A surreal landscape painting. In the foreground, a yellow mermaid with long, flowing hair is lying on a grey, sandy path. In the background, a cyclist is riding on a winding road that curves through a dark, hilly landscape. A large, bright yellow full moon hangs in a dark blue sky above a blue body of water. The overall style is painterly and dreamlike.

# TWO THIRDS NORTH 2021

KURT LUCHS  
LAURENCE KLAVAN  
CYRIL DABYDEEN



TWO  
THIRDS  
NORTH

2021

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## EDITOR'S FOREWORD

2020!

The number seemed so hopeful, echoing itself in even assertiveness. In the Anglo-American tradition 20/20 represents good visual acuity: the ability to read, from twenty feet, the letters on the row of the Snellen chart that healthy eyes were supposed to recognize from that distance. But very little at the beginning of 2020 prepared us to see what would be happening right in front of our eyes.

Around the globe, nations, which had once held up the possibility of democratic self-determination and free speech, were tumbling into repression, nationalism and authoritarianism: from Hong Kong and China to Turkey, Russia, Poland, Hungary, and the United States. The murder of George Floyd beneath the knee of a police officer sparked world-wide protests about racism everywhere, and was met with authoritarian and racial supremacist violence. And then came the global pandemic of a coronavirus.

In our first section, SHAPES OF THINGS PAST AND TO COME, our writers ransack memories and images of brokenness and disorder to find some higher order, hope or meaning. The loss of a mother leaves only a mystery, like a broken vessel found in an archeological dig. Or a



poet seeks hope and calm after the violence exhibited against Black Lives Matter demonstrators. As always, the shape of things to come arises out of the shapes of the past.

It is perhaps no wonder that so many poems came to us this year addressed to the subject of love, even in their titles. Covid-19 has narrowed the range of our friendships and isolated us from loved ones even as some died in loneliness behind hospital windows. Only words could cross the distance, words on telephones, mouthed through windows, and composed into poetry and stories. In our section *WHEN WE TALK ABOUT LOVE*, writers work through stories and definitions to ponder and struggle with the overwhelming variations of love's phenomena. Love will always be one of our most intense literary subjects, whether found in a dead mother's garden gloves, or ironically wrapped up in images of the distant exotic lover, in preference to the pale local poet.

And perhaps in the dreadful feeling of a new world order we seek hope and help in form and structure. *FORM & FUNCTION* loosely pulls together works that organize the day through a cup of coffee, or play with poetic form to capture the feeling and delight of a night of jazz in a club, or the solemn rites and actions in an effort to compensate for a dead child.

*MAKING IT PERSONAL* collects works that suggest passion, loneliness, violence and the dark memories of violation. These works too could be associated with love and its discontents, but some may be a clearer expression of the ongoing horror of "me too!" And these voices too must be heard.

In answer to our doomscrolling through the news, and through history, Christopher Thornton offers us a letter from Sicily suggesting that history need not be one of perpetual conflict and revenge.

And yet, with contemporary massacres in Myanmar, the rounding up of Uyghur Muslims in Western China, the brutal wars in South Sudan and Ethiopia, we are called to recollection and reflection on our European near-history and the brutality of the Siege of Sarajevo almost three decades ago. Džemil Hodžić's essay and his project SNIPER ALLEY PHOTO brings us narrative and visual immersion in daily life while crisis and grief spins around us. A fitting and harrowing metaphor for the present.

This year's IN FOCUS brings you a short story by, and an interview with, Andrew C. Dakalira, a prominent figure in Southern African speculative fiction.

The ironic metaphor of “20/20 hindsight” suggests that we should have perfect clarity when we look back over the course of our personal histories. But now in 2021 we wonder if we dare hope for even a modicum of clarity over the recent past. And once more we look to our poets, not necessarily as the “unacknowledged legislators of the world,” as Percy Shelley proposed, but simply to give us some clarity, vision and hope. Amanda Gorman, the young poet laureate who spoke at the United States’ Presidential Inauguration this year, brought us both a powerful message, and reminded of the necessity of poetry and literature to articulate for us in our hurt and hope.

For while we have our eyes on the future,  
history has its eyes on us.

This is the era of just redemption  
we feared at its inception.

We did not feel prepared to be the heirs  
of such a terrifying hour  
but within it we found the power  
to author a new chapter.

Gorman's words spoke to a world in relief after watching a murderous insurrection. And she demonstrated that a generation raised on Twitter and other social media still could be powerfully moved by the spoken words of poetry.

Paul Schreiber



SHAPES OF  
THINGS PAST  
AND TO COME

# *Bulletin Board*

RICHARD LUFTIG

I remember those thumbtacked  
pieces of paper, handwritten,  
printed in ink or pencil  
about life in this town:

*If you can believe this:  
The Liars Club meeting  
Every Tuesday, 7am  
At the back table.*

*Bible study and prayer  
First Baptist Church  
Fellowship afterwards  
Donations appreciated.*

Pleas scribbled on paper  
torn from notebooks  
with phone numbers written  
again and again on strips

that fluttered like tiny flags  
every time the café door  
opened or the ceiling  
fan caught the announcements

in just the right way.  
*Childcare needed. Call ASAP  
Lost dog. Sweet. Answers to Charlie.  
Handyman: No Job too Small*

And rows of business cards:

*Clifton Insurance-Your Hometown Guys*

*Bob's Septic Service- Fair Prices, No Crap.*

*Swift's Garage: Service You Can Trust.*

Announcements read  
by each customer  
as they paid their bill,  
*Take a Penny,*  
*Leave a Penny* in the cup  
on the counter  
in order to round up  
your tab. And now,

years later when I return  
and drink coffee alone  
from a Styrofoam cup,  
that bulletin board empty.

Thumb tacks pinned  
against nothing  
but corkboard  
save for a note

written in a large hand.  
*For Sale: stove, refrigerator,*  
*deep dryer, chairs, tables,*  
*malt maker, cash register.*

*Make Offer.*

# *Artifact*

DEVON MILLER-DUGGAN

She is a purple glass vase,  
its puzzle-fragments held  
together by the restorer's careful fitting.  
She is the glass encasing what was,  
what held water.

This is what a tel yields to the diggers'  
trowels and brushes.

She's the site, the artifact, and always  
inexplicable. I learn trowels and brushes,  
the uses of string grids.  
Every morning  
is hospice.

No restorer can make the vase  
contain water or blooms.

Every evening is hospice, not  
restorer, nothing to give her a shape she can see

Every noon is hospice,  
and my heart a puzzle-fragment.

My mother dies by shards.  
She has become her own tel.



# *Lovelier Than Diamonds*

RACHEL PINNOW

**W**e set out in early May, decades ago, when the rust-coloured muskeg was still frozen and patches of snow hid in the shadows. We stayed overnight in a town only found on prospectors' treasure maps. Jeff was the lead geologist, having spent many summers scouring the Canadian Shield, and he led Mike and me around all day, picking up last-minute supplies. Finally, he took us to the town's motel, Diamond Dust.

The motel keeper, a middle-aged Cree woman with puffy eyes and a blue rawhide vest, glanced up from her magazine and said, Going north, are you? We don't live there anymore. And she let out a wicked laugh, like someone who could inflict great pain, and who had endured great pain. We live *here* now, she said, eyes scanning the lobby from the cigarette burns in the orange carpet to the row of hooks with dangling room keys. A strange and infinite in-between land. She sipped from a clay mug, revealing a chain of coffee rings across the page, and squinted hard at me, scrutinizing. Then she tapped a little wooden plaque off to the side of her desk that read, *Beware the Memegwesi*. Those are the little trickster people, Jeff would later explain, who live between the rocks in the rapids. Water

spirits. They're known to blow canoes astray, or steal things, if not shown proper respect. And he winked at me like he would take care of everything.

The next morning, the Cub flew northward. Farmland gave way to scrubby bush, and the lakes multiplied like cells until there was mostly blue. Where does the north begin? Where the roads end? At the tree line? Where the great Canadian Shield rises out of the soil? Or is it a remote and stoic land I was searching for in my mind?

I noticed Jeff's shoulders relax as if he was almost home. His clear eyes seemed history-less, unspoiled like the lakes below. Square jawed, he was clothed exclusively in prospector's attire, every article with its purpose: pocketed vest, compass wristwatch, broad-brimmed hat. His only object of vanity was a large, rough-cut garnet strung on a piece of cord around his neck. The garnet shone a plummy red, a perfect dodecahedron, bouncing slightly below his Adam's apple. He caught me staring and smiled, pleased that I'd noticed it. I also noticed his arm draped on the back of my seat. Then we dove toward the lake that would be our base camp for the season.

The landing came off pretty smoothly, nose high, dropping the floats flatly on the lake's surface and drifting to the water's edge. I wish I could go back for a photograph of the three of us standing there on that rocky shore, waving goodbye to the pilot: one canoe with outboard engine, three drums of fuel, boxes of dried goods, tents, kitchen gear, axe, two C7 rifles, and that was all. No one and nothing for hundreds of kilometers.

The schedule was a three-day rotation. Two went out to map outcrop and collect samples, while the third stayed back organizing field notes, protecting the camp and making dinner, which was a full-time job in itself. On top

of the regular chores, each time that Mike and I were out in the field, we'd return to another of Jeff's wooden creations. First, the pier for our canoe, which jutted twenty feet out into the lake, made of six pine trees solid as the rock on which it was built. That same day, Jeff also managed to prepare a meal of jackfish, mashed potatoes (albeit with powdered milk) and canned green beans that were so delicious I nearly cried. Any small comfort was a blessing because a day in the field was ten hours of treacherous hiking through strangling woods and blackflies, and my boots had already blistered my feet to bleeding.

Evenings, we drank tea by the barrel. We traded books, so many books, and music, and occasionally stories of our sightings: a particularly large raven, some clumsy bear cubs, the setting sun – if you stayed up late enough to see it – bounced off the horizon like a pebble skipping off the lake, and a new day began. The dinner conversation didn't diverge much from the quantity of our supplies, whether the day's mapping was primarily diorite, or the coming weather. So it was a relief that Jeff and Mike shared a fondness for crib and I could graciously retire to my tent.

Each night, with the strange brightness of the sky, sleep refused to come. The Memegwesi whispered to me from the lake, humming like dragonflies, cursing me. I was jealous of Jeff, of his ease, his self-reliance, the seeming purity of his soul. Was that not why I came North in the first place? With Jeff, everything was clear-cut and straightforward. How could I get there? The hairy tricksters had led me astray. The Cree woman at the motel kept creeping into my mind, with her puffy eyes and her wicked laugh, echoing across a gulf of blame. *We don't live there anymore.* I wondered what her voice sounded like in her own language, when she told stories to her children. If she had

any. How is it that I felt such guilt then, and still do? And so the nights and days wore on, keeping me half-homesick, half-haunted in the north woods.

Jeff forged ahead on his Xanadu, constructing innovative kitchen shelves with front faces to keep the mice out, followed by elevated tents, a stately pleasure dome, indeed. He insisted on building the platform for my tent first. Most of the handiwork was done with a hacksaw and the flat end of his rock hammer, slung Thor-like from his belt loops. I'd heard that Jeff had started field mapping in university and I'd seen his name on a handful of academic publications, but it looked he was born here on the shores of this lake, was made for this life.

Often, when I looked up from dinner, or from writing field notes, Jeff was watching me and didn't look away when I met his clear eyes. I don't know what he saw in me, but he was reeling me in. His spirit was contagious, so much so that I began to sit at the kitchen table later into the evenings, playing Rummy for dish duty or rationed squares of chocolate. I started talking about where the fish were biting, gave advice on how long to soak the dried lentils, and boasted about which mineral-vein I would stake my claim.

At the beginning of August, Mike flew back to town in the Cub to send our survey reports. It was no surprise when my tent flap parted, and I welcomed Jeff in. Really, four months living together in those conditions was a marriage of sorts. While Mike was away, Jeff doted on me. He was quick to drape a blanket across my shoulders if the air was chilly, light the stove, and make us mint tea. We talked late into the night, made love, and although it was against every fiber of his being, we slept in, until nearly 9 am.

When Mike returned, it was impossible to hide. Jeff wanted things out in the open, and I was embarrassed so I kept away. I retreated to my tent in the evenings and focused on my work during the days. Although I thought about Jeff constantly, of his goodness, his integrity, his spotless conscience, as we hiked through the interminable brush, a repetition of mosses and lichens masking the true nature of what was underfoot. The more Jeff fussed over me, the more vulnerable I felt. The whispers made me nervous of tipping the canoe, of tripping off a ledge. Somehow, his spotless conscience began to weigh on my own, like carrying extra rock samples in my backpack.

Then one day, at the close of summer, Jeff and I came upon a forty-foot outcrop of metamorphic rock. The dark green forest parted for us like curtains and we stood in awe as if at the end of a rainbow. The striped rock layers zigzagged up the cliff, swirled and plumed, bejeweled with garnets, glinting in the midday sun. Breathtaking. And to Jeff, it was exactly what he'd been hunting for. As soon as I saw his reaction, I sank down to write notes and eat my lunch, awaiting the inevitable.

Jeff examined each gem, hexagonal in cross-section, weathered out against the cliff face. He ran his hands across the surface, those same rough hands in the night, until he found the perfect stone. Once chosen, he cracked it out in one, two, three righteous strikes of his hammer, and waived the prize in my direction. The garnet shone between his thumb and index finger, the size of a robin's egg, and a perfect match to his own, the garnet that hadn't left his neck all summer. Lovelier than diamonds, he said, as if he was Thoreau at Walden Pond. He said it in earnest. Jeff never spoke lightly; he meant it all. He meant our lake. Us. Here. Alone.

Looking up at him with his reddish-blond beard, grown to gigantic proportions over the summer, I was stuck between delight and distress. To break the heart of one so deserving might be worse than having your own heart broken. The drone of dragonflies returned, swarming me. The motel keeper's room keys jangling on their hooks, the chain of coffee stains across her page. Something had been stolen. That expectant moment stretched out, doubling and doubling like a map unfolding, Jeff standing there with his garnet promise.

There was no gentle way. I wish I could forget this part. Never, have I met anyone quite like Jeff since. I looked right past him and his garnet, southward, where the Memegwesi told me I needed to go. South toward the rest of my future life. Then I went back to my lunch. Jeff continued to stand there, disbelieving, staring at me as I finished off the can of tuna and took a huge, crunching bite of apple, cruel and unapologetic.

Jeff would have been endlessly content there, with me and our matching garnets, among the dense spruce on what might have been Eden's lake. But I couldn't. I couldn't stay.

# *Fragile Limbs*

ASHIMA SETH

Once you asked me:  
Are you still an imitation of dreadful times?

I tossed and turned through the night  
and the dawn brought no answers.

I still see a little boy with a blanket so thin  
staggering on the side streets.

I see him every dreary twilight  
and try to forget him by every dreadful morning.

# *Higher Ground*

RICHARD LUFTIG

March is when first thaw  
comes to these rivers that feed  
my Midwest towns:  
The Kanawha, Muskingum Wabash,  
Beaver, Roaring Creek and the Red.  
They spread out like fingers  
or sycamore branches  
and flood their swollen banks.

It's been that way so many years  
that people know when it is time  
to cut their losses and stop sandbagging,  
decide what's important  
and move to higher ground.

Today, rivers of people:  
Black, White, Brown,  
wind through the streets,  
signs held aloft, announcing  
it is time that the killings stop,  
boots be removed from necks  
of young men. I watch them  
confronted by an angry mob

with rifles cocked and loaded  
who throw rocks and shout  
those terrible words  
that I prayed so long ago  
to never hear again.



How I wish I could tell  
the marchers not to stop,  
don't take the bait,  
get waylaid, sandbagged  
lose your focus. But rather keep the goal  
in sight and, most of all,  
keep moving, always moving  
to take the higher ground.

First published in *Umbrella Factory*, Issue 44, August 2020.

# *[I reach]*

DEVON BALWIT

I reach for a scrap on the pre-dawn floor  
but come away empty-handed, the scrap

a trick of light in the mechanism of the eye,  
reminding me of Einstein, who called matter

frozen energy, all bodies waystations  
on its journey, a thought perfect

for a yoga mat, death nothing more  
than a phase change. Nothingness a closed spacetime

of zero radius posited by Physicist Vilenkin.  
So the universe tunneled into existence,

trailing measurements and properties  
and causing theists to come running, God

flapping behind, crying—You forgot  
the Prime Mover, the Brute Fact—very like

the daycare ladies when, after my disposing  
of child one and child two, I abandoned

the baby. How can the most perfect being  
we can imagine not exist, asked Anselm,

for then, it would fail to be perfect. Existence,  
chided Kant, is not a property of things, yet

it befuddles even the atheists in the plenitude  
of their quantum multiverse—if all worlds

are possible, then one must exist  
where  $X = \text{both } Y \text{ and } -Y$ , but how?

The sun fully up, there is no  
question—my floor is clear,

certainty a wor[ld]  
void of poetry.



WHEN WE  
TALK ABOUT LOVE

# *Love in the East*

THOMAS LAVELLE

Among the Asian memories  
I find my wife circling  
the bronze Buddha on Lan Tau.  
She smiles, remains reverential,  
mindful of the monastery, the pilgrims,  
the eightfold paths around her.

Finding this, I ponder my failing  
to love her as a Buddhist would,  
to offer *maitri* – some friendship,  
built through shoulders squeezed,  
meals served, jokes shared  
on dark Tuesdays or Wednesdays.  
These things, such thing, easily done  
still done too seldom.

Through *karuna* love is compassion,  
easing or avoiding the beloved's pain,  
without which the beloved is not  
and “love” false or illusory. Again  
failure maps onto many places –  
barstools talking and listening,  
desks and office chairs typing  
and reading, airports and distance –  
years of talk, type, flight  
sowing worry, and in worry hurt.

*Mudita* – joy, a body filled  
or a heart, a soul full,

like dry soil after rain,  
full but fragile, like butterflies  
in storms, droughts, pesticides,  
like love among pain's toxins.

*Upeksha* opens, leaves the beloved free  
to become, to choose paths, grow  
down them, where love seems  
clear, simply not to block.

Home, Buddhas adorn the lawn,  
windowsills and bookshelves,  
far from Lan Tau's bronze.  
We live in the west,  
where love is assertion,  
a weak speech act, divorced  
from doing, from doing no harm,  
from soothing wounds, from the slow  
stewardship of butterflies.

# *Love in a Canadian Novel*

THOMAS LAVELLE

“Love” in a Canadian novel “is a decision”  
a character explains to her not-yet-treacherous  
husband to be, whom we readers adored  
as a boy in Alberta’s woods, but will  
bore us in adulterous middle age.

Since the Middle Age tropes have varied  
but poets agree love’s spring’s external:  
Chaucer’s zodiac, gods and devils, the humors,  
later Freud, heredity, brain chemistry.  
In prose, we fall in love; gravity’s to blame.

In my own near-Arctic place, urban, far  
from Alberta, love, I speculate, is a habit,  
like dancers’ muscle memory or a ball player’s,  
the sum of so many earlier choices  
and actions, but any given day inaction.

The beloved, in these stories, plays minor parts  
waiting passive for love’s alchemy or science  
to work, or not work. For her or him the tropes  
of love just happening seem to make sense.  
Even in fiction, being loved is no choice.



# *In Person*

LAURENCE KLAVAN

I don't know why she wore perfume. It didn't make any sense; he couldn't have smelled her. Yet if it put her at ease or even excited her, why not?

After all, it was like someone's wedding night in the old days, or so I would imagine. So many obsolete rituals had returned that maybe even that one—the comingling of virgins, the bride ignorant of intimacy, the groom waving the bloody sheet afterwards—might be coming back, too. In any case, Saffron had arrived at this moment, the first sexual encounter with the young man who'd been courting her, through a conventional route. The first step had been the traditional introduction by an older friend or relative, in this case, Saffron's aunt Raveen, in whose four-story, rent-controlled apartment house on Washington Square the young woman lived. Saffron was either twenty-eight or twenty-nine, I'm not sure. Aunt Raveen had been alerted to this available male prospect by someone else, though when Saffron asked who it had been, her aunt, increasingly vague about everything, searched her mind and came up blank.

“It was—oh, someone told me, I can't remember who. Someone referred Cornelius to me and so to you.”

Saffron knew that in her idle loneliness her elderly aunt often mistook mass emails requesting money for messages

from friends. “I mean, you actually knew the person who recommended him, right?”

“Knew? As opposed to what?”

“Never mind.”

“So he may contact you? Cornelius?”

“Um, why not?” Saffron realized that she had done it as much to help herself as spare Raveen’s feelings. She wanted to believe an acceptable young man might be interested in her, for she was lonely living with just her aunt a flight up, even if she couldn’t say the word, in the same way well-bred women once again avoided vulgarities.

“Good!” her aunt said and so it began as courtships customarily did now, with an email. Cornelius gave basic information about himself: He was thirty, 5’11”, dark-haired. He worked as a forensic librarian, which he was able to do online and at home now that animated recreations of cells, specimens, and germs had been perfected and could replicate the real thing. He embedded a selfie taken in a bathroom mirror right after a shower. Cornelius had rubbed out a circle in the glass so that he appeared as in a cameo on a locket in another century.

Saffron saw a man much more attractive than she would have imagined. His hair was not just dark but lushly, animal black, whipped away from his face by water, his eyes a midnight shade of brown, the rising steam in the room like hot vapor off a jungle river or something else uncivilized, she couldn’t put it into words. In the oval made by his soapy hands, his shoulders were bare. The portrait made Saffron suddenly both chilled and overheated, as if she were nude in the bathroom with him or in the vegetative tropics or someplace else more suffocating, dangerous and warm than her nondescript (if immaculately kept) one-bedroom.

When Saffron scrolled farther down, she saw that Cornelius was using a polite, mildly humorous tone with which he had begun. *If you'd care to write me back, I'd be very pleased to receive your letter. Warmly, Cornelius Bellow.*

Saffron decided she would answer immediately, but only after she had crafted a reply to her satisfaction. Using pen and paper she wrote draft after draft, attempting to find the best way to describe herself and her job as an online children's librarian, which was an incredible coincidence. She successfully copied Cornelius' breezy yet formal style and was stopped only by the prospect of providing a photo, as he had done.

Saffron was attractive, reasonably, anyway. She kept her blondish hair in a bun, used no makeup and wore formless, unbelted dresses, like an old-school cliché spinster mixed with severe young cloistered novitiate. She knew she couldn't compete with Cornelius' startling shower snapshot, so she stood dressed before her bathroom mirror, and the room was dry. The best she could do was literally let down her hair, which, finally free, exploded out, caressing her shoulders and brushing her breasts before swinging below her waist and landing in her lap. Her framed face now seemed very young, exposed, and unblemished except by freckles, which looked as naked as someone else's nipples, she thought. The mirror needed cleaning and had pops, pockmarks and smears which made it appropriately like an artifact, a daguerreotype or whatever old photos had once been called in a world she would never know, due to the rampaging disease that had changed everything. Saffron took the picture before she could reconsider.

Saffron sent the email and waited impatiently the rest of the day and into the early evening. Was Cornelius holding

off as she had, not wanting to seem too eager? Maybe he was busy collating or collecting something forensic.

Then Cornelius answered: "I was delighted to receive your letter. I may cull and categorize things of the body, but you fill the minds and hearts of the young with what is truly intangible, the joys and insights of art. Who's to say which has more value?" At the end, he inquired whether he might call her on the telephone, which would officially take their relationship to the next stage, and this time Saffron did not hesitate at all before agreeing.

This wasn't when she put on perfume, but she did the next best thing, changed into a form-fitting and flowery dress. Saffron must have felt if she was surrounded by a flattering fabric, her verbal expressions might become more appealing. She feared that her voice was flat and rugged like her aunt's when she reacted to the good news. "When is the call?"

"Tonight."

"Just wonderful!"

Saffron was annoyed by her aunt's excitement, as if Saffron's biopsy result was benign. Was her situation that desperate?

When she got off the phone was when Saffron changed clothes, feeling the pressure and perhaps a fear of her continuing insignificance if she kept living alone as a virgin.

Cornelius' voice was anything but flat and rugged when he got on the line. It was the aural equivalent of his picture: he seemed to speak through an undulating mist of dizzying hot spray from some of kind of exotic spring in which he and she had stripped naked. She heard his grunts, cries and caws from jungle birds before she made

out his words, which were as they had been in print mild, formal, and inoffensive.

He said, "I hope you had a productive day."

"Me? Productive would be giving me a lot of credit."

Cornelius laughed, and his bird call became a mating trill. "Maybe it's good not to credit yourself and let other people do it. That's an old-fashioned quality and a good one."

"It might just be insecurity."

"Maybe. We'll see."

"Will we?"

"I hope so."

This deliciously vague exchange told her all she needed and slightly feared to know. She was very bad at picking up signals. Yet Cornelius was scattering clues like feed in that forest, drawing creatures to him—and she decided to interpret them unambiguously.

"So?" she said, slightly breathless when there was a break in their conversation.

"So," he said, and the word seemed to have different properties coming from a male and not a female mouth, which was exciting. "I think we've...well, I've enjoyed this."

"Me too."

"May I call on you?"

Saffron had hoped this question was coming and thought at least a few seconds of silence afterwards was appropriate.

"Yes, please."

Cornelius could not call on her in person, of course. He'd have to do it on computer, Saffron allowing him in by pressing a key. This was still pre-perfume. Yet Saffron did

more than merely change her dress: she cut her own hair. She found she lacked both the manual dexterity and spatial sense for the task. Her hair fell like leaves in that tropics to the shore of which Cornelius would swim, dropped like the drawers of women who dived in with him. Her head was left so straggly and uneven that she had to cover it with a cap. She couldn't stop dreaming of it.

"I can see you. Can you see me?" Cornelius said this when he came onscreen, the camera showing just his Adam's apple, shirt collar and a few strands of black chest hair, but the camera self-corrected and rose to reveal Cornelius' face. Here, again, he appeared to lean in and out of smoke as actors once effortfully found the lens in 3D films.

"Now I can see everything," she said.

"Good."

A virtual bouquet of roses appeared in the top right corner of the screen. While Saffron could have pressed the "aroma" button, she declined, knowing from unpleasant experience involving food and not flowers—spaghetti marinara and don't get her started—its smell would be nauseating, an innovation that had been brought to market too early and still needed work.

"Thanks. They're lovely."

"I like your cap."

Instinctively, her hand went to her head, to either secure or remove it, she wasn't sure which, and her smile became a wince. Saffron bent forward and let the cap slip from her head the way tap dancers had once doffed top hats down their arms and elbows. Her patchy scalp filled the screen.

"Ah," Cornelius said.

"I did it for this," she blurted out. "For you."

"Well, you didn't have to. You don't have to do anything differently. Not with me."

And that kicked off the rest of their conversation. In earlier days, they might have emptied cup after cup of coffee but neither drank anything and Saffron only excused herself once to pee. In that other time, too, it might not have been wine they were drinking, not yet, that might have happened on the second date. And in fact, the next time they talked, each held something intoxicating and by the third time, both had drunk an enormous amount.

Every time, their connection deepened. A pattern emerged: she was voluble, he was quiet; yet she wasn't out of control but naturally emotional, and he wasn't icy but compassionate and good-humored. They balanced each other out: he was the matchbook that kept her table leg from leaning, she was the window flung open to air out his musty attic. Suffice it to say, encouraged, both knew they were approaching an event in which words would either be unneeded or shouted and whispered. Both knew the next time they saw each other, it would be different.

“How is it going?” Aunt Raveen asked her.

“How is what going?”

“You know what. I'm not an idiot.”

“Sorry,” Saffron said and was sorry. “I'm just...it's hard to put into words.”

“I know what that means.”

“Yes,” Saffron said, to be kind. “You do know. You're so right.”

“Do yourself a favor,” her aunt said.

“What?”

“Put on a little perfume.”

This was when Saffron applied it. Did she do it as a dainty tribute to her aunt, a way to keep her disappearing period of history alive? Or had she done it for herself so she'd feel sensual, physical and fleshy—after all, the

aroma interacted with her skin differently from how it did with others? Was it a fantasy that Cornelius might take her in as she took in herself, even though the program that let her sniff his roses didn't really work?

Saffron and Cornelius faced each other through the screen and made love in the only way that people could now—by touching themselves while watching the other. Saffron made sure to wear something she could unbutton. She wore the old white blouse for which she settled while doing laundry. She hoped that its lack of color might be erotic for it suggested the idea that she was a page eager to be illustrated. Whatever, Saffron thought: she wouldn't be wearing the blouse for long. After they both stroked their faces and both stuck out their tongues as if tasting the other's, both began to remove their shirts. Each stopped, to politely allow the other to proceed, which made them laugh, for their “after you; no, after you” seemed silly under the circumstances. Then Cornelius quickly pulled off his sweater and T-shirt in order to let her take more time, which Saffron did, revealing the best black bra she had, which she also undid and removed, pressing her arms against her small breasts both to shield them and spread them out in a way she thought he would want, having seen enough old TV shows and films to know.

“Let me see you,” he said, and his words were like his hands taking her arms down, which is what she herself did next.

Then Saffron touched herself, imagining his hands by looking in his eyes aware that she would never know what they were like, that her hands would have to be his, just as his hands were hers as he jerked down his jeans and took his penis out.

Saffron said, “Let me see you.”



He obeyed her as she had him, tipping the laptop down.

Saffron felt it was his fingers inside her, insisting and retreating, while his thumb flicked her clitoris, his other hand tugging and rolling her nipples while her hand traced the stiff length of his penis, her wrist purposefully placed against his pubic hair so he'd feel it. She could see the spray of his semen, which he tried but failed at the last second to direct away from the screen, and she came, too, her cunt clamped around his thick fingers, his thumb smearing her clit like a painter dabbing a circle of that new color on her canvas again and again. The picture froze, immortalizing what his face looked like when he was at a peak of pleasure, and this is what their first time together was like.

Afterwards, it took awhile for the internet connection to come back. Cornelius was replaced by a black screen while the computer rebooted. Sitting exhausted in her swivel chair, Saffron held her clothes against herself. With Cornelius gone, she experienced a weird fear that he had never existed at all or, if he had, he was never coming back.

Yet she felt a dizzying desire to do it again. Soon Saffron learned that Cornelius felt the same way. The next time they got together in their different apartments, they placed their hands against their screens and each began undressing using the other's hands.

"Maybe it was always this way," Cornelius said, dandling his hand against his chest hair.

"What was?" Saffron asked.

"I mean, maybe people always used their imaginations when they made love."

"Oh. Maybe."

“Just not as much as us.”

“Right.”

Then, naked from the waist down, Saffron stood, half-turned, spread her legs, and sat several times onto her fingers, which were as long and fat as she’d seen his cock to be. Cornelius had never glimpsed this side of her before: sweat had made the light line of hair on her spine rise like a new path leading them deeper into what was sweltering, stinking, and unexplored.

The next week, they were engaged.

Cornelius’ ring was virtual like the roses, and when Saffron accepted the offering, the twirling diamond icon remained on the bottom corner of her screen.

Marriage, of course, merely meant they would live together remotely, though substantial upgrades to their internet connections would be allowed once they had obtained the license. Additional and more arduous approvals would have to be granted for her to receive his sperm sample so they could try to reproduce. Saffron didn’t want to think about that, not yet, partly because she didn’t know if she wanted children or could even have them. She just wanted to appreciate this event for now.

And she knew whom to thank.

“What?” Aunt Raveen said.

“I said, thank you.”

“You’re welcome.” An unintentionally comic beat. “For what?”

“I’m engaged.”

“Oh. That’s what you said. I thought you said enraged.”

Saffron laughed. “Why would I be enraged?”

“You tell me.”

“Well, congratulations. It’s what I was hoping for.”

“Thanks.”

“He’s such a nice man.”

“He is.” How would she know? “You’ve talked to him?”

“And so humble. I mean, he didn’t have to be so grateful.”

“For what?”

“For what I gave him. I mean, who wouldn’t have done it, under the circumstances?”

“What did you give him?”

“Money. Of course.”

Saffron fell silent. She had so many more questions but the line between building up her old relation’s fraying self-esteem and trying her patience had become thin. So Saffron just hung up.

Saffron didn’t ask Cornelius about it, not at first. She didn’t wish to jeopardize their next encounter, which was the most intense yet, given the escalation, the consolidation of their relationship. First she finished using a dildo and as she matched him coming almost to the moment she lowered and crossed her legs.

“You talked to my aunt?” she asked.

“What?”

“My aunt.”

His head slowly rose. His face was so wet it was as if he had emerged from a swim in their stream. “Yes.”

“You asked her for money?”

Cornelius nodded. Still dazed, he buttoned the shirt he had undone, then blinked a few times, reminding Saffron of a computer scrolling data as it searched for something. He looked right at her, and suddenly the glass of both screens was gone. “I had to.”

“Why?”

“I was...I am in trouble.”

“What kind of trouble?”

“Well, financial. Temporarily.”

Saffron waited, for he was the one with more to say. Cornelius waited, too, until it was obvious that he could not wait her out. Then he explained it in a rush—so quickly and jumbled that Saffron could only make out the major points.

“I’m about to come into money...in a trust, hard to explain...Forensics is worthy work, but no one wants to pay...I’m good for it and will get it back.”

This was a different Cornelius from both the formal suitor and exciting fuck she had known. Saffron fought through her disorientation to reach compassion, which was love, which had only been a word in old stories for her until now. He was going to be her husband, and he needed her help. “Why didn’t you come to me?”

Cornelius blinked one last time. “I was ashamed.” So many tears poured from his eyes it was as if a bottle of tears had spilled inside him and was seeping out everywhere. Saffron had heard it was hard for two people to cry at once yet, seeing his humiliation, it was easy. She gulped so much she couldn’t form words for awhile and was still crying after he had stopped.

“You don’t have to be,” she said, finally.

“No?”

“I’ll give you anything you want.”

Saffron’s parents had both died of the disease rioting through the world and left her enough money to tide her over.

Cornelius appeared to think seriously. His eyes no longer stared at the screen but at something higher, bigger than both of them, Saffron hoped. He shook his head with what she realized was wonder, because he didn’t say no.

“Thank you,” he said, his voice small, as his eyes returned to hers, then went lower, avoiding them in a different direction. He was clearly still ashamed, and

there was nothing she could do to change it. Once he accepted that this exchange made them equal they could take the final step, as brides and grooms had once done down actual aisles. She'd given him everything she had in all ways. He'd have to do the rest on his own. Because she loved him, she believed that he would. Saffron transferred the money to his account.

Their next date was the following night. Yet when Saffron tried to reach Cornelius online, she found that his address was unavailable. She emailed him, and her letter bounced back.

For the rest of the day, Saffron sat quietly when she wasn't compulsively trying to find him. At the start, she felt there must have been a mistake. Later, as the sun set and she turned on no lights, Saffron understood that all along the error had been hers.

"Do you still not remember," she asked her aunt after one too many glasses of wine. "Who gave you Cornelius' name?"

"Who's Cornelius?"

"You know, the..."

"Oh, I remember, of course!"

"Who was it?"

"I meant, I remembered him. Not the other thing."

After she hung up, Saffron first drunkenly smashed her computer screen, then dismantled the system that had connected her to the outside world.

I came to fix it, since I was the one who'd recently done an upgrade. There were still some people who performed necessary physical tasks, covered from head to toe in what could only be called hazmat gear.

Of course, this was just my day job, as they used to say.

My talent was programming animation, creating online imaginary worlds for my amusement and extra income. Sometimes I'd go on a call where I could combine these two things, and those days were the best. This was what happened when I visited Raveen Bray.

The old lady was sweet but she'd seen better days. She was eager to tell me all about herself and the niece who lived downstairs. This was how I came to create Cornelius and tell Raveen that Saffron should meet him. He was hardly the first man I had invented through programs and pixels, but he was my most successful achievement, the one who seemed most life-like, to have an existence independent of me, even though I controlled him completely. Unlike the artists who pulled those strings, though, I was nowhere to be seen, and no one could know how much more physically appealing Cornelius was, maybe more appealing in all ways, than me. Yet since he was my idea, he was my essence.

Saffron couldn't identify me now as I entered her apartment to fix what she'd destroyed. I'd been called by Aunt Raveen after she'd found my card in her keepsakes, knick-knacks and tchotchkes. Saffron looked worse for wear than the last time I'd seen her. It seemed as if she hadn't slept at all and maybe had a few drinks too many. I sniffed for her perfume but forgot I could perceive nothing beneath my glass shield, face mask, and personal ventilator.

All of this had made her look even more attractive. Cornelius had paid off for me enormously, but he'd been a new kind of success, too. For the first time, I'd fallen for one of the people for whom I'd conjured up a companion, the first time I'd ever been in love. Now I couldn't wait to tell Saffron, to do everything with her.

“Oh, right. Come in,” Saffron said, backing up.

Now I would learn why those in other centuries thought everything was better in person. I closed the door and came closer.

# *Love Obsessed*

CYRIL DABYDEEN

The blond man with his typewriter  
    writes words, real words: Latinate  
terms, his way of courting her,  
    to convince her about himself.

Eleanor sulks and remembers  
    a time with her dark lover;  
but the blond man types more words,  
    wanting Eleanor to be free.

Freedom is the only way to save her.  
    Type, type: words being all, you see.  
*No-no!* Eleanor cries; and the blond  
    man leaves her alone after a while.

Eleanor goes in search of her lover  
    and finds him giving affection to  
a Polynesian girl with such thighs: oh,  
    with real womanliness in her

more than Eleanor can ever have; or,  
    only what Gauguin can give her  
as she remains outside his door and will  
    now imagine somewhere else.

What her lover promised her long ago; as  
    the blond man keeps typing words,  
creating more spaces, I know—  
    and not really know.



An ocean with palm trees on a large sandy  
beach and raucous birds, seagulls  
squawking, flying about at will. Type,  
type: words to win Eleanor over by.

She sleeps restlessly that night; and her  
true love is gone, Eleanor knows;  
gone back to Polynesia. And how she yearns  
for him to return to her.

A rainbow arc forms, and waves become  
a surf. Sea-birds quickly appear. What  
will the blond man call up in his typing manner  
but more startling images?

Eleanor looks at the alphabet sign—  
on her hands, an amulet, then between  
her teeth as she crunches hard. Gauguin,  
you see, will come again; and indeed

there's nowhere else for her to go, but wait  
until the right moment when  
words become a strong memory,  
an emblem in her heart to live by.

# *Love Letter*

PEGGY HAMMOND

I outline my mother's flower garden  
with fieldstones, though heat

shimmers around me and cicadas rattle  
in nearby trees, scolding I am too late

for this year's blooms. Undaunted,  
I push another wheelbarrow load,

the weight welcome, rooting me  
deeper into the sandy soil she nurtured.

Her departure before spring softened  
the earth left promises and chores

suspended in air electric with her absence.  
My hands inside her gloves, their

fingertips frayed from years of toil,  
find stones shot through with mica and quartz.

Sheeted in silver and white veined,  
they catch sunlight only to break it,

a thousand love letters cast to the sky.

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# *Lovewalk*

CLIVE DONOVAN

I want to take you for a walk.  
I will carry you respectfully  
at heart level so you may know  
the nearness of my heart.

I will encase you in a cage of ribs  
of woven willow so you might enjoy  
protection as we amble through brambles  
and thorns and mulch of leaves

and fallen limbs of trees,  
the broken bark and mushroom reek  
filling the morning air.  
Do not be afraid,

I am not going to bury you  
in the living waste of forest floor,  
nor will I hang you on a branch  
to be pecked by birds.

See! I cup you in my hands:  
you in your containment  
as you swell with intelligent interest  
wondering why the need to love

is so strong and complex.  
As I place you on an ivy-covered log  
and wave goodbye  
you climb between the bars and fly.

# *Utah Sheep Counter Stumbles upon a Monolith*

DEVON BALWIT

Were it not there, you would conjure it, the heft  
and polish of slick steel, pointed by its maker

towards a rift in the canyon, some ochre-daubed cavern  
beckoning. You approach cautiously, alert to invisible forces,

guardians, alien abduction. Your hands test the surface.  
*Speak friend and enter.* You rest your cheek a moment

against the unlikely chill. Logic says *artist*, says *prank*.  
Even so you quiver before the larger mystery,

shoulder blades pricking to placate the elements, secure fire  
and food and keep predators at bay. Stepping back

into the helicopter, you laugh off the strangeness, easier now  
as the luminous slab shrinks beneath the rotors.





PLACES LOST  
& FOUND

# *Wandarwoorwoo Lost*

KENNETH POBO

The GPS talks to me  
like I'm in second grade  
doing my addition wrong.  
I end up cursing, but what?  
The road has no ears.  
The birds are busy. I'm low  
on gas and wonder if even  
a fleabag motel will pop up.

I've been lost for years and  
sometimes there's chocolate cake.  
Lightning.

A stranger asks if I need help.  
I do. It can come as moonlight  
on a lake, something clear,  
a map unfolding  
between birches.



# *It Is Sufficient*

CLIVE DONOVAN

It is sufficient to see the blush of promised dawn,  
the deep blue sky ridden by cotton puffs of chariots

and not to see like fish or flies – faceted,  
orbital, telescopic, magnified,

not coveting the thoughtless worm's felicity  
nor placid trees, rooting slow, swelling their time-rings.

It is enough to stroll in simple grass, strip seeds, chuck them high,  
be charmed by skylarks and curlews, not envying their song,

nor the rich, naked, natural lives of fox and hare,  
who stop to stare, plain as stone, till I move on

into this bliss-trance of beauty manifest  
for its own perfect sake – not mine – yet it is sweet enough

to watch the sun, far off, cut, as with a razor bleeding,  
fading, at day's death staining, the sea's edge in the west.

# *The Growing Season*

R. J. KEELER

A small, young deer trots by me and it, too, is Buddha.  
These days are like adventures in love and babysitting,  
the miles below mahogany, dark.

On the veranda, many potted blooms.  
On the limestone hearth, many pictures of weddings.  
Then nature takes its course—everyone's life becomes  
wacko messy like a fairy tale in pallid watercolors.

Now, all these many rivers run into inlands.  
Now, we're all whispering into flames.  
The ground underneath seems razed—  
where is that arterial, falls to some flat sea?  
There, compendiums of black and white sails: which one is life,  
which one death?

Remarking on ordinary blackness—it's not just a lack of roses  
or a narrow path between elms or stones on the dirt,  
or clouds above.

It's a moral weakness at the heart of roots and branches.

Now, it comes to pass: fear is too strong a verb  
while over there—salt on the floor, the old soft-shoe.  
Alternatives seem dim, no way out except through  
some weep hole in a narrow canyon. Just like  
an old building, some Masonic temple,  
or vine or turtle that carries the world on its back.

Once in a while the good fairy does come out on top.  
The dykes are still holding back the sea,  
the air still plentiful enough to lift a kite,  
there is water for fledgling corn and melons.  
*Give it up, enjoy life, a sexton preaches, who are you saving it for?*

# *Wild Attire*

HAYDEN MOORE

**M**idsummer was a time of cicadas and fireflies, the great divide between growth and decay. The girl Callisto sharpened the tip of a pine branch with her father's old pocket knife and looked around the woods for threats. She knew the muddy creek that trickled in front of her as her own face. After her parents had died, she convinced herself she'd sprung from that very creek and she gave it a name, a name she never spoke but one that spoke to her every time she encountered it. She smiled at the secret as she closed the pocket knife and returned it to the ragged pocket on the front of her overalls. She admired the veins in her sinuous left forearm as she squeezed the somewhat straight spear given to her by the pine tree. Even the spear was sweating. The rattle of the cicadas magnified the oppressive wet heat and the girl stood up and smiled.

She walked through the woods and the cardboard lining the rotten soles of her oversized shoes squished as it continued its descent into ruin. Had it not been for the decades of broken beer bottles and discarded home appliances strewn everywhere, she would have gone barefoot. But this was a place of shattered time, a living crypt without a family of corpses, an empty grave with a blank headstone. Beyond the woods, in the town of Arcady, people went about their lives oblivious to the

ghosts and secrets Callisto communed with. Here, she was content to fight for every day rather than rot in the comforts of suburbia. But the woods could not provide everything. She had her vices in the forms of shaved ice, peach cobbler and dollar movies that only Arcady could provide. Callisto heard shouting and the words of her mother filled her head: 'Nothing vast enters the life of nymphs without a curse.'

"Hey, look!" A boy yelled from a ridge, "It's Callisto the Magnificent! Show us a magic trick, Callisto!"

"Yeah! Show us a magic trick!" A second boy laughed.

"Look at 'er!" A girl pointed. "Wearin' her daddy's overalls with her hair all in knots. Her daddy drunk himself dumber than he already was until he done died. Hairy as a goddam wolf, he was. Swear on ma' life. Now look at her! I bet she's rabid. Probly' some kind of animal just looks like a girl."

"I can smell er' from here," the second boy said, pinching his nose.

"Bet she's got lice. Even down there," the first boy laughed, grabbing his crotch.

"Don't get too close," the girl said, "She's liable to eat us like a bear."

"I bet her daddy done fucked a bear and made her. Aaaaaooooooooo!" the second boy howled.

"AHHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA!" They laughed together.

"Why d-d-d-d-on't ya'll just g-g-g-g-g-et!" Callisto yelled.

"Look! The bear's tryin' ta speak!" The girl laughed as she pointed at Callisto. "Your mamma teach ya that?"

"My mamma was D-D-D-D-Diana!"

"Hell, my dog's got a name, too," the first boy smiled. "Let's get her. C'mon!"

As the children descended from the ridge, Callisto held fast to her spear before she took to her heels. By the tenth step, she had run out of her left shoe. By the seventeenth, the other one followed. But the rocks were familiar and she knew never to run barefoot in the dead leaves. The oaks and the hickories, the dogwoods and the pines watched in silence as the children closed in on the swift Callisto. Had it not been for the moss on the rock before the stream, Callisto might have outrun them. She fell headlong and her spear rolled into the stream. She heaved over the dead leaves after the little breath she had left was knocked out by the ground.

“I think she shit her pants,” the first boy said in halting breaths.

“It’s m-m-mud,” Callisto said to the ground.

Two pairs of hands pulled her by her freckled shoulder and flipped her over. Black spots swam in the canopy of the trees as Callisto blinked hard as she struggled to breathe. She felt the tip of her own spear at her throat before she saw the red-cheeked girl holding it. When she swallowed, her trachea scraped across the tip of the spear.

“Maybe I can fix her so she can talk right,” the girl said as she twisted the spear in place.

“Nah, she’s dumb as a box a’ rocks anyways,” the first boy said. “Ain’t nothin’ worth hearin’. Maybe we just put her outta her misery. My daddy taught me how with a deer. Won’t take a couple seconds.”

“Betcha won’t,” the second boy said, his belly jiggling beneath his striped t-shirt.

“Bet I could gut you in under a minute, fat-ass,” the first boy laughed.

“Told ya’ not to call me that.”

“Shut up!” The girl screamed. “I’m just gonna prick her a bit. Just a little prick to show her she’s not one of us.”

“After that we can check to see if she’s got girl parts or really is a bear,” the second boy said.

“You a pervert,” the first boy chuckled.

“K...here goes,” the girl whispered, “Just a little prick just like you two’s.”

“Hey!” Both the boys protested.

By the time the girl had raised the spear, Callisto had rolled out of the way and donned her pocket knife from the front pocket of her overalls. When the blade clicked into place, the light from the evening sun glinted off the blade. The other three children stood in silence. She opened her mouth, and tilted forward as she screamed: “ROOOOOAAAAARRRRR!!!”

The children stumbled back before they broke into a sprint away from Callisto. The two boys scrambled up the hill, their shoes squeaking along the damp rocks. As the girl tried to catch up to them with the spear still in her flailing hand, she tripped. The gleaming red tip of the spear pointed at the sky as the impaled girl coughed and cried blood on the ground. She heaved. The two boys watched. Callisto watched. Before anyone could say anything the girl was dead. The first boy pointed at Callisto, tears streaming down his face and ran away. The second boy stumbled after him, his stomach and cheeks bouncing as he struggled to stay on his feet. Callisto watched the blood trickle through the leaves. She closed her pocket knife, returned it to her chest pocket and ran the other way.

It took nine moons for Callisto to develop in her mother’s womb. Nine moons had passed since her mother died. But death was always something that happened in the instant. Life took time. The little life the girl had just a few hours before was gone in a stumbling instant. For the first time in her life, Callisto felt mortal. Even with her

mother watching over her in the guise of the full moon, she felt vulnerable and absolutely alone. A faint breeze blew through the moonlit woods and Callisto settled herself by her creek. The listless song of the cicadas had been replaced by the moonlight sonata of the crickets.

“Hello, Juno,” Callisto said to the creek. “You understand don’t you? I know you do. You told me before. I didn’t make it for that. Nope. I might have scared her too much, though. You look thirsty. Well, I’m thirsty, too. But not for water.”

Callisto half-smiled to the creek. Her words were always honest and flowing when she spoke to Juno. She was silent when she looked up at the moon. Distance and vacancy stifled speech whenever she thought of saying something to Diana. The branches of the trees obscured the moon and looked like dead fingers hanging over her.

“Not that,” she whispered to the water. “No more of that.”

She heard faint voices before the beams from the flashlights appeared as they scanned the woods. She stood up and held her breath. But when she turned around, more flashlights were closing in on her. Her bare feet ached but she felt the need to run. The image of a bear running from a hunter floated through her imagination. She blinked away the image and found herself to be the bear. But she was tied by guilt. When a beam of light fell upon her, she closed her eyes and raised her weary arms.

“That’s her, Pa! She did it!” The familiar voice of the first boy cried. “Told ya’ she looked like some kinda’ animal. She done killed Margie!”

“I wantchu’ to stay right thar’,” a man said slowly. “They said you was armed. That true? Cause if ya’ is, you better tell me now. Is ya’?”

“She got a gun, Pa! I done told ya!” the boy said.



Callisto opened her eyes and tried to blink away the light. A pair of shadows in the shapes of humans stood at the other side of the creek. The pocket knife in her chest pocket felt like a lodestone and the ground was nothing but a mass of metal. She felt like it was either going to make her plummet into the earth or burn a hole through her heart.

“Ya’ got ten seconds fore’ I have to be physical witcha. Now nobody wants none of that,” the man said. “Just gimme your weapon slow like. Real slow. I gotta gun pointed right atcha. And I can see you but tchu can’t see me. Now....one....two....three, I’m warnin’ ya!”

“He’s gonna shootcha if ya’ don’t give it up,” the boy yelled.

As the man continued to count to ten, Callisto looked up. The moon had found a bare patch in the canopy of the trees and was shining unobscured. The creek water sparkled like mercury flowing through some creek on a faraway planet. Even the crickets were roused into a crescendo of sorts as the man reached the count of eight. The boy laughed when the man with the gun counted the number nine. Time slowed down between the numbers nine and ten. Callisto filled the borrowed moment with a plea to the moon, words she had never dared to speak to Diana.

“Mother! Help me! Please! Come for me! Take me up there with you! Take me—”

When Callisto put her left hand to her chest, the bullet pierced her hand on its way towards her heart. When she fell, the hole in her hand found the ground and looked like a stigmata in the light of the moon. She smiled as her last breath bid her eyes close. Just as a soft darkness fell upon her vision, the moon was all that she could see.

# *Seasonal*

## HOLLY DAY

If I lived somewhere warm,  
it'd be easier to disappear.  
I could just lie down and let  
the undergrowth creep to cover me  
let the vinca curl around my fingers  
and knot in my hair  
the kudzu blanket me  
in waves of undulating green  
honeysuckle wrapped tight  
around my arms and legs  
to keep me still.

When the sun came out, kudzu flowers  
would open like bright red trumpets  
all over my body, the honeysuckle flowers  
would release their sweet perfume  
and not even deer or dogs  
would be able to find me  
under the scent  
of greenery and blossoms.

And unlike here,  
where everything dies back in the fall,  
if I were somewhere warm  
more and more things would come  
to cover me:  
a moss-covered tree limb  
exploding with bracket mushrooms,  
dew-heavy pitcher plants

a carpet of webs  
spun by ambitious stretch spiders.  
Curious frogs would be drawn into my orbit,  
bright green and golden-eyed,  
perch unknowingly on my shoulders,  
my hands  
sing the sort of happy pond songs  
always performed in the distance  
never as close  
as I'm hearing them now.

# *Goodbye, Princess*

NAQIYA SHEHABI

You were once a princess  
no worries, no shame.

Wherever you went  
everyone knew your name.

Feasts were made all for you and for your taste only.  
Chattering, laughing, buzzing.

you were never lonely  
like lilies in the field.

As the seasons changed and  
the walls of your castle weakened,

you did not know if you were  
still the same princess. There was

no chattering, no laughing, no buzzing.  
You were not sure if people still remembered

the loneliness crept in.

One last goodbye, to the peeling walls and  
musty bedrooms, to the now old and weak

servants, to  
your once home.

# *Name Place Animal*

ANKUR BETAGERI

Your precious, precious hands  
do not answer to your singular name.  
Your mouth soft as mango flesh  
has no sign of your city's name.  
Your eyes look everywhere –  
can a nation's borders colour its flame?  
Your ear thrills to music strange –  
can it fear the music of a foreign tongue?  
Your hair takes on different shapes –  
can a culture bind its colourful ways?  
Your face flickers through the days –  
how can it belong to a single race?  
We do not own ourselves if our names own us  
what is a name but a resting place?



# FORM & FUNCTION

# *Buses*

IAN C. SMITH

Onset of winter. My mother, ashamed of the smell coming from her seat, receiving looks, bus creaking along, her fear blooming. It stops for wet shuffling passengers, starts, stops again. Travelling to the hospital, she hugs her baby but can't offer him her breast in public. He set forth on his life six months earlier, has been ill three days, this brother I only saw in a photograph. Tyres squelch through rain, water everywhere while my brother dehydrates further. The stench thickens.

My father, home from his bus driving shift, home, where he expected normality, coal waft from the fire's wan warmth, rain mizzling window panes, budgeted food simmering. He takes the hatchet he splits kindling with, treads upstairs, reduces the cot, mobiles spinning wildly before stilling.

Here is my mother again, pen poised over best notepaper, striving for the protocol of words suitable for situations, for our relatives; bearing up, inadequacy weighting her heart, before walking to the post-box, its black slot, letting go, unrealised hopes descending into the unreachable dark.

Or, after ironing clothes, feeding the cat, she might have delivered her grim news in person, waiting at a misery of bus stops with my two-year-old sister, weather churning about them, almost overwhelmed by appetite's absence, effort. I remember being carried from our bus stop one



night some years later, drowsy against my father's shoulder, the closest we ever got.

My parents bypassed the buses, driven by car to their tiny casket funeral having borrowed money from her brother. After those mobiles stopped spinning did they hoard in their hearts forever the uncauterised silence of that bedroom?

[Joe McPhee] 4 nights at Café  
Oto in May 2019 [no chaser]

STEPHEN C. MIDDLETON

Call it Deep Listening

Deep Blues (in word, deed, note, & memory)

Deep River

Deep River of Song

Heritage, heart, and hinterland

(From) Willisau to West Texas

Plainsong / Gregorian / Tuvan throat song

(riffing) – (was my hoarse voice) an old Tuvan throat song injury?

Triflin' men – via Memphis Minnie / Geeshie Wiley / Bessie Tucker  
& (again, about me) /

told him that I'd always secretly worried that I am one myself

& on

Booker Ervin tipped us a wink / gave him a tip

(I'm still trying to track it down)

Slippery as a snake / no fake book / on the margins

Azure / PO – the power of detour

Tenor – banned ...'off to work' – no demonic obbligato

As in (the legend of R. J) – like Joe, he was woodshedding

& here, where the only light is deathly,

Breath sounds

Cecil's extraordinary hissing delivery – captured & *backwards* –  
eroc tinu / obsidian sibilants

Rhythms illicit revolutionary  
The Bahamas (a brief visit by me)  
Is he still 'dancing on the Wulff Road'?  
(Dedication)

Black Top – now what!  
The summit, via Coltrane?

The anxiety dreams  
On stage without notes or knowledge  
The opposite here  
& (in any case) the saxophone repaired (courtesy of Pauline Oliveros)

What science / what precedent(s)?  
Of Ayler / electronics / Baldwin / Duke Ellington / Billy Tipton  
/ Guitar Shorty (John Henry Fortescue) / James Magee (& alter ego)

in a... / in a... jump cut (a) stutter fluttering keys  
(His / A) 'judgement free zone'  
The drama outside the sirens  
The clues are there so many codes

Deep blues / Deep Listening / Deep River / Deep River of Song

By the end / he'd almost given / all the games away

# *Flotsam*

THÄN GUSTAFSSON

This valley gives me no repose from thought  
unwanted; hills nor trees can break the tide  
of night. Beneath the whirling sky I'm caught  
as dark pours in a stormy ocean, wide

and deep. The village lights' reflected glow  
trawls up distorted questions, rippling doubt.  
Why life begins to flow I do not know;  
I have not seen where death ebbs in nor out.

Adrift, I see the maelstrom's eye. Desire  
and guilt and love and hate converge, –then break.  
The house of God chants “Thou shalt not admire!”  
A fleeting answer leaves before I wake.

Perhaps I'm mad; the starry sight I saw  
has stranded me, awash with want and awe.

# *My Binary*

PANKTI LALANI

Literature is counting numbers now  
and everything seems binary.  
The heart making decisions  
and brain pumping blood.

Wasps suck on brown lipstick  
and the cocoa beans are suddenly sweet.  
Not quite a magician playing a trick  
inside a smooth white sheet.

We'll fly to places we've never been  
breathing liquid. Have you ever seen  
butterflies tipsy on haemoglobin  
beneath the mango tree.

Kneel, bleed, surrender, dear sweet pea.  
Sugar isn't there anymore in the sea.  
Literature is counting numbers now  
and everything is binary.

# *Today's Cup of Joe*

JADE RIORDAN

Today is as it has always been  
: an initial etched  
into the bark of a tree  
and the street gutter racing downhill.

The calendar page turns over  
and a month of numbers  
building block-stack themselves,  
one on top of the other.  
This long-awaited week  
-end sleeps itself into Monday,  
an ambulance cries  
in traffic, someone's coffee  
percolates, and I carve  
my initials into the wall.

It's a good day  
to flip this season  
into the next one: last week  
swirling away down the storm  
drain. Last week painful  
to remember,  
last week undercaffeinated,  
last week a number turned over  
and claimed as my own.

Outside, the gutter begins to overflow.

# *Bottom Dwellers*

DEVON BALWIT

by now, we know ourselves eelish, neither  
one thing nor the other, oceanic + continental.

who knew, back in normal, how long  
we could lie in the mud + wait? who knew

we could slough off the crowd, leaving  
glass-skinned + dainty + muscle

our solitary way. this is no year  
for a stomach. at the end of our tether,

masked + forsaking prosecco, we seek  
Sargasso to engender our elvers.

+ if only five battle upriver, no matter.  
even endangered, we are expert

at biding our time, expert at inviting  
the audacious explanatory reach.





MAKING IT  
PERSONAL

# *Flayed*

HOLLY DAY

You can unwrap a tree from its bark  
like you're undressing a ballerina  
pull it off in one, long winding strip  
and let it curl on the ground.  
The tree won't survive its undressing,  
of course,  
unlike the ballerina  
who, depending on your relationship,  
will either stand and stare at you  
defiantly or invitingly,  
or drop to her knees  
to cover herself.

If you peel the bark from a tree,  
it's not like undressing a person at all.  
It's more like flaying the skin  
from an animal, exposing  
the red, wet muscle underneath.  
This is a wound that will never heal.  
A tree stripped of its skin  
may look as though it's still alive  
for a little while, but then

whatever leaves cling to its branches  
will turn brown and fall off  
its roots will curl up  
underground  
and recede far enough

that you'll be able to push the tree over  
with one hand  
like a girl  
with her feet bound  
or entirely removed.

# *I'm Ready*

KURT LUCHS

Not that I'm looking to go  
any time soon, mind you,  
but if death should take me now  
I would not feel cheated.  
I've tasted everything this life  
can offer: love, true and false,  
hate, always true (why is it  
hate that's always true?),  
the quarter moon a slice of blood orange  
just above the horizon,  
the sun at twilight a tulip dipped in lava,  
the music of Bach  
which by itself justifies  
all the failings of humanity,  
the bittersweet joy of fatherhood —  
helping a soul to grow  
even as she grows away from you...  
Yes, I've seen it all:  
two giant snapping turtles making love  
very carefully, as they say,  
a redwood tree that wears a cloud  
for a hat,  
a Dutch still life  
more beautiful than any real fruit,  
and a heart that beats only for me  
day and night.  
Whatever the foreshortened future may hold  
it can't surpass any of these,  
so to echo my beloved Bach,

“Come, sweetest death.”  
I’m ready.  
Just not quite yet,  
if it’s all the same to you.  
I want to spend some time  
with that beating heart.

# *Missing Person*

KITTY STEFFAN

Call me by another name;  
call me by nobody's heart and breath.  
It is not enough to cry for me.  
I want to be that mousy story  
of neon furs and purple pills  
that gets in the saucy tips  
because I never did light up a room  
unless the bridges I burned count for anything.

Now call me by the name you almost gave me;  
call me by nobody's blood, nobody's country.  
It is not enough to cry for me.  
I want to be a fragrant cautionary tale  
of lacquered shoes and pleated skirts  
because gold never made  
much sense to me and not  
for lack of trying.  
It just peeled off, the scam of it all and  
the vein grew dry  
before the date last seen.

Call it in and give them  
my traitor name,  
the one I stole within the night.  
Find one and make peace with it,  
don't look for me,  
my desiccated body is my own.  
Ophelia bloated spilling in the ocean can't  
belong to you.

Don't cry for me; it's not enough.  
Just tell them who I was,  
what I was wearing,  
what I took with me  
and what I left.

# *Ruthless*

KITTY STEFFAN

I'm gonna leave red hair strands  
on your brush and in your bed  
and then leave.

I'm gonna wear your shirts  
and toss them off at the end  
of the day.

I'm gonna let you kiss me hard  
before I go and never say  
the word again.

I'm gonna forget your poems  
at the bottom of a mostly empty  
moving box.

I'm gonna forget pink hairpins  
in your bathroom, in the cushions  
of your couch.

I'm gonna pin you down  
and make you feel alive and tender  
with my teeth.

I'm gonna buy you purple flowers and  
dig from your mouth out all the stories  
with my tongue.



I'm gonna go for the throat.  
I'm gonna mine you for all  
your worth.

And if you don't believe me  
then that's your sin.  
Don't read my fortune  
in the palm of your hand.

# Prey

PEGGY HAMMOND

The older cousin, you know the one,  
the one we ran from, all of us  
so much smaller.

His long strides as he chased,  
our legs short but fast,  
a fox outpaced by the hens.

His hands grabbing, his voice  
slick with tones we did not understand  
but somehow knew to fear.

And after he'd gone, how we'd gather,  
purple popsicles, bare feet,  
eyes wide and dark as a barn owl's,

how we'd whisper to one another  
the stories of *almosts*, *he tried to*,  
*he took me upstairs alone*.

Not knowing the import, we'd giggle,  
voices soft as moth wings  
brushing the screen as evening died.

We grew older and remembered,  
told our mothers, two sisters,  
each one listening, shaking a head:

His mother had suffered enough:  
a cruel husband, another child dead,  
silence was the way. No true harm done.

Stranded, then, left on our own  
memories tingle and worry,  
an elusive itch distressing our days.

Trapped in tight throats,  
questions huddle like scavengers:

Did we survive each snap of elastic  
as fingers snagged and tore at our waists,  
each whisper pressed close to our ears?

In nights limned by sweat-yellowed sleep,  
images flicker like fireflies  
caught within fretting and stifling dreams  
leaving us hollow-eyed and pale  
in morning's bloom of blue light.

# *No Two People*

OMAR SABBAGH

I see it in her eyes, the way those downcast daggers  
arrive, only to register where blade hits on blade.  
And there are others, too, I know who've seen it:  
this globular, sodden look, with wetness without wet.  
No two people were ever here. And if the heart's  
anything left to say, and say with the same guileless art,  
it's that no two people were ever here. She's made  
her bed now, as I've made mine, two sottish errors,  
let's say, too quick in the cloth of the sheets. And her  
face, unveiled now for what it is, is somehow neater—  
but like a shroud from the mask she was wont to build:  
somehow cleaner for the skin's sheer finish. I never knew  
there were so many people living there and yet, so few.

# *An Answer Uncanny*

RIDDHI DHAMANWALA

What if birds froze mid-flight  
and people froze mid-sentence?

What if there was only night, tenebrosity in abundance?  
If?

# *Letter from Sicily*

CHRISTOPHER THORNTON

**W**e know the story all too well. It has been repeated so often it has become a leitmotif of human history: a conquering army overcomes a rival, and in the aftermath a once-thriving civilization is reduced to rubble and ashes. A defeated population is slaughtered or enslaved, its cities are looted, its temples and monuments razed. A page is torn from the human story, to be pieced back together by those who follow.

When the Macedonian Alexander the Great seized Persepolis in 330 B.C., the capital of the Persian Empire was torched and looted in a matter of days. Historians claim that it took a team of over 3,000 camels, mules, and other pack animals to carry off all the loot, which included 2,500 tons of gold and silver. They also agree that it was largely in retaliation for the Persians' burning of Athens 150 years earlier, so a callous scorekeeper might write off the mayhem as a tit-for-tat.

After the Ottoman sultan Mehmet I conquered the Byzantine capital of Constantinople in 1453, his troops were allowed to wreak havoc on the city for three days, in keeping with the custom of the time. Many of the inhabitants were butchered, half of the houses were destroyed, and its many churches stripped of their valuables. The Hagia Sophia became a mosque and the city itself was given a new name—Istanbul, or “full of Islam.”

Less than a century later, on the other side of the Atlantic, the Aztec ruler Montezuma confronted the advancing armies of Hernando Cortez. Aided by the Tlaxcalans, one of Montezuma's rivals, Cortes laid waste to one Aztec city after another until he had Montezuma cornered in the city of Tenochtitlan. After an eight-month siege, Tenochtitlan surrendered. Cortes' forces ravaged the city and swapped the statues of the Aztec gods for Christian icons.

But it didn't always have to be that way, and it wasn't always. There have been times, however rare and brief, when the accomplishments of a conquered people were recognized and even built on by their conquerors. For over 200 years Sicily prospered under Arab rule. It was governed with a spirit of tolerance and acceptance of the island's many faiths and ethnicities—Muslims, Christians, and Jews, Saracens from North Africa, Italian tribesmen. It became a fantastically wealthy trading center, known for its spirit of decadence and indulgence. But the Arabs had also turned the island's patchwork of villages into well-ordered towns and cities, introduced an irrigation system that boosted agricultural production, and established local markets to stimulate intra-island trade. Then the French Normans, returning from a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, landed on Sicily's western coast in 1061, led by Robert Guiscard and Roger Bosso, Robert's younger brother.

From a conqueror's point of view, Robert and Roger couldn't have arrived at a more opportune time. Despite its prosperity, discontent on the island was rife, with regional warlords itching for a rebellion against the rulers in Palermo. The brothers exploited the fray, making deals with leaders of the local fiefs that involved swapping control of land for military support. Bit by bit, Robert and

Roger gained control of more and more of Sicily, so that by 1072 they were able to seize the capital Palermo itself.

Here is where the story takes an unexpected turn. In the wake of the conquest, none of Sicily's mosques were burned. Christian icons never replaced the Islamic symbols of daily life. The Arabic language was not banned. None of the non-Christian population fell to Crusaders' swords. Instead, the brothers recognized the achievements of the longtime Arab rulers and advanced knowledge they had brought to the island and chose to build on them. Eventually both Robert and Roger passed into history. Roger's son Simon enjoyed a brief reign as he island's ruler, but control of Sicily was then handed to Roger II, and under his reign the island reached a level of wealth, power, and influence it hasn't seen in the near thousand years since.

Roger II has often been described as a "product of the Mediterranean." Both his character and consciousness were shaped by the many influences of the region. He was born in multicultural, multi-religious Calabria in 1095, where mosques stood casually alongside churches. His early teachers were Greek and Muslim scholars. He was fond of discussing medicine, philosophy, and mathematics, learned Arabic early in life and spoke it fluently. In a nod to Sicily's Arab legacy his regal cloak carried the date of his regency in the Islamic year—528.

Once Roger II became the ruler of Sicily he chose not to upset its delicate appletart but continue driving it forward. Almost a thousand years before the term "multicultural" had become the buzzword of the modern era, Roger II put it into practice in the upper echelon of his government. Muslim calligraphers recorded state business in beautifully cursive Arabic. Local bishops represented the churches of England, France, and Italy. French became



the official language of the court, but royal decrees were written in Arabic, Greek, Hebrew, and Latin, depending on the community most affected by their content. His commander-in-chief was George of Antioch, a Syrian Christian whose first language was Greek. Under George the Sicilian fleet came to rule the Mediterranean. Other notables included the Arab geographer Muhammad al-Idrisi, and Nilus Doxopatrius, an historian of Greek ancestry. Rather than impose a common code of justice, under Roger the people faced tribunals that applied the laws of their various religions. His approach to governance had a continent-wide payoff: many of the textbooks used in the fledgling universities that had begun to appear all over Europe were translations of scholarly documents that had been compiled in Sicily.

The cultural *mélange* of the island was evident in every aspect of daily life. Coins were inscribed with the Islamic year. Arabic-speaking Christians often sported Muslim attire. The combination of talents and ideas brought the island a level of development that rivaled nearby Andalusia. Before the arrival of the Normans, the Arabs had brought cotton, sugar cane, citrus fruits, and dates to Sicily. Roger refined these innovations, developing profitable industries in the production and export of textiles, sugar, wheat, cheese, and, following successful raids on the Byzantine Empire, the fabric that had become the craze of the Mediterranean: silk.

It can't be denied that geography helped. Sicily's location in the center of the Mediterranean made it a convenient crossroads for the passage of goods but also ideas, and Roger turned away no one who could contribute to the island's prosperity. On his return from a pilgrimage to Mecca, the Spanish Muslim geographer Ibn Jubeir wrote:

[Palermo] is endowed with two gifts, splendor and wealth. It contains all the real and imagined beauty that anyone could wish. Splendor and grace adorn the piazzas and the countryside. The streets and the highways are wide, and the eye is dazzled by the beauty . . . It is a city full of marvels, with buildings similar to those of Cordoba . . . A permanent stream of water from springs runs through the city. There are so many mosques they are impossible to count. Most of them also serve as schools. The eye is dazzled by all this brilliance.

The multicultural character of the island is most clearly represented in a funerary stone for a woman known only as Anna, mother of a priest who went by the name of Grisandus. The inscription is written in Arabic, Latin, Greek, and a fusion of Hebrew and Arabic called Judeo-Arabic, which was designed for Sicily's Sephardic Jews. The date of death is also given special treatment. It was recorded in agreement with the Byzantine, Gregorian, and Islamic calendars.

By the time of his death, Roger had succeeded in uniting all the Norman conquests in Italy into one kingdom with a strong centralized government. Regrettably, like so many good things in life, it was not to last. By 1170, anti-Muslim pogroms began to drive many of the Muslims off the island. Around the year 1200 a "Latinization" effort began to flatten the island's multicultural character. A wave of conversions made Catholicism the dominant religion. By the middle of the century Islam had all but disappeared from Sicily.

That could have been the end of the story of Sicily, or at least the island's cultural kaleidoscope, but it was not—because the Normans were builders, and Roger II,

particularly, took a fancy to the aesthetic values of the Arab rulers he had supplanted, unlike his archrivals, the Byzantines, centered in Constantinople. Almost a thousand years later, the edifices the Normans left behind stand as monuments to the principle of fusion. Today it is a buzzword associated with faddish cuisine, but in historical terms it means recognizing rather than erasing the aesthetics of those who had gone before. In architectural terms it set Sicily apart from the rest of Italy, and even defines Sicilian.

In 1131, a year after Roger II was crowned the island's king, his man of the sea George of Antioch threw up the Ponte dell'Ammiraglio, or Admiral's Bridge, over the Oreto River, east of Palermo's center. Legend has it that Archangel Michael appeared before Roger at the site and assisted in his conquest of the island. Whatever its origins, the bridge's austere lines mark it as Norman, though the same geometric simplicity offers a nod to Arab design.

A few years later Roger reclaimed the San Giovanni degli Eremiti, or St. John of the Hermits, a sixth-century church that later had been turned into a mosque. With magnanimity in victory, Roger paid due diligence to the island's former rulers, rebuilding the entire complex with echoes of Arab design, particularly in the exterior garden, a common feature of Islamic architecture.

Of course there is more. In the center of Palermo, the Church of San Cataldo, on the Piazza Bellini, rose from the foundation of a former church—or mosque, depending on the time period—but both Arab and Byzantine influence is clear. The overall structure is plain to the point of stark (Norman), but geometric designs (Arab) and red domes (Byzantine) defer to influences from the east and add a touch of panache.

Looming over St. John of the Hermits is the massive Palazzo dei Normanni, which served as the Norman kings' command center after they ousted the Arab rulers. It was built on the site of Arab fortress, but the many gardens that connect the mishmash of buildings and arcades were the creation of Arab horticulturists, to preserve a central feature that came in handy in the searing Sicilian summers. Just down the street, the hulking Cathedral of Palermo displays no Islamic influence, and naturally so, but Roger II recruited artisans from Constantinople to create the decorative mosaics splashed across its interior.

It is a bit ironic that one of the most prominent examples of Arab-Norman fusion lies far outside Palermo. It is the cathedral of Monreale, perched at the high point in the town of the same name, and the only reason to visit. But the trip is an essential part of the journey, for the bus from the Piazza Palatina traverses the green and undulating Sicilian countryside as tinier villages pass and the road rises toward the town. The final stop avoids the small plaza in the front of the church. It is on Monreale's main street, a few hundred meters from the massive stone hulk, which is a good thing. It means a final trek of several hundred meters to cover the rest of the distance, and satisfaction delayed is satisfaction better satisfied.

Monreale would not be Monreale, and Monreale would not be Sicilian if it were not for a legend about the cathedral's origins. This one claims that William II was out hunting near Monreale when he happened to doze off under a tree. As he dreamt the Virgin Mary instructed him to build a church on the site. Awakened, William found enough gold beneath the tree to fund Monreale's construction.

History is every myth's spoiler, and Monreale would also not be Sicilian were it not for a more factual account.

In that telling, when the Arabs seized the island in 831 the bishop of Palermo was driven from the city. Choosing to stay close to home, he found shelter in a tiny village that offered a commanding view of his former town. There he built a small church to keep the flame of the Christian faith burning, and it became the foundation of the cathedral once the Normans returned and returned Sicily to Christian rule.

Like so much Norman architecture, Monreale's exterior is stark and severe, as if hiding the many layers of beauty within. There, Arab-inspired geometric patterns swirl across the marble floor, the entire plan a combination of Eastern and Western designs. Looming above are biblical stories recreated in mosaics that were the work of Venetian (read, Byzantine) craftsmen. The disorientation continues in the adjoining cloisters. The courtyard is lined with 108 pairs of columns, decorated in mosaic patterns. Like snowflakes, no two are the same, and each is crowned with a capital in classical floral design. Visitors wander around the cathedral in hushed, or awed, or simply confused, silence. Is this East or West? A European church or a Damascene mansion? Neither, and both. Instead of sending a Christian or Islamic message, what the cathedral stands for is clear—that true beauty is not the sole product of any single people or part of the world but the mingling of many. Each has a say in the final creation, and each earns a share of its effect.

By the time William I and II, the heirs of Roger II, completed the Al Zisa Palace, the Normans had been thoroughly bitten by the Arab bug. Al Zisa—meaning the “wonderful” or “splendid”—was intended to serve as a hunting retreat for the Williams whenever they heard the call of the Sicilian countryside. Today the site is almost due south of Palermo central and well within the

boundary of the city proper, so any aura of idyllic bliss is long gone. Traffic circles around the large park spread out in the front of the palace. A long rectangular pool, lined with seasonal fountains, serves as a reminder of the Arab origin of the entire complex.

To step beyond the walls surrounding the palace is to leave behind the chaotic traffic of modern Palermo, the conservative Catholicism of the rest of Italy, and even the multicultural character of medieval Palermo. The Al Zisa is wholly, thoroughly, and unequivocally Eastern. Doorways topped with pointed arches divide room from room. Decorative wall niches house oil lamps and ornamental vases. The walls are doubly thick to guard against the searing heat of summer and damp chill of the Sicilian winter. Many of the ceilings are decorated with *murqanas*—a feature of many Islamic buildings in which a ceiling is divided into carved geometric patterns that create a honeycomb effect.

But for any medieval Sicilian the most valuable feature of Al Zisa would have been its air-conditioning system. To beat the summer heat, Al Zisa was designed to face northeast, to allow the sea breezes to pass across a large pool laid out before the palace's reception hall. There a network of ducts and channels carried the fresher, cooler air to the upper levels. A good night sleep in a Sicilian summer became, quite literally, a delight of kings.

Arab, Greek, and Roman, Norman and Byzantine—Sicily dances over and defies categorization. The celebration of the *mélange* is arguably the Capella Palatina, the creation of Roger II as an addition to his Norman Palace. Tucked away on the second floor, visitors find their way to the entrance by keeping an eye out for discreetly placed directional signs. But once there, the chapel is presented as quintessentially Norman. The arches and

doors echo North Africa. Inside, Italian artisans designed the floor, though the mosaics that fill the walls are classic Byzantine. Higher up, the wooden ceiling is carved in murqanas surrounded with eight-pointed stars, another nod to Arab influence, while the inscriptions are written in Arabic, Greek and Latin. But lest anyone forget this is a Christian chapel, a massive mosaic of Jesus Christ, the Pantokrator, fills the dome.

Back in the fifth century B.C., a Sicilian cook who went by the name of Mithecus traveled to Greece, and when he returned he wrote what is believed to be the world's first cookbook. Little did he know that in the centuries to come the island he left would become a culinary crossroads, where all the refined tastes of the Mediterranean would have a hand in creating one of the world's most complex cuisines. On the western end of the island the immigrant Greeks would fancy dishes packed with pistachios, olives, and broad beans to complement the tried and true staples of fish and vegetables. Around Tripani, to the west, the North African Berbers favored recipes founded on couscous. After the opening of the New World the Spanish would add corn, sweet peppers, and tomatoes to the ever expanding stock of ingredients.

During their two centuries of rule, the Arabs played the role of head chef in the development of Sicilian cuisine, adding citrus fruits such as lemons, limes, and blood oranges. Durum wheat became the prime ingredient in pasta, and almonds for marzipan desserts (credited to the nuns at the Convent of Eloise). Let us not forget sugar cane and vanilla, without which we would not have confetti—nutty, chewy almond clusters—fennel and pine nuts, raisins, dates, and chickpeas, artichokes and sesame seeds, cinnamon, saffron, and nutmeg. All were all ferried to Sicily by the Saracens of North Africa. Once the

appetite for architecture is satisfied, there is no better way to savor the multicultural character of Sicily than to dip into Sicilian cuisine.

One night I trekked to Palermo's Kalsa district, a onetime Arab market where the pencil-thin main street is lined with stalls by day and restaurant terraces at night. From early morning the town folk pick through the freshest of fresh vegetables and fruits, stacks of cheeses, spice bins filled with fennel and oregano, basil, thyme, and red pepper, and piles of pasta in shapes too many to count.

When night falls the Kalsa becomes one of Palermo's premier dining halls. Red-and-white-checked tablecloths are spread over wobbly, wooden tables. Imagine the scents as sounds and the Kalsa would be a cacophony, a celebration of the blending of culinary influences and the role that each has played in the making of something greater than any would be able by themselves. There is the strong and the soothing, the playful and the existential piquant, the sharp and the sweet, but here they intertwine much like the architectural *mélange* of the Capella Palatina. Your dinner begins with *maccu* that is said to date from Roman times. For a hint of North Africa you add a dash of fennel and a drizzle of olive oil. Then comes pasta *con le sarde* with a glass of *Catarratto bianco* (okay, two). Then *pesce spada alla ghiotta*, and to finish, a slice of *cassata Siciliana*. In the Kalsa, or the Capella Palatina, it is a lesson to be appreciated in a world coopted by nativism, cultural exclusion, and primordial fears of the Other.



In the end, I toss a coin. It spins, twirls in the air, lands on its side, wobbles a moment, tips left, then right—but stays upright.



PHOTO ESSAY  
SNIPER ALLEY PHOTO  
DŽEMIL HODŽIĆ



Photo by Danilo Krstanović

# *My City*

**S**arajevo. Unconquerable fortress. City that suffered but endured. I endured. Siege. Snipers. Shellings. The neighborly love of Greater Serbia.

The times when I was growing up during the war are like one piece. In my head, it has a timeline, but no chronology. My fourth, fifth, and sixth grades are not aligned with what was happening at that time. Events are all over the place.

I remember winters and summers. I remember days and nights. I remember hiding and playing. I remember the World Cup in America '94, Maradona was disqualified. I remember the sadness when the legend of Formula 1 Ayrton Senna died. It's strange how I see it all now, everything that was happening during the siege and that which was going on somewhere in the world. Some of my favorite movies are from the '90s but I watched them long after the war thinking, Hey, *Forrest Gump* was made while we were slaughtered.

Those times are a broken mosaic of snippets of scattered memories. I collect photos from those years, trying to build a mind map of images and hopefully get the complete picture of my childhood, my complete life under siege.

I call it Sniper Alley Photo.

For me, every photograph has a meaning. Every one of them ignites some kind of memory and brings back a lost detail that is dear to me. I see myself in these photos. I see my brother. I see my life. Maybe I am searching for myself in someone else's photograph.

I have a library of frames; my head is full. Those photo negatives are giving me a positive image of my city as I walk the streets of once surrounded and destroyed capital.

My Sarajevo.



Photo by Enrico Dagnino

# *Mother*

**M**y mother worked in a hospital throughout the siege. Sometimes I wouldn't see her for one day and sometimes even two days in a row. Out of three years of war, she spent one whole year in the hospital working for free. Just doing her job. Just helping people. She needed an hour just to get there on foot, in rain or snow, walking the empty streets of Sarajevo, avoiding sniper fire and mortar shelling.

She was a damn good role model. My mother. My rock. My moral compass. The epitome of empathy and courage. Her words from the day my brother was killed still echo in my head. It's difficult to describe how strong she was at that moment. After we came from the hospital she said, "I'm glad I was at home when this happened, to see him one last time and he died in my lap. I'd never trust that others tried their best." If I had to choose one single lesson that has guided me in my life it would be her gratitude to God in this terrible moment. Even in a situation like that she found some ray of light, something to be grateful for.

When I look at the photos of women walking the empty and dangerous alleys during our bloody war, I wonder who they are and where they are going. They remind me of my mother. Those brave cooks, nurses, doctors, civil defense officers, heroines. She was like that, going to work no matter what. I remember she once said that going to work always looked to her as any Sunday morning at 6am, nobody was there, lifeless, melancholic, occasional dogs would cross her street.

I am still trying to find her photo from that period.



Photo by Enrico Dagnino



# *Father*

**W**ar was doling out some unplanned assignments. My father was a soldier and that meant I had some extra chores. At the age of nine or ten I'd get UN aid: half a bread per person. Four of us would get two loaves of bread. There were times when I'd eat my piece by the time I got back home. Some of the chores were heavy duty but back then I didn't see them as such. Chop wood, get water, build a fire, grind coffee, heat the water, prepare dinner. It's war, everyone does it.

Father would often come home around 5pm, after yet another 24- or 48-hour frontline shift. First thing, I'd help him take a shower. There was no electricity and no running water so he'd sit in a dark toilet with a flickering candle and I'd pour a bucket of heated water over him. It was steamy and the shadows made it look like some first-class spa. With his head straight up, I'd splash him carefully to preserve as much of the precious drops as possible. I watered down his trench dirt and the smell of mold. He'd have that strange smell like smoked meat which we missed so much during the war. My brain was confused. It was like a gas station; it stinks but you love it.

Even today when I sit down to eat smoked meat, I remember him returning from the trenches, his sweat mixed with the fumes of the damp ditches, the smell of triumph, of victory, of winning the war. The smoky smell makes him alive again in my mind, coming back to his base, tired but happy. My dad.

After his bath we had dinner, and, of course, Bosnian coffee was a must. That ritual. The scent of normality and isolated moments of pleasure. Pretending to have an ordinary life. I hated grinding the coffee. The pain in my arms was so annoying. Such a tedious task for just a few sips. He was so proud when he taught me how to make it and I was really good at it. Still am. Now I'm trying to teach my kid. I say, This is how your grandpa did it when he came back from the front.



Photo by Enrico Dagnino

# *Brother*

**A**mel, my brother, is four years older than me. He was sixteen when he was killed, and I was almost twelve. During the war, we used to stay home alone, while our parents were preserving the country. Mother was in a hospital working as a nurse and Father was on the frontline. Father told me, “Amel is me when I’m away.” He was everything to me, mother, father and brother. I followed his orders. Those were the times I became a grown-up overnight. When Amel was around, I was fearless, secure, content. My life was complete. He used to give me extra work, pushing me to my limits. I never questioned it. My time was organized according to my duties inside and outside the house. I hated it, of course. I’d rather be playing outside.

Ever since that bloody day, whenever I speak of him as a person or as someone who got killed, or when I mention him to somebody as my brother, I never use the past tense. He is my brother. When people ask me if I have siblings, I say, “Yes, I have a brother.” If I say I used to have a brother, if that somehow slips out of me, I blame myself for getting rid of him.

By finding photos of my late brother, and hopefully finding a photo of myself too, I feel I’d bring back those moments, our ex-life. I’m searching the past for my present. For him.

This is why I started Sniper Alley Photo. I wanted to make a space for myself and all of us the children of war where we can share our stories. My story is not mine only, it’s about all of us who were supposed to be killed but somehow survived. My voice is the voice of all the kids from Sarajevo and my brother’s story is the story of all other kids who were killed. All 1601 of them.



Photo by Keith Brame

# *Friends*

I often ask myself if it's really possible to make new friends. What exactly is a good friend? There are people close to us who can't understand us at all? Can we blame them for that? This keeps haunting me just as that old place where we used to live. We had to relocate when Amel was killed. Start a new life somewhere else. It was too much for my parents, especially my mother. She couldn't stand it because everything was reminding her of Amel. The street, the house, kids, neighbors, trees, fences, noise, even the still sky above us.

My home. Childhood left behind. It looked like we left it for good. Painful, but I was hiding it well. No time to mourn this forced separation, this removal from the place I still love the most.

A bigger pain was suppressing other anxieties. We moved out within two weeks of my brother's murder. I left my heart there thinking I'd never see my friends again. The friends I grew up with. We were so attached, always together, and the war made us closer. One time we did something older boys used to do, something bizarre and ridiculous, but I am glad we did it. It means something now. Proof of a life that actually existed. We'd cut our hands and rub our wounds against each other to get our blood mixed. Blood brothers. As if I sensed my real brother would get killed. I can't remember myself without them being around.

I've lived in many places since but never managed to grow roots anywhere. Never adjusted to any other place. Maybe I just don't want to betray them. Don't want to cheat on my friends, cheat on playgrounds and the games we played, cheat on moments we used to share, cheat on the life we lived.

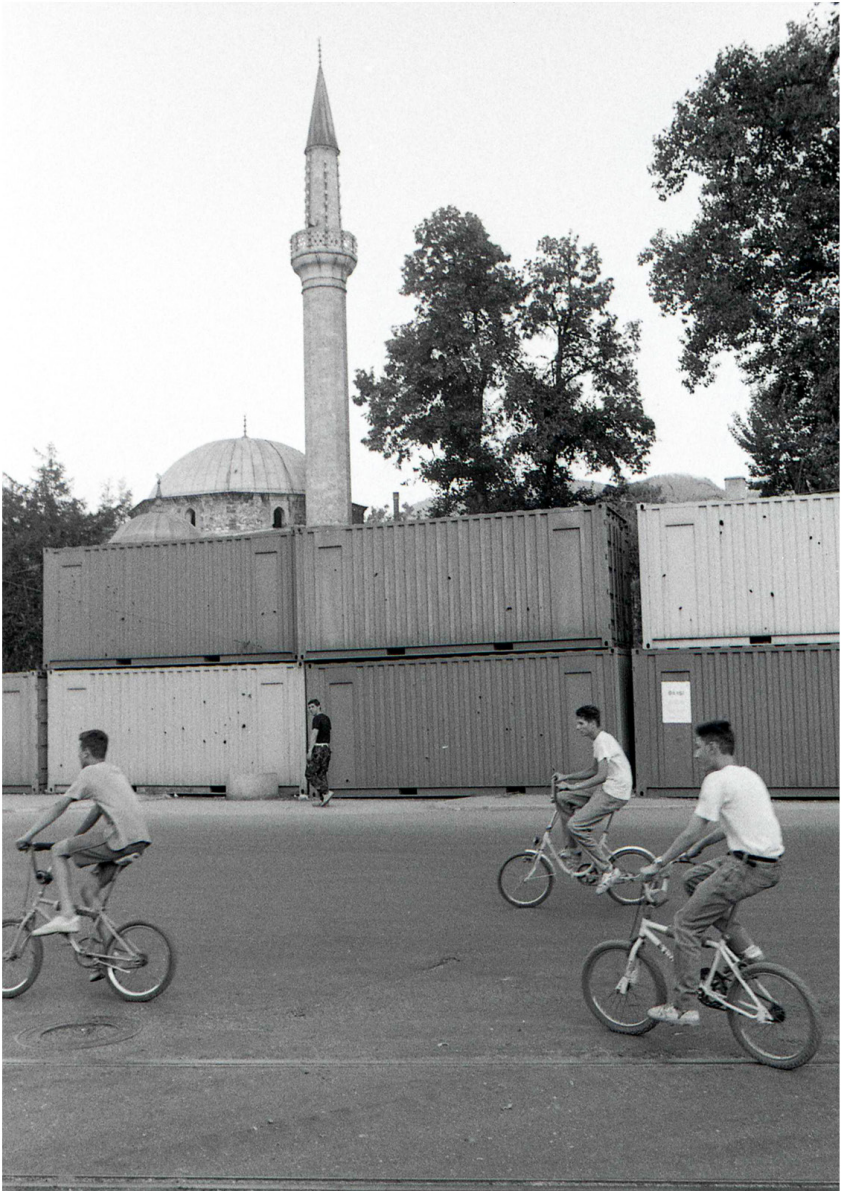


Photo by Delmi Alvarez

# *Before*

**W**hen I'm feeling nostalgic, when I am alone and at peace, walking down any street in Sarajevo immediately reminds me of the time when I used to duck in the sniper alley. Long walks get me thinking. They say growing up here in Sarajevo was difficult, but I don't see it as bad or traumatic. Perhaps I'm fooling myself but I'd say it was beautiful.

I was a kid. Free. My brother was still alive. It's as simple as that.

That's when he was still around, laughing, playing, drawing and sharing with me all the brotherly things. Like the Gregorian calendar or the Hijra timeline, my life is split in two, with Amel and after Amel. My frame of mind changed and my attitude towards living things grew very different from my peers. Death suddenly had less meaning and I felt cold and without empathy.

There was nobody to share these thoughts with because they felt abnormal. I was angry but had no clue why I was angry. The time and place was not exactly conducive to sharing trauma and pain and that's why so many of us are silent. It took me twenty five years to understand people who are still hiding, not yet ready to speak to the world. It makes perfect sense. Some never talk.

I decided it's time to share.



Photo by Danilo Krstanović



# Today

I wish I'd done this before, maybe ten or twenty years ago. All of this, these words, my testimony, my story. Even this text I am writing right now helped me lighten the weight I'd been carrying. The weight which was not letting me cry. How I wish I cried more. My superpower has always been this ability to delay the grief. I put it on hold and it became a prolonged mourning. I'd schedule it the way I want and I'd organize my pain the way it suited me. It was the age of dying and people used to say there is no time to grieve. The hard years. The horror. Killing becoming so mundane. When a kid at the age of twelve sees death, blood, morgues, corpses and all of that without time to reconcile with the reality, you get an adult trapped in a child's body.

My father died in 2016. Cancer. Month-and-a-half was all that this killer needed. Most probably remnants of war. Then there was the bad diet, stress, terrible healthcare and on top of all that murder of his son. I forgot, he was diabetic too.

I haven't cried yet. Not a single tear. This time around I'm not worried like I was the last time. Now I don't question myself as I used to because now I know more and I already have some kind of experience with handling the pain in a very destructive way. Time will tell. Maybe I will cry for him in 25 years' time.

I am free, finally.



IN FOCUS

ANDREW C. DAKALIRA

# *Rise of the Akafula*

ANDREW C. DAKALIRA

**I**t was hard to believe that where there now stood only one gray tree stump, a large forest reserve had once flourished. The myriad of cracks only gave evidence of the ground's unquenched thirst, which had now lasted for generations. The only thing that did not seem to mind the harsh conditions was the dust, which happily swirled around the figure approaching the tree stump.

He was covered from head to toe in red cloth. The goggles shielding his eyes made him resemble an ancient aviator. His black boots left tiny prints in the sand, which were gobbled up by the dancing dust. In his left hand was a metal staff with a wolf-shaped head. The staff towered over him, which was not a difficult feat. The man was only three feet tall.

In front of the stump, he stopped and inserted the base of the staff in a tiny hole in the middle of the dead wood. At once, his stick gave a bright red glow and the ground to his right opened up, revealing a flight of stairs. He began his descent.

“Halt! Identify yourself!” Another man, an inch taller than him, appeared from the darkness. He had a staff of his own, and pointed its tip directly at the visitor's heart. The man in red had expected this.

“It is only me. Tilinde.”

Upon recognizing the speaker, the man relaxed. “We were wondering when you would be back. It's been weeks.”

“There was much to do, Mowa. But I am here now. Are the Chintali down for the night?”

“All but one,” Mowa replied. “Chuma is waiting for you. He said you are to see him immediately after decontamination.”

Tilinde sighed as he stepped into the large cylindrical tube that was the decontamination chamber. The Chintali, the tall people, were always so impatient.

The fluorescent lights stung his eyes as he and Mowa walked towards the farthest cabin in the bunker. The bunker itself was the size of three football fields. It served its purpose well, providing food and shelter, especially for the Chintali. They never stepped outside.

“See anything interesting up there?” Mowa interrupted Tilinde’s thoughts.

“Do you mean the earth’s surface or on Lunarhide?” Tilinde asked back, smiling.

“Both.”

“On the surface, everything is the same. Not much has changed on Lunarhide, either. Just the usual eating, drinking and barking orders. I could not wait to come back.”

The door to Chuma’s cabin was similar to a bank vault’s. This door, though, only opened from the inside. Tilinde was about to press the intercom button on a small panel when the door opened. Inside, a man, about six feet tall, sat hunched at a table, fiddling with a plastic worksuit. He did not look up.

“You may go, Mowa, thank you.” Only after the door had closed behind the retreating guard did the Chintali leader look at Tilinde. His hair, once completely dark, now had gray tints in it and had a few patches missing. His smooth brown skin had a few ridges. “What’s the word from Lunarhide?”

“They say water will be delivered in a week’s time, great leader. The first consignment is going to North America, then Europe...”

Chuma waved a dismissive hand and Tilinde fell silent. “As usual, Africa will be last. Why the hell do we even have council representatives up there?”

Tilinde said nothing. He knew quite well what Africa’s council representatives were doing on the moon; making merry along with other continents’ representatives and the others who had managed to buy plots on the previously-uninhabitable satellite.

“Did they say anything else? Did you mention the disappearance of your kind?”

Your kind. Tilinde resented that, but he calmed himself. “They said it is our problem, that the nchewe have devoured them. They cannot spare anyone else.”

Lines of frustration grew on Chuma’s forehead. “That is unacceptable. What do they expect us to do then? Go out there and fight those mutant dogs ourselves? We are already short of Akafula as it is. We cannot afford to lose more.”

If Chuma had noticed the look of rage on the other man’s face when making that statement, he did not show it. “Anyway, we will deal with that later. You may go to your quarters. How did you travel back, by the way? Shuttle?”

“They beamed me down, great leader.”

“Classy.”

His head had barely hit the pillow when a tiny flashlight shone in his face. “So, what did the old fart say?”

Tilinde only sighed. “You are supposed to be asleep, Malinga. Don’t you have maintenance works tomorrow?”

The tiny female figure pulled itself up and sat on Tilinde’s bed. “I can do electrical maintenance in my sleep, and you know it. So, tell me. What did Chuma say? More orders, or did he just rant about his betters on Lunarhide?”

“Keep your voice down. He was the same as always; too preoccupied to want to talk about anything else.”

Malinga’s teeth seemed to glow in the battery-powered light. “So he does not suspect a thing?”

“No, he does not and it will stay that way. Now, go away and leave me in peace. I have missed my bed and would like to get some sleep.”

The next few days were going to be crucial and he needed as much rest as he could get.

“I will leave you to your bed, your majesty,” Malinga snickered, jumping off the bed. “At least you can sleep in private. Some of us worker bees cannot do that, what with other people constantly in the room. Of course, I would not have to worry about my living arrangements if you married me.”

Tilinde was still smiling when Malinga closed the cabin door behind her. That woman is something else, he thought to himself just before he fell asleep.

For years, Earth was the only habitable planet known to man in its solar system. Not only was it abundant in trees and other forms of vegetation, but it was also a major source of fresh water, with its rivers and lakes. That was before The Chilala. Now, five centuries after the disaster, the planet had turned into a skeleton. All the good things that had roamed the earth were now only retold by Chuma and a few others who bothered to remember.

The Chilala happened only two hundred years after the 20th Climate Change Conference. Mother Nature decided she had had enough. There were droughts. Glaciers melted, resulting in rising water levels. Whatever plant was not killed by the intense heat was destroyed by flooding. Then the rains left and the heat came again, this time even more fierce.

Rivers, lakes and finally oceans dried up. Heatwaves came and killed hundreds of thousands. Even people from

areas in Africa, known for withstanding high temperatures, did not stand a chance. Along with the heat came skin diseases. Everyone was sure to perish. Everyone, that is, except one group.

The Akafula, as the short ones were called by the Chintali, had lived peacefully in the great Chikangawa desert, surviving in the wild without any need for man's technology or his politics. All that changed when the Chilala came. The Akafula wandered the barren earth, using their primitive skills to survive. They were unaffected by the immense heat or diseases caused by the sun's rays. They were free to roam the earth while the Chintali scurried away to live underground. The Chintali noticed their uniqueness and, overnight, a single group of people became valuable. With the help of ships from the Chintali from Lunarhide, the Akafula were rounded up like cattle and forced to live in the bunkers. They became the Chintali's servants, with a few acting as liaisons between those still on Earth and the elite on Lunarhide. They handled maintenance work under the supervision of the Chintali. They cooked and cleaned. In turn, they lived among their tall masters in their underground bunkers.

In the three hundred years that had passed since The Chilala, the Chintali had become more reclusive. Tilinde still did not understand how the tall people could stay so long without sunshine, without fresh air. Granted, the air outside was full of dust, but it was fresh. It was certainly better than being constantly under fluorescent light, eating, drinking and playing handheld video games all day.

"Something on your pebble-sized brain keeping you from working, little man?"

There was no mistaking the voice that brought Tilinde back. "What do you want, Jere?"

Even by Chintali standards, the bunker's chief security



officer was a mountain. Slightly over six feet tall and with over a hundred kilos on him.

“Heard you were back from your vacation,” Jere started. “I was off duty so I was not there to welcome you. How is your concubine up there, Your Highness?” He made a mock curtsy. Tilinde said nothing.

“Do not worry. I took good care of your little girlfriend here while you were away. Wouldn’t want her pretty little face getting electrocuted, would we?”

Tilinde’s ears were ringing. He knew he could not take on Jere, but his fury tempted him. It took great effort to restrain himself. Alarm replaced anger when he heard something else instead; a dog barking. Then people screaming.

Jere easily overtook Tilinde as they rushed toward the commotion. He arrived just in time to see Mowa’s staff spit a flurry of red electricity in the direction of a furry creature the size of a baby elephant, which was foaming at the mouth and howling. The electricity put an end to both. It stiffened and, with smoke wafting from its fur, dropped to the concrete floor.

Tilinde took charge at once. “Mowa, make sure that thing is really dead. Somebody give me a casualty report!”

Jere, however, was inching towards Mowa. “Forget the bloody report; how the hell did those meat-loving, disease-infested dogs get in here? Who was manning the entrance?”

“I do not know,” whimpered Mowa. “The door was opened from the outside. When I went to check, it bit me and charged down here. Along with two others.”

Everyone immediately shrank back from the guard. A few red glows could be seen once again, along with a few murmurs. “He’s been bitten!”

“They travel in packs! There could be more of them about!”

“Check on the children!”

“That’s enough, all of you.” Chuma had silently joined the crowd. “The other nchewe fled the bunker. This was the last one. Escort the wounded to the clinic. That includes you, Mowa. The rest of you, go back to your duties.” He turned to Tilinde and Jere. “You two come with me. Now.”

As he turned to follow Chuma, Tilinde was stopped by Mowa. “They took three of us.” Tilinde knew what was coming even before the little guard spoke again. “I am sorry, Tilinde. Malinga was one of them.”

“We need to reinforce our defences,” Jere said before the three of them had sat down. “Those oversized mutts have never dared enter the bunker before. We must do something, and whoever let it happen must be punished!”

Tilinde was calm. “I agree that something must be done. We must go after them. These attacks are becoming more frequent. Those things travel in packs, and if they have made this their territory, they are not going to stop.”

The mockery in Jere’s tone was distinctive. “Go after them, eh? And just how do you propose we do that, Mr. Hawking? Some of us cannot walk the earth’s surface anymore, remember?”

Tilinde ignored the jibe. “I’ll go. I still have a few of my people left. We can go out there and fight.”

“Sure, go ahead,” Jere retorted. “Be forever known as the man under whose watch an entire clan disappeared. As if you aren’t mediocre already. You may be able to walk up there, but what the hell do you know about combat?”

“That’s enough from the both of you!” Chuma had sat down and not moved since, but his skin had taken an unhealthy shade of grey.

“Sit down.”

“You are both right. We must reinforce our defences, but we also have to eliminate the threat. You are also both

wrong. Tilinde, those few men you have mentioned are the only Akafula we have left. We cannot risk sending all of you out there. You will take five of them. In addition, you will be accompanied by Jere, two other Chintali guards, and me.”

Chuma had expected the looks of shock on both Tilinde and Jere’s faces. “I have found a solution, something I have been working on for the past year.” Chuma pressed a button on his metal desk and a cabinet behind him opened, revealing a plastic suit that Tilinde had seen before. Only this time, there were two more.

“I suggest you both get some sleep. We start off early tomorrow morning.”

The four Chintali and six Akafula surveyed their surroundings. The vast desert slept peacefully in the dusk, while the wind played with the sand

“This isn’t exactly a lot to pine for, is it? It looks like we haven’t missed much.” Jere said through his protective mask.

“Believe me, Jere, we have,” Chuma said. “Just a few centuries ago, this land was green with grass and tall trees while fresh water ran from brook to river to lake, full of fish. We should curse our ancestors for ruining this planet.” The old man looked like he was about to cry. “I am over sixty years old. I talk about fish, about the famous Chambo that was abundant in Lake Malawi and yet, sadly, I have never seen a fish in my entire life, let alone tasted it. All I know about fish, trees and crops, I learned from the ancient books.”

Tilinde said nothing as he followed their tracker, a bouncy Akafula man who kept sniffing the air. He knew better than to talk to the Chintali leader when he was in such a melancholic mood. Besides, he could not afford to pay much attention to the old man’s musings. Not today.

The tracker stopped; his eyes darted carefully around the vicinity. Tilinde could sense something, but Chuma's vision turned out to be better in the dark. "There is something up ahead," he said. "I can hardly believe it, but I see lights."

"Lights? Around here? That's impossible," Jere said to no one in particular. He was about to continue, but the tracker's screams grabbed his attention. The tracker was lifted off his feet by a set of great big jaws and carried off into the night.

Tilinde's staff was already firing. Two of the nchewe were down even before Jere had fired a single shot. In spite of their size, the nchewe were surprisingly stealthy. One of the big dogs went for Chuma's neck, but was down in a nanosecond, a short burst from Tilinde's staff flinging it onto its side. One of the Chintali guards was not so lucky; his throat was ripped open and he was dead before his face hit the ground.

"Head towards the light!" Tilinde's voice was barely audible. The others did not need to be told twice. Chuma led the way, with Tilinde and Jere making up the rear. The big man was surprisingly agile, taking out two nchewe with his staff while twisting and turning.

Chuma could see the lights clearer. They belonged to several large concrete buildings which were surrounded by a wire-mesh fence. What was even more disturbing was the giant gate. It slid open with ease, as if it were electric and not being pushed by two men, neither one of whom was more than three feet tall. Behind Chuma, the second Chintali guard fell and was immediately mauled.

Tilinde noticed the slackening steps of the old man as they approached the gate. "Get in!" He shouted, and Chuma obeyed, still dazed by the picture in front of him. So absorbed was he that he did not hear the giant gate

slide shut. What he did hear a few seconds later was the pounding, as well as the accompanying voice.

“Hey, what the hell are you doing? Let me in!”

The Chintali leader nearly fell to his knees as he turned around and watched his head of security try to fight off a dozen mutated dogs on his own. The nchewe circled and, like meerkats, nibbled at him. Jere took two down before his legs finally could take no more. His colossal frame crashed to the ground, and like vultures, the nchewe pounced. Inside the compound, Tilinde and the others watched.

“Are you mad? Help him! Let him in!” Chuma shouted amidst the noise of flesh being ripped from what was once a giant of a man. Tilinde shook his head. “It is too late for him now, great leader. You, on the other hand, are safe here. The nchewe will not harm us.”

**F**or the first time, Chuma really opened his eyes. He was in a very sophisticated compound. There were lights. Each building had what appeared to be large air conditioners outside. To Chuma’s bewilderment, some women were carrying clay pots on their heads, full of water. Water, the lifesaver he had believed was no longer available on Earth. Most important of all, everyone inside the compound, with the exception of the Chintali leader, was no more than four feet tall. Chuma was alone with scores of Akafula, most of whom he had presumed dead.

As if understanding Chuma’s confusion, Tilinde spoke again. “Welcome to our home, great leader. I will have to stop calling you that, though, I’m afraid. Around here, I am the leader. I am sorry about Jere’s death but he was one oppressor this community can gladly do without.”

“Tilinde, what is all this? What have you done?”

“What I have done, great leader, is free my people.

For years, we have been exploited by your kind, due to a disaster of both our ancestors' making. They destroyed the earth, ignored all the warnings on climate change and global warming. Our ancestors exploited Mother Nature until she could take it no longer. She struck back."

"Spare me the history lesson. I know quite well what happened five centuries ago," the Chintali leader spat, some of the confusion and fear having left him. "It does not justify your betrayal."

"On the contrary, great leader, The Chilala is what brought us here. When it struck, some of your wealthy friends fled, taking up permanent residence on Lunarhide. The rest of you either died or went underground. You then found out that due to certain genetic disorders, we could still roam the earth's surface. With the help of the ships from Lunarhide, you immediately rounded us up, under threat of annihilation. We were first turned into your guinea pigs in your search for cures and skin creams in order for you to walk the Earth's surface once more. When that did not work, you made us your servants. A precious commodity."

Tilinde paused, his cold stare not leaving the man who towered over him. He spoke again, seemingly oblivious to everyone else but Chuma, even when Malinga came to his side. "We worked for you, we learnt all we could. We acquired your technology and other skills, for three hundred years. Our time on the surface also taught us many things. Like how to tame the nchewe, for example. We have had to kill a few, of course, but we had to maintain the ruse. Every one of us taken from the bunker is alive and well, as you can see. They can only attack us when we let them, but they can freely attack you. It was the perfect way of leaving without any Chintali suspecting anything. We are all happy here."

Chuma did not speak but his face might as well have been papyrus paper. “I know what you’re thinking,” Tilinde said, smugly. “We will survive. You see, the one thing that finally made me implement this plan was the water. We can and we will grow our own food. And with the skills we learnt from our time in the bunker, we will not need the Chintali. But I needed you, great leader; their most intelligent being. When I saw those suits, I realised it was only a matter of time before you started exploring the surface, a thing that could jeopardize everything. So you can imagine my delight when you volunteered to come along on our hunt.”

Tilinde looked at the old man again, as the gate behind him slid open once more. “I do hope you will enjoy your stay here. Please excuse me while I go back with a few nchewe to free the rest of my people, and to tell the Chintali news of your demise, of course.” The old Chintali was still in shock. He tried one more threat, in desperation.

“You know what our friends on Lunarhide will do. They won’t stand for this! You will have warships all over this place soon!”

**T**ilinde only smiled. “I am your liaison, remember? As long as I tell them everything is alright down here, they will believe it. And, should they decide to start a war, your own technology will help us build our own weapons. The earth’s surface is ours now, great leader. Change has come, and you will be here to witness it. Just do not take off that suit.”

~

“Rise of the Akafula” was originally published in *Will This Be A Problem*

# *Interview*

## *Andrew C. Dakalira*

JOANNA WOODS

### INTERVIEWER

Thanks for joining me today, Andrew. It's great to connect like this on the phone. Let's hope the connection holds throughout. To begin, I wonder if you could say when and how you started writing?

### DAKALIRA

Thanks. Well, I really started writing when I was in my teens, around 13, 14. I was in secondary school then. But it was something that you just dabble in. So that's how I started. I think it was because I started reading books at a really young age. I was seven or eight or thereabouts, but I've always been fascinated by fiction. I suppose at some point I was like, okay, I wish I could do something like this. I wish I could write, you know, like, write really good stories. I guess that's what really motivated me. I started in secondary school, but then at college I didn't really write anymore. I only started writing again, when, I think I was 24, with some encouragement from a few friends.

So, from there, when some of my friends saw a couple of my stories [...] they said try posting them up, get them



published. Then, I tried submitting to a couple of websites and, surprisingly, my story was accepted. I guess that's how it all started then.

#### INTERVIEWER

Do you know what particular text inspired you back then? And then, I'd love to know what genre you enjoy reading and writing now as well?

#### DAKALIRA

Well, I can single out a few, but I guess if I was to pick an author I think I was inspired mostly by Stephen King, because I read a lot of his books. He inspired me a lot. But then I also read a bit of Lovecraft. There is also a book called *A Bridge to Terabithia* by Katherine Paterson. That's also one of my favourites.

So, I'd say those mostly, and then the genre of horror, I think, or horror and science fiction. Those are what I really enjoy reading.

#### INTERVIEWER

And, of course, you have also written in those registers or genres. That is something we'll come back to. But I'm interested in what your strategy is for getting your writing reviewed and published because you mentioned submitting your story a moment ago. I wonder, do you generally answer calls for submissions, for example, or do you send your original idea off somewhere? I'm thinking especially of entries to online magazines here.

#### DAKALIRA

It's a bit of both. I've written a couple of stories based on things that I saw in calls for submissions. But for the most part, I think I just come up with an idea, write the

story, and then when something comes along that I think would be suitable for that story, I submit. I'd say mostly I come up with [the idea and] write the story first. I don't really think I tailor all my work towards specific calls for submissions. Except for a couple of circumstances.

The AfroSF story was written for a call. But, for example, I'm kind of working on a short story anthology, my own collection now.

#### INTERVIEWER

Would you say that you have a specific target audience?

#### DAKALIRA

I usually say that [...] I write for people who basically want to just pick up and read it, if that makes sense.

Mostly, my target audience is a group that would rather just pick up a book and read, and not really struggle with, okay, what is this guy trying to say and what's with all these big [words or concepts]. I like to think somebody will pick it up and read it and have fun reading it, you know, not try to struggle [with it].

#### INTERVIEWER

I understand, yes. You're aiming to make your texts accessible; I guess we could say they are 'popular' texts in this sense. Expanding on that, would you say that your target audience is perhaps a certain age group? And then, what about readers in Malawi, or outside of Malawi, for example?

#### DAKALIRA

Yeah, well when it comes to age, I mostly write young adult and adult fiction, so it's not really, most of these

things I write aren't really for children. Although there's a collection for children I am writing, but that's not out yet. So I prefer, I think the age group should be somewhere around 15, going upwards.

And as for the audience itself, in terms of nationality or something, when I was starting out it was that I was targeting the local audience [in Malawi]. But right now, I think it's a matter of, let me just put my work out there.

#### INTERVIEWER

Do you use the label 'Malawian author' when profiling yourself? Or perhaps 'author from Southern Africa'..?

#### DAKALIRA

I actually prefer [a writer] 'who resides in Malawi.' I happen to reside here. That's really what I prefer.

#### INTERVIEWER

Would you say that you write with a particular purpose in mind, or in order to promote certain ideas?

#### DAKALIRA

I think something that motivates me is, I try to be a little bit different from what mostly we read about when it comes to literature from a few countries around here. I mean, in the sense that I think most people, when they look at the whole [continent], this category that I prefer not to be in, when they say "African writers", they expect you to be writing about something specific, you know, the struggle, HIV.. and what not. I try to deviate from that. I do of course draw on Malawi and the reality of it and situations here because I have been here all of my life, so I do look at a lot of things happening here, I can't get away from that, but I try to put a twist on it. 'What if' it was like this?

Because when I look at people who are not really a huge fan of [...] stories of witchcraft and what not, I'm like, but actually it is a great piece of fiction here, so I write about witchcraft but perhaps not the way most people would. So, for the topics I try to deviate from the norm and from [...] what people are [expecting] me to write about as an African author.

#### INTERVIEWER

I think this is something that is wonderfully clear in your writing, absolutely. As you say, there is a demand for literary realism and particular kinds of representation in fiction from Africa when we think of the global marketplace.

I'd really love to hear your thoughts on some of your stories a bit more. I have to say "Rise of the Akafula" is probably my favourite of your works. I wonder if you could tell me a bit more about the story in your own words, including perhaps the process of writing it, and then, why you chose the underground bunker as a space of the future in the narrative?

#### DAKALIRA

To begin with, I think it was looking at [...] segregation and I tried to look at it from [...] a different perspective. To me it was like, okay, you know what, we do this whole black v. white, or maybe discriminate against people with disabilities and what not, but then, what if it turned out that 'we' are the ones [who] are basically vulnerable, and the people that we discriminate against are better than us. I think that's where it started from.

Besides that, I think it's one of the stories that I also had the idea of climate change in mind. [I asked myself] where are we going to be, like, maybe 100, 200 years from now. [...] How would the Earth be like if we continue

upon the path that we are [on] now. If we continue on this path, the Earth [will be] uninhabitable.

#### INTERVIEWER

I find it a pretty profound story. You mentioned segregation. Would you say “tribalism”, particularly the socio-historical context in Malawi in particular, contributed to your thinking too then? I think what I am getting at most here is, how much you drew on or used historic accounts of the Chewa migrating to Malawi. And if that actually figured in your writing of the story? Just thinking of the Chewa settling and what we know of their attack on the Akafula in the 15th, 16th century?

#### DAKALIRA

Yeah, actually there was that [...] Mostly [that is] where the discrimination part comes in. [W]hen I was growing up, “Akafula” was the term used for really short people, and people with defects. So, yes the history informs it, but I think mostly for me it was about the discriminatory part, and groups of people it is that we look down upon. [...]

#### INTERVIEWER

Okay. And of course in your story you enable their survival. Again, sticking with this story, I’m interested in the fact that you include the vernacular at one or two moments, for instance, with chilala.

#### DAKALIRA

Yeah, that one means “drought”. Honestly, it’s because at some point I tried to remember exactly what perspective I’m writing from, because I might be writing it in English, but then the idea for the story happens here and comes to me here, based on the current surroundings and what

not, so I [use] a couple of Chichewa words, and then the big dogs are called nchewe which actually means “dog” in Tumbuka. So, yeah, I think it has something to do with that, the fact that I don’t want to forget that I’m writing a story based on things that I have actually witnessed in Malawi.

#### INTERVIEWER

Your last point there is something I am going to come back to: Malawi as a landscape in your speculative fiction. But just to go to your novella for a moment, because in “VIII” in AfroSFv2, you also mix English and Chewa. You use guma and metsu and mohiri, and I feel like I recognise mohiri as the word for “bird” in Chichewa, but I would like you to tell me if I’m wrong there. And then also, [...] are the other words taken from another language in Malawi perhaps, or are they fabricated?

#### DAKALIRA

Actually, they are fabricated! [...] So metsu and guma, all those are fabricated, but chemwa is basically Chewa for “sister”, so that one was actually real! Yeah, it was kind of a mix there. I did fabricate a couple of words, but then the rest were actually originals.

#### INTERVIEWER

Can you speak to the idea of using Malawi as a space of the future in your writing? And perhaps comment on “Inhabitable” on that point.

#### DAKALIRA

[...] I think what I looked at is when, with Malawi [...] well, as the world changes we’re changing with it, although in most cases we actually do that maybe like two

or three years later, but still we change with the world. That's inevitable, I think. So, you have the ship captain [in "Inhabitable"] who's from Malawi, but is travelling together with people from other countries, and they have all trained in Ethiopia.

But then, even though we are past the point that space travel is actually possible, you still have elements that remind you of the fact that while we're developing, we're still somehow not fully there yet. That's where you find that [Jumbe, the protagonist in "Inhabitable"] fell into [the] hospital [in Balaka]. It is to give that element of the fact that, okay, you know what, exploring new places for us to go, but then back here, Malawi is still trying to grow, you know.

[...] I love using Malawi as a landscape because, like I said, I've been here most of my life. I mean I use, I think it is in AfroSFv2 that I use most places, there is Lilongwe, there's Chileka (Chileka is my home village, so I know it well). Then, when I was doing the whole Balaka bit [in "Inhabitable"] I actually had a basic map as well. So, again the fact that I've been here most of the time, I just find it exciting to write in some of these places.

#### INTERVIEWER

I have to say I found it exciting to read these places too! [...] Of course, Malawi is written into twentieth century fiction from Malawi. It is not that that is new, but the familiarity of places like Chileka in the speculative, futuristic work is brilliant! It's pretty awesome to read "VIII", for example, and find one of your characters flying onto the top of [Blantyre's] Clock Tower.

[...] You also use other elements of the landscape, of Malawi. In "Inhabitable", your intergalactic space tale, there is the fabulous character called Thing, the alien

character that you describe as being like the Chambo of Lake Malawi. [...] But the Lake makes a more substantial kind of appearance in “Che Boti”, doesn’t it. Could you talk a little about that story?

#### DAKALIRA

Actually, there was a specific reason [for that story]. I wrote it around the time that you had a lot of talk about how people were wanting to build hotels and what not [by] the lake, specifically in Mangochi. So, yes, I think it was that I was thinking about how it would disrupt the lives of those people who actually live there. They have to move and what not. And there were actually some conflicts there [too] as some villages didn’t want to move, even though the corporate guys were saying, okay, you know what, this is our land and we need to do this, we need to do that. [...] For most of the guys, they were like, okay, you know what, this is where we get our livelihood, and you want us to move? What’s in it for us? So, that story [has] this aspect of it. It was mostly inspired by the fact that, to me, I thought the lake was going to be exploited without being beneficial to the people who were actually there first. Also, especially around the oil debates there.

#### INTERVIEWER

In my work, I’m currently thinking about what we actually mean when we use the term “speculative fiction”, in the African context in particular. But I want the definition I work with to come from the creators of it, as far as that is possible at least. So I’d love to hear how you would define your writing; what do you mean when you say “speculative fiction”?



## DAKALIRA

I think [I use] speculative fiction [for my writing] [...] But I think it's diverse [...] that's what's exciting when it comes to writing these days, especially among writers who come from the African continent. To me, I think it's that kind of wrapping which is not straightforward, which explores the possibilities, which under normal circumstances may seem a bit far [out there] or would be frowned upon. So to me, we have things like horror, which let's face it there is much material for [...] Most writers from Africa will talk about [that]. There's horror, there's scifi, there's [...] magical realism. There are quite different perspectives, but to me "African speculative fiction" is more or less [...] writing which explores ideas that are ordinarily frowned upon and are considered impossible.

I think one of the other things that I really like about speculative fiction is the fact that you base such stories on things that happen all around us. For example, we talked about "The Graveyard". It's something to do with a member of parliament trying to hold his seat and for him to do that he [uses alternative means].

So, I think ["The Graveyard"] is an example of how writers are able to incorporate speculative elements into everyday happening. Like, political or social [issues]. It's actually quite possible to do so. And a lot more people are actually taking it up. For example, the Akata book series by Nnedi [Okorafor].

I think there's still work [to do], if I can say that, there's still work that can be done when it comes to African speculative fiction. Also in Malawi. There aren't really that many authors that are taking speculative fiction seriously. I think that's what's lacking these days. To me, I think [we] need more. Especially Malawi.

#### INTERVIEWER

The sf scene has certainly transformed in the last 10 years in Africa, helped along of course by the growth in platforms and the number of outlets that are now becoming available. If we look at how the landscape has transformed over the last 10 years, then surely the next 10 will see further changes. We hope anyway! Who knows, perhaps there will soon be a speculative fiction publisher based in Malawi.

#### DAKALIRA

I'm actually hoping that w[ill] be the case.

#### INTERVIEWER

Before we go, I was just thinking about the pandemic and how it is impacting on you in Malawi. How's work going, and writing?

#### DAKALIRA

Actually it is slowly infiltrating. I am at home. Work is slow, you know. I don't think most people were taking [Covid-19] seriously in the beginning. So, now that it has [reached a significant] number of cases, I think maybe now they'll think seriously. Especially now that the presidential election is done!

#### INTERVIEWER

Very glad to see that the elections went well yesterday. Have numbers come in yet?

#### DAKALIRA

There are no official numbers yet. It may be some time, but we think it looks like MCP [will win].

INTERVIEWER

Thank you so much for taking the time to talk with me today, Andrew. This has been wonderful.

DAKALIRA

It was nice to talk with you. I don't think I have spoken to anyone about speculative fiction for this long in quite a while. Thank you too.









## Contributors

Andrew C. Dakalira is a widely published Malawi author of *VIII* (2015). Shortlisted for the 2017 Writivism Short Story Prize for emerging writers on the African continent, and winner of the third prize in the Africa Book Club competition. A member of the African Speculative Fiction Society, and a prominent figure in the field of contemporary Southern African speculative fiction.

Devon Miller-Duggan teaches at the University of Delaware. Her books include *Pinning the Bird to the Wall*, *Alphabet Year*, *The Slow Salute* (Lithic Press Chapbook Competition Winner, 2018).

Clive Donovan has published in a wide variety of magazines including *The Journal*, *Agenda*, *Two Thirds North*, *Poetry Salzburg Review*, *Prole*, *Stand*, and *The Transnational*.

Ian C Smith's work has been published in *Antipodes*, *BBC Radio 4 Sounds*, *cordite*, *The Dalhousie Review*, *Griffith Review*, *Poetry Salzburg Review*, *Southword*, & *The Stony Thursday Book*. His seventh book is *wonder sadness madness joy*, Ginninderra (Port Adelaide). He writes in the Gippsland Lakes area of Victoria, and on Flinders Island.

Omar Sabbagh's latest books are *Minutes from the Miracle City*, *To My Mind*, *Or, Kinbotes: Essays on Literature and Reading Fiona Sampson: A Study in Contemporary Poetry and Poetics*. He teaches at AUD.

R. J. Keeler has published two collections *Detonation* and *The invention of the Snowman*. He is a recipient of the Vietnam Service Medal and a Whiting Foundation Experimental Grant. A former Boeing engineer.



Stephen C. Middleton has had five books published and been in several anthologies. He was editor of *Ostinato*, a magazine of jazz and jazz-related poetry. He has been in magazines worldwide.

Richard Luftig's poems and stories have appeared in numerous literary journals internationally. His latest book of poems is *A Grammar for Snow* (Unsolicited Press).

Devon Balwit chases chickens in Portland. Her most recent chapbook is *Rubbing Shoulders with the Greats*. For more regarding her online poems, her collections, and her reviews, please visit <https://pelapdx.wixsite.com/devonbalwitpoet>

Cyril Dabydeen has published 20 books, and poetry in *Poetry* (Chicago), *The Critical Quarterly*, *Canadian Literature*, and in the *Oxford*, *Penguin*, and *Heinemann books of Caribbean Verse*, etc. Former Poet Laureate of Ottawa.

Peggy Hammond's poetry appears or is forthcoming in *High Shelf Press*, *San Antonio Review*, *Inklette*, *West Trade Review*, *Rogue Agent*, *Ginosko Literary Journal*, *Trouvaille Review*, *Amethyst Review*, *Cordella*, *Skylight 47*, *Peeking Cat*, and other publications. Her full-length play *A Little Bit of Destiny* was produced by OdysseyStage Theatre in Durham, North Carolina, USA.

Holly Day's poetry collections are *In This Place*, *She Is Her Own*, *A Wall to Protect Your Eyes*, *Folios of Dried Flowers and Pressed Birds*, *Where We Went Wrong*, *Into the Cracks*, and *Cross Referencing a Book of Summer*.

Ankur Betageri is a poet, short fiction writer and visual artist based in New Delhi. He is the author of *The Bliss and Madness of Being Human* (poetry, 2013) and *Bhog and Other Stories* (short fiction, 2010). He teaches English at Bharati College, University of Delhi.

Jade Riordan is an Irish-Canadian whose poetry has appeared in *Contemporary Verse 2*, *Foreign Literary Magazine*, *Headstuff*, *takahē*, *Tiger Moth Review*, and elsewhere.

Kurt Luchs has won the 2019 *Atlanta Review International Poetry Contest*, and has written humor for the *New Yorker*, the *Onion* and *McSweeney's Internet Tendency*. His books include *It's Funny Until Someone Loses an Eye (Then It's Really Funny)*, *One of These Things Is Not Like the Other* and *Falling in the Direction of Up*.

Laurence Klavan has published a collection, *'The Family Unit' and Other Fantasies*, and the novels *The Cutting Room* and *The Shooting Script*. With Suzan Kim he wrote graphic novels *City of Spies* and *Brain Camp*, and the Young Adult fiction series, *Wasteland*. He received two Drama Desk nominations for the musical *Bed and Sofa*. His *The Summer Sublet* is included in Best American Short Plays 2000-2001.

Rachelle Pinnow's work has appeared in many magazines and she collaborated with derek beaulieu, Calgary's past poet laureate, on a feminist collection *Speechless*. Her story "Manhattan Schist" was long-listed for the 2018 Commonwealth Short Story Prize.

Hayden Moore has been published in *Corner Bar Magazine*, *Metonym Literary Journal*, *Drunk Monkey Literary Journal*, *Fictional Café*, *Modern Literature* and *Calliope*.

Kitty Steffan is a Romanian-born writer whose juvenilia is scattered across elementary, middle school, and high school publications.

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Džemil Hodžić is a Senior Video Editor working for Al Jazeera English. A survivor of the Siege of Sarajevo, he is the founder of Sniper Alley Project which has two missions: to find photos of his family, especially his older brother who was killed by a Serb sniper and to establish a database of photos of the Siege as a way of preserving the memory of survival through the eyes of the children living through war.

Thän Gustafsson earned his BA in English Literature from Högskolan Kristianstad, and is currently aiming for an MA.

Joanna Woods is pursuing a doctoral project on speculative fiction in Southern Africa. She is Communications Editor for Africa in Words - a blog that focuses on cultural production and Africa.

Christopher Thornton published over 60 articles and essays in numerous literary journals like *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Commonweal*, *Confrontation*, *Sewanee Review*, *Antigonish*, *American Scholar*, *Scarlet Leaf Review*, *Atlantic Online*, etc. A book-length travel narrative *Descendants of Cyrus: Travels through Everyday Iran*.

Ken Pobo has a book of prose poems *The Atlantis Hit Parade*. His work has appeared in *Crannog*, *The Fiddlehead*, *Indiana Review*, *Brittle Star*, and elsewhere.

Thomas Lavelle is an American writer and academic who has lived in Stockholm since 1992. He teaches creative writing and professional communication at the Stockholm School of Economics.





