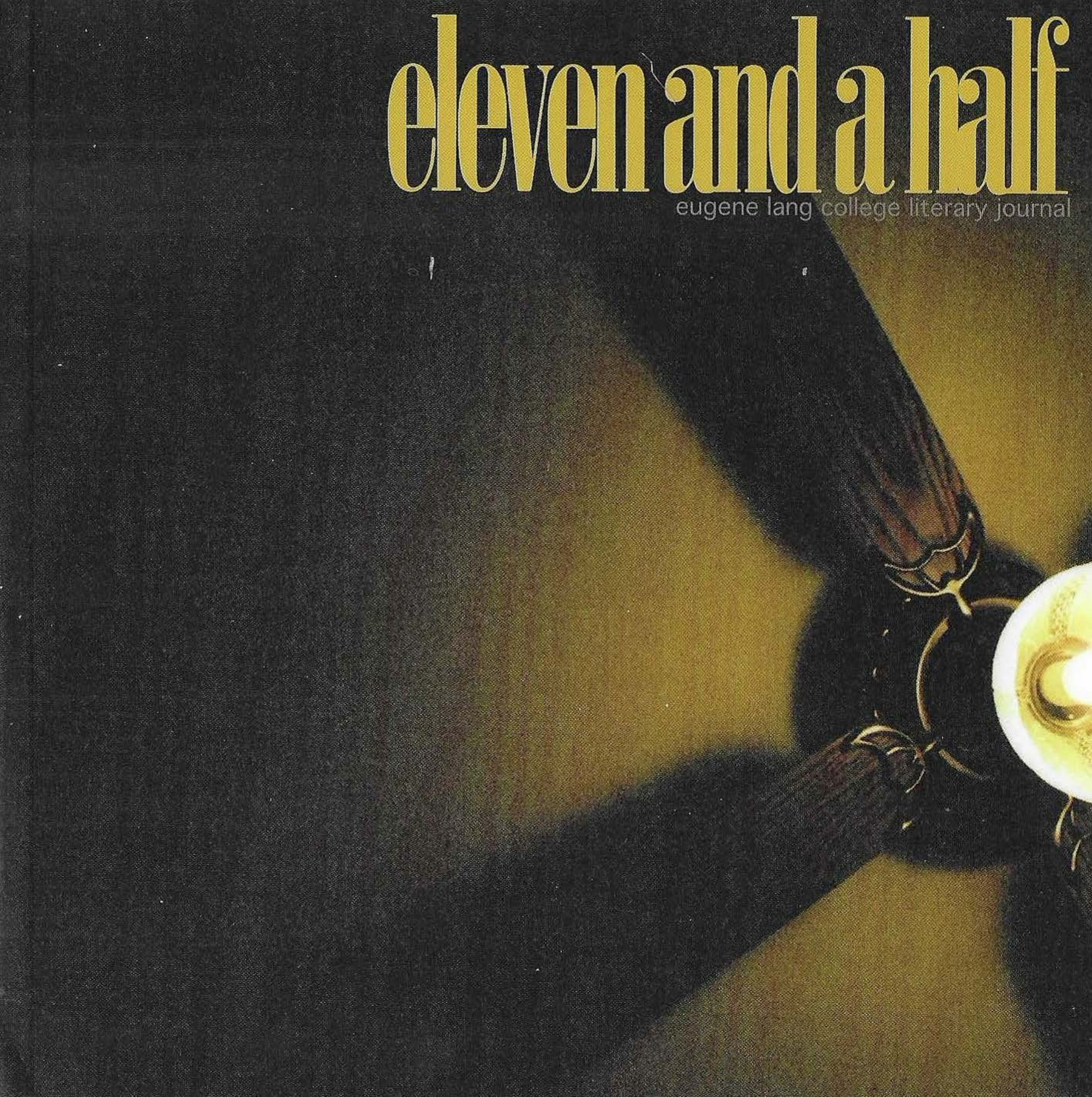
eleven and a half

eugene lang college literary journal



ELEVEN AND A HALF JOURNAL

EUGENE LANG
COLLEGE

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To the Reader:

DESPITE BEING as unsexy as a laundromat, editorial work is always attended by something vaguely romantic. Suppose that in curating the eclectic journal, the motives that underpin literature itself leap into view. Sincerity, discovery and empathy all seem coaxed out of the dark. Suddenly, we perceive their subtle points of contact, and realize that Emerson was right—that the hero appears in the press of knights, the thick of events. If we believe this, it follows that the literary journal becomes a rare opportunity to explore the voices of both reader and writer. As many of the pieces featured herein represent the author's first exposure to a substantial readership, the sense of exploration is heightened even further. These voices speak to you for the first time. Make it count.

Eleven and a Half features poetry, fiction and non-fiction solicited from writers connected to The New School. The editorial team would like to thank all contributors for their work.

the Editors

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ELEVEN AND A HALF

VOLUME TWO

Kittinger Down

John Ericson

Henry is not the one to tell whether or not things are going nowhere. And here he is, dropping a crumpled napkin on an oily plate and boyishly wiping the corner of his mouth with the loose cuff of his shirtsleeve. Henry's been treading water. His house is the smallest on a Chesterbrook cul-de-sac. His car is nicer than his brother's but nothing like his neighbor's. He's married to a short, brown-haired insurance agent who's recently started to lock the door while changing, and whose hips have begun to grow wide, wider—despite his feeling entitled to the tallest woman with the flattest stomach, and wispy bangs to run his fingers through, as if under a faucet of lukewarm water. So, here he is: at a vegan café across town, picking up the tab for his son's 4th grade English teacher, Ms. Rzeznik—a coy young strawberry blonde who tells him her dream of one day publishing as a non-fiction writer. But she hasn't mentioned his son since he squeezed her bare shoulder on his way to the restroom; instead, she's just been talking about herself, and Henry really wants her to keep talking, because she has a way of running the tip of her tongue across her upper lip every time she finishes a thought.

Ms. Rzeznik is a fantasy that Old Henry wouldn't pursue. Old Henry would only pursue these fantasies about Ms. Rzeznik in another life, in which everything would be pretty much the same except for himself, who would be completely different. Well, this is New Henry. This is the Henry that picks his son up ten minutes early, wearing a new leather jacket. This is the Henry that asks Ms. Rzeznik if they can move Scott's midterm evaluations to a vegan café across town the Friday after. This is the Henry that winks at the European waitress with light acne and nails painted a generic red.

Ms. Rzeznik talks and talks and Henry listens on and off, but New Henry knows that if you want to get with a teacher, you have to teach. He's read the paper today, just like Old Henry would, and, in a jaded, faux-cavalier manner, he tells her about the fiftieth anniversary of U.S Air Force aeronaut Joseph Kittinger's parachute jump from a weather balloon—an all-time altitude record of some one hundred thousand feet. She loves the story. She loves New Henry. She says What an effortless, wonderfully simple thing to write about; she clasps her hands, airs her jouissance, looks him in the eye. New Henry nods. He tries to picture her hair hanging in loose curls over her bare chest like that of a virgin in some early renaissance painting.

She could write a whole book about that, she says. He motions for the waitress, asks for the check, and tells Ms. Rzeznik that Yes, she could and she definitely should. The clock ticks. He realizes that it's rather late already and that they're the only patrons left, with the hostess hovering around the waiter at the register, and a hispanic man with a loose ponytail and hairnet poking his head out from partitioned kitchen area. Ms. Rzeznik excuses herself and walks towards the restroom, looking over her shoulder and smiling awkwardly at him as he folds up the napkin in his lap and grabs his new leather jacket.

It is as she descends the icy, salt-stained stoop outside that New Henry, leaning against the snowy newel with one hand in his pocket, seizes her gently by the wrist the way Old Henry once would, forever ago, and pulls his son's English teacher towards him until her mouth is very close to his own. Around the corner, there's the report of a car engine backfiring. Then, it's quiet. New Henry's boots crunch the snow as their weight shifts, sways.

And yet, there's something tremendously sudden in the way he finds himself parked outside her building, looking over at her in the passenger seat and feeling her thin hand reach around his right thigh. In a slight conversation between seconds, the effortless, simple New Henry perceives himself not as Old Henry, but Joseph Kittinger, stepping out of the cone basket beneath the billowing weather balloon, not into air but the mist ing substance of the outer atmosphere, with no ripple in his clothes to tell whether or not he's actually falling. He withdraws his hand from her cheek, and in the spectral light he can see in her face none of the jejune want New Henry acted on earlier, but

something between mistrust and perplexity as he lifts her hand by the wrist into her own lap. And he can't tell if this is Old Henry returning or yet another New one; while the image of Ms. Rzeznik lying at his side—leaning her head against his shoulder, a long leg slung across his own—doesn't at all fade but remains severely superimposed, Henry puts his hands on the wheel and tells her, without looking her way, that Scott's midterm evaluations have been both informative and constructive, both for his son as a student, and himself as a parent. With a sigh, she shakes her head.

Old Henry is neither shifty nor glib like New Henry, but as balding and lovesick as ever in his dark foyer, listening to the running faucet in the bathroom. Leaving the light off, he walks quietly into the living room and slumps down on the couch. He reaches for one of the magazines scattered across the coffee table, desultorily flips through it, shifts in his seat—trying to arrange himself in a visibly comfortable position, so that when his wife comes out of the bathroom, he will look less guilty. Because Old Henry is a terrible liar. The last page of the magazine features another article on the Kittinger Jump: here, the pilot is said to have thought the first sixty seconds of his fifteen-minute descent the longest in his life. It says that he saw, felt, and heard nothing. Then the lock clicks and his wife comes out wearing a cream colored bathrobe and her wet hair is combed back, gathered behind her head. Maybe there will be words. Old, docile Henry saying he's sorry, sorry about New Henry. But right now there's just the brash ticking of the cheap clock in the kitchen. And not a ripple through his shirt.

Trying to Touch That Which is in Motion

Carolyn Ferrucci

The heat wave turns the banana
in the fruit bowl brown.
I think of frying it
and surprising you,
but forgive me,
it smells so sweet.
I'd rather watch produce grow mold.

In dusky October sutra sun,
we crouch on the fire escape,
Wonder over cooling Harlem tar,
Mannahatta and her tribe,
Flood-tide, or ebb-tide.
You take a knot out of my hair,
questioning whether nutrients
uptake better side by side.
Touching your beard with grey hairs
sprouting, I proclaim:
The city of such young men

I swear I cannot live
happy, and you don't understand me.

We stop buying fruit,
the seeds too expensive
out of season. You tell me to wear
my teeth on my sleeve, like I did
when you met me. I try and tell
your conscience to bite. I throw
costume jewelry at you across
the tiled floor. You spill wine slowly
on the bed sheets. We go
to Montreal at its coldest, feel
our stripped bare bones, wear
bear costumes walking through
the multi-climate Biodome.

The Call of the Wild

Ryder Baldwin

There is an odd connection
between powerful

black women and my sexual life.

Pam Greer was on
the television, and so was that Disney movie,
about the frogs,
and always the next day
I'd run into something by Kara Walker and
have to think "ruefully" about my "fall from grace."

There have been things
that my therapist has said aloud to me
that immediately make my consciousness shift three feet
to the left of my being.

Does
it really matter
Jackie Brown was playing
when I lost my virginity?

If I say the word "love" in David's office I will slouch into a ball of ash.

Work V. Swoon #3 for Akilah Oliver

Zee Whitesides

I gave myself over to the work, as blues was so 9th grade & there were so many people in the world. I might have told them I was dead. For all the grief I bought an ax.

A design on cheek, elaborate as a woman's recess, could. Called territorial geography. I said & then I wrote. All the angels I could put in a poem couldn't pass when songs are traditions. "Making busy." What is left on the wall, with its plural steel-string? "Making do."

A record built out of a river, a belief that any troubles may be picked up in any era. The projection & later its alphabet: I told them I might have died.

With not many love rings inside me, it was the best play I'd ever seen; nothing so silly as getting through the day. Archive in an earthen tub where washing & storytelling & head-cutting. This was the blue blush at the deep of my bag. This was passing out before the second ax was over.

If I called graffiti "tattoo" no one would be able to fine me for it.

Alexandra Breznay

THE HOG

CHAD MICHAEL HUNIU

The day was awfully hot. The men were drinking beer; the women wore short dresses or cut-off jean shorts; the smaller kids played freeze tag in the field, some stumbling and nose diving into the grass before the tagger reached them; the bigger kids took turns riding the family hog, a giant thing that did not like being ridden. It was nearly summer and the only thing that helped Gray endure the afternoon party and the allergens, floating in thick platoons through the spring air, was the beer. He stood under the shade of the apricot tree, which wasn't bearing its fruit quite yet, avoiding the others and sneezing into a black bandana. He didn't know the other parents, though he'd been to the Wilmensen's party--an annual event his wife always insisted they go to--three times now. Mrs. Wilmensen was a friend of his wife's, and he never took it upon himself to invite Mr. Wilmensen to go fishing or golfing.

His wife, Coriander, who was in the Wilmensen's light blue country house, was an incessant reminder that he was a fool for believing marriage would enhance his life a second time when it had not enhanced his life the first time. Coriander sought to put all the blame for the boys' failings on Gray's failings as a father. He didn't do enough; he didn't pay enough attention to the boys; he never showed he cared. She was always bringing up the boys' problems. His oldest child, Ash, who was almost nine, played in the hog pen with the older kids. He was from Gray's first wife, whom had divorced him for reasons that included his drinking. Coriander was having a hard time with Ash's building disrespect toward her. She did not think it was healthy, nor did she believe she deserved it.

The youngest, little Tommy, which belonged to him and Coriander, was nearly six and would be entering into the first grade in the fall. Coriander was very worried about Tommy's slow prog ress in reading and writing. He seemed a great deal behind his kindergarten class, though his teacher assured Coriander that this seeming shortcoming would often change radically within a few years. Some children learned slower than others; some were late bloomers. That was all. Coriander had no reason to worry yet. Tommy stood frozen, his arms raised over his head, in the sunny field on the other side of hog pen where there were no trees or corn growing. He had been tagged.

Bill Tressel stood by the picnic table, eating a slice of watermelon. After three years of struggling to pay for the hospital bills and chemo therapy, he'd recently lost his wife to breast cancer. Many at the party who had not attended the funeral three months ago (those who had had done so as a favor to Mrs. Wilmensen) gave their condolences when Bill arrived.

Bill had a daughter who was thirteen and always had to straighten her hair before going out. Her hair was very curly like her mother's had been. It would have been the same auburn color too, but she'd dyed her hair black the month after her mother died, and then a dark shade of purple only a few weeks ago. That Monday, she'd been caught puffing a cigarette off the middle school campus by a teacher, who'd had the consideration to go directly to Bill, having known of the family's loss, and not through the school. Bill had appreciated that. He grounded his daughter and forbade her from smoking, but realized his ineffectualness as the head of his diminished family quickly when he heard her, the night of that same Monday, sneak out through the side gate of the house. He'd been laying in his bed, unable to sleep. He immediately called her cellphone from the landline, hoping to scare her back, and heard her phone's ringtone trickle from her bedroom. He went to her room to be sure she'd gotten away. It wasn't like her to leave her cellphone anywhere. He turned on the light; she had gone.

Bill waited for her on the couch, watching television at a low volume and considering a phone call to the local authorities, until she returned. When he heard a car pull up in front of the house, he switched off the television and went to the front door and stepped outside.

"Dad!" she said, half-way out of the passenger side of the car. "Go," she said to the driver, who

followed her command after she'd slammed the car door. She walked hurriedly toward the house, unable to look at Bill, streaks of her purple hair hanging over her face. As they stood on the porch, they remained silent, until his daughter said, "I miss Mom." She smelled of cigarettes and looked down at her sneakers and began to cry. They stood, a foot in between them, his daughter looking down, waiting for punishment or an embrace, Bill looking at his daughter, unable to recall what his wife would have done in this kind of situation with the girl.

He ate watermelon and watched his daughter texting on her cell phone, sitting hunched over with the device in her lap. She sat in the shade, on the other side of the hog pen, upon the back steps of Bill's sister's house where the sun couldn't reach her straight and purple hair. The sun felt good. The watermelon and lemonade tasted good. He could forget about his daughter for a little while. Where could she dare go this far out of town? She had no way to leave the party and she wouldn't be able to smoke a cigarette this close to Bill and her aunt and the other adults. He could relax.

He looked intently at all things that were not his daughter texting, trying to take interest in them. He'd seen his sister's property many times before. The openness and space it had being this far into the country; the treeless field to the side of the house, to Bill's right, where the younger kids played freeze tag; the larger field behind the house and hog pen and apricot tree, to Bill's left, most of which was barren and a dusty green, with a small section devoted to growing roses and sunflowers, and another for growing tomatoes, watermelon, and others fruits and vegetables, until it was abruptly cut off by a few square miles of corn. The apricot tree had always been there and the hog had been in the pen for four years. But time had passed since he was last here. The roses were blooming, red ones and orange ones. The sunflowers were getting to be very tall. Most of the watermelon were big and ripe. He didn't wish to think of the way his wife had withered away in hospital beds and how long she'd beared through it. He didn't want to think of having to raise their daughter without her.

The older kids in the hog pen, not including Gray's oldest son, Ash, took turns riding the large family hog like it were a bucking bronco. Ash stood at an angle to the hog with both hands on the dusty white fence of the pen, ready at any moment to jump up and out of the way of the beast's path if it seemed set on him.

"Ash," yelled Coriander, walking out of the backdoor and down the steps, where she almost tripped over Bill Tressel's daughter. "You be careful with that hog!"

"I know, Cor-i-an-der," said Ash, pronouncing each syllable of his stepmother's name, feeling embarrassed and avoiding making eye contact with the other kids in the pen, who weren't listening and were climbing all over the hog, fighting for whose turn it was to ride. Ash was nine now and he'd been allowed to play with the big kids in the hog pen last year, though he'd declined because he had been too scared. He didn't know why his stepmother was always so watchful of his whereabouts and his activities or why she cared so much about him. He loathed having to stay at his father's because of her, though he'd come to like his half-brother Tommy, who was oddly happy all the time and never cried when he bumped his head into something. Ash loved being around Tommy because Tommy didn't seem to care about anything, and so Ash felt that he didn't need to either.

The hog turned toward Ash. He gripped the fence tightly, fighting everything in him not to jump up on or over the fence in order to show his stepmother that he wasn't afraid. The hog, which was actually a wild boar that had been caught and tamed by the Wilmensen's, though every one referred to it simply as the hog, was a big dusty brown thing, over two feet tall and nearly four feet long, growing larger each year. The hog veered away from Ash. He relaxed his grip on the fence.

Coriander nodded at her husband's son, seeing that he was still afraid of the hog. She only wanted to give him a way out. "Lunch will be ready soon," she said. "Come wash up."

"I said, I know," said Ash. "I'm fine." He glanced quickly at the hog to see where it was in relation to him.

"Okay," she said. "Just be careful." She turned away from the boy. She wished she could be a second mother to him. For him to understand that she was not against him. But he was just a boy. All she could do was simply deal with it. Let him keep his distance from her. He was very much like his father in that way. She walked over to her husband who was on his sixth can of beer, as she'd been counting, even when he sneaked another while she was helping Mrs. Wilmensen prepare lunch in the house. Walking by a kitchen window, she'd caught Gray grabbing it from the ice chest

and had made a note of it. She didn't want to be embarrassed by him in front of Mrs. Wilmensen.

"Gray, honey," she said, approaching him under the apricot tree, which was not more than fifteen feet from the hog pen. Except for the kids in the pen, there was no one else around the tree. She said, "Can I speak to you in private?" Coriander looked down at the beer in his hand and then back up at him, a look of concern in her green eyes. Her brown hair was let down past her shoulders, a rare occasion. She almost looked beautiful in the sunlight, thought Gray, even with the heavy bags under her eyes. Like she did when he'd first seen her, when he was still married to his first wife. He should have enjoyed her more like she was then, like they were then, when they weren't married, when it was still only a notion, when it was still make believe. Her green eyes sparkled in the sunlight, and when they did he took the last sip of his beer. He held the can in his hand, just above his recently-acquired round belly, in hopes that his wife would think he hadn't finished it yet. He knew she always counted. He brought out the faded black bandana and sneezed into it. His red, puffy eyes stung. He sniffled vainly. "Fine," he said and followed Coriander away from the pen and tree to discuss his drinking.

Bill Tressel watched them walk, passing the roses and watermelon, the thirty or forty feet to the edge of the corn. They were almost out of view because of the apricot tree. He continued to watch them until Coriander caught his gaze. He turned around at this and went to grab another slice of watermelon from a plastic bowl. Other men and women, most of them parents, we're seated at or standing around the long picnic table, talking amongst themselves, helping themselves to lemonade, beer, watermelon and potato chips, waiting for lunch to be served. No one looked up at or made eye contact with or offered any assistance to Bill as he reached across the table for a slice of watermelon. Most had never quite understood Mrs. Wilmensen's brother, though they knew of his loss and felt sorry for him. They did not now how to talk to him or what to converse about. Bill was too silent of a man, with pale blue eyes that were very big and penetrating because of a condition that made them bulge outward, making it seem like he was always staring when he looked at you. It made the others uncomfortable.

Bill finally reached far enough to grab a slice of watermelon and turned around to find something new to watch. It was at this time that little Tommy, Gray and Coriander's son, decided that he

was through with the game. He lifted the freezing curse from off of him, which he had just then self-endowed himself with, thereby making himself unfrozen, and shot his hands to his thigh in order to satisfy an itch.

"What are you doing?" yelled one of the kids who, like Tommy, had been frozen for quite some time. He was sprawled out on the ground on his stomach, the position he had been in when he was tagged. "You're frozen."

Tommy didn't answer, knowing he could do anything now, and began to walk away. He was very thirsty and made his way to the picnic table for some lemonade.

"Hey, Tommy!" the kid bellowed. "I said you can't move!" When the kid realized Tommy couldn't hear him, he yelled to the tagger, "Tommy's cheating! He's trying to quit the game! That's not fair! Who said he could do that?" By this time the tagger had already seen Tommy and was racing toward him. He flew at him with speed and drove his balled fist into Tommy's back. Tommy was shoved forward. He tripped over his feet and hit the ground.

"That's what you get for trying to cheat," said the tagger to Tommy as he stood over him. He left Tommy on the ground and ran back to get the unfrozen.

Bill Tressel, having seen Tommy fall, watched him now get up on his own. Little Tommy brushed off the dirt and grass from his now stained t-shirt and khaki shorts. He did not cry and continued walking toward the picnic table. When he got to the table, Bill tried to ask Tommy if he was alright, but it came out as a croak. He cleared his throat.

"You alright, kid?" asked Bill.

"Yah," said Tommy. "I'm good. Can I have some lemonade?"

Bill Tressel turned to find the lemonade, but a mother who'd heard Tommy's request was already pouring him a cup. So Bill went back to watching Tommy's parents at the edge of the corn. Cori-

ander had the beer can in her hand now. She shook it and looked at Gray plainly. She had known it was empty.

***

The heat was unbearable out of the shade of the apricot tree. Gray grabbed the beer can from Coriander's hand. He crushed it easily and let it drop to the ground. He said, "What do you want from me? Why you always gotta do this in front of the boys?"

"They can't hear us," she said. "And I'm not the one who can't control my liquor intake. For once, I'd just like to not have to worry about you. I have enough on my plate with Tommy, and Ash."

Coriander stood there in the field, her arms at her side, her shoulders slouching now. She was very tired. Perhaps it was the sun. She didn't budge as Gray threw up his hands and stepped away from her, thereby disappearing behind the apricot tree from Bill Tressel's view, then twisting and stepping back into view, muttering when he wasn't sneezing, kicking a tuft of grass.

"This is some bullshit," he said.

"Please keep your voice down, Gray," she said. "We don't have to do this here."

"Keep my fuckin' voice down, she says," he muttered, then sneezed. "Let's not make this a thing."

"For our sons," she said, then corrected herself, "for both Tommy and Ash, for everybody else at this party, please don't do this." She turned too look at the house, hoping Mrs. Wilmensen wasn't standing on the back steps ready to announce that lunch was ready.

"Our sons, your son, my son, the goddamned party, whoopdie-fuckin'-do..."
Coriander couldn't stop him now.

When little Tommy saw that his brother Ash was walking toward him, he looked away from his

parents who were having a conversation all the way across the field where the corn began.

"C'mon, Tommy," said Ash, putting his skinny, gangly body in the way of Tommy's view of his parents. "We don't need them. C'mon." He put his arm around his half-brother's shoulder to help get him moving. Tommy finished his cup of lemonade and dropped it on the ground like he'd seen his father do with his beer cans.

Ash and Tommy joined the older kids in the hog pen by climbing over the dusty white fence. A girl was riding backwards on the hog, her head near the hog's behind. She had her legs around the front of it, her feet barely hooking on to its brown neck. She held its tail tightly with both hands as the hog ran around the pen, squealing and trying to kick her off. She couldn't understand that the hog did not like to be held by its tail, that the hog hated this most. Every time the hog tried to kick her off she grabbed its tail more tightly, pulling it to keep her body from raising more than an inch or two off its muscular back. She laughed with delight as the hog whipped around violently.

Ash and Tommy stood at the edge of the pen, sometimes climbing up the rungs to avoid the path of the hog.

"Do you want to try it?" Ash asked his half-brother, jokingly. But Tommy did not seem deterred by the question. Ash still hadn't worked up the courage to ride the hog and didn't want to look like he was a wuss because his little half-brother did it before him. "No, maybe you shouldn't," he said, quickly. "Your mom'll be really mad."

"I wanna try," said Tommy. "I can do it." The girl riding the hog was finally flung off. She landed in the dirt on her side, sliding before she rolled to a stop. She got up and laughed and began to wipe the dirt off her blouse. Ash watched the hog continue to buck wildly and snort and run around the pen. It was uncontrollable, but the other kids only laughed, watching the hog's enragement run its course until it calmed down enough for someone else to take a turn.

"Tommy, let's go," said Ash, turning away from the hog and beginning to climb the rungs of the fence, catching sight of his parents still arguing in the field by the corn. Where could he go? There

was nowhere to run to. He was trapped in this place.

"But I want to ride the hog," said Tommy.

"No," said Ash. He felt like jumping form the pen and running across the field into the miles of rows of corn, away from the hog and his dad and his stepmother and the whole party, but his legs wouldn't move. "Let's really go. I don't like it here. Let's leave this place and Dad and Coriander." He turned his gaze back down to where Tommy had stood, only to find him walking determinedly toward the still fuming hog in the middle of the pen, where hovered a cloud of dirt. "Tommy!" Ash's legs quivered.

Bill Tressel couldn't watch the couple fighting any longer. He couldn't hear them and the scene hadn't progressed any, the man still sneezing and muttering something and walking in and out of view behind the apricot tree, the woman just standing there, taking it. Bill's eyes were burning from watching them for so long. He closed them and rubbed them with his knuckles. When he reopened them, his vision was blurry. He blinked a few times before regaining clarity. He looked for his daughter. She had left her place on the back porch steps. He'd left her there and now she was gone. Of course she was gone. He hadn't moved from his spot by the picnic table, but he'd stopped watching, if only for a few moments, and she was gone. He shouldn't have stopped watching. He could never stop watching. She was all Bill had now.

Bill started to walk toward the back of the house, hoping to find her around a corner, texting in the shade somewhere or even smoking a cigarette, when he saw the hog barreling down on little Tommy. "Kid!" croaked Bill, knowing instantly what would happen if the boy remained in the center of the pen. A woman at the picnic table shouted frantically to Tommy's parents, the couple arguing at the edge of the corn, who turned and saw and began to run. Bill leapt toward Tommy and the pen. He would save the boy; he must save the boy. But there wasn't much time left and little Tommy was not scared. Tommy had stepped toward the bucking, powerful hog with his hand out, his fingers stretched wide. He would make it freeze and then unfreeze and freeze again with his newly acquired powers. He could do anything.

The hog's round, black eyes had already caught the small, brave eyes of little Tommy. It had already ceased kicking in sporadic circles and had begun bucking straight toward the boy. To the hog, Tommy was just another kid. It wanted to climb all over the hog's back and choke its neck and pull its tail. It was just another one. The hog was now inches away from Tommy's outstretched arm, from his flat hand. How could it have known that Tommy was the only thing keeping his family together?

The Joy of Cooking London Broil

(the Latino way)

Jerry Rengel

Before any actual cooking or preparation can begin you first have to convince grandma that you're not gay for wanting to cook. She islikely to take it as a sign that you are turning over to the dark side. Tryto convince her that you actually enjoy cooking and that there a lot of male chefs on network television, but don't expect her to buy into it. She's had her doubts since she's noticed you hanging out with your lesbian cousin, the one who likes to host LGBT events on her spare time. While she goes into her room to pray for your immortal soul, turn on the radio. Don't bother tuning it as it is likely already preset onto the only Latino radio station that's been blasting out from cocinas, guaguas, patios, parrandas, fiestas and quincianeras since anyone can remember. After you've done these ritualistic steps it's finally time to start prep work.

Pull the handle of your sticky freezer door that takes hulk-like strength to pry open. Next, push the Totinos and Freezy Pops to the side to uncover the frozen cube of beef slabs labeled as London broil that your granny used to make fried steak and onions with. Decide that since you're American, you won't resort to that sort of ghetto cooking and that you will use the proper cooking method suggested on the label: Broil. The meat may be a little frost bitten but that is ok, it is still good. Back in the 70's a Uruguayan Rugby team on a flight to Chile survived a plane crash in the Andes

Mountains by eating the frozen bodies of the dead passengers. So hey if it is good enough for them, it is good enough for you and your family. Pop the cube into the microwave and set it on high. While you wait the suggested 15 minutes for it to thaw out, go help grandma work the volume on the remote control of her old Panasonic television set your cheap dad salvaged from a neighbor's sidewalk. "Anything for my suegra." That won't take more then 5 minutes, so use your last 10 to actually research on Google what the hell London broil really is. After you've done your research, reserve at least 2 minutes to feel overwhelmed by the task and to kick yourself for offering to make dinner. But don't throw in the towel just yet cause it'll knock your pride. Moreover, knowing your judgmental grandma, she'll probably get even more upset if she thinks that you're a sissy AND you cant cook. Besides you went to college after all and if you could turn in a 15-page term paper on the mating rituals of the Olinka tribe then this should be cake.

The recipe calls for Balsamic vinegar and soy sauce. You'll have to do without the former, but the latter can be helped; you have some left over soy sauce packages from the last time your Puerto Rican girlfriend came over and you ordered out Lo Mien because she likes to eat in between fuck sessions. "My turn to be on top, ok papi?" Garlic you have, with abundance. Olive oil too. Once the meat is soft enough, poke holes into it so that it'll cook evenly. Abstain from using the oxidized salad fork your mom bought in a flatware set at the church flea market. "Only $10 dollars mijo, what a steal!"

Now here is the tricky part: deciding whether to use the proper ingredients called for by the traditional recipe, or copping out and drizzling Sazon Goya all over that shit. You go with the Sazon. Sorry Expert Village. After your cuts are all marinated and dredged in soy sauce, pop them into the broiler of an already baking Fordham Road apartment.

Broil both sides until they are a little crispy and black around the edges. If they turn into hockey pucks you have gone too far. In case that happens make sure to throw away the evidence and air out the kitchen or else everyone in your family will be breaking your balls for the rest of the week. Once you see your good to go, boil some yuca and cook some white rice mixed with black beans. Your funny Cuban aunt calls the bean rice mix Moros y Cristianos, or Moors and Christians. So heads up if you ever have Cuban guest over, chances are they are referring to the rice, not the Re-

conquista. But just to be safe you should probably let them say grace. After you're done let it all si
proudly on the stove so your grandma can see that you're not full of shit and you really can cook
Listen to her complain about how you left her kitchen a mess while you watch her eat two plateful
of your banging food. She'll call it "alright", but you know . . . you know better. While you split
some avocados for the rest of the family to eat later, pop open the ice-cold Corona you hid behind
the milk cartoon from your dad, the one that you were saving for a special occasion justlike this
one. And there you have it, in all its SPICK-tacular glory, London broil the Latino way.

John Connell

Ballad of the Battery Acid

Lexi Hornbeck

A single satin green ribbon,
wavers at the base of the spine
The positives leak
The negatives die
until the mind detoxifies.

I remove your bifocal and realize
your clarity of the world in the projected shadows
is only half correct.
It's a two-faced finger-play
of animal shapes.

The leaky battery finds me,
a mannequin with a chipped lip and concave neckline.
My plastered eyelids shake lashes with gravity,
a compromise to leave you
cross-eyed.

The minute-man waltzes with big hand off
the wall clock.

It's a tick-tock two-step
On my crackling feet.

Jealousy

Carolyn Ferrucci

1.
You're hydrofracking her.
I know it.
In the slices of the wet
cracked mirror, she's ashine.
She has shark's teeth--
jewelry, maybe pearls--
freckled skin as proof
she's walked under the sun.

2.
She must have
the richest oils
the most natural
firedamp
for you to extract.

3.
Your unnamed narrator stands
on the glass soiled riverbank.
She is in company of still,
mechanic CAT claws,

bowing, done for the day,
frozen just before the dig.
The skyline reflects
a long broken day.
Even though the light
won't stay long now,
even though the fish
swim now towards
the Hudson's mouth,
this narrator, of yours, still,
would like to be scooped
up with the dirt--
nestled in the metal.

4.
Then there's this other girl.
She's younger. Much younger.
She wears a tutu of pink tulle,
struggles to shove off
her satin shoes on the riverbed.
"Can you help me?"
Green eyes look up
to your narrator, who bends,
lit by the sun, unties the laces.
"I'm done being a ballerina."
Green eyes wiggles her bare toes.

5.
We go to the water.
The much younger girl pushes
a slipper into the river.

The slippers sail, we stay.
"Me too," I say.
I take what isn't mine,
I hurl the other slipper
towards metal Mannahatta. Then--
cackling, birdlike, monstrous we are.
We stand on opus caementicium
newly paved with sunred.

The problem had been one,
of Dwelling and Possession.

STOMPING GROUNDS

NICOLAS AMARA

when I think back to my
stomping grounds I'll
remember how I slinked through
dark mist clouds and
clattering fogs
thicker pages than I'd waded prior
overcast trash under nursing
trees fed by drunk love
and blood screams, fireworks
and gun dreams
I'd recall something whirring by
my tiptoe silhouette, and
then I might turn about and
forget

The Jungle

Sienna Fekete

unruly lies, vines, voices
all synchronized into one beautiful, battered harmony.
ruptured spirits looking for their fragmented bodies.
obscured windows of clarity,
camouflaged behind doubt and fear.
the thick, tangible air
absorbent
a synapse of survival
driven by impulse
driven by soul.

TANKER

N.J. CAMPBELL

The sound of the waves was distant, a hundred feet below the bow of the ship. The hull paint had splattered in the wind and had settled on Andrew's clothes. He ran his fingers over the dry white dots where they had stained his jacket's dark blue. It was cold, the wind was blowing hard and the tips of his fingers had grown numb. He zipped up the rest of his jacket and pulled the rigging slowly up and over the top of the hull.

When he had brought all his equipment in, he headed back out for a cigarette.

"Andrew?"The boatswain called from the port door.

He turned around, the wind pulling smoke across his face.

"Sir?"

"Have you thought about what we talked over?"

Andrew looked at the deck's steel floor, dragging hard on his cigarette.

"No." He exhaled. The boatswain shook his head.

"You haven't been off ship for two rotations of the crew."

"I haven't wanted to go."

"That's not the point, son. You've gotta go."

The officer took a deep breath and sighed.

"I'm requesting your transfer when we get to New York, after a shore leave of six months." He looked at the boy, not more than thirty. "I don't get it."

Andrew didn't either. He shrugged.

Inside, he went to dinner. There were seven of the other members of the crew. Steak, potatoes and corn were served and he sat alone.

Anna, the youngest deck hand, came in and sat beside Andrew. She was the ship's store clerk and brought requested items to the crew at dinner. She placed a pack of Chinese cigarettes in front of him.

"Two." He said, holding up two fingers.

She was surprised.

"All I have is one. I'm sorry—you only ordered one, Andrew."

He nodded and paid for the pack.

She felt guilty. She didn't know why. After a moment, she left to give her other items to the rest of the crewmembers eating dinner.

In his cabin, he wrote in his journal.

'March 22—Fired—Going to shore. Lost 2 pounds. The weather was icy, cold.'

He thought about the weather and heard a knock at his door. The sound was both sharp and dull.

When he answered, Anna stood in the doorway, holding another pack of cigarettes.

"I felt bad I didn't have them at dinner."

"Thank you." He said and paid her for the second pack.

In the morning, he went to the crew lounge where he could watch the sea. The horizon bounced lightly in the windows while the sky turned grey. Pyotr, another deck hand from his shift, came in after a while. He was a large man under forty that had already started to bald.

"Rain," the Russian said to himself in front of the window.

"Rain," Andrew thought.

The bell for the second shift rang and the two started their day.

Alexandra Breznay

FOOTNOTES

WE ASKED THREE AUTHORS TO ANNOTATE THEIR OWN POEMS

NOGGIN[1]

EILEEN MYLES

If I get
this little
sleep
I'm butter
pulling
the greasy
details
over everything

1. I'm not sure about the title. I actually titled the poem to submit it to a magazine and had a weird exchange with the editor after he rejected my poem so I feel a little traumatized now by the poem with the title Noggin. The title though as you might know is the name for a wooden pail you churn butter in. In Ireland. I'm not sure everyone grew up with this word but I did (in Boston) and it is a nickname for a head so I guess the idea is that your head is full of butter. People don't usually talk about one's noggin except in a derisive way. So between the past of the word and the odd present it had with a particular poetry editor I really don't want this title to be taken seriously. I will say though that I have been working on a big shattered poem called I think The Palace since 2010 and it's where all my tiny poems go. I'm glad this footnote is nothing like Eliot's. I think the footnotes are the least interesting part of The Wasteland which I've read lately and think is in many ways a great poem though he certainly is influenced by women, everything about them. My idea with The Palace is that if you wrote on the surface of a balloon and filled it with air the words would wind up moving as the balloon grew. Is that how you spell balloon? I think of reality as something flooded with breath and the words, the tiny bits of poems I write all the time now are always in a context which has vanished almost immediately yet the larger context for all the untitled bits is the giant lungs of reality itself. So much grander than the confining title Noggin I slapped on the top of this poem which by the time you've read this footnote is I hope effectively gone.

A Novel

Aaron Belz

"Please write me a novel in which things are
wonderful in the future,"[1] said my new girlfriend,[2]
then paused to adjust her skirt.[3] She didn't realize
that I'm a stevedore and don't have a girlfriend[4]
and besides, I live in Cleveland.[5] I run a rat
show for the Ecuadorians while my invisible
butler serves them fake punch.[6] It may sound
gimmicky but at least it doesn't pay the bills,
nor does it pay off the ducks that have those
bills[7] still partly attached to their horrifying heads,
though I wish it would, because then I might
get clear of the jackass duck mafia[8] constantly
on my tail.[9] "Please write me a novel," she began
again,[10] as if already revising,[11] "in which," but

1 This quote is from poet Molly Brodak, who lives in Atlanta and teaches creative writing at Emory. She tweeted it in January, 2012. When it showed up in my feed I thought it sounded hopeful and wanted to expand it using my own words. I asked her permission before including it in the poem.

2 I had to invent this "new girlfriend" character to situate the quote in a narrative poem.

3 In retrospect I think this skirt-adjusting moment—symbolizing, as it might, hesitance or indecision on the part of the feminine other—is sexist.

4 Hence the quick retreat to a stevedore, or dockworker, and the narrative-inconsistent statement that "I don't even have a girlfriend," a fact that neither an existent nor non-existent "girlfriend" would be able to "realize."

5 I was picturing Drew Carey while writing this.

6 Having failed to respect women in this poem I decided I might as well take shots at PETA, foreigners and the service class.

7 Play on "bills" here, but also more aggression against animals, just in case the PETA folks didn't know what I meant by "rat show."

8 Not exactly a literary move, here, I've seen Goodfellas and have good reasons to fear the mafia. Describing them as ducks helps disempower them in my imagination.

9 I had "duck tail" in mind, à la Tony Curtis, though I'm not sure that comes through to the reader. Doesn't matter to me whether it does or doesn't.

10 Felt like that sequence of shifts/wordplay had run its course, so I returned to the beginning of the poem again, but then felt like that might be cheating and interrupted the quote itself.

11 What I really wanted to do was not to expand the quote but revise it, I realize in retrospect.

then her words became soupy[12] and depressing,[13]
and besides, who really was she?[14] At first I tried
to delete her from my phone,[15] then called
a friend in Brooklyn at whose pad I'd crashed[16]
not weeks before, and she suggested looking up
"girlfriend" in the Pictionary.[17] So we began
communicating via hastily made drawings, first
of some dictators sitting at a bistro,[18] outside,
in the springtime, one of them laughing,
saying, "Write me a novel in which the undesirable
ethnic other has been purged,"[19] then the others
laughing too, and my Brooklyn friend guessed
"Hyundai dealership?"[20] Uggh, I'm the rat man,[21]
I can't draw, I want to make things wonderful
for both of us[22] but wouldn't know where to start
even if I could write prose, my fine feathered
friend—or friends.[23] P.S. Can't get over that hat![24]

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12 "Soupy," like an overcast sky or a thick fog; I also had in mind Soupy Sales, who had died a little more than two years before I wrote this poem.

13 I think most poets are on some sort of anti-depressants, which drives me nuts, because why? Let the depression flow. We wouldn't have Wordsworth, Emily Dickinson or Morrissey if not for depression.

14 Okay, so I meet the reader/girlfriend halfway: She exists but is of uncertain identity.

16 This refers to a real person whose name is Lori White; we're both from St. Louis, so we're old friends, and she has hosted me at her spacious Greenpoint apartment numerous times.

18 No idea where the dictators came from—I do enjoy mentioning bistros whenever possible in my poems, just as I enjoy throwing in a little French from time to time.

19 Evidence that reinforces the introduction of dictators: I just want you to believe that I know what I'm doing, that in some way I'm following through, finishing what I started.

20 I wrote this because I enjoyed picturing whatever drawing one Pictionary player had made to represent dictators at a bistro that another Pictionary player then interprets to be a Hyundai dealership. Very slim overlap in that Venn diagram.

21 The "Rat Man": Here I would like both to apologize for and explain the way my poems tend to work. For the poem's speaker to refer to himself this way implies that he not only runs a rat show (lines 5/6) but gains much of his identity from doing so, is, in fact known around town as the Rat Man, doesn't seem to mind that. For me to return to the rat show concept is a longer loop to convince the reader that I know what I'm doing in this narrative—that it makes sense. I am interested in conveying the appearance of sense

22 Chiasm, of a sort, now returning to the initial request of the non-existent or unidentified girlfriend.

23 Ducks again.

24 This P.S. is extraneous. It does nothing for the poem. When I read this poem at poetry readings I don't even say the P.S. I'm sorry for having included it. Embarrassing.

Uncle

Aaron Belz

There are a lot of women in this world,
and most[1] of them have eyeballs[2]. "Balls,"

my uncle calls them. "They stare at you
with those big balls[3] it's hard to say no."

1 If there is pathos in this poem, separating it from mundane double-entendre, it arises, I think, from this word: "most."
2 Litotes.
3 While penning these words I had in mind an obscure lyric from '80s British rapper DJ Derek B: "Two big things like basketballs."

Jaws of Life[i]

Joyelle McSweeney

What the hoopskirt loops on an illustrated page[ii]
chanting Eva Eva Eva to the posse's fangs
scrambling o'er the frizzled icepack and the slathering rank[iii]
camera zeroes in and zeroes on the coup de grace[iv]
like a prank of strawberries[v] or a lily spray
which the angel extends in a fraught touché[vi]
like a spray of bullet points on a PowerPoint frame[vii]
goes dum dum bullets whose heads can splay[viii]
when the frank pathologist peels back the face[ix]
Here is the face she wore in life[x]
with a cap of curls and a cap of lice[xi]
so unscrolls the insectoid DNA[xii]
the engraved invitation to the very last day[xiii]
well I didn't know you were so engagée
well I didn't know you were so enchantée[xiv]

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i Or, Joy Division.
ii Hoopla; Au-dela!
iii An Dramaticall Presentation of Uncle Tom's Cabin.
iv A current of OJ runs all along the freeway.
v Othello.
vi The Annunciation.
vii Business class.
viii Dum Dum Arsenal, Calcutta.
ix Procedure.
x Ecce Femme.
xi A patient or a penitent.
xii Entomological pathology/pathological eschatology.
xiii Wedding invitation. Wedding to the antichrist.
xiv Some attitude.

when you died in childbirth when you died in child bed[xv]
your blood sought to partake in hemorrhage[xvi]
now the film reversed and touched to the snout
foretells all the bloodloss like a lowlife tout low
life swing low where the bomb drops down
from the drooling bomber bay from the birth canal
there's the bling and the ring
where the kid falls down[xvii]
where a ring of milky hormones knows to wear a crown[xviii]
where it sweats through the transmission and salts the brow
like a gold flag pin on a grey lapel[xix]
where the damage coalesces when the film slows down[xx]
here's a frame and a frame and a frame and a frame
there's a herb for that and its name is Ioalanthe
rivers of forgetfulness and riversfull of blame[xxi]

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xv A rhyme.
xvi Pronounced "hem-o- rage."
xvii Teens, do the death drop!
xviii Life Magazine photographs of milk drops and bullets through apples; Bovine Growth Hormone.
xix Presidential debate.
xx Zapruder film; home movie.
xxi The Greeks.

where a ruddy minded pilot coulda saved the plane
you sunk your boat for your little pranked plan[xxii]
its past due date its es-tro-gens
made a murky hothouse of its blister pak
ate holes in the garment hiding life from death[xxiii]
made the stitch to slip from its glitchy frame
slipped the pixel like an icepick in the sloamy brain[xxiv]
like an I-like-Ikepick in the sloamy brain[xxv]
like Ikea's gold lapel pin by the crammed freeway[xxvi]
like the golden hammer hits the golden stake[xxvii]
shoves a blade like intuition through the floorboards of your brain[xxviii]

xxii Rebecca.
xxiii 'Dayth'. Deliberate perversion. The vowels here bivouac. Make camp.
xxiv Lobotomy.
xxv Lobotomy.
xxvi Death; Ikea billboards; traffic jams.
xxvii Boxcars boxcars boxcars.
xxviii Lobotomy. And an inkling—

Amelia Belle-Isle

INTERVIEW WITH VICTOR LAVALLE

INTERVIEWED BY JOSEPH BARKELEY

Born and raised in Queens, New York, Victor LaValle is the author of a short-story collection, *Slapboxing with Jesus* and three novels, *The Ecstatic*, *Big Machine* and *The Devil in Silver*. The winner of a Pen Open Book Award, LaValle is an Assistant Professor and the Acting Fiction Director at the Columbia University School of the Arts. Eleven and a Half managing editor Joseph Barkeley had the opportunity to interview him at the Dunkin' Donuts where he does much of his writing.

Joseph Barkeley: You did an interview with 3:AM Magazine about *The Devil in Silver*, and the writer regretted that he didn't get to ask you about the origin of your writing style. Your journey as a writer is not the traditional, "go to school, get an MFA, pump out a book immediately after that, and continue on— "

Victor Lavalle: It was that!

JB: It was? I thought you dropped out.

VL: (Laughs.) Oh, I see. If you're including when I fell apart mentally and physically, then yes, I agree, my path wasn't quite traditional. I got thrown out of college for terrible grades and worked for a temp agency called Manpower, doing various jobs. Cleaning offices, moving furniture, working in kitchens, secretarial. It changed almost week to week.

During that time I was also, I don't know how else to put it, going a little wild. Mentally, I mean. Things were precarious for a year, but I finally got myself on firmer ground again. After that I graduated, went to grad school, and pumped out a book. So I stumbled, but eventually I sprinted.

JB: I read your *BookForum* magazine interview with your friend and former roommate, Mat Johnson. I was wondering: is the voice you have now something you have always had? What were the early stories like? In the early years, what would Mat Johnson be saying to you?

VL: My earliest stories, like in junior high school, were third-rate rip offs of Stephen King and Clive Barker, two horror writers I admired greatly. I didn't write any stories that were truly mine—meaning they sounded like me and included content I knew personally—until I got to grad school. So I wrote my first real stories in the summer between my last year of undergrad and my first year of graduate school. I wrote three stories while working the security desk of Olin Library at Cornell University. I wrote them out of desperation. I was afraid I'd turn up at my MFA and everyone else would have a dozen books written already. I didn't want to show up empty handed. Because I was writing quickly, without overthinking, I used the voice that came to me most naturally. That was my voice. Full of its jokes and slang, vulnerabilities, and rhythm. In retrospect, this was a lucky break. It turned out my voice was pretty distinctive. Or, at least, not that many writers had sounded like me before.

But the danger with that kind of voice is that you'll overuse it. For instance, it's the best and worst thing about a writer like Martin Amis. Language, voice. A writer can rely on voice to camouflage his story's flaws. The voice can be a great way to distract readers from a lack of greater substance. That was my potential pitfall anyway. So when Mat and I became friends in graduate school I helped nudge him into using his true voice, that distinctive quality that is Mat Johnson's own by now. In return he urged me to show some self-control with my voice. By voice I mean language and rhythm, but even content. All of that is "voice." And my voice, unchecked, can become too adventurous, eccentric. The danger of having gone wild when I was younger is that I don't always understand limits, the value of restraint. Mat helped me learn it, in my writing at least.

JB: Is your temp career part of Pepper, the main character of *The Devil In Silver*?

VL: That's part of Pepper, for sure. One of the nicest things about working for Manpower was that I go to learn a little bit about a lot of different kinds of work. I didn't think of it as research at the time, I thought of it as hell, but I was being melodramatic. And now I feel lucky for the experience. Of course, I feel even luckier because I got to leave those jobs behind.
Anyway, I'm obsessed with my characters having jobs. I mean knowing what their jobs are, writing about the work they do. Work is integral to character. If you know a person's job, you often have a pretty good idea of his or her place in the world. That time at Manpower gave me access to about ten different rough careers and I've made much use of the material. Pepper, in *The Devil in Silver*, is a furniture mover. Ricky Rice, in *Big Machine*, was a janitor. Anthony, in *The Ecstatic*, cleans houses and did hazardous waste removal. All jobs I've done, at least briefly. The next book I have in mind takes place in the world of low-end used book dealers, like the dudes who you see on the street on the Upper West side with all the used books set out on folding tables. I worked in that world too, after graduate school, and there are some good stories to tell about the life.

JB: Is this book the one you described as "Anna Karenina in Queens"?

VL: No. That one is still years from being done. I've been gathering info and making notes on it for about three years now. I've still got a decade to go until it's ready. Some books require time, like you have to mature in order to write them well. That's the case with this one and I'm happy to let the process take its time. I've got a bunch of other stories to tell in the meantime, but that one really needs to be right, from top to bottom. There's no rush. For now I've just got a few notebooks full of plans and schemes.

That book feels so important to me because it's really a tribute to my mother. It's a novel about a woman like my mother. She's an African immigrant, Ugandan, who came to the United States alone when she was a young woman. She worked as a legal secretary, worked hard, moving from living in a small apartment to owning a home in Rosedale, Queens. Despite many nicks and bruises she did that standard American dream trajectory. And yet, when she turned about 65, she became a political radical. I don't mean she was bombing banks, but I mean she became a hardcore, left-lean-

ing, politically aware human being. She even handed out flyers for Dennis Kucinich! This is back in the days of Gore v. Bush. She tried to get a recall list signed when Bush stole that election. This was a highly conservative African immigrant, standing around in a middle-class black neighborhood, trying to get complacent people riled up. I was just so impressed by her. I wanted to write about a woman like this. Who some might summarize with a simple story. To me, she was easily as complex as the finest characters in world literature. Anna Karenina among them. The novel won't be a plot point for plot point retelling, of course. Who needs that? Anyway, I can't imagine where I'd locate a farm in southeast Queens. (Laughs.) But it's Tolstoy's sense of scale, and the desire to illustrate the workings of an entire class through the lives around this one woman. That's what I'm going to do. That's why I'm calling it "Anna Karenina in Queens." I guess she might have an affair though. I've got to stick by the original at least a little.

JB: I think it's interesting that, in your fiction, it seems that a lot of things carry over into each book. Loochie, a major character in *The Devil In Silver*, is the main character in your novella *Lucretia and the Kroons*. The Washburn Library from your novel *Big Machine* appears in *The Devil in Silver*.

VL: I'm trying to show that all these stories, no matter how wildly different, are all happening within one universe. The universe of my creation. It's a mark of kinship, I guess. I also like the idea that these books might, in some way, speak to each other. For instance, in *The Devil in Silver*, the reader meets a white nurse named Josephine Washburn. She lives with her mother and is struggling to make a living that will support the two of them. In my last book, *Big Machine*, there was an institution called the Washburn Library. This place was founded, and funded, by a black runaway slave named Judah Washburn, who discovered two cases of Spanish gold coins and used that money to build his fortune, including the Washburn Library.

The Library in *Big Machine* is a vast and mysterious complex built in the woods of Northeastern Vermont. The people who join the Library are, in essence, beneficiaries of this one black man's fortune. Another, much less grand, Washburn Library shows up in *The Devil in Silver*. It's just a rickety little wooden cart on wheels, one that holds a handful of crappy books that the nurse, Josephine Washburn, makes available to patients inside the hospital. Two sides of a family line. I was trying to suggest the ways that fortunes rise and fortunes fall. The great, great, great, granddaughter of the

white Washburn line is a working-class nurse in Queens. The great, great, great grandchildren of the black Washburn line are the wealthy, or at least semi-wealthy, descendants living in comfort. The expected fortunes of the two lines have been upended. I wouldn't make too much of this in the book, but anyone who's read the previous novel might, on a second reading, notice the similarity and think about the point I'm trying to make. The world rarely turns out exactly the way we expect it too. It's the kind of thing, I think, that repays more than one reading of my books. And by the end of my career, all those little ties and riffs and responses will be their own kind of conversation for those who care to listen. For those who don't, they can just enjoy the story told within the confines of the novel.

JB: Speaking more about the craft of *The Devil In Silver*, it felt to me like the physical environment as far as the mental hospital itself was very static, and then the interior lives of the characters were very active. How did you manage that?

VL: My previous novel, *Big Machine*, was a big, broad monster of a book. It travels to different locales, upstate New York, Northeast Vermont, Cedar Rapids, and the Bay Area. It jumps forward and back in time as well. It moves like hell. This made for a propulsive read but not a neat and orderly one. This was by design. That book had to take on its shape because the story, as a whole, was enormous and wild. But for my next book I gave myself the challenge of setting the whole thing in one location. Could I do that while still, somehow, keeping the reading experience surprising and unpredictable? Since I couldn't explore all sorts of physical terrain I had to explore the interiors of the cast. I couldn't go out so I had to go in.

This meant that the true story of the book, versus the plot, was about uncovering the depths of the cast I'd assembled. The reader would think she knew each of them at the start and, as time passed, learn there was more to them than she originally surmised. And each time the reader thought she'd learned everything, understood it all, the characters would surprise again. This would be my way of moving across great distances. In the end I felt this book was easily as expansive as the last one, but a reader could be fooled into thinking otherwise because the bodies of the characters hardly went anywhere. Only by the end does the reader understand the great changes that have occurred in the cast, especially in the main character, Pepper. He's traveled distances he never would've

imagined possible before. He's become, in a sense, a brand new man. All while being confined inside a single building.

JB: Can you talk about the way you use time in your novels? Going back to the *Bookforum* interview, your novels tend to take place in a relatively short amount of time. And your next book might take place over a couple of years.

VL: The "Anna Karenina" novel will take place over at least a decade. But I've got to build up to that. Naturally though, I have an interest in how things function on the minute scale. Day to day, how does the world work? Like right now we're sitting in this Dunkin Donuts. I could watch, with great fascination, as the workers set up shop each morning. Opening the store very, very early in the morning, putting all the donuts in to cook. Setting up the coffee and the tea, getting the register humming, making sure the napkin dispenser is stocked, sweeping the floors and wiping down the windows. All the little functions that make it possible for the larger business to occur. I love the little functions. That's just what draws my eye. You can't fight a war if the planes and tanks aren't well maintained. Or, at least, you're less likely to win. You can't run an economy if the gas stations and donuts shops fail to provide us with our necessary fuels.

I regularly teach a book called *Last Night at the Lobster* by Stewart O'Nan. It's very short. Maybe 120 pages. This novel is, simply, about the last night at a Red Lobster in Boston. That's it. You watch the manager arrive to open the store. He shovels snow from the sidewalks and throws down salt. He smokes a little weed to get ready for the day. He makes up the day's work charts and makes sure all the fryers and so forth are running. It just goes like that, step-by-step, through the day. It's riveting if, like me, you understand the importance of work in fiction. How difficult it is to get the details right. The way that such details become their own kind of narrative. Half my students will love the book and the other half are like 'could you fucking come on? Just get to the end of the day!' That just comes down to temperament though. A lot of people mistake taste for temperament.

JB: You made a comment about reading stories that sound like Henry James, you know, the very literary third person remove, then you meet the person and they're like, "hey, 'sup man." You know, it's very—
VL: Henry James already wrote all of Henry James's books! Leave his voice to him. He's the only

one that could pull it off. That's what I always want to tell writers when they're writing in the third person. There's a strange sort of ventriloquism that happens. A man or woman who speaks in his or her own lively, interesting diction, makes references and jokes that seem particular to her or him, suddenly throws all that away when writing in the third person. They start typing and turn into Henry James or Joan Didion. These are very stylized, personalized voices that have become so popular, so pervasive, that people think they are what third person is somehow meant to sound like. As if there was any such a thing.

It's like when I go to poetry readings and this people I know and love suddenly get up there and (LaValle does his best stuffy poet impression). They reads through their noses, pause portentously after every line. Sometimes after every word. They go all somber and I'm always thinking, What the hell?! I don't know who that's supposed to be. Yeats? Listen to an old recording of him reading his poems. There's at least one out there on YouTube. You'll laugh your ass off. You will absolutely recognize the style. But at least that was his. Probably. Let it go, that's what I want to say to these folks who take on a voice that's not their own. You're better than that. Or at least, your version of you could be wonderful, too.

JB: I think that is a common phenomenon—these anxieties where you want to imitate a writer yet completely rebel against them—with people my age, students. In your craft lecture, you were talking about how students will say something to the effect of, "Joyce got to this point with *Ulysses*. I'm going to start after that!" When you're teaching, is this anxiety the number one problem you notice in writing students?

VL: Well, there are two great anxieties I find in writing students. The serious ones, I mean. The main problem I see in all writing students is that so many have no concept about how to structure a narrative. That is the absolute main problem. I can't even stress enough how common this problem is.

I saw a poet once named Eleanor Wilner give a great talk about the modernists. How when they broke from the 19th century forms, whether in poetry, fiction, whatever, they did so with an unshakable grounding in all the rules of those forms. The poets knew how to write every structured form. The novelists, as well, knew how to construct narratives clearly. They'd been taught these

things in school. It had all been drilled into them. They broke from those learned forms, but only after they'd learned them. So, in a sense, a reader could still recognize the phantom outlines of those forms within the great work of the modernists. The traces, the outlines remained because the modernists were breaking away from something rather than simply throwing anything and everything onto the page. As a result those lasting works may be challenging, but they reward the diligent reader. The payoff for making one's way through the experimentation is a deeper, a more profound understanding of the ideas within. And this comes distinctly from the way these writers play with learned structures and forms. Think of Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*. For all the ways the novel refuses straightforward narrative Woolf is still smart enough to give the reader one nugget of dramatic potential right at the beginning of the book. "We are going to the lighthouse." The fact that it takes ten years for the family to get there is thrilling and wonderful only because she has teased the reader with the possibility of movement, of a destination. I can't overstate the importance of this aspect in the success of that book.

But three generations later, six generation later, the poets and fiction writers are now making copies of copies of copies of these original modernist masterpieces. They write free verse because they think that's the only way poetry can be written. They write plotless, interior novels because they no longer understand how to tell a story clearly. They might admire the work of Woolf or Joyce, but they forget to offer the reader that nugget at the start of the novel. There is no promise of a trip to the lighthouse. There is only a bunch of people sitting around a house thinking. Without the former, the latter is just formless dreck. This was Wilner's point and when I heard it, I was stung with the shock of recognition. She was speaking the truth. This wasn't just a failing in my students but also a failing in me when I was a student. Many of us think we're experimenting with prose, but we're just causing chemical fires in the lab. After her talk I resolved to learn as much as I could about plotting, narrative. How to actually tell a story as clearly as possible. If the students want to deviate from that method fine, great, but they should do so because they've made a conscious choice. Not because they're wandering in the dark. Know your forms!

The second problem facing writing students is that no one wants to write first books. What I mean is that when I ask my students, God bless 'em, which novel or collection they're emulating, which book they hope to measure up against, they never say anything sane. They say they want to write

something like *Mrs. Dalloway* or *Moby Dick* or *Jesus' Son*. I'm in love with their ambition and also want to pat them on the head gently the way you would when a Pomeranian barks at a Rottweiler. You applaud the effort maybe, but hope the little dog never really starts a fight. The point here isn't that these students can't write works of incomparable beauty and staying power. The point is that even Woolf, Melville, and Johnson didn't write these books the first time out. All of them started somewhere else. And never in a place as magisterial as those later works.

But students always hope, sometimes even expect, to leapfrog over their first books and make their debuts the equal of the ones that took even those geniuses many tries to write. I was the same way. I wanted to write a collection of stories that compared to *Dubliners*. But it's worth remembering that James Joyce's first book was actually a collection of poetry. It's called *Chamber Music*. You probably haven't heard of it because it isn't very good. That was his first book. Even that bad boy didn't get things right immediately. I try to impress this on my students. Be good to yourself. Take some of the pressure off your shoulders. You'll write *The Sound and the Fury* with your second book. (Laughs.) Though of course it was Faulkner's fourth.

JB: I wanted to ask about your decision in *The Devil in Silver* to tell a ghost story in a strange blend of third person narration and (often humorous) parentheticals. The number one thing they beat out of us, in fiction and non-fiction, is the use of parentheses. Can you talk about your decision to use parentheses, and how did you balance it with the third person voice?

VL: I wanted to try third person, but I didn't want to use that Henry James voice. Didn't want to use that Didion voice. Didn't want to sound like Shirley Jackson or Gayl Jones or Kenzaburo Oe. All writers I love. I wanted to use my voice. I wanted you to feel like your boy, Victor, is just telling you this story. To do this I needed to imagine a specific person I was telling the story to. I pictured a friend of mine, who is not a big reader at all. I said I'm going to tell this story to my man Ashanti. I'm going to reach him with this one. With a story about this dude named Pepper. It was the best way for me to access the humor, the jokes, and asides. It was all stuff I might say to Ashanti when we hung out and had a few beers. That gave me so much freedom and saved me from fretting about whether or not I sounded like a proper third-person narrator since there's no such thing.

As for the parentheticals...If there's one thing literary fiction seems to request, generally, its restraint. Don't say too much. Don't overwhelm. Be as subtle as the first signs of some secretive disease. But why? Subtlety has its merits. For some. But it can also be a covert way to enforcing a certain point of view, a certain perspective. It's like a kind of code. People who fit in our club, our special society, speak and act a certain way. Want to fit in? Then you'd better zip up. You don't want to act like new money in this old money crowd, do you? But I decided to call bullshit on that rule. Exuberance is exalted, as far as I'm concerned. And restraint can feel like a kind of death mask, a shroud. A lot of that restrained prose seems lifeless to me. So I decided I would just let everything spill out across the page, whether it was a joke, an interlude, or a third person narrator who addressed the reader directly inside a bunch of parentheses. Again, we go back to the idea that you can have no voice but your own. Learn the value of restraint and then relearn the value of abandon. If that's in you, let it out. At least try it and find the best balance to help you tell the story you're trying to tell. And then, in the next story, the next book, you can try something else.

JB: You mentioned before that there does seem to be some anxiety about writing in the third person now. Embracing the remove of third person, combined with the direct, more casual parentheses, feels like a way to address this anxiety.

VL: V.S Naipaul had a nice line about this. Something like, 'every book I write is an attempt to write the perfect book that I will never write'. In truth, of course, I'm not doing anything remotely new. You just have to reach back a ways, a hundred years or more? To see that the proper third-person voice sounded quite different from the way it does now. The remove was removed. That sense of icy distance was its own innovation, but I think it's time for a change. I hate to think of younger writers only using first person, and occasionally second. The third person can be such a wonderful tool for storytelling.

JB: Some of the horror fans did not want the parentheticals.

VL: No. But this goes back to my point about temperament. Some people know what they want from an experience with a book and they only wish to replicate it, exactly, time and again. This is the drug addict's model of reading. So if you deviate from the high they know, and feel comfortable

with, they're going to become uncomfortable. They're going to reject the dose. This isn't simply true of horror readers. This is an issue in every genre of readers one can find. Literary readers can be just as intolerant of mucking with the chemical balance of their drug. So as far as writers go maybe I'm a designer drug. I can't stand horror that is relentlessly grim. I find that more laughable than the stuff that changes mood, finds places for humor and tenderness and wit, along with the terror. Then again I can't really stand literary fiction that lacks a sense of the outside world. The couple seeming to suffer toward a divorce, but whose lives are otherwise going through a trial separation from any larger reality. As for horror, though, I'm far from the only one playing with narrative styles and content. People like Kelly Link, Jeff Van der Meer, and Brian Evenson are just three folks who come to mind. They don't do the same things I do, but they sure mess with horror and fantasy in ways that are eccentric and wonderful. Some horror readers have not liked the parentheticals but then some literary readers hated the monster and the violence. What can you do? I find it impossible to foresee these issues. In my mind, all of it is thrilling and amazing. It's even more thrilling and amazing because it's all being done within the pages of a single book. As long as I feel enthusiastic about the style and story then I'm doing my job well.

JB: On another style note, I wanted to ask about how you work in song lyrics in your work. You work them in as opposed to separating them or using the Pynchon technique of inventing your own song lyrics. How do you seamlessly work in these cultural references?

VL: I find it off-putting when a writer makes their references the foreground of the work instead of the background. But then again they may simply be acknowledging an unfortunate truth. Even smart, attentive readers will miss much of what you're trying to say unless you make it all very clear. I wish I could pretend I'm not the same way, but it's often just a fact of the reading experience. People miss so much. If the book is good it shouldn't matter. They'll still get enough to satisfy. But I do think this tendency is why any number of writers display their references so blatantly. Think of the beginning of Jeffrey Eugenides's *The Marriage Plot*. The first line is something like "look at all the books." Then a paragraph listing all the great works on a character's bookshelf. This is a self-conscious nod of course, Eugenides telling the reader exactly how to read his book. The tradition he'll play into and subvert. You can't miss it. But for me, that's the just problem.
There's a quote I used in *The Devil in Silver*, a line from an interview credited to James Hetfield,

the lead singer of Metallica. Someone, for some reason, has asked about the difference between himself and Sting. Hetfield says, "I read lot of books, too. But I don't need you to know which ones." I always liked that. Though, of course, Metallica has a song called "For Whom the Bell Tolls" so sometimes they flash their literary influences, too. [Laughs.]

Really, I think of those references. The line from a heavy metal song, or a Mos Def song, a quote from a movie or a great book. I consider those things like little secret signs. If you get the reference you might enjoy a grin, for a moment it's like me and you are winking at each other. But the wink shouldn't supersede the story. The story continues whether or not you know the ranting words of the dad from a scene in *Poltergeist*. You shouldn't have to already be in my club to join my club.

JB: Do you write—I mean you wrote a lot of *The Devil in Silver* at this Dunkin' Donuts, right?

VL: I wrote it there [points to a corner off Dunkin' Donuts sectioned off] because there's a plain wall, no windows. I couldn't look out at people passing by and I couldn't even turn comfortably in my chair and peek at the folks inside the store. Head down, facing a blank wall. That's how I got the book done.

JB: Do you just zone out the music playing overhead, or do you bring your own music?

VL: In the beginning, I didn't bring anything and the music playing in the store, kind of loud, would wreck my concentration. I learned to bring headphones, plug them into the computer, and play white noise to drown out the sounds.

Then, at a certain point in the novel, once I had a good steam going on, I took the headphones off again. I had depleted my natural resources for characters and needed to start mining. I realized the people in the Dunkin Donuts were a vast, natural resource. I switched seats so I could eavesdrop without drawing attention. And the conversations I heard here, some ended up in the book exactly as I transcribed them. Some side characters are people who were here. Like this guy [points to a man posted up beside the Dunkin' Donuts entrance]. A black dude with an Abe Lincoln beard panhandling at the entrance? That's good. He looks like Sherman Hemsley playing the Great Eman-

cipator in some low-rent community theater. And yet, I also can't forget that he's only doing this doorman routine at a Dunkin Donuts because he's probably living through some very hard times. If I don't pay attention, I miss all of that.

JB: Last question about *The Devil in Silver*: I saw you mention that your favorite monster is the werewolf. The werewolf doesn't seem to be very popular right now. The vampires are all over, zombies are always huge—but werewolves—the half- animal, half-man monster seems to have disappeared from the culture. Why do you think that is?

VL: Werewolves are coming back. Mark my words! There's a British writer named Glen Duncan who's written two very popular novels about werewolves in the modern day. They're smartly written, slyly funny, and also self-consciously playing with werewolf tropes. And Benjamin Percy has a novel coming out next year called *Red Moon*, a political novel with werewolves as the prosecuted minority. I'm really looking forward to that one.

But I think the potency of the werewolf character comes from the way it plays with questions about our bestial natures. People have to fear that capability in order for the werewolf to feel like a threat. At least that's how I see it. But if today folks are medicated, in stupor of pills and technology, maybe it's hard to even recall the sense that we can transform. Right now, it seems to me, that the best analogy for werewolves, lycanthropy, is the Internet. Good, upstanding people go online and become rabid racists and homophobes, join intolerant mobs, not to mention the pornographic depravity so easy to indulge now that everyone's laptop or cell phone can become a private XXX booth. Maybe that's where we become wild, where we turn into these creatures of lust and fury. Logging online is like the rising of the full moon.

JB: Can you talk about your own half-man, half-animal creation in *The Devil in Silver*? An old, withered man with a bison head torments the patients at New Hyde. I read the bison as an allegory for the obscuring of the cliffs in modern life.

VL: I wanted to write an American Minotaur. One of the things I love about the Greek myths in general is how completely ridiculous and bizarre their monsters are: the Minotaur, Centaurs,

Harpies. They're all bonkers. But look at us still talking about them over a thousand years later. So, I wanted to update that Minotaur, but with an American twist. So I gave it the head of a bison instead of a bull.

We also have a painting in our apartment, done by an artist named Mala Iqbal. It's profile of a bison, done with airbrush. The bison's head, the fur and horns, look a bit cartoonish, but somehow she made its one eye...there was such life in it. A haunted quality. Not exactly evil, but full of foreboding. I pass that painting every time I walk through our living room. And over time the power of its gaze affected me. I was the feeling I was trying to achieve. A thing that you know shouldn't scare you and yet it does.

And, last, the cliff of life. You're right to read the bison in that context. Running those big beasts off the sides of cliffs was an age-old way for Native Americans and European settlers to kill the animals in large numbers. It seemed like a pretty fair analogy for the way we live now. Quite frankly, it's not even like it's hard to see the cliff—we have fallen off the cliff, I think. Or, maybe, we are falling and haven't actually hit the bottom yet. But we're so distracted these days we don't even notice we're falling. It's not that we don't know. Our country is nothing if not anxious or fearful right now. So, it's like in a dream or something—you know you're falling, you feel that you're falling, but you just can't wake up.

JB: It reminds me of the line in the book about the state between wakefulness and sleeping, and that's where—

VL: The real monsters are.

Alexandra Breznay

Bad Husband

Abbie Krupnick

put my man in a box
gave him a cookie
a blanket a watch
dust the sawdust off his rocking chair
comb pomade through his hair
made him start some bad habits
keep an eye on the clock
he off his rocker
my man run like a scared little rabbit
he caught me going at it
he a meek sack of shit
sunk so low
can't seem him for to spit in his eye
come back, mr. man
don't leave me here alone
my joints are shaking
without you to keep them warm
I tried faithful and failed
sorry, you left me unable to walk
still I can talk your legs off

drop you at the station
stranded in the middle of creation
keep your hands in your pockets
don't talk to strangers
hide in your luggage
at the first sign of danger
three police dogs will sniff you
out of the manger
you quaking in your bones
can't sleep without me
can't sleep alone
can't sleep soundly to save your soul
take care of you
when you grow old
you as good as sold yourself
away, she carry what
isn't yours, countdown
the oh-so-slow hours
until its born
law stuck it to you
stuck with her for life
held your manhood
under the knife
she keep her figure nice and tight
lighter than lightweight
string her up like a kite
make you understand why
when she feel the need
to turn out the lights
you a bad husband
she a bad wife

Ten Systems of a Newsstand

Lexi Hornbeck

The Newsstand can be seen as a space for human bodies to engage in a systematic way of life. It is a site where time and rhythm congeal in the open space of a city street. It is a location of selection, exploration, and personal reflection of the human body and the news story. The stories evoke physical and emotional responses during the course of a dweller's visit.

For those that treat the Newsstand as quest of self discovery, it can be seen as the coffee cart where the sugar-to-milk ratio is just right; the fruit-stand with ripest pears; or the express subway line, routinely providing point A to B. The time spent in the space of a Newsstand is always temporary. Monetary exchanges are made, articles read and then abandoned.

The daily circulation of articles from a Newsstand is always likely to provoke situations of cause and effect for the city's inhabitants.

I. Integumentary

On a rack of the Newsstand you grab an issue of the US News and turn to the beauty section. An article warns that salon pedicures can be "rife with risks", for bacterial infections linger in foot-baths at nail salons.

You stroke the clear space of your thumbnail and its smooth sensation sooths you. It seems as if streams of bees-wax are captured within oils generated by the matrix. You think of the massive hooves of an elephant, and wonder how something so tough can rise out from the softest, and most wrinkled of skin; you search for the nail root beneath the surface of your soft flesh but its origins

are hidden. The lunula holds the reflection of light beams within its white sliver.
It is the crescent moon of your body.

On both sides of the nail is a fold where the crease slits into lateral margins. You clutch a small metal instrument from your bag used to push your cuticles down to a pulp.

One side of the instrument is a convex tool used to chisel cuticle tissue. The other is a scraper to clean impurities from the distal edge. Like a garden shrub, you know that nails must be pampered with absolute caution. The nails never grow past an inch for you've developed the nervous habit of biting them.
How could anyone do such a thing as to bite their nails? With all the rife risks?

As a carnivore of your own dead bits of being, please realize this is not proper grooming.

II. Skeletal
On the rack of the Newsstand you buy a New York Times and skim the pages to the film reviews. You read a critics review of the newly released Disney movie The Hunchback of Notre Dame, though you hate reading anything that has to do with the anatomy of the skeletal system. Words like "bones" and "skulls" provoke images in the psyche that earn a bad rep in society. The critique is one of juvenile illegitimacy, which raves the simulated world of Walt Disney. You crinkle the Times into a ball and throw it away like a bad omen.

You know the logistics of the narrative: The poor postured Quasimodo seeks love and receives it only in his hour of death. Poor, poor him! says the "Society of Dead Critics." (This is the name for the imaginary audience of critics you've invented in your head.)

He should have sat up straight, the critics say. Good posture is everything at the end of the day.

III. Reproductive

On the rack of the Newsstand you decide to buy a Cosmopolitan magazine with a 20-dollar bill made from your job of stripping. You pump every last cent into what you consider a "Lady Gaga" magazine. For what is a "Lady Gaga" exactly? Could it be trademark for a pop-culture vagina?

You read on a bench adjacent to the Newsstand, stilettos tapping the concrete, diddling & fiddling the pages with those three-inch finger nails every now and again.

The Diet & Fitness section reads:
"Today's Big Issue: Freezing Your Ovaries!"

It seems a leading fertility expert suggests women in their early to mid twenties freeze parts of their ovaries to prolong their reproductive years.

The first line of the article is a question: What do you think, is freezing your eggs and preserving your fertility a brilliant idea?

Your fingertips diddle & fiddle the pages at the allegro beat as the stand-man catches a glimpse at your Lady Gaga. The corners of his mouth turn up, and cheeks change the color of your lipstick. You smile, for not wearing underwear always makes the day more thrilling.

You get paid each night to heat up your ovaries for all the dancing, fondling, and stripping. Never once did you think of freezing them for preservation. What brilliance!

IV. Muscular

On the rack of the Newsstand you reach for Times magazine like a mad-hatter in passing. You purchase it with a hundred dollar bill though it costs only $2.50. A stack of change is placed in your palm of your hand by the stand-man and in the bills' weight you feel your consumerist strength. Inside the magazine is a Foreign News section about China where an article reads:

The Strongest Man.
He stands full six feet tall.
No brittle yellowman he, but broad and bronzed and bland.
Bible in hand or coat pocket.
Pistol within arms reach.
Devout Christian.
Dead shot.

You are clueless as what exactly a "Dead Shot" is and how it has anything to do with "Devout Christians." It seems an oxymoron of fragments. Rolling the magazine up, you place it into your back pocket. You grab the bills the stand-man has handed back from the other pocket, and the realization sets in that you've been short changed. Screaming at the stand-man to give you all your money back in exchange for the (as you call it) commercial garbage, he simply shakes his head and replies, "What are you going to do, huh, tough guy?"

Looks like you've underestimated his strength in this battle of capitalism.

V. Lymphatic
On the rack of the Newsstand you artfully doge the watcheye of the stand-man and steal an issue of the London Free Press. The title of a headliner story reads, "Woman Who Choked on Marshmallow Dies."

The article states that the woman, Janet Rudd, was working at a "horticultural" booth at a fair beside her twin sister. In an event held each year the contestants must pop one marshmallow at a time into their mouths and say the words "chubby bunny." The victor is the participant that can most amuse the spectators by gorging themselves with the most marshmallows.

According to one of ill-amused spectators, "Janet took a break and never came back."

The St. John paramedics were unable to remove the blockage from Janet's throat. She had swallowed one-too-many marshmallows. The deprivation of oxygen for Janet was fatal, and the fair

never held a "Chubby Bunny" event again. Perhaps, the game would have been safer had the name of it been less syllables, you think.

Out of curiosity, you buy a roll of Mentos from the newsstand and unpack all 12 mint discs into your mouth at once. As they clink against your lymph-notes you choke on the word, "Mento."

VI. Respiratory

On the rack of the Newsstand you scan the titles for a health magazine that will convince you to quit smoking. Instead in the US News you come across a piece that links respiratory problems with post-traumatic stress disorder of 9/11. It illustrates that mental health and physical diseases are distinctly connected, for they balance each other as dependents. They are so dependant of each other, the article says in a ponderous paragraph, that there's no way in knowing which one is the driver.

An unlit Camel in the mouth, you strike a match and almost catch flame to the paper. The article ends with the claim that the post-traumatic stress disorder of 9/11 has a mediating role in the respiratory issues of victims. The skyscrapers cast shadows over your head, as you puff down the length of your cigarette.

VII. Digestive

On the rack of the Newsstand you swipe a print of the Wall Street Journal to use as blankets. You find a stoop near the stand and lay out the pages over the pee-stained cement steps to curl up for a good nights rest. A headline in print beneath your head is laughable, "Anti-White Discrimination After McDonald's Employee Denies Customer New Biscuits."

You try not to laugh ever since you lost most of your teeth, because you think it makes you look crazy.

When a white customer asked a black employee for more biscuits the McDonalds worker was quoted

as saying, "Get a load of this. The white chick has a problem with her biscuits."

The black employee was later charged for Anti-White discrimination.

"The problem wasn't with the biscuits white girl! It was McDonalds," you say out loud to yourself because you're sure no one can hear you. You fall asleep, nauseously digesting a half-eaten Big Mac found earlier in the trashcan.

VIII. Urinary
On the rack of the Newsstand you decide to finally buy a Better Living magazine and become a television star greater than the eloquent delinquent Martha Stewart. You've got ink pens with fruit-shaped topper ends, highlighters, and thick markers poking out of your bag. You've been exercising your wrist in repetitious spasms of underlining. You set the magazine down on a bench beside you to grab your magnifying glass from the bag for closer reading. When you look back up-fist full of pens- you find that your Better Living has vanished.

A homeless man has positioned it on concrete steps of a fountain, and is pissing all over the front page of it.

XI. Circulatory
On the rack of the Newsstand you prowl the selections of music magazines. You navigate towards Vice but as you reach for it a headline catches your eye. It is the cover of Discover that reads, "Big Idea: Snake Oil Cures for Damaged Hearts"

After years of studies, researchers found that python blood contains a trio of molecules that rapidly bulk up and strengthen heart muscle. This suggests a new approach for combating cardiovascular disease that affects 6 million Americans each year. Your thumb strikes the page of the Discover magazine and leaves a small paper cut. A thread of red flows onto the black-and-white ink.

Perhaps, the python blood would become factored in with your cultural identity. Just another percentage in your genetics classification system:

i.e. 20 % Italian, 30% French, 44% German, 6% Python.

X. Nervous

The brain can overload with information found in the days spent at the Newsstand. You never make it to the rack anymore, and instead stay curled up in the fetal position stroking the soothing beds of your nails.

On an Iphone there is an icon of brown empty shelves that reads "Newsstand." There is sound, like that of the clicking tongue, each time the index finger hits the touch screen. You pillage through a mess of titles and press on an article about the electronic Newsstand you are using. The 'innovative' application is leading to numberless closures of city street newsstands.

A writer of Health magazine makes the argument that, "Newsstands don't matter as much as they once did. What is the purest measure of consumer demand? It's newsstand. People putting money down in a retail environment is all about the vitality of your brand."

Pangs of detachment from physical Newsstand sets in after reading the article. There you are, alone in an isolated environment of mass media jargon. There is no time, rhythm, or space to this place. There is only the icon of an empty shelf and the reimagining of one's "self" in juxtaposition to new stories. If technology has become a mechanized system used to redefine human practices of everyday living, it may be necessary to create a new city.

Perhaps, you think, no news is good news that can sustain the livelihood of being.

John Connell

Magical Thinking

Clayton Albachten

Everybody I know went crazy just by my thinking about them. Exchanges are practiced in the magical land I live in—silver coins, sea shells, battalions of virgins any time I so much as remove insects from their hair. All I wanted was a tasty bug. They seem to think even hunger is something special. But when I look at myself in the mirror there's a problem. No one consulted me. Who signed with the Creator in my name? Fucking identity theft is what it is.

I put it in a pot of boiling water, it boiled down to a fortune cookie reading, "A matter of size."

The Creator as salesman. "These bodies are special. They have an 'ontological priority.'"

I think I must've gotten my body from the restaurant I've been eating at my entire life. The one with the sign that says FREE SEX.

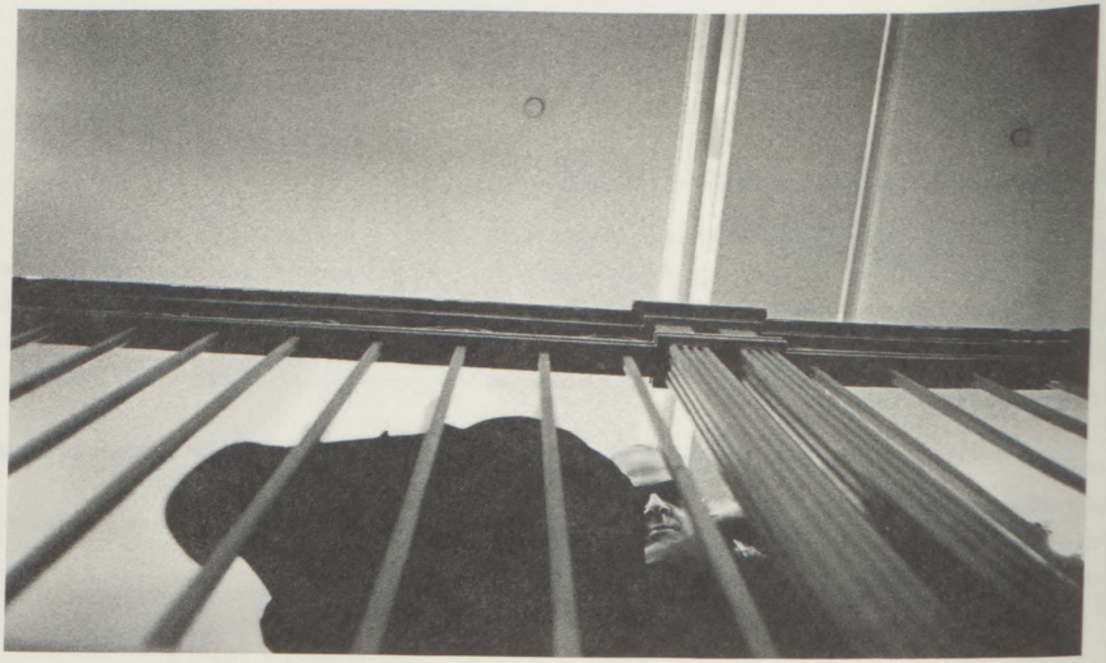
Anniversary

Daniel Creahan

On waking, he brushed the red hairs off the pillow
Left the note and keys on the table
Next to the cutting board

Drove North to the lake,
Where, through gritting teeth
He drowned both the cats

Love
Isn't what we mean to each other
But what we make each other into
And who we accept becoming



Alexandra Breznay

Facebook Poem With Me In It

Jesse Statman

I wish I weren't
the subject of
a poem,
but I am
the subject of
several poems
written
on your
cell phone
and posted on
Facebook.

You wrote to me.
You said I was really cool.
I introduced you to my friends,
digitally.
You told me you were lonely.
You told me I should be
your boyfriend.
I said yes!
We were really happy!

We almost threw a party,
but we ran out of
virtual balloons.

I introduced you to my best friend,
digitally,
and you,
digitally,
told me you didn't want to talk to
my best friend, but you wanted to talk to me,
but you didn't want to call me,
and you didn't want to hear my voice,
and the only picture I can find of you,
is of your feet!

I introduced you to a poet named Hane,
digitally,
and you,
digitally,
asked her weird questions
that freaked her out!

You started gossip about me
in the underbelly of the
New York City Transit System,
and how we were bf and gf, and
sitting in a tree,
T-X-T-I-N-G,
but I broke your heart,
and you were just being
really thoughtful,

and insightful
about all areas of
life!

And you made my friend,
who is really unusual,
really scared of you,
and we hid from you
in the boy's bathroom
at our high school,
and sometimes it felt gross
to be hiding from you
in the boy's bathroom
at our high school,
but sometimes
it felt good,
knowing that
wherever you were,
you definitely weren't
in the boy's bathroom
at our high school,
because that would be
tantamount to
death!

And later on, you called me
and asked why we weren't friends
on Facebook, but I wasn't
on Facebook, and I never will be
on Facebook, ever again in my
entire life, thanks to

people like
you!

And how dare you put poems
about me on Facebook?
Were they even good?
Were they even poems?
Were they even real?
Are you even real?
Am I even real?

Your Facebook profile picture
was of the lead singer
from Green Day.
Is he real?

I don't think anything is real.
I used to think even people I
had never even met were real!
I feel disillusioned,
like the new as it becomes
old.

Blues

Samantha Gabbert

she's wearing a blue dress...an indigo blue dress. cap sleeves cap her olive skin and she's smiling as if the moon is dripping purples reds and golds and it is right here that the braille of my spine melts into a sea of warm sand. she's wearing lipstick because she always wears lipstick, but i don't know this yet. i don't know her name. i don't know she likes to kiss and be kissed on the neck, but i'd like to think she does. she says goodbye next to me. she's laughing, and she laughs as she leaves me the first time and i know nothing of the second time and i say nothing. i just think of her indigo blue dress, much like i remember Columbia blue flags and iron gates and her, the other her, and it's windy there and she's laughing in white with her long dark hair blowing away, just as she slithers a long, thin arm across the back of her neck and wraps it all in closer with the spaces between her fingers and she doesn't see me either. her jean shorts are acid blue. her eyes are darker than mine and i learn other things in the next couple weeks, like that she speaks better french, that she can't handle her liquor, and most importantly we will never be one in the same...and it hurts.

ATLANTIC

JESSIE LOCHRIE

One night I drink too much cheap wine in his attic apartment. In the morning he looks at me with curiosity and fear, like I am a small wild animal that he can't tell is dangerous or not.

I go to the beach and my feet numb in the water and I think about all the boys I've ever known with navy peacoats and necks that smell of cigarettes. All the boys with guitars and shotguns, how they disappear and how it is starting to matter less and less.

III. Yarmouth, December

It is strange how easy this radio silence comes, how little I have found I truly need. How comfortable I have become here, my small bedroom, the smell of bread, lavender candles.

At night the airport is a field of glittering stars - red, white, blue lights mapping out the runways. Above it, the light from the new control tower cuts circles through the fog. Our Eiffel Tower, we say. Our lighthouse, bringing us safely home past sirens and shoals.

And so now — the coyote that runs across the street before me, the rabbits that flee my yard when I walk up the drive. Passing an ice cube between our mouths like we are teenagers, though we are not teenagers and that is fine by me at last. Whiskey lips, cats the color of seals, the rain and the rain and the steam rising off the road.

IV. Cambridge, January

I wonder how many hours of my life have been spent driving into Boston in search of someone that says the word perfect into the space between my shoulderblades. Awaking to sunlight, flowers opening on his skin, red ribbon on my wrists.

Days pass without notice; there's nothing like a boy with blue eyes to make you forget everything. The moon huge over Portland, remote farmhouses without clocks or mirrors. It's no use worrying about Time, O'Hara said, we didn't need speedometers/we could manage cocktails out of ice and water.

It is far too warm to be January. This has never felt like winter at all.

Amelia Belle-Isle

Dad and the Penguins

Banks Harris

Brother

Ford threw parties in the basement of our brownstone when he was in high school. He is nine years older than me. It was past my bedtime but I sat at the top of the stairs. (Not because I particularly wanted to, but because it seemed like something I should do, like something I saw in a movie once.) I didn't need to sit at the top of the stairs because I had seen this before: loud kids tossing their backpacks in a pile before entering our family room. When it would get too loud I'd hide my head under my pillow. One time it got so loud I knew that my parents would yell at him so I went down to the kitchen, grabbed a plate and slammed it against the counter. No one yelled at me so I broke another one, hoping it would drown out the sounds of the stereo and laughter from below. My parents didn't come downstairs and my brother didn't come upstairs to see what was going on. The kitchen floor was littered with broken shards, and I was left in my nightgown trying to figure out how to go back to bed without cutting my bare feet.

Sister

I didn't know who Evan was. When I heard the word sister I asked my mother why she didn't live with us. She's not your full sister, she said. My God! What kind of mother would I be if she didn't live with us? Evan is from my father's first marriage. She is twenty-one years older than me. My mother threw her a wedding party even though she eloped with her husband at City Hall. The wedding was held in our brownstone, a big dinner party, Japanese themed. (Her husband is from Tokyo; there were sushi rolls passed around on treys and cups of hot Saki no one drank.) As plans

cards there were Granny Smith apples with pieces of paper stuck into the top with our family member's names. They were the only apples Evan would eat as a kid, especially seven, when my mother first met her. No one said anything about this Asian themed party. My mother detests sushi. Out of all the cultures, I got stuck with a Japanese son-in-law? They're the most reserved people in the world. Give me an Italian, a Puerto Rican. Now those are the people I can relate to!
Evan and I both write. She writes prose poems about twins fighting in the womb and I write stories about frat boys killing each other by accident. On a weekend when I went to visit her by myself, at her pink wooden house on a swamp in Long Island, she mentioned her sister, Lauren. I never knew about Lauren. She died when she was five, presumably from a health condition from the pictures Evan showed me Lauren drew in the hospital. I recognized the scraggily handwriting, the purple rainbow, the dog with three legs. My father had another one of these drawings framed over his desk at home. I had always assumed that either Ford or I drew the picture.

Father

Dad took me to the zoo once, the crappy one near our house in Park Slope, Brooklyn. There's nothing much to see there besides the sea lions and the meerkats ever since a kid was eaten by one of the Polar bears. (There are no more bears or lions on display.) I remember being small enough to hold his hand and my forehead hit his belt buckle while we shuffled from cage to aquarium tank. I watched the penguins dive under water like my swim teacher taught me how to cut the water with my hands during free-style. They waddled like my brother when his belt was nestled beneath his buttocks as he walked through the neighborhood with a stereo hoisted on his shoulders. "Julia," my father said to me. "You know those aren't the full-sized penguins. Those penguins are very small, but penguins can get to be as big as you or me. Here, let me ask the guy who works here over there."

Before I could say anything else my dad went over to the guy to ask him where the full-sized penguins were. All I remember is him motioning to his forehead indicating height to the zoo attendant. I felt mortified. Though I was four or five, even then I still knew that we were in fact, looking at the normal-sized penguins.

What a crazy Old Fool! Mom said when I told her what happened later. Mistake. I brought this up at a dinner party and my mother told this story ever since, Dad and the Penguins. Your father must have seen a cartoon back in the 1500's when he was a boy and the penguins must have been the same size as the kids! (Mom always called him Old Fool; Tell Old Fool dinner's ready. Old Fool! Get the phone! They are eleven years apart in age.)

Mother

Mom picked me up from school with blood all over her forehead and my dog who was either having seizures or was so doped up on phenobarbital you had to drag her around for walks. The blood was stage make-up; Mom had put it on herself because she was doing a self-portrait in her studio. The other third graders started crying when she showed up. It looked like someone had shot her in the forehead. She licked her lips. My God! I forgot to take it off! My mother painted massive portraits of naked women. She got her models from walking up to people in the streets and saying that she thought they were beautiful. She shoved me in front of them. Look, I'm a mother and I'd just like to work with you. This usually worked because of her Southern accent and the fact that she had no reservation in touching strangers' faces and elbows, telling them how graceful she would make them look in oil on canvas. My mother painted from life. The models were mostly out of work actors and dancers who also earned extra money in taking care of me, until there was a knock on my bedroom door and they were told to go upstairs to the studio to pose while she painted.

Empathy Without Amnesty: Reading *The Reader*

Mike McGuire

Though often held in positive esteem, the act of forgiveness risks being met with severe criticism in certain instances. Take, for instance, the pardoning of a serial murderer, an unrepentant rapist, or someone associated with the Third Reich. Such individuals have garnered reputations so negative in our collective consciousness, it is frequently considered an offense to insinuate that they deserve even a modicum of compassion. Thus, Stephen Daldry's 2008 film *The Reader*, adapted from Bernhard Schlink's novel *Der Vorleser*, is unique in its refusal to paint former Schutzstaffel (SS guard) Hanna Schmitz as a hermetic paragon of the Heartless Nazi. Instead, much of the narrative focuses on how circumstances aligned to motivate her actions, mollifying their contemptible nature. Daldry and screenwriter David Hare allow ample opportunity for actress Kate Winslet to reveal Hanna's inner humanity, making it difficult for viewers to dismiss her as unworthy of understanding as she is punished for her crimes during World War II. Empathic understanding, however, is separate from forgiveness, something Hanna can never achieve for reasons to be discussed herein.

The audience's initial introduction to the Hanna Schmitz character does little to endear her to viewers, possibly a representation of the instant judgment people tend to make of those with Nazi ties. Acquainted to the audience through Michael Berg, the film's fifteen-year-old protagonist, in the town of Neustadt in 1958, Hanna personifies German stereotypes. Fiercely independent, short-tempered, and possessing a severe, clipped, accent, she dominates Michael, with whom she has an affair. Shortly thereafter, however, the film begins showcasing a more humane side of Hanna.

She insists that Michael read aloud to her from the literary classics he is assigned in school, displaying an intense passion for beautiful language. On a date in the German countryside, the camera lingers on her face as it takes on a rare expression of panic when she is presented with a restaurant menu; at last, Hanna is showing vulnerability. Later, while listening to a group of children singing in a church, she starts crying. Hanna is not, then, an emotionally callous individual; rather, she possesses a humanity that has been obscured by necessity.

Hanna, we learn, is illiterate, and she had joined the SS in order to avoid a job promotion requiring her to read and write. Her hard exterior and lack of interpersonal relationships (she insists on maintaining emotional distance from Michael, and flees town when the relationship begins to escalate) can thus be explained by a need to maintain her secret. That her behavior was caused by an unfortunate life circumstance as opposed to an innate callousness and hatred for Jews, leftists, homosexuals, Poles, and or Gypsies, makes her actions more difficult to chastise. Moreover, Hanna seems to have no understanding whatsoever of the atrocity of her actions, readily admitting to the judge of the war crimes trial (in which she is being prosecuted) that she selected concentration camp inmates to be sent to death. Additionally, she admits to keeping the door to a church locked as it burned down, with 300 Jewish women under her supervision inside. Hanna's full disclosure, combined with moments of her looking strangely proud during her confession, suggest a moral ignorance, likely resulting from illiteracy. Presumably, her inability to read enabled Hanna to have a highly limited view of the world, hindering her from engaging with information that may have prevented her from joining the SS.

Ultimately, Hanna falsely accepts total responsibility for overseeing the murder of the women (in fact, she shared this duty with six other guards), partially because to prove otherwise would require revealing her illiteracy. One may also theorize that Hanna's willingness to accept responsibility and the life prison sentence that comes with it is because she has realized, over the course of the trial, the seriousness of what she did. I doubt it is a coincidence that her admission comes immediately after the emotional testimony of a mother and daughter who were under her "care" at Auschwitz.

Meanwhile, Michael, who observed Hanna during the trial, is haunted by his relationship with her well into adulthood. His feelings toward her mirror those of the viewers: initially disgusted that he

loved a woman who condemned others to death, he later contemplates how her life experiences factored into her actions. Eventually, he begins transcribing novels onto audio cassettes and sending them to her in prison (resulting in her learning to read by comparing print copies of the books with his narrations), which seems to be a display of empathic understanding. When Hanna is due for release from prison after serving a sentence of twenty-two years, Michael agrees to support her reintegration into society, though he receives her coldly during a visit. His interactions with Hanna indicate an ambivalence about his feelings for her. Michael loved Hanna and sympathizes with the adversity she has faced, but remains critical of her actions and feels guilty about assisting her. Shortly before her release, Hanna hangs herself in her cell, leaving behind a note bequeathing her savings to Ilana Mather, a camp survivor who authored a book about the death march from Auschwitz which implicated Hanna and the other guards during the war crimes trial. Michael, seeking catharsis, journeys from Berlin to New York City to give the money to the woman personally. She asks Michael upon his arrival:

What are you asking for? Forgiveness for her? Or do you just want to feel better yourself? My advice, go to the theatre, if you want catharsis. Please. Go to literature. Don't go to the camps. Nothing comes out of the camps. Nothing.

Additionally, Ilana refuses Hanna's money and the idea of donating it to a group aiding Holocaust survivors, as that could be considered absolution, and she "won't have any part of that." If The Reader was faithful to the genre of Hollywood-produced film, Ilana, serving as a representation of all the people wronged by Hanna, would accept the offering, pardon her, and free Michael from his feelings of implication. The film is honest, however, showing that instances of catharsis prevalent in works of art are often incompatible with the realities of life, particularly relating to the Holocaust.

Though Ilana would likely agree with Kathryn Belicki, Jessica Rourke, and Megan McCarthy in their essay "Potential Dangers of Empathy and Related Conundrums," that expressions of empathy directed at a wrongdoer may lessen the seriousness of her offense and risk enabling it, this is not the case for Hanna Schmitz. She is unambiguously guilty for the wrongful deaths of hundreds of people, a sin of such significance that it cannot be minimized-- Hanna herself comes to realize that, "It doesn't matter what I think. It doesn't matter what I feel. The dead are still dead." Additionally,

her crimes---selecting which of the women under her supervision would be killed at Auschwitz, in addition to remaining passive as hundreds of Jewish women perished in a church fire--cannot be replicated at the time *The Reader* is set. At the beginning of the narrative, World War II has been over for a decade; she is thus stripped of her former authority, living innocuously as a tram conductor. Moreover, there is no indication that Hanna is anti-Semitic, unfeeling, or particularly violent. When asked by the judge of the war crimes trial as to why she failed to unlock the doors of the burning church, she responds, "If we had opened the doors and they had all come rushing out...how could we have restored order? We couldn't just let them escape! We were responsible for them!" Such a statement indicates moral ignorance as opposed to an innate malice. While this does not excuse her inaction (on the contrary, hearing human beings being burned alive and failing to act is worthy of reproach, lack of education notwithstanding), it makes her an unlikely candidate for a career as a serial murderer. It is also crucial to note that Hanna is, of course, a fictional character, so there is even less risk in sympathizing with her disadvantaged background and resulting illiteracy, which were of paramount importance in her decision to join the SS.

Some people, however, maintain that Hanna's life circumstances should not garner sympathy from viewers, arguing that there is no excuse for her behavior. In a negative review of The Reader from its initial release in 2008, Manohla Dargis of *The New York Times* expresses her outrage at Hanna's illiteracy being used to lessen her culpability, "as if literacy were an excuse for barbarism...[the audience is being asked to] pity a death camp guard." Dargis makes a point that should be taken seriously, as using consequences to lessen a person's responsibility for a wrong risks conveying that behavior ordinarily considered reprehensible is acceptable in certain instances. What Dargis fails to acknowledge is that Hanna's disadvantaged background is never used to exonerate her of responsibility, to legitimize the deaths she is responsible for. Instead, the film asks us to reconsider the notion that certain groups of people preclude empathic understanding.

Indeed, sympathizing with the reasons for committing a wrong is quite different from pardoning it. While one may regret the circumstances which resulted in Hanna's choice to join the SS, it remained her choice, and had devastating consequences. I will invoke Jacques Derrida's sentiment in On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness by claiming that "only the dead...could legitimately consider forgiveness;" no living person has the authority to exonerate her on behalf of all those she con-

demned to death . Though Hanna's suicide the day prior to her release from jail may be interpreted as the film's attempt to redeem her, to show that literacy has afforded her an understanding of her past actions to which the only way she can respond is by taking her own life, absolution remains impossible. Her death is yet another call for viewers to imagine how her life, and perhaps the lives of other people considered irredeemable, could have turned out under different circumstances. As Hanna asks the judge who dismisses her as an unfeeling monster upon learning of her involvement in the Holocaust, what would you have done if you were in her position?

John Connell

Body/House

Kaila Shubak

You were younger than me. You are always younger. Our memories will never have the same colors or same words or same people. More importantly: never the same feelings. But that's okay. It is good to hold on to different things. We didn't know Senator Scott but we knew his house at the end of Harbor Lane. It faced a bay. We both happened to grow up and through a few summers in Cape May. During the day we stayed at the house and when it was time for rest, mom and dad would carry us on a path towards the condo. We probably sleep-walked up the stairs. It was too cold in the condo, never above 70 degrees. Tante Hella and Uncle Dennis (who controlled the temperature) bought the property on which the Scott house was built, secure with the intentions of tearing it down and putting up a Victorian-styled mansion like the others surrounding it. We knew they were rich and could do that.

The Scott house was one-floored except for the maid's quarters above the attached garage. Tante Hella and Uncle Dennis didn't have a maid, the space was just called that. They didn't have a horse and carriage either but the driveway was semi-circular with a post at the end. For a horse. The Senator kept adding more rooms as he had more children, so to get to the other end of the house, the last room, we had to walk through all the other rooms. I don't remember how many there were but you might. All the bedrooms were on that far side, the living room was in the middle, the kitchen on the other side of it. I don't know what end the garage was attached to nor do I remember a bathroom, but both of those rooms existed.

There were white shutters on all of the windows, the exterior walls were white cement. There was a roof. There were multiple doors that didn't have locks on them. That's why we never slept inside the Scott house. It was a house with an expiration date. A house to destroy, because it was a house

with no personal value. We didn't have time to learn all the surfaces we had not been previously acquainted with. We were still learning the purposes of things. We were seven and nine, then eight and ten. Tante Hella let us color on the pale yellow walls in one of the rooms. She would give us crayons and shut the door. You drew a lot of flowers. I drew rainbows. We both drew animals and mom and dad. There were other inanimate objects that demanded attention in animate ways. Like the furniture in the small, dimly-lit library. We only went in there to sit on two big chairs and on the small table in between them, split our candy from the Wawa a few blocks away. I wasn't interested in those books, they were dark-colored and dusty. We knew to be quiet in the library. Mom and dad would routinely check on us to make sure we were okay, that's how quiet we were.

The library was closest to the living room. The living room was the most spacious and coincidentally the most sparse. There was a three-seat couch, various pictures neither one of us would have been able to remember, and in a gothic-font, a wrought-iron "S" over the mantle. There was a white, flower-and-vine-metaled, rolling tray table that we used to serve our guests. We pretended the Scott house was ours sometimes.

There might have been brick. The fireplace was brick. Uncle Dennis had almost burned down the middle of the house one night by throwing pieces of furniture into there. Broken wooden chairs, mostly. I remember the flames crackling, shooting out of the hearth. You called it the birth.

During the day Tante Hella would give us small plastic bowls and ask us to walk to the blackberry bushes that shaped the path towards the condo. We were trusted enough to go by ourselves and we reveled in that fact. We ran. We had to watch out for thorns when picking the blackberries. We wouldn't be able to tell the blood from the fruit's juice on our fingers. I don't remember eating many blackberries after we brought them back. I don't think I liked them at the time. Through the open window in the kitchen, Tante Hella took the bowls from our outstretched hands. The sink was there.

The grass on the property was always yellowed and dry, itchy against our ankles. We walked past the pink, purple, and blue hydrangea that lined the outside walls of the Scott house. There were so many bees. Sometimes we would pick the flowers off the bushes, having thought they were the

most beautiful flowers we had ever seen in our lives so far. We didn't know that the beauty's apex is the start of its decay. There was more than just family over one warm afternoon, and we didn't want to be around all the adults so we went to the furthest room from the living room and shut the door. It got stuck. We were locked inside this room we normally never went into and it was both alarming and exhilarating. We turned our plight into an escape mission. I let you climb through the window first.

After the Scott house was demolished, Tante Hella and Uncle Dennis found a time capsule buried near the foundation. I don't remember what was in it but you might. You tend to remember more than me. I only wish you were able to turn my life into a museum where I'm allowed to touch everything.

How I would Write these poems with someone Else's Presence on Me

ZEE WHITSIDES

As if I were one million dopey
Robert Frosts dropping off the trail
at each intersecting ear

ROBERT FROST: girls around the fire
girls telling girls stories
an ax in the frozen trees…
a sign, look at my marriage

White buglife under the paint
I prefer you not to lavender
but fewer have touched you
and that has made all the guests
woozy clean priest-conversants
My mother asked what's that snow
on the wall and I was caught
into her tune
The fly got up
and walked, Jesus now reigns these poems
Fly Jesus always comes back to my garden

JESUS: At some point I realized
you would never be satisfied
in love so I told you as you
poured out your cup I would
fill it with my blood knowing
you would never stop pouring
or meeting with pourers

Eastern Spine

Micaela Foley

For a solstice I have seen the sky, whitening
in the east.
This morning more than the tide
we fear the waning moon
This morning the wind nettles: a fish spine
marks the place where no thing will grow

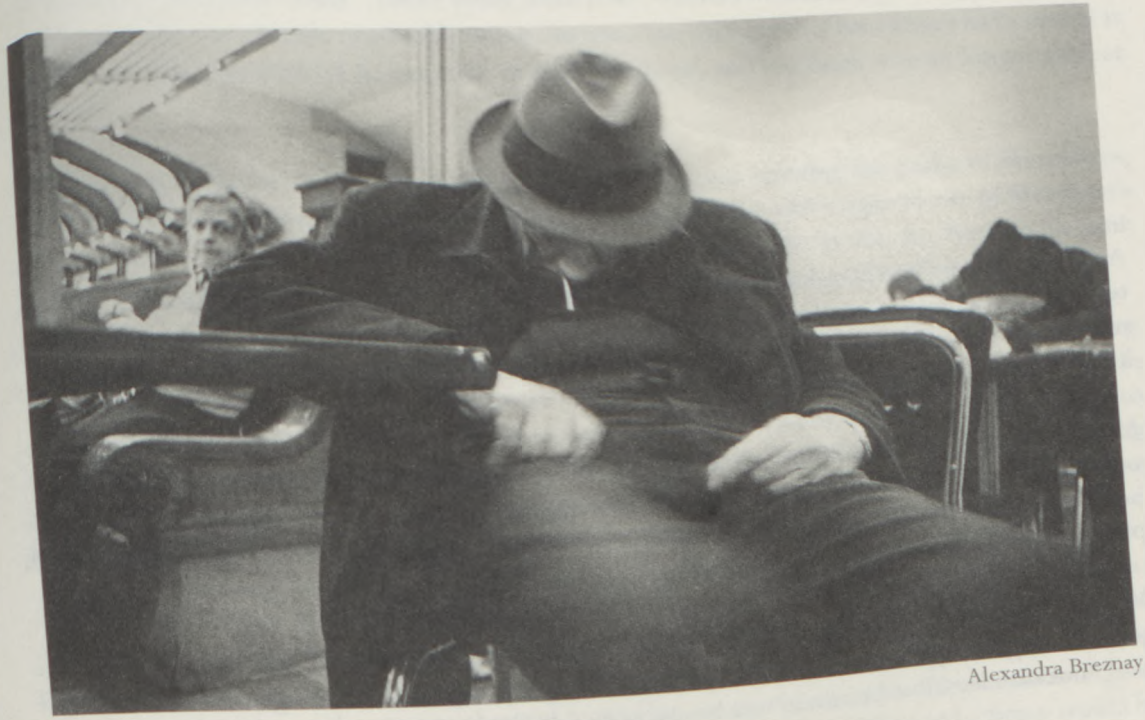
I know:
: the sign
of the ancient flame: fire
despite the dead: the flame gyrates
on the wick: virgins
vestiges they were : eyes and hands
sealed with wax:
: thrice and crest less
the blind did our bidding: now look
how they shudder: oh
: how they drip

This time I light the fire on the tor.
We are in the thick of a circle, winnowing,
casting off the flesh we cannot save and I,
I will not now salt our meat.

Pagan and heavy-lidded, the dancing keep
their distance, turning turning in time
from the color-less coast, crying:
When we have gone, give lilies from your full hands

Let them scatter like stars, now, chanting,
Oh, let our children bear libation,
Such frost, the bonds of fate never blessed.
For we must go, yes we must ---

--- follow that discerning orb towards the blue and ember
of the west.



Alexandra Breznay

The Best Story Ever Written

Michele Berry

A elderly man named Mordecai once wrote a book that was billed as "The Best Story Ever Written". He became immensely popular in a very short period of time, even before the book was released to the public. This upset his wife, who lived a very structured sort of life that involved a lot of staying in and eating soup.

Mordecai and his wife lived in a tottering old house on the outskirts of a rather large city, easily reached by train. Their yard was occupied by two sizable oak trees whose broad leaves littered the lawn every fall. The fall before Mordecai's book was to be published, the yard was littered with photographers, whose bulbs flashed loudly at the windows of the great old Victorian.

Mordecai worked on his story with great precision, putting his heart and soul into the book. He gave the story everything, and he was rewarded. His publisher loved it, his agent loved it. His wife could not care less. But Mordecai was happy, as he felt like his life's work was complete.

He must have read his story a thousand times before it was published. So when it finally rolled off the presses, Mordecai didn't feel an urgency to reread it again. The story was beloved. Critically acclaimed, adults loved it, and children requested it before bedtime. Mordecai was too old to travel the world for book signings, and his wife wouldn't allow it in any case, so the world came

to Mordecai. He met hundreds of thousands of admirers, all who praised him for his honesty, his insight, and his plot structure.

Mordecai felt his life was perfect. Until one day a young girl, a precocious child, walked shyly up to him at one of his book signings, handed Mordecai a copy of his own book, and pointed carefully at page three, seven lines down. "There pains were real". He had meant to say "their", the pains of the characters. It was a barely noticeable error. So much so that none of his editors had pointed it out. But this child had noticed it, and now so had Mordecai, and the book was no longer perfect in his eyes.

He was heartbroken. He stopped his book signings, he stopped enjoying the praise of his readers, and for a very long time he stopped leaving his house, and even his wife began to tire of Mordecai's company. After a year or so, Mordecai left his home to pay some bills in the city. Next to his bank stood a second hand bookstore. And in the window was "The Best Story Ever Written".

Mordecai hadn't touched a copy of his book since the young girl had handed him the object at his book signing, tainting his work for him forever. But he felt a pull towards the dowdy storefront. He was homesick for the world he had created so long ago, despite its imperfections. So he went into the store and the young man behind the desk pulled the book out from the window display, looking at Mordecai curiously. Mordecai sighed and opened the book to page three. There, in scrawling pencil, someone had crossed out his error and corrected it for him.

A laugh found its way into Mordecai's mouth. He let his eyes stray from the offending word and skim over the whole sentence, the whole paragraph, and the whole page. Eventually, he found his way to a chair and read the whole book. When he finally finished, he was crying. He flipped back to page three and read over the passage that had caused him so much heartache. "Bravery was of great importance to them. But so was fear. Without overcoming fear, their ability to be brave would be of no importance. That night, they realized something. There pain was real. But so was their joy." And at the end of that sentence, in the same scrawling pencil, was a scribble.

"Truth."

The mistake no longer mattered. Someone had read his story, despite his mistake, and had taken the same meaning out his words that Mordecai had meant them to. Mordecai bought his book from the second hand store and rode the train back home. When he got to the tottering old house with the oak trees, he found his wife in the kitchen, eating soup. He sat down and told her all about the book and what he had realized that day. When he finished, his wife smiled at him. And then, with a frown, looked into her empty soup bowl. "Mordecai, do we have any more cabbage?"

Contributor's Notes

Clayton Albachten is a senior at Eugene Lang College, where he studied poetry, having narrowly escaped the study of psychology, for which he probably would have been better suited. In dance and film studies courses, too, he has been observed, obscured on most days, unmissable on a few, like a rare metrological phenomena.

Nicolas Amara is a sophomore at Eugene Lang College, with an intended but yet-to-be-declared major in fiction writing, though he also enjoys writing poetry and recording really loud noises to cassette tape in his spare time. He plays drums in two hardcore bands and is a native of Southold, NY. You can find some of his short work on his blog, nicolasamara.tumblr.com.

Amelia Belle-Isle seeks to capture fragments of the past in her photographs so that they will not be forgotten. She lives in Brooklyn.

Alexandra Breznay is a French photographer and filmmaker born in Paris. After studying film at Wesleyan University and social sciences at Sciences Po Paris, she graduated in Arts management and completed a Certificate Program at the International Center of Photography. In her work, Alexandra Breznay leans towards improvisation and uses a colorful and playful outlook most of the times with a philosophical attempt and a sense of intrigue. Built as a puzzle, offering clues step by step, her artistic research currently offers to dive into the realm of time. She sees spontaneity as one of the healthiest exercises. She is now dividing her life between Paris and New York.

Ryder Baldwin grew up in Memphis, Tennessee. Made in New York. Mother from New York. Father from Texas. Twin sister in Chicago. Wants a 1963 BMW R60 more than most things.

Michele Berry is a professional deep sea diver and avid bird watcher. Her goal is to take part in both hobbies at the same time. She wrote this story while in free fall during a skydiving expedition. She is also a pathological liar. Michele is actually a sophomore at Lang and spends her time writing stories, shooting hoops, being an environmental studies major, and making you delicious espressos at Pushcart Coffee. In that order.

N. J. Campbell lives and writes in the midwest. He is just starting the submission process.

Daniel Emmett Creahan is a musician, writer and Media Studies student living in Bushwick, Brooklyn. He has contributed to Network Awesome, Art Observed, and has released

one chapbook, titled "9 Fragments for Fading," in collaboration with artist Christine Rucker. He was born in Buffalo, New York, and makes a pretty good curry, according to his girlfriend.

John Ericson is a senior in the fiction writing program, currently working on his thesis while making a living translating medical journals and legal stuff for other people. His work has appeared in previous iterations of the New School literary journal, as well as publications like Rodeo Magazine.

Sienna Fekete is a first year student at Eugene Lang College, The New School for Liberal Arts. She is an aspiring writer, with a love of the arts and culture. She has previously written for a student-run literary magazine at her arts high school, was on the student advisory committee at Center Theatre Group, and did an apprenticeship at The Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles.

Carolyn Ferrucci is a second semester senior at Lang, a Fiction major and a Poetry minor. She was born/ is being raised in New York City.

Micaela Foley is a senior and poetry major at Lang. She lives in Brooklyn. She was on the editorial staff for this issue of Eleven and a Half. Her work appears elsewhere.

Samantha Gabbert goes by Sam and is a freshman at Eugene Lang College. She likes to read, but she does not read as often as she would like to. She has always loved writing, tea, and learning about types of cheeses. She has been writing stories for as long as she can remember. She can't think of any witty comments to distinguish herself, but hopes that you enjoy her writing even if you feel you could have done a better job.

Banks Harris is a senior at Lang and will graduate with a degree in creative writing. She interns at the Brandt and Hochman Literary Agency, occasionally waitresses, and sings in rock bands.

Lexi Hornbeck is a creative writing student at Eugene Lang. She spends most of her days in an artist loft in Brooklyn writing mixed-up fiction pieces beneath a light bulb. Her aspiration is to create a new genre of literature titled "Dreamscapes" and become a critic for an arts journal. In 2009 she co-created an underground zine called "Things that got Lost in the Couch."

Chad Michael Huniu is a Los Angeles expatriate living in Eugene, Oregon. He currently works for the University of Oregon's student-run literary-arts magazine Unbound.

is a big fan of America, basketball and space, like stars and Battlestar and shit. Along with writing fiction, he also dabbles in photography, music and pinback button making. His pins, often America-themed, can be found on Etsy in the shop ThistleTin.

Abbie Krupnick hails from Summit, New Jersey. In addition to writing, she also fills her time making little movies and finding the perfect chocolate chip cookie recipe.

Jessie Lochrie is a student at Eugene Lang College the New School for Liberal Arts

Mike McGuire studies Culture and Media at The New School. He is enamored of Beatle boots, independent cinema, and the aristocratic elegance of Anjelica Huston. Among his favorite words are "curmudgeon," "harridan," and "craw."

Jerry Rengel is a native New Yorker and a first generation Ecuadorian-American. He enjoys the work of Charles Bukowski, Facundo Cabral, and Azouz Begag. When not meandering around campus, you may likely find him at the NYC Schwarzman public library or at NYU's Bobst Library brushing up on International Law. He is incredibly superstitious and always walks around black cats.

Kaila Shubak thinks while it may be true that everything has already been said it's just as true that not everyone has had a chance to say it. She lives in Brooklyn.

Jesse Statman is a musician and poet from Brooklyn, NY, USA. He performs frequently in the New York area, and can often be seen performing original music on acoustic guitar in local venues, as well as with his rock band, Cannonball Statman. His poetry has appeared in Hanging Loose Magazine, and it was also accepted to the online edition of Eleven and a Half in 2011. He has also read at The Bowery Poetry Club, and performed music at venues such as Goodbye Blue Monday, The Hudson Music Festival, The Path Cafe, The Greenwich Village Bistro, and The Greenpoint Gallery.

Zee Whitesides is a trans woman and poet who probably will have a degree from Eugene Lang when this bio is published. Right now, she's president of the New School's Experimental Writing Collective and doing work on trans*parence in poetry. Zee was born in Elizabethtown, KY and probably loves the South much more than it loves her.

Photo Contributors

John Winston Conell is a photographer based out of Brooklyn, New York. After studying filmmaking and photography at the School of Visual Arts, he worked as an assistant to the legendary rock and roll photographer, Lee Black Childers. You can see more of his photos at johnwinstonconell.com.

Guest Contributors

Aaron Belz lives in North Carolina and has taught literature and creative writing at Saint Louis University, Southern Illinois University, and Providence Christian College. His work has appeared in *Cardus, Wired, Books & Culture, First Things, The St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Exquisite Corpse, Mudfish, Gulf Coast, RealPoetik, The Washington Post,* and *Fence*. His books of poetry include *Plausible Worlds, The Bird Hoverer,* and *Lovely, Raspberry.*

Joyelle McSweeney is a poet, critic, and professor at the University of Notre Dame. Her books include *Nylund, the Sarcographer, as well as Flet, The Red Bird, The Commandrine and Other Poems*, and *Percussion Grenade*. Her reviews appear at *The Constant Critic* and elsewhere, and her poetry has appeared in *the Boston Review, Poetry magazine, Octopus Magazine, GultCult,* and *Tarpaulin Sky*, among other places. Along with her husband Johannes Goransson, she is the founder of Action Books which has published a number of contemporary authors including Lara Glenum, Tao Lin, Arielle Greenburg, and Hiromi Ito.

Eileen Myles was born in Boston (1949) and moved to New York in 1974 to be a poet. *Snowflake / different streets* is the latest of her 18 books. *Inferno (a poet's novel)* came out in 2010. For *The Importance of Being Iceland / travel essays in art* she received a Warhol / Creative Capital grant. In 2010 the Poetry Society of America awarded Eileen the Shelley Prize. She is a Prof. Emeritus of Writing at UC San Diego. She's a 2012 Guggenheim fellow. She lives in New York.

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