The Creative Writing Program owes the inception of its MFA degree and its stellar roster of visiting writers to the Edelstein-Keller Endowment and the generosity of Ruth Easton (née Ruth Edelstein). Ms. Easton was born in North Branch, Minnesota, attended the University of Minnesota for one year, and finished her education at Macalester College and the Cumnock School. She then began a successful career as an actress. She appeared on radio and on Broadway with Walter Huston, Lionel Barrymore, Clark Gable, Eddie Cantor, and Al Jolson.

In 1985, Kenneth H. Keller, then president of the University of Minnesota, discussed with Ms. Easton his plan to launch the University’s first capital gifts campaign — in particular, his hope that the first major endowment specifically benefit the Department of English. As a result of this discussion, Ms. Easton made a significant gift which President Keller arranged to match with an equal sum from University resources, and the Edelstein-Keller Endowment was born. Ms. Easton named the endowment in honor of her brother, David E. Edelstein, and his closest friend, Thomas A. Keller, Jr. (no relation to President Keller).

The first Edelstein-Keller Endowment visiting writer was Isaac Bashevis Singer, who visited the Twin Cities campus in May 1985. Subsequent visitors have included Grace Paley, Adrienne Rich, Edward P. Jones, Yusef Komunyakaa, J.M. Coetzee, Sam Shepard, Colson Whitehead, Vivian Gornick, Tobias Wolff, and the current writer-in-residence, Charles Baxter. The Edelstein-Keller Endowment made possible the conversion of the MA in English and Professional Writing to the MFA in Creative Writing in 1996. The result of Ruth Easton’s generosity and President Keller’s vision is a graduate writing program with a national reputation that continues to attract the finest established and emerging writers in the country. Please visit the Creative Writing Program’s website at http://creativewriting.umn.edu.
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On her way to the kitchen, Concha, in apartment 7, decided to hide herself. During one of those intermissions in bed, she said, ‘I’ll have a glass of water. Do you want it?’

Well, Luis said, and waited naked between the sheets, staring at the tarp. She served water and suddenly, on her way back to the bedroom, decided to stay behind the bathroom door. He heard the clink of glasses and a pitcher, a few footsteps, and then nothing. He thought she had gone to the bathroom, imagined her lying with her back to him, and hummed a song. Then he turned on the stereo, put a CD on, and made sure the blinds were tightly shut, because there was sun outside; below him, the super was sweeping the sidewalk, and a woman was taking her dog for a walk. Then he wondered why Concha hadn’t come back. He stepped into the corridor, saw the bathroom door open, and walked through the living room, the dining room, the office, and the kitchen.

“Concha?”

Then he heard muffled laughter from behind the bathroom door. He smiled, found her hiding, cornered her there, and they made love like savages, against the wall. Over the next few days, she didn’t forget how she had felt while hiding, alone in the semi-darkness. She told Luis she had returned to her childhood for a moment. And his approaching, looking for her, and sniffing at her had turned her on immensely. Luis felt the same. In their subsequent trysts she kept playing hide and seek. Concha used up the closets, doors, and spaces behind furniture. Each time she left the closet by now. She ran to hide herself. On the following morning, he had heard the door shut, as if she didn’t really want to be found. He, too, had become more ingenious at hiding herself. It was like hunting.

Each time it took him longer to find her, and she didn’t give herself away. “Concha?”

At each time she felt him near her and her heart beat fast, or when he heard her laughter, and caught her in front of the semi-dark while waiting for Luis to find her, the moment didn’t know which she liked better: the feeling of lying in bed, or when he knew she was, or when he heard her laughter, and caught her suddenly. This excited them both. One day Concha said she didn’t know which she liked better: the feeling of lying in the semi-dark while waiting for Luis to find her, the moment when she felt him near her and her heart beat fast, or when he finally appeared and held her as if to devour her. After a few months, Luis began to get bored. Their oft-repeated game wasn’t fun anymore. Besides, he had a feeling that Concha was becoming obsessed with waiting alone in the dark, hiding among the clothes in the closet or bottles in the bar, and that she forgot he was looking for her. Each time it took him longer to find her, and she didn’t give any signs like before: she didn’t laugh, nor did she scratch the wall, as if she didn’t really want to be found. He, too, took his time, and even used the time to do something else, make a phone call, choose the shirt he would wear that day, or turn on the coffee pot. In any case, he thought, he would have to find something else or switch their roles. He planned to talk to her about it at breakfast, or when they both returned from work, but he always forgot about it or something more important came up. And the next time they started to kiss, she ran to hide herself.

The last time he looked for her, he immediately found out where she was – on the top shelf of the linen closet – because he caught a glimpse of the door closing. He began like always, a bit bored already, to walk around the house, calling her, but that time he didn’t even take his clothes off; he pretended not to know where she was. He went on like that for a little while, and as she didn’t give any signs, went around the house a couple of times and ended up leaving the apartment, as if to look for her outside. He walked into the café on the corner and ordered an espresso and cake. He stayed seated at the bar for about an hour, reading a newspaper and trying to keep himself from thinking about what to do, what to say, when he got home. After all, things had been rather strained lately, since they had taken to the semi-dark while waiting for Luis to find her, the moment didn’t know which she liked better: the feeling of lying in bed, or when he knew she was, or when he heard her laughter, and caught her suddenly. This excited them both. One day Concha said she didn’t know which she liked better: the feeling of lying in the semi-dark while waiting for Luis to find her, the moment when she felt him near her and her heart beat fast, or when he finally appeared and held her as if to devour her. After a few months, Luis began to get bored. Their oft-repeated game wasn’t fun anymore. Besides, he had a feeling that Concha was becoming obsessed with waiting alone in the dark, hiding among the clothes in the closet or bottles in the bar, and that she forgot he was looking for her. Each time it took him longer to find her, and she didn’t give any signs like before: she didn’t laugh, nor did she scratch the wall, as if she didn’t really want to be found. He, too, took his time, and even used the time to do something else, make a phone call, choose the shirt he would wear that day, or turn on the coffee pot. In any case, he thought, he would have to find something else or switch their roles. He planned to talk to her about it at breakfast, or when they both returned from work, but he always forgot about it or something more important came up. And the next time they started to kiss, she ran to hide herself.

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against a black background with something like a mirror. When he heard noises on the other side, he shut the door quickly.

Luis couldn’t stand his next-door neighbor – a fifty-something architect who thought himself very attractive, like a leading man of old movies, reeking of cologne, swathed in gold chains, and always looked down on him, with the arrogance of someone who owns silk shirts and the latest model pickup. One day Luis told Concha he was sure their neighbor was gay, but she denied it. Don’t be silly! she exclaimed. Then she added that Sr. Pando left very early in the morning on weekends with large black boxes and pigeon cages in his pickup. Sr. Pando – how did Concha know his name? He kept staring at the closet, intrigued. Then he thought it was absurd. It had to be a construction error. Later he would talk to the apartment owner.

In the afternoon he met his friend Pablo for coffee. They got together every Tuesday and talked about their respective translations, which both of them were very particular about. Luis thought of telling his friend that Concha was gone, explaining the gist of the situation: the game of hide and seek, minus the sliding door at the back of the closet. But on second thought, he changed his mind. Pablo would laugh him off – it was a lovers’ game, a private matter between two people. Later he went home, expecting at least a message from Concha, but there was nothing. Everything was the same as he had left it – no one had entered the house, no one had called. When he went to the bathroom, however, he noticed that a few things were missing: Concha’s toothbrush, her creams, her deodorant. So she was leaving him. Living apart for a while didn’t seem like such a bad idea, because he was a bit fed up with everything. He went out again to give her a chance to take what she needed. After dining and reading at Sanborns, he went to the movies.

When he arrived home that night, none of Concha’s belongings remained in the house: her books, her clothes, and accessories were all gone. He found a bra lying at the foot of the linen closet and placed it in the suitcase compartment, so that she could take it if she needed it. Early Saturday morning he saw Concha arm in arm with Sr. Pando, both dragging some black mirrored boxes, pigeon cages, and rabbit cages. Bombay the Magician, said a silver-plated sign on one of the boxes. Luis saw her leave with the magician: he imagined him making her appear and disappear, or sawing her in half. Concha would be happy. He only wished that once in a while she would escape the magician and appear in his apartment.
I lean into my mirror and it swallows me up. A real girl? they yell and rush to touch me, almost sincerely. Feather boas snake around my ankles. A shadowy girl hands me a mask on a stick and some crayons. Isn’t my blood perfect?, I whisper and show her my gouged ankle. Night falls in my pink room. I watch my mother smooth the covers around the doll baby in my bed.

Fernando yanks my braid and it breaks off right in his dirty hand. My teacher’s mouth opens and closes. Breeze from the classroom window jostles paper spiders on the ceiling. Busy with glue sticks, my friends fill their work papers with glistening pictures of ham. Billy talks about weenies. Sweating, Fernando throws my braid under our table, then steals an eraser from the girl on his other side. I peek under the table; my braid, like a determined blond caterpillar, inches back to me.

After I ride over the yellow jackets’ nest, the swarm drags me and my bike underground. What do you have to say for yourself? My mind empties: all those stingers! Are you trying to make this difficult? They sentence me to dig tunnels; for how long, they will not say. A drowsy hum surrounds me, but I surprise them by being excellent at my job. Each day, more show up to watch me work. They admire the dirt I push around. They stroke my arms and shoulders and their light, dry touch gives me the creeps. They swarm my bike, climb the spokes, slowly turn the wheels. I should sell tickets. I should grow wings.
Take your map. A real corner; how it stands lonely, the lighthouse. Mere hillock of background. Sand as paper. Gamesome, tell weeds they don’t grow. Import Canada to a spile. Leak oil, pieces of wood, carried true. Toadstools before houses. Under one blade: oasis. In a day’s walk, wear quicksand snowshoes. Shut up about every utter island, the ocean, very small clams. Found no Illinois.

Look, this island was settled. The legend times swooped and carried his lament. Borne, the wide waters. Perilous, the found skeleton.

Wonder, born on a beach: take. First quohogs, bolder with boats, captured at last. A great watery belt. In all seasons, everlasting war has survived: flood, salt-sea, unconscious. Panic, his malicious assaults.

Thus naked hermits, their ant-hill overrun and watery, parcel out powers. Let America pile upon their blazing banner. This terraqueous globe is through. Ships are but highwaymen, they land without seeking the bottomless. He resides and riots alone, down to ploughing his home. A Noah’s flood lives on, as prairie hides among the Alps. He knows at last, it smells like the moon. The landless gull folds her billows. The land sails to his rest under herds of walruses and whales.
AUTOPSY OF A MANTA RAY
PAUL CUNNINGHAM

i have
heard so much about
our ruined ocean of manta rays
pillaged phrases
capitalistic language
dadaist amputations gliding,
blinking, contrariant amputations
gliding, gliding the blue
where the last manta dwells
whitegarbed against
floors of deformed coral—a collection of
twitching cephalic lobes
(slowing movements)

art
art, with and without its
ruined sex-parts
withering cavernous
mouth upholstery
chomps the oceanfuture
plankton-empty
the task of the
false and final manta
one last cavernous mouth
(and stomach)
exhausted, the contents:
soft segmented bodies
social forces of the epoch
swallowed inside
a veined magician’s cape
(slowing movements)
THE BARD WOLF VS. THE TAXIDERMIST

PAUL CUNNINGHAM

THE TAXIDERMIST:
I hear your fabric whimper.

ME:
I will not continue this pattern of silence.

THE TAXIDERMIST:
I cannot tear myself away from you. I must, your sweet fabric.

ME:
This fabric has seen nothing you will love. Run quickly to your shadows!

THE TAXIDERMIST:
All I have are my shadows! Vomit—

ME:
Will paint you a death of painful caresses!

THE BARD WOLF:
Can you not love? Can nothing rush through your heart’s pipes or fatness? Can your instruments not shriek the efficiencies of love?

THE TAXIDERMIST:
A machine most inefficient. Your fabric whimpers on. I hold myself and my pig emerges.

THE BARD WOLF:
Your pig is a poem of man’s hair. Hair that falls from your fatness and into the saddest of dreams! I am sick of such dreams! I am sick of such dreams!

THE TAXIDERMIST:
I collect you now.

THE BARD WOLF:
I refuse. You will collect only your shadows, your pain, and your loneliness!

THE TAXIDERMIST:
I collect you now.

I found the body of a wolf in the forest behind my home. The wet marble eyes reminded me of a former lover’s. I sat beside the furred corpse for almost an hour. Eventually I took off my sweater and wrapped it around the animal. I carried him back and there were moments that I swear I could still feel him trying to breathe. Making an attempt. I could feel him clinging to me.

[He slips, she pushes. He slips, she pushes. Does not cling. Has stopped clinging. Has stopped breathing . . .]

I want to dream.

I want to dream.

I want to dream.

I want to dream.

I return to the forest in my dream. I smell a system of hearts. I smell a forest of squirrels.
THE TAXIDERMIST:
I have removed your fabric.

THE BARD WOLF:
You will not remove my soul.

THE TAXIDERMIST:
Your soul is of no concern. Your fabric must be preserved. My pig desires only your exterior!

THE GHOSTS OF THE UNMOVING SQUIRRELS:
Fear the Bard Wolf's soul!
Fear the Bard Wolf's soul!
Fear the Bard Wolf's soul!
Fear the Bard Wolf's soul!

THE TAXIDERMIST:
This forest is an unhappy one . . .

THE BARD WOLF:
You are lost to this forest! You are lost!

THE GHOSTS OF THE UNMOVING SQUIRRELS:
You are lost! You are lost!
You are lost! You are lost!
You are lost! You are lost!
You are lost! You are lost!

i showed my father
nature's tendered wolf
i measured the body portions
dragged out the animal
pulled it into an empty tub
home's river split pink

FLESHING,
i brought wolf's death-costume to fabricless body mine wire frame with my own hands / a pushing / no hello whines from new body i pressed / pressed half-life to metal pressed shards of de-boned wolf to skeleton without any muscles / a pushing / my hands traveled over to form furred limbs fabric reversing all openings / a pushing / proof of onecwolf taking shape / scratched my body into wolf watched wolf sleep until it broke open / a pushing / i lay on that beach with you wolf / beach where ghosts still believe they deserve power

flood-copse of violence / pushing / pushing

BARD,
i named my wolf / i can honestly say i know what it feels like to be constantly spilling myself into the dead / pushing / i realize that kissing a living boy and kissing my onecwolf on its forehead is sometimes without much difference / pushing / i find a bird with no heartbeat left /
i cut her from her forever perch /
pulling

pushing / i affix her to the top of my wolf's head / we appear content together / we sit in my bedroom wired frames fully robed / pulling /

i feel like my father thinks i murdered those neighborhood boys
(extra monsters of stillness and hair)

pushing/

(his car narrowing along the beachside road / seizing up, falling toward the ocean / the bodies of boys, buoyant / slackjawed, their kiss-tongues hanging)

/pulling/

i long for the day when violence moves no more

/pushing/

/pulling/

/pushing/

/pulling/

/pushing/

/pulling/

/pulling/

/pulling/

/pulling/

/pulling/

/pulling/
THE TAXIDERMISt:
My body’s pig has eaten my victim’s fabric.

THE TAXIDERMISt:
My body’s pig has chewed itself away from me.

THE TAXIDERMISt:
I have murdered myself! Shadows! Pain! Loneliness!

THE TAXIDERMISt:
Cruel! My Bard Wolf victim survives me!

THE TAXIDERMISt:
Hungry, she refuses to chew! She refuses!

THE TAXIDERMISt:
She stares at me. Knows I am weak. Knows I am too disgusting!

THE TAXIDERMISt:
Nothing will devour me! Not even this bad dream’s forest!

THE GHOSTS OF THE UNMOVING SQUIRRELS:
Not even! Not even!
Not even! Not even!
Not even! Not even!
Not even! Not even!

(Laughter)
You can tell me the bees are dying, but what about the bee in the bees? And how has my skin stretched and known to go on without you, to go on knowing you died alone, a gun in your hand, a gun which must have fallen from your hand as you crumpled on the stairs of Memorial Church? I guess I’m just too much of a loner, you said the first time you took yourself from me. The last thing you said—I don’t remember. What comes back are the words I read about the bees: She will die long before her offspring emerge as adults, mate with one another, and prepare for the coming winter. Clearly, most bees are loners. I will die before I know exactly what to name the thing we grew, impermanence or child or simple orchid. I have heard the body called skeleton lines. I have heard your body called the body.

You can tell me the bees are dying, but from here all I can see is the old church, the one with plywood piers all clad in tartan print. In the white and shiny of the hospital room, no one has brought me flowers. The first day, I had a visitor: a married man who kissed me and asked if I minded. Then my friends came and brought me the books I’d left behind. Morphine-laden, I flounced onto my belly and made the words crawl the page like black bees. I put my hands all over the pages and let the bees trail up my fingers. The bees had worn off by the time the doctor announced they were going to cut me open. It was as if the anesthesia didn’t work. I was waiting for them to put my organs back in. I was waiting for the bees to come back.

If I want to take a picture, I take it no matter what.

- Nan Goldin

You can tell me the bees are dying, but where are the white sheets to cover their bodies? In photographs from Oslo, white sheets litter the youth camp in Norway where over 90 were killed. In a photograph from Cambridge, a white sheet covers Mitch’s body. I wonder if it would be less stark to see what lies beneath the white sheets. Is a body always and only a body? I can’t believe I said body. What could be so alarming about a body that we would need a white sheet? In the hospital, I lie beneath a white sheet as surgeons cut me open. I can’t see it, I don’t know if there is a white sheet, why would there be a white sheet what—? The surgeons reassemble my insides. Under the white sheet I am the one of the lucky ones.

Look, the photographs say, this is what it’s like. This is what war does. And that, that is what it does, too. War tears, rends. War rips open, eviscerates. War scorches. War dismembers. War ruins.

-Susan Sontag
By Dennis James Sweeney

My Story by Andy Chen, Third Grade, English Class, Spring Semester

A note from the author:
I found this story on the floor of my classroom in the English cram-school ("buxiban") where I taught in Taiwan. Half of it was handwritten in painstakingly precise letters; the other half consisted of additions scribbled in a much more casual hand between each paragraph’s sentences. I inquired as to the presence of an Andy Chen in our school and was informed that there was none and, what is more, never had been. I therefore took the occasion to publish the crumpled story into the presence of an Andy Chen in our school and was informed that there was none and, what is more, never had been. I therefore took the occasion to publish the crumpled story into my own hands. If I have done so in my own name, forgive me: the byway of the adult is the only way to lend legitimacy to the work of a child, however brilliant.

You may read this story with or without the peculiar additions, which I have rendered in italics. I, frankly, think it is better without. Nonetheless I have produced the text in full so that the reader can make his or her own judgment on the matter.

Sarah and I play a trick on Tommy because Tommy is easy to play tricks on. We are so much more and less than we think. We put his backpack in a tree.

He tries to get his backpack out of the tree. The invisible fallout floating with his books. He hops up and down like a kangaroo in the desert. Scorpions and heat beneath its toes. He misses the bus. It grows and rolls territorially away. Sarah and I are on the bus. The floors free of spots. We look out the window at the kangaroo. Orange and energetic and translucent. It has fingerprints on it.

When we are in the principal’s office we call Tommy. The phone is connected to its base by a whimsical curly cord. He is sad at home. His cats dislike him. The principal asks if I did it and I say no I didn’t do it. The fear in my eyes as good as a confession. The principal tells Sarah to be more honest.

She says to ask his mom if they can play.

Her whole face changes, even though she is in a mood, or because it is not love? She turns red because he says something in her ear. Her anger is television anger. She hits him on the neck. Like a person is a doll. Chet cries.

Teacher Joy takes them out of class. Hands on their shoulders as if they don’t know where to walk. We can hear her in the hallway. The valleys of her speech evade us and the arcs we can’t ignore. They come back after ten minutes. Six hundred corks. Their faces are wet. Like they have been sprayed with a hose. The teacher says to do our homework.

In it there is baseball. Not the ragged stitches of the ball, the splinters of the bat, but the contour of tradition, the perfected amalgamation of a century of images. I do the homework fast because I watch American baseball on television. The concentrated energies of thousands boxed and redelivered to a single staring kid in a land of different sunlight. My favorite team is NYY.

In the afternoon Betty and Sally are at the clothes shop. Racks and racks and racks like little shelters. Betty’s mom and Sally’s mom are there too. Somewhere, at least, in the mirage-state department stores inspire. Betty tries on a boy’s suit for working. Though of course what boy works? Sally makes a face. Her nose wrinkled, her tongue out. She thinks Betty looks like a clown.

Sally tries on a dress with flowers. Flowers of all colors known to man. She twirls in front of the mirror. The dress’ bottom expanding into the slopped frills of a cupcake cup. Betty is not there. A lonesome joy is an acquired taste. Her mom is looking at underwear. Her fingers sort through the higher racks. She says don’t bother her.

Sally goes to find Betty. Breathlessly, her eyes casting out the window at the kangaroo. Sarah and I are on the bus. Her whole face changes, even though he is far away. She says to ask his mom if they can play.

We are back in class. The windows are irrelevant. Chet likes to sing the one about the farmer. About grass, about pigs, the sorts of things none of us has ever seen. The class tells him not to sing because they are doing their homework.

He stops singing, affronted. Chet does his homework. Writing quickly, thoroughly, as if. He whispers musical notes. Some people must be heard in order to be assured that they exist. Marissa tells Chet to be quiet. To cease existing. Chet is angry at Marissa. You can see him summon what rage he knows how to have. He turns red because he says something in her ear. Her anger is television anger. She hits him on the neck. Like a person is a doll. Chet cries.

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Sally hangs upside down with her toes. Her pleasure of the air on her whole face. Her eyes cast out the window at the kangaroo. Sarah and I play a trick on Tommy because Tommy is easy to play tricks on. We are so much more and less than we think. Their moms sit on a bench and chat.

Chet stands up. He wants motion, all little boys want motion, he says. He pushes Marissa on her swing. His fingers try not to get caught between the chain. She wipes higher and higher. Her stomach is a part of her, then not, then again. Chet is strong. He gives her his strength like a gift. Marissa screams. Tiny crimped cords in her neck. She sounds like a bird falling from a branch. A bird who has learned only to communicate. At the last second it soars. The fulfillment of the greatest hope only possible at the apex of the bad. She smiles at the highest place in the air.

Chet slows her swing down. His face bunches up in a knot. She giggles when he takes the chains. He is nearly powerless against the momentum he has created. He asks if she can do him now. Love is regardless of reciprocation but in it reciprocation must happen. She says no. Because he asked, because she is in a mood, or because it is not love? He starts to turn red. A tomato naked. She says yes she does it.

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She says no. Because he asked, because she is in a mood, or because it is not love? He starts to turn red. A tomato naked. She says yes she does it.
Kids make fun of Sally for her new dress. Laughing is worse than words. She cries. The tears keep escaping from the well at the bottom of her eye. Teacher Joy walks her out of the classroom. Shuffling. She goes to the phone and calls her mother. The whimsical curly cord bore now. Her mom is tired. She needs more sleep than normal people. She says ok. She does not bother to pull the phone away for her monumental sigh. She is sorry.

Teacher Joy brings Sally back into class. Shuffling. She still cries. Her cheeks have two discernible rivers on them, the Tigris and Euphrates of the muck of sadness. Teacher Joy yells at us. There was never anything but silence. She says that Sally cries because she thinks we don’t like her new dress. Its flowers so many, its complete ignorance of the concept of subtlety. Teacher Joy’s eyes don’t blink. She is a casualty of education. We say we laughed because we like the dress. Its flowers so playful we burst in joy. She asks isn’t that right. There was never anything but yes. We nod. Black gray matter. Chet whispers in Marissa’s ear. Hot breath on her cochlea. They laugh and they nod. Publicly, I think they are lying. A person can even only stand and still be lying if they don’t believe what they are doing themselves. Betty is next to Marissa. A lily pad among drowning lotuses. She wears sneakers. Bunched up stylistically at the ankles. I can’t see her socks. I bet they are pink with hearts. Her nod is not a lie.

Sarah never lies either. Publicly. She is at home sick. Part of me has to be too. Sometimes I don’t like Sarah. Proximity as the downfall of sibling love. In class I miss her.

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Marissa plays at Betty’s house. The rug’s loops are tight and dark and hard on bare feet. They play with dolls and a plastic kitchen with food. The dolls sit in the sink in a hot tub. Marissa holds a waffle. It is perfect and inedible. She says how Chet pushed her so high in the swing. Holding his breath at each push so he wouldn’t grunt with effort. She thinks he is strong. He wears basketball jerseys. Betty says he is stupid. Marissa throws the waffle at Betty. She is stunned at her accuracy. It hits her in the eye. Marissa has never thrown something and hit what she was throwing at before. She thinks she is blind. Her eyes are closed. She asks if the blood is on the carpet. The definite article. Marissa runs to her. Three feet of film-ready material. She has a spoon in her other hand. Holding it like a knife. She asks are you ok. Whether it is a rhetorical question means whether you truly care. Betty does not know.

They hug. The first-ever hugs of reconciliation. Betty still has her hand on her eye. She has forgotten it is there. They say they love each other very much. Plastic food encircles them. They are sorry.

In the kitchen that is not plastic they drink hot tea. The hulking mugs next to their fragile hands. Betty’s cat hops on the table. Infinite motion then stillness. Marissa yelps. Privately. The cat only yawns. Cats at their most threatening when they swap with their fangs on display as ancient tribal weapons plunged into the gums of a living breathing animal. They smile at each other. Click. Marissa is allergic to cats. They make her sneeze like a pirate. She does not care. She is an autonomous individual. She likes them.

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Chet’s mom calls. My mom talks to her business-like. In two days I go to Chet’s house. It has picture windows and a balcony. It has white carpets. With pockets of yellow and gray. We sit on them and play with building sets. The atoms of imagination. Chet is good at building. His blocks are robust and their angles are sharp. I want to help him. The diligent engineer. I want to build the tallest building. High enough so we can see the top. We can name it after us. The Chet and Andy Best Tower. Chet doesn’t think we can build the tallest building. He is the son of Zen. I tell him yes. Caring is quality. I put some blocks on the ground. Gasoline in the overloaded motorcycle’s tank. He puts some on top. He puts his hands around my stomach. Then he asks what do I think about Marissa.

I say I think she is pretty. Like a distraction from the business of life. I keep putting blocks on the stack. Amazing how when all the angles are right. I say this is not the tallest. Immediate gratification is its own lack of reward. It is a plan. It is a living blueprint. Borges’ map that smothers the country it charts. I want to build the tallest another time. Transcendent success requires both hard work and patience. Chet wants to know is that all. Because I love her. I say she is funny too. Funny ha-ha. He asks if I want to play video games. The chateau of imagination. I say no.

Chet goes to the living room to play video games. Coldness to warmth and warmth to coldness. I build the plan until it falls down. All plans must fail before they can be put into practice. I can hear the guns in the play room. Russian yells cut short. I join Chet on the couch. Which sinks elusively. It is black and my legs stick to it.

I ask is it ok if I play on the next game. We are stationary. Chet looks at the television. You can see its cross-stitching. The black lines under which the colors vibrate. He says yes. The delay of a million miles of whimsical curvy cord between us. It takes him a long time to die.

Then we play. A united focus on a separate thing. Chet kills me fourteen times. He riddles me with an endless storm of holes and blood drips down my half of the screen. He knows where all the guns are. You only have to run over to them to pick them up. I do not know the buttons. X, triangle, square, circle. When I die the controller rumbles. My grip goes loose each time. It makes my hands feel like a thunderstorm.

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Teacher Joy yells at us. I do not understand the game. She shakes her head like she is disappointed even if it is with herself. She says you do not make up your own words. You cannot just jump into the pile of leaves. You say the same thing to everyone and you see how it changes. People. She says it teaches about people.

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In the afternoon Marissa and Betty visit Sarah. They stand at the door like they expect something. I sit and watch them. They are a bad television talk show. Her room is very cold. Weather. Marissa and Betty pretend that they are not cold. They comment on atmospherics. I see goose pimples on their arms. Pointed mounds of vestigial fright. The wallpaper is yellow. Or is it paint? I think it is yellower every day. Marissa says she is cold. Betty says she is cold. They are sorry.

Chet whispers in Marissa’s ear. In Sally’s ear. A banana slipping comically, moments away from the rupture of its spine. I say penguin. Into our heads leaps the tuxedoed bird, waddling. The class laughs.

Teacher Joy says I do not understand the game. She shakes her head like she is disappointed even if it is with herself. She says you do not make up your own words. You cannot just jump into the pile of leaves. You say the same thing to everyone and you see how it changes. People. She says it teaches about people.
I think Betty is nice too. Images of her bounce in me like windstruck leaves. I have to do my homework. More baseball and I have never seen the dust that bursts from a base when it is hit by a cleat. I kiss Sarah on the cheek. It is wet and salty. She is a good sister.

Sarah gets a card from Tommy and his mom and dad. Sally and Tommy play at Tommy’s house. They are inwardly nude. They throw a ball in the living room. They are thoughtless in their joie. They break a vase that is expensive. Tommy’s mom comes home. Makeup can only last so long. She is very mad. Her face is a smoldering black mess. She makes them dinner. The wok sizzles for less time than usual. She asks what did they do today. They say they read a book about streams. The sorts of things you want to find in back of your house but nobody has houses or backyards, this is a moral education. Tommy’s mom asks what is a stream. She wants them to say nothing. They say it is a small river. Wadeable were one to know what it is to wade. There are tadpoles in it. Giant sperm. Sally and Tommy play at Tommy’s house. She is a good sister.

Sarah gets a card from Tommy and his mom and dad. Neatly printed letters like telegraph-bringers. It has a kitten with a balloon on the front. Its big eyes versus its humanish pose. It says to float to health. There are tadpoles in it. I want to be asleep.

I sit on Sarah’s bed. She is weathed in the altitude of sickness and the pilots won’t let her down. Her room is yellow. Bananas too sick to be attacked by rot. Robin’s egg birth wrinkled. I tell her about the bus. The old bus. It is boring now. I yawn like a chameleon. I do not like rocks. I think why Betty did not get in trouble. Is fairness so important? The wall is very dirty. The streaks are not black but yellowish. There is a bug crawling on it. Its legs are bigger than its whole body. I move my hand to smash it. It flies lethargically upward. Teacher Joy yells at me again. Her voice digs furrows in hard mud, having never seen soft. I put my hand down. My fingers feel waterless. I want to be asleep.

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Networks: Imagine jamming, sticking all sorts of things in your nervous system—

Sex: Rachel Mayes & I smoke cigarettes outside of The Magician, storefront patrons draw crude boobs & fat dicks on steamy windows.

... 

Let’s leave our genitals out of this, okay?

Current City: We need this, the disaster, children’s parks made of concrete & steel, disarray, the shock of something unexpected right behind you at all times: a man dying on the sidewalk, a bar with neon pink FAT BABY on the front window. Don’t you ever let anyone tell you that you need to know the colors of what’s inside. The test is over.

Birthday: I am alive in the most unmiraculous time.

Hometown: Jagged remnants of piers lay waiting in the River Charles.

Relationship Status: & if my lover loses her hands, or hair, then I leave the bitch.

Interested In: I try to throw peanuts at the podium poets

Looking For: Just come on, come with me while I write this. I could use some company—yours.

Political Views: I am Walter, warrior ruler!

Religious Views: I have become terrified of unmade memories. The split-lipped God is on the radio broadcasting silly silver promises.

Activities: Unlock the dead bolt, stomp onto the deck, nearly slip, plunk into the weather-beaten patio chair. Light a cigarette. Take a drag, burp a little burp. Tastes like Nutter Butter Bites. This is all wrong—I just took that over-the-counter Prilosec. That should’ve done the trick. Wait—I’m a writer. Well, I used to be.

Interests: I drink coffee in my leopard print robe.

Favorite Music: The pace of the baroque adagio races my chest.

Favorite TV Shows: Stop smiling & dust yourself off. You’ve been made too real. How did you do it, you brain-float barracuda?

Favorite Movies: Tarantula Man starring Clint Eastwood & directed by Noir Ellí. It hasn’t been made yet, but will be soon. I’m sure of it. Of made movies, my favorite is The Hustler, Or Jaws!

Favorite Books: Do you have any idea how hard it is to constantly write your life into a poem?

Favorite Quotations: We’re all going home alone—you don’t have to flaunt it.

... 

About Me: I am not the Americana. I am not the Polyanina. I am not the русский я.

I am not the Laframboise. I am the petit bourgeois. I am the Louisiana.

I am the vox humana. I am the top banana. I am Oh, Susanna, won’t you cry for me?
Email: I write dead letters to the disappearance.

Current City: You walk the streets hoping you will find something, a sign that you're going the right way. Earlier, you knew the way to the bar without even checking a map.

AIM: just focused on my hand, twisting balled scrap paper nervously.

Grad School: No one talks to no one, that is, no one is really a stranger to me. I tried everywhere but everything was closed.

College: Something done got messed up in my brain.

High School: He thinks briefly of his first love, she of the crying by the kitchen table, & then he's driving through the graveyard, Zeek at the wheel, tumbling tombstones, ravine-bound.

Employer: Barely Legal Biscuits. It's our new literary journal.

Position: I'm the captain until you abandon ship—

Time Period: long, bare thread, tired & gold

Location: Such germination along the Hudson—

Description: It's 8:52am & I'm just getting up for my 9-5.
NOTE: The following erasure poems are comprised of words taken from the noted texts. The words are in order and have not been altered.

Galileo's Sidereal Messenger, Abridged
Erin Murphy

With this instrument of our senses, behold the moon, naked and rough as a philosopher wandering in Paris or at sea. Forsake caution — let ABCD be a cloud, a face, a hand, the sun as shadows lose their blackness and become one.

My wife: like gales of wind, less and less endurable, with highness and lowness, eclectic & not clear.

Men, supreme, are the highest form, the most mature, having important organs & ideas.

Letter from Charles Darwin to Botanist Joseph Dalton Hooker June 27, 1573, Abridged

The pretense that science is objective, apolitical and value-neutral is profoundly political because it obscures the political role that science and technology play in underwriting the existing distribution of power in society. —Ruth Hubbard
Magpie seeped oil. His shoulders ran. The machinery of the grind spoke broken coal from black walls. There was no symmetry. Dovetail slept in the corner, an ooze of white humming from her skin. There was candle glow, and Magpie’s coyote in the dim. Cold hung in the lines between. Magpie shifted another pelt higher in Dovetail’s bedding, the baby only settling deeper towards the floor. Every father in the grind had a son, every man a coyote. It was peaceful brutality in the mines and Magpie an uninvited shine in its darkness. Twice a year the men left the mountains. Twice a year there was a stirring in these hollows. Twice a year Magpie and all of the grind men reached down in the valley and plucked until their hands were raw. The first was on the coldest day, when even the grind iced over with doubt, when the men were at their weakest, when the taffy was unpered and there was the next need for the next wave of men, for the flooding of the mountains with another blight of semen. On this the coldest day the men traveled the slopes toward sunrise, afraid of catching ice in their lungs, or the look of snow on peaks so intimate that it would stiffen their hearts into forever callouses, unforgiving knots that grind men can’t undo. Everyone knows that this is how you kill a grind man, to tangle his heart when the sun is ripe. And down the sides the men would travel, a winter fully bloomed around them, heading to the valley, to the trove of women there, to the knitters of snow and ice, their knitting needles resounding an avalanche of clicking from the ranges the grind men wore on their shoulders. The women of the valley would hear them coming, days in advance, but there was no defense. Once, they set fire to their village. Once they ran and once they built weapons, and once they all stood naked on the breach, devastatingly open to the men of the grind. Nothing changed. The coldest day of the year was a day that the valley women, the snow-knitters, had to look upon with nothing of daughters were left, until the sons were washed clean of their sister-forms, until the men of the grind felt safe again in a nearly womanless world. This was the second day. This first day, when the mountain men stepped out of the mines and out of the grind and down to the valley, this was the day of raping – this was the coldest day of the year and the men had only the strength left in their oil-skinned bodies to hold down beneath them every woman of the valley until every woman of the valley was brimming with wet coal, until every woman had been attacked and held and hollered and spent, until every woman felt every last drop of womanhood forged on the inseam of her thighs by the darkness of hands, by the men of the mountains, by the only danger set upon them in this forest-world where they knitted snow and ice, where they drank root tea, where they loved their sister-wives as if the sun was a star set so close to their faces that snow didn’t matter. And it was on the second day, the second time of the year, nine months later, when the grind would once again halt, when the men of the mountains, of the mines and the coal rubies, would descend into the valley again to reap what they had sown. The men would oil up their backs and their broad chests, their shadows stepped out of the mines and out of the grind and down to the valley until every woman of the valley was brimming with wet coal, until every woman had been attacked and held and hollered and spent, and those who birthed early sometimes fled with the child and sometimes stuffed their angel wings into the child’s mouth until it gasped and sputtered, until it rang with silence. And sometimes these early mother-women held their new babies in their arms and drowned themselves in the river, or leapt from the seat of the world, their feminine arms spread to where a boy or girl would grow, where a coal miner would take room, where either another snowy daughter would blossom only to be drawn and quartered, or a man would root, a boy to be born for the blackest work, for the stall and grudge of pulling dark from dark, raised on glinting oil and pitch, the holler of upturned metal and the sledge of men’s voices pounding in the mountaintops. Only the boys survived, only the sons. The daughters were always burned, always dropped from the world’s edge, always strapped to the trees and set upon by the coyotes, until nothing changed. The coldest of days when the women became unwanted mothers, and those who gave birth early sometimes fled with the child and sometimes stuffed their angel wings into the child’s mouth until it gasped and sputtered, until it rang with silence. And sometimes these early mother-women held their new babies in their arms and drowned themselves in the river, or leapt from the seat of the world, their feminine arms spread to where a boy or girl would grow, where a coal miner would take room, where either another snowy daughter would blossom only to be drawn and quartered, or a man would root, a boy to be born for the blackest Darkness could swallow their baby-faces. And some women, those who birthed early, they only held their babies in their arms until the coal-men returned. And then, if the baby was a girl, it was killed. And then, if the baby was a boy, it was taken by the men, carried away and into the mountains, to the grind, to return one day to the valley, to where their fathers first
raped, and rape again in the low-spots of this world, where there were only mothers and aunts, and the great tearing open of clothes. This is in the valley of always, where every daughter was killed but women always remained. These snow-knitting women, these women of the valley, some would kill themselves and some would be burst during birthing and some simply lost one another in the valley, in the trees or in the bellies of coyotes, yet on the coldest day of the year, the day nine months before the men would return again, there were always women to scream and fight off their attackers, to wield fingers as claws and mouths as knives, to be flayed open on snowy boulders in the valley of this winter, where new men always came. Women appeared. It would be an evening between the first and the second day, the valley women, some growing boys and some girls and some as vacant and blank as paper, and on the startled treetline a new woman would appear, or hundreds of them, from the deepness of nothing, from the recesses where the women wanted to hide but never found cover. All these perfect women, quietly entering the village, watching the valley with quick eyes, women who seemed to know a secret but then only picked up the knitting needles set before them and took, as all the other women of the valley, to knitting snow and ice, duplicating the individual uniqueness of every longing flake, to have it pile on their feet and atop the mountains where the men of coal came from, where their grind constantly rattled, the bodies made of oil, blood and coal dust and the blackened men of the mines. Maggie walked with these men, attempted to think what they were thinking, but he’d committed the sin, the looking into a daughter’s eyes, and all was unbalanced. Fathers have always told sons, fathers and fathers, there is not ever a reason big enough to look into a daughter’s eyes, and it will tangle your heart, and a tangled heart is the death of you. Sons on fathers, and all the noise of the grining underneath their father and son feet. Only Maggie walking with a then unnamed babe in his hands, gripping her ankle, holding her upside down as all men did with all of these daughters, because ending an upside down world was the same as being merciful, and these coal men, these black faces atop frozen hearts, they needed always ever reasons to keep killing this world. Maggie walked with these men and Maggie talked with these men and his words like their words were gravel and pits, the deepness of mines and how these daughters are the rot of the land. Only Maggie’s baby, head towards the freezing dirt and baby lips bluing, Maggie’s baby was so silent he thought she’d already died, and he was happy for the prospect, the bitter love for throwing something already dead off the cliffs at the edge of the world. The other mine-men, their babies were wailing in sync, a cry of daughter-locusts somehow knowing that at the edge of the world there wouldn’t be clouds and sun but wind and spite and loss. All but Maggie’s daughter, who was silent. The world sometimes had it shirk on fathers said never look in a daughter’s eyes, sons on sons knew, but because Maggie was holding the only quiet baby, because she was silent and the oil of Maggie’s brain needed reassurance, because Maggie had a strain of white snow that had infected his heart, he looked. Maggie looked into his daughter’s eyes. In the eyes of Maggie’s daughter, in the split world where he did what he shouldn’t have, when Maggie denied the soot and oil of his veins, Maggie saw: a daughter, a lone ship with a billowing white sail. It was on the ocean. And Magpie denied the soot and oil of his veins, Magpie saw: a daughter, in his hands, in his arms, and a snow-lone ship with a billowing white sail. It was on the ocean. And Magpie’s heart, at that moment, was a daughter.

This is the valley of always, where every daughter was killed but women always remained.

This is the valley of always, where every daughter was killed but women always remained.
1. Madame Graft

Can’t you see me as anything other than compromised gums & shame? I am more than Gauloise, I could brush up on my French but, I’ll never be able to sing like The Sparrow.

2. Betrayer

This Belleville ideal has been abandoned and you aren’t welcome to my lair (not liar).

In other words, yes, fuck off.

3. Monsieur X

Due to our gaze-surprise, say this time at Le Gerny, the shadow of desire we glance away from because the mouth, my mouth is the most dangerous place.
Call me Ishmael. Some years ago -- never mind how long precisely -- having little or no money in my purse, and nothing particular to interest shore, I thought I would sail about a while on one of our whaling ships. I could walk down a street with my umbrella in hand, and never mind who looked at me; I could eat at any hotel that looked good, and run my bill up against the wall; or go where the counters were low, and eat at the place, and leave. I could sit down in a ferryboat, and sit there all day, and no one would say anything about it. I could sit down in a ferryboat, and sit there all day, and no one would say anything about it. I had built myself a coffin on the beach, and laid me down in it every night; and there I would lie, half drowned, half asleep, half dead, in one of the most lexicographically diverse vocabularies in the world, and dream about the men and events of another world, which they call the Present. But I Dere not know what time it was. I had not expected to see such sights as I have since been shown. I could never have believed, in the wildest of my dreams, that I should one day become a midshipman on a common American bark, and then a midshipman on a common American man-of-war, and then a midshipman on a common American sloop-of-war! But I Dere not know what time it was. I had not expected to see such sights as I have since been shown. I could never have believed, in the wildest of my dreams, that I should one day become a midshipman on a common American bark, and then a midshipman on a common American man-of-war, and then a midshipman on a common American sloop-of-war!
PHOEBE REEVES
BULLSHIT

I’d like to reclaim certain words and sing Leonard Cohen songs as if they were sung by women and not men who always want to fuck women in the most romantic or nostalgic manner, to use poetry like a strap-on and ease their bully way into it with a wet metaphor. She bells the rein. They like the way. Just a shrine, a shriven man at his holy archway, the terrifying sacrament of the cunt.

PASTORAL INSOMNIAC SPREE

What do aspens have to tell you can’t figure out from crying?

Their quizzical pauses and rushes, a serrated tipsy wave down a gorge.

Sunlight runs through wine gushing from a split cask. Crisp and deliberate lines on a map show where the watershed begins.

You should have slept well in the rain.

HEADLINES

Oil spills in the bay—slick black on slushy white.

How many Bicknell’s thrushes in the park?
How many governors on house arrest?
Maybe we can all have ankle bracelets someday.

These neighborhoods where everyone over 35 has a cancer. Lung cancer in apartment #92. Leukemia in 88. Makes it hard to get angry when they take up two spaces, park in the one we shoveled out.

The schedule of destruction—spelunkers digging for tin in ancient garbage dumps, black-sealed bags heaved up past stench into—what? light? smog?

On February 2, 1925, a bundled-up picnicker in Central Kentucky might’ve dropped a sandwich down a hole in the ground to world-renowned cave explorer Floyd Collins, on his third day stuck in Sand Cave with a rock on his leg. If only she’d known that the roof would cave the next day, rendering all contact but voice impossible, she would’ve made him fifty sandwiches or more, flung them down like manna from heaven.

Leo Lambert of Tennessee loved Lookout Mountain Cave, loved it so much that he bought land on the side of the mountain just to drill down into it an easier path so more people could visit. (So they could pay him to do it, to walk on his steps, so he could buy his wife a nice new dress.) But after just a bit of drilling, a brand new shaft opened up into another chamber no one had even known was there.

I’ve known what a geode is since my younger brother taught me on a weekend camping trip to the Land Between the Lakes. Dad pulls the boat into a cove, and I’m annoyed because I want to waterski (two parallel planes tied together at the toes to help me stand), and Dad wants to comb the beach for arrowheads but my brother won’t join him. He wants to search for crystals, while my dad insinuates that he should take me with him then. My brother finds specimen after specimen of round crusty rocks. These, he stuffs into socks when we get home to Henderson, and on the driveway near the azalea bush, we pound them with hammers. The pieces crumble inside the cotton, and we pull out even halves. Set on their backs like overturned turtles, their insides sparkle under the sun.

5 August 2010. Mina San Jose, Copiapo, Chile, South America: A rock-fall at the mine, located in the Atacama Desert of northern Chile, traps 33 gold and copper miners 2,300 feet below ground. Seventeen days later, a drill entered a space accessible to the workers, and came back to the surface with a note: “Estamos bien en el refugio, los 33.” We are well in the shelter, the 33.

We are born out of claustrophobia. I imagine, curled up safe inside our mothers, none of us wanted to leave. We all cried when she pushed us out; tiny little sinkholes on our bellies remind us what was lost.

The Song of Snowdon: Or, Merlin Becomes a Man
(A Tale Told in Four Voices)

From deep inside the earth, a voice complains:
“Those stacks of stones piled upon my back keep falling; thus, the walls remain undone. The king suspects poor workmanship, but I know the men are trying, and I even hold my breath. Despite this unrest, I hesitate to shake an honest attempt at progress — but I must, at times, gasp in earnest, forcefully. Something rumbles in my gut which I, for all my embarrassment, cannot subdue. This guilt gnaws, growing both teeth and claws, to scale.”

The wise man built his house upon the rock
The wise man built his house upon the rock

a handbell choir playing Silver Bells, and into the Rotunda Room featuring the Glasgow Brass Quintet. The air inside the cave is warmer than Kentucky winter; the cave holds constant at 54 degrees Fahrenheit. I unzip my coat, fill my lungs, and open my mouth.

Trevor Strosnider updated his current city to Idaho Springs, Colorado.
Trevor Strosnider added Freeport McMoRan Copper and Gold to his work.
Trevor Strosnider added Roland Deschain and Manfred von Richthofen to his profile.

Pwyll Mar in Blaenavon, Torfaen, South Wales, was opened to visitors in 1980 as project of the National Museum Wales. A working coal mine from 1860 to 1980, the site is now dedicated to the preservation of theWelsh heritage of coal mining—a prosperous source of family pride from the Industrial Revolution right up till Margaret Thatcher sank her teeth into Great Britain.

Tom and Becky in the Cave: Chapter 30
At Sunday morning service, the two are nowhere to be found. To everyone’s horror, the realization dawns that Tom and Becky must still be in the cave. After a day of searching, the words “BECKY & TOM,” scarred on the cave wall in lantern soot, are the only trace to be found. Meanwhile, Becky folds up into herself, cries in terror—“Tom, how could you? How could you have gotten us so lost just to slake your own taste for adventure?”

Leonard Cohen wrote The Sweetest Little Song: “You go your way/I’ll go your way too.”

The king laments, alone:
“But what, indeed, am I to do? I have begun in defeat, repeatedly. My designs proposed in blue, clean lines, concrete—yet all attempts at implementation tumble down as if cursed. Here I stand, impotent.”

1077 22nd Avenue SE, Minneapolis, MN
I rent my first subterranean room, a summer sublet, in May 2011. A tiny peace I lily almost survives in the slender of sunlight through my egress window. It’s larger than requirements dictate, a source of pride, but there are no fire alarms on either level of the house. Nothing to warn us if it’s time to crawl out and run for our lives.

My brother earns his Bachelor of Science degree in geology at the University of Kentucky. Before he is done with his last remaining field camp credit, he has landed an entry-level geology job at a mine that shares its name with our hometown, where he’ll earn three times more than a writer with an MFA can hope to make. He comes home for two days, spends one with each of our quarreling parents, packs up his stuff and his girl, and drives back west to make his own. She decorates their bedroom.

The King’s Council, in chorus:
Who, we? We blame the spirit, but A bastard’s blood will cure it. Such a death as retribution Seems to us a fine solution!

“Look, Ruby,” says Leo to his trembling little wife, as they step into a pitch black room. He lifts the lantern and they crane their necks to gaze up at a giant stream of water jetting out of the rock 145 feet up, falling down right at their feet. “I’ll name it after you,” he promises, honest, and kisses her true.

“My daughter, my daughter,” the harvest goddess cries, hands smoothing the pretty girl’s dusty hair. “Please tell me you didn’t eat anything down there?”

“Some caved naked for fear of contaminating the water they mean to study.” —Joni Tevis
The wise man built his house upon the rock
And the rain came tumbling down

The whole earth is concave when mapped onto paper, fat and happy where it bulges in the middle. If you set a turtle on his back and push him down a slide, he falls off the end and lands on his back, pedaling the air, slow motion kicking, kicking.

**Lady Earth cries:**
“[They comb my tangled hair and from within my sticks and stones—yes, from my bosom, pry a trusted son, my own, who once inside me wrathed as this new mystery now moves. He is heir unto my truths. His ear draws close up to my lips; I impart slow whispers, mist. He is quiet, near, as ancient secrets slip like molten tears from my hot heart to his soft hands. We forge a plan from the fire of my womb. Though sophists’ minds will claim to know divine truth, demand death.]”

While the Chilean government undertook its large-scale rescue mission, involving international drill-ribs and the US NASA program among others, numerous foreign leaders contacted Chile’s President Piñera to congratulate him. Solidarity flowed in from Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Peru, Uruguay, Venezuela, South Africa, Poland, the UK, Spain, Ireland, Mexico, and the United States. Pope Benedict XVI sent a video message of his prayer for the rescue’s success, in Spanish.

What must my orthodontist have seen? Calcium deposit stalactites and stalagmites framing the cavern yawned open on his chair, my palette (which we strove to rapidly expand via a nightly turn of the key) a pinkish flowstone drapery.

Johnny Cash promises: “If you wait your turn, you’ll see Ruby fall.”

He knew he wasn’t the only one who’d tried and failed, but he had fallen in love with her nonetheless. He consulted the gods, and all-knowing Zeus gave it to him straight. “You’re going to have to steal her. You know they won’t just give her away.”

Megan and Matt take me home to Adair County with them on a weekend off from camp. On Friday night, we meet their former high-school English teacher in a cow pasture down the road. My hair is wrapped in a bandana, cheap kneepads around my ankles till it’s time; he’s wearing overalls and a hard-hat. His last name is Reiford—no Mr. He’s more than six feet tall and grinning ear to ear. We climb under a fence, but Megan assures me the farmer’s given them permission. They have decent gear, a year’s worth of college credits in geology and geography

On Saturday, we arrived at a high school off the beaten track, a cow pasture down the road. Floyd’s remains were left in the cave, a funeral service at the surface.

June 13, 1927, the new landowner moved Floyd into a glass-faced coffin, on display in Crystal Cave for years—until the night of March 18, when someone stole him away. Soon, Floyd came home, left leg missing. They chained his casket to the ground.
cave. (verb)
1. to explore caves, especially as a support or hobby.
2. to fall in or drown, especially from being undermined—usually used with in.
3. to cease to resist: submit—usually used with in.

The prettiest girl you’ve ever seen is picking flowers—or they’re giving themselves willingly into her hands, depending on your take on whether or not a pie enjoys being eaten. She pulls gently and as the roots yield, Hades himself bursts up through a cleft in the earth, wraps his arms around her waist, a hand across her mouth. He pulls her down.

Leaned back on the couch around midnight, my lover is talking to me and I’m mining his mouth for words he isn’t saying. I marvel at his eyes, his lips, his perfect teeth, the slant then arch toward the roof of his mouth, stretching up into a grand chamber. I tilt my head back and he examines mine. His finger tickles. Later, we’ll discuss how I manage to open mine so wide.

The foolish man built his house upon the sand
The foolish man built his house upon the sand
The foolish man built his house upon the sand
And the rain came tumbling down

Merlin proposes a plan:
“My lord, the only way to forge ahead is simply to force them out. You need not choose sides. Their battle will run its course, but they require the sky to decide. Place your bet with me instead, sir; know I bear the land’s own request. Dig deep within her. You will find the serpents. Though your wisest may disagree, their schemings are not justified, and if I have lied, then kill me.”

After 69 days underground, all 32 Chilean miners and one Bolivian one were brought safely to the surface over a period of nearly 24 hours, on 13 October 2010. Nineteen days earlier, on their 50th day, they broke the record for longest length of time spent underground.

There are all sorts of ways to kick off teambuilding activities—from a blind walk where partners trade bandanas to a team carry-all where no one walks all the way there on his own, no matter how heavy the brother. Once participants arrive at the low elements course, partners take turns standing on a big fallen log and take turns pulling each other off and then attempt to pull the other up. I could drive the tractor, back the boat off the ramp, send participants off a 40 foot high swing without anyone checking to make sure I’d put the right clips in the right place, depending on your take on whether or not a pie enjoys being eaten. She pulls gently and as the roots yield, Hades himself bursts up through a cleft in the earth, wraps his arms around her waist, a hand across her mouth. He pulls her down.

Oh, the rain came down
And the floods came up
The rain came down
And the floods came up
The rain came down
And the floods came up
The rain came down
And the wise man’s house stood firm.

The king again considers:
“These things he claims to understand—that he speaks so well can be no accident. And yet to save his own life, couldn’t any man? I have little at risk but time. So we’ll dig! And no harm done, even if he’s lying. He’s already dying, as things stand.*

But surely you jest, king! Is this a test, king?
To cross. To double cross. Such are the things taught only to little girls who grow into women who block out their days crossing and double crossing. Only the double dutch and hopscotch, of all childish things, are put away. Yet from even these games, women’s stitchery takes a silliness and vanity as exemplified by the girlhood songs sung on the playgrounds everywhere. Consider:

I know a girl names Sarah
I know a girl or two
I know a girl names Cindy Cindy
Wish I had their shoes

They strolled on down to Orleans Orleans
To the swamps, strolled down
They strolled on down to Old Man Johnny’s
Took that old man’s crown

He laughed so hard he keeled straight over
Laughed so hard he died
He laughed so hard to see that party
“Girls are king,” he cried

While one sees the wisdom in the old man’s laughter (and perhaps in his departure from a world gone so daft), the primary seed within the songs such as these flowers at maturity into women’s obsession with ornamentation from footwear and headdress to empty titles, each to be giggled over as the needle weaves in and out of linen much like the pointed feet of a girl skipping two ropes when one should be enough.

There are those who argue that these needlewomen preform a moral task both by keeping their hands from idleness and by stitching (among embroidered herbs, hearts and homes) verses from Epistles and Psalms to be hung on walls or slept on as a pillow, ever present reminders of He who truly maketh and leadeth and restoreth our souls. Again one should consider the rhythms from which these same women nursed as children:

Hillary put on her pantsuit
Michelle put on her dress
And what they spoke of, nobody knows
But only one was looking her best

Here one sees that words, in women’s poorly nourished minds, have no power next to finery. The craft of stitchery reduces words and the morals for which they stand to mere ornaments, pretty charms for petty witches whose spelling is all in vain.
If you hear the dogs, keep going. If you see the torches in the woods, keep going. If they're shouting after you, keep going. Don't ever stop.

Keep going. If you want a taste of freedom, keep going. Even in the darkest of moments, ordinary Americans have found the faith to keep...
He knows that thread
that connects us

God bless you

God bless America

That is the thread
that connects our hearts

That is the thread that runs
through our journey

I come as a sister, blessed
as a Mom, a lifelong friend, mentor, protector
and as a wife, a mother

Heard in the center
at night

I came as a daughter
as a Mom

a sustaining force for

integrity, compassion, and intelligence

For a season
For a lifetime

six-by-four

I want

For a season
For a lifetime

deadly shared

readily shared

God bless the mother
God bless the father
God bless the president
God bless the chief

God bless the whole

And he made

harm’s way.

It was strong enough for Ford gas to find

the man who's unemotional

to the man who's unemotional

At the nightmare world

in small towns

and even to the captives

God bless you

for words

prayer

America
1. How to belong
This first point is critical, so if you come away with nothing else pay attention to this: you will do as crackpot, moonstruck, off-your-head insane as you need to be and get away with it if you know what the normals are thinking. It doesn’t matter if you disagree as long as you play by their rules while they’re watching you.

Admittedly this is easier in principle than in practice. You can know every intricacy of the normals’ perception but when the urge hits you, and I mean physically hits you—when every tendon in your neck pulls taut and your fingers curl into jams and you get that dense feeling in your gut like you’re a collapsing star about to be sucked inside-out and your belly button is the event horizon of the black hole you will become—it’s tough to hide it. Now in the literature they’ll tell you it’s all about tolerating the anxiety until it goes away, but that’s half true. You really do have to tolerate it, ignore the dense feeling and feign composure as best you can while you’re among the normals. The untrue part is the “until it goes away,” because it never really does. It just compresses and comes to rest somewhere inside you, maybe as a kidney stone or a polyp, and you know after after a decade or so you’re going to be full up.

Perhaps you recall the story of the Spartan boy who stole the fox. The preface to this fable, remember, is that every year was encouraged among young Spartans—provided they could pull it off. To be caught, however, meant a swift beating and a lingering shame. So one sunny afternoon in Sparta a young boy steals a fox for dinner, slips it into his shirt and heads home. Along the way the boy bumps into someone—a teacher, a soldier, a townsman depending on the version—and this person asks the boy what he’s up to. While the boy wheedles, the fox comes to its senses and decides to get the hell out of there. It begins to dig its way through the boy, clawing into the soft tissue, burrowing between sinews and gnawing on tangles of ileum. And of course the brave young Spartan never winces, just keeps going about his business. Now in the literature they’ll tell you it’s all about tolerating the anxiety until it goes away, but that’s half true. You really do have to tolerate it, ignore the dense feeling and feign composure as best you can while you’re among the normals. The untrue part is the “until it goes away,” because it never really does. It just compresses and comes to rest somewhere inside you, maybe as a kidney stone or a polyp, and you know after after a decade or so you’re going to be full up.

Exercise 1: Explain your anxiety to a normal. You might be surprised to find that many people regard tolerating something to be a passive act. The normal will suggest it’s better to tolerate a little anxiety than to walk in circles and tap your fingers in a way that makes you look bathetic, or perhaps autistic. Be aware that some of these comments may sting—just try to find the humor in them. (For example, the assumption that dignity is still a consideration.) Tell the normal the panic builds faster than shame and rips you up like a fraying tube sock filled with rocks. Does it help to explain it? Next time, would you say anything at all?

2. How to plan your day
The next point is purely practical. In the pantheon of literature dedicated to obsessive compulsive disorder there are plenty of warnings about how time consuming this life can be, but the authors do you a disservice in not following these warnings to the practical conclusion: if you’re going to take the time to be crazy, you’ll need to revise your schedule. 5 a.m. The alarm goes off. You will lie in bed for another ten minutes to recall your dreams. Did you fuck anyone? Get fucked? Did you kill someone? Did you watch a loved one get eaten by bear? You can still appreciate the unreality of these events, but you can’t be sure they don’t slyly some abhorrent desires. Never forget you are judged on intent.

Even if you don’t think of anything, you’ll still cycle through the basic poses you could have assumed while sleeping—left side, back, right side, stomach, moving slowly to avoid wakening your wife—and pray in each position.

5:12 a.m. Pause outside the shower. This will be your last chance to recall dreams that require specific attention. (You can’t touch the bed after showering because of your aversion to bodily detritus.) In the shower, turn up the heat until the mirrors fog and let your chin slump against your chest. No one is waiting. Nothing is expected from you. Wipe the errant streams of water from your eyes, inhale the steam. This will be your most peaceful moment of the day.

5:30 a.m. In the closet you ponder how to re-arrange the articles of clothing deemed clean and safe to wear. There are only so many permutations possible, but buying more clothes won’t fix anything.

5:45 a.m. This is a coffee-making day. You will learn to make enough coffee to last for two days to limit your time grinding beans and shuffling through filters. The more steps in a process the more chances there are for your thoughts to derail, so streamlining is essential. But today is a coffee-making day. As you fill the pot from the faucet you will notice shapes in the rippling of the water—fragments of circles that end in obscene little points. Stop. Pray for protection.

5:59 a.m. You sit down at the table with a cup of coffee, a bowl of oatmeal and the newspaper. In the forty minutes between sitting down and the moment your wife gets up, you will make it halfway through the front page of the paper. Each page is divided into three sections: the top, which you must dodge forbidden words, outpace the thoughts that well up as your eyes weave through letters that flare and bend and thrust like the teeth of a trap. Sometimes you’ll arrive at the bottom of the page and realize you missed the ideas represented by all those shapes. Start again.

7 a.m. Your wife will be waiting for you. You have been up for two hours and she has been up for twenty minutes, and now she stands by the door, dangling her purse like a pendulum, ticking away the minutes you waste. You will stand over your shoes, staring down, praying for atonement.

3. On the subject of God
Odds are you never spent much time exploring the concept of blasphemy. That’s to your advantage, because you’ll need to start from scratch now. Actually, you won’t require a definition, because incidents will be evaluated case-by-case. Some of your sins will seem forthright, others will be ambiguous or even dubious, but all will require you to pray for forgiveness, just to be safe. You hear people talk about laying their troubles at the feet of Christ and the peace that passes understanding. These people talk of a God who frets when a sparrow falls to earth, who guides his followers through tragedies, career changes, realty transactions, and safe to wear. There are only so many permutations possible, but buying more clothes won’t fix anything.

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when the problem is you

Correct Incorrect

Figure 1: Praying hands

Is doubt a form of blasphemy?

Stop. Go back. Even if every logical fiber in your being dismisses the notion that God would make this wicked thought come true, you cannot shake the guilt. If you stopped sharply in front of someone, or if you notice the panhandler on the corner watching you, you can pretend you’re going back for a coin on the pavement or to glance in a window. They won’t believe you, but you’ll never see them again and it’s a moment of embarrassment you’re resolved to live with.

In some lucid corner of your mind you will wonder how her health is; you wonder if she time you have left with her is precious. You think of how you never call her, how the little grandmother who sits alone in that cavernous split-level with only a fat red tabby nearly as ancient as she is to keep her company. You think of how you never call her, how the little time you have left with her is precious. You wonder how her health is; you wonder if she will survive this. You can’t fault anyone else, because they don’t mean to hurt you. Most of the time they don’t even deliberately disconnect, it’s just that they don’t know what to say. Or maybe you break the ties, because you know this person has seen you do the same shit before you return to the initial prayer.

Then there’s the lists of solutions, which are all written by normals who understand the fissures in your mind the same way people understand that curved wings are hereditary in fruit flies. You will see phrases such as “generally speaking,” or, “early studies have been promising,” or “in some cases showed notable improvement”—in some cases. Not in your case. The booklets the therapists hand out are the worst. The cover designs are indistinct images cast in cold colors like the drapes in a funeral parlor, the titles no-nonsense declarations such as, “Obsessive Compulsive Disorder: A Guide.” They look like owner’s manuals, but don’t bother checking for the return policy. It’s been more than 90 days now anyway.

What you’ll find instead is advice on electroconvulsive therapy, which is generally reserved for an obsessive-compulsive person in the throes of extreme depression. (“Some temporary memory problems and interference with learning may occur with ECT, although other side effects and complications are uncommon.”) Neurosurgery is described as “dramatically effective” with intractable cases of OCD, helping as much as 80 percent of patients whose symptoms were resilient to all other options. You are assured that surgeons are well trained and worry that you might lose control and slip into a sex-trafﬁc. So much more precise nowadays that it almost unfair to call the procedure by the better-known term “lobotomy.”

Figure 2: Go into your bathroom and lock the door. Turn on the lights if necessary. Study your reflection in the mirror; the creases in your brow, the blemishes, the bulge of your lips and the slope of your nose. Then, donning a pent aspect, tell yourself, “It’s not me, it’s my OCD!” Look at your reflection again. Has anything changed?

5. How to let go

You aren’t going to like this last part but you need to be aware: not all your relationships will survive this. You can’t fault anyone else, because they don’t mean to hurt you. Most of the time they don’t even deliberately disconnect, it’s just that they don’t know what to say. Or maybe you break the ties, because you know this person has seen you do the same shit too many times to pretend it’s nothing, and you’re too ashamed to tell the truth and too embarrassed to ignore it.

Maybe you get sick of friends asking why you tap your fingers, why your eyes flicker—are you prone to seizures? You get too many of the tight-lipped, subtle smiles that are supposed to say I know there’s a secret—you can trust me. What they really tell you is I’ve got you pegged.

Some will include tips for self-management (e.g. wait 15 minutes before giving into your compulsion, or touch something else when you feel your hands are dirty). Others will provide you with manuals, but don’t bother checking for the return policy. It’s been more than 90 days now anyway.

4. On reading the literature

A substantial portion of any given book, pamphlet or online entry will be diagnostic. You will be reminded that everyone has intrusive thoughts, and it’s only considered unusual at a pronounced level. Your level will be quantified with scales and inventories that ask you to rate your mental weltering from 1 to 4, 1 being nothing and 4 varyingly interpreted as “extreme,” “no control,” “incapacitating” and “disabling.” None of publishers of these materials seems to recognize that by the time you pick up a pamphlet, you already know the problem.

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Figure 2: Go into your bathroom and lock the door. Turn on the lights if necessary. Study your reflection in the mirror; the creases in your brow, the blemishes, the bulge of your lips and the slope of your nose. Then, donning a pent aspect, tell yourself, “It’s not me, it’s my OCD!” Look at your reflection again. Has anything changed?

5. How to let go

You aren’t going to like this last part but you need to be aware: not all your relationships will survive this. You can’t fault anyone else, because they don’t mean to hurt you. Most of the time they don’t even deliberately disconnect, it’s just that they don’t know what to say. Or maybe you break the ties, because you know this person has seen you do the same shit too many times to pretend it’s nothing, and you’re too ashamed to tell the truth and too embarrassed to ignore it.

Maybe you get sick of friends asking why you tap your fingers, why your eyes flicker—are you prone to seizures? You get too many of the tight-lipped, subtle smiles that are supposed to say I know there’s a secret—you can trust me. What they really tell you is I’ve got you pegged, inside and out. More than anything, you don’t want to be pegged.

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antidepressants, sedatives, clinical studies, deep brain stimulation, spiritual healing centers, meditation, prayer (of the conventional variety, not yours), more exercise, more fruits and vegetables, more Christian music, more sleep, more willpower, less stress, less alcohol, fewer violent movies.

There is no fix when the problem is you. And no matter how much assurance you receive, no matter how many pledges of patience and undying love, you know your kind of crazy has enough rough edges to wear through all bonds in time, and you can be left in the abyss, cut off from the world outside your head.

It goes like this: one day you and your beloved will go out walking at the lake. It will start out well—maybe it will be springtime and the weeping willows will sway with languid satisfaction and the birds will herald a new season, and you think you’ll be different today. But after a few minutes you’ll feel yourself clouding up. The anxiety will begin to accrete in your gut, and though you scream inside your head and recite nursery rhymes to drown out all other thoughts, you’ll bog down. Stop. Go back. Try again. Stop. Again.

After you walk in your fifteenth, twentieth or fiftieth loop you’ll look up at your beloved and know you’ve reached your limit.

"Come back to me, babe," she’ll whisper.

She’ll be sweet at first.

But she can’t stand watching you twitch and blink and mumble, and she can’t stand watching the mothers swerving strollers around you and the junior high kids giggling to each other and the shriveled old Hmong women in headscarves who stare at you with morbid curiosity as they pass and glance back over their shoulders as they hurry away. She can’t stand the hold this has over you—how it takes precedence over logic, over your pride, over her.

"Come on," she’ll hiss through clenched teeth.

This time you won’t make eye contact, only whimper something about needing one more second. She’ll turn with a huff—you’ll hear her shoe grind the concrete as it twists from you in disgust—and then she’ll walk away. Your first instinct will be to try harder, but your mind is like quicksand and you only sink in. At the moment you realize exactly how stuck you are you’ll look up, just in time to see your beloved crest the hill ahead and vanish beyond a curtain of willow dendrites.

Push, dammit, push. Maybe you’ll take a few steps but it won’t be any good and you’ll end up going back. Weak, weak! The by-passers will keep coming, keep gawking, but hating them is no help to you. Then you feel a new fear, a different kind—your lungs pump but the air won’t come out because on top of everything else you’re thinking that when you tap just so and time the blink just right and recite all the words precisely and you feel your soothing shower of absolution, when at last you break free and follow your beloved over the hill and past the willows, she might not be there.

Stay positive. Maybe you’ll get over that hill and she’ll be sitting in grass beside the path, smiling, puffing at hoary dandelions and telling you she didn’t mean to lose her temper—I can’t say. But I can promise you that even if she waits like so many times before, that new pang won’t fade. From this day forward, your breath will always catch when you see her go over the hill, around the corner, past the willows. As long as you remain unchanged, you could never blame her for walking on alone. There is nothing you can promise her, except that when you’re able, you will follow.

**Exercise 3:** Try “stealing” your own fox. This can be most easily accomplished with a 42” x 15” x 15” live trap and a half pound of raw chicken laced with 10 mg of Dinabazine. Remove the animal once you’re certain the drugs have taken effect, using your left hand to clasp the jaws in a gentle but firm manner while your right arm supports the weight of the body and pin the paws against your torso. Pay special attention as it begins to come around, noting how the thrashing builds from slow shimmery to a spasm of flame-red fur and claws. How would you describe your level of control? Do you dare let go?
Kate Renee

Me as a Monster

Yeti Loves Bigfoot
. Not just for winter the sky carries off everything in its path—place to place broken off as if these small stones are sure the dead will wait for them though they remember only distances with no one to look through the ice at the birds frozen midair still expecting your arms to loosen inch by inch from among the others.

. Always more—stepping-stones scented with the slow bend in a river burning itself out—they tire easily are lying on the grass winding things up though sometime the sound comes from the small rocks breaking off for the dead then left where snow is expected from your shoulder and hers—there is so little room and she is just one person turning back a long time without anything to lose.

. You approach from above expect the sun at your back, the sink blinded by spray the way every stream is born knowing how scrapes bottom till its stones ignite explode into oceans

. This dirt still mimics sweat lies down alongside, unsure your lips would quiet it though the finger that is familiar probably is yours—could be enough has already learned to point—in time it will silence even your shadow without pulling it back down as sunsets passing by no longer some shoreline unable to stop for these pebbles struggling to rise together, take you by the hand and without a sound recognize the gesture.

. With each glove almost the same You look face to face For a place to jump— you don’t see the bridge though these weeds are used to winter slip from your fingers the way this sky no longer has room and each raindrop suddenly white, already stone grown huge: each floe inscribed and with a single name warms this hillside midair, brings these dead

. You’re used to this the same cracked cup rinsed till its glaze cools and it’s safe to dry your arms the floor, the walls.

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There is such a thing as awesome, and Guante isn’t going to lose it. It’s not nearly enough. ("REACH")

Marks in Your Brainstem

There is such a thing as awesome, and Guante isn’t going to lose it. It’s not nearly enough. ("REACH")

We’ve seen what they have to offer. It’s great. It’s beautiful.

The move into spoken word was coincident. A creative writing major at UW, he was uninspired by the lit mag scene: “I saw the path that was before me: write, submit to journals, try to get published, get rejected, get published so that other people who are trying to get published can read your work. That did not appeal to me.” If he was going to really reach people as a poet, spoken word was the way to do it. “The revolutionary thing about the modern incarnation of spoken word is that it brings poetry to people who don’t already have a relationship with poetry—I perform in high schools and colleges and railyards and community centers and rap shows and all over, and the value of that should not be underestimated.”

The two forms quickly diverged for Guante. Writing rap according to the flexicimal format (meter, line structure, rhyme, etc.—has had the effect of pushing Guante’s spoken word pieces in the opposite direction: monologue-style free verse. The respective form and context also shape his content. “Rapping is usually done in a loud club, with music blaring, people talking, things happening all around, whereas spoken word is done in a quieter space like a theater, jazz club, coffee shop, or open mic.” The respective form and context also shape his content. “Rapping is usually done in a loud club, with music blaring, people talking, things happening all around, whereas spoken word is done in a quieter space like a theater, jazz club, coffee shop, or open mic.”

When the performance commences it quickly becomes clear that some of the UM students, such as Michael Lee, are good and some are not; Guante pays them rapt attention regardless. About his concentration, he says, “Some spoken word is so bad that it literally makes me feel ill, but sometimes you can tell that a writer is just starting out and is still in the process of finding his or her own voice, and that can be fun to watch. You get to see someone bloom in real time. You can learn something from everyone. I think it’s important to listen to other artists, especially those who aren’t much like you.”

There’s plenty of opportunity for learning when Guante takes the stage. He begins by offering advice, urging these kids not to be intimidated, to recognize that the small audience doesn’t matter. “What matters is, we’re sharing our art with one another.” And then, more practically, he emphasizes the distinction between recitation and performance. Performance is the reason spoken word tends not to hold up on the page: it’s not meant to; it’s meant to be performed. And performance, one gathers, goes like this—and Guante launches into “REACH,” “Family Business,” and a few others from his repertoire. He is fully present, and his presence is large. The poet in his performance is unbound. At some lines he jumps up and down with excitement; at others he darts sideways and then swoops stage-forward in a deceivingly calm voice that highlights by understatement some of his most climactic lines—these are cocky postures, of course, and part of Guante’s performance (a carryover from rap, perhaps) involves boastfully calling attention to that cockiness at the same time as he flat-out earns the right to it. You can hear the confidence in his voice, which he modulates tonally and volumely at facile will, returning periodically to a reliable growl that reaches right up to the rear wall and echoes back down converging on each pair of ears as if from everywhere.

Michele Bachmann of the game / Get on the mic, spit somethin’ insane

Is there an origin story for a force like Guante? Where does he come from? Wisconsin, it turns out. Kyle moved around the state as a kid before matriculating at the University of Wisconsin. It was in Madison that he got his start in rap and spoken word. “It’s kind of cliché,” he says, “but I didn’t choose it; it chose me.” Kyle had long been a hip hop head when he was randomly assigned a rap producer for a college roommate. “From there, it was a natural, organic transition from writing poetry, to musing around with rapping, to seriously rapping. I had a long way to go, but I got the fundamentals (rhythm, multi-syllable rhyme, punchline techniques, etc.) naturally. And when you’re good at something, and happen to have a supportive community around you, it’s hard to not to want to do that.”

Almost immediately (probably too quickly, he thinks, in retrospect), under the influence of Lauryn Hill, Saul Williams, Outkast, Bruce Springsteen, and most of all Goodie Mob’s Cee-Lo, and with the support of his roommate and other friends, Kyle began performing under his stage name El Guante (“EL” later dropped). In 2008, when he left Madison for the deeper waters of the Twin Cities—one of the country’s top spots for independent hip hop and spoken word—Guante’s stage persona was a fully realized artistic creation. He’s comfortable on stage, relaxed (like he knows he deserves the attention) but edgy too (looking sometimes like he can barely contain the energy that surges out from him). The audience, perhaps too quickly, he thinks, in retrospect, under the influence of Lauryn Hill, Saul Williams, Outkast, Bruce Springsteen, and most of all Goodie Mob’s Cee-Lo, and with the support of his roommate and other friends, Kyle began performing under his stage name El Guante (“EL” later dropped). When the performance commences it quickly becomes clear that some of the UM students, such as Michael Lee, are good and some are not; Guante pays them rapt attention regardless. About his concentration, he says, “Some spoken word is so bad that it literally makes me feel ill, but sometimes you can tell that a writer is just starting out and is still in the process of finding his or her own voice, and that can be fun to watch. You get to see someone bloom in real time. You can learn something from everyone. I think it’s important to listen to other artists, especially those who aren’t much like you.”

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such a thing as awesome
dislocate
summer 2012
73
72
23x84
acoustic hip hop EP with Claire Taubenhaus. This is but one
So what you gonna build today? ("Deathbed")
But no one who puts as much stock into any self-form
invoke race, as in “Confessions of a White Rapper,” it’s never
Asian people, or mixed people, or whatever, I may talk more
I try to tap into parts of my own history and memory that will
I think of art as communication,
not as the mystical channeling
of some inner force.
"I think of art as communication,
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of some inner force.
fuck the revolution, join a union
What do you want to say to these people?’ A lot of my work
is about the importance of organizing. . . . When things have
improved in this country, they’ve improved because everyday
day people, students, workers have organized and organized. The other
main thrust of my work, I think, has been about refusing mediocrity
and reaching for something bigger, about making the most of your
potential.”
Humility is overrated
Tonight Guante is performing with See More Perspectives
and Heidi Barton Stink, two of his Tru Ruts labelmates. The show is a fundraiser for the UM chapter of Students for a
Democratic Society, so this also an opportunity for Guante to
combine his art and activism.
Stark, I have the utmost respect for Guante, calling him “an incredible
writer, who is a notch above the other stuff coming out of the
Twin Cities. As a rapper he incorporates so much of what he
knows from spoken word. He knows how to tell a story with
his voice. He has a lot of passion and his heart is always in it. She has worked with him, too, most notably on “Summertime Hip Hop BBQ Jam for the
World,” a track on which she hilariously mocks his un-friendly
tendencies. She describes the process like this: “He tough to work with. We’ve collaborated, but he doesn’t work with
people. He goes away and does his part and comes back with
it finished. That really bothered me at first, but you have to
accept that’s how Kyle works.”
There’s a couch or chair spot for everyone when Stink
begins her first song. The audience sits in a circle to watch
and listen. It’s not clear at this point how many funds will be
raised. Neither is it clear how people got here or why. Five are
SDDS, two are rappers, and giving the people something they don’t
yet know they want.” Some with certain aesthetic dispositions
might object to this kind of earnesty and self-importance, they
might go so far as to say this isn’t art at all, just
sophisticated propaganda.
I’ve never heard him talk down to
organizations already doing good (meaning progressive) work.
Tatyana Benson of The Canvas Teen Arts Center in St. Paul,
says this piece came over email) to method acting: “You have to
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says this piece came over email) to method acting: “You have to
But given the nature of his work, it’s not surprising to hear him say that “with the artists I respect and enjoy, I tend to value ambition over anything. I’d rather something be a noble, interesting failure than be yet another B+ song or poem or movie that does the same thing that people have been doing for years. So for my own work, I want to add something new to the conversation.”

There’s no talking about Guante, finally, without explicitly addressing his ambition. At the time of this writing he is at work on two albums, two books, one one-man play; he’s plotting a graphic novel version of his greatest hits; and most importantly, he says, “I’m using my community connections and whatever local fame I can cultivate to help influence policy. That’s the main goal of everything I do.”

Guante expects all of his work to be tremendous, and he wants all of it to be heard. “I think far too many people focus on one or the other—they’re either basement geniuses making mind-blowing art for a select group of people in the know, or they’re world-conquering superstars who are better at promoting themselves than they are at actually making good art. For me, one without the other is failure.”

Nothing about Guante is understated. He’s going for it. And you’re invited.
As much attention as your work gets for being formally inventive/challenging, the content seems to be equally complex. Can you talk about your interest in the said and unsaid in books like The Body and The Book of Beginnings and Endings?

Both The Body and The Book of Beginnings and Endings center on themes of abandonment, failed love affairs, displacement, and searching. I think that these states of being, in themselves, are chaotic, shifting, move between extremities of happiness and despair. Additionally, they give way to wondering, sense making. Therefore, the subject is often masked and transformed. I think every great act, and being an act, is a balancing act between the seen and the unseen, the said and the unsaid. I think a lot of what’s unsaid is hinted at in form and tangential or digestive impulses in a text. I have always been interested in metaphor, intuitive meanings, symbols, and suggestion in both life and literature. The missing texts of The Body and The Book of Beginnings and Endings operate similarly in that they ask the reader to participate in meaning making, losing, and wondering.

So how would you describe your use of form in The Book of Beginnings and Endings to bring the reader into the book, of the page. There is a long tradition of writers, who, in the act of writing, are playfully aware that their pronouncements are being written in a book, on the page. The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy. Gentleman by Lawrence Sterne is my favorite example of this. My forays into this awareness often result in work that doesn’t neatly fit into the literary categories of our day. I think that when you write, you should only be concerned with your writing—let others work on the genre problem or think about it later after the work is finished.

Your most recent book, Not Merely Because of the Unknown that Was Stalking Toward Them, is a reinterpretation of Peter and Wendy. What drew you to the Peter Pan story?

There are many elements of enchantment at play in J. M. Barrie’s novel Peter and Wendy. Peter Pan, through his make-believe and his insistence on the make-believe, is the origin of much of the enchantment that takes place in the novel. I’m attracted to his ability to so fully believe in make-believe that, for example, the boys on his island could go days eating pretend meals instead of real ones. His inability to separate real and pretend and how this inability leads to real danger, real fright, is at the core of my fascination with him. But, of course, I’m always interested in a love story gone bad, and Peter and Wendy is nothing but a love story gone bad. He is the lover who refuses to fit perfectly, refuses to commit, refuses to choose. Love and make-believe lead to fascinating and dreadful results. It’s a dangerous combination that Peter Pan possesses.

Why did you decide to write from Wendy’s point of view?

Wendy Darling, despite her upbringing as a middle-class Victorian girl, lingers and relishes the dangerous, the subversive, the naughty. She leaves her mother, who misses and loves her, in order to pursue a love affair with Peter, who cannot love her fully—that is, Peter will never make a wife of her. Wendy’s story, I suppose, was also my story for a long while, and I related to her efforts at domesticity, her attempts to keep Peter happy, and her desire to mother and care despite the signs of Peter’s infidelity and high-jinks away from home. What pierces me the most about Wendy is her total willingness to become fully immersed in Peter’s make-believe. She wants what I mean by having my “sense of being” challenged? Is that something that happens more for you in nonfiction than in other genres?

I think what I mean by having my “sense of being” challenged is undergoing some metaphysical change, a change that illuminates the unseen or non-empirical world. Does a work of art, in other words, change how I relate to the human experience or my being in the world. The human experience, in my mind, is a rather tragic one, and, no matter one’s lot in life, we have to die. That is tragic to me. So does a work of art show me something about living and about dying? For example, I recently watched Terence Malick’s Tree of Life, which works to give impressions of a life rather than make any sense in terms of plot or narrative. In this way, in how it strives to explain the experience and mystery of being alive, it is an essayistic film. It illuminates the wonder and the mystery without any overt aims of unraveling or understanding or coming to terms with that mystery. Seeing how a life can be seen through this lens and how tender and fragile that life is and what death and life “might” be is an example of having being challenged. I think this challenge happens in all genres, and it happens better in some works than others. I experience it in painting, photographs, film, novels, poems, and essays, and sometimes I experience it in the everyday, and that is usually occasion to write.

So what are you working on now?

Now, I’m primarily working on my daughter, who was born in January of 2011. She’s quite young, and I feel as if every day is full of her. There is little time left over, and that time is devoted to my job and teaching duties, keeping house, and my relationships with family. Of course, I’m always working on something, if even mentally or piece-meal. Right now, I’m “working” on an essay about a mourning suit and another about gray hair. I have also been “working” on mini-essays, which are very prose-poetry. I’m supposed to also be culling some of my poems into a book that is forthcoming from Coconut Books. I tend to work in quick spurts following by months of non-creative work. I hope that the next “spurt” will come sooner rather than later so I can actually finish something. I’m excited to find out what this something might be.
**MY DOUBLE**

My double wears a white gown like a debutante, a nurse, a dead poet, a bride, a mental patient all at once. She wears it to woo me when she finds me. How she finds and finds me. She’s a photo negative. She clings like a dumb moon. Here she grinning is, craving me like a reflection or a shadow. I’ve hidden from my double, given bad directions, jumped ship. I thought to slit her throat, but she isn’t the mortal one of us, and so I must do more: separate her body from her head. Her gauzy body will stand as a surrender flag billowing outside my cave. But her head travels with me. It must stay with me because it’s mine. It’s awful and it’s mine.

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**EMPTY NEXT SYNDROME**

Even in my ruined cave I am not an either/or. Anybody can recognize over-simplicity, the duality in the rubble. Inside I am/can make everything. Spiritual primordial invisible a golem, I revel. For outside the cave, I was issued only two faces: Mother. Predator. But the same day I exploded my co-opted cave, I pulled the eyeteeth from one outside face and snuffed the kindness from the other. Who issues such literal visages? Who agrees to walk around with two broken faces?

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If there are 51 U.S. cities named Eureka, each a threadless distance from crow and lineament and all the phone lines down, then I have walked the tracks since the first Sunday of the world.

Each a threadless distance from crow and lineament. A century of graffiti has collected in the boxcars. Walk the tracks since the first Sunday of the world. Precede train smoke. The dust is full of thieves.

A century of graffiti has collected in the boxcars. I must stop rehearsing my “surprised” face which preceded train smoke. The dust is full of thieves. If there is something, anything, left to discover

I must stop rehearsing my “surprised” face. A revelation should not look planned. If there is something, anything, left to discover — like Eurekas! Eurekas everywhere! How amazed we once were—Hand me a pair of boots, a shovel. All the phone lines down and I have walked enough. I shall guffaw shall brandish my gold tooth if there are 51 U.S. cities named Eureka.
During your lecture last night, you mentioned that the individual is often fetishized in nonfiction writing, and stressed the need to place the individual in a system. Could you elaborate on that?

Stories tell of people and events, right? So, for a writer, there are two basic ways in: you have a defining event or situation, and you are the one who speaks in a way that reflects some kind of larger situation, a larger condition—humanity or whatever. And that isn’t strictly a question of using or not using an “I.”

Of course, this pertains only to writing about characters outside of oneself—as opposed to writing in the first person. I think a lot about the use and abuse of the first person. I often use a first person of a sort, but I don’t really say much about myself. The first person that I use is a voice rather than a character—it’s an “I,” not a “me.” And there are also times when I want to be able to pop into a reader’s head and talk material—when I want to be able to pop into a reader’s head in a conversational voice, before disappearing again for long passages.

The third person quasi-omniscient style voice is a fantastic, underutilized tool and there is too much of a tendency in reported writing these days for the writer to hold everything together by saying flat out: “I went here, I went there, I did this, I saw so-and-so,” and then: “I, me, I, I, I.” If you really look at it, and you ask, well what difference does it make that that person’s there, too often the answer is: it’s just lazy. There was a while, 25, 30 years ago, when this was considered bold, and called New Journalism to bring in a first person voice where the idea had always been to hide the first person voice. But now it’s become cliché since the New Journalists popularized it, though, isn’t it useful in reminding the reader of the complexity of the information and opinions you’ve gathered? Or would you generally cut it out?

I’m not hyper-conscious of it, to tell you the truth. I’ve sometimes tried to see how long I could go without the first person, just out of sheer formal curiosity, in order to see: is this a crutch? Am I using this lazily? Am I just using it unimaginably? The first person is a great tool. I just think that it shouldn’t be an automatic or an absolute rule. A writer has to resist being dominated by it. Yes, it can be valuable to show how a piece of writing was made—to build in a bit of documentary of the “making of” what you’re reading: “I went here. I went there. This is a chronicle of my experiences.” Hunter Thomson is the extreme version. Norman Mailer building himself up as a kind of character is a different version. Joan Didion creating herself as a frail persona who sort of quivers at the edges of things, although at the same time she writes like she is made of steel. So there are different styles of using the first person that way, but none of them are really about the accurate representation of the author as a person. They’re literary devices created around the device of a persona.

And, at times, the first person allows you tremendous flexibility. If you’re not always using it, but then you jump in and then and then as “I,” and make a declaration—announce a question, or express an opinion, responding to your own material in a way that heightens and shifts it—that can be very strong. So I’m really against having rules about these things, because the writing will happen next to your own material in a way that heightens and shifts it. And I’m against having the writer isn’t the subject. That’s how I like to use the first person—the “I” is a guide, a companion to guide you through the story without creating a distraction.

Even granted that the first person has to some extent become cliché since the New Journalists popularized it, though, isn’t it useful in reminding the reader of the complexity of the information and opinions you’ve gathered? Or would you generally cut it out?

We don’t have to follow them far before they’ve shot off the tires and the van stops.

Anyway, it’s too easy for sincerity to be a rhetorical device. It’s too easy to make the sound of sincerity.

What does sincerity mean? Does it mean that you’ve laid yourself a little bit bare? That you mean what you say? That you’re earnest? So what? A lot of people are earnest and not quite sincere. You can be earnest and stupid, or misguided, or malign. You know—evil people are earnest, too. People you disagree with totally are the fact that they are being earnest or sincere should make it easier for you to tolerate and engage with them, and shelve your resistance or objection.

One space that the insertion of the self can be taken up in a productive way is to remind the reader of the implication of the writer, and by proxy the reader in the situation you’re describing. I don’t know if that’s something you’re conscious of in your writing—Oh, definitely—there are times. I wrote in a piece in Cambodia in ’98, when Pol Pot had just died following his purge from the Khmer Rouge interior party trial. I went up to Phnom Penh, where that’s old turf, and watched reintegration of the last battles of the Khmer Rouge into the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces. The idea was that this very long war was finally pretty much over, and I was writing about what it meant for people to live with the legacy of Pol Pot time, when the entire country had been devastated. Well, one day I’m in the car with the driver and the photographer was working with, my friend Gilles Peress, and we’re driving down a main street in Phnom Penh, and as we come to a big intersection, we see a white van moving bumpy across our path, and then we see motorcycles chasing after it, and there are cops on the bikes shooting at the car, so we say, “whoa, what’s this?” and we chase after the cops.

We don’t have to follow them far before they’ve shot off the tires and the van stops. They pull out the driver, and they beat him to death. Right there, in front of us, they beat him to death in two, maybe three minutes. A huge crowd had gathered in no time out of nowhere, and I was writing about it. I was writing on a story that was about a man named Sok Sin, who had told me earlier that during the Pol Pot years he had lost all track of time, but now at the moment they pull the man out of the car, Sok Sin says, “Oh, he stopped now. Oh, he beat him now. Oh, he unconscious now. Oh, he dead now.” He knew exactly what a body could take. It was all there, it was just a minute, and that was almost the most striking thing about that whole scene. I mean, it was weird enough already. You couldn’t just do this, because there was a cluster of people, but you saw this body get sucked down into this cluster of people, and then arms and legs going down, and then Sok Sin’s叙述 took over. It was his personal narrative—his own personal account of what he had seen, and then Sok Sin’s narration took over. It was his own personal account of what he had seen, and then Sok Sin’s narration took over. It was his own personal account of what he had seen, and then Sok Sin’s narration took over. It was his own personal account of what he had seen, and then Sok Sin’s narration took over. It was his own personal account of what he had seen.
Interview with Philip Gourevitch

Moby Dick—until he’d been dead for many years. Well, he didn’t have one—he didn’t have an audience for his relationship to audience—the scope of the book’s trajectory. I was thinking about influence. It brings to mind Moby Dick, in which very last night, in which you named Melville as an important about, as if it were mine.

Right, I’m exactly what I don’t want you to think about at that moment—of course that’s a first person anecdote. But it’s interesting. At another time I might paraphrase an intensely story in third person narration because I don’t have any direct experience of the story and I want to emphasize that distance and make you feel it.

Later, when we went up to Arlorg Veng, which was the old Pol Pot hangout, we flew up on this military helicopter with a bunch of dignitaries and press to see a ceremony to mark the integration of the two armies. When we landed, they put us on these two-ton trucks to move us around, and again there was this little moment—I’m on a truck, and I’m standing next to this Chinese general who’s in perfect uniform like he’s in some reviewing stand in Beijing, and we’re sort of jostling against the back of this huge truck. And I says, “Hey Jake that you’re going into that cathedral, and then that total madman, who’s wearing this kind of anchors the scene. All that stuff is brad in there. But it’s a mystical book ultimately—on a completely different level than reportage: it’s an epic.

It raises existential issues—

But he also has the most amazing voice in there, I mean the first person voice, and these kind of Shakespearian fights of language. There’s somebody who’s tweeting all of Moby Dick. And I don’t know about this person, but they’re really good because in 140 characters you can barely ever get a full sentence of Melville’s. So it’s almost pure language. You just have these incredible phrases almost every moment, which means every line.

But I do know what you mean about multiple perspectives. That’s what I’m talking about and I’m trying to make out there, and so is this bouncing back and forth between the very concrete, often political reality of a situation and the very strange, often surreal, somewhat mystical nature of human beings and their experiences.

OK, here’s another example—I was in Sri Lanka after the tsunami in 2005 and the whole east coast of the island had just washed away up to a mile or two in, and here was this wave that had been divided a long time by the war with the Tamil Tigers. When the wave hit the country had been on its way back to normal, and now suddenly because of the wave it was all sort of, “Oh, it killed us all equally; it’s a reminder that we’re all one nation,” and the Tigers opened up their territory for the first time in a really long time, partly for humanitarian aid, since they wanted to get in on the stuff that was coming in.

So I was able to go to Mullaitivu, the little coastal town where Prabhakaran, head of the Tamil Tigers, had the Sea Tigers’ and I thought he was going to tell me what he thought the heart of the thing, and you were suddenly allowed to get in. I had very weird interviews with these Tiger-police military commissars the night before and then I went out to the beach and you’re in this place where you can sort of see what the grid of the streets was, but it’s just gone, swept away. Over there’s a flight of stairs going up into the air, over here is a wall of debris, and there’s this kind of wrecked, so it looked like a ruin, which if you think about it, in Italy you’d just say, “oh, it’s a ruined cathedral, what a nice sight,” as opposed to this strange context where it was completely surreal.

It was this empty beach, and there are these guys in church garb going into that cathedral, and then that total madman, the village idiot really, came up to me and started getting really trying to touch my hair. Various people tried to explain it in various ways, and it wasn’t clear, you know, was this a guy in a kind of single of vision, with this soundtrack. It represented an intense brutality, and a relationship with power, and a kind of cruelty and also cruelty of police methods, to say the least. It represented all of these different things in this very short moment, but above all it represented the sense that the people around me in Cambodia carried a kind of terrible knowledge that none of us on the outside have. So that moment—of course that’s a first person anecdote.

But it’s interesting. At another time I might paraphrase an entirely story in third person narration because I don’t have any direct experience of the story and I want to emphasize that distance and make you feel it.

When I wrote A Cold Case, the murder book, I had written a magazine piece of it, and I had a bunch more material, and I wanted to expand it, I ended up doubling it—and it’s not a long book, but it seemed like the right form. Still, I remember thinking as I was working on it, well, maybe I should sort of blow it open here and there and get out to a bigger angle. But I really kept adding on, maybe I’d write as good or in its own way a better book, but I’d lose this book in it, and this book is the one I wanted to write.

So was that an act of omission? No, it was a decision to improve the story for you, and they’re fantastic, but you don’t want to meet characters that really don’t fit the story but were a part of the scene. That’s one reason why I would just wedge them in there just so you didn’t leave them out.
That would be a disservice to the piece, to the characters, and to the readers. When I wrote my first Rwanda piece for The New Yorker, I turned it in way too long, at something like 30,000 words, and it was received with a long, long silence from the magazine. Then I was suddenly given 24 hours to cut the piece in half so that somebody would read it, or else it would simply die. Still, I cut it in half quickly really. And one of the things that I took out right away was a chunk of maybe 5,000 words that worked as an essay unto itself. And I think even before my New Yorker piece had run, I had sold that cut to another magazine as a follow-up piece. So, again, it wasn’t that it was being omitted. In a way to me it was being saved. I could have tried to boil that down, or chunk it, but then it would just be the tracing of what was there—and in the end that material I cut became central to the book I wrote.

You’re going back to Rwanda now to write another book. Even the first time you wrote about Rwanda it was afterwards reporting—you were coming into Rwanda after you left it so the situation had been forgotten in terms of the normal news cycle. I wonder, when you sustain that kind of a relationship with a place over a long period of time, after a decade, now, is it a sense of responsibility that brings you back because you’ve taken on this story, or is it a matter of obsession, or what?

No, it’s just interest, it’s just fascination. I had no desire to go back for a long time. I mean, I had a lingering I will go back some day desire, but I really wanted to do other things, and I did other things. I didn’t stay overly connected to all of it. Frankly, I needed to get it out of my system for a while. And then in 2003, after about eight years away, I went back right at New Years to do one piece for The New Yorker. But I also went back because I had been hearing that people were living together better than I would have foreseen as possible, and I was curious what that was like. Not that they were living together wonderfully, but better. And then suddenly all of these issues and all of the old interests were there. I thought these were astonishing stories here, different stories than I’d told before—or different phases of stories that I’ve told—and I have a history with the place that allowed me to see the stories’ depths very quickly and how to animate them. So I was completely absorbed.

Hanging talked about the first book in different contexts for about ten years by then, there was almost a set of oral essays in some sense, in response to people’s reactions, and responses to the ways some of those issues had overreacted over time, and then there I was seeing all of those responses suddenly reexamined in a very different way, much more critically. That’s when I thought I would like to do a different book about what it means to live with it and what it means to build a society out of wreckage, and how there really aren’t any really clean solutions at all—how a lot of things that are very, very hard to accept have to be accepted.

Aftermath writing seems to be able to avoid some of the pitfalls of on-the-ground-in-the-present reportage that are so often lost and die. Should there have been a chapter of aftermath here, or a separate book? Does the hindsight that characterizes this kind of long-form, reflective journalism allow your work to carry some sort of forward-directed, prophetic potential regarding the future?

You mean, do I think I know where the thing’s going? No. I have no idea. Less now than before. But now, I wrote this piece about the Rwandan bicycling team last summer, and among its preoccupations is the fact that you now have a generation in Rwanda that has no direct memory of the genocide or were really little kids at the time. In this case they are basically in their early twenties, so they were really little kids at the time. They were only eight years old to be traumatized by Rwanda in 1994. And so, it’s one thing to think of the genocide of those hundred days, which was a period of extreme convulsion, but then for many of them for years, there were no answers. And then there I was seeing all of those responses suddenly to the ways some of those issues have refracted over time, in my head, responses to people’s responses, and responses that they have none of the baggage of accountability, suspicion, personal, political, or blame at the same level as the older generation. Those older generation solutions at all—how a lot of things that are very, very hard to accept have to be accepted. And then suddenly all of them the entourage with a million and a half or so people who had fled, some of them the entourage with a million and a half or so people who had fled, some of them the en masse with a million and a half or so people who had fled, and there were coming into the country where you had a quarter of the country in exile ringing the border and in that midst was a sizable army committed to coming back and rescuing the country, and there was a beginning that there was going to be another war. And how that war went down, where that war went down, and when that war went down—all of that was hanging over everything. And of course everybody was trying to pretend everything was all right, or trying to prevent a war happening by maneuver, but the fact was that there was a chapter that had to happen. This couldn’t go on for ever. At some point those camps had to be disbanded, and it was looking worse and worse from the beginning.

So I always knew that was basically my time frame. When I decided to do the book after my first long time there, I thought, I’ll report on the genocide and its aftermath until these camps are gone. And then we would have these moments where I’d think, wait, I hope this doesn’t take five years, or ten years. But it happened relatively quickly. It happened at the end of 1996 in the war that became the first Congo war. And some of that reportage was very present-time and observed. And, of course, aftermath reporting is its own present. The point is that you’re looking at the present in its relationship to some cataclysmic event or some kind of massive realignment of history and you look at people in the after-wash of that.

But now, I wrote this piece about the Rwandan bicycling team last summer, and among its preoccupations is the fact that you now have a generation in Rwanda that has no direct memory of the genocide or were really little kids at the time. In this case they are basically in their early twenties, so they were really little kids at the time. They were only eight years old to be traumatized by Rwanda in 1994. And so, it’s one thing to think of the genocide of those hundred days, which was a period of extreme convulsion, but then for many of them for years, there were no answers. And then there I was seeing all of those responses suddenly to the ways some of those issues have refracted over time, in my head, responses to people’s responses, and responses that they have none of the baggage of accountability, suspicion, personal, political, or blame at the same level as the older generation.

This younger generation has grown up inside what can often look like a kind of propagandistically simplistic national myth of the post-genocide government, the idea that “we are all Rwanda,” that we all identify with the identity of the nation. It happened at the end of 1996 in the war that became the first Congo war. And some of that reportage was very present-time and observed. And, of course, aftermath reporting is its own present. The point is that you’re looking at the present in its relationship to some cataclysmic event or some kind of massive realignment of history and you look at people in the after-wash of that.

I decided to do the book after my first long time there, I was overawed by the reporting, and then there I was seeing all of those responses suddenly to the ways some of those issues have refracted over time, in my head, responses to people’s responses, and responses that they have none of the baggage of accountability, suspicion, personal, political, or blame at the same level as the older generation. It was an affair of their elders, you know? And they really trying to understand how complex some of these things are, and also how fragile, because then some little thing goes wrong or some rumor or signal is given off at the wrong wavelength and the whole place trembles.

So just now you were describing this simplistic national narrative that is binding people in Rwanda together in a vaguely positive way, but then last night in your lecture you said there was narrative after narrative after narrative after narrative with how that had very negative effects, and I’m wondering if you have any thoughts on the distinction between those two narratives—when does a simplistic narrative help and when does it harm?

My thought is that leadership matters. And it’s an important thing to remember when writing about stories. I mean it almost goes back to—if we want to knit this up in a perfect structure, it’s going to have to be somewhat opposed to the larger system. If we look at the Abu Ghraib story, some of those people were way, way out of line, and some of them got into the abuse, and some of them had criminal responsibility, and some of them had to be redeployed, but on the opposite side of the fight. I said, do you really believe that a person who’s spent years fighting in the cause of genocide can just be turned around like that? And I remember, Paul Kagame, the general who later became president, told me: Yeah. He said, people can be made bad and they can be taught to be good. And I thought, that’s either the most naive or the most sinister this that I’ve ever heard, because he was saying people are malleable.

Ultimately what I think is—I suppose it’s a political belief, but it’s also a literary belief that I come away with from all these stories—that none of us know how we’ll behave in such extreme circumstances. Everybody wants to identify with the good guys, or at least with the victims rather than the perpetrators. Everybody wants to think that they will be the hero of conscience. And that’s where I think there’s some false consciousness in the sort of mass marketing of the human rights brand to everybody these days. Everybody is human-rights-this and a human-rights-that. But, you know, if you look at statistics, in societies that have gone off the rails, the majority of people behave badly; they don’t behave well. And I don’t think that suddenly everybody is being so forgiving by righteous human rights doctrine that they will behave well.

Most of us don’t know who we are, because we’ve never been tested in an ultimate way. It’s interesting to me as a writer to look at places where people have been tested, but it’s obvious that all of political energy and life should be dedicated towards living in a society where nobody else has been tested. Which is kind of an awkward thought, right? What makes America a largely very habitable place, wherever one sits on the political spectrum, is that for the most part, we’re not forced to make such extreme choices, and everybody can get along a lot better with your neighbors and everybody else if you’re removed from that. That is what political and civil life ought to be organized to spare one.
Writers

Ana García Bergua

Ana García Bergua was born in Mexico City in 1960. She is the author of the novels El umbral (1993), Púrpura (1999), Rosas negras (2004), and Isla de bobos (2007), as well as the short story collections El imaginador (1996), La confianza en los extraños (2002), Otra oportunidad para el señor Balmand (2004), and Edificio (2009).

Paul Cunningham


Paula Ciewske

Paula Ciwske’s second collection, Ghost Fargo, was selected by Franz Wright for the Nightboat Poetry Prize. She is also the author of Upon Arrival (Black Ocean), and of three chapbooks.

Contributer Notes

"I belong to the school prison like I do everyday and the only real light is the library option during eighth period study hall."

Most Likely to Have a Bitchin’ Summer!

Toshiya Kamei

Toshiya Kamei holds an MFA in Literary Translation from the University of Arkansas. His translations include Liliana Blum’s The Curse of Eve and Other Stories (2008), Naoko Awa’s The Fox’s Window and Other Stories (2010), and Espido Freire’s Irlanda (2011).

Jason Lester

Jason Lester is the incoming managing editor at Web Del Sol Review of Books, and has new and forthcoming work in elimae, otoliths, and Poetry International.

Erin Lyndal Martin

Erin Lyndal Martin is a poet, fiction writer, music journalist, and critical prose writer based in Madison, WI.

Lisa McCool - Grime

Lisa McCool - Grime loves Sappho, wallflower women and collaborations. Her wallflower women are or will be appearing in DIAGRAM, Painted Bride Quarterly, Verse Wisconsin and elsewhere. Poemeleon, PANK, and elimae are some of the journals that have published her collaborative work. Tupelo Press awarded one of her poems first place in their Fragments of Sappho contest.

Kathleen McDokey

Kathleen McDokey’s work has appeared in forty journals and ten anthologies. Her books are Whatever Shines (White Pine Press), and October Again (Burnside Review Press). She also translated French poet Georges Godeau’s fourteenth book of prose poems, We’ll See (Polar Press). She lives with her family in Middleville, Michigan.

Erin Murphy

Erin Murphy’s fourth book of poems is Word Problems (Word Press, 2011). She is co-editor of Making Poems (SUNY Press, 2010). Her works have been published in numerous journals and anthologies and featured on Garrison Keillor’s The Writer’s Almanac. She is associate professor of English at Penn State Altoona. Website: erin-murphy.com

Most Likely to Become a Mermaid

Most Likely to Write for Harlequin

"Spell Check is my Guardian Angel."

Paula Ciwske

Paula Ciwske’s second collection, Ghost Fargo, was selected by Franz Wright for the Nightboat Poetry Prize. She is also the author of Upon Arrival (Black Ocean), and of three chapbooks.
KEVIN MCLELLAN is the author of the chapbook Round Trip (Seven Kitchens, 2010), a collaborative series of poems with numerous women poets. He has recent or forthcoming poems in journals including: Barrow Street, Colorado Review, failbetter, Horse Less Review, Kenyon Review Online, Western Humanities Review, Witness and numerous others.


SIMON PERCHIK is an attorney whose poems have appeared in Partisan Review, The Nation, The New Yorker, and elsewhere. For more information, including free e-books, photo, his essay titled "Magic, Illusion and Other Realities" and a complete bibliography, please visit his website at www.simonperchik.com.


LUKE REITER works as an editor at a weekly newspaper and writes mostly about municipal bonds and people shoplifting at Kmart. He lives in St. Paul with his wife, Ashley, and their greyhound, Lola.

KEVIN SHEA lives in Brooklyn, NY and is a graduate of the MFA program at The New School. He works as an editor of computer programming publications. His poetry has previously appeared in Forklift Ohio, Unshod Quills, Asinine Poetry, and The Equalizer.

“Most Likely to Contract Sun Poisoning”

ASHLEY STROSNIKER’s poetry appears in Fifth Wednesday, Word Riot, and Unsplendid, and her prose appears in DOGZPLOT and decomP. She holds and MFA in poetry from the University of South Carolina, where she served as Editor of Yemassee. She currently lives in Charleston, SC, where works in the publishing industry making other people’s books.

DENNIS JAMES SWEENEY lives in Kathmandu. His work is upcoming in DIAGRAM, Mid-American Review, PANK, and elsewhere. He is, like, totally psyched to be in this issue of dislocate! He likes countries, and trails, and never ending plates of dal and rice, and... well, he likes you! Have a great year! LYL!

“Most Likely to Secede”

CHRIS TAYLOR lives in Madison, Wisconsin where she writes for various amounts of money and is occasionally mistaken for politicians of the same name. Her poems have appeared in the Madison Review, decomP, New Wave Vomit, elains, Verse Wisconsin, and others.

“Most Likely to Be Somewhere Else”
Kristoffer West Johnson earned his BFA from Minnesota State University in Mankato. Shortly after, he began work as a studio artist, exhibiting and selling original paintings and drawings as modern day folk and fine art in the Midwest. Embracing a wide variety of influences from the classical to modern day freak folk and punk art, Kristoffer has developed a unique style that now transcends into a variety of mediums.

"Is something art because you hang it on a wall?"

"If you want to follow a man you first need to find his shadow on the ground..."
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a profile of spoken word / hip-hop artist Guante
interviews with Jenny Bouly and Philip Gourevitch

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