



Who Want the World Like It Is?

A 2016 Election Anthology

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Letter From the Editors

It is unclear how the 2016 election, though still fresh in our memory, will be remembered by history: as the dying roar of an Old America, as the year America finalized its metamorphosis into reality TV, as the time a candidate was caught on tape bragging about sexually assaulting women and “won” anyway, as the second time in the 21st century that the popular vote was superseded by a dated and dysfunctional electoral college, as the fruits of Republican’s labors gutting voting rights across the nation, as the race where a vastly qualified woman lost to an embarrassingly under-qualified man, as the election where America got a taste of its own medicine and felt the sting of having its democracy interfered with, or as nothing but a circus sideshow, whose sweating mammals and fiery hoops seem irrelevant in the shadow of our planet’s deteriorating condition.

Yet I know what I will remember. The love and support shown for one another in the aftermath— an aftermath we are still wading through. And those of us who write— well, we had some things to say. I am lucky to have had the privilege of reading submissions for this anthology, for being reminded that there are so many of us out there who do not, and will not, find this outcome acceptable. Their voices have lent me strength and courage, and I hope they do the same for you.

- Kaleb Worst

The election was divisive, but editing this issue connected us with the many passionate writers who submitted. The process gave us the opportunity to interpret the elections through the creative lens of the moving pieces that we read. The feeling of division in the wake of the elections was upsetting regardless of which candidate we supported, but reading these pieces gave us an opportunity to bridge divides and initiate the healing process. It was an honor and a privilege to collect this diverse array of voices and assemble them into this anthology. We hope these pieces contribute to the reader’s attempts to make sense of it all, as they have for us.

- Shelly Robinson

Kaleb, Shelly, and I came up with the idea for this anthology during an emotionally and physically tiresome bout with canvassing in a “true” swing-state: Colorado. Our efforts felt personally tremendous: *can I really step up to another door only to be dismissed / accused / verbally attacked?*, but we questioned the larger scope of our endeavors every day: *are we actually making a difference?* The obstacle we ran into while trying to answer this question was not knowing the quality and quantity of the work being done across the nation. We were only three people, our office, a few dozen. We became fascinated with the strangers we met at their doors and soon became fascinated with the whole country’s attitude and agenda regarding the election. We wanted to know what actions people were taking in order to even slightly influence the results of the election. To quote the submission guidelines, we wished for writing from those who “worked unabashedly on a candidate’s campaign, canvassed with your heart torn open, held obnoxious signs at street corners, started an enthusiastic project...watched and documented the debates, or been stirred to say what needs to be said.”

Then, the election. The results provoked writers to engage in fervent, emotionally-charged reactions to the world around and within them. We read pieces that questioned vitality, survival, peace, with tears stinging our eyes and sweat illuminating the dips in our body like oil on a fried egg. We read copiously for a month. Curating this anthology became a way for us to process what happened and plan for what’s ahead. We hope, reading this, you’ll find the same two verbs pressing at your fingertips.

I’ll sign off with this section from Amiri Baraka’s poem, *Somebody Blew Up America*:

“Who make money from war
Who make dough from fear and lies
Who want the world like it is
Who want the world to be ruled by imperialism and national
oppression and terror violence, and hunger and poverty.”

- Karolina Zapal

DOCUMENTATION OF APOCALYPSE

By *Shawnie Hamer*

11/8/16 12:00 pm:

We move along the day. We move, don't move anywhere but to the inevitable choice, the choice we didn't make, the choices we make. What's wrong? I feel the weight. Don't even think it. I can't help it, it's there living within the walls of this cubicle, the walls of my ribcage. Don't you feel it? What's wrong don't you feel it? Be positive, it's all about to change, "we" are going to make history. My hands are shaking as I light my 15th cigarette, move my hands to something not hot but just as dangerous

11/8/16 4:00 pm / channeling Amiri Baraka:

What happens when you say the words
What happens when you mark the bubble,
drop the folds into a structure
What happens to my body if you've already drawn the borders
What happens when the borders start feeding on flesh
What happens to thirst if poisoned from the source
What happens to the first people, the last
What happens to those stopped on street corners,
intersections of history & hate
What happens to my daughter if I tell her to fight
What happens to the lovers, to those outside
of names & lines
What happens in the counting
adding on fingers & toes until infinity
the victims & slurs
but being threatened
to report nothing
What happens in a vacuum of nothing
wound so deep that if we crawl into it
we are back where we started
What happens when seeds are planted & abandoned
What happens when the vines choke neighbors in their sleep
What happens in the mind of a mass shooter
What happens to fault when faults shift from belly heat
What happens when clouds reflect rally fist-fights
What happens when the sea retreats from war
What happens when language becomes ammo

What happens when language falls short
What happens in a fall-out
What happens when we are always inside
What happens when we have no choice
What happened to choice
What happened to choosing
love
movement
life
What happens now?

11/8/16 6:30 pm:

(Laughter echoes at kitchen table) Why do you keep pacing?

11/8/16 7:05 pm / text from an east coast lover:

I've been thinking about you all month, I feel. If Trump wins I don't know if we can be seen in public anymore

11/8/16 9:07 pm / phone call from a friend:

How's it looking over there? / It looks like me outside, fighting off panic and the spins

11/8/16 9:36 pm / text to stepmom:

Are you watching this?
Yes
I'm going to puke
It's scary, very scary
I don't want my niece to grow up in a world where he is president
Horrible things are coming

11/8/16 11:45 pm:

What if it happens. What if it happens. What if it happens. What if it happens

11/8/16 11:47 pm:

The bigger question is, what are you going to do about it?

11/12/16 10:12 am / phone call from friend:

I needed to vent / I wish we would've branched out in high school and made more friends / I'm noticing more and more how much they ignore and don't care that I'm Mexican / They don't care how this affects us

11/12/16 6:53 pm / conversation in friend's car:

We are only going to survive and make a difference as artists if we develop a system of underground movements now / Like what? / Like meetings, websites, email chains / How can we make it safe? / I'm sure there is a way / There has to be a way, or they'll find us

11/13/16 10:17 pm / excerpt from letter to mother:

Dear Mom,
I am trying to navigate my emotions around your choice, because I respect that it is *your choice*. However, just because the election is over, doesn't mean that this won't keep coming up. The revolution has just begun—the one being fought on my body and the bodies of so many others. I plan to devote my career, art, and life to this revolution, even if it ends up killing me. I am not trying to be dramatic in saying this. It is a very real possibility. Historically, intolerant dictatorships often go for the liberal artists and thinkers first. History is always bound to repeat, and people are always bound to forget that when moments in history like this began, no one thought the scale of violence that occurred was possible... until it was.

I've tried to really investigate and meditate on why I am so personally hurt by the voting decisions of my family. I know we have contrasting views, but this election is vastly different. I think, in the depths of my broken heart, it feels like my loved ones' votes are saying, "I love you, but...":

I love you, but the safety and empowerment of yours and other women's bodies is secondary to my political agenda.

I love you, but I don't care about your work or what you are trying to accomplish.

I love you, but I don't care about the people I know you truly love. The people who comfort and support you as you chase these dreams, the ones I encouraged, the ones I can't always be there to see or help you with.

I love you, but I don't care what might happen to your future children. I don't care if they have water to drink, or if they can play outside.

I love you, but racism, sexism, hatred and bigotry are not as important as the vote for the Republican Party.

I'm not saying that you overtly feel this way, but this is how it feels from my end. Not just from you, but from all of my family that voted this way. I'm also not saying that I am alone in these sentiments. I'm sure (probably especially after this letter) that there could be some "I love you, but" statements from your end, too.

But that's the thing, I don't know how you feel or what you believe. I don't know what fears you have or had about the opposing side. I know you also have things you are afraid to lose, and I

want to understand them.

In the big picture, I really do want our "sides" to work together to compromise and not be afraid of each other. I think in order for that to happen, the work has to start here, in families, in conversations with those we love.

I want to understand all of this from you, my mother, the one who made me the passionate fighter I am today.

I love you with all of my heart. Thank you again for doing this.

XO

Shawnie

P.S. I told a friend about how you and I are going to write these letters, and he is going to do it with his sister. Already good is coming from this <3

11/14/16 2:01 pm / excerpt from Facebook argument with mother's boyfriend:

Shawnie. One fast and sad subject. Not all women survive an abortion. Please see that as a statistical fact. Sad to say but it is true.

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · November 14 at 2:01pm



Remove

Shawnie Luree Hamer Not that this is at all the point of this conversation as a whole, but the largest factor in deaths from abortion are when women are forced to have them unsafely. When they can't go to an actual clean, safe clinic because her country or religion or family or whoever told her that her body was not her say. You know what else not all women survive? Sexual assault, rape, and domestic violence. Roughly 3 women a DAY die of domestic abuse. Trump has made it very clear that this kind of violent attitude towards women is not only okay, but just part of being a man. It's a little ironic, I'm being told it's wrong to have a say over my body, but violent men (including Trump) can?

11/14/16 7:30 pm / in a yurt in Lyons, Colorado:

You can do it afraid

11/16/16 8:06 pm / phone call to father:

I've been sick and just really overwhelmed / Want to talk about it? / The election feels like a death / I think he'll bring jobs back; I think Hillary was going to take away things from us; I think he's just blunt; I think a woman wouldn't have been respected by countries like Russia and Syria / Does this mean you voted for him? / I hope you're not disappointed in me / I am I am I am I am I am I am I am! / That's not fair, I respect your decisions / But you have a daughter, but your granddaughter is mixed race, they are coming for us now more than ever, you helped them do it / Let's pray that doesn't happen / You can pray all you want, but it already is

11/18/16 10:03 pm / phone call to stepmom:

I am so fucking mad at him. I'm done hiding who I am from you guys. I'm tired of constantly defending who I am. Consider this a coming out.

11/19/16 4:00 pm / Naropa protest reading:

"There is a motherfucker on the mountain" – Fred Hampton
Notebook scribbles: *How do you truly honor your shock & sadness? I feel the itch of hesitation. I'm sorry for unloading. I'm sorry for getting upset. I'm sorry my beliefs have made me feel a million miles away. I'm sorry because I'm not, but someone or something pulls at my fingers, from within my cavities, makes me write these messages of apology*

11/20/16 6:38 pm / phone call to father:

Hey Dad, I'm sorry I was so emotional before. Please understand I'm not being dramatic. Please understand that if they get what they want passed the United States will become a militarized country. Please understand that if they start kicking down doors trying to find immigrants, Muslims, homosexuals, transgender people, that I *will* harbor them. Please understand that because I am an outspoken woman, people want to hurt me. Please understand that because I am an artist and activist that they want to hurt me. Please understand that history always repeats itself / I would never do anything to hurt you with foresight, baby / But you had the opportunity for foresight and didn't do your homework, what will you do now? / Listen, I don't care if I have to sell something off, I want you to take a gun safety course and buy a gun. You have to get ready

11/21/16 1:30 pm:

My girlfriend and I were attacked in an alley near the Ogden Theater / Are you okay? / Yeah but I have a concussion and keep dreaming about murdering people / Your body knows you lost power, it's trying to compensate

11/22/16 1:55 pm:

He voted for Trump. I just don't think he understands I'm a gay man. I asked him: Dad, what are you going to do when I'm an enemy of the state?

11/22/16 7:16 pm / phone call from grandma:

Homosexuality is a sin. I know you love your friends but it says in the Bible / It also says a lot of other things are sin that you all choose to ignore / Well, Jesus tells

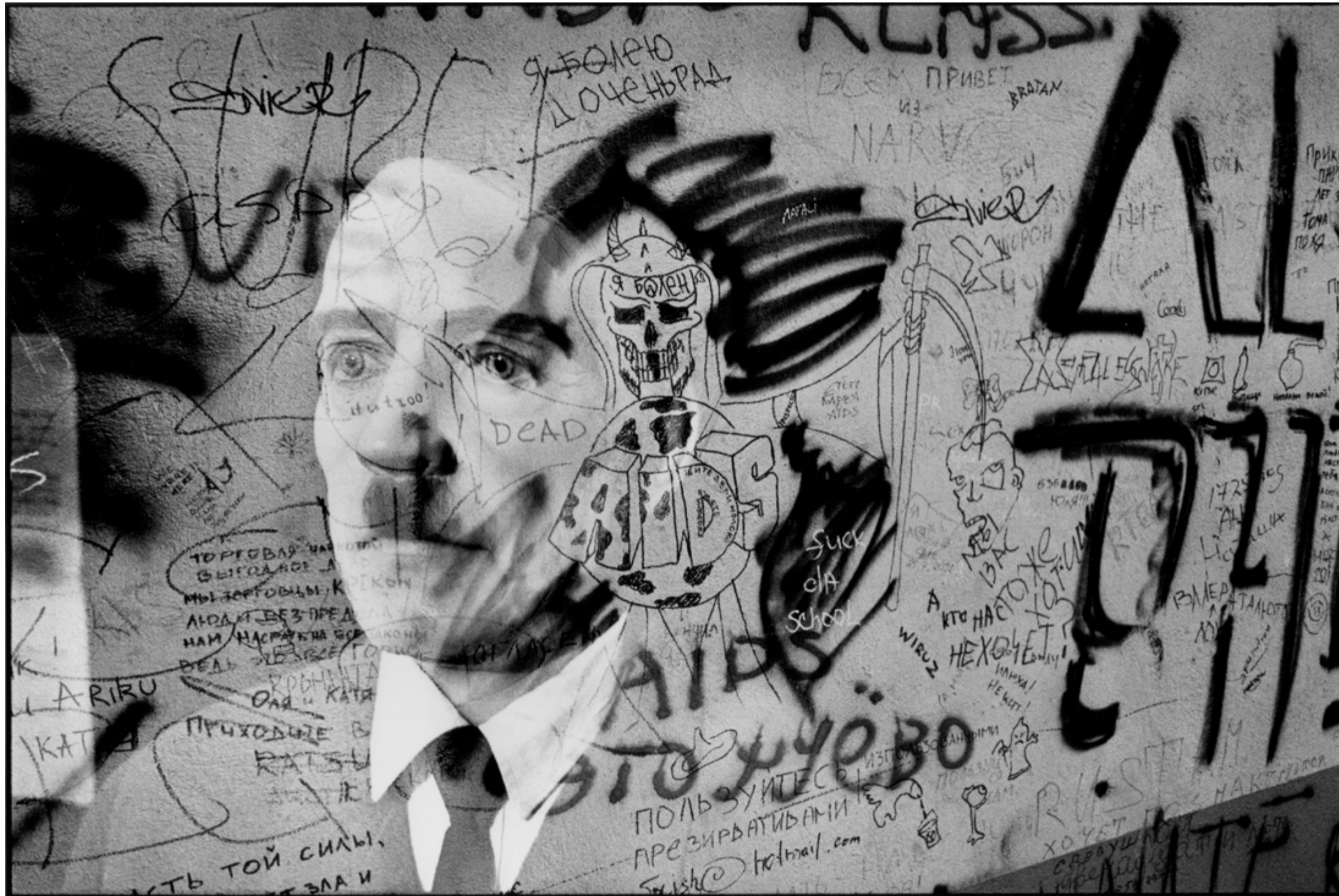
us one law in the New Testament that is supposed to replace the ones made by the rulers in the Old Testament / Which is? / Love one another / Exactly, there are no conditions

11/23/16 5:30 pm / phone call to friend:

I just keep thinking of ways to get ready / I'm getting creepy; my mind keeps going to apocalypse prep- water bottles, canned goods, ammo, ya know? / Yeah, I guess I'm just trying to take care of myself before the war begins, before they start invading / I have hope that this is going to be a revolution toward equality, but I just don't think it will happen without bloodshed

11/24/16 1:36 am / writing Critical Thesis:

Now, in 2016, in the toxic waters of this election, in the midst of the violence being wielded as power toward marginalized bodies, now is the time to love/discover the self, and the force of the wound/womb. Now is the time to reclaim the violation. Now is the time to create as a form of disruption against the dominant. Now is the time to forge an infinite rebirthing of the world through the creation and community of female artists and activists.



Graffiti, Hitler
Latvia, 2002
Harry Wilson

FROM MY WHEREVER

By Lisa Allen Ortiz

Forests down there, cells
and the empire where
cells replicate, slick eye
of rebirth, invisibilia, terror,
mosses, lichen, the kingdom
animalia mud and spit,
spirit-houses, fern-spores,
paths through the forest,
bright mushroom bursts,
orchids with lips and lashes
in cups of leaves, rivers
and mountains, mountain goats
and notebooks and ink wells
and language and the mouths
of babes, the mouths of froth,
the feet of mouths, the heart in mouths
and all that I have to say to you
is *hsth. Vzt Clicking thidbbert.*
I have teeth and tongues
down there. I held my children
there. I hold infinity,
teaspoons, refugees,
peace treaties, lost pieces,
ice picks, tenderness, vocabulary,
urges, humanity.
Yeah. And blood too.

SEEKING MY TRIBE

By Dulcinea Pauzus

You tell me I am a little off these days.
Truth be told, I am broken
in places I didn't know had such cracks,
such seismic vulnerability.

I remember the Japanese tradition
of repairing a cracked piece of pottery with gold.
I want to inject that glue into my own veins,
mixed with the sap from the Chinese lacquer tree.

I cannot escape my rage.

That election night, by 2 am,
I felt violently sucker punched.
I'd anticipated, with so many others, watching
an accomplished, resilient woman take the world stage
with her daughter by her side.
Instead, the bully won.

Like the time my boss at Denny's
called me into the back dining room,
and then punched me in the gut
to give me a taste of what it would be like for me
to exit the restaurant after the graveyard shift
and encounter a lurker, a stalker,
in the back unlighted lot where I was ordered to park my car.

Like the time a man in a Corvaair and a leather jacket
pulled his vehicle to a stop as I stepped off the curb,
demanding that I enter his car,
pointing a gun and a naked erection at me through the window.
I was walking home from 6am mass on a Sunday morning, twelve years old,
with bobby pins stabbing into my scalp
from the Kleenex my mother had affixed to my head
so that I would enter the church in a respectful, humble fashion.

Like the time a professor
asked me to wear pigtails

so that he could pretend I was his daughter
and act out his fantasy of having an incestuous affair with his daughter.

Like the time a teacher
admonished me for wearing overalls and a flannel shirt,
telling me I had no business hiding my feminine curves
from the male gaze.

Like the time my then husband pinned me down
over a washing machine
and attempted to choke the life out of me
because I had the audacity to want to leave him.

Like the time that same husband
commanded I get his gun
and put him out of his PTSD Vietnam misery
when he couldn't fix the leak in the kitchen sink.

Like the time I slept for six years
with that loaded gun on the headboard,
watching him grab and clutch the weapon
even when a racoon scampered across the roof,
trigger finger itching, ready.
Gun at his head. And mine.

Like the time I had a third of my hard-earned pension
legally stolen from me
by a man who didn't bring home a paycheck
for over five years of the marriage.

I don't know what fighting I have left in me.
I have never felt so defeated by a machine
that seems so much bigger and more powerful
than my one lone voice.

And so I join the Pantsuit Nation,
feeling like our private group is walking into a speakeasy with every post
in a town that was quite recently dry of alcohol.
We are women who want to find a safe sanctuary among a sea of map red blood.

I remember eavesdropping on a conversation of women
at a local gym.

Have you seen the new towel boy they hired?
one woman asked the group.
He has a beard. A terrorist beard.
And the motto of this small Kentucky town
is *Best Town on Earth*.

I question whether every person I encounter
voted for their own interests, rather than the greater good.
I knew there was a lunatic fringe,
but the massive numbers who voted for a man
blatantly sexist, homophobic, Islamophobic, and racist
is beyond my comprehension or acceptance.

I keep reminding myself that we've come a long way.
I remember refusing to fetch a cup of coffee for my boss
at a furniture store when I was 14 years old.
I don't remember reading about that duty in my job description,
I told him. And I remember thinking I might lose this job,
that he might simply show me the door out.
Instead, he shook his head, walked away,
and never asked me to refill his cup again.
My first act of assertion in the working world,
my baptism into the world of feminism at age fourteen.

As I see swastikas spray painted on playground equipment in Brooklyn,
as I see *fags* written on apartment doors of women who are married lesbians,
as I hear of a woman in Ann Arbor threatened to be set on fire if she does not remove her hijab,
as I see middle school students build a wall in the hallways of Dewitt,
as I read reports of a noose hanging in the bathroom at a high school,
as I see my ex husband rapidly texting my daughters on election day,
reminding them that the Democrats want thousands of Syrian refugees
welcomed in this country in order to make up for all the babies they killed
through Roe vs Wade and millions of abortions,
as I see the KKK celebrating their candidate's win with parade plans...

I seek my tribe.
I have been fighting my whole life.
This is personal.

I remember when Obama was elected,
and much commentary was made of the fact that
he speaks in full and complete sentences.

That he didn't use sound bites
to reduce complicated ideas down to pabulum
digestible for an attention span challenged audience.
And now I watch a man who has the vocabulary of a third grader,
who speaks in slogans that can be chanted at rallies,
thrown out to a crowd like pulsing red meat,
step into the Oval Office.
Believe me, he says.
And they did.

I thought we were all, mostly,
hungry for the same things.
Civility, provocative discourse,
an examination of issues, inclusion,
embracing our beautifully diverse country.
I was wrong.
This country has elected a man
who spit "wrong" and "such a nasty woman"
into the debate stage microphone
when his opponent was speaking in full sentences.
Many were appalled.
But not enough.

And so I will create my own Kintsugi repair.
I hear the results of this kind of artistry
are so lovely
that some deliberately smashed valuable pottery
so it could be repaired with gold seams of kintsugi.

I will glue my broken pieces back together
with Chinese urushi lacquer
and bathe my body with fine gold powder.
I know that the process is difficult, toxic even.
But once it dries,
the toxic effects are nullified,
creating new patterns of jagged beauty
and strength.

POEM IN WHICH WE VENTURE INTO THE WOODS, SEEKING HILLARY CLINTON

By Kari Burgess

It's not that we're worried about her
even if she got lost
 she knows the way out.
I was just hoping to ask her,
what do we do next? And,
 Where do I get a good pantsuit? And,
when can I have that feeling back?
You know the one when you stick a fork
in your Kraft mac'n'cheese
and the noodles just fit on the tines
like little legwarmers or sleeves or tube socks
and you know that just, everything, is going to be ok
with your perfect mac-to-cheese-to-fork ratio
and do you like mac'n'cheese anyway, Hill?
 (I think she does)
 Does Chelsea go in the woods with you?
Or do you just like to be away
 in God's or Chappaqua's good good nature
or do you hope to find the people
 who hope to find you?
 Can you tell them we're undefeated?
I think we deserve to know by now
 that with every step into the woods
 you are planting seeds in the ground.

NOVEMBER 2016

By Heidi Seaborn

Thanksgiving, and the nasturtiums
are still in bloom. Persimmon

and pomegranate-hued flowers nestle
amongst leaves as large as my hand.

Seeded in the spring in a neat border
edging the grass, along the picket fence—

white, a little worn. My husband
slowly mends the fence, weather

permitting, post by post, slat by slat.
Now, the fence has all but disappeared

in the nasturtiums' tangled brush,
as vines winnowed months ago

under the fence and onto the sidewalk.
Passersby dodge our nasturtiums creep.

Some reach to pluck a bitter flower, take
a bite as they walk on down the road,

their talk of walls and borders, perhaps
just a fence or a bed of nasturtiums.

11/19/16

APOLOGY TOUR

By Jane Harrington

I have closed my gaping mouth and pushed my chin back up where it belongs, and now I've joined the others who are penning complaints and reading arguments in public forums, trying to understand what happened in our country's election. People are doing a lot of apologizing out there—to themselves, to frightened friends, to their children and grandchildren and seventh generation. I've been thinking that the dead, too, deserve some amends. And so, inspired by the pantsuited pilgrims who laid stickers on Susan B. Anthony's tombstone on November 8th, I've been drafting an itinerary for a pilgrimage of my own, an apology tour.

I could start in Rockville, Maryland, at Rachel Carson's grave, because there was probably no issue made more mute in this election than the ecological threat of climate change. In the 1960s Carson's *Silent Spring* turned citizens and businesses into better stewards of our planet. So I would say to her, for the new administration's unabashed plans to gut the Environmental Protection Agency and back out of global climate agreements, that I'm sorry I didn't fight harder. And maybe I'd set a feather on her grave, one shed from a bird that she is credited with saving from extinction: the bald eagle.

Gwen Ifill might be the next one I visit, her loss just days after the election a strikingly sad symbol of what happens when disreputable reporting becomes invasive in a culture. *Gwen, I'd say, thank you for bringing me news each day that I could trust. I'm sorry that I didn't do more to promote principled journalism—to counter the effects of those capitalizing on the spread of untrue stories; to share with more people articles and opinions from news sources buttressed not by intolerance and indifference but by Pulitzer Prizes and Peabody Awards.*

I could steer north then, stop in New York City's Central Park, take a barefoot walk in the grass of Strawberry Fields, where John Lennon's ashes still hug the earth. I'd tell him about all the Americans now living life in fear, not peace—people who had thought they were on an arc of acceptance but now feel shot down. I'd tell him how sorry I am that his messages of love were lost in the din of a cynicism that seems to have no ear for dreamers who can imagine a world where we live as one.

Connecticut might be where I go next, in search of the Newtown memorial being built for the twenty-six who lost their lives at Sandy Hook Elementary. *I apologize, I'd say, for a country that isn't any closer today to making our children safe from assault weapons than it was on that December day in 2012.* And I'd get back in the car, probably now have to push against the rain, against droplets filling my view faster than the beat of wipers, the flick of eyelids.

The morning could find me in Maine, at the Skowhegan library where rests Margaret Chase Smith, first woman to be considered for nomination at the convention of a major political party. Though she'd been widely respected for her work in Congress—the first

woman to serve in both houses—once she had the presidency in mind, “she was depicted as menopausal, addled, not really up to the responsibility,” according to Ellen Fitzpatrick, author of *The Highest Glass Ceiling*. I’d be wishing that I could say to Margaret that we’d come a long way, baby. But, no, I’d have to tell her about the sorry, misogynistic insults that were rampant. I’d have to tell her where we’ve *really* got to today.

I’m still working out the rest of the path. Worth Township, Illinois, is a possibility, to kneel by the grave of Emmett Till, to apologize for not protesting every day against the racism so shockingly on display this election season. Or I could just head south, to the scene of that young man’s ungodly death, and atone for all those in unmarked plantation graves, all those lynched by the Ku Klux Klan. *I thought we’d become so much better than this, so much more enlightened*, I’d say to them. But *Sorry* isn’t nearly enough.

THE ART OF DISCRIMINATION

By Christina Freeman

All of my journey and my striving to be better than I was yesterday was never really for me. It was and it wasn’t. It was about love. All of my life because of what I am and being influenced by American ideologies about women, specifically dark women. I’ve sought to be better than that description because I never wanted to find myself in a situation where I loved someone who wouldn’t see me as being good enough to love. It has been my worst fear since the day I found out that I was not the kind of person who deserved love. For me that happened when I was very young. When I was very impressionable, I was told by many many people in positions of power that people who looked like me didn’t deserve love. So I wanted to make sure that I was extraordinary in some way. I wanted to achieve and be able to say to the world, “I, too, deserve love. Do not deny me because of my race, my economic status, my gender.” Identity politics at its finest. It wasn’t called that then. It was just the way the world was. I thought that if I could be something other than what was normally expected I could change that. I was naive.

I learned that the way I saw it isn’t how discrimination works. Discrimination is about deciding things like this about people without considering who they are individually. Discrimination is about setting values to a human being that mostly dehumanize them by implying that they don’t need or deserve the very basic needs for sustaining a human life. Where they can act in love, care, and compassion for others. It’s about determining that they do not deserve to have the same rights others enjoy.

It wasn’t until I was much older that I realized that.

The trick of discrimination is it doesn’t matter who I really am, what I fight for, what I care about. The person discriminating never cared enough to find out. It’s like deciding a box contains nothing but garbage because its wrapper is green and you’ve never actually opened a green wrapped package because you assume they’re all garbage. How do you break through that haze of misinformation when the person who believes in it believes so fully that they refuse to even test it once?

In a lot of ways I believe that’s what we are experiencing in this post-election environment. We’ve had reputable news outlets determined as garbage. Whole populations of people determined as garbage. Ways of life and loving declared garbage. It’s exhausting to live each day knowing that there are people within your vicinity in your grocery stores in your neighborhood that believe that some people and their lives are garbage. You can feel it in them. In the way they look at you. In how they search for the parts of you that confirm that you’re the garbage they were told you are. They refuse to see any perceived faults as merely human ones that we all battle with. They usually judge you on a different scale, not allowing even the slightest bit of error. The benefit of the doubt means nothing because you never deserved it. It’s not that far of a step to be so entrenched in the idea that even the best possible people are muted and muddled because of your need to view

them as garbage.

I have so much hurt in my soul and my spirit for us as people. We stare at each other from across a cavernous gulf that we make up. Each side yelling the exact same thing, each getting louder, trying to be heard and never noticing that they are yelling the same thing. They are yelling "I'm human, I hurt I bleed I matter. I matter."

A lot of these issues are sparking fresh for me as I write my next book which examines that very extreme juxtaposition between a creative minority female and a privileged rich white male. I always found the seducing the millionaire books lacking because they ignore a very fundamental aspect of socialization which is social groupings. It's not easy to disengage from one social grouping and become fully accepted in another. It's even harder to pull off the love it takes to make the person perceived as less than seem worthy. Love can begin to bridge this gap but we are social and social circles greatly affect the way relationships are conducted maintained and thrive. I know its fiction, you say. Yes it is but if a fairytale has no hope of coming true then why tell it?

In confronting this I realized that there was only a few ways to dig deep enough that a true love could grow. So I did a terrible thing to my male lead. I showed him the absolute truth of his lifestyle. And now he's going to turn around and show my female lead the absolute truth of hers. It's not going to be an easy thing to write because all of my misgivings about beauty, protection, and the state of trying to be a joyful carefree black girl in the south will be right at the surface. I am her in many ways. Weird, artsy with strong headed opinions and a lack of fear that is utterly appalling if you care for this person. The male lead is the person that I've been told all my life I have to find a way to matter to. The person I have to convince that I'm human and deserve love.

I've rarely gotten through my tougher scenes without needing to stop and weep. I feel like now more than ever it's so important that I get this out. Lance the wound and let out the infection that has haunted me and crippled me for most of my life. Because you realize one day that you haven't spent your life trying to prove to "him" that you're human and matter. You were never fighting the masses for your humanity. Discrimination and representation are much more insidious than that. Because some days you ask, you really wonder, "Am I really less than human? Is that why joy seems so far away so removed from my life. Are they right? Has God decided that people like me only deserve hell and scraps from the table of humanity like dogs? Did He just create us to suffer at the feet of those who will never treat us with the care and concern we have always given them?" The problem in those questions is that you aren't looking for those answers from those other people.

The trick is that the arguments, positions, and situations are so compelling you start to think it must be true when you are beat with them every day for hours on end in almost every encounter in almost every instance of life. You know in the deepest part of yourself that to deny the teachings is in its own way denying reality. Others who need to keep this as a reality beat it into the ground using repetition to guide your pattern based brain to their designs. But then you learn and you grow and understand reality is not a

static instance. The use of repetition is folly within itself as the proof that the narrative is incomplete and must be false. Reality is ever changing, no single moment is identical to any other moment. Sunrise, sunset, and it is ultimately a tool that shapes life. Like any tool it can be used to the advantage of some and to the disadvantage of others.

When you reshape and re-purpose the tool you see where the trick really lied. It told you that you needed them to acknowledge that you were human and deserving of love when the first and finest principles of philosophy had already given you that power. I think therefore I am. When you unmask the wizard and pull back the curtain you see yourself staring right back at you. You've spent a life time trying to prove your humanity to yourself. That is the only person who needs to believe in your dignity, your grace, your humanity, your right to be loved as you are. When you're newly freed you shed that reality and that world and you begin your own alchemy.

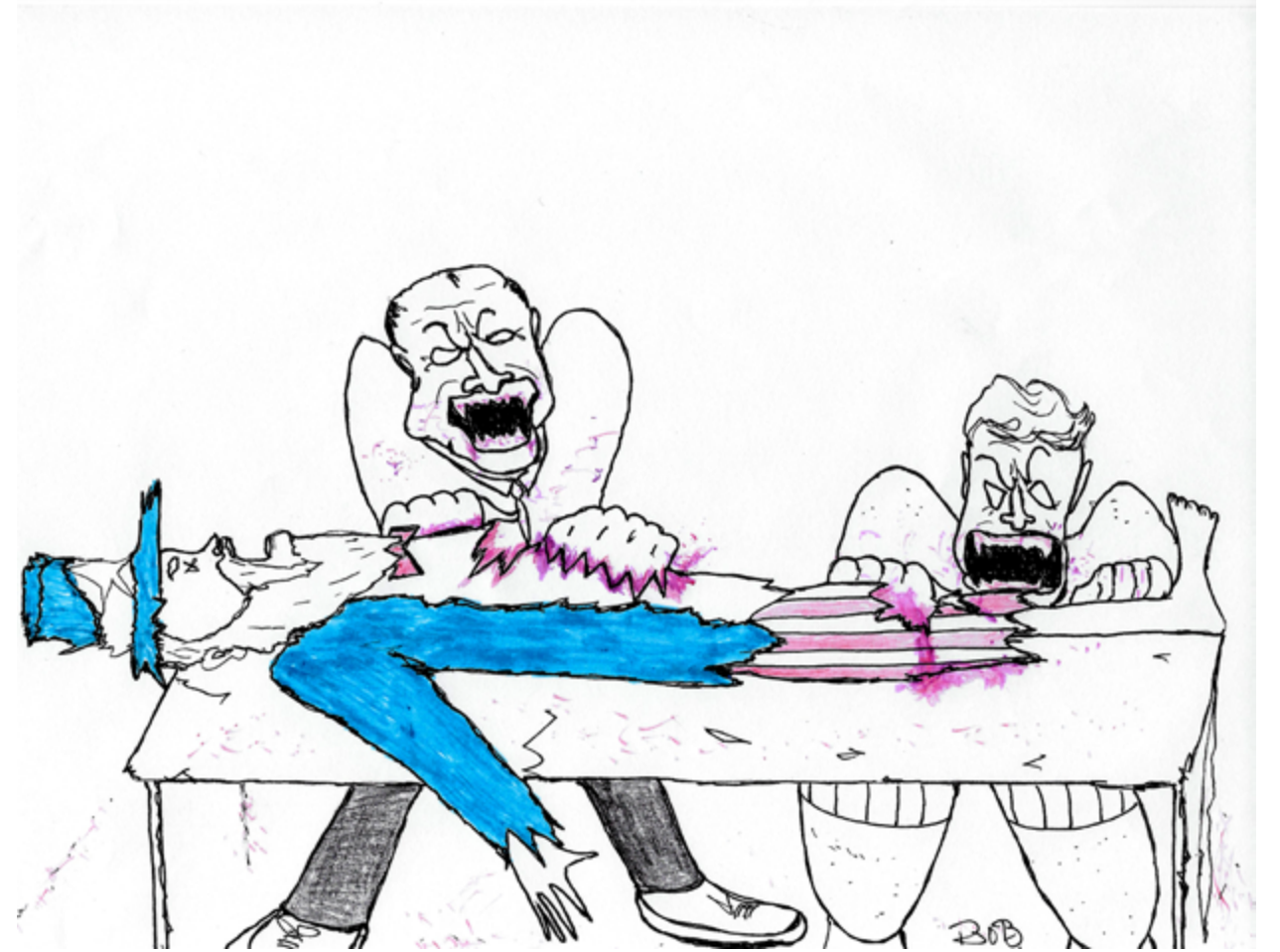
THE DROWNED

By Sergio A. Ortiz

I want to clarify
it was not in a river
but in the very ground
in front of President's Park
where I drowned.

The only river I have
in my memory is
a shudder
where small things
sink but never disappear.

Sometimes, I sink before
the river passes.
And my request for
help
is always late.



The Bureaucratic Buffet
Bob McNeil

CONFESSING MY CRIMES
TO THE MILLENNIAL MINDED
By Millie Szilagyi

I favorite my own tweets. There are three fart machine apps on my phone. I paid for one.

Everyone is perfect nowadays. Some years I disable my facebook account for 48 hours to avoid birthday well wishes

my posture's twisted by neck injuries and no health insurance. I read yoga is good for that. I went to amazon dot com & bought a yoga mat for 19.99. It arrived two days later,

Prime. Spend hours making excuses to not do yoga. Last month I did some poses. tried a YouTube video. Final excuse: "too much dust and cat hair on the mat"

After Bernie, I gave up reading about the presidential debate. With hindsight, this isn't unjust. but still I photoshopped a dick on Donald trump's head. And published the photo on my instagram page. I used the *lo-if* filter. captioned it "tight frenulum." 33 "likes" LOL.

I have no kindle. I like the feel of paper, I kill trees when I read new authors in print but you're fucking welcome, no one reads anymore:

I gave my sister a Wendell berry book for Christmas. She is like really into nature and yoga and shit. Sometimes I envy her:

She doesn't even have a job, she has a career. She feeds off a lifestyle, not a diet.

She gave the book back to me. She didn't want it.

we have the earth in common.

we follow each other.

Today I bought the cheapest coffee at the store, knowing my account was full enough for "rainforest approved" brands. Spent the difference on cigarettes. I smoke American Spirit

Blues. #irony.

During my morning shit I tweeted "hodor" @kristiannairn ✓
he was trying to promote his DJ career.

Everyone's perfect nowadays, & I'm google searching the URL
of IRL. I can't find it. Next page. Hold the door. Looking.

Do I end this confession with a *Yolo*
or an *Amen*?

YOU WANT IT DARKER?
By Gerard Sarnat

"Ring the bells that still can ring

Forget your perfect offering

There is a crack in everything

That's how the light gets in."

—Leonard Cohen borrowed from Sufi

poet Rumi (1207-1273) for *Anthem*, 1992

Fretting Presidential election results coinciding with release of the album in this homage's title, I relistened to a 2006 LCohen breathless podcast —poignantly on a radio show called *Fresh Air*. The Godfather of Gloom, a.k.a. Laughing Lenny, repeats his hoarseness story about probing a doc after vocal cord endoscopy to explore deep inside, "So do I have it now?" to which the ENT specialist responded, "None yet." But such an ominous warning drove him off cigarettes although not til 60 pack-years probably'd sowed their destruction further down where dormant crabs crawled from lungs to fester in vertebrae. That is why DRemnick's recent *New Yorker* profile talked around the dapper gent of *Blue Raincoat* fame reclining in a blue medical chair to ease back pain. Though neither spokesmen nor obituaries have specified cause of death, should you ring the bells lightly, a hunch is metastatic cancer's the probable cause for rush-rush jobs to let loose concluding music as the very private man also sought out a knowledgeable sympathetic interviewer —same guy who had just done a brilliant piece on Dylan. I knew in my bones when in the master's presence at Los Angeles' Disney Concert Hall, tonight likely would be our last waltz: 3 1/2 hours of spry fit-as-a-fiddle love from the older of two Jewish brother-troubadour's Tower of Song. A moment's time plus 60-70 pounds down to concentration camp non-fighting shape later, this gracious sane role-model, our patron saint of sorrow and redemption, passed away into his visionary's sleep.



Furnaces
Dachau, 2002
Harry Wilson

ON THE ANNIVERSARY OF KRISTALLNACHT

By Sofia Lago

I want to discuss the Presidential election 2016, in the aftermath—

I want to discuss the morning of the 9th,
standing on the downtown A train towards Brooklyn & Queens
with my hand clutched around a metal pole
held by so many people that my fingers brush against
an old man's thumb. We're all brown,
or black or Asian,
or a rare white man in his three piece suit headed for Wall Street,
here on this A train to Brooklyn & Queens. I want to discuss the
silence of it,
the way the human noise stopped, leaving us with the
grinding, creaking, rocking
of this tin Campbell's can racing through tunnels underground that
we trust to bring us from station to station
though half the time traffic is at a standstill, like when
a woman pushes another woman
right onto the tracks on days that I can think is,
oh no, I'll be late for dinner.

This is what I pictured, in a pre-coffee daze,
as I rocked on my work heels in the A train to Brooklyn & Queens:
some buccaneer's wooden hull ship after a mutiny,
if the disgraced captain thought to turn the cannon inward to let the tide in,
so the best we can do is flounder until we accept our fate—because
we Americans are pirates in the old school sense,
raiding your lands to steal your wealth and destroy your homes,
all while electing our leader just to throw him out when we're through.

ABC7, on the night of the election, claimed
that #NotMyPresident Trump's campaign rallies were populated
by "non-college white males" wound tight with
self-righteous rage at The Man for keeping them down,
so that he woke a wave of Second Amendment supporters ready
to call for the blood of people who ride the downtown A train to Brooklyn & Queens,
or women who rip a rapist's fetus from their wombs,

or girls who kiss girls who kiss boys who kiss boys. #NotMyPresident
Trump claimed
he would indict Hillary, who beat him 48% to 47% in the popular vote,
like this is 1970s Chile, and build a wall
more decisive than Harding's 1920 Immigration Act.
The "non-college white male" demographic may have heeded his call
like a sleeping giant awoken, but there's another giant
up in arms now,
whose sleep was far more shallow.

I want to discuss the 65 people arrested at Columbus Circle
for exercising their constitutional Right to Assemble
on the anniversary of Kristallnacht,
the same day the electoral college chose our President Elect—
how the people in that protest were traditionally
a patchwork quilt of color and faith and sexuality and gender,
but in that moment felt a singular anger and terror and betrayal
in every drop of affection and self-worth, chanting
"MAKE AMERICA HATE AGAIN" and "WE ARE BETTER THAN THIS,"
understanding that checks and balances has failed
now that every branch of government in its majority has the same views.

In this moment, America in collective
is a woman standing on the yellow subway strip at 1:20PM,
or a ship on the verge of collapsing into the Atlantic.
We're the non-tenured kindergarten teacher crying in the public school utility closet at lunch,
worrying for her livelihood, the mother in hijab fearing
about her family's registration,
or the Mexican woman wondering if her teenage son who crossed the border at two
will have to return to a country he doesn't remember. We're
the downtown A train to Brooklyn & Queens grinding over the tracks,
carrying commuters so silent they might as well be dead.

KENOSIS

By Sam Gilpin

•

drapes flutter in the literal as in circumstance as in
physicalness in dialectics standing still ethnologically
already in an infinite regress from the primary expression
still pitying still better yet quiet in an investment of bone

•

what is length when silence is so awakened for tracings to
sliver on the heterogeneity of codes as in such and such a
searching of flesh for the uncertain look certainly language is
already the arena already the sum of misunderstandings it occasions

-

again its each to count for one and none for one for the fixation
of progress becoming the faint impression of water becoming
but a word processor screaming in reverence in discerning
this perceptual field this data path this collection of driftwood

-

there's no solution no none whatsoever to the presence circulating
these representations here a beating repetition echoing there
the assonantal aesthetic bleeding into a non-normative
syntax classical music and mathematics are not ontology

-

and yet classic and yet even in three movements and yet this slathering
and maximizing the disorienting time scape of a north northeastern
winter this smearing and stuttering shocking a bourgeois public an
opportunity equally for communication and perverting mundane language

-

having never seen light before the world is suddenly beaming
with objects a twilight zone in the combinations of interest
and economic necessity these social agreements becoming but
search terms oscillating between appropriations and ethics

-

in this and in that in recalling nothing said this
auto-didacticism posed in terms of subject and object
becoming but a shaping of film derived from concordance
in a dream she comes through naked and down on all fours

-

there having fallen having fell having this site contingent fact
of existence really starting to heat up having a choice between
taint or tarnish in the prevailing moral rhetoric irrespective
of intellect plagiarism is necessary progress implies it

-

so cerebral so methodical so affirming of the facts
of the material struggle so satisfying in needing a baseline
studying behavior and pathology is so sharply distracting
from our powerlessness as bright as a button

-

being is only in repeating these semiotic theories of Eco
in the vanguard of animal liberation in the product of art
not its expression that's probably perfectly normal
in lacking it it becomes all but impossible

-

security is a totem of stern laughter in justifying police-like activity these state actors understood as temptation as that sweet singing dry voice vocables drifting between death and dying slow concentrations of communication

-

everywhere in its everywhere in its tropes and imagery of the clash between Debord and sharp simulacra a ghostly presence more permanent and undefined I admit to feeling sentimental here

- instituting a bourgeois sovereignty under the cloak of revolution under the softly graded shadows produced by repeated small touches this becoming the stunning white glitter in a felt materiality this becomes the miniaturization of possible uses



The Pillars of Wisdom
Roopa Dudley

NIGHTMARE

By Lydia Swartz

He needs to stop talking so I can talk, I need to tell him what is true, he needs to go out so there's air for us to breathe, so there's evidence we're not already dead, I might be dead now, my pants removed, still warm from my ass, my shoes still muddy wet from running away, but I was not fast, the best I can do is scream as I fail to escape, my voice a siren in every language, I shall not die in my sleep it seems, I shall never sleep at all, instead I will join thunder as if it were an army, I will become all fears, all regret and shame, my claws unsheathed, my teeth sharp, my tears and sweat and pussy juice will climb up in your brain and dissolve your eyelids, you cannot turn away, you may try to break my frail and elderly carapace but doubt survives, it's an idling truck, the first few pebbles skipping light of heart ahead before the rumbling avalanche, I am your violation, your grinding pain that never deserts you, the squatter on my own land who stands in your way by living, by having lived, you will always smell me, you have always smelled me, I cannot be cleansed, I am part of you, you are part of me, if you're scared of clowns I am a clown, if you're scared of the dark I eat all the light, if you're scared of death, I am your cold and soundless tomb, if you're scared that no one will see you I am your dank invisibility, if you're scared of crowds I am manifold, I am burying you alive, with flesh, with mocking laughter, with my blood and my children, I am immune to your artificial prayers and threats, I am pain and assrape and blindness, I am the relentless eyes and bones of 6 million angry Jews, I am all the fags and dykes and queens and pretty trans people you killed, I remember the names and the faces and I have a list of your favorite loopholes, I hit back hard, I never beg, I shall not stop, I am plural and I do not forgive, I am the music made by everyone you harmed, the dance of your dark-haired victims and everyone they love, the eyes that won't look away no matter how shiny and careless you think you are.

MY GENDER WILL BE OUR UNMAKING

By Daryl Sznyter

We face each other at the kitchen table,
my arms hugging my shins, your hands
running circles across your thighs.
We have long since given up conversation
about poetry or the weather, trading news
articles instead that glow up at us
from our phones. White men will take everything,
even my body. Even your union. Our coffees
grow cold and our cereal warm. I google your favorite
color and text it to you. You send back
an I love you. If either of us spoke,
our words would creak from disuse.
The world is our abortion. Outside
is our economy. Snow clings to the window,
obscuring our view.

CANVASSING

By Mary K. O'Melveny

I.

Chain link fencing borders each small plot of land. Looking out, it seems almost lace-like, as if woven veils could protect, encourage all.

Four pit bulls range free as we drive slowly along the empty streets. Although they look fierce, they seem calm enough. I open the car door.

My first destination is a yellow stucco house. Broken blinds barely shield the windows. The gate, a bit lopsided, bends inward

as I make my way on fractured gravel, past dried out grass, crushed up bottles, to a pinkish metal door that pulses with wild scratchings.

I think ancient hieroglyphics, as if tales of better times could be read there like Braille characters. A plastic doorbell is long dead.

I knock firmly. Wait. Knock again. Sometimes one can feel the spirits in a place, however unlikely – a wispy shudder, a tiny intake

of breath, a shiver of dank air. I pause. Knock once more. Finally, rustles, shuffles, clicks. The door cracks back. A heavysset old man peers

out, takes me into his gaze, nods politely. The room soaks up light from the doorway. I ask questions. He is sorry. No voters here.

II.

Next stop, a dusky grey structure broken into four apartments. Window frames peeling, many locks rest uneasy like morbid afterthoughts.

The cracked pavement tiles rise and fall. One imagines a checkers match where players abandon the board to seek comfort from a safer distance.

Two residents, quite visible – laughing even – as we drive up, now disappear like smoke clouds behind an aged door splintered

lightly at the corners. *Knock. Knock.* This time no one opens up though we all know what's happening. No air moves at this entry.

Moving down the row, I sense breath behind metal just as a young white man steps out. Tattoos cover his thin arms as he holds them close.

His name does not match my listing. His mind is not made up yet, he reports. We both know this is false but we end our conversation

without hunger for truth-telling. Two more silent entrances remain. I paste my message at their centers: *DO NOT FORGET -- VOTE ON TUESDAY!*

We turn down a new street, clutching our lists. Boards decorate windows of three successive sad houses. No need to leave voting news there.

III.

I arrive at a small beige ranch.
A red door, peephole mirror long
cut away, greets me. As does a
freshly waxed black car. Hope surges.

A green thumb resides in this place.
Rouge birds of paradise nest near
a white concrete wall where green turf
protects them from disappointments.

A face emerges from the dark
interior – an Elder with white
closely cut hair and a trimmed beard.
He is a Witness, he explains.

He, too, will not be a voter.
I glance around in the eerie
quiet of the mid-afternoon,
detecting his choice of options.

Across the way, a group of young
men are gathered. They don't appear
on my rosters but, sensing chance,
I walk up, flash my brightest smile.

Will you be voting tomorrow?
I ask. At first, they look puzzled.
One calls out Prop 2? They all laugh.
President, I say. More laughter.

So far, men of every age
populate these streets. More may be
standing at corners hoping for
yard or roof work, but energies

here have dimmed down like fading glows
from a Supermoon. I stare at
offers of hope crudely painted
on church fronts and wish them success.

*Proposition 2 was a Florida ballot initiative to approve the use of medical marijuana. It passed.

IV.

At our next street, a young girl slumps
over the curb. Our first instinct
is to call for 911 help
until we see that neighbors know

well the faded innocence of
her light pink sweater, its luster
long erased. Then, her body shifts,
as though the concrete were filled with

cotton batting as she nestled
in for a sweet afternoon nap,
dreaming of more welcoming stars.
The air suddenly feels empty.

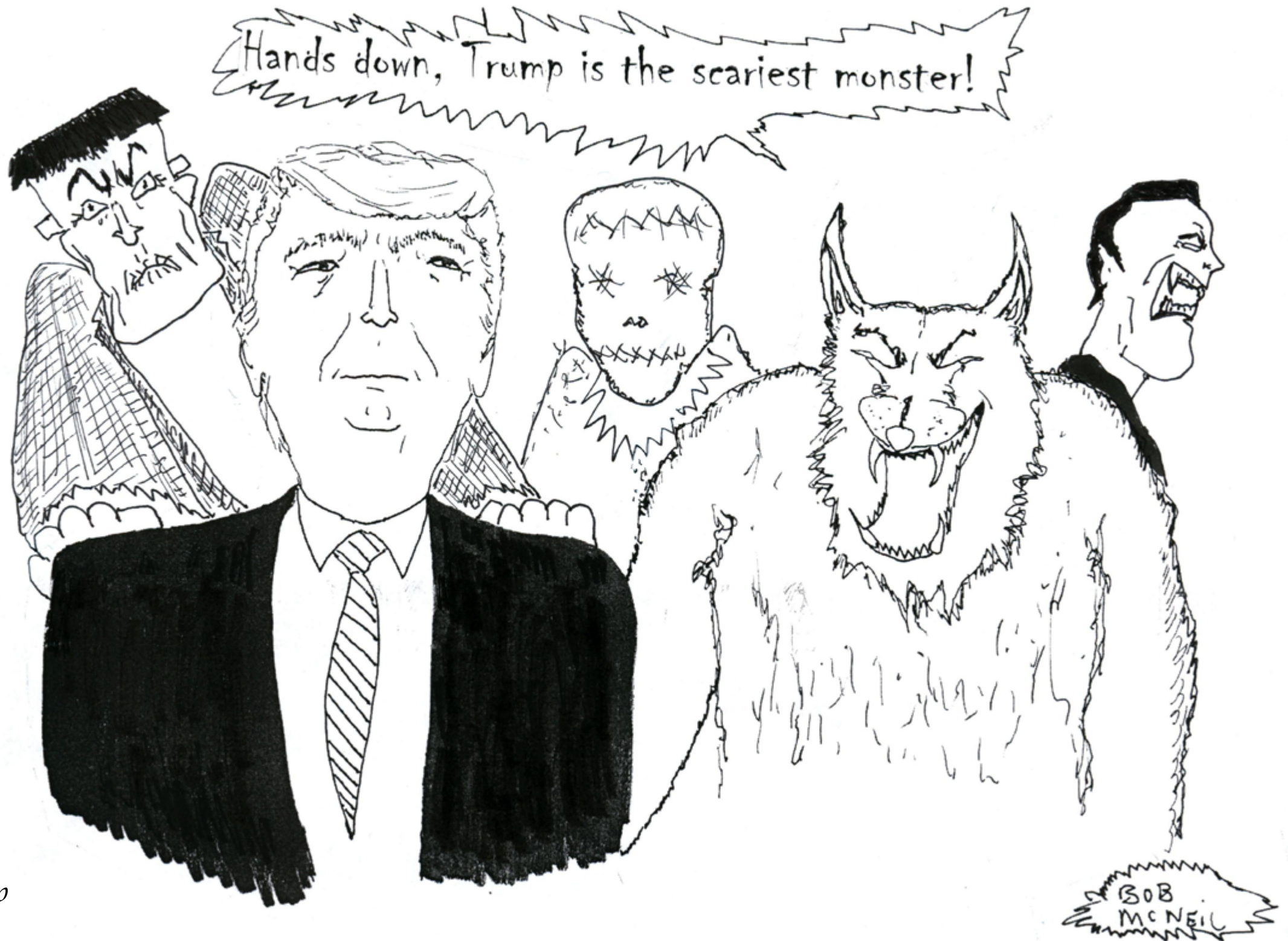
An old brackish tan wooden house
awaits me. So much paint has peeled
away that the effect looks like
a spotted-in-reverse giraffe.

According to my papers, four
voters live here—a bonanza!
I pass through the rusted fencing.
Hope surges once again. *Knock, knock.*

This time, a lovely brown woman
greets me. She could be any age.
Her smile is warm. She leans forward
to listen to my little speech.

Her three sons are not home, but still
in her orbit. I want to shout
for joy that they have jobs! I want
to write up her biography.

No stranger to kindness or to
futility, she takes my hand.
She knows nurture's life-saving gifts:
Thanks, she says. We voted early!



The Terror Called Trump
Bob McNeil

TWENTY TRUMP ACROSTICS

By Ryan Mihaly

Dedicated to my fellow Naropa writers

TRUMP:

The
Reason
Ulcers
Make
Progress

The
Rat
Under
My
Piano

Truly
Repugnant
Uncle
Made
President

The
Real
Uncles
Must
Protest

Tremendously
Reactionary
Urchin
Made
President

Trump
Really
Underestimates
Mister
Putin

Trump
Really
Underestimates
Mike
Pence

Torrential
Republicanism
Undoes
Most
Progress

The
Riptide
Unnerved
My
People

Try
Reading
Us,
Mister
President

He responds:

“Totally
Regret
Uttering
My
Promises”

Trenchant
Rhetoric
Unmasked
Malevolent
People:

They
Reactivated,
Unwaveringly,
My
Pessimism

Then
Ripped
Up
My
Peace

Try
Reading
Us,
Mister
President

This
Republican
Übermensch
Made
Promises

That
Reified
Unrest
Most
Persuasively

Today,
Recognize –
Understand –
My
Purpose

To
Restate,
Ultimately,
My
Plea:

Try
Reading
Us,
Mister
President

Try reading us.

HOW A NEW GRAMMATICAL CONTRACTION MAY SAVE MUCH OF OUR COLLECTIVE SANITY

By Alex Duensing

Religious feuding, shootings, world politicians playing dangerous games, environmental catastrophes are just a few triggers that create millions of Facebook proselytizers. They claim we must ban such and such. They plead with us to wake up and realize that Group X is inherently evil and a threat to civilization. Our news feeds are littered with the lunatic rantings of half-acquaintances and old high-school friends. Even when we agree with them, it can be stressful—and certainly kills some of the buzz we get from baby animal and MacGyveresque gadget memes.

Human compassion and understanding allow me to forgive some of the killjoy effects of my friends' tirades. They are, in part, trying to stabilize after discovering a threat to some part of their existence by the outside world. In a way, their posts and responses are just attempts to regain psychological homeostasis: to feel that they are a part of solving the problem and ushering in a return to normalcy. I can comprehend this and even consider my reading their posts as fulfilling some of my duties of friendship.

However, their posts do have some downsides: they cause strife, they spiral out of control, and they create a permanent electronic record of the rampant anger and illogicality of our era.

So what can be done?

Well, one remedy might come from a contraction that I cooked up while trying to discover new forms of mental awareness other than consciousness: *isa'*, which is short for "is also". "*Isa''*" *isa'n* amazing contraction because it allows one to hold multiple, and even contradictory, viewpoints at the same time.

"*Isa''*" *doesa'* (yes, it's perfectly fine to improvise) this by allowing for multiple concepts to be viewed and acknowledged simultaneously as clear and distinct wholes—and by disallowing the data/arguments/ethical underpinnings/gestalts/etc... in one of them from cancelling out those in another.

I remember the first time I resolved an argument with the term. One of my very knowledgeable and well-informed professors was maintaining that the second Gulf War was about the money. We went back and forth for over an hour. I retorted that geopolitics, resource distribution, and a quest for power that transcended monetary concerns were all also at play. She would then instruct me as to how each of these could be reduced to money. We both got really frustrated and shouted way too much—until, I had my aha moment.

"It *isa'* about the money." I said.

She agreed.

We both had a sigh of relief and went on to have a productive conversation.

"*Isa''*" *isa'* effective because it provides a tool for dealing with complex abstract systems. Counter-examples, contradictions, for instance, do not have the same ability to negate those

attributes predicated of a notion (or its emergent concepts) when “isa” gets involved—because “isa” affords two main things:

1. An understanding that many gestalts may be perceived as coming forth from any given stimulus. Take this famous illustration for example:



This image can be construed as depicting a Dalmatian sniffing the ground, as a whole bunch of crazy looking figures and faces, or something else altogether. All of these construals are valid responses to the question: “What does this picture depict?”

2. Moreover, in contrast to methods of argument/worldview formation, which pit one point against another, the “isa” approach recognizes that the contradiction/disproof of any given point (or many points for that matter) does not necessarily obviate the validity of a gestalt that has emerged from those points. Once a person, for instance, has seen the Dalmatian in this picture, he or she can still maintain that this picture depicts a Dalmatian even if many of the points are suddenly taken away.

Keeping these two points in consideration, just imagine, by using “isa” and its variants, all of the otherwise perfectly sensible Facebook posts that could be saved from the endlessly

regressive ripostes: “yeah but, but what about all of these other important points?”

Yet, “isa” isa’ more than just effective, it isa’ awesome because, as a term, it gives us the apparatus to be compassionate and constructive. It allows us to recognize and encounter the reality and concerns of the other without threatening or deprecating our own. Furthermore, use of the term “isa” subtly causes us to be less absolutist in terms of our own perceptions; the world need not exist in the manner any one or group of us perceive it to be. When this idea is even unconsciously at play, it becomes much easier to come together to create worlds that surpass the one(s) we perceive in isolation: in terms of aesthetics, ethicality, and, perhaps, even in truth.

Facebook quarrels are representative of the way that the limitations of our conceptual frameworks can lead to strife—and to the impediment of the enjoyment of life. Therefore, I suggest all of us who “are a” men, women, religious, atheists, lgbtq+, heterosexual, people of color, white, Republican, Democrat, Independent, human beings (which incidentally, are comprised of many non-human organisms) start using terms like “isa”; we only have our confusion, rage, and illusions to lose.

TWEET TWEET

By Howie Good

Assembled from Donald Trump's tweets

I never fall for scams.
My Twitter has become
so powerful that I can

actually make my enemies
tell the truth. The cheap

12 inch sq. marble tiles
behind speaker at UN
always bothered me.

It makes me feel so good
to hit "sleazebags" back –

much better than seeing
a psychiatrist. I have never
seen a thin person drinking

Diet Coke. If you saw
the Miss Universe girls

you would reconsider.
They are an environmental
& aesthetic disaster. It's

Friday. How many bald eagles
did wind turbines kill today?



*The Clintons Attempted to
Circumvent the Constitution
Bob McNeil*

APOCALYPSE WOW

By Howie Good

Do cows get excited? Their knees don't look like they can handle all the jumping. Why I am so worried. People also ask: Do ants eat each other? Do ants make a sound? I didn't believe my friends when they first told me. On Berlin Street, a vehicle hit a deer. Someone was verbally harassing children on Barre Street. And no cops for miles.

*

There are 55 different types of seagulls, and many of them are no better than cannibals and psychos. At least that's the accepted explanation. I would love to stay in order to find out for sure, but I must leave before something worse happens. The starfish is one worry. Just last night the body of a woman was hauled out of the water, too late for Dr. Heimlich to apply the Heimlich maneuver.

*

Fishing is just a metaphor for general fucked upness. The fish are yellow and blue like the floating spots you see after a camera flash. Many exhibit difficulty navigating the current, apparently the effect of having once been clubbed on the head. In the background is a hole left in the skyline by the collapse of the city's tallest building. Flowers grow claws to scabble over the rubble.

*

The police hate making lists of all the items stolen overnight from unlocked vehicles – boots, radar detectors, golf clubs, laptops, cameras, sunglasses, CDs, cigarettes, and loose change. People were using drugs at Hubbard Park. Now they see sky, and they remember what they are. On State Street, a missing dog was spotted. Wolf, are you there? To hell with it. A rockin' robin sings about how to properly touch a girl so you don't creep her out. Let's pray that it lasts.

SKUNKED

By Kris Hall

All duck bills were child's play.

The Halloween party was three days away and my Howard the Duck costume idea was falling apart the more and more I put it off.

Julianna took advantage of my loss and pitched the couple's theme. She would go as Alice and I, the White Rabbit.

I purchased a giant clock necklace and a rabbit mask with our Amazon Prime account. Neither of which were unique, but I hadn't seen the two items paired together before. It could work and, even if it couldn't, it gave me an excuse to wear my black corduroy blazer with elbow patches.

It was something I made a big deal about on Facebook and hadn't had a chance to get pumped about in person.

The day the mask arrived, it was cracked in the cheeks, nose, and mouth.

I shouldn't be allowed anywhere near super glue.

I am a walking sitcom, sticking to everything.

I asked a store clerk if he knew where I could find the sour ales and for a moment it was like I fooled the universe into thinking I was an anxiety-free, participating member of society.

Another night I am sure the cashier hates me.

Jerry walks in with a dress and wig on.

When people ask him what he's going as, he says,

"Call me Caitlyn." and pouts his lips.

A couple people laugh.

Julianna and I both cringe.

Talking to my mother on the phone, she doesn't get it.

He wasn't in drag, I tell her.

It's like when a person smears their face with

a dark cleansing scrub and takes a selfie;

the conversation shifts when the person

says, "Look! I'm blackface today!"

Talking to my mother on the phone, she doesn't get it.

Much can be lost between two events,

like photo albums in a house fire.

Time is the only thing that truly progresses.

I cannot track the markings of cloven hooves,

which pair donned silk

which pair donned bells.

My shadow is not burned in place,

alive with stillness.

We are watching the map fill up with red.

I've been either grunting at my phone or mind-spitting at the cosmos too hard to share anything remotely poignant in regards to how terribly, terribly disgusted I am with the people of this country. Even if she miraculously pulls through, he's still won.

We are watching the map fill up with red.

I share a photo of Lloyd Bridges from Airplane smoking a cigarette, collar and tie askew.

I make a joke about how I picked the wrong day to quit pizza and sandwiches, because

I'm dieting the only way I know how.

We are watching the map fill up with red.

I want to stress eat my cat's face off.

We are watching the map fill up with red.

The joke about Biff from Back to the Future becoming POTUS is no longer a joke, it is suffocating the present with Brexit Plus.

My wife is crying, she is a second generation peruvian immigrant.

Her Mother keeps a karaoke machine in her living room and encourages everyone to sing.

On Christmas, her Grandmother makes pisco sours and aji de gallina and will not take no for an answer.

They are the closest thing to an honest family I know.

I am crying, my father voted for him.

The same father who once criticized me for enjoying art and literature over sports and shop, accused me of being gay, ready to kill. But mostly just looking to get a rise out of me.

The same father who hit me so hard my body swung a complete 180.

The same father who told me to get over my molestation, that talking about it served no purpose.

He was always trying to get a rise out of me.

My mind is impacted with a need to shed.

My mind is impacted with a need to rage.

I pull Julianna out of bed.

With our defeated bodies we walk into the shower and take the steak knife and plunge it

quick--

two holes.

We shotgun our ciders together.

We drink our mortification. We drink it up.

I am reading about dying on the inside and dying on the outside.

Adventures in Immediate Irreality.

If I find myself in a bubble, I get out while I can.

This doesn't feel like a bubble.

There are no fine lines.

GOTTA CATCH EM'ALL

By Chad W. Lutz

In a November 2012 response to a question posed on Slate.com, former Marine Sgt. John Davis postulates on rumors about what he calls an impending "Second American Civil War." Crazy shit to hear just forty short years outside of a time when the Silent Majority was touting Flower Power and wearing Peace Signs. Now they're driving Mercedes and Beamers. Who knew?

Sgt. Davis goes on to rank the states by strategic value. You can probably guess the top three. Go big, or go home, right? Good old Texas, New York, and California. Alaska and Hawaii are also out of reach, mainly for being so out of reach. Other states with mecca-decca gigantic metropolises like Illinois, Georgia, Colorado, and Washington rounded out the top eleven, and I say top eleven, because those are the only states Sgt. Davis listed.

Think big traffic jams with bullets flying everywhere.

This, of course, is assuming the battle is only going to be between states. With the widespread prevalence of gun ownership in the United States, it may just be demographic on demographic. Ideas fighting ideas. I suppose that's the root of all wars, though, when you get right down to it.

Alaska is even one of a few states that has unrestricted gun ownership laws, although I wouldn't put money on them taking part in a civil war if push eventually comes to ballistics. But what about California, Texas, New York, Washington, Virginia, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, and Illinois? You betcha. Each has money, land, and large taps of citizens to use as soldiers. Most of these places would have stores of food, too. Ohio would have a mix. The Plains region outside of Chicago would have the means to cultivate and sustain themselves. They, along with California and Georgia, grow a good share of what we eat.

California *does* have that dilemma with water, though.

And could you imagine what advantages the Plains and mountain states would have over pretty much anyone else in mobilized, troop-led combat?

But, let's not get ahead of ourselves here. There's a lot happening. Almost too much.

When the Dallas Police Department went under fire on July 7, Chief David Brown gave an order that will forever change the history of law enforcement. After fighting off suspect Micah Xavier Johnson for the better part of an hour, Chief Brown gave an order to use a robot to neutralize the perpetrator. The machine is known as the Remotec Androx MarkV A-1, and is made by Northrup Grumman. It's basically wheels with a camera and one hell of a strong arm and claw, whose grasp enough to grip, with force, up to 145lbs. The robot needed only one of those pounds, however. And that pound consisted entirely of C4 plastic explosives. On command, the Remotec maneuvered toward its target, dropped the package in close proximity to the suspect, and painted the suspect against

a wall.

The robot, if you were curious, sustained minor damages.

Now, I'm not implying that cops are going to start blowing citizens up, nor am I even going to touch on all the other scary scenes that have been popping up around the U.S. in the last few years. What I want to touch on is how evident this Second Civil War can really seem at times and the types of weapons that are going to be available at both sides' fingertips.

Think back to your Facebook use lately. See a lot of people voicing outrage, not just in any one or two directions but just kind of all over the place and about a bunch of different things? It's getting to the point where almost nothing is sacred.

I was wasting time on FaceCook earlier this evening when I came across a video poking fun at Pokemon Go! The video featured a very distraught-looking Redneck Island star Kristen Tuff Scott sitting in her vehicle after getting off of work and having a bit of an existential meltdown in the parking lot. "That's where my life is right now. I wanna catch em', but I feel stupid. This is not where I saw myself at twenty-seven years old." She goes on to admit that she's been simply driving back and forth across the parking lot just to catch more.

Running in Cuyahoga Falls yesterday, I noticed there were a lot of people walking around with their cellphones out like they were trying to find an address. It was awesome. People outside. Smiles on their faces. What more could you ask for? Pretty polar opposite from the grim realities of Philando Castille, Alton Sterling, and the trouble in Dallas.

However, as much positive hoopla and hubbub is being made about Pokemon Go!, there's as much, if not more, general social unrest about it and everything else.

There's a clear and present divide happening between people heading this political election season, but with a little more spark behind it than the typical Presidential election year. The early Primary Season was a small showcase of what officially kicks off later this month in Cleveland at the RNC. There they'll be petitioning Donald J. Trump for U.S. President, and his merry band of GOP mules.

This fall marks the 15th anniversary of September 11. A part of me wonders if we make that grim connection again. Already Cleveland has summoned outside help. Even with a third of their forces dedicated to the convention, the President of Cleveland's Police Union, Steve Loomis, a mere twelve days out from the event said in an open letter his officers are, "simply not prepared to deal with the issues we will be facing during the RNC."

Deep down I want to believe in the goodness of people. I think we all do. Right now, times are trying, weighing our hearts and souls down. Even those of us who have no real direct connection to a lot of the things we see going on in the news or hear through the grapevine are feeling a significant tug. There's something happening out there, real and visceral. I have no idea if it's a Second Civil War, like the fictitious one made up by Sgt. John Davis of the U.S. Marine Corps., or if this is all coincidence. But this feels like more.

It has berth. You can feel its mass. It's the lump in your throat when you hear 50 people have been killed at a nightclub in Orlando, or when you log on Facebook and see videos of cops shooting people; of people shooting people, of people telling people who feel the cops shooting people was wrong; of cops making videos about cops shooting people, about people who don't support cops that shoot people.

The United States might be decades from any kind of real civil war, but even Baby Boomers who lived through the turmoil in the 1960s and 70s in their prime don't remember the world being so violent. A lot of that, presumably, has to do with a hyperactive media. It's much more effective to show the bullet exit the back of the head than it is to shadow play. Although, I suppose most journalism is shadow play. The ability to stream video live and instantly reach millions of people is eons beyond what America in the middle sixties was capable of producing, in a time when there were only 167 million citizens living in this country.

Now there are around 320 million of us, practically double. And, as of July 7, we know Dallas PD uses tactical robots to deliver bombs to suspects. And if the country breaks out into civil war, depending on what side you're on, you might be on the receiving end of several pounds of C4 delivered hot and fresh from C3PO, and unlike you, C3PO will walk away unscathed.

Dukes up, America.

THE DIE IS CAST

By Jane Harrington

When Oscar Wilde's mother was in her twenties and still single, she became involved in politics. That is to say, she became a poet. She wrote under the pseudonym "Speranza"—in part homage to an Italian family line that she claimed to include Dante, and in part because it means "hope" and she saw herself as a champion for the millions living in poverty in her rich country. She wrote ballads for the *Nation*, a newspaper dedicated to fighting for the rights of that long-suffering indigenous populace. Her band of activists—Young Ireland, they called their movement—started a rebellion that began in the summer of 1848, but their mission was thwarted by a spore, fungi that turned the food crop of the poor into slime. Speranza then turned her pen to writing laments to a dying army, now "ghastly, spectral."

She was remembered by the survivors of the Great Hunger. Even decades later, when her son went on tour in America to wax poetic on art for art's sake, it was his mother that the wizened, dewy-eyed immigrants wanted to hear about. (Oscar, a loving son, was said to be happy to comply.) But when the bones of that generation settled into the earth, so seemingly went all memory of her. When I share with others my interest in Lady Wilde, the reaction I usually get might as well be, "Oscar Wilde had a mother?" Fair enough, I thought, the Wildes being only obliquely part of the American story. But then I found that even at One Merrion Square in Dublin—the place where she wrote her poetry and prose, raised children and grieved mightily over the loss of her only daughter, hosted the intelligentsia and literati of the era in her weekly salons, withstood public disdain over a sensational sex scandal involving her knighted husband—it is as if she never was. Unless a plaque has appeared in the months since I last visited that Georgian townhouse, there are tributes on its bricks to only Oscar and Sir William Wilde.

I know, it's a trope: the invisible women behind the men. I learned my history, to worship founding fathers who seemed spawned from the ether. So maybe it should have come as no surprise when, upon peering inward during this deeply troubling presidential campaign, I realized that I had but fed this theme. Looking back on the raising of my daughters, I saw now a yawning gap where there should have been robust discussion of women's progress in this country, particularly in government. Then, perhaps, my daughters might have been more inclined to seek me out for conversation during an election season of such historic significance. To be clear, this is not a criticism of them, all percipient women ever on the side of social justice, but a recognition of my inertia. I mean, I'd never even taken the time to try to understand why my own mother, now 89 years old, was so opposed to the women's libbers when I was growing up. We did all stand together on November 8th, three generations of women in agreement on the need to block an assault, and I do find hope in that. Maybe even a future where all female candidates are viewed fairly, not scrutinized as if under a cosmetic magnifier, their every blemish turned into a monstrous obsession; where if a woman painstakingly earns her credentials and

notches decades of public service, she is not passed over for a famously unprepared man who, yes, probably could have shot someone on Fifth Avenue and still gotten the job.

Lady Wilde published an essay in 1893 about American women, a counterpart she admired as learned and practical ("They can extract square roots as well as pickle them," she wrote), specifically lauding such visionaries as Julia Ward Howe, calling her "Battle Hymn of the Republic" "one of the finest lyrics of the age." About the role of women in this country, she proclaimed, "[They] are not idle in the war of progress against prejudice. They have taken an advanced position in the strife for right and justice, and demand for their sex perfect equality with men—social, legal, professional and political, the right to vote, and even to be elected to Congress, and as they are always terribly in earnest, and have an indomitable will, no doubt they will gain all they demand." If she were writing about us now, I have to think she'd be pretty shocked to see who we have designated to carry the presidential torch into a term of office that will, ironically, include the centennial of the passage of the 19th Amendment. Maybe she'd hearken back to another time in her life, when she was still that twenty-something Speranza and her editor, Charles Gavan Duffy, was on trial for sedition. A key piece of evidence against him was an editorial, a stirring call to arms entitled "Jacta Alea Est," or the Die is Cast. But Duffy hadn't written it, Speranza had. So she stood up in the courtroom and called out to the bench, "I am the culprit...if culprit there be!" She was scoffed at, not believed. It was as if she weren't even there.

Our die is definitely cast—one marked with misogyny, racism, xenophobia and homophobia—and we definitely could use a call to arms. Not the violent-overthrow sort, of course, nor arms that grab and demean us. We need compassionate arms, all flung around women and the men who respect them, around mothers and daughters and sisters and nieces. We need arms that hold tight the frightened among us, lift up the vulnerable, raise placards and pens. We need millions of arms, all pushing us along on the march.

CHECKMATE QUEEN
By Millie Szilagyi

vote with sperm to cleave perception,
ancient beasts, deceptive, praying.
(the men fight pussy and wonder)
hatchet approaches stimulus-
Coral panther! Opal vessel!
Ionic shell, my columns come!
Tube conception, pawn of chessboard.
Undo flirtation, red to stale.



Freedom Of Religion & Expression
Roopa Dudley

CANVASSING, 2016

By Brian Fanelli

Door to door, day to day,
we carry clipboards, ring doorbells
while late autumn Pennsylvania winds
scatter leaves across yards.

We squint at poll sheets, ink boxes,
about who is home, who is voting.
We do this until our feet numb,
until our hands redden.

We believe in this—
telling the hair stylist in a red Sunday robe
where her polling place is, while she blows her nails,
mutes the TV, shows off the latest shade of pink.

We believe in this—
talking to the mother in the rose-patterned dress about voting,
while she preps Sunday dinner, or persuading her neighbor
in a frayed Phillies hat to talk to us as he labors

under the hood of a Ford, asks,
Why does it matter?
I'm one man, and the rich got the game rigged.
Our hands clench leaflets as we give

one final argument to convince him and leave
after he shrugs his shoulders, says, *We'll see.*
We still believe in going door to door,
while campaign yard signs bow to the cold,

their steadiness wavering, as branches sigh,
release more leaves to the wind.

INSTINCT TO SYMPATHY

By Jack Peterson

My friends and I
fall and fumble
into each other

every night
out of Club Cafe
and feel the city

and I always
wish that people
wouldn't drive

where people
are.
Crossing

Meg and I
want to eat
exclusive diets

and are
passed a message
by the bouncer

of Mario's
it's pizza
or falafel.

The universe
presents falafel
first

so fluorescents
and expansive
flattop

of gyro meat
greet us
to negotiate

who's next in
line. We are
and hustle

no cheese
on falafel salad
count our

limited cash
when surprised
by the sign.

I try to sit
so I can't see
the screen.

But it's all we discuss.

Mellissa wants
a thunder jacket
and we laugh

at that. Scott
pierces each
rhetorical balloon

and we laugh
sick. Abby makes
a pact with me

to write under
the blossoming
pear tree

and plans to
last be seen
scavenging

Siberian
trash heaps
for food

not in those
exact words
but we catch

eyes. The rest of
the room
is closer to

distance
and I wish
I weren't drunk

so I can process
what others
really mean.

The man on
the flattop
says again

"I kind of like
the guy. What
can I say?"

and I agree
that there isn't
much that can be said.

When I say
I wish I weren't
drunk

I mean
I wish I weren't
American.

SHOCK

By Lynn Lipinski

My love under orange glow
walking from our home
dinner at the usual place
but a chanting chorus
post-election brave in someone's dad's car
bruises the sky with hate, tears its fabric
We'll call those wounds stars
blue eyes meet brown ones
This is how love goes
Magnetic fields a primal push
through ugliness
I wear you on my body like a shell bracelet
We float in the space
Where engine sounds fade after voices

THE WAITING ROOM

By Tish Hanlon

A small box heater warmed the dingy waiting room at Bergeron Tire Company. It glowed red hot but barely took the chill from the air. I was surprised there were only two people there when I arrived; we were the last of the true procrastinators. In the north country of New Hampshire, changing over to snow tires is a November detail, and this was early January with the first snowstorm of the season to start within hours.

I took up residence in the ripped leather seat closest to the heater.

"I'm sorry, were you sitting here?" I asked the woman pacing the small room, furiously rubbing her hands together.

"Nope, it's fine," she muttered. She jammed her hands deep into the pockets of her oil-stained canvas work jacket and sat down with a heavy sigh in the seat across from me. The man sitting a few seats away startled, looking up from the magazine he was flipping through. He had all the markings of a climber, disheveled hair sticking out from under a wool hat, high-tech jacket, and pants double layered at the knees.

The only vestige in the small waiting room that hinted post-1970 was the oversized flat screen television that was balanced on a banged up metal toolbox. I was checking email on my iPhone when climber guy said: "There he is, our next President." I looked up to see Donald Trump wagging his finger from atop a red, white-and-blue-clad podium. "We're doomed," he went on, "Hillary doesn't stand a chance, she's a liar and Bernie can't win, he doesn't have the votes." "It's the Donald, that's how it's going down."

The woman across from me stared blankly at the TV. "I don't know," I said, careful to tread into the political mire. "I think Trump is upsetting lots of people with his hate speech. At this point, I'm more worried about the religious right. We have enough fanaticism in the world."

Climber guy shared a story about his daughter who was a senior at Wellesley College. "They don't even like Hillary at her own alma mater," he declared and then recounted a trip to London last year while visiting this same daughter studying abroad. "They hate us in Europe, they think all we care about is money and power." I looked back at the TV screen where Trump was wearing a baseball cap that read 'Make America Great Again.'

"We go around making messes all over the world and don't stay to clean them up." Climber guy said while rolling the magazine tightly in his fist.

The tire mechanic opened the door to tell him his car was ready.

"We're really screwed," he said and walked out the door.

"Election time in New Hampshire." I attempted a laugh, to lighten the mood, as the woman stood up and resumed her pacing in the small room. I stole glances at her, studying her. I looked for tremors from drugs, puffiness from alcohol. Was she in her forties or

fifties? She stopped suddenly and looked straight in my eyes.

"I really thought Obama was going to change things." Her tone was more resigned than angry. Her mouth was full of gaps from missing teeth, her eyes small and lifeless.

"We need to take care of the people here and stop trying to fix everybody else's problems. We let all these people come and take our jobs or we just move the jobs far away." Her voice faded and tears welled up in her eyes as she sunk down deep in the chair and lowered her head.

"Is everything okay?" I asked, in a whisper across the small room. The woman was quiet for a long moment. I was somehow relieved at this silence but for the din of the television. She shifted in her seat, crossing and uncrossing her legs. It felt as though the air was being sucked out of this space, where two people were sitting on opposite sides of a room, waiting. The woman was the first to break the silence.

She explained how she works two part-time jobs, one as a breakfast cook and another as a cleaner. She can't keep up with the bills but is trying to keep up with the minimums of her two credit card payments, each charging crazy interest rates because her credit is bad. And now she's looking for a place to live, a room, anything, because the guy she was living with went nuts on her when he was drunk, and he is drunk most of the time. She moved out, leaving everything behind, and now was living in a motel, a shelter kind of place, until she could figure something out.

We talked a little bit about ways she could handle her debt, negotiating interest rates, and how it sounded like the shelter was a good option because she was safe, at least. She could start over.

We grew up not far from each other in the Boston area, and we had both gone to Catholic schools. Just when I thought we might share a laugh about surviving the nuns, the tire guy came to the door and asked her to come out and look at something regarding her car.

When she came back into the waiting room, I could tell the news wasn't good. "Hey, I gotta go, it was nice talking to you," she said. While she was gone, I reached into my bag for the gift certificate I had won at a charity auction for a free tire change, and I took what cash I had in my wallet and folded it into the envelope with the gift certificate. I stood up and pressed the envelope into her hands. "You don't have to do this," she said.

"Yes, I do." I said.

She came back a moment later and said, "I can't take this, no way," and tried to pass the money back.

"You don't understand," I told her as I looked into her tired eyes, "It's what I need to do."

She asked my name and thanked me when I told her. With tears running down her face, she turned to walk away.

I didn't ask your name, I thought to myself as she left. I didn't know why.

I do know that after she left, I sat alone in the waiting room trying to warm myself by

that little box heater, never feeling more privileged or disconnected in my life. I know that as I drove home, along that long stretch of country road, the snow started to fall. I must have passed thirty campaign signs dotting the road, but all I could see was the face of that woman.

How many degrees of separation lay between us, I wondered, in terms of opportunity, of outlook. What would it take to pull her up, to bring me down? I thought of the many near misses in my life: what if I was the one abused by our parish priest? Where would I be if I didn't have my great aunt Nanny to turn to when the sky was falling? What if my husband's cancer was stage four and not one, leaving me with two toddlers? What if?

It is amazing when you really stop to think.

Stop and think for a moment that all human beings are 99.9 percent the same and yet our realities are so varied. Is it in this miniscule fraction of a genetic differential that the chasm is created? Is this where the tipping point resides? Or does our destiny reside in the twists of fate: the good luck, the bad luck?

I think about the climber guy and his angry resignation and of recent conversations I've had with friends who speak disparagingly about the economy, how we have too few pulling the wagon, too many looking for a free ride. I don't think that woman in the waiting room was looking for a free ride.

When I consider what is at stake in this election, I get overwhelmed. I realize I've lost faith in the system. But I have not lost faith in human understanding and in the power of grace. I know what this woman needed was for someone to care. She needed my hand more than she needed the pieces of paper that would vanish by the end of the day. So I ask myself, what am I waiting for? There is so much to be done.

AFTER THE LAST PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE

By Alejandro Escudé

The side you were on
broke the time-flower,

as the microphones leaked
as the moon scraped the sky

leaving traces of Quaker lore,
somebody broke the earthenware pot

against the curtains, someone else
mistook the businessman

for a gentleman. You ran
along the seashore to watch

the galleons glide into the harbor,
then you sat and laid your head

on your knees, you were very young
and it was 1798, the oil lamps

were on in the square when you
returned to your father's,

healing to lie on the bed, listening
to the brooding world.

AMERICA THIS IS QUITE SERIOUS.

By Miles Sarvis-Wilburn

America is this correct?

Allen Ginsberg asks this rhetorical question in 1956 when the world was shadowed by Eisenhower and Nixon. Elvis just hit the charts. War was cold. Larsen was perfect. Monroe married Miller. Pollock died. "In God we trust" was adopted as the national motto and the phrase "under God" was added to the Pledge of Allegiance. Sixty years later, who is writing *America* today? This question begs a deeper question: exactly whose America are we talking about?

That no good. Ugh. Him makes Indians learn read.

The term *America* is Germanic and the name *Amerigo* is said to derive from the Gothic *Amalrich*, literally meaning "work-ruler." Both work and rule were brought to the land not named America and imposed in a sense just as literal as the linguistic turn. It was upon this land and these people that the question "what is America for?" was first answered. The white man said: for the taking. And shortly after this he followed: not for you. This is still his answer, only he says it now through a megaphone with militarized police, pepper spray, rabid dogs, and selective understanding of the word *property*. He says it now to defend the money and thick fire water. The first fire water came by surprise, hot but soothing in a world of changing pain. The next fire water came well-advertised as "industrial growth," "pipeline to prosperity," or, as John Prine put it once, "the progress of man." These protesting natives, first peoples, Indians, say that water is sacred. Interesting, then, that the Nobel Prize in Literature was just awarded to a white man who said "it's easy to see without looking too far that not much is really sacred." Dylan wrote those lines on a tuberculosis blanket in 1965. Fifty one years later and we're talking about Mars while the Earth burns. So what is America for? "Protect your spirit," warned American Indian poet and activist John Trudell, "because you are in the place where spirits get eaten." America is manifest for the destined who never arrive as they never left.

Him need big black niggers. Hah.

The meaning "work-ruler" took no truer form than when America was a boat, the original pipeline of oppression: home to plantation. These were times of ice cold iron and sweltering fields, and it was at this time that America birthed race. Shortly after, it birthed the police. These two children begat a long, long list of names; some are still too recent on the tongue: Michael Brown, Alton Sterling, Philandro Castile, Freddie Gray, Eric Garner, or take it back to 1999 and Amadou Diallo. There are too many names. There were too many ships. One ship is too many. One name too hard. America is still "chaos in the windy grays / through a red prairie." Those words concluded a 1960 poem by Gwendolyn Brooks for Emmett Till. Emmett came back as Tamir Rice only to fall again. If not

for Emmett, or Tamir, or Gwendolyn, then for what? In 1852 Frederick Douglass was asked what the Fourth of July was to the American slave, he responded:

I answer: a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim. To him, your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty, an unholy license; your national greatness, swelling vanity; your sounds of rejoicing are empty and heartless; your denunciations of tyrants, brass fronted impudence; your shouts of liberty and equality, hollow mockery; your prayers and hymns, your sermons and thanksgivings, with all your religious parade, and solemnity, are, to him, mere bombast, fraud, deception, impiety, and hypocrisy—a thin veil to cover up crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages.

One hundred and sixty four years after that essay, knees touched grass during the National Anthem. Bodies crouched low to draw attention away from the hatless heads and covered hearts. This is a silent movement but it sounds like Sojourner Truth when she says that “we have all been thrown down so low that nobody thought we’d ever get up again; but we have been long enough trodden now; we will come up again, and now I am here.” America is a grave from which the resurrected rise.

America this is the impression I get from looking in the television set.

A woman is on television running for President of the United States of America. If this were told upon first landing, the ships would have turned around and sailed back to England where the Queen knows her role as a figurehead with no real power. God forbid that a woman hold the highest office in the land, and given that women were not allowed to vote until 1920, and non-white women barred until 1965, He certainly has strong feelings about this issue. We must wonder if her salary will be twenty percent less than that of Barack Obama. How long will she, at sixty eight years of age, have to field questions about the dangers of her getting her period while in office? Emma Goldman mused that a “woman’s greatest misfortune has been that she was looked upon as either angel or devil, her true salvation lies in being placed on earth; namely, in being considered human.” Indeed, the false binary is pervasive: prude or slut, babe or bitch, trying too hard or letting oneself go, smart or stupid, anorexic or overweight, woman or witch? America has never been for humans, only men. Even the word *hu-man* is a derivative of man, and just like Eve came from Adam, *wo-man* came from *man* as well. This is likely because men made the alphabet and the words, wrote the story of Adam and Eve, and invented the firebomb. Anne Sexton understood this, and so she can answer the question “what is America for?” with her poem *The Firebombers*.

We are America.
We are the coffin fillers.
We are the grocers of death.
We pack them in crates like cauliflowers.

The bomb opens like a shoebox.
And the child?

The child is certainly not yawning.
And the woman?
The woman is bathing her heart.
It has been torn out of her
and as a last act
she is rinsing it off in the river.
This is the death market.

America,
where are your credentials?

*It occurs to me that I am America.
I am talking to myself again.*

The people in the apartment below are yelling at their children. Doors are slamming and they shake the floor. The rain falls heavily like eyelids that need to sleep. This apartment complex used to be low income housing. It isn’t anymore. There was a class action lawsuit and the lawyer representing us tenants secured forty-four units out of two-hundred and sixty to remain subsidized. I called the lawyer and he said that we should hunker down, let natural attrition occur, and we’d likely be able to keep our subsidized rent. That is if we make it five years. A lot could happen in five years. There may be a new president, or dictator for that matter. I could get another master’s degree, or bachelor’s, even. I could take on some more debt. My left knee hurts from work. My lungs wheeze as I’ve run out of asthma medication and am currently uninsured, waiting to hear back from the state office. They were supposed to call weeks ago and breathing hurts now. My spirit is sore from crying. I had hope when I was young but it was a child’s hope, charming and short-lived. I should despair, but despair is boring, absurd, and ugly. All that is left are the open and empty hands of the everyday. I think this is the case for most. America is for the homeless man on the side of the road in the rain. I saw him through the shimmering bus window and his sign read “disabled vet asking for any yard work or help.” He was cold like the war when Ginsberg wrote. His hands were stiff and white, very white as though there was little life left. The life is running out of America. Do we believe in an afterlife?



One Nation Under God
Roopa Dudley

ALLHELLZAPOPPIN SEISMIC SHIFT NEW TESTAMENTARY WORLD ORDER?

By Gerard Sarnat

After going low campaigning, the day afterwards key political leaders at least feigned going high.

Most appeared to signal a peaceful transition of power and respect for the office of our President.

The time for recriminations is maybe hopefully over. Clinton's concession put country before self or party

despite winning the popular vote by about 2 million — which exceeded Kennedy and Nixon's victories.

Is it a good sign Christie—who had proved one bridge too far—was demoted from heading the transition?

Sarah Palin may be floated for Secretary of State if from her Foggy Bottom she can still see Russia.

Can Trump put together consensus infrastructure bills, improve healthcare without gutting millions' coverage?

That possibility of decreased volatility was reflected in the stock market's surprisingly positive response.

While some smile cause they feel vindicated—pain validated, just back from the wilderness where believers

ate locusts and honey with Donald The Baptist—others cry in Planned Parenthood round-the-block

lines to obtain long-term contraception such as IUDs which just might last through the next 4 or 8 years' ban.

DUTCH

By Thomas Beckley-Forest

Saliva is pooling in the back of your throat and you want to swallow, or ask Ezz if it's advisable to swallow, but you don't want to risk gulping down the little piece of paper melting on the base of your tongue, the square with the snarling wolf cartoon on it—plus you've already asked and don't want to sound like a broken record or someone who can't get with the program. THE PROGRAM. What program?

As of a couple hours ago, the date is August 13, 2016. Six people lounge in a garage, semi-circled around a plastic table piled with paraphernalia, the quality of one's seat directly correlated to the number of nights each has whiled away in this garage. It's Will's garage, so he luxuriates like a king in his reclined plastic deckchair, sucking clean a monstrous glass bong. Ezz on his right hand and Jake on his left are similarly accommodated, while counterclockwise around the wheel, you and Cam tough it out on flimsy folding chairs—though at least you aren't the skinny kid between Jake and Cam across the circle, who is teetering on a skimpy, treacherous-looking stool and looking like he's about to burst. Ezz is telling a work story, the one about the woman who staggered over drunk during a birthday party at the micro-brewery last week (it was her birthday) and proceeded—“This is in full view of several co-workers, mind you”—to grab his crotch. “I was one of them,” Will interjects, never one to be left out. It's a good story, lots of crowd participation, and Ezz is telling it well, with as much physical comedy as he can incorporate from his seat—but whatever's inside this kid on the other side of the table, he can't afford to keep it bottled up much longer, and it spills forth—the boy interrupts the show with a cry and a hand thrown passionately forward; he suddenly holds court in the garage. There is something he wants to say.

“It's like, we are all like, *here*, man, you know we are all like laying out the things they exist up here, like we each seeing something different”—his right hand flutters wildly over his temple—“and we are like expressing them, man, like sharing this, with our words and even though we are here we also there through the story”—you are starting to crack up, it's the earnest shine in his eye that really gets you, the prospecting gold-in-the-riverbed excitement—“It's crazy, man!”

Ezz throws back his head and almost cries—the whole group is sputtering with laughter, Will shaking his head with wide, can't-believe-this-kid eyes, and you narrowly avoid choking and swallowing the tab. Perhaps the steady supply of pot has artificially elevated the comedy here, but at least you're all sharing in the same distortion.

“I think this kid might be onto something,” you say thickly through the swamp in your mouth. Ezz rocks forward, still laughing. “Who even *are* you?” he demands of the garage's resident philosopher. “What's your name?”

Will turns to the kid, suddenly activated, “Yeah, wait. I actually have no idea who you

are.”

John Locke 2.0 is prepared for the interrogation. “I'm Jack, man!” he says, stabbing a finger at Cam. “I'm his neighbor, man! We live on—uh, uh, the same street.” Cam nods, fishing in his jacket pocket for another Camel.

“I open up my garage door and there is this guy,” Jack says with an irrepressible grin, miming the motion.

“It's true,” Cam says between pulls from his cigarette.

“And how old are you, again?” Ezz says.

“Seventeen, man!”

You, Will, and Ezz exchange looks. Oh hell. Will breaks in—“and you've never done acid before?”

“No man, never done before, first time is now.”

This goes a long way toward explaining his starry-eyed fascination with the miracle of human language, in all its considerable mysteries.

“Oh, Jesus,” someone says, and you all collapse back into hysterical chuckles. You look at the kid with new eyes—dark matted hair, olive skin tone just a few shades pale of healthy, a hot spark in his eye and a hackneyed smile splashed onto his face. Off the top of your head you can't place an ethnicity, but you have to admit he does look seventeen—he's a scrawny one, all long gangly limbs with no body fat.

“Greaaaaat,” says Will, voice dripping with sarcasm. “I love running a motel for first-timers.” His eyes flick toward you.

“Hey,” you say, “you're the motherfucker who wanted everyone who rolled along from the park to be tripping, remember? I'm a victim of the worst kind of peer pressure.” Will hasn't changed much.

“Oh c'mon, don't be like that,” Ezz admonishes you, echoed by grunts and yeas from around the circle. You wave him off—“Nah man, I'm straight. I'm *joking*. Everything's good. I can handle my shit.”

“Now *that's* the spirit,” Ezz reaches over and claps you on the shoulder, “*That's* what I'm talkin' about.” He looks around the group. “Let's breathe some life into this place, get some tunes going! Eh? Whadda we say?”

Jake sets an iPhone on the table, and the familiar crash of Jay-Z's “99 Problems” starts up. Not to be vexed by interruptions long or short, Ezz continues his story.

“So she's got her hand right there between my legs, right, a good firm healthy grip, and she's not letting go,” he says, using his own right hand as a visual aid. The other hand plucks a proffered joint from Will's hand, brings it to his mouth, and the story pauses for a moment. The group waits with bated breath.

Fully aware of all the eyes on him, Ezz exhales dramatically and picks right back up. “So she looks me dead in the eye, and I can tell in a second that this girl is destroyed, I mean absolutely out of her fucking mind. She's barely standing up straight—if she let go she'd probably have toppled *right* the fuck over. Meanwhile, *he*”—Ezz indicates Will, who's grinning like a bastard—“is over by the bar fucking laughing—his—*ass* off while

I've got this creature attached to my body and by this point we've got a little audience, me and her, and now she says to me, slurring her words so hard I can barely understand her, don't know how she even got it out, her hand still on my cock, she says real slow: *"I'm ready for my birthday present."*

General hilarity ensues. "So when's the wedding?"

"Oh, well, we had a long talk about that, and after consulting both our families we decided on June, you know that time of year, when the sweet, saccharine blossoms of spring mature into the lush foliage of summer."

"Oh, Ezeriya" you say, clutching a hand to your heart, "that's beautiful."

"Yeah, how 'bout you pass the foliage, motherfucker," Jake says, pulling more snickers from the increasingly delirious group. You blink at him, surprised at such a flowering of wit from the usually taciturn boy.

Ezz frowns, joint still in hand, and you sense a speech coming on. "Brother Jacob Kowalski. I would gladly remind you that the marijuana we are currently enjoying was purchased and procured by myself and the brother William Bardo" —a pontificating finger pierces the air—"and at no small amount of personal risk and expense, I might add. So," and at this he pauses for another quick hit from the erstwhile joint, "I would encourage you to remember that patience"—and another one—"is a virtue." The smoke slips out through his mouth and nostrils in thin trickles. Then, finally, with an almost ceremonial reverence, he passes it to you. "You can't rush art."

"If chiefing joints is art, then you're fucking Van Gogh," Will sneers. "Only art you've been making, god knows."

This elicits a twinge of sadness from you. You look at Ezz seriously, and he leers back at you with his jackal's grin, lolling lazily in his chair, as lean and hungry-eyed as the day you met him. His flop of hair is pulled up from his shaved temples in some kind of knot that reminds you of a samurai. Very chic.

"Been writing much since the last time we talked?"

"Not really," Ezz makes a face as he lights a Newport. "Just out living life, having experiences."

"I feel that."

"Yeah man. I'm still young, ya know. Looking for a story to tell."

"Aren't we all." You squint around the garage, which is fast thickening with smoke. Jack, the precocious 17-year-old, is jamming and bopping his head to Jay-Z, who's finished the verse about the racist cop and is ending the song the way he ends most songs: telling the haters they can fuck right off. There's a song you want to hear, but the glazed, stolid expression on Jake's face doesn't invite much input. You lean back and realize you can swallow unimpeded again. The little paper is gone.

"This," Jack points at the iPhone, "good song. When I am little, like say ten yeers auld, back in Jordan, we listen to this all the time."

You perk up. "Jordan? You're from Jordan you said? You used to live there?"

"Uh ya, for"—he pauses to think—"14 years?"

"Oh yeah? That's where you grew up?"

"Uyh...grew up, yes. Then 3 years ago we come here."

"So you're Jordanian?"

"Uyhh no just live there...we live in camp, man, huge camp on the edge of desert. 14 years. Then we come here." The garage is quiet.

"Refugee," Cam murmurs under his breath between pulls from a cigarette. A clearer picture begins to emerge in your mind.

"Ah. This camp, it was like... a refugee camp?"

"Yeah man, many refugees, more coming all the time." The kid is beginning to hit his stride, the words flooding out. "Out there man, \$500 dollars get you over the desert, \$100 more"—he stops, making a pistol with his hand—"get you a gun. Is crazy over there, man! So many people, they try to get to camps any way, then apply for visa to come here."

"Shit," says Ezz, face momentarily grim. Then he springs up and announces he's going inside in search of water. You turn back to the kid.

"So you left 3 years ago?"

He nods. "We move here, we live over on West Side. Then we move to the homes. Where I meet this guy!" He gestures to Cam and grins that same grin.

"And now you're here," you say, smiling. "Cool. Good stuff." A strange warmth is seeping through your limbs, and you realize it's been quite a while since you set that little scrap of paper to melt in your mouth. You notice the garage has emptied out—only you, Jack, and Cam sit smoking under the dim incandescent bulb that hangs from the ceiling. You turn to Cam.

"Where did you say you got this stuff from again?"

He looks at you in confusion from the other end of a newly lit cigarette. The sweet stench of the processed tobacco hits your nose like candy, and you feel a sudden craving.

"Oh, you mean the Lucy? I think it's from Holland. My friend gets it shipped to him by this guy he talks to online."

"Hmmm." You sag deeper in your chair and ask Cam if you can bum a smoke. You light it and pull hard into your lungs, hoping it will slow your skyrocketing heart rate. You realize this; that you need to relax. Virulent tingling sensations are working their way through your body, concentrating and multiplying in your hands, in the pads of your feet. "So it's Dutch. Interesting. Good to know where things are from."

Some circuit pops loose in your head, and you start laughing, a euphoric haze clouding your vision. You make eye contact with the kid across the table, and he starts laughing too, crazily, and you know this ragged child from the other side of the planet shares fully in your delusion, if even only in this single moment, which strikes you as not a little bit beautiful, and impossibly funny. Life is absurd.

You stand up, and everything goes haywire. You will later conceptualize it as some perceptual disruption in the signals between your eyes and your frontal lobe—but in the moment it is only bizarre and incomprehensible, the images of the Cam and the table and the kid swimming back and forth under the raw incandescent light like fish in a tank,

and the electricity-stained wood hues of the interior bleed into each other and wash out again too quickly to fix them clear in your head—and you're still laughing, because this is what you do it for, isn't it, for every stray thought to be a slipstream that whips you away from the mundane truth of this moment, this garage, this city, this country, this race of snickering goblins you call your people.

"I'm going inside!" you announce to the universe and stagger towards the exit, but the doorframe has slid out of place—your depth perception is freakishly inverted; a foot could be a mile, the garage could be a matchbox. You can handle this. Get out.

Hurling over the dark head of the driveway to Will's gleaming house, every light turned on to greet you. Navigating the rickety screen-door and jettisoning your shoes, stumbling across the warping kitchen tiles and rippling plains of rug inside, at last reaching the promised land, the living room—Will, Jake, and Ezz are sprawled on a massive plush couch, glued to the television screen on the opposite wall.

"Thought you'd give me the slip, eh?" they do not answer as you plop down next to Ezz on the couch. The bugging visuals of the odyssey inside have streamlined, settled down. You are almost disappointed, but the show must go on.

You direct your eyes to the TV, which is playing some kind of nightmarish cartoon. Grotesque parodies of small town America present themselves, squealing and trundling along inane little storylines that could possibly hold together as off-kilter attempts at satire—but at some point the narrative always spins out of control, unmaking its own logic as all descends into gratuitous animated violence. You struggle to understand exactly what is going on but don't fail to see the entertainment value—fleeting snaps of irony to keep the viewer's mind engaged as the cartwheel into chaos spins quicker and quicker, unhinging from any attempt at mimicking reality—the constantly warping state of the premise is its strength. Or not? Are you just too fucked up to make sense of anything at this point?

Finally, the sequence ends, replaced by a serene interlude of water sloshing over pure white rocks on some lonely ocean-shore. The sound of the surf soothes your buzzing ears. The contrast is jarring, but suddenly the Adult Swim logo appears and you understand instantly. This shit is tailor-made for acidheads. The generation of Leary, Lennon and Kesey had all these ambitious fantasies of rewiring human consciousness and reshaping society...the revolution, Woodstock, etc; but you've got full cable access and a Netflix subscription, which seems to do the trick.

You look at Ezz and smile broadly, stupidly. You feel high. You feel like the very word *high* was invented to describe this sensation. Your mind has been peeled back by the drug, letting in all the rogue stimuli and expanded, amorphous awareness that is your birthright. A birthright revoked long ago. You are have plucked the Apple from the Tree and taken a bite. You have snuck back in and robbed the Garden, but you feel no remorse.

You are more vividly alive than you ever remember being. Everything you touch, you understand on its own terms. You are sailing through a maelstrom of pure thought; all is brilliance, glimmering sparks and chaotic joy. Your body is an interstellar vehicle, with

you in the cockpit.

No. You are sitting on the couch next to Ezz. He is chewing absentmindedly on a ballpoint pen, the long cigarette tucked behind his ear protruding from his head like an antler, eyes drilled to the large screen on the wall. The Television is still on and it is loud, filling the room with its pulsing, now unintelligible burble. The room is a square box, gradually sinking deeper into the Earth. Eventually, you will sink into the earth, likely through a Catholic burial. This seems strange to you. Would you prefer cremation?

You have to go to the bathroom, a ten-foot span of rug that stretches into infinity. The journey there ranks among the most vivid bathroom-bound trips you've ever undertaken, as the world lolls crazily before your eyes—dazed, you sway as you walk, your naked toes grasping at the fluff of rug underneath, gravity itself unsteady. It is strangely exhilarating. When you make it into the bathroom, you prop up the toilet seat and begin to piss. It feels heavenly, and you have a brief impression that your soul is pouring, cascading, out of your body through that one point. You decide you may be reading too deeply into the implications of this fairly routine bathroom experience.

The bathroom wall is all mirror, from sink to ceiling, and as you wash your hands, you catch sight of something wriggling swiftly across the skin of your face, perceptible only in the corner of your eye. You stop short but can't spot it again, and decide to ignore it. You examine your face. It is the same one you have always had, though the features have blurred and coarsened with age. Something *is* happening here, a twitch unraveling over your skin like a fluttering curtain. Involuntarily, you shudder. Your heart is racing, but more than that you feel a nervous energy in every jittering cell of your body, every pulsing bloodstream. This is just a chemical, these are all just chemicals. Don't let it get on top of you. You stare into the reflection of your own pupils, bulging back at you out of the glass. There is a knock at the door.

"How ya doin' chief?" Ezz's head is peaking around the corner of the bathroom door, his eyes wide and grin wider.

You take stock of the situation and smile. "Never been better. How long have I been in here?"

"Oh, just maybe a minute or two," he obliges with a good-humored chuckle.

Right. "I think I'm ready to greet the world again."

"Spectacular." Ezz beams. "If you'd like to step aside, I'll hold down the fort in here." Ah, the man's purpose becomes clear. You cede the floor.

Somebody has changed the channel in your absence—gone are the whimsical hallucinations of Adult Swim. On the TV, Donald Trump rears up behind a tiny podium, the wall behind him a deep bloody red, snarling at someone offscreen. It's gotta be at least 3 in the morning; what channel would be running this right now? It's from the Republican primary debates—someone must have switched over to YouTube to bring you this latest spectacle: Jake, sitting next to Will, eyes on the screen, clutching the Playstation controller and guffawing, his hulking shoulders shaking with laughter. You look at Will with raised eyebrows. He shrugs. "Jake loves the guy."

Ezz rejoins the crew in front of the TV, and you turn to him with a smile as “Funniest Donald Trump Moments Compilation” continues its background whine. Ezz. One of your oldest friends. You could always count on him to laugh along with you at the big cruel joke of this world, spitting at the all endless pretensions and hypocrisies of life, even if you ended up being the two-bit hypocrites yourselves most of the time, cynical slackers sitting around bullshitting while the cities burn, telling dick jokes at the end of the world. “Ezeriya, my boy,” you rasp, touching his arm in a sudden rush of affection. “The world’s really gone sideways since we graduated, eh? I’ve been hankering to get your views on the events of the past year.”

“What’s this?” he drawls. “You want a hot take from the boy? Plenty of material. Where oh *where* shall I start?”

You gesture at the television. “Start at the end.”

“Trump?” Ezz laughs. “He’s gonna win, without a doubt.”

You shake your head. “Hell no, man. He could’ve, at one point. But he’s blowing it. He blew it.”

Will interjects. “You obviously haven’t spent enough time out here. There are Trump signs up and down this block, and half the others too—and I bet you it’s the same all over the country.” You say nothing.

Ezz nods. “Same deal near my place.”

“I assume Rico’s a fan?” you ask, referencing his stepdad.

“Oh,” Ezz titters. “You don’t mention the name *Hillary Clinton* in that house unless you’ve got a few hours to spare gettin’ *educated*.”

You laugh in spite of yourself, but Ezz keeps going.

“Honestly, I can’t wait for him to be president. It’ll be a death knell for this whole fucking piece-of-*shit* system; no more bullshit, no more façade. Then we can all just rip each other to pieces.”

“Jesus, man. That’s pretty fucking nihilistic.”

Ezz shows his teeth. “Spirit of the times, baby. Bring on the Revolution.”

You sit, thinking before you speak, as carefully as you can manage through the chemical cocktail that’s twisting your thought process around this warped line of logic like bacon tightening around a stick.

“If it is a Revolution, he really is the perfect King Moron to lead it. At the head of an army of idiots. Bring on the fucking Apocalypse.”

Ezz chuckles at your turn of phrase. “Don’t tell me you’re really that surprised. This is America. It was how we were born; now it’s how we die.” He turns a cigarette over in his hands, momentarily fixated on it before looking back up at you. “I for one think it’s long overdue.”

You just shake your head. “Jesus.”

Cam has entered the room; he glances at the screen and shakes his head before taking a seat on the rug. “Ya’ll *really* watchin’ this right now?” Jake frowns, prompting Will to move decisively, grabbing the controller. “I know what we can watch.” Sifting through

hours upon hours of recorded shows on the TV, he finally settles on one, queuing a familiar theme-song, which everyone but you sings along with until you recognize it—“*bad boys, bad boys, whatcha gonna do, whatcha gonna do when they come for you, bad boys, bad boys*”—capped by the sound of dying sirens as a robotic voice grunts “*COPS*.” This one’s a crowd favorite.

On tonight’s episode, the boys in blue have arrested a crack dealer who once did a roaring trade by selling dimebags through a hole in the screen of his front door.

“Fucking *idiot*,” Will mutters forcefully under his breath.

The intrepid lawmen have opted to set up a sting—taking this golden opportunity to bring the dealer’s unfortunate customers to justice. You have to admit, it’s a pretty slick setup. The cops post a decoy inside the house with a gravelly voice to match the mope’s, while armored officers lie in wait behind the tall hedges that box in the front yard. The best part: foyer, yard, and walkup are fully equipped with mics and cameras, so all the folks at home can get a good look at the action. They chuckle to their vest-mics as the fun begins—the first unsuspecting customer approaches, a slightly overweight black man in a plain white T-shirt. He exchanges a few words with the decoy and has already pushed money through the ripped mesh screen when he realizes his mistake—you can see the panic freeze in his eyes. He bolts and barely makes it halfway across the yard before several officers hit him like a pack of dogs, slamming him to the ground with a crunch. The whole room whoops like they’ve just seen a killer interception.

Brutality aside, the whole thing has this bizarre racial charge that rubs you the wrong way—maybe it’s something about the way the cameraman is crowing as it goes down—and instinctively you shoot a quick glance at Cam, the only black guy in the room, trying to gauge his reaction. There isn’t much, just the same glazed expression everyone else is wearing.

Mouth full of grass and dirt, the “perp” is read his rights and given a *pro bono* lecture about life choices, as well as a good hearty fine and a ride down to the station. That’ll teach him.

The scenario resets. This time, it’s a scrawny woman with tight cornrows across her scalp—only she’s a bit smarter and catches on to the trick more quickly, ripping back across the yard in a flash, swearing viciously. She makes it all the way into the alley along the side of the house and gives them a pretty good chase, which the audience watches from a pursuing cop’s jiggling armor-vest—but he finally brings her down, twisting one arm cruelly and impossibly far behind her back while she snarls, writhing underneath the massive cop until the fight goes out of her. Then she slumps, letting him scream at her, her face frozen in a mask of deadened stoicism, devoid of all expression.

“Jesus Christ,” you say. “That’s *gotta* be like fucking police brutality or something. They’re just bullying these fucking people.”

Will just shakes his head; he gives you the same look he gave at the kid’s first outburst in the garage. You’re not getting with the program, that look says, do I have to hold your hand through everything? “I don’t think you get it. If it wasn’t ridiculous, it wouldn’t be

on the show.”

Where is that kid anyway? “Where is that kid?” you ask Cam. “Wasn’t he in the garage with you?”

“Probably still in there,” Cam snorts. “He was zooted the fuck out, man, just talking his head off.”

“About what?”

“Fuck if I know. I don’t think he heard me when I said I was going inside, so I just left him the rest of my Camels and walked out.”

“Damn.” You look at him curiously. “By the way, what’s his deal? He’s from Jordan?”

“Nah, he just had refugee status there. He’s from Afghanistan, I think. I was talking to his mom once—she told me some wild stuff. Back in their village she was getting warnings from the Taliban, like if she didn’t run, they would take her baby and harvest his organs or something crazy like that.”

“Jesus Christ.” You sit still, your mind blank, struggling to integrate this new scrap of information. “What the fuck is going on over there?”

“I dunno man...” Cam shakes his head. “Some fucked up shit.”

You are both distracted by a commotion in the kitchen; Ezz is marshaling the troops for an expedition to get coffee and donuts. Cynthia’s Donut Express has just opened for the morning, only a quarter mile up the road. Not a moment to waste. You have never wanted a warp cup of coffee more than you do at that moment. Will shakes his head; he’s not coming. Not a good idea, he says. Fair enough. The rest of you rise and file out through the kitchen, headed for the backdoor.

None of you see the kid till he’s in your midst, materializing out of the black depths of the backyard like a ghost, staggering into range of the harsh fluorescent backdoor light Ezz has just flicked on. He looks vaguely skeletal, t-shirt hanging off his thin frame, teeth chattering madly. “Where’d you guys go?” All of you are too taken aback by the sight to answer right away, and he just stands there, shivering. He looks at you imploringly. “Yo man, I’m *cold*. You gotta like, give a sweater to wear or something man like I’m going to get hypothermia here, man!” He steps forward. “Help me, man! I’m gonna fuckin’ die out here!”

You stare at the kid, briefly unable to speak. “I’m only wearing a t-shirt, man. It’s not that cold. It’s summer.”

Cam steps forward, getting between you and the kid. “Just calm the *fuck* down dude. We’re going to get coffee. Coffee, yeah? It’ll be warm in there.”

Ezz and Jake have already disengaged and are mounting their bikes, about to kick off down Will’s driveway. “This is gonna be a trainwreck,” you think you hear one of them chuckle to the other. You grab your own bike while Cam coaxes the kid onto his bike and they take off, the kid still pestering Cam about the sweater. You realize you forgot your phone and rush back inside.

You find it on the massive plush couch. Will is still lounging there, surfing through

channels. “Still not coming, eh?”

He shakes his head. “Nope. None of you is in any condition to be in public. They know my face at Cynthia’s—I’m staying well clear.”

You backtrack out of the house, hooking headphones into your ears and jumping on your bike—then you hit the road.

The ride down Sheridan Road is serene—the slow march of “White Rabbit” in your eardrums as you pedal haphazardly alongside a dozen empty lanes, sirens omnipresent in the distance. The acid is still very much affecting you, and the cells in your body feel in constant flux, shuffling and reshuffling up and down from head to toe continuously, never letting you forget how strange and magical it is to be alive at this particular point in the infinite wash of time and space. You are whooooshing past the deactivated and dilapidated bones of old Americana—gas stations and auto shops and shuttered carwashes with 1950’s Space Age designs, drained electricity, metallic sentries in a gray and lifeless wasteland; it reminds you of a graveyard; it chills you to the bone. Maybe Jack was right—there is a cold edge to the night air.

Finally, you can see the donut shop gleaming up ahead, the first place open, blasting the darkened strip with light. You whip into the parking lot, swinging off the bike with what you imagine to be a good amount of flair. Cam is standing in front of the glass-window shopfront, arguing heatedly with the kid. Through the glass you can see Ezz and Jake fooling around inside, trying to pick out what donuts they want from a full wall of selections. You bypass the arguing pair and enter the glass doors, approaching the counter to order.

“I’d like a large coffee, please.” You pause, appraising your choices. The process is complicated by a series of visual distortions; the reality before your eyes is almost pixelated. The childish white-blue-pink color scheme of the donut shop interior suddenly reminds you of a Lego-block structure, and you stifle a giggle. “Could I also get a half dozen cinnamon glaze donuts?”

Looking around, you notice some of the workers seem disgruntled—one girl in particular shakes her head as she prepares your coffee, shooting venomous looks towards the front window. You follow her gaze, and see all of your friends standing out on the sidewalk, engaged in a heated, soundless row on the other side of the glass. Something turns in your stomach. You take your donuts and your coffee and swiftly move to see what’s going on.

“You gotta shut this kid up!” Jake is shouting at Cam. “I’m *cauld*, I’m *cauld*, I’m *dying*, this shit is getting ridiculous.” He turns to the kid, who is hanging on Cam’s elbow, won’t leave him alone. “Handle. Your. Shit.”

“Why are you guys being like this?” The kid is whining, wheedling. “I’m *cauld* man, I swear I’m gonna have like hypothermia after this, look I’m turning blue, man!”

“Look man,” Cam says, trying to be patient. “You need to calm the *fuck* down. We can *not* do this right now.”

As if sensing a dead end, the kid turns to you. “You, man. You understand man, you get it. We all go through bad shit man, we gotta be there for each other.” The tremor in his voice stops you cold.

“I need help man,” he continues, his tone becoming more frantic. “I don’t feel safe here man. I need—I need to use your phone.”

“Just hold on, okay? Everything’s gonna be okay, just calm down.”

“Stop! Don’t move.” He’s shouting now. “I need to use your phone, man!” He stops, putting both hands out towards you as if he’s going to seize you by the shoulders. You take a judicious step back. “Give me your phone! Give. I need. I need to call my mom.” He holds your gaze. His acid-popped eyes are tight, terrified. His lip is trembling. “Mom. My Mom.”

You stare at the kid, really just a kid, you realize—a child, a baby, his psyche reduced to something small and clinging, flailing in an unintelligible world. In the corner of your eye, a woman with a dour early-morning commuter face is climbing out of her car and casting looks your way. You realize you’re making one hell of a scene, with quite an audience too. This has gotten out of hand. “We need to get the fuck out of here,” someone whispers.

“Okay. Hold on. Just calm down,” you plead while backing away from him, trying to draw him from away from the gleaming fluorescent oasis of the donut shop, back into the anonymity of the shadows on the edges of the parking lot. Ezz, Cam, and Jake are with you, making their way toward where the bikes are locked.

“No!” he shouts, scrambling after all of you, the sound echoing out along the strip. “Why are you just—goddammit man!” He’s almost crying. “Stop saying these things to me and just give me the things”—he reaches out, grabbing at closest thing in reach, which just happens to be the large coffee in Jake’s hand.

“YO!” Jake drops the coffee—scalding liquid erupts all over his arm, his leg, staining his skin. Before any of you can react, he winds up and drills a fist right into the kid’s stomach—you hear it connect with a *whoompf!* The kid hits the blacktop, and Jake follows it up with a savage kick to the ribs, which lands with a crunch. Then another. Then another.

“Well, I’m out,” Ezz mutters, looking back at the scene with one leg thrown over the frame of his bike. Swearing, he wheels out of the lot and onto the road. You suddenly want very much to follow him. But you find you can’t move.

You are all frozen in time, watching events unfold with an impotent horror. Jake lands another kick on the kid, who is making a wretched moaning sound from the asphalt. “You *fucking* tweaker,” he spits. You feel like you’re on the other side of a vast gulf, watching this all happen on a screen.

He’s going in for another blow when Cam seizes his shoulder and wrenches him back. They’re shouting at each other, but the sound is drowned out by the pounding in your ears. You crouch down by the kid while he coughs out spatters of blood onto the gravel, knowing you did not lift a finger.



Racism Poster, Reichstag, Berlin, 2002
Harry Wilson

DOUBLY BLINDED

By Sola Oyefara

Lost in a million ways
the mind devolves into
a doubly bonded light stream
digesting reason and moment.

I walk off the edge
letting go of habit
letting the body go limp
This is all I can do

When body is on fire
I quickly fight it.
I am not obsessed
with what urges combustion
for both body and fire
are mutating beyond control

Now is always useful
I simply blink my eyes
and shake my head in order
to see what is really out there

This is how difficult it is to see:

Sun shoots out threads
Man captures something
Body is now fire
I must put out its flames
I am working up to it
I am waking myself up
I am working myself...
Oh, look at that!
Look at what?
Look at that thing
And I look at that thing
and become lost in newer ways

Flames in the breast wobble
The one tooth I have left hurts
The little wisdom left in my grasp
is being gobbled up by the fire that gives it form
I am being urged to go limp

A short while ago
the Masons of the world
forgot how to build an arch.
My son wishes to be a mason.
I am not quite sure that he will not
suffer periods when he forgets himself

Still, fire is good when captured
It is best though when it captures itself

TRUMP AS A FIRE WITHOUT LIGHT #101

By Darren C. Demaree

I'm willing to call him the sun (he'll never be the sun), if he's willing to let Sandra Cisneros make all of his decisions. She'd have him resign, but before all of that she would make him sell pumpkins in the desert for a year. She'd make him be charitable. She'd dress him in a black-laced bra, and pose for a calendar that benefits the LGTB community. Basically, I've been drowning in these Trump poems, and I wanted to think about Sandra Cisneros for an hour, so I put her in charge of Donald Trump in my mind. It was the loveliest hour I've had in a while.

TRUMP AS A FIRE WITHOUT LIGHT #102

By Darren C. Demaree

Think of the white bear skin he owns. Think of how awkward it must have been the first time he lay down naked on top of it. Think of how his belly would reach further down than he wanted it to, how he would see all of himself before the faceless woman entered the room, how in that one moment before she started in on him for some unknown reason (money) he would doubt the whole of the world. The man isn't stupid. He cares about what we think of him. He's had those moments where he wants to, if only one second, not be him. It's doesn't excuse anything he's done. It doesn't excuse anything he's done. It doesn't excuse anything he's done. Most of us don't think to ruin the world because we're aging terribly. Most of us are thankful for the woman. Most of us can rein in the self-doubt enough to not sacrifice the bodies of others in our name. This really is some old-school inept King bullshit.

CONTRIBUTORS

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Brian Fanelli's most recent book is *Waiting for the Dead to Speak* (NYQ Books). His work has been published by *The Los Angeles Times*, *World Literature Today*, *The Paterson Literary Review*, *Verse Daily*, *Main Street Rag*, and elsewhere. Brian has an M.F.A from Wilkes University and a Ph.D. from Binghamton University. Currently, he teaches at Lackawanna College.

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Lydia Swartz conjures with poetry, images, performance, and found audio. Lydia has a chapbook, [Land of Lists](#), and a [deck of Shufflepoems](#). She [proposed GAY MARRIAGE to her partner of 16 years](#) in 2016. Lydia pontificates at [No One Tells You](#), [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and curates a [Seattle Spoken Word calendar](#).

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Thomas Beckley-Forest developed to his current size in Buffalo, New York, a fine city. He studies in Syracuse, and spends his time reading, procrastinating, and cavorting around in an endless crusade to impress Lou Reed's ghost. He knows fiction will not save him, but he continues to attempt it anyway.

Tish Hanlon is a proud first generation American. She lives in the Mount Washington Valley of NH with her husband and two children.