

The Lighter

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The Lighter Spring 2009

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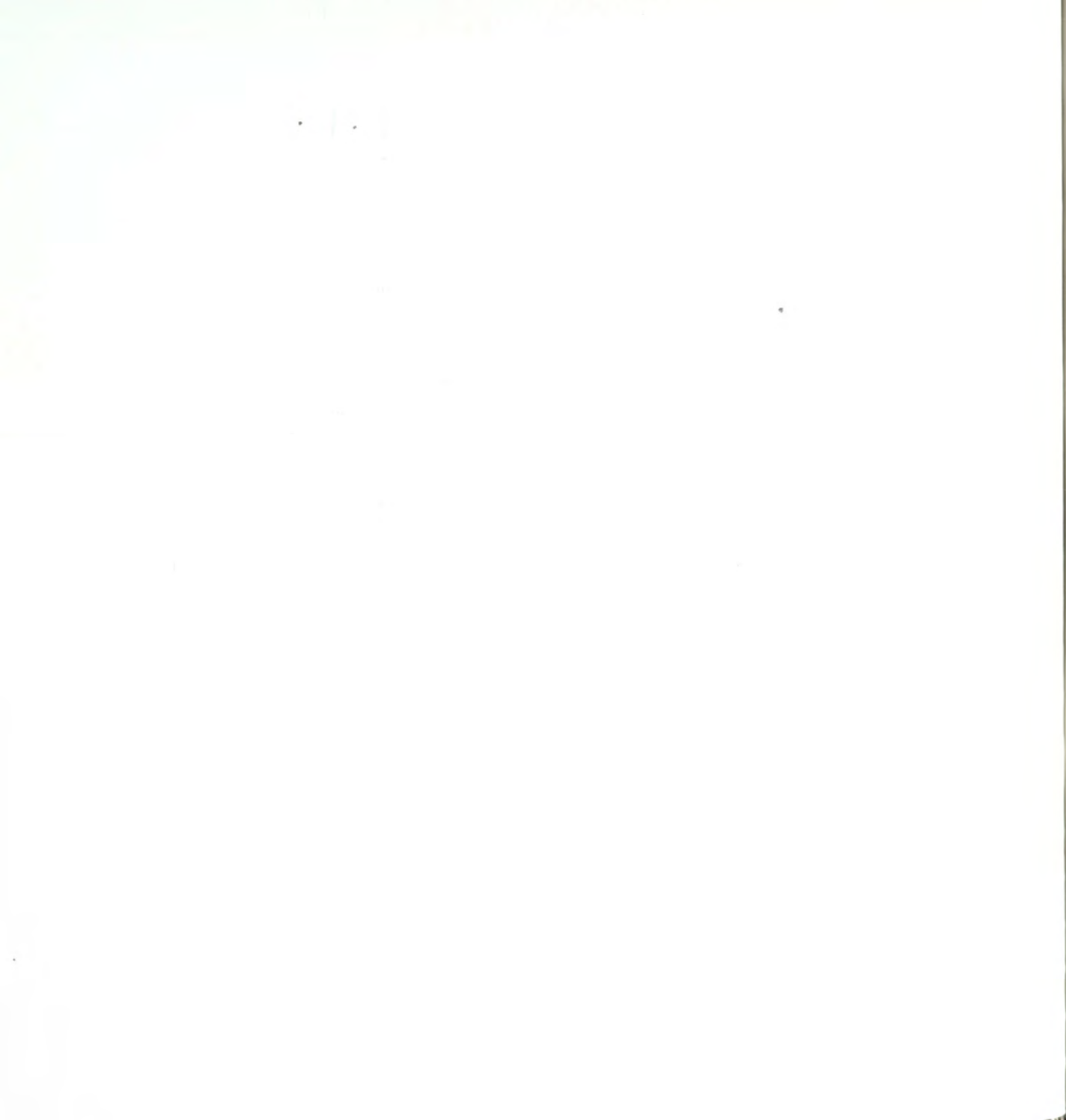
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the
Lighter
spring 2009

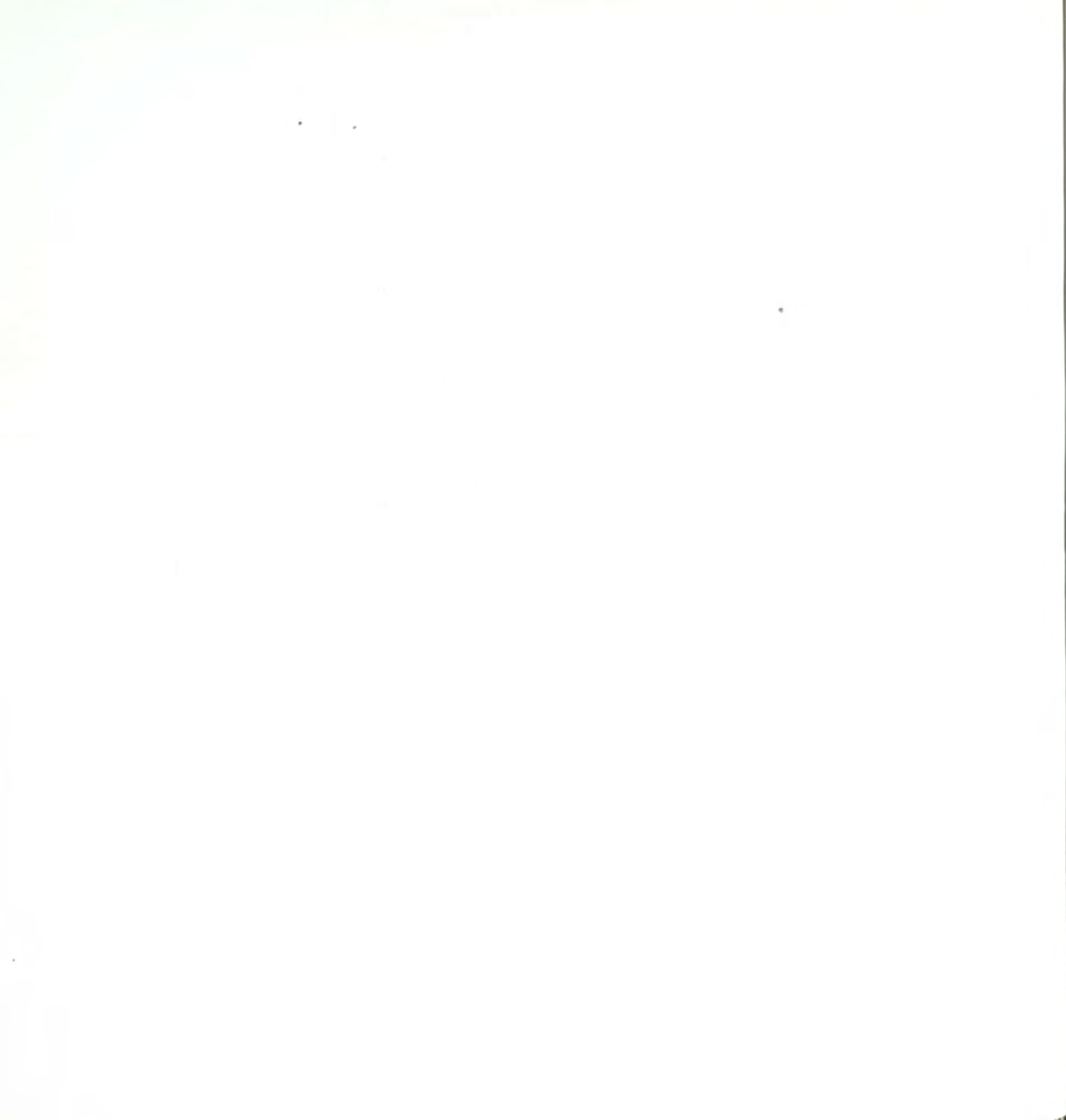


the Lighter

Spring 2009
Volume Fifty-four
Issue Two

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All submissions remain anonymous throughout the selection process. The Lighter welcomes submissions from all undergraduate, graduate and law students of Valparaiso University, regardless of race, gender, religious creed or sexual orientation. The editor assumes responsibility for the contents of this publication. The views expressed in the works do not represent any official stance of Valparaiso University.

Table of Contents

Page Number	Category	Title	Author
6		Interview with René Steinke	Jon Krause
14	poetry	Ghosts	Michaelene Jewett
15	poetry	Come Home	Kaitlyn Whinery
16	poetry	A Haystack Song	John Linstrom
17	poetry	Daedalus, Give Me the Farthest Distance Between Two Points	John Linstom
18	poetry	Shalom Eternal	Ryan Bourgart
19	poetry	haiku arboreus	Robert Thompson
20	poetry	Symmetry	Megan Telligman
21	poetry	Blinds	Megan Telligman
22	poetry	Little Poems about Spain	Ellen Orner
23	poetry	Intrain	Ellen Orner
26	art	Window Illuminated	Dan Lund
27	art	Ticket	Thomas Heet
28	art	Winter Passing	Amanda Gartman
29	art	window	Molly Reynolds
30	art	Just an Old Country Rd.	Taylor Bryan
31	art	Blue	Bailey Fortner
32	art	untitled	Karl Strasen
33	art	Nostalgia on Film	Dan Lund
34	art	Die Fenster	Carolyn Johnson
35	art	Only 80 euro for the best tour in Venice	Ellen Orner
36	art	da passeggio	Hashem Rifai
37	art	Last stop, Starométská	Ellen Orner
38	art	No Trespassing	Bailey Fortner
39	art	Reflection	Stephanie Wood
40	art	Geometry Stairs	Dan Lund
41	art	latitudes	Hashem Rifai
42	art	Mold Pot	Dustin Lawrence

43	art	Faces of Venice	Kelsey Howard
44	art	Slow Shutter in Harvard Square	John Webster
45	art	Catnap	Stephanie Wood
46	art	Island View	Dan Lund
47	art	Pipe Dreams	Amanda Gartman
48	art	liebe	April Edwards
49	art	untitled	Hashem Rifai
50	art	St. Mary's Passage	Kelsey Howard
51	art	untitled	Karl Strasen
52	art	Forty Cent Smarts	Amanda Gartman
54	prose	Lauren	Thomas Heet
55	prose	Meeting in the Shadow of the Matterhorn— <i>A Recorded Discussion Between Émile Durkheim and Sigmund Freud</i>	John Linstrom
59	prose	Historically White	John Linstrom
62	prose	I Loved Lucy	R. James Onofrey
64	prose	White Collar van Gogh	R. James Onofrey
67	prose	Balance	Jon Krause
71	prose	Over the River and Through the Corn	Ellen Orner
74		Contributors' Notes	



Interview with René Steinke

Jon Krause

There were a lot of things I wanted to talk to René Steinke about. Her first novel, *The Fires*, draws heavily on her experience with the city of Valparaiso from the time she was a student, as well as the time she spent as a teacher, at this university. At Wordfest, she read selections from a novel-in-progress, a story about a community of Fundamentalists Christians in Texas, similar to the town she grew up in. I was intrigued by the fact that the settings of her stories seem to become characters that are as important as her protagonists and antagonists.

I agreed to meet with René Steinke one sunny afternoon in February – the city had been pounded with a snowstorm earlier in the week, and sloppy patches of snow still clung to the soggy ground despite the sudden appearance of the sun. Typical Valpo. I waited for René just outside the Career Center (all the other rooms in the new Union were reserved that day), and pondered the irony of our meeting. Here I am, a senior in my final semester, looking forward to graduating and leaving this place, while René was coming back to her old alma mater, returning to those memories and experiencing a vastly different campus than what she remembered.

When she approached, I stood and shook her hand. She immediately retrieved a large white envelop from beneath her arm and, leaning in towards me, said, “I want to show you something.” She pulled out an old black and white photo of five women in long, elegant dresses standing on a parade float. René pointed to the woman in the center, who was wearing a tiara. “That’s my mom.”

Apparently, René’s mother was the homecoming queen when she attended Valparaiso University in the ‘50s. The story goes that René’s father met her that night and they fell in love. Another great Valpo romance story. The university had found the photo in the archives and gave it to René as a gift for her visit.

We proceeded back to a conference room in the Career Center to conduct the interview.

JK: You said you taught here in '94 –

RS: '93.

JK: '93. And you went here, obviously.

RS: Are you recording now?

JK: It's on.

RS: Hello, hello!

JK: Hello!

[laughter]

RS: Yes, I went here. I graduated in '86.

JK: And obviously we have this beautiful new building that just opened this semester. What sort of changes have you seen on campus? Are there any little surprises that you weren't expecting?

RS: Well, I wasn't expecting the union to be so beautiful. It is really nice. And I haven't had a chance to look at the library yet, but I'm heading over there. I was afraid that the buildings were going to be ugly just because I'm sort of fond of old campus and Guild-Memorial, and I was even sort of a fan of Dau-Kreinheder, which was a terrible building.

JK: Where was that?

RS: That was the old freshmen dorm, down there by the gym.

JK: Oh, that the old bookstore was connected to?

RS: Yeah. You know, it was a terrible building, but you always get sentimentally attached to places.

JK: Yeah, I've heard stories about that place from my folks, too.

RS: But the new buildings are not ugly, they're beautiful. A lot of times on campuses I feel like – and this is true on the campus where I teach – they have all these beautiful old buildings and then they'll have a new building, and it's just hideous.

JK: We do get some criticism for our architecture from the '60s and '70s around campus, but I do like this new modern aesthetic that they're going for. Back when you were a student here, you were the editor of *The Lighter* –

RS: I was the co-editor, actually, or Assistant Editor.

JK: Co-editor?

RS: Yes, with Laura Blair, who was an English major and went on to be a Mellon Fellow at the University of Chicago.

JK: I don't know if you've picked up a copy of *The Lighter* –

RS: Yes, but I haven't had a chance to really look at anything except for the beautiful cover.

JK: What was the sense of *The Lighter* back when you were in charge of that?

RS: Well, it was thinner and taller. And it didn't look as professional as the new version. We didn't have the same technology for production back when I was in college,

so our magazine wasn't quite so beautiful. I didn't even write my papers on a computer back then. That's how old I am.

But, here's my best *Lighter* story: Laura and I published this poem by my friend Bill Rhode which was sexually explicit. This was a great poem, I thought, so I could stand by it. I didn't have any ambivalence about the poem itself, and neither did Laura. Laura had this long blond hair and she was very sweet and very studious, kind of innocent, and she was horrified that people were so mad, to the point where we had alumni writing to *The Torch*. But I thought I was kind of Bohemian – and wanted to be above being upset by what other people thought. There was an English professor who's no longer here named Richard Maxwell—who's now at Yale. One of the letters to *The Torch* said, "I can't believe you're publishing such pornography!" I was so happy because Maxwell wrote this letter back that said, "If you really want to read pornography, I suggest you take a look at Marquis de Sade. This is not pornography," and he gave this reason, this reason, this reason; and then went on to say why the poem had literary merit. There was this big scandal, but the good thing about it was that it got people reading *The Lighter*!

JK: Yeah, a lot of people have trouble with that distinction. What can we really get away with? Hypothetically, if a good poem has the conventions of structures and styles that make a good poem, should it be banned just because it has a subject matter that may rub some people the wrong way?

RS: That's why the incident was so interesting. People were actually discussing the issues you've just raised.

JK: I've never seen an instance go far enough to get ink

in *The Torch*, but every few semesters something comes along that stirs up at least a selection committee. Now, I want to talk about your first novel, *The Fires*, as well as all the Valparaiso influences. I remember doing a project on the Kinsey Hall fire –

RS: I love that assignment! I think it's brilliant.

JK: I knew that was in our history. As I was researching for this interview, I was reminded again of the chapel fire in the '50s. And then there was another story that I had never heard of before about a student protest in the late '80s. They built some sort of shanty town that was causing some sort of disruption on campus, and that burned down. So there are a lot of instances of fire on this campus. And there's the fact that your book, *The Fires*, has a lot of tie-ins to Valparaiso. Were any of these instances influential to your writing?

RS: Oh yes. Learning about the Kinsey Hall fire was the way I got thinking about the idea for my book. I was in Mark Schwehn's class "The Interpretation of the Humanities" when I was a senior, and as you know, researching the history of this fire and writing a version of the history with your group is an assignment for that class. I was fascinated this fire. When I did the assignment, it was unclear who set the fire, and I was just really interested in that. The character of Ella came from asking myself the question, "What sort of person in Valparaiso would set fires?" I actually wrote a poem, too, called "KINSEY HALL BURNS DOWN," which I published in a literary magazine. I didn't start writing *The Fires* until '90, and I graduated in '86. But the story did come out from thinking about that initial incident. Then gradually, as I started writing, Kinsey Hall disappeared, but that was the seed of my idea. I didn't know about the chapel fire or the shanty town.

JK: You said that you started writing the book in 1990. You were in graduate school at that time?

RS: Yes.

JK: Did you start writing it during your MFA or your PhD?

RS: During my PhD.

JK: Did you use that as part of your PhD program?

RS: An early draft of *The Fires* was my dissertation, actually.

JK: How much editing did you end up doing to that document until it got published?

RS: A lot. It took me seven years to write this book. I probably couldn't even count how many drafts it's been through. In terms of major drafts – the first draft was my dissertation. There was a second draft that I wrote while I was teaching at Valparaiso in 1993. There were probably four or five major drafts, but infinite drafts of pieces of the book in between the full rewrites.

JK: The book was finally published in '98?

RS: '99. It was accepted in '97, published in '99.

JK: You talked about the film treatment – when was that picked up?

RS: Madonna (and HandPrint Entertainment) optioned *The Fires* just as it was being published in '99, and the script was written a year or so later. They could never

get financing. There was a director who was all set up to work on the film, and various actresses were attached to the project for a while.

JK: Was Madonna ever attached, maybe as the mother?

RS: She was maybe going to direct for a while, and there was some talk of her playing... the aunt? Oh, this is so terrible.

JK: Hanna?

RS: To tell you the truth, this book is very far away from me. It's two novels back now, so it's hard for me to remember everything.

JK: And I always hate characters' names.

RS: But there were various other actresses who read the book and wanted to play Ella. It's a pretty difficult story for a film because of all the flashbacks in time. And I didn't know this then, but it turns out, a lot of novels get optioned, but only a small percentage get made.

JK: Obviously the setting is very much Valpo, and being a resident of Valpo for the past four years, I got a lot of the inside references. Did you image what your intended audience, who didn't know anything about Valpo, what their impression of Valpo would be? How did you want to portray the city?

RS: I guess two things. What I remember is, it was very important for Ella's character to feel trapped. There were lots of references to Valparaiso being confining or oppressive. But I also wanted to show the kind of beautiful weirdness of the town. I hope that came through. Like the Big Wheel sign, that was central to the piece for me.

JK: I think the rotating root beer mug came in at one point.

RS: Yeah, right. Just the beautiful weirdness. Some of the minor characters in town were based on real people. There's a restaurant that isn't here anymore, but I was a waitress there one summer, and there was something very bizarre about the elderly owners who I worked for, and some of the people who were regulars.

JK: I think it was the little personal details that really brought the story to life. Made it more believable.

RS: Good. Oh, and there's the house that's an octagon –

JK: The eight-sided house?

RS: Yeah, I put that in there. I think all small towns have these little odd sites, but I think Valparaiso in particular, has a number of these really strange things that were fun to write about.

JK: Your new novel, which you read from last night, is coming right along. You said it was about halfway done. Do you have an estimated time as to when that's going to be hitting the bookshelves? Are you talking to publishers yet about that?

RS: I have a publisher, if they still exist after the economic crisis. That was the publisher of my first two books. My agent has read the first half of the novel, but it usually takes a year for a book to be published, and I'm hoping to finish it by May or June. So, at least a year and a half at the earliest, probably more like two years.

JK: From your reading last night, you mentioned the subject matter of Fundamental Christianity in the community in Texas you were raised in. Is your intended audience for the book members of that community?

RS: Well, I wouldn't mind if they read it, but I'm not writing for them in particular. I just want to make sure that I write about them compassionately.

JK: Do you think they would be turned off by some of the things you might say about them?

RS: Well, I think there's already, even in the piece I read last night, an implicit criticism. I talked about how I wanted to write about this worldview being challenged. One of the things that happens in the novel, which you find out later, is that the boy who brings her to the party, he's not really responsible because it's somebody else who drugs her. In a way he's sort of a feckless character. But he's a member of her church. Part of the thing I want to work with is that these churches tend to see all of their members as one of their own and outsiders as bad. So what are they going to do when one of their own is accused of raping a girl? I don't know how well that's going to play with the Fundamentalists, so I'm definitely not writing for them specifically. I want the novel to be for anyone who likes to read.

JK: Are you worried about any of them calling you up –

RS: Death threats?

[laughter]

JK: I don't know about death threats, but saying, "I can't believe you said that!" I don't know how personally derived the characters or situations are from real people.

real situations. How worried are you that somebody could take that personally?

RS: Not very. You kind of can't control it. I'm worried to the point of legalities so that I will change the names, but the only characters who are based on real people are minor figures. I'm fictionalizing them, but you'd still probably recognize them if you were from the town, so that's another reason for changing the town name. Even if you write a character based on a real person, and I went through this with my last novel, there are only legalities if you slander them, and I'm not doing that. The main problem is that the incident, the rape, is a fictionalized version of something that happened when I was in high school. But I've made major changes, including the time frame, and the people involved were not Fundamentalist Christians, as far as I know. And other circumstances have been changed. It's just, like the Kinsey Hall fire, one of the seed ideas for the book.

JK: Do you see this book as a way – I mean, it's obviously critical of the Fundamental Christian tradition – as a way of raising issues? Where do you draw the line between pushing the reader and then at the same time try to back off, not offend anyone?

RS: I'm not too worried about offending people. I guess I think offending people might be good, in that it can encourage people to read and think, so I'm not really worried about that. My main problems are aesthetic ones---how to write about these characters in a way that is compassionate but not pandering. The Fundamentalist worldview, in general, is very black and white, but you want characters to be complex, so you need to write about the complexity in the characters that's brewing underneath these somewhat simplistic ideas, in my opinion, about God and life. But I'm interested in what

kind of emotions and what kind of personal experiences drive someone to need to believe that the rapture is upon them, for example.

JK: Well, you said that publishing the book is hopefully a year or two away. How far do you plan ahead in your writing process? Is there another project that you think might be next?

RS: I do have an idea for the next novel. I don't always. Actually, when I started this new novel I had two plot lines, and I wrote about fifty pages of the novel to come and realized that it was a different novel. I don't know exactly how it's going to go, but I want to write about the McCarthy period in Hollywood. The character that I've created is a little-known actress who gets involved in the McCarthy hearings. She just kind of gets pulled in. The blacklisting happened even to very minor figures in Hollywood, so I'm interested in that. It might turn out to be a love story between a Jew and a Christian. My husband is a non-practicing Jew, and I'm interested in both the conflicts and the connections between Jews and Christians. I thought it would be interesting to explore that, especially in the McCarthy period when so much anti-Semitism was in the culture and was connected to the McCarthy-ism. I didn't realize that until I started doing more research.

JK: From reading *The Fires*, I didn't see any big clue-ins to the time period. Do you consider that to be a period piece? This new novel is set in the 50s, so it's going to be a period piece. Do you consider either *The Fires* or your current novel to be a period piece?

RS: *The Fires* is technically a period piece. I think it's technically set somewhere in the 1970s because there's that references to the personal immolations, the Eastern

monks who set themselves on fire that's in the recent narrative past of the novel, and that event happened in the late '60s. I think there's also one other reference that connects the novel loosely to the 1970s. But to be honest, when I wrote it, I wanted it to feel timeless in a way that Valparaiso feels timeless to me.

It is true that the face of Valpo is changing. Within the past few years, we've received a new library, a new union, and I suspect that in the coming years Valparaiso University will see many more changes, including the northern gate which is currently in development. But René is right – Valparaiso is timeless. Go ahead and blame me for sounding cheesy or sentimental, but the spirit of Valpo isn't measured by flashy new buildings. Whether you're coming or going, Valpo, like Christmas, perhaps means a little bit more. And that never changes.

I'll leave you with an encouraging last word from René:

"I'm very happy to see that there seems to be a very vibrant writing community here among the students. That really makes me happy. I would like to support that and cheer you on. Keep doing your work!"



poetry

Ghosts

Michaelene Jewett

Inspired by "Whisper on the Journey:" a portrait by Joel Sheesley

We strolled to the cottage
where we first made love
in the darkness, the green leaves
waltzing with the wind, the stars
twinkling like sparklers
scattering rays of blue, green,
and red fireworks as our bodies
tumble, stretch, and release.

I whispered, "I love you"
then, as I do now, but the notes
fall flat, escape the gray plastic
nestled in your ear. My chapped
lips and pale skin spark nothing
but blurry snapshots, moments
muted. Balding trees watch
our huddled skeleton forms,
haunted and splintered strangers.

I wish you'd remember
how your body pieces with mine,
a puzzle finished and restored.
I wish your heart still melted,
that you are still fire in my arms,
but only gray ashes remain. Her fog
will never clear, they say, as your stale
lilac fragrance assaults me.

I sigh, clutching a shadow.



Come Home

Kaitlyn Whinery

I'm not sure where to go from here.
My heart beats with anticipation for the next time you write or call.
The memory of your voice haunts me in my dreams.
If only you would come back to me, so I could hear it once again.
I wish I could explain how deep the cut in my heart is.
You have carved a place there all your own.
I will keep it safe for you until you come home to me.

A Haystack Song

John Linstrom

I looked in pools of blue
where cut-out reflections gleamed
in my eyes,
but left feeling wet.

I checked a volcanic crater
where magma singed my sweater
and a cave where the wind blew cold,
hoping for something soft in exhaustion.

But it was when a tall haystack,
loaded with earthy fiber
and loam
rose from the pasture,

shook off the clods of poesy
with a singing green shake
and dusted off her toned dancer's chest
that I knew who you are.

And you kicked down the fences and liberated the cows,
smiling milk-white mischievous health,
and, somehow, only wondered if I had been watching the whole time.

Daedalus, Give Me the Farthest Distance Between Two Points

John Linstrom

Wow – the distance
between this ant
and Alpha Centauri
might as well be
the distance between that black branch
and the cold layer of snow it sleeps with.

Like your skin
is so far
beneath your shirt.
Like even if I could scoop
handfuls
of your flesh, I would still never
reach you.

Are the chill frames
of your glasses
actually pressing
those holy strung temples?

No. Please
Don't touch me, I am feathery
and falling

Shalom Eternal

Ryan Bourgart

Perennial pastures of peace pervade
my upright posture. They expand and contract
with a breeze into my heart's hearth,
spreading warmth from the center
of my mind to the soft cushion where I sit.

A white waterfall envelopes
and invigorates me, washing away
vices. Enlightening wisdom watches
within, waiting for release
from vain vestiges of pain.

As the pure torrent empties
into a shallow basin, dry seeds open,
waiting to take root. With mustered
courage, I dive into the abyss, searching
for the lucid liberator that dwells deep.

I follow the rumble of ground and sky,
the click of autumn leaves with whirs of wind.
I roam pristine wilderness,
always finding myself
home in the all-pervading om.



haiku arboreus

Robert Thompson

timber falling down
upon me, crushing my neck
oh, the pain of trees



Symmetry

Megan Telligman

It's the feeling of perfect unnatural order, when both sides match. However, we must agree on what constitutes a side, what must match. Sometimes it's regarded as unattainable in people. Although, we think we're all symmetric (maybe I shouldn't have started this way). "Symmetry is never achieved when strived for." It is a happy accident, like the feeling of finding correct change or the perfect number of any given thing. It is the reason we fold paper in half, before cutting out hearts. But our hearts are not symmetric and we always desire the unnatural.

Blinds

Megan Telligman

*Inspired by Joel Sheesley's painting *Householder Sonata* and childhood paranoia*

“Young children, especially those between the ages of one and two, can swallow the lead dust by wiping their hands on the blinds and then putting their hands in their mouths. They can also swallow the lead dust by chewing on the blinds.”

I once heard that the dust that collects on blinds may become harmful - that after months of sitting on the strips of vinyl, the dust acts like a sponge, soaking up chemicals, becoming dangerous, deadly. There is a minefield of dirt and dust laying on those blinds - there for your cat to bat at, for your child to lick, and for you to wipe away, disdainfully, looking down at the streaks on the wetted cloth. That look - the one we save for human excrement- the way in which we hold trash bags at arms length, creating a barrier of puffy space between our fragile bodies and that decay- but we know that waste is our own.

It's amazing how that forgotten sandwich you took so much care to make this morning changes to a moldy heap of disgust, carried, retching, to a rusted dumpster, Or the change from a bit of dust, coming from tissues waved in fights, dirt from play dates and ignored air filters, into the menacing particles lying resting on those blinds, but waiting to attack.

I wonder if that couple knows, as they stand at arms length, as they fiddle with their doors, of the hazard that rests between them on those blinds, chopping up the landscape into slivers. They continue on with their meaningless tasks silently, oblivious to the discarded remnants of relationships that lay hidden, a thin film of dust and danger, threatening to hurt them.

Little Poems about Spain

Ellen Orner

Midnight Malaga

starry sidewalk, slippery marble;
rainy Spain, coastal October;
magic bubbles, street performer;
Gato con Botas*, tapas hour.

Dialogue for La Catedral de Sevilla

« C'est immense! » said the garçon, and
“The Star Spangled Banner” whistled the guard.
“Take this laurel, bless this house, give me your palm,
Give me your money!” said the old señora, and
No gracias,” said we—“No, no, no gracias!”
Then we climbed the ramped Giralda and—
“Picture a horse,” said Jon, “just picture a horse,
Falling from the top of this tower.”

Saturday Morning in Rincon de la Victoria

Seeing Rincon through swollen slits,
Matching each step with a snap,
Uphill to the center of town
For a basket of burning churros.

Grip one with a paper sheet,
Instantly wet, transparent with grease.

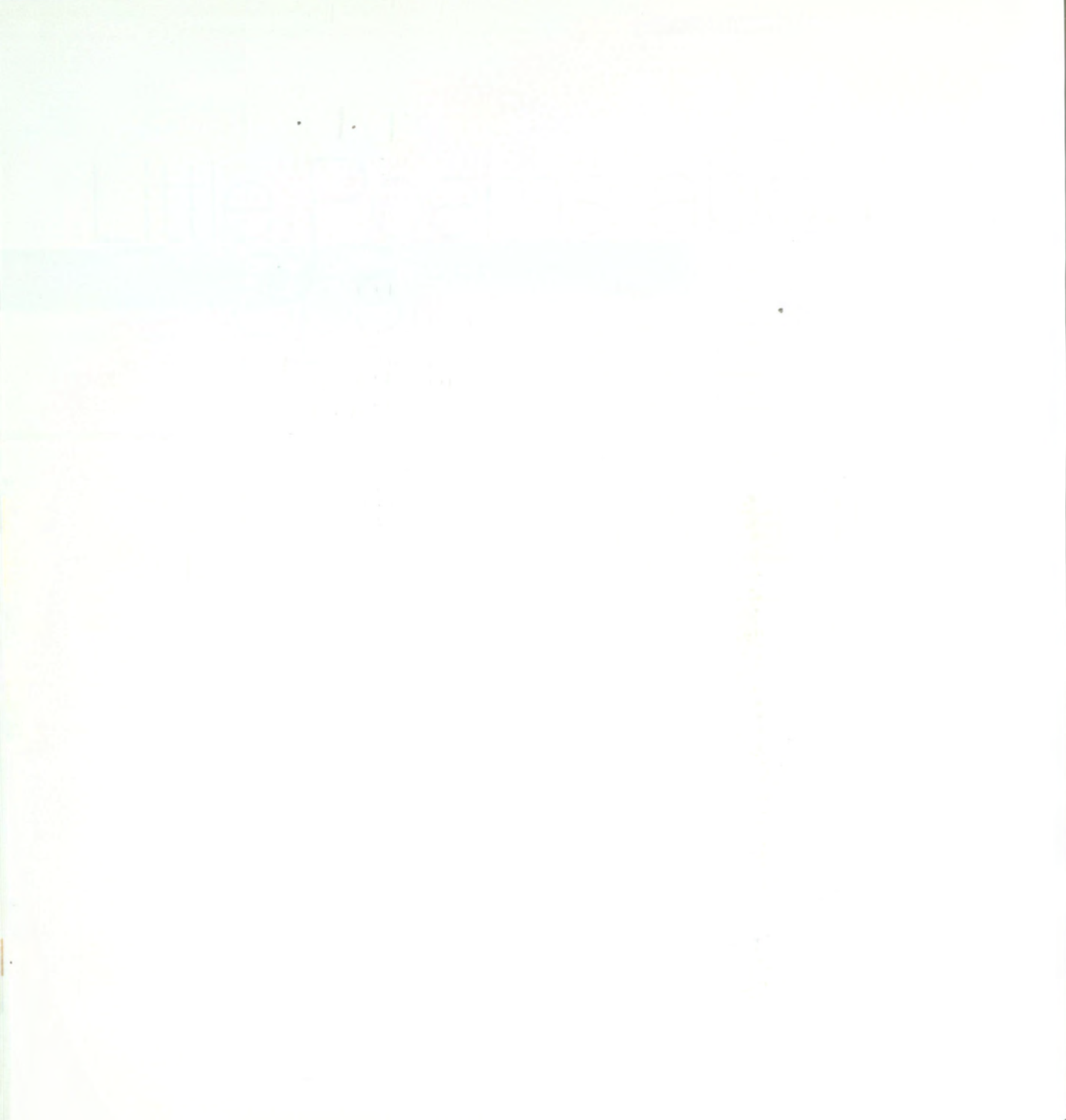
*The owner of this tapas bar explained that “gata con botas” means “puss in boots”, but “Gato con Botas” is a play on words meaning “fellow with a canteen full of wine.”



Intrain

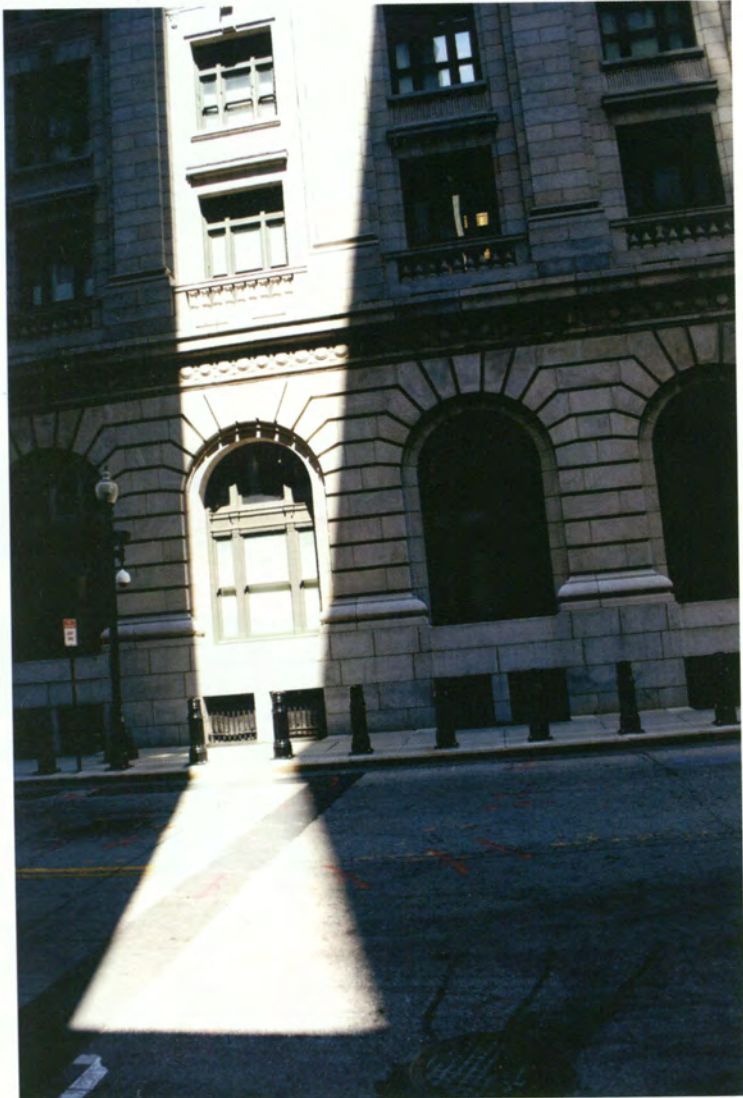
Ellen Orner

On a train is in a shell,
A module for spending
Hours of your life that don't count.
You count them.
In transit, not transition
Suspended but not in suspense.
Watching eyes that cannot see me,
Shouldn't see me, shouldn't be watched.
Long frozen stare, like paintings stare
Back at museum goers, dead.
Then one raised eyebrow,
The naissance of a smile
Startles me into knowing,
I am intrain alive.





art



Window Illuminated - Dan Lund



Ticket - Thomas Heet



Winter Passing - Amanda Gartman



window - Molly Reynolds



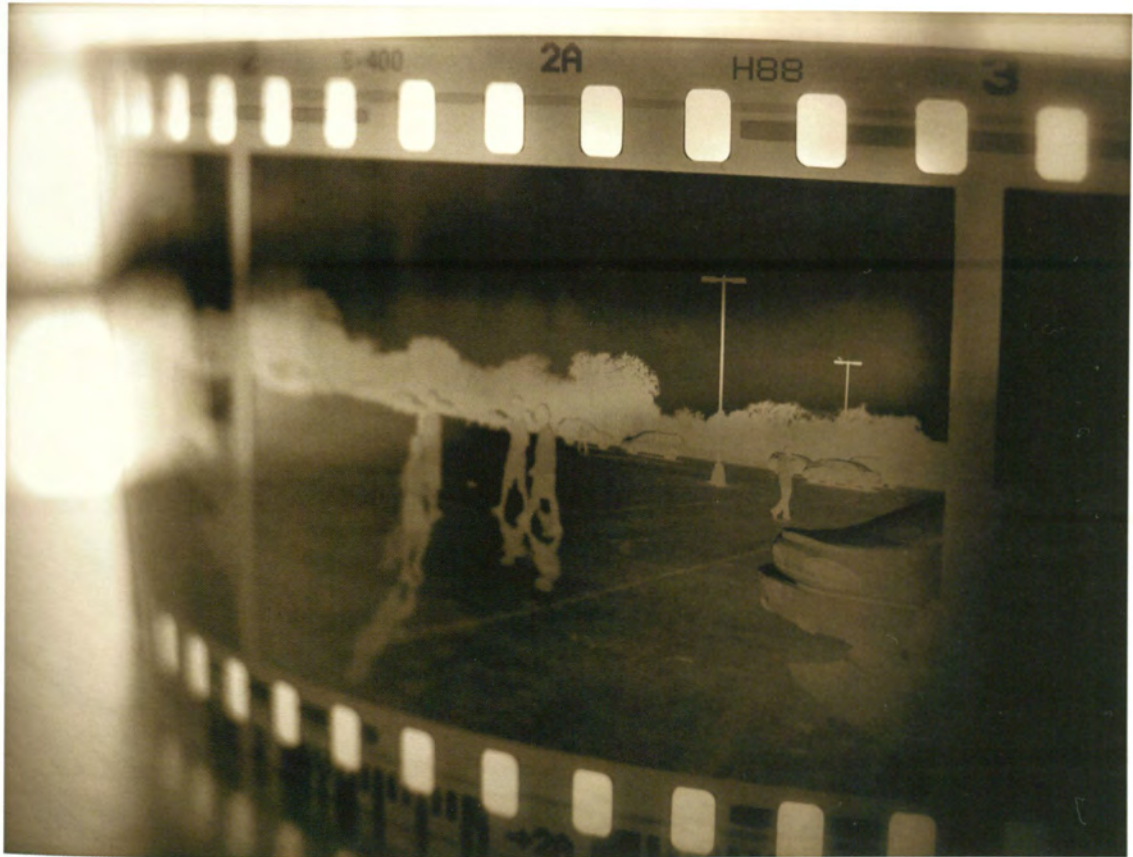
Just an Old Country Rd. - Taylor Bryan



Blue - Bailey Fortner



untitled - Karl Strasen



Nostalgia on Film - Dan Lund



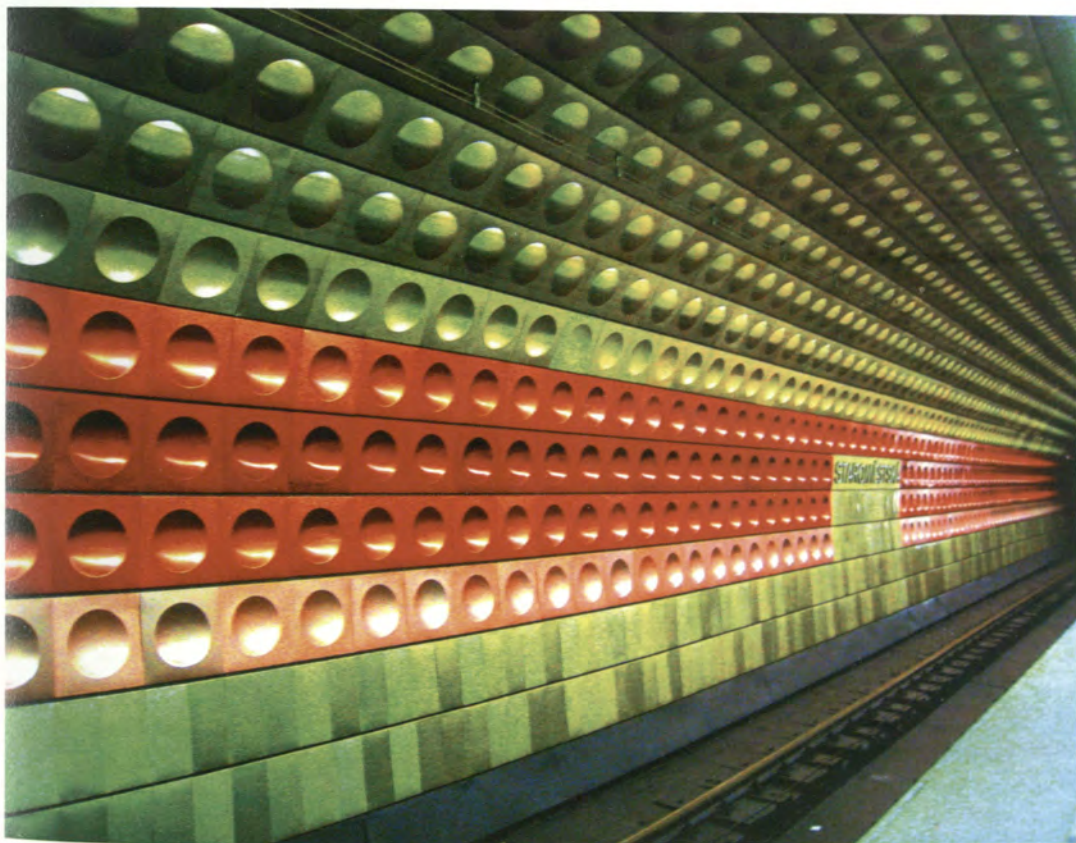
Die Fenster - Carolyn Johnson



Only 80 euro for the best tour in Venice - Ellen Orner



da passeggio - Hashem Rifai



Last stop, Staroměstská - Ellen Orner



No Trespassing - Bailey Fortner



Reflection - Stephanie Wood



Geometry Stairs - Dan Lund



latitudes - Hashem Rifai



Mold Pot - Dustin Lawrence



Faces of Venice - Kelsey Howard



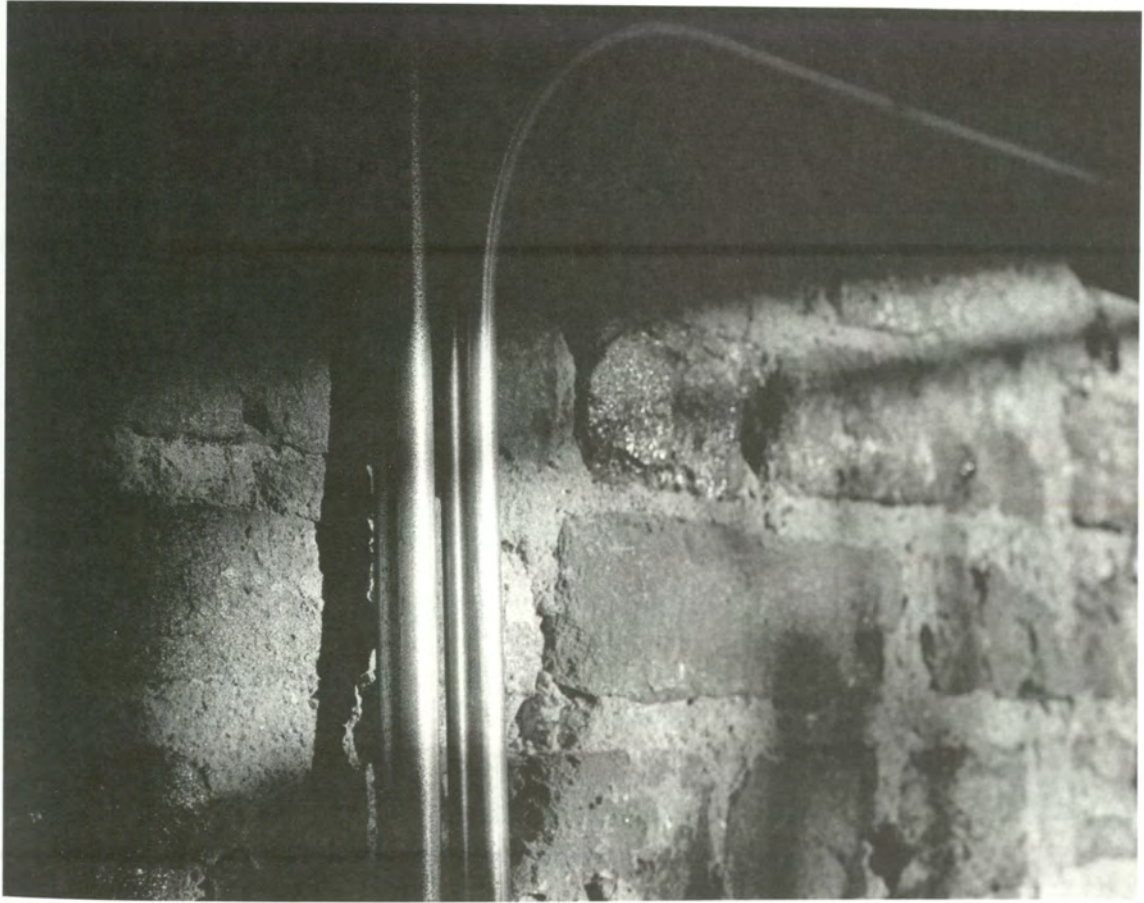
Slow Shutter in Harvard Square - John Webster



Catnap - Stephanie Wood



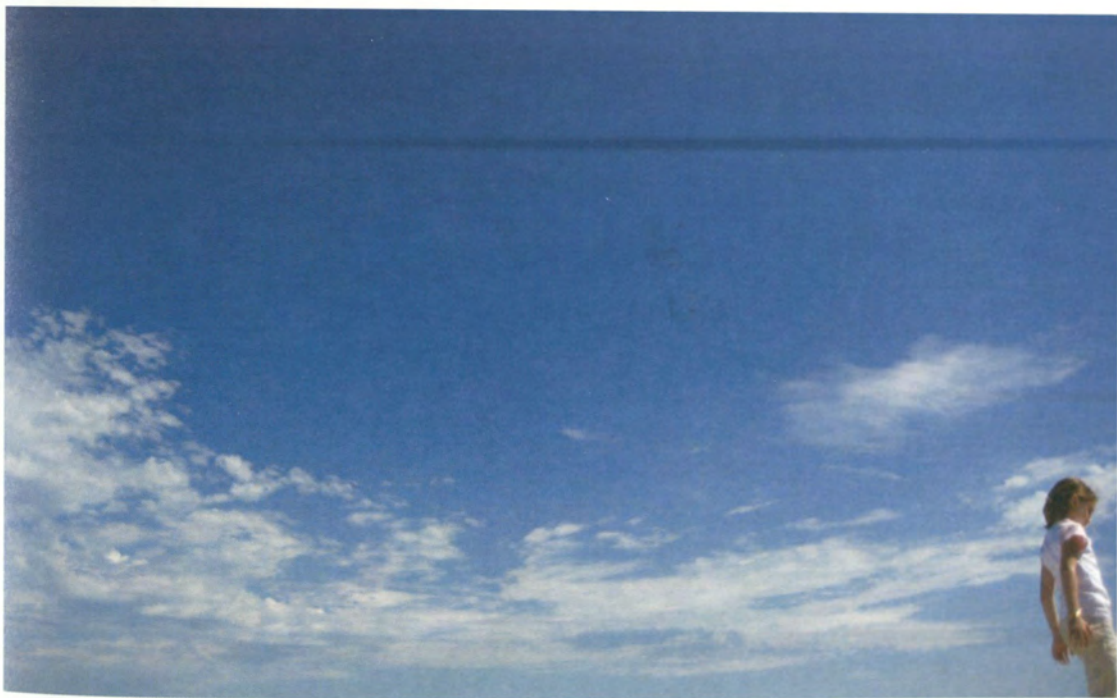
Island View - Dan Lund



Pipe Dreams - Amanda Gartman



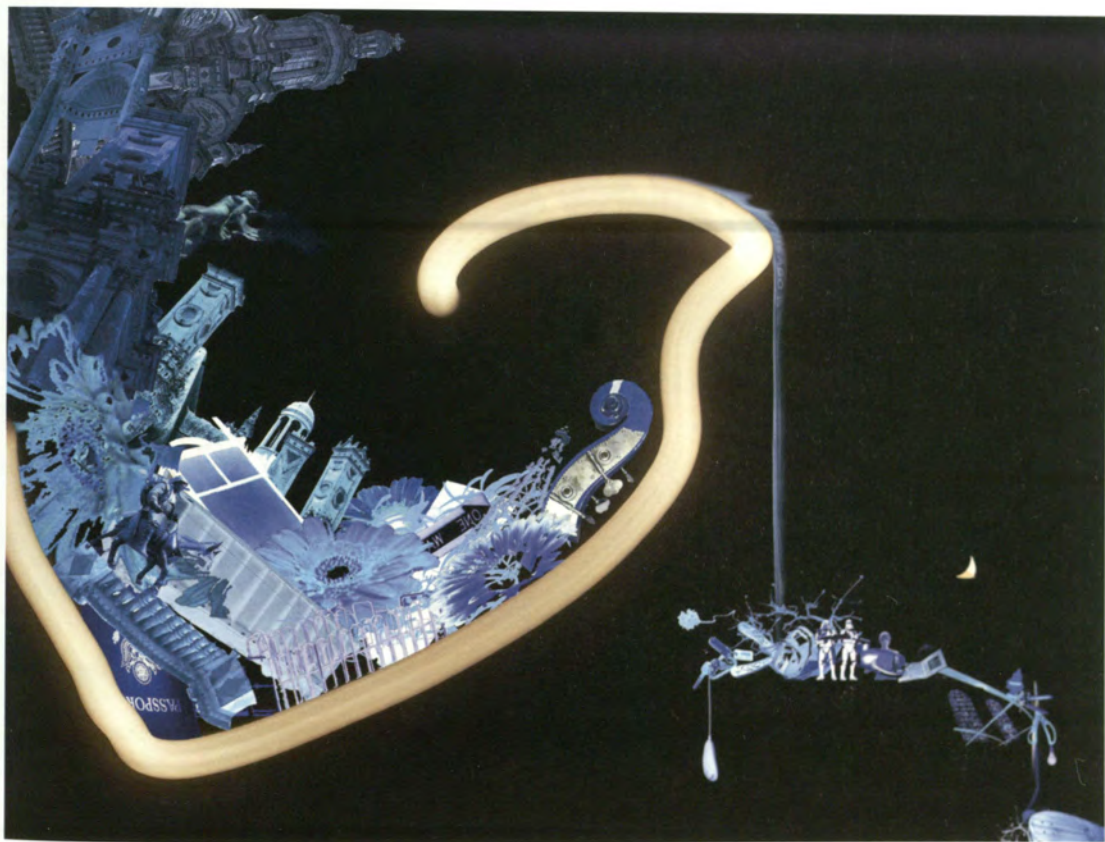
liebe - April Edwards



untitled - Hashem Rifai



St. Mary's Passage - Kelsey Howard



untitled - Karl Strasen



Forty Cent Smarts - Amanda Gartman



prose

Lauren

Thomas Heet

My parents never allowed pets in the house, so every year I would adopt the ceramic sheep of the St. Michael's wintertide manger. Staring into the glowing diorama, I was for a time a tike magi. On camel, I'd dot softly over a painted shepherd's field, ready to dine with tented kings on goat's milk and manna. The Star of Bethlehem was like nighttime medicine and guided us—aunts and uncles, brothers of Moses—across technicolor deserts to a swaddled babe as big as my boat shoe. My fists were only kiwis then.

A cast-iron wood stove anchored our garage during tornado sirens. It was painted black and we weren't supposed to burn styrofoam in it—not even when a new package came. Of course we did anyway and it turned green or something and was bad for us but we ate generic Pop-Tarts and canned spaghetti sauce so what's the difference.

My dad came home from work one night around April when I was in third grade. He had a surprise for us so I drove with him and my brothers out to a corn field

where he hunted in the fall. We parked the truck and he guided us through the tall plants. The ground shook with the panic of hooves as we approached a clearing that had been matted down with the weight of a mother's belly. A party of strangers stood there silent for a few moments—my father and his sons and two shaking wet fawns. Then we drove home.

My mother painted my nail once. For the remainder of the day, I gazed into a crystal ball, escorted a galaxy through my backyard, and lit up Thayer Street like a traveling gypsy with a magical wand. I walked as if I had the world's most precious jewel at my fingertips, knowing that it would never be painted on again. Then I knocked my teeth out in the basement trying to cock an air rifle. I screamed with fear while running up the steps, watching my incisors fall into a pool of blood collecting in my palm: one...two. With a rag in my mouth, I cried how I wished I was a man. That man is twenty-seven now.

I think I'll fall in love in the field across the road—the Faulstich's on 17—when it's blanketed in a thick fog and fireflies are setting it off like heat lightning. I am running in this field with her, laughing in June. The insect constellations glow a secret green—emerging and ebbing on the cool air. We hear a few hoots of a screech owl hiding in the hedgerow and get chills from the neighbor's cows—the warm breath vibrating out their resonant lungs and chests and throats like a lost pod of baleens just wailing to the night like their mothers were dying. My arm is sort of falling asleep under her head and she has a thin essence of body odor and shampoo and we talk about how you can only count the Seven Sisters if you're looking away from them.

Meeting in the Shadow of the Matterhorn

*A Recorded Discussion Between
Émile Durkheim and Sigmund Freud*
John Linstrom

"I began with the desire to speak with the dead," said one contemporary critic. "The speech of the dead, like my own speech, is not private property."

As this critic wrote these words he was ignorant of their importance. Such posthumous speech, though rarely recorded, is uttered often enough in the chance meetings of the deceased on Earth. And trusting in the validity of our good critic's assertion, we feel obliged to offer whatever insight we may in regard to such elusive discourse. We may only hope that the following account will offer some measure of helpful insight to the evolution of this "New Historicism."

Émile Durkheim, having wandered long in darkness, once happened upon the fancy that he might still find some measure of peace in that most sublime earthly recreation: the willful encounter of Nature. Having long since lost all sense of bodily exhaustion, he set out to traverse those many paths which he had never chanced to experience in life, occasionally passing by the mute ghosts of the living, and only very seldom enjoying the privilege of encountering another soul of his own fate. Yet most of these latter seemed to have very little to say.

It was a brisk, sunny day. Mr. Durkheim was scaling

an Alpine mountain slope which stood facing the mighty Matterhorn, when, rounding a scree-strewn bend, he was startled by an elderly, bespectacled dead man of hoary beard, smoking a large cigar and lying out in the midst of the scree, spread eagle and belly up, entirely naked.

The great sociologist approached cautiously, not wishing to frighten the curious figure and risk his misty disappearance. Durkheim had his own inkling as to the identity of the man before him, but he was too late to offer a guess. The prone figure stirred to take a pull from his cigar, and spoke.

"I suppose you consider this to be a fine day, friend?" said the naked man.

Durkheim answered, "Let him rejoice who breathes up here in this roseate light!" He was not sure what event in his life had instilled that quotation in him, but if his hypothesis were correct he knew that it would elicit a reaction from the stranger.

"Ach—" The prone man's face tightened, he released a cough which shook the folds of his flabby body, and he responded, "Schiller. I appreciate that sentiment, but sadly fail to share it, even now, after death." He opened one eye. "Are you in much hurry, friend?"

Durkheim smiled. "Not lately, Dr. Freud." He approached the doctor and seated himself on a small boulder beside him, facing the Matterhorn.

"Your recognition of my name does me honor,

although any wisdom you might have gained from me in life would please me more deeply.”

“I—”

“You wonder what brought me here, like this.”

“Well, certainly.”

“Years ago, I would guess, overburdened with questions regarding my new existence and what meaning I might find in a world apart from life and dreams, I came here in search of the oceanic feeling. I speak of that overwhelming and most sublime sense of connectedness with the universe, eternal and unbounded, which is said to be the true source of all religious energy and is subject, in life, to rechanneling by religious doctrine and other social illusions. Throughout my life, since the concept was first presented to me by the good,—and now, undoubtedly, the late,—Romain Rolland, I was unable to discover this oceanic feeling in myself. I have spent what might amount to many years lying here, hoping to encounter this feeling in the presence of the great mountain and this vast expanse spread before us. In death, you see, I seldom find opportunities for psycho-analysis, although its virtues doubtlessly could prove beneficial to the masses of the deceased. I have therefore been forced to seek meaning and purpose elsewhere. If only it were easier for the dead to encounter each other in this hazy state!”

Durkheim scratched his beard, unfeelingly, out of habit. His beady eyes had brightened at the chance for intellectual discourse, which he now so seldom enjoyed. “If I may, Doctor, you mentioned just now that you encounter difficulty in the search for religious energy, and then dismissed, if I understood, all religion as illusion. Is your search, then, not supremely paradoxical?” Years of mostly solitary wandering had blunted some of the good sociologist’s social graces, but Freud seemed all but put off by his frankness.

“Ah!” the Doctor replied, enthusiastically. “Yes,

it would seem so! But in reality, we can approach an explanation of this oceanic phenomenon without accepting the illusion of religion. It is nothing more than the primal longing to return to the infantile state of an undefined ego, to which so many (millions, perhaps!) are prone. These people long for the state which they once inhabited, in which they could not differentiate their own bodies from their mothers’ breast. Or, perhaps more accurately, they wish for their ego to extend outwards to include the vast universe. They yearn for that primeval oneness. In death, as I find myself now still active after my flesh has fallen away, I wonder if I too begin to feel this yearning.” He took a pull from his neglected cigar. “Yet even here, in the shadow of the Matterhorn, lying with my whole soul exposed and open in the presence of infinite grandeur, I feel not this universal connection! Is this vista not sublime? Certainly, if Rolland’s theory be true (and society would attest to that), I ought to be overwhelmed — but I feel nothing! What is a deceased psycho-analyst to do, bereft of patients, barren of dreams?”

“Well,” the sociologist responded, “I can at least assure you that the institutions of religion, since your day, are not what they once were. I should warn you, Doctor, that I am a man of fact and statistics. While I do not, perhaps, fully appreciate what you say regarding the ‘oceanic feeling,’ your comments about desiring social unity do ring true to what I have discovered in my own findings.”

“Mm-hmm,” Freud returned. He closed his eyes and leaned back in the scree, his translucent skin shining despite the shade of the mountain, and puffed a perfect O ring which quickly dissolved in the breeze. “Perhaps at another point we shall discuss the validity of the facts gathered from my own strict research. But speak! I shall be interested to hear how your science compares with mine, Mr.—?”

“Durkheim. Émile. I should first seek clarity in one respect, sir. I care little for religious doctrine. God, whether He exists or no, concerns me little.”

“Good!”

“Historically, however, religion did once serve a purpose, and a positive one, in society.” At this Dr. Freud began to frown and wag his head, but the sociologist would not be deterred. “Hear me. The Catholic Church served as an excellent institution to bond its members through unquestionable Law. All variation was considered abhorrent, and strict adherence to dogma was necessary. The individualism of Catholics was thereby kept to the absolute minimum, and in the strength of that community the people lived in relative happiness. This is why, Doctor, to the date of my own death, suicide rates among Protestants always surpassed those of Catholics and Jews – the Protestants are loose! Their communal sense is weak. My own studies clearly show that the proclivity of Protestantism for suicide must relate to the spirit of free inquiry, of religious individualism, which it necessarily implies. And I think that you will agree that suicide is perhaps the single strongest indicator to measure the relative sadness of a community. All data, previous to my death, indicated that these rates had reached a level of pathological danger.”

Freud was sitting up, and had been fidgeting. “Dear God! I understand that suicide is neurotic. But so is living under an illusion, a lie! It is true that to some extent we all behave like paranoids, but that does not mean that such behavior ought to be encouraged. You ask for denial of reality, for an actual acceptance of one’s own delusions. As I mentioned, that is absolutely infantile, counter to intellectual progress, and irrational.”

“But you just spoke of desiring the oceanic feeling.”

“Yes, possibly – but that does not mean religion, and certainly not the ‘helpful’ religion you describe. Perhaps restrictions do assist in bringing together a

community, but in imposing a common path for its adherents it restricts their individual aspirations for happiness and protection from suffering. If anything, that unconditional submission depresses the value of life. It does not enhance it. Individuals cannot find happiness without options, and without the freedom to self-actualize. Admittedly, religion saves many people from individual neuroses, but at what cost?”

“I understand, and I do agree that traditional religion is not the answer. Any future religious evolution, I believe, will move towards heightened tolerance of individual initiative and critical scrutiny, as well as a deterioration of religious community. Equally I find that social progress away from traditional religion need not be marked by an increase in suicidogenic social currents – this would imply that combating suicide would include combating civilization itself. I’m afraid that I must maintain, however, that religion has historically prevented suicide, and therefore sadness, by the very prohibition of free thinking which you (and I) find so distasteful.

“The answer cannot be a revival of antiquated religious dogma, but rather the empowering of a new type of socially binding organization. In my work I have sketched a potential model, which I have termed ‘occupational groups.’ But that sketch can wait; the important thing is that civilization find a way to build strong, cohesive, large-scale communities, so that individuals are not left to question their own self-worth but rather are surrounded by reasons to live. The human is a social creature, Dr. Freud. Isolated, he is left only with doubt and despair, and the unanswerable question, ‘to what purpose am I?’ Occupational groups are simply the means I have found to confront the pathological social currents which lead to suicide.”

Freud had been staring intently at the sociologist during his speech. “I am afraid, Mr. Durkheim, that

you have blinded yourself to your own illusions, religious or no. On the one hand, I see that you seek to approach your problem by focusing on causes rather than effects, and for that I commend you. But you are substituting one illusion for another. Whatever form your occupational groups may take, the goal is the same as repressive religion – to dull the individual's sense of self understanding for the sake of the whole. Now, I will never attempt to deceive you into thinking that I have cures for neuroses, individual or social. But I can help patients recognize and understand the neurosis that is there; after that I must leave the solutions up to the patient. The neurosis will likely never leave, but perhaps the patient will be able to live with it. That is all I can presume to offer. Similarly I would advise you against the presumptuousness of prescribing the cure to civilization's neuroses."

"But what you describe as the psycho-analytic process is precisely what I have sought in my studies! I have identified the negative social currents which carry individuals toward suicide, and presented my findings in a format which I think you would find most thorough, meticulous, and scientific. It merely seems to me that society will find occupational groups to be the most effective way to live with the despairing questions of self-worth which lead to suicidal violence. If another 'cure' evolves, all the better! But I think, Dr. Freud, that beyond that we have reached an impasse."

"Indeed we have, and you have revealed it! Your problem, friend, is that you cannot shake your fascination with the 'social current' concept. You claim a lack of individual will power when confronted with the unstoppable force of these socially influential jet streams. Yet I cannot allow for the superego to have the final say. This is the purpose of psycho-analysis, as I have stated – to inform the patient of the causes of his neurosis, and thereby equip his ego to be better able to combat the

already competing forces within him. Social currents do not have the last word when the ego has a host of instinctual cravings to balance against them!

"And . . . damn, cigar's out."

Sigmund Freud had, indeed, reached the end of his fat cigar. Upon noticing this, his image fluttered, flashed, and broke into a fine mist, leaving Durkheim's scope of perception. He had been ready to argue that the id was but another set of social currents which move people, but only Fate would determine if the two specters would find a chance to finish their dialogue.

As it was, a distressed sociologist was left in solitary contemplation on the mountainside – perhaps the last thing he would have liked. The light from the setting sun illuminated half of the shimmering, immutable peak of the Matterhorn across the valley. A group of hikers were on their way up about a kilometer below Durkheim's ghost, and, as they paused to turn and admire the mountain, one hiker with a particularly impressive telephoto lens was heard to say, "Isn't the contrast grand? It's as if it had a mind beneath that rocky skin and were consciously balancing the powers of the Sun's imposing light with the raw force of the shadow on the other side, keeping each at bay according to its own wishes.

"No," concluded the hiker with the telephoto, admiringly, "the light and dark have nothing to do with the Matterhorn itself. It is just playing with them." The rest of the group, without responding, continued to hike.

The mountain itself seemed to illuminate nothing as Durkheim observed it. As dusk slid into dark, the good sociologist wondered that he might be slipping into a darker place himself.

Historically White

John Linstrom

I am sitting at a desk, typing at my own laptop, sending information through the air via the magic of wireless technology, enjoying the faint afterscent of Aussie shampoo and the feel of my soft organic cotton T-shirt (made in the USA, sweatshop free). This is Windhoek West, pointed out on the orientation tour as the “historically white neighborhood.” It seems apt – I am historically white, after all.

Apt – unfortunately apt. Eight hours ago we drove through the informal settlements. Squatting tin boxes leaned loosely against empty air, rocky hills rolled to dramatic horizons, open landscapes clashed into cluttered roadways, pots and chair frames and tires and a baby stroller littered corrugated rooftops, mothers and grandmothers and aunts sat in shady spaces or busied themselves with repeated morning litanies while their children raced the dirt tracks to their day’s self-appointed destiny, unemployed fathers paced or chatted or drank, and a couple kombi buses full of foreigners rattled through the packed lifescape. Surely, I imagined, surely

with only a few days of living here I would be able to write a fiction story about life in the settlements. Surely, just to step into a house, to speak with a mother, I would get the experience....

Apt – annoyingly apt. Consider any Monday that I take a taxi at 1:30 to return home from volunteering in Katutura. Windhoek West, near the Cardboard Box, I tell the driver through his window. “Ah,” he says. “Yes.” That “ah,” that too easily sliding “ah,” that supremely presumptuous “ah” – do I look like a guy who hangs out at a backpacker hostel’s bar? Didn’t I say near, not at? But he knows and I know that I actually am the backpacking type. Next week I’ll just ask to be dropped off at the Polytechnic. I can walk.

Apt – too truly apt. Sitting between steady walls, flushing good toilets, eating colorful food: I am home. And it is all too historically apt.

* * *

Every school day I do the same thing. I open my eyes and look at the plain roof above me. I clothe myself. I walk to the corner to meet Bradley. Then we walk to school, simple as that.

One day we were walking and we were almost hit by a big kombi full of white people. The driver was black, and he honked but he did not slow down much. One of the girls in the kombi waved at me. She had blonde hair and a bright green shirt with no sleeves, and she smiled at me with the biggest smile I had ever seen. I waved back. I hope she did not see me smiling so big. Bradley cursed.

“You know, sometimes they just drive through Katutura to see us,” he said. I did not understand. “You know, to say, ‘Look, there’s a skinny black person,’ or ‘Look, there’s a little house.’ Like we’re elephants or something.” Then for a minute we did not say anything, and then Bradley added, “That’s what my dad said, too.”

"They're nice people, Jacob. One of them waved at me."

"You never know."

"She smiled at me."

"Yeah," Jacob said, "like she would smile at an elephant too."

We got to school and it was like any day again. It was hot. Daniel and Attan ran and chased, and they fell in the dirt before assembly started. I went to the fountain for a drink. The bell rang. We assembled under the blue and white shades which you can see through. We sang the national anthem, Ms. Jacobs gave the Bible lesson, and we sang the school song and two more songs. Principal Awaseb said something about stealing and Mr. Kapuene said something else. Then an upper primary teacher came to the principal with a note. That is when we heard the news, that there was an accident. Menencia Bowe was hit by a tour bus on her way to school that morning. We might not see her in class for awhile, the principal said.

Then we walked in our queues to second period. I saw Daniel and Attan run ahead, but Attan was grabbing Daniel because Daniel was faster, so Mr. Kapuene hit them even though he is not allowed to. So they fell in the dirt again, and we went to class.

* * *

Entering Maponya Mall seemed as ordinary as any other shopping experience. The high ceiling, the broad panes of glass over the wide displays, the mindless mannequins sporting colorful shorts and plastic midriffs, and the nondescript background music all reminded me of back-to-school shopping and gift hunting.

So when a colleague leaned into my ear and said, "Wow, weird being in the minority, isn't it?" I was a little surprised. And suddenly self-conscious.

That's what certain focuses do — they plant the poisonous seed of awareness which grows to let us know our nakedness. Later, at the KFC in the food court, I felt strained just trying to communicate with the woman

behind the counter, who seemed to be entirely irritated with the fact that a white who spoke only English would be expecting service from her. Damn tourists, I thought for her. Swedish shit.

And I remembered working back home at the marina the day the Chinese family came in. They were in the wrong place and were confused about where they were going, but I treated them well when Cory was frustrated with them, right? Maybe I'm not like that KFC worker, maybe I'm better.

And I remembered marching band camp, when Joel marched in front of me. During practice once we marched down Kalamazoo Street, and Joel turned around with his trombone in his armpit and said, "Where the fuck are we going? I don't want to get shot!" Birds chirped and kids played basketball in the park we were marching past. "I'm serious, do you know how many people get shot in the zone every year? Shit!" I knew he didn't know, and I wanted to kick his trombone into his teeth.

But I remembered the high school cafeteria as well. I remembered the table where I usually sat, and all the pale faces matching my plain bologna sandwich. I also remembered the tables which frightened me as I walked past them, tables where I didn't think I was welcome, and I remembered walking past them and noticing no white people and wondering if such unintentionally racist thoughts were forgivable, and if not, if there was any hope for me. The cafeteria was the true litmus test of the community, where one could see it divided as it was in town. It was where the City of South Haven's true colors were literally revealed — revealed and severed.

And I remembered, faintly, living in Jersey City. And I remembered it without the detail which has since been given me by my parents' retelling of our story there, that we were the only whites in our Puerto Rican neighborhood. I know that I, the neighborhood Gerber

baby, was blessedly oblivious even when we moved away in my fourth year.

And I wondered just why that ever changed, and who or what it was that introduced the poisonous seed of judgment into my mind which destroyed my young racial innocence and my ideological purity. Was it a teacher I had? A friend? Or small town life in general? Or perhaps it was the status quo of a nation of people who were not yet at that time quite suffocating from the stresses of postmodern isolationism and categorization.

If that poisonous seed had not been planted, if the roots of racial recognition had somehow never penetrated my soft mind, what would have been different? Would I have remained in contact with Antuann Langston after first grade and continued our friendship? Would I have frequented the various high school cafeteria tables more freely? Would this South African KFC woman somehow sense the difference and speak more easily with me? Would I have actually been less interested in a study abroad program in Namibia?

At least two things would not have changed. I would have still been raised in a house benefitting from a legacy of white privilege. And the people of the informal settlements and of historically black neighborhoods would still see the same pale Scandinavian emerge from the kombi to check out the craft market.

I would still remain caught in my unchosen identity. I would still be floating on the white foam of a social wave. I would still experience moments when I would wish I were someone else, even just for the sake of fitting into whatever context was convenient or desirable in that instant.

I would still be, inescapably and inexorably aptly, historically white.

I Loved Lucy

R. James Onofrey

The clock always seems to tick louder when I can't fall asleep. I've been awake for three days; the person in the apartment above me will not stop. If she isn't watching "I Love Lucy" on maximum volume, Frank Sinatra's voice is vibrating my ceiling fan. I would go up there to ask her to turn it down, but I was raised to respect my elders. Also, I'm afraid it would spread throughout the building that I am harassing the elderly woman in 5b.

My fingers begin to work out a beat on the mattress.

Beads of sweat pushing out of my head.

The hum of the ceiling fan rattles in my mind.

I pull myself out of bed and make my way into the kitchen. Pouring myself a glass of water, I realize I can still hear the wails of Lucille Ball. Oh my God, if this doesn't stop I might go insane.

Desi Arnaz Disorder.

Vivian Vance Syndrome.

William Frawleyosis.

I look at the clock above my sink, five-thirty. I might as well get ready for work; today is an early day at the office, I have to be there by seven. Something about a new client with a lot to offer.

After taking a shower, I get dressed and eat breakfast. At the elevator I'm not sure what button to press, up or down. I press up. I reach the fifth floor and walk down the hallway. There's 5b. I press my ear to the door and listen. My hopes of hearing movement are drowned out by Ricky Ricardo ranting in Spanish. The person across from 5b walks out her door. She's staring at me. Without a word, I walk to the elevator and press down.

At work, I can't seem to focus. The words on my computer screen seem to dance. Co-workers try to talk to me during lunch, but my attention is on the slow drip of water coming from the water cooler.

I can only scowl at the secretary, Lucille. Every time I look at her she seems to shift uncomfortably. To make things worse, she has red hair and wears clothes that look like they're from the '50s. Her face may not resemble the fire-haired Lucy from television, but it's close enough.

The hands on the clock move slowly. Mocking me. It's nice to be away from the noise, but the silence is just as bad.

Slipping the key into the lock of my apartment, I can already hear 5b's television. And it is still "I Love Lucy." Is there a channel just for that fucking show? This is the worst it's ever been, her television is usually off at this time.

I pick up the phone and call my friend.

"Hello?" He answers, a constant thud in the background.

"Hey, it's me. I was wondering if I can stay at your place tonight. The lady upstairs has been blaring

her television every night and I haven't slept in—"

"No can do, man. I've got, um, a friend over. She's going to be over for a while." I hear a prolonged moan before he hangs up.

I lie on my couch and turn on my television. I turn it up as loud as I can. How do you like that? I think to myself, staring at the ceiling. Even with the volume of my TV turned all the way up, I begin to doze off. A commercial catches my attention:

"This month on TV Land, is all Lucy all the time! That's right; everyday, 24/7 for thirty days, is an 'I Love Lucy' marathon." This is spoken over scattered clips of the show.

"Holy shit..." I say to myself. I don't know what to do. Do I just sit here for a whole month and tough it out? Or should I go up there?

I put on my shoes and walk to the elevator.

I press up.

I knock lightly on the door. Realizing Fred Mertz's argument with Ethel overpowers any sound in the hallway, I knock louder. And, like some cheesy horror film, the door pushes open slightly on my last knock.

"Hello?" I say as I walk through the door, noticing the atmosphere changing completely. The room is cold, and there is a strong, rotting smell. All around the apartment, on the floor and walls, is "I Love Lucy" memorabilia. I see the top of someone's head slightly above the back of a recliner. I walk toward her.

"Ma'm? Hi, I'm from 4b, the apartment downstairs? I've been having trouble sleeping and I was wondering if you cou—" I stop dead in my tracks. In the chair, wearing a fading t-shirt with an image of Lucy and Ethel—covered in chocolate behind a conveyor belt—is the corpse of the tenet of 5b. As if reading my mind, Lucy begins to wail.

White Collar van Gogh

R. James Onofrey

At the age of 13, a barber cut my ear off. It wasn't totally off after his scissors slipped, but it dangled by the lobe all the way to the hospital. Each pothole sending the bloody piece of flesh around in a circle. My family couldn't afford for it to be reattached, so the doctors had to fully remove it. Soon after the hospital released me, the barber skipped town.

Ten years later, my head looks like a Picasso, even though my nickname is van Gogh. And the hole where my ear used to be looks like a can of loosely-packed tuna. Here I am in my cubicle: one ear, no girlfriend, and a job that requires me to wear a tie everyday. People look at you differently when you wear a tie, even more differently when your head isn't symmetrical.

I hear the heavy footsteps of my boss coming toward me. Sulking isn't what the manager of an office wants to see, so I sit up. "Good morning, Mr. Ciseaux," it took me months before I was finally able to say his name without being corrected. It's seezo, he would say.

Before he says anything to me, he hands me a letter. "I need 150 copies of this letter, van Gogh," yes, even my boss calls me van Gogh, "When you're done, take them down to the mailroom. Oh ya, and can you start adding a bit more sugar to my coffee in the mornings?" I gave him a nod, and he walks away.

He never gives me the recognition I deserve, I'm the hardest working employee in the building. The others are either playing solitaire on their computer or fucking in the bathroom; yet I'm the one he goes to for menial tasks, such as getting him his morning coffee, or copying papers. However, when you work for a company that is responsible for the distribution of a low-grade sex lubricant that has been the subject of an array of complaints—rashes, burning piss, the discovery of its flammability after vigorous sex causes candles to fall from a headboard—there seems to be an overall vibe of apathy around the office.

At the copier, I think about how each eight hour day I work seems to take something out of me. Out of my soul. Not only do I have an asshole for a boss, but my coworkers treat me like shit. However, this treatment is subtle.

It began as I spotted the gleam in their eyes every time they got the chance to talk to me. They didn't think I realized what they were doing, making sure they talked in the direction of the tuna so I had to decipher everything they said. When I discovered this, I made it my mission to make it impossible for them to do it. I would lean against a wall, with the tuna facing the white cinderblocks. A couple weeks after I started doing this, I seemed to only talk to Mr. Ciseaux; even then it was no picnic. I had a choice, either let them degrade me, or have nobody to talk to. I chose the latter. Pride over social sanity.

The last copy shoots out of the machine, and I get on the elevator. The B glows as it takes me down to the

basement. Before the doors even open I can hear the chaotic sounds of the mailroom. I make my way past the filers, stuffers, and delivery personnel, and stop in front of the secretary's desk. She must be new. I have to come down here at least three times a week, and I've never seen her before.

"Can I help you?" She says with a voice of gravel.

"Yes, I need these letters mailed by the end of the week." I hand her the stack of paper. I was going to give her a polite "Thank you," but I notice she is scrutinizing my face, looking for the thing that makes me unusual. As I turn to walk away, I can see her eyes slightly widen as she spots the tuna.

This isn't the first time I've seen this kind of reaction. Each time I do I want to say something, but that would give them more of a reason to hate me. Something else needs to be done. My actions will definitely speak louder than words.

Six o'clock. I'm in my apartment watching an episode of *The Cosby Show*, subconsciously beginning the formulation of my plan. My dog, Sondheim, lies at the foot of the couch, curled up, sedated by his daily dose of Phenobarbital. Without that pill, he has seizures. I hate to see him sedated, but hate to see him with foam coming out of his mouth even more.

Light bulb.

All I need to do is slip Mr. Ciseaux some Phenobarbital into his morning coffee. Within the next hour, he would be out cold in his office. Long enough for me to do what I need to do.

I'm walking to Mr. Ciseaux's office with his cup of coffee. Three creams, ten sugars, five crushed tablets of Phenobarbital.

Setting the mug on his desk, "Here's your coffee, Mr. Ciseaux. I added extra sugar like you asked."

"Thanks, van Gogh. There was a major mistake in the letter I had you copy yesterday. Here is the fixed copy, make 150 like you did yesterday and bring it back down to the mailroom. Just explain to the secretary what happened."

I walk out of the room without a word. After making the copies, I watch the B illuminate once again.

I place the stack of papers on the secretary's desk. "I brought some letters in yesterday to be sent out, but they had an important mistake on them. Here's the fixed copies." I'm not sure if she is even listening to me. Her head is nodding, but her eyes are fixated where my car should be.

"What happened to your car?" She asks without the slightest tinge of hesitation.

"Well, I got really drunk one night, picked up a butter knife, and cut it off."

"Didn't that hurt?"

"Not really," I say as I walk away. Turning toward the elevator, I can see her staring at me.

As I walk back to my cubicle, I notice a stillness in Mr. Ciseaux's office. I slip my head through the door to see if he is out. With his head flat on the table, spit coming out of his mouth, Mr. Ciseaux was in another world. I walk in, closing and locking the door behind me.

I make my way to his desk and open the drawers until I find what I'm looking for. There they are, top right drawer. The sun glints off the blades of the scissors. I slap Ciseaux's back several times to make sure he won't wake up. I open the scissors and lower them to his ear. Without hesitation, I make a quick cut. A streak of blood stripes across my tie as I let the ear fall into my hand; I slip it into my pocket. I take off my tie and wipe the scissors clean, replacing them in the drawer.

I walk out of his office, throwing my tie away in a

trashcan. At my cubicle, I pull a fresh envelope out of my drawer and write OPEN ME on the front. Fishing the ear out of my pocket, I slip it into the envelope and seal it; the taste of Mr. Ciseaux's blood absorbs into my tongue.

I walk toward the elevator.

Inside, the B glows.

Making my way past the filers, stuffers, and delivery personnel, I stop in front of the secretary's desk.

"Oh, you again," she says.

"Mr. Ciseaux needs a book of stamps, he's fresh out."

"Okay, give me a minute." She walks into the storage room. I place the envelope on her desk, and get back on the elevator. On my way up, I hear a dulled scream.

I load my suitcase in the back seat of my car, and get into the driver's seat. Curled up in the passenger's side is Sondheim, already sedated.

I turn the ignition. "Okay Sondheim, let's go." I turn the corner, and make my way to the highway. Skipping town, with the tuna baking in the sun.

Balance

Jon Krause

"Tommy, wake up."

My brother's low voice woke me the first time, but I pretended to keep sleeping anyway. I rolled over, turning my back to him, and groaned.

"Tommy, I'm serious, get up." I felt his strong hands on my back, shaking me. "It's an emergency, get up."

"Mmmrrrhhhh." I opened only one eye as little as I could so Brett wouldn't see. It was still real dark out. I peeked at the clock. Five o'clock! Five in the goddamn morning!

"Tommy, I think Lucky had a stroke." I twisted my head and looked up at him, squinting real hard.

"What?" Now just for the record, being woke up at five in the morning and told that your dog just had a stroke has to be one of the worst ways to be woken up. Especially on a Saturday.

"Just get up and get downstairs. Quick." Brett hopped out of the room and shut the door behind him. I pulled myself out of bed and started getting dressed. The cot we had set up for Brett was crammed up against the dresser, and I had to lean over it to get a shirt out.

Back before Brett went to college, we had bunk beds in the room. When he left, Dad took the bed apart and put the top bunk in the basement. Dad said it wasn't worth the trouble to set the whole thing up again for the one week Brett was going to be home. I finished buttoning up my jeans and headed downstairs.

As I was walking down the hall, I could hear soft voices coming from the kitchen. Mom and Brett must have already been in there talking, but I couldn't make out the words. Now, I had once seen what a stroke looks like in a person before. My great aunt Sally had a stroke a long time ago, and she came to visit one summer back when I was in grade school. It sort of looked like one side of her face was melting. One corner of her mouth was pulled down real tight, like she was frowning, but only on that one side, and one eye was always closed halfway. She couldn't help but talk real sloppy, and I remember I had a hard time figuring out what she was trying to say.

When I got to the kitchen, Mom and Brett were standing together next to the table. Brett had his arms folded across his chest and Mom was shaking her head slowly. Lucky just lay there, sprawled out on the kitchen floor in a puddle of his own piss. His tongue was hanging out and he was breathing real hard, not cause he was tired but I think cause he was real scared. It was his eyes that creeped me out the most. They weren't really looking at the same thing - the left one was pointed straight up at the ceiling and the right one was staring at something on the wall. Both of them were jiggling back and forth. I remember one of my teachers telling us that that's what our eyes do when we sleep, they jiggle back and forth real fast like that. I looked at Lucky, then up at Brett. He just shook his head. I looked back down at the dog.

Dad burst into the kitchen from the hallway. When he saw the dog lying on the floor, he stopped.

"Ah, hell," he said. We all stood there for a moment looking down at the dog. We didn't know what it was we

were supposed to do, but we did know we didn't want to do it. After a time, Dad breathed out heavy and looked up at Brett.

"C'mon, Brett, get his legs," he said as he bent down over Lucky's head.

"Where we takin' him?" Brett said, and he stared at Dad with a kind of challenge in his eye. His arms stayed folded across his chest.

"We're takin' him outside."

"You ain't shootin' our dog," Brett said right away. Dad slowly stood back up. A look of disbelief came over his face for a moment, and then he looked just plain mad.

"What'd you say?"

"I said you ain't shootin' him," said Brett. "It's inhumane."

"Well, he ain't a hue-main," said Dad. "He's a dog. And I sure as hell ain't payin' thousands of dollars to keep some cripple dog alive. Now pick up his legs and let's go."

"We don't even know what's wrong with him," Brett said. "You don't know that's what's gonna happen." Dad had done the same thing a few years ago when Lucky slipped on the back patio stairs and hurt his leg. We all thought that maybe he had torn some important tendon or something and would need surgery. Dad was going to shoot the dog then, but we convinced him to take Lucky to the vet. The x-rays showed that nothing was torn, and Lucky got better on his own.

"Look at him, Brett," Dad said. "You really think he's gonna get better after this one?"

"I don't know, but you don't know that either," Brett said. The two stared at each other for a little while. Mom and I just kept quiet. "We should take him to see Dr. Keese."

Dad's eyes narrowed as he thought this over. "Fine,"

he said. "Now get his legs and help me get him in the truck."

I got to ride in the back of Dad's old pickup truck with Lucky on the way to the vet. It was my job to keep him still, to make sure he either didn't jump out or get tossed around inside the truck bed during the ride. The dog's big brown head lay in my lap, and he kept trying to look up at me with his big scared eyes. Well, he tried, but most the time his eyes wouldn't let him. I looked at the spots of grey that were starting to show up on his face and thought about all the years we've had him around, thought about losing him. We'd had the dog most my life, ever since our last dog, Bess, died of cancer when I was four. Dad wanted to train Lucky to be a hunting dog, but he was completely gun shy. He had always acted like a puppy, even as he got older. He was always jumping around trying to play.

I didn't want to think about that anymore, so I looked up. The sun was just starting to rise. Bare, frozen fields and shelterbelts flew past on the either side of the road. My hair was getting tossed around in the cold November air. In the cab, Dad and Bret would sometimes say a few words to each other, then get all silent for a while. I couldn't hear exactly what they were saying because of the wind.

Lucky tried to roll over, but his paws just scraped against the floor of the truck bed. I held him down and he gave up after a few tries. I turned my head to see where we were going. The vet's office was still a few miles off.

We could hear all the other dogs barking and rattling their cages in the back as we sat in the waiting room of the vet's office. The animal smell was so thick you could almost taste it. After waiting for about five minutes, Dr. Keese called us back into a cramped little room. We had

to slide Lucky across the linoleum floor to get him in there, and after a few tries we decided just to leave him on the floor instead of putting him up on the counter. Dr. Keese took a little flashlight and looked into Lucky's eyes and ears. "You poor baby," she said as she pet the top of his head. Lucky whimpered.

Dr. Keese took some blood from Lucky and went through a sliding door in the back of the room to where she could test it. Brett and I sat on the floor, holding Lucky down, and Dad was leaning up against the counter. No one spoke. After a few minutes, Dr. Keese came back.

"Well, the good news is it isn't a stroke," she said.

"What is it then?" asked Brett.

"It's a condition known as peripheral vestibular disorder."

Dad stood up from the counter. "Now what the hell does that mean?"

Dr. Keese dropped to her knees and stroked Lucky's fur. "It means he's got an infection in his inner ear."

"What, you mean in his brain?"

"Your inner ear isn't your brain," Brett said. "It means your cock...cockli..."

Dad snorted and rolled his eyes.

"Cochlea," Dr. Keese corrected him. "The infection is making it hard for him to keep his balance. I wouldn't say it's common, but it does happen from time to time in older dogs, especially in larger breeds."

"So, is this gonna kill him or what?" Dad said. "How long's he got?"

"Oh no, it isn't fatal," said Dr. Keese. Dad scowled.

"What about medication?" said Brett. "Shouldn't we be givin' him pills or something?"

"I could prescribe an antibiotic, but it probably wouldn't do much good," said Dr. Keese. "The best thing for him now is rest. The infection should pass on its own."

"How long will that be?" Dad crossed his arms and leaned back onto the counter.

"A few week, maybe," said Dr. Keese. "He's gonna need a lot of love for the next few days. He'll need help eating, getting outside to do his business..."

"Ah hell, that's just great," Dad said.

Brett looked back at Dad. "We can take care of him," he said as he nodded his head toward me. I kept quiet and looked at Lucky. "It won't be too much trouble."

"Shut up, Brett," Dad said. Brett turned back to Dr. Keese.

"You guys let me know if his condition changes at all, ok?" said Dr. Keese. Brett shook hands with her.

"Thanks for your help," he said. Dad coughed loudly and turned to leave. Brett and I started pushing Lucky back towards the waiting room.

After a long argument, Dad let Brett bring Lucky back into the house. We pulled him into the living room and left him lying on the carpet next to the couch. He kept trying to get up and walk around, but he never quite got up to his feet before he crashed back down. Once or twice he was able to get up for long enough to take one wobbly step before he fell. When he tried to stand, his head would twist as far as it could to one side. I thought it would be hard to always see everything tilted sideways like that. On the floor, he would roll around, kicking his back legs to push himself around in circles. After about fifteen minutes of this, Dad got so mad that he made us haul him back out to the yard.

"What a goddamn stubborn, stupid dog," he muttered to himself. "Doesn't even realize he can't stand on his own feet."

Mom was in the kitchen fixing dinner. "So what's wrong with him?" she asked.

"He has an infection in his head," Dad answered.

"In his inner ear," Brett said. "That's where you're

sense of balance comes from. There's this little thing in there that's full of liquid, and when the liquid sloshes around you know that you're off balance."

"They teach you that at school?" said Dad. Brett didn't answer.

Mom handed me a stack of plates and I started setting the table. Dad sat down in his place and Brett helped Mom move all the serving dishes over to the table. We all sat down, said our prayers, and dug in.

"So is he going to be like this forever?" said Mom.

"No, he'll get better on his own in a few weeks," said Brett. "We're gonna have to look out for him until then, make him as comfortable as possible."

"Careful," Dad said. "This isn't some family member you're talkin' about. It's a dog."

"Lucky's part of the family," Brett said. He put his fork down on his plate. "We've had him for years. Of course he's part of the family."

"He's useless," Dad said. "He's the most useless dog I've ever seen." No one was eating now except Dad. He kept bringing the fork from his plate to his mouth as he talked. Mom and I just sat there, looking back and forth at whoever was talking.

"Just cause he won't go huntin' with you don't make him useless."

"Course it does. He doesn't do anything. He's useless." Brett got real quiet for a while. I could tell he was thinking for something to say. His face got real angry.

"You don't even know what you're saying," Brett said. "You don't even know."

Dad stopped eating like the rest of us and looked up at Brett. "You think you're pretty fuckin' smart, don't you?"

"Yeah," Brett said. "I do."

"You must think I'm pretty stupid, then. Am I

right?" Brett just stared at him. Everyone just sat there in the silence. No one even breathed.

"Unbelievable," Dad said, and he continued eating. We sat like that for a moment, not saying anything, while Dad shoveled forkfuls of food into his mouth like we weren't even there. Brett stood quickly and walked straight out the back door. No one spoke for the rest of the meal.

After we had finished dinner, I cleared the plates and washed them in the sink. Dad scooped up all the leftover food into Tupperware containers. When all the work was done, he went out into the living room and turned on the TV. I went out to the back porch.

Brett was sitting there on the step watching Lucky roll around in the yard. The dog seemed to be doing better on the grass than he was doing inside. He was able to take a few steps before he fell back down, but he could only move around in a circle because of the way his head was tilted to the side. He did this over and over.

I went and sat down next to Brett. He wasn't crying or anything, but he looked real sad. I thought for a long time about what I should say. I couldn't think of anything. Instead, we just sat there and watched the dog spin in circles and fall down again and again. Finally, I said something.

"Why'd we have to go and have such a stupid dog?"

"He ain't stupid," Brett said. "He just don't know which way is up is all." I looked over at my brother, but he kept staring off into the distance. He would go back to college in less than a week. I knew I would miss him.

"He'll get better, I think," I said.

"Yeah," Brett said with a sigh. "Sure he will."

Over the River and Through the Corn

Ellen Orner

At least every six months, my family makes a trip to visit my mom's parents in Lawrence, Kansas. PapaCarl is a native: he grew up in nearby Wellsville, hopping fences and losing his shoelaces. Grandmama grew up in a mansion in Turkey, and still doesn't realize what Kansas is, or why she is living there. The two of them met on the American military base in Izmir, when Grandmama was twenty-six and sold PapaCarl, a young Air Force engineer, his pack of cigarettes. But we are talking now of their house in Lawrence, so different from any other reality. The car ride is twelve hours, but we try never to stay longer than three days. We are always fatter when we leave.

Every morning, PapaCarl leaves for Burger King coffee at 4:30 am, 5 when he's running late. Aunt Germaine arrives with breve lattes from the Bourgeois Pig around 11 am, 10:30 when she's running early. Uncle Alan snores on the air mattress by the front door until coffee time. PapaCarl comes back about 8 am, tiptoeing through the kitchen to avoid waking me on the living room couch, but I can hear his emphysemic breathing over his soft shuffle. Dad wakes me at 9, demanding to know if I want eggs for breakfast, and Grandmama emerges around 11:30, singing bonjour and demanding to know who drank her

latte. Mom enters the kitchen in time for breakfast, never without having showered and blow-dried her masses of burnished copper hair.

the smell is of ripening apples and day-old bread. fuji apples, specifically. they're crisper, sweeter. the tiles are smooth terra cotta, mostly cool but warm in odd patches. but you can only feel it with no socks. the light comes from three sources: the dim ceiling fixtures, the brilliant stove light, and the plant-crowded window beside the trash can. (it looks out on the neighbors' broad-slatted side fence and several oozing pines. the trees are gargantuan and monstrously ugly; the fence seems to grow around them. no one ever talks about them.)

a two-step ladder sits in the only cluttered corner with the microwave, phonebooks, Burger King honey mustard packets, and dried up highlighters. you sit on that when you want to hide and hear what's going on at the same time. the sound is a slight buzzing, a soft hissing, a furnace rumble, a hush of running water, an intermittent teapot whistle. the taste in this kitchen is omnipresent, i have never once walked through it—on the way to the shower, on the way out the door, on the way to dinner, on the way back from dinner, on the way to find someplace to cry—without stopping to open the black and tan fridge with a cracked plastic handle and digging through its plastic-wrapped pots to find something to put in my mouth.

Grandmama's kitchen, like the rest of the house, is unequivocally hers, and not PapaCarl's. In name. He cooks as much as she, he fills the fridge with its groceries, the pantry with its jars of Turkish olives, its aluminum

cans of olive oil. He keeps the top of the microwave stocked with pie from “The Merc” and the breadbox over the fridge full of springy, hard-cruste loaves. And yet, it is Grandmama’s kitchen, where we meet to nibble collard greens and patlijan¹, bits of lamb and taramah², yogurt and börek³; where we meet to hug in secret, gossip with an audience, vent in jest and fight in earnest, and always, to make tea.

the sounds are Italian opera, Simon and Garfunkel, cat-bird calls and cat claws on carpet, light snoring, pages turning, lips smacking. the arm chair in the corner has a seat of beaten up maroon velvet, the one by the book shelf is covered in a scratchy, stinging piece of Turkish carpet, and the one facing away from the TV is made of balling up mustard yellow wool. the couch is new—1980s—and deeply indented on the left side, where Grandmama roasts. the room’s centerpiece, like a battered family idol, is a torn and taped 1986 newsprint edition of the New York Times Crossword Puzzle Dictionary. it sleeps on its altar, Grandmama’s ottoman, black with smeared ink and fat with cut-out pieces of secret things. it is wisdom itself, crippled by age and a lopsided spine. Grandmama guards it from overzealous worshippers, especially the cats.

the light is fragmented and filtered: each serious reader finds his own floor lamp, and the rest of us squint when it rains. the walls are wood-paneled; the floor is parquet; the ebony statuettes on the cast iron book shelf gaze admiringly down on thick books about classical Greek philosophers and French impressionists. the smell ought to be a damp smoking hearth fire but instead, it is pine sap and cold condensation on the storm door. in and out, in and out, two ancient black kitty cats make their way every few hours.

The living room belongs to Grandmama too, and to females generally. The men come to visit, but we don’t make room for them on the couch, and if they pick up the remote and try to change the channel to the Cardinals game, we attack. Don’t be unsociable, we say. If you’re

in here, you talk to us. And help with this crossword. Or be quiet so we can read. The living room is where we roast, nap, fester, glare, watch the weather, watch the ceiling fan, laugh and laugh, squabble over crossword puzzles, and share Turkish pistachios from an old bronze bowl while we wait for dinner.

in summertime, the geraniums in the window pull in humid air and stink up the dining room. that is the only smell. in winter, the geraniums tickling your neck hibernate, but the room is still too small, the glass bureau too big, too full of fragile Indonesian things. we make the table fit eight; the feeling is of each others elbows, and a frayed plastic table cloth, beige and dusty rose, from 1973. in the middle, a tiny silver donkey stands with his head bowed, waiting for someone to pinch tiny salt crystals from the tiny barrels roped to his flanks. the glasses are clouded from automatic dishwashing, and the serving spoons are mismatched. the room is full of light, because the dining room is really just a crowded corner in a wide open space: a huge room with a bay window and tropical plants, ancestral photographs and a set of claw-footed furniture with immaculate white upholstery. we sit on it rarely—more often, we drape it with coats, hats, and toddler toys.

The dining room is where we pretend to be civil while we needle and pound, insinuate things, hold our forks in the left hand, and slop roasted okra on each others’ plates. Last December, when my cousin Lena wasn’t speaking to her mother (Aunt Germaine), and Grandmama wasn’t speaking to Kyla (Lena’s three-year-old daughter), and Uncle Alan, who had a terrible cold, wasn’t speaking to anyone, we talked about the yogurt. It went something like this:

Mom: Dad, why is the yogurt pink?

Kyla: Pink?

PapaCarl: I don’t see anything.

Mom: There, around the edges. Is it mold?

Lena: Let me see it.

PapaCarl plops some on his plate.

Grandmama: Yes, just eat it and if you die sooner than we're expecting...

Aunt Germaine: It's mold.

Dad: (sitting in the geranium patch) I can smell it from over here.

Mom: The mold?

Dad: The yogurt. I can't stand yogurt. Why do you all like it?

PapaCarl: Mold isn't pink.

Aunt Germaine: Some mold is pink. Especially on dairy products.

Mom: What's the date on the container?

PapaCarl: Englewood, Colorado.

(laughter)

Mom: Where's the lid? It's on the lid.

Dad: (from the kitchen) November 24th. It's a month old.

PapaCarl: (still reading the carton) Mountain High Yogurt. Contains live cultures. May turn pink. Heh, heh, heh.

Everyone laughs but Grandmama.

Grandmama: It's rotten. Let's get rid of it.

PapaCarl: (plops more yogurt on his spanikopita) It's good.

Grandmama: Aho, he's going to die.

Mom: You're always finding new ways to kill yourself, Dad.

PapaCarl: (passes the yogurt to Uncle Alan, who sets it in front of me) Mold is good for you. Blue cheese. Penicillin.

Me: (shuddering) I'm allergic to penicillin. Get that out of here.

Grandmama: (disposing of the yogurt) We're going to have to get the Poop Tea out, aren't we.

Dad: (setting down his fork) It always comes to that with this family. That's your solution to everything.

Me: PapaCarl's on antibiotics, isn't he?

Grandmama: How's the fish?

Mom: Delicious.

Shortly after, Uncle Alan's chair broke under him, and we laughed so hard we forgot about the yogurt, along with why several of us weren't speaking to each other.

the light is from the television, blue and soothing, and the sound is of voices, real and transmitted. the taste is of desert—raspberry trifle with fresh whipped cream, chocolate chip cookies, or store-bought pie—any desert will do. the smell, for PapaCarl, is the oxygen through his tube; for the rest of us, it's the warm smell of old wood and electronic heat. miscellaneous heirlooms and my mom's adolescent paintings adorn the walls; the plywood table in the middle is for feet, or an extra seat when it's crowded.

PapaCarl's room, a little closet off the huge room with elegant furniture, contains two man-sized chairs and a TV devoted to KU football. This is where we play cards, smile over pictures, talk on the phone, listen to Air Force stories, tell college stories, read the paper and forget to answer—the place where we retreat when the kitchen gets too hot.

This house, along with the backyard whose rusty metal swing set Grandmama has transformed into an elaborate plant stand, and the front porch where Lena flaunts her cigarettes and my cousin Anna and I sneak them, is as familiar to me as the flexible gold fish necklace Grandmama wears around her neck, or the way PapaCarl closes kitchen drawers with his belly. It's a piece of Turkey, where I've never been; a piece of an era that I missed; and a piece of bizarre inheritance that can only be myself.

¹Turkish for eggplant dip

²fish egg dip

³spanikopita (Greek), or spinach pie

Contributors' Notes

Taylor Bryan is a sophomore Spanish and communications TV/radio major from Houston, Texas. He heard about the Lighter from one of his friends who encouraged him to submit his pictures.

April Edwards is a senior studying journalism and professional writing. For her photograph, she studied abroad last semester in Germany, and took her film camera with her. Film is difficult to find in Europe, and when you do find it, it's usually very expensive for only one roll. So she only used her camera when she saw interesting, unusual or beautiful things, like a million swans and no monsters at Loch Ness in Scotland.

Bailey Fortner is a senior art major, concentrating in graphic design.

Amanda Gartman is a junior art major/ukulele player with a habit of staying up late but not doing anything productive, unless you count driving around with good music and sort of okay people at three a.m. productive.

Kelsey Howard is a junior political science and humanities major who loves to spend her time sitting barefoot on her front porch while playing guitar in the sunshine. Her inspiration comes from food, words, music, and friends... thanks guys.

Michaelene Jewett is a junior creative writing and graphic design major. Writing has been a part of her life since she was little. She found a secure place where she can let her emotions speak for themselves. Her greatest source of inspiration has always been her grandfather who died of lung and liver cancer about 7 years ago. The poem "Ghosts" was inspired by Joel Sheesley's portrait of an elderly couple embracing in the woods. The woman looked confused, inspiring her to write about Alzheimer's Disease. The man became the voice of the poem, the one who looked after his wife and watched her slowly slip away. She hoped to capture how life has passed, but his compassion and love for his wife has kept them together. Love is always an important motivator behind all her poems.

Carolyn Johnson is a senior elementary education major and German minor.

Jon Krause is a senior creative writing and humanities major. Next year he will either go to graduate school and become a famous Hollywood movie director or move into his parent's basement and get a job as an office bitch. He can't wait to wail on his new guitar and play around with his new Mac, both of which are in the mail. Waiting is turmoil.

Dustin Lawrence is a senior studying political science and journalism. The thoughts that lead to his greatest work arise from a deep fascination and unholy desire for anarchy in its purest form.

John Linstrom is a third-year coffee drinker who would like a nap but feels a little too skittish about the idea and, dang it, the alarm keeps going off. He's only had one flying dream that he recalls, although he rode a broom in two others, and imagines that you might count the Spider Man one as well. Primary credit for his ideas included here goes to his parents, 24 college students, the snow (not missed), a live-action mystic from Dorado, and that Great Host of Depressing Sociologists, with love.

Dan Lund is a sophomore art major who is a fan of good music, the Cubs, listening to good music while watching the Cubs, and photography. lawlz

Robbie Onofrey is a freshman journalism major and creative writing minor. His inspiration comes from nature, people, and his favorite writers (Chuck Palahniuk, Ernest Hemingway, Amy Hempel, Raymond Carver, Donald Ray Pollock).

Molly Reynolds is a junior Spanish and International Service major. She took "window" from the top of a double-decker bus in Puebla, Mexico. She likes cupcakes. A lot.

Hashem Rifai is a junior biology major. The second couch in the chapel view lounge on a sunny Monday morning is his playground.

Karl Strasen is a graphic design student in the 2011 Valpo class. His work is primarily influenced by traveling and seeing new people, cultures, and landscapes. Therefore, much of his photography contains a hint of photojournalistic inspiration. However, some of his ideas have led to digital processing and manipulation, allowing him to change the context and meaning of subject matter. He is also from Colorado and enjoys

being in the outdoors biking, hiking, and camping in his free time.

Megan Telligman is a junior biology/creative writing major who is picking up bad habits right and left. She enjoys symmetry, paranoia, and losing her voice.

Robert Thompson is a junior mathematics and philosophy major. His sources of inspiration include the human condition, his psyche, and his freakin' awesome cat.

Stephanie Wood is a senior Elementary Education and Spanish major who aspires to return to Kindergarten after graduation, but as the teacher this time, rather than the student. She was finally able to take a photography class (her first completely elective class!) during her last semester at VU, and she has thoroughly enjoyed the experience. She is really excited that her work is appearing in this issue of the Lighter.



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Second main paragraph of text, continuing the narrative or discussion.

Third main paragraph of text, possibly containing a transition or new point.

Fourth main paragraph of text, continuing the flow of the document.

Fifth main paragraph of text, showing the progression of the content.

Sixth main paragraph of text, maintaining the document's structure.

Seventh main paragraph of text, approaching the end of the section.

Eighth main paragraph of text, providing final details or conclusions.

Ninth main paragraph of text, concluding the page's content.

Faint footer text at the bottom of the page, possibly including a date or page reference.

The Lighter is currently accepting submissions for the Fall 2009 edition at
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