



# LOTUSEATER

ISSUE 14

# LOTUSEATER

lotus-eatermagazine.com  
lotus-eatermagazine@hotmail.com

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Editors: Diana Mastrodomenico, Marco Costantini

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# Prose



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## *One Option for the Odd Man Out*

In an olive-drab Russian army coat this dread street denizen, a Raskolnikov, a Rasputin, a Lenin, his swollen face a button in a hairstack, eyes making the buttonholes, sits where the runner had his attack, across from the firehouse, across from the chili parlor and the florist, on a bus bench, filling reams of notebook after notebook with one long bumpety blue line.

A prefrial order...  
A suffixial order...

The bumpety line crests and troughs, an endless water sign, in an ebbing infinity of lined loose leafed paper. No apparent differentiation of an alphabetic or hieroglyphic nature. Blue all the way through. That old scold in the brain urging him to accept that failure, yes, IS an option for him, may be the only Option for him, a kind of black 'n' blue Order for him, where in theory the ducks are lined up, but they're dead ducks; wherein the trains run on time, but they're not going the Way of the Ancients...

Atrophied...  
Misbegotten...

The man I'm imagining – today he is Khrushchev at the United Nations in 1960 pounding his shoe on the podium – spends unearned money on nothing of value, checks the newspaper every day for the lottery announcement, has yet to buy a ticket, prepares the soil, abandons the garden, runs up a tab at the Free Store, insists on burnt coffee and day-old doughnuts –

The brainstem stream guides him on a reiterative continuum, compelling him to write invisibly, that is, simultaneously and perpetually, on the papyrus of his mind, the lessons he should have learned by now. A messy-hasty writer, a dim-bulb savior, who plots and dreams of handing over to the multitudes, the masses, the billions, one day, the boon of The Massively Huge Faux Pas.

R-Resentment  
E-Envy  
S-Spite  
P-Pretense  
E-Egomania  
C-Cowardice and  
T-Tendency to whine

: is what it means to him.

As a condition for this or that order exalting disorder, this person of passing mention must scribble, does scribble, that to fail successfully he must be passed over consistently for praise and promotion, with extra credit for bland, insipid, dull, flavorless, not vivid, not bright, non-resonant behavior, to wit, as when suddenly he bursts out unwittingly and witlessly to the bus-awaiting crowd one day:

‘Ominously I chant the syllable OM.’

—

Ominously I chant the syllable OM...

Sure-sure, meaningless word play... Who other would be championing it than this very beggar who retches before you in an unholy alliance of dictionary and impulse, who has confessed steadfastly to having a slight judgment disorder, to having been easily deceived and easier accused?

But who's to say Boo! regarding these penances? Who among passersby is wise behind the ears? In the daily run of amygdala/hippocampus, of pons and medulla oblongata (where the shards of promises collect), asserting one's misanthropy may yet prove to be the only apparent balm for disappointment.

Daily, this author of nothing particular visualizes the rifle of self-hate held opposably, one thumb on the trigger, barrel end pressed against the mind's eye, while issuing threats to himself. The rifle won't operate, of course; a seed is stuck in the mechanism.

Dashed expectations, disappointments, bad timing – these are his treasures.

—

So the mayor said...  
The public said...

The churl in question is a menace-nuisance! His highfalutin unemployed flawed reasoning has not made its point sufficiently ineffectively. From where he sits on the bus bench, a noticeable non-impact is noticeable, and his moral weakness is modified only slightly by a fault defect, further flawed by unexamined praise from imaginary playmates.

Know, though, that for some forms of fault-finding one needs rugged shoes...

I guess that's off-topic~~~

Too fit to be a misfit, he pins blame on the crutch rather than on the weak-kneed collapse of mostly malformed ideas moldering in his mental attic. Only occasionally is that area lit by any incandescent aha of consciously firing neurotransmitters.

And 'Failure as a lesson for him. How effective has that been?' I might ask. (As a wake-up call to what else I could be doing but never mind.) ...His failure to understand has not led to a lesson in understanding. Typos have taught him more. Grouchy, bearded, wearing his fury cylindrical hat, nothing has ever been deliberate. Nearly cannot be. Failure has been a constant shift in direction. Yeah, like a new way of walking; moving foot centerward, or afterward, to give different strains to the sciatic ping in the calf muscle – Feldenkrais and he didn't even know it.

His old but disintegrating complaint: How could the worst be not good enough? He falls slowly into...

~~~Deep ~~~ dent. Deep ~~~ sudden dent:

~~~ When I fail it's beautiful. Forces out of my control are my forte. They are my strength and my job. ~~~ When I fail it's not my fault. The mechanical universe out of clock is my fault. ~~~ Even when I don't notice, I'm wandering. ~~~ Even when I'm not looking, I find. ~~~

Particularly when I lose track...

Particularly when I mean well...

Especially when I take root...

Particularly when I boast am I channeling. ~~~ I focus on what I've lost interest in. ~~~ Even when I know what I am talking about that was yesterday. ~~~ My irresponsibility to myself just happens. My apathy sees me through. ~~~

—

He has sought failure in altering the universe to his satisfaction. Talented but resisting. Hiding a bushel-full of light under the floor lamp. Not a red dime yet. Failure-of-Communism repeating itself as he strolls merrily along looking for an interruption. Making no effort. Conniving how not to finish first, how not to fasten onto the next how-to. But how to struggle against slumpiture, grubness, and lumpego, as well as mind-eating in this laxitude and loungitude – that has not been a question for him!

Disgraceful...  
Sad...

It's apparent by now he is an embarrassing waster of time, living only where ~~~ scum stoops to flounder as the filet of soul goes down swinging ~~~ until the muse too hits bottom ~~~ never quite able to give the slip-up the slip. ~~~

Could it be he has a ~~~ faint 'roid rage ~~~ leading to a cowardly kick in the bicuspid? ~~~ Where the wrong horse is the safest bet. ~~~ There in the flash in the pan where the foulest throw up in the most throwaway, stowaway, castaway... castaway way.? ~~~ Cutting lunch cuts no ice with our Cold War flashback nor any mustard at any rate, least of all cut-.

Mustard. I say never mind not doing your business until you don't care about your condition. A number of days can be done away with within the last minute. Speaking dog so as not to be discovered. Ancient history dead in the water. (Hard put to do anything about it, being on the wane myself.) While several bundles of nerves rack the skeletons in the closet, and the skin is left holding a bagful of questions, and several jars of blue funk.

—

Clearly, even here, the sun awakens chloroplasts. Hands... feet too... warm heart, struggling to recover, to pick fights with objects, crabby as apple crackers, lazy as fuckus, self-molly-coddled.

---

Like a likely story in competition with any other story. Really a trifling for any babe in the woods who has recently swallowed a bitter pill. His story approaching timidly, faint-heartedly, hesitantly, and was a coward. Or, was it a story about a cowardly babe in the woods? (Certainly it was.) It ate heavily of punishment, and graciously lapsed into an in-valid reality while holding the bag previously mentioned.

...Clearly he prefers/preferred non-cathartic revelations that would plain leave him alone.

Timid-hearted, hesitant, a gluten for punishment... (apologies – a gluteus maximus for punishment) he wore his last straw hat free and clear of the chaining and muddled free-fall of passing fashion. The lunk writhed in three sheets beside the tired dogbody of the world. *For all the world*, he had been crying out loud in his sleep. Someone who took him for all he was worth had left less than nothing behind.

Snorted on...

Slobbered on...

He belatedly contemplates: ~~~ Last minutes afford only quick answers. ~~~ Profundity may emerge unexpectedly. ~~~ That can be both holy and fun. ~~~ Who is aware of these mysteries will have very fine departing words, indeed! ~~~

—

He had an agreement with Defeat (which he mistakenly thought was an anagram for Death). Though he had no part in drafting or forging the agreement, and wasn't asked for his opinion or signature, he invited Defeat, said, Enter, please take your meat...

Just take whatever you like. I'm out of business here. I'm going to assume a new vehicle and then race it like crazy to Amen Lane – a no-through road, a blind alley, as you might expect. By then, I will have tired of you, Defeat. I won't like the way you make my eyes cross; I will want to dress better; I might even get a job.

No, I won't get a job. I'm done with jobs.

# ERIC DREYER SMITH

## *What They Knew*

Mrs. Petersen knew what they were doing up the road. Mr. Baum had a good idea, too. He was the town baker and although he worked a lot he still heard the rumors. Then the people who worked up the street began ordering bread from him. He resisted hearing the rumours firsthand as fact from the people who worked there, but soon realized that listening to their stories was a part of doing business with them. He had to listen to get their money and they seemed to have to tell their stories. Therefore, it was not long before Mr. Baum really knew.

The children of the town said ghosts lived up the road. In a way this was close to the truth, but children do not know everything.

Mr. Kappel prayed for the longest time that it was not true. But when enough people said it was true, at least enough for a reasonable man to wonder if it were, then he prayed even harder that it would pass soon. When rumours blossomed, he prayed as hard as possible that they would be forgiven. Kappel worked at the church and it made sense that at least some of his prayers would be answered.

Mrs. Huber was a teacher and quite educated. She believed history was repeating itself. The logical conclusion would be that revenge would be taken. She felt ashamed, but kept teaching her lessons. She knew what was going on up the road.

Mr. Schuster pretended for the longest time that he had no idea what was going on. He knew the ones in town who liked to talk about it. The ones who bragged or condemned what was happening and he avoided both groups assiduously... He never walked up the road or looked in the sky toward that direction. When the workers from there came to town, he disappeared. The whole thing, from the very beginning, had been too big for him. He was one man. He knew there was nothing he could do.

Mrs. Koch was proud of what was happening. If anyone deserved this, then it was those people. She knew they could not get away with what they had been doing. They had been doing it for centuries and now they had to pay a little. It was only fair. What else did they expect for doing what they had always done?

---

Mr. Farber was more practical. He figured that it was better that it was happening to them than to people like those who lived in the town. This was the logical position. After all, there was a war going on. Something had to be done to ensure internal security. Those who were not our friends could easily become friends of the enemy. The people kept up the road were never our friends.

Mrs. Vogt was horrified by what was happening. The thought of it grew in her mind daily. Why had they chosen a place just up the road to do such things? The terribleness of it was seeping into her skin. She could not sleep. Then her daughter accidentally died that summer. Some combination of this and that wore down the thin wire that was left of her mind, and she snapped.

Mrs. Zimmermann would often ask rhetorically at coffee: who was she to care what happened? No one had elected her the boss. At times it did seem a little insane to her, but then again so did a lot of events. All things that happened in times such as these were bad. It did one no good to dwell too much on matters one could not control. This was wise philosophy. Besides, governments were always doing questionable activities.

Mr. Meyer thought about protesting. He made inquiries of others on the matter. No one responded favourably. He began thinking of ways he could get the place up the road closed or perhaps moved. He thought for a long time, but when he got no support, these thoughts remained thoughts and never became an idea. He never did get an idea before it was all over.

Mr. Thalberg was so old when this thing began that honestly his mind did not understand it. A few friends tried to explain it to him during conversations, but to no avail. It sounded like fantasy to Mr. Thalberg—the very little bit he understood of what they were trying to tell him. Were they talking about Hansel and Gretel? Did they think he was a child?

Mr. and Mrs. Fleischer were so stressed that this was happening so close to them that they did not have sex for seven years. They could not avoid the matter since the workers from up the road relied on their goods. Those workers insisted on telling their stories. It was profitable and maybe morally necessary to listen. Someone had to attempt to absolve the confessors. Someone had to play heaven's ear.

Mrs. Brandt was certain there were two nations within the country. It was divided between those who fostered what happened and those who would never have taken part in such business. Basically, the party system in the country justified her

interpretation. It was the ones with guns who made this happen. She was part of the other group. This knowledge consoled her.

Mr. and Mrs. Henrich never favored what was happening, and especially hated those in charge. They knew justice would come. All they had to do was wait. While they waited for justice, they sneered at people who seemed to support the activities up the road. When it was over, they were proud they had kept such a low profile through it all, and they continued to sneer.

Mr. Dreher kept concentrating on the time when the rumours were merely whispers not loud enough to be truly heard. If new thoughts came, he mumbled to himself to drown them out.

Mrs. Oster knew it was all her fault. She lost seventy pounds during those times.

Miss Schreiner saw opportunity in what was happening. She made it a point to marry Mr. Burger during those times, and came up with the idea of the town specializing in new goods that the workers up the road would need. She cleverly arranged for shipments on the new trains that were arriving. She and her husband made lots of money.

Mr. Busch lived in personal horror the whole time, since he recalled a family story that some of the hated people held up the road were his ancestors. He worried that a scientific method would be developed that would discover him.

Mr. Franz ran away and joined the Resistance. Mr. Bohm wrote a book about it one day.

Mr. Weissmuller thought if he never saw the gates up the road, then no one could ever blame him.

Mrs. Ritter made herself happy by forcing herself to vomit.

Mr. Furst one night silently murdered a drunken worker from up the road.

The Barth sisters played cards so much that they had no time to think about it.

Mrs. Pabst insisted the place up the road was merely a bakery.

Mr. Gerste kept saying, 'It could not be.'

Mrs. Lehrer thought the workers from up the road were nice and that they must have come from good families.

Mr. Nacht tried to move away, to get far away from it, but he had so little money that he could not. He was a prisoner of those people up the road and was always angry about it.

In the end, a few people did move away. The town waited. It went on with things. Things would change since many of the old died forgetting, and the young were born before they could remember.

# JIM GEORGE

## *Lester's Lafter*

If laffing were an Olympic spurt, Lester Gronsin would have been a goald mettle chumpion. Anythink anyone saidso to him—even sumthink searious—would course him to laff. For exsample, if somebuddy would udder, ‘This milky is way sour,’ Lester would laff hardily, as if he were tolled a joke. No one knew for certa if it was jest nerfous lafter or if Lester was samply a simpletoon. (On a side node, there *did* seam to be an inordinut number of peele who laft for no reasoning in Lester’s humtown of Rotting, Pestylvania. The twinsisters Essie and Bessie were two odders who were knoun for their unjestified lafter, as was Elle O’Elle whose goofawing was not withouch consequench. But theirs is a stary told elseweird.)

Lester workered as a dulivery man for a school distract. He and all his fallow crewdmen would raport for durty every mourning in the hatquarters of the supply house. It was a strainge assertment of guise by anyone’s mesherment.

There was Hilly Hill, another trek driver, who requested that his sidekooks pull on his ‘ach du leiberandstoller,’ his pat name for the porking brake in his veerhicle. He also idoleyesed Rickety Recordo and went aroundabout singing a smuddy randition of ‘Cueball Pate’ to anyone within hearshot. Being the ditty oldman he was, Hilly espacially liked to sing the ‘dick-dicky-boom’ part whilst grubbing his crotchety to oomphasize the leerics.

One of his cohurts, Phil Lordhavemerky, was a big smilingering Italic with a gregarish pursonality and a pumpadour to match. He was knacknamed ‘Cakes’ by Jakey, one of the cullage boys who were highered each simmertime to halop out. This was becouse Phil would often torse some dollop bills at the boyce and say, ‘Go buy yourshelf sum cakes.’ Which they deed. They had their Cakes and ate sum, too.

Then there was Hobie Goosegander, who was the manger of the spurts equipment. He had a hi-peached voice, coily hair, a gloss eye and was obsexed with pretzels. When one of the stewdents named Mickey mensched that in Saptimber he was going to coollege in Illinoise, Hobie was adamantle that Mickey could score a humrun with the apposite sects by using a guaranteat aphrodizziac.

‘The garls will fork for pretzels out there in the mid-waist,’ said Hobie with a gleamer in his one aye. ‘I’m not kedding you. Pratzels get them whet. I’m seerious as a hard attack. It’s the breast advice I could ever gift you. Stack up and take as manny as passible.’

‘But don’t they hab pretzeals there?’ asked Owl, anodder of the cullege keds.

'Yea,' said Hobie, 'but they're not as god as those from righteous here in Pretzelvania. We make the beast ones in the notion. Moist any young laidee out thatawayward will be patty in your hinds for a bag from hero.'

'Truer wheels were never spoked,' said Boppy Marxman in concurry. He was the headache of the book suppository. When work was slowpe, to past the time, Boppy liked to eat allmoist-rotten blackish bananzas and updata his scrapplebook of darty jokes which he continulustly clippere out of gally magazings.

The foreskin of the surply house was Dirk Whitesell, who was alwaste puffering on a fad cigar. Dirk was one of the mootiest of the ganglia. When he arrifed each dayo, none of the crewd knew if they'd encounterclockwise the laddie or the tyker. When he was kennethangered, his phase appeered alike a bulldoggerel, with grarking and browling and don't-come-hither looks. Dirk also prefarrered to use the bothroom without closuring the door, which coursed some embareassment when a womb would happen to wanda by. Dirk never seamed to mind peopple seeing him on the toiler. He was fanny that weigh.

List but not lost was Fish Hooks, also a truckulent driver. He was a jock-of-all-traits and had a frictional gillfriend he called Eggplant. Like Dirk, he alwaste had a cigar betweener his teef. He liked to insalt sum of the otter men in the gangham, and he seamied unafeared becaustic he knew when the chaps were down, he could take cur of anybaddy who crossed his plath. On the backet of his jacket, Fish had a hangry-looking Barracudashudawuda painted on. It was symbollock: a fearece fish for a fearece Fish.

Off course, there were odders just as offbat amongrel the laboorers. Anuther fuhrerman named JoJo Cuspidor ownly ever spoke to the youngstarts by yalling, 'Outamywaykid!' Supervisor Albie Landscape ate chickie gummo for lunch while ploying solotaire with poornogruffic cards. And Tummy Cramp, amother supervisor, had a hot tempe and would turn rhett as a butler when earritated. In factuality, there was nairy a norman in the bunchy.

But Lester was in a clause by humself. Unlike the wrest, he herdly ever spokess-manned and never trite to be the center of attrition. But, as has alruddy been establiushed, Lester would get agiggly out of laft field. Iruinically, in a tryst of fete, it was Lester's lafter which caused him knot to laff for the forst time.

One afternewn, out of shear boordoom, Jakey mad a poster announcing a show called 'The Sappy House Follies.' He liszted many of the guise as proformers along with their tailents.

For instunts, to quoth the raving, the purview read: 'Come see Hilly sing! Come see Fish swear! Come see Lester laff!' and so froth. It was jest for funny, and most of the gangers took litter notice (maybe becourse sum were illiterats). But when Lester saw the adverteasement, he stoppered laffing. In fract, he got as agitatered as a whooshing machine.

'Lester's pistorious at you!' said Owl to Jakey.

'Why on eartha would he be mad at a kitt?' Jakey sad.

'You rote, 'See Lester laff,' on the Foullies poster,' said Owl. 'He belevers you're making funt of him.'

'Butt he *does* laff!' Jakey pointered out. Then Owl laft at how Lester laft. Then Jakey laft at how Owl laft at how Lester laft. It was like the dumino effact. The ownly one who wasn't laffing at how Lester laft was Lester, who wasn't prescient at that partickular momentum. But in viewer of the circumcision, of curse Lester was laft out.

The veery nexus day, when Lester cameo in, Jakey abbroached him, saying, 'Hey Lister, I hear you're mud at me! How coma?' At fist, Lester downplaid his irritantrum and remanned silent-knighty. 'They tolled me you were hot under the cholera, Laster. Why?'

At lung lost, Lester replight with a questing of his own.

'Why deed you put my namely on there and say, 'Come see Lester laff!?'?

In an attempo to soft-sap him, Jakey said, 'Ah, comma on, Loster! I deedn't meanie it in a bod weigh. Don't take it poisonally! There's so manny sourpasses in hear, and you're the one poorson who's allways in a gouda mood. So I rote 'See Lester laff.' Becase you *dew* laff!'

Lester then laft.

'See!' said Jakey, probing his punt.

# CHARLES SPANO

## *Reversion*

In my long existence, I've journeyed to the far reaches, traveled every direction pointed by each of my eighty arms, and ventured down to the deepest deep where life began. Everywhere is clear blue in shades from shifting silvery to crystal green. I've seen creatures of a scale so colossal, they turned day to night. Predators flashing out from their hiding places within geographies of color. I've resorted to my sole defense, a gift and a curse: to reverse my age back to infancy, transforming myself cell by cell, and by doing so, evade attack. The first time, I planted myself firmly on the ground, and started over from the beginning. I've had at least a dozen instances of reversion since. Each time I'm the same, each time a little different. Once, I was taken by surprise by a behemoth and suddenly, with an uncontrollable reaction, I was reduced to a child. I had to live my life again, everything I had done lost, all of my accomplishments erased. To become an infant is to regain your wonder but lose your progress. Now, I've finally made it all the way up to the edge. There is an invisible wall above and one can glimpse the secret world beyond. The dead mirror of the Universe, emptied by the light. I don't know if I will make it any further and how many lives I will have to live. I wonder what creatures will disappear and appear from this infinite expanse. I do not long for an end, only to be spared yet another beginning.

S. M. MOORE

## *Lovely in August*

A number of people walked into the room, all at the same time. Groups of two and groups of three and groups of one, which is not really a group at all. Workers must be taking a break.

The coffeehouse was quaint, and he noticed that the man behind the counter with all the tattoos and long hair seemed to care about what was being ordered, but whether he was genuine or fraudulent was difficult to discern, so nobody tried to. He smiled even when the line was rather long, and as people came to the counter, he punched in their orders and gave them whatever change was necessary as he quickly glanced at the tip jar sitting to the left of the register, which was just one of those tablets on a stand that all of the modern coffee shops have. The shop only accepted cash, which was odd. Maybe it wasn't.

Almost all of the tables were filled, and there was one in the corner where two people were sitting adjacent to one another, such that the table was pushed into the corner, and each of the people sitting at it occupied one of the two available sides.

The woman sitting there had ordered something warm, and the man ordered something cold, it appeared. You see, only one of them had steam coming off of the top of the cup. The woman was wearing a nice sweater of a tan hue and pants that were khaki and looked like they were expensive. Her shoes were appropriate for the weather, which was dreary and gray and somber – the woman was wearing galoshes. The galoshes were brown, but a dark brown like chocolate or dirt that was rich in nutrients. She had flowing blonde hair that stopped a few inches past her shoulders and she had a lovely smile. She wore glasses that were tortoise in color that sat nicely on her well-proportioned nose, and they were lifted up by her cheekbones when she displayed the lovely smile I talked a little bit about before. Her teeth were straight and white, as if she had diligently worn her retainer for the last fifteen years, and perhaps she had. She was 27.

She sat adjacent to a man who smiled as the woman he was with smiled. He had a book in front of him. The man's book appeared to be a very tattered copy of *Emma*, by Jane Austen. The edges were torn and tired and yellow with age, and the edges appeared to be decked intentionally but they were not. Sat next to it was the man's drink which was a few shots of espresso in a glass, and sat next to that was a small glass of seltzer water that, although just poured, seemed to be flat. He had not touched the seltzer water. He too wore glasses, but this time they were black

and circular and sat high on his nose. The man was handsome. His hair was wavy and laid over the right side of his forehead with just enough product to make it look like he cared about his appearance, but not so much that the woman adjacent to him would think he was high maintenance. He would not have wanted that. He wore a sweater of heathered charcoal and trousers of light gray, similar in color to those of the woman's. His shoes were light brown which matched his belt. He had a ring on his left ring finger that was gold and modest in size and stone. His face wore a bit of stubble with a more pronounced mustache and it warbled strangely as he spoke to the woman with blonde hair.

They spoke for a long while, and while they did, the coffee shop's customers dwindled and then again became ample and dwindled yet again as is natural. At this point an hour or so had passed, and the woman's coffee was no longer steaming and the ice in the man's espresso had melted such that the espresso became watery and weak. He had not touched the drink in some time. It appeared as if the two at the table would speak intensely for a long while and then stop talking and then speak again to one another with the same intensity as before. Every round of talking and pausing took about 15 minutes and every three rounds or so, the man took hold of his espresso cup and sipped from it, most likely just for something to do with his body as he sat and spoke or was silent. Every once in a while, for the same reason perhaps, the woman who had already finished her coffee ran her hands through her hair and removed her glasses and laid her face in her hands and was still. She then would put her glasses back on and rock back in her chair and look at the man while he started at the table which was now visible because he has shifted his book to the side. His espresso was now sitting on the book and was surely making a ring in the cover, but the man did not care.

The woman removed her sweater and let it rest loose over the back of her chair and the brown of the sweater and the walnut hue of the chair matched, more or less. The woman exposed a blouse that was not colorful but not quite monochromatic either. They continued to speak as the coffee shop again filled with patrons, but before they were washed out by the rest of the customers, they got up and embraced as they smiled. They held one another for a moment and sat back down and as the crowd again cleared, they seemed to be talking much more jovially than they had been before. Now, one of the cups was gone and the naked back of the chair was exposed. They sat mostly in silence as they looked out the window of the shop at the birds and passerby, and there was a very light gray pigeon sitting atop a streetlamp that the man seemed to be looking at. Eventually, the bird flew away and the couple at the table was again forced to look at each other. The woman's mahogany glasses had slid ever so slightly down her nose and she looked at the man and he looked back at her as he opened *Emma* to show her some passage of the text that was difficult to make out.

After he closed the text, they began to engage one of their favorite pastimes. They were particularly fond of sitting around and talking about how much they paid (or would never pay) for things, so they did.

‘When I went over to the grocery store,’ he said, ‘and I saw that grapefruits were on sale. I bought four, which I never would have done if it weren’t for them being on sale. Usually, they are \$2.99. I’m not paying \$2.99 for a pound of grapefruits. I’m not paying that.’

‘Mhm,’ she said, ‘it would be ridiculous to pay that. Let me tell you – I was at the shoe store looking for running sneakers, and I saw a pair I liked. Guess how much.’

‘I can’t imagine,’ he said.

‘Guess,’ the woman insisted.

‘\$100,’ the man guessed.

‘\$120,’ the woman said as the man gasped.

‘I would never have paid that,’ he said.

‘Well, I needed sneakers, and these were the only ones that weren’t ugly or even more expensive, so I paid for it,’ she said, almost shamefully.

‘Was this the store on Leaf Street?’ the man asked.

‘No no, the one on Wilson Street,’ she said, ‘next to the market with the fresh honeydew.’

‘The honeydew?’ he said.

‘Yes,’ she said, ‘the honeydew one.’

‘You should have gone to the shoe store on Leaf,’ he said, ‘they always have bargains there. I love bargains. Real cheap. I mean dirt cheap. Cheap cheap cheap. That’s what I like. Because I’m not going to pay \$120 for a pair of sneakers. I’m just not. You’re crazy if you think I would pay that.’

‘I should have gone there,’ she said as the man rocked back in his chair and nodded.

‘You would have paid less,’ he said, ‘and you know how I love a bargain, and they’ve got bargains, let me tell you. Because I am not paying these ridiculous prices. I’m not paying them. I’m not going to pay them.’

‘I am not going to pay that again,’ she said.

‘You shouldn’t have paid that,’ the man said.

‘I should have paid less,’ the woman said.

‘Ask me next time,’ the man said, ‘because I’m not paying these ridiculous prices. I’m not paying them. So ask me, because I know where the bargains are. I love a bargain.’

‘I’ll ask you next time, because I’m not paying that again,’ she said.

‘God, I never would have paid that,’ the man said. The woman nodded. The man nodded.

It took a moment, but the conversation shifted to the topic of scars after an elderly man walked by with a very noticeable one on his arm. The woman smiled and

said she had a scar, and rolled up the sleeves on her sweater to expose a small mark on her forearm that the man had to squint, even with his glasses on, to notice, and even then, he was not sure if he saw what she was pointing at. He complimented it, and then the woman explained that, when she was young, her cousin had accidentally shot her with a pellet gun. It looked like it had healed well, and she rolled her pant back down. The man also said he had a scar, in fact, he said he had a few. When he was 23, he had been on a date with a woman and he had spilled his piping hot chai on his lap, and it was so hot, that it seeped through his trousers and underwear, and burned his leg. He chose to tell her about a time he fell off of his scooter and hit his knee on the handlebars as he was falling down instead of the story about the chai and his leg, even though he thought that was a story she may want to hear, he just decided to tell a different one.

The woman held her cup in her left hand now, so she could see her watch, which she kept looking at and this made the man uncomfortable, as if the woman did not want to be there in the first place. In the beginning it did not bother him, but the more she did it, the more nervous he grew, until it was no longer nervousness, but an earnest fear that she thought he was boring. He wondered if he should have told the leg scar story, but it was far too late now either way. He relentlessly told stories to try to make the woman ignore her watch, which was hard, because it was a nice watch. First, he told a story about a time where his mother had asked him to cook a turkey for Thanksgiving, but when the woman said she did not like turkey because they made weird noises, the man changed the story.

'I forgot,' he said, 'it was a duck.'

The woman checked her watch. The man told another story, now avoiding foul all together. This story was about a tea his aunt Jennine used to make when he had an upset stomach. The recipe went like this:

Peppermint  
Lemon balm  
Lemongrass  
Wormwood  
Angelica Root  
Love

She laughed a bit when he said 'love,' but then said that homeopathy was for gypsies and drifters.

'Well I am neither of those things,' the man said.

The woman checked her watch. The man said the watch was nice, and it seemed like the woman was worried the man thought she was being rude, so she removed her hands from the table as if to say, 'I am enjoying this time.' The man seemed to appreciate that.

There was a fairly big rush into the small coffeehouse, and it became hard to see

the couple in the corner for a while, but then it cleared up after maybe 15 minutes of the man behind the counter running around and sweating and taking orders and making lattes, some even with skim milk.

The couple again came into view. The woman was holding the book in her hands, as though she had just shown the man another section of *Emma* that she was particularly fond of. The man appeared unamused, and when he appeared that way, it prompted the woman to share yet another story in an attempt to gage the man's interest, as she had been doing all afternoon. The woman told a story about her father bringing her home a parakeet one day for a pet, and how she was always unsure of what to name it but then eventually decided on Evan. The man laughed a bit and lifted his hands from under the table and looked at his watch, and the woman looked at the man looking at his watch, and soon they were each looking at one another for only a moment, until the woman looked away and pushed her glasses of grey up onto the bridge of her nose.

For a short while after, it was difficult to see the couple, as others left and entered and crossed in front of the table. It must have been the previously-mentioned rush group that made exodus during those few minutes when the trash became full and the coffee man with the tattoos ran his hands through his long hair and wiped the sweat from his brow, which had only a minute ago retracted from its state of being furrowed. Eventually, it became easy to see them again. They were still sitting at the table, holding the copy of *Emma* and now trying to wipe off the ring previously made by the espresso cup.

'I hate when that happens,' someone said.

There was a bit of a stir at the next table, as a little girl who was coloring slapped her older brother's hand as he tried to take her crayons, and her slap of the hand caused his hand to knock over a glass of juice that was sitting on the table.

They spoke and spoke and spoke until they stopped speaking and began to just look around at very little. Someone came up to the table, which had not been done before, and asked them if there was anything else that could be fetched.

'No,' they said, 'but thank you.'

'You have really made a lot of progress in that book this afternoon,' the man who came to the table said, noticing that they had made maybe 65 pages of headway, 'I have been watching you from over there.'

'Yes,' they said, 'it is a nice story.'

The coffee man went back over to the counter where an elderly man who looked like he had something to say was standing, and, in fact, he did. He asked the coffee man where the bathroom was, and when the coffee man said there was no bathroom, the elderly man began to fuss. He complained that all places should have bathrooms, and that it hasn't been since that road trip to San Antonio that he has had to go to the bathroom so bad. The old man grabbed hold of his trousers and pulled them up higher than they already were and left the coffee shop, and once he did, the coffee man rolled his eyes at the old man.

Back at the table, they continued speaking as they had been before, about finances and Jane Austen's *Emma* which there really was not much to say any more about. They began to speak about the possibilities of encountering a third kind beyond the realm of what we know now. They made comments such as, 'I wonder if they would have long heads,' and 'I wonder if they have hands with only three fingers,' and while others started at them, they continued to speak of extraterrestrials and how they envisioned their heads being alabaster in color.

They continued to speak and as they did more and more people turned to look around at the man speaking. They gave him confused looks and each time they did, it appeared as though he snapped back into reality for a moment. Coffee drinkers would look at him, and when they did, he would blink and stop speaking, and stare at the table and wait for the awkwardness to disappear, but that always took a moment.

The man was now talking about the difference between steel cut oats and normal oats, and how steel cut oats are better when you mix some honey in with them, and worse when you mix cinnamon in with them.

'You really should control your children,' an old woman said who was sitting next to the man. The man just looked at her and went back to his book - he was pleased he had already read so much today. He opened it up again, and looked forward to finishing the book, because he loved Carson McCullers, and he was excited to be able to tell people he has read *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*. He always bragged about the books he read that way. He was very well read.

The old man who had commented on the man's kids behavior looked away and shook his head and muttered something about *Emma* was a poor choice, and not even Jane Austen's best work. He thought *Northanger Abbey* was surely better.

The waiter brought over a Nicoise Salad and Blanquette de Veau for the man. The waiter asked if there should be more wine, and the man said no because he was not drinking wine in the first place. In this moment, where the man was silent, he wished he had brought his book. In his age, he cared less and less and if he had the book, he may have just pulled it out and read it, and he would have wagered that nobody would have noticed, but then someone spoke.

'How is the Blanquette?' they asked.

'It is fine,' the man said.

'We must remember to stop at the drugstore on the way home,' the man heard someone else say, 'I can not forget to pick up more Tums. After all of this food I surely will need them,' they said.

The man found that comment to be unsavory. The woman who made the comment must have gathered this by the look on the man's face, so she changed the subject.

'I saw an excellent motivational speaker the other day,' she said.

'Is that so,' the man across from her replied, 'what did they say?'

'He came into work and spoke to us about how potential is nothing more than a game of hide-and-seek. Potential is within all of us, we just need to find it hiding behind the internal obstacles that society has constructed,' she said.

'That really is something,' said the man, 'internal obstacles.'

The waiter came back and poured the man another glass of wine. He most likely figured that the man could use it, sitting at such a nice restaurant alone, and all. The man paid his check and began to leave the dining room. It was 12:53pm, and at 1, the man had a meeting with a woman he had gotten to know a bit. He walked across the street, narrowly avoiding a puddle, and as he entered a small coffee shop, he noticed a man behind the counter with long hair and a number of tattoos. As he approached the counter, he slid his book into his back pocket and ordered a double shot of espresso on ice, and as he found a small table in the corner, he began to wonder if the woman's word was good. The time was 1:05; he began to wonder if she would ever show up, or if the woman was like the pigeon he saw a while ago – there, and then gone, and then wondering if he ever saw the pigeon at all.

# Poetry



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# *Martin Anastasovski*

## CARPETBOMBED SOCIAL

to finally catch a mouthful of the phantasmagoric delicacy you have to undulate like a snake inside a faraway hole and prey as nervously as a mercurial monk inside a temple of levitation. you won't be able to know when the opportunity will present itself but you have to be there, in the mindless now, in the eye of the storm – vapor in the breath of the pretty dragon. it will require walking asleep and tasting the air with your tongue. see if the ambiance still has the quality of claustrophobic openness and salty quips lifted from favorite visual gags. like a worm-snake creature, grow your centipedes and touch the soil which is neither desert nor space – just the right amount of both – to find a mother's shoulder where you can open your marveling nostrils, wheezing in and out molecules of awe. what pearl is to an oyster, the world is to a snake. viscous sociality like the lava that made it, a thing of beauty and loathing reflected in the innards of vultures who had bided their time for the flesh of a comrade. all is well, perhaps; not one thing is unwell, perhaps even more.

*C. D. Bailey*

# FIRSTHAND ENCOUNTER WITH A BURNING BUILDING

Clint Eastwood was sitting in a church  
and I was watching him sit in church  
not wanting to be in church.

I was eight years old and I didn't yet understand why he didn't like God.

I was watching him not want to be in church  
and my grandparents' house was on fire.

## Burning on fire

Everything burns on fire  
and my grandparents' house was on fire  
burning.

I was eight years old and unable to process how dangerous fire can actually be.

We left the movie theatre in the middle of Clint Eastwood sitting in a church not wanting to hear about God

And I don't think I wanted to hear about God either.

My grandparents' house was on fire  
it was angry and hungry and it was eating  
I was eight learning how fire works  
and I learned that even God fears fire.

*Danielle Gennaro*

# CECI N'EST PAS UNE APOCALYPSE

in the mornings, I am  
swallowed whole  
by my face in the bathroom mirror—  
the coffee over-

flows as I get lost  
in my own eyes,

like I'm seeing green turn  
to gray  
for the first time,  
as I squint hard to catch who is hiding  
inside them. on the inside

into cosmic darkness, seeing  
nothing, knowing  
nothing, remembering  
nothing.

I see it all  
mirrored  
through the back sides of my eyeballs,  
a facsimile of oblivion—

and I think,  
maybe I've seen too many of those  
horror movies where you find out  
someone has been living

in your house for years—  
where you open  
a rusted door to find that they tore up the carpet and put in  
a fireplace, where the entire  
structure  
of your universe changed  
and you never thought  
to notice it.

# *Lewis LaCook*

## THE BEE MOVIE

The bee movie but every time character does the thing an animated paper clip pops up giving you yet another reason not to kill yourself

The bee movie but every 12th frame is replaced by primordial static

The bee movie but also concentric rings of boot mud printed on my kitchen floor that from this angle look like Churchill

The bee movie in a language I just made up

The bee movie but streaming from a server that accepts http verbs that no other server would dream of asking about

The bee movie but every time someone mentions jazz Cecil Taylor is reborn and not soon enough

The bee movie but there are no bees anymore just iphones

The bee movie but it's a total witch hunt there was no collusion believe me

The bee movie but every color is replaced by a wet sucking sound

The bee movie but every eleventh word is elided by Dilbert as Goebbels pretending that we couldn't feed everyone if we could convince these people we've given up the power to do so to apparently that it would provide fantastic ROI

The bee movie but really it's just amazon eating your hometown alive

# *Dan Raphael*

## BUT HOW WOULD I PAY FOR IT?

when i'm going to work i'm silent. whenever i'm between  
one foot in the air, as if a question of the earth beneath,  
something not yet connected by the wind,  
always a leaf that doesn't agree, a branch trying to balance,  
back turned, eyes straining for a hemisphere

cough three times and resume your seat, the room's  
too big to be inside, too full to be going anywhere.  
sun shadows, fenceposts twitch, my aroma beginning to lag  
as if it's an observer in a mirror

am i going home or coming.  
string wound so many times on which side does it start.  
today i'm myself three blocks before home. i'll stay me for 20 minutes or so  
then my clothes change, i lose 20 pounds, the second floor is 5 steps higher.

this planet eats hundreds of live people every hour—  
only someone exactly 127 pounds could make that spot of earth collapse,  
trap doors baited with smoke so everyone looks up

if I sleep upside down how will the blood pooling my brain effect my dreams,  
a pink tinge in my eyeballs won't go away  
i can sense what's magnetic whether painted over or buried  
as temperature is a state of mind:  
hold your thermos, half your breath, oxygen waiting for a spark  
how long in total darkness til I think the only light is me

my heart sounds like someone trying to make fire without holding onto anything.  
in this hallway between two doors everything is revealed  
a wheel of several rooms on the other side, waiting  
because i was wearing someone else's voice i escaped  
no one will call me 'Daniel' again

# *Nathan Anderson*

## WATER DIALECTIC

Come

reminder of birth  
welcomed into this  
and other rooms

take the arm and jostle  
into position  
inescapable but

for one

Anthropocene  
Medicine  
Born once

saline  
lacking lung  
mitosis

Longing as a means of electricity/returning to form/forming new sand/  
forming without oil/skulls as super conductors/pliable/pliable as a standard  
stone/pliable as a standing stone/breathing beyond the firmament/anosmia/  
drowning/drinking/drowning  
delicate  
delicate  
delicate  
drowning  
drowning  
drowning

## YOU (AS AN ABSENT MINDED POLITICIAN)

The cat  
on the roof  
hears  
the tin plate

### ASTRONOMICAL AS GOD!

‘Pleased to meet you’  
remembering solstice  
‘tubercular in afterimage’  
remembering Astrid  
‘how fairs the haircut?’  
remembering further weathering

Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Hare Hare Hare Rama Hare Rama  
Rama Rama Hare Hare etc. etc. etc.

The cat  
on the roof  
tragically  
tumbles

# *Oisín Breen*

## THE BATRACHOMYOMACHIAN

If I were to ask you in sketches 26,  
To riff and scat with musicality  
The subject; zero; null; the alpha; the standing root and weeping tree;  
How would you explain the origin of our melancholy?

If it is, in some sense at least,  
Pithy, paltry, a sum of us?  
Would you speak to me of laughter, sainthood, and the holy ghost?

Or else, instead of this,  
Would you just remind me of the day we sat together, eating tortillas, patatas bravas, berenjenas frittas, and salmorejo rico, under Berwick bridge, on the way to Holy Island with the tide already in, when we sat, drinking too, though later driving, staring at storks, thinking of pelicans, ignoring gulls, happy for once, beside a shut-on-Sunday producer of stony mausoleum heads?

Or else, instead,  
Would you tell me to drown myself in covetous glances,  
In a 2pm desire to bury my head,  
In collarbone and neck,  
Beneath the Cashmere sweater of that thirty-something,  
With auburn notes,  
On the other side of the café?  
Would you tell me to drink from her, to satisfy a thirst?  
Or else-  
What other baleful note is it that you would sing?  
What is it that I do not yet understand?

## DIFFUSION

It were and it was,  
Atrophied,  
Splintered to the runny egg,

And in its bloated death,  
Hardened,  
A tumour tossed.

It were and it was,  
A carnival burlesque,  
A calumny, all golden,  
A flax doll, of worsted silk, twisted among the reeds,  
A time of spitting, baiting, fulminating, fornicating,  
An idle pale pallor place.

It were,  
And it was,  
The brittle life:  
The self in knots,  
Full of the sweet sound of apostasy,  
And heresy,  
Diffused.

# James Swansbrough

## WHAT I SAY / WHAT GOES UNSAID

Good Morning.<sup>1</sup>

Hope you slept well.<sup>2</sup>

Want some coffee?<sup>3</sup>

The pot's still warm.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> I wanted to kiss you awake / grasp the warmth of your slumber / feel yearning in your hips / remind us both of youth's ripeness / a purpled fig tasted / before the rosy-fingered dawn / had fingertips of death / when time was fluid as olive oil / its scent pungent almost sweet / the liquid smooth and virgin / anointing our memories / like a psalm / O Beloved

<sup>2</sup> Or did my stygian specters wake you with my screams  
bridled by my brother lost these ten years he still gallops through  
sweat-soaked dreams alongside my dead father dead friends  
dead others all mute and grave at the reins with eyes glowing  
and fading in the darkness like inhaled cigarettes and  
one night I am the terrified heart-raced quarry and time  
is viscous like molasses miring my legs as I flee  
their pursuit in search of a hole to hide in  
even if the hole is my tomb  
but before I have gone to ground they're upon me  
their hooves charge indifferently up my spine  
until I am fragment and dust like them too  
another night I am the hobbled hack they ride  
and their crops are flails lashing runes across my back  
the bit tastes like the coppers on their eyes  
preventing me from saying *It's okay it's okay it's okay*  
*Run me furlongs through Hell with your cavalry*  
*break this body shed this blood on your crucible*  
*let me gild your sepulchers with my blood*  
*Only stay—don't leave me behind again*

<sup>3</sup> It is only too early for alcohol because the restless nights exhaust me, time fluid  
as aged whiskey sweating through the staves. My chest is an overtightened kickdrum  
with its membrane stretched gaunt as what the mortician dressed in dad's casket.

Is my heart even mine anymore? Broken, ruptured, and mended so many times it's a ship  
of Theseus only sturdy from a distance. But it still pumps the erratic offbeat steeplechase  
in my chest daily and nightly, percolating blood to my temples until I'm terror and sweat  
like a buck arrowstruck broadside, bounding away from the oaks that betrayed him  
and not knowing he's already dead.

<sup>4</sup> I am not okay I need your comfort need your faith need your forgiveness  
need you to calm me drug me sanctify me fuck me turn the volume down and diagnose me  
I'm grenade made from shrapnel I'm urn made of ash I'm serious as a heart attack  
please find me help don't turn away their deaths still feel like yesterday and time is fluid  
like gasoline its scent pungent almost sweet like the smell of cancer on my brother's breath  
and I only barely hold this wick of my tongue because I bite back the flame.

# Dmitry Blizniuk

## INTO THE LAST CHILDHOOD

Into the last childhood...  
before the jump into the rusted rye of coming of age,  
you die of a thought  
infection.  
you effuse illusions as a cuttle  
effuses a weightless ink cloud, though  
nobody is chasing you.  
thus future blends with present, thus  
the sky and the sea – lovers –  
melt into an imaginary line of the horizon and it looks like  
a blue casserole pan  
with a blue lid, not firmly closed, and inside  
an amber sun octopus is boiled.

[translated from Russian by Valentin Emelin]

## A HIDING PLACE BEHIND THE EARS

Your blood pounds louder.

Red gentlemen going up on the escalator of lust applaud,  
cheer; yellow dome lights blink, flashing past.

Is it caffeine or testosterone?

Your back straightens, like a dragon's spine –  
you put your shoulders, lazy cast-iron weights, back.  
The cheeky stare of a hunter with no rifle.

Your blood shouts, shooing away the icy cockroaches of good sense;  
a string in your stomach reaches up,  
latching onto the peg of your Atlas bone.

No violin pegs, just solid carnivorousness.

Here firefighter meets fire, fear meets insolence,  
and all of them are trying to make friends.

She has entwined you

with the narrow caress of an anteater.

A hiding place behind the ears, the melted pearls of saliva.

A tiny ghost of breathing – Carper – wanders  
around the unlit neighborhood of the body.

Like foam rubber, you are soaked in her flesh, her essence, her last name,  
her DNA, the mushroom spores of thousands of her relatives.

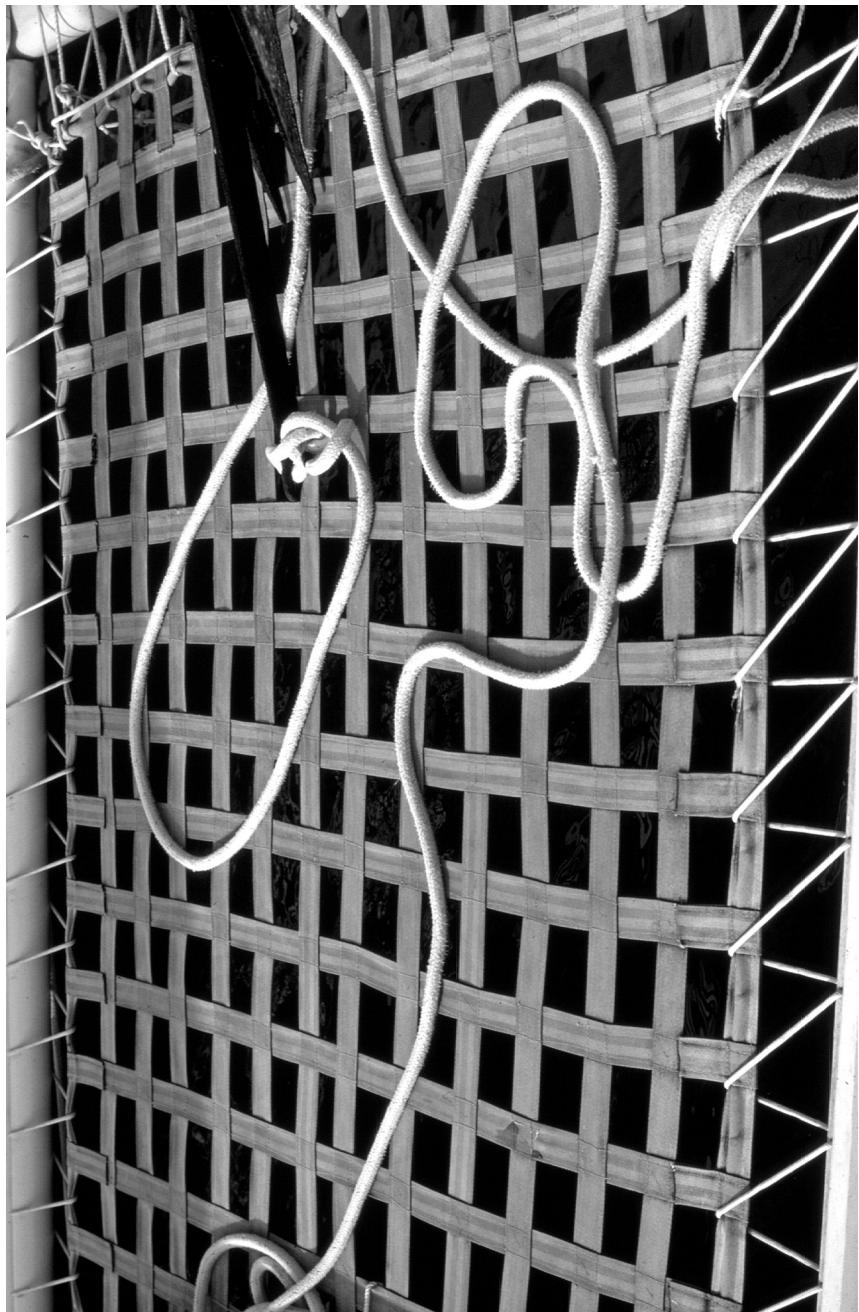
Isn't it an alien invasion on your planet?

Her armpit is like a school pencil case:  
here's a coarse-grained eraser,  
here are the watercolor pencils of tiny moles,  
and you kiss them to make them wet.

You feel her smell on your clothes –  
it's the greenish, acid blood of Alien  
that has eaten through the three decks of the space tug  
and reached the internal deception engine.

You take a shower but then again,  
you come back into the cloud of her smell  
as if into a cocoon; you smile,  
you whistle some nonsense,  
you get a little dumb.

[translated from Russian by Sergey Gerasimov]



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## Contributors

**MARTIN ANASTASOVSKI** is an author living in Skopje. He holds a degree in political science from Montclair State University. He writes poetry, fiction and children's stories. His recent poetic output has appeared on Cephalo Press.

**NATHAN ANDERSON** is a writer from Mongarlowe, Australia. He is the author of the poetry book *Deconstruction of a Symptom* (Alien Buddha Press) and has had work appear in *The Babel Tower Notice Board*, *Coven*, *Otoliths* and elsewhere. You can find him at nathanandersonwriting.home.blog or on Twitter @NJApoeetry.

**IVARS BALKITS'** poems and prose have been most recently published by *Fixator Press*, *Courtship of the Winds*, *Abstract Elephant*, *Fiction International*, *Fleas on the Dog*, *LitroNY*, *cahoodaloodaling*, and *Angry Old Man*. He is a recipient of two Individual Excellence Awards from the Ohio Arts Council, for poetry in 1999 and creative nonfiction in 2014.

**C. D. BAILEY** is a trash poet from Wheelersburg, Ohio. He is a traveling poetry performer, and his work has appeared in a handful of literary magazines/journals.

**DMITRY BLIZNIUK** is an author from Ukraine. His most recent poems have appeared in *Poet Lore*, *The Pinch*, *Salamander*, *Willow Springs*, *Grub Street*, *Magma Poetry* and many others. A Pushcart Prize nominee, he is also the author of *The Red Forest* (Fowlpox Press, 2018). He lives in Kharkov, Ukraine. Member of PEN America. [www.pw.org/directory/writers/dmitry\\_blizniuk](http://www.pw.org/directory/writers/dmitry_blizniuk)

**OISÍN BREEN** A poet, part-time academic in narratological complexity, and financial journalist, Dublin born Oisín Breen's widely reviewed debut collection, *Flowers, all sorts in blossom, figs, berries, and fruits, forgotten* was released Mar. 2020. Breen has been published in a number of journals, including *About Place*, *The Blue Nib*, *Books Ireland*, *Seattle Star*, *Modern Literature*, *La Picciola Barca*, *The Bosphorus Review of Books*, *Kleksograph*, *In Parentheses*, *The Madrigal*, and *Dreich Magazine*.

**ROGER CAMP** is the author of three photography books including the award winning *Butterflies in Flight* (Thames & Hudson, 2002) and *Heat* (Charta, 2008). His documentary photography has been awarded the prestigious Leica Medal of Photography. His photographs are represented by the Robin Rice Gallery, NYC.

**ERIC DREYER SMITH** lives in San Antonio, Texas. He has been an active dreamer. He has seen deep pain in self and other. Has worked in mental health which is both costly and rewarding to the soul.

**DANIELLE GENNARO** earned an MFA from Manhattanville College and has taken workshops with Brooklyn Poets and the Dylan Thomas International Summer School at the University of Wales. She has previously been published in *Oberon Poetry Magazine*, *Wizards in Space Literary Magazine*, *Pittsburgh Poetry Journal*, *Toho Journal Online*, *The Raw Art Review*, and *Silver Rose Magazine*.

**JIM GEORGE** is a writer, artist, songwriter, singer, musician, and sound collagist from Reading, PA. His fiction, poems and artwork have appeared in *Otoliths*, *The MOON*, *Dream Noir*, *The Sea Letter*, *The Ear*, *Defenestration*, *What Are Birds*, *Pennsylvania Bards Southeast Poetry Review*, *Fleas On The Dog*, *ANON*, *Hock Spit Slurp*, *Queen Mob's Tea House*, *The Five-Two*, *The Disappointed Housewife and Praxis*; his nonfiction has been published in *Playboy*, *Cinema Retro*, *Guitar World*, *Best Classic Bands*, *Starlog*, and *Prevue*; and his songs have been used in television and film. He has authored two books—*Jim Shorts*, a humorous collection of wordplayful stories, poems, and line drawings, and *My Mind's Eyeful*, an illustrated children's book. More information at [byjimgeorge.wordpress.com](http://byjimgeorge.wordpress.com)

**LEWIS LACOOK** as a child, on interstate trips, thought the moon was following his family's Econoline van. Upon reaching adulthood, he couldn't tell whether the truth disappointed or relieved him, so he started writing things down. Some of these things looked like poems, and they may have appeared in journals like *Lost And Found Times*, *The Coventry Reader*, *Black River Review*, and *Slope*, among others. In 2012 BlazeVOX published *Beyond the Bother of Sunlight*, a book-length collaboration with Sheila E. Murphy; previously, Anabasis published his book-length poem *Cling*. Lewis can often be found wandering the wilds of Western New York state with his wife Lindsay.

**S. M. MOORE** has published a section of a novel he co-authored in a small newspaper based out of Bates College. Moore is also a regular writer for the Portland, Maine newspaper, *Up Portland*. His poetry is published or forthcoming in *Down in the Dirt*, *Cacti Fur*, and *Literary Yard*, among others.

**DAN RAPHAEL**'s most recent book is *Maps Menus Emanations* published by Cyberwit. More recent poems appear in *Unlikely Stories*, *Otoliths*, *SurVision*, *Impspired*, and *In Parentheses*. Most Wednesdays Dan writes and records a current events poem for the KBOO Evening News.

**CHARLES SPANO** is a screenwriter and tv show creator. He is the co-writer of the indie film *Embers* and the Netflix Original sci-fi feature *IO*.

**JAMES SWANSBROUGH** runs a restaurant repair company in Chattanooga, Tennessee, USA. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Free State Review*, *Cagibi*, *Watershed Review*, *Pittsburgh Poetry Journal*, *Freshwater Review*, and others. He was named Honorable Mention for the 2019 Yeats Poetry Award by the WB Yeats Society of New York. He lives in Signal Mountain, Tennessee, with his wife and daughters.