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Girl with the Skull Mask On

Scott Broker

Driving fast through Mexico City on Thursday night and the wind is way up and my mind is way up and the walls along the highway are way up, too, overgrown with thousands of Black-eyed Susans. And I'm thinking that they're real pretty there, in Mexico City, while I'm driving fast, because of the way they cover something so ugly so pleasantly. This is what I find myself thinking every time I hit that stretch—the one where the annoying kicks of the potholed highway fall away and I float on a little piece of asphalt heaven—on my way into Zona Rosa.

And it's real pretty, right? until I remember that it's just graffiti, not flowers, there on the concrete walls. This is Mexico City. And this is the highway. And Black-eyed Susans are not Mexico's—but Maryland's—favorite flowers. So really it's just painted little televisions with painted little suns in their centers and nothing more than just that—pretty, sure, but no state flower. And I've never decided if that makes the whole thing completely worthless in the end, you know? but tonight like all nights I move over the question because by the time I really get to thinking about it the girls are there, lining the streets like little light poles all evenly spaced and all standing up real straight and whatnot, held up high by these tiny little heels that I always laugh imagining Maggie in.

That's when I'm home, though, MD-based, there not here, and in the shower, trying to get hard by thinking of them down in Mexico, high-heeled and high and all of that good stuff. Legs smooth and dark as asphalt, right? or something like that, and going on for what looks like forever: body after body bordering the roadside, hips pressed out, hands pressed out, selves pressed out. It's the stuff of dreams, really, but when I'm there in MD I can't manage to keep Maggie out of the vision and so all of a sudden she's standing in the shower with me and them and she's in these tiny high heels looking funny as hell and making me laugh but also making my dick soft and so it's really weird, there.

But not here. Here, in the car, driving slower now, my dick is way up, too, and it's not weird at all.

Lots of things *are* weird down here, though. Like for one I'm always thinking about how even though nearly everyone at Seek & Destroy Security™ comes down to Zona Rosa most weekends it's something we only talk about in pairs, never groups, and so it's like Jillian and Tank and I will be standing drinking coffee and only when Tank leaves will Jillian lean in and say: "This past one I snacked on some mad smack and some madder snatch" and for a while I think she's opened up, that she's told me this because she knows I huff now and then or she knows I'm cool with lesbians or something like all of that but when I talk to Tank, later, and indirectly mention Jill's weekend he's all like, "Oh yeah she told me on the lunch break" and I feel sort of duped, every time, there in the office, even though I do it and, really, we all do it, and it's pretty weird, right? the way we talk about it all?

And it's like that's strange, sure, but how about the fact that the stories are never really different, no matter what weekend we're talking about, yet we still treat them like sweet novelties: Jillian gets a girl both Friday and Saturday, and I get a girl, usually just Thursday since it's my first night of the week down in Mexico, and Tank goes to the same bar and talks to the bartender all night because he says he reminds him of Wisconsin, where he lives half his life, and Saul goes to the gay bars and comes into the store with glitter in his hair and it's one of those funny things because he's a pretty serious guy usually, with a deep voice and broad shoulders and then so there's also Deb, who will either go with Saul sometimes or even Tank just once or twice but usually just wanders place to place alone so long as she can get like totally plastered twice over, which is how she likes to put it. All of us, really, minus Claudia, the Baptist, going to Zona Rosa on nights and all of us, always, talking about it only in pairs even though we are all doing the same things each time and eventually telling every single person in the office—minus Claudia, who says we are killing ourselves with sins and substances and sinful substances—that precise story.

Within my own head, even, I'd say that there's not much difference regarding these weekends, either, which is funny because when we started this exchange thing with Mexico they kept stressing that it would be hard, saying things like adjustment and culture shock and homesickness, like we were moving off to space or something catastrophically huge like that, even though we'd be spending half the days of our weeks in the USA. Then they'd go on about diversity and knowledge and the whole two nations united under one security sort of thing and even though S.A.D.S.TM is just a department store branch off of this international effort, I sort of believed it. And so but the point is they spoke volumes about how Mexi-

co City would come at us in Technicolor, like we would remember every detail of every day and inevitably fuse our USA lives with our Mexico City ones, being leaders in showing what it meant to live across borders, which was their catchphrase, but then I got here and hardly remember anything, especially when it comes to the weekends. When Maggie asks what I did, I'll shrug because there's no telling one weekend from another and, if she would care to hear, I couldn't even tell her one girl from another. Little desert fairies, the lot of them, who are all sweet, yes, but whose only real impression is the one left in the passenger seat, marked by the little bit of sand—probably stuck up against their bodies or hidden in their skirts or something—that they all manage to leave behind. And that's easy to wipe off.

So but this Thursday proves a different sort of weird but I don't notice something's off about it until I realize something's *real off* about it. So I'm driving along through Zona Rosa and I realize that there are these floating skulls along the roadway, pasty white and all staring at me, it seems, and it takes me another second to realize that all the skulls aren't actually floating but that they're attached to the bodies of the girls on the sidewalk, like one of those sexy skeleton Halloween costumes you might see in the USA at a high school or something but it's all the girls and it's not Halloween and seeing them is just super weird because it's like it's just me and the heads and everything else feels real dark, even though it's not, and then so I look at the girl I just picked up and realize that she's got this skull on her own head, too, sitting right there in my car beside me.

"What's up with the head?" I ask, eyes forward and thinking of whether I should just pull off now and let her out or whether I should just go with it because maybe I'll have a better version of the same Mexico City-type story for the group and surely I'll still get some pleasure out of the whole thing—assuming she's willing to take it off, of course.

The girl does not answer me but just turns her head my way and then she's placing her hand on my upper thigh and then I'm feeling really weird because I can just see those black eyes of the skull looking at me and it's spooky but I'm also responding to the hand, naturally, and it makes my head squirm. The hands have always gotten me and, really, I might even go so far as to say that it was a hand that made me interested in these weekend ventures at all because, see, to make a long story short, my first encounter with a Zona Rosa girl involved just the hand of a Zona Rosa girl. I won't go on about it but there was something magic about the way that it worked so assuredly in the dark of the car while we moved through

brightly lit streets—one of the better tricks the girls pull off.

We go for a ways and then eventually I turn to the girl and ask, “*Día de los Muertos?*” since it’s the only thing I can think of and maybe it’s already come without me knowing, even though S.A.D.S™ likes to do something each year for it because we have like one actual Mexican coworker and cultural integration and all of that kind of thing.

“*En dos días,*” the girl says, and I can hear her voice hitting against the inside of the mask. “*Este es para las chicas muertas de la calle.*”

Her hand has managed to get inside my belt but I’m not even hard, too busy thinking about the way a mask feels when you speak or breathe too much into it: hot and wet, and so I’m wanting her to take it off for this reason and others, obviously, and now I’m feeling extra creepy myself because I don’t know much Spanish—despite having been working with S.A.D.S™ for half of the week in Mexico each and every week for almost five years—but I do know she is talking about dead girls and streets. And so this whole time she still has the skull over her own head even though she’s trying to grab a hold of my dick and I can’t help but imagine Cynthia saying “I told you so” when I go in tomorrow dick-less or end up dead on the side of the road because the devil fucked the life out of me and so I pull the car over and turn it all off.

“Let’s get out,” I say, the talk of death and streets making me feel especially paranoid right about now. This is one of the other weird things about us at S.A.D.S™ that I should mention: everyone has voiced at some point feeling what Tank ultimately termed being *Trumaned*, which is where you feel like you’ve got a bug in your phone or a little camera on your car and that someone some place either far off or real close is watching everything you do. No one really lets it bother them, obviously, but it is always there, and so like for me, on this particular Thursday, the watched feeling faded a bit when I hit that sweet stretch of road and then welled up again when I saw the first girl. And it welled right up in my dick, making the thing twitch a few times.

That was then, though, when the feeling was the sort that usually comes for me on my way in—sort of like the thrill of jumping the fence into Eden, minus the godliness. Now, though, it’s like I’ve got a dead body in my trunk or something and no curtain to close.

The girl clears her throat and when I look over at her leaning against the car, I see that she has bored a hole an inch deep into the dirt with her heel and so her shoe keeps dropping in and out and in and out and I want

to touch her, suddenly, but then my eyes move to the mask again and I stop. "Let me take that off," I tell her, reaching for it and getting its sides in my hands before she slaps them both away.

"No," she says. And then again: "No."

And so like the scene is weird already, us pulled over on the side of the highway and her with the mask on and me in my suit but now I'm sure it's gotten an extra kind of weird because when she says this I don't know what to do but close my eyes. And the weirdness of this is that I can't just close them because I want to look, too, and so I press my face against the hood of the car, warm with drive, and almost laugh at how odd it all is. When a truck passes by, I stand and open my eyes and half think the girl might be gone but she's there, smoking a cigarette like a perfect kind of advertisement. "We should get off the road," I say.

So some ten minutes after pulling off, I've got a hold of the girl's hand and I lead her off the highway and we start on up a hill and there's a minute here where I'm ahead of her and I've got her little hand, sweaty and soft, in my own, sweaty and softer, and as we move through the trees there's a little bit of excitement in my head and I even feel a little movement from my member down south. When we reach the crest, though, I turn, face the mask, deflate, and sit down on the hard dirt, looking at Mexico City glowing off in the distance and the mountains darkening in the space behind all of that light. Above me, there's a pale lamp just like the ones on the road, casting us like a limelight might but there, sitting on top of the ridge, I feel less like a spectacle and more like someone emerging from a courtroom with a crowd of folks flashing big cameras in their face.

The girl plops down next to me and puts her hand in the space beneath my bellybutton, which feels intimate and weird but I let it rest there. With her other hand, she reaches up and runs her fingers across my chin and lips and I'm there, thinking about a million and one things and not least among them Black-eyed Susans and how bizarre it is that they're called that. Maggie hates the name, calling them instead Doe-eyed Susans, which I've always liked, but either way I'm caught up thinking about them speckled all across the highway below us, the girl and me, but then, of course, I'm correcting that thought because they *aren't* there and MD has not made its way into Mexico. And I'm happy about that, right? because it's better for the over there to be away from the here. Maggie would hate the heat here, and the drugs, and probably the girls even though we've always been open because we're progressive and nonconformist and all of that sort of thing, and I'm sure she's slept with my cousin Lucas at least

ten times in the last year or so and so but anyways it's better to keep the things separate always. There is here and there is there and it's better to not try and bridge the gap because sometimes things should look different—after all, look how different we all are, all of us working at S.A.D.S™ just part time in Mexico, while we're here down south as opposed to when we're there up north. We have not been globalized—another phrase the ones up top love—and I'd even go so far as to say our lives are still cleanly halved between the places and sure, sometimes it seems exciting for the two things to come real close now and then but I think each of us at S.A.D.S™ would agree that for now they really shouldn't be touching at all.

This is what I'm thinking, sitting there in Mexico City, right next to the girl with the skull mask on, because there's something hovering above my chest that feels like guilt. And I'm wondering if this is the weight that so many of the workers who have quit S.A.D.S™ over the last five years spoke of when they left, whether they called it weight or burden or nausea or Hell because, truth be told, I'm starting to think that they were all speaking to what I feel now, up high on this rock. And I'm not sure if it's guilt, really, but it feels like something gone too far, like the moment you're in a car on an icy road and realize that you've braked too late. It's that sort of a weight, though I'm not sure what I've let go on. Maggie seems to be sitting here with me, someplace, but really my attention is being pulled again and again toward the girl beside me. And really it's not the girl but the mask, which is glowing paler than ever, and I think to beg her to take it off, like I might understand something if it's gone, but I don't ask again and instead I continue sitting all quiet and she keeps touching me like she she's trying to find a pulse and I'm half certain that there isn't one at all. After a bit of this, then, she moves back and reaches her hands up, placing them on the cheeks of the skull and then peeling the thing back and off, letting a flow of black hair out.

In the city's blaze, her eyes are shining but, inside, I am pulling back, collapsing into myself like a sinkhole because there, maskless, framed by the darkest of hair, her face still holds the skull's face. I shut my eyes, wishing she would be one of the Mexico City girls again, but when I open them, her face is still skull, and when she reaches toward my leg again, I jerk back and turn from her and before I know what's happening I'm throwing up into the rocks beside me.

The girl's voice rises behind me like the last sound from a deflating balloon. "Are you okay?" she asks in slow English. She puts her hand on my cheek this time and I expect to be bone but the blood is moving and

warm beneath the skin.

When I sit up and look at her, her face looks wholly new, young with dashes of blue above her eyes, slightly crooked bottom teeth that at first I'm sure I would have noticed but now am not so positive about and she has these lines near her eyes from laughing too much, I would guess, and that seems important too. It all seems important, really, but not in a way that gets me off, and then I'm thinking about that mask, about that street full of masks, and I'm wondering if this night is nothing special after all, if maybe they've had masks on this whole time, whether actually or not, and this gets me all kinds of spooked and the girl's there just smiling at me and now I'm wanting to tell her to run, to tell her I could kill her, to tell her I did kill her, in some ways, maybe, but that she's free now and forever. Free of the mask, free of dying.

And that's real nice of me, right? but I don't do those things. Instead, I sit completely still, holding the girl's face in my gaze for fear that any movement will make a skeleton of it again. After a while, I ask what her name is but when I do she just laughs, probably finding the way I speak Spanish stupid and funny. She doesn't answer but just leans in and leaves a circle of red lipstick on my cheek.

We sit for a while more and when she starts whistling the *Jeopardy!* theme, I say, "You can go." She looks confused until I motion with my hand and then she stands and pulls off her little heels before heading down the hill. I realize as she leaves that she has taken the wallet from my left pocket but I'm too busy remembering showers in MD with Mexican girls and with Maggie and with all the in between space, leaving me soft, to even think to call out to her. And then she's over the ridge and I'm grabbing the skull mask from where she was sitting. In my hands, the thing almost feels powerless, limp and warm like a crushed animal or something, but then I'm pulling it over my own head, feeling the heat from her breath against my own cheeks and lips, and I almost taste her name, I think, or something like that, and the mask is alive and gasping. I press my tongue against the lips of the thing and her name is there and then gone, over and over again.

And surrounding my own head, the thing is way too tight, sure, and it's sweaty and totally suffocating, but when I look again at Mexico City all aglow, listening to the girl as she leaves me there, I can't help but think how perfect before laying my head back and breathing in real deep, feeling for the first time something of what it's like to be invisible in a way that's not free. And it is nothing like driving fast. And it's nothing like crossing some border into something or other. It is something, instead, like mov-

ing at the bottom of a pool with no goggles or sense of up and down. A matter, simply, of breath.

So here, at the end, so far away from the rest of it, all I can do is force my own lids down tight, focusing my mind on all that seems relevant while buried in this latex: namely, the simple fact of breathing, of staying afloat, of getting something through the little holes of the mask. And sure, I'm not there on the roadside, there with high heels, there with my hands pressed out, waving. In truth, I'm not there at all. A painted television for a state flower in some ways, yes, but it stands that the breathing is hard, and it's unpleasant, and with my back flat against rock and my eyes watering from the wind, I think that the best I can do is to stay just like that, breathing that suffocated breath, all through the night.

Conflicting Intimacies:
A Featured Interview with
Scott Broker

The following interview was conducted by fiction editors James McNulty and Carson Frame on March 14th, 2015.

James: Hello, Scott! Hope the weather is nice over in the UK. We're so excited to start our first featured interview!

Carson: Hi Scott! It's great to finally speak with you now that the drafting process is finished!

Scott: Hi, James and Carson. I'm equally happy to be speaking with both of you. Thanks for having me!

James: Tell us about your creative process, Scott. Stream of consciousness, in my experience, takes a high level of concentration to write. What were some of the difficulties of writing in this style?

Scott: Much of my creative process revolves around exploring a particular voice— its diction, its syntax, its nuances, and so on. In any story, it is the movement of the voice that first interests me (as a reader and a writer) and I think that making a voice believable and proper to your piece can be difficult to figure out, especially when writing stream of consciousness. One of the ways I have found effective in approaching SOC is by having faith in natural rhythm: throughout this piece especially, I was constantly reading it back out to myself, making sure that the cadence felt natural to the speaker. For SOC to really feel like SOC, the reader ought to be able to trace its movements even when the actual sentence seems to meander in all directions. The difficulty, though, is figuring out the balance between clarity, tension, and indulgence.

Carson: What are some of the benefits you think readers derive from the SOC style you used? I was really interested in how the main character's speech alternated between halting and poetic.

Scott: I think that the particular benefit of SOC in this piece comes down to the interplay of content and form. Within the narrative, there is a lot happening with misperception and efforts at orienting oneself. I think it helps to see this through a narrative voice that wanders— moving down certain avenues of thought then stopping suddenly, turning in a wholly new direction. It makes it clear that the "reality" within the piece is being dictated by a very particular mind and the SOC keeps the reader unable to move out of that perception-dependent reality— locked, that is, in someone else's head and seeing the world, for better or worse, as that person is seeing it.

James: Do you plot out your work before writing it? I've seen images of Faulkner's outlining process scribbled on his walls; I realize it may become difficult to write stream of consciousness without rambling unless you have a very defined structure beforehand.

Scott: I've actually never been much of a plotter— almost all of my stories originate with a first line that I've been mulling for a few days but that's pretty much it. The plot tends to come as the voice works itself out in those early bits, though I find that whenever I become attached to a certain idea plot-wise, the voice of the piece takes it somewhere completely different. This particular story was slightly different because I knew where it ended from the beginning, but I would attribute all of the in-between to the way the first line came out.

Carson: Yes, I was wondering about your choices for that character. What metric did you use to decide what merited inclusion in his thoughts and what was extraneous?

Scott: This is the sort of thing I'm never able to figure out. Going back to the idea of natural rhythm, there seems (for certain characters, at least) to be patterns of specific thinking that make themselves known early on in the story. It's when I see myself refraining to ideas introduced that I know they're important for the piece as a whole (for example, the narrator's quick jump to Maggie interested me as a prospect initially and when she kept appearing as an idea, I knew that that thought was important for

him.) Other lines of thought emerge in early drafts but tend to fall away naturally.

Carson: I like the idea of an opposition between voice and plot, having it be sort of a hashing-out. I mean, the character certainly seems more eloquent in situations where he's comfortable.

James: So you figure out the plotting as you write— letting the voice take control. I feel like many character-driven authors work this way.

Carson: I want to talk a little bit about the role of place in “Girl with the Skull Mask On.” Can you describe how you settled on Zona Rosa? I'm interested to know if the themes of the story arose from that place, or vice versa. You mentioned that the character's voice laid groundwork for the plot. However, themes (at least in my experience) often build from an author's personal associations.

Scott: Certain themes are absolutely located in place— the origin of the story was actually in a photograph I saw of a line of women in Mexico wearing masks to recognize the violence within the prostitution industry. It was such a striking image that I immediately felt compelled to throw a naive American into that scene— to make him (and myself, really) figure out what to make of it. As for Zona Rosa specifically, this came from a bit of research on red light districts in Mexico City— it proved to be an interesting spot because not only do people go there for prostitutes, but it is also a developed commercial and party area. This latter information informed certain co-workers' weekend ventures.

James: In reference to throwing a version of yourself into the world— that seems a wonderful way to approach a story: as a way to help yourself answer a question.

Carson: I like how the story maintains that foreign feeling between people. The naiveté of the main character persists, or is at least acknowledged. You mentioned being in the UK right now. Did your own international experiences inform the story in any way?

Scott: Interestingly, this entire story was written while I was still homebound in the US. That said, my experience of being new places heavily informed the approach to the character. I think that the distance between

yourself and those around seems especially tangible when you are abroad (this is certainly something I have felt before); what comes from this is either a fascination with your place within the foreign or a sort of withdrawal into your own self as a means of comfort. Or, as is the case with the narrator, a little bit of both. I also am interested in the way that geographical lines manage to so decisively disconnect us (whether in the sense of isolation just mentioned or in the sense of care/sympathy, both politically and personally speaking). As can be seen in the story, the way to overcome this immediate me versus them position is something I wanted to work out.

Carson: Your comments about the self and "the foreign" kind of lead into my next question about intimacy. The story really seems to investigate the different ways in which people connect and relate. The last scene, for example, seems to express some kind of ultimate intimacy, even though the character is completely alone.

I wondered how you honed in on the idea of breath as a unifying thing there, as well.

Scott: Yes— this odd interplay of conflicting intimacies was something I was interested in precisely for the reasons mentioned earlier. Many of the characters are unmoored in the new context, looking for ways to feel connected. Some are more benign (Tank's bartender, for instance) but others delve into the uncomfortable space of intimacy at another's expense. The whole sexual urgency throughout the piece was meant to address this latter portion: sex is one of our more natural modes of connecting, but, here, it is being employed in a way that seems mostly to further distance. I wanted to explore how people seek intimacy, misunderstand intimacy, and ultimately reach authentic intimacy in perhaps unanticipated ways. Like you said, the narrator's most intimate moment comes at the end, when he is wholly alone. This arrives, though, once he has seen, however minutely, something into the worth of the girl he is with. I think that when anyone sees another's value, there is an immediate intimate moment; however, the power of this sort of experience is amplified when there was a presupposed disconnect, such as the sense of "the foreign" just mentioned. I thought it was important that the narrator's understanding, though, really be limited to the space of breathing, of living, because he is, in many ways, totally apart from her experience and to claim otherwise would be problematic in myriad ways. That does not mean, though, that he can't connect to her by virtue of them both simply being alive.

James: We had the pleasure of working with you through a few drafts of the story; first through small notes, then intensive critiques. It was an honor and a pleasure to work with you on this; how was working with the same two editors?

Carson: Did you feel, as a writer, our particular pull as an audience? Can you describe how you balanced your own goals for the story with our feedback?

Scott: Good questions. For the most part, having both of your feedback was incredibly helpful in illuminating where the story spoke too little or too much. I think that I had reached a point where it was difficult locating myself as a true reader of the piece and hearing your takes helped put me back in that place quite a lot. As for the particular pull, I think that I could see it but not in a way that felt like "There go James and Carson pushing for X again." The feedback read to me like very good readers wanting a complete story, not like two people with sensitive tastes and odd desires. As for balancing my wants and yours: for the most part, I would implement a suggestion, give it a day, and then return to it, again, as a reader might. Certain things coalesced immediately to the narrative and hardly stuck out (the better done additions) while others became...well, the opposite of coalesced. All in all, though, I loved the process and, again, cannot lend my thanks enough.

James: Regarding your odd desire comment— sometimes editors don't sufficiently explain where they're coming from with their suggestions. It's always very important to us to address why we're making suggestions rather than simply making the suggestions and expecting the writer to take them. We'd never want to write your story for you.

What was the most difficult part of writing and revising this story?

Scott: Well, let it be known that your approach to feedback was quite helpful. Something I struggled a lot with in both the original writing, but especially in the editing was regaining the voice. When I was originally doing it, I would re-read all of what I had aloud three or four times for each writing session so that I could get back into the narrator's head. It was still very fresh, though, so it was fairly easy delving in. The editing, though, which came much later, proved a bit more difficult. When I wanted to incorporate new content, I had to frame it so completely in the voice in order to avoid it sticking out as new— I even had friends read it

and tell me if any section seemed out-of-voice.

James: I have the same problem when writing. You have to work yourself back into the same frame of mind and character that you were in weeks, sometimes months ago. That can be extremely difficult when it comes to very tonally different or stylistic works. Usually, I'll have to reread the work once or twice and touch it up a bit to get back into the voice.

Who are some of your favorite authors? Do you have any recommendations for readers who enjoyed your work? And did any works specifically influence this work?

Scott: Some authors I enjoy and would recommend to anyone are Denis Johnson, Donna Tartt, Don Delillo, Flannery O'Connor, George Saunders, Jhumpa Lahiri, David Markson, David Foster Wallace, and Charles Baxter. As for what authors inspired this piece, I can't say for sure and would happily take suggestions. I had just recently read some Saunders, though, which I think helped in pushing for a sort of hyperreal context bordering on the absurd.

James: I can definitely see a little bit of Saunders' absurdist surrealism in there.

Scott: Glad to hear it! He's one my more recent literary fascinations and I'm glad to have a piece that harkens to him in any way.

James: The striking originality of your work here is one of the many things we love. Very rarely do we see an author skillfully blend stream of consciousness with surrealism, which you did exceptionally well. While I can see small traces of some of those authors you've listed, you've clearly developed your own focus and writing style.

Really, though. Brilliant work on this, Scott. The writing style is beautiful, the characters authentic, the mood breathtaking, and the themes, as we have discussed, are relevant and complex. We can't wait to see what you write next. Are you working on any stories currently, and where can readers (Carson and I included) find more of your work?

Scott: Many thanks for all of the kind words and even more thanks for being such active parts of the editing process. I look forward to working with both of you more in the future. As for current stories, I have just finished the draft of a piece about a man who becomes entranced by film-

ing and re-watching his life (beginning with an incredibly poor attempt at a homemade alien porno and devolving [as much as something can devolve from that point] from there). Ideas at play about understanding and representing ourselves through television, something I've been drawn to as a theme recently. Hopefully you all will see a version at some point in the near future! And my work can or will soon be found at *Literary Orphans*, *Scribendi*, and *Fragments*.

James: I'm actually reading *White Noise* now; Delillo tackles some similar ideas.

Scott: Funny you mention Delillo— I've just finished *Libra*. The influence, it seems, is rather present at this juncture.

Carson: Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about "Girl with a Skull Mask On" in particular?

Scott: I suppose a final word on the story would be something I tell my mom anytime I give her anything to read: don't let the absurdity (or crudeness, or cleverness, or ostensibly indulgent voice, or [fill in blank with any other trait pretty much anyone writing in the 21st century falls into]) distract you from taking the story seriously. I'm a believer in bringing the ethics back to an unavoidably postmodern sensibility and truly do think that, oftentimes, the stranger the story seems, the more relevant to the immediate context it really is.

Thank you both so much for talking— really nice getting to go over some of these ideas with you all and I'm so excited to see the entire issue!

Carson: Thanks so much, Scott! Really looking forward to publishing this.

James: You've given us some really beautiful and perfect answers to think about. It's been great; this issue should be the best one yet!

Still Life with Water

Kathie Jacobson

The two of them - and me standing in between having no clue where to look or how to leave the room – spit words the way we (me and my brother) toss rotten tomatoes to splat against the trunk of the tree at the far end of the garden. He has better aim so usually I quit throwing and gather the tomatoes just past ripe, the ones that maybe have a seam down one side where the tomato took on more water than its skin could hold – and hand them to him like I am the automatic loading arm in a bailing machine.

Momma has taken on more water than her skin can probably hold.

My brother and I have been working all summer in the garden, pulling weeds and hanging tin foil plates to scare the deer away. I like the way the plates rattle. I like the way my brother, when he pitches a tomato, tucks his tongue out of the corner of his mouth as if wetting the air with saliva will improve his aim.

Momma's skin is too small for all that water. I check when I am bringing her a sandwich but I do not see a seam. Dad says she is a whale of a disgrace and she cries and says he can just go and be like everyone else in his family never staying married and I stand between them like I have been tapped in freeze tag and no one is melting me. My brother pretends to be asleep upstairs, but I know he is listening. In the morning he tells me he still thinks Momma will get up out of that bed and cook grilled cheese with margarine and mix up some Kool-Aid like we are too young to work.

He is more scared than me. We eat dry Cheerios by the handful. I flick one at him. Momma is not getting up again. You can see her arms are too round for her sleeves.

I make tomato sandwiches and we take them to the garden.

In spring, my father dumped a load of old manure for the spreader. Except the spreader stopped working and, though the tomatoes are up to

my eyeballs, the pile of poo still sits there. That spreader is like a wish that can't come true because someone missed blowing out all the candles on their birthday cake. Flies are the only ones happy. To get to the pond, I have to walk around that pile, pinching my nose closed, but once past, no one can see me. I can dive in and swim with the turtles who stick their eyes out like they are some sort of bump on an underwater log. If I splash, the frogs are quiet, but if I swim real careful, the frogs sing like an orchestra and I can scoot my toes out of the water and spin in a circle like the Follies on TV. I swim and catfish with whiskers like Mr. Mulvey's moustache, all droopy but with a last minute curl, swim like shadows under me. Under them there is muck that swallows me to my knees. On the shore, I rinse my legs and salt the leeches who shrivel up and let go of my skin but my legs are stained like I am wearing permanent socks.

My brother, when he sees me, gapes. We are not supposed to swim even when it is a million degrees outside and flies buzz all over that manure pile and drink tomato juice where we have thrown them, splat, against the tree.

I shrug and kick water at Tommy. Herons stalk the shallows across the pond, feast like gluttons on pompous, uncaredful frogs. Weeds grow through the bottom of an upturned rowboat. A cotton mouth hatched her clutch beneath that boat and no one has used it since.

Tommy grins and splashes into the pond. The herons fly up.

When my brother floats he puts his arms out like he is making a snow angel or like he is Jesus dead on the cross at Annie's church where they took Buster. Tommy keeps his face in the water while I count the seconds stretching the Mississippi's so that I have a chance of being underwater longer than him when it is my turn. He puffs water from his lips when he stands up, wipes his eyes, shakes an annoying drip from where it pools on the end of his nose. He swats at a dragon fly hovering about his head, drawn by the light reflecting off his wet hair. A leech dangles from his collar bone.

"You got one." I am gleeful, cheered by his misfortune.

He slaps his shoulder and I laugh harder when the leech attaches its tail end to his chest. I bounce from one foot to the other on the bank where the clover never grows above the dirt even when the pond shrinks in late summer.

He splashes at the leech, reaches the dock and grabs the Morton's that we brought with us to kill the suckers. I back away. I know that once he pinches it free, he will fling it at me. He raises his arm to pitch and I run.

"I'm telling." I call over my shoulder as if there were still somebody to

tell.

Momma likes to sleep more than she likes to be awake. Used to be Momma let us swim with the catfish even though Dad said eutrophication was suffocating the pond and no telling what the bacteria thought about that. Momma laughed like summer and said swimming buck naked in a pond was one of life's great pleasures. Dad rolled his eyes in a way that meant he lost the argument and we whooped into the water. Used to be Momma would drive and drive until we got to a new lake or river and Momma would swim across to the other shore while we worried from foot to foot on the sand closest to where she left the car.

After Buster, Momma went to bed where she has stayed.

Momma said Buster was a fish that drowned in the air. He had fingers with nails and toes and everything he needed for a good life. Except breathing.

The doctor said it might have been the water. My father yelled how Momma cannot swim in every damned mud puddle between here and hell, and what is wrong with her anyway. Momma just climbed straight into her bed and eutrophication swelled her up with enough water, she will be a pond if she can't swim in one.

Mr. Mulvey is sitting on the porch when I come up the hill. I do not like the look on his face. His lips wrinkle and curl into his mouth like a potato that has a gash in its skin. Mr. Mulvey has known us since before I was born. He took care of Momma when she was a girl. He is the one to take her when she needs to go away.

I wish my brother were with me but he has not come home.

Mr. Mulvey asks, "Where's your Dad?"

"Dunno."

He flips a yellow envelope against his thigh and I know he wants to say out loud what is inside.

I call my father who carries a radio when he mows the fields. He says to give Mr. Mulvey tea and he will be home soon.

I wait a spell before asking Mr. Mulvey does he want a glass of water.

He announces he will come back later. I watch Mr. Mulvey pull himself into his jeep, the kind they drive in Africa on Born Free. I have watched that movie six times on television. I am glad to cry when they let the lions go.

Tommy and Dad come home together, Tommy holding the door open for flies while Dad unties his boots to leave the mud outside. I have

packed a bag for Momma. Toothbrush, comb, a couple of jogging suits.

Before us, Momma lived on the side of mountain in an old camp. Her cabin stood all by its lonesome in a meadow where the hill flattened for a pause, like it was catching its breath before racing to the top. Momma speculated that the cabin must have been for the nature counselor. Nature counselors, she said, were a reclusive lot, spending their nights watching stars, planning lessons, mapping scavenger hunts, plotting to send campers adventuring through the dense underbrush of the forest. Rabbits burrowed in her yard, munched on shoots of new clover and wild strawberries. Behind the cabin a spring bubbled from the ground creating a muddy indentation in the earth. Mud wasps frequented the edges of that puddle. A pipe plunged into the ground pulled water from the spring and ran it through a mesh screen filter. This was the water she used to cook and clean and drink and bathe. Momma got spoiled by that summer. Even now she does not like to sleep with the windows closed. She scorns the rufous water from our pipes.

Mr. Mulvey knocks when I am fixing cereal to eat in front of the TV. I refuse to answer. Just a proselytizer, I tell myself. Just a timid schoolboy with a bag of shit. Old Mr. Mulvey with no people of his own. I give Tommy a look and he follows me out the backdoor before Dad can tell us get to your rooms. Mr. Mulvey climbs onto the front stoop waving that big yellow envelop against his thigh. It makes a sound like a duck flapping its way off of the pond. Tommy goes down to the garden. I sit on the root of a maple tree that slopes under the kitchen window like a park bench.

I hear Dad at the door and Mr. Mulvey's boots as he walks inside. I imagine his eyes all shifty as he holds out the envelope. I hear Dad rooting through a drawer for a paring knife, the mix of scratch and swish as the knife slices through the paper, the sweep of papers sliding out, and then a long quiet.

"Today?" my father's voice sounds funny.

"Yes." Mr. Mulvey talks in a low voice. I figure he is proposing to take Momma away.

I could shoot the birds singing in the yard.

Once Momma told me how Daddy bumped his head right on the ceiling when I was born. "Babies come from the sea," she began. I imagine waves lapping about inside her body. I imagine the peanut that is me

swelling until the water is displaced. "A leak," she said, "And then a flood." Water puddled under her in the bed. She tapped my father who told her not to worry but when he rolled, pulling the covers back around his shoulders to stretch the night, the sea poured from under Momma and splashed toward him, water lapped the shore of his body like a great tsunami and in a fierce, single leap he was out of bed, his head whapping against the ceiling. Momma liked to rub her fingers flat on Daddy's forehead when she told that part, like she might still find a knot puffing under his hairline.

My father turns away when we scrape our knees and once I saw him wrutch like a cat with a hairball when Tommy needed a tooth, dangling on its last string, pulled.

If Momma goes, Tommy will have to wait for his tooth to cut its own string.

Momma's eyes watch me when I come into her room. I hum as I open the blinds, "*stay free...and beauty surrounds you....*" She doesn't say anything. "Momma, you have to get up." She just stares. Mr. Mulvey will take her if she doesn't get moving. "Get up." I start throwing things out of her drawers, drawers that I am forbidden to open. Momma does not try to stop me which makes me madder. I throw her slip and it catches on a window latch, hangs there like an unfortunate curtain, hangs there like a lady who forgot her knees could go straight, who forgot her shoulders and her chin. I throw her brush, the one with silver on the back she got from her father who died before I was born. It is always there on her dresser; never used for her hair. My aim is awful. Or precise. The handle of the brush flies past the slip and pierces the window like a spear. It perches where it has punctured the glass while a crack eases up and down the pane like the first vein of water poking through ice on the pond in spring. Momma turns her head. Her eyes light on the falling glass and she pushes up on her elbows to watch. Air heavy with lilacs fills the room replacing the smell of old, hard sandwiches and stale Momma. Momma makes a sound like a scrub jay complaining. I can hear Dad's footsteps as he hurries our way.

"Go on," says Momma.

"She is up." I say this though Dad stands the doorway and can see with his own eyes. Dad looks at me, and at the empty drawers, and at the window, and at the slip that sways in the breeze like a ghost. He looks at Momma, then back at me again.

I watch their faces and I watch the floor. Momma's hush puppy feet

slide from the bed and stomp like an elephant to the center of the room. I expect them to fight; I am ready like a rope in a tug of war. "Go on, baby," Momma says. Dad steps sideways to let me pass before he starts yelling.

I throw the door hard against the house when I am leaving. Screen doors were made for slamming, especially ones already torn and offering refuge for mosquitos, escape for no one.

Outside I stomp into the corn where I can see nothing but leaves and the green silk that tops the ears. I get to work catching copper-colored June bugs, piling them in a jar which I will dose with white gasoline and close the lid to suffocate their crop killing selves.

The wind rises. The corn leans heavy and I can see over the top. Across the yard, Tommy stoops down on flat feet, elbows on his knees, ears between. He signals me to be quiet. A painted turtle dug a hole in the dirt between the manure pile and the unmowed edge of the field. She plunks out an egg then sticks a foot in the hole to move the egg to the side before she lays another. Painted turtle is the actual name of the turtles in our pond which is a coincidence because it is what we call them for the marks we paint on their shells when we catch them, Tommy always riding in the bow and me paddling our canoe with the silent dip and pull of a jay-stroke. "Ten o'clock," Tommy's voice sounds soft, like breathing. The paddle drips into the boat as I cross it over to press water hard on the other side turning us toward the turtle's head while Tommy trolls the net so it won't splash. We paint tally marks on the turtles with nail polish, a different color for every year. This turtle has dusty rose and orange tally marks, two years of catching. An egg cracks when it lands in the hole and when I see it I just want to bawl. Tommy will say I am stupid so instead I pick an apple off the ground, chuck it high and punt it with my foot sending white fruit, skinless, in all directions.

When she finishes laying eggs, the turtle uses her back legs like she is swimming in place to knead a dirt cover to the hole. She pushes dry grass onto the top and starts to walk away. We decide to spare her the journey, and, slipping her in a bucket, we head to the pond.

"Momma got up."

Tommy looks at me like he is trying to decide if I am teasing.

I just nod.

Swallow tails crash in to each other over the milkweed that grows beside the trail. "They fighting?" First I think he is talking about the butterflies, which seems ridiculous because they are too light to bother each other. Tommy does not look at me or at the milkweed. He concentrates

on the bucket. Inside the turtle walks like she means to climb out or maybe she just thinks she is making this journey on her own.

I shrug. Wind scrapes water from the lake and tosses it like God's washer women are emptying a tub.

Tommy splashes into the water pulling the bucket like a small boat behind him until he is in up to his tee-shirt. He dumps the bucket. The turtle floats for a minute, head in the sun, then dives. In winter, turtles slide into the murky bottom, deep enough to survive. They have blood like antifreeze to keep ice crystals out. They can absorb oxygen through their skin.

Buster did not have a trick for oxygen.

Tommy floats in the pond, just off the corner of the dock that is sinking. I have counted to twenty, but I will tell him it was only sixteen. If I reach twenty-six, I will throw something to splash near and make him stand up. Salamanders move under the water like orange s's repeating themselves. Tadpoles skitter, wiggling black dots with thin tails. Water bugs stir the silt at the bottom of the pond.

I look back at the house which is small, like a matchbox version of itself from here. Along the shore, young trees stretch in grey lines. When she comes home, Momma will stand on the dock and watch us swim. She will clap her hands when I float the longest. She will say I can swim with her, even across the rivers, even across the lakes. Overhead, an owl sits on the thick part of a branch, near the trunk. I watch until it rises, a single low thump the only sound as air replaces itself after the push of his massive wings.

Interview

Kathie Jacobson

When did you write "Still Life with Water"?

I began working on this piece in August of 2014 as part of a collaborative project between The Writer's Studio in San Francisco and Creativity Explored, a non-profit dedicated to providing artists with developmental disabilities the means to create, exhibit, and sell their art.

Did you have a difficult time deciding the title of your work? Were there any other titles you were considering?

The artwork from which I was working reminded me of the surface of a pond, how fallen leaves and marsh grass decorate the surface. Initially the title was a place holder— a bit of irony in my mind since, of course, a pond would not be the subject of a still life painting. As the story unfolded the working title became a driver. Through the water imagery I was able to explore the way this young narrator charted connection to her mother during a difficult time in her family.

What inspired "Still Life with Water"? Are any of its themes inspired by your own life?

The painting that provided the initial impetus for this story was an abstract piece of greens and golds and rich pinks that seemed rich in the way water can be, simultaneously muddied and clear, reflective and opaque. It seemed like the painting of a pond, the surface giving way to deeper layers of color. The artist used a lot of repeating lines that seemed rapidly drawn.

As I began writing, I thought a lot about the important places of inland water I have experienced, using images of springs, lakes, rivers and a particular pond where I spent many afternoons as a child. Though the pond was at the bottom of a vast alfalfa field and should have been suffocated by the farm runoff, it supported abundant life. I think I first heard the word eutrophication in connection with that pond, and what a word it seemed. I likely repeated it to lull myself to sleep that entire year.

What was the hardest part of writing "Still Life with Water"?

Trusting the child's voice. I needed my narrator to experience her circumstance with wonder and the magnificent half-knowing, half-inventing logic that shapes the way a child puts together the pieces of her life. As I wrote, I sometimes worried the young voice would not be able to hold the complex emotion I wanted to braid into the piece.

Which part of "Still Life with Water" was conceived of first?

I knew the character first— from her voice in the opening scene in which she is throwing tomatoes with her brother. I thought the story would be about a child navigating conflict as her family unraveled at that point. As I wrote the water scenes, however, I realized that I was more interested in how we all come to understand the flaws and beauty of each thing, the wonderful imperfection of love.

Was there anything in your original conception of the story that didn't make it in?

Yes. Initially I thought I was going to write about depression. When I was very young, the mother of a boy across the street periodically left his family. We didn't talk about depression then, or even really about her being gone, but the image of her departure was powerful in my six-year-old mind. As I accrued the water imagery, my interest shifted to exploring the way water was the expression of life and love and the source of death and grief for this family— something I experienced as a child when the waters around our homes became too polluted to be safe. Thankfully, these wetlands have been restored and are once more abundant with all sorts of wildlife.

Tell us about your revision process regarding this work.

In this story, I collected the images as if cutting pictures from National Geographic for a collage. Revision required moving forward and back, as I worked to understand the order of the images and the process of discovery and understanding that my character was working to achieve.

Did you run into any issues while writing this? The tone and voice are beautiful; they must have been difficult to maintain.

Thank you. My intent as I crafted this story was to use free flowing language without restraint, like a child pulling another by the sleeve across the backyard, and to balance this urgent narration with thoughtful construction about how the building blocks of the story fit together. The

scaffolding of the story needed to be sufficient to hold the weight of the material so that I was free to leave the young narrator's voice feisty and immediate, unhindered.

Who are some of your favorite authors? Which authors influenced "Still Life with Water"?

I am a fairly eclectic reader. I love rich, lyrical, image driven writers—so many come to mind: Morrison, Harding, Matthiesen, Li, Kingsolver. I am intrigued by writing that succinctly challenges me— whether through use of language, imagery, ideas, or story— to consider things from an unusual angle. Writers who manage to nail all levels at once are my heroes.

Where can readers find more of your work? Have you been published before?

My work has appeared in *Pithead Chapel*, *Necessary Fiction*, and *Hermetic Chaos*.

What drew you to *Driftwood Press*?

Driftwood Press consistently presents topnotch writing. The accompanying interviews about the work make a rich reading experience, replete with gems about craft.

Rise

Kris Whorton

Henry stands at the open door in his western Caribbean village looking for the signs of the end of the world. Rain pours out of the sky blending with the river and the sea. The hurricane turned north but the water doesn't care. It needs a place to call home.

"The windows of heaven were opened," he says softly, remembering the missionaries from America, gone for just a month, and their teachings about a man named Noah.

The rain has only lasted since dinner two days ago, but already the Barreta River is above its banks and Henry and Jose are trapped at home with their mother beneath the roar on the tin roof. Elena scrubs the floor in the cooking area and orders the boys to wash down walls and clean the insides of the windows. Henry peers out the window and beyond the front porch where they spend their evenings looking out on their village, hoping to be set free soon. Their home is small and already so clean that he cannot understand why she wants him to do this. There is the bed his parents share, and the one he and Jose share as well. Henry thinks he should have his own since he is eight, and Jose is still just a child, a baby almost, only five years old, but his mother won't listen. She says they are a family and families share everything, especially beds and meals at the small table with chairs.

As Henry takes the rag from his bucket, the faint sweet and spicy scent of purifying copal rises from the scrub water.

"Where is Poppa and the boat?" Henry asks as he pulls a chair close to the wall so he can stand on it and reach higher. His father left before dawn but Henry doubts he is fishing. The river is a swirl of brown mud. The fish will be hiding.

"Checking the others," she answers.

"I should be helping," he tells her, thinking she will let him go.

"You are helping me," she says, but he is simply there, with Jose.

"I could paddle."

His mother is silent and Henry thinks of repeating himself. But instead he scrubs, trying to think of another way to convince her. He knows she sees him as a child still, as little more grown up than Jose, but he is taller and stronger. And he has helped his father many times. He is becoming a man, whether she knows it or not, and if he cannot convince her, perhaps Marita can. His mother trusts her because she is a healer.

As Henry stands on the chair, reaching as high as he can to scrub the upper parts of the wall, Jose pokes him with a stick.

Henry turns and snaps his rag, catching Jose just below the eye. Jose cries out in surprise and moments later, both boys are sitting in chairs on the porch, the damp air in close, the wet world before them.

"Sit and be quiet," their mother scolds. "I don't want to hear a thing but the rain."

She disappears inside, leaving the door open, probably to keep an eye on them, but perhaps to hear the rain let up. Their yellow dog, Luko, watches from the lower step, his golden eyes pleading to be let up on the porch. The river water fills the common area and wets Luko's haunches as it rises. He stands, his feet in water and whimpers.

"I can't," Henry tells Luko. His parents will not allow Luko on the porch or in the house, believing fever can come from dogs, although Marita says otherwise and Henry trusts her the most. He leans forward and peers around the Marin's house to see Marita's. Her red boat is already tied to the rail, and her door is open, but he can't see anyone inside. "Always ready," Henry says.

Six of the forty-five homes in Salinas surround the common area in front of Henry's home. Each one is built on stilts, but flooding still makes life difficult. No one can work outside, and there is no chance to play. No one fishes because the water becomes too muddy and flushes the fish to the depths. And sometimes there is fever and death. This is what the women fear. Everyone gets restless and fussy. Even the dogs have to find their own high ground. The jungle falls silent. Gone are the titters and calls of woodpeckers, parrots, tinamous, honeycreepers and the clack-clack of the toucan's bills. Henry hopes hurricane season isn't starting early.

Before Elena calls them in for lunch, another step is submerged and Luko has crept up to the next one. The downpour continues and by early afternoon when they go back out on the porch the water has swallowed one more stair and Luko is curled up in the corner. His eyes open as Henry pulls a chair in close to give him a place to hide against the house. Sighing, Henry wishes for sun and fishing on blue water with his father.

"Let them be carried away to the sea," the white-faced missionaries said about the villagers' gods. They didn't know the sea is where all spirits go to be free. The uprooted trees, the plants, the animals that die in the jungle also make their way east. Henry's father Palacio and their neighbor Esteban Ortiz work just where the river bends. They share a boat and Palacio uses a long pole to push at a tree that is in the water and wedged across others causing branches and smaller trees to dam up.

Are they freeing the old gods in an effort to keep the water moving? No. Nothing the missionaries said mattered to anyone in Salinas. Their sermons drove the villagers to believe even more in Marita who knows how to keep the mosquitoes away so no one will lose their soul.

Henry studies the logs jamming up against the stilts under the houses he can see. Something black bobs under the Young's house. He stands up and leans as far as he can across the rail. It is the slick black fur of a dead howler monkey. A creation god can't be stuck like any other litter from the jungle. How can he free it? Chowen's spirit must find a new body. The animal body can go to the edge of the world, but the spirit has to stay close.

How can he free himself? Henry is already so sick of the rain he could scream. If his mother makes him clean or play with Jose anymore he certainly will. But here is a chance to show her he can do more than watch a boy. The water is only to the third step. That isn't so deep. He could wade to the Young's house, just five boat lengths from theirs. The water will only catch him above his knees and he can use his fishing pole to help him.

But how can he free himself so Jose won't tell or try to come as well? His brother follows him every chance he gets and Jose is too small for this journey.

"You want me to read to you?" he asks Jose. The boy will grow sleepy and then he will nap. From reading to him in bed Henry knows it will only take a few pages.

Usually Jose must beg Henry to read. Now he runs into the house before Henry can change his mind and returns a few minutes later with the pirate story *The Red Rover*. Jose is smiling as he thrusts the tattered book into Henry's hands, and scoots onto his mother's porch chair. Luko is still curled up underneath it and he opens his golden eyes for only a second to make sure nothing is happening.

"Momma says I should thank you," Jose says.

"This one?" Henry teases. "I thought you liked the other stories better."

The missionaries left a Bible stories reader at each house with a child, but somehow, and Henry isn't sure how, his father got them this book and Jose cannot hear it enough.

"I want to know about Scipio Africanus and Dick Fid. The other stories are for you."

Anyone can see that Jose prefers these men over the ones, true and made up, and the gods that Marita tells them about when they walk in the jungle together collecting herbs. Her voice is soft but strong and she moves through the trees and bushes as though she belongs. Henry follows her every step and stays close so he can hear her lessons and see her hands pinching leaves, and parting branches. When Jose comes, the birds quiet and Henry doesn't learn as much because it is Jose's chatter that fills the spaces of the jungle.

Henry settles in the chair next to Jose and flips to the chapter that always puts his brother to sleep. Henry glances up once to see if the howler monkey is still trapped. How long will it take before he can go to it? Jose sits comfortably, his smile expectant.

"Go ahead." Jose waves his hand, mimicking a gesture Henry uses to give the younger kids a head start when they play chase or tag in the common area.

"It is time you start learning to read for yourself," Henry says holding the book out, but Jose sits back and puts his hands in his lap. Henry smiles and begins, glancing up as he reads. Before he has finished a page, Jose's eyes are half closed and his thumb is in his mouth. It won't be long before Henry can sneak down the stairs and wade across the space between the houses.

He looks across the railing and the water filled yard. The monkey is barely visible, just the curve of his back still above water. What will happen if it is still trapped there when the Barreta finds its banks again? Henry softens his voice like he is saying a prayer. He stands up slowly, sets the book on his seat, and keeps talking quietly as he moves toward his fishing pole, peeking inside to see what his mother is doing. She has her back to him, cutting chayote or wild peanuts for dinner perhaps, though it is still hours away.

Jose is slouched in the high backed chair, his chin resting on his chest. Luko still sleeps as Henry eases out from under the eave, rain soaking his hair and shirt before he has made it down four stairs. As he moves closer to the river, he searches the windows and doors of their nearest neighbors. He studies each house; the Youngs and Marins, the Novellos, Lugos and Alvarezs are all closed up. Even Marita's door is closed now. No one

is out. Salinas has never seemed so quiet. And the river is empty of men working together in boats. His father and Esteban have moved on from down river. Where can they be?

It is now or never. Anymore waiting and Jose could wake up or their mother could step out to check on them. Henry holds his fishing pole aloft and sinks his foot onto the river covered third step. It is colder than he expects, somehow crisp like the bottom of the river when he and Jose swim and dive deep. Once both feet are secure, he moves on to the next one. Glancing around again, Henry steps down, stabilizes himself, and then moves again onto the lowest one. He feels the tug of the current and his stomach clenches as he struggles a minute to regain his balance. From the porch, Luko whines.

"Hush," Henry hisses. He is momentarily distracted from the sudden wave of fear. Holding the railing, he leans forward and plants the fishing pole in the ground in front of the lowest step. The water surges around the bamboo and he is suddenly unsure that the flimsy pole will help him. Looking down, he tries to see into the water but it is the same as staring into mud.

Taking a deep breath, and still holding the railing, Henry eases his right foot forward, straining to feel solid ground under it. Luko whines again and then the yellow dog flashes by, and jumps into the water.

"Luko!" Henry shrieks. And then it all comes undone. Jose screams the dog's name and their mother yells at Jose who has somehow gotten from the chair to the last step above the water.

"Henry! What are you doing?" Her tone is incredulous. "Get back up here!"

"But Luko," Henry pleads. He can't seem to make himself move. Already the dog is nearing the Young's, caught up in the current that Henry now realizes would surely have carried him too if he had let go of the railing.

Luko strains to keep his head above water. Henry reaches out with his pole, unsure of what he thinks he can do with it.

"Henry!" Elena yells again. He can't ignore her any longer. He turns and leans into the railing and steps back up slowly as he watches Luko disappear behind the Young's house. The howler monkey is gone too.

Interview

Kris Whorton

When did you write "Rise"?

"Rise" was originally a chapter in a novel and I wrote it about three years ago. I worked on the novel sporadically and this year decided to pull the chapter out. A friend recommended I turn it into a story because it was self-contained and she thought it could work well as a story. I trusted her.

Did you have a difficult time deciding the title of your work? Were there any other titles you were considering?

I'm terrible at titles— my friend who recommended the chapter could be a story suggested "Rise."

What inspired "Rise"? Are any of its themes inspired by your own life?

I'm not sure really. The story came to me in a rush and it felt complete and real and strong. I'm interested in the theme of loss and how compelling it is in terms of the human experience, in part most recently because I have an elderly dog and cannot imagine not having him in my life. Even though Luko (the dog) isn't elderly, Henry's choices and their ramifications will impact him for the rest of his life on some level and I like that the choices we make have results and consequences that surprise and undo us.

What was the hardest part of writing "Rise"?

Killing Luko.

Which part of "Rise" was conceived of first?

The main character was conceived first. Henry was initially an old man in the first draft of my novel. I started thinking about his life to make him a more well-rounded character and this scene/story came to me.

Was there anything in your original conception of the story that didn't make it in?

No, but I didn't kill Luko in the first draft, and I think that tragedy makes the story. I knew that change worked when my friend read it and then called me and said, "I can't believe you killed Luko." I said, "It was Luko or one of the boys." She has two sons. She paused and said, "But Luko?"

Do you primarily write fiction?

Yes. I've published some poetry and creative non-fiction, but I'm in a fiction mode these days. I'm trying to finish a novel that has distracted me for some years.

Tell us about your creative process.

I don't know that I really have a process. Mostly I feel like I am just slogging away and then some lines or scenes come out that ring and they give me hope to keep going with my writing. I don't think there's anything unique about my process.

Tell us about your revision process regarding this work.

I read and re-read and try to find the center of the story; then I cut what isn't working in terms of passive language or uninteresting fluff. Then I send it to my friend and ask for her opinion. She is my long distance writing 'group.'

What inspired the setting of "Rise"? What sort of research did you do in preparation?

I went to Belize in the mid-90s and was intrigued by the beauty of the islands and the sea and the kindness and beauty of the people I met there. When I created the character Henry, I needed him to be an oldish man in the mid-1960s so I had to think about how old he was specifically and when he would have been a boy. I had to research novels/adventure stories from the late 1800s as well as animals, birds and plants that would have been indigenous to the Belize mainland. Finally, I wanted to explore the tension between Christian missionary teachings and the old world gods of the indigenous people so I looked at some Mayan and Aztec gods and took some liberties with what I found.

Who are some of your favorite authors? Which authors influenced "Rise"?

Toni Morrison, William Faulkner, Raymond Carver, Flannery O'Connor, Tim O'Brien. I don't think any of them influenced the story or novel I'm working on directly, but I think about what I love about their writing when I write and edit.

What drew you to *Driftwood Press*?

I love your content, and your covers. *Driftwood Press* is high quality, and I'm honored to be included.

Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about this work in particular?

I love this character (Henry) and have cut him from my novel, but I still find him compelling and plan to keep writing stories about him as he grows into manhood.

A Goddess Lying Breathless in Carnage

Philip Dean Walker

Whosoever covets thy neighbor's wife, *he shall never stray*. Whosoever has woken up next to his wife but thought of his neighbor's instead; whosoever has cherished the fact that his wife's back often faces him when he wakes up in the morning, so that he can pretend, even for just that pre-dawn moment, that she is someone else, that the long slope of her alabaster back dips unknowingly into regions he can only imagine; whosoever has never been to his neighbor's wife; whosoever has never been *in* his neighbor's wife; whosoever has volunteered to wheel the trashcan and the recycling bin down to the end of the driveway just so he can look through the window above the sink of his neighbor's house down the hill at the base of their cul-de-sac where she always washes dishes after dinner while her husband walks around in the background oblivious; whosoever has, on a whim once, driven into her carport and pretended that he lived there and even got out of the car to meet her at the front door and, when she, of course, opened her own door to see who was standing at it, came up with the excuse that he was missing some mail and wondered whether it might have been mixed up with hers and did he think she could check, and then while watching her pillage through her handbag (Louis Vuitton Murakami, he thinks; he should get his wife one so she can be more like her, look more like her) thinks in just that moment that he'd make himself as small as possible to fit into a place she visited often: He'd live in the back of her mailbox anxious for her fingers to graze him as she reached for bills and catalogues; he'd crouch into a ball at the bottom of her purse, sitting on the plank of a nail file balanced precariously on the edge of her key ring and a pack of tissues; he'd shrink into something so small that he could live on one of her eyelashes then move up and down with each closing of her eyes, each impossible wink; whosoever has imagined cradling her short-pixie shorn head in the palm of his hand, gently guiding her down to his cock from which she'd enthusiastically receive whatever avalanche of gifts she'd be able to coax out of him, grateful and ecstatic to

receive his bodily fluids as if they had curative, magical powers; whosoever has made love to his own wife, yet actively imagined she was someone else, even going so far as to cover her face with his wide palms as she tossed and whipped her large mane of brown hair against his chest as she rode him with her knees pulled into a clench, like on a ride in an amusement park too tightly secured; whosoever has licked his lips at the sight of his neighbor's wife at a cocktail party, in that bombastic, eager way he has with that face he has that reads, "devoted," "stable," "safe" (his mother would say "a catch," but then whose mother doesn't say that?), who has fixed her a drink at the makeshift bar set up in the living room, taking just shy of too much time to clink one ice cube after another with silver clawed tongs into one of the gold-leafed crystal goblets someone thought were impressive enough for this crowd, who then poured mostly gin with her tonic and squeezed her lime in such a way that both of them were momentarily blinded by two escaped pistons of lime juice and who then laughed at the sitcom hilarity of it while watching each other through now squinty eyes (for, of course, whosoever covets thy neighbor's wife must also imagine that she covets him, if only for that moment when they both share a laugh and a lime-clouded look); whosoever has treated every problem he has with his wife as a nonissue in the alternate universe where he's fucking his neighbor's wife, who looks at a sagging roof in a thirty-year-old house or the dramatic slope of a broken gutter as things his wife has cooked up simply to annoy him, to occupy his time, whose two children are preternaturally astute and fluent in exotic languages that he can't speak such as Mandarin Chinese or Latin, languages to which his exceptionally intelligent wife is already well attuned and can therefore carry on conversations with them so he can sometimes walk into his own kitchen in his own house in the United States of America and feel like he's stepped into a Chinese noodle shop off a noxious alleyway in Hong Kong, underage whores dispersing like rats from the screened-in backdoor, whose wife's propensity to forget to shave her legs, occasionally rubbing up against him in the middle of the night makes him want to vomit, reminding him of cheap vacations where he had to sleep in a bed with his father while his mother and sister slept in another bed across the motel room; whosoever has imagined choking his wife just so all the languages she knows might spill out of her mouth, word after unrecognizable word, like dead black eels found in waterlogged corpses at the bottoms of drained creeks and lakes; whosoever has followed his neighbor's wife down an aisle of the Safeway, his own cart temporarily parked out of sight, past the fresh produce section with the fine mists of the sprinklers dowsing the leafy cab-

bage and long, tan turnips like a vineyard at a winery he once visited in Sonoma with his wife after they were first married, who picks up a bottle of mangoes swimming in viscous syrup with which he can imagine himself poised above her, dripping juices off the edge of the flaccid mango slice, pooling in the crater of her belly button before he sucks it right out, who dreams of taking her into the chilly trough of cellophane-wrapped packages of ground beef and tenderloins and coiled turkey sausage links and fucking her in it, fucking her right in the meat bin so their thrashing limbs puncture the packages as the meat escapes, wrapping itself around her legs, stringy bits of ground turkey curling themselves around her ankles like sea creatures, a goddess lying breathless in carnage; whosoever cheats on his wife every day in his mind, as if she is a burden, a disappointment to him sexually, a serial boner killer, who could very well be carrying on her own mental affair, with one of her students even—that boy she employs as a teaching assistant or that one girl in her class she refers to as “the Nadine Gordimer girl” (his wife described herself to him once as “sexually fluid” and has admitted to having had affairs with several women during graduate school before they met); whosoever secretly hopes that she feels these things for other people so he may justify his own silent, daily longings; whosever feeds on these silent, daily longings, who subsists on the fantasies like a prisoner subsists on his sweet, rationed bread, who is actually held at bay by his desires, propped up by them, able to be a good husband, to be a good father by the very existence of his secret interior life, whose wife is physically saved from domestic violence or marital rape by virtue of the fact that he imagines his neighbor’s wife is *inside* his own wife and therefore cannot be beaten or violated; whosoever finds himself coming home from work and, seeing his neighbor’s wife once again in the window of her den straightening a pile of magazines on a low glass coffee table, just as she might’ve done if the two of them were preparing the house for a party, or getting it ready to bring home their baby or selling it and moving away together, leaving behind his professorial wife and his children; whosoever sees her and thinks, *What if she were mine?* He shall never stray.

Interview

Philip Dean Walker

When did you write "A Goddess Lying Breathless in Carnage"?

I wrote this story about three years ago during my time in the MFA program at American University. It came out of a workshop I was in that was led by Stephanie Grant (*The Passion of Alice*).

Did you have a difficult time deciding the title of your work? Were there any other titles you were considering?

This went untitled for a while, and I really wasn't quite sure what I should call it. Then I read it through again and the title phrase kind of jumped out at me so I went with it. The supermarket scene is the most raw and sexually carnal scene of the story so I thought it was a good fit to use something from that part of the story for the title.

What inspired "A Goddess Lying Breathless in Carnage"? Are any of its themes inspired by your own life?

The opening prologue of Rick Moody's *Purple America* served as the direct inspiration for this story. I was really drawn to his repetitive use of "whosoever" and wanted to apply the form to my own story which, to me, is about obsession. I can certainly relate to the kind of obsession the main character goes through in the story.

What was the hardest part of writing "A Goddess Lying Breathless in Carnage"?

Keeping the whole story under a few sentences was the biggest challenge. One of Stephanie's pet passions in our workshop was cultivating "the long sentence" and I really enjoy working with them.

Tell us about your creative process.

I tend to either let an idea mull over in my mind for a while until I feel like I'm ready to put pen to paper or (like this story) it comes out *very*

quickly and in practically one sitting. There was an immediacy to this story that lent itself well to pouring out all at once.

Tell us about your revision process regarding this work.

I wrote the whole thing in an hour or so and it went through barely any revision— a rarity!

The revision process for this piece primarily concerned punctuation, to be honest. In order to execute a good long sentence, it has to be punctuated properly within an inch of its life.

You skillfully tell a story in only a few sentences. Was it difficult to maintain the pacing and flow of the sentence?

Yes. The pacing for this story is something that I was very concerned with because you have to make sure that the reader is welcomed into this man's head almost immediately (the whole story exists as a kind of extended fantasy). It's been a great piece to read aloud at readings because the reader/listener kind of gets sucked into the main character's sexual rhythm that comes out in the pacing of the writing.

Who are some of your favorite authors? Which authors influenced "A Goddess Lying Breathless in Carnage"?

Rick Moody obviously influenced this piece a great deal. Others are Mary Gaitskill, Joyce Carol Oates, Ann Beattie and John Updike. The nameless main character of this piece feels to me like he could appear in Updike's suburbia.

Where can readers find more of your work? Have you been published before?

I've been published in several different literary journals including *Big Lucks*, *theNewerYork*, *Glitterwolf Magazine* and *Carbon Culture Review*. I've been working on a series of interconnected stories that all take place in the '80s, the first three of which have been published in a wonderful journal called *Jonathan* published by *Sibling Rivalry Press*.

Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about this work in particular?

I'd love to see what an illustrator would come up with to visually imagine this story someday!

Her Eyes. Hexagons

Emma Ignaszewski

Sonny sees the world in perfect shapes. His fingers are cylinders, wrapping themselves like bendy straws around his toothbrush, a bar of soap, his mother's elliptical wrist. He tucks her, mincingly, into the car and drives to the appointment.

He squeezes into a cubed chair and studies the helix shell wallpaper as the doctor shines his cone of light past fogging corneas. Sonny answers questions, no, she won't eat, yes, she always looks tired. He can see it in her eyes, hexagons. Their angles, one hundred and twenty degrees each, tell Sonny her body is selling out. She wears it like a coat on a hot day.

He watches clouds convect through tempered glass. He sees no dinosaurs or eagle heads, only queues of spheres insipid. They glare against trapezoid mesas, red burnt and chalky.

The doctors bib her in lead and take her away and shine light through her bones. Then Sonny and his mother wait together as if they know each other.

Sonny used to draw shells like alluvial fans, ridged and splaying. He drew his mother's hair in a cinnamon-roll spiral, her smile a crescent tilted ten degrees. He drew skyfulls of snow and heaps of pebbles, all hexagon like his mother's shrinking eyes. But now he mostly sketches buildings, all rectangle and right angle and flat.

He is summoned and manages to smile at her before closing the door. And as her image is squashed between two planes, she looks at him as if she is drawing him and he forgets, as he does often, who is the patient.

The doctors show Sonny the x-rays. There, they say, see how this here has contorted. No longer that geometric beauty. He blinks, and looks again. But, to him, it is the same shape, ugly in its perfection.

Interview

Emma Ignaszewski

When did you write "Her Eyes, Hexagons"?

I wrote 'Her Eyes, Hexagons' the week my family sold my childhood home. I was in Phoenix to help pack it up, and questions of ownership, autonomy, and connection were ripe in the dry, dry air.

Did you have a difficult time deciding the title of your work? Were there any other titles you were considering?

The title was the first element of this story— oftentimes, when brainstorming flash ideas, I'll generate titles until a slipstream pulls me into focusing on one and fleshing it out.

What inspired "Her Eyes, Hexagons"? Are any of its themes inspired by your own life?

I've always been fascinated with synesthesia. The expanded umwelt that arises when perceptions are blended and woven in an unrecognizable pattern provokes fresh thought and relation.

Which part of "Her Eyes, Hexagons" was conceived of first?

I had the idea for the title several weeks before writing— so when I came back to the list of potential flash titles, I was inspired to focus on a protagonist that would see someone's eyes as hexagons.

Was there anything in your original conception of the story that didn't make it in?

Like 3-D printing, this story built up and over and up and over from nothing— instead of writing in volume and carving it back, it was added to until it had a sensible logic.

Do you primarily write fiction?

My medium of choice is flash fiction, though occasionally I'll work in

verse form or short memoir. There's something about the compression of short work that bluntly strips away all that is meaningless and leaves us with the flavorful concentration of story.

Tell us about your creative process.

With flash fiction, I find it much easier to start with the last sentence and then imagine the story that would lead to such an ending. It's a strategy I learned from reading an interview with Stephen King— creating a strange situation and then working backwards to reveal what happened to engender it.

Who are some of your favorite authors? Which authors influenced "Her Eyes, Hexagons"?

Some of the authors that stimulate me most include Wallace Stegner, Ron Carlson, Benjamin Percy, and Alice Munro. I remember picking up a copy of *Runaway* right after hiking the Appalachian Trail for the better part of a month and devouring it in 24 hours. The prose that somehow balances lightness and weight is what I've aspired to here.

Where can readers find more of your work? Have you been published before?

Other flash fiction of mine has appeared in *Washington Square Review* and the *Cornell Daily Sun*.

I will be the Chief

Brian Snell

Grimm's the dim dick who clipped my hair. Done me up no good, I'd say. Grimm's got one worse for him too, you know; Grimm's the one who thinks I've got no chance to be Chief. Thinks he's got that spot on lock, he says. Grimm knows more than he lets on, that's for sure, but if there's one fact he's let slip right by him, it's that I'm not one bit beat till one of us sits down at that desk. I'll have that nice suit, I will, and Grimm won't have a ditch to lose his lunch in when I'm the one who makes the rules. Such words are ones one ought to save for when one won't have to eat them down the way. "Some tough talk he's got, but he ain't got much else," that's what Grimm would have to say on me, I'm sure, but Grimm won't know what's his till I make sure he gets it.

Pegg's the tough lip the boys out past the coal road go to see on pay days. She's got one knee made of wood and the other I think is made out of part of an old sink. But a man can't pay her her due truth if he says he has no thoughts for her as soft as what a cloud must sleep in in some deep part of his mind. When Old Man gets mad they say there's not one thing in this world can bring him back down to a cool head, but I've seen it with my own eyes that a firm glance and a soft touch from good ol' Pegg can make him heel like her dog. I go see Pegg some days if I feel good for the walk through the work yards and past the steel bridge to pop in for a chat. I don't have the cash to spend time with her the way the work boys do but if I bring her some tea or a crust of bread she's got the heart to let me sit a bit and chat with her. When she gets real pleased she talks just the same way as the girls in school did and she waves her hands up and down for just the two in the room and makes quite a small scene, and she shows her teeth when she grins so much you can see the gums and can see where she's had a few knocked out by guys who like it that way, and those are some of the things that make even the rich boys who have wives want to send her nice things in the spring.

I was out to see Pegg and I was on with talk about how I was set on

the Chief spot, Grimm be damned, and she was real nice to sit and nod as I got loose with talk. It seems to be these days that if I set to talk for long I find myself at Grimm and me and our fight to be Chief, and it was the way of Pegg to make a man feel good in his words and self with no thought, or at least no word, on her part to say that she had heard all this the last time, and the last time, and the last time. We talked for some time and then it was time for the boys to get off work and that was the time when she had to wait for them to come and make the place all set for them, so I said my thanks to her for the talk and I walked out through her door and down towards the bridge. The sun was at the high point and I felt like it might be more nice to stay out and to walk than it would be to go back home. There were dogs that roamed the streets near where Pegg lived and I saw them when I went or left there most times, and each time I saw them I thought how they looked like bags of horse bones that got up to run. Each one had a deep ghoul face and they limped through the thick sludge of the sun in the hot of the day to go some place, I had no clue where and I thought it would be worse if I did. I had some thoughts about dogs that they were not meant to be the friend of man, that they had made some pact with Bad Ones and that was how come they were let to live in towns and eat from the hands of men, but in fact we would be best were they to go some place else and live on their own. Trust is best held back from ones who would seek it too much, I think, and none more than dogs seek the trust of men. Thoughts like these were the ones I felt should have a place at the desk of the Chief. I could see to it as Chief that a dog would be shown the trust due a beast who had done no harm in its life and no more than that, which I think would make our town a place where good men with kids and wives would want to come and make their home. That was the task of a Chief in my book, to make the town a nice and safe place for boys and girls to grow and to learn how the world is and what they ought to do.

I took the path that leads up past the lead house and the bronze house and the house made out of coal, and then I took the third left to be on the road that goes towards the New School. The Old School was burned up in a fire in the June that was two Junes ago, and now that spot has just some shacks in it set up by the guys who work at the Fish Gut House. The Fish Gut House was clear on the far side of town from where the Old School spot was but the Fish Gut House boys made dirt to live on so they set up camp any place where they would be left in peace. If there is one thing to say for Old Man, who is Chief right now, it is that he has left the Fish Gut House boys to their shacks in the Old School spot and has

not asked them to move, he just built the New School in a new spot. This I think is a just course for a Chief to take, to help make our town the kind of town where the Fish Gut House boys can set up camp in peace to do their work and they don't get pushed and pulled none. The New School is a bit drab for my taste and it has these great big stone slabs in front and one of them says "NEW" and one of them says "SCHOOL" as if there was a man in town who did not know what the place was, but still it seemed to work all right for the kids who went there to learn and you did not hear much in the way of gripes from their folks so I guess it must be a good school.

Past the New School is a place to sit near the lake and so I sat for a bit to look at the lake and to think. On the far side of the lake there is a group of homes that are built from tin and scrap and things the folks who live there could find on the shore of the lake. Some days I come down here and sit and watch the things that go on on that side of the lake for some long time and then I go back home. I live with no one else and I like it that way, but some days I think I would like to see some life and see it move here and there in the sun, so I come here to the lake shore where I know I will see that. It is odd that there does not seem to be a time of day nor year where there is not life to see on the far side of the lake. The lot where the Fish Gut House boys have set up their camp has life in it if you get there just as the sun comes up, or when they are done with work for the day but have not turned in for bed yet, but when they are at the Fish Gut House their camp is still as the lot it sits on. The men and their wives and kids are on the far side of the lake all day and all night. I have not yet had a thought as to what it is that they do by which they get their food. There is not much here to hunt and they seem to raise no plants. In some kinds of light I see them and I think that they maybe are not like men at all but are more like bugs or some kind of sick, that they are ones that live on the health there is to be had near them and make no moves in this world to make much on their own. Which can't be true of course, they built their homes at least, but these thoughts come to me in the light of the sun some days and I can't do much with them but think them.

I threw some stones at my face that was in the lake and I made it break and then swirl, and then it was fine. I still did not feel much like I would like to be back at home. I looked at the far side of the lake and I saw kids over there that could see me look at them, and they yelled to me some words that I could not hear. I tried to point at my ears as a way to say to them that I could not hear what they said but they kept on so I turned and I left. I walked back the way I had come and got as far as the

New School, then I turned and went on the road that makes a ring on the edge of town. It is not a road one would use to get to a place in town since there were roads that would make a straight line from where you were to where you would want to be, but the Ring Road is nice when you just want to walk and not be in a place. I do not think that is what the Ring Road was built for, though I of course do not know who built the Ring Road or what they were like so I do not know what they meant by it. A road is not like a piece of art where you can look at it and try to know what the guy who built it meant by it from the clues he left for you in it. You can just move on it and try not to fall down. I do not fall down too much when I walk but I do from time to time. When I was young it was not too bad for me to fall down when I walked, I could get back up quick and be on my way, and I did not feel it much the next day. Now when I fall I am down for some time. Once time when I fell I was not back up when the sun went down and the trees had these long arms in the night when I could not get up, and they made to snatch me up but by some luck or grace I was not prey to trees that night. In the years since then my legs and arms and the rest of me as well has gone from bad to worse, and I have had to fix much of me with what I could find in town or in the dump or in the yards out by the Work House. It does not make me look so nice and I have a hard time when I try to move with much speed or with turns that are quick, but I think one of the things that makes me the best choice for Chief is that more than any man in this town I am made from this town, and much of what I stand and sit on is made from things I found in this town. Can Grimm say that? No sir, he can not.

There is just one house that is on the far side of the Ring Road, which is the house that Bess lives in. Bess used to do work the same as Pegg does, and in fact it was Bess who showed Pegg the ropes of how to do that work and found her a place where the work boys and she could be and be left to just their own eyes. I can think back on when I was young and Bess had a face that was like a bright light in the town, one that it seemed like you could see from here or there or way out there and would guide you back if you got lost. She would sit in the park in the day when it was not yet time for her to work and she would sew or read, and it was one of the few soft things of joy in town in the years when the farms were bad and life was lean to walk by her and see her grin at you. She got sick when the war came through town and it brought young men from out of town with it, for whom it had been a long time since they'd seen a girl and a long time still to that since they'd seen one like Bess, and I heard from Pegg that it was like leaves from a tree in fall that their cash fell to Bess in

the jar on her desk So much work took its toll on her and she was not quite the same since, so bad that Old Man said it was not safe for her to be in town near kids and what else so she was made to live in this house on the far side of Ring Road, where she sits at her stoop all day and yells "I AM THE WORLD! I AM THE WORLD!" at those of us who walk on the Ring Road some days, which for all I know might just be me.

The Ring Road is shaped like an egg, and at the part of the egg where it is most like a point there is a small hill which has at the top a small park with just a bench and a few Elms have small red buds this time of year that look like the pills they gave us guys who could not go to the War back when the War was here since that was the same year much of the town was sick. The buds shine a bit in the sun as it starts to set past the trees on the far side of the lake and they make me think of the crisp oak knobs that are on Old Man's desk, which soon will be my desk. It is so close to me in my mind that I can smell the rich thick smell and feel its cool slick weight and see the way it sits in the room so that when you go through the door you are there and the Chief is there in such a way that you feel small though he is in a chair and you are on your feet. I sit on the bench and I look down the road that goes straight through town from the hill, past the Fish Gut House and the gray church and the white church and yard where Grimm works all day with rocks and a sledge. Grimm will not be the Chief. He may be young and he may have knees that still work the way they did when he was born but he has no heat in his mind and I think the folks in town know that. He does not have the town in his bones the way I do. Some birds land on the rocks that are near me and I give them a soft glance by which I mean to say "I see you there, birds, I know you and you know me too."

Interview

Brian Snell

When did you write "I will be the Chief"?

The whole story came together in the course of a week or so; I had some of the pieces of the first paragraph buzzing around in my head without any really specific idea of what they were going to be for, so I got them down on paper and then walked away from it. The more I thought about it after that, the more curious I was about who was saying that stuff and what that person's life was like, so I ended up coming back to it and fleshing it out into a fuller story a few days later.

Did you have a difficult time deciding the title of your work? Were there any other titles you were considering?

The story didn't have a title until right before I submitted it, ly. It was saved on my computer as "weirdchiefguy.doc" for a couple weeks. When I decided to submit it to *Driftwood* and I needed a title, I asked myself, "What would the main character in the story call this little memoir of his?", and his blunt, to-the-point style really only left one option as far as I could see.

Do you primarily write fiction?

These days I mostly write fiction, although lately I've been thinking a bit about trying to figure out some way to pair or group fiction and non-fiction pieces that orbit around the same theme but try to get at it in different ways, so maybe if I'm up for a more ambitious project this spring I'll try to strengthen my essay-writing chops.

Is there anything unique about your personal writing process?

Lately I've mostly been writing stories like this, meaning stories that deal primarily with a specific character's subjective experience. Once I have a sense of what I'd like to do with a character (which usually is extrapolated from some other thing I've been thinking about, or something I've been reading), and I have a vague architecture for the major points of the story ("Guy wants to be chief, has a rival, weird semi-industrial town,

etc."), the actual writing of the story becomes a matter of putting the rest of my life to one side for a few hours and really "being" that character. It's hard to describe exactly, but the experience is weirdly meditative. Sometimes the result is unreadable and sometimes I get something I like out of it.

Tell us about the process of pinning down the tone and mood of the "I will be the Chief."

In a story like this, the tone and mood are so expressly tied up with the main character's voice and method of experiencing the world around him. Once the character started to feel alive to me, and he was more-or-less experiencing the things around him on his own, the tone developed as a consequence of his characterization.

Who are some of your favorite authors? Which authors influenced "I will be the Chief"?

The most obvious influences on "I will be the Chief", and on a lot of the fiction I've written lately, are Samuel Beckett's incredible novel *Molloy*, David Foster Wallace's short story collection *Oblivion*, and James Tate's *The Ghost Soldiers*. All three try, in their own ways, to work through the isolating aspects of being a subject experiencing the world and make them communicable in a way I find really energizing and fun.

Where can readers find more of your work? Have you been published before?

I've written a number of pieces for *The Farmer General*, where I was also the Assistant Editor for a stint. I had a poem come out in the most recent issue of *On the Rusk*, and have previously had nonfiction published in *Pioneer*.

What drew you to *Driftwood Press*?

I have a great deal of respect for *Driftwood*'s commitment to publishing work that is consistently inventive and challenging, and I'm quite excited to get to be a part of it.

Underside

Laurin Becker Macios

If you sit here long enough you'll notice lights in the trees. You'll remember the wood at the harbor, how it was everything that wasn't water. You'll envision the woodpecker by the pond, holding itself to the underside of a branch, grazing almost, unsure where to peck. Several false starts. Or maybe a pattern with which it will break the branch from the tree, a pattern you didn't catch repeating. You'll think about your past—a place you never expected to not want to visit. The men you loved like drunken vineyards. The women like sand storming your eyes. You never expected to exile yourself from your self, but visiting flattens you into the wind-roving map of an island.

Interview

Laurin Becker Macios

When did you write the poem?

I wrote "Underside" in September 2013 when I was at the Martha's Vineyard Writers Residency, run by Noepe Literary Center in Edgartown, MA.

What inspired the poem? Are any of its themes inspired by your own life?

This poem is inspired both by the island of Martha's Vineyard and by my life. I had just spent a morning walking around Edgartown, first around a little pond where I watched a woodpecker on a tree, then to the shore along its weathered wood, and finally to a little outdoor coffee shop. I was sitting there at the coffee shop for quite a while just sort of staring at a blank page, staring at the trees, thinking about my new-ish marriage and its growing pains, wondering how to write about it, or how not to. After a while I noticed that there were strings of lights in the trees, and for some reason it felt meaningful. I think because it took me so long to notice them. That sparked the poem, and I just went with it.

What was the hardest part of writing the poem? What was the easiest?

The hardest part was the ending. I'm still a little unsure if the ending has settled into its skin.

Tell us about your creative process.

I write first in a notebook. Later I move them onto the screen to let them become first drafts of poems, and that's where they begin to change and take real shape.

Who are some of your favorite authors?

Geraldine Brooks, Louise Erdrich, Megan Marshall, Natasha Trethewey, Sharon Olds, Eavan Boland, Kevin Young, Mary Oliver, Rumi, Walt

Whitman.

How long have you been writing poetry? Do you write in any other genres or work in any other mediums?

I've been writing poetry since sixth grade, and I'm 31, so however long that is! I don't write in other genres. I'd love to, but I'm not really one for plot—I don't know how to work a plot, and I don't consider myself a storyteller. My poems, and many of the poems I love, are about capturing and evoking feelings or images or moments, illuminating something important (and possibly overlooked) within a larger story, and that story might not even be present in the immediate periphery of the poem. It may just be life.

Where can readers find more of your work? Have you been published before?

You can find my work at www.laurinbeckermacios.com.

What drew you to *Driftwood Press*?

The poems in *Driftwood* are vivid, varied, full of natural landscapes and bold voices. I fell in love with the poems in issue 2.1.

Wainscot Rats

Mattie Quesenberry Smith

Mother

Next time, look
Behind the boards: rats
Gnaw heavy rinds,
The edible shades,
Even milk, breast-held
By the baby's breath.
This is what you know
About your sister.

Rats slip from disaster,
Drag tails, scatter.
It is you I am watching
This winter,
As you drag your feet
Along the gutter road,
As your yellow eyes
Spy spindleshanks

Along the way.
Why visit again the fact
You have a thieving hand
When to overreach here
Is to grab and hold
The only milk,
Spilling in the street,
Spilling out dry paps?

Interview

Mattie Quesenberry Smith

When did you write the poem?

I wrote this poem in the fall of 2014.

What inspired the poem? Are any of its themes inspired by your own life?

I was inspired to write “Wainscot Rats,” after reading George Orwell’s *1984* and considering the devastating impact conflicts, such as in the Ukraine and in the Middle East, have on people. This poem is part of a series of poems entitled “Dear Winston,” in which I address Winston, the main character, from the points of view of the various women he knows in the novel. “Wainscot Rats” is spoken by Winston’s mother to him as I imagine she would after Winston steals chocolate from her and his young, breastfeeding sister and runs out of the apartment, never to see either of them again.

What was the hardest part of writing the poem? What was the easiest?

The hardest part of this poem was imagining what it must be like for a nursing mother to struggle with starvation in the midst of a state-induced apocalypse, such as the one Orwell explores in his novel. All Winston’s mother is trying to do is survive to nurse her baby and feed her children. Just imagining that frightens me— I think because I have nursed ten children myself, and the thought of having no control over obtaining food and drink while trying to nurse and protect my children terrorizes me. The added wrinkle of Winston stealing from his mother and baby sister is even more troubling, for she must figure a way to understand him through the circumstances of suffering.

Was there anything in your original conception of the poem that didn't make it in?

I cut most of it, so the poem could communicate the images.

Do you primarily write poetry?

Yes, I am currently reworking two length manuscripts and developing “Dear Winston,”.

Is there anything unique about your personal writing process?

I am a hunter and gatherer. In order to write a poem, I risk asking questions and wondering about things that cause tension. Then, I gather bits of ideas, observations, and things, much like a magpie collects its curios. Whatever catches my eye, whatever steals my thoughts just might end up in a poem somewhere.

Who are some of your favorite authors?

I have too many to name, and they are all deceased, with the exception of Thomas Pynchon, Don Delillo, and Michael Martone.

How long have you been writing poetry? Do you write in any other genres or work in any other mediums?

I have been writing poetry since my high school years, though I always remember identifying myself as a writer—even in fifth grade when I completed an exhaustive report on dogs. I also write screenplays and creative nonfiction.

Do you have any recommendations for readers who enjoyed your work?

I recommend reading apocalyptic literature—it is filled with fears of losing control, and it informs us as to what can happen when people forfeit control by submitting to the gentle tides of complicity. Orwell’s Winston is a man who could have been heroic, but instead he enacts minute rebellions and cedes swathes of heroic territory to “getting by.”

Where can readers find more of your work? Have you been published before?

Readers can find my chapbook *Mother Chaos: Under Electric Light* at Finishing Line Press. I have several poems appearing currently in *Floyd County Moonshine*, *Dark Matter Journal*, and *Red Earth Review*. Anyone interested in WWII historical documentaries can find the award winning *Between Two Fires* on the International Historic Films website.

What drew you to *Driftwood Press*?

I found *Driftwood* by reading the review and subsequent solicitations for manuscripts on New Pages. I am drawn to the press because it is dynamic, and I like its independent streak!

Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your work in particular?

Yes, I often write my poems with theories of emergent complexity lurking in the background.

Nate Neilsen

David Gustavsen

Poor, Nate Neilsen,
part time prophet and full
time neurotic, is in the corner
again, his legs knotted
like Buddha as he waits
for revelation. With his head
pillowed between two walls,
he sits and sits, maybe
this time for years.
He'll watch his hair
and skin fall
like leaves, his muscles
and viney capillaries wither.
Then, he'll picks himself up,
and stack his limbs neatly
in a cardboard box:
femur on femur,
rib on rib,
here in the pelvic hollow
space for a mandible—
just the grey bones now,
and two eyes like gas flames.

Inbox(O)

Alan Jernigan

If you stay awake long enough, someone will email you. So I ate another shortbread Chessman and waited. After a while, I noticed the sun crawling up the wall. It was morning. The sun was morning. I wondered what would happen if no one emailed me. I gazed out the window. Down in the parking lot a man swam across a lake, while another man climbed a mountain in the same spot.

At Market

Alice Pettway

In the cashew shade of afternoon
the market ladies' hands are young tomatoes
warm from the sun.

They press palm to flesh,
rub the fuzz on my arms.
We speak simple words
unused to accents.

The child selling onions
is the one
who one day earlier called me *boneca*—

doll—pulling her fingers
through my yellow hair.

Interview

Alice Pettway

When did you write the poem?

I began writing “At Market” in 2010 while I was teaching and working with a women’s empowerment organization in rural Mozambique. The poem then developed slowly over several years.

What inspired the poem? Are any of its themes inspired by your own life?

In Mozambique, especially rural communities like the one I lived in, the market is the center of social life. It is where you get the news, where you drink and visit with friends, where you buy the few food items that you don’t grow yourself. As a foreigner, the market is both where you find your Mozambican self and where you’re most fully reminded of your differences.

What was the hardest part of writing the poem? What was the easiest?

Half of the poems in my forthcoming book, *The Time of Hunger | O Tempo de Chuva*, were begun in Mozambique, as “At Market” was. The greatest challenge with all of them— and I still stew over this even now that I’ve finished the book— was feeling that I would somehow let down the culture I came to value so deeply by failing to capture its essence. Or that I would inadvertently perpetuate the stereotypes about Africa that I hear so often from people in the United States. In the end, the best I could do was to try to let my reader see Mozambique the way I see it — complex and startlingly beautiful.

Was there anything in your original conception of the poem that didn’t make it in?

In the original versions of the poem, I more directly addressed some of the racial dynamics that were always present around me in Mozambique. People often assumed I was a white South African or of Portu-

guese descent (I'm pale skinned and blonde), which carried years of ugly history into my first interactions with people. In the end, I decided that this particular poem worked better brushing up against the issue lightly with the final image.

Do you primarily write poetry?

Yes, I would consider myself first and foremost a poet. I have, however, done a significant amount of advocacy writing about social justice issues as well. I feel writers have an important part to play in creating social change, and sometimes I feel I'm better able to fill that role through prose.

Tell us about your creative process.

My poetry tends to be image driven, and I almost always begin by hand writing the central image of the poem in my notebook. I often write that image over and over until the lines surrounding it began to take shape. I think it's really just an exercise in keeping my hands busy so my brain can work out how to unfold the rest of the poem, but it's necessary to my process.

How long have you been writing poetry? Do you write in any other genres or work in any other mediums?

When I was five, I received my first book of poetry. It had Alfred Noyes's "The Highwayman" in it, and I was immediately obsessed. I recorded myself reading the poem and then would listen to it under the covers at night. I started writing my own poems as soon as I was able to string words together. This seems naïve in hindsight, but there never was a moment that I didn't feel my life would circle around words. But I was right. Those words have come in different forms over the years for different purposes (including some copywriting to pay the bills), but they've always been there.

Do you have any recommendations for readers who enjoyed your work?

Keep reading *Driftwood*. As a reader, I find that if there's a poem I love in a journal, the odds are the editors will publish more like it— if not in the same issue, then in another one.

Where can readers find more of your work? Have you been published before?

Interested readers can find updates on all of my upcoming and current work at alicepettway.com. I'm especially excited to announce that *Salmon Poetry* will be publishing my first full-length collection, *The Time of Hunger | O Tempo de Chuva*, in February 2017.

What drew you to *Driftwood Press*?

As a poet, I gravitate toward journals who are publishing work I admire. I also greatly value editorial teams who bring together art, words and technology into a seamless experience— this is happening at *Driftwood*, and I wanted to be part of it.

Crossing Borders, Pursued by the Feathered Serpent

Danuta E. Kosk-Kosicka

In the train snaking the airport loop,
pinned to the seat by a robot's voice, I am alone.

I doze off and stare at the serpents devouring
skeletons. A frieze of eagles

eating human hearts. Cut in stone. Silent.
Then that man, Harry, in a hammock.

Jungle sounds. Anaconda's embrace.
Coils, wriggling limbs. The shriek.

The automaton at the gate chokes, spits out
my boarding pass, my name misspelled.

In the cramped Boeing: a snoring man with a wide open
mouth, ice cubes crushed into plastic glasses,

the rattle of opening cans.
I wobble on the edge of sound and silence.

Interview

Danuta E. Kosk-Kosicka

When did you write the poem?

I wrote the first version eighteen years ago, right after my return from a trip to Mexico. Recently, I have revised the poem extensively.

What inspired the poem? Are any of its themes inspired by your own life?

My journey to northern Mexico in 1997 resulted in a series of poems, most of them dedicated to particular places there, including Tepotzotlan, Morelia, Toluca, Salamanca, San Luis Potosi, and Lake Patzcuaro. I loved the sights, the landscape, the churrigueresque churches, as well as the music, the food, and the people. In a way they reminded me of the Poland I used to know. This poem is my 'between the realms' experience of traveling back from Mexico to the USA.

Was there anything in your original conception of the poem that didn't make it in?

The original comprised five stanzas. At some point my writing style changed, and shorter felt better. From 38 lines, the poem shrank to seven couplets. The return trip had been intense: I was filled with the emotions brought on by what I had seen and heard, the Feathered Serpent myth, the story about somebody's friend (whom I call Harry) strangled by an anaconda. Starting with a long, pre-dawn, hazy wait at a small airport in Leon (this part didn't make it into the poem), then the dreadful empty train at Dallas/Fort Worth, transferring me from the Mexican to the American leg, to the noise of the crowded Boeing— all real and yet unreal after the majesty and mystery of my dreamed-of pyramids, visited just a day before. So close, yet so far— across both time and space.

Do you primarily write poetry?

I write poems in both English and Polish. Born and raised in Poland I have lived in the USA since I arrived in 1980 on a two-year postdoctoral

fellowship. (I hold a Ph.D. in biochemistry.) The imposition of martial law in my motherland decided that I settled permanently in the USA. At one point I started writing poems in English and translating. I have translated into English over one hundred poems, including Ernest Bryll's and Lidia Kosk's (for two bilingual books). I also translate from English into Polish, including the work of three Maryland Poets Laureate.

Is there anything unique about your personal writing process?

Deciding the language in which the poem wants to be written, English or Polish. That's how I turned to painting the poems that couldn't make up their minds in what language they wanted to come out.

Do you write in any other genres or work in any other mediums?

For years I've written academic publications, in the fields of biochemistry and biophysics. I've dabbled in acrylic painting of my poems. I'm quite involved in artistic photography; I have had several solo and group shows. From time to time I write essays or do interviews in addition to the creative work I do as the editor of the *Loch Raven Review's* poetry translations section featuring poets and translators in a language of my choice, different for each issue.

Do you have any recommendations for readers who enjoyed your work?

My two recent books: *Face Half-Illuminated*, a book of poems, translations, and prose (Apprentice House, 2014), and the forthcoming *Oblige the Light* (CityLit Press, 2015), winner of the fifth annual Harriss Poetry Prize for poetry manuscript. A longer interview is available at: <http://little-patuxent-review.org/2014/12/16/interview-with-danuta-kosk-kosicka/>.

Where can readers find more of your work? Have you been published before?

Check out my poems available online: *Pirene's Fountain*, *Beltway Poetry Quarterly*, and *Van Gogh's Ear*. Some of my Mexican poems have appeared in *Little Patuxent Review*, *Pivot*; and several anthologies.

What drew you to *Driftwood Press*?

Variety of styles, great writing, and the interviews. Also— the fast-track review of submissions— whatever the verdict is I like to hear it A.S.A.P. The way it all is handled and presented feels inviting.

The Weatherman

Wina Puangco

Like Rumpelstiltskin, what you want is a name. Tenderness given for a price paid: come a little closer and I will spin gold from hay. I ask, what is your name? You answer: it will not rain today.

I've called you Stranger, sitting on the dungeon steps, and then Friend the friendless, King of the endless, aimless late night call. On the telephone you were Hello and eventually Good-bye, the receiver clicking in my ear through the curlicue wire.

You were sweet—Sugar, Honey—a mango ripe for the picking, a plum about to burst from thin, diabetic skin. In the shower, you were Come Closer. At the door, Come Again. You were Company in the city summer, Master of drunken evenings ending in wine-sleep. In bed, you were Please, Please, Please—always on the verge of leaving or whichever came first.

It's almost July. The city changes. And I along with it—you along with me: they didn't tell us that gold stiffens in our pillows when the spinning is finished and our mattresses are no longer filled with straw. One, two—ten golden nuggets before our backs break. Should I get the laundry? Leave it—won't rain today, Princess. I reach for the clothespin. Light elongates my finger. You have the wrong story.

You ask me for a name I do not know and cannot give you: words written on the back of your grade school report card, on your certificate of birth. You want what comes before the coma—the comma—listed in the yellow pages, above that and below this. You need it in indelible ink, tattooed on onion skin, set in stone once you have gone.

The line is dripping. I call you a phase—a craving: I'm done with sweets in my coffee. You are a moment of weakness, an anecdote about too much to drink. With them, I call you my friend the friendless and I burn bed, bridge and tangled wire. You are company once kept, in a city I forget: a stranger sitting on the dungeon steps.

I name you Rumpelstiltskin and offer you freedom for a price paid. Let me undress my fourth finger and give you back your hay.

Interview
Wina Puangco

When did you write “The Weatherman”?

I wrote this piece two years ago.

What inspired the poem? Are any of its themes inspired by your own life?

Rumpelstiltskin is one of my favorite children's stories— the importance of names and naming is by far one of the creepiest things ever, in my opinion. And it got me thinking about how relationships evolve— how we change the way we name people according to our interactions with them. I found it fascinating that the reverse could also be true: the way we name people also changes how we view them.

What was the hardest part of writing the poem? What was the easiest?

I wanted the rhythm of the work to echo that sing-song quality fables have while retaining very urban images; that was probably the hardest thing about me. The easiest thing was writing the last few lines— I knew right off the bat that I wanted it to end like that.

Was there anything in your original conception of the poem that didn't make it in?

Yes, definitely. I originally wanted the title to overtly reference Rumpelstiltskin but in the end I found that the piece needed to work beyond the context of that fairy tale as well.

You submitted this as fiction, but our editors thought it worked better in the poetry category. What do you see this work as?

This one is tricky because I don't think I write poetry, although I understand that what I write is definitely more parts poetry than most fiction writing. I would like to think that I write small fiction— not to be confused with flash fiction which usually only shows you a snippet of a narrative—

which can be likened to a miniature: complete, just tiny.

What is your creative process? Is there anything unique about your personal writing process?

I usually work on big projects— for instance, this work is part of a larger series— and fixate on really getting the details down so that each part is its own whole. I'm not sure if that's unique, though. Also, I tend to fixate on a particular line around which I build the entire piece (for "The Weatherman" it was "Let me undress my fourth finger and give you back hay").

How long have you been writing poetry? Do you write in any other genres or work in any other mediums?

I've been writing since I was a kid, but only seriously began thinking of it as a craft in 2008 (I was 17). And yes, I have a lot of longer stories— one of them is in *Plural Prose Journal's* maiden issue.

Who are some of your favorite authors?

Among others: Kelly Link, Shiela Heti, Siri Hustvedt, Margaret Atwood, A.S. Byatt, David Foster Wallace, Audrey Niffenegger, A.M. Homes, Adrienne Rich, Conchitina Cruz, Italo Calvino and Mark Strand.

Do you have any recommendations for readers who enjoyed your work?

I want to recommend Filipino authors— I'd say Erika Carreon (fiction), Eliza Victoria (fiction) and Conchitina Cruz (poetry).

Where can readers find more of your work? Have you been published before?

On my website at www.winapuangco.com.

I've been published in *Plural Online Prose Journal's* first two issues and in (now defunct) *Stache Magazine's* December 2013 issue.

What drew you to Driftwood Press?

Ultimately, I think art and literature are works in not just creation but also curation, and I really liked your previous issues.

Post-Electrical Buzz¹

Laurie Kolp

Embalmed, in a tinted bubble of time
when ceiling lights crown heads

headboards creak, pupils dilate.
Copper beeches the creepy ghosts

only he can see on icy cold nights in May.
Hostile, cockiness hangs

along the halls of shadowed mind
burning the dark air with liquor.

¹ Found poem: source text is John Updike's *Rabbit at Rest*

Interview

Laurie Kolp

When did you write the poem?

Two years ago.

What inspired the poem?

I was participating in the *Found Poetry Review's* Pulitzer Remix and had to write 30 found poems from John Updike's *Rabbit at Rest*. Somewhere along the way, the theme of addiction/recovery developed.

Are any of its themes inspired by your own life?

Let's just say I can relate.

What was the hardest part of writing the poem?

It's challenging to write a found poem, using only words from a source text. I think the hardest part was finding the right words that sound good together while still conveying meaning. It can be tricky to create a unique poem unlike the source text. I didn't even read *Rabbit at Rest* all the way through until after I'd completed the project. What was the easiest? Finishing it. In other words, I knew when it was done. Sometimes it's not always so cut and dry.

Is there anything unique about your personal writing process?

I create a word bank for found poems first.

Where can readers find more of your work?

I have a website (<http://lauriekolp.com>) that directs readers to my publications and shares news.

What drew you to *Driftwood Press*?

Well, the John Updike quote really caught my attention, but I was drawn to *Driftwood Press* because of what you publish.

Snake River

Alina Stefanescu

On our hike along the Snake River,
we glimpsed green suede leaves
soaked by diamond dew drops.

A man missing his dog
can dim things.

Stranded straight in sunlight's puddle
an ivory butterfly pondering the patchouli
scent of man's brown mottled hair-
have you seen my dog her name is Sierra
and she got hit by a car driving fast I can't find
her and it's been hours of looking famished.

Mouth curved downward like a branch,
tensed against the moment before it snaps
in two, his skin baked golden brown,
sun burns pink, peeling in places,
a lodgepole pine man losing his bark.

We try to help, stretch our eyes
for pieces and tatters, animal matters.
The dew dissipates, the day tires
its way into listless afternoon.

My son plies a piece of charred
wood from an old fire circle.
He writes R.I.P. Sierra
on a large silver rock
between breaths of lichen.

Interview

Alina Stefanescu

When did you write the poem?

I wrote the poem during a trip to Colorado with my children in August 2014. It was a sudden poem— a poem that hit me while putting the kids to bed and reviewing the day with them. The day missed a dog. I kissed the kids quickly and sat on the stoop outside scribbling.

What inspired the poem? Are any of its themes inspired by your own life?

We were hiking along the Snake River. The day itself was stunning, perfect, complete. A man missing his dog tore the day into before and after— added a sense of time and urgency to what felt careless only minutes before. I say 'careless' rather than 'carefree' because a modicum of guilt accompanied our inability to help find the pet.

What was the hardest part of writing the poem? What was the easiest?

This was a very easy poem to write because it came fresh, imbued with my children's questions and vivid memories of the hike.

Was there anything in your original conception of the poem that didn't make it in?

Since it wasn't heavily edited or reworked— it just poured out— there was nothing that didn't remain in the first draft. The editing was primarily concerned with lineation, spacing, and sound.

Do you primarily write poetry?

No, I am currently working on a fiction chapbook as well as the final drafts of my first novel. It's terrifying, intoxicating, and incomparably consuming.

Is there anything unique about your personal writing process?

I spend most of the day homeschooling my kids so I've learned to write in locked bathrooms, between dishes, in traffic jams, and anywhere I can steal the minutes. I keep my notebooks (usually two or three) in a backpack and cart them around. I've learned all kinds of cool tricks, including the invention of my own demographic category— stay-at-home-feminist (SAHF) and devising a writing process that runs like the Stroh violin in a Tom Waits tune. I juggle the balls, observe the circus, and aspire to get to that particular place where it makes sense to bring in the purple accordion. I'm that crazy woman you see who keeps whipping out a notebook to scribble as her kids choreograph rain dances in public parks.

Who are some of your favorite authors?

Oh my. Now you've asked my favorite question— the one I can never stop answering. Albert Goldbarth for his sensational juxtapositions. Mary Ruefle for unabashedly feeling things. Alberto Moravio for how he ruined a year of my life. Wendell Berry for his reverence. Walker Percy for his flirtations with irreverence. Howard Zinn for his courage and integrity. Norman Manea for the way in which he bends metal by hand. Ursula K. LeGuin and Emma Goldman for similar reasons. Jonathan Franzen for his well-developed characters. Fernando Pessoa for his heteronymity. Macedonia Fernandez for the way he defied everything he touched. I'll stop now...

How long have you been writing poetry? Do you write in any other genres or work in any other mediums?

Since 1st grade. I write short fiction, creative nonfiction, flash fiction, and literary fiction. But it all feels like writing to me so I'm not well-schooled in genre discrepancies.

Where can readers find more of your work? Have you been published before?

You can read my prose at *3Elements Review*, *Collective Exile*, and *Mulberry Fork Review* and poems at *Jersey Devil Press*, *Negative Capability Press*, *TheNewerYork*, and a few other places easily accessed from my website at http://alina_stefanescu.typepad.com/writing/

What drew you to *Driftwood Press*?

The writing I read in Issues 1.3 and 1.4.

Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your work in particular?

The prose is deeply inspired by the tension between post-totalitarianism and consumer democracy. I am constantly probing the soft fleshy parts of the American dream.

Fearing the Neighbors

Jason Irwin

They keep all the lights on all the time.
I saw the man once: sunglasses and a fur hat.
You can hear him working on his car –
swearing, cursing the gods, crying;
the sounds of tools crashing, wood
splintering from his garage.
They say it's a '56 Chevy, but he never
drives it. Some claim his wife
is a contortionist, hypnotist, or vampire;
that they engage in marathon sex acts
involving finger paints and medieval
weaponry. My uncle heard they came
from somewhere east of Jaw.
They might be terrorists, devotees
of some fossilized orthodoxy, or playwrights.
Mrs. Anderson, who lives next down the street,
and suffers from insomnia
at night, and narcolepsy during the day
says they watch the most deplorable TV shows.

Interview

Jason Irwin

When did you write the poem?

I wrote "Fearing the Neighbors" in January 2015.

What inspired the poem? Are any of its themes inspired by your own life?

The news, Tom Waits, and my uncle who once told me how concerned he was with his new neighbors, who kept their lights on day and night.

Do you primarily write poetry?

Yes, as well as plays.

Is there anything unique about your personal writing process?

I usually start writing in a notebook, sometimes making several revisions in the notebook and then typing the poem into my computer. I may leave the poem for a day or two and then go back to it. Reading it aloud helps a great deal.

Who are some of your favorite authors?

There are so many, but Philip Levine has been a great inspiration, as well as Charles Simic and Robert Bly. At the moment I'm reading non-fiction and Nick Flynn.

How long have you been writing poetry? Do you write in any other genres or work in any other mediums?

I've been writing poetry seriously for about 16 years. I have also been writing plays since 2007. I used to write fiction, but gave it up.

Where can readers find more of your work? Have you been published before?

I have one full length collection *Watering The Dead*, and two chap-

books. They can find out more at www.jasonirwin.blogspot.com

Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your work in particular?

In my writing I use everyday, ordinary experiences by ordinary people who may not have the chance to speak out, and hopefully, if the poem works, make that experience, or that life extraordinary.

If I Can Have Five Minutes of Deathbed

Ryan Havely

When the static
spreads in my brain,
please hang a dream-catcher,
but weave it strong with Sandy's
tennis line, and Jack's short test line
left over from furious casts up river. Up
he told me, picture a half moon, feed the current,
and let the rig work its way back downstream, then
reel it back, cast again at three o'clock, or pull the line
and retreat. Jack knows four split-shot about four inches
weight to weight. God knows four shots, four inches apart.

I pinch the hook in my teeth, he says don't lose your smile.
I crush the barb, and cast.

Interview

Ryan Havely

When did you write the poem?

This is a fairly new poem, in a way. I wrote the title one night after my wife had gone to bed, then stared at the screen for about an hour and fell asleep. I found it again a month or two later and figured out the poem that was supposed to go along with it.

What inspired the poem? Are any of its themes inspired by your own life?

Most themes in most of my poems are inspired by my own life, though I wouldn't call myself a confessional poet. I've tried to incorporate personal details in everything I've written. My mother played tennis her whole life, my father taught me how to trout fish, and, at the time, I thought spending a few minutes on my deathbed would beat dying suddenly, because I'd have a chance to reflect on my life.

What was the hardest part of writing the poem? What was the easiest?

All of my poems are kind of hard to write because I make them so personal. One of my favorite writers, Amy Hempel, said once that she can't write anything until she knows the first and last line. My problem is I tend to know how I think a poem should begin and end, but I can't figure out the middle. I can't stand writing titles, either. I think when I wrote the title of this poem, it was supposed to be the first line.

Was there anything in your original conception of the poem that didn't make it in?

I cut a few lines, but the poem felt too bloated. I had a few more lines about religion (that I can't remember now) but they didn't fit.

Do you primarily write poetry?

Nowadays. I think I've spoiled myself with poetry. A lot of times I

get ideas for short stories, then realize I can write them as poems in a page. Maybe I'm lazy.

What is your creative process? Is there anything unique about your personal writing process?

I don't know if it's unique, but I seem to need pain. I don't like that about myself because I tell my students that writers don't need to be in pain, or be obsessed with death, or whatever, but I'm a total hypocrite. I'm also a revise-as-I-go writer. I don't like getting out a draft and then going back and making the changes. I prefer to stare at the screen, knowing what'll eventually come next, until I feel I've gotten the current line correct. I still go back and revise, but I can't say, "Well, I'll just put this here for now and fix it in revision..."

Who are some of your favorite authors?

My all-time favorite is Vonnegut. I love Hempel, Kinnell, Olds, Frank Stanford, Hugo, Levine, HST, Heather McHugh, Szymborska, etc. Actually, I feel like McHugh and Szymborska are terribly underrated and undertaught in grad programs. I'm also a fan of Simic and Strand. And others. Frank Stanford, etc.

How long have you been writing poetry? Do you write in any other genres or work in any other mediums?

I've been writing since I was too young to know how. I started writing fiction in college because I had already taken all the poetry workshops. I've published poetry, fiction, and non-fiction. I don't mean that to sound like I think myself prolific. I guess I'm like a bear eating out of a dumpster. I'll just kind of write anything.

Do you have any recommendations for readers who enjoyed your work?

If you've never read Kurt Vonnegut's *Breakfast of Champions*, read it tomorrow. Then read Amy Hempel's *Tumble Home*, then Richard Hugo's *Lady in Kicking Horse Reservoir*, then Galway Kinnell's *Book of Nightmares*, then Sharon Olds' *The Gold Cell*, then call me.

Where can readers find more of your work? Have you been published before?

Various literary magazines. *Mobius*, *Niche*, *Broad River*, *Midwestern Gothic*, *Inscape*, *Dappled Things*, *Opium*, *Columbia Review*, *New Plains Review*, *Amper-*

sand, Flying Dog Ale's website.

What drew you to Driftwood Press?

Honestly, the name. The poem I wrote was about my dad teaching me to trout fish in the Driftwood Branch in Pennsylvania.

Sun Lamps

Sara Krueger

Down Subway Tunnel A
we go
to the City Center,
our heads ducked in reverence.

Reaching the sun lamps
that loom in the dank,
I deposit my blanket bundle dutifully
before we hop quick-footed across the tracks
to safely tuck along the limestone walls
in one snaking chain.

From the shadows we watch
behind ground glass goggles
as dials are cranked from level one to two to three
by the twitchy hands of scientists
schooled by dog-eared consumer manuals.

They pace and postulate,
these hopeful men in their rubber sun suits,
until the timers tick, tick, ding
and the white coats appear
to flip this baby of mine from back to belly.

Little chicken crisping.
He goos and gaas in his box,
sporting onion thin skin
that will soon blister and blossom into
a hundred raw rosettes.

I record his progress
in a baby book rescued from the Other Times.
Dreaming dreams like any parent might –
of pulling plugs on the cleaners that move in the moonlight
and surfacing.

Interview

Sara Krueger

When did you write the poem?

“Sun Lamps” took on many forms during the creative process. It began as a response to a writing prompt in the spring of 2014. The raw material that came out of the prompt felt more like the start of a short story or even a screenplay at that point. It was only later on in the year, maybe in the early fall, that “Sun Lamps” transformed into a poem. I was working on a chapbook of apocalyptic poetry at the time titled *Somehow We Remain in the Aftermath*. “Sun Lamps” absolutely felt like it belonged in the collection, which explores the choices people must make to survive in a world ravaged by pollution and war.

What inspired the poem? Are any of its themes inspired by your own life?

“Sun Lamps” was inspired by a black and white photograph from the 1930s. In it, two small children wear oversized goggles and stand in a crib under strange looking lamps while a nurse takes notes on a chart. The image was one of many that I had collected to use as a prompt in a 365-day writing challenge. After the initial writing, I put “Sun Lamps” aside for a few months and then came back to refine it as I worked on my chapbook, *Somehow We Remain in the Aftermath*. In the third section of the collection, a small colony has escaped the barely breathable air and the sun’s scorching rays by going underground to live in the subway tunnels of an abandoned city. “Sun Lamps” strikes a balance between the bizarre and the hopeful. The people within it struggle to find a way back to the surface, but their methods are riddled with painful experiments that may or may not pay off. This poem gave me an opportunity to delve deeper into the science fiction genre, exploring themes of choice and sacrifice against a dramatic backdrop.

What was the hardest part of writing the poem? What was the easiest?

I tinkered with “Sun Lamps” for quite a bit. It tells the story of one woman and her son, weaving together with a poem about his birth and a poem about his eventual ascent into the damaged world above. The challenge for me was to make “Sun Lamps” strong enough of a piece to stand on its own while still having it connect to story elements brought to life in the other two poems. I think I was successful.

Do you primarily write poetry?

At this point, I’m working almost entirely in poetry. There is a satisfaction that comes from successfully communicating a powerful idea or feeling in a small space. So much can go wrong when you only have a few lines to play with on the page. You have to really nail the language and phrasing. I like the challenge of that. Short stories are still an important creative outlet as well. There are a couple of short science fiction pieces that I’m editing at the moment and also, a larger short story collection about circus performers that I’m just starting to outline.

Is there anything unique about your personal writing process?

My creative process is in a constant state of evolution. For me, each project requires its own unique approach. I do love the use of prompts as a brainstorming tool. Once I have a concept I want to work with, I can’t just sit in front of a computer. There needs to be this period of time where I get out of the house and simply think about the idea. I take long walks here in the city. I paint. I go do some hot yoga. Anything that I can do to activate myself, body and brain. This is when I have the biggest breakthroughs. Many times I will also curate a soundtrack for a story so that I can listen while I write and sustain a specific mood. The real fun begins for me after the first draft is done though. I’m an editor at heart. I love to roll up my sleeves and carve into the material to find its heart and then build the piece back up into something new and even better. Editing is its own form of idea generating in a way.

Who are some of your favorite authors?

I adore the short stories of Octavia Butler, Margaret Atwood, Karen Russell, Aimee Bender and Kelly Link. They tend to create strong female characters and place them in strange worlds or have them encounter fantastical problems. I like being completely surprised when I turn the page. These women make me pause while reading and daydream.

How long have you been writing poetry? Do you write in any other

genres or work in other mediums?

I started out in the film industry so my first foray into writing took the form of screenplays. It wasn't until 2011 that I explored other avenues of expression like short stories. Over the last year is when I discovered a deep love for working in poetry. It feels very filmic. You can play with language in the same way you might frame up a shot for a film or edit images together and overlay sound. There is something you want to capture in this one line. A mood. A moment. A sound. An image. Maybe you are experimenting with the relationship between the lines or even how they sit on the page. I am loving what I can do as a poet and plan to work more within the form this year, especially in terms of stringing poems together to tell a larger story.

Where can readers find more of your work? Have you been published before?

I have been amassing creative written material since 2011, but I only just started to submit to journals and small presses this past year. So far, six publications have picked up my poems and short stories, including *Driftwood Press*. You can currently find my work in *Menacing Hedge*, *Devilfish Review* and *Jersey Devil Press* and two new poems will soon be available in *the JJ Outré Review* and *Twisted Vine Literary Arts Journal*. It has been an incredible journey and I am thankful for the experience of working with so many insightful and supportive editors along the way.

i'm debating whether or not to attend mass, mom

Jade Ramsey

you're typically

late on sunday

morning wringing choking

those close-call

sink-washed pantyhose

hair dryer nozzled up one limp leg

airing it full

a lively last-minute nylon flame on

repeat

i question the public flicker

bleached foot of my own votive

Interview

Jade Ramsey

When did you write the poem?

I wrote the poem a year after I moved away from home.

What inspired the poem? Are any of its themes inspired by your own life?

My mother inspired it; I have seen her wash her pantyhose with a hair dryer my entire life. The image is hysterical and my aunt (her sister) always teases her about it. I also wanted to discuss an issue of growing up and making adult decisions— like whether or not to go to church— I am not Catholic, but this seems like a defiant, difficult choice— I also wanted to introduce the hypocritical element of a parent who forgets and rushes last minute, and how this affects a child.

What was the hardest part of writing the poem?

I didn't want my mother to actually think this was about her. Another difficult task was relating the bizarre image to something religious: the votive flames.

Was there anything in your original conception of the poem that didn't make it in?

My own beliefs didn't make it into the poem—I chose not to relate it to my personal spiritual beliefs and opted for a universally known one: Catholicism.

Do you primarily write poetry?

Yes— I enjoy it immensely.

Tell us about your creative process.

I tend to write a lot of prose before morphing into poetry. I prefer to get things down the way I say them aloud and then tweak to a more lyric tone or visual.

Who are some of your favorite authors?

Some poets: Ted Hughes, Larissa Szporluk, and Anna Rose Welch (surreal and apocalyptic).

Some fiction: Curtis Sittenfeld, J.K. Rowling, and Julien Fellowes (coming-of-age, classist issues).

How long have you been writing poetry? Do you write in any other genres or work in any other mediums?

I wrote my first poem as an 11-year-old, impatient for Christmas. I have written short stories and prose, but I enjoy all forms of writing.

Where can readers find more of your work? Have you been published before?

I have a chapbook, *Yawns Between Strangers*, from *Finishing Line Press*; I have been published in *Best New Poets 2013*, *Goblin fruit*, *Whiskey Island*, *Gargoyle*, and others.

Silver Dreams

Iryna Lialko



Your Ad Here
Aaron Schwartz



Asgard
Brandon Geurts



Interview

Brandon Geurts

How would you describe your aesthetic?

Half Francis Bacon, half Lisa Frank.

When did you create "Asgard"?

The piece was originally made around September 2014. It was originally a commissioned work meant for an EP release from a local band, You Blew It!. It eventually developed into its own thing.

What inspired "Asgard"?

The piece is mostly an abstraction. It's somewhat inspired by rock formations and crystals, though I would like to think the piece has more to it than that.

Was there any theme or idea you hoped to address with this work?

This piece was mostly an experiment with formalism. There was no specific theme or goal in mind when I made this piece, except to explore formal elements.

Did you have a difficult time deciding on whether to add a title to your work?

Not necessarily. It's usually harder to name my works, but for some reason, not this piece.

Who are some of your favorite artists? Do you have any recommendations for others who enjoyed your work?

As mentioned earlier, I'm really interested in the works of Francis Bacon. David Lynch has also been a perennial inspiration on my work.

Tell us about your creative process.

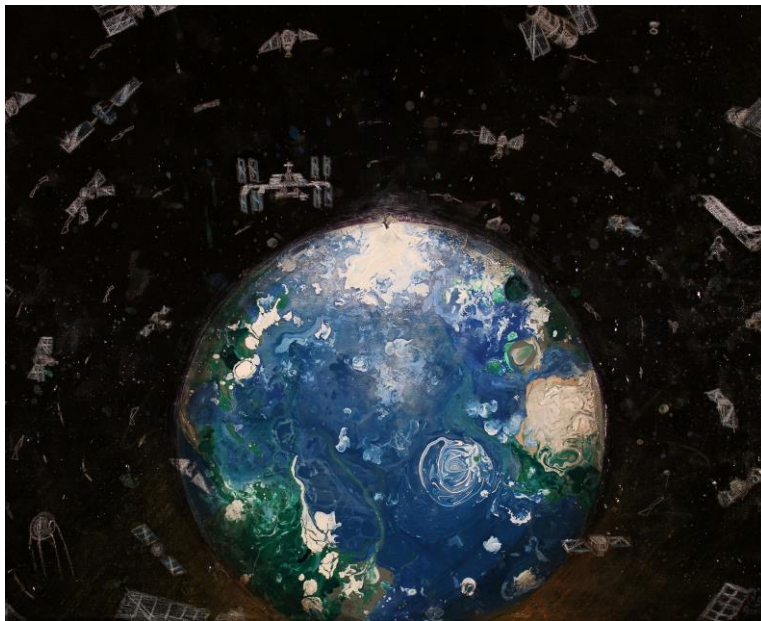
I usually work with watercolor, gouache, and ink wash. My lines are

usually done with pen.

Where can our readers find more of your work? Have you been published before?

You can find more of my work at brandongeurts.com. I've been published in several zines, including *Is It Over Yet?* based out of Orlando.

Human Space
Nathaniel Saint Amour



AstroExponential

Aimee Cozza



Interview

Aimee Cozza

How would you describe your aesthetic?

It's hard to say. It seems like it's pretty different every day. I tend to cling to a couple of ideas though. I really like the natural, chaotic neutral of space, and I really like drawing things like astronauts and spaceships.

Did you have a difficult time deciding on whether to add a title to your work?

Sometimes! I feel like some of the works title themselves, while others I really have to struggle to name.

When did you create "AstroExponential"?

I created "AstroExponential" in 2013.

What inspired "AstroExponential"?

The piece was originally created for a collaboration project calendar. Every year a bunch of artist friends and myself get together and create different themed pieces to go into a themed calendar. It's a fun way to get the creative juices flowing. For a 2014 calendar, we had a "space" theme, and this is what I came up with.

What was the hardest part of crafting the piece?

Not knowing if the end piece will be successful or not. Sometimes you just have to scrap.

Did you have any goal in making the image?

Not really! I just wanted to have fun with it, which I find most of my personal works end up being.

Is art the medium that you're most invested in?

I'd say illustration is, and as for a medium, I'm a huge digital advocate.

Are your other images similar in subject or focus?

I do have a lot of other similar subject images. My college thesis theme was actually about an astronaut. It seems I've been carrying that theme since about 2010.

Tell us about your creative process.

Draw a lot of stuff and hope something good comes out.

Who are some of your favorite artists? Do you have any recommendations for others who enjoyed your work?

I have a lot of inspirations, so it's hard to name all of them here. Like any good artist, I take the things I like from other artists and appropriate into my own. Jeremy Geddes, Angel Medina, Greg Capullo, Marcelo Frusin, Adam Hughes, and Brandon Boyd are just to name a few off the top of my head that I seriously admire.

Where can our readers find more of your work? Have you been published before?

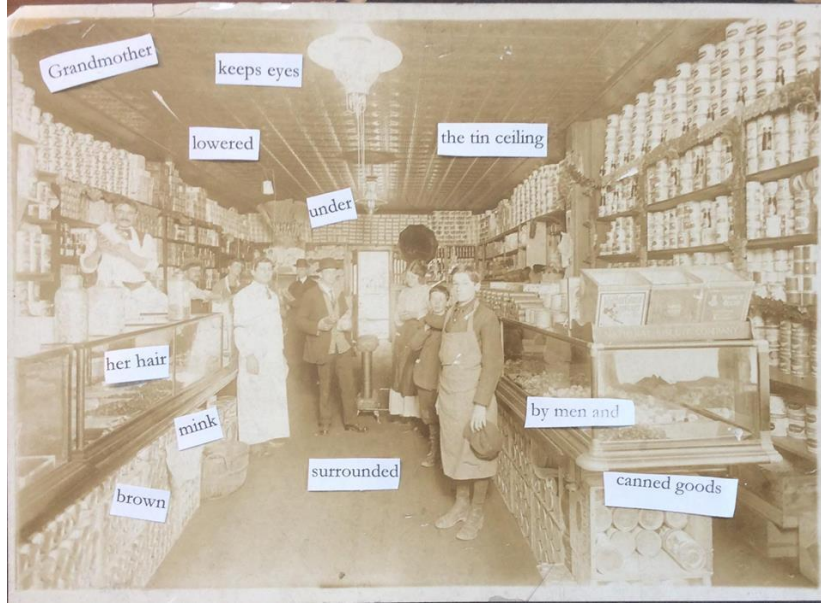
You can find more of my work everywhere! I'm on Tumblr, Twitter, Facebook, and a lot of other places. Mainly my website is the big one that links everywhere else: <http://www.aimeecozza.com>

I have been published before in smaller publications like college literary magazines and other startup zines. I almost got published in *Creative Quarterly* one time. That got me excited.

What drew you to *Driftwood Press*?

Something about the name, first of all, and once I saw a lot of the other submissions I was excited to try to become part of it.

General Store
Judith Roney



Interview

Judith Roney

How would you describe your aesthetic?

Currently, when merging antique photos and language, I'm highly conscious that the individuals within are no longer living, yet have been immortalized through this "captured moment." The antique photos I use are from my family; I try to channel their thoughts and feel the space of their environment.

Did you have a difficult time deciding on whether to add a title to your work?

No, with this particular photo I had a clear memory of my grandmother telling me it was her first place of employment, at "The General Store."

When did you create "General Store"?

In the late fall of 2014.

Do you digitally manipulate photographs? If so, how much did you edit this one?

No, I typed out the words, then cut them into uneven rectangles to impart the imperfection of language and translation.

What inspired "General Store"?

My grandmother, the only female in the photo, passed away in 1978, so her mortal voice has been silenced for decades. Looking at the photo I remembered how I thought of it when I was young and listened to the stories she told, but realized how differently I view the scene now, in the 21st century.

What was the hardest part of crafting the piece?

Deciding on word placement; I didn't want them neatly placed, I

wanted the ‘thoughts’ to appear almost random.

How did you conceive of "General Store"?

When flipping through old family photos, I paused at this one. I’d never noticed she was the only female, and never considered how she did *not* look toward the photographer. I felt this said quite a bit about her, and the era. She was approximately sixteen at the time.

Was there any theme or idea you hoped to address with this work?

I wanted to call attention to the perspective of the shot, almost as if the world was wide open at the photographer’s end, and the men and canned goods narrowed, yet there was my grandmother, near that open door to the early 20th century, and all the changes that were ahead for women.

Is photography the medium that you're most invested in?

I’m first a poet. The precision of words and the freedom of experimentation entice me like a drug. In 2014, I was influenced to begin work on a multi-media collection using antique photographs and various forms of language either applied digitally or manually.

Is art the medium that you're most invested in?

Why, yes— I have a concern art is ‘fading’ in terms of valuation in our primary schools. Without art we wouldn’t have language, and without language we wouldn’t have science, and without art we couldn’t express dreams or discover the exciting results produced by experimentation. I’m about to enter into a PhD program which focuses on texts and technology, which I’ll use to explore these ideas further.

Are your other photos similar in subject or focus?

Yes, I like ‘entering’ into other eras. It works, for me, like a mental time-machine.

Tell us about your creative process.

A fanciful imagination leads me down strange roads; I try to ‘hear’ into the past, while at the same time try to bring the dead into the present day.

Who are some of your favorite photographers? Do you have any recommendations for others who enjoyed your work?

Vivian Maier without a doubt, and Dorothea Lange.

Where can our readers find more of your work? Have you been published before?

I have a website, www.judithrone.com, which is almost up-to-date. My first poetry collection, *According to the Gospel of Haunted Women*, is due out in April. The cover art features another photograph of my grandmother.

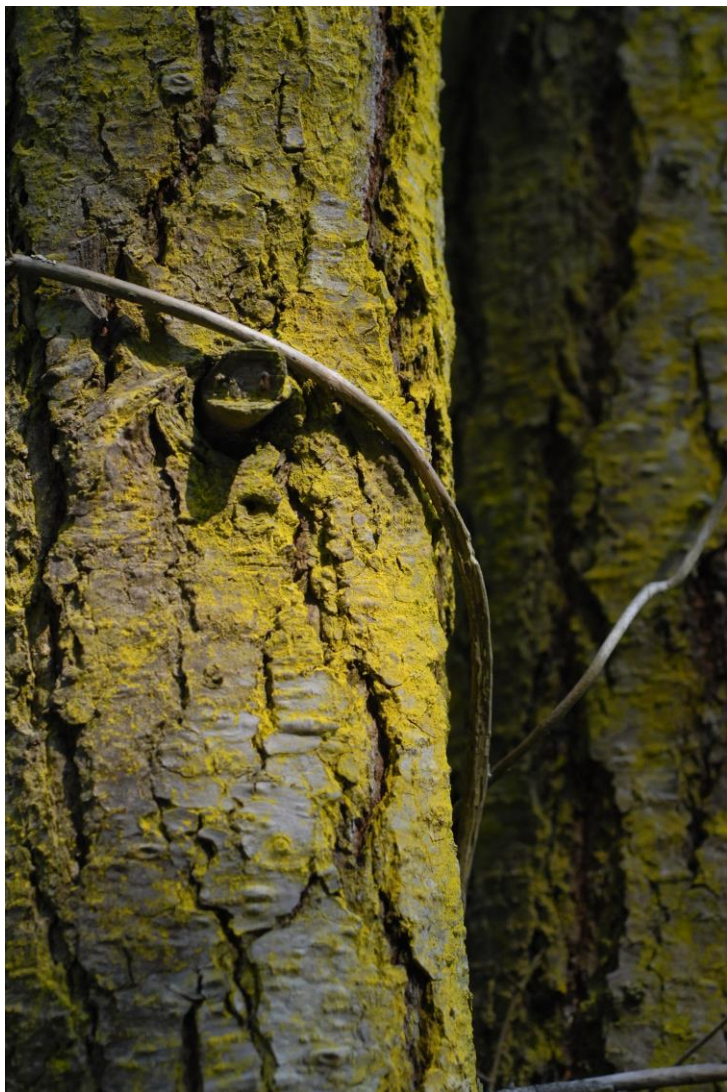
What drew you to *Driftwood Press*?

The encouragement of artistic expression.

Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about this work in particular?

It's a window in time, to the past and to what would change. It's personal, yet it's for all of us to consider how language and imagery work symbiotically.

Yellow Moss Tree with Vine
Jill Twist



Interview

Jill Twist

How would you describe your aesthetic?

Every ordinary thing has something extraordinary about it. This is a feeling I've put words to in the last year, since moving from Buffalo, New York to an island off the coast of Washington State.

What inspired "Yellow Moss Tree with Vine"?

Everything. The island where I live, the colors of the moss, the endless shades of green, the way the light changes, and especially me being here, physically and in person, and seeing it all before me.

What camera was this image taken with?

I shot this photograph with a camera and lens that I borrowed from a photographer that I truly admire— both for her work and for the way she lives her life— Kathy Ballard.

Is art the medium that you're most invested in?

Art is absolutely the medium I am most invested in. The writer, Robert Olen Butler, said, "Art is as much about exploration as it is about expression." Something clicked in me once I heard that.

Tell us about your creative process.

Creativity begins with feeling something. The 'making'— whether it's my photographs or my fiction writing— comes after.

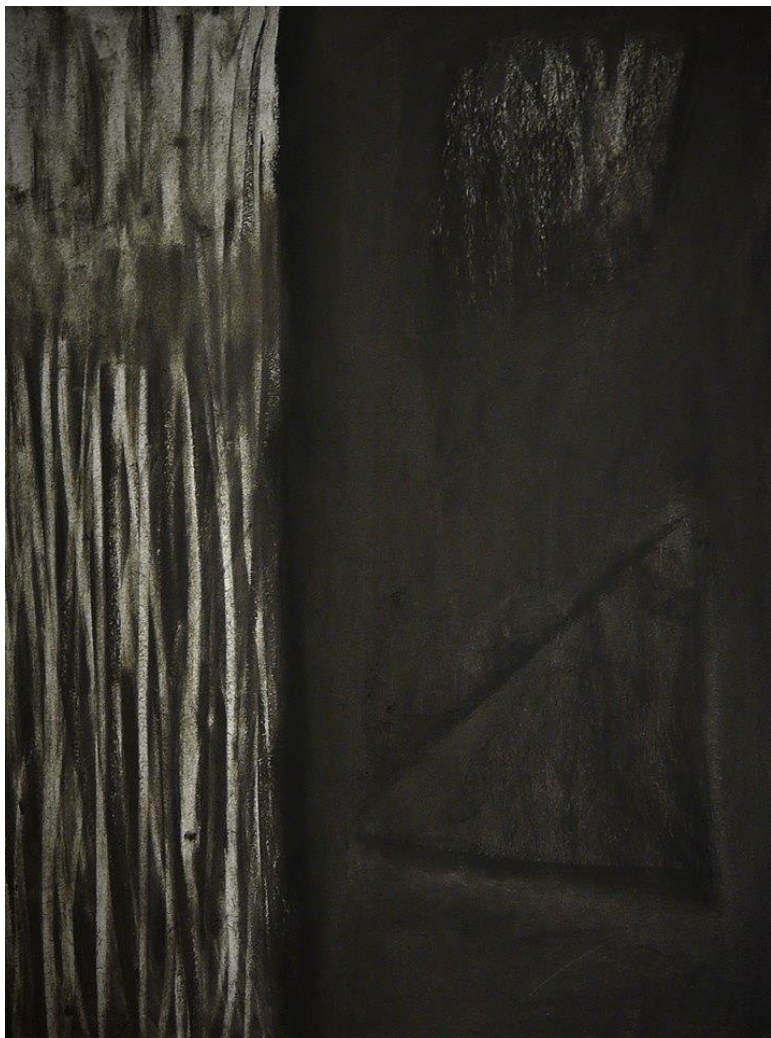
Have you been published before?

I am happy to say that this is my first published photograph.

What drew you to *Driftwood Press*?

The interviews with contributing artists, their personalities, and their diversity. This stands out to me as much as the art.

Farm Goods
Nicholas Perry



Interview

Nicholas Perry

How would you describe your aesthetic?

Pictorially, my work is abstraction with roots in minimalism and abstract expressionism. Conceptually, I believe my aesthetic offers a sense of antiquity and time.

Did you have a difficult time deciding on whether to add a title to your work?

Never. Since the overall concept that surrounds my work is the sensations of memory, I find it necessary and ideal to use a title for a narrative and my own personal documentation purposes.

When did you create “Farm Goods”?

I made “Farm Goods” this year. I wanted to start making drawings that were reminiscent of when I would walk through vacant homesteads.

What was the hardest part of crafting the piece?

Since my creation process is a lot of push and pull with an eraser and a piece of charcoal, the beginning is always the hardest. I work based off of chance, but once a collection of interesting forms arises that I can work with it feels like I am just breathing and nothing could be easier.

How did you conceive of “Farm Goods”?

I did a lot of wandering in the countryside of eastern Wisconsin. I would just walk for hours taking in the vacant homesteads. There was a sense of time and the impact of the human hand in these areas. It was very moving for me to view old tools, discarded wheat barrels, and various other objects while surrounded by this vast open space.

Was there any theme or idea you hoped to address with this work?

I believe that although our memories offer us a visual snapshot that

we can access whenever we care to, we also take into our memory the sensations we felt during the event. Since sensations are themselves intangible, I use the abstract visual language to give it its ‘visual snap shot’ to give it a physicality so I can document it. But, since my forms I produce are so ambiguous for my viewers, they can contemplate their own subjectivity to my work; and not be completely impacted by own take on my work that is represented through the title.

Is art the medium that you’re most invested in?

Yes, I put my heart and soul into what I do. The amount of love I feel towards visual art is something I cannot articulate in mere words. I believe it is an immense privilege to be born with a personality that fits the role of a visual communicator.

Tell us about your creative process.

It is hard for me to define my creative process. It feels like more of an impulsion than a forced daily routine. To be creative for me is to just live and interact with the environment I am in. It is not an exaggeration when I say I can go for a walk down the street just for a couple of blocks and find inspiration for thirty new pieces.

Who are some of your favorite artists? Do you have any recommendations for others who enjoyed your work?

Any work from any era and any artist impacts my work immensely. If I was to get specific, and was to recommend artists for other people, I would have to say Anselm Kiefer, Mark Rothko, Robert Motherwell, and Adolph Gottlieb are five big ones for me.

Where can our readers find more of your work? Have you been published before?

You can access my artist page here:

<http://facebook.com/workofnicholasperry>

I have been published in *The Creamcity Review*’s most recent issue, “The Birds We Piled Loosely”, and *Empty Sink Publishing*’s upcoming summer issue.

What drew you to *Driftwood Press*?

I thoroughly enjoyed the art work and literature you publish. For the visual art, the sense of atmosphere the work provokes is very interesting to me. I liked how the literature offered for the reader an interesting in-

quiry into events ranging from simple to complex.

Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about this work in particular?

Take the time with it when you view it. You never know how such simple ambiguity can allow for so much analysis. The abstract language speaks for areas in life we visually can't register.

No Exit
Adel Souto



My Playground

Adel Souto



Interview

Adel Souto

How would you describe your aesthetic?

I can't really say I have any underlying principles behind what I do. The only thing I ask before I take a photograph is: does this interest me? I like to capture pristine natural environments, but also the dystopian remains of man against nature. I like dramatic shots, hence I am almost always pointing my lens upward, but, in flatter dimensions, I like long horizons. In all of it, I simply frame it as best suits my eye.

Did you have a difficult time deciding on whether to add a title to your work?

The titles come to me almost instantly. Much of the time, as I take a picture, I have a theme in mind, and only when I believe a piece speaks for itself, and stands on its own, do I leave it untitled.

Do you digitally manipulate photographs? If so, how much did you edit this one?

I rarely use any digital manipulation, and have only edited a handful of photos— here and there— when they are slightly off-balance in horizon, or the light levels are too bright. I have never used Photoshop to remove unwanted materials, or to add color and filters. I'm glad you chose to run "My Playground", as many think I added color to it, but it is captured 100% as it was.

What inspired "No Exit" and "My Playground"?

"No Exit" was taken on New Year's Day, 2013, as I loved how empty the station was at noon that day. It's very rare to get a picture in New York City with no one in it, so I just had to take it.

"My Playground" comes from a March 2012 month-long series of photos where I decided to walk, once a week, in my neighborhood of Bed-Stuy, Brooklyn, while keeping one specific theme in mind. That pho-

to was from week three, and the idea was to take pictures of interesting patterns and lines.

What was the hardest part of crafting the piece?

The hardest would be the previously mentioned absence of people, but also unwanted trash. In New York City, people and trash are everywhere, and it's often hard to catch a solitary moment, or capture a pristine environment. It normally takes a lot of patience shooting things here, especially if you want to grasp the moment as is.

What camera was this image taken with?

I mainly use a Nikon D5100, but have shot some with an Olympus Pen E-P3. Sometimes I'll use a Leica D-Lux 3, as it fits in my pocket when I'm walking around the city, and don't feel like carrying a bulkier camera.

How did you conceive of "No Exit" and "My Playground"?

Some come from only being at the right place at the right time (such as "No Exit"), while a handful of others (like "My Playground") are from series I had in mind, and that particular picture stuck out more than any other in theme. There are a few photographs that I do wait, or prepare, to take days/weeks in advance, as I think they would make for a great photograph.

Did you have any goal in taking the image?

Besides the March 2012 month-long work, where I set to capture a theme in my neighborhood each week, I normally don't have a goal in mind, besides keeping my eyes open.

Was there any theme or idea you hoped to address with this work?

For the most part, no. There are a few series, such as my pictures of Dead Horse Bay (featured in the *Underwater New York* website), and those I've taken of Fort Tilden, that point out mankind's hubris, and poor collective attitude towards nature. While it is wonderful to be able to pass along a positive message with photography, I rarely try to purposefully create one.

Is photography the medium that you're most invested in?

I would say it is. I write (three books so far), I paint (work of which has been exhibited in galleries as local as Brooklyn, or as far off as Santia-

go, Chile), and I write poetry (with a few published works), but I just love photography.

Is art the medium that you're most invested in?

Yes. While I sometimes use photography as a form of document (such as my blog for NYC odd spots, *This Hidden City*), I enjoy setting up the camera to capture what I believe to be beautiful. Sharing that beauty gives me great joy. As Joseph Campbell put it so very well, “God is the experience of looking at a tree, and saying, ‘Ah!’, and I try to pass along that ‘Ah!’ moment to as many others as I can, after I’ve had it.

Are your other photos similar in subject or focus?

Isaac Newton explained that “If I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants,” and I take influence from many wonderful artists, so I take photos of wildlife and still life; beautiful buildings and destroyed architecture; flowers and concrete; objects straight on, and others with a skewed viewpoint; the old and the new; the cute and the ugly.

What is your creative process?

Long walks. I encourage that wholeheartedly.

Who are some of your favorite photographers? Do you have any recommendations for others who enjoyed your work?

Some of the work I really enjoy, as well as think others should see are from: Florian Ritter, Alex Noriega, Jen Davis, Francois-Xavier Marciat, Krzysztof Browko, Will Ellis, Karen Knorr and Edward Burtynsky.

Where can our readers find more of your work? Have you been published before?

You can find a bit of my work on my website (adelsouto.com), as well as the previously mentioned *Underwater New York*, and the music site *No Echo* runs my yearly trip to Baltimore, MD, to capture the back-patches of the jackets at its huge metal festival. I also run several blogs that each carry a unique series of photographs; from advertising removal viewed as modern art pieces, to abandoned bicycles (*Forgotten Rides*).

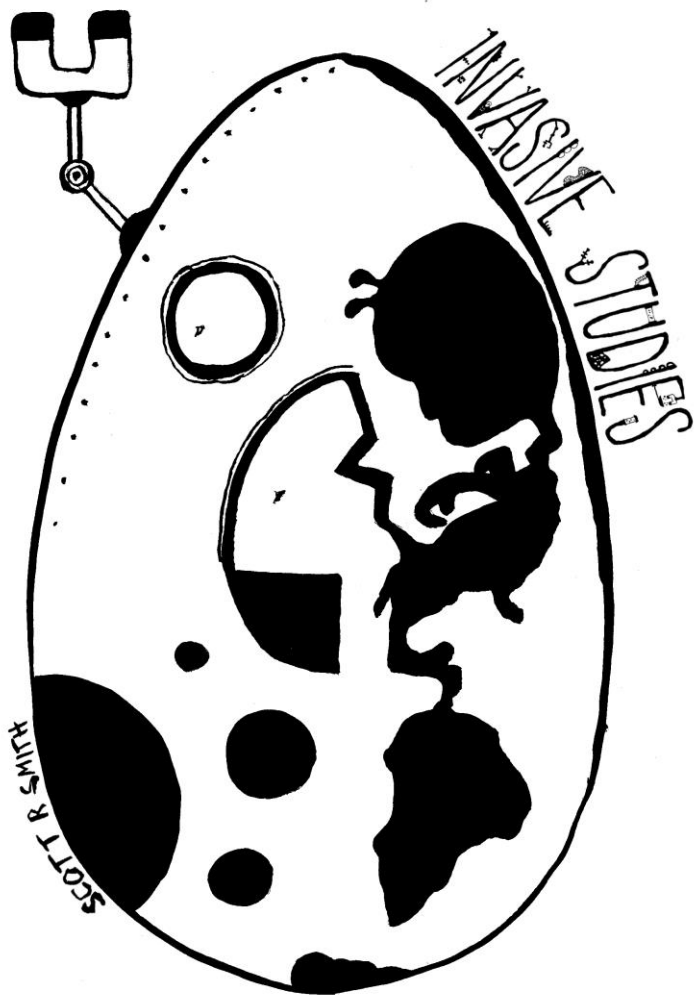
I have had work published in fanzines such as *Razorcake*, and *Small Po[r]tions*, plus magazines *The Sonder Review*, *Able Muse*, and photos of tattoos and tattoo studios in *Ink Slingers Magazine*. Plus some of my photos of Beth Moore-Love’s work appeared in the Larry Wessel documentary *Love*.

What drew you to *Driftwood Press*?

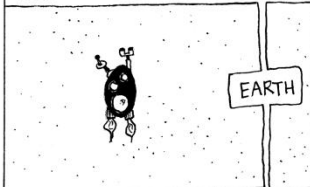
To be honest, as much as I enjoy poetry, your beautiful covers. The artwork is exquisite, and when I flipped through to discover you also feature photography, I really wanted to be a part of it all.

Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about this work in particular?

While I love that others take notice of my work, and enjoy it, whether I have 1000 fans who buy my work, or only my girlfriend and mother take pride in what I do, I shall continue to do what I do, as it is a calling from the Muses. I will always take photos.



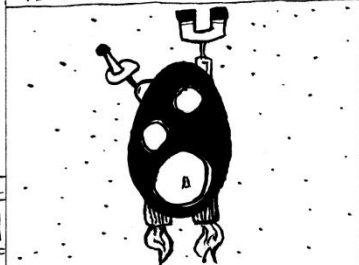
ONLY 9 YEARS AND 5.29064×10^{13} MILES AWAY, A COSMIC HAIR'S BREADTH, THE INVASION FLAGSHIP "DEATH'S PITILESS CLAW," PRIDE OF THE GLOMNIAN EMPIRE, HURTTLES TOWARDS ITS DOOMED TARGET:



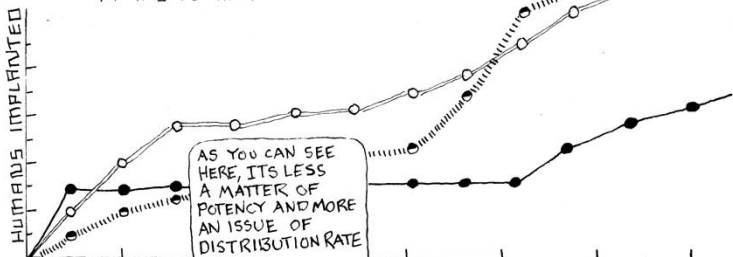
BUT EVEN AT SUCH COLOSSAL SPEEDS, THE DPC'S ARMY HAS BEEN WAITING AND PREPARING FOR 3 GENERATIONS

OMEL
8.4

THE FUTURE KINGS AND QUEENS OF EARTH MUST STILL BE EDUCATED. THEY MUST BE **TAUGHT** THE ART OF INVASION AND LEARN THE FINER POINTS OF INTERSPECIES ENSLAVEMENT IN ORDER TO CARRY OUT THEIR VESSEL'S GLORIOUS MISSION...



PARASITE INFECTION METHODOLOGY



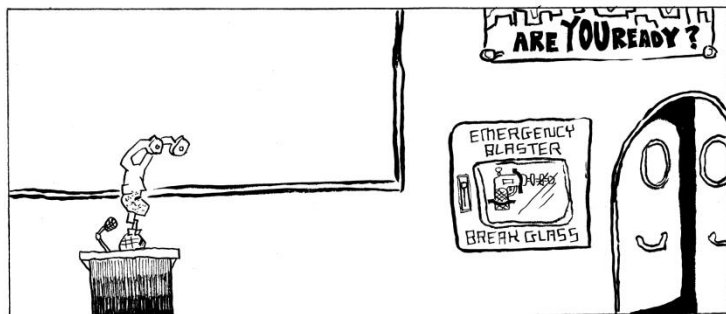
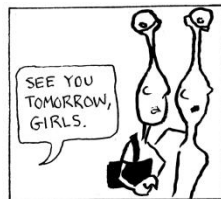
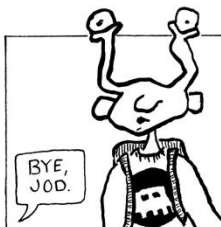
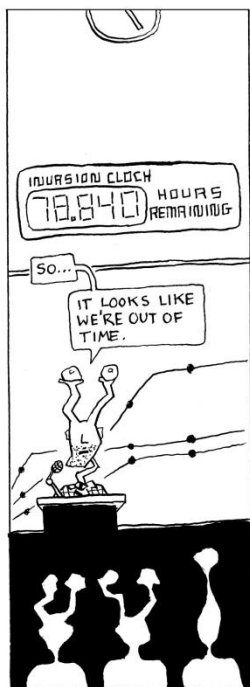
MR. SMIP?

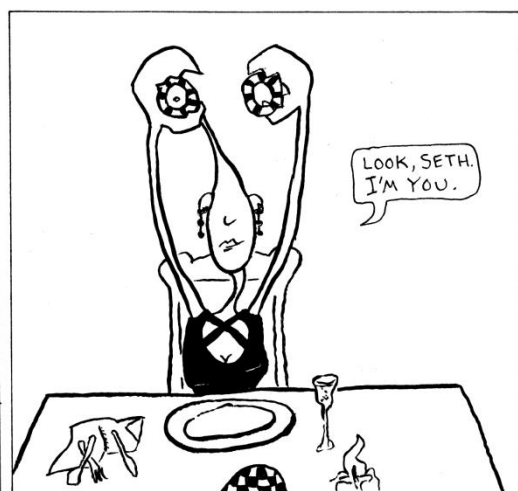
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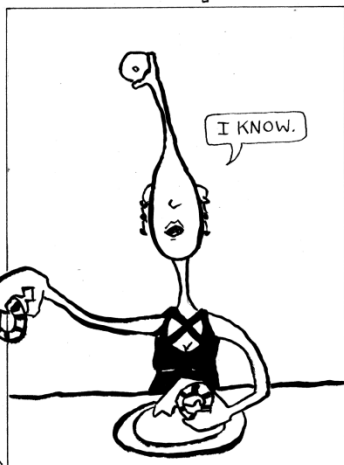
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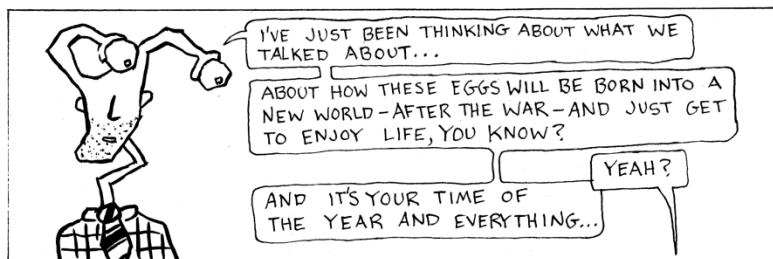
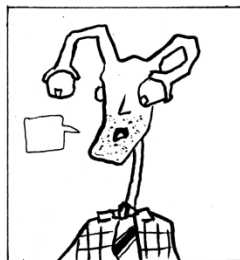
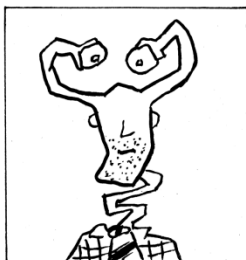
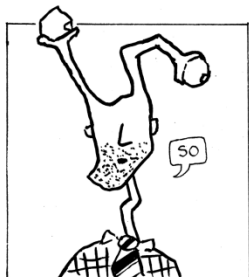
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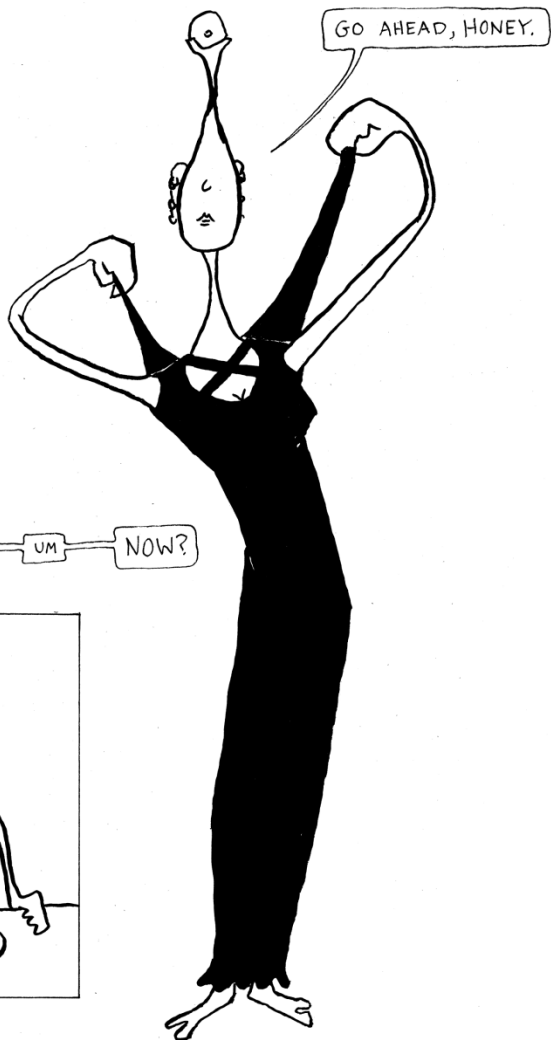
- WATER SUPPLY
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- FOOD SUPPLY





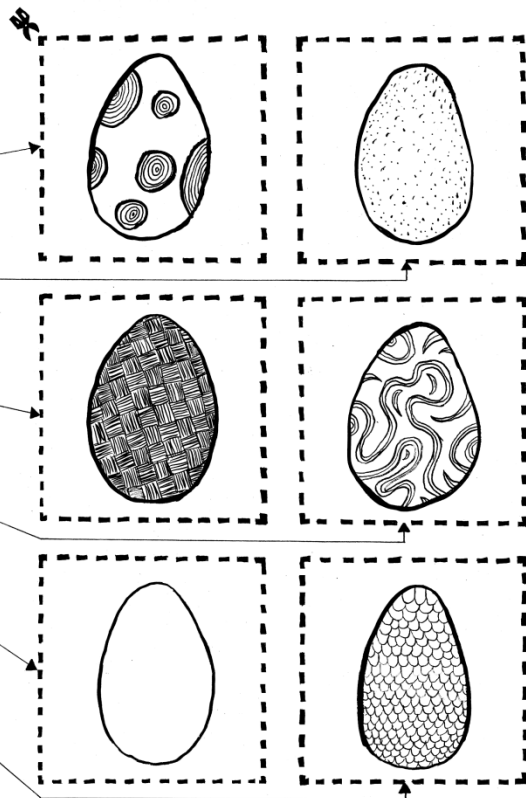






GULP UM NOW?









FOR MEGHAN and VIOLET
and the EGG

Invasive Themes:
A Featured Interview with
Scott R. Smith

The following interview was conducted by founding editors James McNulty and Jerrod Schwarz on March 25th, 2015.

James: Hey, Scott! We're extremely excited to publish your comic— our first ongoing publication in *Driftwood Press*!

Jerrod: We are really happy to have “Invasive Studies” in this issue, and we can't wait to see where the comic goes!

Scott: Thanks again for the opportunity! It's exciting!

James: So I suppose the first thing to discuss is what I meant when I said it's our first “on-going publication.” We'll be publishing “Invasive Studies” every issue for the foreseeable future. Was this work planned as an on-going series before we approached you about it?

Scott: I wrote the comic as the beginning to something larger, but I also wanted it to feel satisfying on its own as well. Continuing the comic will fundamentally change it, but I couldn't be more excited to continue to work within this world.

Jerrod: We've really enjoyed the world, too. What has been your favorite part about creating “Invasive Studies”? What has been the hardest part?

Scott: I love beginnings and endings. The whole concept for this comic came from a mental image of an alien PowerPoint presentation— combining something as soul-crushingly ordinary as Powerpoint with something as fantastic as an invasion of Earth. The ending was fun as well. Interactivity is one of the most compelling pieces of comic writing to me and

getting the reader to choose their own egg in that last spread was a rewarding part of the process.

The hardest part initially was the center— developing Seth into a multi-dimensional character in a relatively short story space. At least it was the hardest part until the piece took an autobiographical turn and everything really clicked.

James: Including Aerosol in the presentation was hilarious, and I love the paneling hiding the ever-looming clock and countdown on that first page.

It seems to me that one of the benefits of comics (and any visual medium) over fiction is the ability to actually visualize the character, which, in some abstract way, makes you more able to identify with the character. Hopefully, that helped with some of your difficulties, as well.

Jerrod: We really enjoyed the egg panel— really gorgeous. Have you worked with fantastical imagery before?

Scott: Yes— the countdown clock was a key addition. I didn't have that idea until a few pages in, but once it became a part of the background environment I knew it had to be lurking everywhere.

My other favorite part of working in comics is the ability to blend the real and surreal by juxtaposing words and images. Comics do magical realism better than straight writing, hands down. That concept really sunk in for me one day while reading the first issue in the "Fables" series. I read a panel of a man walking up a set of stairs— his shadow on the wall had the shape of a wolf—I didn't notice it at first, but when I caught it the second time around it was that much more rewarding. You can't be that subtle with writing alone.

My work in both writing and comics tends to be in that magical realist vein. I've written a collection of children's stories about kids getting wrapped up in magic businesses.

James: So you write fiction in addition to graphic narrative?

Scott: Fiction is where I started in undergrad, and I have my Masters from Middlebury's Bread Loaf School of English. However, that's also where I took my first comics course and it instantly clicked with me. I've been shifting more and more of my work to comics and had a great summer this year at the Center for Cartoon Studies in VT.

Jerrod: Does a writing background have any influences on your comic work?

Scott: I think it changes the process in important ways— sometimes I start with a chunk of dialog rather than a sketch. Of course, you have to get the words and pictures together quickly because they inform each other.

I grew up on Douglas Adams and Terry Pratchett as well— they're both huge influences on what I do on the writing end. More recently, I loved *How to Live Safely in a Science Fictional Universe* by Charles Yu and *The Weirdness* by Jeremy P. Bushnell—which coincidentally has the Devil delivering a PowerPoint.

James: You mentioned your work was autobiographical. Tell us about that.

Scott: Man. That's a hard question. Autobiographical work of this nature is complicated, because of course so much of the material comes from my life (I'm a teacher and a new father), but of course I live in a small town and I would like to think that I'm not teaching my kids how to destroy others.

As the story developed, the fatherhood theme really started to take center stage, as its certainly taken center stage in my life, no matter how hard I try to keep things balanced. But I think the story is really about trying to work out some of the paradoxes inherent in fatherhood as I see it. On one hand, you feel this outpouring of support—increased respect and even admiration from your friends, work colleagues and family. It connects you to other families and to your parents in new ways. It's empowering.

In other ways, it's incredibly isolating and terrifying— you get the feeling that you've been caught up in something much, much larger than yourself. That you have somehow lost control.

Seth is adrift at his point in the story. He's a speck in the void. I wanted to drive that point home with the last page. Love can be like that too.

James: I can see the intimacy of the autobiographical elements shining through; the bits of dialogue towards the end there really do feel intimate. The joke with Mara saying, "Look, Seth. I'm you," followed immediately by, "I love you" is a really beautiful moment. Those are the comedic moments that tend to hit home the most for me— when they're followed up by emotion.

The alienation (pun intended) from others obviously comes through in the overall plot— Seth can't identify with his students— but it's especially apparent on the final page. The whole story we've just seen is encapsulated in a small egg-like ship in the vast vacuum of space; Seth is close to others of his kind, but he's also very, very far away from his home. This, mixed with the tenderness of the few pages before it, brilliantly illustrate the conflicted emotions in your personal life. This is when fiction, or comics, is at its best, I think: when your work almost becomes an allegory for your personal life.

What is your creative process? Is there anything unique about your personal writing process?

Scott: I should say that I love science fiction. My childhood is filled with memories of watching Star Trek and the X-Files with my dad. I want to help other people to see and feel what I feel in sci-fi— to breath some life and heart into the genre.

James: I think you've succeeded in doing so. You said you often work with magical realism; that isn't so different from science fiction— both of them serve to inform real life in some way. They both act as allegories.

X-Files is coming back, by the way, so you'll get to relive some of that nostalgia soon.

Scott: X-Files is coming back— that's the best news I've heard today.

I love how thinking about blocking a page and panel design can impact narrative— it's such an incredibly important step in comics. A great example is the big egg spread. Once I'd finished it, I realized that the back of the page had to be the insides of the eggs— but not until then. Comics design can be very physical and tactile. And then filling those embryos with actual wriggling forms changes the ending of the piece.

James: Right. A bad cartoonist will just tell fiction through comics without considering the formal elements. One should always discover which medium the story is best told in before placing a pen to paper.

Formal considerations like yours, especially towards the end, have large thematic and symbolic ramifications that certainly make the work richer. David Mazzucchelli's *Asterios Polyp* is the best graphic novel I've read regarding formal experimentation.

Scott: Yes. Of course, Chris Ware is brilliant as well. David Small has

such great control of transitions throughout *Stitches*.

Jerrod: To follow this up, what are some of your favorite cartoonists and how has their work inspired or informed your own work?

Scott: Chris Ware opened my mind to so many possibilities with the medium—his stories are so grueling though. I don't go there for fun—just to learn. More recently I've loved Jesse Jacobs' work in *Safari Honeymoon*, which is weird in all the right ways with beautiful moment-to-moment transitions. Plus, parasites are my worst fear and there are a lot of parasites in there.

Chris Ware is the artist that started to get me really thinking about interactivity though—almost like comics as game design. I hope to continue to run with that concept in my future work.

James: Interesting. I'm actually in the middle of Chris Ware's *Jimmy Corrigan*, actually; first time with Chris Ware. Anders Nilsen and Jaime Hernandez are probably my favorite cartoonists. *Big Questions* and *Love & Rockets* are at the top of my recommendation list, the latter of which deals expressly with magical realism (Gilbert Hernandez's half of *Love & Rockets*, especially). I wouldn't rush to call Nilsen a magical realist, but *Big Questions* is definitely akin to it.

Scott: I haven't read *Love & Rockets* yet— I will definitely try to get a hold of it.

Jerrod: You've made an interesting connection: comics and game design. Can you go a little deeper into the parallels between the two?

Scott: I think people have only scratched the surface there—it's an overlap that really excites me. As a narrative medium, comics leave a huge amount of control with the reader. Some of the more progressive comics force readers to read pages in different orders and have a unique experience on the page. If you do it too often, it becomes disorienting, but at the right moments it can really work. Once the reader makes choices with a piece, they become involved—it becomes a more intimate experience.

Jerrod: You make a really great point. There definitely seems to be an overlap between comics and games, specifically those of the point-and-click adventure variety. *Fable*, which you previously mentioned, has con-

verted some of its source text to a point-and-click game.

Scott: It makes sense. All those gutters and closure opportunities, as Scott McCloud would say.

James: Any closing remarks about "Invasive Studies"?

Scott: Just that I'm so excited to be bringing it to actual readers (besides my amazing and supportive wife, who's not just supportive—she's also a brilliant writer). The game design piece is so much more fun when people are playing— that's going to change the shape of what comes next.

Also, you can find more of my work at www.invasivestudies.com and I have a series of comic panels forthcoming in the 2015 edition of *pacificREVIEW*.

James: Thank you for the interview, Scott. I can't wait for the next issue!

Jerrod: We can't wait to see where the comic goes, Scott. We will be eagerly awaiting the next invasion!

Scott: Fantastic. Thanks so much— this has been great.

Spring 2015

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