides getting his kicks taking part in small-claims trials and child-support hearings, he derives most of his joy from devouring the written word. His poetry has recently appeared or is forthcoming in numerous publications throughout the United States and internationally, including *The Bitter Oleander*, *Bryant Literary Review*, *Many Mountains Moving*, *Nimrod*, *Rattle* and *Sojourn*.

Originally from England, **Carl Jenkinson** is a graduate of the MFA fiction program at the University of South Carolina, where he co-edited *Yemassee*, the school's literary journal. He is currently a PhD candidate in American Literature. His fiction has most recently appeared in *Full Circle*, *The Potomac Review*, and the anthology, *The Emergence of Modern Man in the 21st Century*. He is currently working on a book-length memoir about growing up the hearing son of deaf parents. He lives in Blythewood, South Carolina, with his wife, Shanna, and their three boxers: Delia, Betsy, and Max.

**Brad Johnson** is an associate professor at Palm Beach Community College, Florida, and has two chapbooks, *Void Where Prohibited* and *The Happiness Theory* available at [puddinghouse.com](http://puddinghouse.com).

**Lisa Lenard-Cook** is the author, most recently, of *The Mind of Your Story: Discover What Drives Your Fiction*. Her novels have been short-listed for the PEN Southwest Book Award, the New Mexico Presswomen's Zia Prize, and selected for countywide reading programs and NPR Performance Today's Summer Reading List. A member of the faculties of the Santa Barbara Writers' Conference and Narrative Art Center in Santa Fe, and the fiction columnist for Authorlink.com, Lisa lives in Corrales, New Mexico.

**Nadine Lewis** is a poet, an artist, a mother, a wife and a hippie at heart. She currently works to support adults with disabilities and also sidelines as a photographer in Hudson Valley, New York. Although poetry and art give her great fulfillment her greatest creations by far are her children Eamon and Nora brought into this world due to the wonderful contributions of Gregory C. Bray.

**Patricia Lowden** lives in High Falls, New York and spends her winters traveling Central America. She loves words. She is a pizzatarian. Her publications include *Hunger Magazine* and *Woodstock Poets Gallery*.

**Stephen Malin's** poems have appeared in *Antioch Review*, *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Bloomsbury Review*, *Green Mountains Review*, *Margie*, *Sewanee Review*, *West Branch*, *Western Humanities Review*, and many more. Selected for the half-century anthology, *Southwest Review Reader*, Malin's work also emerged in *Poetry Southwest*, *Lyrical Voices*, and other collections, while, additionally, a group of his poems, translated into Russian, was reprinted abroad in *Amerika Illustrated*. Seeing poetry's appeal in both contemplative and communal aspects, he has published criticism nationally—*Walt Whitman Review*, *Theatre Journal*, etc.—and performed his and others' verse in a variety of states and stages. He lives in Westminster, Maryland.

**Isaac Melum** is a graduate of Northern Arizona University having earned a Master of Arts in English. His Bachelor's is from Gonzaga University. Isaac's poetry can be found in the literary journals *Temenos*, *Reflection*, and *Waterlogged August*.

**Hoang Nguyen** is a native of Vietnam who currently resides in California. He is an award-winning illustrator who has also worked in the comic book and gaming industries. He has recently released a book entitled *Hard Boiled to the Max Sketchbook*, a collection of character designs, pin-ups and original comics in the making. His artwork can be found at his homepage: [www.liquidbrush.com](http://www.liquidbrush.com).

**Neesha Oliver** had lived in Arizona her whole life. She spent six years attending Northern Arizona University. She has a Master's degree and a day job. She likes to draw for fun.

**Özgür Parlak** was born in Istanbul, Turkey. During his college years, he discovered the power of shutter release and became addicted to it. Although he enjoys taking photos of almost everything, his favorite themes are people and the life that surrounds them. He traveled around Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam in search of photos that capture life. Currently, he is a graduate student at Northern Arizona University.

**Sandra Raymond** is an assistant professor of English Education at Northern Arizona University. She has taught writing and language arts for the last thirteen years at the middle school, college, and graduate level. In her free time she reads everything she can get her hands on, develops her own black-and-white film, and tries to finish the novel she's been working on for seven years. Her first play, "*Pork Belly Futures*" won first place at the Northern Arizona Playwriting Institute's first annual staged reading.

**Richard Rizzi** was born in 1936 in downtown Brooklyn. He was drafted into the US army in 1955 and served in occupied Germany. He has spent the better part of his life studying and creating music, poetry, and performance art. He resides in New Paltz, New York with his wife Susan.

**Cody Roberts** received a Bachelor's degree in English from the University of Houston's downtown campus. He currently teaches English at NAU. Cody has written for Houston's *Dateline: Downtown*, *The Bayou Review*, *The Traveler's Pen*, and covered the Houston Dynamo extensively for *90 Minutes Soccer Magazine* and *90soccer.com*. Cody is also on the editorial board for *Downgo Sun*, a literary e-zine.

**Valerie Robin** is a teacher and a student at Northern Arizona University in English and German Secondary Education. She is an avid reader of comics, graphic novels and a watcher of anime. She also enjoys cooking and writing about cooking and sincerely believes that the cabbage is an underrated vegetable.

**Eric Roy** lives in Houston, Texas where he buys and sells used records. He has another poem forthcoming in the *New York Quarterly*. These are the first poems of his to see print.

**Jill Scehovic** is a business writer and copy editor who writes fiction in her free time. She holds a degree in creative writing and has been a columnist for *Phoenix Metropolitan* magazine. She lives in downtown Phoenix, Arizona, with two street cats, a balcony of desert shrubbery and a second-hand bicycle she stops with her shoes.

**Elizabeth Tarver's** fiction is forthcoming in *South Dakota Review* and has appeared in *Beloit Fiction Journal*, *Eclipse*, and elsewhere. A Louisiana native, she now lives in Raleigh, North Carolina, where she is at work on a novel.

**Neslihan Ulus** was born in Turkey. Her mother passed her love of art to her and she received the love of music from her father. Despite all the art in the family, she trained as a scientist and studied Atmospheric Science at Istanbul Technical University. Two year after college she moved to the United States, to the Hudson Valley to study English. However, she ended up re-discovering her artistic side along the river. Now, African dancing, making jewelry and digital photography are all that her heart desires.

**Brooke Wonders** completed her MA in English/Creative Writing with an emphasis in both fiction and nonfiction essay from Northern Arizona University in May 2008. She is currently working as a composition instructor. Her nonfiction work focuses on trauma narrative and the function of memory; her fiction trends toward the speculative. Her creative work has appeared in the Flagstaff zine *The Noise*. She is a long-time fan of Diana Gabaldon's work; it was an honor to have the chance to interview Diana.



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thinairmagazine would like to thank...

Diana Gabaldon (underwriter)  
The NAU English Department (underwriter)

Faculty Advisor  
Jane Armstrong, Ph.D.

Editorial Advisor  
Ann Cummins, M.F.A.

Support  
Beverly Cleland  
Kris Harris

Most of all, we'd like to thank our outstanding authors, poets, artists, photographers, and contributing writers. We hope that the composition of this journal does justice to their fine work.



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