

DREAMSTREETS #65

Autumn 2020



E. JEAN LANYON

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Night Shift on Broad Street (c1926) by William D. White

Dreamstreets # 65

Fall 2020

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Dreamstreets #65 cover and incidental art on pages 14, 49, and 52 by E. Jean Lanyon; incidental art on pages 8 and 37 by Franetta MacMillian.

Special thanks to Erica Zoë Loustau for allowing us to use the photo of her work *Aloft* on page 40 and to the photographer Terrence Roberts.

We're Chock Full of Poetry

As always, *Dreamstreets* continues to present many of Delaware's current literary artists, those familiar to readers as well as many new ones, and this issue is no exception. We've got a whole lot of new poets and their poetry to share with you.

Among those of us who produce *Dreamstreets*, Phillip Bannowsky has something of a prose poem in this issue, and Franetta McMillian graphically presents some short verse. Douglas Morea tells us about his new novel with a cover designed by Stephanie Fowler and Max Bohme, and I provide a little slice of life.

Judith Speizer Crandell lives in Milford with her family. Her work has appeared a number of anthologies including those from Delaware's Devils Party Press. Alvina E. Quintana, originally from California, is currently an Associate Professor of English at the university of Delaware. She has a portion of a prose memoir and accompanying poem in this issue. Jamie Brown, who founded *The Broadkill Review*, and who is a familiar presence to many in the local literary community, has some new poetry here. Another familiar literary artist published in *Dreamstreets* for the first time is Maria Keane. While she is also a visual artist, having served as a Professor of Fine Arts at Wilmington University, she has earned accolades from the Delaware Press Women for her 2018 book of poetry *Being There*. Larry Kelts is a regular presence at many of the area's poetry readings. He's been widely published, including his 2014 chapbook *Tatters*. In 2017 he earned a Fellowship from the Delaware Division of the Arts. Poet Phil Linz is also well-known at local poetry venues. Originally from Brooklyn, New York, he is founder and publisher of Fierce Grace Press, specializing in poetry chapbooks, including his own, *The Chapbook: Collected Poems*. Shannon Connor Winward first appeared in *Dreamstreets* #49, and her résumé includes *Fantasy & Science Magazine*, *Analog*, *Qu*, *The Pedestal Magazine*, *Lunch Ticket*, *Literary Mama*, and *Flash Fiction Online*.

Among others appearing in *Dreamstreets* for the first time is Kari Ann Ebert. She is the Interview Editor for *The Broadkill Review*, and her work has appeared in *Mojave Review*, *Philadelphia Stories*, *Gigantic Sequins*, and *Gargoyle*. She has an ekphrastic poem in this issue, as does Larry Kelts. Donald Fry is a retiree from the University of Pennsylvania and in 2015 a featured reader at Wilmington's 2nd Saturday Reading. Karen Hurley-Heyman had been on the University of Delaware Theatre faculty and is past Director of the Delaware Institute for Arts and Education. She earned a Fellowship in Poetry from the Delaware Division of the Arts in 2019. Twice nominated for the *Pushcart* literary prize, Alice Morris is from Lewes, Delaware, and is a member of the Coastal Writers and the Rehoboth Writers' Guild. Her work has appeared in *The Broadkill Review*, *Gargoyle*, and *The Patterson Literary Review*. Cynthia Ventresca's work has appeared in *Third Wednesday*, Ted Kooser's *American Life in Poetry*, *The Broadkill Review*, and *The Spirit in Travels*, an anthology that includes her winning entry for the July 2018 Cosmographia Books Poem of the Month Contest.



Returning to our pages with literary work are David T. Shoemaker, Crucial Poet, Patricia L. Goodman, Robin Hill-Page Glanden, Jeffery Little, Ken Segal, James Miller, and e. jean lanyon, former Delaware Poet Laureate, whose poetry and art has appeared in *Dreamstreets* since its founding.

Our cover art for this issue is from E. Jean Lanyon, who distinguishes her artwork with her name in capital letters and her poetry using all lower case in homage to a favorite poet e. e. cummings. Jean has produced several of our covers, including one of our best from *Dreamstreets* #3, which jean and I co-edited way back in 1980. Along with Franetta McMillian, Jean also provides incidental art for this issue.

It all begins with a novel excerpt by Arabella S. Bianco after our submission policy, some words on Douglas Morea's new novel, and a historic poem from 19th century poet and author Bayard Taylor.

— Steven Leech

Invitation to Submit to *Dreamstreets*

For over forty years, *Dreamstreets* has published works by contemporary and historical writers and artists who live in, or have a strong connection to, Delaware. While we have at times opened for submissions, we have usually published work among a close-knit community of artists. We believe it is time to regularize that practice with a clear submissions process and publication twice per year, while occasionally publishing an extra and more closely-curated number, such as our Summer 2018 issue on the history of music from Wilmington in the 20th century.

What are we looking for? First, Delaware authors, those residing here and those in the diaspora. We like everything from avant-guard to home-spun. We like art that's progressive and authors who are diverse. About forty years ago, we declared that we would not publish anything fascist, racist, or sexist, which set us somewhat apart, yet we have never been afraid of being edgy. Our purpose has always been to promote art that is marginalized by the insular esthetic of Delaware's political economy, not to mention its insular geography. Take a look at past issues, archived at dreamstreetsarchive.com, but don't limit yourself to what you see there. See if you fit the Delawarean criteria, check our submission guidelines below, and submit.

Submission Guidelines (Read these carefully, or you may be ignored.)

We accept literary submissions in any genre from Delawareans and those in the Delaware Diaspora. We solicit our own visual art. Generally, we do not reprint previously published contemporary work although one previously published poem in a sequence of unpublished poems might be permissible; just make sure we know, so we can give credit. **Our reading periods are during the months of December and June**, although we may announce changes. Anything received outside of these submission periods will not be accepted or answered.

Send up to 5 poems of no more than 5 pages. Prose more than 10 pages will have to work hard to find a place. Begin no more than one poem on a page and make your stanza breaks clear. Send your work to [dreamstreets.press\(at\)gmail.com](mailto:dreamstreets.press(at)gmail.com) AS A SINGLE ATTACHED DOCUMENT in Microsoft Word (.doc or .docx). PLEASE, DO NOT MAKE US OPEN AND KEEP TRACK OF SEVERAL DOCUMENTS. Write "Submission" in the email subject heading. IN YOUR SINGLE DOCUMENT, include a cover page with name, address, phone number, email, and a short bio of 50 words or less, and indicate your connection to Delaware. Double space prose, single space poetry, use 12-pt Times New Roman font, and remove extra space between paragraphs. Align text left, except for special or unusual typography, in which case, we may have to work with you to render it faithfully.

Simultaneous submissions are fine, but please let us know in your cover letter if you are courting another and inform us immediately if your work becomes elsewhere engaged. We reserve first serial rights until publication, when all rights revert to the author. Our rights include electronic as well as print publication and magazine re-prints. Please give *Dreamstreets* credit if you re-publish your work.

Submit only once per reading period in each genre unless we ask for more. Our editorial committee will review your work and get back to you before the next issue.

"Go at it boldly, and you'll find unexpected forces closing round you and coming to your aid." -Basil King

Haiku Inside Out

*A Monarch mariposa
meandering its
way southward to Mexico.*

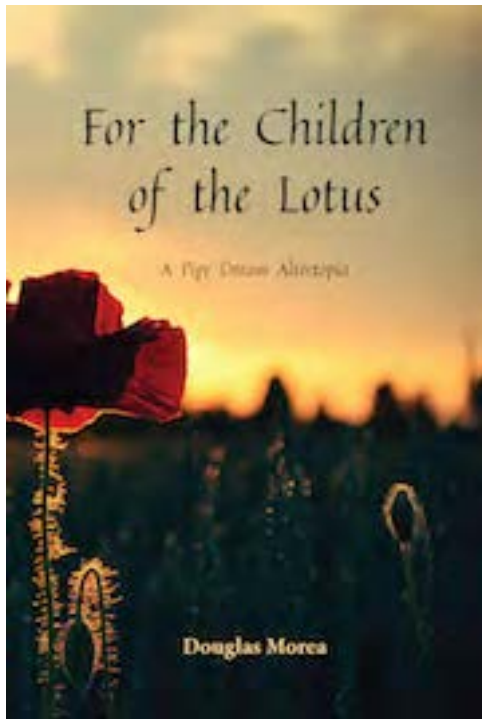
— Steven Leech

THE TRUE TALE OF A TALL TALE Or A LIKELY STORY

Douglas Morea

We live in dangerous times. Therefore, I set down these words against the possibility that you'll never get to read them. No, wait. That's putting the chicken before the horse. Or getting egg on my face. Or one of those, on that list of usual likely stories. I guess that makes me a likely suspect? And in setting down my words I am only rounding myself up.

Oh yes, before I forget: This brief monograph is a combo announcement of impending publication and literary review. As of now, the novel by Douglas Morea



(That's me.), *FOR THE CHILDREN OF THE LOTUS: A PIPE DREAM ALERTOPIA*, is tossing in the throes of getting published. Did I say "novel?" So far, let's call it a novel, to keep the language civil. What is it about? Oh please, don't get me started. Not yet. For now, back to the author's nonsense.

Yes, guilty; I am one of those writer types. Being a writer is an alternative to being a bank robber. But a writer is a bank robber who only winds up stashing the filthy lucre back in a bank account—because the fool still trusts in the bank he just robbed—and forgetting about it, as of no account. That's what writing is, a low-yield long-term investment in hoarding.

I myself robbed poet Tennyson of his "Lotus Eaters," pinching its delicate petal, for the title of my book, and aggravated the assault by using it whole for a "Moment" (What my book calls chapters.), ripping off—with ironic twists—his plot. Shame on me? Hardly, because praised be the name of the Lord Tennyson!—who in his turn only ripped it off Homer, who in his turn lifted it from legends that arose long before, out of the very real but prehistoric Trojan Wars. By the way, there's no copyright on The Lord's Prayer, either.

So you see, all is fair in Love, War, and The Folk Process.

But as a writer I am worse than a thief—I am a turncoat, a betrayer of humanity. Even though I became so as an innocent child. The crime I speak of is the necessary consequence of an invention, and one that I certainly did not invent: I committed the deed in grade school: I learned how to read and write.

You see, writing is a lie. It pretends to be somebody—that's some BODY—talking, a transient local event that vanishes almost as fast as it is produced. And by nature is supposed to. Writing petrifies this vibrant breath into stone, or wood, or sequestered paper, or—nowadays—electronic storage and reproduction. You now think you see and hear somebody talking. But in fact, there's nobody there, and only the bones of something being said. When you engage it, you are making love with a doll, a flexible statue, a lie. This invention is 5,000 years old, and so you can dance with people who danced, and died, all that time ago.

It is a magnificent lie, because it yields up true power. What's the difference between this invention and a lie? Same as with some other magnificent inventions, like, say, Money, or Freedom: whether or not people believe in them. The wealth in the trick is genuine, but the toxicity of death lurks in them. Ironically, not the immediate toxicity of decay, but rather that of its mummified delay, that lurks in them. The springing out of sudden, rude death lurks in them. These dead have written their wills into their dances, and to dance their dance with them is to be owned by worlds long dead—by the limitations and failures of long ago. Because many of their truths are not true anymore, because life changes, and its needs as well. Meanwhile the dead simply don't change with the times; their wisdoms are frozen in time, and cannot learn. And neither can you learn, and change, if your wisdom is owned by theirs.

Before the advent of literacy, religion was in the forefront of the human spiritual tool-kit, keeping pace with the changing world over the generations—the oral traditions remolding flexibly down the generations, without any believers being any the wiser for the wisdom built by nature into the evanescence of the truly living personal breath of speech. But now, changeless voices in graven images trap our every sunrise in the setting suns of yesterdays. And religion is become as much the enemy of spirituality as its friend—because preachers now are lawyers and cops, who sell you by their power to inveigh that IT IS WRITTEN.

But, that sinfulness being as it must, we persist. And so I am currently in the editing throes of working with a publisher/printer, because—as it turns out—a raw manuscript, even one in really good literate shape, needs work in the kitchen, if it is to be presentable and palatable on the dining table of a reader, however imaginary. And so, I the writer am having the dickens of a time of my life, and coming within an inch of it, in an e-mail relationship with my editor, understanding her and getting her to understand me, using the written word. Geez—writing the book was nothing compared with this, because now—unlike then—I have a real reader: my editor. Of my e-mails, I mean. Forget the book. And so a writer's novelty, in having to communicate via the written word. How about that. Shucks.

As to my title: Why a PIPE DREAM altertopia? One reason was laziness: I simply didn't want to have to bother doing any historical or geographical research; so if the work's premise is a dream, I can be as ignorant as I like and still not be wrong. Well, also the consideration that I'm old, and could credibly be canceled by nature any day now; so I had no time to waste—on research. The other reason is that the original impetus for beginning the project was a literal dream I awoke from. Its details were smudgy, but the atmosphere of paranoia and revolution, with politics and illegal magical substances flying every which way... well, that was heady as the cocoon of lingering moist warmth on my pillow—which altered the top right off my topia from the get-go.

As for the LOTUS? And wherefore CHILDREN? I found Tennyson's poem, "The Lotus Eaters," most interesting. (The main page and a half only. I'd ignore the "songs" that come later as merely moody and adding nothing but addition.) For a poem about stasis of spirit, it sure packs a thrust of richly colored density; I spun off bearing its momentum—and hooked on the gravity of three of its words: "Courage," its initiating word, "Melancholy," right about in the middle, and "Home," very nearly at the end. The questions that beach upon, and answers that cast off from, these three words carry for me the trajectory of the poem's day. And this is the day I seized for my book.

And I say "book" rather than "novel" because mine is not exactly a story with a plot—although it does have lots of characters and story lines. It's just written modular instead of linear, which makes it something of a directional collection of essays, which I call Moments. Yeah yeah, but what's it all about? Well, I'll get to that—after I finish with the title.

But first, speaking of the warm cocoon of a dream one has just woken out of—the sense of that is viscerally so rich in Tennyson's poem, I simply couldn't resist. The seductive "high" he describes in the poem, so threatening to the brave but war-weary soldiers hungry for home, is significantly that of opium, and so his mythic lotus embodies his version of the visionary altered state that many British romantics of the 19th century used opium to reach. I took this embodiment for my own mythic substance, to represent a cultural mentality whose adherents seek, after the way of those proverbial children—remember, the title is FOR the CHILDREN?—who alone may enter a spiritual kingdom.

In my book I do separate my mythic drug from those of the real world by denying it the dark side that drugs in the real world unfortunately possess, such as stupor, loss of self-control, dangerous toxicity, and addictiveness. Remember, it's a story; that's why they call it FICTION. And—Surprise?—there are characters in my story who have nothing to do with drugs, and yet participate as children of the spiritual estate regardless. Because a drug is just a prosthetic, a mere enhancer of powers that one must already have.

So. Just What Is This Damn book about? Ach—Don't rush me I'll tell you! Sort of. It's about getting born and dying. About how both are okay because they

make each other necessary. All my many characters and their story lines converge on this theme. I also, as author, stick my big mouth on-and-off into the mix, in order to make it clear that I speak not only of individuals, but of the rise and fall of nations and social orders, and their dreams. (By the way, this tale is no deliberate parallel to, nor parody of, our current national travails. My project was already in progress before the current stupidities unfolded.) But my story is deliberately, and necessarily spiritual—even dipping into a gnostic fable of Jesus, and the fate of his Judea. No, this book sells no religion. In fact, I am an atheist. But it's okay, because God came to me in a dream and gave me permission. We live in an age of certified professionals, and so I'm a licensed atheist. And if you're annoyed because you can't tell if I'm serious or just kidding—Bingo! You get me. I humbly specialize in the passing of all understanding.

In such manner I do, at least in part, redeem myself from the sin of literacy, in that by way of its own instruments I celebrate the ultimate necessity and wisdom of death and rebirth—and the subservience to that fluidity of all personal individual selfhoods. The closing of old eyes and the opening of the new: Eternity lies in that balance. And so I celebrate the passing on and away of all torches, in the knowledge that all flames are inextinguishable because all are indistinguishable from each other: the secret of eternal youth is simply that Creation can hold nothing older than beginnings.

Thus everything that as a writer I've stolen and hoarded? I give it all back!—if only by way of giving my blessing to its all being taken away, out from my failing hands, as I pass on in my turn.

So then. Who's going to read this book? There's that lovely old twinkle of wisdom of many permutations, one of which is: If you want to make God laugh, make plans. So I've decided to cheat God out of his due, at least this once, by not planning to sell any books. It may be at least interesting to see how God evens the score, considering I shouldn't be able to be disappointed. If anybody out there with spare money wants to help God out, by upsetting my planned failure with the blight of success, here's your chance.

But that's granting my book even physically attains to the teetering lip, over which it may slip into public availability. And tumble into your hands. It's not there yet. But let's say it stays lucky enough. Let's say you got your hands on a copy. Let's say a copy got all over your hands, and in the ensuing scuffle it opened, and you tried reading some: would you even be able to figure out how? You can tell, no doubt, from this essay that stylistically I am a hard nut to crack. Yes, frankly, reading my prose can be a bit like breaking into a brazil nut with a nail file. Also, granting the preconditions of our capitalist/consumerist economy, that a product's worth is based on how well it sells rather than on how well it works, then once you bought my book, it would have already served its purpose right there—whether you could read it would be beside the cosmic point. But at least it looks now like my first and only edition will have a pretty cover, and weigh in at over 400 pages, not counting

ink, so that it could evenly balance out one end of a coffee table against a whole carafe of coffee on the other: a gift that keeps giving, therefore, and a formidable paperweight made from—of all things—paper.

Yes, let's look on the bright side. What would upset me by success in the marketplace? I would have to deal with the assaultive indignities of English-major groupies and their stupid questions and complaints. I can hear it all now. There would be, "What did you mean to say?" To which I would have to reply: I didn't mean to say anything. I said what I said. How about I ask you What did you mean to hear? Or its twin question, "In other words, you think..." To which I reply No, I think in my words. Only other people think in other words. Or how about the moral outrage of, "You savage you! Shredding the minds of our children with your leprous excuse for literature!" To which I would counter, Sir or Ma'am, Did you know that the Earth is filled with the sick, the poor, and victims of all possible description? You could either make yourself useful by helping them, or go stand out in the sunshine till you evaporate. But no, you have to dump on my book instead. And lastly the time-honored, "Where do you get your ideas from?" To which, I: The Tooth-fairy. That's why I've lost so many teeth without ever having been in a bar fight. That Tooth-fairy drives a hard bargain.

So you see, maybe this is how God would get even.



Franetta McMillian

Bayard Taylor was born in Kennett Square, Pennsylvania on January 11, 1825. He was an author of several novels, including *Story of Kennett*, part of which takes place in Delaware because the Brandywine traverses both states. The following poem invokes both the beauty of the Brandywine, but also the pitch battle fought there within Bayard Taylor's ancestral memory.



TO THE BRANDYWINE

Again upon my view,
Thou com'st in quiet beauty, gentle stream!
Upon thy waves, the clust'ring foliage through,
Floats the soft summer beam.

Tall trees above thee bend,
That cast dark shadows on thy swelling breast;
And falls the mellow light in hues that blend,
Soft as the Sunset west.

And massy rocks arise,
To whose gray sides the glossy smilax cleaves,
While in the clefts the fox's timorous eyes
Peep from the clust'ring leaves.

The pendent willows dip
Their long boughs o'er, and in the waters lave;
And stoops the modest golden cup, to sip
The brightly flowing wave.

Thou wind'st thro' meadows green,
Fring'd with tall grass and graceful bending fern;
And down thro' glades to join thee, many a stream
Leaps from its mountain urn.

Thou fill'st the silent dell
With tuneful murmurings like a half breathed prayer;
Lifting thy chant, to join the hymns that swell
From temples everywhere.

When evening draws her veil
Across the sunset clouds, the moon above
Looks softly down, and stars are mirror'd pale, —
Pure as a dream of love.

In sunnier climes than ours,
Glide brighter streams, o'er sands of golden hue,
And course their way beneath o'ershadowing flowers
And skies of fadeless blue.

Yet still around thy name,
A halo lingers, ' never to decay,
For thou hast seen of old young freedom's flame,
Beaming with glorious ray.

And once thy peaceful tide
Was fill'd with life-blood from bold hearts and brave;
And heroes on thy verdant margin died,
The land they loved, to save.

These vales so calm and still,
Once saw the foeman's charge — the 'bayonet's gleam; .
And heard the thunders roll from hill to hill,
From morn till sunset's beam;

Yet in thy beauty, now, '
Unchanged thou art as when War's clarion peal,
Rang o'er thy waves, and on yon green hill's brow,
Glittered the serried steel.

And still thy name shall be
A watchword for the brave of Freedom's clime,
And every patriot's heart will turn to thee,
As in the olden time.

It's A Graveyard Smash

Arabella S. Bianco

Back at the house, the girls hardly noticed the distant fire siren. They were lying on the floor of the parlor, helpless with laughter. "Heavenly daze!" said Marigold. "Did you see the looks on their asinine faces?" said Yvonne. "That's the funniest sight I've ever seen in my life," said Alice. "I wonder what we looked like?" said Rhonda. "I guess we'll never know," said Janey. "We won't," said Carrie, "but whatever it was, it skeered 'em good!" They laughed for another ten minutes. Then the doorbell rang. "Open up!" said a belligerent voice. "Williamsport Police!"

Dressed – apparently – in a short, plaid schoolgirl-skirt and snug, frilly white blouse, with her hair in pigtails, and a polite, empty-headed smile on her face, Alice opened the door. "Good evening officer," she said in a friendly tone of voice, "Won't you come in?" A burly policeman barged in. "Sergeant Cogan – Vice Squad. What's going on in here?" "Why, my friends and I are having a crocheting party," replied Alice. "Well, we got a complaint a little while ago, from somebody who said there's black magic and abuse of corpses taking place here." Alice looked perplexed and concerned. "Oh my ... but everybody was alive and well the last time I looked, sir." "Don't get smart with me, young lady!" said Cogan. "Where are your friends?"

Alice led Cogan into the small parlor. "Look, everybody," she said with simple-minded enthusiasm, "It's Sergeant Cogan of the Williamsport Police. He's come to arrest us!" Similarly attired, Janey, Yvonne, and Rhonda looked up briefly from their crocheting and absent-mindedly waved. There was a great miscellany of sewing paraphernalia and partially-completed items scattered all over the furniture, and pattern books strewn out across the floor. A bouquet of mildly slutty perfumes pervaded the room. Carrie and Marigold, however, were not in evidence – although someone had added two new items to the room's *décor*: a life-size statue on each side of the fireplace. One was of Harriet Tubman and the other was of Harriet Beecher Stowe. Peculiarly, both were looking straight down at the floor. Alice glanced at Janey, who rolled her eyes.

"I don't like the looks of this," said Cogan, "You know anything about that car on fire two blocks from here?" "No they don't, Sergeant Simpleton," chuckled the creepy voice from somewhere out in the pitch-dark hall, "but don't sweat it, bozo, maybe next time you'll get lucky and find it stuffed full of butchered bodies – sorry, I meant 'abused corpses.'" Cogan's eyes got huge, but the girls showed no signs that they had heard, and merely shook their heads

uncomprehendingly. "OK, smart alecks" said Cogan – managing to be belligerent again, "You're all coming downtown with me for questioning."

Just at that moment, however, a tall, admittedly handsome, officer strode into the room. "Hold your horses, Sergeant," he ordered. Then he politely addressed Alice, "Miss, I am Captain Corcoran. Are the gentleman and lady of the house here?" "No," answered Alice, as if someone had wanted to know the time, "they're out for the evening." "Are you Miss Hawthorne?" continued Corcoran. "Why, yes, I am," said Alice, obviously quite pleased that she had been asked. "Miss," said Corcoran with some delicacy, "has Sergeant Cogan explained the ... ah ... rather serious reason for our visit?" "Oh, yes he has," said Alice, wide-eyed, "and since none of *us* called you, I'd have to assume that whoever did must have been trespassing. Maybe that burning car Sergeant Grogan – er, Cogan mentioned belonged to them." "We know who it belonged to," replied Corcoran, "and they're unsavory people. And we're going to look into that, too, *aren't we, Sergeant?*" said Corcoran pointedly, and then – directing his gaze at the fireside statuery – said, "Well how about that. You know, my great grandfather was an abolitionist and came from the same town as Harriet Tubman; and my great grandmother once lived two blocks from Harriet Beecher Stowe."

Sergeant Grogan er Cogan snarled. "This is a lot of baloney, sir. We need to toss this place and take them in for questioning!" The other girls disinterestedly resumed their crocheting as Alice said, "We'll be glad to help, Captain, but ... well ... don't you honestly think that if there were ... *corpses* here that you would ... smell something ... rather bad?" "Oh for crying out loud, Captain," said Cogan angrily, "they could have shoved them under their mattresses."

"OK, time out," said Corcoran, "Young ladies, I'm going to have a short discussion with Sergeant *Cogan* out in the hall if you'll briefly excuse us." Alice curtsied coquettishly, escorted them to the hall, then sailed back to the parlor and sat bouncily down – but, whether by accident or by design, didn't keep her legs close enough together to conceal the smooth crotch of her white satin panties from Janey's reliably horny gaze. Corcoran slid the weighty pocket doors closed behind them, but – for no discernable reason – they noiselessly re-opened about an inch. Janey quickly jabbed in their direction with her thumb, and Alice executed a silent tippy-toe into position that the other girls had to struggle not to burst into howls of laughter at – just in time to overhear the following droll interchange through the tiny aperture:

"Would ya turn a light on, for the love of Mike? There, that's better. Sheesh, Cogan, what the dickens is the matter with you? You know how busy we are tonight, and you drag us all the way up here to investigate a *knitting party*? You must have watched *Four Rooms* one too many times, because if you honestly

think those kids are into worshipping the devil, abusing corpses, and hiding the evidence under their mattresses, you seriously need your head examined."

"We got a tip, Captain. You know we're supposed to investigate all tips. Isn't that what the chief's memo said?"

"Yeah. It is. And who might the tip have been from, Sergeant?"

"It was an anonymous phone call, sir."

Corcoran swore under his breath. "Let me get this straight, Cogan: one week from the elections, you want us to toss the Mayor's house and take his daughter and her friends in for questioning on a serious and, under the circumstances, ridiculous charge based on an *anonymous tip*? Are you loco?"

"Procedures is procedures, sir."

"Uh-huh. Well, if your idea of "procedures" is us losing our jobs over this nonsense first thing tomorrow morning, then you need to do some serious thinking about what procedures are all about in the first place!"

"Oh yeah? And what if they *are* up to something? They tried to use ventriloquism on me, I know that much!"

"Ventriloquism is a big word for our line of work," replied Corcoran, "How about a couple of smaller words: *imagining things*." A ferocious scowl swept over Cogan's face, and he clenched his fists like he was getting ready to throw a punch. Corcoran decided it wouldn't be a good idea to escalate this in front of civilians. "OK, fine," he said placatingly, "Go out to the car and get Samantha. But keep your mouth *shut* – sorry, but I'm pulling rank on this. One syllable and you'll be on extended leave. So help me."

The girls had resumed their crocheting – and Janey was still beaming with joy from the glorious upskirt panorama Alice had been sending her way – when Corcoran re-entered the room and cleared his throat. They all innocently looked up. "Oh, Captain, you're back. Are we going to the police station?" Rhonda said enthusiastically. "Ahem ... Miss Hawthorne," Corcoran said slowly and politely, "I am truly sorry for this interruption of your evening; and we have no wish to needlessly invade your privacy. However, the long and the short of it is this: someone has filed a *potentially* serious charge and we are required to look into such matters. Now, ahem, it's fairly obvious to me that there has probably been some kind of mistake. Nevertheless, we are required to file a report – a report which, in this case, will doubtlessly go no further than into a file cabinet ..."

At this point, Cogan returned – with a look of surly triumph on his face, and leading a sturdy-looking female Ratweiler. "This is Samantha," continued Corcoran, "our ... corpse-sniffing dog. We're going to take her into the basement, up and down the hall on each floor, and into the attic. That's all. If she doesn't bark, we will leave you to your evening together – Samantha, come over here! What are you wagging your tail at those statues for? They're not even alive. Sergeant, you will escort Samantha, and I will escort *you*. And I will go with you,

too." Alice happily volunteered, "It's a big house and there aren't any lights on; I wouldn't want you to be frightened." Cogan's face turned magenta, but he said nothing. "All right," said Corcoran, completely nonplussed, "young lady, lead the way."

About ten minutes later, they returned to the parlor. The other girls hadn't missed a stitch. Samantha hadn't barked, and started happily wagging her tail again at the fireplace statues. After profuse and mandarinesque apologies – all of which were graciously accepted by Miss Hawthorne and her friends – the forces of law and order efficiently took their leave – after politely declining several offers of refreshments. The statues returned to being Marigold and Carrie; the girls were once again dressed in casual clothes; and the remnants of the crocheting party had disappeared. "Great job, doll," said Carrie to Alice. "Are you girls wanted?" asked Yvonne. "No," said Marigold, "the cops just don't like us much. If they seen us here, it would have made them a lot more suspicious."

"Why were you staring so modestly at the floor?" queried Rhonda. "Because," replied Carrie, "just as we touched our tongues to the roofs of our mouths, we noticed that huge, gilt-framed mirror on the opposite wall of the parlor." "Well," giggled Janey, "Alice's *fantabulous* 'dumb blonde' *glamour* sure did a great job of distracting the police from noticing that your reflections in that mirror were of Little Eva and Topsy!"

"How can we ever repay you for what you've done for us?" said Alice. "The looks on all those fools' faces were repayment enough," chuckled Marigold. Yvonne nudged Rhonda – who zoomed into the kitchen and quickly returned with lots of strawberry shortcake, plates, silverware, and mugs of soda on a silver tray. "Wow!" said Carrie, "Well, magickin' *does* work up an appetite!"



Alvina Quintana

“Meztiza”

I am struck --
whirling,
more than images,
words colliding
 in my mind—
multiplicity,
 meztiza
consciousness,
 changing—swirling,
taking form with
 hues
dim,
foundational textures;
 spinning—
 kaleidoscopic light.
dark colors
 mixing
with many shapes—
 fresh ideas,
transforming
modes of insight—
 colors with light,
obsidian
 blue black
 transformed into green,
 brighter shades—
moving
 through purple
and
lavender;
 circles
whirling in my head;
 imparting light

onto the topics
 of difference
and
multiplicity,
So many
 perspectives,
notes of steel drums--
 quick accenting
rhythms,
 contingent

 as they are

mystifying--

Alignment!

—a configuration.
 meztiza consciousness --
difference,
 measures,
dark rich textures,
 shifting
to lighter
 playful
shades of mindfulness.
parts
 of the whole
transforming,
 becoming available
to physical,
 sensual perception.

Coming of Age in San Francisco in the 1950s

Alvina Quintana

I am the 7th child in a family of 9, the first kid born in San Francisco to very traditional Mexican parents. I learned early on that “Girls” were expected to stay home and behave in their assigned role as subservient, while “Boys,” on the other hand, were given the opportunity and freedom afforded their male gender.

The house I grew up in, was in the middle of the Mission’s industrial district. Our neighbors a beer brewery –Regal Pale Brewing Company, a plant that marked each day with a high-pitched siren at 8:00 am; 12 noon and 4pm and scented the air with the thick and persistent smell of hops. Bekins Van and Storage was across the street, a rag factory up the block, Variety Sausage, a meat packing plant, and a Tornberg sheet metal factory down the street marked the boundaries of our block. At our front door, railroad tracks for the train that serviced the cement factory two blocks from the house at 2403 Harrison Street vibrated, with a regular house shaking that in essence underscored our earthquake awareness. Two local bars, one on each corner, also framed the house on 20th and Harrison: Cancilla’s on 20th and Harrison, directly across the street from our house and O’Rourkes Tavern on the other corner at 20th and Alabama. Our family owned and operated a small delicatessen that was downstairs from our second floor flat. The deli, “ *Mi Riena*,” was named by my father for his Queen (*mí mamá*). The back room of the store constituted Daddy’s domain, his private candy factory, fitted with copper kettles, a gas stove, a large stainless steel cooling table, and other candy making equipment. There, after his regular eight-hour teamster work-shift, he produced Mexican candy, *cocadas*, *alfajor*, *camote*, *calabaza*, *piloncío*, *membrío*, (candy made with among other ingredients tons of sugar, maple, coconut, quinces, yams, pumpkins—expertly transformed into pink, brown and white coconut candy clusters and sugar coated squash wonders) that we hand-wrapped and distributed to the local stores and Latino movie theaters.

The community we lived in was largely populated by workers during week days but the neighborhood also housed a few low-income, rental units sprinkled between factories and populated primarily by Black and Mexican families. This was a truly a multicultural smorgasbord community. *La Reina* attracted lots of workers, primarily men from the factories, who would drop by for a deli sandwich lunch made by “Queenie” as they called my Mom.

Workers and factories established the invisible borders my mother maintained with vigilance. I learned early on that men were to be viewed as predators, and consequently was instructed to never to talk to strangers, especially men! The borders only allowed skating where my mother could see me from her Deli window perch. The concrete elevated driveway that led to the Bekins Van and Storage warehouse became our skating rink. Aside from the challenge of skating up and sailing down, the driveway led to a to a spacious flat surface large enough for

forklifts that were used to transport large crates from the Bekins trucks into the storage facility, but for us the space served as our personal stage, a smooth surface, ideal for roller skating—There, my sister Rosita and I, spent many an hour skating and flying up and down the driveway, we referred to as “Bekins Hill.” Rosa outskated me, pirouetting and jumping to the glee of workers who cheered her on from the high-rise Brewery windows. My skating was more about speed than tricks. Racing up and down the hill, the air pressing against my face with long braids, my imaginary wings, flying behind gave a sense of freedom. Clearly everyone noticed, our styles differed--Rosa was the aesthetic figure skater, I the speed skater. On more than one occasion my speed proved vital when I noticed slow moving vehicles, watching, taking aim, circling us like vultures, men who would drive by in search of their prey, in cars taking aim on us--two girls gliding across the concrete with ease. This was the moment when I would grab my unsuspecting little Rosita by the arm and say time for us to go home—there is a stranger looming in!

While we skated in our little neighborhood bubble, under the watchful eye of my mother, my younger brother, Vicente was free to explore beyond our block, as a member of the Boys Club, he took part in a variety of workshops, athletic sports and summer camp activities. He would come home to tell us about the world beyond 20th street. We understood that as girls we were captives and he was free.

Given the strict gender boundaries my mother enforced I was surprised one afternoon when she asked me to run an errand that would break through the one-block barrier. I was to go to El Faro, the grocery store three blocks away from the deli to buy one item—a box of Kotex for my sister Julieta. Though I had no idea about the relevance of the purchase I was thrilled to be able to take a long skate up the three blocks on 20th and Harrison Streets to the corner of 20th and Folsom Street. My daily skating sessions had made an expert on evaluating sidewalk payment and I was excited about gliding on the shiny, smooth grey, sidewalk outside the Brewery, racing up the three block incline to El Faro and then sailing back on the return trip home. The skate to the store was intense and invigorating, my arms pumping in tandem with the long strides of my legs. When I reached the store out of breath, cheeks flush from the skate, I fell against the counter and boldly asked Henry if he could get me a box of Kotex. He looked at me turned and retrieved a box and then leaned over to me and whispered “Are these for you or are they for your mother?” I recall thinking this a strange question and remember quietly answering with one word—no. Aside from this brief weird interrogation, the skate back was refreshing, downhill, the big blue box of Kotex under my arm I made it home in no time. I didn’t know what the Kotex box signified, only that it was for my sister (five years my senior) who wasn’t feeling well enough to go to the store herself. All this seemed strange, Julieta’s sudden illness and Henry’s whispered question. Oh well I reasoned, it was great to get away, to surpass the strictly enforced geographic border and feel the space and freedom of the three block distance on wheels. This one time experience soon became a monthly chore and I always got the same response from

Henry.. "Are these for you or are they for your mother?" He gave me a creepy feeling with this question, a question that was always asked in a suggestive whisper. After a few months I too began to feel so uneasy about this errand and Henry's question that I remember telling my mother that I didn't want to go to the store anymore to which she asked why. My response Henry always asks me about the Kotex—always with the same question "Are these for you or for your mother?" She looked at me in her quiet way and then offered a solution that worked like a charm, an answer that I only understood years later and would have never occurred to my naïve eleven-year old mind. "When he asks just tell him that they are for your father."

.....

Phil Linz

On Doing the Next Right Thing (Sheltering-in-Place)

*"No why. Just here."
—John Cage*

One alone, the basement apartment. On the rare trips outside, the memory, my mother,
Deep in the snows of winter, each day we'd have to start the car, make sure the battery's alive;
The learning of waiting. This spring day the car not touched, four days inside, car started easily;
ready to move.

Today's the day of Bob Kaufman's birth, according to the e-mail, the Poetry Foundation
Yesterday National Haiku Day announced on WHYY, along with the request for green.
Ella's "*Blues in the Night*" on Schwartz's archive . . . as near to a perfect sound as possible;
"this is a good song for her"

This is not solitude, it's virtual connection. Music. TV. Internet. Even occasional calls.
I created an altar months ago, yet never sat to meditate, not even once. This evening, sitting,
I found Hamill's *Why Sinatra Matters*, 'cause he still does. Read of his grandparents,
the immigrant assimilation. My folks, too.

I curse the wasting of time, too much television & deep sleep, bright unrecorded dreams,
Never enough writing. Lately going through yellowed theater clippings, reviews since the 80's,
Surprised by the attraction, the desire to retain. Clive Barnes, Michael Feingold, the Village Voice,
New York Magazine; the Sunday Times.

The CoVid warnings specify that "the elderly" are most at risk. The word not applicable, even to
This 66-year old body. Emotionally I'm 23, anxiously optimistic, the world to come; spiritually I'm
Ageless. alive & well. Once the seeker, today know & own the many truths beyond mere words:
it's here, now. Living fully, this breath, this life.

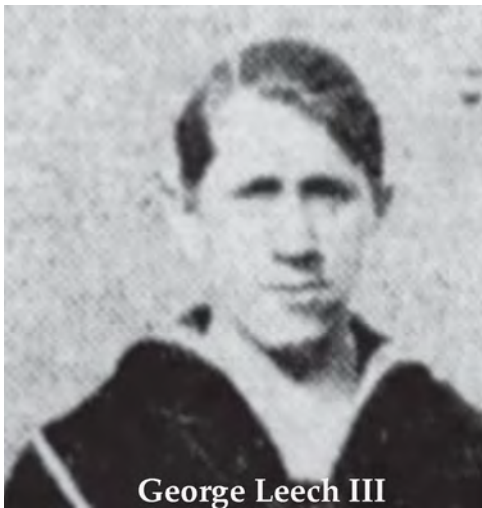
My Uncle's Demon Motorcycle

Steven Leech

No one knows what it was about that bike. Maybe it was a slightly bent frame or some undetected gunk in the carburetor linkage, but that bike had a mean streak. Several years ago my cousin Clarence showed me a snapshot taken in the summer months of 1930. It was a picture of his father, my Uncle Clarence, smiling sheepishly back at us across the years with a cast on his right leg that extended from his ankle to his hip.

"He got that from a motorcycle accident," the younger Clarence told me. Evidently that motorcycle had thrown him for no apparent reason. The bike escaped unscathed and sat idle in the yard until later that summer when my other uncle, Clarence's younger brother George, came home on a short leave from duty in the U. S. Navy. Uncle George had just turned 20 years old and he was old enough to tame that mean motorcycle.

Around the same time my cousin Clarence showed me that snapshot my former father-in-law, who just happened to have grown up in Richardson Park with my father's family and whose nickname in the neighborhood was "Stumpy," told me the details of what was about to happen next.



George Leech III

August 22nd 1930 was a sweltering Friday. In the hottest part of the day my Uncle George had driven that demon bike from the family home on Norway Avenue to the intersection in Richardson Park called Five Points, which was the commercial area where Maryland Avenue, duPont Road, Matthes Avenue and Ashley Circle all converged. It was a gathering place for many of the neighborhood youngsters.

According to my Stumpy, my Uncle George had begun to draw a group of the neighborhood kids around him. By now they had heard the story about the mean streak the bike had. It had been several weeks since they had heard how it had thrown my Uncle Clarence for no good reason. Sitting on the parked and ominously quiet motorcycle, wearing a strapped undershirt, my Uncle George was going to prove he could handle that mean bike. He had already proved it to himself by bringing it to the corner at Five Points.

Uncle George began to dare the other kids in the neighborhood to hop on board and take a ride with him. But he met with silence. The bike's bad reputation held sway. Uncle George repeated the dare, declaring with confidence that he could handle that mean motorcycle. Still no one responded, until Uncle George's buddy on

leave from the Coast Guard, Franny McFall, displayed the devotion of a friend and stood up to the challenge. Both would boast their bravery in the presence of their peers.

So my Uncle George slammed the starter pedal of the demon bike to life. Franny McFall climbed aboard behind him and with the thunder of open pipes making distant crackling echoes against the humidity of summer, the two screamed off up North duPont Road like a banshee leaving all the chickens behind. The demon bike banked around the curve where duPont Road intersects with Race Street smooth as silk, took a dip near Howard Street like a speed boat hydroplaning across gentle surf and cruised as true as an arrow on the straightaway toward the B&O train crossing a quarter mile ahead. There was only one other vehicle way up the road in the distance, a black sedan belonging to A. T. Miller. Both vehicles made the B&O crossing without incident.

The intersection of duPont Road and New Road in Elsmere was much as it is today, an intersection of separate railroad lines. The rail crossing for the Wilmington & Western track was and still is an overpass bridge. The intersection was also a place where the old track trolleys would begin to make their stops for passenger in Elsmere. It was there that A. T. Miller began to slow down to yield to one of those slowing trolleys. But that demon bike had hell in its heart and flight on its mind. On the downside of the overpass it must have become airborne. Maybe my Uncle George had time to hit the brakes to even to downshift, but neither response would work with a bike that was flying.

That demon bike found what was in its heart when it slammed into Miller's sedan bursting into the fire of hell and turning my uncle and Franny McFall into human torches. Before nightfall both were dead. Miller's sedan and the motorcycle had been completely destroyed.

About 30 years ago I had occasion to be standing on the corner of Kirkwood Highway, which hadn't been there in 1930, and duPont Road while waiting for a bus. It was a sweltering afternoon when suddenly a young man on a motorcycle came screaming around duPont Road and roared unto Kirkwood Highway into Elsmere. He was riding a really old motorcycle with old fashion style fenders. Its color was something between a worn gray primer and dull puce. And it had really loud pipes, louder than any I've ever heard before or since. They were like the sound of fireworks going off right next to you. The rider was wearing a strap undershirt and his dark hair was blown back by the force of the acceleration. The first thing I noticed was his nose. Its shape was a family trait. It was then that I realized I had seen a ghost and the ghost was riding a demon.

Jeffrey Little

Motorcycle Hill Climb and My Time Spent Off-World in Abbottstown

I'd just finished off a plateful of fried chicken skins because I told them it was the only food I would eat, besides Lebanon bologna, and though this cupped about as much truth as any statement can it was still all the while a lie. Carsickness exiled me from road trip

vacations, so I was billeted with a tuft of cousins in Abbottstown, outside of time. I was bereft, utterly lacking, they had the wrong dog, the wrong backyard, theirs was a demonstrably different sun and even the air smelled strange. I was certain that this is where

I would die, surrounded by aliens, inside of their alien simulacrum, eating fried chicken skins and scrying their weird walls. We move in small steps, by degree, surviving one moment, and confronting the next, I would sleep, rise, and sit at a table while aliens forked

away at their alien breakfast and see what I would have to endure. Bacon it appears is universal. Cook it to a crisp and it passes. My starving was off the board. Clearly they knew more than I was led to believe. They'd done their homework. Bully for them. Maybe

they even knew about the dead beaver that we saw along the side of the road. I had questions only it could answer. Later, at some event they called a motorcycle hill climb, I relaxed enough to see in its noisome futility the correlative for nearly everything I would

experience afterward in my life. It was like professional wrestling and the internal combustion engine had a love child and nobody was willing to call it what it was. I have no memory as to how long I was off-world in Abbotstown, but next year I'd stomach the ride.

A Trough Is All There Is

In 1972 the world morphed into a sound poem and this poem worked primarily in proper nouns: ABM Spitz-Rebozo Landsat Spassky. Mao-Pong? Thalidomide. Nixon Cox-Munich Amin, Nixon Bangladesh Roberto. I sat in my comfortable confusion,

ignorant of the repercussions. I did not yet realize that beads of nouns were Engines of Accretion. That by the 21st century the psychological landscape would look like the ball pit at Ikea and I'd be sounding out the edges on the secret life of nouns.

As above, so below. In 1972 I was repeatedly being reminded that countless satellites were circling overhead. Me and Cluck took turns surveying the skies above Rolling Acres waiting for one to unshackle itself from its orbit and spiral into the school

like an undercooked rotini. We marched through the hallways with our pockets crammed with magnets theorizing that crash days outclassed snow days by a sweep that it would be foolish to try and fathom. We were foot soldiers for the greater good.

A satellite is a stubborn mistress, we would say to one another, unclear as to the precise specifications of a mistress but in our own way we were certain of something, buffeted on every side by this barrage of information, and a trough was all there was.

Chaw

We played in what we played in.
There was broke stuff. Old bone
and such. Pictures you got used
to, unless you didn't, but you did.

The Labor Day Telethon and The Longest Yard

The first day of High School. It was but one Jerry Lewis Labor Day Telethon away. The helter skelter of beginning again only to end again, then begin again anew. The siblings needled me with chronicles of terror and constant woe, about one teacher

nicknamed The Screaming Skull and another simply dubbed the Nazi. Move about in groups. Avert your eyes. Never call any attention to yourself. My brother shook his head and said three words: The Longest Yard. Stoney lonesome. The clink.

If I'd hung with any of the shop kids then maybe I'd stand half a chance, but in eighth grade all I did for most of my Industrial Arts class was use a rotary sander to create a single, obscenely smooth board. Just one week more and my woodshop project

would've been an envelope stuffed with dust. I was doomed. We all were. The difference was I knew it, and so the burden of prescience was mine. I played a final game of ball against the wall and pulled a Hulk comic from its plastic bag. I waited

there, on the couch, staring at the weirdness of the grey Hulk as one of my new jazz records skipped away on the turntable and Jerry Lewis, the sound turned down, sweated like a man on fire, but the fire was on the inside, and Jerry he knew it too.

Small Bills Please

It was Bent Rim versus the new kid out of Boston. Everyone I knew was flocking over to Crouse Park and its pavilion. It was a blotch of town I couldn't understand. Imagine a ratty notch had been sliced

off a Swiss village and somehow it crash-landed in Pennsylvania. Rim was Cluck's cousin, a giant, but on the dim side, and the prick from Boston couldn't shut up. Dead birds were strung from the corners

of the pavilion. A kid who would later lose a finger cutting leather in a factory where they made baby shoes pulled a cornet out of his lunch bag and shot off a hot high note trill. I couldn't watch. I had no

qualms about bloodshed, and Crouse Park existed as an autonomous zone outside the reach of school. I don't know why but I ran to the little corner store on Lumber Street where every item they sold cost

exactly two dollars and fifty-three cents. As haunts go, it reassured. Miller, the owner, perched behind the register with a handwritten sign that read "Small Bills Please" taped to the till. I couldn't stop shaking.

I figured that Rim would win, Boston wouldn't shut up, and I knew that kid's horn finger wouldn't make it to his grave. But it didn't matter, I was standing in a museum, me and Miller, too terrified to even blink.

Empty Places

Judith Speizer Crandell

How long had she been upstairs in Susannah's bedroom, perched on the edge of a pink satin chair? Susannah peeked in. Rebecca quickly shut her locket.

"Let's join the guys," her hostess beckoned, leading Rebecca downstairs.

The men's voices drifted to meet them. Cars, baseball, taxes. Rebecca focused on his right arm stretched along the back of a gold and brown tweed sofa. Closer, she saw his dark curls caught under his Oxford collar. As she crossed the room, she studied his too-delicate face with its insipid chin. The portrait complete, she dutifully sat on the couch as far away as she could from her husband.

An hour and thirty-seven minutes later – she kept track – they left together. Together they undressed in the shared bedroom. He removed his striped shirt, his black belt, his gray trousers. Only his underwear and crucifix remained. She removed her scratchy gray wool dress, her white underwear, her makeup. Changed, she tucked her locket under her floral flannel nightgown. Together they slipped beneath the white sheet and the white quilt.

As he quietly glided off to sleep, facing his wall, she lay awake, fingering her locket. Her mind skimmed through mountains and a stream, pansies and an apple orchard. *I can't recall Grandma's face. I need to get up and look in my locket.* She knew it would be best if she waited until morning when her husband of fifteen long years had left. *My stomach hurts. It's these pretend couples' evenings.* No arguments, just silence once they were alone. The hard silence of their marriage erased all her fine thoughts and dreams about being a writer, nurtured before she fell for his seductive words, before she married him.

Weekday mornings when he awoke, if there was no striped shirt fresh from the cleaners, he would ask about the shirts, the cleaners. If her car was not parked on the left side of the garage, he would ask about the car, the left side of the garage. A red mug of hot coffee, an egg over-easy, two slices of light toast with butter and apricot jam needed to be carefully arranged on a plate and placed on the forest green Formica kitchen counter. Current invitations to weddings, funerals, dinner parties required terse remarks and coordinated scheduling. Soon the smell of Old Spice After Shave would waft through the house and out the front door.

Weekends he dressed in jeans and NASCAR T-shirts advertising destinations like Charlotte Motor Speedway and Watkins Glenn. Then he left for his rented garage where his prize 1970 MGB awaited his restoration efforts. Efforts only with the car, never with her.

She did not care where he went as long as he was gone. Mornings became afternoons, afternoons became later afternoons. Rebecca could never seem to shake off the chill of their strained marriage as little lines of light condensed into time-

formed images then into nothingness as on a blank TV screen. Her daytime spooled out empty as she anticipated the stillness of evening dread.

Three nights after the dinner party at Susannah's, Rebecca awakened before dawn and walked to the draped window where her childhood rolltop desk stood. Carefully opening the curtains for streetlight, she sat to write, but all that emerged from her pen strokes was a dog with two heads, a lop-sided flower, her maiden name over and over in quotes fashioned out of 66s and 99s.

The pale pink sweetheart roses she had arranged in a milk glass vase appeared hard and small. She felt hard and small. As always with him in the room, she could not think, could not move without bumping into something – a chair, a bedside table, his armoire.

Then, there it was. A seed of discontent, nurtured all these dark married years of discomfort, of silence, where intimacy had been chopped off, where love could not live, where race cars were all her husband embraced. Rebecca must leave him. He never hit her, but he crushed her soul. Silence was his weapon. Emptiness was her wound.

Dressed in a pair of faded jeans and a soft denim workshirt, she left her long dark hair loose. As she walked to her car, the moon appeared, a lemon-yellow wafer. Hazy, it filled her sky to the left, a giant lantern guiding her journey away. No, she could not write, her younger self's passion, with that man in the room, the house, her life.

She stepped on the accelerator, headlights off and recalled a college teacher explaining, "You can write better near water." Rebecca hadn't written anything in years. She yearned for a room by the sea.

Driving through a tunnel, past a field, a rhythm of car and road and driver developed. The pain in her stomach started swallowing her. Her gut feeling mixed fear with anticipation. Not all bad. Something dappled with hope felt better than the fist-punch heaviness of the past fifteen years. She pressed her foot harder on the accelerator.

• • •

Rebecca sat in the Blue Petunia, a restaurant-boarding house. It was many shades of pink with thick white coffee-stained restaurant cups, chipped plates edged in never-ending burgundy. As she drank her dark coffee, she mused about its misleading name and watched the sun rise through a smudged window.

Rebecca rented a room from the owner and cook, Joe Falona. "Second on the right. Window's a bit tricky to close. Sheets, blankets freshly laundered." He smelled of cigars.

Rebecca dragged her laptop and duffle up to her room. Lying on the thin mattress later that evening, as the neon Restaurant/Rooms-to-Let sign flashed red and yellow through her single window, she wondered if she would be able to write here, do without the sea, withstand the moldy corners of a room with faded cowboy wallpaper.

After sleeping late, walking around the lumber piles next door, she ate and went to bed again. She dreamt of her Grandma Anne, her ocean blue eyes, long gray hair, a younger picture than the one she carried against her heart. Tall Grandma bent down to bathe a child whose face Rebecca could not see but knew was her own. Rebecca the Dreamer stepped past the stream and it became mosaic, startlingly beautiful and perfect. Suddenly the image shattered. A hand reassembled the broken glass shards into a portrait. She screamed. It was her husband.

On her third refill of coffee, she tried to make sense of the new day, of the diner, of the people. People of the early morning, yawning, rubbing eyes, hazy. Now she was one of them. She had forsaken her husband and house to join them. A bedraggled waitress handed her a yellowed laminated menu. A man with dirt under his nails played Seven Sisters pinball while guzzling beer.

In the booth across the thin aisle from Rebecca, a woman with a gray-streaked pony-tail slouched over books and magic markers. Her face was smudged and sunburnt, her daisy-print sundress safety-pinned at one shoulder. The woman stood and shoved one of the books at Rebecca. The book was the Bible. Rebecca had only one memory of the Bible, Grandma Anne referencing a biblical namesake. "I wish for you a saintly husband like ancient Rebecca's Isaac." Sadly, that had not come to pass.

"My dear, have you read the Bible? I mean *really* read it? Seen its signs? The meanings floating, flowing, flowering, ah-men? I'm Molly. I'll guide you. For free."

Rebecca felt the window in her stomach opening once more, but she fought the nausea it could let in. *I'm fine*, she told herself. *I can handle this one skittish lady*. Rebecca grasped her locket.

"Take this cerulean blue marker and make the mark," Molly said, dumping a variety of magic markers on the table. "The Bible colors *are* the Bible. Indexes of life. I couldn't live without my self-annotated, anointed Bibles. Oh, my goodness, young lady, the colors. All about the water-sky . . . freedom to breathe the sky-water." After dumping a variety of markers Rebecca's table, Molly slid across from her.

Nothing here for me to fear. Just a lonely woman. Just words. Rebecca listened to the significance of Benjamin and Joseph, Ruth and Naomi, Martha and Mary and what their colors were and what creature or configuration represented them in Molly's strange litany. Seven days became seven nights and blue became yellow and dove became whale.

"Hey, girlie, order us some dark Serbian coffee so I can read your grinds. You are on a sacred journey to the essential element of water, and I'm here to help guide you." Rebecca smiled for the first time since she had escaped her marriage. *What harm could any of this do?*

Rebecca choked a bit on the sludgy coffee. She proffered her cup to Molly who stared raptly at the coffee grounds. "You will turn over, fly up, weave a tangle of cobwebbed leaves, only to swoop them up and turn them into a new story of your life for the Bible."

Rebecca attempted to smile as Molly gathered her racing thoughts into bouquets of rhetoric that were better off not separated out. Through Molly's sunburn and smudges, Rebecca saw a fine-boned bird-like face and felt sad.

Joe Falona burst out of the kitchen. "Is our Molly bothering you?"

"I'm okay with her."

Before climbing the stairs, Rebecca added a scribbled square flower in neon pink to Molly's crude helicopter at the beginning of Esther's story.

Back in her drafty room, Rebecca collapsed under her blanket of fatigue and confusion. She had not found the sea. Her locket hung backwards and twisted. Her clothes felt damp, and she didn't know where to go.

The next day was Sunday. On Sundays years past, she visited Grandma Anne at the nursing home, bringing her bouquets of bright flowers. Sometimes, they sat together watching a movie projected onto the wall. Rebecca propped Anne up, a discarded straw doll. Though the wizened woman couldn't clearly see, couldn't clearly hear – the images, the sounds – she squeezed her granddaughter's hand. Rebecca took a clean edge of her white blouse to wipe away the old woman's tears.

Rebecca would always ask the same questions about the flowers: "Aren't they nice? Don't they remind you of the sun? Don't they make you happy?" This silence Rebecca could tolerate because of the hand squeeze and the tears. The silence of her husband, the not talking past the machinations of day-to-day living, the not touching – this pain Rebecca chose to leave behind. Years ago, she had forgotten why she married him. Seduction did not equal long-term commitment.

• • •

Perhaps Molly's patter was something Rebecca had needed to hear. But, now she was alone and couldn't ask Molly to go with her. But where was she going? Driving in reverse only led to a dead grandmother, a hated husband. Rebecca clung to the image of being bathed and fed and loved by Grandma Anne. To this bright strong face in the locket she wanted to say, "Will you come with me to find the sea? I want to sit on a terrace overlooking the water and write about a flower . . ."

• • •

Rebecca stood outside. Through the dingy diner window, she watched Molly's mouth moving as the Bible woman sat alone drawing signs, adding color to illustrate her personal skewed perspective of the ancient writings. Rebecca could not hear the words, see the colors. She was left alone in the space and time in which only memories can flicker, only hopes can move forward. The car to her right, the room to her left, the sea somewhere else.

Find the sea and write about a flower, she told herself. The new beginning of her story awaited in the water's mist.

James Miller

For Enya


Let go of me inside your song,
and let me hear you like a psalm
whose meaning grips the Irish earth
and brings me back as if to birth
when rhythms were my mother's womb
just as your songs call to the moon.
What is the incense of your hymn,
the salt and misting wind
where by your melody we flow
into the ocean of your unknown?
For you dare us to meet you there
on a far cliff above the sea
after quick storms have washed the air
and looking out one is free
to imagine they too are a bird—
ready to fly once you are heard.

Franetta McMillian

Dreamvoices







there are things that can be proven
yet never written
and things that can be written
yet never proven —

e. jean lanyon

over the back fence

she talks to me,
it is a one-sided conversation
full of people and events
that I do not know.
i struggle to sort and understand
the importance of these events to her.

she talks to me,
and her words wash past me
into white silence, forming a cadence
of unintentional magic.
how can i listen?
how can i hear the trivia of her life
over the wind?

she talks to me,
and her words have no power
to enter my ears
for their threads weave a cocoon
that shuts out
the very sounds of themselves.

she talks to me,
i strain to listen, resolving to hear
regardless of the barriers –
and her words, aware of my intensity,
trick me, triggering mechanisms
beyond my control
and block the sound of her voice.

flemings landing

country roads twist and wind,
short bridges span
inlets and creeks – no streetlamps
illuminate
the storm-drenched landscape.

tempers flare
exploding into ugly words,
actions that cannot
be taken back.

storms raged indoors and out,
lightning and thunder claps
drowning arguments
with sheeted rain.

they screamed at one another,
objects propelled by anger
flew across the room.
no one remembers
what started that argument.

she grabbed her purse,
slammed the trailer door,
ducked into her car and
sped down the road
disappearing into the storm.

sun flooded morning light,
no trace was found
though days and months passed on,
long fruitless search
through weather calm.

seasons pass, storms and sun –
seventeen years at flemings landing,
the waterway is dredged,
among the many vehicles
hers is found, and there she is
come home at last.

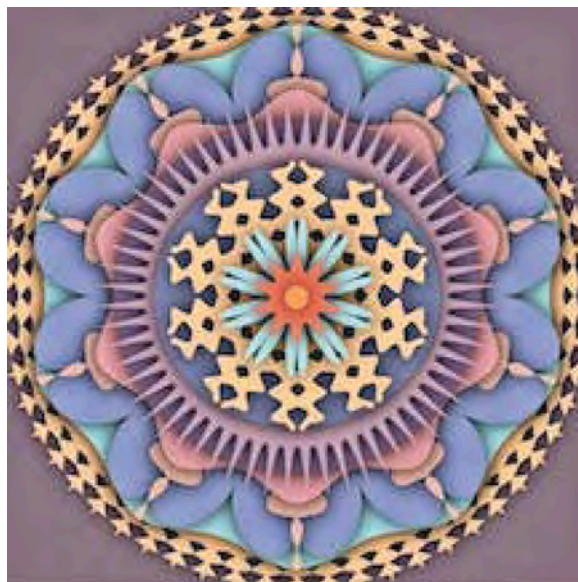
Jamie Brown

Ignition (Antheil's Propellor)

Engine, fire, key,
and the whirling
mass or words
or mass of words
in the vortices of
eddies always
washing back on
themselves
and the crowd screams,
rumbles in their
seats, artists
punching each other
because they
“disagreeaboutart”
and the move-
ment of just so
much air mass
over their heads
is over the heads
is over their
heads and swimming
is like
flying if the
air were
viscous enough
we wouldn't
need wings, piano
keyboards
sliding out of
or into the moonlit
sea at night, pine
trees swaying
in the palms

of penitents flogging
themselves
burdening them-
selves down
with the ashes of
their own complaints

always looking in the
mirror for you or
me rather
than the faces
they are doomed to perceive
inaccurately.



Franetta McMillian

Fever Dreams

The storm approaches
 проз нёт сглаз сны зу*
in that half sleep
the interweaving of
the conscious and sub
becomes clear
 the tactile flush of skin
 hypersensitive to the
 touch of hallucinations
Pictographs are far less fixed
in pronunciation than in meaning—
Phonograms ideographs of sound—
the reverse
Dialect is the result
of pictographic language
 What wild-eyed prophets
 what wide-eyed prophets
shout from rooftops,
sacrifice on horned altars
blood charcoal on stone
hearts raised in bloody hands
appeasing not God but the
assimilated population
of the newly conquered country
 feverish Russian dreams
 haunt sleep, echo
 with half-remembered desires
 and fears, emoluate
 such waste matter and evacuate bowels
wracked with violent
vomit spasms remembered
childhood illnesses
and the trauma of screaming
parents, the bang-bang of
the gun reverberating through
my mother's ears to mine,
father's vodka, first implicit
threat to end your life
swirling in the vortex
perspiration, clammy skin, and
waking, sick to the stomach
at how **it** all comes back,
it all comes back, even
the memories not mine.

(*loosely, "prose, not the maleficent dreams of memory")

The Great Upsweep

Phillip Bannowsky

The wealth of the world is a great upsweep, from calloused hands and broken nails at prisons and plantations of cotton, sugar, opium, and cacao, from electric brains at keyboards plying poetry or peddling overseas girls, from hoarse voices at call centers touting credit cards, politicians, and scams, from inflamed vertebrae in warehouses and delivery docks, from grammar tongues and tired legs in schoolrooms and lecture halls, from arms swinging hammers, stacking parts, turning wheels, lathes, prayerwheels, from heels and toes treading crossbeams, climbing launch pads, lumber trees, ziggurats, from bones bent over bean fields with short hoes, from lungs blowing madrigals, blues, and sonatas, from elbows cradling food trays, beer crates, babies, and sheets, from souls translating visions of nightpools to oilpaint, from eyes aiming gunsights, drone strikes, jet wings, and missiles, from throats counting cash and crying, and every sip, thread, trope, swipe, note, beat, hut, nail, forge, spire, stripmall, robot, skyscraper, cell tower, and skill deposited like a sediment of hours in bank notes, contracts, rent-rights, deeds, and a hierarchy of privilege.

Maybe it began in the hours spent chipping at cutting tools, every concave facet a congelation of sweat, an emblem of added skill, amortized in the next sweat spent chipping stone, foraging fruit, shaping shelter. Skill, seed, nest, and toolstone the first wealth, owned by the makers, their families or tribe. Or owned by the takers, broad shouldered, stealthy, or just lucky to find stone that flakes, flora that feed, cattle that herd, fire that smelts, and ore that shapes into sword that sweeps stone, sweat, fruit, and slaves into their hands. Lucky to survive sickness and spread it to those in the next valley or across the mountain or seas. Maybe the stealthy built markets, systems of trade and fair exchange: Keep enough to incentivize but not steal enough to rig the game. Maybe the game revolutionized, resolved the founding stealth, maybe unskillfully squandered the wealth. Maybe the wealthy incentivized stealth, a scale of who keeps most and who keeps much, who keeps less and who never keeps in infinite calibrations of color, gender, and distrust.

The fruit of knowledge is the knowledge of the fruit. The apple is a tart Kazakh pippin. A thousand human generations, found, planted, crossed, grafted, and transplanted it. Millions pick, pack, crate, carry, and peddle for cash or credit. The crate of knowledge is the knowledge of the crate. The fifty-two-thousand-dollar custom Corvette in a Washington state gated community garage is an apple, Kazakh sweat, Guatemalan and Mexican sweat. Sweat, sweat, sweat upswept!

Ekphrastic poetry is poetry inspired by visual art. It is poetry that is intended to expand the experience of vision beyond the frame of an artwork and to derive an expanded vision in both the visual and literary artworks, or merely to express inspiration.

Aloft



Artwork by Erica Zoë Loustau

photo by Terrence Roberts

Kari Ann Ebert

A Docent Interprets *Aloft* by Erica Zoë Loustau

Look how the tree sculpture outside the museum transforms itself
into an old woman at dusk: straining against the wind. Strings of black birds
between tree & building become hair reflecting night. Like inky strands of DNA flying wild.
Her chin juts out. Forehead cuts the blast, dividing destruction into streams.
No strength like the strength of a crone hefting her will.

Witness the birds strung up by wire: tree to building to lobby in long echoes of lines.
Little ones, dark as a mother's eye smudge, mottled by migration & despair.
Small children caught in the gale fall into queues, absorb the ligatures
drawn through their spines. Notice their mother: separated, held back
as they fly. Carried away on the waves of men's breath.
Whispered without regard for their wings.

Consider it now from another perspective: the woman disappears without a trace.
In her place a shadow-hand raised from depths. Tensed like a sorcerer
mid-spell. The birds unbecome children, unbecome hair, un-become.
In their absence dark streams spew from fingertips, bent on vanishing
all trace of memory from the air.

Observe the final view in moonlight: silver tree standing ghostly & still,
revealing its mettle. Listen to the hollowed-out center
as the wind enters its throat.

This Mappa Mundi

I feel you at night clumsy & fumbling fingers
calloused from need long ago you abandoned
the path turned back from mountain passageways

darkened with disuse trapped under the thickening veneer
of time it takes too much effort too much care
to peel away the layers without destroying the way

that lead us home this compass
rose remains branded
on the underside of my skin

Loving the Che in Him

-after Ana Menendez

later I wake
beside him he sleeps
oh his lashes
spill over the white
oh his skin
a marble miracle
cool to the touch
and oh but oh

his mouth
his mouth hides
sharp white teeth
buried in a rebel's beard
curled over his lips
oh those lips
and oh how defiant
even in sleep

Evening Wind



Edward Hopper

Larry W. Kelts

Evening Wind

after Hopper

Sunlight and wind fall through the open window.
She stands stirred by the secret urges of her blood,
testing the illuminating light that illustrates her skin,
the sheets, the window, the blossoming curtains.

What cannot be said, what passes unseen through
the willing window and her, quickens her
repressed desire and makes her flinch as she climbs
naked into this strange bed of buried dreams.

This etching led Hopper into the crowded streets
of his imagination, where ideas less easy
to define sometimes catch like the billowing curtains
and filter through the light striking her and us,
as we watch her, caressed by wind and light,
become a shadowed invitation urging us into his dream.

David T. Shoemaker

The Music of the Spheres

Upon a lofty cirrus-shrouded throne
Far removed from Earthly woes and care
Surrounded by angelic joyful tone
Presides the Lord of Heaven, unaware
That when he said: "Let there be light!" a Bang
Created more than just a burst of light.
But like a bell which echoes when it rang
Linked fusion unto fusion in its might.
And from this chain reaction there was born
A universe of stars and galaxies
Spreading across the sky from dusk to Morn
Dancing around the Godhead's throne's axes.
The music of the spheres is just a drone
A background hum before the heavenly throne!

Donald F. Fry

Epithalamium

— *For Heather and Andrew*

A wedding and a dearth of wine – their sum,
a miracle, at least in Galilee
back then. Here happy spirits, flowing free,
celebrate, for that reason we have come.

Our miracle's not water borne or bound,
dependent not on fickle-natured grapes..
Two-fold's our present Joy - it takes this shape:
a new and precious daughter that surrounds

us with a verve that soothes our aging bones
and gives our much-beloved son a soul
mate, a landscape of heather in one sole
Heather, a meadow's bloom condensed, well-honed.

Secondarily, as a vine divides,
creating branches new, unique and strong,
square-rooted, grafted now the groom belongs
to the family that nurtured his lovely bride.

(The Steward of the Feast, his check in hand
recoiled when I said subtract from their bill
6 water cisterns for a wine refill
We have our Miracle – this wedding band!)

To add to this miraculous world, please ply
your talents strengths and love with husbandry,
please prune this vine, your newfound property
and let your love multiply, multiply!

The Elephant Dream of Private Lewis Keiss

Real? Imagined? There were no elephants
yet. (Blindmen too – flimsy as filigree.)
Sheer fear had blown the bladder of a lung's vein free
to hemorrhage on his new blue Union pants.

They trained to Cockeysville, sardined and squished,
fourteen miles from Baltimore; bridges out
rumored rebel Calvary, out, about
were responsible, townsmen're Secesh.

Outnumbered, out-generaled and out-gunned, they fled
to the suburban fields of York and camped
on soggy grounds, famished, anchovy-cramped
cold, unpaid, BUT miles, miles from rebel lead.

No badge of courage red or otherwise,
was found among the callow skirmishers,
who with a single bullet armed, faced spurs
of phantom Calvary, hours 'fore sunrise.

'Twas here that Lewis Keiss had had his dream.
Blanket-less but in deep sleep - then the magic
show commenced, six hundred thousand tragic
pachyderms herding far beyond the stream.

Ancient surgeon who never snuffed a germ,
had seen snakes, rats, accompanying DTs,
but he knew a hemorrhaged lung- he decreed,
"fright, sheer fright has made this mortal worm turn."

Now his Episcopalianism failed,
as did his heart. The boneyard's Pastor said:
"Could be Baptist or worse, Catholic bred.
"I will not desecrate this hallowed vale!"

Keiss' dream's deferred until the barrow,
red, wheeled, charoned his corpse across the road,
macademless. His comrades dumped their load
pitward. The lone mourner -morning sparrow.

Let's cross the river you and I and rest,
under the shade trees' silken tent. Blindmen
feel the elephants with brushes, soap, then
hoses, pumps and with sightless hands that they're blessed.

Trunk, a snake; ear, fan; leg, the trunks of trees,
flanks, wall; tail, rope; tusk, a spear;
Keiss with shades and cane joins the dark frontier.
Each blindman knows the elephant he sees.



Patricia L. Goodman

Forgotten

Old Hiram Harvey pounded
heavy staples into this locust post,
stretched barbed wire to contain
his cows, barbed wire that now
twists, hangs broken, cows faded
beyond memory.

We all want to be remembered,
but one or two generations is all we get.
Once talk of us and our deeds has passed
into other graves, our memories pass
with them, no longer relevant.

Except for ourselves
why worry about accomplishment,
with perfecting that last poem,
planting that last flower.
We may as well visit our favorite park.
Once memories die, we are forgotten.
Our only goodness
lives on in fleeting images,
scraps of wire refusing to let go.

Dragons

His eyes gleam, this tall grandson
of 21 years, who stands at the edge
of his future. He will graduate college,
step into the whirl of business
he has launched, be off

to conquer dragons.

I watch this generation
with misty eyes, memories
still warm. My dragons, conquered

long ago, rest cozy in kennels. Flight
has left them, scales disintegrate, fire
no longer a spark. It's difficult to fly
with arthritic wings, ears that can't
hear slayers sneaking up behind.

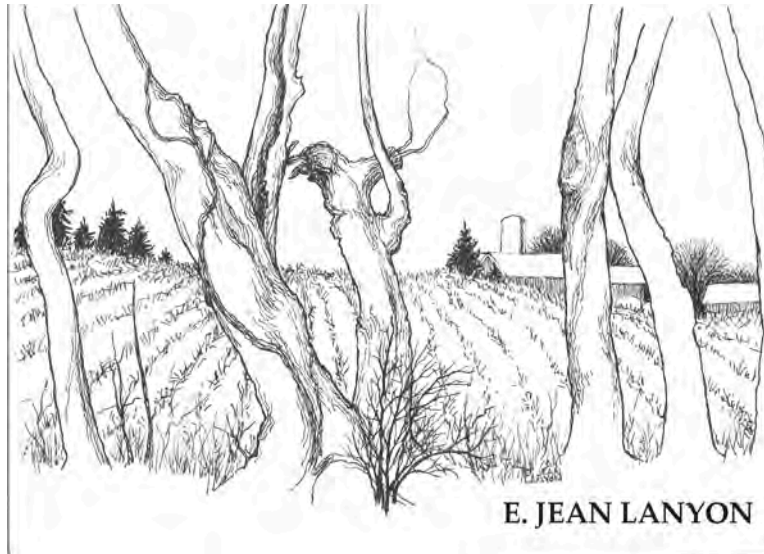
I count now on the young
to battle demons, keep us
protected. Let me revel
in their conquering.

maria keane

Speaking of Silence

Tattered weeds of
words slowly sipped
through years of paper straws
draw sweetness, nurturing me
without the sound of you.

Pregnant words tumble in space,
scribbling the tongue.
Tendrils of arduous speech.
wait and want for your mouth to bray:
an answer to chisel the stone upon your tongue.



Why it is...

Yes, Maya, I think know why your caged bird sings.
My reason is different from yours,
however, I selfishly claim to be
strapped to time and place.

Confinement causes me to borrow
your theme of pain and sorrow.
Self-imposed isolation, masochistic;
I do know why, though caged, she sings.

This quarantine for many fills
all of us with want. Things
are known but not the reason, still
I dare to tip my wings to strive

toward freedom of another time
when friends could gather without constraint,
play with verse or words that rhyme.
She sings a poignant song, but now, I think know

why the caged bird has to sing. She is alone
tethered with bars that halt the breeze,
locked in a space she cannot own.
Then I know why this caged bird needs to sing.

Ken Segal

I wish I were a Woman

I wish I were a woman,
I would be a total slut!
I would wear some naughty lingerie
And have tattoos on my butt.
I would complain during my period
And for being second-class.
Those rich white guys are just children,
They can kiss my lily ass!
I would wear my hair in wild styles,
Changing color on a whim,
If I had a loyal boyfriend
I would be loyal to him.
I would have desserts and diets,
And alternate the two.
I would sing a song in a clear, high voice
A serenade for you!
I'd bond with other women
And we'd laugh at silly men.
We'd exchange personal stories
And have luncheons now and then.
I wish I were a woman,
Just to change my way of seeing,
And because of new anatomy, a new way I'd be peeing.

Mad

You know that I'm quite crazy,
And in fact I am quite mad,
You could say I am eccentric,
But these things are not all bad.
I can manage my finances
And can hold a worthwhile job,
I am not inclined to murder
Or to join an angry mob.
I talk to myself occasionally,
Or I gesture in the air,
I may argue quite vociferously
To someone that is not there.
I am prone to some delusions,
That is, things that are not so,
But you just cannot convince me,
I'll say "yes" when you say "no!"
I'll occasionally see things
That you will not see as well.
I will see the gates of Heaven
Or the firestorms of Hell.
I would argue with you often,
And I'd win out every time.
I would just destroy your world-view
And I'd replace it with mine.

Alice Morris

Woman In Black

—after untitled photograph, photo credit not given

who is she
with this raven hair that frames white face with waves
of black sea
flowing past shoulders,
one eye exposed —

a Picasso

seated alone
on a stage, chin raised
microphone waits,
her gaze into space, gaze into her soul, into the climax

of silence

on her lap a thin book of blue, hand placed upon it, this —
her Bible her heart her nation

assured of the weight of the words that have carried her to this place — she waits
embraced by worn leather curves of chair, trendy-cool concrete wall behind her

she waits

to read from red lips
freshly painted

who is she
this woman whose willed words
will strut and float, break and break — then leap

into some utterly foreign, yet not
unfamiliar language

who is she
this woman in black,
woman in black, woman —

so serenely waiting

Writing While Switching Channels Between the 2015 Baltimore Riots and a Cooking Show

Police, in full riot gear
form a line

at the intersection
of six plated

tortellini, a spoonful's worth —
marching

towards a gelatinous broth — defying tradition —
grandmother's kitchen.

One by one, the rebels sliced through
displayed

like pigeons at the galleria
to shit

on convention.
Police must teach

rejection
until that day

the gastrointestinal critic
is forced to stay

later
prints words of sorrow

that he took so long
to find you.

Robin Hill-Page Glanden

I REMEMBER

Sometimes I cry when I'm driving— on a rare trip to the grocery store.
At night I dream of busy streets, traffic jams, parties, and crowds of people.
My only covid pandemic dream was of a large table
with rows and rows of face masks—I chose a bright red one.

I remember school days.
Kids at desks and side-by-side at long cafeteria tables.
Playgrounds with laughter and games—kids without a care in the world.

I remember high school dances.
Rock bands playing cover tunes.
Teenagers dancing close.

I remember the beach.
The mingled scent of Coppertone and French fries.
I remember the warm sand, jammed-packed with beach blankets.

I remember days in New York City—
Weaving through sidewalk crowds.
Broadway shows, bars, clubs.
Standing in subway cars, shoulder to shoulder—
The biggest fear was getting your pocket picked or your ass squeezed.

I remember hugging, kissing, touching.
I remember shopping, traveling, restaurant tables.
I remember concerts, live theatre, big screen movies, baseball games.
I remember weddings, graduations, funerals, church services.

I remember TV news without body counts.
I remember life without quarantine.
I remember life without masks and smiles in full view.
I remember smelling like Estee perfume, not Clorox.

Now it's virtual reality—life on the small screen:
Online meetings, performances, classes, conferences, visits.

We are together but apart.

I remember the Old World—the times we might now call “the good old days.” So many things, simple things, we took for granted.

I remember.
And I will never forget.

Shannon Connor Winward

Deeper Than Dreams

Sleep is silken water
closing over my mouth
my eyes
I give so much of myself
to this life
our child
even sadness takes its bite
no reason, just an afterthought
I am so tired

My head on your chest,
I hear your heart
promise it is strong
and it is mine
and it will be all right
even if all we do is sleep
it would be all right
though your body suggests,
deferential, otherwise

a knot of tension, patience, asking
reminding
what it was like
when we were younger
and sleep could wait

I hold you for comfort
an anchor of calm
but you become an ache of restraint
dissolving, sweet panic
and I am the tide

just like that, I move for you
a shift, a curl of legs, lips
open, I grip your shoulders
fit to drown—
come with me, my dear one
come down
if only for the moment, this
is better than rest.

This is a place
deeper even than dreams

Biographer

If ever in this country they decide to erect a monument to me I consent to that honor under these conditions — that it stand neither by the sea, where I was born... Nor in the tsar's garden... But here, where I stood for three hundred hours, and where they never, never opened the door for me.

– Anna Akhmatova, "Requiem"

If I write a book about you, let it not be a lament, nor a manifesto, but a light. Let it be a neon arrow saying, Here, Look Here at this charming child, this beautiful boy, struggling up through cracks where what we've built is shrugging itself to shards under its own weight. I am just another mother who loves her son. I am just one more who stood at the window with your insurance cards, who dropped everything (except a pen) for the phone calls saying come take him, because we can't. I am the stenographer of three-hour IEP meetings, I am the archivist, the keeper of the binder three hundred pages thick, the list of your medication history a much-folded square in my purse. These hours are poems. These hours are a testament to what is wrong, what is broken, and my odd little darling, it isn't you. You are the intersection of delicacy and tenacity, you are where Evolution says try this. You are a challenge to complacency, to status quo, and they who dragged you down the hall, your little roots kicking, who put you into a windowless room, a box, never will learn ways to grow children beyond plucking out the different until you show them how. They never listened to me even as I screamed it, amplified by specialists and lawyers, they never opened the binder to see you not as a list of needs but as a whole being with a future unfolding, the story of which they are co-authors, these builders of square buildings with closed doors and crumbling walls. If I pile it all together, stick a label on it—if I write the book, let it be for them, a heads-up, a herald that it's you, the new, to bring down the paradigm. Let them hear that from me.

Karen Hurley-Heyman

Measure for Measure's Sake

"If you don't find true balance, anyone can deceive you."

Rumi: "Stay Close to My Heart"

I held a wild rose softly, up against
the cheek of a super moon, and knew,
before laying one stroke of ink upon
blank paper it is well to consider heft
of coal; measure also weight of space
just as some, who before cutting
one geometrical shape out of sheet
steel, consider how light seems a
lifted foot of one flamingo, how
powerfully bright is the color buttercup
yellow, and then say, "of course" as they
cut playful shapes that will float and spin
in perfect balance as planets do through
this universe of so much Rumi space.

Fox will balance rabbits as
owls do squirrels, yet nothing
keeps pace with the songs of birds
and whales and wolves or rain
tapping grass, falling fine as
sparks off comet tails or pouring,
in war, dry powder into holes
to discharge deadly ordinance.

Election Year

Warbling like robins, police cars fly
down my street. Spinning like Hot
Wheels, robins skid around my lawn;
make sudden stops, cock heads, yank
up defenseless worms. A colossal, red
fox speeds out of nowhere hot on the
heels of a rabbit. My mind chants a
line from Flanagan & Allen's WWII
hit: *run rabbit, run rabbit, run, run,*
run. Bunny executes an unexpected left
hand turn; Rudy charges on not braking
to temper his momentous tunnel vision.

It's spring. In my neighbors' yards
daffodils are breaking
ground, everything is turning on a dime
into a grander version of itself.

Cynthia Ventresca

Perspectives

There is silence in letting go,
to photos in a trash can on the curb, crinkled and forgotten.

The dust leaps from our ceiling fan into swirling oblivion
like the first five years of promises. Forgotten.

You brought dark blue rivers deep and winding,
but what if I needed to be a meadow, waving and forgotten?

On Sundays we pull the car over to gather wildflowers
that shimmer as stars we've lost, unnamed, forgotten.

You are not the sum of visions you find in your rearview mirror,
Cynthia, but what thrums just off to the side. It waves at you,
forgotten.

Sorry

died yesterday when you could not summon enough to sweep the shards
from the kitchen floor one more shameless time. Survived by: your heart.
Used instead of *no*. Used because you never learned the difference
between holding and carrying. But as your lips formed the word again and
again, it taught you that a rubber band stretched too thin does not spring
back. That everyone has their own viruses to burn away, and when you
drink too much merlot and wake up at 4am to a robin chanting mercies
through the solitude, it's okay. He will ask of you nothing. And finally, it
must be said of the word that even broken, it was beautiful when sung and
sung back. Like music, or an echo. Like the echo of music.

A Secret Revealed

David T. Shoemaker

I think you are now old enough to know the truth about Santa Claus. I have wanted to tell you for a long time, ever since that Christmas Eve when you snuck downstairs and saw your mother and I putting your gifts under the tree. The look of devastation and betrayal on your face as you ran upstairs crying broke my heart, but I knew you were too young to understand then.

The truth is there never was A Santa Claus—at least not one person. It was always a group of people working together to increase the good in the world.

It all started with a young man, Miklaus of Patara, around 300 AD. Today he is remembered as Saint Nicholas of Myra, Defender of Orthodoxy, Wonderworker, Holy Hierarch, and Bishop of Myra, but back then he was just Miklaus—or Klaus to his friends. He was the son of wealthy Christian merchants living in what is today Turkey. He was very devout, and therefore had little interest in the wealth his parents had accumulated. To him, all the gold and silver were just tools that could be used for either good or evil. He dedicated himself to making sure they were used for good.

For example, he found out one day that one of the merchants who had lost everything he owned when the ship carrying his cargo to Rome sank in a storm was going to sell his three daughters into prostitution. To prevent this, he slipped a coin purse full of gold coins through the daughter's window at night, so they would have the money to pay their dowry and be married. It took him three nights—one for each daughter—and never announced who their benefactor was. This was important to him—that the gifts be given anonymously, so that the credit would go to God instead of to him.

Klaus became the village priest, and would use the confessional as a way to have his parishioners help each other anonymously by leaving small gifts as penance. He always told them they could never say that they had given the gift, or the penance would be void and they would end up in hell.

When Klaus became the Bishop of Myra, he instructed his priests to use the confessional in the same way, expanding the network and multiplying the good in the world. He was particularly keen to make sure that poor children received the food and clothing they needed, especially in winter when foraging was difficult.

At the Council of Nicea, Klaus was defrocked and imprisoned temporarily because he slapped Arius for speaking heresy in the Sacred Cathedral. For this reason, he is not listed among those in attendance and earned the title "Defender of Orthodoxy." Secretly, though, his use of the confessional was spread among those at the Council, and it soon became common practice throughout the Roman Empire.

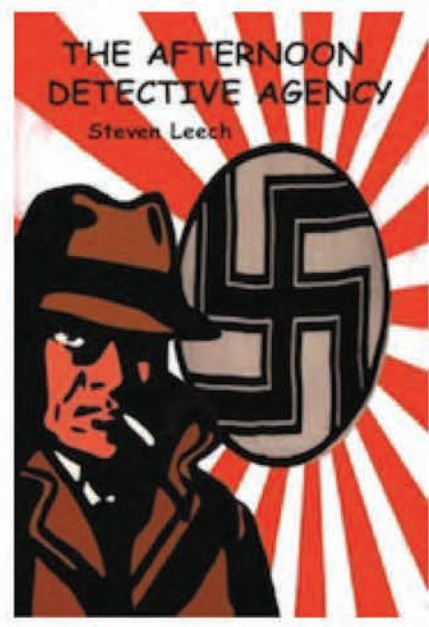
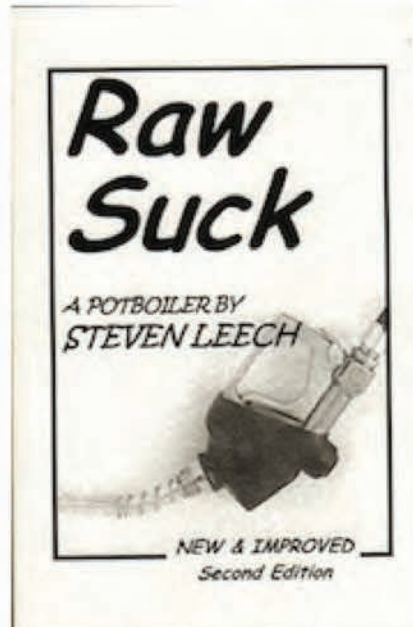
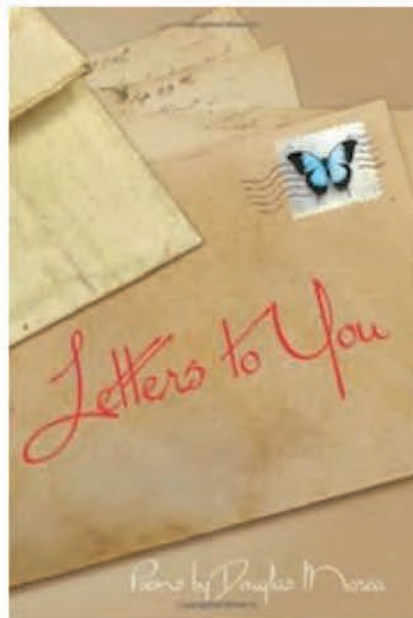
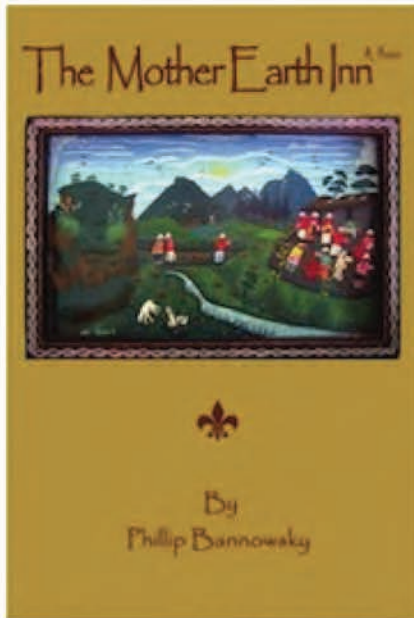
It continued to survive through the Dark Ages by word of mouth, sometimes in small circles. In 929 AD, Vaclav I of Bohemia restored Christianity in his Duchy and brought priests from Germany. Among them was a young monk named Podevin, who became Vaclav's faithful servant and page, and who taught him about Miklaus' secret network. Vaclav was impressed, and in 930 AD established the Order of Saint Nicholas among his knights and lords as a way of spreading Klaus' method of using gifts to increase the good in the world. The Order remained a secret society, however, so that no knight or lord could claim credit for the works. Today, we honor Vaclav and Podevin every Christmas when we sing "Good King Wenceslaus," but the deeper truth behind it remains hidden.

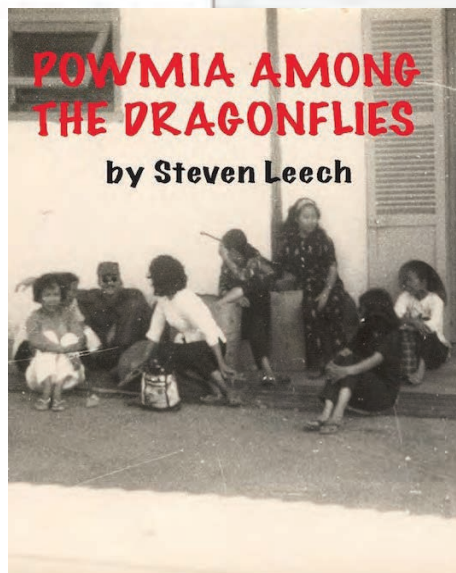
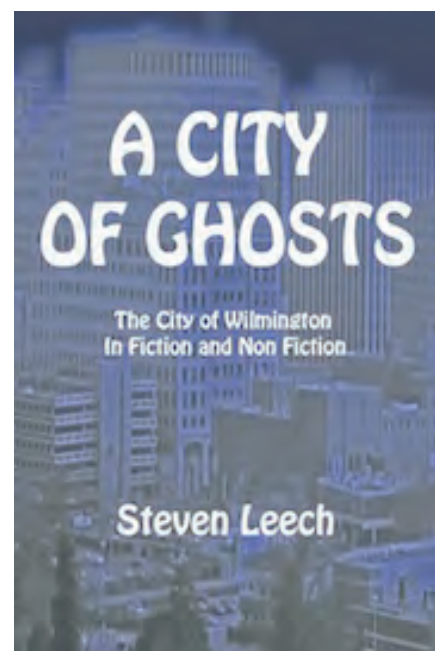
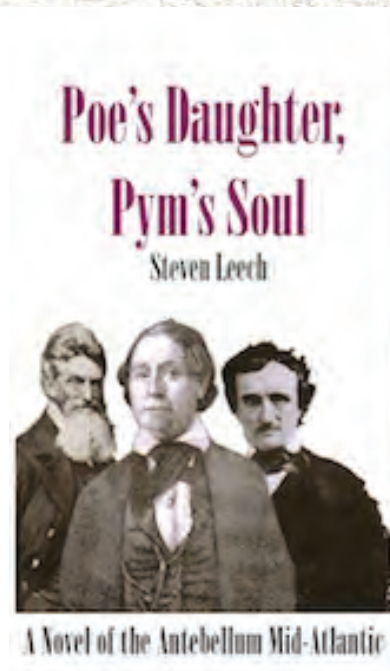
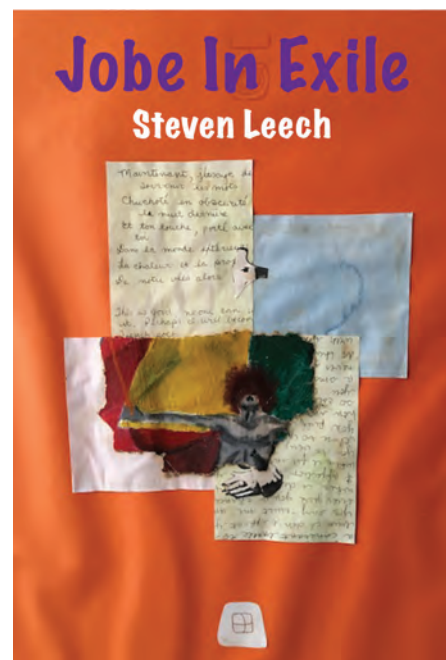
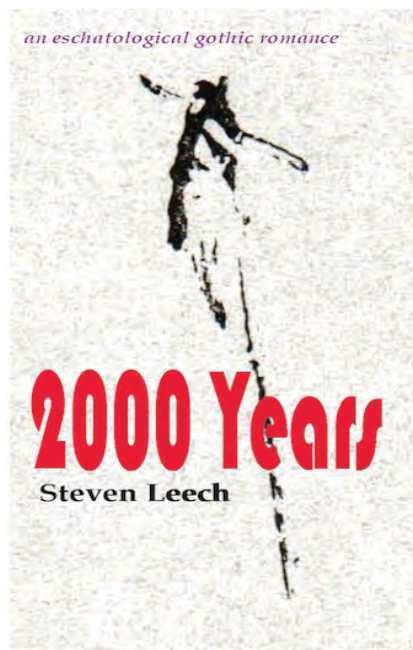
By the early Nineteenth Century, there was a backlash against secret societies, especially the Illuminati and the Freemasons. It was during this time that Clement Clarke Moore, a member of the Order of Saint Nicholas, anonymously published "A Visit from Saint Nicholas." It was a way to provide cover for the secret society and teach its values to the public at large by creating the Santa Claus myth. He was inspired by the story of Miklaus, or Saint Klaus, when he wrote it, but added embellishments to delight children and hide the role of the Order. In 1843, another member of the Order, Charles Dickens, published "A Christmas Carol" to further spread the values of the Order and stress that they were to be kept year-round—not just at Christmas. Both have become holiday favorites and have helped spread Klaus' mission to increase the good in the world.

For years now, you have been begging me to get a new hat. You seem embarrassed by my old Papashka with its black fur and worn wool. But I can't get rid of it. It is part of my uniform. You see, the top panel with its silver cross on a red background is my insignia as an officer in the Order of Saint Nicholas. So, when you saw me putting the gifts under the tree all those years ago, you truly saw Santa Claus, or at least a santa claus. There are many of us around the world, which is how all the presents are delivered in just one night.

Junior members wear ones with white fur and a white cross on the red wool—much like Clement Moore described. I hope that, now that you are a man, you will choose to wear one and join us in multiplying the good in the world.

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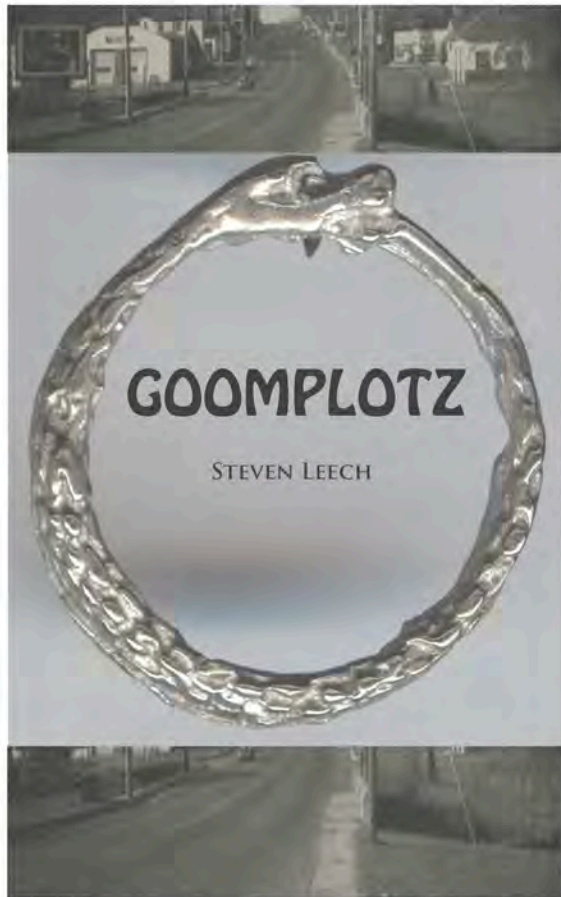
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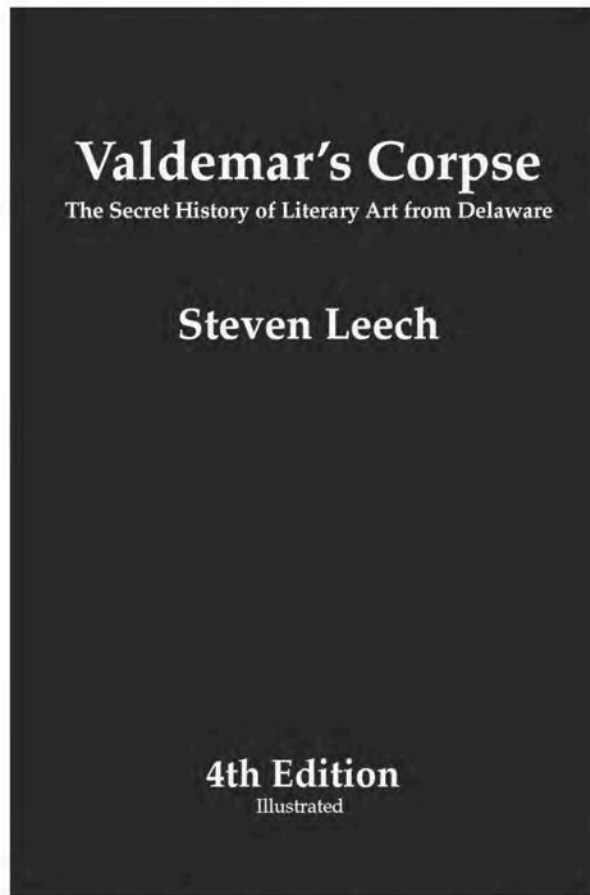
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