

...thewritersblock...

august two zero zero nine

issue number three

greetings.
issue number three has arrived.
there are a few things of (possible) interest to you that should
be said before you begin reading,
so here goes:

1)

The Writer's Block is no longer an "I" project. With pride and pleasure, I would like to introduce two Assistant Editors to the magazine: Amberlee Boulton and Teilo Moore. They are both established and (of course) aspiring writers, and I look forward to their insightful outlook and helpful criticism in future issues.

2)

We have finally established an online forum! Please check it out at <http://thewbmag.proboards.com> and feel free to speak your mind. You can register or comment anonymously as a Guest. Either way, we have introduced several topic threads already, the most crucial of which focuses on the central mandate of the magazine: that the accessibility of writing should trump all other considerations.

3)

I have approached photography and pictures of artwork differently in this issue. Instead of using images to illustrate the texts, I have set each image on a page of its own, with title and author displayed up front and on top, just like the literary pieces. I was inspired in this approach by Sigfried Kracaur. His thoughts on the interaction between images and text simply blew me away: "The invention of illustrated magazines is one of the most powerful means of organizing a strike against understanding. ... The image-idea drives away the idea. The blizzard of photographs betrays an indifference toward what things mean." (Siegfried Kracaur, *The Mass Ornament* 58). Kracaur goes on to observe that this photographic blizzard "does not have to be this way" (58), and I agree. Thus, images will no longer function as decoration in *The Writer's Block*. As a magazine, it will be illustrated only in the sense that it will contain illustrative artwork, whether straight photography or photographed pieces of art. Hopefully, the value and meaningfulness of every image included in the magazine will increase as a result.

So...read, revel, seek fulfillment, and blah blah blah ENJOY!

Ben Gehrels
Editor, *The Writer's Block*

issueNUMBERthree

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The Writer's Block including, but not limited
to, essays, artwork, photography, poetry, and
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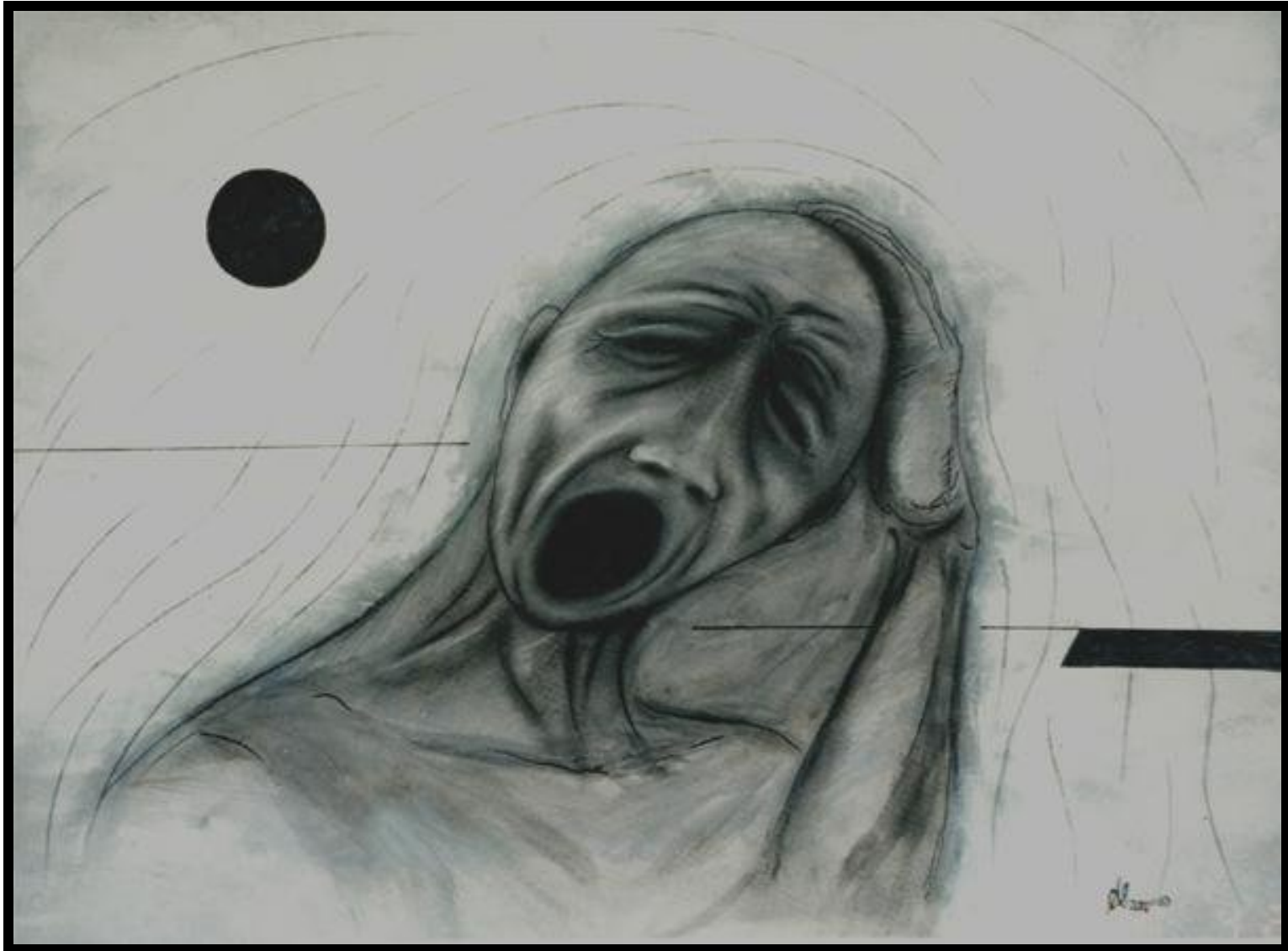
bandipur

kathmandu

alley storm

neon serpent

Alpha et Omega
A.J. Isbister



Sarnath Monks

J.Demie Ocean



Common-Law

Amberlee Boulton

Tightening at the thought of you
used to feel good.

Now I reek with the stench of rust
Dried blood and salty seed mixing in a tiny pool under my belly
I don't have to look
Only endure your probing cock and fat belly
slapping against my most private skin

You Philistine
Fat and Spoilt
Covering me in sweat, hair and come—
My cunt a platter you gorge

What a luxury
To experience the flesh
And not be preoccupied by the soul

Wrenching disgust
I choke back bile crying your name
The track of my tears cuts through the splatter of your seed

This is when you cry out,
Hold me,
Apologize
"I'm sorry baby, come to bed
it's time to sleep."

A Miscellany on Bones

Joe Girard

i

...and as we discussed last semester the army ants leave nothing but the bones. So the picture you get is of a skeleton, animal or human, usually already dead, but sometimes caught and killed at unawares, laying on the ground in a physical expression of...some amusing variety. I say amusing because if you look at, say...this still...yes, you notice how the elk's skeleton seems to be in the middle of performing some ballet. And these human remains, found and photographed in Yellowknife provincial park, seem to be engaged in the most ecstatic love making of their lives. Or after-lives. You see how nature has a sense of humour? You look at these pictures, class, and you almost get the distinct impression...that the army ants wanted you to see it this way...

ii

The light coming in from the crack in the shed door was skinny as paper, but enough to bounce off all the metallic spades, and shovels and bicycle parts and make the interior bright enough to see each other. Johnny and Crissy snuck away during a game of wink murder the adults had organized before abandoning it for drink and small talk.

"It's not?" Crissy said, poking it slightly and shivering with excitement. Her eyes watered and she salivated. She wiped all her ten-year-old moisture into her shirt sleeves and refixed her gaze.

"Heck, no," Johnny said, still holding his sky blue shirt up to his chin, trying not to look down. "Mom says bones don't shrink and grow like that. Mom says bones take your whole life to

grow up big and huge, like parents's are, and take the whole other part of your life to shrink back again, like grandparents's do. That's what mommy says."

"Mommy?" Crissy said and giggled, poking it again and watching it nod up and down like a dumb kid in class, the kind that agree with whatever teacher says. But it wasn't just like a dumb kid, she thought. It wasn't dumb. It was like an invitation. It was saying yes, yes, more of that. Like a dog getting into the way its head is being rubbed. But why this made her eyes water, and her throat wet she had no idea. "Mommy touches your bone?"

"It's not a bone!" Johnny shouted, and then they both stopped, listening for the sound of approaching feet across the lawn grass. In a flash, Crissy was on her feet and Johnny let down his shirt and pulled up his pants in one gesture.

"It's a bone." Crissy said after a moment of silence. "It's just a different kind of bone." To which she added: "Idiot."

iii

The bone collector's name is Teresa. She's 94. Says her name means Lamb of God. She's got everything. Don't know where her wealth comes from. Lives in an apartment below a dentist's and above a private dick. Has a '64 Chevy with five hundred thousand miles on it.

She's got everything. Serious stuff.

A bat. A squirrel. A baby hammerhead shark. That one straight from Cuba where hammerhead shark skeletons wash up all the time apparently. What she has you won't believe. Elephants. Yeah, and you'll find a way to ask her – like a joke is how I did it – if she's got any human parts around. And she'll surprise you. She's got everything. Cute stuff. Hamsters, cats, gerbils, dogs, horses, you name it. Not the whole tip-toe, no, no. But parts. Parts of everything. Up there between the dentist's and the private dick. It's not an apartment, really, it's an office.

She never leaves anymore. It's like Noah's Arc in there, but without the shit stink, but that's worse. The no smell. The smell of bone. Every bone.

iv

So this skeleton's walkin' down the beach, comes across this lady with no arms 'n' no legs, sun-bathing. Goes, "Help me! I can't reach my sun lotion. I'll burn!" So skeleton grabs the bottle, even wipes the lady down. 'N' he's gonna keep goin' but then she goes, "Turn me! Or I'll burn." So skeleton, kinda bugged now, comes back 'n' turns the lady over. 'N' she's friggin' heavy, even without the arms and legs, so now he's really bugged. He's gotta go have his walk, right? Blow off some steam. He almost gets away 'n' the lady goes, "Bone me! I'll burn!" So skeleton comes back, bends over, scoops up the lady, hucks her in the ocean and goes, "There, now you're boned!"

That was the last joke dad told me before the accident what killed him.

v

In May of 1996 news reporter Henry Dawkins' wife Eileen is killed in a car accident with a reefer. Her corpse is photographed covered in Ocean Liner brand fish sticks. Henry moves to the Canadian Maritimes to live with family, unknowing that the salt in the air would heighten the chances of his watch strap corroding. The watch was a gift from Eileen, the face plate made of fused shark teeth.

Ten years after his arrival in Cape Breton, the salt-air got the better of the strap and it snapped, slipping off his wrist while kayaking, disappearing into the black deep of the Atlantic, fading like a memory. He capsized himself to retrieve the watch, the only piece of Eileen he kept after the incident with the fish-sticks. He

resurfaced a memento shorter. And a finger shorter, the skin around his index knuckle serrated, as if the watch itself had bitten back.

An irate Henry then writes “Less Fish, More Food,” an article that wins him the favour of many local restaurants, one of which invites him to dine for free if he’ll agree to a photo op. Sadly, for the owners of Bite Size Sushi, Henry dug into his meal only to discover that this was not his first encounter with the fish, by way of finding his undigested finger, lodged in its insides. The panicking owners, looking to make amends, brought out a second plate this time covered in the Bite Size’s trademark bite size sushi rolls. Henry issued a warning to the proprietors and took a roll off the plate. He chewed it satisfactorily at first, smiled for the cameras, and shook the owner’s hand. Then he began choking, rocketed his table into the crowd of photographers and reporters, waving his arms in the air like a palm tree in a hurricane. One photographer managed to scramble over the thrown table, grab Henry from behind and save his life. But no one noticed as the nickel-sized shark-bone watch cascaded out Henry’s flapping mouth, over the terrace railing and back down into the icy Atlantic.

Spectator Sport

John F. Buckley

I’ve been making an effort to read more lately.
Television was really entertaining for a while
but got to the point of seeming as though it were
poking me in the third eye with an antenna.
It was funny the first time it happened, but still.

Now I’m reading pieces that aren’t always obvious or even accessible. Or sometimes even good. But, you know, I want to expand my horizons and make an attempt to become more extensive, to spread myself like *pâte* across my life, a nice thick layer.

What I really want the opportunity to accomplish, while I read instead of working out at the gym (since I had to adjust my priorities) is to find some writer, someone whose writing I can call “supple,” whose lines are supple lines, lithe and agile.

“Damn,” I’ll go, “Those are some supple lines!”
I’ll watch them bend and make shapes I didn’t know,
forms I hadn’t thought, though I excel at grammar.
I look forward to experiencing a sinuous stream
of diagonal eloquence, rhythmic gymnastics, poetic athletics.

And then another writer will writhe into view,
a stylistic wrestler, a mound of sinew and thews
(also a pleasure to say), a rope tangler who can
wrangle tropes to fit his or her will, torquing
ordinary concepts into wrought ornamental vines.

So I read a little more, hoping for the mat and the rodeo,
trying to keep my balance as my toes hit the beams
set before me, trying to ride the pommel horse,
to break the palomino, to forge figures that add up,
shine, shoe a steed. I read and try not to slip.

When I Die

John Grey

What if I get sent to the wrong God.
You didn't shave your toes,
paint your testicles red,
just like I said you must.

What's obeying all ten commandments
to some guy who shakes his head,
says, it was there in the book all along...
swallow twenty seven ants a day
then stand on your head in a corner.

What if he says, sorry,
I didn't ask for prayer
but names of trees spelled backward
then banishes me to the devil.

But what if it's the wrong devil.
No fire, no brimstone,
just a bunch of men and women
slouched in chairs,
eating peaches,
listening to some guy
ramble on about how glad he is
they didn't boil their fingernails,
wear purple shirts,

to make that old fool happy.

Apartment 4B

John Grey

Going nowhere is not just for cynics now.
Sentimentalists are free to cry out from the ruts.
I've taken an apartment in a seedy neighborhood.
I may fall in love with rats while I'm here.
And the moon doesn't just rhapsodize.
It rises slowly in my gut.
Likewise, it's not just geese that migrate.
A thought fluttered in a field this summer.
Now it's bedded down with winter,
mating with all the crap the weather's done to me.

There was a woman who clasped to my wrist like a charm.
She's in bedlam now with a hole drilled through her head.
And a family offered me money in lieu of affection,
hence the greasy nickel in my hip pocket.
I thought childhood glimmered bright
but now I've sunk it in with all the deeper meaning.
A street corner preacher decides I need a religion.
And to save time, he gifts me one of his.
I take it back up to my room with the sour milk
and bread turning green on the surface.
I've gone from trusting to trial lawyer to trembling.
And now I even have a God.

I sure am disowned by the best.

Blue
J. Dennie Ocean



Gorkha
J. Dennie Ocean



First Birth

Melissa Schuppe

Pushing you out of me was like
the fear of everything
twisted up in wet, searing pressure.

You didn't even let me get my bra off
before elbowing your way out—
always your way,
from that moment onward—
pushing and pressing.

When they laid you on my belly
not gently—
there was no empowerment.
That would come later,
after soul-shaking relief that it was done.

And nothing was harder
and nothing was ever simpler
than pushing you into existence.

Treasure

Melissa Schuppe

I pulled a handful of change
from the washer today.
The soap and the water had
made the coins shiny, copper and silver colliding
off the bare bulb above me.
There beneath the cobwebs and the
mold
in the basement
I held it in my hand like treasure.

I took it upstairs and dropped it
into the change jar
on the pine shelf,
that jar you used to keep your tobacco in.

From which the children
steal out all the silver,
leaving the golden pennies behind.

They

Steve De France

Here is perfume of crushed roses,
a framed Jesus walking petaled walls,
here they walk between doilies & new testaments.

They appear like polka dot flowers in jersey,
plugging up passages in supermarkets,
counting paper clips, unfolding coupons,
cashing a single cheque each month.

Not like the exaggerated women of Baudelaire
thrown like a projected skeleton before a Paris sun.
But quietly--some drawing breath in pain
they come back to their room,
where long into the night climbing moon
they listen to distant police sirens
& whirling helicopters
street sounds--squealing tires--women screaming.
They start at each real and imagined sound as
terrorists from the television news

come for their sex,
they touch bibles & check
the locks & chains again.

Will the sun ever come again?

At last the first frail flashes of sunlight
show a preamble—then the genesis of another day,
opening with sure fingers white reality
a mailbox a 97 chevy a black dog
a milkman or is it a mailman?

They rise to fish teeth in glasses.
Take tea in a hand painted tea cup,
never mind its chipped, things simply are.
As they open the window shade
to stare at the new grey day
death does not seem so real now.

It is not unquiet in a quiet room,
It is quiet in a quiet room,
here is perfume of crushed roses,
a framed Jesus walking petaled walls.

Car Accident

Timothy L. Marsh

Driving by the football stadium at Bridgewater State: the watch-me-not obese girl walking around the rubber track, so large and mournfully lonesome that even at 35 miles-an-hour I feel sorry enough for her to arrange the first line of a heartbreaking poem, when suddenly ahead of me the Drake's Coffee Cakes truck brakes to make a turn and I jelly into its rear 35 miles-per-pity, shatter my face against the wheel, opera gongs and coolers of brow blood, and that girl just walking along, not a glance at the commotion, fists balled, speaking clear as day: You asked for it.

Psychotic - Tuesday June 11th, 1996.

Michael Weems

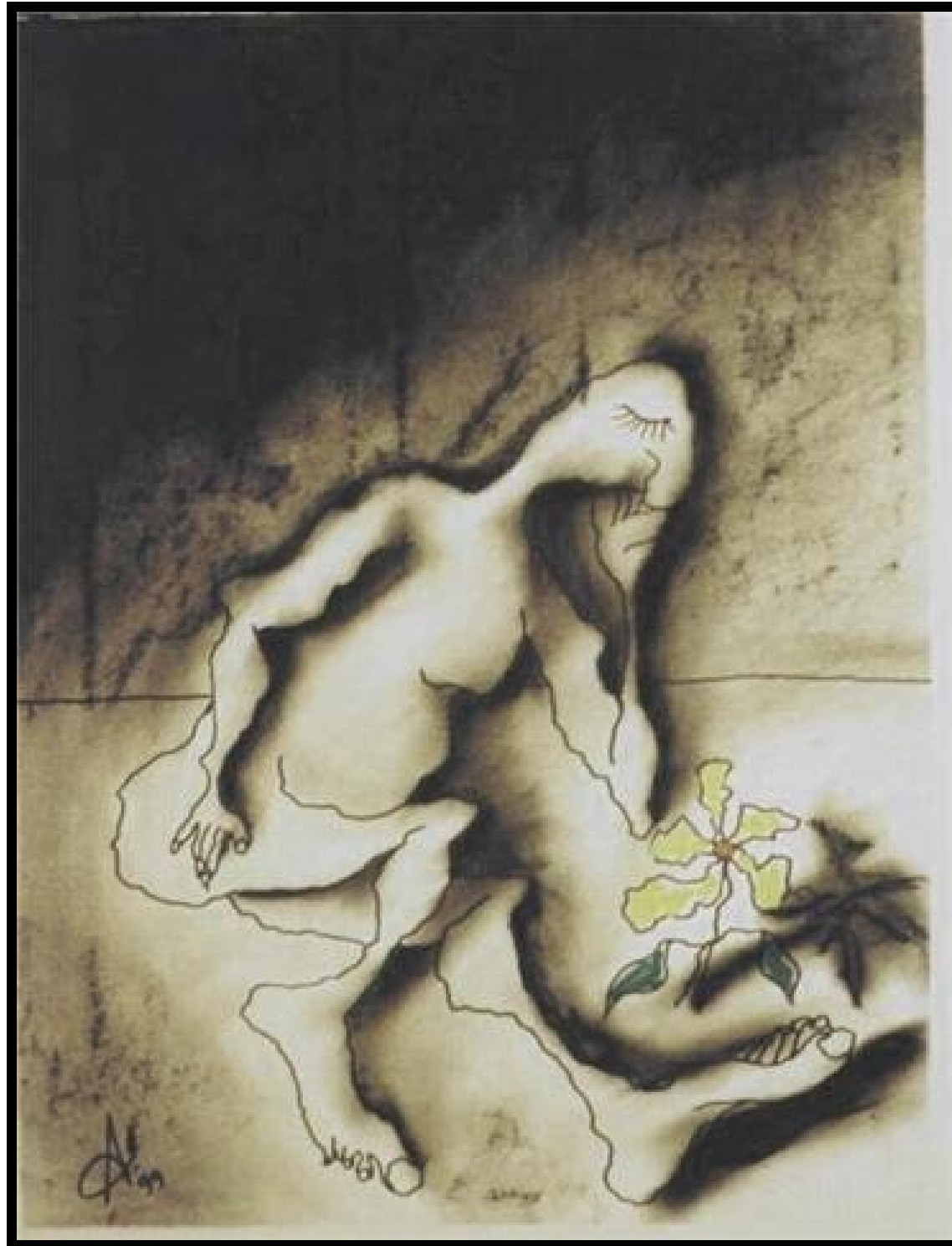
Old man, canoe settled in the middle of the lake.
“Bet you think a seventy year old man couldn’t do
A hundred push-ups in the middle of a canoe, now do ya?”
I stand, my dog at the end of the leash, both of us stare.
Before I can even evoke a simple response, he continues,
“I’ve been in the circus since I was fifteen,” he yells.
“What!? You don’t believe me?
I’m gonna put this canoe on my van, that’s my van over there.”
A woman jogger passes me as I walk slowly to my car.
I greet her and in the distance hear the old man start up.
“Bet you think a seventy year old man—”

Black and White Angel

Adam Jefferies Schwartz



Dreamer
A.J. Isbister



Spoonfuls

by Stephanie Werner

1. (Love)

Pain seeps in, botulism in the cans
that sit in the back of Elisabeth's pantry for decades
stacked ten deep: a protective wall
of canned corn and cherry pie filling.

Days of baking before our visits
apple pies, cherry cheesecakes, two of each
extras stacked in the freezer out back.

All our favourites laid out in excess,
watched us eat every bite before offering more
conditional second helpings.

Her arms, strong from mixed batter
and scrubbed floors, gave ferocious hugs.

2. (History)

Wartime escape from Russians into Nazi territory
smuggled onto the train
cross-dressed in a swastika'd uniform.

Transplanted far from her father's vineyards
most of her family lost.
Post-War, recovered her mother
only to be martyred by the burden
imprisoned by memories, paralyzed by the past.

Immigrating across the ocean with three young children
welcomed as kin by cousins

who were strangers.

Mute at the market – no English, no French
working, always working
cleaning the toilets of Westmount Jews.
Bit her tongue against the truth
of the Holocaust (editing the history
of her brother's role as a Junior SS.)

3. (Irony)

Housekeeping handicapped by arthritic limbs
invisible dust collects in far corners.

Laundry lies in musty piles she forgets to fold
once her house smelt of Parisienne Javel water
and Downy fabric softener,
the laundry team rumbled every day.

Her expression of love cut off (from the stove)
too many forgotten pots boil over and burn.
She confuses unwritten recipes
for muldoshes, spaetzle, and strudel.

Her pride and joy stretching the dough
like a parachute across the dining room table
strong fingers pressing from underneath.

Holes are an embarrassment –
my mother's strudel dough is full of them.

4. (Time)

Today, to her, it's 1972 – she complains
about leaving Canada and all her friends
dragged south of the border.

Once she doled out shopping trips
to the worthy ones, forced others
to wash their own piss-stained sheets.

Her battered life rafts
slip through holes in her memory.
Now there are great-grandchildren
whose names dive off the tip of her tongue,
disappearing like her eldest son's children
from their places in frames on her wall.

5. (Dependence)

Her heart (she says) is failing ever since
her Pomeranian died, over ten years ago.

Her last dependant's abandonment
caused her chest to tighten.

Poor runt of a dog – doomed from the start
found cowering amongst her litter.
A vulture swooped in and snatched her up,
fed on her dependence.

Her tiny legs never allowed
to grow stronger – barely walking for herself
cuddled and coddled, called mine schaeetze
until she died in Elisabeth's arms.

6. (Home)

Perfume-scented prison
smells of orchids
as if the wallpaper had come to life.
Blooms flourish placed in a line

in the bay window
fragile purple petals.

Trapped there with her plants, she would prefer
to shackle herself to the four-poster
surrounded by her precious artefacts
from the Home Shopping Channel
and never leave.

7. (Communication)

She stutters over forgotten English words.
One day soon she will lapse into German
her Schwabian dialect misplaced in upstate New York.
One day I will no longer understand her,
the only words she taught me:
“grossmutter” “muchenbacher”
“ich liebe dich.”

8. (Reality)

She calls at good moments,
complains nobody visits hoping that I will
bring my children – forget the last time.
The screams and tears, betrayal of joy –
I nursed the baby to escape the bickering
which leached through particleboard walls.

Her reality is: like her crocheted afghans
multi-coloured and full of holes, cold seeps in
no matter how snugly wrapped.

My reality is this: I must protect my children
from being force-fed with loving spoonfuls.

Push

Carmen Faye Mathes

There's a lingering smell of poopy diapers in the air, and it doesn't help that the next presentation topic is constipation. It's me that smells like feces, there's no denying it, the damned house is steeped in it, and Clara can't seem to stop crying long enough to take out the bins. I don't push her. I went out the other day and bought one of those body-sprays for men. It makes my nose itch, but the packaging assures me that it works, and also seems to suggest that a better sex life might be a fringe benefit. It's called SupaChill Deluxe, Designed to Initiate Intimate Interaction, and was only \$5.99 at Shoppers Drugmart. I lay the stuff on thick, though I'm not sure I trust the results—a haze of icy scent cloys to my stinking self.

I've arrived at the restaurant early, it's four-thirty and the wait-staff haven't even changed into their uniforms. There's a girl putting wine glasses on the table, she's wearing a bouncing tennis skirt and one of those no-bra sports tops. I rate her an imperfect ten (eleven being the top of my own personal scale). I watch her breasts ebb and flow as she leans over the tables, depositing the crystal in a perfect pattern. She has a way of holding the glasses upside-down by the stems, looped in her spread fingers. She must have ten or eleven in one hand—in only one hand!—impressed, I christen her Crystal Stemware, and imagine her as a sexy cross between Carmen Elektra and Martha Stewart.

Peeling my eyes off Crystal, I survey the room and realize that, much to my dismay, the restaurant staff have already set up the screen and the projector. There is an orange extension cord coiled on the white lined table, and a power bar. Everything is ready already. They have even supplied the roll of duct tape that I

had to ask for last time. I plug in my laptop. I walk around the room purposefully, inspecting the tables for cleanliness, for completeness. They are clean. They are complete save the glasses, which Crystal Stemware is doling out, one by one. I pretend to professionally scrutinize the angles of the chairs. They appear to be at good angles. No one will have a problem seeing the speaker. I sit down at the front of the room. My pungency follows me, and I wonder if Crystal Stemware has noticed. I might be inclined to upgrade her to a ten-point-five—she has great skin, tanned and freckly all over. Her calves are muscular and small. She has the same tiny wrists and ankles as Clara.

I understand that the comparison is not a good idea the instant I think it, but there, it's been thought and now it leaps up on me like a terrier-dog, raucously greeting my entrance into this house of rotten images. Right in front of me, the vivacious and buoyant Crystal, and inside my skull, the image of my pale and bruised-looking Clara. Her body, shoulders, eyes, face, ribcage, sunken like a shipwreck, and her mind preoccupied, blocked, shielded, unassailable even to allied forces. Clara, who had once floated by my office as the most definite eleven, has since become un-ratable.

Remembrances of the old Clara compete with nightmares of the new. They flash like a PowerPoint projected behind my eyelids. First, Clara is cha-cha-ing flirtatiously towards me in the hot pink dress with the thigh-high slit from the Salsa party last October. Then, she is on the couch with a snotty quilt tucked up under her chin, staring blankly in a way that seems to look inwards; when I look in her eyes I can see clear into the back of her skull. First, she is perched on the kitchen counter, happily reading Zadie Smith, reciting the funny bits out loud in a British accent. Then, she is lying on the floor in our bedroom with all the windows open and the rain blowing in; covered in goosebumps and shivering, refusing to cover herself. Finally I see her as she has been everyday since: wearing only her mother's graying bathrobe and loose-fitting sweatpants, her face broken out in

pimples and that she picks at, sometimes, until they bleed all over and I have to tell her to get a Kleenex or something.

Since the baby died, Clara has lost her vitality. People tell me this is understandable.

Crystal Stemware leaves the room and I am alone. I give the dogged memories a good kick and they yelp and turn tail. I repeat “live in the present moment” about seven times inside my head, and remind myself that I am paying for a one of those phone-therapist services, I am overlooking all the long distance calls to her mother in Switzerland, I am purchasing Bombay Sapphire at an alarming rate. Clara just needs time, and I must focus on where I am right now.

Look around: the banquet hall is filled with spaces for people to fill. Count it out: eight tables of eight, sixty-four chairs, 128 wine glasses, 384 forks and knives. Focus. I take out my newest deodorant-spray and spritz my chest and shoulders, and then my crotch for good measure. I wait for the speaker, Dr. Geong, to arrive, and for my invitees: doctors who are being seduced with free food and wine and a nice evening out.

Last week, I called their offices to confirm their attendance, telling them, come for the free meal, stay for the hour-long pitch on our newest pharmaceutical achievement! Today’s topic is “Constipation Relief in Palliative Care Situations”, today’s drug is Reddigo, and today’s special is Galloway Beef Tenderloin with Cranberry and Truffle Jus.

By five-thirty, I am very bored. I click on Dr. Geong’s PowerPoint presentation and flip through the slides, though I’ve already seen it once. Yesterday I asked Dr. Geong to email it to me so for “review”. I was curious, I guess, but also fed up because Clara wasn’t speaking that day. She had locked herself into the den and was folding all the baby clothes into a new arrangement: colours.

The day before yesterday, it was sizes.

The thing that happens when you have a baby is that all sorts of people give you all the old dirty baby things that they have been storing in their crawl-spaces since they had their last child. People are endlessly charitable, coming by to drop off bags of broken toys and moldy-smelling pajamas.

All the pajamas have feet attached, which means that you never get any baby-sized socks. This is something I noticed, the lack of socks. I asked Clara once if we should buy some, but she was laughingly ambivalent, “We can wait a bit, and see if it’s a boy or a girl, and see if it’s a big-foot or a little-foot.”

That last month of her pregnancy she had been amiable and I had been charming. We had had everything: each other, a child coming, and enough faded baby clothes to insulate our basement. I had been charismatic at work, being put in charge of the newest, most important drugs on the market. I was ascending while Clara was expanding, and the baby was getting ready to exit.

Crystal Stemware comes back into the room with two wine bottles held in the crook of her arm. I say that I only really want to taste the red. She pops the cork in that quiet, professional way where they just ease it on out. She smells the cork dismissively (I lean away from her searching nostrils) and dollops me a taste. I swirl and sniff and drink, pronouncing it “fine” so that she will get on with it and fill my glass. Alberto Zenato and I have recently become quite good friends.

Suddenly the door bangs open against the wall, and Dr. Geong hurries in. I resist the urge to look at my watch, though it must be six o’clock by now. The massively built doctor greets me with a hand held out that barely reaches past his joyful belly. We shake, and his palms are dry but moisturized. He feels like baby skin. I want to feel his hand again, but he pulls away and his arms hang beside him, increasing the hugeness of his girth.

I say, “Welcome to Toronto. I’m Nathan Moore, the rep for Multibye Pharmaceuticals you’ve been dealing with. How was your flight over? What is it, three hours from Calgary?”

He responds by stretching his meaty arms above his head like a sleepy child and yawning enormously. He does not cover his mouth. I can see his tonsils, like he's a cartoon lion about to eat my head.

"Oh the flight was cramped. The food was untouchable—you know, the regular way of things. Have we got the PowerPoint all set to go here? People should arrive by six-thirty?"

"Yep, everything's organized."

Crystal Stemware, who has been hovering, senses her moment and comes over. "May-I-offer-you-a-glass-of-red-or-white-wine-or-something-else-to-drink?"

Dr. Geong asks for a Diet Coke, and is informed that all they have is Diet Pepsi. This information seems to throw him, and he actually pauses to contemplate his options before ordering a club soda and limejuice instead. He then ambles over to the projector and begins to fiddle around.

I watch him, and try not to gulp my wine. I want to engage him in conversation, something to keep my mind off Clara, but I am afraid of bringing my smelliness too near. I concentrate on sipping slowly, and soon enough I am slipping wholly into those memory traps again...

So I think: the worst part about watching Clara is the way she drags her feet around. She no longer bends her knees sufficiently, so she walks as though manacled by the ankles, sort of skating across the hardwood floors in my big old slippers that don't fit her, making this awful scraping noise. It's like having Mr. Burns skulking around the house.

I want to tell her to go barefoot, like she used to. To tip-toe upstairs and surprise me in my study, with Irish coffee or cookies. I know this is selfish of me, but when I tried to bring her hot cocoa she left it on the counter for a week and a half, until it became foul and cheesified. When I brought her cookies (store-bought, but they were Bakery Fresh!), she looked at me and said, "You'd think someone in your position could find me something a little more potent than cookies." I told her she needed a

prescription for that, and to go to a doctor she would have to actually leave the house. That had been one of our big fights, where she had become hysterical, screaming, "Don't you have any fucking SAMPLES!?!?"

A crowded hubbub has begun, and it interrupts my thoughts. The doctors are starting to arrive. I regard them, trying my best to look attentive and professional. Probably 90% of them are underdressed for the occasion: I spot two pairs of scuffed white running shoes, and an old guy in Levis 501s. One woman is actually wearing a baseball cap with her ponytail pulled through it. For all their education, doctors are surprisingly etiquette-inept. I already know that most of them will not know how to use silverware. They will clutch a salad fork in one hand and a fish knife in the other while navigating their beef tenderloin. I once did a drug presentation for a group of lawyers and did not have these problems. I greet the doctors cordially and hand out name-tags.

Unlike most of my and Clara's friends, I really enjoy my job. It's not just the wining and dining: it's that I really do believe in the product. I believe in drugs. Now, I know there is a lot if anti-multinational pharmaceutical sentiment out there, and maybe some of it is valid. A lot of people are put off by all the media hype around things like Vioxx with the heart attacks, and SSRIs with the suicidal inclinations.

But for me, the bigger picture is that drugs improve lives, and drugs save lives. When someone can manage an illness like schizophrenia, for example, then they can begin to live their lives, instead of living their disease. Or what about diabetes? For a diabetic, insulin is not an option, not an elective; insulin is life-support, and without it, they would die. And of course there are things that make our modern lifestyles possible: things like birth control, acne medications, pain killers—where would we be without them? The pharmaceutical industry would not be a multi-billion dollar enterprise were it not delivering real successes—and for me, success is relief from suffering.

Once everyone is finally seated, I settle myself right at the front of the room, dead center. Dr. Geong begins explaining that people who are in palliative care—situations where there is no hope of a cure and they are just being made as comfortable as possible—are usually hopped up on so much pain medication that they can't even see straight. Dr. Geong says that a little-known side effect of this is that painkillers can cause constipation. For someone who is unable to help themselves, this is incredibly awful. I find myself nodding along. I mean, imagine: you are about to die, and you can't even take a shit.

I look around the room, hoping that all the other doctors are seeing how important this is. Think about it: you are stuck in a wheelchair, say, and you need the nurse to help you onto the toilet. She's an overworked old frau, less healthy than half the people in the hospital, perpetually aching for a smoke. It's late, when you ask, apologetically, if you can please go to the bathroom. Frau Nursie is in the middle of something else when you ask her, but she sighs and heaves you up by the armpits, wrestles you onto the porcelain throne, gets you all settled with your undergarments down around your knees. She leaves the bathroom, but you can sense her standing just outside the door, waiting. And then, when it comes right down to it: Nothing. You can't step up to the plate. No movement.

What then? What if you are sharing a room with this crotchety old guy who you just know is judging you from the other bed, thinking that any man—even a man who is about to die—any real man, could at the very least take a shit before he kicks the bucket.

I don't know where I heard it, or maybe it's common knowledge: a good shit is better than bad sex. I believe it. I mean, there is something so invigorating about getting it out of you. It's so satisfying or something—

My cell phone rings. Loudly.

Mortified, I leap to my feet and hightail it out of the room, the pixilated sound of "Ode to Joy" chasing my nerves to

the door. Once I'm standing in the restaurant's foyer, I check the call display: it's Clara.

Annoyed, I say "Hey."

"Baby,"—she has always called me baby—"Baby I don't know what to do. Zoloft got into the garbage and there's a huge mess everywhere. Everywhere! It's everywhere, Nate! It's disgusting—the smell, it's awful!"

Zoloft is our Jack Russell, the first step we took towards being a family instead of only a couple. Clara wanted to name him Happy, but I was set on being ironic.

"What? He got into the—oh my god, Clara. You still hadn't taken the trash out? It. Has. Been. Months. I knew something like this was going to happen. I just... god. What do you want me to do about it? Clean it up for Chrissake!"

"I... I... Nate it's everywhere. It's all over the tiles, and the carpet. I think he brought it into his kennel. And he was eating it. He was eating it."

I think I am going to be sick. I almost yell, "Just leave the house! Put Zoloft in the backyard, and get out of there!"

"I can't, I can't. I don't know what to do!" She whines, and it makes me hate her, a tiny bit.

I am a voice of iron. "Just go to the coffee shop, it's open late. When I get home, I will deal with it."

"Nate, you know I just... I just can't" she croaks the last word. "I can't."

"You don't want to go? You still can't go out? This has to make you leave the house."

"Come and get me."

"I'm in the middle of a presentation!"

"Come and get me."

"Dammit Clara!"

Now I really am yelling, and I catch Crystal Stemware staring at me from the kitchen doorway. I slam out of the restaurant, out onto the street front. I have the phone pressed so hard to my ear that it is aching. Clara is crying. I can almost hear

her shaking and trying to suppress herself. I hang up on her, just angrily snap the phone shut. I cross the parking lot with huge, ground-covering strides and am in my car and speeding away from the restaurant.

When I get to the graveyard I park awkwardly. Getting out, the driver's side door is too close to a massively overgrown caragana and I squeeze against the vehicle to avoid scratches. My arm is caught anyway, and I deserve the stinging cuts. I stop for a moment, holding myself in check while standing in the wet grass of a cemetery parking lot, wearing navy dress pants and a white collared shirt with blood on one sleeve. Stay in the present moment. Present in the stay moment. Stay in... I start power-walking up the shale path, the tailored cuffs of my slacks swinging about my ankles comically. I am not running. Instead, I am: arms swinging, butt wiggling tightly, slight paunch rebounding with each step, legs stretching to their maximum—not running.

I do not know any other part of this cemetery, save the part that I know so well. This part: the hill that overlooks the faraway city center. The hill that is green and neat, with trees perfectly spaced apart, roots leaving room for other things to be buried. There are only a few graves a little ways away, because this is my family plot, and I have never, in my twenty-seven years of life, had anyone die before.

My parents are still living; my grandparents are still living. My great-grandparents I never met, and they are buried somewhere in the Ukraine. All my aunts and uncles, my brother and his wife, my cousins and their kids, are fine and well. I have never been to a funeral. We didn't have one for the baby. Honestly, dead babies are embarrassing; they make people cringe.

And besides, who had she known besides us?

My grandparents, ever the pragmatic immigrants, had bought themselves a plot in this cemetery in the same week that they bought the land where they would build their house. It was just as important to them to be together in death as it was in life, or in the afterlife, I guess was how they saw it back then. This left

them with no money to build the house, of course, so they squatted on their own land for six months. They dug a latrine so they could go to the bathroom in the place where they planned to have a garden later on. So practical! Every August, my grandfather will proudly boast, "this all from our garden. This all come from us." The rich summer boon, beautiful big heads of lettuce, small flavourful carrots, basil and rosemary, chives and dill that come back year after year. My grandmother tends to the garden still; she's brought her own flowers to this grave every Sunday since it happened.

The tiny headstone is white marble, soft and new. It looks clean.

Toilet bowls always look clean too, even though you know they're filthy.

Dammit! Whenever I am here, my brain takes me away again so I cannot concentrate on really being sad. When I'm anywhere else all I can think about is what is here, what is only here, what has ceased to be. But then, standing here with bowed head and melancholy shoulders, I cannot stop my mind from being elsewhere, can't stop myself from thinking, upon looking at the little grave, that no one at the restaurant knows where I am, and Dr. Geong has probably finished speaking. I wonder what the restaurant will do about the bill? They probably have my corporate credit card number on account. I imagine the confusion of Crystal Stemware as she tries to explain to her boss: "I saw him yelling on his phone, and then he just left! I dunno where to—I just saw him run out the door and drive off." I try and push these thoughts away. I look at the grave. It is so clean.

The inscription says,

Annie Clarabell Moore
May 12, 2008 to June 14, 2008
Time we were not given
but love we gave, and give forever.

My cell rings again and I ignore it, knowing Clara is heartbroken by my rudeness. My memories of the baby are all mixed up in memories of her. Even when that little body was out of her, it was still part of her. Attached, mouth to nipple, enclosed by arms. A tortoise-baby; indestructible.

When Annie was home with us, in her crib that I built from the Ikea Kit, she would look up at me and I could see Clara in her little face. They had the same turned-up eyes. Annie's were dark, almost black, but Clara had read somewhere that they could lighten, and I knew that they would turn out to be Clara's particular shade of hazel. And the smells! The baby smells: soft warm talcum-powdery smells mixed with saliva and sometimes tears. I would put my nose in Annie's belly and blow raspberries and breathe her into me. Clara's arms, her breasts and stomach all began to smell of Annie.

I sit down on the grass beside the grave, and begin tearing up the petals of one of Oma's bouquets of dead flowers. It has dried out, and the petals look like baby-pink confetti as I sprinkle the grave.

Annie died in her crib, at 3:00 in the morning, without warning, without signs, without struggle. She just died. Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, or SIDS—such a friendly sounding acronym. Like the name of the kid you used to play ball-hockey with down the street. I know what's really going on, though. By calling it that, it lets the doctor off the hook from knowing what actually went wrong. Our doctor said SIDS like it was self-explanatory, then, seeing our confusion, he added some stuff about brain-function problems, abnormalities in the Medulla. He looked at me to see if I knew what the Medulla was, so I said, straight from last week's presentation, "Autonomic functions: breathing and blood pressure, swallowing and defecation." The doctor looked shocked, but I was too tired to elaborate, and then he got really excited and started blathering on about serotonin levels. But it was all maybes. Maybe this, maybe that; we're not sure how

you could have prevented this, but maybe... I am not someone who enjoys uncertainties. I want answers, and I want to know what the appropriate steps are to fix a situation. But there was no fixing this, there is no fixing a dead baby.

My phone rings a second time, and I flip it open. I don't say anything, but I can hear Clara sobbing. In the background, Zoloft is barking. She must have put him in the yard. He'll have the whole garden dug up by the time I get home. Clara is making those hiccupping noises and sniffing loudly.

I say, "I am coming home and I'm gonna get you out of there."

I walk down the hill with the phone on my ear, not saying anything but just listening to her breathing become more regulated. I crawl my way back into the car, getting a few more scratches.

Traffic congestion in Toronto makes everywhere far away. I drive for forty minutes. The entire time, the phone is held at my ear, and Clara and I breathe together. Neither of us says anything.

As I approach the front door I can see Clara sitting on the chair in the mud room. She is not wearing my slippers. She has on flip-flops, jeans, and an oversized U of T hoodie. I open the door and stand in the doorway, holding my hands out to her. She rises and comes to me, and we are standing on the actual doorway together, which is raised off the floor by a couple of centimetres. It is not very wide and slightly uneven. I fear slivers. We hold onto each other, halfway between inside and outside. Clara is no longer crying; she looks all dried out. When I kiss her cheek, it is salty. I lick her face from her jawbone up to right underneath her eye, then follow the path of her dried up tears with my tongue. She closes her eyes and I kiss them. Then I take her head into my chest, and lose my equilibrium and kind of teeter backwards out of the doorway and she comes with me because we are holding each other and she is loose and awkward and out of the door, and—out—into the world again.

The Behemoth

Mitch R. Murray

A poet's work is to name the unnameable, to point at frauds, to take sides, start arguments, shape the world, and stop it going to sleep.

– Salman Rushdie

All I ever wanted was to know what to do.

– Dave Eggers (You Shall Know Our Velocity!)

1. The brewing of the Behemoth

It took time.

I wrote my first real poem seventeen months ago because in high school writing poetry was for faggots.

1.1. A mentor who would later be understood

An Orpheus of the jazz guitar though he would never admit it,
he had played with John Taylor and Kenny Wheeler.

But he taught high school.

He once asked me:

How do you become a millionaire as an artist?

Start with two million.

And he laughed and laughed.

He should have grown his moustache like Confucius .

2. Eat, drink, and be merry

The litanies of my contemporaries:

shotgun, jägerbomb, pornstar. For the white kids
in the bread aisle: patrón (as if they knew how to drink it).

I scry the future in its corked glass duomo.

So crack a bottle.

Slated,

raided,

I have become jaded

and cringe every time

I hear them tell someone they texted them to tell them they facebooked them to tell them they'll call them.

Ill txt 2 u ltr (:

[after I read 60 odd happy birthday!s from people I don't even know]

Everyone has fmylife bookmarked; a compulsive twitch.

Today, I realized I'm a poet. FML.

When was the last time any of them picked up a book

besides the ones they're

unconditionally and irrevocably in love with?

I read the past, yes, on paper, that's right.

It tells of times before they

chopped up deep-fried the last dodo birds
to make the first mcnuggets,
before mcdick's ejaculated its special sauce
on the greasy consumers' tongues.
They deserve and avn award
for best group scene.

And as the oil slips to the bottom of the trash heap,
soaking the newspapers

(Obama say that
more casualties in afghanistan while trying to bail out
gm fucks the transformers market assaulted
by a shooter in a fitness club police say
michael vick will return to the nfl)

I cho-k

-k

-ke on the french fry troposphere of the downtowns and wonder

am I the only one scared by the fact that
there are only six students in a writing class soon to be gone,
that Rostropovich will never play another cello suite?
Will I be ostracized because
my guitar hero is Andrés Segovia?

And the quite-frankly-sickening answer is Yes, I am, I will,

yes, until I learn to stop worrying and love the

ts ts ts ts
bom bom bom bom

of music.

Grind grind grind and crack another bottle.

The synecdochical Behemoth

ink-splot pen grip,
weariest eyes, brow thought-creased,
poetry, not bills, in wallet

is here to fight its leviathan.
Our mortal kombat.

FINISH HIM!

They are too engrossed by “people.”
We live in a new Gotham.
Who won the race to post Heath Ledger’s date of death on wikipedia?

3. An elegy for the Joker

We do live in a new Gotham
and Gotham is Joyce’s Dublin.
A dirty sonofabitch,
sadly mainstream.

It's an Alexandria burning,
where the people devour
hummingbird tongues
and lick the
sugar off grapefruits.
It's a "Desolation Row"
and it's crammed with
21st century thin men.
What were you and what am I?
An agent of chaos.
An artist. Poet.
But you? You reached masses.
Then death digested you into the
pulpy shit of tabloids.
(FATALITY!)
And they gobbled that up too.
Gorged themselves on it
while talking about toxicology and statues
until they threw it up
to make room for desert:
jon and kate and michael jackson
You were one of me
and I am one of you—
a joke.
We are anachronisms.

4. We

Now, artists are reclusive cliques.
Painters are mute,
musicians are exclusive,
and writers are
as pretentious as a Jane Austen novel.

My generation learned to cry
on 9/11.

Now we watch the towers
fall to “The Flower Duet”
on youtube, like a movie trailer.

Now we’re Palahniuk nihilists
who pump multi-vitamins
from pez dispensers,
piss yellow gatorade,
and brand ourselves with lululemon.

5. The holy war that launched a thousand ships Or: A box-full of vendettas

Bless me, father, for I have sinned. This is my first confession:

I try my best to love, but then I see shit like season twenty of big brother and it makes me hate people

who use improper grammar who choose people's choices who get their news from perezhilton who wear skinny jeans with american apparel cardigans
and scarves indoors and whose bona fide indie style is designer
who can tell you everything about Darfur except that it's in Sudan
who drink fair trade coffee because that extra philanthropic buck is equivalent to a trip to the third world and who leave tea bags in their cups so that everyone can see the dangling tab that says Organic! Look how much I care!
who have become Hawking parodies with qwerty phones
who go to wendy's with exact change and still think obesity is a disease
whose six-year-olds go cuckoo for cocoa puffs while playing call of duty
because as responsible parents they're too worried about whether dumbledore is gay!

The priest sits munching eucharist wafers "Do you repent all of these sins?"

"No, not really."

Munch munch "Technically you have to mean it."

"But I don't really. I don't even know what I'm doing here. I have to say: the kids in Jesus Camp are more terrifying to me than terrorists."

"Then just say you mean it." Munch "And hurry. American Idol's on."

"Just say it?"

'Yeah, everyone does. Then you do a few ave marias and we'll call it square.'

'Square? Just like that?'

"Well, in your case we'll throw in some our fathers, but yeah."

"Jesus Christ."

"Did you know christ means 'the anointed'?"

"Like a garlic bread."

“This isn’t worth it. I could stay in this damned confessional until you die of starvation.”

(Keep eating that malnourished corpus christi.

Too bad you’re pro-life; you could scramble some yolks. Then at least we wouldn’t have overcrowded trailer parks.)

6. An adjourning:

Back to my saturated world,
where we live like Doberman Pinschers in a box.
Where, moustache-less, I laugh and laugh.

Interested in having a review published in The Writer’s Block?

We are currently looking for writers to review “Verus and the Grand Assembly of Believers” by Gravenhurst writer Wendel Messer. Messer's new book holds religious figures up to ridicule and examines the price the world pays for indoctrinating its young in other-world fantasies. Here’s a brief teaser:

The story unfolds in the middle of the next century. To escape the world’s insurmountable problems (a wall separates Canada from the US, now a fundamentalist theocracy), science is giving the human race an upgrade. The faithheads are worried they may not be included. The plan connects in a fundamental way with the West’s Roman past.

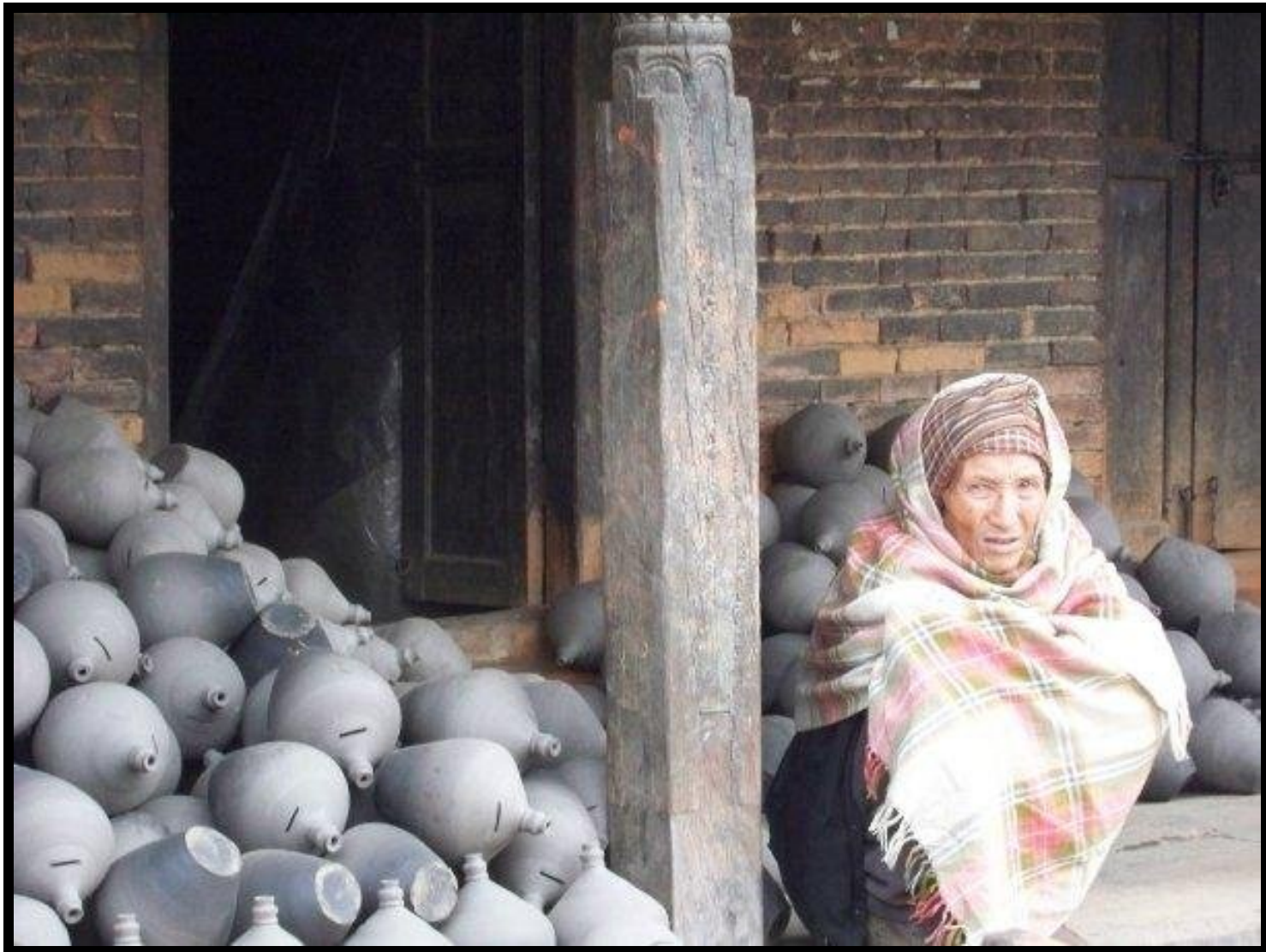
More info on the book can be found at: <http://www.thesink.ca>. To receive a review copy, send your credentials to the author: wmesser@thesink.ca. Then send your review to Writer’s Block. If your writing is up to scratch, your review of “Verus” will be published in Writer's Block.

Bandipur
J. Dennie Ocean



Kathmandu

J. Dennie Ocean



Alley Storm
Steve Ausherman



Literary Locker Room

Pam Calabrese MacLean

ALL
of
my
poems
are
short
p
e
n
c
i
l
thin.

Yet I strut
the literary locker room,
exaggerating
h e f t
& g i r t h
& w o r t h.
Lending singularity,
plumping moments past,
hinting (nudge, nudge, wink, wink)
at wonders yet to come.

And know precisely
how men feel
about their penises.

Baroque Music

Pam Calabrese MacLean

Baroque music
brings me
to this cathedral
turns my head
toward flowers
kept
from sunlight,
women
bound,
and children
torn
away.
Virgins on this altar
wait
for a man,
tall and gaunt,
his black tongue,
unholy as love.

The Fat Fabulous

Changming Yuan

easy-going, they
gab; they
grin; they
giggle; they
guffaw; they
gossip; they
goof off; gooey

Chanson of a Chinaman*

Changming Yuan

ching chong, coolie
chink, shina, chonky
so was i called a dragon of barbarity
a born rogue holding the laws of truth in deformity
because i ate rats, dogs, slugs and snakes
i began with anything but genes of true humanity

ching chong, coolie
chink, shina, chonky
so am i made a dead enemy of civility
growing grotesque against values in white reality
because i hate freedom as much as human rights
although i have the right to be a human entity

ching chong, coolie
chink, shina, chonky
so i will be seen a species of non-conformity
an inflated satan beyond the borders of christianity
as long as i'm pig-eyed, crow-haired, the farthest other
i must be treated as a real demon only

*A parody on 'Chanson for Canton' (London: Punch, 1858), a telling example illustrative of the deeply-rooted and long-held western tradition to demonize China as culturally the most disparate Other.

Mice in a Fish Tank

Howie Good

Old students remember me
saying things
I don't remember saying.

They say I said,
"Never write a boring sentence –
never."

They say I said,
"Work your life around your art,
not your art around your life."

They say I said,
"Talent is dedication."
And maybe I did.

It sounds like something I'd say,
a dead flashlight
masquerading as music.

But what I should've said was,
Avoid the jealous notice
of the assistant prosecutor.

I should've said,
Conspire with would-be celebrities
against sleep.

I should've said, Bark
as if you were
mice in a fish tank,

or the tattooed heart
of a drunken sailor,
or the heretic upstairs

getting ready for a date.

Death to iPhone

Avery Dumont

Today I drowned your iPhone.
Its cute, electronic face
looked up at me through
the water
 in the kitchen sink
 and blinked for dear life.

The little
square-framed body
didn't struggle under my grip, but accepted that I,
 the human,
 knew best.

You know all of your
games,
phone numbers,
text messages,

and photos of Efron, Foxx, and Clooney--
who you claim
 are close,
 personal friends?

Yeah.
They breathed their last radio
frequencies.

Two bubbles floated up from the
rectangle,
 then it went dead;
 all radiation ceased.

You're crying for your loss of money,
connections,
and you look at me like I murdered your best friend.
 Have I?

But, I finally have your full attention.
I can tell you again that my dog, Yeti,
 has died,
 and I'm crushed.

I can tell you that you responded the first time I told you
by saying, "Great,"
because you were touching your iPhone.

Neon Serpent

Steve Ausherman



Blackbirds

Emily Stephens

Gasoline marbles scattered onto
The pavement. I saw your
Reflection in the rearview
Mirror of a neighbor's car
Just as I ran into it
Winded myself
Gasping on the ground
Gravel in my elbows
A split second head crack
Against the bottom of the
World, they tell me
If I dig deep enough I will
Discover China
But I am only looking for
Blackbirds
Buried
By my mother
To see what death looks like
Through the eyes of a child,
Picking weeds to see if
I can pass them off
As flowers

Currency

Jason McCall

I watch a wolf catch a young boar in its jaws
and it makes me jealous and angry at Adam,
evolution, or anything responsible for giving
the animals of the world their names and dominions,
for deciding that men should have eyes and ears too
weak for the hunt, feet too slow for flight, and skin too flaky
and thin to bear the touch of the seasons. When a bird shits
on my car I doubt it's daydreaming about being me,
trading in the wings and migration patterns for a four
cylinder engine and clocks that can never keep pace
with the sun. Why can't there be an interspecies
bazaar? Some market in the ruins of Eden where I can offer
my opposable thumb for a boa's unhinged jaw,
give up my reason for a bull shark's bottomless
hunger, and swindle the raven out of its intimacy with heaven.

Vancouver When it Rains

Adam Jefferies Schwartz

You can film any first world city in Vancouver: there are quaint houses with picket fences and unruly gardens, concrete apartment blocks from the seventies and modern skyscrapers with all the amenities. If you want a slum, we have that too, druggies looking as addled as anywhere does.

Vancouver is my home and it's not my home; it could be anywhere. I could be anywhere.

We tried to have discussion groups at my college; it didn't work, people kept agreeing with each other too quickly. All this agreement, however, should not be confused with actual agreement. You can't even take for granted that anyone is awake.

Still, I live here. I'm alone most of the time. It rains.

But rain is too simple a word to convey the full variety of wetness. There is, first, the darkness. Some time in October the sun retreats. Light becomes depressed, muted, not its usual self. She gets lazy, heart broken. She's unable to rouse herself until later, later in the day. Mornings start at eight, then at nine and then even later. What follows is a hungover version of brightness: muted, fuzzy-tongued grayness. You remember all your most embarrassing moments, in slow motion. It looks like used cotton balls, it hums with the soft whine could have beens.

It smells of regret.

Rain.

Adam Jefferies Schwartz

There is: the near rain, the come on and rain already, the light misting, the "it's good for your skin", the swirling torment, the darkness but no rain, the bog, (the relatives who come for a visit and then don't leave and they don't find work either). There's the steady pissing down rain slowly eroding what's left of your nose, your shoes and your self-control. There's the gusty rain that destroys umbrellas on contact. There's the slightly heavier but not yet full rain that's just enough to confuse taxi-drivers, who blockade the street. There's the constant rain—a house full of toddlers and their steel drums.

Nothing dries out, not ever. After a week, after two, after three, you understand introversion. After four, after five, after six weeks, you understand pessimism.

The rats are catching cold, poor things have little red noses; you consider what you can do for them— lacing the garbage with menthol maybe.

I'll tell you what there is not. There is no warm, tropical rain. There is no big bang rain, something noisy, something dramatic, something that's over quickly and makes you feel cleaner afterwards.

There's no clap of thunder, either.

Shelter

Roy Berger

Yeah, that space ship shaped church is still there. I imagine that most of the people who were living there in the seventies are still there too. If not in the same houses, probably within a few blocks of where they always lived. It was a village really.

The bus stop and bus shelter were a focal point in my life. I was there every day at 6:25 AM or 6:45 AM to catch the 58 bus and begin my path to work on the other side of the island. One morning I noticed that the thick glass sides of the shelter had been plastered with sheets of paper. They were of the three ringed and lined variety and were inscribed by ball point pen. They were protest messages claiming that a particular hair tonic was manufactured by the devil and would cast everyone into hell and that the government was complicit. Duplicate original pages were blowing all over the sidewalk, all with the same content and each hand done. It made me think of Rod but I knew he couldn't have created them.

The last few years, during the summer and often in the winter, Rod use to sit on a bench in the shelter and watch the world unfold. He had an apartment right next door to it. It was on the corner beside a Depanneur, kitty corner from an elementary school, across from a Catholic church and also neighbour to a Parisian butcher shop. The trees were forty to a couple hundred years old and the lawns were still a decent size. Anyway, Rod was normally sitting there or on his front steps and he always had a friendly greeting for anyone going by.

“How are you, Roy? You're looking good. So young and strong – may God go with you.” It was a ritual with him.

He died a couple of years ago. I guess he was close to fifty. His next door neighbour hadn't heard him making sounds for a few days and called the landlord. Upon entry they discovered he had died. Rod had diabetes and it was assumed he had gone into a coma and died in his sleep. He'd neglected his insulin on occasion and had difficulties in the past.

Rod was fairly thin and stood about five foot nine. He pretty much wore the same clothes every day and usually had a days' growth of beard. His teeth were broken, missing and both yellow and black. Brown coffee and tobacco stained drool was usually flowing over his lower lip and onto his shirt or jacket.

“Did you hear, Roy?”

“What's that, Rod? Hear what?”

“It's NASA.” Rod said. Rod always pronounced NASA as NAAZZAAHHHH in a long drawn out drawl. “They proven that it's NASA. NASA with their blue lasers. They're murdering us all!” His eyes danced around a bit behind his glasses and his thermal coffee cup danced cold coffee over the brim. You didn't have to know Rod very long before you understood his concerns about NASA; the American space outfit.

Rod had lived in the neighbourhood for most of his life and moved across from the church about five years earlier. The church with its out buildings and lawns took up the front of the

entire block. The architecture was what austere Gothic Catholic money built at the turn of the last century. Above the thick semi-circular wooden doors was a large stone statue of the Madonna, that is the Virgin Mary, mother of Jesus.

Anyway, when I had just started up this used and rare bookstore Rod use to come by on his bicycle and trade odd theological pamphlets. He spoke of NASA a lot but he had a real strong interest in the Virgin Mary and was searching for particular information published by particular religious sects that dug his line. It was clear from his physical condition and single minded pursuits that he was gone. Gone somewhere. Many mornings I'd find him sitting on the store steps shooting up his insulin. Over time I shooed him away because of his loud ranting. I did it friendly like because after all he lived just around the corner and had his own front steps.

He also liked to shoot up on the front steps of the church. Sometimes Rod would go to Sunday service. In addition to some of Rods' conditions he also had Tourettes' which came with uncontrollable sudden verbal outbursts. When the tic hit his words were out of context and repetitive. Rod had a tenuous relationship with the French Parish priest who in the end relented and allowed Rod to sit on his steps, sometimes all day, shouting, "You have all been murdered! It's a beautiful day, Shirley – God loves you. NASA is murdering us all. I'm gonna talk to God and he's going to throw them all to Hell! How's your cold, Shirley? You're looking good."

I went to his place once for dinner. His three room apartment was neat and tidy. It was sparse. He had his bed, couch, turntable-stereo, Montivani and Tschaikovsky records and a few shelves of religious tracts. We had a pink chicken dinner with cold mash potatoes and gravy. I couldn't wait to leave. It was an

awful evening but I left smiling and thanked him and was booked up after that.

He told me once that he used to teach chemistry at McGill. Then one day he changed and, "...it's NASA shooting blue lasers causing the biggest disasters. They are murdering us all. We've already been murdered."

He would quiver and puff his cigarette. His pants were soiled. "The Virgin Mary says she is gonna have God cast them all into Hell because they are eeevillll! Did you hear what happened in New York City...at the World Trade Center? That was terrible. It was NASA with their lasers. I just heard it from Tommy over on Fourth Avenue. He goes to St.. Anthony School. God is going to cast them all into Hell. Have you got a cigarette?" And then he might yowl for a bit.

One time he came by with some small medallions to drape around my neck. They were of the Madonna and from Madjugoria. When I opened the store he came by with a Polaroid camera and had me hold up the store sign. He took a few pictures. Weeks later he showed me the receipt for a registered letter he had sent to the Vatican addressed to the Pope with my photo. In the letter, he said that he didn't want me to be murdered by NASA and that I was good people. It cost him seven dollars. My file grew on both sides of the ocean.

He'd sit on the corner or ride by on his coaster bike. He liked garage sales and church rummage sales. He chain smoked and was looked in on twice a week by somebody from the city. Passing by his house one could sometimes hear him growl, "You've already been murdered."

The last few times I saw him was in January 2002. He was

wearing brand new boots that, “...Mrs. Fenshaw bought me. And new pants and look at this new coat, Roy. Is it ever warm. Mr. Gauthier – he’s the city’s case worker.. He said I needed new clothes and gave me five hundred bucks. If you ever need anything, Roy. Just let me know. I’ll call Mr. Gauthier for you. NASA, NASA is sending blue lasers. You’ve already been murdered.” Thick brown drool was leaking from the space between his teeth and hanging in drops off his chin.

“Thanks, Rod. You’re looking good. Stay strong.”

You can believe I got some twilight zone laughs from the neighbourhood regulars after 9/11 when I insisted that Rod was probably the only one who knew what was going on and that he should be our leader...

The first thing I thought of when I heard he’d died was that Rod made it to Heaven. If there was ever a guy who preached the word it was him. It would be a surprise otherwise. I have this funny wispy image of his Heaven. In it I see Rod. He’s perched on a chair, smoking cigarettes and drinking instant coffee. He’s hanging out at the Pearly gates with God himself because they’re big buddies. I see this procession of surprised and horrified NASA executives as their time has come. A laughing Rod points at them – spittle flying - and a side splitting, knee slapping God casts them into Hell with Rod shouting, “You’ve already been murdered.”

What to Do When You Encounter a Poem That Looks Like Broken Spaghetti Dropped on the Floor

Pat Tompkins

Turn the page.

Writer and Artist Bios

Stephanie Werner is a poet, writer, teacher and mother of two who currently resides in St Albert, Alberta. A graduate of Concordia University's Creative Writing program, her poetry has also been published in the online journal Four and Twenty.

Avery Dumont graduated from McMaster University with a double major in social work and sociology. Her short story, Twenty, Four, and Seven, was published in Issue 9 of Sorrowland Press' Dance to Death in March of 2008: http://www.sorrowlandpress.com/index_files/D2D_Willms_Issue_IX.html. In February of 2009, she had an article featured in the West Niagara News. Her novel, The Language of Thunder, is currently ranking number six in the Top Ten Novels, as chosen by the readers on theNextBigWriter (a closed forum where writers can improve their craft by receiving constructive criticism from fellow writers): www.thenextbigwriter.com / <http://www.thenextbigwriter.com/marketing/top10.html>. She will be seeking publication for her novel this year.

Raised in the Detroit area, John F. Buckley has lived in California since 1992. He teaches English at Orange Coast College and does some writing and editing on the side. Please get on his bandwagon now, while he's meek and humble, before success rots his character and he explodes in a maelstrom of pie-hurling and self-aggrandizement.

Howie Good, a journalism professor at the State University of New York at New Paltz, is the author of eight poetry chapbooks. He has been nominated three times for a Pushcart Prize and twice for the Best of the Net anthology. His first full-length poetry book, LOVESICK, is forthcoming from The Poetry Press. Visit his Web site at <http://apocalypsemambo.blogspot.com/>,

Changming Yuan grew up in rural China but currently lives in Vancouver. With a PhD in English, Yuan has had poetry published or forthcoming in Barrow Street, Canadian Literature, London Magazine, Queen's Quarterly and more than 150 other literary publications worldwide. Yuan's first collection 'Chansons of a Chinaman' is forthcoming from Leaf Garden Press in September 2009.

Carmen Faye Mathes is a PhD candidate in English Literature at the University of British Columbia. She likes really expensive wine and really cheap take-away curry. She had been previously published in the Takahe (New Zealand).

Steve Ausherman is a poet, painter, photographer, potter, fly fisherman, wanderer, and high school fine arts instructor who lives in New Mexico. His photographs have recently appeared in 580 Split, South Loop Review and can be viewed at Color and Light Gallery in Madrid, New Mexico. His poetry has recently appeared in Decanto, Bear Creek Haiku, The Aurean, Avocet, and THE Magazine.

In the last year Timothy Marsh's work has appeared or been accepted in several literary magazines, including The Crab Orchard Review, The Nashwaak Review, The Newfoundland Quarterly, The New Quarterly, Green Hills Literary Lantern and The Oregon Literary Review, among others.

Pat Tompkins is an editor in the San Francisco Bay Area; his poems have appeared in *iota*, *red lights*, *flashquake*, and other publications lacking an initial cap (plus a few with a cap, such as the *Aurorean* and *Thema*).

Roy Berger was recently published in the Feb. 2008 issue of *Monitoring Times*, www.Powderburnflash.com #34 and #131. He is currently writing another great Canadian novel and living in the legendary artists' colony of Cornwall, Ontario where palm trees bloom in the winter and a cool breeze blows in summer.

Michael Weems is a NYC based writer, playwright, and actor. Recent playwriting credits include: *Fragments*, *Waiting Life*, and *Onward, Forward* (Little Hibiscus Productions), *Subtlety* (Algonquin Productions), *Burden Me* (Strawberry Riant Festival & Awakening Drama); *Waiting Life*, *Ready to Shine*, and *Subtlety* (Brief Acts) and the upcoming production of *Fragments* (Manhattan Repertory Summer Festival - July 2009); Recent fiction/poetry credits: *Love Me, As Well* (Record Magazine - Winter 08-09) *When We Reached the Forest* (Indite Circle Literary) and being named the poet of the month for 'O Sweet Flowery Roses Literary Journal (October 2008), as well as recent works being published by 63 Channels Literary, *Jump In Magazine*, and *Oregon Literary Review*, amongst others. Thanks to my loves, Christine & Thomas. www.michaeltweems.com

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Melissa Schuppe is a nursing student and mother of four who lives and writes in Lynchburg, Va.

Pam Calabrese MacLean lives in Antigonish, Nova Scotia where she works in the Library of St. Francis Xavier University. She is the mother of three boys and Nonna to one perfect grand-daughter. She is partner, poet, playwright and passionate about all these things. Her award winning poems have appeared in literary journals in Canada, the US and Great Britain. *Twenty-four Names for Mother* (Paper Journey Press 2006) was her first book of poetry. Most recently she was awarded first prize in Room's 2008 poetry competition. Her flash fiction has appeared in two US anthologies: *Women Behaving Badly*, 2004 and *Blink*, 2006. Calabrese MacLean's first play, *Her Father's Barn*, has garnered awards at The London Fringe Festival (2005), Liverpool International Theatre Festival (2006), and The Uno Festival in Victoria, BC (2007). In 2006 Calabrese MacLean co-edited *Flavours of Varmland* for the Varmland Museum in Sweden. Her second book of poetry, 'The Dead Can't Dance', is forthcoming from Ronsdale Press in the fall of 2009.

j ocean dennie contemplates, meditates, wanders, witnesses, creates. He plays and prays and daydreams too. He is only just starting to reveal to the world his photos of encounters with enchanted places and faces.

Jason Mccall is from the great state of Alabama. He holds an MFA from the University of Miami. His poetry has been or will be featured in Marr's Field Journal, Fickle Muses, Straitjackets, The Rose & Thorn, Cimarron Review, and New Letters. He currently teaches English and Literature at the University of Alabama.

Amberlee Boulton is currently residing in Antigonish, NS. Having recently graduated from the University of Waterloo, she is looking forward to not worrying about school, and intends to focus on her creative writing as she shops for grad schools.