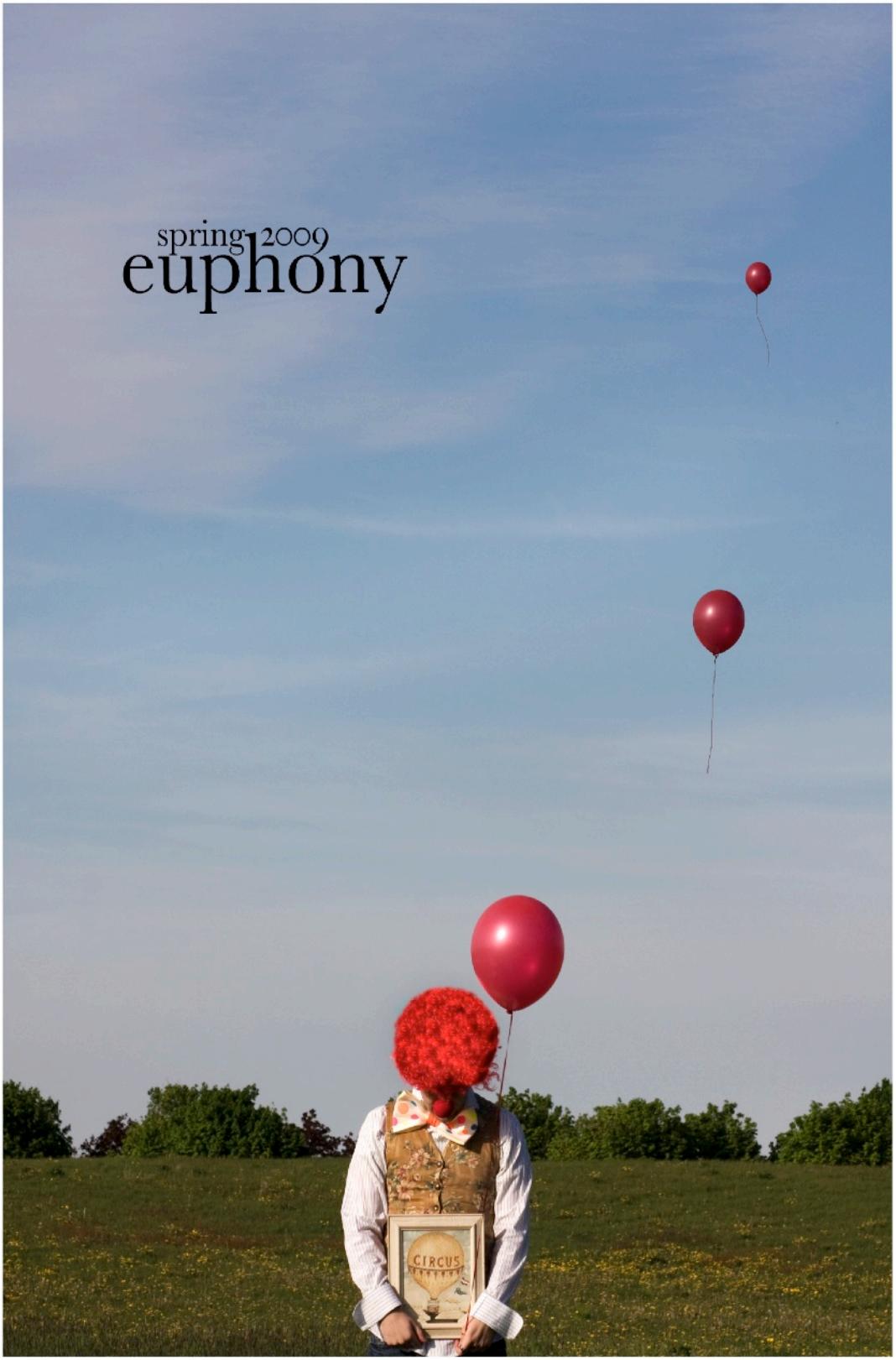


spring 2009
euphony



EDITORS' FOREWORD

Thank you for taking the time to take a look inside the Spring 2009 issue of *Euphony*. This issue features some of the more experimental work *Euphony* has published in recent years. We are proud to include innovative and modern poetry both spare and indulgent as well as fiction ranging from the evocatively realistic to the eerily beautiful psychedelic. While this issue's poetry, fiction, and drama astutely tackle a wide array of themes, they do so with a levity we hope you will appreciate as the weather inches toward pleasant again.

Our website has been steadily receiving nearly 1,000 hits a month, and we couldn't be any more excited. In addition to an increased flow of submissions from across the country, our readership has grown well beyond the Hyde Park area. Our website contains up-to-date information on how to submit writing and how to join our staff; in addition, we publish web-exclusive poetry, fiction, and non-fiction throughout the academic year. Visit euphonyjournal.com for more details.

THE EDITORS

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Euphony is a non-profit literary journal produced biannually at the University of Chicago. We are dedicated to publishing the finest work by writers and artists both accomplished and aspiring. We publish a variety of works including poetry, fiction, drama, essays, criticism, and translations. Visit our website for more information.

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Krystin Gollihue

54

As we sat on a bench in St. Peter's Basilica,
our skin turned a shade, and then another
and the western sunlight washed over the marble floors,
and we laughed at La Pieta
as if we had known our own sons
as if we had loved them.
Outside, the Pope blessed every bit of my anatomy
(even the dark places)
and I sucked on a glass bottleneck to see if it would break in my mouth,
and I listened to the bodies closing in around me,
and I wondered if that rhythmic humming
was the unbuttoning of the Virgin Mary's wedding dress,
or simply some mumbled prayer for forgiveness.
Do you remember how long we stayed in the Square
before we ran beneath the statue of Jesus,
letting the smoke drift above us?
His nose was left perpetually turned upwards,
nostrils flared in stone,
and his petrified lips curled to one side.
Seven days in that place where the cobblestone street sloped with the
earth,
and then one morning it was empty,
and we felt something very large missing from our short lives.
No one to laugh at,
no one to crucify.
No wine to paint our lips red,
no cigarettes to paint our fingers yellow.
And the dead skin from our sunburns dropped about our ankles,
layer over layer,
and it crossed in the silent summer breeze,
leaving us tanned
and wondering.

Maryann Corbett

The Historian Considers the End Time

She sees now why they'd want to let it go—
the prison of the body, as they called it.
The nails thickened and yellow, the long hair lost,
the bones a honeycomb, the papery husk
left of the woman she was.

The old *Cathari*
believed we would be done with it. No rising,
no day of wrath, no judging the quick and the dead.
Only the sloughing of a chitin shell
to let the flame leap back into the Light.

She grants that it tempts her. Every time she struggled
for breath on stairs, or vomited from the chemo,
the fact of body felt less like God's gift,
and more like a thoughtless insult, or at best
a wrong, and not God's doing

That was their doctrine.
She of all people knows they suffered correction:
swept away by a twenty-year crusade—
the hundreds burned to death at Montségur
who would not grant the goodness of this world.

They had to be corrected; now she's certain.
The canons laid it down: we rise with our bodies.
Our very bodies as we bear them now—
The fathers set it in stone: the world is good,
and the body's way of knowing is all we have
in the end.

They must, those thirteenth-century prelates,
have known it with a blazing certainty,
the truth he's going to know then, when he hugs
the clothes that hold her fragrance, when his chest knots
as he cleans her closet, when months past the funeral
he finds in a broom strands of the long, dark hair.

A Response to Critique

“It’s throttled. In a noose.

Cut loose!

Why such heavy lifting?

Drifting

is key. As Taoists say,

wu wei:

do without doing. Play

out line. Go knotless. Waft.”

(I picture my frail craft

cut loose, drifting away.)

Christopher Watkins

Troutman Street, Juxtaposed

Troutman Street
was an awful
street in a Puerto Rican
ghetto of Brooklyn
that I now remember
mainly for the time
we saw a living cat
feeding on a dead cat
on the sidewalk out in front
of our railroad apartment.
But it was also,
the computer said,
the site of a famous
mob hit in the seventies.

I lie on a table
about to have a biopsy,
to see whether drinking
has given me cancer,
and I am thinking about cancer,
but also about Mississippi John Hurt
and the smell of cat urine
in the carpet of a room
in Seattle where I learned
to fingerpick the blues
with an alternating bass.

A woman's voice
is on the radio;
she is discussing her talks with famous chefs,
specifically, what they would choose for their last meals.
Who would they have it with,
who would prepare it, where would it happen?
I tell my fiancée,
"Baked beans on toast,
with you,

prepared by me,
in the Old Parochial House in Ballyvaughan."

Which all has to do
with juxtapositions;
what you learn next
always changes what it was you learned before,
and in our case,
love is wonderful,
and only the beginning.

Nathan Whiting

Steel Illusion 29

A truck of cold moves, cold truck cold.

Omit landscape—snow.

Omit road.

Small pea moon include the cloud

a black red gray cloud, yellow white plum
cloud. The truck moves.

Wind hefted pistons pull
gravel over gravel over gravel
vaporized—silver brown ivory cloud.

A cold truck, frozen metal rides.

Omit schedule—drifts.

Omit route,
feathery memos

written by wheels,
sky's weight known,
moon tiny. Let the world
alter the world. Cold moves cold
feathers by frost engraved.

Jason Tandon

Those Early Weddings

The band on break gave us no reason
To miss the cake-cutting
And blindfolded crawl
Up the bride's gartered thigh,

While we drank martinis served dirty
And ogled a man who tip-tapped
Across the hotel lobby
With two leggy hookers stitched in silk.

The plug pulled and ballroom cleared
The groom craved Chinese.
High heels snapped in cobblestones,
Suit pants split their seams—
But where was the bride?

We found her in the park
Riding bareback with a general,
Her wine glass wielded like a saber,
The train of her gown in the other hand
Wiping her blood red mouth.

Richard Lopez

where confidence comes from

the bright green of the trees
and the proud sun that hangs above
in the spring and summer
are for your joy and its celebration,
but remember that the party will
be absorbed in silence
as the natural world tires down
and becomes weary,
as the men of old skin sell their clothes
down into the soil
where they are tucked in
with white water
and become stitched together
and somberly transformed
into confidence.

Lauren Dobay

New York City, 1971

I know she has almonds in her heart,
stores some peanuts behind her ears
cashews between her toes.

Tells me this in a voice that bellows
all the way up from her jowls. Have to
snack on the way up, rusted wrought iron,

growls in hunger beneath her, she
heaves a breath, Pauses; macadamia
nuts flow from her fingers,

Up she goes. Some Saturday
she'll sit on the fifth stair from the top
catching her breath. Real hot out here,

she'll say to me, going to steam the
vegetables. Been raining up north,
snowing down south.

Eats an pecan, tugs herself
off the stairs. lumbers up, top floor,
rent controlled, the fire escapes
are wrought iron palace steps.

C.L. O'Dell

Black Cat

I grabbed
film to catch it,

black cat
in a
grazing
field,

stalking
birds,

a buoy
in an ocean,

a miserable
dis-
coloration

piled loose
in the stairwell

of thought,

un-
photographable

in its place.

Gene Barry

Tactile Memories

for my father, Micheal Barry

How do I know your
drive to run these teeth
over the inviting dead
what torc to chose
when indicating

and yet I rub the
chiromantic map with
unromantic oils and
smooth each surface
without life

dress the contrasting
donors with shavings
toiled and blindly
undressed in lonely
un-hugged trances

why do I hold this
whistle in your
clasped hand
Spear's index
at the ready

with the open snuff box
in distracted thought
see to your nails
massage your waiting
mound of Venus

un-gloved you gave
to give me life
beyond our clasped
audience of DNA
I applaud you.

Richard Landers

Painter's Diary

(after Paul Klee)

These pheasant studies are a puzzle for eyes
trained from models, that find the true bird
hung over the sink unfit for sketches. Unfolding
structures, flat mechanism in aviary of dark sticks.
To Italy for museum copies and more naturalism,
Munich red-eye sways for blurred camera vision.
I draw the short Milanese porter who laughs
at accents in our car. Under the white shadow
cast by the Alps, no one can sleep—we climb
into the east's rising aura. My chosen subjects
break concentration with dining car chatter. Erase
warts to gain order, convinced by form's priority.
Trees are spots of pigment. A raucous dream
wakes my smudging hand in the night of the heart.

Dan Pinkerton

The Machine Is Whispering Futility

A skein of humanoid chirrups & burps
while I swooned:
one second, checkout lane—
conveyer, divider bars, clangng addendum
to dead breath, sour apertures—

then: rabbit hole of Armani-clad indiscretions.

One film star being vulgar with a Danish
ingénue while his insecure fiancé observes;
a second film star dismissing one
of his harem amid the chicest
ruins of Paris.

The vulgarities sounded mystical, recherché,
compounding upon my ears
until everything external
dimmed to a fragmentary ping.

paper versus plastic...balance due...
A cold high dryness made me wonder
if this weren't vicuna country.

I was nearing middle age
on a Saturday in the bicycle section
of a big box, feeding the zing
of my youth to tube lighting, so much
spearfish to the tapeworm.

Fallen leaves skimmed the automatic
doors, an exodus underfoot.
They too were concerned about oblivion.

Alexander Zelenyj

The Grey Tammy and the Living

The living Tammy appeared on weekends. Friday nights she came and Sunday nights she bedded herself like a hibernating animal until her rebirth a work week away. Saturday, this incarnation of my best friend lived like she never seemed able on the remaining days of the week. Something in her nature slouched her during those middle days, like gravity pulling her down and down until she crawled like the dying towards the bright light she glimpsed ahead of her.

It was the Monday Tammy who clung to her chair across the kitchen table from me. Haggard and pale, she looked as though she hadn't seen sunlight for years. Her greasy blonde bangs hung low over her eyes. Her eyelids drooped and I couldn't make out the pretty eyes they hid. I almost didn't want to see them – their vivid blue would be like a pleasant day peeking through the cloud cover of the rest of her, and this idea repulsed me a little. The skin of her eyelids held the dim stains of eyeliner, looking gently bruised. A bandage was spread across her small angular chin, looking too-big and awkward. I remembered the look of the bruise from the night before, when it had been fresh. Nothing remotely stylish about it—like eyeliner looking cinematic. You could almost see the ghost of the man's knuckles where he'd caught her a hard one. I didn't remember why he'd done it; maybe he'd been drunk or bad-tripping or both, or neither. Sometimes men did this kind of a thing to her. It wasn't that she was blind. You couldn't say something sarcastic about her; something like she knew how to pick 'em: she didn't discriminate among the throngs of the interested very much at all. She let everyone choose her and have her, and of course who wouldn't pick her from a crowd with a body that nice to look at, and with eyes so hungry?

The newspaper sat on the table between us, untouched. I thought of her declaration a few weeks before, that the Monday edition carried only bad news so better to forget it. She poured herself a half-cup of coffee and I noticed her bandaged hand. I hadn't known about that injury. I wondered what he'd done, the man from the night before, or some other man she'd met while I'd been looking elsewhere after our latest gathering of friends and strangers at our small apartment hole had spilled over into the trash bar midway down the block. I wondered where he'd gone and hoped he'd stay there or farther away than that, which he probably would like most of them did after doing what they had to with her.

A pool of sunlight slowly spread its way into the room, enveloping her in her chair. I waited for her to notice it touching her. She cringed a moment later. "Fuck off," she cursed the new day, making no move to vacate her place, only placing a hand across her eyes to shield them from the intrusive glare. Her grey face and bandages gave her a mummy-like appearance, and I wished for her the longest sleep to deflate the bags from under her eyes. A thousand-year slumber and then waking into a new world, maybe even as a new girl.

I finished my coffee and cereal and sat with her a while longer. I told her, making my voice soft for her Monday ears, "I gotta go. Or I'll be late. So." I slid from my chair and left her hating the sunlight and the things it lit up for her to see.

When I came in after 5:00 she was the first thing I saw, curled up like a sick child on the couch. I hung up my coat gingerly, trying to be quiet, but I woke her besides. "I skipped work," she murmured from the grey light of the curtained room.

"That's okay," I told her, worrying about rent in a week's time, deciding immediately afterwards that I needn't worry because she'd find a way, like she always did. Men seemed to like giving her money. Money wouldn't be a problem, not for her. "I'm hungry," I said. "I'm going to make spaghetti. You want?"

"Okay." Passing her on the way to the bathroom she caught my wrist in her hand. I looked and her eyes were grateful and remorseful. I smiled. We said nothing.

The following morning was a rainy Tuesday. I found her at the living room window, staring into the overcast sky. I felt a little happy for her, sun-hater that she was. I said, "The thunder woke me. How did you sleep?"

She was a few seconds in answering me. "I slept a little. I feel sick. Like I'm going to puke. My throat's scratchy. Talking hurts."

I came to her and rubbed her back. She smelled like cigarettes and sweat. She was ashen. Her bandage was gone and her chin looked like fruit gone bad, green and purple and swollen. The pouches beneath her eyes were dark. They were puffier than they'd been the day before. She reminded me of someone dressing like a football player with paint greasing the places under their eyes, but otherwise not resembling a football player in any way. I thought how it looked as though her eye pouches, as bloated as they were, might hold the tears she'd cried lately, and how if she kept it up they might burst sometime soon.

We watched the brewing sky together. Wind and rain lashed at the

window glass. It felt warm and safe there in the curtained room. I wished that I could stay there in the dark with her all morning, just listening to the storm. I felt her waiting for me to say something soothing. I said it softly. "Maybe do you want to forget work today? And I'll just see you later on?"

She nodded beside me. Her hand found mine and squeezed it in thanks.

"Do you want breakfast?" I asked her. "I'm going to grab some cereal."

But she only shook her head imperceptibly, and drifted from the window. I watched her cross the room like a ghost in her white pajamas. I heard her bare feet patter on the tiles in the hall. Her bedroom door whispered closed and then there was silence except for the rain on the glass. I hoped she'd feel better later on. I hoped that she'd wake into a day as comfortably dismal as the morning spitting and crackling outside.

I came in from work that evening and she was straddling a stranger on the sofa. The silence of the scene, two naked, voiceless figures connected in the murky light, made it a haunted kind of a picture. Then her voice came at me like a knife in the dark. Simply, she yelled, "Privacy!"

I gave it to them. I slipped past and into the bathroom at the far end of the hall. I ran the tub and undressed and climbed in and left the water running until it bobbed past my chin. I stayed there for I don't know how long, waiting for the haunting to finish in the living room. The water was hot, almost scalding, and in the risen mist I kept seeing swirling pale unclothed figures.

When I came out with my head in a towel she was waiting in the hall. Her eyes were searching mine, and I wondered what they saw there. She said, "Don't look at me like that. Don't give me that look." Then she turned into her room and slammed the door. Her voice came muffled from the room: "The rent money's on the kitchen fucking table."

I knew she knew it, that I'd given her no kind of a wrongful look. She condemned herself when no one else dared, and when too few people cared enough to do so.

I arrived home later than usual, bitching about staff meetings that didn't require menial me being there, running late and stranding me in the cold and wet with the next bus a half hours' wait away. But the smell of pasta filled the air, and Tammy's kind smile and the way she rubbed my arm made the day disappear. I felt even better once I'd changed into my around-home jogging pants and baggy t-shirt. It was nice coming home to dinner being readied, and I told her so. "I never get tired of spaghetti.

It's delicious. Thank you."

She smiled, hands on the air in a gesture showing me that it was no big deal. We ate in silence a while.

"I didn't go to work again today," she confessed to me. Then she cried. Without warning of any kind. Her eyes ran like faucets, and I went to her and tried to hold her and eventually she stopped batting away my hands. I held her, and I told her that I'd hold her good until she felt better. "Until you feel better, okay?"

"Okay," she sniffled, laughing at her nasally voice, and the pathetic look of her fallen apart again.

A moment passed and I went back to my chair. I thought that she'd had her cry and that she'd be good for the remainder of the night. "It's almost like I'm not even me, you know?" she thought aloud. Sometimes she surprised me in this way, the way she started digging into heavy subject matter so unexpectedly. She startled me like this from time to time, even though nobody knew her as well as I. She sputtered on. "Until Friday, when I can be...When there's time to be free and..."

"I know." My voice was consoling. It just came out that way, even if she might not have wanted to be consoled. I couldn't help that with her. She went on earnestly, sounding as though she was trying very hard to convince me of something. "It's like I'm different, right? Like I'm different then than on days like today."

I nodded, smiling kindly. I drank my coffee like everything was okay. Coffee with pasta I found disgusting but I needed the caffeine boost after my long day. I needed to stay alert for her when she was in a coming-apart mood.

"It's like I'm two totally different people, even. That's what I feel like." Her voice was pleading. Her eyes were relentless scouring mine for something.

"I know, Tammy."

She looked haunted sitting across from me in the flickering kitchen light. The single candle had been her idea. She liked the pretend romance of things like this. She admitted that she was a girly girl who liked things like scented candles and colorful knee socks. Something about the admission always made me sad each time I heard her say it. The candle smelled like strawberries. Its red wax had pooled like lava in the ceramic dish it sat in. I looked through the murky air at her. Her shoulders were slumped and her voice tired. Her features were gaunt and her skin sickly. Her eyes were black and her smile nowhere to be found. I said, "Two more days. Only two more days."

There was silence for a moment. The noise of traffic shooting past on the rain-drenched street outside sounded louder then. Sleek and slippery,

it reminded me of snakes hissing through tall grass. I didn't say a word. Tammy spoke then, and it sounded perfect in the candle-lit kitchen, her voice and her words.

"As long as you still love me."

I told her that I did. "I do." Her eyes were in her plate before her, as if she was frightened to look at me. I knew she heard the smile in my voice, and I knew too that she could tell it was a sad smile. But it was truthful, the way I was with her then, like I always was. I finished my coffee and lingered a while. We sat without talking in the strawberry air. I left her sitting in the candlelight a while after, heading for bed and without feeling any guilt. I felt her eyes watching me go, but she said nothing, and there were two days until Friday when she could live again.

Thursday she slept.

I left her curled on the couch in the morning. In the evening I had to search for her and finally found her sleeping like a little girl—huddled inside of an old brown sleeping bag, on the floor inside of her walk-in closet, its door half-closed. Once again, I tried to be stealthy but either I was clumsy or else she had keen ears.

"Hi," she murmured sleepily from the closet.

I leaned over her. The smell of shoe leather was on the air. It was a comforting atmosphere. I understood why she'd want to make her hideout there in the close musty space.

"You look like a big potato," I told her, making my voice sound amused despite the tugging feeling in me when I saw her like that. So small, vulnerable. So beautiful and pure-looking.

It earned me a small chuckle from the shadows. I ventured, "I'm hungry for hamburgers. You hungry?"

Her voice carried no strength. "I'm going to sleep a while longer."

"Okay. Have nice dreams." I left her. I ate alone. I washed my dishes and then watched some bad T.V. The air grew cold and I got blankets from the basket of blankets and pillows we kept beside the couch for just such emergencies as this. I watched the news but she was right: It was all bad, or at least the parts I caught. I thought of her, huddled like a potato in the room beside me. I went to bed soon after. I hadn't seen her at all since finding her hours before. I fell asleep feeling lonely and when I woke up I hoped I'd find her at the kitchen table, looking better or still sad but at least there waiting for me. It was Friday morning, after all, a good time for waking into. But the table was empty and I left without eating breakfast, wondering who I'd find at home at the end of my day.

She looked every bit a classic witch drifting past in the hallway; jet wig catching the pale overhead light, black and blue striped stockings, mascara caked on and making her eyelashes into tarantula legs. I called after her, "You look like a witch."

She didn't answer, but the sounds of her preening herself came from the bathroom. Water ran, the bathroom mirror squeaked as she opened it on its rusty hinges. The clattering noise of her hands rummaging in the shelves behind the mirror. A protracted silence followed as she colored her eyelids or reddened her lips or tried to fathom the young woman watching her in the mirror glass.

Party nights seemed endless. The hours leading up to them were delicious, too, when potential seemed to hang in the air. Anything might happen tonight - we used to say this to each other in years past, meaning who knew which boys we might meet and kiss, or how much beer we'd drink and how much laughter we'd let out. Anything might happen. The night might never come to an end. Our mantra, hopeful and filled with promise, and maybe a little bit pathetic now that years had passed and we'd seen the trend of those nights, too-brief and nearly always disappointing. Sad, that still we returned to those old ways, as if we were still the youthful girls of the past. As if time hadn't marched on and added lines to our faces and worry needling us whenever we thought about tomorrow, no matter how earnestly we played the part of being oblivious of its looming presence.

Her singing voice drifted to me, and I admired her hopefulness. She was romancing the moment the way we used to, like I'd never be able to again. The song I didn't recognize but her husky voice carried the melody nicely. An upbeat song but a little mournful in her deep timbre, but it might just have been that I knew her well and sometimes the sound of her so misled really brought me down.

Her voice came from the bathroom. "Am I the good one or am I wicked?"

Thinking of her kind eyes and her wicked smile, I told her truthfully. "Probably a bit of both."

She said nothing to this, but she picked up the lost thread of her song a moment afterwards. Her husky voice carried the melody sweetly, deep and light, somehow making me think of all the black candy in the world.

It was a good party with a healthy turnout. Everybody was saying so. Arrivals began as early as 8:00 with the main body of the crowd filling our congested place by midnight and spilling into the hall a while after. This was okay. Weekend loudness and debauchery was allowed in shit-holes like

ours located undeniably on the ghetto side of the city with fellow tenants welcome to pop in as they liked. Another communal gathering of friends and acquaintances and shady strangers drifted in like flotsam from the street. All were welcome on those nights of freedom. Great party, ladies. A get-together to remember.

Like always, she treated it as a masquerade, owning the spotlight in her dark get-up and weekend manners. Cozy with her man on the threadbare couch, unabashed in the way she fiddled with parts of him, clothes, hands, hair. Vivacious—she was that, and more, too, of course, although I think maybe only I saw the rest. Maybe only I saw the transformation of her, so shocking from the yesterday-her to the tonight-her. Alcohol helped the change, and the occasional acid hits, but I hoped she wouldn't inhale any more powder lines like she had on a few past nightmare gatherings.

Her cackle filled the room suddenly, another bout of unchecked flirtatious laughter. She was good at it. She reeled everyone in. She was a fisherman in this way who could catch anyone. Or maybe she was just the bait, and she wasn't really in charge of casting the line at all. This made sense to me. She made a few heads turn with her brazen ways, and a few pairs of eyes exchange a certain kind of knowing look. Judgment on a party night, and I hoped she hadn't noticed any of it like she sometimes did. If these clowns are judging me bad, she'd once lamented on a hung-over morning, then how bad must I be? But then I watched her a while with her new man, her fingers clinging in his long hair. He was pretty with his long locks and bright eyes. Her voice came clear through the music. "I come from a long line. Of witches and other bad people." And I knew she was feeling good. I knew she was free. I thought of women riding broomsticks against lunar backdrops. I considered how good she'd look against that pale circle hanging in the night. I watched her smiling eyes and thought that the moon would bow to her beauty. The moon might even fall from its orbit to honor the passage of such a creature through the unworthy night.

She laughed again and her man laughed loudly too. His eyes were narrow because he knew his great luck with the girl draped over him like a wet article of clothing. I left them in the middle of their prelude to other things. I went in search of another drink. Or possibly I went in search of someone to talk with, someone like me, someone that I might really luck out with and who might truly like me back when I liked them, too. Someone like her, but possibly a man to woo me like I'd once hoped to be wooed. A stranger blown in from the street outside. A knight exiting the night outdoors to rescue me, like a hopeful, naïve dream from my youth.

Another Sunday night was upon us, another final escape before the world encroached as it had to. Saturday was a wreck behind us, dim and hazy through the usual party-fog. Friday was an even murkier thought, a misty notion that might have happened but then again perhaps not the way the disjointed pieces seemed to tell that night's story.

Silence and unspoken expectation hung over our greasy dinner of leftover pizza. I felt her excitement and deeper fear. She was ready to dive into the night like she'd dove into the previous evening and the one before that. She'd give it everything she had. This is how she treated her escapes. Violently, almost, as if each of these were her final night to taste beer and cigarettes and the tongues of strangers and freedom.

We ate in this loaded silence. The pizza was good, maybe made better by the expectant atmosphere. Into it, she spoke. "I promise to find something new soon." She'd made her voice bold and brave for me. It was her way of tempering her confession, giving me vows of bettering herself like she swore to do from time to time. Starting anew, a clean slate, a remade her that we both knew could never exist. She lost jobs like friendships—her mother had said that to her once, years ago in the days when they still spoke infrequently. The words made a lasting impression on her—she still quoted her mother from time to time, when she was feeling especially self-loathing. I'd been watching the sky through the kitchen window when she said it. The rectangle I was focused on was a deep purple, rich with early evening stars. It was a perfect Sunday night sky. I said nothing.

"I promise, Sarah." Her voice was tinged with worry, and something deeper that we both knew was her shame. A wad of elastic-bound dollar bills sat beside her plate. It looked dirty so close to her food, but it was also a relief to exist there at all with the phone bill due the Friday before and the phone company sure to hound us throughout the forthcoming day. I didn't draw our attention to it. I made like I hadn't spotted it there at all. I didn't ask when she'd found out about her last job gone to hell like the others.

I nodded and finished my pizza slice. We sat a while without any words. I became grateful the more I thought about it, that she'd given me the confession on that night. On another of her nights, another weekend night like a final stand or something just as pivotal and all-important, instead of waiting for Monday morning when grave news seemed appropriate, or expected. I said into the dead air, "Are you gonna fuck him tonight? Ronnie, right? Was that his name? Is he coming tonight? He's pretty. He seems nice." I stirred my coffee listlessly with my spoon. I made my voice casual, like I was asking only another everyday thing of her, which I really was.

I eyed her where she'd been drooped like a rag in her disheveled

bedclothes and tangled hair only the moment before. Her posture now was straighter. She looked healthy. Stronger might have been the word for the look of her then. Pale as was her natural complexion but with apples coming into season in her cheeks. Not fully bloomed but an undeniable rosy ghost. Through her bangs, I saw her eyes. The clouds had lifted from them, like gauze falling from a pair of jewels. They shone, like sunshine but murkier, darker somehow, a night-time energy watching me evenly. She didn't flinch anymore. She was smiling. She said nothing. I didn't mention the nice man I'd met the night before while she'd taken her own partner into her bedroom, the man with gentle eyes and nervous way towards me that I liked so much. I didn't want her to feel resentful or threatened, and so I didn't tell her about the way he'd made me feel unexpectedly good, and comfortable, safe almost, like I hadn't felt with somebody for a very long time. But I told her, "With eyes as blue as yours, you could get anyone."

She only kept smiling, without words, like a mystery never to be unraveled. Her posture stayed bold. The starlight burned on in her stare. I watched her. I couldn't look away. She looked younger, brighter. It was like looking at the dead returned to the world of the living, a miracle in the middle of another trackless stretch of same-old. I said nothing, only basked in the fleeting moment of her.

Timothy Braun

At the Bottom of the Sea, or, The Bathtub Play

NOTE: This play may be performed in a bathroom, which would allow about four to five audience members into the space at a time with flashlights to light the actors. If performed onstage, the actors should be in a bathtub.

(A cool autumn night. The sounds of a carnival.)

(Children laughing)

(A roller coaster's racing)

(CHARLIE and MAY are in the bathtub. It is filled with bubbles, surrounded by candles, and the two drink from a bottle of vodka. The bubbles create a screen or curtain so the actors are not nude. It is important the audience never see the actors fully nude. They kiss. He rubs her neck.)

MAY. That dress looked good on me.

CHARLIE. Looked good on you.

MAY. It's short in the sleeves. It doesn't cover my wrists.

CHARLIE. What kind of fabric is it?

(He runs his hand down her stomach. It disappears in the water.)

CHARLIE. I asked you what kind of fabric the dress is made from.

MAY. Don't know. I have some mail for you.

CHARLIE. Still? What kind?

MAY. Personal letters. Birthday cards.

CHARLIE. Who are they from?

MAY. How would I know? You're not supposed to open other people's mail.

CHARLIE. That never stopped you before.

MAY. That was hurtful.

(The sounds of a rollercoaster can be heard. She then guides both of his hands under the water.)

MAY. (Yelling) Both hands! Both hands! (Whispering) Good. Good boy.

(MAY runs her fingers over his lips in a figure eight pattern. Then she drinks from the bottle of vodka and kisses CHARLIE.)

MAY. So, do you kiss your new wife in front of my daughter?

CHARLIE. I'm leaving. Drop the kid off at my place in the morning.

MAY. Please don't...

CHARLIE. She's our kid, not your daughter. I am doing the father thing for you.

MAY. You don't have to brag about it.

CHARLIE. You know, Candace wanted to come here this weekend.

MAY. Why didn't she?

CHARLIE. She felt like she would be infringing on your time with the kid.

MAY. My time with the kid? That's nice of her. After all, Candace gets to see our daughter five days a week. Does Candace smoke in front of my daughter, like her father does? Does Candace drink in front of my daughter the way her father does?

CHARLIE. I want the kid home in the morning.

MAY. Please. I'm sorry. I would just like to spend some time with you and Molly.

CHARLIE. You mean Molly. Spend some time with Molly.

MAY. She is asleep right now. And the new wife thinks you got a hotel room.

(Silence. Then, he drinks from the bottle of vodka.)

CHARLIE. Are you still job hunting?

(She takes his hands again and puts them under the water again.)

MAY. Both hands, Sweetie! Both hands!

CHARLIE. Don't yell. You'll wake the kid.

(She rubs her thumb over his lips in a figure eight.)

CHARLIE. Are still looking for a job?

MAY. We are in a recession.

CHARLIE. Of course.

MAY. Molly wants to go to the carnival tomorrow, but I don't think she

should be riding things like carnival things at her age.

CHARLIE. We used to ride carnival things like that.

MAY. No. We used to ride the Ferris wheel. She wants to ride roller coasters.

Do you remember the first time we kissed?

CHARLIE. By the roller coaster at Coney Island.

MAY. No. It was under the Ferris wheel. We had pink cotton candy. That was the first cotton candy I ever tasted. The crystals stuck to your lips, and made them taste like strawberries.

(*She kisses him.*)

CHARLIE. You wore a white Ramones t-shirt that night. With a blue flower behind your ear.

MAY. You pulled the flower out my neighbor's lawn. Like you owned the street. You looked good that night. You won me a stuffed animal. A purple Tasmanian Devil; Molly calls him Dizzy Devil. You won him playing the coin toss game. On the glass plates. The first time we made love I was wearing that Ramones shirt. You ripped it in half, right down the middle. You said "I would go to the bottom of the sea with you."

CHARLIE. That was a long time ago.

MAY. No it wasn't. It was yesterday to me.

(*Silence.*)

(*Then. She takes his hands and puts them under the water once again.*)

MAY. (*Whispering*) Both hands. Both hands, baby.

(*Silence.*)

(*Then. CHARLIE drinks from the bottle.*)

CHARLIE. I got a promotion. Last Monday.

MAY. Charlie, that's wonderful.

CHARLIE. The company wants me to move to Sacramento. Candace wants to take the kid.

MAY. Please.

CHARLIE. You will still have some weekends and the holidays.

MAY. I won't let you.

CHARLIE. You don't have custody.

MAY. California?

CHARLIE. I'll pay for plane tickets. So the kid can visit.

MAY. What about you?

CHARLIE. What about me?

MAY. You need to say something. You need to say something to me now.

(The sounds of a rollercoaster can be heard.)

MAY. I looked nice in that dress today.

CHARLIE. Yes you did. What kind of fabric did you say it was?

MAY. I don't know.

(She takes a drink. She then takes his hands and places them under the water.)

MAY. *(Softly)* Both hands. Both hands. Both hands. Both. Hands.

(Children playing can be heard in the distance at a carnival. Then a carnival caller can be heard.)

(Curtain.)

Alan Clinton

Double Prints

Old age dominates, frost in Florida. Listen, I'm trained like everyone else to love the pink acrylic nails, the red and yellow flowers, and most of it is drawn to scale, tiny as razor cuts, bleeding a lot, as faint as a childhood scar on the face, only that scar was all you lived for, the only thing that kept the big teeth and white lips from attacking like a Jack-o-lantern. There are so few magical objects in the Jack-o-lantern, rain pouring a waterfall from the pink flowers. Most of the time rain has the effect of today; the weights crashing you down in the museum, the carousel peddling vaginas again, and love an incredibly distant concept, having completely bathed you two days ago, sleep was supposed to be like crystal meth, a locust garden. Grey matter green matter, there's a brain above the razor wounds, a circuit for the willow branches, organized much like this photo-essay/children's story/heart slip slipped right in like that brown shadow of mulch in the center of things, an oasis in the lush chance of botany on third avenue, not of horticulture doing its own thing, and I should appreciate the rich texture of it all; the woods are full of ice like that, only I'm being disturbed by the giant mirror of frost blocking the entire left side of the photo, a real live wailing wall draining down in a brown afternoon. I should look away, enjoy what's left of the picture, much like psychoanalysis, but then I'm annoyed at the proportional discrepancy of the texture I'm supposed to enjoy, as if spikes spreading across Karen's back could play such a bit part, as if they didn't have rhizomes peeking through cracks in the mirror that this prosthesis knows nothing about.

Here's the whole problem with how they taught me to see: it very seldom looks you in the eye, it doesn't account for the ghost limbs in the prosthesis. Here the effect was created with the reflection in the mirror, with the trunk of the car passing right below Lullaby's nose. That's significant. The position of the ghost has caused its back to arch in a way that reflects the nature of the imagery. And see the serrated fur, that's my skin walking across a sword garden, the spikes peeking through a wound in the mirror, the swollen tail a viral effect. A similar effect was once created by a slippage in the film sequencing, so that the entire statue of liberty was imaged within the statue's crown. Well, the same holds true for werewolves trying to kill themselves with copper bullets. Most of the

time, it only results in a death's head forming on the lump of the throat. That is the next thing to say. Danielle, I'm so much better fed than if I hadn't called to check on your sweater. That should have been said two weeks ago. I can't hear anything. I'm nervous, but have no energy. I think this is why the heart slip smokes out every day, so that there is always that ghost of the tree across the street, the one that danced the night you tried to channel the blackbird, acid did that, airmail, don't think you can get any exorcism done by skimping out on the holy water, the bible, the film, etc. I feel much like I did the summer I went insane by sleeping on my professor's couch for two months. For the last two months I've slept on the floor of my apartment. You see, my bed looks very high and thin, like serrated fur, like a crack of solidity over an abyss.

Well, I obviously didn't take this one. You know what it is, the writer's desk. Just as every mother thinks her son is handsome, all parents think their son is a great writer. Guess where the stapler in the photo spends most of its time? In the other room holding down the curtains so that I can run the air conditioner and masturbate at the same time without being seen. I don't know why I bother. As Anatole France said, "From Augustine to the present, writers of confessions have always remained a little bit in love with their sins." And you asked for it, right? They all want to know where the writer lived, wrote, ate, and even masturbated. And they all do something strange like draw on the walls with chalk.

To try and have a moment's peace without building a pagoda, or is it a gazebo or whatever. You knew you were building it all along, so it's rather hard to surprise yourself with it afterwards. It makes the trees surrounding it very uncomfortable, you can't brush it across your face, and it doesn't look anything like the ugly little toadstools Danielle loves to photograph. You want it to open up suddenly like a vein in the ground searched for in the Zen of heroin addiction, where the blood itself is what gives you a fix. This is not romanticism, but a simple necessity, a rejection of the visionary experience that can't be pulled out of your pocket like a cigarette. It makes ice sway in the breeze, and won't kill you. It's a desire for that mirror opening up suddenly in a fault line, one that doesn't make your old age swim up to you like a goldfish. It isn't your priest telling you you're saved, your analyst telling you you're alright, or your mother telling you you're beautiful. It's sticking your money in the slot, pushing coke, and receiving a bouquet of flowers, every second of your life. Missing your way to Camelot, and ending up with your hair turning into water, food turning into stars. This may be asking a lot. John Berryman said that life is boring. My father said that all jobs have a significant portion of unpleasantness. But life has tricked me up somehow, so that the richest sunny gardens are

as small as a sunflower seed swallowed in an instant. And like the heroin addict, I need more and more, so that the next dose of life might kill me. A stadium full of angels bores me instantly.

There are ironies that escape my father, even a winged gem like this one. Of course he liked the idea of a bird standing atop the sign mandating that he not be fed, like a sentinel for his own kind. Last night Christina said that though she was baptized Catholic and too young to do anything about it, she couldn't subscribe to a religion whose main purpose was to make you feel guilty. Confession, I said, was not a means for absolving sins but a way of mobilizing pleasure in the direction of the priesthood. That was just what I needed to say, because then she blurted out that she'd always wanted to photograph a naked woman hanging on a cross, and then stick that photograph in a toilet with a picture of Elvis hanging above it, and then photograph the whole mess. It just occurred to me that Jennie and Christina should be roommates. They're both bound in a dorm contract without anyone else, both only children, both photographers, and both smoke pot every day. I could wrap them both in a knot and start thinking about Danielle.

There's a lot of beauty out there, and a lot of darkness, but it's always something small in it all that holds you like a strange attractor, a black tear of leaf that has positioned itself at the height of these burning islands, it holds you and hums, walks down the hallway toward you after you watch the bombs, and you think it's going to explode across the picture in an entirely new black lightning tree. It's something that all the oil drills and power lines can't even begin to approximate. And light just shuts its teeth and bleeds before this. Everyone seems to be seeing liquid trees these days, but Danielle started it all the first time I met her. As we approached a hill covered with blackened, limbless trees, I stopped at one of the first and told the rest of the group, I just wanted you guys to know that I think this is the coolest tree I've ever seen. At that instant, Danielle said that it was like liquid. Can you imagine what kind of power such an instantaneous transformation might have, how it might resonate for months afterwards, even longer?

What amazes me is how we manage to forget these experiences, snuffing a cloud into ice. But sometimes, the clapping Zen is re-invoked, carrying the same form but a different mask, so that going through the motions is no longer a cliché but a wonderful *déjà vu* tricked up by choosing to walk two miles under the stars instead of driving to the party, the fire less traveled. Chemically speaking, the same energy is released when you break a bond as when you make one. Danielle said that, and transfixed me in liquid.

An exercise in frustration, the face snuffed out, the writing blurred,

just you and, metal forming worry lines, light and paint looking for cause and effect. Everything looking like the UPC symbol on the corner of Shakespeare. I woke up at 6:30 this machine and wanted, missed anything I thought about how the party last night was completely unreal in the sense that I said everything to Danielle I had planned to say, unlike the texts that still float in the air between Jennie and me. I thanked her for both times she fed me, asked her if she had finished and published her paper; I even said some things I hadn't planned to say, I was on with timed releases. When I first walked in the door, Scott, the mystery who says nothing but still attracts Danielle I can tell, was playing the flute in the other room. I almost lost my way over here, but I followed the sound of the flute. I say these things with such seriousness, it takes a while to know I'm joking, but the first thing I said when I walked in, Danielle thought for a second or two or three or four and exclaimed, that is so awesome! Not funny, but awesome, as if she recognized in it an allusion to the uniqueness of her giant shadow house. It was well worth the wait, like being on acid when it takes a half hour to open the paint can and two minutes to paint the entire canvas of your wall one color in the rainbow of a bird face and dancing and making love at the same time, and exercise in elation, the painting blurred into a metallic ecstasy, just you and love.

I was telling Christina, very un-Catholic, the former raver and roller of ecstasy, the photographer who likes to taunt me with photos of her boyfriend's favorite vagina, that I felt like a goddamn romantic poet writing this piece about the botanical gardens. Of course, this was after she told me she had not written her Hiroshima report or her crime report, but had spent the whole weekend at these very botanical gardens. Lord knows what kind of drugs she was on during this little excursion, though it better not have been acid because that would mean she had finally found some and not gotten any for me. Yeah, I have permanent trails, but that's only the traces of the people who turn the other way or choose a different route when they see me, people from other states who enter my mind and make me blush. If you followed the trail around you'd see I have forked toes. I just started writing this poem last night explaining it all, stopped after two lines, and called it "demon": "there's a demon inside of me, crawling all over my face/ and it asks me to marry you, and murder the blind." Let me put things short and sweet, I'm going to mail a Christmas card to Karen, with two possible but not mutually exclusive results. She may end up trembling in the hospital, and her boyfriend may throw a hundred thousand dollar brick through my window. This is not a veiled remark or anything else but plain fact, I am able to write and say things with wicked, unintended effects. Satan was just a monster who wanted to love.

Well, from the look on her face, mother is probably giving me advice. I can do one of two things, try to remember what we were talking about at the time or just recite what she tells me every single time we talk. Alex, you almost always have to go through a few bad experiences before you find the real thing. A few! I don't like to stereotype, but how about every single time. As if she was qualified to tell me anything about my life at all. Now don't pull any sentimental parental bullshit on me because you happen to be one yourself. She was married by the time she was 22 and has, objectively speaking, jack shit to tell me about two years that she never had. Or for that matter, anything about my life whatsoever. Quoting my uncle, "Your parents don't live in the real world." They used to pray (in my presence) that God would find the right Christian girl for me to marry, when I was like twelve years old. The irony of this is that while they were praying, I was slowly becoming a shape shifter, sometime atheist, sometime Satanist.

Okay, I slipped, see my chin high and my gaze into the sky, probably all due to my father's command to look off into the distance and create the artificial image of a mad love he never even imagined much less dared. In his world poetry rhymes and you can kiss your engineering scholarships goodbye, you criticize people for glad-handing and then feel you should "show your face" at a church gathering. I slipped, but if you look at my feet you can tell I'm walking a tightrope, and I'm about to crash into two days of a rainy apartment. Only if I do, I can't tell Karen—it makes her nervous to think that people like me exist. And if I see her at the grocery store with a broken hand, I can't ask her how it broke or how she's getting along with it. You see I've decided to refrain from approaching her when she's accompanied by someone who might be able to kick my ass. You know the old routine, if we choose to step outside, one of us is liable to get hurt. And it ends up being you. So you could say this is a cigarette ash that's about to take my whole shirt up with it when all along it was meant to be a candle burning next to the bath. Cigarettes? Maybe she'll quit, maybe I'll start. Needle? Hand it over. You always hear about how fucked up people's lives get after they become addicts, but for some reason you never hear how fucked up their lives were beforehand. Another thing you never hear about is how taking acid even once makes the grain of wood, even in a photograph, an unearthly flow chart, like the touch of your hand sending ripples through the water, an amazing head massage floating backwards down a river, just before the rain begins to chill you.

Here are some ways you can read this prosthesis. Imagine those reeds right of center are slivers of the sun. Of course you're fascinated and wish to see all the sunflares leap away like grasshoppers, but the slivers will cut

your cocaine eyes to pieces. Feel it break your bones Mr. Jones. So I give you an impressionist rendition, that apartment we fix up for the philanthropists. I'm like the everglades. You can't live here, and if you visit for very long I'll eat you alive. Now you think this is a metaphor but it's not. The last time I talked to Karen outside her dorm, there was not an insect to be found, but she kept slapping herself and saying that she was being eaten alive. And to give her credit, I don't even think she was lying. It's just that my presence made her feel like there were insects around biting her. Most of the time you're content driving right through me, watching my birds rise like soft Jewish lips. Sometimes, either bored or morbid, you want to be stung once or twice, lusted after, sense the rainclouds underneath the water. You made this wooden prosthesis so you could stop, walk a hundred yards inside of me, urinate, and walk back. For my part, I'm much too bored to not welcome you with open arms and even dramatize myself a bit. A dash of valium, some empty sex, some laxatives, isn't this much better than a horsey ride? The midget, the hairy woman, the elephant man, they were thrilled to be put on show. It was contact.

Look at how the grass is starting to burn up on my side of the walk. Before I got a phone call from Danielle, just now, I was going to say that my complexion, expression, and features are almost exactly the same as the actor playing the head fascist in Pier Pasolini's film in hateful homage to the Marquis de Sade, *Salo: 120 Days of Sodom*. I can truly say that it is the only film I give enough of a shit about to say that I truly wish I'd never seen it. The thing is, the very day after I was forced to watch the film I bumped into Danielle by chance. We were both rather aimless on bicycles that evening which was just long enough for this Italian girl to redeem me from the depths that Mussolini/Pasolini shoved me down into. And today she saved me from those depths again, that comparison, this photo of myself fretting over keys with a gazebo protruding from my head, from the belief that she hadn't called back because she wasn't ever going to. I have a lunch date with her for Tuesday, under the pretense that we must photograph something that doesn't exist.

I must have stepped on the grass the very moment the picture was taken, otherwise it would be brown as the tree I've been touching for more than a second. So you can see why someone like me, pale who turns trees brown and full of wickedness, would be attracted to someone like Danielle, dark who turns blackened trees to liquid and full of Catholicism. Shoot, I'd even become moral and pretend to believe in God in order to be her man—maybe even just to hang out with her for a bit. Lord knows I've had enough practice learning how, and knowledge is all you need to perform a good con job. Maybe I could even con myself. Meanwhile, I'll remain skeptical, burn the grass and squeeze my own ass. Mom will continue to

stand in flowers that propel her on to a meaningful life. But the flowers that cover her feet also erase the footprints, so that I can't follow, and she can't give directions. We'll continue to speculate on how the lifeless brown does seem to be randomly spread out at times, but as always come to the undeniable fact that an entire lavender flower castle seems to spring up from her feet while, when I try to rub shoulders with a woman I love, she turns into a brown tree in some weird twist of mythical rape. Mom puts her hand to her chin, and I put my hand to my ass and elsewhere, but we can't for the life of us determine the cause of this disparity. No, I was wrong, I'm dangling the keys in my other hand, and when I dropped them, they fell upwards, past René Magritte's rape, past the Buddha's repeating footprint, past the bluest owl escaping a black hole, landing exactly where I knew they would.

The metal labels were just too much for me to take. I was too tired to run away, but I had to look away. The first one referred to the reeds, telling me that every poem I had ever written or thought was a green poisonous fruit that would be better off locked in Christina's apartment as an exhibit I was eternally banned from because of a little incident with bats at Carlsbad. The second tells me that my keys are a glass coach that shrunk into a tiny piece of wood that holds my entire body together. My summer is stretched out across the pond, blistered. I have to look away from the intensity of watching following Karen walk around in circles in a dark parking lot, vomiting in the shadows. But when I look away from the intensity, I see the flattening of mountains, where the richest experience tastes like sand. I do believe that's the heroin addict's performance, the mountains get flatter and flatter until he injects one so tall it kills him. That's what's called being backed up in a corner. Do you know what I'm saying? If I choose sleep, the blisters don't heal but wilt while I'm fully conscious. And if I choose love, it's all those songs on the radio suddenly coming true but worse, Karen vomiting and laughing, lip trembling and I watch her tell me to leave the hospital she's trembling in the next morning covering her breast as if I would be there to watch it. But Alex, you told me that this has happened to her before in many types of situations. Friend, this is not about absolving myself, this is about standing in a mirror and watching yourself, over the course of two hours, transform into the devil.

A blackbird sits on my rearview mirror now, and though my mirror puts scratches on its beak and scales on its feet soon to replace those beautiful black feathers, it keeps looking at me when I look to the past the only thing I can do when the rest of the universe is blurred. Karen once wrote a poem about making love where the blackbirds are. I picked up on this black haired beauty's theme in my acid vision and turned the volume

up to 1000. And to tell you the truth I think I'll remain insane for the rest of my life or until I can transform the bird back into the window pane it once was. But there's only one tree in this rain forest, and I don't think a whiff of magnolia is much like the philosopher's stone. I will make love where the blackbirds are. Let me, in my moment, be a privilege to you. Inside me I will make three blackbirds become one. Please, do not neglect my precious friends. Without them, I am only a heavy corpse. With them, I can make you cry out sharply to me. Know the blackbirds will always fly and you and I will explore explosion. Then she wrote about a sphinx walking off into nothing, troubled by the shadows of indignant desert birds. In love, a blackbird sits between two faces, the tail brushing one lip, the beak fucking one iris. Shatter my tongue into a murder of blackbirds to tickle my throat and fill my lungs and my stomach with enough butterflies to be the most interesting person in the world with a thousand dreams for Danielle to interpret. That was a prayer for the future.

Let's think of the two names for this cat. My brother found it outside of a dance club called Liquid back in his skeleton suit era. Its hip was shattered, and the bouncer begged my brother to take her home so he wouldn't have to. So its name was Liquid—as incredible as Fairy Tale or Lullaby or Sanity. Until my mother got a hold of it and named it Sunshine, which is sort of like a psychic predicting that an attractive young woman will become serious with someone named Jim or Jo[h]n. The attempt to marry Christine and Jennie failed miserably on a technicality, but it ended up in a two-hour conversation with Jennie about everything. Immediately after the two-hour conversation, I got a wrong number for someone named Jim. So, Jennie was talking with me at Leonardo's on Saturday and said that after our conversation she had an entry about me in her new book of found objects titled "elan." It was ashes from her cigarette, and she went on to not explain what she wrote or what I have to do with ashes. At first, my brother's white cat was named Sanity, a moving metaphor for the concept just as my kittens Lullaby and Fairy Tale sing themselves and write themselves as they move, but soon he caved in and chose something non-metaphorical, non-signifying, the Biblical Simon. I think that this move happens 1000 times a day especially in my vicinity. As for me, I still call my brother's cat Sanity, and my mother's cat Liquid.

Double-take, Double-prints, I know you think you've already seen this, but it was merely clicked a second later. Here's the plan, starting this afternoon. Christina's leaving for Greece tonight, but she's going to leave an autobiographical report of the rave scene behind, the ecstasy and plasma and prostitution. At 4:30 I'm going to pick Jennie up standing at her dorm. There's a full moon last night tonight and tomorrow. I'm

going to take five pictures of her at Lake Alice with a broken candle. In the first, her profile next to the lake, holding the candle close to her face. In the second, facing me, offering me the candle. Then she'll be holding her lips near the flame as if to kiss it or blow it out—then another right after the flame is gone. Finally, one of her facing the lake, the candle next to her feet. Tonight, I'll call Danielle to see what time tomorrow she can do it, the exact same poses. I got the idea because the unique photo opportunity I hinted to her came down like Joyce's "Araby." I was going to put my hand over her eyes, lead her into the gallery, tell her to keep them closed as I walked away from her. Okay open and take a picture of me. Suddenly, as if kidnapped by a magician, she would see me sitting on a crescent moon straight out of a film by Méliès. Only the museum took down all the backdrops the day after I first discovered the entire world ready for you to be photographed against. But with a promise from Danielle to be photographically surprised, I had to think of something else besides, I just wanted to have lunch with you anyway. A thought of what she meant to me, and a dropped red candle in broken glass answered.

This is an apology to you for some of the things I've said, some of the things I've suggested. I originally called this "A Prosthesis in Horticulture" because it is not me but an artificial limb, a shadow that grows more abstract and cold than what throws it. And when I write, I dramatize myself like the cat's tail and fur expanding to ward off predators. I'm the scared creature with very long and sensitive feelers looking for the warmest spot in the house, jamming my head down a vase, lying on two-dimensional clouds. I think I'm in a house, but the hallways are illusions, I'm as free as free as free without need of a door without a house or doorways leading to dropoffs. When I finally think I'm free, the vents are illusions. When I'm about to suffocate, the corners and walls start moving back and forth on wheels. The grooves in my head begin to squirm towards fear. My leg is being served up on a silver platter. The clouds are starting to spread apart. The sun is straightening its tie before it turns to liquid. There's a red sore splintered in my chest. There are tarot cards on the other side of these photos. I want to make jewel boxes for them and read my future. When I think I'm in love with Danielle, I'm pouring beer into her bed. When I think I'm inside her, I'm vomiting on her sweater. She hangs out with me on her "scattered" days. She's writing a paper today, her "focused" day. Why am I not helping her with it. Why am I fantasizing about smoking out on Payne's Prairie with Jennie under the full moon.

When I think I'm taking a bath, I'm talking to Jennie on the phone. John is just someone she bitches to and fucks on the weekend. I'm someone she bitches to and doesn't fuck on the weekend. Both John and Bobby

like to tell her she's too good for people. Bobby says she's too good for John. John says she's too good for Melissa. John and Bobby were former lovers. When I think I'm rock-hopping, I'm really. . . I could be in court with Jennie on Wednesday, my arm around her, my hand over her mouth so she won't reveal she was an accomplice. Instead, I'm driving Danielle to school and advising Jennie to not even show her face in the courtroom, her conscience being too big to evade questioning. If Jennie breaks up with John, she can take me to see Waiting For Godot. If Jennie doesn't break up with John, she can take me to see Waiting For Godot. Either way, I'll be waiting for Godot to come walking across the liquid prairie, my mind fucked up with microdots to lubricate his/her arrival. I'm afraid if I tell him/her to leave, she might be suicidal. As a giant, I will tell her/him to leave my house if she sleeps on someone else's couch. John is gone, Bobby is leaving like clouds, Melissa has been caught stealing, and here I come like a distant stampede of trees knowing some things, that bats are renowned for their fertility, how to use lily pads as rocks, condoms alone are eighty-eight percent, humor is a sign of intelligence, color patterns have nothing to do with solidity, and how to, using spy novels and the Parisian sewers, contact Samuel Beckett when he hasn't been answering his mail for two years.

There, put a warning flag in the ocean of swords. There, arrange to furnish televisions showing nothing but water. There, have a table that wilts swords and grows food. There there now. Suddenly I'm there at David Allred's lake house. Have I been there more than once. I remember telling Saskia to watch out for rape because I couldn't think of anything else to say. Faux pas. They're raping guys over there now. 'Tis better to give than receive. You can see an old man lying on his back. He's much like a walk sign. Now the televisions are diamonds. Now the televisions are roller coasters. Smoke is moving across my wall. My lap makes me sleep. Did you ever laugh at the fact that the woman taking a bath was named Bathsheba, that Peter was the guy going around chopping things off, that Paul is a homonym for a coffin cloth becoming insipid, boring, or wearisome. That Danielle, who interprets dreams, never dreams herself? I saw her at the top of iron steps with a green backpack, looking at me exasperated. Everything else was blurry, a glance and a phantom. Now the smoke is moving from Jennie's cigarette to my face, and I wonder if this makes me look mysterious enough to overcome the fact that a sheep should never marry an ox. Her boyfriend is a rabbit, a perfect match for the sheep. The funny thing is, the children's story I had written and dedicated to her read, "For J.B. and everyone else trying to pull a rabbit out of their magical sack." Still, in her shaking foot, her tattoo curiosity quenched by accident, her blue striped sock bought by her mother very

close to me, her black jeans I was wearing as well, her velvet naked grey top, and trembling arms, she was disturbed when she found oxen were incompatible with lambs—I could have told her.

This terrain looks much like the water Danielle will be traversing when she leads canoes the last day of January. The bottom of this river looks like the mountains in North Carolina that both Danielle and I know. Funny how a month ago I was thinking about asking Danielle if she'd like to visit our respective friends in North Carolina and her grandmother and my brother in New York. Now, I'm just trying to get her to call me back before she leaves tomorrow so that I can get five photos of her in a half hour.

When you look across a sea of yellow, you can't see the crags we live on, the acid fires moving across our head. I'm looking down for a hole where I could pass some time, ringing like a phone call when I'm framed by dry wells. Would I give up two years to live with someone who smokes? Two decades? They are red planets bleeding and blistering, covered by fragments of newspaper. Would someone else give up a lifetime for a face that ripples in the wrong directions when it speaks, a surface where a red wound rises slowly? Mother still looks up for the camera as if she expects to find something there. I know that only something finds you and I've spoken to enough ancient mariners for one day. Someone built a wall around the sea so that as soon as you swing out of the circle, you're not protected from the crags so even as I'm turning around in bliss my hands are shrinking together as if my fingers are wilting, I can't warm them over a flower. Flowers are meant to accompany airmail and cause horrible sunrises. Flowers are meant to be covered in semen when you're a little girl. Smile, never forget to smile. Don't look directly at the camera, especially when you're playing Joan of Arc. It's funny how my initials explain everything, why burning always occurs at a stake, why I stand on the other side of the flowers, why they can't spill over the green wall to protect me everywhere, why Danielle ends up crying in front of me at two a.m. early Thursday morning. So there will be no pictures of her, no acid trip before two identical candle picture boxes to determine who I belong to. She would rather ride her "goat" home at two a.m. than let me drive her.

Mom would not accept my answer, "because I'm demonic," when I told her why Danielle did not want to see me. But she wouldn't have accepted any of my other answers either, so I tried to translate things into Biblical binary very much like a post she insists on leaning up against. Most people, you see, look at the waters of paradise through a wire grating. I live in the vanishing perspective of tables and chairs I could maybe wear as an uncomfortable ring, and I wait for islands to rise into monsters if

they must. I'm walking into the Devil's Sinkhole at night when I'm not supposed to be there much like this summer, only instead of Karen at my side, a flashlight. This is approximately 20 hours after I made Danielle cry, six months after I took Karen here and tossed the I Ching with her, showing us Limitation, the abysmal water placed above the joyous lake. And tonight, before I get to the bottom, the last three wooden flights are covered over in water. It's been raining a lot the last week, but I never imagined it would do something like this. I light the red candle, place it in the water, and push it off. And, I make my first open prayer ever, to Satan, Jesus, Krishna, or whoever is out there, to grant me some sanity, some love. It was the first time I've ever prayed to Satan, and let me tell you it was a bit scary doing it on this cold night in the Devil's Sinkhole so I eased into it by invoking him along with the others, sort of as an invitation to whoever cared. But pretty soon, I'm sure I'll be saying my prayers to him alone. You see I don't really think Satan cares, but I know he understands. That night, looking from the edge, I realized I had planted a star, a candle floating in the sinkhole, my own echo of the night dome.

Andrew Chen

Review: *The Late Show* by David Trinidad

Turtle Point Press, 2007

Today's poets face a unique set of obstacles. In an era when readers have become too cool for Confessionalism, yet are growing tired of postmodernism's insistence on the disinterested and the ironic, poets need to be fresh and original yet aware of their place among these and other complex standards of tradition and expectation. David Trinidad, in *The Late Show*, his third collection of poems, succeeds with wit, style, and sincerity.

If we are forced to classify, Trinidad would best be described as a second- or perhaps third-generation New York School poet. For those drawn to the New York School's cosmopolitan, pop culturally aware, coterie-driven, playfully sexual (often homosexual) glimpses into the avant-garde lifestyle that charmed a generation of readers, Trinidad does not disappoint. His first poem, from which the collection takes its title, engages no less than twenty-five stars and starlets of Hollywood's fading golden age. And like the poets before him, Trinidad's poems are on a first name basis with members of the gang—James Schuyler, Tim Dlugos, and Joe Brainard being the most noteworthy. Many of his poems writhe with homosexuality and the homosocial, unafraid to present that carefree attitude toward the socially forbidden that his predecessors reveled in. All of this will satisfy the New York School reader.

Yet Trinidad writes with a sentimentality that departs from the tradition, reinventing and rediscovering its tropes. He acknowledges that the golden age of Hollywood is over. Instead of, say, an urgent concern over the collapse of Lana Turner, Trinidad writes how "Lana Turner learns that / she and her daughter, Sandra / Dee are in love with the same / man." His lines seep a quiet, exposed tragedy. In "Hack, Hack, Sweet Has-Been," he describes the careers of Bette Davis and Joan Crawford, their inescapable, B-movie-ridden decay and the gracelessness with which they accept their decline. Rather than hip and fresh and glorifying, the portrayals of the Hollywood figures America once loved are violent and heartbreakng.

Similarly, the poet names Trinidad drops are significant of deeply

intimate relationships with friends and fellow artists, which allow the poems to remain accessible to readers despite their extreme specificity. In “To Tim Dlugos,” the poet is clearly vulnerable, reaching for a dead friend whose emotional impact was defining for the poet—and as readers we understand that. We don’t feel obscured by the names of the men we don’t know. From the poem—

Now you’re dead fifteen years, who once broke down
and confessed to Raymond, after a night at the baths,
your helpless addiction to unprotected sex.

Though we don’t know Tim and we don’t know Raymond, we feel and empathize with the breakdown, the confession, even the addiction on some level—despite the fact that the poem takes the form of an address to Tim and Tim only. In writing of a conversation the two had—

Then: “You’ve gained weight.”
An uncharacteristically cranky moment, my friend, in an
otherwise grace-filled death. “I’ll lose it,” I said. And have.
Yesterday, walking home from the gym at dusk, I was struck
by the sky: a color you, who celebrated such nuances,
would have appreciated: Popsicle blue.

Like much of the conversational poetry of the New York School poets, there is an element of artistic connection that is emphasized—particularities of color and imagery in the world, in this case even gesturing toward a society of materialism. But for Trinidad, the artistry signifies much more—here, a promise kept and a friend’s grace that resonates in the poet’s emotional world and resurfaces in its habituations. Finally—

Nursing a ten-year crush, I was always reticent, let you—so smart
and so sharp—take the lead. I think I could keep up with you now.

In these closing lines, Trinidad exhibits what is impressed after this emotional wrestling with the poet he addresses, and through such relationships with artists and friends and lovers he clues us in to his own insecurities. Trinidad takes the poetic methods and subjects of the New York School and reinvents them for himself and for us.

The sexuality, while written without hesitation, is in no way a transgression flaunted against society, the poet one step removed—instead, we read them as personally defining relationships, glowing successes and dark regrets. In “A Regret,” a poem describing a one night stand with last

name-less Kurt, we are given sexual details—but from them, we also feel a certain sincerity in the encounter. Trinidad writes, “in the / clubhouse, how / I checked his / body out,” before proceeding to focus on “what we / talked about / before we / leaned against / my car and / kissed, under / that tarnished / L.A. moon.” We hear both that “I / couldn’t keep / my hands off / his ass” and that “he thanked me / sweetly.” Again, we feel the raw, unabashed sexuality we’ve seen from members of the New York School, but together with Trinidad’s impulse to lead us to the sincere, the genuine, the human.

As readers, we wonder the entire time how Trinidad manages to write with such sentimentality without offending us. He is, after all, anything but an ironist. While a poem will consist of, for example, eighty-seven shades of pink lip gloss, we get the impression that rather than criticizing materialism and superficiality, the poet actually feels intimately connected to these feminine things, these pinks. The same goes for the collection of Barbie dolls he brings up again and again; while it would be easy to dismiss them as a satire of the booming materialism of the age and the pervasiveness of gender roles, it would simply be incorrect to do so. No, our poet is deeply attached to these objects, compulsive and obsessed—and to be honest we are more interested, more affected because of it.

Trinidad is a chameleon with both form and content. One moment, he’s on the verge of full-blown prose poetry in “For Joe Brainard”; the next he’s collecting found materials from old notebooks in “Candy Necklace.” He writes a round of gorgeous, stunning sonnets, both Shakespearean and Petrarchan, in “A Poet’s Death,” before writing a tragically hilarious thirty-stanza pantoum in “Hack, Hack, Sweet Has-Been.” His verse dances across the page in tiny, careful steps in “Written with a Pencil Found in Lorine Niedecker’s Front Yard,” and captivates us in long, stream-of-consciousness lines in “A Poem Under the Influence.” We can’t help but feel that Trinidad is changing monumentally even through the course of the book—and we are right there with him. He is struggling with something—his insecurities, his history, his life and his loves—and in the process, he charms, penetrates, and astounds.

CONTRIBUTORS

Gene Barry was born in Cork City Ireland and is involved in Mad Woman Poetry, a weekly poetry event in the city. A Biomedical Engineer for most of his life, he now practices as a psychotherapist and counsellor and is currently finishing a play and editing his first collection of poetry. Gene has had poems published in *Stony Thursday*, *Cyphers*, *Revival*, *Dark Stream*, *Irish Examiner*, *Five Words*, *Douglas Post*, origamicondom.com, *Under the Radar Poetry*, *madswirl*, *Emara* and was the featured Poet of the week on poetrysuperhighway. His first collection of poetry will be published in 2009 by Revival Press. Gene has read at numerous poetry venues, including the Whitehouse in Limerick and at the Patrick Kavanagh Celebration in Dublin.

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