
“
The
Anguish
of
Sleep
”

EXISTOTHERWISE

A Journal of Cancelled Confessions

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self-portrait by Claude Cahun

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untitled

Azrathel

CHRIST without HRT becomes CIS.

But Christ is spelled with HRT, and thus, Christ is not cis.

Ergo: Christ was trans.

Bicycle Frame

Edward Lee



Secret and Hidden

Kathleen Hulser

The difference between secret and hidden.
Let's start with intent
Secret is on purpose
Hidden may be squirreled away
But often it is erasure
like the gaps in records that shape
the scope and bias of archives.
Like "no women died," the comment
on NY Times obituaries omitting
all kinds of nonmale, nonwhite people.

Secrets come wrapped in colorful psychology,
repressed, traumatic, foundational.
They fester and corrode and distort,
their impact all the greater
the less conscious they are.

HIdden seems to speak more
to the culture than the individual.
Stories, facts, scandals, events
that were lost, buried, submerged
or never deemed worthy of comment.
That now seems earthshaking, central,
a conceptual turning point.

Like the history of slavery,
under-researched, consigned to footnotes,
the perpetual skeleton in the closet
of American democracy
and the founding fathers.

Like the prevalence of family sexual abuse,
known but unspeakable, experienced

but little recorded.
Now that memory amends the documents,
we find it written in pain.

Like Indian removal,
while place names track Native Americans
everywhere in landscapes whose
lakes, rivers and mountains
no longer feel the tread of moccasins.
Hidden, available for rediscovery.

So, secret and hidden both yearn
for the light, await the probing eye
the questioning spirit that
always says
“Things are more than they seem.”

One of You is My Mother

Sadiyah Bashir

I was born from a gossip spittle /
My diet consists of eating trees / Flesh /
And undoing advancements /
I am a newer Medusa /
Born with the proper eyes / but I choose the former stare /
For tender strokes of madness comes from choosing /
To do the wrong thing anyway /
I was born from / Chaotic mouths /
Their heartbeat resting in the clap of their enamel /
(surely, there is not enough soap in the world to wash these bitches mouths)
We wash in the sound bath / of our names being called /
Scrapping with the blade of the wind /
There are no matriarchs here /
If there were / I wouldn't have been born /

Bathing

Sadiyah Bashir

I am sinking, and there is a watch party of women who call themselves
my kin placing bets on how good I'll look at the bottom, or if the weight
I've put on will push my body up to float. Surely, there are better ways to teach
daughters how to christen their own water. The daughters who do not survive
become the rain. There is not a daughter who survives. In fact, these women have
drowned too. Each a drop in the ocean of our womanly sorrow. Hating themselves like
their mothers do. As I float, I wonder if you can make a man out of water. I
think not, who then would they call on before they get baptized? Plus, I've never
met a man capable of folding into himself.

Female Friends

Livvy Krakower

I watch Joyce fail to light a cigarette against the wind.

Little sparks erupting then disappearing in an instant like dying fireflies kept in a jar. Her back is hunched over. Through her sheer top I can see every vertebrae of her spine and I have the strange desire to lick them all to see if they taste different from one another.

Please don't look at me like that Joyce says to me. We are standing outside of our dorm. The no smoking sign close to us. Joyce is beautiful in the type of way that ice is beautiful when it melts. She is beautiful like a piece of toast.

Like what? I ask.

Like I'm weak.

She clicks the lighter on again but the fire vanishes before it can even touch the cigarette.

Joyce asks me if she should quit smoking and I tell her no.

Every morning, Joyce sprays Happy by Clinique on the soft parts of her neck -- wrists -- breasts, but after she smokes Newports, she smells stale and I feel guilty about how it turns me on.

This lighter is fucking dead Joyce says and drops it on the ground. She removes the cigarette from her mouth and places it behind her ear, *I'm gonna go to sleep.*

I watch her walk away.

I worry that the only thing I will ever be good for in life is watching people walk away.

Joyce lets herself back into our dorm without saying goodbye. She doesn't have to. She knows that around midnight I will knock on her door and she will open it and we will say no words and we will sleep together and in the morning I will ask her if I can wear her socks and she will say no and I will want to cry.

I pick up the lighter from the ground once Joyce disappears. I click it on and let myself feel the heat of it against my forearm.

Joyce once told me that to be depressed is to be on fire. She also told me that the only thing humans are capable of feeling is loneliness, but Joyce also said that this lighter was fucking dead and as I finally start to smell my skin burn I realize that it is not.

fever dream

Erica Viola

a fever dream

or hallucination
of
a
woman
young
sliding
down
ward
in
to
dark
ness
until

she hits

awakens
just
as they pull her
from
the furnace

this is not hell?

they pour
what's leftover
into an urn
wipe the spillage
onto
the floor like
dinner
crumbs

smack her down
onto a table
in a strange room
leave her

solitary

dusty
decades
later
I arrive
with
colourful carpets
paperback books

open windows let light in
the cracked blinds
fall apart

I know her name
whisper

remove her lid
look inside the marbled depths
flakes of soot
pale shredded bone

pop pop pop:
she begins to crackle
like ruins
of a bonfire

tendrils of smoke
slither
upward:
she's a live wire,
sparking infinitely
sending up

small explosions
of powder.

I taste sulphur
inhale her

hold her in my hand
feel her heat

shudder
as she begins
to glow

AUTHORIAL VOICE

Stacey C. Johnson

The writer, aware that the telling of certain stories in the third person might, by another writer, be handled effectively as neat confessionals, sometimes laments. It would be good if she could walk into the world naked, saying “I am that I am!” like some deity.

Having lost belief in selves as focal points some time ago, now she can only watch what happens to her body with uncertain degrees of remove. Having also lost allegiances to what she once might have considered a certain landform of facts like a single continent against a singular ocean, she now thinks that it does her no good to try to figure where any of these went.

Now that any nascent sense of would-be self is gone, memory can also be recognized at some distance, for the fiction it is. Her old ways would never admit such heresy. Once, she tried to say things like “I did,” and “I went” and “this is how it was.”

She is no longer convinced that she has been anyone, anywhere, ever. However, given various expectations of the current milieu, this emerging understanding is going to continue to present certain problems. For now, the writer may decide to ignore these, keeping vigil in this bed in this underground shelter where this pen over this notebook continues to move.

Recurring Lucid Nightmare 01

Kristin Fouquet



Recurring Lucid Nightmare 02

Kristin Fouquet



Recurring Lucid Nightmare 03

Kristin Fouquet



Excoriate Yourself

Andrea Fogel

August 15, 1999: Densely were the belongings contained within Pauline's cramped room. The shelves were stacked with the writings of such authors as Dworkin, Genet, and Freud, alongside her cassettes of various exploitation and avant-garde movies, in turn beside her cassettes of rock 'n roll favorites plus the oldies. Beneath her bed—a loft—was her desk, upon which her computer was currently turned off.

Instead of engaging with any of that though, she was lying on her mattress in her underwear, not doing much of anything. Her sparse clothing was not for erotic purposes, but instead because she couldn't care to do herself up pretty for today. Were she to do that, she'd have a cute blouse on coupled with a pencil skirt, knee-high white socks, and Mary-Janes. And don't forget the azure eye-shadow, the pointed eye-liner, or the carmine-shaded lipstick. She definitely could care about her appearance. But really, she had no pretensions on this day of all days of having any boys to impress at school, not that she ever really did on much of any day, even though she was "supposed to" have had at least one by this point.

There wasn't a point though in getting dressed up to go out much of anywhere on this Sunday anyhow; to be outside for any substantial period of time in these dog days meant to swelter. Besides, Pauline never went to church, let alone on vacations; they were noise distracting from her state of anarchy in which she absorbed herself: her hyperreality.

Speaking of, it was probably a good time to open that package on her desk she had ordered off the internet the week prior, instead of just resting in bed. Those on-line catalogs tended to list some rather lurid films—this one surely being no exception.

The *In the Realm of the Senses* video-tape was revealed inside the packaging after Pauline opened it with a jack-knife. She was able to garner from her cursory reading before she had ordered it that it was some notorious art-house sex film of Japan, directed by someone, as listed on the box cover, by the name of Nagisa Oshima. The name Nagisa, she knew, could be a man's name or a woman's. Hopefully a woman directed this film, that being the case; erotica is a world dictated for the sexual power fantasies of a bunch of male chauvinist pigs.

She figured anyhow that since the awaited tape was now in her possession, she might as well pop it in the VCR and see what came out. Although it certainly would have offended the sensibilities of the parents of a seventeen-year-old girl especially such as herself, she had ensured a level of clandestinity in her acquisition of the tape in order to prevent such a turmoil.

The motion picture's story, she then learned, set in imperial Japan, featured as its protagonist a former sex worker—her name Sada Abe—who now worked at an inn. As the owner, Kichizo, took an interest in her, she began an affair with him, shown in graphic sexual detail.

Pauline really wasn't aroused at all by their sexual liaisons, which comprised the majority of the film; in fact, she was rather disturbed by them at points, with her having no intention of using the film for sexual arousal anyway. Most notably, watching Sada squirm, not just in her face, but more relevantly, her genitalia and the flesh surrounding them, as Kichizo inserted an egg inside of her womanhood, felt like second-hand molestation to Pauline. He, in response to Sada thereafter expressing her excruciation, suggested that she should push it out as a hen does.

As Sada took care with her expulsion of the egg as to not excoriate herself, Pauline thought then that this film could not have possibly been directed by a man; surely, it must have been directed by a woman. Her reasoning was as follows: Although it showed sex as something that was inflicted upon Sada, she in turn inflicted violence upon the inflicter: repeatedly sexually strangling him, not because she lusted for his impositions all along, but instead because this was the language of violence in which she had been instilled for years and years. Sada's only means of retorting culminated in her ultimately consummating the fantasies of her abuser in turn, because she saw no way out other than, what was for her at least, a release of both physical violence and sexual ecstasy.

Perhaps, however, she was merely excusing the male power fantasy. She did, after all, recall Andrea Dworkin's analysis of the Sadeian figures of Justine and Juliette: "The so-called libertine re-creates herself in the image of the cruelest (most powerful) man she can find."[1]

At the film's climax, this was epitomized as Sada severed off Kichizo's manhood with a knife (as she had threatened to do previously in the film). The strikingly-colored blood engulfed his crotch as his penis was sliced away. And then there was his scrotum, in her hands. In blood across his torso, the words read: "Sada and Kichi: together forever." A narration began over the shot of her lying beside his body, stating that until she was arrested, she carried his genitalia around with her to various Tokyo inns. After she was captured and the matter was publicized, the narrator continued, the emasculation became the zenith of a cause celebre across Japan.

At this point, now that the credits were rolling, Pauline could not help but recall from "The SCUM Manifesto" its words on emasculation. She vividly recalled a phrase about the act, although in what context it was written she had forgotten.

1 A quotation from the 95th page of her book Pornography: Men Possessing Women, as published in 1989 by Plume.

But she couldn't leave it at just her fleeting recollection; she had to see again what Solanas wrote. So there it was, from Pauline's shelf:

When the male accepts his passivity, defines himself as a woman (males as well as females think men are women and women are men), and becomes a transvestite he loses his desire to screw (or to do anything else, for that matter; he fulfills himself as a drag queen) and gets his dick chopped off. He then achieves a continuous diffuse sexual feeling from 'being a woman.'

Pauline realized—as had become routine for her—that she could not distract herself any longer for the day from her present existence by this "edification": her wallowing in her own shit after watching a sex film this time, also fashioned into something high-brow. Even so, she couldn't shake the feeling in this moment of recognizing herself as somewhat like Sada, although Pauline was in sexual pain rather than sexual glee. As if to cosmically reinforce this, her father's booming voice hollered out to her from the downstairs:

"Arnold!"

Egg Punk

Anastasia Kimm

Don't fuck with me
I've got nineteen teeth
(and they're not even mine)

I've got slapstick
feeling and ripped
back-

I've got a rhythm
of sickness
and two
dead cats.

War I love you:
I've learnt to accept
the bomb,
and now it's kind of fun.

I've got different
ideas for what society
should be

and I promise you-
none of them involve
communism,

mostly just
sitting in bed
and drinking
natural wines-

what I've done
to myself,

with the organics
and the greenery

I even quit smoking
(it's nuts how bored you get of it,
though I think I may be
the boring one now)

Lenin I love you,
it's a shame what they've done
to your country

I have a statue of you
in my room-
it's a bit of a nightmare
because it takes up all the space
and I have to sleep
on the floor

I don't mind,
if I get to stay by you, Lenin,
and stroke your feet
in pure, filthy
ecstasy;

I've got knives on both sides,
I've got tears (in both eyes),
I've got blood on my hands
I've got no rhyme in this line (sorry)

What would I do without the bolsheviks!
I met them in the square
quite a few many odd years ago
where I got shot
with the bullet
that has never dislodged itself-

I met you in a TV ad,
they auctioned you off,
American programme style,
twenty one twenty two twenty
three,
I paid a fifty three thousand
for you
(which could've gone to my mortgage)

I want you in prison with me;
we can hold hands in
lesbian repartee-

I will have been arrested
for my criminally poor
chess playing

–and losing all my money
in the casino

(an extra year
for playing Radiohead
on the jukebox)

I am thirst personified,
I've got a giant bottle
of diet coke,
and I drink it like it's water.

Take heed, young gentlemen!
I flop like a
3D water model
and fuck
like a woman
who likes women.

Where was I in the 80's?
Undead, at a punk gig,
I had released myself
all over the place,
and no that doesn't mean
anything at all.

Where was I last week?
If I knew I'd tell you,
I can scarcely remember
myself,
and that's because it's not important.

Nothing's important!
It all means absolutely
fuck all

It's about as satisfactory
as a warm foamy pint

what you make of yourself-

and I do apologise,
I really do,
that you're looking for meaning
where there is none;

I've spent twenty minutes writing this
and it literally means

Viator

Mona Mehas

I miss your structure, your repeating line
Have you left me forever? Will I run
Like a wild dog on fleet feet, yellow eyes
Terror-filled, intelligent, all-knowing?

Longing to count your mislaid syllables
I miss your structure, your repeating line
Freedom enclosed, the cage left open, you
Elude me like dreams before the ink dries.

Blossoms open my throat, my mind; expand
My true vision, uncover my blindness
I miss your structure, your repeating line
Open your sky, let me pass to your sun.

I'm held in your comforting grasp, at peace
Floating in gray, surrounded by brightness
My body and yours, our poems entwined
I miss your structure, your repeating line.

TRAVELING COMPANION

Toti O'Brien

Consciousness slips into my dreams
and imperceptibly awakes me
but the night leaves a message for me
as I venture into daylight.
My hand prods for a black covered
notebook. I ink down something.
Now an incipit marks the glistening
surface, like the vanishing prints
of a sleigh dog on snow. A few words
to be repeated like a nursery rhyme.
A few letters, the name of a station
where the train didn't stop. I will
chant them out loud or whisper them
softly as I bridge across reality falls,
their corrosive vapors. Keep
the conch shell tight in your fist
to ensure a safe trip, said the shaman
before I drank the potion. Or was it
the fairy godmother, at birth? Hold it
tight, they insisted. I did.
And I've got the trip. Not the safety.

Candid Pessimist

Beatriz Seelaender

tell me, how does one see past
the incumbent colossus of dread
reflected on the lens of the camera,
blackened with remembrance of the present,
its thick and deceitful frame

tell me, how does one carry one's body from a distance,
my psyche scurrying ghostlike on
concrete pavements in remission:
I cannot hold hands with the world
for I come hand in hand with myself

shall I set a timer and pose for a candid shot
after reality's bus has departed according to google maps
after the natural world's been diagramed by
ulterior motives and cruel intentions and
predispositions and flanderizations

a no-win condition: there's nothing to the world sometimes;
not even pain; just a blur: a thumb blocking the picture;
a shadow in the way of the projector
no perspective for the promising poets
or even unposed photographs for posterity

The Melancholy of the Sunset Overdrive

Charm Chandler

So that the Earthian skies are simply more than distance away from this grounded body, I feel the need to have my physical form consumed by evening light, so that such six o'clock radiance may decorate my tropical skin with slants of gorgeous sunset hues. And let me, in turn, use those vague and far-off colors as a new identity to glimpse the fragmented true reality, a partial reality. I must admit that this twilight infatuation (and the act of glimpsing) is just a covert operation for what I truly wish to say: that my lover, the sunset, whispers secrets to me. Secrets that ultimately seem to be critiques of absolute reality.

Absolutes are silly, but the idea of there being no absolutes either is also equally just as silly. We exist between the tensive paradox of absolute and partial lie, ruminating in both; we do/can absolute and we do/can partial. As I grow now, I begin to understand that both words are actually inching toward each other but never actually touching, similar to a tragic unknowable romance.

That is where the melancholy lies, and why I am always thinking about the totality and poetic analogy of reality, and how we often put various adjectives that come before and modify the word reality, i.e. adjective reality (virtual, consensus, hyper, etc.). Body-in-reality. Body-as-defined-by-sunset. As language-users and shapers of subjective reality, which is really (let me assume an absolute!) a chain of infinite partial meanings attempting to capture the wholeness of an absolute, let me propose a new adjective reality: sunset reality.

Meaning? The eternal transitory space of all realities that contains the ebb and flow and undulation and infinity and so-and-so and and and. I would liken it to a liminal space that as a tongue-in-cheek surprise, functions as an absolute, but all encompassing, all the time. Everything is sunset reality; everything is absolute fragmentary. Let all of everything subsume itself. Abscond with the phrase sky-as-limit! Cover the world (we are not quite yet at cosmosis levels) in the sunset reality chiaroscuros!

I much prefer this than the other adjective realities. Of course, the sunset has its other contenders. Other slants of lights. Morning is hope and despair for the new; afternoon is potential in the middle; night is neon silence. A special mention to the dawn, sunset sister, but I am not fond of beginnings.

When I am faced with the odd realization that the sunset reality is a lover incarnate, I am giddy. It-as-personification-of-partials romanticizes the beautiful mundane, the intangible real. Physical senses are not enough! The mysterious and meticulous poet-perception shall permit a

juxtaposition of fantasy reality with reality reality, so as to be left with rose-tinted solutions from this gobo perception.

This is why I willingly cover myself in this obsession. This is why poetic reality is closer to sunset reality than I think, closer to other certain realities: such as Yu Xiuhua's lover in a faraway place, Sayaka Murata's convenience store, and Mirabai's Krishna devotion.

How I love the stupid handsome and beautiful heavenly sphere in the six o'clock radiance, a distinct slipping found in its sunset light. I am thinking about the opening line of this essay, and I am slipping. I have seen/heard/felt/became enough analogies for it. So has everyone else.

I do worry about whether I love the sunset or rather, a more unsure truth: the hue of the light itself. But I am unfamiliar with Suhrawardi's illuminationism. Also, I am not fond of all light. I do not obsess over electronic light, mostly. And how could I not mention light's sister, the covetous dark? How could I not mention the covetous dark's distant cousins, the shadows? Jun'ichirō Tanizaki In Praise of Shadows has much to say on that.

I do not have much of a conclusion, because it feels like the beginning is the end and the end is the beginning in the sunset reality. Eternal reflection time. Transitory states. Absolutes that are partial. Liminal spaces between self-generation and other-overdrive connected by obsession, a perpetual thought process. Melancholy. So that the Earthian skies are simply more than distance away from this grounded body, I feel the need to have my physical form consumed by evening light, so that such six o'clock radiance may decorate my tropical skin with slants of gorgeous sunset hues.

burning haibun for penelope

Maya Walker

in a far away time there is a mother, a wife, a daughter. beside her a son, a hero, a warrior. in some distant place his father, her husband. the time is unknown. war is fading from our senses. i rewrite, respin: war is its own myth. the mother fights her own battles, the hero rejects his place as the son, the father his place as a husband. a tale as old as time, they say. a tale as old as yourself, i reply. the family is its own myth. the mother is no longer a daughter as soon as she gives birth. the mother is no longer a wife as soon as her husband leaves. the mirage of belief is its own myth: perhaps a star falls down in your place. perhaps you were never there. they have taken your name to mean journey, they forget what you left behind. my elegy, my eulogy, i cannot find the tune. i blink, you're gone again.

//

mother son,
father war
rewrite, respin
a tale as old as
yourself
the mirage of belief is
its own myth a star falls down in your place
my elegy, my eulogy,
i blink, you're gone again.

//

mother son,
father,

the mirage of
your place
i blink, again.

TOMMY HILFIGER BREAK-UP

Kenneth Pobo

I fished out a pair
of your underpants
from behind the washer.
A spider clung to the band.
I set him free. What to do
about your undies?
Call you? No.
We aren't speaking.
I could make a bonfire,
eat Smores and
toss them in.
A purging. After
I throw them in
the kitchen trash can,
I await the trash collectors.

A tiny bit of me wishes
I had kept them.
A souvenir.
And a warning.

Statues Can't Breathe

Donald Zirilli

I woke up this morning with a statue
lying on my chest.

Maybe it was one of the Roosevelts,
or just a president, someone like that,
he had a mask on
and also it just wasn't the best angle,
plus I'd gone to sleep thinking
the earth would stay where I left it.

And I'm not saying
we all need to be cement,
I'm not some secret pigeon apologist,
really I just need some room.
I mean tell me
when they pull you from the rubble
there won't be some hair in your fist.

I don't know if you're aware of the problems
they're having with AI.
They won Jeopardy and Go
but they still can't find the right Nazis
on social media. I think it's because
computers don't breathe.

It's like that statue said to me,
I must still be standing
because I never moved.

Some Borders Should Not Be Crossed

Donald Zirilli

Lifting my head
above a wall
to peek at a Drive In Movie,
I grab a wire,
discovering
pain in my fist.

As I crawl under a fence
to visit cows, my
consciousness
is pushed down
through the top of my head,
the pasture forced
into a dream.

From an ink brush,
the Zen master draws
the paper's
electricity,
but we only see
his blank eyes
as he pushes through.

We only hear the rip.

REM Transport

Gary Duehr

The sleek white vans started to appear after 2 a.m., their bright hoods flashing like teeth under the string of streetlights. The whir of the vehicles that of an insect's legs rubbing together. On the doors in slanted Arial, indicating forward motion: REM Transport. The whole neighborhood dark and still as the vans circulated from street to street, hesitating for stop signs, in an ever-widening radius, as if surveying the modest zip code of ranch houses and colonials. Seen from high above, the vans' pale ovals like white blood cells pulsing through arteries.

Here and there turning into a driveway, headlights flaring on the evergreens, blanching the garage door. An upstairs bedroom light flicking on, then after a count of ten, the porch light spreading its glow. The door with a gold-pineapple knocker easing open, at the same moment as the van's side door slides noiselessly open, and two attendants in blue scrubs disembark to aim a stretcher, swathed in a white sheet and pillow, at the front steps. A dog yapping from the backyard, grinding its chain on the pavement. A cloud swabbing the half-moon with a reddish tint.

A brief pause, inchoate murmurs, before the stretcher reemerges, a sleeping figure tucked into its folds, a cocoon with bumps of shoulder and knee. The van pulling away, the door of the house clicking shut from inside. Porch light snapped off, a count of 10, the upstairs light extinguished.

None of the passengers remembering a thing the next morning, a blackout as dense as from a drugged cocktail in a downtown bar. Only a tinge of shame, waking up on the grade school soccer field or on the shoulder of the highway or stretched out on some leaves in the woods. Shivering, under a thin white sheet, in the chill. No idea how they got there or what had happened to them. Feeling their arms and legs for bruises, their torsos for any subtle trauma, but finding themselves intact. Only a nagging itch from a bump on the nape of the neck. Probably a mosquito bite. Breathing in a deep sense of relief, as if they'd been sleeping for days.

Later, after trudging a mile or two home, a fragmentary glimpse coming back to them: an airy, curved atrium like an airport terminal, bright and featureless, punctuated by the sound of a soda machine clanking cans down into its slot. Everyone keeping to themselves, no idea who arranged the pickups and how widespread the transports are. Daily life drumming on as it always had—hitting the gym, long office lunches, pickups after school, messy affairs and petty embezzlements, fender benders and missed diagnoses and eruptions of unexpected bliss. But everything glazed with a thin gray layer as if not quite consciously absorbed. Someone remembering flyers with the headline "Sleepless?" on telephone poles and in laundromats a couple weeks earlier. The bottom edges ragged where phone numbers had been ripped off.

Then one clear blue autumn morning, sunlight slanting down the curved streets with names such as Laurel Drive and Shady Lane, a phalanx of lawn crews arriving with gas-powered leaf blowers slung over their shoulders. In lime-green safety jackets, black hoodies and floppy shoes, young boys of 10 or 11 with the scrubbed faces and earnest expressions of a choir. Maybe from the next town over. The blowers growling as they fanned out through the front yards, puffing up squalls of orange and yellow leaves. The collective noise a cacophony of chainsaws.

Pulling in the drive that night to help kids with homework or do takeout in front of the TV, feeling the barometric pressure had changed, like when a plane is landing; a swallow or yawn clears the ear canals. As if something ineffable had been sucked out of the neighborhood. A smell of ozone hanging in the air.

Soon after, a children's librarian noticing that sparrows were no longer crowding the maple outside her window with their loud cackle. A retiree kneeling in the community garden wondering why the stone path was no longer silvered with snail paths. The bowl of milk a boy had been leaving on the back steps for the wiry, feral cats in the alley going undisturbed. A blanket of silence descending. The rumble of a jet overhead sounding far too close. The dings of the freight train crossing coming clear from streets away.

People's hearing growing acute, as they started to drift toward the piano in the living room or dusty guitar leaning in the corner of the bedroom. Flutes disinterred from their velvet cases. Violins folded under chins. Fingers finding a new, springy agility. Melodies exuding in a golden warmth that flowed down spines, illuminating bodies from the inside like lanterns. So peaceful that dentist appointments were missed, lunches with friends forgotten. Somehow this fresh quota of sensation making up for everything else.

One Wednesday afternoon, an REM Transport van found by the police, skidded off the road into a bridge abutment. The back half cracked open like an egg. Inside, a cot with IV tubes dangling next to it. In racks bolted to the van's walls, rows of vials labeled "Serotonin" with dates and street addresses. The license plate traced to REM corporate headquarters in Hartford, where inquiries were met by a blank wall of customer relations. A report filed but no further action taken; the officers too preoccupied rehearsing for a brass band concert on the town square next Sunday.

On the Crooked Path

Mark Tulin

There is no need to hide my cock,
to compress it, regret it, to tie it up
in a knot—to sleep in a bed too small,
to wear heels or a puffy hat
to make me seem tall.

There is no need to fake it, although
I prefer cherry red lipstick,
dresses that are too tight,
revealing the bulge in the night,
the platform shoes that make my legs
seem long and slim.

No cover-ups, no excuses;
I do not tolerate abusers,
or chastisers for wearing panties
instead of cute-printed boxers—
God, I don't want to look like my father.

Set me on the crooked path,
away from the strait and narrow.
Today, I want a taste of danger,
and tomorrow, drink the wine of sorrow.

Nicholas Michael Ravnikar

ARACHNID

A Naiad ran an acacia
ranch in a candid cardiac
ad. An anarchic arch-cad, I
hid rind in hard china chain.
Acid rain char'd cicada. I add: nadir + nadir.
I ran an air raid radar — a cinch.
Chic hair and hard chin, a Rich Dad
can cancan an archaic aria rancid.

SEASHORE

As a hero shears a horse's ass, ere
he hear assessors erase a rose so rare,
he oars ashore, shares a hoarse ear.
See her shoes? Her sores? Or her rash?
She harasses seahorses: "Here, here! Shoo! Shoo!" She
shears her hero's roar — a rash error. Seers
see, hearers hear. So he hearses her. Harsh.
Oh! Here's a rarer horror: Eros erases ash.

DIALECTS

A sad saddle said, "Add less" sells ads.
I taste a stale Celtic ale teal.
I see a sect, a dial, aces.
I dialed a lass less addled. Dialectical state.
Scalded steel's telltale scales. Dice stall.
I said, "All dead laid still. Let's see."
A sad saddle saddles a less sad lad.
Etc., etc.

Nocturne

Gale Acuff

I died in a dream last night but rose
again when I rose again, I guess - I
rose at dawn as usual, light rarely
lets me sleep, and got dressed for work and ate
and left the house in the billowing light
but it was dark before I made it home
so I had supper and watched some TV
and fell down dead again on the bed like
I do every evening - now I'm lying
here with the dark but still awake, so light
is within me shining only brightly
enough that I see innumerable
white dots upon the black and when I hold
my hand before my eyes I see my foot.

A New Haunting

Briane Willis

She had been haunted like this in ceaseless cycles.

Her body hadn't been hers for a while. But the thought of disassembling, fiber and atom ripped to fragments, was unnerving. A threat of decomposition and collapse.

This possession followed the path of the previous rounds; a pursuit of roots in her mind, shooting out greedily. Dirt under her fingernails, picked by teeth until they were too short. Soil crept into the veins, black and scratchy. The ailments were tolerable, easy to cover up. She could pretend to be okay.

That was before. Now, there was only this fresh-familiar awareness that her loneliness had a shape of its own, separate and oppressive.

She glanced down at herself and quaked. Her body was a map of features showing the subtlest of tortures; lines on her thighs like ropes burnt into her flesh, a mole she picked to see the red spurt of blood mixing with the twilight of her skin. She had her routines and they were ordinary, comfortable, though markedly entropic. Once, it made sense to attempt an organizing of her being. But she soon discovered the futility of these efforts on the simultaneously gaping and crimped landscape of her ill mind.

It made her seasick to watch the tumult of feelings and so she shut them out.

This night expelled itself around her in inky swathes, textured, abrasive. She set her pen down, relinquishing the scribbles thick as river stems, an attempt to rebuff the growing tide. A zephyr sneaked through a window, barely ajar, and discovered her in a seated coil. She let the waft overtake the moment, shutting her eyes, the sensation a rare and perilous transgression.

Gale dying on her arms and neck, she opened her lids and breathed out of habit. Loose in the sky sat the moon. Its minimal luminance had no innovative tricks and neither did she. Such a distant orb could do little beyond contorting over and over, growing big and small. The body stretched to give life and death and the cycle churned on itself. But the moon was also leaving the earth, seeking release from gravity. The smear of distant rock was a visible reminder, a process of creeping abandonment.

She yearned for that endless absence of space. No weighted horror was possible in the viscous black. She would be blank, emotionless, stilled as ancient bones embedded in the strata. Suspended in nothing.

No, this wasn't anything she hadn't witnessed over the years and days and seconds. Her form mimicked concavity in response, for the ghost seemed extra hungry, mouth agape and shadowed. Lumbering between steps, it sought her in a crowd. Leaping from roof to roof as she tried to outrun it. Stranger still was the un-puzzling of her composure while surrounded by oblivious people living oblivious lives. She couldn't possibly crouch and crawl to recover the pieces, strewn here and there, without garnering concerned glances.

Of course, she didn't belong on the ground, sniffling and wild. People were expected to stand upright, to demonstrate their dissimilarities to less refined creatures. Her animalism only tore off the sheet to expose their own innate proclivities. Some probably staunchly believed they were evolved beyond these tendencies. But she showed them the truth.

All it took was a mind that corroded itself, finding the villain within.

She first discovered how grief became physical with the loss of her mother. A person exited her life, swift and wretched, and in that vacancy came the phantom. With tendrils sent deep into her foundation, her melancholy became a wraith and she the host. Choking. Stifled. Constrained.

There was no turning back. Her chemicals were boiled and brewed into an unprecedented concoction. Steeped and assembled and made unnatural. Sorrow-filled and empty.

Stitched into this displaced plane, she removed herself and others accommodated the shift, stepping away, averting their gazes.

The worst was at night. The ghost made the black edges of her room breathe. An undulation of lungs threatened seizure, grasping at her own oxygen, robbing it. This specter was a thief, she gradually understood. Stealing her calcium, making her bones brittle. Removing the intricate plating of her abilities and strength. When she finally died, she imagined her ribcage making a drum for the ghost to celebrate its victory. The prospect conjured a tepid smile.

There was no delineation between her thoughts and the vicious background babble. Its voice was tinged amber and melodious as honey. If she listened, it would pour into the shell of her ear. It wasn't sticky nor pungent. Nevertheless, she could taste it.

Unlike those that visited in the past, tempting her to oblivion, this current visitor summoned a specific madness of the soul, more insidious. Barren as an old structure long surrendered for vines, Spanish moss layered upon paint-chipped walls, and shuddering every time the wind deployed, it eased into her. An exoskeleton revealing an elapsed existence, where reality was forced to crack at the pressure. She harbored these truths in her palms.

Uncountable days passed, unblinking, and she eroded. People noticed, knowing her past and the frequent spells that cast her in bruised-hues. But none chose to reach her.

In isolation, anguish set its harmony, struck resonant, making her hum.

Soon, the water called and she answered. Under the moon–crouched and expectant–she left her home, veering toward the sea. She tracked the sinuous coastline in silence.

Her boat rowed out on its own accord, the water's fingertips striking the boards and sending her onto the horizon. A lateral string tugged her closer, hypnotizing and erasing in equal measure. The approach exceeded time or the confines of it, and she clawed at the boat rails, marring the surface to identify and measure.

At last, she would meet her tormentor.

On the brim of the world, close to eclipse and discontinuity, she bobbed. The subtle corruption embraced her, a final relenting she had sworn never to plummet inside. A nuisance of simplicity and inevitability too grotesque to have looked at directly. The battle of the mind against itself.

Hanging at the precipice, she spread her arms and howled her farewell.

Accepting the sounds with whispery wet replies, the waves amassed a strange, countering consensus.

She heard the murmur of the deep and inhaled sharply. Her private ghost had swayed at the periphery in shades of grey and black for many years. But by her invitation, it uncloaked and shone a green hue above her, shedding a glow both viscous and gilt. Dappled on the waves, she watched the fern-soft undulation and grasped at it. Her tongue was thick, sweat cloying relentlessly. Yet, a burgeoning desperation outweighed her resignation.

She wanted to live.

Her arms bent like jagged branches and grasped the oars, slicing into the cold whitecaps, which echoed her howl. Rowing to the shore, her boat a conveyance, a return, she scrambled onto the sand. The grim presence distantly observed her sputtering.

I want to live, she told her ghost. You may never leave. You may persist. But so will I.

She stood and tilted a chin to the clouds. The corporeal revenant startled, diminished in size. And as she stepped into the world afresh, her haunting followed behind. A perpetual voyeur, but one whose power had been rescinded.

Faults

Zach Murphy

You were born into chaos before it became your shadow. You learned that your first heartbreak didn't unequivocally break you, it just prepared you for the future. You wondered why the stars preferred not to be seen, then you understood them for retreating behind the shroud. You longed as your dreams danced in the distance, only to taunt you in your sleep. You witnessed things burn because there was no other way. You witnessed things burn because there should have been another way. You felt your soul splash, sink, and swirl, like a tear that gets lost in a storm. And still, the mountains patiently breathed.

untitled

Nicola Davison Reed



untitled

Nicola Davison Reed



Contributers



Azrathel (he/him) is queer as fuck. Writes in English and Norwegian. Feminist. Elf enthusiast, Argent Dawn EU. Artbreeder. He/him. (Cis, but AFBT - assigned female by TERFs, twice.)



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Kathleen Hulser is a writer, public historian, and activist. Currently she writes catalogs for amArtHouse Gallery in Bantam, CT and edits ArTour, a new culture magazine. She has been NY Transit Museum curator, New-York Historical Society public historian and has taught American History. She also creates public art projects such as The War of 1812 augmented reality cell phone tour. Her original walking tours include The Underground Railroad in New York, Lighted Signs of Times Square and Bad, Rad and Boho Women. She worked on curatorial teams for Slavery in New York, Nueva York, and Revolutions: America, France, Haiti.



Sadiyah Bashir (she/her) is a mom of two, an award-winning poet, and a Muslim Womxn's Organizing Institute fellow. Her poetry has been featured in media outlets such as Al-Jazeera and the Washington Post. Her first self-published book entitled "Seven" explores trauma and triumph through the lens of Black Muslim womanhood. She can be found on all social media @sadiyahamb



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Stacey C. Johnson writes and teaches in San Diego County. She is a graduate of the MFA program at San Diego State University and creator of The Unknowing Project. Her work appears in Oyster River Pages, Pacific Review, and Fiction International, as well as various other publications. Her poetry chapbook Flight Songs is forthcoming from Finishing Line Press (February 2024). You can find her at staceycjohnson.com and on Twitter @StaceC-Johnson.



Kristin Fouquet is a photographer and writer from lovely New Orleans. Her photography appears in online journals and magazines, on chapbook and book covers, on album artwork, and occasionally in galleries. When not behind the camera, Kristin writes literary fiction and is the author of six books. Visit Le Salon



Andrea Fogel is a transsexual author who writes to capture the obscure emotions of the gutter in which she lives in order to elevate the low-brow into the high-brow. Publication of her poetry is forthcoming in the zine Gender Anarchists. Her website can be found at fogel.info.



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Mona Mehas (she/her) writes about growing up poor, accumulating grief, and climate change. A retired, disabled teacher in Indiana, USA, she spends most days at her laptop with two old cats as chaperones. Previously, Mona used the pseudonym Patience Young. She's published multiple essays, stories and poetry in Sad Goose Coop, miniMAG, other journals, anthologies and two museums. In 2020, Mona watched every Star Trek show and movie in chronological order. Follow on Twitter @Patienc77732097 and linktr.ee/monaiv.



Toti O'Brien (she/her) is the Italian Accordionist with the Irish Last Name. Born in Rome, living in Los Angeles, she is an artist, musician and dancer. She is the author of Other Maidens (BlazeVOX, 2020), An Alphabet of Birds (Moonrise Press, 2020), In Her Terms (Cholla Needles Press, 2021), Pages of a Broken Diary (Pski's Porch, 2022) and Alter Alter (Elyssar Press, 2022).



Beatriz Seelaender (she/her) is a Brazilian author from Sao Paulo. Her novellas, to be published later this year, have earned her both the Sandy Run and Bottom Drawer Prizes. Her poetry and short fiction can be found online and in print. She has a dog, Uli, about whom she's written the upcoming chapbook "Canon Familiaris".



Charm Chandler (he/it) is a lover of words and lives in the Sunset Reality. He has a Bachelor's Degree in English. He has work forthcoming in both Vita Poetica and Fleas on the Dog. When he is not writing, he is perpetually confused.



Maya Walker (she/her) is an avid reader, tea drinker, and lover of words. She is the founder and editor in chief of Fulminare Review as well as an executive editor at Spiritus Mundi Review and a staff writer for Immortal Journal. You can read her work at The Augment Review, Ice Lolly Review, Fifth Wheel Press, and others, or find her at the abyss of ink known colloquially as the Instagram page @maya_whispers_words.



Kenneth Pobo (he/him) is the author of twenty-one chapbooks and nine full-length collections. Recent books include Bend of Quiet (Blue Light Press), Loplop in a Red City (Circling Rivers), Lilac And Sawdust (Meadowlark Press), Lavender Fire, Lavender Rose (BrickHouse Books), and Gold Bracelet in a Cave: Aunt Stokesia (Ethel Press).



Donald Zirilli (he/him) was a James Tate Prize finalist and a nominee for Best of the Net and the Forward Prize. He edited Now Culture and The Rutherford Red Wheelbarrow and judged poetry for the NJ Teen Arts Festival. His poetry was published in The 2River View, Anti- poetry magazine, ART TIMES, Nerve Lantern, Posit, River Styx, and other periodicals and anthologies. He and his wife live in an idyllic corner of New Jersey with two dogs and a cat. His chapbook, Heaven's Not For You, was published in 2018 by Kelsay Books. zirealism.com



Gary Duehr (he/him) has taught creative writing for institutions including Boston University, Lesley University, and Tufts University. His MFA is from the University of Iowa Writers Workshop. In 2001 he received an NEA Fellowship, and he has also received grants and fellowships from the Massachusetts Cultural Council, the LEF Foundation, and the Rockefeller Foundation. Journals in which his writing has appeared include Agni, American Literary Review, Chiron Review, Cottonwood, Hawaii Review, Hotel Amerika, Iowa Review, and North American Review. His books include Winter Light (Four Way Books) and Where Everyone Is Going To (St. Andrews College Press).



Mark Tulin is a retired therapist from California. Mark's books include Magical Yogis, Awkward Grace, The Asthmatic Kid and Other Stories, Junkyard Souls, and Rain on Cabrillo. He's featured in Cafe Lit Magazine, Still Point Journal, The Opiate, The Haight Ashbury Literary Journal, Amethyst Review, Vita Brevis Press, White Enso, WryTimes, and others. He is a Pushcart nominee and a Best of Drabble. Visit Mark at www.crowonthewire.com.



Nicholas Michael Ravnikar makes poems, plays, paintings, kids books for grownups and other multimedia excursions. He edits and hosts Paper Knives. A recovering alcoholic-addict who lives with Borderline Personality Disorder, ADHD and persistent depression, he's quit nearly every job he's had, from dishwasher to college professor to bathtub repairman, but he managed to earn an MFA from the Kerouac School at Naropa University. For free books and publication opportunities or to connect on social media, visit bio.fm/nicholas-michaelravnikar



Gale Acuff has had hundreds of poems published in a dozen countries and has authored three books of poetry. He has taught tertiary English courses in the US, PR China, and Palestine.



Briane Willis (she/her) writes fiction and poetry. Her work can be seen in Solarpunk Magazine, Lover's Eye Press, and Carmina Magazine, among others. She has an M.S. in environmental education and over a decade of informal education experience. She lives in the Texas Hill Country with her partner and young child, as well as two dogs, three cats, and a bushel of chickens. You can find her at www.brianewillis.com.



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NDR (she/her) is a photographer based in Robin Hood country making Portraiture; street & conceptual photography. "I work from a natural light studio in a small town off the A1... Photography is my third child, my obsession, my class A. It is a privilege to improve upon a passion and to have someone other than myself enjoy it too ~ I never take that for granted. When I am not hustling for business I love to make conceptual and street photography - I have been working on a street project for some time now called #The Comfort of Strangers 30 Seconds of Street Portrait." nicoladavisonreed.com

