

Folio

2011

1. fo·lio noun \fō-lē-ō\ Folio

1. A book consisting paper folded in half to make two leaves or four pages **2.** Paper folded in this way **3.** A certain number of words used to measure the length of a document **4.** The original publishing format of the Gutenberg Bible **5.** A binder for loose papers **6.** A book of the largest size, usually fifteen inches tall **7.** The original publishing format of Shakespeare's plays **8.** A book leaf which is numbered on the front only **9.** A number on a leaf of this type **10.**The undergraduate literary and arts publication of Southern Connecticut State University

Staff

| | |
|-------------------------|------------------|
| Editor | Lisa M. Litrenta |
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| Poetry Editor | Amie Dighello |
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| | |
| Faculty Advisor | Jeff Mock |

Readers

Allison Ancel, Michael Bellmore, Madelyn Downer,
Angelo Gallo, Thomas J. Hils, Alex Malanych,
Joe McCarthy, Geoff Troup

Judges

Fiction

A Connecticut native and former Folio staff member, Jaclyn Watterson has an MFA from Oregon State University. She has stories published or forthcoming in Cloudbank, Thumb-nail, and Sou'wester, and is beginning work on her PhD in fiction at the University of Utah this fall. She misses Tim Parrish's workshop.

Poetry

Suzanne Frischkorn is the author of *Girl on a Bridge* (2010) and *Lit Windowpane* (2008) both from Main Street Rag Publishing. In addition she is the author of five chapbooks most recently *American Flamingo* (MiPO, 2008). Her honors include the Aldrich Poetry Award, an Emerging Writer's Fellowship from the Writers Center, and an Individual Artist Fellowship from the Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism. She serves as an assistant editor for *Anti-*.

Art

JoAnne Wilcox is a New Haven photographer specializing in environmental portraits and events. She is happiest when she finds the beauty in the people who make up our community.

Awards

Fiction

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| First Place | Christopher Cortis, “Fiendish Friends” |
| Honorable Mention | Jennifer Leno, “Not a Bar” |

Poetry

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| First Place | Angelo Gallo, “Neurosis” |
| Honorable Mention | Sarah Tortora, “We Commit His Body to the Ground” |

Art

| | |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------|
| First Place | Bill Geleneau, “Reclamation” |
| Honorable Mention | Sarah Tortora, “Security Blanket” |

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Condemning Prometheus

Thomas J. Hils

His eyes are wild, dumb
rolling in their sockets like
an inbred horse at the gate.

His breath
close to my face, sour,
as he leaks hot words and spit—
condemning Prometheus.

Hands calloused and rough,
sweat-slick, beating the air—
trying desperately to stay afloat
as if he knew.

His unshaven cheeks, sunken,
an old man,
god of scrap yards;
bolted together with rusted parts,
a hammered jaw unhinging lightning words of protest
choking on sand,
no man's land hands raised
as if he could stop me.

Not a Bar

Jennifer Leno

Honorable Mention, Folio Fiction Contest

A man walks into a bar, but it isn't a bar. The walls are too white, and the drone of the jukebox is far too monotonous. His hands aren't shaky enough to account for the vast amount of cheap alcohol he's consumed, and the lights that hang high on the ceiling are much too bright to create that proper "bar" atmosphere.

The man stares blindly into the mandarin skin of his eyelids, studying the shapes and shadows each involuntary wince of pain (pain?) transposes. The jukebox drone has faded into a timely rhythm of high-pitched beeps and low voices.

The man is tired. His brain is buzzing like the flock of "z's" that, under normal circumstances, would describe his present condition – though these "normal circumstances" usually don't consist of white walls and bright lights, but rather the comfort and consistency of blood, booze, and women.

The man is lonely. He sighs and suddenly the jukebox hums to a frequency he's familiar with. Thunderous thumps and bass beats echo off the snow-white walls of his confinement, staining them with adolescent colors in red and blue and green.

The man smiles. He always enjoyed the pleasures of such simple colors. Red like blood, blue like tears, green like greed: a life's work in a trichromatic palette. The jukebox is slower now, hardly steady, and pulsing like the beat of a dying heart. The man is scared. The man is silent. The man is in a bar.

All Your Dreams Are Dead

Michael Bellmore

Navy blue blazer,
red tie receding
hairline, and leather shoes:
he smiles sidelong
from the corner of 1972
like, “I remember sitting there
at an empty table in a busy room,
tapping the blunt end of a felt tipped pen
against a legal pad,
playing poetry,
biting my thumb.

“I remember how your shoes feel—
worn and not patent, holey to the elements,
the rain soaking your graybottom socks;
the radio training your nights,
cigarettes at dawn with stoned colleagues
talking Captain Kangaroo and detergent commercials
and what it means to be American and young and noticing how
other young Americans don’t seem to notice
children’s TV and the insidious resonance of jingles.
I remember legal pads and felt tipped pens
and that nagging self-appointment:
‘Someone’s got to do it.
I want to do it.
It’s important.’”

like,
“Listen kid—
have fun while you still can.
Keep that upper lip stiff. Ignorance is bliss.”

like,
“You’re playing with fire.
Bury your romance. San Francisco is full—
hipsters now, creative economy start-ups, dead bodies.
The glamorous drunks and triumphant sodomites have packed
it in.
They’ve all pissed out their organs or started playing accordion
and gone and died anyway.
Poetry ain’t what it used to be. Go talk to your advisor.
See about changing your major.

“If you don’t, well...
if you’re lucky:
you’ll end up here like me:
walking the halls of a school that does not love you
with a tie around your neck.”

hair

Alex Malanych

when i was 19
i let my hair go let
my hair flow
up my back
and 'round my waist.
felt like Al
felt like some flannel
staring at myself
in glass, at my ass
judging with pursed lips
and squirts of
gel
to make hair harder
than the hung
guy i met
last night
sipping
whiskey.
hipster
downtown on crown
wearin sperrys
scruff
and denim
told him i was 17
for fun
he did it anyway.
age of consent
does nothing for the thrill
of sleeping with strangers.

Light

Sarah Felhart

“Drew? Drew! Andrew!”

Drew awoke, sitting bolt upright in his desk chair, a slip of notepad paper clinging to his cheek. Looking up, the sunlight momentarily blinded him. He blinked the sleep from his eyes to see Melanie standing above him, hand on hip.

“Hey, sweetheart,” he yawned, crumpling the paper and tossing it on the desk. “What’s the matter?”

“You were up all night again, weren’t you?” she said. Her jaw was set, her eyes raking his disheveled appearance with disdain. His chestnut hair was wiry and unkempt, his lanky limbs stemming from his stained white t-shirt and boxer shorts. He was sure, however, that the look she was giving him had more behind it than just his sleeping arrangement.

“Oh, yeah,” he said lightheartedly. “I found this really interesting article last night, and I ended up doing some research. You know how that goes.”

“All too well,” she said, rolling her eyes.

Drew frowned up at his girlfriend. “What’s that all about? Why do you always have to roll your eyes at me like I’m some kind of idiot?”

“Drew, not now, alright? You’re running late for work, so I—”

“Again?” He snatched the clock off of his desk and shook it. The batteries had died. “Shit!” he said, dropping it back on the desk and stalking past Melanie down the hall to their bedroom.

“Ever think of just coming to bed at night like a normal

person?” she called after him.

“What time is it?” he called back.

He heard her sigh. “It’s almost eight.”

“Shit!” He started yanking drawers open, stepping into clean underwear and a pair of pants. He snatched a button-down and a tie out of the closet while he was at it.

“What does it even matter?” Melanie said. He could hear the rifling of paper drifting down the hall. She was organizing his desk again. He hated it when she did that. He lost things when she did that. “You keep telling me you hate this goddamn job anyway, so who cares if you’re late a day or five? Not like we can’t live off the money I make working at the fucking diner, right? Not like we have bills to pay or a future to plan or any stupid shit like that!”

Drew stopped doing up his pants, his button-down still open, his tie draped around his neck. He walked back down the hall and saw Melanie sitting in his chair, rubbing a temple with her fingertips.

“What the hell is that supposed to mean?” he said.

Melanie rubbed her face with her palms and sighed again. “Why don’t you tell me what it means, Drew?”

He buttoned his shirt, occasionally missing one and having to backtrack. “Why have you been like this, Mel?” he asked. “I swear, I just can’t figure it out.”

“We’ve talked about this. I’m worried about you, you know that.”

Drew quirked an amused eyebrow. “Because I’ve fallen asleep at my desk a few times?”

“Don’t be stupid.”

He heaved a sigh as he tucked in his shirt. “The whole religion thing again. For the last time, will you relax? I’m fine!”

“You are not fine!” Melanie said, her hands now lost in her auburn curls. “You’ve been obsessing for months! You’ve been reading more science and philosophy books than I’m able to keep up with! The staying up late, the note-taking – it can’t be healthy!”

“I’ve been reading! Isn’t that what you encouraged me to do? You said it would make me feel better and it does!” Drew did up his pants and his belt, his hands shaking with a force he found surprising.

“I told you to read so you could be informed about all the stuff you told me you wanted to be informed about, not to have it fill some void that God left in your life!”

“Well, in my defense, it’s a pretty big fucking void!”

“Don’t be sarcastic with me!”

“I’m not being sarcastic!” Drew had absently knotted his tie. Growling, he gave up and let it hang lop-sided around his neck. “You know how I was when you met me! God and family! Family and God! That’s all there was! Now there’s neither, because –according to the gospel of Michael Carroll–I can’t fucking have one without the other!”

“You can’t keep letting what your father said get to you!”

“When my mom was sick, what did I do the entire time? What did the whole family do the entire time?”

Melanie sighed, her posture relaxing, as if the air had gone out of her. “You all prayed.”

“And when she died, what did they all say about it?” Drew was pointing a trembling finger in Melanie’s face, his anger hitting a point that felt dangerous to him, and yet he couldn’t reel it in.

She looked up at him, her eyes dark. She pushed his hand away from her. “That it was God’s plan,” she said, standing and walking past him to their kitchenette. She tore open a cabinet and got a bowl and her box of Kashi cereal.

“Bullshit!” Drew said, following her. “If God just has this great big plan that no one can alter, then what’s the fucking point in praying in the first place? Why ask for anything?”

“I know, Drew, we’ve talked about this. Calm down.” Melanie was pouring milk over her cereal, not even looking at him now.

He felt hot, his blood pounding in his temples. He forced calm into his voice. “I’m just trying to find some sort of meaning in my life, Mel. If I’m not here to serve God, then what the fuck am I here for?”

She sighed heavily and leaned on the counter, crossing her arms in a way that made her look defeated. “I don’t know.”

“Exactly!” Drew raked his hands through his hair, making the uncombed tousles even worse. He caught sight of the clock on the stove and grumbled deep in his throat. “I have to go.”

“Go.”

Drew hurried to the door and slipped on his shoes. He cast a quick look back at Melanie before walking out.

She never looked up.

Drew lay under the cool shade of a tree in the park,

his hands tucked behind his head. He had been on his way to work, but the thunderous discontent rolling through his mind screamed that some things were just more important.

His relationship with Melanie had been suffering for months. It had started off small, with things like being scolded for forgetting to wash the dishes after she cooked, or leaving the light on while he was reading in bed, keeping her awake. But lately, things had been escalating. They were bickering like an old married couple. It rattled him. Without her, who did he have? His family sure as hell didn't give a damn. They were all too involved with their omnipresent, all-loving, and yet somehow vengeful imaginary friend.

“Baa baa, black sheep, have you any wool?” Drew sang under his breath, undoing the horrid knot he had somehow managed to make in his tie. He chuckled, but it had no humor in it. He didn't think his sense of humor could wriggle him out of this particular situation.

They had been together since senior year of high school. Melanie sat in front of him in Chemistry. He tended to forget that there was a blackboard at the front of the room, and instead spent more time staring at the back of her head, studying the way the curls of her hair fell about her shoulders and the way she chewed on her pen before taking down notes. She had talked to him a few times, turning to him with things like “When's the next test?” and “Did you get that part? I missed it.” He never could work up the courage to really talk to her. So, it came as a shock when she decided to sit with him at lunch one afternoon.

They were fast friends. She came to him with all her

problems, and he shared his own. He supposed that no one else was willing to do this for her. Why else would she have kissed him on the bus ride home that one sun-filled Tuesday in April? Why else would she have asked him to be her boyfriend, her ocean-colored eyes so full of hope and wondering?

Religion had never been an issue. She had considered herself Catholic, even if she wasn't as adamant about it as he had been. Her faith had been enough for him and his family to welcome her with open arms. When she lost her faith, it wasn't nearly as catastrophic for her as it was feeling for him. During his junior year of college, she broke it to him that she just kind of...stopped believing. She had been reading these books, she said, and her faith just stopped making sense. It had bothered him of course, but he was too far gone, too blinded by love to let it have any real effect on him. He figured it was a phase, and that she'd see the light soon enough. He hadn't dared tell his family, though.

His reading wasn't the problem. Drew knew that for a fact. Melanie had been reading the likes of Dawkins and Hawking herself, had even handed him the books when his universe started falling apart at the seams. She told him they would help. He had had no such luck, however. Everything he had read that made any sort of logical sense pointed to the same thing: that life was merely an accident. He really didn't think he could handle admitting to something so utterly terrifying, if he was being honest with himself.

He didn't want to lose her, not when they had come so far together. Hell, she was the only reason he was staying at his shitty excuse for a job. Whoever had said sitting in a cubicle

helping design computer software was a dream job deserved to be punched in the mouth for being so stupid.

Oh, yeah. That had been his father. And Drew had swallowed and regurgitated that bullshit himself. Of course, just like all the rest of it.

Drew finally worked out the knot in his tie and let it dangle on his shoulders again. He knew that he needed to relax, but Mel had one thing right: he was obsessing. Ever since God had disappeared from the equation, he found that relaxing about the reason for his existence – something he was always so sure about – was quite the impossible feat.

He found himself staring up through the leaves of the big oak tree, the clouds floating idly by. When he was a child, he would lie just like this and see only the sky, those clouds shaped like race-cars and people's faces, the most amazing things he could think to see in it. He certainly never thought of anything beyond it. Now that he was an adult, he could see so much more than just those light tufts of water vapor. He could look at the sun, and appreciate it for keeping him warm and alive. He could think of all the stars hiding behind daylight, hanging suspended beyond Earth's atmosphere, and all of the other planets that traveled amongst them. His mind then leapt to all of the other planets they had yet to discover, in galaxies that were still waiting to be found.

All of a sudden, Drew felt incredibly small. And here was the weird part: he liked it.

I've been arrogant, he thought, slipping his hands out from under his head and running them through the grass to his sides. All at once, it was hitting him. The ground beneath

him felt so massive he could almost convince himself that it was breathing. He was on a rock, spinning through a universe whose limits were entirely unknown to man. To think that life here – this wondrous, exciting, terrifying experience he was having – had some kind of inherent meaning was presumptuous. It was –

“Fucking arrogance!” Drew sat up, everything in his brain felt like it was clicking into place. His life was short. It was unimportant. But damn it all if he was going to waste it pleasing everyone but himself.

Drew hopped off the ground and started up the sidewalk on his usual way to work. It was better late than never.

Drew burst through the lobby doors, startling Ruby, the receptionist. He was grinning, his button-down untucked with the sleeves rolled, tie still hanging around his shoulders. He rushed to the stairs– the elevator wasn’t fast enough– and climbed them two at a time to the fourth floor. When he got there, he breezed by cubicles with their prairie dog occupants popping up to sneak a peek at the goings-on. Reaching his boss’s office he rapped on the door, rocking on the balls of his feet.

“Come in,” came Peter Briant’s practically sing-song tenor.

Drew waltzed in, extending a hand. “Peter, good to see you!”

Standing, Peter shook the hand offered to him, his eyebrows rising just so at the disheveled appearance of his employee.

“Great to see you as well, Andrew. Is everything...alright?” He swept a hand at Drew’s attire. Next to him in his expensive suit and well-oiled hair, Drew knew that he was being measured and found that he hardly cared.

“I’m fine, sir, great, in fact. But I’m here to tell you that I, uh, well...” Drew chuckled a bit, unable to contain himself. “I quit. There, I said it! I quit!”

Peter’s eyebrows knitted together as he shoved his hands deep into his pockets. “Why on Earth would you, of all people, quit? Didn’t you say when I interviewed you that designing computer software sounded like a dream?”

Drew laughed through his nose. “Yeah. Yeah, that was me. Problem is, I woke up.”

“Very funny.” Peter settled into his high-backed leather desk chair and looked at Drew in a way that indicated he was not at all amused. “So let me get this straight. You kissed my ass for this job, worked so hard that you were actually promoted, and now you come in here – two hours late, mind you– looking like you just rolled right out of bed and tell me you’re quitting?”

Drew rocked on his feet again, hands in pockets. He cast his eyes up and away in mock-thought. “Uh, yeah. Yup. You’d be correct.”

“Don’t be a smart-ass,” Peter said, fixing him a threatening glare. “I don’t know what’s gotten into you. You’ve been late at least once a week for almost a month, coming in unshaven or half asleep, you’re lucky I haven’t fired you.”

“Why haven’t you fired me?” Drew began to pick at a spot on his chin.

“You’re a good man, Andrew. Other than this little phase you seem to be going through, you work hard, you’re motivated. We need personality like yours on the floor.”

“Because we all know personality is so important when you’re sitting behind a desk all day.”

“Don’t be so casual about this, Carroll. This is your career we’re talking about.”

“My career?” Drew said, startled out of his nonchalant calm. “Is that what you call this? Let me tell you something, Briant, this isn’t a goddamn career!”

Peter looked affronted, as if no one had ever dared utter a curse word in his presence. “I was simply saying—”

“This is a job. You wanna know what my career has been for the past – oh, I dunno – fifteen years of my fucking life? The thing that I dedicated most of my time to, more than that outdated, piece-of-shit computer in that padded cell? Being the fucking guy everybody wanted me to be!”

Peter sat stiffly in his desk chair, his hand curling around the arm in a claw. “What has gotten into you, Andrew? Calm down!”

Drew was beyond his breaking point. The floodgates were open, and he was not about to be staid by some suit with hair that belonged in the goddamn 1950s.

“I went to a Catholic high school and prayed to a God that I just assumed was there because everybody told me He was!”

“This is hardly –”

“I went to college to study computers because everybody told me there’d be good money in that!”

“Well, there is, but you –”

Drew threw himself forward, leaning on Peter’s desk and coming face-to-face with him. “I got a job here because everybody told me it sounded like a cushy position that would let me glide through life, when gliding through life is all I’ve ever done!” Drew’s chest was heaving, eyes glazed with tears that had been threatening to spill since this morning.

Peter stared at him for a moment that felt like an eternity, his jaw slack, face full of something that Drew couldn’t pin-point. Shock. Fear. Maybe both.

“Get out of my office,” he said, decidedly calm. “You don’t work here anymore.”

Drew chuckled as a few tears managed to roll down his cheeks. “You’re right. I don’t.”

He turned on his heels, his smile now dimmed but returned to him, and strolled out of the office, not even sparing the man behind him a parting glance.

Drew walked into the apartment practically humming, kicking off his shoes by the door and dropping the box containing what little he had in his cubicle beside them. Melanie was sitting on the couch, and jumped at the sound. She looked up from the novel in her lap and fixed him with a confused stare. “Why aren’t you at work?” she asked. Her eyes flitted to the box at his feet.

He slipped his tie out from under his collar and tossed it at her. It landed on her head, covering one of her eyes and deepening the concern in the lines of her face. He laughed

harder than he should have.

“I quit,” he said, still chuckling.

Melanie stopped cold in the middle of taking the tie off her head. She went pale.

“You what?”

“Yeah, finally did it!” Drew settled next to her on the couch and put his feet up on the coffee table. He picked up his dog-eared copy of Plato’s *The Republic* and thumbed through the pages absently, wanting to give his hands something to do with all of his excited energy.

Melanie tossed her novel aside and turned to face him completely.

“Please tell me you’re joking.”

Her eyes were searching his almost frantically. He felt his good mood falter. Of course she was going to freak out. It would have been helpful if that thought had caught up with the rest of him at a more convenient time than this.

“Mel, I’m not joking.”

“Alright, it’s not funny anymore, Drew!”

“Babe, I quit! I went into Mister Briant’s office and I quit! What more do you want me to say?”

“Why the hell would you do something so stupid?”

Drew wrenched his book without noticing he was doing it. He took his feet off the table and turned to her, his face growing hot.

“Stupid? That job was killing me, Melanie! I had to get the hell out of there before I turned into another one of those goddamn drones who only pop their heads out of their cubicles for coffee and doughnuts!”

Melanie got to her feet, bearing down on him like a mother scorning her child.

“Drew, I’m a waitress! I can’t keep everything together on my own! Do you think of no one but yourself?”

He looked up at her as if seeing her for the first time.

“I was thinking of you the whole time! I quit that job because I want to be better for you! I want to have some sort of mental stability, so I can be there for you!”

“Oh, because this is showing so much mental stability! What the fuck do you expect me to do now?”

“I’m going to find another job! Did you think I was just going to say ‘Oh well, now Melanie can handle everything?’? Is that who you think I am?”

“Well, it’s beginning to look like it!”

Drew opened his mouth and closed it again, his anger going out of him like air from a balloon. He stared at her for a long moment, the silence between them thick and deafening.

“I’m...never going to be able to make you happy, am I?” he said, the softness of his own voice almost alien to his ears.

Melanie sighed gruffly, ruffling her hair with both hands. “Drew, don’t. Don’t make this about you, this is about us.”

Drew looked away from her. Plato stared up at him with blank, ghostly eyes of granite from the cover of his book. He thumbed the ragged pages, his mind working with the speed it had become accustomed to during months of study and analysis. A small smile crawled across his face as he felt a familiar clicking-into-place.

“There is no ‘us’ anymore.”

“What?”

Drew stood, feeling like the universe was set back in order around him when his eyes leveled with hers.

“You heard me. I’m done with this.” He motioned between the two of them, his hand still clamped like a vice on his book. “This is who I am now. This is who I’m going to be, and all you’ve done so far is deal with it.”

“What the hell did you want me to do?”

“I wanted you to accept it!”

Melanie took a step back and glared at him. “So that’s it, then? You say we’re done and that’s that?”

“That’s all I have to say to you.”

Melanie searched his face, lips pursed and nostrils flaring. When Drew supposed she found nothing of use to her, she plucked her purse from the coffee table and pushed past him to the door.

“I’ll send my sister over for my things,” she said. Sliding her feet into her pumps, she cast him one final, dark look before storming out of the apartment and slamming the door behind her.

Silence. Drew found the ringing in his ears to be rather pleasant to the alternative. He flopped onto the couch, melting into the cushions with a heavy sigh. That wasn’t exactly how he had pictured the rest of his day going.

Drew became aware that *The Republic* was still held fast in his hand. He smirked, opening the book to a badly creased page where Socrates was having a conversation with Glaucon about the sun, and how it provided man with warmth and light.

Noble Gases and Bayonets

Joe McCarthy

Dan Nye was with us when the
Bay Parkway was
congested.

We blew our noses because
the radio was a static hysteria.
Smells Like Teen Spirit sounded like
bayonets piercing our guts,
so we drove back to
Massapequa entertaining the speakers
with our voices.

No, we probably bored them with memories
of NPR.

I prefer the noble gases.
Prefiero los gases nobles.

We copped some Heebs at a 711
where the lucid storefront of
eternity was all neon lights, glass, and
glinting green graffiti.
Laborious snoring could be heard from the products behind
windows that were merely
mirrors reflecting the
yearnings of a culture.

We followed lethargic yellow
lines of paint and conspiring
road signs back to our aunt's house.

Here we would
speculate on the Hopi Indian
understanding of time,
in a yard where frayed fences apologized
for their constricting nature. They told us that
nature was never meant to be
divided up and
paper recycling plants are an
extension of death.

Budweiser sparked thought like the
French Revolution.
Radical ideas reigned supreme,
and fixed philosophies were
guillotined.
We sat in lawn chairs that
pinched our hips.
The exotic smell of fresh pineapple
flirted with our nostrils and the
crisp, salty wind from the Sound
cooled our bare feet as we cast
scattered glances at a meteor
shower that seemed to be
stuck in traffic somewhere along
the Milky Way.

My brother clutched at his
rosary beads as Dan, in his
black, skintight, barely-below

the knee jeans, said Christianity
inhibits freedom.

I sipped on a beer that tasted of tropical fruit,
and reached my hand up to direct traffic
for meteors that were too impatient to follow
the constellation's construction signs.

One Thousand Steps

Angelo Gallo

At the edge of town,
beyond the unmarked
neighborhoods
and cluttered
outdoor markets,
rested a tiny chapel
upon a hill made from
the narrow concrete angles
of one thousand steps.

I started at dawn,
but I soon lost count.
It grew harder to stand straight;
the heat mocked my balance
as I rocked back and forth,
feeling like the sun gave me wings
only to slowly take them away.

For three hours
I climbed
and wondered,
“What was all the sweat for,”
until I heard the unbearable
moan of everything below.

This was for the yayas in Leyte
serving the well-versed mestizos hiding behind

brightly painted villas, who carefully wash their linens only to fold them quickly, leaving just in time for the late night jeepney back to their barangay barrios.

This was for their husbands, the squatters, and their muddled homes built out of rusted aluminum and drift-wood findings on the edge of a battered coast, decorated with bargain bin trinkets and the spreading mist of adobo pork and pinakbet soaking in their own juices for days and days until every morsel is eaten.

This was for their daughters, the flight attendants who followed me home with their pencil skirts wrapped tightly like banana leaves, well aware of how every man in every aisle is peeling away at them as if the casing held a mound of sticky, sweet rice with a dripping chocolatey center; Morón, I believe the locals called such a dish, takes a whole day for one grandfather to make just a small batch.

At the top
was a gate
freshly painted white,
and behind it was a pastor
who welcomed me
with the dry edge of his sleeve
to wipe my forehead clean.

The view was marvelous
despite the blanketing haze,
the uneven homes across the valley,
and the spots of gray in-between them.

I handed him the sheet of paper
designated to me four hours ago.
It held a song inside,
one I couldn't understand
or hum on my way down.

Fiendish Friends

Christopher Cortis

First Place, Folio Fiction Contest

Charlie woke from a deep, dreamless sleep and began to look down at his watch, knowing what he would see before his eyes were even fully open. The image was already burned into his mind, but he was a slave to routine. His eyes took in the face of the watch and its intricate design of tight lines swirling every which-way, twisting through the area where each of the gold numbers sat blurry beneath a layer of dust. The crystal was cracked from the ten to the four and again from the middle up to the two, but Charlie didn't care. The cracks and worn silver look added character and uniqueness to his best friend. He placed his finger in the center of the crystal, feeling the length of the crack, tracing it up and down. The watch was the only thing Charlie had worn since he had come to rest at his new home all those millennia ago; his t-shirt and jeans had long ago turned into dust. He spoke to his silver mechanical companion.

“Good morning, darling.”

Charlie waited for her response, and looked up at the perfect cube that was his prison. The walls, floor, and ceiling were completely bare, six grainy surfaces with their own sets of unique characteristics. He knew every line, divot, and grain on every surface of his prison and had even named and befriended them all. His second best friend, a swirling line of dark grain whom he called Cape Cod was to his left, about level with his forehead as he sat slouched in the corner. He tilted his head in greeting and rubbed the sleep from his eyes. Even with his eyes closed, Charlie could still see the walls in his mind; they never

left his consciousness. His friends never left his subconscious mind either; his dreams were devoted to tracing his finger along each line on the walls, naming comrades as his finger passed over them.

He opened his eyes once again, and judging from the amount of eye crud that was on his fingers, Charlie figured that he must have been asleep for around fourteen hours. He mentally added the number to his ongoing tally of imprisonment time.

“Woo-hooooo!” he cried out in glee. “Gettin’ close to an eternity!” He grinned at his own joke, a bit annoyed when he looked back down to his friend’s face and saw only a blank stare.

“It’s just a joke, jeez...lighten up.” He paused. “Ha! Three ‘j’ words in one sentence! Jumpin’ Jehosephat jelly-rolls!” He could barely speak over the peals of laughter that echoed around him. “Jar o’ Jesus juice! Big giant German Jew!” He looked back down at his friend and was pleased to see that she was now roaring with laughter along with him.

Wiping the tears of (jumpin’ jubilant) joy from his eyes, Charlie looked up to the center of the ceiling from where a mediocre glow fell. He had been here for more years than he could count and had never seen the light go out, dim, or even flicker. Weeks had been devoted to staring at the light source, trying to see some type of inconsistency, but there was none. When he touched the part of the ceiling that the light was emanating from, it felt no different than the walls or even the floor. As far as Charlie could tell, it was The Perfect Light, and it would never go out for the remainder of his time in solitude.

His plastic tray of nutrition paste and a cup of water were in the corner across from him, as they always were whenever he woke. Those assholes. He never saw the food appear or be placed into The Food Corner, but whenever he fell asleep, the food was there when he regained consciousness. Faking sleep didn't work, closing his eyes for long periods of time didn't work, and neither did standing in the middle of his room yelling, screaming, and pleading for food. The same mystery surrounded his waste. For as long as he could remember, he had been doing his business in the corner opposite The Food Corner, which he, of course, named The Shit Corner. Every time he went to sleep, his leavings disappeared. Charlie had a sneaking suspicion that whatever came out of his body was somehow processed and filtered and then given back to him on the plastic tray. His stomach grumbled as he looked at the tray of (greatly gooeey, greenish-grey) paste. Charlie's mouth twitched, threatening to burst out laughing again as he remembered how he and his friends hadn't been able to speak for days after one of them had created the four-word alliteration.

"Garbage," he muttered, unable to hold back a chuckle as his slim figure rose.

"No, stop. (heh) We've got business to attend to." He walked to the wall across from his food, turned around to face the opposite wall, and bent his head down to stare at the ground. His leg muscles tightened as he sprang forward, catapulting himself towards the wall with his face still looking at the ground, the top of his head quickly approaching the oncoming wall. Although his powerful lunge should have sent him splattering into the wall with only two steps, by the time he

got halfway across the room, he was barely moving. When he reached the far wall, he was stopped. His mind did not tell his body to stop, nor did his instincts try to save his life by frightening him into stopping, he simply stopped.

“Sometime soon...” he muttered to none of his friends in particular.

Not fazed by the abrupt interruption of his suicidal plan, Charlie bent down to pick up the tray of (gelatinous) garbage, which he had stopped directly next to. Grimacing, he reached down to the food as he had thousands of times before, getting ready to ingest the tasteless filth that kept him alive. He had tried to starve himself, but after two weeks of not eating and seeing food always present, he had given in. His hand touched the rim of the plain plastic bowl. He froze.

Something was different.

Nothing was ever different in The Room. He stared down at his hand poised on the bowl of food, with a chill running down his spine and out across his skin. His stomach was in his throat, choking him, and his heart was beating out of place in his chest.

His hand started to tremble as he looked at the little hairs that grew out of his knuckles. They were bending in a way that was different than normal, and something was moving across the skin on the back of his hand. Something subtle and very warm. He tried for over a minute to remember what it was that he was feeling across the back of his hand, and then it suddenly burst through his mind like a rush of water from a broken dam.

Wind.

“Whispering wind...in white willows...”

Memories flooded his mind: memories of being outside on a breezy summer day, and memories of driving in...in cars with the windows down. He knew right away what he was now feeling: something that he had trained himself not to feel ages ago. Charlie slowly looked to the right, where the breeze was coming from.

There was a crack in the wall.

A new imperfection. A horizontal crack, only two inches higher off the ground than his cup of water and perfectly straight. Charlie stared in wonder at his new friend, Hope.

He swiped his hands to the side, scattering the bowl and cup across The Room, and fell to the ground, shoving his face right next to the crack. His eye lined up with it, and he could see a faint orange-red light seeping through. The dull glow dominated his vision for a moment, and he moaned in pleasure at the color he had never seen in his prison.

“Hiya, Hope, how’s it hangin’?” His gentle voice cracked.

His eyes started tearing, and loud sobs filled his ears. The warmth coming through the crack grew to a sharp heat and, although Charlie felt his eye starting to dry, he couldn’t bear to look away. When pain overtook him he was forced back from Hope, and fell into the middle of the room, still sobbing. He stared up at The Perfect Light, a beautiful grin creeping onto his face, tears streaming down the sides of his face.

The light flickered; Charlie’s eye twitched.

Now that two new things had happened at once, Charlie was overwhelmed. He stood up, wiping the tears from his

cheeks (which had long ago stopped growing hair, due to his constantly ripping it out), and started yelling.

“What the hell was that? You flippin’ flickered!” He bent down to pick up his plastic tray, and then threw at the Perfect Light.

“After all this time, and after everything that we’ve been through, you’re going to flicker? Fuck you! What about ME? Don’t you care how I feel?”

He looked down at his watch, the dusty face still laughing, but this time at him.

“You’re in on this, too, aren’t you? You didn’t even say good morning to me!”

Charlie’s eyes shifted around the room, rolling from Cape Cod who was bellowing with laughter. Samuel, the little loop of darker grain next to the Perfect Light, was giggling. Julia, the intersection of the Sleeping Wall and the Ceiling, was having an absolute fit.

He turned towards Hope and kicked the wall as hard as he could.

“Everyone I have ever loved is turning against me now! I’m gettin’ outta here!”

Dust fell from the wall as he kicked it again. In every one of the thousands and millions of times that Charlie had hit the wall before, nothing had ever fallen from it. The walls were indestructible, but now they were failing. Charlie aimed another kick at the wall, harder. More dust fell, spurring him into a frenzy of kicks, and even punches. He ran back and forth across The Room, his breath coming with heaving, racking bursts of tears, throwing his entire body weight against the

wall over and over again. Cracks formed lightning bolts where Charlie hit, growing larger and larger as he continued his quest.

Hours passed. He forgot to add these to his tally.

Charlie's numb shoulder hit the wall again. The wall now looked like a crater, the surface of it flexing outward towards what Charlie was certain had to be a new life. Sweat ran down his entire body, leaving clean trails through the dust that had accumulated on it. He rested up against the broken wall for a moment, and felt the spider web of pieces shift slightly.

"This is too much for me..." he said, looking back to all of his friends. "You're all breaking my heart..." They were no longer laughing, only staring.

He stepped back and, with an extra burst of speed, ran and jumped at the wall, bringing his feet up to hit first. He extended his legs into and through the wall of his prison. Sand, dust, and oven-hot air flew into The Room through the hole as he fell out. Right before the brightness overwhelmed his vision, he saw that he was on a hill facing a beach that stretched off into the curvature of the Earth in each direction.

It's too red... he thought right before his eyes squeezed shut.

He landed on the soft sand of the hill's slope and started rolling, happy even though his friends had betrayed him. Then the heat hit him. Even as he was picking up speed, the sand burned into him like hundreds of tiny coals. He screamed aloud, trapping sand inside his mouth as well as all over his body. He slammed onto flat ground and felt the rest of his breath forced out of his chest. He breathed in deep to continue the scream of agony and fear, but the air that flowed into his

lungs might as well have been molten lead. He coughed it out quick and gasped, only adding to the fire in his throat. Pushing himself up and standing, he felt the heat amplifying on his skin, cooking him where he stood. He looked around as his eyes adjusted to the excess light and saw what had happened to the world he used to know.

Everything was bathed in bright red light, a hue so brilliant that the sand shimmered, looking as if it were on fire. Charlie's feet told him that it probably was. The land to the sides of him stretched as far as he could see, but there was nothing around. No plants, trees, or fences, and no buildings, sidewalks, or stairs. Charlie could see nothing rising above sea level other than waves of heat, thrown up from the sand.

The ocean in front of him was boiling— large bubbles broke through the surface, sending pockets of steam skyward. A small wave of simmering water lapped at his foot, and Charlie was grateful for the cooling relief the water offered against the heat of the air and the Sun. Hundreds of massive volcanoes thrust up into the sky further out in the water, all of them belching smoke and fire into the already flaming atmosphere. Lava flowed down their sides in droves, adding even more steam to the air when it crashed into the ocean.

Charlie was in hell.

There was only one solution. He had to get back into The Room, where the air was breathable and not full of the smell of burning hair and roasting meat. Maybe his friends would forgive him for his outburst earlier, they had spent so much time together, how could they not? He spun around, leaving the skin from the bottom of his feet on the sand, and right

before he went blind from the brightness that stuck his face, he saw the Sun. Instead of the warm yellow glow that he had envisioned bathing his face and arms, he was faced with the source of all the heat that he now felt. The entire sky behind the hill he wanted to run towards was filled with unbearably bright light. The Sun had grown to a hundred (thousand?) times the size it was in Charlie's memory, glowing the most evil color of red he had ever seen. Red flares extended out from both sides of the Sun, making it look like a hungry, giant beast crashing towards the delicious Earth.

The last thing that Charlie's eyes saw was the outline of The Room, perched on top of a hill that used to be miles underwater over a million years ago. His vision went black, and his knees sunk to the ground. He could feel the skin on his legs fusing with the sand, and soon his hands, his arms, his chest, and his face followed. He brushed his right hand through the scorching sand, and placed his first two fingers on the face of his best friend, feeling the crack that went from ten to four, and again from the middle up to the two. His fingers stuck and would no longer move. The pain was so unbearable that his mind turned it off, and he was numb to the transformation of The Last Human on Earth into charcoal.

His mind was still working, and he could clearly see what he had seen for all those years, what he was most familiar with. That perfect cube with The Perfect Light illuminating all the incredible inconsistencies and irregularities in its intricate grainy surfaces. He put his finger on Cape Cod, tracing the swirled length of it, laughing as he and his best friend thought of words that started with the letter C...

The Sweetest Smell

Cristina Albaladejo

The smell of a skunk is the sweetest smell of all. Well, maybe not all skunks, but the one I hit with my car on Route 8 smelled like gasoline and rosemary and oranges. She was diminutive and I knew she was female because her nipples were secreting something like gold that smelled like oranges. But these were not the oranges you think of when you're down in Florida. No, these had the smell of the Valencia oranges from the Easton Farmers Market; very much like the oranges I bought five summers ago. It was winter now. I looked at Rosemary—that's what I decided to name the dead skunk—and saw that inside of her gaping maw hung the tiniest piece of bright orange peel. I reached inside, frisking away the fleas leaping off of her and onto me, and grabbed the orange peel. It was the size of a dime...maybe a penny, and had been in the process of being chewed. It was not hard, but soggy—covered with heaping layers of saliva. I held it to my nose, keeping my eyes on Rosemary until they naturally closed. I reemerged when one of those Rosemary fleas bit me, and I took it as a sign to put the peel back into her mouth. In my car, I had the urge to turn around and return to sweet Rosemary; but a sign off Exit 11 read: Sweet Winter Valencia Orange Farm Exit 61—fifty-five miles ahead, two miles past the black and white rosemary bush. I sped to eighty-six miles per hour and continued to drive past Exit 11.

Maritza in the Pulse of the Street

Luisa Caycedo-Kimura

Brick buildings stand tired
above courtyards,
like aging prison guards
wheezing in the New York City heat.
Their darkened glares
protect the neighborhood from trees.

Thick air packs fried plantains,
disinfectant, and roach spray
in a moldering bag, then lingers
in doorways and alleyways
with no place to travel.

Her pleather shoes leave
streamers of red childhood
scraping home against a sizzling
asphalt. Friends pull her by the arms
towing her young body
behind their laughs. Feet drag
and thump against the hot concrete
street in syncopated sound,
a weak backbeat to shrills
from the open volume
of a fire hydrant.

The girl resists the tugs
of her friends, until the spray

covers her head, torso,
and skin-stretching legs.
Shrieking as the water thrust
hits her new dress in cascading
pulses. She clings to her candy-red
cellophane wrapping,
then smiles street-innocent
in this on-the-way-home
moment, where she cools
her urban smoldering.

The children's wet play
reverberates,
down the block, congas
vibrate rhythms beyond sunset,
random neighbors
from their rooftops hear more
than a pulsating beat
any life can dance to.

Grandmothers look out
from ancient tenement windows
predicting weather they already know.
Maritza will be a mother by fourteen.

klepto

Alex Malanych

i have finally located
and identified what
i shall henceforth refer to as the “jameson scent,”
that boy dead and gone for lenox st.
i was walking in portsmouth.
i happened upon a little boutique selling journals made from
organic balsa and other quasi-hippy artifacts.
as i walked past the candle display with
accompanying chart of chakra cleansing
properties made by free trade
teenage mothers in a third world,
i caught something familiar hooked to the breeze
from a dilapidated air conditioner behind the oil diffusers.
nearly sticking a bamboo diffuser pole up my
nose, i came to the conclusion that
you, my n.y. darling dead and gone,
are the scent of “burl wood” by anthropologie.
that shop lady grinned like a mental dental
patient, anesthetized with patchouli incense.
“buy it, honey. they do wonders at the commune.”
i had intended to buy said oil diffuser, just so others
would not think i was
terribly crazy, and soon remembered that,
like the organic balsa wood journals, and
singing bowls and
smudge sticks and
hemp skirts,

the diffuser would cost my soul
and the concession that you
are one of these tie-dye groupies
huddled by a compost heap
chanting janis joplin.
i snuck a pole into my
pocket.

Calamari

Dee Ginicola

Arlo left the car running as he ran into the Dunkin' Donuts to order coffee for the family. I was holding the boxes of pizza and the calamari. One box was for us, a Margarita pizza: fresh basil and tomatoes, no cheese. We didn't eat meat. Or cheese. Or anything that came from an animal. I wasn't too crazy with it all. I had friends who ate meat, and I didn't judge them. I mean, who cares? To each his own, right? If they didn't eat animals, that was even better, but I didn't pressure them or anything. Arlo was a different story. Just before we pulled into the parking lot, he was cursing out the calamari and hoping it was soggy and disgusting for when they ate it.

"Serves them right," he snarled, "for eating those cute little squids."

"Squids are not cute, Arlo," I countered him, twisting and pulling a dread in between my small fingers.

"Yes they are, Melanie. All squishy and..."

"Tentacle-y? You're just being all crazy-activist again. Squids are ink-pots. In fact, that's where they got the word. In Latin, it's Calamarium. Anyway, let people eat what they want. Geez."

He refused to go through the drive-through to get the coffee, so I was alone in the car with the calamari. Now it's not like I needed to eat it, or even that I really wanted to. I had forgotten what calamari-- or fish in general-- even tasted like. It had been three years since I had had one bite. I was strict. It meant something to me. But I was alone in the car.

When I was a kid, my dad would take me fishing. No

big deal, just trout in the river, or bluefish in the summer. They put up a good fight. We did mostly catch and release, but every once in a while, if we caught a nice big one, we'd keep it. Dad would help me filet it, and my mom would cook it on the stove, or sometimes in the oven with some breadcrumbs and butter. I felt like Annie Oakley or somethin'.

Plus, it wasn't like squid were endangered. Okay, I mean, Giant Squids are, but not the kind that people make into calamari. In fact, almost every culture enjoyed them. Italians, Greeks, Chinese, Filipinos, Spaniards, Portuguese, you name it. If people were by the water, they were catching and eating squid. And for some people, that was what kept them alive!

And yes, I considered myself a vegetarian, but have you ever seen a squid? They are not cute. In fact, they are the antithesis of cute. They have multiple squiggly legs, a beak-- yeah like a bird -- a bulb-like, slimy body. Let's put it this way: I wouldn't be proud if it were my pet.

The coffees were pretty specific. One large iced coffee, hazelnut with three Sweet and Lows and cream, one medium toasted almond coffee, regular with skim milk, decaffeinated, and one caramel latte, skim milk, two Splendas and whipped cream on the top. I knew I had time.

Slowly, I uncurled the white paper bag that surrounded the calamari box. I slipped my hand inside and felt around. It was a foam box, but the opening was on the inside of the bag. I looked over my shoulder into the windows of the Dunkin' Donuts. My fingers fumbled along the foam container's edges. I had to decide if it was worth it.

My legs were warm and humid from the pizza's steam

and, as I shuffled my feet, I kicked an empty Green Tea bottle and startled myself. What if Arlo caught me? Did I want him to catch me? What if my breath smelt like fish? I wasn't quite sure what I wanted, but I snatched the foam container out of the bag and popped it open. It smelt like my childhood. Calamari and marinara sauce with a lemon on the side.

Is it worth it? I didn't care anymore. I took a large, squiggly, and yet oh-so-crunchy piece of squid and stuck it in my mouth. It was delicious. I mean, it was fried, so why wouldn't it be delicious? I think you can fry just about anything and say it's great. I thought about fried Oreos at carnivals and onion rings at Burger King. Just as I let the last bit of cute-little-squid slide down my throat, I heard the knock on the window.

He was right there, three coffees in his hands, knocking on the window, judging me.

"What the hell do you think you're doing?" he questioned.

I paused. "I uh... I'm." I closed my eyes and the container.

"Are you serious? Did you just eat MEAT? What kind of dread-head-vegan are you? You might as well just eat the whole thing now. Go ahead! You've ruined yourself!" He continued to ramble, "Poor little things, all battered and fried, and you don't even care... I thought I knew you better... I just can't believe it. I really can't. And I saw you do it!"

I opened the container back up, took two large handfuls and shoved them in my mouth greedily. I ate and ate, a hog at a breakfast barrel, staring Arlo right in his eyes. He watched in disbelief as I finished every last crumb and licked my fingers slowly.

“What are you gonna do about it?” I glared at him.

He paused, glassy-eyed and gaping-mouthed.

“I guess,” he bit his bottom lip, “I guess we have to go get more calamari for them.”

church

Alex Malanych

went down to arimethea on edwards
and happened upon a married man
behind heretical storefront windows and
the virgin mary burning from below in
votives casting red:
let's make this a habit, father.

it's hard:
concentrating
when the priest crosses himself.
his face so young, so old.
i want to be communing with god
(i really do)
and catch myself
eye-fucking
green
and floral
waving gold and crackers
gulping down the cleanup
while i kneel down.
"i am not worthy to receive you."

he's got rope.
he does a magic trick
a catholic one.
hey father, tie the rope around my neck
so we can play the pass out game

while you read me the gospel,
hester prynne's
monogram stamped in gold.
sitting on wood pews
with wood in my pocket
and wood on the walls: hanging
save the date memos
for a revelation.

Conversations Over Flan

Cristina Albaladejo

My mother's eyes were swelling. "I can't believe that you would shame your own family this way. What will people think of you, Anna?" She was standing by the white ceramic sink carefully separating egg whites from egg yolks.

"Oh, Mami, it's not like I've robbed a bank or stolen a car. I'm only dating. And he's a really nice guy. You'd like him if you just got to know him."

Papi was sitting at the kitchen counter reading *The New York Times*. "Victor, why do you sit there and say nothing to your daughter? Do I have to do everything alone? Between the two of you, I don't know who is worse."

She cracked the eggs harder, becoming careless with the process. Shaking her head, she began to have an open conversation with God about why her only child would ever do such a thing and why she had to do everything alone, as if I wasn't sitting there in front of her.

Keeping her eyes on the egg yolks, she continued. "Are his parents happy about this? Let me guess, they let him do whatever he wants. Well, don't think that you can just walk around here like one of them. We didn't raise you to be like that. If Latinos paraded around this world acting like them, this world would be more of a disaster than it already is."

"Mami, I really don't think it's that big of a deal. His family is nice, and they don't let him do whatever he wants. They let him do what makes him happy."

Mami stopped cracking eggs and looked hard at me. "Anna, I want you to be happy, but trust me, he is not going to

make you happy. Why don't you do something else until you find a good-fitting husband? Why don't you call the hospital? I'm sure they could use you. You were supposed to call months ago. Que Paso Anna? You have been so occupied with your little friend that you no longer care."

I ignored her question. "No Mami!" For a moment we sat in silence. I felt her staring. I glanced at the pan con tomate in front of me. It was disrespectful to look at an adult in the eye during a dispute. I kept my head down and took a deep breath.

"Robert is coming over for dinner on Saturday. You don't have to like him; I just want you to be nice to him... please." With her nostrils flared and mouth wide open, Mami looked at Papi, then at me, washed her hands and walked out of the kitchen with her head held high, leaving the mess of eggs in the sink.

Papi turned to see if she had gone and closed the newspaper. "Anna, I want you to make your mother happy."

"But dad, this is ridiculous. I should be making my own decisions about this. I'm twenty-eight years old, and I'm the one who has to be in the relationship. Not her. I understand I still live in this house, under your rules, but not by choice. Mami is feeling a lot better now since she finished chemo, and she doesn't need me to take care of her anymore. One day, she'll be gone, and she can't run my life forever." I wanted to take it back. Papi looked down and shook his head, took off his square frame glasses and rubbed his eyes.

"Anna, you do what you want, but you never think about what is right for the family. You need to take the time to think about these things. You're right, one day she will not be

here. We will not be here, but for now we are, and you need to learn to deal with that.”

Robert poured me another glass of wine before he went to wash the remaining dishes in the sink. He had prepared juicy pork tenderloin with fancy potatoes and grilled asparagus. The wine had settled in and I watched him in silence as he washed every dish so carefully. His long body hunched over the sink, his head nearly touching the ceiling. His hair was light brown, messy, the way I liked it. It was not long and thick like mine; I could actually run my fingers through his, which I did – often. He sensed my stare and turned to look at me sipping my wine. He smiled, revealing the gap between his teeth.

“You excited about Saturday? I have to admit, I’m kind of nervous about meeting your dad.”

If only he knew that Papi was the least of his worries. My entire life, my father had never said much, especially with Mami commenting on everything and everyone. Papi played it safely by keeping his mouth shut, avoiding the wrath that came almost every time Mami opened her mouth. It was her Robert needed to worry about. She was a tiny thing—only 5 feet short exactly. Her hair was a fiery red, almost orange, and she always wore her best jewelry—everywhere. Her mouth matched her wardrobe perfectly, and everyone in the neighborhood knew not to mess with Maria.

Her most famous story is when we went to the walk-in clinic a few years earlier. We were sitting in the waiting room when a black male came in wearing a light blue dress with san-

dals to match its red flowers. He walked in and sat in the seat directly next to my mother. She periodically stared at the poor man over a long five minutes or so, watching the clock almost as much as she was watching her purse. The man looked at her. With eyebrows raised, he asked, "Can I help you, chica?"

"Yes. You can help me by moving away from me."

I grabbed my mother's hand hoping she would consider my informal supplication to please stop.

"Well excuse me chica chica, I ain't hurtin' nobody. I'm stayin' right here til they call my name. You can move if you want to, chica, there's plenty of room."

And that was that. Standing up, my mother turned to the man. "Listen to me, you faggot nigger, I am not your chica chica! All you niggers are the same, but you are the worst!"

The rest was a blur I worked too hard to remove. I looked at Robert who looked at me without worry.

"Don't sweat it, I'm sure they'll love you as much as I do."

It was Thursday, and Mami still hadn't spoken to me. I went outside where she was sitting out on the white plastic patio furniture she had forced my father to buy last summer. I walked closer to her. She was smoking a cigarette, something I hadn't seen in years. When she noticed me, she threw the cigarette on the ground, crushing it with her foot. She looked at me angrily because I had caught her smoking, as if it were my fault.

"What? Are you going to yell at me for smoking too?"

I couldn't help but laugh at who my mother was. And though I wanted badly to know why she was smoking, I passed the question. I looked down at the tawny grass.

"I'm sorry for the other day. I shouldn't have disrespected you." I looked up and she was looking up at me with her eyebrows raised.

"Oh that? I don't care about that. It's your life. What does it matter to me if you mess it up dating a white boy? Date a black guy for all I care. Anyway, I have more important things to worry about."

I chuckled, "Oh yeah? Like what?" She looked away when I asked her this question. For a long moment she sat, silent. I turned and saw my father being nosy, standing in the house on the other side of the sliding door. He turned once he saw me glance at him. Mami reached into her pocket, carefully pulling out another cigarette and a lighter, making sure not to ruin her freshly manicured burgundy fingernails. She lit the cigarette.

"Don't worry about it Anna, it's none of your business anyway. So what should I cook tomorrow for your little white friend? Flan? Or should I bake an apple pie?"

When I woke the next morning, I decided to lie in bed a little longer than usual. I imagined what the possibilities of dinner with Robert and my parents could turn out to be. I imagined Mami hugging Robert, loving him because he ate every bit of food on his plate. He'd even ask for a second slice of flan. My father would be sitting in his favorite chair as he

and Mami praised Robert for becoming a successful accountant and they would openly discuss and maybe even share recipes. While in the bathroom, Robert would ask permission to marry me, and my parents would happily say yes. But the night would probably begin with a lecture from my mother to Robert on interracial relationships and why the world would be better off without them. I expected Robert would last until the end of dinner, politely excusing himself to the bathroom and never returning, unfortunately missing Mami's famous caramel flan.

Muffled voices came from my parents' room. I suspected they were talking about Robert and me, and then I heard what sounded like my mother crying. I got out of bed and crept into the hallway. I stood outside my parents' door and listened as best I could.

"Maria, when are you going to tell Anna? If you do not tell her, I will." Papi's voice was trembling as he fought to keep it stern.

"You need to stop crying Victor, Anna will hear you. I don't think we should tell her now, anyway. I will this weekend, I promise. Right now I have to start preparing the food for tonight. She is too excited. Don't worry, everything will be alright."

I heard some movement and I swiftly went back into my room. My phone fell on the floor beside my bed, loudly vibrating. Robert was on the other end.

"Good morning babe." His voice was so at ease, and for that moment, I was grateful for the interruption. "So I wanted to know what I can bring over tonight to impress the parents. Any ideas?"

“You don’t have to bring anything over. Trust me, my mother will cook enough to feed for weeks.” This was not a lie. On average, Mami would cook about three or four plates per person. Second to her mouth, she was well known for her cooking. She enjoyed cooking for people, even for those who she did not like much.

When Robert was telling me something about how he thought he shouldn’t come empty-handed, someone knocked on my door.

“Robert, I’ll call you back.” I hung up before he could reply.

Papi’s eyes were buried under dark circles and his face was flushed.

“Anna, we need to speak to you.”

“Papi what’s the matter?”

My heart was pounding. I followed him to the kitchen where Mami was placing a large flan in the oven. She turned to find us both standing there.

“You have to be kidding me, Victor!”

My father looked at her and with a strong voice said, “You are going to tell her Maria!”

“What’s going on?” I said.

She looked at me, irritated.

“Fine. Anna, sit down.” My father left the room, leaving Mami and me sitting in the kitchen alone.

“Anna, the cancer came back.” There was no pause. No thinking of how she would tell me. No thought of how her delivery of words could affect me. My heart sank and I suddenly felt sick. “The doctor says that it looks bad and I decided not to

do treatment. I was on it for two years, and I don't want to do it again. Your father tried to talk to me but I have made my decision, and there is no discussing it, Anna."

Tears were gathering. "When did you find out?"

"About a month ago. But I did not tell you because you have been so busy with your little friend. I never see you because you are never home. Maybe if you spent more time at home with your familia and less time with him you would deserve to know these things!"

I looked deep into her eyes. "Deserve to know these things? Deserve to know these things? I'm your fucking daughter for God's sake! D-D-Don't you think you should have told me something like this? My little white friend has nothing to do with this! It's you! You're so fucking selfish!" I stood up and kicked the chair. My mother continued yelling at me as I walked out the front door. I didn't care that I was in pajamas; I didn't care what I had just said to my mother. I went to the only place I could think of. A place I could go to think.

Robert was just finishing breakfast when he opened the back door. My hair was tangled in knots and I hadn't even brushed my teeth yet. I cried harder once he answered the door. He tried to ask me what was wrong, but I didn't have enough energy to explain. He didn't fight me. We spent most of the afternoon in bed. I cried on his shoulder for what seemed like hours. He held me in closely until I fell asleep.

When I woke up, Robert had gotten up and was in the kitchen cooking. I looked at the clock beside his bed. It was

7:30 pm. I couldn't stop thinking about Mami. I wondered if she had cooked the meal she had been preparing. Was she feeling sick? Was she hurting? Why didn't she want to take medication? I suddenly wanted to see her and hold her. I missed her, but, first, I had to give Robert an answer.

Robert was making some tasty concoction as usual. This was something I knew Mami would have loved about him. A cup of tea was waiting for me on the counter, and I wondered how he knew I had woken up. He looked at me and brushed the hair out of my face. I sipped my tea and we sat down at the table.

“Robert, my mother's cancer came back. She told me this morning.”

For the next hour, I told him about my morning, but I refused to ever tell him about how my mother felt about him. There was no reason for him to think less of her.

“I'll be here for you, no matter what you need, Anna.”

Those words stung, and I knew what I had to do.

“Robert, I think we need to take a break. A long one. I have some things to take care of at home. I'm sorry.” Robert had been the best thing that had happened to me in a long time, but he would never understand me or my family. His mother did not care who he dated and how her son made her appear. Robert's parents taught him to do what his heart told him to, but mine didn't. Robert would not understand that it was disrespectful to speak back and disagree with your parents. But I could not blame him. It was me who chose to want to be like my American friends. I chose to stand up to Mami, who took it much better than I thought. It was me who challenged her and my father.

It was me who hurt her.

Robert, confused, looked at me. It took him a few seconds to speak.

“However much time you need, I’ll be here Anna.” He walked me to the door, gave me one last kiss and told me he loved me.

“I love you too Robert.” I didn’t have the heart to tell him that it may have been our last time together.

I finally walked into my house after a ten minute drive that felt like forever. I knew what I wanted to say and ask Mami, but I didn’t look forward to it. When I walked in, there was silence throughout the house and I knew where to find her. I walked into the kitchen, and there she was, sitting at the kitchen table where I had left her earlier this morning. We seemed to look at each other at the same time. I rushed towards her as she threw her arms around me.

She brushed my hair with her warm hands that smelled like cinnamon. “Shhh Anna, Shhhh.”

“Why aren’t you taking medicine? Why don’t you want to get better?” My mother looked at me and smiled.

“Ay Anna, you and your father need to chill out. I said, don’t worry about it; everything is negotiable. We’ll talk about it, I promise. But right now go and get comfortable and when you come down, we’ll talk about everything over flan. That’ll make you feel better.” She pulled the hair out of my face and brushed my hair with her fingernails. Somehow I believed her.

We Commit His Body to the Ground

Sarah Tortora

Honorable Mention, Folio Poetry Contest

When the Biggest Brother first fermented the vine that is our arbitrary earth, plucked parasite from parasite and immersed the naked planet into the interplanetary array of gaseous exchange, He served only us, did it only for us; sacrificed His only son and let him turn to dust. Oh holy oogenesis, oh holy sperm and egg, we dedicate three days per earth-spinning year to your ever-watchful televised eye.

Regurgitate rejected nourishment, memorize the mantra, kneel down and chant, recite to the sky; demand and ye shall be supplied. Ashes emerge from the ground when coffins resurface in the center of town. No skeletons in these closets, nor under these vestments; just the relics of dead saints, hair and blood woven into the noose that frames a heretic.

No chance for salvation through dissent. What is that but to preserve a dusty old hag? Might as well place unrisen bread in the mouth of a fag. Biggest Brother forgives, but His lemmings do not; and no one forgets except a dead elephant.

One foot in the grave, one eye on the nave, as it goes for the vast majority of electronic Neanderthals. Predestined hierarchies of pyre and ashes, mascara and lashes, pleasantly conceal the false bottoms of anatomical pretense to reduce glare and make uniform. Hail martyr, full of face, cheeks flushed with prevailing disaster. Lips lined with iodine, sticks of wax

top puckered ingestors, dirt to conceal mortal nature, sinful sutures.

You can drown in holy water while clinging to a straw; but unless you add some mustard seed to your self-cured beef, your carcass will be bloody dust, a Fibonacci delinquent.



A Lesson in Teapots

Wheel Thrown Altered Ceramics

Haley Smith



Seahorse

Pen and Ink

Victoria Padilla



Lightened

Photography

Angelo Gallo



Abel's Forest
Silkscreen
Neil Pascarella



Love, Aerin

Acrylic

Aerin Zavory



Salvation

Wood, Rope, and Tile

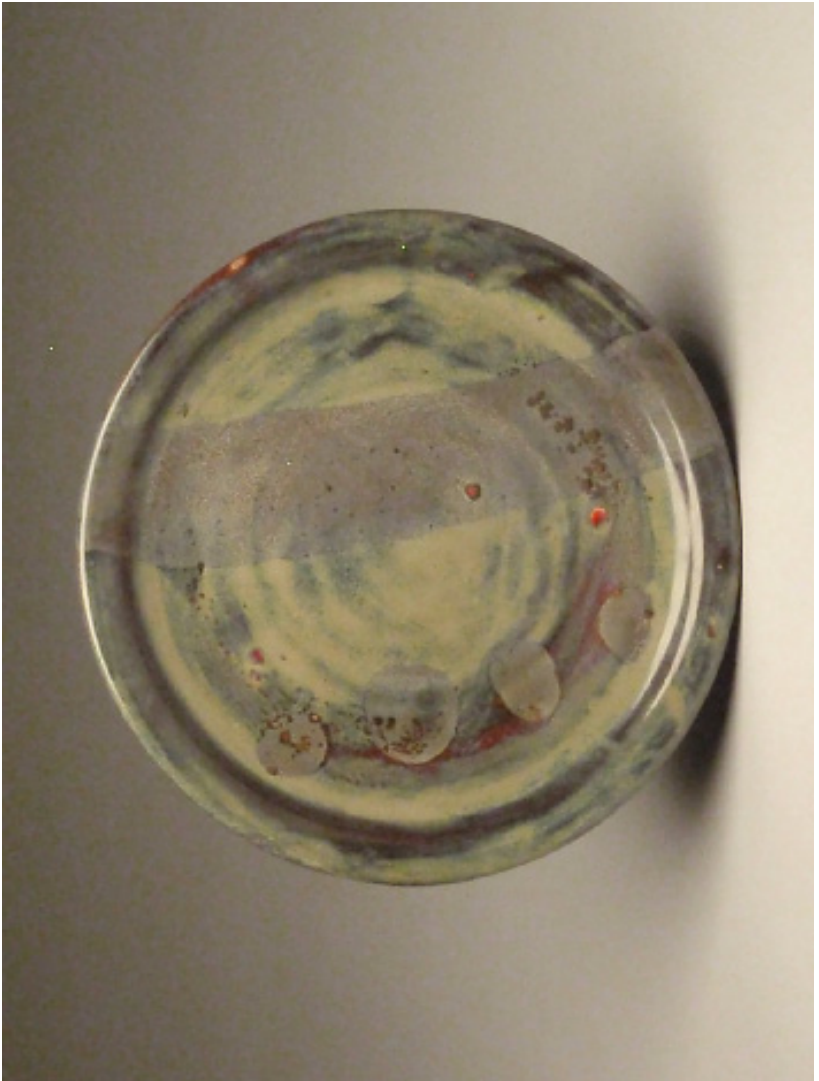
Haley Smith



Velvet Octopus

Watercolor

Victoria Padilla



Untitled
Ceramics
Ali Griffin



Untitled
Photography
Becky Schaffrick



Do What You're Told

Steel

Sarah Tortora



Woolgathering
Photography
Lisa Turso



Untitled

Ceramics

Mariana Baquero



Reclamation
Photography
Bill Geleneau

First Place,
Folio Art
Contest



Untitled
Ceramics
Katie Hudnall



Security Blanket
Caution Tape and Cotton Batting
Sarah Tortora

Honorable
Mention,
Folio Art
Contest



Untitled

Ceramics

Mariana Baquero

In your shirt

Madelyn Downer

my hands perform this disappearing act:
my fingers are swallowed up whole
by soft cotton sleeves.
It reminds me of the friction
of your skin and my skin and your sheets.

The collar latches onto my earrings
every time I turn, thinking I've heard
strains of your voice in the other room.
You're not there. I am face to face
with empty space; the echo of this house mocks me.

I mourned your scent for days when I realized
the fabric began to smell more and more
like me—like pumpkin pie and lavender
and Tide—and I started to forget
your cracked leaves and wet grass musk.

The first time a button leapt from the front,
I washed your shirt in hot salty water and wrung it
through greedy knuckles, trying to hold on
to what I had left of you. I thought if I waited
any longer, every fiber would have wasted
in my presence.

Maria's Bolero

Luisa Caycedo-Kimura

At twenty, the virgin Maria
del Carmen, flashes her eyes
of palm trees, mouth of oceans,
hips of waves. With suntanned bongos
draped in her salted breeze
from Cuban sugarcanes,
she sculpts indelible footprints
in the Caribbean sand.
Her playful teeth nibble
her new husband's lips,
mouthing words
into mambo adventures.

With Ernesto, they bathed
their tomorrows in custards of passion,
gift wrapped in contentment,
as they ignored the scent
of nascent hurricanes,
of love-tied sorrows, trials,
and death, they ignored whispers
from lips long dead.

Fifty years later, Maria sings a requiem
to concrete and glass. Her face
hardly lets her move. Her husband
lies still in a wooden box.
The infestation of uncertainty

gnaws at the balconies of her bed.
She once said adios to abuelas,
wrapped fate in the thickness
of a tropical storm, and fled
with Ernesto to the cold breaths of clouds
shadowing another land.

Life, wealth, and politics
are fleeting anchors in borrowed sand.
And like montunos and cha-chas
that fade in loaned cultures,
Maria laid Ernesto,
and their last conga dreams,
in the foreign darkness
of a northern grave,
with a kiss and an ordinary rose.

An Impossible Engagement

Shelby N. Williams

“You can’t sit in the car the whole time. It’s freezing and they’re your parents.”

“So? They love you just as much as they love me. They probably love you more.” Nicole folded her arms. The bitter Seattle wind crept through the cracks of the car and found its way underneath her clothes to dance with her porcelain skin.

“Oh come on. Your parents adore you. Why else would your mother call you incessantly until you agree to go see her?” Alex questioned, adjusting the collar of her houndstooth coat.

“To irritate me?” Nicole replied, sending mild frustration in Alex’s direction. “You know how she is.”

“I do. But you have to admit, she’s entertaining to watch.” Alex smirked slightly, causing Nicole’s pink jaw to unclench. “Uh-huh. So come on, let’s just do what we came here to do, then we can leave.” She reached a slender, tawny hand over to remove a spec from the chestnut bangs peeking out from underneath Nicole’s wool cap. Nicole sighed.

“Ok. But first sign of batshit and I’m out the door!”

“So girls, what have you been up to since we last saw you? Staying out of trouble I hope?”

Nicole’s mother, Irene, was perched on the edge of the beige sofa, dressed in a lavender pencil skirt and matching sweater. Grinning, she daintily poured ginger tea from a flowered china teapot into a flowered china cup. Glancing quickly at Alexandra, Nicole spoke.

“Well, now that you mention it, we’ve been planning something really big.”

Irene looked toward her husband, Jake, a tall and scruffy man who was sitting next to her in an oversized armchair, clutching a half drained bottle of beer. “Oh? And what might that be?”

Alexandra smiled and patted Nicole on the back. “Go ahead. Tell ’em!”

Nicole gave a forced grin. “Well, Mom, Dad...we’re getting married!”

Irene looked at Jake and smiled as he smiled back. “Oh my Goodness! You’re getting married? I can’t believe it! I’m so excited! Jake, they’re getting married! They’re getting married!”

“Glad to see you’re so happy Mom.” Nicole proclaimed, almost in shock. Irene chimed on.

“And why wouldn’t I be? My girls are getting married. So what are their names?”

“Names?” Alexandra asked, furrowing her brow.

“Of the lucky bachelors!” Irene exclaimed. “And shame on you two for not bringing them around here! How can you marry boys I’ve never even met? Nicky, you’ve brought Lexy to every holiday and family event since you two met in college. Surely, one of you would have thought to bring the men in your lives to meet us?”

Nicole gave another forced smile. “Yeah, you’re right, Mom. Our bad.”

“Certainly. I expect to be meeting them as soon as possible. So what are their names?”

Nicole rolled her blue eyes as she searched for something to say. As usual her mother was being her mother— only seeing things the way she wanted to see them. For Nicole, this response was nothing new, and dealing with her mother’s blatant denial was not on her list of things to do. Resolving to move on, she was elbowed to continue speaking by Alex, who smiled and put her hand on the small of Nicole’s back. It was then that Nicole finally decided to relax and take in the ridiculousness of the situation.

“Well, Mom, my fiancée’s name is... Alex.”

Alexandra grinned at this statement. “And my fiancée’s name is, uh, Nick.”

Irene smiled happily. “Alex and Nick! How adorable! Jake, they’re both marrying people with the same nicknames as the other! They might as well be marrying each other!”

Jake smiled at his wife, then looked away from her, eyes wide. Irene spoke again.

“So tell me, Lexy, have you decided on a location?”

Alexandra looked to Nicky quickly then spoke. “Yes. We’re definitely gonna do it in Whistler.”

Irene grew even more excited. “Canada. How different! That sounds lovely!” She turned to Nicole, casually sipping her tea. “What about you, honey?”

“I was thinking Whistler as well.”

“Well, Whistler’s becoming pretty popular, isn’t it? Have you set a date?” Irene said.

“Uh-huh. If everything goes well, we’re hoping for December 15th. The day we met. In line at the bookstore,” Alexandra said fondly in remembrance.

Irene cooed. “Oh how cute! Meeting at the bookstore. Didn’t you meet Alex at the bookstore, dear? Wouldn’t that be a coincidence?”

Nicole forced another smile. “Yeah. Coincidence.”

“Oh, but isn’t December 15th kind of soon, Lexy?”

Irene questioned.

“Sort of, but we’re just planning on a having a small, intimate kind of ceremony. It shouldn’t be too difficult.”

Irene turned to Nicole. “And what about you, Sweetie? Have you set a date?”

Nicole responded impatiently. “December 15th.”

Irene gave a puzzled look. “Oh. Well, that’s the same day, isn’t it, dear?”

“Yes, mother. It is.”

Irene set down her tea. “Well if the two of you are planning for the same time, then either you’ll miss each other’s weddings –”

“No, Mom. We’ll both be attending.”

“Oh, of course. Neither of you would ever do that. The two of you have been joined at the hip for years.”

Alexandra chimed in. “Yep. Happily together for almost five years.”

Irene spoke again. “So, if you’ll both be present at the ceremonies, then that can only mean—”

Nicole and Alexandra looked expectantly at Irene, hopeful that what they were telling her had finally registered. Irene was silent for a moment, then her face lit up and she stood excitedly.

“A double wedding! Oh my goodness! A double wedding! How exciting!”

Nicole rose abruptly. “Ok, time to go.”

Nicole knew her mother loved her dearly, but there was no getting around the fact that when it came to some things, her mother was just impossible. Nicole looked to Alexandra, motioning for her to come. Giggling, Alex obliged.

“Yeah. We should get going. We’ll see you guys tomorrow.”

They exchanged kisses with Irene, who continued to rant on about the fantasy double wedding, and Jake walked them to the door. He smiled and kissed them both as they motioned toward the door.

“Congratulations, girls. I’m so happy for the both of you. And don’t worry – I’ll explain it to your mother again.”

1 Cup of Sugar, 1/2 Cup of Nonsense

Rachel Amarante

Creative Non-Fiction

I believe in snickerdoodles. I believe in chocolate, chocolate chip scones. I believe in the roar of the electric mixer and the beep of the timer. It is not just a cookie. Really, cookies are all that make sense anymore. It is the look of cookie dough on my fingertips before I taste it. It is the feeling of making the best M&M chocolate-chip cookies ever or the worst ganache frosting.

It is quite a sight: me, in the kitchen with the radio blasting and flour in my hair and everywhere else flour is not supposed to be, like on the toaster or in the cracks on the floor. My dog is looking at me like I lost my mind. Maybe I did lose my mind sometime between a hard-as-a-rock vanilla cake and forgetting the butter in the chocolate crinkles. But that is okay because, for the first time, I will not let a few mishaps tarnish a good thing. That time between the cake I couldn't get a knife through and the crinkles, I realized that I may actually be good at something. Not only that, but I realized everything was all right even if I was really losing my mind and not from any cake, but from a nagging voice in my head. That very voice was telling me I could not touch any of the spoons in the drawer to stir in the butter.

I told my father when I was eight years old that I needed to touch things, and I could not stop. I touched the table to show him, like he did not understand what it meant to touch things, and in some sense, he did not. I was eight years old, and at night, I would stay up for hours turning the lights on and off,

washing my hands, opening and closing my door, and touching the stuffed animals on my bed over and over again because I had an overwhelming fear that told me I had to. My father was really thinking about what to say.

“Well,” he said, “just don’t do it.”

Why did I not think of that? Just don’t do it, don’t touch it, don’t think about it. Well, that night is imprinted in my mind because even at eight years old, I knew that I could not do that. I just did not know why. It would be midnight, and I could not stop tapping my doodle bear.

I remember telling my mother when I was sixteen that I thought I had OCD. She came up with plenty of other reasons for what I was feeling: I was stressed; it was a weird family thing; it was anything other than that. Well, I told her, it may not be OCD or any anxiety whatsoever and if it is not, then, my goodness, there is something wrong with me. At least she took it better than my friend who had a very difficult time holding back her laughter. I resented her for that for a long time, until I realized just how strange it sounds even to myself. I thought if I told people that it would make me feel better, but that was not what I needed. I needed to feel something other than my anxiety; I needed to feel normal.

I am obsessive compulsive, and I believe in the power of baking a cake. For that time that I am baking anything, a birthday cake or an apple pie, I feel the control over myself that sometimes escapes me. Then of course there are times when I am left wondering, why am I tapping the side of the bowl repeatedly, or why am I afraid to add in the sugar? That is because my mind is telling me I cannot open the oven door until I walk in and out of the kitchen twice, or I have to turn the mixer

on and off even after I am done using it. Even with all that, I love every minute when baking consumes me and my obsessive thoughts do not.

It does not make sense, but really what does make sense anymore except cookies, of course? There are times when I feel crazy: especially, when all I can think about is the grease on the keyboard that I am typing at, or the fact that I cannot use any pen or pencil in my house for reasons even I know are quite ridiculous. What do you do when your mind is overflowing with thoughts you cannot control? Even when you find yourself torn between logic and the obsessive compulsions in your head, you are content in the kitchen with a bowl of batter that soon will be baked into something wonderful. I know it sounds crazy, but when I am in the kitchen, and there is chocolate splattered on the wall, I may get anxious, and I may get compulsive thoughts in my head, but it does not take over my life like in any other moment.

Forget baking and forget anxiety; I believe in the feeling it brings me. That feeling that for that moment everything is as it should be even if the chocolate mousse recipe has too many steps to make sense of and the crepes are becoming pancakes. I believe that everything is all right. I believe in the laughter that comes with the failure of shortbread cookies. I believe in the explosion of flour across my face and the kitchen. I believe in doing what makes you happy. I believe that everyone is crazy, and everyone needs a little help sometimes, even if that help is from a baking sheet. I need the focus baking brings me. In the utter confusion of the world, I find serenity in baking a pie. For me, rarely anything I do makes sense, but cake, cake definitely makes sense to me, and cookies, of course, make

complete sense.

I made pumpkin cupcakes for the fall, and my friend told me I was fantastic. Not just the cupcakes, but I was fantastic. Fantastic at life? Probably not. Fantastic at baking? Maybe someday. It may have been the positive reinforcement, or maybe it was that first warm bite into a chocolate brownie when I realized my OCD may make me do a lot of crazy things, but this crazy girl and her crazy mind baked a damn good brownie. And whether I was good at it or not did not matter. I may not be Paula Deen or Julia Child, but I love baking even if this newfound love would make me gain twenty pounds (here's hoping for that not to be the case); I decided to roll with it.

Sometimes I lose myself while trying to sort through all the things my mind tells me I can and cannot do, and sometimes I feel like screaming while trying to satisfy my never satisfied mind. Life just throws so much at every single person all at once, and we all deal with it the best we can. For me, I crack a few eggs and get creative with desserts. Rainbow cupcakes anyone? As cliché as it sounds, I open the oven and put every last worry in there to bake into something good, just like raw cookie dough. There are times when we all want to find a rock to hide under for the rest of our lives, or maybe that's just me. But I don't do that. Instead, I bake cupcakes to remember that it really is not all that bad. I bake scones to remember that I am not going crazy. I bake snickerdoodles, not only because they are delicious cookies, but because they make me happy, and I will continue to do so for as long as the rest of the world and my OCD are something that I have no control over. Let's be honest – both the world and OCD make no sense like snickerdoodles do anyways.

Children

Stefan Christensen

“Is he okay?” the gawker asks.

“He’s fine,” I say.

“That’s a big bump on his head.”

“He’s fine.” Hannah sides with me.

“Is that blood?”

“He’s okay.” We attempt to pass the gawker.

“I don’t know. That doesn’t look good.”

I glance over the head wound. It’s to the left side of his forehead. His eyes are puffy doughnuts.

“Hey Larry, how you doing, buddy?”

He pauses and hunts for focus. I see the recollection in him.

“Hey there,” he says.

“You’re the Law Man, right? Larry Lawless! No rules!”

I shout at him like a seven year old shouts at Fido.

“Ye-ah.”

“See I told you, man, he’s fine,” and I push through the gawker and on down Madison Avenue. He shouts something about a concussion, but we continue.

A few hundred feet ahead of Larry, Hannah, and me, Dave and Dimitri lay waste to city, state, and, occasionally, privately owned property. Dimitri is obliterated; Dave has “Drug Free” tattooed down his left leg, which shows beyond the end of his plaid short shorts.

I knew it was too soon. Her and me. On that trip, right then, right after all the decisions, right after the anguish only two days past.

I balance Larry each time he tips toward me. He's very difficult to deal with but he makes it easier for me and Hannah to separate.

"I know it's hard, but I thought this would help?"

"I mean, it's fun," Hannah says with an inflection that clearly states that it would be fun. If only it were six months earlier, or nine months later, maybe.

"Dave and Dimitri and Larry."

"I know."

"We love them."

"You love them. You love them, Chris."

"What, you don't like them anymore?"

"No, it's not that I don't like them. It's that..."

"Whatever happens is going to be insane. So much fun," I say with a smile, hypothesizing the scenarios the night could bring.

"Yeah, well maybe now isn't the time for insanity."

"I just thought it would get your mind off everything."

"It's not easy when you're still in pain," she says, dismissing all notions of an argument.

"Well, it's just..."

"Just what?"

"Are you okay?"

"What do you think?"

"I'm sorry." I say. Hollow.

"Yeah, I'm sure you are." She says as her eyes meet the pavement. Conversation ceases and Larry staggers next to us.

We are gaining on Dave and Dimitri, who seem to have stopped. As we approach, I see that Dimitri is kicking a massive plate glass window with his steel-toed boot. The window

is at the ground level of what seems to be a state owned building.

“I can’t believe this won’t break,” he says plainly.

“It’s weird,” Dave contemplates, as he ties his half head of dreadlocks in a ponytail of sorts. The back of his cranium has recently been shaved to make room for a spider crawling down its web to eat a fly. His good eye watches Dimitri with concerned displeasure; his bad eye is completely white and serves no purpose. He resembles a carnival freak.

“Guys, aren’t all the bars right up there?” I say, concerned. As much as I may support the destruction of state property, it certainly seems a bad idea this close to Albany’s nightlife strip.

That city. Its rot. Decay. A dead metropolis. A dying metropolis, rather. Some people still live there. It’s blurry. That line between living and almost alive.

I manage to move Dave and Dimitri beyond their target and onto another. We come upon Lark Street and we’ve reached the bars, the women, the anger, Bomber’s Burritos, the naked aggression of it all. Immediately we delve in, into Dr. John’s Pub, it doesn’t matter which really.

Inside the bar, Dave and Dimitri are lost immediately. Hannah and I position Larry on a stool and we sit on either side of him, so he can be caught no matter which way he falls.

The bartender serves us, giving a funny glance toward Larry, but he is too preoccupied by the allure of tips to question.

“Where do you think D’n’D went?” I look at Hannah and wonder why she bothers to speak about anything else. I

can sense her anger, but I'm not quite sure what to do about it. I want to make things better but I don't even want to speak the word.

I examine the glass in front of me. Bourbon quenches in a particular way. Not thirst, certainly. But something, no doubt. It delights by incineration and erodes the confines of whatever it is that needs to be diminished. There is an assurance that one receives in its company, an affection that one receives from only it, and none of its cousins on the shelf. The deep, burnt amber of mediocre whiskey glistens and it is hard not to be distracted by it.

"I don't know where they went," I finally mutter.

"They'll find us, I guess."

"How do you feel?"

"Cramps still."

"What can I do?"

"Nothing," she says and tips Larry back to a semi-upright position. She examines his face and looks caringly into his pupils. He is still only a step above unconscious. It is his own fault; he should have known Dimitri was too drunk to support his weight. His head hit the asphalt with a vile crack.

"This was bad timing, huh?"

"Is there such a thing as good timing for an..." she can't say the word.

"I was talking about coming up here."

"Well, this trip was just a bad idea."

"I thought it would be helpful," I say.

"Well, it isn't."

"Ok, sorry." I pause to think. "It just wasn't the right time."

“I know,” she says.

“I mean, look around us. Look at what we do. Who we know. It wouldn’t be right.”

“Probably won’t ever be.”

“Well, don’t say that.”

“You always said you didn’t want any.”

“I know,” I sigh self-consciously. “That doesn’t mean that I made the decision.”

“I guess not.”

I knew we weren’t going to survive it. Not together anyway.

“Did you talk to your mom?”

“Yeah.”

“What did she think?”

“We just spoke about my dad,” Hannah confesses with a grimace.

The bartender suddenly cuts between us.

“That guy has got to go!”

“He hasn’t had any drinks tonight,” I say, realizing Larry has become slumped over like a garbage bag full of ice cream. I attempt to straighten him.

“Get him out of...” the bartender stops as I prop Larry up and he sees his face. “Jesus, take him to a hospital.”

“He’s fine.”

“Well, get him out of here, anyway.”

“He’s not bothering anyone.”

“He can’t be in here like that!”

“C’mon, he hasn’t...”

“I don’t give a damn if he has or hasn’t drank!”

“Don’t be a prick.” As the words flop out of my mouth, a commotion starts up behind me. Through the shuffle I see who I think is Dimitri. He is being carried out the door, screaming and cursing the whole way. I force back the remainder of my drink and smack the glass on the bar. Chunks of ice fly up and then dance across the over-finished surface.

“Fucking asshole,” I snarl at the bartender and grab Hannah and Larry at either side of me. Getting out the door is a struggle. By the time we’ve made it through the bystanders, it’s about settled. I leave Hannah and Larry and run towards the conflict. I arrive in time to see a few kicks to Dimitri’s stomach, and Dave catch a fist to the jaw. I push angry frat boys off my friends, wanting to fight them, but their job is done and they’re headed back towards the bar.

“Watch your fuckin’ mouth, asshole,” one of the assailants says as they walk away.

D’n’D lie momentarily fetal, then slowly gain their wits and rise to sitting positions. It seems that the onlookers don’t want to help, I’m guessing because of D’n’D’s unkempt exteriors. Dave licks blood from off his skinned knee and Dimitri wipes some off his lip.

“Sure sucks when you lose,” Dimitri states.

“Oh yeah,” Dave agrees. They exude a sort of nonchalance that only men who have been on both the giving and receiving end of numerous punches and kicks can have. The Lark Street audience seems to be in more pain than either of them.

Hannah breaks through the crowd with Larry trailing. She holds his hand limply but yanks him with authority now and again.

“Oh god! You guys are such... Are you ok?”

“Yup, fine.”

“Are you sure?” She starts brushing Dave’s face off. He picks a piece of gravel out of palm.

“Yeah, we’re okay.”

“What the hell happened?”

“I don’t know really,” Dimitri starts and we all stare in disbelief. “Well, I guess I saw this girl who I thought would like scumbags. Trashy slut, y’know? I said something about filming us fucking and...”

“I thought you made gay porn?” Hannah interrupts.

“I produce gay-thug porn, but that’s just my job. I have hobbies also. At any rate, she had a boyfriend, and he had some boyfriends, too, I guess. And, very sweetly, Dave, here, tried to rescue me, but he ended up just as bad off.”

“What do you make of all this, Larry?” Dave cuts in as he grabs our space captain.

Larry stares at him blankly.

“My thoughts precisely,” Dave says and we all laugh healthily. Hannah pauses to check Larry’s pupils again while the rest of us continue our jokes.

We were just misfit kids. No real idea what was going on. Not cut out for anything. Not cut out for responsibility.

We keep walking. The bars are nothing tonight. Every one of them is a miss. Every one of them is full of problems. We end up walking into a residential neighborhood. Dave and Dimitri are still leading, still causing ruckus, singing and laughing, occasionally kicking over a garbage can.

The clinic was sterile and the chairs were cold. I wanted to go in with her but the doctor thought it was best I stay in the

waiting room. The air conditioning was too much. I remember the goose pimples on Hannah's legs as she walked away with the doctor.

Hannah walks next to me without confidence. Our talks continue.

"You just don't get it," she says.

"I just..."

"Don't get a what?" Larry says. He's returning to consciousness a bit. He still needs some more time.

"I just don't know that I would ever want that life," I say.

"I know."

"Someone hating me as much as I hated my parents."

"You've said that before."

"I've said it a hundred times."

"It's just all empty."

"There's still goodness."

"There's nothing," she states plainly.

"Don't say that. We can put this behind us."

"Sure."

When?

"Behind and in front us of..." Larry trails off, and I push him from falling into me. Hannah grabs him by the arm and holds him closer to her, keeping him well balanced.

"What are we going to do right..."

"Guys come here," Dave yells from up ahead. He and Dimitri are standing outside of a house listening. "Do you hear that?"

"Yeah."

“It’s a party.”

“I’m tired,” Hannah says, holding her stomach and looking to me for assurance.

“No, let’s go in.”

“Really?”

“It’ll be fun.”

“I don’t know.”

“Come on.” Dave and Dimitri start walking up the staircase to the house. “It’s going to be fun. I promise.”

Dimitri shoves open the door, and the scene is absurd. A drunken couple is passed out at one end of a couch; music blares from the stereo; two twenty-somethings are smoking weed from a soda can; a few others are drinking beers and chatting. This is no party, it’s the leftovers, the kids who can stay up all night talking about grand ideas while they collect unemployment checks. If they were weirdos, they might be armchair revolutionaries. Instead, they’re like armchair bureaucrats, or something.

“Uhh, what’s up guys?” a particularly moronic looking one, holding the soda can, dribbles off.

“We’re here to fucking party!” Dave says.

“The party’s over.”

“It’s cool, man, we’ll have fun.”

“What?”

“Let’s hang out, it’ll be fun.”

“Uhhh, ok,” he says with some reservations. “I’m Dave.”

“Me too. That’s easy.”

“Me, three,” Dimitri says.

“I’m actually Dave, also,” I say. Hannah jabs me. She’s not smiling.

“You guys are all named Dave?”

“Sure are,” Dimitri says as he sits on the couch next to the dozing couple.

Time drags on. Dave and Dimitri continue to make fun of these kids, and the kids continue to have no idea. I’m tired at this point and I’m not sure how much more of this I can take. It was way too much. Why did I think that coming to see these crazy bastards at this time was a good idea? Larry is coming back around and if he joins in with Dave and Dimitri, we may never see the end of it. Hannah and I sneak to a corner.

“I just don’t know...” she starts.

“I’m sorry we came up here.”

“Yeah. Ok.”

“What then?” I pry.

“I don’t know. Why don’t you make a decision?”

“Sorry.”

“Don’t be sorry.”

“Sorry we came up here. I know it’s hard to be around these guys. It was a bad idea...”

“It’s hard to be around you.”

“What?”

She was unbearably silent. It tortured; those waning seconds.

“I’m helping.”

“You think you’re helping?”

“I’m sorry.”

“Shut up with your sorrrys. I’m tired of sorry, and how

are you, and how are you feeling, and is everything okay. I'm sick of it!"

"Sorry." Stupid.

Her eyes roll and keep rolling. "I'm tired of all of this."

"So, what then?"

"So, what then, what? What does that mean?"

Larry bursts into our corner. He seems alert and sound of mind. His head injury seems to have worked itself out. Just as I thought it would.

"It's time to go." He's frantic.

"What?" Hannah questions.

"It's time to go."

"Why?"

"Now!"

"No, we're talking here," I say.

"Dave and Dimitri ordered three hundred dollars of pay per view on these dudes' TV. They're trying to talk their way out of it now."

"What!"

"It's mostly porn."

"Of course it is," I say. I can't help but laugh.

Hannah turns to me with a sneer that I know is saying more than "stop laughing." It said, you don't get it. It said, I'm tired of you. It said, I'm tired of this. It said, you're a murderer.

"I'm going," she says.

"We're coming..." but before I can finish the sentence she is out the door. She's gone and I've got to collect my children before I can chase after her.

Neurosis

Angelo Gallo

First Place, Folio Poetry Contest

“After setting her room on fire, Lucia Joyce, daughter of acclaimed writer James Joyce, was sent to Zürich, Switzerland to be psychoanalyzed by Carl Jung in 1934. ‘To think that such a big, fat materialistic Swiss man should try to get hold of my soul,’ she said upon arrival.” -The New York Times

I carry a cup of scalding
coffee everywhere I go
expecting the guy who
stole my bike
when I was twelve
to pass at high speeds
in the opposite direction
on a damp, empty street;
the sudden blackness
is all just for him.

*

There are those other girls
I just can't stand to look at
with brighter hair and
smiles that loom for days,
as if they were handmade,
serving only to carve
a makeshift cerulean sky.

*

I am barraged by a constant
begging to pay homage
to my father's whim.
He paints me purely
in the guise of the artist
in perpetual motion;
I danced in his wake.

*

Keep cigarettes with your coffee,
they tell me,
and never make the change to tea.
The clash of stale herbs superheated,
they tell me,
will drain you otherwise and keep you
perilously on the edge of dulled, familiar
razors you've given sweet pet names to.
They tell me
to embroider my family's name on the backs
of them, but it's everywhere already:
bordering the newspapers,
or weighing down, with thick binding,
students' hands in a hazy Dublin café.
They tell me
it's a beautiful name—difficult to escape
the S of Joyce, Joyce, Joyccccceeee.

*

I sit by the Seine, on a bench
made not too far from here,
waiting until I mold into those
unnatural angles and begin to
stare at the ground,
convulsing, praying
for an open scene;
and I ask you, Doctor Jung,
when will it bring my eyes
any closer to the horizon?

Folio and Alan Michael Parker: A Dialogue

Alan Michael Parker is the author of two novels and five collections of poetry, most recently *Elephants & Butterflies*. Recipient of a Pushcart Prize, the Fineline Prize from the *Mid-American Review*, and the Lucille Medwick Memorial Award from the Poetry Society of America, Parker's work has appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Paris Review*, and *The Yale Review* among many others. He is editor of *The Imaginary Poets* and director of creative writing at Davidson College in Davidson, North Carolina.

Folio: What prompted you to start writing?

AMP: I can only remember a childhood filled with writing, including the usual story of childhood novels (an invisible mouse, the Crucifixion) and frolicsome imitations of A.A. Milne. Choosing to be a writer happened later, in my teens, and in part as a way to accommodate my life as a reader of books.

Folio: Which do you consider yourself first, a poet or a fiction writer?

AMP: Maybe a poet. Or a fiction writer. Do I have to choose? My training is in poetry—undergraduate workshops and my M.F.A.—but having taught fiction writing for years, and written early, unpublished novels that might be politely called “practice,” and now being committed to both genres, I no longer know how to answer that question. Mostly, I now think in books, by which I mean that my work fairly early in its writing begins to take shape, whether I’m writing discrete lyrics or longer works of prose.

Folio: How have your tastes in literature changed? How has your writing style changed with time? Do you view the two as correlated?

AMP: I am sure that my taste has developed, but I’m not sure into what. Many of my favorite works of literature have been favorites more than once in my life, as I have the privilege of teaching what I love. Nevertheless, newfound affections for

Gordimer and Lethem have informed my novels, as have abiding obsessions with Kafka and Calvino. In poetry, I return to Bishop and Frost, Levis and Matthews, but also to very different voices: Erika Meitner, Kevin Young, Kevin Prufer, Jennifer Knox.. If there's anything self-consciously different about my current work, it's that I'm trying to choose risk: I have come to understand the impossibility (for me) of "safe art."

Folio: How does being a professor mesh with being a writer?

AMP: Well, what a treat! My employer pays me to talk about books. Sure, marking papers has seasonal demands, and the politics of the academy magnify the trivial, but I love my job. Not being a particularly able 9-to-5-ist, teaching helps my writing life directly.

Folio: How do you think the proliferation of MFA programs and MFA-trained writers has affected the literary world?

AMP: Writers are better educated in other people's ideas sooner. Workshop-based methodologies are widely employed as ways of knowing. Sometimes, a workshop democratizes art to a fault; usually, one hopes, a workshop empowers.

Folio: How many times have you been turned down for publication?

AMP: Oh, my word! I've been turned down hundreds of times—that is, if one considers each rejection of each poem or

story, for example. I've had poems rejected, too, that have gone on to win prizes elsewhere; it's such a mercurial and unpredictable business. My first collection of poems took seven years to find a publisher; my first novel took ten years, inspiration to publication. Commerce and literature and editorial taste and politics make for an ever-shifting Venn diagram.

Folio: What, do you think, is literature's greatest power or attribute? What role can it play in our day-to-day lives?

AMP: Well, literature trains us to live awake—at least, it helps me try to live so. Plus, the books I read tend to be wiser than I am, which works for me didactically (although by “wiser” I don't mean necessarily rife with spiritual knowledge or redemptive).

Folio: How much of your own writing is derived from personal experience and how much is pure imagination?

AMP: Is there a difference between personal experience and pure imagination? Some of the writers I most admire—Salman Rushdie, for example—would argue “no.” I certainly make up a lot of what happens to my characters, but feel too that the “real” factors into the work.

Folio: Young writers are often told to write what they know. Unfortunately, undergraduates don't usually “know” very much. In short, should we start telling aspiring writers to imagine more?

AMP: I tell my students to write what you know and what you can imagine successfully. Of course, that adverb's a killer.

Folio: How did Columbia University School of the Arts make you a better writer? Would you advise undergraduate writers continue in MFA programs?

AMP: I loved being in an M.F.A. program! What a great experience—Poetry school! Poems all the time!—and I cherish the friends and readers and writers I met in grad school. But it's a humbling business, this writing life; the poems and stories are merciless, already, and so one wants a supportive community to help. Yes, I would suggest that young writers go to grad school—if they want, and if the work's willing—but I also suggest waiting a few years after undergrad, if only to be a more adept and deeper reader first.

Folio: How did your time at the MacDowell colony uniquely benefit your writing? How much of an impact did living with artists working in other mediums have on your writing?

AMP: I go often to artists colonies, and I love the cross-disciplinary affinities cultivated there. If nothing else, a month with other artists, defined by twelve-hour days in my studio (of course, the work's paramount) serves as a reminder that what I do has a context; there are like-minded, different people out there, and we make art, and that's a powerful, essential endeavor.

Folio and Brian Johnson: A Dialogue

Known for his prose poetry, Brian Johnson is professor of creative writing at our very own university. In addition to receiving a Connecticut Commission on the Arts Fellowship, Johnson has received two nominations for the Pushcart Prize, a Best New Poets nomination, and an Academy of American Poets Prize. Johnson is editor of *Sentence: A Journal of Prose Poetics*. His most recent work, *Torch Lake & Other Poems*, a finalist for the Poetry Society of America's Norma Farber First Book Award, earned Johnson the 2010 Faculty Scholar Award.

Folio: What prompted you to start writing?

BJ: I was a reader first. As a teenager, I gravitated toward European novels about revolt of one sort or another: *Steppenwolf*, *The Immoralist*, *The Stranger*... And because literary revolt didn't require others, it seemed to me something I could attempt and probably enjoy. I knew I wanted to be a writer at fifteen, but didn't begin writing in earnest until I graduated from college. I began with a meandering, formless novel. Disgusted with the results, I turned to writing ten-to-fifteen word poems, one word per line. I could actually see and understand the shape of these things, and that was a big difference, a pleasing one. I've been writing poetry ever since.

Folio: Did you have any mentors?

BJ: There are two kinds of mentors: stylistic mentors and career mentors. I've had a lot of stylistic mentors, but few career mentors. For one, I tend not to hang out with live poets much. I didn't even know any poets until I went to graduate school, and that was after I'd been writing poetry for seven years. The two people who have been most helpful to me are Peter Johnson (no relation) and Gray Jacobik. Peter gave me my first teaching job (at Providence College) and appointed me associate editor of *The Prose Poem: An International Journal*. Gray has always been the most enthusiastic—that is, sincerely enthusiastic—reader of my poems.

Folio: How often did you write then as opposed to how often you now write?

BJ: As you can probably imagine, it is easier to write when you're single and you strategically limit yourself to part-time jobs that require very little intellectual or emotional investment. So, in my twenties, when I was a waiter, a bookstore clerk, a tennis instructor, a movie theater usher, I wrote every day and then dragged myself to the income-producing work. Now that I'm married and teach full-time and edit a literary journal (*Sentence: A Journal of Prose Poetics*), I write less. But I console myself by saying that I write more efficiently. Like many of Southern's professors, I do a lot of my writing in January and over the summer break.

Folio: If you had to pick one author whose work has most influenced your own, who would it be?

BJ: It's nearly impossible for me to pinpoint influences. I assume that whatever I've loved influences me, whether or not anybody, including myself, can see it. I would also say that most of my influences are nonliterary. I think the best answer to this question of influence would be to give you a partial list of the things I love and the approximate age at which I first encountered them: Voltaire's *Candide* (21), Paul Klee's paintings (25), Zbigniew Herbert's poems (25), Bach's sonatas and partitas (27), Luis Barragan's buildings (33), and Odysseus Elytis' *The Little Mariner* (40).

Folio: How have your tastes in literature changed?

BJ: I have always preferred works that push literature to places that no one thought it should go, or could go. This preference

extends even to pre-twentieth-century novels like *Tristram Shandy* and *Epitaph of a Small Winner* that played with language and narrative style in witty and ingenious ways. I wrote my undergraduate thesis on Joyce's *Ulysses*, which is a huge, difficult, and fascinating book. I agree with the Spanish philosopher Ortega y Gasset, who calls poetry "the higher algebra of metaphors." There are a lot of ways to solve for x , reality, and I admire works of poetry and fiction that attempt to solve for it in ambitious and formally transgressive ways. As for my own writing, I take a different approach with each book, which has undoubtedly expanded my range as a writer even though it has restricted my publishing options. In fact, I'd begun to think I would die bookless. So getting *Torch Lake and Other Poems* into print was a relief; four unpublished works preceded it.

Folio: How does being a professor mesh with being a writer?

BJ: The only thing that really meshes with being a writer is solitude. A professor's life offers more of that than other professions, since I spend a lot of time alone reading and preparing for class. Some of that time is also spent writing and thinking about poems, but not enough. What would be really nice is a year in the woods—or a year in a hotel room—or a year on an island—or... You get the point. That is the fantasy writer's life, which very few writers experience. The real writer's life is about searching for time to write and being sufficiently obsessed in your search that you actually find it.

Folio: How do you think the proliferation of MFA programs and MFA-trained writers has affected the literary world?

BJ: I don't think anyone has done a study gauging the literary effects of MFA programs, which have mushroomed in the last fifteen years. I suspect that they've affected writer quantity in some way. With all those MFA graduates, we probably have more writers, more competent writers, and more unemployed or slightly employed writers than we've ever had in the United States. But whether more MFA programs will produce more great writers is an open question. They're still a fairly recent phenomenon, and most of the world does without them. One thing to bear in mind is that MFA programs are schools. Schools indoctrinate, wittingly or not. They inculcate messages, they develop teachable mantras—"Show, don't tell" is a famous one—and those messages and mantras create literary values that get embedded in a lot of published work. If you agree with the values, you will see MFA programs as a positive development. I have an MFA, and I trust that it did me some good beyond merely establishing my credentials to teach at the college level. Even so, MFA or not, at some point as a writer and independent thinker you need to become unschooled, to shed what you've been taught, to resist it and follow some highly personal inclination. The goal, I think, is to become a school of one. Emily Dickinson, Walt Whitman, Allan Ginsberg, Wallace Stevens, John Ashbery, Susan Howe—they are all schools of one. They're extreme poets, inimitable poets. As long as MFA programs don't prevent such poets from existing, then the programs do no harm.

Folio: When were you first published? Where?

BJ: At 29, after five years of writing poems, I finally had a bite, but the literary journal that accepted my poem folded before the poem could be published (journals tend to have short half-lives). A year later, I had a poem accepted in a journal called Paragraph.

Folio: Where is the line between prose poem and vignette?

BJ: I can't give you a definitive answer. Poems fall flat or fall apart for many reasons. But I don't think prose poems are inherently weaker, more prone to being uninspired, than other forms. There are as many vignettish free verse poems as vignettish prose poems. The uninteresting poems of any type will always outweigh, by a huge margin, the interesting ones. It would be nice if there were some rules for determining literary merit, but I think most editors (not all) tend to judge poems on a case-by-case basis.

Folio: What unique power do you see in the prose poem that more lyrical poems fail to attain?

BJ: I try to be cautious in characterizing poetic forms. The American prose poem favors comic monologues, but two of the greatest prose poets in France, Arthur Rimbaud and René Char, I consider lyric poets. One of the great attributes of the prose poem is its flexibility. It can be witty, tender, domestic, surreal, demonic, and ruminative, sometimes all in the same poem.

The American version does tend to make use of vernacular language, which makes prose poems (at least in theory) more approachable and friendly than traditional verse forms.

Folio: What, do you think, is literature's greatest power or attribute? What role can it play in our day-to-day lives?

BJ: I think literature's effects are varied. They depend on the recipient. I was fairly untethered as a kid. Some called me "spacey," others thought I was stoned most of the time. For me, literature had a grounding effect. What happened in novels was truer, richer, deeper, and more clearly expressed than what often seemed to be happening in my life. I felt more intensely and saw things more clearly while I was reading. It was a spiritual experience; being in a novel was like being in church, but better. Literature helped me to understand what kind of life I wanted and what kind of experiences were worth pursuing. For me, I saw writing as a way out of the middle class. I was convinced that making literature and experiencing books was far more important and far more pleasurable than making money and experiencing money. Once I got out of college, I acted on that belief by writing a lot, and making almost no money, for as long as I could sustain such an existence. I'm no longer convinced that the fundamental contest is art vs. money, but I still think that literature, in general, intensifies our appreciation for beauty and our understanding of suffering, and can transform those who spend a lot of time around it.

Folio: How much of your own writing is derived from personal experience and how much is pure imagination?

BJ: I was just reading a New Yorker article that raises doubts about the reliability of the scientific method. Scientists are discovering that many of their research findings are not replicable, but instead seem to decline in validity over time. In other words, it gets harder and harder to repeat the original experiment in such a way that you get the same results. You could extend this difficulty to all of human experience, and certainly to any poetic method that tries to capture “personal experience.” Many poems seem to be faithful renderings of personal experience, miniature replicas of events in the poet’s life, but in fact poems are no different than any other art. They’re made out of words, as paintings are made out of paint, and music is made out of sounds. Every arrangement of words is an experience in itself, a new experience, regardless of the desire of writer or reader for an exact reproduction of a “real” event.

Folio: Young writers are often told to write what they know. Unfortunately, undergraduates don’t usually “know” very much. In short, should we start telling aspiring writers to imagine more?

BJ: We all know a lot more than we think we know. But much of what we know, sadly, we tend to dismiss as unsuitable and uninteresting for a poem. So we run from it. I’m surprised at how many rhymed, starry-eyed poems about love and lost love I read in my beginning poetry class. Love is the universal

theme that everyone thinks worthy of a poem, but what results is often generic, abstract, and melodramatic. By way of contrast, one of the most imaginative poems I read last semester was about the properties of the number zero. It was written by a math major. She knew about numbers, and she wrote about them, even though numbers might be seen as flat, unpoetic stuff. The paradox is that a poem about zero, or a poem about a wheelbarrow, might be more moving than the poem about the horrible break-up. Young writers should be made fully aware of that paradox.

Thanks:

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All of the students who submitted their work

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Open-mic participants

Everyone who attended Folio readings

All the readers